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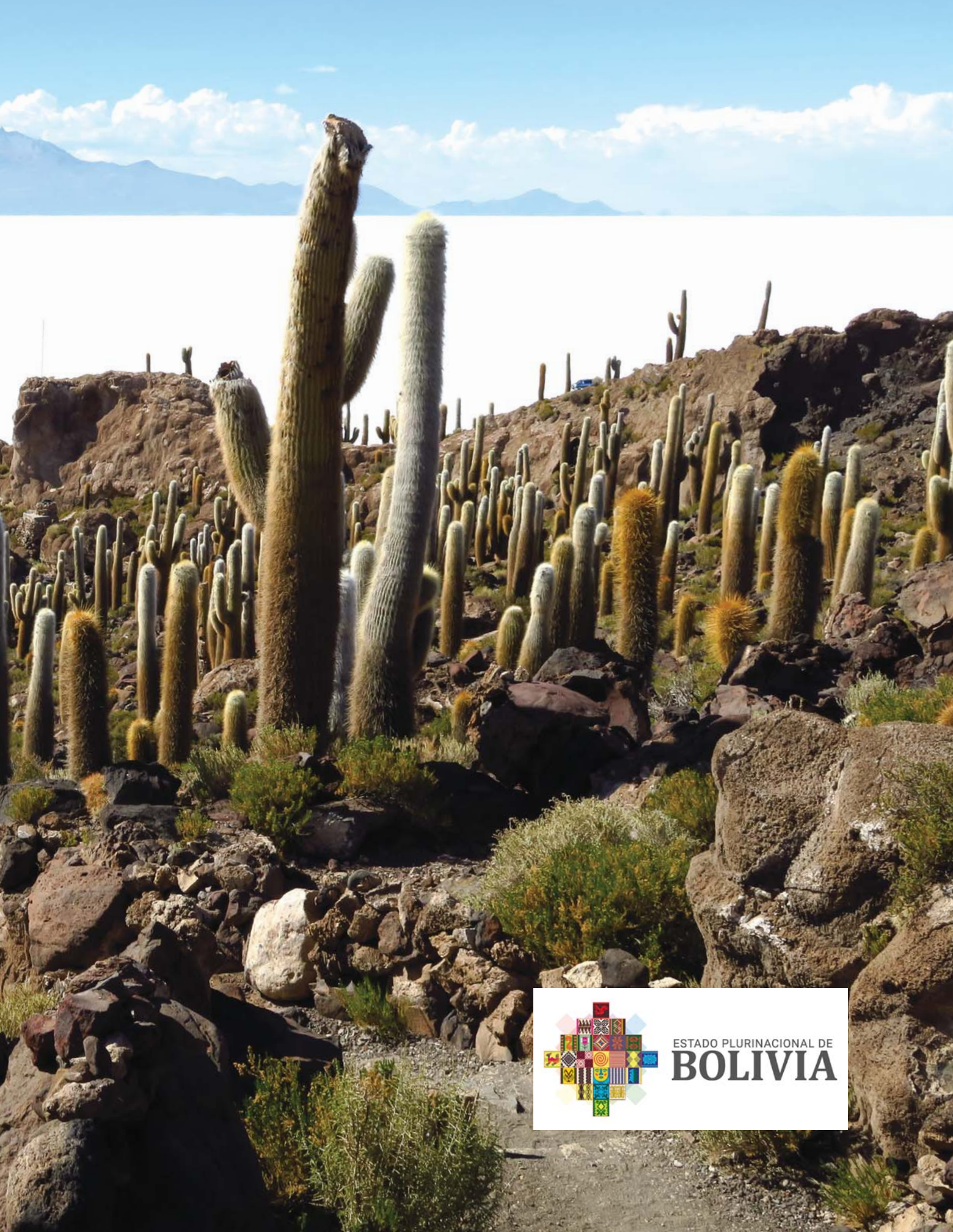
FALL 2023

*Nevada Road Trip
Valley of Fire State Park*

C o m e W i t h U s & S e e T h e W o r l d !



Incahuasi Island, Uyuni Salt Flats, Bolivia



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Welcome to World Traveler



This past year, 2022, marked a very special anniversary for World Traveler as we celebrated 20 years of our multi-award-winning publications, and we are as passionate about travel as ever.

When we began, our print issues were spread far and wide. It was not long until we launched our website: www.worldtraveler.travel, which has recently merged both American World Traveler and Canadian World Traveller. In the following years we introduced new media: eMagazines, eNewsletters and World Traveler Social Media pages. Today we find ourselves with a vast reader base and electronic presence which has been growing exponentially in the past three years.

In this issue, we start our worldwide journey in fascinating Japan to taste its wonderful cuisine. Flying east, we find 'Bangkok: the Gem of Southeast-Asia!', then onto the other side of Asia to Dubai, where we find fantastic cuisine and a dish for every pallet. Nearby in Israel, we travel wonderful and out of the way, less traveled pathways. Close by, we tour Egypt and discover the best this fabulous country has to offer the traveler.

Next, with a super charged itinerary in Europe, we start in Turkey to taste the many variations of its most popular cheeses. In the beautiful island nation of Malta, we find yearlong activities and attractions and a flourishing art scene. To the north, in Germany, we learn about the Danube Gorge region before hopping on a wonderful 'Scenic' cruise through the Rhine and Moselle Rivers. Next, we head to the Nederland and discover the historic city of Maastricht. In France,

we anticipate the 2024 Olympics and find it will be a fascinating Games with lots of new and old venues used for the many disciplines. Still in France, we take a small LeBoat water vehicle on a family trip through the Nivernais Canal region and find charming villages and a beautiful countryside. In Spain, we find 10 relaxing holiday spots before finishing our Europe portion in the lovely region of Porto, Portugal.

On to the Americas, where we start with a fantastic cruise on Holland America Lines that brings us the great itinerary from Boston, along Atlantic Canada on to the St Lawrence River to finish in beautiful Montreal. Just south, we head to another family adventure, this time for some winter fun in New Hampshire's amazing White Mountains. Heading west, we find 'Cincinnati: The Queen City of the West' before continuing way west to find the mighty Mammoth Lakes region in full fall glory. Still in the American west, we find amazing, 'Las Vegas - the Entertainment Capital of the World!', this before we head on a fabulous road trip of 'Awe-inspiring Nevada'. Onto Nayari, Mexico, where we enjoy the wonderful diversity in Islas Marias, and San Blas.

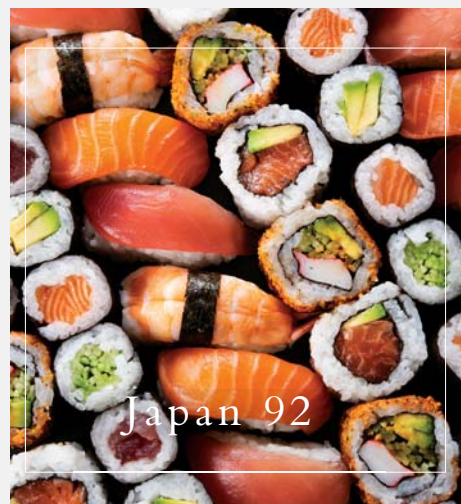
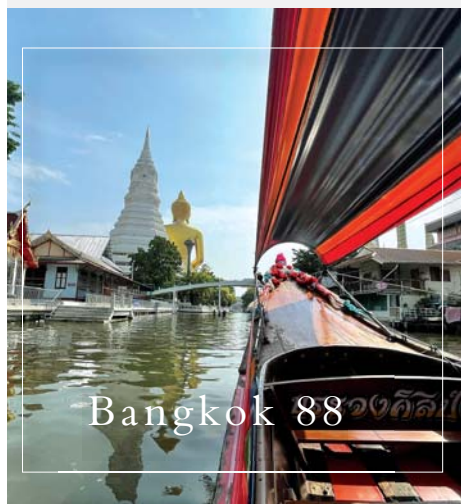
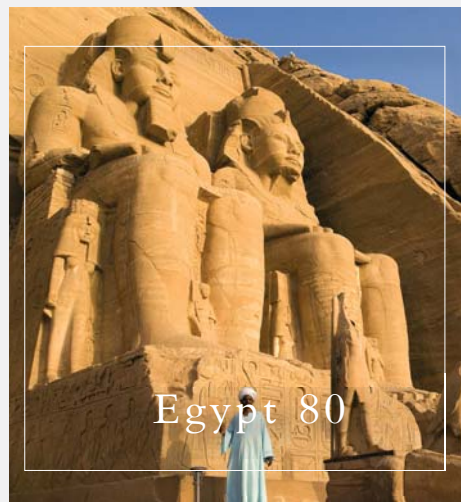
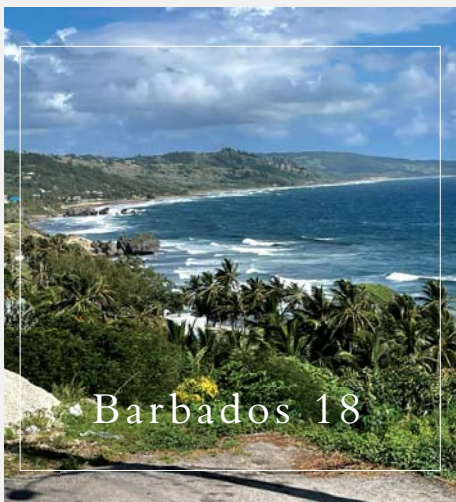
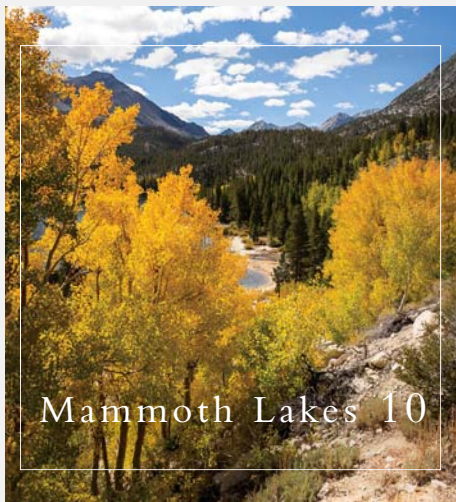
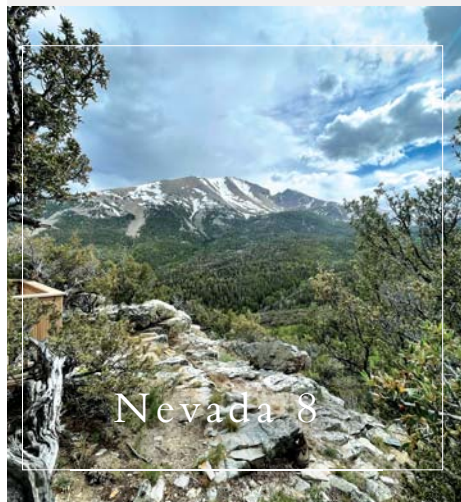
Lastly, we jet off to the Caribbean and Barbados, where we explore the two beautiful contrasting sides of this tropical paradise. In our Tropical Tidbits pages we discover the latest exciting new happenings in the ABC islands before going on a cruise, this time with Aurora Expeditions that takes us from Costa Rica and through the Panama Canal.

Happy Travels!



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



My thoughts through a tour of southern Nevada's landscape made me feel like I was in some kind of epic western movie. With our big Chrysler sedan, we would take in the best of this region, including magnificent state and national parks, ghost towns, lonely desert highways, quiet villages, a bizarre hotel, massive outdoor art, the mighty Hoover Dam, taste delicious American cuisine, and incredible scenery all along the way.

The Nevada tourism authority has done an excellent job at highlighting tourist friendly routes that bring you across the whole state. This was a helpful tool for us to decide where to visit the best parts of this incredibly large state. With so many choices, we would include portions of the many suggested routes and combine them to make a loop that started and ended in Las Vegas.

Road trip on

We had a fairly good idea of what to expect, after all, we were in the desert. From high in our Las Vegas hotel room, we could see mountains (Nevada has some three hundred mountain chains) and the dry arid desert in every direction, as far as the eye could see.

On our first full day, we would leave Las Vegas on the Great Basin Highway before heading onto a smaller route. The metropolitan traffic slowly dissipated to where we would find long stretches with little to no vehicles. On a less traveled road along the way to a state park, we would drive for 15 minutes without seeing an oncoming car and no one in my rearview mirror. We were blissfully alone to enjoy the fantastic scenery and experience the wide-open spaces of the American West.

A park like no other

Heaven or Hell, Earth or Mars? The Cathedral Gorge State Park was out of this world! This part of the world is truly astounding. Heavenly skies competed with Mars-like, bone-dry jagged hilly formations that dominated the scenery. This was a wonderful place for beautifully unusual pictures and for snacks, lunch, and refreshments in the shaded areas with an amazing view. Practically alone in this unbelievable landscape, travelers can hike along designated paths and venture into the landscape itself.

Great Basin National Park

A short drive away we would be in the town of

Pioche and discover its historic buildings and have lunch. Our guide suggested to go to Gunslingers (love that name, appropriate for the west), but found the establishment closed and opted for an old school bus converted to a mobile restaurant that served massive portions of American's most popular foods.

Onwards, we would be in contrasting landscapes throughout our drive and continuously moving upwards to reach our destination. The Great Basin National Park is a gem, much cooler, and full of healthy, mature trees.

Just imagine, in the hot Nevada summer our guides encouraged us to wear jackets as we would head below ground to visit the Lehman Caves. The story behind the discovery of the caves involves a rancher who found one of his cows in a deep hole and after rescuing the beast, he would be surprised to find he was in an extensive cave system and went on to making it a tourist attraction. With our knowledgeable guide, our group would discover the amazing and elaborate lighted network with paved paths and solid stairs to make it safer and tourist friendly.

Shortly afterwards, we would take the Wheeler Peak Scenic Drive upwards and enjoy the parks' fantastic scenery. Along the twisting and cliff hanging ride, there were many rest areas and entrances to some sixty miles of hiking trails. The vistas were jaw-dropping, and it was as if we were in a colorful glossy postcard. Here again was a part of the fantastic American West experience.

Ely

After a long day of driving and a wonderful day of discovery, we reached the town of Ely. Having driven over 10 hours, we were as far north as we would go and now would start heading back towards Las Vegas at a more leisurely pace.

After a wonderful meal at Margarita's Mexican Restaurant, we would have a refreshing night of sleep to then check out the city and attractions at the Ely Mural Tour and Nevada Northern Railway Museum before heading back on the open road.

Tonopah

What an absolute delight to visit the town of Tonopah. This would be an unusual day in an unusual place, and we would love every waking moment while there.



We will start with our stay at the Mizpah hotel, a building that is over a century old and richly decorated to honor its historic past. The longest staying guest is the friendly 'Lady in Black' as this hotel is known as the number one haunted hotel in America, unfortunately, (or fortunately), she never visited our room.

Speaking of hotels, the ultra-bizarre Clown Motel is world famous as 'America's scariest motel.' And I see why. Having always hated clowns, I still appreciated the visit to the eerie but incredibly well presented and decorated clown shop filled with anything and everything associated with clowns. And wouldn't you know it, right next to the motel was a historic cemetery.

To add to our Tonopah day of discovery was the historic Tonopah Historic Mining Park. Here we learned of the struggles and riches this site brought to the region and town. Now an outdoor museum, the area has remained true to its roots with massive original buildings and deep, dark tunnels.

Across the street from our hotel was a store more tailored for Cowboys than urbanites, we enjoyed and chuckled at the apparel and souvenirs. On the same block was the Tonopah Brewing Company, a western style eatery, where the menu featured tasty homemade brews and a wide selection of cornucopias size meals.

Outdoor art to the heart's content

Wonderfully bizarre is the best way to describe the drive along the Free-Range Art Highway. First came the International Car Forest of the Last Church, where cars and buses are buried headfirst into the ground with the back wheels sticking out. Next was the Goldwell Open Air Museum, a large and unusual piece of art depicting ghostly figures from the last supper and close by was the historic and popular ghost town of Rhyolite, with unbelievable centuries old empty stone buildings. Later in the trip we would also appreciate yet another outdoor masterpiece by visiting the Seven Magic Mountains, modern art at its best.

Death Valley

If the scenery at the Cathedral Gorge was Mars like, then that of Death Valley National Park was its much bigger cousin on steroids. We were in awe and speechless while discovering only a small portion of this well-designed and meticulously kept treasure. On this very hot

day and in the comfort of our air conditioned sedan, we would drive along the network of smooth and some dirt roads to discover some of the best recommended visiting areas for spectacular views and short walks including the Dante's View, the Artist's Palette, Badwater Basin, and Zabriskie's Point. This is a park to enjoy, reflect, and remember as a masterpiece of natural history and our beautiful planet.

Spring Mountain Ranch

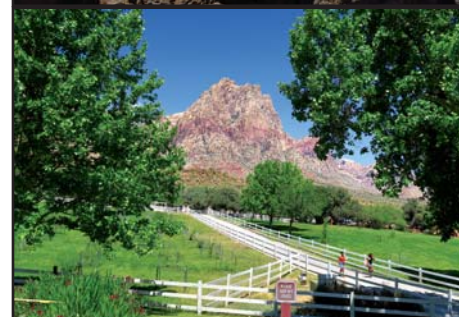
After a wonderful meal at the Artisan Cellars restaurant and winery, and a good night's sleep in the city of Pahrump, we were off to yet another dimension of amazing Nevada. This time we would find ourselves in a completely different climate zone as the Spring Mountain Ranch State Park was lush and green, and totally contrasted most of what was seen so far. The small microclimate was due to underground springs and pioneers settled this beautiful area and enjoyed its rich soil for farming and ranching. The famous American millionaire Howard Hughes also appreciated the area, bought the land, and made it a part-time home for living and entertaining. Having spent a brief time here and loving the tranquility and harmonious setting, I could understand his obsession.

Hoover Dam

Last, and certainly not least, we would head to Boulder City and discover the imposing Hoover Dam complex which was at the time the largest construction project in the world and broke new engineering feats. Straddling both the states of Nevada and Arizona, the power-plant generated lots of electricity and the water reserve in Lake Mead met the needs of many southwestern states. A guided tour started with a projected short movie of its history before we went both deep underground to see the humongous generators and high above to get a birds-eye view of the dam's massive surroundings. Understandably, this is an extremely popular attraction, and most visitors can appreciate its significance and complexity.

Nevada is the seventh largest state in the union, and on this tour, we would only see a small fraction of this enormous state. We were thrilled, entertained, in bliss, in awe and spectacular Nevada touched all our senses! Now I wonder, what does the rest of the state hold for the traveler. I guess we will have to return and discover more hidden treasures. ■

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Flaming Colors Brighten Mammoth Lakes' Fall Season

by Randy Mink



Even many Californians think they have to go out East to witness the splendor of fall foliage, but the Sierra Nevada Mountains offer their own blazes of glory, as I witnessed last October in the high-altitude resort town of Mammoth Lakes.

While Mammoth Lakes is best known as a winter sports mecca, fall finery is a less-hyped treasure I've been telling everyone about. The masterful blend of autumn hues and mountain majesty exceeded my expectations.

Groves of quaking aspens, whose electric yellows and flaming oranges paint the slopes, provide a brilliant contrast to the firs and pines. Set against picture-postcard mountain scenery under clear blue skies, it's something few parts of the country can duplicate. Whether I was hoofing it on the trails, boating on the lake or soaking in color-splashed vistas from the road, the golden spectacle had me taking pictures like crazy.

The East, I discovered, doesn't have a monopoly on Mother Nature's annual show.

The Mono County community of Mammoth Lakes, at 8,051 feet above sea level and home to about 8,500 permanent residents, is a kingdom unto itself, the nearest major airport being three hours away in Reno, Nevada. The relative remoteness just adds to its appeal.

An all-season vacation haven, Mammoth Lakes has amenities aplenty, offering more than 65 restaurants and a variety of hotels and vacation rentals, not to mention a full-service hospital and a small commercial airport with flights from Southern California during ski season.

Boasting a summit elevation of 11,053 feet, Mammoth Mountain Ski Area is the highest resort in California. Served by 28 chairlifts and two gondolas, it counts 150 distinct runs. While Mammoth may not be on skiers' national radar, "Southern California considers us their backyard ski hill," says Lara Kaylor of Mammoth Lakes Tourism. The drive from Los Angeles is 5.5 hours.

Though it takes some traveling to get there, Mammoth Lakes makes a great base of operations for exploring the Eastern Sierra and Yosemite National Park, whose eastern entrance is 45 minutes from town. Fall foliage time in this neck of the woods means fewer crowds than the busy winter and summer seasons.

Surrounded on all sides by protected federal lands, the town can't expand—it can only build up. Its centerpiece is the Village at Mammoth, a collection of restaurants and shops surrounding a landscaped plaza that invites strolling and warming up at the communal fire pits. The clocktower building gives this “downtown” a cozy touch of Alpine Europe.

“Lakes” in the town's name is derived from the five renowned fishing lakes in Mammoth Lakes Basin, an idyllic setting five minutes from the Village via a free trolley. Almost 100 lakes lie within a 20-mile radius. My group visited several of them on our fall hikes, getting some great pictures of pretty foliage and rocky crags reflecting on the pristine water.

On our early October trip, temperatures reached into the 70s F, dipping to the low 30s at night. The best period for leaf-peeping generally is mid-September to mid-October.

Trees in the Mountain West display little of the fiery reds seen in New England and Atlantic Canada every fall, but the aspens' yellow and orange leaves, mixing with the lime-colored ones that have not yet turned, create a spectacle nonetheless. Cottonwoods, willows and bigleaf maples add pop of their own. An autumn snowfall will inject a novel element, providing a white background for the turning leaves.

Just the majestic Sierra Nevada setting—the stuff of calendars and travel posters—mirrors a grandeur not found in the East. Marveling at the changing leaves, you have to remember to pause and take in the big picture, an awe-inspiring tableau of verdant meadows, rugged high desert, jagged mountain crests and oh-so-vertical Jeffrey pines. Forming a spine that stretches 400 miles along the eastern side of California, the Sierra Nevada abounds with mighty granite peaks, many of them rising to heights of 10,000 to 14,000 feet. The jaw-dropping panoramas lure movie production companies to the area.

On separate days, we hit two hiking trails on either side of Coldwater Canyon, a short drive from the Village. Each hike had a lake—Emerald Lake or Heart Lake—as its destination. At one point on each trail we passed a sign indicating the entrance to the

John Muir Wilderness Area of Inyo National Forest.

Exploring Mono County

Farther afield, we took US Highway 395 north from Mammoth to two fall foliage hotspots—Lundy Canyon and June Lake Loop—popular with hikers and motorists. Lundy Canyon Road ends at a trail considered one of the best for fall color hikes in the West. A view of Lundy Falls flanked by colorful aspens appears within the first mile.

Our travels on 395, a designated California Scenic Byway, included a brief stop at another Mono County must-see—mineral-rich Mono Lake, near the village of Lee Vining. More than twice as salty as the ocean, the ancient inland sea intrigues visitors with its eerie tufa towers, oddly shaped limestone structures created by freshwater springs that bubble up through the lake's alkaline waters.

A paradise for photographers and bird-watchers, Mono Lake attracts migrating birds that feed on the alkali flies and tiny brine shrimp. Kayakers can paddle among the tufas, and interpretive trails provide close-up looks at the otherworldly formations.

Near Bridgeport lies Bodie State Historic Park, the site of the best-preserved ghost town from California's Gold Rush era. This outdoor museum, a trip highlight for me, interprets what is left of Bodie, a wild 'n' woolly mining camp that contained 30 gold and silver mines and more than 60 saloons, not to mention a red-light district and large Chinatown with opium dens, in its 1877-1881 heyday.

On wide dirt paths, tourists pass weathered houses and commercial buildings scattered across the high desert landscape. They visit the 1882 Methodist church, poke around the cemetery, inspect rusted vehicles and machinery, and peer through windows of the hotel, jail, saloon, general store and schoolhouse.

Day Trip to Yosemite

Planning my trip to Mammoth Lakes, I was most looking forward to the day in Yosemite National Park, a bucket-list destination. Our



group took a full-day tour with a company that deploys 7- and 14-passenger vehicles to Yosemite. While hordes of people pack the park in summer, fall is much quieter.

To reach Yosemite's less used eastern gate (elevation 9,945 feet), we traveled from Mammoth Lakes to Tioga Pass, the highest paved mountain pass in California. The drive afforded grand High Sierra vistas as we made our way into the valley, where the park's top landmarks reside. The Tunnel View overlook was thronged with visitors framing the ultimate shots of iconic granite monoliths El Capitan and Half Dome. We also got a glimpse of Bridalveil Fall, which had some water at the top, but spring and early summer are best for seeing the park's waterfalls in all their thundering fury.

Another Yosemite exclamation point was our one-mile hike to Tuolumne Grove of Giant Sequoias, one of three such groves featuring the enormous trees that live to be more than 2,000 years old. The day in Yosemite ended with a visit to El Capitan Meadows, where we watched awestruck as daring rock climbers scaled the sheer face of El Capitan.

Hikers, climbers and skiers can work up mammoth-sized appetites. Happily, the town of Mammoth Lakes has something for every taste, from the simple to the sophisticated. Side Door Wine Bar & Cafe specializes in crepes, paninis, fondue, tapas and charcuterie plates. I'll never forget the pillowy, plate-size chicken presto crepe with creamy goat cheese, a main course that was followed by luscious Nutella, strawberry and cinnamon roll crepes our group shared for dessert. ■

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The Maltese Islands Will Host the maltabiennale.art 2024

For the First Time Under the Patronage of UNESCO March 11 – May 31, 2024



Fort St Elmo, Valletta

Malta, an archipelago located in the heart of the Mediterranean Sea, has been acclaimed for its luxurious accommodations, warm climate, and 8,000 years of history. However, the Maltese Islands also boast a rich and deeply rooted connection with arts and culture since the beginning of its existence. Its strategic location at the cross-roads of civilizations has fostered a

unique blend of cultural influences, from Phoenician and Sicilian to Arab, European and the Knights of St. John. Malta's diverse heritage is vividly reflected in its architecture, cuisine and traditions.

Malta is home to 3 UNESCO World Heritage Sites. These are the Capital City of Valletta, Ħal Saflieni Hypogeum

and the Megalithic Temples including Ħaġar Qim, Mnajdra and Ġgantija, which stand as testament to its artistic prowess, dating back over 5,000 years. The Knights of St. John left an indelible mark on Maltese culture with the stunning St. John's Co-Cathedral in Valletta exemplifying their artistic legacy.



Fort St Elmo Courtyard

In 2024, Malta as a hub for the arts will take center stage with the announcement that UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) has granted its patronage for the first time to *maltabiennale.art*, which will be held from March 11 – May 31, 2024. UNESCO's patronage is considered a high form of recognition for this art festival, which while still in its infancy, has already garnered a strong and encouraging global response from artists, and is clearly set to become the focal cultural event of 2024 in Malta.

Through contemporary art, *maltabiennale.art* will be investigating the Mediterranean, reflected in the theme for the biennale's first edition: *Baħar Abjad Imsaġar taż-Żebbuġ* (White Sea Olive Groves). The biennale will unfold across Malta and Gozo, mainly within Heritage Malta's historic sites, many of which have been declared by UNESCO as being World Heritage Sites, including Valletta, the capital, and Gozo's Ġgantija.

In her letter, UNESCO Director General Audrey Azoulay expressed how UNESCO's aims are perfectly reflected in *maltabiennale.art*'s dialogue between Mediterranean art and cultures, and how this led the organization to grant its patronage to the *maltabiennale.art* 2024.

Her Excellency also congratulated *maltabiennale.art*'s president, Mario Cutajar, as well as Heritage Malta for

this initiative, and wished them the greatest success. The letter was delivered by Malta's ambassador to UNESCO, Mgr. Joseph Vella Gauci.

maltabiennale.art 2024 will be opening its doors on the 11th March 2024, and will welcome visitors until the end of May 2024. With just one week remaining for artists to submit their proposals for participation in Malta's largest cultural event in 2024, over 500 applications hailing from 80 states have already been received.

maltabiennale.art will be officially inaugurated by the President of Malta, his Excellency Dr. George Vella.

maltabiennale.art is a Heritage Malta initiative through MUŻA, the Malta National Community Art Museum, in partnership with Arts Council Malta. The biennale is also presented in cooperation with the Ministries for Foreign and European Affairs and Trade, National Heritage, the Arts and Local Government, and Gozo, as well as with Visit Malta, Spazju Kreattiv, Malta Libraries, and the Valletta Cultural Agency.

**malta
biennale
.art 2024**

maltabiennale.art is online:

Official website: www.maltabiennale.art

Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn: [@maltabiennale](https://www.facebook.com/maltabiennale)

Email: info@maltabiennale.art



Grand Master's Palace



Ġgantija Archaeological Park



The Inquisitor's Palace

Michelle Buttigieg, Malta Tourism Authority's Representative North America, noted that "the attraction of Malta for many visitors from the US & Canada, is still very much its 8,000 years of history and its robust arts & culture scene. It is wonderful that Heritage Malta will be using its many historic sites to provide a showcase for these works of art, creating a unique and exciting platform to integrate history with culture."

For more information on Malta, visit: www.VisitMalta.com

For more information on Gozo, visit: www.VisitGozo.com

For more information on Heritage Malta visit: www.heritagemalta.mt



VisitMalta



Cincinnati: The Queen City of the West (and Birthplace of the Magic 8 Ball)

by Jennifer Merrick

When I first heard that Cincinnati's nickname was 'The Queen City of the West' or that it had even been described as the 'Paris of America', I had my doubts it would live up to its grandiose name. To be honest, I knew very little about this Ohio city except it had a baseball team and its radio station staffed some very funny DJs and a newscaster who thought turkeys could fly (at least according to the 1970s TV sitcom series WKRP in Cincinnati).

But after a recent visit, I can say that The Queen City of the West absolutely deserves its regal title. I also discovered numerous inter-

esting facts about Cincy (a more recent nickname), including that it was an important stop on the Underground Railroad, had the first professional baseball team, takes its chili very seriously, has a strong German heritage and the Magic 8 Ball --you know, the prognostic billiard ball you shake and answers all your questions --was invented here. So I thought we could use this fortune-telling sphere to ask some questions about its birthplace.

