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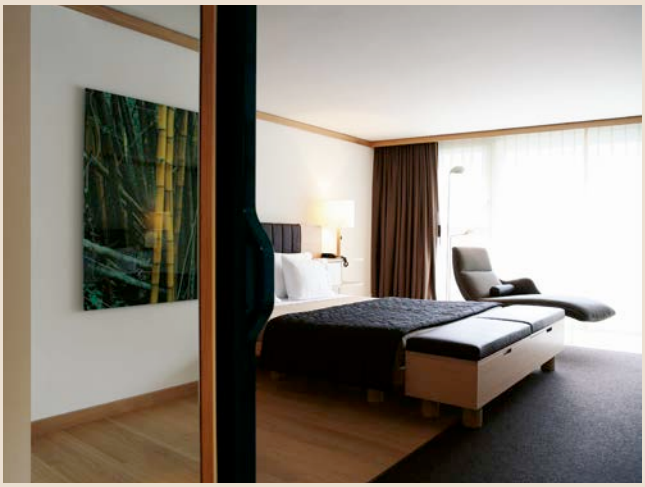

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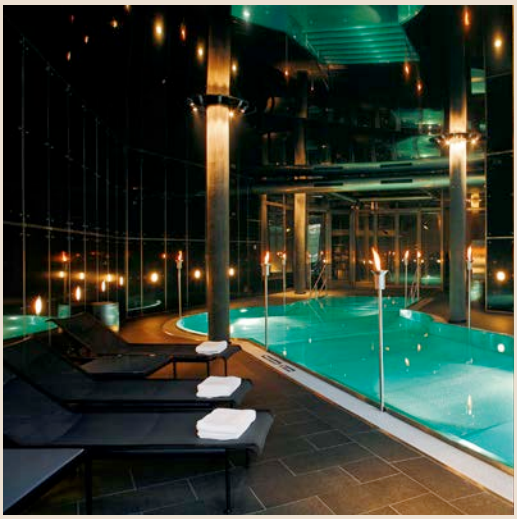

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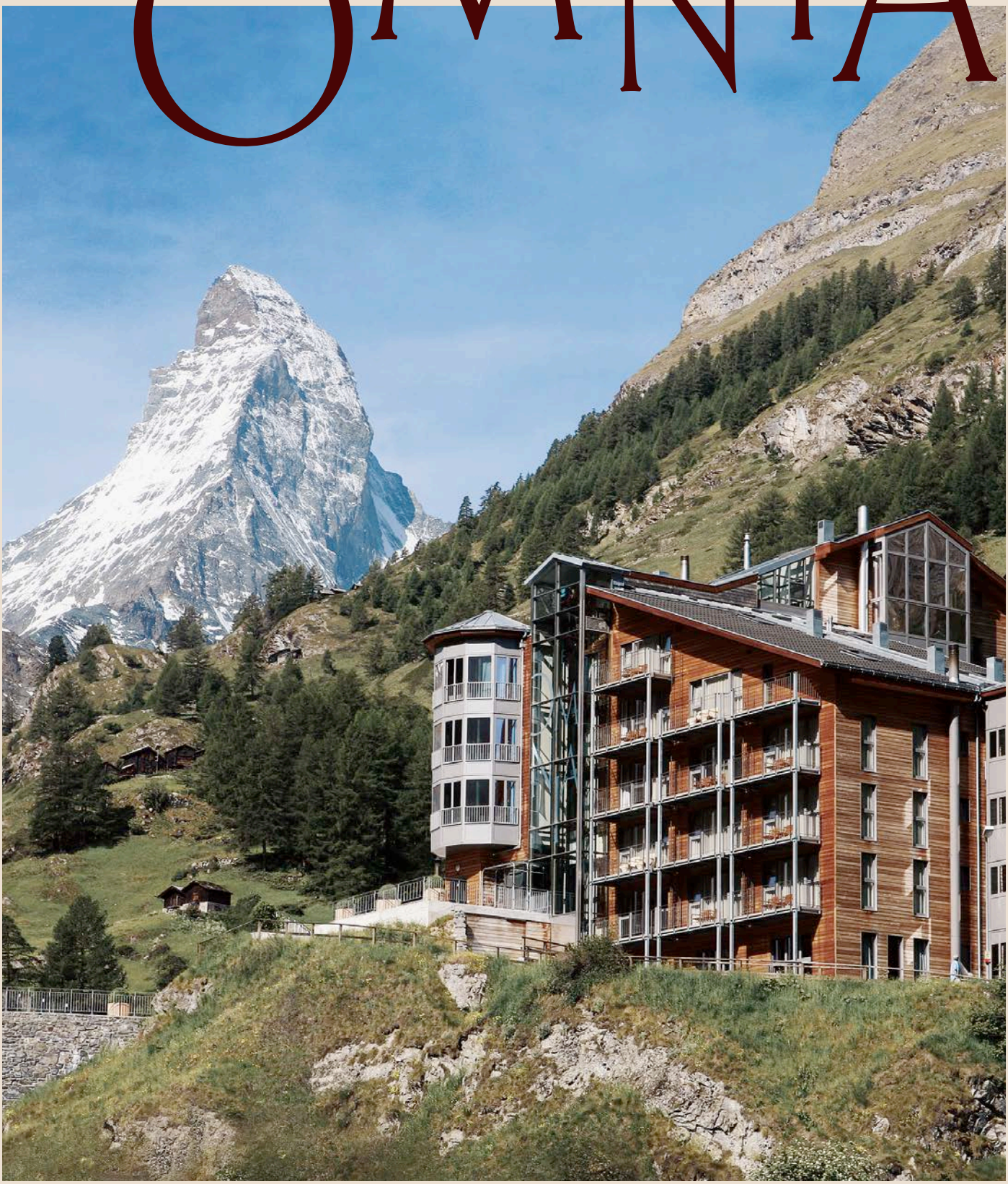


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A daily activity, carrying water at a step well, Jaipur, Rajasthan, India
IMAGE: Getty

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Contributors

COVER STORY: THE POWER OF PLACE

Ade Adepitan MBE

British television presenter and wheelchair basketball player Ade talks about his BBC Two series *Africa with Ade Adepitan*, revealing his reasons for making it and his shock at learning about the slave trade's impact on Nigeria, the country of his birth.

Felicity Aston MBE

In 2012, polar explorer Felicity Aston became the first woman to ski solo across Antarctica, but it was her 2018 all-women expedition to the North Pole that most changed her outlook on humanity, ocean warming and the future of our planet.

Pico Iyer

Celebrated for his vivid tales about Japan, the country he's called home for over 30 years, British-born travel writer Pico delves into his early career as an international affairs writer and reveals how a trip to Tibet changed his life forever.

William Dalrymple

The multi-award-winning Scottish writer and historian describes how how travelling around India for the past 30 years has changed him, leading him to embrace the virtues of pluralism and open-mindedness

Christina Lamb OBE

British journalist and author Christina Lamb has reported on hotspots across the grobe. She looks back at her first trip to Afghanistan, in the 1980s, and how it shaped a life-long love of the place and all its complexities.

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC TRAVELLER

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Editor's letter

'Travel is a state of mind. It has nothing to do with distance or the exotic. It is almost entirely an inner experience.'

There seems to be a Paul Theroux quote to back up almost anything you want to say about travel; the US travel writer and novelist has a knack of eloquently conjuring the words to describe shared experiences that are somehow personal to each of us. Lately, travel has been an inner experience, centred on nostalgia for places visited and fervent plan-making for trips to come.

With the chance of the real thing seemingly tantalisingly near — and yet, at the time of writing, still subject to government restrictions — we asked some of the most influential voices in travel to give meaning to these strange times. In this issue's cover story, Pico Iyer, Levison Wood, Christina Lamb, William Dalrymple, Emily Chappell, Robert Macfarlane, Ade Adepitan, Felicity Aston and many more household names reveal the places they hold dearest, the travel experiences that have changed them, and the destinations that have demonstrated the power of a place.

Whether it's a wild encounter, a meeting with someone new, or simply a moment of realisation that your place in the world isn't quite what you thought it was, we celebrate the transformative effect that travel can have.

And on that note, I'd like to welcome the thousands of new subscribers who value armchair travel as much as the real thing. In print and online, we aim to ensure you #stayinspired.

PAT RIDDELL, EDITOR

@patriddell
@patriddell

AWARD-WINNING NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC TRAVELLER

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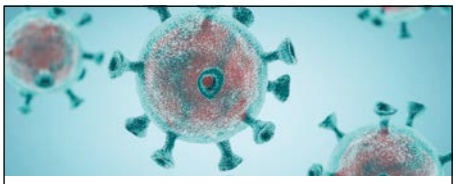

Coronavirus

The ongoing pandemic continues to affect travel. Please note, prices are subject to change. Contact your travel provider for the most up-to-date information. For the latest updates on safe travel and border restrictions, visit *fco.gov.uk*

HIGHLIGHTS

Photography Competition 2020

We're busy working through the thousands of entries in this year's contest. Keep an eye on the website in August as we announce the winners and runners-up.

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SMART TRAVELLER

SNAPSHOT

Luna Prestint, Italy

In a normal year, September would be a busy time in the vineyards around the medieval town of Montalcino, just south of Siena. This is when the sangiovese grapes are harvested to make Brunello di Montalcino wine. One winery here that stands out is Casato Prime Donne. Owned by Donatella Cinelli Colombini, it's a venture run solely by women. When I visited last year in the early hours of the morning, I made my way through the mud and waited until the first rays of sun parted the fog to reveal rows of vines, where young local women, including Luna, were hard at work picking the grapes. **FRANCESCO LASTRUCCI // PHOTOGRAPHER**

francescolastrucci.com
@francescolastrucci

BIG PICTURE

Ruhtinansalmi, Finland

I took this image in the small hours one morning last summer in the east of Finland, close to the Russian border. I was part of a group of photographers visiting the region, all of us keen to capture shots of brown bears with their cubs. This particular morning, we'd been waiting all night in small photo hides beside a pond as the bears are often active when it's dark. We'd seen a few bears, but hadn't managed to get any good pictures. Then, suddenly, a mother bear came sniffling along the edge of the pond with her three one-year-old cubs. Shortly after, a big male bear arrived nearby — males can be a threat to cubs and have been known to kill them. Wary, the mother and her cubs stood up on their hind legs to get a better view before running off in the opposite direction. Luckily, I managed to take this fleeting shot just moments before they scampered away.

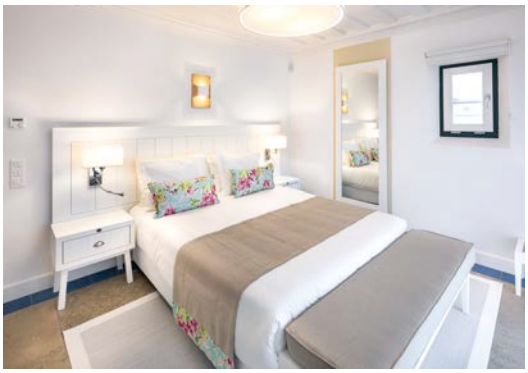
BJØRN H STUEDAL // PHOTOGRAPHER

stuedal.photography
@stuedal

Bjørn is The Societies' Monthly Image Competition's Wildlife Photographer of the Year 2019. thesocieties.net

SHANTIVILLAS

Escaping to a villa retreat



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NEW ROUTES

WALK THIS WAY

Slow Ways is poised to get Brits discovering the country in a new way. We talk to founder Daniel Raven-Ellison about the ambitious new initiative

Tell us about Slow Ways

Our islands are rich with paths, but they haven't been pulled together into a single network that clearly shows people how they can get between places on foot. Slow Ways aims to create a web of walking routes connecting all of Great Britain's towns and cities, as well as thousands of villages. Most of the project has been completed in lockdown, with 700 volunteers drafting 7,000 Slow Ways routes that collectively stretch for over 62,000 miles. That's the equivalent of two-and-a-half laps of the equator.

What inspired the project?

I've walked around Great Britain a lot, and I've noticed things that could be done to support people walking more. For example, rural walks that start and finish in the countryside can feel inaccessible. However, as Slow Ways' routes often start and finish in urban areas, where there's a greater choice of restaurants and accommodation, the project will hopefully encourage more people to go hiking.

Could this be an alternative to taking transport?

Many of us are used to walking a few miles for the sheer pleasure of it. I think Slow Ways will help to remind and inspire us to make walks of that kind of length to see friends, family or for work. Slowing down can be so good for us. If we all walked more, it would be good for our health and the environment and would give us more time together — and it could potentially save us money, too.

What's next, and how do people get involved as volunteers?

Now that we've drafted the network, the next challenge is to get outside, to explore and test it. All going well, I hope we'll be putting out a call to recruit 10,000 volunteers from across Great Britain to help with that at the end of this summer. To volunteer, and to get involved, people should sign up for the newsletter on my website.

INTERVIEW: AMELIA DUGGAN

DANIEL RAVEN-ELLISON is a National Geographic Emerging Explorer and the founder of Slow Ways. *ravenellison.com*

IMAGE: GETTY

CITIZEN SCIENCE: THREE PROJECTS TO GET YOU OUTSIDE

BIG SEAWEED SEARCH

Strolling along the British shoreline? Download the contributors' guide from the Natural History Museum's website and submit photos to help scientists monitor the effects on environmental change of Britain's sealife. *nhm.ac.uk*

GARDEN BIRDWATCH

Learn about the birds in your garden and contribute to an ongoing scientific study by logging your avian sightings with the British Trust for Ornithology. Now in its 25th year, the scheme relies on the public to better understand the importance of garden habitats. *bto.org*

ISPY A HEDGEHOG

The Wildlife Trusts runs a number of regional surveys, but its two hedgehog-spotting programmes — for Cumbria and Wiltshire — are particularly worthy as numbers have fallen 30% in the past decade. Report your sightings at *wildlifetrusts.org/citizen-science*

STARGAZING

SEIZE THE NIGHT

Thanks to less light and air pollution, the country's night skies are darker than usual. So stay up, head out and go starry-eyed

Spread across southern England, **CRANBORNE CHASE** offers night-sky visibility that's so good it was the first Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in the UK to be designated an International Dark Sky Reserve, in October 2019. Cley Hill, near Warminster, is one the best spots for stellar views, and you might see something else, too — it's said to be a prime spot for UFO sightings. *chasingstars.org.uk*

Wales's rural and rugged **PEMBROKESHIRE COAST NATIONAL PARK** is perfect for enjoying the night skies, partly due to its distance from big towns and cities. It has string of designated sites where visitors can discover the night sky, including Broadhaven South Beach, near Stackpole, and Poppit Sands, on Cardigan Bay. *pembrokeshirecoast.wales*

Meanwhile, the **NORTHUMBERLAND** landscape is always a dramatic backdrop, but it's the heavens that steal the show after dark. Awarded 'gold' status by the International Dark-Sky Association, the Northumberland International Dark Sky Park has the darkest skies in England. On a clear night at Cawfield Quarry, beside Hadrian's Wall, you can see our neighbouring galaxy, Andromeda, 2.5 million light-years away. *northumberlandnationalpark.org.uk*

Truly escaping light pollution in the South East can be hard, but the **SOUTH DOWNS** offer some of the best places to stargaze in this corner of England. Visit Butser Hill in Queen Elizabeth Country Park, one of Hampshire's highest points, or head to Birling Gap near Eastbourne, where the sky often shimmers with stars over the English Channel. *southdowns.gov.uk*

A sparse population in Scotland's **GALLOWAY FOREST** means this woodland is a haven for astronomers. It became the UK's first Dark Sky Park in 2009 and steps have been taken to ensure light pollution remains at a minimum. On a clear night along the A712, which winds through heathland, you can admire the glittering Milky Way. *forestryandland.gov.scot*

CONNOR MCGOVERN

SEEING STARS

Dr Stuart Clark's top tips

Dr Stuart Clark is the author of *Beneath the Night*, which is available from October 2020, published by Guardian Faber. RRP: £14.99 *stuartclark.com*

1 ENJOY THE VIEW

Don't try memorising constellations. With familiarity, you'll notice the patterns stars make — then you can start putting names to the constellations.

2 LOOK UP

Planets visible with the naked eye are distinguished from stars because they don't twinkle. Venus and Jupiter are bright white, Mars is a baleful red, Saturn is the colour of straw and Mercury only appears in twilight.

3 GEEK OUT

Apps such as Star Rover or Sky Safari (Android and iOS) are inexpensive ways to find your way around the night sky.

IMAGE: GETTY

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A TASTE OF

COPENHAGEN

Restaurateur Claus Meyer, co-founder of Copenhagen's most lauded restaurant, Noma, discusses the evolution of New Nordic cuisine in his hometown

CLAUS MEYER kick-started the New Nordic culinary revolution in the late 1980s and opened the acclaimed Noma in 2003.

The French word 'terroir' is very important in understanding the concept behind the New Nordic movement. It's the impact of natural forces — soil condition, sun, wind and rain — in a specific region that enables us to bring food to the table with its own distinctive characteristics. In the Nordic region, there aren't many people, but we have lots of fertile soil. The idea was to deal with primary produce that had been exposed to very little cultural influence. Whatever we find in our wild landscapes is unique to our region.

Previously, eating in Denmark was a matter of economic efficiency. I grew up in an era of canned meatballs and mashed potato powder, the birth of sauce colouring and of the bouillon cube. I knew that Denmark not only needed but deserved an enthusiastic approach to food — it was just a matter of finding a way to unlock the true potential of our food culture.

I'm still astonished by the impact Noma and the New Nordic movement has had on the culinary landscape. The idea that ingredients cultivated close to home can harness an equal if not superior taste experience compared to sought-after delicacies traded across borders has stood the test of time.

These days, however, the culinary scene in Copenhagen still maintains a profound understanding of the importance of using local ingredients and working from a sustainable starting point. The Danish capital is a hotpot of taste explosions, ranging from street food to Michelin dining, covering every part of the globe along the way. Young trailblazers and seasoned chefs come together to form a food metropolis, which may be small in size but still manages to influence the global food agenda.

Read the full interview with Claus Meyer online at nationalgeographic.co.uk/travel

Claus lists his top three Copenhagen culinary experiences

LOLA
In 2012, I founded the part-restaurant, part-social education project Gustu in La Paz, Bolivia. Spearheading it was Kamilla Seidler, who last year opened Lola, combining great, affordable food with a social empowerment programme for trainee chefs. *restaurantlola.dk*

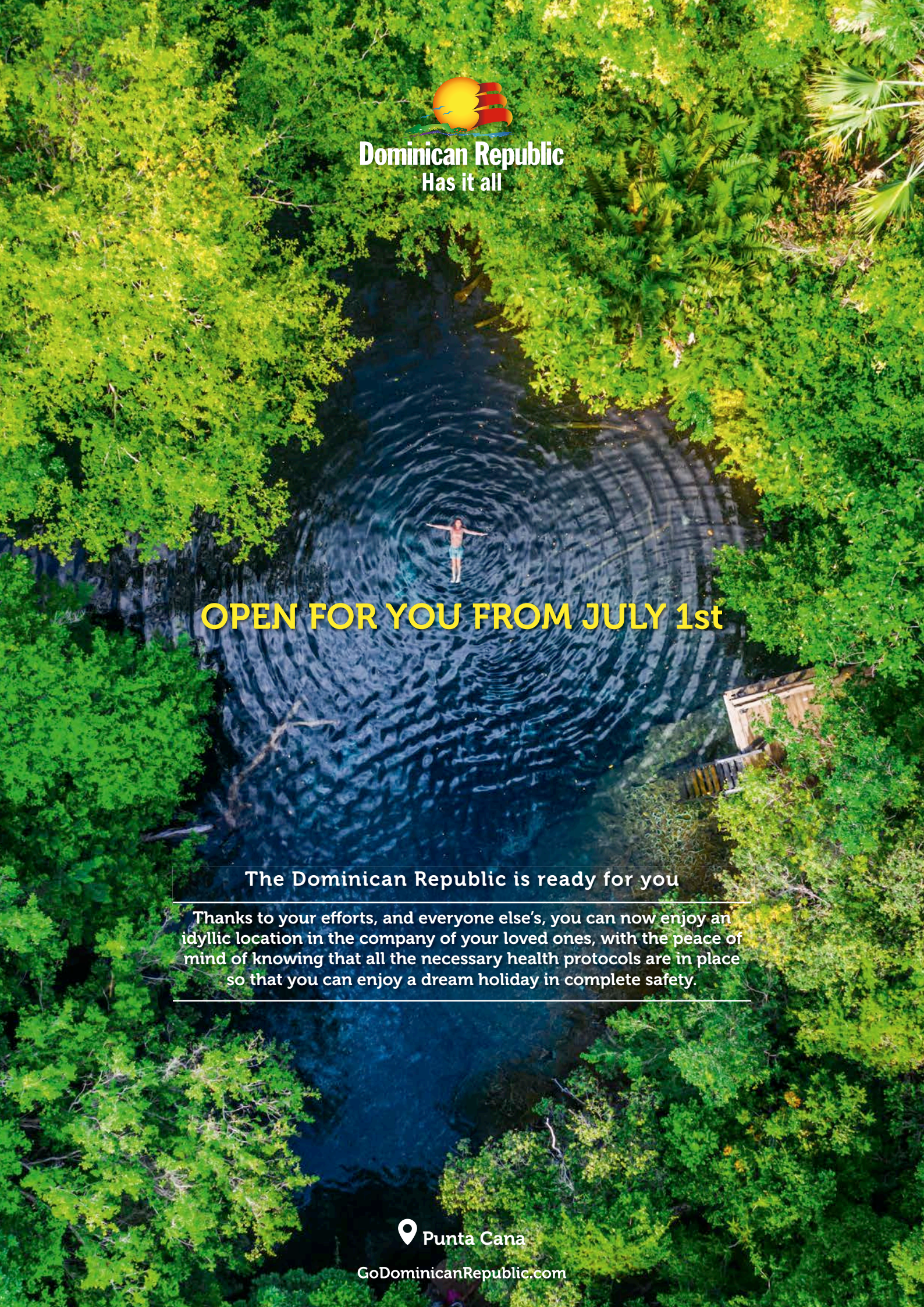
DECIDERET CIDER
You can't visit the cidery itself, but the guys behind Decideret Cider make some of the best cider I've ever had. They create a hyper-local variety using only surplus apples from private garden owners in Copenhagen. You can buy the ciders from good restaurants and speciality stores. *decideretcider.dk*

HART BAGERI
Richard Hart is a Brit with a remarkable insight into the mechanics of baking. He opened his storefront in the Copenhagen district of Frederiksberg in 2018. It's a bit pricey, but the flavours make it worthwhile. *hartbageri.com*

TAKE IT HOME

The *kanelsnurrer* cinnamon swirls served in Meyer's Bakeries (a chain of four artisanal bakeries in Copenhagen) are a great project to try at home, combining easy techniques with more challenging ones.

Find the recipe for *kanelsnurrer* (pictured above) on our website. Share your photos using **#STAYINSPIRED**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ON THE TRAIL

SOUTH AFRICA

Take an epicurean road trip in the Hemel-en-Aarde Valley and Cape Whale Coast, sampling smooth wines and Saturday markets. Words: Heather Richardson

1 CREATION

At the top of the valley is Creation, one of South Africa's best wineries. Stop by its Tasting Room restaurant — overlooking fields of vines and the mountains beyond — for a delicious, wine-paired lunch. Beetroot-marinated springbok is matched with smooth Pinot Noir, while trout nigiri comes with a fruity Chardonnay. There are tasting menus for non-drinkers, vegans and kids, too. *creationwines.com*

2 SUMARIDGE ESTATE WINES

Further down the valley, this family-owned estate is a fine spot for a tipple, with sweeping views towards Walkers Bay. Its Cellar — a stone-walled, gable-roofed tasting room — is designed in the style of the wine houses in Beaune, Burgundy; Hemel-en-Aarde is often called 'Little Burgundy' due to its cool-climate wines. Settle down on the balcony to sample wines such as the flagship Shiraz-Pinotage blend, Epitome. *sumaridge.co.za*

3 GLAMTRAILS

Itchy feet? Set off on a walking tour through the vineyards of Hemel-en-Aarde, with hiking routes ranging in length from one to four miles. The 1.4-mile De Bos Estate trail, which offers glorious views of the ocean and valley, takes around an hour and a half. You'll be led by botanist Frank Woodvine, who will talk you through the Western Cape's endemic fynbos greenery along the way. Finish the walk with a picnic lunch and wine-tasting at Bosman Hermanus' The Frame House eatery. *glamtrails.co.za*

4 HERMANUSPIETERSFONTEIN MARKET

No Saturday morning is complete without a visit to the Hermanuspietersfontein Market in Hemel-en-Aarde village. At this family-friendly spot, which tends to be filled with locals and visiting Capetonians alike, stalls sell the likes of Cape Malay samosas, pies, shellfish and fruity vintages from Hermanuspietersfontein Wines. The market is open from 09.00 until 13.00 — beat the crowds and go early. *hpf1855.com*

5 BIENTANG'S CAVE

Hermanus is famous for its whale-watching — and at Bientang's Cave restaurant, you can spot southern right whales from your lunch table. Overlooking the rolling waves of Walker Bay, the spot is named after the last known Khoi *strandloper* ('beach walker'), who lived here in the 1800s. Battered hake, peri-peri chicken and Cape Malay curry are on the menu; all are best washed down with a glass of MCC (South African sparkling wine) or a rock shandy (lemonade, soda water and Angostura bitters). *bientangscave.com*

6 GROOTBOS PRIVATE NATURE RESERVE

Take the 45-minute drive from Hermanus to this protected swathe of land that's home to protected fynbos, ancient milkwood trees and two luxurious five-star lodges. The site's wine cellar is superb, with a selection of rare vintages and excellent local wines to choose from. Spend your time on fynbos 'safaris', learning about the reserve's flora and fauna, or while away an afternoon hiking or horse-riding along the trails. *grootbos.com*

DID YOU KNOW?

In 2019, Hermanus and its surrounding towns were named South Africa's first UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy, noted for its extensive network of local fishermen, farmers, beekeepers, cheesemakers, winemakers and chefs.

ILLUSTRATION: MARTIN HAAKE

FAMILY

THE COAST IS CLEAR

Escaping the crowds is all the more important this summer. We pick some of our favourite bustle-free beaches for a day on the coast with the kids

Chapman's Pool on the Jurassic Coast in Dorset is ideal for fossil hunting

Earnse Bay, Cumbria

BEST FOR: Sunsets and letting off steam

Few people come to Cumbria for its beaches, but west-facing, empty Earnse Bay on Walney Island (you'll reach it across a bridge from Barrow-in-Furness) is perfect for a picnic. Views of the largest wind farm in Europe, the mountains of the Isle of Man and, on a clear day, Snowdonia, can be spectacular. *visitcumbria.com*

Blackgang Beach, Isle of Wight

BEST FOR: Solitude and sandstone

Blackgang Beach is surely one of the least visited of all the island's beaches and getting there's as much fun as being there: you have to slither down a steep, sometimes slippery (but generally safe) path from Niton. The payoff is a glorious beach of fine-grained, ochre pebbles, overlooked by a magnificent sandstone escarpment that resembles a vast slab of honeycomb. *visitisleofwight.co.uk*

Botany Bay, Kent

BEST FOR: Natural drama

It's hard to believe this spectacular beach lies within striking distance of the grand facades of Broadstairs and seaside cheer of Margate. The soaring chalk stacks reach up to 130ft and there are also large stretches of pristine white sand — ideal for long lazy walks or a spot of sunbathing. *visitkent.co.uk*

Chapman's Pool, Dorset

BEST FOR: Fossil-hunting

Tucked away on Dorset's Isle of Purbeck, Chapman's Pool is far quieter than its better-known neighbour, Lulworth Cove. Its beauty is more than worth the modest effort needed to navigate the footpath to the sand and shingle. And as this is the Jurassic Coast, the kids will have every chance of finding ammonites, shell fossils and even small bits of Paleolithic reptiles. *visit-dorset.com*

Embleton Bay, Northumberland

BEST FOR: Birdwatching and kite flying

Vast, crescent-shaped Embleton Bay hides in plain sight behind the commanding Dunstanburgh Castle. Even on the sunniest day you can wander, fly a kite or watch the puffins and terns with few concerns about social distancing. The castle looks like something a six-year-old might draw, perched on a cliff, with crumbling ramparts and a huge portcullis. *visitnorthumberland.com*

Covehithe, Suffolk

BEST FOR: Remote beauty

Reached from a lane that ends abruptly at a crumbling cliff edge with a backdrop of a roofless church, Covehithe, south of Lowestoft, has an edgy, dramatic beauty that is sure to capture any kid's imagination. Explore the water-smoothed trunks of trees taken to the shoreline by the collapsed cliff, before taking a break on the soft, golden sand. *visitsuffolk.com*

Lee Bay, Devon

BEST FOR: Rockpools

An isolated beach in North Devon is hard to find even at the quietest time of year, but pint-sized Lee Bay near Ilfracombe is one such place. Close to popular Woolacombe, you'll find a small, sandy beach and rockpools that are perfect for exploring, paddling and sunbathing away from the crowds. *leebay.co.uk* **MARK ROWE**

Read more at nationalgeographic.co.uk/travel

IMAGE: GETTY


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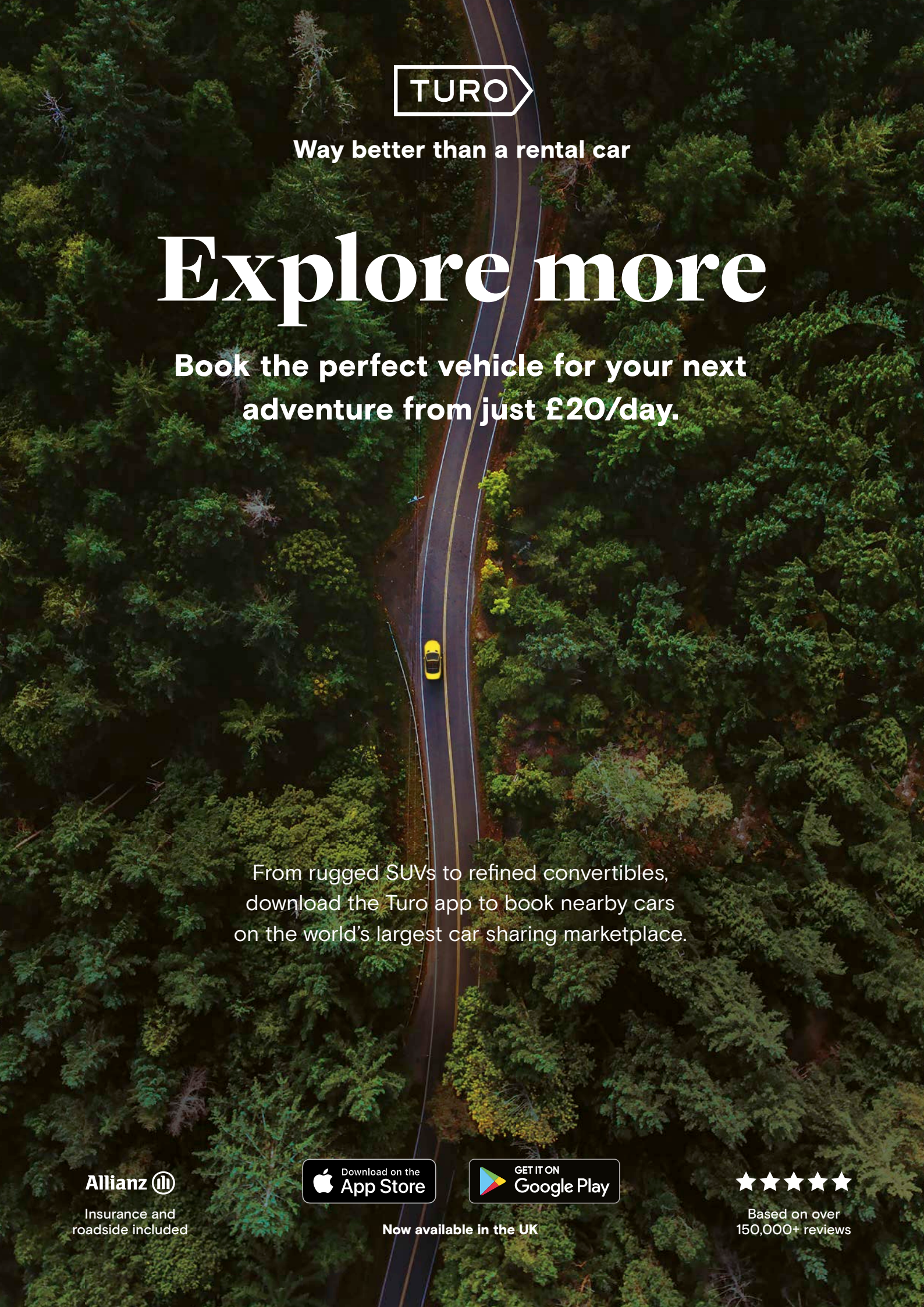
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STAY AT HOME

SHETLAND

Scotland's northernmost frontier is a truly remote escape, with prehistoric history and fine seafood to boot

Why go

Thanks to its historic Scandinavian ties, today, the Shetland Islands is an intriguing blend of Scottish and Nordic culture — in fact, its remote location in the North Atlantic means it's actually closer to Bergen than to Edinburgh. It's a far-flung choice for a UK break that offers up plenty of opportunity for adventure. Travellers can hike along the jagged coastline, try their luck at spotting orcas and puffins, stumble across an Iron Age settlement or just hop in the car and drive through the islands' windswept landscape (looking out for those famous little ponies en route, of course). *visitscotland.com*

What to do

Archaeological sites are everywhere on Shetland: Jarlshof is one of the finest, situated on a dramatic headland at the southern tip of the mainland. Here, visitors will find the remains of a settlement spanning 4,000 years that contains everything from Iron Age wheelhouses to a 16th-century laird's house. For an even older sight, take a trip to Eshaness peninsula. Follow the path along the coastline from the lighthouse to see the cross-section and layers of solidified lava flows of a 350-million-year-old volcano. *historicenvironment.scot shetland-heritage.co.uk/eshaness*

Don't miss

Shetland's capital, Lerwick, features a gorgeous winding high street where, at the southern end, you'll find the lodberries, a collection of water-fronted cottages and storehouses once used by merchants for easy access to the water. Look familiar? One of them stands in for the home of Detective Jimmy Perez in BBC's crime drama *Shetland*.

