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Published by:

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In this issue, we start our world-wide odyssey in the 'Land of the Rising Sun' to find Japan's 'Great Getaways' and to discover Oku Japan's Self-Guided Tours of 'Kyushu's Hidden History'. On the same journey, we explore the remarkable 'Five Stans'. To the far west of Asia, we jet-off to find the best of Dubai and savour the best MICHELIN STAR restaurants this worldly destination has to offer.

In Africa, we learn about Lion World Travel's 'Top Three African Honeymoon Destinations' before we visit fascinating Zambia and find many thrilling adventures awaiting us. To the north, we take a relaxing Windstar Cruise to uncover the Volcanic Islands of the Canaries.

In Europe, we find Türkiye's Most Beautiful Cittaslow Towns and while in the Mediterranean, we find 'Greece's Unexplored Aegean' by Small-Ship Cruise aboard Variety 'Panorama' Cruises, then discover Malta's sister, the amazing laid-back island of Gozo, before exploring beautiful natural settings in Italy. In the Iberian Peninsula, we find 'Salamanca is Spain at its Most Majestic' before heading to taste the best cheeses and chocolate in Gruyeres. In Paris, we go for tasty Italian cuisine at Ober Mamma and then we discover the Rubenshuis and some of the best from the classic artist, Peter Paul Rubens. In Germany, we find Opera is very popular and much appreciated throughout this great nation. In Northern Europe, we continue our discovery of the delightful Baltics aboard the Viking Sky through its Viking Homelands itinerary before exploring the best of Ireland with Insight Vacations' well-tailored itinerary.

On to the Americas where we start in Canada's beautiful capitol of Ottawa and find it has 'Everything a Holiday can Offer', before working up an appetite for the wonderful food found in Philadelphia. In Maryland, we find plenty of great American history and beautiful natural settings before we head for 'a spirited visit' to the charming state of Indiana.

Now, to the far-far north to take a 'girl-friend cruise' with Princess Cruises through incredible Alaska before experiencing even more outdoor beauty as we head to the Golden, BC, region and enjoy some of the best of Western Canada. South bound, we find out 'What's New' in the awesome states of Oregon, Utah and Nevada. While there, we discover that Reno-Tahoe has a wonderful and eclectic array of experiences for the traveler. In California, we take in the great outdoors of Los Angeles and its neighbouring community of Torrance.

In Latin America, we find the best of supernatural Costa Rica on a fun, educational and well-planned tour with Exodus Adventure Travels, before 'Exploring Brazil: From the Vibrant Streets of Rio to the Depths of the Amazon Jungle'.

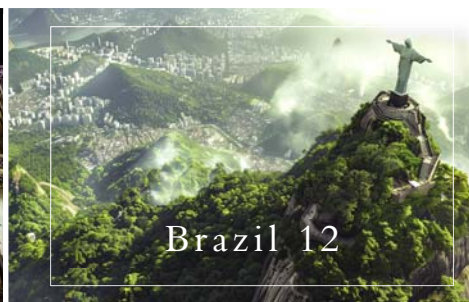
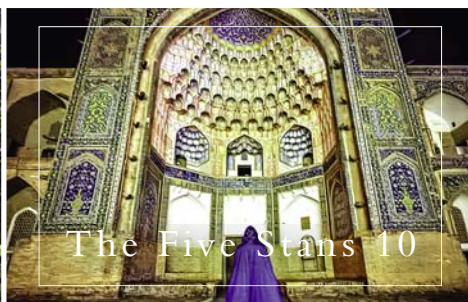
Finally, to conclude our round the world journey, we head to the 'land down under' to take in all that is new in magnificent Australia.

Happy Travels!



Departments

Destination (features)



Around the World (short informative travel pieces)



Japan + Italy + Germany + Good-to-Go + Exodus Adventure Travels + Oku Japan + Lion World Travel + Malta
Turkey + WT 21 Must Visit Places + Philadelphia + WT Foodie Tour + Nevada + Oregon + Utah + Zambia
Flanders + Torrance, CA + Gruyeres + WT 22 Years of Memorable Images + Ottawa + Ober Mamma
Los Angeles + WT 11 Best Cities + Dubai + Australia + Tropical Tidbits

Cruising Section

48

Cruise News
Variety Cruises Panorama
Princess Cruise to Alaska
Disney Cruise Line Expansion
CroisiEurope's Ganges River Cruise
Viking Homelands Cruise
The Canaries with Windstar Cruises

Stay & Play

64

airfield by Marriott Nordhavn, Copenhagen

Luxury Hotels...Grand Resorts...Charming B&B... Opulent Villas...Quaint Country Inns...
Ec lodges...Luxury Safari Camps...Ice...Cave...Treetop...Hotels



A Costa Rica Adventure with Exodus Adventure Travels

Article and photography by Michael Morcos

As such a popular destination and favourite of many adventure travelers, I wanted to find out what all the fuss was about in Costa Rica. Having traveled to 78 countries, this tropical destination has always intrigued me and been on my bucket list for decades. I would finally satisfy my curiosity and take a one-week trip to uncover the land between two oceans.

I have always said if when you discover a far-off destination, do it right the first time. The tour with Exodus Adventure Travels on their 'Natural Highlights of Costa Rica' would be the right company to explore with.

This would be my second time out with Exodus, the first coming in 2023 when I went on a 'trip of a lifetime' with them to northern

Africa on a two-week adventure to discover the 'Highlights of Morocco - In Comfort'. That trip was one of my favourites, not only for exploring the exotic treasures of Morocco but also for how well Exodus handled it. I was excited to experience the same professional service, choice of great hotels, guides, drivers, transportation and a general feeling of knowing I would be taken care of from the time I arrived at the airport to my departure.

Just like my trip to Morocco where there were only a few guests, we would be only nine travelers in Costa Rica, which makes any trip more delightful as we could get up and go in a short period of time.

Accommodations

Exodus provided us with strictly the best possi-

ble accommodations in ideal locations close to the attractions we would visit. This trip was set up perfectly, and all our rooms were clean and convenient with great staff and services. My favourite was the individual cabins found at the Evergreen Lodge in the Tortuguero National Park. Basically, we were nestled right into the tropical forest with natural setting all around us, the main river was a stone's throw away, the facilities were properly kept and blended in with the surroundings. Instead of windows in our cabins, we would have screen meshing on three sides that let in fresh air and kept the insects and wildlife at bay.

To add to this authentic experience there were no roads to this lodge and the only way in and out was by specially built motorized boats. This whole experience turned out to be



one of the highlights of the trip, and I started understanding why Costa Rica was such a desired destination as it prides itself by protecting its land and keeping a natural and sustainable environment.

The Exodus effect

From a to z, meaning from the moment I first surfed their website through my safe return home, I only have positive praise for this wonderful touring company. Their online portal is exceptionally user-friendly, and adventurers can find their next dream trip quickly, easily and with a lot of fun. Their in-house staff took care of all the details to organize and prepare the world traveler for the journey with many emails and links to more travel information.

Like my previous tour to Morocco, Exodus hires some of the best guides I would ever have on any trip. Friendly, helpful, knowledgeable and experts in their field, they were fantastic to be around and instrumental to the success of the tour.

Guillermo, our guide in Costa Rica, was a jewel and always ready to help us no matter the time of day and was always happy and smiling. A biologist by education, he spent decades learning and loving nature and gave us fascinating view of Costa Rica's flora and fauna.

On both trips, Exodus had the most experienced drivers and excellent modes of clean and safe transportation. As well, Exodus guests were a joy to travel and share these amazing experiences with. Those who are friendly, educated, and well-mannered always blend in well to the Exodus way of doing things. It goes without saying that most of the adventurers are repeat Exodus travelers as they know what they want on every trip and get it.

Excursions galore

The best way to learn about a destination is to get out and embrace it. Exodus' 'Natural Highlights of Costa Rica' was well researched, planned and perfectly executed. Every day was a grand day of discovery and with the guidance of Guillermo, we were out and about in the marvellous nature where we would see a multitude of wildlife, including the bigger animals, such as three different species of monkeys, reptiles, (too) many species of birds to even start describing them,

right down to the hundreds of fascinating insect species we would see. We also embraced Costa Rican culture in the towns, villages and countryside with its welcoming people and delighted in the ever-popular local dishes that were fresh and healthy.

Personally, I had a few things to see on this trip and was not disappointed as this Exodus itinerary brought us to them. On my list was: the Costa Rica rain forest, the Arenal Volcano, both east and west coasts and beaches, the Cloud Forest, the 'Treetop Walkways' and the bridges that span the many gorges in the region of Monteverde. As an added bonus, Guillermo brought us to a banana plantation where we would find out all there is to know of these fruits from harvest to packaging.

With all that physical activity, we still had plenty of downtime to reflect rest, rejuvenate, and of course shop for beautifully locally crafted gifts and souvenirs to fill up our luggage.

Rain, rain go away.

Unlike the northern climates, my home and native land, where there are four seasons, in the tropics there are only two, that is the rainy season and dry season. Venturing to Costa Rica in the wet season is not as bad as I thought and after our first two nights of unbelievable rain, we would have decent breaks in the morning and afternoon. And heading from the humid east over the mountains to the west coast brought us much needed dry conditions, blue skies, and brilliant sunshine.

"Pura Vida" is the slogan used to promote Costa Rica travel. Translated it means 'pure life,' for locals it means the 'good life' and will often be used to greet each other. To me, there is nothing truer than this greeting, Costa Rica has the good life. Having been to the tropics on many occasions and on three different continents, including nearby Panama and the Amazon, I find Costa Rica very welcoming, laid back and exceptionally well kept. This Exodus adventure tour was unlike any other I have ever experienced. My time with the other guests, Guillermo leading us, and the combined experience of the Exodus team with their 50 years of experience made this truly a trip of a lifetime and will remember it for all my days. ■

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A Visit to Remote Central Asia

Traversing The Five Stans with World Expeditions

Article and photography by Nicholas Kontis



The names of seven Central Asian nations end with the suffix “-stan.” It’s a Persian word meaning “land of the,” as in “land of the Afghans” (Afghanistan) and “land of the

Paks” (Pakistan), two countries are well-known in today’s turbulent world. But the other five may be more fascinating to modern global explorers.

Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan share a history that has followed them across the steppes from ancient to modern times, from Alexander the Great to Genghis Khan, from the fabled Silk Road through 73 years of Soviet control. The people of the countries that now identify collectively as The Five Stans declared their independence from the USSR in 1991.



While each has followed its own path into the 21st Century, a journey through the mysterious region today highlights similarities more than differences. I traveled overland for 23 days from isolated Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, to vibrant Almaty, Kazakhstan, with tour leaders World Expeditions.

Along this road less traveled, I discovered vast deserts stretching to lofty peaks where alpine lakes cradled fertile valleys. I found classic Islamic architecture in blue-domed mosques and museums, and remnants of the bygone Soviet era in myriad monuments and relics, apartment buildings and a clinging infrastructure.

Turkmenistan

Turkmenistan stands out as the most clandestine and unexplored. A guided tour with a formal letter of invitation from a government-approved travel agency is a must, adding an element of exclusivity to your journey. It may leave you feeling privileged, experiencing a destination that few have had the opportunity to explore. It may also leave you feeling dazed and confused. Ashgabat International Airport, built like a stylized falcon, charges USD 95 for a Turkmenistan visa and another USD 17 for a declaration of a negative COVID result, although no test is ever administered. (The government denies the pandemic ever pierced its borders.)

First stop is the “White City” of Ashgabat, the national capital. The Guinness Book of World Records documents the bizarre metropolis as having the most white marble buildings (nearly 600) of any city worldwide. Beautiful but seemingly abandoned, it’s like Las Vegas meets Pyongyang. Yet beyond the flashy facade, the Turkmen people are warm and hospitable. In bazaars and malls, locals are always curious to discover where you come from and make you feel welcome. They can also be direct in their requests for privacy, frequently insisting on “no photos.”

Leaving Ashgabat, Turkmenistan’s highlights include the UNESCO Heritage site of Merv, the oldest of the ancient Silk Road



oasis cities. A half-million people may have lived here in the 12th century, making it one of the world's largest cities and a spiritual pilgrimage site.

In a nation with one mind-boggling sight after another, Turkmenistan's highlight may be a fiery crater in the Karakum Desert village of Darvaza. Known as "The Gates of Hell," it has been burning since 1971, when Soviet mishap punctured a natural gas cavern.

Uzbekistan

The most show-stopping nation among the Five Stans is Uzbekistan, a cultural cross-roads with a spellbinding arsenal of blue-domed mosques, masterful mausoleums, minarets and madrasas (institutes of learning). In mesmerizing Khiva, Bukhara and Samarkand, architectural marvels dominate the landscape. The government's heavy investment in preserving these fairytale cities is a testament to the country's potential for expanded tourism. Textile, pottery and carpet shops make for a shopper's paradise.

In the ancient desert oasis of Khiva, in western Uzbekistan, the walled fortress of Itchan Kala is an open-air museum. Displaying more than 51 magnificent fortresses and palaces from past civilizations, Khiva features many of the most memorable attractions of the iconic Silk Road.

Our tour party spent two nights in the citadel of Bukhara, whose historic center on the Silk Road, has remained mostly intact. Among its architectural highlights are the Ark Fortress, Po-i-Kalyan and the Samanid Mausoleum, as well as numerous other sites representing early Islamic design.

No name is as evocative of ancient history as Samarkand, the jewel of the Silk Road. Registan Square awes visitors with its three madrasas and colored-light show after dark. Even more impressive is the Shah-i-Zinda, its dazzling turquoise tiles dating back to the 14th Century. Many sites are connected to Amir Timur, the most acclaimed of all Central Asian warlords and conquerors.



Tajikistan

Because of a border conflict between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, we couldn't travel directly from one country to the next, so we departed Uzbekistan twice. Our long day's road trip from Samarkand to picturesque Dushanbe, Tajikistan's meticulous capital city, testified to the country's mountainous beauty. Our journey along the majestic Pamir Highway, much of it above 10,000 feet, offered breathtaking scenery at every turn.

In Dushanbe, we visited the Varzob River, Independence Square, modern monuments, lakes, fountains and flower-laden parks. We followed our tour of the capital with another five-hour drive through more mountains, ending in Khujand, an agricultural center that had been attacked by Alexander the Great.

Returning to Uzbekistan, we enjoyed a single night in the Fergana Valley, where we visited silk factories and ceramic makers in the town of Rishtan.

Kyrgyzstan

Entering Kyrgyzstan, our new guide, Olga, assured me: "Our unique natural beauty will leave you excited and eager to explore." As in Uzbekistan, we spent almost a week in this nation, among the soaring peaks of the Tien Shan mountains, turquoise lakes and remote villages, welcoming the warmth of nomadic herders whose yurts were scattered along the sides of mountain roads.

Our first stop was the ancient city of Osh on the Silk Road, dating from the time of Alexander. We hiked Suleiman Too Mountain, a sacred site overlooking the city, where locals worship in caves etched with petroglyphs. In the Arslanbob Valley, we were grateful for modest guesthouse accommodations at a homestay, hosted by a local family who prepared our meals and offered warm hospitality.

We hiked again in the unspoiled Jalal-Abad region of western Kyrgyzstan. There was hardly a soul in sight as we traipsed through walnut forests around Sary-Chelek



Alpine Lake, with its lucid blue waters. We continued a drive through the dramatic of crags of Chyckan Gorge before visiting a nomadic family's yurt, along the Talas Ala Too range on the road to Bishkek.

The national capital, Bishkek is the most traditionally Soviet-style city of any Silk Road capital. Its communist statues date from its decades as a Russian outpost. Travelers get a sense of how locals live at the buzzing Osh Bazaar.

Kazakhstan

Almaty, the vibrant former capital of Kazakhstan, is a three-hour drive from Bishkek. Boasting an abundance of oil, minerals and natural gas, Kazakhstan is the most economically advanced of the five countries of Central Asia.

Almaty, a city of about 2 million, feels like a bustling European city. Among its landmarks is Panfilov Park, where Zenkov Cathedral is a Russian Orthodox Church built entirely of wood. A new attraction is a Ferris wheel, nearly 200 feet tall, mimicking the London Eye. Along with several other World Expeditions guests, we extended our adventure by two nights to better explore the city.

World Expeditions

The Five Stans overland discovery tour unveils essential highlights of the contrasting cultures and landscapes of the five former Soviet republics along the fabled Silk Road and its blue-tile accents.

The tour covers 21 days of adventure travel, including 18 nights of hotels and four homestay nights at a guest house in Kyrgyzstan, all with breakfasts. Six dinners are also included. Most of the tour takes place in Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, with shorter stays in Tajikistan and Kazakhstan. May and June are optimal months for travel in Central Asia, after spring's chill has lifted and before the summer heat strikes. ■

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Exploring Brazil: From the Vibrant Streets of Rio to the Depths of the Amazon Jungle

by Olivia Liveng



Brazil is a country of contrasts and surprises, offering a unique blend of vibrant city life, stunning coastal beauty, and the lush, mysterious allure of the Amazon rainforest. Whether you're relaxing on Rio's beaches, exploring its cultural sites, or immersing yourself in the biodiversity of the Amazon, Brazil's unique blend of city, ocean, and jungle ensures a trip filled with unforgettable memories. So get that passport ready and

The Heartbeat of Brazil: Rio de Janeiro

Where to Stay

In Rio de Janeiro, the best way to start your journey is by immersing yourself in the luxury and comfort of the Sheraton Grand Rio Hotel & Resort. Located on the stunning shores of Leblon Beach, this hotel offers breathtaking ocean views and top-notch amenities. The Sheraton Grand Rio is the perfect place to unwind and enjoy the city's vibrant energy, from beautifully appointed rooms to serene

swimming pools. The resort's location provides easy access to some of Rio's most iconic beaches, including Ipanema and Copacabana, making it an excellent base for both relaxation and exploration.

Another excellent option is the JW Marriott on the famous Copacabana Beach. This luxurious hotel combines elegance with comfort, providing exceptional service and amenities to guests. Its central location makes it an ideal base for exploring Rio's numerous attractions. The JW Marriott's rooftop pool offers stunning views of the beach and the city, making it a perfect spot to relax after sightseeing.

What to Do

Iconic Landmarks

Begin your exploration of Rio with a visit to Christ the Redeemer, one of the New Seven Wonders of the World. This iconic statue stands tall atop Corcovado Mountain, offering panoramic views of the city and the surrounding landscape. The journey to the top is as impressive as the destination, with the train ride through Tijuca Forest providing glimpses of Rio's lush greenery. Be sure to visit early in the morning or late in the afternoon to avoid the crowds and enjoy the serene atmosphere.

Next, head to Sugar Loaf Mountain, where a cable car ride to the summit reveals breathtaking views of Guanabara Bay and the cityscape. This is a must-visit spot, especially at sunset when the city is bathed in a golden glow. The cable car ride is an experience,

offering stunning views as it ascends the mountain. At the top, you'll find several observation decks, walking trails, and cafes where you can relax and take in the scenery.

Cultural Immersion

To taste Rio's rich cultural heritage, take a walking tour of downtown. Stroll through Cinelândia, explore the vibrant Lapa district, and marvel at the colorful Selarón Steps. Each location offers a unique glimpse into Rio's history and artistic spirit. Cinelândia is home to several historic buildings, including the Municipal Theatre and the National Library, which showcase the city's architectural splendor.

Lapa is known for its nightlife and vibrant street culture. The iconic Lapa Arches and the bustling night markets are a must-see. The Selarón Steps, adorned with colorful tiles from around the world, are a testament to the creativity and passion of the artist Jorge Selarón, who dedicated his life to creating this stunning mosaic.

A visit to the Museum of Tomorrow is also highly recommended. This futuristic museum, housed in an architectural marvel, explores the possibilities of the future through interactive exhibits on sustainability and science. The museum's striking design and thought-provoking exhibits make it a must-visit for those interested in the future of our planet.

Beaches and Outdoor Activities

Rio's beaches are legendary; only a trip to the city would be complete with spending time soaking up the sun. Ipanema Beach is known for its stunning views and vibrant atmosphere. Stroll along the promenade, play beach volleyball, or relax on the soft sand.

For a more tranquil beach experience, visit Leblon Beach, which is less crowded and offers a more laid-back vibe. The nearby Rodrigo de Freitas Lagoon is perfect for a leisurely bike ride or paddle boating, providing a peaceful escape from the city's hustle and bustle.

Where to Eat

Head to Confeitaria Colombo, a historic café



in downtown Rio, for lunch. Established in 1894, this elegant venue serves traditional Brazilian dishes in a stunning Belle Époque setting. The high ceilings, ornate mirrors, and intricate woodwork create a charming atmosphere. Try the feijoada, a traditional Brazilian stew, or the coxinha, a famous Brazilian snack.

Another excellent lunch option is Maguje, where you can enjoy contemporary Brazilian cuisine in a chic atmosphere. The restaurant's modern decor and innovative menu make it a popular spot for locals and tourists. Be sure to try their seafood dishes, which are fresh and flavorful.

Dinner

When it's time for dinner, the Michelin-starred L'Etoile restaurant at the Sheraton Grand Rio offers a sophisticated dining experience with panoramic city views. The restaurant's menu includes French and Brazilian cuisine fusion, with dishes that highlight local ingredients and flavors. For a more laid-back evening, visit Embaixada Carioca for a happy hour and watch the sunset over the city while enjoying delicious local bites and cocktails.

Head to Rio Scenarium in the Lapa district to taste Rio's nightlife. This famous nightclub is set in a beautifully restored colonial mansion and offers live music, dancing, and an eclectic atmosphere. Enjoy a caipirinha, Brazil's national cocktail, and dance the night away to the rhythms of samba and forró.

The Mystique of the Amazon Manaus and Beyond

Where to Stay

Leaving the bustling city behind, head to the heart of the Amazon rainforest for a completely different experience. The Uara Amazon Resort, located near Manaus, offers a luxurious yet authentic stay in the jungle. This eco-friendly resort provides all the comforts of modern accommodation while immersing guests in the natural beauty of the Amazon. Each room offers stunning views of the surrounding rainforest and rivers, ensuring a tranquil and immersive experience.

The resort's facilities include a swimming pool, spa, and dining options serving delicious Amazonian cuisine. It also offers guided tours and activities that allow guests to explore the rainforest and learn about its unique ecosystem.



What to Do

City Tour of Manaus

Begin your Amazon adventure with a tour of Manaus, the gateway to the Amazon. This bustling city is rich in history and culture, with several landmarks worth visiting. Start with the Amazonas Opera House, a striking symbol of the city's rubber boom era. This stunning building, with its intricate architecture and opulent interiors, is a testament to Manaus's prosperous past.

Explore the bustling Adolpho Lisboa Municipal Market to experience the vibrant local culture and browse various Amazonian products. The market is housed in a beautiful iron structure and offers a wide range of goods, from fresh fruits and vegetables to handmade crafts and souvenirs.

The Rio Negro Palace is another must-visit landmark. This historic building now serves as a cultural center and offers a glimpse into the city's rich history. The palace's beautifully landscaped gardens and elegant interiors make it a peaceful retreat from the city's hustle and bustle.

Meeting of the Waters

One of the most fascinating natural phenomena in the Amazon is the Meeting of the Waters, where the dark Rio Negro and the sandy-colored Amazon River flow side by side without mixing. A boat tour lets you witness this incredible sight and understand its science. The tour also offers opportunities to spot wildlife and learn about the local ecosystem.

Jungle Tours

Embark on a guided jungle tour to experience the Amazon rainforest's biodiversity. Activities include hiking through the dense jungle with an expert guide, learning about the flora and fauna, and spotting exotic animals such as sloths, monkeys, and various bird species. The tours also offer the chance to learn about medicinal plants and traditional uses of the rainforest's resources.

Fishing for piranhas in the Amazon's waterways is another thrilling activity. Experienced guides will teach you how to catch these infamous fish and their role in the ecosystem. The tours often include visiting a local village, where you can interact with the residents and learn about their way of life.

Victoria Amazonica

Victoria Amazonica, the giant water lily, is one of the Amazon's most iconic plants. These massive lilies can reach up to 3 meters in diameter and are known for their striking beauty. Visiting a lagoon where these lilies grow is a magical experience, offering a glimpse into the Amazon's intricate and diverse plant life. The lilies are particularly stunning during the blooming season when

their large white flowers open at night and close by morning. Guided tours provide insights into the life cycle of these fascinating plants and their importance to the local ecosystem.

River Excursions

The Amazon River and its tributaries offer numerous opportunities for exploration. Canoeing through the serene waters allows you to get up close to the diverse aquatic life and enjoy the tranquility of the rainforest. Spot the unique pink river dolphins, a rare and delightful sight, as they swim gracefully through the water.

Overnight river cruises offer the chance to spend a night on the river, enjoying the tranquility of the Amazon under the stars. These cruises provide comfortable accommodations, meals, and guided excursions to explore the surrounding rainforest. It's a unique way to experience the beauty and serenity of the Amazon.

Indigenous Community Visits

Visit local indigenous communities for a deeper understanding of the region. These visits provide insights into the lives of the Amazon's indigenous people, their traditions, customs, and sustainable ways of living in harmony with the rainforest. You'll have the opportunity to learn about their traditional crafts, music, and dance and gain a greater appreciation for their rich cultural heritage.

Parintins Festival

If you're lucky in planning your timing and decide to visit late June, you can immerse yourself in the vibrant culture of the Amazon by attending the Parintins Festival, one of Brazil's most spectacular cultural events. Held annually on the island of Parintins, this festival showcases the rich traditions and folklore of the Amazonian people through dazzling performances, music, and dance. The highlight is the epic competition between two teams, Garantido and Caprichoso, who depict local legends and myths in a breathtaking display of costumes, floats, and theatrical storytelling. This celebration offers a feast for the senses and a profound connection to the region's cultural heritage, making it an unforgettable experience for visitors. ■

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Salamanca is Spain at its Most Majestic

Article and photography by Randy Mink

Two of my favorite things to do in Europe are: 1) communing with the past in historic city centers with rambling pedestrian zones and 2) watching the world go by while noshing away at an outdoor cafe. For me, life doesn't get better than this.

In west-central Spain, the perfect place to pursue both passions is Salamanca, a medium-size city just 100 minutes away from Madrid by high-speed train.