May I ask how Cincinnati's nickname came to be?

Yes, definitely. The nickname originated in the

early 19th century when thousands of settlers congregated to the area, which quickly emerged as a center of arts and commerce with theatres, saloons, beer gardens and dozens of breweries. At that time, the City of Seven Hills (another nickname) was situated at the edge of the unknown Wild West and acted as a final bastion of culture and urban indulgences before heading into uncharted territory.

Poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow solidified the city's moniker in his 1854 poem, in which he wrote:



"To the Queen of West. In her garlands dressed. On the banks of a Beautiful River."

Thank you, but that was over 200 years ago, does the noble name still apply today?

As I see it, yes. "It still has a kind of royalty to it," said Rick Pender, local author of 100 Things to Do in Cincinnati Before You Die. He added that he loves giving tours and hearing people say how interesting and picturesque the city is.

"They expect it to be a flyover city in the flat, boring Midwest," he said. "But it's anything but." He explained that thanks to the Ohio River, there are hills and valleys, and the city punches above its weight in so many areas, including professional sports, arts and culture, culinary offerings and craft breweries. "And we have the best of Kentucky, too."

Kentucky? Isn't Cincinnati in Ohio?

Reply hazy, try again.

Is Cincinnati in Kentucky?

It is decidedly so. Cincinnati is actually a tri-state region and has counties in Indiana and northern Kentucky, which is just across the bridge --well, bridges. There are more than half a dozen crossings connecting the two states, including the impressive John A. Roebling Suspension Bridge that looks like a smaller version of the Brooklyn Bridge.

Was it designed to model the Brooklyn Bridge?

My reply is no. In fact, the Brooklyn Bridge was modeled after the Cincinnati bridge, which was a prototype designed by its namesake engineer 17 years earlier. Not only is the monumental bridge beautiful to look at, it's also fun to walk across a pedestrian footpath from Cincinnati, Ohio, to Covington, Kentucky. So if you're inclined, and I certainly was, after a day touring the 19th-century beer-making tunnels with Queen City Underground Tours and sampling some local brews at Moerlein Lager House in downtown Cincinnati, you can walk across state lines and the Ohio River for a bourbon tasting at New Riff Distilling in Newport, Kentucky.

I'm intrigued now. Is there anything else to do besides beer and bourbon?

Without a doubt. There are a slew of options depending on your interests, but here are my faves:

Hear Stories of Freedom at the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center: The Ohio River was an important crossing point for freedom seekers with Ohio being a free state and Kentucky a slave state. The stories this Center tells so well are heart-wrenching, but important to hear, and its exhibits are a powerful testament to the struggle for freedom, human rights, and the ongoing fight against oppression.

Illuminate the artistry and history of neon and U.S. advertisements at the American Sign Museum.

Admire urban creativity with an Art Mural tour by Art Works: Cincinnati has over 200 murals and this walking tour offers a behind-the-paint glimpse of the artists and their muse.

Create your own bourbon masterpiece with a Wenzel Whiskey Blending Experience: Feel the warmth of a Kentucky hug, the heat of the bourbon going down your chest, as you taste different varieties. Then, put on your distiller's hat, and mix up your own signature blend that is bottled and labeled for you to take home.

Explore the city's darker past of gambling and organized crime on a Newport Gangster Tour.

Dive into Cincinnati's delectable food and drink scene: Montgomery Inn Boathouse serves up mouthwatering ribs with a view (be sure to take them up on their offer of a plastic bib). A bookstore provides a chillaxing atmosphere for pastries and breakfast sandwiches at Lil's Kitchen. Other delicious options include Ripple Wine Bar, Cedar, Maplewood, Second Sight Spirits and Bircus Brewery.

But whatever you do, don't miss out on the chili, which reigns supreme in the city's collective food psyche. Spiced with sweeter seasonings like cinnamon and even chocolate, if rumours about secret sauces are correct, the thinner sauce-like chili is iconic. Cincinnatians are divided between the Gold Star and

Skyline franchises and are fiercely loyal to their choice. Camp Washington Chili is a more neutral option and has been awarded by James Beard as an 'American Regional Classic'. Their traditional 'three-way chili' is a combination of spaghetti, chili and a mountain of cheese though you can add onions and beans for a 'five-way chili'.

Delve even deeper into the city's epicurean delights at Findlay Market with Cincinnati Food Tours. Established in 1852, it's everything a good market should be with vendors of all sorts, including some whose families have been here for multiple generations, peddling fruits and veg, speciality foods, prepared dishes, and bespoke crafts and household items. A knowledgeable guide ensures you won't miss out on any highlights, like the banana pudding at Makers Bakers or goetta at Eckerlin Meats. A mixture of oatmeal and sausage, goetta is a Cincinnati specialty that began as a method to stretch the meat but is now a classic comfort dish.

Pork, incidentally, plays an important role in the city's history. In the early 1800s, Cincinnati was a major pork-processing center, earning it yet another nickname – Porkopolis. Symbols of the flying pig are all over, and every May, over 40,000 people take to the streets for the Flying Pig Marathon.

So, while turkeys don't fly, pigs do in Cincinnati (or whatever nickname you want to call it) --a regal city with a touch of whimsy.

Should I visit?

Signs point to yes.

If you go: Air Canada offers direct flights to Cincinnati from Toronto (only a 90-minute hop). For accommodation, an excellent choice is Hotel Covington on the Kentucky side. This historic building, which was a former high-end department store, has been transformed into a boutique hotel with 114 guest rooms. It sports a stylish combination of design and comfort, an outstanding restaurant (that served up the best cornbread I'd ever tasted), and an outdoor courtyard. ■

WWW.VISITCINCY.COM





Chilling Out in Maastricht

Article and Photography by Steve Gillick

“You say you know the Netherlands? Well, it's quite different here”. And with this, Marieke Huijvenaar, our guide from the Maastricht Visitors Center, revealed some of the charms of this amazing city. “The south is different from Amsterdam and Delft. It's more of a French atmosphere reflecting a Burgundian way of living: slower, easy, and enjoying life”. And certainly, the cobblestone streets in the downtown area, lined with beautiful houses dating back three centuries, and the outdoor café-culture fully complement this relaxed ambiance.

After a city stroll, it felt so natural to join the locals at an outdoor café, leisurely sipping a hot frothy cappuccino or an icy cold Brand beer and marveling at the historic buildings on the Vrijthof (Vrit Hof, or 'Free Place') across the street. This large square is home to the Hoofdwacht, a military building dating to the early 18th Century where the keys to the city gates were kept. And next door are the twin churches, the Church of St. John and the Basilica of Saint Servatius.

St. Servatius, the Bishop of Tongeren, is the patron saint of Maastricht. Tradition holds that his remains are in a 6th-century crypt under the Basilica. The Saint Servatius Bridge was built in the last two decades of the 13th Century to replace an old Roman Bridge that collapsed in 1275, supposedly from the weight of pilgrims crossing over the Meuse River to honor St. Servatius.

And the Meuse River, which flows through the middle of Maastricht, gave the city its



name. 'Mosea Trajectum' was the Latin (Roman) name for the city, meaning "crossing of the Meuse". Over the years, the name transformed into Maastricht. For visitors, the city's history is integral to the tourist experience. But so is the laid-back vibe.

We stayed at the Townhouse Design Hotel and Spa in Wyck, the trendy area of the city on the eastern bank of the Meuse. The hotel has a bohemian feel all its own, with a friendly reception desk, a great breakfast-lounge-library area, complimentary coffee and tea, and a welcome cup of delicious, hot tomato soup!

The Townhouse is five minutes from the Maastricht train station and Stationsstraat, the main street that heads directly west and across the St. Servatius Bridge, and on to Binnenstad, the city's historic center. Traffic consists mainly of bicycles, boats, and pedestrians. And the scenery from the bridge, of church steeples, medieval towers, houses, and waterfront cafés, is captivating.

The Maastricht Visitors Center is located in the Dinghuis building, dating to 1470. Over the years, it served as a courthouse, prison, and City Council chamber, but one of its more intriguing roles was as a fire tower. A guard watched for smoke and other signs of danger, and the tale follows that when a one-eyed lookout was hired, he was only paid half the salary of his two-eyed predecessors.

The Vrijthof is just down the street, and then beyond is Market Square, home of the Stadhuis, or Town Hall, completed in 1664.

Maastricht's curving cobblestone side streets make visitors want to walk just a bit more to see what's around the bend. Intriguing house plaques relate to days gone by: A 1767 home featuring a blooming Linden tree, a golden ram with the motto, 'In den Grooten Bock' (In the big box), a 1743 plaque "Au Cheval Noir", featuring a Black horse, and a house with the date 1790, under a stone carved medallion with the words "Nous Desiron la Pax" (We want Peace), relating to the French Revolution in 1789 and the fact that Maastricht belonged to France at that time.

Other side streets lead to the flying buttresses of the 13th Century Gothic Franciscan Minderbroederskerk and the impressive fortifications of the 11th Century Romanesque Basilica of Our Lady.

The site of Helpoort (Hells Gate) grabs the imagination. Constructed in 1229, this is the only remaining gate of the original wall around Maastricht. We were told, unofficially, that the name comes from pouring boiling water or oil on enemies who tried to force their way into the city. But another explanation relates that people suffering from the plague were not allowed to enter the city and had to dwell unprotected, outside the wall, like living in hell.

This is one of the most picturesque areas of the city, with medieval towers, remnants of the 1st and 2nd walls, and Staspark (City Park), with the sights and sounds of Coots, Moorhens, Grey Herons, Chaffinches, and more.

Nearby, history blends with gastronomy at Bisschopsmolen (Bishops Mill), where the overwhelming aroma of freshly-baked 'vlaai' emanates from the bakery. Vlaai, or Flaai, is a fruit-filled pie made with cherries, apples, apricots, strawberries, or plums. The Mill dates to the 11th Century when the original owner, Godfrey of Bouillon, led the 1st Crusade to Jerusalem. When he asked the Bishop of Liège to finance the arduous journey, the Bishop demanded collateral. And when de Bouillon failed to return, the Bishop took possession of the Mill. The ancient Water Wheel can be seen behind the bakery.

Gastronomy is one of the city's top attractions, especially at popular outdoor eaters such as De Brandweer Kantine, Petit Café Moriaan, and Noon. The latter is a chic riverside outdoor café, where Passion Fruit Martinis pave the way for tasty appetizers such as squid with thick ink dip, 'choppy shrimp' made with scampi and lime, and Asian slow-roasted Pork Belly. The main courses included Five-spiced DuckDuck, Boneless Tam Yam Asian Ribs, and Mexican mole Sea Bass. So good!



And in Maastricht, the idea of 'chilling out' can take on a whole new meaning. We left the 30C (86 F) June heat and entered the North Tunnels under Fort St. Peter, where the constant temperature is a cool 11C (52F). The tunnels are the remains of 2000 years of Limestone mining, starting with the Romans and ending in 1900 when bricks became much cheaper for construction. Farmers who owned the tunnels under their land began to offer tours and then enhanced the attraction by hiring artists to sketch drawings on the walls. Today, the tours through the dark, cold tunnels by guides from the Society for the Preservation of Nature are fascinating.

During World War II, the tunnels were used to smuggle goods and people to Belgium and France, particularly Jews escaping Nazi-occupied Europe. And the tunnels are also famous for the Vault, where upwards of 800 paintings stolen by the Nazis were stored. This included The Night Watch, the 1642 masterpiece by Rembrandt van Rijn.

Both thrills and chills might be generated by the wildlife in the tunnels. One thousand bats roost in the tunnels during winter. And the Beast of Maastricht, also called this home. The skull of a Mosasaurus ('Lizard of the Meuse River'), an aquatic dinosaur that lived 80-66 million years ago, was discovered here in 1764.

Maastricht is often referred to as the most beautiful city in the Netherlands. It's a place to chill out, wander, shop, drink at an outdoor café, and enjoy life! ■

WWW.VISITMAASTRICHT.COM





The Two Wonderful Contrasting Sides of Barbados

Article and photography by Michael Morcos

This would be my third trip to Barbados, but unlike the first two, this one would be memorable. More succinctly, my first two experiences included an overnight stay waiting for a connecting flight to a neighboring island and my second trip through here was from the airport onto a cruise ship with immediate departure. That did not allow nearly enough time to know Barbados.

The fun begins

There are two distinct sides to this beautiful tropical island. We would enjoy the best of both areas, starting in the lush and green east side and finishing in the more populated west side known for its posh resorts. The two sides are also geographically different in that they are part of two tectonic plates pushed onto each other creating the highlands in the east.

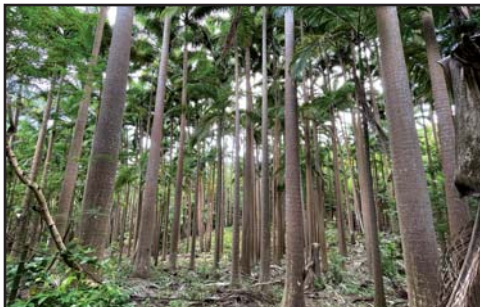
Naniki Cottages

My ride from the airport started off on a smooth and slightly curvy road, but within minutes, that all changed. We suddenly started going uphill and downhill with sharp turns all along the way and had our scenery changed from beach to dense tropical forest. When we finally arrived at our accommodations, the Naniki Cottages, we were met with something quite different to most Barbados travel brochures as we were in a magnificent natural setting, and the individual cottages for each guest included a large living room, kitchen, and bedroom with our own private balcony. Each cottage was made up of wood and matched the surrounding lush greenery. The resort's main dining room was outdoors and had a calm and spectacular view of the rolling hills and thousands of palm trees.

Adjacent to the property was a wonderful palm forest with a 2 km hiking trail. The owner, Tom, explained that this land was once a sugar plantation 85 years ago and now has the most palm trees in one place on the island.

Coco Hill forest

It was a delight visiting Coco Hill as we would take a leisurely stroll through a natural setting, all the while enjoying the incredible views of the surrounding green landscape. Along the way, we would be greeted warmly and served freshly picked and prepared coconuts. We would also stop for a time to just sit, close our eyes, and feel the positive energy of this forest. A wonderful day and a dimension of Barbados I did not expect and surely appreciated.



Hunte's Garden

Centenarian owner Anthony Hunte is one colorful character who has spent most of his energy and time devoted to creating a spectacular garden with flowering plants, bushes, tall trees, water fountains, and garden sculptures. There is also beautiful artwork throughout the property as well as a restaurant-bar with fantastic views of his multi-level garden. Here is the true meaning of paradise, with water everywhere, birds flying freely, soothing colors and fresh coolness from the overhead canopies. This would be a beautiful place for relaxing and forest bathing.

Hamilton's Pottery

That looks so easy, is what I think every time I see people working with clay. A pottery workshop at a small family run store would prove me wrong. We saw how to make simple objects from clay found a short distance away. It only took a couple of minutes to create a beautifully shaped object ready for firing and finishing. We were each given a turn at the pottery wheel and that's when disaster struck. As funny as it was, I knew at that moment I would fail if this was a career. Luckily, there were many exquisite, finished pieces that ranged from vases to richly detailed decoration pieces that were all made of natural materials on display and available for purchase.

eBiking the East Coast

Biking while traveling is always a terrific way of seeing more in less time. Even better is eBiking. We would hook up with Gears 246, a local biking company and, with a professional guide, we would see amazing sites all throughout the short 2-hour ride. It didn't matter if we were on paved or dirt roads, or even if the terrain was hilly, with little effort we took in incredible vistas including a beautiful seaside pasture with grazing cows, villages with happy, smiling locals, beautiful historic churches, and a rather bizarre setting of three crosses by the cliff and silhouetted by sunny skies. Near the end we would park the bikes and go through a dense forest to an amazing hidden waterfall. Truly a fantastic and memorable day on this beautiful island.

Tree-planting at Walkers Reserve

To add even more diversity to our east coast tour, we would find ourselves at Walker's Reserve. This piece of land is in a major transformation phase where the mining company

organizers decided to let it return to nature and have the public enjoy it. The material that was extracted from this quarry is now all over Barbados as a main ingredient in cement and a big part of the development of the country. From the short time we spent there, I could tell that they are doing a fantastic job turning it into a welcoming and natural environment with a wonderful seaside backdrop. To help in this effort, we had a fun time planting trees that will beautify the park for generations to come.

Sugar Bay

In contrast, the West Coast is the area most visitors associate with Barbados. Located directly on the beach, we would check into the fabulous Sugar Bay Resort to find a posh setting with comfortable accommodations. This property can easily be a stand-alone destination with many wonderful dining options, live entertainment, beach and water sports activities, or plain relaxing by the pool with refreshments.

My accommodation was superb with an extra-large room that had all the creature comforts and modern amenities a traveler would want and expect including a spacious and shaded balcony, perfectly located with a view of the sea, the pool, and the gardens. With a friendly and dedicated staff, life was good at Sugar Bay!

Sailing the waters

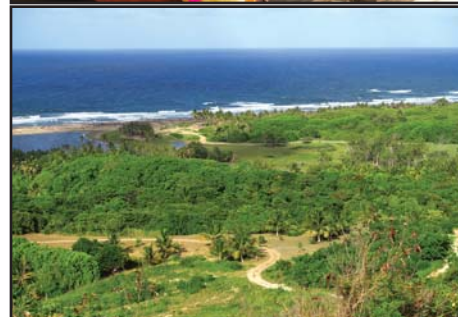
How could a great tour, combined with fantastic accommodations in a tropical paradise get any better? How about trying a private boat ride through the aqua-blue waters on a luxury catamaran while staff offered tasty cocktails, delicious snacks, and well-prepared meals. That is what we did, and it was certainly a wonderful way of accenting an already fun time in beautiful Barbados.

Barbados has been a favorite for many people looking for a safe and friendly island, returning again and again, and I see why. There are plenty of warm, sunny days, fantastic service, wonderful food, a storied history, and a multitude of options for the sun-seekers looking for relaxation and nature lovers looking for hidden gems. Either one or both makes this Caribbean destination just right with something for all tastes and budgets! ■

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Around The World (in 34 pages)



Türkiye's rich cheese culture captivates visitors

Turkish cuisine is impressive for its rich variety, unique delicacies, and diverse cheeses produced in different regions. The rich biodiversity generated by the climate unique of different areas of Türkiye is the basis of these flavours.

"White Cheese": From Edirne to Çanakkale "White Cheese" is a staple of Turkish breakfasts and a popular delicacy in the country. It is produced in almost every region of the country and its taste, aroma, and texture all vary based on climate, source, and production methods. Best enjoyed with crunchy simit bread, or with melon, Rakı and appetizers, its exceptional taste and flavor from the milk of cows, sheep, or goats will have you trying it in every region you visit.

Balıkesir: Home of 50 Different Cheese Types The city's multicultural makeup, products made from different varieties of milk, and diverse production methods have turned this region into a 'real cheese paradise'. The "Kelle" cheese, made using various types of milks and techniques, is famous in all regions of this beautiful city on the Marmara-Aegean border. Sepet (basket) cheeses produced from sheep-goat milk, brined Tulum cheeses, and lor (curd) cheeses, which are made from whey, are also recognized as Turkey's most delicious cheeses.

Moldy Cheeses of the Cappadocia Region Niğde moldy blue cheese from the famous city of Cappadocia, is one of Turkey's most unique types of cheese. It is stored in caves 15-meters deep, where it is left to ripen for seven months. During this time, it takes on a distinctive flavour and blue colouring, and it also acts as a natural antibiotic. It is commonly enjoyed with breakfast, especially in omelettes.

Exceptional Tastes of the East: A Real Cheese Paradise The Eastern Anatolia Region is famous for its unique cheeses, such as the Erzincan Tulum cheese, Kars Kaşarı cheese, and Van's Herby cheese. These varieties are exceptionally tasty as they are produced in high plateau areas where there is a rich plant diversity, and fresh, cool air. ■

[HTTPS://GOTURKIYE.COM/](https://goturkiye.com/)

World Traveler Fall 2023



Germany - By boat through the Danube Gorge

The Weltenburger Enge (Weltenburg narrowness) with the Danube Gorge is one of the oldest nature reserves in Bavaria. Anyone travelling along the Danube through this unique cultural landscape south of Regensburg in the company of Captain Renate Schweiger will experience an unforgettable natural spectacle.

And while enjoying the breathtaking landscape visitors travel along some major historical sights and places in Eastern Bavaria like the Walhalla Hall of Fame, the Unesco-City of Regensburg, the Liberation Hall in Kelheim and the Weltenburg Abbey at the Danube Gorge.

Regensburg, the once-flourishing trading metropolis on the Danube, has been designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site due to its well-preserved medieval old town. Visitors looking for a peaceful journey can take a cruise from the Steinerne Brücke (Stone Bridge) through the beautiful Danube Valley.

King Ludwig I built the Walhalla just ten kilometres outside the city gates. Its location on the banks of the river was carefully chosen. This magnificent classicist Hall of Fame comes into view from afar. The Weltenburger Enge with the Danube Gorge is situated downstream, 30 kilometres south of Regensburg.

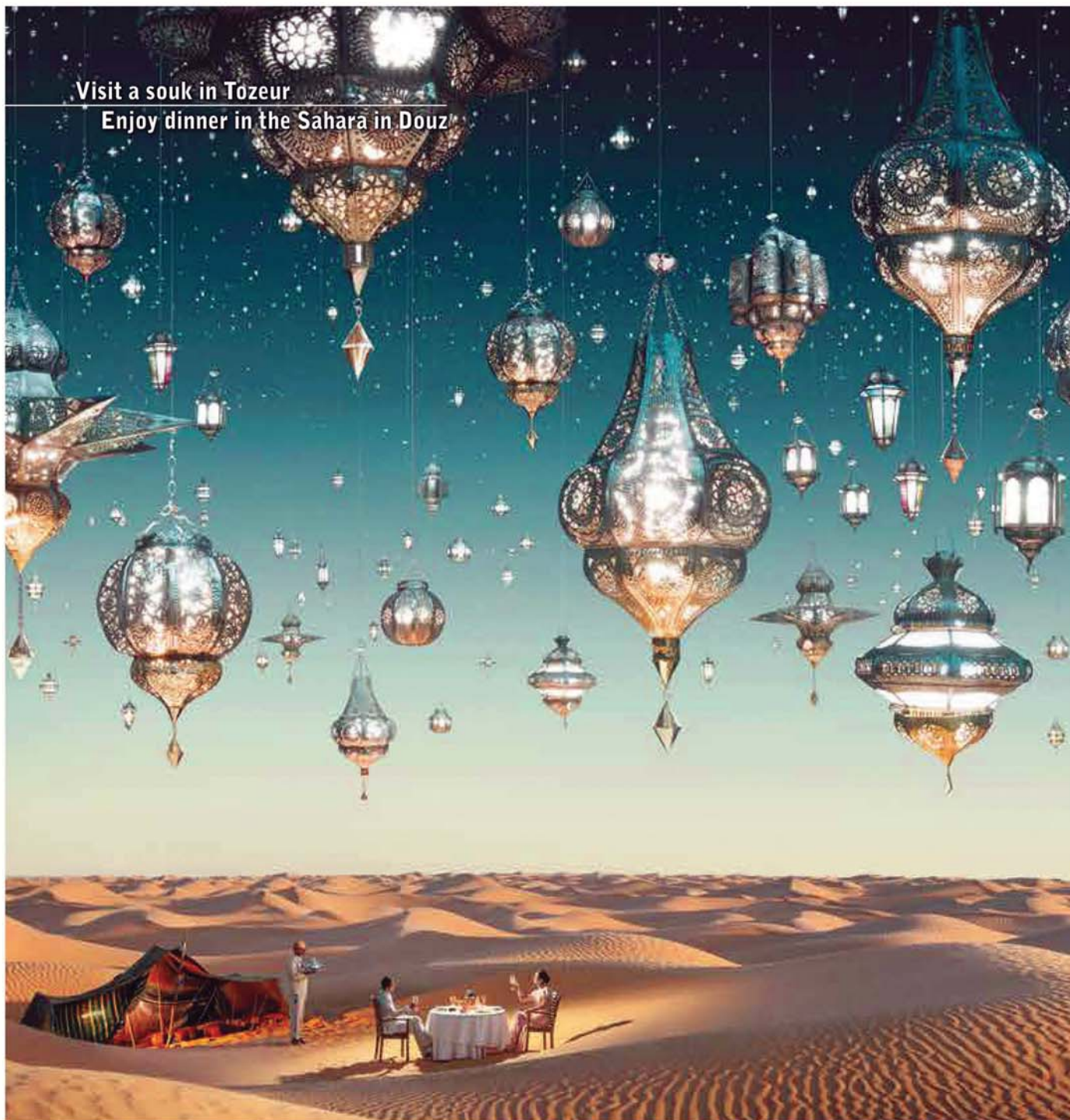
A fairy tale landscape The cruise ship glides past lush forests and rock faces up to 100 metres high. The centuries-old rock formations attract aristocrats and wealthy citizens to the region in the 19th century. In 1840 the idyllic landscape was declared a natural monument by King Ludwig I.

A beer from the Klosterbrauerei The crowning glory is Weltenburg Abbey. It was founded in the year 600 and is Bavaria's oldest monastic complex.

Beer from the abbey's brewery has also won numerous accolades. It can be tasted in the beer garden of the Klosterschenke Weltenburg, along with other regional specialties. ■

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



INSPIRING
Tunisia

Exodus Adventure Travels Unveils New Active Europe Collection

New Itineraries Created to Meet Travellers' Expanding Interests and Desire for Adventure



With the significant increase in European travel from North America, Exodus Adventure Travels, the award-winning leader in adventure travel, has launched a new Active Europe Collection. This expanded offering, including hiking and cycling trips, features more than 19 new itineraries across nine European countries. These new adventures are designed to bring travellers closer to Europe's hidden gems while enjoying new and unique experiences in the great outdoors.

The new Active Europe Collection encompasses active itineraries that have been meticulously crafted to cater to adventure enthusiasts, with options for every skill level and interest. From the Tuscan countryside and the UK's Lake District to Norway's Fjords and the Mediterranean Coast, each trip promises to deliver unforgettable moments and authentic encounters with Europe's natural wonders.

The new European collection includes a variety of memorable adventures including:

Tuscan Hills & Chianti Wines – Premium Adventure: On this eight-day guided tour, guests will enjoy an elevated experience as

they explore the idyllic Tuscan countryside, with a stay in an exclusive villa complete with a pool and private chef. From this base, which is located close to the medieval town of San Gimignano, the trip features five days of gentle walking and sightseeing, including visits to Florence and Siena, as well as timeless villages and the quaint walled town of Certaldo. Activities include three wine-tasting experiences, as well as a visit to Brolio Castle gardens, the birthplace of Chianti wine.

Castles, Hadrian's Wall & the Lake District: Travellers can discover the forts, fells, and film sets of northern England on this new six-day guided trip that offers a wonderful combination of history and hiking. Highlights include a visit to beautiful Alnwick Castle, which stood in as Hogwarts in the first two Harry Potter movies, the striking Bamburgh Castle on the Northumberland coast, the Holy Island of Lindisfarne to see the historic priory ruins, and much more. Travellers will also hike a section of Hadrian's Wall, hike Cat Bells for unforgettable views over the Lake District, and summit Helvellyn, a walk considered to be among the most beautiful in the UK.

Cycling the Mediterranean Coast in Spain: Cycle between the vibrant cities of Barcelona and Valencia on this week-long guided adventure on two wheels. Travelling along the Mediterranean coast, with stays at a different seafront hotel each night, the itinerary features a fantastic mix of cycling lanes and quiet paved roads, with only four short transfers on the cycling days.

Cycling the Coastal Portuguese Camino: Following the Atlantic shoreline, the

Portuguese Camino coastal route is perhaps the most scenic of the trails that comprise the iconic Camino de Santiago. On this eight-day culture-cycling adventure, guests start in Porto and head north, eventually crossing into Spain and to the final stop in Santiago de Compostela. Along the way, the tour visits a string of atmospheric coastal towns, and through the picturesque Galician countryside, while also collecting the stamps necessary to receive the Compostela certificate in Santiago, proof of completion of this historic pilgrimage.

Walking the Fjords: The Norwegian fjords are rightly ranked as one of the most stunning natural wonders of the world and on this nine-day guided hike, travellers will be immersed in the stunning landscapes that define this region, including snow-capped mountains, steep green hillsides, and powerful waterfalls plunging into calm, clear fjordic waters. By exploring by foot, travellers enjoy unique access to areas of stunning beauty and high panoramic viewpoints. In the fjords, guests stay in two locations – a cozy family-run guest-house that looks towards the Feigumfossen waterfall, and another family-run hotel on the waterfront in the town of Fjærand.

Cycle the Loire Valley: On this gentle week-long cycling adventure, travellers ride sections of the Loire à Vélo, a scenic cycling route that tracks along the Loire River – from Blois to Saumur – past orchards, vineyards, and small villages. Highlights include visits to a magnificent chateau steeped in Renaissance history, stops at the world-renowned vineyards of Vouvray and Chinon, and much more.

As with all itineraries, Exodus Adventure Travels' Active Europe Collection prioritizes sustainable and responsible travel practices, fostering a deep connection with local communities and minimizing the environmental impact. ■

For more information on all these trips, and to explore Exodus' full line-up of adventures worldwide, visit:

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Wild Women Expeditions

Antarctica: The Ultimate Adventure

Why is Antarctica the ultimate adventure? Franny Bergschneider, Wild Women Expeditions' Program and Operations Manager and resident polar expert explains it all!

A Land Dedicated To Science And Peace

When you go to Antarctica, it is a complete sensory experience. Antarctica is a continent dedicated to peace, science and conservation, it is protected by the Antarctic Treaty of 1959. In Antarctica, you can disconnect from your daily life and routine and become immersed in an entirely different experience that both educates you, and gives you the opportunity for self-reflection and rejuvenation.

Why Women Need To Go

Today, there are expedition leaders and guides who are women holding space in places where 100 years ago, women weren't allowed. As women, it's important for us to carve out space where we haven't been allowed to go before. An expedition to Antarctica gives women the opportunity to feel safe and empowered, to take risks and take up space, to get out of their comfort zone and do the things that they've always wanted to do.