Where to eat

At Frankie's, you'll find battered haddock and chunky chips, but you'll also see steaming bowls of mussels and scallops. Over in Lerwick, The Dowry is a modern cafe with Nordic vibes and views out to the harbour. It serves beautifully presented mains and is also a good place to try Shetland's local ale, brewed a mile up the road at Lerwick Brewery. *frankiesfishandchips.com instagram.com/thedowryshetland lerwickbrewery.co.uk*

Where to stay

Sumburgh Head Lighthouse perches precipitously on the southern tip of mainland Shetland. Bed down in the former lightkeeper's house, which has walls so thick you'll barely notice if there's a storm raging outside. And look out for orcas — this is one of the best spots to see them from land. *shetlandlighthouse.com* **GAIL TOLLEY**

WE LIKE

Two short ferry rides from the mainland gets you to Unst, home to a remote gin distillery, Shetland Reel, which does tours during the summer. A stroll through Hermaness National Nature Reserve takes you within sight of the island of Muckle Flugga, the UK's most northerly point. Or, explore the headland at Skaw that's dotted with Second World War bunkers. *shetlandreel.com*

ABOVE: Shetland pony grazing on the island of Unst

IMAGE: GETTY

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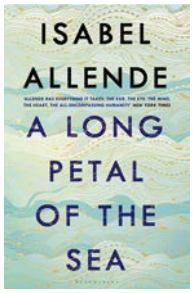
THE WORD

THE GREAT ESCAPE

Whether it's Sri Lanka, Nigeria, Chile, Havana or Paris, journey around the world with fictional tales that conjure a crackling sense of place. Words: Sarah Barrell

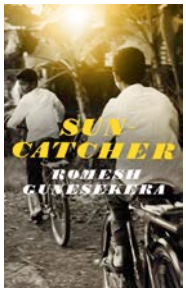


A Long Petal of the Sea, by Isabel Allende
Isabel Allende's latest novel is a thumping read, following the life of a young doctor from Barcelona, forcibly transplanted to Chile during the Spanish Civil War (aboard a ship chartered by the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda, no less). Raised in Chile and exiled to Venezuela, Allende understands the rippling effects of being uprooted herself, and this story focuses on the lasting impact of displacement. (Bloomsbury, £16.99)

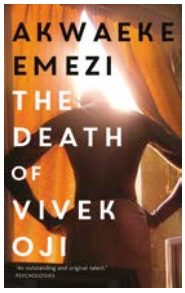
The Parisian, by Isabella Hammad
A love story, of sorts, moving from Palestine to Montpellier then Paris in the decades before the Second World War, this is a tale of how global politics and cultural identity shapes individual lives. A vivid rendering of both one Palestinian life in transition, and of a vastly shifting world order, this ambitious debut novel has been shortlisted for the Edward Stanford Travel Writing Awards. (Vintage Publishing, £9.99)

Love After Love, by Ingrid Persaud
The follow up to *The Sweet Sop*, which won both the Commonwealth Short Story Prize 2017 and the BBC National Short Story Award 2018, in *Love After Love*, Ingrid Persaud mines tender human truths from otherwise invisible, small-town Caribbean lives. The everyday family houses, back gardens and streets of Trinidad are firmly in frame, brought sharply to life with colloquial, rhythmic Trini dialect. (Faber, £14.99)

Island of Secrets, by Rachel Rhys
This summer's ebullient beach read (or, perhaps local park read) is set in 1950s Cuba, a country on the cusp of revolution. Bored Iris from the home counties happens on an invitation to Havana, where she has ambitions of becoming an artist. She soon uncovers gangsters, socialites and fated romance; the latest from the Nigerian-born multiple-pen-named-writer of mystery and crime fiction. Due in paperback July 2020. (Black Swan, £7.99)



Suncatcher, by Romesh Gunesekera
Take a trip to 1960s Sri Lanka with Romesh Gunesekera, who was shortlisted for the Booker Prize for Fiction and the Guardian Fiction Prize for his debut novel, *Reef*. This story is set in Ceylon during mid-century political upheaval. With schools closed and the government floundering, the young protagonist has to rely on his developing strength of character. This really is a fitting read for our times. (Bloomsbury, £8.99)



The Death of Vivek Oji, by Akwaeke Emezi
This second novel from Wellcome Book Prize and Women's Prize for Fiction nominee Akwaeke Emezi offers up a chronicle of a death foretold, examining the events leading up to the mysterious demise of the titular young Nigerian. Raw, strange and packed with a contrasting cast of characters, this is a tale whose atmosphere lingers long after the reading is done, not least its striking account of modern day Nigeria. (Faber, £12.99)

IMAGE: GETTY

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

What travel plans do you have? Where do you want to visit next? And what do you want to see in the magazine? You might be keen for thrilling tales from far-flung shores or simply inspiration for a weekend getaway here at home. Whatever kind of content you want from *National Geographic Traveller*, then we'd love to hear your thoughts.

And to say thank you, we'd like to offer you a little something. If you fill out our online survey, you'll receive a special code that gives you 20% off products from our partners, Craghoppers. Plus, you'll also be automatically entered into a draw to win one of 100 free Craghoppers T-shirts.

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***National Geographic Traveller* (UK) has teamed up with McKinlay Kidd and Kuoni to offer an eight-night epicurean adventure along Ireland's west coast**

THE DESTINATION

Threading for more than 1,550 miles of Ireland's west coast, the Wild Atlantic Way is one of the world's most spectacular road trips. Dotted along this windswept route is a whole host of natural, cultural and gastronomic experiences that offer a diverse, vibrant portrait of the Emerald Isle. Highlights include the bustling markets of Cork and the picture-perfect seaside town of Kinsale, renowned for its fresh seafood and artisan crafts. Other adventures await, such as exploring the mysterious lunar-like landscape of Burren National Park in County Clare; tasting seaweed along the shore in Caherdaniel; and sampling the finest malt whiskeys on offer at the Dingle Distillery.

THE PRIZE

Courtesy of UK & Ireland tailor-made specialists McKinlay Kidd, and in partnership with Kuoni and Tourism Ireland, the winner and a guest will set off on this unforgettable self-drive, eight-night adventure, departing from Britain by ferry. Valid for travel until 31 October 2021, the Wild Atlantic Way Food Trail itinerary offers ample opportunity to discover the area's untamed beauty by car and includes insider recommendations, locally guided walks and day tours. Accommodation is in a variety of hand-picked lodgings, from family-run guest houses to a tower house hotel that's located just moments from the beach. *kuoni.co.uk mckinlaykidd.com*

FROM TOP: The Cliffs of Moher in County Clare; oysters, a speciality on Ireland's west coast

TO ENTER

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

AFTER WHICH PRECIOUS STONE DOES IRELAND TAKE ITS NICKNAME?

Competition closes on 30 September 2020. The winner must be a resident of the UK aged 18 and over. Full T&Cs at *nationalgeographic.co.uk/competitions*

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NOTES FROM AN AUTHOR // CHRISTOPHER BEANLAND

SYDNEY

Hanging out at lidos is a great way to experience Australia, and the outdoor pools that dot the Sydney coast offer a watery way to get under the city's skin

The world looks different from the water. You get new views, new perspectives. You see the birds, the contrails of planes, the blues of the sky, the clouds forming into the shapes of countries you've visited or the faces of people you love. Floating in the cool blue water of Sydney's many pools, I saw different sides to this city of swagger and sweetness: one Australians find overbearing, yet Brits find positively restful.

The joy I get from a dip in the pool — wherever in the world that happens, be it in Sydney or near my home, at London Fields Lido in Hackney — encouraged me to write a book about the world's greatest al fresco pools. A return to Sydney to swim in the most magnificent ones of all seemed obvious.

Australia's largest city quivers on hot days, and the pool is where you cool off. At the 1930s North Sydney Olympic Pool, frogs and seahorses dance across the art deco walls like some kind of seaside Jazz Age spectacle. Sydney Harbour Bridge soars above you. At Andrew 'Boy' Charlton Pool — named after a homegrown recordbreaker — you'll find swimmers huffing and puffing in pursuit of their own personal bests, while across the bay you can spy on most of Australia's Navy, moored up at Potts Point.

Sport is the voice Australia has used to speak to the rest of the world (if you discount TV soap *Neighbours*) and swimming is one thing it's excelled at. Over at Bronte, on the pavement by the changing rooms, I'm inspired to tell one small story in my book after chancing upon a plaque dedicated to Evelyn Whillier. She was a freestyle swimmer who competed for Australia in the 1936 Berlin Olympics and then taught almost everyone in Bronte to swim at the jaw-dropping Bronte Rock Pool, set beneath under the cliffs.

The ocean is more fun, but the waves that roll in all the way from Chile and bash you up like a cat trapped in a washing machine are sometimes too much for even an experienced swimmer like me. The rock pools like Bronte, Clovelly and the famous Icebergs at Bondi lie somewhere in between the human-made and the godlike. Coogee has its Ocean Baths, which are nothing more than a load of rocks dumped into the sea, and the charming Wylie's — a privately run rock pool where the pastel colours painted onto wooden decks and jaunty font of the signage remind me of the New York State summer camp in *Dirty Dancing*. It's overrun with bluebottle jellyfish when I swim there and I have to avoid the little blighters on each length, like I'm playing a real-life computer game. Some other interlopers have snuck in too: spiky little sea urchins the lifeguards scoop up and put in a Tupperware box for intrigued punters to take home and cook. Next door is the only lido I can't visit, McIver's: a women-only coastal bath where, so I'm told, going topless is practically compulsory.

At Andrew 'Boy' Charlton Pool — named after a homegrown recordbreaker — you'll find swimmers huffing and puffing in pursuit of their own personal bests, while across the bay you can spy on most of Australia's Navy, moored up at Potts Point

Swimming is only half the story, of course. Eating your lunch, reading, idly scrolling on your phone, sunbathing — poolside is where Aussies chill out and yabber. I watch families bicker, teenagers moan, couples flirt, tourists get their photo taken (and yes, I join in), see a *Love Island* contestant on a photo shoot, and lads throwing themselves into the water from the cliffs above Bronte pool.

As Melburnian author Christos Tsiolkas points out, pools are a part of what being Australian means. His writing is inspired by the culture of changing rooms and sundecks, each informing his acute observations of everyday Australian life. You see everyone at the pool, from the fearless kids splashing around to the grandmas serenely taking their daily dip. In a classless society like Australia's, the pool is for everyone; for a few quid, or often even for free, you can get your diurnal exercise and your mental respite, to boot. The pool is a safe space in a country where seemingly everything else, from the spiders to the seas, is trying to kill you.

Whenever I visit Sydney, the last thing I do before leaving is go for a swim in the sunshine, usually at Bronte or Coogee where I can alternate between lengths in the pool and some wilder action in the surf. And it's never failed to put me straight to sleep — a most peaceful sleep, too — on the flight back to London and, inevitably, the cold.

Lido, by Christopher Beanland, is published by Batsford and is available from 6 August. RRP: £20.
@ChrisBeanland

ILLUSTRATION: JACQUI OAKLEY

MEET THE ADVENTURER

JENNY TOUGH

The endurance athlete on a mission to run across a mountain range on every continent discusses positivity and the lessons that helped her survive lockdown

As a solo adventurer specialising in remote regions, you're no stranger to social distancing. Did this help prepare you for life in lockdown?
My travels have taught me a lot of lessons, but I never could have predicted they'd give me tools for something like a lockdown. Solo expeditions teach you how to be alone with your own brain, how to cope with fear and uncertainty, and how to keep going when the trail ahead seems far too long. But I think the biggest lesson I've learnt, and one that definitely applies to everyone, is that you're tougher than you think. It may seem impossible, but you'll surprise yourself.

Tell us about your first adventure.
I'd just finished university and went back to Canada, where I'm originally from, and decided that I really wanted to go north to the Yukon. I wanted to go by human power — that was important to me — so I decided I'd cycle there. I'd never cycled anywhere; I didn't know anything about it. I bought a bike, watched YouTube videos on how to change a tyre and then cycled up the Rocky Mountains. It was about 1,245 miles, took around a month and totally changed my life. It was really empowering.

What does adventure mean to you?
It's a state of mind. You can't really define it by the distance you cover, the place you go to and how long it takes. It's your attitude — that you're open to new experiences and seeing things in a different way.

What's been your most challenging moment?
When I was running across Kyrgyzstan, I made a massive navigational error, went down the wrong valley and set off a few landslides. Ahead was a cliff edge leading into a pretty gnarly whitewater river; the only other way forward was to climb a mountain. I was thinking: "All directions would definitely kill me if I got it wrong." I decided to go with the climb, and it was a like a prolonged near-death experience. It was a mistake that could have cost me everything. I decided that as soon as I got out of that valley, I was going to leave and go home.

When I got to the top, after what felt like hours, I just collapsed and had a little cry. And then as soon as I was done crying, I fixed my ponytail, got up, kept on running and just went back to business.

What is the most extreme place you've visited?
I ran across the Bolivian Andes — which was a world first — and it was way more extreme than I ever thought it would be. Some sections were incredibly remote; then there was the altitude and the weather. I still look back on that leg and think: "Oh my god, I can't believe I actually survived that."

How do you go about planning an adventure?
It starts with a lot of daydreaming. I think one of my best time-wasting hobbies is staring at maps. And then you start to wonder, what's it actually like there? Is it possible to get around? What vehicle would I use? Could I do it on foot or do I need skis? You just start filling in all those little details until you have a complete route in front of you that you want to attempt.

What's your approach to packing?
Go as light as possible. Besides the camera, everything I'm taking has to be integral to my survival. And then, obviously, it's got to be equipment that's completely reliable — or at least reparable with duct tape.

What inspires new adventures for you?
A desire to see what's around the next corner. I want to see every part of the planet and I want to meet the people on it. But also, within myself, I want to know what challenges I can actually accomplish and how much further I'm able to push myself. It's all about wanting to know more, to know what else is out there.

INTERVIEW: ANGELA LOCATELLI

Jenny is currently involved in a project to run solo and unsupported across a mountain range on every continent. In July this year, Jenny hopes to attempt her fifth mountain range, the Alberta Rockies.
@JennyTough
jennytough.com

READ THE FULL INTERVIEW ONLINE AT *NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC. CO.UK/TRAVEL*

IMAGE: JAY FRENCH @FREERIDENEWZEALAND


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STAY INSPIRED

WHAT'S ONLINE

CELEBRATING THE DESTINATIONS WE MISS

As part of our ongoing Stay Inspired campaign, we ask a few of National Geographic Traveller's editorial team to toast their favourite destinations

MADRID — CONNOR MCGOVERN, COMMISSIONING EDITOR
My last trip to Madrid was when I started to really understand the city. By day, I explored museums and churches, and wandered through sun-drenched barrios and leafy parks. By night, however, I discovered a different side to Madrid: I squeezed into raucous bars that have barely changed in a century, uncovered the exciting cocktail scene and mopped up the night's excesses with a plate of churros. It'll be a while before I can visit Madrid again, so for now I'll make do with Spain on a screen. Thankfully, legendary filmmaker Pedro Almodóvar's work captures all the hedonistic, zeitgeisty vigour of Madrid in the 1980s, when the city was rediscovering itself after the Franco dictatorship.

BORNEO — CHARLOTTE WIGRAM-EVANS, CONTENT EDITOR
I'm thinking back on the week I spent with the Kelabit tribe in Bario, a tiny cluster of villages hidden deep in Borneo's eastern Highlands. As well as learning about village life and exploring some of the 600sq miles of rainforest on their doorstep, I spent long evenings cackling around a campfire.
The Kelabits' sense of sarcasm is unparalleled, and their dry wit — paired with an incredible warmth — has left me longing to return. For now, I'll be making do with recreating the cocktail we drank together: pineapple juice, crushed ice, mint leaves and a lot of white rum, but when we can travel again, you'll find me in the jungles of Borneo.

MANCHESTER — NICOLA TRUP, ASSOCIATE EDITOR
Last year, I took a trip back to Manchester, the city I lived in for university and where, secretly, my heart still lies. Yes, it rains an inordinate amount, but with its red-brick architecture, fantastic food and unbeatable music scene, it's a beauty all the same. While confined to my London flat, I've been escaping to Manchester via film (namely the fabulous *24 Hour Party People*, about the city's music scene in the 1970s-1990s) and radio (thanks to Greater Manchester heroes Radcliffe and Maconie on BBC Radio 6 Music). In the words of Radcliffe, Manchester is "a city that thinks a table is for dancing on" — and once we're free to roam again, I'll be back on that table like a shot. **READ MORE ONLINE NOW**

TOP STORIES

Here's what you've been enjoying in our Stay Inspired campaign this month **#stayinspired**

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Nori Jemil discusses her latest assignment in Turkey

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Five restaurant recipes to try during lockdown
Cook these dishes from *National Geographic Traveller Food*

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See the world's natural wonders in real time
How webcams can act as live portals to stunning natural vistas

WHY TRAVEL GUIDE BOOKS MATTER MORE THAN EVER

As independent travel publishers everywhere struggle in the face of Covid-19, decorated adventurer and Bradt Guides founder Hilary Bradt reflects on the travel guide genre — and what you can do to help it survive

The days when we could travel anywhere, almost at whim, seem like a distant memory. Now even a few miles from home feels like a foreign country. So, for now, the written word has become our escape; it has the power to transport us to those places we know we'll journey to once this crisis is over.

I'd like to share the story of the early days of adventure travel publishing, how Bradt Guides came to be established, and how our approach to travel has shaped a generation of explorers — and how, without your continued support, this global crisis might see this work come to an end.

It was the 1970s, and George — my then husband — and I were looking for a publisher for the next edition of our little guide, *Backpacking Along Ancient Ways in Peru and Bolivia*. We met with the man who was then the leading travel publisher in Britain.

"No, this isn't for us; it's too specialised," he told us. Our description of five hiking trails with off-the-beaten-track recommendations and thoughtful asides on local customs weren't the sort of things he was interested in. "But I'd publish a more mainstream guide to Peru if you'll write it."

"But we can't afford to go back," I replied.

His attitude was cavalier: "Just use some brochures from the tourist office."

And that's why I ended up becoming a publisher myself. Guidebook writing is serious stuff, and good authors have an obsession with portraying the country they love with passion, accuracy and individuality.

The 1970s were a wonderful time for travellers, with three long-enduring companies starting up. We all had one aim: to share our discoveries with like-minded young people. **READ THE FULL STORY ONLINE NOW**

IMAGES: BEN ROBERTS; GETTY; NORI JEMIL; LAURA EDWARDS

BEYOND THE TRAVEL SECTION

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How centuries of pandemics have shaped the British monarchy
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WEEKENDER

BRECON BEACONS

Take it slow through South Wales and discover endless trails over moor and mountain, coaching inns creaking with history, ghostly goings-on and moody landscapes to make the heart sing

Words: Kerry Walker

Wales makes quite an entrance. As rolling, chequered fields fade in the rearview mirror, the Brecon Beacons begin to loom on the horizon: a clear reminder you've reached a wilder, more mountainous land. Snowdonia to the north may have the upper hand height-wise, but these peaks are just as dramatic, rippling across 520sq miles of national park. Rising like the prows of great ships, they hoist their sails above moors misted with purple heather and glacier-carved valleys, the ramparts of Iron Age hill forts and the dark skeletons of ruined castles. And whether they're seen in the gilded light of a late-summer afternoon, cloud-wreathed in the rain, or frosted with snow, their beauty is entirely their own. This weekend-long journey heads off the beaten track — or *igam ogam*, as the Welsh say — from the eastern Black Mountains and their secluded valleys through to the central Brecons, where lofty summits, hiking trails and dark night skies await, before dipping south to waterfalls hidden in ferny woodlands ripe for a fairytale. Pack sturdy boots and clothes that can handle mud, and look forward to getting stuck behind that pootling tractor or stray sheep. This is one journey not to be rushed.

DAY ONE SKIRRID TO CRICKHOWELL

MORNING

There are higher peaks in Wales, but few have the pop-up effect of the 1,594ft Skirrid on the eastern fringes of the Black Mountains. Sweeping above a fretwork of hedgerowed fields, the Skirrid takes its Welsh name, Ysgyryd Fawr ('great shattered mountain') from the massive landslide that shook its northwestern flank during the last Ice Age.

Rambling up through broadleaf woods carpeted with ferns and wildflowers, the path emerges onto a wind-beaten ridge. When the Welsh weather behaves itself, the views from the trig point are unbeatable, reaching west to the conical Sugar Loaf and the Brecon Beacons, east to the borderlands and south to the Severn Estuary. Ospreys, buzzards and red kites often glide on stiff breezes above the exposed outcrop. And if history grabs you more than birdlife, look out for the ruins of a medieval chapel and the mound-and-ditch ramparts of an Iron Age hill fort near the summit.

AFTERNOON

After a bracing hike, The Skirrid Mountain Inn beckons for lunch. With 900 years of history, it claims to be Wales' oldest and most haunted boozer. It sure looks the part, with sagging, woodsmoke-blackened beams and an inglenook fireplace where Shakespeare supposedly once enjoyed a pint and came up with the impish character of Puck for his play *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The hangman's noose above the stairwell nods to the pub's darker past as a courthouse.

Road trips are two-a-penny in Wales, but few can rival the one through the remote, steep-sided Vale of Ewyas, which unfurls just north of the inn. The halfway point is Llanthony, where the ruins of an Augustinian priory are so wildly romantic that they inspired Turner to commit the scene to canvas in 1794. Further north, a single-track lane ribbons through windswept moorland and up the 1,800ft Gospel Pass, Wales' highest road. Near the top, astonishing views of Hay Bluff to the east and Twmpa open up.

EVENING

As the late-afternoon light slants over the hills, head south on the A479, where the views of the Black Mountains — including the highest peak, 2,660ft Waun Fach — prove distractingly lovely. Your base for the evening is Crickhowell, a picturesque Georgian market town that straddles the River Usk. The 18th-century stone bridge here is well worth admiring for its mismatched arches (12 upstream, 13 downstream).

Crickhowell's showpiece is The Bear Hotel, a 600-year-old former coaching inn that was once an overnight stop for travellers heading from London to West Wales. Now a delightfully old-school gastro pub and hotel, it brims with low oak beams, log fires and cosy nooks. In summer, the hanging baskets are something else. If it's warm, grab a pre-dinner drink in the rear courtyard. The menu plays up seasonality and traceability in dishes like Black Mountain smoked salmon with crostini and lemon oil, and braised lamb shank with spring-onion mash.

EAT UP

The Brecons' three best food experiences

FELIN FACH GRIFFIN

With log fires in the inglenook, low beams, flagstone floors and Chesterfields worn smooth by decades of shuffling bums, this pub between the Brecons and the Black Mountains is the country dream. Garden-grown and locally sourced ingredients are elevated to gastro heights in simple-but-punchy dishes like smoked duck with feta and pickled garden berries. *felinfachgriffin.co.uk*

WELSH VENISON CENTRE

Watch deer, sheep and cattle graze as you dig into a local- and season-driven lunch at this terrific farm shop and café between Crickhowell and Brecon. Outdoor fires and blankets keep you warm while you enjoy rural views over Black Mountain Roast Coffee, homemade cake, and farm-to-fork snacks like gourmet venison burger topped with Welsh cheddar, bacon and fried onions. *beaconsfarmshop.co.uk*

THE WALNUT TREE

Shaun Hill heads up this Michelin-starred restaurant in the rolling borderlands. 'Shaking the pans' for 50 years plus, Shaun's menu is a love affair between Wales and France, with occasional whispers of India and North Africa. The vibe is unpretentious, the price surprisingly modest (3-course lunch £32), and the flavours simple and bright in dishes like squab pigeon with petits pois. *thewalnuttreeinn.com*

LEFT: A hiker surveys the view from Black Hill (also known as Cat's Back) in the Black Mountains, the easternmost of the Brecon Beacons' hills
RIGHT: Usk Bridge and The Bridge End Inn, Crickhowell, with Table Mountain in the background

IMAGES: GETTY; ALAMY

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DAY TWO CRICKHOWELL TO PENDERYN

MORNING

Crickhowell is capped off by its very own Table Mountain, and that's where you're headed after a bright and early start. It may not be in the same league as its Cape Town namesake, but this flat-topped, 1,480ft red sandstone outcrop is still a challenging climb — a rite of passage for local hikers. Once the site of an Iron Age hill fort, it stands sentinel above countryside ribbed with hedgerows and dry-stone walls. Beginning on the Llanbedr Road above Crickhowell, the trail picks its way through a wooded dingle and shadows a brook to reach a sheepfold. From here, it's an easy climb up and over stile and field to the top and back. The summit rewards your efforts with uplifting views of the Brecons and Black Mountains.

AFTERNOON

A half-hour drive west takes you along a beautiful stretch of the A40. Were this not an A road, it would be tempting to drive at 30mph the whole way to your next stop near Sennybridge and admire the views. But if you're lucky, a tractor will appear. Pause in Defynnog for lunch at The International Welsh Rarebit Centre, a former a schoolhouse that's now a cafe, art gallery and cultural hub. Accompanied by salads prepared from garden-grown produce, a number of the delicious rarebits on offer deviate from the traditional recipe. These include the likes of Guinness-laced Stout Irish and Summer Rarebit, made with Welsh goat's cheese, honey, walnuts and lemon zest. It's as good as cheese on toast gets.

EVENING

Post lunch, the road beckons for a short but scenic drive south through the wild heart of the Brecons. Allow sufficient time for gawping at the views of the sweeping peaks, including South Wales' highest, Pen y Fan, to the east. After 20 minutes or so, you'll arrive at Penderyn, just in time to catch a distillery tour. Or make straight for the bar for a tasting of its single malt whiskies and traditional juniper-based gins.

Should this whet your appetite for the good life, treat yourself to an overnight stay at Gliffaes hotel, an Italianate Victorian manor on the banks of the River Usk that offers a dash of old-school class. The restaurant menu is weighted towards dishes created using local produce, like supreme of guinea fowl with spring vegetable broth.

IMAGES: ALAMY; KERRY WALKER

TOP 5

Outdoor Activities

SHEEP TREKKING

What could be more Welsh than a walk with a sheep? At Aberhyddnant Farm in Crai, near Brecon, you can do just that with its flock of sheep, which include Jacob, Valais Blacknose and Ouessant (the world's smallest breed). Bring sturdy footwear for mud and wet weather. From £25 per person. *sheeptrekking.co.uk*

FORAGING

Passionate forager Adele Nozedar, author of *The Hedgerow Handbook*, runs half-day, kid-friendly foraging courses, which give the inside scoop on wild food in the Brecons (from £35 per person). Botanical gin workshops are also available (£40 per person). *breconbeaconsforaging.com*

WILDERNESS SURVIVAL

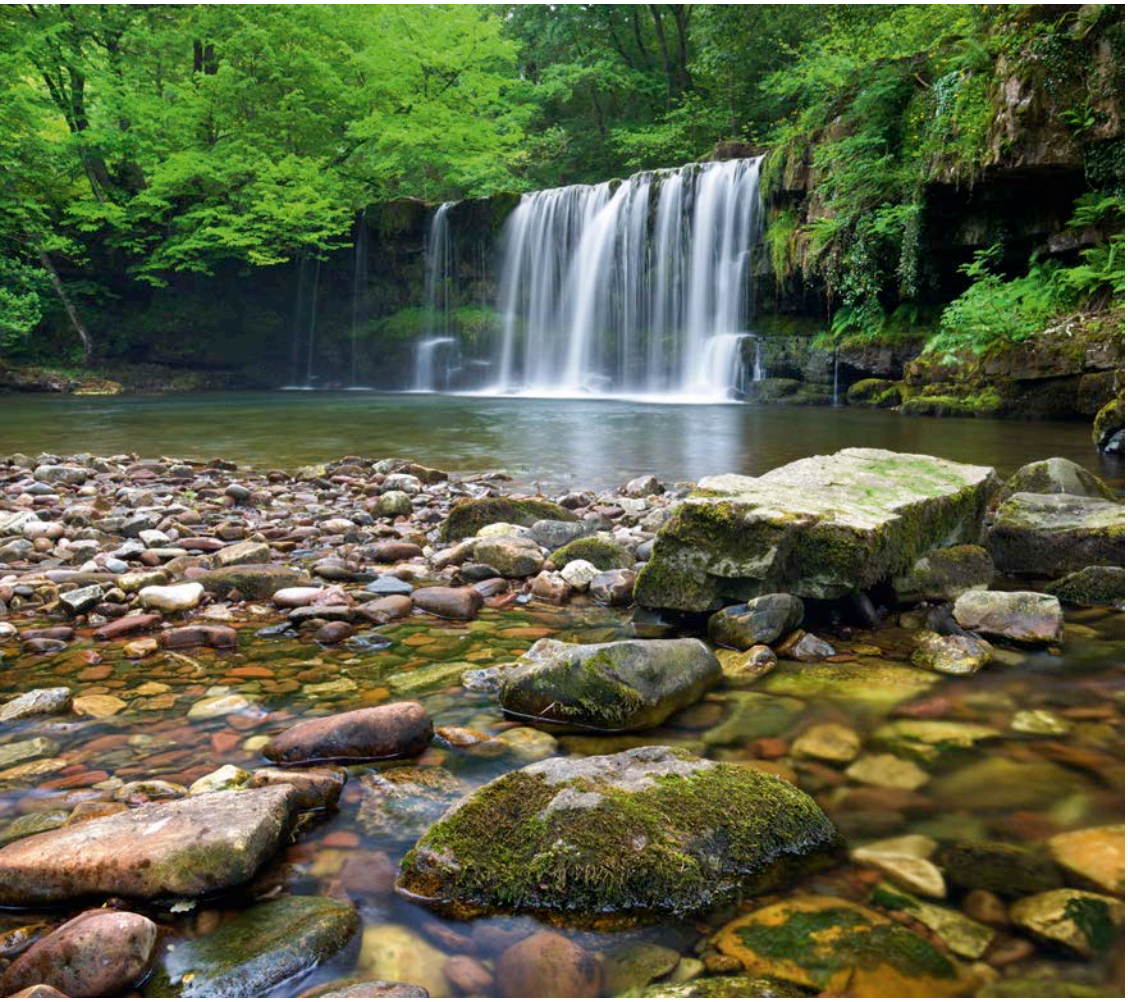
Bear Grylls Survival Academy has 24-hour courses covering everything from building an emergency shelter to fire lighting. £349 per person. *beargryllssurvivalacademy.com*

STARGAZING

The Brecon Beacons National Park is an International Dark Sky Reserve. Among the best spots are the Crai and Usk Reservoirs, Llanthony Priory, Hay Bluff and Sugar Loaf Mountain. *breconbeacons.org*

ADVENTURE SPORTS

Brecon-based Black Mountain offers canoe, kayak and mountain bike hire, whitewater rafting, caving, gorge adventures and much more. From £26. *blackmountain.co.uk*



TRUNK CALL

Blink and you'll miss the tiny hamlet of Defynnog, near Sennybridge, which would be a shame for all lovers of ancient trees. Here a mighty yew, which was a sapling during the Bronze Age, spreads its 5,000-year-old branches across the churchyard.

THREE MORE WALKS ON THE WILD SIDE

Ideal for a post-lockdown ramble, these half-day hikes let you sidestep the crowds and immerse yourself in the Welsh wilderness. The national park was closed at the time of writing, so be sure to check restrictions before hitting the trail

BRECON BEACONS HORSESHOE

No Brecons trip is complete without puffing up the highest peak: 9,537ft Pen y Fan. Ticking off a quartet of summits — Corn Du, Pen y Fan, Cribyn and Fan y Big — the Horseshoe Ridge walk is a longer, more dramatic alternative to the popular straight-up stomp to the top. Beginning at the Lower Neuadd Reservoir, the trail ascends steeply along a ridge, where views crack open to reveal bald, sheer-sided mountains and valleys blasted with glacial moraine. From Pen y Fan, you can see all the way to the Cambrians, Black Mountains and Bristol Channel on clear days. And if the descent can be boggy and tough-going at times, spare a thought for the SAS; they run these tracks in full gear. *nationaltrust.org.uk/brecon-beacons/trails*

LLYN Y FAN FACH

If you're convinced you've taken a wrong turn as you negotiate a single-track lane patrolled by unruly sheep, seemingly on the road to nowhere, keep on driving. Out on its lonesome near Llanddeusant, in the lesser-explored western Brecons, the four-mile circular trail to Llyn y Fan Fach is immediately spectacular. The path shadows a burbling stream to a steel-blue glacial cirque lake, encircled by sheer slopes buckled and contorted by elemental forces over millennia. Ascend the ridge for views that take on a near-mystical quality when curtained in cloud and mist. Llyn y Fan Fach is the backdrop for the Lady of the Lake legend, a tale of hopeless love that appears in the Welsh folk epic, the Mabinogion.

YSTRADFELLTE

A warm day is best for striking out on the five-mile Four Falls loop walk at Ystradfellte, which can easily be tied in with a visit to the nearby Penderyn Distillery. Heading through pine forest and deep into an ivy-draped, fern-cloaked wooded gorge, the trail leads up and down steps and over footbridges to four cascades. The two-tier spectacle of Sgwd Clun-Gwyn ('white meadow fall'), a canyoning and whitewater rafting hotspot, is pure drama, but arguably the highlight here is the wispy Sgwd-yr-Eira ('waterfall of the snow'), where you can actually walk behind the falls and feel the spray. Arrive early in the day to snag a parking space and experience the falls at their most peaceful.

