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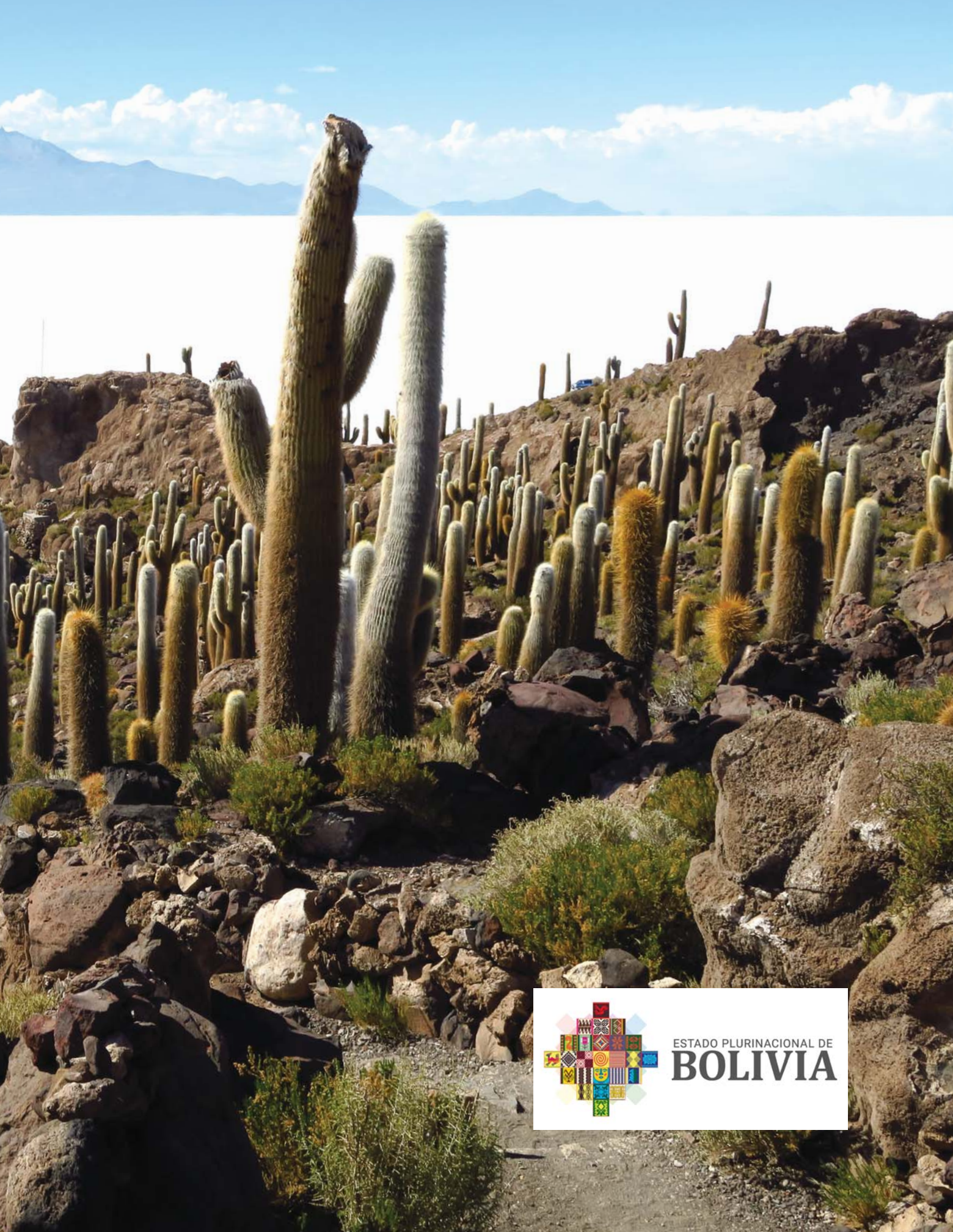


Thai women dancing in traditional costume

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



Incahuasi Island, Uyuni Salt Flats, Bolivia



ESTADO PLURINACIONAL DE
BOLIVIA

A low-angle photograph of the Great Sphinx of Giza, showing its massive head and the tiered body. The Sphinx is made of light-colored limestone. In the foreground, there are stone structures, including a large rectangular block with hieroglyphs and a smaller pedestal. The sky is blue with scattered white clouds.

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Welcome to World Traveler



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

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

In this issue, we start our worldwide odyssey in Japan to find the best of its outdoors destinations. Next, we take a cruise along the Mekong River through the 'Land of Two Smiles' by traversing Cambodia and Vietnam on CroisiEurope's luxury ship the Indochine II. Onwards, we head to the Asian paradise of Thailand and discover out of the way gems. We then jet-off to the other side of this vast continent to discover the amazing diversity of Dubai before we head to Israel, 'The beating heart of the Middle East'.

Close by, we tour Egypt and discover the best this fabulous country has to offer the traveler.

While in Africa, we head to Tunisia, 'A Country with a Heart of Gold!'.

In Europe, we enjoy all the beautiful Turkish Riviera has to offer before heading on a river cruise on the Scenic Opel through the heart of Germany. In Spain, we take the Flamenco route to enjoy this classic dance and music. Lastly, we find out about Exodus' new gastronomy tours in Europe and around the world.

Too the far west, in North America, we find ourselves floating in a hot tub in beautiful Victoria. In the USA, we get a delightful tour of Northern Kentucky and the wonderful iconic cuisines of close-by Tennessee and Alabama. Next, we head on a Texas road trip to experience both rodeos and wines. In New Orleans, we enjoy the beats of this great music city before finding out the well kept secrets of charming and historic St. Augustine. While in Florida, we enjoy a great Asian meal at Jaya restaurant in Miami and then discover the best of Disney's new opulent ship the 'Wish'. Slightly to the south, we visit Havana and its heart and soul, and in Mexico City, find there is lots of urban magic! Lastly in the Americas, we take a break in Panama's out of the way beaches before exploring the last least traveled content of Antarctica.

Happy Travels!



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Thailand: *The Asian Paradise*

Article and photography by Michael Morcos

FTwo weeks of pure bliss. On my return visit to this enchanting land, I would rediscover Bangkok and Chang Mai and visit some fabulous out-of-the-way places. In this part one of two articles, we will focus on the historic city of Sukhothai, the ever charming village of Baan Na Ton Chan, head way north to Chiang Mai and finish off in the amazingly beautiful island of Ko Samet.

Sukhothai

This must be the cutiest little airport in the world. This is when we land in the ancient Thai capitol. Just walk off the plane and you are at the extra small terminal where your luggage is brought to you on a hand cart. Amazingly, adjoining the landing strip is a zoo and the resident zebras would be equally surprised to us as we were to see them. In Sukhothai, we would visit monk early in the morning give them offerings before we would

visit the ancient capital ruins, and its archeological treasures from centuries ago I was particularly awestruck by one particular Buddha statue that was surrounded by a wall. I stood there for long period admiring this piece of artwork and also fascinated on how it was conceived and built. As always, we would feast on delicious Thai cuisine, experience unique local culture as we would visit a large ceramic factory that produced anywhere from finely sculptured religious artifacts to everyday tableware. After the tour we would



take in part classes, painting simple cups and saucers, all the while laughing, and joking at our mistakes.

Baan Na Ton Chan

We would now head to the countryside to the village Baan Na Ton Chan. What a delight it was to be in the fresh air, seeing rice paddies and locals going about their day. Here we would experience true Thai village life. As expected, the pace of life is slow and relaxing. This village runs itself as a commune where everybody helps one another. Hands on arts and crafts is common in a way that has been passed down for generations using old style looms. The finished fine silk products like scarves and clothing are sold through a community store. Our multitalented driver was also a toy maker and brought us around to show us his amazing creations. We would finish our short visit by going to a Home Stay dwelling that is set with a magnificent view of the rice fields. Here we would have a quite time and be served a wonderful and Thai lunch. It was the most unbelievable colorful display of food I've ever seen. Choices were varied, it was a feast for both the eyes and the pallets

Resturant galore

On yet another foodie occasion, we would go to the Mai Heun 60 to discover this is more than a restaurant as we would walk-through a fantasy garden. Although this was all man-made, it was amazing to see, colorful mature orchids in full bloom everywhere, lush greenery, a gushing waterfall spilling into a tranquil pond and to make it all show so mysterious was fog pumping in from every direction to give the illusion of being in the rainforest. Also noted, the food was perfectly Thai and the fresh coconut water was refreshing.

Chiang Mai

Although I have been to Chiang Mai before, visiting the wonderful bustling night markets and the amazing Wat Phra That Doi Suthep Temple, our short visit this time would bring us to a once in a lifetime experience as we visited the Elephant Nature Park. This large out of the way property hosts abandoned or injured elephants. This sanctuary was not specific only to elephants, but also to buffalo dogs cats and

whatever creature needed place to live. The stars of course were the Elephants and was an unbelievable way to interact with these gentle giants who would literally and joyfully walk right up to you hoping for a snack. The Park is a non-profit organization and has vetr-naieans as well as a small rmy of volintieers. This is et another unique Thai experience and one that should on both children and audaults alike while in Chiang Mai.

Koh Samet

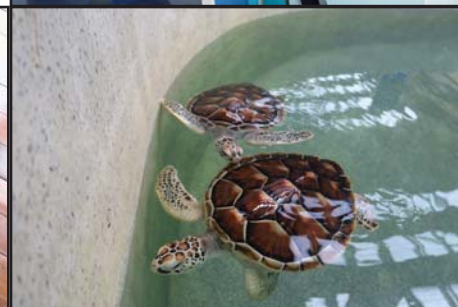
If you're looking to do little and enjoy life one minute at a time, then Koh Samet is the perfect destination. As an island in the south of Thailand, this paradise was perfect to refuel and recharge and enjoy the magnificent scenery, warm waters, and fine sandy beaches. Here we would enjoy all this, plus continue eating amazing Thai gastronomy, take a speedboat to snorkel and discover colourful traopical fish, healthy coral reefs and exotic sealife. Our posh accommendations at the Paradee Resort was an experience on its own with opulent private villas facing white sandy beaches. Getting there was different then just checking into a hotel as we would have a crew bring our luggage on a luxury boat and then disembark us directly at the properties shore. Yet another amazing Thai experience. Life is good.

Turtle haven

On our way back to Bangkok from Koh Samet, we would stop at the Royal Thai Navy Sea Turtle Conservation Center. It was refreshing to see a big emphasis on saving and building up the turtle population of Thailand, and where we would be delighted to see many varieties of this creature sea being rehabilitated for the wild.

South East Asia sure has its magnificent destinations, all with their differences of languages, culture and food but Thailand stands out as being the easiest, safest and perhaps the best destination of them all. This memorable country tour is nothing short of enlightening and a must visit destination for both the serious traveler and those just looking to relax and on unwind. Truly an Asian paradise. ■

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Israel: The beating heart of the Middle East

by Daniel Smajovits



For some it's the land of Milk and Honey. Others call it the Promise Land. Those in the high-tech sector have dubbed it Start-Up Nation and for the throngs of pilgrims, it's simply the Holy Land. Regardless of the nickname, Israel is the crown jewel of the Middle East, a melting pot of history, culture, entertainment and pure bliss.

Whether it's your first visit or you're a regular, any trip to Israel will centre around Tel Aviv, the beating heart of the country. Nestled up against the Mediterranean Sea, while steeped in modern Israeli history, Tel Aviv is young, vibrant and full of flare. Fourteen kilometers of beaches make up the coastline, packed by beachgoers regardless of the day and season. While dozens of hotels line the beach, none have direct access due to the Tel Aviv Promenade. Two of the most popular spots to stay are the Dan Tel Aviv, which was recently renovated and boasts the famous colourful façade, designed by Israeli artist Yaacov Agam and the Hilton Tel Aviv, which is one of the largest properties in the city. Boutique hotels can be found in the streets close to the beach as well.

As most tourists spend countless hours in Israel either on a tour bus or walking, carve out at least one day to spend on or by the beach. Test your hand-eye coordination by joining the popular beach paddle-ball game of matkot, join the thousands who run up and down the promenade by day or night or simply pack a cooler with local beer (Goldstar or Maccabi), snacks and rent a chair. Regardless of your activity, you can't go wrong on any one of Tel Aviv's beaches.

Home to countless five-star restaurants with modern takes on Israeli and international cuisine, while in Tel Aviv, ensure to spend one of your meals indulging at the Shuk (market) HaCarmel, where locals and tourists flock for the freshest fruits, vegetables and pastries. Nearby Sarona Market is a modern take on the classic market, but with upscale restau-





rants and stores, perfect for an evening activity. Bars and restaurants surround Kikar Rabin and line Dizengoff and Rothschild Streets all open into the wee hours of the morning. The Old Port in North Tel Aviv is home to a number of restaurants and quickly becoming a popular spot as well.

Before you wear out your new pair of walking shoes in Jerusalem, break them in with two unique walking tours: a graffiti tour of Florentin and one of Jaffa. The Florentin neighbourhood has emerged as the home to Israel's modern art scene, while Jaffa is the southernmost and oldest enclave of Tel Aviv and one of Israel's truly mixed cities and also where you can find Arabs and Jews living and working together peacefully. While in Jaffa, ensure to sample the hummus from Abu Hassan, perhaps the best hummus in the country or even the world. Now a sit-down restaurant, the hummus dates itself back to the 1950s. The recipe was developed by Hassan's mother and Hassan's father once sold it on the streets of Ajami, a primary Arab neighbourhood of Jaffa.

With your shoes worn in, only an hour drive from Tel Aviv is Jerusalem, Israel's capital. It is here that the rich and intertwined histories of Judaism, Christianity and Islam converge in the Old City, where millions of tourists flock to their respective holy sites and immerse themselves in the past. Surrounding the Old City walls is a hip and modern metropolis where the Orthodox and Unorthodox live and work side by side.

While you can get lost in the cobblestone streets of the Old City on your own, we recommend a guided tour to ensure you make the most of your precious time. All licensed Israeli tour guides must complete courses that

cover pre-history through to the modern State of Israel as well as archeology, geography and more. Every organized tour will cover the Old City's four quarters: Jewish, Christianity, Muslim and Armenian and visits to the Western Wall, Church of the Holy Sepulchre and some also include the Temple Mount (Dome of the Rock). Most tours start outside the city walls and cover modern Jerusalem as well.

With or without a guide, a must on any visit to Jerusalem are trips to The Israel Museum, home to the Dead Sea Scrolls, and to Yad Vashem, the world Holocaust Remembrance Center. Both museums will complement your time in the Old City and provide you with the complete perspective of Israel and the Jewish people's history and place in the modern world.

Taking a break from touring, no visit to Jerusalem would be complete without a trip to Mahane Yehuda Market. If your schedule allows for it, stop by on a Friday morning for the pre-Sabbath hustle and bustle which will put your senses into overdrive. Juxtaposing the Friday atmosphere, return any Sunday through Thursday night where the shops convert into bars and restaurants. By day, a must is Marzipan for their wide array of pastries, including their famous rugelach and right across the street of the market is Hummus Shel Tehina, one of the best hummusias in the country. At night, grab a drink at Beer Bazaar, Casino de Paris or Shuka.

Modern Jerusalem includes the upscale Mamila Mall, home to luxurious shops and restaurants and the gentrified train station, HaTachana, which now boasts a number of restaurants and bars as well as is home to many concerts and events.

As one of the most visited cities in the world, Jerusalem also has its fair share of both luxurious and historic hotels. From the only hotel for Presidents and world leaders in the King David to the modern Waldorf Astoria, Inbal or David Citadel – there is no shortage of lavish spots to lay your head.

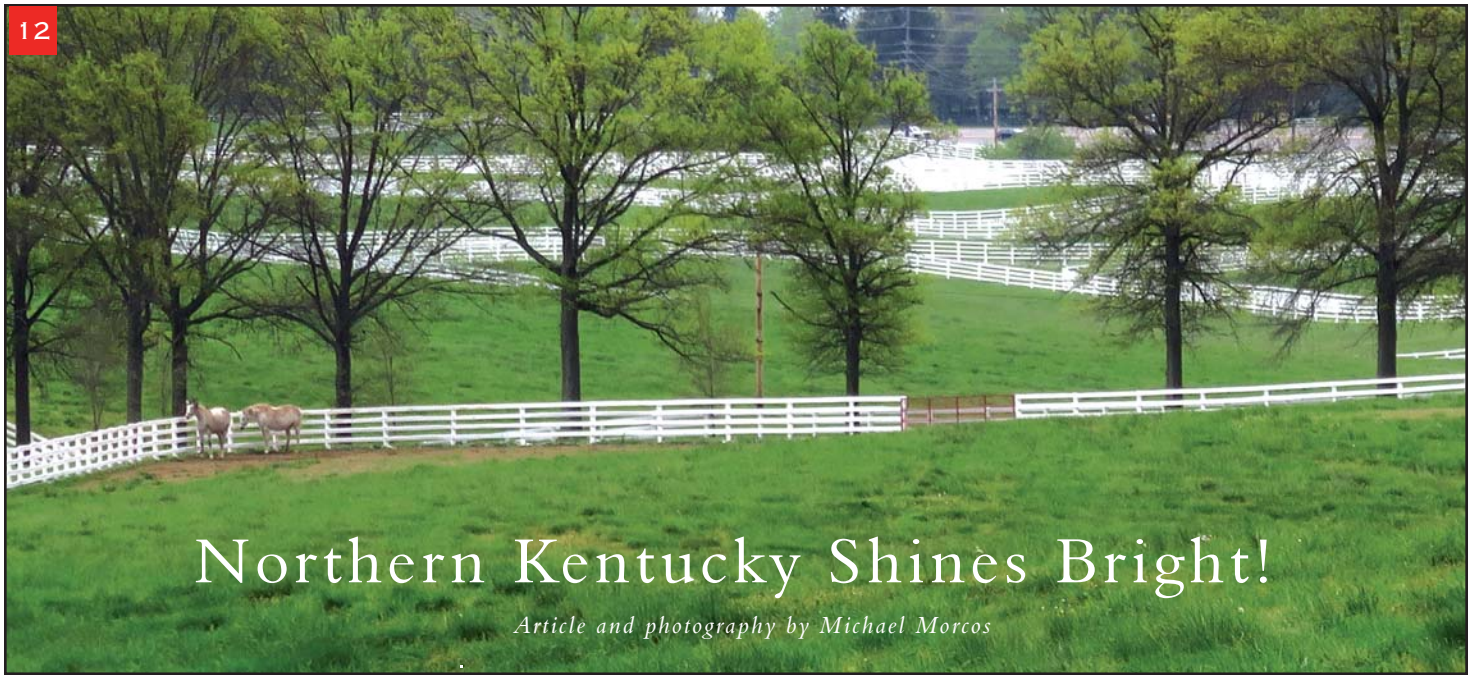
Unlike the rest of Israel, Jerusalem shuts down for the Sabbath, lasting from Friday sundown until Saturday sundown. Consider spending this day at the Dead Sea, a 90-minute drive south, where plenty of hotels and spas will allow you to enjoy a day of rest and relaxation or join the locals back on the beach in Tel Aviv.

True to one of its nicknames as the Start-Up Nation, the high-tech sector in Israel has developed the perfect way for tourists and locals alike to experience the country. Before you visit, add DD - +972 52-892-1079 - to your contact list. While a phone number to you, DD is an Artificial Intelligence platform that will guide you to the best restaurant, club, bar or activity of your choice. The AI will begin to ask questions to learn your preferences and then send you on your way with all the information you need, ensuring that after only a few messages back and forth, you have the perfect recommendation or tip. This free service is a great way to help you explore Tel Aviv like the locals do – a must use while in Israel.

Tel Aviv and Jerusalem only scratch the surface of modern Israel. From the adventure capital and resort town of Eilat in the south to the wineries in the Golan Heights, the country offers something for everyone. ■

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Northern Kentucky Shines Bright!

Article and photography by Michael Morcos

With this visit to Kentucky, I have now visited exactly 25 of the 50 US states. Kentucky is the most northern of what is considered the southern states. This is due to the fact they had slavery right up to the Civil War. This beautiful place was on my bucket list for decades and after a grand tour of the north, I can see why. There was always a certain mystique about Kentucky, about horses, bourbon, and delicious, mouth-watering food. I would have all these in abundance and discover much, much more about this shining star in the union. On this tour, we would start in the laid-back city of Covington, visit the state's most loved racetrack in Lexington and finish with a bang in Louisville.

Covington corner

The city of Covington is not very well known but still, it has one of the nation's best airports and is directly across the river from Cincinnati Ohio. Covington itself is clean, quiet and very inviting and our stay at the Hotel Covington was the perfect way to start our tour and discover fascinating nearby communities - and is also a short drive to Lexington.

Here we would visit Second Sight Spirits in Ludlow, a small boutique distillery on 'Bourbon Trail' and have a comical tour about

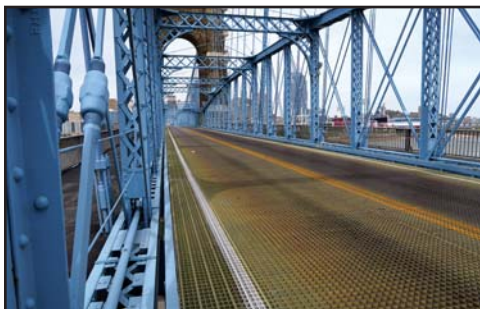
how the owners got to where they are through trial and error. After many tastings, my favorite was a hazelnut flavored Bourbon.

Later that day, we would visit the Revival Vintage Bottle Shop, an interesting concept where guests are served up small amounts of vintage liquors from around the world. Guests can taste these wonderful spirits without buying a whole bottle and sometimes being disappointed. We tried a freshly opened 100-year-old Kentucky Bourbon that had a taste that could not be duplicated at any time since.

Across a small river was the town of Newport. Not very much happens in this sleepy bedroom community these days but this place sure had an incredible history. That is to say before Vegas was Vegas, Newport had the nations reputation as the original sin city. Organized crime families from as far as New York and Cleveland more or less ran the city with no less than 30 casinos and many brothels. Although casinos were illegal, the local government officials and police turned a blind eye and even got kickbacks to just let things be. Much later, after a gun slinging incident, a police chief stopped the party and Newport went into decline only to have its past resurface in Las Vegas.

Lexington, here we come

With much anticipation, we would head to the magnificent region of Lexington. Getting there, we passed a countryside that was like being in a postcard. After all, this was horse country and all around us were large pastures with white fences and rolling hills and is best known for horses, ranches, and racing, and in particular, to the Keeneland Racecourse. Sure, Churchill Downs has international popularity, but Keeneland has history and multiple layers of charm and class and I would understand why it is so loved by locals as their favorite. As the races are on for just one month in the spring, you could feel the energy and excitement in the air. We would be invited to the clubhouse where there is plenty of tradition and a strict dress code where men needed to dress up in suits or at least jackets and ties, and the women come in their Sunday best wearing beautiful dresses and stylish hats. Of course, horse racing is exciting, but wagering, even the smallest amounts makes the race itself that much more fun and captivating. Being novices at the track, we would bet on horses not based on the jockey and the horse statistics, but on horse colors and their jersey numbers, it was hilarious, a great day to enjoy one of the most important events of the year.



