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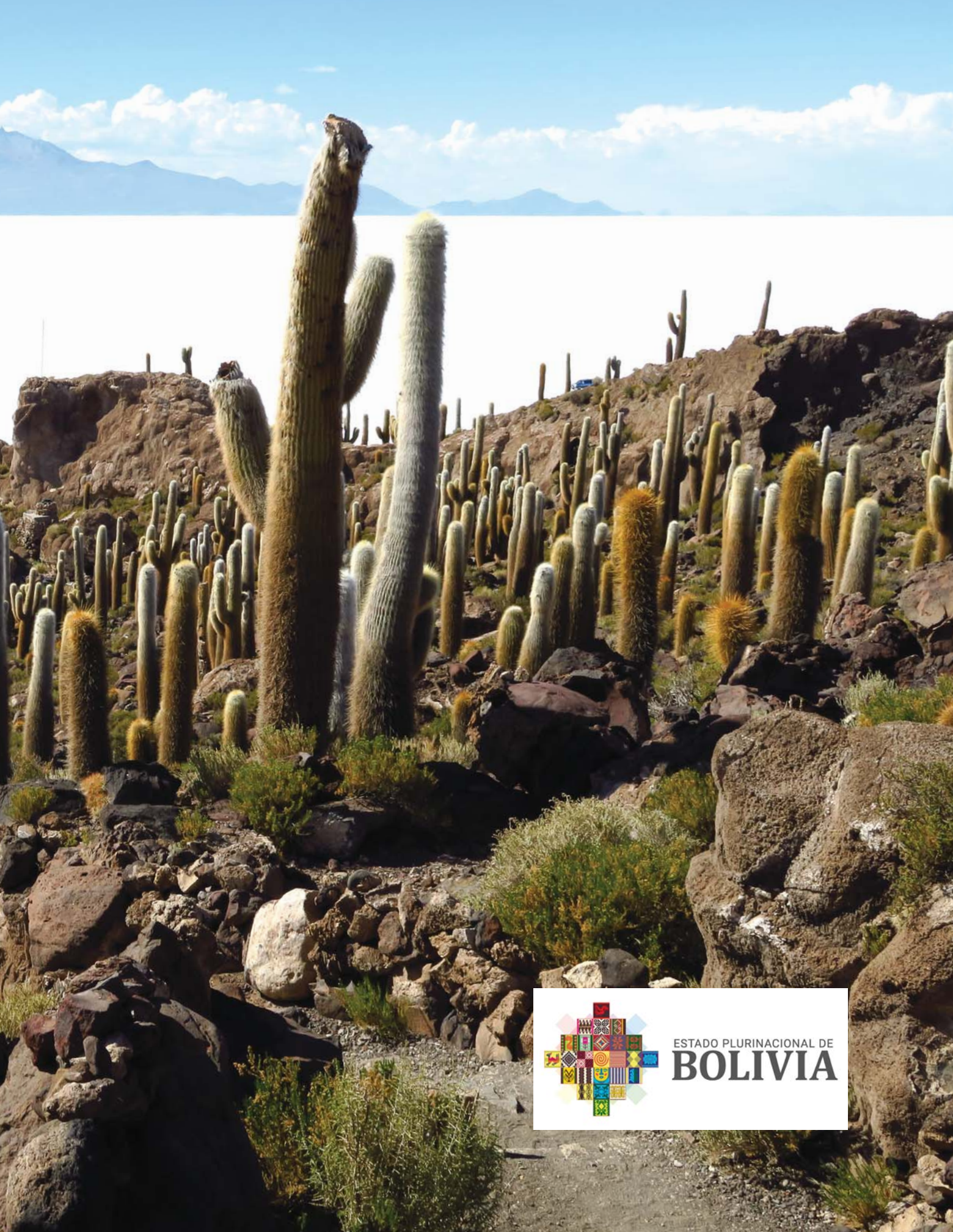
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Welcome to World Traveler



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 tours of discovery in the Far East by visiting the incomparable Tokyo to find it has many faces including its urban electric feel and out of the way islands with plenty of natural settings. Closeby, we visit the community of Izumi to find great history, gastronomy and a flock of some 10,000 beautiful cranes. We then set sail through 'The Land of two Smiles' to discover the best of Cambodia and Vietnam on a luxury cruise with CroisiEurope on the mighty Mekong River. Lastly, we head to Thailand to find this amazing destination is geared up for some 16 distinctive yearly festivals.

To the other side of this vast continent, we head to Dubai and see how this desert paradise is going green and becoming ever so sustainable. Due west, we head to Africa on not one but two Nile cruises, including an Exodus Travels offering that includes many worldwide destinations with a Nile adventure and an Uganda Chimp and Gorilla discovery trek.

Now in Europe, and in wonderful Malta, we find that there is now yet another Michelin Star

restaurant, bringing the total on this tiny island nation to six. Starting in Italy, we take yet another cruise, this time on Viking's 'newest ship, the Neptune and its 'Icon Mediterranean' sailing to discover the best of this delightful region. With the departure port in Spain, we extend our stay and find exceptional service, beauty and charm at the 'Paradores de España'.

Next, we jet-off to North America and to far western Canada where we discover the stunning natural beauty of Waterton Lakes National Park. Just across the border we head to Montana to find there is something for every taste and budget in this amazing and sparsely populated northern state. To the south, we find, 'Reno, Nevada Offers Much More Than Casino Thrills'. In Tucson, Arizona we enjoy the 'Saguaro, Sunshine and Sumptuous Gastronomy'. In the coastal community of Mendocino, California, we find there is a laid back feeling and plenty of natural surroundings in this region by the sea. To the east coast, we find that Fort Lauderdale is a "Year round destination". For our last sailing of this world-wide tour, we embark the 'Harmony of the Seas' for a father and daughter cruise of laid back fun and wonderful memories. In our 'Tropical Tidbits' pages, we learn about all the new happenings found in these proud Caribbean nations.

To Latin America we go, first in Mexico, we find the relatively unknown and lightly traveled 'Other Side of Nayarit'. In Bogota, we taste the wonderful and delicious flavours of Colombia. To its southern neighbor, we find Intrepid Travel Launches New Trek in Peru 'The Great Inca Road'. Lastly, and certainly not least, we head to find a fascinating adventure in 'Magnificent, Magical, and Mystical Bolivia'!

Happy Travels!



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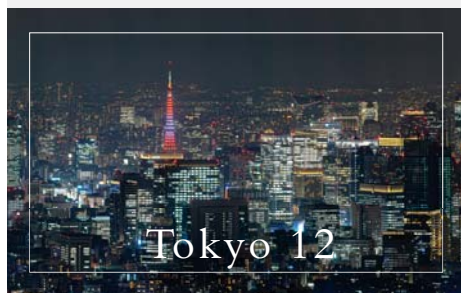
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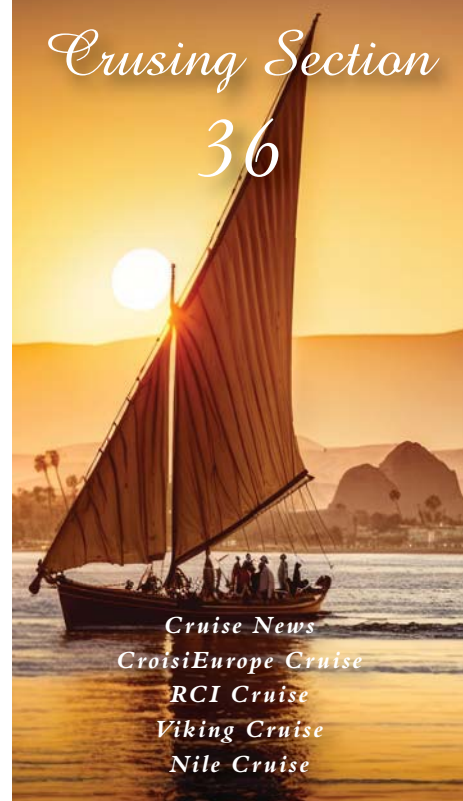
Destinations



(short informative travel pieces)

Malta + Spain + Intrepid Travel + Good-to-Go + Dubai
Montana + Thailand + Exodus Travels + Fort Lauderdale + Reno
WT Vintage Front Covers + Waterton + Qatar Airways + Izumi, Japan
WT 20 Years of Memorable Images + Tropical Tidbits

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Stay & Play - 50



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



Flavors of Colombia

Savor traditional foods and beverages at Bogota's street carts, markets, restaurants and cafes

Article and Photography by Randy Mink

It seems as if you can't walk a block in central Bogota without running into a fruit market, sidewalk juice stand or mom-and-pop cafe. And you're never far from a street vendor serving up that classic Colombian corn cake, the arepa, hot off the griddle.

Not long after their arrival in this sprawling, traffic-choked capital cradled by the green slopes of the Andes, first-time visitors seeking to sample native foods inevitably find themselves biting into an arepa. Colombia's version of a tortilla, the ubiquitous patty of corn-meal and butter is usually grilled plain or

filled with a sweet cheese, or sometimes with egg, ham or chicken. Arepas can be a snack, light breakfast or starchy accompaniment to a sit-down meal.

Corn plays a part in many Colombian dishes with Andean influences, as do meat and potatoes. Food in this South American country is basically peasant fare, simply prepared and gently flavored.

Traditional Favorites

Bogota's most famous dish is the beloved ajiaco santafereno. A hearty meal in a bowl,

ajiaco is a chicken and potato stew with small pieces of corn on the cob. It is flavored with guascas, a wild herb native to the Andes, and often garnished with capers and a dollop of sour cream. Ajiaco is popular with tourists dining at La Puerta de la Cathedral, a restaurant located in a historic, high-ceilinged building around the corner from the main cathedral. Specializing in traditional Colombian cuisine, it is just steps from Plaza de Bolivar in La Candelaria, the atmospheric Spanish colonial district. Its narrow cobble streets brim with churches, museums, handicraft shops and 300-year-old houses.



Many in my tour group at La Puerta ordered the ajiaco, but I went for the bandeja paisa, another signature Colombian dish that satisfies big appetites. The platter of chorizo, fried pork belly (chicharron), pulverized beef, rice, beans and baked plantain is topped with a fried egg and comes with an arepa and a slice of avocado.

Sample This Corn Brew

One day we took a tour called “Bogota Like a Local,” which exposed our group to more Colombian food and drink specialties. During a tasting session at La Candelaria’s Casa Galeria Cafe, we sampled a fermented corn drink called chicha and were surprised to learn that Colombia grows 60 different types of corn, a grain that for centuries has been an important part of the heritage of indigenous people in the Andes. The corn brew is slightly bubbly, thick and most commonly yellow.

As our Casa Galeria host told us, chicha has religious origins. Long ago, it was made by the local wise man, who would chew the corn off the cob and then let it ferment in a pot—in his saliva—for 15 days. Villagers who partook of the brew supposedly were drinking knowledge. Over the years, the idea behind imbibing chicha evolved into the secular, and chicha became associated with drunkenness and stupidity. In fact, after a political revolution in 1948, in which 70 percent of Bogota was burned, drinking or producing chicha was declared forbidden. To this day, the drink is still on the books as being illegal, though the law is not enforced.

The chicha we had at Casa Galeria was from an ancient recipe from the cafe owner’s family. Following tradition, we drank from a gourd cup with a string attached. Our brew (made only with corn, no water) was fermented for only two or three days and had an alcohol content of 2 percent, but vendors up and down the street, a colorful stretch filled with artistic graffiti, sell bottles of chicha with 4 or 5 percent alcohol (though it can go up to 12 percent). And it comes in many different flavors in a rainbow of colors. At night, students flock to the chicha bars surrounding Plaza de Chorro de Quevedo, the lively hub of the graffiti district.



Other Drinks to Try

Our Casa Galeria session featured other drinks, including Club Colombia amber beer (paired with orange slices, strawberries and caramel brownies), the premium brand made by Bavaria, the country’s only industrial-scale brewery. We also sipped Chela, a locally made, small-batch coffee beer that has chocolate in it.

At a sidewalk cafe near my hotel, I tried another local drink—refajo. A strange combination of cola and beer, it helped wash down my empanadas bogotanas, pockets of fried corn dough filled with potatoes and stewed beef. Empanadas are found in every South American country, but the ones in Colombia, crisp and golden with a nice crunch, are on the small side (so you can order more and try different fillings).

For a souvenir, I brought home a small bottle of aguardiente, Colombia’s heavy-hitting spirit. Translated “fiery water,” the clear, anise-flavored liquor is made from sugarcane.

You can’t discuss Colombian beverages without mentioning its famed coffee. Locals enjoy un tinto (black coffee) any time of day. Walking around La Candelaria, I spotted a Juan Valdez cafe, one in a chain of Starbucks-like coffee shops named after the fictional character that many North Americans remember from TV commercials way back when. Whereas Colombia once exported almost all of its best coffee beans and few Colombians drank coffee at cafes, the local coffee scene has improved immeasurably in the last 15 years, with trained baristas staffing some 50 coffee shops in Bogota alone.

Festival of Fruits

I’m not big on vegetables but do love fruits, and in Colombia you can have a different fruit every day of the year. Many of them are not found in other parts of the world. You’ll find common tropical fruits like mangoes, pineapples, papayas, passion fruit, bananas and guava, but also unfamiliar ones with names like feijoa, curuba and granadilla. The latter is an orange-yellow fruit with slimy



gray contents. Guanabana (or soursop) is a large, spiky, rather intimidating “dinosaur egg” filled with sweet, milky white flesh. The green higo (prickly pear) comes from a cactus variety and has a sweet, orange-colored meat. The bittersweet lulo, orange on the outside and bright green on the inside, is often consumed in the form of a water- or milk-based juice, as are many of the other fruits.

Our “Bogota Like a Local” group had a chance to sample the fruits of Colombia at a sit-down session at La Perseverancia Market Square, a famous produce market dating back to 1940. The photo-worthy, 80-stall market is a common stop on gastronomy (and general) tours of Bogota. Its restaurant serves up traditional Colombian fare, including ajiaco santafereño, bandeja paisa, steaks, soups, and various seafood and fish dishes.

Just walking down the street in Bogota triggers hunger pangs. You’ll see pushcart vendors cooking hamburgers, slicing mangoes, grinding sugarcane into juice, or grilling corn on the cob (mazorca) and skewers of meat.

In La Candelaria, I couldn’t resist the ladies selling obleas, which are big flat wafers filled with arequipe (milk caramel), berries or whipped cream. Many years ago when the Rolling Stones were in town, lead singer Mick Jagger bought an oblea, and even now many of the carts bear his caricature (complete with flabby lips), a sort of celebrity endorsement. ■

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Saguaros, Sunshine and Sumptuous Gastronomy Smitten with Tucson, Arizona

Article and photography by Jennifer Merrick

Though prickly and somewhat intimidating, I fell in love at first sight. Driving to Tucson, the saguaro cacti stood proud in the desert with their arms stretched out high. The landscape was so alien from the pines and mixed hardwoods of home that I felt I had jumped through the TV of my childhood and landed in an episode of *The Road Runner Show*.

With an average height of 40 feet, the saguaro image is a symbol of the American West. In fact, it only grows in the Sonoran Desert and can be found almost exclusively in southern Arizona and western Sonora, Mexico.

But in this limited area they were plentiful. And wherever we went, this King of Cactus greeted us.

At the Desert Museum, my appreciation deepened when I learned the life span of the slow-growing plant was between 150 – 200 years, and that it took 50 to 75 years for their arms to appear. The 98-acre property was more a combination of botanical garden and wildlife preserve than a ‘museum’. Not only did we find out more about my newly beloved saguaros, but we also viewed indigenous wildlife (including Mexican gray wolves, mule deer and the pig-like javelinas), marvelled at the colours and varieties at the interpretive cacti gar-

dens, oohed and aahed at the gemstones displayed in an underground cave and hiked the Desert Loop Trail.

Surrounded by my latest infatuation, I was reluctant to leave. But I needn’t have worried. We drove away on the scenic Gate’s Highway, where hundreds of giant spiny arms saluted as we wound our way through the Tucson Mountains.

Once in the city, a rival Tucsonan suitor vied for my affection –gastronomy.

“Tucson punches way above its weight when it comes to food,” said Chef Mat Cable, co-owner of Zio Pepe, an Italian eatery. He



credits the camaraderie of the local chefs who challenge each other in their creative use of local ingredients. Zio Pepe uses heritage grains, indigenous to Arizona, in their thin-crust pizzas.

"It took us two months to perfect the recipe," said Cable. It was a winner, and the textured nutty flavours complemented the original toppings.

At Coronet, a stylish restaurant in the historic Coronado Hotel, our palates delighted in the innovative menu items, which used the freshest of local ingredients, especially the region's citrus. The butternut, kohlrabi, radicchio salad, for example, featured bruleed grapefruit, herbed pistachio cream and sunflower sprouts.

Flavours from Tucson's southern neighbour play a strong influence on its culinary scene –not surprising considering over 40 percent of residents have Mexican heritage and its location 70 miles from the border. The small but spicy chiltepin chili, for example, adds a fiery kick to locally-inspired dishes. Mexican restaurants all over the city offer a variety of authentic experiences and flavours. At Seis Kitchen, named for the six culinary regions of Mexico, we sampled a variety of tacos on housemade corn tortillas with refreshing agua frescos as we enjoyed the outdoor courtyard and sunshine (by the way, Tucson has 350 days of sun a year). El Charro, whose claim to fame is being the oldest Mexican restaurant in the US with continuous operation by the same family, was another tasty meal with its signature sun-dried carne seca.

Indeed, it seemed impossible to have a mediocre dining experience in the Old Pueblo and its culinary offerings wooed us continuously with divine meals at Cup Café, 5 Points Market, Prep & Pastry and Tito & Pep. I now understood how Tucson earned its UNESCO designation as a Capital of Gastronomy, an honour bestowed on only two US cities (the other being San Antonio). Key factors in obtaining this honour are the region's agricultural heritage and culinary distinctiveness. We learned more about both on a visit to Mission Gardens.



"Tucson's birthplace was here," said Kendall Kroesen, the Garden's outreach coordinator. He explained that the flooding of the Santa Cruz River combined with the black volcanic soil created fertile land for growing crops. Today, it's an archaeological site and education centre, showcasing six distinct gardens from different historical periods and cultures.

The sweet scents of citrus and fresh herbs permeated the air as we walked through the various gardens and Kroesen explained how some of the desert plants were used. The prickly cacti might look inedible and unconvincing for harvest, but we learned firsthand that wasn't the case when he sliced open a cactus fruit and offered a taste.

Citrus was plentiful and since all the varieties came from heritage trees found in the region, the flavours were different than those in the supermarkets. To prove his point, Kroesen offers a taste of a lime. My mouth got ready to pucker anticipating a sour taste that never came as these limes were sweet.

"But the oranges are sour," said Kroesen.

After a visit to Mission Gardens, I understood better how the cultural influences and Sonoran Desert vegetation laid the foundation of the city's gastronomic greatness.

With so much good food, it was fortunate for my waistline that Tucson's hiking was equally awesome.

Five mountain ranges surround the city (Tucson Mountains, Tortolita Mountains, Santa Catalinas, Santa Ritas and Rincon), and you could hike a lifetime here, but we fit in what we could, hitting these classic spots:

Saguaro National Park was iconic, showcasing my beloved saguaros in all their glory and offering more than 165 miles of hiking trails both in the Tucson Mountain District in the west and the Rincon Mountain District in the east.



"Welcome to Tumamoc Hill, an oasis of desert in the heart of the city, a National Historic Landmark, a sanctuary, a beacon, a summit with panoramic views," read the sign that perfectly summed up this hike. Though at times it might have felt like a Stairmaster, the views of the city and surrounding mountains were worth every huff and puff.

Located in Tucson's Coronado National Forest, Sabino Canyon was a natural wonder with rugged desert terrain and rocky outcroppings. A 30-minute tram ride that crossed nine stone bridges took us to a lookout point, where we were treated to panoramic views. There was also access to more remote hiking trails, but limited by time, we opted to hike down, and the landscape once again awed us.

This was sadly the last hike of our Tucson trip. You might think that after being around so many saguaros throughout the visit they would have lost some of their novelty. But this was not the case, and I was as smitten as ever.

And what should I happen to see at the end of our hike?

A roadrunner! Beep, beep!

I looked around just in case the coyote was hiding behind a saguaro with some ACME dynamite.

If you go: Flair Airlines offers non-stop flights to Tucson from five Canadian cities. It's also less than a two-hour drive from Phoenix. For accommodation, an excellent choice for a city stay is the Tuxon, a stylishly designed, boutique hotel that offers curated events, including star gazing. Outside the city centre is Hacienda del Sol, which offers a tranquil and luxurious experience on their beautifully landscaped 43-acre property. ■

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The Tokyo Beat Goes on...with vitality, energy, and taste!

Article and Photography by Steve Gillick

Visitors remove their shoes and socks and roll their pants to their knees before entering the 'Soft Black Hole'. The room is dark, and the 'floor' is really a deep, sinking, cushiony surface. Every step is awkward as people attempt to maintain their balance. But they end up tumbling sideways, sinking up to their waist, trying to take giant steps to find solid footing, and then fall onto and into the soft, bean bag-like flooring. And this is only the introduction to Tokyo's interactive Teamlab Planets exhibit, where the theme is "Immerse your Body, and with Others, Become One with the World".

The sensory explosion continues to flow through a series of artworks. The kaleidoscopic 'Water Area' features multi-coloured Koi fish that seem to swim around visitors' feet. The 'Infinite Crystal Universe' is a mesmerizing maze of beads, lights, and mirrors. The 'Falling Universe of Flowers' encourages visitors to float with the flower images that

cascade down the walls. And 'Transforming Space' features giant movable spheres that turn different colours when touched.

However, Teamlab Planets is only one of Tokyo's many innovative sensory-stimulating activities. Japan was off-limits to visitors for nearly three years due to the pandemic, but the re-opening date of October 11, 2022, was music to the ears of those who could hardly wait to resume exploring the country, specifically Tokyo. And know that Tokyo refers to both the city and the Prefecture that extends to Okutama, Tokyo's 'nature getaway', about 2 hours west of the city.

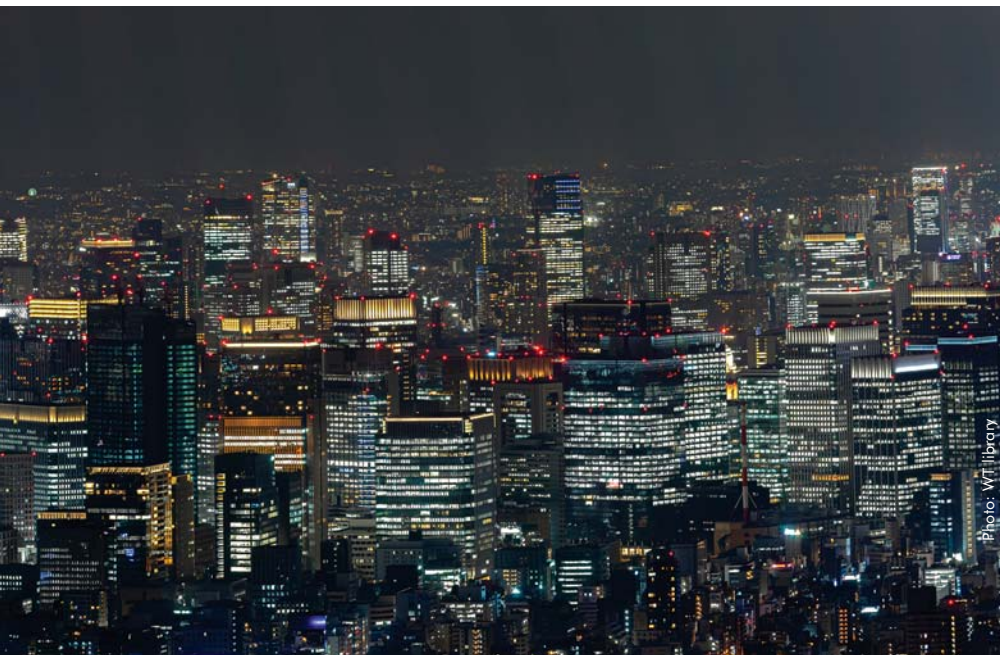
Okutama conjures up thoughts of nature, wellness, and 'shinrin-yoku', or 'forest bathing', where people embrace the atmosphere of the fresh air, peaceful ambiance, and the music of the trees. And Okutama is the place to be for those who enjoy a strenuous hike through the mountains, a casual stroll to visit a shrine,

or a determined walk along a tree-lined path to discover a hidden rock garden. In addition, there are waterfalls, caves, lakes, suspension bridges, vistas, and even troops of Japanese Macaques.