MORE INFO

Skirrid Mountain Inn.
skirridmountaininn.co.uk
Penderyn Distillery.
penderyn.wales
Beacons National Park.
breconbeacons.org
Visit Wales website.
visitwales.com

HOW TO DO IT

A car is a must for exploring the remote reaches of the Brecon Beacons, but if you're coming by train, Abergavenny is a good gateway, with trains to London (via Cardiff) and Manchester. The A40 is the main road through the Brecons. In Crickhowell, simple doubles at The Bear start at £117, while Gliffaes has double rooms from £149 in low season.
bearhotel.co.uk
gliffaeshotel.com

ABOVE: Scwd Ddwli falls, near Ystradfellte, a stop on the Four Falls loop

IMAGE: AWL IMAGES

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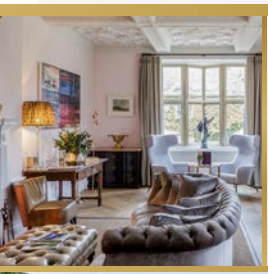





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EAT

LIMASSOL

Over the centuries, the Cypriot city of Limassol has absorbed the flavours of the Mediterranean and Middle East, while its vineyards have proved equally adaptable, nurturing both local and international grapes. Words: Nina Caplan

What will the future judge to be beautiful? I often wonder this while travelling through places that don't conform to a guidebook ideal of prettiness. In our carefully curated world, where every town has a tourist board and every food trend a champion, it's rare to find a place that hasn't airbrushed out its blemishes and imperfections to appease the tourists. Yet, for those of us with a keen interest in local flavours, these can be among the most rewarding places to explore. And, so it proved with Limassol.

For a winter-weary Brit like me, Cyprus offers warm reprieve. On arrival, I find the coastline thick with buildings but also alight with sunshine, the Mediterranean glinting beyond. My driver — a child during the Turkish invasion of 1974 — recalls this entire stretch as empty land, save the ruins of Amathus, one of Cyprus's ancient kingdoms, conquered by the Persians, Romans, Byzantines and Arabs. As a boy, he used to play here, dipping into the Mediterranean at will. Still today, he tells me, "if I don't see the sea for two or three days, I get stress".

Now it's a different sort of playground. Just beside Amathus is Amara, a five-star hotel, constructed on several levels, all facing the sea. The spa had to be built around one of Amathus' ancient walls. Everything else is brand new and very elegant, fashioned from local wood, travertine and granite. It's not Limassol's first luxury hotel but it's certainly the only one with restaurants helmed by global gastronomic heavyweights Nobu Matsuhisa and Giorgio Locatelli.

This is the new Cyprus. But there's a lot of value in the old, too. Limassol's recently redeveloped port has restaurants with sea views and decent fish, but rather than seek out these shiny new premises, I go looking for older wineries instead. Usually beautiful and often under-explored, they can be great places to dine — or at least ask for recommendations. Winemakers know the best local restaurants — they are, after all, the ones to supply these establishments with wine.

ABOVE: Street cafe's with tourists in Omodos village, Limassol District
RIGHT: Grilled octopus at Armyra by Papaioannou restaurant, at Amara

IMAGES: GETTY; AMARA

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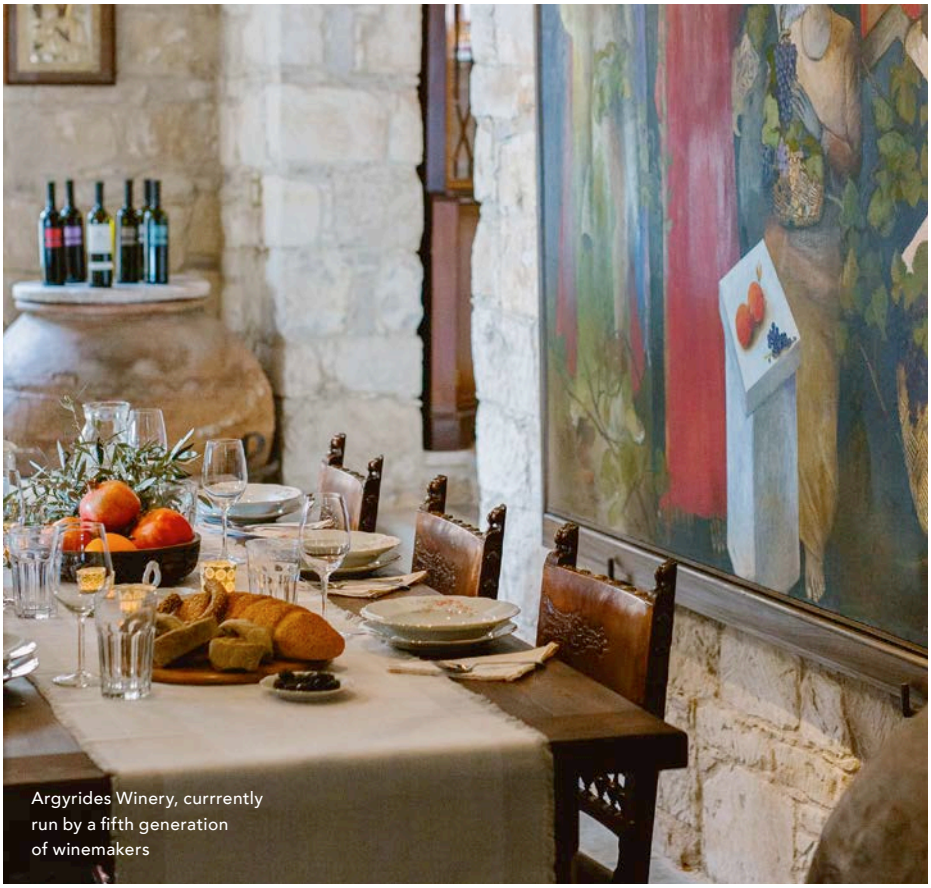
Rebecca Argyrides' family has been making wine for five generations. The production run at Argyrides Winery is tiny: 38,000 bottles a year. Until recently, they'd load up the donkey with wine — "in the middle of the night, to avoid bandits!" — and travel to Nicosia to sell it. Rebecca, her mother and a younger woman with a baby girl comprise the winemaking team, but they're not the only important females here. The local red grape, Maratheftiko, produces only female flowers. Once pollinated with another variety, it produces a lovely wine — emphatic but not heavy, full of cherries and earth and sandalwood; it's excellent with the grilled meats the Cypriots love — but, says Rebecca, it's hard work to make. To accompany that wine, she recommends the food at Karatello Tavern in Limassol's old town, and a little farther out, Koursaros, which, according to Rebecca, has the best fish.

But first, more wine. Rebecca and I set off into the parched hills, their limestone soils somehow nurturing both trees and vines. This feels as far from the development-clogged city as you can get, yet this landscape is only a 40-minute drive north. After stopping to view the frescoes of a tiny, ancient church dedicated to lovelorn martyrs — on the banks of a river between the villages of Pera Pedi and Koilani — we reach Sofoklis Vlassides' winery.

Architecturally speaking, Vlassides Winery is as sleekly spectacular as Argyrides is old-fashioned and cosy. Rebecca and Sofoklis are old friends who bicker good-naturedly about the relative merits of local and international grape varieties (Sofoklis: "Local varieties do well at all altitudes. They're the future." Rebecca: "Maratheftiko is enough work for us!"). We try both: Aleatis, a plump, gorgeous white from the indigenous Xynisteri, but also Opus Artis, a blend of the more familiar Merlot, Cabernet and Shiraz grapes. Where to try them with food? Sofoklis suggests Zygi, a fishing village east of Limassol where Santa Elena Fish Tavern serves his wines.

After our next stop — at Marcos Zambartas's small winery, which makes a remarkable number of good wines, including Margelina, a blend from vines planted in 1921 — we return to Limassol, hungry, to find a different city: one much closer to the Cyprus we'd hoped to see. Walking down a side street beside the pale, medieval stone of Limassol Castle towards Karatello Tavern, we spot workmen drinking Cypriot Keo beer outside an unpretentious cafe. The proprietor, a former fisherman, uses his dockside contacts to feed his old friends a cheap, good lunch each day. We order a beer which comes with complimentary nibbles: a dish of salty snails.

Bottles of wine line the double-height walls of this airy, cheerful tavern, where salad and vegetables are marvellously fresh, and fresher-still fish is sold by the kilo.



Argyrides Winery, currrently run by a fifth generation of winemakers

IMAGES: ARGYRIDES WINERY; KARATELLO TAVERN

A TASTE OF *Limassol*

KARATELLO TAVERN, LIMASSOL
This friendly tavern has a large terrace overlooking Limassol Castle and a high-ceilinged interior stacked with wine shelves. Owned by a Limassol restaurant group, this is an unpretentious place (you tick boxes on a paper menu) with good local food: fresh fish, various roasts and meatballs and lots of grilling. Around €35 (£30) per person for fresh sea bass and local wine. *carobmill-restaurants.com*

SANTA ELENA FISH TAVERN, ZYGI
The interior is cool and old-fashioned, while the exterior seating, arranged on a pedestrianised throughway, allows for excellent people-watching. The fish is fresh from the sea, there are local wines to accompany, and the staff are low on English but so high on helpfulness and charm that it doesn't matter. Around €35 (£30) per person, with local wine. *facebook.com/santaelenafishtavern*

AGIOS EPIKTITOS TAVERNA, ARMENOCHORI
Set in the hills above Limassol, the Armenian village of Armenochori is now a refuge for wealthy expats, a fact reflected in the wine list, which includes a Bordeaux Grand Cru at €150 (£124). The food is very Cypriot, though, with souvlakia, *sheftalies* (meat balls), snails and halloumi all on the menu. Guitar players circulate, as do a large family of feral cats, all with their eye on your dinner. Around €25 (£20) per person, with local wine. *facebook.com/agiosepiktitostavernalimassol*

Five food finds

1

ELIES TSAKISTES

These green olives, doused in coriander seeds, garlic, lemon juice and olive oil, may be hard to pronounce but they're easy to consume — especially with a glass of local white wine.

2

SKAROS

Parrotfish, which the Cypriots grill whole, innards and all. It may sound like an unappetising proposition, but the slightly bitter taste is truly delicious.

3

XYNISTERI

Cyprus's most common white grape produces a lovely aperitif, which is an excellent match for more delicate fish. It can be fresh and floral or more complex and textured; when made well, it's dangerously drinkable.

4

SHEFTALIES

This popular fast food consists of meat (usually pork and lamb) kneaded into meatballs and wrapped in caul fat. Then it goes into warm flatbread with diced tomatoes, yoghurt and herbs.

5

MARATHEFTIKO

Not the easiest grape variety to pronounce, nor to produce: the vines ripen in fits and starts. Still, for winemakers who persevere, this red variety (found only in Cyprus and rich in colour) can be fabulous: full of cherries and sandalwood.

Winemaker Marcos Zambartas, the owner of Zambartas Wineries, stands among vines

Rebecca's Viognier (surprisingly austere, for Viognier) makes a wonderful match for the sea bass. Walking off our meal, we head into the resort town of Aiya Napa, where we admire the imposing cathedral and peer into the 16th-century Kebir Mosque, its minaret poking up above the old Turkish quarter. Wandering down shady alleyways past charming shops and cafes, we begin to feel that warm, self-congratulatory glow of travellers exploring another gastronomic world. Just as Cabernet Sauvignon made here doesn't taste like a Cab from Napa Valley or Bordeaux, so the fish, meat and vegetables that land on our plates have the specific flavours of this place — particularly the fresh sunny tomatoes, unmarred by refrigeration or air travel.

In the evening, we drive into the hills to a village with views over city and sea, to a wood-lined restaurant. Like almost everywhere in Limassol, Agios Epiktitos Tavern offers meze — here, numbering around 20 different plates: a great way to explore the menu. But the quantity is daunting. Instead, we order sparingly: zucchini and eggs; souvlakia (tasty skewered meat); and tender beef liver. A trio of guitar players circulates; the wine, from Kyperounda Winery, whose vineyards are just too distant for our visit, is delicious. Feral cats patrol the wall of the stone terrace, neon-shiny eyes watching for the copious leftovers they're no doubt accustomed to.

Back in town, far from such rusticity, we find Japanese-Peruvian fusion cuisine, conjured up by a chef who found fame in New York. Matsuhisa Limassol restaurant might seem an odd choice for a gastronomic exploration of Cyprus, but arguably chef Nobu Matsuhisa's elegant sushi and famous black miso cod — which went beautifully with the local Xynisteris and Viogniers and Maratheftikos — were as much the taste of this island's complicated history as hummus or souvlakia.

Matsuhisa made me think of Cyprus's ancient conquerors. Not least, the Byzantines who popularised the use of spices such as cumin and coriander; the Arabs, who surely brought hummus with them and may also have introduced stuffed vine leaves, here called *koupepia*; and the Persians, whose word for 'frying pan', '*tavas*', has come to name a local dish of slow-roasted beef or lamb. *Louvana*, a puree of yellow split peas, probably came from Greece; even Cyprus's tacky egg-and-chips joints owe something to 20th-century holidaymaking colonisers. It seems, then, that gastronomic authenticity, like architectural beauty, is sometimes simply a case of waiting a few hundred years.

Limassol's nearest airports include Paphos and Larnaca, which are typically served from the UK by airlines including EasyJet. *easyjet.com*. For the latest on safe travel and border restrictions, please see *fco.gov.uk*

IMAGES: ZAMBARTAS WINERY; STOCKFOOD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NEIGHBOURHOOD

MUMBAI

Mumbai's spectacularly diverse neighbourhoods are home to everything from glitzy Bollywood studios to grand architecture and a national park that's famed for its leopards. Words: Jamie Lafferty

Not for nothing is Mumbai called Maximum City. There are two Londons' worth of people living here in an area less than half the size of the British capital and five million people a day use the creaking train network. It's hard to imagine this city has ever been entirely quiet, or that the scents of incense and fried food have failed to comingle on a hot afternoon. Another of its nicknames is the City of Dreams, a place where Bollywood stars are revered as demigods. A first-time visitor won't fail to notice that the spectre of poverty seems to lurk around every corner, too, but with a booming construction sector, and the Mumbai Metro project slowly transforming an ailing transport infrastructure, Mumbai is moving steadily, noisily, vibrantly into a hopeful new era.

IMAGES: GETTY; ALAMY

FROM LEFT: Flower market in Mumbai; Auto rickshaws in Bandra

Bandra

I'm listening to a new recording in a Bollywood sound studio and it's awful and pitiful and embarrassing. If I was reviewing this performance, it would be entirely negative. I'd say that the singer sounds nervous, for one thing, but fundamentally devoid of ability, for another. I'd add that whatever his day job is, he should be kept well away from the 121-year-old Bollywood industry, which requires maximum pizazz and pep, not to mention talent and confidence.

I can say all of these things because I am the singer and, despite my mumbled protestations, guide Raj Nagrani has just cajoled me into murdering Neil Diamond's Forever in Blue Jeans at 11am on a Thursday. It isn't the first time I've mangled that song, but it's the only time I've done so sober.

"We'll send you the remix," beams Raj, apparently not offended by my effort. We're on the lot of SJ Studios, one of several Bollywood production companies dotted around Mumbai. As well as this sound studio, there are sets — some are permanent, but others are just empty floors that can be rapidly customised into almost any backdrop. When filming isn't taking place, tours are offered.

Around 2,000 movies come out every year in India, a ludicrously high volume (the US churns out around 600) that demands constant production. The most lavish and star-studded are all made here in Mumbai.

Prior to arriving for this studio tour, Raj had driven me around the neighbourhood of Bandra to get a better sense of the industry. Unlike Hollywood, Bollywood doesn't exist as a physical place, but Bandra is comparable to Beverly Hills. Many of the industry's top stars have properties here, which fans are known to gather outside in the hope of catching a glimpse of their heroes.

Several producers and directors also live here; Bandra is unmistakably the land of The Haves. Car horns are less constant here, the roads are clearer. There's a huge private hospital, a Starbucks, nightclubs and, more generally, an unmistakable atmosphere of affluence. At the southern tip of the peninsula on which Bandra lies, close to the ruins of an old Portuguese fort, stands the Taj Lands End hotel. Its House of Nomad bar is where the stars come to sign massive deals over cocktails.

Raj talks about the business as a sort of religion. "I thought cricket was India's unofficial religion," I joke. "It's popular, sure, but they have seasons," he replies. "Bollywood is important every day."

When in Mumbai

1

MUMBAI SANDWICH

This affordable streetfood staple typically contains beetroot, boiled potatoes, cucumbers, tomatoes, onion and mint chutney.

2

CRICKET

Cricket is revered in Mumbai, as it is throughout the subcontinent. The Indian Premier League team here is the Mumbai Indians, whose home — no laughing now — is the Wankhede Stadium.

3

COLABA MARKET

If you don't like haggling, then this absolutely isn't the place for you. Just a couple of blocks away from the opulence of the Taj Mahal Palace hotel, the relentless vibrance of the Colaba Market is a handy reminder that you're still very much in India.

4

LEOPOLD CAFE

A city institution since 1871, the Leopold Cafe was one of the targets of the city's 2008 terrorist attacks. It's since come to be a symbol of defiance and cherished by most Mumbaikars.

5

MARINE DRIVE

If you've overindulged on the paneer and roti, head out for an early-morning run along Marine Drive. You'll be joined by hundreds or thousands of locals also keen to get their exercise fix — whether that's a jog or a spot of yoga — before the sun becomes too intense. Later, couples and families emerge to enjoy a seaside perambulation along the two-and-a-quarter-mile promenade.

Fort

"They used to say that the streets were built by opium and the buildings by cotton," says Sneha Patil, momentarily sounding like she's been chasing the dragon herself. The guide from Khaki Tours is taking me on the popular Castle2Gateway walk, which focuses on the colonial history around the Fort neighbourhood at the south of Mumbai's peninsula.

Although this part of India had already been colonised by the Portuguese and Dutch, it went through an economic explosion under British rule. At the heart of that boom time were the opium and cotton trades.

To come to Mumbai and not visit Fort is akin to visiting New York City for the first time and avoiding Manhattan — it's possible, but surely not advisable.

This former economic hub remains one of the city's most prosperous areas and is, by far, its grandest, architecturally. As the opium and cotton barons grew rich, so they erected vanity projects around the city. The majority still stand today.

"This is one of my favourite spots in the city," says Sneha, as she looks for a spot on Kala Ghoda Square where we're less likely to get run over by a marauding auto rickshaw. Spinning on the spot, she gives me a grand tour of wildly varying architectural styles.

"From here, you can see the Rajabai Clock Tower, which is Venetian gothic, then the former Watson's Hotel, which is an industrial pre-fab. Next to that we have the Army and Navy Building which is typically neoclassical. Next there's gothic, then Elphinstone College, which is renaissance revival, then come round here and we have traditional Indian and then finally art deco. It's really remarkable."

We move on, pushing south towards Mumbai's most famous landmarks: the Gateway of India and the Taj Mahal Palace hotel. They too date back to the British Raj, and their stories are the stuff of local legend. The satisfyingly chunky, endlessly photographed Gateway was famously built to commemorate the arrival to India of King-Emperor George V and Queen-Empress Mary, the first British monarchs to visit the country. "Except it wasn't finished until 13 years after they were here," says Sneha with a smile. And what about the Taj Palace, just across the road? "Well, the story is that Mr Jamsetji Tat [an Indian industrialist] decided to build it after being turned away from Watson's Hotel because he wasn't white."

And is that true? "Well, I like the story anyway," says Sneha knowingly.

Sanjay Gandhi National Park

I've always loved Indian English and the way it clings to archaic verbs and half-forgotten idioms. Indians don't argue, they quarrel; they don't think someone is nuts, but that they 'have bats in their belfry'. It's a variant of the language that bathes in hyperbole and quirky idioms, whether that's a 'best exotic hotel' or a 'cryptic and elusive predator' — the latter is a phrase naturalist Sagar Mahajan uses to describe leopards. We're in the north of Mumbai, on the edge of the Sanjay Gandhi National Park, just 20 minutes from the international airport. This is one of the very few national parks in the world that falls within a city's boundary, and it makes up the majority of Mumbai's green space. Amazingly, it's also home to an estimated 50 leopards — it's difficult to believe that they have 20 million people for neighbours.

"We've 46sq miles of wooded areas and so this is the densest population of leopards in India — normally they'd require a lot more space," explains the guide from the Bombay Natural History Society as we follow a two-hour nature trail from the Society's Conservation Education Centre.

As well as the big cats, the park is home to four types of deer and over 170 butterfly species. Around 250 species of bird have been spotted here too. Unfortunately, this includes the crow, the ugly call of which seems to drown out other more melodious songs. Elsewhere in Mumbai — as is the case in all of India's megacities — these scavengers are usually accompanied by stray dogs, but they're not in evidence here. There's a good reason for this: "When we study leopards, we have to look at their diet. Around 60% of what they eat is dogs, mostly strays," Sagar tells me.

The leopards have been observed hunting rats. "What I like about the leopards is how adaptable they are," says Sagar, when I ask him about this. Were it not for the danger they also pose to humans, leopards would surely be a very welcome form of pest control in other parts of the country.

But on our trek, we don't meet any. This is partly because it's daytime and leopards are mainly nocturnal, but also because only 25% of the park has been made accessible to the public. The rest remains wild and, although we might be on the fringes of India's most populous city — and an abundant supply of canines — the felines, when given a choice, will always prefer to go unseen.

IMAGES: ALAMY; GETTY

FROM LEFT: the ubiquitous Mumbai sandwich; the Gateway of India; Kanheri Caves, a popular attraction in Sanjay Gandhi National Park; spotted deer, one of four deer species found in the park

MORE INFO

tajhotels.com
khakitours.com
sgnp.maharashtra.gov.in

G ADVENTURES offers a four-day Mumbai itinerary, including a guided nature walk, Bollywood city tour and Fort area heritage walk as part of its TailorMade tour offering. From £999 per person, B&B, flights and other meals not included. *gadventures.com*

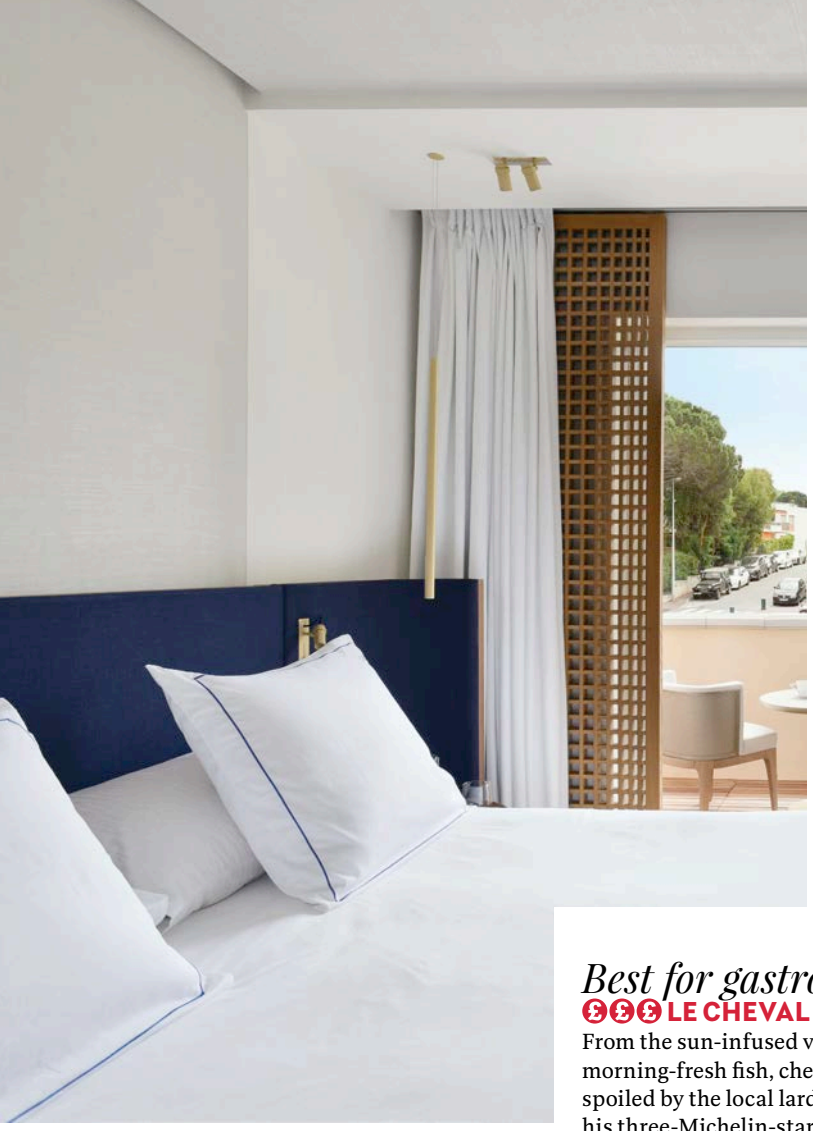
SLEEP

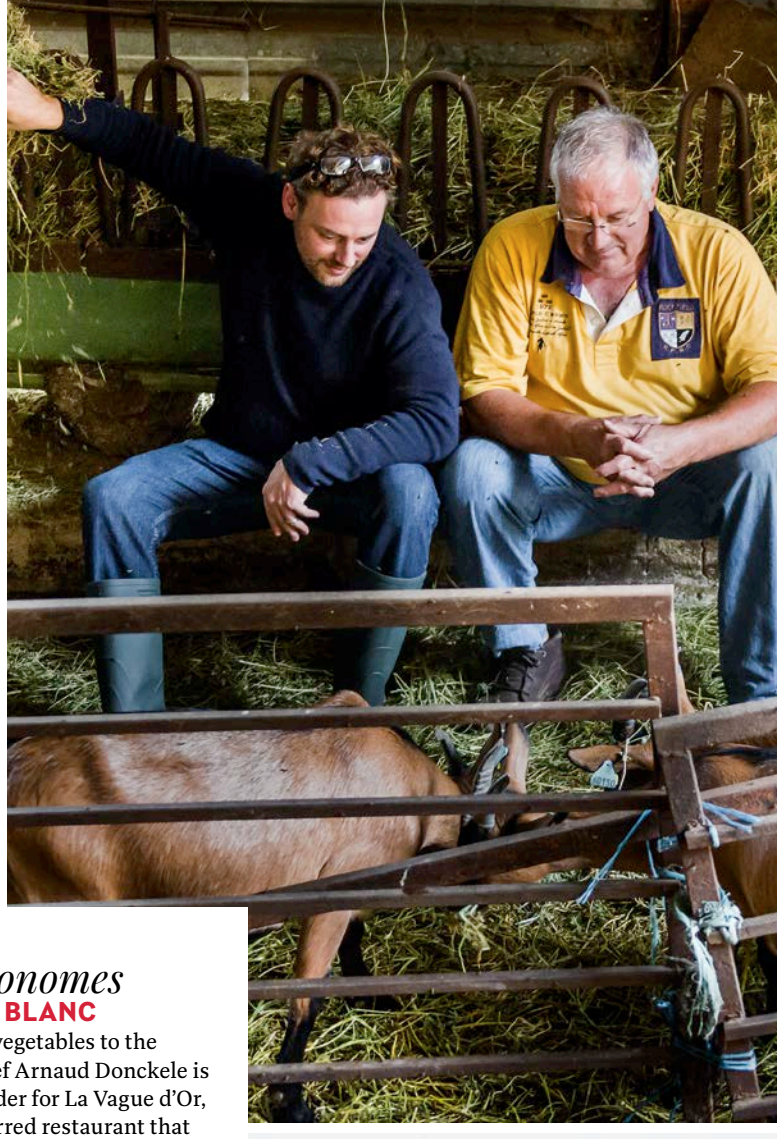
SAINT-TROPEZ

High-end hideaways, chic townhouses and plush hotels hidden in the pines — it's all here in the Côte d'Azur's ritziest resort. Words: Carolyn Boyd

Saint-Tropez is known for being the showy playground of jet-setting fashionistas, but dig a little deeper and you'll discover plenty of Provençal character. From the Place des Lices, the central square where traders tout local produce, it's a short stroll up to the 17th-century Citadel. From here, gaze out over the terracotta roofs of pretty yellow townhouses and admire the coast as it curls around the Gulf of Saint-Tropez to nearby Sainte-Maxime. Indeed, the best beaches are a little further out of town, including Plage de Pampelonne where a bikini-clad Brigitte Bardot put Saint-Tropez on the map in the 1956 film *And God Created Woman*. When it comes to accommodation, the town's glamorous reputation inevitably pushes prices up, but with exquisite design, gourmet cuisine and jaw-dropping settings, they're well worth the splurge. More reasonable rates can be found if you hunt a little harder, though be prepared to forego the same level of luxury.

IMAGE: AWL IMAGES





Best for gastronomes

LE CHEVAL BLANC

From the sun-infused vegetables to the morning-fresh fish, chef Arnaud Donckele is spoiled by the local larder for La Vague d'Or, his three-Michelin-starred restaurant that looks out over Le Cheval Blanc's cypress-shaded terrace. The acclaimed restaurant is the highlight of this hotel, but with a sublime Guerlain spa, an infinity pool and a private beach where therapists apply your sun cream with a facial massage, there are even more reasons to stay. With just 30 rooms, the interior design draws on cobalt-blue, white and neutral tones, while also celebrating the work of local ceramist Roger Capron, a contemporary of Cocteau and Picasso. The service, meanwhile, is impeccable.

ROOMS: From €600 (£508), room only.
chevalblanc.com

Best for year-round escapes
£ VILLA COSY

Summer is when Saint-Tropez really swings into life, so a number of hotels shut up shop for the winter season. Villa Cosy, however, just a short walk from the centre in the town's hilly suburbs, is one of the few that's open all year. Its 23 rooms are decorated in natural colour schemes, with wooden floors and stylish furniture, and are set between several mansions and their courtyards. Several of the rooms offer terraces that open onto the hotel's courtyards and two swimming pools — both kept a balmy 28C all year. The courtyards are a sun trap, too, and so are ideal for breakfast al fresco. There's a small spa with a hammam and sauna, along with two treatment rooms with Sothys products.

ROOMS: From €230 (£192), room only.
villacosy.com

Best for fitness fans
£££ LA RESERVE RAMATUELLE

Set high above a hidden cove near the medieval village of Ramatuelle, six miles from Saint-Tropez, La Reserve makes an ideal bolthole for those who want to both switch off and tone up. As well as a state-of-the-art gym and indoor and outdoor pools, personal training sessions include such as activities as cardio, yoga, Pilates and aquabiking, while lovers of the great outdoors can get their hearts pumping with Nordic walking and jogging. Sustenance either comes from the two-Michelin-starred La Voile, or a more casual rooftop Japanese restaurant. The hotel's Philippe Starck-designed beach club on the Plage de Pampelonne is a must, too.

ROOMS: From €850 (£785), room only.
lareserve-ramatuelle.com

Best for wellness warriors

££ LILY OF THE VALLEY

Interior designer Philippe Starck has brought his signature eclectic style to the Cote d'Azur with this high-end hideaway, set above the beach at La Croix-Valmer, just over the peninsula from Saint-Tropez. With collections of bold modernist prints and an African vibe, the decor is striking, but the hotel's real raison d'être is its wellbeing space, set in a 21,500sq ft space around and beneath one of its swimming pools. Whether it's fitness, detox, weight loss or simply some R&R, there's a programme and a team of trainers and therapists on hand to make it happen. Don't forget to call in at the restaurant and its terrace for views of the wooded coastline towards Cavalaire-sur-Mer.

ROOMS: From €383 (£324), room only.
lilyofthevalley.com

Summer chic
on the Riviera

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(*) "Summer Chic package" at www.lenegresco.com in a deluxe sea view room, junior suite or sea view suite including the buffet breakfast at La Rotonde. Beach mat and parasol provided free of charge. Offer available from June 21 to September 30, 2020 inclusive.

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LEADING HOTELS®

Best for retro glamour

££ HOTEL BYBLOS

If Brigitte Bardot put Saint-Tropez on the map, then Hotel Byblos was designed to keep it there. Sadly for Lebanese billionaire Jean-Prosper Gay-Para, who built the hotel in 1967 to woo Ms Bardot, his grand gesture didn't result in reciprocated love. The hotel has maintained its star quality, however, with Beyoncé, George Clooney and Lady Gaga among its guests, and its nightclub, Les Caves du Roy, is where Mick and Bianca Jagger had their wedding party. With 91 rooms and a splendid cocoon-like spa, the hotel has bold, colourful decor throughout with striking features by ceramicist Roger Capron.

ROOMS: From €357 (£300), room only.
byblos.com

Best for setting sail

£ LA BASTIDE DE SAINT-TROPEZ

Those who enjoy admiring the boats in Saint-Tropez's harbour should book into the Bastide de Saint-Tropez — guests can hire its 72ft Sanlorenzo Yacht to explore the coastline. Landlubbers, meanwhile, will be spoiled by the hotel's beautiful grounds, which feature olive trees, fig trees and perfumed blooms around an idyllic pool. Its 26 rooms are set between four Provençal farmhouses and are decorated in classic regional style.

ROOMS: From £201, room only. *relaischateaux.com*
bastide-saint-tropez.com

Best for budget stays

£ HOTEL B LODGE

If you've blown your budget on Champagne rather than accommodation, this spot is a good place to rest your head. Set in the centre of town, its 12 cosy rooms are decorated in neutrals and rich browns, and are spread over three floors, some with a terrace. There's a small pavement cafe, Café Barock, which is open until the wee hours. It's worth noting that there's no lift, so if you're not planning on travelling light, it's wise to book a lower floor room.

