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Free inside
ADVENTURE GUIDE

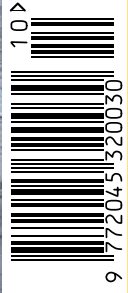
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Bali

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Genoa

Pesto, pandolce & pignolini — feast on the flavours of Liguria

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A photograph of a luxury outdoor lounge at dusk. In the foreground, a fire pit with a bright fire is surrounded by several wooden lounge chairs. The lounge is built on a wooden deck with a railing. In the background, there is a large wooden building with a thatched roof, illuminated from within. The sky is a mix of blue and orange, suggesting sunset or sunrise. The overall atmosphere is warm and inviting.

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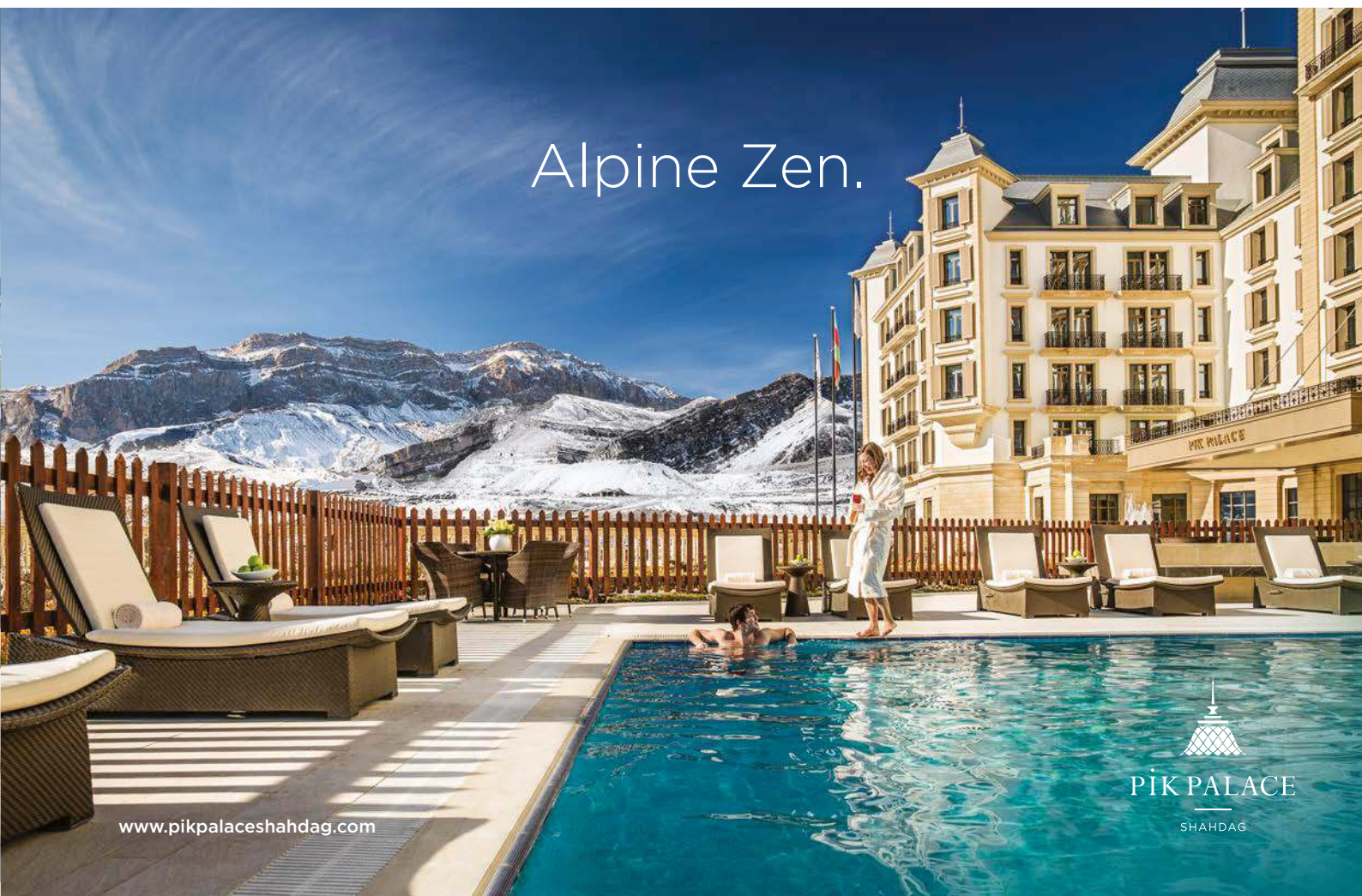
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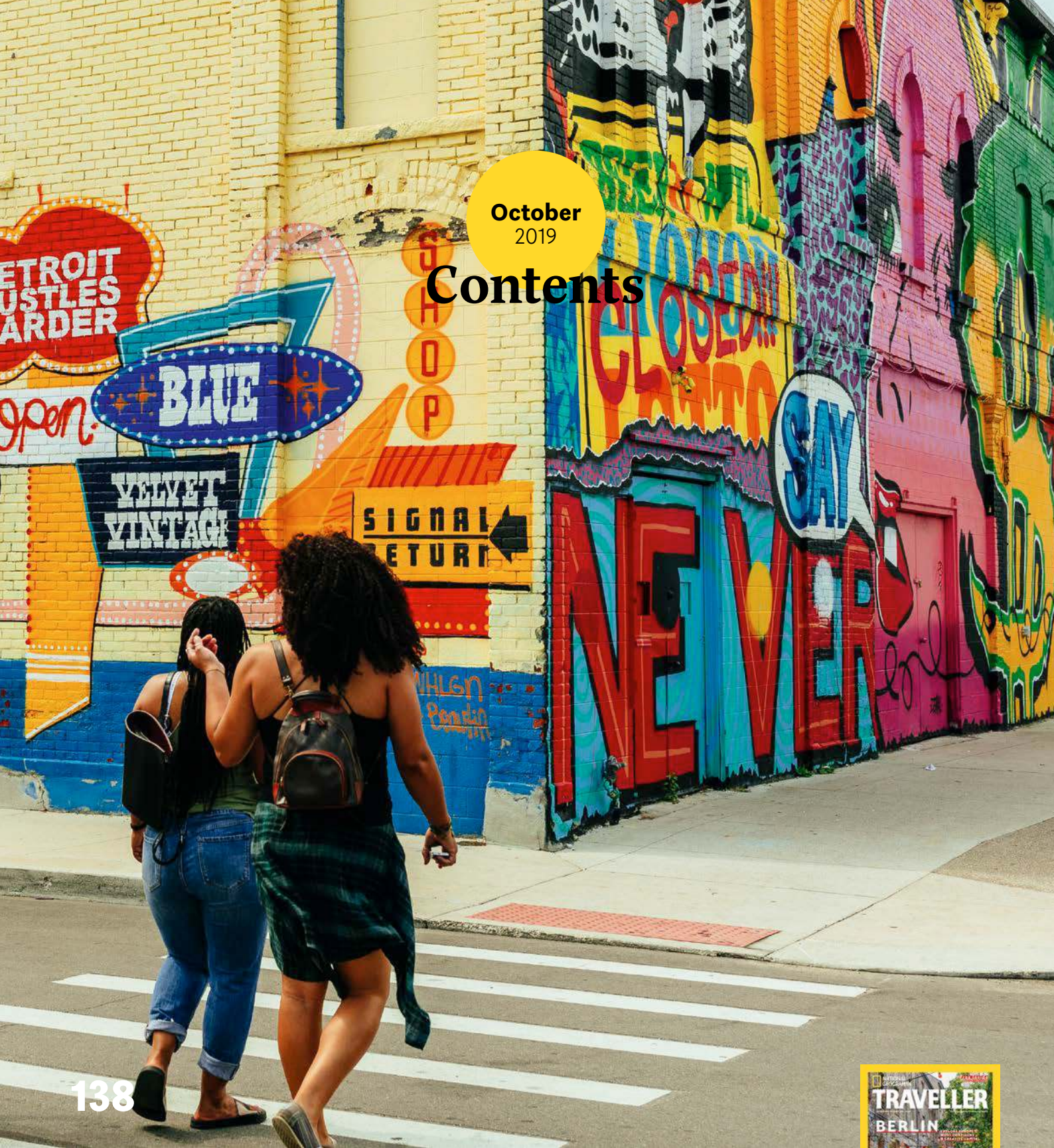
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This is Wales. #TasteWales





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The courtyard outside the Café Cinema and Anne Frank Zentrum in Mitte, Berlin

IMAGE: Celia Topping

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Contributors



Nicola Trup

Although I've been to Krakow several times, I rarely strayed far from the Old Town. So on this visit it was a joy to see other sides of the city, from the 'workers' paradise' of Nowa Huta to the brutalist majesty of the former Forum Hotel. **KRAKOW P.67**



Aaron Millar

The Route of Parks was the bumpiest, muddiest, wildest, most beautiful road trip I've ever taken. But what struck me most about Patagonia was the feeling of being surrounded by wilderness. It really was like driving to the ends of the earth. **CHILE P.100**



Sarah Barrell

Bali has a rich fine arts tradition that dates back centuries, but beyond decorative paintings of rice paddies and pretty batiks, contemporary artists are redefining the landscape of this exotic holiday island with truly fascinating results. **BALI P.112**



Amelia Duggan

A renaissance is underway in Downtown Detroit. Once-empty art deco edifices now host hotels and bars, and vacant lots house vinyl shops, vineyards and art installations. This soulful, storied city is starting a new chapter, in style. **DETROIT P.138**



Farida Zeynalova

Baku is almost unrecognisable these days, worlds away from the city where I grew up. But amid the blindingly shiny development, its Silk Road-era nooks remain the main draw, a throwback to life here before the revolutionary oil boom. **BAKU P.150**



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Editor's letter

Search Google for 'Berlin reinvention' and you'll find excitable entries for everything from architecture and design to cuisine and clubbing.

In a way, it's not surprising. The fall of the Berlin Wall triggered a process that saw a divided city reunite, regenerate and, eventually, completely reinvent itself.

The German capital — the focus of our cover story (p.80) — was divided for over 50 years, but has spent the past three decades making up for lost time. So far this century, it's proved to be a hotbed of progressive movements, creativity and culture.

A sense of rebirth, of freedom, of being able to start again is what sparked this renaissance, helped by a youthful spirit, cheap rents and arts funding. Go there today, and you'll find a city very much at ease with itself.

In many respects, it's a lot like Detroit, another place that's emerged from hard times by embracing creativity and trying new things. In this issue, you'll get to experience both cities in their full, unfettered glory. Our feature on Detroit reveals a city embarking on an exciting new chapter (p.138), while our cover story examines just what makes Berlin Europe's coolest, most confident capital.

PAT RIDDELL, EDITOR

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AWARD-WINNING NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC TRAVELLER

French Travel Media Awards 2019: Best Art & Culture Feature • British Guild of Travel Writers Awards 2018: Best Travel Writer • Travel Media Awards 2018: Consumer Writer of the Year • AITO Travel Writer of the Year Awards 2018: Travel Blogger of the Year • Visit USA Media Awards 2018: Best Consumer Travel Magazine Feature • BSME Talent Awards 2018: Best Designer • LATA Media Awards 2018: Consumer Magazine Feature of the Year • French Travel Media Awards 2018: Best Wine & Gastronomy Feature • NATJA Travel Media Awards 2017: Photography: Overall Excellence — Print Publication • British Travel Awards 2017: Best Consumer Holiday Magazine • British Guild of Travel Writers Awards 2017: Best Travel Writer • British Guild of Travel Writers Awards 2016: Best Travel Writer • British Travel Awards 2015: Best Consumer Holiday Magazine

HIGHLIGHTS



Adventure guide

Free with this issue, our guide is full of practical tips, tales, advice and inspiration for your next intrepid escape.



Reader Awards

There's still time to have your say in our annual awards, plus you could be in with a chance of winning an incredible prize (p.14).



Travel Writing Competition

After reading hundreds of entries, we've found our top three. Read the travel tales that stood out in this year's competition (p.190).

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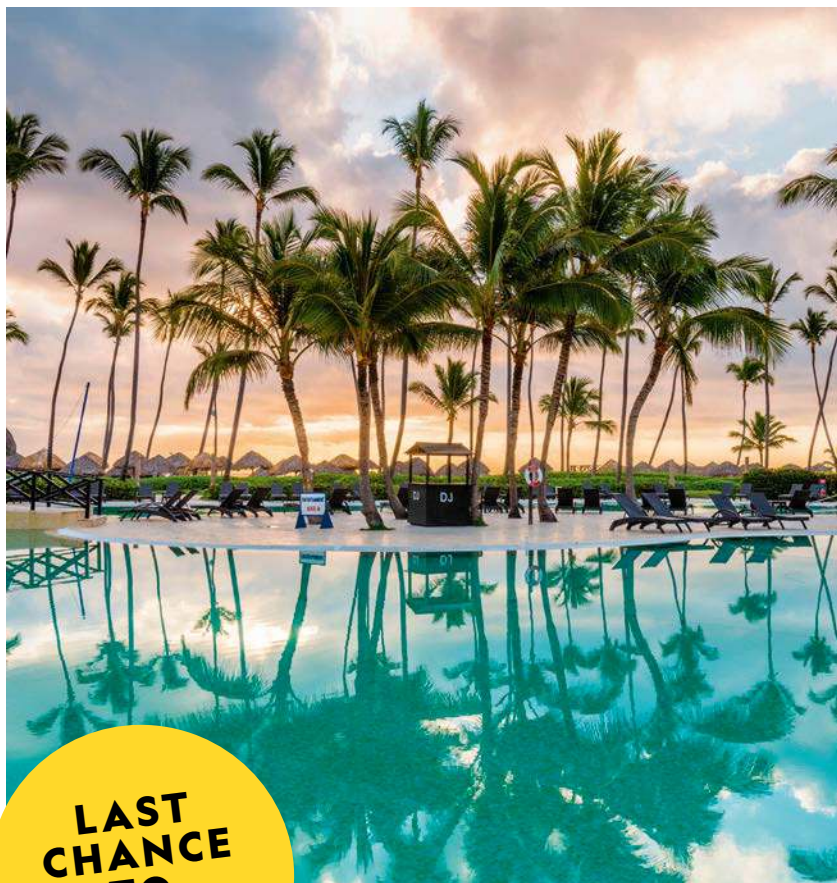
TRAVELLER

READER AWARDS

2019

AND NOW IT'S OVER TO YOU!

Our Reader Awards are back for the fifth year in a row and once again, we want to reward the very best in the travel industry. Whether it's the destinations you can't get enough of, brand new attractions that caught your eye or TV shows that have had you hooked this past year, these are the awards decided by YOU. But time's running out as voting closes on 30 September. So get online, think back over your recent travels and pick your winners.



**LAST
CHANCE
TO
VOTE!**



THE PRIZES

SEVEN NIGHTS FOR TWO IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

The winner and a guest will jet off to this Caribbean paradise, courtesy of Air Europa, and stay at the Grand Bahia Principe Aquamarine in Punta Cana: a lush oasis with stunning beaches, swaying palms and ocean views. On offer is a free diving class in the hotel's swimming pool, and guests can take their pick from an array of dining options, including an international buffet, restaurants serving Japanese and Peruvian food, plus Italian and fine dining establishments. bahia-principe.com aireuropa.com

A TWO-NIGHT STAY FOR TWO IN THE LAKE DISTRICT

Set on the shores of Ullswater, Another Place, The Lake is ideal for those who value getting active as much as relaxing. The winner and a guest will receive two nights' B&B, with dinner included, as well as lake sports lessons and a spa treatment at the Swim Club. Guests can swim in the lake-view pool or follow in the footsteps of legendary fellwalker Alfred Wainwright and explore the region's dramatic landscapes. another.place

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THE WINNERS

Winners will be announced on 4 December 2019 at The Montcalm London Marble Arch, online and in our Jan/Feb 2020 issue. Prize draw closes 30 September at 23:59 GMT. Voting and prize draw open to residents of the UK and Ireland aged 18 and over. Prizes are subject to availability. Full T&Cs available at nationalgeographic.co.uk/reader-awards

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SNAPSHOT

Chris Rumbold, Isle of Eigg, Scotland

While hiking across the beautiful Hebridean island of Eigg, I met Chris, one of only 90 or so people who live here. Several years ago, he fell in love with the island and moved here from Cambridge in pursuit of a quiet life. Overlooking an islet by the main pier, his home sits beside a path frequented by walkers. He often sells home-grown produce — eggs, strawberries, root vegetables — as a way of earning his keep, but there's sometimes a shot of whisky on offer, too. My encounter with Chris and his dog Ted left me wondering what it is about a place that draws you in and makes you want to change your lifestyle forever.

ERIC KRUSZEWSKI // PHOTOGRAPHER

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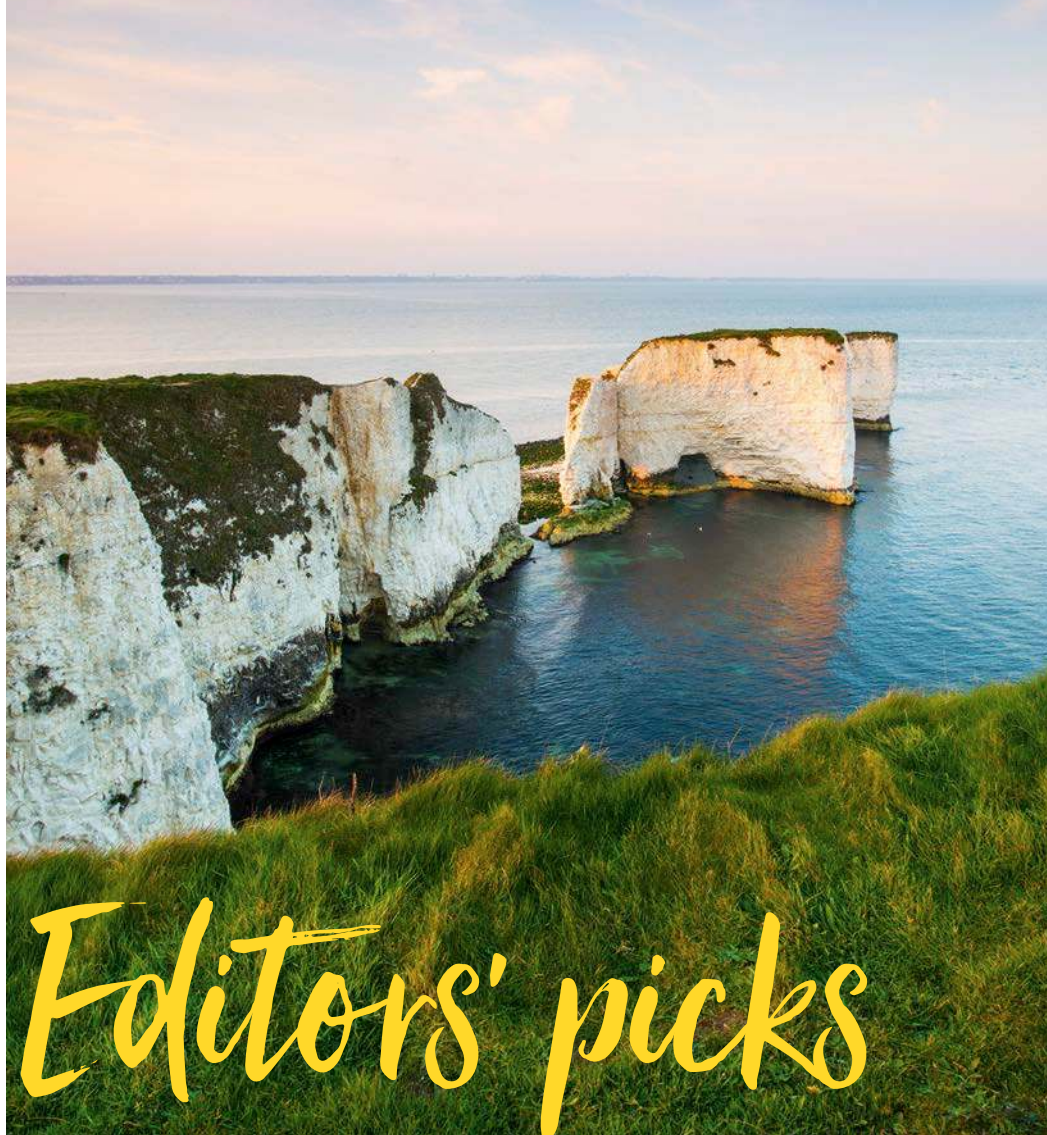
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Silversea's new ship, *Silver Origin*, which has been designed entirely with the Galápagos Islands in mind, will be the most elegant ship to ever sail the region when it launches in summer 2020. The all-suite, 100-guest *Silver Origin* will embark on her maiden voyage in July 2020, unlocking the authentic beauty of the Galápagos by connecting guests with the destination through immersive experiences. Along with a seven-day voyage, fares also include roundtrip economy class air to Ecuador and between Ecuador and the Galápagos Islands, transfers, a two-night pre-cruise hotel stay and park fees.



Galapagos by Steve McCurry

For more information please call 0207 340 0700,
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From foraged cocktail ingredients to the best new British trails, our team have unearthed the latest travel highlights

IN NUMBERS

EVEREST'S BAN ON SINGLE-USE PLASTICS

2020

the year from which the ban will take effect

30 microns

(or 0.003cm) the minimum thickness of plastic drinking bottles

11 tonnes

the amount of rubbish removed from Mount Everest this year

50,000

the annual number of tourists to the region

£29,000

the proposed fee to climb the peak, as suggested by a panel advising the Nepal government. **ANGELA LOCATELLI**



Southern comfort

In Houston, Texas, recently opened restaurant-cum-arts-space Kulture offers elevated Southern comfort food under a gallery of contemporary art, all set against a backdrop of live local bands and monthly food-and-culture salons. [@kulturehouston](#)

SARAH BARRELL

Out-there drinking

New this year, gin lovers can head out into the wild with The Botanist gin and Hunter Gather Cook to learn about foraging, sustainable cocktail-making and wild cooking. Plus, take part in a fire cookery workshop and a cocktail competition. [huntergathercook.com](#)

ZANE HENRY

SNAP HAPPY

The National Trust is asking visitors to Dorset's Studland Bay to take photos through a giant picture frame, then share their shots using #NTshiftingshores. The Trust hopes to create a timelapse of the changing coast. [nationaltrust.org.uk](#)

ELISHA LUNDIN

THREE NEW

British trails

WALES

The Heart of Wales Line Trail follows part of the national railway network, snaking through the area's gloriously green countryside. Visitors can combine a walk with a train ride, or add it to a journey along the Cambrian Way. [heart-of-wales.co.uk](#)

SCOTLAND

The Loch Ness 360° Trail is a walking, cycling, running and outdoor activity trail that takes in some of the most dramatic scenery in the Highlands. The trail connects the Great Glen Way and the South Loch Ness Trail, forming a full circuit around the loch. [lochness-360.com](#)

ENGLAND

Winding through the North's urban and rural landscapes for 162 miles, The Desmond Family Canoe Trail passes through the likes of Liverpool and Leeds. It follows canals such as the Aire & Calder Navigation and takes five to seven days to complete. [canalrivertrust.org.uk](#)


MARIA PIERI


BIG PICTURE

*Shiofune Kannon-ji,
Tokyo, Japan*

Tokyo isn't simply an urban jungle — its distinct districts throw up all manner of natural secrets, from looming mountains to secluded gardens. Shiofune Kannon-ji Temple, built during the 7th century, is one of those secrets. When the rainy season comes, thousands of azaleas and hydrangeas bloom at once, and the temple turns into a little piece of technicolour paradise. I woke up at 4am, and arrived here just after sunrise to watch the shadows receding, revealing a sea of colourful flowers. A delicate fragrance of burning incense made this moment even more relaxing and unforgettable.

JORDY MEOW // PHOTOGRAPHER

 [offbeatjapan.org](https://twitter.com/offbeatjapan)

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Tallinn

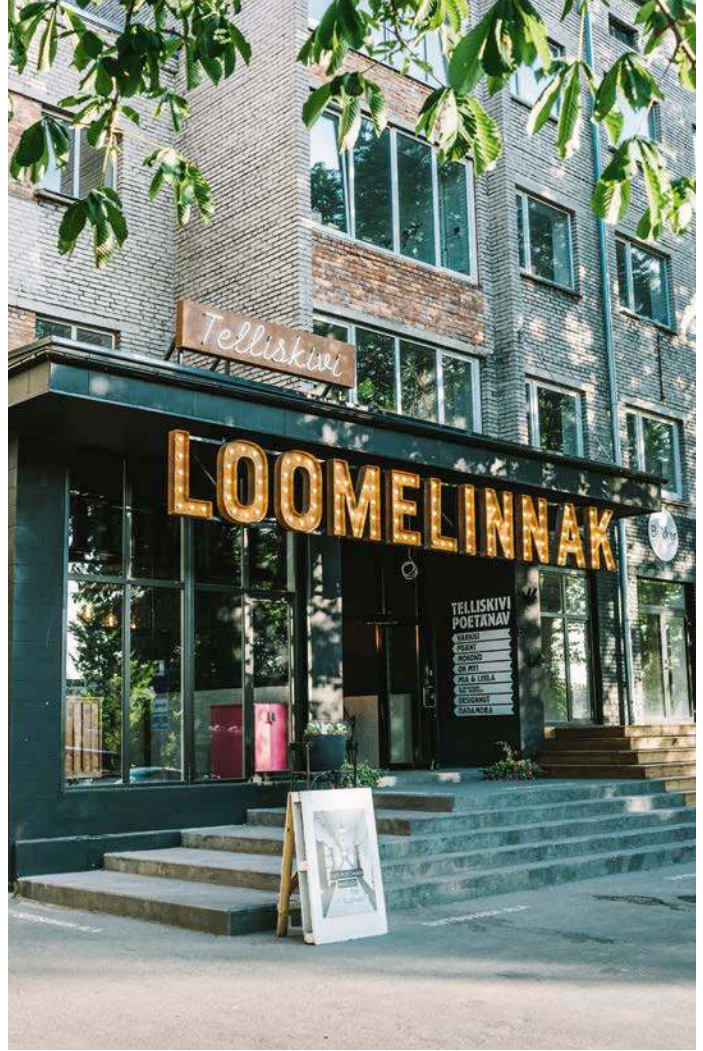
BALTIC BRILLIANCE

A photography showcase and new arts centre are among the latest cultural attractions in the Estonian capital

A former industrial estate turned hip arty enclave, **TELLISKIVI CREATIVE CITY** is a magnet for all things cool, with over 200 independent businesses housed in its revamped warehouses.

A new string to its cultural bow this summer is the pop-up photographic art centre, **FOTOGRAFISKA**, complete with a gallery, restaurant, gift shop, bar, event space and club. Among the works on display are stunning shots of the Siberian tundra and Pacific islands by British photographer Jimmy Nelson, and a series of images of the Serra Pelada gold mine by Brazil's Sebastião Salgado. Estonian chef Peeter Pihel heads up the restaurant, where the focus is on sustainability. Not only does a zero-waste policy operate in the kitchen but a 'from leaf to root, from nose to tail' philosophy underpins the short, inventive menu with dishes such as river crab bisque with trout croquettes, and local onions baked in compost, served with chantarelles and artichoke crisps.

Also on Tallinn's arty agenda this autumn is the **PROTO INVENTION FACTORY** — a multisensory, science-meets-fantasy experience at former submarine shipyard Noblessner opening in October, that brings prototype inventions from previous centuries to life using modern technology. And for another culture fix in the Estonian capital, the **KAI ART CENTER** opens on 20 September as a showcase for local and international art, set within a revamped warehouse. visitestonia.com fotografiska.com prototehas.ee/en kai.center **HELEN WARWICK**



FROM TOP: Telliskivi Creative City; Fotografiska; courtyard, Telliskivi Creative City



OUT & ABOUT

SEE
Set to reopen this autumn after a revamp, Tallinn's **ESTONIAN MARITIME MUSEUM** shines a light on the city's maritime history. Set in the medieval tower of a naval fortress built by Peter the Great, the museum now includes a rooftop deck and cafe. meremuseum.ee

SHOP
Located to the north west of Tallinn Old Town, the cavernous **BALTI JAAMA TURG** ('Baltic Station Market') has reopened with a host of fresh-faced stores touting homewares, antiques and art, and kitchens serving up everything from baked treats to buffalo wings. en.astri.ee

EAT
JUUR has been flying the flag for new Nordic cuisine since it opened in 2017, bolstering the city's burgeoning foodie reputation. The decor includes plenty of exposed brickwork and Scandi-style furnishings. Nab a table and a three-course menu from €37 (£34). restoranjuur.ee



Image: © STB

Immerse yourself in the beauty of The Islands of The Seychelles



Image: © STB



Image: © Chris Close



Image: © Denis Island

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AFTER-DARK FESTIVALS

Lights out

Some of the best artistic and cultural offerings happen after dark. Stay awake and soak up a late-night dose of culture

As autumn approaches, a new season is upon us in more ways than one. Across the world, museums, galleries, theatres and clubs are starting to fling open their doors after hours to celebrate their cultural offerings and Europe is leading the way. Head to **NIT DEL'ART** in Palma de Mallorca (21 September) and watch the streets come alive with performance art and street theatre as the city's best venues usher you in until midnight. There's an air of secrecy surrounding these celebrations as organisers keep details well under wraps until the night itself.

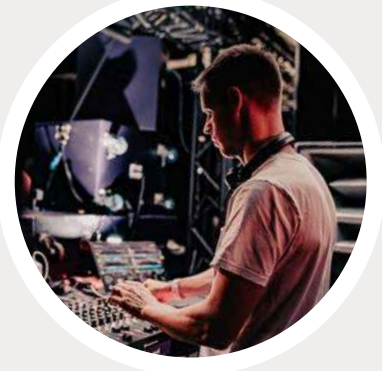
Meanwhile, over in the French capital, the **NUIT BLANCHE** festival transforms Paris (5 October) into an all-night celebration, with performers taking to stages across the city from 7pm until 7am. This year, visitors can sign up for La Grande Traversée — two night races across the city that give running revellers after-dark access to the likes of the Louvre, the Musée Guimet and the Centre Pompidou.

The party continues in Copenhagen, where **KULTURNATTEN** will illuminate the Danish capital for one night only (11 October). More than 250 museums, theatres, libraries, churches and parks will welcome night owls looking for an extra dose of culture. Past events have included burlesque performances in the Frederiksberg Library, Cold War fashion shows, silent meditations and much, much more.

illesbalears.travel en.paris.info kulturnatten.dk **JOSEPHINE PRICE**

FESTIVAL FEVER

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MUSIC

AMSTERDAM DANCE EVENT, NETHERLANDS

16-20 OCTOBER

The world's biggest club festival of electronic music attracts a whopping 370,000 people and thousands of musicians for a packed programme of events across the Dutch capital.

The five-day festival also features a host of conferences and screenings by day, but the fun really starts when the sun goes down.

amsterdam-dance-event.nl

TECH

ILLUMINUS, BOSTON

19 OCTOBER

This is New England's answer to Paris's Nuit Blanche — for one night only, the cityscape becomes an immersive, artistic playground. Expect a colourful array of smart, thought-provoking installations dotted around the Downtown Crossing area that celebrate the historic city's emerging tech sector.

illuminusboston.org

SPACE

NORTH PENNINES STARGAZING FESTIVAL

23 OCTOBER-3 NOVEMBER

Watch the skies twinkle in one of the darkest swathes of mainland Britain. Pop-up planetarium events mark the 50th anniversary of the first Moon landing and stargazing supper clubs let you explore the skies with expert photographers. northpennines.org.uk

LIGHTS

DIWALI, AMRITSAR

27-30 OCTOBER

It's celebrated all over the world, but if you can get to the northern Indian city of Amritsar, the celebrations will dazzle. Tens of thousands of Hindus and Sikhs will head to the Golden Temple, which will be covered with lights and its surrounding pool will be aglow with candles and ceramic lanterns.

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Reforestation

SYLVAN SUCCESS

The world's forests continue to face unparalleled threats, yet in some places, these ecosystems are flourishing

From Borneo to Brazil, the world's rainforests remain under serious threat. In fact, according to the World Resources Institute, an area of primary tropical forest the size of Belgium — around 12,000sq miles — disappeared in 2018.

But despite mass deforestation hitting the headlines for more than a decade, initiatives across the world are finally taking big steps to revive our arboreal world. Ecotourism pioneer Costa Rica is leading the reforesting revolution, and claims to have more than doubled its forest cover in the past three decades. NASA-funded satellite surveillance has helped the government and landowners monitor human activity in the rainforest, such as illegal logging. If the country can protect its secondary forest (those that regrow naturally after being cleared or degraded), Costa Rica is on track for a carbon-neutral future by 2021.

It's fitting that Brazil, home to most of the mighty Amazon rainforest, is hosting one of the world's biggest reforestation projects. Since 2016, Conservation International

has been restoring 73 million trees on land previously cleared for pasture. Seeds from more than 200 native plants are scattered on each square metre to ensure a healthy, resilient mix of species.

Meanwhile in Ethiopia, forests have dwindled dramatically in the last half-century. To make amends, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed recently channelled the spirit of AFR100, the African Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative. In July, what's thought to be a record-breaking number of seedlings was planted in a nationwide effort to boost the country's tree population — over 353 million, according to the government's official estimate.

And what can travellers do to help? Planting a suitable mix of saplings is, of course, just the start. But by donating to a wildlife charity, volunteering for a forestry programme or swapping flip-flops for hiking boots and exploring a community woodland with a local nature guide, perhaps we can all sow the seed of a greener future.

EMMA GREGG



IN NUMBERS

THE WORLD'S FORESTS

3.04 trillion

trees in the world

15 billion

trees cut down each year

9%

of tree cover lost since 2000

50%

of the world's plant and animal species dwell in rainforests

1.2 trillion

replanted trees would cancel out a decade of CO2 emissions



**CHURCHILLS**
PORT



A TWIST ON TRADITION

White Port Tonic

AT THE Chef's TABLE

Spike Gjerde reveals what to eat and where in Baltimore

What's exciting about our city's food scene is that it feels very homegrown; we're so fortunate when it comes to local ingredients, especially fresh fish and shellfish from the Chesapeake Bay. Oysters are key to Baltimore's history, and there are plenty of oyster bars run by people who really care about the product and the experience. These places aren't hugely glitzy, but they all reflect the personalities of their owners and the different neighbourhoods.



SPIKE GJERDE is an award-winning chef. He manages eight locations across Baltimore, including Sandlot. sandlotbaltimore.com



INSIDER'S BALTIMORE

FOR THE BEST BIVALVES

I love the atmosphere at Thames Street Oyster House in Fell's Point, and the menu reflects some of the best fish and shellfish cooking anywhere. It's incredibly consistent, reliable and delicious. thamesstreetoysterhouse.com

FOR A TASTE OF ITALY

Two pizza spots I love are Paulie Gees, which has an emphasis on vegan options and a trophy-lined back bar room, and Verde, which is all about Neopolitan-style pizza and offers an expansive selection of classic toppings. Both places use traditional wood-fired ovens. pauliegee.com/hampden verdepizza.com

FOR NEIGHBOURHOOD DINING

My current top picks are Le Comptoir Du Vin, with its bistro dishes and natural wines, and Orto, which serves wonderful pasta. comptoirbaltimore.com ortobaltimore.com

THE INGREDIENTS

Chesapeake blue crab

With a rich, buttery taste, this local crab is found right on our doorstep and is perfect for broths and soups.

Keepwell Vinegar

These vinegars are produced by two of my pastry chefs, using local ingredients like grapes, apples, ginger, bitter lemon, strawberry and aronia berries.

Maryland tomatoes

Anyone visiting this part of the country should try these red beauties, which are at their rich, juicy best in summer and autumn.

Must try

Baltimore crab cakes are a food icon. The best are to be found at Faidley's Seafood in Lexington Market; eat them with coleslaw and a cold beer.



BOOTS ARE MEANT TO

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Greg Hennes - Modern pioneer and founder of The Jennings Hotel - Danner.com/GoThere

Danner
- EST. 1932 -

ON THE TRAIL

Rio de Janeiro



Listed as UNESCO's first World Capital of Architecture for 2020, Rio is full of modernist marvels. Take a wander and discover some of the best. Words: Connor McGovern

1 CASA DAS CANOAS

Start at the former home of Oscar Niemeyer, godfather of Brazil's modernist movement. Cleverly built to sit amid the greenery, the minimalist pad is defined by its heavy use of glass and curves — his signature style — from the flat, kidney-shaped roof to the rounded pool. niemeyer.org.br

2 COPACABANA BEACH

Stray from the sand of the city's most famous beach and you'll find modernist art right beneath your feet. Roberto Burle Marx's black-and-white promenade runs along Avenida Atlântica. Inspired by similar pavement designs in 1930s Portugal, the motif has become an unofficial emblem of the city.



1 CASA DAS CANOAS ROCINHA

3 MUSEU DE ARTE MODERNA

Meander on to Flamengo Park and marvel at the city's modern art museum, conceived by architect Affonso Eduardo Reidy. After taking in the artwork, be sure to head up to the upper level, where the roof terrace and lounge have dramatic views of Sugarloaf Mountain. mam.rio

4 METROPOLITAN CATHEDRAL OF SAINT SEBASTIAN

Edgar Fonseca took inspiration for his hulking church from the Mayan pyramids. However, it's the inside that truly dazzles: four huge, kaleidoscopic stained-glass windows run from floor to ceiling, casting specks of coloured light over the central altar.

5 PALÁCIO GUSTAVO CAPANEMA

This is one of the most important landmarks in town. Overseen by modernist master Le Corbusier, it was the first modernist project in the Americas when it was finished in 1943. Don't miss the beautiful blue-and-white azulejo tile murals, which add a splash of colour to the ground floor.

7 MUSEU DE ARTE CONTEMPORÂNEA DE NITERÓI

Niemeyer's masterpiece is a striking, three-floor modern art museum, which sits on a cliff above Guanabara Bay. It's become a poster boy for Rio's modernist architecture, thanks to its bowl-and-pedestal shape and winding red walkway. culturaniteroi.com



6 TEATRO POPULAR DE NITERÓI

Another of Niemeyer's avant-garde edifices, this theatre cuts a wavy figure with its white-and-yellow, undulating shape. You might even be able to catch a show *al fresco*, as the cleverly conceived stage is half-indoors, half-outdoors. culturaniteroi.com

WHERE TO STAY Rotterdam

From cardboard houseboats to cool campsites, the Dutch city's new hotels are a glimpse into the future

1 CULTURE CAMPSITE

This spot prioritises sustainability with a selection of eight individual sleeping structures made from upcycled materials and designed by local architects. But this is no ordinary campsite: digs consist of everything from grain silos to converted greenhouses, but it's the Floating Bricks structure — a single room constructed from glass and rejected bricks — that's the most eye-catching. Along with shared facilities, guests also have the use of a see-through, domed common area. Doubles from €75 (£70). culturecampsite.com



2 HOTEL NEW YORK

The former head office of the Holland America Line is now a glamorous hotel and heritage site with a bookshop in the lobby, a barbershop in the basement and a water taxi service to the city centre. Some of the 72 rooms have fireplaces or turrets, while the former boardroom, complete with wood panelling and a freestanding bath by the window, overlooks the river. From €155 (£145). hotelnewyork.com

3 CITYHUB ROTTERDAM

Boldly billing itself as an 'urban hotel for digital natives', these quirky rooms are where Dutch design meets Japanese tech. Guests are issued a digital wristband for room access and paying for drinks and snacks. An app controls the interior lighting, while the provided bathrobes and slippers add a little dignity to the shared bathroom experience. From €56 (£51). cityhub.com

4 WIKKELBOAT

Made out of 24 layers of corrugated cardboard, the Wikkelboat has become so popular the operators built a second one. Sleeping four guests in two rooms, the floating houseboat includes a self-contained kitchen and bathroom, and is designed to maximise space, with fold-down beds and pull-out sofas. From €115 (£105). wikkelboat.nl

SHANEY HUDSON

IMAGES: VAL ROSS; MARC HEEMAN; FRANK DE ROO - FOTOBUREAU DE ROO; TAUFIQ HOSEN; BOJE PLOEG. ALL RATES QUOTED ARE FOR STANDARD DOUBLES, ROOM ONLY. RATES EXCLUDE THE 6.5% TOURIST TAX.



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Discover more at <https://www.japan.travel/en/uk>



MUST-SEE MUSEUMS

GEEK OUT

SCIENCE & INDUSTRY MUSEUM, MANCHESTER

Old steam engines, vintage cars and sleek fighter jets are just some of the exhibits children (and adults) will marvel at in this big-hitter of a museum. Don't miss *The Sun* (until 5 January) — an epic exhibition that shines a light on the centre of our solar system, with blockbuster simulations of a solar storm and a sunrise over Antarctica. scienceandindustrymuseum.org.uk

SWOT UP

HORNIMAN MUSEUM & GARDENS, LONDON

This museum is known for its collection of curios, from the natural history gallery presided over by a walrus to a vast number of musical instruments. Plus, there's a revolving calendar of family-friendly events, from natural trails around the gardens to fun-filled family raves. Don't miss the *Brick Wonders* exhibition (until 27 October), featuring coral reefs, Egyptian pyramids and more, all crafted from Lego. horniman.ac.uk

ACT OUT

MK GALLERY, MILTON KEYNES

Following a top-to-toe makeover that included a sprawling new extension, this Buckinghamshire art museum reopened in the spring to rapturous applause. A vibrant hub of art, cinema and live performances, its new features include an artist-designed playground and a lively programme of fun, child-focused workshops. mkgallery.org

Family fun
BRIGHT IDEAS

The UK's museums never fail to inspire and inform, so get your cultural fix with our pick of the best free outings this autumn

Following a 15-year facelift, all eyes are firmly on the National Museum of Scotland. The Edinburgh institution unveiled the last phase of its makeover earlier in the year, with three new galleries: Ancient Egypt Rediscovered, Exploring East Asia and Art of Ceramics. Among the fascinating new exhibits, you'll find a large block chipped from the Great Pyramid of Giza and a coffin dating from around AD 175-200.