Salamanca's Plaza Mayor, one of the most magnificent town squares in Spain, is ringed with cafes serving up tapas, those

delectable little bites craved by locals and tourists alike. Steps away, cobbled, car-free streets invite carefree wanderers to travel back centuries, as distant as the Middle Ages. Giving this outdoor museum a youthful vibe are students from around the world who attend the University of Salamanca, Spain's oldest.

Tourist-friendly but not too crowded, the historic core is compact and manageable. The number of sights is not overwhelming, so there's time to pause, reflect and loll about eating tapas on the Plaza or Calle Rua Mayor, the main pedestrian artery. Salamanca's Old Town, to my mind, is Spain in a nutshell.

From your umbrella table on Plaza Mayor, once a bullring and now criss-crossed by constant foot traffic, you can take in the sweeping expanse of Baroque architectural grandeur dating from the 1700s. Cement benches provide seating in the middle of the square, and three floors of stately, balconied apartments rise above the archways that rim its perimeter.

In the arcades, you'll find not only cafes but restaurants, bakeries, ice cream shops and the tourist office as well. The flag-bedecked clock tower building, a common meeting point, houses the Town Hall. Stone medallions on the colonnades depict great Spanish writers, kings and queens, and



Salamanca's Plaza Mayor



Student Quarter



Salamanca Cathedrals

explorers like Columbus and Cortes. Sort of a community living room, Plaza Mayor is the heart and soul of Salamanca.

Tapas Tasting in Old Town

On a bright spring day, I surveyed the splendor from my perch at Las Torres, nibbling on items from the tapas menu at the venerable cafe/bar, a Plaza Mayor fixture since 1927. My favorite was hornazo, a meat lover's dream. This Salamanca province specialty consists of layers of pork chorizo, pork loin and ham wrapped in lattice-crusted yellow dough. I also indulged in fried eggplant slices drizzled with honey (*crujiente de berenjena-miel* in Spanish), more of an Andalusia specialty (from that region's historical North African influences).

During my two days in Salamanca, I had other memorable tapas. At the Plaza's Cafeteria Los Escudos, I chose two classics—Iberian cured ham (*jamon iberico*), thinly sliced on the spot, and a wedge of Spanish omelette (*tortilla de patatas*), a simple egg-and-potato dish.

On Calle Rua Mayor, another prime spot for people-watching, I stopped at Cuatro Gatos for *revuelto de farinato*, a pretty orange-yellow concoction made of farinato (pork fat mixed with bread crumbs and paprika) and fried egg. Flavored with onion, salt, anise seed and other seasonings, farinato is called the "poor man's chorizo."

Seeing Salamanca from on High

In Europe, whenever the chance arises, I climb to the top of a major landmark—for bird's-eye views and just the challenge and bragging rights of making it to the summit. Salamanca's Old Town presented me opportunities at two buildings a short walk from Plaza Mayor.

At La Clerencia Church, I ascended the wooden *Scala Coeli*, or "Stairway of Heaven," on a 200-step trek to the passageway connecting its two bell towers. Setting my sights even higher, I then took the spiral, bell ringer's stairwell for a look at the big iron bells. Besides enjoying panoramas

of the city's ancient churches, convents and palaces, I spied migratory storks nesting on the dome of the colossal Baroque church, which began life in 1617 as a training school for Jesuit missionaries and now is home to Pontificia University, a private Roman Catholic school.

I also tackled the 328-foot-tall bell tower—and tried my hand at bell ringing—at Salamanca's somewhat quirky double-cathedral complex. Built centuries apart, the Old Cathedral and New Cathedral are actually attached—they share buttresses. In fact, you can't visit the 13th century Romanesque church (Cathedral of Santa Maria) without going through the Cathedral of La Asuncion de la Virgen, or New Cathedral, which isn't new at all—it was built hundreds of years ago in the Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque styles.

For those who don't make it to the bell room at the top, lower-level terraces offer fine views of the town and the cathedrals' exteriors. A cell phone tour of the interiors highlights sumptuous wood carvings, murals and a massive organ.

University Plays a Big Role

For its first 200 years, the University of Salamanca was in the Old Cathedral. Founded in 1218 by King Alfonso IX of Leon, it ranks as one of the oldest universities in Europe.

On a walk through the Old Town's student quarter, it's not uncommon to hear English spoken, as many North American study-abroad programs take place at the university, which includes both historic buildings—some from the 15th century—and modern ones. Besides Spanish language courses, foreigners take classes in Spanish culture and literature.

Intricate stone carvings on the facade of the main university building (*Escuelas Mayores*, or Upper Schools) provide the focal point for tourists exploring the hallowed streets of academia. The decorative style of ornamentation, popular during the late Spanish Renaissance, is called *Plateresque* because

the filigree-like carvings resemble fine silver jewelry, *plata* being the Spanish word for "silver." At any time of day, you'll see people craning their necks trying to spot the "hidden" frog sitting on a human skull, supposedly a symbol of good luck. (Vendors sell croaking toy frogs, and souvenir stores are full of frog trinkets.) Tourists can go inside the academic shrine and see the original classrooms and lecture halls, now museum exhibits.

Old Town's Golden Glow

The sandstone used in Old Town's buildings, quarried in nearby Villamayor, takes on a golden cast as it ages, giving Salamanca a special patina and the nickname Golden City. New buildings constructed with the same stone exhibit a lighter shade.

The best place for photographing the Old World splendor from a distance is the Roman Bridge, a pedestrian span over the River Tormes. Located just outside the city walls, this 1st century relic comprises 26 arches, 15 of them originals.

Salamanca's Old Town doesn't roll up the sidewalks after dark. Floodlit church towers, domes and facades cast a romantic spell, and ornate iron lampposts illuminate the stone streets. Strolling around this enchanting labyrinth one night around 11:30, I witnessed people thronging restaurants and cafes, lining up at ice cream stands, and sitting on park benches and church steps as they watched the crowds parade by. (I'll never get used to the Spanish penchant for late-night dinners.) There were even families out with young kids, and a few souvenir stores were open as midnight approached.

Why was I pounding the pavement well past my bedtime? Having been seduced by the Golden City, I just wanted to soak up every last drop of magic before I had to leave by train the next morning for Madrid and my flight home. Salamanca is truly a treasure to savor. ■

SPAIN.INFO/EN/DESTINATION/SALAMANCA/



Farinato Tapas



The University of Salamanca



Old Town by Night



Reno-Tahoe, Nevada: Casinos, Rodeos and Kayaking

Article and photography by Michael Morcos

What an eclectic and diverse selection of offerings the region of Reno-Tahoe has. Imagine rolling the dice one day, enjoying an authentic country style rodeo the next and then a short distance away being in the fresh mountain air with the incredible scenery of nearby Lake Tahoe. Add to this a lively music scene, fascinating modern art, delicious international cuisine and very friendly locals and you are about to have a great time.

Nevada, the seventh biggest state in the union, sure has its share of polar opposites, including unmatched entertainment, quirky festivals and art installations, wide open arid areas and it still has lots of space. Somewhere between Las Vegas' dizzying attractions and Nevada's vastness is Reno-

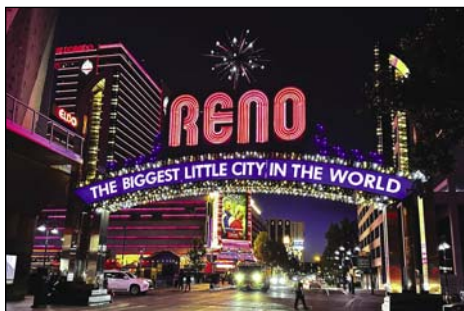
Tahoe, not too much of one thing but perhaps just the right mix of it all.

Your Best Bet

What a strange name for a hotel, I thought to myself. As this would be our accommodations while in Reno, I needed to know how it came to be named and found out the Best Bet Motor Lodge was established many decades ago and the name stayed, so did the lively original neon sign. The Lodge has recently been renovated, refurbished and reimagined and is now a boutique-style motel that includes a new spa and sauna. From my first impressions, I would summarize the Best Bet in one word, gorgeous, with a great deal of attention given to small details in its decor. My room on the lower level was extremely spacious and had ele-

ments of old and new that thoroughly complimented each other. The cement floors were mostly original and added a dimension of resilience while the handsome furniture and modern washrooms had a soothing effect. As a side note, after viewing other rooms, I can honestly say this motel had some of the most fascinating looking wallpaper I had ever seen, all different and each its own visual piece of art.

The Best Bet staff were welcoming and offered genuine and laid-back smiles which made our stay very relaxing. As a new acquisition, the owners of the Best Bet had decided to venture onto this property as their original hotel 'The Jesse', in town, only had a handful of rooms which were mostly booked. Within this hotel was the Estelle restaurant



where we would enjoy well-presented and tasty al fresco Mexican dishes.

Place your other best bet

Compared to Las Vegas, Reno's casinos can be best described as pint size, but it would be a harsh and unfair way to describe Reno's gaming rooms. On their own, these casinos have a rare character with interesting and even bizarre interior decorations and high-lights that have withstood time and cannot be duplicated. Within a short time, I started to admire their uniqueness. While I am not a gambler, I did notice there was just about everything one could want in a casino including slot machines and a host of just about any table games that I could think of, and all with lively dealers. While being caught up in the excitement and not to be left out, I did find a way of betting with the help of a local and a betting terminal, I placed a bet on a NHL hockey playoffs game for my favourite team to win. By the following night, I had the good fortune of finding out that not only did my team win, I had almost doubled my money. Viva Reno!

Rodeo time

La piece de resistance would be difficult words for the locals to understand, but my excitement for this annual event was palpable. It was all about timing as the popular Reno Rodeo runs for only 10 days and spurs the economy and fills the air with excitement and jubilation. If it wasn't enough that both the USA and the state of Nevada were patriotic, this day was patriots' night and the guests were encouraged to wear anything with stars and stripes, and to my complete joy they did, hosting a colorful blend of shirts, hats, dresses and even star and stripes on their boots.

The organizers of this non-profit rodeo have had some real problems of late, good problems that is, as the rodeo stands and grounds continuously sell-out, and even a bigger, better problem is that there is a waiting list for sponsors to come on board. This only shows the popularity of the event. Way-to-go Reno Rodeo!

Although I have traveled for the better part of four decades, there are still times that I am ecstatic about an event and the Reno Rodeo was one of them. I was now as far as could

be on this continent in distance and lifestyle from my north-eastern home, and the event felt like I was in some faraway land. Knowing I would be in attendance, I made sure to bring my cowboy hat, plaid shirt, jeans and leather shoes, after all I wanted to fit in on this incredible day. The pre and post shows were as much fun as the main event itself, we would feast on hardy favourites, meet the lively rodeo clown, the ever-smiling rodeo queen, be delighted by many cowgirls on horses carrying American flags, thrilled by the Sheriff's helicopter flyover and see the biggest American flag I had ever seen in person. I cannot think of anything that typifies this local community and its western spirit than this day, and yes, of course, the riders were wildly entertaining and fun to watch.

The refreshing Lake

Now for something completely different. With Reno behind us both in distance and experiences, we were but a short distance to the mountains and heading towards California. The urban setting made way to a major highway then off to smaller roads and finally winding and twisting upwards, we were in green heaven completely contrasting the dryness that Nevada is known for. The short drive was part of the journey, and we would find delightful with panoramic views of the mountains, forest and Lake Tahoe in the distance.

This region had always been a mystery to me and I heard so many great things and in a very short time, I could understand why this is such a great four-season destination. I would have never thought that there could be skiing in Nevada and yet we passed such a mountain with trails. In the village itself, we would pass by 'millions row' (now billions row) and the who's-who of these opulent and extremely well-kept properties. I would also learn from our guide that the lake waters were 99% pure and fed by snow melt of the tall and beautiful surrounding mountains. To thoroughly enjoy the remarkable scenery on this brilliantly sunny day, we would enjoy individual see-through kayaks from the sandy beaches and would gently paddle our way through the crystal-clear waters, all the while feeding all our senses with pure bliss. ■

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Japan's Great Getaways

Almost 70 percent of Japan is forested and home to popular "Power Spots", where health and well-being enthusiasts immerse themselves in the phytoncide emissions of the woods for rejuvenation. Interestingly, there is a quantifiable physiological effect from doing this.

Escaping the bustle of Tokyo, Okutama lies two hours west by train. It's an easy jaunt to inspirational scenery and serenity. "Okutama" means "beyond the spirit of the waters", and here you'll find lush mountains gushing with waterfalls and rivers that rush past trails, paths and caves.

On the Japan Sea Side, Sado Island, Niigata is renowned as the home of Kodo Taiko drumming, where you can beat massive drums in guided classes. It's also a bastion of coveted high-end sake breweries, including Hokusetsu, a favourite of Robert De Niro and his Michelin-starred restaurant, Nobu. Unique to water transportation, the Tarai-Bune (Tub Boats) seem like DIY boats made from wooden hot tubs in which women in traditional folk attire steer you around the bay. The lush greenery and purity of the waters make this area of Niigata prized for its high-quality rice and seafood.

Shimane is renowned for authentic tea houses and immaculate gardens, like the award-winning Adachi Museum of Art. This is a bucket list destination for green tea enthusiasts and horticulturalists. Meander around the Matsue Castle area and take a relaxing gondola ride under low-hanging trees, passing the turtles, ducks, river fish and exotic birds of the Horikawa River along the way. The bridges are so low that, while singing Japanese folk songs, the boat captain casually pushes a button to close the boat's awning within an inch of your head. Admire one of Japan's few remaining original castles along with the architecture of this samurai-era town.

Along the rocky coast, the recreation of choice is geo-kayaking in crystal clear waters through sea caves along the Oki Islands, while the interior is home to Omori town's ancient temples and shops, and the storied forest-walk to the Iwami Ginzan Silver Mine.

The Imperial Family frequents the resort town of Karuizawa, where Hoshinoya Karuizawa Resort is the height of luxury. Sip green tea on the porch of your own private villa and watch the floating lanterns reflecting the starry night in the water below. The focus here is on embracing simplicity and relaxing the body and mind through nature walks that trace the migration of birds, frogs and bears. In the evening, before shuffling off to sleep, enter a Meditation Bath. Wade into the hot spring and glide through a dark corridor, into a pitch-black room with zero visibility. Free of any distractions, the body unwinds into complete calmness. ■

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Autumn's Ascent: Explore Italy's Trails this Fall

Adventurers of all levels can explore some of the country's most charming towns and historic sites with a variety of hiking/walking trails. Framed by lush foliage that turns into a tapestry of autumn colors, these trails often take you to places that are inaccessible by car, allowing you to discover hidden gems and off-the-beaten-path locations providing a unique perspective on the destination.

Below are two destinations in Italy perfect for fall travel – including details on gorgeous trails to traverse and bespoke stays for exemplary hospitality.

Portofino Coast: Explore: Autumn is the perfect time to hike on the many coastal trails. Even in Cinque Terre the crowds are less, temperatures have cooled and there are fantastic views of the shining sea. The hike to the Portofino Lighthouse, or "Faro di Portofino," is a must-do activity for visitors seeking breathtaking views and a taste of the natural beauty surrounding this picturesque Italian village.

Stay at Grand Hotel Bristol Spa Resort, Rapallo: Grand by name, grand by nature on Italy's Portofino coast, Grand Hotel Bristol makes an instant impression. This turn-of-the-century building, in the Liberty style, is a rose-pink landmark between the green hills and blue Gulf of Tigullio. Once a glamorous destination for Grand Tourers, today it invites guests to experience a modern-day take on la dolce vita – blending timeless charm with contemporary elegance in Rapallo, a lesser-known destination on the famed coast. Grand Hotel Bristol is home to the largest spa in the region, over 22,000 sq. ft. of relaxation!

Lake Como: Explore: Lake Como offers numerous popular hiking trails that cater to a range of abilities and interests. One of the most popular trails, the Greenway del Lago di Como, is a scenic walking path that stretches along the western shore of Lake Como in northern Italy. This picturesque route covers about 10 kilometers (approximately 6.2 miles) and connects several charming villages, offering stunning views of the lake and surrounding mountains. A sampling of additional hikes include: Monte Grona, San Martino Church, Villa del Balbianello.

Stay at Grand Hotel Victoria, Menaggio: Built on the architectural structure of an ancient convent, the newest five-star hotel in Menaggio has a central, stunning lakefront location. Enriched by beautiful gardens and a 12,900 sq ft spa with personalized treatment programs, swimming pool, and signature scents handcrafted in-house, it's surrounded by breathtaking views of the lake and its mountains. ■

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Opera in Germany

Nowhere is opera more alive: around one third of all opera performances in the world are staged in Germany. The figure of more than 80 opera houses in the destination of Germany is unparalleled anywhere else, as is the number of premieres. Since Germany's first opera house opened its doors on Munich's Salvatorplatz in 1657, opera has become one of the pillars of national culture; a magnet for millions of visitors from all over the world – and for outstanding performers.

You can find a brief description of Germany's most important opera houses by visiting their website. Some featuring magnificent decor, plush boxes, marble and many items reminiscent of courtly eras, others favouring a simpler, more modern and down-to-earth style. All fascinating audiences with amazing productions, spanning the full spectrum of operatic creation, from Baroque to contemporary. Some opera experiences are even transformed into airy and light open-air events with live broadcasts in summer. As you can see: it's time to discover something very special. Or simply: time for opera in Germany. Below is just one example of such opera houses.

Bayerische Staatsoper: a temple devoted to art.

With its Corinthian columns, the fact that Munich's National Theatre resembles a temple is most likely no coincidence. The home of the Bayerische Staatsoper, the Bayerisches Staatssorchester and the Bayerisches Staatsballett has always been a place of devotion to higher arts. The young Amadeus Mozart, no less, made his breakthrough here with *Idomeneo* – premiered on 29 January 1781; and the "Fairy Tale King" Ludwig II later summoned the heavily indebted Richard Wagner to the prestigious venue. The majority of the current building dates back to 1825; with five refurbishments and modernisations having brought it up to date with the times. The 2,500 m² stage area, ranking among the three largest in the world, reflects the productions presented here: art on the grandest scale. ■

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Exodus Adventure Travels Kicks Off 50th Anniversary Year

Exodus Adventure Travels, the international, award-winning leader in adventure travel, is celebrating 50 years of epic adventures with special savings on its guided group trips.

50 Years of Industry Leadership

Exodus Adventure Travels was started in 1974 with a heart-warming story of two friends, John Gillies and David Burlinson, who took an overland truck to the Minaret of Jam in Afghanistan, deep in the heart of the Hindu Kush. Soon after they expanded their efforts to other adventurous trips to Kathmandu in Nepal and other destinations.

These two passionate travellers were able to turn their sense of adventure and discovery into a career, and Exodus was born. By the 1990s, along with being the first travel company to take an overland truck into China, Exodus expanded its product offering, adding cycling adventures to its portfolio.

In the 2000s, Exodus' trips reached almost every corner of the globe. Throughout various mergers and acquisitions, Exodus remained true to its brand of providing extraordinary experiences supported by knowledgeable local guides and travel professionals. In 2021, Exodus became part of Travelopia, which today is the world's largest collection of experiential travel brands.

Looking to the Future: Commitment to People, Places, and The Planet

Exodus Adventure Travels understands that the future of travel is based on the well-being of people, places, and the planet. As leaders in the adventure travel industry, Exodus' goal is to improve life through travel in the places that it visits, the people it meets, and on the planet that its travelers explore.

The organization's trips help customers to experience the real joy of a country by trav-

elling in small groups, off the beaten track, to avoid and reduce some of tourism's most serious impacts on nature. It gives back to communities by staying in locally owned accommodation and employing local guides, avoids waste generation, and has a stringent animal welfare policy. Exodus Adventure Travels measures the carbon footprint of all its trips and contributes towards nature regeneration through a commitment to rewild 100 square metres per passenger.

Through its foundation, Exodus Adventure Travels aims to improve lives through travel by investing in the regeneration and conservation of the natural world. The Exodus Travels Foundation focuses on three main themes of grassroots community building, uplifting women, and wildlife, biodiversity & regeneration. ■

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ADVENTURE TRAVELS

Oku Japan Introduces New ‘Walk & Explore’ Self-Guided Tour: Kyushu’s Hidden History

New itinerary combines elements of Oku’s classic walking tours with stunning hikes interspersed with days of cultural exploration in lively cities and historic towns.



Oku Japan, a leading Kyōto-based tour operator specializing in sustainable and culturally immersive walking & trekking experiences, has launched a brand-new self-guided tour on the island of Kyūshū. The eight-day Kyūshū’s Hidden History self-guided itinerary represents a new type of tour style for Oku Japan, combining elements of its classic walking tours, complete with three stunning hikes through the island’s breathtaking landscape, complemented by new ‘Exploration Days’ in lively cities and historic towns.

“This tour is both our first ‘Walk and Explore’ offering, and first self-guided trip on the island of Kyūshū,” says Hiroshi Kawaguchi, General Manager for Oku Japan. “Combining classic, nature-immersive hiking opportunities for which we are so well known, with in-depth exploration of the island’s unique history in such culturally important areas such as Bungo-Taketa and Nagasaki, offers guests a wonderful combination of experiences and a truly in-depth and immersive way to delve into Kyūshū’s secrets.”

The third largest of Japan’s four main islands, Kyūshū is considered the cradle of Japanese civilization. It was through here that foreign traders arrived in the country, and the centuries of trade here formed the region’s cultural fabric as much as its volcanic activity formed its land. Even during the Edo period, when Japan famously sequestered itself from outside influence, foreign merchants from a select few countries were able to conduct business via Nagasaki’s trading post of Dejima.

On this new eight-day, ‘Walk and Explore’ self-guided trip, guests will travel from the onsen town of Beppu on Kyūshū’s eastern coast to the western port city of Nagasaki. Along the way, travelers will explore Usuki, once the domain of a famously Christian daimyō (despite the Tokugawa shogunate’s enforced ban of the religion) and the home of dozens of mysterious Buddhist sculptures of unknown origins; the Kusenri Plain, located in the sprawling Aso Caldera, the largest in Japan; and Mount Unzen, a dramatic grouping of volcanic peaks and geothermal vents.

The tour features three unforgettable hikes up mountain trails that lead to breathtaking viewpoints. This includes a trek around the lovely, lush island of Onyūjima, followed by a night at a local farm in Saiki where guests get to experience rural life firsthand. The next is a hike up to the peak of Mount Eboshidake, which stands at 1,337 metres and is one of the mountains that make up the massive Mount Aso group (Mount Aso being the largest caldera in Japan and one of the largest in the world – large enough to have a city inside it!). And finally, guests will hike up to the peak of Mount Myōkendake, one of the mountains that make up the Mount Unzen cluster, where they will be rewarded with panoramic views of the Shimabara Peninsula.

Alongside these fantastic hikes, guests will have the opportunity to explore the region’s cultural landmarks guided by Oku Japan’s detailed, turn-by-turn walking directions, which also provides recommendations of things to see and do, as well as important historical information that helps paint a background picture and deepen one’s understanding of the area. Accommodations on this trip include Western-style hotels, onsen ryokans, family-run guesthouses, and one night at a farm where travelers will get an intimate look at the area’s rural lifestyle.

Departures are recommended from March until November. Included in the price is accommodations, daily breakfast and four dinners, train tickets for intermediate journeys on the trip, ferry trip from Kumamoto Port to Shimabara Port, detailed maps, entrance fees for the Inaba Family Villa and Usuki Stone Buddhas, four pre-paid taxis, local support by telephone, and Oku Japan’s ‘Preparing for your Trip’ and ‘Traveling to Japan’ guidebooks. ■

For more information on this brand-new ‘Walk and Explore’ tour and Oku Japan’s full line-up, Visit: [OKUJAPAN.COM](https://www.okujapan.com)



Lion World Travel Unveils the Top Three African Honeymoon Destinations for 2024

Newlyweds experience unmatched luxury and romance in South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania and Seychelles



With the upcoming wedding season, The Travel Corporation (TTC)'s Toronto-based award-winning safari outfitter, Lion World Travel, is revealing its top three honeymoon destinations for 2024, meticulously curated by its Africa Specialists to offer couples an unparalleled blend of romance, adventure, and seductive luxury. From crimson sunsets and starry skies to thrilling wildlife encounters and intimate beach escapes, these adventure-moons are a once-in-a-lifetime vacation for newlyweds.

Families and friends are invited to join the celebration of their couple's post-nuptial bliss with the option of contributing towards a Honeymoon registry. Couples can craft and personalize their registry with the assistance of LWT's Africa Specialists and have a dedicated web page, allowing loved ones to view and contribute towards their captivating African safari honeymoon. Newlyweds can combine both a safari adventure and an idyllic island getaway.

Below are the top three African journeys that capture the best of the continent's natural beauty, which will appeal to wildlife enthusiasts and beach lovers looking to unwind at ultra-private luxury properties.



Immerse in a memorable South African journey from Cape Town to Victoria Falls

During the 10-day Ultimate South Africa and Victoria Falls safari, couples start their journey in this dynamic city and relax at the Silo Hotel, an architectural masterpiece. Guests savour on a wine-tasting tour of the Cape Winelands, beginning with a picturesque stroll down the quaint town of Franschhoek; enjoy a Sabrage demonstration and olive oil tasting, followed by a chef-prepared lunch with farm-grown ingredients. They will experience the soothing sounds of the bush while sleeping under the stars. Honeymooners will escape on an amorous retreat, be pampered together in a sumptuous suite with a private pool and receive a complimentary one-night stay in a treehouse at Lion Sands Ivory Lodge, adjacent to Kruger National Park (subject to availability). Onwards, they will participate in exhilarating game drives with knowledgeable rangers who will provide insights about the African savannah. The next stop is Victoria Falls, where newlyweds can witness the awe-inspiring power of the falls and unwind in the Island Treehouse Suites, complete with a private plunge pool and personalized butler service, offering the epitome of luxury. This journey offers serene sunset cruises on the Zambezi River, picturesque views of natural beauty, and incredible wildlife sightings in South Africa.

