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Welcome to World Traveler



In this issue, we start our exciting world-wide odyssey in Tokyo, as we savour wonderful Japanese cuisine as well as discovering great art in many great museums on this beautiful island nation. While in the orient, we head to Sichuan, China, to find, 'Cuisine, History, Culture...and Pandas too!' Still in China, we find the best of the worldly city of Beijing. Too the far west and still in Asia, we 'Discover Dubai' and its many incredible offerings.

Close by, we start our European segment with a trip to Anatolia, Turkey, to find the historic Wooden Hypostyle mosques that have been added to the list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Still in Turkey we find the beauty in its North Aegean islands. In Germany, we experience the remarkable contrast of the marvellous Schleswig-Holstein region and the beauty and opulence of the Sanssouci Palace. South to Spain, we find Malaga is the 'Perfect Andalusia Vacation Destination' and at the same time discover 14 amazing Spanish museums. In the beautiful island nation of Malta, we find yearlong activities and attractions and a flourishing art scene.

On the other side of the Mediterranean coast, we tour Egypt and uncover the best this terrific country has to offer the traveler. To the far west of North Africa, we take 'A Trip of a

Lifetime Through Fabulous Morocco with Exodus Adventure Travels.'

Next, we head to the Americas by starting in Canada's far-far north to find a new cruise offering to Baffin Island and Greenland with Adventure Canada. In Quebec City, we take in 'A French Holiday,' while way west, we participate in the ever-exciting Calgary Stampede! In the USA, we head to Oregon's magnificent Coast before discovering San Francisco's Presidio and then what is new and exciting in the state of Utah. In Wisconsin, we visit the charming area of Lake Geneva before traveling south to music city Nashville and nearby to explore the best of Northwest Arkansas, all the while taking in the sounds of country music in West Virginia, Mississippi, and Alabama. In St. Peterburg, Florida we taste amazing vegan sushi before taking a relaxing cruise with Holland America through the Southern Caribbean.

Regarding cruises, we take three in a row. First up, Exploring the Amazon with Amazon Nature Tours' then we find ourselves 'Smiling to the End of the World Onboard the Viking Polaris!' in Antarctica and lastly, 'Quark Expeditions' Safari to South Georgia Island and Antarctica.'

Happy Travels!



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Around the World (short informative travel pieces)



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Stay & Play



Beau-Rivage Palace, Lausanne, Switzerland

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



Malaga, the Perfect Andalusia Vacation Destination

Article and photography by Michael Morcos

The locals know it, returning visitors love it, and so did I. Malaga is an Andalusian gem by the sea with lots to see, do and experience. So perfect is this magnificent city, that it felt like it was created by a Hollywood set designer. Imagine this to start: the location is on the beautiful Costa del Sol in Mediterranean with sandy beaches, near perfect weather including 300 sunny days per year, many centuries of interesting history. Fabulous architecture including a Roman theatre, an incredible Moorish fortress, world-class museums, a friendly and walk able pedestrian only city center, clean streets and lanes, historic churches and beautiful Cathedral, wonderful choices of restaurants and gastronomy, fashion boutiques, and its most famous resident was none other than Pablo Picasso.

NH Hotel Málaga

First impressions mean a lot and I knew by my short drive from the international airport

through town to my hotel, I could see this was a beautiful city with little traffic, wonderful parks, and unique buildings. My stay would be at the NH Hotel Malaga, a Spanish hotel chain I had stayed with many times on many trips to Spain. The service was always friendly and courteous, their properties are well located, clean, and perfectly decorated to reflect the surroundings. My room was rather modern and spacious with a wonderful balcony that gave view to a courtyard. Behind the walls of a historic building across from my room I could hear enchanting Spanish music, listening in I figured it must have been a Flamingo dance school. I would taste mouth-watering local pastries, while being absorbed by the sounds of Spanish singers and shoe tapping. Just one great moment to start my fantastic Malaga visit.

The Mercado

Stepping out to discover Malaga, I would be surprised to find the Malaga Atarazanas Food

Market was only two short blocks away from the hotel. The historic and fascinating building entrance was of Moorish style and the interior was iron beams and grids. When inside, the dominating smell was of freshly caught fish and its best to visit in the morning when the fisherman unload their catches. Beyond that was a fully stocked market of fruits, vegetables, olives, meats and wonderful delicacies to discover. This was just one dimension among many I was to visit.

The Malaga Port

What a wonderful job the city of Malaga has done to revitalize the port. It was artistic, modern and easily accessible in the center of town. All along the waterfront were parks, statues, restaurants, shops, and a dock that welcomed luxury cruise-liners, personal watercrafts and working ships of every size and dimension. To better discover the port and Malaga Bay, the beaches and outlying Shores, I would board a three level sightseeing boat. The cool ocean breeze and gentle rocking of the ship made us ever so comfortable and relaxed on this hot and sunny day. The Seagulls guided us all along the way and we enjoyed the magnificent scenery of the city, Costa del Sol beaches



and suburbs while we would cross many other ships along the way.

A very Picasso day

Spain’s most famous artist is also Malaga’s most famous resident. Having been born and lived his early years here, you can find traces of this worldwide known artists everywhere. We would start our journey of discovery at the Picasso family house and find that he lived a good and privileged life in a rather richly decorated property in the center of the city. We followed by a visit to the Santiago church, where he was baptized and finish off at the fantastic Museum Picasso Malaga. This museum is very popular attraction, well laid out in a modern looking building and full of so many of his original artworks that it would need lots of time to fully take in. The Picasso collection here is only second to those found in Madrid and a real treat to have a chance to see such amazing and detailed mastery in person!

Centro Malaga

In my many decades of travel, I could not remember a city packing so much into such small area. The centre of Malaga is easily walkable through its pedestrian only streets and the attractions are just minutes away from each other. On a particularly packed day, I would take in the well-appointed Calle Marqués de Larios for some shopping then visit the remarkably beautiful Plaza de la Constitución and marvel at the buildings, statues, and fountains. Moving on, I walked to the Plaza del Obispo to visit the magnificent Catedral de la Encarnación de Málaga and appreciate its richly decorated interior and then was truly delighted at the centuries old Moorish castle of Alcazaba with its beautiful gardens and spectacular 360° view of the city and sea. I finished my day with the relaxing time at the Hammam Al Andalus baths in a well-kept historic building that has original artwork throughout.

On another charged day, I would stroll by the city gardens and school district and visit the Malagueta Bullring, this beautiful arena is not frequently used, but during bull fighting season it is a highlight of the city and faithful fans pack the seats. A short distance away is the remarkable Centre Pompidou, with only two with such names, it is the little sister of the

renown Parisian landmark. This museum was artistic and ultra-modern looking, the artwork inside was both beautiful, fascinating, intriguing and something to expand the mind. To end the day I would take a walk along the beautiful beach, enjoying the sun’s rays, cool sand under my feet and admired the upscale residential area set by the seashore.

Spanish gastronomy galore

Spanish cuisine is one of my favourites as it varies from region to region and is always delicious and nutritious. Malaga sure has its abundance of restaurants serving local specialties such as gazpacho, pescaíto frito, and espetos de sardinas as well as Spanish favourites, and even international cuisine. I would try many different eateries, all great and made unique by their location, decoration, themes, and wonderful dishes including: the Tercer Acto restaurant, Los Patios de Beatas, restaurant Kaleido, Doña Inés and La Sole del Pimpi, a place that I would find the most fascinating restaurant in El Pimpi. This extremely popular Malaga restaurant is partially owned by the other most famous Malagueños, Antonio Banderas. Guest here have included celebrities, diplomats, and even royalty. Getting in is a challenge as the line-ups stretch out from two different entrances for people not just waiting to be seated, but waiting to make reservations. The charming old style looking Taverna served beautiful local wines and the large portions of mouth water dishes that pleased the palate and hit the spot. A great meal with lots of ambiance made for a memorable night and visit.

Adios beautiful Malaga

Before my visit, I thought to myself, what could I possibly do for four days in Malaga, but believe me, four days is only an orientation of this wonderful city and I actually found myself having to discipline my stay by highlighting what I wanted to do most. I would rush from one place to another just so to absorb a little of the most popular sites and attractions. Malaga is truly an Andalusian gem in a region that has so many sites that needs time to be discovered and enjoyed, including just even relaxing by the beach or a café, and take in the best of its people and offerings. ■

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Savouring My Return Visit to Tokyo

Article and photography by Steve Gillick

One of my first social media posts from Tokyo featured a colorful medley of scrumptious dishes: Blue-egged Sweet Shrimp, Salmon, and Sea Urchin roe, a selection of ultra-fresh tuna sushi that included the prized fatty cuts, and a fragrant bowl of chicken with delicate bamboo shoots, and fish cake, complemented by several cups of delicious, crisp and dry Kamikawa Taisetsu Sake from Hokkaido. A friend in Canada immediately responded that I was embarking on yet another chapter of "How I ate and drank myself through Tokyo". Nothing could have been closer to the truth!

This return visit to Tokyo aimed to see and do as many "new" things as possible, including switching our hotel from the vibrant Ginza area to the energetic Asakusa neighborhood. Our modest room at the Kanzashi Asakusa Hotel imparted dramatic views of the Tokyo SkyTree, the tallest tower in the world, and Sensoji, the oldest temple in Tokyo. And while we had visited Asakusa many times on previous trips, living right next to the temple paved the way for new opportunities.

Sensoji is packed with tourists during the daytime, each vying to get the best photos, selfies, and videos and then flocking to the ancient street, Nakamise-Dori, to buy souvenirs and sweets. But in the evening, when we walked through the temple area from the Asakusa Metro Station to our hotel, nary a person was in sight. It was just us, the night sky, the bright moon, the glaring, scowling faces of the temple-guardian Nio statues, and the beautifully lit buildings showing off the exquisite architectural details and carvings of the Hozomon, or Treasure-House Gate, the



Five-Story Pagoda, the Main Hall, and the Asakusa Shrine. This is the place to be after hours for tranquility.

However, the other side of Asakusa can be electric, with crowds checking out stores such as Uniqlo for clothing and Don Quixote for discounted prices on everything, along with relishing the street food. Happy hordes head to Hoppy Street to dine and drink at one of the many small izakayas. Hoppy refers to a virtually non-alcoholic beer. It's mixed with Shochu (25% to 40% alcohol), giving the bland-tasting drink some bite!

But we were curious about a lineup outside a tiny restaurant and discovered Okina Soba. Freshly made cold soba noodles (zarusoba) are served in a large bowl, accented with dollops of fresh seaweed. You dip the soba into the special sauce (tsuyu) with your chopsticks. It's so tasty. And when you're finished, pour hot soba water (sobayu) into the remaining tsuyu, and enjoy a comforting, end-of-meal drink.

On another day, with soba thoughts, we found 'Naze Sobani Raayu wo Ilerunoka' near the Shimbashi JR Station. The humorous name means, "Why do people put spicy oil in their soba?" Our dish was a taste bud dream! Cold soba with an extraordinary dipping sauce of perfectly spiced oil, seaweed, sesame seeds, scallions, and bamboo. When you mix in a raw egg, it's 'umai': So good!

Tendon (short for 'tempura donburi') is another great lunch option. Tempura Nakayama in the neighborhood of Ningyocho is only open for lunch from 11:15 am to 1:00 pm. This tiny, counter-seat restaurant has a high turnover of loyal customers, so the line moves quickly. No photos, no kids under 12, no groups.

We ordered the shrimp, fish, and vegetable Tendon, incredibly tender and tasty, bathed in a delicious sauce that was a little sweet, a little barbeque, and a little soy. We enjoyed it with crunchy pickles, miso soup, and beer. Highly recommended!

And at Cally no Mise Hachigatsu ('Curry Shop, August') in Shimokitazawa, Tokyo's Curry Capital, we savored every bit of the outstanding, packed-full-of-flavor chicken and vegetable curries.



Our evening meals combined memorable past experiences with exciting new ones. In Machiya, we dined at Wasuke (twice!) and Koshuya. In Yoyogi, the go-to place is Sushi Darihan, known for excellent, moderately-priced fresh seafood. In Monzen Nakacho, we dined at Masurao, a stand-up seafood restaurant, as well as Otaruya, which features mouth-watering dishes and sakes from Hokkaido. Specialties at these izakayas include deep-fried oysters, grilled Hokke, salmon jaw, sardine, scallop, mackerel and buri (Yellowtail) sashimi, ankimo (monkfish liver), and cumin chicken wings.

Each evening meal was accompanied by delicious dry sakes from around Japan: Fukui, Fukushima, Miyagi, Yamanashi, Yamagata, Niigata, and Hokkaido.

Aside from our understandable fixation with food and drink, our infatuation with Tokyo and especially 'what's new' in the city kept us very busy. Most stores and attractions don't open until 10:00 am or 11:00 am, but this was no problem for early risers (like us). Birding at the break of dawn in Senzokuike Park, just 30 minutes outside the city, usually conjures up a colorful Common Kingfisher. Or a visit to Tsukiji Market at 5:30 am allows time to buy fresh onigiri (rice balls filled with seafood) at Onigiriya Marutoyo without the usual long line up, and you can explore the food and kitchen utensil shops along the alleyways and in the two indoor markets without the throngs of tourists.

One morning, we met Misao Sugibayashi, the Instructor at Tsukiji Cooking and assistant instructor Kuniko Tsurugaya. This popular school appeals to those interested in an interactive culinary experience. We started with a shopping excursion for fresh ingredients at the Japanese pickles shop, the bonito flake store, and the fish and seafood stalls. Afterward, we participated in preparing miso soup, tempura, and sushi. The students then had the pleasure of devouring their creations. It was educational, fun, and tasty!

In the Shibuya neighborhood, we visited Magnet, which has a reputation as one of the best places to view and photograph the hundreds of people at the frenetic, all-direction Scramble Crossing. And right around the corner is Miyashita Park, a green oasis with an



outdoor activity complex (skate park, bouldering wall, beach volleyball, kids play areas), an indoor shopping arcade (skateboards, vinyl records, casual clothing), and many restaurants. It's a great place to unwind!

Further activities that soothe the soul can be found in Tokyo's art scene. There is stunning architecture, such as the Mode Gakuen Cocoon Tower in Shinjuku and the Louis Vuitton flagship store in Ginza. And there are myriad Art Galleries. We visited the Tokyo National Museum in Ueno Park to see "100 Takes on Hanshan and Shide" by Tadanori Yokoo, a Japanese graphic designer, illustrator, and painter. Yokoo posed the two Tang Dynasty Zen poet-monks, known for their erratic behavior and spirituality, in contemporary situations.

We also explored the National Museum of Modern Art in Takebashi, near the Imperial Palace, to learn about the life and art of Munakata Shiko, the world-renowned graphic artist and wood-block printmaker.

Between eating and exploring the city, there was time for shopping in Asakusa, Ginza, Shinjuku, Yurakucho, and Ueno. Overall, we spent seven jam-packed days in Tokyo and, as always, could have spent more. ■

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The Maltese Islands Will Host the maltabiennale.art 2024

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



Fort St Elmo, Valletta

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

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

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

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



Fort St Elmo Courtyard

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**malta
biennale
.art 2024**

maltabiennale.art is online:

Official website: www.maltabiennale.art

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

Email: info@maltabiennale.art



Grand Master's Palace



Ġgantija Archaeological Park



The Inquisitor's Palace

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

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

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

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



VisitMalta



Schleswig-Holstein, the Land of Wonderful Contrast!

Article and photography by Michael Morcos

How could they be calling for rain on such a beautiful day, I thought to myself as we rode the rails to Busum. We would soon find out that this city on the North Sea shoreline seemed caught in a loop of sun, clouds, rain, repeat! It was a hilarious pattern that continued all day long and absolutely comical when you are ready for it!

Touring the Schleswig-Holstein region of Germany, we would soon find out it was vacation time for the locals, German visitors, and international tourists. There was certainly a laid-back, joyful atmosphere as couples, groups and families went about enjoying the fresh air and the marvellous lush green countryside.

We would spend the coming days discovering the 'land between two-seas,' that is the penin-

sula that starts in northern Germany and continues up to Denmark and is surrounded by the North Sea on the west side and the Baltic Sea to the east. Here we would visit the 'mud-flats' in a National Park, be entertained by seals, visit a historic Viking settlement, be enchanted in the small town of Schleswig, stroll through the beautiful countryside, get a feeling for cosmopolitan life in Kiel and taste wonderful north Germany cuisine all along the way.

Starting in the town of Busum, which would be our base for a couple of days, we would have the best of contrasting worlds. We would stroll along with the masses on the main street to find bars, restaurants, and tourist shops, see the quaint fishing port, walk on the seabed right in front of our hotel, and enjoy a marvellous meal set high above the shore with a fantastic sea view and setting sun.

While here, we would also learn some interesting things about the tides, geography, coastal protection, and renewable energy. We had arrived at our hotel at absolute low tide and could see people were walking a kilometer away on the seabed and in stark contrast a couple of hours later the tide was in and so were the people.

We would also learn that seawalls are continuously being created all along this region as climate change and rising waterlines are taken very seriously here. The "walls" are gentle sloping piles of dirt that are being held fast by grass, and they are very complementary to the setting.

It was interesting to find out about Germany's heroic commitments to renewable energy and land conservation as we would also find this region is the perfect place for power generat-



ing windmills. At sea and on the mostly flat terrain, the wind is continually blowing and there are windfarms in just about every direction.

The National Park

I would normally associate a national park with forests, lakes, and mountains, but the Wadden Sea National Park had none of these, and in contrast was made up of mud, sand, and sea and perfect with its own character. Here we would find brave cyclists battling the wind, enthusiastic windsurfers, and stroll along the shoreline with people of all ages while enjoying the fresh ocean breeze and the sand between our toes. Just a short distance away there were murky, sandy waters, small ponds and grasses that somehow survived it all.

The best part of our visit was walking in the mudflats with a naturalist who gave us all the facts about marine life. With pants rolled up to our knees, I would think back to a time where mom told me not to walk in the mud but here, I was like a kid again and with the mud up to my ankles. Made me feel free and was quite liberating. On a funny note, our guide did mention to be careful as not to slip as we made our way towards the flats. Well, shortly afterwards I became victim as I was videotaping and took a spill, lucky it was on soft grass. I have the footage as proof of me going down and later we all chuckled about it.

Seehundaufzuchtstation

When thinking about animals that associate well with humans, dogs, cats, and certain birds seem to fit the bill and after a visit to the Seehundaufzuchtstation (try saying that ten times) I would certainly add seals to that list. Amongst the many other things this center does, it rescues stranded and injured seals for research and rehabilitation on these native marine animals. The center itself has these furry creatures as the stars, and they love the limelight and attention from both staff and guests. Feeding times are especially fun as the Grey and Common seals ham it up to get a morsel of fresh fish.

UNESCO World heritage site

It was a blissful day with sunny blue skies, walking in sweet fresh air, alongside healthy

mature trees, cows, and sheep lazily grazing in the meadows full of wildflowers as we slowly made our way to a Viking village. The fascinating re-created settlement was a historic doorway to the life and times of the original inhabitants. Dressed in typical period costumes, the characters interacted well with guests while performing what was then daily duties. The Viking Museum Haithabu itself was very well presented with many original Viking artefacts including a beautiful longship. It was a fantastic visit that concluded with a hardy Viking meal in a natural setting.

Bricks and pedals

The port city of Schleswig was a delight to visit. It had the grandeur of the cathedral and the charm of an out-of-the-way town. Saint Peters tower was so tall, it could be seen from a long distance away while the interior gives even more impressive feelings of greatness with exquisite priceless artwork throughout. In contrast, the city was tranquil and absolutely spotless. Walking through the streets and alleyways, you can see that the residents have a great life here and appreciate their town as just about everything, including the main square and their homes, were immaculately kept with beautiful blooming flowers planted in every small space. Along the waterfront, sailing boats and luxury watercrafts dotted the port that was once a bustling fishing harbour.

Kiel's away

We would finish our fabulous tour of Schleswig-Holstein in the city of Kiel where we would experience even more contrast to everything we had seen and done during the week. As a first impression, I would say this is a city on the move with lots of new, modern, and stylish buildings along its canal and yet later we would find Kiel also has lots of history and has kept its traditions alive. A two-hour boat ride brought us out through the estuary to the Baltic Sea to witness the locals at work and play. We would also visit a small candy factory, an environmentally friendly adventure supply store, a quirky used items store and all the while indulge in fabulous local cuisine in its many establishments including tasty seafood sandwiches from a stand by the waterfront. Life is good in north Germany! ■

WWW.GERMANY.TRAVEL





Exploring Northwest Arkansas

Three refreshing towns in the Ozark Mountains

by Randy Mink

A region with inviting communities surrounded by vast stretches of Ozarks wilderness, Northwest Arkansas surprises many first-timers with its dynamic cultural scene and quality of life. No wonder this friendly neck of the woods is often rated as one of the best places to live in the United States.

The corporate headquarters of Fortune 500 companies like Walmart and Tyson Foods, along with branch offices of other powerhouse businesses, keep local economies strong. Not far from the Oklahoma and Missouri borders, this fast-growing corner of

the Natural State also hosts the University of Arkansas' flagship campus in Fayetteville, a place sizzling with college-town buzz.

Bentonville

This thriving city of 56,000 is the birthplace and nerve center of Walmart Inc., the world's largest retailer. Bentonville is also recognized as a world-class arts center and mountain biking hotspot.

Fronting the Benton County Courthouse, a traditional town square hosts musical sessions, special events and a Saturday farmers'

market. Restaurants, breweries, coffee shops and boutiques keep the place hopping throughout the week.

On one side of Bentonville Square resides the storefront where Sam Walton, the founder of Walmart, got his start. Now the Walmart Museum, the building on Main Street occupies the original Walton's 5 & 10, a variety store he opened in 1950, 12 years before establishing Walmart Stores, Inc.

Though the Walmart Museum is closed for renovations through spring 2024, visitors can catch the Walmart story a few blocks away at



the shrine's temporary home, called Walmart Museum Heritage Lab. Its most engaging feature is Mr. Sam the Hologram, an uncanny digitally-generated likeness of Walton sitting on a stool wearing his blue Walmart cap. Visitors to the renovated museum will be able to ask Mr. Sam questions and hear responses from a list of 240 things that he said or would have said.

A top-rated cycling destination, Bentonville bills itself as the Mountain Biking Capital of the World. Coler Mountain Bike Preserve, a five-minute bike ride from downtown, offers more than 17 miles of trails and is connected to more than 250 miles of natural-surface trails in Northwest Arkansas.

For walking and hiking, some 20 miles of urban trails meander through town. One trail goes from downtown to Bentonville's most impressive visitor attraction—the free-admission Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, a gift from the Walton family.

Uniting art, architecture and nature, Crystal Bridges is nestled in a ravine surrounded by gardens, sculpture-dotted trails and lush Ozark forest. Built over water, the stunning complex of pavilions and bridges is the brainchild of Alice Walton, the only daughter of Sam and Helen Walton. Most of the property originally belonged to the family, and it's where the billionaire art collector and her brothers played as children.

Crystal Bridges' galleries present more than five centuries of American masterworks. Museum-goers will see iconic paintings like Gilbert Stuart's portrait of George Washington and Norman Rockwell's *Rosie the Riveter*, plus works by the likes of Mary Cassatt, John Singer Sargent, Edward Hopper, Georgia O'Keeffe, Andy Warhol and Jackson Pollock.

In Bentonville, art seems to be everywhere you look—murals, sculptures, neon installations. The Momentary, a Crystal Bridges satellite occupying a former cheese factory, offers the latest in cutting-edge visual art.

Fayetteville

The university campus is a prime point of interest in this city of 92,000 permanent residents. Touring the grounds, you'll encounter

the Historic Senior Walk, whose five miles of sidewalks showcase the names of more than 200,000 graduates dating back to 1876, grouped by year of graduation.

Things go crazy on football weekends when the Arkansas Razorbacks compete at Reynolds Razorback Stadium. The mascot name Razorback comes from the wild hogs native to the Arkansas wilderness. Fans do the Hog Call, one of the most recognizable cheers in all of sports. You can purchase the latest Razorback gear at Hog Heaven in the stadium or at the Campus Bookstore, which is near Walmart on Campus, one of the smallest Walmart stores in the country.

The Dickson Street entertainment district, a short walk from both the campus and historic downtown square, reflects the town's youthful vibe. The heartbeat of Fayetteville, it offers an eclectic variety of eateries, bars, music clubs and other places to hang out.

Fans of U.S. presidential history flock to the Clinton House Museum, the first home of Bill and Hillary Clinton. They were married in the living room of the one-bedroom English Tudor Revival-style cottage and resided there in 1975-76 when both were teaching at the University of Arkansas. Exhibits include campaign memorabilia and a replica of Hillary's wedding dress.

Telling the story of the house purchase in his book *My Life*, Clinton writes: "When Hillary came back from her trip, I said, 'Remember that little house you like so much? I bought it. You have to marry me now because I can't live there alone.' I took her to see the house. It still needed a lot of work, but my rash move did the trick."

Eureka Springs

An artist colony and Arkansas' most-talked-about tourist town, Eureka Springs is one of America's truly distinctive destinations.

Here in this quirky Victorian village, cliff-clinging cottages appear to be stacked one on top of another. Crooked streets wind higgledy-piggledy through town, meeting at right angles only once. In some cases, steep stairways substitute for sidewalks, giving Eureka Springs the nickname "Stairstep Town."

Founded in 1879, Eureka Springs soon established itself as a popular health resort, attracting visitors from around the country to the healing waters of its natural springs. Two of the early days' stately hostleries, the Crescent and Basin Park hotels, are still around and combine modern amenities with touches of yesteryear. (Watch for a profile of the "haunted" Crescent Hotel in the magazine's spring issue.)

Downtown's limestone-and-brick buildings, dating from the late 1800s and early 1900s, house specialty shops purveying everything from kitchen gadgets to novelty socks. At Eureka's Nut House you'll find barrels of freshly roasted pistachios in flavors like lemon, jalapeno and chili lime. The store also offers bottles of funky craft sodas (peanut butter or lemon meringue, anyone?).

Arts and crafts galleries—and great antique shops—are part of the commercial scene as well. It's said the hamlet of 2,278 people is home to some 300 artists and musicians. Examples of public art include the Rainbow Stairs, a steep, color-splashed staircase that connects Center Street with North Main.

On a hilltop outside of town, The Great Passion Play is elaborately staged in a 4,000-seat amphitheater on select evenings from May through October. The epic drama about Jesus Christ's last days on earth features over 150 actors and dozens of live animals, including horses, camels and donkeys. Nearby is the must-see Christ of the Ozarks, a mammoth white statue visible for miles around. Visitors to the Passion Play campus also can tour The Holy Land, an area where they meet costumed characters at exhibits replicating the Jerusalem Marketplace, Sea of Galilee and other Biblical sites.

Among other area attractions are Turpentine Creek Wildlife Refuge, a sanctuary for rescued tigers and other big cats; and Eureka Springs & Northern Arkansas Railway, a scenic tourist train. For subterranean splendor, consider Cosmic Cavern, War Eagle Cavern and Onyx Cave. ■

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18



Sichuan, China



Cuisine, History, Culture...and Pandas too!

Article and photography by Michael Morcos

Sichuan Province is one of the largest provinces in China, with a generous mix of plains, hills, mountains and plateaus that offer landscapes any artist would love. Located in southwest part of the country, it is a gateway to Tibet, and its capital city, Chengdu, is a cultural and industrial center famous for its luxurious satins, brocades, and lacquer products since the 13th century.

Abundant natural beauty can be found within the stunning landscapes that include ravines, rivers, hot springs, waterfalls and limestone caves. Some local areas have been developed into scenic sites for tourism, including the Lizhuang ancient city, Xingwen Stone Sea and Tianquan Cave, and the mountains host more than 50 kinds of rare animals, including giant pandas that visitors can see at the Chengdu Panda Breeding and Research Center (one of the most important research centers in the world for the conservation of giant pandas).

There is a rich, textured history and culture that can be found here, as Sichuan is one of

the birthplaces of the Chinese nation and plays an important role in China's history. As early as 25,000 years ago, civilization appeared here and has left this area abundant in historical heritage.

The City of Yibin is a fine example of this historical significance. Among many attractions there lies ancient buildings and structures that date back through the ages.

Natural wonders abound with several hot springs near Yibin, including the Bamboo Sea (acres and acres of Bamboo plants) and the Xingwen Stone Forest.

The Cuiping Mountain in the centre of the city provides wonderful views of Yibin from all angles. Liubei Pond Park is Sichuan Province's most famous scenic spots and is famous for inspiring the great calligrapher Huang Tingjian. This tranquil park also has live actors who dress in ancient clothing and go about life as if we were in old China. An amazing glimpse into the past of this ancient culture!



