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LEISURE & LIFESTYLE TRAVEL MAGAZINE

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*The Allure of
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in the Heart of the
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World Traveler
Canadian World Traveller
American World Traveler

Tel: 1-855-738-8232

www.worldtraveler.travel

info@worldtraveler.travel
info@canadianworldtraveller.com
info@americanworldtraveler.com

Publisher
Michael Morcos

Editor-in-chief
Greg James

Contributing Editor
David J. Cox

Graphic Department
Al Cheong

Advertising Department
Leo Santini

Marketing Department
Tania Tassone

Distribution
Royce Dillon

Senior Travel Writers:
Susan Campbell
Judi Cohen
Steve Gillick
Nicholas Kontis
Olivia Liveng
Jennifer Merrick
Randy Mink

Contributors:
Mike Cohen
Jennifer Bain
Natalie Ayotte
Daniel Smajovits
Lisa Sonne
Jasmine Morcos
Cherie DeLory
Glenn J. Nashen
Jessica Percy Campbell
Mathieu Morcos
Gregory Caltabanis
Anne-Marie MacLoughlin
Alexandra Cohen

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As the leaves begin to turn and the air takes on that crisp, golden hue, World Traveler invites you to embark on an unforgettable journey spanning continents, cultures, and countless moments of awe. This fall, we take you on a worldwide odyssey—one brimming with ancient history, modern marvels, and the promise of discovery at every stop.

Our adventure begins in the vibrant heart of Tokyo, where towering pagodas stand as serene sentinels of Japan's timeless traditions. From there, we journey to tantalizing Thailand, a land of rich flavors, gilded temples, and warm smiles. The Asia segment concludes in captivating Turkey, exploring its historic capitals—each recognized for their UNESCO World Heritage treasures.

Europe welcomes us with the sun-kissed shores and deep history of Malta, a small island nation with offerings as grand as its past. In Rome, we uncover the Eternal City aboard Big Bus Tours, then set sail into the Mediterranean with the elegance of Crystal Cruises. Switzerland's Davos enchants with alpine charm, while Nuremberg invites reflection on its storied past and participation in its vibrant present.

Our cruising adventures continue—first along the romantic Rhine with A-Rosa Cruises, then on the legendary Danube with Uniworld. Berlin reveals its many faces before we head south to Granada,

Spain, where the Alhambra dazzles. The Loire Valley in France offers fairytale châteaux, while Flanders in Belgium tempts with hidden treasures. Scotland's rugged coastlines come alive aboard the Hebridean Princess, and Ireland invites us into its emerald embrace.

Across the Atlantic, we join Viking Cruises for an awe-inspiring voyage through Alaska's wild beauty, then discover a mountain gem in Fernie, British Columbia. Farther south, we uncover unexpected delights in Bentonville, Arkansas, and sip the rich, full-bodied coffee of Chiapas, Mexico.

Africa greets us with a road trip from the thundering Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe along the mighty Zambezi River to the southern reaches of South Africa, where inspiring initiatives uplift local communities.

Finally, we venture to the Land Down Under—Australia—where fresh developments and endless horizons mark the perfect finale to our global circuit.

So pour a warm drink, settle in, and join us as we traverse the globe. This season, the world is calling—and it's more beautiful than ever

Happy travels, everyone!



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Around the World (short informative travel pieces)



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Dusit Thani Bangkok

Luxury Hotels...Grand Resorts...Charming B&B... Opulent Villas...Quaint Country Inns...
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Mad About Magnificent Malta

Article and photography by Nicholas Kontis

The festival took me by surprise. It was nearing midnight on August 1, the first Sunday in the month, and the streets of Valetta were jam-packed with merry-makers — even more than usual in a city that knows how to party. A reveler told me this was the Festa San Duminku, the Feast of St. Dominic, a patron saint of the island nation of Malta.

Earlier in the evening, a statue of San Duminku had been paraded through the European capital, down Republic Street to St. John's Square. Waving colorful banners, the frenzied throng paused at the 1571 Basilica of Our Lady of Safe Haven and St. Dominic to enjoy a fireworks show and rousing rock music played by a local disc jockey. (Think "Living on a Prayer" by Bon Jovi.) It didn't take long for me to get caught up in the spirit of the occasion.

Apparently, St. Dominic was quite a guy in his time (circa 1200). A Spanish-born friar who founded Catholicism's Dominican order, he became the namesake of the Dominican Republic in the Caribbean, as well as patron saint to astronomy and the natural sciences. I thought of this as I stared beyond the smoke of fireworks into the starry Mediterranean sky.

Such is life in this ancient but oft-overlooked nation, a tiny archipelago of three islands. Located 50 miles south of Italy's Sicily and 175 miles east of Tunisia, it bears some of the personality of both Europe and North Africa.

Ancient history

Maltese history dates back 7,000 years, and locals will tell you that it hasn't changed much since the 17th century. Its area of 122 square miles, about the same as the District of Columbia, ranks it as the tenth smallest country on earth — yet with a population of about

545,000, it is the most densely populated nation in the European Union. Its component islands of Malta, smaller Gozo and tiny Comino, which get 300 days of sunshine a year, depend upon tourism to provide 15 percent of the economic foundation.

Through the ages, Malta has been conquered by many of Europe's greatest civilizations, including Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Romans, Arabs and Normans. Even the Knights of St. John hunkered down here after being evicted from Rhodes by the Ottoman Empire of the Turks. Beginning in 1814, 150 years of British colonial rule and near-constant contact with Italy shaped the island nation into a unique blend of cultures. The Maltese language, a cross between Italian and Arabic, is the official tongue. About 60 percent of locals can speak some degree of Italian, although English remains widely spoken. This linguistic diversity is a testament to Malta's rich and varied history.

The island of Malta is only 17 miles long and nine miles wide, yet along with Gozo, it packs a splendid variety of things to do and see.



During my brief visit, I marveled at prehistoric temples, fossil-studded cliffs, and clandestine coves, accented by a remarkably intense history.

Vibrant Valletta

I could happily have spent my full week in Valletta. The small city may be Europe's most underrated capital. A UNESCO World Heritage site since 1980, it was still ignored by global travelers until 2018, when Valletta was named European Capital of Culture. Before that designation, a large stream of investment from the European Union led to the transformation of the City Gate, built by famed Italian architect Renzo Piano.

The city has an edge, a pulse. While Valletta's limestone architecture conjures images of the Middle East, its forts, like those at Syracuse, in Sicily, could be from medieval Europe. Valletta's outdoor cafes and high-octane energy could pass for any European city. A cultural capital filled with churches, museums, art galleries, and a world-class cuisine, it has also become a magnet for young people staying out late at its coffee shops and bars.

Here's a rundown on what to do on a visit:

The Silent City: In the heart of Malta island lies its ancient capital, Mdina, also known as the Silent City. The fortified citadel sits on a hill, offering commanding views of the surrounding countryside. With its narrow streets, elegant palaces, and golden limestone buildings sheltering shops and restaurants, Mdina is an atmospheric masterpiece.

The Three Cities: Situated across the Grand Harbour from Valletta, the "Three Cities" — Vittoriosa (Birgu), Senglea (L-Isla) and Cospicua (Bormla) — are living relics of Malta's deep maritime and military past. Among the oldest settlements on the islands, these ancient fortified towns played a crucial role during the rule of the Knights of St. John and throughout the four-month Great Siege of 1565, when the Maltese defenders turned back a force of Ottoman conquerors. Rolling Geeks offers a guided tour in a self-driving electric car with pre-programmed GPS. Perfect for travelers on a tight schedule, the talking car is your guide to the Maritime Museum, the Inquisitor's Palace, the War Museum, and the National Museum of Ethnography.

Rabbit on the menu: Napolitana pizza may be ubiquitous in Naples, but the Maltese are even more rabid in their passion for rabbit. It's called *fenek* and it's the national dish: On average, Maltese eat almost seven pounds per person, per year. A great place to try it is *Aaron's Kitchen*, established in 2010 by celebrity chef Aaron Degabriele. "Our culinary scene does indeed include rabbit," the chef told me, "but it also features pasta. Our local ravioli, *Ravjul Malti*, is made of cheese from sheep's milk and parsley. *Pastizzi* are our savory flaky puff pastry filled with ricotta cheese and curried peas. Also dear to the Maltese identity is our sourdough flatbread, *fira*."

Stroll Merchant Street: The heartbeat of Valletta runs through Merchant Street, its main thoroughfare, where you'll find souvenir shops, restaurants, coffee and gelato cafes, along with boutique hotels. On weekends, you'll find live music and revelry in the city's center. During the warmer summer months, the city is alive into the early morning hours.

Malta by the sea: Masaxlokk is a picturesque fishing village located 20 minutes' drive from Valletta. Here you'll get an authentic glimpse into Maltese seafaring life. The colorful *luzzu* fishing boats — green, red and blue — draw tourists for photos. And every Sunday sees a bustling fish market: When I asked a local fisherman what time the market closed, he responded: "When the fish are gone."

Day trips depart Masaxlokk for swim stops at St. Peter's pool and Ghar Dalam Cave, the oldest prehistoric site in Malta. It's close to the Blue Grotto, a natural wonder made up of six sea caves. When the sun reflects off the sea, the grotto gleams with a blue glow that illuminates its narrow, arched entranceway.

Camino: Though too crowded in the summer months for my taste, one can't argue that the turquoise waters of the Blue Lagoon on Malta's small third island of Camino are a Mediterranean paradise. I learned the hard way that it's best to arrive early in the day or come for a sunset swim.

Going to Gozo

"You must go to Gozo. There is much to do there," said John Caruana. His family owns the outstanding Avalon Boutique Hotel where I stayed in Valletta. "It's much quieter than Malta and easy to get around."

Gozo is Malta's little brother, a quick and easy escape, 45 minutes by fast ferry. Many travelers consider its 5-star Kempinski Hotel San Lawrenz (see page 81) to be the best hotel in the country. While the hop-on, hop-off bus is an excellent way to view more of the island, I used the Bolt (app Uber Malta) to take quick rides to a few of Gozo's highlights.

I headed first to Victoria, the island's sleepy capital, to explore the towering Cittadella, or Castello Gozo, a fortified medieval acropolis. In the 15th century, the citadel laid the foundation for what became the historic core of Victoria.

I explore rugged Dwejra Bay. With waves crashing upon dramatic rock formations, I marveled at the fossil remains of sea urchins compressed into disc-like skeletons, embedded into the base of the formations. There is excellent swimming and sunbathing here.

I found Ta'Pinu Shrine, one of the most religious sites in Malta, in the village of Gharb. Known for its miraculous healings, the Roman Catholic Basilica is dedicated to the Blessed Virgin of Ta'Pinu. To this day, the spiritual site attracts pilgrims and visitors worldwide.

No visitor should miss the Neolithic Ggantija Temples, constructed around 3500 BC, predating both Stonehenge and the Great Pyramids of Giza in Egypt. A UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1980, the gigantic stones have stood on the edge of the Xaghra plateau for over 5,600 years.

I ask my Bolt driver, Ruben, moonlighting from his job as a high-school teacher, to help me understand the interwoven complexity of Maltese culture. He answered: "We were conquered by Arabs in 870, so as blood we are closer to Arabs. But in religion, we are closer to Europe, as we are Christians, which makes us quite a complex people."

How to get there

I traveled to Malta with Variety Cruises, my favorite small motor-yacht cruise line. Variety runs a week-long sailing from Naples with stops in Sicily, ending in Valletta, Malta. While there are numerous international flights, I jumped at the opportunity to enter Malta by sea. ■

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TAKING A DEEP DIVE INTO GOZO

Gozo, Malta's enchanting sister island, offers a unique blend of natural beauty, history, culture, and adventure.

Despite its small size, it is packed with experiences that cater to every kind of traveler, from beautiful beaches and stunning coastlines to ancient landmarks and vibrant events. The island can only be accessed by ferry, and is more rural and less crowded than mainland Malta. Whether you're seeking relaxation, exploration, or a taste of Mediterranean life, Gozo has something exceptionally special to offer.



History: a Small Island with a Great Story to Tell

For such a small island, Gozo boasts a remarkably rich and diverse history. Its 8,000-year timeline is deeply intertwined with that of its sister island, Malta. Positioned in the heart of the Mediterranean, Gozo's strategic location made it a prize for many rulers throughout the centuries.

The island's history reads like a tapestry woven with the threads of different civilizations. From the Phoenicians, Romans, and Byzantines to the Arabs, Normans, Saracens, French, and British, each era has left its mark. Evidence of human settlement on Gozo dates back thousands of years, with the Ġgantija Temples—one of the world's oldest free-standing structures—standing as a testament to this.



This UNESCO World Heritage Site, along with its adjacent museum, showcases artifacts that will leave you marvelling at how ancient civilizations navigated and built with such gigantic stones, long before modern technology.

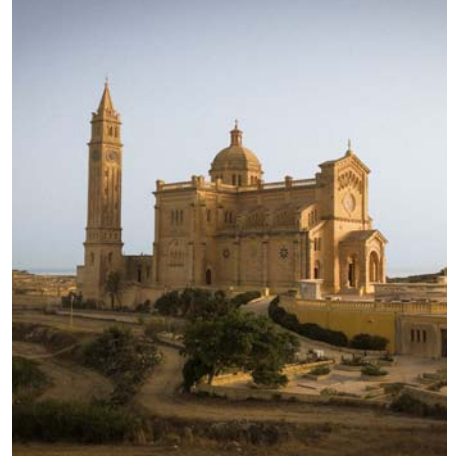


Gozo's history continues to unfold in its fortified medieval city, the Citadel in Victoria. This historic site tells tales of fortifications, battles, and resilience, including a dark chapter when the fortress fell to invaders, leading to the island's near-total depopulation.

Beyond these iconic landmarks, Gozo's Baroque churches, quaint chapels, and scattered archaeological sites reveal layer upon layer of history. From the Phoenicians to the Knights of Malta, each culture has added to the island's unique character.



Exploring Gozo feels like stepping back in time, offering fascinating insights into a heritage that continues to shape its identity today.





Amazing Mediterranean Cuisine

Gozo's cuisine is a rich blend of Mediterranean flavours, deeply rooted in its agricultural heritage and artisanal traditions. The island's fertile soil and mild climate yield an abundance of fresh produce, forming the backbone of its culinary identity.

A standout delicacy is gbejniet, small cheeselets traditionally made from sheep's milk. These versatile cheeses are enjoyed fresh, dried, or peppered, and often feature in dishes like ravioli and pastizzi—flaky pastries filled with cheese or peas.



Another local favourite is ftira Ghawdxija, a traditional flatbread topped with tomatoes, olives, capers, and a drizzle of local olive oil. This hearty bread encapsulates the essence of Gozitan flavors and is a must-try for visitors.

Gozo's culinary scene also embraces the farm-to-table philosophy, with many restaurants sourcing ingredients directly from local farmers and fishermen. This commitment to fresh, seasonal produce ensures that traditional dishes are prepared with the highest quality ingredients, offering an authentic taste of the island's gastronomy. At restaurants like Maldonado Bistro, you can participate in a hands-on cooking class where guests get the full farm-to-table experience. Each cooking class includes a brief walk to the city center of Victoria to visit a vegetable shop, butcher or fishmonger and meet a cheesemonger to purchase freshly made sheep cheese. At the end of the cooking class guests can take it easy and enjoy lunch with a complimentary glass of local wine and coffee.





Wild Waters: Tracing Africa's Spirit from the Zambezi River to the Indian Ocean

by Olivia Liveng

There's a particular kind of silence that falls on the Zambezi at dawn. Not the hush of stillness, but a reverent pause, as if the river itself is waiting for the world to wake up. In this predawn light, mist rises above dark water, herons lift like spirits, and the only other sound is the soft plop of a fish breaking the surface. Here in northern Zimbabwe, the river is a lifeline, carving a ribbon through wild bush and feeding a landscape older than memory.

The journey from the Zambezi River to the remote Maputaland coast of South Africa isn't one that many travelers attempt. It's a trip across two countries, over hundreds of kilometers, through landscapes that change so gradually—and then, so suddenly—that you'll wonder if you've entered another world. But for the curious, the adventurous, and those with a taste for contrast, it's one of Africa's most rewarding overland routes. It's a story of wild waters, shifting biomes, and the enduring connection between land and sea.

The River's Heart

Most journeys here begin at Victoria Falls, where the world's largest curtain of falling water roars into a chasm fringed with rainforest and rainbows. But leave the crowds behind, heading upriver, and you'll discover a quieter stretch of the Zambezi. This is where the river breathes deeply, broadening into oxbow curves, and where islands like Tsowa seem to hover just above the current.

On the riverbanks, ancient baobabs keep silent watch. Crocodiles bask in the mud,



and elephants step with surprising grace down to the shallows, sucking up water with their trunks. In the golden hour before dusk, the bush glows ochre and gold, and hippos begin their evening chorus—a low, bubbling laughter that seems to bounce off every ripple.

Days here move at river pace. You might start with a bush walk, shoes soaked in dew as your guide points out lion tracks pressed into the sand. Later, take a slow drift by boat past nesting bee-eaters, or just watch the light shift across the water from your tent's shaded deck. There is time for listening, for learning the language of the river: the warning bark of a baboon, the steady buzz of cicadas, the faint splash of a distant fish eagle diving for its breakfast.

The Zambezi's draw isn't just the wildlife, but the sense that you are part of something ancient and vast. There's humility in sharing space with elephants and knowing the same water here will one day rush out to sea, hundreds of miles away.

Where to Stay

Tsowa Safari Island, Zambezi River, Zimbabwe

Set on a private island in the Zambezi, Tsowa Safari Island offers eight tented suites with views straight onto the river, indoor/outdoor showers, and just the right amount of luxury. Activities include guided walks, game drives in Zambezi National Park, boat cruises, and sundowners in the sand. The intimate size and island setting mean wildlife comes to you—expect elephants in the shallows and bushbuck grazing near your deck.

The Passage: Shifting Worlds

Leaving the Zambezi, the road eastward carries you out of Zimbabwe and across the border into South Africa's KwaZulu-Natal. The journey is a study in transformation. Savannah gives way to thornveld, which softens into sugarcane fields and then, almost imperceptibly, into coastal forest. The air changes, too, growing heavier and

salt-laced as you near the Indian Ocean.

Somewhere in the journey—often along a red-dirt road threading through eucalyptus and banana trees—the tempo of life shifts. The landscape is greener, the skies bigger, and the ocean is always just over the next rise. The Maputaland coast is a part of South Africa that feels almost hidden from the world, protected by miles of wild dunes and the vast iSimangaliso Wetland Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site where rhinos roam and ancient lakes mirror the sky.

The Ocean's Edge

The first view of Mabibi Beach is unforgettable. The dunes rise and fall in gentle arcs, grass-topped and golden, and then, suddenly, you see it: a sweep of white sand rolling down to water that is impossibly blue. This is the Indian Ocean at its most pristine—warm, clear, and empty except for the occasional fisherman poling his wooden dhow through the surf.