All-star day

What is in a name? There are so many ways of pronouncing Louisville, it was hilarious hearing the locals saying Lou-ee-ville or Lou-uh-vul. In any case, Louisville, a rather small city, sure punches above its weight. Here we would visit a beautiful cemetery, 'the race-track', world class museums and top it off with perhaps the most impressive fireworks display I have ever seen.

We would start our day with a visit to the Cave Hill Cemetery where two famous people lie, Colonel Sanders and Mohamed Ali, and discover that Ali's plot is rather low-key for such a popular, worldwide figure.

A trip to Louisville would have to include what could be considered the granddaddy stadium of horse racing. Churchill Downs, located in the city itself sure has its grandeur and maybe the most spectacular two minutes in sports, that is when the famous derby runs its annual race for three-year-old horses. The facilities themselves are grand, housing over 150,000 spectators for that one notable day. It also has a wonderful museum that is both entertaining and educational on the history of horse racing in Kentucky and the many jockeys and horses that have participated here. As a special note, there is a tribute to Secretariat that won the Triple Crown and has set records that still stand from the 70s.

For an all-star line-up, we would visit the well-designed Muhammad Ali Center that pays tribute to the world-famous boxing champion and humanitarian. Kentucky sure has more than share of recognize stars, and perhaps Muhammad Ali is the most recognized figure worldwide. The museum, which is housed in a beautiful, modern and technologically advanced building shows the history of 'Cassius Clay' from his humble beginnings through the many years of boxing and then later on to his worldwide message of doing good and helping others through to the biggest fight of his life when dealing with a debilitating disease.

Next at bat, the Louisville Slugger Museum and factory. Once again, Louisville has a world renowned and recognizable name. Not quite as big as Muhammad Ali, but for baseball fans, the Louisville Slugger is a worldwide famous brand. As an Expos fan and follower of baseball, I marvelled at the wax figures of

the greatest baseball players in the museum, which also includes a collection of famous bats, and in stark contrast, was the actual bat factory. The fascinating tour showed how pre-cut pieces of lumber are shaped, finished and lacquered to become some baseball player's favourite bat.

Our timing could not have been any better, exactly two weeks before the running of the Kentucky Derby is the celebration of Thunder Over Louisville. This would be the start of two weeks of fun and excitement. Thunder Over Louisville is held only one day per year and located on the river front of the Ohio River. It is a fantastic way to see the locals celebrate where people of all ages came out to view the daytime airshow that included everything from vintage aircraft to the mighty new F35. That night was nothing less than one of the most spectacular fireworks shows I have ever seen. For 30 minutes there were plenty of oohs and aahs as the sky lit up with magnificent color over the river, the bridges and throughout the city.

The fun never stops

Yet still another amazing day in Kentucky. The fun continued as we venture into the countryside. The vistas were out of this world. Lush green fields, beautiful, healthy mature trees, and amazing white fenced pastures. Our visit to Historic Hermitage Farm, a working farm that raises racehorses had almost everything I ever thought about Kentucky. We would start by visiting the barn with healthy looking horses, continue to a Bourbon tasting and finish with a delicious dinner at their Barn Restaurant located in an old renovated barn. This day was a slice of classical, authentic Kentucky.

A trip through Northern Kentucky is like hitting a grand slam. All this and I still need to mention the warm and friendly hospitality of its people, the distinct music scene and the wonderful local gastronomy that includes BBQ's, fried chicken and that all so famous Hot Brown dish. Can't imagine what the rest of the Bluegrass state has to offer, so I guess I'll have to come back to find out more on other famous Kentuckians like Abraham Lincoln, Daniel Boone, George Clooney, Loretta Lynn, Jennifer Lawrence, Johnny Depp, Mitch McConnell and The Hatfields and McCoys! ■

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Havana Wonderment

Article and Photography by Steve Gillick

When someone is artfully nicknamed the Picasso of the Caribbean or painted as the Cuban Gaudi, Brâncusi, or Dali, it's got to get your attention.

Following in the footsteps of such luminaries as Madonna, Bon Jovi, and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, a visit to Fusterlandia in Jaimanitis, Havana, Cuba, puts you face-to-face with the artist himself. José Rodríguez Fuster is a ceramist, painter, and sculptor who has painstakingly created a mosaic masterpiece in his vast neighbourhood compound. Millions of colourful tiles

adorn walls, murals, arches, sculptures, hearts, and faces, reflecting a passion for Cuban culture, religion, politics, whimsy, and fantasy.

Fuster is an endearing character who poses for photos and shares insight into his creative philosophy, based on "seeing the world in different ways". And when asked about his art's seminal influence, he simply replies, "I am Cuban".

Fuster's response, echoed by so many people we met in Havana, contributed to the energy and excitement of our return to the city.

Havana has adopted three pillars of growth and transformation: cultural heritage, cultural identity, and sustainable development. And it's hard to walk down a street seeing revitalized parks, museums, or hotels, without conjuring up the name of Eusebio Leal. He was appointed City Historian by Fidel Castro but quickly embraced the greater role of restoring the crumbling buildings in Old Havana. By the time of his death in 2020, in addition to the iconic Capitol Building, over 300 buildings had been refurbished, including the Ernest Hemingway hangouts of El Floridita and La Bodeguita del Medio.



Hand-in-hand with the preservation and beautification of Havana, Leal promoted social and cultural programs with an emphasis on family-friendly neighbourhoods, seniors, and youth.

Case in point: Mirroring the scene from the movie "Fame", on a sunny Saturday morning, 50-60 student members of Ballet Liszt Alphonso Dance Cuba took to the street for an energetic and spirited dance performance to the song Mama Mia, followed by an enthusiastic rendition of La Macarena, where it was almost impossible not to join in the festivities.

And certainly, the Bethlehem Convent Senior's Day Care and Home residents, from across the street, were not shy about strutting their stuff next to the students. Bedecked in red T-shirts and carrying blue, yellow, or orange batons, the seniors, aged 60 plus, proved they were more than footloose.

It was an incredible scene that reflected the importance of music to Cubans of all ages and the inseparable connection between music and dancing to the Rumba beat. Our city guide, Gretel Cylvester Zulueta, noted, "Cuban dance music is in the DNA. Chacha, Salsa, and Mambo show happiness".

For the audience of locals and tourists, the sight of senior citizens dancing in the street was a heart-warming tribute to the spirit of staying active and involved in the community. And those ubiquitous Cuban rhythms enveloped us at every meal with lively music complementing the tastes of Cuban fare. A great example was at La Bodeguita del Medio ('pub in the middle of the street'). In front of a painting that depicts two of the pub's most famous clients, the Cuban poet Nicolás Guillén and American author and journalist Ernest Hemmingway, Jorgé, the bartender prepared a counter-long line-up of Mojitos, Hemmingway's drink of choice. In a corner, the rhythmic blend of guitars, bass, bongos, and maracas blended with the voices of Grupo Raízón to create the perfect casual dining experience. After savouring the Arroz Congri, the traditional, flavourful dish of rice and black beans, Eduardo, the head waiter, revealed that "the secret to excellent food is my team": Jorgé mixing the drinks,

and Leticia, serving the food with a glowing smile.

And music also serenaded us as we wandered through residential streets, where pushcart vegetable stands and the odd 1962 pink Pontiac Bonneville were part of the everyday scenery. But then again, so are Cuban cigars and Rum.

At the ribbon-cutting ceremony to open the Cigar Bar at the Iberostar Parque Central Hotel, Juan Carlos García Granda, the Minister of Tourism, and a surprise pop-in guest, Manuel Marrero Cruz, the Prime Minister of Cuba, spoke about what Cubans love and what they love to share with tourists: history, culture, beaches, music, cigars, and Rum. And not far away at the Museo del Ron Havana Club, our guide, Osvaldo Mandina Machado, reminded us during our Rum tasting that Cuban Rum and Rumba are featured on the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage list.

Another excellent venue to enjoy drinks, music, and a view of the sea, amidst the ambiance of Cuban culture and history is the Bay View Bar (a.k.a. The Hall of Fame Bar) at the Hotel Nacional de Cuba. And you can arrive in style! Just hail a 1953 Buick on Havana's Malecon, the picturesque seawall walkway, for the 10-minute drive, past dilapidated old buildings, architecturally curated new buildings, and intriguing sculptures. 'The place to be', the Malecon, is often called 'the sofa of Havana' due to the casual comfort it offers locals and visitors alike.

In Cuba, as the saying goes, there are two seasons. Summer lasts 360 days, and spring, with slightly cooler temperatures and a drizzle of rain, occupies 4-5 days, spread over the year. And while the all-inclusive scene at Varadero, Holguin, Cayo Santa Maria, and elsewhere is tempting to the senses, many other areas respond to the demand for 'travel wonderment'. Las Terrazas is a great example.

This UNESCO Biosphere Reserve is located 45 minutes southwest of Havana. It offers relaxation, adventure, and history, with walking trails, waterfalls, guided tours, and birding.



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Idalmis Guía, a third-generation naturalist, met us to find and photograph Cuban Trogons, the Robin-sized National Bird of Cuba that mirrors the white, red, and blue colours of the Cuban Flag. And amidst the Calabash, Avocado, Guava, and Mulberry trees, we found many species, including Red-legged Honey Creepers, Green Woodpeckers, a Stigeon Owl, and a mating pair of Cuban Todies, with a bright green, pink, red, and white female perched next to the vibrant yellow, green, blue, white, red, and pink feathers of the male.

In 1968, the story goes that Fidel Castro was travelling through the region when his jeep got stuck in the mud, and the rest is history. The area around Las Terrazas was developed as part of the "Green Revolution", a sustainable plan to counter the effects of logging, coffee plantations, and hurricane damage and to benefit living conditions and job opportunities. Six million trees were planted, followed by homes, schools, playgrounds, and clinics.

Las Terrazas is a great day trip for nature lovers who want to indulge in the Cuban version of 'Shinrin-yoku' (Japanese forest bathing). Overnights, delicious food, and aromatic coffee are available at the eco-friendly Moka Hotel, where balcony views take in trees, birds, and fresh air.

Havana allows visitors to connect with Cuban culture in personally meaningful ways. Those seeking travel wonderment will find it here.

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Around The World (in 32 pages)



The Turkish Riviera - where Türkiye meets the Mediterranean - attracts millions of visitors each year with its exceptional fusion of nature, history, and culture

Antalya and its thrilling attractions

Located in the centre of the Turkish Riviera, Antalya is well known for its over 200 Blue Flag-registered beaches and legendary historical landmarks. Within the boundaries of the province lies a sporting paradise, with some of the world's most breathtaking hiking trails, including the Lycian Way, Pisidia Heritage Trail, and St. Paul's Way.

All along the coastline, travellers seeking fun activities can find incredible options. The seaside town of Kaş is regularly listed as one of the top 10 diving locations in the world, while Belek attracts recognition for its world-class golf courses.

One step will take you to the Lake District and the rose and lavender gardens.

Antalya and surrounding provinces are also home to Türkiye's Lake District, with its many natural wonders in the Mediterranean Basin. The District has 16 lakes, including Akşehir, Burdur, and Salda, and was named one of the "The 50 Best Places to Travel in 2023" by Travel + Leisure. With tectonic lakes and historic Roman sites, the travel magazine rated the region as a top choice as a destination for cultural richness.

Travelling through the Lake District, visitors can discover Türkiye's primary rose and lavender growing region of Isparta. With a centuries-old history of flower cultivation, Isparta offers experiencing the natural beauty of the Mediterranean like no other place can. Admire the stunning picture-perfect setting of lavender in purple blossom as you explore these hidden gems on the other side of the Taurus Mountains. ■

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Hot Tub Boats Float in Victoria, BC

by Susan Campbell

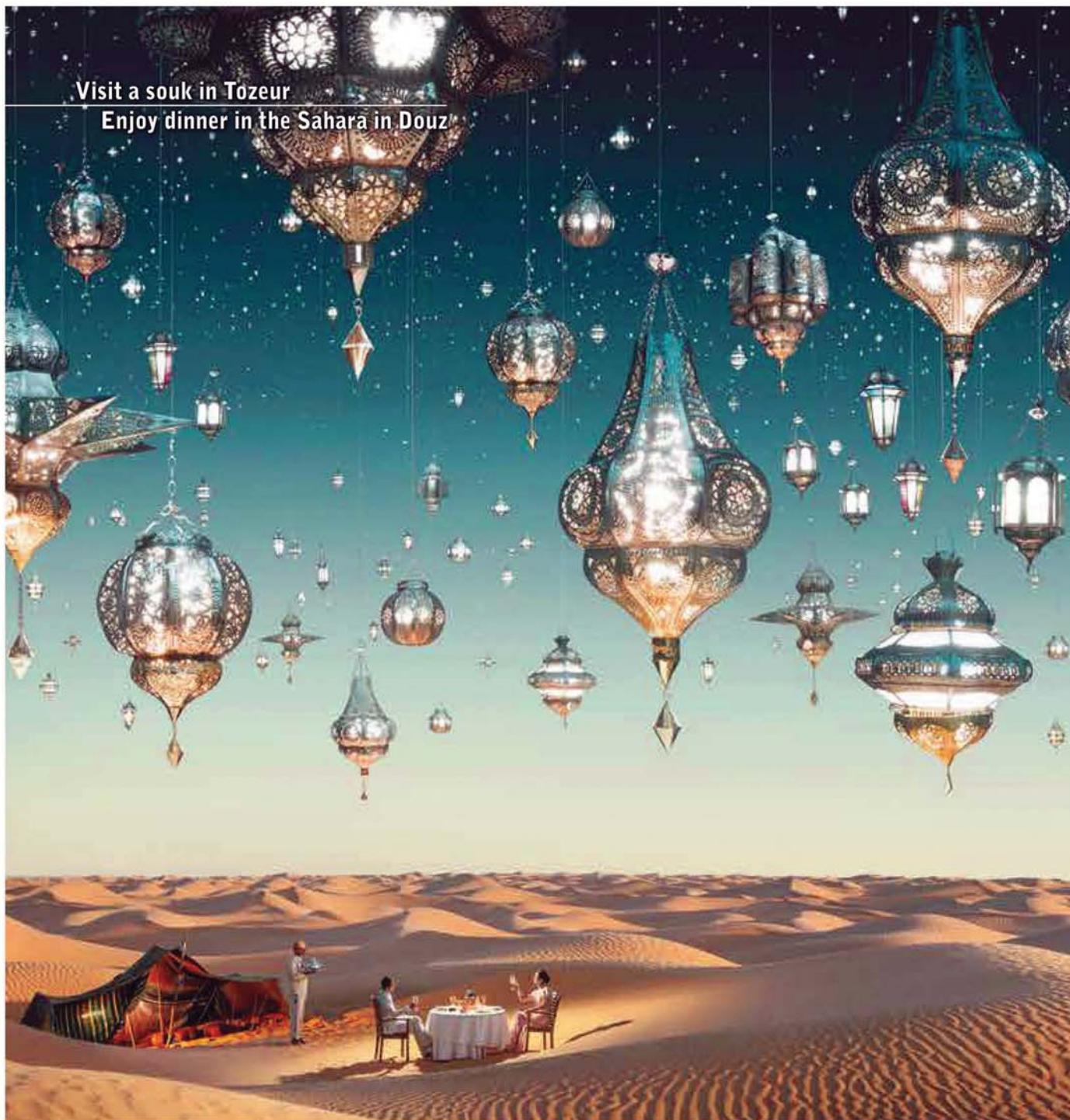
Victoria, British Columbia is the only place in Canada you can float your boat and soak in it, too! On a recent trip to BC's beautiful little port capital, we had the opportunity to try out the country's only floating hot tub boat adventure. It was a blast!

I love the sea, I love boats, and I adore hot tubs, put them all together in one package and I'm in bliss. After a brief safety and driving instruction we were off, puttering around the sea channel in Upper Harbor and around the Gorge Waterway on our own private little wood-burning propelled hot tub. Maneuvering is a breeze, no boating experience necessary, and it doesn't go very fast. In fact, the numerous little water taxis, sailboats, sea kayaks and even outrigger canoes on our waterway passed us easily while waving furiously, and obviously wondering what the heck we were traveling in! If you didn't know better, you'd think the little boat was sinking because it's full of water! But it's not. And the water is blissfully warm while the surrounding sea is icy cold. If you're brave enough, you're welcome to stop and take a dip off the side. Many do, and there's a handy little retractable ladder to help you get back in.

Beyond offering up incredible scenery along the route, the bonus is that you can control the soundtrack via Bluetooth onboard as you glide by the scenes. You can also bring your own food and drink. (No alcohol, though.) Or you can opt for extras like charcuterie boards and sparkling apple juice (pre-orders necessary.) You can also make it more luxurious with one of their biodegradable bath bombs. We highly recommend this fun and unique journey if you visit Victoria, it was one of the highlights of our trip. ■

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Calling All Foodies!

Exodus Travels Launches Collection of Brand-New Gastronomic Getaways

Pairing mouth-watering cuisine with a side of adventure



Award-winning adventure tour operator Exodus Travels has just unveiled a new line-up of foodie-focused trips as part of its brand-new Gastronomic Getaways Collection.

Designed for food lovers and adventure seekers alike who want to experience the best of both worlds while exploring new destinations, these amazing trips take travellers on a journey through some of the world's most exciting, and culturally rich, food destinations – exploring everything from bustling street markets lined with vendors to traditional family-owned restaurants in small villages.

Indulge in pastel de natas while riding long beautiful coastlines on a Southern Portugal cycling adventure or enjoy a bowl of pho as you glide past the towering karsts of Ha Long Bay on a Vietnam & Cambodia Highlights tour – these adventures offer the opportunity to connect with the culinary culture and his-

tory engrained in each dish.

But the Gastronomic Getaways Collection is not just about the food. It's also about adventure. Travellers will have the opportunity to explore each destination's natural beauty, from hiking along coastlines or mountain ranges to cycling through countrysides and along city streets.

Here are a few of the other trips that make up this tasty collection.

Cycling Girona and the Catalan Coast

On this seven-day guided trip, travellers will explore a region considered by cycling pros to be among the best on the planet. Led by an expert guide, the itinerary explores historic villages via disused railway lines, quiet small roads, and coastal paths, and includes guided tours around the medieval towns of

Besalu, Begur and Pals, a stop at a local vineyard for a memorable tasting session, and of course exploring the fabulous local cuisine.

Tuscan Hills & Chianti Wines Premium Adventure

Indulge in the food that has been officially nominated to become a UNESCO-listed Intangible Cultural Heritage site on this eight-day premium guided tour. Based out of a private villa on the cusp of the Chianti winelands, not far from the medieval town of San Gimignano, this Tuscan walking adventure visits Florence and Siena, timeless villages, and the quaint walled town of Certaldo. Activities include three handpicked wine-tasting experiences, a visit to the birthplace of chianti, two dinners with wine-pairing menus, and much more. And when guests aren't exploring, they can be lounging next to the villa's pool enjoying vineyard views or sampling regional produce cooked by the private chef. There's also an option for an introduction to classic Tuscan cuisine by taking part in a hands-on cooking class.

Treasures of Morocco – Premium Adventure

Discover the many wonders and the unmatched cultural diversity of this enchanting North African Kingdom on this 12-day culture-focused premium adventure. Staying in accommodations that include traditional riads, an award-winning eco-lodge, and a luxury desert camp, guests will tour diverse cities, journey into the Sahara and navigate dunes on camelback, have lunch with a Berber family, indulge in a relaxing hammam session, and much more. Travellers will also take a culinary voyage as they go, and even join a cooking class where they can then savour the results. ■

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Japan's largest cities are nothing short of marvels, drawing tourists to some of the only places in the world where futuristic high-rises share the streets with wooden shrines and sliding-door eateries. By now, the appeal of each of these urban centers is well-documented.

For as much as there is to discover (and fall in love with) in these well-travelled metropolises, the most authentic taste of Japan awaits in the 70% of the country that lies beyond the cities. Blanketed by forests, mountains, and coastlines, Japan is one of the world's greenest destinations and a leader in sustainable nature tourism. Visitors can stay in low carbon footprint traditional accommodations and experience a diverse range of hiking, cycling, pilgrimages, rafting, canyoning, kayaking and diving in beautiful natural settings like nowhere else in the world.

Heaven for a kayaker! **Lake Shikotsu in Shikotsu-Toya National Park**, Hokkaido is the northernmost ice-free lake in Japan. The water here is considered the cleanest in the country. Due to its clarity, the lake is like glass, enabling beautiful visibility all the way to of the lake floor, and creating spectacular, mirror-like reflections of the mountains and trees that encircle it. Just imagine fishing for sockeye salmon here amongst the blooming flowers of spring or the changing leaves of autumn.

The Michinoku Coastal Trail officially opened in 2019. Trails stretch 900 km along the northeastern coast of Tohoku between Hachinohe, Aomori and Soma, Fukushima. Visitors bask in the unspoiled vistas along rugged cliffs, sandy beaches, lush woodlands, and quiet fishing villages. In addition to the pristine nature, travellers here are inspired by the stories of those they meet who tell of the earthquake and tsunami that swept through over a decade ago, and the incredible recovery that followed. In the calm of the day, it's hard to believe.

The Picchio Wildlife Research Center in the resort town of Karuizawa is only an hour away from Tokyo by train but feels like a world away. This region of diverse ecosystems, within the majesty of the Japanese wilderness, is home to a wide range of flora and fauna. Take an eco-friendly, sustainability-focused adventure tour here and you will spot the elusive animals through the trees: from Japanese macaques to Asiatic black bears.

The rush never ends! River rafting in Japan is absolutely exhilarating. Since Japan is so mountainous, rivers roar into the valleys. **Gunma Prefecture** has long been lauded for forest bathing and hot springs, but is also becoming known for rafting along Minakami's Tone River, considered one of Japan's "three greatest rivers." Combining rafting and canyoning here is an unforgettable experience that will likely be the most invigorating day of your life.

Japan continues to become more eco-friendly and increasing options for where to stay, where to dine, and what to do have opened up a new world of exciting travel opportunities that re-assert Japan as a premier world travel destination. ■

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World Traveler Summer 2023



Six Flamenco Routes around Andalusia

Spain has numerous flamenco routes around Andalusia. Many of them are intended as a way of discovering the roots of great masters of the art such as Paco de Lucía, Camarón de la Isla, Sara Baras, José Mercé and others. They are a chance to visit flamenco clubs or "tablaos" and see flamenco shows, learn all about the genre in the visitor centres, and above all to experience the art of flamenco to the full.

The Bajaní Route visits the provinces of Cadiz, birthplace of the flamenco singer Camarón de la Isla and the composer and guitarist Paco de Lucía, and Seville. This sightseeing route mainly focuses on places linked to the flamenco guitar. The route includes Algeciras, Jerez de la Frontera, Morón de la Frontera, San Fernando, and Sanlúcar de Barrameda.

The Camarón Route - This route is based in San Fernando (Cadiz), the birthplace of José Monge, known as "Camarón de la Isla". The tour evokes the legendary figure of this brilliant flamenco singer, and takes us from the house where he was born, to the "Venta de Vargas" where he first performed and made his name as a child. The tour goes to the heart of flamenco.