Seychelles Islands: A Beach Paradise Getaway Designed by Nature

Complementing a Southern African safari, this archipelago is home to some of the most beautiful and unspoiled beaches in the world, making it an ultimate honeymoon paradise. The 5-night Seductive Seychelles offers luxurious accommodations in a secluded heaven-on-earth atmosphere surrounded by enchanting islands where guests can

choose to stay at restorative deluxe properties, including Maia Luxury Resort & Spa and Fregate Island. They can unwind on the white sandy beaches of Mahé, watch splendid sunsets under the shade of palm trees, and take leisurely walks through mountains, lush forests, and waterfalls. The itinerary includes three lavish accommodation options that offer an infinity pool, jacuzzi, luxurious terraces, personal butlers, and chambers with spectacular ocean views. Couples can explore uninhabited islands and engage in a variety of water sports, such as fishing, snorkelling, scuba diving, and sailing, amidst vibrant coral reefs, ensuring they can create lasting memories in this breathtaking honeymoon haven.

Let love soar through the skies of Kenya and Tanzania

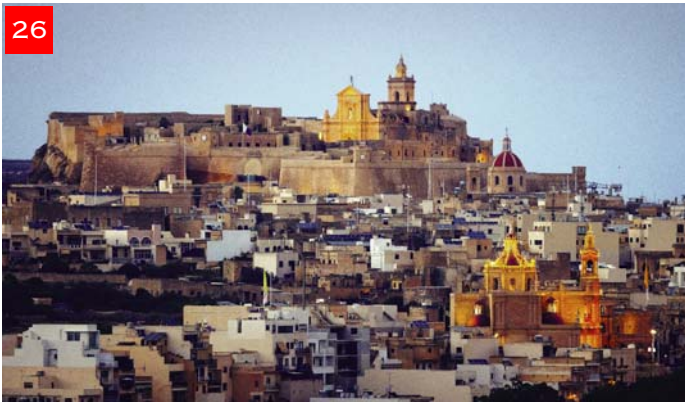
The 8-night Ultimate Kenya and Tanzania Angama Mara, is a safari journey designed for honeymooners who desire a mix of romance and nature escapades. They will begin their adventure-moon with a guided game drive enroute to the luxurious tented camps at Sasaab with four-poster beds and private plunge pools. Newlyweds will discover some of the rarest northern species, the Samburu "Special Six." The adventure continues when they fly to the Maasai Mara, one of Africa's Seven Natural Wonders, where they can witness the Great Migration during migration season. Beyond land safari, couples will witness aerial views of rare fauna on a hot air balloon safari while soaring over the Maasai Mara. They will explore the vast plains of the Serengeti, one of Africa's greatest wildlife regions. Newlyweds will stay at the five-star Serengeti Bushtops, one of the most luxurious camps on the continent, offering all-inclusive accommodations encircled by private decks and hot tubs with sundowner cocktails served by a dedicated private butler. They will enjoy full-day game drives, indulge in picnic lunches or bush breakfasts, and witness stunning sunsets while enjoying seclusion in Serengeti National Reserve. ■

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World Traveler Fall 2024

Cours of a Lifetime Cours of a Lifetime Cours of a Lifetime



Discover the Mediterranean Island of Gozo, One of Malta's Sister Islands

B Brilliant blue waters full of diving sites, ancient Megalithic Temples, 300 days of sunshine and year-round festivals; this is what visitors can expect while exploring Gozo. The island is part of the Maltese Archipelago in the Mediterranean, accessed only by ferry, and is more rural and less crowded than mainland Malta. Slow tourism, a growing trend, is about taking one's time to immerse oneself in local culture. Gozo is now attracting travelers looking for authenticity, local farm-to-table experiences, history, and culture this coming autumn season.

Diving and Beaches

Gozo is thought to be Calypso's Isle from Homer's The Odyssey making it a must-visit for Greek Mythology fans. Enjoy some of Gozo's azure waters and environmentally sustainable beaches, where guests can try scuba diving or snorkeling. Malta is one of the top scuba diving destinations in the world, and THE top in Europe.

Gozo has three gorgeous Blue Flag beaches. One is Ramla Bay Beach, known for its red sand, and is an excellent place to relax. Marsalforn Bay is another incredible spot, it's one of the most developed and highly frequented bays to visit with several restaurants around it. Hondoq ir-Rummien, a rocky beach on Gozo, is also an excellent location for diving.

Rich Cultural Heritage

Gozo is an island steeped in history and culture. During a longer stay, visitors have the chance to explore more off-the-beaten-path cultural and historical sites. A must visit are the Ġgantija Temples, a UNESCO World Heritage site, built in Gozo before the Egyptian Pyramids. A great opportunity to experience the remains of ancient history, without the crowds of similar World Heritage sites.

Gastronomy - Farm-to-Table

Gozitan farmers use organic methods to grow all their crops. Gozo's food specialties and recipes involve their fresh produce. Visitors can support sustainability with the wide variety of organic meals available in Gozo.

Relaxation - Taking it Slow

Gozo has more than sights, it offers opportunities to unwind during a long stay. The warm Mediterranean climate throughout the year makes off-season visits in the fall and spring less crowded, more "slow" and more enjoyable. The island has retreat houses such as the Manresa Retreat House, to find inner peace. There are yoga retreats to relax and exercise. There are also spa facilities to get a massage or just slow down for the day.

WWW.VISITMALTA.COM



Türkiye's Most Beautiful Cittaslow Towns

Every year, Türkiye's stunning coastal provinces beckon millions of visitors with promises of serene, tranquil getaways. If you're seeking a slower, more relaxing holiday, Türkiye's Slow Cities (Cittaslow) are the perfect destinations. Here, time stretches, traditions are cherished, and the scenery is nothing short of breathtaking.

Imagine starting your day with a sumptuous Turkish breakfast and ending it with fresh Aegean seafood, regional olive oil dishes, and exquisite Turkish wines. In between, the options are endless: boat trips, surfing, and exploring ancient sites are just a few of the delightful activities that await you.

Peaceful Holidays in the Izmir Province: Seferihisar and Foça

Situated along the Aegean Sea, İzmir province is home to not only the bustling city of İzmir but also several picturesque holiday spots like Çeşme, Alaçatı, Urla, and Kuşadası. Seferihisar, Türkiye's first Slow City and a Cittaslow member since 2009, is less than an hour's drive from İzmir and about 20 minutes from the nearest beach.

This charming town combines its traditional coastal character with sustainability initiatives like solar-powered street lamps and mesh bags instead of plastic. Local shops sell products made from area-grown plants, and the Sunday market at Sığacak Castle offers a variety of regional goods. Known as the tangerine capital, Seferihisar celebrates the tangerine season every November with the Tangerine Festival (Mandalina Şenliği). The district is also rich in history, with ancient sites like the Ancient City of Teos, a key Ionian settlement.

Foça, named after the seals that inhabit its coast, offers a blend of history, nature, and sea. The area is a sanctuary for the endangered Mediterranean monk seal and boasts Blue Flag beaches such as Eski Foça, Yeni Foça, Bağarası, and Ilıpınar, perfect for canoeing, sailing, and swimming.

Eski, Foça's old town, is a charming neighbourhood filled with seafront taverns, bakeries, and friendly cats. This peaceful fishing village is also famous for its olive groves and vineyards producing the unique Foça Karası grapes. Start your day with a crispy simit or hot pastry from a local bakery, and in the evening, enjoy stuffed mussels with plenty of lemon and local wines made from Foça grapes.

The Turkish Riviera's Capital of Tranquillity: Finike

Antalya province, celebrated for its Blue Flag beaches, dive sites, and luxurious resorts, also hosts the charming town of Finike, a Slow City. Established by the Phoenicians in the fifth century BC as Phoinikos, Finike has a rich history with ancient sites like Limyra and Arykanda. The area's natural beauty includes orange groves, pristine beaches, and turquoise bays. One such spot, Andrea Doria Bay, is renowned for its clear waters and lush surroundings, sometimes visited by Mediterranean seals and Caretta caretta sea turtles. ■

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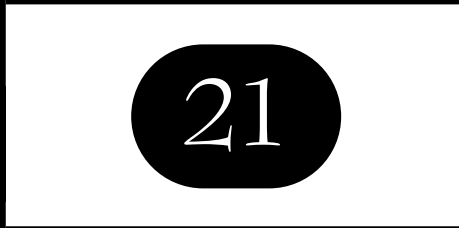
Australia



Canada



China



21



Dubai



Egypt



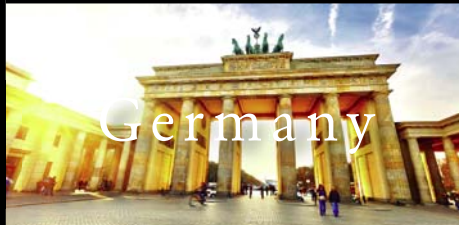
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Tastes of Philadelphia

by Randy Mink

I hadn't had Cheez Whiz since I was a kid, so I chose that for my cheesesteak, a hefty sandwich slathered with the flavorful yellow sauce. Others prefer melted Provolone or American cheese on the thin strips of ribeye stacked inside the long, chewy roll.

No food is more emblematic of Philadelphia than the cheesesteak. (To be clear, it is a sandwich, not a slab of meat served with potatoes.) Steak joints are found throughout the city, and everyone has their favorite.

The most famous cheesesteak masters are Geno's and Pat's King of Steaks, rival eateries that share an intersection in South Philadelphia. But I didn't go for the obvious.

After scouting out some cheesesteak places in the Old City on my first night in town, I

chose Campo's. Tapping into Philadelphia's colonial heritage, I dined at an outdoor table on Market Street, right across from Christ Church, a fine example of 18th century Georgian architecture. Family-owned since 1947, Campo's is the official cheesesteak of baseball's Philadelphia Phillies.

Though I came to Philadelphia primarily to brush up on American history, sampling the traditional food scene became a priority of equal importance. There were two must-see destinations on my list.

Reading Terminal Market

Come lunchtime, it seems everyone in downtown Philadelphia descends upon Reading Terminal Market, an indoor food emporium dating back to 1893. More than 80 vendors fill the sprawling space, formerly a railroad station. Neon signs enhance the old school feel.

Besides stalls offering fresh produce, meats and fish, you'll find artisan cheeses and all kinds of regional and ethnic delights, from Cajun and Caribbean to Thai, Japanese and Filipino. You can get poutine and high-end corn dogs at Fox & Son Fancy Corn Dogs, tapas at A Taste of Spain, and cheesesteaks and hoagies (Philly's version of a sub) at Carmen's.

Hearty Amish fare from nearby Pennsylvania Dutch Country appealed to me, so I sidled up to the counter at Dutch Eating Place and wolfed down every bite of my hot turkey platter with mashed potatoes, cranberry sauce, white bread and lots of gravy. Dessert was a softball-sized apple dumpling with a little pitcher of cream.

Italian Market

Serious foodies bring their appetite to the Italian Market, a mainstay in South Philadelphia since Italian immigrants settled the neighborhood in the late 1800s. The country's oldest continuously operating outdoor market, now home to many ethnicities, is a collection of shops and stalls that spans nine blocks along South Ninth Street.

Italian Market tasting tours are offered by StrEATS of Philly, whose vivacious owner/guide Chef Jacquie (Jacqueline Peccina-Kelly) grew up in the neighborhood and loves sharing childhood reminiscences. The two-hour walks make up to eight stops and include chats with shop owners.

Our afternoon tour started with meats and cheeses at Claudio Specialty Foods, an Italian grocery in the same family since the 1950s. At Di Bruno Bros. House of Cheese, we sampled thinly sliced salami and a creamy, crystalline Gouda from Holland. Cardena's Oil & Vinegar Taproom let us try olive oils and balsamic vinegars from around the world.

Our final stop was Isgro Pastries, a fourth-generation bakery that's been around since 1904. Each of us was given a cannoli filled with ricotta and dark chocolate chips—a sweet way to end our palate-pleasing tour.

WWW.READINGTERMINALMARKET.ORG
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China: Dim Sum



Germany: Black Forest Cake



Greece: Moussaka



Italy: Pizza Margherita

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What's New in Nevada

"Nevada's Alps" attract adventurers as dupe destination

Home to over 300 mountain ranges, Nevada is the most mountainous state in the continental U.S. Locals have dubbed the Ruby Mountains, "Nevada's Alps," and Canadian outdoor enthusiasts looking for an adventure playground at altitude, but close to home will find it along Nevada's Rubies Route. With majestic mountain scenery, this region is home to alpine lakes, streams, waterfalls and wildflowers, ideal for hiking, mountain biking, fishing and camping. The drive up the Lamoille Canyon National Scenic Byway is only open in summer because of heavy snow the rest of the year.

Burner Byway

"Burners" will gather in Northern Nevada's Black Rock Desert for Burning Man – the world-famous celebration of art, community and radical self-reliance. Curious visitors looking to experience this spirit, can travel Nevada's Burner Byway any time of year. From Reno, road trippers can explore the Black Rock Desert playa, one of Earth's largest, flattest surfaces; stargaze at Massacre Rim, one of only seven Dark Sky Sanctuaries on the planet; rockhound for black fire opals (Nevada's state gem); tour Burning Man-owned Fly Geyser; and discover the Indigenous culture of the Paiute Peoples at Pyramid Lake. ■

[HTTPS://TRAVELNEVADA.COM/](https://travelnevada.com/)



What's New in Oregon

Oregon's regenerative tour operator opens own retreat

In August 2024, First Nature Tours – Oregon's leading regenerative tour operator – is set to open their own property, Fir Haven Retreats. As a nonprofit organization, Fir Haven will be investing any profits into regenerative initiatives, such as river cleanups, trail restoration, forest regeneration, salmon rehabilitation and native oak tree planting, all experiences available to guests. Nestled atop a hill in the heart of the Columbia River Gorge, the 20-acre property will feature 14 private, modern A-frame-style cabins surrounded by serene forest as well as communal amenities, including natural hot springs, cedar hot tub, sauna, cold plunge, outdoor yoga platform, indoor/outdoor kitchen and campfire. Fir Haven will also serve as a basecamp to the adventures available in the region, such as windsurfing, kiteboarding, fishing, rafting, hiking, mountain biking and more.

Increasing accessibility on the Oregon Coast

Joining the efforts of Oregon Adaptive Sports and Adventures Without Limits, the Oregon Coast is working to make its beaches and other natural wonders more accessible to all visitors. A partnership with David's Chair, named after Oregonian David Hatrick, who had ALS, provides free use of electric, all-terrain track chairs for those with mobility challenges. The chairs allow users to independently navigate sandy beaches and rugged trails in eight coastal communities from Manzanita to Gold Beach. A second program is the seasonal installation of Mobi-Mat® – ADA compliant, portable, non-slip and roll-up mats which create temporary pathways and ease beach access for those using mobility devices such as wheelchairs and walkers. The mats are available at access points in Lincoln City, Seaside and Beverly Beach State Park, with more in the works. ■

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What's New in Utah

Puck drop! NHL hockey arrives in Utah

Hockey fans can now follow their favourite teams to Utah with the National Hockey League's arrival in Salt Lake City. The Arizona Coyotes have moved north and become the Utah Hockey Club, scheduled to play their first 2024-25 season game at home on October 8, 2024. Home to the Greatest Snow on Earth®, Utah has a strong winter sport history as the successful host of the 2002 Winter Olympic Games. Salt Lake City is in the running to host the games in 2034, with the official announcement made on July 24, 2024.

Capitol Reef scenic drive to re-open for off-season

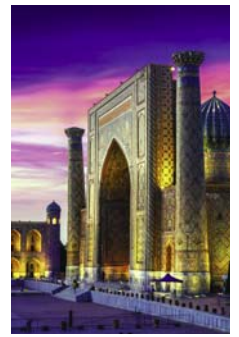
The scenic drive in Capitol Reef National Park, one of Utah's Mighty 5® national parks, will reopen in Fall 2024 after closing through the summer to complete a rehabilitation project. As Utah works to keep the state Forever Mighty, the preservation of its special places are priority.

What's on the "Horizon" after Yellowstone

As Utah celebrates 100 Years of Film in 2024, Oscar and Emmy winner Kevin Costner has released the first installment of his filmed in Utah, multi-chapter western, Horizon: An American Saga. After the phenomenal success of the drama series Yellowstone – with scenes filmed across the American West, including Utah – Salt Lake City's Transportation Network has launched two new Yellowstone production tours (summer and winter). The guided day tours take set-jetting visitors to some of the iconic filming locations along Northern Utah's Wasatch Mountain range, providing exclusive access to sites not available to the general public. The experience includes a two-hour horseback riding tour in summer and a two-hour snowmobile tour in winter. ■

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in the surroundings before being treated to breakfast, lunch or afternoon tea back on Livingstone Island.

www.visit-victoria-falls.com

White Water Rafting

Prepare for an exhilarating experience and navigate the raging rapids of the Zambezi River. The white-water rafting is considered by experts as the best one-day rafting trip on the planet, and it's easy to see why. The Zambezi River is home to large waves, with Class IV and V rapids providing an adrenaline rush like no other. It's a thrilling adventure that guarantees a wild ride and incredible memories. www.safpar.com

Bungee Jumping

Thrill-seekers can engage on the ultimate adrenaline-pumping adventure with bungee jumping at one of the world's greatest bungee sites. Positioned off the renowned Victoria Falls Bridge, against the backdrop of the Victoria Falls, participants prepare to take the leap into pure exhilaration. With a countdown echoing in their ears, adventurers launch themselves into a heart-stopping, 365-foot free-fall, experiencing four seconds of pure adrenaline as they hurtle towards the Zambezi River's tumultuous rapids below. For those seeking an extra dose of excitement, consulting with a Jump Master opens the door to more daring maneuvers, such as ankle-tied backflips or "star elevators." www.book.victoriafalls-guide.net

Abseiling

For an adventure-packed day, Zambia's Batoka Gorge offers the perfect playground. The Full Day Abseil adventure has participants experiencing a range of thrill-seeking activities. From forward and backward abseiling to gorge swinging and rap jumping, options abound. Glide through the air on the Flying Fox, zip across the gorge on a 1,148-foot cable slide or traverse the landscape by zipline. With expert guides ensuring safety every step of the way and all-inclusive amenities like breakfast, lunch and cold drinks, adventurers are guaranteed a once-in-a-lifetime experience at the Batoka Gorge.

www.abseilzambia.com ■

WWW.ZAMBIA.TRAVEL



New Rubenshuis Experience Centre and Garden

New Rubenshuis Experience Centre and Garden to open on 30 August 2024 Artist, marketeer, scientist, diplomat, and family man. Peter Paul Rubens was an extraordinary talent, but also a down-to-earth man. The Rubenshuis (Rubens House) is where he lived and worked for much of his life, as well as being a place where he enjoyed a happy and voracious life.

The Rubenshuis experience centre and garden will re-open on 30 August 2024. Visitors will now be able to enter via its new entrance at 13, Hopland, where a brand-new building designed by Robbrecht & Daem architects provides the gateway to the Rubens Experience, its lush renovated Baroque garden, and its library. This marks the completion of the first phase of the renovation of the Rubenshuis.

The lush renovated Baroque garden, and the library provide a more expansive and accessible entrance to Rubens's universe. The museum will focus more on experience and comfort. Using technology, visitors can immerse themselves in Rubens's life and world in the Rubens Experience. The thousands of documents contained in the library about Rubens, can be viewed on demand by any member of the public upon request. The new garden has now become a green extension of Rubens's city palace. The contemporary design features 17,500 plants and flowers and will flourish all year round, thanks to specialist colour advice by Antwerp fashion designer, Dries Van Noten. This verdant urban oasis also has a superb view of Rubens's home. ■

WWW.VISITFLANDERS.COM



As part from its stunning national parks and landscapes, Zambia stands out as Africa's premier destination for adventure and extreme sports. The Victoria Falls region hosts a variety of activities that attract visitors from around the world -- from bungee jumping off the Victoria Falls Bridge to white-water rafting along the untamed Zambezi River.

Microlighting

Experience Victoria Falls from a unique vantage point with a microlight flight, often referred to as the "Flight of Angels." This exhilarating adventure provides either a 15- or 30-minute journey, offering views of the Falls and surrounding landscapes. Not for the faint-hearted, the shorter flight takes passengers high above Victoria Falls, with the pilot skillfully maneuvering close enough for them to feel the spray of the cascading water below. www.livingstonesadventure.com

Canoeing Safaris

For a combination of adventure and wildlife encounters, embark on a canoeing safari along the Zambezi River. Paddle through calm waters, surrounded by wildlife and diverse birdlife. While it may seem serene at first glance, prepare for a surge of excitement when encountering the Zambezi River's hidden treasures: hippos, crocodiles and other creatures along the riverbanks, a unique safari experience. www.vicfallscanoeing.com

Devil's Pool

Experience the thrill of swimming at the edge of Victoria Falls with a visit to Livingstone Island, also known as the Devil's Pool. After a short boat ride from the banks of the Zambezi River, guided by friendly staff, visitors reach the island where David Livingstone first laid eyes on the falls. Marvel at the views of Victoria Falls from this vantage point, with vibrant rainbows adding to the spectacle on sunny days. Then, take the plunge into the Devil's Pool, a natural rock pool located right at the edge of the falls. With the assistance of experienced guides and safety ropes, swimmers can safely swim to the pool's edge, where a natural rock ledge creates a barrier enabling them to peer over the cascading waters. Lie back on the rock ledge and soak

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Spending Time in Los Angeles? Stay in Torrance

by Jennifer Merrick

A sprawling metropolis is the very definition of the City of Angels. Spread over 33,954 square miles, the Greater Los Angeles area has over 200 neighborhoods, municipalities and even cities within its boundaries. Like a patchwork quilt, each section has its own design and distinctive character. West Hollywood is sequins and gemstones. Venice Beach is bohemian fringed. And Torrance is an unpretentious bright patch of sun, surf, brews and fun.

This under-the-radar coastal city in southwest Los Angeles County is only 11 miles from LAX airport and about the same distance from the LA cruise terminal. It's also the beginning of 'The Strand', a pictur-

esque 22-mile bike trail that runs along the Pacific shoreline from Torrance Beach to Santa Monica. All of which made it an ideal place to stay before embarking on our four-day West Coast Getaway Princess Cruise. On our all-too- short stayover, we cycled one of the most scenic bike rides ever, watched surfers ride the giant waves, sampled tasty craft brews, indulged in local eateries and even squeezed in some shopping.

We rented bicycles at Torrance Bikes with the full intention of cycling the entire length of the trail to Santa Monica. But we didn't make it. There were simply too many photo opps and sites along the way to distract us. Redondo Beach had a classic wooden pier

with a sign on the landing boasting 'food, shops and fun!' It wasn't false advertising, and we walked our bikes for a while to enjoy a stroll and the ambiance. On the boardwalk, among the stalls and the eateries, was a statue of George Freeth, whose claim to fame was being the first surfer in the US. He certainly started something because as we pedaled along the ocean trail, we saw plenty of wave enthusiasts along the way. We stopped and watched in awe at how miniature the wet-suit-clad surfers were compared to the massive waves they were shredding.

All good bike rides deserve a reward, and we had ours at Good Stuff, a local chain serving up fresh Californian fare and all-day breakfasts. Its large outdoor patio was just off the bike path and had a view of the ocean and all the action happening along Hermosa Beach. We toasted our grand Strand bike with a local lager.

Torrance is well-known for its craft beer scene, and it all began with Red Car Brewery.

"We started in 1994 with a beer kit," said proprietor, Laurie Brandt. Today, their popular IPAs and English-style ales are made on the premises. The restaurant, located in Old Torrance, serves up pub classic and wood-fired pizzas. Nearby is the Del Amo Fashion Center, one of the largest malls in the US, and too big to see more than a fraction of it on our quick lookaround. We also didn't get the chance to try ramen. Torrance is the ramen capital of Southern California, and there's even a 'ramen map' showing where visitors can enjoy this slurpy dish. But this just means we'll have to visit this vibrant patch of Los Angeles the next time we're in town. Hope to see you there!

If you go: A great choice for accommodation is Sonesta ES Suites Torrance Redondo Beach. Each of their oversized one- and two-bedroom suites features a fully equipped kitchen, work area and large comfy beds. ■

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Discovering Gruyères

by Daniel Smajovits

Nestled in the heart of the Swiss Alps, the Gruyères region provides an enchanting experience for travelers seeking both relaxation and adventure, promising a rich tapestry of history, culture, and natural beauty.

Anchored by the medieval town of Gruyères, no visit to the region is complete without stops at both La Maison Cailler and La Maison du Gruyère for indulgence in chocolate and cheese respectively.

La Maison Cailler

Located in the picturesque town of Broc, La Maison Cailler is a testament to the country's rich chocolate-making tradition. Established in 1898, Cailler is Switzerland's oldest chocolate brand, and La Maison Cailler offers an immersive experience into the world of Swiss chocolate. The interac-

tive visitor center takes guests on an exciting journey through the history and production of the country's best chocolate, complete with unlimited tastings.

La Maison du Gruyère

No visit to Gruyères is complete without a taste of its world-famous cheese. In production since 1115, a visit to La Maison du Gruyère will allow you to discover the secrets behind its delicious flavor. Visitors can observe the entire production process, from the milking of cows to the aging of cheese. Large windows provide a clear view of the cheesemakers at work, and panels explain each step of the process. Your admission includes three cheese samples – aged at 3, 6 and 12 months – allowing you to discover for yourself what makes the cheese so unique.

Gruyères

A beautiful hike or short drive from La Maison du Gruyère is the heart of the region: the medieval town of Gruyères. The town will transport you back into the Middle Ages, serving as a perfect example of how Switzerland looked and felt in the 13th century. Home to La Château de Gruyères, the HR Giger Museum, The Tibetan Museum and Le Calvaire, in addition to a host of restaurants and hotels, you can spend an afternoon or multiple days exploring, hiking and truly getting to know this incredible region.

Depending on when you visit Gruyères, you might be lucky enough to partake in one of the region's famous festivals, such as their annual Medieval Festival, Cheese Festival or the bi-annual Double Cream Festival. Each highlights the region's incredible culture and history.

Before booking your trip, we recommend investing in the new DayPass La Gruyère, which includes admission to three most popular attractions of La Gruyère: Maison Cailler, the Gruyères Castle and La Maison du Gruyère. Passholders also receive priority access, allowing you to skip most lines. Should you not have your own transportation, the pass includes all local public transport as well.