Here, the bush and the sea seem to merge. Forest trails wind down to the sand, shaded by milkwood and wild fig. Step into the ocean and you'll discover coral reefs alive with butterflyfish, parrotfish, and, if you're lucky, a turtle or two gliding by with prehistoric calm.

The rhythm of life is elemental. Sunrise brings the tracks of loggerhead and leatherback turtles, who nest on these beaches in summer. At dusk, fireflies gather in the forest and the sky comes alive with stars so dense they cast shadows on the sand.

Beyond the beach, the wetlands stretch inland—a mosaic of papyrus swamps, clear lakes, and fever-tree forests. Lake Sibaya, the largest freshwater lake in South Africa, reflects every nuance of the sky, and its reed beds are alive with hippos and kingfishers. The sense of remoteness here is profound; you might go days without seeing another soul beyond the staff and a handful of other guests, all drawn by the promise of raw nature.



Thonga Beach Lodge, Maputaland Coast, South Africa

Hidden in the coastal dune forest of iSimangaliso Wetland Park, Thonga Beach Lodge is as close as it gets to castaway luxury. Thatched and stilted suites blend into the forest, each with a private deck and sweeping views. The lodge is famed for its turtle tracking excursions (in season), world-class snorkeling and diving, and warm Zulu hospitality. It's the sort of place where the days drift by with the tides—walks on empty beaches, lazy afternoons in the shade, and dinners by lantern light.

Conservation and Community

What ties these two wild places together—beyond the fact that you can visit both in one journey—is a shared ethos of stewardship. In both the Zambezi heartland and the Maputaland coast, lodges collaborate closely with local communities and park authorities to ensure that wildlife and people can coexist in harmony. Whether it's supporting anti-poaching efforts along the Zambezi or sponsoring turtle monitoring projects on the coast, tourism here is an engine for conservation.

There's a sense, as you watch the sun sink behind the baobabs or wade into the surf at dusk, that you are part of something bigger. Here, in Africa's wild waters, you find not only a journey through place but a journey through time—a chance to touch the world as it once was, and as it could still be. ■

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Davos - Andrea Badini



Hotel Grischa - Maurice Poree

Davos, Switzerland: A Magical Mountain Getaway

by Jennifer Merrick

“The founder knew there was a special energy here,” said Ferdinand, a spokesperson at the *Hotel Schatzalp*, looking out at the panoramic views of the alpine meadows and mountain peaks. “And later science proved it.”

He was referring to Willem Jan Holsboer, a Dutch railway pioneer and entrepreneur. At the end of the 19th century, Holsboer spent two years scouring the Alps for a site to build a sanatorium for tuberculosis patients (at the time, alpine air was believed to possess curative properties). He decided on this site, a broad south-facing slope above Davos, a Swiss town high in the Graubünden mountains, convinced it was especially healing.

Years later, French physicist Alfred Bovis developed a device that claimed to measure energetic vibrations in places. Ferdinand told us that some places around the hotel measure 26,000 Bovis units—remarkably high compared to the average of 6,000 to 7,000 (Stonehenge reportedly registers at 13,000).

Built in 1900, Schatzalp combined a progressive approach to medicine with luxury, turn-of-the-century grandeur. No expense was spared. The Art Nouveau design features graceful curves, large terraces, expansive windows and lounge areas with intricate tilework and works of art. The latest in electrical lighting and plumbing was installed.

“Even the toilet seat was heated,” said Ferdinand, when we viewed the room Kaiser Wilhelm II stayed in.

Wealthy patients were treated with a program that included seven-course meals and hours spent wrapped up on lounge chairs to breathe the mountain air. Some left, claiming to be cured, while others were quietly whisked out a discreet exit in the hotel, their bodies brought down to town by toboggan. In the end, it was antibiotics that cured TB and since the 1950s, the Schatzalp has been operating as a resort. Its elegant rooms and colourful grounds steeped in wellness and literary lore -- and perhaps with a transformative energy if the Bovis meter on the property is any indication.



Hotel Grischa - Jennifer Merrick



Hotel Grischa - Jennifer Merrick



Hiking Davos - Martin Bissig

However, not everyone is convinced of the so-called “energy fields”. “I’m a natural scientist,” said Fabian, the head gardener of the property. Still, he admitted that the Schatzalp property was a unique place, citing its sun-drenched plateau and rare ecological makeup. “We have both alkaline and acidic soils here,” he explained. “That’s unusual—and it creates a rare and rich alpine habitat.”

Schatzalp’s gardens are a living testament to this natural richness. The Alpinum is a sprawling botanical garden with themed zones showcasing plants from around the world. The Edelweiss zone dazzles with over two dozen variations of Switzerland’s most romanticised flower, while the most colorful section—The Thomas Mann Garden—pays homage to the hotel’s most famous literary guest. Mann’s seminal book of German literature, *The Magic Mountain*, was set in a fictionalised sanatorium that was inspired by the Schatzalp.

Whether or not you believe in mystical measurements of energy forces, there’s no doubt that Davos and the magical mountains that surround it have a special allure. At 1,560 metres above sea level, it’s the highest municipality in Switzerland, most known for its winter sports and international economic negotiations.

Here are a few ways Davos captivated us on a recent summer getaway:

Luxuriating in stylish accommodation and fine dining

Each January, Davos draws the global elite for the World Economic Forum. With them come a polished crop of hotels, restaurants and cocktail bars. *Hotel Grischa* stands out—not only for its location directly across from the railway station, but for its seamless blend of modern décor and warmth. Rooms feature warm wood accents, bold textiles and spacious bathrooms, while the hotel’s restaurant serves up chef-centred cuisine in a chic atmosphere. Famous guests include the Canadian hockey hero, Sidney Crosby, and Justin Trudeau once delivered a speech in the hotel’s popular bar.

Riding the rails

Switzerland’s trains are always a joy, but the ride from Davos Platz to Filisur ranks among the best. This section of the UNESCO-listed Rhaetian Railway passes through tunnels, by waterfalls, across gorges, and over the remarkable *Landwasser Viaduct*—a stone bridge arching 65 metres above the valley floor. One stop before *Filisur*, we disembarked to view this archeological marvel from a platform.

Special sightseeing trains run on this route. Some have open-air carriages, while others are ‘nostalgia trains’, historic railcars from the 1920s restored to their former glory. Traveling in the luxury retro carriages complete with velour seats and decorative paneling, I could easily imagine I was in the Orient Express era of train travel. Another trip back in time was the village of Filisur itself with its narrow streets, a tiny 15th-century church and beautifully painted and decorated Engadine houses.

Admiring the photos and paintings at the Kirchner Museum

Davos was home to Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, a German artist renowned for his expressionist style of painting and printmaking. The museum dedicated to him displays his dramatic works impressively by placing them side by side with the images that inspired them. Even the building’s glass walls reveal the mountain views and landscape that was Kirchner’s muse for his art. The collection also includes letters, photos and personal effects, providing an intimate look at an artist who both struggled and thrived in these mountains.

Relaxing at the wellness centre

No alpine town is complete without a wellness centre, and Davos’s *Eau-là-là* offers a modern, family-friendly aquatic center, complete with indoor and outdoor pools, diving platforms and a 260-foot water slide. The adult-only wellness area offers saunas, steam baths and a large relaxation room.



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Schatzalp Funicular - Andreea Boduch

Indulging in authentic Swiss cuisine at Walserhuus in Sertig

Only a short drive or scenic two-hour hike from town lies the rural hamlet of Sertig, situated at the end of a wide valley. Surrounded by high peaks and grazing cows, *Walserhuus* is a cozy alpine inn serving hearty regional dishes. The fish I ordered was caught in the nearby river and we tried capuns, a local speciality consisting of dumplings filled with dried meat wrapped in chard leaves. “It’s something my mother makes,” said Andreas, our Swiss dining companion. “Every family has their own version.” Paired with a local beer from nearby Monstein, it tasted even better.

Hiking the mountains

In summer, the same gondolas that ferry skiers in winter transform into gateways for hikers. From the top, trails sprawl into high alpine wilderness, passing through flowered meadows, rocky outcrops, and panoramic overlooks. Our most memorable outing began with a short, steep ride up the historic *Schatzalp funicular*, which has been operating since Christmas Eve of 1899. After touring the historic sanatorium turned hotel and its gardens, and learning about its special energy, we followed a quiet path back down into town. As I looked out over the valley and breathed the fresh alpine air, I couldn’t help but think that perhaps Holsboer and Bovis were on to something after all. ■

WWW.DAVOS.CH/EN/



Landwasser Viaduct - Jennifer Verity



Eau-là-là - Marcel Giger



Hotel Grischa - Maurice Pares



Tracing My Irish Roots: An Outdoor Journey Across the Island

by Olivia Liveng



For as long as I can remember, Ireland has existed in the background of my family's story—a country defined by memory, music, and migration. My dad's people left Donegal generations ago, bound for America with little more than hope and the strength to endure. Returning as a visitor, I came not just to see the land, but to feel the echoes of those roots that shaped the lives that followed.

Dublin: On the River, in the Moment

Dublin is a city with a living pulse. From the glass-fronted comfort of The Spencer Hotel, I watched the River Liffey slip quietly through the heart of the capital, ferrying stories past old brick warehouses and shining new towers. Taking to the water myself with City Kayaking Dublin, I saw the city from a different vantage point—bridges arching gracefully overhead, the commotion of the quays fading to the splash of paddles and the call of birds. The same river that once sent thousands of emigrants out into the world now brings new arrivals in, carrying memories both old and new.

Later, walking along the Liffey's boardwalk, Dublin's layers unfolded with every step—Victorian pubs, street musicians tuning up for the evening, and shopfronts that hinted at both tradition and reinvention. No visit to Dublin is complete without a stop at the Guinness Storehouse, where the scent of roasted barley hangs in the air and the city's brewing heritage comes alive. Standing atop the Gravity Bar, pint in hand, I looked out over the city's sprawl—an only-in-Dublin panorama that stitches together past and present. The city is vibrant, but its welcome is sincere. In the evenings, I'd watch the sunset from the banks and imagine the generations who stood in the same spot, facing the same tide of change.

Wicklow: Walking with History

Beyond the city, Wicklow's mountains rise—green and untamed, carpeted in ferns and shrouded by legend. Glendalough is a place that insists you slow down and listen. The path wound past sixth-century stone churches, through stands of oak, and over the soft, hushed moss. My guide from Hilltop Treks pointed out the monastic ruins, each stone worn by centuries of footsteps. The beauty of

the landscape was so profound that I couldn't help but wonder if my ancestors had ever paused here, seeking solace in the silence. Later, riding e-bikes through Ballinastoe Woods, we skirted the brooding waters of Lough Tay—its inky surface ringed by silver birch and wild heather, as dramatic as any landscape in Europe.

Lunch at a local inn in Laragh felt well-earned after hours on the trails, the kind of meal that tastes of fresh bread, butter, and conversation. It's these moments between activities, those that are quiet, grounded, and impossibly green, that set Ireland apart.

Leitrim: Where Water and Legend Meet

If Wicklow's charm is ancient, Leitrim's is elemental. Stand-up paddleboarding with Lough Allen Adventure, I drifted on a lake mirrored with cloud and mountain. The names—Sliabh an Iarainn, Tuatha Dé Danann—belonged as much to myth as map, but the feeling was real: a sense of connection, a reminder that history here is always just below the surface. Evenings in Carrick-on-Shannon felt timeless, the River Shannon slipping past as the sun dropped low and lights flickered on in the windows of centuries-old pubs. Perhaps the same pub's ancestors had a pint while pondering a life in the New World?

Cuilcagh Lakelands:

Deep Earth, Wide Horizons

Northern Ireland revealed itself in layers—first, below ground, wandering the echoing passages of Marble Arch Caves, and then high above, climbing the wooden slats of the Cuilcagh Boardwalk Trail, “the Stairway to Heaven.” The wind here is relentless, the view borderless. A sound meditation inside the caves brought a hush, the kind that settles the mind and stirs the spirit. There's a sense here that Ireland's most profound beauty is often just out of sight, revealed only to those willing to go a little further.

Memory, Migration, and the Emigrant Trail

The Emigrants Trail near Derry brought my family's past into sharp focus. With Cathy O'Neill of The Emigrants Walk, I followed the path trod by famine-era emigrants leaving Ireland forever. At the summit, placing a stone on the Carn, I felt the weight of

absence and the resilience required to start again. At Friels Bar, the sight of the old famine pot drove home the hardships endured—my connection to this place no longer just abstract, but lived. Standing in those fields, the silence was heavy; it was impossible not to imagine the hopes and heartbreak packed into every step toward the unknown.

Belfast: A City Rewriting Itself

Belfast pulses with contradictions—old scars and new confidence. At Titanic Belfast, I found the sweep of history told with humility and drama. A Black Taxi Tour threaded past murals and memorials, revealing a city that refuses to be defined solely by its past. Yet Belfast knows how to celebrate; the 5 Stop Brunch Food Tour with Taste & Tour Belfast was pure delight—sipping clever cocktails, tasting twists on classic breakfast dishes, and feeling the city's story in every bite. The city's brunch scene is not just about food; it's an expression of community and creativity, woven into Belfast's determination to move forward.

Donegal on the Horizon, and Coming Full Circle

At journey's end, standing on Benone Strand, I watched the Atlantic crash below the distant cliffs of Donegal. I imagined my ancestors' final, bittersweet glimpses of home—wondering if they expected, or even dared to hope, their descendants would ever return. That skyline, moody and wild, felt at once foreign and utterly familiar.

To explore Ireland on foot, by paddle, by bike, is to see it as a land of motion and memory. Each step and stroke brought me closer to understanding my own family's story—not just the hardship of leaving, but the beauty of what they carried with them. In Ireland, heritage is not a matter of ancestry alone; it's in the hills, the rivers, the kindness of strangers, and the way the land welcomes you, even after generations away. Leaving, I felt changed—not because I found Ireland, but because I saw how deeply Ireland had always been a part of me. ■

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Around the World (in 32 pages)



The Alhambra, Granada

Spain's Five Most Visited Wonders

Spain's allure is undeniable, with its rich history, vibrant culture, and breathtaking architecture drawing millions of visitors each year. Among its countless treasures, five destinations stand out as the country's most visited and unforgettable, each offering a window into Spain's soul.

1. La Sagrada Família, Barcelona – Antoni Gaudí's unfinished masterpiece is a mesmerizing fusion of Gothic and Art Nouveau design. Its towering spires and intricate facades captivate visitors, while the interior, bathed in vibrant stained-glass light, feels almost celestial. Every detail tells a story of faith and ambition, making it one of the most iconic landmarks in the world. No trip to Barcelona is complete without witnessing this architectural wonder.

2. The Prado Museum, Madrid – One of the finest art museums anywhere, the Prado houses timeless works by Velázquez, Goya, El Greco, and other European masters. Each gallery is a journey through centuries of artistic brilliance. Visitors are drawn to its vast collection not only for its beauty but also for the deep connection it provides to Spain's cultural heritage.

3. The Alhambra, Granada – This Moorish palace and fortress complex enchants with its ornate stucco work, tranquil courtyards, and breathtaking views of the Sierra Nevada. A UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Alhambra offers an unforgettable experience where Islamic and Spanish cultures converge in an extraordinary display of art and history.

4. Seville Cathedral and La Giralda, Seville – As the largest Gothic cathedral in the world, this monumental structure impresses with its scale and splendor. Inside, majestic chapels and priceless treasures inspire awe, while climbing La Giralda's tower rewards visitors with sweeping views over Seville's rooftops and beyond.

5. Park Güell, Barcelona – Gaudí's playful park is a vibrant explosion of color and imagination. Its mosaic-covered sculptures, winding pathways, and panoramic terraces create an almost dreamlike atmosphere that delights visitors of all ages.

These five destinations embody the essence of Spain—where history, art, and culture come together to create moments of wonder that linger long after the journey ends. history, art, and culture converge to create experiences that linger long after the journey ends. ■

WWW.SPAIN.INFO



Flanders' Five Most Visited Treasures

Flanders, the northern region of Belgium, captivates visitors with its medieval towns, artistic heritage, and rich cultural traditions. Among its many highlights, five destinations stand out as the most visited and unforgettable experiences in this enchanting region.

- 1. Bruges' Historic Center** – Often called the “Venice of the North,” Bruges charms with its cobbled streets, picturesque canals, and perfectly preserved medieval architecture. Visitors flock to its bustling Market square, climb the iconic Belfry for panoramic views, and glide along its canals to soak in the city’s timeless beauty.
- 2. Ghent's Gravensteen Castle** – In the heart of Ghent, this imposing medieval fortress transports travelers back to the age of knights and battles. With its towers, ramparts, and fascinating exhibits, Gravensteen offers an immersive journey through Flanders’ storied past while overlooking the vibrant city that surrounds it.
- 3. Antwerp's Cathedral of Our Lady** – This Gothic masterpiece is home to some of Peter Paul Rubens’ most celebrated works. The cathedral’s soaring spire dominates the city skyline, while its interior dazzles with intricate stained glass and awe-inspiring art. Antwerp itself thrives as a hub of fashion, culture, and history.
- 4. Ypres' Menin Gate Memorial** – A moving tribute to the fallen soldiers of World War I, the Menin Gate is one of Flanders’ most visited landmarks. Each evening, the Last Post ceremony is performed, honoring those who never returned from the front—a solemn yet unforgettable experience for every visitor.
- 5. Mechelen's St. Rumbold's Cathedral** – Known for its striking 97-meter tower, this cathedral invites travelers to climb its 538 steps for sweeping views of Flanders. Alongside its breathtaking vistas, the cathedral showcases magnificent bells and historic charm in a city often described as one of Belgium’s hidden gems.

Together, these five destinations reveal the heart of Flanders—where history, art, and memory intertwine to create a truly remarkable journey. ■

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The Five Most Visited Châteaux of the Loire Valley

The Loire Valley, often called “the Garden of France,” is celebrated for its enchanting landscapes, charming villages, and its crown jewels—the magnificent châteaux. Among the many treasures that line the river, five stand out as the most visited and most unforgettable.

- 1. Château de Chambord** – The largest and most iconic chateau of the Loire, Chambord is a stunning example of French Renaissance architecture. Commissioned by King François I, it boasts over 400 rooms, 80 staircases, and the legendary double-helix staircase often linked to Leonardo da Vinci. Its rooftop terraces offer spectacular views of the vast surrounding park, Europe’s largest enclosed nature reserve.
- 2. Château de Chenonceau** – Known as the “Ladies’ Château” for the remarkable women who shaped its history, Chenonceau elegantly arches across the River Cher. Its graceful galleries, formal gardens, and richly decorated rooms create a romantic atmosphere, while its past as a royal residence and wartime hospital adds depth to its charm.
- 3. Château de Amboise** – Perched high above the Loire River, Amboise offers both historic significance and sweeping panoramas. Once a favored royal residence, it is also the resting place of Leonardo da Vinci, whose tomb in the chapel draws visitors from around the world.
- 4. Château de Villandry** – Famous for its extraordinary Renaissance gardens, Villandry is a living masterpiece. Its perfectly manicured ornamental and kitchen gardens, arranged in intricate geometric patterns, delight visitors in every season and make it one of the most photographed châteaux in the valley.
- 5. Château de Blois** – A fascinating blend of Gothic, Renaissance, and Classical architecture, Blois was once the residence of French kings. Its grand halls and royal apartments reveal centuries of intrigue and political drama, offering a captivating glimpse into France’s past.