Senzokuike Park is a little bit closer to the city of Tokyo (about 40 minutes) and provides a different experience for nature lovers seeking bright colours and birdsong. Around the lake and the nearby pond, there are colourful Eurasian Kingfishers, Feral Rose-ringed Parakeets, Long-tailed Tits, Black-faced Buntings, Warbling White-eyes, and more.

Back in the city, a sense of nature and calm can be found in many buildings designed by the architect Kengo Kuma. In October 2021, the Haruki Murakami Library opened on the campus of Waseda University. Kuma designed a soft wooden interior to encourage people to sit on the main staircase to read and reflect. And he created a wooden tunnel design on





robot) figures, and spaceships flying in and out of the billboard.

13

Of course, sensory fulfillment would not be complete without indulging in Tokyo's reputation as one of the best food cities on the planet. Foodies can savour just about any type of international cuisine in every price category. Our preference is seafood, and we were overwhelmed by the creativity, freshness, and mouth-watering tastes we encountered.

Noboru Shibata is the owner of Izakaya Wasuke in Kappabashi, the neighbourhood known as the kitchenware capital of Tokyo. Even though the restaurant was packed, Noboru-san meticulously prepared our dish of assorted sashimi. First, he sliced the raw fish and artistically arranged the pieces on the platter. Then he opened a small plastic container filled with tiny Japanese Maple leaves (Momiji) that replicated the Autumn colours of red, orange, and yellow. He took his time to find the perfect colour and leaf combination before carefully positioning it on the platter. And then, adding decorative red berries, he served the ultra-fresh dish. So appealing!

And the proverbial apple doesn't fall far from the tree. Noboru-san's son, Hajime, owns another Izakaya Wasuke, this one located in Machiya. Again, we were treated to an evening of melt-in-the-mouth seafood. The gilled Hokke (mackerel) was as tender as butter, and Hajime's Japanese/Asian-style Curry creation was outstanding. It was mildly spicy, emanating a comforting umami warmth that stayed with us for hours.

A few subway stops away in Kita-Senju, the line-up to get into Tokudawara, a small stand-up seafood restaurant begins at 4:00 pm. Here, chef Hirofumi Nakamura prepares unique dishes that please the eyes and charm the taste buds. The ankimo (Monkfish liver) and the marinated oysters are excellent choices.

After a three-year absence, it was a reassuring pleasure to discover that the vitality, energy, and taste of Tokyo was not only intact, but also refreshingly enhanced. This visit was the best way to celebrate and reward a love for travel.

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the exterior to pay homage to his love for the transformative effect of Murakami's books on himself. ("When I start reading a novel by Haruki Murakami I get the sensation of being sucked into a tunnel...This tunnel draws you deeper and deeper until you are suddenly thrown back out into everyday life when you close the last page of the book"). And good to know that the Library was designed for die-hard Murakami fans as well as those who have never read one of his books. It's well worth a visit!

The vitality and energy of Tokyo is best reflected in the neighbourhoods that comprise this city of 14 million. An excellent place to start is in Daikanyama, where the relaxed strolling vibe takes visitors past the shops, cafes, and galleries. At the Hillside Forum Art Gallery, we were welcomed by the fashion, textile, and nature artist Akira Minagawa to view his latest collection. A painted eagle on a jug included the declaration, "I have wings since I was born". And a medallion featuring a pine tree and the outline of a person featured the truism, "Bird Sing Fish Swim Man Walk Live like that".

Next door is Daikanyama Tsutaya Books, which has been referred to as one of the best bookstores in the country. Beyond the award-

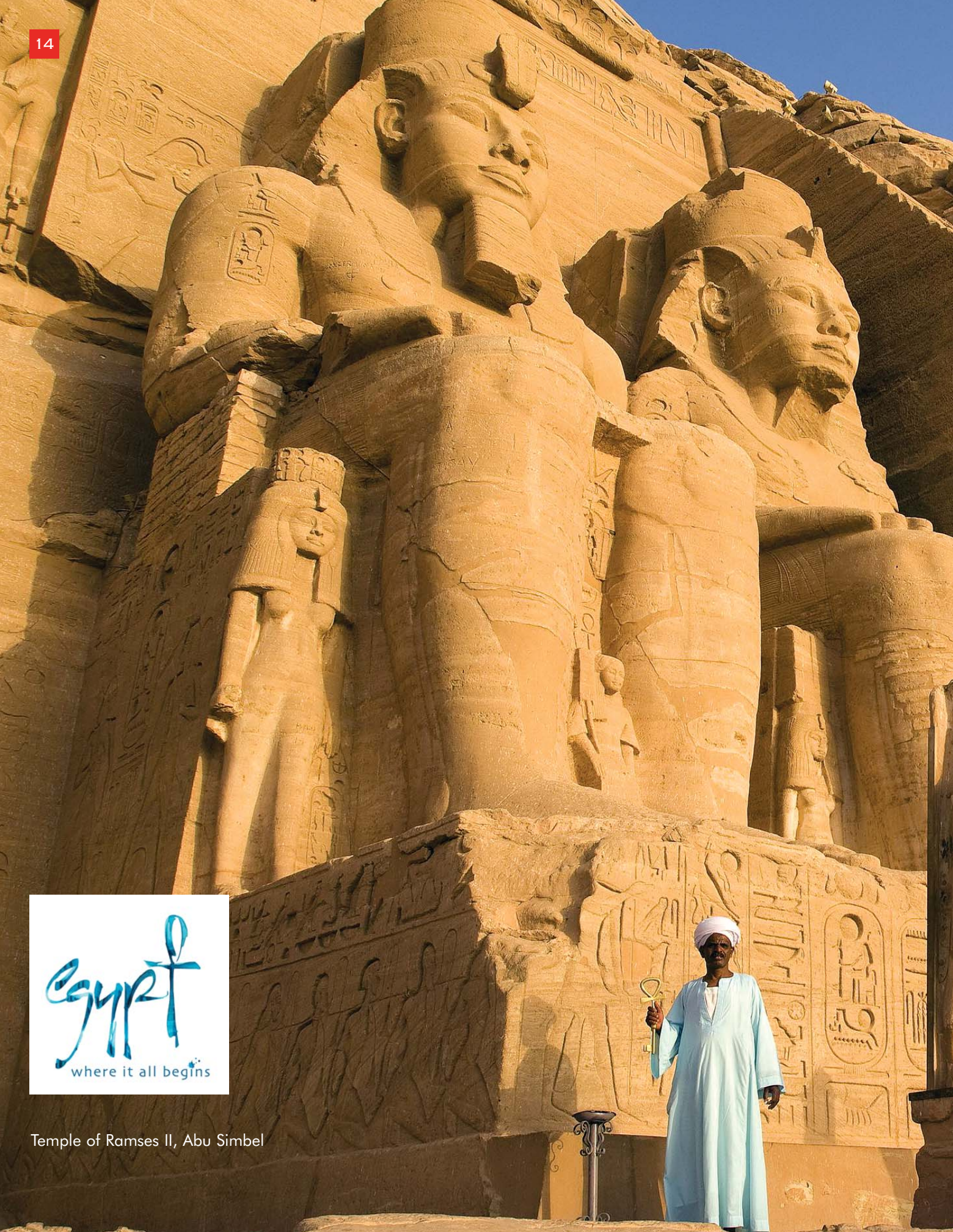
winning architectural design lies an impressive selection of books and music.

Another neighbourhood to discover is Shimokitazawa. This is an older area of Tokyo that has undergone gentrification. It now boasts an exciting array of used clothing stores, Asian curry shops, Craft Beer, and vinyl record shops.

And for those who love to listen to original music on vinyl from the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, take the Metro (subway) to the newly renovated Shibuya station. Instead of heading to the famous Shibuya Crossing, turn the table and head over to Record Bar 33 1/3. This small, atmospheric bar has a great sound system and a relaxed ambiance, all of which add up to a thoroughly enjoyable way to spend an evening. Shigeru Ito, the owner, keeps the memories flowing with a collection of over 3500 LPs and 2000 singles.

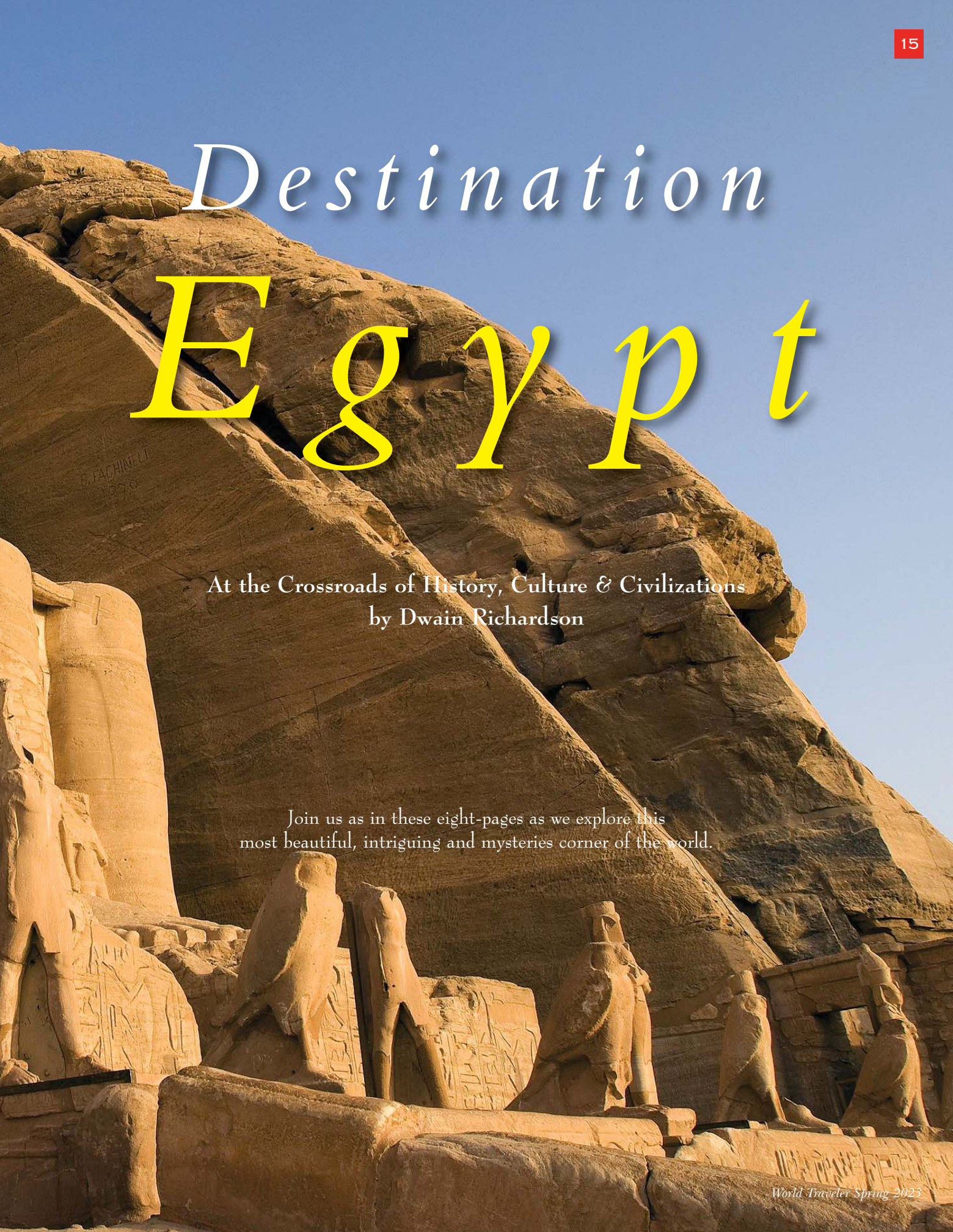
Visitors looking to sweeten the kitty, can take the East exit of the Shinjuku train station and listen to the loud Meow from the giant 3-D cat. Kyodai Mikeneko (giant calico cat) plays, rolls over, yawns, and stares at the crowds below. After the cat's performance, the screen transitions into a 3-D Manga (cartoon) featuring Naruto superheroes, Gundam (giant





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 the museums 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 present 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

17

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).

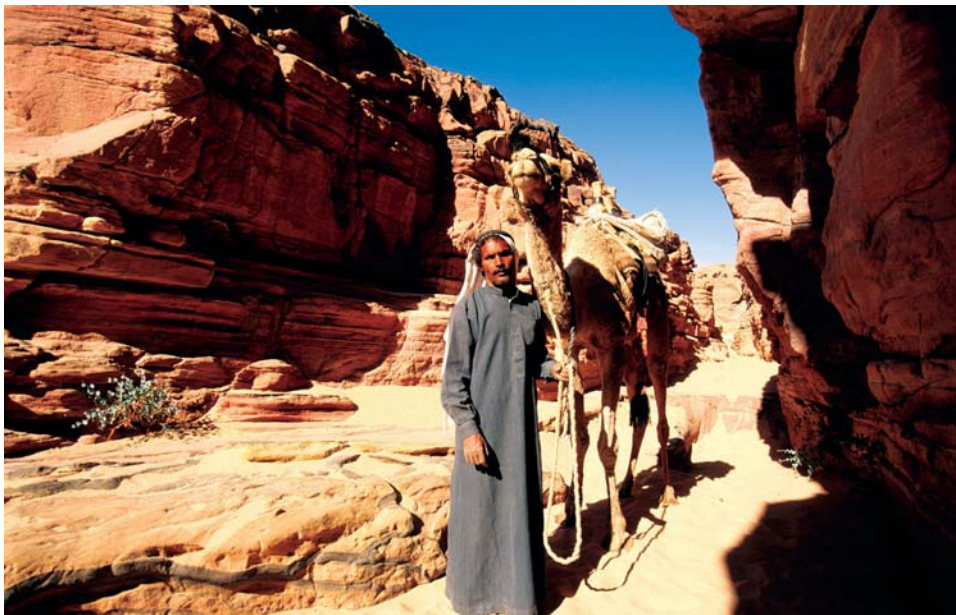
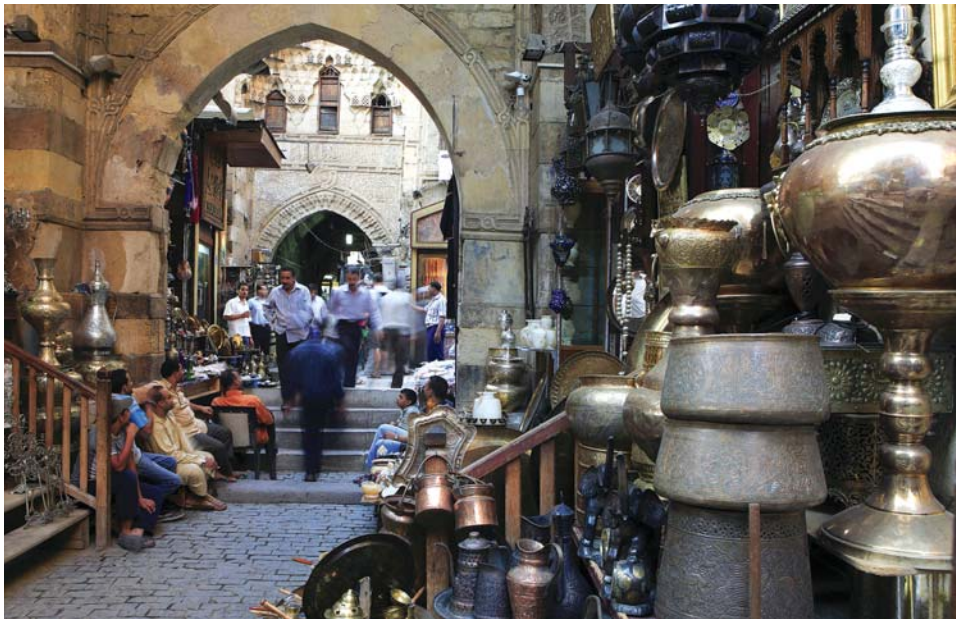
The Hanging Church

(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 coffee-houses 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

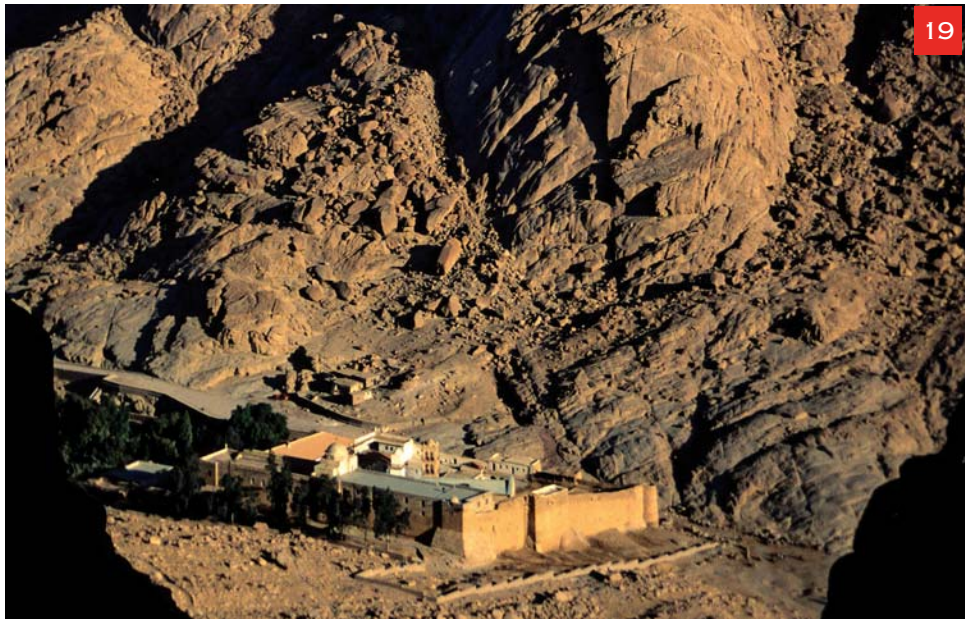
This is a city located on Sinai Peninsula's southern tip and along the Red Sea coastal strip. This is the economic hub for the country's southern governorate, and includes cities such as Dahab and Nuweiba. You'll find St. Catherine's Monastery and Mount Sinai nearby. Most importantly, Sharm-el-Sheikh 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

WWW.EGYPT.TRAVEL



Around The World (in 22 pages)



The recent launch of the fourth edition of the Malta MICHELIN Guide includes a newly starred restaurant bringing the total of Michelin starred restaurants in the Maltese archipelago to six. The new Michelin Guide 2023 showcases the richness of the Maltese culinary scene, influenced by the many civilizations that once made these islands their home.

The 2023 edition elevated the Fernandō Gastrotheque in Sliema, to a One Michelin Star status. The five restaurants that have retained their MICHELIN Star status are Under Grain, Valetta; Noni, Valletta; ION – The Harbour, Valletta; De Mondion, Mdina; and Bahía, Balzan.

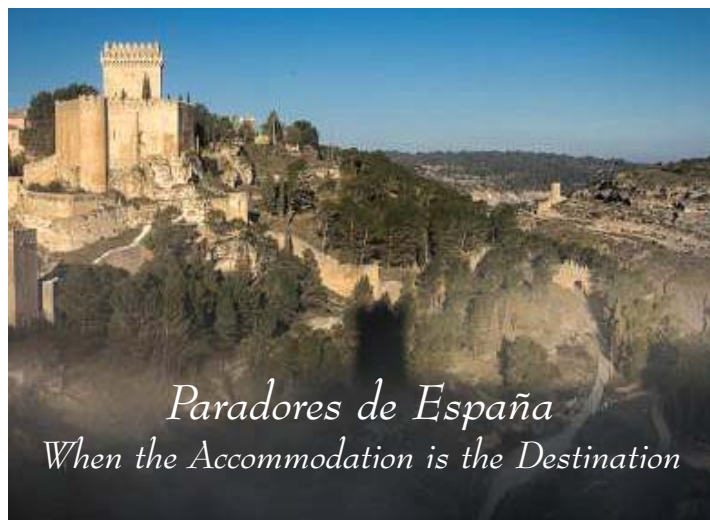
The new edition introduces five new restaurants to the Recommended selection: Giuseppe's, Naxxar; Loà, St. Paul's Bay; Grotto Tavern, Rabat; Leglign, Valletta; and Rosamì, St. Julian's. This brings the 2023 Malta selection up to 25 Michelin recommended restaurants.

The Bib Gourmand status has been maintained by four restaurants: Terrone, Birgu; Commando, Mellieha; Grain Street, Valletta; and Rubino, Valletta. These restaurants offer good quality and good value cooking.

The MICHELIN Guide Malta 2023 selection includes 35 restaurants in total: 6 one MICHELIN Star, 4 Bib Gourmands, 25 recommendations

Gwendal Poullennec, International Director of the MICHELIN Guides, expressed his pride in welcoming a new restaurant to the MICHELIN Stars family, and commended the development of the Maltese culinary scene, which continues to surprise and delight gourmets. He added, "Whether for its UNESCO designated heritage, its status as a Mediterranean crossroads, its ancient history or its colorful and joyful cuisine, Malta has everything needed to seduce travelers." ■

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Unique and sustainable accommodation

There are currently almost a hundred Paradores located throughout most of Spain. They usually have an average of 65 rooms, thus ensuring a personal, quality customer service. More than half of them are located in historical monuments and buildings; and many others offer accommodation in national parks and outstanding natural spaces. In addition, their restaurants serve a harmonious blend of traditional dishes alongside the latest culinary trends. All of this shows the Paradores' commitment to sustainability, which translates into a management model where the protection of historical and cultural heritage, care for the environment and the promotion of the local economy always prevail.

The experience of Paradores

There are many options to enjoy the special experience of the Paradores. You can find them in Spain's top cultural cities and destinations, such as Granada, Toledo, Córdoba, Segovia, Ávila, Salamanca, León, Ronda, Mérida and Santiago de Compostela, to name but a few. You could also opt to touch base with nature with Paradores set in breathtaking landscapes like the Picos de Europa, the Pyrenees, the Sierra de Gredos mountain range or the Teide. In addition, you will have the opportunity to book your stay in combination with other cultural and leisure activities in the surrounding areas. And also with the possibility of sampling the best local products and cuisine.