Yibin is also home to the Wuliangye Group who produce a very popular national alcoholic drink. Their headquarters is so large, it is like a city within a city! The company is important to the area as they are the biggest employer in town, and the locals are proud of the connection.

The profound cultural heritage of the city makes it one of the most famous historical and cultural cities in China. Bamboo craftwork and bamboo related foods are popular, and offer tourists a sample of the local cuisine and an opportunity to purchase unique gifts.

Lizhuang is another ancient city by the Yangtze River, where visitors are treated to a trip back through time juxtaposed with luxurious buildings in the old street of Lizhuang Town. For visitors, there is the Xuanluo Hall (Hall of Spiral), where a palace named Wenchang Hall lies waiting to be explored. The main hall of this palace is a wooden pavilion where the architect made full use of the principle of mechanics, creating a magical spiral-shaped hall. Incredible feat of engineering.

Life moves very slowly here, but there are a great number of markets where the Sichuan local cuisine, known worldwide, is available, inexpensive and delicious.

As in most of China, we were treated to colourful shows, costumes, music and dance, but the Xingwen Miao Minority Folk Residence is one of the best spots for this. The Miao are one of the biggest minority groups in China and in their new complex they treat visitors to song, dance and art exhibitions. With the intricate moves and fabulous costumes, it is easy to understand how China can produce such amazing shows at events like the Olympics when local shows are this good!

The Xingwen Stone Sea is a world famous scenic spot with amazing features, including the longest natural scenic viewing limestone cave in China called the Tianquan Cave, which holds a record in space and length. With stone flowers, stone bamboo, stone pillars and more, the cave system has features that will please every cave fan, including my favourite, an underground river! The surface stone sea extends 10 kms from east to west, and 4 kms from South to North with wonderful shapes and imposing features. There are stone peaks to the south and a dense stone

forest covers the west and north, with the great 'Peak of Couples', standing just like a couple with hand in hand.

Another interesting feature of the park is a gigantic sinkhole, the largest in the world! The sinkhole is about 650m long and 208m deep!

These caves are among the best I have ever visited, at times imposing, and other times awe-inspiring. The park has made it easy to walk around as everything is well lit and the paths are easy to walk.

The Bamboo Sea of Southern Sichuan is one of the largest bamboo forests in China and has been among the most well-known tourist destinations for visitors. It is a natural wonderland created and, a place that is far more mysterious than the mundane world of everyday tourism. The core area holds over 5000 hectares of huge and upright bamboo shelters ridges, peaks and hills stretching all around the area. It looks like a vast green sea with a bamboo forest containing further treasures, including the Rainbow Waterfall and the Fairy Lake among others. The Waterfall is a towering 200 meters high and as the sun shines on the waterfall, rainbows are often seen. The Fairy Lake is the ideal location for tourists to enjoy bamboo rafting.

A final spot on this journey through Sichuan Province was a once in a lifetime trip to the Chengdu Panda Bear Research Center and it is the world's only place that focuses entirely on the critically endangered giant Panda. This is one of the highlights in the city of Chengdu, Sichuan, as well as in China, and was a true highlight of the trip. The place is enormous and there is ample space for the animals – a rarity in the zoo world. The animals were very active while we were there, and the Panda cubs were absolutely adorable. We were very lucky, as the Panda handlers had brought the young cubs out for us. Though we were not allowed to touch them, we were allowed to take photos and videos of them.

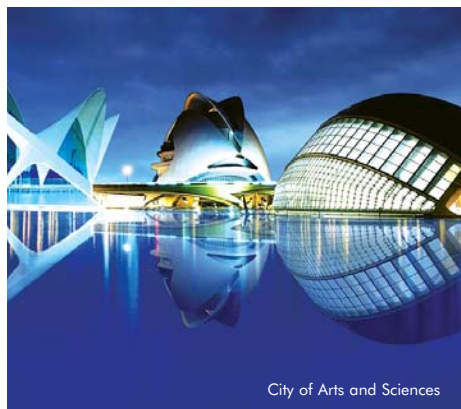
They also have a cinema showing documentaries of pandas, offering a deeper understanding of these interesting creatures. ■

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Sichuan, China



Around the World (in 34 pages)



Spain

14 museums for all tastes

Forget the clichés. Going to museums, at least in Spain, can be fun, interesting and even thrilling. We've put together a list of 14 museums we suggest visiting on your trip.

Reina Sofía National Art Centre, Madrid

Prado Museum, Madrid

City of Arts and Sciences, Valencia

Dalí Theatre-Museum, Gerona

Guggenheim Museum Bilbao

Picasso Museum in Barcelona

Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum, Madrid

Picasso Museum Malaga

National Archaeological Museum, Madrid

Sephardic Museum, Toledo

Altamira National Museum, Cantabria.

Sorolla Museum, Madrid

National Museum of Roman Art, Mérida

El Greco Museum, Toledo ■

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Germany

Sanssouci Palace, Retreat on the Vineyards

No other palace is so closely linked with the personality of Frederick the Great as Sanssouci. The name Sanssouci – without a care – should be understood as both the primary wish and leitmotif of the king, because this was the place where he most preferred to retreat in the company of his dogs. The king's summer residence was ultimately his favorite place and sanctuary in difficult times.

The location of the palace beside its well-known vineyard terraces and the originally preserved 18th century interior decoration allow visitors to delve into the world of the "philosopher of Sanssouci." The interiors are characterized by their elegance and stylish displays of grandeur. They are also a clear expression of the king's love of beautiful surroundings – his "Prussian Arcadia."

The magnificent Picture Gallery and the New Chambers palace also belong to Sanssouci Palace.

It is of note that the king wished to be buried in a crypt on the uppermost terrace of the vineyard. Even in death, he wanted to be near his beloved Sanssouci. His wish was granted, although not until his reburial there in 1991. Frederick the Great's grave is located on the highest terrace along with other regional specialties. ■

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Is Oregon's Southern Coast its greatest secret?

The Oregon Coast, known as the People's Coast as the entire 584 km is accessible to all residents and visitors under Oregon law, offers three distinct regions: North, Central and South, with the latter being the least visited yet arguably the most beautiful.

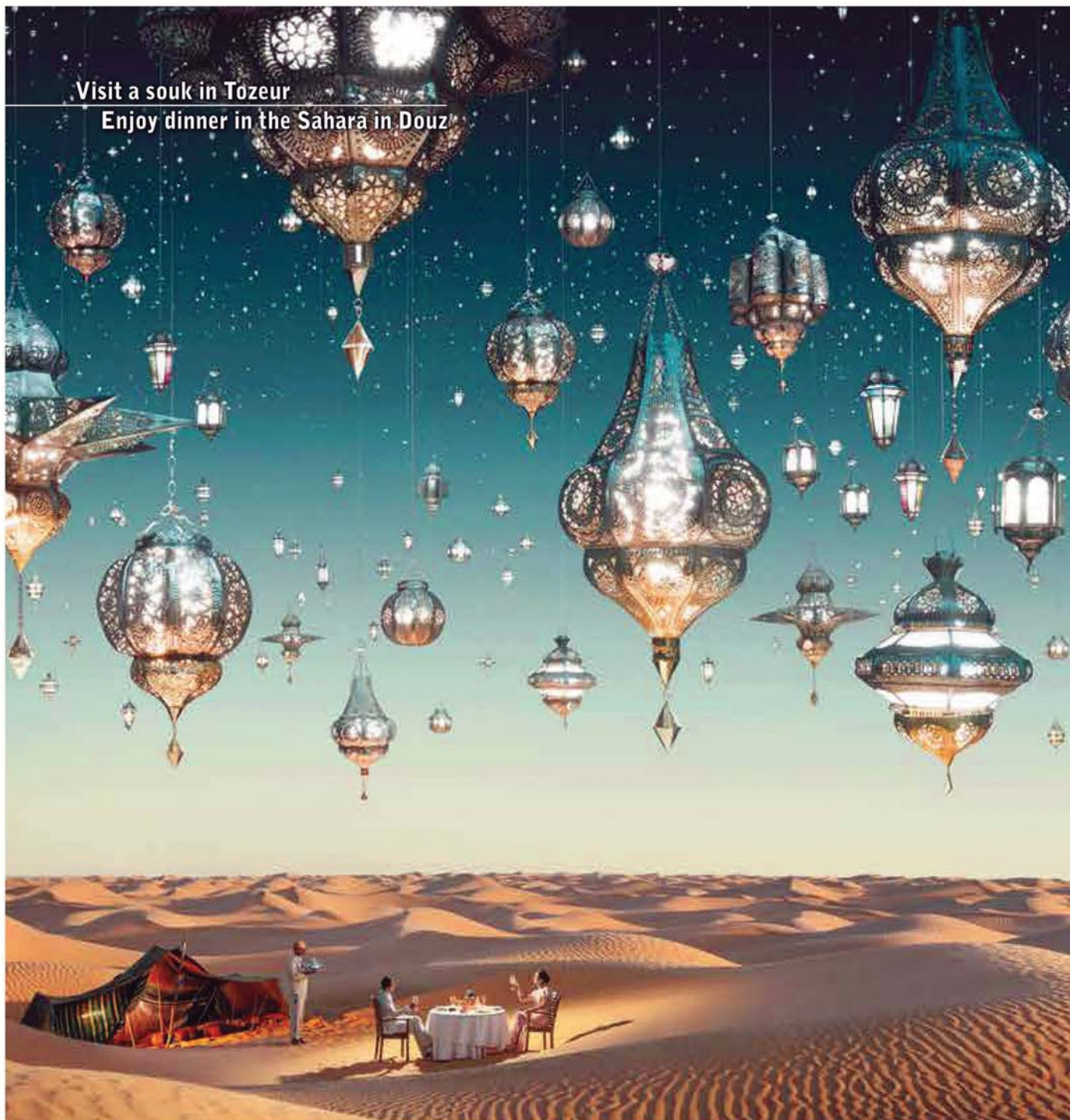
Start your Southern sojourn in Coos Bay with a stay in one of the new cabins at the waterfront Bay Point Landing. Get out on the water by kayak with South Coast Tours – one of Travel Oregon's Why Guides.

At Gold Beach, join Jerry's Rogue Jets on the Historic Mail Boat Route up the Rogue River – a designated National Wild and Scenic River. This is one of the few remaining mail boats in the nation delivering since 1895 when road access did not exist. The Wild Rivers Coast Food Trail will keep you sustained along your journey with crab, cranberries and craft beer.

And finally, travel the Samuel H. Boardman State Scenic Corridor, a 19 km linear park featuring awe-inspiring sea stacks (including Arch Rock and Natural Bridges), 300-year old Sitka spruce trees, and 43 km of the renowned Oregon Coast Trail. ■

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



INSPIRING
Tunisia



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 traveling 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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Travel is tough on your skin, but many skin care regimes contain harsh chemicals and don't come in travel sizes. That's why the Veriphy travel pack of all-natural but highly effective formulations that cleanse, tone, exfoliate, and hydrate your skin are a must-pack, and their "20/20 Eye Cream" is also a plus. All Veriphy products are vegan and cruelty-free.

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Forget fridge magnets, postcards, and key chains, why not wear your travels? Jet Set Candy has reinvented the ultimate souvenir with travel-inspired jewelry and collectables. Choose from quality sterling silver, 14k vermeil, or solid gold jewellery, and you can also order custom made pieces. And they are continually adding to their globetrotting themes and products, so follow them at: <https://jetsetcandy.com>



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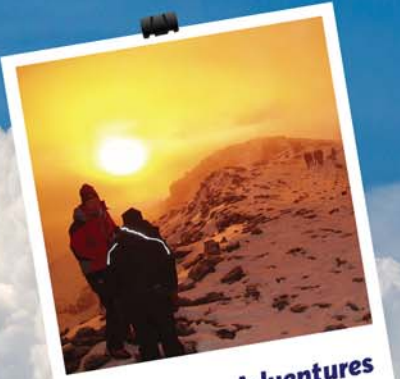
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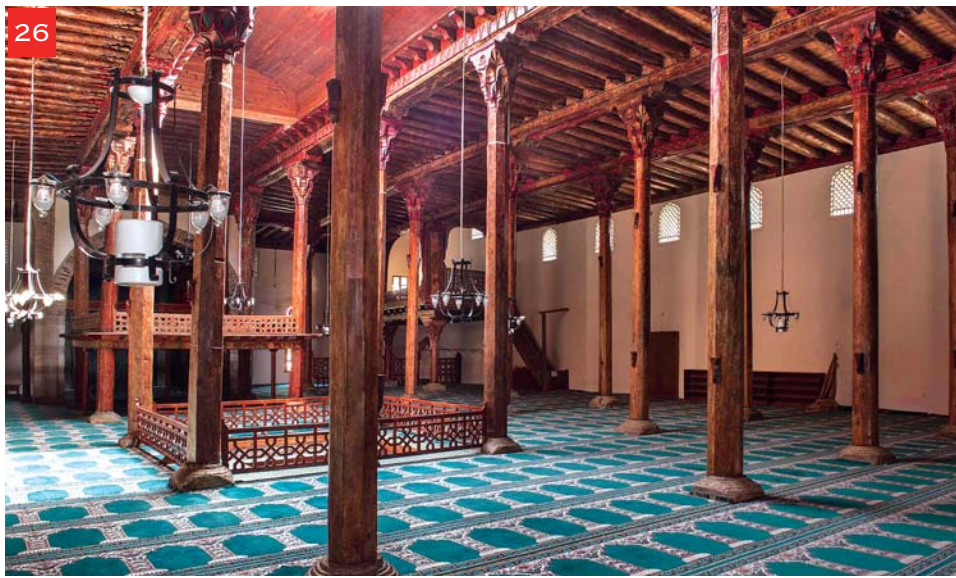
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The beautiful North Aegean islands of Türkiye

Wooden Hypostyle mosques in Anatolia added to UNESCO World Heritage Sites list

Wooden hypostyle mosques of Medieval Anatolia have recently been recognized as significant cultural landmarks and added to the prestigious UNESCO World Heritage List.

These historical mosques are considered the epitome of wooden hypostyle architecture in Anatolia, and hold the distinction of being Türkiye's first serial cultural sites to receive this esteemed recognition.

This collection of remarkable mosques comprises five distinct structures, each constructed between the late 13th and mid-14th centuries, and located in different provinces of present day Türkiye. The mosques that have been included in the UNESCO list are:

Beyşehir Eşrefoğlu Mosque in Konya
Sivrihisar Ulu Mosque in Eskişehir
Kasabaköy Mahmut Bey Mosque in Kastamonu
Ahi Şerefeddin Mosque in Ankara
Afyonkarahisar Ulu Mosque

These mosques are characterized by their exterior masonry and striking wooden interior columns, known as "hypostyle" which support a flat wooden ceiling and roof. What sets them apart is the intricate wood carving and meticulous craftsmanship displayed throughout their structures. From the minbars crafted using the "kündekari"; technique to the exquisite engravings called "kalem işi" and the precise wood-working seen in the doors, column capitals, ceiling beams, and corbels, these mosques are a testament to the skill and artistry of their creators.

Not only do these well-preserved historical sites offer a glimpse into Anatolian life and culture

during the Middle Ages, but they also showcase the unique architectural excellence of the Seljuk and Ottoman periods. Among the listed mosques, the Beyşehir Eşrefoğlu Mosque stands out as the largest wooden columned and beamed mosque in Anatolia, showcasing the grandeur of stone and wood craftsmanship. Similarly, the Sivrihisar Ulu Mosque is a rare example of a large wooden-columned mosque in the region.

The Kasabaköy Mahmut Bey Mosque is particularly noteworthy for being constructed without the use of a single nail, featuring an extraordinary interior and wooden structure. The Ahi Şerefeddin Mosque, or Arslanhane, impresses with its harmonious combination of spolia material and wood. Finally, the Afyonkarahisar Ulu Mosque represents a unique example of Seljuk architecture, blending wood and brick with exquisite glazed tiles.

These wooden mosques of Anatolia are not only exceptional for their religious significance but also for their architectural ingenuity. The absence of nails in their construction and the impeccable handcrafted decorations make them true marvels of craftsmanship. Exploring these extraordinary mosques along a thematic route offers a captivating journey through the rich history and cultural heritage of Anatolia.

With the addition of the five mosques, there are now 21 World Heritage Sites on the UNESCO list from Türkiye. ■

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Bozcaada, Gökçeada, and Cunda are three beautiful islands in the Turkaegean region that offer a chance to experience the Aegean's riches. Guests can start their day with delicious Turkish breakfasts in stone houses, swim at lovely beaches, and end their day with enjoyable dinners at traditional taverns.

The tables are filled with Turkaegean's centuries-old recipes, with mezes served first, followed by the famous seafood of the islands. Here are some tips to help you decide which of these islands is most suitable for you.

Bozcaada: A Peaceful Haven for City Escapes

Bozcaada is a beautiful Aegean island near Çanakkale known for its clear waters, vineyards, and wines. The Bozcaada Castle is the most prominent landmark and can be easily reached by ferry. Other notable attractions include the Bozcaada Museum, Ayazma Monastery, Windmills, and Virgin Mary Church.

The World's First and Only "Cittaslow" Island: Gökçeada

Gökçeada is the world's first and only "Cittaslow" island since 2011. It boasts authentic villages, clean sea, and long beaches for activities like diving, surfing, and swimming. Aydıncık Beach is the most popular spot, with a 1200-meter-long beach and golden sand. Other pristine beaches include Gizli Liman, Laz Bay, Yıldız Bay, and Mavi Bay.

A Fairy Tale in the TurkAegean: Cunda

Cunda, or Ali Bey Island, is a stunning North Aegean island that you can visit any time of year. You can reach it easily via a short bridge. The island's main attraction is the Takiyarhis Church, which was restored in 2011 and now serves as the Ayvalık Rahmi M. Koç Museum.

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Tune into the Sounds of the South with Country Music

One of the many charms of the Southern states is music. Music is everywhere, it's part of their culture, identity, and history. Country music is one of the most popular types of music in the world, and this special type of music is originated in the United States of America.

If you're a (country) music lover, then it's time to travel South and enjoy their many musical offerings!

West Virginia

Mountain Stage is a live radio show broadcasted over 150 public radio stations nationwide. Produced by West Virginia Public Broadcasting and distributed by NPR Music, this show is considered to be the state's musical crown jewel. Its mix of excellent music and world class talent continues to bring international attention to the Mountain State. The show can also be attended in person and is most often broadcast from its home base in Charleston but has traveled to venues all around the world. Many legends

have been among guest artists over the years, including John Prine, Cassandra Wilson, Steve Earle, Norah Jones, and Rosanne Cash.

Mississippi

Country music is one of America's most well-known exports and it has many roots in Mississippi. This quintessential American art form encompasses folk lyrics, dance tunes and ballads about love and heartbreak. It's a blend of styles and cultural traditions that first took form over 100 years ago. One of country music's first pioneers was Mississippi's own Jimmie Rogers, known as "the Father of Country Music." His performance, lyrical style and "Singing Brakeman" image set the standard for the performers that followed and laid the foundation for country music's explosion into the mainstream.

Today, Mississippi visitors can learn about legends like Rogers, Tammy Wynette, Elvis Presley and dozens more artists produced in the Magnolia State by following the Mississippi Country Music Trail. With a map of markers posted all over the state, fans can seek out their favourite artists and learn about their contributions to the genre or just travel the highways and byways of Mississippi to learn about the people and performance venues that have shaped country music. The Country Music Trail website provides location information and the stories behind the markers, so fans can enjoy seeking out and standing on the ground where their favourite performers first played.

Alabama

Alabamian Hiram "Hank" Williams, born on September 17, 1923, was one of the most influential singer songwriters and gave a voice to the "everyman." He was the first country music superstar with hits such as "Hey Good Lookin'," "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry" and "Your Cheatin' Heart."

Visit Montgomery's Hank Williams Museum to see his stage costumes, guitars, and the 1952 blue Cadillac in which he died, aged 29. You can pay your respects at his grave, in nearby Oakwood Cemetery, marked by a marble cowboy hat.

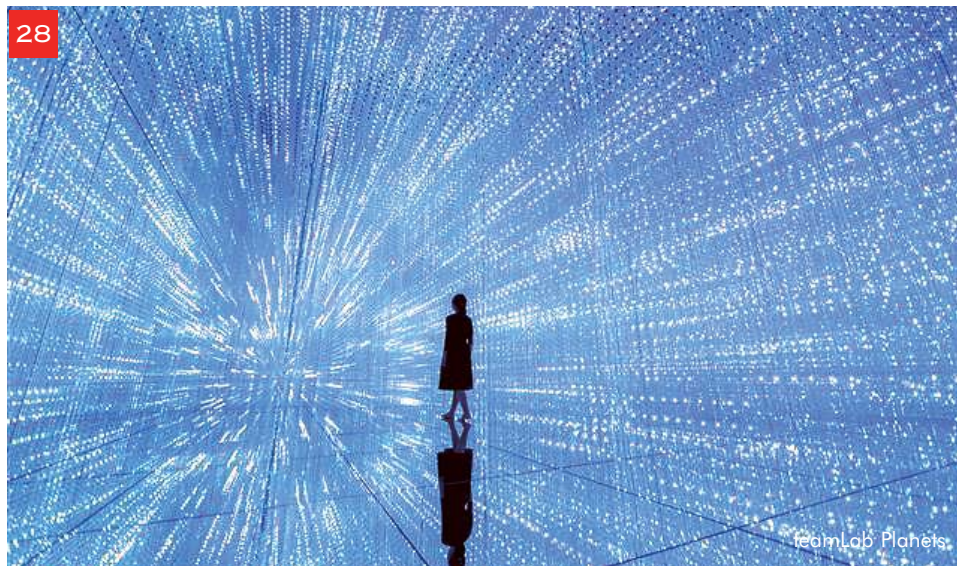
Need a little more music in your life? There are even more musical experiences to be discovered in Arkansas, Missouri, Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee. ■

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[HTTPS://ALABAMA.TRAVEL](https://alabama.travel)





Japan: An Oasis of Art

Visits to galleries and museums add colour to travel itineraries and inspire and amaze all who experience their multi-sensory exhibits. This is especially true when traveling in Japan, where even the architecture speaks to the profound imagination of the country's creative minds. An art-themed tour of Japan can lead you through the most beautiful nature and the most dazzling traditions to the most exciting avant-garde visions.

Below is a quick guide to some of Japan's most awe-inspiring art exhibits.

teamLab Planets - Tokyo boasts galleries of the most renowned Japanese artists - from Takashi Murakami with his colourful flower faces to the Ghibli Museum for enthusiasts of Hayao Miyazaki's world-famous films. Tokyo's teamLab Planets was recently recognized as "Asia's Leading Attraction" at the World Travel Awards 2023. This immersive experience is a selfie wonderland that makes artists of us all. Colours rain down and borders melt as guests journey through surrealistic soundscapes enveloped in psychedelic landscapes. Here you can perch in a nest in space while being visually blasted by a laser light show, or wade in a pool of ethereal lily pads while refracting light with your hands. It's mind-blowing...and just the tip of the iceberg.

Beyond Tokyo, you'll find plenty of regional art to appreciate, in places such as:

Naoshima - Known as the "Art Island" in Kagawa Prefecture, Naoshima is home to open-air exhibits that appear on the shore, like Yayoi Kusama's iconic black-dotted yellow pumpkin. Galleries, sculpture gardens, contemporary art museums and architectural projects are humming with life. In Les Archives de Coeurs, stand in the Heart Room to hear Christian Boltanski's recordings of heartbeats from around the world. The Teshima Art Museum resembles a water droplet. It is a tranquil shell harmonizing nature, art and architecture, with openings for light, wind and flowing water from rain and idle rice terraces. The Chichu Art Museum houses diverse works to admire and experience, from Claude Monet to James Turrell. Island-hopping here is heaven for an art enthusiast. A great time to visit is during the Setouchi Triennale Art Festival.

The Adachi Museum of Art in Shimane Prefecture has been recognized by the Journal of Japanese Gardening as Japan's number-one garden for the past twenty consecutive years. Every pebble, every leaf, every blade of grass is immaculately maintained. Along the

winding path, each vantage point is more breathtaking than the one before. The long narrow windows of the garden teahouse appear as poetic hanging scrolls. It's as if the Gods and the gardeners fell in love. You could stare at this landscape all day knowing that you're gazing upon Japan's most captivating display of horticulture.

Nebuta Museum Wa Rasse

Aomori Prefecture's Nebuta Museum Wa Rasse houses a gallery of illuminated floats from the Aomori Nebuta festival. Incredibly elaborate constructions depicting mythical warriors in dramatic battle scenes are made of intricately designed paper lanterns that represent a thousand years of ancient Japanese legends. The floats are massive, and exhibits introduce you to every aspect of this renowned festival. Interactive experiences include taiko drumming and a "Haneto" experience, where you can dance to Hayashi music like a high-energy Haneto dancer. There is also a hands-on Nebuta experience in which you can feel what a real Nebuta is like, or make your own digital design on a touch-screen and watch it come to life.

Sapporo Art Museum - Nestled within a picturesque pocket of nature, the Sapporo Art Museum includes the works of local artists and engages in art-related research. The adjacent Sapporo Art Park punctuates the rolling green landscape with sculptures that change appearance depending on your angle and the season you're viewing them, making a leisurely stroll through the park a viscerally interactive and intellectually stimulating experience. Both the Garden and Museum feature special and permanent exhibits of sculptures, as well as musical and theatrical productions, and educational projects in which you can experience traditional Japanese crafts such as pottery, dying, weaving, woodworking and block prints.