From Geneva, the drive to the Gruyères region is just over one hour, however, there is regular train service between Geneva Cornavin via Lausanne and the region. Should you opt to drive, there is ample parking at the base of the medieval city of Gruyères as well as at both La Maison Cailler and La Maison du Gruyère.

Gruyères is more than just a picturesque town; it's a cultural and historical gem set amidst the stunning backdrop of the Swiss Alps. Whether you're drawn by its rich history, unique museums, outdoor activities, or culinary delights, Gruyères promises an unforgettable experience that caters to all types of travelers. ■

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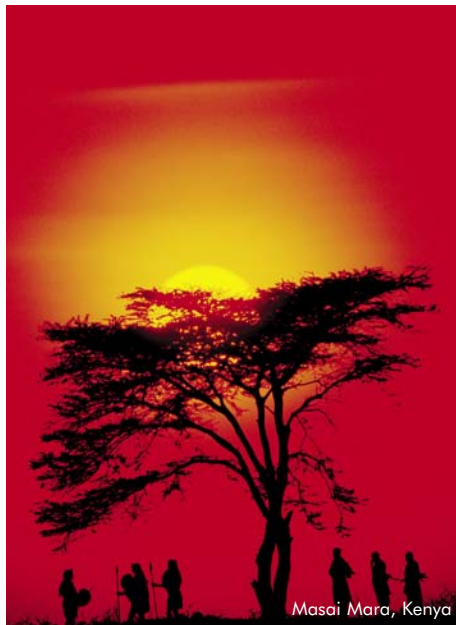




Balinese women



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Masai Mara, Kenya



Bamboo Forest ,Kyoto



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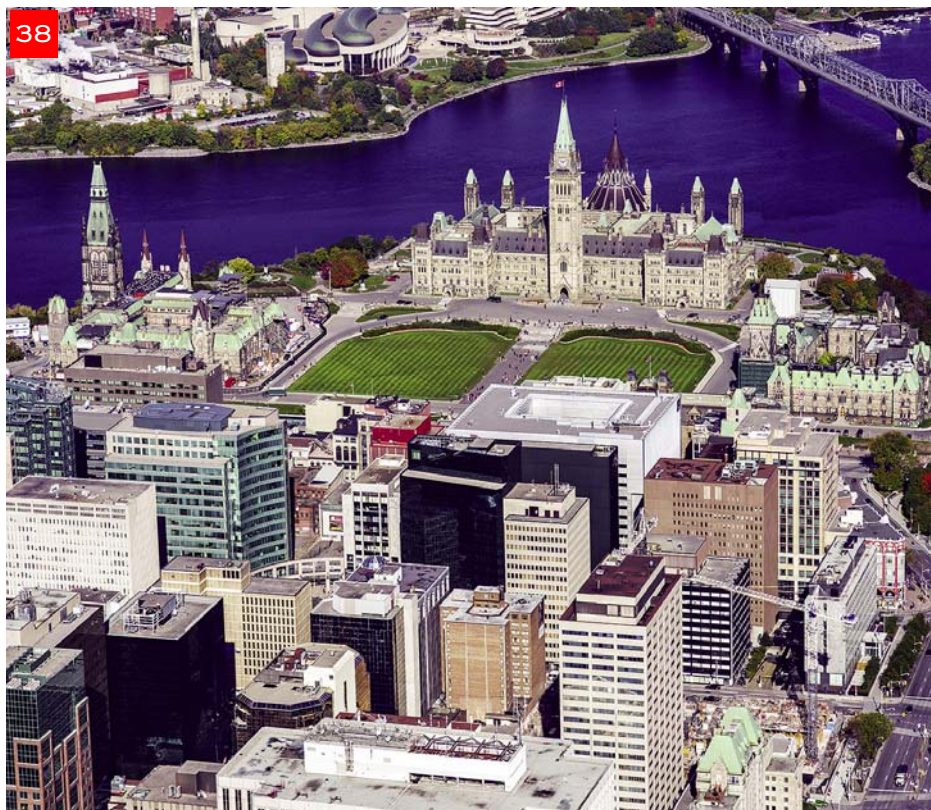
Hornbill Festival, Nagaland, India



Mt Cook, New Zealand



Red Lizard Train, Tunisia



The City of Ottawa has Everything a Holiday can Offer

by Mike Cohen

As Canada's capital, Ottawa is the perfect place to experience some of the country's best attractions, celebrations and flavors in one welcoming city. With its unique blend of urban and rural beauty, year-round outdoor activities, and vibrant neighbourhoods, the Ottawa region is best explored over several days or more. Since I often go there for family reasons, an extended trip is usually on the agenda as was the case this past summer.

Parliament Hill is the most visited Ottawa attraction. Guided tours are free and include the Senate, House of Commons, East Block and Parliament: The Immersive

Experience. Ottawa cultural attractions, museums and galleries invite visitors to experience the best of Canada all in one place. Whether it's the stunning National Gallery of Canada, with world-class art on display, or the dramatic Canadian War Museum, these are the experiences that bring Canadian culture to life for any visitor. A historic farmers' market and shopping district by day, a favorite gathering place of restaurants and clubs by night is the ByWard Market, just east of Parliament Hill. A historic waterway filled with boaters spring through fall and the world's largest naturally frozen skating rink in winter, the Rideau Canal winds through the heart of Ottawa

before connecting with the Ottawa River through dramatic stepped locks right next to Parliament Hill. Ottawa is a city of celebrations, offering visitors a year-round calendar of parties, festivals and special events.

The Capital's premier performing arts venue, the National Arts Centre, presents a full lineup of music, dance and theatre, plus popular touring acts and shows. Ottawa also has a thriving local theatre scene, including the Great Canadian Theatre Company, Ottawa Little Theatre, The Gladstone and La Nouvelle Scène.

Looking for a top-notch place to stay? Check out the magnificent Brookstreet Hotel in Kanata, about a half hour from Parliament Hill. This luxury property is noted for outstanding dining, incredible entertainment, luxurious accommodations, inspired green initiatives and world class golf and fitness facilities. Be sure to try the Perspectives Restaurant for breakfast, lunch, supper or weekend brunch. The heated outdoor salt-water pool and the area surrounding it truly is a slice of paradise and therefore a big draw in the summer months. The hotel is now completing an impressive \$11 million renovation project, transforming its guestrooms into a haven of luxury and comfort.

Ottawa is also home to the National Hockey League Senators, the Canadian Football League Redblacks as well as pro soccer, basketball and baseball teams.

The culinary scene in Ottawa is in full bloom, with a thriving community of Ottawa chefs and diverse restaurants making names for themselves both at home and abroad. So, let me recommend three top-notch dining establishments in the Byward Market, Starling Restaurant Bar, The Métropolitain Brasserie and Somewhere Dine Bar as well as Cocotte at the Metcalfe Hotel. I am a big breakfast fan, so check out the Wellington Diner, Nate's Deli on Sparks Street and Zola's in the west-end. Each of these places are also open for lunch and dinner. ■

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Ober Mamma: A trip to Italy via the 11th Arrondissement

by Daniel Smajovits, Photos: Ober Mamma

From the cheese to the baguettes, no trip to Paris is complete without sampling some of the country's most famous fares – but once you've met your fill of French food, dotted throughout the city are seven small enclaves of Italy, bringing a slice of Italian heaven to the City of Light.

Nestled in the bustling Oberkampf district, Ober Mamma is a true hidden gem with a vibrant atmosphere, exceptional service, and mouth-watering cuisine.

Each restaurant under the Big Mamma Group umbrella features similar menus, which include Italian classics, and naturally, a few delectable twists. At Ober Mamma, their two wood-fire burning ovens complement an evolving menu, changing on the availability of fresh ingredients, but always guaranteeing guests a unique experience.

During our visit, Italy's most luxurious export – the truffle – was featured throughout. The rare mushroom accentuated the flavour in their unique cream of ricotta pizza as well as in two

pasta dishes: a hearty bowl of mafaldine pasta topped with freshly shaved truffles and their Cacio e Pepe, which was classically finished tableside in a wheel of Parmesan cheese.

The one constant at all Big Mamma restaurants is their attention to detail and authenticity. In true Italian fashion, the pizza dough rises for 48 hours before being baked to perfection for 80 seconds and naturally, their pasta is prepared fresh daily. Should you be interested in one of their raw antipasti, whether it's meat or cheese – they come straight from Italy, twice a week. For the rest of their ingredients, all Big Mamma restaurants source from local producers, guaranteeing their quality and freshness.

As for Ober Mamma's dessert menu, it features Italian classics like Tiramisu and Profiteroles, but also includes a refreshing – and vegan – twist on strawberries and cream.

Not to be outdone by the food, expertly crafted cocktails range from the traditional to Italian classics with a twist, add just the right touch following a long day on your feet. Wine lovers can rejoice and choose between French and Italian options as their extensive wine list offers something for every palate. As their cocktails have become so popular, the Big Mamma Group also opened an Italian speakeasy in the 9th Arrondissement called. Bar No Entry, which is undoubtedly worth a visit as well.

With a warm, rustic interior that transports you straight to Italy, the cozy yet chic decor, complete with wooden tables, hanging plants, and an open kitchen, sets the stage for an unforgettable dining experience. The lively and friendly vibe of the restaurant makes it an ideal spot and must visit on your trip to Paris. ■

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Outdoor Los Angeles

Experience LA's Natural Beauty

Runyon Canyon Park

Located on the eastern end of the Santa Monica Mountains, Runyon Canyon Park is the ideal destination for beginner to expert hikers alike. Take in the views of the Hollywood Sign and the Sunset strip on this stunning mountain trail, boasting 160-acres overlooking the beauty of Los Angeles.

LA's Best Hiking Trails

Experience the hundreds of biking and hiking trails that LA has to offer. Whether you're looking for Beginner, Intermediate, or Difficult trails, LA has no shortage of outdoor trails that will exceed any tourist's expectations.

Venice Beach

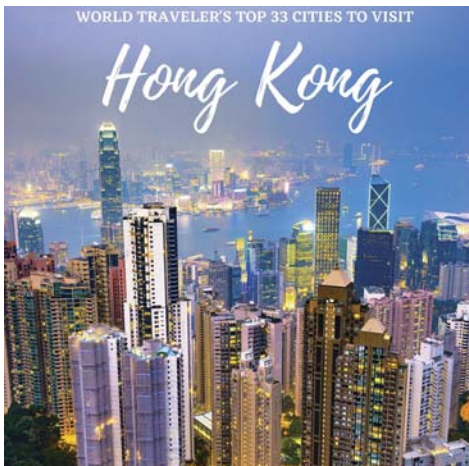
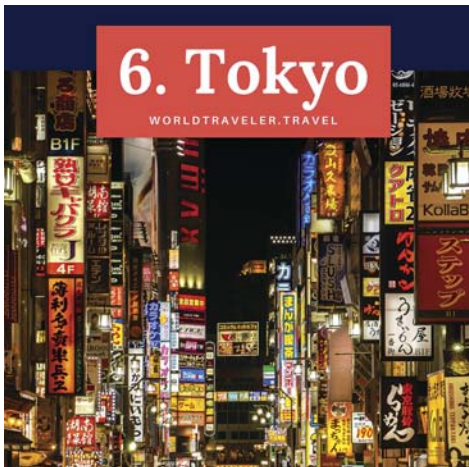
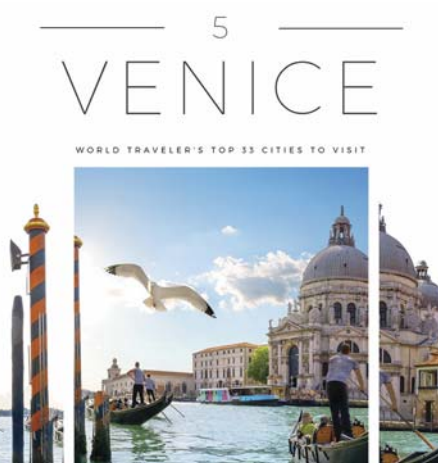
An iconic and lively beach where surfing, sand, and skating combine. You can't miss the world-famous Ocean Front Walk that is often the stage for rollerblading and a set for numerous films and TV shows. Bodybuilders, chainsaw jugglers, musicians, breakdancers, palm readers and all kinds of folk artists keep things entertaining at this classic beach. Whether you're interested in shopping, dining, or people-watching, Venice Beach has it all.

Malibu Surfrider Beach: A surfer's paradise

There's no better place to be than Surfrider Beach in Malibu. Surfrider is known as a Californian surfing hotspot, as much as being a place to play in the waves or watch surfers from the shore. Partake in bird watching or discover the unique Malibu Lagoon Museum for an educational experience on Malibu's diverse species and ecosystems. ■

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5 Top Things To Do in Dubai (And a Few I Wish I'd Done)

Article by Judi Cohen, photography by Judi Cohen and Dubai Tourism



Dubai is a city with a mix of modern marvels, cultural heritage, and unparalleled luxury. During my recent visit, I discovered some must-see experiences that showcase the best-of-the-best of what Dubai has to offer, along with a few activities I wish I'd had time to explore. Here are five things you should do in Dubai, plus a few more if you have the time.

1. Desert Safari

Picture this: cruising over sand dunes in a vintage Land Rover, just as they did in the 1950s. Our safari adventure took us into the desert to watch a fascinating falconry show, a traditional Bedouin practice that's been passed down through generations. The evening ended with a lavish dinner under the stars, complete with traditional Emirati cuisine and live entertainment. It was a magical experience that transported us back in time and offered a taste of authentic desert life.

2. Burj Khalifa, Dubai Fountain and Dubai Mall

From the observation decks of the Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest building, take in the panoramic views of Dubai. Afterwards

watch a dazzling water show set to music at the Dubai Fountain. Enter the Dubai Mall, one of the largest shopping centres in the world. The mall is worth seeing, complete with a full-size skating rink and indoor amusement park. I have never seen such beautiful public washrooms, anywhere!

3. Marvel at Dubai's Skyline

One of the best ways to appreciate Dubai's futuristic architecture, is by just driving around. Start with Sheikh Zayed Road, lined with skyscrapers like the twisted Cayan Tower and the striking Museum of the Future. Don't miss the sail-shaped Burj Al Arab and the Atlantis Palm, perched on the crescent of Palm Jumeirah.

4. Visit The Old Port Area

For a taste of Dubai's rich history, visit the Old Port area along Dubai Creek and wander through the Al Fahidi Historical Neighborhood. It's a serene contrast to Dubai's modern vibe.

5. Explore the Souks

Dubai's souks (market) are a sensory delight, with vibrant colors and exotic scents. The Gold Souk is famous for its dazzling jewelry, while the Spice Souk offers a fragrant mix of spices and herbs, including saffron. Don't forget to haggle—it's all part of the experience! I purchased two camels that play music and they continue to be a source of great enjoyment for my grandchildren.

Wish I'd Done:

Though my trip was packed with incredible experiences, there were a few things I missed: Dine at Orfali Bros. Restaurant:

Unfortunately, time ran out, but I'll make it a priority next time!

Take the Hop-On Hop-Off Bus: A convenient way to explore more of the city at my own pace.

Enjoy a Friday Brunch or High Tea: Dubai is famous for its extravagant brunches and high teas, and I regret not experiencing one.

Visit Abu Dhabi: I wish I'd added extra time to drive to Abu Dhabi to visit the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque and the cultural landmarks.

Dubai is a city that never ceases to amaze, and no matter how much you see, there's always something left to discover in a great city with the newest, biggest and best of just about everything.

Whether you're a first-time visitor, like I was, or a seasoned traveler, these experiences will make your trip unforgettable. ■

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MICHELIN Guide Dubai 2024 Underpins Emirate's Status As Culinary Hotspot



MICHELIN revealed the third edition of its annual MICHELIN Guide Dubai during a prestigious ceremony at the recently opened One&Only One Za'abeel. Among the highlights was Row on 45 becoming the fourth restaurant in Dubai to receive two MICHELIN Stars.

This year's prestigious MICHELIN Guide Dubai includes a total of 106 restaurants, representing a 53.6% jump since the Guide's inception in 2022 when it listed 69 restaurants. Decided upon by MICHELIN's famously anonymous inspectors, the increase in

restaurants in this year's edition, also up on the 90 included in 2023, is testament to Dubai's expanding and increasingly diverse gastronomy scene.

The 2024 edition recognises four two MICHELIN Stars restaurants, and 15 one MICHELIN Star restaurants, four of which are newly awarded. Dubai is now also home to 18 Bib Gourmand restaurants and three with a MICHELIN Green Star.

Some 35 different types of cuisine are represented across the 106 restaurants, with the selection underpinning Dubai's burgeoning culinary scene, as well as its commitment to delivering exceptional dining experiences across the city.

Dubai is renowned for being a culinary capital and plays host to a diverse selection of more than 13,000 restaurants and eateries across the city, from street food, to hidden gems and fine dining, catering to almost 200 nationalities living in the city. The latest Dubai Gastronomy Industry Report ranks Dubai second in terms of restaurant density across the globe, in addition to being named one of the top 10 cities for food lovers.

The emirate's development as a globally-recognised gastronomy hub is evidenced through an eclectic range of awards, accolades, and initiatives, including being named No.1 global destination for a third successive year at the Tripadvisor Travellers' Choice Awards 2024, and hosting the annual Dubai Food Festival, which celebrated its 11th edition this year.

As one of the oldest and most prestigious food guides globally, the MICHELIN Guide has been rating restaurants anonymously since its inception in the 1900s through a three-star system, as well as Bib Gourmand which recognises reasonably priced quality cuisine. MICHELIN Green Star awards were introduced in 2020 and recognise restaurants at the forefront of the industry when it comes to their sustainable practices.

The growth of the emirate's gastronomic landscape continues to be on an upwards trajectory and is reflective of the success achieved within the tourism sector – in 2023 alone, Dubai welcomed a record 17.15 million international overnight visitors, a 19.4% year-on-year increase. This year, between January and May, a total of 8.12 million visitors stayed in Dubai, up 10% on the same period in 2023.

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New from Australia



Whale Search Expedition

Bundaberg, Queensland - Lady Musgrave Experience inaugural Whale Search Expedition has kicked off for the year, taking guests on an unforgettable adventure aboard the luxury high-speed catamaran Main Event. Witness the majestic migration of Humpback Whales along Australia's famed 'Humpback Highway', off the coast of Queensland. Departing from Burnett Heads Port Marina, this half-day journey offers a unique opportunity to spot the first whales of the season while enjoying expert commentary from Marine Ecologists. Beginning with a traditional Smoking Ceremony conducted by Taribelang Bunda custodians, set sail on the scenic waters and keep an eye out for diverse wildlife. This adventure promises an enriching and memorable marine encounter for all ages.

Sunrise Journeys launch at Uluru

Ulu u and Kata Tjuta, Northern Territory - Voyages Indigenous Tourism Australia have launched Sunrise Journeys, at Ayers Rock Resort in Uluru. An all-new Indigenous laser, light and sound show, the early morning immersive experience will showcase the spiritual heart of Australia and the connection Anangu (the Traditional Owners of Uluru) have to Country. A collaboration between renowned leading Anangu artists and leading visual experience creator, Mandylights, the sensory display will trans-

form the desert landscape into a kaleidoscope of colour and sound. Brought to life with state-of-the-art animation technology, the two-hour Sunrise Journeys experience takes place as the sun rises on Uluru. Created in consultation with three female Anangu artists, the work titled Ngura Nganampa Wiru Mulapa, translates from Pitjantjatjara to English as "our Country is truly beautiful" and depicts a modern telling of the artists' shared connection to these lands.

New twelve Apostles Lookout

Great Ocean Road, Victoria - Victoria's iconic 12 Apostles on the Great Ocean Road can now be marvelled from a spectacular viewing platform. Rising out of the rugged Southern Ocean, the 45m (150ft) tall limestone pillars, located 4.5 hours drive from Melbourne / Narm, have become a must-visit destination for travellers making their way along the Great Ocean Road. Boasting wide and accessible paths, the new platform was designed by members of the Eastern Maar community to resemble two 'clapsticks'. Incorporating colours that are reflective of important totemic species to Eastern Maar peoples, the platform opens up new views of the stunning coastline on Keeray Woorroong Country. The revamped viewing area is a partnership between Parks Victoria and the Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation, as part of the Victorian Government's Shipwreck Coast Master Plan.

Kuuma Nature Sauna

Baretta, Tasmania - Embark on a wellness journey like no other at Kuuma, Australia's first sauna pontoon boat, where the time-honoured tradition of sauna therapy blends seamlessly with the serenity of open water, offering an unparalleled experience. Set on Margate Marina, just a 20-minute drive south of Hobart / nipaluna, Kuuma provides a unique 1.5-hour sauna experience with both communal and private sessions



available. Communal sessions accommodate up to eight participants, fostering an intimate yet social atmosphere for guests to unwind and connect. Designed with a spacious open layout to take in the natural surroundings, Kuuma promises an exceptional sauna experience that revitalises both body and soul for an unforgettable journey to rejuvenation.

Injiid Marlabu Calls Us at El Questro

East Kimberley, Western Australia - Embark on a journey of cultural and spiritual immersion of the Ngarinyin Aboriginal Australian people's rich heritage with Injiid Marlabu Calls Us, at El Questro homestead. Nestled in the East Kimberley, the best way to get there is via the town of Kununurra. This experience invites guests to engage deeply with the land and waters and is led by Traditional Owners, the program unfolds with ancient rituals and storytelling traditions passed down through generations. Guests can participate in an ancient healing ritual and pathfinder, and explore the significance of the Coolamon, a carrying vessel that plays a significant role in Aboriginal Australian 'Motherhood'. Illuminating the profound ties between culture and land, the experience focuses on storytelling and song, sharing the tales and melodies of Injiid, fostering a deeper connection to El Questro's vibrant cultural tapestry. ■

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Tropical Tidbits

by Sue C Travel

Summer fun in the Caribbean...

Typically, when most folks think of going to the Caribbean, they are out to escape the harsh cold of winter. But there are plenty of reasons to consider a summer holiday there, and many islands don't get much hotter than it gets in North America during this season. Plus, you have a refreshing sea and surfside pools to cool off in. It's also a season when the rates are much lower and the crowds are far smaller, and you're bound to get some very good all-inclusive deals, too! Here are some other incentives to convince you to consider planning a tropical summer trip...

See sea turtles & whale sharks

One of my very favorite reasons to head to the Caribbean in the summer is because that's when all kinds of sea turtles come ashore to lay their eggs. (Including the massive leatherbacks!) Many resorts in the Caribbean and Mexico have programs where you can be alerted to the hatching of the eggs and watch the baby sea turtles scamper off into the sea. It's an incredible bucket list experience. Another marine-focused delight this time of year in tropical hot spots is the ability to snorkel with whale sharks. They are gentle giants (they are not sharks, they are the world's largest

fish, and they don't eat other animals or people!) They are filter feeders that love krill. When large amounts of krill are found along the coasts of Mexico's Yucatan region, they gather from all over the world to feed there. There are many reputable outfits that will take you to snorkel alongside them but do your homework first to make sure they are well-vetted, eco-friendly, and safe. You'll be absolutely amazed at this adventure if you love the sea. Whale shark season around Cancun is typically June to mid-September, and don't forget your underwater camera!





Gala summer festivals & carnivals

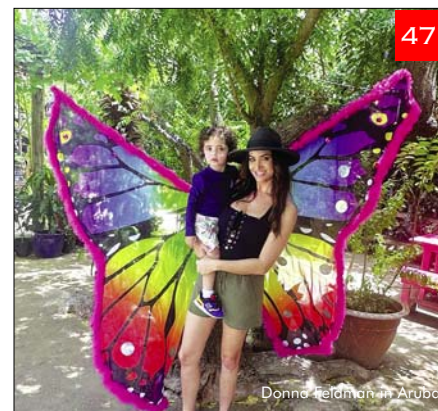
Though carnival in the Caribbean originated as a pre-Lenten celebration and is most often celebrated just before Easter, there are many other like-minded island festivals of gala music, parades, dance, and festivities that only occur in the summer. One of the most famous is Barbados' Crop Over in August which signifies the end of the sugar cane harvest. If you go, keep an eye out for native Barbadian Rhianna, she often dances in the parade along with the other revelers. St. Lucia celebrates Carnival in July, as does the tiny island of Saba, and The Bahamas annual carnival style Junkanoo celebrations take place every Saturday in July as well. Antigua has their big Carnival shindig the last week of July to the first week of August, and Anguilla's August carnival revolves a lot around a sensational sailing regatta. There are also major music festi-

vals to seek out, too. Jamaica's Reggae Sumfest takes place in Montego Bay in July and it's a crazy good time, and St. Kitts Music Fest in June has an eclectic assortment of first-rate outdoor entertainment. (Visit each destination's respective tourism website to confirm their festival and carnival dates for this summer season.)

Incredible kid's and teen's clubs & activities

And since school's out for the summer, if you're a parent seeking something to do with your kids that you will enjoy as much as they do, consider a Caribbean holiday at a resort that caters to all ages. There are some brands that are a no-brainer for wonderful activities for children like Nickelodeon Hotels & Resorts, and Beaches Resorts take it a step further with their ability to also cater to children with special needs since they have garnered their Autism Certification from The International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards. But many regular resorts also have fabulous kids camps and activities that allow parents ample time to enjoy adulting in paradise. Take a spa day, a romantic sunset sail, or simply lounge peacefully by the pool with a Pina Colada in hand while your kids enjoy all kinds of supervised adventures. On offer are all kinds of activities like pirate treasure hunts, arts and crafts, cooking classes, watersports and wildlife and ocean adventures. I've witnessed many excellent activities for kids at many tropical resorts but one of my favorites is the Ambassadors of the Environment programs at the Ritz-Carlton hotels. Their agenda is fashioned by Jean-Michel Cousteau to teach children about the importance of preserving our marine life in the most entertaining way possible.