Route of the 3/4 beat - This is a flamenco tour around the provinces of Seville and Cadiz. You'll visit the Triana neighbourhood (Seville) and other places in the province of Seville such as Utrera and Lebrija. The route also includes Alcalá de Guadaira, Cadiz, Dos Hermanas, Jerez de la Frontera, Cabezas de San Juan, Mairena de Alcor, and Seville.

In the footsteps of Antonio Chacón - A route to explore –to the sounds of fandango (a popular flamenco dance style)– the Granada plain and the flamenco districts of Granada. As well as Granada, the route includes Algarinejo, Fuente Vaqueros, Iznájar and Málaga.

Route of the "cantes abandolaos" - This route in honour of the flamenco singer Cayetano Muriel Reyes –otherwise known as "Niño de Cabra"– runs through the mountains of Cordoba and makes a stop in its capital. On the itinerary you'll pass through Bujalance, Cabra, Cordoba, Lucena and Puente Genil.

The mining route - This route through the provinces of Almería and Jaén offers a close-up view of flamenco styles like the fandangos of Puerta de Segura and the jotas of Siles, Albánchez, and El Ojuelo. On your itinerary you'll see Almería, Andújar, Linares and Paterna del Río.

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From City Lights to Starry Nights Craft Your Own Route Across Dubai's Desert!

Dubai has been known for its stunning skyline, record-breaking attractions par excellence and unique architecture, luxurious shopping and dining options. However, there is so much more to be discovered in Dubai. Just a short drive to the outskirts of the city awaits a whole new experience. As you pass the city lights and leave behind the hustle and bustle, you're transported into the pristine desert and are surrounded by miles and miles of uncharted sand dunes.

The vibrant city of Dubai is home to unique desert experiences that should not be missed! From exhilarating sand dune bashing to serene camelback riding, from romantic candlelight dinners to unfiltered stargazing, the desert of Dubai assures travelers of an unforgettable experience and loads of lasting memories.

A True Bedouin Experience

Looking for a journey back in time? A journey into the desert to experience the lives of the Bedouin people is highly recommended. The Bedouins are a semi-nomadic group of desert dwellers that are the oldest inhabitants of the Arabian desert and are known for their resourcefulness and warm hospitality.

Travelers journeying into the desert to witness a true Bedouin experience can get a glimpse of their lives through Al Marmoom Bedouin Experience. A mere 30-minute drive from the city, the Al Marmoom desert is home to a true Bedouin escapade. With tours scheduled throughout the day, guests can experience a camel ride, a caravan-styled tradition majlis and an exciting live falcon show. Guests are also welcome to

take a tour through the Bedouin village, where they can witness cooking demonstrations, sample freshly brewed Arabic coffee and bask in the glory of age-old Arabian Hospitality.

Camel Trekking & Dune Bashing

For those looking for a more quintessential experience, a camel trekking expedition through the desert is something worth a try. These expeditions through the desert are specially planned during the cooler months to give visitors a glimpse into the emirate's glorious past. As you trek on camelback through the desert, your guide will take you through local history, flora and fauna, and age-old cultural traditions.

If an exhilarating and heart-dropping experience is what you're looking for, a must-do activity would be the dune bashing. Get behind the wheels of your very own quad bike as you ride the highs and lows of the mesmerizing sand dunes. There are options for you to book a tour with a guide who will drive you through these dunes at heart-racing speeds and ensures adrenaline-inducing action.

Dubai Desert Conservation Reserve

For nature lovers, the Dubai Desert Conservation Reserve is a marvel waiting to be explored. Spread out across 225 square kilometres and taking up about five percent of the total land in Dubai, this reserve is completely fenced off to protect the natural flora and fauna of this area. With over 50 plant species, 120 birds and 43 mammals and reptiles, the reserve gives tourists a rare insight into the habitat of these splendid creatures.

Apart from witnessing the flora and fauna of the desert, the Dubai Desert Conservation Reserve also offers its guests a plethora of other fun and thrilling activities to choose from like falconry, sandboarding, camping under the stars and enchanting desert safaris as well. ■

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Uncovering Bocas del Toro, Panama's Secret Treasure

by Olivia Liveng

Bocas del Toro is a province located in the northwest of Panama, consisting of a mainland and a chain of nine islands. The region is known for its natural beauty, pristine beaches, and vibrant Caribbean culture.

The main town of Bocas del Toro, also known as Bocas Town, is a colorful and lively hub with a mix of traditional wooden buildings and modern conveniences. It's a popular destination for backpackers, surfers, and eco-tourists. Considered the Galapagos of the Caribbean, Bocas del Toro has become one of Panama's most visited eco-tourism destinations and one of Earth's most biologically diverse places.

Bocas del Toro is home to several protected areas, including the Bastimentos Island National Marine Park, which encompasses

several islands and coral reefs. The park is famous for snorkeling, scuba diving, and wildlife watching. Visitors can spot various marine life, including sea turtles, dolphins, and colorful fish.

The region also has a rich cultural history, with influences from Spanish, West Indian, and indigenous groups. The Afro-Caribbean culture is particularly evident in the food, music, and language. Many locals speak English, Spanish, and Creole, adding to the area's unique charm.

Some popular activities in Bocas del Toro include surfing, kayaking, paddleboarding, zip-lining, and hiking. Visitors can also take a boat tour to explore the archipelago, visit local villages, or relax on one of the many secluded beaches. Bocas del Toro is a biodiverse region home to various wildlife, including sloths, monkeys, toucans, and sea turtles. Visitors can experience nature up close through eco-tourism activities like hiking, snorkeling, and wildlife watching.

Bocas del Toro's location on the Caribbean side of Panama gives it a different feel from other destinations in the country. The region has a laid-back atmosphere with a robust Afro-Caribbean culture reflected in the locals' music, food, and language.

Sustainable Hotel Choice La Coralina Island House

In recent years, Bocas del Toro has become a leader in sustainable tourism, with many hotels and tour operators implementing eco-friendly practices. One such hotel, La Coralina Island House, has paved the way in eco-luxury in this pinpoint of paradise. The hotel offers the idyllic island escape of yesteryear, with stunning views, seclusion, and the balance of indoor/outdoor living with exceptional private villas and rooms, magical gardens, world-class restaurants and bars, and a holistic wellness spa. The hotel is creating a community for those who want to immerse themselves in this natural wonderland while basking in feelings of rejuvenation—physically, mentally, and spiritually. ■

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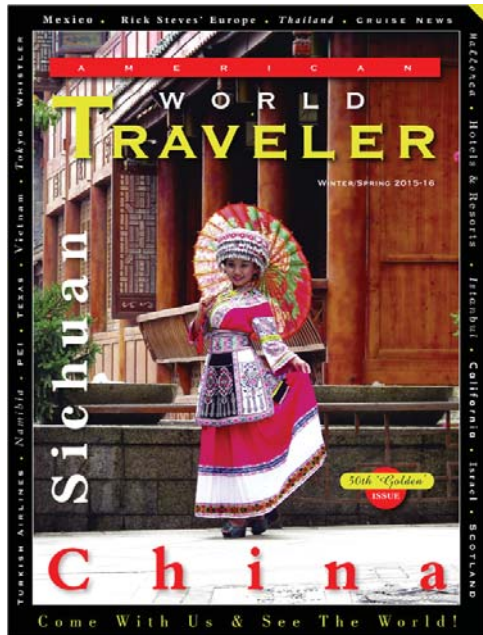
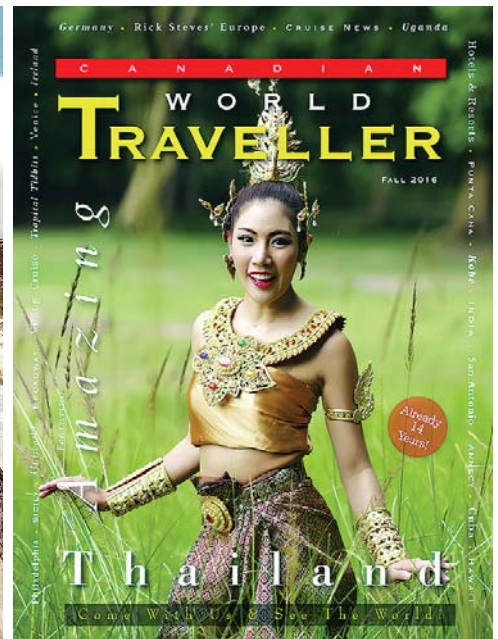
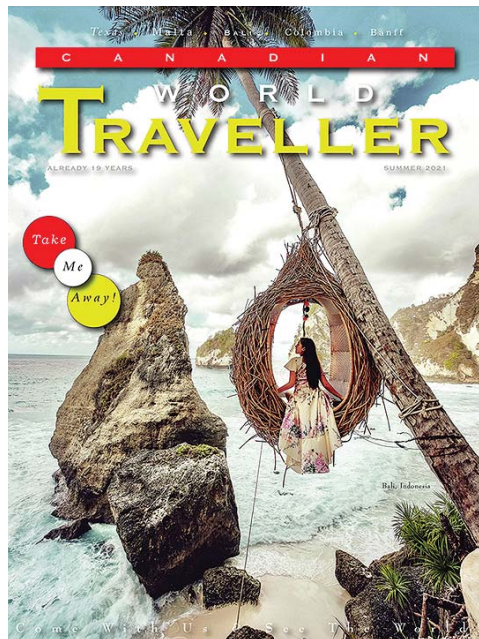
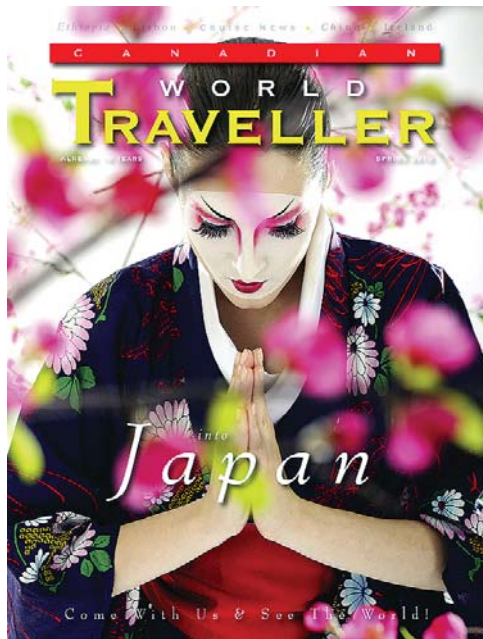
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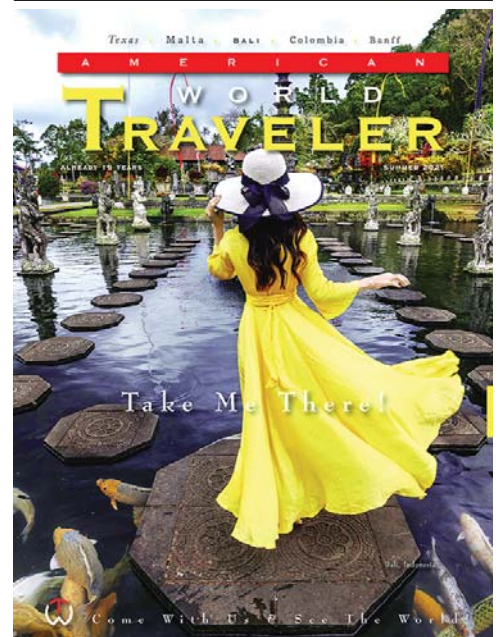
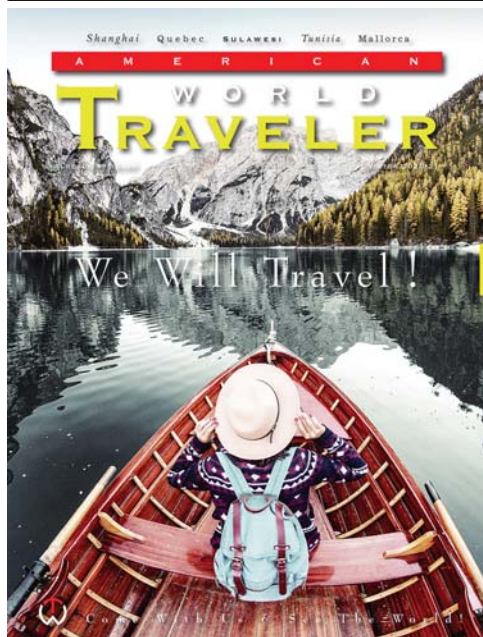
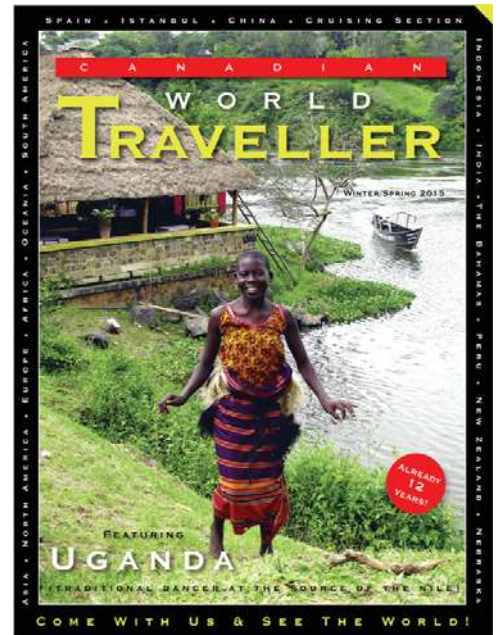
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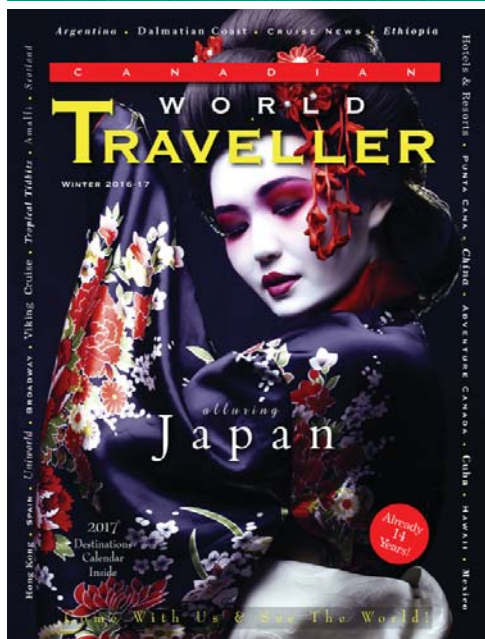
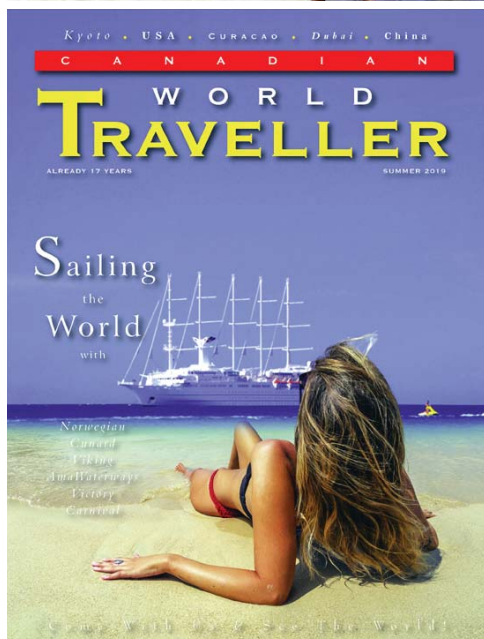
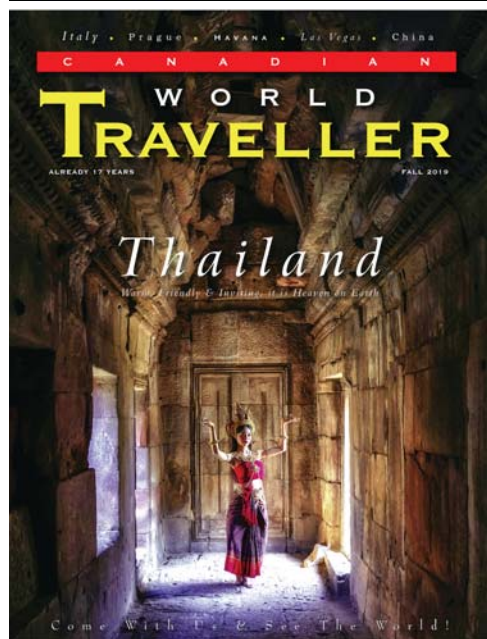
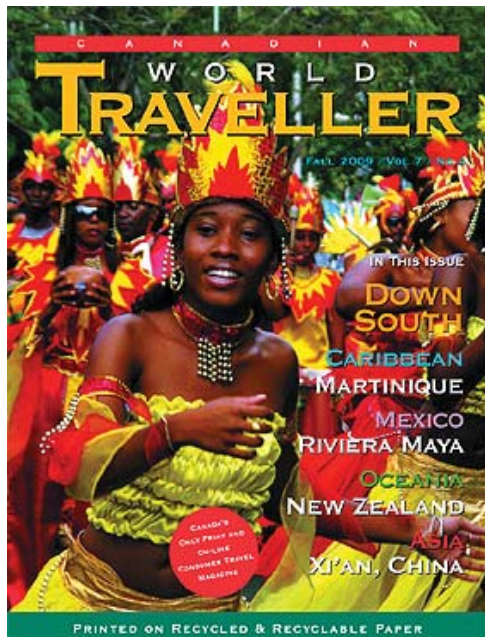
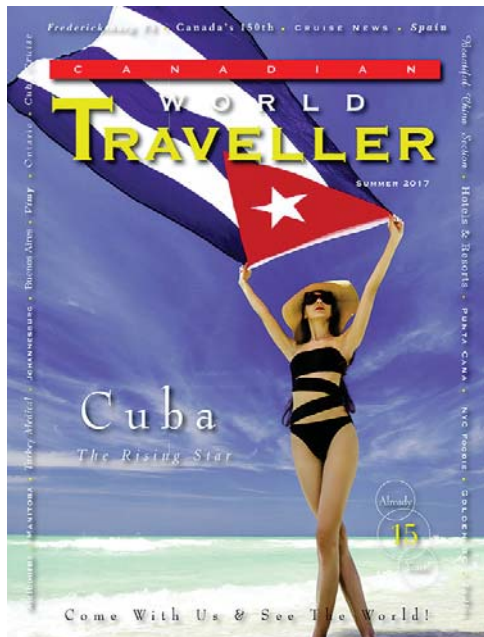
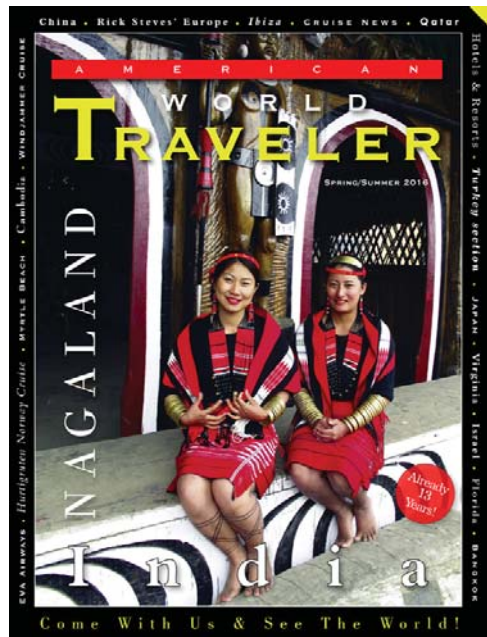
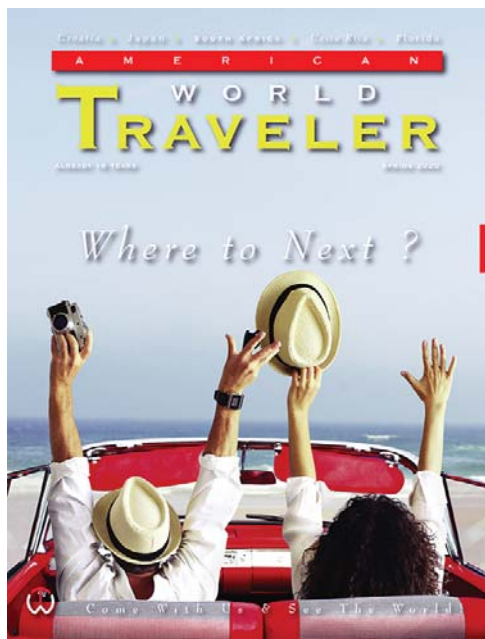
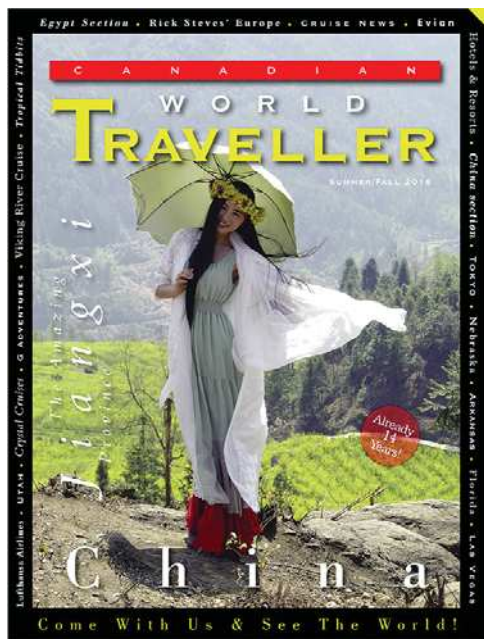
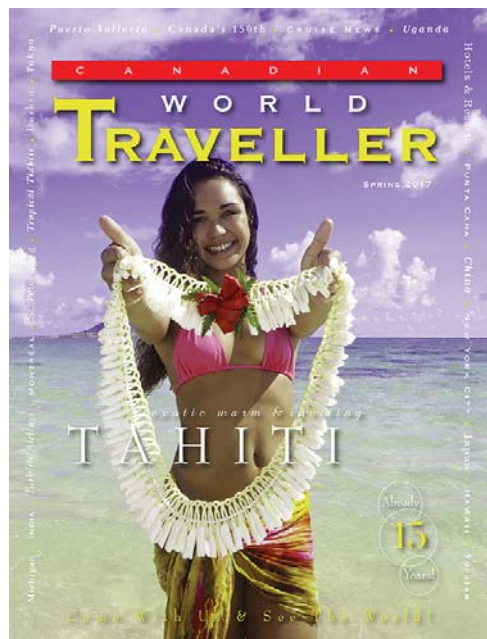
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New Orleans: Music, Music, Music and so Much More!

Article and photography by Michael Morcos

From the late morning to the early morning, music can be heard throughout Central New Orleans. What a delight, to enjoy such energy, devotion and style. On this two-day visit to New Orleans, I would discover the best this Deep South USA city has to offer travelers.