Elsewhere, the museum has plenty to educate and entertain, too. Spread across two buildings (one cool and contemporary,

the other polished and palatially Victorian), it spans a range of topics, including natural history and the arts. Little ones can ride in a Formula 1 racing simulator, dance on a giant sound board, dress up as a deep-sea diver, or unearth fossils in the 'palaeontologist's pit'. Visitors can even send mini hot air balloons into the museum's atrium and watch them bob between aeroplanes suspended from the ceiling. nms.ac.uk **HELEN WARWICK**

Read our full list of must-see museums at nationalgeographic.co.uk/travel

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LIKE A LOCAL

Halifax

Halifax Waterfront
OPPOSITE FROM TOP:
 The Nook interior; the
 35-day, dry-aged steak,
 Primal Kitchen

Known as ‘Hali’ to locals, the city is one of east coast Canada’s culinary hotspots. From coffee to lobster chowder, you won’t go hungry in Nova Scotia’s capital

Caffeine cool

Coffee shops are common as cod in this harbour city, but there a handful of must-visit cafes. One of the best is **THE OLD APOTHECARY** in the heart of Downtown Halifax — set up by a mother-and-daughter team when word of their chocolate brownies went viral during a local food festival. Named after the chemist’s that stood here in 1910, a coffee and one of their delicious, handmade pains au chocolat will set you up for the day. theoldapothecary.com

One block over, the unpretentious **WORLD TEA HOUSE** has 120 organic varieties of tea that flat-capped owner Phil Holman personally sourced from small ethical plantations around the world. Whether it was scaling Nepalese mountains or attending the

weddings of growers, “traceability means everything to me,” he says. worldteahouse.ca

What **THE NOOK** lacks in size, it makes up for with heart. Not only is the coffee first-rate, but they also run a programme where you can purchase a token worth either CA\$2 (£1.25) or CA\$5 (£3.10) at the same time as your brew. You can give these tokens to those in need, who can in turn cash them in for a coffee and bagel. It’s a caffeine fix that warms both stomach and soul. thenookhfx.ca

Historic hangouts

A local institution trading since the mid-18th century, **THE SPLIT CROW** was Nova Scotia’s first tavern. Today, it’s swapped sailors for students who have adopted it as their campus bar. They come for the CA\$13 (£8)



TOP TIP
Join the locals on their daily commute aboard the Halifax Transit. Running since 1752 between Dartmouth and Downtown, it's the world's second-oldest saltwater ferry service.

Queen's County Chowder — a warming bowl of lobster, haddock and potatoes. “It’s one of the closest to my grandmother’s recipes I’ve found,” says Rachael Sheppard (see column). “It takes the chill out of your bones in the winter and harks back to the days when lobster was cheap as chips.” splitcrow.com

Also providing comfort is the ‘donair’ — the city’s official street food since 2015. When two Greek brothers emigrated here in the 1960s, they couldn’t sell a single gyro to locals who preferred their lamb with mint sauce. So, they swapped lamb and tzatziki for spiced ground beef and ‘salad sauce’ (a tangy mix of condensed milk and vinegar) and instantly had queues around the block. It’s all freshly prepared at spit-and-sawdust **SNAPPY TOMATO** — a local institution that’s

been dishing up ‘donairs’ for generations. snappytomato.ca

Halifax hums with maritime history, and its seafaring heritage comes alive amid the briny air of the 18th-century pub, **THE PRESS GANG**. Here, platters of milky oysters are washed down with a single-malt whisky to a soundtrack of live jazz and blues on Friday and Saturday nights. thepressgang.ca

If beer’s more your thing, you’ll be well catered for in this city of craft breweries. In fact, Haligonians are such fans of beer that Alexander Keith, the city’s most-famous brewmaster, was mayor three times. Head to the tongue-in-cheek **CHARM SCHOOL** pub, run by **UNFILTERED BREWING**, where a number of local beers are on tap. unfuckingfiltered.com **EMMA THOMSON**

RACHAEL SHEPPARD'S
top places to eat



LEMON TREE

I adore this family-run Turkish restaurant. Housed in a pink, one-up, one-down house on ‘vintage row’ (Queen Street), you can’t miss the lemon tree painted on the facade. The welcome’s extremely warm and the food — from the *kofte* to the *baklava* — is faultless. lemontree-restaurant.ca

TEMPO

There are loads of places to eat lobster in Halifax, but this open kitchen is usually the cheapest and they also offer great grab-and-go lunches. tempofooddrink.com

PRIMAL KITCHEN

This rustic joint ages and butchers its pasture-raised beef onsite. It’s dished up on wooden boards, with homemade ‘slaw and bone-marrow butter, but sure to try the truffle parmesan fries too. Whenever I have friends visiting, I always take them here. primalhfx.ca

TRIDENT BOOKSELLERS & CAFE

For ‘me time’, I head to this 30-year-old neighbourhood gem. It’s a Parisian-style coffee shop inside a bookstore and I love the straight-backed mahogany cases, yellowing chequerboard floor and the quiet jazz they play while you browse. Plus, the coffee is also roasted onsite. facebook.com/tridenthalifax

GIO

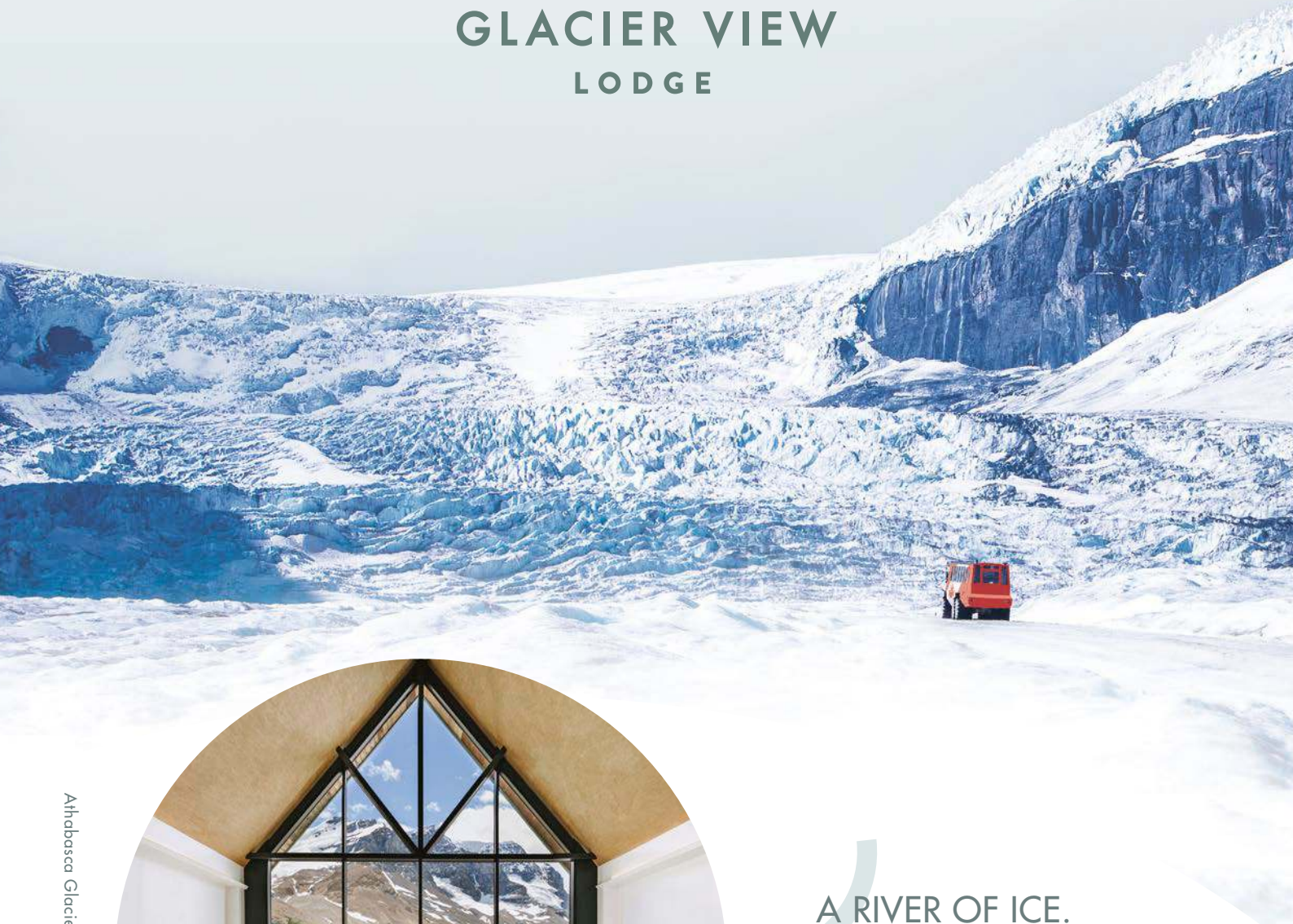
Housed in the Prince George Hotel, this is no bland hotel restaurant. The chef, Vince Scigliano, lets the talent of his team ‘run free’ on Tuesday nights with a six- or eight-course tasting menu that’s out of this world. giohalifax.com

Rachael is the owner of *Local Tasting Tours*, which offers food-centric tours of Halifax. localtastingtours.com

IMAGES: TOURISM NOVA SCOTIA; PRIMAL KITCHEN; MICHAEL CARTY PHOTOGRAPHY



GLACIER VIEW LODGE



Athabasca Glacier / Canadian Rockies

A RIVER OF ICE. A BLANKET OF STARS

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Stay at home STONEHAVEN

Coastal walks, a dramatic castle and fine food make this the perfect Scottish seaside escape

Just a 20-minute train ride from the Granite City, Stonehaven is a generous slice of coastal Aberdeenshire charm. Postcard-pretty, with a walled harbour, whitewashed houses and mouth-watering fish and chips, it's an ideal base for travellers looking to explore the great outdoors. Beaches, coves and plenty of hiking trails are available to while away a long weekend. But Hogmanay is when the town really comes into its own — locals flood the streets come 31 December, swinging balls of fire over their heads in a local tradition of 'purifying the soul'. And getting to this corner of northern Scotland is even easier on board the newly renovated Caledonian Sleeper, which runs nightly from London and arrives bright and early in Aberdeen at 7.39am. visitaabdn.com sleeper.scot

What to do: The views alone warrant a trip to dramatic Dunnottar Castle. Presiding over the North Sea on a rocky headland, the imposing fortress can trace its origins all the way to the third century. It's accessible by car, but the 40-minute walk from Stonehaven Beach — along a winding clifftop path — is well worth lacing up your boots for. dunnottarcastle.co.uk

Where to drink: Drop by The Ship Inn on the harbour for a wee dram or one of the

Scottish craft gins on offer. If you're a serious gin aficionado, however, jump on a train to Aberdeen and check out Orchid & Porter's Gin Micro Distillery, which has won numerous accolades as Scotland's best cocktail bar. shipinnstonehaven.com orchidaberdeen.com

Where to stay: Opened in 2018, Dalriada Luxury Lodges' clutch of five self-catering lodges sits high above the town, and offers chic self-catered stays in a supreme setting. With views out to Dunnottar Castle, it's the perfect place to hole up after a day exploring the windswept coast. There's the option to add bike hire and access to the nearby golf course, too. dalriadalodges.com

We like: Stonehaven's most famous culinary export is perhaps the deep-fried Mars bar, but at Auntie Betty's, you can get your sugar fix with a giant ice cream covered in pick-and-mix and mini marshmallows. facebook.com/auntiebettystonehaven

Don't miss: Keep your eyes peeled around the harbour, where you'll find maritime-themed sculptures made of scrap metal — including fishing boats and a lighthouse. Their creator was a mystery until this year, when the 'Stonehaven Banksy' was revealed to be local artist Jim Malcolm. **TAMSIN WRESSELL**



WHERE TO EAT

Make a beeline for the award-winning Bay Fish & Chips. Right on the seafront, this is the place to go for a delicious, locally-caught fish supper. Opt for the battered scampi with a generous squeeze of lemon. thebayfishandchips.co.uk

FROM TOP: Dunnottar Castle; fish and chips, The Bay





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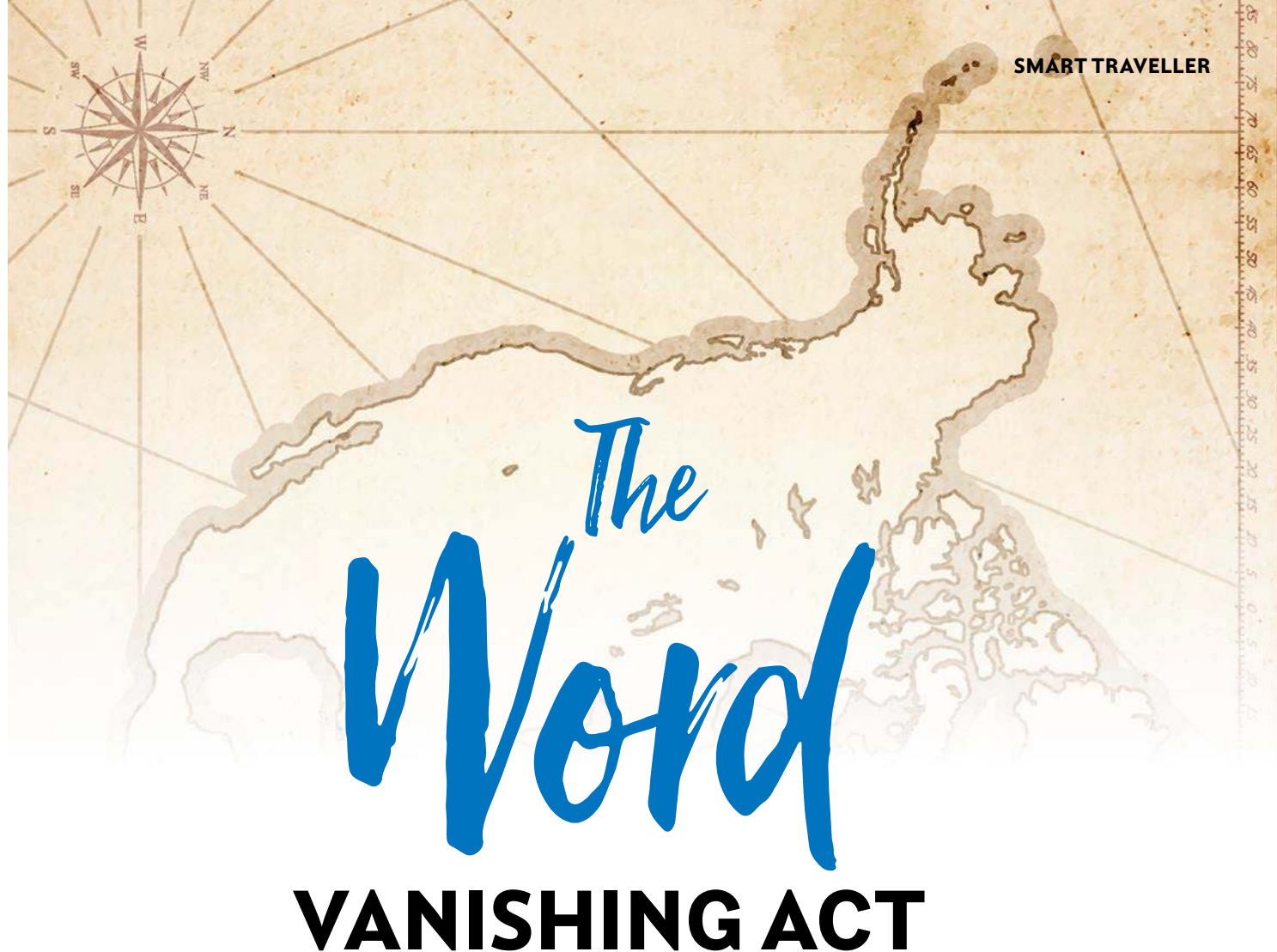
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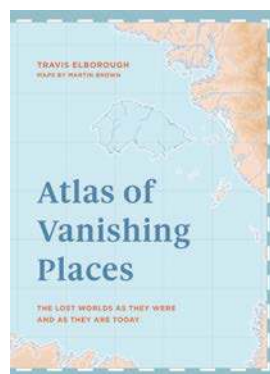


The Word

VANISHING ACT

Maps aren't just about getting from A to B. One new tome takes a slightly different approach by showing us the places slipping off the radar

The latest in a series of unexpected atlases by Quarto offers up places that were once the centre of our human worlds but have now disappeared under the sands of time (or, in some cases, literal sand). Written by pop cultural historian Travis Elborough, this book delves into the faded fortunes of legendary cities, examines rivers and seas whose changing forms have reshaped the human settlements around them, and digs up the dirt on ancient civilisations that have vanished without a trace. We take a look at four destinations fading out of sight.



Dead Sea, Israel/Jordan

This Middle Eastern sea is an eerie place that earned its lifeless epithet from its high levels of salinity (more than seven times saltier than the ocean), meaning neither flora nor fauna can thrive in its waters. Since the 1970s, neighbouring countries have diverted water from its tributaries, so it's shrunk from 50 miles long to barely 30 miles, with water levels plummeting at an alarmingly fast rate. Initiatives are in place to impede its recession, but without drastic action, the Dead Sea may well soon be dead.

Mahabalipuram, India

The ever-changing oceans have the power to unearth ancient wonders as well as wipe them away. After the 2004 tsunami, the retreating sea around the Shore Temple of Mahabalipuram on the Bay of Bengal scoured centuries of grit from the site and uncovered several granite sculptures buried beneath layers of sand. Figures of elegant beasts now bask in the sunshine after centuries of obscurity — lending weight to the myth that Mahabalipuram had once been a powerful port. Its survival offers insight into how our coastal relics might be preserved.

River Fleet, London

The only clue that Angler's Lane — a street off Kentish Town Road in north London — has a watery past is its name. This was the erstwhile haunt of fishermen who worked on the River Fleet, a waterway that once ran from the boggy uplands of Hampstead south towards the Thames. However, by the 1300s the waterway had become an open sewer and was entirely blocked by the 1600s. An expensive scheme was devised to widen the river for commerce, but the project never proved economically viable and by the 1800s the river had been driven underground.

Congo Basin Rainforest

Spanning central Africa, from the border of Uganda-Democratic Republic of the Congo across to Cameroon, the basin lost around 64,000sq miles between 2000 and 2014 due to extensive logging. The need to protect the forest is now greater than ever; more than 10,000 species of plants and 400 mammals call its swamps, rivers, canopies and savannah home, including scores of great apes. **SARAH BARRELL & CONNOR MCGOVERN**

Atlas of Vanishing Places by Travis Elborough is published by White Lion Publishing. RRP: £22



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The destination

Known as the Caribbean's 'Spice Island', Grenada may be a destination for food lovers, but it's also a country of tropical climes, palm-fringed beaches and warm welcomes. In the heart of it all — on the exclusive Pink Gin Beach — is Sandals Grenada Resort & Spa. This idyllic slice of paradise is where lush scenery and laid-back island vibes create a unique experience. There's an array of international dining experiences on offer, too — guests can tuck into traditional Caribbean fare at Spices, signature steak at Butch's Chophouse, or delicious Japanese Teppanyaki at Kimonos.

The prize

The winner and their partner will receive seven nights at Sandals Grenada Resort & Spa for two adults, return economy flights from Gatwick and resort transfers. Sandals Grenada Resort & Spa is a Luxury Included resort, which means the lucky pair can enjoy all-inclusive, five-star global gourmet food as well as unlimited top-shelf premium spirits and fine wines for the duration of their stay. There's also the chance to keep in shape with on-site sports facilities or try some of the resort's watersports, which include snorkelling and scuba diving (for certified divers). sandals.co.uk



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Answer the following question online at nationalgeographic.co.uk/competitions

Sandals Grenada Resort & Spa sits on which beach?

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You turned up in your thousands as we brought our biggest celebration of food and travel to London's Business Design Centre on 20-21 July. There were live demonstrations and interviews with culinary giants like Raymond Blanc, Gennaro Contaldo, John Torode and Andi Oliver; one-on-ones with cookbook authors and food writers including Felicity Cloake and Asma Khan; and 45 different exhibitors from around the world, from Greece to Thailand and Hungary to Malta, all offering their delicious food, drink and culinary expertise. If you couldn't make it this time around, then fear not, because we'll be back in 2020 with a bigger — and even tastier — National Geographic Traveller Food Festival. For now, whet your appetite with some of the most memorable moments from this year's event...



Gennaro Contaldo making fresh pasta
INSET: John Torode



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Raymond Blanc speaking to a packed audience

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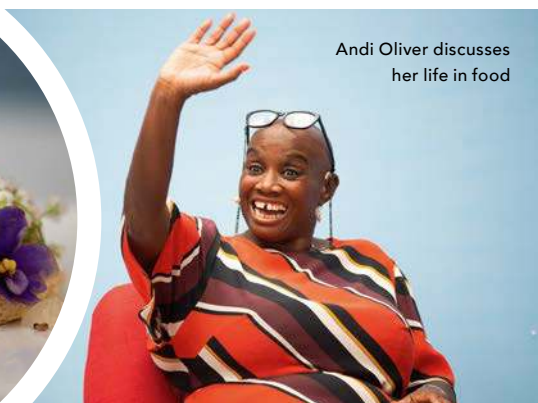
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IMAGE: AWL IMAGES

MEET THE NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC TRAVELLER (UK) TEAM...

Maria Pieri, editorial director

Overseeing the magazine since its inception, Maria has over two decades of experience as a travel and lifestyle editor

Pat Riddell, editor

The editor of *National Geographic Traveller* (UK) since its launch in 2010, Pat has been a travel writer and editor for more than 15 years

Stephanie Cavagnaro, deputy editor

New Yorker Stephanie is a travel writer and has been an editor at *National Geographic Traveller* (UK) for over six years

Sarah Barrell, associate editor

Former deputy editor of the *Independent on Sunday's* travel pages, Sarah writes regularly for national UK newspapers

Glen Mutel, executive editor

As well as his role on *National Geographic Traveller* (UK), Glen has been the editor of *National Geographic Traveller Food* since its launch in spring 2018

Nicola Trup, associate editor

Nicola is also deputy editor of *National Geographic Traveller Food* and has contributed to numerous publications, including *The Guardian* and *The Sunday Times*

Olly Puglisi, picture editor

With over a decade's experience, Olly sources, commissions and edits the magazine's photography

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NOTES FROM AN AUTHOR // JAY RAYNER

NEW ORLEANS

In pursuit of the ultimate last meal on earth, one dish — in all its simple, unrefined glory — makes a lasting impression in the Big Easy

In the early 1990s, as a young reporter finding my way, luck smiled upon me. I was asked if I'd like to go on a press trip to New Orleans. Would I? The city was famed for two things: music and cooking. I loved my jazz, was already a sometime jazz pianist, and while I was years off being made a restaurant critic, my decisions were often belly-led. I imagined nights on Bourbon Street, zigzagging from one louche music bar to another, breaking off only to feast on gumbo and sugar-dusted beignets.

What I hadn't expected was to be so thrilled by the oysters. As a child I'd been introduced to them by my mother [journalist and broadcaster Claire Rayner], who took me to lunch at Rules, London's oldest restaurant, in Covent Garden. It began with oysters. I was enthralled by the accessories that accompanied them: the stand and the muslin-wrapped lemon and the fearsome looking bottle of Tabasco. It seemed to me the height of adulthood.

On that first night in New Orleans, we went to the Acme Oyster House on Iberville Street deep in the French Quarter, and I was introduced to a totally different oyster culture. Partly, it was the informality with which the bivalves were all but flung at us. Rules had white-jacketed waiters; here, oysters were shucked by big men with bare forearms like hams, and slapped down onto the bar like a challenge. But it was also the oysters themselves. I was used to something fragile and silvery, with the saline crash of the sea. These were big and white and creamy. They were an invitation to gorge, which — despite the jet lag — is what I did.

A quarter of a century later, when I came to write *My Last Supper*, a book on the pursuit of my last meal on earth and the stories behind the dishes and ingredients I'd chosen, I knew oysters would be a part of it. That in turn would mean a return to New Orleans. It's a city defined by its location on the Gulf Coast and therefore access to what were, until relatively recently, some of the most productive wild oyster beds in the world.

It was here in 1889 that Oysters Rockefeller was invented. Jules Alciatore, son of the founder of the venerable Antoine's Restaurant, was looking for a dish to replace



the snails that his customers came to him for, because of a shortage. He decided to put the topping of breadcrumbs, parsley, butter and other herbs that they used with their snails on to oysters instead and then bake them. In a glorious piece of marketing spin, he named the dish after oil tycoon John D Rockefeller, because it was so rich. In turn, rival restaurant Arnaud's created the likes of Oysters Bienville, topped with shrimp, mushrooms, green onions and various herbs, and a bunch of other cooked oyster dishes too.

On my research trip I worked my way around many of these stations of the cross, enjoying the city's old-school Southern charm. It's a cliché to describe modern New Orleans as a gaudy tourist trap, but that's to misunderstand its history. It's always been a good-time town, there to serve the waves of sailors as they come off the ships. It's one of the reasons jazz was born here, in the brothels of the French Quarter.

Where oysters were concerned, the New Orleans I met this time around was a subdued city. BP's Deepwater Horizon oil rig disaster of 2010 killed 11 people, and spilled more oil into the sea than any other petroleum industry accident in history, decimating the oyster beds. Many oyster fishermen had simply taken the multimillion-dollar compensation and retired. Where the beds once supplied bivalves to the entire US, now they produced only enough for local demand.

One morning, I went to an oyster talk at the warehouse headquarters of the P & J Oyster Company, which has been around since 1876. We were told stories of the beds, and slurped prime raw product off the shell. Between oysters I asked Al Sunseri, president of the company, what he thought the appeal was. "It's really the only animal you eat while it's still alive," he said simply. "Some people don't want to know that, but it's true."

I downed another oyster and brooded on mortality. What better food could there be for a last supper?

“We were taken to the Acme Oyster House on Iberville Street in the French Quarter, and I was introduced to a totally different oyster culture. Here, they were shucked by big men with bare forearms like hams, and slapped down onto the bar like a challenge”

My Last Supper: One Meal, a Lifetime in the Making by Jay Rayner is published by Guardian Faber. RRP: £16.99.

[@jayrayner1](#)

VIEW FROM THE USA // AARON MILLAR

TALL TALES

Historic, huge and humbling, California's giant sequoias are a powerful reminder of the importance of forests

Bill Bryson's *A Walk in the Woods*, in which he describes hiking the 2,200-mile Appalachian Trail, from Maine to Georgia, is one of my favourite travel books. Not just because Bryson is the funniest travel writer alive today — a man who, in that book, describes a moose as 'a cow drawn by a three-year-old' and his plan for a bear attack as '[to] literally shit myself lifeless' — but because I also love how it celebrates my favourite landscape: forests. Oceans are wild, but unattainable. Mountains impressive, but daunting. Forests, however, are different.

Which is lucky, because America is filled with some of the greatest in the world. I've seen aspens turn gold in the Rocky Mountains, and New England oaks blaze a fire red. I've walked among the Joshua trees of the Mojave Desert — strange, spiky things that look like they've been drawn by Dr Seuss — and, in Nevada, glimpsed the gnarled bark of the Great Basin bristlecone pine, the oldest of which had their roots in the ground at the same time as the first stones of the Egyptian pyramids were laid.

But of all of America's trees, one is surely king: the great sequoia. John Muir, the 19th-century Scottish-American environmentalist, called this Californian giant the 'god of the woods'. Stretching hundreds of feet into the sky, with reddish-brown bark and blankets of evergreen needles, it's the world's largest tree by volume; growing as tall as a 27-storey building and as wide as a double-decker bus.

Sequoias exist only in a narrow band of elevation on the western side of the Sierra Nevada mountains, with the biggest found in Sequoia National Park and Kings Canyon National Park. It was only when I visited that I realised what a spectacular place it is. This is the back door to Yosemite National Park, home to soaring granite peaks, black bears and alpine meadows bursting with wildflowers. The hiking is superb, there's world-class rock climbing, and even an enormous marble cavern called the Crystal Cave.

But the trees are the main reason people come here, and the best place to see them is the Sequoia National Park's Giant Forest.

Remember that '80s film, *Honey, I Shrank the Kids*, where a bunch of teenagers are reduced to the size of ants by their amateur scientist dad? It's like that. I walked fully upright through fallen, hollowed out sequoias, craned my neck as I strolled through groves of wood colossi, and, yes, I'm not too proud to admit it, I tree-hugged too. Well, I tried, at least. It would take 10 of me, stretched fingertip to fingertip, to reach all the way around even the smallest tree here.

The biggest is General Sherman — the largest living thing on Earth. It's hard to visualise 52,000 cubic feet, so let's just say, if it were a hot tub, you could share it with 1,000 friends and still have room to wiggle. If it were a keg, it would hold over three million pints of beer. I walked around its enormous trunk, 103ft in circumference, soaring 275ft high, like a skyscraper of bark and leaf, and hardly believed it was real. Fossil records suggest giant sequoias date back to the time of the dinosaurs — giants from a time of giants. Humbling, inspiring and hard to comprehend.

Forests have the remarkable power to make you stop and think. Bryson wrote: 'Woods are not like other spaces... they make you feel small and confused and vulnerable, like a small child lost in a crowd of strange legs.' And that's how it feels among the giant sequoias.

But woods are also somehow comforting, relaxing and, most importantly, alive. Deserts and mountains are ecosystems where life exists; here, life simply is. You can feel it. You can sense the Earth breathing, springing and soaring into the sky.

Studies have shown that simply looking at pictures of trees is enough to reduce stress levels. Forest bathing — wandering mindfully among the woods — is one of the latest wellness trends. We haven't evolved to live in cities, I thought as I stared up at these gods of the woods. We've evolved to live here among the trees. Perhaps it's time we all went for a walk in the woods. visitcalifornia.com

British travel writer Aaron Millar ran away from London in 2013 and has been hiding out in Boulder, Colorado ever since. 🐦 @AaronMWriter



ILLUSTRATION: JACQUI OAKLEY



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WHAT'S ONLINE

BEST DAY TRIPS FROM LISBON

Heading to the Portuguese capital? Stay a little longer and venture further afield to beaches, chic coastal towns and fairytale palaces

Words: Connor McGovern

Visitors quickly fall for Lisbon's charms. Hardly surprising in a city that has it all: vibrant neighbourhoods, fine food and rich cultural heritage. As a result, many visitors don't venture out of the city itself, but those who do are well rewarded. Lisbon provides the perfect base from which to discover some of western Portugal's natural and cultural treasures, and its good-quality local transport network means many excursions are an easy train or bus ride away. Within an hour, visitors can be exploring sandy strands with some of Europe's best surf; decadent mountain palaces with intriguing pasts; historic towns and villages; and vineyards, forests and wild natural parks that teem with wildlife.

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NEW ON THE SITE

Here's what you can look forward to on the website this month

**FOOD****Tasting New Mexico's chiles**

A staple of the state's cuisine, they can be found in everything from tequila to ice cream

**RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL****Q&A with CEO & activist Justin Francis**

Discussing the challenges facing the tourism industry

**FOOD****Meet the maker**

Dutch former actor Joris Putman creates a premium vodka using only organic tulip bulbs

JAPAN: SUMO IN THE SPOTLIGHT

With the Rugby World Cup almost upon us, we focus on Japan's most sacred sporting contest. Words: Ben Lerwill

The fighter rests his knuckles on the clay and stares ahead, expressionless. His hair has been waxed into a delicately fanned topknot. His backside could block a stable door. He propels himself forward, a juggernaut of meaty momentum in a loincloth. Eleven-thousand people roar in approval. Seconds later, his hefty rear has been dumped without decorum into the crowd. His hair's all over the place and he wears the startled look of a man unsure what day it is. Fight over.

I'm at a Grand Sumo Tournament in Tokyo. Every few minutes, men the size of buffaloes enter the arena to slap seven shades out of each other while spectators drink beer and tuck into bento boxes. A sumo match is short and intense, a thunderous coming-together of biceps and bellies. Before each bout, an announcer enters the ring and chants the names of the next fighters in a long, wavering song. It sounds rather like a call to prayer.

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IMAGES: AWL IMAGES; GETTY



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Weekender

TURKU

The ultimate island-hopping destination, Finland's 155-mile Archipelago Trail is a place of rocky skerries and forested islets, where eco-retreats, Nordic cuisine and saunas abound — and the gateway to it all is buzzing Turku, the former capital city. Words: Stephanie Cavagnaro

A constellation of some 20,000 islands fan out like the Milky Way from Finland's southwestern shores — some simple rocky skerries, others topped with twisted pines. This largely Swedish-speaking island chain rising from the Baltic Sea is one of the world's largest archipelagos. Its wind-beaten shores are green beacons of the quiet life, offering lung-cleansing air and shelter for seabirds.

Explore the floating greenway following the 155-mile Archipelago Trail — a laid-back loop of roads and free public ferries — to take in sleepy red boathouses, forested islands and sheltered coves. It's a place where terns and swallows zip by, traditional Finnish smoke saunas abound and, in summer, roadsides are carpeted with wild strawberries and lingonberries.

Turku, Finland's oldest city and the former capital, is the gateway to it all, divided by the linden-lined River Aura into 'this side' (older) and 'the other side' (newer). It's a city undergoing a colourful renaissance led by a string of openings: the city's first rooftop bar; a brand new funicular; and even a prison-turned-hipster-paradise housing a microbrewery, bakery and coffee roastery. And with new direct flights operating from Luton, it's now much easier to touch down in Turku.

ABOVE: Wooden cottage and sauna, Finnish archipelago
RIGHT: Kakola Brewing Company

FOLLOW THE TRAIL

Up for a challenge? The 745-mile St Olav Waterway historic walking route launched in May, taking trekkers from Turku through the Finnish archipelago, across the Åland Islands and to Trondheim in Norway. stolavwaterway.com/en



DAY ONE TAKE IN TURKU

MORNING

The way to Turku's heart is through its larder. Start at Turku Market Hall — it may date back to 1896, but it's no antique. At Herkkunuotta, bowtie-wearing chef Mikko sells fresh fish and creates dishes like cold-smoked pike roe with fennel and sour cream on archipelago bread (a malty, sweet loaf), and herring with Finnish strawberries. Next, savour mature emmental and organic goat's gouda at Juustopuoti before stopping for a cake-and-caffeine kick at MBakery Café. Nearby, the 280ft-tall Turku Cathedral is a gothic monument to the city's former life as Finnish capital. "The cathedral is 700 years old, and has seen it all — the fires, the wars," says my guide, Olga. Inside, it's austere, with hints to its history as a Catholic church: Roman pillars, vaulted ceilings and a cavernous nave housing statues of bishops.

AFTERNOON

Still peckish? Stop for a light lunch in the airy foyer cafe of Aboa Vetus & Ars Nova before exploring this double-bill museum. Ars Nova celebrates contemporary art, while Aboa Vetus is firmly set in the past. Ruins lie beneath the building, showcasing stone houses and artefacts discovered during excavation. Head around the corner to Old Great Square to peer down the medieval cobbled street of Luostarin Välikatu, then kick back and relax on a Låna electric boat cruise along the river. Pack a case of gin-and-cranberry Hartwall Original Long Drink cans — a Finnish summer favourite — to sip as you as you cover the 2.5-mile stretch from the cathedral to the Baltic Sea; you'll pass red-brick warehouses, art displays, defunct cranes from shipbuilding's heyday and even a 700-year-old castle fortress along the way.

EVENING

So good it should be illegal — Kakola Prison has been transformed into the city's latest hedonist hotspot, with access to this new area via a free funicular. Grab a bag of pick-me-up at Frukt, which sources seasonal coffee from small producers and roasts it on the spot, or, if you're after a stronger tippie, head next door. "Welcome to the smallest bar in Turku," says Peter, owner of Kakola Brewing Company. The five-seater space serves pints ranging from a sour ale spiced with raspberry to a dry hopped saison. "Hopefully next spring we'll open a tap room so you can see into the production area," Peter adds. Nearby Kakolanruusu restaurant's thick walls evoke the prison it once was, but the creative sharing plates are no canteen cuisine: try the mackerel escabeche with oyster emulsion and green juniper.



THE HOT LIST

Where to sauna

AIRISTO SPA

Strip off and slip into the wood-heated igloo-shaped sauna. Or go all out and try the electric, infrared, steam, wood and alter-scented smoke varieties. To cool off, make your way to the outdoor solar-heated pool or opt for a sea plunge to take your temperature down a few degrees. airistospa.fi/en

HERRANKUKKARO

On the shoreline, just 40 minutes' drive from Turku, is the world's largest underground smoke sauna, the *maasavusauna*, big enough for 124 people. The *kyläsavusauna* (the village smoke sauna), meanwhile, is a more intimate affair, holding groups of up to 30. Don't miss the outdoor heated baths and saltwater pool overlooking the Baltic Sea. herrankukkaro.fi/en

FORUM SAUNA

An ideal place to try out a *vasta* (a fragrant bunch of silver birch twigs with which you gently whip yourself); the practice is said to aid circulation and soften skin. There's also an infrared sauna, mud therapies and leech treatments. visitturku.fi/en

SAARONNIEMI

This popular summer beach west of Turku turns into an ice swimming hotspot come winter. From early October until late April, brave bodies come here to heat up in the sauna before the big chill. visitturku.fi/en

HOTEL STALLBACKEN

It doesn't get much more traditional than a wood-fired sauna at this quaint B&B. Be enveloped in *löyly*, the steam produced by throwing water on hot stove stones, then, make your way outside to roll in piles of refreshing snow. hotelstallbacken.fi/en

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DAY TWO INTO THE ARCHIPELAGO

MORNING

Rent a car for the ultimate Finnish road trip: the Archipelago Trail. On the drive towards Nagu, stop off at Art Bank gallery in Pargas to meet eccentric owner Ted Wallin. "I'm the only recognised reincarnation of Salvador Dalí — and I didn't choose him. He chose me," he announces. The gallery's rooms are packed with surrealist paraphernalia: a gold leaf-covered floor light, a lip sofa, anthropomorphic drawers and melting clocks. Ted also hosts a splash-out €3,000 (£2,700) Privat Dalí dinner for 10 — the setting is baroque-luxury with spiral twisted table legs and gold ribbon-lined chairs, while food and drinks are straight out of Dalí's cookbook.

AFTERNOON

Stop off at Sattmark Kaffe & Safka for a seasonal spread. An 18th-century croft, it houses a boutique restaurant and shop selling such edible souvenirs as white chocolate with bilberries, local apple juice and salty liquorice. Take a seat in the sunny courtyard for a fish feast: egg mousse with herring and pickled onions, cold-smoked salmon and crab-marinated herring, all scooped up with archipelago bread and new potatoes. Save room for coffee and knock-your-socks-off cinnamon buns that are the perfect combination of fluffy and sweet. Hidden in the woods beyond is a collection of eco-lodges made from clay and straw.

EVENING

Head west to Nagu Marina, from which you can either drive a further two hours to Houtskär or go VIP aboard a private charter boat. Scenery rips past: birch-, pine- and spruce-covered islands; seabirds sailing across blue skies; and chilli-red boathouses providing a pop of colour against the greenscape. Dock at Hypeis Vårdshus, a small B&B run by husband-and-wife team Sam and Outi. Dine on the likes of smoked lamb, local potatoes with dill sour cream and the freshest fish at the unfussy restaurant, then retire to your room; most offer sea views and come decked out with striped baby-blue wallpaper, patterned armchairs and Finnish books.



IMAGE: ALEKS TALVE

Kaskis
ABOVE:
 Frukt Coffee
 Roasters

DRINK UP

Turku's best bars



FOR LOFTY REVELRIES

WALO ROOFTOP BAR: The city's first rooftop bar opened this summer atop Hotel Wiklund. Turn up for stunning sunset views over the city, and a selection of organic wines, bubbly and mocktails like raspberry lemonade. raflaamo.fi



FOR BEACH VIBES

SURF SHACK: This summertime pop-up is a local haunt, open until 02.00 on weekends. There's an alfresco seating area, DJs pop by to spin decks and the menu offers a winning combo of ice cream and cocktails. surfshackturku.business.site



FOR HOPPY HANGOUTS

KOULU: Exam papers are swapped for pints at this brewery-cum-restaurant set within a neo-renaissance ex-school building. In the summer, a buzzy beer garden grill sizzles with pork ribs and slow cooked brisket. panimoravintolakoulu.fi/en



LEFT: Cyclist on the Archipelago Trail

DAY THREE ISLAND LIFE

MORNING

Up and at 'em for a sea and sauna session, where it's customary — but not mandatory — to go in the buff. Sweat it out as you overlook the peaceful water beyond, with geese, swallows and terns crossing the skies in search of breakfast. “Do you know what to do when swimming in cold water?” owner Sam asks. “Don't be tense — just relax and breathe slowly.” And with that, hot-foot it into the chilly sea, then retreat to the heat of the sauna, repeating this process until you've worked up an appetite. Indoors, a breakfast spread of fresh bread, porridge, granola and rhubarb jam awaits. And afterwards? Try the easy climb up Borgberget Hill and its observation tower for views over the distant Åland Islands and boats snaking between the clusters of green.

AFTERNOON

Take a ferry from Houtskär to Korppoo as you make your way back to Nagu. Stop for a stroll at Korppoo's string of harbour huts, selling everything from smoked salmon to sailor trinkets. Walking trails twist away from here, one leading to a medieval church, others to secluded beaches. If you've time, take a fishing or kayaking trip. In Nagu, the leafy garden of the mustard-hued Köpmans Café & Restaurant provides a perfect pitstop for a slice of berry pie and a round of 'poptails' (frozen fruit pops served in sparkling wine). Flavours include gin, cucumber and tonic, and strawberry, mint and cantaloupe. For something more substantial, however, head to L'Escale for French fare or try Najaden, a steamboat restaurant serving up crispy pizza and cold beers.