ROOMS: €120 (£107), B&B. *hotel-b-lodge.com*

Best for lovebirds

£ £ PAN DEÏ PALAIS

Bardot wasn't the first woman to set hearts aflutter in Saint-Tropez. Back in 1835, a French general fell in love with a Punjab princess called Bannu Pan Dei and built the lavish Pan Deï Palais to celebrate. Traditional Provençal mansion from the outside, the hotel has a distinctly exotic feel within. The dozen rooms include features such as four-poster beds and fresh orchids. A gourmet restaurant serves fresh, local produce.

ROOMS: £372 (£343), room only. *relaischateaux.com*
pandei.com

Best for a secret escape

£££ LOU PINET

Squirrelled away on the edge of town, Lou Pinet is the new kid on the luxury hotel block. Opened in June 2019, the hotel has 34 rooms set in several mansions surrounding its outdoor pool, which is shaded by two elegant stone pines ('Lou Pinet' means 'pine' in Provençal). Interiors celebrate the colour, vibrancy and creativity of the Cote d'Azur. There's a small spa, while the relaxing restaurant has a menu featuring premium meat and seafood.

ROOMS: From €430 (£362), B&B. *loupinet.com*

Best for shopaholics

££ WHITE 1921

With chic outlets galore, Saint-Tropez is shopping heaven, and this boutique hotel is perfectly situated for it on the central square, Place des Lices. With the best shopping streets in town on your doorstep, it's easy to drop off your purchases before heading out to buy some more. With just eight rooms and suites designed, as the name suggests, in breezy white hues, there's also a sophisticated Champagne bar in which to wind down after a hard day of shopping.

ROOMS: From €330 (£277) room-only. *white1921.com*

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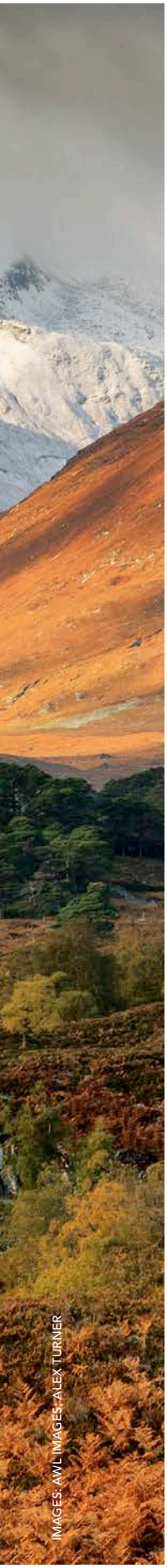
THE POWER OF PLACE

Travel has the potential to change each of us: the people we meet and the challenges we undertake in the places we visit can greatly affect who we are. This special cover story is a celebration of that transformative, magical power. A range of experts, from athletes to adventurers, reveal the destinations and experiences that have changed their lives and shaped how they look at the world

STORIES BY **ADE ADEPITAN, DOUG ALLAN, FELICITY ASTON, JULIA BRADBURY, EMILY CHAPPELL, WILLIAM DALRYMPLE, ALASTAIR HUMPHREYS, PICO IYER, CHRISTINA LAMB, ROBERT MACFARLANE, RAY MEARS, ALICE MORRISON & LEVISON WOOD**

COMPILED BY **SARAH BARRELL**

Loch Affric, surrounded by pine forests and the mountains of Kintail, Cairngorms National Park, Scotland



IMAGES: AWL IMAGES; ALEX TURNER

UNITED KINGDOM

SECOND NATURE

ROBERT MACFARLANE

"Literature and landscape are the intertwining braids of my life."

WHAT FIRST DREW YOU TO THE UK'S WILD REGIONS?
Mr Kipling Cherry Bakewells. Perhaps not the answer you'd expected; I should explain. My childhood holidays were invariably spent in mountainous regions — Connemara, the Lakes, Snowdonia and above all the Scottish Highlands. My parents had to lure my brother and me into the hills, and they did so with cakes and sweets, ruthlessly. My summer birthday cake would often be a cherry bakewell with a single candle in it, on a windy mountaintop. Strange are the things that set us going.

HAS WRITING ABOUT LANDSCAPES HELPED YOU UNDERSTAND THEM MORE?
Literature and landscape are the intertwining braids of my life, certainly. I read my way up mountains before I walked up them, and I walked up them before I wrote about them. Now I find that place deepens page, and vice versa. Nan Shepherd, author of *The Living Mountain*, taught me to see the Cairngorms completely differently, and indeed to approach mountains differently. Nan preferred passes to peaks, an ethos of pilgrimage to one of conquest, and she spoke of walking 'into' the mountains, rather than only up them. J A Baker's incandescent masterpiece *The Peregrine* sprang the much-maligned landscape of coastal Essex into astonishment for me, and ignited a fascination with peregrines that's tracked me back to my own city of Cambridge, where a pair now breeds on the gothic stonework above the main street.

WHERE HAVE YOU FELT MOST HUMBLED BY NATURE?
Certainly in Arctic Norway, alone on the windward and seaward side of the Lofoten archipelago in winter, when I crossed the central ridge of that island range to reach a vast sea cave in which, thousands of years previously, iron oxide had been used to paint dancing red figures on the cave wall. A northerly blizzard blew in, trapping me in the bay without mobile signal for some days. I was both frightened and awed by what I discovered there, and what happened to my experience of time on that wild frontier.

WHAT TYPE OF TERRAIN MOST INSPIRES YOU?
I live in Cambridge, a landscape so flat you can fax it, as the old joke goes. The landscapes that inspire me most are still mountainous ones, though. When I'm in the mountains, I find myself whooping and cheering involuntarily, whistling, singing, hugging my friends spontaneously. "There are places where the natural movement of the heart is upwards," wrote the mountaineer-mystic W H Murray. We all know a version of that feeling, those places, and for me it's in the high mountains, especially in winter.

HAVE YOUR RECENT EXPLORATIONS OF THE SUBTERRANEAN WORLD SHIFTED YOUR FOCUS, OR ARE YOU STILL A SUMMIT-SEEKER AT HEART?
The darkness of the world's interior holds greater mysteries than the sunlight of the world's summits. We know so little of what lies beneath us; it's the space into which we've long placed that which we love most (the bodies of our revered dead, precious goods) and that which we fear most (nuclear waste, secrets, the murdered). So, I'm both more fascinated and more appalled by the underworld than by the peaks, if that makes sense.

IN OUR UNCERTAIN TIMES, WHAT PLACES ARE YOU DERIVING COMFORT FROM?
A small beechwood on the outskirts of Cambridge, reachable along a field path perhaps 50 years old, which leads past hedgerows foaming with blackthorn and hawthorn blossom. It's a modest place, planted by the community, and giving shelter and succour to hundreds of thousands of people over the decades. Right now, the green-gold light falling through the young beech leaves, the wrens whirring between bushes; these remind me of patterns of being and circuits of life that exceed our own suddenly crumbling systems and structures.

Robert Macfarlane is the prize-winning author of Landmarks, The Lost Words, The Old Ways, and Underland, all published by Penguin Books

TIBET

THE ROOFTOP OF MY BEING

PICO IYER

"Clear and elevated as I could never remember feeling before. Freed of every distraction."

I was 28 years old and enjoying the kind of life I might have dreamed of as a boy: a 25th-floor office in Midtown Manhattan, a stimulating job writing on international affairs, a studio apartment next to a one occupied by a gaggle of runway models. Yet something in me intuited that the enticements and exhilarations of this world might prove so all-consuming that I'd wake up one day, aged 70, and realise I hadn't lived at all.

So, I asked my bosses for a six-month leave of absence and flew to Tokyo. Within a few days, I was in Hiroshima; silent, watching red and yellow and emerald lanterns sent floating down the Motoyasu River on the 40th anniversary of the dropping of the atomic bomb. Soon, I was staying in a broken room in Manila's red-light district, heading out each morning to join the demonstrations that would culminate in the toppling of Ferdinand Marcos through the nonviolent People Power Revolution. Later, I was riding an overnight train from Guangzhou to Beijing, stepping out to find the capital's wide streets entirely car-less, citizens in blue Mao jackets playing badminton in the main boulevards leading to Tiananmen Square.

The moment that transformed me, however, came after I flew to Lhasa, in Tibet. My parents had introduced me to Tibetan monks while I was a little boy, in Oxford, and as a teenager I'd made my first trip to Dharamsala (with my father) to meet the Dalai Lama. But nothing had prepared me for the shockingly blue skies on the plateau itself, the silence around the great monasteries of Drepung and Sera, the tear-streaked faces of pilgrims who'd walked 1,200 miles — some prostrating themselves every few steps — to see the Jokhang Temple by flickering candlelight. Lhasa then was still a cluster of whitewashed shops and houses under the protective gaze of the 1,000-roomed Potala Palace high above.

One bright September afternoon, I took the steep walk up to the home of the Dalai Lama, and, after passing through rooms full of statues and mandalas, stepped out onto a terrace to look across the valley. The elements had a sharpness I'd never seen, even at higher altitudes in the Andes. The monks chanting inside conferred an air of solemnity. The few other visitors were mostly pilgrims, excitedly buying scrolls near the rooms where their spiritual leaders once lived. At that moment, I felt not just on the 'rooftop of the world', as all the guidebooks had it; I was on the rooftop of my being, as clear and elevated as I could ever remember feeling before, freed of every distraction. By the end of my four-month journey across Asia, I'd decided to tell my bosses I was leaving my comfortable job and moving to Japan, where still I live, 35 years later. But it was that one moment in Tibet, in the midst of all the oppression and destruction that culture had suffered, that reminded me if I didn't follow some intuition to leave the familiar world behind, I could remain an exile all my life.

Pico Iyer is the author of 15 books, most recently, Autumn Light and its companion piece A Beginner's Guide to Japan, both published by Bloomsbury Publishing. picoiyerjourneys.com

A Buddhist ceremony involving butter tea, taking place at Sera Monastery, Lhassa, Tibet
TOP: Resident monks stroll through Jokhang Temple, Lhasa

IMAGES: GETTY; AWL IMAGES; DEREK SHAPTON; BECOMINGX/SAM MCELWEE

UNITED KINGDOM

GREAT ESCAPES CLOSE TO HOME

ALASTAIR HUMPHREYS

"My monthly tree-climb reminds me that wildness, escape and the natural world are waiting everywhere."

Perhaps my biggest perspective-shift about the power the natural world has on the soul came sitting in the branches of an oak tree minutes from my home. The buds of new leaves glowed lime green in the spring sun. Bluebells carpeted the wood, and the dawn chorus rang out in jubilation after the quiet winter months. I noticed the seasonal changes because I climb this tree every month, scheduled into my online calendar alongside all the meetings, tax deadlines and family commitments. This lunch-hour foray may seem scant adventure in comparison with trekking in the Himalayas or the jungle mysteries of Costa Rica. But I disagree. For my monthly tree-climb reminds me that wildness, escape and the natural world are waiting everywhere.

This mind-shift to champion the small and local developed through what I call 'microadventures'. After years chasing conventional, 'epic' wilderness experiences around the globe, it occurred to me to look outside my front door. I walked a mere two-mile radius around my home. Along the way, I discovered places I'd never seen before; I'd become an explorer. I found spiderwebs jewelled with dew, the aroma of cut grass, willowherb and cow parsley. The epiphany came when I challenged myself to seek adventure in the most boring, built-up place I could think of: the M25. A friend and I spent a winter week walking a lap of the motorway, through snow-covered fields and along a web of footpaths and lanes. One evening, the orange glow of London's lights illuminated a frozen field as we crunched through the snow towards a village and, we hoped, a pub. The wind was raw, my feet hurt, my belly rumbled in competition with the motorway traffic. I grinned at my friend, raised my arms in triumph and yelled in delight at the moon, "This is it! This is the wild, raw universe unrolling before my eyes!"

Adventurer, author and motivational speaker Alastair Humphreys is the author of Microadventures: Local Discoveries for Great Escapes, published by William Collins. alastairhumphreys.com

AUSTRALIA

A TESTAMENT TO HUMAN RESILIENCE

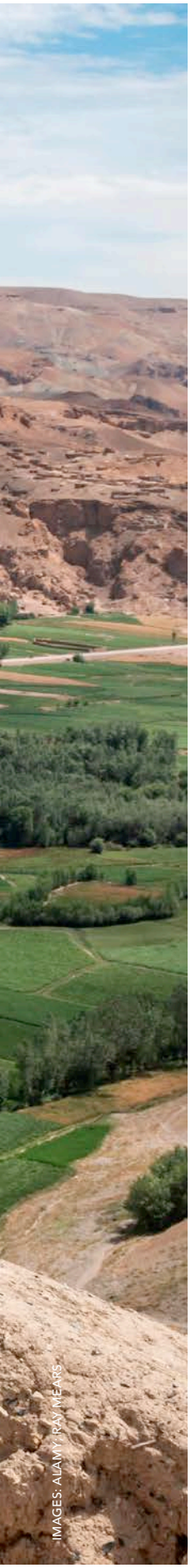
RAY MEARS

"You can't be unchanged by experiencing the aftermath of a bushfire like this. What really made an impact on me is just how strong the Australian people are."

Kangaroo Island has had bushfires before, but this year's was unprecedented by local standards. It moved across a 30-mile front at 60mph, with flames 330ft high. I visited one particular farm that had lost 600 sheep — and if you've ever met a sheep farmer, you'll know just how much they love and depend on their animals. Another 500 had survived, but the shearing shed hadn't, so the farmers had improvised a platform and were tackling the remaining sheep. The fleeces were absolutely filthy, thick with soot and dust, forcing the farmers to change blades every two sheep. When I looked into the farmers' eyes, I could see the hurt and the loss — but at the same time, you just know that they're going to be alright.

In February, bushcraft expert Ray Mears travelled to South Australia to document the impact of the 2020 bushfires on its landscape and wildlife. raymears.com

Sweeping views across the Bamiyan Valley, Afghanistan



IMAGES: ALAMY; RAY MEARS

AFGHANISTAN

A FOREIGN CORRESPONDENT IS BORN

CHRISTINA LAMB

"I was just 22 the first time I went to Afghanistan, and it turned everything I'd known or valued upside down."

Sometimes, if I catch the fresh scent of pine trees or see a fragment of deep-blue lapis lazuli, it takes me back. Back to Herat, stamping my feet to keep warm in a dusty shop crammed with muskets and antiquities, as I watch Sultan Hamidy, the glassblower, conjure up goblets of jade-green and cobalt-blue, telling me that for every one he blows he breathes the name of one who's died in the war. Back to Mazar-i-Sharif and the cloud of snow-white doves swirling round the Blue Mosque, where legend has it any grey bird will be turned white. Or Kabul, in November's pomegranate season, drinking thick juice from a roadside grinder with a giant wheel or sucking on ruby-red pips shining like jewels.

I was just 22 the first time I went to Afghanistan and it turned everything I'd known or valued upside down.

I had no links with the country but had ended up in neighbouring Pakistan after an unexpected invitation to a wedding in Karachi. I fell in love with the place and took a crowded minibus called a Flying Coach up the Grand Trunk Road to Peshawar, which any Afghan will tell you used to be part of Afghanistan, and many believe still is.

In my bag was a pack of letters written in black ink by a Pakistani friend to local contacts and a copy of Rudyard Kipling's novel, *Kim*.

The bus journey ended at sundown in the Old City, which, it seemed, hadn't changed very much since Kipling's day. Wooden-framed buildings leaning on each other, streets filled with men wearing black eyeliner and silver-embroidered slippers with curled toes, rifles casually slung across their backs.

I soon found my way to the Storytellers' Bazaar, where a boy played an accordion and long-bearded elders sipped green tea and talked about battles as if they'd happened yesterday. We had a shared history, Britain and Afghanistan having fought three wars between 1878 and 1919, and they loved to remind me they'd won (well, at least twice).

Afghanistan lay the other side of the Khyber Pass and the jagged mountains we could see in the distance. I began travelling in and out with the *mujahideen*, who were fighting the soldiers of the Soviet army, which had occupied their country. The air was so crisp and the mountains full of pines, and the villages where we stayed were the poorest places I'd ever seen. Yet everyone we met shared all they had — a little tea, dry bread and occasionally some yoghurt or dried mulberries. I'd never met people so hospitable, or such storytellers, even though most were illiterate. It made me realise they had values we'd forgotten.

I never imagined then that Afghanistan would become so much part of my life, a place I'd visit frequently over the following 32 years. Perhaps your first assignment as a foreign correspondent always has a special pull, like a first love affair.

When I hear people talk of the country as a 'dusty land of men with beards and guns', it's true that it's been at war for 40 years and that Afghans fight even with kites and boiled eggs. But it's also a land of poetry and pomegranates, and I dream of the day when there's peace and I can visit with my son, who's almost the age I was that first time.

Christina Lamb OBE is the chief foreign correspondent at The Sunday Times and author of Farewell Kabul: From Afghanistan to a More Dangerous World, published by William Collins. christinalamb.net

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NOVA SCOTIA
CANADA

Chobe National Park, Botswana, provides a migration corridor for elephants to protected areas in the north east

BOTSWANA

WALKING WITH ELEPHANTS

LEVISON WOOD

IMAGES: GETTY; ALBERTO CACERES

"I walked the length of the River Nile, where I saw with my own eyes the reality of conservation on the front line."

Walking from Zimbabwe into Botswana last summer, I spent a month living and breathing elephants. I walked alongside a herd as they followed their migration route towards the Okavango Delta, accompanied by a San Bushman called Kane. Like Kane, the other local people I met lived alongside elephants, the numbers of which have plummeted across Africa as human populations have risen, encroaching into wild habitats.

My views on elephant protection used to be pretty simple: the bad guys were the ones killing elephants for the tusks, and the good guys were the people out there trying to stop it. But the people I met in the villages and farms along our journey weren't bad or unsympathetic; they were struggling to feed their families and make a livelihood. A herd of marauding elephants eating crops, destroying fences or threatening people is a real danger. The complexity of elephant conservation is that of humans and elephants needing the same stretches of land to live. It's a tough question to answer, let alone to solve. Kane put it neatly: "If you love elephants so much, why don't you take some back to England and put them in the Queen's parks. See how long they last." He had me there. At one point during our search for the magnificent beasts, on hearing a faint, deep rumble, Kane's eyes lit up. "Lions," he whispered. "They've got a kill." It was a buffalo being gorged on by three fully grown male lions. "When I was a child," Kane said, "we'd wait for the lions to have their fair share, then go and help ourselves to some meat. Are you hungry?"

I thought he was joking but, following him, we sneaked towards the lions until we were just three metres away. Standing up quickly, the lions grunted: there was a tense stand-off, then, suddenly, the cats ran for the shade of a nearby tree, almost as if to say, 'Go on then, if you must'. We crept up to the dead buffalo to inspect the carcass, lions looking on.

"We know how to live with animals," Kane shrugged with the air of a philosopher. "If you want to save them, you have to work with the locals."

That trip taught me an important conservation lesson: glossy wildlife films are meaningless without the true story of how people survive and thrive in the same environment as wild animals.

Adventurer, author and broadcaster Levison Wood is an ambassador for the Tusk Trust. Walking with Elephants, a three-part Channel 4 documentary set in Botswana, aired in May. levisonwood.com


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ALASKA

TAKING IT TO EXTREMES

EMILY CHAPPELL

A remote mountain highway in Alaska during winter

"I hadn't anticipated how much this cold would weaken me"

I've never been as frightened as I was the day I rode towards Glacier View. Although barely three days from Anchorage, civilisation felt a long way behind me. My tyres rustled over a thick crust of compacted snow as I pedalled north, and the Chugach Mountains towering above shone whiter with every hour that passed. The cold felt malevolent, gnawing painfully at my fingers and toes, clawing at my throat and nostrils. The sunlight taunted me, promising a warmth it refused to deliver.

I hadn't anticipated how much this cold would weaken me. I'd been covering distances like this for years, but I'd rarely ridden so slowly, unable to muster the spark needed to cycle at anything above walking pace. I was, I understood, at the mercy of a simple and brutal equation. The energy in my body was finite. A litre of porridge (with butter, almonds and chocolate chips) would normally have seen me through most of a day's riding, but out here, my body was burning through it at a much higher rate, trying to maintain its usual 37C in an environment more than 60C colder.

The occasional houses I passed were shut up for winter, drifts of snow in their driveways. My only potential heat source was a puny multi-fuel stove, which I doubted my cold-clumsy fingers would be able to wrestle from my pannier (never mind assemble and light), and the only food I could access was a stash of peanut butter cups in my bar bag.

With time, I adapted. In my sleeping bag, my body became a furnace that dried damp gloves and socks and melted the water that had frozen solid in its flask. I learned to dress efficiently, so that my sweat didn't line my jacket with frost, and to keep food where I could access it without removing my gloves.

A month later, I stood at the junction with the Cassiar Highway, a 500-mile road through the British Columbian backcountry. Unlike the busy Alaska Highway, with its compacted snow and friendly truckers, the Cassiar was hidden under drifts, with just a couple of tracks to suggest that vehicles had ever passed this way. I glanced between the two roads. The thrill of fear, familiar now, had lost much of its sting. I turned south and set off into the drifts.

Athlete, author and former cycle courier Emily Chappell is the author of Where There's A Will. thatemilychappell.com

IMAGE: GETTY

AFRICA

AFRICA, BEYOND THE HEADLINES

ADE ADEPITAN

"To see someone like me, with a disability, in a place synonymous with flak jackets and tanks: it's not what the world expects"

HOW DID YOU COME UP WITH THE IDEA FOR YOUR TV SERIES, *AFRICA WITH ADE ADEPITAN*?

It's something I'd wanted to do for decades. As a child watching the news in the UK, all the images I ever saw of the African continent were of war, corruption or poverty. I wanted to change that. So, for the four-part BBC Two series, I travelled through what, as we aimed to show, is such a fun, exciting, diverse continent — not one homogenous place. It was part travel, part current affairs. I also wanted to do a homecoming story of sorts, as I moved from Nigeria to London when I was three years old.

WHAT MADE THE BIGGEST IMPACT ON YOU?

When we travelled from Cape Verde to Senegal, we followed the story of the slave trade, seeing the places where slaves were kept in unfathomable conditions. Some of the most sought-after slaves came from the Uraba tribe in Nigeria, where I was born. It was a shocking realisation for me.

WHERE CHALLENGED YOUR PERCEPTIONS THE MOST?

Mogadishu, Somalia. To go to a place that's so notorious for death and destruction was significant. To see someone like me, with a disability, in a place synonymous with flak jackets and tanks: it's not what the world expects. We had security with us around the clock, undercover guards and such a short time in which to get the stories of these incredible characters.

There were women playing basketball who leave home for the court without saying anything to their families. Once they were behind closed doors, off came the burkas and on went the tracksuits. They knew that if they were caught, they risked being stoned to death, but they wanted to change the world for other women. As an athlete, I've never risked death to play ball.

Adedoyin Olayiwola 'Ade' Adepitan MBE is a TV presenter and wheelchair basketball player. Africa with Ade Adepitan was broadcast on BBC Two last year. adeadepitan.com

The Amazigh village of Aroumd in Morocco's High Atlas Mountains

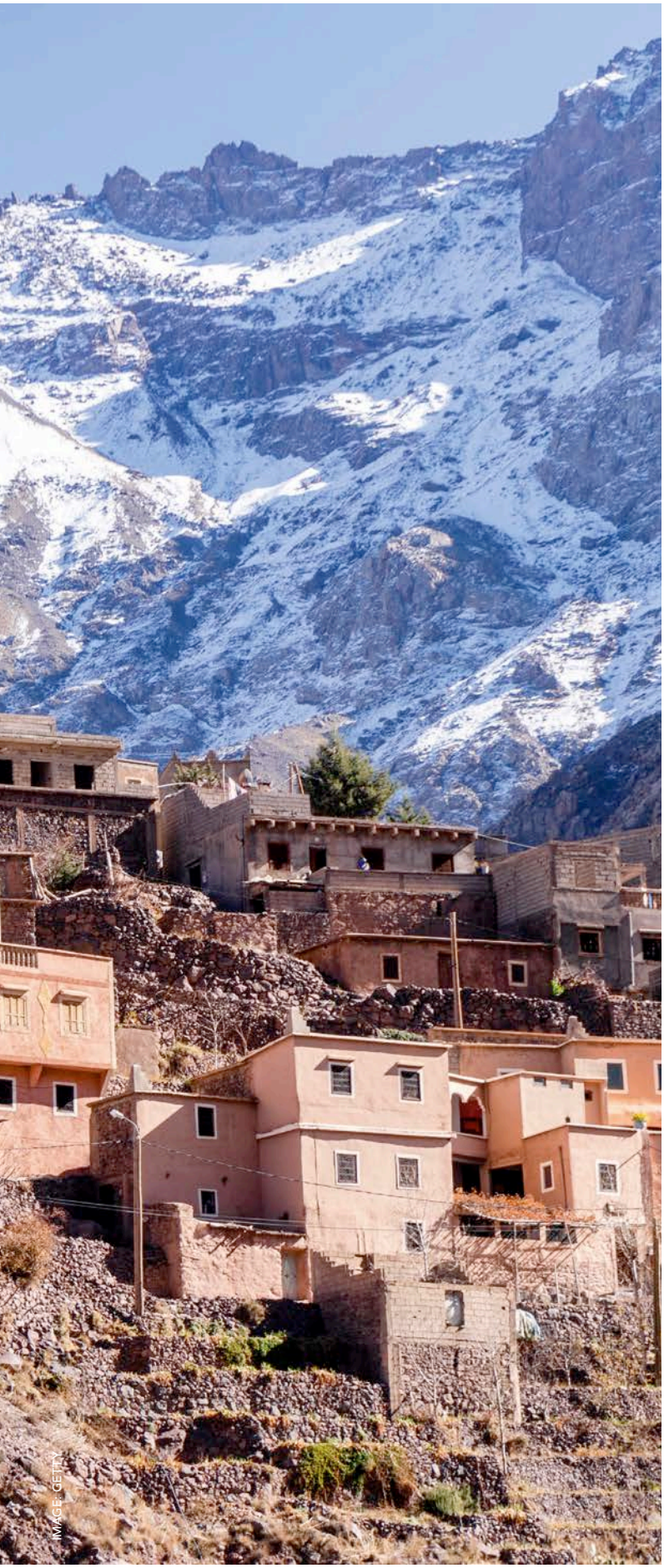

IMAGE: GETTY

MOROCCO

COMING HOME

ALICE MORRISON

"Looking out at the glory of the mountains, with her warm hand in mine and the sun on our faces, brought me a simple and complete happiness"

My most recent expedition took me 1,000 miles across the Sahara, crossing endless golden dunes, facing weeks of moon-like barren wastelands and watching hundreds of camels gallop towards a well for water. These unforgettable experiences have all had an indelible impact on me, but it's the small family compound where I live, in Morocco's High Atlas Mountains, that has changed me the most.

The Amazigh village of Imlil comprises a main street and a clutch of red clay buildings built into the mountains, with the *douar* (family compound) accessed via a track overlooking a sea of walnut trees. Three families and a number of cows and chickens live in the *douar* with me, our houses looking onto a communal courtyard. Life in Morocco is segregated by gender, so my home life is with the women. Initially, I worried how I'd fit in — I fail on every level as a female here, where home and children define your worth. I have neither husband nor children, and I can't cook couscous.

My first ally was a 90-year-old grandmother. She would come to my house daily, bringing an orange or some apricots, and teach me words in Tashlaheet, the local dialect. Looking out at the glory of the mountains, with her warm hand in mine and the sun on our faces, brought me a simple and complete happiness.

'One hand can't clap' is a saying in Arabic, and here it's impossible to be lonely. If I sit on my front step, a neighbour will immediately appear for a chat about nothing in particular: the weather, who's had a baby, what we're having for lunch. I'm always invited to join the women at 5pm, when they congregate to drink sweet mint tea and eat flaky pastry pancakes dipped in wild honey or home-churned butter.

It's the opposite of the busy life I was used to. Here, everything is simpler. People have time for each other — and time to sit and watch the flocks of rooks swirl and swoop over the peaks.

Alice Morrison is the presenter of BBC Two's Morocco to Timbuktu: An Arabian Adventure, author of Adventures in Morocco and creator of the Alice in Wanderland podcast: alicemorrison.co.uk/podcast

GREECE

RECONNECTING WITH GREEK ROOTS

JULIA BRADBURY

"It made me want to keep the connection alive for my own children"

From the island of Skiathos, I went out on one of the few remaining traditional fishing boats. Depleted fish stocks have seen some local fishing families turn their hands to sustainable tourism, taking handfuls of passengers to secret beaches. This is about as far away from 30,000 people stepping on a cruise boat in Venice as you can get — and it's the way forward for tourism. Meeting people like this across Greece cemented my bond with my mother's home country; it made me want to keep the connection alive for my own children. I'll return to Skiathos as soon as I can, so my kids can meet those fishermen. I want them to connect with that way of life, and care about it as much as they do their own.

Julia Bradbury is a broadcaster and adventurer. The Greek Islands With Julia Bradbury was broadcast on ITV earlier this year. theoutdoorguide.co.uk

RIGHT: The bustling Chandni Chowk market in central Delhi


IMAGE: GETTY

INDIA

HOW INDIA HAS CHANGED ME

WILLIAM DALRYMPLE

"Delhi never feels pedestrian. It always feels bonkers"

I NEVER INTENDED TO COME TO INDIA. I originally set out to be an archaeologist in the Middle East, but the dig I was assigned to in Iraq closed down — purportedly due to a nest of British spies. So, I joined a friend who was heading to India. I had no particular connection to the country, but when I arrived, it was one of those moments in life when everything changes. Thirty years later, I'm still here. A constantly changing kaleidoscope of things has kept me attached, and a whole variety of careers have been facilitated by being here. My first job, teaching, took me from the Himalayas down to the far southern tip of country. By the time I was two stops in, India had unveiled itself in all its complexity and beauty — I was addicted.

I'M A CHANGED PERSON, HAVING LIVED HERE. Just as I now look different from how I did when I turned up in India aged 18, I now think very differently too. I came from an extremely Catholic Scottish background. I went to monastic schools, my uncle's a priest and my brother became a priest, too — we took our Catholicism seriously. Here, everyone believes in different things. Even within Hinduism, there are million ways of practising, different gods to worship and a choice of festivals to observe. India is so vast and varied in a way that Britain isn't for me; it's an oddly homogenous place despite its history of immigration and empire. India has made me more open-minded than would have been possible living in Europe. India is a true multiculture — it's massively pluralistic in every sense: racially, religiously, climatically, geographically. It's a living lesson against dogmatism.

DELHI IS MUCH UNDERRATED, EVEN WITHIN INDIA. It's regarded as a difficult place to live and as a big, polluted city — although it's been glorious during lockdown. For me, as a historian and a writer, Delhi is fascinating. It has such a tangible sense of history, with monuments lying around on roundabouts, and tombs, palaces and old city walls wherever you turn. The Delhi Archives is also located here — housing a lifetime of documents that have barely been read — and when I need a break from my research, there's plenty going on elsewhere. Delhi has transformed in the last couple of decades from a government town to become a place that's home to India's publishing and media industries, and many of its best writers. It has an amazing classical music and dance scene. I'm never bored here. In England, on a dreary winter's day, things can feel pedestrian. Delhi never feels pedestrian. It always feels bonkers.

I'VE BEEN TRAVELLING AROUND INDIA FOR 30 YEARS AND THERE'S STILL A GOOD QUARTER OF THE COUNTRY I'VE YET TO SEE. There are major monuments and mountain ranges, extraordinary places in the Himalayas I'm dying to visit. India is a continent rather than a country — you could never run out of things to explore here. I feel like a child in a sweet shop or a miser in a bank vault sometimes. There's an almost infinite amount to take in, see and understand. The book I'm currently working on is about the diffusion of Indian culture out of India: the way Buddhism took over China, and the way Hinduism took over Southeast Asia. Plus, how Indian mathematics travelled first to Baghdad and then to Renaissance Europe, giving us the decimal system and the numerals we use today — I didn't know all this until a few years ago. Here I am in my mid-50s, still discovering amazing, world-changing information whenever I open a book about this country.

William Dalrymple is the author of numerous travel and popular history books about India. His latest book is The Anarchy: The Relentless Rise of the East India Company. williamdalrymple.uk.com

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INDONESIA

CAPTURING THE CORAL REEFS

DOUG ALLAN

"I'm granted a chance encounter with a whale shark. The gill rakers that sieve out her tiny plankton food are visible inside her open mouth as she swims past me."

Underwater, there's a breath-taking profusion of life: dazzling hard corals in spiky blues and pale yellows; soft anemones like floppy grey mushrooms; rainbow riots of fish. The water, as warm as a bath at the surface, meets the deeper, cooler layers. This fuzzy thermocline interface plays hell with the focus through the camera lens as I rise and sink through it; it's like lime juice being poured into a margarita.

Above me, the school of fish is so dense it darkens the sun. It moves like a giant single organism, swirling like a murmuration of starlings. As if by magic, holes appear in the fish mass as my bubbles rise through it. Cruising on the periphery are the mobula rays, predators capable of bursts of speed so fast there's no way I can follow them close up. I film them wide and hope the editor can make something of it.

Doug Allan is an award-winning wildlife and documentary cameraman whose credits include BBC One's The Blue Planet, Planet Earth and Frozen Planet, and National Geographic documentaries. dougallan.com

FROM TOP: The spectacular rock formations of Indonesia's Raja Ampat archipelago; clownfish seen on an anemone during one of Doug's dives in Raj Ampat

Emperor penguins at Snow Hill Island, Antarctica

POLAR REGIONS

THIS MUCH I KNOW

FELICITY ASTON

"The vanishing of the world's sea ice? It's a story that still needs to be told."