Strangely, the city is rather quiet, and yet still loud. I spent the trip visiting the nation's well curated World War II Museum, the magnificent Garden District with its mature tree-lined streets, an array of beautiful mansions and a popular historic cemetery. I would also get a bird's eye view from high above in the Vue Orleans tower that also has a great museum devoted to the history of New Orleans, and then experience music all along the way on the streets and in the bars of the Bourbon district and Frenchmen Street.

Music seems to be in the blood and veins of New Orleans. We would find residents of all ages engaged in the art - from kids drumming on a plastic kitchen tubs to single street

musicians to multiple pieces street bands, live music in bars as well as at the airport on our way home.

I was fired up to find such large bands playing wonderful, southern style music in the morning, as well as way past midnight on Bourbon Street. I stood there for a very long time absorbing these magicians that were not only looking for tips but were actually loving what they did and appreciated the lively fan support. These were precious moments of joy and harmony.

I was well advised to visit Frenchmen Street where there is an incredible variety of music styles in multiple bars that are close to each other. The plan was to have one drink in one bar for a short period of time and retire after a long day. Our plans changed immediately as we embraced this electric atmosphere and instead went barhopping. On our way to our hotel, we were again absorbed by yet another amazing street band. Good sleep could wait because New Orleans was at its best.

The New Orleans food scene is varied with many dining options, from local cuisine to international gastronomy; it is all available to the visitor. Tasty and all so filling, my favorite by far was fried chicken, and I would have a year's worth of this southern culinary delight. Every day I would find a different restaurant serving this ever popular dish, and believe me when I say, opt for the smaller portions as they are already humungous. Warm and inviting, this dish is popular with locals and myself, it satisfies the palate and soothes the soul. It is tummy licking good.

I have read and heard so much about New Orleans that on this my first visit I would highly recommend a few days to absorb its unique culture that stands out among so many American cities but word of warning, once bitten, you will return as will I. ■

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Mexico City Neighbourhoods: The Magic Sets In

Article and Photography by Steve Gillick



Mexico City can be intimidating for first-time visitors. The frenetic traffic congestion is often the first experience that greets travellers when they arrive in this city of 22 million. But during a few days of discovery, the city's calmer soul is revealed by walking and exploring the many alluring neighbourhoods, each with a unique charm and personality.

We had a taste of the 'bohemian' areas, including the bars and restaurants of Roma and Condesa. And we were enveloped in the chill-out ambiance of Coyoacan, with its cobblestone streets and colonial architecture. This is also the venue of the home of legendary artist Frida Kahlo.

The Kahlo connection continues with a series of stunning murals by her husband, Diego Rivera, at the Ministry of Public Education in the Zócalo district. The paintings, completed between 1923 and 1928, depict family life, workers, and the raw emotion of the Mexican Revolution.

El Zócalo (a.k.a Constitution Square or Centro Historico) is at least a half-day adventure. This includes the Metropolitan Cathedral, the ancient Aztec Templo Mayor, the National Palace, the frescoes and murals in the old Jesuit College, plus statues, sculptures, photographs, and people-watching. You can even refresh in Cantina Salón España, which boasts the largest collection of tequilas in the city.

Visitors easily need another half day to explore the sites in Chapultepec Park. The fantastic exhibits in the National Museum of Anthropology celebrate the people and the culture of Mexico's past and present. And then a climb to Chapultepec Castle, once the home of Emperor Maximilian 1st, affords panoramic views of the city, punctuated with scores of deep purple Jacaranda trees.

Feeling energetic, one morning, I walked from our hotel, the Camino Real Polanco, along the Paseo del la Reforma, one of the city's main thoroughfares, to the Zócalo. The

route showcases many prominent landmarks, including the Fountain of Diana, El Caballito (the horse's head statue), the Benito Juárez Monument, and the Palacio de Bellas Artes.

But I must admit that Xochimilco ("flower place"), in the central south, was the most intriguing neighbourhood experience. This is Mexico City's nature reserve. But it's also known as the Venice of Mexico because of the canals and the colourfully painted tourist boats (known as trajinera or chalupa) that ply the waterways, often with weekend partying in mind.

Right on cue, a canoe drew up alongside our boat. The 'bartender' threw back a blanket covering several large plastic jars and poured generous portions of Pulque for us to taste.

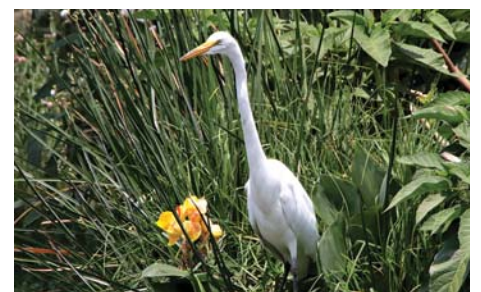
Sebastián Muñoz, our host and the co-founder of Rutopia, a company specializing in connections that allow travellers to discover Mexico through the eyes of its people, cautioned that "Pulque doesn't get you drunk...it gets you magical". And after repeated tastes, the magic set in.

Pulque is made from the fermented sap of agave. Its 5%-7% alcohol content is similar to beer but tends to give you 'hazy' feelings rather than outright intoxication. And this only enhanced our fascination with the area. Marco Polo, the local leader of a project known as 'Olintalli' or 'Land in Movement', spoke to us about the triple sustainable goals of the Xochimilco project in terms of promoting Ecotourism, Agrotourism, and Ethno tourism. We visited farms, learned about axolotls, the endemic, eco-sensitive salamanders, and enjoyed cool, refreshing drinks of Kale and Beetroot with a farm-fresh lunch.

Our short adventure in Mexico City was packed with an array of sensory experiences. The initial intimidation factor gave way to relaxed feelings of comfort, paving the way for future visits to explore more. ■

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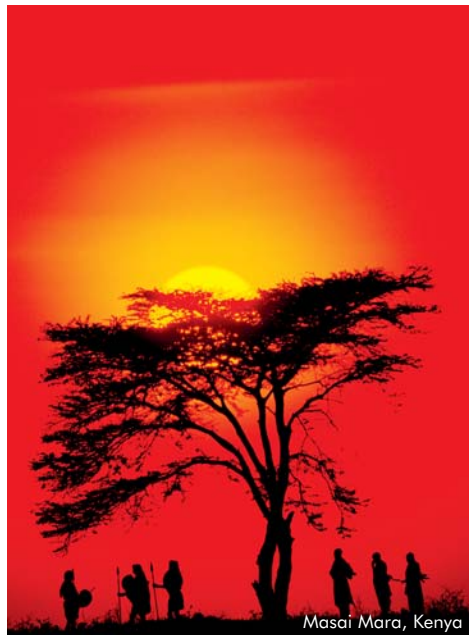
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Mount Fuji, Japan



Rice Fields, Ubud, Indonesia



Dim Sum, Hong Kong



Skiing, the French Alps



Jaya: A five-star taste of Asia in the heart of South Florida

by Daniel Smajovirs

From the architecture and white sand by day to the lights and music by night, Miami Beach lives up to all the hype, but only steps away from the glitz of South Beach is a restaurant that from the moment you walk into their courtyard will transport all your senses to the wonders that is Southeast Asia.

Located in the five-star Setai Hotel, Jaya hits all the notes for a perfect and delicious evening. Featuring a menu inspired from Thailand, India, Chia and Japan, Executive Chef Vijayudu Veena and his team will dazzle even the pickiest of eaters with unique takes on Asian classics such as curry, dumplings and sushi.

For those in the know, Jaya has become a prime destination for its atmosphere as well. Named as one of Miami's most beautiful restaurants, guests dine around a beautiful water feature in the courtyard. Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights feature the Asian Night Bazaar where, while you dine, you are entertained by various acts, such as arial artists, fire shows and contortionists. On the night of our visit, we dined in awe as both a

contortionist and fire dancer gracefully tiptoed around the diners.

The elegance of the contortionist was secondary to the finesse put in each one of our dishes. Many guests opt for the Thali Platter, which allows you to sample an array of the chef's specialities and includes Jaya's signature plain or garlic naan bread. Since our party had some dietary restrictions, on our visit, we opted for appetizers of octopus, served with an adobo sauce, fingerling potatoes, garlic chips and a roasted garlic aioli and an order of truffle dumplings, filled with scallops and shrimp and topped with a Black Truffle emulsion. For our main course, we chose to mix fish and meat with a Sea Bass Tikka Masala and the Filet Mignon. Both proteins reflected the Asian flare of Jaya with five-star finesse.

Luckily, our visit also coincided with National Peking Duck Day, and each diner was presented with an amuse bouche of Jaya's signature Peking Duck. Served on a steamed pancake with scallions, cucumbers and a bean sauce, the delightful and authentic taste immediately reminded us of a prior trip to Beijing. As Peking Duck is a Chinese classic

which is notoriously difficult to perfect, if eating this speciality has ever crossed your mind, ensure you add it to your order on your visit.

Should you choose to experience Jaya on a Sunday morning, the Sunday Jazz Brunch is true to theme as live jazz serenades guests as they sip on endless Louis Roederer Champagne, rosé or white wine. On the menu is an incredible mix of traditional, yet elevated, brunch staples, Asian and Indian dishes and desserts. Recently, Jaya also began offering a live grill, fresh crêpes and a Bloody Mary & Mojito Bar. The ever-expanding menu continues to cater to their diverse clientele, all reflecting the restaurant's signature roots.

Whether it's for casual brunch or a special dinner to cap off a wonderful vacation in Miami Beach, Jaya will satisfy your quest for an impeccable Asian meal, in the heart of South Florida all without the pesky jet-lag.

Ensure to make reservations in advance and take note of smart casual dress code. ■

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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.

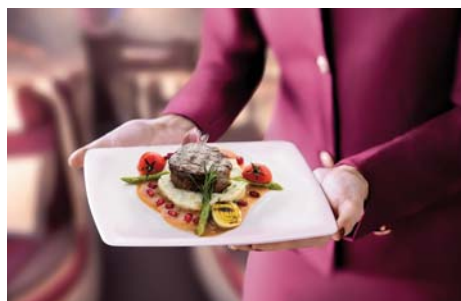
Even better, had I been traveling with my husband or other family members, we could have even chosen seats amenable to a four-person work area or even a dou-





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

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



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

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

Stopover Program

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

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

A Whole New World

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



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

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

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

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Eat Your Way Through Southern USA & Taste Iconic Culinary Offerings

If you're a foodie in search of your next travel destination, look no further than the states of Alabama, Kentucky and Tennessee whose iconic culinary offerings have made waves across the globe. From the smoky barbecue of Alabama to the sweet bourbon and Hot Brown dishes of Kentucky to the lip-smacking Nashville hot chicken from Tennessee, these destinations are a dream come true for every culinary enthusiast out there.

With recipes that have stood the test of time and are older than even the states themselves, a lot is yet to be discovered. Follow along as we list down the most iconic and sought-after locations in Alabama, Kentucky and Tennessee that cannot be missed while journeying through these mesmerizing destinations.

Alabama

Alabama is home to one of the most iconic culinary scenes in the world with its barbecue culture taking center stage. From award-winning fine dining offerings to budget-friendly roadside hidden gems, Alabama's culinary scene includes all-time favorites like mouth-melting barbecue, food truck delicacies and French-inspired cuisine.

While planning your culinary-inspired itinerary into Alabama it would be advisable for you to keep some time out to indulge in its barbecue offerings. Springtime marks the beginning of barbecue season, and one will

find food festivals dedicated to the art of barbecuing across Alabama. The state is also home to several award-winning barbecue restaurants and a plethora of barbecue cook-offs.

Did you know? Alabama is HUGE on barbecue cook-offs. Every summer, the state transforms itself and plays host to several cook-off festivals that have an array of exquisite food, music, and drinks to offer. Two of the most iconic and long-running food festivals are the Smoke on the Water BBQ



Festival in Florence and Hog Wild for Art Festival in Camden.

To indulge in the most sought-after barbeque offerings Alabama has to offer, foodie tourists must visit also visit the Bob Sykes & Blues Festival in Bessemer, Alabama. Combining the beautiful tunes of Blues music and a lip-smacking array of barbeque offerings served by the maestro chefs at the famous Bob Sykes B Q restaurants, this festival is a perfect addition to your culinary escapade.

Kentucky

Are you ready for the best meal of your life? Kentucky is the destination that might fulfil that wish! Culinary enthusiasts travelling to Kentucky for a holiday are in for a journey to experience food traditions that are older than the state itself.

The first destination that should be on every food aficionado's itinerary is the gorgeous city of Paducah which has created a wholesome environment for culinary artistry. Throughout the city of Paducah, you'll not only find a diverse collection of barbeque but also cafes serving contemporary cuisine curated using fresh, locally sourced food.

Kirchhoff's Bakery, one of the many locally-owned restaurants has been popular through the ages. The bakery is famous for serving artisanal bread recipes and other innovative offerings like cranberry walnut and sun-dried tomato and basil bread. Another must-visit restaurant, which is a stone's throw away from Kirchhoff's Bakery is Cynthia's California Tuscan Ristorante which serves tasty Italian cuisine made from homemade pastas and specially crafted breads.

A visit to Kentucky is incomplete without indulging in the state's very own Hot Brown Sandwich. With a history dating back to 1920s, the Hot Brown Sandwich was first created for the guests of the Brown Hotel as a late-night meal for visitors. The Hot Brown Sandwich is now a part of the culture and tradition in Kentucky and is served across Louisville-area restaurants. The sandwich is so in tune with the legacy of Kentucky that there is a specially curated Hot Brown Hop that helps hungry tourists find the perfect sandwich to suit their tastes.

Tennessee

From the globally renowned Hot Chicken in Nashville to the delectable Memphis-style

barbeque, Tennessee has a rich food culture that reflects its southern roots.

39

One of the most sought-after experiences for a foodie would be the Chattanooga Dinner Train. This unique concept train offers guests a 3-course meal while riding through the scenic landscapes of Lookout Mountains while the ambiance of the train car takes you back in time.

Every food lover travelling to Tennessee must try the Nashville Hot Chicken while in Music City. One of the restaurants serving delectable Nashville Hot Chicken would be Prince's Hot Chicken which has been serving the gold standard for hot chicken for almost 100 years. For food enthusiasts looking at indulging in a more modern take on Nashville Hot Chicken, Hattie B's is the place to be. Serving freshly fried chicken across six heat levels, the chicken served here is curated to specially suit each person's pallet as per their liking.

With so many delicious experiences in the South, all cravings are sure to be satisfied!

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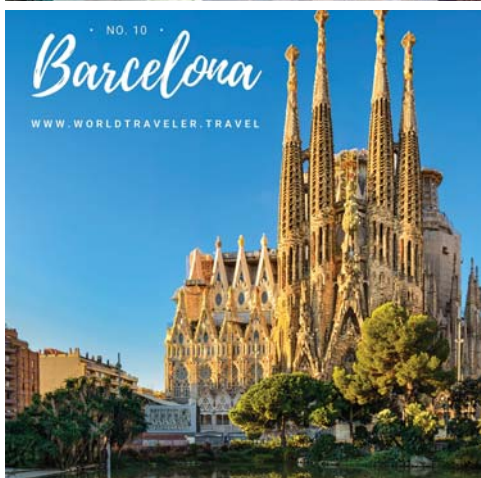
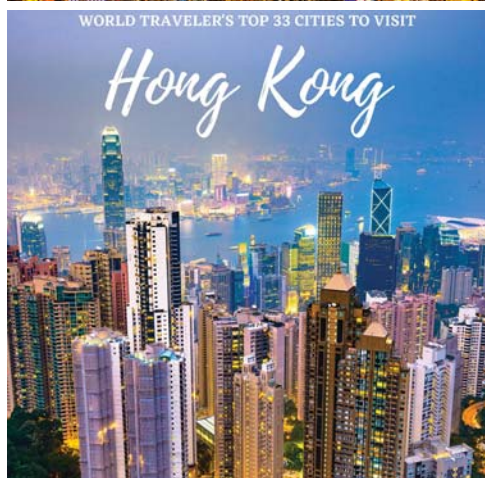
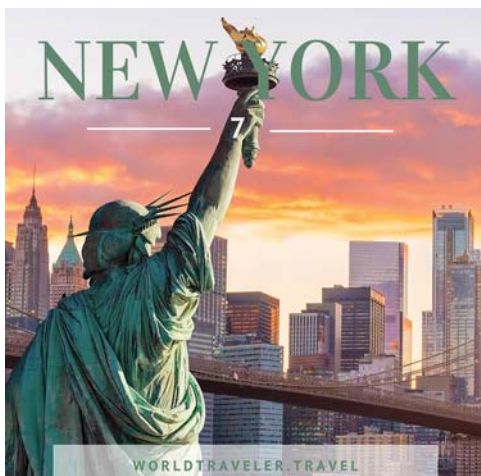
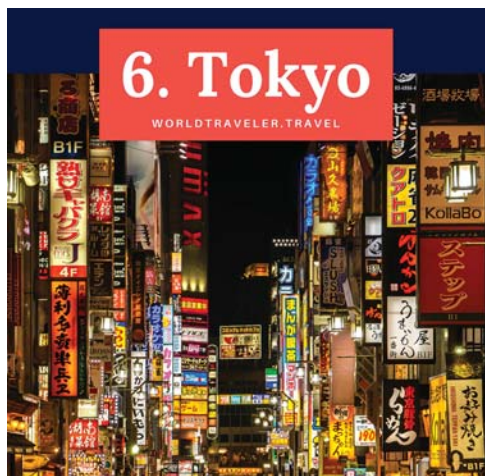
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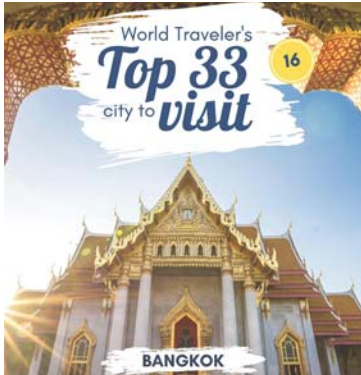
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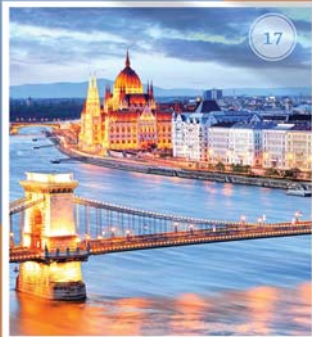
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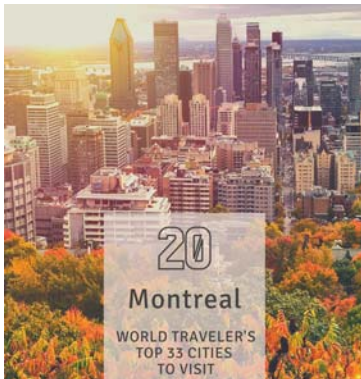
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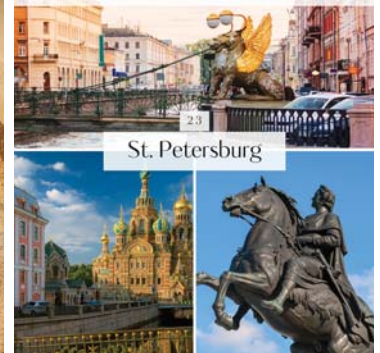
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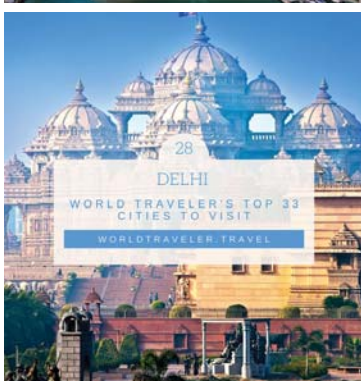
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MEXICO CITY



A Journey of the Senses



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

Mouth-watering tastes worth travelling for

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



Take flight in a hot air balloon at sunset

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

The colourful Aegean coastal city of Izmir

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

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

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



The luxurious ancient port city of Bodrum

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

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

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

Make sure your flight is part of the vacation

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

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

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

Are you ready to Widen Your World?



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Going Further With *Turkish Airlines*

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

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

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

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

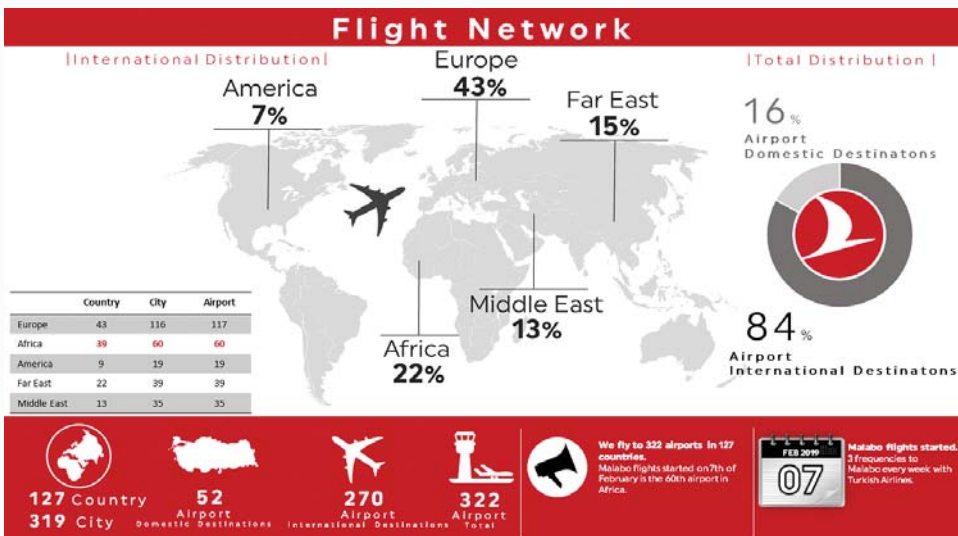
Their aircraft include A330s, A340s, B777s, B737-800s and B727-800s, all well maintained and laid-out with the customer in mind. Each section is designed with creature comforts taking front and centre. The seats throughout the plane are comfortable and the facilities are kept impeccably clean and

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

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

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

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Tropical Tidbits

by Sue C Travel

Summer is Sea Turtle and Whale Shark Season!

There are many good reasons to head to the Caribbean islands or Mexico in the summer beyond the deeply discounted accommodation rates and the less crowded beaches. This is the season to witness the awesome event of baby sea turtles hatching and scampering off to the ocean. Many resorts give them a helping hand with building protective barriers around the reefs and lowering their lights at night so

the turtles don't mistake them as the reflection of the moon off the waves which is their guiding signal to get to the sea. They also alert guests as to the hatching events so they can witness one of nature's miracles first-hand, it's a bucket list worthy experience.

The summer months are also the best time to swim and snorkel with whale sharks in the Mexican Caribbean. Just off of Cancun is one of the prime spots where these gentle mammoth fish congregate to feast on a surplus of plankton in this area, they are typically solitary animals and this is the only time they gather together en masse. But make sure you book your outing with a reputable touring operator like Cancun Adventures, one that only does small groups, uses reef safe sunscreen, and respects the animals by keeping their distance. Do your research first.