EVENING

It takes a little over an hour to get back to Turku for a last hurrah. Kick off your evening with a pre-dinner drink at E. Ekblom; a recently devised option is the 'spruce' cocktail, made with Napue gin, ruby port wine, spruce sprout syrup, cranberry and lime. “In Finland we have 'everyman's rights' — you can pick anything you want from the forest,” Riku, the barman, says of the syrup. Next up, head to 'this side' of the river for dinner at Kaskis, a 36-seater spot that's often booked up two months ahead. Four- and six-course seasonal options are paired with wine; dishes range from whitefish and fried nettles with a lemon-seasoned butter sauce to a white asparagus, pork and Varkaus caviar with homemade almond milk. ☐

MORE INFO

Turku Market Hall. kauppahalli.fi/en
 Aboa Vetus & Ars Nova. aboavetusarsnova.fi/en
 Låna Boats. lanaturku.fi
 Kakola Brewing Company. kakolabrewing.com
 Kakolanruusu. kakolanruusu.fi/en
 Art Bank gallery. artbank.fi
 Sattmark Kaffe & Safka. sattmark.fi/briefly-in-english
 Hyyeiss Vårdshus. hotelhyypeis.fi/en
 Köpmans Café & Restaurant. kopmans.fi/en
 Kaskis. kaskis.fi/en

HOW TO DO IT

Wizz Air has a new thrice-weekly nonstop flight from Luton to Turku. wizzair.com
 Solo Sokos Hotel Turun Seurahuone in Turku is from €138 (£121). sokoshotels.fi
kissmyturku.com
visitturku.fi/en

NAANTALI

WOODEN TOWN MAGIC IN THE FINNISH ARCHIPELAGO

A picturesque old town, majestic views and the charm of thousands of islands. This quaint spa town in southwest Finland is the home of the Moomins and the summer residence of Finland's president.



A touch of history

Cradled by the glimmering Baltic Sea in a fairytale setting, the historical town of Naantali has a charming blend of culture, cuisine and architecture that can easily be explored on a weekend break.

World's largest archipelago

Travel on the Archipelago Trail — a looping route that passes through the most iconic views, fishing villages, manor houses and stone churches, across bridges and ferry crossings.

Moomin holidays

Explore the original Moominworld theme park and meet the beloved Moomin characters. Stay in the comfortable Naantali Spa, which was named Finland's Leading Hotel 2019 at the World Travel Awards.

Eat GENOA

The Italian home of pesto and pandolce is turning a corner when it comes to food, with modern dishes sharing the culinary spotlight with old favourites. Words: Audrey Gillan



There's a whirring and a juddering, a clattering cacophony as a 19th-century confectionery machine spins around to make a praline paste. The aroma of hazelnuts hangs heavy in the air as Eugenio Boccardo scatters chopped nuts into a drum, where two large granite wheels pound away. With rubber belts rolling above him and wheels turning beside him, Eugenio takes a chocolate scraper and scoops up what has now become a liquidy puree.

"This is the oil from inside the hazelnuts," he explains. This paste will then be refined in another machine, along with sugar, over the course of two days. It's a slow process.

The little factory at Romeo Viganotti, a classic Genoese chocolatier and confectioner, sits across five floors, in what was once a brothel. Eugenio, whose father owns the business, leads me to another room where I meet Adriana, who's pouring orange liquid through a metal funnel into vintage moulds dusted with icing sugar. She's worked here for 45 years, Eugenio tells me, and today she's making *gocce di rosolio*. "They're a typical candy of Genoa," he says. "They're

particularly popular with children, because the inside remains liquid."

People still queue to pick their chocolates at this 153-year-old local institution. "They take a long time to choose. The waiting is part of the charm and the beauty," Eugenio tells me. "People are old-fashioned in Genoa."

Romeo Viganotti is one of the city's listed *botteghe storiche*, historic shops and workshops where tradition is revered. At another of these wonderful places, Antica Polleria Aresu (a shop selling chicken and eggs), an exuberant Matteo Timossi demonstrates his antiquated device for determining the freshness of an egg. Assistants run back and forth to the walk-in fridge, bringing whole birds or thwacking breast fillets onto the marble counter. The fourth generation of his family to run the business, Matteo laughs: "These shops are like those animal species, like the panda, we must be preserved or there'll be nothing left."

The *botteghe storiche* are the cornerstones of life in the medieval streets of Genoa — not only a relic of the past, but a testament that life in this city is still lived vibrantly.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Santa Maria di Castello; Pietro Romanengo fu Stefano; pandolce; handmade chocolates, Romeo Viganotti

IMAGES: XEDUM; GETTY



DUBROVNIK

a city for all seasons



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www.tzdubrovnik.hr

Celebrating culture inside the stone walls

The iconic city walls have safeguarded Dubrovnik for centuries, and have allowed the city's rich cultural history to thrive and grow. A veritable cornucopia of landmarks have stood the test of time and today are testament to Dubrovnik's proud history. But it isn't only the stone facades that have been protected, the soul of the city beats to the sound of culture. And this year the jewel in the crown of Croatia's cultural calendar, the Dubrovnik Summer Festival, celebrates its 70th anniversary. It will, of course, be celebrated in style with an impressive line-up for this summer.



FROM LEFT: Dining al fresco at Piazza delle Erbe; octopus dish, The Cook

Pasticceria Villa di Profumo's shelves are painted in pistachio hues and laden with cakes (including a marvellous version of *pandolce*, the local Christmas cake), boxes of chocolates and twinkling, old-fashioned glass jars of sweets. Maurizio Profumo — who runs the family business with his brother Marco — leads me out of the shop and down a narrow alleyway to another of their shops, Gelateria Profumo, home of award-winning gelato.

"We've become famous for our gelato," he says. "It's not common gelato. It's made by people who have real pastry skills; the *zabaglione* [a milk, cream and sugar base for the gelato] we use is made in the pastry shop. We don't buy in any products; we even make our own candied fruits. We make the gelato fresh every morning, with no additives."

Genoa's old town is a maze of alleyways and tiny streets, known as *carruggi*. The novelist Henry James described it as 'the most winding and incoherent of cities... the most entangled topographical ravel in the world', but it's precisely this that makes Genoa so charming. It's such a wonderful place to lose yourself, stumbling across gems of churches, hidden restaurants and fascinating little shops by happenstance rather than design.

Down by the port, I seek out Antica Friggitoria Carega. *Friggitorie* are shops that sell fried fish and vegetables, and here, black cauldrons of oil are being heated over wood. I try squid, anchovies, and another tiny fish called *pignolini*, and ponder the local saying 'even a shoe tastes good when it's fried'.

Cucina povera ('cooking of the poor') influences much of the food here. This is the birthplace of ravioli, the name of which comes from the word '*rabiole*', meaning leftovers. Squeezed between the sea and the mountains, Liguria has very little fertile land, so hardy crops such as chickpeas and chestnuts are mainstays. They're also turned into flours, to be used in beloved dishes such as *farinata* — a pancake-like snack made of chickpea flour, olive oil, salt and pepper, eaten fresh from the oven (try it at Antica Sciamadda, where the wood-fired oven is almost 200 years old).

Known as La Superba, meaning 'the arrogant' or 'the proud', Genoa is a largely conservative city where many people are suspicious of change, which contributed to much of its youth leaving in recent years, in search of excitement and modernity elsewhere. But many are returning with the belief that their hometown is on the cusp of great things. One of them is Daniele Rebosio,

A TASTE OF Genoa



THE COOK

Genoa's only Michelin-starred restaurant combines traditional Genoese dishes with modern techniques. Try *seppia carbonara*, where the 'spaghetti' is thin strips of soft, slow-cooked cuttlefish. It's topped with egg and pecorino, cheese foam and a drop of squid ink. Other dishes include *crudo de mare* (a raw seafood platter) and *scucuzun*, a tiny Genoese pasta, served with clams and spring vegetables. Three courses from around £62 per person. thecookrestaurant.com

ANTICA SÀ PESTA

One of Genoa's most popular historic restaurants, this place is family-run with communal tables and a friendly atmosphere. Crispy *farinata* is cooked in the wood oven in vast pans, and another speciality is the delicious Genoese vegetable pie. Alternatively, try a plate of home-made tagliatelle with fresh pesto, accompanied by pitchers of house wine. Expect a long queue on Saturdays, and it's closed throughout the summer. Three courses from around £20 per person. sapesta.it

MERCATO ORIENTALE RISTORANTE

The old market has been completely overhauled, though the traditional shopping area remains at the front. Chef Daniele Rebosio heads up the restaurant on the first floor, where dishes include beef tongue topped with borage flowers and capers; and rare tuna in pastry, served with seasonal vegetables and soya. Three courses from £36 per person. moggenova.it/mercatorientale-ristorante



Gelateria Profumo interior
RIGHT: Pesto Genovese

the executive chef at Mercato Orientale Ristorante, above the newly refurbished market, Mercato Orientale Genova.

“People in Genoa normally go abroad to work, because this never used to be a city for your ideas. I left at 18 because my city gave me nothing from my point of view. But I’ve returned aged 23 and I’m very grateful that things are changing. We want to do something different here,” he says. “There are 2,900 restaurants in Genoa, and 2,800 do pasta with pesto sauce. I’m interested in experimenting. I use local ingredients, but different techniques. Pesto is uncommon with rice, so I make rice with basil pesto, one with pecorino, one with balsamic.”

Matteo Caruso and his stepbrother, Andrea Cremonese, also feel certain that Genoa is at a turning point, and so, two years ago they turned their family *latteria* (milk shop) into Tazze Pазze, a gourmet coffee house. Sitting outside in the medieval Piazza delle Cinque Lampadi, Matteo tells me the pair have travelled the world to find coffee beans, and they take them to a roastery with very precise instructions.

“In Italy, we maintain a quality of espresso that’s good, but the beans are roasted too dark. You burn all the taste that way,” he says, presenting me with a gorgeous cappuccino and a slice of salty focaccia to dip in it.

Yet, for all its culinary developments, Genoa’s most famous taste remains *pesto al mortaio* (mortar-made pesto), also known as *pesto genovese*, which dates back centuries. At MaddAlive, a bar and event space in

the basement of the old Palazzo Cattaneo Adorno, Marina Firpo, a guide and cookery teacher, shows me how to make it.

“In the Middle Ages, pesto was made with different kinds of herbs. But by the 18th century it was made with basil and pine nuts (or sometimes walnuts), and parmesan or pecorino, and a little light olive oil. Parmesan makes it sweeter while pecorino makes it stronger. Some mix half and half, but my family prefers stronger,” she explains. “Our basil is small and the leaves are very light in colour. It shouldn’t grow any more than 30cm high; pick the leaves from the whole plant.”

Marina tells me to put half a clove of garlic per person, plus 30 pine nuts, into a Carrara marble mortar and pound them with the pestle — ‘pesto’ means pounded in Italian. I should keep turning the mortar a quarter of a turn using the four small handles known as ears. The sound is meditative, a kind of harsh thump that becomes softer as the pesto begins to elide into a verdant, creamy emulsion. “When it’s like a paste, add leaves and a little coarse salt. Basil leaves have essential oils inside. And you need a marble mortar, because marble is cold.”

As my pesto comes together, it’s not just the colour that’s bright and light; it smells so different to any green gloop masquerading as pesto I’ve seen before: fresh and alive, almost. Genoese seafarers took jars of pesto on voyages with them, but when they returned home, it was the smell of fresh basil and the promise of fresh pesto that made their hearts sing. Now I understand why. □



Five Genoa food finds

1

FARINATA

Chickpea flour, olive oil, salt and pepper, baked in a large tin pan over a wood fire. It’s best eaten fresh from the oven, savouring the crispy, almost-burnt bits.

2

PESTO AL MORTAIO

Sweet yet salty, heady with the aroma of basil and a little nutty; there’s nothing like the real thing.

3

PANDOLCE

Popular between Christmas and Twelfth Night, this unleavened, sweet, biscuity bread is spiced and studded with pine nuts, candied fruits and peels.

4

RAVIOLI ALLA GENOVESE

Square envelopes of pasta stuffed with wild herbs, veal, parmesan, eggs, garlic, salt and pepper.

5

FRIGGITORIA

These shops sell various fried foods. Head to the old port for seafood, tiny fish and vegetables, coated in batter and cooked in cauldrons of oil for Genoa’s original street food.

British Airways flies from Gatwick to Genoa from £160 return. The Valéry Guest House offers double rooms from €80 (£72) a night, B&B. ba.com valeryguesthouse.com visitgenoa.it botteghistorichegenova.it

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Neighbourhood

KRAKOW

Poland's second city is a first-rate destination for travellers seeking elegant medieval architecture, a buzzing bar scene and a rich history spanning some of Europe's most seismic moments. Words: Nicola Trup



When it comes to looks, Poland's second city takes first place. Its people suffered hugely during the Second World War, but Krakow's buildings were spared the devastation inflicted on many other Polish cities, leaving its medieval Old Town — a UNESCO World Heritage Site with a castle, cathedral and one of Europe's largest medieval squares — mostly intact. Stray beyond the historic centre of the pretty postcard city, across the Vistula River and to the outer edges, and you'll find districts with fascinating stories to tell: tales of Jewish history, living under communism, or how new life is being breathed into this old city.

NEIGHBOURHOOD

Kazimierz

“The danger for Kazimierz is making it into a Jewish Disneyland,” Celina, my guide, says, as we stand next to a stall — one of several — selling skull caps, Star of David necklaces and carved statuettes of klezmer musicians.

This Judaica (Jewish ceremonial art) isn't aimed at Krakow's tiny Jewish community, who number just 120. It's for the visitors who come to trace the history of the district, which was home to around 56,000 Jews before the Second World War, during which the Nazis forced the vast majority into the Krakow Ghetto and concentration camps.

After the Holocaust, this part of the city was “a ghost town”, says Celina — largely abandoned apart from a community of artists drawn here by cheap rents. But, “it all started changing rapidly after *Schindler's List* [the 1993 movie that was filmed here]”. An influx of visitors and investment followed, with the area's creative, bohemian vibe also getting a boost. A pair of former tram depots have been transformed into an engineering museum and a restaurant, Stara Zajezdnia; a 1970s former office block has become hip Nova Resto Bar; and vacant lots have been commandeered by clusters of food trucks.

Nudging up against the Old Town, this is one of Krakow's most central neighbourhoods, but it manages to squeeze in little pockets of greenery. On a sunny afternoon, people flock to the lush Mleczarnia beer garden, or peaceful Mehoffer Garden (named after the local artist who designed it), hidden behind a museum, between apartment blocks.

We wander over to Plac Nowy, a square that Celina describes as “a big party area”. At its centre is a red-brick rotunda, formerly a kosher slaughterhouse, whose windows serve as hole-in-the-wall food stands. Most of them sell *zapiekanki*, Poland's answer to the croque monsieur — a toasted, open-faced sandwich topped with mushrooms and melted cheese. Tomorrow, when I return, there will be a flea market, selling everything from cutlery and clothing to yet more Stars of David.

Kazimierz has several museums dedicated to its Jewish history, but the Galicia Jewish Museum does the best job of fusing past and present. A sleek space with a cool cafe and a bilingual bookshop, it has a permanent exhibition of modern photos documenting what remains of Jewish culture in the region.

We pause at Ulica Szeroka, a square with trees at its centre and pavement cafes skirting its edges. Celina points out two restaurants, Ariel and Ester, which play the best klezmer music in town. We pop into Remuh Synagogue, which survived Nazi occupation and is now Krakow's only operational synagogue. Peaceful and understated, it's a world away from the souvenir stands just beyond the gates.



PREVIOUS PAGES: View over Krakow's medieval Old Town

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Mehoffer Garden; Wawel Castle; Pączki (doughnuts); Szeroka Street, Kazimierz



Podgórze

This has to be the best view in the city. In front of me, hilltop Wawel Castle rises above the Old Town, while to the left is a tree-filled former quarry that's soon to be turned into a park. There's a group of hills behind, but on a clear day you can see all the way to the Tatra Mountains, marking the border with Slovakia.

Krakow has four man-made hills, all with rather hazy origins. The one I'm standing on, Krakus, is named for the city's mythical founder and is thought to have been built by the ancient Slavs at least a millennium ago.

"Podgórze has always been different; a small town within a big town," my guide, Szymon, says. Just across the Vistula from Kazimierz, this area feels suburban by comparison, its streets lined with villa-like homes and neighbourhood restaurants. At the junction of Staromostowa and Kazimierza Brodzińskiego, we buy cones of tart blueberry ice cream from old-school grocery shop Delikatesowo. "This is the most international food corner in Krakow — you have Italian, Vietnamese, Basque," says Szymon. "Fifteen years ago, there was nothing. The pedestrian bridge opened in 2009 and everything changed," he adds. Thanks to the Father Bernatka Bridge, more visitors are straying south of the river.

Under Nazi occupation, Podgórze was home to the Jewish Ghetto, and the district honours its history on Plac Bohaterów Getta (Ghetto Heroes Square) with a powerful memorial: 33 oversized, empty metal chairs. Nearby, a pharmacy whose owners passed on food and information to ghetto residents, Apteka Pod Orłem, has been turned into a museum, as has Oskar Schindler's Enamel Factory, a short walk away in Zabłocie.

On the riverbank, another piece of history has found a new purpose. The hulking brutalist Forum Hotel opened in 1988, and in the years after its closure in 2002 its bedrooms were abandoned. Today, the ground floor has been given over to Forum Przestrzenie, a bar, club and gig space that hosts raves in the former kitchen and conference rooms.

Robert, part of the team behind the venue, takes me to the basement bar, Klub 89, which has been kept almost exactly as it was in its Eighties heyday. It's a David Lynch-style dream of red lights, carpeted walls and leather booths. If the bedrooms were available and looked anything like this, I'd check in.

"Everything inside needs rebuilding," Robert tells me. With the bar and club being temporary, the Forum's future is still up in the air.



When in Krakow...

1

PAŃCZKI

On Tłusty Czwartek (Fat Thursday), the last Thursday before Lent, it's traditional in Poland to eat *pączki* (doughnuts). Some of the best are to be had just outside the Old Town, at Cukiernia Michałek, where the fillings include rose jam.

2

OLD TOWN

Krakow's crowning glory is its medieval Old Town. Highlights include Wawel Castle, and central square, Rynek Główny, where you'll find the beautiful Cloth Hall, worth visiting for its architecture rather than its pricey souvenirs.

3

TYTANO

A complex of bars, restaurants, nightclubs and arts spaces set in a former tobacco factory just outside the Old Town. Pick up a beer at Weźże Krafta and a carnivore's dream sandwich at 'meat bar' Meat & Go, before a gig at live music venue Zet Pe Te.

4

PLANTY

Encircling the Old Town, this park is made up of 30 gardens, dotted with flowerbeds, water features and statues of historical Polish figures, like Nicolaus Copernicus.

5

OBWARZANKI

Created here in the 15th century as a gift for the king, the *obwarzanek* is a sort of proto bagel, still sold from street-corner carts around the city. Crusty and slightly sweet, it's lighter than its Jewish cousin, and while it's not filled, it usually comes topped with poppy seeds, or sometimes salt or cheese.



Central Square, Nowa Huta

Nowa Huta

Just as I'm wondering how I'm going to recognise Klaudia, an ancient green car sputters to a halt in front of me, its engine not so much purring as yowling. It's a 1972 Trabant, a GDR brand that was popular across the Eastern Bloc. And my guide is driving it for a reason: we're off to the 'workers' paradise' of Nowa Huta.

Krakow's easternmost district, Nowa Huta was built between 1949 and 1951 to house employees of the steelworks at its heart. It's one of only two planned cities in the world built in the socialist realist style, the signature Soviet aesthetic that was all about big, blustering buildings and banging the drum for communism. "The city was a gift from Stalin," Klaudia says. "Showing off, really." Paranoia meant 250 bomb shelters were built under Nowa Huta, some of which are now open for tours.

We rattle through the 'new' part of town (built between the 1970s and 1990s), passing the Polish Aviation Museum, a former airfield, and Nowohuckie Centrum Kultury, a cultural centre, outside which are street food trucks and a live band.

The city was intended to be laid out in the shape of a wheel, with Plac Centralny at its heart, but only half the spokes ever materialised. One of those spokes, Aleja Róż, which Klaudia calls "our Champs-Élysées", is a wide, partly pedestrianised street punctuated

by tidy lawns and flanked by domineering, Orwellian apartment blocks, built for the staff of the steelworks. "Everybody was equal, but some more equal than others," my guide quips, pointing to the flats with balconies.

The buildings' ground floors are given over to grand colonnades, and shops and restaurants that hark back to Nowa Huta's heyday, from the Bar Mleczny Centralny (a milk bar barely changed since the early 1950s) to Cepelix, a gift shop with vintage chandeliers and wooden display cabinets. Amid the net curtains and laminate furniture of Restauracja Styłowa — once popular with Communist Party officials — Klaudia buys me a cherry vodka, urging me to "drink it Polish-style, in one shot". It's not all communist throwbacks, though. On either side of the road are branches of hip local ice cream chain Good Lood, both with queues of teenagers outside.

Aleja Róż was also once home to the world's largest Lenin statue, and while that went the way of the communist regime, the steelworks once named after him still stands. Today, it employs 3,500, a fraction of its peak workforce of 40,000. At the entrance are two fortress-like administration buildings, one for the workers and one for management. While both brim with original features, the managers' building, with its marble staircases and chandeliers, is the more impressive. Some truly were more equal than others. □

MORE INFO

Polish National Tourism Office.
poland.travel
 Crazy Guides (Trabant tours).
crazyguides.com
 Stara Zajezdnia. starazajezdniakrakow.pl
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 Tytano. tytano.org
 Cukiernia Michatek.
facebook.com/cukierniamichalek

✈ Wizzair flies to Krakow from Luton, Birmingham and Doncaster Sheffield. wizzair.com
 Puro Krakow Kazimierz has double rooms from 222 Polish zlotys (£47), room only. purohotel.pl

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HAVANA

The Cuban capital is awash with stylish hotels, from cool mid-century apartments and grand art deco mansions to chic townhouses and newly renovated *casas particulares*. Words: Emma Thomson



Cubans are raising their daiquiris in two year-long celebrations: Havana turning half a millennium old and the 60 years that have passed since the Cuban Revolution. The anniversaries have encouraged a surge of investment into hotel upgrades and new properties, as well as sprucing up the city sights and spawning a slew of sleek, renovated *casas particulares* (private homes). Prices are steadily rising, but so is the quality. Old Havana is still the salsa-rich heart of the city, while the enclave of embassies in Miramar has been adopted by luxury hotels. If you want to shimmy with Havana's cool kids, choose Vedado — home to the art gallery/bar Fábrica. Time spent sleeping in Havana is time wasted they say, but these latest finds may well change that.





For foodies

333 IBEROSTAR GRAND PACKARD

The hotel that once welcomed the likes of Chilean poet Pablo Neruda and actor Marlon Brando has been resurrected from little more than a crumbling facade and reimagined with a modern extension floating atop the original colonial design. Its 321 rooms are blank-white canvases with pops of canary yellow or eggshell blue, but it's the corner infinity pool with views of the Malecón and its four restaurants that draw guests.

ROOMS: From 260 CUC (£200), B&B.

iberostar.com





For 1950s movie stars

££ TWIN APARTMENTS

New to the renting scene, this pair of apartments on the sixth floor transports you back to the 1950s the minute you step in the lift. The interiors are a calming oasis of whimsical cotton-candy pink walls, vintage lamps, fans and newspapers in the open-plan kitchen. And the cushion-festooned sofas are perfect for reclining on in fluffy slippers while nibbling pink-Champagne bonbons. There's pay-for wi-fi too.

APARTMENT: From 250 CUC (£190), room only.
twinshavana.com



For thespians

£ ECONOMIA 156

This LGBTQ+-friendly option is owned by Jazz and Stephen, a pair of film and theatre directors who are currently turning the downstairs area into a teaching theatre. It's a great entry-point to Havana's creative side — the concierge is an actor called Triana and the staff members take real interest in introducing guests to the best of Havana's nightlife and theatre scenes. There are three en suite timber-beamed rooms (two doubles, one twin) arranged around a central courtyard and guests have a high-spec kitchen at their disposal. This place is a real off-the-beaten-path find.

ROOMS: From 176 CUC (£135), B&B.
economia156.com

For history buffs

🏨🏨🏨 HOTEL NACIONAL

This beloved 1930s art deco classic is a national monument and symbol of Cuban identity and little has changed since its heyday. The walls are lined with memorabilia and the rooms are severely kitsch — you'd laugh at the prices they charge if it were anywhere else. But you're paying to stroll the same hallowed halls as Fred Astaire once did and sleep in the same bed as Rita Hayworth or Ava Gardner — rooms 246 and 225, if you're interested. Step back in time by attending the nightly 9pm Parisian-style cabaret for a taste of the Havana of old.

ROOMS: From 260 CUC (£200), B&B.
hotelnacionaldecuba.com



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Kempinski chose to make its debut in the Caribbean with a splash. While its five-star 246 rooms, 50 suites and spa are the finest in the city, it's the El Surtidor infinity rooftop pool that's the real draw. Seated at the old town crossroads, Gran Hotel Manzana is alive with history: guests sip daiquiris in the shallows where Cuba's first silent film was once screened, and preserved in the basement are remnants of Havana's 17th-century defensive walls.

ROOMS: From 550 CUC (£425), room only. kempinski.com



For art fiends

\$\$\$ HAVANA MAR

Esteemed Cuban abstract artist, Michel Perez Pollo, owns this beautifully curated private top-floor apartment with one double bedroom. Often known simply as 'El Pollo' (The Chicken), he has held major exhibitions all around the world. His wife Johanna receives guests and arrives at a time of your choosing to prepare breakfast.

APARTMENT: From 120 CUC (£90), B&B. cubaprivatetravel.com

For hipsters

\$\$\$ PLAZA VIEJA 1912

Open for just over a year, the owner's son — who works for Givenchy — designed this high-end two-bed apartment. The 'Colonial' room features a huge wood-frame bed, oil paintings and stained-glass windows with wonderful views of one of Havana's iconic central squares. There's a rooftop terrace with a sunlounger and breakfast is prepared in your private kitchen.

APARTMENT: From 250 CUC (£190), B&B. plazavieja1912.com

For stunning views

\$\$\$ PENTHOUSE YUVALGO

This 1950s penthouse is brimming with of-the-period *objets d'art* and a spectacular collection of artworks by contemporary Cuban artists. It has three individually designed en-suite rooms, but the standout is the suite with a roll-top bath and multiple terraces. The owners can also arrange massages, dinner, salsa classes, a local translator — you name it.

ROOMS: From 100 CUC (£76), B&B. cubaguesthouse.com

SLEEP

For peace and quiet

🏠🏠 GARDENS APARTMENT

This chic townhouse offers four minimalist rooms with mammoth four-poster beds decked out in organic linens, raw-wood doors and antique-tile floors that open onto a palm-filled central courtyard, gently wafted by fans on hot days. There's currently no wi-fi and the rooftop hasn't been developed yet, but there are promising plans for a small pool. Nice details include vintage Hemingway-esque typewriters and a well-stocked honesty bar.

APARTMENT: From 200 CUC (£150), room only. cubaprivatetravel.com

For a touch of class

🏠🏠🏠 LOMA DEL ANGEL

Named after the neighbourhood it's situated in, right in the heart of Habana Vieja, this meticulously restored home offers just two suites fit for a president — the Living Room and the Terrace. Filled with hand-picked furniture and fine linens, both are named to help you choose which space you'd prefer: a larger sitting room or a spacious balcony on which to breakfast al fresco. They charge full whack, but rain showers, butler service and personalised one-on-one tours quickly give you bang for your buck.

ROOMS: From 300 CUC (£240), room only. lomadelangel.com 📍





Gran Hotel Manzana
Kempinski

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STREET FOOD THURSDAY

Markthalle Neun is transforming Berlin street food, introducing the likes of Eritrean beef stew and bubble waffles to a city weaned on currywurst and Pilsner

It's 8pm on a Thursday, and beneath a string of bare light bulbs in the high-roofed Markthalle Neun, there's a sprawling, happy crowd drinking beer. Squeezing through the throng, I make my way to the temporary food stalls to investigate why everyone's here. The Markthalle Neun's Street Food Thursday is buzzing: I spot *pão de queijo* (Brazilian cheese bread), and sugary Hungarian chimney cakes rotating on a spit. There are large pots of deep red Eritrean beef stew, paper-wrapped bubble waffles drenched in various glossy sauces, and *arepas* (South American cornbread baps) — hot off the griddle and stuffed with chorizo and vegetables. The regular market stands are open too: I admire wooden boards laden with cured meats and cheeses; and big, fat, dry-aged beef burgers being passed over the butcher's counter at Kumpel & Keule.

Until relatively recently, much of this exotic global fare would've been very hard to come by in the German capital. Five years ago, you might have wolfed down a currywurst at the end of a night fuelled by Berliner Pilsner, but you'd never have planned a trip here for the cuisine. Food concept innovator Kavita Goodstar moved from Birmingham to Berlin in 2009, and — despite the city's reputation for creative freedom — found the gastronomic scene to be very traditional and closed. Her response was to launch a supper club for fellow immigrants, who came together “to make meals in honour of their matriarchs and present their stories”. As the community rapidly grew, Kavita seized her chance to shake things up. In 2013, she launched a street food event at the Markthalle Neun.

Around 14,000 people turned up to the inaugural Street Food Thursday and, within 30 minutes, every scrap of food had been sold. It showed there was a huge appetite for culinary diversity and suggested Berlin's residents were ready for something new. Since then, Street Food Thursday has taken on a life of its own, even if Kavita has moved on. But the steady influx of immigrants to Berlin shows no signs of slowing, and the city's food scene continues to evolve. With the recent revival of Sonnenallee, a street in the Neukölln district that's packed with restaurants offering a variety of Middle Eastern and Arabic cuisines, Kavita says immigrants are no longer speaking “just to their own communities, but to the foodie community, too”.

Swedish food and restaurant blogger Per Meurling made Berlin his home in 2009. He tells me he moved here because “you could do what you wanted, when you wanted, all without limits”. Today, this applies not just to the arts, music and all-night clubbing, but to the food and drink scene, too. Per believes Berlin's culinary diversity is now on a par with that of New York. “You can eat well in any cuisine, from Japanese to Syrian to Szechuan, and you can spend as much or as little money as you want,” he says.

Glass of German Scheurebe in hand, I join the queue at Italian bakery Sironi and begin chatting to two Ligurian Berliners. They tell me the thick, rustic *focaccia allo stracchino* is unmissable, and I order myself a slice. Served warm, the bread's underside is crispy and golden, its centre soft and salty, while its edges ooze shiny beads of oil. I polish it off happily, take a large gulp of wine, and eye up a Portuguese custard tart across the way. **cd**

**Served warm,
the bread's
underside
is crispy
and golden,
its centre
soft and salty,
while its edges
ooze shiny
beads of oil**

PREVIOUS PAGES: Markthalle Neun
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: All
Markthalle Neun: bread on sale at
Sironi; a group chatting indoors; al
fresco drinks; Kumpel & Keule; interior





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT:
 Berlin Wall Memorial; My Florist Is
 A Dick by Shepard Fairey; street
 art, Urban Nation; exterior, Urban
 Nation; interior, Urban Nation



THE TATTOOED WALL

Amid the destruction and division of the postwar decades, graffiti gave Berliners a creative, defiant voice — celebrated today in the city's galleries and memorials

The first graffiti I ever saw was German. I was six years old and it was on a wall that was being destroyed live on television. I had little understanding of its significance, but my mother has German friends and so somehow none of it felt so very far from home. As diggers clawed at this dreadful barrier, I remember, amid the wild celebrations, noticing that one side was heavily tattooed.

Thirty years since it fell, the Berlin Wall is an enduring psychic scar on the city. At the Berlin Wall Memorial, its last graffitied remnants have been left for all to see.

On boards in the accompanying gardens, details of the Wall's construction, *raison d'être* and those who died because of it are laid bare. The detail is forensic, the effect deeply moving. Rusty metal information posts offer testimony to its awfulness at the push of a button. The recorded voice of a woman describes in hideous detail what it was like to see victims of a grenade attack dragged back to the east side.

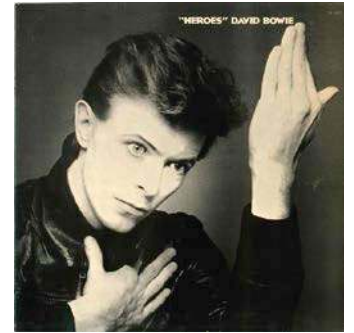
The colourful graffiti nearby is almost painfully jarring. "If you ever wonder if you're seeing East or West in old photographs, just look for the graffiti," says Anne Mueller, tour guide at the Urban Nation museum in Schöneberg, later that day. "The east side was untouched because of the 'death strip' [a 150-metre-wide no-man's land strewn

with barbed wire, watchtowers and machine gun posts], but on the west side it was very common to paint."

At Urban Nation, work by some of the world's best street artists is presented in an almost conventional gallery setting. One such piece is *My Florist Is A Dick*, a sinister depiction of a riot policeman brandishing a flower, by Shepard Fairey, aka Obey, who came into prominence after creating Barack Obama's famous 'Hope' campaign poster.

Creation being a natural response to destruction, it doesn't feel like much of a stretch to link the Wall and the Second World War with Berlin's palpable dedication to artistry. This city has experienced so much disruption, but this hasn't just enabled town planners to hit the reset button, it's also allowed art and artists to flourish.

"Initially, the people doing it in the city were punks and migrants," explains Anne. "In the 1970s, Berlin still had a lot of war damage and people thought it might be nice to bring some colour back. Authorities weren't very strict about it." When the Wall came down in 1989, it created a large channel of relatively cheap real estate, right in the middle of the city. Artists didn't hesitate to fill the void and, whatever their medium, they've never really left. urban-nation.com berliner-mauer-gedenkstaette.de **JL**



BOWIE IN BERLIN

In 1976, David Bowie moved to Berlin. "He expected a postwar city with a grim, downtrodden atmosphere," explains Philippe, our Berlin Music Tours guide. "But no, it was all surprisingly relaxed."

Philippe paints a vivid picture of the German capital during this era. "In Berlin you could party for 24 hours," he says. "With it being under military occupation, you might expect otherwise, but you have tens of thousands of young men here, basically waiting for something to happen. There was an atmosphere of 'do as you please'. For a party animal such as David Bowie, that will shape how you live your life."

My Bowie Berlin Walk lasts nearly four hours, with a fair chunk spent near Hansa Studios, where the artist recorded *Low* in 1976 and *Heroes* in 1977. It was situated close to the Wall. "The [East Berlin] guards had direct visual contact into the studio," Philippe tells us. "They were young men, 19 or 20, with a gun, doing their military service, but keenly aware that if they were posted on this particular corner, there was a chance they'd get to groove along to Western music."

At this point, the opening bars of *Heroes* suddenly ring out from an nearby window nearby. A coincidence? Or a neat trick cooked up by Philippe? Either way, it feels thrilling.

We head next to the Reichstag, where Bowie played to West Berliners in 1987; thousands of East Berliners gathered on the other side of the Wall. "You could hear them," explains Philippe. "They were shouting 'Down with the Wall!'" music-tours-berlin.com

JFC

BERLIN BEAT

The city has long been a muse for rock stars

DEPECHE MODE

Between 1983 and 1986, the British band recorded four albums at West Berlin's Hansa Studios, and in 1988 played East Berlin's Werner-Seelenbinder-Halle (the site of the present-day Velodrom cycling arena). Heavily influenced by German industrial music, the group featured German artist Joachim Schmettau's Hand with Watch sculpture (found in the Hansaviertel district) in the video for their 1983 single Everything Counts.

NICK CAVE

Cave moved to Kreuzberg in 1983. He arrived with The Birthday Party, but ended up putting together the Bad Seeds here after meeting German musician Blixa Bargeld, who became the group's guitarist. They also recorded at Hansa Studios.

LOU REED

The musician's concept album named after the German capital was actually written before he'd visited the city. Later, in the mid-'70s, Reed shared a flat in Schöneberg with Bowie and Iggy Pop. He'd hang out with the pair at the Dschungel nightclub, Berlin's answer to New York's Studio 54. These days the venue lives on as the classy Ellington Hotel Berlin.

IGGY POP

Near the Schöneberg flat Iggy shared with Bowie and Reed is Neues Ufer, a gay cafe-bar where they used to hang out. A few miles to the west in Charlottenburg is legendary celebrity hotspot Paris Bar. It was here Iggy and Bowie were interviewed by *Rolling Stone* in 1979 for the infamous 'Bad Boys in Berlin' feature.

WORKING UP A THIRST

Not cool enough to make it past the formidable doorman at Berghain, Berlin's high temple of techno? No worries — your bar crawl options in Berlin never run dry

As I look at it, the world is upside down. So are the pictures. There's a carpet on the ceiling with a coffee table hanging beside it. I'm glad that Madame Claude is the first stop on my Berlin bar crawl because if I walked into this upside-down Kreuzberg bar anything other than sober, I'd be worried I'd lost my mind.

The unsmiling bartender is at least the right way up. He offers me a choice of locally made craft beers, before turning on the stereo. I seem to have arrived a little early and the smell of stale smoke has me wishing someone would light a fresh cigarette. An acquired taste it may be, but this is exactly the sort of accessible, grimy joint that contributes to Berlin's cool reputation.

The next bar is the considerably more refined Ora. This former apothecary is today a slick restaurant and cocktail bar, but the owners have drawn heavily on the building's pharmaceutical history, changing little of the decor and mixing drinks in chemists' beakers. The original shelves and drawers, once used for tinctures and potions, now house various cocktail ingredients. The stools have been allowed to rust; the floor-to-ceiling mirrors have a time-worn charm.

While savouring my second sazerac, I ask the barman about legendary Berlin nightclub, Berghain. Housed in a former power plant in Friedrichshain, the city's techno mecca has earned global notoriety for being both brilliant and seemingly impossible to get into. Is it worth me trying? "They say you should wear black, and nothing too fancy, but..." He shrugs. "Well, good luck."

The next day, I find myself queueing with a few hundred other would-be clubbers, making my way inexorably forward. It's a slow process, but, as the place opens at noon on a Friday and stays open for 57 of the following 60 hours — it closes on Saturday from 9am to midday for cleaning and restocking — I'm confident I'll at least make it as far as the bouncers.

The queue is infamous enough to have its own Instagram account, *@BerghainLive*, designed to ensure clubbers wait as little

as possible before the axe falls on their techo-scored dreams. They post updates all weekend so if it's particularly bad you can just wait in a nearby bar until it's calmer. Similarly, if the bouncers are feeling lenient or there's no line, they'll let you know.

Tonight, it's busy, so I put my earphones in, pick a Spotify playlist and try to convince myself that, at 36, I still like this type of music. After a few house tracks, I'm willing to believe this will all be worthwhile, but then worry that the earphones themselves might somehow decrease my chances of getting in. So instead I spend much of the 65 minutes it takes me to get to the front dipping in and out of the party chat around me. Much of it is speculation about what may or may not improve chances of entry. People frame everything around what they'll do if they get in, not when. And their fates rest with Sven Marquardt, the club's head bouncer, who's so well known he has his own agent — although this may be as much to do with his sideline as a photographer.

If you think Berghain is what happens when a place becomes too cool, I wouldn't disagree — although this is exactly the sort of thing a bitter person who didn't get let in would say. Disappointed, but not defeated, I shuffle off and explore Friedrichshain. And it's not as though I'm short of other options — this city parties as late as any other on the Continent and somehow manages to lure people back out for day clubs, too. I settle for a nightcap at the excellent Gin Chilla Bar. With 387 varieties to choose from, I order the local Berlin Urban Gin and sink into one of its soft, low chairs. It's been a strange evening but it's hard not to be struck by the German capital's confidence.

Yes, it works hard to perpetuate its cool image and, no, Berghain isn't the only place that has long queues outside, but this city gets under your skin. It's the sort of place you visit for five days and quickly begin wondering what the next five years will bring. JL



Clubbers queue outside Berghain
ABOVE FROM LEFT: Old fashioned and sazerac cocktails, Ora; interior of Ora



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BERLIN

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“When I did my first big pasting on a building, a policeman asked: ‘Is this an advert or political?’ When I said ‘neither’, he simply said: ‘Go on then.’”



Various & Gould
BELOW: The staircase
at the duo's studio

FACE VALUE

The urban artist duo and real-life couple Various & Gould explain how they complement each other creatively, and why making street art is like raising kids

“Already when I came to Berlin people were telling me it was... what’s the word?”

Gould’s question hangs in the air.

“Over,” suggests Various.

“Yes, they said that it was over — that street art was over, that the scene was finished,” continues Gould. “You hear this again and again, but then new people come with new eyes and fresh minds.”

The artist couple finish each other’s sentences a lot, or retrieve a wayward English word for the other. These days, the multimedia duo have located themselves in a Lichtenberg studio, in the east of the city.

The pair, who’ve been in a creative partnership for 15 years, have a son together. What could’ve potentially been a fraught business model for other couples has been a source of strength for Various & Gould. “Of course we think about our process, but it’s not like you can say one does the drawing and the other does the painting,” says Gould. “It’s like...” Various picks up the baton. “We definitely each have skills that complement the other. I think I’m more like the action

part and he’s more like the conceptual, thoughtful part. We blend that together and we learn a lot from each other.”

