

West Virginia ♦ Acapulco ♦ SINTRA ♦ BASEL ♦ Cayo Coco ♦ Egypt

C A N A D I A N

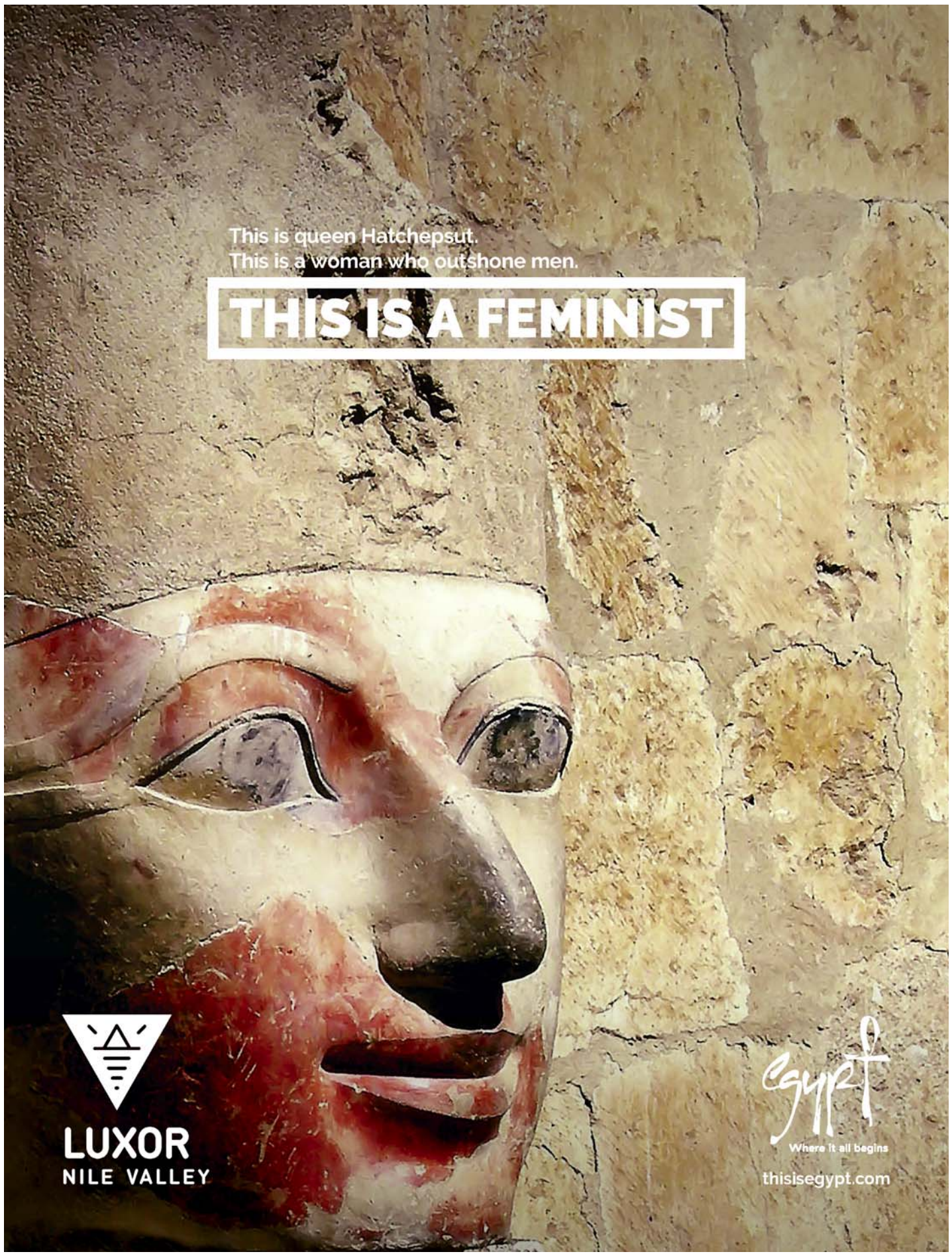
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In this issue, we start our round the world odyssey in the Far East where we find the natural beauty of Japan. We then head to Dubai and discover where its popularity stems from. Close by, we head to Turkey for more natural beauty and its storied history.

On to Europe and a stop in Karpathos to find out why it is 'Greece's Most Sustainable Island.' While in the Mediterranean, we head to the island nation of Malta to find 'Romance' and 'An Endless Summer' before we take a wonderful cruise to experience the new magnificent 'MSC World Europa' and why it is perfect for toddlers. In Spain, we visit many wonderful and unusual contrasting museums before going to Portugal and the 'Fairytale-like UNESCO World Heritage site of Sintra.'

Northbound, we eat to our hearts content in the historic and well-kept Swiss city of Basel and then on to Germany for some refreshing outdoor activities. We then take two different cruises, first a springtime river sailing through the Low Countries and find 'Contemporary Luxury on Uniworld's Newest Ship' the S.S. Victoria. To the far north we discover magnificent Scandinavia, Germany, and Poland aboard the beautiful Viking Sky through its Viking Homelands itinerary.

In Africa, we start in Egypt to discover the best this exotic country has to offer including a Nile River cruise on the well-appointed Sonesta St. George. To the sub-Sahara, we go to Zambia and find out why this emerging tourist destination should be on every serious traveler's 'bucket list.'

Next, we jet off to the Americas with a first stop in the quiet community of Twillingate, Newfoundland,

and while in Canada, we go to Peterborough and discover the new and well-presented Canoe Museum before 'Igniting the Spirit in Winnipeg' with the Indigenous people of the province.

Onto the USA and starting in West Virginia, we learn about its historical significance and enjoy its natural beauty. In the South we rediscover the wonderful city of Charleston and keep on going through the many great states of Alabama, Mississippi, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Missouri. In Florida, we find a great culinary scene and how the sunshine state has more than its share of Michelin Star restaurants.

Close by, we take 'A perfect vacation: Royal Caribbean's Freedom of the Seas' cruise to the Bahamas. In Cuba, we venture to the laid-back region of 'Jardines del Rey' (gardens of the king) in, Cayo Coco, Cuba.

Back to the continent, we find what is new and exciting in the western states of Nevada, Oregon, and Utah, while in Los Angeles, we discover its amazing arts, architecture, and history. On to Mexico, we find the handsome little creatures in the 'Monarchs of Michoacan' and then find great news that the west coast seaside town of 'Acapulco is on the comeback trail.' Finally, in the Americas, we head to lands' end and take our last cruise, this time with the Stella Australis to see the incredible wildlife and breathtaking scenery.

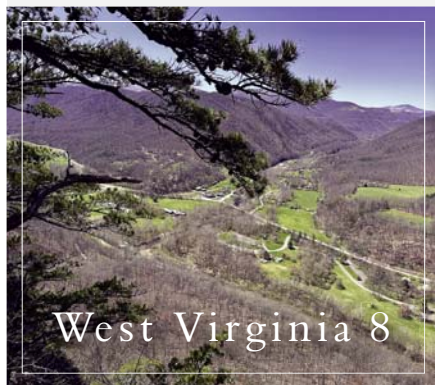
To complete of round the world journey, we head to the 'land down under' to discover what is new in wonderful Australia!

Happy Travels!



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Destination (features)



Around the World (short informative travel pieces)



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West Virginia: Quiet Country Roads and Much, Much More!

Article and photography by Michael Morcos

I was amazed to find out from our guide that Abraham Lincoln and I shared the same exact view from the same spot of the well-kept historic houses and gardens in Harper's Ferry, West Virginia. This little-known town played a major role and was once at the forefront of the American Civil War, and where two weeks before the end of the war Virginia was split, and West Virginia was born. Hero or villain, John Brown sure made his name here two years before the start of the Civil War. He and a couple of dozen other like-minded individuals decided it was time to free the slaves and mounted a successful surprise attack on Harper's Ferry, but this was short lived as federal troops moved in to capture him. He

was tried and hung but sparked the resistance against slavery.

The junction of two great rivers, the Potomac River and Shenandoah River was a great water source that led to the creation of Washington DC down-stream. From this very point comes the tri-state area of Virginia, West Virginia, and Maryland and from the shore, we could see all three.

Adventures galore

Adventure seekers can get their kicks with River Riders, where there is plenty of thrilling options to choose from, all in fun and safety. We would opt for the tree-to-tree tracks and after a safety briefing, we would proceed to

the first of three tracks. Clutching the cables we would each take our turns traversing obstacles. Onto the second track, somewhat harder, we found ourselves even higher with less footing space, our group would also drop in numbers. Finally, we were down to three who attempted the ultimate skill test of balance, strength and determination and doing daredevil stunts, balancing ourselves on thin wire, climbing down netting, and finally sliding quickly down a zip line. What an adrenaline rush, what an adventure, a great day to remember.

Country roads

I think I've heard this song more in one week than I have in the past decade.



Country Roads the internationally beloved song by John Denver and is a shoe tapping melody and just about everywhere we went we were treated to this famous piece, and loved every time it played, knowing we were in the land of West Virginia.

Country music is alive and well in these very small communities as we would take in two small live music venues, where the artists played their hearts out and brought the audience a great night of performances. I was impressed by the ambiance of these two bars, a great ending to a perfect West Virginia day.

Germany in West Virginia

How odd was it to be checking into the Bavarian Inn, and in of all places West Virginia. This unique Inn was started by a German immigrant and his family who built a world class hotel and grounds with their love of the old world. This establishment was popular and known by locals, but the real crowd came on weekends to be pampered and taste the exceptional cuisine and even on premise brewed beers. The location of the buildings could not be any better as it hugged the shores of the Potomac River, the same river that George Washington traversed in the famous painting.

We were pleasantly surprised when we found ourselves on German Street in the town of Shepherdstown. Historically beautiful, it had well-kept period homes, restaurants, boutiques, and galleries that lined the two sides of this charming street. That night, we would go on the Shepherdstown Mystery Walk, a ghost hunting tour. Our guide, dressed in a magnificent and striking long blue dress, would bring us to cemeteries and explain that the city has suffered tremendously, and had more than its share of tragedies during the Civil War. Shepherdstown became an outdoor field hospital for some 8,000 wounded and dying soldiers and thus the many lost souls that haunt this now quiet town. It was certainly enlightening and educational to find such a small town had such significance in US history.

The train that could

There is a nostalgic love of train travel that

goes back centuries to when the rails were first set. To relive those fantastic days of old, we would ride the Potomac Eagle Scenic Railroad to nowhere. Starting and ending at the same station, this eclectic train was made up of several cars that span the many past decades. It was a relaxed and fun journey that brought us past farms, forests, by the river, over bridges and all along the way we would feast on wonderfully prepared dishes.

Very stately

It might be the best for last, as we certainly delighted in visiting the Blackwater Falls State Park. Our rooms at the beautifully run lodge were clean, comfortable, and relaxing with fantastic views of the West Virginia hills. We would then take in what this park is most visited for. Walking down a couple of hundred steps, we first heard the loud roar and thunder. A few more steps and we made our way through a small opening in the forest and got our first glimpse of the fantastic falls. It was breathtaking and mesmerizing at the same time to see the power of nature at its most wild!

More adventure awaited us as we would hike Seneca Rocks. The trip was a challenging and invigorating hike uphill towards the summit, but with the incredible panoramic views from on top, it was worth every last step. Here we would absorb the magnificence of nature surrounding all the while delight at all the wildlife around us, including many eagles drifting in the crosswinds. There wasn't a care in the world. West Virginia was at its spectacular best and confirmed why it was a place I had to visit!

I had the good fortunes of walking in the footsteps of three incredible men: George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Abraham Lincoln. They were here and left their mark to what would become a great state and a foundation for an incredible country. West Virginia, in some ways, was what I expected, but then again, I learned of its historic significance, its boundless natural beauty and with the unbelievably friendly laid-back people, it is a place to discover, absorb and remember! ■

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Acapulco is on the comeback trail

Article and photography by Steve Gillick

One could readily agree that Sergio and Acela Mejia, the owners of Restaurant Bar Gaviotas II, are the personification of Acapulco! Ideally situated by the sand and surf at Playa Bonfil, just south of the city on the Pacific Coast of Mexico, the specialty of the house is Pescado a la talla. This mouth-watering Red Snapper and Sea Bass culinary masterpiece is grilled to perfection using a secret family recipe, resulting in an almost creamy, umami-mouthfeel-taste sensation.

The restaurant servers are High School and University students from villages in the surrounding Sierra Madre del Sur Mountains, and they learn that customer service must be excellent every day. And so they smile when they portion the platter-sized fish and plate it for the diners. Sergio tells me, "We understand that Acapulco depends on tourists who want to return home with memories of the city and its history, the ocean, the beaches, and the food. They allow us to serve them, and we thank them,

with our food, for giving us the opportunity".

And the same attitude of customer service and creating food memories continues.

El Nido Restaurante ("The Nest") sits on top of Cerro del Magote in Papagayo Park with a commanding sea view. The locally hand-crafted table figurines and masks are attention-getters, but so is the pozole, a traditional Acapulco and Guerrero State soup. We are offered white (very little spice), green (medium spice), or red (spicy), and we choose green with pollo (chicken). Fresh oregano, red onion, and serrano chili flakes punctuate the soup, making this a delectable and hearty meal.



As if the view and the pozole were not enough, lunch was complemented by the festive singing of the group 'Mariachi Tequila de Acapulco'. Following their robust rendition of 'Quizás, quizás, quizás', Horacio García Aquilar from Alquimista Mezcal Artesanal led us through a tasting of three kinds of mezcal, including one with a giant (dead) wasp in the bottle. Apparently, it's used to cure lovesickness.

During the tasting, we learned that "you don't drink mezcal...you kiss it". But before the peck, it's important to visually check the clarity of the beverage and experience the "nose" by sniffing the mezcal from one nostril and then the other. Then you put "your whole nose" into the glass to breathe in the bouquet. Finally, with the greatest amount of saliva you can accumulate in your mouth, you take a tiny drink and appreciate the effect on your taste buds. I will say that after several tastes, our taste buds were quite pleased.

Wahoo Acapulco is another food milestone, where every bite turns into an "Oh my goodness" moment. Chef Diego Mendec explained that he combined traditional Mexican foods with contemporary tastes, and inspired by customer feedback, the result was "more love, more feeling, more everything!" And more is what you want after you taste the ultra-fresh 'typical' ingredients in combinations of tuna, avocado, octopus, scallops, shrimp from Mazatlan, and fish from the Pacific Ocean.

Alongside Acapulco's Carretera Escénica (Scenic Highway), Las Brisas Acapulco, a 5-star hilltop hotel, celebrates peace, relaxation, luxury, panoramic vistas of Acapulco Bay, dreamy sunsets, and food memories. Under the supervision of Executive Chef Josue Ramirez, our evening meal was highlighted by a perfect dish of thick, juicy Cajun shrimp with tarragon crustacean reduction on a bed of the creamiest risotto you can imagine.

While food is a great destination attraction, Acapulco has lots more to feast upon!

La Quebrada remains one of the top draws. This is the rocky hill where the world-famous cliff divers perform from heights varying from 30 to 41 meters (98 to 135 feet), diving into an ocean pool between the rocks, where the depth ranges from 4.8 to 5.8 meters (16 to 19 feet). During the daylight hours, the divers judge the depth visually. However, according to divers Osiel (age 13), Dorion (age 20), and Giovanni (age 33), the divers determine the depth of the water after dark by listening to the waves. They jump into the pool, climb the rocks on the far side of the hill, pray at the shrine to the Virgin of Guadalupe, wave to the patrons in the viewing areas, and then dive when the waves are just right. It's a spectacular event.

Acapulco's historic area is not far from the cliffs centered around the Zócalo, or public square, in Plaza Juan Álvarez, with a history dating to 1555. The focus, beyond the colored flags, is the Catedral de Nuestra Señora de la Soledad, the central Catholic Church in the city showcasing a combination of Neocolonial, Moorish, and Byzantine architecture. The Zócalo comes alive at night with eateries, market stalls, and music. You can even arrive in style in a calandria, one of the colorful tractor-drawn carriages festooned with twinkling light bulbs.

Up a winding Street just north of the Zócalo is 'the House of the Winds', where Diego Rivera, the famed muralist, lived with the art patron Dolores Olmeda for the last two years of his life. The house is closed to the public, but the street mural, Exekatlalli, draws visitors and art aficionados throughout the day. The mural, made of colored tiles and shells, depicts Quetzalcóatl, the feathered serpent, facing off on either side of the gate. Other figures include Tlaloc, the God of rain, lightning, and thunder, Xoloitzcuintle, a black Mexican, hairless dog, and a frog that affectionately recalls Olmeda's nickname for Rivera; "My beloved frog".

Acapulco's Malecon, or seaside boardwalk, begins in the historic zone and provides a relaxing stroll around Acapulco Bay. The

scenery includes mountains, slope-side residential homes, sandy beaches, waterfront restaurants, tour boats, fishing boats, colorful nets, and fishermen selling the daily catch of red snapper, horse mackerel, sole, pompano, tuna, and more.

Nearby lies the Fort of San Diego, initially built in 1617. The Acapulco Historic Museum on the grounds tells the story of the Fort's role in Mexican history, from defending against pirates in the 17th century to the Mexican War of Independence in the 19th century.

The Malecon continues past small parks where residents chat, jog, and exercise beside trees filled with Yellow-crowned Night Herons!

And on the topic of parks and birds. Outside the city proper, there is a celebration of nature at Tres Palos Lagoon. We spent several peaceful hours on a boat journeying along the waterway and mangroves and spotting Great Egrets, Black-crowned Night Herons, Anhingas, and Frigate Birds.

When Elvis Presley starred in Fun in Acapulco, the top-grossing movie musical of 1963, Acapulco, a.k.a 'the Riviera of Mexico' was enjoying a heyday of movie stars and tourism that started in the 1940s and would last until the end of the century. Then, the violence of cartels up and down the Guerrero coast pretty well closed Acapulco to all but local tourists. And yet another setback was Hurricane Otis, a Category 5 storm that devastated Acapulco in October 2023. With perseverance and determination, Acapulqueños immediately started to rebuild damaged buildings and infrastructure and set their sights on re-introducing Acapulco's allure.

So, it's great news that international visitors are once again experiencing Acapulco's charm as it rapidly advances along the comeback trail. It's a city that's definitely worth visiting. ■

WWW.ACAPULCO.COM



Fairytale-like Unesco World Heritage site of Sintra

Article and photography by Nicholas Kontis



Most visitors to Portugal arrive in cinematic Lisbon, picture-perfect with its seven unblemished hill-sides overlooking the Rio Tejo, carefully curated and devised over centuries.

Seventeen miles northwest of Lisbon is the fairytale-like Unesco World Heritage site of Sintra. The lofty town perched above the Serra de Sintra coastline was the center of Romantic architecture. Until their brutal overthrow in 1911, Portugal's royal family and other wealthy aristocrats from Lisbon made Sintra a second home retreat.

Among Sintra's many luminaries, Lord Byron glamorized Sintra. "Lo! Cintra's glorious Eden intervenes in a variegated maze of mount and glen," as inspired in his epic poem *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. The Danish writer Hans Christian Andersen was a resident of Sintra, moved by its 19th-century ornate and colorful architecture and Moorish castle.

Upon arrival, one can't help but be mesmerized by its soaring cliffs plunging to sandy beaches below, ornate palaces, iconic churches, medieval Moorish fortresses, and Renaissance art inside pastel-hued mansions.

With its imposing mountain range and miles of lush, green forested trails filled with parks and palaces in a surreal fairy tale setting, rolling down to the deep azure Atlantic, it's difficult not to get captivated by its endless beauty.

In 1995, UNESCO designated the fabled village, which covers nearly 960 hectares, a World Heritage site. It became the first destination in Europe to be classified by UNESCO as a landscape comprising Sintra and the surrounding Cascais Natural Park.

Monserate Palace

A half a mile from the historic center of Sintra lies the Moorish arches of the Palace of Monserate. The former home of a Victorian-era English textile millionaire, the first viscount of Monserate, Francis Cook, was the owner of one of England's most extraordinary private art collections. Cook conceived the present romantic palace and gardens as a family summer residence.



A unique testimony of 19th-century eclecticism, the Palace of Monserate is one of the most distinctive landmarks in Portugal.

The palace blends Venetian Gothic style with influences from India and Moorish architecture, combining various shapes, styles, and materials to form a unique palatial home.

The property boasts Portugal's most outstanding botanical gardens. The exotic, expansive Zen-like gardens extend miles, and exotic plants line the grounds. The owners went to great lengths to have curious and alluring flora from Chinese weeping cypress, Mexican palms, yucca, agave, Japanese camellias, and Himalayan rhododendrons, all organized by their geographical origins.

One can spend hours strolling the grounds and never tire of the mismatch of contrasting architectural styles, massive environments, and diverse foliage.

Quinta Da Regaleira

The Quinta da Regaleira is a charming stately manor-style house with an onsite chapel that will leave you spellbound. From 1898 to 1912, its original owner, Augusto de Carvalho Monteiro, dedicated his life to transforming his cherished palace into its present-day state.

Although Italian opera designer Luigi Manini designed it in the early 20th century, the Quinta da Regaleira blends Neo-Gothic, Neo-Manueline, and Italian Neo-Renaissance styles. Some of Portugal's leading artists, sculptors, and woodworkers, Antonio Goncalves, Joao Machado, Jose da Fonseca, Costa Motta, Rodrigo de Castro, and Julio da Fonseca, created the exuberant scheme.

The ornate villa has a home-like feel for such a grand structure with an eclectic design. It has incredibly carved fireplaces, panoramic terraces, a Renaissance Hall, and a turret high above the structure with panoramic views over the lush, green Sintra Hills and the Atlantic Ocean. The combination of extravagant Manueline Renaissance and Baroque styles is haunting.

Pena Palace

The crown jewel of Sintra is the UNESCO World Heritage Site Pena Palace. The palace is a castle set high on a hill overlooking Sintra with trails leading to the nearby Atlantic Ocean. Its natural environment constitutes the most pivotal part of Sintra's cultural landscape. The stunning park and palace built by King Ferdinand in 1838 represent the finest examples of nineteenth-century Portuguese Romanticism.

The Grounds of Pena Park

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The Parque da Pena, covering over 500 acres, is filled with gardens, ponds, bridges, caves, greenhouses, and other tiny houses that contain the most critical piece of Sintra's cultural heritage. The grounds seem to continue forever. Discover the valley of the lakes, where five lakes flow into the Grotto of the Monk, a place of solitary meditation for the Hieronymite monks. The Countess's Fernery holds the first ferns in the Parque de Pena, which Don Fernando II began. A Manueline Chapel graces the noble grounds. One can easily spend a day meandering the palace and its well-manicured grounds.

Convent of the Capuchos

Abandoned in 1834, the convent of the Holy Cross in the Sintra Hills, also known as the "Capuchos" or "Cork Convent," was built in 1560. The friars chose it as a place of retreat and remarkable for its extreme simplicity. It embodies the ideal of universal brotherhood lived by the Franciscan monks who lived there. The cork from the many oaks on the grounds was used as insulation in the sacred convent.

The Cork Convent is fully integrated into the surrounding forest, built to fulfill the teachings of contemplation of Saint Francis of Assisi. The eerie surrounding woods have survived the gradual deforestation of the Sintra Hills and were cared for and maintained for centuries by the holy men who lived in the convent. An immense tangle of ferns, mosses, epiphytes, and climbing plants encumber the sacred grounds.

Get active in Sintra

Sintra is much more than majestic palaces and awe-inspiring castles. It boasts vast open spaces set among lush green forests, 60 square miles of lush green vegetation leading to a rugged coastline and miles of beaches. The active traveler can experience nature, sports, and various types of outdoor adventures: mountain biking, hiking, rock climbing, boogie boarding, rock climbing, bird watching, golf, repelling, hang gliding, and more. ■

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(in 36 pages)

Around the World



Marking Earth Day in Japan: Picchio

While Earth Day is celebrated around the world on April 22, 2024, the occasion carries special meaning in Japan. There, it reflects long-held values and is an essential reconfirmation of the trend toward eco-tourism and sustainability. Japanese culture and traditional spirituality are rooted in nature worship, and tourists might be surprised to know that, beyond Tokyo's excitement and neon lights, 68.5% of Japan is forested. This unspoiled landscape provides an incredible range of opportunities to experience Japan's unique, biodiverse nature.

Travelers seeking authentic, immersive experiences in natural environments that provide real meaning beyond mere sightseeing will find them in Japan. The robust Conservation and Nature Restoration efforts undertaken by Japan's Ministry of the Environment (in cooperation with local communities) have been effective in maintaining Japan's natural beauty to meet those needs. Below, we shine a spotlight on one of the organizations offering exceptional eco-tourism experiences for the green-at-heart traveler.

Picchio Wildlife Research Centre

A highlight of any visit to the beautiful town of Karuizawa, Nagano Prefecture, where Tokyoites choose to vacation in summer, is a stop at Picchio Wildlife Research Centre. Picchio's tours include hikes into the wild against a stunning volcanic backdrop to observe the Asiatic Black Bears in their home environment. Travelers experience the extraordinary beauty and pristine nature and wildlife of the forests and alpine shrubs that define this region of Japan. In the Ainu culture of northern Japan, the Asiatic Black bear symbolizes loyalty, wisdom, and strength. These beautiful animals coexist in various habitats across Japan and their protection is a top priority. The conflict countermeasures used by Picchio include radio transmitter collars on bears to understand their behavioural patterns, and use this knowledge to direct them away from human traffic. Picchio's goal is to educate both bears and humans about coexistence while also preventing the loss of majestic ecosystems.