New Ocean Conservation Programs at Jade Mountain & Anse Chastanet

Spearheaded by Executive Director Karolin Troubetzkoy, a female pioneer in the Caribbean travel and sustainability space, these St. Lucia sister resorts have taken great measures to plant coral nurseries and launch ocean-inspired sustainable action projects to help protect and preserve the local environment. In addition to running the island's largest dive operation, the properties' 'Reef Life And Renewal Ambassador' hosts a new series of hands-on, educational courses that range from PADI Reef Rescue Dives and Dive Against Debris workshops to an Invasive Lionfish Tracker Speciality Course, a Sea Turtle Awareness Specialty Course, Coral Reef Restoration Courses and more. (Photo above)

Visit: www.jademountain.com



ANSE CHASTANET IS AWESOME FOR KIDS

Think of the lush and lovely island of St. Lucia and 'romantic escape' might be the first thing you envision, and you'd be right, it is an ideal oasis for couple-canoodling. But there is lots to do for kids, too, especially if the family stays at Anse Chastanet. The lovely little boutique resort has curated some wonderful creative programs to enrich a child's island holiday, especially this summer. And parents will adore the fact that the kids are having a blast while they squeeze in little more alone time on the beautiful beach. The new kid-friendly programs span a gamut of interests, too. Master Chef Juniors in training will love the "Eat What You Grow" harvesting and cooking class experience, while young bakers will adore the 'Bean-to-Bar' cacao harvesting and chocolate making classes led by the resort's 'Chocolate Alchemist'. Adrenaline rush seeking kids can go jungle biking or hiking on tree-lined trails while the resort's annual summer Sea Kids Camp offers snorkeling with sea turtles, exploring underwater reefs with PADI dive certification courses (ages 10+) and participating in coral reef restoration workshops, too. And budding artists can express themselves in the new Discover & Paint Marine Critter Class led by a local artist. And they all can wind down at day's end with kids' yoga and meditation classes. Bet they'll sleep well!

Find out more at: www.ansechastanet.com

New Wine and Spirits Ventures in Aruba

Against all odds, the arid, semi-desert, cacti-studded island of Aruba has man-



aged to grow grapes that can be made into wine! It has been a labor of love for some very determined vintners out in Alto Vista valley (near the famous chapel,) and they are finally reaping the fruits of their labor with very welcome rewards. Alto Vista Winery is now producing half a dozen of their own wine brands plus a Red Star artisanal rum. Guided tours for visitors are now available and culminate in sommelier led tastings in their lovely indoor-outdoor patio. Products are also available for purchase.

Visit: <https://www.altovistawinery.com/>

Pepe Margo Distillery is another new, spirited Aruban venture right downtown Oranjestad in an area fast undergoing an exciting urban renewal. The beautifully refurbished heritage home of a well known local hostess and great cook Margo Arends affectionately known as "Pepe" (auntie) Margo is now home to a charming artisanal distillery in her name making their own gins and the first-ever molasses-based rum to be fermented and distilled in Aruba. As Margo was known to do, they now graciously host guests on a beautiful patio garden but with a twist. They offer up with craft cocktails made with their spirits and exceptionally creative tapas. Guided tours are available, but the bar and garden are open for a visit anytime. Products available for purchase make excellent made-in-Aruba souvenirs, too.

Visit: <https://pepemargodistillery.com/>



A Private Island Paradise in Fiji

If you're seeking a private retreat that Fantasy Island dreams are made of, Turtle Island Fiji, secreted away in the azure waters of the Yaskawa archipelago totally fits the bill. Even your exciting arrival via private seaplane and greeted by welcoming staff is reminiscent of the popular television series. And you barely need to share this all-inclusive idyllic experience with anyone else but your significant other. There are only 14 bures (Fijian villas) yet 12 pri-



vate beaches, and you have your own dedicated local concierge to help you enjoy the local culture and activities like snorkeling, fishing, scuba diving, beach horseback riding... or you can choose to do nothing at all!

Visit: www.turtlefiji.com

Comprehensive New Development in Puerto Escondido

Slated to open summer of 2024, OCN Resorts & Residences will offer grand complex of luxury vacation villas and units for purchase with world-class amenities, including culinary concepts by chef Brad Kilgore, winner of the prestigious James Beard Award. Situated next to Laguna de Manialtepec, a bioluminescent lagoon, a wide range of water activities will be offered amid stunning natural surroundings and a lush jungle ecosystem. Resort bookings begin in spring 2024.

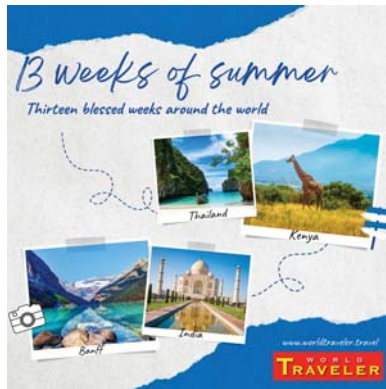
Visit: www.ocnresorts.com



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



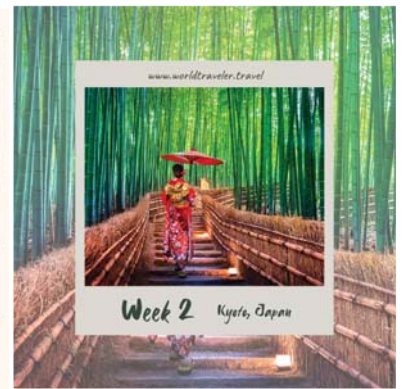
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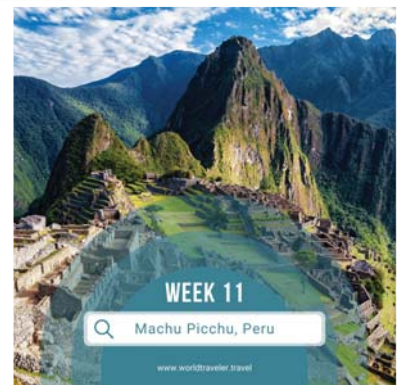
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This photo: Disney Wish at private island

C o m e W i t h U s &

AMAZON DANUBE MEKONG NILE RHINE RHÔNE MOSELLE SEINE YANGTZE

PACIFIC SOUTH PACIFIC INDIAN SOUTHERN OCEAN

ADRIATIC AEGEAN MEDITERRANEAN CARIBBEAN BALTIC BLACK SOUTH-CHINA SEA



Sail The World!



Holland America Line Set To Sail Most Diverse Asia Cruise Season With 49 Ports Across 10 Countries In 2024-2025

Nine unique 14-day itineraries offer exciting combinations of different countries; two longer 28- and 53-day Legendary Voyages showcase deep culture and history of Asia

For Holland America Line's 2024-2025 Asia season, the cruise line is set to explore the Far East with departures from Hong Kong, China; Yokohama (Tokyo), Japan; and Singapore to some of the most exciting cities across 10 countries, with a strong focus on Japan. Noordam will sail a series of nine different 14-day itineraries that travel around Cambodia, Indonesia, Japan, the Philippines, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand and Vietnam. The cruises showcase the diversity of the countries while celebrating their unique histories. Late departures and overnight ports allow extra time for sampling the nightlife, cuisine and culture of the region. ■

WWW.HOLLANDAMERICA.COM



CroisiEurope Cruises Announces New Cruise Itineraries for 2024

CroisiEurope Cruises, Europe's largest cruise line, has announced the launch of its 2024 cruise schedule. The list of new river, barge, and coastal cruises includes destinations in Spain, Holland, France, and Africa, among others.

Highlights of the 2024 river, barge, and coastal cruises include:

La Dolce Vita along the Italian Coastline: Journey through the unworldly paradise of Maddalena Archipelago on this exclusive itinerary. **The Oise Valley:** Vacation through an undeniably captivating region of France, the Oise Valley. **The Mysterious Cyclades and Dodecanese Islands in the Aegean Sea:** Discover ancient Greece on an exciting 8-day itinerary through the cradle of Greek civilization to Athens and its Acropolis. ■

WWW.CROISIEUROPE.TRAVEL/EN/



MSC Cruises Opens Sales for Stunning Itineraries in Japan for Winter 23/24

The new winter program on MSC Bellissima will commence from November 2023 with an 11-night, nine-night and six-night cruise from Yokohama. From January to March 2024, MSC Bellissima will homeport in Naha/Okinawa offering guests from around

the world the opportunity to experience Japan's stunning landscapes and beaches, rich cultural heritage, ancient traditions, and modern attractions with multiple destinations – all without having to repack a suitcase.

The Winter 23/24 season will see MSC Bellissima sailing within Japan and to Keelung, Taiwan (China), offering cruises of four to five nights in length, with varying itineraries visiting destinations such as: Okinawa, Japan, Ishigaki, Japan, Keelung, Taiwan (China) and Miyako Island, Japan. ■

WWW.MSCCRUISES.COM

Viking Announces New Expedition Voyages in the Arctic

Three New Itineraries Exploring Canada and Greenland Launching in 2025



Viking has recently announced three new summer season expedition voyages in the Arctic. Debuting in July 2025, the new itineraries, which range from 13 to 27 days, explore the polar north in Canada and Greenland, with two of the three voyages visiting the Canadian High Arctic.

The 13-day *Into the Northwest Passage* itinerary sails roundtrip from Nuuk, Greenland and features destinations including the pristine waters of the Ilulissat Icefjord and the eastern entrance of the famed Northwest Passage in Pond Inlet, Canada. Guests can also discover stunning natural beauty and dramatic landscapes during the 15-day *Canada & Greenland Explorer* itinerary, which sails between Toronto and Nuuk. Those interested in more in-depth exploration can choose a combination of the two itineraries, the new 27-day *Canada & the Northwest Passage* voyage.

Viking is also offering world cruises between the Great Lakes and "the end of the world." The *Viking Octantis®* will begin her epic journey from Milwaukee to Ushuaia on the 70-day *Longitudinal World Cruise III* in September 2023 – offering guests a variety of impressive travel milestones in a single journey from the heart of North America through engineering wonders like the Welland and Panama Canals, into the Chilean fjords and finally to Antarctica. Similarly, the *Viking Polaris®* will embark on the 71-day *Longitudinal World Cruise II* from Duluth to Ushuaia in September 2023; she will also sail the 62-day *Longitudinal World Cruise IV* from Milwaukee to Ushuaia in October 2024. Viking also offers a similar voyage in reverse, from Buenos Aires to Milwaukee, with the 65-day *Longitudinal World Cruise I*, which embarks in February 2024. ■

WWW.VIKING.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 state-rooms 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

Europe Cruises & Cruisetours Season as Princess Cruises Celebrates 40th Anniversary Sailing in the Mediterranean



From the cruise line that delivers dream vacations to millions of guests every year, Princess Cruises is celebrating its 40th anniversary sailing the Mediterranean by featuring two of its newest and largest ships there in 2025 – Star Princess and Sun Princess.

The 2025 cruises and cruisetours season offers travelers looking for the ultimate European adventure abundant natural beauty, history and traditions, combined with diverse cultures, all while enjoying a relaxed, stress-free travel experience on six beautiful Princess cruise ships: NEW! Star Princess and NEW! Sun Princess, plus Majestic Princess, Sky Princess, Regal Princess and Emerald Princess.

Sun Princess will sail a series of seven-day Mediterranean voyages from Barcelona, Rome or Athens, that will visit coveted destinations including Istanbul, Naples and Santorini.

Both of the cruise line's newest ships offer next-generation features, host 4,300 guests, offer more than 1,500 balconies and 29 restaurants and bars throughout 21 decks. Their groundbreaking design centers on a glass sphere that infuses the Piazza with light and connects guests with dynamic views of the world. Another stand-out venue is The Dome, a cutting-edge top-deck entertainment space inspired by the tiered cliffs of Santorini.

Cruisetours: Combine the cruise with multiple days on land to experience more of the region. Guests can choose to sightsee in the cosmopolitan city of Madrid on the Highlights of Spain cruisetour, visit Florence and Rome on the Classic Italy cruisetour, explore Mediterranean treasures on the Best of Greece cruisetour or take in the spectacular landscapes of Ireland on the Ring of Kerry cruisetour. ■

WWW.PRINCESS.COM

Seabourn Debuts First-Ever "Grand Africa Voyage", Circumnavigating the Continent in 90 Days



Seabourn, a leader in ultra-luxury voyages and expedition travel, is inviting travelers to explore the exotic and dynamic lands of Africa with its first-ever "Grand Africa Voyage." Departing November 30, 2024, Seabourn Sojourn will circumnavigate the continent and sail more than 17,000 miles during a 90-day roundtrip adventure from Barcelona, Spain. The journey will offer a world of experiences for guests, visiting 44 marquee and off-the-beaten path ports and cities throughout 26 countries, with six overnight stays on the itinerary.

The only ultra-luxury ship to sail around the entire continent, Seabourn Sojourn will visit a blend of historically profound destinations on its Grand Africa Voyage. Highlights include Alexandria, Cairo, Tel Aviv and Jerusalem; lush, tropical paradises such as the Seychelles and Bom Bom Island; lands with breathtaking, diverse landscapes and wildlife such as Kenya, Madagascar and Zanzibar; and culturally rich destinations such as Cape Town, Morocco and Mozambique. In addition to renowned destinations, guests can discover Africa's lesser-known gems such as Luanda, the "Paris" of Africa, and Cape Verde, the "Gateway to the West."

Featured destinations on the Grand Africa Voyage include: Alexandria, Egypt. Safaga, Egypt. Mombasa, Kenya. Cape Town, South Africa. Bom Bom Island, Sao Tome & Principe. Casablanca, Morocco. ■

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Full steam ahead! Sailing Through the Land of Two Smiles with CroisiEurope, part II

Article and photography by Michael Morcos

Full steam ahead! In this second of a two-part article, we set sail to discover some of the highlights found along the Mekong River and Delta. Life could not be any better as we would discover these magnificent Cambodian and Vietnamese destinations from our luxurious home base on the RV Indochine II, CroisiEurope's flagship in Asia.

On board, there is nothing left to chance, as everything is designed for comfort to enjoyment. CroisiEurope's cruise was filled with plenty of activities and yet gave us enough

downtime to enjoy this beautiful ship and be pampered by a genuinely happy crew each day.

There was at least one daily port of call, and everything was included, from transportation to shore, guided tours of spectacular monuments, markets, temples, and even shows were included. The only thing to remember is to bring personal items and bring back happy memories as the crew took care of every little detail to make every excursion memorable and enjoyable.

Day one was a wonderful way to start our nine-day journey. In Angkor Wat, situated in Siam Reap, our visit was nothing short of spectacular. We were up at dawn to witness the rising of the sun that silhouetted the fantastic structures and then spent the day discovering this massive ancient site. Beyond Angkor Wat, there was a multitude of sites to visit, so much so that the average visitor would surely run out of time, while the history buffs could easily spend a week here.

Of all the cruise line companies that sail the Mekong, CroisiEurope is the only one that



sails on Lake Tonle Sap. This special portion of the cruise would take us to out of the way places that have very few tourists. By the time we finally caught up with the other luxury ships a couple of days later, we would have visited just about everything that contrasts to Siam Reap, including a village where an elderly man would find his way up to the tops of Sugar Palm trees to gather sap used for everyday cooking. In the same village, we would find others making an assortment of clay objects using an ancient method. If this was not enough, we visited a Buddhist monastery and historical temple. Just getting there was an experience on its own as we rode by ox cart through rice paddies, experienced local villages and discovered a wonderful and sometimes serene lifestyle that explorers dream about.

On another excursion, we would be treated to a village that specializes in producing amazing looking bronze ware. This would seem to be an art that has been passed down for many generations where personal dwellings are also the workshops for melting, shaping and artfully designing great looking pieces used in everyday life as well as for home decor and in temples. This was yet another unexpected dimension of Cambodia.

Onwards to the last leg of our Cambodia portion where we would find ourselves in the national capital of Phnom Penh. CroisiEurope would organize an orientation tour by no less than a tuk-tuk. On this extremely hot day we would be cooled by wind as we navigate through the central parts to discover that the city is both hectic and congested, but compared to other capitals, slow paced and inviting. The newer high-rise buildings contrasted drastically to the historical French quarters.

The following day we would rediscover Phnom Penh and visit it's most famous and popular sites, including the breathtaking and spotless grounds of the royal palace, the national museum and the retention center that was used for interrogating and torturing citizens during the Khmer Rouge days.

All along our journey, we would feast like kings, and yet keep in shape as the wonderful Cambodian and Vietnamese cuisine is lean

on fats, yet incredibly nutritious, healthy, and tasty. This was the same on board our ship, as CroisiEurope had many choices of local, French and international dishes. This is one cruise which I actually ended up being the same weight as when we started, not only that, but I actually felt full of energy and in top shape.

Continuing south towards the sea, we would now find ourselves in another country. Although Cambodia and Vietnam are neighbors, there was a definite difference in culture and atmosphere. Where Cambodia was rather calm, Vietnam, that has many times its population, was rather charged. Generally speaking, the citizens were more active, boisterous and seemingly more industrious.

Here we would visit charming villages, take a canal tour, visit local markets, world-class museums, historical temples, a large pottery factory, a war zone that included Viet Cong tunnels, blasted out tanks, and even the shooting gallery where visitors, for a price, could fire off a choice of assault weapons such as an AK-47.

Our long cruise navigated the many tributaries of the Delta and ended up in Ho Chi Minh City. This large metropolis has so much to see and do that it would take the better part of a week to explore. Navigating the streets at rush-hour was both hectic, dangerous and a rush of adrenaline as there was an unbelievable number of scooters and motorcycles that drive in every direction and even on sidewalks. This bustling city has its colonial past and yet is pointed straight towards the 21st-century.

CroisiEurope sure has a winner on this route that immerses any visitor to South-East Asia in its delights. Coupled with a luxurious a state-of-the-art vessel, fantastic service, great cuisine and a wonderful itinerary, there is no better way of visiting the Mekong in style, safety, and comfort. ■

WWW.CROISIEUROPE.TRAVEL/EN



55





Cruising Through the Heart of Europe

In comfort and style aboard the Scenic Opal

by Randy Mink

I can't think of a more relaxing way of seeing Europe than cruising in luxury along its great rivers. Unlike a multi-country bus tour or train journey, you unpack just once, as your ship is home sweet home for the week. And as these sleek white vessels often dock in the center of town, the tourist highlights lie just steps from the gangway.

My most recent magic-carpet ride to adventure was "Charming Castles & Vineyards of the Rhine and Moselle," a seven-night trip filled with shore excursions in southwestern Germany, northeastern France and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. Delivering us to these enchanting places was the 163-passenger Scenic Opal, one of 12 ships in the Europe fleet of Scenic, an Australian-owned cruise line geared to English-speaking guests. (A full

report on the Rhine/Moselle itinerary, which began in Mainz, Germany, and ended in Basel, Switzerland, will appear in the magazine's fall issue.)

The Scenic Difference

At first glance, most river ships in Europe seem to offer a similar product, but Scenic stands out in two ways. First, guests have a little more elbow room, as the vessels offer a higher-than-usual passenger-to-space ratio. Whereas many ships of the same size take on 180 or more passengers, Scenic's four-deck floating hotels carry 163 guests maximum. (Our sailing counted 129 passengers, including 53 Americans, 27 Canadians, 37 British, nine Australians and a smattering of other nationalities.) The Scenic Opal and sister

ships Scenic Amber and Scenic Jasper were built in 2015/2016 and refurbished in 2019.

Floor-to-ceiling windows in both public areas and most staterooms, moreover, give the feeling of added space. All cabins on the Sapphire and Diamond (second and third) decks feature a full-length, enclosed balcony with two padded wicker chairs, a table and a wide horizontal window that glides up or down at the push of a button. A curtain and a glass door can be used to close off the bedroom from the peaceful nook, called a Scenic Sun Lounge. For this sense of extra space, Scenic ships are marketed as "Space-Ships" (not because they're futuristic-looking). Smaller staterooms on the less-populated lower deck, the Jewel Deck, have a large picture window but no balcony.



The other chief takeaway about Scenic is the all-inclusive price. You never have to take out your wallet and won't even be asked for a credit card at check-in. The cruise fare includes not only gratuities, airport and hotel transfers, laundry service once per cruise, shore excursions and multiple dining options but also unlimited complimentary beverages (soda, beer, wine, cocktails, spirits) all day, not just with meals. You don't even need to worry about using your room's mini-bar—just help yourself to free drinks and snacks when the mood strikes. Treats in my cabin included Pringles chips and a favorite of mine—Manner cocoa-flavored hazelnut-creme wafers from Vienna. The refrigerator, replenished daily, was stocked with everything from Coke, beer and juices to German wines and miniature bottles of rum, gin and whiskey.

Food, Glorious Food

In the Crystal Dining Room, I always tried to get a window table so as to look out on the sloping vineyards and fairy-tale towns flanking the Rhine and Moselle rivers. The daily breakfast buffet featured a million different items—well, at least 100 anyway—and even offered chilled Champagne. There were bagels and artisan breads, yogurts and fruits of all kinds, and hot-off-the griddle pancakes or waffles, not to mention made-to-order omelets. The Brits and Australians appreciated the baked beans, porridge, English bacon, and grilled tomatoes and mushrooms. One morning we had bread-and-butter pudding.

The breakfast buffet also offered cheeses, cold cuts and smoked fish (herring, rollmops, halibut, salmon). What's more, we could order from a menu that featured lamb chops, French toast and perfectly done, oh-so-decadent eggs Benedict.

Lunch also was a smorgasbord. I really enjoyed the German buffet, a special meal that put an exclamation point on our morning transit through the castle-studded Rhine Gorge and got us in a jolly mood for the tourist-thronged wine town of Rudesheim. The spread included three types of sausage—bratwurst, Kasekrainer (cheese-filled) and Weisswurst (white veal sausage)—and three mustards. There were sauerkraut, parsley potatoes and both bread and potato dumplings. Cheesy spaetzle, freshly tossed,

was served hot from the pan. I didn't have room for the fried chicken (Backhendl), pan-seared river trout in almond butter or even a morsel of the pork knuckle.

Recorded oom-pah band music lent a Munich beer hall vibe as I washed down traditional German foods with a tall glass of Erdinger Weissbier, a classic wheat brew. Dessert was Dampfnudel, a pillowy steamed dumpling filled with blueberries. Other lunch buffets usually featured at least one food representative of the region we were traveling through.

On King Charles III's coronation day, the River Cafe, an area of the Opal Lounge that offers a daily lunch buffet, we had fish 'n' chips while watching the ceremony on big-screen TVs. The lounge's coffee and tea stations had scones with jam and clotted cream, another British touch.

The River Cafe, open during the day for sandwiches, salads, ice cream and pastries, is transformed each evening into Portobellos, a five-course Italian dining experience for which each guest receives a printed invitation once during the week. Table La Rive, a sophisticated chef's table offered once a cruise to Diamond Deck and Junior Suite guests, stars innovative fare with wine matching in a small-group setting in the dining room.

Every night, the restaurant's a la carte dinner menu gave us appetizer, main course and dessert choices. If we didn't want one of the three entree selections, we could order a salmon steak, sirloin steak or chicken breast.

Rather eat in privacy on your balcony? An extensive room service menu is available from 6 a.m. to midnight.