Each prefecture in Japan offers galleries of Japanese and international artwork, and their architecture sets an immediately pleasing tone. These experiences enable you to be immersed in the rich and vibrant cultural expressions of Japan's ancient traditions as well as the animation, technology and imagination of the leading artists of tomorrow. ■

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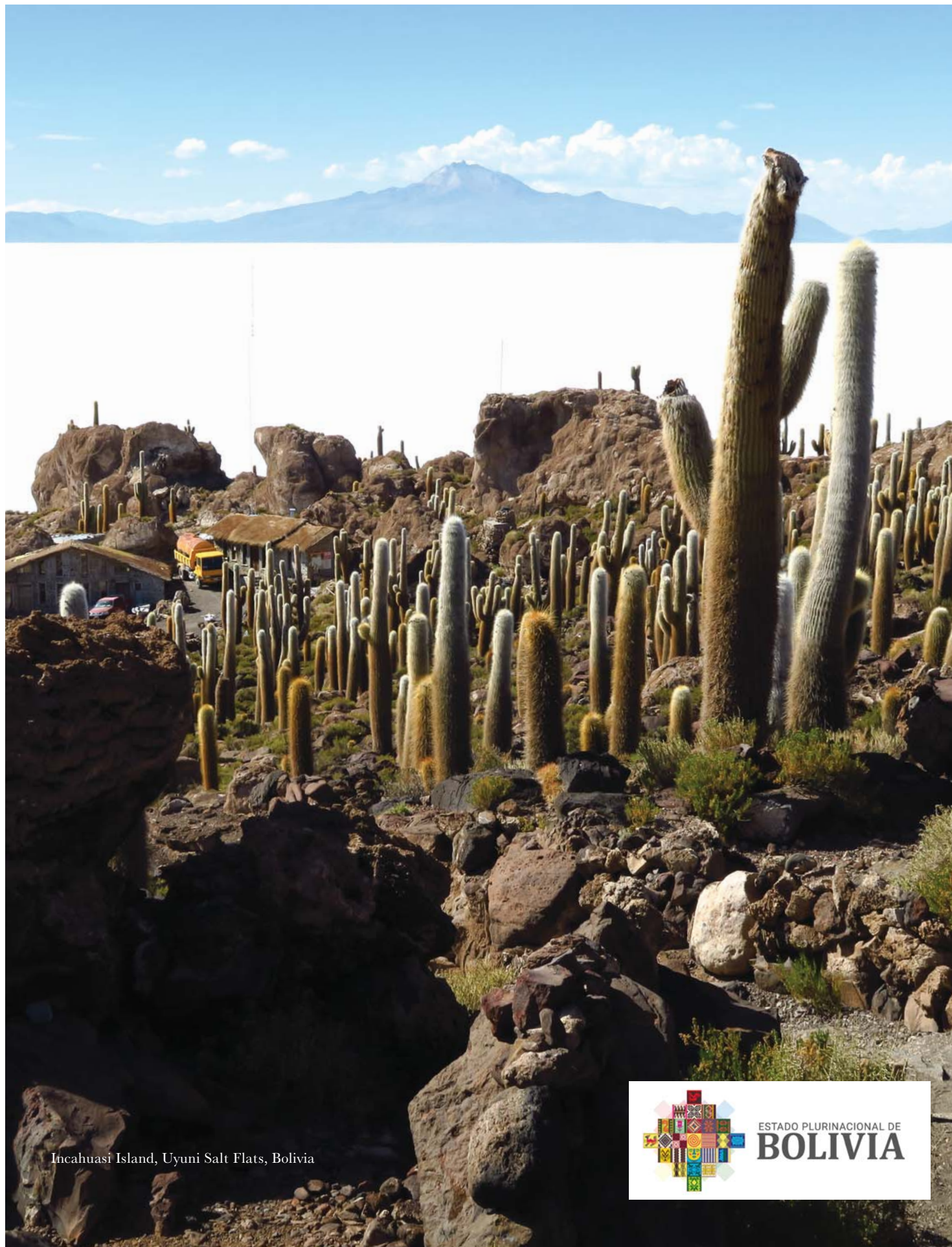
Naoshima



The Adachi Museum of Art



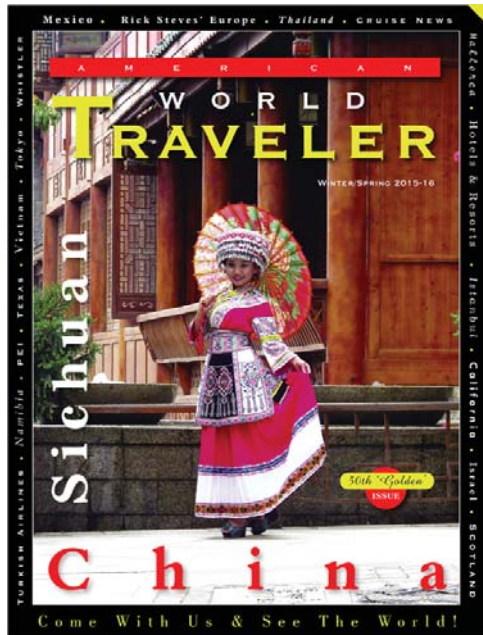
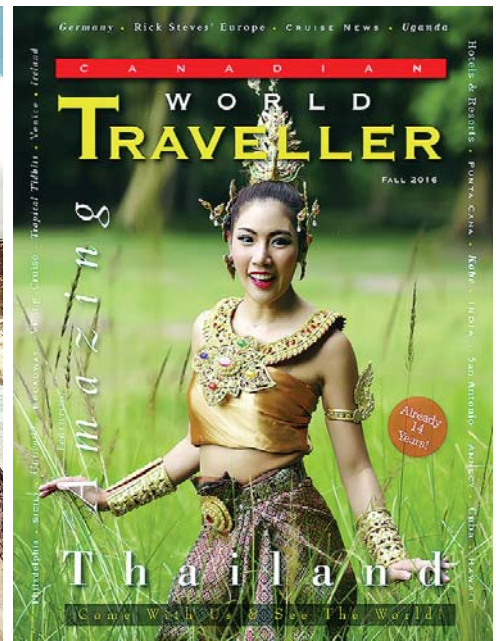
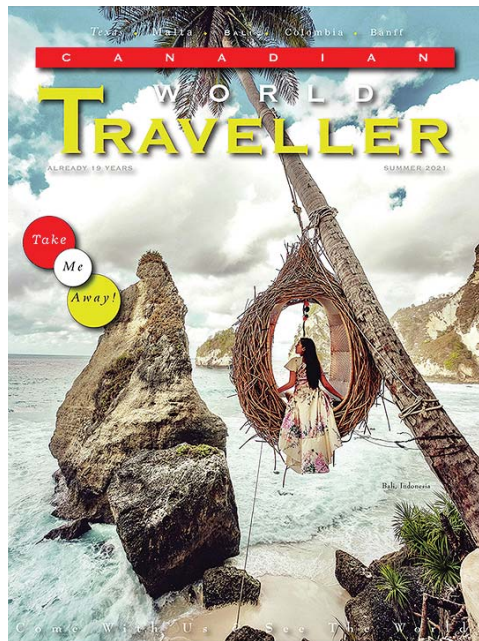
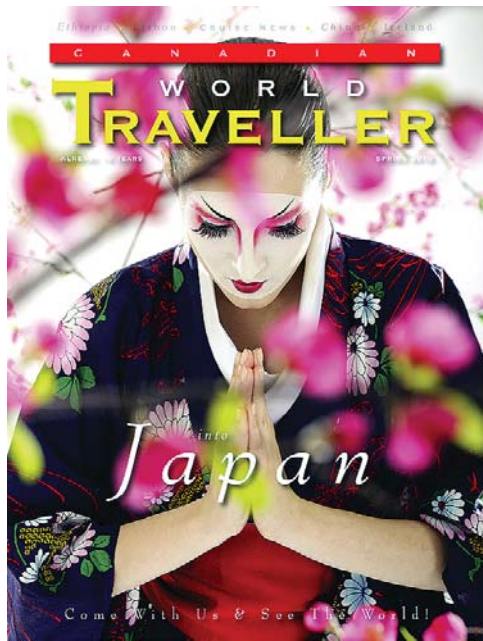
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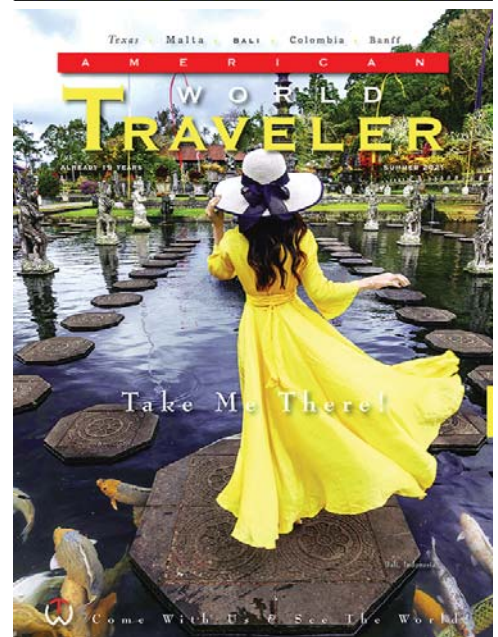
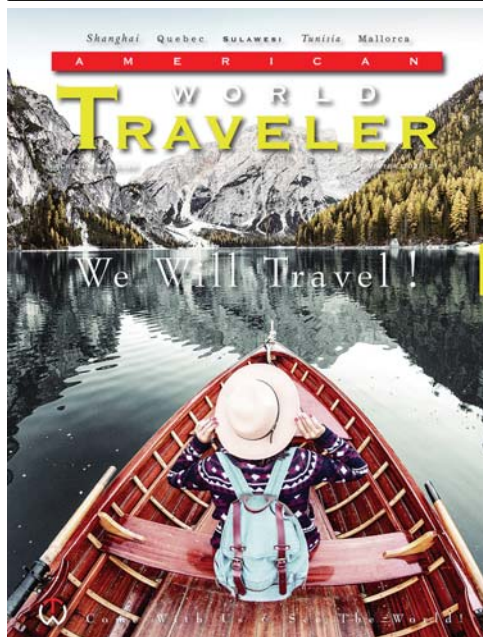
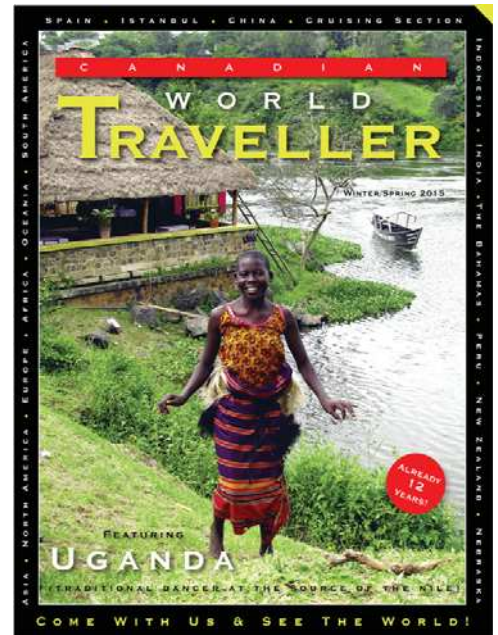
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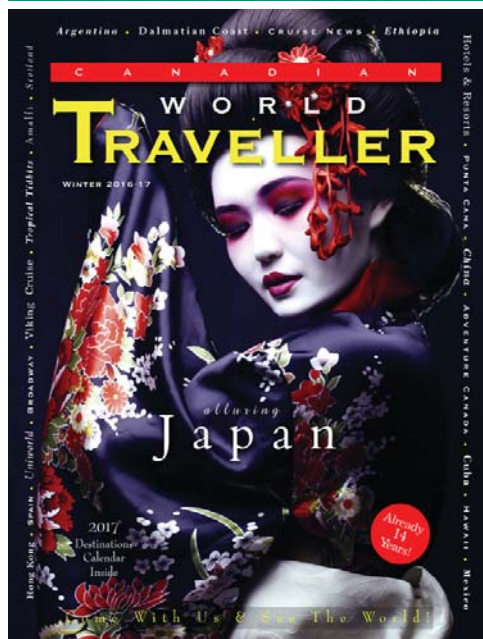
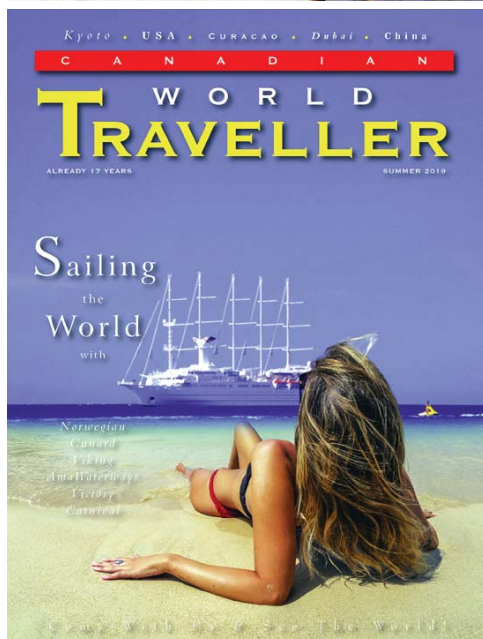
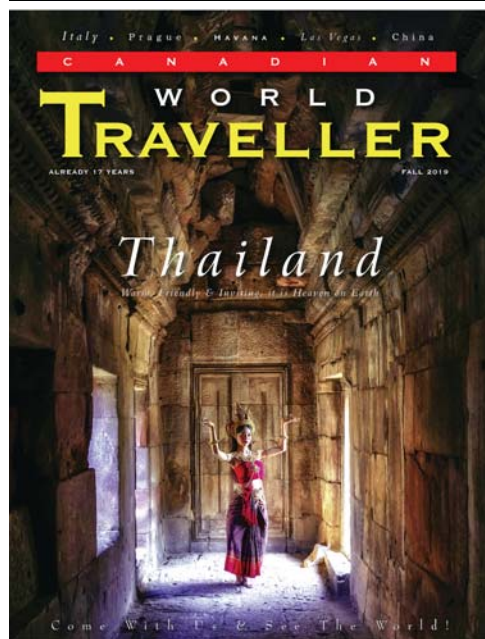
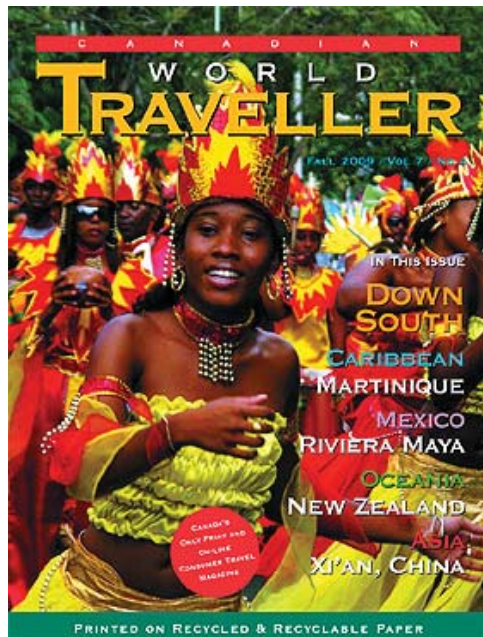
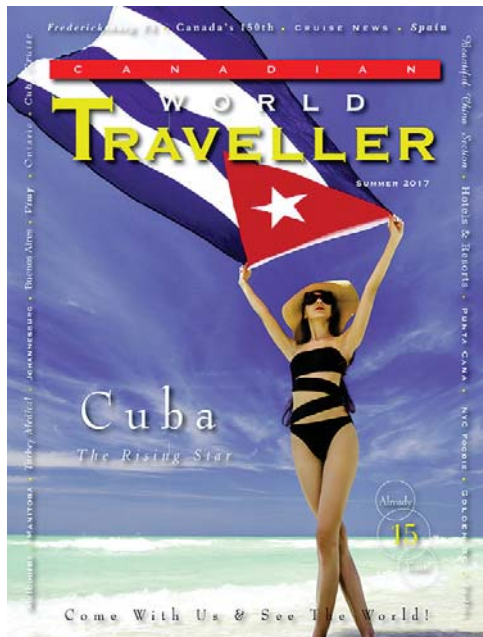
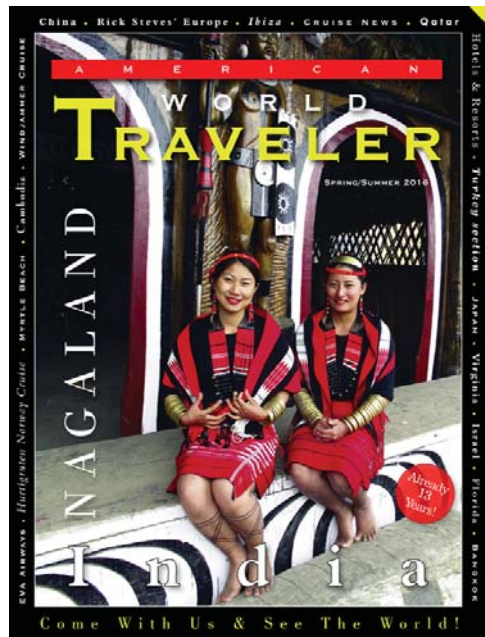
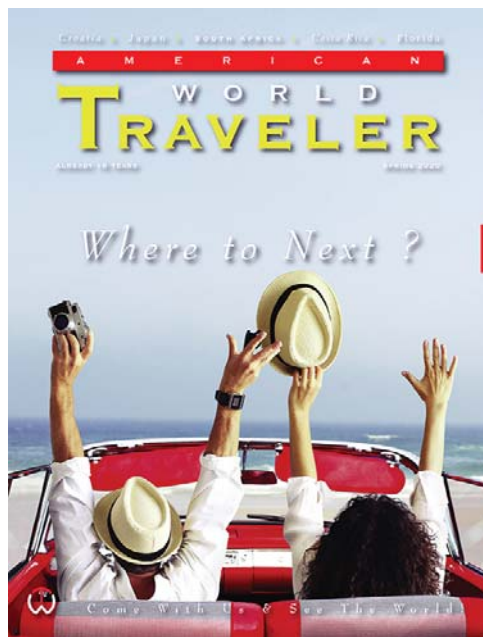
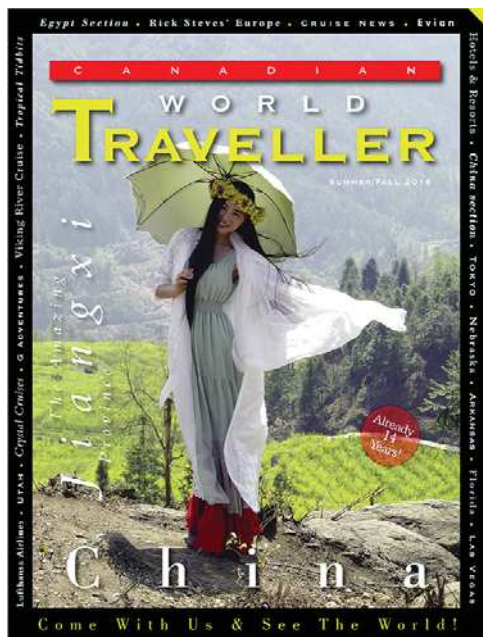
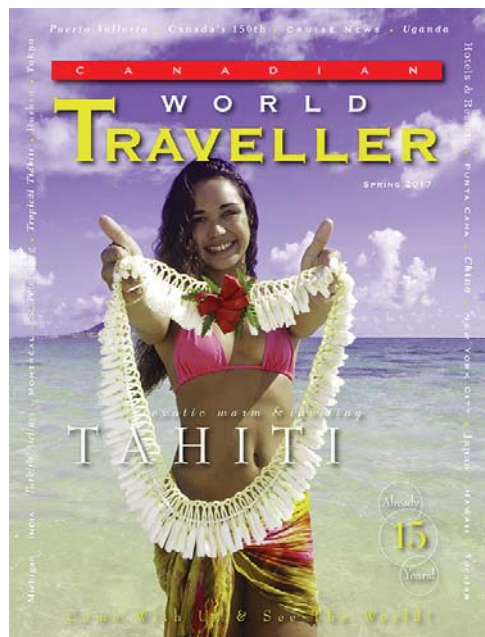
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Enchanting Elegance in Tuscany: Discover the Timeless Charm of Villa Saletta

by Olivia Liveng



Villa Saletta is a gem of Italian history and luxury living in the heart of Tuscany's picturesque landscape. This esteemed estate, owned by only four families through its rich history, is a testament to Italian heritage and contemporary luxury. From its early days under the Riccardi family, through the influential Medici era, to the current stewardship of the Hands family, Villa Saletta stands as a beacon of elegance and tradition.

At Villa Saletta, guests are invited to immerse themselves in the Tuscan dream, surrounded by acres of secluded, breathtaking countryside. The estate offers three historic villas for rental: Fagnana, Valle, and Casolore, each boasting unique charm and luxurious amenities. Fagnana, the largest, is a rustic 19th-century farmhouse perched

atop a rolling hill, offering mesmerizing views of the surrounding woodlands and valleys. Casolore, once a hunting lodge, now provides an intimate Swiss-chalet ambiance, perfect for smaller groups seeking tranquility amidst nature.

Luxury is paramount at Villa Saletta. Each villa is equipped with top amenities expected from a high-end estate. Fagnana's expansive kitchen caters to culinary excellence, inviting top chefs for private dining experiences. The villas come with essential provisions and complimentary Villa Saletta wine. Daily housekeeping services, a heated swimming pool, and climate control also ensure comfort throughout the year. While Wi-Fi connectivity is limited due to the estate's vastness, it hardly matters when surrounded by such picturesque beauty.

The villas' interiors exude a rustic elegance reminiscent of classic country manors. Vaulted ceilings, terracotta floors, and wooden shutters add to their charm, while modern comforts like L'Occitane bath products, heated bathrooms, and luxurious beddings ensure a comfortable stay. With various room types and multiple bathrooms, the villas accommodate guests' needs with ease and elegance.

Villa Saletta's culinary offerings are a highlight of the experience. The estate's team provides bespoke catering services, featuring local Tuscan ingredients and contemporary cooking techniques. Guests can indulge in Chianti-braised beef, duck terrine, or savor innovative dishes like beef tartare with bottarga. Private cookery classes are available for those seeking a hands-on culinary experience, teaching the art of traditional Italian cooking, from fresh pasta to classic tiramisu.

A visit to Villa Saletta is incomplete without exploring its renowned winery. The estate produces exquisite wines under the connoisseurship of Guy Hands, including the limited 980AD vintage. Focused on harmonizing with the Tuscan terroir, the vineyard cultivates classic Sangiovese and Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Merlot. Future expansions promise to enhance this viticultural journey with fine dining and additional osteria offerings.

In summary, Villa Saletta is not just a luxury rental; it's an immersion into Italian history, culture, and culinary excellence. It's where rustic charm meets modern luxury, offering an unforgettable Tuscan experience. Whether it's the allure of historic villas, the exquisite culinary offerings, or the exclusive winery experience, Villa Saletta promises a stay that embodies the essence of the Tuscan dream. ■

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JayWay Travel Will Plan Your Next Luxurious Adventure to Europe

by Olivia Liveng



JayWay Travel, established in 2006, offers a distinctive approach to European travel. Specializing in custom tours, they cater to a wide range of European destinations, focusing on personalized experiences for each traveler. Their expertise extends to Central, Eastern, and Southern European countries, including popular destinations and lesser-known gems.

The destinations covered by JayWay Travel are extensive. They include Albania, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy,

Kosovo, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Moldova, Montenegro, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Switzerland, and Spain. This variety of choices allows travelers to explore diverse European cultures, landscapes, and historical sites.

In Italy, for example, JayWay offers a variety of tour packages, such as an 8-day exploration of Rome, Florence, and Venice, a journey through Central Italy, and a romantic honeymoon trip combining the allure of Rome and the Amalfi Coast. They also offer a unique itinerary showcasing the highlights

of Eastern Sicily, including Taormina, Ragusa, and Siracusa, as well as a tour focused on Italy's rich history and the stunning seaside in Sorrento.

Their presence in Central and Eastern Europe is notable, with local representation in cities like Dubrovnik, Split, Zagreb, Rome, Venice, Prague, Belgrade, Budapest, Berlin, Krakow, Bucharest, Tallinn, Tbilisi, Tirana, Kyiv, Madrid, Barcelona, and Paris. This network ensures travelers have a personalized and immersive experience akin to a "magic carpet ride," as they put it. It also allows North American travelers to leave their comfort zones and explore less traditionally-touristed cities and countries, while still feeling well cared for.

For those interested in exploring Croatia, JayWay offers customized tours such as an 8-day Christmas trip through Zagreb, Split, and Dubrovnik, an in-depth exploration of Southern Dalmatia, and a journey delving into Croatia's Roman history. These tours deeply dive into Croatia's rich cultural heritage and stunning landscapes.

Greece is another highlight in their portfolio, with packages like an 8-day tour of Athens, Paros, and Santorini, a week-long journey through Athens and the Peloponnese, and a 10-day itinerary covering the castles and palaces of the Greek Islands. These tours offer a mix of historical exploration and relaxation in some of Greece's most beautiful locations.

JayWay Travel's commitment to custom-tailored, immersive experiences across a wide range of European destinations makes them a notable choice for travelers seeking a unique and personalized European adventure. Their extensive destination list, combined with specialized itineraries in Italy, Croatia, Greece, and other regions, ensures that travelers can explore Europe in a way that suits their preferences and pace. ■

[HTTPS://JAYWAYTRAVEL.COM/](https://jaywaytravel.com/)



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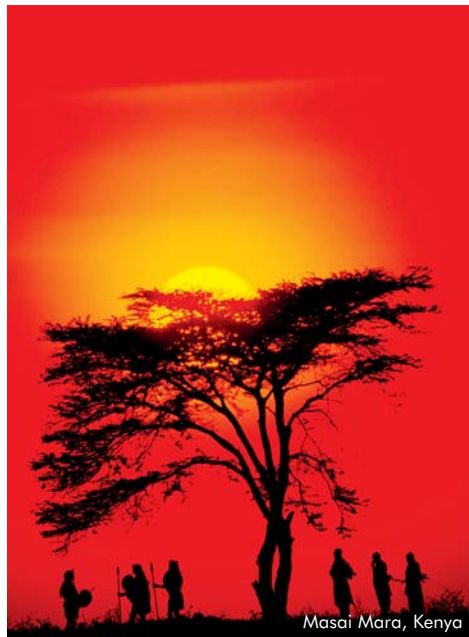
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Vegan? Yes Please!

A peak into St. Petersburg's hottest new restaurant

by Daniel Smajovits



A short 15-minute drive from the spectacular beaches of St. Petersburg, House of Vegano is an absolute delight for patrons, offering up light and delicious options, using a variety of mushrooms as the foundation for most of its dishes and rolls. Tatham provides a master-class in Vegan cuisine with each bite – transforming mundane vegetables and fruit into five-star delicacies.

On our visit, we had a sampling of rolls, including the Spicy Toona, which featured marinated tomato, avocado and cucumber, the Still I Rise, anchored by spicy krab (king oyster mushroom) and the unique Burg, named after St. Petersburg and featuring both lion's mane and king oyster mushrooms. Complementing these rolls were hearty dumplings filled with soy protein and portobello mushrooms as well as a range of juices and kombucha which paired perfectly with our meal.

Truth be told, we were far from the only non-Vegans dining that evening, as seemingly every other table remarked how their meal tasted identical – or even better than – the real thing. While undoubtedly a gem for all those customers whom follow a Vegan or Kosher lifestyle, House of Vegano will become a go-to for locals and tourists, regardless of diet.

The inspiration for House of Vegano stemmed from Tatham's personal challenges. After being diagnosed with the autoimmune disease Lupus in 2007, she lived with in pain until the pandemic, where she began to experiment with a plant-based diet. Almost immediately, her life changed for the better and within a few months a new Thalia – and restaurant blossomed.

A must-visit for all tourists, House of Vegano is located at 1990 Central Avenue in downtown St. Petersburg. Reservations are recommended. Should you not have access to a car, delivery is also available. ■

[HTTPS://HOUSEOFVEGANO.COM/](https://houseofvegano.com/)

It's not every day that a former body-builder, turned Emergency Medical Technician, with no classical culinary training, can transform an idea borne out of necessity into one of St. Petersburg, Florida's hottest new restaurants – but owner and chef Thalia Tatham has done just that.

Opened in March 2022, House of Vegano has taken the Tampa Bay area by storm, delighting vegans and non-vegans alike with

its unique take on Asian cuisine. Located in St. Petersburg's Grand Central District, each menu item is entirely plant-based, ranging from their signature sushi rolls to dumplings, ramen and even poke bowls.

With an equally unique décor, including a floor made entirely of Pink Himalayan Sea Salt, diners are in for an incredible culinary and visual experience, one that will have them returning for more.



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Wisconsin Resort Community Treasures Its Storied Past

Lake Geneva has long been a summer escape hatch for the elite

by Randy Mink



Ah, to be rich...rich enough to own a waterfront mansion in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin...to be fortunate enough to view your sprawling summertime estate from the veranda while taking in the crystal-clear waters of Geneva Lake, home to millionaire moguls since the late 1800s.

Even if such real estate is a bit outside your budget range, it's fun to fantasize about being super-wealthy. Ordinary tourists can do their daydreaming from a tour boat or the 21-mile public footpath that passes right through the front yards of these palatial playgrounds.

After the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, well-to-do Chicago families traveled by train to the southern Wisconsin town of Lake Geneva. On its shores, they established opulent second

homes while the Windy City rebuilt. Lake Geneva became a Gilded Age retreat for captains of industry such as the Schwinn (of bicycle fame) and Wrigleys, who built a chewing gum empire. (Oddly, the town is Lake Geneva, but the lake is Geneva Lake.)

Though some original homes have been replaced with even grander mansions, more than 100 historic estates remain. Several adjacent lots belong to the Wrigley clan.

A good introduction to this resort community is Lake Geneva Cruise Line's "U.S. Mailboat Tour," a 2½-hour cruise. Besides narration highlighting the magnificent manors, the tour features the drama of young mail carriers hopping on and off the moving boat as they deposit letters in pier mailboxes. Passengers

cheer on the "mail jumpers," hoping they make it back onboard without falling into the water (which they sometimes do).

Cruise guests marvel at the pretty gardens, sweeping lawns and expansive terraces festooned with potted plants and posh furniture. One homeowner has a big-screen television mounted to a tree so he can enjoy the big game from his hammock. Most homes are occupied in summer only and sit empty the rest of the year.

Black Point Estate is the only historic lakefront home open for tours, and it can be visited only on a tour boat. A time capsule of the era, the 1888 Queen Anne contains much of its original furnishings. The estate was enjoyed by four generations of one Chicago family that made its fortune brewing beer.

The Geneva Lake Shore Path hugs the shoreline as it skirts the entire lake just a few feet from the water. Completing the circuit takes eight to 12 hours, but most visitors tackle a segment at a time. Signs posted in yards and on piers warn "Private Property. No Trespassing."

Exhibits at downtown's Geneva Lake Museum spotlight Native American heritage, mailboat service and area hideaways used by Chicago gangsters way back when. Former resorts, such as the country's first Playboy Club hotel, and one of America's foremost observatories, are remembered as well.