Shiretoko National Park, UNESCO World Heritage Site

Picchio has established a second site in the pristine Shiretoko National Park in Northern Hokkaido. This is one of Japan's most diverse landscapes: mountainous, often snowy, and famous for its hot springs (and their simian patrons). Tours here include total immersion into the magnificence of northern Japan's nature in spring, summer and fall. In winter, drift ice walking tours are a 360° experience, from walking on plateaus of drifting ice to diving beneath the icy water with a specialised aqua scope, all while enjoying the breathtaking panoramic views around you. ■

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Spain's Museums

Here are four recommendations for museum lovers:

Gallery of the Royal Collections

Located next to the Royal Palace of Madrid, the museum houses an excellent selection of art works showcasing the richness and diversity of the Patrimonio Nacional collections. These are the result of the major role as collectors and patrons of the arts assumed by the Spanish Monarchy over time. This gallery is one of the most important museum projects in Spain in recent decades. The first surprise is the main building, a 40,000-square-metre building carved into the rock that is perfectly integrated into the surroundings of the Royal Palace.

Lanzarote Atlantic Museum

Opened in 2016, Lanzarote's Atlantic Museum consists of ten underwater installations exploring contemporary themes and the use of natural resources. Sculptures by the artist Jason deCaires Taylor, a specialist in underwater art which calls to protect the oceans, are distributed on the sandy sea floor, over an area of about 100 square metres. All the pieces are designed to adapt to the native marine life and to encourage the reproduction of Lanzarote's local species, as they were all created with pH-neutral, environmentally-friendly materials.

Chillida, 100 years of the universal Basque artist

2024 sees the hundredth anniversary of the birth of Eduardo Chillida, one of the most influential Spanish artists of the 20th century and known for such poetic works as his Wind Comb. This year, we suggest you take two trips: to Spain and to the heart of this genius. Standing in front of his sculptures means listening to nature and finding harmony between form and emptiness. Chillida must be experienced not only in museums, but also in the public spaces it transforms

City of Arts and Sciences

The city of Valencia is one of Europe's largest centres for the dissemination of science and culture. It is made up of amazing buildings such as the Hemisfèric and the Oceanogràfic and stands out for its avant-garde architecture, work of the renowned Santiago Calatrava and Félix Candela. The City of Arts and Sciences of Valencia is situated along almost two kilometres of the old Turia riverbed. It is made up of six major elements: the Hemisfèric, the Umbracle, the Museu de les Ciències the Oceanogràfic, the Palau de les Arts and the Àgora. ■

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Germany

Camping and trekking under the starry skies

Did you know that with a network of 185,000 miles of trails, Germany offers an extraordinary variety of hiking routes for every taste and fitness level? From paths along the coast and through blooming heathlands, to river valleys and mountain landscapes, Germany has it all!

Those in search of an authentic natural experience can simply roll out their sleeping bag under a starry sky and grill a few sausages on the barbecue, while more demanding travellers can look forward to all the comfort of a lodge and gourmet dining on site at a five-star campsite. Between these two camping holiday extremes, Germany offers a plethora of options to suit every taste. More than 1200 certified campsites from the coast to the Alps invite you to explore this simple and economical way of travelling.

Variety for every taste

Outdoor enthusiasts can usually find lots to do as soon as they leave their tent, from hiking to cycling, climbing to canoeing. Many campsites are also right on the doorstep of pretty towns and cities, making them an ideal base for cultural activities. Visitors can enjoy a completely relaxed holiday, staying at the campsite and exploring the many and varied leisure options, from volleyball and bowling or wellness. Families will appreciate facilities such as indoor and outdoor play areas, childcare and petting zoos.

Wilderness Camping Permitted: Trekking Sites for Camping

Trekking sites are legal wilderness camping sites where hikers and even canoeists are allowed to pitch their tents for one or two days. Sometimes they are also called bivouac sites. Most of them are only sparsely equipped. The trekking sites are havens for hikers who want to roam through the great outdoors for several days or weeks at a time. In addition to designated areas for pitching tents, they often offer simple composting toilets and fireplaces. Some of these wild campsites need to be booked in advance, while others can simply be explored. ■

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Visit: <https://pakreve.com>



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This non-greasy, water-resistant mineral sunscreen is good for you and the environment as it excludes ingredients that pollute the reefs and disrupt your hormonal system. Beyond being an eco-friendly choice, their dermatologist-recommended UVA/UVB protection SPF 30 formula is ideal for sensitive skin and children as its gluten-free, paraben-free, and fragrance-free. They also make body oil and lip balms.

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What began as an organic baby foods line is now a popular adult traveler choice for healthy, on-the-go nutrition. These easy-squeeze pouches don't require refrigeration and provide a salt-free, sugar-free energy boost that's under 100-calories. Enjoy grown-up exotic flavors like Curry Vegetable Mango or Shawarma Artichoke & Cauliflower or Squash & Kale with Turmeric, and more.

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WANDERCARE DRY SHAMPOO

Wandercare specializes in creating innovative, dehydrated personal care goods for earth-loving travelers. Their latest is a unique dry shampoo powder that instantly refreshes hair using an all natural 100% biodegradable formula. The unique puff applicator allows for mess-free, targeted dispensing while its Provitamin B-5 strengthens your hair. Pocket-size for easy packing, and refills come in eco-friendly paper envelopes.

Visit: <https://wewandercare.com>



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Exodus Adventure Travels Kicks Off 50th Anniversary Year

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

50 Years of Industry Leadership

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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ADVENTURE TRAVELS

Oku Japan Focuses on Empowering Communities Through Sustainable Initiatives and Hands-On Support



The Shishi-mai lion dance as performed by a member of the Oku team.

From trail maintenance and English lessons to cultural preservation, Oku Japan invests as much in the communities in which it operates as it does the trips it runs there.

Oku Japan, a leading Kyoto-based tour operator specializing in sustainable and culturally immersive travel experiences, makes it a priority to support the local communities it operates in as much as the travelers who partake in one of the company's many guided and self-guided walking tours. As part of that, Oku has implemented a variety of initiatives aimed at supporting residents and local economies and preserving local cultures.

One of its key initiatives, of course, is its deep commitment to working with locally owned accommodations, restaurants, and activity providers. By partnering with local businesses, Oku ensures that a significant portion of travelers' spending directly benefits the communities they visit, helping to support livelihoods there and preserve traditional ways of life. However, beyond the support that comes by way of its tours, Oku routinely works with the people that make up these businesses to provide indirect support designed to assist in their long-term success. So far this year, this has included various community sessions organized by Oku to help business owners feel more confident in dealing with English speakers, including reviewing common phrases, as well as cultural differences and norms, and ways to navigate them.

The Oku team also assists every year with maintenance activities along the Nakasendo Trail, which is minimally funded and quickly becomes an issue if it isn't maintained. Gathering volunteers from its Kyoto office and Kumano Kodo branch, the Oku team clears overgrown branches, trims back grasses, and cleans signage along the trail. The same applies to controlling the growth of the bamboo in the region, with April bringing with it the start of the growing season. For the first time this year, at the request of the community, the Oku team is assisting the village of Tsumago in trimming back and removing bamboo to help maintain the landscape, as well as assist in harvesting the shoots, which are then given to the community to use in a variety of ways, from textiles to cooking.

On the cultural side, Oku Japan has also stepped in to assist with the preservation of long-held traditions, specifically the Shishi-mai lion dance that is part of yearly harvest festivals among communities along the Kumano Kodo. Thanks to its deep ties with the communities here, and particularly in the village of Chikatsuyu where camaraderie and trust has been built up over the years, members of Oku's branch office have participated in the dance, assisting village elders in keeping the tradition alive. ■

WWW.OKUJAPAN.COM

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AAT Kings Launches Australia Northern Territory Adventures with New Outback Short Break Tours

AAAT Kings, the award-winning Australia and New Zealand guided holiday company, has partnered with Australia's Northern Territory to showcase the Outback's untamed natural splendour and has launched two new Short Break tours, offering immersive and vibrant cultural experiences. These Short Break two-to-five-day tours enable travellers to personalize their holidays and embark on multi-sensory and off-the-beaten-track adventures while being led by knowledgeable Driver Guides. Guests will connect with Aboriginal culture on an Uluru Base Walk guided tour or practise their dot-painting skills with the Aboriginal Anangu artists of Maraku. They will view the world's most spectacular vistas, from a spectacular sunrise at Kata Tjuta to the Nitmiluk (Katherine) Gorge with its towering limestone cliffs.

On the new 4-day Kings Canyon, Uluru and Kata Tjuta Short Break tour, travellers will explore Uluru Kata Tjuta National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site with a visit to the Cultural Centre and travel to the base of Uluru which is considered sacred by the area's indigenous Anangu people. They will meet an engaging local guide who will narrate the Aboriginal Tjukurpa (creation) stories. Guests will walk with their guide to Mutitjulu Waterhole who will share the meaning of the ancient 40,000-year-old Rock Art created by the traditional owners of the land and the beautiful spiritual sites surrounding them. Afterwards, they will make their way to the Uluru Sunset Viewing area to witness a breathtaking sunset and admire the largest sandstone monolith in the world. Their adventure continues the next day by watching a sunrise at the spectacular Kata Tjuta and its 36 giant domes. They will embark with their guide to scenic valleys and canyons while learning the history, culture and geology of Australia's Red Centre.

On the new 3-day Kings Canyon and Uluru Short Break tour, guests will journey through stunning desert scenery from Ayers Rock Resort. They will travel through Curtin Springs Station and view Atila (Mount Conner). On the way to Kings Canyon, their Driver Guide will provide insights into the history of the surrounding cattle stations. They will stay and relax at the Kings Canyon Resort before enjoying an awe-inspiring sunset. Travellers will marvel at this incredible place with its 300-meter-high sandstone walls and majestic views which stretch across the desert. They will rise at dawn to make the climb to the rim of the canyon and be rewarded with panoramic views of Watarrka National Park at sunrise. With time permitting, they can go down to the oasis of the "Garden of Eden" which is a stunning watering hole surrounded by lush greenery and rare plant species.

For a truly immersive guided vacation, the 15-day Outback Adventure combines the best of South Australia and the Northern Territory beginning in Adelaide with its vibrant cultural, culinary and entertainment activities. In the heart of the Flinders Ranges, guests will enjoy a MAKE TRAVEL MATTER® Experience at Wilpena Pound Resort, renowned for its breathtaking ancient Outback landscape with its ancient fossils and geological history. ■

WWW.AATKINGS.COM



New Tours from Boundless Journeys

Get ready to explore ancient cultures, immerse yourself deep in the African wilderness, hike to lively traditional Irish pubs, and bask in the beauty of the Mediterranean. Boundless Journeys has designed the following tours to bring travelers handpicked boutique accommodations, regional cuisine, and their favorite guides to lead you through these adventures.

Ireland: Gems of the Emerald Isle

Prepare to be swept away by the raw beauty of Ireland and the warmth of the Irish people on this journey through the Emerald Isle. This itinerary has been crafted to showcase the ultimate combination of bucket-list highlights and hidden gems off the beaten path.

Italy: Sardinia's Mountain & Coast Hiking

This journey brings together the finest of Sardinia, inviting travelers to embrace its diverse landscapes, culture, and exceptional hiking. Over this nine-day journey, experience the Emerald Coast and its islands, Sardinia's rugged interior mountains, and the pristine waters of Orosei Bay.

Thailand, Laos, Cambodia & Vietnam: the Best of Southeast Asia

This itinerary is carefully curated based on Boundless Journeys' travels throughout the region. Visit small villages far off the beaten path, chat with monks and rice farmers, and explore ancient wonders. Discover fascinating historical context at every stop.

Slovenia & Croatia: Alps to Istria

From Slovenia's picture-perfect Lake Bled, travelers set out on thrilling hikes into the remote corners of the Julian Alps, a mountain lover's paradise. In Croatia, venture into Istria, a beautiful peninsula beloved by Europeans but little known by outsiders.

Croatia & Montenegro: Treasures of the Dalmatian Coast

Whether you're drawn to history, nature, or simply the joy of exploration, this trip promises to be a captivating adventure that will stay with you for years to come. Journey from the Dalmatian Coast to the Bay of Kotor, hiking, kayaking, and exploring the history of this stunning coastline.

Kenya: Sky Safari

This thoughtfully crafted itinerary offers diverse adventures efficiently and stylishly with executive planes, direct flights, expert guides, and luxurious lodgings in stunning locations. A sky safari allows you to explore deeper, and to spend longer immersed in the sights, sounds, and sensations of the African bush.

Tanzania: Sky Safari

The Tanzania sky Safari takes you to the treetops of Tarangire, where bed-rooms balance amid the baobabs and the country's biggest concentration of elephant roams. You'll visit the Ngorongoro Crater, the UNESCO-listed volcanic caldera brim-full of wildlife. Discover the Serengeti and witness the Great Migration. ■

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G Adventures expands 'Jane Goodall Collection' in honour of environmentalist's 90th birthday

G Adventures, the pioneer of community tourism, has announced that it has added five wildlife-focused trips to its 'Jane Goodall Collection' in celebration of Dr. Jane Goodall's 90th birthday. The collection, which is endorsed by Dr. Jane Goodall herself, aims to promote responsible wildlife tourism and support conservation efforts across the globe.

The update will see travellers embark on life-changing adventures to Tanzania, the Amazon, Galápagos Islands, Costa Rica and the USA, including a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to observe chimpanzees in the wild in Gombe Stream National Park, the place Dr. Goodall began her trailblazing research in 1960 at the age of 26.

The new additions build upon the success of the existing 'Jane Goodall Collection', which launched in 2016 and has empowered nearly 30,000 travellers to make a positive impact on the planet, just by having the time of their lives. As a proud partner of the Jane Goodall Institute of Canada, a portion of every adventure booked will be donated to help support its mission to protect wildlife and work with local communities as their partners in conservation.

With 19 trips now part of the 'Jane Goodall Collection', the latest itineraries offer travellers the opportunity to experience wildlife across a range of G Adventures travel styles. The 'Amazon Riverboat Adventure In-Depth', which is part of the Marine travel style, cruises the Amazon on a riverboat to spot wildlife, and visits a rescue centre for orphaned manatees. Meanwhile, the 'Tanzania: Chimp Trekking & Serengeti Safari' itinerary is part of the recently launched Geluxe Collection of premium active trips. This itinerary includes a walking safari of the Ngorongoro Crater, a safari drive across the plains of the Serengeti, and the opportunity to see wild chimpanzees in iconic locations from Dr. Goodall's historic time spent there. Additionally, the 'Galapagos Express Adventure' marks the first '18-to-Thirtysomethings' itinerary in the collection - a fast, fresh and full-of-wildlife adventure tailored for younger travellers.

Dr. Jane Goodall added: "The Jane Goodall Institute thanks G Adventures for their continued support. Connecting with nature and having respect for animals is important for the wellbeing of our human spirit. It also gives travellers an understanding of the urgent need to protect our beautiful planet before it's too late."

The new additions to the 'Jane Goodall Collection' include:

Tanzania: Chimp Trekking & Serengeti Safari
Amazon Riverboat Adventure In-Depth
Iconic Wildlife of Yellowstone & Grand Teton
Costa Rica: Tortuguero, La Fortuna & Rio Celeste
Galapagos Express Adventure: Wilderness and Wildlife ■

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Australia

Canada

England

21

France

Italy

Japan

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PLACES

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Spain

Tahiti



China



Dubai



Egypt



Germany



Greece



India



Mexico



Peru



Portugal



Thailand



Turkey



USA



Venture beyond the boardroom: discover the top accessible hiking trails Istanbul has to offer

Planning a business trip to İstanbul? Set aside some time for an enchanting outdoor adventure. Trekking paths throughout İstanbul allow for "bleisure" travellers to unwind after meetings and for tourists to discover distinct natural landscapes.

Natural Wonder of İstanbul: Belgrad Forest

The Belgrad Forest in Sarıyer district is a convenient trail for nature lovers in İstanbul. Described as the "lungs of İstanbul," the Belgrad Forest covers 5,300 hectares, offering naturally-shaded picnic areas and an abundance of paved hiking routes. The 6.5-kilometre long Neşet Suyu Trail is a favourite among runners and walkers.

Paradise Next to the City: Ballıkayalar

Ballıkayalar Nature Park, only an hour's drive from İstanbul in Tavşanlı village of Gebze, is a well-known marvel among nature lovers, rock climbers, and hikers. Located in a 2-kilometre valley with a meandering stream, the park offers easy to moderate hiking experiences. The valley's lake, waterfalls, and travertine terraces leading to the Ballıkaya Stream offer spectacular views. Visitors will be sure to spot many of the park's local inhabitants, including roe deer, wild rabbits, wild boars, moles, martens, and various bird species.



Hidden Treasure of Tekirdağ: Uçmakdere

Uçmakdere, located in the Şarköy district of Tekirdağ, is a popular destination for outdoor enthusiasts looking to venture deeper into the nature of İstanbul. The region is adorned with flourishing pine forests and offers breath-taking views of Ganos (Işıklar) Mountain and the Marmara Sea. This surrounding landscape is known for its local village products, lifestyle, and culture, making it a popular route for cyclists, motorbike travellers, and campers.

Escape to Nature

Nestled in Yalova's Çınarcık district, the Erikli Plateau stands out as another popular hiking destination close to İstanbul. The plateau, about a two-hour drive from İstanbul, features dense trails surrounded by apple, fir, linden, chestnut, and elm trees. While the trails in the area gently slope, providing a moderate rather than easy level of trekking, encountering a waterfall during your walk is a delightful reward. After exploring the Erikli Plateau, be sure to visit the region's Teşvikiye City Forest, Double Waterfall, and two Bottomless Lakes. ■

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



Peaceful and cool: Discover İstanbul's Anatolian Side

Istanbul, the city that bridges two continents, is a unique blend of European and Asian cultures. The Anatolian side of the city, located on the Asian continent, offers a peaceful yet "cool" experience. With its natural beauty, historic landmarks, exciting nightlife, delicious cuisine, and plenty of shopping options, there's something for everyone.

The Prince Islands, located off the coast of the Anatolian side, are known for their beautiful nature and historical mansions. These islands offer a perfect escape for those who want to experience both the tranquillity of island life and the sparkle of İstanbul.

Historical Neighbourhoods Run Beside the Bosphorus. Once you get off the ferry in Üsküdar and head straight to Anadolu Hisarı, you will find yourself in beautiful neighbourhoods and elegant buildings that are hundreds of years old. Kuzguncuk, your first stop, will amaze you with its colourful buildings lined up among the Bosphorus Strait, giant plane trees, inviting cafés, and historical orchards still used today. Beylerbeyi, one of İstanbul's oldest stops in Bosphorus, captivates visitors with its coastline and historical Beylerbeyi Palace.

Most people know Çengelköy, another historical district in this region, for its coastline and ancient tea garden overlooking the Bosphorus. This garden is a beautiful spot to stop for a Turkish tea with a simit and enjoy the stunning view. Çengelköy is also famous for its centuries-old mansions, picturesque neighbourhoods and fish restaurants where you can enjoy mezes with tasty seafood.

Kadıköy: One of the Coolest Neighbourhoods in the World

Kadıköy is widely regarded as the most popular neighbourhood on the Anatolian side. With its cafés, pubs, restaurants, wine houses, and taverns, Kadıköy has become one of İstanbul's most vibrant social hubs in recent years. It also welcomes you to check out its antique shops, record stores, second-hand bookshops, a century-old pharmacy, and even an opera house. The Süreyya Opera House opens its doors to guests on performance evenings, and draws in audiences like a decorative ornament in the heart of Bahariye Street. ■

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Malta's "Endless Mediterranean Summer" of Events & Festivals

Malta, a Mediterranean archipelago and cultural hub, is renowned for its abundant sunshine and a rich history that spans more than 8,000 years. Summer is always a busy season of festivals and events, but Malta and its sister island Gozo continue to be a vibrant hotspot in the Fall, offering a diverse array of concerts and festivals. With a packed year-long event schedule, Malta promises something for everyone, while also inviting visitors to explore its three sister islands: Malta, Gozo, and Comino.

Village Festas - at Parishes Across Malta and Gozo

Village "Festas", also known as Il-Festa, an annual community event with religious roots, is held in village parishes across Malta and its sister island, Gozo. This traditional Maltese village feast has now been recognized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, UNESCO, as part of Malta's intangible cultural heritage. Malta's main festa season kicks off annually in late April and extends until early October, featuring numerous events in various villages.

Malta Jazz Festival - July 8th – 13th, 2024

Considered by the international jazz community as a 'true' jazz festival and a beacon of artistic integrity, the Malta Jazz Festival presents a panorama of jazz music in all its facets. This Jazz Festival stands out as an event that achieves a perfect balance between the savant and more popular elements of jazz.

Isle of MTV Malta - July 16, 2024

Held in partnership with the Malta Tourism Authority, Isle of MTV Malta will return to the island's il-Fosos Square on Tuesday, July 16, 2024, with headlining performances from DJ Snake and RAYE. Promising huge, open air sets, Europe's biggest free Summer festival is in its 16th year.

Dance Festival Malta - July 25th – 28th, 2024

Dance Festival Malta is a multi-disciplinary festival that strives to cultivate a dance environment in Malta. The festival will host a series of workshops, masterclasses, and performances that welcomes international and local artists and choreographers. This unique festival will allow attendees to immerse themselves in the dance culture of Malta.

Malta Pride 2024 - September 6th – 15th, 2024

Malta, situated between Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, gives members of the EMENA (European, Middle East & North Africa) LGBTQ+ community the opportunity to gather and celebrate in a safe environment where people are free to be themselves. Occupying the top spot on the Europe Rainbow Index for seven consecutive years, Malta, has also been awarded an outstanding 92% in recognition of the laws, policies, and lifestyles of the LGBTQ+ community out of a total of 49 European Countries. Guests from abroad will find plenty of gay-friendly restaurants, events, cafes, pubs, nightclubs, and boutiques to visit, ensuring all LGBTQ+ travelers will have an amazing time.

www.visitmalta.com

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Romance in Malta

The Perfect Mediterranean Backdrop for Destination Weddings, Honeymoons And Even "The Bachelor"

Malta and its sister islands Gozo and Comino, an archipelago in the Mediterranean, boasts a year round sunny climate and 8,000 years of intriguing history. It is no wonder that "The Bachelor" selected Malta for one of its episodes (E4) from the latest season. With its picturesque backdrop, coastal views, historic architecture and sites that create a romantic ambiance, Malta is the best destination for stunning wedding settings as well as unforgettable honeymoons.

Malta, home to three UNESCO World Heritage Sites, is perfect for couples who are looking for unique and memorable venues. Valletta itself, Malta's Capital, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, built by the proud Knights of St. John, and offers plenty of spectacular historic settings. In addition to luxury hotels, baroque palaces with gardens, and converted farmhouses (in Gozo), some of these historical venues are themselves Heritage Malta sites such as St. Angelo Hall, the Terrace at the Malta Maritime Museum, Egmont Hall at Fort St. Angelo, Castellania Courtyard and the Garden at the Inquisitor's Palace. Couples opting for a Monday through Thursday wedding will only have to pay for set-up and catering, and are exempt from venue rental fees. Discounts are also available at other Heritage Malta sites if the wedding is held Monday through Thursday.

In Maltese culture, marriages are lavish affairs, but whether couples are planning a laid back "I do" for close family or a spectacular affair for 200, any wedding held there will be one to remember. The celebration can take whatever form couples wish from a meal or cocktail party to a lavish reception, the old-fashioned way. Large buffet receptions are very much part of the traditional Maltese wedding.

This Mediterranean archipelago has a wide selection of experienced, professional caterers who can offer local fare including dressed tuna to barbecues, mouth-watering buffet and finger foods. The 'Going away' ritual can be memorable: whether couples choose a horse-drawn Karozzin, a sleek limousine, or even a traditional Dgħajsa boat on the Grand Harbour.

Honeymoons

Following a wedding held in Malta, couples then have time to explore and discover the diversity of the Maltese Islands. With something for every interest, the possibilities are endless, ranging from the cosmopolitan side of Malta to the lure of Calypso's Isle, Gozo, and the solitude of Comino.

Malta: Popular LGBTQ+ Wedding and Honeymoon Destination

Diversity is ingrained in Maltese culture, and over the past few decades, Malta has made significant progress toward becoming an LGBTQ+ friendly destination reinforced by anti-discrimination laws introduced in the Maltese Constitution in 2014. In 2017, Malta voted to legalise same-sex marriage and amend the marriage act, replacing words such as 'husband' and 'wife' with the gender-neutral 'spouse'. For this reason, it should be no surprise that since October 2015, ILGA-Europe has ranked Malta in top place of the Rainbow Europe Map & Index for the past eight years! ■

www.visitmalta.com



China: Dim Sum



Germany: Black Forest Cake



Greece: Moussaka



Italy: Pizza Margherita

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Japan: Sushi



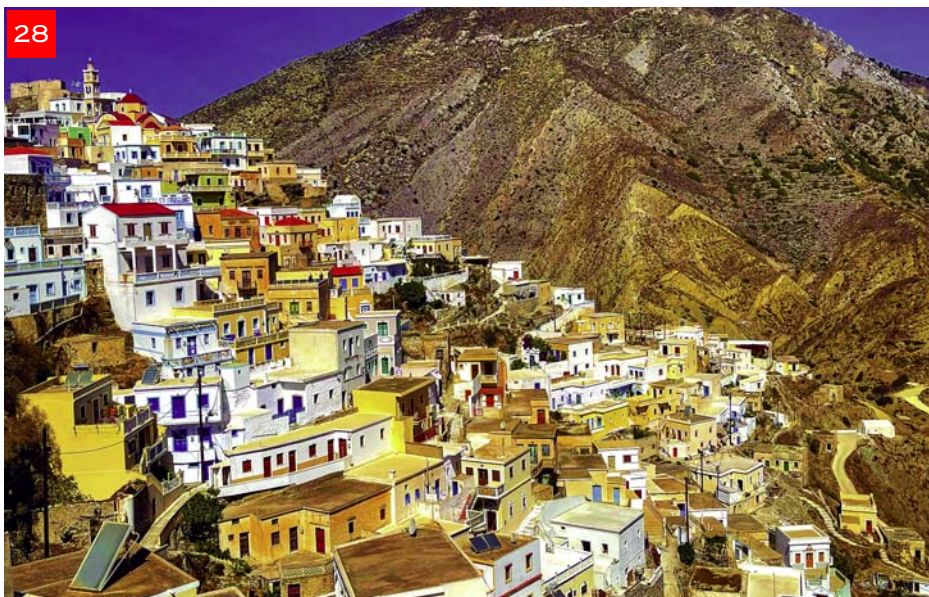
Mexico: Tacos



Spain: Paella



Thailand: Pad Thai



Karpathos: Greece's Most Sustainable Island

Article and photography by Nicholas Kontis

Greece is arguably Europe's most popular summer vacation destination. However, as in any holiday hot spot, the strain of high-season tourism takes a toll on the environment. Greece sees over 30 million visitors annually, most of them during July and August.