The Animals

In Antarctica, the density of wildlife is extraordinary. You will have the opportunity to be able to see three species of penguins, Adelie, gentoo and chinstrap, as well as large marine mammals such as humpback whales and leopard seals.

You can get quite close (within the set limits) and the wildlife will not be disturbed by your presence as there are no terrestrial predators in Antarctica.

Why Travel with Wild Women Expeditions?

When you travel with Wild Women Expeditions, you are travelling with other like-minded adventurous women. Women in our community are amazingly supportive and ready for a challenge. Hello polar plunge! A Wild Women Expeditions host will be on your expedition to facilitate and curate the Wild Women experience onboard, with exclusive events and excursions throughout the journey. They will cheerlead you, if need be, they will encourage you to push your own self-imposed limits. They will buoy the group spirit just like that friend you know who is always the life of the party.

Traveling with other like-minded adventurous women means you have an instant built-in friend circle to travel to the Antarctic with. On our Antarctica small ship expeditions, we share space with other passengers. This adventure is not women-only and not WWE-exclusive, that's why our hosts are there, at the ready, to help you navigate ship life and excursions with confidence. ■

[HTTPS://WILDWOMENEXPEDITIONS.COM/](https://wildwomenexpeditions.com/)



What's Old is New Again *Oku Japan Unveils New Tours Along the Ancient Kumano Kodo*

Oku Japan is a Kyoto-based tour operator specializing in sustainable guided, self-guided and custom walking tours exploring remote regions of Japan. The very first travel brand to offer self-guided walking trips along Japan's ancient pilgrimage routes, Oku continues to honour its passion for Japanese culture by fostering meaningful community partnerships, encouraging cross-cultural connections among locals and travellers, and forging new adventures in Japan's still-undiscovered territories.

Recently, Oku unveiled new tours along the Kumano Kodo, an ancient pilgrimage trail located on Japan's Kii Peninsula and comprised of several routes. While the Nakahechi route (also known as the 'Imperial' route) is perhaps the most well-known, there are several others that carry their own unique histories and atmospheres, and it is on two of these routes – the Kiiji and Iseji – where Oku is offering a selection of new self-guided walking tours.

"Oku Japan has run a self-guided program along the Kumano Kodo since 2010, and we operate a local branch office in Chikatsuyu, so our ties with the local community are especially strong," says Hiroshi Kawaguchi, Oku's General Manager. "After the disruption of the last few years, we are excited to develop and now launch new tours in the region, offering travellers even greater opportunities for discovery and cultural immersion, while providing the communities here with even more much-needed support."

Along the Kiiji, or western route, Oku invites guests to experience the best of two worlds as it merges with the classic Nakahechi route, where the company has run a program for years. Available as both five- and six-day options, the duration of these hikes are no longer than four hours, making it a very accessible option to all levels of hikers, along with allowing more time for guests to enjoy the local communities.

The Iseji route follows the coast and connects the Ise Grand Shrine, or Ise Jingu (a Shinto shrine dedicated to the sun goddess Amaterasu and the country's most significant spiritual site) to the Hayatama Grand Shrine in Shingu, a holy ground that is part of the Kumano Sanzan or Three Grand Shrines of Kumano.

All of these tours operate year-round, and guests are supported by Oku Japan's team in Kyoto, its local Chikatsuyu office, and by the company's bespoke turn-by-turn walking instructions and topographical maps. ■

To learn more about these new self-guided hiking adventures on the Kumano Kodo, or to see Oku's complete line-up of self-guided and guided tours, please visit: WWW.OKUJAPAN.COM



Family-owned and operated, expedition cruise company Adventure Canada likes to connect its guests to the people and places it visits in a way that inspires those travellers to protect the many wonders of our planet.

Offering a comprehensive range of small-ship expedition cruises in the polar regions, Atlantic Canada, Europe, and along the Pacific Northwest, it pairs its extraordinary itineraries with an amazing roster of special guests – experts in their chosen fields who are there to enhance each journey through their presence, knowledge, and craft.

This includes Researchers-in-Residence who specialize in marine biology and geography, and the like, an Inuit master carver, and even revered Canadian author Margaret Atwood, who is one of Adventure Canada's longest-standing special guests, having sailed on over 12 expeditions.

In fact, on the August 2024 departure, Atwood will join Adventure Canada on its Greenland and Arctic Canada: High Arctic Explorer expedition, a 13-day adventure that promises to be a journey of a lifetime.

Offering travellers a rare and unique opportunity to be immersed in the extraordinary landscape, history, and culture of Earth's northernmost regions, on this itinerary, guests visit Inuit communities, get up close to glaciers and icebergs, search for the remarkable wildlife that call the High Arctic home, and spend time onboard learning from experts.

It starts with a charter flight from Ottawa, Ontario, to Quasuituq (Resolute), Nunavut – home to just under 250 people and an important staging point for High Arctic research and tourism – where guests transfer to the Ocean Endeavour by Zodiac to set sail on this epic adventure.

There's a stop at the Franklin Expedition Historical Site on Beechey Island, where guests learn the compelling history of the HMS Erebus and HMS Terror's doomed attempts to sail through the Northwest Passage. Boarding Zodiacs, they will search for whales, seabirds, and polar bears as they explore Tallurutiup Imanga (Lancaster Sound), one of Canada's newest National Marine Conservation Areas. On Devon Island, they will learn about its unique geological character, with its flat-topped mountains, glacial valleys, and substantial ice cap.

At Mittimatalik (Pond Inlet), Inuit culture and traditions are on full display in this busy and vibrant Arctic community, with experiences that include drum dancing, storytelling, and throat singing.

The last few days include a day at sea highlighted by workshops and presentations as the ship crosses the Davis Strait towards Greenland, a hike along the Tundra on Greenland's stunning west coast, a visit to the town of Ilulissat, and a stop to explore colourful Sisimiut, Greenland's second largest city, before ending the trip with a journey up the 190-kilometre-long Kangerlussuaq Fjord and across the Arctic Circle one last time. ■

For more information on this cruise, visit: [ADVENTURECANADA.COM](https://adventurecanada.com)



Make Way for a New Style of Wellness Travel with **Terra & Tu**

For curious and intentional travelers, Terra & Tu offers a new kind of wellness adventure. Shifting the focus from the activity itself – think intensive yoga retreats and restrictive fasting schemes of wellness trips past – to being present in a destination and experiencing the rich variety of physical and mental fulfillment a place has to offer. With a distinct perspective on what it means to be “well,” Terra & Tu adventures aim to foster a state of flourishing among guests, embodied by “la dolce vita” culture of Tuscany.

“While traditional wellness trips often focus on deprivation meant to lead one to wellness, we take the opposite approach believing that true wellness is not about denying yourself the pleasures of life, but enriching your mind, body, and soul with positive experiences,” says Finlay Bressler, Terra & Tu's founder and president. “Focused on creating meaningful connection with the culture and heritage of Tuscany through guided exploration, having outstanding culinary experiences, and measured but impactful yoga, meditation, and spa sessions, in the most beautiful settings, here at Terra & Tu our wellness adventures are about fulfillment.”

Terra & Tu currently offers an eight-day Tuscany Wellness Adventure guided tour that starts in Florence, followed by two days at the indulgent five-star Terme di Saturnia Spa and Resort, famous for the medicinal thermal hot springs that were used first by the Etruscans and later the Romans who believed them to be a gift from the gods. After that, guests make their way to Terra & Tu's private Tuscan villa near the hilltop village of Asciano. From this exclusive location, guests enjoy six days exploring medieval villages and quiet hiking trails with the best local guides, tasting Tuscany's famed wines, and relaxing at the villa with yoga mornings and culinary afternoons that feature the region's famous cheeses, honey, pasta, and fresh produce.

Far from the typical tourist route, the Tuscany Wellness Adventure offers the right balance of activity and relaxation, leaving travelers rejuvenated, enriched, and energized. Guests who want more self-guided meditation and relaxation time may opt to forgo excursions beyond the villa on most days. ■

For more information on Terra & Tu, its “travel is wellness” philosophy, and for details on its approachable wellness adventures, visit: [TERRAANDTU.COM](https://terraandtu.com)



Porto and Northern Portugal: Where Time and Tradition Collide

by Olivia Liveng

Nestled in the northwest corner of the Iberian Peninsula, Northern Portugal is steeped in history, culture, and natural beauty. Its crowning jewel, Porto, is a testament to Portugal's rich maritime past and vibrant contemporary spirit.

Porto: The Invincible City

Overlooking the Douro River, Porto, known as 'Oporto,' is a city of contrasts. Its medieval Ribeira (riverside) district is a labyrinth of narrow cobbled streets, ancient houses, and bustling squares. Yet, a few steps away, you'll find modern eateries, avant-garde art galleries, and chic boutiques showing off the city's contemporary flair.

One cannot speak of Porto without mentioning its most famous export: Port wine. The Vila Nova de Gaia cellars, just across the river, house countless barrels of this fortified wine, waiting to be sampled and savored. The iconic double-decked Dom Luís I Bridge, designed by a disciple of Gustave Eiffel, connects Porto and Gaia, offering visitors breathtaking panoramas of the terracotta-roofed cityscape.



Northern Portugal's Rich Heritage

Beyond Porto, Northern Portugal boasts a wealth of attractions. The region is dotted with historical cities like Braga and Guimarães. Braga, known as the "Rome of Portugal," is famed for its religious significance, with its imposing cathedral and the Bom Jesus do Monte sanctuary. In contrast, Guimarães, often called the "birthplace of Portugal," is a UNESCO World Heritage site with its well-preserved medieval architecture and the pivotal Guimarães Castle.

The Douro Valley, another UNESCO site, is an absolute must-visit. This terraced, river-hugging landscape is the birthplace of Port wine. Cruising down the river or traveling by train, visitors witness the spectacular undulating terrain adorned with vineyards. Many quintas (wine estates) welcome guests for tours, showcasing the age-old wine-making process and inviting them to indulge in tastings.

Nature and Adventure

For those inclined towards nature and adventure, the Peneda-Gerês National Park offers a pristine environment of mountains, forests, and waterways. It's a haven for hikers, bird watchers, and those seeking solace in nature. The park is also home to ancient megalithic stone formations, traditional villages, and diverse flora and fauna.

Culture and Festivities

Like the entire region, Northern Portugal's cul-

tural offerings are rich and varied. The area is known for its festivals, from the religious São João Festival in Porto, where the streets come alive with music, dance, and revelry, to the historical Feira Medieval in Santa Maria da Feira, which transports visitors to medieval times with its knights, jesters, and artisans.

Fado, Portugal's soulful folk music, finds its roots in the north. Though often associated with Lisbon, Porto has its unique variant, usually performed in intimate taverns, evoking nostalgia and deep emotion.

Porto and Northern Portugal offer a harmonious blend of the past and present. Whether sipping a vintage Port, exploring ancient ruins, or dancing in the streets during a local festival, the region invites you to partake in its age-old traditions while making new memories. It's a corner of Europe where every stone tells a story, and every moment is a step back. One visit is seldom enough; such is the allure of Northern Portugal. ■

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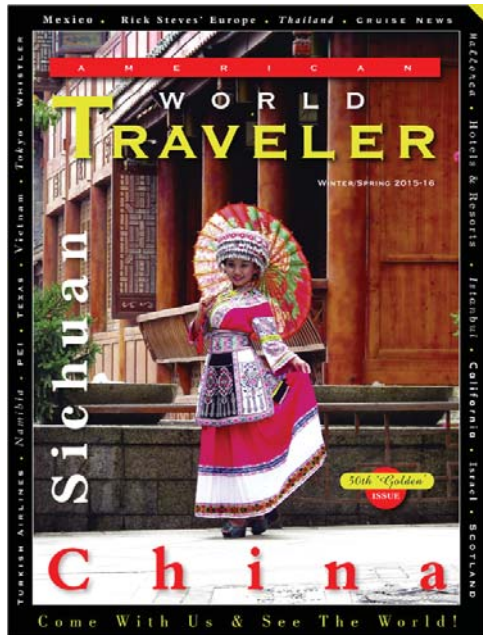
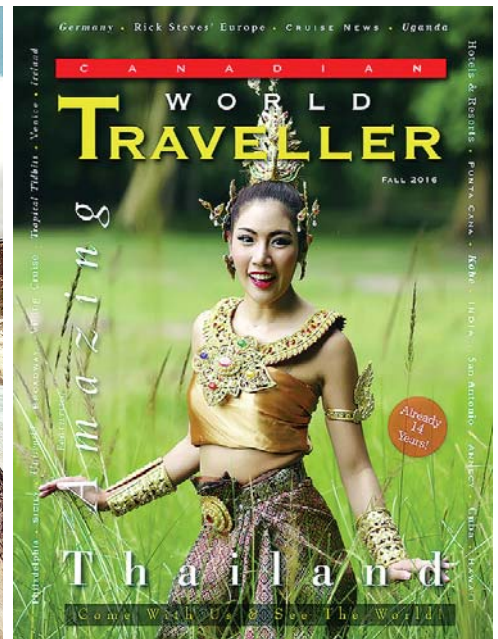
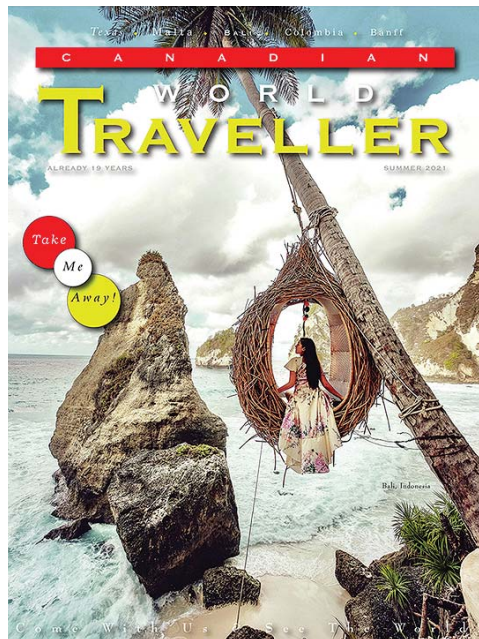
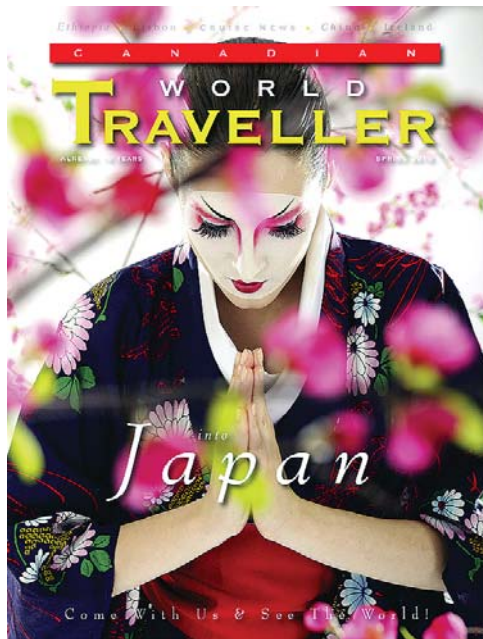
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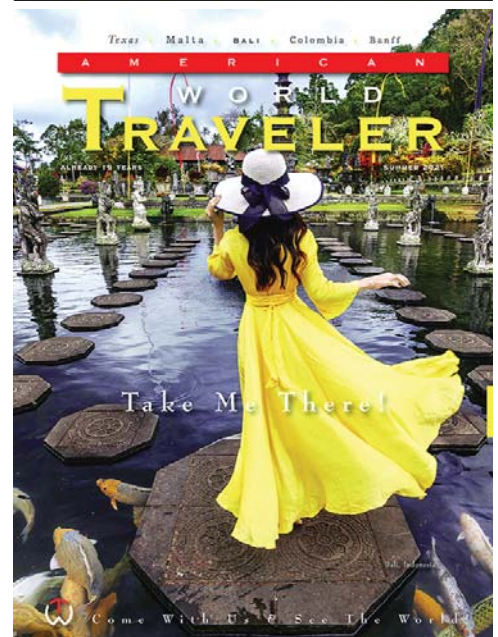
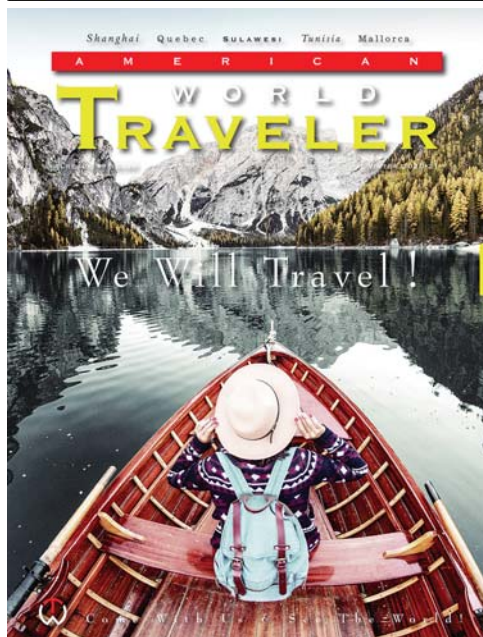
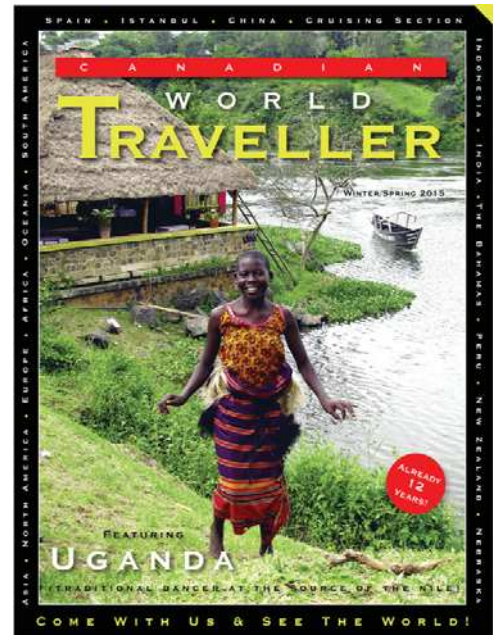
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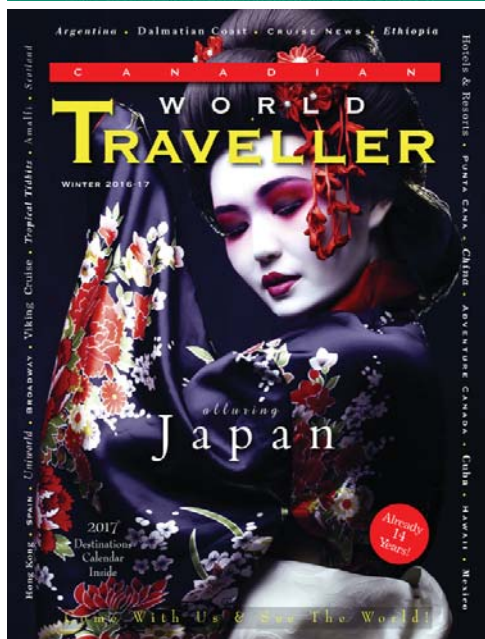
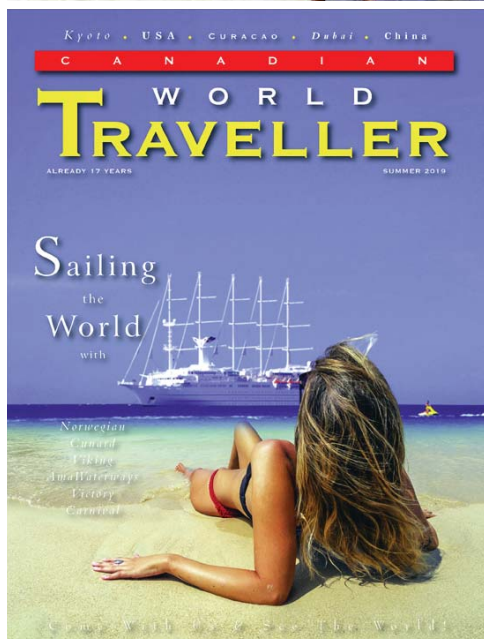
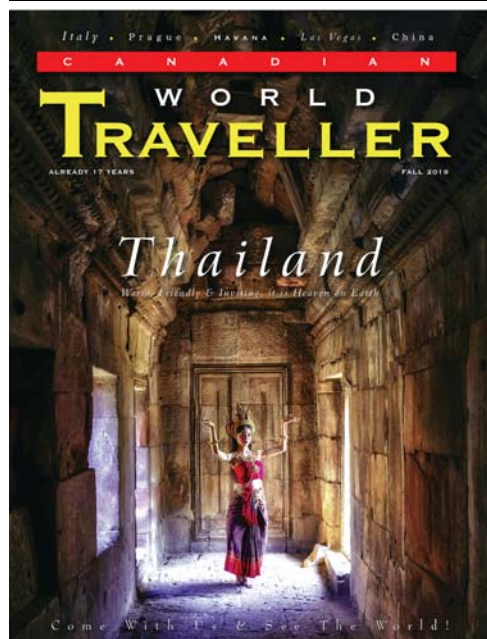
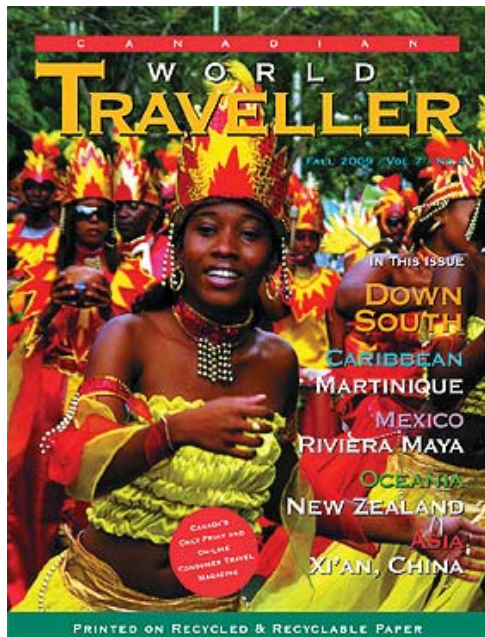
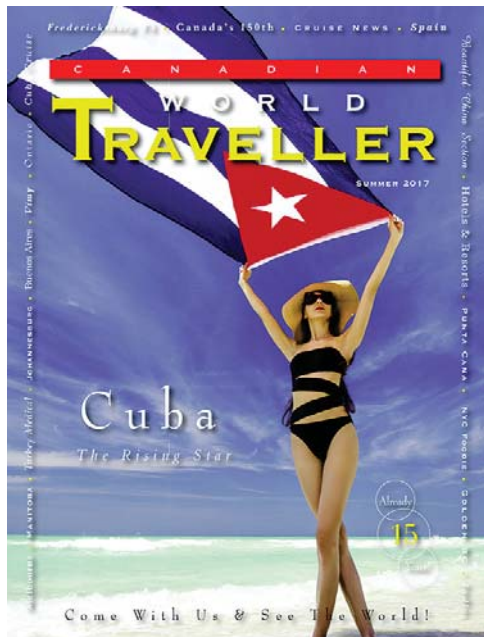
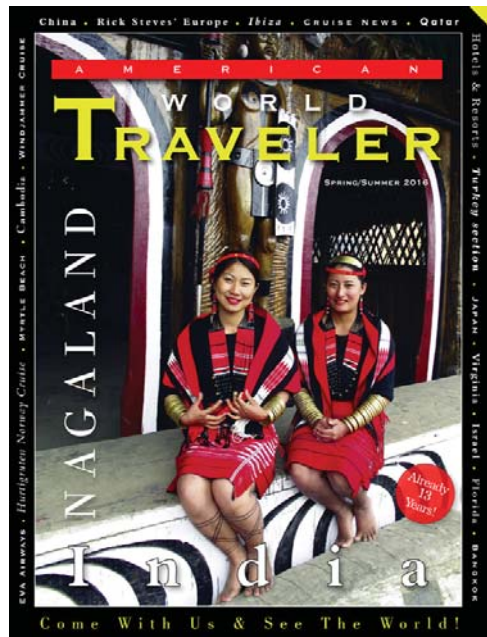
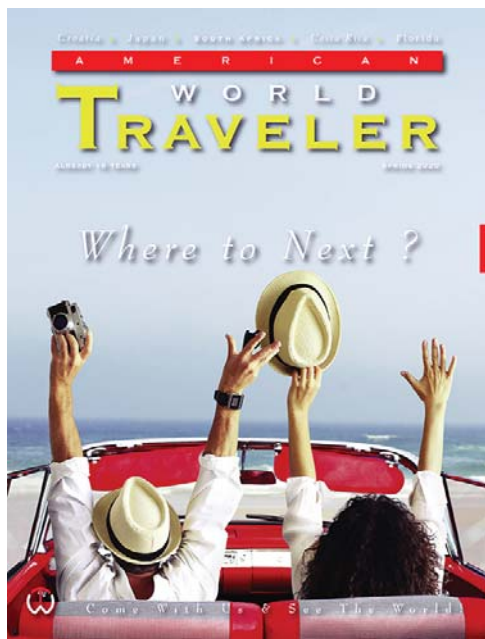
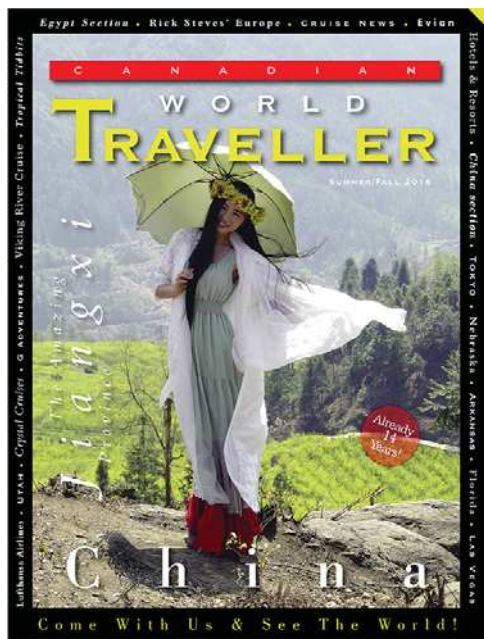
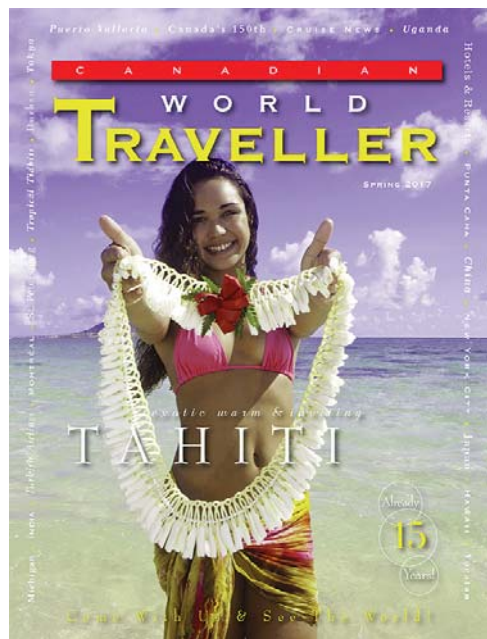
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Paris 2024 Olympics

The world's largest sporting event will take place against the backdrop of iconic sights in the City of Light

by Randy Mink

Anyone thinking about a once-in-a-lifetime trip to Paris should sprint, not jog, if they want to lock in tickets and hotel accommodations for the 2024 Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Dates for Olympic Games Paris 2024 are July 26 to August 11, while the Paralympic Games will run from August 23 to September 8.

Starting with Paris 2024, the sale of hospitality packages for the Games is being centralized via a single provider. For the first time, individuals can go to one source to secure hotel rooms and guaranteed event tickets.

In this new, groundbreaking model, On Location, a global e-commerce platform that

creates customized experiences at major events worldwide, partners with the International Olympic Committee as the official and exclusive hospitality provider for Paris 2024 (and Milano Cortina 2026 and Los Angeles 2028).

On Location and authorized sub-distributors (including ATPI Canada) are the only safe sources through which ticket-inclusive packages can be purchased. For tickets only, the official Paris 2024 Ticketing Program (reporting record sales) is the only other risk-free way to secure attendance to the Games.

On Location offers both Travel Packages (event tickets, hotel, sightseeing and various amenities bundled) and Hospitality Packages (event tickets but no hotel).

For example, the July 27 beach volleyball Hospitality Package at the Eiffel Tower Stadium, priced at 350 euros, includes pre-event access to an Olympic-themed hospitality lounge with TV screens broadcasting coverage throughout the space. Plans for some sports are priced at under 100 euros.

As for Travel Packages, they come in two categories—Discover packages (for shorter stays) and Explore packages (longer stays,

sightseeing, other amenities). A two-night Discover package using a 3-star hotel (August 4-6) includes two tickets to volleyball or track and field, plus transportation to and from the event, and costs 2,820 euros per person. (Obviously, these hotel packages are not cheap.)

Competition Sites

Olympic venues will be spread across metro Paris at both well-established and temporary arenas, with many sports being played against the backdrop of iconic landmarks.

In Champ de Mars, a greenspace at the foot of the Eiffel Tower, the temporary Champ de Mars Arena will host judo, wrestling and wheelchair rugby. The park's Eiffel Tower Stadium is also temporary. Beneath the glass roof of the Grand Palais in Champ de Mars, fencing and taekwondo competitions will take place.

The world's best archers will take over the esplanades of Hotel des Invalides, the complex of buildings containing monuments and museums related to France's military history, including the tomb of Napoleon Bonaparte. The Seine riverbanks, along with surrounding streets, will welcome marathon and cycling events.

The Games' opening ceremony, with the Eiffel Tower looming in the background, will unfold on and around the Seine. At least 600,000 spectators will be able to greet the athletes as they parade by in boats, and most onlookers will not have to pay admission. It will be the first time the Summer Games' ceremony has not been staged in a stadium.