Sunscape Curacao even has a camp out overnight on the beach as part of their program and they also have a club just for teens. And they are also right next door to the Curacao Sea Aquarium which can also be an educational complex to



Donna Feldman in Aruba

teach kids about sea life. Grace Bay Club in Turks and Caicos also has a Teen Xtreme program that includes mocktail parties, sunset reggae cruises, water skiing and wakeboarding lessons. And Club Med Miches Playa Esmeralda, in Dominican Republic has cool supervised activities for babies to teens, including trapeze lessons. Thrill-seeking kids will adore all the crazy water slide towers and zipline routes of the parks that come as part of the package at Xcaret Hotel in Playa del Carmen, Mexico. And in Nassau, Bahamas, the Atlantis kid's program even hosts a wizardry program. (They are also one of the few resorts that have a later night kids club that goes to 10:30 pm so parents can enjoy the casino and maybe some gourmet dining.) And they have their own waterpark on site, too. In fact, these days on site water parks seem to have become all the rage for family friendly Caribbean resorts. (Parents enjoy them, too!)

But most kid's clubs are reserved for children ages 4 and up. So, if your child is younger, you might like our recommendation of the ideal toddler-friendly Caribbean destination to check out this summer in the Stay & Play section of this issue on page 82. ■



Antigua Carnival



Award-winning travel journalist Sue Campbell is based in Montreal but makes it her business to be on top of everything cool, hot, and new under the sun throughout the Caribbean and Latin America.

World Traveler welcomes her as a regular columnist. Follow her on Instagram and Twitter @suectravel

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CRUISING SECTION

Cruise News - pages 50 - 51

Greece's Unexplored Aegean Aboard Variety Cruises' Panorama - page 54

Why a Princess Cruise to Alaska is the Perfect Girls Getaway - page 56

Disney Cruise Line Announces Fleet Expansion - page 58

CroisiEuropes Announces Ganges River Cruises - page 58

Exploring the Viking Homelands aboard the Viking Sky, part II - page 60

Exploring the Volcanic Islands of the Canaries with Windstar Cruises - page 62

This photo: Sun Princess in the Mediterranean Sea

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Sail The World!



'Heroes and Villains' Themed Disney Destiny Sets Sail for Legendary Family Vacations in November 2025

Beginning in November 2025, the Disney Destiny will draw on the legacies of Disney's larger-than-life heroes and villains to forge a legendary cruise vacation steeped in the lore of illustrious Disney stories. The new Disney Cruise

Line ship will debut one-of-a-kind venues and experiences that complement the extraordinary entertainment, world-class dining and unparalleled hospitality that make every Disney Cruise Line vacation legendary.

Part of Disney Cruise Line's unprecedented period of growth and expansion, the Disney Destiny – sister ship to the Disney Wish and Disney Treasure – will sail its maiden voyage from Port Everglades in Fort Lauderdale, Florida in November 2025, followed by an inaugural season of four- and five-night cruises to The Bahamas and Western Caribbean, including visits to one or both of Disney Cruise Line's island destinations, Disney Castaway Cay and Disney Lookout Cay at Lighthouse Point. ■

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AmaWaterways Introduces the Magnificent AmaLilia on the Nile

Unique experiences await travelers on the river cruise line's second ship on the Nile

As North American travelers continue looking to Egypt as a bucket-list destination, the award-winning river cruise line AmaWaterways has launched its latest addition to the fleet, AmaLilia, on the enchanting waters of the Nile River. Specially curated with upscale regionally inspired décor and 41 staterooms, including 13 suites, the luxurious new ship embarked on its inaugural journey in April 2024. The 11-night Secrets of Egypt & the Nile cruise and land experience includes a seven-night round trip river cruise from Luxor and is paired with three nights pre- and one-night post-cruise stays in historic Cairo at the prestigious St. Regis Cairo, overlooking the Nile River. ■

WWW.AMAWATERWAYS.COM



Seabourn Unveils New Ultra-Luxury Voyages on Seabourn Quest for the 2025 Holiday and Spring Seasons

Seabourn, the leader in ultra-luxury cruising and expedition travel, has announced a new program of immersive itineraries available on Seabourn Quest as the ship explores Australia & New Zealand, the South Pacific, Hawaii and the Panama Canal from December 2025 to April 2026.

Seabourn Quest will sail a total of 22 itineraries with 46 destinations in 13 countries, including a new series of 10-day voyages sailing roundtrip from Papeete (Tahiti) that provide a full immersion in French Polynesia. ■

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Viking Named a "World's Best" for Oceans, Rivers and Expeditions by Readers of Travel + Leisure in 2024 Awards



Travel + Leisure readers have voted Viking® a "World's Best" for oceans, rivers and expeditions in the 2024 World's Best Awards, which were announced today. Viking was once again named #1 for Oceans and #1 for Expeditions and was again voted one of the World's Best river lines. Viking is also rated #1 for Oceans, #1 for Rivers and #1 for Expeditions by the readers of Condé Nast Traveler. No other travel company has simultaneously received the same honors by both publications—something Viking has achieved two years in a row.

Since 1995, Travel + Leisure, the largest travel magazine brand in the U.S., has invited readers to cast their vote for the World's Best in cruising with considerations in the following features: cabins/facilities, food, service itineraries/destinations, excursions/activities and value.

With a clear focus on creating experiences for The Thinking Person, Viking does not try to be all things to all people. This approach has resonated with guests, and today's announcement is just the latest milestone in a series of recent accolades. In addition to the awards from Travel + Leisure and Condé Nast Traveler, Viking dominated the 2023 Cruise Critic Editors' Picks Awards with seven awards – more than any other line – across the luxury, river and expedition categories – including Best Cabins and Best Spa in the luxury category. Viking was named Best Luxury Line, Best Line for Couples and Best Line in the Mediterranean in U.S. News & World Report's 2024 Best Cruise Lines ranking; among the Best Cruises by the editors and panel of experts in both the Women's Health and Men's Health 2024 Travel Awards; and two of Viking's ocean ships, the Viking Sky® and the Viking Neptune® were rated and ■

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MSC Cruises Rolls Out Red Carpet with Exclusive Shore Excursions for MSC Yacht Club Guests



MSC Cruises has recently revealed that for the first time, guests traveling in the MSC Yacht Club will have the opportunity to book a carefully curated selection of exclusive shore excursions so that they can discover new places, new cultures and new people, immersing themselves fully in the destinations they visit.

The MSC Yacht Club is MSC Cruises 'ship-within-a-ship' concept offering added privacy and exclusivity to elegant suites in a keycard-access area of the ship. Offering its guests added luxury in a relaxed and elegant atmosphere, this exclusive area provides dedicated facilities, with its own sundeck and pool, restaurant and lounge, as well as personalized service, such as the 24-hour butler and concierge desk.

Available on many of MSC Cruises' ships, the MSC Yacht Club offers its guests a secluded retreat while allowing them to enjoy the countless facilities and entertainment possibilities available throughout the rest of the ship.

In keeping with the MSC Yacht Club experience, the cruise line has now introduced more than 90 specially designed MSC Yacht Club shore excursions in various ports in the Caribbean, Mediterranean and Northern Europe, with more to come in other regions later this year. Providing even more exclusivity, the excursions run with only small groups, enabling guests to explore their destinations more intimately.

From the MSC Yacht Club, guests will have priority disembarkation and then move into private transportation for extra comfort during travel, ensuring a feeling of relaxation with all the details taken care of. ■

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Princess Cruises Announces Extended 2025-26 Japan & Southeast Asia Cruise Season



On the heels of record-breaking travel to Japan by U.S. visitors in 2023, and another strong season underway this year, Princess Cruises has recently announced it will extend the number of itineraries in Japan during the 2025-26 season.

The 2025-26 cruise season to the must-see island nations of Japan and Southeast Asia onboard a Princess ship has just been announced. On sale now, Japan-built Diamond Princess returns featuring an expanded Japan season showcasing the region's breathtaking fall foliage, Mt. Fuji, Kyoto and more.

From ancient temples and castles, to bustling markets and breathtaking gardens, cruisers experience the best way to see Japan with Princess with a new fall 2025 season offering 11 new voyages ranging in length from nine to 22 days, visiting 25 destinations throughout the Land of the Rising Sun, as well as stops in Korea and Taiwan.

Highlights of the season include:

- 13-day Circle Japan Fall Foliage sailing taking place during the beautiful autumn leaves season
- 9-day Circle Japan voyage a circumnavigation of the country with stops at Nagasaki, Akita and Sakaiminato
- 9-day Southern Islands departures to the southernmost part of Japan and the lush islands of Okinawa and Ishigaki
- 10-day Kyushu & Korea cruise, which sails these large islands of Japan including visits to Hiroshima, Osaka (for Kyoto) and Shimizu (for Mt. Fuji)
- For the ultimate Japan exploration, guests can combine these 18- to 22- day itineraries for an unforgettable 40-day adventure ■

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Explora Journeys Unveils Unique Destination Experiences in the Caribbean



Explora Journeys, the luxury lifestyle ocean travel brand of the MSC Group unveils a series of exclusive Caribbean destination experiences. Guests can discover these meticulously crafted experiences during their Caribbean journeys, blending celebrated destinations with off-the-beaten-path ports.

With EXPLORA II arriving in the Caribbean in November 2024 and EXPLORA I in December 2024, guests will have unparalleled opportunities to immerse themselves in the Caribbean's breathtaking landscapes and vibrant cultures, all while indulging in exceptional luxury.

EXPLORA I and EXPLORA II will visit a varied array of destinations in the Caribbean until March 2025. These include Gustavia in St. Barts, Oranjestad in Aruba, and St. John's in Antigua. Itineraries also feature ports such as Belize City, Bequia in the Grenadines, and Cozumel and Progreso in Mexico. Each destination is selected to provide a unique and enriching exploration experience.

Highlight Destination Experiences include:

- *Willemstad, Curaçao*
Natural Wonders, a Voyage of Learning
- *Saint-Pierre, Martinique*
Privileged Access and Rum Tastings on the Rhum Clément Estate
- *Gustavia, Saint Barthélemy*
Luxurious Beachside Relaxation and Lunch at Rosewood Le Guanahani
- *Progreso (Merida), Mexico*
An Unforgettable Journey to Uxmal and Hacienda Xocnaceh
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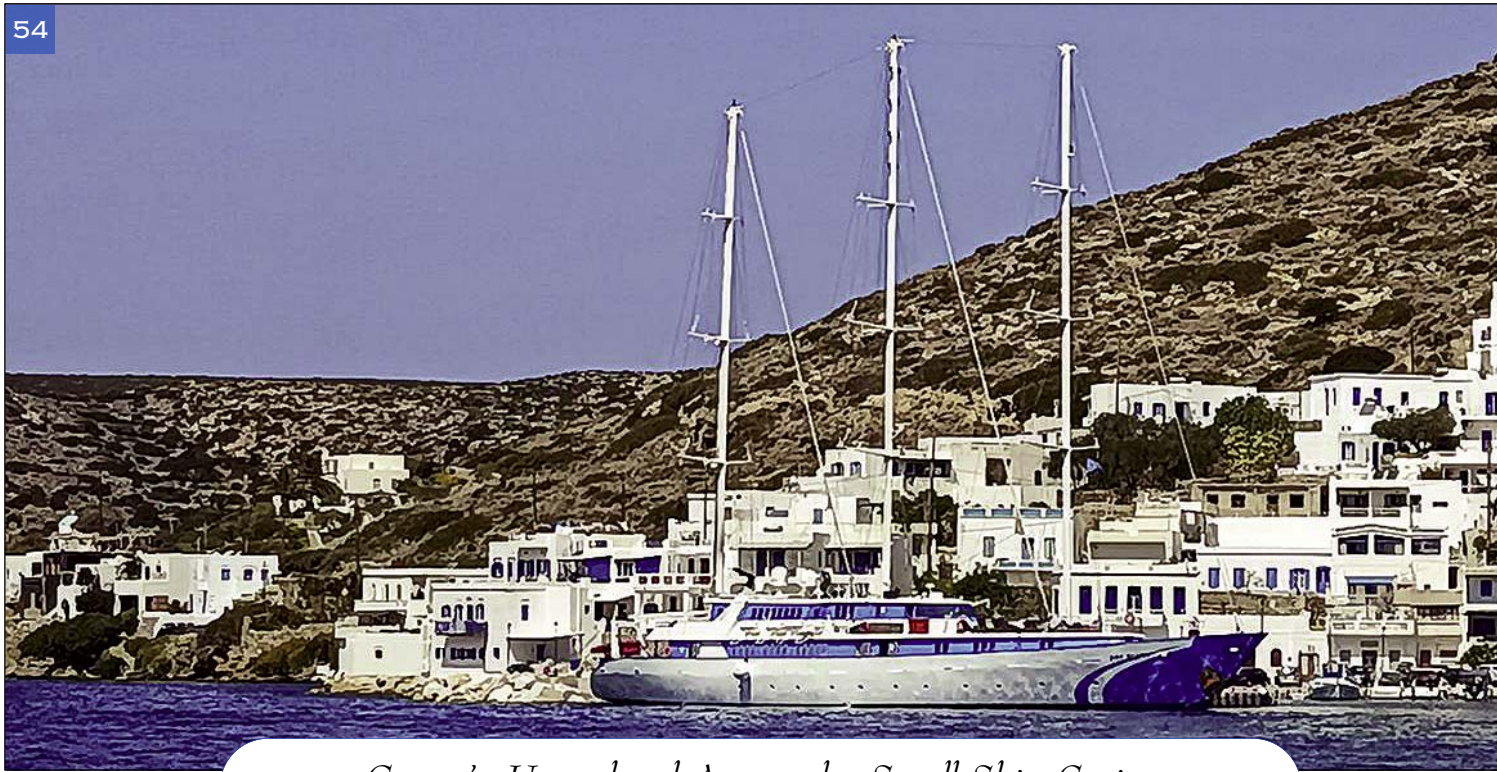
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Greece's Unexplored Aegean by Small-Ship Cruise Aboard Variety Cruises' Panorama

Article and photography by Nicholas Kontis

During the summer vacations of my youth, my family and I visited relatives in Greece. I slept in spare bedrooms, on creaky couches, and even in a sleeping bag in backyards. However, my most cherished memory was sailing with an uncle who co-owned a 50-foot yacht. He took me on a voyage from my father's home in Patras to the Ionian islands. I discovered pristine beaches that many tourists never see, enriching my Greek adventure with diverse encounters.

Later, silver-screen epics like *Big Blue*, an anthem to waters of the Aegean Sea; *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*, a love story set on the island of Kefalonia; and the romantic comedy *Mamma Mia!* with its star-studded

cast, paved the way for a boom in tourism to Greece.

But it's not as though Greece was ever absent from travelers' radar. And the attraction is only growing. Lured by marvelous antiquities, over 200 inhabited islands with world-class beaches, and a tasty Mediterranean diet, over 30 million people set foot on Greek soil in 2023.

Greece's leading small ship operator, Variety Cruises, anchors in secluded ports inaccessible to larger vessels. These include the islands of the northern Dodecanese and the less-visited isles of the Cyclades.

I find the appeal of small-ship cruising irresistible. A perfect example is Variety's "Unexplored Greece" itinerary: Eight flawless days and eight islands with only 38 other guests on the luxury motor-sailing yacht *Panorama*. We enjoyed spacious cabins, elegant Mediterranean dining and a panoramic deck. We made impromptu stops for refreshing swims in hidden coves, shared meals with locals at seaside tavernas, and explored unspoiled islands without suffering the tourist crowds of Mykonos and Santorini tourists vying for sunset and wind-mill photos.

Athens and Ikaria

My wife and I spent our first night in Athens at The Athenaeum Hotel, a newly opened





Photo: Variety Cruises

property adjacent to the labyrinthine city center of Plaka. The next day we boarded the Panorama at the port of Marina Zeas. The boarding process was smooth. As I stepped onto the deck, the warm sea breeze greeted me with the anticipation of adventures ahead.

Flexibility is crucial to any expedition sailing. Itineraries are not set in stone. Seasoned cruisers learn to expect the unexpected and go with the flow. Our first stop was at Ikaria Island, where one in three residents live to be at least 90 years old. But after a swim in the emerald waters of Seychelles Beach, a tanker maneuvered into our anchorage. So Captain Andreas Sifnotis announced that we would head straight to our next stop on Patmos.

Patmos

Skipping the afternoon and evening in Ikaria meant more time at the picturesque

harbor of Skala on Patmos, northernmost of the Dodecanese group of 12 enchanted isles. On a half-day tour, we climbed to the Monastery of St. John the Theologian and visited the cave where the evangelist had the apocalyptic visions that led to the writing of the Book of Revelation.

The element of surprise and adventure — the thrill of not knowing what each day will bring — is one of the things that makes small-ship cruises unique and exhilarating. Each day, passengers can choose between an arranged excursion, exploring the island on their own, or merely basking in the sun.

Lipsi

Serendipity greeted us on Lipsi, whose population is only 700. Pilgrims from other islands joined locals to celebrate the feast of St. John of Klydonas, and we found ourselves experiencing true tradition. The people of Lipsi sang and danced as children jumped over the flames of burning floral wreaths to exorcise evil spirits. Dinner was on our own, which encouraged us to indulge in fresh fish at port-side restaurants. Some travelers detoured to a winery famous for its Aposperitis dessert wine served to Prince Charles and Camilla in Athens.

Kalymnos

On Kalymnos, we arrived in the late afternoon at the energetic port of Pothia, famous for its sponge divers. On a guided tour, we visited a Neoclassical house — built by proud native historian Mihalis Kyranis — to see a curated collection of the island's rich cultural tapestry and to learn about the brave men who dedicate their lives to sponge diving. I hired a cab to take me to the top of the island, to the stone monastery of the island's patron saint, Agios Savvas. For dinner, my wife and I joined other guests from Argentina and Australia for a seafood feast at Mamouzelos Restaurant on the waterfront.

Amorgos

Our next island stop was one that I already knew. Amorgos is the undiscovered jewel of the Cyclades. Heavy winds prevented us

from landing at the island's main port of Katapola, so we docked at Aegialis instead. While many of my shipmates took a walking tour, I met with island matriarch Irene Giannakopoulos for a cooking demonstration at her lofty Aegialis Hotel & Spa. Later, I opted for a drive around the island to visit one of Greece's most imposing landmarks, the Monastery of Hozoviotissa. Built into a rock face on the side of a cliff 300 feet above the sea, it offers far-reaching views of the evergreen and turquoise Aegean.

Serifos

Before returning to Athens, we stopped at Serifos, another island I had previously visited. At the port of Livadi, I rented a car for 30 euros and drove around the island, making swim stops at beaches frequented by only a handful of people. The lively port town leads upwards to the central village of Chora.

M/S Panorama

The Panorama goes where larger ships cannot. Its two dozen cozy cabins can accommodate 49 passengers. Amenities include private bathrooms, a TV, a small safe and a mini-fridge. A small lounge at the ship's entrance boasts panoramic windows and a library of books about Greece. Guests share breakfast and either lunch or dinner in a large dining room; the menu features both Greek treats and international cuisine. An indoor bar and lounge area are on the upper deck. Outdoor areas include two sun-decks. We usually sailed at night, waking up most days at new ports of call.

If your idea of paradise involves small-ship sailings in a land of mythical beauty with fewer than 50 guests, this Greek vacation may be your perfect holiday. You'll see picturesque villages on less-explored islands, stop at clandestine coves and beaches, and dine on the freshest catch of the day at quiet ports of call. Variety Cruises' "Unexplored Greece" is more than a passage to authentic Greece. It is a portal to immersing yourself in the true spirit of this ancient land. ■

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Princess Cruises

Why a Princess Cruise to Alaska is the Perfect Girls' Getaway

Article and photography by Judi Cohen

What do you get when you combine pools and sundecks like a resort, spas and pampering like a wellness retreat, entertainment, dining and gambling like a casino resort, and adventurous activities in an outstanding destination? -- A Princess Cruise fit for two princesses traveling together! When my sister-in-law and I decided to take a girls' trip, we wanted something that combined adventure and relaxation, and an opportunity to escape big city life. We agreed on taking a 7-day Alaska Cruise aboard the Discovery Princess. Little did we

know, this journey would be the ultimate girls' getaway!

Sail Away Party from Seattle A Celebration of Fun

Our adventure began with a bang as we set sail from Seattle. The Sail Away party on the Lido deck was a high-energy celebration that set the tone for the entire trip. With loud music, line dancing, and a lively atmosphere, we were swept up in the excitement. It was the perfect way to kick off our girls' getaway—dancing, laughing, and enjoying the festive vibe. The Sail Away party was just the beginning of the fun that awaited us.

Cabin Comfort: A Cozy Retreat

Our cabin was more than just a place to sleep, it was a cozy retreat to relax and unwind. Our cabin was perfect, with plenty of storage, comfortable twin beds and a nice sized bathroom with a shower. The highlight of our cabin, however, was the private balcony. We loved starting our mornings sipping coffee on the balcony as we watched the stunning Alaskan scenery pass by. The balcony was also the perfect spot for some quiet time with only the sound of lapping waves.



Princess Cruises

Relaxation and Pampering at the Lotus Spa

No girls' getaway is complete without some serious pampering, and Discovery Princess didn't disappoint. The Lotus Spa offered a wide range of treatments designed to rejuvenate our bodies and minds. We indulged in facials, massages, and even a visit to the hair salon to get ready for our nights out on the ship. We took time before and after our treatments to relax in the Enclave, a tranquil area within the spa with a hydrotherapy pool, heated stone beds, and steam rooms. The services in the Lotus Spa and use of the Enclave were at additional charge.

The Sanctuary: Adults-only

The Sanctuary, an exclusive, adults-only area on the top deck, offered unobstructed views of the seemingly endless Alaskan landscape. We wrapped ourselves in cozy blankets and had hot chocolate as we watched the breathtaking scenery. We booked a half-day in the Sanctuary while the ship sailed in the serene waters of Glacier Bay National Park and listened to the narration from the bridge, and although it was little cold, it was nonetheless an experience we'll never forget.

Choosing Our Own Activities Daily

One of the best parts of our Princess Cruise was the freedom to choose our own daily plans. Except for the safety drill at the start of the cruise, nothing was mandatory. The variety of options allowed us to customize each day. My sister-in-law is an early riser, so she would head to the gym for stretch classes and Pilates in the early morning. I, on the other hand, preferred to sleep in and meet her for a leisurely breakfast in the World Marketplace Buffet. The variety of options allowed us to customize our days, and we always found something fun to do together. We booked shore excursions as a duo, exploring Alaskan towns and experiencing some thrilling adventures. Dining was a shared experience as well, with a variety of places to grab a bite or have a formal meal. We capped off our evenings with cocktails at a bar, chatting with the bartenders and other guests.

Thrilling Excursions

Helicopters, Sled Dogs, and More

We embraced the ruggedness of Alaska in choosing our shore excursions. I insisted on doing the most adventurous excursions as I am passionate about small planes and helicopters. We took a scenic helicopter ride up to the Denver Glacier, where we had the once-in-a-lifetime experience of dog sledding on the glacier and even holding the adorable sled dog puppies afterwards. Another thrilling adventure took us on a 6-person floatplane to Misty Fjord Monument, where the landscape was as breathtaking as the flight itself. These adventures added an exciting dimension to our girls' getaway and happily pushed my sister-in-law out of her comfort zone.

In Juneau, we took a walking tour that gave us a taste of the local culture and cuisine including a memorable dinner at Tracy's King Crab Shack. On a walking foodie tour at night in Victoria, BC, we tasted good old Canadian Beaver Tails (fried dough with cinnamon and sugar) and other delights.

Nightlife: Entertainment, Shows and Casino

The fun didn't end when the sun went down. We enjoyed live shows at the bars and in the theatre, tested our luck at the casino (I sadly lost), and relaxed with cocktails around the ship. The combination of entertainment, unique bars and restaurants, and the stunning Alaskan scenery made for unforgettable evenings. Whether we wanted to dance the night away, catch a live performance, sit on the top deck under the stars or simply enjoy quiet drinks, Discovery Princess had it all.

Shopping on Board

From Designer Goods to Souvenirs

What's a girls' getaway without a little retail therapy? The Discovery Princess boasts an array of onboard shops, offering everything from designer handbags and jewelry to unique souvenirs. We spent a few afternoons browsing the stores, picking up gifts for ourselves. We couldn't resist checking out the special offers.

Dining Experiences

A Culinary Journey

Dining on the Discovery Princess was a culinary journey, with nine included dining options, and an additional seven specialty dining options available at an extra charge. We made reservations for specialty dinners at Catch by Rudi, for gourmet seafood, at the Crown Grill for steak, and at the Italian restaurant, where we indulged in delicious pasta dishes and pizzas. We splurged on the "360 Dining Experience", a sensory feast that was beautifully choreographed. During the meal we were led on a virtual tour of four countries with menu items, images and smells from each. The scent of lemons in Greece and lavender in France inspired our wanderlust! We also enjoyed casual dining at the various buffets and cafes, and we never missed an opportunity to taste some gelato, or a decadent calorie-filled ice cream treat, guilt-free! With our Princess Medallions we could order food or drinks anywhere on the ship from the coffee shops and restaurants and have them delivered to us. We spoiled ourselves by ordering room service for a magical al fresco breakfast on our balcony in Glacier Bay National Park.

A Fairytale Getaway

Reconnecting and Recharging

All in all, our cruise to Alaska was more than just a vacation—it was a chance to disconnect from the chaos of daily life and reconnect with each other. We balanced relaxation with adventure, pampering with exploration, and created memories that will last a lifetime. The combination of luxurious amenities, stunning scenery, and the thrill of discovery made it a fairytale getaway that we'll cherish forever. If you're looking for the ultimate girls' getaway, a Princess Cruise to Alaska is the perfect choice. We are already planning our next destination on a Princess Cruise. ■

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Disney Cruise Line Announces Fleet Expansion and Introduces All-New, Broadway-Caliber Stage Shows

Amid a period of unprecedented growth, Disney Cruise Line shared more exciting news recently during D23, The Ultimate Fan Event, including further expansion of the fleet and new details about the signature entertainment coming to the Disney Treasure and Disney Destiny in 2024 and 2025.

Disney Cruise Line Expansion

Disney Cruise Line announced an additional four ships that will join the award-winning fleet, giving families more opportunities to experience the world-class dining, exceptional entertainment, and signature hospitality that Disney Cruise Line is known for.

With five ships in the current fleet and four others already in the works, the additional four ships announced Saturday will bring the fleet to a total of 13. These new ships, which will debut between 2027 and 2031, will be constructed at the Meyer Werft shipyard in Germany, and the ship names, designs, and itineraries are still in development.