Savvy travelers seeking a sustainable Greek island holiday, where every tourist dollar goes to local businesses, ditch the usual glitzy suspects like Mykonos and Santorini. They head instead to the far-flung Dodecanese group in the southeast Aegean Sea. These islands, brushing the Turkish coastline, offer an authentic insight into traditional Greek life.

Located between bustling Rhodes and mythical Crete, Karpathos maintains time-honored values and attracts relatively few visitors. The way of life on the massive island is as close to original Greek as one might find in the ancient nation, before the intervention of smartphones and the internet. Time seems to stand still in Karpathian villages, where eco-sensitive guides tread lightly on sacred

trails once trodden by shepherds of another era, interacting with fishermen and boat captains along with experts in local geology and flora.

One of the last unspoiled islands in the Aegean, Karpathos offers more than a relaxing holiday for beachcombers. The 300-square-mile island is an ideal destination for ecotourism. At the crossroads of three continents — where Europe meets Asia and Africa — it is draped in flawless nature and proud inhabitants, and its traditions are strong.

The isolated north

The northern and southern sections of Karpathos are deeply contrasting. In the south, the vibrant port of Pigadia has several full-board high-rise hotels, fine-dining restaurants, bars and clubs. There are no large hotels in the isolated north, where accommodation consists only of guest houses, tiny private homes and small family hotels.

A highlight of northern Karpathos is a Natura 2000 reserve, incorporating Greece's newest marine park and embracing the mountainous islet of Saria. Its biodiversity is seen through endangered species, from the monk seal (*Monachus Monachus*) to over 900 plant species, many of them endemic.

With its white, pastel-washed homes, remote Olympos village is set atop a jagged mountain overlooking azure waters. It is the archetypical Greek island vista. Cut off from the rest of Karpathos until the late 1970s, the village has a matriarchal society.

Grandmothers still wear traditional dresses and tsemperi headscarves, the last of a bygone era.

The area of Avlona, a valley with 300 traditional farmhouses yet few inhabitants, provides another peek into the past. Its picturesque port of Diafani has fewer than 100 locals, but all are hospitable, welcoming guests to their private rooms and restaurants.

Ecotourism Karpathos

Conscious of respecting her people, her culture, and the flora and fauna of this fragile land, native daughter Evangelia Agapiou champions ecotourism on her home island. A guide and sustainable tour operator, she is the owner of Ecotourism Karpathos, whose active offerings bring visitors into direct contact with the local community and the island's nature. These include three hikes of varying degrees of difficulty, traditional cooking classes in Olympos, birdwatching, botanical tours and beekeeping.

Raised in Diafani and Olympos, Agapiou learned early on that permanently living on an isolated Greek island requires strength, endurance and love for the environment.

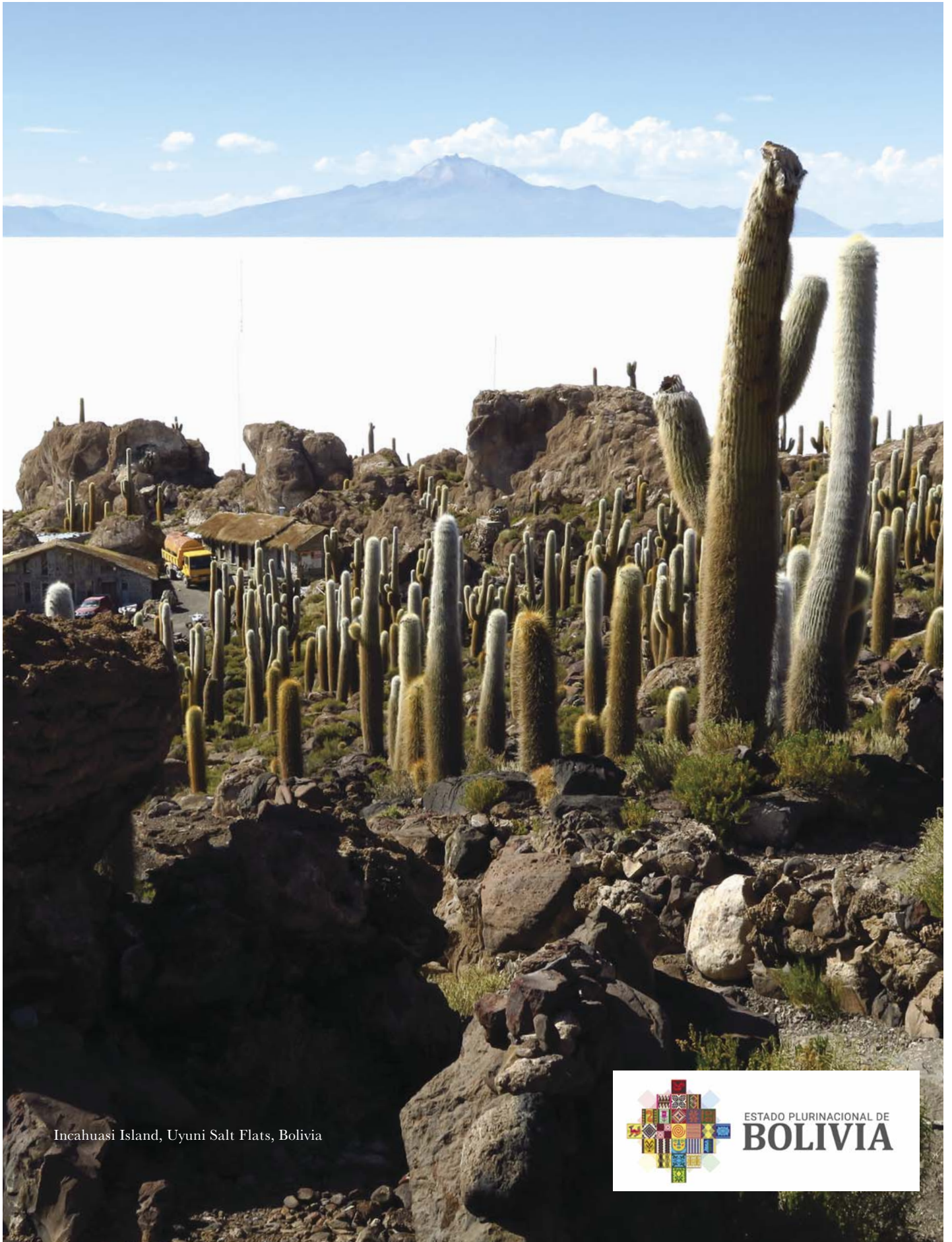
"The future of our island is dependent upon not being overrun by tourism, but to attract better travelers who will spend more on our, perhaps, once-in-a-lifetime experiences. When you take one of our cooking classes, walking tours or botanical tours, you have a great experience that benefits the locals, keeping our island unchanged," Agapiou said.

Karpathos is paving the way toward more sustainable travel and experiential encounters. The hidden gem remains unphased by travelers who venture out of bounds for a visit. Sustainable tourism benefits locals, but it also provides a satisfying journey for those visitors going local, seeing every dollar spent in the community.

This is a destination for travelers hungry for immersion into the unpretentious Greek lifestyle. Karpathos is light-years away from the Greek tourist trail, and it's worth a lingering look. ■

WWW.ECOTOURISM-KARPATHOS.COM





Incahuasi Island, Uyuni Salt Flats, Bolivia



ESTADO PLURINACIONAL DE
BOLIVIA



What's New in Nevada

Hike to Canada from Nevada on new trail

The state of Nevada has developed a new hiking trail called the Capital to Tahoe Trail. Eight years in the making, it starts on the steps of the Nevada State Capitol Building in Carson City and winds 26 km up to Lake Tahoe and the Tahoe Rim Trail, which connects with the Pacific Crest Trail. From there, the Pacific Coast Trail leads north to Canada culminating in British Columbia's E.C. Manning Provincial Park (and it also runs south to Mexico).

Sidle up to Nevada's sagebrush saloons

Nevada may be known by Canadians looking to "drink in" all that Las Vegas has to offer, but some of the best watering holes in the state – "sagebrush saloons" as they're called – can be found on its backroads. As the Road Trip Capital of the USA with 10 themed road trips across the state, Nevada suggests visitors sidle into a sagebrush saloon for a window into the Silver State's mining and boomtown history. These saloons are still slinging frosty beers and beverages, but also serve hearty meals.

Going galactic on Nevada's E.T. Highway

World UFO Day is July 2, 2024, so what better way for paranormal enthusiasts and die-hard UFOlogists (it's a thing) to explore the Extraterrestrial Highway across central Nevada; one of 10 themed road trips across the Road Trip Capital of the USA. The route runs past the Nevada National Security Site, including Area 51 – the top-secret portion of the base which the U.S. government only admitted to in 2013, where countless "UFO" sightings have been reported. Although travellers can't visit the base itself, kitsch-inclined road trippers can see a lunar crater, the Black Mailbox, pick up road trip snacks at E.T. Fresh Jerky and souvenirs at the Alien Research Center gift shop, pose for photos with alien murals, and hear local tales over alien beers and saucer burgers at the Little A'Le'Inn. ■

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What's New in Oregon

Oregon Outback named world's largest Dark Sky Sanctuary

A 2.5-million-acre area of southeastern Oregon has been certified as an International Dark Sky Sanctuary by DarkSky International (formerly the International Dark-Sky Association), making it the world's largest Dark Sky Sanctuary to date. Located within an area commonly referred to as the Oregon Outback, the Oregon Outback International Dark Sky Sanctuary has committed to protect its starry night skies for the benefit of residents, visitors and wildlife. The area is located within the largest, contiguous, pristine dark sky zone in the Lower 48 U.S. states, and this certification helps to protect a large portion of the designated zone.

Hit the electric highway in Oregon

Oregon is home to one of the largest and most robust networks of electric vehicle (EV) fast-charging stations in the U.S. It has developed six electric byways for visitors to road trip around the state, including the Oregon Coast, Southern Oregon, Willamette Valley wine country and Mt. Hood Territory – Oregon's highest peak and only year-round, lift-served skiing in North America. Oregon also offers an overarching EV eight-day itinerary which combines all byways into one self-guided trip.

Oregon Trail Interpretive Center reopens after renovations

After a three-year closure to complete major renovations, the grand reopening of the National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center will take place on Memorial Day weekend in May in Eastern Oregon. Located near Baker City (turning 150 years old in 2024 and hosting events to celebrate throughout the year), the National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center is a 500-acre site, including a large museum containing exhibits that tell the compelling story of the Oregon National Historic Trail and the emigrant experience. ■

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What's New in Utah

April favours Utah's "Forever Mighty" initiatives

Utah depends on the stewardship of the state by residents and visitors alike to ensure it remains Forever Mighty. This includes the preservation of Utah's night skies, and April's Global Astronomy Month and International Dark Sky Week was an ideal time for astro-tourists to learn about the state's internationally accredited dark sky parks and communities – more than any other destination on the planet (24 and counting!).

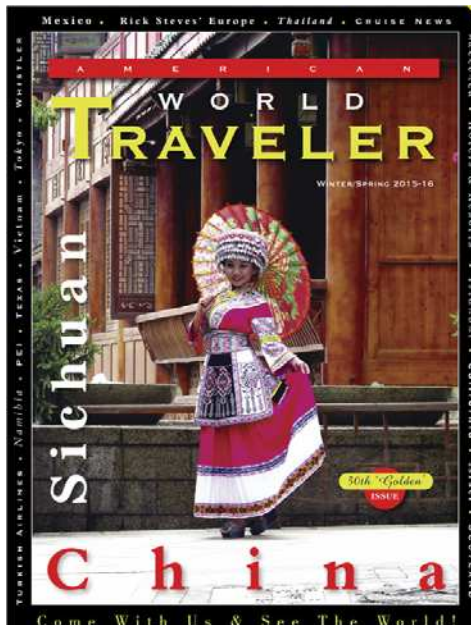
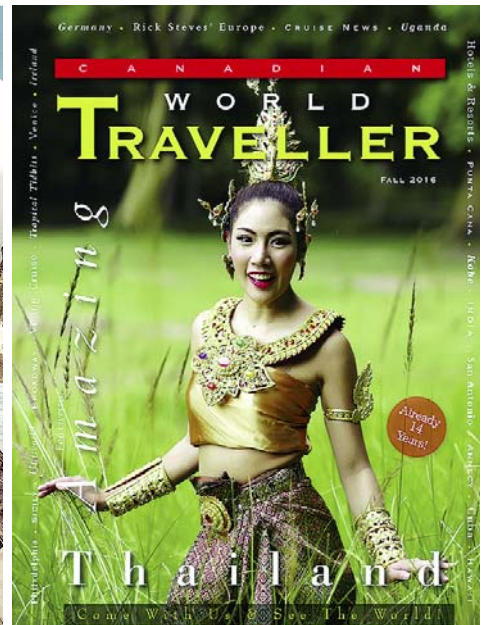
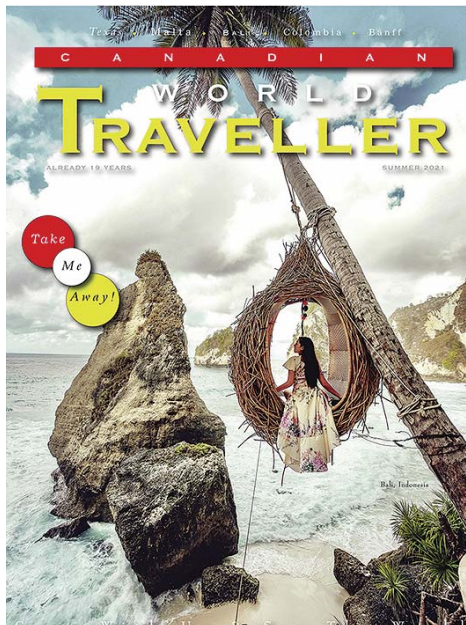
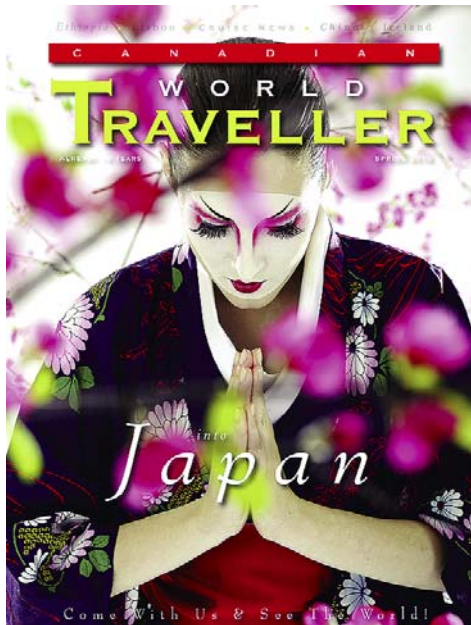
Stewards of the land Indigenous experience

The Lodge at Blue Sky, located near Park City, UT and one of the state's newest luxury properties, offers an endless list of unique experiences to guests, including the Sage Ceremony and Stories with the Shoshone. In this rare opportunity, Shoshone tribal member, Darren Parry, shares his culture through a private sage ceremonial blessing and heritage presentation discussing lessons in environmental stewardship, reciprocity and the Bear River Massacre restoration project. Darren showcases an array of museum-quality Shoshone beading and weaving artifacts as he tells stories passed down from his grandmother and other tribal elders.

Hike in Hollywood's footsteps through 100 years of film

As the trend of "set-jetting" – where travellers visit destinations featured in movies and TV shows – continues to influence the travel industry, Utah. America's Film Set® will celebrate 100 years of film in 2024. Robert Redford is widely known for developing Utah's Sundance Film Festival and Sundance Mountain Resort, and the new Pahneekahvets Trail is a short, but soul-stirring hike at the resort that will leave nature lovers in awe of Northern Utah's Provo Valley. Utah's Parry Brothers shot the first film in Cedar City, UT in 1924. Cedar City's iconic Cedar Breaks National Monument offers seasonal hikes and, with the opening of the new North View Contact Station, is now accessible year-round. ■

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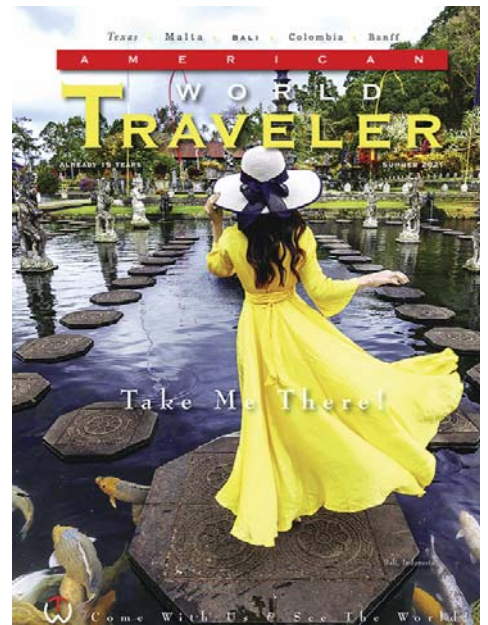
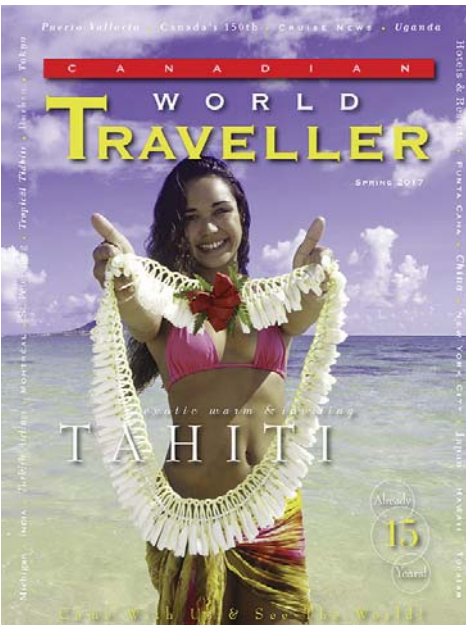
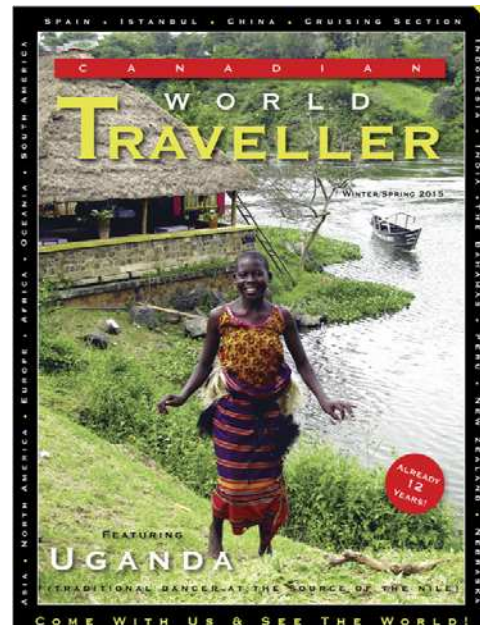
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ITA Airways Expands into Canadian Market

ITA Airways has made its debut in the Canadian market with the launch of its new nonstop connection between Toronto and Rome.

The new Toronto – Rome Fiumicino flight is operating six weekly frequencies, with daily flights from June to September and five weekly roundtrip flights in October.

The inaugural flight was operated with the new Airbus A330-900 aircraft, which features the most recent breakthroughs in aviation technology. To ensure an exceptional travel experience, the A330-900 offers a three-class configuration with 30 seats in Business Class, which are fully reclineable to a full flat bed, 24 seats in Premium Economy Class and 237 seats in Economy Class including 36 seats dedicated to Comfort Economy – all promising a comfortable and enjoyable journey to our passengers.

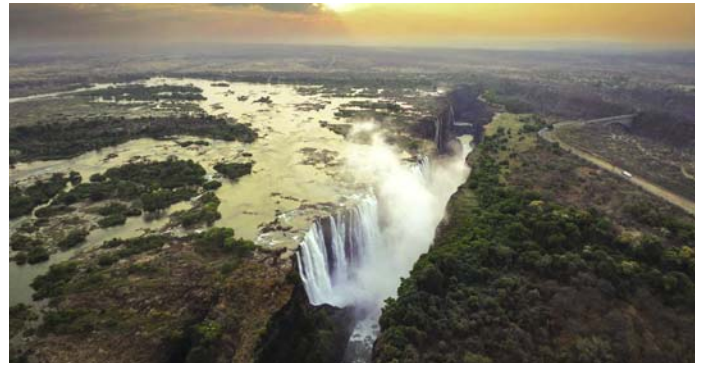
ITA Airways started its operations on 15th October 2021 with a fleet of 52 aircraft. At the heart of the Company's strategy is its ambition to be an ambassador of Made in Italy by offering personalized services and ensuring a completely Italian in-flight experience at every stage of the journey. This goal is achieved thanks to important partnerships with renowned Italian brands, such as Brunello Cucinelli, who designed the uniforms of the crew and ground staff, Walter De Silva, who created the interiors of ITA Airways' new aircraft, and starred Italian chefs, who are signing the on-board gastronomic offerings. One of the Company's strategic pillars is also its commitment to sustainability, achieved through a continuous fleet renewal with technologically advanced and efficient aircraft.

The opening of the new Toronto – Rome flight represents an important product for the Company, as it increases connections to and from North America, the first market for ITA Airways after Italy. On 7 April, the new direct Rome Fiumicino - Chicago flight was also inaugurated and with the new North American routes launched in Summer 2024, the number of destinations that ITA Airways operates in the USA and Canada rises to eight. ■

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World Traveler Summer 2024



Zambia Emerging as Africa's Next Bucket List Must

Increasing numbers of American travelers have the African nation of Zambia in their sights. Located south of Tanzania and north of Botswana, Namibia and Zimbabwe, Zambia is massive in scale - 15% larger than Texas, half the size of Alaska. The country's crown jewel is the Zambezi River's Victoria Falls, the world's largest waterfall, considered one of the planet's seven natural wonders.

Densest concentration of animals

"Zambia is emerging as one of the premier wildlife and safari destinations in Africa, with sighting of the "big five" virtually guaranteed on day one," says Matongo Matamwandi, Chief Executive Officer of the Zambia Tourism Agency. Home to 20 national parks - some among the best preserved and most diverse in Africa - 30% of Zambia is under conservation protection. South Luangwa National Park is known as the "birthplace of walking safaris." Naturalists have designated the southern Luangwa as one of the world's largest wildlife sanctuaries.

The concentration of animals around the Luangwa River and its crescent-shaped lagoons is one of the densest in Africa, protecting 60 different animal species and more than 400 bird species. Located in central western Zambia, Kafue is the oldest and largest national park in the country, covering an area of 8,650 square miles - the size of New Hampshire.

A Natural Wonder of the World

The first European to "discover" the Victoria Falls was Scotland's David Livingstone, who named it to for Britain's queen. But for time immemorial, it's been called "Mosi-oa-Tunya" (the smoke that thunders). The falls are among the widest and highest in the world, offering a breathtaking spectacle of power and beauty. Beyond its scenic allure, Victoria Falls serves as a hub for extreme adventure such as bungee jumping. The Zambezi River offers white-water rafting among rapids considered the most intense in the world. Yet Devil's Pool, a natural pool located at the falls' edge on Livingstone Island, allows the unforgettable experience of calm and safe swimming just inches from the precipice.

Alongside classic and walking safaris, visitors rappel down the Zambezi Gorge and zipline over Victoria Falls. Canoeing requires no technical experience and provides up-close encounters with hippopotamus, crocodile and elephant. Helicopter flights are also available, as is the "flight of the angel," an aerial tour offering spectacular views of Victoria Falls and the Zambezi River. Most visitors also spend time in the historic town of Livingstone, adjacent to Victoria Falls, and Lusaka, Zambia's leafy capital, home to 3 million.

Situated in the Great Rift Valley, Zambia is rich in fascinating influences and diverse traditions. Home to more than 70 ethnic groups and 19 million inhabitants, it is recognized by the World Economic Forum (WEF) as one of Africa's friendliest, safest and most welcoming destinations. ■

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Charleston: Then and Now

Article and photography by Michael Morcos

It was all about the rice, our guide added, that is how Charleston became the richest city in early America. Rice was ideal to grow in this region as water was abundant for this thirsty crop that was sold for more than any other grains. According to the recently opened International African American Museum, we would find out the fields were often tended to by slaves from West Africa who had experience with the grain. This industry ultimately led to Charleston also becoming one of the major slavery ports in the Americas.