Outside of the city, the Palace of Versailles' grounds will host equestrian events. Olympic tennis and boxing matches will be held at Stade Roland Garros, the site of the French Open tennis tournament. Stade de France, used by France's national soccer team, will host track and field events, plus the closing ceremony. ■

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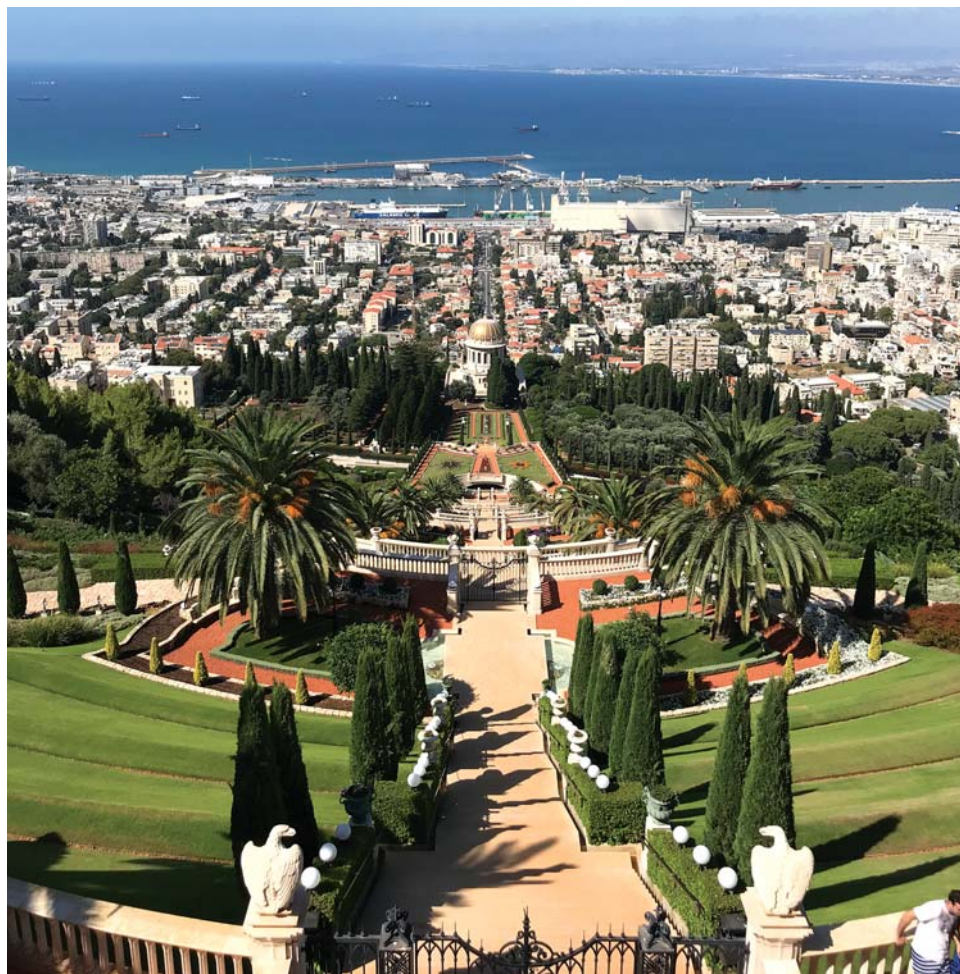
FRANCE IS IN THE AIR



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Israel's Hidden Gems

by Daniel Smajovits



While tourists are often drawn to Tel Aviv's stunning beaches and non-stop party scene or the immense history of Jerusalem, the country is filled with countless hidden gems, often overlooked as another exit on the highway.

Far away from the hustle and bustle of Tel Aviv is Akko (Acre), one of those gems. The history of the city was shaped by all those who conquered the land before it and now is a shining example of how the country's Jewish, Christian and Muslim population co-exist.

With the Old City of Akko named a UNESCO World Heritage Site, tourists can marvel at the various ruins that have stood the test of time before immersing themselves in the lively market or a walk along the walls of the city, which are built up right along the sea. Known for its fresh sea food, Acre is home to one of Israel's top restaurants: Uri Buri. While reservations could be hard to come by, if you can snag a spot, you might just witness chef and owner Uri Jeremias hard at work, cooking some of the best Israeli cuisine imaginable. A short walk away

is the award-winning Efendi Hotel, a boutique hotel that will make your stay in the city all the more enjoyable.

Akko's more well-known neighbour to the south is the port city of Haifa. Jutting out into Mediterranean Sea, Haifa is a popular spot for cruise ships for its multi-cultural vibe and natural beauty. The city's most famous attraction are the Bahá'í Gardens, the holiest site in the Bahá'í faith. Instantly recognizable, the Gardens are a spectacular series of terraces located on Mount Carmel in the city centre. While incredible to visit and photograph, the central terrace is also the location of the Shrine of the Báb, one of the key religious figures of the Bahá'í. Tours are offered daily at noon and are free of charge, but there is cost for entry to the site itself. Nearly one million tourists visit the Gardens each year, taking in their incredible views of the city and sea.

Following your visit, take a stroll, grab a coffee or a quick bite in the city's German Colony. For those less inclined to walk up the Gardens or the mountain, Haifa's Carmelit Underground Train is the world's shortest subway system, which will save your legs a 900-meter uphill trek. If you cannot snag a room at the aforementioned Efendi Hotel, The Dan Carmel is located at the top of Mount Carmel and is not only luxurious, but also provides breathtaking views of the sea and city.

Most tourists only need two nights in Haifa to experience the best of both Haifa and Akko. With your legs tired from the trek up Mount Carmel, ensure to include an afternoon at Hof HaCarmel and the Dado and Zamir beaches – equally as beautiful and much quieter than the more well-known beaches to the south.

If time is an issue, due to the proximity of Haifa and Akko, it possible to stay experience both in the same day, but two days are recommended to truly immerse yourself in these hidden gems. ■

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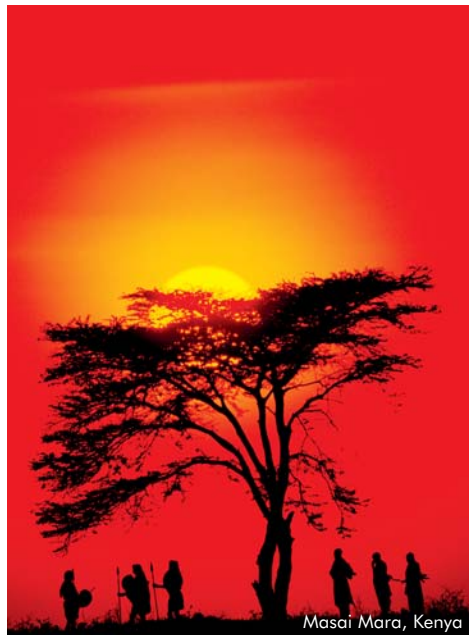
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Skiing, the French Alps



Las Vegas - the Entertainment Capital of the World!

Article and photography by Michael Morcos

Known as the entertainment capital of the world, it may be surprising to know that Las Vegas has evaded us for many decades. Finally visiting, we would start our scheduled road adventure of lower Nevada from Vegas by spending two nights at both the beginning and end of our trip. In just a short while here, I could only say I hadn't seen anything small and cute but instead just about everything was grand and magnificent.

Our two main areas of exploration were the world-famous strip and downtown Las Vegas. It ended up with us spending most of our time downtown as it had plenty to offer.

The Circa Resort & Casino

Our hotel was perfectly located in what was originally the Las Vegas of Bugsy Siegel. This

large building has it all and is close to everything a visitor could want for a fun and comfortable vacation. The Circa's pièce de résistance was the stadium pool. It was hard to believe it was real and was like being in a football stadium with no less than six gigantic pools and an enormous screen playing sports. It was both horribly wrong and amazingly intriguing.

Fremont Street Experience

Directly in front of our hotel entrance, the Fremont experience offered a carnival-like atmosphere throughout the day. The long and wide pedestrian street had an amazing ceiling projected screen, many casino hotels, a multitude of bars, restaurants, souvenir shops and convenience stores, plenty of street performers and lots of fantastic live bands playing to an energetic crowd. We



loved and enjoyed our strolls along this fascinating part of town, and no trip to Las Vegas would be complete without it.

AREA 15

To say that Area 15 is one of a kind is an understatement. It was refreshingly entertaining with a multitude of pavilions over a large area with plenty to see and do for all, and a full day can easily be spent with all its eclectic offerings. Our favourite was the Van Gogh experience, where we immersed ourselves into a 3D graphic journey of this famous painter's artwork and landscapes with the use of special glasses.

Downtown Lip-Smacking Foodie Tour

Close to our hotel, this guided foodie tour is a wonderful way of visiting downtown Las Vegas and tasting some excellent finely prepared food. In less than two hours, we would try some very tasty foods and drinks prepared by talented chefs. While these individual and sometimes shared plates were small, we would be full and satisfied in some very attractively decorated restaurants. Being a visitor on a tight schedule we felt this was a fantastic way of being introduced to some of the best eateries in the district.

The Grand Boulevard

The strip is Las Vegas and Las Vegas is the strip. There is nothing in the world that resembles or even comes close to this place in opulence and decadence in such a small area. In a short time, we made our way through some of the most incredibly beautiful resorts available anywhere in the world, including the Wynn, the Bellagio, the Aria, the Venetian and Caesar's Palace. It was sensory overload, but wonderful fun and we were constantly in awe. Within a few hours we were both amazed and exhausted by the sights and sounds of it all. I believe the strip must be consumed one bite at a time and one day at a time.

There is so much to see and do, we barely scratched the surface and would only get a sampling of Las Vegas. This incredible city is now on our radar, and we will return. ■

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Qatar Airways Qsuite Sets Precedent in Air Travel

by Olivia Balsinger

Galavanting around the world just got a whole lot easier—and a whole lot more glamorous. Qatar Airways has proved that travel—even luxury travel—does not have to break the bank. Further, the airline is an industry leader in aviation travel that doesn't create extra headaches or grievances.

And with direct flights to Doha from more than 150 destinations on every inhabited continent, Qatar Airways is genuinely connecting the world. As one who typically loathes flying, I was disappointed when the flight attendant woke me up as we

descended into Doha's dawn on an overnight from New York City. Qatar's Qsuite (Business Class) was undoubtedly the finest flying experience of my life. Here's why:

My Qsuite Journey

I was fortunate to travel Qsuite -the first of its kind in business class-which provided me complete privacy when I wanted it, along with ambient mood lighting and a fully flatbed. I have flown business or first class on many airlines, but Qatar Airways

sets the new standard. The lovely stewardess who greeted me as I stepped onto the flight showed me all of the (countless) amenities travelers with this airline class receive. Afterward, she smiled and told me I had the option to close my curtains, which ultimately sealed my belief that I wasn't on an airplane but in the comfort of my cozy living room.

Even better, had I been traveling with my husband or other family members, we could have even chosen seats amenable to a four-person work area or even a dou-





ble bed. Imagine that—flying with a partner and given the luxury of a double bed—heck, airplanes become more comfortable and luxurious than home!

And how often do we dread long airplane rides simply due to the pit of hunger that manifests after barely being able to digest airplane food? The airline also provides business class passengers an “à la carte” dining option, making my constant hunger more manageable. Was I on a flight or in a five-star restaurant in the center of a metropolis? The possibilities were endless.



The most difficult decision I made was to commence with a French onion soup or escargot (of course, my answer was oui to both!) The Quite menu adheres to the structure of a four-course meal - with soup, appetizers, and desserts - with a post-sleep ‘breakfast’ (starters and mains) as the final destination is in sight. Of course, there are lighter options available that can be enjoyed at any time during the flight.

The stewardess went out of her way, surprising me with champagne and chocolate when landing in Doha and with Maha Gold Service (meet and greet’ service) both during arrival and departure. I felt like royalty in the air.

Stopover Program

It gets even better. Until discovering oil in 1939, Qatar cultivated its most significant profit and recognition from pearl diving. But it has since grown, making its considerable mark on the tourism map. Typically, accommodation is one of the costliest expenses on vacation. However, travelers can alleviate this cost when they transit via Doha for a few days with Qatar Airways’ Stopover Program.

This generous program waives visa fees from eighty countries. It also provides accommodation at luxury four or five-star hotels, such as InterContinental Doha or Souq Waqif Boutique Hotel for two nights—for a mere USD 100 booking fee!

A Whole New World

Once landed in Doha, I was equally blown away. Indeed, Doha itself has proven to be a significant tourism draw. The city is significantly smaller than Dubai and Abu Dhabi, which allows it to keep its slightly provincial feel. While travelers can still find modern high-end innovations, such as Doha Festival City with an Angry Birds theme park, Qatar stays true to its heritage in several ways. I visited the Souq Waqif, one of the most traditional in the Middle East, to find pearl shops and tea

shops where men still gather to play Dama’s classic game. Whether eating traditional Qatari food or getting whimsically bewildered in the labyrinth of people watching, the Souq is not to miss.

Qatar is also equally modern, as it is timeless. The sheer decadence and luxury found within Qatar’s hotels are reason enough to visit. Take The Mondrian Doha, in Doha’s West Bay Lagoon neighborhood. The property’s 270 rooms have views of the human-made Pearl Island. I enjoyed a luxurious detoxing massage much-needed swim in the penthouse pool. The hotel epitomizes dual elegance and creativity, described as Alice in Wonderland in real life, the whimsical architecture by famed Dutch designer Marcel Wanders. One misconception among Western tourists is that because Qatar is primarily governed under Sharia Law, there are zero legal drinking opportunities. However, five-star international hotels are allowed to sell alcohol to foreigners. Two Qatari hotspots are found in The Mondrian, Masaharu Morimoto’s new Morimoto Doha, and the bespoke Black Orchid club.

Finally, there are only two countries where the desert sand meets Qatar and Namibia’s ocean. Few things spike adrenaline more than a safari in a 4X4 through Qatar’s vast desert, about an hour and a half ride from Doha city center. The radio is blasting Arabian-French techno music as a white Land Cruiser picks up speed. The experienced guide smiles slightly mischievously and revs the engine before accelerating through this stunning natural oasis as the sound of sand descending the slopes overwhelms. Q-Explorer Tours is a professional tour operator that handles individual and group guided arrangements, catering to specific itinerary desires and budgets. In addition to dune bashing, the company provides many other opportunities to explore Qatar’s culture, gastronomy, and natural beauty. ■

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Dubai Dining and Michelin Guide

Today, food and drink is often the highlight, if not the reason, for travel. For those looking for their next foodie destination, Dubai offers a thriving food scene full of family-friendly cafes, celebrity restaurants and Instagrammable hotspots. From traditional Emirati cuisine to meals inspired by the rich cultures of the hundreds of nationalities living in Dubai, there is something for every type of taste. Delicious and authentic experiences recently opened in the destination include:

The new Lila Wood-fired Taqueria brings authentic Mexican flavors to Dubai on Jumeriah Beach Road. Operated by alumnus of the kitchens of Michelin Star chef Rick Bayless and protégé of culinary historian Diana Kennedy, chef Chaw Lash together with her partner Tarek Islam are bringing the first wood-fired taqueria to the Middle East that uses traditional culinary techniques to grind heirloom Mexican corn into masa for tortillas. Visitors can enjoy delicious street tacos and wood-grilled sharable entrees.

Opened in St.Regis Dubai, The Palm in January 2023, Rüya Dubai offers a taste of sophisticated, seasonal dishes from the Anatolian peninsula. Visitors can enjoy palette-pleasing flavors and visually appealing décor in a vivacious atmosphere. The restaurant's Head Chef, Gökhan Cokelez, hails from Anatolian region and is crafting unique dishes such as courgetti dolma (wild mushroom ragout, fennel, and oregano) and whole grilled seabream with spiced herb rub.

Bungalo34 instantly evokes holiday vibes serving up Mediterranean specials in a secluded setting overlooking the sea.

Located in Atlantis The Royal Dubai, Estiatorio Milos is known for its fresh seafood with options including wild oysters and delicate ceviche.

Transporting visitors back to the 1920s, Josette is one of the most Instagrammable dining spots in the destination with pastel-pink and deep green hues, opulent chandeliers and gold accents. French cuisine can be enjoyed in this charming atmosphere with menu options such as buttery rib-eye steak and crepes.

Additional well-known spots in Dubai include the Arabian Tea House in Al Bastakiya, providing traditional tea service; Orfali Bros, serving up a regularly-changing, seasonal menu of regional dishes with a twist; Ibn Albahar, offering Lebanese seafood; and SALT, a popular burger restaurant that has gained a group of loyal customers, or SALTERS.

The 2023 Dubai MICHELIN Guide includes 3 restaurants with two MICHELIN Stars, 11 restaurants with one MICHELIN Star, 3 restaurants with a MICHELIN Green Star, 17 Bib Gourmand restaurants, and 59 MICHELIN selected restaurants. ■

WWW.VISITDUBAI.COM



10 places to enjoy a relaxing holiday in Spain

If you'd like to avoid enormous cities and instead enjoy some peace and quiet, comfort and beautiful nature, these destinations will help you leave all of your stress and daily routine behind.

Costa Calma, Fuerteventura, the Canary Islands Stroll along the shores to enjoy the shallow turquoise waters or go on a bike ride!

Els Pujols, Formentera, the Balearic Islands Alongside the soft sandy beaches, you will find a beautiful and relaxing lagoon that opens into the sea.

Altea, the Valencian Community Travel back in time with the smell of the sea, ocean views and beautiful little spots connected by cobbled streets.

Tossa de Mar, the Costa Brava, Catalonia You can discover a light-house, ancient Roman walls that were rebuilt in AD 10 and restaurants where you can taste the area's delicious seafood.

The Cies Islands, Pontevedra, Galicia All of your stress will melt away as you explore the idyllic landscapes and beaches, some of the best in the world.

Anaga, Tenerife, the Canary Islands Take a stroll through a dense laurel forest that is home to giant lizards. You will find the most primitive nature hidden away in this northern part of the island.

Castropol, Asturias Enjoy some incredible sights on the right bank of the Eo Estuary, a town that was recognised with the Exemplary Town of Asturias award in 1997.

Soria, Castile and Leon Soak up the atmosphere of the medieval streets and its Romanesque architecture and listen to the famous song: Camino Soria, by the rock band Gabinete Caligari.

Alcalá del Júcar, Castile-La Mancha Marvel at this charming village located in a spectacular area with a Roman bridge and houses carved into the rocks.

Alcántara, Extremadura Experience this real-life beautiful postcard town for yourself as you watch the Tajo river flow under the Roman arched bridge, built between AD 103 and 104. ■

[HTTPS://WWW.SPAIN.INFO](https://www.spain.info)

A full-page photograph of the Great Sphinx of Giza under a blue sky with scattered white clouds. The Sphinx is the central focus, with its massive head and body visible. In the foreground, there are stone walls and a small obelisk-like structure.

THIS IS EGO



GIZA
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Family Road Tripping in New Hampshire's White Mountains

by Jennifer Merrick

Introverts are drawn to the mountains while extroverts prefer the beach, according to research done at the University of Virginia. If that's the case, we must be a family of introverts because some of our best vacations have been in the mountains.

This year's winter road trip to the White Mountains of New Hampshire was no exception. Part of the Appalachians, these jagged, granite mountains are arguably the most ruggedly beautiful in Eastern North America. They encompass 86 peaks, 48 of which are over 4000 feet with the iconic Mount Washington towering over them all at 6,288 feet. About 800,000 acres of this alpine wilderness form the White Mountain

National Forest, a federally protected park, offering a smorgasbord of recreational activities in all four seasons.

A hike to the Flume Gorge at Franconia Notch State Park was our family's first adventure in the Granite State (New Hampshire's nickname) and we were instantly enamoured. The lime green moss that covered the giant boulder contrasted against the dark green of the pines and bare branches of the hardwoods. The trail led to the gorge and after climbing down a small ladder, we were on the shores of a gushing waterfall that we had all to ourselves.

With over 6000 kilometers of trails, there are endless hiking opportunities to be had but a few to add to your list include: Diana's Bath, Crystal Cascades, Mount Chocorua and Blue Job Mountain Loop.

A Grand Family Resort

At the turn of the 20th century, there were approximately 30 grand hotels in New Hampshire, where wealthy socialites frolicked away the summer. Few remain today. But the Omni Mount Washington endures as grand as ever, its stately architecture nobly

standing in the midst of the snow-covered mountains.

Expansive renovations over the years have maintained its glory and ensured that every modern comfort and amenity is available to its guests. Outdoor activities on their extensive acreage are also a huge draw with golf and hiking in the summer and sleigh rides, cross-country and alpine skiing in winter. Families return year after year, said spokesperson, Craig Clemmer:

"The hotel's passion is really about family, about multi-generational travel and spending time together."



This Canadian family loved our time at this elegant but comfortable property. For myself the highlights were our scrumptious family meal together at Stickney's Restaurant as well the mountain views that seemed to greeted us wherever we happened to be in the hotel. The fave for our grown-up kids was the downhill skiing.

Skiing in the White Mountains

Owned by the Omni Mount Washington, Bretton Woods has New Hampshire's largest ski area with over 400 acres of skiing and snowboarding on 63 trails and 35 glades. Their recently added 8-passenger gondola was a smooth and comfortable way to reach the top. And even non-skiers can ride it to admire the views or lunch at Rosebrook Lodge. If Nordic skiing is more your style there's over 100 kms of groomed trails, including a loop a higher-altitude loop, accessible by ski lift.

Loon Mountain is another stellar choice for families, with a friendly atmosphere and lots of options for the less avid skiers. We tried their snow tubing, which was far from ordinary, equipped with brakes, steering and a ski lift to bring you to the top of the run.

Mountain Adventures

At Alpine Adventures we hopped into a Pinzgauer, a six-wheel drive Austrian military vehicle, for an off-road thrill ride into the snow covered forest.

"This vehicle will go through anything," our guide announced as reversed up a snowy hill. We held on tight as bounced through the snow-covered forest, stopping at look-out points and a treehouse, where we warmed up and watched as zip liners flew through the trees on the adventure company's cool winter ziplining course.

Our sleigh ride at Nestlenook Farm was a more relaxing excursion. With hot cider in gloves and sleigh bells ringing, we clip-clopped through the picturesque 65-acre estate that stretches along Ellis River. When conditions are right, there's also ice skating on Emerald Lake.

Kanc Winter Magic

Referred to affectionately as 'the Kanc' by locals, the famed Kancamagus Highway (Hwy 112) is a scenic byway beloved by bikers and motorists. We set off on it from Lincoln to North Conway from blithely



45

unaware what a treat was in store for us.

It had snowed all night and the mountains and forests were covered in a blanket of fresh, white powder. The higher we drove, the more enchanting the scenery became until I could stand it no longer.

"Stop the car!" I pleaded. We parked the car at the next stop, which happened to be the Hancock Trailhead. As we started to walk, surrounded by a canopy of white-dressed forest, I thought we had climbed out of the back of a wardrobe and into the land of Narnia. Our own snowy magical moment for our family of introverts.

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Beach
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RENTALS

Rejuvenate in Pompano Beach, Florida!

Top-Rated, Boutique, Extended-Stay Lodgings

Ready for a beach break and safer getaway option? Play or work remotely in the sun - away from crowds, hotel lobbies and depending on restaurants for every meal.

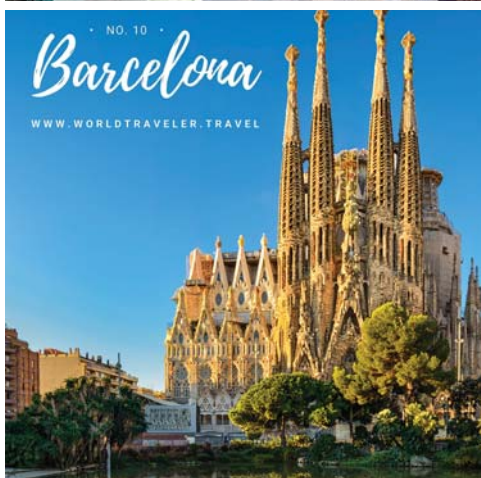
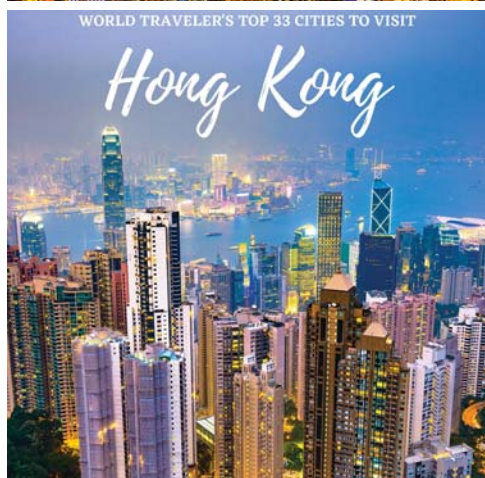
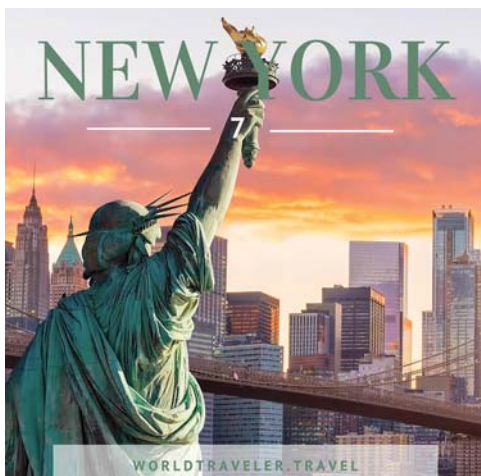
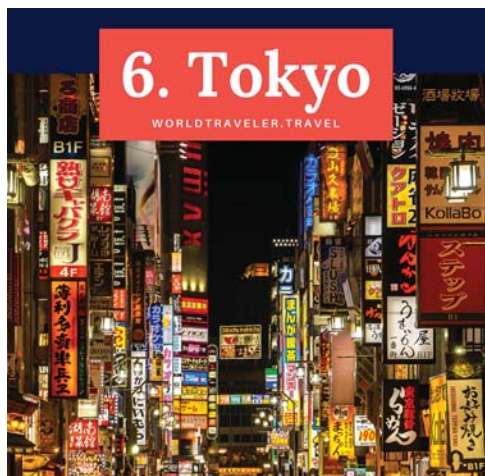
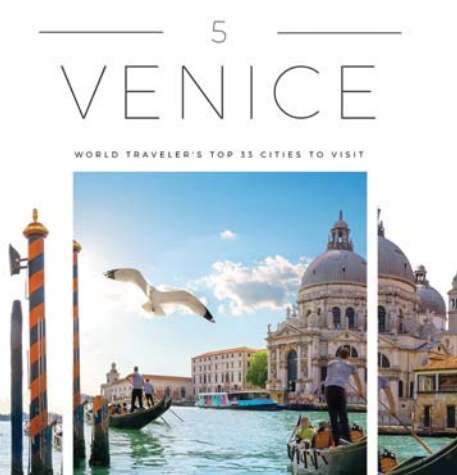
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Madrid

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PRAGUE

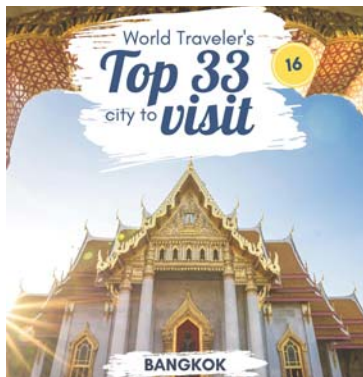
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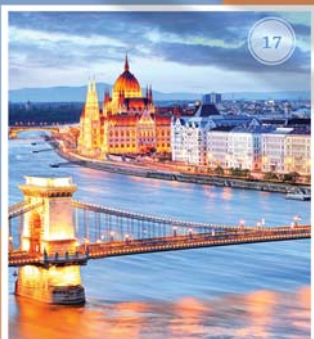
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Lisbon



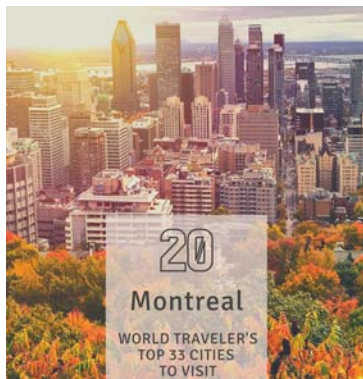
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Montreal

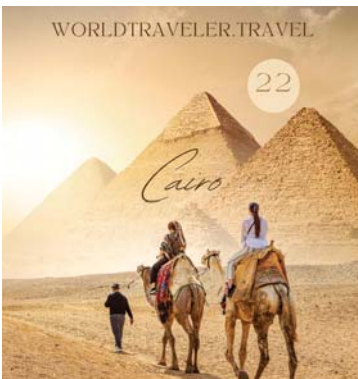
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Cairo



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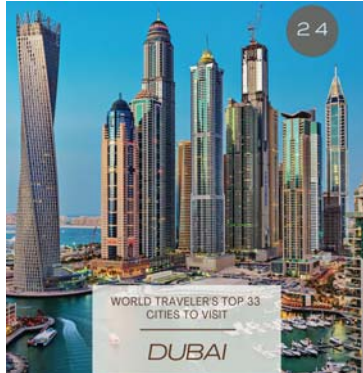
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**CAPE
TOWN**



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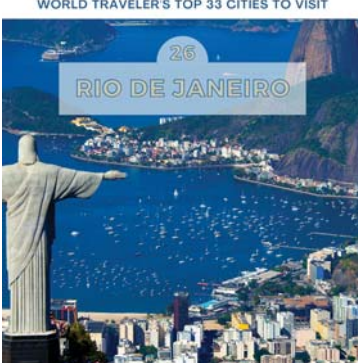
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RIO DE JANEIRO



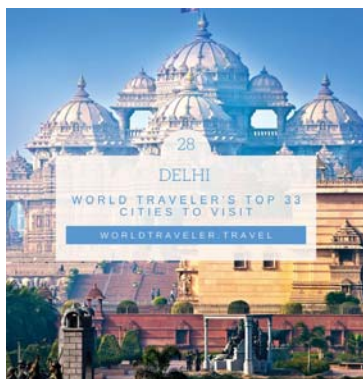
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SYDNEY

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Buenos Aires



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MEXICO CITY



A Journey of the Senses



At the crossroads of Europe and Asia is Istanbul, with a rich history spanning over two thousand years. Strategically located on the Bosphorus Strait, Istanbul is a vibrant city where east and west meet to create this unique cultural capital. Istanbul is home to an estimated 15 million inhabitants, built on seven hills, and topped by the minarets of over 3,000 mosques including the world-famous Blue Mosque and Hagia Sofia.