Go the Distance: "Disney Hercules," All-New Stage Show to Debut Exclusively Onboard Disney Destiny

When the Disney Destiny sets sail in November 2025, it will bring spaces and experiences inspired by legendary Disney heroes and villains to the high seas. Onboard, one such tale of good vs. evil will come to life when everyone's favorite Greek gladiator takes center stage in the Walt Disney Theatre in "Disney Hercules," an all-new, Broadway-style show developed exclusively for the Disney Destiny.

The high-energy show will be filled with the celebrated songs and larger-than-life characters from the Walt Disney Animation Studios movie, presented in an all-new way. "Disney Hercules" will stay true to the story and spirit of the film while showcasing a fresh, modern adaptation tailor-made for the stage. ■

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CroisiEurope's Announces Ganges River Cruises: A Journey of Discovery

CroisiEurope, Europe's leading river cruise operator, is thrilled to announce its highly anticipated Ganges River cruises, offering travelers a unique and immersive experience through one of India's most culturally rich and historically significant regions.

Beginning in February, 2025, CroisiEurope will operate a series of exceptional cruises along the sacred Ganges River, providing an unparalleled opportunity to explore the vibrant tapestry of Indian culture, history, and natural beauty. The Ganges River, revered as a life-line for millions, winds through a landscape teeming with ancient temples, bustling markets, and serene countryside.

A Journey of Discovery

CroisiEurope's Ganges River cruises will feature:

- **Luxurious Accommodations:** Guests will stay aboard the elegant and specially designed river cruise vessel, RV Ganges Voyager offering modern amenities and stylish décor that ensures a comfortable and memorable journey.
- **Cultural Immersion:** Daily excursions will be led by knowledgeable English speaking local guides, taking guests to iconic sites such as Varanasi, known for its ghats and spiritual significance, and the majestic temples of Kolkata.
- **Authentic Indian Cuisine:** A gourmet dining experience will highlight the diverse and flavorful cuisines of India, prepared by talented chefs using fresh, local ingredients.
- **Enriching Experiences:** Guests will enjoy traditional music and dance performances, as well as opportunities to participate in local crafts and cultural activities.

Exclusive Itineraries

CroisiEurope's Ganges River cruise itineraries are designed to offer both relaxation and adventure. Key highlights include:

- **Varanasi:** Witness the mesmerizing Ganga Aarti ceremony and explore ancient temples along the river.
- **Kolkata:** Discover the city's colonial heritage and vibrant street life, including visits to the iconic Victoria Memorial and Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity.
- **Farther Explorations:** Optional excursions include visits to the Sunderbans mangrove forest, home to the Royal Bengal Tiger, and rural villages where guests can experience traditional Indian life first-hand. ■

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Photo: Viking SKY in Edelford

Exploring the Splendours of Northern Europe on the 'Viking Homeland' Sailing

Article and photography by Michael Morcos

Eleven destinations, six countries, five currencies and one incredible cruise! In this part two of our 'Vikings' 'Homelands' itinerary sailing article, we will dive into the many ports of call that offered us everything from natural outdoor settings to cosmopolitan panache, all while our home away from home, the fabulous Viking Sky, awaited our return with its luxury and comfort.

Life could not be any better as we were pampered, entertained, wine and dined with the finest dishes and guided to the best sites and attractions in every stop from Norway, through Denmark, Germany, Poland, Finland and finally, Sweden.

To some, a cruise is a way to kick back, relax and enjoy cocktails by the pool. This is of course possible with Viking; however, most of their passengers lead an active lifestyle that includes learning about new lands and cultures and participating in hands-on adventures. This was the case for us on the 15-day itinerary during which we barely had any downtime, and days packed with activities. Being creatures of habit, our days were wonderfully repetitious with three wonderful meals, a daily excursion (or two), tea-time, cocktails, time at the gym or the spa, taking in music performances throughout the ship, early evening entertainment shows, a comfortable and restful sleep and then repeat the next day of delights!

The Viking Sky

Although a few years old, the Sky was in perfect condition, clean, well maintained and as attractive as the day it first set sail. We really had everything we needed on board and never thought of how to make things any better. The Sky, like all its sister ocean ships is the perfect size, well thought out, planned, designed, and built to take to the open oceans safely and comfortably, but also is the perfect size to visit smaller out of the way harbours.

It is spacious, which means that there are hardly ever any line-ups, and comfortable seating can be found just about everywhere. Having already sailed on these beautiful



ocean ships, I should have known better than thinking the ship was half full, but when talking to a Viking manager I would find out the ship was at near capacity with more than 900 guests. This has always been a highlight to sailing with Viking, to be able to get around without negotiating other passengers in the way.

Sailing the old world

Europe has two massive seas. Compared to the well-known Mediterranean, with its tourism and popular destinations like Venice, Rome and Barcelona, the Baltic Sea is much more tranquil and inviting for the world traveler.

The six countries we visited were filled with beautiful natural surroundings including Norway, Denmark, Sweden, and Finland. So much so that our visit to Berlin was rather hectic but still a joy to be in the country's capital, witnessing some of the best of Germany. We set aside two optional excursions where we would be guided through the magnificent countryside on bicycles to take in the fresh air and open spaces, with stop overs at historic out of the way churches and tranquil seaside harbours that made this part of our trip fun and memorable.

It is difficult to pick any one moment I enjoyed the most as there were far too many to pick from. What did stand out was taking a walk in Eidfjord alongside the river surrounded by tall mountains. In Oslo, we loved the masterpieces at Vigeland Park and viewing the famous "Scream" painting at the Munch Museum. In Copenhagen, we loved that worldly popular mermaid statue and the excitement and bustle of the Nyhaven harbour. We were delighted by the tranquil bike rides through the countryside in both Bornholm and Aland. Berlin was exciting and invigorating. Gdansk was a wonderful surprise with its charming and well-kept quarters, while we were enamoured by Stockholm's medieval city center.

Professionally guided towards

As per our many Viking sailings, there are guided tours included in every part of call, and this was the case throughout our cruise. Viking does an exceptional job of coordinat-

ing all their passengers off the ship and to their designated guide who would then get us on luxury coaches or directly walking towards the attractions. These tours are always well organized with fantastic, friendly, and knowledgeable local guides.

Within a very short time, we would get an orientation on the destination and learn about its history, culture, museums, main attractions, and areas to shop and dine. In the big cities like Oslo, Copenhagen, Gdansk, and Stockholm, we easily navigated through the rush of the crowds and felt like we had been there much longer than the couple of hours exploring. The wonderful Viking staff would always welcome us back on board with smiles, a hot towel, refreshments and offered a perfect end to a wonderful day of exploration and touring. This contrasts with doing this on our own, where it could be complicated, tiring and a times frustrating.

Viking's multiple sailing options

Cruising is cruising, right? Not at all! First, we must distinguish between high-capacity cruising with ships that host over 4000 passengers and the midsize and smaller vessels. This is where Viking comes in with three categories of their own. The ocean ships with a capacity of 930 passengers sail the world, while the Viking Expedition ships that accommodate less than 400 passengers visit Antarctica, the Great Lakes, and soon enough, the high Arctic. Even smaller are the masterfully built Viking Longships that sail the European waterways, while the Nile, Mekong, and the Mississippi rivers all have their distinctively built ships for these destinations.

All these Viking ship classes are different in character and sailing styles, but all have things in common. This includes remarkable design, décor, service and amenities and they have all proven to be a remarkable success as year after year Viking is continuously winning awards and leading the field.

With that in mind, the 'Viking Homelands' cruise is a winner and fabulous way of experiencing the splendours of Northern Europe! ■

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Exploring the Volcanic Islands of the Canaries with Windstar Cruises

Article and photography by Parm Parmar

These Canary Islands emerged from volcanic activity in the Atlantic Ocean 20 million years ago and were discovered by Europeans in the 1500s. They boast a unique allure with their fragrant pine forests, captivating volcanoes, lunar-like landscape, sandy coves, expansive dunes reminiscent of the Sahara, and coastal resorts.

When I boarded Windstar's Star Pride, my exhaustion and jetlag vanished. I'm not sure whether it was the sun's warmth or the staff's warm welcome, but my spirit lifted. I couldn't wait to set sail on our eight-day cruise through the Canary Islands to Lisbon.

The Windstar Star Pride is renowned not just for its exceptional service and optimal size but also for its unique experiences. From its appealing destinations like Italy, Croatia, Iceland, and Tahiti to the extraordinary service and offshore excursions, guests choose Windstar repeatedly for their cruise experience.

The Canary Islands

The Canary Islands, a Spanish archipelago off the northwest coast of Africa, are renowned for their diverse landscapes, ranging from volcanic peaks to lush forests and pristine beaches. With a mild, subtropical climate, they attract visitors year-round for outdoor adventures and relaxation.

One of the many advantages of cruising on a small ship is that lesser-known destination ports are accessible.

Whether on the ship or prior to boarding, you can book various excursions to each island or explore independently. The tours are impressively well organized and led by knowledgeable guides.

Lanzarote's Alien Landscape

Like many of its sister islands, Lanzarote, our first port stop, is filled with volcanoes, lava fields, and rocks, with volcanic ash often used for farming. It's quite the alien landscape. My excursion, Wonders of Lanzarote, was the right choice. We arrived in the stunning Valley of Haria. Known as



the "village of a thousand palms," it is renowned for its beautiful architecture and popularity as a holiday destination. It's a charming place, and I can see why it's popular with hikers.

We went further afield to Lanzaloe Park in Órzola, its one of Europe's largest organic aloe farms. After a tour of the farm, we tried some of the skin creams made with this plant; aloe's healing properties go beyond just sunburn lotion.

Our final stop was Jameos del Agua, located inside a volcanic tunnel, featuring a restaurant, concert hall, and cafés within the tunnels. This spot is not to be missed because the caves are jaw-droppingly beautiful.

Whale Watching San Sebastian de la Gomera

Our adventure in San Sebastian de la Gomera began as we hopped onto a small boat to go Whale watching. The island's rugged beauty was breathtaking as we ventured out into the open sea. Minutes turned into an hour as I eagerly scanned the horizon with my fellow guests, the boat rocking with the waves. Just as our excitement reached its peak, a cry of joy from fellow passengers alerted us to the sighting of a whale spout in the distance. Soon, a pod of pilot whales emerged, gliding gracefully through the water. It's a short excursion and also a great way to see the rocky island from the water.

Otherworldly Teide National Park, Tenerife

Santa Cruz, Tenerife, our second port of call, is one of the Canary Islands' most popular tourist destinations. It's highly walkable but busy with both locals and tourists. A visit to the La Recova de Santa Cruz, with its fresh fish, fruits, bakeries, and restaurants, is a must. I splurged on some silver jewelry there.

In the afternoon, I joined an excursion to Teide National Park, passing through diverse micro-climates and the clouds of Corona Forestal Natural Park and La Orotava. Teide National Park, the largest in the Canary Islands, offers breathtaking landscapes dominated by Mount Teide, which rises to 3,718 meters. I marvelled at



Los Roques de García, the park's most famous rock formations. Mount Teide features volcanoes, craters, chimneys, and lava streams, creating a remarkable panorama. The park is renowned for sunsets and stargazing. Our tour included a magnificent sunset after a delectable 3-course dinner with wine at Restaurant Papillon.

**Funchal Madeira
City Highlights and Cable Car (Portugal)**

We explored Funchal, our final port of call, before heading to Lisbon, the vibrant capital of Madeira. It has stunning coastal views, lush gardens, and rich history. Our adventure began with a stroll through the historic Old Town, where we admired the colourful painted doors and quaint cobblestone streets. Walking through the bustling Mercado dos Lavradores, a lively market showcasing the island's freshest produce, flowers, and local crafts. The highlight of my day was the exhilarating cable car ride to Monte, offering breathtaking panoramic views of the city and the Atlantic Ocean. Brave souls, not me, jumped on the unforgettable toboggan ride down the steep streets, a unique and thrilling experience.

**Windstar's Star Pride
My Home Away From Home**

The Star Pride has expanded its guest room capacity from 212 to 312 passengers, adding 50 new cabins and suites. New Owner's Suites were also introduced mid-ship with step-out balconies.

My suite, an original-style cabin, featured a luxurious new bathroom with two sinks, glassed-in showers, and some with bathtubs. Robes, slippers, L'Occitane toiletries and numerous USB power outlets were provided. Upgrades include energy-efficient engines and eco-friendly wastewater treatment systems, enhancing the ship's sustainable cruising capabilities. Windstar Cruises is dedicated to environmental responsibility, continually improving its impact.

Eating well on Windstar is a Given

Eating well on Windstar cruises begins with Amphora Restaurant, the ship's main dining venue, it offers a varied dinner menu with items curated by James Beard Foundation-



trained chefs. The menu changes daily, offering a variety of dishes from different cuisines. One night, my table dined on a stew of seafood in a cream sauce with fingerling potatoes, and another night, I had a perfectly roasted rack of lamb with chimichurri sauce.

At the rear of the ship, the Veranda serves breakfast and lunch with indoor and outdoor seating. In the evening, the outdoor area transforms into Candles, a 30-seat steak and seafood restaurant. The last night on the cruise, dining at Candles was a perfect spot for a Surf and Turf dinner with delicious sides of broccolini, creamed cauliflower, and onion rings cooked to perfection. I won't go into the deserts, I still remember their taste.

Love Spanish Cuisine? Then Cuadro 44, led by Michelin-starred chef Anthony Sasso, features dishes like Paella Croquetas and Catalan Salad. Save room for desserts such as Crema Catalan. StarGrill offers breakfast until 8 a.m. and daily lunch options, including roasted chicken and grilled salmon. Take advantage of the made-to-order Cheeseburger and soft-serve ice cream station. The Yacht Club Café is a cozy lounge with the best coffee on the ship, along with sandwiches and pastries. Most Windstar voyages offer an outdoor barbecue and dance party by the pool (warmer climes), offering fantastic food and a lively atmosphere.

The Pool, Gym and Spa

On sea days, I enjoyed the gym, trying to burn off some delicious foods imbibed on the voyage. The spa offers complimentary access to a thermal suite with a sauna, steam room, showers, and heated loungers. My fellow passengers raved about the spa, but I decided to hit up the shopping on board.

The pool deck featured a terraced layout with a hot tub at the top, an infinity pool in the middle, and cascading pools below, perfect for sunbathing. ■

WWW.WINDSTAR.COM





The Athenaeum Hotel Athens

by Nicholas Kontis

Athens offers equal measures of mesmerizing historical sites in an infectious old city center, which breeds creativity. I traveled to the classic city to sail on a motor yacht to some of Greece's lesser-explored islands with small ship leader Variety Cruises. I sought a hotel for a few nights in Athens with specific criteria: comfort and location. In the city of antiquities, I prefer to be in the heart of Athens's nonstop vibrancy.

Imagine being strategically positioned just a stone's throw from the central Plaka labyrinth and within walking distance of the fashionable Kolonaki neighborhood. This is the Athenaeum Hotel, your perfect base for exploring the grand metropolis. Its proximity to the Temple of Olympian Zeus adds a touch of history to its modern charm, making it an ideal choice for your Athens adventure.

The deluxe property, with its 52 rooms and suites, some with Acropolis views while others look out to Athens's historic past spectacles of Lycabettus Hill and the Temple of Olympian Zeus, offers a luxurious and comfortable stay. The hotel's plunge hydromassage pool and fitness center are available for relaxation and keeping in shape, ensuring a pampered stay during long days of sightseeing, shopping, and dining. You'll feel indulged

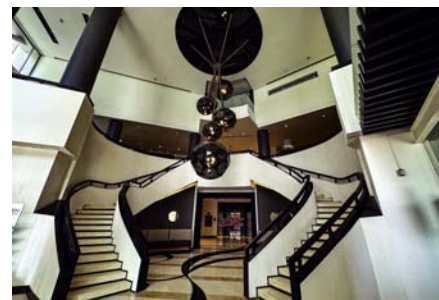
and pampered with a range of luxurious amenities.

The hotel's refined roof garden, Pasithea Restaurant, blends a menu of Greek-Mediterranean plates with sweeping backdrops of the iconic city. Under the tutelage of Michelin-starred Chef Alain Ducasse, Evangelos Nikas offers his culinary talents from more than ten years of preparing delicious dishes at some of the world's most refined hotels.

The modern rooms and suites are designed with serenity in mind. From plush bathrobes to a well-stocked mini bar, an espresso machine for your caffeine fix, hardwood floors, a spacious desk, luxurious cotton linens, a large TV for entertainment, a king-size bed for a restful sleep, a hair dryer, a safety deposit box for your valuables, and climate control for your comfort, the property has thought of everything to ensure your stay is as comfortable as possible.

With its ideal location, the Athenaeum Hotel is the perfect complement to your stay in Athens. You are in the city's heart, ready to explore all the city offers. You're always at the center of vibrant energy, ready to explore immediately. ■

WWW.THEATHENAEUM.COM.GR



Le Méridien Mexico City

by Nicholas Kontis

The coveted all-suites Le Meridien Hotel, strategically located in the heart of Mexico City's financial hub along the iconic, bustling metropolis' main thoroughfare, Reforma Avenue, is a comfortable solution to the busy capital. Its prime location, within walking distance of the Zocalo, Diego Rivera Mural Museum, Chapultepec Park with its crown jewel castle, the Archaeological Museum, and the Angel of Independence monument, ensuring you can easily explore the city's major attractions, filling your days with excitement and discovery.

The Le Meridien Hotel offers 160 spacious suites, each a comfortable haven with floor-to-ceiling windows, either queen- or king-sized beds, separate living rooms, marble bathrooms, mini-fridge, bathrobes, desks, coffee machines, 55-inch flat-screen TVs, and hideaway sofa beds. These suites are designed to provide you with the utmost comfort, ensuring you feel relaxed and pampered throughout your stay. Some rooms come with sweeping views of Reforma Avenue and the city, providing a home away from home for guests. There is an indoor pool and fitness center.

La Gloriosa is the property's ground-floor restaurant. The diner flaunts the concept of a Mexican cantina, with cocktails and meals combining artisanal fusion with the sophistication of Mexican cuisine. The restaurant serves a tasty daily breakfast buffet.

With a kind and responsive staff, the Marriott Bonvoy business hotel has enough panache to satisfy travelers seeking out the major sights of the iconic metropolis. The property is also committed to sustainability, with eco-friendly practices in place to reduce our environmental impact. ■

WWW.MARRIOTT.COM



Fairfield by Marriott Nordhavn A New & Cozy Retreat in Copenhagen

by Olivia Liveng

The Fairfield by Marriott Copenhagen Nordhavn, a new addition to Marriott's portfolio, blends modern comfort and Scandinavian simplicity. Located in the burgeoning Nordhavn district, this hotel offers a fresh and cozy stay for both leisure and business travelers. Here's an in-depth look at what you can expect during your stay.

Situated in the vibrant Nordhavn district, the Fairfield by Marriott is well-positioned for guests looking to explore Copenhagen's contemporary and historical attractions. The hotel is a 10-minute walk from the nearest metro station, providing easy access to the city center and other vital areas. Additionally, the nearby Århusgadekvarteret neighborhood is bustling with restaurants,

shops, and cafes, making it a lively place to stay.

The hotel's design embraces the Danish concept of "hygge," which translates to a sense of coziness and comfortable conviviality. The lobby features a beautiful communal table centered around a tree, inviting guests to gather for a glass of wine, coffee, or a bite to eat. The seating arrangements range from intimate two-person tables to larger booths and flexible seating that can be rearranged for group activities or discussions. This communal atmosphere extends to the dining and public spaces, promoting a laid-back, social environment.

The hotel boasts 222 rooms, all measuring 17 square meters and designed with simplicity and functionality in mind. The rooms come with either twin or queen beds and offer views of the sea or the inner courtyard. Large windows flood the rooms with natural light, creating a bright and airy feel. However, the minimalistic approach means that amenities such as a minibar, safe, or coffee machine are not included. Instead, the focus is on essential comforts like comfortable beds, soundproofing, blackout curtains, and well-located plug sockets (including USB-A and USB-C). The bathrooms are

compact yet efficient, featuring a rain shower with refillable toiletries from Nirvae Botanicals. While some guests might miss additional amenities, the overall design ensures a clutter-free and orderly space, perfect for short stays.

Breakfast is served at The Social Market, the hotel's complimentary breakfast buffet area, from 6:30 to 10:30 am on weekdays and until 11:00 am on weekends. The buffet offers a variety of options, including pastries, cold cuts, fresh fruit, juices, yogurts, cereals, and eggs. The kitchen island setup is efficient but can become crowded during peak times. For those needing a caffeine fix, there are coffee machines available throughout the day, although a fee applies outside of breakfast hours.

Fairfield by Marriott Nordhavn emphasizes communal living with various public spaces designed for socializing and working. The flexible furniture arrangements allow guests to create their own comfortable setups, whether for solo work sessions or group meetings. The hotel also offers a 24/7 market for snacks and essentials, a fitness center, and excellent complimentary Wi-Fi throughout the property.

Guest reviews highlight the hotel's cleanliness, modern design, and friendly staff. Many appreciate the convenient location and the comfortable beds, though some mention the room size as a drawback for more extended stays. The breakfast receives praise for its quality and variety despite occasional crowding. The Fairfield by Marriott Copenhagen Nordhavn stands out as a fresh and modern hotel choice in Copenhagen. It is ideal for those who value simplicity and comfort, with thoughtful design and communal spaces making it a welcoming retreat for travelers. Whether you're visiting for business or leisure, this hotel offers a cozy and efficient base for exploring the Danish capital. ■

WWW.MARRIOTT.COM



Puntacana Resort & Club - *Tropical Paradise Found*



Accommodations

Puntacana Resort & Club is the Caribbean's leading resort community on the eastern shore of the Dominican Republic. Tortuga Bay is member of the Leading Hotels of the World and the only AAA Five Diamond awarded hotel in the Dominican Republic, offering understated elegance, privacy and unparalleled personal service. Located at Playa Blanca is The Westin Puntacana Resort & Club, guest enjoys all of Westin's signature amenities and Don Queco Cigar Bar. Our Four Points by Sheraton is situated at Puntacana Village, few minutes away from Punta Cana International Airport (PUJ).

The Estates

Become a part of our magnificent paradise community with the purchase of a vacation home in the elite The Estates at Puntacana Resort & Club, where Julio Iglesias, Mikhail Baryshnikov call home. An exclusive lifestyle of relaxation, excitement and understated elegance, prospective buyers can choose among elegant homes perched above the Caribbean Sea or overlooking scrupulously manicured golf courses in Corales, Tortuga, Arrecife, Hacienda, Hacienda del Mar and Marina. Home and apartments are also available at Puntacana Village.



Golf

With 45 holes of championship golf, Puntacana Resort & Club is the Caribbean's premier golf & beach destination. The P.B. Dye designed La Cana Golf Course, consisting of 27 holes across Tortuga, Arrecife and Hacienda, was declared the number one course in the Caribbean by Golf Magazine. Designed by Tom Fazio and set between rocky cliffs, coral reefs and the expansive Caribbean Sea, the Corales Golf Course features six oceanfront holes, multiple lines of approach and picturesque canyons, making for an exhilarating experience.

Activities & Spa

Puntacana Resort & Club offers a wide range of adventures for guests of all ages including golf, tennis, kite boarding, scuba diving, horseback riding, fishing and numerous excursions by sea, land and air. The leading spa in the Caribbean, Six Senses Spa at Puntacana Resort & Club presents a range of innovative packages, Signature treatments and Asian therapies. Visit Galerías Puntacana to enjoy an assortment of shops, restaurants, playground, and our spirited nightlife.

Dining

Puntacana Resort & Club is home to 6 world class eateries with an indigenously delectable cuisine. Tucked inside Tortuga Bay, the AAA Four Diamond awarded Bamboo blends modern cuisine with Mediterranean influences. Specializing in local seafood, The AAA Three Diamond Award La Yola is located at the Marina. At La Cana Golf & Beach Club is The Grill, an American style grill offering views of the sea. The Westin Puntacana Resort & Club provides a variety of restaurants and bars from Ananí to Brassa Grill. Next door is Playa Blanca, a beachfront tropical restaurant. Our Dine Around Program offers the best sampling of our finest culinary experience. All restaurants offer complimentary shuttle service within the resort. More dining options are available at Puntacana Village.



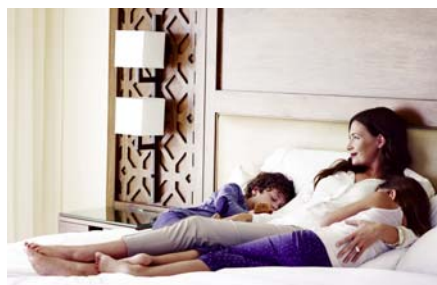
Corporate Social Responsibility

We believe that in development there needs to be equilibrium among the economic, environmental and social components. Our non-profit Grupo Puntacana Foundation serves both natural and social resources, while contributing to the sustainable development of our Dominican Republic. These practices have been guiding principles of our company, and along with vision, hard work and perseverance, the key to our success.

Punta Cana International airport

Punta Cana International Airport (PUJ), built, owned and operated by Grupo Puntacana, the resort's developers, and located within Puntacana Resort & Club, is just minutes away from check-in at any of our hotels or private homes. Punta Cana International Airport (PUJ) has direct service from 98 different cities around the world, making Punta Cana the most accessible destination in the Caribbean. Our VIP terminals service the needs of guests flying in private aircrafts.

The Caribbean's Premiere Golf
& Beach Resort Community
WWW.PUNTACANA.COM



EXPERIENCE LIFESTYLE

At Puntacana Resort & Club

The destination for relaxation, simplicity and convenience. With three miles of magnificent white sandy beaches and forty-five holes of championship golf, it's never been easier to call a place home. Our very own Punta Cana International Airport guarantees an effortless journey from the terminals to the lobby of our AAA Five Diamond Award-winning boutique hotel Tortuga Bay and The Westin Puntacana Resort & Club.



PUNTACANA®
RESORT & CLUB

For more Information visit: www.puntacana.com



Four Seasons Hotel Cairo at the First Residence

by Randy Mink

From my 14th-floor room I had a bird's-eye view of boat traffic on the Nile River and could hear the constant horn-honking that is so much the soundtrack of car-clogged Cairo, one of the most congested cities in the world.