Paradores Routes

You can even create your own unique itineraries by staying at different Paradores of your choice, visiting the monuments and historical villages along the way while you take in the diverse scenery. From motorbike routes to mountain biking tours, passing through the landscapes of Game of Thrones or the iconic cultural routes of the St James Way and the Silver Route... On the Paradores de Turismo website you can find numerous suggestions for enjoying your next trip to Spain, which will be full of sensations that are sure to surprise you. ■

[HTTPS://PARADORES.ES/EN](https://PARADORES.ES/EN)

The Great Inca Road: Intrepid Launches New Trek in Peru

Intrepid to Become the First Global Tour Operator to Bring Travelers Along a New Remote Section of the Famous Inca Trail



- Exploring the Caral-Supe archaeological site, left behind by a civilisation pre-dating the Inca and built at the same time as the first Egyptian pyramids.

- Meeting with a master weaver to learn about his work and life on the Great Inca Road, where his family has lived for generations.

This new trip from Intrepid is an example of the company's ongoing commitment to growing its style of sustainable, experience-rich travel, as its product team continues to create new and more responsible ways to explore a destination. During the pandemic, the Peruvian government announced they would reduce the number of trekking permits offered for the popular Inca Trail to help protect and preserve the region and its famous ruins. Today, only 500 trekking permits for the traditional trail are offered per day, which includes porters and other tourism workers. The development of alternative trekking routes in the Andes, such as the Inca Trail Road, helps to drive tourism to new communities while reducing the strain on the environment.

Intrepid Travel, the world's largest B-Corp-certified travel company, is debuting a new 12-day trek of the Great Inca Road. The new tour, which will depart for the first time in June 2023, will offer an alternative to the popular Inca Trail to Machu Picchu and presents an opportunity to develop an entirely new trekking region in Peru. The trail, which starts in Huaraz, is nearly 1,000 miles from Ollantaytambo where the famous Inca Trail embarks. This new section of the trail will bring the benefits of tourism to new communities and help with the ecological, historical and cultural preservation of one of the most important routes along the ancient Inca Trail.

Intrepid, which worked to scout and preserve the new path in partnership with fellow B Corp SA Expeditions, will become the first global tour operator to bring travelers along this section of the 25,000-mile ancient highway. Gary Cohen, Intrepid's General

Manager of Latin America, took part in one of the first scouting trips within the region during the early developmental stages of the project. "We are so excited to share this spectacular Great Inca Road trek with the world," says Cohen. "The future of Peru tourism is truly in these trails, and without sustainable development, they will be lost forever," he adds.

Intrepid's new 12-day Peru Expedition: Trek the Great Inca Road includes guided hikes, accommodations, 11 breakfasts, five lunches and four dinners. Other highlights include:

- Joining a local leader and traditional llama caravan to hike storied paths that few travelers have ever seen.

- Visiting well preserved yet remote Inca outposts.

"As a Quechua descendant and trekking adventure guide, I've always dreamed of walking some of Qhapaq Nañ [also known as the Main Inca Road]," says Martiza Chacacanta, Intrepid's Deputy Operations Manager in Peru. "Walking alongside llamas, considered sacred by the Incas, and resting in tambos where my ancestors would have slept, made me feel privileged, blessed and proud of my culture. Over the last few months, we have been eager to welcome travelers back to our country. Tourism plays such a vital role for our economy and impacts so many people's lives. Now, as travelers return, I am so excited to show the world the Great Inca Road and help preserve it for future generations." she adds. ■

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Dubai is rich in sustainable activities, from environmentally conscious hotels and zero-waste dining experiences to sustainable attractions and so much more. Travelers visiting Dubai on and beyond Earth Day this April will discover a host of luxurious yet sustainable experiences, of which many are hidden gems or local secrets. See below for more information:

Sustainable Stays

While taking in the waterfront views along the Palm Jumeirah, guests at Andaz Dubai The Palm can dine on dishes made from the hotel's on-site hydroponic farm. Those interested in Dubai's desert scene should book a room at Al Maha, an eco-friendly resort that utilizes an LED lighting system alongside solar panels and sustainable water management systems to ensure their operations minimally impact the environment. Other options include Anantara The Palm Dubai Resort, which is committed to reach 0 percent plastic use across the resort, Sofitel Dubai The Palm, which has attained certifications such as Planet 21, Green Globe and ISO 14001 or Rove Hotels, which has garnered a Green Key eco-label for its composting practices and water and energy reduction.

Conscious Dining

Whether it is within LOWE's distinctive 'Waste NOT' multi-course menu that creatively repurposes what would usually be considered food scraps into fine dining dishes, BOCA's extensive vegan menu, Tieble's simplistic farm-to-table approach, or SEVA Table's macrobiotic salads, mushroom burgers and veggie soups, Dubai's array of restaurants offer options and inspiration for the environmentally-conscious foodie.

Green Attractions and Experiences

Those looking for sustainable experiences beyond hotel lobbies and dining tables can visit The Green Planet, an indoor tropical rainforest that is home to over 3,000 species of plants, animals and birds, or the Dubai Desert Conservation Reserve (DDCR)'s, desert experiences that include camel trekking, authentic Bedouin camp experiences organized by licensed operators and overnight safaris - perfect for the adventure-seeking traveler. Those seeking a better understanding of green initiatives and projects can learn more at Dubai's Expo City - Terra, a pavilion that holds the highest available accreditation for sustainable architecture and offers immersive experiences that show the impacts of human choices on the environment. Other educational experiences include Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Solar Park's Innovation Center or Al Marmoon Desert Conservation Reserve, which is the largest nature reserve in the UAE, covering 10 percent of Dubai's total area and encompassing the Al Qudra Lakes. For a hands-on experience, visitors can get involved with Goumbook Ghaf Tree Planting's initiatives to leave a planted indigenous tree and a positive impact from your journey. ■

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Montana is Known for its Rich History and Charm. Yet the State Knows how to add in Just the Right amount of Modern-day Amenities to Keep Things Fresh. It's this Blend of the old with the New that Makes Travelers Fall in Love with Montana Time and Time Again.

Sensational Skiing

With 14 incredible ski areas ranging from world-class resorts to charming lesser-known ski hills, Montana is a mecca for skiers. With 3,000 acres, a summit elevation of 6,817 feet and breathtaking views of Whitefish Lake and Glacier National Park, Whitefish Mountain Resort is a skier's dream come true.

Awesome Aerial Adventures

Nestled just outside of Anaconda along the Pintler Scenic Highway is Montana Zipline Adventures. Participants zip through Montana's longest zipline course (over 9,300 feet) and get a perspective of the panoramic Pintler Wilderness normally reserved for the birds.

Luxurious Lodging

Secluded in one of Montana's most pristine valleys is The Ranch at Rock Creek, a 19th-century homestead with award-winning hospitality. Situated on 6,600 acres of rugged Montana ranchland and wilderness in Western Montana's Gold Country, The Ranch at Rock Creek features rustic, yet elegant accommodations.

Trail to the Stars

Montana recently unveiled a Trail to the Stars, making it easy to plan a trip to more than 40 of the best locations for viewing the night sky. Thanks to the area's small towns and wide-open spaces, there is little to no light pollution and a lot of room to see the brightest stars and furthest galaxies visible in the lower 48. The trail also includes suggestions for day-time activities, dining and lodging, making it easy to explore the state's off-the-beaten-path locations.

Celebrate Indigenous Culture

Experience the rich culture of Montana's 12 tribal nations at a Native American powwow. Enjoy traditional song and dance, taste Native American cuisine, and buy local authentic arts and crafts while taking in the sweeping views of the unspoiled landscapes on tribal homelands. Attending a powwow, which are held throughout the year, is a great way to celebrate the ancestral histories of our native people. ■

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16 Distinctive Thai Festivals to be Promoted Internationally

The Ministry of Culture has identified 16 distinctive festivals from around Thailand to be promoted on the international stage in line with the government's Bio-Circular-Green economic model and the promotion of Thailand's 5F soft-power foundations – Food, Film, Festival, Fight and Fashion.

The 16 festivals are distinctive to their location, and are examples of the many unique and fascinating festivals that take place throughout Thailand each year, including world-famous celebrations like Songkran (the traditional Thai New Year) and Loi Krathong. The promotion of these 16 festivals is to further highlight the kingdom's cultural traditions and help generate more revenue for local communities, in line with Thai tourism's new direction towards more sustainable and responsible tourism.

The 16 festivals are:

Chao Mae Lim Ko Niao Festival, Pattani

A colourful homecoming festival for Chinese descendants of Pattani province. This year, the event took place on 2-8 February.

Ban Chiang World Heritage Festival, Udon Thani

A celebration of the historical significance of

the World Heritage Site-listed Ban Chiang area, considered the most important prehistoric settlement so far discovered in Southeast Asia. This year, the event took place on 10-12 February.

Hok Peng Festival to Worship Phra That Chao Phu Phiang Chae Haeng, Nan

A worship ritual at Wat Phra That Chae Haeng, Phra Aram Luang, in Phu Phiang district. This year, the event is taking place from 28 February to 6 March.

Hae Malai Khao Tok Festival, Yasothon

A cultural celebration in which thousands of hand-made garlands connecting popped rice together are displayed on floats. This year, the event takes place from 1-5 March at the event's grounds in front of Mahachanachai District Office.

Hae Pha Khuen That Festival, Nakhon Si Thammarat

This celebration sees the wrapping of a long piece of sacred yellow cloth around the base of a stupa at Wat Phra Mahathat Woramahawihan. This year, the event takes place from 5-6 March.

Korat Street Art, Nakhon Ratchasima

A lively and colourful showcase celebrating creative works by regional artists.

Sdok Kok Thom Festival, Sa Kaeo

This festival highlights the renowned historical Sdok Kok Thom Khmer castle.

Kram & Craft Sakon Festival, Sakon Nakhon

A festival in celebration of the local community's cultural creativity, involving the use of natural plants to dye fabric.

Phuket Food (Creative City of Gastronomy) Festival, Phuket

A fantastic occasion for food lovers, with plenty of food – both local and international – to be enjoyed.

Bun Ban Klang Festival, Chon Buri

This outdoor merit-making ritual in Phanat Nikhom District involves locals putting food onto banana leaves cut into squares, to ward off bad luck. The event is on from March-June 2023.

Vesak Day Festival, Mae Hong Son

Known locally as Nataya Heng-sattha Gingala Nom Bucha Visakhauramee, the event is a traditional merit-making ceremony held on Vesak Day, a sacred day to Buddhists and some Hindus.

Tak Baht Dok Mai Khao Phansa (Festival of Floral Offerings), Saraburi

A traditional merit-making ceremony involving the giving to monks of white Khao-Phansa flowers, also known as Dok Hong Hern (flying swan flower), held annually on Khao Phansa or Buddhist Lent Day.

Phaya Sri Satta Nakarata Worship Ceremony, Nakhon Phanom

A religious ceremony for the Naga believed to live in the Mekong River at Phaya Si Sattanarakat multipurpose yard, enshrined on the banks of the Mekong River. The event is on in July 2023.

Hom Heet Toi Hoy Roi Jai Tai Lue (Tai Lue Local Festival), Phayao

This event honours the Tai Lue ethnic community, and their distinctive traditions. Taking place at Wat Phrathat Sob Waen: Temple of the Tai Lue Culture, Chiang Kham Town, Yuan, Chiang Kham District, Phayao. The event is on from 15-16 July 2023.

Phetchaburi City of Gastronomy Festival, Phetchaburi

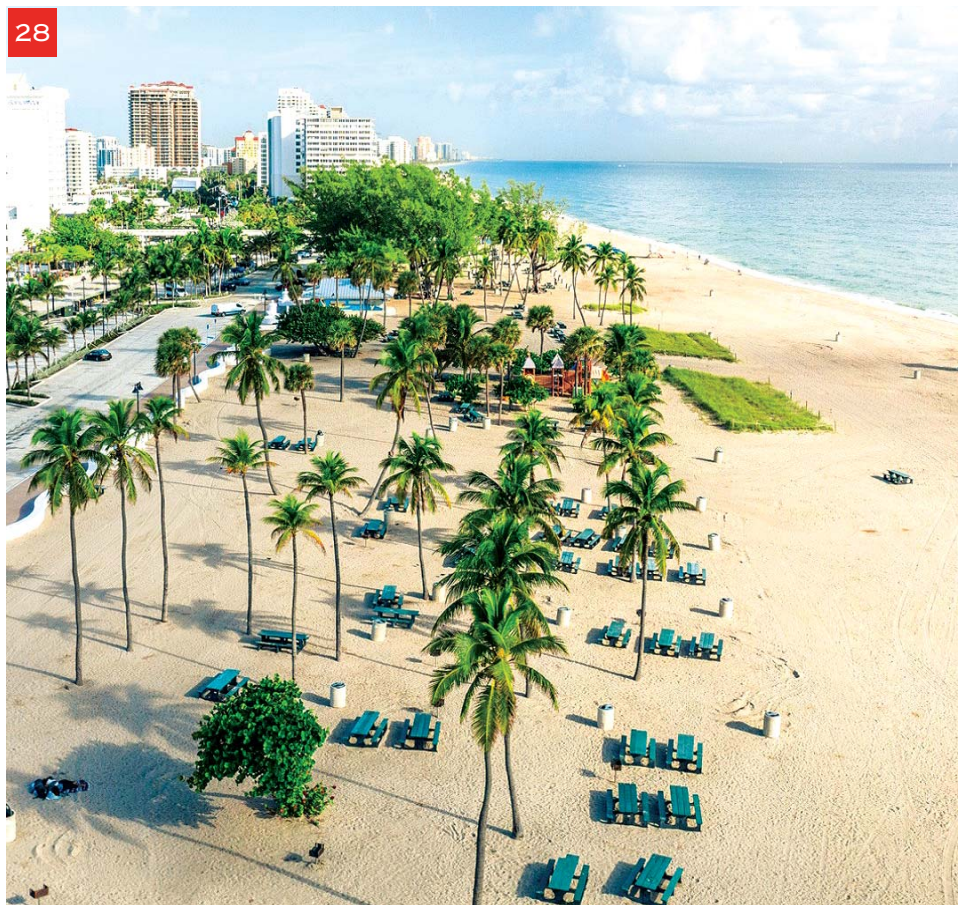
Another great event for food lovers, where they can enjoy fantastic local cuisine.

Khom San Duang Festival, Lamphun

Literally translated as a festival of a hundred thousand lanterns, this is a picturesque celebration that sees numerous floating lanterns let go into the sky during the annual Loi Krathong Festival at Wat Phra That Haripunchai Woramahawihan. ■

WWW.TOURISMTHAILAND.ORG





Fort Lauderdale: a sunny year-round destination

by Alexandra Cohen

Fort Lauderdale is the largest municipality in Florida's Broward County, now known worldwide as a year-round destination with plenty to do for all age groups. Nicknamed as the Venice of America due to its 300 miles of inland waterways, there are plenty of ways to explore the intracoastal, lined with impressive mansions and yachts.

If shopping is something that you hope to do in Florida, look no further than Sawgrass Mills, the world's largest single-story discount mall. Further discount shopping can be accomplished at the Fort Lauderdale Swap Shop, which is the largest indoor/outdoor flea market down South. For a more tradi-

tional shopping experience, The Galleria at Fort Lauderdale is a more upscale shopping mall with stores including Macy's, Michael Kors, and much more.

"Visit Lauderdale," the official Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) for Greater Fort Lauderdale in South Florida, recently unveiled its new brand campaign "Everyone Under the Sun." The vibrant campaign reflects Greater Fort Lauderdale's welcoming and inclusive community.

There are close to 600 lodging establishments, with more than 37,000 hotel rooms in the area, ranging from luxurious high-rises to smaller boutique hotels and motels.

During my trip, I chose to stay at the B Ocean Resort (<https://www.boceanresort.com/>), which many people may remember as the former Sheraton Yankee Clipper. The resort is conveniently located in the heart of the city, around 15 minutes from Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport, Port Everglades, downtown Las Olas Boulevard and along the famed coastal highway A1A.

The B Ocean Resort offers 481 spacious guest rooms and suites, a spacious lobby and several meeting spaces. Guests may choose to relax at either of the hotel's two outdoor swimming pools. The private beach offers every guest two free beach-loungers and towels per room, with the option to also rent umbrellas when the weather permits. Beach-side service is provided by the award-winning Boucher Brothers Management. I have had the pleasure of experiencing their fantastic work in the past. They provided excellent service during my stay. Servers from the hotel restaurant, The Salty Siren, come right to your seat to take your order, further enhancing your relaxation.

The hotel has five restaurants on site, including the Naked Crab where we dined soon after checking in. Make sure to check out their marvelous mermaid shows.

There are more than 4,000 wining and dining establishments and 132 nightclubs in Broward County. Let me recommend two in the Los Olas area: Matchbox and the Lobster Bar Sea Grille. The former is among 15 locations in the US. This one opened in early 2022, known for brick oven pizzas, mini burgers, fresh salads, and chef-inspired entrées, like Miso salmon and chimichurri steak frites. The latter offers an extensive selection of seafood, including, as mentioned in its name, a large array of lobster dishes. During my meal, I had the opportunity to taste some oysters, the restaurant's famed lobster morsels (lightly fried lobster with Greek honey-mustard aioli), Dover sole served with brown butter and a side dish of quinoa mixed with kale, the decadent Whole Lobster & Black Winter Truffle risotto dish, as well as some profiteroles to end the meal on a sweet note. Everything was delicious! ■

[HTTPS://WWW.VISITLAUDERDALE.COM](https://www.visitlauderdale.com)



Exodus Travels - Five Trends & Tips to Start Travel in '23 Off Right!

Regenerative Travel, Luxury Adventures, Gearing Up to Go, and more!



The start of every year prompts reflection on the past and gets us thinking about our aspirations for the future. This often impacts our goals for the coming year, and it's our adventure and travel dreams that offer the most inspiration.

Award-winning adventure and small group tour company Exodus Travels is inviting travellers to have transformative, meaningful, and healing experiences in 2023. To make up for lost time, to help make the world a better place, to immerse in local life, and master the art of going with the flow. Here are a few trends that will help every type of traveller find their way in 2023:

Portugal: Walking & Wine Premium Adventure:

This eight-day, guided group trip is part of Exodus' Premium Adventures and takes travellers on a deep-dive into the premier wine

region of Portugal, the UNESCO-listed Douro Valley. Led by one of the company's expert guides, guests will be immersed in atmospheric Porto and indulge in a voyage of taste and discovery through the verdant Douro Valley, where port wines are produced. Venture into the region known as Terras de Basto, home of Portugal's young wine, vinho verde, and stay in handpicked hotels.

NEW! Tuscan Hills & Chianti Wines Premium Adventure:

A brand-new addition to Exodus' offering, this eight-day guided group walking & trekking adventure is based out of an exclusive country home located on the edge of the Chianti winelands, close to the medieval town of San Gimignano. Visit Florence and Siena, explore timeless villages and the quaint walled town of Certaldo, savour exclusive wine-tasting experiences, and more. There's also ample free time to choose your own adventure - such

as a trip to medieval Volterra, a tour of ancient Lucca, or perhaps a hand-on cooking class.

Nile Cruise: For a classic Egypt experience, this nine-day itinerary delivers – complete with ancient temples and tombs, and travel by boat. The trip kicks off in Cairo with visits to the Pyramids at Giza, El Azhar Mosque, and the lively bazaar, among others. On day three, guests fly to Luxor, visiting the Karnak and Luxor temples before boarding the cruise boat where they will spend the next four nights, disembarking in Aswan for more exploration on day seven.

Cycling in Sicily: Combine a cycling adventure with some White Lotus season two-inspired content on this eight-day trip that explores the baroque gems of Ragusa, Modica, and Noto, ending in Syracuse, the ancient heart of Magna Graecia (Greater Greece). Cycle through idyllic farmlands, deep gorges, and dramatic coastal scenery, and, of course, sample some of the top-notch cuisine, considered among the best in Italy.

Peru: On the eight-day **Inca Trail** guided group tour permits are required and are highly sought after, with the company strongly recommending booking at least six to eight months in advance to avoid disappointment.

Uganda: On the 10-day **Chimps & Gorillas of Uganda** trip, which visits Kibale Forest, Queen Elizabeth National Park, and Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, visas are required to enter the country and permits to see the chimps are strictly limited and must be booked in advance.

India: On the 16-day **India Tiger Safari**, travellers have the opportunity to see one of the world's most captivating predators up-close. However, spaces of jeeps in the parks close 30 days prior to departure and the process for securing visas to enter the country can take up to five weeks. ■

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

World Traveler Spring 2023



Reno, Nevada Offers Much More Than Casino Thrills

by Randy Mink

In my travels to just about every corner of the world, I still haven't made it to Las Vegas. But, to get a taste of the gaming and entertainment scene that lures people to Nevada's urban hotspots, I recently spent a few days in Reno, Vegas' smaller counterpart, to explore the city of 225,000 and nearby Lake Tahoe.

For years I had seen Reno's signature landmark, the lighted gateway arch on Virginia Street that proclaims Reno "The Biggest Little City in the World." That sign alone—one of America's best-known city symbols—had always piqued my curiosity, and I'm constantly on the lookout for secondary cities that don't get the attention of big kahunas like Vegas.

I'm not a gambler but enjoyed poking around downtown Reno and its three interconnected casino hotels—Circus Circus Reno, El Dorado and Silver Legacy. Part of Caesars Entertainment and known collectively as THE ROW, all three hotels offer vast gaming

floors, shops, restaurants and bars. There's also gaming action at hotel-casino complexes outside downtown, namely the Peppermill, Atlantis and Grand Sierra.

Along the Truckee River, downtown's revitalized Riverwalk District encompasses parkland, cultural attractions, boutique shops, art galleries, and places to eat, drink and listen to music. You might see folks taking a dip in the river or floating along in tubes, kayaks or rafts.

The National Automobile Museum, at the edge of the Riverwalk District, is Reno's premier attraction—in my book anyway. A gold mine for antique car buffs and nostalgia-seekers, it displays some of the oldest and rarest cars in existence. You can pose seated in a 1926 Ford Model T, the only car guests are allowed to touch.

The museum has about 200 cars on display in galleries and period streetscapes with storefronts and old-time gas pumps. My favorite section was Cars of the Stars. I saw Elvis Presley's 1973 Cadillac Eldorado, the Batmobile from the "Batman" TV series and the 1953 Chevy Corvette bought sight unseen during the model's first year by 6'4" John Wayne, who could barely fit into the small cockpit.

The Nevada Museum of Art, three blocks south of the river, hosts touring exhibitions and rotates works from its collections, which are strong on Indigenous, African American and Western art.

One of my favorite Reno discoveries was Midtown, a once neglected area that today buzzes with an artsy vibe and eclectic array of shops and eateries. The highest structures in this low-rise neighborhood are neon motel signs harking back to another era; some of the retro motels are still in business.

One day I drove from Reno through the Sierra Nevada Mountains to Incline Village, Nevada for a look at Lake Tahoe, North America's largest alpine lake. Remarkably clear and surrounded by lush forests of fir and pine, the lake straddles the Nevada-California state line. I stopped at a scenic viewpoint and walked along a short segment of the lakeside Tahoe East Shore Trail, taking pictures like crazy.