Mouth-watering tastes worth travelling for

It is the food that leaves the greatest impression. Traditional Anatolian staples such as doughy manti (dumpling), freshly squeezed juices sold on every street corner and sesame covered simit rolls, perfectly accompanied by Turkish çay (tea). The smell of fresh fish or rich Turkish coffee are often in the air.



Take flight in a hot air balloon at sunset

On everyone's bucket list should be a hot air balloon flight at sunrise. People travel to Cappadocia from all over the world to take part in this spectacular sight of hot air balloons making their gentle flight over the valleys and fairy chimneys, lit up by the rising sun. Accommodation ranges from cool and rustic cave hotels to elegant and luxurious houses. Traditional Turkish baths (hamams) in which to relax and unwind is also a highlight. During your stay, venture into underground cities, cave churches and the outdoor museums to learn more about the history of this special place. Cappadocia is also famous for its wine, and a must experience element of your meal.

The colourful Aegean coastal city of Izmir

In Western Anatolia on a bay of turquoise water is the Aegean coastal city of Izmir, where archaeological sites remind visitors of a rich history set against a backdrop of the hilltop Kadifekale castle. Spot one of the most famous landmarks of Izmir, the Clock Tower designed by French architect Raymond Charles Pere dating back to 1901. To enjoy the view and save your legs from the 155 steps connecting city streets, use the public elevator known as Asansör. Another alternative is the modern

European-style quarter of Karşıyaka which also offers excellent sea views. Notable nearby highlights are the enchanting ancient ruins of Ephesus, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. The nearby village of Çeşme is a charming gastro-nomic paradise with its whitewashed houses and blue painted windows.

Turkish food in Izmir has many influences and flavours for every palate. Izmir meatballs, called köfte, are enjoyed across Turkey, made lovingly with local spices and served in a tasty tomato sauce. Try local specialty Kumru, the perfect on-the-go snack of sausage, cheese and tomato served in bread, or the delicious pastry Boyoz, which can only be found in Izmir and should not be missed!



The luxurious ancient port city of Bodrum

Rugged, rolling mountains meet the shores of the crystal blue Aegean Sea in the small city of Bodrum. The Aegean coastal city is spread across a double bay, mixing ancient and modern history. The city is home to the ancient Greek city of Halicarnassus, site of the Tomb of Mausolus, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Along the coastline is the well-preserved medieval Bodrum Castle which offers superb views and is home to the Museum of Underwater Archaeology.

Renowned for its unique "sugar cube" houses, Bodrum is one of Turkey's gems and is fast becoming the first choice for holidaymakers the world over.

Escape to small villages or enjoy the extravagance of its many five-star hotels and bustling nightlife, Bodrum is the place where the green of the forest meets the clear blue waters of the Aegean Sea.

Make sure your flight is part of the vacation

Vacation time is precious, so make every minute count by starting your trip the moment you step onto the plane. The award-winning products and services of Turkish Airlines' Business Class provide an unparalleled experience with the utmost elegance. Prior to take off, passengers can benefit from extra baggage allowance, priority check-in and boarding, and access to Turkish Airlines Lounges.

Relax in exclusive seats, with massage functions, that convert your seat into a 188 cm flat bed. Delight in gourmet dishes prepared and cooked to your taste by Flying Chefs, and enjoy comfort kits to maximize your wellness on-board. Business Class also offers a cutting-edge in-flight entertainment system, films in different languages, a wide assortment of audio-books, a great range of music and much more. It boasts award-winning catering designed for any palate where you can enjoy international cuisine and local Turkish specialties such as 'pide' and 'börek' with fresh fruit juices and tea.

Whether you are enjoying the wonders of Turkey for several weeks or only a few days as part of the Turkish Airlines Stopover Program, Turkish hospitality and wonder awaits.

Are you ready to Widen Your World?



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Going Further With *Turkish Airlines*

Glowing reviews and exceptional food are the order of the day for this up-and-coming airline!

Part of the Star Alliance network, Turkish airlines (THY) offers service to Canadians from Toronto and Montreal, and connections to destinations all over the world from their hub in Istanbul.

Building on their international reputation, THY has been climbing the ranks as a top provider and doing very well in Canada.

With 321 destinations, and adding new ones at a rapid pace, THY welcome travellers with smiles and a friendly hello, though often with a charming accent!

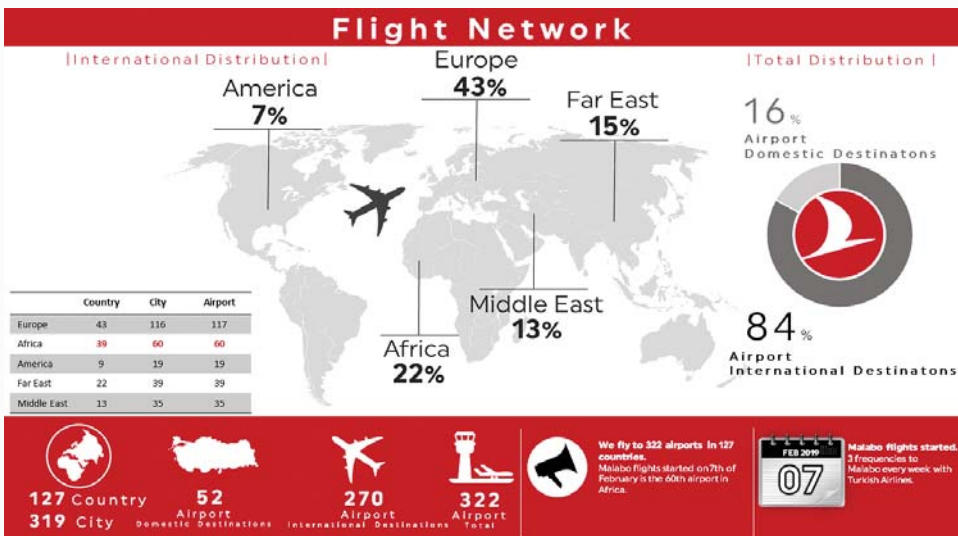
Their aircraft include A330s, A340s, B777s, B737-800s and B727-800s, all well maintained and laid-out with the customer in mind. Each section is designed with creature comforts taking front and centre. The seats throughout the plane are comfortable and the facilities are kept impeccably clean and

organized. Most Business Class passengers can expect either fully lie-flat seats or angled lie-flat seats that brings relaxation to a higher level.

Comfort Class is Turkish Airlines' premium economy section is highlighted by slightly larger seats configured in two-by-three-by-two rows, a large video screen and entertainment system with an iPod outlet and a laptop power outlet for each seat.

Even passengers traveling in Economy Class can enjoy an above average trip, as all passengers enjoy the famed THY complimentary meal. Though multi-course meals are provided in Business Class on extended range flights, all passengers are treated to the award winning food served on board. Considering that THY deals with one of the world's biggest (maybe the biggest) catering service and are partners with Do & Co., there is no surprise in the quality THY can offer!

WWW.TURKISHAIRLINES.COM





Tropical Tidbits

by Sue C Travel

Island Hopping the ABCs

The Dutch Caribbean islands of Aruba, Bonaire, and Curacao (The ABCs) are all outside of the hurricane belt and offer year-round perfect weather. English is widely spoken, and they are all safe, and tourist friendly. And recently, they all seem to be competing to offer more cool things to do! And though they're very close to each other, and share many cultural similarities,

they offer very different holiday experiences. Unfortunately, bopping around between these islands is not as easy as ABC. There are no ferries between them. Small regional airlines are your only option. So, I wouldn't recommend trying to do all three in a one-week holiday. You'll spend more time in airports than you will in the air. But here are a few recommendations if you want to island-hop on holiday from any of them.

Aruba-Curacao (or vice-versa)

If Aruba's your base, you'll find plenty to do in a week beyond fun in the sun and sand on their world class beaches. But if you're curious about its closest sister Curacao, and you have more than a week, a one-night, two-day visit will give you a good preview.





Fly over early and stay at an economical central spot in Willemstad like the Bed and Bike Hotel in Pietermaai. They offer bicycles to help you explore. (So very Dutch!) They are within easy reach of Curacao's colorful historic UNESCO World Heritage Sites and the incredible new outdoor art in the neighborhoods of Punda, Otrobanda, and Scharloo. Don't miss the new Kura Hulanda square and so many fascinating museums around downtown, too. For dinner out, Pietermaai district has some of the best foodie haunts and fun local nightlife within walking distance of your hotel. If you want to explore Curacao's wilder side take the "All West Beach Hopping Tour" with Irie Tours, it's a fabulous overview of the island's natural coastal treasures. And do take a side trip to the Curacao Sea Aquarium to learn all about the island's vibrant marine life.



If Curacao's your base, book an early flight to 'One Happy Island' and stay at an economical spot like the Hyatt Place Aruba Airport Hotel. Rent a car for your two-day stay. Aruba is the smallest of the ABCs (65 sq. miles), and all its best attractions are within easy reach by short car trips. (Including Arikok National Park- a must visit natural preserve.) All the beaches are free and open to the public, and you can visit all the best ones on the same day! You'll also want to drive to San Nicolas (15 minutes from the airport) to experience their incredible art walk. The entire town is now an exciting outdoor gallery.

The historic capital of Oranjestad is also well worth exploring. Book an outing with Aruba Walking Tours to retrace its history that includes a stop at the archeological museum as well as a local cooking demo. After dark, head to Renaissance Marketplace downtown for dozens of night-clubs/ cafes, outdoor entertainment, and glitzy casinos, or head to the famous Palm Beach strip for more of the same electric nightlife.

Curacao- Bonaire (or vice versa)

Also, if Curacao is your base, hop the 10-15-minute flight to sister island Bonaire to experience the differences. Though the 'B' of the ABCs is the second largest in land-mass, it's the smallest in population, and the least developed of the three. A true pioneer in eco-preservation, all the brilliant aqua waters surrounding the island are protected by law. This island is best known globally as being a shore diver's paradise, but the conditions of its brilliant Lac Bay also make it one of the best places in the world to learn to windsurf. But even if neither sport is your cup of tea, there are lots of reasons to visit this unique outpost.

Take an early flight and grab a cab to Divi Flamingo Beach Resort & Casino a few minutes away. It's right downtown on the sea and offers excellent snorkeling right at their beach bar! They are very committed to coral restoration, too. Divi's side entrance leads right to the colorful little



capital of Kralendijk which is easily walkable on foot. Within walking distance are the water taxis to Klein Bonaire by Epic Tours, an uninhabited little island just across the bay boasting Bonaire's most glorious beach. Or visit the island's best snorkel sites with some fun party people on the new Lady Bella's wooden schooner. Or, if you'd rather see the resplendent reefs without getting wet, hop aboard the adorable little red Bon Sea Semi-Submarine.

To venture further afield, rent a golf cart from Bonaire Cruisers and travel to the surreal scene of wild flamingos cresting a pink lake flanked by towering mountains of sea salt nearby. (Cargill Salt Works operates there.) Or rent a 4-wheel drive with Bon Bini Rentals to explore the rugged, arid cacti-studded Washington Slagbaai National Park. Stop at the island's oldest village Rincon on the way to sample the world's only liqueur made from cactus at the Cadushy Distillery. Their tasting garden there is a pure delight. Then, sample some fabulous authentic local food like goat stew and pumpkin pancakes at Posada Para Mira. And closer to downtown, there is surprisingly high-end gourmet fare at spots like Brass Boer and Foodies. There's so much more to do on Bonaire than diving.

Or, if you're planning to spend a month in the Dutch Caribbean, plan to bop around back and forth between them all! The ABCs offer a colorful kaleidoscope of cool things to do under the tropical sun. ■

Visit the islands' tourism board sites at:

WWW.ARUBA.COM

[HTTPS://BONAIREISLAND.COM](https://BONAIREISLAND.COM)

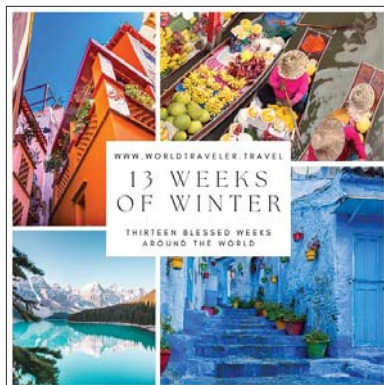
WWW.CURACAO.COM



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.

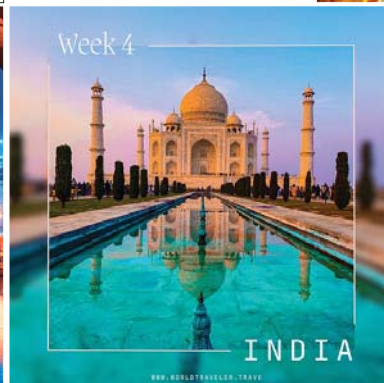
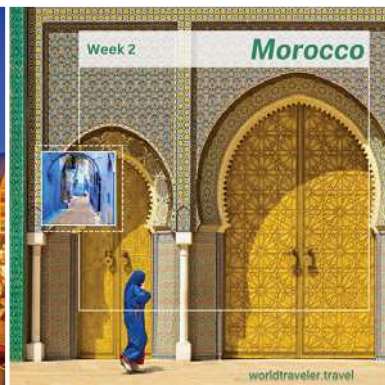
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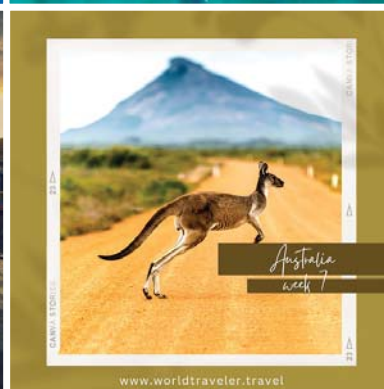
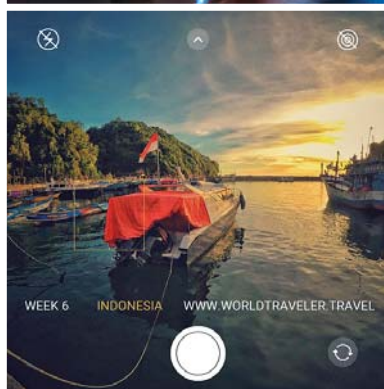
World Traveler's

thirteen
weeks of
winter
travel

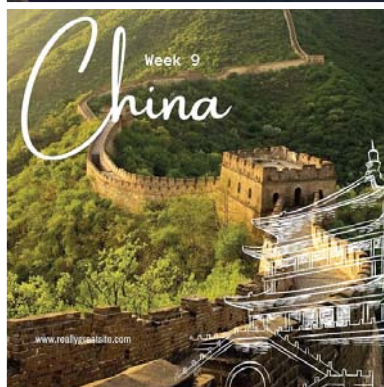
as posted on our
social media pages



around the
world in
thirteen
weeks



dream
plan
go!



bring your partner or
leave your partner behind

bring the kids or send the
kids to the in-laws

tell the boss to...
(in gentle terms) take it
or leave it!



make it
happen!

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This photo: Viking Ocean Ships in Valletta, Malta



Sail The World!



Celebrity Cruises Continues Caribbean Expansion of New Itineraries Bringing Four Ships to Three Florida Ports

Celebrity Cruises has unveiled all-new Caribbean offerings for the Winter 2024-2025 season on board four stellar ships – Celebrity Apex, Celebrity Constellation, Celebrity Equinox, and Celebrity Summit.

Embarking from three Florida ports: Central Florida's Port Canaveral, West Florida's Port Tampa Bay, and South Florida's Port Everglades, travelers will enjoy more than 40 new itineraries, all open for booking. Catering to the diverse needs of today's consumer, the new program offers a wide range of experiences, from rejuvenating quick getaways to weekly 7-night cruises, and up to 9-night escapes. Transporting guests to tropical hotspots from Belize and Bimini to Grand Cayman and San Juan, a select number of itineraries also offer the opportunity to visit Perfect Day at CocoCay. ■

WWW.CELEBRITYCRUISES.COM



UnCruise Adventures Unveils Exciting New Routes and Deployment Changes for 2024 and 2025

UnCruise Adventures, the trailblazer of the Small Ship Expedition Niche, continues to set the pace with new itineraries.

Newly Added and Expanded Routes: Alaska's Northern Lights and Winter Sports, Canadian Coastal and Olympic National Park Adventure, Aleutian Islands Adventure with Kodiak, Katmai & Kenai Fjords National

Park, Aleutian Islands Adventure with Alaska's Peninsula & Prince William Sound, Prince William Sound Explorer, Inside Passage with Glacier Bay & Olympic National Park, Alaska's Wild, Woolly and Wow, Kids in Nature, Glaciers & Wildlife Family Explorer, Glaciers & Tranquility, Alaska's Adult-Only Adventure, Northern Gulf of California, Whales, Birds & Sealife Adventure. ■

[HTTPS://UNCruise.COM](https://UNCruise.COM)



Explora I Sets Sail on Her Maiden Journey

EXPLORA I, the first ship to join the fleet of Explora Journeys, the luxury lifestyle brand of the MSC Group, has commenced her maiden journey on August 1, for a seven-night sailing that will take guests through the majestic landscapes of Lerwick, Shetland Islands and Kirkwall, Orkney before heading to Reykjavik, Iceland.

The luxury ship will spend several weeks in Northern Europe to offer a range of different itineraries and will then cross the Atlantic Sea and spend the winter in North America and the Caribbean Sea before returning to Europe in Summer 2024 for voyages in the Mediterranean Sea.

EXPLORA II is currently being built in Italy and will come into service in August 2024. EXPLORA III will become the first of two LNG (liquefied natural gas) powered vessels to join the Explora Journeys' fleet with the ship due to be delivered in 2026 and EXPLORA IV in 2027. ■

[HTTPS://EXPLORAJOURNEYS.COM](https://EXPLORAJOURNEYS.COM)

Viking's Newest Nile River Ship Named in Aswan

The 82-Guest Viking Aton Joins Company's Growing Egypt Fleet Amidst Strong Demand



Viking has recently named its newest river ship, the Viking Aton, with a special celebration in Aswan, Egypt. The ship's ceremonial godfather, Richard Riveire, designer of Viking's award-winning river, ocean and expedition vessels and founding Principal of internationally acclaimed interior design firm Rottet Studio, offered a blessing of good fortune and safe sailing for the ship—an evolution of the naval tradition dating back to thousands of years. The Viking Aton, an identical sister ship of the Viking Osiris, is a state-of-the-art vessel specifically built to navigate the Nile and will sail Viking's popular Pharaohs & Pyramids itinerary.

The Viking Aton & Viking's Growing Egypt Fleet

Hosting 82 guests in 41 staterooms, the new Viking Aton is inspired by Viking's award-winning river and ocean ships with the elegant Scandinavian design for which Viking is known. The Viking Aton is the identical sister ship to the Viking Osiris, which was named in 2022 by Viking's first ceremonial godfather, the 8th Earl of Carnarvon. The sister ships feature several aspects familiar to Viking guests, such as a distinctive square bow and an indoor/outdoor Aquavit Terrace. The Viking Aton joins Viking's growing fleet built specifically for the Nile. In addition to the Viking Aton and the Viking Osiris, identical sister ships the Viking Hathor and the Viking Sobek, are under construction and will be delivered in 2024 and 2025, respectively. Additional ships in the Egypt fleet currently include the Viking Ra and the MS Antares; by 2025, Viking will have six ships sailing the Nile River. ■

WWW.VIKING.COM

New Seabourn Pursuit, Seabourn's Second Ultra-Luxury Purpose-Built Expedition Ship, Embarks on its First Voyage, Sailing to the Kimberly Region and South Pacific Over the Next Year



Seabourn Pursuit, the second ultra-luxury expedition ship for Seabourn, embarked on its first voyage and welcomed its first guests on board on Saturday, August 12, 2023. The ship kicked off its maiden year with an eight-day voyage from Valletta, Malta, to Rome.

Seabourn Pursuit is the second of two new expedition vessels from Seabourn, the leader in ultra luxury and expedition travel, launched in the past two years. The ship is purpose-built and designed to provide guests who are looking for out of the ordinary experiences combined with life-expanding moments in exquisite, ultra-luxury comfort. The ship will also offer the many Seabourn amenities and services guests know and cherish, such as the line's renowned fine dining options, entertainment, luxurious suites and personalized, intuitive service by the onboard team.

Seabourn Pursuit offers the same luxurious "yacht like" small ship experience that travelers have come to expect from Seabourn, enhanced by world-class equipment that allows the line to offer its widest range of expedition activities led by an expert 24-person expedition team of scientists, scholars, naturalists, and more. Designed and built for remote, diverse environments to PC6 Polar Class standards, the ship includes a plethora of modern hardware and technology that extends the ship's global deployment and capabilities.

Seabourn Pursuit, like the rest of the ships in the Seabourn fleet, offers an abundance of space and elegance, eight dining facilities serving gourmet cuisine, and luxurious all-suite accommodations, including a pair of two-level Wintergarden suites. ■

WWW.SEABOURN.COM

Hurtigruten Norway Unveils its First Zero-Emission Cruise Ship: World's Most Energy-Efficient Cruise Vessel



Weeks before its 130th anniversary, Hurtigruten Norway unveiled plans for its first zero-emission ship. Initially announced in March 2022, under project name 'Sea Zero,' the first-of-its-kind initiative has revealed early concept plans for the world's most energy-efficient cruise ship. Hurtigruten Norway presented the findings alongside its consortium of 12 maritime partners and research institute SINTEF, all joined in the pursuit of achieving emission-free marine travel. Tasked with developing energy-efficient and carbon-neutral technology solutions, the consortium shared key findings following its first year of research.

In line with their focus on sustainable operations tailored to the Norwegian coast, Hurtigruten Norway plans for smaller, custom-built ships that leave a positive footprint with zero emissions to both sea and land. With the first ship ready in 2030, the company plans to transform its entire fleet into zero-emission vessels. Since only 0.1% of ships worldwide currently use zero-emission technology, Hurtigruten Norway's project aims to drastically improve the greater cruise industry's sustainability record and future of travel.

Hurtigruten Norway's future ships will be electric and equipped with batteries that charge in port. Combining 60-megawatt hour battery solutions with wind technology, the vessel is expected to feature numerous firsts and improved solutions that do not exist on cruise ships today, including retractable sails with solar panels, artificial intelligence maneuvering, contra-rotating propellers, and multiple retractable thrusters. Additional technologies include air lubrication, advanced hull coating, and proactive hull cleaning.

The three retractable, autonomous wing rigs will comprise 1500m² (16,146 ft²) of solar panels and a total wind surface of 750m² (8,073 ft²), reaching a maximum height of 50m (164 ft) when fully extended. ■

WWW.HURTIGRUTEN.COM

Embrace the Adventurous Side in South America & Antarctica with the 2024-2025 Princess Cruises Season



Majestic Princess Debuts and Sapphire Princess Returns Showcasing Otherworldly Landscapes, Vast Antarctic Tundra, and Chilean Fjords

As a growing number of travelers mull the allure of Antarctica, Princess Cruises today unveiled four exciting voyages planned for the Seventh Continent for the 2024-2025 season.

In 2024-25 Sapphire Princess will again sail guests to some of the world's most dramatically diverse landscapes with the opportunity to get swept away by the breathtaking beauty of Antarctica, the charm of the Falkland Islands' penguins and incredible vistas of Elephant Island, Antarctic Sound and Gerlache Strait. As the top-rated large ship cruise line in the region, only Princess offers guests an up-close look at the wonders of the white continent while enjoying large ship comfort and small ship personalization at a fraction of the price of explorer ships.

With two ships, 26 destinations and 14 countries, the 2024-2025 season includes 15 total departures on 11 unique itineraries. New this season is a 17-day Antarctica voyage sailing roundtrip from Buenos Aires, featuring an overnight in this vibrant homeport. In addition, for guests looking for the ultimate exploration, a 51-day South America Grand Adventure awaits sailing on Majestic Princess between Los Angeles and Ft. Lauderdale, highlighted with overnight stays in Lima, Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro. ■

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A Le Boat Family Adventure on the Nivernais Canal, France

by Jennifer Merrick

If you're looking for a carefree all-inclusive cruise vacation with every meal taken care of and nothing to think about except maybe what excursion to choose or when to book a massage, Le Boat is not for you. But if you're up for an adventure and looking for an authentic travel experience that will take you off the beaten tourist path and immerse you in a destination, then book Le Boat for your next vacation.

The company, which has been operating for over 50 years, specializes in self-operating houseboats with bases all over Europe and on the Rideau Canal in Canada. Its biggest fleet is in France, covering nine regions

across the country, each with their own heritage, attractions and charms.

They all looked so inviting, it was hard to choose, but we eventually decided on the Burgundy region. About 150 kilometers southwest of Paris, this historical destination in the heart of the country is famous for its vineyards, chateaux, medieval villages, colorful gardens and bucolic countryside. In the end, we decided to cruise the Nivernais Canal from the town of Migennes to Tannay.

The canal, built between 1784 and 1841, links the Loire with the Seine and was originally constructed for transporting wood from

the forest to Paris. Today it's used purely for pleasure, and boaters navigate its locks and tunnels to enjoy the beauty and charm of one of the prettiest waterways in Europe. Some are experienced skippers who have adopted houseboating as a way of life in much the same way as RVers while others are novices with little or no experience.

Houseboats are a learning curve at the beginning. There's the maneuvering, the workings of the tanks, cooling system and, most intimidating, the navigation of the locks. These aren't small boats, after all. On this trip, we sailed the Royal Classique, which had three bedrooms, three bathrooms, a living area and kitchen. But luckily, not only do





renters get a detailed orientation and are guided through the first lock, the boat has thick rubber bumper pads around its circumference. We had already done a fabulous Le Boat cruise on the Rideau Canal three years ago, and so we were familiar with the workings of the boat and the canal system. But we were a little apprehensive about boating in France.

Would our French be good enough? Would our university-aged kids be bored with the rural setting? Would we be ignored by the locals? We needn't have worried. Communication wasn't an issue, the 'kids' loved it, and locals made us feel welcome (one kind monsieur even gave us some freshly-picked cherry tomatoes from his garden).

We quickly embraced the rhythm of house-boating. Mornings we cruised, coffee in hand, before the afternoon heat hit. Afternoons were for baguette buying, lunch-

ing, biking and sightseeing. Early evenings, we usually navigated a few more locks before mooring for the night. Each site was different. Some were in natural settings that had nearby campgrounds and dark star-filled nights with sounds of wildlife while others were in the center of medieval towns, within walking distance of architectural marvels. Late evening activities depended on location, so some nights we'd dine in town while others we'd swim at a nearby watering hole. But the end of the night was always the same --we'd pour ourselves a glass of a local libation, and after toasting the day, we pulled out the charts and the suggested itinerary to plan our next day on the water.

Some of the best moments of the trip were random: a recommended restaurant in the tiniest of towns, where we had the best French meal of our trip, exchanges with locals and other boaters, and simply watching the scenery pass by. The fields of sunflowers were particularly breathtaking as was the great blue heron who took off in front of us. Other highlights were recommended in the itinerary that's provided on Le Boat's website and include the stellar attractions that the region is known for. If you decide to cruise the Nivernais Canal, and I strongly suggest you do, here are a few sights you won't want to miss:

Auxerre – With its cobblestoned main square, half-timbered buildings and 15th century clock tower, this medieval town is exactly the image that comes to mind when you think of Europe. As it's situated right along the canal, we were able to moor right in the center of Auxerre to explore its treasures. The Saint Etienne Cathedral, which took over three centuries to build, is particularly impressive with its Gothic archways, 13th-century stained glass and ancient crypt.

Caves de Bailly Lapierre – The coolest experience of our boating vacation took place in this underground quarry that holds millions of bottles of Crémant de Bourgogne, the region's celebrated sparkling wine. And by cool, I mean 12 degrees Celsius cool, which is the temperature of these subterranean chambers even on a hot summer day. The crisp air felt heavenly, and we immediately signed up for the six-euro tour and learned about Burgundy's wines, the history of these

cellars, and the labour intensive process of producing Crémant. A tasting culminated the experience, and the minute the bubbles danced on my palette, it became my new favourite sparkling. Sorry, Prosecco.

Nivernais Canal Cycle Path – With bikes on board, it was fun and easy to ride on the 190-kilometre trail that ran parallel to the canal.

Hostellerie de la Fontaine – The lockmaster (the person in charge of the canal lock) raved about this restaurant so much that we thought perhaps her relatives owned it, or she was receiving a kickback. But after our meal at this cozy restaurant in the tiny hamlet of Accolay, I completely understood her enthusiasm. It was French cuisine at its best with local specialties like escargot, trout and meat and produce from nearby farms. The service was impeccable, and even included the suave flourish of lifting the cloche cover off the entrée at the table. Amazingly, there was no sticker shock at the end and the price was on par with other meals. We raved about it so much to the next boaters we encountered they probably thought we were getting a kickback.

Vézelay – This inspired hillside village was the only sight we weren't able to walk to from our boat, but it was absolutely worth the 20-minute taxi ride to see it. We felt as though we were walking in a postcard as we climbed the winding, cobbled street exploring the ateliers, boutiques, art galleries and cafes. At the top was the awe-inspiring Basilica of Saint-Marie-Madeleine, a UNESCO World Heritage Site built in the time of the crusades. Its grounds were equally stunning with colourful rose gardens and a panoramic vista of the countryside.

Rochers du Saussois – These 50-metre-high limestone cliffs along the canal dwarfed our boat as we cruised by. Rock climbers have been challenging themselves here since the 1950s, and we spotted a few making their way to top.

I imagine it's not the most carefree thing to do on vacation, but I bet they had fun. ■

[HTTPS://WWW.LEBOAT.COM/](https://www.leboat.com/)



Cruising Eastern Canada Waters

An Unforgettable Journey With Holland America

by Olivia Liveng



Cruises have often been stereotyped as a leisurely getaway with buffet tables and late-night card games. However, there's a dynamic transformation unfolding in the cruising world. As new ships launch and older ones get revamped, the amenities and experiences onboard evolve to reflect contemporary tastes. The essence of adventure and rejuvenation is beckoning travelers of all backgrounds and ages to embark upon the open seas. This new wave of cruising is not just about destinations but also about the journey itself. My husband, Jonathan, and I were among those enticed by the siren call of the waves.