These days, they work mainly in the studio, but just a few years ago the pair were part of the city’s street art scene. “We started working in the streets in 2002,” says Gould. “When I did my first big pasting on a vacant building, a policeman came up and asked: ‘Is this an advertisement or political?’ When I said ‘neither’, he simply said: ‘Go on then.’ People really don’t mind.”

Like many prominent artists, the duo have occasionally courted controversy. Two years ago, they created vast, colourful papier-mache casts from statues of Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx. That got them a lot of attention. The reaction was, they say, “interesting”.

“Working in public is a good lesson,” says Various. “For me, it’s like raising kids — at some point, you’re going to have to let them find their own way. Once they’re out there, they’re not mine anymore. They belong to the public and I don’t feel so attached.”

variousandgould.com **11**





Tables set at Lode & Stijn
ABOVE FROM LEFT: Lode van
Zuylen; grilled sturgeon, fava
beans and cucumbers with pickled
wild garlic buds, served with
Lode's handmade sourdough and
whipped herb butter, Lode & Stijn



SMART CASUAL

Dutch chefs Lode van Zuylen and Stijn Remi serve unfussy fine dining fare in Berlin's arty, diverse Kreuzberg district

Only a few steps down an unremarkable side street off Kreuzberg's Landwehr Canal, Lode & Stijn's plain grey exterior and small, sleek sign places it firmly in blink-and-you'll-miss-it territory. Ten years ago, the mere suggestion of a casual fine dining restaurant in this location may have been considered absurd, but today, in this quickly gentrifying neighbourhood known for its vibrant, alternative streak, the passion project of Dutch chefs Lode van Zuylen and Stijn Remi feels entirely at home.

The pair initially met at culinary school in the Netherlands in 2003 before reuniting in Berlin years later to launch a series of pop-ups; they then went on to open their own restaurant in 2016. What encouraged and enabled Lode and Stijn on their arrival in Berlin was not just the creative culture for which the city is renowned, but the relatively low financial risk: "It's impossible to start anything on a small budget in cities such as Amsterdam or Paris," explains Stijn. "But in Berlin, a creative person can start with very little money and go on to make a living."

Today, however, rents are rising and less space is available. "It was definitely easier five years ago to say, 'I've got 10,000 euros, I'll give it a go,'" says Stijn. "But even today, you can put down a few cheap tables and chairs and have the opportunity do something great."

The decor at Lode & Stijn is contemporary and stylish, with white walls, wooden furniture and artwork propped up on the forest-green banquette. A seat in the corner affords me a view of the whole restaurant, and I watch my fellow diners enjoying their five-course meals. It's fine dining, certainly, but in a very warm, relaxed atmosphere.

The evening-only menu is seasonal and ingredient-led, and the focus is on high-quality produce, much of it sourced from the nearby market, Markthalle Neun. I'd return to the restaurant for the sourdough alone, served with a lightly nutty, pale ochre butter. Lode & Stijn's take on classic Dutch *bitterballen* (meaty croquettes) are breaded balls of brill, served with a horseradish mayo that has a proper kick. The real highlight of my evening, however, is the silky Wadden Sea oyster, poached in its own seawater and dished up with shiitake mushrooms and cabbage.

Lode and Stijn launched their restaurant from a place of joint passion and friendship — just two chefs who loved to cook; they admit they've grown more serious since then. However, without Berlin's culture of creativity, experimentation and encouragement, not to mention its relatively cheap rents, Lode and Stijn's welcoming premises on Lausitzer Straße would likely be home to something else entirely. lode-stijn.de **CD**

DINE OUT

KIN DEE

Self-taught head chef Dalad Kambhu came to Berlin via Bangkok and New York. Her sharing menus feature Thai dishes made with regional ingredients; Dalad prefers working with local ingredients like apple and kohlrabi to using imported mango or papaya — an approach that helped her Lützowstraße restaurant earn its first Michelin star in 2019.

SIGNATURE DISH: Kin Dee Kraprao Octopus (octopus confit with spicy Thai sauce). kindeebBerlin.com

MALAKEH

A flush of Levantine restaurants have opened in the capital recently and according to food blogger Per Meurling, "the greatest ambassador of Syrian food" is Malakeh Jazmati. Forced to flee from her home in Damascus, Malakeh came to Berlin by way of Jordan, where she hosted her own Syrian cooking TV show; her restaurant on Potsdamer Straße is popular with locals and immigrants alike.

SIGNATURE DISH: Fattet Makdous (crispy flatbread with fried aubergine, tomato sauce and yoghurt). malakeh-restaurant.de

ERNST

There's only room for 12 at the wooden counter of Ernst, on Gerichtstraße, arguably Berlin's most exclusive restaurant. Diners can watch as Canadian chef Dylan Watson-Brawn and his team prepare thought-provokingly simple dishes and listen to stories about the producers from whom the ingredients are sourced.

SIGNATURE DISH: Menu constantly changing. ernstberlin.de

THE ROAD TO BERLIN

For Barry Burns, multi-instrumentalist of Scottish band Mogwai, a temporary change of scene led to a second career as co-owner of Berlin bar Das Gift

HOW DID YOU END UP IN BERLIN?

My wife and I decided that we'd like to get out of Scotland for a while — and we ended up staying for the long-haul. To be honest, Berlin was the first place we thought of trying out and I don't remember why we were so single-minded about it. It's been good to us, but it has also made us appreciate Glasgow, too. I think we were taking the old city for granted, but both are brilliant places.

WHAT ARE YOUR EARLIEST MEMORIES OF THE CITY?

I remember walking down the street we were temporarily living in and it was quite a trippy experience. Now I have nothing but respect for people who have been brave enough to just pack a van or a bag and move somewhere they have no prior connection with. It takes a long time to get used to new surroundings.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE THING ABOUT BERLIN?

The complete lack of anyone caring what you look like or what you're doing — unless it's crossing the street on a red light or similarly unthinkable behaviours.

HOW DID THE BAR COME ABOUT?

By accident, really. My wife was looking for an art studio and the rental agent asked if she wanted to have a look at a bar that was up for rent. A month later and we had asked our pal, artist Phil Collins, and his boyfriend if they wanted to open a bar. Just like the move to Berlin, it was done on a whim and quickly became a part of our story.

HOW DID YOU CHOOSE THE AREA FOR DAS GIFT?

We didn't really. We just liked the look of it. It was already a sort of old man's pub, and we didn't change too much visually. We now live in that area (Neukölln). The bar isn't themed at all, and other than the sporadic haggis event, you might not know it's owned by Scots.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE MUSIC VENUE IN THE CITY?

I've only been once but I love the new Festsaal Kreuzberg. I saw Low [an American indie rock group] performing there fairly recently. For playing, I like Huxleys Neue Welt, because it's grimy, and also the nicer Admiralspalast, where we did the live soundtrack to a screening of Mark Cousins' film *Atomic, Living in Dread and Promise*. JL



“If you want to party at 5am, you can; if you want pizza, it’s right there; if all you want to do is chill in the park, you can do that, too”



CENTRE STAGE

German singer Jennifer Weist, of Berlin-based band Jennifer Rostock, explains how she made the once-daunting city feel like home

“I remember the feeling when I first arrived in Berlin and it was, ‘I don’t want to live here,’” says Jennifer Weist. “It was so big and so noisy. It’s dirty, too. My first impression was that it was cool to be here for a weekend, but then I wanted to go back home.”

“It’s totally different these days, of course,” she continues. The intervening years have done much to change her mind, and the city now feels like home. “My friends are here and they’re my family. I love all the opportunities — if you want to party at 5am, you can; if you want pizza, it’s right there; if all you want to do is chill in the park, you can do that, too.”

Sitting on a riverside bench in a quiet, leafy part of east Berlin, Jennifer explains how she now finds the capital much less daunting. She’s created her own “little town”, as she calls it, within the wider city limits; she gets on with her neighbours, loves her dog and is happy to spend the weekends relaxing.

If this seems remarkable, it’s because Jennifer embodies the vision of a devil-may-care rock star. Her tattoos start at her neck and cover most of her body. “This is Berlin,” she says. “Everyone has tattoos and piercings. The city is very open-minded, so it’s not a big deal.”

After a decade together, Jennifer Rostock is on hiatus, but Weist hasn’t been tempted to move elsewhere — partly because of the roots she’s forged here, but also because of Berlin’s relaxed vibes. “I lived in New York for three months,” she explains. “And I couldn’t believe all the rules: you can drink outside, but not smoke; you can smoke outside, but not drink. I was like, ‘F*** this — what’s going on here?’”

So Berlin is cool, right? “Well yeah, but you need to go out and make it that way,” Jennifer says. “If you just sit around expecting things to happen here, the city can kill you. But it’s so creative, with so many amazing people. And that’s really cool.” jennifer-rostock.de

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AT A GLANCE

Need some extra inspiration? Here are 11 of the best Berlin experiences, from bunker tours to open-air swimming

SUMMER SOUNDS

If you find yourself in Berlin on a weekend during summer, head to Mauerpark. Here, you'll find the popular Bearpit Karaoke, a sort of gladiatorial arena where members of the public come on stage to blast out their favourite tunes. The concept, founded by Joe Hatchiban, came to London for the first time in 2017, but this Berlin edition is the original — and best. bearpitkaraoke.com

DOWN BY THE RIVER

There's plenty of redevelopment going on along the banks of the mighty Spree river. A fine example comes in the form of Holzmarkt, an old wood market that reopened in 2013 as an urban village and creative hub, home to everything from a co-working space and art studio to a wine shop and bakery. A riverside utopia in the city, this community project is a welcoming space for alternative, creative types. holzmarkt.com

GOING UNDERGROUND

Berlin certainly doesn't shy away from its past. There are relevant museums all over the city, but for something a little more involved, head to the Berliner Unterwelten for guided tours of historic bunkers, anti-aircraft installations and abandoned subway tunnels. All help build an understanding of what it was like to be a German citizen while Allied bombs rained down on the city. berliner-unterwelten.de

KEBAB KINGS

The city is said to have as many as 4,000 stalls, restaurants and food trucks offering a version of the doner kebab, a fast food favourite largely imported through the city's thriving Turkish community. Who serves the best is the subject of debate, but Mustafa's Gemüse Kebab is hugely popular. If you don't fancy queueing, try one of the Rüyam Gemüse Kebab outlets, which are just as tasty but not quite so rammed. rueyam.de

MURAL MASTERCLASS

There are plenty of street art tours around the city, but Alternative Berlin Tours offers more than most. After being shown around by a street artist, participants are invited to a former margarine factory for a hands-on course in graffiti techniques. alternativeberlin.com

The banks of the Spree
BELOW: Graffiti workshop with
Alternative Berlin Tours



A BERLIN

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Cycling through Tempelhofer Feld

CINEMA CLASSICS

Michel Hazanavicius's 2011 Oscar-winning film *The Artist* proved there's still plenty of life in silent movies, but in Berlin, cinema-goers hardly needed convincing. Since 2001, Kino Babylon has shown arthouse movies in its revived 1920s cinema, with a programme that includes a selection of silent flicks every Saturday. Visitors can relive the golden age of cinema, with an experience far removed from the modern world of monthly memberships and unrelenting adverts; there's even an original cinema organ, too. babylonberlin.de

URBAN OASIS

Berlin is blessed with plenty of green spaces but perhaps the best of the bunch is Tempelhofer Feld. Originally constructed in the 1920s, the former Tempelhof Airport in the south of the city ceased operations in 2008. The 386-hectare open space and terminal — once one of the largest structures in Europe — have since been reclaimed for use as a public recreation area. Today, the vast site features a four-mile cycling, skating and jogging trail, a six-acre barbecue area, a dog-walking field and an enormous picnic area. thf-berlin.de

RETRO CAR RIDE

The Trabant is an icon of the former German Democratic Republic. More than 3.7 million of these plucky little cars were made in East Germany but, owing to their mechanical shortcomings, they were often difficult to love; in 2016, Autotrader described the Trabant as “an awful car made by communists”. Visitors feeling a sense of nostalgia can, however, embark on a Trabi Safari tour around Berlin. A maximum of three adults are allowed in each Trabant, many of which have been painted in eye-catching animal patterns. trabi-safari.de ➤



Photobooth at RAW Gelände
BELOW: Dance teacher at
 Clärchens Ballhaus

SPLASHDOWN


Berlin's winters are notoriously inclement but its long, hot summers don't get anywhere near as much press. There are plenty of provisions in place for coping with the heat, however, and while the lakes outside the city may be tempting, there are also a number of public pools dotted around the centre. The most famous is the Sommerbad Olympiastadion (situated in the stadium that hosted the 1936 Olympic Games), which counts a 50m pool, children's pool, diving boards and waterslides among its facilities. Alternatively, head to the banks of the Spree — but rather than jumping into the somewhat polluted waters, make your way to the Badeschiff, a floating pool set within a barge on the river. arena.berlin/veranstaltungsort/badeschiff

HAVING A BALL

Another of Berlin's renovated institutions, Clärchens Ballhaus ballroom has been around since 1913. However, unlike many of the surviving historic buildings in the city, this one

still delivers a version of its original function: providing people with a space to dance. While you'll certainly find some old-timers two-stepping, new waves of dancers have also started attending classes, helping the old ballroom stay relevant. Concerts are held here throughout the year, and there's also a restaurant — perfect for those who want to come and have a look around without actually dancing. ballhaus.de/en/startseite.html

CREATIVE COMPLEX

Aesthetic plays a massive part in Berlin's standing as Europe's trendiest city, and the offbeat compound RAW Gelände feels like a culmination of all its coolest credentials. Here, in a former train repair station, you'll find a jumble of independent bars, day-and-night clubs and galleries vying for attention, all surrounded by a kaleidoscope of murals, paintings and posters. There's also an old hangar that's been converted into a skate park, a bunker repurposed as a climbing wall and a selection of outdoor photobooths. **JL** 

HOW TO DO IT

British Airways Holidays has city breaks from London to Berlin from £128, including return flights and two nights' room-only hotel accommodation. ba.com/holidays

Berlin Music Tours offers several itineraries including the East-Berlin Music Walk, a multi-media bus tour and artist-dedicated walking tours including Bowie, Depeche Mode and U2. From around €20 (£18) for 2-3hrs. musictours-berlin.com

Alternative Berlin offers free daily street art walking tours, meeting at the Television Tower, Alexanderplatz. alternativeberlin.com

MORE INFO

Berlin: Imagine a City, by Rory MacLean (Weidenfeld & Nicolson). RRP: £14.99.
Berlin, by Joseph Pearson (Reaktion Books). RRP: £14.95.
visitberlin.de/en_germany.travel/en



MOUNTAINS


HOTEL

Seefeld, Tirol - Austria

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info@mountains.at

Inhale Mountains

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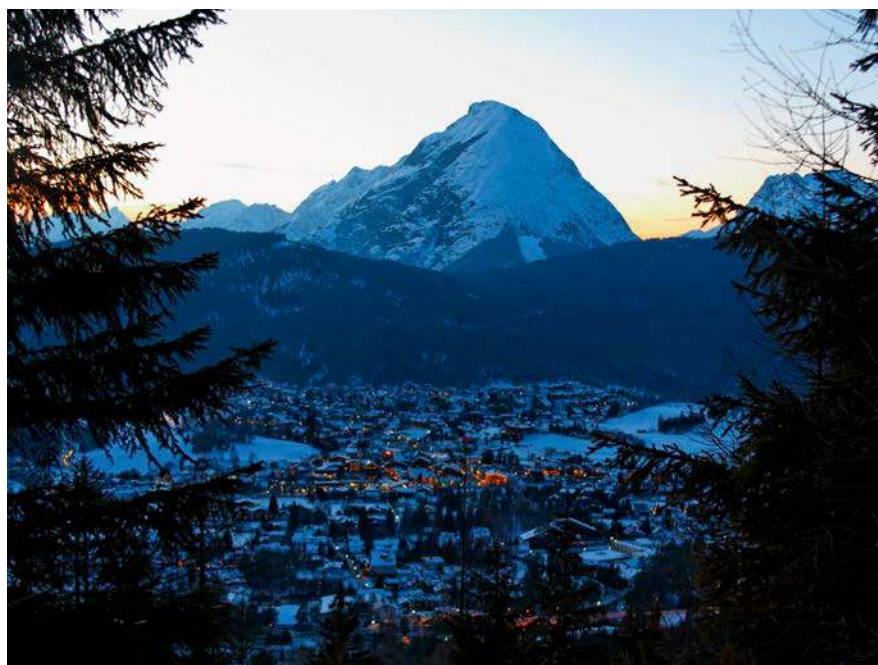






IMAGE: LINDE MAIDHOFFER

IT STARTED WITH ONE MAN

A road trip along Chile's new Route of Parks takes travellers to the ends of earth. The brainchild of an visionary conservationist, who snapped up swathes of wilderness, this is a journey that snakes through 17 national parks, showcasing one of our planet's most extensive, and protected, wild frontiers

WORDS **AARON MILLAR**



During his five-year voyage around the world, Darwin stopped in Patagonia, on the southern tip of South America, and wrote these words: ‘No one can stand in these solitudes unmoved, and not feel that there is more in man than the mere breath of his body.’

Patagonia has that effect on you. It isn't part of the ordered world; this a boundless land, pristine and desolate, unrivalled in grandeur and scale, untouched by progress and industry and cement and steel. This is a place where nature is still king. You come to Patagonia to feel the wildness of the world untainted by human touch.

Now there's a new way to see it: the Route of Parks, South America's most spectacular road trip. Launched at the end of 2018, the 1,700-mile trail — mostly dirt track — is an amalgamation of three existing long-distance scenic routes through Chilean Patagonia: the Carretera Austral in the north, and the Patagonian Channels and End of the World Route in the south. To do the whole thing in one go would take a month or more. So, I decided to tackle just the northern section, heading from Puerto Montt, at the region's northern boundary, to the edge of the Southern Patagonian Icefield — 700 miles straight down in three spectacular weeks.

This section is special because it's still relatively untouched by tourism. Say the name Patagonia and most people think of Torres del Paine National Park in the south. It's rightly famous: spectacular granite towers rise from the Patagonian steppe like the spires of some vast cathedral. Up here, it's different. Tourism is still in its infancy — it feels adventurous and raw. And, arguably, the landscape is at its most dramatic and varied too: the lush rainforests and coastal fjords of the Chilean Lake District gradually giving way to the high peaks of the Andes. But this is far more than just a pretty drive. The Route of Parks is the realisation of one of the biggest and most audacious conservation dreams ever conceived.

It started with one man. Doug Tompkins was a rebel. Kicked out of school at 17, he set off to climb, ski and kayak the world. At the age of 23, frustrated with

the lack of outdoor gear available to the mainstream market, he and his first wife, Susie, set up the original The North Face shop, in San Francisco, selling climbing and camping equipment. Esprit, a clothing company, followed shortly afterwards. Both ended up as globally recognised brands, earning their founders a fortune.

But, like a true rebel, Doug gave it all up, sick of “selling people countless things they don't need”, as he put it. Instead, in the early 1990s, he and his second wife, Kristine, who'd run the clothing company Patagonia for 20 years, sold up, moved to Chile and began buying up wild land there, with the aim of protecting it from development. Then, in January 2018, they did something no one saw coming: they gave it back.

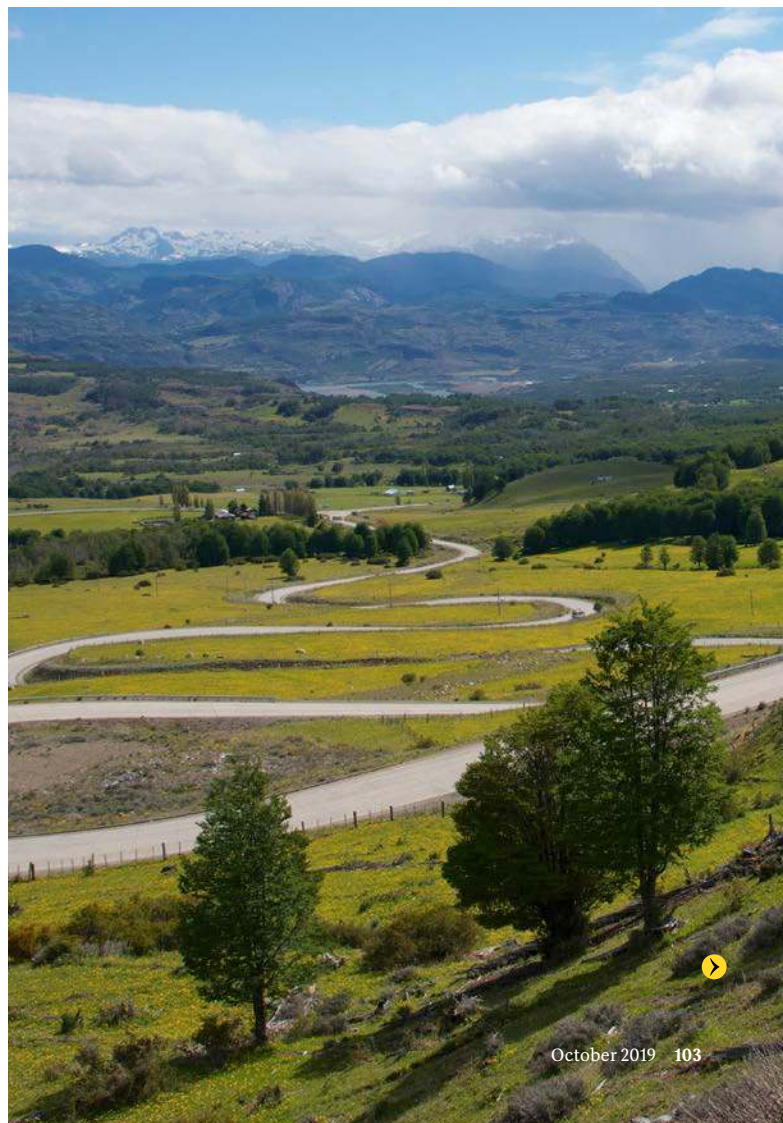
Last year, the Tompkins Foundation donated one million acres of wild land to the Chilean people, the largest private land donation in history, on the condition that it would be matched by a further nine million from the Chilean government and used to create five new national parks and expand three existing ones in the region. This new land now links together a total of 17 national parks in the region, 28 million acres in all, from Puerto Montt, in the north, to Cape Horn, on the southern tip of the continent — one of the largest swathes of contiguous protected wilderness on the planet.

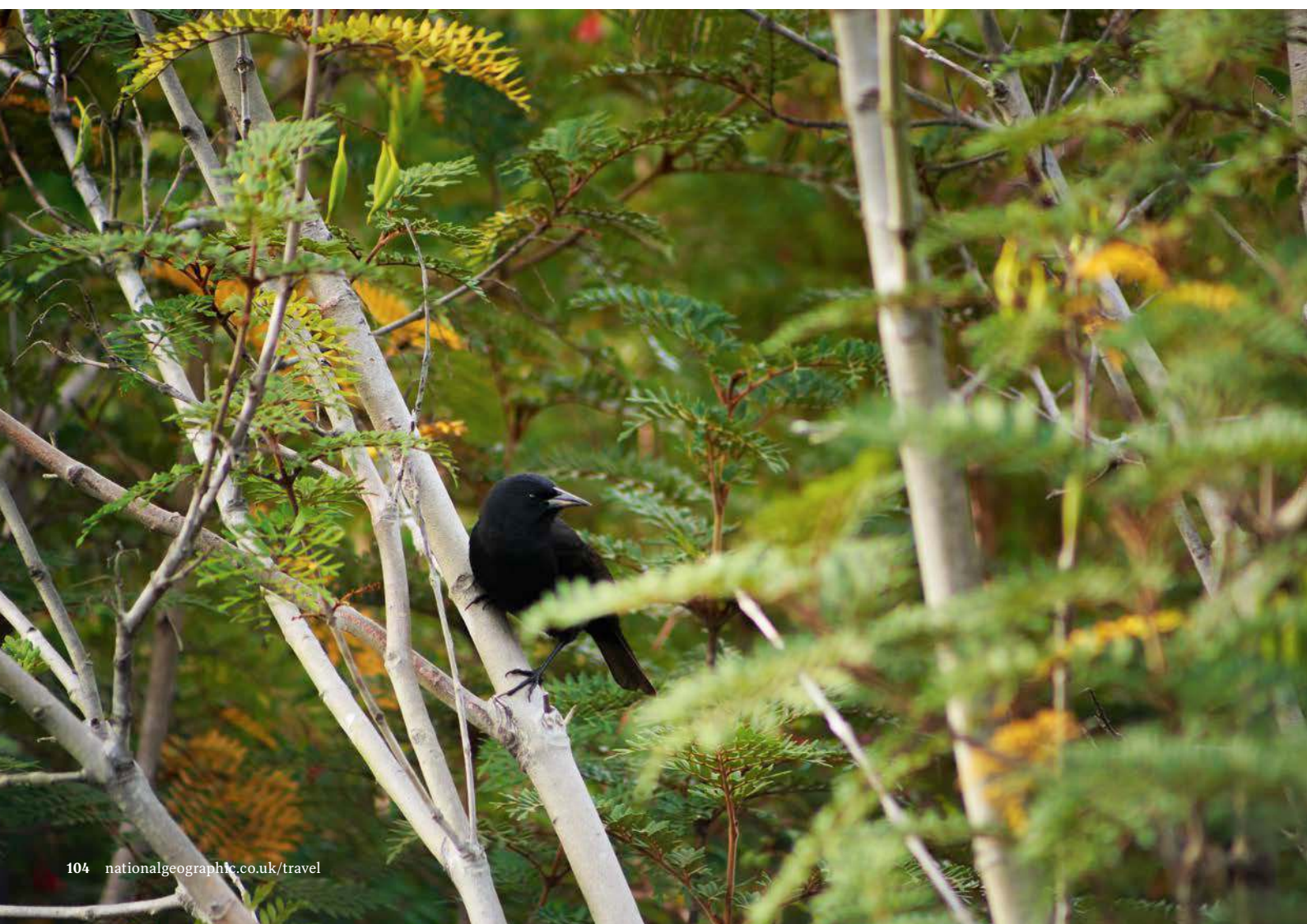
Tragically, Doug didn't live to see his dream come to fruition; he died in 2015, after falling into freezing water on a kayaking trip on Patagonia's General Carrera Lake. Instead, it was Kristine who ensured his audacious plan came to pass. “The Route of Parks strings together some of the wildest places left on earth,” she would tell me later in the journey. This is more than a road trip. This is a pilgrimage through one the planet's last wild frontiers.

PREVIOUS PAGES:
Patagonia Park
RIGHT, CLOCKWISE
FROM TOP LEFT: Hiking the Avilés trail; flora, Queulat National Park; Cerro Castillo National Reserve; guanacos



CHILE





FROM TOP: Torres del Paine National Park; austral blackbird, Pumalín Douglas Tompkins National Park

The first major stop on the Route is Pumalín Douglas Tompkins National Park, named in honour both of its founder and the big cats that roam these forests. I see it first in glimpses from the water, 100 miles and three ferries south of Puerto Montt: steep mountain slopes squeeze the ocean on both sides. Black summits dusted in white snow poke through the mist.

This was the first parcel of land the Tompkins purchased, back in 1991, and it's among the more accessible areas. I hiked to rushing waterfalls, climbed rocky viewpoints along the coast and walked on the slopes of the Chaitén volcano, whose summit crater has been steaming since it erupted in 2008, sending a plume of ash 10 miles into the atmosphere. The highlight, though, was the alerces. These enormous trees, southern relatives of the giant sequoia, are among the longest-living organisms on earth. The tiny hamlet of Caleta Gonzalo is the gateway to the park — seven hobbit-sized cabanas, a restaurant, campground and visitor centre on the water's edge. Nearby, I found a grove of hundreds of 3,000-year-old trees, draped in moss, soaring hundreds of feet to the sky. A thousand years before the first stones of London were laid, these trees had their roots in the ground. They predate the Roman Empire, Buddha and Jesus Christ. I hiked deep into the forest and found an old giant. Touching its bark was like reaching back in time.

From there, I followed the road south for a week, my car climbing from thick jungle steam to serrated towers. I hiked to the Hanging Glacier of Queulat National Park, a spectacular river of ice, gaping over a 200ft-high cliff, like a frozen tongue. I saw the sunset over Cerro Castillo National Reserve, a perfect rooster's comb of rocky peaks, completely devoid of crowds. I found a cave containing 7,000-year-old hand prints, left by the Tehuelches, the original inhabitants of Patagonia, and watched the confluence of two rivers, the bright blue Baker and silty grey Nef, combine, like a magician's trick, into the brightest turquoise I've ever seen.

For brief sections there was tarmac, but mostly the road was bumpy, muddy and wild. From the small frontier town of Chile Chico to the lakeside village of Puerto Guadal it was borderline suicidal. Picture a muddy road, barely wide enough to fit a car, hewn from enormous sea cliffs, crumbling on the edges like a frayed shirt. Picture no barriers on the sides — or worse, the occasional section with a car-shaped hole punched through it, signposting the spot where a hapless motorist had plummeted hundreds of feet down the sheer cliff face. Now picture me, sweating profusely, white-knuckling the wheel around a narrow bend, when a truck appears. Going in the opposite direction. If driving forwards was bad, reversing along the outer edge to let him pass — half my tyre balanced on nothing more than optimism and thin air — was motoring Russian roulette.

But that's part of the adventure. You don't drive the Route of Parks for a smooth ride, you drive it because almost no one does, because coach loads of tourists can't and, hopefully, never will. You drive it because, like climbing mountains to see the summit view, the best adventures are always hard-earned.

Reversing to let him pass — half my tyre balanced on nothing more than optimism and thin air — was motoring Russian roulette

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:
 Mirador de Guadal
 overlooking General
 Carrera Lake; lupins
 on the banks of the
 Rio del Salto; alerces
 trees, Pumalín Douglas
 Tompkins National Park

Big country, small communities

Not that I was roughing it all the time. Following a new itinerary from Spain and Latin America specialist Pura Aventura, Route of the Parks Uncovered, I had my own 4x4, a map and enough freedom to find, and occasionally lose, my own way. Which meant days immersed in the wild, nights tucked up in family-run guest houses offering home-cooked meals and generous pourings of silky Chilean wine. These included Posada Queulat, whose six snug cabins are surrounded by rainforest and waterfalls; and El Mirador de Guadal, a lodge with private verandas gazing across Patagonia's highest peaks.

Then, a perfect South American moment. Patagonia National Park, 40 miles south of Puerto Guadal, is the Tompkins' crowning glory. "It's extraordinary, because there are very few places within the region that have such diversity," Kristine told me. "Lakes, rivers, mountain peaks, grasslands, the Northern Icefield, endemic species, huge fossil beds — they're all here."

But what's truly special about the park is what they're doing with it. When the Tompkins purchased the land in 2004, the Chacabuco Valley had been decimated by decades of sheep and cattle ranching. Their genius was not to manage its restoration by hand, but rather to let it rewild: tear down the fences, kick out the cattle and sheep, and then let the land simply be, and heal itself. And it's working. As the grassland has regenerated, the wildlife has returned: *guanacos* (funny, red-furred llama-like creatures), Andean condors, pumas and the critically endangered huemul deer. I hiked the park's flagship path, the 14-mile Lagunas Altas Trail, a 3,000ft ascent from the valley to a high summit ridge, and found all of Patagonia's wonders — emerald lakes, sparkling icefields, an amphitheatre of Andean peaks. I could feel the land

humming, feel the regrowth, the rebirth, the return of native species and balance buzzing in the air.

But such rapid transformation may have a cost. One of the most alluring aspects of driving the Route of Parks are the small communities you pass along the way, most of whom are still following a traditional, rural way of life — tending small farms, living in hand-built shacks by the side of the road. I watch gauchos in flat caps on horseback herding sheep and cattle to pasture. Many of these people see the Tompkins' plan as a threat to their traditional livelihood.

That's where the Route of Parks comes in. Essentially, this is the eco-tourism arm of the Tompkins' conservation dream, which aims to ensure local communities are connected, and invested, in the preservation of their own wild land. They're hoping to inspire the gauchos to turn into part-time guides, villages to build B&Bs, restaurants and other tourist infrastructure. It's looking hopeful: the project is projected to generate around \$270m (£222.5m) annually in tourism revenue and create more than 40,000 jobs, proving that economics and conservation can be good bedfellows, after all. This isn't just eco-idealism, this is a call to action.

From Patagonia National Park, the route heads 150 miles south to the town of Villa O'Higgins, which marks

As the grassland has regenerated, the wildlife has returned: *guanacos*, Andean condors, pumas and the critically endangered huemul deer





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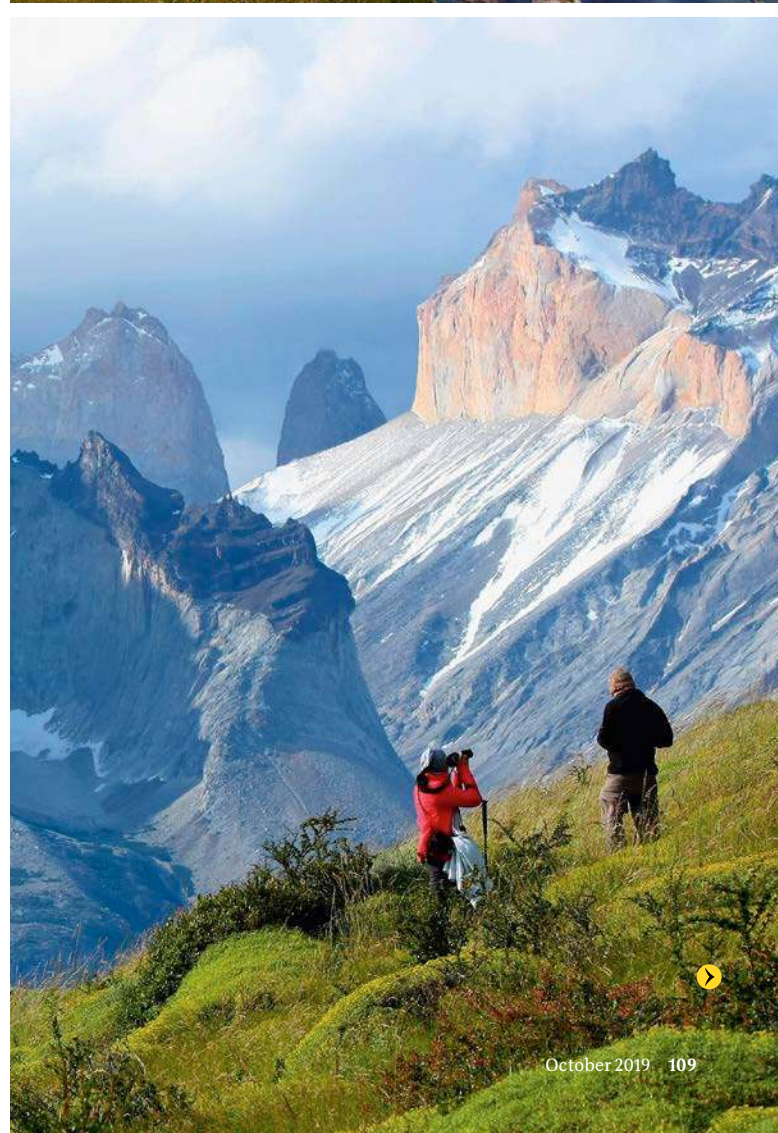
FROM TOP: Chacabuco River, Patagonia National Park; Torres del Paine

the end of its northern section. From here, a ferry will take you to the southern section where the landscape changes again to the windswept pampas and vast emptiness of the far south. But I detoured to the west for an alternative, and arguably, far more romantic finish to this northern stretch.

When the legendary English travel writer Bruce Chatwin wrote of this region in his seminal book *In Patagonia* as ‘the farthest place to which man walked from his place of origin’, he was surely describing the village of Tortel: no cars, no roads; a tiny settlement of approximately 300 souls built entirely on stilts around an idyllic bay. It was like finding an oasis at the ends of the earth.

Although I’d reached the end of the road, I hadn’t reached the end of the adventure. Further south still, accessible only by boat, was the Jorge Montt Glacier, on the edge of the Southern Patagonian Icefield — one of the largest non-polar bodies of ice in the world. Captain Noel, a local man whose family has lived in Tortel for generations, agreed to take me out on his handmade wooden ship for a night on the ice. But this wasn’t just any old dinghy. Featuring a large lounge with panoramic windows, four cosy cabins below deck, a wood-burning stove (yes, on a wooden boat) and a first mate who doubles as a gourmet cook, this was the Patagonian equivalent of a luxury cruise liner. For two days, we were completely alone. We moored on remote beaches to fetch fresh water from mountain cascades and chipped glacier ice to cool our cocktails. In the evenings, Noel taught me to fish the traditional way with spool and line. In the mornings, we kayaked around icebergs glowing neon blue from minerals in the ice, as if lit up from within.

Kayaking around icebergs is one thing, getting hit by one in the middle of the night is something else altogether. Peace and stars, the comfort of my bunk, and then suddenly a sound like an earthquake ripping the side of the boat in half, shouts in Spanish and people running about on deck above. I raced up, visions of the *Titanic* flooding my brain. But I needn’t have worried. Noel just shrugged. There were no leaks. I guess getting





Jorge Montt Glacier

hit by icebergs is the price you pay for coming to this remote wilderness.

But nothing compared to the drama of Jorge Montt itself. On our last day, we boarded a small, open-sided rigid inflatable boat that had been towed behind the main vessel, weaving through a bay of icebergs until we came to a rocky peninsula. We moored and scrambled on all fours to a viewpoint above the ice; Jorge Montt sparkling in the sun like glitter. Noel turned to me with a look of surprise, explaining he's never climbed this peak despite a lifetime exploring these waters.

That's why you make the journey to this far-flung spot. Doug Tompkins called national parks "the gold standard of conservation... preserving the masterpieces of a nation for all of its citizenry". But as I stood on the edge of that great icefield, surrounded by some of the last unexplored corners of the globe, I realised that the Route of Parks is something more than that too. In Europe and America, national parks are cultivated for human recreation. That's not entirely the case here. The vast majority of terrain the Route crosses has never been explored, there are countless unclimbed peaks, endless miles of uncharted terrain. There's something right about that. In this ordered world of progress and industry and cement and steel, there should be places that remain untouched. There should be places where nature is still king. That's the solitude that moved Darwin. That's the flag in the ground. □

ESSENTIALS



Getting there & around

British Airways flies nonstop from Heathrow to Santiago. LATAM flies daily from Santiago to Puerto Montt. ba.com latam.com

Average flight time: 14h30m.

Car hire is essential to see the Route of Parks as public transport is limited and unreliable. A 4x4 and a good paper map are highly recommended. Puerto Montt airport has rental offices.

When to go

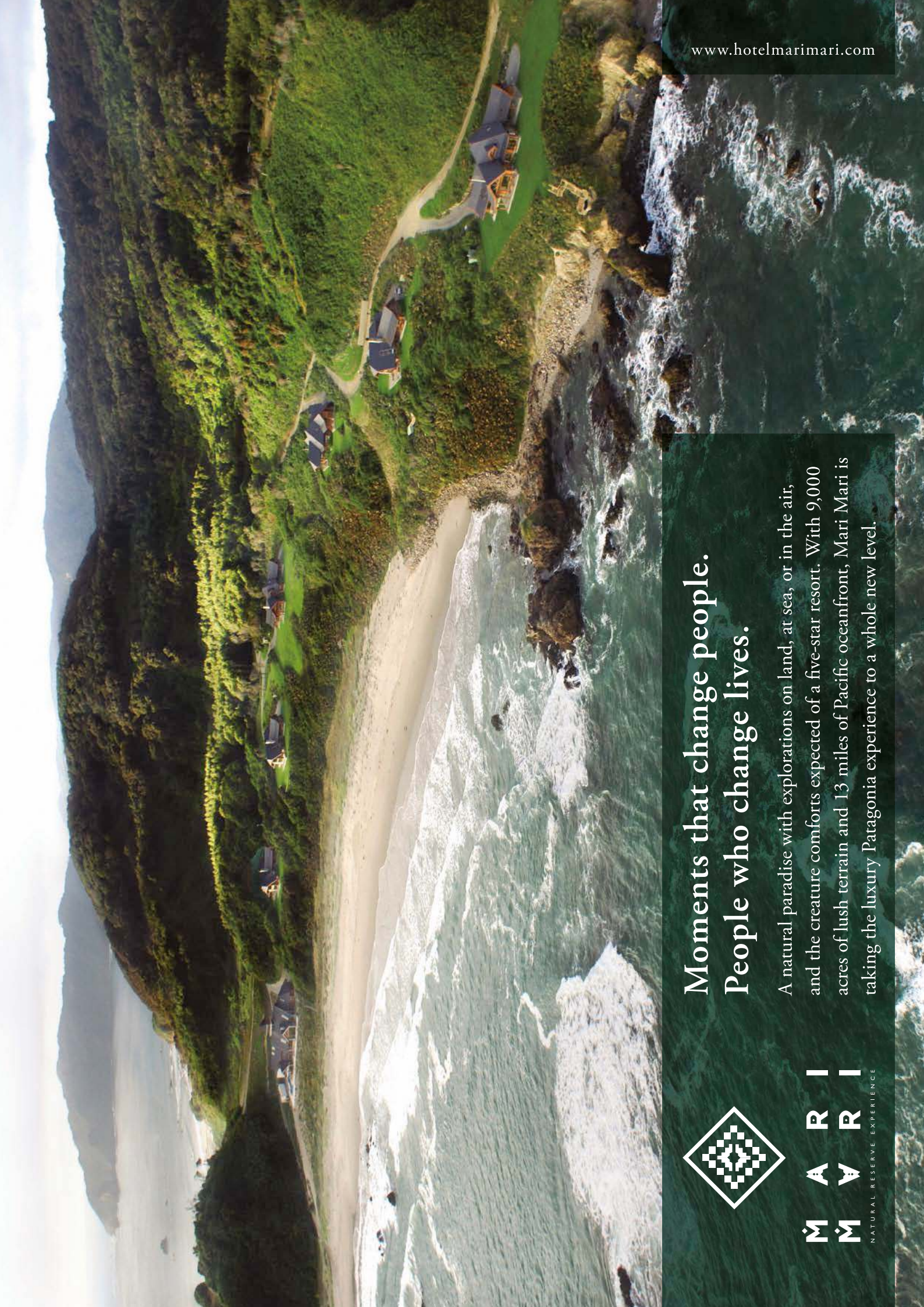
Patagonia is a vast region, so the climate varies considerably. Broadly speaking, the northern zone is semi-arid, with an annual average temperature of 12-20C. The southern zone has a cold, dry climate, averaging 4-13C throughout the year.