The Museum is an exceptional looking building placed on the shores of the original slavery port. It is raised by a floor to honour the many bodies that laid below the soil. It took years of planning and funding, but finally it stands to bear witness to the history of slavery in the New World. Hi-tech and yet simple, it has an amazing array of original African artifacts and as well multimedia presentations by modern-day African Americans. A one-of-a-kind museum, it is now a must visit when in Charleston.

This would be my second time to Charleston, and really, it is the same charming and inviting southern city today as it was two decades ago. Walking the streets of central Charleston is like being teleported to a time centuries ago. Life looks good here even with the tourist crowds as there is never any traffic jams nor unwanted noise, just a peaceful and harmonious laid-back feeling.

Our hotel, the Mills House, was ideally located on Meeting Street, at the very heart of old Charleston and minutes away from the famous slave market. Surrounded by beautiful boutiques and a multitude of restaurants and bars, this historic building was in immaculate shape with all the modern amenities including a pool and spa, but also kept true to its rich past.

You can walk around aimlessly and find something of interest on about every street here. Every building has a story to tell that deepens the history of Charleston. One street away from the Mill House is King Street, which has something for everyone from grand hotels to fine dining, an old movie theatre and many small specialty shops.

Dining could not be any better as Charleston offers so many choices, it would be hard to decide. We did try the Church and Union restaurant, not only for its menu but we were enamoured by its uniqueness. Housed inside an old, abandoned church, the ceiling has the entire book of Sun Tzu's The Art of War written on the ceiling. An over-the-top idea, but it sure does stand out and will be remembered.

No first trip to Charleston would be complete without a visit to Angel Oak. It is jaw dropping at first site. So immense is this Oak tree, it is hard to describe, how not only it reaches to the skies, but also in every direction, even downwards to the ground and would be the biggest single tree I have ever seen. This I would consider a freak of nature and has defied centuries of hurricanes to stand defiant and strong. ■

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Li River, Guilin, China



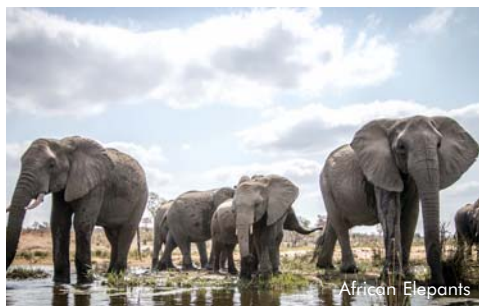
Warrior, Flores



Santorini, Greece



Snorkeling Fun



African Elephants



Salt Caravan, Djibouti



Peruvian Family



Mount Fuji, Japan



Rice Fields, Ubud, Indonesia



Dim Sum, Hong Kong



Skiing, the French Alps



The Road to Twillingate, Newfoundland & Labrador

Article and photography by Steve Gillick

In 2023, Twillingate, the Iceberg Capital of the World, located along Iceberg Alley, witnessed fields of sea ice and a flotilla of icebergs floating and drifting from Greenland during the mid-May to mid-June viewing season.

And never having seen an iceberg before, Twillingate was immediately placed on our 2024 travel list. But nature is nature and can't be planned. There were no icebergs to be seen. The closest we got to an iceberg was when we quaffed a few pints of Quid Vidi Iceberg Lager. However, we were not disappointed when we discovered the area's outstanding beauty.

Twillingate is a town in Notre Dame Bay on the East Coast of Newfoundland and Labrador, about 1 ½ hours north of

Gander and 5 hours north of St. John's, the provincial capital. The name derives from French fishermen in the 17th century who called the area "Toulinquet", after a group of islands off the French coast.

Travelers know that sometimes the best adventures are often serendipitous. Instead of driving straight from St. John's to Twillingate and hopping on a boat to find icebergs and Atlantic Puffins, we changed plans at the last minute. Someone tipped us off about the town of Elliston. And so, we drove 3 ½ hours north of St. John's to the "Puffin Viewing Site" in Elliston to see Atlantic Puffins flying, landing, burrowing, nuzzling, and clamoring on an island rock only a few hundred yards away and also on the land right beside us. Then, we drove ten minutes to the lighthouse in Bonavista,

where the breathtaking coastal, crashing-water scenery was complemented by Atlantic Puffins doing their thing. Both visitors with high-end cameras and cell phones were absolutely thrilled.

And from Bonavista, it was a 4-hour drive to Twillingate through small villages and along forested highways. We crossed the Tickle Bridge that joins the town's south and north islands and began to explore.

As nature enthusiasts, we headed to the village of Crow Head just 7 minutes away. The Long Point Lighthouse has dramatic views of the ocean and high, steep cliffs (with no guard rails), but also bounding Snowshoe Hares and territorial White-throated Sparrows. Several trails head along the coast in different directions, revealing incredible seascapes and colorful birds, such as the Boreal Chickadee and the White-winged Crossbill.

Back in town, we visited the Twillingate Museum, which features local history; the Durell Museum, where we learned about Titus the Polar Bear's town visit in 2000, and about the now-extinct Great Auk, a penguin-looking bird; and a stop at the Auk Island Winery, where featured brands include Mummers Wine, Moose Joos and Funky Puffin.

Breakfast at Annie's was a treat. We enjoyed tasty homemade fish cakes and eggs served with a warm smile and conversation.

For dinner, we headed to Georgie's, where, aside from our Iceberg Lagers, the Anchor Salad, with Cranberries, Partridge Berry, Feta, Grapes, and Red Onion was refreshingly delicious. This was followed by freshly steamed lobster with drawn butter. So good!

Our trip to Twillingate was an eye-opener to the area's unbelievable scenery, nature trails, food, and hospitality. Plans are to return next year – whether there are icebergs or not! ■

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TRAVEL SOUTH USA

Exploring the Great Outdoors: Destinations Offering Dark Skies and Outdoor Excursions

Explore the beauty of the natural world where the stars shine bright and outdoor adventures await. From serene stargazing spots with minimal light pollution to thrilling landscapes perfect for hiking, camping, and exploring, these destinations promise unforgettable experiences under the open sky. Whether you're an astronomy enthusiast or an outdoor adventurer, these places offer a unique blend of celestial wonders and exciting activities to reconnect with nature and marvel at the universe above. So, grab your gear and get ready to embark on a journey that will create memories of a lifetime.

Alabama

What's New - Nestled in the heart of the Appalachian Mountains, Fort Payne is a hidden gem waiting to be discovered. This charming, small Alabama town holds a special vibe all its own. From its natural beauty to its rich history, Fort Payne has something for everyone.

Fun Fact - Little River Canyon is also referred to as the "Grand Canyon of the East".



Mississippi

What's New - Mississippi visitors can make fast and convenient reservations at state parks all over the Magnolia State using an updated reservation system for Mississippi State Parks. Travelers can make use of the website or the MS State Parks app to reserve camping sites, view campground details, and peruse photos to help plan their next outdoor adventure.

Fun Fact - One of the rarest birds in North America is the indigenous Mississippi Sandhill Crane. This coastal species, distinguished by their gray color, are similar in appearance to herons, and are native to Gulf coastal region. When a refuge was established in 1975, the Mississippi Sandhill Crane National Wildlife Refuge, there were fewer than 40 of these majestic birds alive. Today the population is around 120.

South Carolina

What's New - Parasailing Over the Coast: If you think Hilton Head Island's coastline is beautiful from the ground, try seeing it from hundreds of feet in the air.



Fun Fact - If you're among the growing number of travelers looking for a little adventure on your vacation, you'll find plenty to get your adrenaline flowing in South Carolina. All of the state's top destinations offer an array of exciting activities and experiences, from hiking and kayaking to zip lining and shark fishing.

Tennessee

What's New - Discover the new Tennessee Night Sky Trail: An Unforgettable Stargazing Adventure. Immerse yourself in panoramic vistas atop majestic mountains, serene lakesides, and historic downtowns that make up the Tennessee Night Sky Trail. Each location has been carefully selected to provide optimal conditions for experiencing the wonders of the universe. Whether you are a seasoned astronomer or simply seeking a moment of tranquility, this trail has something for everyone including travel itineraries for each nearby city.

Fun Fact - One of the highlights of the new Tennessee Night Sky Trail is its accessibility. Eight out of the nine recommended viewing areas offer opportunities for open stargazing including spaces for wheelchair access. Notably, the iconic observation deck at the Tri-Cities Airport provides a unique vantage point for fans to observe the night sky, as well as aircraft and mountain views.

Missouri

What's New - Missouri State Parks are excellent for stargazing, but don't just come when the sun sets. Many parks have fun programming for visitors to enjoy. Current River State Park has a popular foraging class, First Missouri State Capitol State Historic Site hosts basket weaving classes, Learn2Climb programs are now available at Johnson's Shut-Ins State Park starting in April. In October, Bennett Spring State Park will be celebrating its 100th anniversary, which will be full of live music, storytelling, history displays and living history re-enactment of the Civilian Conservation Corps.

Fun Fact - Missouri's darkest state park is Current River State Park. The park has a history as a corporate retreat, but today offers a peaceful haven for outdoor adventurers. ■

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The Monarchs of Michoacan

by Nicholas Kontis

Every autumn, as cold weather arrives in Canada and the United States, Monarch butterflies begin their migration to the warmer climes of Mexico. Flocking south in colonies of over 20 million, and depending on weather conditions, they travel 80 to 120 miles a day until they reach Michoacán, as many as 3,000 miles south of their summer homes.

Four butterfly sanctuaries, all within a single biosphere reserve, are open to the public in the adjacent states of Michoacán and Mexico. The two most frequented, both in Michoacán, are El Rosario, not far from the town of Ocampo, and Sierra Chincua, outside Anguero.

Monarch butterflies travel further than any other insect. Their long journey begins in August, but it is mid to late November before they settle into the rugged forested mountains of Michoacán, its tall pine and oak trees sharing the Oyamel fir forest. The butterflies

swarm the region, showcasing a sea of orange in the far-reaching trees. For eco-travelers, their mating ritual is an exceptional experience.

Over the next five months, nearly 1 billion of these flighty insects hunker down in the thick forests of the protected Monarch Butterfly Biosphere Reserve, on their annual return from the US and Canada. In 2008, UNESCO honored the reserve as a World Heritage Site.

Monarch butterflies can fly as high as 1,200 feet, although cooler temperatures keep them nearer the earth. Their life cycle is four generations — three of which survive only about a month. The fourth group live up to nine months, and these are the ones that migrate between central Mexico and the northern United States or Canada.

Their bright orange-yellow color comes from milkweed, the sole host plant of the Monarch. Deforestation and pesticides are its most significant threats.

Witnessing the Monarch migration should be on every traveler's radar. January and February are the best months for visits, as it's during this time that the butterfly population is at its highest.

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Discover LA

Downtown Los Angeles at a Glance

Arts & Culture

- See a performance at The Music Center, Walt Disney Concert Hall, Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, Ahmanson Theatre or Mark Taper Forum
- Visit a renowned art museum, such as The Broad, Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) Grand Avenue, or The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA, or discover new and international artists at galleries like Hauser & Wirth, Hive Gallery, Arts District Co-Op, DOMA Arts Complex, Over the Influence, Night Gallery or Spring Arts Collective
- Discover your artistic passion at the GRAMMY Museum or Fashion Institute of Design & Merchandising Museum
- Immerse yourself in street art, including "Pope of Broadway," "The Cleansing of Carnage from Vagus," "Bloom," "Kiss," "Ed Ruscha Monument," Santee Public Gallery and the Container Yard

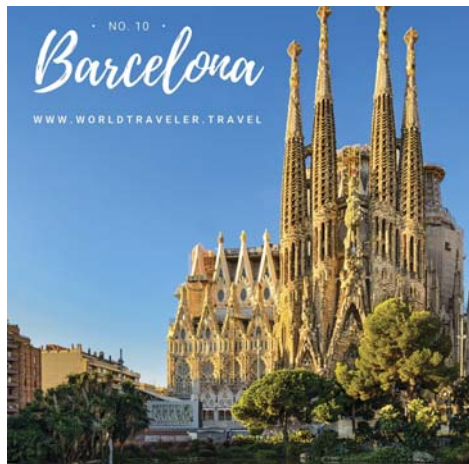
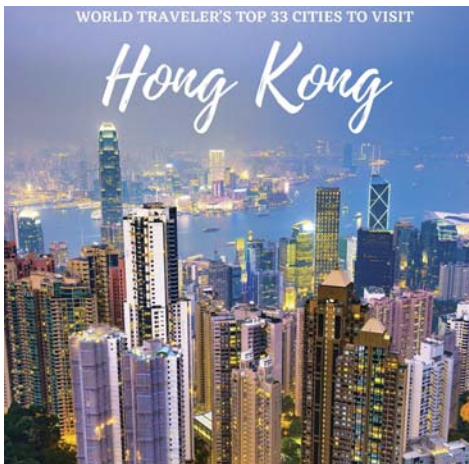
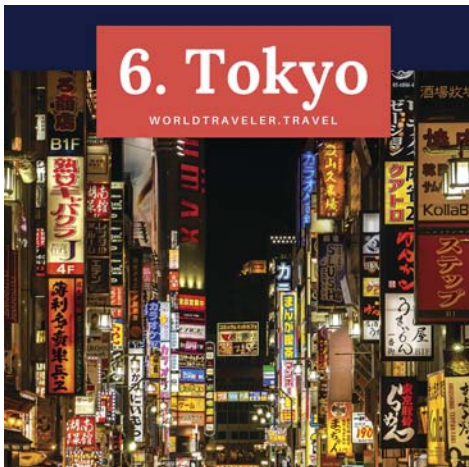
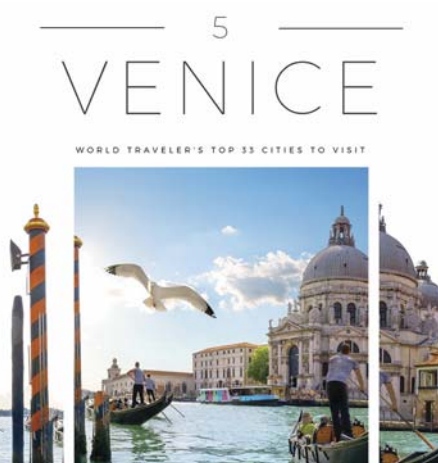
Architecture

- See Frank Gehry's vision come to life at the Walt Disney Concert Hall and Conrad Los Angeles hotel
- Visit famed buildings from your favorite movies, including the Bradbury Building from "Blade Runner" and The Biltmore Los Angeles hotel, one of DTLA's most-filmed sites
- Explore the eclectic mix of Spanish, Art Deco and other styles at LA's City Hall, Union Station and Central Public Library
- Stroll along South Broadway where historic theaters have been repurposed for retail and entertainment, including the Apple Tower Theatre, Rialto Theatre (now Urban Outfitters) and The United Theater on Broadway

History

- Visit some of the city's oldest buildings at El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historical Monument, including Avila Adobe and Sepulveda House
- Dive into LA's diverse cultures at LA Plaza de Cultura y Artes, Italian American Museum of Los Angeles, Chinese American Museum, Japanese American National Museum and more ■

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Igniting the Spirit in Winnipeg

Article and photography by Steve Gillick

The spirit of Winnipeg, the capital and largest city in the Canadian province of Manitoba, is steeped in history, culture, and tradition. The Forks National Historic Site, now a popular area for learning, recreation, and dining, marks the confluence of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers. It was here some 6,000 years ago that First Nations gathered to trade goods from the forests and the prairies and to share practices, customs, and beliefs.

On a return visit to the city, whose name is Cree for 'muddy water' (referring to Lake Winnipeg), I attended the annual pow-wow, Manito Ahee (an Ojibway term for "where the creator sits").

According to Katherine Strongwind, Marketing and Communications Manager, a pow-wow is a gathering where all tribes come together. The celebration is inclusive, and indigenous peoples and non-native visitors can learn about each other and the land they live on. "We are one with the land

on Turtle Island (the name used to denote Earth or North America)".

Dezirae Tootosis, the Head Lady Dancer, explained that visitors derive energy from watching the pow-wow. Ten-year-old Grass Dancer Tatum Mentuk confirmed that "when I hear the drums, they are talking and calling my spirit". And Kasen Street, the Head Man Dancer, explained that dancing is healing. "You are dancing for those who can't dance, and if you make at least one person feel good, then it's worthwhile".

The Grand Entry featured 1170 dancers, chiefs, dignitaries, and royalty. It was a stunning spectacle of color and song. Most participants wore magnificent regalia reflecting their position in the tribe and/or dance specialty, with vivid colors harkening back to each person's naming ceremony and tribal affiliation. It was mesmerizing.

And this energetic spirit accompanies visitors when they explore Winnipeg.

In Quamajuk (pronounced cow-my-yok), the gallery containing the largest collection of Inuit art in the world visitors learn how powerful art can be. "It energizes people", according to Learning Coordinator Colleen Leduc. Seeing a pair of 2000-year-old snow goggles or pondering Abraham Anghik Ruben's "Memories: an Ancient Past", or learning about the ancient Inuit legend of Nuliajuk, present in Goota Ashoona's sculpture "Tuniigusiia/The Gift", just outside the front door of the Museum, is part of working toward healing, learning about Indigenous culture, and celebrating the land".

The Leaf in Assiniboine Park is a different celebration of the land. Visitors walk through four distinct indoor biomes showcasing the diversity of plants across the globe and then visit six outdoor themed gardens. Notably, the Indigenous People's Garden highlights the elements of fire and water amidst a naturalized garden inspired by the Manitoba landscape.

Indigenous history and culture feature prominently in the excellent exhibits at the Manitoba Museum, the Garden of Contemplation at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, and the wildlife preserve at Fort Whyte Alive.

Foodies can discover delectable dishes on Indigenous-inspired menus at such places as Manoomin and Gather Craft Kitchen and Bar. At the Feast Café Bistro, celebrated Chef Christa Bruneau-Guenther's dish, Braised Bison Short Rib, complemented with root vegetables, smoked wild blueberries, and juniper maple demi-glace, is a memorable experience!

Winnipeg is one of the most diverse cities in Canada due to the waves of immigration that began with French fur traders in the 18th century and continues to this day. But visitors who come to interact with Indigenous history and culture will ignite their spirit of curiosity, education, discovery, beauty, music, storytelling, gastronomy, traditions, healing, and awe. ■

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Cherie DeLory

Paddling, Cruising and Hiking the Historic Trent-Severn Waterway

by Cherie DeLory

I awoke to the rising sun glittering across the Otonabee River into my suite, at the Holiday Inn Peterborough Waterfront. Once out on the waterfront trail, I wasn't sure if I should follow my nose and the smell of freshly baked oatmeal cookies, to what I'm told is the town's Quaker Oats facility, or stop into the Silver Bean Café's waterfront location in Millennium Park for more butter tarts and brownies.

After 20 years on the waterfront, its second location is 5 minutes away in The Canadian Canoe Museum's new building and waterfront location on the shores of Little Lake. The relocation grand opening was on May 13 and it houses the world's largest collection of canoes and kayaks, and now offers canoe and kayak rentals.

The first canoe I noticed when I walked into the Exhibition Hall was one with a vintage gramophone sitting in the middle. It belonged to Toronto canoe builder, Octavius L Hicks and was donated to the

museum in 2017. This type of canoe circa late 19th and early 20th century was affectionately termed "courting canoe". It made me think of a story my aunt told me about my grandfather who had taken his soon-to-be wife on a canoe day-trip to the Toronto Islands for a picnic lunch. Of the more than 600 canoes and kayaks on display, one will speak to you as well.

The much romanticized canoe was first built by the Indigenous peoples of Canada out of lightweight and durable birchbark that floated along the original roadways — the waterways, canals, lakes and rivers.

The Trent-Severn Waterway, circa 1833, is a national historic site. The group of lakes that connect Lake Ontario to Georgian Bay spans 386 km from Trenton, Ontario to Port Severn. A main attraction for boaters and sightseers are the historic lift locks and locks that allow boats to move along the canal at varying elevations. The Peterborough Lift Lock (Lock 21) is the highest in the world,

raising boats 65 feet using hydraulic power. I had the thrill of experiencing this in a kayak and I recommend you try it at this summer's Lock & Paddle event on Saturday, July 20th.

The Peterborough Lift Lock is an engineering marvel, built in 1896. I recall as a young girl my family taking a day-trip to see Lock 21 and a few others along the TSW. The grandeur of the structures and the excitement of watching the boats pass through the locks remains a happy childhood memory.

There's more exiting adventure for canoeists with the official Canadian Canoe Route, a mapped 7-day suggested itinerary that takes you on the open road and waterways from Toronto to Ottawa. If you'd rather steer your boat than paddle it, make your way to Del Mastro Horseshoe Bay Resort Marina and captain your own 40-foot luxury houseboat, no boating licence or experience required. The marina in Peterborough is the second home base in Canada for Le Boat, following its launch on Ottawa's Rideau Canal a fews ago. Anchors aweigh! ■

[HTTPS://THEKAWARTHAS.CA](https://thekawarthas.ca)



Cherie DeLory

Dubai: A Dazzling Destination for Dream Nuptials



From a once humble trading port to a vibrant metropolis, Dubai is steeped in history yet brimming with modern allure, offering an unmatched backdrop for a myriad of romantic occasions to unfold. From intimate beachfront ceremonies along pristine, gold sand shores, to lavish ballroom affairs in heritage-rich venues, the city offers a variety of world-class amenities and services for every whim—complemented by customizable premium packages.

Ethereal Venues

Gracing over 350,000 sqm of landscaped lawns and sandy beach, The Ritz Carlton Dubai exudes elegance reminiscent of the French Riviera. Dedicated event planners, in-house florists, and a creative culinary team work together to enhance every wedding package, which can be tailored to specific cultural needs such as Indian and Arabian celebrations.

Against a backdrop of indulgent Arabian splendour, One&Only Royal Mirage features majestic Arabesque ballrooms, elegant reception areas, and impeccably maintained gardens, perfect for a chic wedding affair.



Tucked away far from the bustling city center, Meliá Desert Palm is a boutique 5-star hotel set amidst a picturesque 64-hectare polo estate. This tranquil oasis features a secluded garden, offering couples a quaint courtyard framed by 80-year-old olive trees for exchanging vows.

Madinat Jumeirah boasts a collection of 10 venues including Fort Island, located in the heart of a lagoon in the palatial gardens. Setting the stage for a grand, al fresco ceremony, the venue can accommodate up to 600 guests and offers stunning views of the iconic Burj Al Arab Jumeirah.

Bespoke Oases

Honeymooners can whisk away on romantic yacht charters with Xclusive Yachts for serene cruises along the Arabian Gulf coast, beach-side picnics, and exploring secluded islands.

Chef Andrea Migliaccio brings Capri's two Michelin-starred dining experience to Dubai with pop-up Ristorante L'Olivo at Al Mahara. Featuring a floor-to-ceiling aquarium, indulge in divine Mediterranean flavors and innovative dishes for an intimate and romantic soirée.

Sonara Escape hosts private pop-up events in their chic, zero-waste desert camp. Expert 'experience creators' curate every detail from décor, fine dining, to entertainment—including fire shows. Guests can stay overnight in organic nest suites or experience their 'Sky Safari' for an immersive journey into astronomy and Arab heritage.

Experience the magic of Hot Air Balloon Dubai. Flights start at dawn and can be combined with desert safaris, gourmet breakfasts, or falconry shows. Tailored packages are also available for special occasions, including a unique proposal above Love Lakes Dubai's heart-shaped waters.

Pre-Wedding Indulgences

Talise Ottoman Spa at Jumeirah Zabeel Saray offers an opulent prelude for soon-to-be-weds and bachelorette parties. Spanning over 8,200 square meters, this award-winning spa provides a selection of services inspired by Ottoman heritage dating back centuries, including traditional hammam steam treatments.

With panoramic views of The Dubai Fountain, Al Bayt in the Palace Downtown Hotel infuses the timeless tradition of afternoon tea with Arabian-inspired specialties as camel milk crème brûlée and saffron scones.

For a memorable bachelor party, explore the diverse selection of top-tier golf courses in Dubai, which offer unparalleled scenery and challenging gameplay. The historic Majlis Course at Emirates Golf Club is built along the crest of the cityscape and set amidst rolling dunes, while the Dubai Creek Golf & Yacht Club offers a captivating fusion of traditional and modern design, with lush fairways and breathtaking vistas of Dubai Creek.

Legal Marriage in Dubai

All nationalities can get legally married in the UAE. Non-Muslims can marry at the respective embassies or consulates of their home countries in the UAE, or even at a temple or church according to their religion. Some countries require their citizens to file an application of intention to marry at their embassy or consulate before the event. The marriage should also be registered in the embassies of both partners in the UAE. For an Islamic wedding, there is a separate list of criteria that needs to be met. ■

WWW.VISITDUBAI.COM



Dubai named 'No.1 global destination' in Tripadvisor Travellers' Choice Awards for the third consecutive year

Dubai is the only city to date to have won this consumer choice award for three years in a row

Dubai has secured the coveted No.1 global destination ranking in the Tripadvisor Travellers' Choice Best of the Best Destinations Awards for an unprecedented third successive year – becoming the first city to achieve the milestone.

Dubai's latest top international ranking was announced by Tripadvisor, the world's largest travel guidance platform, in its Travellers' Choice Awards for 2024: Best of the Best Destinations. The accolade carries further significance due to the winners being selected based exclusively on the reviews of millions of global travellers in the Tripadvisor community. The awards factor in the quality and quantity of Tripadvisor reviews and ratings for hotels, restaurants and experiences in each destination over a period of 12 months between 1 October 2022 through 30 September 2023.