These five châteaux showcase the Loire Valley at its finest—where history, art, and natural beauty unite to create an unforgettable journey. ■

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INSPIRING
Tunisia

Exodus Adventure Travels Unveils New Tours for 2026

Small-group tours span across the globe with immersive cultural, wildlife, and active travel experiences



Exodus Adventure Travels, the leader in active small group guided tours, announces its new tours with departures starting in 2026, with immersive experiences across Asia, Africa, the Americas, Europe, and the Middle East. From hiking Oman's golden dunes to cycling South Africa's legendary Garden Route, the new itineraries available to book now reflect travelers' growing desire for deeper, more meaningful exploration—whether on two wheels or two feet.

Backed by research and traveler feedback, Exodus' latest lineup responds to increasing demand for active travel experiences in nature-rich and culturally authentic destinations. Exodus' latest trips are designed to bring travelers beyond the guidebook while enjoying the ease of small-group travel, led by expert local guides. The new tours include first-time itineraries in Colombia, Guatemala, and Laos, plus upgraded safaris and premium adventures in Africa and Central America.

New Departures for 2026:

Asia - Culture, Cuisine & Mountain Treks

Discover Laos in Comfort

This gentle-paced cultural tour journeys from Vientiane to Luang Prabang, showcasing golden temples, riverside villages, and the spiritual heart of Laos. River cruises, local markets, and time with local artisans offer a rich, immersive experience.



Vietnam Highlights

From Hanoi's Old Quarter to Ho Chi Minh City's buzzing markets, this tour blends culture and adventure. Travelers explore Halong Bay by boat, cycle quiet country roads, and visit UNESCO towns like Hoi An, all while sampling the country's incredible cuisine.

Best of Sri Lanka

From leopard safaris in Yala National Park to the sacred city of Kandy and hill country tea trails, this all-in-one tour covers the best of Sri Lanka's diverse landscapes and culture, with time to unwind on the coast.

Oman Desert Odyssey

Trek through rugged canyons, explore ancient forts, and camp beneath the stars in Wahiba Sands. This journey offers a blend of natural wonders and Bedouin hospitality, with time in Muscat and traditional villages along the way.

Africa - Big Five Safaris and Scenic Cycling

Tanzania Safari Adventure

Witness the Great Migration and spot lions, elephants, and giraffes on game drives through the Serengeti and Ngorongoro Crater. Cultural visits with the Maasai and expert-led wildlife tracking make this East African safari unforgettable.

Kruger Safari Highlights & Garden Route Cycling

Pair Big Five safaris in Kruger National Park with a bucket-list cycling journey along South Africa's southern coast. Ride past vineyards, whales, and dramatic cliffs while staying in comfortable accommodations throughout.

Cycling South Africa's Garden Route

Pedal along one of the world's most scenic coastlines, where lush forests meet whale-filled bays and dramatic cliffs. This point-to-point cycling adventure takes travelers past vineyards, wildlife reserves, and the Indian Ocean, with comfortable accommodations and expert guides throughout.

The Americas

Rainforests, Ruins & Remote Wonders

Discover Guatemala

Explore ancient Mayan ruins in Tikal, colorful highland towns, and the mirror-like waters of Lake Atitlán. This cultural itinerary blends archaeology, crafts, cuisine, and natural beauty in one of Central America's most captivating countries.

Wild Costa Rica: Premium Adventure

A luxurious take on Costa Rica's iconic wildlife adventure, this tour features upgraded eco-lodges, rainforest hikes, and river safaris in search of monkeys, toucans, and sloths—all with a lighter environmental footprint.



Essential Colombia

From the Caribbean charm of Cartagena to the coffee farms of Minca and Medellín's art-filled streets, this adventure explores Colombia's culture, cuisine, and biodiversity with expert local insight and unbeatable opportunities to hike the wild landscapes and beaches of Tayrona National Park.

Mexico's Yucatán Adventure

Discover a vibrant mix of ancient history and coastal beauty with visits to Chichén Itzá, colonial Mérida, and turquoise cenotes. This compact tour offers a balance of culture, nature, and culinary discovery.

Discover Peru

Uncover the cultural and natural highlights of Peru, from Lima to Cusco and the Sacred Valley. The journey culminates in a visit to Machu Picchu, with chances to explore markets, ruins, and Andean traditions along the way.

Europe - Coastal Hikes and Island Charm

Hiking Greece's Dodecanese Islands

Island-hop on foot across the Aegean, hiking scenic trails that wind past monasteries, coastal cliffs, and whitewashed villages. This route connects lesser-known islands like Patmos, Kalymnos, and Leros, offering both natural beauty and cultural depth. ■

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Find Spiritual Renewal Off the Beaten Path with Oku Japan's Self-Guided Adventures, Including One Brand New Tour



Discover itineraries that invite travelers to slow down and reconnect through Japan's sacred trails and timeless temples.

As more travelers turn to nature and mindful journeys for deeper well-being, Oku Japan – a leader in immersive, community-focused journeys into the heart of Japanese culture – is featuring a collection of self-guided walking tours, including one brand-new itinerary, that explore some of Japan's most sacred routes.

Rooted in centuries-old pilgrimage traditions and steeped in local wisdom, these itineraries invite travelers to move at their own pace, finding calm and inspiration in forested mountain paths, ancient temples, and remote villages where hospitality and reverence for nature endure.

"At Oku Japan, we believe travel is more than visiting places – it's a chance to reconnect with yourself and the world around you," says Hiroshi Kawaguchi, general manager for Oku Japan. "All of our tours – particularly our brand-new 'Spiritual Journey through Yamagata' itinerary – invite travelers to slow down, breathe deeply, and really feel and experience the places they are visiting, the

people who call it home, and the deep-rooted spiritual traditions that have become the very essence of life here."

Below are a few examples of Oku Japan's itineraries that prioritize mind and body.

NEW! Spiritual Journey through Yamagata: Wander through northern Japan's tranquil forests, hidden shrines, and hallowed temples on this brand-new self-guided tour that follows a contemplative route inspired by mountain ascetics. In the northern reaches of Japan's main island of Honshu, discover the enduring connection to Shugendo, a faith that combines elements of mountain worship, folk religion, and Buddhism. Ascetics known as yamabushi practiced here, climbing the mountain trails as a form of meditation and training. On this itinerary, travelers will follow the same storied trails as the Shugendo practitioners of past and present, visit two of the three sacred Dewa Sanzan mountains, connect with local communities who have long safeguarded these traditions, soak in rural onsen, and much more.

Shikoku 88 Pilgrimage: Embark on a section of Japan's most famous pilgrimage, visiting some of the revered 88 temples scattered across Shikoku Island. This self-guided journey blends meaningful walks along paved towns roads and unpaved forest trails, traditional pilgrim lodging, a chance to bathe at Dogo Onsen, the oldest onsen hot spring in Japan, and to explore the atmospheric Iya Valley. The Shikoku 88-temple Pilgrimage was founded over 1,200 years ago by the renowned monk Kukai, and this itinerary highlights some of the most fascinating parts of this 745-mile/1,200-km circuit.

Oku Japan also offers a 13-day Temples and Trails of Shikoku small group guided tour.

The Kumano Kodo: Stretching into varying corners of the Kii Peninsula, this 1,000+ year old UNESCO World Heritage pilgrimage route follows in the footsteps of emperors and pilgrims alike. Extending across mountain ranges and lush green valleys, through quiet hamlets and bustling hot-spring towns, of the trails that make up the Kumano Kodo, the Nakahechi trail was once considered the imperial route, leading from Takijiri on the western edge of the peninsula and stretching to Shingu on the eastern coast. The sheer number of pilgrims who would march in long processions earned this trail the nickname "pilgrimage of ants," and it remains the most popular of the routes today. On Oku Japan's self-guided itineraries, daily walks lead to ancient shrines and secluded villages, offering moments for quiet reflection, forest bathing, and authentic encounters with Japan's spiritual heartland.

Oku Japan offers a variety of tours along the Kumano Kodo, including self-guided itineraries along the Kiiji and Iseji routes and two small group guided tours: Japan Hiking Highlights: The Kumano Kodo and the Nakasendo Trail and the Kumano Ancient Trail. ■

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AAT Kings Reveals Top 2025 Stargazing Experiences in Australia and New Zealand

Showcasing several of the best dark skies viewing conditions in the Southern Hemisphere



AT Kings, the leading Australia and New Zealand guided holiday tour operator is excited to reveal their top 2025 stargazing experiences with several destinations being recognized by the International Dark Sky Places (IDSP) program which will appeal to astrotourism travellers. IDSP was founded in 2001, which certifies protected areas, parks and communities around the globe. These places protect and preserve dark sites in these ecologically sensitive areas through education and effective lighting policies including environmentally responsible outdoor lighting.

"Noctourism is one of the hottest trends for 2025 and some of the most stunning stargazing experiences are located in Australia and New Zealand and guests are traveling from across the globe to witness these starry night skies," says Ben Hall, CEO, AAT Kings Group. "Our unforgettable

guided journeys showcase the celestial spectacles of our Southern Hemisphere which will appeal to nature lovers and astrophiles who are seeking nighttime travel experiences," he adds.

Mackenzie Region, South Island, New Zealand - Aoraki Mackenzie International Dark Sky Reserve

On the 7-day *Contrasts of New Zealand* guided vacation, majestic mountains are the backdrop enroute to Lake Tekapo with its turquoise waters. This stunning destination is breathtaking and remote. The lack of light pollution showcases dazzling stargazing at the UNESCO World Heritage listed, Aoraki Mackenzie International Dark Sky Reserve and it is the largest reserve in the Southern Hemisphere. Guests will marvel at the celestial experience offered at a purpose-built observation crater with expert astronomy guides. The Crater Experience located in

Lake Takapo (Tekapo) offers one of the darkest and clearest skies in the world with the assistance of high-powered telescopes which provides incredible views of distant galaxies and star clusters. The guides will also provide both Maori and Western perspectives. The reserve has received global recognition as a centre for astrotourism with its vistas and preserve the dark skies of the Mackenzie region for future generations. This excursion to Aoraki Dark Sky Reserve is also available on the 18-day *Contrasts of Australia and New Zealand* and the 22-day *Highlights of Australia & New Zealand* journeys.

Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary, Australia – An accredited International Dark Sky Sanctuary

On the 8-day *South Australian Outback Adventure*, travellers will enjoy some of the world's best stargazing conditions in the Southern Hemisphere at the Ningana Imaging Observatory with their state of the art Digital Astro Experience. With its International Dark Sky accreditation, their nighttime skies are free from light and atmospheric pollution. Guests will enjoy the relaxing space to view the splendours of the solar system that are light years away. These Observatory tours have also garnered Advanced ecotourism accreditation.

Alice Springs, Australia- Galaxy Gazing at the Earth Sanctuary Space Observatory

On the 15-day *Outback Adventure*, when exploring Alice Springs, guests will enjoy the Earth Sanctuary Space Observatory and deep sky telescope while stargazing at some of the best views of the galaxy surrounded by the Outback's dark sky nights. The sanctuary is one of only three places in the country that offer celestial viewing without light pollution or moonlight interference with star visibility. Their local astronomer will share the magic of the constellations and zodiacs with a laser-guided journey through the southern night sky. ■

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Explore the Wild, the Protected, and the Profound with Wilderness Scotland, Wilderness England & Wilderness Ireland



Lake District, England

As Scotland's Isle of Arran joins the ranks of UNESCO Global Geoparks, it is a timely reminder that the UK and Ireland are home to some of the most extraordinary wild spaces and protected places on Earth. From ancient peat bogs and towering mountain peaks to marine sanctuaries and legendary islands, these landscapes are not only stunningly beautiful but also culturally rich and ecologically significant.

Below are just a few of these wild places where award-winning brands Wilderness Scotland, Wilderness England, and Wilderness Ireland offer small group guided journeys that invite travelers to experience these amazing places slowly, meaningfully, and sustainably.

Scotland

The Isle of Arran: Nicknamed "Scotland in Miniature," Arran was officially announced as a UNESCO Global Geopark this past April, 2025, the 10th such park in the UK. With its variety of rock types and structures, vast archaeological and geological heritage, and array of habitats with an equally diverse range of plant and wildlife that benefit from the landscape and underlying geology, Arran is a truly unique place to visit.

Wilderness Scotland offers the Arran: Scotland in Miniature small group guided hiking tour that spends an unforgettable week exploring this beautiful island, discovering its many instances of natural beauty. Having been continuously inhabited since the early Neolithic period, Arran's history, heritage, and culture run deep, with a landscape peppered with standing stones, hut circles, and hidden cham-

bered cairns – it's an engaging and evocative place to explore on foot.

Flow Country: This vast area of bog peatland in Northern Scotland is the largest blanket bog in Europe, covering some 460,000 acres in Caithness and Sutherland. Deriving its name from the Norse word 'floir', meaning wet or marshy, in 2024, it was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, recognizing the significance of the area's natural ecosystems and contributions to the region's biodiversity.

Wilderness Scotland's hiking and E-bike trips on the Orkney Isles pass through Flow Country at both the start and end of the itineraries, as the groups travel to and from the remote islands from Inverness, the cultural capital of the Scottish Highlands.

England

Lake District National Park: Known for its glacial ribbon lakes, rugged fell mountains, and historic literary associations, the Lake District is England's largest National Park and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Home to Scafell Pike, its highest mountain, and Wastwater, its deepest lake, this is a gem of a place to visit.

Wilderness England offers a few guided adventures that explore the Lake District, a place it refers to as "one of the wildest corners of northwest England." There's the Iconic Peaks of the Lake District, a six-day hiking trip that climbs to the top of some of the highest peaks in the park and enjoys some of the country's most rugged and spectacular views. There's also the more moderate The Lake District hiking journey that focuses more on exploring the area's charming villages, open countryside, and the flora and fauna of the region.

Wales

Eryri National Park: Wales' largest national park, Eryri, covers a total of 823 square miles and is steeped with culture, history, and heritage, and is a place where the Welsh language is part of the day-to-day fabric of the area. Home to nine mountain ranges, 23 miles of coastline, 11,000 hectares of native wood-

land, and with 1,497 miles of trails to explore, no matter where you go in this park, it is sure to reward you with an abundance of fantastic views and magical wildlife.

Wilderness England's seven-day Eryri (Snowdonia) fully guided hiking trip explores the park's many hidden gems and provides the opportunity to summit Yr Wyddfa (Snowdon), the country's highest peak. Along the way, guests will learn about the rich tapestry of Welsh mythology and folklore and get to know the history here along with the local people who shape it.

Ireland

Páirc Náisiúnta na Mara, Ciarraí: In a place known for its marine biodiversity and coastal landscape, it is fitting that it is also where you'll find Ireland's first marine national park. Designated as such in 2024, the park includes iconic islands such as the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Sceilg Mhichíl (Skellig Michael), marine reefs, mainland coastal, and maritime sites clustered in one broad geographic location – on and off the iconic Kerry coast. It brings together some of the area's finest nature habitats, including limestone reefs, flagship sand dune systems, and blanket bog, and protects these habitats and the diverse species who live there – from breeding seabirds such as puffins and gannets, to wintering water birds, seals, whales, and dolphins. In addition to the biodiversity, locations within the park are very significant for their language, folklore, and cultural heritage.

Wilderness Ireland's Hiking & Island Hopping Cork & Kerry itinerary is a unique hiking tour in the spectacular southwest region that explores, by foot and by boat, some of the area's wildest coasts and islands. This includes a visit to the remote Skelligs, Ireland's most famous islands. It was on Skellig Michael, also called Great Skellig, where 7th century Irish monks lived and prayed on the island's rocky slopes, while on the equally renowned Little Skellig, more than 27,000 pairs of gannets reside, the second-largest colony in the world. ■

[WILDERNESSSCOTLAND.COM](https://www.wildernessscotland.com)

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Isle of Arran, Scotland



Skellig Michael, Ireland



O Canada! G Adventures celebrates its roots and opens new doors to travellers with its largest Canada expansion to date



GAdventures is paying homage to its Canadian heritage with the launch of nine exciting new adventures, right on its doorstep. Spanning six provinces, the trips will highlight the very best in landscapes, wildlife, culture and community experiences in the adventure travel company's home country.

Covering Classic, Active and Marine travel styles, the new trips will take travellers from the towering mountains of the Canadian Rockies and colourful fishing villages of the East Coast, to the fjords and national parks of Northern Québec. Following the recent announcement of G Adventures' Arctic Expedition relaunch, travellers will also have the rare opportunity to journey by sea from Iceland's southwest coast, around the rugged shores of Greenland to the breathtaking landscapes of Canada's easternmost province, Newfoundland and Labrador.

In the East, the *Newfoundland Adventure: From Signal Hill to Gros Morne* offers rugged coastlines, puffin colonies, misty fjords, national parks, cozy pubs, art workshops and museums, celebrating the coastal charm and history of

Newfoundland. Heading West, the *Canadian Rockies Winter Adventure* takes travellers to snow-capped peaks, frozen waterfalls and quaint mountain towns. Travellers will strap on their snowshoes and trek the trails of Sunshine Meadows and through Johnston Canyon and, weather permitting, the adventurous can walk across Abraham Lake, watching the giant ice bubbles trapped beneath the surface.

The new trips will cover a broad and varied geographic swath by both land and sea, from Newfoundland with its rugged coastlines, puffin colonies, national parks and museums to the Rockies where travelers will be awed by snow-capped peaks, frozen waterfalls and picturesque mountain towns. With itineraries tailored for both winter and summer seasons, Northern Québec offers snowshoeing to lighthouses, ice fishing, dog sledding and cozy chalet accommodation from December to February, while in the summer months of June to September, active travellers can get the blood pumping with treetop trail adventures, hikes through Parc Jaseux and kayaking through Saguenay Fjord.

Highlights from the nine new Canada itineraries include:

Canadian Rockies: Northern Lights Winter Explorer:

On this nine-day adventure, explore the iconic landscapes of Banff, Lake Louise, and Jasper, then dive deeper into local culture at Alberta's first and only Métis cultural interpretive centre. Spot wildlife, learn the stories and traditions of the Métis people, and watch the sky for a chance to see the dancing northern lights.

Coastal Treasures of the Canadian Maritimes

From the colourful fishing villages of Nova Scotia to the sweeping coastlines of P.E.I. and the wild tides of New Brunswick, dive into the best of Eastern Canada. Hike the Skyline Trail in Cape Breton, walk on the ocean floor at low tide at the legendary Hopewell Rocks and snap postcard-worthy photos of lighthouses while visiting the UNESCO-listed town of Lunenburg.

Northern Québec Summer Lodge Escape

Starting in Montréal, this seven-day adventure heads toward the St. Lawrence River and then into the wild. Hike to a lighthouse with sweeping views, visit riverside villages, paddle through the epic Saguenay Fjord, and stay in a cozy forest chalet with a campfire and s'mores - all before a final stop in storybook Québec City.