OF ALL MY POLAR EXPEDITIONS, THE ONE THAT HAD THE MOST PROFOUND EFFECT ON MY WORLD VIEW WAS MY 2018 TRIP TO THE ARCTIC. There isn't a 'hypothetical impact' of climate change — this is something that's happening now. It's our history. Skiing to the North Pole won't be possible in about five years' time. The first time someone crossed the surface ocean to stand on the pole, having got there on two feet, was in 1969. In the space of a little over 50 years, we'll have gone from the first to the last.

MY REASON FOR WANTING TO KEEP RETURNING TO THE POLES IS TO COLLECT DATA. I'll go back to the Arctic with another team of women in 2022; we'll be among the last humans to get out on high-latitude ocean sea ice. The world relies heavily on computer models to predict future scenarios, and those are only as good as the data we can collect.

HUMANS ARE VULNERABLE TO THE FORCES OF NATURE. When you're out there standing on the ice, it brings home how inconsequential we are. I don't just mean the power of sea ice or ocean currents but, say, the magnetic fields that cause Aurora Borealis and Australis. When you witness that one sunrise a year in Antarctica, or when you're in Siberia and it's -60C and you see materials like rubber become as pliable as clay, you realise most humans have a very limited vision of our existence.

WE'RE A TINY SPECK IN THE UNIVERSE, BUT WE PUNCH ABOVE OUR WEIGHT. Humans achieve incredible things and it gives me hope for our planet. I believe we'll help ourselves through science and human spirit. We're clever enough, and we should be smart enough.

SOMETIMES IT'S ALL ABOUT WONDER, NOT SCIENCE. I'm well versed in the science of the Northern Lights, but when you're beneath them, it's hard to believe they're anything other than magic. All those folktales you hear about them being created by a celestial fox brushing the sky with its tail, or the souls of the dead playing football with the skull of a walrus — out there, under the endless sky, these make so much more sense than particles coming down a magnetic field.

Felicity Aston MBE is a polar explorer. She'll be concluding her Royal Geographical Society speaking tour, Polar Exposure: The Women's Euro-Arabian North Pole Expedition, in November and December 2020. felicityaston.co.uk

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THE **EMERALD EDGE** OF EUROPE

County Kerry and neighbouring West Cork are bastions of Celtic culture, their five Atlantic peninsulas — jutting into the ocean like an outstretched hand — home to historic monasteries, storied islands and otherworldly seascapes. Tracing this shoreline on a wild, week-long road trip showcases Ireland's southwest corner at its most rugged, ancient and surprising

WORDS **AMELIA DUGGAN** PHOTOGRAPHS **KAROLINA WIERCIGROCH**

Down in Ireland's south west, the land frays to tattered peninsulas that splay into the Atlantic like five mighty, crooked fingers.

Around them, little islands — some inhabited, many not — stand sentinel among the thrashing waters, fragments of the mainland half-lured to sea by the mercurial wiles of the horizon. This stark coastline, stretching from County Kerry into rural West Cork, has the unmistakable feel of a frontier.

"This is where Europe squares up to the rest of the world," my guide, Ciarán Thornton, confirms, adjusting his flat cap, to which is pinned a kestrel feather. "Just off this coast, the ocean shelf vastly drops away as the Eurasian Plate goes out to meet tectonic North America. You can feel it even without knowing it. There's something almost magical about liminal places like this. It's hard to put into words."

It's still early — the first morning of my week-long road trip tracing southwest Ireland's coastal edges — when Ciarán and I climb out of the car in the former smugglers' cove of Derrynane Harbour, at the tip of Kerry's Iveragh Peninsula. We're met by a briny slap of ocean air, an excitable sheepdog and a small flotilla of fishing boats floating upon a hazy bay. Somewhere out of sight is our destination: the archaeological marvel of Skellig Michael, an island settled by a dozen Christian monks in the sixth century and, today, abandoned to seasonal bird colonies — and tourists.

Visiting isn't easy, though. To preserve the integrity of the site, only 15 small vessels are licensed to take people out (between May and October) and these tours — which sell out far in advance — are regularly called off due to dangerous ocean swells. "Someone has brought some luck along today. This is the first day in almost a week we've gotten the green light," skipper John O'Shea says, as eight passengers and three dogs pile off the jetty into his boat.

Life jackets are passed around, the boat is unmoored in a flurry of slackened ropes, an engine sputters into life and we're away. In his captain's cabin, John is steering with one hand and warming hunks of bread on a hob with the other. "Tea?" he asks as I squeeze in to join him, disturbing a sleeping dog as I do. "This is practically my second home," he says, in an attempt to explain the jumble of possessions and pillows. "This was my father's fishing boat. He was the first to offer proper tours to the islands, back in the '70s. Business is much busier now." Much of the reason for this upturn in Skellig Michael's fortunes can be attributed to its star turn in the 2017 film *Star Wars: The Last Jedi*. "You haven't brought a Jedi costume or lightsaber, I see," John remarks dryly.

I spend most of the hour at sea on the prow with Luna, the Border Collie — "our chief dolphin spotter". It's a quiet morning for marine life: Luna's barks only alert us to one seal, glossily flipping about in the waves. Soon the pyramidal outline of Skellig Michael appears on the horizon, its natural spires and buttresses crystallising into view as we grow closer. It strikes me as an untamable place; still simmering from the violent geology that formed it. Even on a calm day, tides smash into its barnacled cliff faces — sending up geysers of white spray — and gales compete to dislodge stones.

The island unsettled the Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw when he visited in 1910: he described it to a friend as "an impossible, mad place ... I tell you the thing does not belong to any world that you and I have lived and worked in: it is part of our dream world."

The intensity of faith that drove generations of monks — for some 600 years — to make this austere splinter of rock their home, is almost incomprehensible.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: John O'Shea, seen here with his dogs, Watson and Luna, has been sailing visitors to the Skellig Islands for over two decades; a boat waits under the cliffs of Skellig Michael; steamed Cromane mussels at The Boat Yard Restaurant & Bar, Dingle; the view across to Little Skellig and the mainland from the sixth-century monastery on Skellig Michael
PREVIOUS PAGES: Walkers scale the cliffs of Dunmore Head, Dingle Peninsula


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"You have to understand that early Celtic Christianity was very different — you didn't need a church to be close to God, or a priest," Ciarán explains. "These men were influenced by the Desert Fathers, like Saint Anthony, who lived in solitude outside civilisation. For them, the divine was in nature. This was a place they could meditate upon creation."

Ireland became an important centre of learning and mysticism following the introduction of Christianity to Ireland in the fifth century by Saint Patrick; the ruins of nine such island monasteries have been identified off this stretch of coast, but none as well-preserved as Skellig Michael.

At the top of 618 uneven steps — a testing 600ft climb that, according to our health and safety briefing, has occasioned a handful of recent fatalities — we emerge onto a terraced shelf. Behind us is a low, grassy 'saddle' and a closed-off path that rises to a hermitage built, daringly, on an exposed ledge on the most southerly peak. Up ahead is the monastery compound: a clutch of beehive-shaped drystone huts, known as *clocháin*, a cemetery of rustic crosses and the eastern wall of a medieval abbey. Its remaining window looks out to sea; through it, I can see the outline of Small Skellig, home to the world's largest gannet colony. Guillemots and razorbills trail their shadows across slopes dusted with wildflowers and puffin nests. I didn't know a place this beautiful or thought-provoking existed so close to home, just across the Irish Sea.

Catherine, a resident guide — bronzed from the summer, wearing practical, cut-off shorts — answers visitors' questions and shares some of the island's secrets. She tells us that due to the fragility of the ecosystem (not to mention the perilous topography), guests aren't permitted to explore beyond the steps and monastery walls, but assures us that every jutting rock and hidden plateau of the island would've been familiar to the monks. "Each crag became a Station of the Cross," Catherine says. "Imagine throwing open your arms towards the ocean in worship. This was the edge of the known world back then, remember — there was no America yet."

Throughout the tourist season, Catherine lives in a cabin on the island while working her fortnight-long stints. "I always try to take in the sunrise or sunset. Last night, I woke up and saw the moon had cut a path of silver through the sea and the whole site was lit up in monochrome. I know it's said too often, but there really is magic here."

Back on the boat, John is frying up mackerel for us — he'd been busy with his lines while we were exploring. It's the best fish I've ever tasted — mouthwatering and buttery soft. It's with much reluctance that I share some with Luna, before rinsing my hands in the cold surf. I feel immeasurably grateful for the trip; enriched, smiling and a little sunburnt. I notice our captain appears to have come alive after a day at sea, too. His tan has deepened and his eyes twinkle like sun-brightened shallows. Skellig Michael may have lost its monks, I think, but it still has its pilgrims.

Dingle all the way

It's raining hard when we set out from Ventry Bay the next morning. Cormorants move like shadows in the shifting mists and, on the wet sand, the retreating tide has laid out large fans of knobbly kelp. Elated by the climate, Ciarán strides off apace. I trundle in his wake, beginning to doubt the 'waterproof' claims of my outdoor wear.

We're heading out on a half-day hike of a section of the Dingle Way, the 101-mile trail that follows the coast of the Dingle Peninsula — the western part of which is one of two designated Gaeltacht (Irish-speaking) regions in County Kerry. We'd spent the previous night in the main town, Dingle (Daingean Uí Chúis, in Irish), an atmospheric cat's cradle of harbour lanes, where live music spills out of family-run pubs, candles flicker in the windows of seafood restaurants, and shops selling knitted goods stay open late. The county relies heavily on tourism (its stunning 120-mile Ring of Kerry driving route is flooded with coaches in the hotter months) but I'm finding that the region absorbs the crowds well. "It hasn't lost its charm," Ciarán agrees, "and it's easy to get

Dingle (Daingean Uí Chúis, in Irish), an atmospheric cat's cradle of harbour lanes, where live music spills out of family-run pubs, candles flicker in the windows of seafood restaurants, and shops selling knitted goods stay open late

Colourful street in Daingean Uí Chúis, more commonly known as Dingle

out and alone into nature quickly — that's part of its magic. There are areas that feel untouched by time."

Ciarán isn't from these parts — he grew up in the mountains of County Wicklow — but has met me in the south west for a bespoke, private version of Wilderness Ireland's Hiking and Island Hopping Cork and Kerry group tour. He hums the ballad Come by the Hills as we climb through wetlands, past burial mounds and ringforts, towards Eagle's Rock. Ciarán is only in his late 20s but has an encyclopedic grasp of the country's complex mythologies and flora — and thoughtful takes on our times. "You're visiting at a special time. Ireland's reawakening, discovering itself, figuring out its identity," he tells me. "We're an ancient country but, in terms of independence, also barely 100 years old. For a while, we leaned into the whole 'leprechaun' thing," he says, skewering the use of corny motifs taken from folklore and splashed across keyrings and fridge magnets. "But people are finding that we have a real connection to the land, the trees, the rocks, the language, our stories. We've been through a lot, but it wasn't lost. We'd just forgotten."

"Throughout our history, invaders came for glory, because it was a holy land, a famous land, a fertile land, or whatever their reason," Ciarán continues. "But they all fell in love with it and mixed in. That's the true character of the land and the people: something very old and accepting. And it's surfacing again. You need only look at our politics."

In 2015, Ireland legalised same-sex marriage — becoming the first country in the world to do so by popular vote; two years later, it elected as premier Leo Varadkar, a trailblazing young, gay politician and the son of Indian immigrants; and in 2018, a referendum resulted in a landslide win to legalise abortion. "But," Ciarán says, adding a humble caveat, "these are my just philosophical musings based on little more than walking in the hills."

Our walk ends with hot chocolate and hearty soup at clifftop coffeeshop Caifé na Trá, from whose windows we're gifted expansive views across a choppy strait to the Blasket Islands. The weather has cleared and we can see the main island's wide smile of a yellow beach is dotted with seals basking in the sun. Below us, a handful of brave surfers chase waves to shore. In my hands, I'm turning over a piece of slate bought from a local artisan; it has the word 'love' carved into it in Ireland's ancient Ogham script. Together, the markings look like a broken feather, or a tree with short, erratic limbs. Inscriptions like these — some dating back to the fourth century — can still be seen on some of the almost 100 standing stones across Dingle. Ciarán explains these are markers proclaiming the name of the local clan.

"West Ireland is one of the last places where you can still imagine what Celtic Europe was like before the Roman Empire," he explains, as the waitress swings by with seconds. Latin culture only arrived here later, with English rule and the Roman Catholic Church. "The Gaelic language survived in rural pockets like this that were hard to colonise," Ciarán continues. "And people kept the culture alive through songs and the stories. That couldn't be subdued. You can't stop someone singing a song, can you?"

The following day, we head to a lesser-visited part of the peninsula. The hedgerows around the village of Annascaul are heavy with the fantastical remnants of late summer: shocks of fuschia bells and plump bilberries. A bauble-round robin flies around us, its wings purring in the warm air. "It's good to have a guide in Ireland," Ciarán insists. "This walk would just be a footnote in a guidebook, if that. And you'd miss all this." The Con Dubh Loop Walk is one of his favourites as it has "maybe the quietest places in Ireland". We explore a rustic graveyard of cairns and crypts, where many inscriptions have been buffed away by time and the elements. Interestingly, here lies early 20th-century explorer Tom Crean, a local lad who signed up for three legendary Antarctic missions, including Robert Falcon Scott's Terra Nova Expedition (1910-13), and

At the former smugglers' cove of Derrynane Harbour, we're met by a briny slap of ocean air, an excitable sheepdog and a small flotilla of fishing boats. Somewhere out of sight is the archaeological marvel of Skellig Michael, an island settled by a dozen Christian monks in the sixth century and, today, abandoned to seasonal bird colonies

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: A ram in a coastal pasture, Dingle Peninsula; visitors scale treacherous steps on Skellig Michael known as 'the way of Christ'; patchwork of fields near Allihies on the Beara peninsula

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Bantry House, a stately home and museum with guest rooms overlooking Bantry Bay on Sheep's Head peninsula; it's still run by descendants of its 18th-century founders

was aboard the ill-fated *Endurance* with Irish Antarctic explorer Ernest Shackleton. Still standing today, in Annascaul, is the pub Crean founded when he retired, the South Pole Inn, now plastered with portraits, cuttings and medals celebrating his exploits.

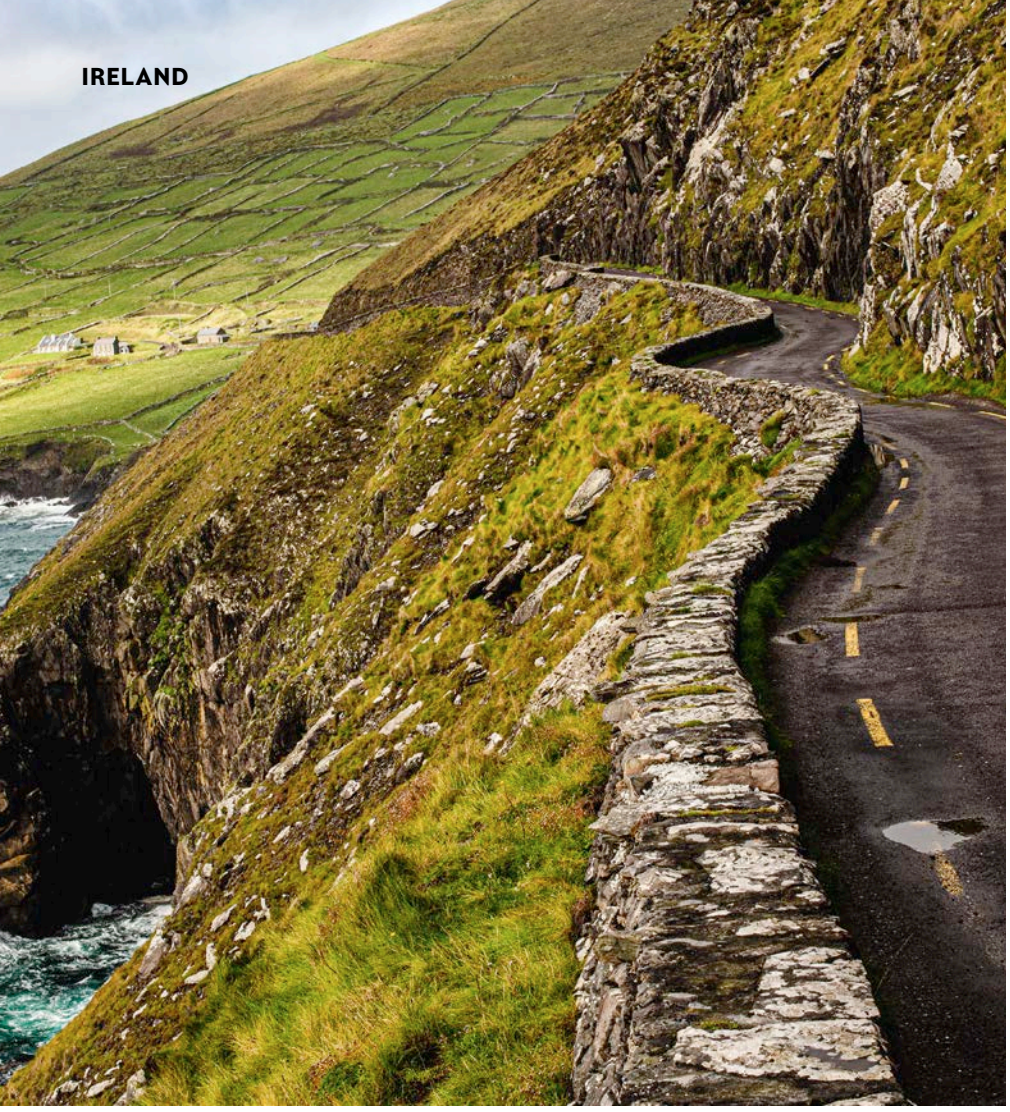
Before the path returns us to the village, it takes in Annascaul Lake — a pool of quicksilver in the crook of a valley dotted with Fresian cows and curly horned sheep. We plonk ourselves down on the bank, among the bell heathers. "Appreciating nature, for me, is a process of unlearning, trying to find a state of wonder, curiosity, unknowing," Ciarán confesses. "You may think you know a place, a scene — but try to look closer."

The wild west

I bid Ciarán goodbye in the pretty tourist town of Killarney and drive on along empty coastal lanes, until I cross into County Cork. The landscape is so rugged, rural and untouched, it's easy to believe you're the first traveller to stumble upon it. Unpaved roads, braided across the Beara Peninsula, bring me to postcard-perfect, pastel-hued Allihies, with its dramatic ruined engine houses — a reminder that this was once a thriving copper mining village. And in the fishing port of Castletownbere, I eat more than I can justify at the Beara Coast Hotel: buttery scallops, line-caught fish and salty samphire, followed by a platter of local cheeses (Milleens, Durrus and Beara Blue). Afterwards, I sip pints of Guinness with locals in MacCarthy's Bar. A tense game of Gaelic football is unfolding on the television, and I'm accepted into the fray with the cheerful question, "Who are you shouting for?" from the barmaid.

The next day, I press on, parking the car and taking the tiny wooden cable-car across to Dursey Island for a hike. As old cables crank the carriage across the seething strait below, I notice a bottle of holy water from Knock and a psalm pinned to the wall — presumably to reassure travellers of a nervous disposition. "I've also got a bottle of whiskey if you need a little extra courage," a passenger sitting opposite me jokes.

The island is a revelation: lobster crates and tame donkeys decorate cottage gardens; a ruined abbey, said to have been built by the monks of Skellig Michael, haunts a cliff; stonechats click and flutter among hedges of tasty blackberries. During the summer, I read, it's a great spot for whale-watching. Dursey, I also discover, has a tragic history that demands to be heard: in 1602, Queen Elizabeth I's forces massacred 300-odd



Coastal road on the Dingle Peninsula

residents — men, women and children of the O'Sullivan clan. Some were thrown from the cliffs, others jumped.

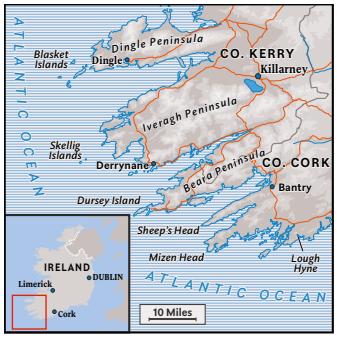
This sobering story stays with me, but I pick up brighter ones, too, first at Garinish Island — home to the historic Bryce House and its Italianate gardens, which hosted some of Ireland's great 20th-century thinkers before becoming a museum — and later in Bantry. I stay in the little town's crowning glory, Bantry House, a stately home with plush guest rooms, still run by descendants of its 18th-century founders. After the house closes to day guests, I wander through the drawing rooms admiring the collection of art, gilt mirrors and tapestries before curling up by the roaring fireplace (with a tipple from the honesty bar) and reading about its former residents.

The final flourishes of West Cork take me through the wildest landscapes I've seen yet, to places that feel unmoored from the rest of Europe. Driving the precarious coastal tracks towards the tip of the Sheep's Head peninsula, I'm reminded of one of Ciarán's sayings: 'There are no straight roads in Ireland, or straight answers'. Astonishingly, at the tip of the headland is a cafe — Bernie's Cupán Tae. Bernie Tobin's improbable establishment is often called 'the teashop at the end of the world', and after my bumpy journey it certainly feels like I've reached a remote outpost. Scones slathered with homemade jam set me up to cruise back down the peninsula and follow the south west's pinky finger up to the forlorn signal station at Mizen Head.

On my final evening, I meet Jim Kennedy, of Atlantic Sea Kayaking, beside the saltwater inlet of Lough Hyne. There are gutsy swimmers taking a late-summer dip as we paddle out in kayaks, the heavens darkening. "There's depth to West Cork; once you peer beyond the top layer you can feel this whole other world," Jim says. "It's the best place to taste Ireland, but it'll never be touristy — for one thing, you saw our roads." My guide is a champion kayaker who's been running tours in West Cork for 25 years but still ranks as a 'blow-in', according to local standards.

We pause and float in the darkness, listening to the heavy breaths of a nearby seal. "Look closely at the water," Jim says softly. I see that my moving oar is glittering with blue sparks. How had I not seen this before? I look closer still and see the reeds and fish are dancing with light, too. I plunge my arm in and bring up a glittering gauntlet. I thought you had to travel to the Caribbean to see bioluminescence like this, I say. "Well," Jim says, laughing kindly, "maybe you've heard: there's a little magic here."

ESSENTIALS



Getting there & around

Ireland's south west can be accessed via Shannon Airport in County Kerry or Cork Airport in County Cork, both of which are typically served from the UK by airlines including Ryanair. *ryanair.com*
Average flight time: 1h30.
Car hire is essential unless joining a group tour.

When to go

Ireland is a year-round destination but summer and autumn offer the best weather (July and August average 15C). Boats to the Skellig Islands typically run from May-early October; booking ahead is essential. Due to coronavirus, Skellig Michael won't be open until 2021. The island has no toilet or cafe facilities, and it's advisable to bring study shoes, a packed lunch and waterproofs.

Places mentioned

Skellig Tours. *skelligtours.com*
Dingle Way. *dingle-peninsula.ie*
Caifé na Trá. *facebook.com/caifenatra*
South Pole Inn. *southpoleinn.com*
Beara Coast Hotel. *bearacoast.com*
Dursey Island. *durseyisland.ie*
Bantry House. *bantryhouse.com*
Mizen Head Signal Station. *mizenhead.ie*
Atlantic Sea Kayaking. *atlanticseakayaking.com*

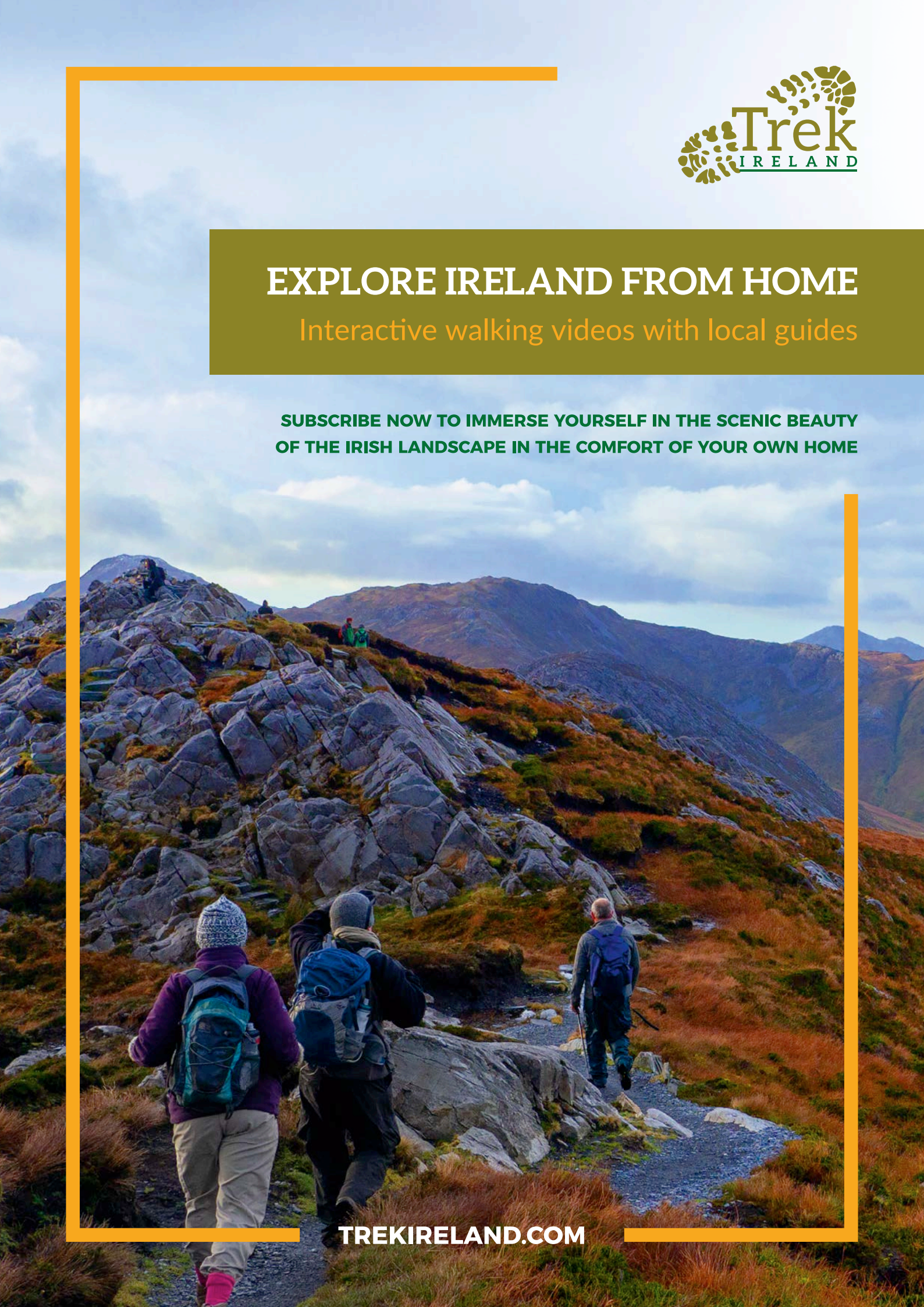
More information

Ireland Tourism. *ireland.com*

How to do it

WILDERNESS IRELAND offers the week-long Hiking & Island Hopping Cork and Kerry from €1,870 (£1,675) per person. Includes guided hikes along the Wild Atlantic Way, a visit to Skellig Michael and two other islands, visits to local craftspeople, and six nights' accommodation in local hotels, all B&B. Group and bespoke tours available. *wildernessireland.com*

ILLUSTRATION: JOHN PLUMER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the A to Z of the Indian Ocean

From dipping your toes in the showstopping bay of Anse Source d'Argent to exploring the storied capital of Zanzibar, the Indian Ocean offers an expansive catalogue of exotic flavours, eco-hideaways and groundbreaking conservation work protecting a vast menagerie of endangered wildlife. Incorporating African and Asian shorelines and archipelagos, it may be a little while before we're able to visit, but that doesn't stop us dreaming

WORDS **EMMA GREGG**

IMAGE: GETTY

anse source d'argent

How do you pick a favourite beach in the Seychelles? With its coral sands and remote location, the star of La Digue makes a play for travellers' hearts

Steeped in desert-island allure, the Seychelles archipelago is scattered with drop-dead gorgeous beaches. It's almost impossible to choose a favourite. Anse Source d'Argent on the island of La Digue, however, is something special. Its backdop is dramatically architectural. Huge grey granite boulders, as tall as mansions and curvaceous as elephants, frame the scene. Light bounces gently off the sea and the water is as shallow as a paddling pool. Along with Anse Intendance on Mahé and Anse Lazio on Praslin, its supermodel good looks are legendary.

These shores are also models of marine conservation. In March 2020, the Seychelles announced the final details of a new initiative to designate 30% of its waters — a region larger than Germany — as Marine Protected Areas, to help safeguard ocean species, habitats and livelihoods against over-fishing and the effects of climate change.

With a name that means 'silver spring', the kilometre-long Anse Source d'Argent is particularly envy-inducing. It's a quintessential paradise, with immaculate coral sand, impossibly blue water and the luxury of solitude — sheer heaven.

HOW TO DO IT: Mahlatini offers an 11-day trip to Mahé and La Digue in the Seychelles from £3,270 per person sharing, including half-board accommodation, transfers and return flights from London. *mahlatini.com*

BIRYANI

The Indian Ocean is one of the world's most colourful culinary melting pots: the air is scented with spices; breakfast tables are laden with ripe, juicy fruit; and chefs work African and Asian ingredients into dishes such as biryani (rice with spices and marinaded meat or vegetables), bhuna (curry based on spices fried in oil) and golden breadfruit fritters, fried in gram flour batter. Cooking classes are available in resorts across the region: in the Maldives, for example, luxury eco-resort Constance Moofushi offers kitchen masterclasses on request. *constancehotels.com*

FROM LEFT: Sunrise over Anse Source D'Argent on La Digue Island in the Seychelles; lamb biriyani; an elephant on Tanzania's wildlife-rich savannahs; accordion player, Sauti za Busara music festival, Zanzibar, Tanzania
PREVIOUS PAGE: Grey heron on the beach at Bandos Island, the Maldives

IMAGES: GETTY; ALAMY

COMOROS

Also known as the Comoro Islands — Grande Comore, Mohéli and Anjouan — Comoros is among the region's best-kept secrets. In Moroni, the capital, you may detect hints of the Tanzanian island of Zanzibar in the narrow lanes and carved doors. Wildlife-wise, the islands echo Madagascar, with mongoose lemurs on Anjouan and whales and dolphins offshore. But in many ways, the Comoros is a place apart — and fascinating for it.

*d*odos

Gone but not forgotten, dodos live on as an emblem of Mauritius — they feature in the island's passport stamp. Poignantly, they've also come to symbolise the mass extinction that threatens our planet. For the past 50 years, Mauritius has had a conservation network that's focused on the nation's endangered plant and wildlife species. Île aux Aigrettes, a protected islet off the east coast, is one of its gems. *mauritian-wildlife.org*

*e*lephants

Strangely, perhaps, Africa has few safari regions that include Indian Ocean beaches as well as wildlife-rich savannah. Tanzania's Saadani National Park is one of those rare, magical places. Base yourself at Saadani Safari Lodge and you can spend your days in a four-wheel-drive vehicle searching for herds of elephants. They move between the trees and the Wami River, cooling themselves with slow flaps of their ears.

*f*estivals

Time your trip to coincide with a festival for the guarantee of a vibrant atmosphere

1 SAUTI ZA BUSARA, TANZANIA
Zanzibar's annual live music festival is one of Africa's best, showcasing local taarab and bongo flava bands alongside African stars from as far afield as Algeria and South Africa. 11–14 February 2021. *busaramusic.org*

2 HOLI, MAURITIUS
Culturally diverse Mauritius has a packed calendar of festivals. The most colourful of these is Holi, a two-day Hindu celebration involving bonfires, music and the good-humoured showering of friends and neighbours with fistfuls of gulal powder in rainbow hues. 28–29 March 2021. *tourism-mauritius.mu*

3 AZGO, MOZAMBIQUE
For five days in May, Maputo's annual arts festival, Azgo — local slang for 'let's go!' — floods the campus of Eduardo Mondlane University with Mozambican and pan-African music, cinema screenings and adventurous art shows. 19–23 May 2021. *azgofestival.com*

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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: A youngster cycles through the streets of Stone Town, Island of Mozambique; a humpback whale breaches at sunset off the coast of Madagascar; giant tortoise, Île aux Aigrettes, Mauritius

GIANT TORTOISES

Once found on almost every continent, giant tortoises were hunted to near-extinction during the Age of Exploration (from the 15th to the 17th century). However, in the Seychelles, a late 19th-century ban on their slaughter saved the Indian Ocean's last tiny population. There are now around 150,000 Aldabra tortoises, mostly on the island of Aldabra. This atoll is breathtakingly remote, but if you're keen to see some huge reptiles lumbering around, there's a more accessible alternative: Curieuse Island, which can be reached by water taxi from Praslin Island. *seychelles.travel*

HUMPBACK WHALES

Most of us are familiar with East Africa's Great Migration, which gallops across Kenya's Maasai Mara between July and October each year. But have you heard of East Africa's Marine Migration? At around the same time the wildebeest and zebras are arriving from the Serengeti, humpback whales appear in Kenya's coastal waters, ready to breed. Some calve in the warm, calm refuge of Watamu Marine National Park. The Watamu Marine Association has been studying them since 2011, and runs a project allowing tourists to add their sightings to its database. *watamu.biz*

*i*sland of Mozambique

In its medieval heyday, Africa's Swahili Coast was dotted with prosperous trading posts. Tragically, some of their most magnificent buildings crumbled away after independence, but in Mozambique's first capital, Ilha (as the locals know it), many mansions have been restored, with appealing guesthouses, galleries and museums popping up on the historic streets.