Yerkes Observatory, occupying a lakeside campus in Williams Bay, recently opened up to visitors after a major renovation. An architectural masterpiece sporting three domes, Yerkes was home to the University of Chicago's astrophysics program for over a century. The tour highlight is going inside the largest dome and riding the world's largest indoor elevator, a platform that rises 26 feet to meet the world's largest refracting telescope. ■

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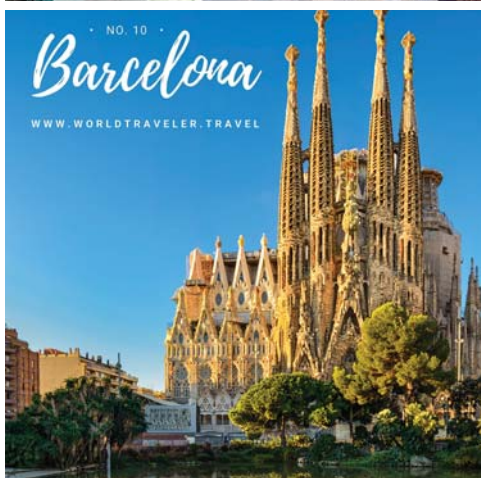
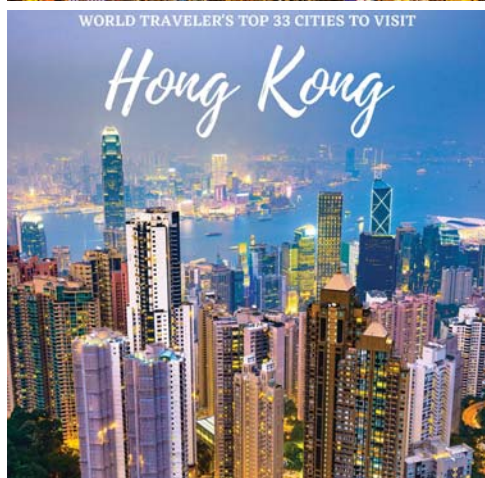
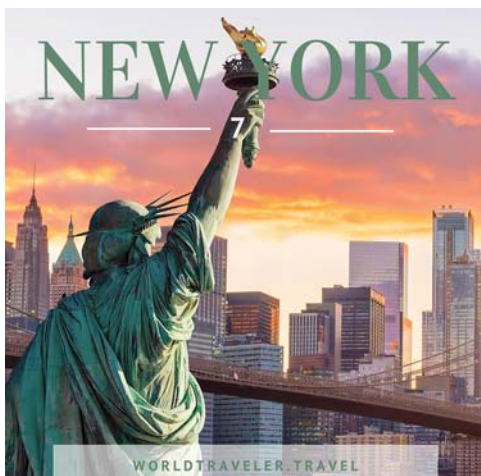
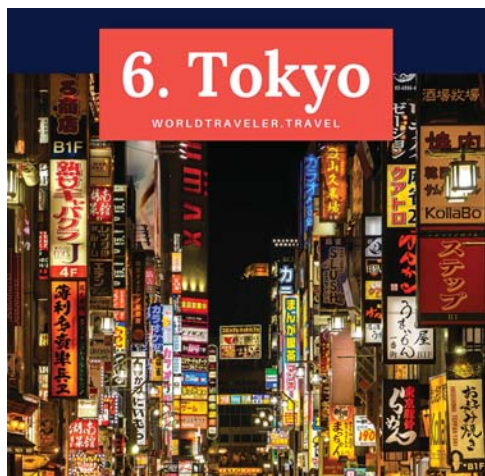
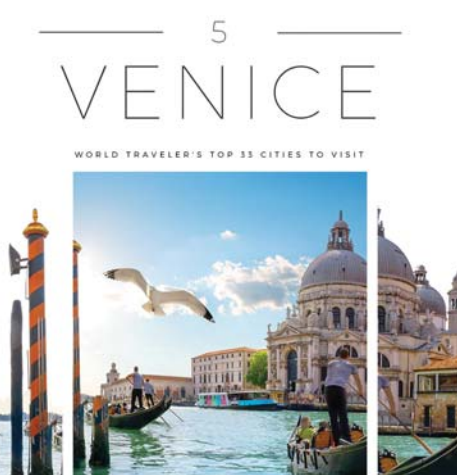
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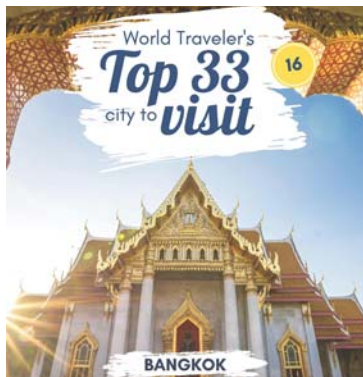
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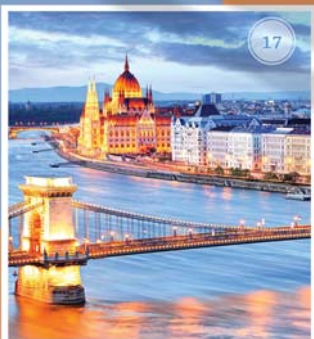
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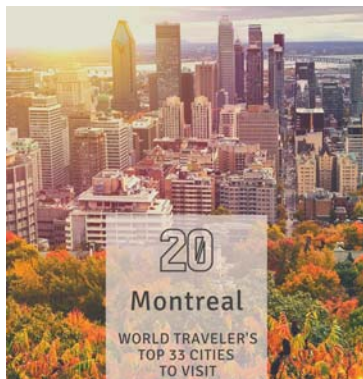
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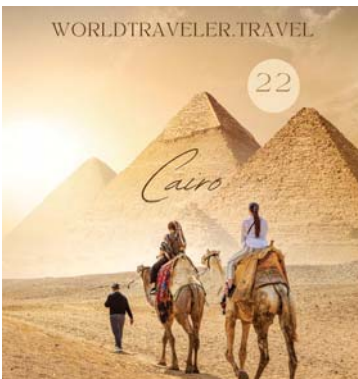
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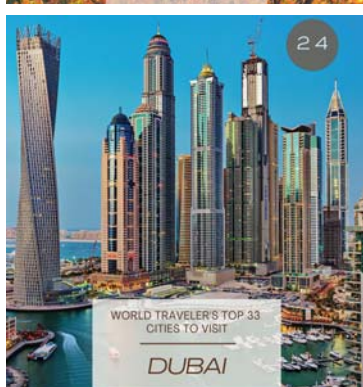
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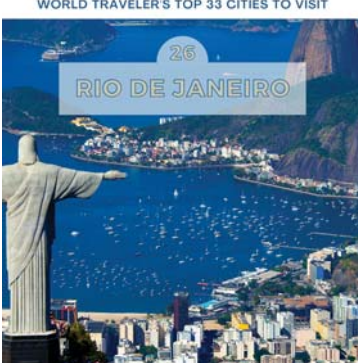
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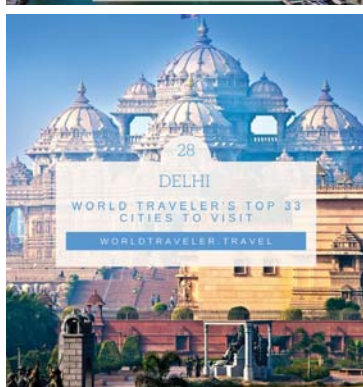
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What's New in Utah

First dark sky-certified resort in the world

Not only is Utah home to more internationally accredited dark sky parks and places than anywhere else on the planet, its Under Canvas® Lake Powell-Grand Staircase property has become the first DarkSky-certified resort in the world. DarkSky International, formerly the International Dark Sky Association, is the recognized global authority on light pollution and dark sky preservation. In partnership with DarkSky, Under Canvas® has developed the DarkSky Resort certification program to set the standard in the travel industry and encourage hospitality companies to join in its commitment to protecting the nighttime environment through conscientious design, operations and guest education.



New Indigenous national monument another reason to base camp in Utah

Located in Arizona, but stretching to the Utah border, Baaj Nwaavjo I'tah Kukveni/Ancstral Footprints of the Grand Canyon National Monument has recently been designated as the newest national monument in the U.S. Proposed by the Grand Canyon Tribes, it protects approximately one million acres of their ancestral homelands. Kanab, Utah, already serves as an ideal base camp to Southern Utah with Zion, Bryce Canyon and Grand Canyon National Parks only a short drive away – along with The Wave and Buckskin Gulch, considered the longest and deepest slot canyon in the world – and now outdoor enthusiasts can add



this new national monument to their must-visit list when staying in Kanab.

Get your spook on at Great Salt Lake

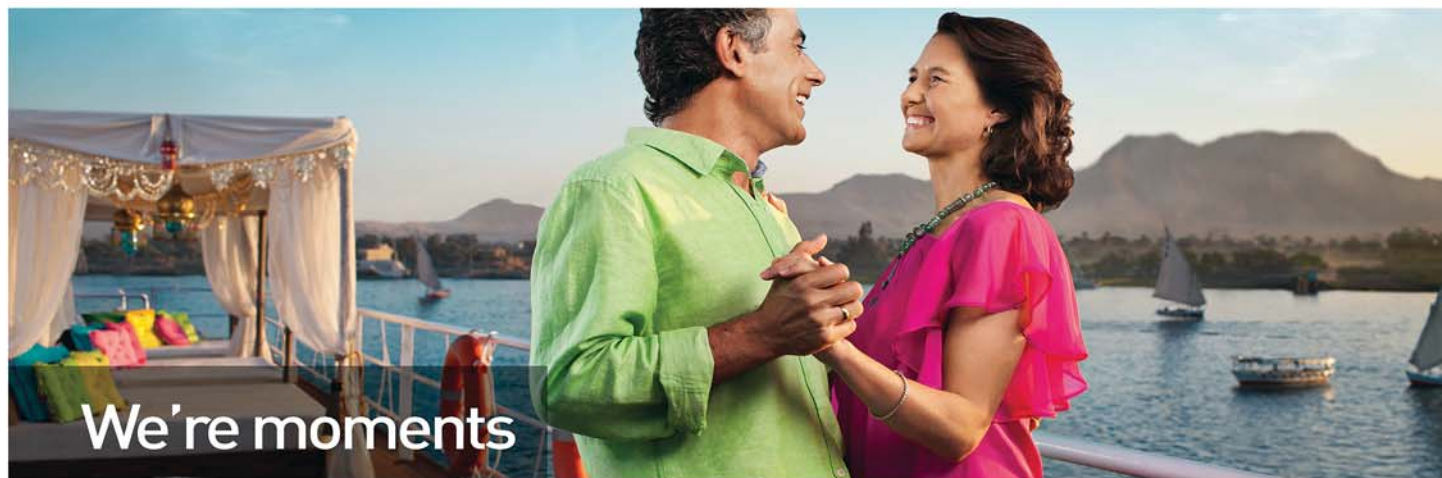
Visitors looking to go ghost hunting this October (or year-round!) can experience potential paranormal activity in Northern Utah. In particular, the area around the Great Salt Lake is home to a number of hot spots, ranging from Ophir (one of Utah's best preserved ghost towns) to Saltair (a resort area on the south shore of the lake). The Travel Channel's Ghost Adventures have filmed episodes and "confirmed" activity at both Saltair and Benson Grist Mill. Local news outlet KSL documented activity alongside a team from the Western Association for the Science of the Paranormal at Fielding Garr Ranch, now part of Antelope Island State Park, and Fremont Island and the waters of the Great Salt Lake are said to be haunted by a grave digger named Jean Baptiste.

Warm up this winter in Utah's hot springs

Utah has 106 known hot springs with temperatures above 77°F. Crystal Hot Springs, located one hour north of Salt Lake City, is known for having the highest mineral content found in the U.S. and for the closest natural occurrence of hot and cold springs at one location. Homestead Crater in the Heber Valley near Park City, is located inside a beehive-shaped, limestone dome where visitors soak, practice stand-up paddleboard yoga, snorkel and scuba dive – this is the only warm water scuba-diving destination in the U.S. so an ideal location to complete certification. Meadow Hot Springs, near Bryce Canyon National Park, offers three pools located in a farmer's field where divers can explore an underwater cave, and Mystic Hot Springs, near Capitol Reef National Park, offers two swimming pools, vintage bathtubs surrounded by mineral-formed rocks, and a music festival. ■

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Discover Dubai

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New Openings

One&Only One Za'abeel

Named Dubai's vertical resort, One&Only One Za'abeel is an extraordinary urban hotel that reimagines the traditional horizontal resort concept with a groundbreaking vertical design, masterminded by world-renowned architects Nikken Sekkei. Nestled in the exclusive Za'abeel neighborhood, where old and new Dubai meet, the resort places guests



One&Only One Za'abeel

at the epicenter of cultural, culinary, and entertainment experiences. Anchoring this architectural marvel is The Link, the world's longest cantilever, an avant-garde feat of engineering, housing dining concepts, unparalleled leisure experiences, and a rooftop infinity pool offering breathtaking 360-degree views of the Dubai skyline. One&Only One Za'abeel seamlessly marries tradition and innovation, delivering an unmatched hospitality experience in the heart of the city.

SIRO One Za'abeel

Scheduled to open late 2023, SIRO One Za'abeel is a beacon of wellness and fitness in the heart of Dubai. Nestled within the iconic One Za'abeel complex, this exceptional facility offers both a modern hotel and wellness centre equipped with stunning city views. With a state-of-the-art fitness club spanning two floors, including a 1,000sqm gym, dedicated yoga and meditation spaces, as well as specialised studios for activities like cycling, HIIT, boxing, and Pilates, guests are in for a comprehensive fitness experience. The integrated Recovery Lab will provide advanced treatments such as cryotherapy, infrared therapy, oxygen therapy, physiotherapy, and more. Dedicated mindfulness coaches will guide guests through meditation, breathing exercises, and visualisation techniques. The

guest rooms, designed as 'Recovery Cocoons,' feature cutting-edge technology to enhance physical and mental recovery, along with personalised sleep rituals, creating an oasis of rejuvenation. SIRO One Za'abeel stands as a testament to Dubai's ambition and innovation, offering a supreme wellness sanctuary in the heart of the city.

Innovative Events

Art Dubai

Art Dubai, the premier international art fair in the Middle East, takes place annually in Dubai, UAE. With a focus on fostering a global dialogue on art, it plays a vital role in promoting the rich cultural heritage and contemporary art practices of the MENASA region and beyond. Through its diverse gallery presentations, Art Dubai expands perspectives on art and cultivates a culture of discovery, making it a key platform for artists, designers, textile specialists, curators, and art professionals. The event will be taking place from 1-3 March 2024.

New Restaurants

The Guild

The Guild is a sprawling 17,000 square feet of interconnected spaces, including The Nurseries, The Potting Shed, The Rockpool, The Salon, and The Aviary, make up The Guild's captivating culinary ensemble. The Nurseries entices patrons with a Café Bohème-inspired ambiance adorned with potted plants and twinkling fairy lights, evoking the charming streets of Tribeca. Offering an array of brasserie-style breakfasts and sumptuous lunchtime fare, The Nurseries captures the essence of indulgence, while its chic pastry boutique and enchanting evening jazz performances ensure a multi-faceted experience. Meanwhile, The Potting Shed envelops guests in an indoor-outdoor haven, resembling a private greenhouse. As day transitions into evening, The Potting Shed comes alive with elevated canapés and effervescent spirits, creating an intimate space for pre-dinner gatherings. With its unique design fusion of lush foliage and luxurious accents, The Potting Shed encapsulates The Guild's commitment to culinary excellence and immersive dining encounters.



Bab Al Shams Desert & Resort



Chez Wam

Introducing Chez Wam, a captivating haven that transcends culinary boundaries to forge connections through the harmonious convergence of gastronomy, music, and shared moments. Translated from French slang as "At Mine," Chez Wam encapsulates the warmth of familial gatherings and the nostalgia of friendly invitations. An embodiment of Chef Hadrien's dream, this destination embodies the art of celebration, where the rhythm of life intertwines with laughter, clinking glasses, and retro melodies. At the heart of this haven is Chef Hadrien's visionary prowess, harmonizing the contemporary and the classic with finesse. A fusion of modern French cuisine and global inspirations, the menu tantalizes palates and fosters camaraderie over delectable fare and artfully crafted libations.

With a nod to his worldwide travels, Chef Hadrien weaves his favourite techniques, ingredients, and experiences into this culinary tapestry. The menu consists of a host of indulgent dishes, from Fried Camembert with a luscious Sweet Philly Sauce to the Smoked Taramasalata paired with Creamy Avocado and Sourdough Bread. For a taste of the sea, the Marinated Salmon with Pickled Gel and Horseradish Cream offers a delightful freshness, while the Lobster Roll with Sour Mayo and Chili Powder adds a touch of decadence.

Authentic & Unique Wellness Journeys

Bab Al Shams Desert Resort & Spa Desert Views Massage

Bab Al Shams Desert Resort and Spa invites guests to immerse in the tranquillity of the desert with a Desert Views Massage. This deeply relaxing treatment takes place in a serene setting, surrounded by breathtaking desert landscapes. The unique treatments are provided by skilled therapists, who use a combination of techniques to release tension, improve circulation, and restore balance to the body. The wellness experience that combines the soothing sounds of nature and peaceful ambiance of the desert promises to



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transport guests into a tranquil state of pure bliss.

Taj Exotica Resort & Spa

Taj Exotica Resort & Spa invites guests to experience the restorative power of Indian healing techniques. The combination of the five sacred elements – Akash (Space), Vayu (Wind), Agni (Fire), Jal (Water) and Prithvi (Earth) is integrated into the Ayurveda focused therapies offered, combining soothing scents, serene sounds, and products rich in natural extracts to provide the ultimate overall wellness experience. The spa also offers guided yoga and meditation classes. ■

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Beijing: the cradle of Chinese history

by Daniel Smajovits

For millennia, China has captured the hearts and minds of the world. Since opening up her doors to tourists in the late 1970's, more than one billion people have flocked to explore its unique culture and history.

Any first-time traveler to China should start in Beijing, where the country's rich history is on full display. To fully appreciate the city, Beijing is best explored not only on foot, but with the help of a local.

On our visit to Beijing, we spent two days with Leo Kui, who operates a number of tours in Beijing and the surrounding areas. In his mid 30's, Leo's passion is ensuring that visitors leave China with a genuine love for his country and his people. Over the course of two won-

derful days, Leo brought life into the century's old landmarks through his personal stories of growing up in one of the world's most complex societies. Unlike on larger group tours, Leo limits the number of guests to ensure that he builds a relationship with each and every person, allowing for candid and open conversations that allow you to truly appreciate life in China.

Some of the country's most famous landmarks such as the Forbidden City, Tian'anmen Square and the Temple of Heaven are all within walking distance of each other and navigating throngs of tourists becomes part of the fun and excitement. While there is a perfect photo op at every corner, Leo ensures to meticulously explain the significance of these places to his culture and people and naturally, the role they still play in China today.

With so much to see and do in Beijing, ensure to spend at least one afternoon and evening, either on your own or with a local, walking through the city's hutongs, or alleyways, some of which remain unchanged since the Ming Dynasty. Today, the remaining hutongs are protected by the government, ensuring that this part of Chinese culture remains intact. Within the winding hutongs around Beijing, you will come across a myriad of restaurants, both for tourists and locals alike, shops and even hotels and guest houses. Yet, locals still live and work in these areas, ensuring their authenticity and critical role in Chinese society.

Although you can spend days within Beijing city limits immersing yourself in the culture, dedicate a full day to visiting the Great Wall of China, which lies a touch more than 100 kilometres outside the city. With many different access points and ways to visit, we decided to once again spend the day with Leo, ensuring that we would be able to make the most of this once-in-a-lifetime experience.

It only takes a few minutes of climbing to realize the massive engineering marvel that is the Great Wall. Built over the course of many dynasties, our full-day tour provided two unique perspectives on the wall: the ancient and the restored. Starting at the Gubeikou portion of the wall, visitors can gaze and climb through the ancient fortifications. Having never been reconstructed, this portion of the wall is a bit difficult to access, but provides visitors with a unique perspective on this mighty barrier. Following a delicious and traditional lunch came the highlight of the day: the restored Jinshanling section of the wall. Timing it perfectly, Leo ensured our arrival came just prior to sunset. With a glass of wine or baijiu, a traditional Chinese liquor in hand, your group is alone, basking in the sunset and the serenity of this wonder of the world. ■

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Tropical Tidbits

by Sue C Travel

Tropical Travel Trends for 2024

As the new year dawns, sun seeking travelers are continuing to demand more from their beach vacations than simply fun in the sand and sea. Wellness trips are topping bucket lists and “purer” paradises are also in big demand. Studies are showing that today’s traveler is more mindful and eco-conscious, especially when visiting micro-ecosystems where climate change is playing a part. They want to give back, get to know the locals, and spend far more time in nature than in past decades when hedonistic romps in a party prison with a great beach and swim-up bar would do. They are also demanding better quality food and drink in all-inclusive set-

tings, and more culture-centric activities for all ages. Fortunately, many sun destination tourism boards and hotel conglomerates are beginning to listen. It looks like 2024 will be a tough year for sun seekers only because there will be so many more excellent options of destinations, packages, and resorts to choose from.

Costa Rica Rising as Wellness Destination

Wellness travel has never been bigger, and the Blue Zone in Costa Rica’s Nicoya is fast becoming less of an off-radar destination these days for those seeking to totally de-stress in nature... and to live longer! (Costa Rica has one of only five “Blue Zones” in the

world- places with the most centenarians!) The peninsula is awash in secluded beaches, charming rural towns, and wellness-centered experiences. Eco-friendly resorts offering yoga and spa retreats with forest bathing, earthing, waterfall hiking, meditation in lush jungles and more, are popping up everywhere there now like Hotel Nantipa in Santa Teresa. And local spas are tapping into Costa Rica’s natural products like volcanic mud, coffee, tropical fruit, and chocolate as ideal elements to enrich treatments. With 29 national parks, 19 wildlife refuges, and eight biological reserves, Costa Rica checks all the boxes if you’re seeking the ultimate “Pura Vida” destination to add to your tropical travel bucket list this year.

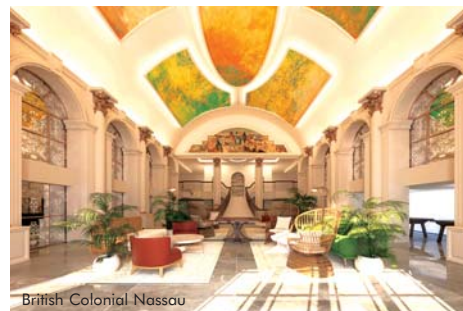
Visit: www.visitcostarica.com/en



Hotel Nantipa Costa Rica



Costa Rica Spa



British Colonial Nassau



Historic Nassau Landmark Creatively Reimagined

The legendary “Grand Dame” of Nassau, the over 100-year-old British Colonial Hotel, has a very storied past. Hosting scandals and intrigue and the secret lives and loves of the rich, famous, and powerful from different epochs, if its walls could talk, the gossip would make a great period movie. And now the old girl has been thoroughly brought back to life to face a modern future as a unique, boutique sun escape with a total renovation top-to-bottom to accommodate today’s discerning traveller. However, great pains were taken to preserve as much original artwork, design, and décor as possible including the eclectic choice of unique room layouts that offer something for every type of guest. Always a centre for gala events, the historic grand ballroom, a supper club, and a cigar bar still reflect the glamorous lifestyle of a bygone era, but now the new restau-



rants, bars, and luxurious pool and beach-front amenities make it a cosmopolitan sanctuary in the heart of the Bahamas’ most vibrant little city.

Visit: www.britishcolonial.com

Star Clippers Set Sail with New Wave Offers

Famous for their authentic tall sailing vessels for those who prefer to travel the seas in a more eco-friendly and romantic style, Star Clippers is offering more than 90 sailings through October 2025 with all kinds of enticing offers. Enjoy food, beverage, and air credits on many of their exciting itineraries which include sojourns throughout the Caribbean, the Mediterranean, and Central America. New specials are also available on their popular 14-day transatlantic crossing on the mother ship the majestic Royal Clipper that still holds the Guinness World Record for being the largest and only five-masted, full-rigged sailing ship in service anywhere. All three ships in the fleet have teak decks, swimming pools, fine dining, fun tropical bars and piano lounges, and itineraries include authentic experiences and cultural activities in each of their ports of call. Some itineraries also include pre or post sailing hotel stays as well.

Visit: www.starclippers.com

New Romantic Hideaway Encourages “Kidulting”

There is no dearth of upscale, all-inclusive adult-only romance-centric resorts in Jamaica. But this new one in Montego Bay comes with a twist. Opened November 2023, the 352-room Hideaway at Royalton Blue Waters, Montego Bay is an Autograph Collection adults-only all-inclusive resort that features 11 bars and 12 restaurants, including the new ceviche-focused Dorado. On site are also two buildings with their exclusive Diamond Club™ room category, which have personal butlers, enhanced amenities, a private lounge, and more perks... but here’s the twist. It’s located directly beside the Royalton Blue Waters Montego Bay, their family-friendly all-inclusive, and Hideaway guests have full access to both! That’s where the ‘kidulting’ comes in. It’s a new cultural trend where adults engage in activities typically reserved for children, and experts say it



is beneficial to mental health! Adulting can be so overrated, and what self-respecting adult wouldn’t love to romp around a giant pirate-themed waterpark while on holiday without judgment? Here you can partake of the infectious joyful spirit of children at play when you want it but escape their noise when you don’t! It’s win-win!

Visit: www.royaltonresorts.com/resorts/hideaway-blue-waters

Porter Heads to The Sun!

I recently traveled with Porter Airlines for the first time this past holiday season and I found them an absolute pleasure to fly with. And with all the continuous chaos surrounding today’s major league carriers that’s no small thing! I totally appreciate their no middle row design on every plane, and I found the seats to be comfortable with lots of legroom. Free WIFI and quality refreshments- like wine and beer and good snacks like chocolate chip banana bread are always complimentary, and the staff was upbeat and competent from gate to onboard and beyond. Though my inaugural trip with them was short- Montreal to Toronto and back, I see that they are adding many sun destinations to their offerings from Canada. That’s great news. New routes include five major hubs in Florida and three in California, with more planned for the future. And so far, their fares have been competitive, too. I hope they will also be adding Caribbean escapes to their routes soon as an excellent alternative as well.

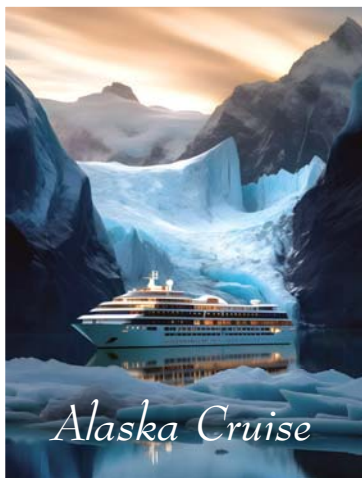
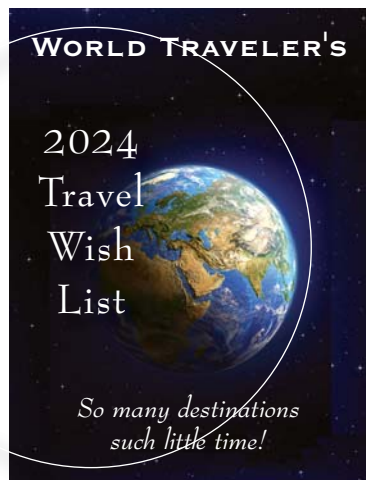
Visit: www.flyporter.com/en-ca ■



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 @suetravel



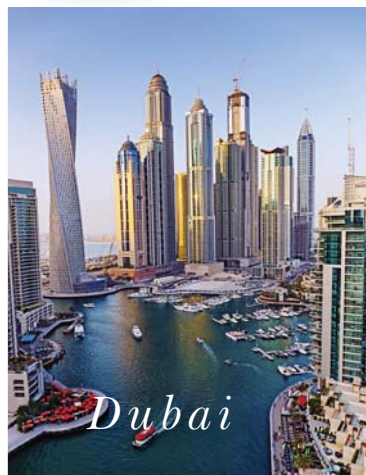
Alaska Cruise



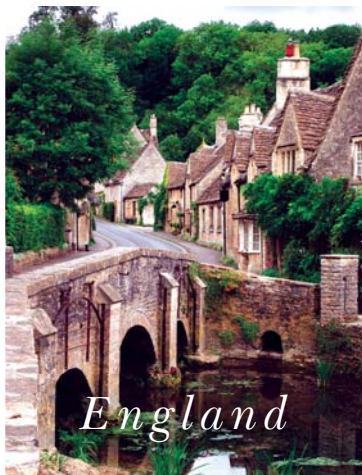
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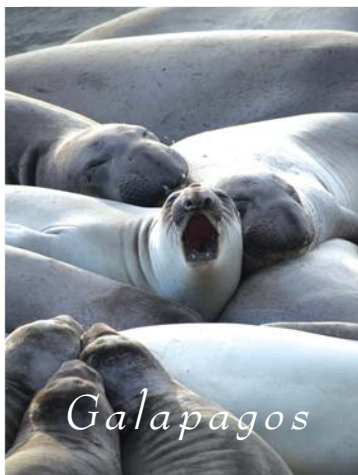
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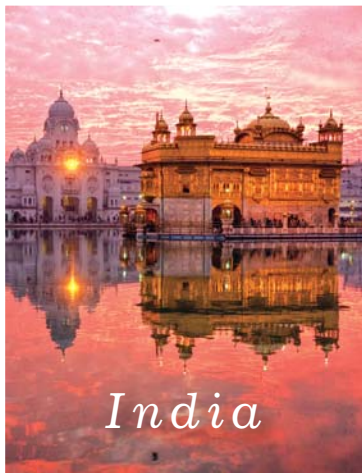
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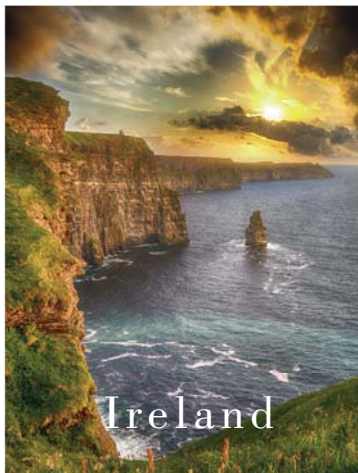
Greece



Iceland



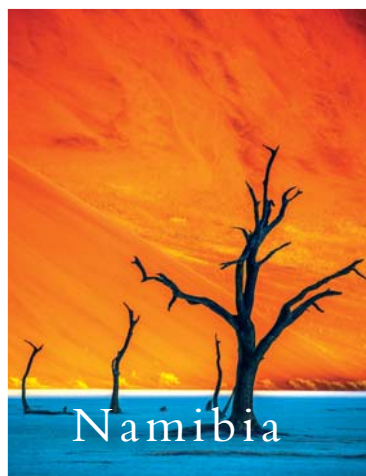
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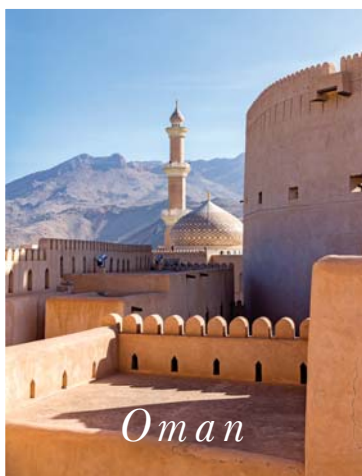
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This photo: Viking Expedition Ship in Antarctica

C o m e W i t h U s &

AMAZON DANUBE MEKONG NILE RHINE RHÔNE MOSELLE SEINE YANGTZE

PACIFIC SOUTH PACIFIC INDIAN SOUTHERN OCEAN

ADRIATIC AEGEAN MEDITERRANEAN CARIBBEAN BALTIC BLACK SOUTH-CHINA SEA



Sail The World!