Iceland, Greenland, & Labrador Expedition - Europe to Canada

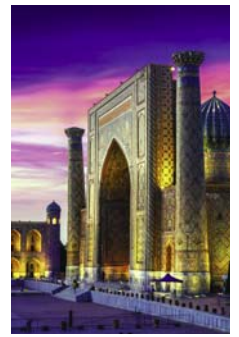
Embark on a 16-day epic journey from Iceland's southwestern coast, around the rugged shoreline of Greenland, and to the stunning landscapes of Canada's Newfoundland and Labrador. Learn more about the landscapes and wildlife through on-site lectures and briefings while exploring the edges of an ice floe by Zodiac, whale watching, and walking the Tundra. ■

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

Backroads: What It's Like to Travel with the World's Leading Active Adventure Company

by Olivia Liveng



There are a few moments on a Backroads trip when you catch yourself thinking, "This is exactly how travel should feel." It might be early morning on a quiet lane in Burgundy, the air still cool as you pedal past rows of sun-dappled vines. You stop, not because you have to, but because a Trip Leader is waiting with warm pastries and fresh fruit, greeting you by name, somehow knowing whether you prefer coffee or tea.

That's the real difference. Backroads doesn't feel like a packaged group tour. It feels as though someone has anticipated your best vacation ever and quietly handled every detail, leaving you with nothing to do but take it all in.

Travel That Fits—No Matter Who You Are

Every Backroads guest wakes up with a range of options. Each day's itinerary offers a range of routes, from challenging climbs for those who want them to gentle loops for travelers who prefer to linger over landscapes. You don't need to keep pace with

anyone but yourself. If you're going to take a break, you can hop in the van without any questions asked. If you'd rather skip the ride and explore a hilltop town, your Trip Leader will point you toward their favorite bakery or secret swimming spot.

The real magic is in the flexibility. It's travel designed for both the type-A explorer and the laid-back dreamer. Backroads Trip Leaders, who are as much local friends as logistics experts, handle everything with ease. They know the shortcut to the best gelato in Tuscany and the name of the cheesemaker at tomorrow's picnic stop. Somehow, they seem genuinely invested in making sure you get what you want out of the trip—even if you change your mind at the last minute.

Surprise and Delight, Daily

Each day brings something unexpected. Maybe it's an impromptu tasting in a hillside vineyard, or a pop-up riverside lunch with food that tastes better than anything you'd expect in the middle of nowhere. One

night you might be dining under the stars on the patio of a 16th-century inn, the following swapping stories by the fire with fellow travelers who, only a few days ago, were total strangers.

The luxury isn't just in the properties—though you'll stay in some real gems—but in the feeling that the whole experience is somehow tailored to you. Luggage appears in your room before you do. E-bikes show up when your legs are tired. If it rains, a backup plan appears instantly, and you find yourself in a cozy café you never would have discovered on your own.

Backroads makes the logistics invisible, so you can focus on the moments that matter: watching the sunset from a quiet bluff, laughing with your Trip Leaders over dinner, hearing a bit of local history straight from someone who lives it. ■

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Exploring Valletta, Malta: Heat, History, and Living Heritage

Article and photography by Judi Cohen (Traveling Judi)

Malta, a tiny island nation in the heart of the Mediterranean, lies just south of Sicily and north of Africa. For North American travelers, it may still feel like an “off the beaten path” destination, but Europeans and seasoned travelers have long discovered its golden stone cities, sparkling harbors, and rich cultural history. Cruise ships regularly dock in Valletta, bringing day-trippers eager to explore its UNESCO designated old city.

When to Go

Summers in Malta are hot, and the city’s limestone streets radiate heat into the afternoon. Peak season runs from July through August, with temperatures above 30°C (86°F) and cruise ship traffic is at its highest. For fewer crowds and more comfortable sightseeing, plan your visit in April to early June or September to October.

A Morning of Heat, Crowds, and History

We began our day passing through Valletta’s City Gate into the grid of the old city. By mid-morning the sun was already blazing, and the streets were packed with

cruise ship passengers, crowding souvenir stands and snack shops and queuing outside St John’s Co-Cathedral.

Even in the bustle, Valletta’s character is on full display with limestone palaces, carved wooden balconies, and shaded laneways with centuries of history. Upper Barrakka Gardens offered a brief escape from the heat with its sea breeze and sweeping view across the Grand Harbour, where ferries and cruise ships glistened at the docks.

Inside St John’s Co Cathedral and Behind the Scenes

Stepping into St John’s Co-Cathedral is like entering another world. The austere exterior hides a Baroque interior of golden vaults and marble floors with 405 tomb slabs of the Knights of St. John (only some have bodies buried beneath them), and ceilings painted by Mattia Preti. In the oratory is Caravaggio’s *The Beheading of St John the Baptist*, his only signed work.

Beyond the public galleries, we were given a behind the scenes glimpse of the cathedral’s ongoing restoration project, led with pas-

sion and dedication by CEO of the St. John’s Co-Cathedral Foundation, Tonio Mallia. He and his skilled team of conservators work tirelessly to clean and preserve priceless paintings, source old marble to match centuries old slabs, and restore tombs and crypts with painstaking care.

The cathedral’s expansion project includes a new Tapestry Chamber and a restored Caravaggio Wing, built with 2,700 hand cut limestone blocks to integrate seamlessly into Valletta’s historic streetscape. Watching the team’s craftsmanship in action, shaping stone, conserving art, and installing modern lighting, felt like witnessing history being preserved for generations to come.

From Midday Heat to Evening Calm

By early afternoon, Valletta’s streets grew hotter and quieter as visitors retreated to restaurant patios and bars. We walked down narrow streets and alleyways pausing in shady corners like St George’s Square and visiting the armory in the Grand-masters Palace.

In the late afternoon, as we returned to our quiet oasis at The Phoenicia Malta, the transformation was complete. The crowds were gone, the limestone glowed in the late sun, and Valletta felt almost like a city paused in time, silent but alive with history.

Valletta: Beauty, Craft, and Continuity

Valletta is a study in contrasts: the intense heat and the welcome shade, the morning crowds and the evening calm, the centuries old city and the patient work of those preserving it. Experiencing the living restoration of St John’s Co-Cathedral gave us insight into the driving force behind the project, and proof that Valletta is not just a museum of the past, but a city continuously shaped by passion, skill, and a commitment to preserving its heritage.

I plan to return to explore more of Valletta and to visit the completed Museum Project and Restoration work at St. John’s Co-Cathedral. ■

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South African Tourism and Tourism Cares Launch the Meaningful Travel Map of South Africa

New tool connects travel trade and conscious travelers to authentic, sustainable experiences across the country



South African Tourism and U.S.-based global non-profit Tourism Cares are proud to announce the launch of the *Meaningful Travel Map of South Africa*, a dynamic digital resource that connects the global travel trade and mindful travelers to tourism experiences rooted in sustainability, cultural preservation, and community empowerment.

"South Africa's landscapes, wildlife, and cultures are among the richest and most diverse in the world, and we recognize the importance of safeguarding them for generations to come," said *Darryl Erasmus*, Chief Operations Officer at South African Tourism. "The launch of the Meaningful Travel Map of South Africa allows us to spotlight the remarkable efforts of local tourism change makers and invite the world to experience South Africa in a more conscious and meaningful way."

Showcasing Impactful Travel Experiences

The Meaningful Travel Map of South Africa features a curated selection of community-based tourism initiatives, social enterprises,

conservation programs, cultural heritage projects, and sustainable accommodations. Each experience has been carefully evaluated for its positive social, environmental, and cultural contributions.

Travelers can discover everything from wildlife rehabilitation centers and indigenous-led cultural tours to eco-lodges that reinvest in community development and organizations focused on preserving South Africa's pristine coastlines. The Map encourages travelers to move beyond traditional itineraries and form deeper, more impactful connections with the people and places of South Africa.

Check out South Africa's Meaningful Travel Map featured products and experiences and connect with them directly to build your next itinerary.

Community-Based Tourism: Awelani Lodge, Monkeybiz South Africa, Township and Village (Pty) Ltd, Witsieshoek Mountain Lodge and !Xaus Lodge

Cultural Preservation: Indlondlo Cultural Village, Juma Art Tours and Maboneng Township Arts Experience

Environmental Responsibility: Klein Goederust Boutique Winery, Panthera Africa NPC and Shamwari Private Game Reserve

Advancing Responsible Travel

"Tourism Cares is proud to welcome South Africa to our global family of destination partners," said *Greg Takehara*, CEO of Tourism Cares. "South Africa's leadership in responsible tourism — from its early conservation initiatives to its continued focus on cultural preservation and community upliftment — aligns perfectly with the vision of our Meaningful Travel Program. We are thrilled to welcome the first Meaningful Travel Map in Africa and are committed to working with South African Tourism to build a future where travel leaves a positive, lasting impact."

The Meaningful Travel Program by Tourism Cares equips tourism professionals with tools, education, and real-world examples that demonstrate how sustainable travel practices can drive development, strengthen communities, and protect cultural and natural assets.

A Shared Commitment to a Sustainable Future

South African Tourism has long championed a holistic model of tourism that supports biodiversity conservation, respects cultural heritage, and uplifts local communities. With over 21 national parks, 12 UNESCO World Heritage Sites, nearly 2,000 miles of coastline, and a deeply ingrained tradition of warm hospitality, the country offers an extraordinary canvas for responsible travel. ■

Meaningful Travel Map of South Africa link:

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For those seeking superior travel experience, Copa Airlines offers Business Class on all flights, featuring exclusive services such as priority baggage handling and access to Copa Clubs and Star Alliance VIP lounges worldwide. On select routes, the airline provides a Dreams Business Class experience, with fully reclining lie-flat seats and an extensive in-flight entertainment system. When planning a trip, travelers can take advantage of the Panama Stopover Program, which allows for a stop in Panama for one to seven days at no additional airfare cost, allowing the option to explore two destinations for the price of one.

Copa Airlines also offers ConnectMiles, a loyalty program where passengers can earn miles for future travel with Copa Airlines or any of the 24 airlines in the Star Alliance network, which spans over 1,300 destinations in 193 countries.

Industry Recognition

Maintaining its leadership in the region, Copa Airlines was recognized by Cirium as the "Most Punctual Airline in Latin America in 2024" for the tenth time, achieving a punctuality rate of 88.22% positioning itself among the three most punctual airlines worldwide. The airline was also recognized in Conde Nast Traveler's 2023 Readers' Choice Awards as one of the Top 15 International Airlines, the only carrier from the Americas on the list. Additionally, for the ninth consecutive year, Copa Airlines received the SKYTRAX award for the Best Airline in Central America and the Caribbean..

About Copa Airlines

Copa Airlines, a subsidiary of Copa Holdings, is a leading airline in passengers and cargo in Latin America. In its 76 years of operation, it has established the Hub of the Americas® in Panama City as the continent's premier connections center. With a very modern fleet of Boeing 737 aircraft, Copa Airlines serves countries in North, Central, South America, and the Caribbean. The airline consistently achieves top on-time performance results in the continent and among the best in the world. Copa Airlines is a member of the Star Alliance, the world's most relevant airline network, and offers the ConnectMiles frequent traveler program, allowing accumulation and redemption of miles across more than 25 airlines worldwide. To plan your trip, purchase tickets and manage reservations, use Web Check-in, and find information on travel policies and requirements.

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Big Bus Tours in Rome

by Alexandra Cohen

Big Bus Tours is the largest operator of open-top sightseeing bus tours in the world. Inspiring the spirit of adventure in over 25 cities, across four continents. Beginning with a fleet of three, today hundreds of buses and guides are helping over four million tourists explore each year.

Their aims are simple: to make hop on, hop off sightseeing the number one thing to do on your city break, offer a day or two (or three) of memorable, cultured and even educational fun and to help you tick off the best bits their world-famous cities have to offer, and then some.

While in Rome, Italy, the Big Bus Tours represented our first activity, Seated on the top deck it represented the perfect introduction to the city and the best photo opportunities of iconic landmarks. This daytime sightseeing tour showcased the Eternal City in all of its glory: the Colosseum, Circus Maximus, Piazza Venezia, Piazza Navona Fountain, Vatican City, and more, with stops located nearby so we could hop off the bus to explore them at our own pace. During the tour, we were able to tune in to pre-recorded commentary, which is available in a variety of languages



When you book the tour you will need to select the date you'd like to hop on the bus. If you're touring with them for more than one day, your ticket must be used across consecutive days, and the date you select at time of booking should be the first day of your tour. Some tours also require you to select a time of travel, to secure your seat. If your ticket has extra inclusions, you may also need to book dates and times for these inclusions after your purchase is complete via their Booking Portal.

Services operate daily from 9 am to 6 pm so see the service information page on their website for tour schedule information and notices. Alternatively, you can check times with a Big Bus Tours team member, buses pull up at each stop every 20 minutes

Educational and informative pre-recorded commentary are available on board all buses. Tune in via complimentary headphones to learn secrets and stories about the rich history of Rome, its famous inhabitants, dazzling architecture and vibrant culture. Commentary is available in the following languages: English, Italian, Spanish, French, German, Brazilian, Portuguese and Mandarin Your complimentary headphones are distributed when you board the bus. They are brand new and you are welcome to keep them!

All buses are equipped with wheelchair ramps and there is of course room downstairs. However, the only way to reach the upper deck is by going up the steps. ■

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Contiki, the world's leading travel brand for 18-35 year-olds, is expanding its Africa portfolio with the launch of four new trips in Africa. Designed to make bucket-list safaris more accessible to younger audiences, each new itinerary, across Kenya, Tanzania and Eswatini and South Africa, delivers the classic safari experience with added adrenaline and cultural immersion, without the premium price tag.

From Kenya to Tanzania, these new trips cover key Africa destinations with local immersion and unbeatable safari experiences:

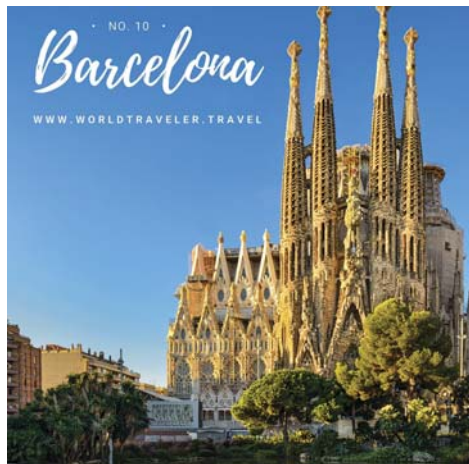
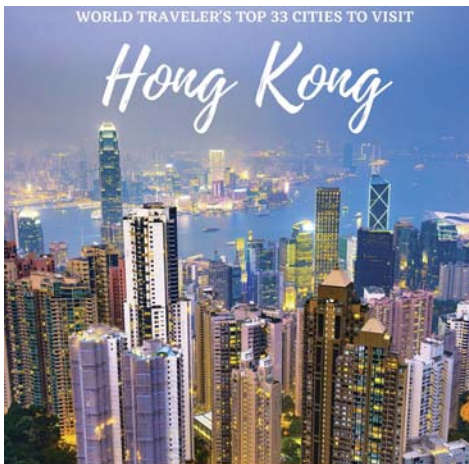
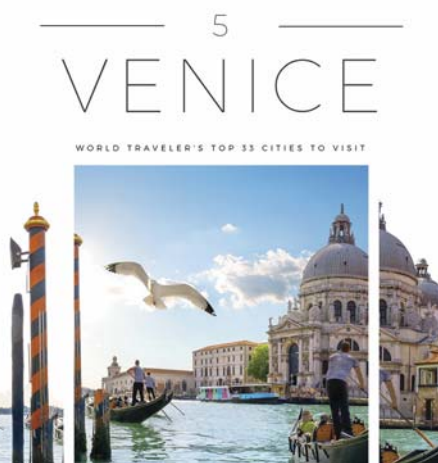
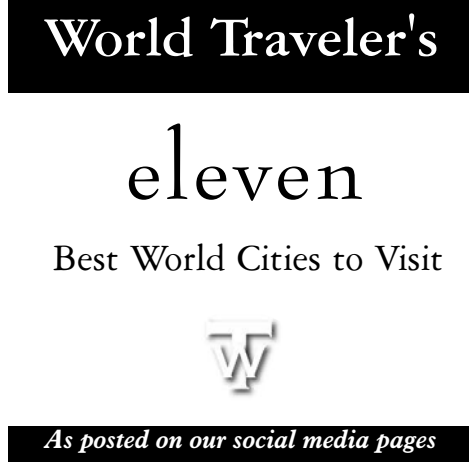
- **Kenya & Tanzania Adventure:** Ideal for young travelers who want to see the best of East Africa in one seamless experience, this trip covers five national parks over 11 days, including the Maasai Mara and Amboseli - while offering a rich mix of wildlife encounters, optional adventure activities and cultural immersion.
- **Kenya Adventure:** Travelers will explore three of Kenya's most iconic national parks across six action-packed days. Highlights include Big 5 game drives, mountain biking through nature and villages, white-water rafting, ziplining, archery, a hot air balloon safari over the plains, and a cultural visit to a Maasai village.
- **Tanzania Adventure:** This six day itinerary ticks off the Serengeti, Ngorongoro Crater, and Lake Manyara. In addition to daily game drives, travelers can opt into treetop walks, cultural village visits, and a night safari for a rare opportunity to see big cats in action after dark.

Each trip includes a custom overland vehicle for the best views during safaris and premium campsites accommodations, where travelers will fall asleep under the stars, with tents pre-assembled by the on-ground team, and all amenities taken care of. These trips are led by experienced Trip Managers who are also fully trained safari guides, alongside a dedicated driver and on-road chef for freshly-prepared meals throughout the journey.

In addition to the new East Africa trips, Contiki has announced a new version of its popular Cape, Safari & Falls itinerary. The new trip 'Cape Town, Kruger & Bushfire Festival' now features the Bushfire Festival - one of Africa's most celebrated music events. This 9-day itinerary combines South Africa's must-see highlights, from Cape Town's dramatic coastline to iconic game drives in Kruger National Park, finishing with three nights at the iconic Bushfire Festival, with a host of acts from across the continent, local food, art and more.

With the launch of these new trips, Contiki's Africa portfolio now includes over 30 itineraries across the continent - from Egypt and Morocco to Namibia and multiple safari adventures.

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Fernie, British Columbia: A Rocky Mountain Town with a Soul

Article and photography by Jennifer Merrick

“This place has a soul,” said Max, our Scottish-born guide with Canyon Raft Co., who was navigating us down the shimmering Elk River. The sun’s rays warmed us, welcoming spring, and the snow on the Rocky Mountains glistened on the jagged peaks that surrounded us. We agreed that the ethereal combination of river and mountains in this corner of southeastern British Columbia, about three hours south of Calgary, was blessed. But it was more than just the stunning scenery that drew Max to Fernie, and why he’s still here after eight years. He explained that it was not just a pretty mountain town where tourists come to ski or hike, but rather a place where kids are still out on their bikes all day, people are welcoming and history and stories are alive.