The top Tripadvisor award is the latest in a series of global accolades for Dubai. In 2023, the city was ranked the No.1 city in the world to relocate to in a report by financial services provider Remitly, and was ranked the best city in the world for remote workers by property consultancy Savills in its top 20 list of the 2023 Executive Nomad Index. Dubai was also named the world's No.2 city destination in Euromonitor International's Top 100 City Destinations Index 2023 and ranked one of the top 10 cities in the Global Power City Index, in a report issued by the Mori Memorial Foundation's Institute for Urban Strategies in Japan. The UAE was also named the second safest country in the world in 2023, according to findings revealed by Numbeo, the world's largest database of user-contributed data about cities and countries worldwide. This recognition strengthens Dubai's attractiveness as a top global livability hub that provides a unique lifestyle to the 200 different nationalities that call the city home, underpinned by high safety and security standards that allow travellers to visit with peace of mind.



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New from Australia



Whale Shark season at Ningaloo Marine Park

It's whale shark season from February through to July at Western Australia's Ningaloo Marine Park (Nyinggulu), and Coral Bay Tours is offering an intimate, face-to-fin experience with these gentle giants.

Each year, the park becomes a haven for the largest fish in the ocean – the whale shark. Reaching lengths up to 11 metres (36 feet), gentle whale sharks return to the shores of Western Australia in search of plankton and krill.

The World Heritage-Listed Ningaloo Marine Park is one of the only places on Earth where visitors can experience swimming with three big marine wonders in one location - manta rays, humpback whales and whale sharks - when migration seasons align around August.

The tour kicks off with a reef snorkel experience amidst coral gardens and vibrant marine life. After morning tea, the quest to encounter the majestic whale sharks begins, with a spotter plane guiding the way.



Elevated Escape: Noosa to K'gari

Discover the world's largest sand island by land and air with K'gari Explorer Tours newest package, Elevated Escape: Noosa to K'gari.

Departing from Noosa, two hours north of Brisbane / Meeanjin, a helicopter takes three guests through the skies above the Great Sandy National Park and UNESCO-designated Noosa Biosphere Reserve to K'gari's sandy shores. Upon landing, guests embark on private ranger-guided and bespoke 4WD tours of the island's World Heritage-listed icons, and can enjoy light touches of luxury like a gourmet picnic lunch.

Developed in partnership between eco-certified K'gari Explorer Tours and Salt Air Aviation, Elevated Escape: Noosa to K'gari includes return transfers to Noosa, national park fees, and foreign language translation through the K'gari Explorer Tours app.

Point Nepean ebike Tour

Cycle through an exciting blend of history, nature, and adventure on the new e-bike tour from Emoceen, a sustainable provider of eco-friendly and immersive experiences in Australia's most stunning coastal regions.

Starting about a 90 minute drive south of Melbourne / Narm, at the very tip of the Mornington Peninsula in Point Nepean, the tour takes guests to historic landmarks including Quarantine Station and Cheviot Hill, which both boast unrivalled views of the southern coast. Make your way through lush trails filled with flora and fauna, and on to sweeping views of Port Phillip and the Melbourne skyline.

Emoceen's newest tour traverses over 19kms (11 mi) of beautiful coastline and Australian history, providing an insightful journey into Australia's military history. ■



The Sunshine State welcomes nine new MICHELIN Star restaurants in 2024



Three one-MICHELIN-Star restaurants added in Miami, four in Orlando and two in Tampa, bringing new total to 26

Nine restaurants joined the sought-after group of MICHELIN-Starred restaurants in Florida, as the 2024 selection of the MICHELIN Guide Miami, Orlando and Tampa was recently announced.

In total, 26 restaurants were awarded Stars by the anonymous MICHELIN Guide inspectors, with L'Atelier de Joël Robuchon Miami remaining atop the list with two MICHELIN Stars. This year's selection includes 149 restaurants and 38 types of cuisine with the new Stars including Japanese, Peruvian, Vietnamese and Scandinavian.

Here are the new MICHELIN-Starred restaurants:

Orlando

Camille (Vietnamese cuisine)
Natsu (Japanese cuisine)
Papa Llama (Peruvian cuisine)
Victoria & Albert's (Contemporary cuisine)

Miami

EntreNos (Contemporary cuisine)
Ogawa (Japanese cuisine)
Shingo (Japanese cuisine)

Tampa

Ebbe (Contemporary cuisine)
Kosen (Japanese cuisine)

MICHELIN Green Star

Kaya (Orlando; Filipino cuisine)
Los Félix/Krüs Kitchen (Miami; Mexican/Contemporary cuisine)
Bib Gourmand ■

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Tropical Tidbits

by Sue C Travel

Summer fun in the Caribbean...

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

See sea turtles & whale sharks

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

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





Gala summer festivals & carnivals

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



Antigua Carnival

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

Incredible kid's and teen's clubs & activities

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

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



Donna Feldman in Aruba

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

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

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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This photo: Viking Ocean Ship in Norway

Sail The World!



Disney Destiny Will Bring Stories of Legendary Disney Heroes and Villains to Life

Disney Cruise Line revealed the first details about its next ship, the Disney Destiny. The design theme, sister to the Disney Wish and Disney Treasure, will be “Heroes and Villains,” drawing on the legacy of beloved Disney stories, characters and theme park attractions, to forge a cruise vacation that will empower guests to embrace their own calling aboard every unforgettable voyage.

The Disney Cruise Line and Walt Disney Imagineering teams were inspired by the dynamic duality of every great Disney story, where opposing forces of light and dark drive characters to rise to their purpose, when developing the Disney Destiny. Onboard, guests will encounter heroes and villains alike – including those from beloved Walt Disney Animation Studios stories like “The Lion King,” “Hercules” and “One Hundred and One Dalmatians” – within the spaces, experiences and entertainment throughout their voyage. ■ [HTTPS://DISNEYCRUISE.DISNEY.GO.COM](https://disneycruise.disney.go.com)



MSC Cruises Introduces Seven Distinct Districts to its Newest Ground-Breaking Ship, MSC World America, New for 2025

MSC Cruises recently revealed that its ultra-modern new flagship, MSC World America, will feature seven distinct districts each bringing together a range of tailored experiences. Combining bars, restaurants, entertainment and leisure facilities, each district will meet the needs, moods and desires of travellers throughout their time on board.

The ship will usher in a new world of cruising to American shores when she enters service in April 2025. Each of the seven districts boasts its own atmosphere, facilities and experiences, expertly designed to enhance the onboard experience, allowing each and every guest to create a one-of-a-kind holiday that is uniquely theirs, maximizing their time on board. ■ [HTTPS://WWW.MSCCRUISES.COM](https://www.msccruises.com)



Aurora Expeditions to Welcome Third Small Ship, Douglas Mawson to Fleet

Aurora Expeditions, the award-winning Australian-owned expedition travel company, has announced that it will soon welcome its third purpose-built small expedition ship, Douglas Mawson to its family of pioneering vessels.

Due to begin sailing in late 2025, Douglas Mawson’s inaugural season will also mark Aurora Expeditions’ return to East Antarctica for the first time in 15 years, with new itineraries to include a Mawson’s Antarctica voyage to East Antarctica in honor of the ship’s namesake, departing from Hobart.

Douglas Mawson will carry an average of 154 passengers and will be the newest Infinity Class vessel to enter the market, joining Aurora’s sister ships, also named after pioneers in their field, Greg Mortimer and Sylvia Earle. ■ [WWW.AURORA-EXPEDITIONS.COM](http://www.aurora-expeditions.com)

Viking Marks Float out of Newest Egypt Ship



Viking® has recently announced its newest ship for the Nile River—the 82-guest Viking Sobek—was “floated out,” marking a major construction milestone and the first time the ship has touched water. Set to sail in the fall of 2024, the Viking Sobek will join the company’s growing fleet of state-of-the-art ships for the Nile River and will sail Viking’s popular 12-day Pharaohs & Pyramids itinerary.

The Viking Sobek & Viking’s Growing Egypt Fleet

Hosting 82 guests in 41 staterooms, the new, state-of-the-art Viking Sobek is inspired by Viking’s award-winning river and ocean ships, with the elegant Scandinavian design for which Viking is known. An identical sister ship to the Viking Osiris, the Viking Aton and the new Viking Hathor, which is scheduled to debut this summer, the Viking Sobek features several aspects familiar to Viking guests, such as a distinctive square bow and an indoor/outdoor Aquavit Terrace. With the addition of both the Viking Hathor and the Viking Sobek, the company will have six ships sailing the Nile by the end of 2024. Additional ships in the Egypt fleet include the Viking Ra and the MS Antares.

Viking’s Pharaohs & Pyramids Itinerary

During the 12-day, Pharaohs & Pyramids itinerary, guests begin with a three-night stay at a first-class hotel in Cairo, where they can visit iconic sites. Guests then fly to Luxor, where they visit the Temples of Luxor and Karnak before boarding a Viking river ship for an eight-day roundtrip cruise on the Nile River, featuring visits to the Valley of the Queens, Valley of the Kings, the Temple of Khnum, the Dendera Temple complex, the temples at Abu Simbel and the High Dam in Aswan, and a visit to a colorful Nubian village. Finally, the journey concludes with a flight back to Cairo for a final night in the ancient city. ■

[WWW.VIKING.COM](http://www.viking.com)

Seabourn Modifies 90-day Grand Africa Voyage, will Visit 42 Destinations in 20 Countries



Seabourn, the leader in ultra-luxury voyages and expedition travel, is inviting travelers to explore the lands of Africa with its 90-day Grand Africa Voyage, featuring a newly modified itinerary that will take travelers to the East, South, and West Coasts of the continent.

Changes were made to the original itinerary to prioritize the safety of guests and to avoid the Red Sea while designing a new extraordinary itinerary that keeps the original length of the cruise with in-depth exploration of the African continent with only one repeat port. Seabourn Sojourn will still sail roundtrip from Barcelona departing on November 30, 2024. The new itinerary includes visits to 42 marquee and off-the-beaten-path destinations and cities in 20 countries, with seven overnight stays.

The Grand Africa Voyage will provide a once-in-a-lifetime travel experience, where guests can explore Africa's natural beauty via safari, hikes, scuba, snorkeling and other enriching cultural experiences, such as a visit to a camel milk farm, botanical gardens, living archaeological museums, and more. In addition, several optional multi-day Seabourn Journeys will be available at various destinations, offering in-depth opportunities to explore treasured sites on land that cannot be accessed on single-day excursions from the ship, including a gorilla sanctuary, Victoria Falls, and more.

Seabourn Sojourn will visit a blend of historically profound destinations on its Grand Africa Voyage. Highlights include luscious, tropical paradises such as the Seychelles; lands with breathtaking, diverse landscapes and wildlife such as Madagascar and Zanzibar; and culturally rich destinations such as Cape Town, Morocco and Mozambique. ■

WWW.SEABOURN.COM

Around the World in 114 Days with Princess Cruises!



Princess Cruises has recently announced its 2026 World Cruise - a 114-day voyage aboard Coral Princess - will visit 52 ports in 28 countries, across six continents, the most destinations ever reached on a Princess World Cruise.

The destination-rich World Cruise offers two roundtrip options with departures from both Ft. Lauderdale, departing January 5, 2026, and Los Angeles on January 21, 2026.

New elements guests can look forward to aboard the 2026 Princess World Cruise include:

- Inaugural call to Boracay, a tropical paradise in central Philippines known for its gorgeous beaches and resorts, a first for Princess.
- Coral Princess will also make first-time World Cruise calls to:
Puerto Chiapas, Mexico
Ponta Delgado, Azores Islands
- Visits to 52 destinations, the most ever offered on a Princess World Cruise, with access to 45 UNESCO World Heritage Sites around the globe.
- More time in port with "More Ashore Late-Night" stays in 13 ports including Singapore, Sydney and Honolulu, and one overnight stay in Hong Kong.

Coral Princess Amenities and Entertainment Connecting guests to the destinations through the cruise line's onboard programming with enrichment speakers, destination experts, ambassadors, performers and theatrical productions supports the critically acclaimed and expertly curated itinerary, making this World Cruise truly memorable. The onboard experience offers: Cultural Enrichments, Destination-Specific Events, and Guest Lecturers. ■

WWW.PRINCESS.COM

Quark Expeditions Introduces M/V Ocean Explorer to its Polar Fleet



Quark Expeditions, the global leader in polar adventures, has announced the latest addition to its industry-leading fleet: the Ocean Explorer. This 138-passenger polar expedition ship will set sail under the Quark Expeditions banner at the start of the Antarctic 2024/2025 season.

"Going beyond in the polar regions requires the best expedition team operating the best ships," says Andrew White, President of Quark Expeditions. "And we've got both. Ocean Explorer is the perfect addition to our fleet—for adventure, for luxury, and for leading-edge technology, this purpose-built polar expedition ship truly delivers for our discerning polar explorers."

Ocean Explorer's state-of-the-art expedition technology elevates the polar experience in every way: extensive adventure capability for thrilling off-ship adventures, exceptional safety and sustainability features, plus outstanding interior space and comfort. With its distinctive X-Bow design and remarkable two-story forward lounge, Ocean Explorer sets a striking stage for unforgettable polar expeditions.

This Infinity class polar expedition ship was delivered in 2021 by Quark Expeditions' long-standing partner SunStone Maritime Group, the largest expedition-only ship-building provider in the world. Ocean Explorer's rated Ice Class 1A and PC6 place it in the same league as its soon-to-be sister ship, the technologically-advanced Ultramarine. ■

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Exploring the 'Viking Homelands' aboard the Viking Sky

by Michael Morcos, photos courtesy of Viking

Where are the crowds, I thought, surely the ship cannot be full...On the contrary, I would learn the Viking sky on the 'Homelands' journey was at full guest capacity, so it was quite astonishing that there were rarely any line-ups anywhere on board.

In this part one of a two-part article, we will focus on the Viking Sky itself, with its amenities, public spaces, gastronomy, service, entertainment, and excursions. While in the second article we will focus on the destinations, two blissful weeks visiting six fantastic countries including exciting urban settings

and the natural, beautiful, and quiet countryside.

Viking style right from the start

Having booked our flights with Viking, transfers to the ship from the airport was done in typical Viking fashion, meaning seamlessly. The Viking staff greeted us at the airport placed our luggage on the shuttle and within minutes we were at the ship. Checking in was quick, easy, and relaxing, and before we knew it, we were in our stateroom and ready for the adventure.

The wonderful Sky

Like its sister ships, the Viking Sky has a

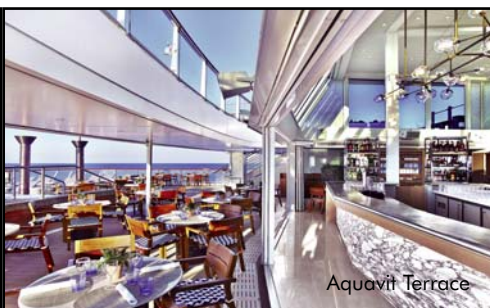
maximum capacity of 930 passengers and is considered small when compared to other mass market ships that hold thousands of guests. This made our trip more pleasurable, as there was very little to no waiting times for embarking/disembarking for excursions, restaurant tables were often easily available, and all other activities were always available and accessible.

Staterooms and suites

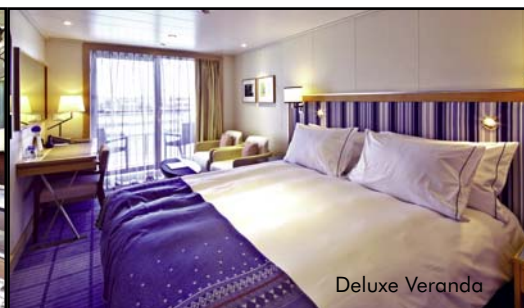
In keeping with the Nordic design, our suite was stylish, well lit, very practical, and we felt comfortable for the entire two weeks. Our washroom was quite spacious considering it was on a ship and had plenty of



Explorers' Lounge



Aquavit Terrace



Deluxe Veranda

room. Bi-daily room service by a dedicated professional cleaning staff was ideal and our stateroom was always looking and smelling fresh. The best part of our room had to be the private balcony, where we would spend many hours watching the great scenery drift on by.

Public spaces

As small as the ship was, it had plenty to explore. It took the entire first week to finally find all the nooks and crannies and experience everything the Sky had to offer. Our favorite was the Explorers' lounge on the upper decks in the bow of the ship, which covered two floors with lots of quiet corners for curling up with a book. The views from here were amazing and you could see for miles. Drinks and cocktails were served most hours of the day and there was live music at times as well.

The main pool, with a gigantic retractable glass roof, was perfect indoor/outdoor weather bathing. There was the 'Living Room,' a peaceful area by the atrium for socializing, and the Torshavn bar for late night partying, drinks, and dancing. Other spaces open to all passengers included the open aired Aquavit, found in the back of the ship with its wonderful, heated infinity pool and great spots for outdoor dining.

The Winter Garden, with its fabulous Nordic inspired wooden columns and spiral ceiling, was great for afternoon tea, and the spa found on the Viking Sky is unique and a delight to visit. It consists of a large heated indoor pool with powerful jets as well as steam rooms, a small plug pool and a below zero snow grotto for that invigorating Scandinavian experience.

For those who want to keep in shape, there is a full gym to help burn off those excess calories. On the top deck there are outdoor exercise machines, golf putting greens and shuffle boards.

And for those night-time performances, shows and daytime lectures and workshops there was the main theatre on the bottom floor that is spacious and, as with the rest of the ship, well designed.

Design and comfort

Design-wise, each part of the ship is well planned. The staircases have reproductions of the colorful and historic Bayeux tapestry and in the elevators, there were mystical Troll figures hidden in the panels. All this made the Viking Sky special, unique, and made for enjoyable conversation starters. The exterior views of the Viking are well balanced and quite pleasing with beautiful, smooth lines. This look flows into the ship's interior. The first thing a passenger notices when entering the ship is the atrium and the overall 'less is more' Scandinavian style. There is plenty to enjoy with wonderful art and sculptures throughout the ship and it is as lovely to the eyes as it is soothing to the mind, as you can imagine. One can relax in all corners of this vessel without being bombarded with excesses.

Gastronomy

One of the greatest joys of sailing is the choice of food. It is a good thing there is a gym! The Sky had an ample choice of eateries, including the World Café located on the upper level was most travelers favorite as there were floor to ceiling glass windows for magnificent views of the surroundings. Passengers could even sit outdoors on the balconies. The World café is buffet style with three settings a day. With a multitude of options, there was something for every palate, from freshly prepared meat and fish dishes to vegetarian plates and even vegan choices; it was always mouth-watering.

Other options included the Pool Grill that served great burgers, while at Mamsen's they served late breakfasts and snacks and delectable pastries and cakes. Afternoon tea and snacks are served daily at the Winter Garden and my routine on many nights was the visit the Sushi bar for freshly made delights. Chefs on the spot prepared these exquisite morsels and I just could not get enough!

'The Restaurant,' yes, that is its name, is an enormous space but did not feel like it. There were partitions for noise and privacy, and it offered a sit-down service open for

breakfast and suppers with many choices and, as on all Viking cruises, beer, wine, and soft drinks are included. Guests have an extensive wine list to pick from at an added cost.

For something different, there is Manfredi's and The Chef's Table. These two restaurants are smaller and quite intimate. Both need reservations. Manfredi's is an Italian style cuisine, while the Chef's Table has a rotating theme of international dishes.

Shopping at sea

What would a trip be without bringing home gifts and souvenirs? Viking ships offer an impressive collection of boutiques and specialty shops for everything from fine jewelry, handbags, perfumes to bathing suits, designer clothing and everyday essentials, and all tax free and easily charged to your room.

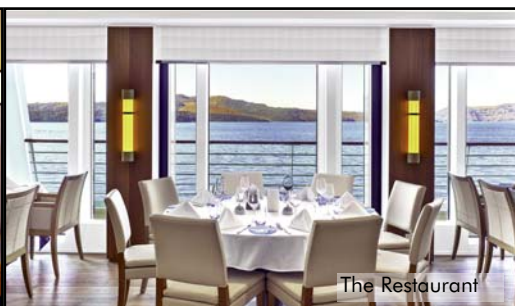
Dedicated staff

You just cannot get any better service at any hotel or cruise line company. It was impeccable and every request was managed quickly, and with a smile. I could tell the crew really loved their job as they were ready and eager to serve at any time. From the Captain and his team down through the program director, to the kitchen staff and the maintenance personal, all made our trip that much more pleasant.

Destinations and tours

Join us in our next issue as the onshore adventure beings. We would start in Bergen, Norway and slowly head towards the Baltic Sea ending in Stockholm, Sweden. Along the way we would visit tranquil towns, walk, hike and bike through the beautiful and lush Scandinavian countryside, visit worldly cities like Copenhagen and Berlin and experience centuries of incredible history, art, and architecture! ■

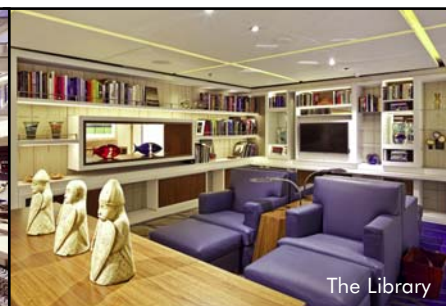
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The Restaurant



Main Pool



The Library



Cruising the Nile in Style

by Randy Mink

For three blissful days in February, our Goway Travel group basked in luxury aboard the Sonesta St. George. Sailing on one of the fanciest of the 170 overnight tourist ships that ply the Nile River in southern Egypt, we were treated like royalty amid elegant trappings reminiscent of an 18th century French palace. I doubt if the Egyptian pharaohs ever had it this good.

With a staff of 85 serving 100 or so passengers on a typical peak-season sailing—almost a 1:1 ratio—guests can expect plenty of pampering.

Exploring Upper Egypt

Our three-night northbound cruise from Aswan to Luxor included morning and afternoon excursions to temples, tombs and other archaeological sites. Toronto-based Goway Travel arranged for Ramy Sakhry, a certified Egyptologist, to accompany us ashore and interpret the wonders of antiquity that we had come to see. For passengers who are not part of a tour, the Sonesta St. George provides a complete shore program.

Americans comprise about 40 percent of the ship's clientele, with Canadians,

Australians and Japanese also well represented.

On the first morning, our Goway gang walked right from the gangway to the ruins of Kom Ombo Temple, just steps from shore. For visits to Hatshepsut, Luxor and Karnak temples and royal tombs in Valley of the Kings, we went by bus from the dock. For Edfu Temple, we boarded two-passenger horse carriages for an eye-opening 10-minute ride through the dusty streets of Edfu. The driver even let me hold the reins for part of the clip-clopping jaunt.



We were in Upper Egypt, a term that refers to the country's southern region, as the Nile flows north from its principal source, Lake Victoria in east-central Africa, to the Mediterranean Sea. The longest river in the world at 3,470 miles, the Nile has been Egypt's great highway from time immemorial. The country relies on the river to create fertile land in an otherwise desert landscape.

Our nine-day Goway tour of Egypt started farther north on the Nile, in Cairo, from where we flew EgyptAir to Aswan. After the cruise it was back to Cairo by air from Luxor.

My favorite moments were spent watching the world go by on the ship's Sun Deck. Traveling along the palm-lined floodplain at a gentle speed of 13.5 mph, we saw cows grazing at water's edge and farmers tending to fields of vegetables, wheat, sugar cane and banana trees. Some of the workers rode donkeys. Viewing the green ribbon of vegetation along either bank provided a welcome break from the history-heavy sightseeing on shore.

Some of us indulged in the hot tub or swimming pool, while others snoozed in a cabana. We enjoyed sunny days in the 70s (Fahrenheit). It almost never rains in this part of Egypt.

Dining Delights

Food on the Sonesta St. George was outstanding and plentiful. At the Egyptian Buffet the second night, a cook kept busy deep-frying falafel. The hot, crispy balls of ground chickpeas, herbs and spices never tasted so good. And this was our chance to try koushari, the national dish and a popular street food consisting of lentils, rice, pasta, chickpeas and fried onions in tomato sauce.

There were 12 different sweet treats on the dessert table, 11 bread varieties on the bread table. Among the sticky Middle Eastern pastries were baklava and konafa, a traditional Arabic dessert made with thin layers of shredded phyllo pastry, sugar-

based syrup and a creamy milk pudding. For the occasion, passengers donned turbans or showed off the embroidered Egyptian dresses and blouses they bought on shore.

Under a canopy on the Sun Deck, an Indian-themed lunch smorgasbord featured beef shawarma, veal pie, fried fish and hamburgers as well as Indian dishes like potato-filled samosas, spicy green beans and chicken curry. A lunch buffet in the dining room displayed a lamb carcass from which slivers of meat were sautéed in a pan with rice, garlic and bits of liver for each guest. Breakfasts also were bountiful spreads—I counted 18 cheeses on the cheese and cold cuts table.

Two evenings we enjoyed a la carte meals. One night I started with kibbeh shami, or fried balls of spiced minced lamb with pine nuts, onions and bulgur wheat. My entree was pan-fried veal in a blue cheese sauce. Others in our Goway group chose the rice-stuffed grape leaves or chicken fatta, a bowl of roasted chicken cubes with rice and toasted bread in a velvety garlic and yogurt sauce.

Well-appointed Public Areas on the Nile Cruise Ship

After dinner in the spacious Lounge Bar, we gathered for Egyptian-style entertainment. The first night featured a Nubian music and dance troupe; the dark-skinned Nubians are an ethnic group indigenous to southern Egypt and northern Sudan. Another night it was a belly dancing show.