Discover the Mythology & Splendour of Ancient Greece & Meteora on a Brand New Cruise from CroisiEurope

CroisiEurope has launched a brand new cruise through the cradle of ancient civilisation taking in the splendour and mythology of ancient Greece and Meteora. With just four departures in March 2024, this cruise visits some of the most beautiful and iconic sites in the region before the tourist season kicks in, allowing guests to take advantage of fewer crowds and easier access.

The seven-night cruise onboard the 198-guest La Belle de l'Adriatique is round trip from Athens with calls in Gythion, Katakolon and Igoumenitsa. With all excursions included within the cost of the cruise, guests can enjoy visits to The Acropolis; UNESCO World Heritage Site Mystras, the ancient city of Sparta; Olympia, Meteora, and Cape Sounion. ■

WWW.CROISIEUROPE.TRAVEL



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

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

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

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

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



Explora Journeys Unveils Unforgettable Destination Experience in Central America, USA & Canada Pacific Coast and Hawaii

Explora Journeys, the luxury lifestyle ocean travel brand of the MSC Group, unveils its latest Destination Experiences, inviting travellers to immerse themselves in the unparalleled beauty and culture of the Americas and Hawaii.

A 14-night journey from Amador, Panama to Los Angeles, USA visiting ports such as Quepos, Costa Rica, San Juan del Sur, Nicaragua, Puerto Quetzal, Guatemala and Cabo San Lucas, Mexico, offers guests the chance to immerse themselves into Central American cultures.

During a six night journey from Los Angeles, USA to Vancouver, Canada with highlights including stops in San Francisco and Astoria in the USA, allows for discoveries along the American West Coast.

Guests have the chance to absorb the energizing atmosphere of Hawaii during two extraordinary journeys: nine nights from Vancouver, Canada, to Honolulu, USA and nine nights from Honolulu, USA, to Vancouver, Canada. ■

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

Viking Announces 10 Additional River Ships in Europe



Viking has recently announced it will welcome an additional 10 Viking Longships® to its river fleet in the coming years. To meet strong demand for European river voyages, eight of the new vessels will sail Viking's popular itineraries on the Rhine, Main and Danube rivers, while two additional Viking Longships will join the fleet on the Seine River. The total order is also inclusive of one Viking Longship for the Seine River that was announced in February 2023. Five of the new vessels will be delivered in 2025, with the remaining five to be delivered in 2026.

With a current fleet of 80 river ships and more than 50 percent of the market share for North American travelers, Viking is by far the industry's leading river line. The award-winning Viking Longships, which comprise the vast majority of the company's river fleet, host 190 or fewer guests. Featuring an innovative patented design, the vessels offer a wide variety of stateroom choices, the revolutionary indoor/outdoor Aquavit Terrace and Viking's signature Scandinavian design aesthetic. The new vessels feature a hybrid propulsion system with batteries and are also equipped for shore power to reduce reliance on fuel while in port. Onboard solar panels further contribute to the ships' energy efficiency.

This announcement is the latest significant milestone for the company as Viking has recently celebrated the float out of its newest ocean ship, the Viking Vela, which will debut in December 2024, and announced a new ship for the Mekong River in 2025, the Viking Tonle. In October, the company made history when it was voted #1 for rivers, oceans and expeditions by Condé Nast Traveler in the publication's 2023 Readers' Choice Awards. The company was also voted to the top of its categories for rivers, oceans and expeditions by Travel + Leisure in the 2023 World's Best Awards. No other travel company has simultaneously received the same honors by both publications. ■

WWW.VIKING.COM

Seabourn Pursuit to visit Warm-Weather Destinations During First-Ever Expedition Season to South Pacific, Kimberly Region in 2024



Seabourn, the leader in ultra-luxury voyages and expedition travel, will embark on its first-ever expedition voyages to the South Pacific and the Kimberley region in 2024 on board its newest ultra-luxury expedition ship, Seabourn Pursuit. Between March and October 2024, the ship will journey across the Pacific and visit a number of islands and warm-weather destinations rich in culture, history and natural beauty, with abundant wildlife. The exciting schedule includes stops at Papua New Guinea, Micronesia, Guam, the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and Fiji, as well as line's first expedition voyages to the Kimberley region in northern Australia.

Seabourn Pursuit will offer a number of expedition experiences designed to immerse guests in the beauty and wonders of the destinations. Included expedition offerings such as Zodiac cruising, nature walks and hikes, scuba diving, and snorkeling will be available on most itineraries. In addition, the ship will offer optional expeditions with dives on two custom-built luxury submersibles and kayaking at select destinations. Led by a world-class expedition team of 24 experts, including scientists, scholars, naturalists, and more, guests will receive the highest level of knowledge and guidance throughout their Seabourn expedition voyage.

Seabourn Pursuit's 2024 South Pacific and Kimberley itineraries include:

- The South Pacific from Chile to Melanesia, sailing between the islands of the South Pacific and the coast of Chile.
- Papua New Guinea & West Papua, Indonesia, operating a series of 15-day voyages.
- The Kimberley, Western Australia, in the region between Broome and Darwin. ■

WWW.SEABOURN.COM

Get Closer to the World's Most Sought-After Destinations on Crystal's 2025 World Cruise



Encounter Aspirational Locations with an Impressive Voyage that Sails to More Than 31 Countries and Boasts Widely Acclaimed Abercrombie & Kent Experiences for an Unrivalled Epicurean Adventure

From awe-inspiring itineraries and revived over-land experiences, to reimaged spaces, award-winning dining and one-of-a-kind service, Crystal has opened booking for the 2025 World Cruise onboard Crystal Serenity. Sailing over the course of 123 nights, the voyage encapsulates visits to more than 31 countries, 62 ports and 17 overnights where A&K Travel Group – Crystal's ownership group and the world's leading tour operators, introduce unparalleled shore excursions, overlands and pre- and post-tours for World Cruise guests.

Departing from Fort Lauderdale, Fla., the journey begins by sailing to Mexico, Belize, Honduras and Colombia. A transit through Panama's iconic canal commences before sailing alongside South America's western coast visiting Guayaquil, Lima and Pisco. The voyage continues by exploring the majestic Chilean fjords and enjoying a stop at the gateway to Antarctica, Ushuaia, then north up the coast of South America to the lively festivities of the Rio Carnival. Namibia and South Africa's remarkable coastlines hove into view through St. Helena, one of the world's most remote islands. The thrill of African experiences follows, with an extensive program through Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania and Kenya. Crystal Serenity proceeds east to the powdery sands of the Seychelles and Maldives before traveling onwards to Sri Lanka, then Mumbai for an overnight. Sailing west, travelers will enjoy a visit to the iconic Valley of Kings in Egypt and the mystical city of Petra in Jordan until its final stop through the Italian coast in the blooming spring sailing to Barcelona. ■

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Adventure Canada Unveils 2025 Expeditions with Itineraries That Focus on the Wonders of our World, and the People & Cultures that Call Some of the Most Fascinating Regions of this Planet Home



Cultural Connections, the Spirit of Exploration, and the Power of Nature Combine with Adventure Canada's Passion for Discovery in 2025 Line-Up

Industry-leading expedition cruise operator Adventure Canada has unveiled its 2025 line-up of small-ship expeditions that will explore some of our planet's most hard-to-reach places, with a focus on the people, culture, history, and wildlife that call these regions home. 2025 expeditions include an all new Baffin Island itinerary and the return of popular Scotland and Iceland journeys.

Below are the expeditions featured as part of Adventure Canada's 2025 line-up:

- NEW for 2025!
Baffin Island and Greenland
Circling the Midnight Sun.
- Greenland & Wild Labrador
A Torngat Mountains Adventure.
- Heart of the Arctic.
- Iceland Circumnavigation.
- Iceland to Greenland
In the Wake of the Vikings.
- Newfoundland Circumnavigation.
- Into the Northwest Passage and
Out of the Northwest Passage.
- Scotland Slowly.
- Scotland, The Faroe Islands &
Iceland. ■

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Smiling to the End of the World Onboard the Viking Polaris!

Article and photography by Michael Morcos

I was like a little kid in a candy store, I just could not get the smile off my face as we unpacked our bags. We were now at the starting point of what would be a 'trip of a lifetime' to the wonderous white continent of Antarctica and on a wonderful Viking cruise!

We were not new to Viking, on the contrary, cruising with Viking is always in our hearts, minds, and even our souls. Our many past sailings with this amazing cruise line company led us to venture on their beautiful and well-appointed river ships, sea ships, and even on the expedition ship, the Octantis, Polaris' identical sister-ship. This much sailing with one company can only mean one thing, excellence on the waters! Time and time again, Viking is true to its high standards of service, well detailed and curated excursions, exceptional cuisine, and add to it a genuinely

friendly staff, safety, and security, and a wonderful stress-free environment and you have what makes Viking a top favourite among cruisers with continuous awards and favourable reviews.

In this first of a two-part article, we will focus on Viking's organizational excellence, getting to the Polaris and the briefly look at the ships' amazing offerings while we will feature the beautiful Polaris, the sailing, and landings to the 'last continent' in a future article.

The journey is part of the trip

As a bonus to the 'Antarctic Explorer' cruise is a full day in Buenos Aires, and another partial day in the most southern city in the world, Ushuaia. First, getting to the end of the world from the northern hemisphere is no easy feat.

To describe it backwards, going home from Antarctica took us two days of sailing and three flights in a row two make it one of the longest journeys we had ever taken. In a nutshell: Viking made the whole experience fun and relaxing!

Viking did a magnificent job of getting us to the ship and every step of the way was curated to perfection. The Viking arranged flights were on time and we arrived at all destinations with luggage in hand. Upon landing in Buenos Aires, we were immediately greeted by a cheerful and helpful Viking staff and our luggage was taken and placed on a luxury motorcoach with no delay, and we headed straight to our hotel in a very proper, upscale, and clean district.





Included in the Viking Antarctic Explorer cruise was a one-night stay at a hotel, ours was the Hotel Madero. This was a fantastic property to recharge and rejuvenate for the coming day. Our large and beautifully decorated Superior room included: two large comfortable beds, a clean and spacious washroom, a kitchenette, a relaxing seating area and large balcony that gave great views of the city as well as the garden area of Buenos Aires.

With roughly 24 hours before departure, we would waste no time discovering what is nicknamed as the 'Paris of Latin America'. Rightfully so, Buenos Aires had grandeur to it, with magnificent old-world architecture, grand boulevards, quaint neighbourhoods, and the fabulous Plaza de Mayo.

In speaking with the Viking staff at our hotel lobby about orientation and what to expect in the upcoming cruise, we also inquired if whether a Tango show was too touristic or made for locals? Without hesitation, she said absolutely a must in Buenos Aires, and that she herself and friends take in these shows

often. Without a second thought, we would head to entertainment district for a dinner show and what would be a marvellous time. The food, wine, and Tango experience was way above our expectations. No less than 15 musicians, performers and dancers dazzled us, and we ended our day with great memories of this Argentinian capital.

Sitting on my bed early in the morning was when I suddenly realized I was barely awake, but I was smiling uncontrollably. We managed to get a short but good nights sleep and were just hours away from embarking the mighty *Polaris* to head to the 'last continent'. Our Viking chartered flight to Ushuaia was well organized and our bags were picked up from our room and sent straight to the plane while we would just head to the gates with tickets in hand and ready for departure. The journey itself was a thrill as we would board the plane on the tarmac itself and find that all the middle seats were vacant giving us ample room to stretch out. The three-hour journey was quiet and relaxing, and we would have magnificent views: especially of Patagonia, the high Andes and finally Ushuaia.

With little time, we would still be able to visit Ushuaia, what I would describe as a frontier town by the sea and the departure point for most Antarctica cruises. This little jewel had a laid-back feeling with plenty of shops and restaurants and it still had churches, schools, hospitals, and everything else for the locals that inhabit it and call it home all year long.

If it is true that smiling and laughing is good for your health, then this trip with Viking is exactly what the doctor ordered. The Viking Antarctica Explorer experience was literally 'heavenly'. Our opulent stateroom was perfect, the public spaces were warm and inviting, the overabundance and wide variety of delicious and healthy food choices was always something to look forward to, the itinerary and landings were remarkable and the wonderful Viking staff made us always feel welcomed and safe at our brief home away from home. ■

WWW.VIKING.COM





Exploring the Amazon with Amazon Nature Tours

by Nicholas Kontis

As river-cruise operators seek new waterways to explore, South America's great Amazon remains mostly undiscovered. Yet it may have greater potential to lure global explorers than any other river in the world.

There is a good reason why operators of small ships rhapsodize at the potential of new sailings on the world's most significant jungle river. Amazonia is the home of the world's largest rainforest, covering 2.5 million square miles. It touches nine South American countries. The possibilities of uncharted discovery are seemingly boundless. Except for a few large cities erected in the last century and a half, not much has changed since the early

quests of global navigators Francisco Pizarro and Theodore Roosevelt. The ceaseless Amazon remains as surly and cantankerous as ever.

Expedition cruise lines exploring the Brazilian Amazon depart out of an unlikely port of call. Manaus, founded in 1669 and named for the Manóas Indians, is the capital of Amazonas, Brazil's largest state. Known as the "Jungle City," this fascinating metropolis of 2.2 million lies by river travel a distance of 1,000 miles from the mouth of the Amazon, where the river meets the Atlantic Ocean at Belém.

The city's *pièce-de-resistance* is its Renaissance Revival-style opera house. Built in 1896, the Teatro Amazonas boasts a mind-

boggling, ceramic mosaic dome of colors that represent the Brazilian flag. The structure has been methodically restored to its glory days' appearance. Most construction materials were shipped from Italy, France and England. One can only marvel at the logistics involved.

Style and Elegance

While a stay at a jungle lodge is a novel alternative to scrutinizing the jungle, the best way to view the ecosystem is by expedition cruise. Limited numbers of passengers, exquisite and spacious decks, and meticulously deluxe staterooms make this epic adventure a luxurious one.



Amazon Nature Tours carries no more than 18 guests on its small-ship expeditions from Manaus. The Motor Yacht Tucano (M/Y Tucano) ventures farther up the mammoth river than any other vessel — nearly 200 miles, or about twice the voyage offered by other operators.

Crafted in 1997 with cabins refurbished in 2018, the 80-foot Tucano was built for the sole purpose of meandering the Amazon and its tributaries in comfort. Shiny white with crimson accents, this modern-day showpiece replicates the elegance of steamboats that played a significant role in the 19th-century development of the vast jungle: Think Klaus Kinski in “Fitzcarraldo” or Humphrey Bogart and Katharine Hepburn in “The African Queen.”

The Tucano has a broad beam, for stability, and a flat, shallow-draft bottom. This allows for passage across sandbars, enabling miles of divergent off-grid exploration of tributaries inaccessible to other Amazon vessels.

In the classic style of a bygone era, the grand boat has large decks on three levels. Many of its 80-plus windows are more than three feet tall, affording astonishing rainforest views. Each air-conditioned stateroom has at least four large port windows for viewing the untamed wilderness, as well as handcrafted wooden panels and brass accents.

The kitchen and decks mimic the feel of a luxury yacht. The salon, which doubles as the dining room, adjoins a comfortable lounge area where new friends may mingle. A library is filled with books on the river and jungle.

Although the onboard galley is small, the chefs dazzle with comfort foods. The palate-pleasing Brazilian menu of three meals a day is accented by a happy hour of appetizers and drinks on the top deck. Meals include local fruits and vegetables; the freshest catch of the day; and a meat or chicken dish, usually served with rice or pasta. Breakfast is eggs, fruit, and oatmeal. For a sugar rush, there is also a scrumptious homemade cake for dessert, breakfast or an afternoon snack.

Naturalist guides

The luxury of a smaller-berth cruise allows passengers a personalized and unhurried

jungle experience that focuses on the flora and fauna under the verdant canopy of the Amazon rainforest. Trips are led by two highly trained naturalist guides, who show the hidden wilderness during three or four jaunts daily. The trained eyes of these guides spot many bird and monkey species that guests might otherwise miss.

The world's largest biosphere does not disappoint. Travelers connect with pink river dolphins, who seem to always put on a show; squawking toucans, macaws, and parrots in a kaleidoscope of bright colors; lazy sloths and iguanas, and the vast array of cacophonous, long-tailed monkeys, including several that are found nowhere else on earth.

The mastermind behind Amazon Nature Tours is founder and CEO Mark Baker, a native of Newport, Rhode Island. In his 20s, Baker embarked on what would be a life-changing, month-long journey sailing to coastal Venezuela then hiking and working his way south over the continental divide into the Amazon landing in Manaus. Falling in love with the jungle, he succeeded in creating the Motor Yacht Tucano, an elegant riverboat as comfortable as a luxury yacht.

From Manaus, the company offers year-round voyages. Many sojourners prefer to visit during the rainy season when waters rise 40 feet and fish swim in the upper branches of trees.

“The Motor Yacht Tucano is designed to conduct sustainable tourism, treading lightly on the fragile forest,” Baker said. “We practice energy conservation, waste management, and pollution control. We have procedures in place onboard to conserve energy while retaining the comfort of our cruises.”

Two itineraries

Amazon Nature Tours offers two itineraries aboard the Tucano. Both traverse the murky waters of the appropriately named Rio Negro (“Black River”) to reach into the heart of the primeval jungle. Here, they branch into day trips for deeper exploration by launch or kayak.

The “Into the Wild Amazon” cruise captures the essence of the Amazon in four nights. With three to four excursions per day broken

into two groups, travelers can visit the critical environments of the timeless forest.

“Voyage to the Heart of the Amazon” is a six-night endeavor, sailing upstream nearly 200 miles, deep into this UNESCO Natural World Heritage Site. The Tucano slides into off-the-beaten-path tributaries, channels, and canals to investigate the topic of rainforest conservation.

Both journeys include fact-finding missions via motor launch or kayak. Encounters with local fauna and flora are priceless; visits to local villages are life-changing. River dwellers show you how to fish for piranha and offer their crafts.

After afternoon appetizers, you may find yourself back in the forest with trained naturalists, who point out unusual vegetation, camouflaged exotic animals, and hidden birds perched high in towering trees, not readily visible to untrained eyes. “Did you know that there are over 2,000 different species of tree vines in the Amazon?” suggests Amazon Nature Tours guide Alex.

In the evening, the guides may recommend a nocturnal search for creatures of the night. Among them is the cunning caiman, a smaller crocodile best viewed with flashlights in a pitch-black backdrop.

Some travelers may fear the Amazon River, associating it with man-eating, razor-toothed piranhas. In reality, the carnivorous fish rarely attacks humans — so it’s safe to swim. There are countless deserted bronze sand beaches and watering holes. Spending a couple of hours floating in the murky Rio Negro is a crowning moment of an Amazon voyage.

As the trip winds back downriver, travelers will be alerted to a phenomenon known as “the meeting of the Waters.” About six miles outside of Manaus, two of the Amazon's largest tributaries meet, the darker, charcoal-hued Rio Negro joining the clearer and sand-colored Rio Solimoes. The mind-bending contrast continues for over 10 miles. From there, the Amazon, as the river has been re-baptized, twists and turns towards its Atlantic Ocean entrance. ■

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Sailing the Southern Caribbean with a Dutch Touch

Article and photography by Jeremy Mink

Having cruised the Caribbean before, we were interested in trying out a Caribbean vacation with a bit of European flavor. Fitting the bill were the islands of Aruba and Curacao, situated just north of Venezuela.

Hundreds of years of Dutch rule have left their mark on these islands, which are constituent countries of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. It seemed most appropriate to visit these Dutch isles on a Holland America Line ship, so we did, on a recent 9-night cruise aboard the 2,688-passenger Rotterdam.

Two Days in Balmy Aruba

We embarked in Fort Lauderdale, Florida and enjoyed two relaxing days at sea before docking for two full days in Aruba's capital city of Oranjestad. The bubble-gum pink, colonial-style Royal Plaza Mall was our first sight from the ship and the bright colors continued into the downtown shopping area. We spent most of our first day on this "One Happy Island" basking in the gently rolling turquoise waters of picture-perfect Eagle Beach, where wind-sculpted Fofoti trees grow out of the powdery white sand. Eagle Beach is one of several stunning strands running along Aruba's west-ern coast.

We washed off the sand, assessed our sunburns, then took advantage of our overnight in port with a nightlife excursion aboard a Kukoo Kunuku party bus. The bright red bus, equipped with maracas for each passenger, traversed the city streets and arid countryside with music blaring from its open windows. We stopped at a beach for a Champagne toast, enjoyed an oceanfront dinner al fresco, and visited two bars for dancing and drinks.

On our second day in Aruba, we took a dive in the submarine Atlantis. Blue tang and sergeant majors peeked in the windows as our guide provided comical yet informative narra-



tion. We glided past coral fields and shipwrecks before touching down on the sandy ocean floor. Other excursions offered in Aruba included snorkeling, scuba diving, a sunset cruise and bus tours around the island.

Exploring Curacao

We woke up the following morning in Willemstad, the capital of Curacao, the Dutch Caribbean's largest island. The short walk from the harbor to Willemstad's historic center, a UNESCO World Heritage site, was a pleasant one with waves crashing against rocks adjacent to the path and wild iguanas eyeing us from their perch atop boulders. The path continued through the Rif Fort, built in 1828 to protect the entrance of St. Anna's Bay but now an attractive open-air mall.

Once past the fort, we could see across the bay the unmistakable stretch of waterfront known as Handelskade. The row houses lining the water sport distinctly Dutch architecture, but the colorful paint jobs are uniquely Curacaoan and are seen on postcards, t-shirts and license plates everywhere. To get a closer look, we strolled across the Queen Emma Bridge. Built in 1888 but renovated several times since, the pedestrian bridge affectionately known as "the swinging old lady" floats on pontoons and swings open to let marine traffic into and out of the harbor.

After exploring on our own, we took a city bus tour. The towering Queen Julianna Bridge offered a panoramic view with our cruise ship in the distance, and each street we drove was lined with homes and businesses more brightly painted than the last. Along the way, we sampled drinks made with the island's signature liqueur, Blue Curacao. Other cruise passengers spent their time in Curacao touring the Hato Caves, visiting aloe vera and ostrich farms or sunning at the beach.

The Dutch influence on both islands is seen and heard beyond the architecture. Dutch is an official language, and windmills and wooden shoes are found in gift shops. Though each island is autonomous and controls its own internal affairs, the Netherlands controls foreign affairs and national defense. Bonaire is the third in the trio of Dutch islands in the Southern Caribbean (commonly

referred to as the "ABC Islands") and also has a cruise port, but it was not a stop on our voyage.

Private Paradise

Following two more sea days, our final port of call was Half Moon Cay, Holland America's private island in the Bahamas. Here, many simply sunbathed on the gorgeous beach or frolicked in the crystal-clear water. Others went horseback riding, biking, snorkeling or kayaking. We chose an excursion where we swam with sting rays, fed them fish, kissed sea cucumbers and ogled at conch as they wriggled from their shells.

Shipboard Pleasures

Built in 2021, the Rotterdam is Holland America's newest ship and the seventh in the company's 150-year history to bear that name. She is one of the fleet's largest, yet offers a relatively intimate experience when compared to the mega-ships it docks alongside in Fort Lauderdale. The onboard experience is also more relaxed and sophisticated. You will not find water slides or rock-climbing walls, nor any belly-flop or hairiest-man competitions.

The mid-ship Lido Pool and aft Sea View Pool areas were always well-populated, especially on sea days. Outdoor options for the more active included a jogging track, shuffleboard courts, cornhole boards, ping-pong tables and a basketball/pickleball court. Among the organized activities were arts and crafts lessons; trivia sessions; movie screenings; beer, wine and martini tastings; and mixology classes.

The ship came alive at night with multiple entertainment options. Charismatic dueling piano players belted out familiar hits in Billboard Onboard, a band jammed to rock classics in the Rolling Stone Rock Room, and a blues band, complete with horn section and soulful vocalists, performed R&B, Motown and more in B.B. King's Blues Club.

World Stage, the ship's main stage, provided an immersive experience with theater-in-the-round seating and floor-to-ceiling wrap-around LED displays. Here, entertainment

rotated nightly with comedians, singers, a dance group and our personal favorite, the Island Magic Steelband, taking the stage.

Dining Delights

Day or night, dining options were varied and plentiful. Breakfast, lunch, dinner and late-night snacks were served in the Lido Market from themed stations like Breadboard, Distant Lands and Wild Harvest. Burgers, hot dogs and fries were made to order throughout the day at Dive-In, and NY Pizza & Deli fired up pizzas until midnight. The Grand Dutch Cafe offered Dutch specialties like pea soup, herring, Dutch pancakes and softball-sized cream puffs called Bossche bols.

Excellent multi-course dinners were served in the main dining room, but cruisers could step up their culinary experience at additional-charge restaurants. Canaletto dished out osso buco and freshly-made pasta. Tamarind served up superb pan-Asian cuisine with ocean views. Pinnacle Grill offered steaks and seafood in an upscale setting, and Rudi's Sel de Mer exemplified fine dining with classic French dishes, fresh seafood and the best filet mignon.

Taking the stairs and walking the Rotterdam's public spaces not only allowed us to burn off some excess calories from these meals (not that we were counting), but to behold an impressive array of artwork. Largely music- or nature-themed, the style and media varied widely. Vinyl records carved into likenesses of famous artists, junk art collages of wild animals and abstract arrangements of deconstructed musical instruments are just a few examples.

From the Dutch Caribbean to the Dutch mainland, with plenty of non-Dutch countries in between, the Rotterdam will offer various Caribbean itineraries through early 2024 before spending the summer cruising Northern Europe, including stops in the Netherlands. ■

WWW.HOLLANDAMERICA.COM





Viking Longship

Viking: What's New in 2024 and Beyond

Viking's curated selection of new itineraries deliver guests to the world's most prestigious destinations, from the sun-kissed coasts of the Amalfi to the heart of the city in Paris (great for the 2024 Olympics!) and onward to the untouched beauty of the Arctic. In addition, Viking is slated to unveil new sister ships, adding to the world-class fleet and offering an unmatched journey that allows guests to experience the Viking difference.

River Voyages

New Itineraries:

- Viking launched a special 12-day voyage to commemorate the 80th anniversary of Operation Overlord and the historic battles of Normandy with the new Paris & D-Day 80th Anniversary voyage from London to Paris with departure dates running from March through November 2024. Due to strong demand, Viking will also offer the London, Paris & D-Day itinerary starting in 2025.
- With increased interest in extended voyages, Viking added a new 15-day river voyage, Lyon, Provence & the Rhineland, that combines a sailing on the Rhine River with one in Southern France beginning March 2024.