Amid the vast array of available destinations, we plotted our course for an Eastern Canada expedition aboard Holland America's *Zaandam*. While the thought of road-tripping was something we discussed briefly, it faded when the allure of the ocean beckoned (and we realized just how complex planning a road trip for some of the more remote destinations we wanted to access!) What cruises offer, especially in today's age, is an elegant fusion of exploration and luxury – a floating hotel with ever-changing views. And for us, the choice to set sail was clear.

Navigating the Ports with Precision

Crafting the perfect cruise itinerary is an art form. Beyond the onboard activities and entertainment, the selection of ports, the excursions they offer, and the stopover duration can dramatically shape the nature of your adventure. Ports that are easily accessible with rich histories or unique local cultures can turn a good cruise into an unforgettable one. Holland America's *Zaandam*, in its wisdom, seemed to have privileged positions at every port. Docking in the heart of cities like picturesque Quebec, with its cobbled streets and European charm, added layers to our adventure.

The iconic Le Château Frontenac became a serene backdrop for our mornings. At the same time, Montreal, with its vibrant arts scene and culinary delights, offered both the convenience and charm of urban life. To think of walking the old town, sampling local cheeses, and then embarking on a ship with hot poutine in hand – it's a traveler's dream.



Ensure a Smooth Start with an Early Arrival

Any seasoned traveler will vouch for the unpredictabilities of journeying – flight delays, misplaced luggage, sudden weather changes. Mitigating these uncertainties ensures that you start your journey stress-free. Therefore, we decided to anchor ourselves in Montreal a day before our cruise. The city, with its fusion of old-world charm and modern vibrancy, set the perfect tone for our upcoming journey. Those famed Montreal bagels, our charming attempts at speaking French, and the majestic beauty of the Saint Lawrence River at dusk were only precursors to the wonders ahead.

Travel Light, Travel Right

The essence of any fulfilling travel is not in quantity but in quality. In a world where it's easy to get caught up in the whirlwind of must-dos, we chose the path of minimalism. Each port brought myriad possibilities, but instead of cramming our schedule, we let spontaneity guide us. Meandering through the Canadian port cities at our own pace, we found hidden gems in alleyways, had unexpected conversations with locals, and found joy in observing life around us.

The Nightlife on Board

The *Zaandam* truly comes alive when the sun sets, and the ship's lights reflect on the tranquil waters. Onboard activities range from theatrical performances and live music to dance parties and themed nights. The blend of international passengers also makes for vibrant and diverse evenings. Some nights, we engaged in deep conversations with fellow travelers, sharing stories and forging connections.

Unravel the Wonders of the Kids Club

For families, ensuring that young ones are entertained is crucial. Holland America's Kids Club is not just a play area but a hub of creativity and learning. From arts and crafts workshops to storytelling sessions and treasure hunts, the activities are designed to engage and educate.



Relish a Post-Cruise Respite

While the cruise itself is a whirlwind of experiences, allowing the magic to settle is essential. For this reason, we opted to spend a few additional days in Boston. With its blend of colonial history and modern innovation, this historic city was the perfect bookend to our journey. Our chosen accommodation, The Boston Harbor Hotel, proved pivotal to enriching our Boston experience. Ideally located within walking distance of Boston's signature attractions, it allowed us to explore effortlessly. Moreover, the hotel's onsite restaurant, Rowes Wharf Sea Grill, became our favorite harborside spot. Here, we indulged in modern culinary twists like the lobster bao while enjoying the lively ambiance of waterfront people-watching.

Setting Sail Once More

Our journey aboard Holland America's *Zaandam* was an intoxicating blend of leisure, exploration, and rejuvenation. As the Boston skyline faded and the magnificent *Zaandam* receded from view, it left an indelible mark on our hearts. In this new era, we realized that cruising is more than a vacation; it's a voyage of discovery.

To all seasoned and budding adventurers, here's my message: Dive into the world of cruises. Amidst the gentle sway of the sea and under moonlit skies, your next unforgettable journey awaits. The oceans are vast, and their stories are countless. Set sail, and write your own. ■

WWW.HOLLANDAMERICA.COM





Aurora Expeditions: Costa Rica Through the Panama Canal

by Nicholas Kontis

While I never tire of cruising, some voyages are more memorable than others. One such journey was a 14-day Central American excursion through the Panama Canal, from Costa Rica's Pacific shore to historic Cartagena on Colombia's Caribbean coast.

My wife and I traveled in April 2022 with Australia's award-winning Aurora Expeditions aboard its Greg Mortimer expedition ship. Before and after our canal transit, our cruise hugged the verdant jungle coastlines of Costa Rica and Panama enroute to Colombia.

Highlights

- Luxury accommodation aboard the custom-built Greg Mortimer
- Extraordinary flora and fauna on the Pacific coasts of Costa Rica and Panama
- Protected marine life in the sanctuary of Coiba National Park
- An indigenous community of Embera people in remote Darien National Park
- A tour of Panama's "Old Town" with its striking multicolored structures
- A daytime crossing of the Panama Canal
- The Afro-Caribbean vibe of Cartagena de Indias, Colombia

Along the 'Rich Coast'

As a land bridge between North and South America, Central America contains a wealth of flora and fauna from both continents. At its heart is Costa Rica, a nation whose name translates to "Rich Coast." About the size of West Virginia, it brims with an abundance of wildlife in national parks designed as eco-

playgrounds. Proud of its pura vida (Pure Life), Costa Rica is home to 5% of the world's species — even though it covers a mere .03% of the Earth's surface. Beaches along both the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea offer surfing and snorkeling.

Arriving in the capital city of San José, we stayed at the Doubletree by Hilton Cariari, as arranged by Aurora Expeditions. We always arrive a day or two before sailing to acclimate to our surroundings and, in this case, to explore the colonial capital.

Aboard the Greg Mortimer

Aurora Expeditions was the brainchild of Greg Mortimer, an intrepid explorer and moun-



taineer who launched the company in 1985 to share his passion with friends and family. In Antarctica, he pioneered ship-based adventures in which cruise guests could enjoy sea kayaking, snorkeling, scuba diving or even climbing.

His namesake ship, the stately Greg Mortimer, was built in 2019 for the expressed purpose of traveling the waters of the polar regions. State-of-the-art technology, notably a Norwegian-designed Ulstein X-Bow, assures smooth sailing through the waters of Drake's Passage and Greenland's surrounding seas. When we hit a storm between Panama and Cartagena, this feature definitely calmed the ship.

We boarded the Greg Mortimer in Puerto Caldera after a comfortable bus ride west from San José. At a length of 104 meters (341 feet), the vessel welcomes up to 160 guests. (The average number is 132, though there were a mere 32 on our trip.) There are six spacious passenger decks, eight observation decks, two sun decks, a library, a pool with a pool bar, and two jacuzzis.

We were briefed on each day's activities in the lecture theater. The mudroom was the center of operations for zodiac trips to nearby rainforests and islands: Fifteen of the rubber craft served the ship.

And at the end of each day's activities, we enjoyed drinks in the Elephant Bar and a piano bar, and explored a gift shop for Aurora-logo keepsakes as well as caps, sunscreen, wet bags and toiletries.

Given the ship's nonstop schedule, I doubt many guests were able to take advantage of the gym or spa. I couldn't even find time for a massage. My wife and I remained healthy for the entire journey, but we were secure in knowing that a doctor and medical team were aboard in the event of illness or accident.

Wildlife and native tribes

Costa Rica and Panama are ecological treasure troves of UNESCO-honored national parks. First in Manuel Antonio National Park, then in the lush tropical rainforests of the Osa Peninsula and Corcovado, we saw lazy sloths, cacophonous rainbow-billed toucans, and wailing spider, capuchin, squirrel and howler monkeys. Myriad species of birds, iguanas

and snakes accented our hikes.

In the Golfo Dolce, we boarded zodiacs for a three-hour tour to Saladero, where acrobatic dolphins gave us a full display of their athleticism. In Coiba National Marine Park, we had the option of kayaking or paddleboarding inside the bay.

In Panama we visited a community of indigenous Embera Indians. The 100-or-so people allow visitors a glimpse into their everyday lives. I found this day trip to be mostly genuine, although some of my group questioned the authenticity and wondered if it was simply an opportunity for natives to sell handicrafts and trinkets.

A man, a plan, a canal: Panama

Panama is the only place in the world where you can see the sun rise on the Pacific and set in the Atlantic from the same spot. Its vibrant capital, Panama City, is the only capital city in the world with a rainforest within its city limits.

On a guided city tour, we explored the picturesque old quarter of Casco Viejo. The Miraflores Locks visitor center provided a glimpse into the operation and history of the Panama Canal. I learned that Lake Gatun is the world's largest manmade lake after Lake Mead (on the Nevada-Arizona-California border).

The journey's highlight was the daylight crossing of the canal (30 nautical miles, 57 kilometers) from the Pacific Ocean to the Caribbean Sea. I was excited to witness the workings of the famous canal up-close, while crossing Balboa, Miraflores, Pedro Miguel, Culebra Cut, the Chagres River, Lake Gatun, Gatun Locks and Limon Bay at Colón.

Cartagena, Colombia

The cruise ended in Cartagena de Indias, on Colombia's sun-splashed Caribbean coast. After a guided tour of the city, we disembarked for one last night at the Hilton Cartagena, an outstanding beachfront property with four outdoor pools.

Although relatively small in stature, this historic port city cradles nearly 500 years of colonial charm. It is intoxicating, making an early exit almost unfathomable. My wife and I stayed in the enchanting walled city for an extra five days. Then we flew to Medellín for five more days, to explore more of Colombia.

The human element

Ultimately, it was the people I met who will create the most lasting memories. In particular, the international team of guides and naturalists made it unforgettable.

Costa Rican Conrad Weston is a photographer and naturalist. His knowledge of bird species is nothing short of remarkable. On

jungle hikes in Manuel Antonio and Corcovado, Conrad pointed out birds in trees that the average eye would never find.

British biologist and destination expert Phoebe Edge was always accessible. No question was a burden. "The sea has a way of enchanting us, capturing our imagination and intriguing us with mysteries of the unexplored, so embrace every moment," this wise scientist reminded us.

Austrian hotel director Franz Wusits and his team were a joy to be around, as were the rest of the 56 crew and 18 additional staff. A Jamaican chef and Peruvian food-and-beverage manager oversaw three meals a day, and special needs were easily answered — including my wife's request for gluten-free, dairy-free meals.

Notes and tips

A recurring theme on this expedition, and any such journey in the sun, is to stay hydrated. Aurora gives each guest a water bottle and filling stations are available on each deck. I was reminded to bring sunscreen, mosquito repellent, a raincoat, a change of footwear for wet landings, and binoculars to capture the unexpected at a distance.

Don't expect much downtime. Don't miss anything. Go with the company's motto of "go with the flow and remain flexible." Spend as little time as possible in your room. Don't miss the chance to see dancing dolphins or breaching whales from the observation decks because you were in your room.

You're up early each day for breakfast at 7 a.m. Morning excursions begin at 8 or 9. Return for lunch and head back out for afternoon exploration, then come back to the ship for eye-popping sunsets and dinner. Days go by fast and are jam-packed.

Although shipboard dress is informal, cocktail attire is appropriate for the Captain's Welcome meet-and-greet cocktail gathering at the Elephant Bar, followed by a three-course dinner. ■

WWW.AURORA-EXPEDITIONS.COM





Afloat on the Rhine and Moselle

A dream river voyage on the Scenic Opal spotlights cozy towns in the heart of Europe

by Randy Mink

With its half-timbered houses, tangle of cobbled alleyways and picture-perfect castle perched on a crag high above the market square, the German village of Cochem struck me as something plucked from a medieval fairy tale.

Almost too good to be true, the Moselle River town of 5,500 was one of several stops on "Charming Castles & Vineyards of the Rhine & Moselle," a seven-night cruise itinerary offered by Scenic, an Australia-based company with 12 luxury river ships in Europe. My brother and I were aboard the 163-passenger

Scenic Opal, whose amenities were described in the magazine's summer issue, page 56.

Happily, in Cochem and some other ports of call, the historic town centers lay just steps from the ship's gangway. I love being in the middle of everything within minutes of disembarking.

Because of my ancestry and the fact that my first trip to Europe was a summer German language program in Austria, I've always had an affinity for German-speaking countries. Until this cruise, however, I had never been to the Rhine or Moselle valleys.

It was the Moselle's inclusion that steered me to the itinerary, as not all Rhine cruises venture to this narrower, slower-moving, more intimate tributary, which twists and turns more than 100 picturesque miles between the German cities of Trier and Koblenz. Many Rhine journeys spend time in the more industrial stretches to the north.

I also liked this particular circuit because it touched four countries. Besides shore excursions in Germany, Scenic offered tours in France and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. The cruise ended in Basel, Switzerland, where we stayed two nights in a hotel before flying home.



The Rhine travels nearly 800 miles from the Swiss Alps to the North Sea, forming the border of southwestern Germany and western France. From the Vosges Mountains, the Moselle flows through northeastern France and Luxembourg to Germany, joining the Rhine at Koblenz, our first port after embarking the day before at Mainz, a city of 200,000 about 40 minutes from the Frankfurt airport.

Both waterways dish up a passing parade of vineyard-covered slopes, hilltop castles and idyllic towns with gabled houses, church steeples and leafy riverside promenades—an eye-popping feast for those of us who thronged the railings or drank it in from deck chairs. Steady streams of barges, sightseeing boats and pleasure craft also kept us engaged. One afternoon on the Moselle, the Scenic Opal went through three locks, the first one upon leaving Koblenz for the pretty Moselle Valley, my favorite part of the trip.

Koblenz: At the Confluence

In Koblenz I opted for a ship-arranged walking tour but easily could have wandered on my own. The colorful squares and alleys of Old Town, a largely pedestrianized shopping zone with plenty of cafes and bakeries, were a short stroll from our berth at the Rhine Promenade. (My brother chose the e-biking excursion, pedaling off on one of the ship's electrically assisted bicycles.)

The park-like river walk led to Deutsches Eck, or German Corner, the point where the mighty Rhine meets little sister Moselle. Lording over the tip of land is a monumental equestrian statue of Kaiser Wilhelm I (1797-1888), first emperor of the New German Empire. Overlooking the confluence is Ehrenbreitstein Fortress, a massive complex reached by cable car from the beautifully landscaped promenade.

Little Luxembourg

From our next stop, the Moselle Valley town of Bernkastel, we took a morning excursion to Luxembourg City. Our guided ramble through the capital city's oldest quarter, famed for the stone bastions and battlements rising above dramatic ravines, focused on the shop-filled pedestrian zone and included panoramic

lookout points. After the tour my brother and I relaxed over hot chocolate at the Chocolate House, snaring an outdoor table across from the Grand Duke's Palace, where we earlier had snapped pictures of the soldiers on guard duty. Passengers who didn't sign up for Luxembourg could choose to visit a Bernkastel winery and sample the valley's renowned Rieslings.

Moselle Crowd-Pleasers: Bernkastel & Cochem

After lunch on the Scenic Opal, moored across the bridge from Bernkastel, we explored the storybook German town. Its riverfront facade didn't look unusually quaint, but as we probed deeper into the web of little streets, the place just kept getting cuter and cuter. I wanted to photograph every square, crooked lane and antique building in my path, and slip into every wine tavern. That evening, we all boarded buses for Trier, where Scenic had arranged a private classical concert staged amid the grandeur of the 13th century Liebfrauenkirche, Germany's oldest Gothic church.

In Cochem, the hub of the Middle Moselle, our excursion featured a visit to Reichsburg Castle. From its lofty vantage point we enjoyed sweeping views of the river, the steep vineyard abutting the castle grounds and a skyline dominated by the onion-dome spire of St. Martin Church. Dating from the 11th century, Reichsburg was restored in the late 1800s by a wealthy Berliner who created an idealized version of a medieval stronghold. Although not architecturally faithful, it certainly gives Cochem a photogenic landmark, and three-fourths of the main tower is original. Mounted animal heads, suits of armor and period furniture set the mood inside. Afterwards, a walking tour of Cochem showcased its compact central square, Baroque town hall and ancient town gates.

On the Romantic Rhine

Next we traveled the 32 miles from Cochem back to Koblenz, where our ship overnighted in order to get in position for a morning journey to Rudesheim, an odyssey that would spotlight the Upper Middle Rhine Valley, or Rhine Gorge, the river's most castle-studded corridor. This would be our big day, the one we'd been waiting for.

As we looked out from the breezy top deck, it was castle after castle, many of them, romantically, in various states of ruin. Some crowned distant summits, others rose straight from the shore. Vine-ribboned hillsides and timeless villages seemed to be waiting around every bend.

As we learned from the cruise director's narration and from Tailormade (Scenic's smart-phone app), some of the fortresses have been repurposed as museums, restaurants, hotels or private residences. The app's commentary helped us explore ashore as well as identify towns and landmarks we passed while cruising.

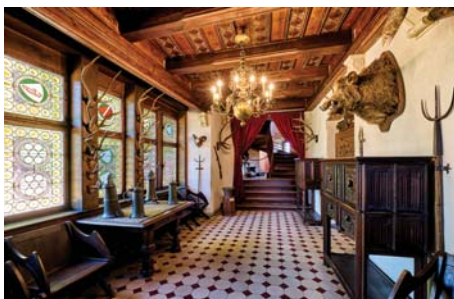
In Rudesheim, a tourist-packed village crammed with wine bistros and souvenir shops, we hiked through vineyards to Niederwald Monument, a grandiose memorial that commemorates the 1871 founding of the German Empire after the end of the Franco-Prussian War. Our uphill trek was challenging, the cable car ride down a lot more fun.

Forays into France

Heading south on the Rhine, the Scenic Opal tied up at two more German towns. From Rastatt we were torn between a tour to the German spa town of Baden-Baden and one to Strasbourg, capital of France's Alsace, a region that historically has flipped back and forth between German and French control. In Breisach, our last port before Basel, we had to weigh Colmar, Alsace's most beautiful town, against Freiburg, a Black Forest gem renowned for its medieval Old Town.

Since we had seen plenty of Germany, we went all in for Alsace and enjoyed walking tours of Strasbourg and Colmar, both with cozy, traffic-free historic cores chockablock with pastel, flower-laden, Hansel-and-Gretel houses. It's just that touch of fairy-tale fantasy we needed to put a happily-ever-after ending to our trip through the enchanting heart of Europe—the Europe of our dreams. ■

WWW.SCENICUSA.COM





Oshawa, Ontario's Courtyard by Marriott and TownePlace Suites by Marriott

by Mike Cohen

The City of Oshawa is located in the Durham Region of Ontario and best known as the home of a major General Motors plant. It is less than a one hour drive from downtown Toronto and closer to some of its top attractions like the zoo.

The Marriott International property, opened just a few years ago, is a combined 115-room Courtyard by Marriott hotel and 98-suite TownePlace Suites by Marriott hotel at 1011 Bloor Street East, owned and managed by Sunray Group of Hotels. The property shares a fitness center, an indoor swimming pool and meeting spaces with over 12,000 square feet of versatile event space. Sunray has some 50 hotels under its umbrella in Canada.

The dual-brand property I stayed at is situated just north of Highway 401 and is connected to the Oshawa Harmony Event Centre. It offers convenient access to the Oshawa Centre, Canadian Tire Motorsport Park, Tribute Communities Centre and the Canadian Automotive Museum.

I was elated with my accommodations, a full suite with all the comforts of home. Upon arrival, guests can store bags on the "Luggage Drop" and plug personal devices into the "Tech Drop" ledge for seamless technology integration.

The Courtyard also offers the Refreshing Business lobby environment, where guests can enjoy an open and bright area outside of their rooms. Along with media pods, complimentary Wi-Fi and a variety of seating zones, the redefined space is ideal for everything from pop-up meetings to social gatherings. The lobby also features the newly designed Bistro, the epicenter of the lobby, which fosters social connections and collaboration with more flexible and informal seating options.

This hotel is ideal for travelers who need accommodations for longer stays, offering studio and one-bedroom suites with fully equipped kitchens that have stainless steel appliances and granite countertops, and separate living/working and sleeping areas in some suites.



On both mornings I took advantage of the excellent buffet breakfast, from waffles, eggs and bacon to bagels, toast, muffins, Danish, juices and of course coffee. ■

WWW.MARRIOTT.COM/YOOCY

WWW.MARRIOTT.COM/YOOTS



The Phoenicia Malta

Malta's Five-Star The Phoenicia Malta and Iniala Harbour House & Residences

Malta Tourism Authority, a Virtuoso member since 2017, has announced that two more five-star properties, The Phoenicia Malta and the Iniala Harbour House & Residences, have been accepted as Virtuoso Preferred Suppliers. The growing number of Malta's Virtuoso preferred suppliers, which already include the InterContinental Malta and Citrus Meetings & Events, reinforce Malta's position as a luxury destination.

The Phoenicia Malta has long been recognized as one of the island's finest hotels and world class service. From the day it started welcoming guests in 1947, the hotel has presented refined and luxurious experiences. More recently, the property has added new, and improved amenities, such as the beautiful Deep Nature Spa, rejuvenated gardens, the new look of the much-loved Club Bar, as well as the newly created Pegasus Junior Suites.

Iniala Harbour House & Residences

The luxurious Iniala Harbour House & Residences overlooks the famous Grand Harbour. Spread across five grand townhouses and their ancient vaults, dating back to the 1600s, Iniala Harbour House & Residences offers 23 uniquely designed rooms and suites, outstanding facilities, world-class cuisine and a dedicated team that ensure guests of world-class service. ■



Iniala Harbour House & Residences



Rejuvenation, Relaxation and a Room with a View Lake Austin Spa Resort *by Jennifer Merrick*

Lounging on the outdoor chair in front of my room at Lake Austin Spa Resort, I gazed at a view that I never imagined existed in Texas. The turquoise water of Lake Austin shimmered, reflecting the lush, verdant vegetation surrounding it. Colorful beds of flowers contrasted the shades of green of the many varieties of trees. Directly in my line of sight was an especially stunning lofty hardwood that I didn't recognize.

"It's a magnolia!" my hiking guide told me later. "Probably about 80 years old."

I couldn't believe it. It was five times the height and triple the width of the magnolia I

have in my front garden. Also incredible is what it would have witnessed during its eight decades.

This 19-acre property, which has garnered multiple accolades including a World's Best Award by Travel + Leisure magazine, has gone through several reincarnations. Since the 1940s, it's been a hunting and fishing lodge, a rodeo clown training camp and a 'fat farm', on which severely calorie-restricted diets were enforced. If that magnolia could talk, it would certainly have some stories. It might even say something about locals coming in on boats at night to sell chocolate bars to the starving campers.

Today though it would tell of more tranquil scenes: yoga on the dock, watercolor painting classes en plein air, kayaking, hiking, martial arts, meditation workshops and blissed out guests in robes returning from the spa. But there was no spa when the rodeo clowns and dieters were here. Built in 2004, the 25,000 square-foot LakeHouse Spa is a destination in its own right with an outdoor pool, hot tub, cabanas, and 30 treatment areas offering more than 100 body and skincare therapies. Indoor swimming is available in the Junior Olympic-sized Pool Barn that also hosts multiple wellness and exercise classes. It was here we donned specially designed ankle and wrist equipment that created resistance for strength training aqua class. We also tried a myofascial wellness session, a hands-on therapy focusing on the connective tissues, in the warm water.

Our minds were also stretched at the resort with lectures, classes, author visits and other learning opportunities. One evening, an astronomer talked about the cosmos and showed us how to locate constellations in the night sky. In another less brain-taxing activity, we practiced making a Topsy Texan cocktail.

Balance is a key philosophy at the Lake Austin Spa Resort, which can especially be seen in their dining experience. The delicious healthy meals focused on flavour, nutrition and locally sourced ingredients, including some from their own organic gardens.

With only 40 rooms at the resort, there was an abundance of personalized attention for each guest. In addition to all the amenities you'd expect at a luxury resort, each suite had a view of the lake. And a few also looked out at a magnificent 80-year-old magnolia tree. ■

WWW.LAKEAUSTIN.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 Brasserie 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

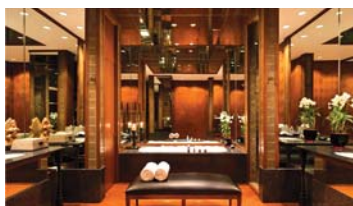


The Sukhothai Bangkok

by Michael Morcos

Round and round I went, that's what I did after entering my deluxe suite at the Sukhothai hotel. First, going to the left was the enormous washroom, then into the master bedroom and around to the living room and back to the large entranceway. I was in bliss! After a very long journey, including three long-haul flights, my stay there was exactly what the doctor ordered.

I knew from our approach to the hotel entrance that this was one incredible property. It was quiet and tranquil with beautifully kept gardens, reinforcing my thoughts of this gem in the city.



My room was absolutely perfect, with plenty of space, or should I say an overabundance of space, that I barely even used the living room. I appreciated the well-appointed washing facilities that had both a tub and a shower, and on opposite ends were his and hers wash basins. The tall

windows opened onto the courtyard and offered a magnificent view of the large pool of exotic floating aquatic plants.

Dining on the property was perfect. The service was impeccable, and the Thai menu was amazingly prepared by master chefs that made the presentations so beautiful that it was a shame to disturb them.

As compared to many Bangkok hotels which are increasingly in skyscraper buildings, the Sukhothai hotel's main building is only a few floors high and although it is an older premise, it is absolutely spotless and has an abundance of gardens, statues, and assortment of smaller buildings.

The biggest danger of staying in such a beautiful and opulent property is that you might likely miss out on visiting the city. This beautiful resort has just about all someone needs on premises. There are richly decorated restaurants, a spa, pools, seating areas both inside and outdoors, and perhaps one of the best hotel gyms anywhere in Bangkok. In all, this is a one-of-a-kind property and boasts beautiful artwork throughout, rich decorations, built with the finest material and kept with loving care ■



WWW.SUKHOTHAI.COM

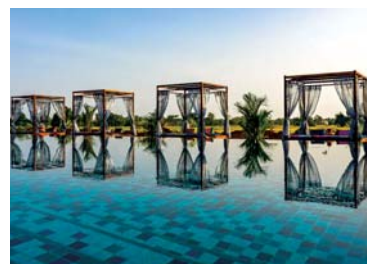
Canadian World Traveller Fall 2019



Sriwilai Hotel

by Michael Morcos

Another day, and another visit to a magnificent Thai hotel. By total coincidence, we would be in the city sharing the name of our last hotel, Sukhothai. This time, we were out of Bangkok and into the ancient capital. This wonderful hotel reflects the tranquil and natural setting of the city and we immediately felt relaxed and at total peace within the property. The Sriwilai is set on a large plot of land with gardens full of colorful flowers, healthy looking vegetables, and many fruit-bearing trees. We were in the country and as close to nature as we could get.



My accommodation in a large, superior room was spotlessly clean and as natural as the surroundings. There was a beautiful dark wooden ceiling, earth tone ceramics throughout, spacious washroom facility, classy looking wooden and wicker furniture, and wonderful large windows with a dazzling view of the greenery.

My room had the look and feel of rural Thai village design, but also had all the modern amenities one would want and expect, including fast Wi-Fi service, plenty of storage space and a welcoming tea station.

Although this was a hot night, we would still sit outside with a refreshing breeze and a view of the beautiful pool reflecting the flames up from garden lanterns. Perfect moments only happen once in a while, and we were living in one here at the Sriwilai. Our incredibly tasty and well-presented Thai meal included different delicacies meant to be shared. It was so fresh that we could tell it came from just a few feet away.

The truly enjoyable nights and beautiful sunny days in a perfect setting washed away our jet lag. With a friendly, caring, smiling staff, blissful moments at the Sriwilai, and among the many incredible historic sites of this charming and peaceful city that refreshed and nurtured our mind, body, and soul. ■



[HTTPS://SRIWILAISUKHOTHAI.COM/](https://SRIWILAISUKHOTHAI.COM/)



Melia Chiang Mai

by Michael Morcos

The Melia Chiang Mai is nothing short of a top-class property. It was striking at first sight and refreshing as we entered the lobby. It was both simplicity and sophistication, modern and yet had a definite old-world Thai influence where the major style was white walls and ceilings with accents of different colored wood tones and highlighted with modern looking furnishings and artwork.

I have stayed at many Melia properties around the world, and I have always left with the impression of an upscale experience and restful and relaxing time. This Spanish hotel chain knows and understands hospitality and how to serve their guests. And from my stay at the Melia Chiang Mai, these thoughts were reconfirmed.



My deluxe room was just about perfect, as comfortable as it was inviting. It seemed that everything was thoroughly thought out and placed in just the right place. Although not a large room, I never felt that I was missing space. The

washroom facilities were just right, very clean and proper with a fantastic showerhead to soothe aching muscles.

To my delight there was a large window with a seating area that gave a magnificent view of the surroundings. Speaking about views, the roof top terrace was to die for. Built on multiple levels, guests could have refreshments and meals while enjoying a 360° view of the whole city of Chiang Mai, as we did to watch a spectacular sunset over the hills.

Besides being in the heart of the city, close to a popular street market, this property also has a top-notch spa facility and my massage there was heavenly. Everything was just perfect at this gem in Chiang Mai. ■



WWW.MELIA.COM



Paradee Koh Samed Resort

by Michael Morcos

Plainly stated, Paradee Koh Samed Resort is a spectacular destination on its own. Once checked in, there is no reason to step out as everything is at hand for a comfortable and relaxing stay.

Situated in the Gulf of Thailand, the island of Koh Samed is a tropical paradise and so is this incredible property. You cannot just drop by, as it takes a coordinated effort with the dedicated hotel staff to get you and your luggage onto a luxury speedboat and out to the resort. This on its own was a delightful adventure as we would take in the refreshing breeze on blue waters alongside the tropical coastline to arrive on the resort's beach to a smiling, welcoming staff.

My Garden Pool Villa was nothing short of heavenly. I had a magnificent villa to myself that included a beautifully decorated living room coupled with a large and comfortable bedroom. The magnificent washroom had both a big tub and private outdoor shower, added to these was an outdoor patio with a private plunge pool. My walled area had shrubs in front with just enough open space to get a view of the sandy beach and clear aqua-blue waters.



The Paradee dining experience was perfect. There was a fantastic hot and cold breakfast buffet, drinks at the sunset bar and our dinners were delicately prepared and well-presented Thai dishes served alfresco and made for a memorable evening of eating delight.