On any cruise, I tend to overeat (don't we all?), so every day I hit the walking track on the expansive Sun Deck, a breezy area with tables, chairs, loungers and a vitality pool. Happily for me, the track was lighted after dark. I recall one night making my rounds as floodlit Reichsburg Castle loomed beyond the storybook Moselle River town of Cochem, Germany, a magical moment indeed.

A Superlative Staff

Every evening we all gathered in the spacious



lounge with cruise director Alex Thurein, who briefed us on the next day's schedule. An affable German who was born in Wiesbaden and currently lives in Salzburg, Austria, he set the upbeat tone of the cruise. From Day 1 we knew we could go to Alex for travel advice or any problem. (On a personal note, I will be forever grateful to him for helping me contact credit card companies after a pickpocket incident during a shore excursion in Colmar, France.)

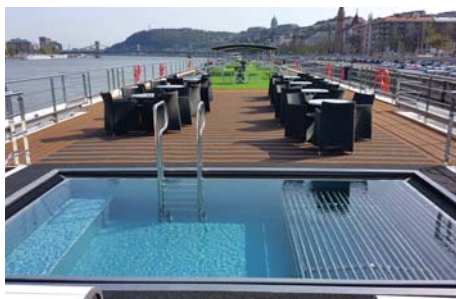
One morning Alex gave a brilliant presentation on "Germany and the Germans: A Brief Overview of 1,200 Years of Central European History." Another day his topic was Europe's rivers, canals and lock systems.

The Scenic Opal's crew, 53 in all, represented 14 nationalities, from Thai and Indonesian to Serbian and Polish. Our captain was Hungarian. The women staffing the reception desk always had smiles and couldn't wait to assist or answer a question.

Also smoothing the way was the stateroom's TV, an encyclopedia of information and entertainment options. We could watch television shows (I mostly caught the live BBC news-casts), choose from a wide selection of movies and music, view the daily schedule and lounge presentations, and bone up on the ports of call. A keyboard even let us use the screen as a computer.

With high-tech gadgetry, an all-inclusive approach and plenty of space to unwind, Scenic has thought of everything to ensure a worry-free journey on the rivers of Europe. ■

WWW.SCENICUSA.COM





Disney Cruise Line's newest ship is a Wish come true

by Daniel Smajovits

Evoking all the feelings that come to mind when one thinks of Disney, there is no more appropriate name for Disney Cruise Line's newest ship than the Wish – and much like its namesake, the onboard experience makes every passenger's wish come true.

Sailing from Port Canaveral, Florida, the Disney Wish encompasses all the latest in the Disney universe with its patented attention to detail that for both adults and children, transforms fantasies into reality.

On-Board Experience

As a family with two small children, the Disney cruising experience and expectations for our family is vastly different than one with older children or for couples traveling solo. Regardless of the size or age of your party, Disney ensures a special on-board experience for everyone to enjoy.

For families with children, the magic of the Disney Wish begins as soon as you step aboard via the Grand Hall, where true to theme, children are greeted with their own wishing wand and above their heads,

Disney Princesses line the balcony welcoming all.

As childcare is a primary concern for parents, Disney provides a few options for children of all ages. The It's a Small World nursery welcomes babies as of six months to children three years old, while the Disney Oceaneer Club will entertain children until the age of 12. The latter features multiple themes, ensuring to pique the imagination of all. From fairy tales to Star Wars, while parents enjoy a few calm hours basking in



the Caribbean sun, your children are safe and sound - spending time with Cinderella, Iron Man or R2D2 only a few decks away.

As part of the fun of a Disney cruise is to experience the magic as a family, the Wish offers several on-board attractions that allow parents and children to dive into the movies together. From the Star Wars Universe, where you can step into an interactive high-tech cargo bay with Rey and Chewbacca to the Disney Imagineering Lab, where via hands-on activities, your children can see how the Disney magic comes to life – the Wish provides one-of-a-kind experiences at sea for young and old.

Yet, perhaps the most unique aspect of the Wish is the Disney Uncharted Adventure, the first-ever interactive game at sea played via the Disney Cruise Navigator app. Guests create their own avatars and then participate in themed journeys throughout the ship. True to form, the game is truly immersive with augmented reality and special effects and takes your on-board experience to an entirely new level.

If it's thrill seeking you're after, Disney has dubbed the AquaMouse water coaster as the first Disney attraction at sea where the two-seat ride navigates 760 feet of tubes which wind around the ship's top deck, providing incredible views, a show and over 60 water features.

Once the day has come to a close, as with all Disney sailings, the entertainment is family-friendly and echoes the best of Broadway. Both The Little Mermaid and Disney Seas the Adventure made its debut on board the Disney Wish, along with a reimagined version of Aladdin. Furthermore, two theatres consistently play first-run movies, and the Luna entertainment venue is home to live music, comedy and family game shows.

For adults, the Disney Wish offers the adult-only Quiet Cove complete with an infinity pool, bar and poolside lounge for a serene getaway. However, once the kids are asleep, the piece de resistance is the Star Wars Hyperspace Lounge.

The Hyperspace Lounge made headlines

for both its theme and for having the most expensive drink in the galaxy, The Kaiburr Crystal. Priced at \$5,000, the Kaiburr Crystal is a drink, but also an experience – to be expected for that price tag.

Guests are presented with four silver-plated glasses filled with a cocktail made of Camus Cognac, Yuzu, Kumquat, Grand Marnier Quintessence, one shot of Pappy Van Winkle 23 Year Reserve Bourbon, one shot of Taylor's Kingsman Edition Very Old Tawny Port and one shot of Watenshi gin. Additionally, the buyer receives a gift-bag with a water bottle and backpack, while their cabin is decorated in a Hyperspace-theme, complemented by a bottle of Sparkling Wine from Skywalker Ranch. Additionally, the purchaser also receives a voucher for 4 people to visit the Skywalker Ranch itself, which is normally closed to the public.

Designed to look like a star cruiser, you can experience Hyperspace Lounge as a family during the day, but it becomes adults only as of 9 PM. Due to the popularity, visits are limited to 45 minutes, which is plenty of time to grab a reasonably priced drink and soak in the atmosphere.

Dining

Guests on the Wish have the opportunity to rotate between three specialty quality dining venues, with zero surcharges, while keeping the same waitstaff each night.

While the warmth of the Caribbean might be just outside your window, the Wish is home to the world's first Frozen-theme theatrical dining experience, where you can experience the Kingdom of Arendelle and dine on Norwegian-inspired cuisine with its most famous residents: Queen Anna, Kristoff, Elsa and Olaf. The restaurant allows you to be seated around a centre-stage where the Frozen story comes to life. For those familiar with Frozen, ensure you come with an appetite as Oaken is the one preparing your meal.

On your second night, not to be outdone by Arendelle, Ant-Man and the Wasp showcase Quantum technology in a nod to the



latest installment of the Marvel Cinematic Universe, at the Worlds of Marvel restaurant. Guests play an active role in the experience while dining on dishes inspired by the superheroes from throughout the Marvel universe.

The third stop of your rotation is the 1923 restaurant where guests enjoy a diverse menu inspired by Disney's Californian heritage, featuring local ingredients native to that evening's theme.

As with all Disney cruises, a casual dining experience is offered via the Marceline Market, named for Walt Disney's early childhood hometown. The market features 10 unique food stalls inspired by films such as Tangled, Ratatouille and Zootopia. Additionally, quick bites, such as barbecue, pizza and ice cream can be found at the Mickey and Friends Festival of Foods.

Staterooms

As the newest Disney ship, each stateroom stays true to the Disney theme in a modern and welcoming environment. Guests can choose from four options: Concierge (the most luxurious), Verandah (balcony), Oceanview (porthole) and Inside cabins. All rooms are designed with families in mind and regardless of your choice, the Disney magic is felt inside each and every cabin.

Itinerary

The Disney Wish is currently sailing to the Bahamas and Castaway Cay (Disney's Private Island) for three-and four-night cruises. ■

[HTTPS://DISNEYCRUISE.DISNEY.GO.COM](https://disneycruise.disney.go.com)



Argentina: The Ultimate Destination for Cruising Enthusiasts

by Olivia Liveng



Viking Expedition Ship in Antarctica

With its vast coastline stretching over 4,800 kilometers and encompassing a wide array of natural wonders, Argentina offers an unparalleled opportunity for travelers to embark on an extraordinary cruise adventure. When it comes to unforgettable cruising experiences, few destinations can rival the breathtaking beauty and diverse landscapes of Argentina. From exploring remote glaciers to discovering vibrant cities and charming coastal towns, here are several reasons Argentina stands out as the best destination for cruising enthusiasts.

What to see on a cruise from Argentina

Glaciers and Wildlife

One of Argentina's most iconic attractions is the awe-inspiring Perito Moreno Glacier in Los Glaciares National Park. Embarking on a cruise through the Patagonian fjords allows you to witness the majesty of this colossal ice formation. The vibrant blue hues and thunderous sounds of breaking off the glacier are truly mesmerizing. Cruising in the Beagle Channel presents opportunities to spot diverse wildlife, including penguins, seals, and various bird species.

Ushuaia: The End of the World

As the southernmost city in the world, Ushuaia serves as the gateway to Antarctica and the southernmost point of any cruise itinerary. This charming city boasts breathtaking landscapes, including snow-capped mountains and pristine forests. Cruising from Ushuaia provides an extraordinary chance to explore the stunning Tierra del Fuego archipelago, navigate the famous Drake Passage, and witness incredible marine life, such as whales and albatrosses. For those seeking a once-in-a-lifetime adventure, embarking on an Antarctic expedition cruise from Ushuaia is an experience like no other.

Vibrant Coastal Cities

Argentina's coastal cities are rich in culture, history, and vibrant energy. Buenos Aires, the country's capital, is a must-visit destination known for its European-inspired architecture, tango music and dance, and world-class cuisine. Cruising along the River Plate allows you to uniquely witness the city's iconic landmarks. In addition to Buenos Aires, other coastal towns like Mar del Plata and Puerto Madryn offer a mix of stunning beaches, diverse wildlife, and charming seaside towns that showcase Argentina's coastal culture and hospitality.

The Falkland Islands

A cruise around Argentina's coastline often includes a stop at the Falkland Islands. These remote islands are a paradise for birdwatchers and nature enthusiasts. They offer exceptional opportunities for wildlife photography and observing rare and endangered species. Exploring the Falkland Islands is a highlight of any cruise itinerary in Argentina and provides a unique insight into the region's natural biodiversity.

Cultural Immersion

Embarking on a cruise in Argentina allows you to immerse yourself in the country's rich cultural heritage. From traditional dances like the tango to the gaucho lifestyle in the Pampas region, you can witness and participate in authentic cultural experiences. Many cruise itineraries also include visits to historic sites and museums, offering a deeper understanding of Argentina's fascinating history and diverse cultural influences.

Types of Antarctica cruises from Argentina

Expedition Cruises

Many companies specialize in expedition cruises to Antarctica, offering an immersive and educational experience. These cruises allow passengers to explore and learn about Antarctica's unique ecosystems, wildlife, and history. Expert guides and naturalists are typically present on board to give lectures, workshops, and guidance during excursions.

Luxury Cruises

Luxury cruise companies also offer voyages to Antarctica, providing a more upscale and comfortable experience. These cruises often feature spacious and well-appointed cabins, gourmet dining options, and amenities like spas, lounges, and theaters. While luxury cruises still provide wildlife viewing and exploration opportunities, they may also emphasize relaxation and a high level of personalized service.

Activities and Excursions

Regardless of the cruise company, voyages to Antarctica typically include various activities and excursions. These can consist of Zodiac boat tours, allowing passengers to get closer to wildlife and explore remote areas and hiking opportunities on designated landing sites. Some cruises offer additional activities such as kayaking, snowshoeing, or even camping on the ice.

Wildlife Encounters

Antarctica is known for its incredible wildlife, including penguins, seals, whales, and various bird species. Cruises from Argentina to Antarctica often focus on allowing passengers to observe and interact with these animals in their natural habitats. The actual wildlife sightings and encounters can vary depending on the time of year and the specific itinerary.

The logistics of a cruise from Argentina
Best Time To Cruise From Argentina: The best

time of year to cruise from Argentina to Antarctica typically falls within the Antarctic summer season, from late November to early March.

Itineraries

The itineraries for cruises to Antarctica from Argentina can vary in duration and destinations visited. Common routes include the Antarctic Peninsula, which offers stunning landscapes, abundant wildlife, and visits to South Georgia and the Falkland Islands. Some longer voyages may consist of stops at research stations, providing insights into scientific research and the challenges of living in this remote region.

When planning a cruise to Antarctica, it's essential to consider factors such as the cruise company's reputation, vessel size and amenities, comfort level, itinerary details, and budget. Researching and comparing different companies and offerings will help you find the best voyage with your preferences and expectations.

Cruising Companies That Offer Sailings To Argentina

Several cruising companies offer voyages from Argentina to Antarctica, each providing unique experiences and itineraries. Here are some notable companies and an overview of what their travels are like Viking, Quark Expeditions, Hurtigruten, Silversea Expeditions, and, Ponat.

It's advisable to research and compare the offerings of different cruise companies to choose the one that best aligns with your preferences, budget, and desired level of comfort and luxury.

Argentina's vast coastline and diverse landscapes make it an ideal destination for cruising enthusiasts seeking unparalleled beauty and unique experiences. From the awe-inspiring glaciers of Patagonia to the vibrant cities and charming coastal towns, Argentina offers a wealth of attractions for travelers to explore. Whether you're captivated by nature's wonders, cultural immersion, or seeking a once-in-a-lifetime adventure in Antarctica, cruising in Argentina is an experience that promises to leave an indelible mark on your memory. Discover the magic of Argentina's coastal gems as you make your way to the end of the world.

ARGENTINA. TRAVEL





New York City: The Arlo Midtown

by Alexandra Cohen

During my recent visit to New York City with a friend, we stayed at Arlo Midtown, a two-year-old hotel property located right between Times Square and the Hudson Yards, on 38th street and 9th avenue. If the hotel name sounds familiar to you, perhaps that is because Arlo Hotels is an independent, four-star lifestyle hotel brand, with two other locations in New York City, two in Miami, and the newest property having just opened in Chicago. Featuring 489 guest rooms and suites, Arlo Midtown also features a modern-looking lobby bathed in greenery, with a coffee shop and plenty of comfortable, cushioned seating.

While the hotel has six different room types available for all travelers, my friend and I stayed in a King room on the 20th floor, which featured an incredibly comfortable bed, a view of nearby skyscrapers, and calming colour palettes of white, grey, and light blue. One of the room's highlights was a comfortable window bench, which you will find in most of the hotel's rooms. Rooms are also equipped with bedside wireless charging stations, Bluetooth radios, 55" LED TVs, and complimentary WiFi. The bathroom includes a glass-enclosed shower and softly backlit bathroom mirrors.

Another hotel highlight is the rooftop, where you can soak up some beautiful panoramic views of the city, including the Empire State Building, from 26 stories as you socialize with friends, mingle with colleagues, or celebrate with family over craft beers, fine wines, creative cocktails, and light bites.

The hotel's business features include a variety of flexible meeting and event spaces, with seven venues offering a total of 7,334 square feet of meeting space spanning across three floors. The hotel's leisure facilities include a state-of-the-art fitness facility, outfitted with traditional weights and cardio equipment, in addition to Peloton bikes, an Interactive Fitness Mirror, a yoga studio, and more. ■

WWW.ARLOHOTELS.COM/ARLO-MIDTOWN



The Phoenicia Malta

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

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

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

Iniala Harbour House & Residences

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



Iniala Harbour House & Residences



Courtyard Washington, D.C. Dupont Circle

by Randy Mink

A sparkling new addition to a well-established residential street in one of Washington, D.C.'s liveliest neighborhoods made a perfect base of operations for my recent trip to the capital city. The location—close to the commercial activity of Connecticut Avenue, Dupont Circle Metro station and Embassy Row—could not have been better. The White House was just a 20-minute walk away.

Marriott's 10-story Courtyard Washington, D.C. Dupont Circle lies on a quiet, well-lit block of N Street NW, a street lined with turn-of-the-20th-century townhouses, some of them now law offices or restaurants. On pleasant days, the windows of the lobby lounge open onto the sidewalk plantings, letting the charm of the neighborhood waft in.

The 143-room hotel, which opened in early 2022, is tucked between the Hotel Tabard Inn, a relic of the past where guests sip drinks before a fireplace in a cozy, wood-paneled bar, and Embassy of the Federated States of Micronesia. The environs, in fact, abound with foreign governments' embassies, many of them occupying opulent mansions dating back to the days when Dupont Circle was the preferred address of the elite. Today the eclectic mix of clubs, restaurants, offbeat shops, coffeehouses and bookstores make the neighborhood diverse and a bit funky.

The Courtyard's convivial lobby lounge, with its tables, booths and five-stool bar, functions as a social gathering spot, workspace for laptop users and restaurant called The Bistro. After a busy day of sightseeing, the room pro-

vides an inviting place to unwind over drinks and "Social Snacks" like chicken wings, meatballs, quesadillas and Margherita flatbread.

Courtyard guest rooms, accented with abstract art and decorated in shades of gray, feature minimalist design, contemporary flair and tech-savvy touches. I liked the long desk facing N Street and the oversized chair on rollers. But perhaps the best feature was the bright, white bathroom with a walk-in shower and huge circular mirror set in a ring of light.

Other in-room amenities included free Wi-Fi, an abundance of outlets for devices, a refrigerator, safe, coffeemaker and 55" HDTV. There's a 24-hour fitness center in the basement.

Dupont Circle, a tree-shaded traffic island where Connecticut, New Hampshire and Massachusetts avenues meet, is a great spot to sit on a bench and people-watch. In the middle rises a white marble fountain honoring Rear Admiral Samuel Francis du Pont, a Mexican-American War veteran and Civil War naval hero.

For a peek into the diplomatic side of Washington, it's fun to walk north along Massachusetts Avenue NW, known as Embassy Row, and see how many embassies and ambassador's residences you can spot. A statue of Winston Churchill outside the British Embassy stands across the street from one of Nelson Mandela at the South African Embassy.

The vibrant neighborhood is a window on the world in the most cosmopolitan part of town. Guests of the Courtyard Washington, D.C. Dupont Circle can rest assured they're in good company and moving about in the right circles. ■

WWW.MARRIOTT.COM



Puntacana Resort & Club - *Tropical Paradise Found*



Accommodations

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

The Estates

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



Golf

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

Activities & Spa

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

Dining

Puntacana Resort & Club is home to 6 world class eateries with an indigenously delectable cuisine. Tucked inside Tortuga Bay, the AAA Four Diamond awarded Bamboo blends modern cuisine with Mediterranean influences. Specializing in local seafood, The AAA Three Diamond Award La Yola is located at the Marina. At La Cana Golf & Beach Club is The Grill, an American style grill offering views of the sea. The Westin Puntacana Resort & Club provides a variety of restaurants and bars from Ananí to 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



Stay and Play in the Sonoran Desert at Hacienda del Sol, Tucson

by Jennifer Merrick

The properties that enamor me the most are the ones that pay homage to their surroundings. Resorts that wouldn't belong anywhere else in the world but where they are, like the Hacienda del Sol, located just outside Tucson.

Relaxing on my room's balcony, I gazed at the Santa Catalina Mountains in the distance and admired the Saguaro cactus standing majestically in front of me. The brilliant blues of the sky, pink hues of the desert and green of the cacti were reflected in the property's Spanish Revival décor. The colourful ceramic tiles, pottery, fountains and artsy sculptures complemented the extensive gardens with a mixture of native cacti, flowers and citrus trees. Even the resort's history fit its Sonoran Desert locale.

So what is its history?

Built in 1929 as a private girls' finishing school, it was where high-society families sent their daughters to be taught etiquette, art and horseback riding. In the 1940s, the school

was converted to a guest ranch and hotel, where Hollywood stars like Spencer Tracey, Katherine Hepburn, John Wayne and Clark Gable frequently stayed. The property has retained its historical charm and character, and many of the original structures still stand today, but it has been restored, renovated and expanded by its current owners and has all the modern comforts and amenities you would expect from a luxury resort.

And just what are the amenities?

Lounge lizards will appreciate the two outdoor heated pools and jacuzzi, thoughtfully designed with fire pits for cooler nights and views of the surrounding nature. Energizer bunnies can enjoy the fitness center, tennis courts and hiking trails on the resort's 34 acres and the whole menagerie can indulge in a massage or facial at the full-service spa. Throughout the property, you'll find courtyards, arched doorways, bubbling fountains, and comfortable seating areas, all surrounded by blooming gardens. Inside, relax by the hand-painted fireplace in the historic main building or read a book in the cozy library.

The two on-site restaurants live up to Tucson's foodie reputation as a UNESCO-recognized city of gastronomy. Enjoy upscale dining at *The Grill*, paired with one of their over 800 wines or partake in more casual options on the outdoor patio at *Terraza*. Live jazz, classical guitar and piano performances in the evening are a soothing accompaniment to its tapas and cocktails.

In-room amenities include refrigerators, microwaves, spacious bathrooms, comfy bathrobes and luxe toiletries.

Tell me more about the rooms.

Their 56 rooms vary in layout and size from historic guest rooms to the Tracy-Hepburn 'Casita', a 1,500 square-foot unit where Spencer Tracy and Katherine Hepburn used to stay. This 1,500 square-foot unit features two bedrooms, two patios and a fireplace. All of their most-recently added units include extra-large bathrooms, sitting areas and patios or balconies with a view.

Anything else?

Art is everywhere on this property from quirky sculptures and brightly coloured ceramics to paintings and Native American artifacts. Many of the pieces are created by local artists, reflecting the cultural heritage and artistic traditions of the American Southwest. This diverse collection, like the resort, wouldn't belong anywhere in the world but in the Tucson Desert. ■

WWW.HACIENDADELSOL.COM





Expect the Unexpected: Falcon's Resort by Melia, Punta Cana

by Jennifer Merrick

A welcome treat in your room is always a nice touch at a resort, perhaps some chocolates, a cheeseboard or even a bottle of bubbly. But in my room at the Falcon's Resort by Melia, along with some lovely macarons, was a more unusual gift – a caricature of myself. Drawn in stealth by a local artist as I was checking in, it was a flattering depiction, a 2.0 version of myself with not a character line or flaw to be found.

It was the first of many pleasant surprises that exceeded my expectations at this all-inclusive, five-star resort. It turned out that this surprise element was what the resort was striving for in its 'resortainment' offerings.

"It's part of the attraction," said Christelle Luchini, hotel director and customer experience expert. "We want guests to experience the 'wow factor' and to expect the unexpected." They certainly succeeded, and 'wow' was exactly the word I used repeatedly during my stay. Here's why:



Accommodation: Every room option at the resort was a luxury suite, and all of its 432 units were impeccably styled. My Beyond Master Suite Swim-Up oversized suite had a dining room, living area, master bedroom, and spacious bathroom with rain shower and soaker tub. The mini bar had more choices normally offered with cartons of milk, coconut water and wine spritzer among the offerings. The espresso maker was a much-appreciated amenity that quickly brewed up rich-tasting cups of java. But the most impressive wow factor was the suite's outdoor patio, featuring a comfortable sofa in its sitting area, lounge chairs, cabana and jacuzzi, all within steps to the outdoor pool.