Viking Ocean Ship

New Ships:

- Viking recently announced an expansion of its river fleet in Southeast Asia with the new Viking Tonle. Designed for the Mekong River, the 80-guest vessel will join its identical sister ship, the Viking Saigon (debuted in 2022) and will sail between Kampong Cham, Cambodia and Mỹ Tho, Vietnam as part of Viking's popular 15-day Magnificent Mekong itinerary. The ship is under construction and is currently scheduled to debut in October 2025.
- With strong demand on the Nile River, Viking will add two additional sister ships, the Viking Hathor and the Viking Sobek, which will be delivered in 2024 and 2025, respectively. By 2025, Viking will have six ships on the Nile, offering the largest and most elegant fleet, by far.
- In 2025, Viking will also welcome a new Viking Longship on the Seine River. This identical sister ship will join our current fleet of four Viking Longships sailing the river, docking in our exclusive location in the heart of Paris, near the Eiffel Tower, offering an exceptional experience for travelers and coincide with the Paris Summer Olympics in 2024.

Ocean Voyages

New Itineraries:

- Beginning in 2024, Viking will introduce the Iconic Iceland, Greenland & Canada itinerary. This 15-day voyage will immerse guests in striking natural beauty and volcanic landscapes, while delving into the rich history of Viking exploration, allowing for leisurely strolls through the charming streets in ports of call.
- The Malta, Morocco & the Mediterranean itinerary will make its inaugural voyage in late 2024. The roundtrip journey from Barcelona spans seven countries in 16 days, featuring visits to UNESCO-designated sites, North African

cities, the Alhambra palace and other scenic wonders.

- Viking is set to unveil the Viking World Voyage I in 2025. The colossal 180-day adventure traverses the globe, encompassing 37 countries on an unforgettable voyage across six continents.
- Setting sail in 2025, Viking will embark on a new adventure with the Grand Australia Circumnavigation itinerary. The 32-day sailing takes guests on a voyage around Australia, offering the chance to uncover a harmonious blend of iconic natural wonders, lesser-known cultural gems, and captivating histories in cities such as Perth, Adelaide, and Melbourne. The itinerary includes exploration of Indonesian treasures Komodo and Bali.

New Ships:

- In late 2024, Viking will welcome a new sister ship to the Ocean fleet, the Viking Vela.

Expedition Voyages

Longitudinal World Cruises:

- In 2023, Viking launched the new intercontinental Longitudinal World Cruise collection, with expedition ships sailing between Antarctica and the Great Lakes. On these epic voyages, guests will achieve more travel milestones in a single journey than most people accomplish in a lifetime – from the heart of North America through engineering marvels like the Welland and Panama Canals, into the Chilean fjords and finally to Antarctica. Upcoming new 2024/2025 itineraries: Longitudinal World Cruise IV and Longitudinal World Cruise V.

Antarctica and the Arctic:

- Viking announced three new summer season expedition voyages in the Arctic set to debut in July 2025. The new itineraries range from 13 to 27 days and explore the polar north in Canada and Greenland. More specific itinerary information is available online: Into the Northwest Passage, Canada & Greenland Explorer and Canada & the Northwest Passage.
- More recently, Viking announced another wave of new itineraries in Antarctica for the 2025 season. The new 87-day From the Arctic to Antarctica itinerary will expand offerings to the "White Continent," sailing from Nuuk, Greenland to Ushuaia, Argentina. ■

WWW.VIKING.COM



Viking Expedition Ship



Photo: Andre Gallant

Baffin Island and Greenland

Circling the Midnight Sun with Adventure Canada

Family-owned and operated, expedition cruise company Adventure Canada specializes in facilitating exploration of the world's least visited and most amazing places – the Canadian Arctic, the awe-inspiring fjords of Greenland, the Isles of the north Atlantic and beyond.

Offering an adventurous range of small-ship expedition cruises, Adventure Canada complements each extraordinary itinerary with a hand selected expedition team – experts in their fields who are there to enhance each journey through their presence, knowledge, and craft. Emphasis is always placed on selecting expedition members from the areas visited to ensure that guests benefit from not only expert but local interpretation.

New for 2025, Adventure Canada is offering its first ever sailing of Baffin Island and Greenland: Circling the Midnight Sun – a brand new trip designed to immerse guests in the beauty and wonder of life in the High Arctic, chasing the magic of the 24-hour sun experienced North of the Arctic Circle. Hosted by revered Canadian

author James Raffan, this 12-day expedition is an in-depth exploration of the wonderful landscapes, people and culture of Nunavut, Canada and Greenland in the height of the Arctic summer.

This expedition begins in Nunavut's capital city, Iqaluit, at the head of Frobisher Bay. After transferring by Zodiac from Iqaluit Harbour to Ocean Endeavour, set sail towards the first stop, the uninhabited island of Kitigtung, also known in English as Lady Franklin Island, to marvel at the incredible geology of the Arctic Archipelago by sea. Explore the coastline by Zodiac, keeping watch for seabirds, polar bears, and marine life.

Continuing North, call on Southeast Baffin Island, spending time on the nuna – the Inuktitut name for land – hiking or just taking in the breathtaking surroundings. Adventure Canada always offer a variety of options for time on the land designed to suit the interests and abilities of their guests. On the next day call on the small but vibrant community of Panniqtuuq to be immersed in Inuit art in a variety of mediums such as print and fibre arts at the Uqqurmiut Inuit Arts Centre, known for its beautifully woven tapestries and prints.

Other opportunities of note include two-days spent exploring the stunning and culturally significant Cumberland Peninsula, an ecologically rich area sustaining the Inuit and their predecessors for thousands of years. Not only is this an ecologically and culturally rich place, it is also significant in the history of maritime explo-

ration. The Cumberland Sound area is even considered a potential missing link in the early search for the Northwest Passage. After exploring the Cumberland Peninsula, sail across the Davis Strait to Greenland, crossing the Arctic Circle.

In Kalaallit Nunaat, known in English as Greenland, take in spectacular coastal areas, enjoying many and varied opportunities for hiking, walking, photography, and more. Visit UNESCO World Heritage Site Illulissat Icefjord, renowned for its enormous icebergs and the source of many icebergs that make their way to the North Atlantic. Visit the Illulissat Icefjord Centre and enjoy the town with its varied museums, cafes, craft shops, and bustling harbour. Spend your last few days exploring the Sisimiut Coast, witness stunning glaciers, islands, and Fjords, before disembarking and waving a fond farewell to the beauty of the North in Kangerlussuaq, Greenland, for a charter flight to Toronto, Ontario. ■

ADVENTURECANADA.COM



Photo: Andre Gallant



Photo: Dennis Wemy

Polar Opposites: Penguins and Luxury

Quark Expeditions' Safari to South Georgia Island and Antarctica

Article and photography by Nicholas Kontis



I recently joined 132 other travelers on a 15-day voyage from Argentina to South Georgia Island and Antarctica. We flew from Buenos Aires to the southern port of Ushuaia for a half-day tour of Tierra del Fuego National Park. There, we boarded Quark Expeditions' new luxury ship, Ultramarine, purposely built to traverse tumultuous polar seas like the notoriously rough Drake Passage, the body of water that separates South America from Antarctica.

The planet's polar regions are largely unvisited, even by the most seasoned global explorers. This journey took us to scarcely touched South Georgia, for an unforgettable penguin safari, and to the icy southern continent of Antarctica.

Aboard the Ultramarine

Ultramarine, which accommodates 199 guests, is designed to go beyond the familiar in polar exploration routes. It is equipped with two twin-engine Airbus helicopters, which (weather permitting) can take guests high above the icecaps for spectacular views, and touch down on a landscape that few humans will ever visit.

The vessel offers a robust portfolio of adventure activities, spacious suites and breathtaking public spaces for outdoor wildlife viewing. An easily maneuverable deck plan enables easy access to zodiac craft, from which passengers make shore landings and get close-up perspectives on fauna.

The functional changing rooms ("ready rooms") are on Deck 2. Here, guests store parkas and mandatory muck boots before and after boarding zodiacs. On Deck 3 is the reception and hospitality area, as well as the Polar Boutique, where clothing, gear and souvenirs are offered for sale.

Deck 5 has the large Balena Restaurant with large tables to share with fellow travelers and cozy dining tables for couples. The wrap-around deck provides ample space for viewing marine life and mammals. In the state-of-the-art Ambassador Theater, the passionate and knowledgeable cruise team keeps guests riveted with lectures on history,

fauna and safety, as well as announcing the coming days' events.

Deck 7 has the smaller Bistro 487 restaurant, the fitness center, the Tundra Spa, and a sauna room with windows that provide sweeping views to sea. The cozy Panorama Lounge and Bar is a popular hangout during long days at sea, with a deck for nature-watching.

South Georgia Island

With 50% of the island covered in ice and snow, only a handful of scientists and researchers live on remote South Georgia Island. The "Galapagos of the Poles," as it is sometimes called, is remarkable for its abundance of wildlife, notably four species of penguins (which inhabit the island in incredible numbers) and more than 30 breeding bird species.

In a short time, I saw black-browed, grey-headed and light-mantled albatrosses; king, macaroni and gentoo penguins; blue-eyed shags, Southern elephant seals, and fur seals. Although the population of fur seals on the 100-mile-long island is estimated at 2 million, it is the king penguins that summon the most attention. Hundreds of thousands of these massive but flightless birds live in a colony on the Salisbury Plain.

The only settlement is the hamlet of Grytviken, once a whaling station. The 1922 grave of Ernest Shackleton, the charismatic polar explorer from Ireland, is well celebrated in a small cemetery that stands amid a collection of dilapidated mines.

Sea Days ... and Antarctica

Most days are spent at sea, from Ushuaia to South Georgia, Antarctica and back across the Drake Passage to Argentina. Weather conditions dictate the expedition schedule. Meanwhile, the cruise team conducts presentations and briefings in the Ambassador Theater. Most guests remain on the lookout for potential whale, penguin, seal and bird sightings on the observation decks; others take advantage of free time in the spa and sauna, or socialize in the Panorama Lounge.



Photo: Matthew Ludeman

Finally, on March 12, we hoisted the baby-blue Antarctic flag on a morning zodiac ride, completing an adventure that very few experience. The South Georgia penguins may have been a highlight, but it was the journey's pinnacle moment to set foot on the globe's southernmost continent.

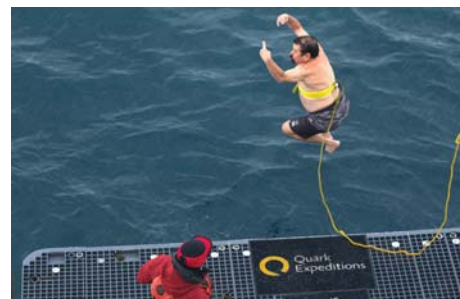
For bragging rights, I undertook an invigorating Polar Plunge. This ritual is enacted once on every polar voyage: Willing and hardy participants, wearing tethered harnesses, jump or cannonball off the ship's plank into the freezing Antarctic waters for a quick but safe dousing. Liquid courage is provided in the form of vodka.

Onboard meals

Meals were served three times daily in the Balena Restaurant and Bistro 487. On sea days, buffet breakfast (with an omelet station) was offered from 7 to 8:30 a.m.; lunch was served from 12:30 to 1:30 p.m., and dinner from 7:30 to 9 p.m. Between meals there were lectures or zodiac excursions. At after-dinner bar talks, guests mingled with the expedition team.

Executive chef Jorg Lehmann and his passionate team showcased such entrees as slow-roasted lamb rump, herb-crusted turkey breast, broiled barramundi fillet, Thai-style chicken (fried with lime and chilies), vodka-baked salmon, and surf and turf. Two dapper sommeliers from Buenos Aires brought their wine knowledge to the sailing, presenting unique pairings of Argentine wines to accompany meals. ■

WWW.QUARKEXPEDITIONS.COM





The Renaissance Esmeralda Resort and Spa at Indian Wells in Greater Palm Springs

by Alexandra Cohen

For many years I heard such wonderful things about The Greater Palm Springs (GPS) region, which continues to evolve as one of the world's most enticing resort destinations. We were fortunate enough to find accommodations at the Renaissance Esmeralda Resort and Spa at Indian Wells for a wonderful seven day stay

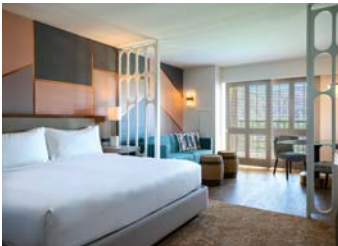
The resort, located 16 miles from Palm Springs Airport, underwent a multimillion-dollar redesign a few years ago, including new guestrooms and suites, a new multi-story lobby, an olive tree grove and new food and beverage areas and menus.

A brand of the Marriott International, Inc, this is a distinctive desert resort with a nod to the hotel's storied legacy and star-studded history. Guests can experience a sense of adventure through recreational activities ranging from high-energy to relaxing with options such as the intimate, full-service Spa Esmeralda; a state-of-the-art fitness center; tennis courts; two 18-hole championship style golf courses; bike rentals; and more.

The resort features spacious and beautifully appointed rooms and suites designed to complement distinction with comfort and convenience. Guests enjoy a selection of 560 rooms, including 103 suites, ranging from 420 to 2,879 square feet all with balconies and breathtaking views of the mountains, pool or golf course.

The resort boasts activities for every member of the family, from adventure seekers to those seeking a relaxed environment. Sample activities available to guests include swimming in the largest pool in the desert, a sandy beach, a fitness center with state-of-the-art facilities (including Peloton bikes), golf and tennis facilities and private pool-side cabanas. We experienced the latter for one day and it was nothing less than a piece of heaven. The same goes for the spa.

As for the poolside, the seating arrangements were extremely comfortable and water temperature just perfect. Pool staff could not do enough for us. We ordered drinks and lunch each day from our section.



Finally, a word on the dining experiences at the hotel. We enjoyed Cava and the Place Lobby Bar, both of which feature fresh and locally grown ingredients with seasonal menus. ■

WWW.RENESMERALDA.COM



Barceló Hotel Group Opens a 5-star Hotel in Malta, *Barceló Fortina Malta in Sliema*

Barceló Hotel Group announced the management of Barceló Fortina Malta, a modern, avant-garde design hotel owned by the Maltese company Fortina Investments Limited, in the Mediterranean archipelago of Malta. This is an iconic establishment located on the promenade of Sliema, which has been completely renovated and transformed into a modern 5-star hotel with 183 rooms and opened its doors as a 5-star hotel operated by the Barcelo Hotel Group on September 18, 2023.

A design hotel with spectacular views of Valletta

Located on the promenade of the town of Sliema, Barceló Fortina Malta is characterized by its modern and elegant architecture, as well as its panoramic views of the Mediterranean Sea and the fortified city of Valletta, declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1980.

The hotel opened its doors after an extensive renovation and expansion of the original facilities, which transformed it into a modern 5-star property with 183 rooms. The newly renovated five star property includes an Ina wellness center, reflex gym and a heated indoor pool, along with a stylish newly-built lido featuring two restaurants and a lounge bar which are additions to the culinary offerings available within the establishment. The hotel is conveniently located within walking distance of Malta's largest shopping center.

Barceló Fortina Malta will have six meeting rooms with a capacity of up to 250 people, fully equipped to host any type of event. This makes it the ideal hotel for those travelers visiting Malta for business purposes and wishing to extend their stay to enjoy the historic city and the hotel's facilities. ■

WWW.BARCELO.COM



Discovering Lausanne: A Tale of Two Palaces

by Olivia Liveng

Nestled on the shores of Lake Geneva, Lausanne, a gem in the Swiss Riviera, beckons travelers with its picturesque landscapes and rich cultural heritage. Known as the "Home of the Olympics," Lausanne is not just a scenic retreat but a hub of international sports history. The city's blend of natural beauty and historic charm, coupled with its luxury accommodations, makes it an irresistible destination for discerning travelers.

Lausanne Palace: A Blend of Historical Elegance and Modern Luxury

The Lausanne Palace is in the heart of this stunning city, a symbol of refined luxury and exceptional hospitality. The hotel's facade, a stunning example of early 20th-century archi-



tecture, sets the stage for opulence. The interior décor is a tasteful blend of sophistication and warmth, creating an inviting atmosphere for guests.

Accommodations at the Lausanne Palace are designed with an eye for luxury. Each room offers panoramic views of the cityscape and Lake Geneva, complemented by plush furnishings and modern amenities. The hotel's dining experiences are a culinary delight, ranging from sumptuous breakfasts to exquisite fine dining options, each promising a unique gastronomic adventure.

The spa and wellness center is a haven of tranquility, offering a range of treatments designed to rejuvenate the senses. The hotel's commitment to guest satisfaction is evident in the personalized and attentive service, ensuring every stay is memorable and comfortable.

Beau-Rivage Palace: Where 19th-Century Charm Meets 21st-Century Elegance

A short distance away, the Beau-Rivage Palace stands as a testament to 19th-century grandeur. Its Belle Epoch exterior and prime location on Lausanne's Ouchy marina offer guests a luxurious escape. The hotel's lake-view terrace, with its Riviera-like ambiance,

provides a serene setting for relaxation and contemplation.

The Beau-Rivage Palace excels in blending historical elegance with contemporary comforts. The rooms, decorated in traditional Swiss style, reflect the local French influence through their color schemes and fine tapestries. Modern renovations have added a touch of contemporary luxury, evident in the elegant brown color schemes and premium furnishings.

The hotel's dining options are a highlight, particularly the Anne-Sophie Pic restaurant, which offers an innovative take on modernist cuisine. The Cinq Mondes Spa and various fitness and relaxation facilities ensure guests have ample opportunities for rejuvenation and leisure.

The Beau-Rivage Palace's strategic location also makes it perfect for exploring Lausanne's old city and the picturesque Lavaux vineyards, with the concierge service providing expert guidance for these excursions.

Lausanne: A City of Contrasts and Luxuries

Lausanne is a city that offers something for everyone. From the historic Olympic Museum to the charming old city with its array of cafes, shops, and art galleries, there is no shortage of cultural experiences. The scenic beauty of Lake Geneva and the surrounding Alps provides a stunning backdrop to this vibrant city.

In conclusion, Lausanne's Lausanne Palace and Beau-Rivage Palace offer distinctly luxurious experiences in a city that effortlessly combines natural beauty with cultural richness. Whether seeking historical elegance or modern sophistication, visitors to these two iconic hotels in Lausanne are guaranteed an unforgettable stay in one of Switzerland's most enchanting cities. ■

WWW.LAUSANNE-PALACE.CH

WWW.BRP.CH/EN/HOME

WWW.LAUSANNE-TOURISME.CH/EN



Puntacana Resort & Club - *Tropical Paradise Found*



Accommodations

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

The Estates

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



Golf

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

Activities & Spa

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

Dining

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



Corporate Social Responsibility

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

Punta Cana International airport

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

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



EXPERIENCE LIFESTYLE

At Puntacana Resort & Club

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



PUNTACANA®
RESORT & CLUB

For more Information visit: www.puntacana.com



Alt Hotel Toronto Pearson Airport Handy, High-Tech, and Homey

by Susan Campbell

On a recent December trip to Aruba, it made more sense to fly via Toronto for much better fares, even if that meant flying from Montreal first and overnighing. The key was finding a hotel close to the airport for a very early morning connection that wouldn't break the bank. I did.

Alt Hotel Toronto Pearson Airport was recommended by fellow travel writers, but finding it wasn't as easy as I thought. It's listed as on the rail line of the terminal trains, but the entrance is not connected directly to the airport. Due to a lack of signage, I ended up doing the free Terminal Link loop twice until someone told me to get off at Viscount Station, take the escalator down, and go outside. Once I did, it was impossible to miss the gleaming tower of Alt Hotel waiting a few steps away.

I'd arrived late at night, cold and tired, and was looking forward to hunkering down for a

good night's sleep before my early departure. But the lobby lounge fireplace was so warm and enticing, and the sight and aroma of wood-fired pizza beckoning me from behind the bar of their Altcefera Café was too much to resist. I decided to refuel there with a hot slice and a cold beer, and the staff and fellow travelers were so friendly, I tarried far longer than planned. The café is open 24/7 with a stand alone mini-market with fresh top-quality meals to-go, and they serve full hot breakfast, too. Finally, I was off to check out my room.

This Alt Hotel has a collection of 153 rooms spanning 14 floors. Not overly spacious by design, the modular concept is out to optimize every nook and cranny in a sleek, no-nonsense way while still providing every possible convenience. The initial austerity is buffered by one big, color pop of signature art, and the floor-to-ceiling windows add an extra illusion of space. My room was on the 12th floor cor-

ner with a great view of the bustling airport below, but I found it sound-proofed enough that the jet noise didn't disturb my sleep. And what a slumber it was!

Of all the beds I've experienced in hotels around the world, this was one of the most comfortable ones I'd ever encountered. They didn't scrimp on quality when it comes to bedding. Other amenities include coffee nooks, plush robes, irons, hair dryers, and quality bath amenities, and every bathroom sports a large rain shower cubicle. Large, HD TVs with Chromecast and tons of places to charge your tech are also a given. Alt Hotels also offer the added benefit of flexible check-out times which is a huge plus, and free powerful WIFI, a 24/7 fitness centre, and conference spaces also add to the allure for business travelers. I really enjoyed my brief but sweet stay at this brand, and I will seek them out again.

Alt Hotels are owned by the Germain Group, and you'll find them in Winnipeg, Toronto, Ottawa, Quebec, Montreal, Brossard, Halifax, St. John's, Saskatoon, and Calgary. ■

WWW.GERMAINHOTELS.COM/EN/ALT-HOTEL





Divi Dutch Village Beach Resort Aruba

A Deluxe Delight for All Types of Travelers

by Susan Campbell

I've had an ongoing love affair with the Divi Resorts throughout the Caribbean for the past 15 years. And, I've had the good fortune to stay at almost all of them, often multiple times, on Aruba (there are five distinct Divi resorts on that island,) and on Bonaire, St. Maarten, and Barbados. (I have yet to visit their St. Croix resort, but it's on my bucket list for 2024.)

It's been a pleasure to watch the Divi brand progress over the years. Their signature tasteful tropical décor always evolving, ongoing property refreshments and amenity refinements, consistency of quality and service, and their unwavering welcoming vibe from friendly staff has never failed to impress. But the real beauty of this brand is their commitment to offer such an eclectic choice of holiday styles to suit so many different types of travelers. And my most recent stay at Aruba's Divi Dutch Village Beach Resort exemplified that commitment- all in the same location!

The Divi Dutch complex is a collection of three-storey apartment style buildings located directly behind the low-rise Tamarijn all-inclusive resort (also part of Divi,) that snakes along a stellar stretch of gorgeous Druif Beach. Though the village accommodations are not directly on the beach, every room is a very short walk to the sea. Guests also have easy access to the entire half-mile stretch of stellar sand that connects the Divi Aruba all-inclusive complex to sister resort Tamarijn, and the community is backed by the Divi Golf Course.

Accommodations at the Dutch Complex were designed with time-share and extended stays in mind with full kitchens, large well-appointed rooms, often with multiple bedrooms and fold-out couch options, and everything one would need to entertain including access to community BBQs, laundry facilities, and more. But in the past few years, they've also added an all-inclusive option that gives you unlimited access to food and drink at 11 restaurants and nine

bars between the three properties Divi Aruba, Tamarijn, and their own dedicated Tiki Pool Bar. If that sounds like a lot of choices, it is, but no worries about getting around as you are connected by one of my favourite things about the entire Divi Aruba community – complimentary chauffeured shuttles! I adore bouncing around in them from property to property, and better yet, they also take you to the shops and alfresco live music at the Alhambra Mall and its glitzy casino! They also transport you to Windows on Aruba, Divi's glamorous stand alone gourmet dining spot that's also open to the public.

I adored my most recent accommodation there, a cool split-level abode on the ground floor steps from the hot tub, the poolside Tiki Café and the lively swim-up bar and a few more steps to the sea. And there's plenty to do beyond the beach like tennis, pickleball, motorized water sports, coaster bikes, plus a glassed-in beachfront fitness centre and the island's only rock-climbing tower. There are also two excellent spas, and families will love the Sea Turtles Club for kids, too. There really is something for every type of traveler at Divi Aruba's Dutch Village. ■

WWW.DIVIRESORTS.COM





The Bellustar Tokyo, Tokyu Kabukicho Tower, Tokyo

Article and photography by Steve Gillick

The public transit directions are relatively easy. Arrive at Tokyo's Shinjuku Station. Walk a short distance until you see the snarling face of Godzilla, and then turn left toward the soaring, modern entertainment and hotel complex, the Tokyu Kabukicho Tower that opened on May 19, 2023. Here, the energetic vibe of the Hotel Groove Shinjuku occupies the 19th to 38th floors, while the serenity of the Bellustar Tokyo embraces floors 39 to 44, with the heavenly 'Penthouses in the Sky' on floors 45 to 47.

Godzilla may be a star attraction in this part of the city, but it's only one of the many landmarks visible from the fantastic heights of the Groove and Bellustar accommodations. If it's a first visit to the city, there's hardly a need to visit the iconic Tokyo SkyTree and other Tokyo

observation platforms with your own in-room panoramic views.

The Hotel Groove Shinjuku, A PARKROYAL Hotel, is a Four Star Lifestyle property geared to the interests of leisure travellers who will be out and about exploring Tokyo but looking for comfort and relaxation at the end of the day. The 538 rooms from the 20th to the 38th floor include great views, twin or King beds, small working desks, a Marshall Bluetooth speaker, and environmentally-conscious amenities (paper toothbrushes and razors).

The Bellustar Tokyo, a Pan Pacific Hotel, is a five-star luxury experience. The 97 rooms and 5 penthouses were designed for world travelers who enjoy creature comforts in a quiet, peaceful, and unique hotel environ-

ment that differentiates itself from the plethora of corporate hotels in the area. Certainly, the name Bellustar, or 'Beautiful Star', and the peaceful, soothing music in the 18th-floor reception area set the tone.

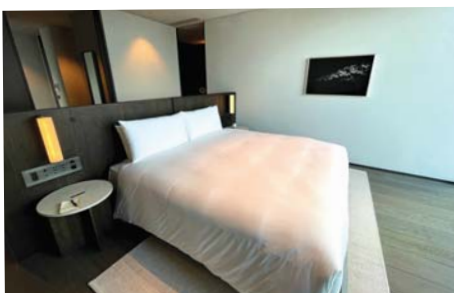
The room concept is modern but still very Japanese in character: wooden floors, sofa cushions with Kimono designs, a yoga mat in the room, floor-to-ceiling picture windows, and large bathrooms with deep Japanese-style tubs appropriately positioned to soak in the city views.

Keiji Ashizawa, a master of harmonized simplicity in his design, worked on the details of the Bellustar's five Penthouses to create a 'Tenku-scape', a celestial sky-scape incorporating the elements of the four seasons (Flowers, Birds, Wind, and Moon). The two two-story penthouses and three one-level penthouses evoke impeccable attention to detail and focus on those incredible vistas that have been known to include Mt. Fuji on clear days.

Restaurants on the 45th floor feature French cuisine or Sushi/Teppanyaki.

Shinjuku is one of Tokyo's most dynamic neighbourhoods, featuring restaurants, bars, shopping, exploring, and entertainment. Kabukicho Tower adds to this dynamism, making a stay at the Bellustar Tokyo a memorable treat for the senses. ■

WWW.BELLUSTARTOKYO.COM





Songtsam Linka Retreat Lake Basong Tso

A Low-Carbon Hotel, is the First Property in the Tibet Province of China to be Awarded the Prestigious Green Globe Certification

Songtsam, an award-winning luxury boutique hotel collection and Destination Management Company, located in the Tibet and Yunnan Provinces of China, announced that its first low-carbon hotel, the Songtsam Linka Retreat Lake Basong Tso, was awarded the prestigious Green Globe Certification. This property, Songtsam's 16th, and largest property (122-rooms and suites) is the first Green Globe Certified hotel in Tibet.

In terms of sustainable development, in addition to a policy of energy conservation and emission reduction, Songtsam is also committed to supporting the economic development of the local community while simultaneously making a conscious effort to preserve the rich cultural traditions. Songtsam's policy of hiring employees from the local communities (at least 120 jobs for villagers) will contribute to the common prosperity of the region. Songtsam Linka Retreat Lake Basong Tso will also give 5% of the property's operating income to the adjacent Jieba village every year.



Green Globe, in making the announcement noted that, "Songtsam Linka Retreat Lake Basong Tso stands as a shining example of sustainable tourism. As the first property in Tibet certified by Green Globe, this enchanting property seamlessly integrates responsible practices into every aspect of its operations, setting a remarkable standard for environmentally conscious hospitality. This property also serves as a cultural bridge offering multi-faceted experiences that combine authentic architecture, cultural workshops, proximity to spiritual sites, interaction with local communities, educational resources, and opportunities to appreciate Tibetan art and traditions."