Reno and Lake Tahoe—the perfect one-two punch. ■

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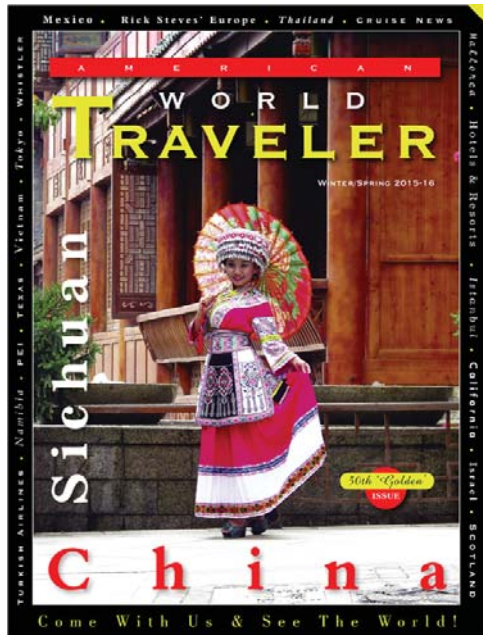
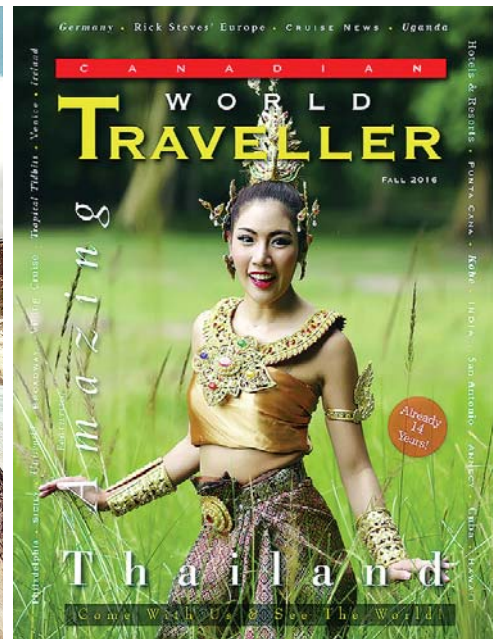
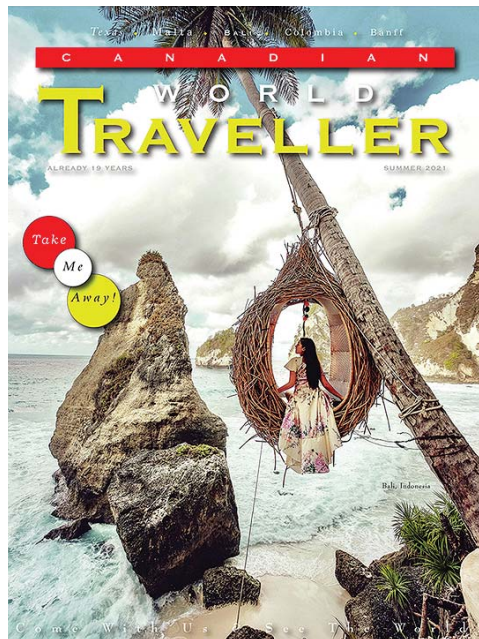
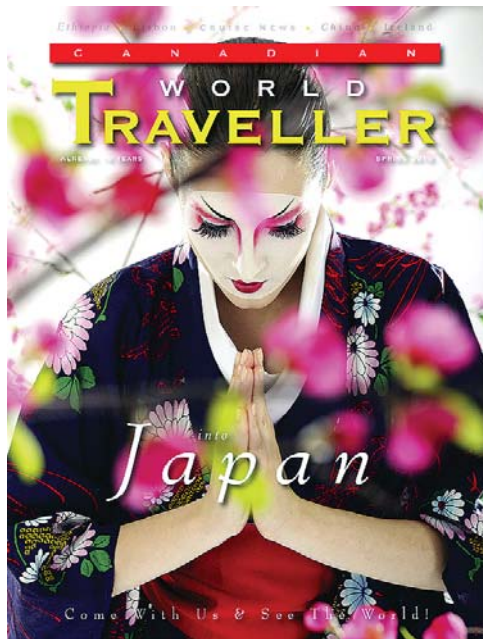


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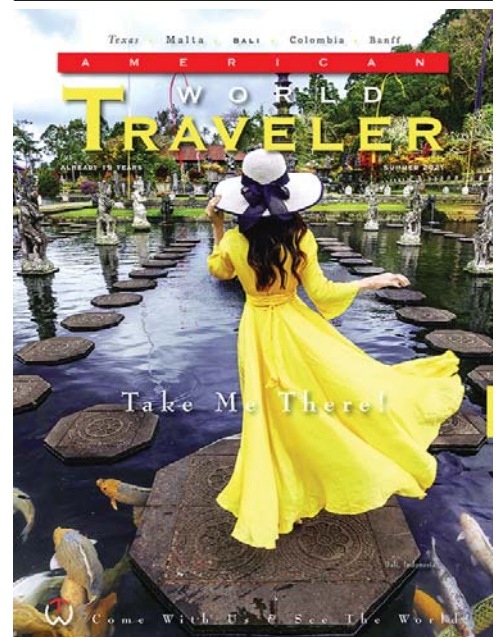
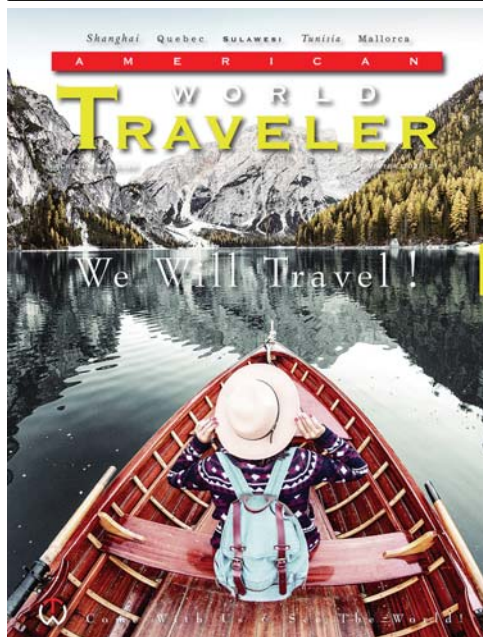
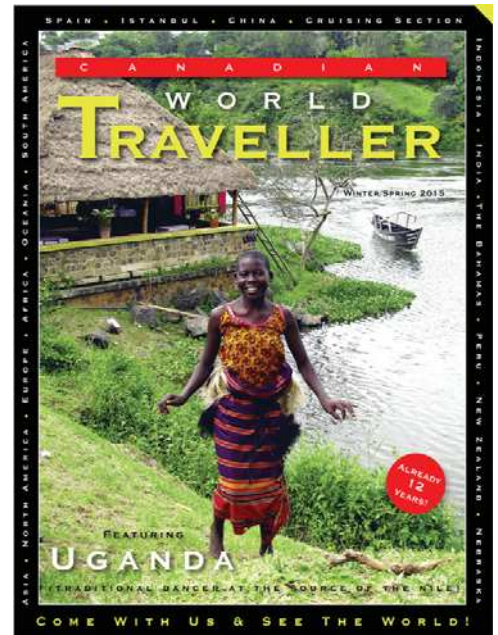
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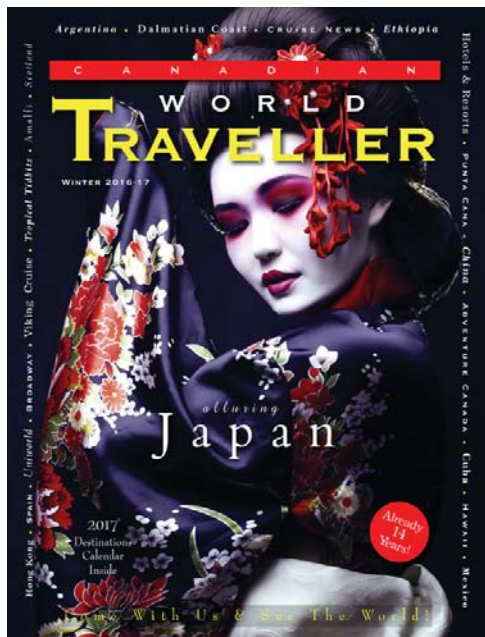
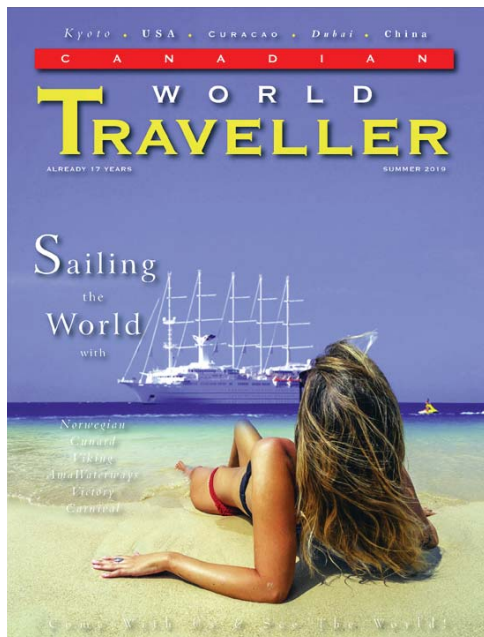
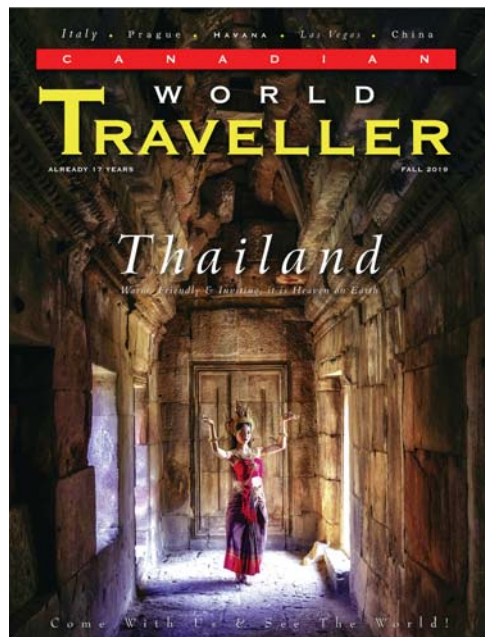
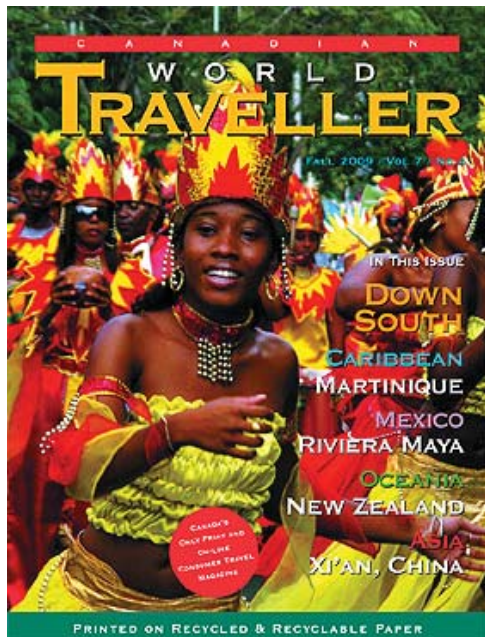
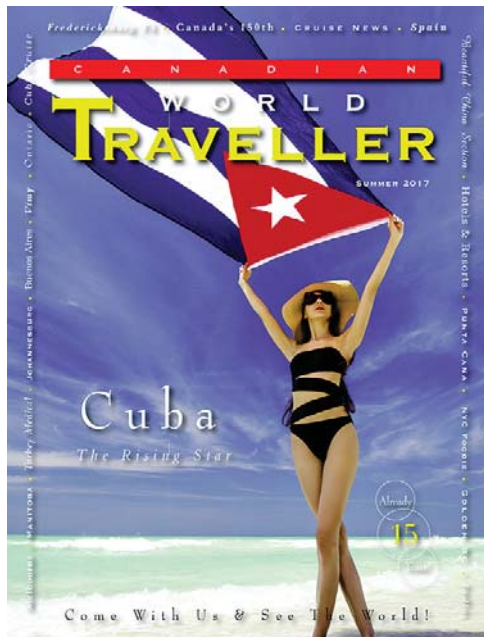
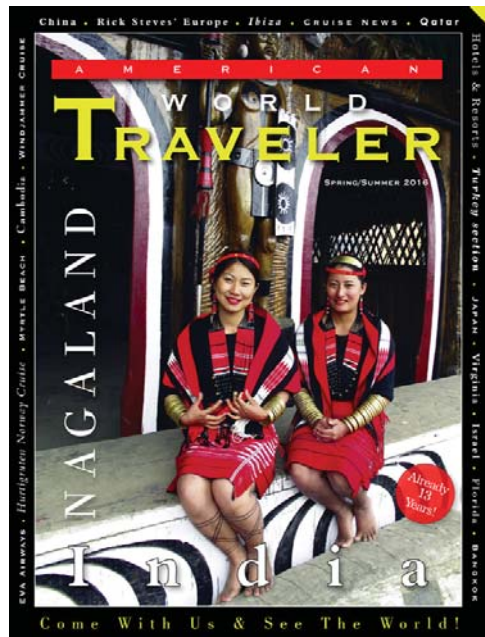
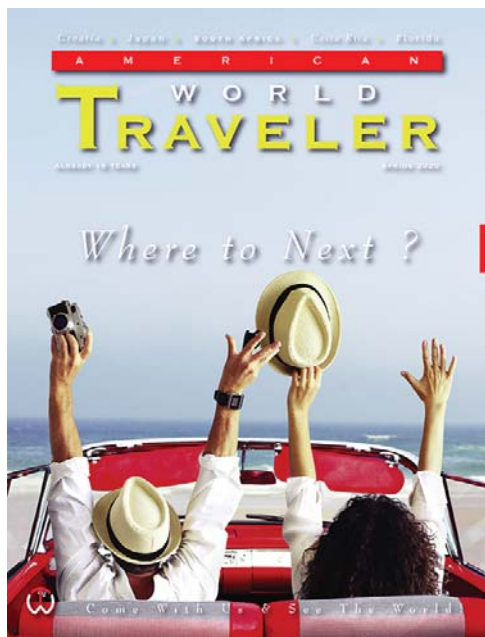
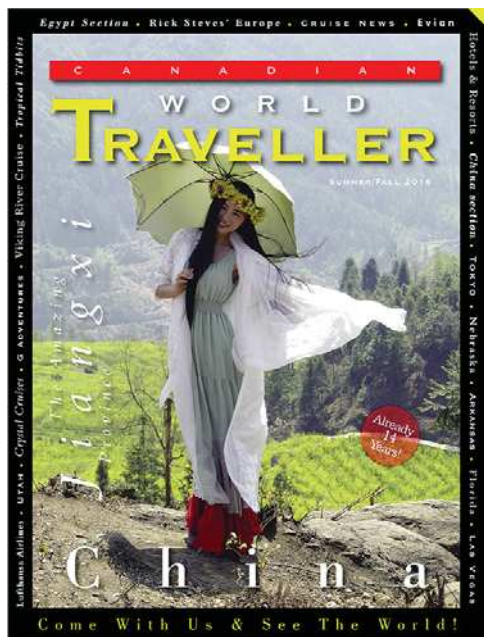
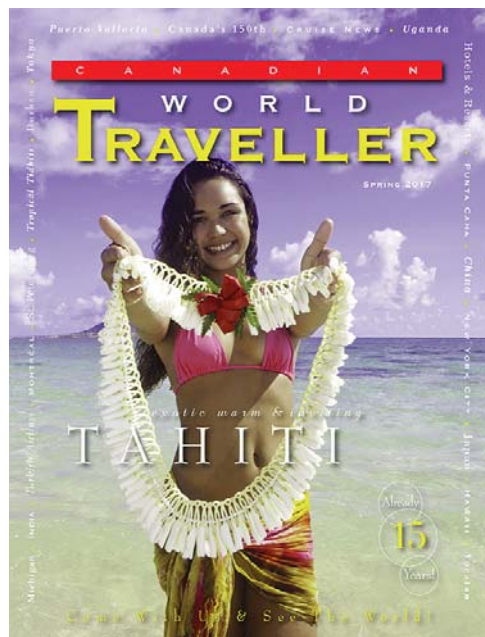
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Sublimity of the Mountain Peaks Waterton Lakes National Park

Article and photography by Jennifer Merrick

National Parks exist in order that every citizen of Canada may satisfy a craving for Nature and Nature's beauty: that we may absorb the poise and restfulness of the forests; that we may steep our souls in the brilliance of the wildflowers and the sublimity of the mountain peaks; that we may develop in ourselves the joy and activity we see in the wild animals..."

James B. Harkin, the first Commissioner of Dominion Parks (now Parks Canada), was referring to all of Canada's national parks when he wrote that in the 1930s, but I can't help feeling that he was thinking of Waterton Lakes in particular. Located three hours south of Calgary in the Rocky Mountains, this sublime park borders Montana's Glacier Park National Park in the US. In fact, the two parks and the two nations came together in 1932 to form the Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park. It was the first partnership of its kind in the world and a symbol of peace and goodwill between Canada and the US.

When we took a cruise from the Canadian side to the US, it was impossible to tell the difference as the same deep-blue mountain lake

met a forested treeline that stretched up to the dramatic, snow-covered peaks. The only way to know where one country ended, and the other began was a signpost in a narrow clearing.

The foresight of both countries to protect this beautiful landscape over a 100 years ago has certainly paid off. It's now home to over half of Alberta's plant species (including rare orchids and wildflowers), 250 species of birds and 60 species of mammals.

Waterton is also a community with many family-owned businesses, restaurants and outfitters, so whether it's the 'poise and restfulness' or the 'joy and activity' you're seeking in a national park, here's a sampling of things to do:

- Indulge in afternoon tea at the historic Prince of Wales Hotel.
- Observe celestial bodies with Dark Sky Tours. As a designated dark sky preserve, Waterton keeps artificial light at a minimum to reveal the night sky in all its starry brilliance.

- Hike up Bear's Hump, a short but steep trek that's worth every huff and puff for the views of the town amongst the mountain peaks. It's one of over 50 hikes available on the park's 200+ kms of trails.

- Relax with a view on the balcony of Bayshore Inn, a family-owned lodge right on the shores of Waterton Lake.

- Enjoy meals that range from upscale Italian at Red Rock Trattoria to family friendly wood-fired pizzas at Trappers Mountain Grill and the casual Wieners of Waterton, whose gourmet hot dogs have almost a cult following.

- Channel your inner cowboy/girl with a horseback ride at Alpine Stables. This two-hour adventure takes you through changing landscapes with gorgeous viewpoints.

- Bike the Chief Mountain Highway. Rent e-bikes at Pat's Waterton and pedal from the prairies to the mountains.

Flying down the highway, the sublimity of the mountain peaks we passed defied any superlative, and I was grateful that our national parks existed. ■

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Come With Us & See The World!



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 double 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

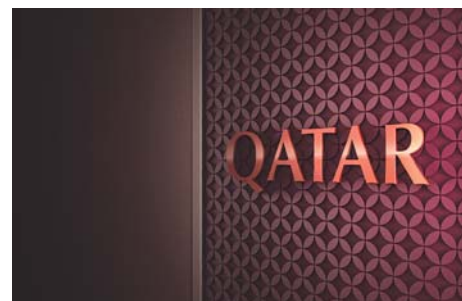
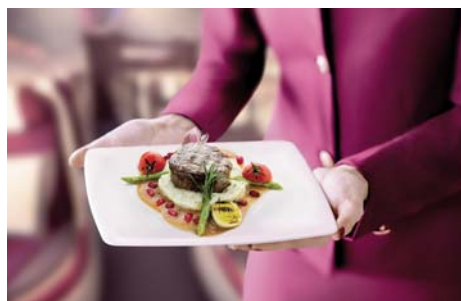
Once landed in Doha, I was equally blown away. Indeed, Doha itself has proven to be a significant tourism draw. The city is significantly smaller than Dubai and Abu Dhabi, which allows it to keep its slightly provincial feel. While travelers can still find modern high-end innovations, such as Doha Festival 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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Izumi City, Kyushu, Japan

Article and Photography by Steve Gillick

Izumi City, in Kagoshima Prefecture, Kyushu, Japan, is a magnet for visitors from afar. Just ask any of the 13,000 Cranes that flock to rice fields every winter!

The annual Crane migration is a sight to behold, with an estimated 10,000 Hooded Cranes (about 80% of the global population) and 3,000 White-naped Cranes (about 50% of the worldwide population). They follow the north and northwest winds from Siberia, northeastern China, and Eastern Mongolia to converge in Arasaki Village, part of the Izumi-Takoano National Wildlife Protection Area, about a 30-minute taxi ride from the Izumi train station.

Flocks of small sooty-grey Hooded Cranes (Nabe-zuru) and taller, red-faced White-naped Cranes (Mana-zuru) can be heard and seen on the rice paddies and in the ponds, where they feed and roost in pairs (cranes mate for life), often with one or two chicks in tow.

The cranes can be observed and photographed by walking along the fields as well as from the deck of the Crane Observatory. The centre also has exhibits about the life and habits of the seven species of crane known to frequent the area.

The Crane migration may specifically appeal to birders, wildlife and nature lovers, families, photographers, and curious travellers. However, Japanophiles, history buffs, and foodies will also love Izumi.

After our first of three visits to see the Cranes, we decided to relax in the cleansing hot waters of Maizuru Onsen, a public bath appropriately named 'Dancing Crane'.

And feeling rejuvenated, we hopped into a taxi, where the affable driver, Fumio Susaki,

became our impromptu tour guide for the next hour. First, we visited Hakozaiki Hachiman Shrine, where two White-naped crane statues guard the entrance to the largest Shrine Bell in Japan. It's 4 meters high (12 feet) and weighs 5000 kilograms (11,000 pounds).

Then we were off to see what we were told was one of the largest Jizo statues in Japan. Red-bibbed Jizo Statues represent Jizo Bosatsu, the guardian deity of children and travellers. After paying our respects, we headed around the corner to Izumi-Fumoto, the old samurai residential area.





The 400-year-old street lined with beautifully sculpted trees has remained unchanged over the years. And, as our visit was in November, many Japanese Maple Trees ('Momiji') displayed spectacular fall colours of yellow, orange, and red. Historically, Samurai warriors were stationed in this district to protect Satsuma Domain from invasion by the neighbouring Higo Domain. Two of the 150 Samurai residences are open to the public, and knowledgeable guides provide information and answer questions.

Nearby, the Izumi-Fumoto History Museum has an excellent Samurai armour exhibit, but the most gripping display is a stealthy, life-sized Samurai archer with a steely look of concentration on his face as he silently reaches behind his back to take an arrow from his quiver.



Following a sunset visit to see how the Cranes were doing, we returned to our hotel near the train station and then walked to Uomatsu, a traditional Izakaya, about 15 minutes away. The owner, Mieko Matsuki, was very welcoming, and the food was exceptional. We started with Kibinago, Silver-stripe round herring, served sashimi-style with sumiso, a miso/vinegar dip. This was followed by chunky, meaty Hagatsuo (Bonito) sashimi.

And cranking up the taste buds even more, our Kurobuta arrived. This is Japanese Black Pork, derived from black British Berkshire Pigs, known for their tender, marbled meat. It was served in a vegetable stew. So good! And then, the final dish was presented. Nangoku genkidori translates as 'south country fine chicken'. This local Kagoshima Prefecture-



bred chicken was served deep-fried (with secret herbs and spices!) and was unbelievably succulent.

The next day, as the sun was rising, we had one last visit with the Cranes, and then it was time to head back to the train station for our onward journey in Kyushu.