More info

chile.travel
rutadelosparques.org

How to do it

PURA AVENTURA'S 21-day Route of the Parks Uncovered trip costs from £5,987 per person, including internal flights, accommodation, 4x4 hire, guided excursions and some meals. Excludes international flights. pura-aventura.com



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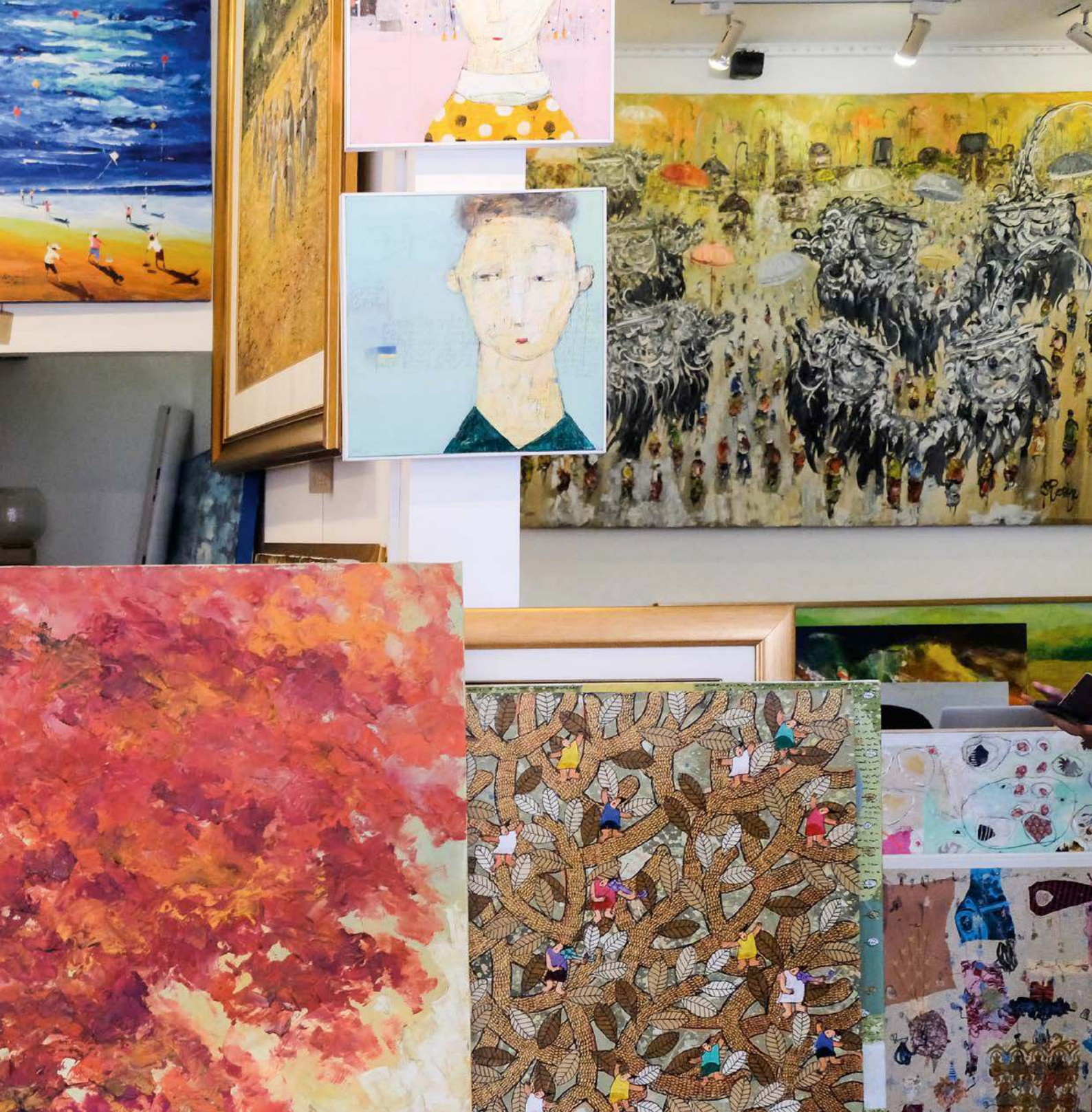


MARI MARI
NATURAL RESERVE EXPERIENCE



A brush with the divine

WORDS SARAH BARRELL PHOTOGRAPHS FRANCESCO LASTRUCCI



Balinese art channels the sacred, dating back to a time when it was created for the gods. Today, the work of the island's artists — while bold, challenging and uniquely skilled — remains devotional and is deeply rooted in place. With nature and life so intertwined, it's no wonder the canvas is a medium on which to explore Indonesian identity







The lion's eyes loom yellow through lotus leaves, pupils wildly dilated; ears rigid, alert. His fur is long and matted, but it's the teeth I can't take my eyes off: sharp, oversized sabres curl up from the lower jaw; a monstrous mouth that's fixing me with a deranged grin.

"He's a symbol of good," says Kenyem, the artist who painted the Balinese *barong* — a mythical king of the spirits, part panther-lion, part shaggy dog — that stares out of a vast canvas leaning against Kenyem's paint-splattered studio wall. Lotuses, leaves and vines spiral in concentric meditative circles from the *barong's* mane towards the painting's frame, where — at its base — a river springs to life. The evening air is heavy, petrichor-pungent from the recent storm, rainforest aromas creeping in through the gallery's carved wooden windows. In the great tradition of Balinese art, nature and life are intertwined.

"When painting, I look for signs in nature," continues Kenyem. "A falling leaf, a branch curling. It's a way of god, nature, telling us something," he trails off into a shy smile. Like the *barong* before me, the paintings of I Nyoman Sujana Kenyem ('Kenyem') are fertile canvasses, webbed with abstract patterns: leaves, flowers and branches often in acid hues surreal to a foreigner's eye,

endemic to this tropical corner of the world. Encircled by these vibrant nests, Kenyem's signature tiny human forms, walking, dancing, jumping — not figures dominant over nature, but details of it.

"Balinese art goes back far before the commercial, to the sacred," says Kenyem. "When art wasn't to sell, but for the gods. My father did this. He was a temple sculptor." Born in this small village near Sayan, in the rainforest-dense district of Ubud, Kenyem has painted since he was a boy. Adapting the traditions of temple art into something unrecognisable, his work is still somehow devotional, and deeply rooted in place.

"This one's called Holy Water," he says nodding to his *barong* painting-in-progress. "The springs are in the village, where water is taken for ceremonies. Bali's spirit is very strong for me. When I exhibit in Jakarta, it's so busy, so crowded and I can't paint. My heart isn't free. I need to be quiet. I can always sense Bali; I have to come home."

Outside, the sky is bruising purple. Rain is returning. Accepting a lift, I pick my way over a carpet of frangipani flowers that have been ripped from trees in the rising wind, and hop onto Kenyem's moped. Juddering over potholed, cobbled lanes as we wind through the village, roosters take a noisy sunset stand on pagoda shrines. These structures populate courtyard gardens of traditional

PREVIOUS PAGE:
Purpa Fine Art
Gallery Seminyak
LEFT FROM TOP:
Tirta Gangga,
Karangasem;
Kenyem in his
gallery, Sayan
ABOVE:
Kenyem's studio



walled houses. I balance precariously pillion, oversized hotel umbrella flailing madly in one hand, feeling quite the colonial clown; a sight Bali is surely well accustomed to.

Long before *Eat Pray Love* turned this Indonesian island into a set-jetting circus of spirituality, Europeans were making pilgrimages to Bali in the 1920s and 1930s. They were drawn in by its Eastern promise of tiered rice paddies, rustic villages and visual arts that narrated a heady blend of Hindu, Buddhist and ancient animist lore.

Invited by Balinese royals, such artist-patrons as Dutchman Rudolf Bonnet and German Walter Spies put the jungly uplands of Ubud on the map as an oasis of art, shifting themes from religious to everyday subjects, albeit with a firm Orientalist focus. I find one of Bonnet's distinctive paintings — a sensual portrait from 1936 of a Balinese king, semi-dressed in ceremonial garb — not in an art gallery, but displayed on the walls of a hotel set among banana leaves and sandalwood trees in the rainforest just north of Sayan.

A small collection of 1930s Balinese art, part of the eccentric creative vision of hotel designer Bill Bensley and local hotelier-art collector Suwito Gunawan, adorns the canvas walls of Capella Ubud luxury tented jungle camp. Not a tree was felled for this new higgledy-piggledy hillside construction, where rocky Flintstones-esque plunge pools hover over the Ayung River's vast gorge. The mix-not-match aesthetic combines floral Cath Kidston-style interiors with campaign furniture, loos designed like carved wooden thrones and shiny brass monkeys perched in

cheeky poses on tent apexes. The restaurant's show-stopping ceiling's huge, hand-painted frieze depicts stories from the Hindu epics, and overlooks a pool that resembles a giant tin bath.

Surrounded by such a visual cocktail it's a wonder anyone notices Bonnet's work lurking in a lounge behind reception. But Bali doesn't lack prominent art galleries. Palatial institutions populate both Ubud and its surrounding jungly reaches, where I find more of Bonnet's work, including his signature, romanticised portraits of noble peasants and ceremonial dancers, in the venerable Neka, Agung Rai and Puri Lukisan museums. The latter was founded by Bonnet himself at the behest of a local prince; all offer a compelling crash-course in the history of Balinese arts — from the highly detailed Kamasan paintings of the 16th century, richly interlaced with winged monkey gods and handsome elephants, to the modern, rounded nudes of I Gusti Nyoman Lempad, Bali's native modernist maestro.

Out of the frame

Balinese art also thrives beyond museum walls. I follow a sky-scraping mountain ridge just north of Capella, passing pendulous ceremonial *penjor* (decorative bamboo poles) nodding giraffe-like in the breeze. They signal it's wedding season, according to Bali's 210-day Pawukon calendar.

Arriving at Keliki village, I adjust my focus from the towering to the tiny. Hunched over a table, in the open-fronted pavilion of the I Wayan Gama Art School, ebony blocks of Chinese ink to hand, three young boys

FROM LEFT: Wayan at work in the I Wayan Gama Art School, Keliki; Wayan working on an intricate Keliki-style drawing









work on detailed paintings the size of an envelope. They're sweating and it's not just the humidity. The youngest, aged just 10, painstakingly outlines the shape of tropical birds no bigger than rice grains; the 12-year-old shades a lotus-levitating Ganesh, while a diligent teen colours the smouldering volcanic peak of Bali's iconic Mount Agung.

I spot what looks like a classic peasants-in-the-rice-paddy scene, until I concentrate a little harder and see farmers not wearing traditional batik sarongs, but Nike T-shirts. In a coastal landscape, Caucasian bathers spill out of bikinis you could fit on a pencil tip and pea-sized aeroplanes disgorge luggage-trailing tourists.

"Keliki style began in the 1970s with classic scenes of pastoral life and Hindu stories, but it had to adapt to be relevant to life in Bali now," says Gama, the young artist-founder of the school. This impressive non-profit is keeping Keliki painting alive — it's tutored countless local children and is among a thriving community of traditional wood-carvers, mask makers and sculptors.

Traditionally, Bali's artists are polymaths of music, dance and fine arts; painting as a standalone form, largely a European import, has been transformed since the 1930s from folksy depictions to abstract and conceptual works. Yet the island's contemporary artists are often still magnificently multidisciplinary.

"His styles and interests changed so rapidly — every four or five years," says Buratwangi ('Bee'), of her father I Made Wianta, the septuagenarian maverick widely considered Bali's contemporary art pioneer. "If he wasn't an artist, he'd be a librarian," she jokes, as we tour Wianta's archive in the basement studio of the family's home in Denpasar.

Tens of thousands of densely patterned sketches, bold-stroke abstract paintings, set-designs for theatre productions and poems line floor-to-ceiling shelves. Parking tickets and ripped newspaper are as numerous as canvas — Wianta works with whatever's to hand. He's transformed fragrant plant roots into huge pieces of sculpture, car exhaust pipes into an installation. "For a while he was influenced by Japanese calligraphy," says Bee, leafing through pages of Wianta's energetically painted lettering. "They don't mean anything. It's a made-up language," she laughs. "His mind works differently to most people's. Truly. He sort of dances as he works. When he was in Japan, a neuroscientist became so fascinated with his method, he scanned his brain."

It turns out Wianta's working mind enters a trance-like state akin to deeply meditating monks. "It's funny," says his wife, who's joined us. "His family always wanted him to be a priest — yet he still ended up using his *taksu*." The unique Balinese concept

LEFT FROM TOP:
Four Seasons
Resort Bali at
Sayan; bamboo
hands made for the
Ngrupuk parade
in a community
centre, Ubud
ABOVE: Wood
carving, Taksu Bali
Art Gallery, Ubud



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IMAGES: GETTY; TOURISM QUEENSLAND

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of charismatic spirit energy is discussed further as we crack open a bottle of local white. “It’s a recent development. Surprising, right?” smiles Bee at my positive reaction to the minerally wine.

Her father joins us, momentarily; incapacitated by a road accident a few years ago, Wianta’s activity has to be limited. “Kenyem sends his warm regards,” I say, on whose work Wianta has been a great influence. He doesn’t reply, but fixes me with the most piercing, glittering stare. His eyes are as penetrating as Kenyem’s lion god — absolutely teeming with *taksu*.

But it’s time to hit the beach. Or at least, the coastal town of Seminyak, where scooter jams contribute to the sunset scrum; tourists vying for oceanfront views at beach club landmarks like Ku De Ta. I put a Bali Basil Smash (gin, lychee, Asian basil) and banging tunes on hold for a while longer. I dodge the crowds at cold-brew hotspot, Revolver, where iced coffee comes in old-style glass liquor bottles, and pass a parade of indie boutiques where Balinese batik comes with international chic. Arriving at Purpa Fine Art Gallery, owner Ari Purpa welcomes me into a forest of bright canvasses.

“Java’s contemporary art scene, of course, leads the way for Indonesia, but it’s changing,” says Ari, the first woman among a patriarchal family line of gallerists. The stylistic dictates of Bali’s classical art traditions have been a cursed blessing for contemporary artists: something to both work within and also escape from. “It’s still unusual to find female artists here, but they’re definitely emerging,” says Ari.

Citra Sasmita is one one of them. She’s a contemporary artist under Purpa’s representation whose striking, often bloody biological female abstracts are daring in narrative and distinctive in style. “I want to talk about Indonesian identity,” she explains. “People say our art is very touristy. But it can be more than that. It can be about a discourse, not just money. I went to Java to study, and it felt like the land of the free.”

Born in a conservative village in western Bali, Citra began her career as an illustrator at the *Bali Post*. “My parents didn’t know I was an artist at first. I told them I worked in a cigarette factory,” she says.

“I don’t see myself as female artist; I’m an artist. But I get still get shouted down sometimes,” she smiles. “I’m supported by my husband, though. He’s Japanese,” says Citra, to which Ari offers a hear-hear, announcing that she herself has a French partner. “It would be tough to be a female artist married to a Balinese man,” smiles Citra. “I’m starting an arts collective for women from Bali and Indonesian islands as far as Kalimantan. Bali has such potential. We have the materials, the skills and the traditions.”

Eastern promise

Ubud might grab the spotlight as a crucible of modern art, but the traffic-snarled streets of Denpasar — a place to land in and leave for most — has become an arts incubator via such schools as the Institute of Art (ISI), and National Academy of Arts in Denpasar (STSI).

“I’ve painted since I was four years old, watching my father, learning,” says Teguh Ritma Iman. We’re in his studio

BELOW: Taking offerings from Pura Goa Lawah temple to the sea, Dawan





ESSENTIALS

Getting there & around

Garuda Indonesia flies non-stop from Heathrow to Bali, via Jakarta on return. Emirates, Cathay Pacific, Malaysia Airlines and Singapore Airlines also fly from the UK to Bali with connections. garuda-indonesia.com emirates.com cathaypacific.com malaysiaairlines.com singaporeair.com

Average flight time: 17h.

Car hire is available throughout Bali but taxis are an easier, more affordable way to get around. Blue Bird Taxis is considered the most reliable. bluebirdgroup.com

When to go

Bali's weather is tropical year-round, ranging from 28-35C, often with daily showers. April-June and September are the best months to travel as the humidity is at its most bearable.

Places mentioned

I Nyoman Sujana Kenyem. [facebook.com/sujanakenyem](https://www.facebook.com/sujanakenyem)
 Agung Rai Museum of Art. armabali.com/museum
 Neka Art Museum. museumneka.com
 Keliki painting. [facebook.com/kelikitraditionalpainting](https://www.facebook.com/kelikitraditionalpainting)
 Purpa Fine Art Gallery. purpagallerybali.com
 Teguh Ritma Iman. [facebook.com/iman.ritma](https://www.facebook.com/iman.ritma)

Where to stay

Four Seasons Resort Bali At Jimbaran Bay. fourseasons.com
 Alila Manggis. alilahotels.com
 Four Seasons Resort Bali At Sayan. fourseasons.com
 Capella Ubud. capellahotels.com

How to do it

CARRIER offers 10 nights in Bali from £4,955 per person, including three nights at Capella Ubud, two nights at Four Seasons Sayan, five nights at Four Seasons Jimbaran Bay, B&B, based on two sharing. It also includes the Artist Trails experience at Capella Ubud, return flights, private car transfers and the Fast Track Voyager service at Heathrow. carrier.co.uk



on a scruffy, tree-lined Denpasar street. Scores of paintings by Iman's esteemed artist father, Sumatran-born Roesli Hakim, line walls of the ground-floor office, while works by his teenage nascent-artist son deck the adjoining family home; upstairs Iman's studio is doubly layered with stacked canvasses and piles of sketches.

"My father taught at STSI — we've inherited his teachings," smiles Iman. Bold, bright blocks of colour unite their work, Iman's figurative portraits the most distinctive, often featuring expressionistic fish, leaves, birds; many of women. "I see so much power in Balinese women. They have strength, but also much to give."

Seeking the colourful low-key coastal life that often inspires Iman, I leave Denpasar. "Go east," they all said when I asked what had become of the Bali I remembered from my first trips to the island — long before Seminyak morphed into a shopping mall and Ubud became a movie set. "Go east," they'd responded again, when I'd asked if the Bali I saw in paintings could still be found.

So, as the artists and gallerists instructed, I head to Bali's most easterly point, where the island's fish-shaped form noses into Lombok Strait. Here, under the omnipresent peak of Mount Agung, I find not tranquillity but chaos. Monsters are roaming the streets: 16ft 'ogoh-ogoh' ogres baring blackened teeth the size of tombstones, trailing long nets of fetid hair, bulbous feet raised in a warrior pose, jiggling to the percussive hammering of an attendant *kulkul* band and kohl-eyed, barefoot dancers. Not strictly styled on demons of the Hindu pantheon, creepy

papier-mache incarnations of Conan the Barbarian and a not-so-jolly Green Giant pass among the pagodas of Amlapura's temple, stopping for families to take selfies. Balinese kids don't scare easily.

Ngrupuk — Bali's New Year's Eve celebrations — sees demons roused from their slumber with a monster party. *Ogoh-ogoh* effigies, the pride of communities island-wide, are surreal works of folk art that take months to make. I watch as these gorgons get their final touches of hair and make-up under banyan tree-shaded side streets — a drop of blood to a fang here, some backcombing of a matted beard there — before I choose a float to follow. They snake through Amlapura's centre. The call and response of the *kulkul* band leads us to a temple, into which the *ogoh-ogoh* vanish (at least for non-Hindi), most destined to end up in a pyre of ceremonial smoke.

And then: silence. Nyepi — New Year's Day — brings 24 hours of complete inertia and hush, boring those demons back to bed for another year. Everything shuts — airports, seaports, radio and TV stations, power grids; streets are deserted as people retreat indoors for a strictly observed day of dormancy.

In my hotel, on eastern Bali's rice paddy-fringed shores, the only sound is of the waves raking the grainy volcanic sand. My voice lowers to an insistent whisper. By nightfall, when all lights must be extinguished or windows blackened out, I feel like I've stepped into one of Kenyem's paintings — into a circular meditative silence, of sea, sky, earth — still keeping one eye open for the sabre-tooth grin of the *barong*. □



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Z A N Z

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHS CHRISTOPHER WILTON-STEER



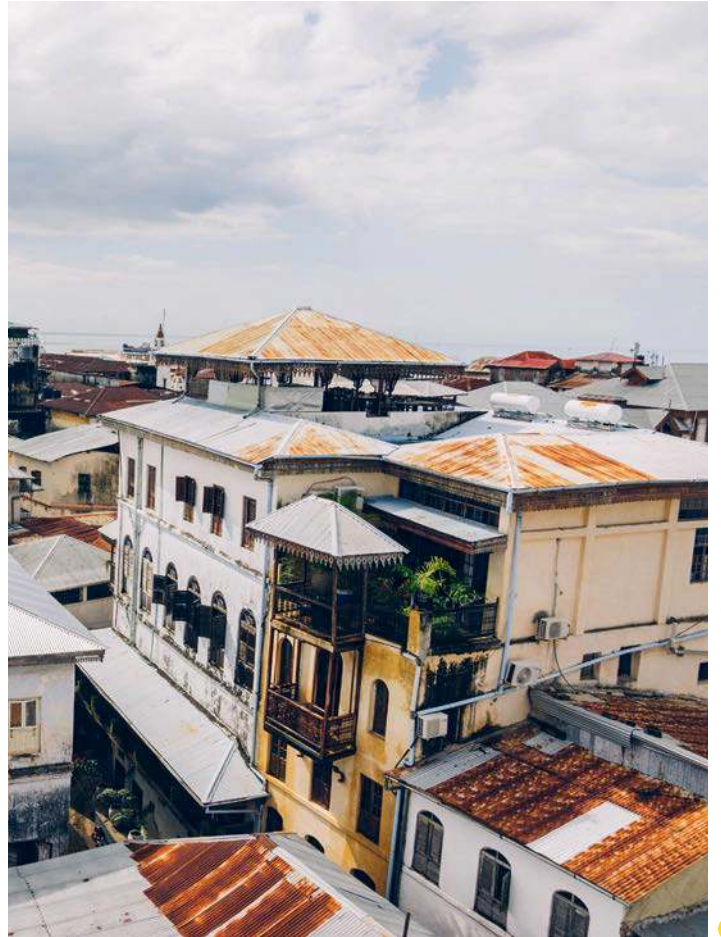
I B A R

Ruled for centuries by the Sultanate of Oman, Tanzania's laid-back archipelago is home to a vibrant blend of African, Islamic and Portuguese architectural and artistic styles




As the heat of the day eases, people begin to emerge along the harbour in Stone Town, the old part of Zanzibar's capital, Zanzibar City. Generations of fisherman have plied the shores of this seafaring island, which has seen the arrival of Omani Arabs and Portuguese explorers.



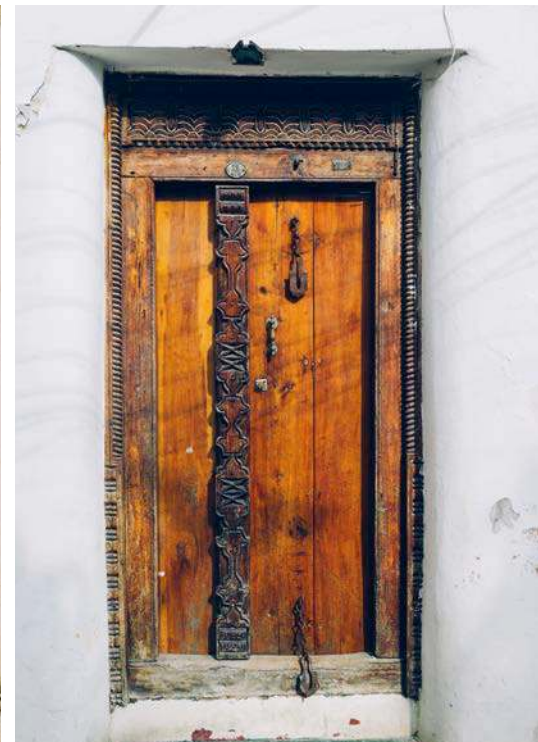
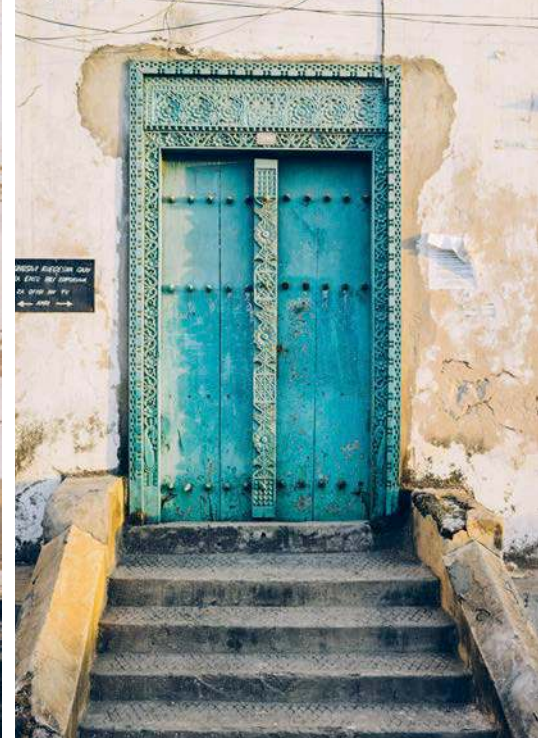
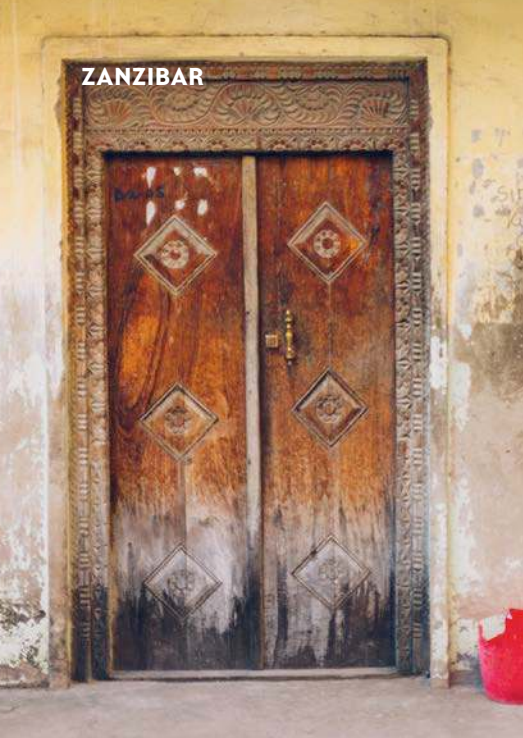






Restored to its former glory in the 1990s, the distinctive lattice-worked, peppermint-green facade of Stone Town's Old Dispensary — a waterfront landmark — now houses shops, an Ethiopian cafe and a display detailing the building's history. 

ZANZIBAR

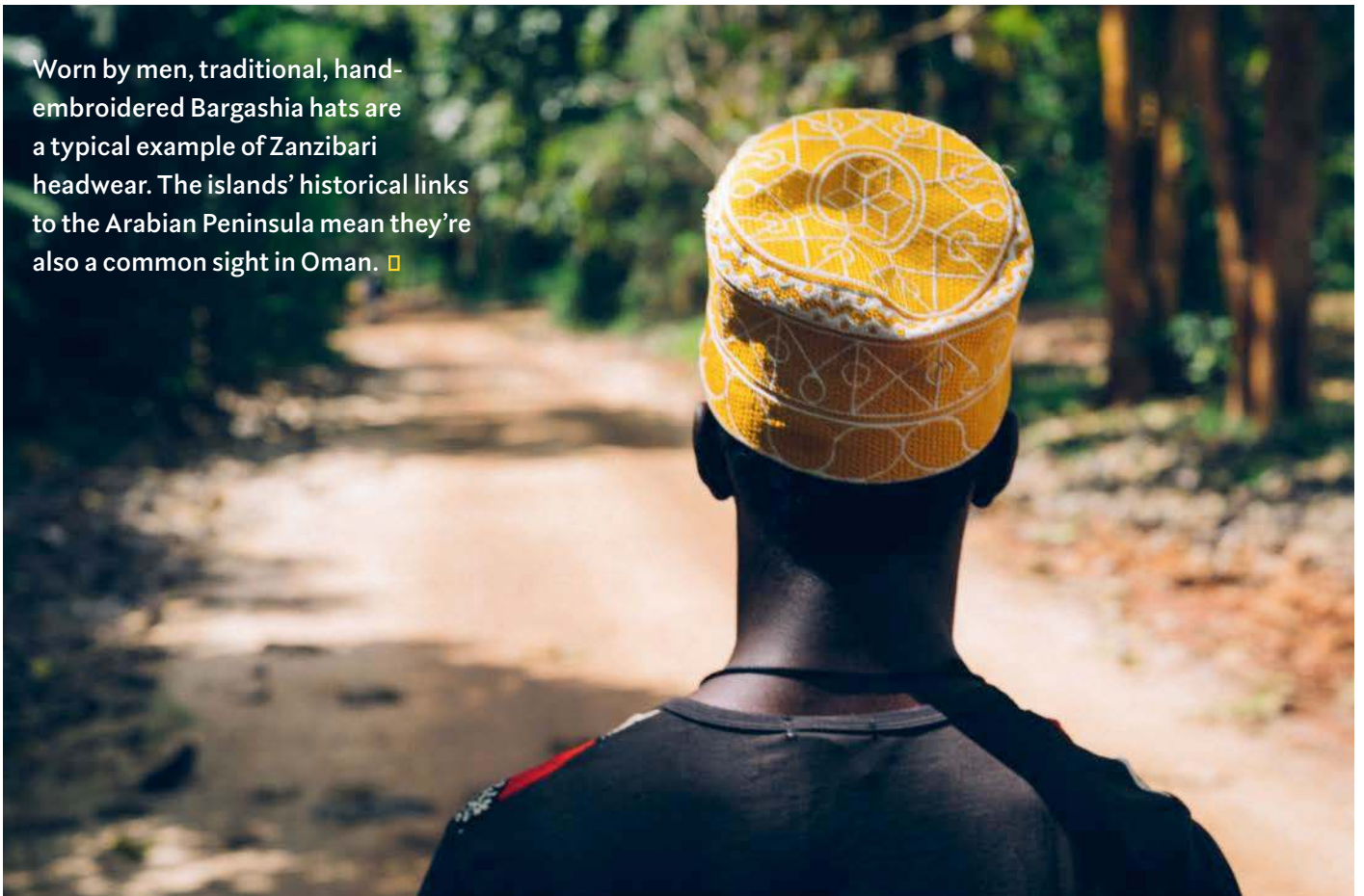




Of all its intriguing architecture, Stone Town is perhaps most famous for its doors. These large, brooding portals stand out for their design, blending African, Indian and Arabic styles brought to the islands by traders and migrants. The brass knobs protruding from many of them are inspired by those found on much larger doors in India, a practical design created to deter elephants from smashing their way through the doorway.

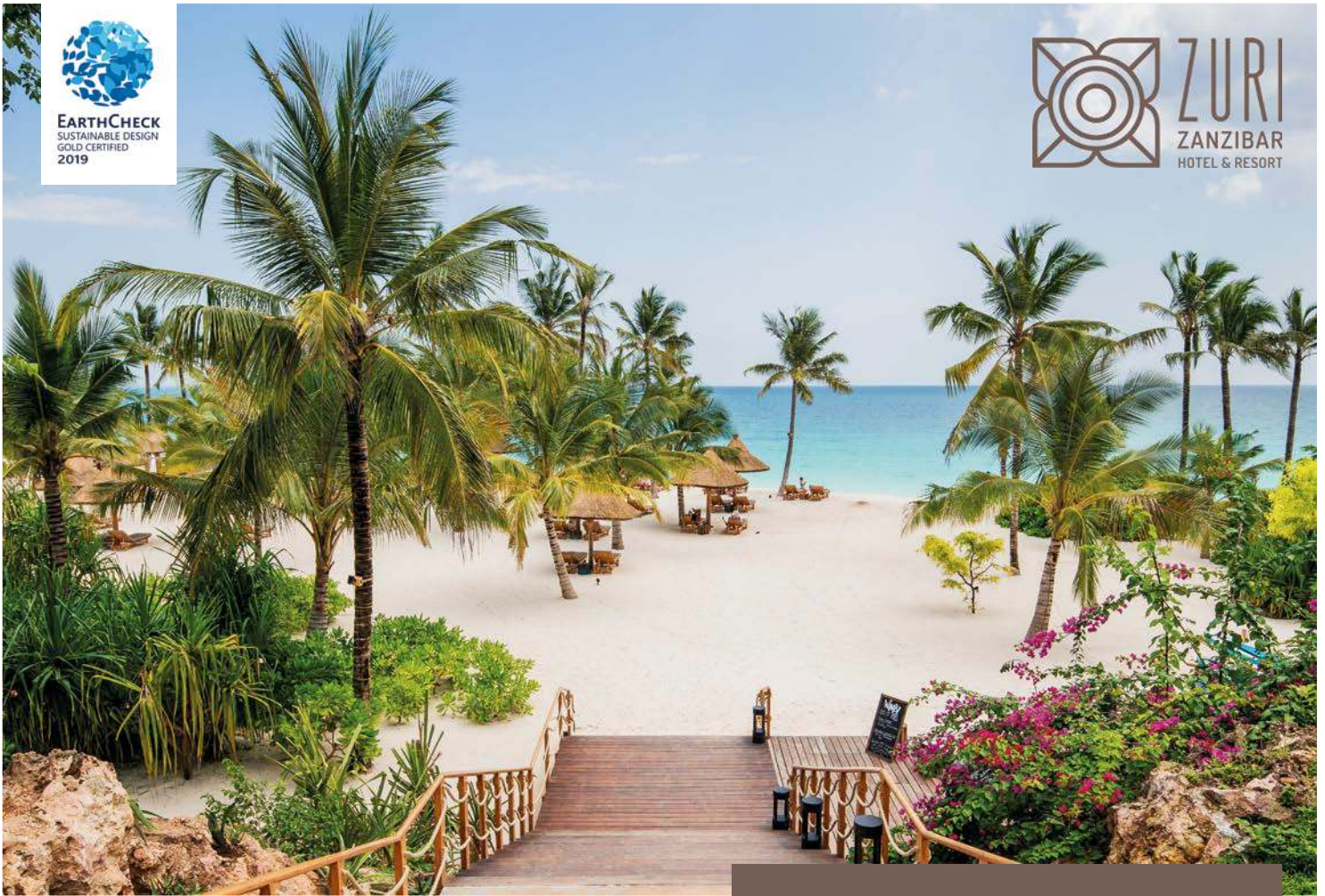


Worn by men, traditional, hand-embroidered Bargashia hats are a typical example of Zanzibari headwear. The islands' historical links to the Arabian Peninsula mean they're also a common sight in Oman. □





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HOW
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A SMART TOURIST



Innovations in travel make it easier for everyone to access and enjoy destinations. We look at European cities embracing the concept of smart tourism – and what that means for visitors

For those who like to live on the cusp of innovation, smart tourism is the phrase of the moment. It's about how a destination connects visitors to its attractions, how it promotes liveability and how it makes cities more resilient and better able to respond to challenges. It goes a lot further than free wi-fi and bike-sharing schemes. Savvy travellers want more info, more insight, more experiences. How are European cities responding to this? Leaps in technology and visionary thinking are closing the gap between expectations and how a destination copes with swelling visitor numbers. It's all about ensuring visitors get the best out of a city, without having adverse effects.

The European Capital of Smart Tourism campaign is an EU initiative recognising outstanding achievement in smart tourism in European cities. It aims to promote smart tourism in the EU, network and strengthen destinations, and facilitate the exchange of best practices. Participating cities are provided with opportunities for cooperation and new partnerships. But what does this really mean for visitors?

Take accessibility: we're talking about smart city cards – giving access to attractions and public transport, which will be converted digitally so travellers can be sent real time info and updates. Brighton's free, all-terrain wheelchairs on the seafront, giving disabled people greater access to the beach, have been lauded. In Nice, visitors can find 'Nice greeters' – locals willing to impart on-the-ground intelligence about sights off the tourist trail.

For sustainability, examples include kayaking tours in Copenhagen – free, if those taking part collect rubbish as they go. In the sunny city of Palma de Mallorca, greenery has been planted in urban corners, lowering the summer temperature by up to four degrees.

Digitalisation is fundamental to smart city living. In Ljubljana, it's easy to download the Nexto app, which combines storytelling with virtual reality, creating an innovative guide to the city. In Málaga, the free SMASSA app lets travellers know how full car parks are in key destinations. In the Italian city of Ravenna, tourists can interact online with locals and get their insights.

Finally, there's cultural heritage and creativity, focusing on anything from reinvention projects to festivals encouraging local artists to brighten areas of their city with bold street art.

Helsinki and Lyon are the first European Capitals of Smart Tourism. Turn the page to reveal what makes them the smartest of the bunch.

Kiasma, Helsinki's museum of modern art

Helsinki

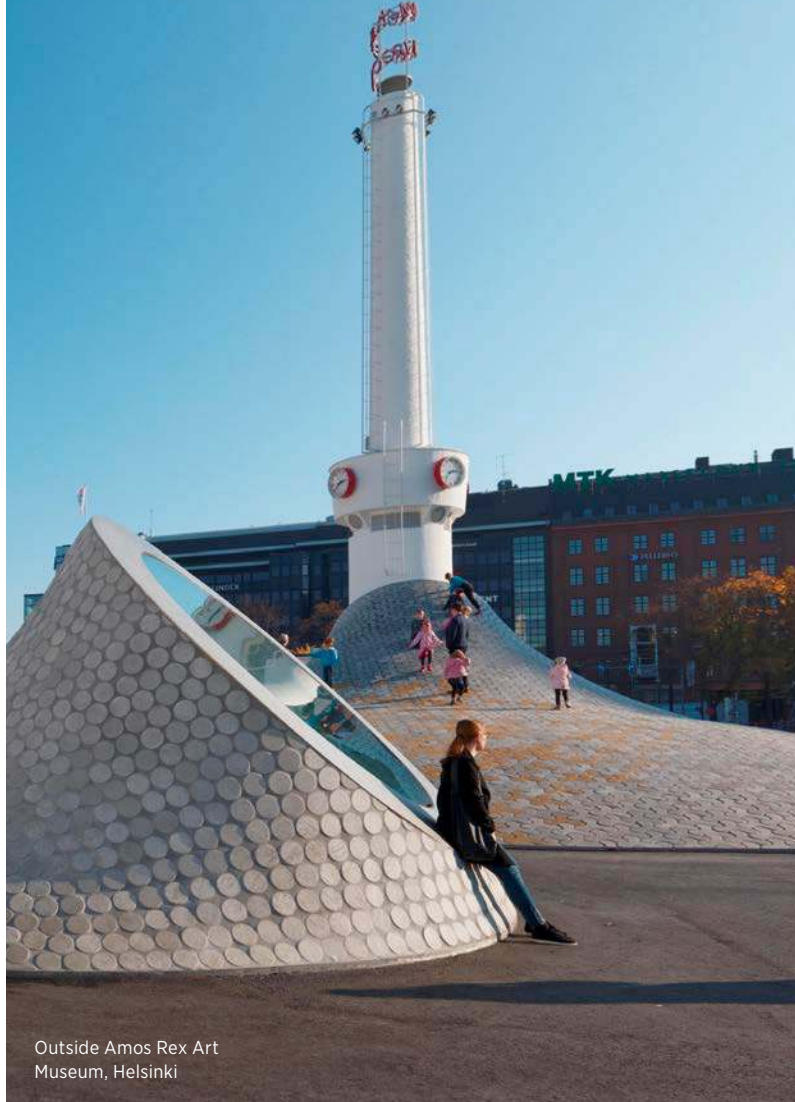
Spruced up industrial spaces, an avant-garde foodie scene and an ever-evolving architectural landscape — Helsinki is at the vanguard of creativity and reimagination.

Accessibility: Plans for an Uber boat system and driverless buses are underway. There are multilingual 'Helsinki Helpers' to guide visitors, and public transport is free for those in a wheelchair or with a pushchair. The Whim app is a one-stop shop for bus and train tickets as well as taxis, bikes and rental cars.

Sustainability: Plans are in place to ensure the city is carbon neutral by 2035. It's increasing accessibility for cycling, walking, electric vehicles and rail traffic. The 'Think Sustainably' programme provides practical tools so residents, visitors and businesses can make more sustainable choices.

Digitalisation: The MyHelsinki app is a guide to the city with recommendations from locals. A highlight is MyHelsinki Lists — a visual map of favourite places anyone can create and share.

Cultural heritage & creativity: Find homegrown design across the city, from gallery upstarts to gastronomic 'labs'. For culture kicks, strip off for a Finnish sauna — this traditional ritual is still going strong and new public saunas continue to pop up.



Outside Amos Rex Art Museum, Helsinki

Musée des Confluences,
Lyon's science centre and
anthropology museum



Lyon

Lyon is lauded for its exceptional culinary scene and compelling history, but the metropolis has also been busy transforming itself into a smart city for the 21st century.