“It’s a real community,” he concluded.

After our family’s getaway in Fernie we couldn’t agree more. Here were some of the highlights:

Cruising the trails on e-bikes

The Fernie Fox Hotel, where we had a lovely stay, is committed to sustainability with initiatives like rooftop solar panels, no single-use plastics and complimentary e-bikes for their guests. And it turns out that this mode of transport is the ideal way to explore the area.

The newly paved and accessible Fernie Valley Pathway connects to an extensive multi-use trail network. With no huffing and puffing, we zipped up to Fernie Provincial Park to enjoy a short hike on their trails, cruised along the Elk River through idyllic parkland and cycled through the town’s historic downtown, checking out its heritage buildings and local businesses.

Sipping a sunset cocktail with the legendary ghost rider

Fernie is rich in legends and folklore from the Three Sisters (represented by the three mountain peaks in the Lizard Range), whose

heartbreak haunt the area to the celebrated ‘Griz’, a giant hermit with the strength of Hercules, who roams the mountains. But the most famous is the ghost rider who reveals himself on horseback on the face of Mt. Hosmer. Each summer day at sunset, the shadowy figure reveals itself. Some choice spots to enjoy the view and toast the spirited equestrian with a sundowner include the Griz Bar at the Fernie Alpine Resort and the Bayleaf Indian Fusion restaurant at the golf course.

Dining at local downtown restaurants

Fernie’s historic downtown is a joy to stroll around in. There are no chain stores, and numerous heritage buildings have been repurposed. The 1909 train station, for example, is now a hub for the arts with galleries and events and the town’s original bank is now a museum. Many other original buildings now house local businesses run by locals with passion and pride.

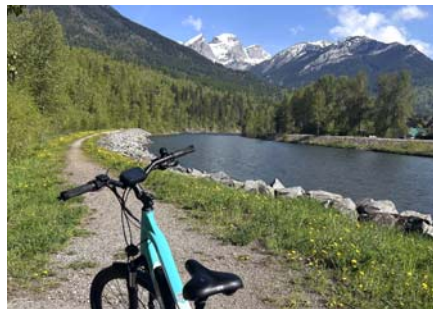
The restaurants are no exception. Big Bang Bagels makes their inspired bagels in-house, Nevados serves up flavorful Latin-fusion tapas with signature Mezcal and tequila cocktails, and the Bridge Bistro hosts brunch favorites with a view.

Marveling at the sublime views

With a glacier-fed river running through Fernie and the Rocky Mountain peaks surrounding it, you don’t have to go anywhere to appreciate the views. And it takes no time at all to reach trails with jaw-dropping panoramic vistas. We joined a guided excursion with Hike Fernie, which brought us through wild-flowered trails that led to benches perched on the edge, looking down to the town below and the mountains around us.

Equally stunning is the Elk River, where water adventures can be as relaxing as flyfishing and floating gently down the river or as adrenaline-filled as a white-water thrill ride through rapids. We opted for the float, and our guide, Max, pointed out wildlife like osprey and deer and told us about the soul of his new hometown. ■

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China: Dim Sum



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Finding Light in Nuremberg, Germany

Article and photography by Judi Cohen (Traveling Judi)

A few days in Nuremberg made for a meaningful and unexpectedly uplifting finale to a Jewish heritage-themed Uniworld Danube river cruise in Hungary, Austria and Germany. Nuremberg surprised me. It's a city of contrasts, layered with history, culture, and beauty, and filled with moments that invited both reflection and joy.

Fairytale-like Old Town, Modern City and Historical Importance

Steps from the hotel is the Craftsmen's Courtyard, a charming enclave of artisan workshops and cobblestone lanes. It's a lovely introduction to Nuremberg's fairytale-like Old Town, where half-timbered buildings, Gothic churches, and stone bridges sit comfortably alongside modern cafés and shops.

Outside those medieval walls, Nuremberg is a thriving, modern city. Nuremberg draws visitors not only for its beauty and cuisine but for its profound historical importance.

During World War II, Nuremberg was both a symbol of Nazi propaganda and later, a

place of justice during the Nuremberg Trials. This complicated legacy makes it a vital destination for those wanting to understand Germany's past. And judging by the crowds, many people do.

Former Nazi Party Rally Grounds and Documentation Center

We took a tram to the former Nazi Party Rally Grounds and Documentation Center. Though the main museum is under renovation until 2026, the temporary exhibition inside the vast Congress Hall offers powerful context on how Nazi propaganda shaped a nation. We wandered through the enormous Third Reich parade grounds, and the Zeppelinfeld grandstand, struck by the scale and spectacle of it all. Once a stage for hate-filled speeches, those same spaces are used today for jogging, car racing, concerts, paddle boating, and family picnics.

Where to Stay:

Staying at the Cloud One Hotel, just across from the central train station, was an ideal location for touring. With stylish rooms, a great breakfast buffet, and a 14th-floor Sky Bar, it offered panoramic views of the city's red rooftops and steeples. That first evening, watching the sunset, I felt a surprising sense of calm.

Daytrip to Dachau Memorial Site

The next day, we took a train to the Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial Site. Originally, we planned to walk the historical path prisoners were marched down, but due to the heat, we took a short bus ride from the train station. Walking through the iron

gates leading into the memorial site with the slogan "Arbeit macht frei" (work will set you free), we saw crowds of tourists and school groups. Our guide explained that in Germany, all students are required to visit former camps and learn about the Holocaust.

Most of Dachau's buildings were demolished after the war, but reconstructions of the barracks and crematorium, help tell the story. A museum is in the original intake building where prisoners had everything taken away and exchanged their given names for a number. While our guide touched on the broader prisoner population, she noticeably downplayed the Jewish experience.

As I walked through the foundations of the former prisoner barracks surrounded by imposing guard towers, I felt my father's presence. He was a prisoner in Dachau, as were my grandparents and other family members. I recited the Kaddish, the Jewish mourner's prayer, and placed stones on the monuments to honor my family and the six million Jews who perished during the Holocaust. I also donated money to support the preservation of this sacred site.

Comfort Food in the Old City

When we returned to Nuremberg's lively Old City, we dined at Fränk'ness, the creation of celebrity chef Alexander Herrmann. We savoured the burrata with pine nuts, fresh breads with creamy spreads, roasted steak, potatoes au gratin, and a crisp Austrian rosé. Food, like travel, can be healing.

Nuremberg had given us space to reflect, to honor the past, and to feel hopeful about the future. I wish we had more time to walk in the Old City and try some bratwurst with cold beer. ■

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Escape the Chill: Make West Hollywood Your Wellness Haven This Fall



As temperatures plummet across the north, there's no better time to trade snowflakes for sunshine and book a wellness retreat to West Hollywood. Burrowed in the heart of the Greater Los Angeles region, this two-square-mile city exudes energy, creativity, and a commitment to next-level wellness that draws celebrities and travelers year-round.

This fall West Hollywood is calling travelers to trade grey skies for golden sunshine, with outdoor adventures and soul-soothing wellness experiences that promise a complete mind and body reset.

Spa Rituals and Star-Quality Treatments

In West Hollywood, wellness isn't an afterthought; it's practically woven into the city's DNA. Here, world-class spas offer treatments designed to melt the stress away and leave you glowing long after your trip ends. Try the signature "B Silent Ritual" at Bamford Wellness Spa inside the lush, sustainable 1 Hotel West Hollywood, which pairs a shiatsu rocking technique with an Indian head massage to promote deep sleep.

At the Spa at The West Hollywood EDITION, ancient therapies meet high-tech modalities, like an infrared sauna paired with a CBD foot scrub.

And if your skin craves a winter pick-me-up, book the Cryo T-Shock Facial at Bamford or a lymphatic "Sturmglow Facial" at Dr. Barbara Sturm's boutique spa, designed to lift, tone and revive tired complexions.

Outdoor Wellness Under the California Sun

Why hibernate when you could be moving under clear blue skies? Start your morning with rooftop yoga at Mondrian Los Angeles or Petit Ermitage, where you'll flow through sun salutations with panoramic views of LA's iconic skyline.

If you're craving adrenaline, sweat it out in a kickboxing class at Rumble, or sign up for a guided e-bike tour with Bikes and Hikes LA to explore the Hollywood Hills and celebrity-lined streets of Beverly Hills; a workout with a side of star sightings.

In need of a nature fix? Lace up your runners and head to Runyon Canyon Park, just

ten minutes from West Hollywood. The East Ridge Trail rewards hikers with sweeping vistas of downtown LA and the Santa Monica Mountains; an escape from icy sidewalks back home.

Eat, Sip and Nourish

West Hollywood's food scene is a playground for health-conscious foodies. Grab a cold-pressed juice and a chickpea burger at 1 Kitchen inside 1 Hotel, or share vegan tacos and spirit-free cocktails at Gracias Madre, a go-to for plant-based Mexican fare.

For a cozy brunch, The Butcher's Daughter plates up bright smoothie bowls and vegan pancakes on Melrose Avenue, while nearby Zinqué's smoked salmon toast and quinoa burritos make it a local favorite.

Of course, indulgence is also part of wellness. Unwind with a night out on the Sunset Strip, dancing at Skybar or catching a live band at Whisky a Go Go, before treating yourself to a next-morning Hangover IV Therapy at Spa Pendry - a West Hollywood secret weapon that'll have you brunch-ready in no time.

Exclusive Fall & Winter Offers

This season, West Hollywood's new BOGO gift card program makes wellness travel even sweeter. When you purchase a gift card to use at participating hotels, spas, restaurants and boutiques, the city will boost your balance by 50%.

Make This Your Season of Self-Care

Whether it's a restorative solo getaway, a girls' trip before the holiday rush, or a romantic retreat that swaps fireplaces for sun-soaked pools, West Hollywood guarantees Canadians a wellness-focused winter like no other. With luxury and creativity around every corner, and temperatures that rarely dip below sweater weather, it's the perfect place to rediscover your glow. ■

[VISITWESTHOLLYWOOD.COM/WELLNESS](https://www.visitwesthollywood.com/wellness)

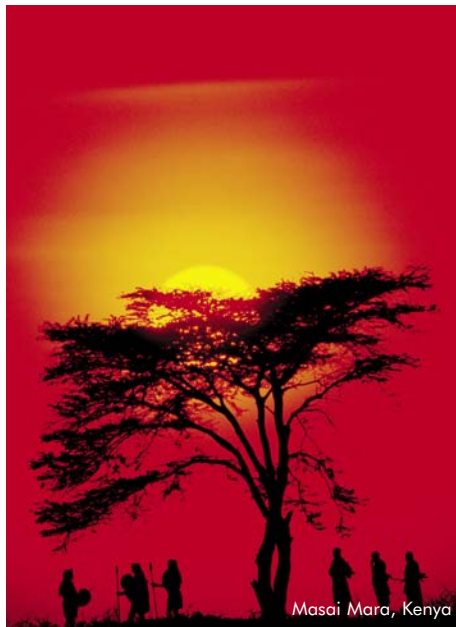




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Entsukaku Pagoda

Tokyo Pagodas: A Spiritual Journey

Article and photography by Steve Gillick

Visitors to Japan have been marveling at Pagodas since the 7th century. While originating in India, the idea of a holy reliquary, first to house relics of Buddha and then to include holy scriptures, followed the spread of Buddhism to China, and then to Japan. Tokyo is home to five of Japan's 81 pagodas, offering soaring beauty, symmetry, and solace, and representing the spiritual journey that ascends through the five elements: earth, water, fire, wind, and sky.

Senso-ji Temple Pagoda - Asakusa - One of Tokyo's most popular attractions, Senso-ji Temple in Asakusa, welcomes over 30 million visitors annually. The five-storied pagoda, initially built in 942 to hold Buddha's ashes, was rebuilt in 1973, standing at 53.32 meters high and making it the country's second tallest.

While very crowded during the day, Senso-ji becomes tranquil after sunset, allowing for a peaceful illuminated encounter with the main buildings and the pagoda.

Kyu Kaneiji Pagoda - Ueno - Ueno Park is one of Tokyo's must-visit destinations, offering a wide range of attractions, including Cherry Blossom viewing, several of the National Museums, and historic shrines and temples. Located within Ueno Zoo, the 36-meter five-storied Kyu Kaneiji pagoda dates back to 1639 and has remained intact since. The name is a reminder that Ueno Park lies on the former grounds of the Toeizan Kan'eiji Temple, whose purpose was to protect the Tokugawa Shogunate, six of whom are buried nearby.

Entsukaku Pagoda - Hotel Chinzanso Tokyo - Originally constructed in Hiroshima in the 12th century and rebuilt in 1622, the three-storied Entsukaku pagoda was painstakingly relocated to the garden of the Hotel Chinzanso in 1925. Views from the rooms and suites reveal the pagoda peaking through the morning 'sea of clouds', and illuminated amidst the lush garden in the evening.

Gotokuji Pagoda - The Cat Temple - Tokyo visitors pounce on the idea of visiting Gotokuji, famous for its thousands of beckoning cat figurines, known as Maneki-Neko, waving in "good luck."

Nearby is a 22.5-meter-high three-storied wooden pagoda, inaugurated in 2006. It blends into the serenity of the garden, reinforcing Buddhism's deep connection with nature.

Ikegami Honmonji Pagoda - Ikegami Honmonji Temple, dedicated to the Buddhist sage Nichiren, is home to the Kanto region's oldest five-storied pagoda, built in 1608. This hilltop temple also features a scenic lookout.

Tokyo provides enlightening ways for travellers to reflect on the mystique of the pagoda and to continue their own spiritual journey. ■

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World Traveler Fall 2025



National Centre for Environmental Art

New From Australia

Some of the hottest openings across the country includes:

Yolngu Power: The Art Of Yirrkala

The Art Gallery of New South Wales' Yolngu power: the art of Yirrkala showcases eight decades of Yolngu culture and creativity, featuring nearly 300 works by 98 Aboriginal artists from north-east Arnhem Land. Presented with the Buku-Larrŋgay Mulka Centre, the exhibition highlights how Yolngu artists have used their work for political and cultural expression since the 1940s.

Visitors can also explore Yalu, an immersive digital installation in a former wartime bunker, and enjoy the Warakirri dining experience—a five-course meal paired with storytelling that celebrates Aboriginal Australian food and heritage.

Meanjin to Minjerribah Cultural Day Trip

Step into the heart of Aboriginal Australian culture with Yura Tours on North Stradbroke Island/Minjerribah, where Quandamooka Traditional Owners share 60,000 years of unbroken connection to land and sea. This full-day experience goes beyond typical tourism, guiding guests through sacred stories, cultural practices, and native plant knowledge amid stunning coastal landscapes.

Departing from Brisbane/Meanjin, the tour supports reconciliation through economic partnerships with the Quandamooka community. Highlights include local wildlife encounters and a visit to artist Delvene Cockatoo-Collins' studio in Goompi (Dunwich), where ancestral stories are handprinted onto contemporary works.

National Centre for Environmental Art

Australia's first gallery dedicated to environmental art has opened in Halls Gap, at the foothills of Victoria's Grampians National Park. The National Centre for Environmental Art invites visitors to explore the intersection of art, science, and nature through thought-provoking exhibitions and immersive experiences.

Launching with End & Being by Jacobus Capone—featuring video and photography from a performance on Mont Blanc's Bossons Glacier—the centre also includes a botanic garden, native grasslands, and outdoor commissions. Just two hours from Melbourne/Narrm, it offers a powerful new lens on our relationship with the natural world. ■

WWW.AUSTRALIA.COM



ings; the Presidential Complex; Güven Park; Youth Park; Ankara Train Station; and İş Bank Building.

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Central to Türkiye's submission are the many ways in which the city's layout and structures reflect the cultural importance of Ankara. The İş Bank is emblematic of the country's approach to economic reconstruction during the Republic era. Institutions like the Faculty of Language, History and Geography, as well as cultural organizations such as the State Opera and Ballet and Ankara Radio, demonstrate the new government's focus on arts and communication. Investment in these areas allowed Ankara to become the world-class city it has become, earning its spot under UNESCO's consideration. ■

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

Türkiye's Capital Ankara Makes the 2025 UNESCO Tentative List

Ankara, the capital of the Republic of Türkiye, has officially been admitted to the UNESCO 2025 Tentative List. This move recognizes the exemplary modern architecture and approach to urban planning that have set Ankara apart as a respected world city and an elite destination. With its inclusion, the total number of Turkish sites on the list has been raised to 80.

Ankara replaced Istanbul as the capital of Türkiye on October 13, 1923, following the 1922 decline of the Ottoman Empire

and subsequent restructuring of the Turkish Republic. Representing a shift in attitude towards one of progress, Ankara would thrust Türkiye into the future with an intensive modernization initiative beginning under President Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and continuing through the 1970s, transforming it into the city it is today. The UNESCO submission – filed collaboratively by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and the Turkish National Commission for UNESCO – includes feats of urban design such as the North/South-oriented Atatürk Boulevard and districts such as Ulus and Kızılay. It also features such iconic structures as: The First, Second and Third Grand National Assembly of Türkiye build-





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S a i l T h e W o r l d !



Princess Cruises Announces Largest-Ever Japan Deployment in 2027

In a historic first, Princess Cruises announces its most expansive Japan season ever in 2027, featuring two Japanese-built, sister ships - Diamond Princess and Sapphire Princess - sailing from the Tokyo region throughout the entire season.

Marking a major milestone for the brand's legacy in Asia, the 2027 program includes 78 departures across 50 unique itineraries, with voyages ranging from seven to 28 days, making it Princess' most robust Japan deployment to date.

Itinerary Highlights:

- **Cherry Blossom Voyages** (9–24 days): Timed to follow the blooming season from south to north across all four of Japan's main islands.
- **Festival Cruises** (8–24 days): Celebrate Japan's most vibrant summer festivals including the Aomori Nebuta, Tokushima Awa Odori, and Kochi Yosakoi with late-night stays.
- **Circle and Grand Japan Voyages** (9–28 days): Circumnavigate the country with visits to Osaka, Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and more.
- **Okinawa & Taiwan Itineraries** (9–18 days): Explore the subtropical beauty of Okinawa and the cultural richness of Taipei and Hualien.
- **Japan Explorer Cruises** (9–13 days): Discover iconic cities like Shimizu (for Mt. Fuji), Kobe (for Kyoto), and Kagoshima. ■ WWW.PRINCESS.COM



Virgin Voyages Reveals Showstopping Entertainment Line-Up Ahead of Brilliant Lady's Inaugural Seasons

When Virgin Voyages' newest Lady Ship sails into the New York harbour this September, fans are expecting the brand's award-winning entertainment line-up to be, in a word – Brilliant. Shaped by customer feedback and the brand's commitment to continuous innovation, those aboard will enjoy

even more comedy, live music and immersive storytelling. The entertainment is designed to keep pace with the ship's adventurous spirit as *Brilliant Lady* introduces seven new, original productions. This ship will also bring back reimagined favorites, all designed to complement *Brilliant Lady*'s longer itineraries and diverse destinations. Virgin's new routes range from five to 16 nights and take Sailors from Bermuda's pink sands to Alaska's majestic landscapes and glacial fjords. ■

WWW.VIRGINVOYAGES.COM



A Season of Discovery: National Geographic-Lindblad Expeditions Unveils 2027-28 Deployment

National Geographic-Lindblad Expeditions have recently announced the first of its highly anticipated 2027–28 deployment openings, offering guests the opportunity to explore some of the most awe-inspiring destinations on the planet aboard the fleet of mission-built expedition ships.