IMAGES: AWL IMAGES; GETTY

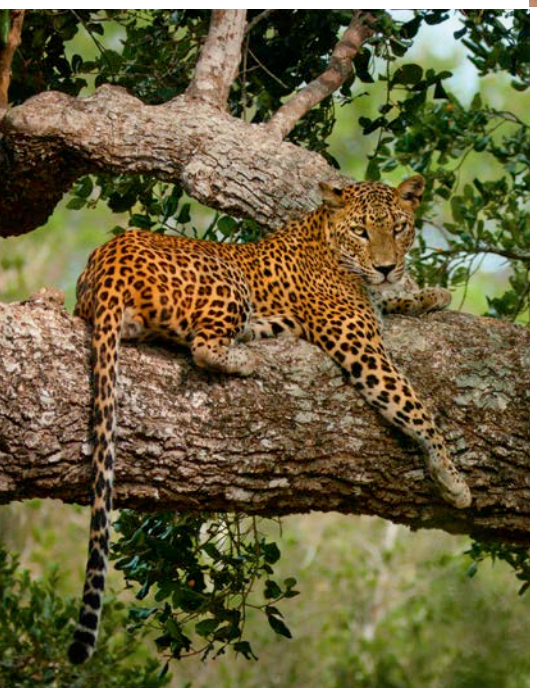
jungle

At Tree Tops Jungle Lodge in Sri Lanka, lying in a hammock surrounded by the squawks of wildlife is the perfect way to relax. Deforestation has plagued the coastline, but here, a glorious swathe of jungle has been restored. *treetopsjunglelodge.com*

kreol culture

Mauritius is awash with European influences, but at Zilwa Attitude hotel, indigenous culture comes first. Kreol proverbs decorate the bedroom walls and staff organise language lessons and visits to locals' homes. *hotels-attitude.com*

FROM LEFT: Sri Lankan leopard on a branch, Yala National Park, Sri Lanka; a ring-tailed lemur carries a baby on its back, Berenty Reserve, Madagascar; prawn fritters served with lemon wedges



mayotte

The steep, volcanic peaks of this island — a French overseas department — are popular with hikers. Below them are fertile slopes, fragrant with vanilla and cloves and lush with banana, papaya and jackfruit trees.

nightlife

Mombasa is the buzzing centre of Kenya's coastal party scene. Check out Tapas Cielo bar in the Nyali area, Moonshine beach bar at The Reef Hotel Mombasa and Shots Bar in the Bamburi area. *tapascielo.com reefhotelkenya.com*

LEMURS

A nighttime safari in Madagascar reveals another side of the rainforest: this biodiverse African island is the endemic home of the lemur, one of the world's most endangered mammal groups

Nocturnal lemurs peer down at me with a pointed stare. I'm tiptoeing through a patch of ancient Madagascan rainforest, flicking my torchlight through the trees, and tiny lights are beaming steadily back at me: eyeshine. As I approach the closest pair of eyes, details appear: the round, furry face and long, fluffy tail of a mouse lemur.

"Let's continue," says Sesen, my guide, who has known this forest since childhood. "It's best not to dazzle them for long. A snake may be watching."

In Madagascar, it's perfectly possible to wander along forest paths at night. In fact, I'd highly recommend it. Elsewhere in the tropics, a nocturnal forest walk can be terrifying, with creepy-crawlies, venomous snakes and dangerous mammals to watch out for. But in Madagascar, no such worries apply — if you're a human, that is. If you're a lemur, you need to watch out. Here in Madagascar's central highlands, mouse lemurs live alongside Malagasy tree boas, non-venomous snakes that can grow to over two metres long. The boas have thermoreceptive pits that allow them to work out exactly where their prey is.

"Don't worry — I've never known our snakes to attack people", says Sesen, as if reading my mind. Relieved, I tiptoe onwards.

Planning this nocturnal adventure was as simple as waiting for nightfall and following Sesen into the forest. As the darkness deepens, I'm glad to be accompanied by a guide with a calm attitude and a good sense of direction. Everything looks different by torchlight. A panther chameleon wobbling on a twig looks monstrous, and owl screeches sound like screams.

The next morning, I wake from a dream of swimming in the ocean with whales calling all around. As I blink awake, the dream fades, but the sounds remain. Fuzzily, I recognise it. My cabin at Saha Forest Camp overlooks a curtain of trees that's home to the indri, Madagascar's largest and most vocal lemur. Lemurs flourished on this island, but illegal activities like mining have whittled away their habitat, leaving their numbers threatened. To have seen — and heard — them in the wild is indeed the stuff of dreams.

HOW TO DO IT: Rainbow Tours can arrange a 17-day escorted wildlife-watching tour of Madagascar from £4,520 per person, including accommodation, flights and domestic transport. *rainbowtours.co.uk*

IMAGES: GETTY; YUKI SUGUIRA

off-grid retreats and eco-lodges

Hoteliers are creating planet-friendly places to stay in sublime, natural settings

1 ALPHONSE ISLAND, THE SEYCHELLES
The chalets on private Alphonse Island, in southwestern Seychelles, come with their own bicycles, allowing guests to freely trundle along the palm-fringed paths. Naturalists offer updates on the comings and goings of turtles, and the diving is superb. *alphonse-island.com*

2 THE RAINFOREST ECOLODGE, SRI LANKA
For a wraparound rainforest experience, try a nature walk from The Rainforest Ecolodge. The hotel stands on a tea estate bordering the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Sinharaja Forest Reserve — the country's largest primary rainforest. *rainforest-ecolodge.com*

3 MAFIA ARCHIPELAGO, TANZANIA
Five islands make up Mafia Archipelago. The capital, Kilindoni, is a sandy-laned town surrounded by mangroves and papaya trees. Chole Bay, meanwhile, is one of Tanzania's top snorkelling destinations, its reefs teeming with clownfish and rays. Stay at Pole Pole, overlooking the bay. *polepole.com*

prawn fritters

Selina Periampillai, a Mauritian chef and author of *The Island Kitchen* cookbook, serves up her recipe for prawn fritters (known as 'crevettes croustillantes')

SERVES: 2 **TAKES:** 30 mins

INGREDIENTS
1 tbsp spring onion, finely chopped (approximately 2 spring onions)
1 green chilli, finely chopped
2.5cm piece ginger, peeled and finely chopped
1 garlic clove, finely chopped
150g raw king prawns
1 lemon, ½ juiced, ½ cut into wedges
1 tsp soy sauce
30g plain flour
30g cornflour
1 egg, beaten
500ml vegetable oil, for deep-frying

METHOD
1 Mix the spring onion, chilli, ginger, garlic, prawns, lemon juice and soy sauce in a bowl. Season with salt and pepper, then set aside to marinate for 15 mins.
2 Combine the plain flour and cornflour in a bowl, then add 30ml chilled water and the beaten egg and whisk gently.
3 Pour the oil into a deep frying pan and heat until the temperature reaches 180C on a cooking thermometer. Scoop out the prawns from the marinade and pat dry with kitchen paper. Dip the prawns into the batter one by one, then deep-fry in the oil for around 2 mins until lightly browned and crisp.
4 Drain, then immediately serve with the lemon wedges.
The Island Kitchen by Selina Periampillai (Bloomsbury Publishing, £26) is out now.

QUIRIMBAS ARCHIPELAGO

The azure waters, coral reefs and luxurious lodges of Mozambique's Quirimbas Archipelago promise the ultimate island idyll. Ibo Island Lodge, located on the north west of Ibo Island, comprises three magnificent waterfront mansions and is the perfect base for an island-hopping escape, with plenty of opportunities to explore by kayak, dhow and standup paddleboard. *iboisland.com*

The Seychelles Islands

another world

Seychelles Tourist Office - UK & Ireland
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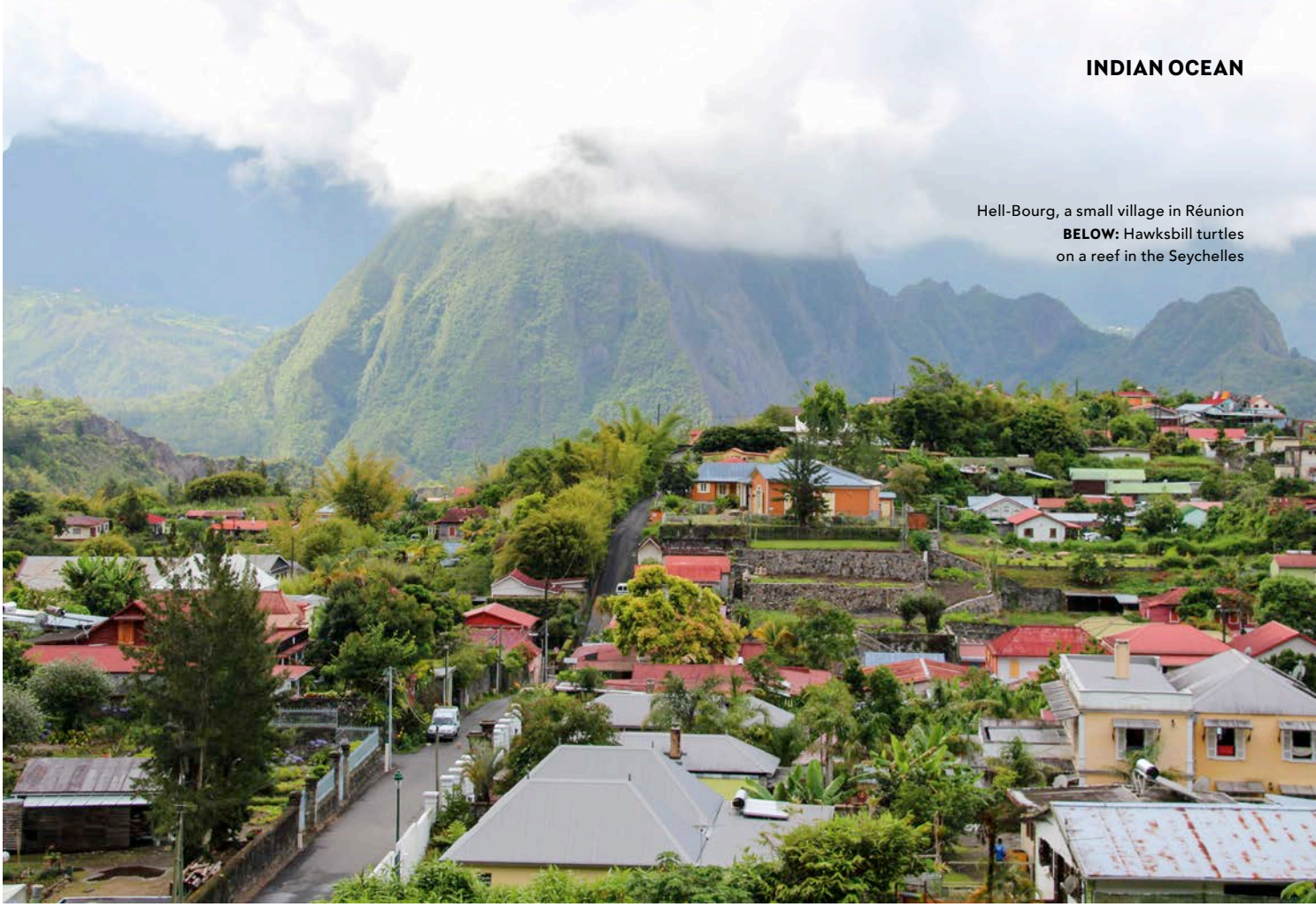

Hell-Bourg, a small village in Réunion
BELOW: Hawksbill turtles on a reef in the Seychelles

RÉUNION

The island of Réunion, 420 miles east of Madagascar, is a jumble of jagged, UNESCO World Heritage Site-listed peaks, thrusting up to 10,000ft into the sky. Among them is Piton de la Fournaise, one of the world's most active volcanoes. Steppes Travel offers bespoke hiking and beach holidays that explore La Réunion's zigzagging trails. Afterwards, maybe head to nearby Mauritius for a well-earned chillout. *steppestravel.com*

SWAHILI

Learn a little Swahili and it will always smooth your path in Kenya. Hotel staff often greet guests with a cheery '*karibu*' ('welcome'). The well-known *hakuna matata*' ('no problem') is a firm favourite too. To break the ice, practise saying '*habari*?' ('how are you?'). *magicalkenya.com*

IMAGES: GETTY

*t*urtles

A paradise idyll in the Seychelles, North Island is as passionate about the environment as its luxury credentials. Ayyoub Salameh, the general manager of North Island, discusses the island resort's rehabiliation and conservation efforts

Hawksbill and green turtle numbers are dwindling. Visitors with four weeks or more to spare can help by working as Marine Conservation Volunteers on North Island in the Seychelles, assisting environmentalists in monitoring turtles and other endangered species as part of a long-running ecosystem restoration project.

Why do sea turtles need protecting?
They're keystone species. For example, green turtles keep the seagrass beds healthy by grazing on them, and their egg shells and the hatchlings that don't make it add important nutrients to the ecosystem. By safeguarding the nesting sites of hawksbill and green turtles for two decades, we've seen a remarkable increase in turtles nesting here.

What's the main threat to their survival?
Truthfully, fishing gear and rubbish in the ocean. Turtles can drown if they get caught in debris. To tackle this, North Island is plastic-free. We've banned single-use plastic and, every morning, our beach patrols collect rubbish carried by the trade winds and recycle it to ensure it doesn't re-enter the ocean.

How is ecotourism in the Seychelles aiding marine conservation?
It's educating people, while raising funds to enable us to do more. The non-profit organisation Wildlife ACT has been an amazing partner. One of the original team, Elliot Mokhobo, fell in love with the flora and fauna of the island and decided to stay on. He's one of our best-loved guides. *wildlifeact.com north-island.com*


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UNDERWATER ADVENTURES

With low-lying islands surrounded by shimmering reefs, the Maldives is a superb place to learn to snorkel and scuba dive, or perhaps advance your skills. For the ultimate indulgence, you can experience the ocean from the comfort of your bed by booking the ultra-exclusive The Muraka, at Conrad Maldives Rangali Island. Launched in late 2018 for an eye-watering $200,000 (£160,000) per four-night stay, this two-level lagoon suite has a submerged bedroom with huge windows and an arched ceiling of transparent acrylic. It's like sleeping in a private aquarium. *kagimaldives.com*

vanilla

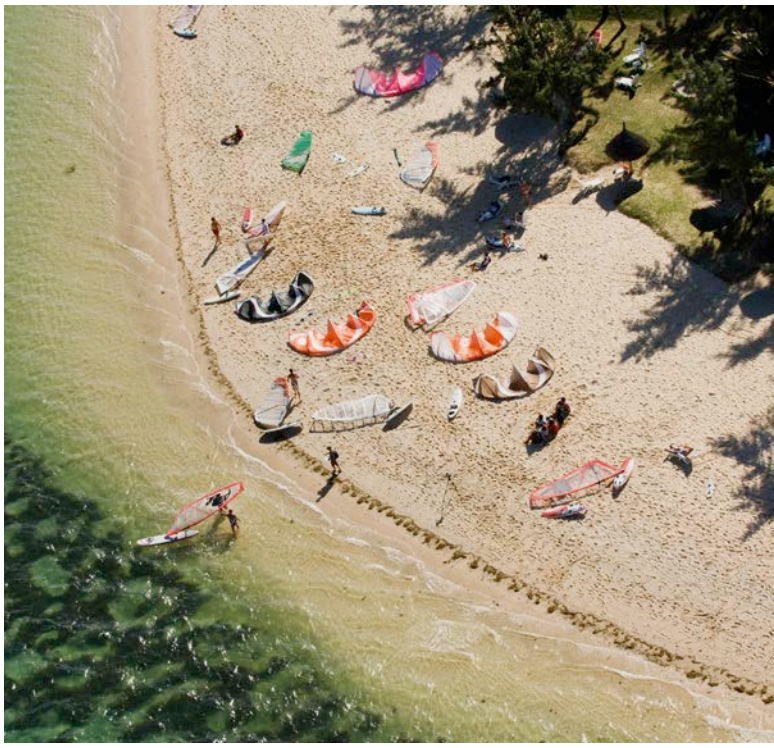
Around 80% of the world's vanilla pods are grown in Madagascar. With a minimum export price of £280 per kilo, it's a treat when hotel housekeepers leave them on your pillow. Sweet and evocative, vanilla is so quintessential an island commodity that Madagascar, Seychelles, Réunion, Mauritius, Comoros and Mayotte chose the name Vanilla Islands for their tourism partnership, which encourages visitors to island-hop. *vanilla-islands.org*

WATERSPORTS

Mauritius has a wild side. In the south west, a basalt monolith, Le Morne Brabant, acts as a natural throttle, whipping up winds that set hearts racing among the windsurfers and kitesurfers who flock here. One Eye break, to the west, is famously lively and should only be tackled at high tide. For beginners, Le Morne Lagoon is ideal, with resorts such as Lux Le Morne offering lessons. *luxresorts.com*

XYLOPHONE MUSIC

Handmade from wood, with hollow gourd resonators beneath the keys, the marimba is Africa's xylophone. In Kenya and Tanzania's laidback beach resorts, you'll often hear rippling marimba melodies floating on the breeze. Together with acoustic or electric guitars and wood-and-goatskin drums, they're a mainstay of the local bands that entertain at hotels and bars. *magicalkenya.com tanzaniatourism.go.tz*



FROM TOP: Vanilla extract for sale at a market in Madagascar; windsurfing in Mauritius; musician playing the marimba

IMAGES: ALAMY; GETTY

ZANZIBAR

This year, Stone Town, the historic quarter of Zanzibar City, celebrates its 20th year as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. As ever, a cultural tour is the perfect complement to any time spent lazing on Zanzibar's shores

*y*lang-ylang flowers

Marilyn Monroe would've felt perfectly at home on the island of Nosy Be, in northwest Madagascar. It's one of the world's biggest producers of ylang-ylang, whose sweet, exotic fragrance adds a tropical frisson to Chanel No 5, Monroe's favourite perfume. With glamorous resort hotels and direct flights from Rome and Milan with Neos, Nosy Be is popular with beach-loving Italians, and others are catching on, too. *neosair.it*

FROM LEFT: Ylang-ylang flowers growing on the cananga tree, Madagascar; Street vendors in front of a traditional Stone Town doorway selling papaya, oranges, bananas and jack fruit to passersby

If, after a safari in Tanzania, the ocean is calling, a trip to the pale, palm-fringed beaches of Zanzibar is the answer. As a bonus, Stone Town, the historic capital of Unguja, the main island in the Zanzibar archipelago, is fascinating to explore. For much of the past two millennia, the sheltered bay on Unguja's western shore was the Indian Ocean's most treasured harbour. From as early as the first century, merchants from Yemen, Iran and west India were anchoring here to strike deals with the spice, ivory and slave traders based along the Swahili Coast. By the 10th century, Stone Town was beginning to take shape. With Portugal, Oman and Britain taking turns to preside over it between the 16th and 20th centuries, it absorbed influences from all three, as well as from Arabia and India.

Present-day Stone Town is an intriguing jumble of narrow streets and alleys, shaded from the tropical sun by coral stone mansions with heavy wooden doors. Many have vine leaves and flowers carved into their frame, an indication that the house was built for a spice merchant — there's a good example at **EMERSON ON HURUMZI**, a boutique hotel. Other doors feature geometric patterns, tradesmen's symbols or passages from the Koran. Some are studded with brass spikes, an 18th-century fashion imported from India, where doors were heavily reinforced to withstand charging elephants.

In 2020, Stone Town celebrates the 20th anniversary of its inscription as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Wander the alleys on foot, and you'll discover shops and galleries stuffed with African antiques, fabrics and *tinga tingas*, brightly coloured paintings that are distinctively Tanzanian. **MEMORIES OF ZANZIBAR** has a large selection, and you can sometimes watch local artists at work at the **CULTURAL ARTS CENTRE**. To take in the cityscape over cocktails and lunch, head to the rooftop **TEA HOUSE AT EMERSON SPICE**. *emersononhurumzi.com emersonspice.com memories-zanzibar.com*

HOW TO DO IT: Audley Travel typically offers a 12-day trip to Tanzania, with four nights on safari at Selous Game Reserve and five nights in Zanzibar, from £3,810 per person, sharing. Includes accommodation, flights from London and all domestic transport. For more information on Audley's flexible bookings promise, visit *audleytravel.com*

IMAGES: GETTY; AKU/CHRISTOPHER WILTON-STEER

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24 HOURS IN ZURICH

Tried-and-tested recommendations are the key to making the most of a trip to Switzerland's lakeside metropolis. Twisper ambassador and award-winning cocktail maker Dirk Hany, owner of cocktail den Bar am Wasser, curates the perfect tour

With its gilded banks and formal dining halls, a certain conservatism has long defined Switzerland's largest city. But amid an influx of talented young creatives, Switzerland's mountain-backed, lakefront metropolis is being invigorated by innovative restaurant menus and indulgent bar concepts. "I grew up in South Africa, but my dad is Swiss and he was adamant that Zurich is the best place to learn about fine dining," says Dirk Hany, owner of the city's Bar am Wasser.

Dirk's professional life encompasses accolades from the prestigious Spirited Awards and Mixology Bar Awards; a long stint as ambassador for drinks brand Pernod Ricard, which took him around the world; and jobs fronting such stellar Zurich drinking dens as Widder Bar. His original dream, however, was to be a chef. "I wanted to manage a grand culinary hotel," he says. "But I soon realised the potential of cocktails as a liquid kitchen. Plus, bar work puts me front of house, where I can be my sociable self."

The menus at Bar Am Wasser, a full-service, sit-down bar offering everything from amuse bouche-style aperitifs to dessert drinks, are works of art — and not just for the cocktails within. Each season's menu is tailored to specific local flavours, creatively interpreted and designed by local artists. "People beg, borrow and steal them," laughs Dirk. With the city's bars newly reopened, 'back to the roots' is this summer's theme. "It seemed time to revisit classic cocktails — with a twist, of course," explains Dirk. "And it's time to revisit Zurich's much-missed bars and restaurants."

Morning

Kafischnaps is a simple little coffee shop in the heart of the city, decked out with black-and-white tiles and wooden chairs. The vibe here is local: the coffee comes from a Zurich roastery, the milk from a nearby dairy and the fruit and veggies from the local outdoor market. *kafischnaps.ch*

Brunch is a popular pastime in Zurich, so head to ROSI for 'frühschoppen', the German and Austrian tradition of having a late-morning get-together over a drink. Expect lots of breads and traditional pancakes, plus home-made preserves, local sausage and plenty of beer and wine. *rosi.restaurant*

Afternoon

Baur's, at the Baur au Lac hotel, is a brasserie-style restaurant with a beautiful bar section. The dining menu includes French brasserie classics — think beef filet and tartare — and heavy but delicious desserts. As it's annexed to a five-star hotel, service here is phenomenal. *baurs-zurich.ch*

For a quick bite, try the lakeside Pump Station. Run by a local character called Baba, who even has his own Facebook fan page, the Alpine-grill-style menu includes potato salad, kebab and grilled sausage. It's worth a visit just for the amazing mountain views and Baba's jokes. *pumpstation.ch*

Evening

Zurich has a diverse international dining scene, but when it comes first-rate Swiss dishes like fondue and raclette, you often need to head to the mountains. Kronenhalle, however, is a great spot for traditional fare, including Zürcher geschnetzeltes and *rösti* (potato gratin pancake). I always take visitors here, as they love to see the waiters dressed up in classic service uniform, and the paintings by Picasso, Van Gogh and Rembrandt on the walls. *kronenhalle.ch*

Bü's, named after the owner, is another personal favourite; I love a great host, and Bü is exactly that, arriving tableside with a sharp click of his heels. The place has a vast wine collection, so ask for the full menu rather than the daily print-out. *buetique.ch*

After hours

Zurich tends to attract a young club crowd, so I head for places like Club Bellevue, which has a slighter older clientele and plays classic house music. Klaus is another favourite; although not strictly a member's club, it's a place 'for friends and friends of friends' and entry is at the bouncers' discretion. Inside, you'll discover a world of dance and burlesque. *club-bellevue.ch* *hausvonklaus.ch*

In the early hours, head to Gräbli Bar, which has attained cult status for being open around the clock. *graebli-bar.ch*

THE LOCAL BESTSELLER

MAKE IT AT HOME

Bring home a taste of Mexico with Bar am Wasser's bestselling cocktail, El burro de los Muertos, featuring the Mexican spirit mezcal

Ingredients

40ml mezcal
20ml fresh lime juice
10ml agave nectar
20ml passion fruit juice
ginger beer

Method

Mix the mezcal, lime juice, agave nectar and passion fruit juice, then strain into a highball glass filled with ice. Top up with ginger beer. *baramwasser.ch*

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: River Limmat; Augustinergasse; Rosi; Pump Station; Dirk Hany at Bar am Wasser

Essentials

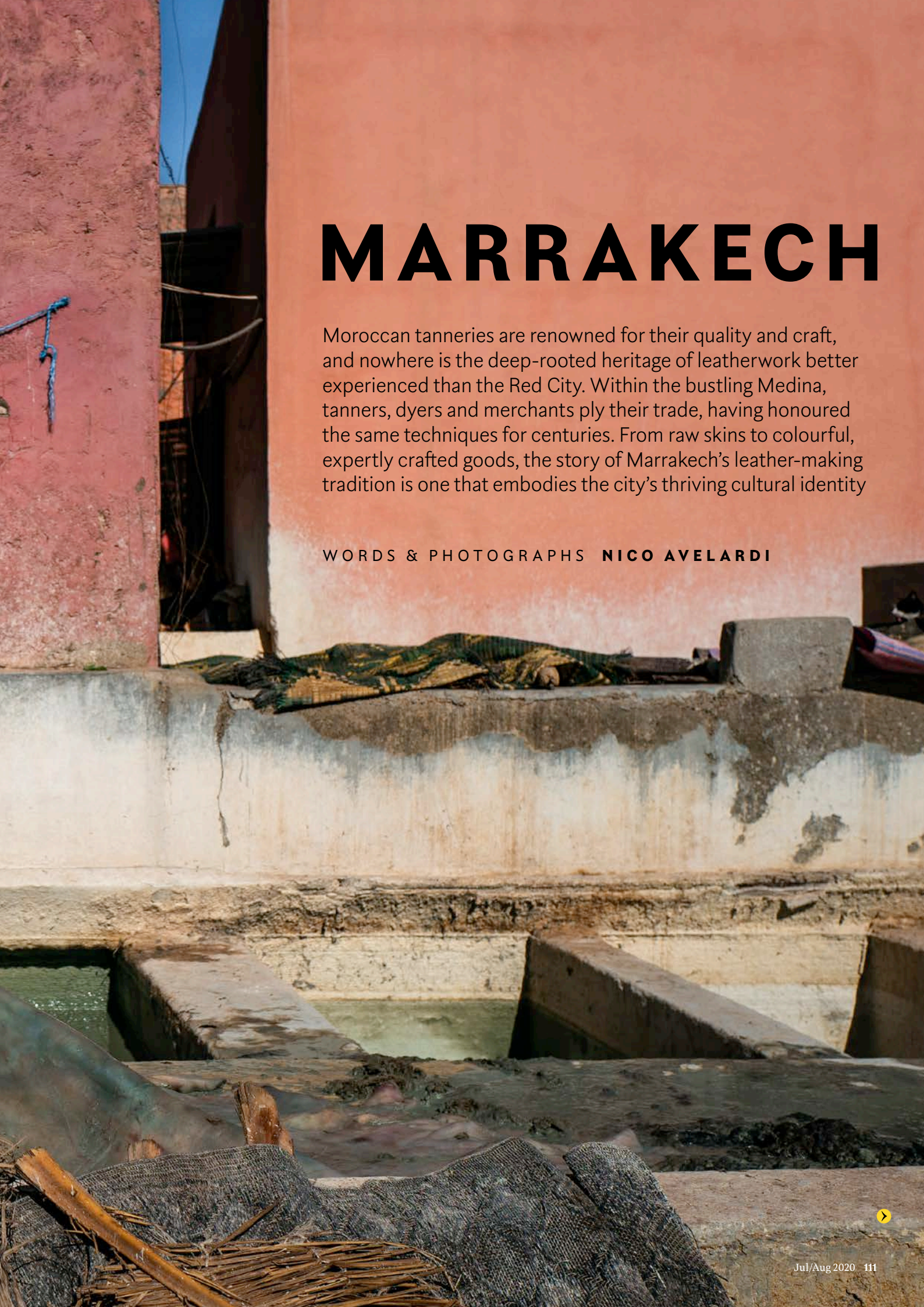
TWISPER is a social travel app that allows networks of friends to share and discover the best places to eat, drink and sleep around the world as well as follow travel and lifestyle influencers and magazines for recommendations. Find out more at twisper.com

TWISPER
Be advised, by friends.

MARRAKECH

Moroccan tanneries are renowned for their quality and craft, and nowhere is the deep-rooted heritage of leatherwork better experienced than the Red City. Within the bustling Medina, tanners, dyers and merchants ply their trade, having honoured the same techniques for centuries. From raw skins to colourful, expertly crafted goods, the story of Marrakech's leather-making tradition is one that embodies the city's thriving cultural identity

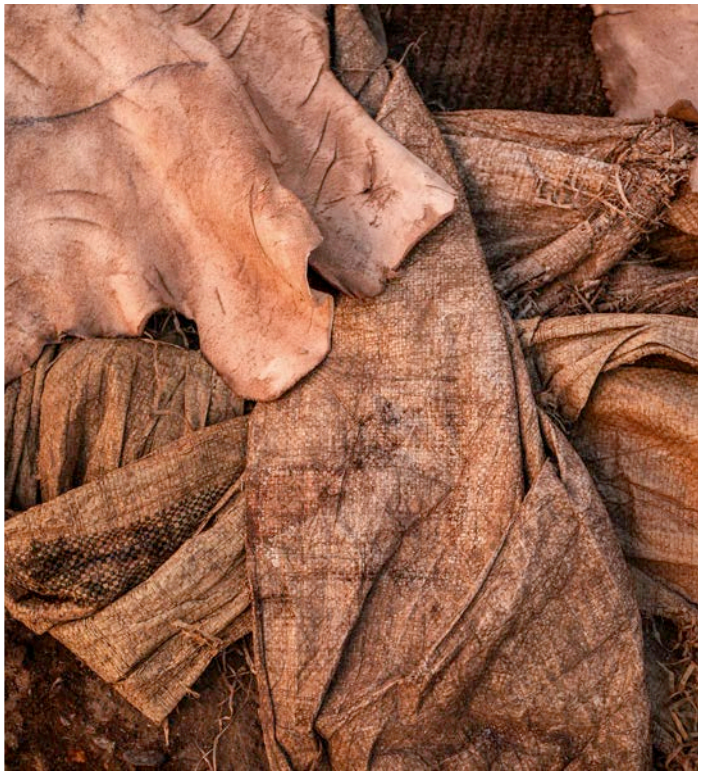
WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHS **NICO AVELARDI**

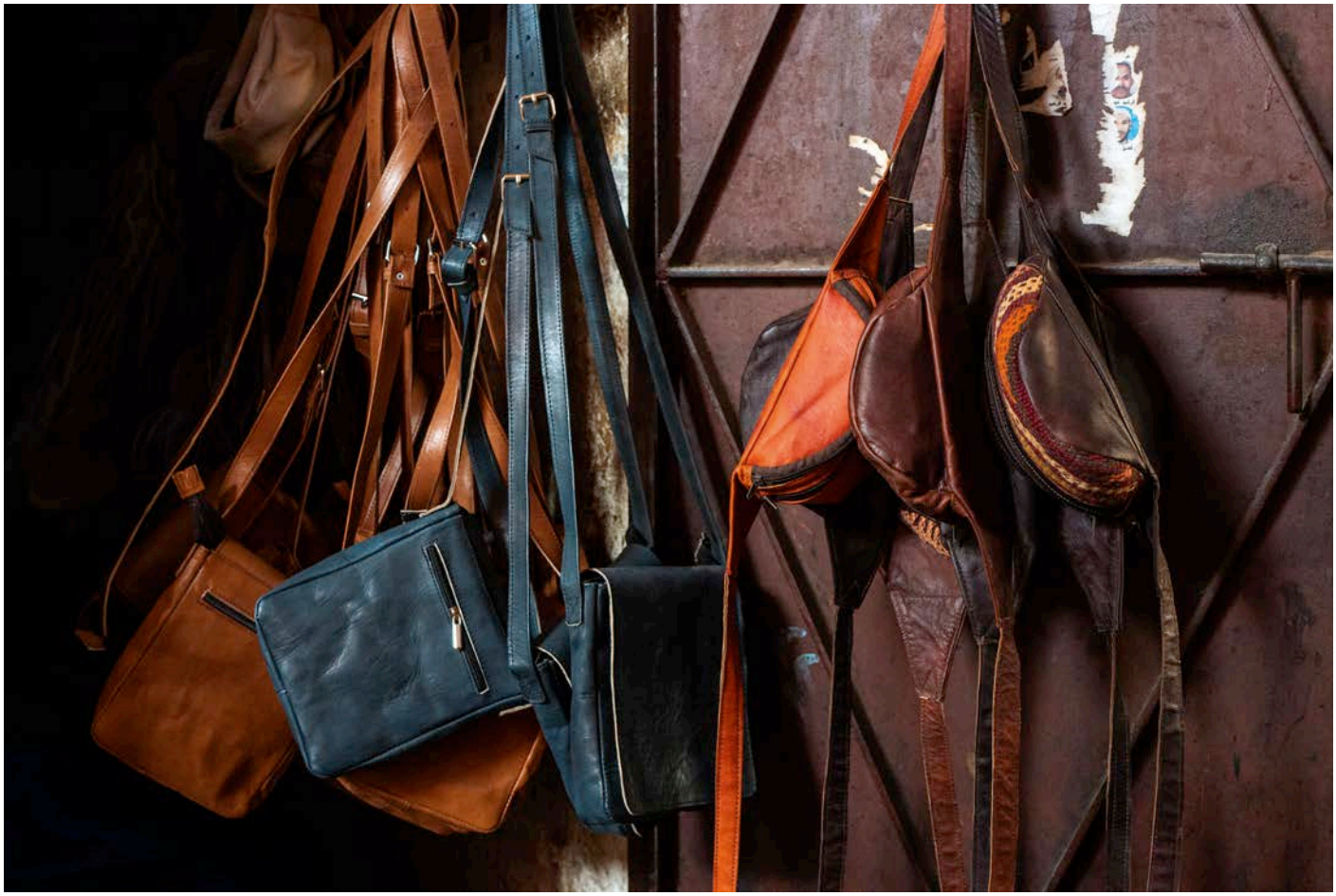


Located around the edge of the Medina, Marrakech's open-air tanneries are a living postcard of the city's age-old leather-making tradition. Here, skins are tanned solely using natural elements before being taken for dying. Visiting the tanneries feels like a glimpse into the past. Little has changed in this industry; the same techniques have been used here since medieval times.