Izumi was a great surprise destination with samurai adventures, exceptional food, warm, friendly people, and the added thrill of witnessing one of nature's wonders, the annual Crane migration. ■

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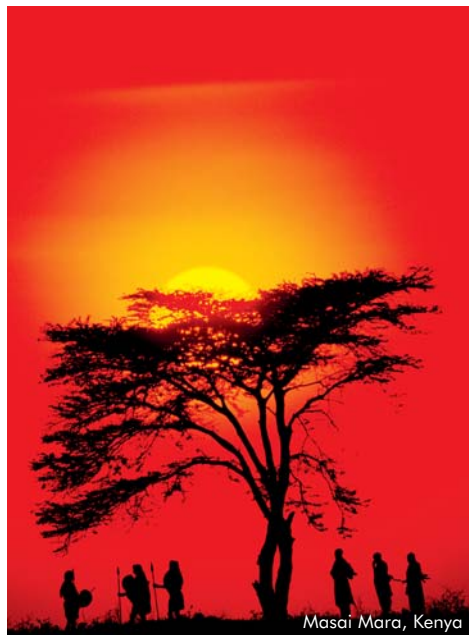
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Long-tail boats, Thailand



Sea Turtle, Caribbean



Li River, Guilin, China



Warrior, Flores, Indonesia



Santorini, Greece



Snorkeling Fun



African Elephants



Salt Caravan, Djibouti



Peruvian Family



Mount Fuji, Japan



Rice Fields, Ubud, Indonesia



Dim Sum, Hong Kong



Skiing, the French Alps



Tropical Tidbits

by Sue C Travel

New in Aruba

On the heels of my latest in-depth research trip to find all new and cool on One Happy Island, there are a few stand out spots and trends I must highlight.

Over the top overwater luxury

First (pictured above) is Potcho Potcho, the latest luxe incarnation of overwater bungalow at the beautiful boutique resort Aruba Ocean Villas. Each year I return there to

find even more splendor to admire. This time, a new reception and lobby/ tiki hut bar, canals throughout new bamboo cabins surrounded with blooms, and long boardwalks out to the latest villas. We had the opportunity to stay in the newest one that offers a level of luxury unheard of on this island. It is a two-story penthouse – one full top floor for the indoor bedroom, bathroom, deep soaking tub, dining nook hammock, hammock swing plus a personal massage table (you can order treatments) and it looks down onto a huge deck. That deck contains its own tiki bar, dipping pool, marble soaking tub, rocker lounges, outdoor bed, hammock, bathroom and shower, an outdoor dining area, a wine bar, and a cut-out access right into the sea where a clear kayak and paddleboard await for your individual use. Inside, on the ground floor, you'll find a formal dining area, kitchenette, and a stunning lounge with a transparent floor that looks down into the sea. Breakfast is included. Also included is a

driver who will chauffeur you around in a BMW. Note: this is an adults-only resort.

Visit: www.arubaoceanvillas.com

New foodie trends

Aruba's food scene is a vibrant mix of over 400 hundred restaurants and our recent foodie explorations proved that creative plant-based offerings are trending and plentiful everywhere there now, too. In fact,



I would venture that Aruba is now the vegan gourmet capital of the Caribbean! But another new trend I found on this trip was the emergence of so many chef's tables. Joining well-established places like Infini, Carte Blanche, The Kitchen Table, 2 Fools & a Bull and Papillon's Secret Garden experience are Aruba Royale (previously known as Fred), Ever (spawned by popular Peruvian restaurant Lima), Koal in a beautifully restored heritage building downtown, and The Journey by Amuse in the old windmill area. And Senses, previously on Eagle Beach, has relocated to Radisson Blu in Palm Beach and sports a hybrid concept-half the space is a la carte and the chef's table is ensconced in the other half. Very cool.

Revisiting French St. Martin for foodies

It's been a while since I was in French St. Martin, but historically, it has always been known as the culinary capital of the Caribbean, mostly due to the dual offerings of their Grand Case region- lip-smacking slow smoked ribs from their "lolos" outdoor BBQ grills (lolo means locally owned and locally operated) and for their classic and legendary French cuisine emporiums like Le Pressoir. But this trip I was a guest of the Festival de la Gastronomie de Saint-Martin that features cooking workshops, tastings, a culinary village, restaurant and bar competitions, and chefs from all over the world invited to judge the best dishes based on a theme. This year the theme was plantains, and who knew you could be so creative with that bland fruit? My favorite incarnations were plantain cheesecake, ceviche, and even a plantain liqueur! And the pop-up gourmet village was based in Marigot where I was also delighted to discover a brand new lolo row along that waterfront. Over a dozen shipping containers turned eateries showcase local food, and the aromas, music, and energy give the downtown region an eternal carnival vibe. Though the container row is not meant to be permanent, I hope they keep it as it certainly attracts foodie visitors. For info on this year's festival,

visit:

<https://festival-st-martin.com/en/home/>



New Embassy Suites by Hilton Aruba Resort now open

Though I've not stayed here yet, I did take a tour of the massive property to get a feel for the vibe. The best way to describe the soaring atrium entrance is ethereal, and the dining spots on either end seamlessly blend into the grand lobby space. The rooms are bright, fresh, and no-nonsense modern, most of them are ocean front with incredible views. The water circuit is arguably the largest on the island, and access to the beach is via a tunnel under the road. A large stand-alone modern casino is also slated to be on site soon.

Visit:

www.hilton.com/en/hotels/auajmes-embassy-suites-aruba-resort/

New at Divi Little Bay Beach Resort St. Maarten

I never set foot on the Dutch side of St. Maarten without dropping in for at least a night stay at my favourite resort there, I am a big fan of Divi resorts throughout the Caribbean. This one recently added a new level of all-inclusive to its offerings called Ocean, and I was delighted to stay a night in the new wing. I love the adult-only areas and the new rooftop bar as part of their perks, and the fact that all the modern, couple-oriented rooms are oceanfront with stunning views. The older wings are more conducive to families as they have multi-room suites and all you need for self catered stays. And I also never miss a chance to spoil myself with a signature



massage at their stand-alone spa Indulgence by the Sea. Heaven. I also find snorkeling off their house pier an indulgence well worth taking time to enjoy.

Visit:

www.diviresorts.com/divi-little-bay-beach-resort.htm

Stunning new stays on Frenchman's Reef St. Thomas USVI

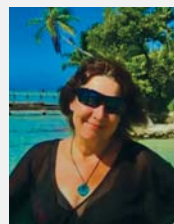


Slated to open late spring 2023, the all-new Frenchman's Reef dual concept will feature not one, but two distinctive yet interconnected stays along brilliant Morningstar Beach. After a \$425M rebuild, Westin Beach Resort & Spa will offer guests a brand-spanking new 392-room full facility resort and it will be joined by a charming new 92-room boutique property The Morningstar Buoy Haus Beach Resort, an Autograph Collection Hotel. Guests at the Buoy Haus will also have access to amenities at the Westin, and both will have access to their private catamaran the Flying Frenchman.

Visit:

<https://frenchmansreefstthomas.com/>

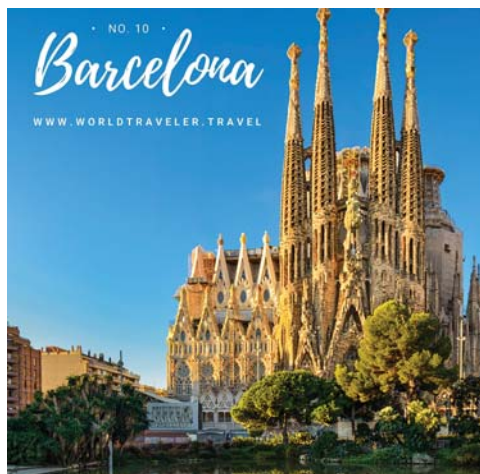
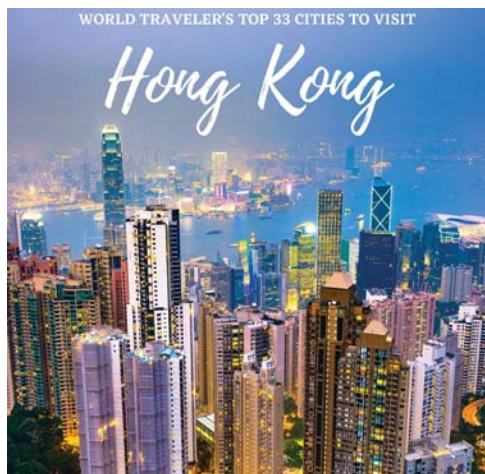
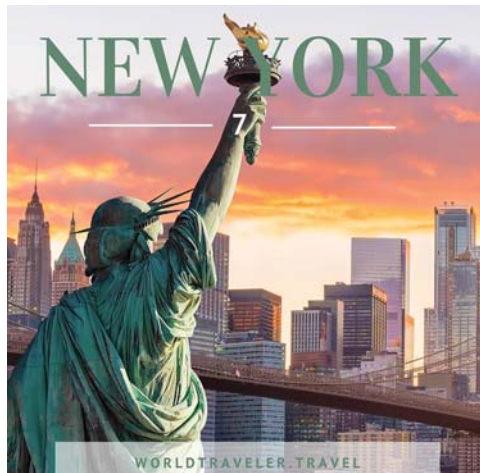
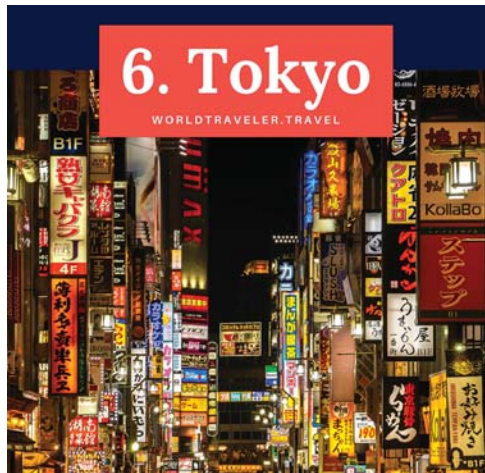
(Special Note: Main photo courtesy of local Aruban photographer Hyro Oduber. Visit: www.letsgowithhyro.com.)



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.

Follow her on Instagram and Twitter @suectravel



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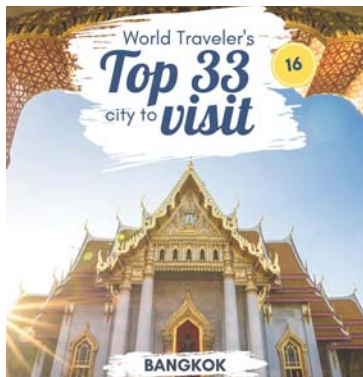
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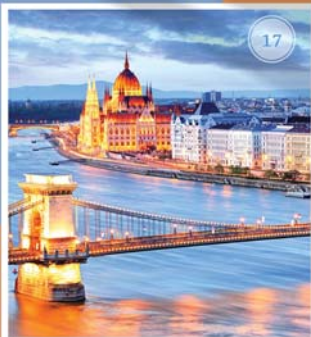
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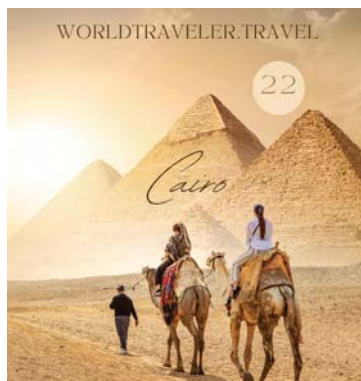
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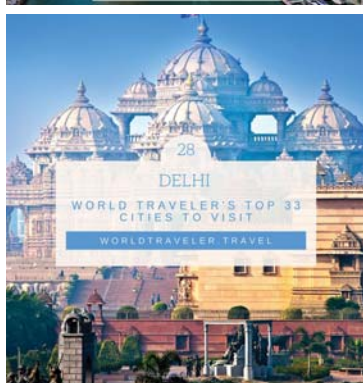
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Sail The World!



UnCruise Adventures Provides Front Row Seats for 2024 Total Eclipse Adventure Cruise

Recently, UnCruise Adventures announced it has opened bookings for a dedicated Baja California Eclipse Cruise departing April 6th, 2024. This one-time sailing will offer perfectly positioned viewing for guests off the coast of Mazatlán with

only 66 available cabins. The 7-night adventure cruise offers the ultimate way to experience the natural wonder of the total solar eclipse while exploring the picturesque waters of Baja, California, Mexico.

UnCruise Adventures has been the leading small ship adventure cruise line in the Baja California, Mexico for decades, giving guests the added security in their knowledge and detailed itinerary of the area. The meticulously created eclipse sailing includes not only a total solar eclipse but an adventurous playground of steep red bluffs, sun kissed private beaches, charismatic marine life, sea lion snorkels and more. ■

[HTTPS://UNCRISE.COM](https://uncruise.com)



CroisiEurope Celebrates 30 Years on the Danube with Special Anniversary Offers

To celebrate 30 years of cruising on the Danube, CroisiEurope is offering savings of on select 2023 sailings itineraries:

A six-day cruise from Passau to Budapest via Melk and Vienna, cities with a rich culture and history.

An eight-day Beautiful Blue Danube cruise round trip from Vienna exploring the abundant treasures of Austria and Hungary.

A nine-day cruise along the Danube to the Balkan Peninsula and the Danube Delta. This cruise takes guests to the heart of Eastern Europe.

A 12-day cruise from the Black Sea to the Blue Danube to admire the majestic river crossing eight countries with calls in four capitals. ■

[WWW.CROISIEUROPE.TRAVEL/EN/](http://www.croisieurope.travel/en/)



Explora Journeys Unveils Designs of Ocean Penthouses and Ocean Residences Onboard Explora I

Explora Journeys, the luxury lifestyle brand of the MSC Group, recently unveiled the design of its Ocean Penthouses and Ocean Residences on board EXPLORA I, the first of a planned fleet of up to six luxury ships. Ahead of its maiden journey departing from

Southampton, UK, on July 17, 2023, this is the second unveiling of the unique design philosophy for its 461 ocean-front 'Homes at Sea' after sharing the plans for its entry-level Ocean Suites last year.

Thoughtfully designed to stimulate the senses and reflect the brand's philosophy of creating an 'Ocean State of Mind' owing to carefully considered elements such as natural light, colour, space, privacy, and connection with the sea, Explora Journeys has worked meticulously to ensure every guest experiences an opulent, yet intimate retreat as they embark on their own ocean journey. ■

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

Alaska Season is Here! Princess Cruises Sailing Seven Ships in Alaska in 2023



Princess Cruises, the leading cruise line in Alaska, is readying for the start of the 2023 cruise and cruisetour season which begins April 29. Sustainable seafood and award-winning programming that immerses guests in all things Alaska are highlights again this year as Princess sails seven ships throughout The Great Land across 14 cruise itineraries and 25 land-sea vacations, including the line's newest ship Discovery Princess along with Royal Princess, Ruby Princess, Majestic Princess, Grand Princess, Crown Princess and Sapphire Princess.

New for 2023 is an expanded Wild for Alaska Seafood menu that can be enjoyed by all guests sailing with Princess in Alaska this season. Introduced in 2022, Princess's Wild for Alaska Seafood menu is an industry-first, location-based seafood initiative featuring an extensive menu offering a rotation of fresh Alaska seafood dishes, along with destination-inspired cocktails including flights of Alaska spirits sourced from local distilleries. Distinctive Alaska seafood dishes with featured items are offered every night in all main dining rooms and highlight only the freshest seafood ingredients with multiple varieties of Alaska salmon, including King (Chinook), Sockeye and Coho, as well as wild Alaska cod (caught by hook and line only), halibut, rockfish, Dungeness crabs, wild spot prawns and razor clams.

Underscoring its role as a steward of the environment, Princess developed the new "Wild for Alaska Seafood" program in partnership with Pacific Seafood, Alaska Seafood, and Alaska Leader Seafood, all of which have an abiding commitment to environmentally responsible practices and are among the best-managed, most sustainable fisheries in the world.

Guests can enjoy cruises from seven to 11 days, departing from San Francisco, Seattle, Vancouver, B.C. and Anchorage (Whittier) as well as cruise-tours which take guests 500 miles into the heart of Alaska – where they seamlessly transfer from ship, to train to Denali, all in one day. ■

[WWW.PRINCESS.COM](http://www.princess.com)

Celebrity Cruises adds two Exclusive Preview Sailings of Brand-New Celebrity Ascent



Offering two exclusive preview sailings prior to her official maiden voyage, Celebrity Cruises, is giving travelers the chance to sample a taste of relaxed luxury at sea on board the brand-new Celebrity Ascent, the fourth ship in the industry-transforming Edge Series.

The two new sailings include:

- A four-night Western Caribbean itinerary departing Port Everglades on November 22, 2023, and taking guests to Cozumel, Mexico over the American Thanksgiving holiday.
- And a three-night Bahamas cruise departing Port Everglades on November 26, 2023 and visiting the lively street markets of Nassau, Bahamas.

Guests aboard Celebrity Ascent will enjoy signature experiences found exclusively onboard a Celebrity Cruises Edge Series ship, including:

- Transformational accommodations including legendary two-story Edge Villa staterooms with direct access to the exclusive suite-only The Retreat Sun Deck.
- Awe-inspiring views from the iconic Magic Carpet - the world's first cantilevered cruise ship experience, and from bow to stern as a result of the unique outward-facing ship design.
- The pinnacle of relaxation, design and luxury starting with a sprawling Nate Berkus-designed Sunset Bar; a world-class Resort Deck with exclusive cabanas, infinity-edge plunge pools and two-story Martini-shaped hot tubs.
- Culinary offerings for everyone with more than 30 distinct food and drink venues. ■

WWW.CELEBRITYCRUISES.COM

Viking Marks Float out of Newest Egypt Ship

Set to Debut in Summer 2023, the New Viking Aton Continues to Build on Viking's Commitment to Egypt



Viking has recently announced its newest ship for the Nile River—the 82-guest Viking Aton—was “floated out,” marking a major construction milestone and the first time the ship has touched water. Set to debut in August 2023, the Viking Aton will join the company's growing fleet of state-of-the-art ships purpose-built for the Nile River and sail Viking's bestselling 12-day Pharaohs & Pyramids itinerary. Viking has seen very strong demand in Egypt, with the 2023 season now sold out and many 2024 sailing dates already sold out. The surge in demand has led Viking to open 2025 sailing dates sooner than originally expected.

The Viking Aton & Viking's Growing Egypt Fleet Hosting 82 guests in 41 staterooms, the new, state-of-the-art Viking Aton is inspired by Viking's award-winning river and ocean ships with the elegant Scandinavian design for which Viking is known. The identical sister ship to the Viking Osiris, the Viking Aton features several aspects familiar to Viking guests, such as a distinctive square bow and an indoor/outdoor Aquavit Terrace. In addition to the Viking Osiris, the Viking Aton will join the Viking Ra, which launched in 2018. In response to strong demand, Viking will have six ships sailing the Nile by 2025 with the addition of two new sister ships, the Viking Hathor and the Viking Sobek, which are already under construction and will be delivered in 2024 and 2025, respectively.

Viking's Pharaohs & Pyramids Itinerary

During the 12-day, Pharaohs & Pyramids itinerary, guests begin with a three-night stay at a first-class hotel in Cairo, where they can visit iconic sites such as the Great Pyramids of Giza, the necropolis of Sakkara, the Mosque of Muhammad Ali, or the Grand Egyptian Museum. Guests then fly to Luxor, where they visit the Temples of Luxor and Karnak before boarding a Viking river ship for an eight-day roundtrip cruise on the Nile River. ■

WWW.VIKING.COM

Seabourn Celebrates Seabourn Venture's Maiden Voyage to Antarctica



Seabourn, the leader in ultra-luxury ocean and expedition travel, reached another milestone with Seabourn Venture making its first-ever visit to Antarctica. The line's first purpose-built expedition ship, Seabourn Venture marked the inaugural voyage to the “Great White Continent” with the official naming ceremony, when the ship came to a stop in the fast ice of the Weddell Sea, part of the Southern Ocean.

In Antarctica, the ship offered hiking tours and Zodiac rides, all led by a dedicated 26-member Expedition Team of wildlife experts, scientists, historians, and naturalists. Guests also had the option to partake in expedition experiences such as kayaking where expedition guides led guests to paddle amongst the beautiful landscape, or diving Antarctica by Seabourn's luxurious expedition submarines where guests' eyes were opened to the wonders beneath the sea.

A Maiden Year Full of Exploration

Starting in May 2023, Seabourn Venture will offer two new itineraries encompassing the British Isles and Iceland.

Between June and August 2023, Seabourn Venture will then explore the Arctic with a series of 14- and 15-day voyages to Greenland and Iceland. On August 27, 2023, the ship will embark on a 23-day journey across the Northwest Passage, one of the most infamous and storied passages in the world from the Atlantic to the Pacific with a fascinating history of exploration. ■

WWW.SEABOURN.COM

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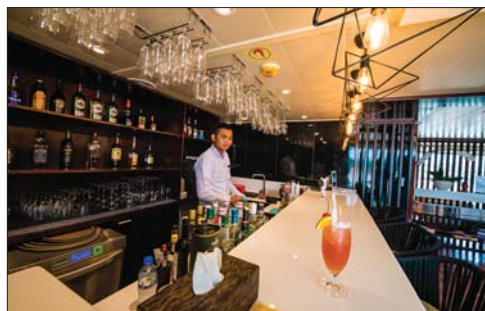
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Sailing Through the Land of Two Smiles with CroisiEurope

by Michael Morcos, photos courtesy of CroisiEurope



It is rare for me to find a trip of a lifetime, as they are rightfully once in a blue moon. Specifically, throughout my many years of traveling, only now and then does a trip have such wonderful experiences and great memories that they truly do last a lifetime.

This was one such tour and would include a luxury cruise through Cambodia and Vietnam on the tranquil Tonlé Sap lake /river, and the mighty Mekong River. To top off these wonderful countries, our other destination would be the beautiful RV Indochine II cruise ship.

The delightful CroisiEurope ship was our home away from home for nine days, and it was perfect for sailing these Asian waterways in all seasons, to say the least. With a maximum capacity of only 64 passengers on this cruise (there were less passengers than that, as this post-pandemic route had only recently been reopened) we felt spoiled and pampered by the warm and inviting staff members that offered us excellent service and attention.

CroisiEurope is a leading cruise line company, with the head office based in France and sailings on European canals and rivers. Further abroad they sail the Egyptian Nile, Southeast Asia and southern Africa as well as ocean ships that frequent three continents.

Being French, they surely know the art of hospitality, including all the comforts, service, cleanliness, and of course, amazing gastronomy and great wines. All this was evident on our Mekong cruise, and we appreciated and enjoyed every moment from start to end.

In this first of two articles, we will highlight CroisiEurope and the beautiful RV Indochine II ship. In a later feature, we will highlight the two wonderful Cambodian and Vietnamese destinations that included tranquil, out of the way villages, the magnificent Siam Reap temples and landmarks, the Cambodian capital city of Phnom Penh and its palaces and the delightfully chaotic Ho Chi Minh City (formally known as Saigon). The best part, though, it was the warm, gentle and welcoming smiling people, their delicious cuisine, and the cultural aspects that made this journey so special.

Design and comfort

It was love at first sight. Having viewed this ship on the internet and in brochures, the Indochine II in person was like finding a beloved, long-lost friend. We immediately felt surrounded by total comfort and luxury. This is CroisiEurope's latest edition on the Mekong cruise itinerary and although it looks like a historic colonial design, it is freshly decorated with modern colorful furniture and has all the latest amenities.

Staterooms

Our beautiful stateroom was handsomely decorated with dark wood floors and paneling, and was clean, functional, and comfortable. Best of all was the large balcony that gave us amazing vistas of the shoreline and locales. We would spend many hours outside while we sailed, no matter the weather. There are only two choices in-state rooms: most were of similar size and design while there is an upgrade option with a larger cabin and a full size terrace.