Accessibility: Lyon got top billing at the 2017 Access City Awards and has been building a reputation for easy access. Bike rentals, car sharing, e-scooters and a river shuttle have proved popular, and the whole public transport network, hotels, restaurants and attractions have been adapted for those with disabilities, including speaking menus.

Sustainability: Lyon-Saint-Exupéry airport is carbon neutral. There's a city-wide campaign to promote sustainability, which labels enterprises with a sustainable approach. And artists exhibiting in the city's legendary 'Festival of Lights' are rewarded for taking responsible measures when crafting installations.

Digitalisation: On the horizon is the new ONLYLYON Experience — a system that will send live info to visitors, including travel updates and advice about where to go in the city. There's also a clutch of apps to help navigate its corners using augmented reality, from the historic *traboules* (passageways) to its captivating, UNESCO-listed murals.

Cultural heritage & creativity: Lyon's culinary credentials are internationally renowned. Look out for the *Bouchons Lyonnais* quality label, which guarantees at least 80% of ingredients are sourced locally.



The 2019 European Smart Tourism Award winners:

Four other cities have also been spotlighted under the initiative's four major headings: accessibility, sustainability, digitalisation and cultural heritage and creativity.

Accessibility: Málaga has undergone mass regeneration over the past couple of decades and the Andalusian city has also been making headway with accessibility for all — its bus network has been overhauled to help travellers with reduced mobility and sight; many attractions offer adapted tours; and there's special assistance at its main beaches.

Sustainability: A quick peek at Ljubljana and it's easy to see why the Slovenian capital has made the grade in this award. Private cars are banned in the city centre; a fifth of the urban

sprawl is green space; and degraded areas are being reimagined into local enterprise. All this, plus a commitment to local and artisanal produce in hotels and restaurants.

Digitalisation: Copenhagen's social media platforms provide a thorough chronicling of the city, and at the Copenhagen Visitor Centre, travellers can gaze at moving posters and robotics, and slip on virtual reality goggles to stare at its key sights, before heading out, armed with its informative app.

Cultural heritage & creativity: The arts scene in the Austrian city of Linz is thriving: industrial spaces have been reimagined into studios and galleries and leftfield exhibitions crop up in unusual spaces — even rooftops. The city also hosts Ars Electronica, the world's leading festival of digital art.

More info

The initiative recognises outstanding achievements in smart tourism in European cities. Lyon and Helsinki proposed attractive programmes of activities for 2019 to celebrate their titles as European Capitals of Smart Tourism. They now act as role models for other destinations and are sharing best practices on a number of platforms.







City life

DETROIT

A wave of civic pride has seen this one-time Michigan powerhouse bounce back from bankruptcy to become a vibrant hotbed of creativity. **WORDS:** Amelia Duggan

PHOTOGRAPHS: Lucy Hewett

“Hey, come in!” engineer Bill Skibbe says, removing his headphones and waving me into his mixing studio. He deftly lifts a 12-inch single off a turntable, spins it between his fingers and places it gently under a microscope. “Let’s have a look at what I just cut.” Under the lens, the minute stylus grooves are as large and smooth as rivers. “Where it squiggles, that’s where there’s bass,” Bill explains. He seems satisfied with the result and leans back in his chair.

“Vinyl’s a three-dimensional sonic experience,” Bill says. “It’s more sympathetic to the human ear. And it’s a much greener way to listen to music — there are no servers with giant carbon footprints. We had Mark Zuckerberg walk in here the other day. I think it blew his mind that we’re using this old technology; it’s practically unchanged since Thomas Edison. But me, I’m in love with the physicality of vinyl. So this place,” he says, throwing open his arms, “is my mecca.”

I’m poking around Third Man Records, the Midtown music emporium that Detroit native, rock star Jack White (of The White Stripes fame) opened in 2015. There’s a stylish shop and performance space out front, stuffed with T-shirts and token-operated jukeboxes. And at the back, down a low-lit corridor, past Bill’s studio, is a whirring record-pressing plant. The floor is varnished a funky, chemical-spill yellow, and the workers sport branded boiler suits and cool haircuts, looking like they’re fresh off a shoot for *Rolling Stone*.

Bill tells me there are only a few other places in the world where you can record a live album, then have it mixed and cut to vinyl in the same space. “It’s unconventional,

but that’s Detroit,” he grins. “The craziest part was when Jack told me he’d opened on the Cass Corridor. I was gigging round here in the ’90s, and it was not a neighbourhood you felt safe in. But it’s completely turned around. I mean, there’s even a dog park!”

Midtown’s resurrection from seedy no-man’s land to a flourishing retail area that’s home to microbreweries and off-beat businesses is part of a tide of uplift and reinvestment that, in just a few years, has revitalised the depopulated heart of Detroit.

For the first half of the 20th century, Detroit was America’s wealthiest and most influential city, but in the 1950s racial tensions and declining industry triggered an exodus. The once-grand city staggered on, beset by crime and corruption, until it collapsed, filing for Chapter 9 bankruptcy in July 2013. Rock bottom, however, had a galvanising effect; the city began to reimagine itself.

“There were no rules, so people made them up,” explains Dan Armand when I arrive in Eastern Market — a district characterised by Victorian storehouses and ramshackle lots that’s popular with young creatives. In 2015, Dan launched the annual Murals in the Market festival, turning his depressed neighbourhood into a canvas for international and local street artists. “There’s a lot of pride in Detroit,” he tells me. “Those who stayed are passionate about this city. And there’s a can-do attitude because we want more for ourselves. Like when people got together and formed ‘lawnmower brigades’ to tidy up abandoned lots.”

As a result of the festival, 125 murals are now splashed across warehouse walls, subterranean spaces and water towers.

PREVIOUS PAGES:

Eastern Market

CLOCKWISE FROM

TOP LEFT: Third Man Records; Madcap Coffee; Arthur Rugenstein, owner of Detroit Design Reworked, Eastern Market; avocado salad with feta and crispy shallots next to a burrata cheese plate with stone fruit, Wright & Company

***A new leaf** // The city’s prescient motto was coined by Father Gabriel Richard after a fire razed the city in 1805: ‘Speramus meliora. Resuget cineribus’, meaning ‘We hope for better things. It will rise from the ashes’*



DETROIT





Kind words // ‘Say Nice Things About Detroit’. The ubiquitous, unofficial motto of the city, seen on everything from T-shirts to bumper stickers, was coined by local woman Emily Gail in the 1970s. “I just wanted to create a place where all of us who loved the city could join hands,” she explained



FROM LEFT: Street art at The Belt; the Anna Scripps Whitcomb Conservatory, Belle Isle

As we explore, Dan points out works by Detroit artists. There are the signature stylised flowers of Ouzi, a marching band by Pat Perry, and works by Olayami Dabls and Tyree Guyton.

“A lot of local artists started out doing graffiti right here, before the clean-up,” Dan tells me as we enter Dequindre Cut, a two-mile sunken greenway between Downtown and Eastern Market. The leafy corridor, created along a defunct railroad a decade ago, is a picture of urban progress and harmony; street art brightens underpasses, while joggers and cyclists weave around us on the footpath. “I remember there were just layers and layers of graffiti,” Dan says. “It’s crazy to see it now.”

We part ways in the marketplace from which the area takes its name. It’s Saturday — market day, a cornerstone of city life since 1891 — and 225 vendors have taken over the ‘sheds’, many selling vegetables or honey from urban farms set up in some of the city’s tens of thousands of empty lots. The whole of Detroit seems to be here.

Down the road, I stop at Bert’s Market Place, one of the city’s oldest jazz clubs, where people are tucking into soul food on street-side tables. Ribs sizzle on a barbecue and there’s Motown on the stereo. An excited wedding party piles out of a bus and begins lining up for photos in front of a psychedelic mural. In the distance, Downtown’s huddle of art deco skyscrapers cuts a striking silhouette against the cloudless sky. The city feels alive and safe, and it looks gorgeous. I have to admit, it’s not at all what I expected.

ON THE WORLD STAGE

Karin Risko, owner of City Tour Detroit, clearly enjoys opening travellers’ eyes to their misconceptions about the city. “Not how you imagined, is it?” she asks, as we amble along the River Walk. Part of Detroit International Riverfront, the 5.5-mile promenade leads all the way from Downtown to bucolic island park, Belle Isle, past pavilions, flowerbeds and even a sandy beach. “A lot of what people think of when you say ‘Detroit’ are these grand, empty skyscrapers going to ruin, or Michigan Central Station, with its windows boarded up,” Karin says. “It’s been the focus of a ruin porn feeding frenzy for years. That was the only story the media wanted to tell.”

Built in 1913, Michigan Central Station was created by the same architects who designed New York’s Grand Central Terminal. When it closed in 1988, its vaulted ticket halls became a magnet for techno raves and urban scavengers. The building — in Corktown, the city’s oldest immigrant neighbourhood, now a burgeoning bastion of small bars and brunch spots — is finally about to be brought back to life, by Ford Motor Company, no less: a colossus of the automotive industry that underpinned the city at its peak.

The poster child for Detroit’s fall from grace, the station is a beacon for its triumphant regeneration. But Karin is keen to stress the recent uptick in Detroit’s fortunes isn’t — for anyone with at least a passing interest in history — the most interesting thing about the city. “People think Detroit is some new

discovery. All the new restaurants and hotels in the centre are great,” she concedes, “but we have a long history of contributing not just to America, but to the world.” To illustrate her point, Karin tells me about Detroiters’ pivotal role in the Underground Railroad — a network of safe houses and people that helped escaped slaves to cross the border to freedom in Canada. She then relates sensational tales of speakeasies and smuggling gangs from the Prohibition era — an estimated 80% of America’s bootleg booze entered the country here — and stories of how the Motor City swung the tide of the Second World War by mass-producing munitions. This is the city that produced sporting legends like the boxer Joe Louis; Motown music and epoch-defining singers like Stevie Wonder and The Supremes.

It was also the birthplace of Fordist industrialism and a place where a migrant labourer could make a middle-class wage. “We had more theatre seats than anywhere outside of Broadway,” Karin tells me proudly as we pass under the multistorey neon marquee of the Fox Theatre cinema.

Touring Downtown with Karin, it’s easy to imagine the grandeur of the city during the Roaring Twenties. Ornate skyscrapers make canyons of the wide boulevards, and steam escapes from vents in the road, the product of an antique cooling system still used by over 100 buildings. Half a century of stagnation has resulted, inadvertently, in the preservation of the architectural charms of another era. Best of all, there’s not a Starbucks or McDonald’s

INSIDER TIPS

What started as a casual meet up between two bike-enthusiasts has grown into Slow Roll, a bike ride that attracts thousands of cyclists every Monday night from May to October. The leisurely route often heads through suburbia, so it's a great way to see local life in The D. [slowroll.bike](#)

True North is an experimental live-work community centred on 10 corrugated-steel prefabs in Core City. It hosts Facebook-advertised events, including campfire gatherings, yoga classes and ecstatic dance sessions. [truenorthdetroit.com](#)

Winemaker Blake Kownacki has been encouraging Detroiters to grow vines in the city's empty lots, and the results can be sampled at a tasting in his new winery-cum-hip hop club, based in a former ice cream factory. [detroitvineyards.com](#)

in sight — although, considering the rate of regeneration in the area, this might not be the case for much longer.

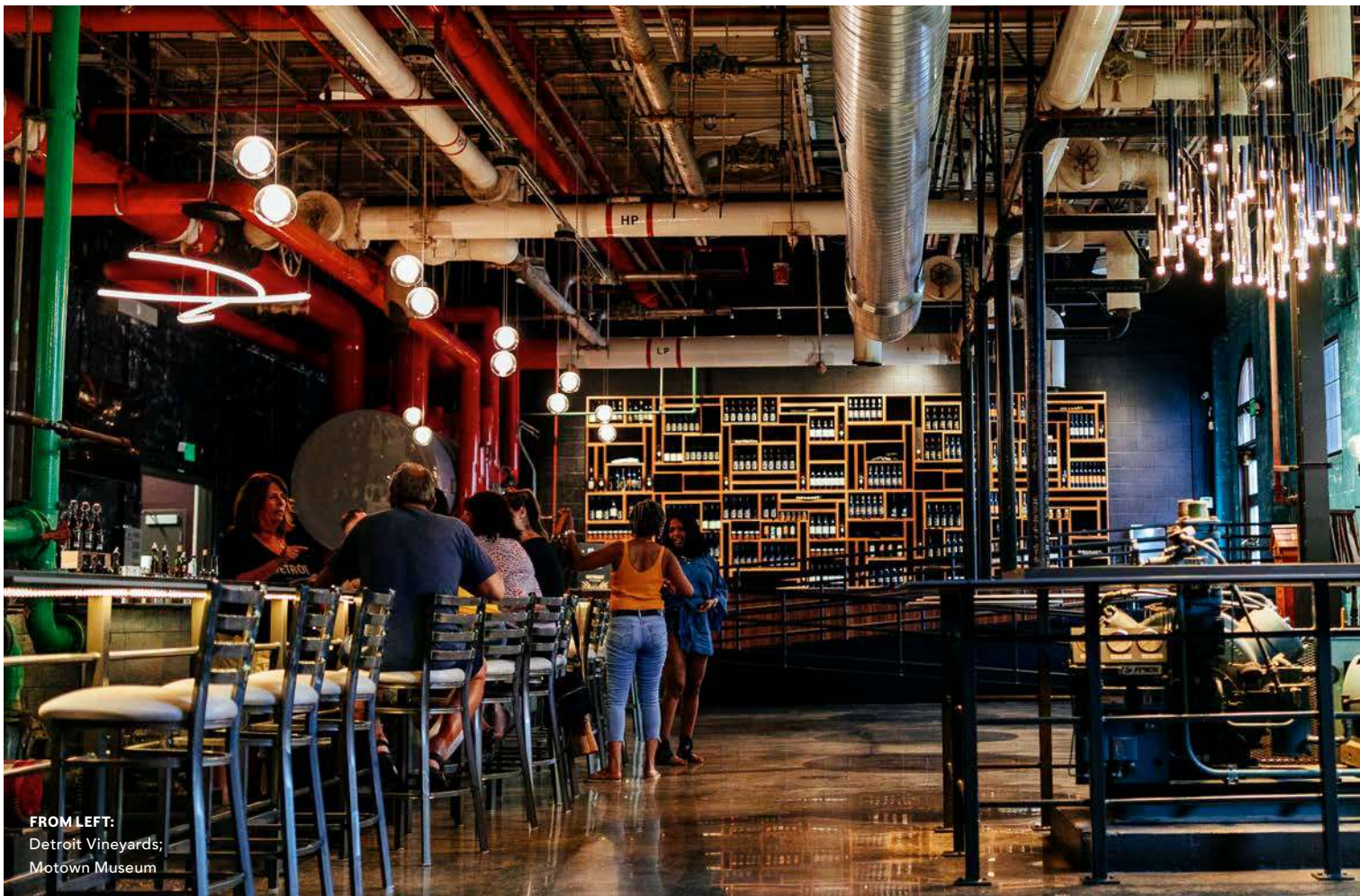
As the sun sets, Downtown heats up. The plaza of Campus Martius Park is full of trendy urbanites drinking cocktails, and the bars in The Belt — a nondescript alleyway reimaged as a muraled corridor of eclectic watering holes — are starting to get busy.

A number of far-sighted hoteliers and restaurateurs have helped flesh out a renaissance in these parts, kick-started by Detroit-born investor Dan Gilbert. His company, Bedrock, has bought, renovated and reopened over 100 historical buildings at the city's heart. Largely down to him, Downtown is flourishing, handsome and safe for travellers to wander about in, day or night. One of Bedrock's most high-profile successes has been Shinola, a luxury goods brand that set up shop in the then-crumbling capital of Michigan back in 2011 and confounded business experts by turning a profit. This January, the 129-room boutique Shinola Hotel followed. Billing itself as 'Detroit's new living room', most of the staff grew up locally and the interior's artworks and flourishes are predominantly sourced from Michigan. The global buzz

that accompanied the opening seems solid evidence the city is truly set for a comeback. Some locals, however, remain sceptical. After all, over the decades there have been many false dawns.

My last stop of the trip is Bad Luck Bar — an establishment whose name belies the admiration it's stirred up among mixology geeks in the three years since it opened. No sign hangs outside the alleyway entrance — a serpent, painted in black on the door is the only hint at what lies within. Inside, a heavy curtain is drawn aside by a hostess and I'm ushered into an intimate, low-lit bar. I select 'Metamorphosis' from a drinks list styled like a deck of tarot cards. 'Progression' and 'change', it promises, will be my reward for imbibing the mix of banana-infused blackstrap rum, white rum, milk, masala syrup, lemon juice and bitters.

I think it's a fitting salute to the city as it enters a new phase. Dan Kwiatkowski, the owner, demurs. "Renaissance' is a bit of a dirty word round here. It's been thrown around, on and off, for years. But maybe, when you look around at everything that's happening..." He pauses, as if scared to jinx it. "It is hard to deny." I'll be the one to say it out loud: Detroit? You can call it a comeback.



FROM LEFT:
Detroit Vineyards;
Motown Museum



14 hours in... DETROIT

8AM

BREAKFAST AT SAN MORELLO

Downtown's Shinola Hotel makes a meal of breakfast — in the best way. On a sunny day, sit under the in-house Italian restaurant's striped awning on bustling Woodward Avenue, order your eggs a la carte and witness the city waking up. If necessary, an additional caffeine kick is on hand around the corner at minimalist suntrap Madcap Coffee. sanmorello.com madcapcoffee.com

10AM

HEAD TO EASTERN MARKET

Recent years have seen warehouses and water towers in the historic market district bedecked with vibrant, politically charged murals; 125 have been created since the Murals in the Market street art festival began here in 2015. Explore solo or book a guided bike tour with RiDetroit. The area comes alive with produce vendors and thronging locals on Saturdays year-round, and Tuesdays and Sundays in summer. Grab a classic Coney Island hot dog from one of the stalls, or head to Gather, a restaurant

specialising in locally sourced ingredients cooked over a wood-fire grill. ridetroit.com easternmarket.org gatherdetroit.com

1PM

CHOOSE AN ART MUSEUM

Among the first artists to make blighted city blocks their canvases in the 1980s was Tyree Guyton. His colourful installations of found objects festoon the vacant lots of Heidelberg Street, the road he grew up on. Another was Olayami Dabls, who bedazzled a depressed neighbourhood with mirror mosaics and transformed it into the MBAD African Bead Museum. Another option is a free guided tour (1pm, Tuesday-Sunday) at the Detroit Institute of Arts in Midtown. Its world-class collection, which includes Diego Rivera's Detroit Industry Murals, was narrowly saved from the auction block during the city's bankruptcy. mbad.org heidelberg.org dia.org

3PM

TAKE A TOUR

Private or group tours with the history buffs at City Tour Detroit will illuminate



Q&A with Alex Trajkovski, editor, Grand Circus Magazine

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE THING TO DO IN THE CITY?

I go to the Detroit Institute of Arts about once a week. We have a world-class collection that rivals MoMA's in New York, but with none of the crowds. Come here and you'll probably have a Picasso all to yourself. I think it speaks to the spirit of the city that the collection was saved for the people. Art is the soul of any city.

WHAT INSPIRED THE MAGAZINE?

I was living in New York when Detroit declared bankruptcy. News channels were broadcasting images of burned-out homes, empty skyscrapers, and wall-to-wall ruin porn, but there was so much more to the story of the city. The magazine was spotlighting art, culture, and urbanism during a time when not enough positive things were being said about Detroit. And there are a lot of cool things to shout about. Each issue is made to be a lasting artifact, a thing of beauty — it's a nod to Detroit's record for craftsmanship.

WHAT'S YOUR TAKE ON DETROIT'S RENAISSANCE?

Detroit was one of the USA's greatest cities, and it fell from grace, spectacularly. We're all committed to seeing it restored. When a new shop, bar or restaurant opens, there's a real fanfare. You won't see that excitement in other cities. That said, some neighbourhoods are transforming radically, while others have yet to see any uplift. The challenge ahead is to progress inclusively; to not repeat the mistakes of the past.



Eastern Market

the city's pivotal role in the Underground Railroad, celebrate famous scions, like the boxer Joe Louis, share Prohibition Era tales of smuggling, and map out the industrial boom-and-bust that shaped the Motor City. One chapter that needs little introduction is the birth of Motown music in the 1960s, which can be experienced in a sing-a-long museum tour of record label founder Berry Gordy's headquarters and recording studio on West Grand Boulevard. citytourdetroit.com motownmuseum.org

5PM SWING BY MIDTOWN

Many locals can still scarcely believe that Detroit's renaissance has even spread to the once-notorious Cass Corridor. In a few short years, dozens of microbreweries and local retailers have set up shop. Highlights include Third Man Records, the recording studio, vinyl press and music emporium opened by Detroiter Jack White in 2015, and the beloved bakery Avalon International Breads. thirdmanrecords.com avalonbreads.net

6PM EXPLORE THE RIVER WALK

Broken sidewalks and concrete silos have, over the past decade, given way to a 5.5-mile, landscaped promenade that's the ideal way to enjoy the Detroit River and glimpses of

Canada on the far shore. Pick up a MoGo bike to visit Belle Isle, Detroit's answer to New York's Central Park (landscaper Frederick Law Olmsted designed both), pausing for photos at the James Scott Memorial Fountain and Sunset Point. mogodetroit.org

8PM DINNER AT WIGHT & COMPANY

This is one of Detroit's best restaurants, holding its own amid a sea of new Downtown openings since 2014. It doesn't take any reservations, so bank on a wait at the bar — no great hardship, as there's theatricality aplenty in the elaborate cocktails and moody industrial decor. The owner also runs The Sugar House — regularly ranked among the country's best bars — in Detroit's ultimate hipster hood, Corktown. wrightdetroit.com

10PM COCKTAILS AT THE BELT

The Belt, an alleyway in Downtown's former garment district, is the place to be at sundown. Join the Millennials sipping al fresco cocktails at The Skip, and look up to appreciate the murals and bold slogans by Detroit-based art gallery Library Street Collective. Later, slink below ground to the neon wonderland of live music venue DeluXX Fluxx, or duck into new mixology mecca Bad Luck Bar, a few blocks away. thebelt.org badluckbar.com □

ESSENTIALS



Getting there & around

Delta Air Lines, Air France, KLM and Virgin Atlantic all fly direct to Detroit Metro Airport from Heathrow. delta.com airfrance.co.uk klm.com virginatlantic.com

Average flight time: 8h40m.

The QLine streetcar connects Downtown and Midtown. A regular fare is \$1.50 (£1.24) for three hours or \$3 (£2.48) for a day pass. The Detroit People Mover, an elevated light rail line, circles Downtown and a journey costs \$0.75 (62p). Uber and Lyft taxis are available via their respective apps, while ride-share bikes can be picked up with MoGo. Lime, Bird and Spin offer electric scooters. qlinedetroit.com thepeoplemover.com uber.com lyft.com mogodetroit.com li.me bird.co spin.app

When to go

Summer (June–August) sees highs of 30C; winter (December–February) ranges from -6C to 2C.

Where to stay

Rooms at Shinola Hotel from \$255 (£205) a night, room only. shinolahotel.com

More info

visitdetroit.com visittheusa.co.uk/music *Grand Circus Magazine*. readgrandcircus.com Murals in the Market. muralsinthemarket.com *A History Lover's Guide to Detroit*, Karin Risko. RRP: \$21.99 (£18.13)

How to do it

AUDLEY TRAVEL offers tailor-made trips to the Great Lakes. An eight-day, self-drive costs from £2,290 per person (based on two sharing). Includes three nights at Shinola Hotel plus time in Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore and Mackinac Island, international flights, transfers, car hire, room-only accommodation and some excursions. audleytravel.com/usa

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#HOWDOYUBECO

THE ULTIMATE HIKING GUIDE WITH **DANNER**

We've teamed up with Danner, the bootmaker, to pick out some memorable treks — from North America's epic Pacific Crest Trail to scenic Majorca — highlighting the best footwear for each route



Classic hikes



EUROPE

Deià to Port de Sóller

A 7.5-mile path passes some of Majorca's most breathtaking spots: olive groves, secluded orange orchards and woodland. Kicking off in the arty village of Deià, you'll wind along scenic hillside paths. There are climbs in places but the final leg heads downhill towards the glittering Med.



USA

Hickman Bridge Trail

Utah's lunar landscapes and endless skies are a must-do. Try the Hickman Bridge Trail in Capitol Reef National Park, a two-miler looping past red rocks and desert flowers. The natural Hickman Bridge soars for 300ft, and the trail swoops beneath its arch towards a Insta-worthy rocky bluff.



THE BOOT

Mountain Light Cascade Clovis

For over 30 years, the Mountain Light has set the standard in durable, performance footwear. Built in Danner's Oregon factory, the boots feature premium components and an iconic look that makes for an easy trail to pub adventure. RRP: £360

Athletic adventures



EUROPE

Sennen to Coverack

The South West Coast Path covers 630 miles of stunning Cornish coastline. Highlights include the 55-mile stretch from Sennen to the village of Coverack, passing Land's End and Lizard Point, Britain's most southerly point. On this walk, you'll also be able to steal views of the distant Isles of Scilly.



USA

Giant Ledge

The past decade has seen a host of exciting new trails in New York State's the Catskills. The 3.75-mile trek to Giant Ledge kicks off at Route 47, outside Oliverea, ending at five ledges. Camp on one of the ledges for epic stargazing, then wake for a spectacular hike up neighbouring Panther Mountain.



THE BOOT

Trail 2650 GTX Mid

An easily-packable option for travel, these boots are both light and versatile, with great grip to tackle uneven terrain. They're also sturdy and 100% waterproof, so you can feel completely confident tackling the boggiest of landscapes or getting caught in that unexpected downpour. RRP: £159.95

Performance treks



EUROPE

The GR20

Corsica's legendary GR20 stretches for 110 miles, running almost the entire length of the French island. The two-week hike takes in jagged mountains, pine forests and water holes for wild swims. Camp or hole up in a mountain hut, where steaming stews are served to hungry walkers.



USA

Pacific Crest Trail

At a whopping 2,650 miles, this trek winds from California towards Washington state. The route's popularity soared after its feature in the 2014 Reese Witherspoon film, *Wild*, in which she sports a pair of Danner boots. Highlights include Mount Whitney and Crater Lake National Park.



THE BOOT

Mountain 600

Long days tackling tricky terrain are a doddle with these ultra-comfy boots. The springy soles blend synthetic natural rubber and EVA. Their grip on wet surfaces is superb, as is their stability over scree. Another excellent option for both exploring the trails and city streets. RRP: £189.95

DANNER ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW

Charles Danner founded the company that bears his name almost a century ago, with the aim to create boots that were both high-quality and durable. His boots became well-known among loggers in Oregon, men and women who were on their feet all day — an excellent test of the durability of his product. Danner was a roaring success, and the brand has stood the test of time, growing into the name we know and love today. The same meticulous attention to detail is still crafted across the board, as is the use of only top-quality products. A globally trusted brand, it's no surprise Danner boots are a firm favourite for all types of outdoor activities.



City life

BAKU



With a medieval quarter that preserves Silk Route traditions and a modern, ever-evolving core, the Azerbaijani capital is something of an enigma, even to regular visitors

WORDS: Farida Zeynalova



“I’d never leave this neighbourhood,” says Musa, blithely tossing a pair of dice onto the backgammon board in front of him. “It hasn’t changed much, and I like that.”

The 75-year-old retiree, who’s lived in Baku’s Old City all his life, is sitting on a rug in one of the historical quarter’s many winding, cobbled alleys. His legs are crossed, his shoes are off and he’s slowly sipping black tea with a slice of lemon. The very suggestion of living anywhere else is met with a resounding tut. Behind us is a rusty parked Lada, draped in a rug. Two luxuriantly moustached men are leaning against the bonnet — one plucking at amber prayer beads, the other chomping on sunflower seeds, which come wrapped in newspaper. Above our heads, a woman in a paisley headscarf hangs her washing on the balcony, eavesdropping on our conversation. Maiden Tower, a 12th-century monument, stands majestically a few yards away, and we can hear the clamour of nearby Kichik Gala, a street lined with traditional restaurants and rug shops.

This is the slow-paced, placid side of the city that Musa and many others know and love. But outside these 12th-century walls, rapid gentrification is forging a very different Baku. For more than 70 years, up until 1991, Baku bent to the will of the USSR. The past decade, meanwhile, has seen a wealth of new hotels, architectural marvels and shopping complexes, all integral to its rebirth. In 2010, Fountains Square, the city’s lush piazza, received a facelift and now abounds with

boutiques, restaurants and shady benches with gossiping locals. Two years later, Baku hosted the 2012 Eurovision Song Contest, held in the purpose-built Baku Crystal Hall on the harbour of the Caspian Sea. The cityscape hasn’t stopped growing since.

That same year, the abstract, meringue-like whirls of Zaha Hadid’s Heydar Aliyev Center became a soft addition to the city’s skyline of Soviet-era mass housing. Soon after, the likes of Formula 1 and UEFA caught wind of Baku’s potential as a moneyed host; there have also been bids, albeit unsuccessful, for the city to stage the Summer Olympics. But there’s no subduing the splendour of the Flame Towers, a trio of skyscrapers that lights up the city each night with 10,000 LED screens — a nod to Azerbaijan’s ‘Land of Fire’ moniker and its heritage as the crucible of Zoroastrianism, the ancient fire-worshipping religion.

The past few years have also seen the emergence of platforms for young, artsy Bakuvians — a naval base has been converted into an exhibition space, galleries have opened up in the Old City and the old-school Baku jazz scene is slowly making a comeback. Growing up in Baku during the 1990s, the country was fresh out of austere, communist hands. Today, even to me, it’s a puzzle — a confounding mix of Azeri, Russian and Turkish in the Caucasus. It’s trendy and traditional, Asian and European. By day, you can explore ancient troves from the Silk Road era, by night, stroll the boulevard and feel like you’re in an exciting metropolis.

KİMYƏVİ TƏMİZLƏMƏ





Azerbaijan Carpet Museum
RIGHT FROM TOP: YARAT
 Contemporary Art Space;
 Yaşıl Bazar (Green Market)
PREVIOUS PAGES: Flower shop
 near Khagani Park, central Baku

SEE & DO

OLD CITY: Known locally as İçəri Şəhər, the Old City is Baku's well-preserved medieval quarter. Mount the narrow steps of the former fortress, Maiden Tower, for sweeping views of the city and its crescent-shaped harbour. Wander further inside the ancient city walls to Shirvanshah Palace — the sprawling religious complex that was home to northern Azerbaijan's ruling dynasty in the Middle Ages — to explore its main courtyard, bath house, burial vaults and mosque.

BOULEVARD: Baku's beloved Boulevard, or Dənizkənarı Bulvar, has been a local haunt for more than a century, and it's where you'll find city-dwellers strolling, rollerblading and chatting come evenings and weekends. The leafy promenade has grown over the years to approximately two miles long, stretching from National Flag Square to Freedom Square. It features everything from a multistorey shopping centre to a Ferris wheel.

AZERBAIJAN CARPET MUSEUM: The country has an enduring love affair with carpets. This three-storey seafront museum is the work of Austrian architect Franz Janz and is shaped, quite impressively, like a giant roll of carpet. Get lost among thousands of Azeri carpets, national garments and traditional ceramics, and catch one of the regular exhibitions by local artists. azcarpetmuseum.az

CONTEMPORARY ART: Inside a converted 1960s naval building, YARAT Contemporary Art Space is a not-for-profit hub founded in 2011 by artist Aida Mahmudova. In the Old City, check out YAY Gallery and Kichik Galart for local designs, then head to Heydar Aliyev Center — even if only to admire the jaw-dropping exterior. yarat.az yaygallery.com

NIZAMI STREET: This pedestrianised street is a two-mile stretch of boutiques, restaurants and souvenir shops housed in baroque and art nouveau-style architecture. The grand Azerbaijan State Academic Opera and Ballet

Theatre regularly stages performances like *Leyli and Majnun*, a heart-breaking story of two lovers penned by 12th-century poet, Nizami Ganjavi. The ornate facade of the Nizami Museum of Azerbaijan Literature is best admired at night. nizamimuseum.az

LAND OF FIRE: Don't miss Atəşgah (Fire Temple), once a site of Zoroastrian, Hindu and Sikh worship. Yanar Dağ is a flaming gem, too: the hillside fire is said to have been burning for 4,000 years — a sight so entrancing that Marco Polo wrote about it when he visited in the 13th century. yanardag.az/en

GOBUSTAN NATIONAL PARK: Dancing stickmen, a headless pregnant woman and a rampant goat are among the freakish prehistoric petroglyphic sketches in Gobustan, an hour's drive from central Baku. This rocky, arid expanse is also home to 400 mud volcanoes — more than any other country. gobustan-rockart.az/en



IMAGES: AWL IMAGES; SITARA IBRAHIMOVA

EAT

SEHRLI TENDIR: This low-key, rug-draped restaurant in the Old City is one of the few places in Baku where locals will queue for lunch. Alongside clay-baked *təndir* bread, try *dolma* (stuffed vine leaves) and a side of *motal* (hard goat's cheese), washed down with *dovğa* (a yoghurt drink with herbs). [facebook.com/sehrlitendir](https://www.facebook.com/sehrlitendir)

PASSAGE 1901: This converted bazaar serves up mouth-watering meats, shish kebabs and salads. The decor is reminiscent of a Soviet-era house, with books, relics and furniture from communist times found all around the courtyard. Downstairs, tea is served out of coal samovars, and there's live music most evenings. *20 Nigar Rafibeyli.*

MUGAM KLUB: This open-air restaurant offers a menu of signature Azeri dishes like grilled kebab, *səbzı plov* (lamb and rice with leek and herbs) and *qutab* (thin dough with cheese and spinach). Go in the evening for a performance of *mugam* — melancholic Azerbaijani folk music — then head upstairs to explore the souvenir shops. *9 Haqiqat Rzayeva.*

The small print // *Thousands of tiny books — including one that's a nanoscopic 0.75mm by 0.75mm — are on display at Baku Museum of Miniature Books. Bring specs or a magnifying glass. minibooks.az*

AFTER HOURS

ROOM: Cosy and laid-back, with a pinch of hipster — this place is Baku's answer to a Shoreditch wine bar. A few feet from Fountains Square, ROOM is a local's haunt that's buzzing by night. It offers great Azerbaijani and international wines. [facebook.com/roomfineartwinedine](https://www.facebook.com/roomfineartwinedine)

BEERBAŞA: This upmarket yet relaxed sports bar is a short funicular ride from the centre and serves some of the best beer in town. Centred around a microbrewery, it offers a selection of pale and dark beers and ales, and a menu including seafood, fries and German-style sausages. beat.az/project/beerbasa

BARREL PLAYGROUND: This lively open-air club is a relatively new concept for Baku's nightlife. Creative cocktails, themed DJ sets and performances of techno, electro and jazz make for a perfect summer night out. Open seasonally. [facebook.com/barrelplayground](https://www.facebook.com/barrelplayground)

**LIKE A LOCAL**

TEA TIME: You'll find *çayxanalar* (tea houses) all across the capital, and the drink is often served with a side of *mürəbbə*, a sweet fruit preserve. Head to Çay Bağı 145 in the Old City for a glass or two with a sea view, or duck into the movie-themed Coffee Moffie behind Fountains Square. [facebook.com/caybagi145](https://www.facebook.com/caybagi145)

LIFE'S A BEACH: A 45-minute drive northeast of the city centre is Bilgəh, Baku's most popular beach, which is free to access and has umbrellas and chairs available to rent.

HAMMAM CULTURE: Ağa Mikayil Hamam is your best shot if you're after the most authentic, skin-renewing scrub. [facebook.com/meshediibadhamami](https://www.facebook.com/meshediibadhamami)

SWEET THING: One of the nation's favourite sugary treats is *şəkərbura*, a crescent-shaped pastry stuffed with sugar, nuts and a pinch of cardamom. *Paxlava*, or baklava, is ubiquitous across the country. In the summer, find a street-side vendor selling *plambir* — a simple, delicious ice cream from Soviet days.

All that jazz // Despite a ban during Soviet rule, Baku witnessed a boom in jazz music in the 1960s and '70s, when composer Vagif Mustafazadeh combined it with traditional muğam folk music to birth a hybrid genre

**BUY**

BAZAARS: Loud, colourful and thronging with noisy stall-owners and bargain-hunting shoppers, bazaars are an integral part of daily life in Baku. The sprawling Yaşıl Bazar (Green Market) is the city's largest, selling fruits, spices and pickles. Keşlə and Təzə are also popular with locals. Beware, English isn't widely spoken at bazaars, but hand gestures will suffice.

LABELS: If the likes of Gucci and Dior are your thing, head to Neftçilər Avenue opposite the central Boulevard. 'Neftçilər' means 'oilmen' in Azeri — in 1961, the road was so named to commemorate those working on oil rigs. Today, it's a showy stretch of international brands, but you'll also find Baku Puppet Theatre and Government House here.

ANTIQUES: Discerning antiquarians should head to the Old City to find authentic Azeri gems like a kilim rug from Quba (the area famous for its ancient art of carpet weaving) or traditional samovars and copperware.





Mirza Mansur, Old City
LEFT FROM TOP: Silk scarves and rugs at Silk Way Carpet Shop; tea served in a traditional armudu glass





SLEEP

SAHIL HOSTEL & HOTEL: Small on budget but big on location, this friendly, colourful hostel is situated just metres away from the Boulevard. Dorm rooms are available for up to 10 people, and there are also private rooms with en suite bathrooms and balconies. sahilhostel.com

SEVEN ROOMS BOUTIQUE HOTEL: Set within the Old City walls, this hotel is near the Maiden Tower, Shirvanshah Palace and some of Baku's best restaurants. Rooms are light, modern and comfortable, and there's a complimentary buffet breakfast thrown in. sevenrooms.az

FOUR SEASONS HOTEL BAKU: The creme de la creme of Baku hotels, the beaux-arts-inspired Four Seasons sits on the affluent Neftçilər Avenue. The lobby is the show-stealer, with marble floors, a grand staircase and opulent chandeliers. fourseasons.com/baku 

Ancient city walls with the Flame Towers in the background

ESSENTIALS



Getting there & around

Azerbaijan Airlines has the only direct flights from Heathrow to Heydar Aliyev International Airport, operating three times a week. Airlines offering flights with a stopover include Turkish Airlines and Emirates. azal.az emirates.com turkishairlines.com
Average flight time: 5h30m.

The Aero Express shuttle runs regularly from the airport to the city centre (28 May Metro Station/Central Railway Station). A single ticket costs 1.50AZN (70p) and the journey takes approximately 30 minutes; taxis cost around 20AZN (£9).

Baku has a sufficient bus, metro and taxi system, but the city is best explored on foot. A BakuCard available in a 24-hour, 72-hour or one-week format offers free/discounted entry to a selection of museums and attractions, as well as free public transport across the city. Prices start from 24AZN (£11). bakucard.az

When to go

Temperatures in the summer can reach over 40C (although the breeze from the Caspian Sea helps). The best months to visit are April-June and September-October, when there's little chance of rain and temperatures are cooler. In March, celebrations take place across the city to mark Novruz — the coming of spring.

More info

azerbaijan.travel

How to do it

INTREPID TRAVEL offers a 20-day tour of Azerbaijan & Georgia, including three days in Baku. Prices start from £2,475 per person including accommodation, transportation, activities and meals. Excludes flights. intrepidtravel.com

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TRAVELLER 10 ■

FAMILY: NATURAL WONDERS



IMAGE: GETTY

The best family trips bring geography, geology and the natural sciences vividly to life. From monumental mountains to shifting glaciers, smouldering volcanoes to sacred rock formations and awesome aurora-lit skies, we line up the most spectacular places on the planet to inspire natural wonder in young travellers



01 | THE NORTHERN LIGHTS

Our planet's ultimate light show isn't something that performs to command. Children will be wowed by this celestial spectacle — if they're not forced to sit and wait for it to appear

Suddenly it's above us. Flickering like a faltering light bulb, making the sky dim and brighten in rapid succession. "That's it!" I yelp. "It's happening!" My daughter, picking up on what must seem like disproportionate excitement about an indistinct glimmer, goes with it in the way young children sometimes do. "Oooh. Really cool!"

As natural as the Northern Lights are, they're a phenomenon that seems wholly unnatural, regardless of how many times you see them. They're what 19th-century gothic novelists might imagine a spectral display to look like, and yet, they're awesome in the fullest extent of the word, suggesting there's more beyond that celestial ceiling than you ever comprehended.

Once they get going, that is. Otherwise, expect a lot of waiting around. The aurora borealis is never better experienced than when you don't expect it. In Inari, in deepest northern Finland, wired from a long day's travelling, we'd decided to take a quick toboggan run through what was essentially the hotel's car park. Solar activity was forecast as low, and the weather a little overcast, so we weren't expecting an aurora show. But here it is, suddenly above us.

Leaning back on our sled, my daughter's bobble hat tickling my nose, the flickering light grows into a greeny-white ghostly

tinge moving across the sky in a wobbling arc. I point to direct my daughter, Ella, to its trajectory, but there's no need: a full display blooms, showering like a waterfall for a couple of seconds, then sending a domino of undulating green ripples across the sky — a Mexican wave from something unknown.

Since then, my daughter has been a harbinger of the lights on our travels, even at unexpected times and in places far from the polar norms: on an island in central Sweden in mid-summer; outside our chalet in a well-lit, central Norwegian ski resort. And, on the occasions we've awaited its arrival (once, on a frozen northern Finnish lake with tripod cameras set to long exposure, and an expert guide to explain the science), Ella has been less impressed, bored with having to wait for the heavens to show their hand.