Pairing Lindblad Expeditions' pioneering heritage with National Geographic's exploration expertise, National Geographic-Lindblad Expeditions will continue to deliver exceptional voyages guided by veteran expedition leaders, naturalists, historians, scientists, and National Geographic Experts who illuminate the wonders of the natural world at every turn. The 2027–28 season features voyages across seven continents, designed to connect curious travelers with wildlife, wild places, and local communities in ways that are authentic, enriching, and respectful. ■ WWW.EXPEDITIONS.COM

Viking Announces New River Voyages in India



Viking® has recently announced its first river voyages in India on the *Viking Brahmaputra*, a new 80-guest vessel designed specifically for the Brahmaputra River. Currently under construction and scheduled to debut in late 2027, the *Viking Brahmaputra* will set a new standard for modern river voyages in India. The ship will sail between Guwahati and Nimati Ghat in the northeastern state of Assam as part of Viking's new 15-day itinerary, *Wonders of India*. In addition to an eight-day river voyage, the itinerary includes a fully-guided land program with overnights in Delhi, Agra and Jaipur.

The Viking Brahmaputra

The new *Viking Brahmaputra* will host 80 guests in 40 outside staterooms. Featuring the signature Scandinavian design for which Viking is known, all staterooms and suites will have floor-to-ceiling sliding glass doors with a veranda. Guests on the three-deck Viking Brahmaputra will also enjoy a range of amenities, including a Spa & Fitness Center and an open-air Sky Bar on the Upper Deck.

Wonders of India

The 15-day *Wonders of India* itinerary program will operate roundtrip from Delhi, with hotel stays in Delhi, Agra and Jaipur that bracket an eight-day Brahmaputra River voyage, sailing east or west, respectively. With 13 included tours, guests will be immersed in India's cultural treasures and will have the opportunity to experience as many as 10 UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Guests will delve into the rich history of India's Golden Triangle, exploring Agra's fabled Taj Mahal, strolling through Old Delhi's winding streets and glimpsing Jaipur's ornate Palace of Winds. While sailing the Brahmaputra River, guests will see Guwahati's temple, encounter the thriving villages along its banks, search for the one-horned rhinos and buffalos of Kaziranga National Park and discover the cultures of Majuli, one of the world's largest river islands. ■

WWW.VIKING.COM

Seabourn Announces First Ever “Pole to Pole” Grand Expedition Voyage for 2027



Seabourn, a leader in ultra-luxury and expedition travel, has unveiled its first-ever expedition Grand Voyage – the 94-day “Pole to Pole: Grand Expedition” on the purpose-built Seabourn Venture. Departing on August 17 and concluding November 19, 2027, the voyage will span more than 20,500 nautical miles, charting a course from the High Arctic to Antarctica and offering a once-in-a-lifetime combination of remote landings, immersive expeditions, rare wildlife sightings, and signature Seabourn luxury experiences.

The 94-day voyage begins with an overnight stay in Reykjavik, Iceland, followed by a charter flight to Kangerlussuaq, Greenland, where guests will embark the ship. Over the course of the sailing, Seabourn Venture will offer 60 days of expedition experiences and visits to destinations across 14 countries and territories, including five days in Antarctica, three in South Georgia, and three in the Falkland Islands, as well as six days in the famed Northwest Passage and a new three-day experience to the remote and rarely-visited Ellesmere Island in the Arctic Archipelago. Additional highlights include 33 sea days; and crossings of the equator, Tropic of Cancer, and Tropic of Capricorn. Between the poles, guests will also explore sun-drenched tropical islands and vibrant coastal regions across the Caribbean and South America, experiencing the full spectrum of the planet’s geography, from icy wilderness to equatorial warmth. The sailing concludes in Ushuaia, Argentina, with a post-cruise charter flight to Buenos Aires. The full itinerary is available on Seabourn’s website. ■

WWW.SEABOURN.COM

Hapag-Lloyd Cruises Unveils Three Extraordinary South and Central America Expeditions Aboard Their Bilingual Ship, the HANSEATIC Inspiration



This November and December, Hapag-Lloyd Cruises invites adventure seekers and cultural explorers alike to experience the breathtaking beauty and biodiversity of South and Central America. Aboard the cutting-edge expedition ship *HANSEATIC inspiration*, guests will traverse some of the world’s most stunning landscapes from Costa Rica and the Panama Canal to the remote Chilean fjords on three distinct, expertly curated journeys. The *HANSEATIC inspiration* caters to the international market with all itineraries conducted in both German and English.

Designed for discovery, these small-scale expeditions immerse up to 230 guests in diverse ecosystems, indigenous cultures, and rarely visited destinations. With over 30 years of expertise as the market leader in German-speaking expedition cruising, Hapag-Lloyd Cruises offers a refined, yet adventurous experience enhanced by expert-guided Zodiac excursions, luxury accommodations, and personalized service.

Each itinerary offers unparalleled access to natural wonders and cultural treasures:

• Oh, How Beautiful is the Panama Canal

A dynamic 11-day journey from Panama City, featuring a full-day transit through the legendary Panama Canal and a first-time stop at Punta Leona in Costa Rica.

• Mysterious Equatorial Adventure

This 16-day voyage explores the Pacific coasts of Panama, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Chile—rich with ancient ruins, rainforests, and indigenous encounters.

• Nature is Big, Man is Small

A 15-day deep dive into Chile’s majestic fjords, towering glaciers, and iconic national parks, including the famed Torres del Paine.

Guests can enhance their expeditions with curated pre-and post-cruise programs or fully customized Travel Concierge arrangements. Extended journeys with multi-cruise combinations are also available at exclusive rates. ■

WWW.HL-CRUISES.COM

Explora Journeys Debuts Extraordinary New Itineraries for Summer 2027



Explora Journeys has unveiled its highly anticipated Summer 2027 journeys spotlighting a trifecta of exciting firsts for MSC Group’s ultra elegant ocean travel brand. Under the banner ‘An Ocean of New’, the season will introduce distinctive journeys visiting maiden ports in the Mediterranean, welcome the launch of a new ship, Explora IV, and momentarily add the breathtaking and long-awaited horizons of Alaska with Explora III to the brand’s ever-evolving collection of destinations.

Unfolding from March to November 2027, this new season of itineraries spans some of the globe’s most captivating regions, inviting guests to plan ahead and experience the extraordinary aboard Explora I, Explora II, Explora III, and now Explora IV.

New European Perspectives

While Explora III and IV explore new shores in Summer 2027, Explora I and II will create fresh memories in the brand’s home waters, celebrating the Mediterranean’s enduring allure and revealing its best-kept secrets. Embracing the contrasts of East and West, more than 60 possible journeys will trace storied coastlines, pausing in charismatic maiden ports.

Alaska – An Epic Destination

Bringing its blue-ice glaciers, verdant forests and life-filled waters into Explora Journeys’ collection of destinations is a major milestone in the brand’s onward expansion. The first opportunity to experience Alaska’s untouched wilderness, cultural vibrancy and hyper-local culinary scene with Explora Journeys will be aboard Explora III in Summer 2027. ■

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Viking Orion: Scandinavian Luxury Meets Alaska's Untamed Frontier

Article and photography by Michael Morcos

Cruising Alaska with Viking was more than a trip—it was a revelation. Having sailed with Viking on ten separate voyages across river, ocean, and expedition categories, I've come to expect a certain level of polish, professionalism, and warmth. But even with that experience, our recent journey aboard the *Viking Orion* exceeded every expectation. This was Viking at its absolute best—intimate, seamless, elegant—and perfectly suited for exploring one of the world's last true frontiers.

This article, the first of a two-part series, focuses on life onboard the *Viking Orion*, while the second will explore the magnificent land excursions through Alaska, from Seward

to Vancouver. For now, let's sail into the heart of this exceptional ship and the experience it delivers.

A True Ocean Gem: The Viking Orion

Launched in 2018, the *Viking Orion* is part of Viking's award-winning ocean fleet. With a maximum capacity of just 930 guests, she's designed to feel spacious yet intimate, luxurious but not ostentatious. This balance becomes immediately apparent from the moment you step aboard.

The *Orion* offers a classic Scandinavian aesthetic—clean lines, warm woods, soft lighting, and an abundance of natural textures. There's

a calming flow to every space, from the polished stone atrium to the inviting lounges and quiet reading areas. She's more than a vessel; she's a floating Nordic sanctuary.

Embarkation, Viking Style

Our journey began in Anchorage, where Viking's seamless organization was immediately evident. Having booked flights and transfers through the cruise line, every step was stress-free. We were met by Viking representatives, and after a scenic drive to Seward, we were quickly ushered through embarkation, and moments later we were in our state-room with our luggage already waiting. Within minutes, it felt like home.



A Stateroom With a View—And Then Some

Our stateroom featured the brand's signature Nordic design—understated luxury with maximum functionality. A king-sized bed, a well-lit vanity area, spacious closets, and a beautifully appointed bathroom with heated floors made for a truly comfortable stay. But the highlight was undoubtedly our private veranda. Sailing past glaciers and snow-capped peaks, it became our favorite perch for morning coffee or evening wine. The ever-changing views were hypnotic.

Housekeeping, done twice daily, was impeccable. Our dedicated stewards always ensured the room was spotless, restocked, and freshened. Viking's attention to detail is simply unmatched.

The Joy of Public Spaces

Every inch of *Orion* is thoughtfully designed. It took nearly the entire first week to fully re-explore its many tucked-away gems and hidden corners.

Our favorite spot quickly became the *Explorers' Lounge*, located on the upper decks at the bow. Stretching across two levels and framed by floor-to-ceiling windows, this space felt like an alpine retreat. Cozy chairs, quiet nooks, and live classical music made it the perfect place to relax after a day of adventure.

The *Wintergarden*, with its laced wooden canopy and gentle lighting, provided a tranquil space for traditional afternoon tea. Meanwhile, the *Aquavit Terrace*, tucked at the aft of the ship, offered al fresco dining beside a beautiful heated infinity pool—one of the best places to watch the Alaskan landscape slip by.

Then there's the *Living Room*, a stylish, social atrium space ideal for reading or impromptu conversation. And for those late-night moments, the *Torshavn* bar beckoned with cocktails, live music, and a chic ambiance.

Wellness at Sea

For wellness lovers, *Viking Orion* shines. The full-service *LivNordic Spa* is a destination unto itself. After hiking in the wilderness or exploring small Alaskan ports, there was no better

way to unwind than with a soak in the hydrotherapy pool, followed by a visit to the steam room and the unique snow grotto—a true nod to Scandinavian traditions.

Artful Details and Scandinavian Charm

One of Viking's most delightful touches is how they embed culture into every aspect of the journey. On *Orion*, art and history are ever-present. Reproductions of the *Bayeux Tapestry* line the stairwells, while charming Scandinavian folklore characters—hidden in elevator panels and corridors—add a playful note.

You'll find rotating art exhibits, curated book collections, and interactive digital displays throughout the ship. These quiet, thoughtful touches elevate the cruise from a vacation to an enriching experience.

Gastronomy at Its Peak

Dining aboard the *Orion* was nothing short of exceptional. From casual bites to fine dining, Viking continues to prove that culinary excellence is a cornerstone of the guest experience.

The *World Café*, a buffet-style venue with panoramic views, became our go-to for breakfast and lunch. Its impressive variety ranged from freshly grilled meats and seafood to vibrant salads, artisan breads, and an abundance of vegetarian and vegan options.

For a quick and satisfying bite, the *Pool Grill* served up mouthwatering burgers, while *Mamsen's*, a Norwegian-inspired eatery, offered sweet and savory delights throughout the day.

Dinner was often enjoyed at *The Restaurant*, which felt more like a refined brasserie than a ship's dining room. Offering full table service and a rotating menu of regional specialties, every meal here was a culinary journey.

But the stars of the dining experience were *Manfredi's* and *The Chef's Table*. *Manfredi's*, with its Italian focus, served the best bistecca fiorentina I've had outside of Tuscany. The *Chef's Table* offered a five-course tasting menu inspired by global cuisine, paired expertly with wines. Both restaurants required

reservations—and were worth it every time.

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Shopping and Entertainment

While *Orion* isn't a floating shopping mall (thankfully), its boutique offered a curated selection of goods—from Scandinavian fashion and fine jewelry to practical travel items and Viking-branded keepsakes.

Evenings onboard were relaxed and intimate. Guests enjoyed lectures by resident historians and naturalists, classical music performances, and occasionally, cinematic screenings in the ship's *Star Theater*. This wasn't Las Vegas at sea—this was culture, refinement, and intellectual curiosity.

Legendary Service

Viking's crew deserves its own standing ovation. From the ship's officers to the dining staff, housekeeping, and guest services, every team member we encountered was professional, attentive, and genuinely warm. The crew-to-passenger ratio was clearly evident in the level of personalized service we enjoyed throughout the trip.

You never felt like a number. Every interaction was thoughtful, and often infused with humor and heart.

What's Next: Alaska Awaits

The real magic of this cruise, however, lies just beyond the railings. In our next issue, I'll share highlights from our immersive ten-day journey starting in Seward, (gateway to Denali), sailing to places like Valdez, Icy Strait Point, Haines, Juneau, Sitka, Ketchikan, scenic sailing through the Inside Passage and finally to Vancouver.

From the majesty of glaciers to the charm of remote fishing villages, this itinerary gave us front-row seats to Alaska's raw, rugged beauty.

Until then, know this: the *Viking Orion* isn't just a way to see Alaska. She's a destination all her own. ■

WWW.VIKING.COM





Photo: Crystal Cruises



A Glimpse of Heaven at Sea: Cruising the Mediterranean Aboard Crystal Symphony

Article and photography by Judi Cohen (Traveling Judi)

Coming Home to Crystal. I first fell in love with Crystal a decade ago, somewhere between the Amalfi Coast and the soft glow of a Mediterranean sunset. Returning this summer to sail aboard *Crystal Symphony* felt like meeting an old friend, one who had not only aged gracefully but blossomed into something even more welcoming.

Originally built to host 922 guests, the ship now accommodates just 606 after a 2023 refurbishment under new owners, A&K Travel Group. On our voyage, there were 479 pas-

sengers from 24 countries, including 70 children. Even at peak times, it felt as though the ship had secret passageways where guests vanished. Whether lounging by the Seahorse Pool, sipping sunset cocktails, or tucking away in the Palm Court, we found space and quiet at every turn.

Suite Sanctuary at Sea

A Sapphire Verandah Suite on Deck 8 became our comfortable home at sea. A living room, complete with sofas and coffee tables, a dining table, walk-in closet, and a marble bathroom with double sinks and an

oversized shower set the tone for comfort. The king-size bed, with high-quality, super-soft linens, and the private balcony, accessible from both the bedroom and living room, made it hard to leave.

We often dined on the balcony as we sailed away from ports, watching the sun go down. Most nights, we slept with the balcony door open, lulled by the gentle hum of the sea and the warm breeze.

And then there was Daniel, our butler. By day two, he knew our preferences. Laundry?



Handled. Champagne? Chilled. Chocolates? Magically replenished while we were out. Each afternoon, savory and sweet hors d'oeuvres appeared as if by magic.

The Heart of Crystal: White-Glove Warmth

What truly sets Crystal apart is its people. Many crew members returned after the relaunch, and their joy in being back radiated in every interaction. The bartenders who remembered our names. The steward who shared his favorite Greek island tips. The always-smiling cook, Silas, in the Marketplace restaurant, who knew our breakfast order before we said anything. Each encounter left us feeling welcome, as if we were guests in a private home.

A Culinary Voyage

Food is an essential part of any cruise, and on *Crystal Symphony*, it becomes an experience all its own. With nine dining venues to choose from, we often found ourselves planning our days around meals, not because we were hungry, but because dining onboard was a delight.

The Marketplace was our go-to for breakfast and lunch. The fresh, colorful buffet, with different hot and cold dishes on offer daily, coupled with alfresco seating at the back of the ship on nice days, made for a perfect combination.

For lunch and dinner, Beefbar, a concept restaurant born in Monte Carlo, became our favorite. We liked the bright, modern décor and the sea views. It offered a wonderful mix of high-quality steak, interesting street food, and vibrant salads. The signature bao buns and avocado hummus paired beautifully with filet mignon or striploin steak. Beefbar also offers premium Kobe and Wagyu beef options starting at \$90.

Umi Uma, the Japanese-Peruvian fusion restaurant by famed chef Nobu Matsuhisa, was over-the-top delicious. At the sushi bar, we were impressed with the artistry of the chef as he carefully selected sushi appetizers for us. Moving to a table after our appetizers, the signature Nobu-Style Black Cod, and Nobu-Style Lobster with Truffle-Yuzu were unforgettable.

Osteria d'Ovidio, named for Crystal's owner, Manfredi Lefebvre d'Ovidio, offered traditionally prepared Italian dishes including homemade pastas and risottos. The ambiance was romantic with candles and soft music. Our servers suggested wine pairings and provided exceptional, personalized service all evening.

Other dining venues included Waterside, the main dining room (available for breakfast and dinner), the Bistro and Trident Grill for lighter bites (and ice cream) throughout most of the day, and 24-hour Room Service. The Vintage Room is an intimate venue that hosts tastings and wine-pairing menus at an additional cost.

The only thing I wished for was the availability of alfresco dining at night under the stars.

Life Between Ports

Crystal Symphony offered plenty to do onboard between ports. From the Aurora Spa's wellness and beauty services to a well-equipped fitness center, a pickleball court, golf nets, shuffleboard, and a promenade deck that circles the ship and was well used by runners and walkers. The options felt endless. Enrichment programs included guest speakers, photography classes, and computer skills sessions. Live music and nightly shows added a sparkle to our evenings. On sea days, the Daily Program spanned two pages, filled with activities to choose from.

The White Party was a standout, an all-white celebration with champagne, cocktails, caviar, and dancing under the Atrium dome. Everyone, from barefoot children to twirling grandparents, was swept up in the party.

Ports of Call: A Mediterranean Tapestry

Sailing aboard *Crystal Symphony* in Greece and Italy was a tapestry of memorable views, storied streets, and the kind of summer heat that had us searching for shade. What we discovered was that the magic of these places often lives in the spaces between the guidebook highlights: a quiet seat along the water or a café to watch people and feel the rhythm of each place.

Mykonos felt like a postcard brought to life with its whitewashed lanes, bursts of

bougainvillea, and the Aegean glittering in the sun. We climbed up to the iconic windmills before retreating to Little Venice for a breeze and a little shopping.

High atop the dramatic cliffs, Santorini's white buildings and blue-domed churches sat like a string of pearls on the edge. Tenders from the ship to the port ran all day, and we visited Santorini in the early morning, returning by tender late in the afternoon to watch the sunset over the azure sea and the *Crystal Serenity* anchored offshore.