Gastronomy

If you are looking to lose weight and get in shape, then look no further than this cruise. Conventional wisdom would say otherwise, but with the added daily activities and the healthy meals served on board, it is relatively easy staying slim.

The meals served on the Indochine consisted of two healthy and delicious buffet style servings and a sit-down service with many options to please any pallet. Included on the menu was fine French cuisine, complemented by dishes with a local flavor, and you can order a meal prepared exactly to your taste and needs by special demand. We would be an example of staying fit and in shape as we would disembark the same weight as when we first started this journey.

Public spaces

You would think that on a ship with the capacity of only 64 passengers public space on the Indochine would be a premium, but that is just not true. The whole top level of the three-

level ship was devoted to passenger comfort. With such a warm and humid climate, the outdoor shaded platform was a favourite of most guests as we would feel a cooling breeze and have fabulous views of the river, passing ships and the delightful countryside. Here we would watch life go by while cooling off in the pool or enjoying delicious tea or refreshments. Also on the same level are the ship's bar, entertainment centre and meeting point for presentations. On the main level are the beautiful restaurant, reception and a mini store. In all, when we were outside our cabin, we felt in total comfort with plenty of elbow room to spare.

Excursions

We will focus on the destinations in a future article but for now, all I can say is that there is at least one excursion included per day. CroisiEurope has done a great job of bringing us to some of the best there is to see and do all along the cruise route. With knowledgeable, professional guides, we would learn this and much more about the lands, history, and cultural aspects of Cambodia and Vietnam.

Even though the main language on this cruise was French, everything was also communicated in perfect English. That included all paperwork, on board presentations, throughout the many excursions, and even with the French speaking crowd. All in all, the French passengers made attempts to speak English while the English-speaking guests made attempts and even brushed up on their French. It was both beautiful and comical and a perfect extra element that comes with traveling.

This was definitely a tour of a lifetime as we visited this fascinating 'land of two smiles'. As it was our first visit to Cambodia and Vietnam, we would only consider it as a small introduction to this exotic far away land. There is so much more to see, that we will return and possibly have another trip of a lifetime. ■

WWW.CROISIEUROPE.TRAVEL/EN/





Harmony of the Seas: First Impressions Last a Lifetime

by Glenn J. Nashen

They say that 'first impressions last a lifetime'. As a repeat cruiser, I've had many first impressions on very impressive ships. My experience aboard Royal Caribbean's Harmony of the Seas four years ago left such lasting impressions that I just knew we would be destined to meet again someday. That 2019 cruise was extra-special as I traveled with just one of my three children, 18 year-old Nikki - a daddy-daughter holiday. That was an exclusive trip on what was then the largest passenger ship in the world.

This year, my middle child, Tali, 19 years-old, would be my lucky travel-mate for a return voyage aboard Harmony. I was anxious to witness the excitement in her eyes when she would embark upon this extraordinary ship.

Harmony set sail in 2016 and is currently the third largest cruise ship in the world. She's also the longest, and has a passenger capacity of nearly 6780, plus a crew of 2200. One would think with 9000 people onboard that you'd be constantly knocking elbows and reaching for the last scraps of food at the buffet! Nothing could be further from the truth. With 2747 staterooms, 16 guest decks, seven "neighborhoods", and 20 restaurants, there is ample space to spread out and enjoy your vacation as you like. It is nothing short of a floating luxury resort with all the amenities, more than you could imagine.

This was our first post-pandemic cruise, as it likely was for most guests. Few people continued to wear masks. There was more than enough space for everybody to feel comfort-

able, with washing stations as you entered the buffet restaurants and hand sanitizers at each of the 24 guest elevators.

Tali and I began each day soaking up the early morning sunshine through the large stateroom balcony door. The gentle, warm breeze and sounds of the sea were refreshing and mesmerizing. Then, we would head up to the sports deck for a few games of pickleball. The multi-sport court is also used for basketball, volleyball and dodgeball. We teamed up with sport enthusiasts who looked forward to a good heart-pumping sweat to get the day started.

There were bountiful options for breakfast and brunch. We usually chose from the generous offering at the Windjammer Café where



guests from all over the world mingled among the hot and cold buffets, fresh baked pastries, omelet station, and juice bar. We would greet foreign-speakers with a friendly smile and often break the ice with a curious, "Where are you from?", usually in English, sometimes in French. It could not be easier, or more fun, to talk to complete strangers. It's thrilling to meet guests and crew members from all around the world. I've made it a habit to learn to say 'Thank You' in a dozen languages.

Harmony has a mind-blowing 23 areas with pools, hot tubs, waterslides and flow-riders! We alternated sun-bathing on the busy pool deck near the thrilling water slides, chilling at the tranquil adult-only solarium, and snoozing at the secluded lounging area along the jogging track.

Choosing a lunch destination was a favorite pastime. The terrace at The Park Café, surrounded by lush greenery offered a unique setting to enjoy our veggie Panini and roast beef sandwich. With birds chirping and guests strolling past us along the meandering pathway in Central Park we needed reminding that we were actually on a ship!

Sports animator MX (South Africa) enthusiastically instructed us in zip-lining 10 stories above the Boardwalk. Then it was off to rock-climbing on the massive 40 foot wall followed by soaking in the hot tubs. We ate ice cream and drank lots of Pina Colada, Daiquiri and Mojito mocktails each day, enjoying our special time together, chatting about what to do next, knowing full well there simply wouldn't be enough time to do it all.

One particular afternoon we attended a wine-tasting event at Vintages in Central Park. Linda, our sommelier, (Indonesia) decoded the intricacies of our six glasses of wine. We learned how to pair with various dishes and she counseled us on bottles from \$15 to \$150.

Each afternoon we'd grab a couple of slices of pizza from Sorrento's, open 24-hours-a-day, and fill our "bottomless" tumblers in one of the automated soda machines. We'd head up to our 11th deck stateroom balcony to snack, relax, gaze out at the sea and chat. The "Voom Wifi" connection was solid, so we sent pictures and videos daily to our family and

friends back in chilly Montreal. Our outside cabin and balcony were spacious and the attendant, Anthony (Jamaica), was attentive, friendly and thorough. He made monkeys out of twisted towels and kept the room spotless. Twice-a-day tidying was recently reduced to once and that was just fine with us.

We usually went to the late seating in the Main Dining Room, where service was formal and classy. Our waiters, Gerald (Philippines) and Ping (China) and our uber-friendly head waiter, Ercan (Turkey) always asked how we enjoyed our day. Our meals were exquisitely plated and tasted delightful. Unfortunately, the endless lobster tail dinners are a thing of the past. One of our outstanding meals was at Izumi, a hibachi and sushi specialty dining restaurant. Chef Julien (Philippines) put on quite a show, cooking up traditional Japanese dishes right in front of us. With spatulas and knives whizzing by, eggs being tossed in the air, singing and cheering galore, my meal included filet mignon, scallops, lobster tail and shrimp. They easily accommodated Tali with tasty vegetarian options. There were so many other specialty restaurants to choose from - another reason to return someday soon!

Night time entertainment was a big highlight. We loved both musicals in the Royal Theatre: 'Grease' was sensational - amazing Broadway calibre voices, delightful dancing, lavish costumes and extravagant sets. 'Columbus', was a whimsical, dimwitted musical parody that brought us to our feet loudly applauding the talented actors. The two ice-skating shows in Studio B were lively and well-choreographed with some of the best skaters from Europe and North America. The aqua-shows were simply unbelievable with divers soaring high above the audience, splashing into the pool and disappearing under the deck. Highly entertaining and action-packed, the divers, swimmers and even a tight-rope walker provided heart-stopping thrills and edge-of-your-seat excitement.

Other activities included the art auction, a delightful singer from "Lettermen" fame, live music, dancing, and shopping galore. There was even a parade down the Royal Promenade, a massive dance party and balloon-drop. There was so much activity, entertainment and food that we simply could not



find enough time to do it all!

Instead of excursions we opted to remain on board when it was quiet and there were no lines. We enjoyed these port days by exploring the ship. The one exception was in Labadee, Royal Caribbean's private Haitian resort, where we took advantage of the beautiful beaches. Tali and I lounged under beach umbrellas and splashed in the warm turquoise water. We were spoiled with non-alcoholic fruit drinks and a grand buffet. Local artists performed in marching bands, dance troupes and acrobatics. Merchants offered their crafts in the marketplace. Everything was within a 10 minute easy walk from the ship. A shuttle also circled the resort. It was a great day at Labadee.

This was a remarkable Royal Caribbean experience - they excel at taking care of each one of their guests, ensuring a spectacular vacation. From the moment we arrived at Port Everglades in Fort Lauderdale until our return one week later, everything was perfectly organized. Like an orchestra, each part was in perfect harmony (pardon the pun).

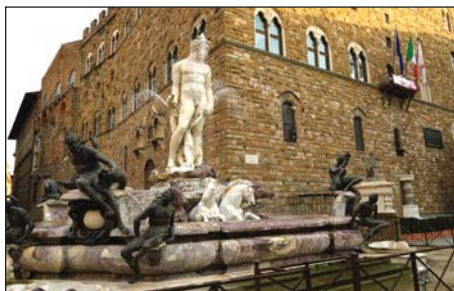
They also say, 'you don't get a second chance to make a first impression'. For those like me who have cruised more than once on Harmony of the Seas, I believe you can enjoy the first impression, over and over again. ■

WWW.ROYALCARIBBEAN.COM



The Iconic Viking Experience

Article and photography by Michael Morcos



Iconic would be the best word to describe this cruise and the destinations. After all, what could be more iconic in the Mediterranean than ports of call like Rome, Tuscany, Provence and Barcelona. These are just some of the destinations we would enjoy on this Viking's 'Iconic Mediterranean' cruise.

Iconic would also be the word to describe the Viking experience itself. This being our seventh cruise with them, they know how to take care of their guests, making any and all journeys seamless, effortless, comforting and relaxing, while also taking all the guesswork out of the trip from the arrival airport, to the ship, to all the included excursions and every on board experience. Simply put, this is Viking perfection! Iconic Viking!

On all our Viking cruises around the world, whether on river ships, sea ships or expedition ships, Viking has never disappointed. Add to that everything promised was practiced and delivered. Kudos to Viking staff and management, they are doing all the right things to have such a faithful clientele that return time and again.

It has always been a pleasure sailing with Viking. The trips start long before the ships sail as the anticipation builds by studying the destinations and the planned excursions. Packing, leaving home, and navigating the chaotic airports is an experience in itself, but nothing could be better than seeing a Viking lollipop upon arrival, knowing right then and there that everything will be taken care of for the entire trip.

In this part two of a two-part article we will highlight the features of the Neptune as well as the magnificent Mediterranean ports of call.

The journey begins

Our cruise would start in Rome and end in Barcelona. To truly experience the eternal city, it is best to arrive a couple of days early and enjoy the magnificence of Rome while also relaxing and shaking off the nasty jet-lag. Viking has pre and post cruise options that include hotel stays and guided excursions and are well worth it.



Having visited Rome several times, and less than four months ago, we opted to go directly to the ship. Located one hour away from the airport in the harbor city of Fiumicino, we find the handsome and newly built Neptune awaiting us with open arms and a red carpet.

Boarding was quick and easy, checked in and given a key within moments. We would then be welcomed with refreshments and led to the ship's elevators. Arriving at our staterooms, we would find our luggage already there. That is service!

So new was the Neptune that it even had a new car smell. Being the sister ship of other similar class ships, it would be the eighth of nine planned Viking sea ships. Only the Saturn remains to be launched and it should be another beauty. Since we had already sailed on this ship class before, we would know where all the beautiful public spaces were and could easily find our way around. With so much thought going into public spaces, it is difficult to pick a favorite spot, but the Nordic Spa and the Explores' Lounge are certainly on top of the list.

Two wonderful Tuscan days

After our first night of cruising, we would arrive early in the city of Livorno. This harbor would be our base to explore the wonderful Tuscan countryside and its beautiful historic cities. The cruise included two excursions, with a wide host of optional excursions available for an additional fee. Our selections would include Pisa and Florence on the first day, and a delightful countryside winery and the historic walled city of San Gimignano on the second day.

Pisa would not be much of a city to visit without the leaning tower, on this beautiful sunny day we would experience this Tuscan icon and marvel at the centuries old buildings and its less visited side streets and cafés.

In Florence, we would start with a fabulous lunch at a wonderful and colorful restaurant, the meal was typically Florentine: tasty, filling, and a wonderful introduction to this gem of Tuscany. Shortly after that, we would follow our guide on a walking tour that introduced us to the best of Florence before



we were given free time to explore on our own. With a fresh chill in the air, we would discover that Florence is magical at night as we wandered care-free through the city's cobblestone streets and lanes.

Delightful Provence

Onwards, we would sail to beautiful Provence. In Nice, we discovered the laid-back feeling of southern France, in charming Aix-en-Provence we would journey back in time to a wonderful and delightful small town feel. In Monaco, we discovered the rich and opulent playground of the French, and in Marseille, we experienced a cosmopolitan atmosphere in this grand city by the sea. For such a short visit, this region sure has lots to offer travelers of all ages and interests.

After a much needed rest, we would rejuvenate and recharge on a sea-day just in time for a visit to the amazing city of Barcelona. Yet another included guided tour would bring us to the best of the city. My favorite by far would be the church of La Sagrada Familia. Barcelona has much too much to see and do, and just like Rome, to do it justice, extra nights would bring out all the flavor of this unique and at the times breathtaking city.

One iconic destination after another brought to the end of our wonderful journey. This was truly a memorable cruise for the main reasons that we visited wonderful places, ate fabulous foods and experienced yet another Viking masterpiece on the high seas, all in comfort, safety and class. ■

WWW.VIKING.COM





On the Nile

Article and Photography by Lisa TE Sonne

I can't believe we are on the Nile, the longest river in the world, the "mother of civilization," the river of Moses, King Tut, Cleopatra, Nefertiti, Somerset Maugham, Agatha Christie, and so many more.

My eyes open dreamily to see blue waters rippling past a river bank of palm trees, papyrus-like grasses, and a donkey and thatched hut reminiscent of a biblical manger.

I am waking on the top deck of the M.S. Mayfair plying the passage that thousands of feluccas with their distinct sails have journeyed over thousands of years. After seeing

the ancient Egyptian sun god of Ra depicted in temples and tombs, and on cartouches and post cards in Cairo and Alexandria, I have enjoyed a solar nap, a more contemporary homage to the powerful sun overhead. It's January, but I am comfortably warm.

I hear snatches of French, Spanish, and Arabic, as well as English, from some of my fellow passengers on the 74-cabin Mayfair. Some kids are giggling and splashing in the roof Jacuzzi. Tea is being served in porcelain cups to adults. And then, in the distance, a muezzin calls locals to pray to the one great God Allah, in this country whose history is

carved and painted with images of ancient gods that look part lion, crocodile, jackal, owl, lion, cow, cat, or even alien.

My mind cruises through images that I have now seen in person, not just books or screens. The Egyptian museum in Cairo was an essential three-dimensional primer before going to tombs and temples. The museum's 120,000 artifacts include King Tut's gold mask, well-preserved royal mummies, and colorful hieroglyphics.

The museum is nestled among high-rises in



how it got there and who else has touched it in hundreds of generations of people.

Driving through open desert, then crouching through a long narrow passage and descending into the bowels of the Earth to see something astonishing awakens an innate thrill of discovery.

In our current world hurtling past Snapchat and 30 nano-seconds of fame, the carved walls and pillars and ceilings in these temples are still telling stories millennia later - tales of battle and bravery, tenderness and love. And they have created rock stars (literally) for the ages.

We also created our own little stories when going to have hibiscus tea in a Nubian village, visiting the Aswan Dam, clambering over rocks to see the Unfinished Obelisk, and helping make paper in the Papyrus Museum. But our touchstone was always the Nile River to smell the winds that swirl felucca sails and to watch the moods of the clouds and to feel the rhythms of the river's tides.

Our well-appointed ship provided several ways to view river life: topside with winds and smells and sun, from the dining room with good food and drink, or from a balcony in the suite. Our room even had a deep bathtub with a sliding panel, so that we could see over the bed, through the balcony glass door, and onto the Nile itself.

We passed diverse tableaux - oasis-looking settlements, stretches of sand-piled deserts with a row of camel, and all-rock islands with only winged visitors. We passed the river life of fisherman and farmers in realms once ruled by great pharaohs. We passed cliffs with cave-like portals that stirred mystery about what might have once been.

When the sun blazed fiery farewell to another day, we saw it in the sky and reflected in the Nile, as it has been millions of times before. And later we could sleep on the Nile, under the stars of Moses and Pharaohs.

Yes. We really are on the Nile. ■

WWW.EGYPT.TRAVEL



the capital of Egypt, which bustles with 20 million living people. Across the Nile to the west, in Giza, famous monuments to the dead, including the Giant Pyramids and the iconic Great Sphinx, are roughly 4,500 years old. That's thousands of years older than other ancient bucket-list destinations, such as Angkor Wat, Machu Picchu, the Aztec pyramids, and the Anasazi cliff dwellings.

River Life

To live a few days on the life-source Nile, my husband and I flew south to Luxor to begin our cruise to Aswan. My first image of the Nile at Luxor was of waters much bluer than the river's commercial artery through Cairo. And beyond the blue, desert mountains contrasted with colorful hot air balloons.

Moored near the great Luxor Temple, the Mayfield became our moving home en route to shore excursions with wonderful guides. In only a few days, via horse-drawn carriages, air-conditioned vans, and shaded motorboats, we managed to visit the Valley of the Kings with King Tut's tomb, the Valley of the Queens, the Temple of Karnak, the Temple of Rameses, the Temple of Horus in Edfu, the Philae Temple and Luxor Temple.

Countless guidebooks and web sites can share incredible facts about famous locations: Estimates say about 2.3 million stone blocks weighing about one ton each were used to build the Great Pyramid. The eyes alone on the Sphinx of Giza are two meters high. But to be there with your own eyes is to wish they, too, were two meters high. There is so much to take in and to wonder about. To touch one of these mammoth stones and to marvel at





Historic Park Inn, Mason City, Iowa

by Randy Mink

For history fans and architecture buffs, sleeping in the world's only remaining hotel designed by Frank Lloyd Wright is a dream come true.

Opened in 1910 and saved from the wrecking ball a century later, the Historic Park Inn in downtown Mason City, Iowa, stands as a tribute to the Prairie School of architecture made famous by Wright, who is generally considered America's greatest architect.

The building once housed a bank and law office as well as a 43-room hotel called the Park Inn Hotel. Today's Historic Park Inn, after an extensive restoration project completed in 2011, has 27 guest rooms, plus a restaurant and a basement-level bar with billiard tables. The former banking hall serves as the ballroom.

The landmark's exterior is vintage Prairie School: a long, low look with wide roof overhangs and horizontal banding created in brick and stone. Original art-glass windows, a signature Wright element, adorn the facade, which overlooks Central Park and its statue of the master builder. Exact reproductions of furniture and lighting fixtures, even the hallway carpeting, mirror Wright designs and motifs.

The best place to soak up the ambience is the Skylight Room, a sitting area with 25 original art-glass panels set below the skylight. Books on Wright are available for guests' reading pleasure.

Guests find displays of vintage photos and other memorabilia throughout the public areas. Docent-led tours are offered by Wright on the Park (WOTP), the non-profit organization that owns the boutique hotel and is responsible for its ongoing preservation.

Other features original to the building include 14 window grilles, tile flooring in the lobby and Skylight Room, stairway railings and balustrades, and many guest room doors.

To satisfy 21st century travelers, rooms had to be enlarged and outfitted with private baths, as they were tiny and had shared bathrooms. Featuring amenities like smart TVs and heated floors, rooms come in varying sizes, all sporting Wright design touches. ■

WWW.HISTORICPARKINN.COM



New Tokyo Hotels in 2023

Bulgari Hotel Tokyo: Opening in 2023

Taking over the top seven floors of a new ultra-skyscraper, the Bulgari Tokyo will be located within walking distance of top sites in Tokyo, including Nihombashi, Ginza and Tokyo Station. In addition to its 98 guest rooms and the iconic staples of Bulgari Hotels (the Bulgari Bar, Il Ristorante, and Il Cioccolato), the Bulgari Spa will offer innovative treatments and a 82-foot-long indoor pool.

https://www.bulgarihotels.com/en_US/tokyo

Janu Tokyo: Opening 2023

Aman Resorts' sister brand, Janu, will open its affordable luxury hotel Janu Tokyo in 2023. Located within the same complex as the new Aman Residences Tokyo, Janu Tokyo will feature 120 luxury rooms overlooking a central square of lush greenery. The property also will be home to Japan's largest spa, six restaurants, a café and bars.

<https://www.janu.com/en/>

The Tokyo Kabukicho Tower: Opening 2023

Expected to be Japan's largest hotel and entertainment complex, the massive Tokyo Kabukicho Tower will open in spring 2023. It will feature two luxury hotels – the Hotel Groove Shinjuku and the Bellustar Tokyo. The complex will also feature the Bandai Namco amusement center, the concert venue Zepp Tokyo, two floors of live theaters and cinemas, and an entertainment food hall.

<https://tokyu-kabukicho-tower.jp/>



Glamping at Whispering Springs Wilderness Retreat

by Cherie DeLory

After two years plus of social distancing I was more than ready to cozy up to nature on a glamping adventure at Whispering Springs Retreat in Northumberland County in Ontario. The two-night yoga wellness retreat was curated by boutique luxury travel outfitter, The Divine Destination Collection. Its standards are high for providing meaningful, luxurious travel destination experiences, and this is no exception.

Glamping is camping with an invigorating dash of glamour, where once you peel open the entrance of the rustic log-framed safari tent you step into what looks like a cozy log cabin interior with sophisticated decor, upholstered bed, soaker bathtub and heated blankets. I slept in a Treetop Tent, two stories high,

with a luxurious oak-framed Queen bed, ensuite bathroom, and private balcony overlooking the spring-fed pond. Nothing says communing with nature like sleeping in the treetops, sharing branches with the local chickadees.

Whispering Springs Retreat sits on 200 acres of prairie and meadow wilderness ecosystem in the hamlet of Grafton, Ontario, 90 minutes east of Toronto. It's only 10 minutes away from Ste. Anne's Spa, where you can peruse its pretty walled gardens, and indulge in pampering spa treatments and nourishing dining options. Back at Whispering Springs, from canoeing in the pond to sinking into a hammock or bird watching, nature's ambiance is calming. You can enjoy the outdoor salt water pool, hot tub, sauna, and electric and wood-burning fire pits, lounging comfortably on a Muskoka chair, signature S'mortini cocktail in hand at sunset.

Breakfast baskets including a freshly baked croissant, juice, and yogurt parfait can be delivered upon request, and wood-fired pizzas, craft beer and local wines are served at the open-air Watering Hole Guest Lounge and Bar. I enjoyed elegant candle-lit dinners of Beef Wellington and roast chicken with mushroom sauce.

At sunrise, when it comes time to explore the Whispering Springs wilderness, I can't help but think I'm entering into the enchanted wood masterminded by children's book author, Enid Blyton in *The Faraway Tree* book series. I don't spot any fairies or pixies, but our guided forest bathing walking tour leads us beyond the horses in the pasture to the whimsical Forest Chapel. A peaceful destination wedding setting, the open-air Forest Chapel is sheltered by a canopy of old-growth forest and is certain to offer many nature lovers a wedding ceremony to remember.

On my return walk through the forest and then alongside the spring-fed pond, past the tents and cabins, stopping to look at wildflowers and chipmunks, I admire a hand-crafted wooden swing set too irresistible to bypass. I take a seat and hold onto the ropes. As I swing and swoosh back and forth, I'm certain I can hear nature whispering to me.