FAR AWAY
TOWN

Tanning is hard labour, carried out entirely by hand. First, the raw skins are washed with salt, before being coated in a thick paste made from limestone to make them supple. After two weeks, the hides are immersed in huge vats of bird droppings, then left to dry. Finally, the tanners scrape away any remaining hair before the skins are sold on to local dyers and crafters.





The maze of alleys beside the Ben Youssef Mosque heaves with workshops, where the processed, dyed leather is transformed into a variety of goods. The place is alive with industry: sewing machines thud away in the background, workmen hammer at hides with wooden tools, and the tea and coffee vendor calls out, pushing his trolley through the busy, twisting lanes. All this activity — both inside and outside the workshops — makes this corner of the Medina one of the most fascinating places in the city.

Marrakech's beguiling souks are the nation's largest: a complex network of narrow passageways, packed with all kinds of goods. The traditional markets are mainly organised according to the products sold or the specific trade, and Marrakech's leather souk commands a large, busy corner of the Medina. Here, merchants tout the wares of local craftspeople, selling everything from *babouche* slippers to embroidered satchels. Getting lost in these bustling alleys while admiring the local craftsmanship is a unique experience.

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ADVENTURE AWAITS

From mountain climbing in the Lake District to river rafting in North Wales, The North Face is fronting a new diversity project aimed at enriching young people through the power of the great outdoors



Students rock climbing
OPPOSITE PAGE: Students from City Academy, Hackney rock climbing in the Lake District and canoeing in Wales

The North Face has been synonymous with the great outdoors for decades, helping adventurers from around the world tackle inscrutable challenges with it's award-winning products and clothing range. Since 2010, the company has funded hundreds of non-profit organisations under themes of 'Enabling Exploration' and 'Loving Wild Places'.

Now, as part of The Explore Fund that's being rolled out in the UK, Germany and Italy, The North Face has launched a new project making adventure accessible for everyone, especially children from underprivileged communities in urban areas. The project is in partnership with The Outward Bound Trust — a charity dedicated to teaching children life lessons through nature — and gives opportunities to explore the wonders of the UK's wilderness through confidence-boosting activities such as kayaking, hiking, rowing and orienteering, all in a bid to encourage equality and ignite a passion for the great outdoors. Both brands are passionate about adventure as a means of self-growth, and believe it should be for everyone, not just for those who can access or afford it.

This follows last year's successful campaign, She Moves Mountains, where girls from Sarah Bonnell School in east London headed to Cumbria for an weekend of outdoor challenges. Here, we look back at a trip from February this year, where around 35 students from City Academy in Hackney headed to North Wales for a resilience-testing few days, and find out what the experience meant for them.

THE CHILDREN'S VIEW

Neesha Davis, aged 12: "This is a totally new experience for me. I've never done anything like hiking or canoeing. I really enjoyed making new friends and learning new things."
Favourite activity: Canoeing as well as walking up a mini waterfall.

Stephanie Adusei, aged 12: "I love how different it is in Wales [compared] to home; how much space there is and the lack of buildings. I could definitely live here, but I'd miss being so close to Primark."
Favourite activity: Scrambling.

Farrell Governor, aged 14: "I've been on the trip before, but I loved it so much that I applied to come back. I enjoy not having [electronic] devices and just being able to read and experience the outdoors."
Favourite activity: Camping.

Jack Day, physics teacher at City Academy: "It's a great environment to spend time with your pupils. It amazes me to see how much effort the kids put into the trip, which is often the opposite of what we see in school! I personally love being outdoors as I'm originally from Yorkshire. The trip creates a shared cultural touchstone with the kids that we wouldn't otherwise have and I use that back in the classroom. It's also a leveller for me and the kids — we all have a go at the same activities and camp together."

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For more information on The North Face and Outward Bound Trust, visit *thenorthface.co.uk*

IMAGES: RICHARD PENCOTT

CITY LIFE

BILBAO

Renowned for its art and riverfront architecture, Bilbao is a city of chattering markets, long nights and football-mad locals, but it also knows a thing or two about good food and drink. **WORDS:** *Ben Lerwill* **PHOTOGRAPHS:** *Slawek Kozdrasw*

Cyclists buzz under plane trees as traffic purrs past baroque churches. Two newlyweds are on the riverside, posing for photos. The groom is wearing a beige three-piece suit (you can get away with that sort of thing in Bilbao) and the bride a flowy white dress, the breeze catching the gauze and billowing it out, cloaking both husband and wife in a feather-light cloud of material. They giggle and embrace. Behind them, the River Nervión flows wide and blue under the sleek lines of the Zubizuri footbridge.

But Bilbao hasn't always provided a photogenic backdrop. Thirty years ago, the idea of having your wedding shots taken at the water's edge would have been laughable — the river was a murky, odoriferous thing, the quayside a mass of rusting industry. But the largest city in the Basque Country has since morphed into one of the most vaunted examples of urban regeneration in Europe, full of chattering markets, long nights and proud, football-mad locals, and was even designated an official UNESCO City of Design in 2014. Today, you can almost sense it swelling out its chest with self-confidence, glass of *txakoli* white wine in one hand and salt cod croquette in the other.

Visitors will want to loosen their belts a notch or two, because this is a city that knows a thing or two about good food and drink, filling its larder with a bounty of produce from the Atlantic, the lush farmland of the surrounding hills and vineyards carpeting the valleys. Wander the city's streets and you could be forgiven for thinking it's permanently on lunch hour. Glasses are knocked back before noon, bakeries bulge with customers and *pintxo* bars throng with besuited workers. Near-neighbour San Sebastián might draw the international foodie garlands, but the *bilbaínos* eat and drink with relish.

"Cooking is simpler in Bilbao," says chef Paul Ibarra, speaking to me at his lively Basque restaurant, Los Fueros, which has been pulling in locals since 1878. Behind him, families pick through platters of grilled prawns. "In San Sebastián, the food is more elaborate, more French-influenced. Here, simple is good. But that doesn't mean it's easy. If you cook something, it has to be marvellous; the flavours have nowhere to hide."

To make his point, Paul sizzles off a portion of hake in olive oil, sprinkles it with sea salt, adds a dollop of roasted pepper mayonnaise and places it before me. "I don't know about you," he says, "but if I die tomorrow, this would be my last meal." The fish is golden, with a slight crunch to the bite. It would be a fine choice, to be fair.

FROM LEFT: Chef Paul Ibarra, of Los Fueros restaurant; the Zubizuri footbridge, designed by Santiago Calatrava; Guggenheim Museum Bilbao; pintxos at Mercado de la Ribera
PREVIOUS PAGES: Louise Bourgeois' sculpture Maman, outside the Guggenheim Musuem Bilbao

The bigger picture

The Guggenheim isn't the only top-quality Bilbao gallery. Take time to visit the excellent Museo de Bellas Artes, for Basque and Spanish works

"And look," Paul says, proffering a bottle of *txakoli*. "The white wine here is different to San Sebastián's. We use the same grape, but theirs is sparkling. Ours has no bubbles." He pours some out for me, the chilled wine causing condensation to form on the glass in seconds. It's crisp, fruity and sublimely fresh. "No bubbles, just good wine," says Paul. "That tells you something about Bilbao."

TAKE ME TO THE RIVER

None of which is to say that the city lacks fizz. Bilbao can be showy, even flamboyant at times. Its transformation over recent decades has left a very visible legacy, with one particular project standing as a (literally) shining example. When it opened in 1997, the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao had the world's cultural commentators falling over themselves with excitement. Its giant, sinuous, metallic form was likened to a cross between a palace and a ship. Today, over two decades on, the museum remains a world-class attraction, inside and out.

Perhaps inevitably, the Guggenheim has its own Michelin-starred restaurant, Nerua Guggenheim Bilbao. Focused on seasonal Basque ingredients, its best-known dishes include a sole and clam cream soup and a smoked eel ravioli with beetroot and green apple. Maritime influences are everywhere you turn in this port city, from the set menus to the architecture. I even arrive by overnight ferry, and there aren't many city-break destinations where you can do that.

"It's hard to explain how much Bilbao has changed since the 1970s," guide Miriam Ruíz López tells me as we wander the streets around energetic Plaza Moyúa. Around us, grand hotels look out over trim lawns and curvy, Norman Foster-designed subway entrances. "People know us now for our art and our riverside architecture, but when I was growing up there was an urban myth that the water was so dirty that if you fell in, you'd die."

Bilbao's long history has been shaped by its estuary location. From its beginnings in the year 1300, this has always been a city of seafarers, traders and shipbuilders, a place happy to draw its influences from all compass points. At the same time, of course, it's also somewhere that prides itself on its self-determination. A case in point: the city's top-flight football team, Athletic Bilbao, famously still employs a Basque-only policy for its player recruitment. In all sorts of respects, Madrid is a distant notion.

The produce used by the city's bars and restaurants also belongs squarely to the region. At the Mercado de la Ribera,


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Urban recognition *// Bilbao was named European City of the Year at the 2018 Urbanism Awards, which takes into account everything from urban development to environmental issues*

a riverside hall that's the largest covered market in Europe, the aisles accost you with mounds of mussels, towers of tomatoes, walls of cheeses and vats of green beans. There's a touristy element to it — local advice is to avoid eating in the style-over-substance bars within the market hall — but many of Bilbao's leading chefs still stock up their restaurant larders right here.

The sheer variety of local ingredients makes the omnipresent *pintxo* — the Basque take on tapas — the perfect Bilbao food. Found on almost every bar counter in town, these snack-sized creations are traditionally meant to be consumed in two bites. Today, however, they've evolved from simple-but-brilliant classics such as the *gilda* — an olive, a chilli and an anchovy on a stick — to creative concoctions that might involve anything from quail eggs to spider crab.

Most bars offer a wide choice, but generally have their own, honed-to-perfection house speciality. The locals have a word — *poteo* — which refers to the act of moving from bar to bar, ordering a drink and a *pintxo* in each. You hear the word said a lot, and no wonder. To spend an evening drifting around a softly lit neighbourhood, gorging on bite-sized dishes and watching the edges of the buildings grow gradually hazier, is one of Bilbao's greatest joys.

THE TIMES THEY ARE A-CHANGIN'

"I've worked behind the bar here for 30 years," says Aitor Aginako, his face cracking into a grin above his neatly pressed blue shirt. Café Bar Bilbao sits in one corner of the Old Town's Plaza Nueva and has a marbled counter, a chequerboard floor and patterned wall tiles. "In 30 years, you learn how to look after customers. You need to know where to stand — always be close by, but without invading their space — and how to treat people with respect. But most of all," he says, pointing to small portions of *bacalao al pil-pil* (salt cod in a garlic and chilli sauce), "you need good *pintxos*."

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Croissants at Bohemian Lane cafe, Bilbao's first vegan bakery; Bohemian Lane owner Sandra Mateo; Café Bar Bilbao prides itself on serving some of the best *pintxos* in the city

Q&A with Patrizia Vitelli, Bilbao Food Tours

HOW IMPORTANT IS FOOD TO THE LOCAL CULTURE?
Food is everything in Bilbao. Every big decision, every celebration, every important meeting takes place around a table. We're lucky to have a huge variety of ingredients — we have a long coastline and the climate is just right for growing crops and vegetables — although Basque cuisine is still quite traditional. It's honest food.

WHAT'S THE RELATIONSHIP LIKE BETWEEN SAN SEBASTIÁN AND BILBAO?
There's a healthy rivalry. San Sebastián gets called 'Little Paris' — in the '70s and '80s, some of its chefs trained in France, so it's a bit posher there. Although if you ask them, they'll say the *bilbaínos* think a lot of themselves!

WHERE TRADITIONAL BASQUE RESTAURANTS WOULD YOU RECOMMEND?
Try El Arandia de Julen — it does the best beans and steak — or Pulpería Vermutería Florines for good-quality octopus.
bilbaofoodtours.com

Close to Plaza Nueva are the seven medieval streets — known as Las Siete Calles — that make up the heart of the Old Town. Ancient five-storey buildings with wrought-iron balconies look down on the cobbles. On one of these streets, Calle Carnicería Vieja, is Bilbao's first vegan bakery, Bohemian Lane. Its owner, Sandra Mateo, welcomes me with a coffee and a slice of carrot, cinnamon and walnut cake (verdict: two sticky thumbs up).

"Bilbao is changing," she says. "People thought I was crazy to go against the usual traditions, but, as in so many places, veganism is growing." A steady flow of customers through the doors underlines her point. "I actually studied architecture," Sandra continues. "I still love walking around the city and staring at buildings. I like to think I actually use my education in my baking. It takes architectural skill to create a three-layered vegan cake!"

Today's city has eye-catching buildings by the dozen, from the 41-storey curves of the Iberdrola Tower to the neo-baroque detailing of the Arriaga Theatre. For me, one in particular stands out. Not the Guggenheim, for all its showstopping beauty, but the Akzuna Zentroa, a bizarre but brilliant cultural complex created by French architect and designer Philippe Starck in 2010. Its vast, dark foyer is supported by a series of squat, stylised pillars. Commuters wander through this otherworldly gloom while families recline on glowing benches and, way overhead, swimmers float in a glass-bottomed rooftop pool. It's an oddity that somehow finds a natural home in Bilbao.

The building was once an enormous wine warehouse. This makes sense. Sooner or later, everything in Bilbao comes back to food and drink. I later learn that the local couple I'd seen having their photos taken on the riverside were about to embark on a banquet of what can only be described as Basque proportions: a traditional seven-course wedding feast lasting several hours. It's no wonder they were looking so happy.

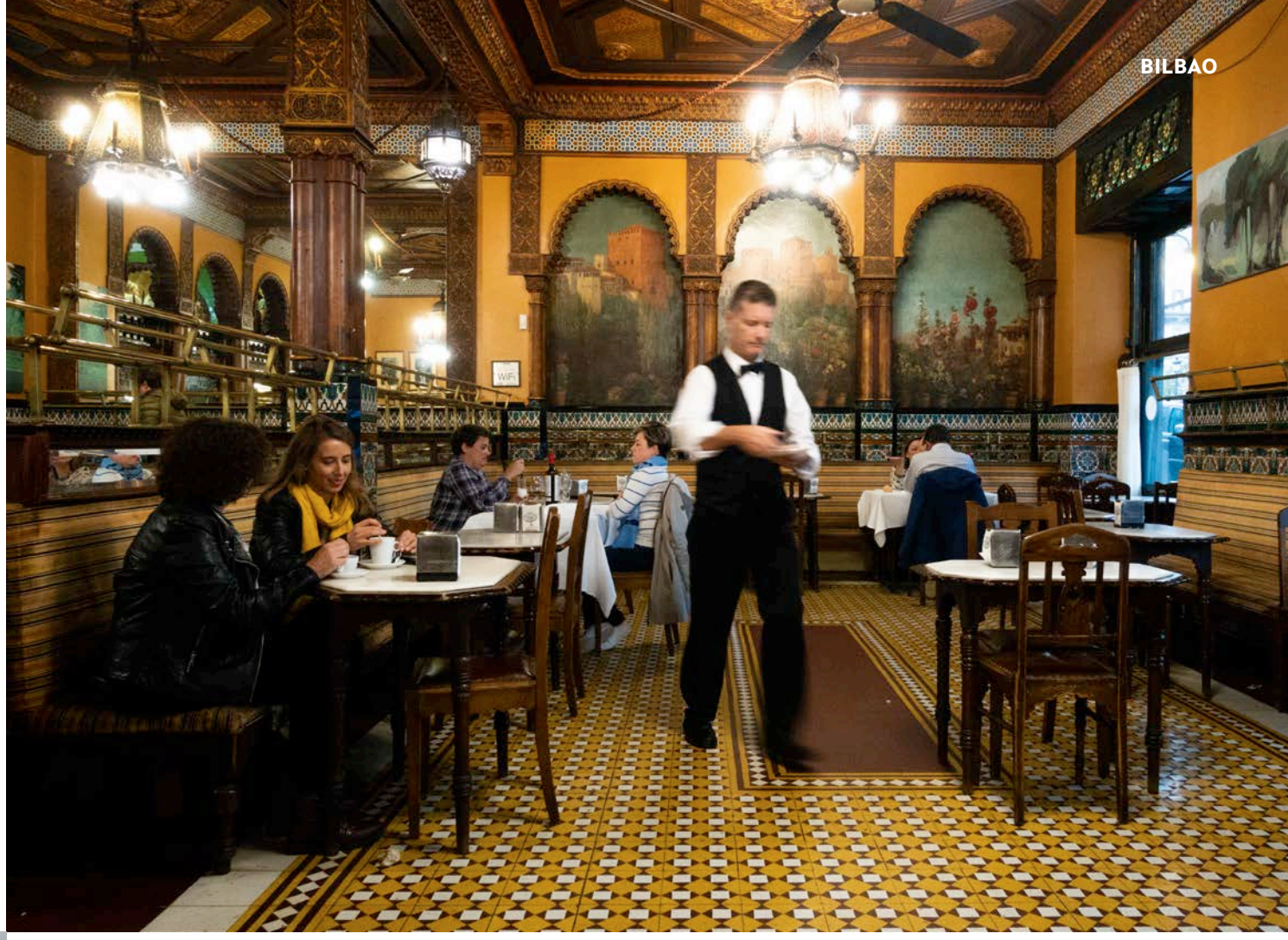
INSIDER TIPS

Kalimotxo is a drink that's popular across the Basque region. Improbable though it sounds, it's made by mixing equal parts cola and red wine, and tastes much as you'd expect.

Locals rarely order more than one *pintxo* per bar, although no one's going to object if you choose to stay put and try multiple options.

The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao is closed on Mondays, but otherwise opens from 10:00 to 18:00. Coming later in the day is a good way of beating the crowds.

If you're travelling by car, the underground Arenal Casco Viejo car park is centrally located and has reasonable daily parking rates.



FROM LEFT: Street scene in the city's colourful Old Town; gildas at Gure Toki *pintxo* bar; perfect for late-night snacks, Café Iruña opened its doors in 1903

Top 8
FOOD & DRINK HIGHLIGHTS

EL GLOBO
BEST FOR: LUNCH-HOUR PINTXOS

Bare brick walls and a lively lunchtime throng create the setting for this local favourite, where the house speciality *pintxo* is a disc of bread topped with spider crab, paprika and a béchamel sauce. Pair it with a chilled glass of *txakoli* and you may find it hard to ever leave. It's a few minutes' walk from Plaza Moyúa and, as with so many places in Bilbao, offers excellent quality at an extremely affordable price. *barelglobo.es*

CHARAMEL GOZOTEGIA
BEST FOR: BAKED GOODS

Locals queue up, waiting to pile into this Old Town bakery the moment it opens its doors each morning, which tells you all you need to know about the quality of its in-house baking. You'll find everything from croissants and pastries to more inventive concoctions such as a blue-cheese cheesecake. The coffee is particularly good, while the homely interior design — with greenery hanging from the rough stone walls — makes it the kind of place you'll want to stay awhile. *charamelgozotegia.com*

BASQUERY
BEST FOR: BEER-LOVERS

Located near the Udaletxeko Zubia Bridge, this uniquely multifunctional spot is part brewery, part bakery and part restaurant. Staff in breton tops buzz around ferrying drinks and parcelling up bread. It does a good-value midweek *menú del día*, which you can enjoy while watching bakers and brewers going about their business, although it's the beer that's the main attraction. Try the hop-heavy Hitman IPA. *basquery.com*

GURE TOKI
BEST FOR: EXQUISITE PINTXOS

Situated in one corner of Plaza Nueva, Gure Toki is to many minds the greatest *pintxo* bar in the city, with some of its creations elevated to the realm of fine dining. It's eminently affordable too, with devilishly good specialities such as its sheep's cheese soup, served in a tiny bowl with quail egg, mushroom and truffle oil, one of the best couple of euros you'll spend anywhere. Some of its *pintxo* offerings require ordering direct from the kitchen — don't be afraid to ask. *guretoki.com*

Gure Toki *pintxo* bar, where specialities include cheese soup

PROMENADE BILBAO

BEST FOR: DEVOURING GILDAS

Calle Ledesma runs parallel to the main shopping drag, Gran Vía, and is lined with bars and terraces. It lends itself superbly to a spot of bar-hopping, although tiny Vermutería Promenade, with its slim yellow frontage, can be easy to miss. Seek it out, largely because it does one of the best *gildas* in Bilbao. Made with anchovies, olives and green chillis, this *pintxo* is said to be named after the 1946 Rita Hayworth film *Gilda*. *promenadebilbao.com*

CAFÉ DEL ARENAL

BEST FOR: CHURROS

On the fringes of the Old Town, this cafe isn't much to look at — expect slot machines, tired neon, and a TV showing pop music — but serves up an irresistible treat in the form of its hot chocolate and churros. The chocolate is ludicrously thick and rich; the churros are crunchy tendrils of warm, sugared dough fresh from the kitchen. Bag a seat outside, in the shadow of the Iglesia de San Nicolás de Bari, and get dunking. *facebook.com/cafeteriaarenal*

CAFÉ IRUÑA

BEST FOR: ELABORATE DECOR

Overlooking the Jardines de Albia since it opened its doors in 1903, this stunning cafe still feels like some half-dreamt Moorish fantasy, with glazed tiles, painted murals, wood carvings and a tasselled valance above the bar. It's a relatively large venue, split into multiple areas, but the main event, food-wise, is the grill in the far corner, where lamb kebabs are spiced and cooked to order. As late-night snacks go, it takes some beating. *cafeirunabilbao.net*

LA VIÑA DEL ENSANCHE

BEST FOR: OLD-WORLD AMBIANCE

Across the street from El Globo, La Viña del Ensanche has been in business since 1927. It retains a pleasantly bygone feel, with tulip-shaped lampshades, dozens of ageing postcards on the walls and huge legs of ham hanging above the bar. This acorn-fed jamón, cut wafer-thin, is what the bar is famous for, but there's a broad range of other *pintxos* to try. In 1996, the bar opened a produce shop to sell the in-demand ingredients and wines on its menu. *avinadelensanche.com/en*

ESSENTIALS

Getting there and around

Bilbao is typically served by non-stop flights from London and Manchester, with airlines such as British Airways, EasyJet, Ryanair and Vueling. Aer Lingus flies direct from Dublin. *ba.com easyjet.com ryanair.com vueling.com aerlingus.com*
Average flight time: 2h.
Brittany Ferries sails between Bilbao and Portsmouth and Rosslare, with up to three sailings a week in each direction. There are also sailings between nearby Santander and Portsmouth (three times a week, both directions) and Plymouth (once a week, both directions). *brittany-ferries.co.uk*
Average sailing time: 24h.
Bilbao is easy to cover on foot, but its metro and tram system is efficient. Fares start from €1.60 (£1.40) and €1.50 (£1.30) respectively. The airport is easily reached by public transport.

When to go

Late spring and autumn are the best times to visit, avoiding the intense heat and high prices of the peak summer months and the wetter days of winter and early spring.

Places mentioned

Los Fueros. *losfueros.com*
Guggenheim Museum Bilbao. *guggenheim-bilbao.eus*
Café Bar Bilbao. *bilbao-cafebar.com*
Bohemian Lane. *bohemianlanebilbao.com*

More info

Bilbao Tourism *bilbaoturismo.net*

How to do it

BRITTANY FERRIES has ferry-and-hotel packages, at Bilbao's four-star Hotel Abando, from £389 per person, including a four-berth cabin with return sailings. *brittany-ferries.co.uk*
LOVEHOLIDAYS has four nights at the four-star NYX Hotel Bilbao in December on a room-only basis, from £233 per person, including flights and flight amendments. *loveholidays.com*

ILLUSTRATION: JOHN PLUMER

CARIBBEAN™

For all the top tips, inside insight and advice on how to get the best out of the Caribbean visit...

www.caribbean.co.uk

UNCHARTED TERRITORY

A new cruise on one of Ponant's high-tech, state-of-the-art ships promises close encounters with the Weddell Sea and Larsen Ice Shelf in one of the most remote areas on the planet

You're a long way from anywhere once you reach the Weddell Sea. This remote body of water lies off the seldom-visited eastern coast of the Antarctic Peninsula. To call it magical would be no understatement: it's a silent, almost dreamlike world of glaciers, ice floes and alpine peaks — a binary world of blue sky and white that stretches to the horizon in all directions, making for unforgettable sailing.

Ponant's 11-night Weddell Sea and Larsen Ice Shelf expedition cruise showcases this most spectacular of regions to unrivalled effect. The Larsen Ice Shelf, on the edge of the Weddell Sea, has produced some of the largest tabletop icebergs ever seen. It also marks the ship's ultimate destination, and as the vessel heads into deep Antarctica, those on board become immersed by the great white continent.

The ship departs from Ushuaia, in Argentina's southern Tierra del Fuego region, before sailing across the fabled Drake Passage via the far-flung South Shetland Islands. Over the next week and a half, as well as history and wildlife lectures from Ponant's team of expert naturalists, passengers have the chance to kayak between ice floes, ride on hovercrafts and electric snowmobiles, try scuba diving and even rise above the Antarctic landscape in a hot air balloon.

Numerous shore visits in rigid-inflatable boats provide the ideal opportunity to see the region's extraordinary wildlife up close, from leopard seals and wandering albatrosses to Adélie penguins and humpback whales. Few voyages can lay genuine claim to being the trip of a lifetime, but visiting the Earth's lower-latitudes on an intrepid, educational expedition is emphatically one of them.

ABOVE: Pleneau Bay, Port Charcot
RIGHT: Emperor Penguins

IMAGES: PONANT

THREE MORE POLAR SAILINGS

1 Pristine Spitsbergen with National Geographic

Ponant has partnered with National Geographic Expeditions for this nine-day trip from Tromso to the polar island of Spitsbergen. First passing Bear Island, home to hundreds of bird species, the vessel then sails via Norway's fjord-laced Sor-Spitsbergen National Park. Spitsbergen, which forms part of the Svalbard archipelago is spectacular. With on-board luxury, and wildlife ranging from whales to Arctic foxes, this is a journey to be savoured.

2 At the Genesis of the French Polar Expeditions

Follow in the wake of the great explorers on this new 11-day cruise, focusing on the rugged east coast of Greenland. Departing from Reykjavik, you'll sail west to reach Greenland's icy coast. The voyage explores the mountainous Ammassalik region, where Captain Jean-Baptiste Charcot sailed, before moving north to the Blosseville Coast, named after the explorer Jules de Blosseville. As well as meeting local Inuit people, the trip offers the chance to spot polar bears.

3 Emblematic Antarctica

This 12-day expedition cruise is the classic way to experience Antarctica. Departing from Ushuaia, in Argentina, the ship spends two days crossing the Drake Passage before arriving at the Antarctic Peninsula. What follows is the chance to revel in the region's epic landscapes, as well as the opportunity to see first-hand the extraordinary animals that make this continent their home. Expect mind-bending numbers of penguins, while stylish on-board hospitality adds even more to the experience.

THE SHIP

The trip to the Weddell Sea takes place on board the latest addition to Ponant's fleet, *Le Commandant-Charcot*. As the first hybrid electric polar exploration ship to be powered by liquified natural gas, it's a game-changer. The state-of-the-art vessel is designed to have minimal environmental impact. On-board comforts include an indoor pool, panoramic lounge, lecture theatre, restaurants and a Sothys spa, as well as just 100 cabins and suites. Shore excursions, meanwhile, take place on easy-to-board, 10-person rigid-inflatable boats. With its revolutionary design and luxury mindset, *Le Commandant-Charcot* is a polar exploration ship with a difference.

Essentials

Ponant sails to 100 countries with modern, environmentally friendly ships. Polar specialists, including biologists and glaciologists, are on board every exploration.

Polar Routes are the expedition cruise specialists who have gone to the ends of the earth and back again to bring you the best polar expedition cruises around.

POLAR ROUTES

PONANT

For more information visit *polarroutes.co.uk*

TRAVEL GEEKS

ASK THE EXPERTS

IN NEED OF ADVICE FOR YOUR NEXT TRIP? ARE YOU AFTER RECOMMENDATIONS, TIPS AND GUIDANCE? THE TRAVEL GEEKS HAVE THE ANSWERS...

Q // I'm planning a trip to South Africa in 2021, and keen to support local communities. What do you recommend?

A great way to support local people is to choose a tour with a local guide or group — one that gives back to communities, as well as showing you the sights. A great example of this is Juma Art Tours, a Cape Town-based social enterprise that connects tourists with vulnerable locals in Khayelitsha through art, cycling and gardening programmes. Another recommendation is 4Roomed eKasi Culture, also in Khayelitsha. Founded by *MasterChef South Africa* finalist Abigail Mbalo, it's a restaurant styled on the traditional houses of South Africa's oldest townships. Abigail encourages young black woman to stay in their hometowns, and to use their culinary creativity to entice visitors to dine locally and share cultural experiences. The restaurant serves classic township dishes with a fine dining twist.

If you're planning to head out on safari, choose a game reserve that has social initiatives in place. Not-for-profit Lepogo Lodges in Limpopo, for example, runs a carbon-offsetting programme, while Samara Private Game Reserve in the Great Karoo partners with organisations on research, conservation and community projects.

You can also choose to stay somewhere managed by a local community, such as Bulungula Lodge on the Wild Coast. It's owned and managed by the local Xhosa community and is entirely solar-powered. A great resource for finding community-led accommodation and activities is non-profit organisation Fair Trade Tourism. *jumaarttours.co.za facebook.com/4RoomedeKasi lepogolodges.com samara.co.za bulungula.com fairtrade.travel*

KGOMOTSO RAMOTHEA

FROM LEFT: Signal Hill, Cape Town, South Africa; taking photos in Daisetsuzan National Park, Japan

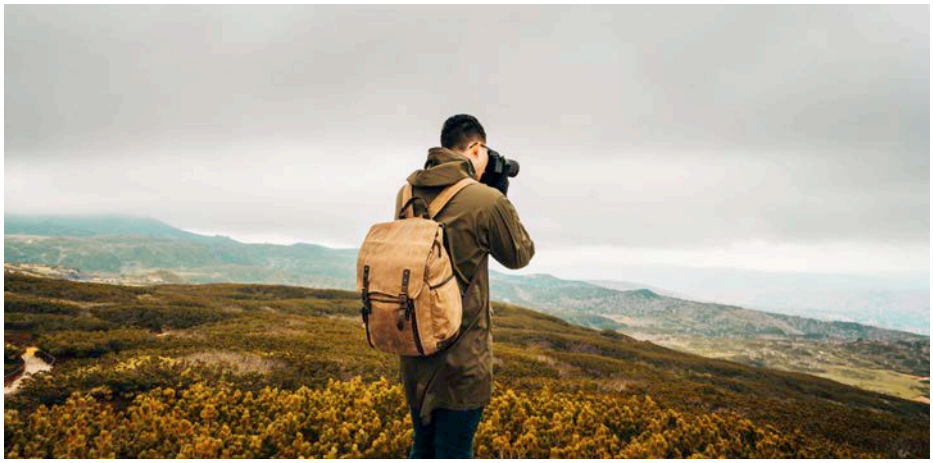
IMAGES: GETTY

Q // I'd like to book a trip abroad for next year, but am nervous about making the commitment. What advice do you have?

While trips in 2021 are likely to go ahead, it's still too early to book without running the risk of being left out of pocket. Earlier this year, the coronavirus outbreak left thousands of UK travellers stranded and millions more waiting months for refunds. The risk of another outbreak causing further disruption is significant.

Generally, the sensible thing to do is to take out travel insurance that covers illness and travel disruption, which the better policies would usually include. However, as insurers now exclude coronavirus-related claims, I wouldn't recommend booking a trip just yet; instead, wait until policies return without these exclusions.

Once insurance is sorted, I would recommend booking a package holiday. They're currently financially protected by the government, so you'll receive a refund if the company goes bust (and it's likely some will in the near future). Look for firms that have refunded quickly in recent months; you'll be rewarding those smaller, specialist operators that did the right thing, and you'll get your money back if anything goes wrong. **RORY BOLAND**



Q // I want to improve my travel photography without going too far from home. What tips and resources would you recommend?

I'm a strong advocate of exploring your own backyard; you can transfer that travel curiosity to your local neighbourhood with great effect. There are many ways to sharpen your observational skills while experiencing 'boring' everyday scenes, like watching sunlight be diffused through trees and seeing what shapes the rays cast over the ground. You can also play with light and shade. Head out to your garden or local park and explore the effects of harsh afternoon light on your photography.

If you have a variety of lenses, now's the time to experiment and challenge your range. For cityscapes, try using a fixed lens, such as a 50mm. As you won't be able to freely zoom in and out, you'll be forced to concentrate on composing more interesting shots while having to maintain social distance.