Naples was alive with scooters, graffiti, and the scent of pizza in the air. We wandered the narrow alleys, savoring the raw character of the city. We found a restaurant close to the port for homemade gnocchi and pizza. Crystal made port days seamless, from all-day tender service to shore support. We never felt rushed, and we were always free to explore at our own pace or take a Crystal excursion.

Why Crystal Symphony Captures the Heart

Crystal Symphony isn't the flashiest ship afloat, and that's the point. She's refined without being stuffy, luxurious without being over-the-top. Every detail is considered, space and comfort are built in, and the crew's genuine warmth ties it all together. I call this quiet luxury.

As we sailed toward Civitavecchia, we retreated to our balcony to watch one last sunrise. The sea was calm, the air warm, the ship humming softly beneath us. We were already missing a place we hadn't yet left.

That's the magic of Crystal. It's not just a cruise. It's a feeling, a memory, a longing to return. And return we will.

As we left the ship, we were already talking about a multi-generational Crystal cruise with our children and grandchildren so they could enjoy the Waves & Fantasia kids' facilities, and we all could have quality time together. After all, you can never be too young to be "crystallized"! ■

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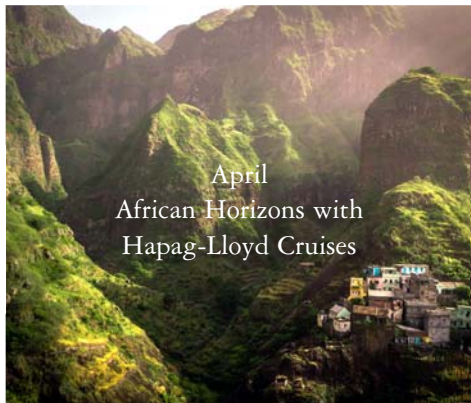
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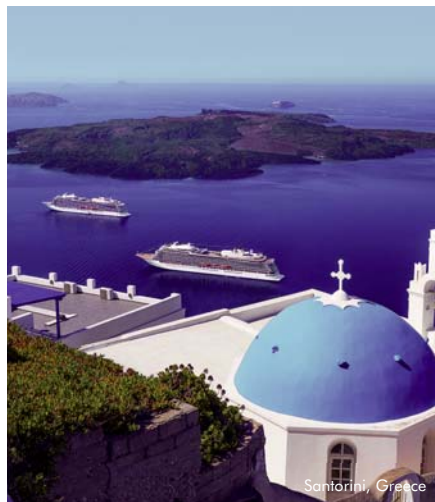
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(21 days; between Rome – San Juan) Explore ancient sites in Rome, see Florence's grand Renaissance architecture and discover Monte Carlo's extravagance. Visit Marseille, famed for its delicious cuisine, and discover opulent architecture in the Spanish cities of Barcelona, Valencia and Seville.

Adriatic & Mediterranean Discovery:

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Iberia & Mediterranean Antiquities: (22 days; between Lisbon –Athens) – See some of the world's most important ancient sites during a sojourn to Mediterranean shores.

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(29 days; between Lisbon –Istanbul) – See the colorful streets of Lisbon and Seville's spectacular palaces. Visit hillside Tangier and admire Granada's medieval architecture.

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NEW for 2027

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(22 days; between London – Amsterdam) – Discover Scotland's rugged Highlands and admire the scenic cliff tops of Ireland, the



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Grand Mediterranean Explorer:

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Viking® has recently announced that 14 new ocean itineraries exploring the Mediterranean, United Kingdom, Ireland and Scandinavia in 2026 and 2027 are now open for booking. Ranging from 15 to 36 days, each of the new voyages combines two or more of Viking's most popular itineraries to allow for more in-depth exploration.

“Viking guests are curious travelers who are interested in enriching their lives by exploring and learning about the world,” said Torstein Hagen, Chairman and CEO of Viking. “With our destination-focused approach and elegant small ships, our voyages have always been designed to bring guests closer to their destination and provide opportunities for cultural immersion. These new voyages offer even more choices for guests who wish to extend their time abroad with one seamless itinerary.”

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Photo: Hebridean Princess

A Rare Find in the World of Luxury Cruising

Hebridean Island Cruises in Scotland Aboard Hebridean Princess

Article and photography by Judi Cohen (Traveling Judi)

In a world of cruising filled with towering ships and crowded ports, finding something truly rare feels almost mythical. But every so often, if you're lucky, you stumble upon a unicorn. For me, that unicorn was *Hebridean Princess*, a ship unlike any other, small in size, but grand in charm, elegance, and soul. This tiny floating country house would be my home for 7 nights in Scotland's Outer Hebrides Islands in a style I can only describe as, well, royal.

After all, *Hebridean Princess* was chartered, twice, by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. And by the end of my Outer Hebrides Isles Adventure, I would understand why.

Ahead of the cruise, I received a courier package containing a glossy Personal Cruise Journal & Travel Documents along with four luggage tags. This felt different from getting an email only.

An Arrival Like No Other

My journey began in Glasgow, where the cruise line arranged a coach transfer from the airport to the port of Oban. This turned into the most breathtaking transfer I've ever experienced. Our expert guide, Colin Wilson, narrated the entire 2.5-hour drive, pointing out famous Scottish lochs and castles, as we wound our way through lush green hills and valleys with awe-inspiring views, like a fairytale.

We reached the sheltered harbor of Oban, where the *Hebridean Princess* sat gleaming at the pier, her crew lined up to greet us. Called up by our names individually, a piper in full Highland dress, piped us onto the ship. The tone was set, and I knew this was not just any cruise!

Floating Royalty

With just 46 passengers, 2 short of the ship's

capacity, and 37 crew, *Hebridean Princess* feels less like a ship and more like an exclusive country manor house. Her Highness Queen Elizabeth II chartered *Hebridean Princess* for her 80th birthday and one other time for the royal family. There's a signed portrait of Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip at the reception desk, and the Royal Warrant hangs in the Lookout Lounge.

Formerly named *MV Columba*, she went into service as a Caledonian MacBrayne car ferry plying the Isle of Mull. In 1988 she was acquired by Hebridean Island Cruises, who transformed her into the gorgeous vessel she now is, with wood paneled lounges, a brick fireplace in the main lounge, and plush upholstery and drapery in the staterooms. We stayed in the Isle of Coll stateroom, with three large bow-facing windows, rich tartan upholstery, a full bathtub, an unexpected treat at sea, and a decanter of whisky that was replenished daily.

Small Ship, Big Heart

The ship's intimate size fosters camaraderie. We dined each night at a large, hosted table in the Columba Room, with interesting guests. Two solo travelers at our table, Mary and Edward, were particularly delightful. Mary told us this was her twentieth voyage aboard *Hebridean Princess*, while Albert has been on over thirty times, yet they had never met before



this cruise. Their enthusiasm was infectious, their stories about *Hebridean Princess* were endless.

Mary quickly became my personal “Scottish language liaison.” Each morning, she greeted me with my new Scottish word of the day, such as “dreich” (dreary), “wabbit” (under the weather), and “scunnered” (fed up or annoyed).

As we anchored silently in a sheltered loch just outside of Oban, under a setting sun, another of our table guests, Scott, brought out his bagpipes and performed on the top deck, backlit against the sky. As he piped, Auld Lang Syne, tears streamed down my face. What a way to “feel” Scotland!

A Taste of Scotland

Dining aboard *Hebridean Princess* is a celebration of local bounty: freshly baked breads, oysters, salmon, venison, hand-dived scallops and lamb. The Columba Restaurant, with its floor-to-ceiling windows, offers stunning views to accompany each meal. And with every meal freshly prepared to order, no request was too much. Menus changed daily at lunch and dinner, and it was always difficult choosing from the exceptional choices. Breakfast was a blend of fresh fruits, yogurts, honey still in the comb, smoked salmon, cream cheeses, blood pudding, streaky bacon, and hot breads. There was also the option of ordering eggs and other dishes a la carte.

Afternoon tea was served daily in the Tirie Lounge, often followed by a lecture. Pre-dinner cocktails included tasty canapés and endless chatter. The atmosphere was sophisticated but never stuffy. The ship’s small size creates a unique intimacy. Staff knew our names and drink preferences by the second day. We got to know all the guests onboard or during our shore excursions, and it all began to feel like a floating family.

Itinerary Highlights

Our itinerary, started and ended in Oban. While there was a planned itinerary, Captain Richard Heaton, would confirm any changes at our nightly briefings in the Tirie Lounge.

We arose on our second day to spend the morning cruising the Sound of Mull and Sound of Sleat towards Kyle of Lochalsh, where we

berthed alongside. Busses took us to the picturesque Eilean Donan Castle. While photographs were unfortunately not permitted of the castle interior, we were told the castle is used for many movie sets. Upon returning to the ship, we found a printed formal invitation to join the Captain and the Ship’s Officers for champagne and Canapes in the Tirie lounge prior to a Gala Dinner in the Columba Restaurant. The invitation said, “Officers will wear Dress Uniform this evening” which was a signal for guests to wear formal dresses and tuxedos, suits or kilts.

Before arriving at Stornoway on the Isle of Lewis, the following day, we cruised the coastline of the Isle of Skye and The Minch. At Stornoway we visited the Callanish Stones, that are older than Stonehenge and the Pyramids in Giza, and equally mysterious. *Hebridean Princess* remained alongside that night, and violinist Jane McMillan came aboard for what would be the only music of the cruise.

Remaining in Stornoway overnight we were able to visit the elegantly restored Victorian Lew’s Castle, once a World War II hospital. The ballroom, with its chandeliered ceiling and views over the harbor, evoked echoes of past grandeur. At the adjacent museum I learned of the island clearances, a tragic chapter in Scotland’s history, when men, women and children, were uprooted and forced to move to Nova Scotia and Cape Breton in Canada, and some American cities, to start new lives.

After lunch the ship sailed on to Tarbert on the Isle of Harris, while we toured the island. One of the highlights was a Harris Tweed weaving demonstration. One of the most desirable wool textiles in the world is produced in the Outer Hebrides on one island with two names, separated by a mountain range, the Islands of Lewis and Harris. The entire Harris Tweed production process must occur completely in the Outer Hebrides in accordance with the 1993 Harris Tweed Act. The weaver we met with explained that the fabric must be handwoven on a treadle loom (not machine operated) at a private home on the island, before being returned to the mill for processing.

From Lochboisdale, the next day we used tenders and a fast rigid inflatable boat to get to shore. From there coaches took us to Prince’s Bay on the Isle of Eriskay for leisurely walks on the spectacular white sand beaches with pristine turquoise water. During our lunch back

onboard, we cruised to Castlebay on the Isle of Barra, where we toured Vatersay and visited beautiful beaches all afternoon.

On our last full day, we cruised the Sea of Hebrides towards the Isle of Coll. Guests could use the *Hebridean Princess’s* bicycles and helmets or walk the quiet rural island with sheep and horses and a mere 150 residents. The off and on rain showers created an ideal backdrop for our last day in the Scottish outer islands.

A Timeless Farewell

On the final night, the Captain’s Farewell Gala Dinner was a grand affair. Our tablemate, Scott piped in the captain and the “great chieftain o’ the puddin’ race” (the traditional haggis). Captain Richard then addressed the haggis with a Robbie Burns poem and pierced it with his dagger. We toasted with a wee dram of whisky, and enjoyed a serving of haggis, neeps and tatties, complete with a whisky reduction, before a main course of Roast Loin of Rannoch Moor Venison. Pure Scottish magic.

There were kilts, sparkling gowns, and tuxedos. I looked around my table, at Mary and Edward, at the piper, the crew members, the landscape beyond the windows, and felt the enormity of what this little ship has given me.

In today’s fast-paced, over-connected world, *Hebridean Princess* offers something rare: a return to grace, to depth, to quiet wonder. As one of the Scottish guests said, it was “pure dead brilliant.”

Final Thoughts

If you’re seeking action-packed adventures or glitzy onboard shows, this isn’t your cruise. But if you long to feel Scotland, to explore its heart and palate, while connecting with its landscapes, people, and soul, then a cruise onboard *Hebridean Princess* is unmatched.

It’s no wonder Mary and Edward, and many other passengers on the ship keep coming back aboard this unicorn. Now I understand why. I will heed their words, “Haste ye back”. I will. ■

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Three Generations, One River: Cruising the Rhine Aboard A-ROSA SENA

by Olivia Liveng

Suggesting a river cruise with my family—a nearly three-year-old, a spry 83-year-old, and myself—raised a few eyebrows back home. “Isn’t that for retirees?” a friend asked. I wasn’t sure myself, but curiosity and a rare alignment of schedules pushed us to book anyway.

Düsseldorf: A Modern Classic

We started in Düsseldorf, where the Ruby Luna Hotel became our base camp—this part of the city hums with midcentury energy and sleek confidence. You’re within walking distance of the Rhine promenade, and it’s impossible to ignore the contrast: young families picnicking under willows, cyclists zipping past, art students sketching the river-

side, old-timers staking out their favorite bench. Ruby Luna itself is clever—airy, polished, and a little playful, which is to say, Aksel, my son, was in heaven. Hanne, his great-grandmother, appreciated that she could be downtown in minutes without having to flag a taxi or decipher transit schedules.

We’d wander from café to gallery, stopping for dense chocolate cake or a tart altbier (for the grownups). Düsseldorf’s Altstadt doesn’t traffic in postcard prettiness so much as lively authenticity—beer halls, bric-a-brac shops, kinetic squares.

Life on Board: The Real Face of Modern River Cruising

The A-Rosa Sena, our home for the week, is a far cry from the stereotypical image of a river cruise. Instead of quiet hallways and genteel boredom, the ship buzzes with a sense of friendly motion. Couples, friend groups, and families like ours fill the spaces, creating a lively atmosphere.

Cabins are generously sized for river standards; big windows let you spy the ever-shifting Rhine scene—a barge here, a fairy-tale town there. Unpacking for the week felt oddly freeing; I could finally stow away the suitcases and settle into a rhythm. Mornings meant sunlight through the window and the



slow realization that we'd woken up somewhere new. Breakfasts were easy—plenty of fruit, eggs to order, pastries that rivaled anything onshore. There was no “hurry up and wait” feeling—just an easy, communal start to the day.

In the mornings, Aksel eagerly joined the supervised pirate-themed “Kids Club”, a rare find on a river cruise, where he made friends and had a blast. The top-deck baby pool, another unexpected luxury on a river cruise, was a constant source of joy for Aksel, ensuring he was always in high spirits. Meanwhile, I took advantage of the Sena's impressive wellness area, complete with a real sauna and skilled therapists who could transport you to the beaches of Bali with their treatments.

Afternoons were for excursions or slow hours reading on deck, the water glinting past. The complimentary e-bikes, lined up each morning, gave us independence at each port. Sometimes we'd join a group tour, but often it was more fun to make our discoveries. Evenings unfolded at their own pace. We'd dress up a little for dinner, never formal but never sloppy. The food was a highlight: unfussy yet fresh, with plenty for picky eaters – including an entire kids' buffet, perfect for Aksel – and more adventurous palates. The staff knew when to bring out the crayons and when to bring out the wine list. Live music sometimes drifted up from the lounge, setting a pleasant tone and ensuring a lively yet refined ambience.

What stands out, looking back, is the sense of autonomy on board. Hanne could retreat to the lounge and watch the Rhine scroll by for hours, content in her world. Aksel made friends in the playroom. I could carve out time for a sauna or a book. We were together, but never on top of each other, and all each of us had moments of privacy, which is so vital on a multigenerational trip.

Antwerp: Where Old Stones Meet New Cool
Antwerp made a quick case for itself. The walk from the boat into the city center is easy, and soon enough you're standing in

Grote Markt, the square lined with gabled guildhouses. There are chocolate shops everywhere; we did our best to find the “best” (and, spoiler, everyone had an opinion!) The Cathedral of Our Lady was both grand and, thankfully, cool inside—a good place for Hanne to sit and for Aksel to spot the details in the stained glass. We squeezed in a stroll at the Antwerp Zoo, one of Europe's oldest, where the giraffes and playgrounds offered a break from architecture and history.

Rotterdam: Dutch Grit with a Green Heart

Rotterdam was a delightful surprise. It might not have been my first choice, but that's the beauty of cruising—it expands your horizons. The skyline is a modern marvel, but the true Rotterdam is found at street level: food stalls, bike lanes, and neighborhoods that feel both experimental and lived-in. I joined a guided A-Rosa bike tour and weaved through green parks, along canals, and into neighborhoods that felt authentically local. Even Hanne, content to explore the Markthal for cheese samples and people-watching, couldn't deny Rotterdam's infectious energy.

Amsterdam: Canals, Bikes, and a City That Gets Under Your Skin

Amsterdam's no secret, but even on a brief port stop, it delivers. We boarded a canal boat; Hanne watched the city glide by, and Aksel shouted out every swan and houseboat. The flower market, narrow lanes lined with independent boutiques, and impromptu cheese tastings filled the rest of the day. The best moments came not from sightseeing but from simply sitting by a canal with coffee, soaking up the city's rhythm. With an overnight stay in town, we had the rare luxury of time—ample opportunity to linger over stroopwafels in hidden bakeries and wander through the city's standout museums without rushing, ticking off everything on our wish list and still finding space for spontaneous detours.

Cologne: A Skyline That Ends With a Toast

Cologne felt like a celebratory last chapter. We checked into the 25hours Hotel The Circle—a retro-futuristic spot that's both hip and comfortable. The city's centerpiece, the twin-spired



cathedral, dominated our wandering. We explored side streets and local bakeries, and in the evening, took the elevator up to NENI, our hotel's rooftop restaurant. The view—Cologne Cathedral lit up after dark—is reason enough to linger over another glass of wine and some hummus (the restaurant is Israeli cuisine, after all!)

Reflections on the River

Traveling with three generations isn't always effortless, but on the Rhine, it rarely felt like work. Onboard, everyone had space—literal and metaphorical—to find their rhythm. The A-Rosa Sena's real achievement isn't just clever design; it's creating an environment where a toddler, a great-grandmother, and everyone in between can move at their own pace. The lack of pressure—no need to squeeze in every sight, no rush to catch a bus or a flight—meant we could be fully present.

There's a special kind of magic in seeing the world through your child's eyes, but there's also deep comfort in knowing your elders are content. Our days flowed as easily as the river itself: together, but never forced. In the quiet hours—watching windmills slip by, trading stories over dessert, or simply walking through a new city at dusk—I realized this is what multigenerational travel should feel like.

A river cruise, it turns out, isn't about age at all. It's about time—how you spend it, and with whom. And for one slow, extraordinary week, we spent it precisely right. ■

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A River of Memory and Meaning: My Jewish Heritage Themed Danube River Cruise with Uniworld Boutique River Cruises

Article by Judi Cohen (Traveling Judi), photography by Judi and Uniworld

I always found destination focused river cruising on small ships fascinating and enjoyable, but it was during my recent Jewish Heritage-themed cruise on the Danube from Budapest to Nuremberg, that I began to understand how deeply enriching this form of travel could be. This wasn't just a scenic European getaway; it was a journey through culture, community, and centuries of Jewish history on one of Europe's most storied rivers. As a child of Holocaust survivors, I was interested in learning more about Jewish history in the countries we visited.