So, now, I treat the Northern Lights as a gift. Like snow, ice and all things nice, the aurora isn't a tourist-friendly freak show, but part of the weird wonder of life around the polar latitudes. **SARAH BARRELL**

 Adventures Abroad's seven-night Family Winter Log Cabin tour in Jeris, Finland, includes return flights from London to Kittilä, accommodation and activities. From £1,845 per adult, £1,195 per child (age 5-12). Tours begin 29 December. activitiesabroad.com
Best for: Five-plus

THREE TO SEE: AURORA-HUNTING HOTSPOTS FOR FAMILIES

TROMSØ

In the heart of Norway's aurora zone, this port city is a great place to base yourself when waiting for the lights. Three-night family-friendly breaks, including aurora hunting, from £1,295 per person. offthemap.travel

LULEÅ

This Swedish Baltic archipelago has snow-shoeing, skating on frozen lakes, and the chance to visit local Sami reindeer herders. Five-day trips from £1,585 per adult, £830 per child. best-served.co.uk

ROVANIEMI

Combine a visit to Santa with a Northern Lights mission in a Finnish winter wonderland that's sure to satisfy the tots. Five-night trips from £1,635 per adult and £1,195 per child. scanadventures.co.uk

PREVIOUS PAGES: Hiking in Langdale, Cumbria
RIGHT: Northern Lights, Oqaatsut, Greenland

Q&A
**PROFESSOR
 JIM WILD**

Jim Wild is professor of space physics at Lancaster University

WHY DO YOU FIND THE AURORA BOREALIS SO INTERESTING?

I've always been fascinated by our planet's connection to the solar system. The Northern Lights are visible evidence of that: the outer atmosphere glows with ghostly light as electrically charged particles from space are guided along the Earth's magnetic field. What's not to love?

WHERE DID YOU SEE THE LIGHTS AT THEIR MOST PROMINENT?

I was doing fieldwork at a remote radar station near Tromsø in Norway while studying for my doctorate. I was wearing all the layers I had in temperatures of -30C when I was treated to an epic display that filled the sky.

WHERE WOULD YOU RECOMMEND FAMILIES VISIT TO SPOT THEM?

In Iceland you can combine your hunt for the aurora borealis with glaciers, volcanoes, hot springs and whale watching.

WHERE IN THE UK IS THE BEST PLACE TO SPOT THE LIGHTS?

Typically, the Northern Lights are only seen from the British Isles a few times a year. But the further north you travel, the better your chances. Follow [@aurorawatchuk](#) on Twitter to boost your chances by trying to find dark spots without light pollution and with a clear view of the northern horizon.
jwild.co.uk



02 | MOUNTAINS

Scaling a mountain is never easy, but on the Indian Ocean island of Mauritius, reaching the summit isn't just a physical challenge — it's a lesson in history

What a view. On one side, the deepest blue lagoon beneath Le Morne Brabant mountain, on the other, the Indian Ocean's varying shades of blue, from aquamarine to indigo, into which taper Mauritius' green southern reaches. A metal cross marks the spot: the island's highest accessible point.

But the view up close is almost more impressive. Caves, nooks, crannies and overhangs shape the steep slopes of this majestic basaltic mountain — a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2008, with a summit that rockets 1,824ft above those Indian Ocean blues.

It's been no mean feat to make it to the top. Our hike starts at 6.45am, and is led by two guides: the wiry, dreadlocked Mauritian superhuman, Steve, who sets off at a pace that puts even my infamous speed walking to the test; and William, the tall, youthful Mauritius-born Australian, equally able to take one stride to my two.

Our group of 10 travellers — tourists and locals — begin the swift 3.5km hike up to the check point, weaving through mapou and banyan trees, stepping over buttress roots, trudging through mud, leaves and stones. From here, only children over 10 can advance, although we're warned it's really best suited to hardy teens, hence we decide to do this part of the trip without ours. We find ourselves climbing, scrabbling, grappling our way over volcanic rock, stony grey boulders and trees worn smooth by hands. The hike has turned into a vertical ascent. At one point, we notice metal hooks in the rock face, indicating a rope was once in place to help haul trekkers up. Today, however, it's considered safer to free-climb instead.

"It was too slippery," says Steve. "It's better you don't rely on the rope."

One of our group, a Mauritian bedecked in a sun hat, shades and a determinedly cheerful disposition, is reduced to slow, faltering movements. "I'm going slow, I'm on vacation," he says, panting. "Take a picture, to prove I got up here."

And once we do? It's a truly epic view, a victorious prize well worth the two-hour

scramble. But the peak also harbours a tragic past. The mountain stands proudly as an exceptional testimony to local resistance against slavery; the mountain was used as a fortress and a shelter for escaped slaves from the east; from mainland Africa, Madagascar and India. The story goes, following the passing of the Slavery Abolition Act by the British in 1834, a group of soldiers and police travelled to Le Morne in order to inform runaway slaves they were free. The slaves, on seeing the approaching authorities, climbed to the top of Le Morne Brabant's cliff and jumped to their deaths, choosing freedom in death rather than a return to slavery.

"The British, Dutch and French gave us so much good — sugar cane, cuisine — and so much sadness," says Steve.

Later that morning, at the nearby Paradis Beachcomber Golf Resort & Spa, where we're based, I fill my son and daughter in on the climb.

"Le Morne means sadness," I explain. "It was named by the French, but the Dutch had previously called it Mount Triest, which also means sadness."

"Yes, we know," says my 11-year old daughter. "The slaves threw themselves off the top. It's horrible."

"And yet, it's such a beautiful place too," I say, flicking through our photos.

"Could I do the hike, mum?" asks my 10-year-old, gung-ho son.

"Yes, next time," I say. "Lots of climbing. Although your dad didn't find it that easy."

But, as my children are learning, not all travel is about the physical challenges ahead of you. Sometimes it's also about understanding how a destination's complex past can shape a landscape too. **MARIA PIERI**

✎ Seven nights' half-board at Paradis Beachcomber Golf Resort & Spa for two adults and two children (under 12) from £4,930, including flights, activities and transfers. beachcombertours.uk tourism-mauritius.mu Best for: 10-plus, but teens are better suited to reach the summit

Read our top five things to do in Mauritius with children on nationalgeographic.co.uk/travel



Uluru-Kata Tjuta
National Park
BELOW: At the foot
of Uluru



03 | ROCKS

Why is Uluru so sacred?

Uluru isn't only a spectacular natural landmark, but a deeply spiritual place. The local Aboriginal people, the Anangu, are the traditional owners of Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park, the area that encompasses the rock. For the Anangu, this is a living place governed by Anangu law, known as Tjukurpa — the foundation of Anangu life and society. The Anangu people believe the landscape around Uluru was created at the beginning of time by their ancestors. A landmark decision made in 2017 means that climbing the Rock is forbidden as of 26 October 2019, 34 years after it was handed back to the Anangu people by the Australian government.

What's the best way to experience Uluru?

The Uluru Base Walk — you can circumnavigate the 10km base and relax beside waterholes, take a break under a magnificent Sheoak tree and peer into hidden caves. Join a guided tour to hear stories passed down by generations, see incredible rock art sites and learn about its flora and fauna, including 73 types of reptiles and thousands more species of creepy-crawlies.

What are the other highlights in the area?

The Uluru-Kata Tjuta Cultural Centre is a great starting point. It offers information about the park as well as an introduction to Anangu culture. For a fun way to experience the icon, travel through the red sand of Australia on the back of a camel, taking sunrise and sunset tours to both Uluru and the soaring rock domes of Kata Tjuta. You could also join a Maruku Arts dot painting workshop at Ayers Rock Resort to learn about the Tjukurpa creation symbols.

What sort of cultural experiences are on offer for families visiting the area?

If you're up for a real adventure, you can travel a few hours deep into the heart of the Red Centre with SEIT Outback Australia, led by Uluru's Anangu people, on a 4x4 tour to visit places like Cave Hill, site of the Seven Sisters creation stories. Your guides will point out the desert dunes and painted caves of their homeland.

HOW TO DO IT: Explore Uluru and the Northern Territory's other geological giants, too, from Kings Canyon to the Devil's Marbles. This is also the place to take the ultimate Australian camping trip: a night spent sleeping out in sight of the rock will reveal starry skies and a sunrise that will be forever etched in your family's memory. Two-day tours of Uluru, including meals and swag bags for camping, from £220 per person. uluru.com

BEST FOR: Six-plus



04 | ICY WONDERS

Glacier Grey, Chile

Capture the raw nature of this icy icon and kayak around its extremities, or for the more daring, try ice-climbing — as long as they can fix on crampons, your teens can take part. The dramatic Torres del Paine National Park is a good place to start, with head-spinning views of geological oddities and ice-treks on the gargantuan glacier. Though with rising temperatures, the future for this vulnerable glacier is under threat.

HOW TO DO IT: Responsible Travel's 16-day Patagonia Family Holiday starts from £5,445 per person and includes the Perito Moreno Glacier in Argentina's Los Glaciares National Park and Torres del Paine National Park. responsibletravel.com

BEST FOR: Teens

Franz Josef Glacier, New Zealand

For James Bond kicks, travellers big and small can soar to Franz Josef by helicopter, landing directly on the ice, and spend several hours gazing at crevasses and negotiating narrow paths. It's located in Westland Tai Poutini National Park — a wild and weird expanse with mint-green lagoons, dramatic mountains and colossal valleys. This is also the fastest and steepest of New Zealand's glaciers, which moves up to 13ft every day.

HOW TO DO IT: Wexas' 13-day Best of the South Island tour offers family-friendly, but extraordinary experiences, including a heli-hiking tour of Franz Josef. From £3,125 per person. wexas.com

BEST FOR: Eight-plus

Vatnajökull, Iceland

Want to know how it feels to cruise across a glacier so large it can be seen from space? Daring travellers can do just that on snowmobiling tours of Vatnajökull, coasting on compacted ice and snow towards a bright white horizon. For end-of-the-Earth drama, stop by iceberg-strewn lagoon Jökulsárlón, where you'll spot eerie, bobbing chunks of ice: the castoffs from Europe's largest icefield, Vatnajökull.

HOW TO DO IT: Discover the World's eight-day Essential Iceland Self-Drive trip includes a stop at this glacial lagoon, from £957 per person. discover-the-world.com

BEST FOR: Six-plus

Athabasca, Canada

You could play it safe with a walk along the glass-floored Columbia Icefield Skywalk. Then again, you could go full adventurer and zoom over the glacier in an ice-gripping vehicle on a family-friendly tour, stopping

to drink its pure glacial waters and learning about mountaineer's tools. What's more, this is probably the world's most accessible glacier with a car park just metres away from its luminous edges in Jasper National Park. Scientists predict Athabasca has a life expectancy of less than 50 years, so if there's a time to see it, it's now.

HOW TO DO IT: Classic Journeys has a six-day Canadian Rockies trip from \$4,295 (£3,533) per person. classicjourneys.com

BEST FOR: Six-plus

Trift Glacier, Switzerland

Landing on this precarious glacier isn't recommended for children, but the journey to it will hit the spot for adventurous kids, who will relish the cable-car ride that soars close to this glacier in the Bernese Highlands. Jump off and it's a challenging hike, through alpine meadows and rugged mountain paths to the vertigo-inducing suspension bridge with views towards the glacier. But be warned, the 560ft-long Trift Bridge certainly isn't for the faint-hearted, swaying around 330ft off the ground.

HOW TO DO IT: Catch the bus to Nesselthal, Triftbahn, and purchase your cable-car tickets from here: grimswelt.ch/en

BEST FOR: 10-plus **HELEN WARWICK**

FAMILY GETAWAYS IN SERFAUS-FISS-LADIS

The three Austrian villages of Serfaus, Fiss and Ladis in Tyrol have positioned themselves as family specialists within the Alpine regions



Taking children skiing makes a lot of sense: teach them young and they'll be cruising down black runs before you know it. For an ultimate family adventure, look to the Austrian resort of Serfaus-Fiss-Ladis. Pitched on a sunny plateau in Tyrol, it's frequently recognised as a family-friendly region in the Alps.

It's the resort's trademark kids' slopes that make it ideal for thrill-seeking families. There's the interactive Murmli Trail, with a cast of hooting owls, and Fiss Cave World, where pint-sized skiers whoosh through a 'burning' fire hut. And don't miss the Bears Slope for a cruise through a bear's

mouth or the Kids Fun Slope. Children who are still unsure on their skis can gain confidence at Kinderschneealm and Berta's Kinderland, the resort's ski school areas, which combine expert tuition with playful learning aids.

While the youngsters are skiing, parents can get in on the action, gliding down 214km of ski routes or exploring winter hiking trails. Later, the whole family can savour Tyrolean specialities in numerous chalets, such as the traditional Zirbenhütte Restaurant, or tuck into gourmet cuisine at Crystal Cube, while enjoying 360° views of the mountains through its all-glass walls.



Three more activities to try

Night snowcat rides

After dusk, climb aboard a snowcat — hulking snow-grooming vehicles that smooth out the slopes once the skiers have left for the day.

Tobogganing

Try the 4km run from Komperdell mountain station to Serfaus, or the 3km route that starts at Steinegg and leads you to the Schönjoch valley station in Fiss.

The night shows

Kids will love the resort's evening entertainment — live music, acrobatic dancing and light shows — before heading out on a night ski back to base.

Essentials

Getting there: A number of airlines fly direct from London to Innsbruck. From there, it takes around an hour and 15 minutes to get to the resort by car.



05 | WATERFALLS

WHERE: Victoria Falls, Zambia/Zimbabwe

HOW TO DO IT: The best spot at Victoria Falls? The nail-biting Devil's Pool — perched right on the edge of the falls — where swimmers, great and small, gather amid the spray of thundering water. From \$105 (£85) for a tour of Livingstone Island as well as a dip. devilspool.net

BEST FOR: Eight-plus

WHERE: Iguazu Falls, Argentina/Brazil

HOW TO DO IT: Many hair-raising boat trips whizzing into the falls are unsuitable for kids under 12. Instead, opt for an ecological rafting trip that takes in the upper Iguazu River and is perfect for spotting giant butterflies, iguana, turtles and birds. Visit as part of Journey Latin America's 14-day Family Brazil trip, from £3,570 per person. journeylatinamerica.co.uk

BEST FOR: Eight-plus

WHERE: Plitvice Lakes National Park, Croatia

HOW TO DO IT: A dramatic series of cascades trickles from one glassy pool into another in this forested national park. Kids will love exploring the jade-green waterways on the free boats and larking around the wooden walkways. Entry from £6.50, but children under seven go free. np-plitvicka-jezera.hr/en

BEST FOR: Six-plus



06 | MARINE ENCOUNTERS

WHERE: Belize Barrier Reef, which is, as of 2019, the world's largest coral reef system. You don't need a PADI licence to explore this

technicolour waterworld off the diminutive central American country. Just slip on a mask and fins and you'll be eye-to-eye with turtles, nurse sharks, giant manta rays and dolphins. That said, for older ones who can dive (over-10s), you've got the dramatic Blue Hole at your fingertips — an eerie submarine sinkhole that's one of the world's most majestic dive sites.

HOW: Belize Sailing Vacations offers cruising around Belize's cays aboard luxury catamarans. Prices from \$1,945 (£1,603) a night for four people. belizesailingvacations.com

BEST FOR: Eight-plus **HW**

Queen angelfish,
Belize Barrier Reef
ABOVE: Plitvice Lakes
National Park, Croatia



TUTANKHAMUN: DISCOVER THE TREASURES

As Tutankhamun: Treasures of the Golden Pharaoh presented by Viking Cruises arrives in London, follow the story of the 1922 discovery



1922

British archaeologist and Egyptologist Howard Carter unearths Tutankhamun's almost-intact burial chamber, hidden for more than 3,200 years. Financed by Lord Carnarvon, the discovery is hailed as one of the greatest archaeological finds of the 20th century.

1968-1978

The mystery of how the pharaoh died continues — but thanks to modern science, speculation is rife that 'King Tut' may have been killed with a blow to the head. Many of the excavated treasures are sent on a sensational world tour, attracting millions.

2018-2020

The Tutankhamun: Treasures of the Golden Pharaoh exhibition begins a world tour, arriving at London's Saatchi Gallery in November 2019. Three times the size of any past travelling Tutankhamun collection, the 150 pieces range from jewellery to furniture. The exhibition comes a century after Howard Carter first gazed into the famous burial chamber, and the legend of the Boy King has captivated the world ever since. This once-in-a-lifetime event allows visitors to admire the artefacts on tour before they return to their new home at Giza's Grand Egyptian Museum in 2021.

1925-1939

Following the death of Lord Carnarvon in 1923, Carter and his expert team transfer all 5,398 items from the tomb to Cairo's Egyptian Museum. In 1924, Carter receives an honorary doctorate from Yale University; he passes away from cancer in 1939.

2005-2009

A scan contradicts the murder verdict; it's now believed the 19-year-old king died from an infected leg wound. Another mystery is solved, too, as DNA evidence indicates the two stillborn babies also discovered in the tomb are his daughters.

Essentials

Tutankhamun: Treasures of the Golden Pharaoh presented by Viking Cruises opens at London's Saatchi Gallery on 2 November for a limited run. General adult admission from £24.50, plus fees.

TUTANKHAMUN
TREASURES OF THE GOLDEN PHAROAH
SAATCHI GALLERY | 2 November 2019 - 3 May 2020

JUST DESERTS: FAB FOUR

WAHIBA SANDS, OMAN

The Omani desert is best appreciated overnighting in a desert camp. Also known as Sharqiya Sands, it has both dunes and salt flats home to migrating birds.

HOW TO DO IT: KE Adventure's eight-day Oman Family Adventure combines dolphin-spotting with sandboarding, camel rides and a Bedouin homestay. From £2,290 per person. keadventure.com

BEST FOR: Eight-plus

SAHARA, MOROCCO

If you've a real head for adventure, explore the dunes of the Moroccan Sahara. They're easy to reach, but no less jaw-dropping than those in its impenetrable centre.

HOW TO DO IT: The nine-day Fez and the Sahara tour from Families Worldwide includes camping in the desert and camel rides. From £1,199 per person. familiesworldwide.co.uk

BEST FOR: Eight-plus

ATACAMA, CHILE

Stay in the high-altitude village of San Pedro de Atacama and head out into one of the the driest place on Earth. Enjoy hiking, horse-riding, stargazing and geyser tours.

HOW TO DO IT: Original Travel's 14-day Highlights of Chile tour starts at £8,460 per person. originaltravel.co.uk

BEST FOR: Eight-plus

Gobi, MONGOLIA

A vast wilderness claiming a huge swathe of southern Mongolia, the Gobi is a patchwork of mountains, forest, icy canyons and mighty great dunes.

HOW TO DO IT: See the Gobi's Flaming Cliffs and visit a nomadic family during the 10-day Kids and Camels tour with Nomadic Expeditions. Two weeks from £7,200 for a family of four. stubbornmuletravel.com

BEST FOR: Teens HW



Namib-Skeleton Coast
National Park, Namibia

07 | DESERTS

Roller coaster dunes, diamond fields and desert dragons await in the sandy expanse of Namibia's Dorob National Park

"So, on a scale of one to 10, how exciting would you like this to be?"

We're poised at the foot of a cascade of dunes in a top-of-the-range 4WD, with Hennie Roets, our local guide at the wheel.

"Ten!" we whoop, and we're off, flying along a barely-there track, sand fountaining around us as we accelerate. Plunging down the first slope at exhilarating speed, we pause, then zoom up the next. And the next. And the next.

We stop on a peak the colour of clotted cream. Undulating dunes recede to the southern horizon and below, to the west, is the silver-flecked Atlantic. "Let me take your shoes," says Hennie. "You're going to love it." He's right. The moment my toes sink into the dune, I'm as happy as a kid in a sandbox.

This is Dorob, Namibia's newest national park. Declared in 2010, it added the final link to a chain of protected areas stretching all the way along the Namib, Namibia's coastal desert, from the Kunene River on the Angolan border to the Orange River, bordering South Africa. Called the Namib-Skeleton Coast National Park, this remarkable, 975-mile-long megapark has diamond fields and sunbaked sands lapped by cold Atlantic currents.

At first sight, the Namib's dramatic landscapes appear barren, but look more closely and a fascinating ecosystem unfolds. Desert-adapted beetles and barking geckos thrive here. In the north, hardy lions survive by hunting antelopes in dry gullies and seals on the shore. Protecting their habitat has been a crowning achievement for Namibia, a nation that's had huge conservation successes. Much of the Namib is out of bounds to vehicles, but parts of Dorob, near Walvis Bay, are reserved for 4WD adventures like ours.

This is a region rich in minerals. Wave a magnet over a pinch of Dorob sand, and it dances: it contains ferrimagnetic magnetite. Halfway through a sentence, Hennie darts off then returns clasping something tiny. It's a shovel-snouted lizard with long toes suited to running on the sand. And it's more perfect than any desert jewel. **EMMA GREGG**

➤ Audley Travel's 15-day Namibia self-drive safari includes climbing Sossusvlei's famous dunes and sleeping in a desert camp. From £2,951 per person. audleytravel.com

Best for: Adventurous travellers of any age



08 | RAINFOREST

Far from the bustling cities, the Indonesian island of Java's lush rainforest reveals wildlife at its most colourful and abundant

"Follow the branch," says Kelik, our guide. "Follow it until you see something that's blue, fluffy and singing."

In the thick rainforest canopy above the village of Jatimulyo, 20 miles above Yogyakarta on the island of Java, even a mellifluous blue parcel of fluff can be hard to pick out. The rain has only just stopped and sunlight bounces off the soaking, shimmering leaves. My son Thomas (10) nudges me and points. Finally, I see it: a black-naped monarch. Looking as though it's been freshly dunked in a pot of cobalt-blue paint, the bird wavers on twigs and branches before fluttering off into the hinterland.

We continue on our walk along forest tracks, a route that contours close to high crags on the slopes of Gunung Kelir mountain. Vines dangle around us, their upper origins lost in the canopy, while giant fig trees stand sturdily. Indonesia's forests have been ravaged by palm oil plantations, but a government moratorium on further clearances of rainforest was (at the time of writing) still being enforced. Villagers have established a small, low-impact coffee


plantation, which provides an income that enables them to preserve their remaining rainforest from slash-and-burn clearing.

As we amble back to the village, the forest rustles with life — sunbirds and flycatchers hop along branches while small, unseen mammals scuttle among the undergrowth.

We say goodbye to Kelik and head downhill to the plains. Alamanda Villas, where we're staying, is a low-key collection of traditional Indonesian bungalows, or *joglos*, in a rice field on the outskirts of Yogyakarta.

I ask Thomas what he made of the forest walk. "I just loved the fact that you looked one way and saw an amazing butterfly," he replies. "Then you turn another way and there's a beautiful bird and another way I saw a spider that would scare my sister."

MARK ROWE

 Trailfinders has flights to Yogyakarta via Singapore from £900 per person in high season. Alamanda Villas has five-person bungalows from £40 a night. A guided day tour to Jatimulyo costs £25 for one adult and one child. trailfinders.com alamandayogyakarta.com
Best for: Six-plus

TAKE NOTE: RULES OF THE JUNGLE

STAY HYDRATED

High humidity means children — and parents — will need to drink regularly. Enquire ahead as to whether filtered and drinkable water is available or not, and consider bringing your own water purifiers.

BE PATIENT

Jungle life tends to be active at dawn and again at dusk and night, and guided hikes and boat trips follow this pattern. In between, there can be a lot of hanging around, so bring a pack of cards and plenty of books. Some lodges have wi-fi.

DON'T GRAB

Children will be tempted by all the tactile opportunities that rainforests present, such as swinging on dangling fig branches or running their fingers through thick, lush foliage. All these are wonderful ways to get stung or bitten. A good deterrent is to show them YouTube footage of TV presenter Steve Backshall getting stung by bullet ants.

CONSULT YOUR DOCTOR

Many destinations, for commercial reasons, play down the risk of malaria, so don't automatically believe a lodge or travel company that says the disease isn't present. Take the same approach with rabies and dengue fever and speak to your doctor well in advance of travel.

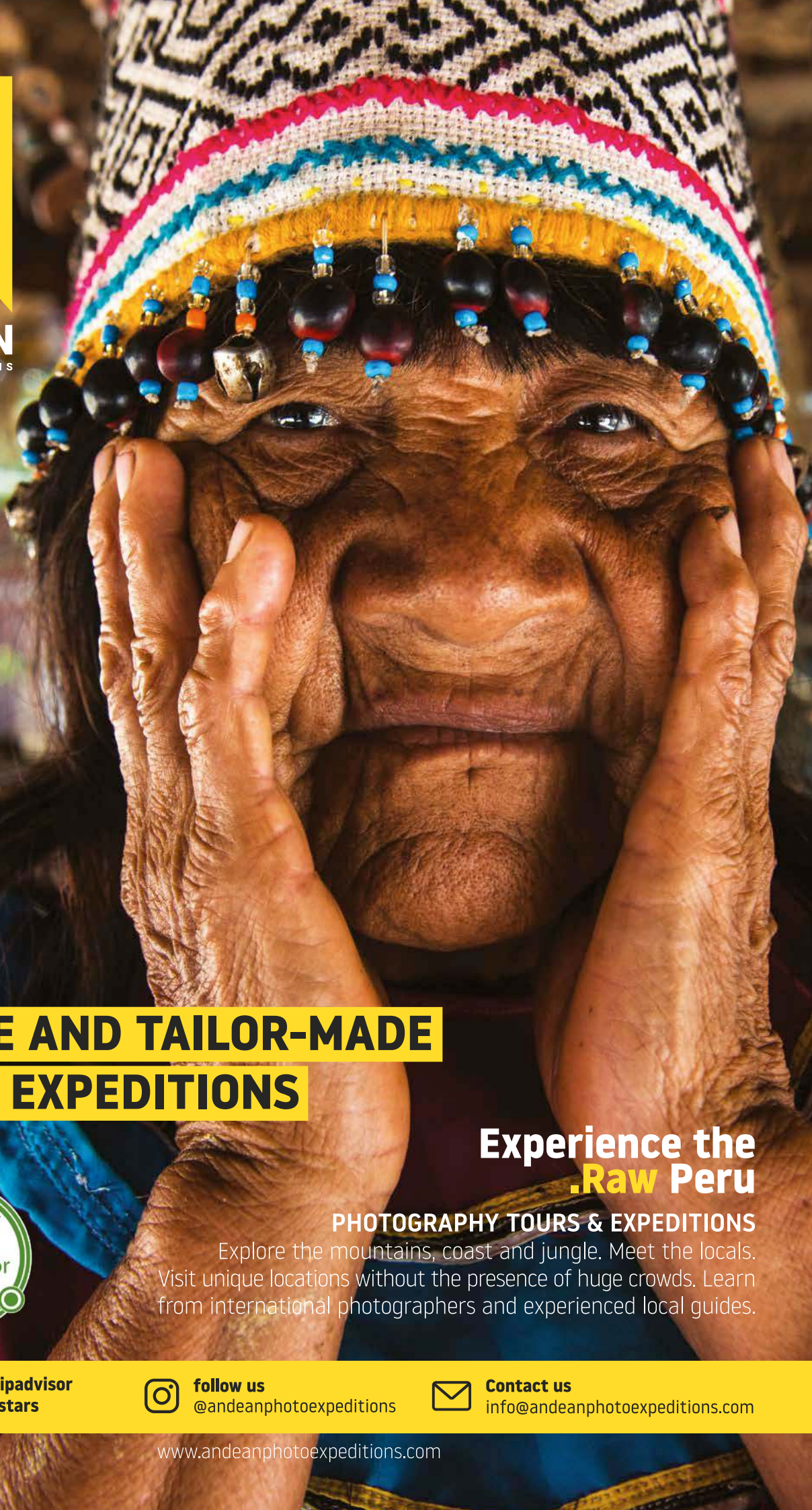
THINK GREEN

Logging, mining, palm oil and soy plantations are rampant in rainforests, so get your little ones interested in conservation early by educating them on the challenges jungles currently face. Ask about the environmental policies of your tour operator or lodge, too, as many either work closely with, or are operated by, environmental organisations.



Hanging bridge, Mistico Arenal
Hanging Bridges Park, Costa Rica
LEFT: Javanese rainforest





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Cable-car, Mount Etna

09 | VOLCANOES

Want to get up close to a smouldering, sulphurous peak? Sicily's explosive icon is a good place to start — just remember to wrap up warm

“What happens if it erupts while we're there?” asks Sam (7). It's a fair question. Standing 10,912ft in height, Mount Etna is Europe's largest active volcano, a monster of a mountain that's both blasted and sustained life on Sicily for millennia. In fact, the gnarly black rocks on the local snorkelling beach were once spat out by this beast, and fiery eruptions can still light up the night skies. So naturally, as we approach the peak by car, there's a little trepidation. “The volcanologists are able to tell when there's any danger,” I say, reassuring myself as much as the kids.

Reaching the upper slopes, Sicily's chaotic traffic thins out. The temperature drops. At 6,200ft, we park up at Rifugio Sapienza — a staging post for visits, and ski resort in winter. A cable-car whisks us up over the post-apocalyptic moonscape to 8,200ft, where a 4WD bus then climbs the last leg to 9,500ft.

Here, a guide walks us around the rim of a crater, explaining Etna's first eruptions occurred more than 500,000 years ago. Our shoes crunch over warm, bony nuggets of

rock. An eggy smell of sulphur fills the air, and patches of red, oxidised earth lie like giant stains across the landscape. We take selfies in the wind, hair all over the place. Sam ends up wearing three tops and my sweater, and he's still cold.

It's amazing how interwoven this post-apocalyptic peak is with life on Sicily. Before our trip, the kids knew volcanoes from books and TV, but now it feels like we understand them in 4D. People who live nearby simply call Etna ‘A Muntagna’ (‘The Mountain’). Its fertile soil and microclimates make the olives sweet and wines delicious and many Sicilians depend on that very soil for their livelihoods. But alongside that, of course, is the constant threat of a new outburst, the next calamitous puke. It feels like a living thing, a moody giant bossing the island, both creator and destroyer.

And it's steeped in legend, too. The volcano was the supposed haunt of the one-eyed monster Cyclops, and the Greek god of fire Hephaestus is said to have kept his forge beneath the mountain. Even now, 1,640ft

above us, the peak is puffing. Thankfully, Etna doesn't erupt during our visit.

Driving back down the mountain, swapping rocky slopes for green and forested flanks, we stop at Murgo, a small winery on the southeastern side. The ‘minerality’ of the volcanic soil here produces ‘supple, earthy and electric’ grapes, according to the guide. The kids are at first intrigued to learn how wine is made. Then the novelty wears off.

We sit down for lunch. I've read that the Sicilian dish, *pasta alla Norma*, reflects the volcanic landscape — sweet tomato sauce is the lava, aubergine the black rock, basil the greenery around the mountain and a sprinkling of *ricotta salata* the snow on its peak. It's time to tuck in. **PÓL Ó CONGHAILE**

▶ A cable-car ride, 4WD bus tour and guided walk on Mount Etna cost from £35 per person from Rifugio Sapienza. Bring layers for the cold, be sure to wear closed shoes — no sandals or flip-flops — and plenty of sunscreen. funiviaetna.com/en
Best for: Five-plus

10 | FJORDS

The hotly anticipated release of *Frozen 2* hits cinemas in November, so why not make the ultimate kid-friendly sacrifice and take your crew on a Disney Cruise to the Norwegian landscapes that inspired the hit animation. While the on-board antics are geared to children, the fjords around which it sails are stark, wild and extraordinarily beautiful. The trip also takes in Sunnmøre, where your kids can imagine meeting Elsa, Anna and all the stars of the blockbuster film.

HOW TO DO IT: The seven-night Norwegian Fjords Cruise from Dover starts from £3,835 per person. Alternatively, Coastal Norway's Hurtigruten ferry offers a Young Explorers programme, with free activities for those aged seven to 13. disneycruise.disney.go.com hurtigruten.co.uk

BEST FOR: Three-plus HW 📍



Norwegian Fjords

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GEEKS HAVE THE ANSWERS...

Q // Pakistan has been on my radar since British Airways started flying there late last year, but I'm not sure where to go or what to see. Any suggestions?

Back after an 11-year hiatus, the direct British Airways flight to Islamabad — plus a new tourist e-visa system — is making entry to Pakistan simpler and faster.

Independent travel is possible, but it's by no means easy. Most visa applications require a Letter of Invitation (LOI), so it's far easier to book with a specialist tour operator, such as Wild Frontiers.

The vast vistas and clean air of the north is the best place to start. It's a wrinkled blanket of valleys peopled by rural communities that can be shy, but eager to welcome travellers again.

Rumble over the 12,250ft-high Shandur Pass. Closed by snow for six months of the year, in summer, the pink, flower-studded plateau

is home to the world's highest polo field, which featured in the BBC series *Himalaya with Michael Palin*.

Spend time with the Kalash people on your journey. Said to be the descendants of Alexander the Great, they're famed for their colourful embroidered dresses and headdresses, as well as for their pagan ceremonies.

Then follow the roads east to Skardu, a pretty area, snuggled away in the far northeast of Pakistan's Gilgit-Baltistan region. A stay at the timber and mud-brick Khaplu Palace, the finely restored timber and mud-brick residence of the Raja of Khaplu, is a lingering highlight. wildfrontierstravel.com

EMMA THOMSON

ABOVE FROM LEFT:
Lower Kachura Lake,
Skardu Valley, Pakistan;
interrailing

Q // I've seen some news pieces about Interrail recently. How does the travel pass work for UK-based travellers?

Interrail travel hit the news in August when British rail companies pulled out of the scheme, sparking such a backlash that within 24 hours — following intervention from Britain's transport secretary — a U-turn was announced.

UK-based travellers have several options. A 'global' Interrail pass covers 31 countries and more than 40,000 destinations, or you can buy a less expensive country-specific pass. Then you may travel by train to either an airport, a ferry port

or to the Eurostar terminal (covered with your pass) to depart Britain — and on your return home, a journey is also covered. Eurostar trains are included, but you must make a reservation, which costs €30 (£27). There's a detailed explanation of how to do this on the Eurostar page of The Man in Seat 61 website. A month-long global pass with unlimited travel costs from €603 (£551) for an adult, or €464 (£424) if you're aged 28 or under. interrail.eu seat61.com

TOM CHESHYRE



Q // Where do you recommend for a harvest-season, foodie weekend away?

Head to the New Forest, where, at this time of year treetops are transformed to burnished gold, moorland heather to vibrant pinks and purples, and woodland grounds become carpeted with beech mast and acorns. The latter provide fodder for the rare-breed pigs that are let out to roam free among farm and forest during autumn's pannage season — a tradition that dates back to the New Forest's founding as the royal hunting ground of William the Conqueror. Once fattened up, they provide the sort of premium pork that would turn Iberian ham-makers green with envy. It's a great time for mushrooms, too,

with foraging walks organised by local groups including River Cottage master mycologist John Wright.

Shops across the national park stock produce awarded New Forest Marque designation (denoting local provenance). Match your pannage pork with a medal-winning Brook Hill Vineyard white, and a side of Real Jam's spiced apple chutney. Then check into one of a number of local foodie hotels, such as The Pig, near Brockenhurst. Its kitchen-garden-led menu shines with seasonal goodies. Double rooms from £150. thepighotel.com thenewforest.co.uk

SARAH BARRELL

Q // I have annual travel insurance, but it'll expire halfway through my upcoming trip. I'm renewing, but how will this impact what I can claim?

Speak to your insurer now. The good news is you have an active policy in place, which means if you have to cancel your trip, you'll be covered.

But if you leave your policy to automatically renew without checking the terms, you could find the insurer won't accept renewal on the same terms — for example, if your health has changed or the insurer has a different underwriter.

If you speak to your insurer, you can get concrete assurance that your trip is covered in full, on terms you're satisfied with, or arrange some bespoke extension, if that's the only way of doing it. If you're not happy with the outcome, you could buy another annual policy, which starts on the day your old policy expires.

The alternative could be buying a single-trip policy to cover you for the period you're travelling, cancelling your annual policy.

I put your question to the Association of British Insurers, the body that represents travel insurance policies, and it backed up my advice — speak directly to your insurer, and they'll be able to tell you where you stand with your current policy. which.co.uk

GARETH SHAW

THE EXPERTS



GARETH SHAW
HEAD OF MONEY,
WHICH?



TOM CHESHYRE
AUTHOR OF SLOW
TRAINS TO VENICE



SARAH BARRELL
ASSOCIATE EDITOR,
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC
TRAVELLER (UK)



EMMA THOMSON
CONTRIBUTOR,
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC
TRAVELLER (UK)

THE INFO

UNESCO NEW WORLD HERITAGE SITES

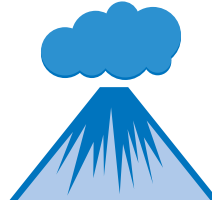
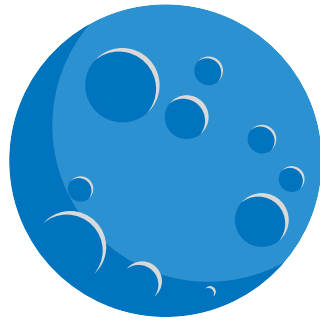
UNESCO HAS ADDED NEW LANDMARKS TO ITS WORLD HERITAGE LIST FOR 2019. WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT THEM? WORDS: NICOLA TRUP

29

The number of new UNESCO World Heritage Sites inscribed this year — the largest number added to the list since 2001 — bringing the total to 1,121.

32

The total UNESCO World Heritage Sites in the UK after Jodrell Bank was added this year. Founded in 1945, the Cheshire observatory is the world's earliest surviving radio astronomy building.



IN NUMBERS

VATNAJÖKULL NATIONAL PARK, ICELAND

14%

The approximate amount of Iceland's territory covered by the national park, Europe's second-largest.

3,127sq miles

The area of the Vatnajökull glacier, which has an average thickness of 1,640ft.

10

The number of central volcanoes in the national park; a central volcano is one that has a single, central cone.

TAKE THREE

Architectural wonders



20TH-CENTURY ARCHITECTURE OF FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT

In the US, eight buildings, including New York's Guggenheim Museum, have been selected to represent Wright's style of 'organic architecture', with open plans and a blurring of interior and exterior spaces.



SEOWON, KOREAN NEO-CONFUCIAN ACADEMIES

This new South Korean listing comprises nine *seowons* (traditional private educational institutions). Founded between the 15th and 19th centuries, the academies were designed to teach respect for learning, as well as for the environment.

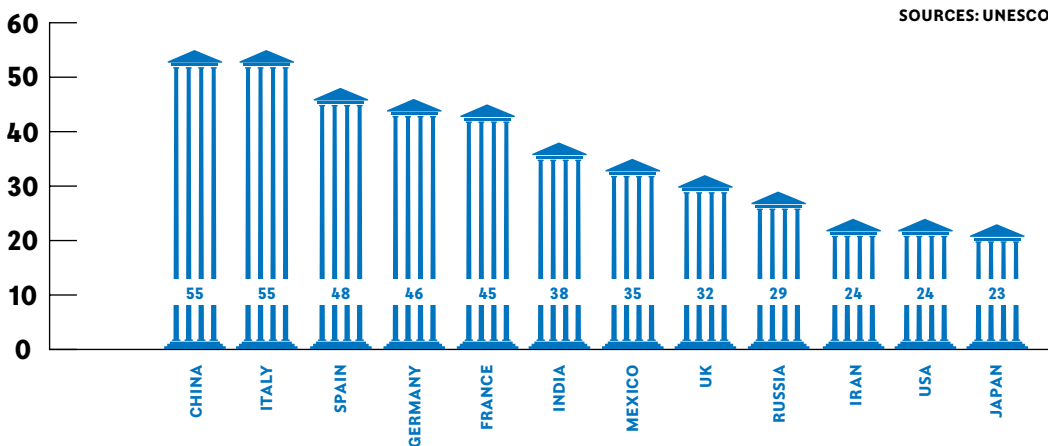


CHURCHES OF THE PSKOV SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE

In the northwest Russian city of Pskov, 10 churches, cathedrals and monasteries dating from the 12th to 18th centuries have been selected for their vast influence on architecture across the country.

The latest additions bring the total amount of cultural World Heritage Sites to 869, the number of natural sites to 213 and the number of mixed sites — those with both natural and cultural significance — to 39.

COUNTRIES WITH THE MOST UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITES



HOT TOPIC

SHOULD WE PAY AN AIR TRAVEL CARBON TAX?

AS PART OF A GOVERNMENT INITIATIVE TO REDUCE CARBON EMISSIONS AND TACKLE CLIMATE CHANGE, AIR TRAVELLERS MAY SOON HAVE TO PAY AN EXTRA TAX. BUT WILL THIS WORK? WORDS: SIMON USBORNE



What is carbon offsetting?

For well over a decade, individuals and companies have been able to balance the effects of their emissions on the environment by investing in, say, renewable energies or tree-planting projects.

For an airline passenger, this might mean offsetting the carbon emissions from one ticket on a London to Los Angeles flight by donating €133 to climate-protection projects via German nonprofit Atmosfair, which has a carbon footprint calculator.

What began as a system with largely unregulated schemes has become more sophisticated as awareness of the climate crisis has grown along with travel's part in it (transport overall accounted for a third of UK carbon emissions in 2018). Offsetting is now part of a global energy market.

Does it work?

Up to a point. Schemes remain voluntary and popular awareness is fairly low. The International Air Transport Association says just 1% of airline passengers voluntarily offset their emissions. Book a flight online with Virgin Atlantic, for example, and there's no mention of offsetting. Search separately and you can offset your flight with ClimateCare, a UK-based environmental company that works with the airline (a relative bargain of just £5.70 will cover a one-way London to New York flight, it calculates). However, critics are adamant that offsetting misses the point and simply allows individuals, not to mention giant corporate emitters, to carry on as usual rather than facing up to and, crucially, investing in real change.

What's the new proposal?

The 'call for evidence' report published by the Department for Transport last July explored different ways to better engage with passengers on the impact of travel — with a focus on carbon offsetting. One idea is to compel ticket sellers, including airlines, to include the option to offset carbon during the booking process by checking a box. Ministers are clear that any scheme should remain voluntary, but also suggest an opt-out model.