Lake Basong Tso Area & Jieba Village

Songtsam Linka Retreat Lake Basong Tso is located in the historic Jieba village. The villagers keep the living traditions of the Gongbu Tibetans providing Songtsam guests a rare opportunity to witness age-old Tibetan customs. During festivals, the villagers go around the lake, race horses, and dance. On weekdays, the elderly villagers are often dressed in gorgeous and heroic Gongbu Tibetan costumes.

Songtsam Linka Retreat Lake Basong Tso

At an altitude of 3,480 meters (approx. 11,417 feet) the Basong Tso luxury suite and other room types showcase the ingenious fusion of Tibetan architecture and modern design. The guest rooms range in size from 36 to 105 square meters (approx. 387 to 1,130 sq ft), and each bedroom is equipped with a diffused oxygen supply system.

Architecture & Design

The design and layout of the hotel buildings echo the Cuogao Ancient Village, which is also on the shore of Lake Basong Tso. Cuogao Ancient Village completely retains the architectural structure and village layout of the Gongbu Tibetans. Songtsam took an active role in the protection and renewal of Cuogao Ancient Village. The design of the Songtsam Linka Retreat Lake Basong Tso, was inspired by the settlement style of the Cuogao Village. The staggered heights of the buildings expand the viewing angle as well as make the building complex itself appear as an integral part of the surrounding landscape. The structure of the upper wood and lower stones of the building complex and the design of the overall moving line are also inspired by the long-standing life wisdom of the Gongbu Tibetans, who used the architectural space to build the connection between people and even echo the relationship between people and nature.

The structure and appearance of the hotel building are a tribute to the local cultural history of Basong Tso, while the color schemes inside the hotel reflect an extension of the natural scenery of Lake Basong Tso itself. From the public area to the guest rooms, the use of different shades of green reflect the seasonal changes of Lake Basong Tso.

Sustainable Development & "Zero-Carbon" Hotel Goal

In 2022, Songtsam and Siemens Energy signed a strategic cooperation framework agreement to jointly promote green and low-carbon circular development in rural areas. The Songtsam Linka Retreat Lake Basong Tso, a low-carbon hotel, is a result of this partnership. Energy consumption is offset by self-generated electricity, and carbon emissions are reduced to a minimum by using the abundant solar energy in Tibet to power the hotel.

Lake Basong Tso Activities

There are many opportunities for Songtsam guests to experience the spirituality and nature of the surroundings. One can opt to go on an escorted walk to the Xincuogou hidden in the deep valley of the high gorge. Along the way, there are snow-capped mountains and glaciers, and groups of yaks wandering leisurely in the grassland covered with flowers; hiking enthusiasts can go upstream to find Zhong Lake at the end of the river, or stroll nearby the idyllic Zhala River. The mysterious and tranquil Doqin Monastery is a spiritual pilgrimage in itself; A visit to the Cuogao Ancient Village provides the visitor with an opportunity to appreciate the charm of Gongbu architecture, wood carvings, and participate in a plant art prints handicraft workshop. ■

[HTTPS://WWW.SONGTSAM.COM/EN](https://www.songtsam.com/en)

VILLA PARADISO

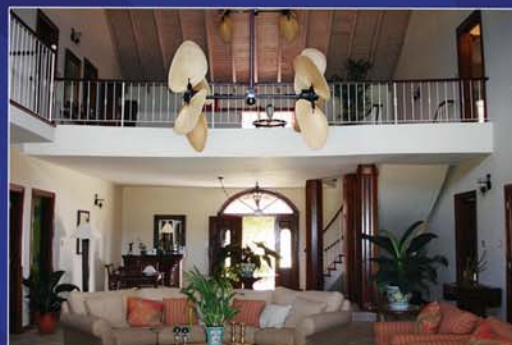


*Your Escape
Jamaica*

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



M Resort Spa Casino Las Vegas Retreat Away from the Fray

by Randy Mink

From our room's floor-to-ceiling windows, panoramic views of the Las Vegas Strip confirmed that all the glitz was clearly within our grasp. Though the best of Sin City lay right at our fingertips, it was comforting to know we could keep the Strip's carnival atmosphere at arm's length, as our hotel was out by itself in the desert, 10 miles south of the fabled corridor. Even diehard Vegas fans say the city's heartbeat can become too rich for the blood.

M Resort Spa Casino was our safety valve. A self-contained, upscale retreat on a 90-acre plot in the Nevada community of Henderson, it's a bit removed from the frenzy yet in the same league as the big-name Strip proper-

ties. Whenever my adult son and I returned to our suburban estate after spending time in town, we felt a sense of order, of calm, of being home. Public areas are spacious and sparkling, and almost everything—casino, bars, restaurants—is on the lobby level.

As official headquarters hotel of the NFL's Las Vegas Raiders and other professional teams, the 390-room resort plays up its sports connections with football- and hockey-themed eateries. When we entered the lobby, we couldn't help notice the elaborate water wall with statues of a player from football's Raiders and the Henderson Silver Knights, an American Hockey League affiliate of the NHL's Vegas Golden Knights.

Soon after arrival, we went to the top (16th) floor for Asian fusion cuisine at Jayde@16. From our table overlooking the city lights, I savored honey walnut prawns and washed it down with Japanese beer. My son went for the sushi and sashimi.

Knight Time Hockey Bar, bordering the casino floor, is the perfect spot for watching hockey. From the bar or adjacent tables, patrons can view the NHL and other sports TV channels. A video column shows hockey play, and walls are adorned with Silver Hawks paraphernalia. The beers-on-tap menu features 96 brews from around the world, including five from Canada. For lunch we enjoyed Montreal Smoked Steak Poutine. (One evening a hotel shuttle took us to T-Mobile Arena, about 20 minutes away, for a Golden Knights-Montreal Canadiens match.)

Entering Raiders Tavern & Grill, guests pass through a shrine-like display of autographed footballs and helmets under glass. The decor mirrors team colors—silver and black—and Raiders memorabilia is everywhere. First Down Butter Cake, a winning dessert item garnished with date jam and toffee sauce, comes in the shape of a football.

The names of two restaurants—Anthony's Prime Steak & Seafood and Marinelli's Pasta Bar—are nods to M Resort founder and former owner Anthony Marnell III. Likewise, the resort takes its name from his surname initial.

The expansive M Pool area, equipped with cabanas and daybeds, features two heated, infinity-edge pools and two hot tubs. Doubling as an entertainment piazza, the sprawling, palm-studded space hosts headliner concerts.

The resort, owned by PENN Entertainment, soon will break ground on a second tower that will hold an additional 384 guest rooms.

A shimmering oasis not unlike a mirage in the desert, M Resort is simply Marvelous (with a capital M). ■

WWW.THEMRESORT.COM





Visions of Yesteryear Flavor Westgate Las Vegas Resort & Casino

Barry Manilow headlines at this luxury property adjacent to the convention center

by Randy Mink

As soon as I walked into the lobby of Westgate Las Vegas Resort & Casino, I saw the bronze statue of Elvis Presley and knew this was the Vegas base camp for me. There he was in bell-bottom pants holding a microphone, a guitar slung around his shoulders.

Titled “Elvis: The King of Las Vegas,” the sculpture is a favorite selfie spot and reminder that the showroom of this storied place (formerly the Hilton) hosted his eight-year run of sold-out performances from 1969-1976.

Being of a certain generation, I was looking to tap into the Vegas of yesteryear during my stay in town, and the Westgate provided just the dose of nostalgia I needed. Prowling the public spaces on the first floor, I had a field day

inspecting the framed posters, artwork and black-and-white photos of stars who entertained there way back when—legends like Barbra Streisand, Liberace, Ann-Margret, Dionne Warwick, Tom Jones and Barry Manilow.

Entertainment Options

Manilow, now 80 years old, performs at the Westgate Las Vegas Resort & Casino today. The crooner’s residency continues through 2024, with 15 three-night engagements scheduled through December. His show features favorites like “Mandy,” “Copacabana,” “Can’t Smile Without You” and other hits from the 1970s and 80s.

Next to the theater, the gift shop sells every-

thing from Barry-themed drinkware to throw pillows and rubber duckies. Or how about a Barry bobblehead?

Manilow’s image adorns an exterior wall of the mammoth, 2,956-room resort and flashes on the 28-story outdoor video sign, said to be the largest freestanding sign of its kind in the world. His picture even graced my room key card.

The resort’s playbill also features Frankie Valli and The Four Seasons, another blast from the past. Valli, who turns 90 on May 3, is set for several appearances in 2024.

The Westgate Cabaret presents comedy and magic acts, plus musical shows like “Soul of Motown,” a tribute to vocal groups such as The Temptations and Smokey Robinson and The Miracles.

In one corridor, near the giant game arcade, resort guests can play entertainer in a room equipped with a grand piano that invites passersby to sit down and pose at the keyboard.

Recreation and Dining Choices

Outdoors on the third level, resort guests can relax in a cabana at the huge swimming pool. Other amenities include tennis and pickleball courts, a fitness center and full-service spa.

The property’s most eye-popping dining venue is the cavernous space encompassing Benihana’s Japanese steakhouse, Rikki Tiki Sushi and Silk Road Asian Bistro. The village setting is landscaped with statuary, lush foliage and a koi pond. Fresco Italiano offers tastes of Italy, and Edge is a classic American steakhouse.

Clustered by the Race & Sports SuperBook, the world’s largest such facility, are Nacho Tacos, Drafts Sports Bar & Grill and Cordovano Joe’s Pizza. Nearby is Fresh Buffet.

Westgate Las Vegas Resort & Casino is located off the north end of the Las Vegas Strip, next to the city’s convention center. The heart of the Strip is just a five-minute monorail ride away. ■

WWW.WESTGATE.COM





Luxury in Lakeland: The Storrs Hall Hotel

Article and photography by Nicholas Kontis

England's Lake District ("Lakeland") has lured travelers since the Victorian era. Named a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2017, it is the United Kingdom's premier national park district, attracting nearly 20 million visitors each year. Its fame springs from the 19th-century romantic verse of lyrical poets William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Robert Southey, all of whom found solace and inspiration in the picturesque backdrop and rocky hilltops.

Storrs Hall, a luxurious four-star hotel, overlooks a splendid stretch of Lake Windermere's southern shoreline—just a five-minute drive from the tourist village of Bowness with its shops, pubs and restaurants.

A hotel since 1895, the handsome manor dates from 1797, when it was constructed as

a lakeside villa by Yorkshire landowner Sir John Legard. Later, Liverpool merchant John Bolton extended the property to 17 acres with manicured gardens amidst a forested park. Bolton added huge, lattice-framed windows that gaze across Windermere's waters, welcoming copious amounts of glistening lake light.

Style and rooms

Besides its indulgent lakefront grounds, the independently run manor, mimicking a country estate, has a sublime interior that is at once stately yet relaxed. Cabinets and nooks flaunt granite busts and model clipper ships, some of the vestiges of original furnishings auctioned off by previous owners.

Today Storrs Hall has 35 rooms, including six adults-only woodland cabins with Japanese-

style hot tubs adjacent to the waterfront. The former boathouse has been converted into a lakefront suite with a hot tub and fire pit. The 28 rooms in the main Georgian-style carriage house are period classics with contemporary features such as king-size beds, chaise longues, smart TVs, coffee makers, and bathrooms with free-standing baths and walk-in showers.

Marriage ceremonies are held outside the stone temple gazebo, and three rooms are licensed for weddings.

In decades past, lake steamers would pick up and drop off guests at the Storrs Hall pier. That's no longer an option, but the estate's low-key intimacy remains in touch with its ethos of Victorian etiquette.

Dining and activities

Chef Andrew Beaton, a native Cumbrian, helms the Storrs Hall kitchen. Breakfast and dinner, served in the Lake Edge Restaurant, feature a locally sourced, seasonal menu. Seafood is taken from nearby Morecambe Bay, lamb from the Cumbrian mountains and Yew Tree Farm, once owned by author Beatrix Potter.

The ornate, mahogany Tower Bar serves curated cocktails and light meals in a serene traditional pub setting. Or enjoy the quintessential British experience of afternoon tea, with homemade pastries and clotted-cream scones.

Windermere is England's largest lake, and its picturesque setting amid the Cumbrian mountains lends itself to such adventures as bicycling, guided walks, waterfall hikes, rock climbing, off-road touring and even golf. Watersports, naturally, are most popular; they include swimming, paddle boarding, kayaking, boat and ferry tours. Culture vultures can tour craft breweries or explore William Wordsworth's daffodil gardens and the World of Beatrix Potter (and Peter Rabbit).

"You can sense that people are relaxing the minute they arrive," said Storrs Hall general manager Andrew Nicholson. "It is such a tranquil environment." ■

WWW.STORRSHALL.COM





To Barbie or Not to Barbie in La Belle Province

by Cherie DeLory

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

Love her or leave her, Barbie is here to stay. In fact, Barbie is hotter than ever and pink is the new black. Everything seems to be coming up pink on the heels of last summer's splash hit Barbie movie, the highest grossing film of 2023. Now, Canada's first Barbie Dream Suite is available for all generations of Barbie fans.

The luxury hotelier, Fairmont Queen Elizabeth in Montreal, Quebec has teamed with the iconic fashion doll's creator, Mattel, to design



a posh 1200-square foot spacious pink pad fit for a, well, Barbie! It's part of Fairmont's Beyond Limits themed suite offering to allow guests an immersive experience into Barbie's glamorous world. The Mattel and Fairmont partnership ends September 30, 2024 and celebrates Barbie's upcoming 65th birthday and the hotel's 66th anniversary.

The adventure begins on the 17th floor. Look for the conspicuous pink door at the end of the corridor and prepare to think pink. Enter a spacious foyer with shades of pink to be discovered at every turn. You won't have to look far to notice the fun details that make this sensational suite feel like you've entered your childhood Barbie Dream House.

The living and dining room is where the magic happens and it feels as if time is standing still. The clock above the sofa is stopped at 3:09 to represent Barbie's birthday, March 9th. Flip the light switch to get the party started. There's a sparkling disco ball, an old-school vinyl record player to spin the Barbie movie soundtrack, and a vintage pink telephone to call in your bragging rights.

The windows open to the outdoor air and a fabulous view of the Mary, Queen of the World Cathedral/Cathedrale Marie-Reine-du-Monde across the street where you can't help but notice the church's majestic copper green dome. This is a pad Barbie and her friends would be tickled pink to hang out in.

Heck, I want to live here, let alone spend a night for a special occasion. There's a chic powder room and both bedrooms have an ensuite with a pink hair dryer and flat iron. Open the closets to find cute pink velvet hangers and a pink safe box for your valuables.

Nods to Barbie abound; with photos of travel adventures in Montreal, doll displays and pretty coffee table books to brush up on Barbie trivia and history. The pink doesn't stop in the kitchenette, where you'll find a special dog dish should you bring your pooch along for the celebration.

A perk is access to the Gold Floor Lounge on the 21st floor, which means breakfast and all the cappuccinos and hot chocolates topped with whipped cream your heart desires up to 10 pm. A hearty selection of canapés are served from 5 to 7pm, followed by sweets at 8 pm. The pool is open until 10pm; adults only from 8 to 10 pm, and the gym is open all night.

Choose from Dream Suite Packages starting at \$1,499 per night for up to four guests. Enjoy Barbie Tea and Cocktails and Mocktails, Barbie Spa, PJ Soiree, and Sweets Shop. The VIP Dream Suite includes airport chauffeur service with a driver, whose name could be Ken. Look for the white limo and "Ken" will be sporting a pink bow tie.

Porter flies to Montreal-Trudeau International Airport from both Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport, located on the Toronto Islands, and Pearson International Airport located in Mississauga (approximate flight time 1.5 hours). A free Porter shuttle bus operates between the Billy Bishop Airport and the Fairmont Royal York Hotel, adjacent to Union Station. ■

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The Calgary Stampede Shines in Western Canada!

Article and photography by Michael Morcos

Having visited so many countries on so many continents throughout the decades, it was time for a taste of Canadiana, and nothing could be more Canadian than the Calgary Stampede. Stampede, Rodeo, Fair, Carnival, call it what you will, it is one heck of a show with something for everyone of all ages.

Of course, the crown jewel is the rodeo but add to it Indigenous cultural performances, amusement park rides and games, livestock shows, agricultural exhibitions, endless food stalls and restaurants, art galleries, Grandstand live music shows, dance performances, fireworks and packed nightly dance halls and you have what is often called the best outdoor show on earth. And I would strongly agree!

This would be my first time to Calgary, and I would experience exactly what I had been told about this beautiful and exciting western city. Yes, this was an authentic cowboy city, people did wear cowboy hats, checkered shirts, blue jeans and leather boots and yes, locals were genuinely happy, smiling, open, and ready with greetings all around.

Before my three-day visit, I would watch the daily rodeo shows on TV. I was excited that after all these decades of travel, I would finally check off the Stampede from my bucket list. Although the visit was short, the thrills came one after another and the memories would last a lifetime.

If I wasn't already excited, walking around the city at Stampede time ratcheted up the feeling to "10". Though now a huge, renowned

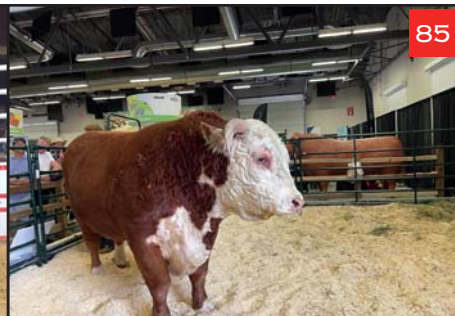
event, the original Calgary Stampede was held in 1912 as a small rodeo and agricultural fair where locals would congregate and mingle. Since then, it has developed into a 10-day event that celebrates Western heritage, culture, and traditions.

We were surrounded by the ambiance, style and music of this annual rodeo and exhibition event held in Calgary, Alberta, which has now become one of the largest and most famous rodeos in the world, attracting visitors from around the globe and an economic engine for the city.

Food, food, and more food

Food galore is an understatement; there was just about every sort of delight to satisfy any palette. A visitor would never starve at the





Stampede, to the contrary, you must be disciplined in case you get mistaken for a big round barrel after indulging in a cornucopia of offerings. Its like being in a TV show for food! When the choices include cotton candy, corndogs, turkey drumsticks, fries, fine cheeses, and Alberta beef its easy to be lost in a world of goodies! There were literally food stalls and sit-down restaurants less than a minute away with mouth-watering delicacies to fill all desires, and we would try helpings all day long!

Happy Birthday Chuckwagon races

Not only does Calgary have the best chuckwagon races in the world, but this would also be a special year as it was the 100th anniversary for what must be the most popular event of the Stampede. Watching the race from the best seats in the grandstand proved very exciting as first there is the introduction and then off they went around the track and to watch these teams of horses gallop at full speed heading to the finish line was amazing. The thunderous sound was deafening, and I would find out the horses used were like athletes and where chosen for their high energy levels and truly loved the attention and high demand of the race.

Besides the races, there were other various rodeo events, such as steer wrestling, barrel racing, bull riding, and tie-down roping, but the races were hard to beat.

The Stars

It's all about the horses, our host Chance Flad would explain as we headed for a tour of barns. They are the stars and are treated as such with a perfect diet and continuous veterinary care. I would find out behind the grounds there are hundreds of horses and

cattle. I thought to myself that takes a lot of coordination to get the right horses and steer on time to the show grounds and without any hitches, they did.

Behind the scenes

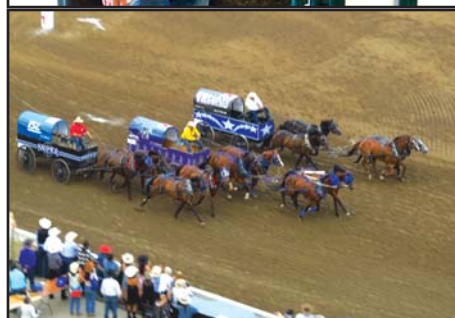
With so much happening at the rodeo, it was not until we were permitted to see the cowboys and cowgirls resting or preparing or even getting medical attention that I realized these performers had a hard life but at the same time loved what they did. Imagine traveling from far-away places across Canada and the USA for only a few seconds of riding. This must take a lot of discipline and dedication and the winners must have feelings of absolute elation when they succeed!

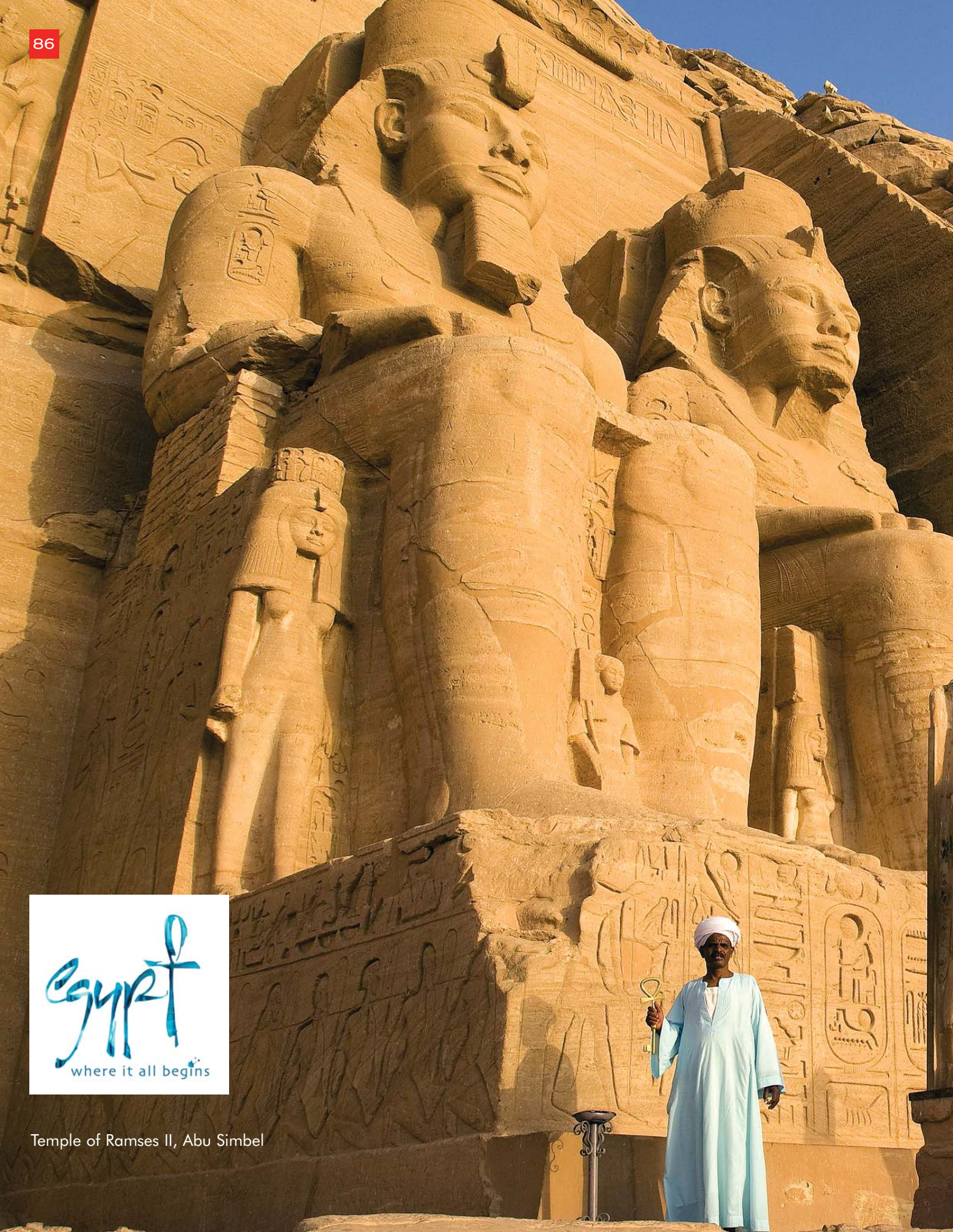
The perfect stay

Visitors to Calgary could not be better rested and refreshed then staying at the Calgary Fairmont Palliser. This grand dame of a hotel is in the center of the city and only a few minutes' walk to the grounds. The historic building was warm, inviting, clean and meticulously kept. My large corner suite was cozy, comfortable, richly decorated and had all the modern amenities one could want and expect in this opulent property.

On our two days at the stampede, we would be thrilled and delighted by the host of activities and events. The grounds of the last weekend were packed with lots of energy and excitement, and as I would understand, this was a normal day. The Calgary Stampede is proudly Canadian and a must to anyone looking for a slice of western culture! ■

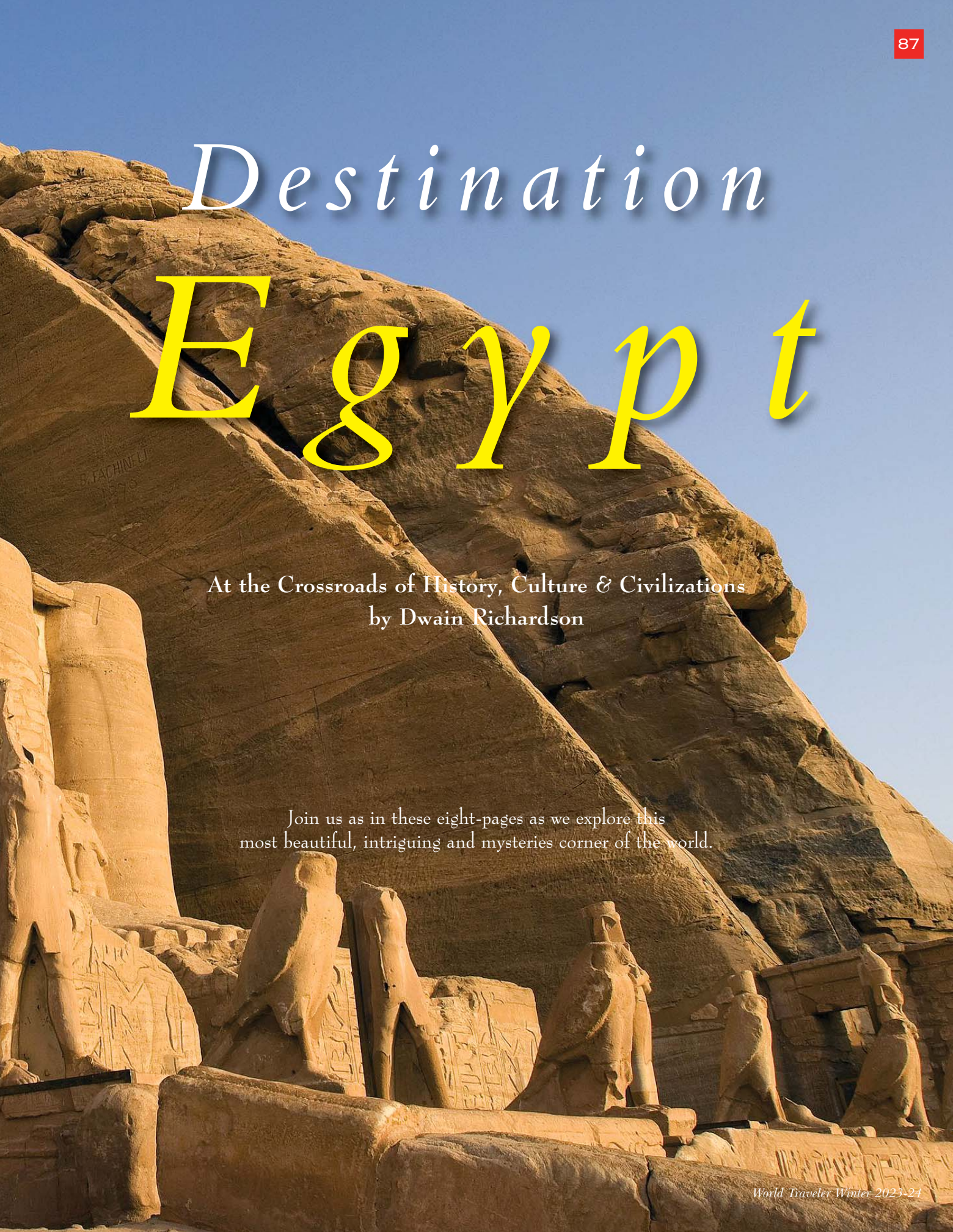
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Egypt
where it all begins

Temple of Ramses II, Abu Simbel



Destination Egypt

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

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



King Tutankhamun's Mask

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Four leading geological regions are pres-

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

CAIRO

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

Great Pyramid of Giza

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

Great Sphinx of Giza

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



Egyptian Museum of Antiquities

89

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



Mosque of Muhammad Ali

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



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

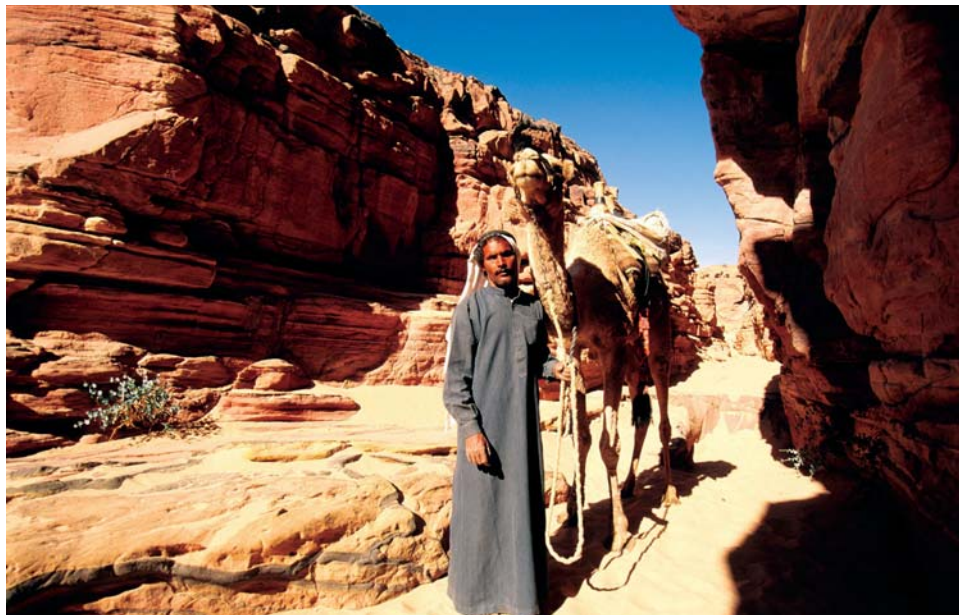
The Hanging Church

(St. Virgin Mary's Coptic Orthodox Church)

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

Khan el-Khalili

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



SINAI PENINSULA

Ras Muhammed National Park

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

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

St. Catherine's Monastery

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

Sharm-el-Sheikh

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

NILE RIVER

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

Luxor

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





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

Valley of the Kings

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

Karnak Temple Complex

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

Aswan

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

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

Abu Simbel Temples

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

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

THE WESTERN DESERT

Siwa Oasis

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

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

With respect to culture, Berber inhabitants

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

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

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

Mud-brick houses in Shali, an old town

Desert sand dunes south of Siwa

Siwa salt lake

Temple of the Oracle of the Amun

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Nashville Shows Up!

by David J. Cox

As we drove through the city from the airport, I was struck by both the city's cleanliness and visual beauty!