Life is good at the Paradee. How could it not, a beautiful tropical island, opulent accommodations, clear blue skies, hot sunny days, a private sandy beach, great service and a wonderful ambiance, how else could it be.

WWW.SAMEDRESORTS.COM/PARADEE/



Double Your Pleasure at Zoëtry Curaçao Resort & Spa

by Susan Campbell

I've had the immense pleasure of staying at almost every Zoëtry brand all-inclusive resort throughout the Caribbean and Mexico, and each has its own imitable boutique style. But when I go to the tropics I really prefer to stay on the sea, and every Zoëtry I've been at so far has been oceanfront. Except this one in Curacao. And, though it's an elegant little property of 72 well-appointed suites with a lovely tropical pool area offering their signature Endless Privileges® array of very high-end inclusions, I was disappointed with its location. And its limited choice of on-site restaurant and bars was also a surprise. (Though they do offer 24/7 room service.) But I soon learned that they have their own beach nearby, accessible by complimentary golf cart shuttle, so off I went to explore it.

A few minutes drive away on a small cove of blindingly white sand cresting restless aqua

surf sits Zoëtry's beach. There are day beds and sunshade loungers, but it's very new, so there are no additional amenities yet. However, I spied something very intriguing there. Lined up like dominoes along the sea cliff were futuristic looking white 'pods'. Apparently, these are to become little stand-alone, fully furnished high-end adult-only accommodations which will be part of Zoëtry, also with complimentary golf shuttles to the main property, and with their own food and beverage service. That changes things. The addition of these unique stays will certainly enhance this island's choices of experiences. But there's more.

I then discovered that ALL guests at Zoëtry Curaçao Resort & Spa also have full complimentary access to everything at Dreams® Curaçao Resort, Spa & Casino right next door! (Including complimentary golf shuttle transportation.) That changes everything.

I had the opportunity to tour this Dreams when it first opened in Curacao in 2019. (And I've also stayed at most Dreams resorts throughout the Caribbean and Mexico,) but have yet to stay at this one. But I love this brand, their offerings, and their happy vibe. And so many included activities and nightly shows and entertainment, and this one has cool extras like cocktail making, dance, Spanish, and Papiamentu (Curacao's native language), classes, too.

And their Unlimited-Luxury® offerings can't be beat. This one offers gourmet and casual options at seven dining spots (where reservations are never required,) and top shelf spirits at four bars. Their water circuit has three pools, but best for me was the beach! Though the entrance is narrow, the waters are super clear and calm and full of tropical fish. And snorkeling equipment is included.

Though both resorts are family friendly, Zoëtry is very adult focused, so you'll seldom see children on their property. But there are also ample adult extras at Dreams like a modern casino, a nightclub, and a new sports bar/brewery Tex-Mex spot. And both resorts have spas and fitness centres, too.

So, if you don't mind shuttling around a bit, this Zoëtry offers two excellent holiday experiences for the price of one. ■

WWW.HYATTINCLUSIVECOLLECTION.COM



Dreams® Curaçao Resort, Spa & Casino



Sandals Royal Curaçao

New All-Inclusive Luxury Sprawls Across Santa Barbara

by Susan Campbell

I was well-acquainted with the Santa Barbara Beach Resort that was formerly located on the historic site of the old Santa Barbara Plantation on Curacao's southeastern coast. And though she was a grande old dame, she had begun to show her age over the past decade. So, I was excited to check out everything that Sandals' had done to rejuvenate and reintroduce this often off-radar region of the island. It was impressive.

The Sandals brand is well known as providing comprehensive all-inclusive offerings at their various adults-only escapes throughout the Caribbean. Though not exclusively couples' only, they are designed with couples in mind. Each of their 350 rooms offer one king bed options only. (Be forewarned on the sleeping accommodations if you're planning to share a room with a buddy here.) But the vibe is very

social, it's not all canoodling couples at every turn. In fact, I found the crowd to be a happy welcoming party style group enjoying all kinds of on-site activities together.

The original estate crests 3,000 acres of Spanish Waters about 45 minutes from the airport, and this resort now sprawls over 44 oceanfront acres of it. The lovely coconut palm studded property also basks in the shadow of Mt. Tafelberg (Table Mountain—so named for its flat top,) and it's right beside the scenic Old Quarry Golf Course. Their private beach is a stellar strip of white sand with aqua waters protected by a long jetty that leads to the marina where yachties dock, and where activity boats pick up guests for excellent sea outings. (I highly recommend the snorkel the sunken tugboat trip!) And though it is remote, complimentary airport transfers are always included. And a LOT more is included as well.

Beyond all food and drink at 8 stand-alone dining spots, 13 bars, and 24/7 room service included, this resort has the cool addition of a food truck park reflecting the island's "good-stuff-to-go" local foodie culture. They also offer a generous dining credit at off-property restaurants for those staying in qualifying suites, and complimentary Mini Coopers for island explorations. And unique to this resort are also the complimentary coaster bikes

which you will certainly appreciate to traverse the massive property in the heat.

Also unique to this resort are the new Awa Seaside Bungalows with private translucent plunge pools looking onto the ocean. These cool peek-a-boo pools match their awesome Dos Awa double tier infinity pool, which is the focal point of the resort, and unique to this property as well. And in keeping with their romance theme, their new Kurason Island Suites are centered around a massive heart-shaped pool. They've also added some lovely swim-out circuits to pre-existing wings where there were none before.

In all, I think they have done a marvellous job here. And the service, though tipping is strictly prohibited as per Sandals' policy, I found to be exemplary on many levels. Many staff members went way above and beyond to make my stay special. ■

WWW.SANDALS.COM/ROYAL-CURACAO



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**.



RESERVE YOUR EXCLUSIVE PRIVATE JAMAICAN PARADISE TODAY
Call Tony Alberga 416.561.6664



Visit villaparadisojamaica.com OR flipkey.com

Live Calendar



Dimensions: Retreats in the Algonquin Highlands, Ontario

by Cherie DeLory

Dimensions is an all-seasons luxury healing retreat, with a comprehensive wellness and clinical team to provide restorative wellbeing. This dog and cannabis friendly retreat is located on 45 woodland acres along the sandy shores of Maple Lake, in the Algonquin Highlands near Haliburton, Ontario, a 3-hour drive north of Toronto.

The setting reminds me of my childhood summer camp days, when stress wasn't a reality, and fresh air and evergreens abounded. Upon closer inspection, this adult-only wellness retreat is everything good about your childhood camp memories, reimagined and elevated for adults who want to experience

luxury in nature. The indoor vibe is a crisp, midcentury modern aesthetic with all the desired creature comforts; leaving you wanting for absolutely nothing, except a few extra nights stay.

In addition to the Wellness retreat that I experienced, Dimensions currently offers three other retreats that practice healthy ways to manage trauma and stress: the four-day Ascend retreat includes a plant medicine ceremony, the 10-day veterans-only Elevate retreat, and Actuate for corporate retreats.

The summer Wellness retreat program is a two-night all-inclusive stay that includes guided forest bathing, a sound bath ceremony,

floatation tank therapy, and biosound session that will calm your nerves and awaken your senses. There's a private dock for yoga and lounging; and floating, boating and swimming in the clearest lake I've ever experienced. I couldn't resist going into the water for a restorative swim.

Apart from the all-inclusive offerings, guests can book more wellness modalities including massage therapy, cacao ceremony, acupuncture, reiki, mindfulness, and cold-water immersion therapy.

Maple Lodge is where guests gather at the harvest table for wholesome and delicious organic, gut-friendly meals, prepared by Mexican born and raised Executive Chef Miriam Echeverria, using produce from local farms and freshly picked mint, green onions and tomatoes from the garden.

At any hour, guests can relax in the lodge and choose from a selection of organic Pluck teas, fancy lattes and cold drinks, and homemade treats to munch on from the grab-and-go mini fridge. I couldn't resist the chocolate brownies and energy bites should I require some nocturnal food therapy.

My luxury cabin left me breathless. This is 5-star boutique hotel calibre in the middle of the forest. Pine ceilings and oak cabinetry and floors bring nature inside. Windows open to the lulling breeze and lapping of the lake. If the wall-to-wall window seat and money-shot views of the lake weren't enough, I had a gorgeous ensuite bathroom, soaker tub with another view of the lake, and a scrumptious skincare collection provided by Telford, an all-natural plant-based Ontario line. Falling asleep was a dream with my organic pillow and bedding by Obasan.

On my last evening, after the sun had set and the stars were plainly visible, I sat by the campfire holding a cup of tea. With only the sounds of a lone loon calling across Maple Lake, the chirping crickets and the crackling embers, I was able to reflect on my wellness journey of self awareness, and the time I took to heal my body, mind and spirit. Then, a mosquito brought me back to reality and into my luxurious cabin to indulge in spa night. ■

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Luxury by the Beach: Hacienda Del Mar Los Cabos Resort

by Nicholas Kontis

Los Cabos is world-renowned as a pleasure-seekers beach destination, flaunting endless sunshine and luxurious resorts on sparkling sand.

More than 80 hotels and resorts accommodating all travel styles welcome guests to the region. The luxurious Hacienda del Mar Los Cabos Resort is the finest, overlooking the Sea of Cortez. It is an ideal abode for a romantic getaway, a relaxing refuge, or a family vacation, offering action-packed tropical adventures in the sea or adjacent desert environment.

Mexican hacienda style

The architecture features courtyards, fountains, and many walkways that wind past white stucco walls with rustic wood accents and tiled roofs of red clay and 273 upscale rooms and villa suites, ranging from one-bedroom to

twin-level, four-bedroom suites.

The grounds are perfectly manicured gardens, five pools, and a kids' club with a mini water slide. You'll find an infinity pool, an activity pool, and a pool with a swim-up bar, hot tubs, and jacuzzis. Restaurants and bars are seemingly everywhere.

Dining for every taste

A good problem is having more dining options than days at the resort. The all-inclusive, four-star property tempts guests with local and international menus. Gourmands will find a bellyful of meals in a plethora of locations. There are four upscale restaurants, four casual snack bars for noshing, and in-room dining.

The award-winning Pitayahas restaurant serves delectable Mexican-Asian fusion cuisine. Diners here are welcomed to the Cava

de Santiago, an underground wine cellar and a winner of Wine Spectator's award of excellence. It contains over 200 vintages from nine countries.

With spectacular beach views, the lavish De Cortez Grillhouse serves some of the region's finest cuts of meat and a fresh catch of the day from Cabo's bountiful waters. A mecca for steak lovers, it's Baja-Mediterranean fusion menu has twice been accorded the prestigious Diamond Award from the American Academy of Hospitality Sciences.

Other dining options include local fare at Tomate's Restaurant, El Burro Cansado taco bar, and Tortugas Snack & Beach Bar, where you'll find a raw bar and fresh sushi. Sirenas serves casual craft pizzas, burgers, and salads, adjacent to one of the swimming pools.

Golf, Adventure, and Spa

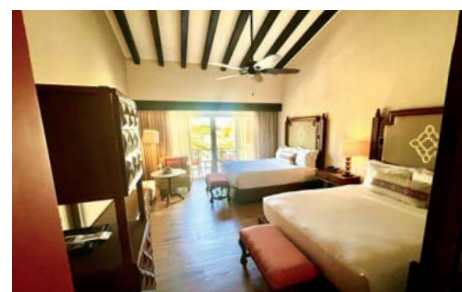
Golf is one of the most popular activities for Cabo visitors. Indeed, the breathtaking golf courses, with scenic ocean views, lure seasoned professionals and first-time golfers to this oasis in the desert. The course layout of the Hacienda's Cabo del Sol course is striking, with ocean views from almost every hole.

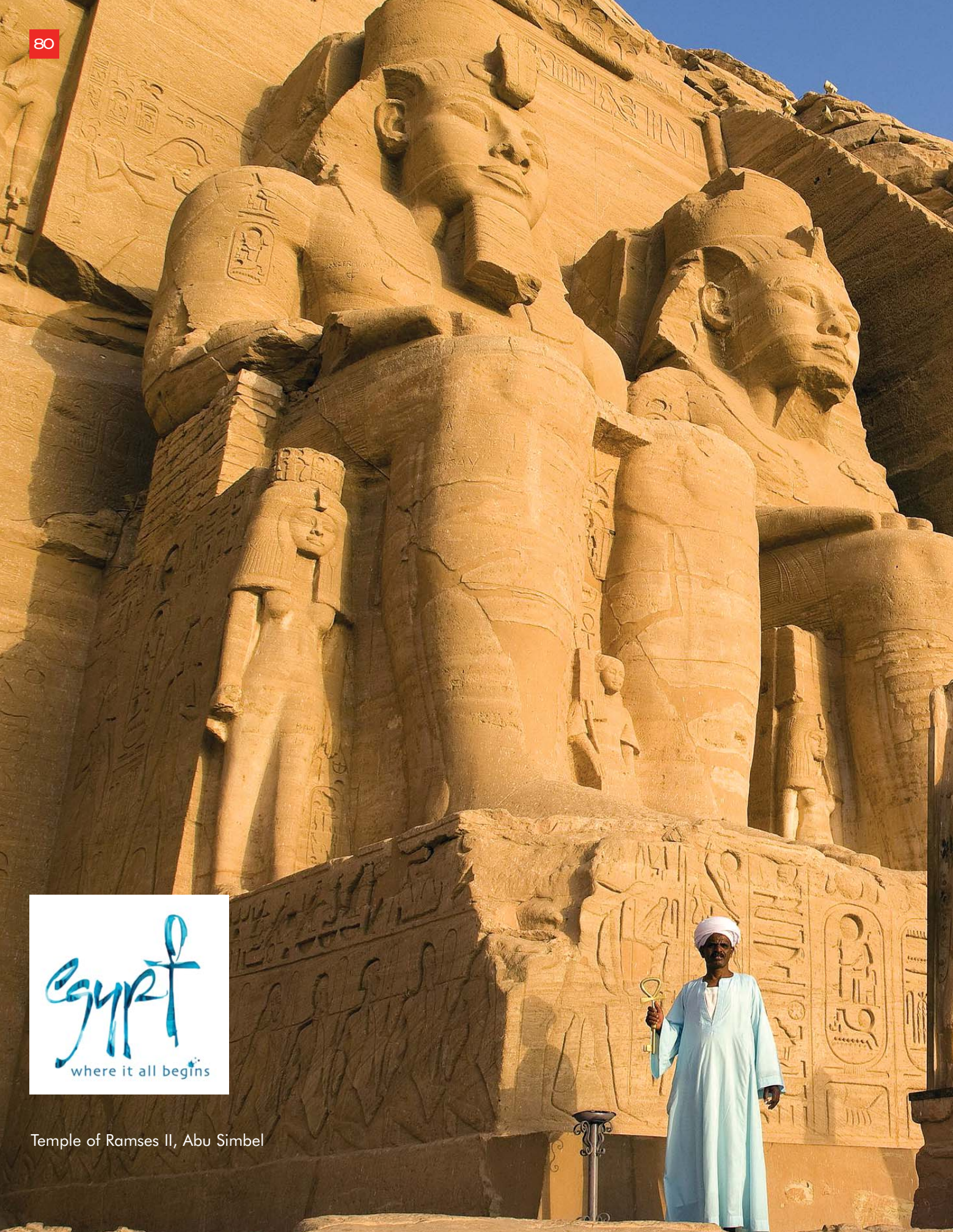
Beyond golf, the list of adventures, both soft and adrenaline-filled, is long. The surrounding waters offer an underwater world for scuba divers and snorkelers. Baja California hosts many fishing tournaments, making half-day or full-day boat charters a must for angling enthusiasts. Eco-adventures include hiking, zip-lining and rock climbing. Many visitors explore beaches and deserts on ATVs.

The rejuvenating Cactus Spa invites guests to enjoy a variety of signature spa treatments that cultivate wellness and indulge one's senses. A variety of therapeutic massages, facials, body wraps, salt scrubs, manicures, pedicures, waxing services, make-up services, and hair care will enhance your stay.

Several packages are inspired by traditional Mexican practices, sometimes employing a blend of native herbs. There are sauna and steam rooms, hot and cold jacuzzi tubs, and relaxation spaces. ■

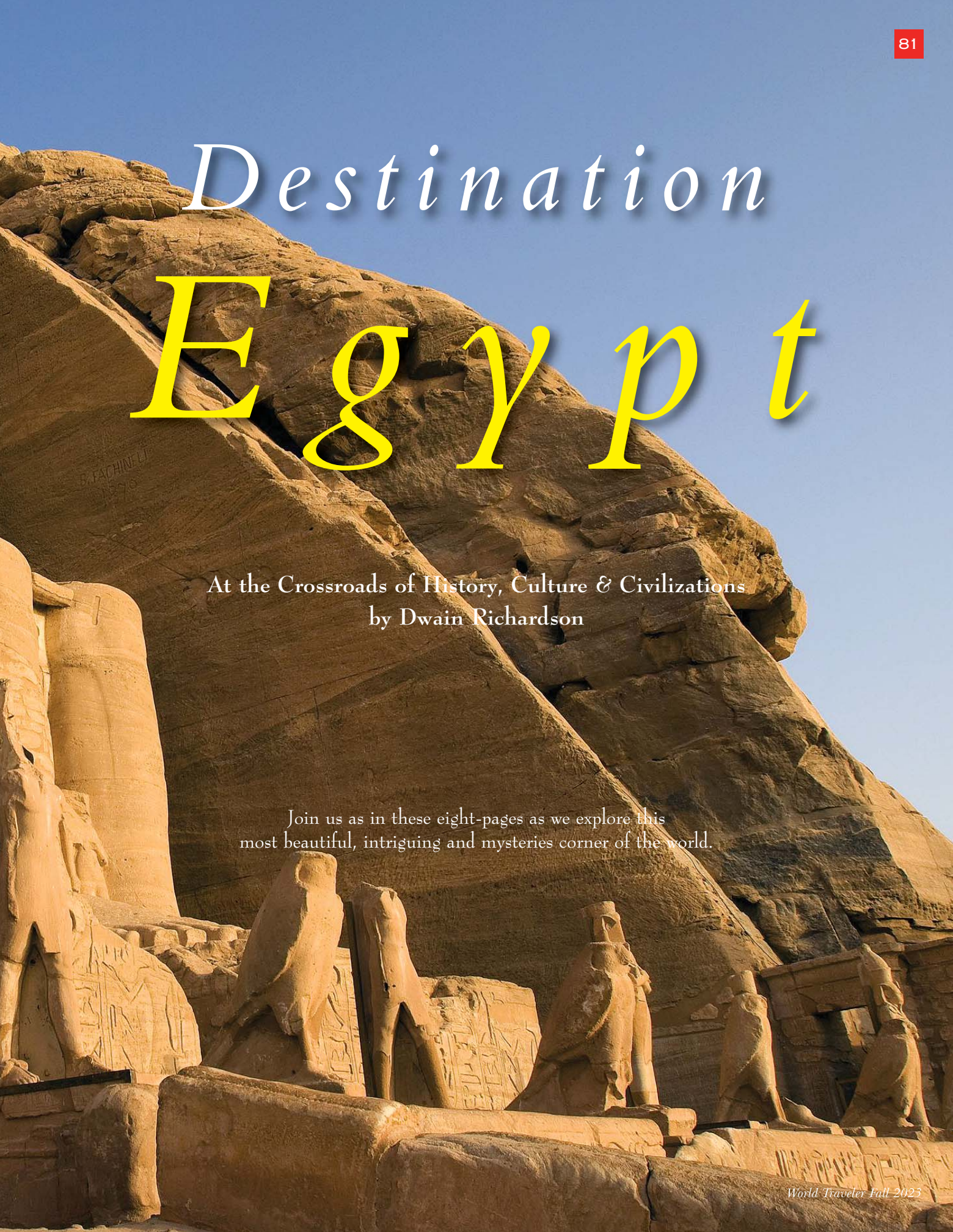
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Egypt
where it all begins

Temple of Ramses II, Abu Simbel



Destination Egypt

*At the Crossroads of History, Culture & Civilizations
by Dwain Richardson*

*Join us as in these eight-pages as we explore this
most beautiful, intriguing and mysteries corner of the world.*



King Tutankhamun's Mask

Egypt has been steeped into history for the longest time. Because there has been a lot of interest in Egypt's history, historians coined the term "Egyptology," which is the study of pharaonic Egypt. Egyptology spanned the period between c. 4500 BCE and CE 641. How did Egyptology begin? Scholars going with Napoleon Bonaparte's invasion of Egypt published the *Description de l'Égypte* (1809–1828); this publication made huge quantities of source materials about ancient Egypt available for Europeans.

Did you know that written Egyptian documents dated to c. 3150 BCE? This was the first time that pharaohs developed the hieroglyphic script in Upper Egypt. These scripts provided the source material for Egyptological study.

Following the Arab conquest, only the Copts kept the ancient language alive (written in Greek characters). Coptic texts taken Egypt during the Renaissance awakened interest in the Egyptian language. German Jesuit Athanasius Kircher published a Coptic grammar in 1643; European travellers returned to Egypt with antiquities and stories of wondrous ruins. What's more, Egyptology became an academic discipline in France, England, and Germany.

American museums opened Egyptian collections in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The University of Pennsylvania, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Brooklyn Museum are some of music collections that have done a lot of work in Egypt.

On the geographical front, Egypt has two coastlines on the Mediterranean and Red Sea. It borders Libya to the west, the Gaza Strip and Israel to the east, and Sudan to the south.

Egypt has an area of 1,001,449 square kilometres. The longest straight-line distance from north to south is 1,024 kilometres, and the straight-line distance from east to west is 1,240 kilometres long. The country's maritime boundaries measure more than 2,900 kilometres of coastline along the Mediterranean Sea, the Gulf of Suez, the Gulf of Aqaba, and the Red Sea.

Most of the country is made of desert. Thirty-five thousand square kilometres (3.5%) of the total land area is cultivated and permanently settled. Most of Egypt is located within the desert zone that runs east from Africa's Atlantic Coast and connects with southwestern Asia.

Four leading geological regions are pres-

ent in Egypt: Nile Valley and Nile Delta, Western Desert (also known as Libyan Desert), Eastern Desert (an extension from the Nile Valley until the Red Sea Coast), and Sinai Peninsula. Of the geological regions, the Nile Valley and Nile Delta are the most significant areas, though they cover only 5.5% of the country's total area.

CAIRO

While you're in the country's capital, be sure to visit the following attractions:

Great Pyramid of Giza

This is the oldest and largest of three pyramids in the Giza complex. It borders El Giza. The Great Pyramid is one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, and is the only structure that has remained intact over the years. The Great Pyramid has three chambers. The lowest chamber was cut into the bedrock, which served as the chamber's foundation and was left unfinished. The Queen's and King's Chamber are the second layer of this structure. Lastly, the upper layer is made of buildings that used to include two mortuary temples to honour Khufu, Egypt's second pharaoh of the fourth dynasty, three smaller pyramids for Khufu's wives, a "satellite" pyramid, a raised causeway to join the two temples, and small mastaba tombs. (Mastaba means "house for eternity" or "eternal house.")

Great Sphinx of Giza

This is a national symbol for ancient and modern Egypt. The sphinx is carved from the Giza plateau's bedrock. If you look at it carefully, you'll see that it looks like a lion's body. The head looks like that of a king or god. The sphinx symbolizes wisdom and strength. Visitors would be pleased to note that the sphinx has been recently restored. You can find the Great Sphinx at the Nile River's west tip, located near Cairo. While visiting, let yourself be amazed by the many temples that surround the sphinx. Some of these temples contain multiple sphinxes.



Egyptian Museum of Antiquities

83

This is Egypt's largest museum. It opened in 1902. Visitors will be greeted with 107 halls, huge statues (on the ground floor level), small statues, jewels, Tutankhamon treasures, and mummies (all on the upper level). Interested in photos? The Egyptian Museum of Antiquities has dedicated a section to photography. And if you like books, periodicals, and other written material, you'll be able to visit the library. Lastly, the museum dedicates seven sections to treasures and monuments in chronological order. See Tutankhamon's treasures in the first section. All pre-dynasty and Old Kingdom monuments are found in the second section. The third section presents the first intermediate period and Middle Kingdom monuments. In the fourth, check out the Modern Kingdom monuments. In the fifth section, find all the late period monuments (including those of the Greek and Roman periods). Find coins and papyrus in the sixth section, and sarcophagi and scrabs in the last section.



Mosque of Muhammad Ali

You can see this Ottoman mosque from a mile away. It was built in the nineteenth century and in honour of Tusun Pasha, Muhammad Ali's oldest son, who passed away in 1816. Architect Yusuf Bushnak completed the structure in 1848. The mosque and citadel are some of many attractions and landmarks in Cairo. Step inside the mosque and you'll see that its architecture is typical of Turkish style. The mosque has a main dome surrounded by four small and semicircular domes. The minarets are cylindrical and have two balconies and conical caps (you'll see these on the mosque's western side). The mosque is made primarily of limestone. The lower storey and forecourt, however, are made of alabaster. The mosque's western entrance leads to the open courtyard. The courtyard is surrounded by rounded arcades with small domes. You will notice a marbled



fountain in the middle of the courtyard, built by Ismail Pasha in 1828. One last detail about the courtyard: Note an iron clock on the western wall, presented to Muhammad Ali by King Louis Philippe (France).

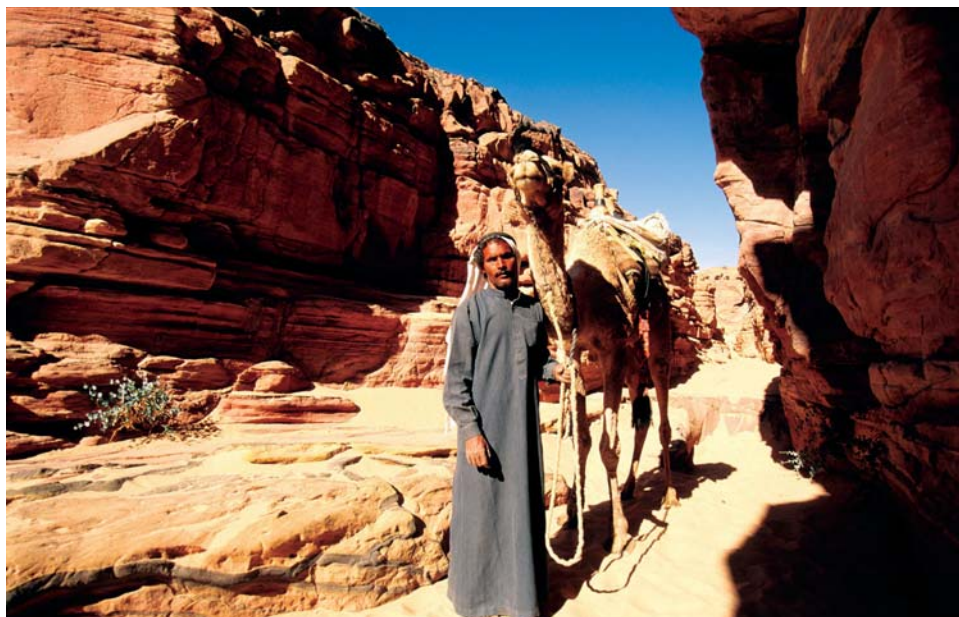
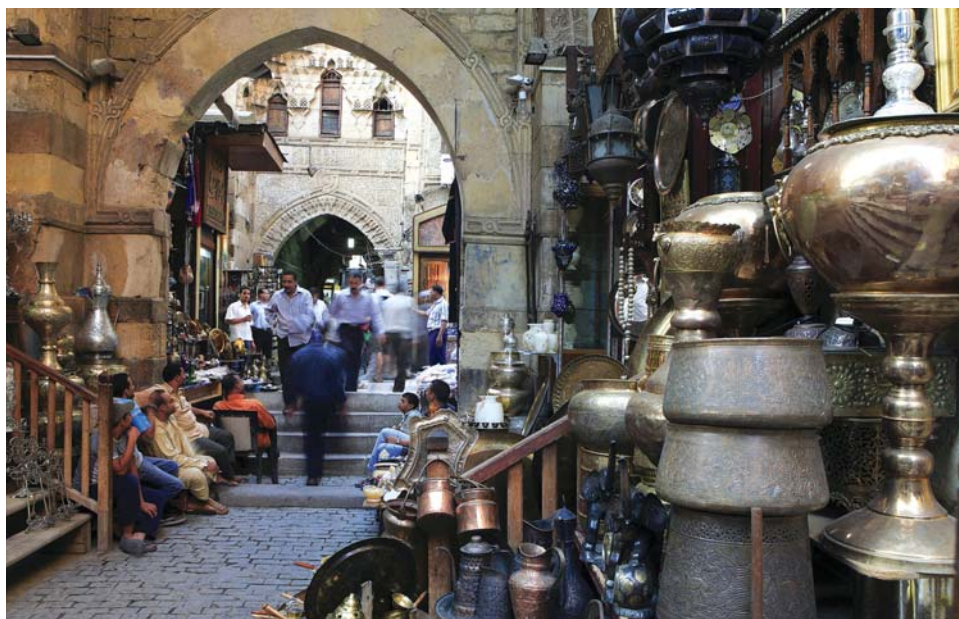
The Hanging Church

(St. Virgin Mary's Coptic Orthodox Church)

This is one of Egypt's oldest churches. The history of this particular church dates back to the third century A.D. Why is this attraction known as the Hanging Church? It is situated above a Babylon Fortress gatehouse, and its nave is suspended over a passage. Unlike most churches that may have as many as ten steps, the Hanging Church has twenty-nine. Be prepared for a long hike up! Once you enter the church, be prepared to see 110 icons. Of these icons, the oldest dates back to the eighth century. The others, however, hail from the eighteenth century. The iconostases within the church are made of ebony and ivory, just like the main altar. The icons depict a number of religious personalities, including the Virgin Mary, the Twelve Apostles, and St. John the Baptist.

Khan el-Khalili

Care to do some shopping during your stay in Cairo? You'd want to stop by Khan el-Khalili. This bazaar district is the city's main attraction for residents and tourists alike. The bazaar, which was first a mausoleum, used to be the heart of Cairo's economic activity; sultans would build businesses nearby. Today, most Egyptians run businesses here. Take advantage of buying local products (souvenirs, antiques, jewelry). But there's more: take a sip of coffee or shisha at one of the many coffeehouses along the strip. If you're feeling hunger pangs, many restaurants are at your fingertips. If you prefer to buy foods, you'll come across many food vendors throughout the market.