Yet Four Seasons Hotel Cairo at the First Residence, an oasis of calm and classical grandeur, insulated me and my fellow Goway Travel tour members from the frenzy of Egypt's gritty capital. The hotel is part of a mixed-use complex called the First Residence.

A 20-story luxury hotel on the western bank of the Nile, the Four Seasons lies across the street from the Giza Zoo and its botanical gardens. (Actually, the hotel is in the Cairo suburb of Giza. The Pyramids of Giza can be seen from some rooms.)

Sumptuously Appointed Public and Guest Rooms

The hotel's architecture and decor are classic French Empire, reflecting the Napoleonic period in Egyptian history. Gilt finishes, highly polished woods, and lavish use of marble, along with Egyptian motifs, lend touches of elegance the pharaohs would have enjoyed.

Members of the Saudi and other royal families, plus Egyptian celebrities, stay at the 262-room Four Seasons or in apartments in the neighboring First Residence high-rise.

My Premier Nile View room had a chandelier in both the entranceway and bedroom. Thanks to a super-comfortable bed and the best pillow ever, I never slept better.

International Cuisine

From my room I could see the permanently docked First Nile Boat, home to most of the

hotel's restaurants. Nairu's pan-Asian menu features Cantonese, Japanese, Indian and Thai dishes, while Zoe offers Greek-inspired fare and Xodo is a Brazilian steakhouse. Riva is the place for brick-oven pizzas.

The boat's Le Petit Chef presents a novel dining experience. In a digital animation show that turns your tabletop into a swirl of colors, a little cartoon character appears at each guest's plate and prepares each course before the actual dish is served.

Overlooking the hotel's fourth-floor swimming pool, Aura delights guests with hot and cold mezzes and a selection of Syrian and Lebanese grilled entrees.

Bountiful Breakfast Buffet

At breakfast time, our Goway gang feasted at the Four Seasons' palatial third-floor Tea Lounge, where the buffet offered everything from vegetable curry and moussaka to made-to-order omelettes. One day I tried feteer, a flaky, cheese-filled Egyptian pastry, ladling on tahini sauce and molasses. We all enjoyed the thick, flavor-packed mango and strawberry juices.

Boutique Shopping at its Best

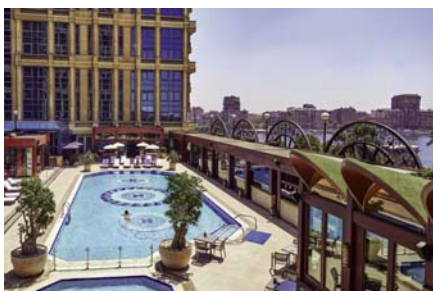
Attached to the Four Seasons is Giza First Mall, a collection of high-end boutiques. On the ground floor of the three-level indoor shopping center, the hotel's French brasserie, La Gourmandise, serves up bouillabaisse, French onion soup, steak frites, quiche and irresistible pastries.

Jewelry shops include Rolex, Tiffany and Bulgari. Horus Relics sells reproductions of ancient Egyptian artifacts. One merchant purveys plush Egyptian cotton goods.

Goway Travel Captures the Best of Egypt

A first-class trip all the way, our Goway tour also included an overnight at the Four Seasons in Alexandria and three nights on the five-star Sonesta St. George cruise ship in southern Egypt. Returning to Cairo for a final night before the flight home, we wrapped ourselves in luxury at the Fairmont Nile City. ■

WWW.FOURSEASONS.COM/CAIROFR
WWW.GOWAY.COM



Visit a souk in Tozeur
Enjoy dinner in the Sahara in Douz



INSPIRING
Tunisia



The Ruby Claire Geneva A Chic Boutique Experience in the Heart of Switzerland

by Daniel Smajovits

Nestled in the picturesque city of Geneva, Switzerland, the Ruby Claire stands as a beacon of luxury and style at an affordable price. This boutique hotel, part of the Ruby Hotel Group, redefines the concept of opulence with its sophisticated design, exceptional service, and prime location. Ideal for discerning travelers seeking an unforgettable stay, Geneva's Ruby Claire transcends the ordinary.

Ambiance and Design

From the moment you step into the Ruby Claire, you instantly realize that you're in for something a touch different. With the reception desk and bar/restaurant on the top floor, and all guest rooms below, the hotel

itself is designed with an ambiance that seamlessly blends modern elegance with a cozy, welcoming atmosphere. The interiors feature a harmonious blend of contemporary design elements in the hallways to the modern art which adorns the chic restaurant and bar. Guests can also leave their francs at the door – the Ruby Claire is completely cashless and automated, with check-in done via a screen at the hotel bar.

Exceptional Accommodations

The Ruby Claire is designed for both the young and young at heart. With plenty of space to unwind, each room features a modern rain shower, complete with his and her bath wash, as well as a large sink and

counter area. Should nothing on the television pique your interest, you can also turn on one of the room's Marshall speakers to the Ruby Group's own radio station. Each floor is also equipped with The Galley, a place where you can grab a quick coffee or tea at no charge, use a common ironing board or purchase some necessities that you might have forgotten.

Give Your Morning

A Boost: The Ultimate Breakfast Experience

A standout of the Ruby Claire is its exceptional and locally sourced breakfast. Neighbourhood suppliers deliver freshly baked bread and pastries each morning to complement a host of meats, fish, cheeses, vegetables and fruits. Switzerland's famous Bircher muesli is on the menu as well as pre-made granola and a selection of nuts and dried fruits allow guests to create their own too. Topping off the experience is bottomless barista coffee and tea.

Nightcap on the terrace

After a long day of exploring Geneva or a day-trip to nearby Lausanne or Gruyères, there's no need to rush back to the Ruby Claire. With the restaurant and bar open 24/7, light and affordable Italian inspired bites, pair perfectly with the hotel's vast drink menu, are at the ready. Ensure to try one of the hotel's signature cocktails, created by one of their talented mixologists.

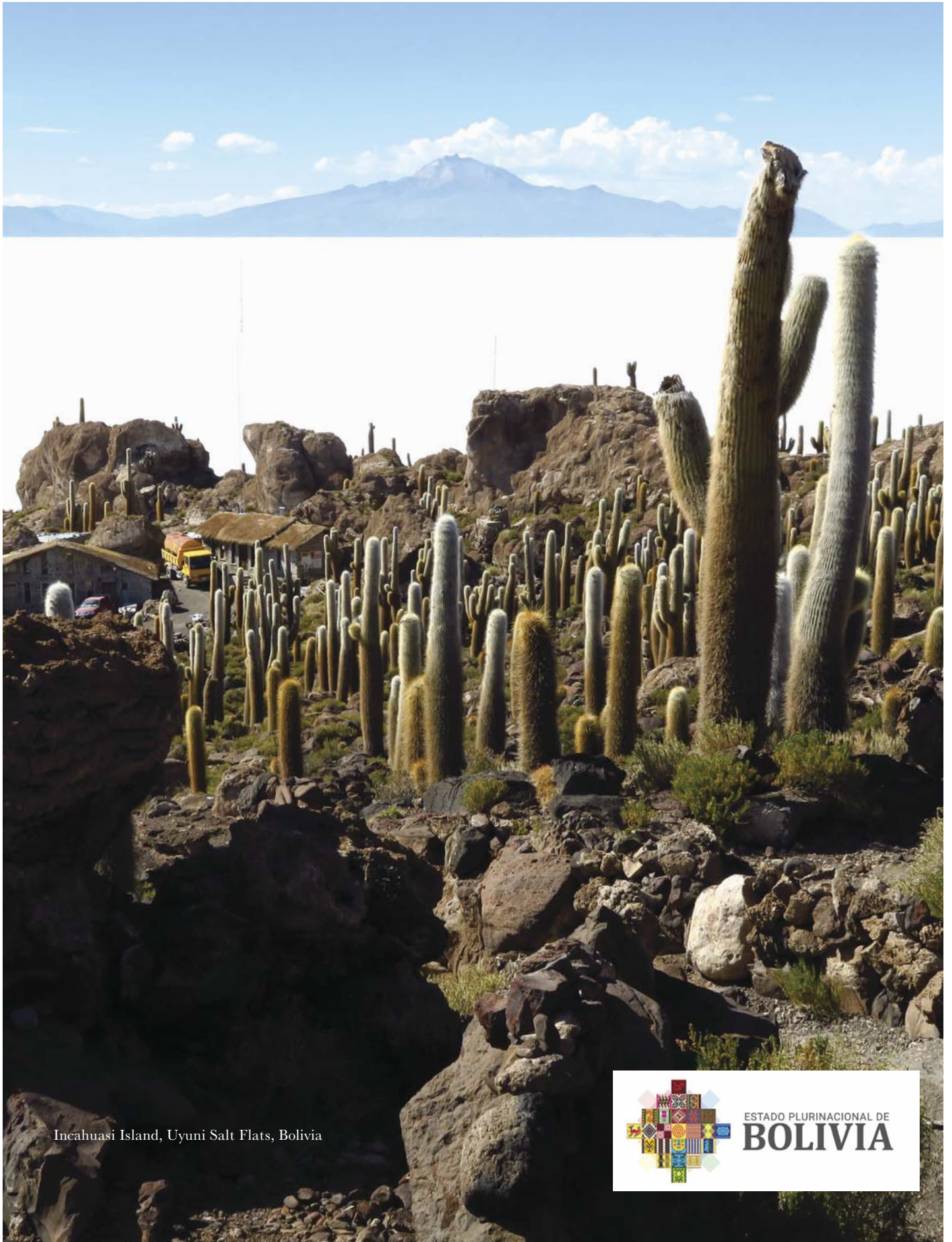
Location, Location, Location

Within minutes of leaving the Ruby Claire, guests can find themselves enjoying a leisurely walk with breathtaking views of Geneva's Jet d'Eau or at the Place Bourg-de-Four, home to some of the city's most high-end shops and restaurants. Only a few minutes further is the historic Old Town and numerous other cafes and boutiques.

The Ruby Claire Geneva represents the future of boutique hotels. Whether you are visiting Geneva for business or pleasure, the Ruby Claire promises a memorable stay, one that will have you longing to return long after you've landed back home. ■

WWW.RUBY-HOTELS.COM





Incahuasi Island, Uyuni Salt Flats, Bolivia





flowers,” said our guide, Harry, as we started walking. He pointed out some pale yellow blooms. “The Western Anemone are really special,” he said and explained how their spiny stalks allowed them to crawl through the snow. Further along the trail were meadows blanketed with bright yellow glacier lilies. As we stopped to take pictures, the not-so-camara-shy Columbia ground squirrels popped out of their burrows, cheeping loudly with their bird-like whistles.

As we continued our hike, we crested the Great Divide, the spine of the Canadian Rockies that separates two watersheds. For recreational hikers like us, it was thrilling to do a high-alpine hike without first chugging miles uphill.

“It’s such a privilege to have access to back-country at this altitude,” said Harry. With the gondola and lift, mountaintop trails are available to every ability from strollers to hard-core back-country climbers.

But no matter if you’re a soft or hard-core adventurer, there’s the ‘apres-hiking’ to look forward to when you’re staying at the lodge. The Mad Trapper’s is an institution and it’s as eccentric as the character it was named after. It’s housed in the original Canadian Pacific log cabin, where it all began. The walls are filled with memorabilia and photos, the beer is cold and the food is pub grub at its best, especially the poutine. There’s also the Chimney Lounge for more upscale cuisine and Java Lift Coffee Bar, perfect for a morning java fix and to-go hiking snacks. The sauna and the large outdoor hot tub soothe tired muscles and are the ideal complement to any outdoor adventure as are the suites in the hotel. With a balcony, fireplace, large soaker tub and floor to ceiling windows, the accommodations are a retreat themselves.

Coming back down the gondola at the end of our stay felt like we were leaving a glorious mountainous island in the sky and returning to earth. But our reality was now filled with mountain memories and a sense of tranquility we didn’t have when we went up. ■

WWW.SUNSHINEMOUNTAINLODGE.COM

Stay and Play at a Mountain Island in the Sky at Sunshine Village

Article and photography by Jennifer Merrick

In the heart of Banff National Park, the Sunshine Gondola whisked us up almost three miles on a 20-minute ride through surreal mountain scenery. Not only was it a ride to remember just for the views alone, but it was also the method of transportation we needed to use to reach our accommodation at Sunshine Mountain Lodge.

Sitting at 7,200 feet, the 84-room resort is the only high-alpine accommodation in Banff and is part of a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Up here, as far as the eye can see are the Rocky Mountain peaks, including Mount Assiniboine, Canada’s Matterhorn.

The Sunshine Mountain Lodge is better known as a winter destination, with ski in/ski out access to 3,300 acres of terrain across three mountains and 145 trails blan-

keted with its famous natural ‘champagne powder’ snow.

But we arrived in the summer with hiking poles instead of ski poles. Would this award-winning international ski destination be an equally exceptional off-season getaway? We couldn’t wait to find out and signed up for a guided hike offered by the hotel.

We took the Standish Chairlift, which began where our gondola ride ended and went up an additional 625 feet to an altitude of 7,825 feet. Here, we stood on the border of two provinces –Alberta and British Columbia. Looking out at the horizon and the sea of mountain peaks was awe-inspiring. But there was also beauty when we looked down.

“People come from all over to see the wild-





Stay, Play and Remember at St. Eugene's Resort

by Jennifer Merrick

A postcard-perfect view revealed itself as we crossed the bridge to St. Eugene's Resort in Cranbrook, British Columbia. Fishermen were trying their luck in the rapid St. Mary's River; golfers were also testing their skills on the lush greens along the bank; and gardeners were tending to the colorful blooms of the beautifully landscaped grounds. An historic brick building covered in ivy stood regally with its arched windows and stately design.

It's only when we learned the history of the building that the idyllic sight turned dark. From 1912 to 1970, the building housed the St. Eugene's Mission School, a residential school where native children were torn from their families, stripped of their language and culture and subjected to abuse. At the Ktunaxa Interpretive Centre, located in that very building, we learned about the 10,000-year history of the Ktunaxa people through exhibits that ranged from the creation story and scale-model tipis and boats to photographs and information about the heartbreaking residential school history.



"How do people see the resort because of what happened here?" I asked our guide.

"Most see it positively," said Maren. "We were able to create something beautiful for future generations to enjoy."

It took a lot of work. When the school was closed in 1970, it remained abandoned, becoming derelict and vandalized, for 20 years. Some wanted it demolished, but a community referendum voted in favor of restoration. The building was gutted and stripped to its century-old brick walls and enhanced with dark wood. An 18-hole championship golf course was opened in 2000, followed by the Casino of the Rockies in 2002. Expansion continued with adjoining buildings and the 125-room hotel, and most recently, a full-service RV Park.

Today the native-owned and operated resort is thriving and has become a go-to destination for weddings, conferences and getaways to a geographically-gifted corner of British Columbia.

Its location at the southern end of the Columbia Valley, where the Purcell and Rocky Mountains meet, means you'll see vistas of the peaks everywhere on the property whether you're on the golf course or relaxing on the terrace of your room. Off the resort, too, there's an abundance of recreational activities to enjoy in the area. Some popular options include: hiking at Wycliffe Conservation Area, rafting the St. Mary's River, swimming at Wasa Lake Provincial Park, biking the extensive network of trails, and exploring the towns of

Cranbrook and Kimberley. Whatever you decide to do, the resort's pool, spa and restaurants will be waiting for you when you return.

The pool complex comprises of a heated outdoor pool, hot tub, sauna and steam room and the BlushMediSpa offers a wide array of treatment options. Three onsite restaurants include: the 19th Hole, which serves up classic breakfasts and pub-styled mains on the golf course, Kiᑭsuᑭ kikiᑭ (meaning "good food") that lives up to its Ktunaxa name inside the casino; and Numa, which delivers a more upscale dining experience.

The resort has everything you'd expect in a luxurious property, but it doesn't ignore its past. Its hallways are lined with indigenous art and photographs of the residential school history. Each of the holes on the golf course has a Ktunaxa name. Education of the Ktunaxa people and indigenous culture is an experience the St. Eugene's Resort aims to highlight, and the resort is proud to state that its story "shows the resilience of the Ktunaxa people to come full circle and return to their roles as stewards of the land, looking to the future, but never forgetting the past." ■

WWW.STEUGENE.CA



VILLA PARADISO



*Your Escape
Jamaica*

Jamaica, the land of Bob Marley and Usain Bolt, is also ranked as one of the **top five** most favoured **tourist destinations in the world**.



There are many excellent all-inclusive hotels on the island, but if you're looking for more **private and luxurious accommodation**, then we would be delighted to welcome you to **Villa Paradiso, an enchanting seven-bedroom seaside villa in Ocho Rios**.



Villa Paradiso is located in the **secure gated community of Mammee Bay**. The two-acre Villa Paradiso property is lush with tropical plants and flowers.

Villa Paradiso combines the sumptuous elegance of a Mediterranean-style villa with the welcoming warmth of Caribbean hospitality.

As you arrive at the villa in your **private coach**, our staff will greet you with cold towels and an even colder drink. Walk onto the **63-foot veranda** and view the **glistening waters of the Caribbean Sea**, the **immaculately private white sand beach** and the inviting pool terrace. Our five professionally trained staff, led by our housekeeper **Nadine**, will look after your every need and make your vacation **an unforgettable experience**.



Exclusive Private Jamaican Paradise

All seven bedrooms are individually styled with ensuite bathrooms, overheads fans and air conditioning. Your rooms will be cleaned daily by Nadine and our laundress **Judith**. The **spacious living areas** combine comfort and elegance with lots of space to relax with a cold drink served by **Jermaine** the houseman. Mealtimes are very special at Villa Paradiso. **Leila**, our superb cook, will prepare all your meals. **Local delicacies** to try include pumpkin soup, salt fish and ackee, jerk chicken and curried goat, all seasoned with delicious local herbs and spices. Meals are served by Jermaine and **Michael**, our grounds man, in a professional yet friendly way.



There are numerous **great attractions** to visit in the **Ocho Rios area**. **Ronnie**, your coach driver can take you **rafting, tubing, or golfing**, as well as **swimming with the dolphins** at **Dolphin Cove**, climbing the famous **Dunn's River Falls**, or zip lining at **Mystic Mountain**. Then there is **Bob Marley's birthplace/museum** in the hills above Ocho Rios, and the Crafts Market and duty free shopping in Ocho Rios, only 10 minutes away.

The Riu Hotel, a five minute walk down the beach, can offer you rental of **many water sport activities including sailing and scuba diving**. We look forward to welcoming you to Villa Paradiso, **your Jamaican home away from home**.



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Live Calendar



LionsDive Beach Resort Curacao So Much More Than a Diver's Sanctuary

by Susan Campbell

I was recently surprised to learn that Curacao's LionsDive hotel was celebrating its 35th anniversary this year. To be honest, I'd not been keeping up with it much over the years since I don't dive. (Yet!) But its reputation as being the island's first diving accommodation Mecca has always been well established. I remember it way back when as a rather nondescript small black and white building of 70-some rooms. But it is the location in front of a unique wall shore dive, beside Ocean Encounters, the island's premier dive operator, and steps away from the legendary Curacao Sea Aquarium, all added to its allure for those seeking the ultimate scuba

holiday. And though I'd passed it countless times conducting my continuous research seeking all new on the island, its transformation was not readily apparent since the bulk of the property sits upon a hill above the beach. So, this trip I decided to plan a brief stay there to catch up with the changes, and all I can say is, "Wow! I had no idea!"

This once Spartan little outpost has since morphed into an uber impressive full-service resort. You'll need to explore the mazes of lush gardens and secret alleys throughout to discover surprises like an Olympic-size swimming pool (the only one in the

Caribbean,) with immaculate lounging areas and a child's pool. And tucked beside their awesome Asian dining spot called "Nemo" you'll find another pool bedecked with stunning outdoor local art. In fact, there are many outstanding murals throughout the property created by local artists. I also immediately noted sustainability and environmental protection are a hallmark of this property. Solar panels are on prominent display and water conservation, recycling programs and the like are prominent in the rooms. And let's talk about the rooms!

This resort now offers a wide host of accommodation choices for all holiday styles and budgets including the luxe new beachfront cabana walk-out suites, and the completion of 28 additional rooms and suites is scheduled for September 2024. (They also plan to improve their gym and spa facilities as well.) But it was my two-bedroom oceanfront second-story stay that was definitely something to write home about. It begins with a full modern kitchen stocked with all you need to self-cater, two bathrooms with rain showers, multiple smart TVs and some beautiful communal living areas. (Note: all outlets are European style, there are no 100-120-volt outlets in the rooms to charge your tech, so adapters are required.) And my balcony was a real showstopper! It was massive, and could easily host a party of a dozen people comfortably, and the view overlooking the beach is spectacular. Day and night.

Then there's the beach! They have staked out their own private surfside heaven in silky white sand right out-front cresting calm, protected waters ideal for snorkeling and paddle boarding. And if you opt for breakfast inclusion, it's served buffet-style at Hemingway's right on that beach. For off-property fun, right next door you have all the cool shops, bars, beach clubs, cafes, and trendy restos of multi-level Mambo Beach Boulevard. And if you want to explore the famous colorful UNESCO World Heritage sites of Willemstad nearby (and you do!) the hotel provides free daily shuttles to town. Oh yes, and if you do dive, they offer excellent sleep and dive packages as well. ■

WWW.LIONSDIVE.COM





A Slice of Paradise at Lake of the Ozarks

by Randy Mink

Outside the entrance to the lobby, a sculpture of a giant blue flip-flop flanked by palms greets arriving guests at Margaritaville Lake Resort Lake of the Ozarks. The photo-worthy installation signals the tropical beach vibe that awaits vacationers ready to chill out and unwind.

Sprawling across a hillside overlooking the main channel of one of the Midwest's largest manmade lakes, the central Missouri playground has been a destination hotel since 1960 but only recently took on the Margaritaville brand, a synonym for island ecstasy and casual fun.

I remember staying at the storied resort with my family when it was called Tan-Tar-A Resort, Golf Club & Spa. For a period, it flourished under the Marriott banner. Tan-Tar-A became Margaritaville in 2019.



As one of 40-some Margaritaville resorts in the real estate/restaurant/retail empire inspired by the lyrics and lifestyle popularized by late singer-songwriter Jimmy Buffett, the 520-room property embodies the spirit of escapism reflected in hit songs like "Margaritaville," "Come Monday" and "It's Five O'Clock Somewhere." At various venues you'll hear Buffett's music and see videos of his performances in addition to songs and clips showcasing other pop artists.

You Won't Go Hungry in Paradise

In the Anchor Building, the lobby's License to Chill Bar & Grill, named after a Buffett song title and 2004 concert tour, serves tasty flatbread pizzas and other light fare. A walk down the hill takes you to the waterfront LandShark Bar & Grill, where you might have a fish taco or cheeseburger with your margarita or LandShark Lager, the Margaritaville-brand beer. The adjacent swimming pool, with a swim-up bar and surfboard-shaped bar tables in the water, is one of five at the resort.

On the other side of LandShark is Tiki Hut Pool Bar. Steps away, Windrose Marker 26, a fine dining restaurant, specializes in steak and seafood.

In the resort's main complex, which spills down the hillside in a series of hallways and stairways, are two other eateries. JB's Boathouse Grill, accented with nautical trappings, has a great breakfast buffet offering everything from biscuits and gravy to made-to-order Belgian waffles. Nearby are Fin City Pizzeria & Billiards and an eight-lane bowling alley.

Recreational Activities

Margaritaville's marina rents boats, skis, WaveRunners and other water toys. A 125-passenger yacht, the Tropic Island, offers narrated cruises on Lake of the Ozarks, which was created more than 90 years ago by the construction of Bagnell Dam.

Jolly Mon Indoor Water Park has a 600-gallon tipping bucket, a lazy river, water slides and an oversized hot tub.

Guests also can tackle the mini golf course or, across the road, the 18-hole championship course at The Oaks Golf Club. They can saddle up for horseback riding at the resort's stables or compete on the new pickleball courts.

Spacious Guest Rooms

My eighth-floor nest was typical of the generously proportioned, lake-facing suites in the Anchor Building. With a balcony affording scenic views, it had two king-size beds, a sleeper sofa and full kitchen. Besides guest rooms in three additional hotel buildings, there are lakefront cottages with one- and two-bedroom units, plus rentals at the neighboring vacation home community.

Shops on the Boardwalk, up the escalator from the lobby, includes a store purveying Margaritaville-themed merchandise ranging from margarita and beer glasses to Jimmy Buffett CDs and tank tops proclaiming "No Shoes, No Shirt, No Problem."

Recharging at Margaritaville Lake Resort is the next best thing to a Florida fling. ■

WWW.MARGARITAVILLELAKERESORT-LAKEOFTHEOZARKS.COM





Beating a Path Through the Heart of Northern Maryland

by Randy Mink

Being a hiking enthusiast, history hound and fan of quaint little towns, I found lots to like during my recent trip to north-central Maryland, a part of the state that seems light years away from the Baltimore-Washington, D.C. metro area.

When many of us think of Maryland, we think Baltimore, Annapolis and other cities on the Chesapeake Bay. But I was traveling through the farmscapes and forested mountains to the west—specifically Frederick and Washington counties. Bordered by Pennsylvania, Virginia and West Virginia, the region is a tantalizing blend of Appalachian and sophistication.

I based myself in Frederick and from there made easy excursions through the tranquil green countryside that starts right outside the city limits. Though Frederick is Maryland's second-largest city (population 80,000), the friendly vibe and sense of community give it a small-town feel.

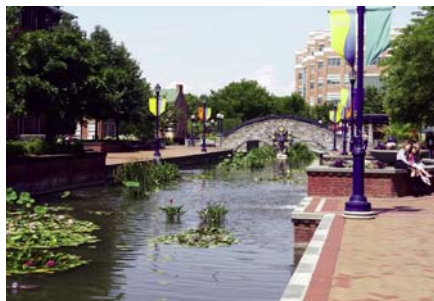
Exploring Historic Frederick

Downtown Frederick boasts a 50-square-block historic area loaded with 19th century buildings, including brick row houses and churches sporting stately spires. Extremely walkable, the district abounds with specialty shops and restaurants. Its crown jewel is Carroll Creek Park, whose landscaped promenades invite strolling on both sides of

the creek. Clustered at one end are several breweries and a distillery. A hub for concerts and other special events, the linear park claims the largest free water garden in the world, featuring picture-perfect lily pads and exotic vegetation from the Amazon jungles.