Bavaro Beach: A scenic walk or short golf cart ride away lie one of the best beaches in the world. Bavaro's postcard-perfect stretch of white-sand shoreline and turquoise waters is recognized by UNESCO as one of the three most beautiful beaches in the world. Lounge chairs reserved for hotel guests, an open-air restaurant and a beachside bar created the idyllic sun-drenched ambiance for beach days.

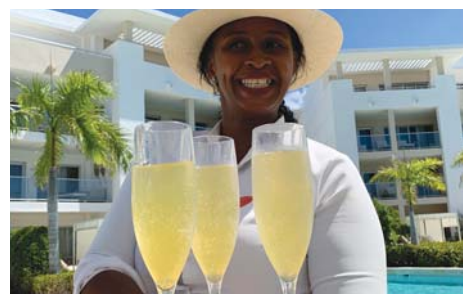
Activities Galore: Day and night, kids and adults, active and chill activity options were all covered with a roster that included yoga, aqua fitness, rum tasting, live music and dance lessons for adults. Kids had their own activities though it would be hard to get them out of the *BLAST Water Park* with its slides. All fun, but the true wow moment came with a visit to the theme park next door.

Katmandu Park: Resort stays include passes to this newly opened attraction, which has a partnership with the resort. I thought this was a nice bonus and imagined that an amusement park on a small Caribbean Island might have a few roller coasters, perhaps a Ferris wheel and some carnival games. Boy, was I mistaken. This 100-million-dollar park had immersive and interactive rides, which were on par with what you'd find in Orlando.

Non-tech adventures were equally impressive and included Expedition Golf, a 36-hole mini-golf course designed to take golfers either up in the mountains or down in earth's caves, and High Point Adventures, a challenging, adrenaline-pumping rope climbing obstacle course.

Katmandu thoroughly immersed me in its steam-punk world of the hidden realms with an added island vibe of dance, drums and music. And it was the biggest surprise of many during a fabulous and fun stay. ■

WWW.MELIA.COM



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**.

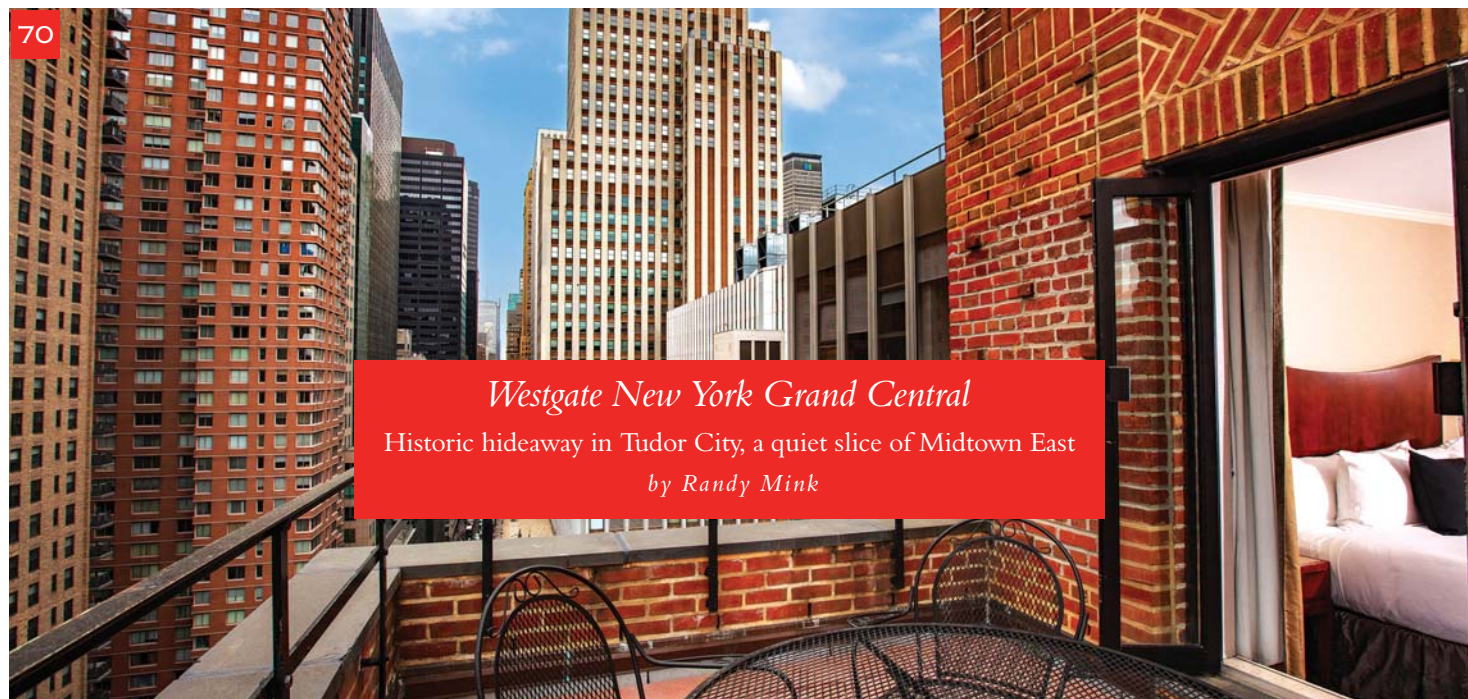


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Live Calendar



We don't normally associate the word "cozy" with New York City, but a snug feeling swept over me while making a new discovery on my recent trip there. I'm familiar with most neighborhoods in the borough of Manhattan but probably would not have stumbled across historic Tudor City had I not stayed at the newly renovated Westgate New York Grand Central.

Tucked in the Murray Hill district on Midtown Manhattan's eastern flank, Tudor City, a leafy residential oasis brimming with Old World charm and the architectural flourishes of high-rise buildings almost a century old, proved to be a great base of operations. Grand Central Terminal and the heart of tourist activity were short walks from my East 42nd Street hotel. United Nations Headquarters, an East River landmark, was just two blocks in the other direction.

The 500-room Westgate New York Grand Central occupies two red-brick towers in Tudor City, an ambitious development started in 1927. Designed to be a self-contained community, Tudor City was the first residential skyscraper neighborhood in the world. The Westgate originally was the Hotel Tudor and for many years a Hilton.

Westgate Resorts opened the hotel in 2018 and celebrated a grand reopening three years later. In a major makeover, the 20- and 17-story towers from 1927 were completely gutted, but original mouldings and outer windows with wrought-iron grids survive. There are 38 different room configurations, and 13 rooms have a private balcony or terrace.

The lobby's most striking features are artworks depicting glamorous women, including reproductions of iconic Gustav Klimt paintings. Most recognizable is the Klimt work popularly called *The Woman in Gold*, a portrait of Viennese socialite Adele Bloch-Bauer set against a field of gold, Byzantine-like mosaics. The painting was the subject of *Woman in Gold*, a 2015 movie starring Helen Mirren and Ryan Reynolds.

The rustic Tudor City Tavern, with its exposed brick walls and columns, serves as the hotel's social center and breakfast room. Signature cocktails include *Moon Over Manhattan*, a blend of vodka, elderflower liqueur and white cranberry juice garnished with an edible orchid frozen inside an ice sphere.

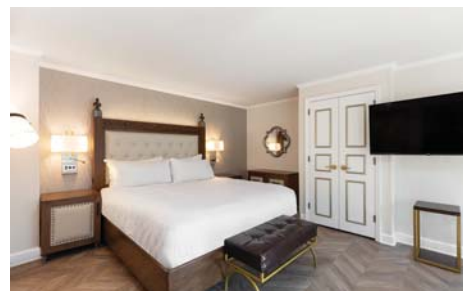
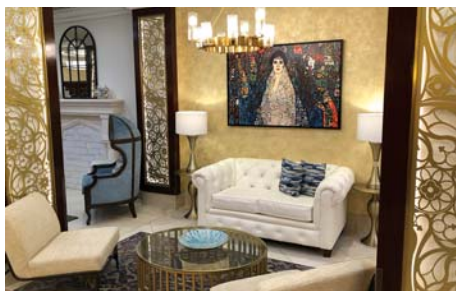
Guest room amenities include a jumbo LED TV, mini refrigerator, laptop-size safe and coffee maker. Sparkling bathrooms feature a large, backlit LED mirror, quartz vanity and magnifying makeup mirror.

Triple-pane windows keep out much of the traffic noise, and they open for fresh air. I had views of balconies, terrace gardens and penthouses of vintage Tudor City buildings accented with the terra cotta medallions, limestone window trim and castellated rooftop turrets typical of those found throughout the neighborhood. It was like waking up to merry olde England or a university campus in Collegiate Gothic style. Some rooms afford views of the East River.

After a busy day of Manhattan sightseeing, it's comforting to know a good night's sleep awaits at the Westgate New York Grand Central in peaceful Tudor City.

A member of Historic Hotels of America, the hotel is one of 22 U.S. properties of Westgate Resorts. ■

WWW.WESTGATENYC.COM





River Rock Resort Really Rocks

by Susan Campbell

I first noticed River Rock Resort on my way to Vancouver airport via the SkyTrain the Bridgeport Skytrain Station from the downtown port a few years back. It caught my eye since it was directly attached to the tracks, and the sign also said 'casino', so that piqued my interest, too. So, we decided to stay there a night on the way back home from a family trip to Victoria. And though the stay was very brief, we packed a lot into the hours we did have and intend to plan a longer return visit to enjoy all this very cool resort has to offer another time.

Passing from the SkyTrain, it appears like one modern tower hotel, but there's a whole lot more than meets the eye. It's an entire accommodation oasis, a multi-faceted entertainment complex, and a massive meeting, convention, and reception venue, plus a

huge 24/7 casino. There are two stand alone tower wings separated by a driveway yet connected by a skybridge. The tower directly attached to the SkyTrain is called The Hotel and it has 193 standard contemporary rooms with a choice of king or two queen beds, its own reception, and a standalone classy Chinese food emporium the Sea Harbour Restaurant featuring authentic Cantonese specialties. (Don't miss the dim sum there.) Across the street is the larger complex with the casino attached called The Resort. It is an all-suite hotel of 203 rooms cresting a marina on the Fraser River with a massive, landscaped lawn spilling down to the water, that is where we stayed. Though our suite was spacious and comfortable facing the marina, and the plush bedding was divine, if you really want to go upscale, book their Presidential Suite which has its own fireplace and a games room with a pool table, too!

Food and beverage options abound, though we did not partake of their comprehensive buffet which is heavy on fresh seafood offerings at night, we did enjoy some delicious tapas and cocktails in the outdoor part of their Curves lobby restaurant and some great snacks in the casino's "food court" which offers choices of brick oven pizza, Asian noodles, and monster burgers. There

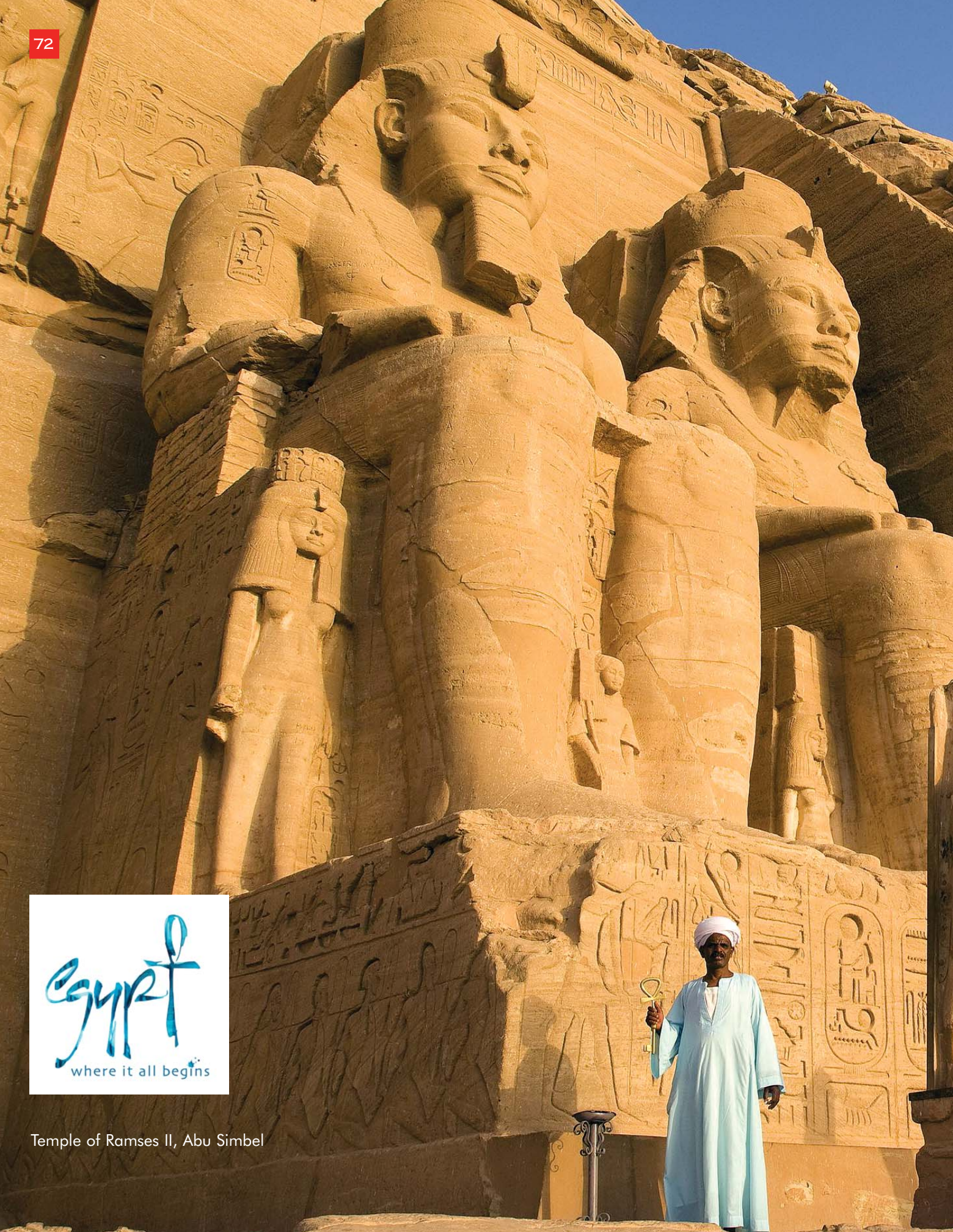
is also a Starbucks in the lobby and a well stocked mini mart with snacks to go. There is also a Show Theatre but there was nothing on that night, we preferred to stake out the casino anyway, a seemingly endless labyrinth of modern slot machines, we did not win any jackpots, but did have a great time.

Sadly, I did not have enough time to experience their piece de resistance, a glorious glassed-in tropical pool with a hot tub and a 70 ft. waterslide, or their on-site Spa, but that is top of the list for next trip. They also have a complimentary fitness centre on top of the pool with a great marina, view, too. We hopped the Skytrain directly from the hotel the next day, the trip to the airport was 7 minutes. Handy, indeed!

River Rock Resort is part of the I-Prefer rewards program, so sign up for free and rack up your points to get all kinds of cool upgrades and extras. ■

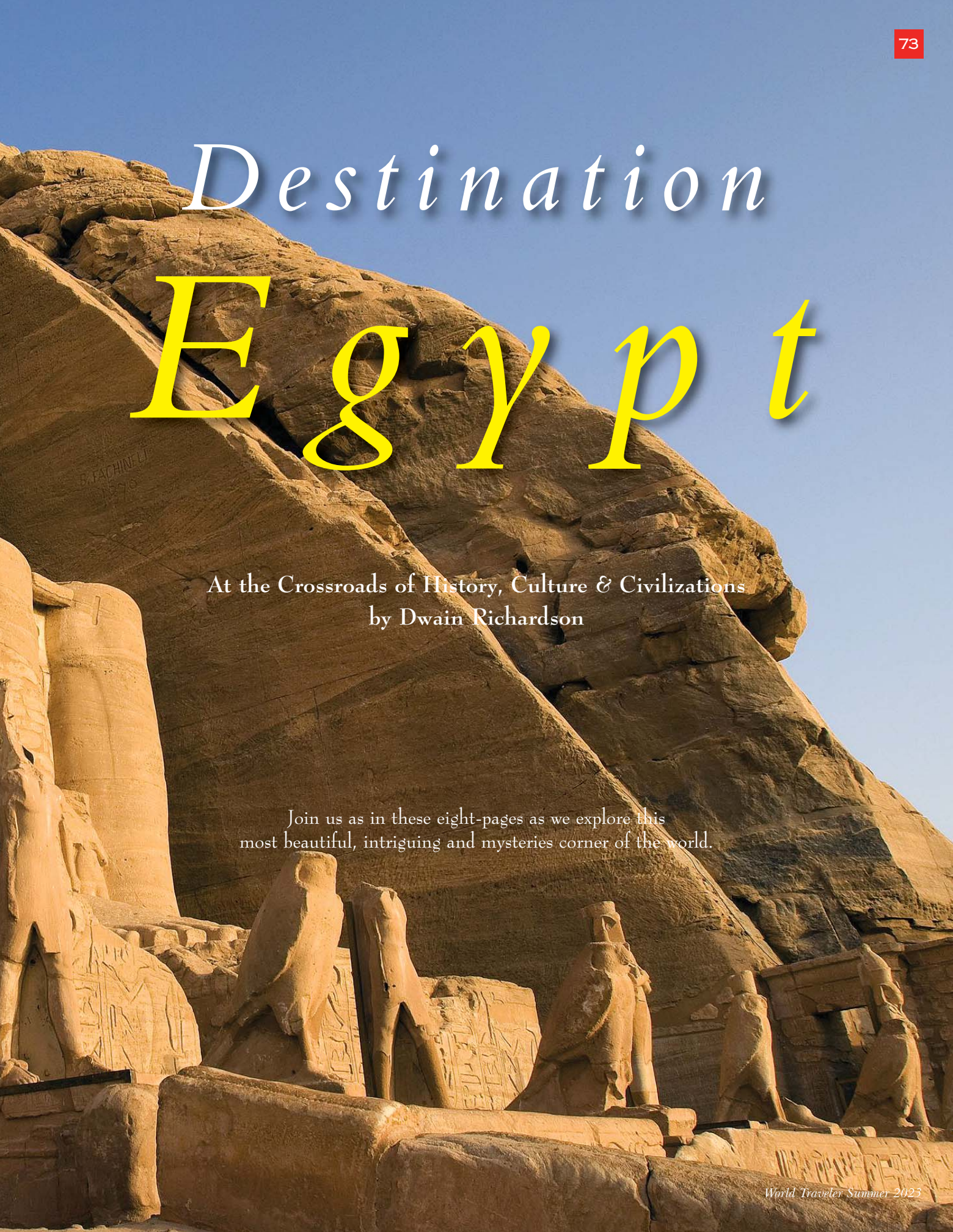
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Egypt
where it all begins

Temple of Ramses II, Abu Simbel



Destination Egypt

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

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



King Tutankhamun's Mask



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Four leading geological regions are pres-

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

CAIRO

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

Great Pyramid of Giza

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

Great Sphinx of Giza

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

Egyptian Museum of Antiquities



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



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

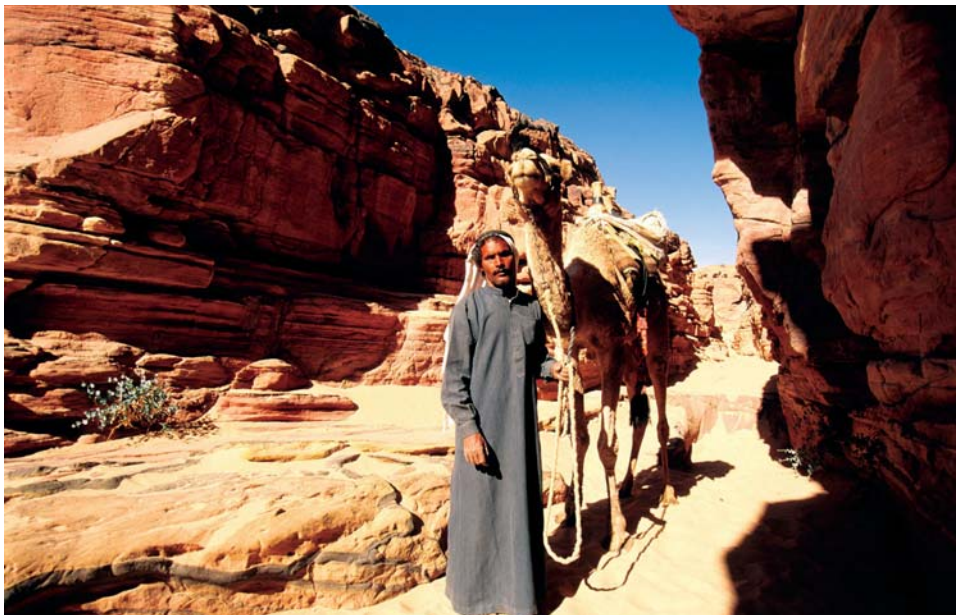
The Hanging Church

(St. Virgin Mary's Coptic Orthodox Church)

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

Khan el-Khalili

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



SINAI PENINSULA

Ras Muhammed National Park

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

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

St. Catherine's Monastery

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

Sharm-el-Sheikh

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

NILE RIVER

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

Luxor

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





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

Valley of the Kings

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

Karnak Temple Complex

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

Aswan

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

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

Abu Simbel Temples

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

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

THE WESTERN DESERT

Siwa Oasis

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

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

With respect to culture, Berber inhabitants

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

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

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

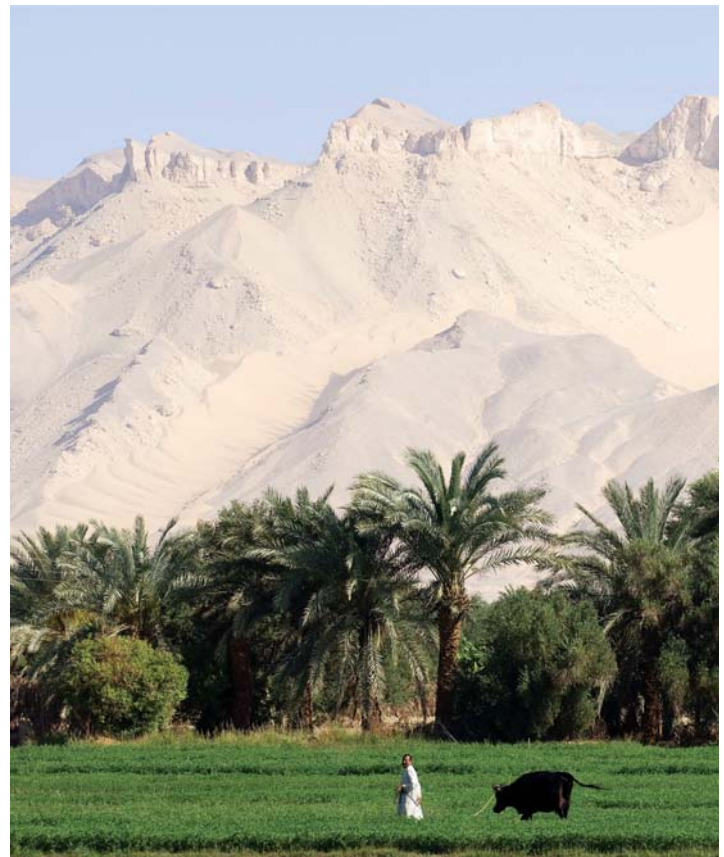
Mud-brick houses in Shali, an old town

Desert sand dunes south of Siwa

Siwa salt lake

Temple of the Oracle of the Amun

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Rodeo to Wine: A Perfect Lone Star State Road Trip Combo

by Jennifer Merrick

The excitement of the city or the tranquility of the countryside? A star-studded spectacle or a show of wildflowers? Revelling and relaxing are equally appealing on vacation. But on this Texan spring break road trip, we didn't have to choose. Houston and Fredericksburg hit the sweet spot with a perfect combo of energy and relaxation.