[HTTPS://WWW.WHISPERINGSPRINGS.CA/](https://www.whisperingsprings.ca/)
[HTTPS://DIVINEDESTINATIONCOLLECTION.COM](https://divinedestinationcollection.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

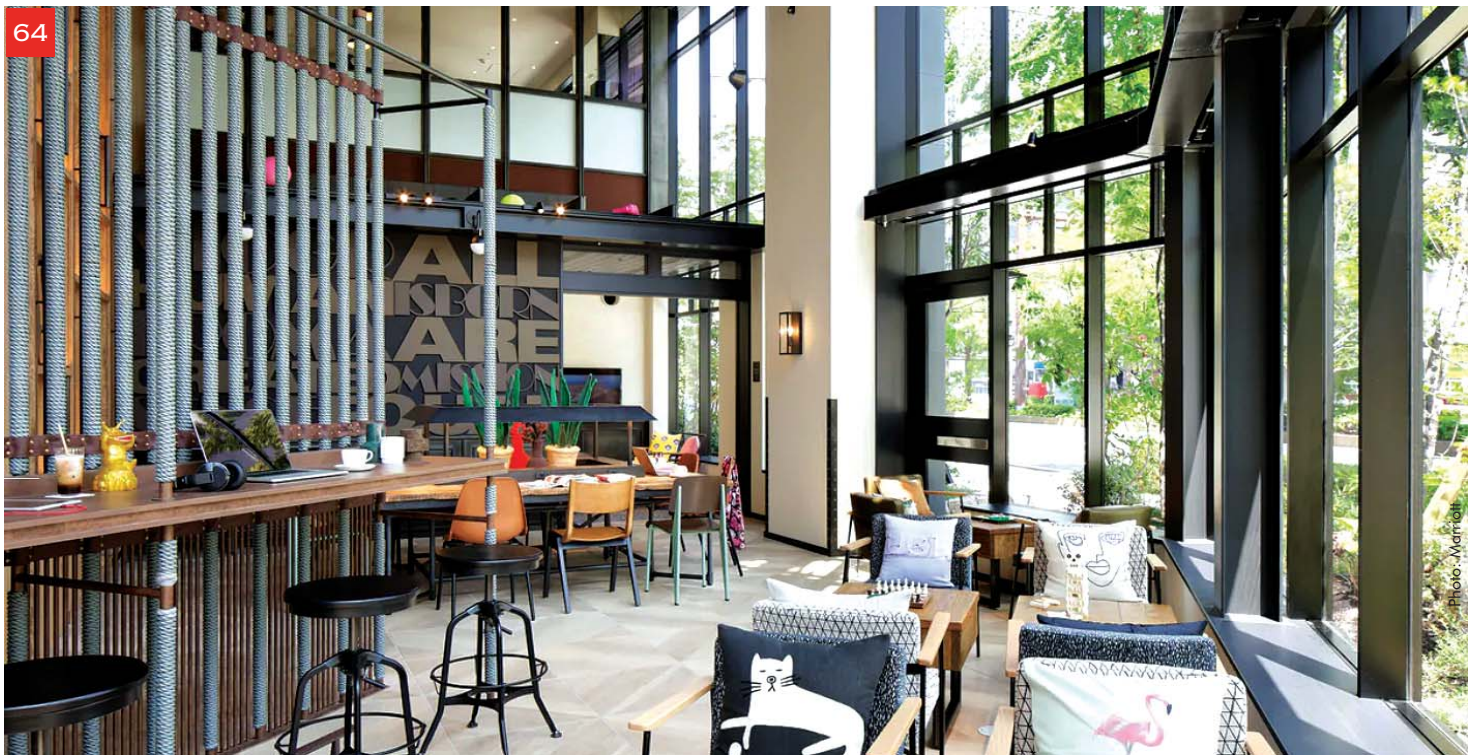
At Puntacana Resort & Club

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



Moxy Osaka Shin Umeda Hotel, Fukushima, Osaka, Japan

Article and photography by Steve Gillick

The word “moxie” became popular in the 1930s and was applied to people who were spirited, gutsy, and had nerve. So I can say that it’s more than fitting for Marriott to have named a Select Brand of hotels “Moxy”, especially after I had the pleasure of staying at one. Moxy Osaka Shin Umeda is described on their website as “hip, playful and fun” and, well, you know, it was!

The staff were proficient in English and extended that warm greeting that is missing in so many hotels these days. The lobby features a well-stocked 24-hour bar and complimentary coffee and tea service for staying guests. In addition, there are both communal and private tables for enjoying meals. On our first stay, the thick, fresh salmon sandwich that the hotel prepared for our early morning departure breakfast was great, and on our second stay, the in-house buffet breakfast with eggs, sausages, crispy fried potatoes,

yogurt, fruit, croissants, toast, and even a rack of freshly made donuts was substantial and tasty.

The vibe at the Moxy is transmitted by the giant color-changing Octopus suspended from the lobby ceiling and continues in the lounge, where conversations or computer chats take place in comfortable chairs next to a giant Rubik’s Cube. Regular hotel events include a Saturday night DJ, Salsa nights, and Karaoke.

But as Nobuko Kotani, the Moxy’s affable Sales Specialist, explained, the hotel decorations also pay homage to Fukushima, one of Osaka City’s 24 wards in which the hotel is located. Artworks depict the rivers of Osaka, rice fields, small factories, robotics, car part manufacturers, and local companies such as Panasonic and Daihatsu.

The ‘Champagne-bubble’ elevator took us to the hotel gym with the sign beseeching clients to “Hustle for that Muscle”, and the fun signage continued in our room. There was an encouraging note on the very small refrigeration unit, “Too small? Drop by the bar. We have a BIG fridge. We’re waiting for you”.

In fact, the room amenities were full of that Moxy vibe. For example, in both the 25 and 20-square-meter rooms, the fold-away luggage stand and the table and chairs are con-

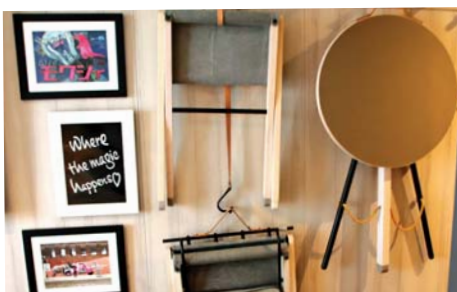
veniently hanging on hooks on the wall next to the large-screen television. And the retro grey telephone, with a bright orange dial and phone cord next to the complimentary water bottles, was another playful touch.

The room colors were soothing, the beds were comfortable, and the bathrooms provided ample space.

The 288-room hotel is less than a ten-minute walk from the Fukushima train station, which is one stop from the main Osaka train station. But the convenient location also allowed us easy access to Dotonbori, the principal tourist hub in Osaka, with its huge colorful restaurant signs and crowds lining up for crab, takoyaki, kushikatsu, sushi, soba, and more.

The Moxy has a very positive, unique ‘difference’ about it. I was very impressed, and I plan to return! ■

[HTTPS://WWW.MARRIOTT.COM](https://www.marriott.com)





Hoshino Resorts Kai Beppu

by Steve Gillick

When you enter your room at Hoshino Resorts Kai Beppu and exclaim, “Oh my Goodness”, you know you’re in for an extraordinary experience. The focus of each of the 70 Kai Signature rooms is the magnificent ocean view from the huge picture window that fully occupies one wall. And the pink-brown color of the walls, called Kakishibu or bitter persimmon, enhance the intensity of the view over Beppu Bay. The first reaction is to just sit on the sofa in front of the window and gaze in amazement.

But the Kai Beppu experience begins at the entrance to the ryokan when you are greeted by the smiling staff. Next, they escort visitors to Onsen Square in the lobby, where a huge picture window, a hand bath, and a foot bath allow guests to unwind and engage with the

scenery. And the adventure continues as the culture and tradition of Beppu are reflected in this newly opened (July 2021) building designed by famed architect Kengo Kuma. A cobblestone alleyway leads to the arcade/meeting room, past the travel library, and on to the gift shop, the garden, and the onsen, or hot baths.

Taro Hirooka, the Assistant General Manager, explained that the ryokan reflected the atmosphere of the onsen town and that Beppu, with over 2000 onsen sources, was possibly the most renowned hot spring area in Japan.

The soothing indoor baths at Kai Beppu allow for relaxed hot water or warm water bathing while contemplating the ryokan’s peaceful Japanese garden. The waters leave the skin feeling soft and smooth.

Afterward, for a change of pace, the Night Fair in the lobby features colorful lanterns, self-serve ramen snacks, chuhai tasting (shoshu with fruit juice and liquor mixes), and family games.

At dinner time, guests descended a staircase under the Kengo Kuma-designed bamboo dragonfly chandelier, for a Kaiseki meal (multiple courses served in sequence) that was taste-bud heaven. It featured chicken, scallops, salmon, swordfish, fugu, sashimi, noo-

dles, kabosu citrus (similar to lime), and local vegetables. Our server told us to ready our cameras for the spectacle as she lifted the top off the Bungo Nabe (seafood, chicken, and beef hot pot), and the steam poured out, simulating Beppu’s hot springs!

A final hotel event, the Toji Jug Band, was a fun way to end the day. Then, back in the room, with lights dimmed, the night view of the ocean and the comfortable beds lulled us to sleep.

The following day, after using the private hot spring tub on our balcony, we enjoyed a delicious breakfast before we sadly had to leave for our next destination.

The Hoshino Resort Kai Beppu is an amazing experience. The location is excellent, the staff are very friendly, the rooms are stunning, the views are spectacular, the onsen is so relaxing, and the food is outstanding. What more could a traveler need to pamper their travel curiosity and soothe their soul at the same time? ■

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VILLA PARADISO



*Your Escape
Jamaica*

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



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



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

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



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



Exclusive Private Jamaican Paradise

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



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

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



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Live Calendar



Hotel Giraffe: Boutique Hideaway in New York City

by Randy Mink

Maybe it's the live orchids in the lobby lounge, the fresh green bamboo stalks in my guest room or simply the place's name, but I immediately feel at peace after checking in to the Hotel Giraffe, a sleek and stylish sanctuary in New York City. Being a fan of history and architecture, I also like the landmarks that lie outside its doors.

Located at the corner of Park Avenue South and East 26th Street in Manhattan's NoMad neighborhood, between midtown and downtown, the 12-story boutique hotel stands in good company. Occupying a whole city block across Park Avenue is New York Life Insurance Company, its 40-story headquarters crowned by a gilded, pyramidal roof, a beacon on the city skyline since 1928.

My balconied room facing East 26th overlooked the site where Herman Melville, author of novels like *Moby Dick* and *Billy Budd*, lived from 1863-1891. A plaque on the site's current building attests to that fact,

and the corner street sign designates the intersection as Herman Melville Square.

What endears me most to the Hotel Giraffe is its high-ceilinged lounge paneled in blond wood and bordered by tall windows on two sides. Relaxing over breakfast or winding up the day with a drink, guests feel their cares lift away while seated at the dining tables or in the couches and easy chairs flanked by potted trees. Orchid plants, single orchids floating in silver teardrop vases, and lilies brimming from large vases lend a cheery floral touch. Shelves behind the service counter hold carved wooden African animals, and one wall sports a framed picture of a giraffe. The black baby grand piano adds a note of grandeur.

Guests visit the spacious lounge to help themselves to snacks (health bars and gourmet potato chips), fresh fruit, coffee, tea and soft drinks. Its breakfast bar offers pastries, yogurt, orange juice and hard-boiled eggs. Like many hotel guest rooms in Manhattan,

quarters are not huge, but an abundance of mirrors seems to enlarge the space. They covered two walls in my bathroom and were set into both sides of the closet's wooden doors. A wood-framed mirror was mounted above the long granite-top workspace graced with potted bamboo, and mirrors surrounded the bar set-up atop the refrigerator.

The shelf above my ice bucket and wine glasses held four books, including *Tall Blondes: A Book About Giraffes*, which tells everything you ever wanted to know about the gawky but graceful creature. A six-foot-tall giraffe statue accents the hotel's Rooftop Garden, a warm-weather gathering spot.

Happily, my go-to place for ethnic dining in New York is just a block away from the Hotel Giraffe. I am talking about a two-block stretch of Lexington Avenue called Curry Hill or Little India. There you'll find a dozen simple eateries dishing up Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Nepalese specialties.

The 72-room Hotel Giraffe is part of the Library Hotel Collection, which includes three other Manhattan boutique properties, plus hotels in Toronto and Budapest. ■

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Eye Spy the Luxurious St. Ermin's Hotel

by Nicholas Kontis

If you've ever imagined yourself as an international spy, you owe it to yourself to spend a night or three at St. Ermin's Hotel in London's Westminster district.

While Central London is brimming with opulent hotels in storied enclaves such as Mayfair, Knightsbridge and Hyde Park, none can tell the stories of St. Ermin's, a Victorian-era grand dame beautifully renovated in Queen Anne style. Now a part of the Marriott Autograph Collection, the four-star, red-brick property has an ideal location, just around the corner from the St. James Place underground station.

Covert past

Designed as a luxury apartment building in 1892 by J.P. Briggs, famed as the architect of the Savoy Theater, it was converted in 1900 into a hotel that assumed historical significance during World War II and the Cold War. Indeed, it remains the only public establishment in London closely associated with the history of espionage.

It was used as a spy headquarters during World War II. In 1940, Prime Minister Winston Churchill formed his Special Operations Executive (SIS) and MI6 forces at the fabled dwelling. A secret tunnel allegedly connects the ground-floor lobby to Westminster Palace and the adjacent tube station.

If this all sounds very James Bond to you, consider that Bond's creator, author Ian Fleming, once strode this hallways in his previous career as a British intelligence agent.

All the world's a stage

As you enter the hotel grounds through a lofty

wrought-iron gate, you find yourself in an enchanting courtyard flanked by a colorful garden. The sweeping lobby mimics Briggs' theatrical balconies and whimsical staircases; it even echoes like a theater. A diverse combination of evocative Art Nouveau styling, Rococo plaster work, sparkling chandeliers, Oriental cushions and prints grace the storied residence. In keeping with its spy theme, antique décor includes various keepsakes, collectibles, codes, surveillance devices and Cold War-era relics.

A £30 million renovation, spearheaded by Los Angeles-based designer Dayna Lee's Powerstrip Studio, restored hallways and interiors. Lee took inspiration from 19th-century botanist Christopher Dresser. Ubiquitous plant, flower and leaf motifs now grace the green building.

Living quarters

The homey hotel boasts 331 sophisticated rooms along with 41 suites and family suites. Each is different in design, shape and size, but all draw upon worldwide textural influences to convey a calming effect. Two-poster beds, crisp bed linens, sumptuous soft furnishings, vibrant colors, White Company toiletries, over-



sized windows, flat-screen TVs, iPod docs, and built-in international sockets all add to the sense of being in your own home. Junior Suites combine the latest in technology with fabulously innovative pieces — Louis Vuitton-style furniture, leather-wrapped wardrobes, mother-of-pearl inlays, chocolate marble, large walk-in showers and inviting claw-foot baths.

The hotel has created 27 family rooms, each with a pair of queen-sized beds, two bathrooms, and an additional sofa bed to ensure maximum flexibility for all. Upon checking in, children receive an intriguing St. Ermin's Secret Agent Package with a top-secret briefing to test their observational and sleuthing skills around the hotel.

Casual fine dining

St. Ermin's on-site restaurant, the award-winning Caxton Grill, is an informal affair with 72 seats and a private dining room for 20. Light and airy, it overlooks the pretty courtyard garden and offers a mouth-watering selection of classic British dishes for lunch and dinner.

Executive chef Alexander Boyd serves a seasonal menu that includes herbs from the hotel's own rooftop garden, which shares with 350,000 resident Buckfast bees. Large plates include grilled monkfish, pork chop with grilled apples, and an olive-fed Wagyu skirt steak.

Discretion advised

Guests may want to tip a pint or nurse a cocktail at the Caxton Bar. The storied watering hole was once a haunt of Churchill, who enjoyed champagne at the bar. It was also frequented by the notorious Cambridge Spies, double agents who worked for both Russia's KGB and England's SIS in the 1950s.

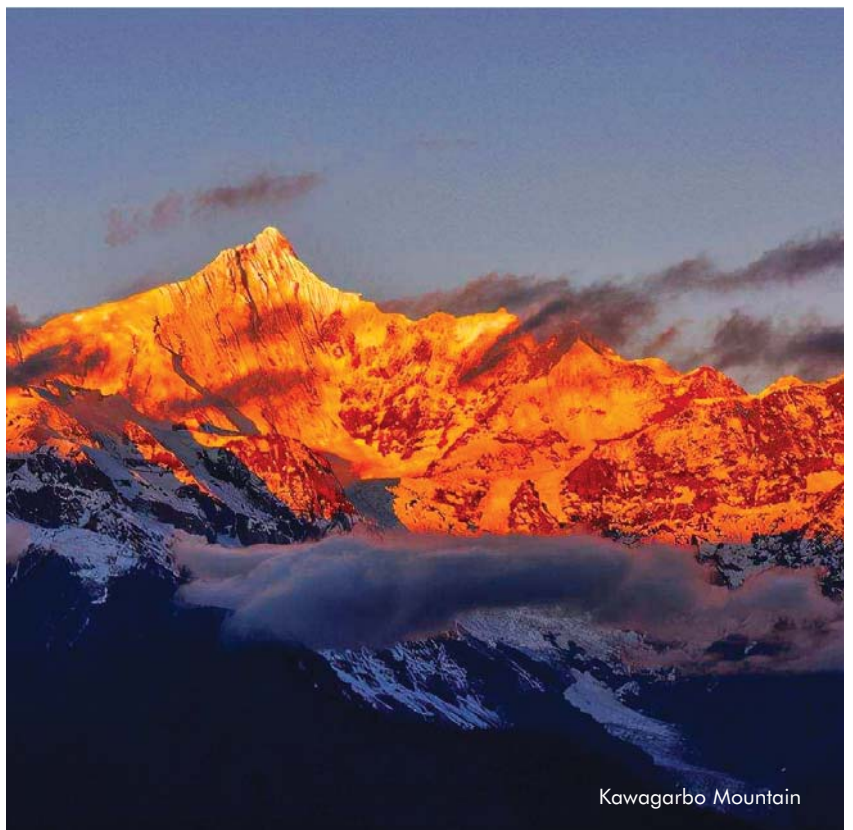
Classic light fare, wine flights, champagnes and whiskies are Caxton specialties. The best-known cocktails are the Bowler Hat: Sipsmith gin, lemon juice and honey from the rooftop bee terrace. Guests are encouraged to mingle with staff at a daily late-afternoon happy hour in the lobby.

It's true that, in the 21st Century, you won't see an elaborate affair of women dressed to the nines in bodiced corsets, other evoking Victorian fashion. But the stylish St. Ermin's leaves it to your imagination to seek a bygone era. Its modern makeover comingles time-honored traditions for an unrivaled London stay. The welcoming and professional staff make you feel right at home. The hotel is also dog-friendly, with designated rooms for guests wishing to pamper their pups. ■

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Florence Li, Songtsam's
Director of International Sales & Marketing



Kawagarbo Mountain

ARC'TERYX and Songtsam Present the Kawagarbo Series

A Limited Edition of Technical/High Performance Apparel Inspired by the Highest Peak in China's Famous Meili Snow Mountains

ARC'TERYX, the global design company specializing in outdoor technical high-performance apparel and equipment, together with Songtsam, the award-winning collection of luxury boutique hotels resorts and tours, in the Tibet and Yunnan Provinces of China, held a press launch of the limited edition co-branded Kawagarbo Series. Born out of a five-year strategic partnership between ARC'TERYX

and Songtsam, and inspired by the first and highest peak in the Meili Snow Mountain Range, Kawagarbo, the collection's launch highlights the sustainable principles and initiatives of the two brands who both advocate for the harmonious coexistence between humans and nature. The launch took place last week at the ARC'TERYX store on Broadway in SoHo, New York City.

Florence Li, Songtsam's Director of International Sales & Marketing, spoke about the ongoing symbiosis of humans and nature and how it was a major factor in Songtsam's decision to collaborate with ARC'TERYX. Li told the gathering at the launch about Songtsam's commitment to sustainability and spoke about the collaboration with ARC'TERYX for the Kawagarbo Series itself. She said, "We are excited to inspire and encourage our industry partners to live in harmony with the mountains and nature through this global media launch of this first ARC'TERYX X Songtsam collection."

Guy Fattal, well known Outdoor & Adventure Photographer, also spoke, and noted that, "I believe that the collaboration between ARC'TERYX and Songtsam is a natural connection for two brands that emphasize sustainable development whilst leaving a positive impact- environmentally and socially. Born in the coastal mountains, ARC'TERYX has always been committed to conveying its unique outdoor lifestyle, leading people into nature and finding Outer Peace. I have also learned that Songtsam provides a superior experience for many mountain travelers, whilst opening the door to hidden and unique places."



The co-branded Kawagarbo Series

Inspired by the Kawagarbo Peak, the first of thirteen peaks in the Meili Snow Mountain Range in the Yunnan Province of China, the co-branded Kawagarbo Series features the rich colors of Oracle and Daze Yellow, Bordeaux Red, and Kingfisher Blue, each reflecting a different phenomena in local nature. The colors are inspired by the representative red and yellow in Tibetan culture, as well as the yellow (representing land) and red (representing people) in the Songtsam logo. "The colors for the co-branded Kawagarbo Series between ARC'TERYX and Songtsam draw inspiration from the local mountain culture and the sacred mountain that is prohibited to climb," noted Guy Fattal. The Series includes well-known products of ARC'TERYX, including the Beta AR Jacket, Gamma MX Hoody, Aerios 15 Backpack. In addition, the inner left pocket of the Beta AR Jacket is embroidered with the collection's exclusive logo that depicts the thirteen peaks of the Meili Snow Mountain, adding unique meaning and imagery to the product.

ARC'TERYX and Songtsam Mountain Clean up Initiative

As a representative of global leading outdoor brands, ARC'TERYX always thinks about how to have a positive global impact on sustainability. Songtsam's mission, as a collection of luxury properties, shares the same commitment to environmental sustainability as well as supporting the economies of the local communities. After the official announcement of ARC'TERYX ReBIRD™ project in 2021, ARC'TERYX and Songtsam agreed to donate part of the revenue from the sales of the Kawagarbo Series to support the operation of a local resident initiated mountain clean-up team. The growth of the number of visitors enjoying magnificent views and exploring the venturous peaks, unfortunately had a downside and resulted in a huge increase of the garbage left behind. The local mountain clean-up team responsible for removing this litter from the mountain was determined to do the clean up in a way that would minimize the environmental impact by using mules. ARC'TERYX will initiate 'ARC'TERYX mountain clean-up team' and donate 15 mules to the local mountain clean-up teams to support this environmental initiative. This action embodies one of ARC'TERYX four core values – DO RIGHT. This commitment by both brands, ARC'TERYX and Songtsam, to creating harmony between humans and nature, through sustainable development will only reach its peak with practical actions that will positively impact the local environment. ■

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About Songtsam

Songtsam ("Paradise") is an award-winning luxury collection of hotels, resorts and tours located in Tibet and Yunnan Province, China. Founded in 2000 by Mr. Baima Duoqi, a former Tibetan Documentary filmmaker, Songtsam is the only collection of luxury Tibetan-style retreats within the wellness space focusing on the concept of Tibetan meditation by combining physical and spiritual healing together. The 16 unique properties can be found across the Tibetan Plateau, offering guests authenticity, within the context of refined design, modern amenities, and unobtrusive service in places of untouched natural beauty and cultural interest. Songtsam is a Virtuoso Preferred Partner. Songtsam welcomes all travelers including families with children, travelers with disabilities and is LGBTQ+ friendly.