Nashville has been undergoing a renaissance since several disasters in the early 2000s destroyed much of the core. They have since become a modern day "boom town." My exploration would uncover many of the new attractions while honoring what made the city famous in the first place: Music!

The Embassy Suites is steps away from the convention centre, Country Music Hall of Fame, and the music filled Honky Tonk row, this lavish property has enough to keep a visitor indoors by enjoying the rooftop pool and

bar, the restaurant, or the fantastic guest suite. A 'Welcome to Nashville' Cocktail Reception in a 30th Floor room overlooking the cityscape offered food and wonderful views.

With the most impressive wall of Whiskies I have ever seen, the Black Rabbit welcomed us with a multi course meal that included great braised Brussel sprouts, a delicious couscous, and a melt-in-the-mouth lemon-butter chicken. A great atmosphere and fine dining – a good start to the trip!

Just down the street from our hotel was one of the most marvellous streets I have had the pleasure of discovering. As I stood at the intersection, I could hear a live band, but something was off as I heard conflicting music. I moved south and I see another venue with another live band! I ended up walking up and down and saw over thirty bars (Honky Tonks) pumping live music into the streets from 10am to 3am. The best part is that it does not cost a thing. Long live the Honky Tonk Highway!

After visiting the Nashville Visitor Center, we enjoyed a guided tour of the city centre. This would be one of my favorite activities as the

tour was narrated by Leonard, who had a story for every locale as well as suggestions for food and leisure.

The Country Music Hall of Fame & Museum has an outdoor walk of fame and floor after floor of recordings, outfits, and other memorabilia celebrating the immense impact of country music. There were so many interesting sights and sound, my favorite being the temporary exposition on California Rock.

Famous for producing what is known as "The Nashville Sound.", the Historic RCA Studio B has seen hit after hit performed and recorded within its walls. We stood on the same spot that Elvis Presley stood to record his hits!





The National Museum of African American Music (NMAAM) is a must see. With a ton of interactive exhibits and a meandering layout, it explores the influence African American composers have had on all genres of music from classical to country to jazz and hip hop. The Museum also offers guests the chance to engage in a rap battle, produce songs and sing with a choir.

Another highlight was a tour of the Ryman Auditorium, a National Historic Landmark. Originally a church, and still replete with wooden pews, it is known as the Mother Church of Country Music and was the home of the Grand Ole Opry for decades.

The Listening Room's wide stage hosts musicians of all levels. Their acoustic sets were fantastic, and the ambiance of music aficionados made the night quite special. Food and beverages were available, and I enjoyed the local beer quite a bit.



City Visit

The Frothy Monkey cafe chain has become a staple since 2004 through good food, drinks, and a great ambiance. Each location is housed in historic buildings, ours was an old Hosiery factory and offers a unique character.

The L&L Market has boutiques offering everything from local goods and gifts to lattes and clothing. Marathon Village is a wonderful model for the re-purposing of old factory buildings as they have built retail spaces including the History Channels' American Pickers, a Jack Daniels store and a museum containing several rare Marathon vehicles. ABLE, a store opened by women to provide living wages and safe working conditions for the women making their pieces, offers leather goods, jewelry and more while supporting female designers and creators.

The Alan LeQuire Studio offers a peek at this artist's miniature busts and various other pieces, including mock-ups of his immense statue of Athena and the impressive "MUSICA" statue conveying the importance of music to Nashville.

At Nelson's Green Brier Distillery, which re-opened 105 years after Prohibition forced its closure, we enjoyed a gourmet lunch, a tour of the facility and a tasting of their award winning small-batch Bourbons developed from the original family recipes.

The Grand Ole Opry has seen countless stars of the music industry grace its stage, and this night we saw some great music, including a performance by Lady A. Our visit included seats and a backstage tour filled with stories and looking at legendary photographs throughout!

That night we stayed at the W Nashville, located in the hipster neighbourhood called the Gulch. Its huge pool was a highlight, and the rooms were luxurious and well cared for throughout the stay. It was a treat for the senses with a large shower and one of the most comfortable beds I have ever slept in. A good thing too, as the next day was to be filled with more activities.

Walking Tour

Once just a food truck, the popular Biscuit Love is a locally owned family business providing delicious breakfasts, including their gravy covered biscuits and fluffy pancakes.

A walking tour of Upper Broadway and the Gulch started at the Frist Art Museum located in Nashville's former U.S. Post Office building, an art-deco masterpiece itself. It offers rotating art shows throughout the year with an artistic educational facility upstairs.



95

Carter Vintage Guitars contains more instruments than you can imagine. Founded in 2012 by Christie and Walter Carter, they had a vision of providing a welcoming place for instruments and the musicians who play them. We took in the vast range of guitars and even got to strum a few chords.

At the Tennessee Brew Works, the food was great, but the real treat was the varied collection of high-quality craft beer. The brewmaster pays homage to the land, traditions, and culture of Tennessee through their All-Tennessee grain beers.

Third Man Records is a combination record store, concert space and recording studio. Musician Jack White opened the Nashville location in 2009 and has the world's only live venue with direct-to-vinyl recording capabilities. We got lucky as there was a live concert and our guide showed us all the great nooks and crannies – including the re-created motel motif in the warehouse!

At Paddywax Candle Bar where we had an opportunity to make our own personalized candles. It was a lot of fun and let us explore our own creative juices.

Our final Nashville adventure would be a full course meal at the 404 Kitchen. Run by acclaimed chef Matt Bolus, his creations always use the highest quality ingredients that are often from local suppliers, farms, and distillers.

Music, food and country charm, Nashville is a warm and welcoming city filled with history and an exciting energy. ■

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A Golden Visit to the Presidio of San Francisco

by Jennifer Merrick

At the exact moment I pulled up to my hotel, the fog parted to reveal the two top peaks of the towers of San Francisco's iconic bridge before disappearing again under Karl's shroud (Karl being the moniker locals call the city's pervasive fog). After checking in, I was thrilled to see from my hotel window that the bridge had revealed more of herself with crimson-painted steel stretching into the fog that now only draped half of her. By the time I left 30 minutes later, the entrance was complete, and she stood in all her glory, sunlight spotlighting the artistry

and engineering that makes the Golden Gate Bridge the star she is.

This magical hide and seek performance looped continuously during my stay in San Francisco and I never once tired of its seduction. I was lucky enough to have a front row seat, as I was staying at the Lodge at Presidio, the closest hotel to the Golden Gate Bridge. This 40-room luxury property is located in the Presidio San Francisco, a remarkable 1500-acre urban park and a National Historic Landmark District.

The storied military past of the Presidio began in March 1776, when Spain established its northernmost outpost in the Americas here. It then served as a Mexican fort from 1822 until 1846 and finally a US Army base until the 1990s. For the past 30 years, the Presidio has been developed and transformed into an ambitious public recreation property that hosts a wide array of cultural, natural, and historical experiences for locals and visitors alike.

By staying in this urban refuge, not only did I have my golden view but the best of both worlds as well. Surrounded by nature's beauty and the water views, I basked in the park's calmness. Yet all of San Fran's vibrancy and attractions were a short, free shuttle bus away.

Exploring the Presidio

Presidio Tunnel Tops: "We're standing on top of a highway," said Lisa Petrie, the park's spokesperson. If she hadn't told me, I never would have guessed there was a busy highway underneath our feet. The new 14-acre park, one of the most recent and ambitious projects at the Presidio, was designed by the same architecture team behind New York City's High Line.

"We did a lot of community outreach with different demographics to ensure the design appealed to a diverse range of ages and communities," said Petrie. This input influenced details like the colorful murals, large gathering spaces and seating areas, and food





offerings. The Outpost, a two-acre play-ground overlooking the bay, was a favourite for kids along with the Field Station, a discovery center where they connected with the nature around them through hands-on art and science activities.

Another highlight of the new Tunnel Tops was its access to the previously isolated marshlands, known as Chrisy Fields. Formerly an airfield, these restored tidal marshes now see birds taking off instead of planes. It's one of the reasons the biodiversity is so high in the urban park with 750 species of flora and fauna, 21 of which are threatened, rare or endangered. The marsh's trails were part of the 24-mile network that connected Baker and Stinson beaches, multiple scenic overlooks, and the National Cemetery.



Walt Disney Family Museum: This museum's interactive galleries granted an intimate window into a man whose vision inspired so many. The 12-foot model of Disneyland was particularly impressive; however smaller displays, like his grocery list and the newspaper articles that chronicled the world's reaction to his death, were also insightful. Other cultural attractions at the Presidio included the Society of California Pioneers, Korean War memorial, Yoda statue and an archaeological lab.

Presidio Social Club: This restaurant was always a place to gather even when it was an officers' Club in the early 20th century. Now renovated with an airy design and retro touches, it served up classic American dishes and cocktails. The relaxed atmosphere fit its location, particularly on a summer day when diners lingered on its large patio. Other restaurants in the Presidio included Colibri Mexican Bistro, Ironwoods and Sessions.

Lodge at Presidio: The accommodation felt like an attraction itself with its collection of photographs paying homage to the building's former life as military barracks. The mostly black and white depictions of life on the base were retouched with splashes of colour fitting in nicely with the modern refurbishment of the historic building. In front of the entrance is the Main Parade Lawn, which used to be the training ground for soldiers. Today instead of push-ups and drills, I saw young people kicking a soccer ball, loungers soaking up the views on massive red reclining chairs and picnickers noshing on food truck concoctions. The lodge's large, wide white porch was the ideal vantage point to watch the action while still keeping an eye on the Golden Gate peep show.

Off the Presidio Adventures

As much as I was tempted to spend my entire San Franciscan vacation at the Presidio, there was much more to explore in the Golden City.

Ferry Market: There's nothing like the sights, smells, and tastes of a bustling market, and the Ferry Building is one of the best. At the market, I immediately gravitated to the Blue Bottle Coffee stall, and with a strong, rich brew in hand I browsed the stalls that sold everything from oysters and cheeses to preserves, sourdough bread and local wines.



Chinatown and North Beach: Walking around the steep alleys and streets in two of San Fran's oldest and most colourful neighbours was also a treat for the senses. I stopped at the Golden Gate Chinese Cookie Factory, the birthplace of the fortune cookie. My fortune read 'plan for many pleasures ahead', which proved an accurate prediction, as my next stop was Eco Terreno for their Bee Classic Tasting Experience. Their vineyard in Sonoma prides itself on organic and biodynamic farming practices that nurture the health of the soil and the grapes. Their urban wine tasting room in North Beach's historic Jackson Square poured samples of their award-winning wines in curated tastings. My wine ambassador assistant spoke passionately about both the vineyard and each of the five selections, which provided many pleasures to my tastebuds, as foretold.

Biking the Golden Gate Bridge: It was now time to get up close and personal with the attraction that I had been enjoying in the distance. My adventure with Blazing Saddles, a well-respected outfitting company, offered bike rentals, equipment, and guided excursions. I picked up an eBike at their Fisherman Wharf's location, which is just a block away from the car-free bike path to the iconic bridge, not to mention a cool place to hang out. After testing out the bike and a video presentation of the route, I was off. I tried to keep the bridge in my sights but once again Karl the fog moved in, and the golden bridge played her game of hide and seek. Once on the bridge, I was glad of the eBike so I didn't have to petal against the wind through the cool mist. Up close, the structure was larger, more imposing and powerful. It was a thrill to ride across it. The minute I crossed and was cruising down to Sausalito, the sun appeared, and I turned around to see the shining red landmark. The foggy screen I had just gone through seemed like an illusion.

Bravo, Golden Gate Bridge, your exit was as good as your entrance. ■

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A French Holiday: Dining and Lodging in Quebec City

Article and photography by Nicholas Kontis

Québec City is North America's oldest French-speaking city. First settled in 1535 (by explorer Jacques Cartier) as a fur-trading settlement, it is perched high on the north bank of the Saint-Lawrence River with sweeping views of the Laurentian Mountains. The gorgeous enclave was formally established in 1608 by Samuel de Champlain. Its early history reflects Europe's Anglo-French conflicts of the 17th and 18th centuries, and even after France ceded "New France" to Britain in 1763 following the Seven Years' War, the region has always remained staunchly French.

In 1985, historic Québec was named a UNESCO World Heritage site. Its ramparts, bastions, and gates make it the only walled

North American city north of Mexico. Condé Nast readers rank it in the top 20 culinary cities in the world. Quebec's February Winter Carnival attracts nearly 400,000 people and is the largest winter festival in the world.

Picturesque cobblestone streets captivate visitors in any season, but springtime is exceptional. Flowers bloom in city parks as days turn longer and winter snowdrifts slowly melt. Crowds are spare and temperatures are mild. Best of all, March and April are maple syrup season, when cabanes à sucre ("sugar shacks") in the city and surrounding woods rejoice in the harvest of the celebrated sap. Syrup is poured on every dish as Quebecers feast and dance to local music.

Behind the massive walls of the fortified city, alluring Rue de Petit-Champlain, perhaps North America's oldest street, dates back to the 17th century. Charming boutiques and lively restaurants line cobbled lanes. Locals and tourists alike stop to watch buskers and performing artists. "I have the best retirement plan in the world," said an elderly gentleman, playing his violin for any who cared to listen.

A wide range of museums are located within the tantalizing "Walled City." The Museum of

Civilization chronicles the heritage of New France. If your interests drift to indigenous culture or military history, there's something here for you, too.

An Epicurean Journey

A food-critic colleague told me that Québec City is becoming known as the gastronomic capital of Canada. Quebecers, she said, are foodies, and the city has an army of brilliant young chefs who use locally sourced ingredients in their sustainably oriented restaurants.

Intrigued, I asked for dining recommendations. These restaurants topped the list:



Chez Rioux & Pettigrew: Located in the old port in a building that housed the Rioux & Pettigrew general store in the 1860s, R&P is a popular rendezvous point. It features 19th-century art, beautiful brick walls and oversized windows that overlook the green spaces on vibrant Rue Saint-Paul. Chef Dominique Jacques, winner of the “Les Chefs” Canadian TV competition, has transformed the dwelling from a wholesale grocer to a European-style bistro.

Jacques’ seasonal menu, sourced from artisanal vendors throughout Québec, includes such favorites as roasted lamb with corn salsa-fried polenta, and blood pudding is always on the menu. The Rioux & Pettigrew Experience is a four-course tasting menu that highlights Quebec’s rich agricultural heritage.

Melba Restaurant: In Quebec City’s up-and-coming neighborhood of Saint-Sauvuer is the casual 35-seat diner Melba. Neither a bistro nor a gastropub, Melba offers a comfortable dining experience popular with chefs and restaurant industry workers. Helmed by a trio of owner-chefs, its cozy, relaxed atmosphere is provided by a minimalistic space with earth tones and warm textures. Comfort foods include duck à l’orange and grilled Arctic char. Other menu highlights may include bison tartare, marinated mackerel, smoked mussels, and roasted leeks in hollandaise.

Tanière: Located in the historic old town is Québec’s ode to the region’s boreal forest and its answer to the Napa Valley’s French Laundry. François Emmanuel Nicol, the 32-year-old chef, and dining-room director Roxan Bourdelais Tanière have partnered to create dual dining experiences in this restaurant. At the chef’s counter, diners enjoy award-winning dishes with a view “behind the scenes” to the kitchen, where the culinary team is busy at work.

Or they can descend to an intimate cellar space for an evening of epicurean ecstasy. Here, they enjoy a contemporary Canadian blind-tasting menu that reflects and weaves a tale of the foods of Québec. Throughout the three-hour ritual, chefs serve an undisclosed menu of 15 to 20 dishes, all of them chosen according to the season. Thus each dish is a complete surprise.

Verre Pickl: We might not be surprised by French-Spanish fusion, but Québec-Mexican?

Why not? Here on Maguire Avenue, chef-couple Alexandra Romero and Jerome Gilpin mix flavors from her native Mexico with Jerome’s French techniques. Alexandra adds chocolate mole sauce to dishes and incorporates such Mexican staples as birria and chicharron. Jerome’s decadent offerings include a semi-sweet doughnut filled with foie gras. The concept is of a refined super club: Groups of 10 to 18 may share a set menu of five to seven courses at a single large table. “At Verre Pickl, we want you to feel like you’re with your family sitting around the dinner table,” Alexandra said.

Verre Pickl is just one highlight of bustling Maguire Avenue, which runs through the heart of Québec City’s Sillery neighborhood. The outdoor cafes, bars and boutique shops are mainly patronized by locals. Two other outstanding restaurants here are La Gaspésienne 51, for seafood, and Tapas & Liege, for Spanish cuisine.

The Ile d’Orléans

Many of Québec City’s chefs source their farm-to-table products from picturesque Ile d’Orléans, just 8 km from the city. The St-Lawrence River island, 34 km long, is 95 percent agricultural: It has only one small town but scores of farms and vineyards. Here food lovers find honey, maple syrup, dairy products, handcrafted chocolates, berries, wine, cider, and a bountiful harvest of fruits and vegetables, along with rabbit. The island’s seal of approval, “Savoir Faire Ile d’Orléans,” signifies all products that come from the island.

I immediately discover cheese recipes brought from the Champagne region of France dating back to 1635. The Fromagerie Feme Audet produces several varieties of goat cheese, as well as artisanal soap and cosmetics made from goat milk. At Cassis Monna et Filles, the Monna sisters cultivate black currants and create homemade sangria. In the maritime village of Saint Laurent, jam-maker Confiturerie Tigidou also boasts a boutique shop and diner to stop for lunch. Saint-Pierre Le Vignoble was one of the first wineries in the region when it was founded in 1982; panoramic views of vineyards reach out over the river to the mainland. Richard Boily Sugar Shack offers guided tours of maple-syrup production.

Where to Stay

Auberge Saint-Antoine: Encompassing three historical buildings in the heart of Québec City’s Old Port is the award-winning luxury boutique hotel Auberge Saint-Antoine. The family-run property offers 95 chic and spacious rooms, including eight suites. The Chez Muffy restaurant serves seasonal cuisine and Sunday brunch in a sophisticated setting.

Preserving its illustrious past in a contemporary hotel, relics from each period of ownership are showcased throughout the property. The hotel staff offers guided tours. Amenities include a wellness spa, yoga classes, and a state-of-the-art gym.

Fairmont Le Château Frontenac: No trip to Québec would be complete without a visit to the iconic Fairmont Le Château Frontenac. No hotel in the region exemplifies Old World glamour like this grand manor. Perched high above the historic citadel, the fabled castle on Cap Diamant is a time-honored showpiece. It opened in 1893 to house wealthy guests traveling on the Canadian Pacific Railway. In 1943, Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill converged at the property, planning for the invasion of Normandy. Throughout the 20th Century, the hotel hosted many of the world’s richest and most famous people.

In 2014 the Château underwent a \$75 million renovation to modernize its 611 rooms while keeping its Old World charm. The acclaimed Champlain restaurant is helmed by another of Québec’s star chefs, Gabriel Morneau-Langevin, whose pedigree includes the famed Michelin three-star restaurants Noma in Copenhagen and Les Maisons Marcon in France. The grand 1608 Bar showcases wines of the province. The hotel also has a large indoor pool, spa, jacuzzi, gym and sauna.

Hotel Musée Premières Nations: At the four-star Hotel Musée Premières Nations, 15 minutes outside Quebec City, the Huron-Wendat Nation welcomes visitors to experience the rich historical significance of Quebec’s aboriginal culture — the First Nations, as Canada calls it. The experience of the indigenous people is related throughout the hotel, but most completely in the on-site Huron-Wendat Museum and the Ekiokiestha National Longhouse. A natural spa and gourmet restaurant round out this immersive stay.

Bora Boreal: The ultimate vacation rental, 45 minutes from Quebec City, is a floating cottage surrounded by nature, offering unrivaled forested privacy. Part of the Tanière family, this hidden gem is the perfect blend of being entirely off the grid and glamping in a cozy houseboat. ■

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A Trip of a Lifetime Through Fabulous Morocco with...



Exodus Adventure Travels

Article and photography by Michael Morcos



There is a saying that goes like this 'don't blame the baker if the butcher bakes the bread.' With that in mind, it goes without saying to let the experts plan your dream trips, after all, tour operators know the industry, the destinations, guides, hotels and have the years of experience to make perfect recommendations.

This would be my first tour with Exodus Adventure Travels, and to say the least, our 15-day 'Highlights of Morocco in comfort' tour was fantastic, enlightening, complete and went just as planned, scheduled, and promised.

This Morocco tour would include the best-of-the-best, where we would start and end in the vibrant city of Marrakech and do a loop including: Casablanca, the capital of Rabat, Roman ruins, exploring the ancient city of Fez, visit palm groves, historic towns and fortresses, driving to the edge of the spectacular Sahara, through the High Atlas mountains and into the beautiful seaside city of Essaouira and all the while being immersed into fabulous Moroccan history, authentic culture and delightful cuisine.

I had already visited Morocco during a brief stay, a layover connection from lower Africa where I would be on my own to visit Casablanca and Marrakesh. I enjoyed my time there and decided from this experience and all that I have heard about this great kingdom that I would like to visit the rest of this exotic country. It became a bucket list destination that I would fulfill in a grand way!

The experts

Now celebrating their 50th year, Exodus Adventure Travels must be doing all the right things as they not only survived the many decades of changes in travel but expanded and now offer tours on all seven continents with a multitude of offerings and travel styles within many countries and destinations.

In the planning stages, with so much of the world to see, their websites are visually pleasing, very well presented, easy to navigate and provide prices, exact tour dates and plenty of exciting information to perk a travelers' interest. A click away, guests can have the atten-

tion of a knowledgeable staff member while the toll-free number offers a chat with an expert to answer any and all inquiries regarding the offerings.

There was nothing left to chance on this 'Highlights of Morocco in comfort' tour and the experts at Exodus made the tour seamless. From 'a to z' was taken care of, including preparing us with pre-departure information such as: entry requirements, vaccines (if necessary), what to expect while there, what to pack, flight options, proper travel insurance, and all the little details that take the stress out of traveling.

Our tour included: lifts to and from the airport, all accommodations, local transport, a tour leader, guided tours in the many distinct locations, all breakfasts and some meals, a Hamam and camel ride in the desert.

Our arranged stays all along the way in the many different cities, towns and out of the way regions were spot on. These richly decorated properties were always in the best locations, with attentive personal service. They were safe, clean, comfortable, and relaxing and ranged from charming family run Riads to modern hotels, and all gave a feeling of being true to famous Moroccan hospitality.

Without a doubt, the people around you can make or break a trip. Our group of 13 was made up of singles, couples and a family, and we hit it off at our first briefing and continued bonding throughout the trip with lots of spirited talk about travel experiences as well as our own daily lives back home. With travelers from the UK, Ireland, the USA, Canada and Malaysia, there was never any language barriers, and I would consider myself fortunate to have made such great travel companions in such a short time. This I would attribute to Exodus' client profile as many were repeat guests and have bought in to the philosophy of this great touring company.

Our tour leader Lahcen was heaven sent. He was professional, kind, gentle, attentive, and perfect for our group. Having worked with Exodus for many years and being a native

see following page





Moroccan, he knew exactly what to expect on this trip and would set up just about everything we needed. Because of his efforts, we would always leave on time, easily find our way to all the accommodations, destinations, and guides, and would enjoy many short stop overs with remarkable scenery. We appreciated his recommendations for restaurants and shops, and he was always able to find pharmacies, shops, and even knew where the next restroom would be. He would even invite us to his family home along the way where we would meet his beautiful children and taste home-made desserts and refreshments.

A great advantage to using a touring company such as Exodus was the ability to meet locals in their own residence, and to be treated to wonderful home-style cuisine. This is something individual travellers would have a challenging time accomplishing, and on the few occasions we were given the choice of going to restaurants or home visits. Without any hesitations, the whole group always chose to interact with families and get a glimpse into their lives. The families appreciated the extra money while we thoroughly enjoyed the authentic cuisine and their dwellings.

Why, Morocco?

The adventure traveler is inquisitive, worldly and is continuously looking for a unique experience. Morocco is such a place, having kept its fascinating culture and rich traditions alive and true. Looking at its geography, not many countries are as isolated as Morocco. Surrounded by two large bodies of water, the Mediterranean and Atlantic flank the north and west while the unforgiving Sahara Desert and the immense Atlas Mountain range adds to its isolation in a corner of Africa giving it an extremely unique 'island nation' identity.

Let the tour begin

Highlights of Morocco is a perfect label as on this Exodus tour every day was memorable and every day was also an exciting new day of adventure and discovery.

Whether you like it, love it or indifferent to it, Marrakesh was a rush to the senses through its sights, sounds and smells, and no tour of Morocco would be complete without it. There

was lots of energy and in its immense central Square of Jemaa El Fna. We could find stands selling everything from freshly squeezed fruit juice, charcoal pits cooking anything imaginable, to sit down restaurants, souvenir shops and lively street performers and there were even some snake charmers.

A visit to the big cities brought us to the very impressive Hassan II Mosque, in Casablanca, to the capitol of Rabat and its beautiful monuments, gardens and white-washed seaside houses. In the densely populated city of Fez, we would explore the tiniest of alleyways and the incredible tannery district. Also, along the way we would find well preserved Roman ruins, had jaw-dropping vistas, and visit artisanal workshops and factories.

While in the countryside and in the High Atlas Mountains, we would meet locals at the markets, be invited for fresh mint tea in a Bedouin tent and be charmed by musicians playing classic Moroccan instruments in a typical Moroccan village. We would visit Kasbahs and secluded villages, see rugged landscapes and herders with horses transporting goods in the same way as in the past centuries. Taste wonderful delicacies and take in a hot and soothing Hamam in a historic setting all the while admiring the beauty and tranquilly in natural settings.

It was impossible for me to pick any particular event, activity, or destination as my favourite, it would be like asking me which one of my children I liked the most. Perhaps one the most invigorating of them all was the visit to Sahara sand-dunes where we would start a trek in the dark to climb up to the highest point to see the sunrise and then capped off with an amazing camel ride through the dunes to see the brilliance of a setting sun.

The cost of travelling is only relevant when paying for it, this is a temporary moment and in time would be soon forgotten, while the experiences and memories could last a lifetime. With a great itinerary, a dedicated guide, wonderful travel companions and the warm welcome and hospitality of the Moroccans I would have 'a trip of a lifetime'!

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