Houston, whose nicknames include Bayou City, Space City and H-Town, is the fourth largest city in the US. We had a blast exploring its rich multiculturalism, awesome culinary scene, stellar attractions and one of the biggest and most-anticipated events in all of Texas.

Let's rodeo!

"It's like a Super Bowl everyday," said Stacy

McKay, a volunteer at the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo, and explained that close to 250 million people visit during its three-week run.

"People from all walks of life pull out their cowboy boots and have fun."

It was a true spectacle, and though we didn't have cowboy boots, we certainly had fun. Highlights included seeing the iconic Texas Longhorn cattle, sipping vino and listening to live music at the Champion Wine Garden under the warm sunshine, noshing on carnival foods like deep-fried lasagna roll, and cheering on the bull riding cowboys, barrel racing cowgirls and even cowlkids as they hilariously endeavoured to ride a sheep. The evening ended with fireworks and a high-energy, big-name concert.

More than just barbecue

H-Town is one of the most ethnically diverse cities in the US, with the third-largest Hispanic population and the fifth-largest Asian community among American cities. Not only does the city's multicultural fabric create a dynamic and thriving cultural scene, but it's also reflected in the flavours of its culinary landscape. Yes, you can and should taste some smoky, melt-in-your-mouth, barbecue brisket and ribs, but you can also enjoy authentic Vietnamese pho, Mexican street food and fine dining in chef-driven restaurants.

We savoured some truly memorable meals: an exquisitely prepared and presented prix fixe lunch at Le Jardinier, located in the Museum of Fine Arts; delectable Southern cuisine at Lucille's; fresh seafood with a view of



Galveston Bay at Landry's Seafood on the Kemah Boardwalk; and a smorgasbord of tastes at POST Market. The latter is a 550,000 square-foot repurposed post office plant that has been transformed into a community hub with exhibits, workspaces, a concert venue and a food hall. We enjoyed our treats on the building's massive rooftop with a view of the city skyline at sunset.

Ride the Bayou

A captivating way to explore Bayou City and the bayou itself is on a bicycle tour. Buffalo Bayou Park is a 180-acre green space that has trails for walking and biking, rivers for kayaking and numerous art installations to admire. As we pedaled down into the ravine our guide, Brian Kondrach, pointed out sights like Monumental Moments, where four-foot-tall words exhorting us to explore and reflect sat among a towering circle of oak trees; Jaume Plensa's Tolerance installation with sculptures representing the seven continents, and even a bat colony. Although we couldn't see the nocturnal flying mammals, we could certainly smell them. At dusk, hundreds of Mexican free-tailed bats take to the sky from under the bridge, putting on an extraordinary batty spectacle.

Houston, we have no problem

We came to understand why the cosmos lives in the hearts of Space City's residents when we visited the NASA Johnson Space Center. The exhibits here were the real deal, so we could touch a piece of moon rock, explore a shuttle-carrying 747 aircraft and view the Mission Operations Control Room 2, where ground control planned and executed the Apollo missions. The 1,620-acre complex featured more than 400 space artifacts and offered experiences and programs from tram tours to breakfast with an astronaut and behind-the-scenes VIP experiences.

Fields of blue

After the energy of Houston, it was time to hit the road for a more tranquil retreat, and so we drove four hours west to the town of Fredericksburg in Texas Hill Country. As we got closer, the landscape changed and blankets of wildflowers appeared, with the bluebonnet (the Texas state flower) stealing the show. I obviously wasn't the only one captivat-

ed by the sea of indigo blue blooms as vehicles had pulled over on the side of the road, where families, and even Harley-Davidson motorcyclists, were snapping pictures.

Willkommen in Fredericksburg

The town's welcome sign is in both German and English, reflecting the town's heritage. German immigrants, who arrived in the mid-nineteenth century, would work the land during the week and come into town on Sundays for church, shopping and socializing. Main Street would have looked very much the same as it does today with limestone buildings, a marketplace and the Vereins Kirche (United Church). This octagonal building looked like it was lifted out of a small German town and plucked down in the middle of Texas. We learned more about this group of immigrants who crossed the ocean to forge new lives for themselves inside the Vereins Kirche and at Pioneer Museum.

We tasted the town's heritage, too, at Der Lindenbaum, a family-owned eatery that served up authentic Deutschland fare and beverages. After a hearty meal of schnitzel and beef salad in this historic, cozy restaurant, we strolled down Main Street perusing the local specialty stores, candy shops, wine tasting rooms and art galleries.

It's wine o'clock

Fredericksburg is the second most visited wine region in the US after Napa, with over 50 wineries dotting its rolling hills. We set off in style with locally-owned Reserve Tours to visit a few of them.

Signor Vineyards was our first stop and as we alighted from our limo, the first thing we noticed were the cultivated grounds and flowers on the property.

"It's a special place," said our waiter Jeff as we tasted the wines. "It feels as much like a garden as it does a winery."

He also explained why wine has exploded in this region, saying that it has a similar climate to Spain and that "the heat in Texas does amazing things."

Pedernales Cellars was next on our sipping agenda. Here, we lounged on the outdoor

patio in the shade of a beautiful oak, glass in hand, savouring both their Tempranillo wines and the views of the hilly fields.

Our last stop at Heath Winery had a completely different atmosphere with modern buildings and a sampling room with floor-to-ceiling windows and sleek counters with groups of happy tasters around them. Bubbly was their specialty, and they poured us sparkling rosés and limited-edition vintages paired with beautifully presented appetizers.

We toasted our fabulous day in Fredericksburg Wine Country and dreamed about staying and visiting the other 47 wineries, but our road trip was nearing the end.

Enchanting encounters

On the way out of town, we stopped at Enchanted Rock State Natural Area, where we hiked to the summit of the massive granite dome, admiring the alien-like rock formations and the panoramic view at the top. We said goodbye to Texas and a road trip that had transitioned from the vibrancy of the rodeo, multiculturalism, and space exploration in Houston to small-town tranquility, where people strolled hand in hand, bluebonnets bloomed and wineries invited us to slow down and enjoy.

Who needs to choose between excitement and relaxation on vacation when you can have it all with a Houston/Fredericksburg combo?

If you go: Air Canada offers non-stop flights to Houston from several Canadian cities. For accommodation, an excellent choice in Houston is Hotel Icon. This downtown landmark building with stately neoclassical architecture is now a luxury hotel conveniently located near downtown attractions and the Museum District. In Fredericksburg, the Hoffman Haus Bed and Breakfast offers luxury self-contained cabins with kitchen, living room, spacious bathroom and outside sitting area. It's ideally situated in a quiet enclave within walking distance to Main Street.

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Tunisia – A Country with a Heart of Gold!

Article and photography by Michael Morcos

Fourth time lucky? That sounds funny but if it was true, then I would be four times lucky to visit this incredibly beautiful and diverse country of Tunisia. Everything is always just fine in this Mediterranean paradise. The destinations and attractions are varied, going from the lush mountains by the sea in the north to the beautiful but arid climate of the Sahara Desert. As always, the food is fantastic, we always eat well in Tunisia with culinary delights that have influences from North Africa, the Middle East and even a hint of French gastronomy. And the people, they have a heart of gold, always polite and friendly.

Having already discovered the four corners of Tunisia, I would now retrace some of my favorite places and revisit many great sites and see if life has changed in a rapidly changing world. On this journey, I would stay mostly in the north and not far from the sea.

Hammamet

Hammamet has proven to be one of my all-time favorite seaside cities. With an eye on tourism, there is a historic fort, fascinating marina, opulent resorts on the sea and the compact but wonderful old medina. This is where a visitor can lose themselves in endless winding narrow allies with whitewashed build-

ings all along the way. And that is exactly what I did, admiring the atmosphere of locals in their everyday life. Looking for a break and with a growing appetite, we would have a great lunch at the well-known seafood specialty restaurant Le Barberousse.

Le Barbarossa, located on the ramparts of the old medina, offers a great dining experience with some local favorites and Mediterranean and Tunisian cuisine. The setting also offers a glimpse into the past of the city and is a wonderfully romantic spot overlooking the bay of Hammamet. My senses and my stomach were both filled to bursting!



Nabeul Ceramics

Years of perfecting their art has made this family run business a little gem. With so much pottery coming from industrial factories, it was refreshing to see how this place still produces simple works of art by loving, caring and talented hands. Just about anything made with clay can be found here on the two levels of their store. The basement is where the shaping, painting, and firing of the ceramics takes place. If you can, try to enjoy the demonstration that harkens back to simpler days.

Although I have bought many such items in the past, most of which still adorn by home and friends' places and still I could not resist adding to my collection. After all they were beautiful and all so affordable.

Kairouan

Kairouan is considered the fourth most important religious cities for Muslims after Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem. Here we would visit the Great Mosque of Kairouan, the Basins of the Aghlabids, and walk along the walls of the fort and experience local life at the souk.

I was taken away by the majestic Great Mosque, incredible detail in its architecture. Dating from the early ninth century, this masterpiece shares much with ancient Roman lighthouses, and is something to behold. It is also one of the highest structures around and offers a great view.

I am always taken aback in these historical locals by the feats of engineering and construction that stand the test of time. Here it's the impressive Aghlabid Basins, a massive feat of engineering built during the 9th century by the Aghlabid Dynasty. It has provided water for townspeople in Kairouan who would otherwise be in perpetual drought. It's considered the largest hydraulic installation of the Middle Ages.

The souk is a place of marvels and wonders. To fully appreciate it, put aside several hours to explore the boutiques that line the streets selling everything you could imagine. Filled with life, bright colors and a festive vibe, the shop keepers are helpful and a joy to deal with.

El Jem

The Amphitheatre of El Jem is the main draw in sleepy city, and their Roman coliseum is one of the best preserved in the world. I loved the visit here. What I can appreciate the most was that there was practically no one on site, this city being a little out of the way. We had this colossal space all to ourselves to explore and discover. This is a gem to any fan of ancient sites and well worth a half day visit.

Sousse

While in Sousse, a visit to the Archaeological Museum is a must. It has some of the best-preserved roman mosaics anywhere in the world. As in the other cities, a visit through history is in the offing while walking through the medina, the Great Mosque of Sousse, the Souk District, the Ribat and the Kasbah will round out your trip. A little further out the wonderful beaches of Port el Kantaoui with its white sands and blue waters and access to chic boutiques, golf courses and shoreside restaurants on the central Tunisian coast.

Tunis

As an international city, the capitol is the heartbeat of this great country. Tunis has it all, from its old quarters and small streets to grand boulevards, world class museums, exceptional cuisine, landmark buildings, souks, and markets. It deserves an article of its own, and this vibrant city should be a must for any Tunisian tour.

Sidi Bou Said

The best for last and a great place to end our tour. Sidi Bou Said is a small hilly town on the mediterranean and is popular with both the locals and visitors alike. Its laid-back atmosphere makes for a comfortable and relaxing trip. One could have a meal and refreshments at a number of establishments, but my favourite is the Cafe des Delices that overlooks the harbour and offers unbelievable sunsets. One visit to Sidi Bou Said is never enough just the same one visit to this beautiful country is only the start to many more lucky returns to the country with a heart of Gold! ■

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Peeling Back Layers of History in Florida's Ancient City

"Old" is the key word in tourist-friendly St. Augustine

by Randy Mink

As someone who likes to commune with the past, I'm always on the lookout for places filled with historical attractions and a leisurely yesteryear feel that takes me back in time. Happily, I just discovered a Florida coastal city where travelers can soak up history as well as sun.

St. Augustine, founded in 1565 by adventurers from Spain, is the United States' oldest European-settled city. Established much earlier than the better-known English colonies in Plymouth, Massachusetts, and Jamestown, Virginia, this compact town of 14,300 in

northeastern Florida boasts more than 60 historic sites, many of them within easy walking distance of each other in a 144-square-block historic district. You've got Spanish and British colonial trappings, pirate lore, maritime heritage, Gilded Age stories, even 1960s civil rights history.

Exploring narrow, brick-paved streets in the highly walkable central core, you'll come across the words "old," "oldest" and "ancient" more than a few times. Attractions include the Oldest House Museum Complex (a Spanish colonial dwelling from the early 1700s) and Oldest Wooden School House. Perhaps you'll pop into The Ancient Olive for olive oils and gourmet foods or Ancient City Brunch Bar for quiche and coffee. The oldest part of the well-preserved historic district is Old Town, a quiet neighborhood centered on Aviles Street, the oldest public street in the country.

Getting an overview of St. Augustine

The ideal way to get your bearings is a narrated 60-minute whirl on a Red Train Tours tram

or the hop-on, hop-off tram operated by Old Town Trolley Tours, which makes a 90-minute circuit with 22 stops. Or digest small bites of history while sampling St. Augustine's great culinary scene during a three-hour foodie adventure with The Tasting Tours. Horse-and-buggy jaunts also provide a good introduction to old St. Augustine.

To see the city from the water, consider an outing with St. Augustine Scenic Cruise, one of several operators offering boat tours of Florida's Historic Coast. The Black Raven pirate ship does daily cruises geared to chil-



dren, plus weekend evening trips for adults over 21.

A swashbuckling past

Castillo de San Marcos National Monument, the oldest structure in town, is the best-preserved example of a Spanish colonial fort in the continental U.S. and a prime spot to start your sightseeing. It reminded me of El Morro and San Cristobal fortresses in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

The imposing Castillo, with massive, diamond-shaped bastions at each corner and a moat on three sides, was built between 1672 and 1695 to protect St. Augustine from pirate raids and Spain's major rival, Great Britain, during a time when the Florida-Georgia-Carolina coastline was an explosive international battleground. It was needed to assure safe passage of Spanish galleons laden with sugar, tobacco, gold, silver and other treasures from Spain's possessions in the Caribbean. When Spain ceded Florida to Britain in 1763, the Castillo became Fort St. Mark, and as Fort Marion under American control was used as a military prison in the Seminole War of 1835-42, Civil War and Spanish-American War.

Castillo visitors enjoy clambering about the gun decks overlooking the city and Matanzas Bay, touring exhibit galleries in the casemates and listening to ranger talks. Cannon and musket demonstrations are given on weekends.

Those swashbuckling days also come alive at the St. Augustine Pirate & Treasure Museum, just across the road from the Castillo. Popular with kids and adults alike, the attraction counts more than 800 authentic pirate artifacts, including doubloons, pistols, tavern tankards, a genuine pirate treasure chest (said to be the only one left in the world) and one of only two remaining Jolly Roger flags that flew over ships. Exhibits shed light on torture techniques, famous pirate movies, and notorious real-life thieves like Captain Kidd, Blackbeard and Sir Francis Drake. Shiver me timbers!

Poking around St. George Street

The Colonial Quarter, a living history village with a working blacksmith shop, climbable



watchtower and cannon firings, neighbors the Pirate Museum and backs up against pedestrianized St. George Street. Along this cozy retail corridor, tourists drift from shop to shop, hunting for souvenirs and stopping for tasty treats— everything from crepes and pretzels to popcorn and ice cream.

Some might cringe at the area's commercialism, but I think it's a lot of fun. I even liked venerable Potter's Wax Museum on Orange Street. Housed in an 1886 drugstore, America's first wax museum (established 1949) gives tourists a chance to pose with kings and queens of England, U.S. presidents, Frankenstein, Marc Antony and Cleopatra, Beethoven and Mozart, Shakespeare and Britney Spears.

Columbia Restaurant, in the heart of St. George Street, offers one of St. Augustine's premier dining experiences. Decorated with Spanish artwork, hand-painted tiles, wrought iron and black-and-white family photos, the Columbia, one of seven Florida locations owned a fifth-generation, family-owned company, specializes in Spanish/Cuban cuisine. Think tapas, Cuban sandwiches, Cuban black bean soup, gazpacho Andalusia and paella a la Valencia.

One can make a meal out of the Columbia's signature salad. Tossed tableside with a garlic dressing (sold in the gift shop), Columbia's Original "1905" Salad is a succulent symphony of iceberg lettuce, julienne of baked ham and Swiss cheese, tomatoes, olives, grated Romano cheese, olive oil and Worcestershire sauce. Warm Cuban bread with salted whipped butter provides the perfect complement. (The salad is named for the year the original Columbia, Florida's oldest restaurant, opened in the Ybor City district of Tampa.)

Origins of St. Augustine

Fountain of Youth Archaeological Park occupies the approximate site where Spanish explorer Juan Ponce de Leon came ashore in 1513 and named it La Florida (Land of Flowers). It wasn't until 1565 that the Spanish colony of St. Augustine was established there, then a Timucuan Indian settlement.

On landscaped grounds populated by free-roaming peacocks, park visitors see replicas of an Indian village and a 1587 mission church. In the 60-year-old springhouse, they drink from the source from which Ponce de Leon replenished his ship's water supply, a spring marketed to suggest the youth-giving fountain that legend says he sought. The souvenir store sells bottles of spring water (just don't expect eternal life).

Monuments to the Gilded Age

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My favorite historical landmarks in St. Augustine are those from the Gilded Age, the glittering high-society days of the late 19th century. Members of the U.S. East Coast elite spent their winters at the palatial Hotel Ponce de Leon, a gem of Spanish Renaissance Revival architecture built in 1888 by oil tycoon and railway magnate Henry Flagler, the man often considered the Father of Modern Florida.

Tours of the former hotel, now the main building of Flagler College, are climaxed by a peek at the student dining hall, a cavernous room with wooden Corinthian columns, carved oak and mahogany, lavish murals, music balconies where bands once entertained hotel guests, and the world's largest collection of Tiffany stained-glass windows—79 panes—in their original location. The building's exterior, a mesmerizing medley of spires, turrets, towers, cupolas and red-tile roofs accented by the rotunda's big fat dome, is equally as magnificent. What a place to go to college!

Across the street from the college stands another former Flagler-built playground for the rich, built in the same architectural style as the Ponce de Leon. The old Alcazar Hotel now houses City Hall and the Lightner Museum's eclectic collection of antiques and curiosities, from vintage toasters to posh furnishings that once graced Chicago mansions. Guests of the Ponce de Leon walked over to the Alcazar to use the bowling alley, steam rooms and world's largest indoor swimming pool. The pool's deep end now is Cafe Alcazar, a grand setting for lunch.

To immerse themselves in the Gilded Age, present-day vacationers can stay overnight in a third Old World-inspired hotel sharing the intersection with the Lightner Museum and Flagler College. The 138-room Casa Monica Resort & Spa, rich with Moorish Revival and Spanish Baroque influences, opened in 1888

as the Casa Monica Hotel and was purchased just a few months later by Flagler. The hotel did not survive the Great Depression and sat abandoned before being transformed into the St. Johns County Courthouse in the late 1960s. After a new courthouse was built, the majestic property was once again empty for many years until entrepreneur Richard Kessler bought it in the late 1990s and turned it into a luxury hotel, one of 11 in the Kessler Collection portfolio. A member of both Marriott International's Autograph Collection and Historic Hotels of America, the Casa Monica retains many of its original architectural flourishes, and its public spaces shine with museum-quality art.

The Casa Monica's builder, Franklin W. Smith, lived down the street at Villa Zorayda, a Moorish Revival-style home meticulously fashioned after the Alhambra Palace in Granada, Spain. A quirky treasure house of art and antiques from Europe and the Middle East, Villa Zorayda Museum has been owned by the Mussallem family since the 1930s.

Smith also built St. Augustine's Moorish-style Castle Warden, a former mansion and hotel that now showcases oddities at the original Ripley's Believe It or Not!, a museum of the bizarre. If you want to see a live tarantula, a cannibal fork from the Fiji Islands or a Tibetan human skull drum, this place is for you. I learned something from the video "How to Swallow a Sword" but am still hesitant about guiding a long blade into my esophagus.

To truly experience St. Augustine's Old World ambience, many travelers opt to stay in one of the historic district's 30-plus bed & breakfast inns. Exquisitely decorated, often with period antiques or reproductions, these gussied-up homes offer deluxe amenities, a gourmet breakfast and the personal touch of a friendly innkeeper.

Civil rights history and maritime lore

In a formerly African American neighborhood, the Lincolnville Museum and Cultural Center chronicles black history in St. Augustine, the scene of nationally televised civil rights demonstrations in 1964. A vintage television console shows news footage of the clashes with police. The fingerprint card of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who was arrested for unlawful assembly and civil disobedience, is on display, as is a section of a whites-only Woolworth's

lunch counter where college students in 1960 staged a sit-in after being denied service. In downtown's Plaza de la Constitucion, the St. Augustine Foot Soldiers Monument, which includes a series of bronze tablets in the sidewalk, honors civil rights activists who endured beatings while marching peacefully.

A short drive from downtown to Anastasia Island, via Lions Bridge, takes visitors to the St. Augustine Lighthouse & Maritime Museum. Painted with swirling black and white stripes and capped with a bright red lantern, the photogenic lighthouse, dating back to the 1870s, is still used as a navigational aid. It's a spirally 219-step climb to the top.

In the former lighthouse keeper's house, the exhibit "Shrimpin' Ain't Easy" looks at the local shrimping industry. I picked up a number of fun facts from the "Shrimp University" touchscreen. For example, did you know that eight of 10 shrimp sold in the U.S. today are farm-raised, mostly in Asia and South America?

Wild-caught shrimp, however, taste better, and many St. Augustine restaurants take pride in serving local catches. Among the best places for fresh seafood and other traditional Southern specialties are O'Steen's and the New Orleans-style Harry's Seafood Bar & Grille.

Anastasia Island is also a beach destination. Sun-seekers sink their toes into the white sands of Anastasia State Park, St. Augustine Beach and Crescent Beach.

The barrier island's St. Augustine Alligator Farm, a zoo popular with families, features 24 species of crocodilians from around the world, not to mention lemurs, snakes and exotic birds. Guests get a look at rare albino alligators, marvel at storks and vultures with enormous wingspans, and have a chance to feed alligators and two-toed sloths. The theater hosts wildlife shows.

Offering layers of history, along with on-the-water relaxation and lighter diversions that fuel a well-oiled tourism machine, St. Augustine has a personality all its own. For those looking for something new, the ancient city delivers. It's certainly Old Florida—but not the same old Florida.

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