About Songtsam Tours

Songtsam Tours provides guests an opportunity to curate their own experiences by combining stays at its different hotels and lodges designed to discover the region's diverse culture, rich biodiversity, incredible scenic landscapes, and unique living heritage.

About Songtsam Mission

Songtsam's mission is to inspire their guests with the diverse ethnic groups



and cultures of the region and to understand how the local people pursue and understand happiness, bringing Songtsam guests closer to discovering their own Shangri-La. At the same time, Songtsam has a strong commitment to sustainability and the preservation of the essence of Tibetan culture by supporting the economic development of the local communities and the environmental conservation within Tibet and Yunnan. Songtsam was on the 2018, 2019 & 2022 Condé Nast Traveler Gold List.

For more information about Songtsam visit: [www.songtsam.com/en/about](http://WWW.SONGTSAM.COM/EN/ABOUT)

About ARC'TERYX

ARC'TERYX is a Canadian company based in the Coast Mountains. Our design process is connected to the real world, focused on delivering durable, unrivaled performance. Our products are distributed through more than 2,400 retail locations worldwide, including over 115 branded stores. We are problem solvers, always evolving and searching for a better way to deliver resolved, minimalist designs. Good design that matters makes lives better.

To learn more about ARC'TERYX, please visit: [https://www.arcteryx.com/us/en/](https://WWW.ARCTERYX.COM/US/EN/)





A Mendocino Meander

Artlce and Photography by Nicholas Kontis

Mendocino County is one of California's most fetching treasures, and a drive up its rugged Pacific coastline is one of North America's memorable road trips. Here, majestic redwood forests march to the crests of steep cliffs that overlook unspoiled beaches. Somehow, the overdevelopment that swallowed other California coastal communities missed Mendocino.

The scenery along Highway One is nothing short of breathtaking. After coursing through Napa and Sonoma counties, it enters Mendocino County 154 miles north of San Francisco — four to five hours' drive via the coastal route, or about three hours via inland U.S. Highway 101. This is where Martha's Vineyard gentility meets California sustainability, and indeed, there's something for everyone.

Mendocino brims with outdoor adventures, highlighted by dramatic cliffside hikes on manicured trails that link lofty lighthouses with pebbly beaches. As Highway One glides silently through tiny towns and languid fishing villages, it passes dozens of unique and enchanting Victorian inns. Many stand side-by-side with exquisite Michelin-starred restaurants that serve farm-to-table California cuisine from local organic farms.

The eponymous town of Mendocino offers delightful hand-crafted shopping finds. And the nearby, under-the-radar Anderson Valley wine region (think Napa in the '90s) has become famous for its cabernet sauvignons and other vintages, including pinot noir.

Charming Inns

One of my favorite places to stay is the Victorian-style Little River Inn, in the same family since it was built as a dwelling in 1853. Today, fifth-generation innkeeper Cally Dym works together with her executive-chef husband Marc in managing the family business. Renovated from home to inn in 1939, the pet-friendly property now has 66 units (all with full or partial ocean views) of many styles, including the premier, seaside Mallory House cottages.

As you stroll the garden paths, you can almost feel the ghost of actor James Dean, who stayed here in 1954 while filming *East of Eden*. Sip cocktails at Ole's Whale Watch Bar, then slip into Marc's restaurant for such plates as braised short ribs, cioppino, Thai-inspired rock cod and pan-roasted halibut.



The historic, wood-shingled Park Brewery Gulch Inn was built in 2001 with redwoods salvaged from the adjacent Big River. A massive, custom-built, metal-and-glass fireplace is its centerpiece, towering windows affording sweeping views of Smuggler's Cove. Eleven faux-rustic rooms take their names from flora and fauna of the region: Redwood, Pine, Pelican, Heron and Manzanita, to name a few. Breakfast is made to order; an afternoon happy hour features local craft brews and wine, followed by a light dinner, such as chicken curry with coconut rice.

The Elk Cove Inn & Spa relishes its striking slot in the hamlet of Elk (population 200) on the hilly Mendocino coastline. This exquisite bed and breakfast — romantic, luxurious and remote — dates back to 1883, when its Craftsman-style quarters were built. Spa suites were added more recently. Oceanfront cottages display understated elegance, with cathedral ceilings and massive picture windows upon a small beach and gigantic rock. Breakfast is delivered to the room each morning. A trail winds down to the beach from a gazebo. Passionate innkeepers Victor Passalacqua, the chef, and his wife, Melissa Boon, the sommelier, serve a daily revolving menu of coastal cuisine at the inn's Sibo restaurant. Many of the ingredients are sourced from an on-property greenhouse.

Pursuits and Exploits

The coast's small population hubs — Mendocino Village and Fort Bragg — each are worthy of hours of exploration. Begin with a cup of morning coffee at Goodlife Cafe & Bakery. Then meander the streets of Mendocino or take a leisurely walk from downtown, along cliffside trails leading to Big River Beach in Mendocino Headlands State Park. The 19th-century Ford House serves as a local history and art museum and doubles as the visitor information center.

Underrated Fort Bragg, the biggest town on the Mendocino coast, is a 15-minute drive north. Once a hardy lumber town, it was previously a military garrison. At Glass Beach, a rainbow of colored sea glass washes up on the shore. Seafood restaurants adjoin the fish market at Noyo Harbor, one of California's last traditional fishing. In July, it hosts the World's Largest Salmon BBQ.



Fort Bragg is home to the Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens, one of only a few ocean-front botanical gardens in the United States. A two-hour stroll through 47 tranquil acres of manicured flora reveal a dense coastal pine forest, including colorful fuchsias, magnolias, rhododendrons, succulents and dahlias. All roads lead to the spellbinding rocky coastline.

An excellent way to see old-growth redwood groves is to ride the famous Skunk Train or take rail bikes along Pudding Creek. The pristine forests have remained mostly unchanged since the 19th century, when loggers joined to expand their timber operations. More adventurous visitors can take a two-hour guided tour on electric-powered, custom-built, two-person rail bikes, following the track of the Skunk Train.

Four miles north of Mendocino, the highlight of Point Cabrillo Light Station State Park is the impressive 1909 Point Cabrillo light, now fully restored. A half-mile trail from the parking lot also leads to three original keepers' houses and other structures. These are now for rent as historical inns, ideal for those who want to get the full Mendocino coast experience. A museum chronicles the light station's inception.

The often-overlooked Anderson Valley Wine County stretches along Highway 128 for 15 miles, from the craggy coastal cliffs to rolling hill country. The coolest of California's many wine regions, it comprises 90 vineyards and 62 low-key wineries revered for their terroir. Boutique wineries include Lula Cellars, Fathers+Daughters Cellars and Navarro Vineyards. Gowan Heirloom Ciders features cider tastings.

Outdoor Adventure

Mendocino's vast open spaces make it an ideal location for hiking. There are miles of coastal trails, some with Pacific views, and longer paths that reach deep into the redwood forests. The region's temperate climate makes it an ideal destination in most months.

Mendocino Headland Trail is an accessible four-mile roundtrip for viewing tide pools and marine birds. Jug Handle Ecological Trail is five miles with a gradual 300-foot climb. Van Damme State Park has excellent coastal hik-



ing on its Spring Ranch property two miles south of Mendocino Village. Its Fern Canyon hike along Little River is a narrow but paved and wheelchair-accessible trail. The Big River Trail follows Big River Estuary on its north side; it's 11 miles long and beautiful, with a very mild elevation gain.

Big River Estuary, surrounded by soaring redwoods, provides kayakers, canoes and stand-up paddlers with effortless adventures. At 8.3 miles in length, this is California's second-longest tidal estuary. Catch A Canoe and Bicycles Too, located on the river below the Stanford Inn, offers a choice of guided adventures. A highlight is meandering the calm waterway in a redwood outrigger.

Should your visit be between November and February, plan to do some whale watching. Along the Mendocino coast, the odds are excellent that you will spot gray, humpback and/or sperm whales traveling south from Alaska en route to Mexican waters. Whale festivals, held in March, celebrate the migration.

Chow Down

Mendocino County cuisine is creative and refined, yet not stodgy. Serving both farm-to-table and fresh catch-of-the-day specials, its chefs are inspired by the unpretentious, coastal timberland surroundings, the fertile terrain juxtaposed by the sea.

In Mendocino village, palate-pleasing restaurants include the MacCallum House, Trillium, and longtime standout Cafe Beaujolais, all serving modern California favorites. For a laidback bar food experience, locals visit Patterson's pub for evening libations. Goodlife Cafe & Bakery is well worth the wait for breakfast and pastries.

In Fort Bragg, Mayan Fusion serves Yucatan-inspired Mexican dishes. In Noyo Harbor, watch boats going out to the sea from the docks of one of California's few remaining small fishing villages. Noyo Fish Company and Princess Seafood Market serve fresh fish or shrimp and chips, lobster bisque, and even sashimi.

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The Other Side of Nayarit, Mexico

Article and photography by Steve Gillick

Ruth Pinedo de Anda, the co-owner of El Itacate ('To Go'), brimmed with enthusiasm as we entered her restaurant in Jomulco and marveled at the traditional décor. Historically, Jomulco was the home of the field hands, who worked down the road in Jala, where the landowners lived. And no matter which direction you look, the Sierra Madre Mountains frame the horizon.

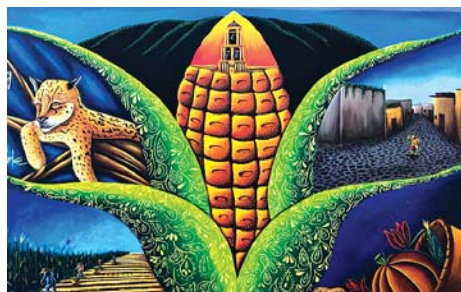
This is a side of Nayarit that visitors don't often see. For years, many travelers thought of Puerto Vallarta in the state of Jalisco and Nuevo Vallarta in the state of Nayarit as one

large beach and resort zone. In July 2022, Nuevo Vallarta officially became known as Nuevo Nayarit to formally confirm its separate identity.

However, the towns and resorts along the Bay of Bandaras had already established themselves as landmarks of Nayarit: Bucerias, Punta de Mita, Isla Marietas, Sayulita, San Francisco (a.k.a. San Pancho), and San Blas. And each destination embraced a following of those seeking their own perfect holiday of beaches, luxury, chilling out, nature, whale watching, birding, partying, gastronomy and culture.

But turning inland at San Blas and taking the new Autopista Tepic-San Blas leads to new Nayarit encounters.

At El Itacate in Jomulco, we enjoyed a refreshing glass of Tamarind water and then a sumptuous bowl of Sopa Tarasca, made with pinto beans, local cheese, tortilla, garlic, guajillo chile, cream, and lettuce. This was followed by a platter of tostadas with spicy beef and vegetables, rice, peas, carrots, and re-fried beans. It was a tasty, traditional country meal, complemented by smiling service in a rustic 'home' environment.



Afterward, we drove the short distance to Jala and checked into the Nukari Quinta Boutique Hotel. Nukari is a Nahuatl word, meaning 'story', and what a story the building told. It was initially constructed in 1778 by a wealthy landowner family, Los Partida. Over the years, it was transformed into a hotel and then upgraded and opened in 2021 as the Nukari. Inside are the classic features of a Spanish Colonial home, with a central courtyard. White arches and columns are complemented by rustic red walls and at sunset, they positively glow, along with the surrounding mountains. As an all-suite hotel, the rooms are enormous, with poster beds, comfortable living rooms, and a shower and Jacuzzi in the bathroom.

The rooftop bar and restaurant of the hotel provide great views of the tower and green cupola of the Basilica Lateranense, the main landmark in the town. And a walk just outside the hotel on the cobblestone streets leads to Jala's oldest building, the Iglesia de la Concepción, built in 1582.

Jala is one of Nayarit's four Magic Towns (Pueblos Mágicos), recognized for embodying magical qualities. These can include beauty, natural wonders, history, culture, folklore, traditions, cuisine, warm hospitality, and more. Coincidentally, we arrived on February 17, and that evening a celebratory parade in the downtown area marked the anniversary of Jala's Magic Town designation. The other Magic Towns in Nayarit include Sayulita, Mexcaltitan, and Compostela.

Jala is the home of the annual Feria del Elote (Corn Festival) that coincides with the August 15th celebration of the Virgin of the Assumption, associated with the Basilica. In fact, Jala produces the largest cobs of corn in the world, some of which reach a length of 20 inches (50.3 cm).

And Jala is also famous for the 'Black Giant' that looms over the town. Ceboruco is a 2280-meter (7480 feet) high, active strato-volcano that last erupted in 1870. Driving to the Ceboruco sign and the steaming fumaroles takes about 45 minutes. On the way, the road leads past a popular weekend breakfast/brunch outdoor buffet restaurant,

El Rincon Del Campesino: Sabores del Campo (A corner of the farmer's field: Flavours of the Hills), where guests help themselves to heaping portions of cactus salad, re-fried beans, local cheese, spicy guacamole, grilled beef, and delicious stews of potato, chicken and pork, as well as zucchini-pumpkin, tomato, corn, and onion. Hand-made Gorditas de Sal (small thick corn tortillas) soak up the juices.

On the narrow, winding, grassy road leading to the volcano, stray cows slowly meander out of the way in a dry desert landscape dotted with agave fields. At the colorful Ceboruco sign, white steam pours out of the natural vents, making for dramatic photos. And those with time and water bottles can take the paths to explore the area, including the crater.

As the sun set back in Jala, the dull beige mountains turned a bright reddish gold. A walk around town revealed the vivid colours of the public buildings and houses: pink, blue, yellow, red, green, and orange. And every street ended with amazing mountain vistas.

Dinner that evening was at Mirabel Cenaduría, just around the corner from the Basilica. It was filled with local families enjoying a Saturday night get-together of traditional, local dishes. And the portions were enormous! The Pozole Pollo, a rich Mexican broth made with chicken, chili, onion, cumin, garlic, and cabbage, was absolutely delicious. The Tamales Rajas, corn dough filled with meat, beans, roasted peppers, and cheese, was thick and hearty, and the large cup of Horchata, a creamy sweet rice drink flavored with cinnamon, was certainly more than enough to complete the meal.

After dinner, a 'callejoneada' took place in the square outside the Mercado. This traditional event features a group of musicians walking around, singing, telling stories, and interacting with a giant paper statue.

The following day, food again was the focus as we journeyed to Compostela, another Magic Town. In Santa Maria del Oro, we pulled into a packed parking lot to enjoy



Birria at La Sierra. Birria is a Nayarit dish that consists of stewed meats (goat, beef, or lamb). We ordered the 'sampler' dish, which also included chorizo, chicken, and pork. The long lineup moved pretty quickly. And while waiting, guests visited the souvenir stand, purchased camote (sweet potato cooked in sugar), visited the fire pit to take in the aroma of the meats grilling on long metal skewers, wandered around the restaurant to chat with the friendly, smiling staff, and sang along with the walk-around singer-guitar-player (Mariachi also originated in Nayarit).

After being seated, tortillas with salsa, onions, and local cheese were served, and then when the steaming platter of Birria arrived, and it was make-your-own taco time. The food was simply delicious!

After a few short afternoon stops at La Laguna, the Crater Lake, and the historic downtown area of Compostela, we followed the Autopista 2 hours back to Nuevo Nayarit.

In a chat with Juan Enrique Suárez Del Real Tostado, Nayarit's Minister of Tourism, he described the state as "the jewel of Mexico". Suárez listed volcanoes, waterfalls, beaches, migratory birds, culture, gastronomy, and Magic Towns, concluding, "You put all these things together, and you have Nayarit".

Interacting with 'the other side' of Nayarit was an energizing, colorful, photogenic, delicious, and meaningful travel experience. It certainly provided a great reason to return! ■

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Let the Adventure Begin in Magnificent, Magical and Mystical

Bolivia

Article and photography by Michael Morcos



Ten days, five regions, one country. Bolivia is a gem in the rough and it was mine to cut and polish. For many years I have had it in my sights and now, let the adventure begin. On this whirlwind tour we would miss Bolivia's biggest city, and also most well known city, as Santa Cruz and La Paz would have to wait for another day. Also, plans for a future visit would include the amazing Amazon as there was just not enough time for these three great places.

Instead, we would visit some out-of-the-way places, less known destinations, and a couple of incredible natural beauties. Landing in Santa Cruz, we would find our way to Villa Montes, then to the south to wine country in Camargo, reach higher altitudes in the mining city of Potosi, to the Uyuni Salt Flats and then finally finish off in Lake Titicaca. All along the way we would be thrilled and mesmerized and within hours we were calm and tranquil. Bolivia has a way of thrilling and chilling visitors in many different ways in short periods of time.

Villa Montes

We had never heard of Villa Montes, but were strongly urged to visit. Somewhat out of the way and barely on the tourist map, Villa Montes sure packs a punch. Here we would visit an army base that is a couple of miles from its Paraguay border and where decades ago there was hostility between the neighbours in a yearlong war. Peace is now kept, but this challenging and dramatic period where Bolivia fought for its own right to exist is an enactment of this war and is presented to tourists. Unique in its presentation, it was an outdoor theatrical show that transformed us to a period many generations ago.

For something completely different, we would visit at the 'Eco Parque Don Pastor', a ranch. In North America we would call the hired hands cowboys, in Argentina they are well known as gauchos, Here they are 'Chacos' and what a thrill it was seeing them in action corralling the livestock. On this picture perfect morning we would be greeted by the resident parrot, see a whole pork being roasted on open flames, participate in a tradition of drinking freshly squeezed cow milk mixed with a local alcohol and then to see a traditional local dance while musicians played wonderful Bolivian country music.

Still more diversity as we visited small Indigenous communities and tasted incredibly delicious locally caught river fish at the family run Gaybo restaurant. We found adventure at the Cabaña Turística "El Angosto" with rafting through a stunning canyon, rock climbing and a cable car ride over fast moving waters. All this and more can be found in a small distance from each other. Our stay that night was at the cities best, the fabulous Hotel Boutique El Rancho Olivo.

Road trip

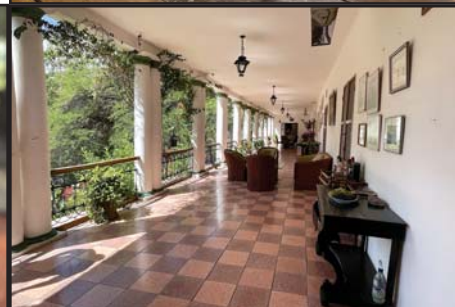
Getting to Camargo from Villa Montes was a thrill on its own. Known as the 'World's most dangerous highway' is something I would attest too and strongly agree that this is an adventure to be had. Imagine this: a setting sun, a dirt road that clings onto the side of a mountain, sheer drop on one side with no car railing, and you have a vision of what an exciting and at times heart stopping drive it was. At one point, a huge truck came from around the corner and with both drivers breaking, we found ourselves face-to-face. Reasonableness and smart negotiating had us driving backwards while the truck driver carefully and slowly passed us while only mere inches from the sheer drop. We drove this highway because it was the only real route to take but some willingly come to ride bikes downhill here for a thrill and bragging rights.

Camargo

This small, sleepy town of Camargo can be crossed within minutes by car and it's worth a visit for the authentic feel and quiet charm. Camargo has a beautiful cathedral, and its central square is used for local produce in the town markets. The surrounding area has fabulous desert hills and mountains and is well known for its wines and spirits. We would visit one such place at the Bodega Cepa De Oro that is known for growing the highest altitude grapes in some very rough soil. We ate lunch at this winery of local and delicious Bolivian style meals. Tasting the wine and spirits would prove that the grapes that have concentrated juices produce a very unique taste and body structure.

We would then visit a couple of Singani distilleries that produced the countries favorite liquor. The San Pedro distillery, built in a his-

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toric colonial style building, continues the local monks recipe for beautiful Singani liquor originally for the mine workers. This day was like being in a fairytale, with a sunny blue sky, freshness in the air and dry desert surroundings, made for a delightful and memorable stay and tour of the Camargo region.

Potosi

Camargo was a gentle journey uphill to higher altitudes and by driving to Potosi, we would now be entering the Andes. At 4000 meters, this mining city is considered the highest city in the world.

The Spanish came here looking for gold, but as luck would have it, found lots of silver. This area was mined 500 years ago and is still today. There is plenty of silver as well as other sorts of metals and is the source of Potosi's main economy. It was once the richest place in the world. So hilly is the city that you can barely walk a block without going up or down hill. We had to pace ourselves as the air is thin and breathing is difficult and muscle cramps are common. Our enthusiastic guide was formally a mine worker and explained to us how dangerous and demanding the job was. Even though he worked hard every day for years, he struggled to make any income and decided to lead tours instead and show the best of his fascinating city. Of interest in Potosi: an underground mine tour, a visit to the historic mints and museums, the cathedral and churches and the markets.

Uyuni

Incredible, unbelievable and breathtaking, these are just a few words to describe this ultra-unique experience. No trip to Bolivia would be complete without a visit to the Uyuni Salt Flats. High in the altitude of the Andes, the receding oceans millions of years ago left seawater that once evaporated would leave tons of salt as far as the eye can see. Known as barren grounds, this is a desert with less than 10% humidity. I thought nothing could possibly live here yet in the islands of the salt flats, there are cactuses that grow by less than a centimeter per year.

The flats are a major tourist attraction, and for obvious reasons. Its natural beauty can easily be the highlight of our tour and with a 4x4, an experienced driver and knowledgeable guide of lamigo tours we would find ourselves in yet another fairytale setting. The scenery was out

of this world, like something from a distant planet. With plenty of challenges, such as thin air, and lots of UV rays we would thoroughly enjoy this spiritual and mystical place snapping up photos of the flats, the islands, and the incredible and stunning setting sun.

Besides the flats, there is railway car graveyard. This would be yet another unique experience to see dozens of locomotives and railway cars sitting idle and rusting in the Uyuni desert. Just another day of amazing Bolivian diversity.

Lake Titicaca

Another day in Bolivia, yet another high altitude destination, and another unique experience. Now in northern Bolivia, Lake Titicaca is the highest navigable lake in the world and is shared between Peru and Bolivia as tourists traverse both countries to get the most and best of these two amazing destinations. Historically, Lake Titicaca is the birthplace of the Inca Empire, and a one-hour boat ride would bring us to Isla del Sol, the heart of the Inca Empire and a spiritual place for these people. The island is tranquil and a great place to relax and reflect on the natural, beautiful, and serene surroundings. Also found here are the magnificent ruins of the Tiwanaku people that preceded the Inca. For the energetic, there are trails that cross this island leading to some of amazing historic treasure while at the same time giving incredible vistas of this lake in the clouds.

On the shore, the town of Copacabana itself has a remarkable Cathedral, plenty of tourists' shops and restaurants serving the specialty of fish caught from the lake.

To any serious travelers, Bolivia is a must visit destination. It has a little of something different not found anywhere else. Being landlocked and bordering five other great destinations: Peru, Brazil, Paraguay, Argentina, and Chile, it has something in common with all its neighbours. Our trip was both invigorating and challenging, and in the end, it was a great adventure with many wonderful memories. For its many incredible sites, it is easily a standalone destination, or can be combined as a multi-country tour. Either way, Bolivia will stand out as being: magnificent, magical and mystical! ■

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