The smaller Panorama Lounge, with green leather armchairs, blue marble tabletops and faux-wood paneling, has a clubby feel and can be used for lectures or small-group gatherings. Accented with crystal chandeliers, ionic columns, a florid pink-burgundy carpet and plants in oversized brass pots, it's also a place to relax over a good book or just enjoy a drink away from the crowd.

First impressions are important, and the ornate, marble-floored lobby is certainly a dazzler, with its huge chandelier, volumi-



nous drapery and a staircase mural invoking romantic visions of France. A replica of a golden pharaonic throne, not unlike ones discovered in ancient Egyptian tombs, graces the staircase landing on the floor above, just outside the small spa and fitness center.

Spiffy Staterooms Abound with Amenities

The Sonesta St. George's stylish staterooms are among the largest on the Nile. My faux wood-paneled, twin-bedded room featured a French balcony, a desk, table, floor lamp and two chairs, plus a television and a refrigerator stocked with drinks. A nice touch was the welcome basket with fresh fruit, chocolates and a small bottle of Egyptian wine. On the wall behind the beds were crystal-and-brass sconces and a hand-painted scene suggesting tranquil French country life in centuries past. The bathroom, with teak vanity, floor and trim, had L'Occitane toiletries, towels embossed with hieroglyphics and a tub with Jacuzzi-like features.

The Sonesta St. George, built in 2006, continually refurbishes its facilities, replacing draperies, tablecloths and cushions well before the need arises. One of five Sonesta-branded ships on the Nile, she underwent her last major renovation in August 2023.

Seeing the splendors of ancient Egypt is a bucket-list experience, and a river-going magic carpet ride just adds to the aura of enchantment. ■

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Our Adventures to the End of the World with Australis

by Alba Moro Ocana

We were extremely excited knowing that an extraordinary adventure through Patagonia awaited us. But first, a stop in Santiago, Chile for a quick day trip to officially start our journey to Punta Arenas, the starting point of the Patagonian exploration. In our short but fantastic visit to the capital city of Santiago, we visited a couple of art galleries, the bustling central "Mercado" market, and a Chilean-cuisine restaurant.

Onto the tip of South America, and from the moment we stepped on board the Stella Australis, the warm welcome from the crew set the tone for an unforgettable voyage. Each day on the cruise was a new chapter of discovery and adventure.

Our first stop was in Ainsworth Bay and Tuckers Islets where we learned how life resurfaces after the ice melts while hiking through the beautiful sub-Antarctic Magellanic Forest. Later, we visited the Tuckers Islets by zodiac, getting up close to Magellanic penguins and cormorants.

We then sailed along the northwest arm of the Beagle Channel and disembarked in the Pia Fjord with its prominent peak extending from the top of the mountain range to the

sea. The view was stunning. Continuing our journey, we navigated under the majestic gaze of the "Glacier Alley," which passes through internationally named glaciers.

Arriving at Cape Horn National Park, we disembarked to walk through one of the southernmost points of the world, surrounded by its charm and legends. In the afternoon, we visited Wulaia Bay, a historic site of one of the largest settlements of the native Yaghan canoeists.

On the final day, we arrived at the Port of Ushuaia, the most important Argentine city in Tierra del Fuego and the southernmost city in the world. Disembarking, we had time to explore this unique city before transferring to the Ushuaia airport for our flight to Buenos Aires.

The land and sea experiences were absolutely magical, but life onboard the Stella was also perfect. The friendly and hospitable staff and the relationships we created and nurtured were the highlights of the trip. My cabin was also wonderfully comfortable, with expansive windows offering stunning panoramic views of all the passing landscapes. It looked like we were in a movie the entire time. The dining experiences were

exquisite and featured a fusion of local Patagonian cuisine and international dishes, all paired with fine Chilean wines.

Additionally, before and after excursions, there are onboard lectures and presentations by the region's expert guides. They are exceptionally insightful, educational, engaging and provide deep insights into the region's history, wildlife, and geology.

Overall, our Australis cruise was truly a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Patagonia's untouched landscapes, diverse wildlife, and sheer majesty left an impression that will stay with us forever. This journey not only enriched our understanding of this remote part of the world but also reignited our passion for pristine nature and adventure.

For those considering a trip to Patagonia, I cannot recommend Australis Cruises enough. Their commitment to providing an exceptional and environmentally respectful experience truly sets them apart. Make sure to plan ahead as their season runs from September until April. ■

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Contemporary Luxury on Uniworld's Newest Ship

by Judi Cohen, photos: UniWorld

Sailing through Belgium and the Netherlands on the sophisticated S.S. Victoria for a Tulip Time Cruise

I was invited to cruise with Uniworld Boutique River Cruises in late March, 2024, for a seven-night 'Holland & Belgium at Tulip Time' itinerary for the debut of a new ship to their fleet, S. S. Victoria.

Before I tell you about the outstanding excursions— some of the best I've taken on a European river cruise, let me share some of the S. S. Victoria's luxurious features.



Contemporary Luxury Interiors

The S.S. Victoria's contemporary design with accents of marble, velvet and brass, offers a small-ship boutique experience. Plenty of natural and ambient lighting, mixed with the ship's light palette, made for a serene onboard experience. The style of this ship is quite different from the rest of Uniworld's fleet with tastefully ornate décor, oozing with old world luxury.

With room for just 110 guests, in 55 suites, the S.S. Victoria never felt busy or crowded. The staterooms are particularly spacious for river ships, each with floor-to-ceiling windows, king sized mattress, espresso machine, rain shower, heated bathroom floor, fine Asprey products, plush towels, and comfy bathrobes.

The S. S. Victoria is the first ship in Uniworld's fleet to have a two-bedroom Royal Suite which is a whopping 759-square feet. With just one connecting bedroom and a living room it becomes a 506-square foot suite.

Our Spacious Cabin with Floor to Ceiling Openable Window

Our 23.5-square-foot Signature French Balcony cabin (Number 207) felt spacious and my husband and I found it very comfortable. There was something wonderful about having a luxurious king size bed facing a floor to ceiling openable window so we could enjoy the passing scenery and the fresh breeze as we cruised.

Not only was our cabin generously sized, but it also had a walk-in-closet with hangar space and shelving, ample for two guests, a luxurious bathroom with double sinks, heated floors, a shower with a rain shower head and a hand held shower as well. Controlling the water temperature, pressure and shower head preference was well designed, making it easy for technology-challenged folks, like me, to operate everything effortlessly. For phones and laptops there were multiple outlets on the night tables and on the desk and counters, and the cabin lights and curtains could be controlled with the touch buttons beside the bed. Luxury amenities were pro-

vided in abundance, and more were available on request if needed.

Unexpected Surprises on the ship

S.S. Victoria's lovely rooftop bar, with tables and lounge chairs, didn't have the opportunity to sparkle on our sailing since temperatures averaged 9 degrees Celsius, with clouds and rain most days, however, I would have enjoyed drinks with a view at sunrise and sunset ordinarily. To pass under low bridges, the bar structure is collapsible.

Another surprise was having a small pool in the spa area. Not many European river ships have an indoor pool with access to an outdoor deck.

For entertainment, presentations and enjoying drinks and coffee with other guests, the lounge not only had panoramic floor to ceiling windows, but also a striking glass ceiling.

Dining Above Par

Meals in the Dining Room included impressive breakfast and lunch buffets, and full table service at dinner. With floor to ceiling windows, and colorfully appointed comfortable seating, the room felt warm and welcoming day and night. Private Dining can be arranged for a small group, a Chef's table dining option is available during the cruise (at an additional cost), in-room dining is available as well as rooftop dining (subject to weather). Beer, wine and soft drinks were included at meals.

The dining room manager, chef, waiters and waitresses knew our names and preferences by the second day which created a meaningful personalized experience at all meals. One of the waiters, Sasha, spoke to me in Hungarian throughout the cruise upon learning that I was fluent in Hungarian. This was charming.

Shore Excursions Highlights- Getting out into communities and cities

As much as we enjoyed the comfort of our stateroom, the culinary feast and relaxing in the magnificent lounge, we welcomed the

opportunity to leave the ship for Uniworld's well-organized excursions in the cities and towns on this itinerary. At least one shore excursion was available at no extra cost in every port. Choosing from among the options proved quite challenging.

Excursion highlights in Belgium included a stop at the Atomium, built for the 1958 Brussels Worlds Fair, passing the Royal Palace, and a walking tour in Brussels through the historic downtown area, with signature chocolate shops and an opportunity to sample traditional Belgian waffles. Cruise Director, Piet, was always on hand to share his passion for the city and the waffles!

In Antwerp, we visited the central train station and the Antwerp Zoo before our excursion to "Chocolate Nation" where we were immersed in the chocolate making history of Belgium. We happily tasted multiple flavors of molten chocolate in large vats before leaving. Rather than returning to the ship, we opted to stay in the city, and explore the diamond district with three diamond exchanges, and where the largest number of uncut diamonds in the world are traded.

One of the more somber, yet enriching excursions was the opportunity to visit the Netherlands American Cemetery and Memorial, where more than 8,000 American soldiers lie under white crosses and Stars of David headstones across the green lawn and rolling hills of Limburg, a short ride from the port in Maastricht. They died here during Allied Operation from September 1944 until the spring of 1945 earning "praise that will never die". In the cold and rain, we stood quietly at the "Mourning Woman Statue" with three doves and a new shoot rising from a war-destroyed tree, and in the Court of Honor with a reflecting pool that had the names and information of the over 1,700 missing from the Army and Air Force engraved on the wall flanking the reflecting pool. Our Dutch guide, Arie-Jan van Hees, carried photos of the dead soldiers and shared family stories while also explaining that each grave has been adopted by someone in the community. They go twice a year to place flowers and pay respects to their adopted soldier. He proudly showed us the grave of the soldier who his young son adopted and cares for. Although we were chilled and soaking wet, we thought it fitting to put stones on the Jewish grave markers and say Kaddish for the Jewish soldiers who gave their lives. This is a not-to-be-missed excursion.

From the port in Schoonhoven, Holland we drove to Kinderdijk, a UNESCO World Heritage designated site with 19 historic windmills dating back to the 1600's. All 19

windmills were water-pumping mills used to drain the land. I learned that windmills are passed down from generation to generation and families still live inside them. A 30-minute boat ride provided the opportunity to see the windmills on both sides of the canal. Along the way we passed small farming communities with sheep, pigs and geese on the grassy dike.

Arriving in the port in Amsterdam on Easter weekend, with plans to visit Keukenhof Gardens, Piet pointed out this we had arrived on the busiest day of the year, and indeed the gardens were packed with visitors admiring thousands of tulips in full bloom in the gardens and inside the greenhouses. The cold and rain did not dampen our spirits as we explored the blooms of every colour and pattern during our early morning visit. I learned that people come to Keukenhof Gardens to check out the gardens and purchase tulip bulbs that are shipped all over the world.

On our cruise there were options for the afternoon in Amsterdam to learn about the Red Light District, and to visit the Anne Frank House. Returning to the Anne Frank House was a stark reminder of humankind's cruelty and intolerance. Climbing the steep narrow stairs in the hidden walls and rooms where the Frank family lived in silence hiding from the Nazis, and then reading passages from Anne Frank's diary is both chilling and disturbing. When you go on this Uniworld cruise, be certain to visit the Anne Frank House.

Cruising on the canals and the Rhine waterways with Uniworld Boutique River Cruises aboard the S.S. Victoria, was an opportunity to experience onboard luxury and comfort, first-class hospitality, superbly prepared meals on and off the ship, and to experience the villages and cities on the route. While our cruise was early in the spring season, and the weather was less than ideal, our cruise was wonderfully memorable. Just a taste of the Uniworld hospitality has left us wanting to return to do another European river cruise soon. ■

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Judi Cohen



A perfect vacation: Royal Caribbean's Freedom of the Seas

by Daniel Smajovits

There is arguably no better feeling than standing on deck with nothing but calm blue seas on the horizon. Whether you're escaping for a weekend or a week, the Caribbean provides that and much more – and Royal Caribbean's Freedom of the Seas has transformed itself into an affordable and perfect getaway for all.

Long before the latest mega-ship in the Royal Caribbean fleet, the Icon of the Seas, the Freedom of the Seas was once the largest cruise ship in the world, however, despite its multiple pools, bustling prome-

nade, rock climbing wall, ice skating rink – amongst a host of other amenities – you rarely feel the size and scope of its 156,000 tons.

Sailing from Miami, Florida, with four-to-eight-day trips in the Eastern and Western Caribbean, the Freedom of the Seas still hits all the notes cruisers have come to expect when sailing with Royal Caribbean with added surprises along the way.

On-Board Experience

From the moment you book your cruise, Royal Caribbean International has made

the cruising experience as guest friendly as possible.

From the comfort of your home, we recommend downloading the Royal Caribbean application on your smartphone. Their user-friendly app will give you itinerary, dining and entertainment updates leading up to your sailing date. More importantly, it ensures your check-in process is as smooth as possible. Using the app, guests can check-in, complete a health assessment as well as all muster-station requirements before leaving your hotel. With the boarding pass saved on your phone, once you



arrive at the port, cruisers can drop their luggage, pass through security and begin their adventure within minutes.

Only once on-board, via the app, you can make the most of your time at sea. Depending on your sailing, reservations are required for some production shows and activities – all of which can only be made via the app. The app also provides additional functionality in terms of free messaging to other guests, a ship map, daily schedule and weather updates. It can also be used to make certain purchases.

On our four-night voyage, the Freedom of the Seas offered us two unique production shows as well as a figure skating performance along with a child-friendly and adult-only comedy show. With a different entertainment option each night, Royal Caribbean allows you to make the most of your time at sea without missing out on a performance. Complementing the marquee evening events were a host of smaller options around the ship, which ranged from the traditional Bingo and pool games during the day to trivia, various singers, a Piano bar and dancing at night.

Dining

With a revamped menu in 2024, Royal Caribbean's Main Dining Room continues to be the showcase of their dining experience. With early and late dinner options as well as My Time Dining for the laissez-faire traveler, you will have ample opportunity to sit down and enjoy some of the finest dinners at sea. Each night's menu is themed, but the classic options are always available. For those with special dietary needs, such as Vegan, Low-Fat, Kosher, Halal and more, RCI will go above and beyond to cater, however, we suggest you contact RCI in advance of your sailing to notify them. While the Main Dining Room is also open for breakfast and lunch, those menus remain set, regardless of the evening's theme.

For the even more casual traveler, the Windjammer buffet is open for breakfast, lunch and dinner and provides an incredi-

ble variety of options for each meal. For dinner, the Windjammer's central station reflects the theme of the Main Dining Room to ensure guests do not miss out on any option.

Particularly unique about all Royal Caribbean sailings is their Indian cuisine. Once an off-menu item to satisfy their Indian guests, their dishes have become so popular that an Indian option is available each night. Should you have a taste for Indian food, we highly recommend it.

Since part of the fun of cruising is the incredible variety of food, look no further than the Promenade, where either Sorrento's Pizza or Café Promenade will satiate your hunger with pizza, light sandwiches, and pastries. On deck, El Loco Fresh serves up fresh Mexican favorites during the day and across the pool is Sprinkles for a classic frozen treat. While Room Service is available 24/7, only breakfast is complimentary.

If you want to take your dining experience up another notch, Freedom of the Seas also offers multiple paid specialty options, including the exclusive Chef's Table for dinner or the family-friendly chain Johnny Rockets for a classic 1950's diner experience.

Staterooms

With four classes of staterooms: Interior, Ocean View, Balcony and Suite, Freedom of the Seas offers guests all the amenities they have come to expect on board. While the ship was drydocked and refurbished in 2020, note that some staterooms lack ample charging options for today's tech-heavy traveler, so we recommend bringing a charging-hub to mitigate any issues.

Itinerary

With the influx of larger ships in the Royal Caribbean fleet, Freedom of the Seas can be found year-round in the Caribbean. On our four-night adventure, we had the opportunity to enjoy two days at sea as well as one day at Royal Caribbean's private

island, CocoCay, as well as a lovely day in Nassau.

As almost every Caribbean sailing brings their guests to CocoCay, Royal Caribbean does an excellent job at ensuring that guests do not feel overwhelmed. Although there are often 5,000 or more passengers off the ship at any given time on the island, with plenty of secluded beaches and pools to choose from, your day can be as serene or exciting as you make it. Complementing the activities are a number of restaurants and bars, most of which are included with your cruise fare and/or drink package. Naturally, Royal Caribbean also offers many paid add-ons such as the Coco Beach Club, where a day-pass will provide you access to an exclusive beach and the Thrill Waterpark, the largest waterpark in the Caribbean.

With Nassau as the only other port-of-call on our cruise, we chose to book an excursion to Pearl Island, where we had the opportunity to interact with some of the Bahamas' most famous inhabitants, a colony of pigs, as well as enjoy various water sports such as snorkeling, jet skiing and banana boat rides. Although the Bahamian pigs are native to Bimini, a five-hour ferry or 30-minute flight from Nassau, locals brought a colony to Nassau so tourists can have a taste of the experience. Very popular with young families, the excursion lasts half the day, allowing you ample opportunity to visit Nassau's shops and restaurants before returning to your ship. Note that while most tours offer snacks, such as chips or cookies, we suggest packing a lunch if you are traveling with children.

Without a doubt, the Freedom of the Seas provides travelers with one of the best values at sea. While many cruisers will opt for the thrills of the mega-class ships, if you are looking for a serene getaway, without feeling overcrowded, look no further than Freedom of the Seas. ■

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MSC Cruises: The Perfect Toddler-Friendly Getaway in the Mediterranean

by Olivia Liveng

Traveling with a toddler can be challenging (I would know: my son, Aksel, has been to three continents in only 18 months!) After stressing about details on every holiday we've planned since his birth, we finally found the perfect escape to suit all our needs: a week aboard the MSC World Europa, circumnavigating the Mediterranean, and we are never looking back. MSC Cruises offers an exceptional solution for families seeking a luxurious, hassle-free vacation. The MSC Yacht Club's suite accommodations, amenities, and activities tailored specifically for young children make it an ideal choice for families. It allowed us to bond, relax, and

splash around—all one needs on a vacation with a mini.

Luxurious Comfort in the MSC Yacht Club

When you're in the same room for seven nights straight (and for daily naps when you're with a toddler in tow!), enjoying your cruise ship room is essential. Choosing to stay in a suite at the MSC Yacht Club is a game-changer for families with toddlers. The Yacht Club offers exclusive amenities and personalized services that elevate the cruising experience and provide security, ensuring comfort and convenience for parents and children.

Spacious and Well-Equipped Suites

The suites in the MSC Yacht Club are designed with luxury and space in mind. They provide ample room for a family, featuring separate sleeping areas that can accommodate a crib or toddler bed. The spaciousness allows toddlers to move freely and play within the suite, offering a safe and comfortable environment. Furthermore, the suites come with high-end amenities such as flat-screen TVs, minibars, and 24-hour room service, making catering to a toddler's unpredictable schedule and needs easy.

Personalized Butler Service

One of the standout features of the MSC Yacht Club is the personalized butler service. This round-the-clock assistance is a game-changer for parents traveling with toddlers. The butler can help with everything from arranging dining reservations to providing information about kid-friendly activities on the ship. They can even assist with unpacking and packing, allowing parents to focus on enjoying their vacation rather than managing logistics. This service is designed to make parents feel relieved and well cared for—and (finally?) relieved of a few parent duties.

Exclusive Access to Yacht Club Areas

The MSC Yacht Club offers exclusive areas that are perfect for families. The private pool area, for instance, is less crowded than the main pool, providing a safer and more relaxing environment for young children. The Top Sail Lounge also offers breathtaking views and a tranquil setting where parents can unwind while their toddler naps or plays nearby. The Yacht Club restaurant provides a gourmet dining experience with flexible options, making catering to a toddler's dietary needs and preferences easy.



ences easier. And don't get us started on the attentive staff, who go as far as blowing up balloons to keep the babes entertained.

Exploring the Mediterranean with a Toddler

Embarking on a Mediterranean cruise with your toddler promises a one-of-a-kind blend of cultural immersion and relaxation. The region's breathtaking beauty, mild climate, and diverse destinations make it an ideal family choice.

Rich Cultural Experiences

The Mediterranean is home to some of the world's most iconic cultural landmarks. From the ancient ruins of Rome to the charming streets of Barcelona, there is no shortage of enriching experiences. Many shore excursions offered by MSC Cruises are family-friendly, with shorter durations and stroller-accessible routes, making it easier for families with young children to participate. These excursions provide an excellent opportunity for toddlers to experience new sights and sounds, fostering curiosity and learning. The region's mild climate is also a plus, offering pleasant weather ideal for outdoor activities. Whether playing on a sandy beach in Malta or enjoying a pizza slice in Naples, the Mediterranean's diverse environments provide endless opportunities for memorable family moments.

Convenient and Stress-Free Travel

One of the most significant advantages of cruising, especially with a toddler, is the convenience and stress-free nature of the travel experience. Unlike traditional travel, where moving from one destination to another can be cumbersome and tiring, a cruise allows families to unpack once and enjoy multiple destinations. MSC Cruises' well-organized itineraries and efficient boarding processes make traveling with a toddler a breeze. The onboard facilities ensure that all the family's needs are met, from dining and entertainment to childcare and medical services. Also, if you're in the Yacht Club, you will receive the unique privilege of bypassing the line while checking in and at departure—a must with a toddler!



The Advantages of a Big Ship

The size of MSC's ships is another factor that makes them ideal for traveling with a toddler. The expansive space allows for a wide range of amenities and activities that cater to young children, ensuring they are entertained and engaged throughout the trip.

Extensive Onboard Facilities

MSC's large ships boast impressive facilities, including multiple pools, water parks, and sports courts. The splash zones and shallow pools are particularly appealing for (potty-trained) toddlers, providing a safe and fun environment to enjoy the water. Additionally, the ships feature numerous lounges, theaters, and play areas, ensuring there is always something to do, regardless of the time of day.

Variety of Entertainment Options

The entertainment options on MSC ships are vast and varied, catering to all ages. Dedicated play sessions, family-friendly shows, and interactive activities keep toddlers engaged. The ship's daily schedule includes puppet shows, magic performances, and character meet-and-greets to delight young children. The abundance of entertainment options ensures that toddlers are never bored, and parents can find activities that suit their child's interests and energy levels.

Toddler-Friendly Amenities and Activities

MSC Cruises excels in providing a range of amenities and activities specifically designed for young children in the larger area of the ship—so you can leave the Yacht Club and reap maximum entertainment benefits. These facilities ensure that toddlers are entertained and cared for, allowing parents to relax and enjoy their vacation.

Dedicated Baby and Toddler Clubs

MSC Cruises is the ultimate family line, featuring most ships' dedicated baby and toddler clubs. These clubs are staffed by professional caregivers who provide a safe and nurturing environment for young children. Activities are designed to stimulate development, including everything from arts and crafts to interactive games and storytelling sessions. For parents, knowing that their toddler is in good hands allows them to enjoy some well-deserved downtime.

Baby Rooms and Play Areas

The size of MSC's ships allows for extensive facilities, including multiple baby rooms and play areas. These spaces have age-appropriate toys, books, and play equipment, providing toddlers with a fun and engaging environment. The play areas are designed with safety in mind, featuring soft flooring and secure boundaries, giving par-

ents peace of mind while their little ones explore and play.

Dining Options for Toddlers

MSC Cruises understands that dining with a toddler can be challenging, so they offer a range of dining options to suit young children. The main restaurants provide high chairs and kid-friendly menus, while the buffet offers a variety of choices that are sure to please even the pickiest eaters. The Yacht Club restaurant offers a more intimate dining experience, allowing customized meal options and a quieter environment—Aksel tried (and loved!) everything on the menu.

Safe and Secure Environment

Safety is a top priority on MSC Cruises, and the ship's design reflects this commitment. The extensive use of child-proofing measures, such as secure balcony railings and non-slip surfaces, ensures a safe environment for toddlers. Additionally, the ship's layout is designed to be easy to navigate, with clear signage and well-marked paths, making it simple for parents to move around with strollers. The availability of medical facilities and trained staff further adds to the peace of mind of families traveling with young children.

Traveling with a toddler can be daunting, but MSC Cruises provides an exceptional solution, particularly within the luxurious MSC Yacht Club. The spacious and well-equipped suites, personalized butler service, and exclusive access to Yacht Club areas ensure families enjoy a comfortable and stress-free vacation. The toddler-friendly amenities and activities, including dedicated baby clubs, play areas, and tailored dining options, cater specifically to the needs of young children. MSC Cruises is the perfect choice for families traveling with toddlers. It offers a luxurious, convenient, and enriching experience that creates lasting memories for parents and children. ■

WWW.MSCCRUISES.CA





The Osthoff Resort

A Trio of Classic Resorts in Elkhart Lake, Wisconsin

by Randy Mink

Road America, one of the premier road racing courses in the U.S., put the resort village of Elkhart Lake on the map when it opened in 1955. A stop for most major North American race series, the track draws some 800,000 spectators every season.

Though fast cars have brought fame to Elkhart Lake, life in the northeast Wisconsin town (population 967) moves at a slower pace. The genteel ambience is reflected in three Victorian-style hotels that have welcomed travelers for generations. Within easy walking distance of charming shops and eateries, each of the white clapboard hostelryes offers a private beach on the pristine lake, whose blue-green waters provide an idyllic setting for swimming, fishing and boating.

The Osthoff Resort

An AAA Four Diamond property, The Osthoff Resort was originally opened in 1886 by German entrepreneur Otto Osthoff. A favorite destination of the affluent escaping big-city hustle and bustle, it was sold in the 1950s and for over 30 years operated as a drama and arts camp.

Rebuilt in the 1990s, The Osthoff comprises three buildings featuring steeply pitched roofs, gables, dormers, turrets and gingerbread trim. Expansive lawns sweep down to the lakefront path. Each of the 240 suites has a kitchen or kitchenette, dining and living room, fireplace and private balcony.