Downtown's National Museum of Civil War Medicine, a must-see, provides fascinating insights into early medical practices and the human suffering caused by the 1861-1865 war that tore the country apart. For one thing, you learn that two-thirds of the 700,000-some soldier deaths resulted from diseases spread by unsanitary conditions in crowded camps, not bullets and bayonets. Many succumbed to dysentery.

Major advances developed during the war—like the design of prosthetic limbs and a triage system for treating the wounded—changed medicine and battlefield evacuation techniques forever. Amputations were the most common surgery performed in



field hospitals, almost all of them done with the patient under some form of anesthesia, mainly chloroform or ether inhaled through a cloth.

Thousands of wounded Civil War soldiers were treated in homes, barns, churches and places of business in Frederick and other towns in the region. The stories of soldiers, surgeons and civilians come to life on the museum's "One Vast Hospital Walking Tour."

Antietam: Carnage in the Cornfields

Many of those needing care were wounded at Antietam Creek, the site of an infamous battle. Antietam National Battlefield memorializes the valiant men who participated in the bloodiest single-day conflict in American history (September 17, 1862). Of the nearly 100,000 Union and Confederate Army soldiers fighting in the farmlands near Sharpsburg, about 23,000 were killed, wounded or missing.

As a Massachusetts infantryman wrote to his father: "The slaughter was more awful than anything I ever read about....there is no place where you can stand and not see the field black with dead bodies as far as the eye can reach."

Antietam, one of America's most beautiful and best preserved battlefields, today is peaceful, almost idyllic. The National Park Service site contains dozens of stone monuments—many crowned by rifle-toting or sword-wielding soldiers—and interpretive panels alongside a self-guiding tour route threading fields planted with corn, soybeans and wheat. One monument honors Clara Barton, "Angel of the Battlefield," who brought bandages, lanterns and food to field hospitals and in 1881 founded the American Red Cross. Antietam's newly renovated visitor center offers ranger talks, exhibits and a movie about the epic 12-hour battle.

On a happier note, my next stop was Bonnie's at the Red Byrd, a roadside diner that's been dishing out home cooking since 1958. At this Keedysville landmark decorated with cardinal knickknacks, I ordered the fried country ham sandwich platter, though

the homemade BBQ pork and Wednesday specials (all-you-can-eat fried chicken and "slippery chicken" pot pie) were tempting. I saved room for chocolate meringue pie.

Main Street in Boonsboro

On the way to Boonsboro, I stopped at Crystal Grottoes Caverns for a cool 45-minute tour of Maryland's only show cave. Then I spent an hour or so exploring Boonsboro's Main Street with a walking tour brochure in hand. Established in 1792, the town thrived during the mid-1800s when the National Road, the nation's first federally funded highway, brought prosperity. Now U.S. Route 40 and a Maryland Scenic Byway, the National Road, once busy with horse-drawn wagons and stagecoaches, crossed six states between Baltimore and St. Louis. The new National Road Museum is set to open soon on Main Street, joining other points of interest on the historic roadway's path through town.

Boonsboro's current claim to fame revolves around a famous resident, best-selling romance novelist Nora Roberts. On Main Street, she and her husband own a bookstore, a gift shop featuring the works of local artists and Inn Boonsboro, an eight-room, literary-themed boutique property that occupies a former hotel popular during National Road boom years.

History and Hiking

Not far from Boonsboro, more Civil War history surfaces at South Mountain State Battlefield, which stretches between Washington Monument State Park (home to the first monument to honor George Washington) and Gathland State Park, near Burkittsville. The castle-like War Correspondents Memorial Arch at Gathland, dedicated in 1896, is inscribed with names of journalists killed in war. Museums across the road chronicle the Battle of South Mountain (waged three days before Antietam) and the life of noted Civil War correspondent George Alfred Townsend. Located in the northern Blue Ridge range, South Mountain claims a portion of the famed Appalachian National Scenic Trail, the 2,180-mile footpath that traverses the Eastern United States from Maine to Georgia.

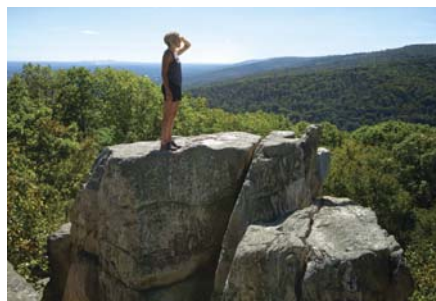
Hiking opportunities also await on the towpath of C&O Canal National Historical Park, whose scenic hiking/biking trails hug the Potomac River for 184 miles from Cumberland, Maryland to Georgetown in D.C. One day I drove a segment of the C&O Canal Scenic Byway, getting off at two places for hikes to locks, lockhouses and aqueducts that once served boat traffic on the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal. For lunch, I stopped in the historic canal town of Brunswick and rewarded myself with a scrumptious turkey, cheese and cranberry panini in a former church turned cafe, Beans in the Belfry.

Catoctin Mountain Park, near Thurmont and just south of the Pennsylvania border, provided my favorite hikes in northern Maryland. Panoramic lookout points have to be reached on foot, as there are no roadside overlooks for motorists.

Driving through the park under leafy canopies, I passed a road posted with a "Do Not Enter - Restricted Area" sign and noticed a "No Photography" icon as well as a park police car. Having read some travel guidebooks in advance, I knew the "secret" road led to Camp David, the country retreat of U.S. presidents since the days of Franklin D. Roosevelt. The park's visitor center carries two books on Camp David, but park personnel, understandably, are mum when the subject comes up.

Catoctin Mountain Park, a National Park Service unit, adjoins Cunningham Falls State Park, where one trail leads to Catoctin Furnace Village. A fascinating historical attraction dating from the early days of the Industrial Revolution, the village comprises ruins of the old iron-smelting furnace and ironmaster's house, plus the Museum of the Ironworker and workers' cottages that now are mostly private residences. The African American Cemetery Trail pays homage to the slaves who toiled in the furnace under hot, dirty conditions. The restored 1820 Forgemans' House, furnished with antiques, offers overnight accommodations. ■

WWW.VISITMARYLAND.ORG





Fall in Love with Golden this Autumn

Article and photography by Jennifer Merrick

Once is enough for some destinations even if they have their own merits and charms. Other places call us back and the urge to return is strong. Golden, BC falls squarely in the latter category. We first visited six years ago and became enamored with this small mountain town with a big heart and even bigger mountain scenery.

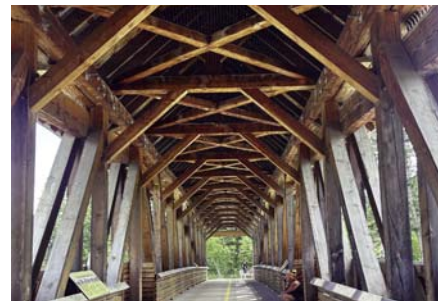
Situated in the Valley of a Thousand Peaks, which separates the Rockies to the east and the Columbia Mountains to the west, there are six national parks within a two-hour drive: Banff, Jasper, Yoho, Kootenay, Glacier and Mount Revelstoke.

Golden has an authentic, untouristy vibe with independent shops, cafés and restaurants, many of which are run by locals who visited for a winter of skiing or a summer of mountain biking and never left. We could understand their choice and were excited to be back. We discovered that some things had changed: The Golden Skybridge brought an exciting new attraction, and the downtown core was more pedestrian-friendly and inviting with a riverwalk path. What hadn't changed were the mountain and river outdoor activities, the laidback friendly vibe and the sheer dramatic beauty of the region.

In all four seasons, Golden offers outdoor adventure with skiing and snowshoeing in the winter, rafting in the spring and hiking and mountain biking in the summer. Fall is also a special time when the larch trees change to the color of the town's name, and the ground vegetation turns red. The snow has yet to cover it, but until it does, here are some of the best autumn activities that are sure to make you fall in love with Golden, too.

Cool off with a downtown walk along the river

"It's a natural air-conditioner," said Andy Brown, the town's spokesperson. The fast-moving glacier fed Kicking Horse River with its year-round temperature of 3 – 4 °C (37–39 °F) cooled the air as we walked along the path of its bank. But until recently, we wouldn't have been able to enjoy this effect.



"All this was just a back alley with garbage bins etc.," said Andy.

Today, visitors can enjoy a multiuse trail, outdoor patios and even five-room boutique accommodations, Rooms at Riveredge. The path connects to the Rotary Trail, which follows the river and connects to parks and residential neighborhoods.

Central to this connectivity is the Kicking Horse Pedestrian Bridge, the longest free-standing covered bridge in Canada. Built from locally sourced timber, its impressive design reflects the heritage of the Swiss guides in Golden.

Teeter across Canada's two highest suspension bridges at Golden Skybridge

At 426 feet above a massive canyon in the Columbia Valley, this is not an attraction for the acrophobic. But for most people, including ourselves, the burst of adrenaline is well-worth the thrilling view of rushing rivers and waterfalls, mountain peaks and thick forests. For more heart-thumping adventures there's also the Sky Zipline, Canyon Edge Challenge Course, Railrider Mountain Coaster, Axe Throwing and the Giant Canyon Swing. Or you could just relax on the walking trails, take in the views at the lookout points and order up some nosh from the food trucks and have a picnic.

Hike the peaks of Glacier National Park

Canada's second biggest park, Glacier, is situated in the Selkirk range of the Columbia Mountains, approximately 50 miles west of Golden. It's home to the historic Rogers Pass, a route discovered in 1881 through the 'impenetrable peaks' that now join our nation from coast to coast. It's also considerably less crowded than other parks in the area.

"For every 10 hikers at Banff or Yoho, there's one there," said Andy and revealed that it was his favourite.

Both the drive to reach the park and the hikes within its over 500-square-mile borders showcase spectacular glaciers and mountain peaks.

We hiked the Asulkan Valley Trail that took us past the remnants of Glacier House, which in the Gilded Age was the spot for the wealthy to vacation in this alpine wilderness that had been opened up by the CP railway. The trail then traversed scenery that was not unlike a Lord of the Rings movie with lush and verdant vegetation, multiple waterfalls, giant boulders, wildflowers and snow-capped peaks in all directions. The final section was a steep ascent that brought us above the treeline and rewarded our efforts with a view of the glacier and the Illecillewaet River below.

This was just one of many hikes on the park's 87 miles of developed trails that range from short strolls along the valley floor to challenging steep glacier climbs.

Spot eagles and other wildlife in the Columbia Wetlands

At over 180 kilometers in length, this protected tract of land is home to over 300 species of birds, fish and other wildlife. Columbia Wetlands Adventures provide guided tours of this ecological treasure, or you can explore on your own with the rentals provided.

We were on a quiet and comfortable cataraft tour, which was the perfect anecdote for our tired legs from our previous hikes. Armed with binoculars, we relaxed as the guide navigated the meandering channels of the river and pointed out wildlife. We were lucky enough to spot two bald eagles along with osprey, herons and a beaver.

Explore Yoho National Park

Yoho originates from a Cree word that means 'awe and wonder', and there are plenty of spots to do just that in this national park, located 60 kilometers east of Golden. There are more than 400km of hiking trails within its boundaries, and highlights include Takakkaw Falls, one of the highest waterfalls in western Canada, and Lake O'Hara, a jewel-blue lake so incredible that you need to win the lottery to be able to take the shuttle to reach it. Emerald Lake is the largest of the park's 60-plus lakes and lives up to its name with a glimmering deep turquoise colour. We strolled around this

oh-s- photogenic lake, which was an easy 5k-loop but took longer than expected because each new vista beckoned for a photo.

81

Meet Boo at Kicking Horse Resort

This rescue grizzly bear has been making this mountain his home for 22 years and educating guests about his often-misunderstood species. The Kicking Horse Grizzly Bear Refuge was set up when Boo was orphaned and the 20-acre tract of mountain wilderness is now his to hunt, play and forage. The interpretive centre provides guests with information about grizzlies in general and Boo in particular.

We took part in the Ranger Assist Program (RAP), which gave us a behind-the-scenes look at his care and insight into his personality. Afterwards, we took the Golden Eagle Express Gondola up to the summit for a view once described as an infinity pool of mountains. We felt on top of the world both literally and figuratively, while we hiked the ridge trails and worked up an appetite for lunch at the Eagle Eye Restaurant. At 7,700 feet, it's Canada's highest restaurant, and while we enjoyed our tasty food and brew, we planned our next visit to Golden.

If you go: It's less than three hours drive from Calgary International Airport or the Canadian Rockies International Airport in Cranbrook. We stayed at the Prestige Inn, which was a convenient and comfortable base to explore the area, and we especially enjoyed the hotel's amenities that included the pool and hot tub. The town of Golden has very few chain stores or restaurants, and it was a pleasure to indulge in some of the local cuisine. Our favourites included Wandering Fern, Eleven22, Whitetooth Mountain Bistro, Reposados Tacos, Island Restaurant and Bluebird Café. ■

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A spirited visit to Indiana

Article and photography by David J. Cox

A bright and sunny day awaited us as we headed out to the small Indiana communities we would explore over the next few days – Bloomington, Columbus and Nashville.

We would start our adventure a little south of Indianapolis in Bloomington, where the landscape is inspiring to the spirit and the eyes. Tucked in the lush forests of the Hoosier National Forest, this small city is home to Indiana University, a healthy inter-

national cuisine, as well as a vast array of outdoor activities.

After a late lunch, we arrived at one of the largest wineries in the U.S. As a big fan of west coast wines, I was looking forward to seeing what the Midwest had to offer. Oliver Winery has deep roots here, being the creation of a law professor from Indiana University, William Oliver. He was so passionate about bringing wine to the mid-west that he drove the effort to pass legislation

that allowed Indiana growers to build small wineries in the state.

A year after the Indiana Small Winery Act passed, Oliver Winery opened in 1972. Their flagship bottle of Camelot Mead began their climb to fame. With hints of orange blossom its easy to see why this wine became a best seller. Now run by William's son Bill, the winery is expanding in all directions with a range of red and white wines that cater to every taste. I suggest the Creekbend Chambourcin red and the Creekbend Vignoles semi-dry white. A tour of, or picnic in, the property is also a wonderful experience.



Later, we would be treated to a series of home-grown beers at a local fixture, Lennies, where some famous faces like John Mellencamp have been known to enjoy the pork tenderloin or massive Lennie's Original, a sandwich with beef and fixings stacked high.

A night's sleep and we would experience the great outdoors with a hike and kayak adventure on the man-made Lake Monroe. As we walked, we were treated to the story of the park and bittersweet history of the reservoir construction by a knowledgeable ranger who explained how the Lake displaced an entire village.

After some more local beer and one of their signature Stromboli pizza sandwiches at Nick's English Hut, we were treated to the story of this must-visit restaurant in the heart of the Indiana University's campus serving folks since 1927.

Fuelled up with good food, we then headed to the Upland Brewing Co. headquartered in this bustling university town. Here I would be introduced to the complex and unique wood-aged sour ales that Upland has built their reputation on. Guided by their expert brew master, we were taught how the entire brewing process worked and then treated to a sampling of their tapped beers at their Wood Shop, a state-of-the-art production facility and tasting room. Their Hoosier Gameday Lager was a personal favorite while the others with me preferred the Guava Sour and the Champagne Velvet Pilsner.

Cardinal Spirits have been using local ingredients, modern technology and traditional methods to craft their unique whiskeys, vodkas, and gins. After a quick tour of the distillery, we were offered a series of delicious craft cocktails, canned carbonated mixed drinks as well as their aged whiskey. The highlight was when our host himself prepared the popular drink-de-jour, an Espresso Martini with Cardinal's delicious and flavorful base.

That evening, I was treated to a steak the likes of which I have not enjoyed since I was a kid. Janko's Little Zagreb, a legendary

local steakhouse and a staple of the area open since 1973, offered up their 18oz Rib Eye with a perfect baked potato. Their entrees and other offerings are fantastic as well, especially their Spicy Meatballs!

An hour east of Bloomington is Columbus, known as a great destination for architecture lovers and after the guided tour we had, it was definitely true. The churches, bridges, homes and even the famous Cummins company factory buildings all offered unique architecture and styles and a treat for the eyes.

Lunch would introduce us to another local wonder, ZwanzigZ Pizza and Brewing, created by pizza lovers Kurt and Lisa Zwanzig. Originally a corner pizza place, they have built a local empire with a lovely restaurant and more recently a brewery. The rotating stock of over 20 craft beers, including their award winning and quite tasty Ticket Chocolate Beer and Ghost Pepper Imperial Stout. They also make some mouth-watering Root Beer and other craft sodas that are wonderful.

The next sipping stop would be at the Simmons family farm in Columbus, whose present Simmons, David, has expanded the business into many fields. Starting with their wines, I enjoyed the light but flavorful Marechal Foch Red as well as the refreshing and crisp Autumn Late Harvest. The forward-thinking David and wife Brenda decided to branch into brewing and distilling and have come up with unique and quirky beers that include names like Fresh Froot and Sour Deisel. The highlight for me however were their Whiskeys: the crisp and clean Wheat, the full bodied 6-year Straight Bourbon and my favorite the Rye, one of the best I have tasted. The property also has a restaurant, and every year hosts a Corn Maze Beer Fest where dozens of breweries from around the country are featured in an 11-acre corn maze.

The taste still on my mind, we were off to a real treat. Founded in 1900 and family-owned, Zaharakos ice cream shop is a sight to behold. Recently restored, it contains two early nineteenth-century onyx soda fountains, an Italian marble counter as well as a

1908 Welte Orchestrion. There is also a series of bookable rooms with antiques and period-accurate accessories – a step back in time.

Dinner at the exclusive Henry Social Club would round out the day and include a several course meal and some excellent cocktails made with spirits from local distilleries.

A morning spent mountain biking and hiking in the Brown County State Park led to a discussion about sacred Native American sites within the state. Moving on, we enjoyed a guided tour of the Brown County art gallery which came with a history lesson on the beginnings of the artist colony of Nashville, Indiana. Down the road, I saw the Brown County Art Guild residing in the historic Minor House and learned that the Guild supports and showcases current Guild artists and has a permanent collection as well.

We then headed for lunch in Indiana's oldest country inn, the Story Inn. Run by a knowledgeable and passionate Rich Hofstetter, it has become a destination for weddings, special event evenings and even comedy nights. He has ensured that visitors can enjoy the property's fully renovated rooms and guesthouses, including the room with the ghost of the "Blue Lady".

My sipping trip to Indiana ended with a visit to the state's largest craft distillery, Hard Truth. The brainchild of some veterans-turned-entrepreneurs, this special landmark is situated on 325 acres of mixed-use land. During our visit we were treated to the ATV tour, where we stopped at a reproduction of a country still (that works and can be rented!) as well as a speak easy and a stage for live concerts. The tasting was a great way to end off the trip, as they offered a magnificent aged 94% rye that was beyond good.

Hidden gems are my favorite discoveries when I travel, and I found a treasure chest in Indiana. ■

WWW.VISITINDIANA.COM





Discovering the best of Ireland with Insight Vacations

Article and photography by Michael Morocs

“

I never check the weather forecast” said our tour leader Karen, “but I do always carry an umbrella”. Those are facts about the emerald island and in the same day and even the same hour, you could get sun, cloud and rain, that is maritime weather for you.

Many decades later, after a brief visit to Dublin, I would give Ireland my full attention

as it has been high on my return visit list. Since I have not been here in such a long time and don't know when I would return, I figured to experience the best of Ireland would be with a touring company, and Insight Vacations fit the bill perfectly.

The saying ‘killing two birds with one stone’ would not apply here, as on this trip I ended up killing three birds instead. With the

amazing work of the Insight Vacations team and a well-planned itinerary, I would see the stunning Trinity College Library in Dublin, marvel at the incredible Cliffs of Moher and be taken on what I would consider the best castle to visit ever with an overnight stay at Ashford Castle.

The intense itinerary crafted by the Insight team proved to be just what I wanted. We



would experience the magnificence of Ireland on the 'Irish Elegance' tour which included beautiful Dublin, a visit to Blarney Castle (to kiss the rock), a stay in charming Killarney, and a fantastic traditional song and dance show. We would also marvel at the scenery in the Ring of Kerry, be amazed by the majestic Cliffs of Moher, get lost in the crowds in historic city of Galway, take in the beauty of both Connemara National Park and the stunning Kylemore Abbey. After all that, the best was saved for last, the ever-impressive Ashford Castle.

Delightful Insight Vacations

What a delight to have traveled with Insight Vacations. They took great care of us from pick-up right to the drop off at the airport for the flight home. The starting point was their attractive and user-friendly website that was a lot of fun to navigate and a great escape from the everyday life while dreaming of the next vacation. With detailed information of their many Irish itineraries from their travel professionals, it was easy to choose the best tour to meet our needs, schedule, and budget. Once decided, Insight helped guide us to prepare for the great journey with plenty of information and answered all our inquiries. On arrival, we would be greeted at the airport by their friendly and helpful staff and then brought directly to our first hotel where we would be already checked in with a room key in hand. From there it was just an easy matter of keeping to the meeting times.

Although the maximum capacity for this tour was 40, we were just a group of 27 English-speakers consisting of mostly most North Americans looking to embrace Irish history, culture, food, art, and nature. With fewer guests, there was plenty of room to stretch out on what would be one of the most luxurious motor coaches I have been on, with plenty of legroom.

Besides a couple of stragglers on a couple of occasions, our meeting times were incredibly precise and on such an intense tour the schedule was respected and went exactly as planned. All this comes from the marvellous work of the Insight team and our tour leader Karen.

Accommodations

Packing and unpacking is just one of the things that come with touring, unlike the all-inclusive resorts or taking a cruise where once you are settled in, you are in. Our trip required us to check in five times in just seven days. It is a major chore to stay organized while being dazzled by so many attractions, but this was made easier with the thoughtfulness and many years of experience Insight has under its belt, helping us feel at ease throughout the trip and knowing someone was taking care of all the details. To make things easier, Insight took care of our luggage and bags, taking them from our bus to our rooms and reverse from my rooms to the bus. This is both a timesaver and a back saver.

The choice of hotels we stayed at was just wonderful. Not having much time in the rooms, we would have simple requirements, like cleanliness, functionality, and of course, a hot shower and a comfortable bed for sleep. The hotels Insight choose for us were all the above and just perfect to rest and recharge. Above it all, we would be treated to great luxury properties that had the best: locations, wonderful settings with views of beautiful gardens, landscapes and natural surroundings that made us feel at home within a matter of minutes.

Breaking the mould and off the chart, Ashford Castle is in a league on its own and truly a destination of its own. Having read and seen this incredible property in print, online and in travel videos, nothing could prepare me for this memorable stay. Having followed the series Downton Abbey, I felt the charm, elegance and majesty of this bygone era at the Ashford.

It all starts at the entrance where we would drive for a few minutes through this immense 350-acre property that has untouched woodlands, a private nine-hole golf course, a mote over a canal, manicured lawn and gardens with wonderful statues, many paved walking and natural trails, a hands-on Falconry school and it also straddles a sizable river.

see following page



85





The site of the main building is absolutely stunning from all angles and a work of art and engineering for its time. The inside has unmatched Irish beauty, with marvellous wooden floors, walls and staircases and richly decorated with carpets and artwork. My room was equally fabulous. When entering, it certainly put a smile on my face as I discovered this impressive room and thought, I would need more than one day to thoroughly enjoy the elegance of such a masterpiece hotel. Dining on site in the main hotel restaurant was again from another era. Gentlemen are asked to wear a dinner jackets, so as to keep to traditions, a great idea that set the tone for this opulent evening where we would enjoy beautifully prepared and presented dishes that were healthy, tasty and when paired with the right wines brought us to a great ending to our day.

TTC and Insight Vacations

The Travel Group could just be the biggest touring company in the world. Not sure about this as fact, but they do have on their website some 36 different brands that could accommodate the travel styles for all generations and include their own brand that includes The Red Carnation, a hotel group that includes the Ashford and the upscale Uniworld River Cruises.

One of TTC's divisions is Insight Vacations, with multiple tours on five continents. From this first trip with them, and from my great experience on the 'Irish Elegance' itinerary, I can only surmise that all their trips are handled with the same professional service as what was promised and scheduled was respected.

Onwards

What next, that is how I felt day after wonderful day as I would continuously look forward to the next adventure. Although it is up to each guest to decide on how much activity or laid-back relaxation they wanted, the 'Irish Elegance' tour is both easy flowing and at the same time quite demanding and all depended on the way each person wanted to take in this beautiful island. For me and many other energized guests, we wanted the full experience and see and do

as much as we could in the six full days of touring. It was at times a bombardment to the senses and overwhelming to take it all.

As such, we would have little time to reflect on where we were, as a taste of something new was just about to come up. Good thing in this age is that we have smart phone cameras to capture the moment to later relive those precious experiences. I believe Insight and our tour leader Karen understood the intricacies of traveling and gave us priceless guidance on what to see and do in the many locations with the limited time there. While talking to many of the other travelers in our group, I would hear only positives about both Insight Vacations and our itinerary, so much so that I would encounter many faithful returning Insight guests from previous travels together.

Let the tour begin

On an average week, there isn't a whole lot that I would consider very important or life changing. On this one-week tour of Ireland, there was something of great interest every single day, if not two or three amazing experiences by night-time. So much happens that to adequately describe my discoveries in the many wonderful places is almost impossible, though many words come to mind: speechless, mesmerizing, inspiring, joyful, grateful and humbling on the spectacular cliffs and during the Trinity College visits, the Ashford Castle stay, in the little things like a stop at a village pub for freshly baked scones, the drive-through the charming countryside, the historic Abbey and grounds, tasting Irish coffee, beer and whiskey, and hilariously trying to understand the friendly locals' English accent. The joy continued in the shops that sold everything Ireland, and in the greetings by a bagpiper at Ashford Castle and in traveling and interacting with fellow travelers and sharing the wonderful Irish experience. ■

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A photograph of two Buddhist monks in traditional red robes and ornate golden hats with red tassels. They are blowing long, curved golden horns decorated with intricate carvings. The background features a vast, high-altitude landscape with snow-capped mountains under a clear blue sky.

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