Many organisations and companies, including the Royal Photographic Society, Nikon and Leica, have launched online resources. By forcing us to be present, the current situation offers an excellent opportunity to push ourselves creatively. I'll be teaching courses that explore this idea at my upcoming online academy: *academy.geotravelermedia.com*

Further tips and tricks can be found at:
nationalgeographic.com/photography
online.nikonschool.com/courses/
instagram.com/explore/tags/stayhomewithleica
store.leica-camera.com/uk/en/programme
LOLA AKINMADE ÅKERSTRÖM

Q // I want to go on a long-distance hike this summer. Where would you suggest that has good camping potential along the way?

The 186-mile-long Pembrokeshire Coast Path has plenty of campsite offerings. Compared with other popular coastal footpaths around the country, the campsites along this route are generally more easily accessible from the main footpath, smaller and tend to be independently run. For the best coastal views, stop off at Rhosson Ganol campsite on St David's peninsula, overlooking Ramsey Sound. The best pocket-sized campsites for privacy, meanwhile, include Becks Bay Camping near Tenby, Point Farm Campsite near St Ann's Head and Little Haven Campsite near Walton West.

The National Trails website is a helpful resource, as it details campsites along every section of the route (although it doesn't include some of the very smallest farm campsites). There are also excellent hop-on-hop-off bus services for walkers during the summer months. For more details, see *coolcamping.com* and *nationaltrail.co.uk*
JAMES WARNER SMITH

THE EXPERTS

KGOMOTSO RAMOTHEA // SOUTH AFRICAN TOURISM
SOUTHAFRICA.NET

RORY BOLAND // WHICH? TRAVEL
WHICH.CO.UK/TRAVEL

LOLA AKINMADE ÅKERSTRÖM // CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER
LOLAAKINMADE.COM

JAMES WARNER SMITH // AUTHOR, COOL CAMPING BRITAIN
COOLCAMPING.COM

THE INFO

THE RISE OF THE VIRTUAL TOURIST

WE ROUND UP SOME OF THE WONDERFUL WAYS WE'VE BEEN EXPERIENCING THE WORLD FROM HOME. WORDS: CHARLOTTE WIGRAM-EVANS

IN NUMBERS

THE LOUVRE, PARIS

7

THE NUMBER OF VIRTUAL TOURS AVAILABLE, SHOWCASING DISPLAYS AS DIVERSE AS RENAISSANCE ART AND EGYPTIAN ANTIQUITIES.

11.1 million

THE NUMBER OF VISITS THE LOUVRE'S WEBSITE RECEIVED BETWEEN 12 MARCH AND 8 JUNE

380,000

THE NUMBER OF OBJECTS HOUSED IN THE MUSEUM. *LOUVRE.FR*

13 DAYS

The duration of Tourism Western Australia's virtual tour of the region, which includes meeting kangaroos and taking a dip with orcas. *westernaustralia.com*

700,000

The number of people who virtually visited the Faroe Islands in a six-week period during lockdown — over six times the number of actual visitors in 2019. The project saw tourists from 197 countries explore the islands through the eyes of a local. *visitfaroeislands.com*

£100,000

THE AMOUNT ONE HOST CLAIMS TO HAVE MADE WITHIN THE FIRST MONTH OF AIRBNB LAUNCHING ITS VIRTUAL TRAVEL PLATFORM. *AIRBNB.CO.UK/S/EXPERIENCES*

NATURAL WONDERS *to visit virtually*

ANTARCTICA

The Shackleton 100 interactive virtual walking tour takes in Antarctica's extraordinary wildlife and historic landmarks. The environmental impact of in-person tourism to the continent makes this virtual option all the more enticing. *shackleton100.com/antarctica*

GALÁPAGOS ISLANDS

Live cameras and 360-degree video footage bring the creatures of the Galápagos Islands that bit closer to home. Watch blue-footed boobies and land iguanas go about their day in real time. *airpano.com/360photo/galapagos*

GRAND CANYON

Two billion years of history are mapped out in layers of rock and fossil in the Grand Canyon. Virtual visitors can learn more on an archaeology tour or set off on a kayak trip. *nps.gov*

Four ancient sites to explore from afar

THE PYRAMIDS, EGYPT

Of the 100-plus pyramids that have been identified in Egypt, the most iconic is the Great Pyramid of Giza, which was constructed around 2560 BC. Virtual visitors can examine the gigantic structures up close, as well as seeing the nearby cemeteries and settlements. *giza.fas.harvard.edu*

ANGKOR WAT, CAMBODIA

Originally built by the Khmer Empire as a Hindu temple in the early 12th century, this sandstone complex was gradually converted into a Buddhist centre of worship. Take in the famous temples, as well as the nearby town of Siem Reap, via these online tours. *virtualangkor.com*

MACHU PICCHU, PERU

Situated 7,970ft above sea level, these 15th-century ruins are evidence of an engineering marvel. Check out the famous Temple of the Sun, see the courtyards (complete with grazing alpacas) and 'scale' Machu Picchu's highest point. *youvisit.com/tour/machupicchu*

OLD QUÉBEC, CANADA

The historic district of Old Québec is one of North America's finest remaining examples of a fortified colonial city, founded by the French in the 17th century. Virtual tours offer visitors the chance to experience the area's unique architecture. *quebec-cite.com*

SOURCES: LOUVRE.FR, MUSEUMS.EU, TRAVEL PR, FORBES.COM, HISTORY.COM, UNESCO.ORG

IMAGES: GETTY

HOT TOPIC

READ THE EXTENDED VERSION OF THIS ONLINE AT NATIONALGEOGRAPHIC.CO.UK/TRAVEL

REFUNDS, REBOOKING & YOUR RIGHTS

TRAVEL OPERATORS AND AIRLINES HAVE COME UNDER FIRE FOR OFFERING CREDIT — OR NOTHING AT ALL — RATHER THAN REFUND CONSUMERS FOR TRIPS CANCELLED DUE TO COVID-19. WHAT OPTIONS DO CONSUMERS HAVE? WORDS: SARAH BARRELL

IMAGE: GETTY

A long time ago in a reality far, far away — or, in other words, early March this year — travel-related hashtags started making the rounds on social media. 'Postpone don't cancel', 'rebook don't refund' and 'defer don't drop' were variations on the clarion call from champions of industry as countries started shutting down, and people began assessing the likelihood of imminent trips being able to go ahead.

It was a sentiment that, at the time, had some traction with consumers keen to support businesses and communities at their chosen destinations (and even keener to keep the faith that a holiday was still within their grasp). But as borders closed and airlines began bulk-cancelling flights, it became apparent that coronavirus's impact would be more severe and long-lasting than originally thought, so people started seeking refunds in earnest.

"Since the UK entered lockdown in March, Which? has heard from thousands of passengers who have had their trips cancelled and been left without their money as airlines and holiday operators continue to delay or simply deny them their refunds on a massive scale," explains Rory Boland, editor of *Which? Travel*.

"We know the industry is under immense pressure as a result of the pandemic, and don't want to see it suffer further. But it can't be on consumers to prop up airlines and travel firms through this period as companies openly break the law and effectively use customers' money as an interest-free loan, especially when many of those waiting for refunds are also in difficult financial situations."

"Consumers are entitled to a refund — it's the law. This hasn't changed during Covid-19," says Kane Pirie, founder of VIVID Travel and managing director of the Right to Refund campaign. "2020 has been brutal for us, with massive cash outflows only made possible with additional finance from me as the main shareholder. Many other owner-managed tour operators have also done the right thing: followed the law and refunded customers. Several larger tour operators could refund but refuse to do so."

The companies who get this right will have invested well in their futures. "We've avoided mass cancellations by speaking to each client to talk through their options," says Derek Jones, UK chief executive of DER Touristik, parent company of a number of big tour operators, including Kuoni. A vocal advocate of industry unity rather than refund campaigns, Jones says: "There's still clearly an appetite for travel. With a compassionate approach, we've managed to persuade the majority of our customers to rebook in 2021."

But are those new bookings safe? Predictions of zombie travel companies staggering into 2021, taking bookings, then falling insolvent just as those new bookings or credit notes become redeemable are legion. The precarious state of the airline industry adds to the problem.

Which? was among several consumer rights groups to lobby the government's Competition and Markets Authority to investigate companies breaking the law on holiday refunds.

"Which? wants to see the regulator come down strongly on any airlines found to be systemically denying or delaying refunds for cancelled flights and holidays," says Boland. "And for the government to set out how it will support the industry, allow airlines and holiday operators to refund passengers, and restore trust in the sector."

More information: *which.co.uk/travel*
gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice
caa.co.uk/atol-protection
abta.com/tips-and-advice

YOUR RIGHTS

1. If an EU airline cancels your trip, you're entitled to a refund or a rebooking. You don't have to accept credit or vouchers. Beyond the EU, it depends on the terms and conditions of your carrier or travel agent.

2. Package holidaymakers whose trips are cancelled are entitled to a full refund within two weeks.

3. If you cancel your trip because you don't want to travel, it's not a given that your travel company will refund you. Wait until it cancels the trip, then rebook or request a refund.

4. If your company doesn't cancel, and the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) is still advising against all but essential travel, your policy may cover you for cancellation if you bought travel insurance before coronavirus became a 'known event' on 13 March 2020.

5. You may be able to claim on purchases made with a credit card via Section 75 of the Consumer Credit Act, and even some debit cards via the 'chargeback' scheme. This is usually only successful if you can prove your travel provider is refusing to give you a refund or has gone out of business.

KIT LIST

DAY-TRIP ESSENTIALS

APPRECIATE SOME OF THE BEAUTIFUL LANDSCAPES CLOSER TO HOME — EQUIPPED WITH THE RIGHT GEAR — ON A DAY TRIP
WORDS: TAMSIN WRESSELL

1 KEEN HARVEST MASK
To encourage wearing masks, Keen has created a line of them made from upcycled materials originally sourced from its shoe range. They're washable and reusable to minimise environmental impact, too. RRP: £10 for two. *keenfootwear.com*

2 KATHMANDU HELI THERMORE JACKET
For when the weather is on the changeable side, this Kathmandu jacket — made from recycled synthetic fibres — provides dependable warmth without the bulk. It's designed to be worn as a mid or outer layer to keep away the chills when the sun goes down. RRP: £99.99. *kathmandu.co.uk*

3 BRIDGEDALE ULTRALIGHT SOCKS
Wearing high-performing socks is essential for keeping feet happy on day trips. The Ultralight range from Bridgedale has been specifically designed for warmer weather, on and off the trail, to ensure feet stay dry and comfortable. RRP: £15. *bridgedale.com*

4 SMARTWOOL MERINO ULTRA LIGHT HOODIE
Designed to pack down into its pocket, Smartwool's merino wool adds breathability to this super light hoodie. Made from a blend of merino and recycled polyester with a DWR coating to provide wind and weather protection. RRP: £114.99. *smartwool.co.uk*

5 ARC'TERYX NORVAN LD 2 SHOE
Arc'teryx's new lightweight trail running shoe is designed to be breathable, durable and to provide all-day comfort on extended walks and trail runs. Ideal on shifting terrain. RRP: £140. *arcteryx.com*

6 OSPREY ARCHEON 25 BACKPACK
Made fully from recycled fabrics, this roll-top backpack comes with a rain cover and a specific backsystem support available in men's and women's ranges. It has metal fastenings for durability and a front pocket for easy access. RRP: £150. *ospreyeurope.com*

Three to try: Fill your backpack

JACK WOLFSKIN RE WASTY

Take home your rubbish after a day out with this 100% recycled reusable rubbish bag. RRP: £12. *jackwolfskin.co.uk*

POP & STORE 1L LUNCHBOX

Collapses down when empty, saving 60% space, for on-the-go storage. Available in a range of sizes. RRP: £5.99. *addis.co.uk*

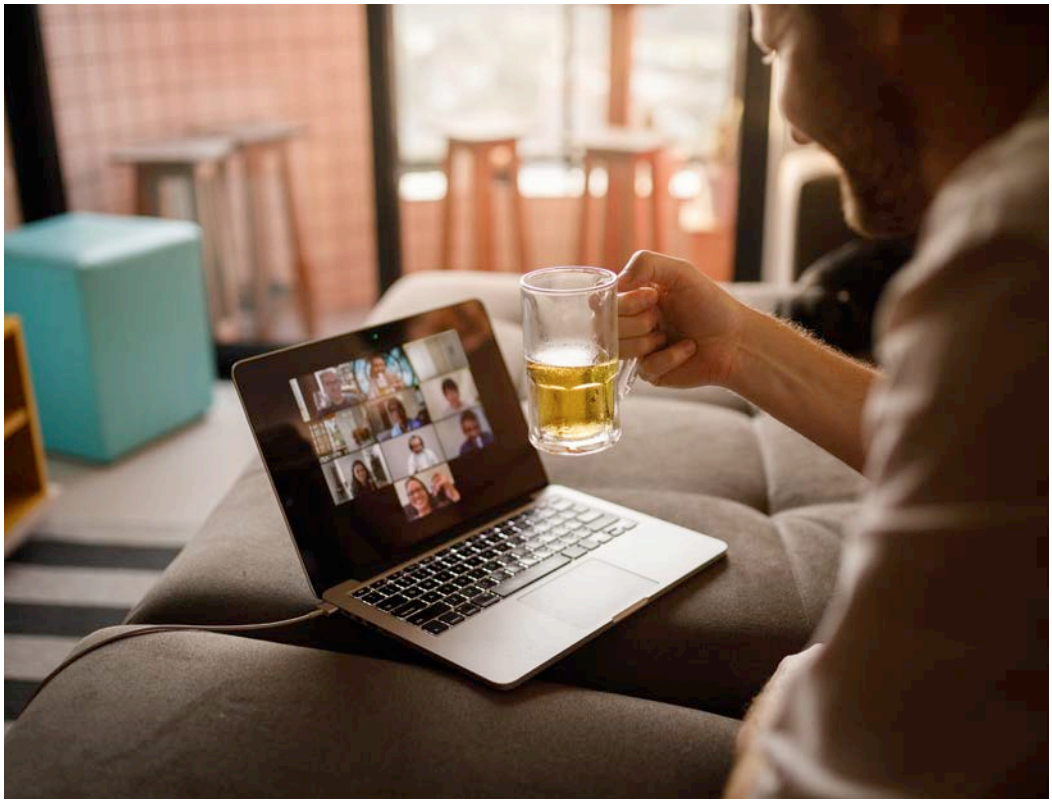
CLOSCA BOTTLE

In line with their Consciousness campaign, Closca have created reusable, wearable bottles inspired by nature. RRP: £35. *closca.com*

TECH TRAVELLER

STAYING IN TOUCH

PEOPLE FROM ALL CORNERS OF THE GLOBE AND ALL WALKS OF LIFE ARE COMING TOGETHER ONLINE AS A WAY OF STAYING IN TOUCH, A HABIT WHICH SEEMS SET TO CONTINUE LONG AFTER SOCIAL DISTANCING HAS ENDED. WORDS: KATE RUSSELL



When it comes to virtual socialising, there are now a dizzying number of text and video-call platforms. The most important question to ask when choosing the right one is: what are the people I want to talk to using? WhatsApp is a safe bet, with two billion active users worldwide and automatically encrypted messages for security. You can start a one-to-one or group chat with anyone in your phone's contacts — if they don't have WhatsApp, they'll get a message inviting them to download it. In some regions (notably South America and Southeast Asia), it's the default communication tool for both individuals and professional travel companies. A useful feature: give the app access to location data in your phone's settings, and 'attach location' to show a map of where you are.

Video-conferencing app Zoom has exploded in popularity: free and easy to use, you don't need to download the app to set up or attend a gathering. Just tap the invitation link and Zoom will run in your browser. Installing the app provides better call quality, and some security features aren't default. Add the password option to stop random 'Zoom-call bombers' disrupting your call, and under advanced settings enable 'Waiting room' to place all attendees in waiting until approval from the conference host to ensure you have invitees only. Also, in advanced settings, 'Touch up my appearance' adds a soft-focus filter to your video that smooths out shadows and wrinkles in a subtle way. You can even add a virtual background, which is useful if your house or hotel room isn't camera-ready.

The free Zoom video-call service can host up to 100 participants, but if you want something even easier for groups of up to six, Talky lets you set up and join an audio or video call without registering or downloading. Just give your room a name, then start chatting.

As online socialising becomes imbedded in daily life, the likes of Microsoft, Google, and Facebook have upped their virtual comms offerings. Microsoft Teams have travelled outside of office space with a mobile app to connect friends and family, while Facebook's group video-calling feature, Messenger Rooms (which lets up to 50 people to chat at the same time), and Google Meet, platforms already at our fingertips, look set to become long-term travel companions. *whatsapp.com zoom.us talky.io meet.google.com messenger.com/rooms*

IMAGE: GETTY

TOP THREE... *noise-cancelling headphones*

BLUETOOTH SONY WH-1000XM3

Life can get loud, as many of us discovered during lockdown. Did you know babies cry at 130db, which is louder than a jet engine heard inside a passenger cabin. These high-end wireless cans have some of the best active noise cancelling on the market. RRP: £329. *sony.co.uk*

WF-1000XM3 TRUE WIRELESS EARBUDS

Noise-cancelling earbuds that are also wireless are quite rare — complex technology is hard to cram into tight spaces. This really impressive pair, however, has an accompanying app that lets you adjust ambient sounds to allow voices to be heard, while blocking out other noises. RRP: £220. *sony.co.uk*

SOUNDCORE LIFE Q20 HEADBAND

Budget shoppers often have to forfeit some of the features and sound quality found in more expensive headphones, but this reasonably priced pair have active noise-cancelling technology slated to reduce up to 90% of external noise. They're also very comfortable and have a built-in bass booster. RRP: £48.99. *soundcore.com*

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

We're raising a glass of Campari and saying '*saluti*', as Italy reopens to travellers. From meeting artisans in the north to soul-soothing coastal road trips in the south, now — more than ever — is the time to plan an off-the-beaten-path getaway. We'll show you how

***Plus** // Buffalo, Cappadocia, India, Kenya, Kuala Lumpur, Mexico City, Osaka, Palma, Wales*

SEPT/OCT ISSUE ON SALE SEPTEMBER 2020

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see page 144

IMAGE: ALAMY

The Gems of Roberto E. Wirth

Welcome from Roberto E. Wirth

It is my pleasure to take you on a discovery journey through Italy and introduce you to my collection. Five gems, each featuring its own distinctive personality, share a timeless elegance and an authentic Italian style. Meticulously designed historic villas and residences, in unique and unparalleled locations, where guests can appreciate the distinctiveness of an exclusive style. Enchanting settings where one can feel the personal touch of a family-owned business.

Roberto Wirth

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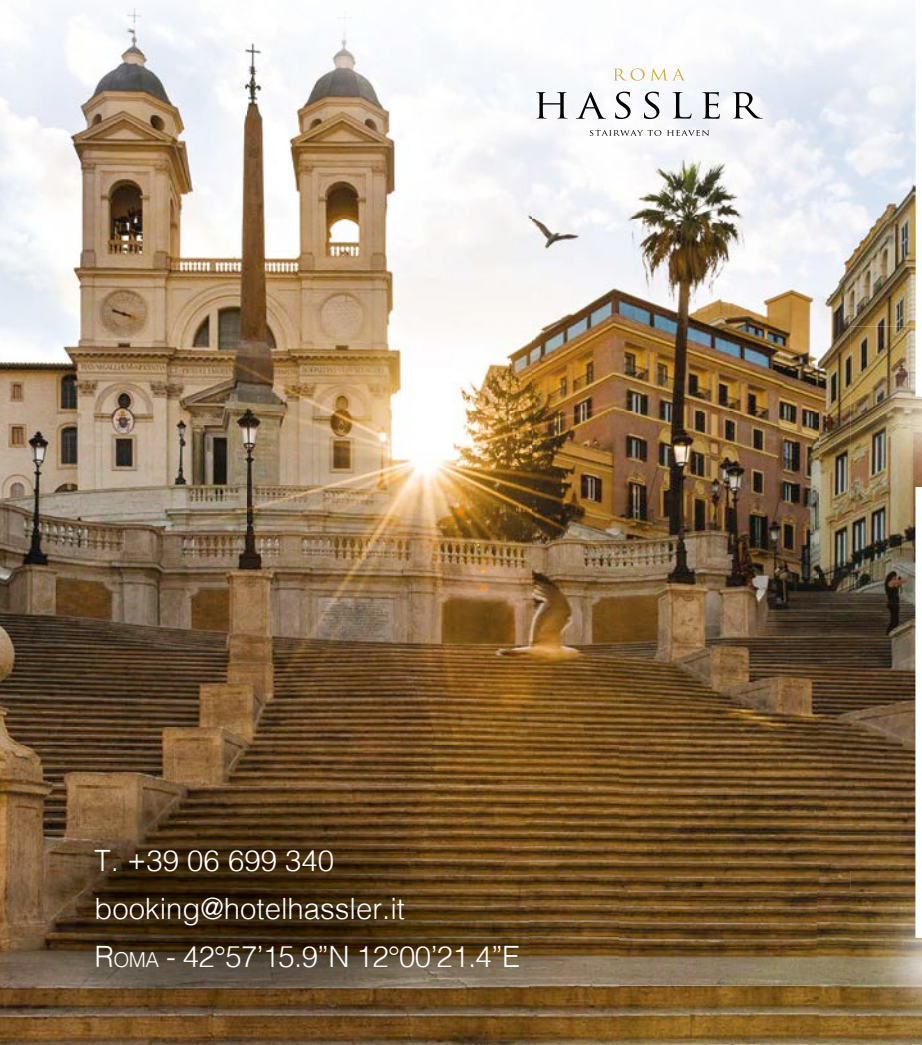
Spedalicchio - 43°17'35.0"N 12°14'05.1"E



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IMAGES: CHARLIE RICHARDS; ROSALIND ATKINSON; FOOD STYLING: ANGELA ROMEO

FIVE WAYS WITH

Watermelon

With dishes from around the world, there's plenty to delve into at our Food Festival. To help you stay inspired, here's five ways to get the most out of watermelon

Watermelon is a perfect summer ingredient: colourful and refreshing, it looks amazing and is great for cooling down. At our next Food Festival, we'll be showcasing plenty of dishes with a global outlook — you can broaden your palate stall by stall in our exhibitor space, plus catch demonstrations and talks. For now, we've gathered together some of our favourite international watermelon dishes to inspire you.

CYPRUS

A typical Cypriot summer evening meal is grilled halloumi served with cubed watermelon; grill the cheese for two minutes on each side until golden then add toasted pine nuts, torn mint leaves and a squeeze of lime juice.

VENEZUELA

A cross between a fruit salad and a punch, tizana is a mix of fruits — watermelon, melon, pineapple, grapes, bananas, apples and really any other fruit that comes to hand, peeled and chopped and then mixed with orange juice and a splash of grenadine. Add a handful of ice and keep in the fridge.

TURKMENISTAN

Watermelon is so popular in Turkmenistan that it even has its own national holiday, Melon Day, which takes place every August. A popular accompaniment to tea is watermelon jam, which is often served on toast. It's made from pureed watermelon, lemon juice, sugar and pectin: boil and store in sterile jars.

GHANA

Ghanian markets are usually full of the fruit in the summer, so watermelon lemonade is very popular. Made with plenty of lemons, it's wonderfully refreshing. Blend the watermelon and add lemon juice, strain and add sugar syrup to taste, then chill in the fridge. Serve over ice; it can even be served in a watermelon half.

INDIA

Chef and cookbook author Romy Gill has shared her simple recipe for watermelon salad. Romy will be appearing at the Speakers' Corner at the National Geographic Traveller Food Festival to talk about her book, *Zaika: Vegan Recipes from India*.

Tarbuj ka salad

SERVES: 4 TAKES: 5 MINS

INGREDIENTS

1 small watermelon, halved
1 lime, juiced (if you don't have a lime, use the juice of ½ lemon)
½ tsp sea salt (substitute with chaat masala or mango powder, if you have these to hand)
2 tsp fresh mint, chopped
½ tsp black pepper, crushed

METHOD

Mix all the ingredients in a bowl and serve. It's refreshing, delicious and very simple to make.

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

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WIN

A summer bundle from Finisterre worth £115!

Finisterre's new collection is inspired by the natural world, with designs taken from the archives of the Natural History Museum. Made from recycled and organic materials, the bundle includes a rucksack and T-shirt, featuring illustrations from 17th-century naturalist Maria Sibylla Merian, and a second T-shirt embroidered with a sea-faring tern, from naturalist John James Audubon's *The Birds Of America*. *finisterre.com*

IMAGE: GETTY

★ STAR LETTER

Staying grounded

Having well developed travel plans for 2020 is one thing, but having been further inspired by your December 2019 issue, the decision was made to reduce air miles and travel by land or sea for adventures in 2020. In an undetermined period where 'stay home' is safest for all and the outlook unknown, will the convenience of air travel be less appealing than alternatives? As an interrailer of years gone by and quite happy to live out of a single (smallish) bag, I do believe zigzagging across a country or several by train, road or with two feet gives an adventure untouchable from 30,000ft. The world will certainly change, and I for one hope it's for the better. **MATT WACKETT**

Tasting notes

Your 'Taste of Lebanon' feature (March 2020) reminded us of our trip to the country. We ventured beyond Beirut and discovered Bsharri, the birthplace of poet Kahlil Gibran, at the head of the Qadisha Valley which rings with poetry of its own. There we found Café Aroma, run by Tony. We ordered sandwiches of kafta, Lebanese sausage and shrimps, washed down with Lebanese coffee: sweet and bitter, smooth and silky, without any residue. Thanks to Tony, we learned the difference between Lebanese and Arabic coffee! **NANDINI CHAKRABORTY**

Bear it in mind

Your article on bear conservation in Abruzzo (March 2020) was beautifully presented. I've visited this area of Italy a few times, including Pescasseroli. It was in an unspoiled part of the country, and so I was delighted to hear of the conservation work of both Salviamo L'Orso and the European Nature Trust (in Abruzzo and Scotland). I am grateful to these people as our delicate planet, and all the living creatures we share it with, needs as much help as possible. I'll certainly look into returning to Abruzzo to spend some time with national park guides to learn more about the area and its wildlife, including the amazing Marsican brown bear.
DR NADIA TUZI

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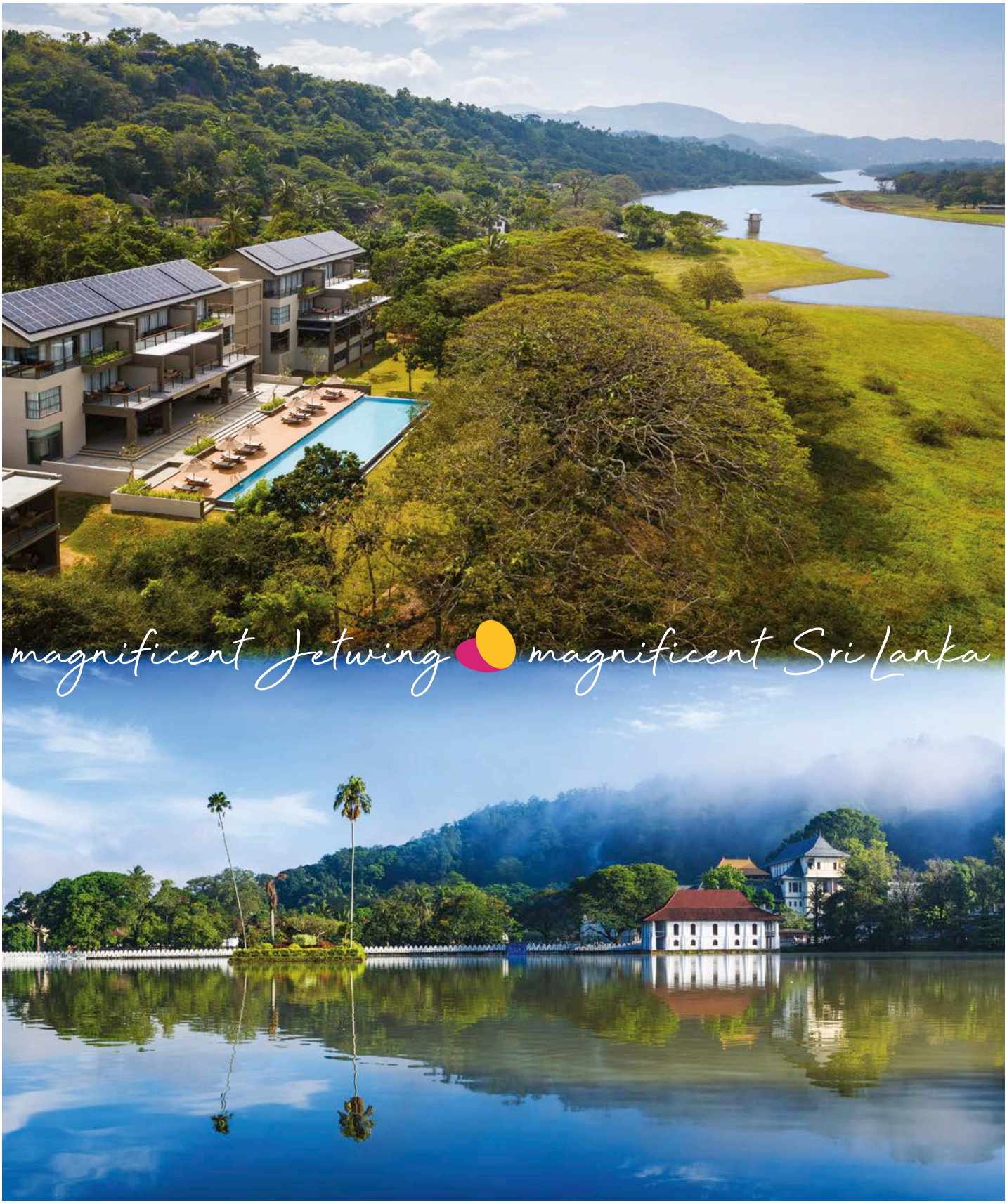

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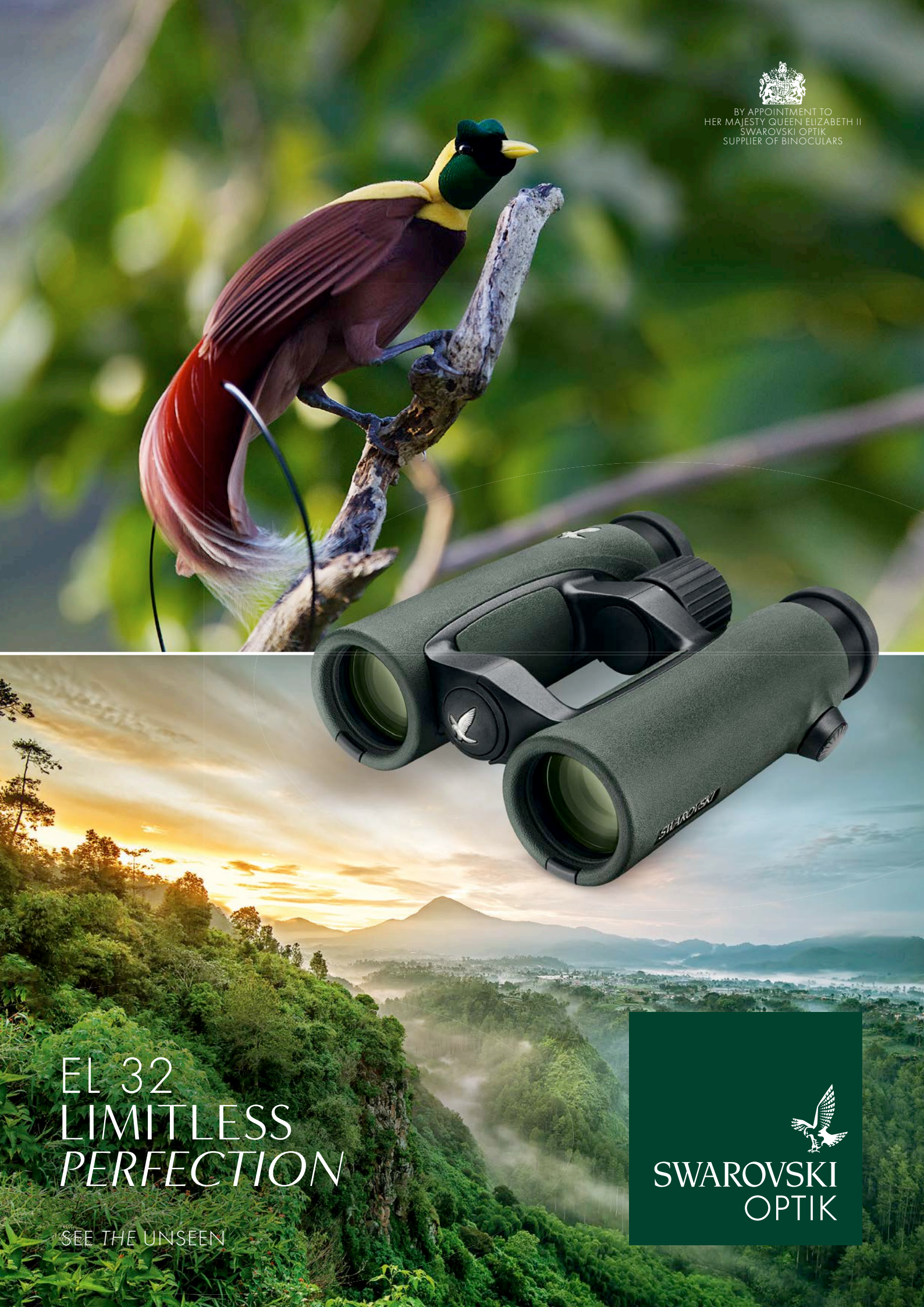
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