Hotel amenities include a full-service spa, cooking school, fitness center, game arcade, and indoor and outdoor pools. When you're ready to dine, choose from the Concourse Restaurant & Lounge, Otto's Restaurant or the cavernous Elk Room cocktail lounge, whose floor-to-ceiling windows overlook the lake and lawns.

Siebkens Resort

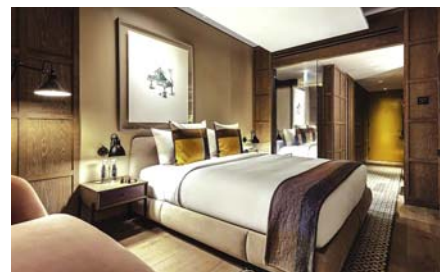
Established in 1916 by Laura and Herman Siebken, Siebkens Resort is the smallest of Elkhart Lake's trio of traditional hotels. It is steeped in Old World atmosphere, with two buildings dating to the late 1800s. Guests stay in one of the 31 historic hotel rooms or in the condominium building.

The resort's Stop-Inn Tavern, a popular gathering spot filled with road racing memorabilia, occupies a former opera house. The adjacent Sissy's is an outdoor beer garden, and P.A.M.'s restaurant offers fine dining.

The Shore Club

Just up the hill from Siebkens resides another time-honored resort, The Shore Club. The Social, a speakeasy-themed lounge/restaurant accented with Prohibition-era decor, shares a 1910 building with a theater featuring bands, karaoke and comedy acts. Nearby, overlooking the 600-foot beach, the Tiki Bar also presents live music. ■

WWW.ELKHARTLAKE.COM



The Londoner Hotel

Nestled amidst the bustling energy of Leicester Square, The Londoner Hotel stands as a sanctuary of tranquility and sophistication, offering discerning travelers relaxation and indulgence. As a cultural capital, foodie haven, and shopping oasis, it's no wonder US traveler numbers are steadily inching back to record highs.

Here are reasons why The Londoner is the perfect choice for a city break holiday:

Suite Dreams: 350 rooms and suites harmoniously blend residential charm and London class. Each is individually designed, with spacious living areas, separate bedrooms, objets d'art, and magnificent views.

Residence Access: As a guest, the suite keys open the door to three beautifully designed spaces to socialize, dine, and relax for residents only.

The Retreat: Access to the pool, gym, superfood clinic, full-service salon, yoga classes, and priority access to daily curated experiences.

VIP Packages: Elevate the experience with thoughtfully curated packages designed for exploration or relaxation, which include West End premieres, luxury shopping access, customized wellness and medicinal programming, and more.

Food and Beverage: Savor culinary masterpieces at the six concept eateries and bars, indulge in artisanal cocktails, or experience private dining in the comfort of your suite.

Personalized Service & Events: Whether it's arranging bespoke experiences tailored to your preferences or indulging in exquisite amenities, the team is committed to making each stay truly unforgettable.

Prime Location: Conveniently situated near popular attractions including Covent Garden and West End theatres, offering the perfect blend of tranquility and accessibility. ■

WWW.THELONDONER.COM



Pug Seal Allan Poe: Home Sweet Home in Mexico City

Article and photography by Nicholas Kontis

Mexico City needs little introduction. It is a high-octane 24-7 megalopolis boasting world-class museums, colossal monuments, bustling markets, tasty street food, fine dining, vibrant neighborhoods, and hotels for all travel styles, satisfying all visitors.

In the heart of the exclusive Polanco neighborhood, a block from Avenida Presidente Masaryk, Mexico City's answer to Rodeo Drive, the 20-room Pug Seal Allan Poe is a stunning and luxurious boutique hotel, transformed from a three-story 1930s private residence in two adjacent buildings.

My only previous experience at such a converted and restored residence was at J.K. Place in Florence, Italy. The general manager there described it as "like staying at your rich uncle's or rich friend's home." I had not seen the concept replicated until I spent a two-night stopover in the Mexican metropolis.

Here, it's a bespoke, stylish, curated property, entered through wrought-iron gates on a residential block of upscale Polanco—on a street named after author Edgar Allan Poe. It feels a lot more like finding your way into an architecturally designed home in London's Mayfair or New York's Upper East Side than it does a boutique hotel.

The Pug Seal is under the umbrella of the Tesoros group, which boasts over 38 properties in 12 Mexican states. Its sister property, Anatole France, located around the corner, is another Pug Seal boutique. Casa Pug Seal in Coyoacan is an Airbnb; the only Pug Seal outside of Mexico City is Zapoteco in Oaxaca.

Inspired by the Aztec Quetzalcoatl deity, the Pug Seal's whimsical and visually appealing design is the work of the art firm Rococo. It incorporates nostalgic and futuristic touches inspired by Mexico's historical culture. An eclectic collection of textiles, mosaics and other furnishings, adapted from 18th and 19th-century motifs, make this a tasteful departure from the busy city.

All plush junior and master suites have comfortable beds with goose-down pillows, mini-bars, flat-screen televisions, robes, and slippers, with bottled water and coffee supplied. The complimentary breakfast includes Mexican favorites like chilaquiles. A cozy "living room" features an Honor Bar, open at all hours to guests who may enjoy an after-hours drink. There's even a wellness retreat off the courtyard garden. Guests may borrow bicycles to explore nearby Chapultepec Park and other locales.

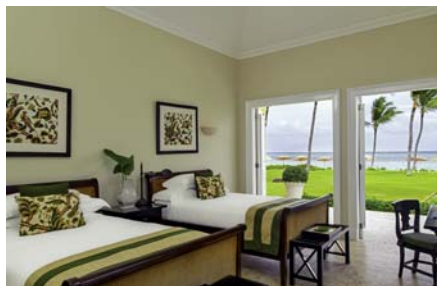
"Our guests come to our hotel to explore the city but return to their relaxing oasis in Polanco," said innkeeper and manager Paula Fernandez. "Here there is some of the best dining and shopping in the city, all within walking distance."

If you prefer a quirky boutique hotel that feels like a Mexican home, Pug Seal Allan Poe is in a league of its own. Room rates range from \$210 to \$350 per night. ■

[HTTPS://PUGSEAL.COM/](https://pugseal.com/)



Puntacana Resort & Club - *Tropical Paradise Found*



Accommodations

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

The Estates

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



Golf

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

Activities & Spa

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

Dining

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



Corporate Social Responsibility

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

Punta Cana International airport

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

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



EXPERIENCE LIFESTYLE

At Puntacana Resort & Club

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



PUNTACANA®
RESORT & CLUB

For more Information visit: www.puntacana.com



Four Seasons, Scottsdale: Stay and Play in a Desert Sanctuary

by Jennifer Merrick

“It looks like a movie set,” was my first thought when I took in the view from the terrace of our casita at the Four Seasons, Scottsdale, Arizona.

We had arrived close to midnight the night before, so we could only see the shadowy outlines of the two 30-foot saguaro cacti with their arms stretched out to the stars. When I threw open the doors the next morning, the saguaros and desert landscape greeted me joyfully.

“Come and play!” they seemed to say.

There were lots of opportunities to do just that on this 40-acre property, located just over 30 minutes north of the Phoenix airport. We had signed up for a guided morn-

ing hike and in no time, I was strolling in the movie set I had admired from the room.

At Pinnacle Peak Park, a 150-acre nature reserve located right next to the Four Seasons, we met the cast of characters. The star of the show was the chuckwalla, a large bulky lizard with a big black head and reddish speckled trunk. Basking in the sun and his role, he gave us a reptilian smirk as we snapped his pic. Cottontail rabbits and a chorus of birds also made their appearance.

The sun was shining brightly, illuminating the wildflowers and blooms among the granite boulders. We admired it all at the look-out point near the end of the trail before meandering back to the resort.

What I immediately appreciated about the property was the way it embraced its surroundings rather than competing with them. The 25 adobe casitas housing 210 rooms and suites blended in with the hills, and the ground’s landscaping showcased the Sonoran Desert’s lush plants and blooms. Walking anywhere on the property filled me with a sense of tranquility and relaxation.

There were other ways to unwind, too. The 60,000-square-foot pool with the mountain in the background was a luxurious spot to lounge and swim, and the resort’s spa featured a menu of treatment options, including the Nopal Massage. Nopal cactus, more commonly known as prickly pear, nourished the skin, and the gel that was expertly massaged into the skin came straight from the cactus pads themselves. This serene desert experience was a highlight of my stay, but it wasn’t the only one.

A lesson in pickle ball: If you haven’t heard of it, Pickle Ball is a cross between tennis and ping pong, and its popularity has soared in the past decade. I never understood why until this workshop. By the end of our morning session, I was rallying in an actual game and having a blast. It’s just one of a smorgasbord of onsite activities that include golf, yoga and fitness classes.

Paella with a sunset view: Specializing in fresh seafood and dry-aged steak with a Spanish flair, Talavera is the most upscale of the resort’s dining options. The paella, which was chock full of succulent shrimp, lobster, mussels, clams, chorizo and pork belly, tasted as good as it gets. So it wasn’t a surprise to learn that their young, talented chef had worked in a Michelin-starred restaurant in Spain before moving to Arizona.

Lingering over the multi-course delectable dinner paired with a light, fruity Spanish wine and a desert sunset, I had to pinch myself to check that I wasn’t actually on a movie set myself. ■

WWW.FOURSEASONS.COM/SCOTTSDALE





JW Marriott Orlando and beyond

by Alexandra Cohen

Orlando, Florida has long been known as the theme park capital of the world, making it an ideal visiting location for people of all ages, including both children and Disney Adults. While I had visited the city with great enthusiasm as a child, this was my first time returning in my adult years, and I am pleased to report that it has not at all lost its magic and wonder.

Where to Stay

While Orlando has more than 490 unique properties to choose from, we chose to stay at the JW Marriott Orlando Bonnet Creek Resort & Spa, a beautiful hotel which first opened its doors in 2020. Looking for action and fun? The hotel includes not only a pool, but also an Activity Garden for families which features the Mount Chelonia rock-climbing wall, a nine-hole mini golf course, and an open lawn to play giant chess. There is also the sixth floor Kids Conservatory, which offers access to various games and arts and crafts. When you

are ready to explore the city, the hotel offers a free shuttle service to take guests to the Disney World theme parks, as well as to Disney Springs, which is located less than 10 minutes from the hotel. The shuttle service can be booked in advance, and if desired, will also pick you up from any of these destinations.

The resort has 516 rooms, as well as 18 event/meeting rooms, two pools, a soothing hot tub, personal poolside cabanas (highly recommended), the Spa by JW and some excellent on-site dining options. I recommend their signature Sear + Sea steakhouse, which offers both a nice interior and a small patio overlooking the pool and the ninth floor rooftop lounge, Illume, which features a menu of creative and hand-crafted cocktails, sushi, and Asian tapas.

Universal Studios

When trying to select a theme park, the options are limitless. While I had visited

several as a child, I had no doubt upon my return to Orlando that the Universal parks were at the top of my list. Outside of its separate water park, Universal features two distinct parks that one may wish to explore: Universal Studios, and Universal's Islands of Adventure. Visit one, visit both separately, or visit both in the same day by purchasing a park-to-park pass. Amongst other attractions, Universal Studios features areas tributing various cities, including Hollywood, New York, and San Francisco, as well as Minion Land and Springfield, USA: Home of the Simpsons. Universal's Islands of Adventure includes Marvel Superhero Island, Skull Island, Jurassic Park, Seuss Landing, and more. That being said, the highlight for me was, without a doubt, The Wizarding World of Harry Potter. The Harry Potter universe is a must-visit for all fans of the books and movies, and sprawls over both Universal Parks.

Dining Out

During my recent trip, I discovered the wonders of Disney Springs, which is an incredibly popular entertainment, dining, and retail district formerly known as Downtown Disney. Disney Springs is a completely outdoor district featuring 120 acres of boutiques, restaurants, and entertainment. Let me recommend Wine Bar George and Morimoto Asia, both located in this area and Sophia's Trattoria at the brand new Conrad Hilton. Wine Bar George is predominantly tapas-style restaurant and as its name implies, this is the only restaurant in North America to offer more than 200 wines, all available by the glass, by the bottle, or in some cases, even by the ounce. Morimoto is a spectacular two-story Pan-Asian destination Sophia's Trattoria's patios seating is directly facing the hotel's picturesque lagoon and man-made beach. Both the restaurant's aesthetic and menu are meant to celebrate the coastal-inspired Southern Italian cuisine, with dishes including wood-fired pizzas, handmade pasta, fish, and meat. ■

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



Discover Porto's Most Luxurious Accommodations

by Olivia Liveng



The Rebello Spa



Saboaria



Village by BOA

Embark on a seamless journey to Porto, a city that beckons with its rich history, vibrant culture, and stunning landscapes. Renowned as one of Europe's best city break destinations, Porto is easily accessible from other European cities. And for travelers from the United States and Canada, direct flights now connect North America to Portugal's second-largest city, making your luxurious Porto getaway just a flight away.

Among the most exclusive accommodations in Porto are The Rebello Spa, Saboaria, and Village by BOA. Each hotel provides a unique blend of comfort, elegance, and local charm, ensuring every visitor experiences Porto's best offerings.

The Rebello Spa: A Luxurious Urban Retreat

Roman-Inspired Elegance

Situated along the scenic Douro River, The Rebello Spa is part of the prestigious Bomporto Hotels group. This sanctuary of tranquility draws inspiration from ancient Roman baths, combining historical elegance with modern amenities to offer a truly unique experience. The spa features a semi-heated pool, a sauna, a state-of-the-art fitness center, and four exquisitely designed treatment rooms. Using 100% natural, organic products from the Portuguese brand EssenciAroma, the spa incorporates traditional Roman herbs like pine, eucalyptus, juniper berry, lemon, cedar incense, rose, cinnamon, lavender, chamomile, and cardamom, ensuring each treatment is both authentic and naturally therapeutic.

Personalized Treatments

The Rebello Spa offers a variety of treatments based on traditional Chinese, Japanese, and Indian medicine principles. One standout offering is the "Ritual The Rebello," a two-hour therapy session that includes a full-body exfoliation, a relaxing massage, and a comprehensive facial treatment. This signature ritual aims to rejuvenate the body and mind, making it a guest favorite.

After their treatments, guests can unwind in the tranquil water lounge, illuminated by lamps that mimic the sun and moon phases, creating a serene and soothing ambiance. The spa's gym, equipped with vintage pieces and advanced technology, provides the perfect environment for burning calories and reducing stress, catering to fitness enthusiasts and those seeking relaxation.

Culinary Delights at Pot&Pan Restaurant

Complementing the serene spa experience is the Pot&Pan restaurant, which embodies the ethos of "good wine, good food, and good friends." Chef André Coutinho crafts a menu rich in traditional Portuguese cuisine with a contemporary twist, using seasonal, high-quality ingredients. The restaurant's cozy atmosphere, enhanced by dark walls and lush greenery, feels like dining at a friend's house, with local artisanal touches adding a unique charm.

Bello Rooftop: A Scenic Retreat

Perched on the 4th floor, the Bello Rooftop offers a vibrant and relaxed atmosphere perfect for enjoying a cocktail while enjoying stunning river views. This rooftop bar is ideal for gatherings with friends and family, featuring a variety of snacks, fresh cocktails, and Neapolitan pizzas created in collaboration with the renowned Lisbon pizzeria M'arrecree. The drink menu includes six signature cocktails and three mocktails, each inspired by different herbs, fruits, seeds, roots, and flowers, ensuring a delightful experience for every palate.

The Rebello Hotel: Luxury and Heritage

The Rebello Hotel, housed within four beautifully restored industrial buildings, offers 103 uniquely designed suites that perfectly blend modern comfort with the historical elegance of Porto. Located in Cais de Gaia, the hotel is close to Porto's main attractions, including the famous wine cellars, Jardim do Morro, and the UNESCO World Heritage-listed historic center. The architectural and design ele-

ments of The Rebello Hotel celebrate the artistic and creative spirit of Porto, offering guests an immersive and luxurious experience.

Saboaria: A Boutique Experience

Historical Significance

Saboaria, a 5-star boutique hotel, opened its doors last year and pays homage to the old soap factory that once occupied its site. This hotel combines historical significance with modern luxury, offering a unique and memorable stay. The founders of Saboaria are collaborating with historian Francisco Queiróz to develop a series of books documenting the history of the building and its surroundings, highlighting the hotel's dedication to preserving and celebrating its rich heritage.

Luxurious Amenities

Saboaria features a luxurious spa, a heated swimming pool, and 28 beautifully designed apartments. The hotel's design aims to combine the coziness of home with a constant feeling of serenity and well-being, making it a perfect retreat for those seeking relaxation and comfort. Each apartment is meticulously designed, offering guests a unique blend of traditional charm and modern amenities.

Activities and Workshops

Guests at Saboaria can enjoy various activities, including music sessions, soap-making workshops, and yoga classes. These offerings provide a unique and enriching experience, allowing guests to immerse themselves in the local culture and unwind in a tranquil setting.

Village by BOA: Contemporary Elegance

Unique Accommodations

Situated in a historic neighborhood in the heart of Porto, Village by BOA is a stunning aparthotel that combines the charm of a historic setting with the modern amenities of a 5-star boutique hotel. Village by BOA offers 40 unique accom-

modation units designed to provide the utmost comfort and elegance. The aparthotel's contemporary design seamlessly integrates with the historic surroundings, creating a harmonious blend of old and new. Each unit is thoughtfully designed, ensuring guests enjoy a luxurious and comfortable stay.

Modern Amenities

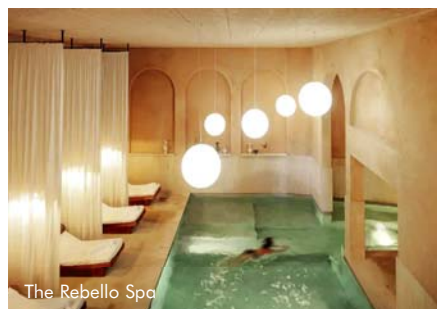
The hotel includes a fitness center, a pop-up store, and a local deli, ensuring guests have everything they need for a comfortable and convenient stay. The Space, a 120m² penthouse, is designed for hosting boutique private events, from workshops to chef's table experiences, providing a versatile venue for various occasions. This penthouse offers stunning views and has state-of-the-art facilities, making it perfect for personal and professional gatherings.

Immersive Experiences

Village by BOA is dedicated to offering immersive experiences that allow guests to connect with the local culture. The hotel's pop-up store and deli feature local products, highlighting the best of Porto's culinary and artisanal offerings. This focus on local goods ensures guests enjoy authentic and high-quality experiences during their stay, making each visit truly memorable.

Porto's luxurious hotels, including The Rebello Spa, Saboaria, and Village by BOA, offer unique and intriguing experiences that showcase the best of the city's charm, history, and hospitality. Whether indulging in bespoke spa treatments, savoring gourmet cuisine, or enjoying vibrant rooftop views, each hotel provides a perfect retreat for travelers seeking relaxation, comfort, and a taste of local culture. With their blend of historical elegance and modern luxury, these hotels promise an enriching and memorable stay in the heart of Porto. ■

WWW.THEREBELLO.COM
WWW.SABOARIAPORTO.COM
WWW.VILLAGEBYBOA.COM



The Rebello Spa



Saboaria



Village by BOA

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



The Tokyo Edition Toranomon

Article and photography by Steve Gillick

“Heightseeing” is considered an elevated special interest category of sightseeing. It refers to the uplifting attraction that many travelers display toward skyscrapers, towers, observation decks, and panoramic vistas, all from as lofty a viewing point as possible. The highest tower in Tokyo is the Tokyo Skytree, but the Tokyo Tower, in second place, is very impressive on its own.

The orange and white communication-observation tower is particularly gorgeous at night when illuminated, resembling a 332.9 meter (1092 foot) Christmas tree. Many travelers arriving or departing by air from Tokyo’s Haneda Airport in the evening immediately spot the Tokyo Tower. So, imagine yourself marveling at the iconic landmark outside your hotel room window. This is the view that guests enjoy from the

Tower View rooms and suites at The Tokyo Edition Toranomon.

This 5-star luxury lifestyle hotel, managed by Marriott International, is located on floors 31 to 36 of the Kamiyacho Trust Tower, a 4-minute walk from the Kamiyacho Metro Station. The neighborhood is Toranomon, which means “Tiger Gate” and refers to the southernmost of the 36 gates that protected Edo Castle, the current venue of Tokyo’s Imperial Palace. While the Tiger Gate was demolished in 1870, the term ‘Toranomon’ continues to conjure up feelings of energy and excitement, which certainly describes this downtown area of Tokyo.

The Tokyo Edition Toranomon opened in October 2020 with 206 rooms, including 22 suites. The interior was designed by Kengo Kuma, the celebrated Tokyo-based architect known for incorporating nature (wood, plants, trees) into his works. Kuma collaborated with Ian Schrager, the American entrepreneur of Studio 54 fame, whose cutting-edge company conceives innovative ideas for luxury hotels and residential properties.

The rooms are spacious and comfortable, with one King or two Queen beds, and feature panoramic window views of the

Toranomon neighborhood. Guests of all ages stay at the hotel while enjoying do-it-yourself leisure travel, package tours, family adventure, or corporate travel. The hotel concept is based on engagement, energy, luxury, and customer service.

After a busy day exploring the city, guests can return to their hotel room to luxuriate in the deep Japanese bathtub, using high-end Le Labo soaps and amenities. Some rooms include a walk-out terrace. All rooms can access the outdoor Garden Terrace, where guests enjoy drinks or dinner. It is surrounded by plants and trees and has an open view of the Tokyo Tower.

Other relaxing venues include dining in the Jade Room or Blue Room, visiting the lobby bar, or enjoying the new and classic cocktails in the award-winning Gold Bar.

The Hotel Edition Toranomon offers a relaxed, luxury experience complemented by the backdrop of the Tokyo skyline. ■

WWW.MARRIOTT.COM





A Slice of Paradise at Lake of the Ozarks

by Randy Mink

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

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

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



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

You Won't Go Hungry in Paradise

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

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

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

Recreational Activities

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

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

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

Spacious Guest Rooms

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

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

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

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Holiday Inn Resort Aruba

A terrific tot-friendly tropical escape

by Susan Campbell

Have toddler will travel?

Supermodel/actress Donna Feldman is no stranger to jet-setting around the globe to exotic locations and staying in high-end luxury digs as part of her profession. But when she wants a real tropical holiday in paradise away from the frenetic pace of her career, she asks me to help as I specialize in island escapes as a travel journalist. I'd already

sent her to a few islands, the last being a request for a romantic escape with her boyfriend a few years back. I recommended Aruba Ocean Villas, their adult-only South Pacific style overwater bungalows are insanely dreamy, and apparently, the island magic worked well as they've since married and now have a beautiful son. But her recent request for a stress-free tropical family holiday spot to take their two-and-a-half-year-old boy was more of a challenge. Choosing not only the ideal island, but also

a resort that checks all the boxes for having a toddler in tow was tricky. Fortunately, I figured out just the right place on both fronts.

First, I recommended Aruba for many parent-pleasing reasons. It's safe and clean with modern infrastructure and welcoming, friendly, multilingual locals (most Arubans speak English, Dutch, Spanish and Papiamentu). It's also an extremely stroller-friendly island as it's flat as a pancake. No cliffs to tumble down or copious staircases to deal with, and the streets and sidewalks are very accessible. The weather is ideal year-round with no hurricane season, and the shopping for toddler essentials is easy. You'll find well-stocked supermarkets and pharmacies with everything you would typically buy at home. And the drinking water is not only safe, but also delicious, too! (It's made from desalinated seawater.) This island also has first rate medical facilities should visitors ever need. As far as accom-





other resort beachfronts. (No noisy jet-skis or speedboats to run you over while you float!)

Then there is this resort's excellent water circuit situated mere steps from the sand. The vibe throughout is family-friendly, no swim-up pool bars full of loud spring breaker types. But it's the zero-entry access of the main pool (with kid-friendly waterfall tubs) that really seals the deal for little ones. No worrying about them falling into the deep end as is the case in most resort pools. (Though do mind the stand-alone pool at the far end that is more adult-oriented where the hot tubs are by the Seaview Tower.) And the area surrounding the pools are all smooth paved stone with lots of shaded spots to lounge.

Another great plus about the location of this resort is that it is right across the street from Aruba's famous Palm Beach nightlife strip—two miles of restaurants, bars, cafes, shopping spots, and outdoor fun all along flat, stroller-friendly sidewalks. Of particular note for toddlers is Paseo Herencia Mall steps from Holiday Inn's lobby. It's like a mini carnival after dark. They have free nightly light and water shows and entertainment in their courtyard, kiddie rides like trains and carousels, bouncy castles, and scads of snack fare spots and treat shacks.

Eclectic dining options & adult-focused pastimes

This Holiday Inn also has a great all-inclusive plan for families where kids 11 and under stay, eat, and play free, and adults get a spa credit per room and discounts on water activities. Dining includes an eclectic choice of restaurants, beach bars, and cafes, and kid-friendly cuisine is easy to find. (Toddlers can be such picky eaters!) But they also have a surprisingly good upscale choice of gourmet fare, too.

And your holiday doesn't have to be all par-enting and no play. Babysitting services are available should you need a couple's spa day or a glitzy outing at the nightclubs. In fact, Donna and her husband took advantage of the babysitting service to enjoy an enchanting private catered romantic dinner-

for-two with toes in the sand at Seabreeze. Other grown-up pas-times include serene hammock hang-out areas and a secluded jacuzzi, complimentary bicycles, tennis courts, a 24-hour fitness center, and a modern on-site casino.