Is it likely to happen?

Something has to give if governments are going to meet various climate targets. The UK has legislated for a net zero greenhouse gas emission target by 2050 and needs consumers to join the mission. But aviation has been slow to address the problem, only recently investing significantly in research into greener fuels, more efficient engines and even electric airlines. Even while proposing to help inform travellers about the true cost of their journeys, the Department for Transport said its focus remains 'the development, production and uptake of zero-emission technology across all modes of transport'. But in the case of aviation, scientists say those technologies may arrive too late to alleviate the crisis.

WHAT ELSE CAN TRAVELLERS DO?

STAY AT HOME

Sporadic reports suggest Britain may retreat from its sunseeking traditions to become a nation of staycationers. Not travelling abroad is an easy way to reduce your footprint and save money.

FLY WISE

It's hard to overstate the impact of flying for those who do venture abroad. In Sweden, 'flygskam', or 'flight shame', is said to be inspiring a big switch to rail travel. Swedish teenage climate change activist Greta Thunberg, who this year took trains across Europe and even sailed from Plymouth to a climate change summit in New York, is leading the way.

TRAVEL CONSCIOUSLY

If you're going to jet off somewhere, whatever the distance, there are growing options to do so as sustainably as possible, while also navigating the tendency among the industry to 'greenwash'. An eco-conscious tour operator, like +Impact Travel and Responsible Travel, will take the uncertainty out of booking an ethical trip, sourcing genuinely responsible lodging, guides and destinations. And if flying is a must, offsetting can't hurt. positivetravel.ch responsibletravel.com

AND ANOTHER THING... CLEAN GETAWAYS

CLEAN EATING

Birmingham's Michelin-starred Simpsons restaurant is hosting a new cooking class on World Vegan Day (19 November). £150 includes a three-course lunch. simpsonsrestaurant.co.uk

CLEAN BREATHING

A new yoga break has launched, featuring meditation, ice baths and cold-water plunges in the waters around Ireland's Cliffs of Moher. Four-day retreat from €570 (£520). cliffsofmoherretreat.com

CLEAN LIVING

Take a gastronomic walking tour of rural Japan's onsen network, stopping for cleansing baths in natural hot springs. Five days from ¥298,000 (£2,300). walkjapan.com

CLEAN SKING

Good news for eco-conscious travellers: book via certain operators, such as Scandinavian Travel, and you can hit the snow via low-, or carbon-neutral routes. scandinavian-travel.co.uk

Kit list TRAVEL WITH TOTS

A TRIP WITH A NEWBORN OR TODDLER CAN BE A DODDLE WITH LIGHTWEIGHT, PORTABLE AND RECHARGEABLE KIT
WORDS: STEPHANIE CAVAGNARO

2 JEM + BEA JAMIE INDIGO DENIM

Ditch the dull changing bag — this denim backpack is a stylish, hands-free option. Made with a water-repellent interior lining, it's chock-full of handy details: insulated bottle pockets, four interior pouches for nappies, a vanity bag and padded changing mat. RRP: £150. jemandbea.com



3 ELVIE PUMP

Electric, silent, small and wearable, this pump is the first of its kind. Ideal for expressing in transit, it fully charges in two hours and slots into a nursing bra, automatically switching from stimulation to expression mode. Milk volume and pumping history can be monitored on an app. RRP: £249. johnlewis.com



4 MAXI-COSI PEBBLE PRO I-SIZE

This June-launched, 12kg infant car seat is said to be one of the safest options on the streets. The impact-absorbing seat's inlay can be removed as your newborn grows up to 75cm tall (around 12 months). Compatible with a host of pushchairs, it's also approved for planes. RRP: £199. maxi-cosi.co.uk



5 CAM CAM CHANGING MAT

The clutch-sized mat is padded with foam and covered in dirt- and water-repellent cotton, while a handy inside pocket fits a nappy and muslin. Opt for the retro 'Holiday' version, whimsically illustrated with penny farthings, beach balls and hot air balloons. RRP: £30. scandiborn.co.uk



6 ARLO BABY MONITOR

Rechargeable and compact, this smart monitor only requires a phone to check up on your bundle, making it an on-the-go essential. There's uber-clear 1080p HD video, temperature and humidity sensors, a night light, plus a doze-inducing lullaby and white noise player. RRP: £140. amazon.co.uk



1 BUGABOO ANT

This new travel pushchair packs a punch: it's the brand's lightest yet at 7.2kg and can be folded into a compact carry-on or a pull-along trolley. Small but sturdy, features include all-wheel suspension and a reversible, height-adjustable seat for a toddler weighing up to 50lbs. It's also suitable for newborn use with the Bugaboo Bee Cocoon. RRP: £429. bugaboo.com

Three to try: baby carriers

£ LOVE RADIUS BASIC BABY WRAP

Lightweight and newborn-ready, this uber-soft wrap is made from French terry jersey, cotton and elastane. RRP: £40. naturalbabyshower.co.uk

££ ERGO BABY OMNI 360

With lumbar support and four carry options, this infant-to-20kg carrier is comfy and versatile, while the new 'cool air mesh' provides ventilation. RRP: £154.90. ergobaby.co.uk



£££ OSPREY POCO AG PREMIUM

Adventurers: this hiking backpack adjusts to all wearers, has a safety seat for your little one, a rain/sun cover, plenty of pockets and a removable 11-litre daypack. RRP: £320. ospreyurope.com





Tech traveller

TECHNOLOGY REPORTER FOR @BBCCLICK AND AUTHOR OF *WORKING THE CLOUD*, KATE RUSSELL PICKS THE LATEST INNOVATIONS

SAFELY TUCKED AWAY

USING A FEW SIMPLE GADGETS CAN HELP YOU KEEP VALUABLES SAFE, SOUND AND OUT OF SIGHT ON YOUR TRAVELS



If you want to keep your smartphone safely tucked away when travelling, a pair of wireless in-ear headphones with built-in voice assistant can help.

Groov-e's SoundBuds (groov-e.co.uk, £64.99) are a fantastic budget alternative to the big brands, as long as you're prepared to compromise a little on sound quality. You can access your phone's voice assistant via the touch button on each bud, enabling you to play music, listen to podcasts and issue voice commands to travel apps while your phone is out of sight. Meanwhile, safety-conscious travellers can now

reach for the Ekster 3.0 smart wallet (ekster.com, from \$60 [£50] to \$100 [£82]), which bills itself as the 'world's first voice-activated and solar-powered smart wallet'. With room for a fold of banknotes and up to 10 credit cards, the RFID protective casing will keep your cards safe from hackers scanning crowded places for NFC payment strips. For an extra \$49 (£40), you can add the global tracker card, which is solar powered and links up to Google Assistant and Amazon Alexa, so you can ask these assistants where you left your wallet should you lose it.

GET THE GADGET

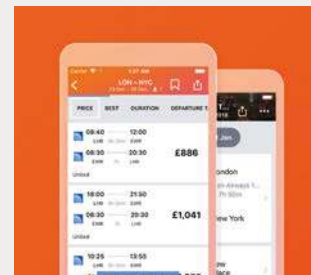
Activ5

Activ5 is a pocket-sized strength and fitness training aid that connects to a smartphone app coach — the perfect antidote to long flights and inactive holidays. It's a smart-looking and tactile gizmo that's great for those who want to work out while they travel, but don't want the fuss of finding a gym. The Activ5 app guides you through more than 100 isometric workouts that centre around lifting, holding and squeezing the device with various parts of your

body. Use it to focus on specific areas — like arms, neck, legs and back — or choose a whole body workout. As well as improving muscle strength and stamina, the workouts are geared towards better flexibility, balance and mobility. The routines are easy to follow and can be completed in five minutes almost anywhere. RRP: £119.95. activ5.com

[@katerussell](https://twitter.com/katerussell)
katerussell.co.uk

TOP TIPS FOR... talking travel



Coupled with simple AI and chatbot platforms, voice-enabled applications provide the tech-savvy traveller with a seamless way of interacting with digital travel services.

FLIGHT & ITINERARY MANAGEMENT

Many travel sites, like Kayak and Expedia, now provide smart speaker skills and apps that enable you to make bookings and check itineraries and departure status using voice.

HOTEL SMART SPEAKERS

A growing number of hotels and guesthouses offer visitors the opportunity to control their room via a smart speaker. The Marriott hotel chain is leading the charge here, having made a huge commitment to in-room smart-speakers across its properties.

REAL TIME TRANSLATIONS

Voice-controlled chatbot concierge services offer 24-hour customer care in any language. This year, Google piloted its Interpreter Mode translator at hotel check-in desks, including Caesars Palace in Las Vegas.



FREQUENT FLYER

ARE NO-FRILLS TRANSATLANTIC FLIGHTS HERE TO STAY?

BUDGET AIRLINES HAVE BEEN FLYING US ACROSS THE ATLANTIC FOR OVER 40 YEARS. WE TAKE A LOOK AT THE MAJOR PLAYERS AND ANALYSE WHAT THE FUTURE HAS IN STORE. WORDS: JOSEPHINE PRICE



When did budget transatlantic flights begin?

Founded in 1966 by British entrepreneur Freddie Laker, Laker Airlines was the first carrier to offer low-cost, no-frills transatlantic flights. Primera Air, Wow Air and Norwegian were among the airlines that adopted the business model in the ensuing decades.

What do these no-frills offerings look like?

Well, first of all, forget the extras. Passengers pay for their seat only, with everything else — meals, luggage, drinks and choice of seat — at an additional cost. This scaled-back approach means passengers aren't paying for, say, checked luggage if it's not needed.

Which airline is doing it particularly well?

There's one standout carrier: Norwegian. It's been honing this business model since 2013 and has grown from providing transatlantic for less to piecing together a web of low-cost routes that span North America, South America, Europe

and Asia. At the Skytrax World Airline Awards in June 2019, Norwegian was named World's Best Long-Haul Low-Cost Airline for the fifth consecutive year.

Have there been many notable failures?

Yes. Primera Air, the Scandinavian low-cost carrier, terminated business at the end of 2018 due to its failure to make the long-haul arm of the business profitable. The airline was looking to move from the charter flight model, which had lost its footing in Europe, and wanted to try something more attractive to customers — it didn't succeed. Wow Air — the Icelandic no-frills option — had made inroads into the transatlantic market, too, but went under in March 2019. Ryanair hasn't yet made it into the long-haul arena, either, despite promising to do so.

Is there much competition in this field?

Airlines such as Virgin and British Airways are now competing on fares directly with low-cost carriers. British Airways,

for example, has cut costs by reducing leg room.

What do these cheap flights mean for sustainability?

With the price of jet fuel continuing to rise and consumers becoming increasingly aware of the environmental impact of flying, many airlines are facing an uncertain future. But the budget carriers don't have the business and first-class options that bump up carbon emissions (the fewer seats on a flight, the larger the carbon footprint per passenger), so no-frills airlines are arguably a better choice.

What's next for the no-frills market?

Not every no-frills airline is expanding at the moment. Norwegian has scaled back some of its transatlantic routes for the winter season, but the airline is believed to be exploring less crowded routes such as the UK to South Africa and South America. Lufthansa is also launching a host of new transatlantic routes, to be shared with its low-cost subsidiary Eurowings.

HOW MANY TRANSATLANTIC ROUTES ARE THERE?

11
WITH NORWEGIAN

5
WITH LUFTHANSA

10
WITH VIRGIN ATLANTIC

29
WITH BRITISH AIRWAYS

VIETNAM, LAOS & CAMBODIA

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TOUR HIGHLIGHTS:


- City tours of Saigon, Hoi An and Hanoi
- Overnight cruise through Halong Bay
- Two-day tour of the magnificent Angkor Wat temple complex
- Dragon boat ride along the Perfume River
- Explore the Cu Chi tunnel network
- Meander down the Mekong River in Laos
- Take in the sights of Luang Prabang, the cultural capital of Laos
- Tour the 19th century Imperial Citadel of Hue

 **13 breakfasts, 1 brunch, 10 lunches and 14 dinners**

EXTEND YOUR TOUR: 3 nights unwinding on the beaches of **Mui Ne**, Bed & Breakfast from just **£349**

TOUR HIGHLIGHTS:

- Coastal journey along Chapman's Peak Drive to the Cape of Good Hope and Cape Point
- Spot the Big Five in Kruger National Park
- Scenic drives along the Garden Route and Blyde River Canyon
- Visit Stellenbosch and Franschhoek in the Cape Winelands, with wine tasting included
- Lagoon Cruise to the Knysna Heads
- Visit to Tsitsikamma National Park
- City tour of Cape town

 **11 breakfasts, 1 lunch and 2 dinners**

EXTEND YOUR TOUR: Witness the awe-inspiring **Victoria Falls** for 4 nights on B&B from **£1,099**

TOUR HIGHLIGHTS:

- Tour Havana, including visits to Revolution Square & Floridita's Bar
- Che Guevara's mausoleum
- Visit a tobacco plantation, ancient river cave and Cuban cigar factory in Viñales
- Cannon ceremony at La Cabaña Fortress

 **All meals included**

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TOUR HIGHLIGHTS:

- Tour of Santiago
- Witness the strikingly enigmatic statues of Easter Island
- Wine tasting in Colchagua Valley
- The Tatio Geysers in the Atacama Desert
- Spot the flamingos of Chaxa Lagoon

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The Jewel of the Atlantic

The Azores are located in the Atlantic Ocean, between Europe and America. The islands of the archipelago, an autonomous Region of Portugal, are divided into three geographical groups: the Eastern Group, comprising Santa Maria and São Miguel; the Central Group, including Terceira, Graciosa, São Jorge, Pico and Faial; and the Western Group, composed of Corvo and Flores.

Each Azorean island has its own identity. An extraordinary natural legacy, they all have their own unique landscapes, traditions, cuisine and architecture. Words can't quite describe the charm of these nine charismatic islands. Sculpted by ancient volcanoes and populated over the centuries by courageous and kind people, the Azores are a place of varied heritage and experience.



..... **Direct flights from London**





The expression 'nature all around you' could well be used to describe the Azores Region. The archipelago offers unmatched conditions for nature tourism by virtue of its unique natural heritage. This heritage has been preserved and classified, and includes marine biodiversity, flora and fauna, volcanic caves and geolandscapes, nature parks and botanical gardens, as well as natural resources exclusive to each island. All of this biodiversity and geodiversity, together with the islands' traditional towns and villages, present unparalleled opportunities for nature tourism.



Examples of the quality and richness waiting to be explored include themed tourist routes (such as those based on wines, volcanoes and spas), numerous trails carved along breathtaking natural landscapes, diving and fantastic golf courses with views over the sea and mountains. The ideal place to enjoy unmatched experiences in a natural setting, the Azores also play host to other activities not to be missed, such as hiking, whale-watching, birdwatching, scuba diving and canyoning.



VISITAZORES.COM



10

Reasons to visit the Azores

- 1 Swimming with wild dolphins and world-class whale watching
- 2 Unique Portuguese islands less than a four-hour flight from the United Kingdom
- 3 An abundance of inexpensive locally sourced produce
- 4 Variety of exciting options for adventure-seekers and families alike
- 5 Stunning natural beauty
- 6 A safe and tranquil place to relax and unwind
- 7 Rich cultural heritage and unique identity
- 8 A range of affordable accommodation options
- 9 A positive setting for health and wellbeing
- 10 An award-winning sustainable tourism destination

VISITAZORES.COM

IN THE NEXT ISSUE



NATIONAL
GEOGRAPHIC

TRAVELLER

Mexico

Whether it's the fiery flavours of a street market taco or the tang of a perfectly poured margarita, the tastes and traditions of Mexico's larder are manifold. In our next issue, we work our way through an epicurean A to Z of this varied, vibrant cuisine

Plus // Antarctica, Austin, Bruges, Dubai, Freiburg, Glasgow, Ibiza, Seoul, Turkey, Zimbabwe

**NOVEMBER ISSUE
ON SALE 3 OCTOBER 2019**

*For more information on our subscription offer,
see page 200*

 NATIONAL
GEOGRAPHIC**TRAVELLER**

TRAVEL WRITING

COMPETITION 2019



Earlier this year, we invited you to submit your travel writing to our prestigious annual awards. Up for grabs was the chance to see your name in print and win a fabulous trip to Southern Africa. We received hundreds of entries, revealing some great untapped talent and unique travellers' tales. After much deliberation, we whittled the entries down to three. They include a mysterious encounter with a geisha in Kyoto, an overnight stay in a Mongolian *ger* and — our winner — a vivid portrayal of a lesser-known corner of Bolivian culture.

WINNER

BOLIVIA: NO HOLDS BARRED

ONCE A SEGREGATED MINORITY, BOLIVIA'S CHOLITA WOMEN ARE NOW CELEBRATED CULTURAL ICONS, NOT LEAST IN THE WRESTLING ARENA. WORDS: SARAH GILLESPIE

She strides in against a backdrop of guitar chords, chest thrust out like an exotic bird. She takes her time to enter, raising her arms to reveal the embroidered flowers on her shawl, swinging her hips so that her skirts swell. She stops before my camera, arranges herself just so, and smiles. The shutter clicks and she's off, feeding on the admiration of others. Satiated for now, she removes her bowler hat and steps into the wrestling ring.

It seems an unlikely arena for an indigenous woman, but Bolivia's *cholitas* have been subverting expectations for decades. Forced to dress in the style of their Spanish colonists, they scaled the clothes of their oppressors, padding their hips to create a cartoonish female form, piling on tiers of lace and bling, and topping their pigtailed heads with a men's bowler hat.

The election of Evo Morales, the country's first indigenous president, has elevated the *cholita* from segregated minority to cultural icon with unprecedented economic heft. Boarding the cable-car to the high-altitude metropolis of El Alto, I was joined by a *cholita* who, only decades ago, would have been barred from public transport. She cut a commanding figure, swathed in black lace and dripping with amber jewellery, her hat pierced by a silver pin. In the market, they're everywhere, hawking Chinese-made toys and secondhand tools. Their recent foray into El Alto's professional wrestling scene has bemused many, but to *cholitas*, it's an extension of their theatrical power.

Our *cholita*, Juanita 'La Cariñosa', is squaring up to her rival, Sonia 'La Simpática'. There's a hum of anticipation, then the call: "Uno, dos, tres, lucha!" Juanita slams into the ropes and launches into the air, wrapping her slim legs around Sonia's neck and sending the pair of them down in a billow of skirts. A pigtail chokehold is followed by a swift kick between the shoulder blades — Sonia goes down, and Juanita stamps on her belly, screaming curses. Jeers ring out around the arena — music to her ears. Juanita curls her delicate fingers into a fist and lets out a peal of delight. It's *telenovela*-scale drama with no holds barred, where water bottles and bags of popcorn become clubs and projectiles.

While the fighting between *cholitas* is vicious, the greatest censure is reserved for the men who dare to challenge them.

At one point, a spandex-clad monster of a man squares up to a tiny girl in little velvet shoes. She's David, he's Goliath, and she smacks him down into the floor, the crowd screaming in delight. The partisan male referee, in a black-and-white striped shirt, is a pantomime villain, administering sneaky kicks to the backside, assisting the *cholitas'* rivals, and making victory so much sweeter when it comes.

Those who complain about the scripted nature of the drama are missing the point. It's never been about realism or even physical strength — it's about redefining power, and power in 21st-century Bolivia wears a tiered skirt and a bowler hat.

{ JUDGES' verdict }

Our team thought Sarah Gillespie's winning feature on Bolivia stood out for its strong sense of place and authentic storytelling, which draws the reader into what feels like a uniquely immersive experience. A compelling snapshot, Sarah's tightly focused piece of writing does a brilliant job of showing, not telling, and engaging all the senses. It paints a vivid picture of a very specific place and time, yet also brings fascinating insight into wider Bolivian culture.

WINNING PRIZE A SOUTHERN AFRICA ADVENTURE: WILDLIFE, WATERFALLS & WILD COAST



G Adventures

Courtesy of G Adventures, Sarah will embark on an eight-night trip across Southern Africa. This itinerary showcases some of the best the region has to offer. The journey will take her from Namibia, across Botswana and on to Zimbabwe on an authentic African adventure that takes in the elephants of Chobe National Park; San Bushmen in the Kalahari; the thundering roar of Victoria Falls; and the Okavango Delta, explored by dugout *mokoro* canoe. A knowledgeable chief experience officer will ensure Sarah has the most authentic experience possible, staying in characterful accommodation, including camping beneath starry skies — something that will surely inspire further award-winning travel writing. gadventures.co.uk



Gers in the snow in Ulgii, Mongolia

RUNNER-UP

MONGOLIA: GOATS & A GER

A TRADITIONAL MONGOLIAN TENT PROVIDES REFUGE IN A STORM FOR ALL BUT THE FURRY MEMBERS OF THE FAMILY. WORDS: STEPHANIE TURNBULL

Burning horse dung doesn't smell as bad as you might think — a thought I'd never expected to ponder, I realise, as I watch our Mongolian host pour another bucket of hard droppings into the stove.

I'm the unexpected guest of a typically hospitable nomadic family in Khövsgöl, a vast and rugged province in Northern Mongolia. The journey had been relentlessly thwarted by appalling spring weather: howling winds strengthened over hundreds of miles, snow storms that dumped drifts across roads.

My guide and I had spent five hard hours spinning and sliding through knee-high powder in a draughty Russian van. Having spotted crystallised goats packed together, we prayed to every god that we'd also find the nomads they belonged to. Eventually, blessedly, the scuffed white of a traditional Mongolian *ger* emerged through the blizzard. Unexpected visitors in the midst

of a snowstorm seemed not to phase the family inside in the slightest. We were swiftly ushered to the left of the *ger* — the visitors' side — and told to sit on the narrow wooden bed, before being furnished with a bucket of *boortsog* (dough fried in mutton fat), *aarul* (rock-hard goat's curd), and steaming bowls of salty milk tea.

Cheeks stinging from the shock of the heat charging out of the stove, we glow pink from chin to forehead. Warmth pulses from centre to circumference as flurries of snowflakes fall through a gap in the roof, hissing as they hit hot metal.

Khövsgöl lies on the border of Russia, sharing the same somewhat chilly Siberian climate. It habitually hits -50C in January, for which nomads are typically prepared. But snowstorms in spring are a particularly unwelcome surprise. The family, who migrate each season, have only recently moved here,

and in between them offering us more tea, more bread, more sweets, there are rapid, agitated phone calls. More than 15 of their lambs have already died in the cold and 30 goats are lost in the blizzard. Several brothers, uncles and sons are out attempting to find them.

The goat search team registers only the mildest surprise at our presence as they return. As the final man stoops through the door, he shakes his head. No luck, they tell us. They'll try again in the morning.

In the meantime, there's always vodka.

A jar of clear, slightly viscous liquor, distilled from fermented *tarag* (a type of yoghurt), is conjured from a locked cabinet. A single glass is passed between each of us and repeatedly returned to be refilled. There's no sign of abating. A pack of cards is produced and dealt for *durak*, a game known across Mongolia that's played with much strategy, patience, and vigorous throwing down of cards. I lose dismally; it must have been the vodka.

We eat a dinner of dried meat and handmade noodles before rolling out blankets — custom dictating that our feet face the door. Crocodile clips are removed from a car battery and the light flickers off. Only firelight remains, picking out the *ger's* central struts in gold; the last few snowflakes drift lazily down between them.

RUNNER-UP

JAPAN: THE GEISHA'S SHADOW

AN ENCOUNTER WITH A GEISHA IN THE OLD KYOTO DISTRICT OF GION PROVOKES WONDER... AND MORE QUESTIONS THAN ANSWERS.
WORDS: CHLOE CHIOY

The woman shuffles through the rain, her oil-paper umbrella barely shielding her elaborate hairstyle. The wood of her shoes clacks against the pavement. She begins to hum, the beautiful cacophony forcing me to shake loose my mother's hand and follow her through the lantern-lit streets of Gion.

I'm led to a wooden teahouse with black strips of fabric decorating the entrance. My mother catches up to me and we seek shelter under the baked-tile roof.

A powdered white face greets us wordlessly and gestures to a private table.

I sit facing a painting of woven animal hair depicting a nightingale: the messenger of song stands proud and awaits the promise of performance.

The aroma of the tea set before me is a hard one to decipher — green tea with notes of ylang ylang or possibly chrysanthemum.

I don't know what etiquette to follow, so I nod in thanks. The hollow twang of a *shamisen* (a three-stringed instrument) summons a geisha's shadow — given away by a single lantern — from behind a screen of paper fans. I reach for my mother's hand.

The beautiful woman clad in a brightly coloured kimono steps forward and gracefully sinks onto the layered *tatami*. She commands an air of mystery and femininity. Raising a billowing sleeve to her face, she parts her sugared lips in silent lament, revealing ink in her teeth, stark against the white of her nape. I'm transfixed. Perhaps she's found a lover

and they're forbidden from being together. Perhaps her child has been snatched by the *Shinigami* (death spirits).

Her hands are well versed in the art of performance. They form shapes that whisper of love and loss. She quickens the pace of the story with a flutter of her fan and the entrance of a high-pitched flute. Perhaps she's running. The staccato rhythm intensifies as she arches her back and crosses her eyes.

The dancing girl is still as the *shamisen* quiets. Two wooden boards clap, forcing her onto her knees. She meets my gaze, red-and-black-rimmed eyes proud and unwavering.

"The rain didn't last very long," my mother comments as we slip on our shoes. "We should hurry before it pours again."

"Do you think she was reunited with her lover in the end?" I ask, as we hurry past the *machiya* (townhouses) and stop to admire the beauty of Shirakawa Canal. A soft moonlight glow bathes the white cherry blossoms as they dance on the gentle water below.

"What lover?" my mother asks. "She was playing a man nurturing the dream of living in a better world."

I glance up to study the willow trees. Their branches flow elusively through the wind as if each one held its own story. □



Japanese women wearing yukatas



GROWN-UP GAP YEARS



IMAGE: GETTY

EVER THOUGHT TAKING A CAREER BREAK WILL BE OFF-PUTTING TO POTENTIAL EMPLOYERS? A 'GROWN-UP GAP YEAR' IS NOW MUCH MORE ACCEPTABLE THAN IT'S EVER BEEN — WE REVEAL THE REASONS BEHIND THIS GROWING TREND. WORDS: JULIA BUCKLEY

Tim Potter wasn't worried about ramifications for his career when he embarked on an eight-month trip around the world.

"I was perhaps overly optimistic," he says. "I'd been in the sector for 10 years and knew quite a lot of people. I thought I'd be able to get a job when I got back — whether it would be my dream job would be another question, but I was OK with taking that risk."

It was 2012, and Potter, who was in public relations, had just finished working on the London Olympics alongside his partner. A career break to go travelling — or a 'grown-up gap year' — seemed like a natural progression for them both.

The couple spent four months travelling around Asia: month-long stints in Nepal and the Philippines then on to India, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos. Next, they flew to Mexico via Canada, worked their way down Central America, and spent a month in both Colombia and Brazil — they were planning to have some 2016 Olympics-related meetings there, he says, but it didn't work out.

Not that the lack of work affected his prospects. Within three weeks of his return, he was in another job (he'd interviewed for it in a phone booth in Colombia). Today, he's MD of marketing agency Hunt & Gather, and wouldn't swap his year off for the world.

But is Potter's experience common or did he get lucky? Some people assume taking a career break will automatically be off-putting to potential employers, but according to Emily Bain, MD of secretarial and PA recruitment agency Bain and Gray, it can actually be quite the opposite.

"As a recruiter, I see it as a positive," she says. "Our job is to educate our clients so they're on the same page."

Bain goes on to say that taking a grown-up gap year is more common than you'd think — in fact, it's been a steadily upward trend since the 2008 recession. "People couldn't get work so they just took off," she says.

Donna Jeavons, sales and marketing director for Contiki, which specialises in travel for those aged 18 to 35, agrees the crash heralded a cultural change. "Since that recession, it's been much more acceptable to take time out," she says.

Jeavons thinks there's been a shift around career breaks in more ways than one. "Half of my friends have settled down, the other half are still single — and they're the ones taking the opportunity to go travelling," she says.

Tim Fryer, UK manager at STA Travel, says grown-up gap years can only have a positive effect on your career. "Taking a break gives travellers time to refocus on work as well as the space to reflect on what exactly it is they want to do," he explains.

YOUR GAP YEAR TRAVEL TICK LIST

SABBATICAL

Don't assume you have to resign — many companies may be open to you taking a sabbatical. Check your workplace's policy with the HR department and you might be pleasantly surprised. Even if not, book a meeting with your boss and explain your plans, how you'd see your work being covered while you're away, and what you could bring to the table upon your return.

COVER

Travel insurance is a must, and it's worth plumping for the most comprehensive cover available. Check your policy carefully, as many have exclusions for activities as anodyne as riding a bike.

FUNDS

Save not just enough money for the break itself, but to cover you for up to six months on your return, in case it's tricky finding a job. A fund to get through three months post-return is a must — both financially and mentally.

TICKETS

Plans can change while you're on the road, so it's worth looking into flexible flights, or round-the-world tickets. Many long-haul flights are nonrefundable, but can be changed for a fee. Of course, you can also lock in the main flights, and take the train in between. Prices for last-minute train travel tend to be rather more reasonable, too.

ACCLIMATISE

Think you might be nervous? Ease yourself in with a longer stay in your first destination, or consider booking a group tour for a couple of weeks to start off. Many people, especially first-time solo travellers, find this helps them acclimatise, gain confidence and meet potential travel mates.

A third of people who travel with Raleigh International, which matches volunteers with placements, are between 30-49, and 62% of those are female. Almost half describe themselves as taking a career break, or taking time out to consider their options. "They're often at a turning point in their careers or lives, and we form part of that journey," says Raleigh International's Lucy Burrows-Smith. "One of the biggest driving factors we see is people actively wanting to remove themselves from a corporate environment to immerse themselves somewhere they'll be able to make a greater positive impact."

The long-term implications

The desire to go travelling is by no means all work-related, though. For many, recovering from illness, the loss of a loved one or something like divorce can be the trigger. And some simply have an ambition to see a certain place — or places — by a certain age.

"As I was approaching the last year of my 20s, I thought to myself, 'Do I want to spend this year sitting behind a desk, or do I want to have a big adventure?'" says Emily-Ann Elliott. "I'd been saving for years to go travelling some day, so I made a list of 30 things I'd always wanted to do around the world, and called it my '30 Before 30' trip."

She quit her job as a reporter on a local newspaper and took nine months off for a solo round-the-world trip. The trip, she says, gave her the "time and space to think about my career". She went back to her career, but set up a blog on her return, *The Grown-Up Gap Year*, to help others in her position plan their travels.

"Taking a gap year when you're older means that you have different things to consider, from how to save for a trip like this to what to do with property you rent or own, and whether you should quit your job or ask for a sabbatical." On her blog, she discusses these issues in depth, as well as how to readjust on your return. "Nowadays lots of companies see travelling as a positive thing," she says.

Two employers we spoke to agree. Inspired by her own recent 10-month travels, Lise Thorne has just introduced a policy for the 65 employees at her IT consultancy, allowing them to take one month's unpaid leave a year, on top of their annual leave. "I'd have had a different opinion five years ago, but now I think we all grow from travel," she says.

Meanwhile, investment banker Toby Norfolk-Thompson recently rehired a member of staff who'd returned from a grown-up gap year. "I was very positive about it, because she chose to return to a role she really wanted instead of carrying on travelling. She was generally much better at coping with stress than before, too," he says.

Let's not get ahead of ourselves, though. Emily Bain admits that some employers' instinct is to turn their noses up at someone who's had a break. "If there's a gap on a CV, people can make assumptions," she says. "The old school approach has always been for that picture perfect CV. But our culture has changed and companies have to accept it."

However, she says, the onus is on the traveller to sell their experience as something that will benefit future employers. For her clients, that's where she comes in — as a recruiter, she becomes a lobbyist, writing detailed profiles to send to the employers. But those of us without a recruiter on hand can do what she does. "You have to explain the whole picture," she says. "Making your CV gap accountable actually brings your profile to life." So, don't hide it — make a big deal of it.

Bain reckons that although gap years are acceptable, whatever you do (or don't do) on them, learning some kind of skill is important — though it doesn't have to be academic. "I had a client who learned a special kind of weaving in India, and that to me is really interesting. It became a real talking point."

The most obvious skill to take from travel, of course, is a language. Matt Horsburgh of language-learning app Babbel reckons it's crucial — not just to give you something to come back with, but also to have a better time while away. "Travelling at 35 is different to travelling at 21," he says. "Back then, I never felt any pressure to learn a language — people didn't seem to mind me speaking English. But now, I want to make more of an effort. Maybe I'm just more culturally sensitive, but locals are much friendlier if you can speak to them in their own language, and it opens you up to more opportunities."

He remembers turning up in a remote hilltop town in Spain, where his Spanish language skills won him and his group an invitation to a local fiesta. "We spent the evening with the B&B owner eating and drinking. It was an amazing experience that only came about because I was able to communicate with the locals."

Learning a language will help you on your return, too — and it's not just about cynical CV points. "Even if you don't need languages for your career, learning one builds your confidence, skills, and takes time and motivation," says Horsburgh — who landed his current job during a travel stint, living in Germany and working in a bar to learn the language. "A potential employer sees that as a benefit — they recognise the drive. Being exposed to other cultures helps too — even down to different countries' ways of greeting people. That's important in the workplace."

How to volunteer responsibly

Giving something back is an important part of travel, and many people on a career

break do a stint volunteering as part of their travels. Just be realistic, says Justin Francis, CEO of Responsible Travel. “You’re not going to change the world, but for those you do help, you can make a world of difference.” Francis says it’s imperative to research the organisation you’re volunteering with to be sure that there’s a real need for your skills. “If you have genuine skills you can offer a community, then do, but before taking any employment, consider if the job is one that could be filled by a local,” he says.

Companies like Raleigh International can set you up with a placement that plays to your strengths. It’s also worth seeing if there are schemes tied specifically to your profession — like AFID (Accounting for International Development), which sends up to 180 British accountants to work with charities abroad each year (interestingly, they have a 50:50 gender split). “By using their professional skills in a different context, they reenergise,” says volunteer manager Dave Busby. “Often they come back and decide they want to go in another direction more permanently — they look for work in the charity sector. Or they’re happy to go back to the commercial world — they’ve scratched that itch and have a different perspective on how valuable their skills are. They come back with softer skills too — they’ve worked in a different culture, with limited resources, and have worked with non-finance people. Having that perspective is good for an employer.”

Some volunteers never come back, of course. Others have an epiphany and make life-changing decisions. A sabbatical in Costa Rica and Nicaragua prompted Damian

and Joanne Withers to ditch their careers in architecture and photography and start a hosted self-catering business, St Mark’s Stays, in Cumbria. Janice Miller spent 20 years working for multinational companies before a volunteering trip to Peru led her to found Kidasha, a children’s charity in Nepal. Then there are the more personal revelations: writer Katie Butler’s year in Australia and Southeast Asia by bike saw her shed 35kg and ultimately become an endurance cyclist.

It’s not all about work, though; a career break like this is about doing something for yourself. A grown-up gap year eliminates responsibility, says Lianne Young, who went from being a gym manager to a sex and relationships counsellor following a round-the-world trip. “Having less means obtaining more, both physically and mentally — we offload mental, physical and material pressures,” she says. “Backpacking makes you realise we don’t actually need so much in our lives. Your confidence grows as you travel and you see life from a new perspective. It’s the best therapy.”

So will you regret it? Not according to 55-year-old supply chain consultant Chris Barrett, who took a grown-up gap year 28 years ago. Before leaving, he wasn’t sure whether it would harm his career; now he says he wouldn’t hire anyone without some travelling under their belt. “My only regret is that it leaves you with an appetite to do more — I can’t watch travel programmes because I get intensely jealous,” he says. “I’m fairly confident it didn’t do me any harm in my career. If any organisation was unwilling to consider me, they’re not the kind I’d want to work in.” □

MORE INFO

contiki.com
statravel.com
responsibletravel.com
raleighinternational.org
afid.org.uk
babble.com
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India is a land of wonder and splendour. Visitors are drawn to the cultural vibrancy of the country while at the same time enjoying the warmth and friendliness of the people. Gujarat is a glorious example of India's tradition and hospitality. With a varied topography, architectural marvels, exotic cuisine, exquisite artisanship and a vibrant culture full of festivals, Gujarat definitely has a lot to offer.

A panorama of white sands

Deserts have long fascinated us. Mostly, people associate them with scorching heat and relentless sun. This image has changed over the years with the advent of desert festivals, where the pleasant and enjoyable aspects of deserts have come to the fore. Rann Utsav is one of the most celebrated and sought-after desert festivals in the world. This is a desert that sizzles in the summer, but come winter, the salty marsh transforms into a mesmerizing silver sheet of white. The sight is both mystical and magical.

Cultural hues

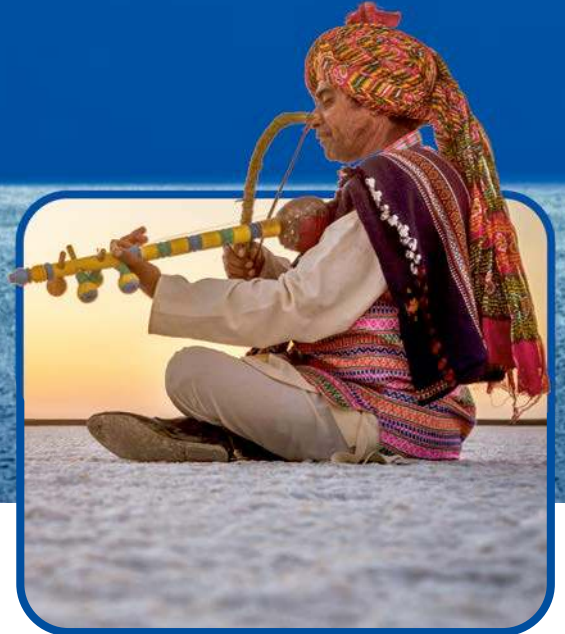
Kutch is one of the most ecologically and ethnically diverse regions of Gujarat. Besides offering a ringside view of the white landscape of the desert, Rann Utsav offers visitors a vantage point to explore the history, culture and archaeological sites of the Rann. Visitors can see scintillating performances by local artists that pulsate with vitality and variety and hear lilting songs in Kutchi dialect that transcend any language barrier.





Cradle of craftsmanship

Kutch has a reputation as the custodian of age-old crafts and traditions, which have been authentically preserved. Kutch has earned fame as the land of weaving, block-printing, Bandhani tie-and-dye, Rogan-painting, embroidery, pottery, wood-carving, metal-crafts, shell work and other handicrafts.



One desert, myriad activities - an unprecedented experience

Besides the cultural extravaganza, activities on offer include camel-safari, para motoring, rifle shooting, desert car rally, horse riding, pool, archery, star gazing and all-terrain vehicle ride. The festival venue offers wi-fi connectivity, spa, kids entertainment zone, conference and meditation hall, cafeteria, etc.

Travelling down for the Rann Utsav, tourists can also use it as a hub to embark on sightseeing tours to many other famed destinations in the region, such as Mandvi, Dholavira, Narayan Sarovar and Lakhpat.

How to reach

The Rann Utsav is held at Dhordo Village in Kutch District of Gujarat. The village is approximately 80 Kms from Bhuj.

By road: For those travelling from Ahmedabad, the bus is more convenient than the train as buses are easily available at frequent intervals on a daily basis.

By rail: Bhuj and Gandhidham are well-connected with Ahmedabad and long distance trains to and from Mumbai, Pune, Kolkata, Nagercoil and other important rail heads.

By air: Bhuj has a domestic airport where daily flights connect to Mumbai with a travel time of less than two hours.



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Felucca boats on the Nile, Aswan, Egypt

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★ STAR LETTER

Down by the river

Emma Thomson's Egypt story (September 2019), in which she followed the Nile, made me yearn for the *dahabiya* trip we had to put aside because of time constraints when we visited Egypt for a week in 2014. Though spending the night beneath the full moon in the White Desert remained the most evocative, unforgettable experience on the trip, the other highlight was a homestay on Elephantine, a small island in the Nile, close to the city of Aswan. We met islanders for whom being surrounded by the flowing waters of the world's longest river is a way of life. Encounters with the locals always make for the most memorable experiences when travelling. Perhaps it's time to return to Egypt, just for that *dahabiya* trip alone!

NANDINI CHAKRABORTY



Just deserts

I found the Jordan photo story by Yulia Denisyuk from the Jul/Aug 2019 issue particularly striking. I loved the beautiful photography — it really captured the elements of nomadic Bedouin life that manages to thrive in such a barren and harsh landscape. I found the powerful portraits of the Bedouin community simple yet mesmerising, and the brief yet informative descriptions told enough to hold the reader's attention, keep them intrigued and inspire them to visit this mystical Middle Eastern land for themselves. **SHALAMAR VINCENT**

From Spain with love

Despite having travelled a lot in Spain, Cantabria is one of the few regions I'm yet to reach. So, I enjoyed reading about the region in your recent article (September 2019). Much is written about Spain's crowded cities and costas, but it's the lesser-known landscapes of this popular destination I find most interesting. In fact, I took a copy of the September issue with me on holiday to Spain this summer — it's from the sunny terrace of a little bar in Tortosa that I thought I'd write in and share how much I enjoyed the article. And in true Spanish style, there's some bread, olives and a cold lager in hand, too. ¡Salud! **MAX HOLMES**

Don't miss!

National Geographic has teamed up with Tisserand Aromatherapy to offer a range of wellbeing products made with 100% pure essential oils and blended with natural ingredients. Tying in with National Geographic's focus on sustainable products, the range of toiletries and oils is also made with fully recyclable packaging. Available at Boots and online. From £9. tisserand.com/protectandrespect

IMAGE: GETTY



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