SINAI PENINSULA

Ras Muhammed National Park

This is the most famous park in the country known for scuba diving. As you dive below the crystal waters of the Red Sea, you'll see many coral reefs and various species. The sea walls are breathtaking, too. Ras Muhammed National Park became a protected area in 1983. Divers, please note: You cannot dive anywhere you please. You need to dive in selected areas only. Another important tip: Visitors must vacate the premises by sunset. The best places for

scuba diving? Shark and Yolanda Reefs. Both reefs are mountain-like peaks rising from a sandy sea bed spread out below the surface. You can also scuba dive at Satellite Reef if the sea current isn't too strong.

St. Catherine's Monastery

Its official name is Sacred Monastery of the God-Trodden Mount Sinai, and is located at the foot of Mount Sinai. It is part of the Church of Sinai, which is a member of the wider Eastern Orthodox Church. Like other churches in the country, St. Catherine's Monastery teems with iconic art, particularly mosaics. Most of the art is in the form of hot wax painting. In addition to mosaics, visitors will find several liturgical objects, chalices and reliquaries, and church buildings. A few other points of note: The monastery has the oldest operating library. St. Catherine City, located around the monastery, is a small town with hotels and swimming pools. The monastery is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Sharm-el-Sheikh

This is a city located on Sinai Peninsula's southern tip and along the Red Sea coastal strip. This is the economic hub for the country's southern governorate, and includes cities such as Dahab and Nuweiba. You'll find St. Catherine's Monastery and Mount Sinai nearby. Most importantly, Sharm-el-Sheikh is a holiday resort for tourists. Watersport and scientific tourism enthusiasts will appreciate this southern city a great deal: it is possible to do snorkelling and scuba diving, and those interested in species will be happy to note that there are 250 various coral reefs and one thousand types of fish. And let's not forget the resorts: Aqua Blu Sharm Resort is one of many resorts tourists can choose from for accommodation and meals. For the curious, Aqua Blu is a four-star hotel resort.

NILE RIVER

Many boating companies offer cruises along the Nile River. Some companies of note are Avalon Waterways, Emerald Waterways, and Memphis Tours. Visit the company websites for information on fares and booking.

Luxor

Located in Upper Egypt and often characterized as "the world's greatest open-air museum" (characterized as such because the temple complex ruins in Luxor and Karnak are in the modern city). Temples and museums grace Luxor's east bank.





Temples also make up the many attractions in the west bank. In addition, you'll find two valleys of note—Valley of the Kings and Queens—Tombs of the Nobles, Deir el-Medina (workers' village), and Malkata (palace for Amenophis III, ninth pharaoh of the eighteenth dynasty).

Valley of the Kings

This is the place where people constructed tombs for pharaohs and powerful nobles for five hundred years (sixteenth to eleventh century B.C.). Visitors can find this valley on the Nile's west bank. The valley is divided in two: East Valley and West Valley (most tombs are in the eastern zone). Unfortunately, most tombs are not open to the public, and the tombs that are open may sometimes close whenever restoration work must be done. Only one tomb is accessible to the public in the West Valley. Visitors must have a ticket in hand to see the site. Guides will show you around the tomb, but they cannot talk while visiting inside. Sorry, camera lovers: photography is no longer permitted inside the tomb's walls.

Karnak Temple Complex

Come see a mix of temples, chapels, pylons, and other buildings at this complex. Construction began during the Middle Kingdom period and continued into the Ptolemaic period. Did you know that Karnak is a common name in popular culture? It's been the feature location for a number of movie scenes in *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen* and *The Mummy Returns*. Agatha Christie's *Death on the Nile* takes place aboard the S.S. Karnak steamship. And a number of music groups, including the British symphonic metal band Bal-Sagoth, make mention of Karnak in songs like "Unfettering the Hoary Sentinels of Karnak." This is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Aswan

This is another southern city in Egypt. What makes Aswan special? It teems with tourists year-round. In fact, Aswan is an ideal winter destination for many, since the Nile River offers breathtaking views. The river flows through granite rocks, round emerald islands covered in palm groves, and tropical plants. And like most Egyptian destinations, Aswan does not fall short of sites or monuments. Interested in visiting the Agha Khan Monastery? Sail across to the Philae Temple. If you want to see more attractions, why not take a trip to St. Simeon's Monastery? Another feature of this city is culture. Take a bite into local fish produce

at a restaurant while listening to Nubian music. Want to spice up your food? Stop by at a local market and purchase local spices. Up for a tattoo? You can get a henna (flowering plant) tattoo while you're here. If you want to take a bit of Aswan with you as you return home, be sure to buy souvenirs and African handmade goods at the Aswan Bazaar. Finally, if you ever have arthritis or any type of pain during your stay, you can bury your body aches in the city's sand. Aswan also has a number of sites for people to relax and rejuvenate.

Abu Simbel Temples

These are two massive rock temples located in Abu Simbel, a village in Nubia, near the Sudan border. You can find the temples on the western bank of Lake Nasser, 230 kilometres southwest of Aswan. To avoid being submerged by Lake Nasser, the temples were relocated in 1968. This is a UNESCO World Heritage Site; the complex is coined the "Nubian Mountains," since they run from Abu Simbel to Philae, near Aswan. Two temples await visitors upon their arrival. The Great Temple is the largest. When you arrive at the entrance, you will see a bas-relief representing two images of the king worshipping Ra Harakhti, a falcon head. Step inside the temple and take a look at the layout. It is triangular in shape, as are most ancient

temples in Egypt. The hypostyle hall is characterized by pillars representing Ramses linked to Osiris, the underworld god. This indicates the pharaoh's everlasting nature. You'll also see colossal statues; some of them bear a white crown of Upper Egypt, and others wear a double crown of Upper and Lower Egypt. A pillared hall follows the hypostyle hall. The pillared hall features various scenes of royalty and victories in past wars. The Small Temple is known for its statues of a king and his queen. Here's one particularity with the Small Temple: scenes with the queen playing instruments adorn the walls. (The instrument in question is the sinistrum.) Pillars and bas-reliefs depict various scenes with pharaohs, queens, gods, and goddesses.

THE WESTERN DESERT

Siwa Oasis

This is an Egyptian oasis sandwiched between the Qattara Depression and the Egyptian Land Sea in the Libyan Desert. It is one of the country's most isolated settlements with a population of 23,000.

Agriculture is the main industry in the oasis, though tourism has become a runner-up in recent times.

With respect to culture, Berber inhabitants

in the oasis were talented in creating basketry, pottery, silverwork, and embroidery crafts. Dress styles were also of major significance, especially bridal silver and silver ornaments/beads women wore at events. As roads and television services made headway in the Siwa Oasis, all silver ornaments were eventually replaced by gold ornaments.

Like most parts of Egypt, the Siwa Oasis has its share of festivals. The Sihaya Festival is by far the leading festival in the area. It honours Saint Sidi Sulayman, the town's traditional patron. What happens during this festivity? The local men assemble on a mountain to eat, sing songs of thanks to God, and make peace with one another. The women remain in the village and celebrate by singing, dancing, and playing drums.

Here's a brief list of sights you might want to check out as you visit the Siwa Oasis.

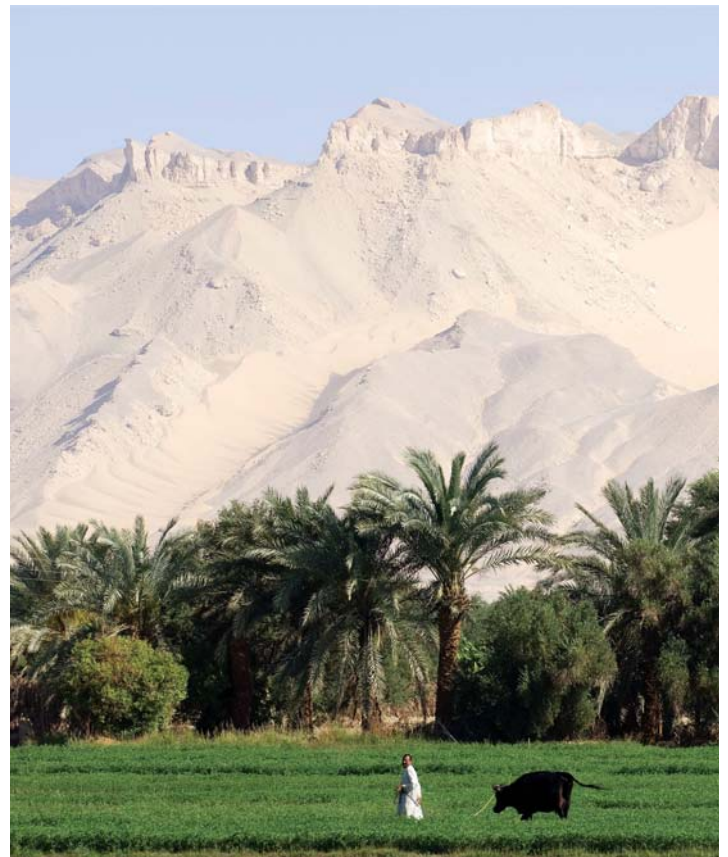
Mud-brick houses in Shali, an old town

Desert sand dunes south of Siwa

Siwa salt lake

Temple of the Oracle of the Amun

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Bangkok: The Gem of Southeast-Asia!

Article and photography by Michael Morcos

Most trips to Thailand start and end in Bangkok. This would be the case for our pan-Thailand trip where we would book-end our country wide tour in this magnificent sprawling city. There is so much to see and do that Bangkok can be a standalone destination.

In the few days here, we would discover and even rediscover the most popular Buddhist sites, the royal palace, take a motorized boat tour through the famous canals and enjoy great food, including a small family run Portuguese style restaurant.

Water taxi

Bangkok has many means of transportation, by far my favorite one is on a traditional pri-

vate long-tail boat powered by an awkward looking car engine that sticks out of the back. What a thrill it is to view the city from these motorized boats on the Chao Phraya River. Here the heat dissipates with the rushing winds, the sites of other boats with the sound of the powerful engines, and we would be on our way to the most iconic views of Bangkok.

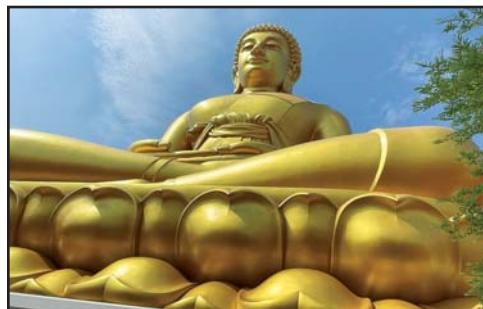
Temple of Dawn

This would be my second trip to Bangkok, and also to the Temple of the Dawn, and it was well worth it. Its mighty complex is directly on the river and is an amazing site from afar as it is right up close. I would stand in amazement for minutes at a time, thinking about how the complex structures were built

so many centuries ago, and the sheer commitment of people's ability to create such elaborate beauty. Round and round, up and down I went witnessing not only the physical structure but all the cheerful, happy visitors. Selfies were the order of the day, but there were many professional photographers, taking pictures of individuals with somewhat elaborate set ups, where I believe some were professional models on shoots.

Kudi Chin community

The Portuguese were the adventurers of the day, having sailed to four corners of the world including Southeast-Asia. They were welcomed in Bangkok to set up a peaceful community that became a harmonious district



where Buddhist, Christians and Muslims lived as great neighbors. To our fortune, we would have lunch prepared and served in a friendly and relaxing atmosphere at a family house/restaurant. Although the dishes were mainly Portuguese inspired, they still had an international fusion of taste. The presentation was colorful and the food delightful, and shortly after we would wonder the small lanes and visit a well put together Portuguese museum-cultural house with many historic items brought to Thailand centuries ago. Strange at first to see European furniture, clothing and dinner wear, it was still a fabric of Bangkok's diversity.

Toss of the sticks

We would head to another beautiful temple where on the outside were fortune telling booths and a game of tossing the sticks, also known as Kau Cim in Chinese, where players kneel on the floor and gently shake a box full of bamboo sticks until one comes out. I did and, wouldn't you know it, my favorite numbered stick came out with my fortune written out in a foreign language. Having it read by a Thai person, I was told I will live a long, happy life with my family. Great I thought, I love these fortune sticks!

Sit back and enjoy historic Bangkok

Yet another long boat ride, this time would be on the old canals and through mostly residential areas. It was fascinating to see how the locals used these waters as their main way of connecting to the other parts of the city with not much land they would use every single square inch for relaxing and growing vegetables, fruits, and flowers. Most historic homes were modest in size, but on certain occasions, you will even see large and richly decorated mansions. After all this is prime territory, in the heart of the city.

The Grand Palace

The grand palace is the perfect name for this immense complex. I might even call it the Grandest Palace, if that makes sense, as it is one of Thailand's most visited places and you can tell its popularity by the hordes of people who enjoyed their time there. This is not only a holy place but was also the residence of the royal families for many centuries until 1925. Not following any floorplans or directions, I just walked where there were less people. I often ended up in the same place twice,

which meant a double viewing and a second chance at an amazing photograph. Once again, I marveled at this human creation of such fantastic eastern architecture, artwork and in the fine material used to create such amazing beauty. It is highly recommended to add this to any Bangkok itinerary as it will awe the senses and create life-long memories.

Wat Phra Kaew

I can see why Wat Phra Kaew (the Temple of the Reclining Buddha), is so popular. We waited our turn to enter the temple itself and anticipated what would be one amazing statue. This reclining Buddha was breathtaking, so humongous and long that I could barely see the opposite end. It did not matter if you were at the head or at the feet statue, it seemed like it went on forever and was breathtaking and marveled at how it was created in such a rather tight space.

While there, visitors can purchase tokens that were sold by the cup full and can be placed into buckets while making prayers. For me, this was a must visit place as it is shown in all travel guides, on many travel shows and videos. The rest of the complex is also pleasing and takes time to properly appreciate.

Bangkok the gem

Bangkok is not just another mega city. Although it has urban sprawl, at the same time has many quiet, friendly neighborhoods, plenty of shopping options from the small stores to the modern megamalls. Eating here is heavenly, food is fresh, healthy, and rich in flavor and can be found anywhere from the small street stalls to fine dining restaurants. There is a clean and well-functioning public transit system, and although cities of this size have problems with traffic and pollution, from my experience, there is much less of this in Bangkok. There are also beautiful and well-kept green spaces and is a rather clean city for its size. It has a world class Airport, modern convention center, and of course let's not forget the night life that visitors and locals love, and it is safe and secure to walk the streets at any time. With all the above, Bangkok is the gem of Southeast-Asia! ■

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Nayarit, Mexico: Engaging with Nature in Jomulco, Islas Marias, and San Blas

Article and photography by Steve Gillick

Brandon and Aaron live in the town of Jomulco. When they're not in school, the cousins, ages 10 and 8, walk 30 minutes to the waterfall, carrying a tray of snacks to sell to locals and tourists. Their small dog, Salchi, happily accompanies them, even when they climb the slippery rocks of the waterfall to refresh themselves during the day's heat.

Jomulco is literally down the street from Jala, one of Nayarit's nine Pueblos Magicos (Magical Towns). But Jomulco has a unique charm all its own. Not far from the town square, a dirt road ends at a farm where three curious horses seemed to know who to approach to have their muzzles patted. From

there, it was a wobbly stagger on the short, broken suspension bridge across a creek and amidst the mountains to a nature trail leading to the waterfall, about 20 minutes away.

As locals and tourists enjoyed the refreshing waters, Brandon adopted a thoughtful pose when asked what he liked about living in Jomulco. He explained that aside from the annual corn festival parties, he loved nature, especially the waterfall and the mountain views. And aside from Jomulco's postcard mountain sunrises and sunsets, the sight of Ceboruco, an active stratovolcano looming over neighboring Jala, is something to behold.

Nayarit is ideal for travelers looking for 'destination-nature-engagement', a prime motivation for travel in the 2020s. Certainly, we were ready to further connect with nature when we journeyed to San Blas, a Magical Town on the Pacific coast, and boarded the Islas Marias II ferry to explore Nayarit's emerging tourism-nature destination, the Maria Islands.

The 130-kilometer (80 miles), 3 ½ hour crossing was highlighted by views of the Pacific Ocean stretching across the horizon. Occasionally, a pod of Pacific bottlenose dolphins rode the waves alongside the ferry, and eventually, the distant archipelago of islands (San Juanito, Maria Cleofas, Maria



Magdalena, and Maria Madre, the only populated Island, gradually came into view. Meanwhile, a screening of the 1951 movie *Islas Marias* in the indoor lounge provided a glimpse of the dreaded penal colony, nicknamed "The Pacific Hell".

And that dread was the impetus for Roberto Camacho, one of the passengers and a retired electrical engineer from Mexico City, to be drawn to the islands. He saw the movie "Islas Marias" as a child and grew up wondering how these isolated islands could be dedicated to suppression. "I wanted to see it with my own eyes. The islands captured my attention...so many suffered and died".

María de Montserrat Zárat Varela, one of the tour hosts, noted that people were curious about the islands because "No one has been here unless you were a prisoner". But this changed in 2019 when President Andrés Manuel López Obrador ordered the Islas Marias Federal Prison Complex closed. As the islands had already been designated a Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO in 2010, a new chapter in their life seemed to have been pre-ordained. On December 16, 2022, Isla Madre was opened as a tourist complex.

When we docked at the Pier in Puerto Balleto, recently added to Nayarit's list of Magical Towns, the passengers lined up to disinfect their shoes, and the luggage was also sprayed to avoid introducing species that might pose a risk to the fragile environment.

Accommodation was at The Hostel. Inside each room was a small table, chairs, coffee maker, dishes, refrigerator, a double bed, bunk bed, and a washroom with a shower. Thankfully, the room was air-conditioned. The outside temperature was 31C (88 F), but the humidity elevated this to over 40C (104 F).

It should be noted that this is an adventure experience, not a luxury outing. The 'all-inclusive' package includes the return ferry ride, basic accommodation, simple buffet meals, and guided tours on foot and by bus. Visitors can expect that it will be sweltering, that swimming at the beach (Chapingo) is a

one-time, 3-hour scheduled event, and that many areas of the Island are off-limits.

Nevertheless, a positive visitor experience involves a spirit of adventure, a fascination to learn about the Island's notorious past, a love of incredible scenery at the Christ Statue, the Lighthouse, and the lookouts at Chapingo and Punta Halcones, and the allure of seasonally sighting global and endemic species on land, in the air, and in the ocean: whales, sharks, manta rays, sea turtles and dolphins.

Our knowledgeable and personable guide, Fernando Rivera, was one of the Protectors of the Biosphere, a team of Marines assigned as Island tour guides. He brought us to the Visitor's Center, where the dream-like mural "Sueños de Libertad" (Dreams of Freedom) depicts an indigenous girl releasing endemic species, including red/orange Cardinals, red-billed Hummingbirds, Crested Caracaras, Hooded Orioles, and yellow-headed Parrots. There are also Tres Marias Cottontail rabbits, raccoons, wild goats, and iguanas. In fact, the logo of Islas Marias displays a rabbit and a parrot, both of which can be easily spotted.

Highlights of the daily tours included The Pier, where each 'new rope' of prisoners (bound by ropes or chains) disembarked. This is also the place for sunset ocean views by the Islas Marias sign. Across the street, near the handicraft stalls, is the colorfully painted Mandela Arch, which commemorates Mandela's life and his 18-year imprisonment on Robben Island. At the Panteon or cemetery, Fernando told the story of the Jesuit priest Juan Manuel Martinez Macias, known as Padre Trampitas (Priest of the Tramps), who befriended El Sapo (The Toad), an infamous serial killer. The two friends are buried next to each other.

La Reserva, the Museum, covers the islands' history from the arrival of the Spanish Conquistadors in 1532 to the Penal Colony that existed in several stages from 1905-2019. The 'Pacific Hell' was known for extreme temperatures, harsh living conditions, and inhumane treatment.

Personalities showcased in the Museum



include twice-imprisoned José Revueltas, the political activist and author of *Los muros de agua* (Walls of Water), based on his prison experience.

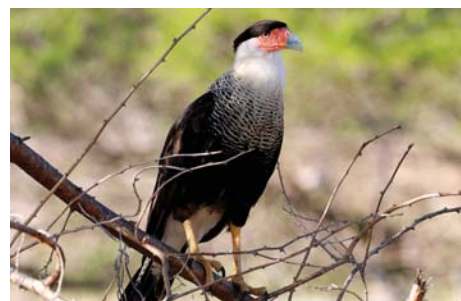
For many, though, the main curiosity on this trip is the maximum security prison built in 2011 to incarcerate cartel leaders and dangerous offenders. When the prison population increased from 2,000 to 8,000, critical food, water, and medical supply shortages led to its formal closure in 2015. Today, visitors explore the depressing, tiny, gray prison cells.

Still, the Biosphere Reserve's nature experiences are rousing. At 5:00 a.m. one morning, we climbed the 1.5-kilometer (1-mile) trail to the monument of Christ The Redeemer, a huffing, puffing hike. The following day, at 5:30 a.m., we took a shorter uphill path to the Lighthouse. Both climbs offered magnificent panoramas of Puerto Balleto, the beach, and the mountains.

On the third day, we boarded the ferry to return to San Blas, and that afternoon, we took a boat tour of the mangroves. Photographs encompassed 360 degrees of spectacular sunset scenery, Boat-billed Herons, Black vultures, Anhingas, and Green Herons, including an over-the-water nest full of curious chicks. It was as if Nayarit released a final display of nature to conclude our stay in the state.

Nayarit offers so much more than stunning resorts and blissful beaches. Interacting with Nayarit's extraordinary nature and absorbing history is a creative and meaningful way to add value to a holiday in Mexico. ■

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Flavors of Japan

Sampling one of the world's great cuisines on a one-week whirlwind tour

Article and Photography by Randy Mink



Photo this page: WT image library

Now that word is a mouthful....and it was probably the most mouthwatering food I tasted on my recent trip to Japan with Toronto-based tour operator Goway Travel.

Our group's weeklong trip to Tokyo, Kyoto and Hiroshima was filled with visits to temples, shrines, gardens and other traditional sights, but each day brought culinary adventures as well. I was surprised we were able to sample so many different dishes and experience so many cooking techniques in such a short amount of time. It wasn't all rice bowls and sushi. We had everything from ramen noodles to Kobe beef to dozens of foods I'd never heard of—like okonomiyaki.

This popular dish, known as Hiroshima's soul food, is served in some 2,000 restaurants in and around the city of a million-plus. Okonomiyaki first appeared after World War II as a cheap, filling food to satisfy the hunger of workers. (Hiroshima, of course, was the victim of the atom bomb in 1945, and the museum and monuments in Peace Memorial Park were the chief stops on our itinerary.)

So what is okonomiyaki? There are many variations, but the standard version features pork, eggs and noodles. Made with a thin, crepe-like base layer and piled with ingredients, the humble-looking pancake is cooked on a long, flat griddle. Besides sliced pork belly, eggs and soba noodles (made from buckwheat flour), the patty contains dried green seaweed flakes, green onions, bean sprouts and cabbage. Some people add toppings such as oysters or squid. What made it extra delicious at our modest Hiroshima lunch restaurant was the house-brand sauce, a thick, sweetened Worcestershire-type sauce I liberally poured on, a condiment so good I had to buy a bottle to take home. We ate at tables just steps away from the counter, where patrons on stools had ringside seats to watch the chefs work their magic.

Enchanting Miyajima Island

I'm not a fan of shellfish, but Miyajima Island, a five-minute ferry ride from the outskirts of Hiroshima, was paradise for some in

our group. On Miyajima's main shopping street, fellow travelers had a field day sampling the island's famous oysters, mussels and clams after exploring the seaside Shinto shrine (a Japan icon) and hilltop Buddhist temple. Our Goway guide, Brittany Banks, got grilled oysters on a stick, while one tour member savored a small plate of oysters covered with melted cheese.

On the island, I found my own indulgence, snacking on maple leaf-shaped sweet buns (momiji-maniyu), another Hiroshima-Miyajima specialty. These little sponge cakes, served warm from a handheld griddle, typically are filled with red bean jam or chocolate. Other flavors include custard and cheesecake; sometimes the momiji-maniyu are deep-fried on a stick. Tip: Protect your food from the tame deer that roam the town and grab things from unsuspecting tourists.

Tastes of Kyoto

One day in Kyoto, our small Goway group bellied up to the long counter at Manten Tempura and got a close-up look at the cook preparing our lightly battered treats. Served fresh from the vats of oil one at a time, the piping-hot morsels in our multi-course lunch included shrimp, eel, green pepper, mushroom, radish, pickled kelp and other tempura items that we dipped in bonito broth. A cup of miso (the ubiquitous soup made from a fermented soybean paste with rice, wheat or barley) was part of the meal, too.

Other culinary highlights in Kyoto were dinner at a steakhouse for tender cuts of famed Kobe beef and a real spectacle the next night featuring kimono-clad waitresses and a geisha performance at Yoshido Sanso, a traditional Japanese inn, or ryokan. In a private room our group savored an exquisitely choreographed kaiseki meal consisting of small dishes presented one at a time, starting with an assortment of appetizers like salmon sushi and conger eel tofu. The parade of haute cuisine continued with red snapper and tuna sashimi, tempura (deep-fried shrimp, sweet potato and green pepper), grilled sablefish and fig with sesame sauce. We also enjoyed two soups—miso and crab meat tofu, and this was our chance to try sake, the Japanese alcoholic drink made from rice. The refined experience was topped off with a dessert of kiwi and orange mousse.

Tea has always been an important part of life in Japan, and our group gained a little insight at a tea ritual inside the teahouse at Kyoto's Temple of the Golden Pavilion. Green tea, containing powerful antioxidants, is known for its health benefits, and matcha, a powdered green tea, is commonly used not only in tea ceremonies but is a popular flavor

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of ice cream and other sweets. There's even a matcha Kit-Kat bar. Boxes of matcha-flavored confections make colorful gifts to bring back home.

Don't Miss Tokyo's Big Fish Market

Seafood is a staple of Japanese cuisine, and what better place to indulge than Tokyo's Tsukiji Outer Market, one of the largest fish markets in the world. A tourist attraction as well as a locals' hotspot, the market teems with vendors hawking their wares. Part of our group headed to a sushi restaurant, but I decided to wander, take photos and try something from a street stall.

With more than 100 fishy businesses to choose from, I had plenty of lunch options. It was my first full day in Japan, and I was overwhelmed by the language and just the tempo of life in Tokyo. But the English words "Tuna Steak" on a food wagon caught my eye, so I went over and ordered a Coke and skewer of tuna nuggets for \$5, waiting patiently while the woman seared the meat with a little gas torch. Eel skewers also seemed to be a big item at the market.

Colorful signs at Tsukiji Outer Market showed bowls and platters of assorted seafood (much of it raw), including salmon, salmon roe, sea urchin, eel, scallops, shrimp and snow crab. Fatty tuna (a prized delicacy), medium-fatty tuna and tuna sushi rolls also were part of many combos, most of which came with a bowl of rice and/or suimono (a clear soup). Another market favorite: the Japanese rolled omelet (tamagoyaki), a seasoned, neatly folded pillow of yellow delight served hot off the griddle. Yum.

More Tokyo Culinary Highlights

In Tokyo, our group had two cook-it-yourself encounters. At a casual barbecue restaurant we took off our shoes and slid onto benches surrounding tables equipped with a burner in the middle. With help from our guide, we ordered a la carte—slices of duck, chicken, wagyu beef, yams, other vegetables—and then cooked them over the hot coals, in some cases getting things a tad overdone.

In a restaurant that featured hot pot cuisine, we again did our own cooking—this time submersing noodles, tofu, bean sprouts, other vegetables, and thinly sliced raw beef, pork and chicken (chosen from a buffet at the front of the restaurant) into the steaming communal pots of either broth or soy milk before us. When the food was done, we took it out with communal chopsticks and into our individual bowls of rice.

One way to sample the local cuisine is no more complicated than going to your hotel's included breakfast buffet, which will offer a

vast selection of both Japanese and Western foods. At the Shiba Park Hotel in Tokyo, brave ones among us tried slivers of sautéed burdock (a brown root vegetable), salted plum (definitely an acquired taste) and cups of natto (foul-smelling fermented soybeans whose bland taste can be enhanced with soy sauce or wasabi mustard). The buffet is also a good place to try miso soup and the Japanese rolled omelet.

For gourmet grazing, some of us used our free time in Tokyo's fashionable Ginza district to invade the epicurean food halls on the lower levels of Mitsukoshi, the best-known department store. In a setting not unlike Harrods fabled food halls in London, you'll find everything from sushi rolls and bento boxes to luscious pastries and decadent chocolates, even English teas, scones and clotted cream. Many top Tokyo restaurants have outlets at Mitsukoshi. Come hungry.

At the other end of the retail spectrum are the convenience stores that seem to pop up on every other block in Tokyo. The big three quick marts are 7-Eleven, Family Mart and Lawson. Our group stopped often at these places for snacks, basic necessities and cash from ATMs. Near the cash register are hot foods like packets of chicken nuggets or steamed buns filled with meat or a sweet bean paste. Some stores have tables for dining.

Also convenient are the vending machines on the streets and at tourist attractions, some of them artfully decorated. Besides chips, candy and soft drinks, they dispense beer, wine, and hot coffee and tea. (Japan has the world's highest number of vending machines per capita.)

And then you have American fast food chains, including McDonald's, Burger King, Wendy's and KFC. A quirky Japanese tradition for many families is ordering buckets of KFC fried chicken for takeout at Christmastime. At KFC stores starting in November, you'll see pictures and statues of Colonel Sanders in a Santa hat.

Though I would have done some of these food adventures on my own, having a guide with knowledge of Japanese cuisine, dining etiquette, language, culture and travel logistics made the journey hassle-free and a fun learning experience. Many restaurant menus have English translations, but many do not. Happily for those of us not so adept with chopsticks, forks are generally available.

Bon Appetit! (Or however you say it in Japanese.)

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