Toddler friendly off-property outings

There's plenty to do with small children off property, too. Explore the colorful capital city of Oranjestad where old-fashioned open-air trolleys take you around the down-town core for free! And right off Palm Beach is the Butterfly Farm, an amazing oasis for all ages, and your first entrance fee is good for as many repeat visits as you like. You should rent a car for a day to go further afield to see more animals like the ones at Philip's Animal Garden or the Donkey Sanctuary. And all of Aruba's beaches are open to the public, so rent some portable beach chairs and gear from Traveling Light Aruba to throw in the back of your car and explore them all at will.

Donna says, "Our son Austin adored the Butterfly Farm. And Baby Beach is so aptly named, perfect for little ones, we really enjoyed it there too after we toured the amazing outdoor art in San Nicolas. So worth the half-hour drive! But I must say it was difficult tearing him away from his aquatic playground in front of the hotel. Just spending time with us at the beach and pool area there became his happiest pastime ever. We might make this family Aruba trip an annual thing!"

And I would be remiss if I didn't mention the absolute need for the First-Class Experience service on departure at the airport. Especially if you are flying back to the US with a toddler! It's so worth the extra funds for the extra special help to skip to the front of all the security and customs lines with your stroller and extra kid baggage, including your restless kid! And you get to wait for your flight in an upscale VIP lounge with free drinks and snacks. Win, win. ■

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WWW.INSTAGRAM.COM/DONNAFELDMAN**

modations, though most resorts have kids' clubs, they are typically reserved for children 4 and up. Toddlers need a special type of set up where parents can spend time with them by the water without always stressing about their safety. So, I recommended Holiday Inn Resort Aruba as their ideal choice for a multitude of reasons.

Location, location, location...

In my opinion, Aruba's 2-mile stretch of gorgeous Palm Beach is one of the most kid-friendly seafront stretches in the Caribbean. The surf is always pond-calm, the water crystal clear, and the white coral sand is baby powder soft, ideal for tender tootsies. (Plus, it never gets blazing hot!) And the ¼ mile stretch of the beach fronting Holiday Inn's three towers of 590 rooms is my favorite peaceful spot to swim on island because it's cordoned off from all the motorized water sports that disrupt many





Zum Gifhüttli

Biting Into Basel

by Randy Mink

Served piping-hot and oozing with cheesy goodness, the veal cordon bleu at Zum Gifhüttli restaurant is something to savor, even drool over. Lunch in the wood-paneled dining room remains the warmest memory of my visit to Basel, the third-largest city in Switzerland.

After disembarking there from my week-long Rhine River cruise, I was most looking forward to exploring the medieval Old Town with its museums, churches, riverside promenades and specialty shops lining atmospheric alleyways paved with cobblestones. What turned out to be just as inviting, though, were the traditional, pub-style restaurants scattered about the historic core.

Seeking Out Cordon Bleu

Cordon bleu is the house specialty at Zum Gifhüttli. We ordered the Classique, a juicy, golden-breaded schnitzel filled with ham and melted cheese, taking advantage of the Tagesteller ("daily plate"), a deal for 36.50 Swiss francs (about \$43 US) that included french fries, pumpkin soup and dessert.

Zum Gifhüttli's menu lists cordon bleu variations, like the one with ham, cheese, asparagus, cherry tomatoes and Hollandaise sauce. Another consists of chorizo, mozzarella and herbs. The Florentiner has ham, cheese, spinach and a fried egg on top, while the Schweizer features two Swiss delicacies—Bündner air-

dried ham and scrapings of raclette cheese. Opting for pork cordon bleu, instead of veal, can shave a bit off your bill, but any meal in Switzerland will cost much more than at home.

Guests at Gifhüttli can dine in the main-floor Bierstube, upstairs in the white-tablecloth Weinstube or, in warm weather, at outdoor tables offering the bonus of people-watching in Old Town's pedestrian zone.

Fans of cordon bleu and antique charm also gravitate to Old Town eateries like Zum Braunen Mutz and Restaurant Löwenzorn. The latter offers tables in its historic rooms and in the idyllic courtyard garden, where blankets, furs and electric heaters keep patrons toasty in cooler weather. Löwenzorn favorites include the wienerschnitzel and traditional Swiss fondue.



Zum Gifhüttli



More Dining Delights

Restaurant Kunsthalle, a sophisticated but friendly Old World restaurant in the same building as the Kunsthalle Basel contemporary art museum, every winter opens its Fondue Stübli, a cozy fondue chalet next to the landmark Tinguely Fountain. Additional city-center spots for fondue (and other Swiss classics) are Walliserkanne and Safran Zunft.

On our springtime visit to Restaurant Kunsthalle, we had a lunch of pasta amidst dark wood and classical cherub murals in the cozy, vaulted Schluch room. The more formal “white” room overlooks the chestnut tree-shaded patio, one of Basel’s prime spots for alfresco dining. The Kunsthalle’s menu reveals typical Swiss fare, including Zürcher Geschnetzeltes (veal strips in a sauce of white wine, cream and mushrooms) with rösti, the ubiquitous Swiss version of hash browns offered at most restaurants that serve french fries.

No discussion of traditional dining spots is complete without a mention of Gasthof zum Goldenen Sternen, Basel’s oldest restaurant. Though it’s been at its current riverside location for only 50-some years, it dates back to 1412. In the 1970s the ancient building was dismantled and rebuilt stone by stone along with the original ceiling paintings and all the wood paneling. Highlighting the menu are highly regarded fish dishes—I had the lightly fried salmon filet with linguine. It also offers lamb shank, steaks and wienerschnitzel, among other entrees. The restaurant looks out on the Rhine River, and there’s outdoor seating under trees on the riverfront promenade.

Basel: A City of Museums

Goldenen Sternen (“Golden Star”) is located in the picturesque St. Alban quarter, a quiet neighborhood noted for its patrician townhouses, half-timbered buildings, narrow streets and a stream that powers the waterwheel at the Basel Paper Mill. A fascinating museum detailing the history of paper making and printing, the medieval mill, not far from Old Town, was one of many that made St. Alban a book publishing center for centuries.



Though at first skeptical about how interesting a paper museum could be, we found it eye-opening. Especially fun was watching demonstrations of how pulpy goop is transformed into paper. We made our own sheet as a souvenir. Until the 19th century, we were surprised to learn, paper was made almost entirely from old rags and ropes that were sorted, cleaned, cut into strips and left to decay in a rag cellar’s rotting vats. The exhibit on toilet paper explains that it was considered a luxury product when first introduced in the late 1800s.

Claiming nearly 40 museums, Basel has a museum for every interest, showcasing subjects ranging from cartoons and musical instruments to city history and Jewish culture. Most visited are its two leading art museums.

Kunstmuseum Basel, whose three-building complex holds the world’s oldest municipally owned public art collection, presents seven centuries of European art and boasts the world’s largest collection of paintings by the Holbein family. On the outskirts of Basel, Fondation Beyeler houses some 400 masterpieces of modern and contemporary art, including pieces by Picasso, Monet, Matisse and Cezanne.

The Basel Historical Museum, with exhibition halls under the vaulted ceilings of a former 13th century church, focuses on the intersection of the cultures of Switzerland, France and Germany. (From Basel, Germany and France are just a hike or bike ride away.)

A River Runs Through It

In the summer you’ll see people sunning on the riverbanks and swimming or floating in the Rhine. Basel Tourism offices and retail stores sell something called a Wickelfisch, a brightly colored, fish-shaped waterproof bag for keeping your clothes dry as you whoosh down the river past city landmarks. It’s not to be used as a flotation device.

Sightseeing cruises provide another way of experiencing the Rhine. Or you can take one of the small passenger ferries that shuttle back and forth between the larger southern part of the city (Grossbasel, or Greater



Basel) to the northern side (Kleinbasel, or Little Basel) at four crossing points. Attached to a cable that spans the river, the non-motorized boats are guided deftly by expert ferry operators.

We took the five-minute ride from St. Alban to the opposite bank, then walked along the riverside path for 11 minutes before reaching the Museum Tinguely, a showplace for monumental mechanical sculptures created by world-renowned artist Jean Tinguely (1925-1991), who grew up and studied in Basel. Buttons allow visitors to activate some of the playful, mischievous and wacky creations, causing them to rattle, shake and whirl.

Sweeping views of the Rhine can be enjoyed from the tree-shaded terrace of Basel Cathedral. Sporting impressive twin towers, it is the city’s most prominent landmark. Ambitious types can climb the towers’ narrow staircases (about 250 steps).

For the Sweet Tooth

One of the best places to take a break from sightseeing is Confiserie Schiesser, a cafe/tea room/confectionery with an on-site chocolate factory and bakery. Founded in 1870 and now in its fifth generation of family ownership, Schiesser faces Old Town’s vivid red Rathaus (Town Hall) and market square. A tantalizing array of chocolates, cookies and pastries tempts the sweet tooth. Distinctive to Basel are the Basler Lächerli, a ginger cookie made with honey, spices, almonds, and candied orange and lemon peel.

A few doors down from Confiserie Schiesser, high-end Läderach chocolatier sells slabs of mouth-in-your-mouth chocolate called Frisch Schoggi. Sold by the gram, the uneven pieces are studded with everything from hazelnuts and almonds to cranberries and cornflakes.

Indulging in Basel’s tasty treats is the epitome of Swiss bliss. ■

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Jardines del Rey, Cayo Coco, Cuba

Article and photography by Steve Gillick



You know you're in a special place when you learn that Cayo Coco, one of the principal keys in the archipelago of Jardines del Rey, translates into "the key of the White Ibis". Known locally as the Coco Bird, the White Ibis is an endemic species that evokes the spirit of nature, sustainability, wellness, and adventure, the foundations for multi-generational visitor enjoyment on the north coast of central Cuba.

There are all-inclusive resorts with unbelievably picturesque soft-sand beaches, where the opalescent waters stretch over sand bars and coral reefs.

And there is the opportunity to escape from the all-inclusive mindset and learn how Cubans live, listen to the music, relish the food, explore a farm, join in a traditional folk dance, taste rum, savor freshly roasted coffee, cruise the mangroves, and thrill to a sighting of a tiny, many-colored Cuban Tody.

Joaquin Reinaldo (a.k.a. El Tio Rey (Uncle Rey)), the 80-year-old owner of the eco-historical site of Sitio la Güira (Site of the Calabash trees), explained that "visitors need to be in contact with Cuban culture. They need to know our story and interact with the people, Cuban life...our present, and our past".

Jardines del Rey, 'the Gardens of the King', owes its name to Spanish conquistadors who honored King Ferdinand II in 1513. Stretching over a coral reef in the province of Ciego de Avila, the 'gardens' occupy several island 'keys' or 'cayo', including Cayo Coco, Cayo Guillermo, Cayo Romano, and Cayo Paredon. Today, the area is easily accessible by a 15 to 20-minute drive from the Aeropuerto de Jardines del Rey or a 27-kilometer (17-mile) causeway that connects with the mainland.

Our talk with El Tio Rey touched on the area's 353 different plant species and 200 bird species. He noted that there are nature trails where visitors can go into the woods and enjoy the Cuban version of 'shinrinryoku', the Japanese term for 'forest bathing', where one absorbs the ambiance and energy of the trees. Lunch was simple but delicious, featuring yucca, corn, rice, freshly roasted pork, and local fruits, accompanied by music.



Afterward, we enjoyed the enthusiastic, smiling dancers of Compañía Folkórica Zama, who performed traditional countryside dances, and we participated!

La Redonda furthers the enjoyment of nature. Speed boats rush across the lake toward the red-infused waters around the Red Mangroves. Bromeliads and Orchids grace the trees along the channel as the boats slowly glide past giant termite nests and idyllic views of soaring Royal Palm trees, where West Indian Woodpeckers clutch the trunks and drill nesting cavities.

A visit to the farm, La Maria, is a further exercise in nature appreciation, Cuban culture, and agrotourism. The farm lies just outside Morón, the province's oldest city. Our guide, Milaxy Pérez Reyes, provided some insights, starting with a welcome drink ("we grow and roast our own coffee") and then on to the open garage that houses working models of a 1952 Massey-Harris tractor, a 1956 Chevy Bellair, and a 1956 John Deere Tractor. (Visitors can drive the John Deere if they wish). We learned about the Mango fruit trees in the orchard and the uniquely Cuban expression "Mango," which refers to a very attractive and appealing man or woman.

Milaxy pointed out the Mariposa (white butterfly) flowers and noted their history during the war with the Spanish, where Cuban women would hide messages inside the flowers. We tasted sugar cane juice from freshly crushed stalks, visited a hive of stingless melipona bees, and watched goats nibble greens in the field while Muscovy Ducks and Guinea Hens made a fuss nearby.

When asked why people should visit La Maria farm, Milaxy stressed the importance of "facing the reality of Cuba, learning how farmers live, and connecting with nature."

The nature theme of Cayo Coco continued with a visit to the Crocodile Farm. The breeding farm is under the care of the GECC (Grupo de Especialistas en Crocodriols de Cuba) with the goal of increasing the population of the American Crocodile species and "to make up what humans destroyed and restore the natural balance of the ecosystem by eventually releasing the crocodiles back into nature".

Crocodiles can be fed by visitors who stand on a porch and use a long fishing pole apparatus affixed with a piece of chicken. Other crocodiles, submerged in the pond, glared at the visitors. Our visit reinforced the overall Cuban attitude—and objective-toward preserving nature and practicing sustainability.

In a celebration of islands, boats, beaches, and coral reefs, we boarded a Catamaran in Cayo Guillermo for a completely relaxing

full-day cruise that included swimming, snorkeling, and basking in the sunshine at Playa Pilar, which is touted as one of the best beaches in the Caribbean due to its powdery white sand and shallow, calm waters.

Lunch at nearby Media Luna Key featured Chef Junior's grilled lobster, possibly the tastiest in all of Cuba. "The Chef makes the difference", he told us. "I appreciate work and am very happy. I like to treat our guests well". And part of this treatment included the music of the group Trios el Caribe. Chef Junior noted that "the relationship between music and food is very important. It's like a very happy marriage".

A remarkable component of happiness in Jardines del Rey is the opportunity for nature immersion. One morning, I hopped into the 1955 Chevy Belair of Cayo Coco's premier birdwatching guide and naturalist, Paulino Lopez Delgado, for a morning of sheer enjoyment along back roads and through bushes. Paulino's 25 years of experience and very personable manner guided us through one of Cuba's most important bird habitats. Within minutes, we were face to face with a Cuban Tody, the tiny pink, red, blue, green, yellow, gray, and white bird at the top of the viewing list for birders and photographers. In the next few hours, we saw over 30 different species, including a Great Lizard Cuckoo, a curious American-Cuban Kestrel, an active family of Smooth-billed Ani, a stunning Green Woodpecker, plus Kingbirds, Vireos, Warblers, Flycatchers, and a very determined Red-legged Honey Creeper, with a mouth full of twigs for the nest.

Paulino said that nature was a hidden benefit of Jardines del Rey, which few visitors take advantage of. For those looking for some adventure, it gets them away from mass tourism. They tour in small groups; they see amazing colors, hear bird life, and interact with Cuba in a very memorable way.

Jardines del Rey is a very special place where locals exhibit infectious pride, enthusiasm, and connection with culture, food, and nature, and visitors are invited to join. ■

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The Splendors of Egypt Cast a Magic Spell

Article and photography by Randy Mink

Egypt! After years of daydreaming about doing the big trip, I finally made it to the land of the Pyramids and King Tutankhamun, Cleopatra and Queen Nefertiti.

In the travel world, the term “bucket list” may be overused, but Egypt had always been on my personal agenda, and now it’s been checked off. This fascinating desert

country straddling Africa and Asia was everything I had hoped it would be.

My small Goway Travel group spent a week touring Cairo, Alexandria, and the ancient temples and tombs of southern Egypt. A real highlight was a three-night cruise from Aswan to Luxor on the Nile, the world’s longest river. See my Nile cruise article on page 60.

Goway’s partner on the ground in Egypt is Emeco Travel, whose staff goes above and beyond to make the experience seamless. Each of us on the trip appreciated Emeco’s meet-and-greet service at the Cairo airport. After going through customs, our group was ushered to a waiting mini-bus for the 45-minute, late-night drive to Four Seasons Hotel Cairo at The First Residence, a 5-star property attached to a luxury shopping mall in Giza, a separate city of 2.5 million.

Grand Egyptian Museum

On our first morning, we got a peek at the brand-new, partially opened Grand Egyptian Museum (GEM), a \$1 billion complex that has been in the works for years. With moving walkways through cavernous galleries—not to mention shops, a food court and children’s museum—it claims to be the world’s largest archaeological museum devoted to a single civilization.



We were blown away by the museum's King Tutankhamun Immersion Experience, a half-hour visual extravaganza in a rectangular theater swirling with digital images that tell the story of the "boy king," whose tomb was only discovered 102 years ago. Eventually, King Tut relics and other treasures now at various Egyptian museums will make their way into GEM's spaces. The stunning building, across the river from Cairo on the desert plateau above the western edge of Giza, slopes toward the Pyramids of Giza, just a mile away, echoing their architecture.

Pyramid Scheme

What a thrill it was to come face to face with the trio of mighty Pyramids, the only survivors among the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Built as pharaohs' tombs 4,500 years ago, they were the tallest structures on earth until the 14th century and, remarkably, have remained in a good state of preservation. It's possible to go inside the tomb chambers, but we were told it's dark and claustrophobic with not much to see.

The mood at the Pyramids, the very symbol of Egypt, is far from reverent, however, as hundreds of vendors hawking souvenirs and camel and horse cart rides create a circus-like atmosphere. After a patio lunch at Khufu's restaurant, our Goway gang went to a panoramic lookout point affording views of all three monuments. Each of us paid \$2 to pose atop a camel with the Pyramids as a backdrop. Before leaving the Giza plateau, we got a close-up look at the Sphinx, the iconic sculpture combining the head of a man with the haunches of a lion.

Cairo Sightseeing

Our Cairo visit also included the National Museum of Egyptian Civilization, which covers every period in the country's history. The dark, eerie lower level contains the mummified remains of 20 kings and queens from antiquity, many with blackened heads, feet and arms poking out of the fabric.

In Old Coptic Cairo, we toured medieval Coptic Orthodox churches and the 9th century Ben Ezra Synagogue. It's said that the Church of St. Sergius and St. Bacchus is built over a cave that sheltered Mary, Joseph

and the infant Jesus for three months when they fled to Egypt to escape persecution from the Roman king of Judea.

On the outdoor terrace of Hill-Top Restaurant at Al-Azhar Park, an oasis of greenery overlooking Old Cairo, our Goway group then feasted on a lunch of chicken and lamb kebabs, rice and french fries. We dipped puffy pita bread into creamy sauces—tahini, hummus and babaganoush.

Mesmerizing Marketplace

To me, Cairo, a city of 22 million, is all about street life, and there's no better place to dive into the fray than labyrinthine Khan-el-Khalili Market, a typical Arab bazaar populated by stray cats, folks in traditional dress, boys carrying trays of bread on their head—and plenty of tourists. Shopkeepers deliver well-honed sales pitches, asking passersby to "take a look."

Along Khan-el-Khalili's warren of alleyways, hole-in-the-wall shops brim with brass tea sets and sparkly belly dancing outfits, gold and silver jewelry, embroidered dresses and handbags, perfumes and carpets. King Tut and Queen Nefertiti statuettes come in all sizes.

In a spice emporium with open sacks of dates, nuts, teas, herbs and various powdery cooking ingredients, the friendly owner opened jars of curry for me to smell. Another merchant, after selling me two T-shirts, insisted I see his silver shop next door. From an antiques dealer I snared my find of the day—a weathered Pepsi sign in Arabic that I now display at home with my other soft drink memorabilia.

Chaotic, Congested Cairo

Cairo's traffic-choked streets are a free-for-all. Expect to spend a lot of time in your bus or taxi because traffic moves slowly, sometimes not at all. With horn-honking motorists constantly changing lanes while somehow avoiding pedestrians who nonchalantly weave through the nonstop parade of moving cars, it's a wonder we never saw an accident, though close calls occurred every few seconds. Watching your



driver, seemingly calm and unflustered, deftly maneuver through the tangle of traffic is quite a show.

I like walkable cities, but Cairo is not one of them. Since there are very few stoplights to slow the steady streams of traffic, tourists don't have many places where they can cross with confidence. We would often follow locals as they darted into the roadway, hoping for the best. In one instance, a man noticed our hesitation and led us across, returning to the other side after completing his good deed.

Call of the Nile

From Cairo our Goway group took an EgyptAir flight to Aswan, the starting point of our Nile River cruise to Luxor. The next three days were nicely paced, split between archaeological site visits, shopping stops and time to relax on the Sonesta St. George, a 5-star river ship.

After settling into our cabins and having lunch onboard, we were off to the Temples of Philae, a series of temples that were dismantled in the 1970s, removed from flood-ravaged Philae Island and rebuilt on nearby Agilkia Island. Along with our guide, Ramy Sakhry, we boarded motorboats for the short trip to the island in Aswan Lake, a body of water between the 1902 Aswan Dam and the High Dam, completed in 1972. Dedicated to the goddess Isis, the Temple of Isis was begun around 690 B.C. and for 700 years was the most important shrine in Egypt.

see following page





I'm glad I did a little reading about ancient Egypt before the trip. Knowing historical periods and names of certain gods, kings and queens prepared me for Ramy's commentaries. All guides on Goway tours are certified Egyptologists.

Exotic Shopping

After the Temples of Philae, we were taken to two shops before going back to the ship. At both places we were seated on comfortable cushions in showrooms and served hibiscus tea while listening to sales spiels. Surrounded by bottles of essential and medicinal oils at Mohammed El Fayed Essence of Life Perfume Palace, we got a whiff of different scents applied to our wrists and forearms; some received neck and forehead massages using the oils. The lavender spray, we were told, promotes sleep and relaxation, while a few drops of clove oil in water not only helps to relieve toothache but stops vomiting and helps to curb the desire for alcohol and nicotine. From frankincense and myrrh to mint, eucalyptus and sesame oils, each elixir has some use in aromatherapy.

Then it was on to Al Attar Spices, where we were given tastes and smells of everything from ginger and ginseng to oregano and powdered mint.

I didn't buy a single thing at the shops we visited but enjoyed the product demonstrations. These "commercials," moreover, provided a welcome break from the history-heavy touring.

At an alabaster shop I got some good shots of turbaned artisans as they chiseled the

stone. Salespeople at Sekhmet Papyrus Gallery showed us how papyrus leaves are processed and made into works of art. At Habiba Hand Weaving, many in our group bought Egyptian cotton textiles, and I photographed the weavers at their looms.

Noteworthy Temples and Tombs

Among the most photogenic sites we encountered was Edfu Temple, which we reached from the ship via horse carriage. One of the most striking and complete temples, the structure has survived so well because it was buried under debris for centuries until being discovered in 1860 by a French archaeologist. Begun in 237 B.C. under Ptolemy III, Edfu Temple was completed 180 years later by Ptolemy XII, the father of Cleopatra VII (played in the epic movie by Elizabeth Taylor). It is dedicated to the god Horus.

One could spend a week visiting the temple complexes clustered in and around Luxor, a Nile River city of 700,000 located 420 miles south of Cairo. Our Goway gang hit the highlights—Luxor and Karnak temples on the east bank and the burial places of New Kingdom kings and queens on the west bank.

In Valley of the Kings, where pharaohs were laid to rest in rock-cut tombs bedecked with gold and jewels, we were given a ticket good for entry into three of the eight tombs open to visitors. The chambers, decorated with hieroglyphics and paintings in various states of preservation, provided a good place to commune with the past and escape the desert heat.

On our February trip we enjoyed sunny days in the 70s (Fahrenheit), even low 80s, with nights and early mornings on the chilly side. I can't imagine traipsing through the archaeological sites in the summer heat. Egypt is mostly desert; there is little shade.

Alexandria: The Second City

Our Goway journey wound down with a flight from Luxor back to Cairo and then a three-hour drive to the Mediterranean port of Alexandria, Egypt's second-largest city (population 7 million). Though it was far

from our favorite place on the tour, Alexandria impressed us with the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, a modern library complex inspired by the city's original library and prominence as a center of learning in the ancient world. Among the library's museums are ones devoted to art, antiquities and late President Anwar Sadat, who was assassinated in 1981.

Memorable group meals in Alexandria included a seafood lunch at the waterfront Fish Market and grilled specialties at Byblos, a Lebanese restaurant at the swank Four Seasons Alexandria Hotel at San Stefano, where we overnighted.

A Last Look at Cairo

In Cairo, the deluxe Fairmont Nile City pampered us on our final night. Since my flight home the next day was not until midnight, I had another 12 hours to see more of Cairo. In the morning I glimpsed the treasures of King Tutankhamun's tomb at the Egyptian Museum, an old-school repository of antiquities. My afternoon was spent poking around the mosques and museums atop The Citadel, a fortified complex of museums and mosques affording fine views of the city below.

Go With Goway

Goway specializes in custom-designed trips for groups and individuals. It recently introduced Odysseys by Goway, a new line of small-group journeys (16 guests maximum) with guaranteed departure dates. One of those is the nine-day "Egypt Odyssey."

The Toronto-based company takes globe-trotters to 115 countries, and its website lists more than 1,500 suggested itineraries, 14 of them in Egypt. Egypt is often combined with countries like Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Dubai and Qatar.

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A photograph of two Buddhist monks in traditional red robes and golden hats with red tassels, blowing long, ornate golden horns. They are standing in a high-altitude landscape with snow-capped mountains in the background and a small village in the distance.

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