A Floating Boutique Hotel with Heart

Our ship, S.S. *Beatrice*, with a capacity of 148 guests, and thoughtfully designed pub-

lic areas, felt intimate in the best possible way, like a floating luxury boutique hotel. With sleek design, panoramic windows, and warm, elegant interiors, it felt like home within minutes of boarding. The service was impeccable from start to finish. Every staff member greeted us by name within a day and ensured we were always comfortable. Whether it was pressing our clothes for dinner, or simply checking in with a smile, our butlers, Marcos and Marcos, attentiveness made a big impression.

The stateroom itself was spacious and sophisticated, with ample storage, luxurious bedding, and a Juliet balcony with sliding doors for a full view of castles, vineyards, small cities and other ships on the Danube.

Active travelers could use the well-equipped fitness room and start mornings with yoga on the sun deck. There's something deeply calming about practicing sun salutations on an open deck with a cool morning breeze before temperatures begin to climb.

Fine Dining and Inclusive Luxury

All meals, shore excursions, and even wine with lunch and dinner were included. Mozart's, the main dining room served elegant, regionally inspired cuisine with options for every diet. Whether it was goulash in Hungary, schnitzel in Austria, or delicate pastries in Germany, the food reflected the journey.



The atmosphere at meals was relaxed, with open seating, and we quickly made friends with guests from around the world.

Never Crowded

The ship never felt crowded. Because of the size and thoughtful layout, guests could find quiet corners to read, sip tea, or watch the river go by. Social spaces were lively but never noisy. The balance of programming, free time, and choice in excursions created a sense of calm luxury.

Jewish Heritage Highlights

About a third of the guests chose this sailing for the Jewish Heritage program, which included a blend of excursions, onboard enrichment, and cultural experiences. The rest were there to enjoy the ambiance of the ship and the Danube highlights. The atmosphere was warm and inclusive for everyone.

Uniworld offered included excursions each day. In Budapest, Vienna and Regensburg, there was one Jewish Heritage shore excursion, and another with a general cultural or historical theme. We never had to choose between exploring our roots and seeing the broader highlights of Central Europe. We could do both, since the tours were offered at different times of the day. Tomas, the cruise manager provided talks every evening in the lounge to explain the tour options in detail.

Budapest, Hungary

A half-day Jewish Heritage excursion began on the banks of the Danube River, not far from the Hungarian Parliament building, where sixty pairs of empty shoes, the type worn in the 1940's, made of cast iron, are set into the concrete on the embankment. They are a memorial to the Hungarian Jews who, in the winter of 1944-1945, were shot on the banks of the Danube River by the members of the Arrow Cross Party. The memorial left me wondering who the men, women and children missing from the sculpture were.

Our tour continued at the Dohány Street Synagogue, the largest synagogue in

Europe, and the second largest synagogue in the world. Before entering the former Jewish Ghetto, we explored the Raoul Wallenberg Memorial Park behind the synagogue that was named after a Swedish diplomat who saved thousands of Jews during the Holocaust. We gathered around the Tree of Life memorial in the center of the park. Its metal leaves bear the names of Hungarian Holocaust victims as a reminder of the lives lost.

We also walked through the Jewish Quarter, strolling down Kazinczy Street to visit the Kazinczy Street Synagogue. The Jewish Quarter today is a vibrant neighborhood of cafés, kosher eateries, and cultural spaces. It was heartening to see this area's renaissance, even as we honored the memories of those lost. We looked down as we walked to read the brass Stolpersteine in the cobblestone road inscribed with the names, and the birth and death dates of the victims of the extermination during the Holocaust.

Vienna, Austria

Beginning at the Judenplatz, the town square, that was the heart of the Jewish community in the Middle Ages, our guide took us to the Shoah Monument, a concrete library with the books turned inside out. Continuing our walk, we arrived at the Stadttempel, Vienna's main temple and the only synagogue, dating back to 1826, to have survived the "Night of Broken Glass", a pogrom against Jews throughout Nazi Germany, Austria and other areas in the region.

For a broader cultural experience, we enjoyed an evening of music by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Johann Strauss, complete with professional dancers waltzing romantically in one of Vienna's historic halls. This was part of the Uniworld Masterpiece Collection and one of the few excursions that came with an extra charge. It was worth every dollar.

Regensburg, Germany

Our visit to Regensburg, one of Germany's best-preserved medieval cities and the oldest

documented settlement of Jewish people in Germany, was unforgettable. A local guide led us on a walking tour through the medieval town of Regensburg, over the Iron Bridge and on to the magnificent Stone Bridge. We walked through the former Jewish Quarter (Neupfarrplatz) and to the Dani Karavan Monument memorializing the original Regensburg Synagogue, as well as seeing Oskar Schindler's house. Then we made our way to the New Synagogue to learn about Jewish culture and history in Regensburg which flourished, suffered and was rebuilt over the centuries.

In the late afternoon, we were taken to a delightful concert in a Gothic cathedral to hear the Regensburger Domspatzen, "The Regensburg Cathedral Sparrows." Domspatzen is the oldest boys' choir in the world, dating back to the 10th century.

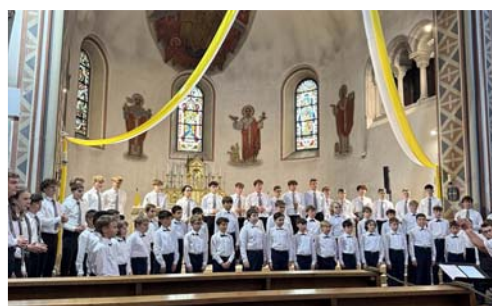
Onboard Community

We celebrated Shabbat (the Jewish Sabbath) on Friday evening at Max's restaurant on Deck 3, which was transformed into a space filled with song, light, and community. There was even challah, candlesticks, kippahs, and local kosher wine, all provided by Uniworld. For me, that service symbolized what this cruise was about: connection to Jewish tradition and a shared sense of purpose.

This Danube sailing was more than a river cruise, it was a journey through time, memory, and identity. Whether you have Jewish heritage or simply an interest in history and culture, the Uniworld experience was first-class. Every element, from the luxurious comfort of the ship, the depth of the excursions, the insight of the enrichment program, and the warmth of the staff worked in harmony to create something profound.

River cruising often promises to take you to the heart of Europe. On this journey, I discovered it could also take you deep into the heart of your own story. ■

[HTTPS://WWW.UNIWORLD.COM](https://www.uniworld.com)



Adventure Canada Announces New Vessels for 2026



After 10 happy years on *Ocean Endeavour*, Adventure Canada is moving to *Exporis One* and *Ocean Nova* in 2026. The leader in small ship expedition cruising is excited to offer their iconic program, focused on education, immersion, and fun, on the updated vessels.

Adventure Canada is excited to announce two new-to-them vessels for the 2026 operating season. The vessels, *Exporis One* and *Ocean Nova*, offer increased comfort to guests and a more intimate experience with a capacity of 144 and 78 guests, respectively. Of course, the same fantastic Adventure Canada programming, service, and experience will remain.

"We are thrilled to be operating on *Exporis One* and *Ocean Nova* for the 2026 season and beyond," says Cedar Swan, CEO of Adventure Canada. "These ships set the foundation for adventure perfectly with the facilities and capability to operate in challenging Arctic conditions safely while facilitating meaningful, educational, and fun-filled programs in the most beautiful and moving places in the world. The new vessels will increase the comfort of our guests with enhanced shipboard facilities and allow us to continue with our immersive shore-side experiences as well. They truly offer us the best of both worlds, and we couldn't be more excited to welcome our guests to these vessels in 2026."



Operating on both vessels will also allow Adventure Canada to offer more trips, with a small but steady increase in trips offered in 2026 and beyond. Key considerations in selecting both vessels included analysis of their carbon footprint and environmental impact, proven track record of safety and experience operating in ice and Arctic conditions, and guest comfort and capacity.

Exporis One, a vessel with capacity for 144 guests and operated by Silversea Cruises until 2023, was purpose-built for expedition travel in 1989, making it well-suited for polar environments and comfortable exploration. Having undergone several refurbishments – the latest in 2018 and 2023 – the ship is well appointed with 72 staterooms and suites, many with balconies, two restaurants, a fully equipped fitness area, outdoor jacuzzies, sauna, steam room, and massage facilities. In addition, the vessel offers common areas for lounging, reading, participating in workshops, presentations, performances, and attending daily briefings with a learning lounge, main lounge, and panoramic lounge. *Exporis One* is outfitted with a fleet of Mark V zodiacs to get guests from ship to shore quickly and efficiently. New for 2026, Adventure Canada is proud to be able to include WIFI access and standard alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages on all trips on *Exporis One*. Adventure Canada will work in partnership with expedition travel company and ship owner *Exporis* to operate *Exporis One*.

"We are absolutely delighted with this strategic partnership with Adventure Canada," says President of *Exporis* and co-founder of PONANT, Philippe Videau. "This collaboration represents a tremendous opportunity to

combine our expertise and shared vision to provide unforgettable experiences for all passengers. Adventure Canada shares our core values, including responsible exploration, authentic discovery of destinations, and respect for local cultures."

In 2026 Adventure Canada will offer the following expeditions aboard *Exporis One*: Spirit of Scotland (formerly Scotland Slowly), Scotland, the Faroe Islands, & Iceland: North Atlantic Saga, Iceland Circumnavigation, Iceland to Greenland: In the Wake of Vikings, Into the Northwest Passage, Out of the Northwest Passage, and Greenland and Wild Labrador: A Torngat Mountains Adventure.

Ocean Nova Purpose built in 1992 for Greenland's icy waters, *Ocean Nova* is a comfortable vessel born for expedition travel. Built for efficiency, function, and an intimate experience, the cozy ship offers 45 guest cabins, a restaurant, fully equipped gym, library, and panoramic observation lounge. One of the vessel's highlights is its open decks which are a dream for photographers and scenery lovers. With a shallow draft and easy access with a fleet of eight zodiacs, guests will spend more time exploring and less time ferrying from ship to shore. Adventure Canada will work together with Nova Logistics to operate *Ocean Nova*. Importantly, *Ocean Nova* sails with a lighter carbon footprint than most expedition vessels, which was an important consideration in the selection of which vessels Adventure Canada would operate going forward.

In 2026 Adventure Canada will offer the following expeditions aboard *Ocean Nova*: Scotland and Faroe Islands: Isles of Wonder, Scotland, The Faroe Islands, & Iceland: North Atlantic Saga, Iceland to Greenland: In the Wake of Vikings, Heart of the Arctic, Baffin Island and Greenland: Circling the Midnight Sun, Greenland and Wild Labrador: A Torngat Mountains Adventure, and Newfoundland Circumnavigation. ■

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Nob Hill's Historic "InterContinental Mark Hopkins" Is a San Francisco Treat

by Nicholas Kontis

One hundred years is a long time in the hospitality business. San Francisco's iconic Mark Hopkins Hotel has the cachet to stand up to historical scrutiny.

Named for one of the "Big Four" railroad tycoons whose investments made the Transcontinental Railroad possible in 1869, the hotel stands atop Nob Hill. All four businessmen settled their families here; Nob Hill remains one of San Francisco's wealthiest neighborhoods. Mark Hopkins' home was an opulent 40-room mansion. It stood until it succumbed to the great earthquake and fire of 1906.

Twenty years later, in 1926, the new Mark Hopkins Hotel opened on the original site. The 19-floor structure, built by an ownership group headed by investor George T. Smith, was a 19-floor architectural marvel. And now, in 2026, the iconic Mark Hopkins will mark its centennial anniversary.

The palatial property boasts 383 rooms including 26 full-size suites. Of these, a half-dozen are super-luxury specialty suites with décor to match.

Connie Perez Wong, the hotel's creative director, described the architecture as a blend of French Chateau and Spanish Renaissance styles. "It is inspired by the splendid chateaus of the Loire Valley," she said. "The structure is built in a winged fashion, allowing all rooms to have views."

The most famous room in the hotel is the Top of the Mark, San Francisco's most revered penthouse cocktail lounge since it opened in 1939. Once the nine-room suite of mining engineer Daniel Cowan Jackling, it took on a new life when

Smith, the owner, took the advice of his friend, newspaper columnist Herb Caen, to open a lounge with a dance floor and live music.

During the Second World War, an estimated 30,000 servicemen visited the Top of the Mark. Soldiers lined up for a potential last drink, well aware of their uncertain futures. According to Chief Concierge Ric Lee: "One day, a serviceman bought a bottle of bourbon, telling the bartender that anybody from my squadron can get a free shot, but the person who gets the last shot has to buy another bottle and leave it at the bar to keep the tradition going. The Squadron Bottle was created, and still exists to this day."

The hotel's signature restaurant, the elegant Nob Hill Club, is nestled off the lobby. It serves three meals daily, contemporary American fare with global influences. Think steak frites, seared king salmon, chicken piccata, and even bacon cheeseburgers.

"The property has a diverse clientele of almost half leisure and business travelers," Lee told me. "Families are always welcome, and travelers arrive to delve into the hotel's rich history." ■

[HTTPS://WWW.IHG.COM/](https://www.ihg.com/)



Na Nirand Romantic Boutique Resort
by Randy Mink

Nestled along the Ping River in the heart of Chiang Mai, this intimate, 45-room hideaway embodies Thailand's distinctive character and warm hospitality. For three blissful days, Na Nirand Romantic Boutique Resort was my oasis, a cozy nest tucked away from street traffic yet a short walk from all the sizzle of Chiang Mai's famous night market.

Na Nirand comprises six two-level buildings featuring teak wood and architectural elements evocative of the Lanna-colonial style prevalent in the late 19th century. Present-day Northern Thailand was part of the ancient Lanna Kingdom. Colonial design influences give a nod toward the region's British, Chinese and Myanmar trading history.

My second-floor room had teak and rattan furniture, teak floors, a beamed ceiling and a balcony that overlooked the central courtyard's swimming pool and lawn. Framed swatches of handwoven Lanna textiles, two hanging lamps festooned with tassels, an antique-style telephone and wire-art figures above the headboard added to the ambience.

Out my bathroom window I could see the back wall of the beautiful Buddhist temple that I visited twice. Some guests could hear occasional chanting, and I heard crowing from roosters in the temple complex.

A separate riverfront building at Na Nirand, called House of Colonial, has a private pool and four luxurious, themed Riverfront Colonial Suites ideal for honeymooners: Burmese Dream, Enchanted Chinese, Harmonious British-Indian and Siamese Love.

An umbrella table on the waterside terrace of TIME Riverfront Cuisine & Bar, the resort's restaurant, was a serene place to start the day. Its breakfast buffet offered a wide range of Asian and international fare, and the two cooks at the outdoor station whipped up great omelets, waffles and pancakes. The terrace was partly shaded by the massive spread of the shoreline's iconic 100-year-old rain tree, the symbol of Na Nirand, a little slice of paradise. ■

WWW.NANIRAND.COM



Dusit Thani Bangkok: Beacon of Thai Hospitality

by Randy Mink

A sanctuary of calm in a chaotic city that never sleeps, the 5-star Dusit Thani Bangkok claims a storied past. And with an eye to the future, it stands as the centerpiece of an emerging mixed-use development.

The original Dusit Thani opened in 1970 as the city's tallest hotel and quickly became a gathering place for high society. After being torn down in 2019, it was rebuilt on the same site across from Lumpini Park, the green lung of downtown Bangkok's commercial district. The brand-new property had its grand opening last September, 2024.

Signature elements from the original hotel were preserved for use in the 39-story building. The number of guest rooms was reduced from 540 to 257.

The spire that graced the old Dusit Thani, a beacon of luxury for discerning travelers, now resides within a larger golden pinnacle atop the roof. The original spire was inspired by the stupa of Wat Arun (Temple of Dawn), a Bangkok landmark on the Chao Phraya River.

Directly underneath the spires, an exhibition honors the memory of the original hotel and pioneering spirit of businesswoman Thanpuying Chanuit Piyaoui, founder of Dusit International, one of Thailand's leading hotel and property development companies. Dusit Hotels & Resorts today counts more than 300 properties in 18 countries.

The Dusit Thani's big selling point, in my mind, is that each guest room sports an expansive window framing views of Lumpini Park. With just the touch of a button, the shade and curtain rise to reveal the sweeping panorama—a leafy scene by day, city lights by night. The hotel bars and infinity swimming pool also overlook the park.

On both mornings during my stay, I got up early to beat Bangkok's notorious heat and humidity by taking a walk around Lumpini Park, an oasis of lakes and lawns. More important, central Bangkok's premier greenbelt provided a window on Thai life, as I encountered happy groups exercising to music, working out at fitness stations, playing badminton and practicing the ancient Chinese art of tai chi.

Besides splendid vistas, favorite features of my sumptuous 23rd-floor room included Thai-inspired artwork, wood paneling and an entryway with lots of closet space. The spacious bathroom was equipped with green marble double sinks, plush robes and towels, and a standalone tub. Pampering continued during a traditional, two-hour Thai massage at Devarana Wellness, the hotel spa.

After dark, a fine way to ditch Bangkok's intensity is relaxing over cocktails in the open-air Spire Rooftop Bar while drinking in skyline views. Offering the same scenery one level below, the fully enclosed 1970 Bar concocts libations named after people and events from the decade when the original Dusit Thani opened. Darker Side of the Moon is a nod to the Apollo 13 mission in 1970, while other drinks are inspired by movies that starred Ronald Reagan, Sophia Loren and Tom Jones.

Dusit International's flagship hotel is part of the Dusit Central Park project, which includes an office tower, a high-end retail center that opened in August and a residential high-rise now under construction ■

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Puntacana Resort & Club - *Tropical Paradise Found*



Accommodations

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

The Estates

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



Golf

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

Activities & Spa

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

Dining

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



Corporate Social Responsibility

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

Punta Cana International airport

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

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Manchebo Beach Resort & Spa *A Heavenly Health & Wellness Oasis*

by Susan Campbell

Due to celebrate its 60th anniversary in 2026, I wonder if the original owners, KLM pilots Mense and Fokker Hamminga, realized what a choice location they picked for their tiny two-story hotel they built back in 1966. The sprawling carpet of snow-white sand cresting impossibly aqua surf is the broadest swath of beach on Aruba. And though this is often referred to as Manchebo Beach, it's officially part of the impressive 4-mile expanse of Eagle Beach which consistently ranks among the top three beaches on the planet!

Though the island has seen massive development since its inception, this little boutique hotel has managed to remain timeless in its unassuming charm and warm Caribbean welcome. But when they built a magnificent mahogany alfresco beach pavilion out front to serve as a "shala"- a space to practice yoga- as part of their forward-thinking pivot to become a dedicated health and wellness resort, it began attracting a whole new style of traveler.

ward-thinking pivot to become a dedicated health and wellness resort, it began attracting a whole new style of traveler.

A shift to mindful healthy holidays...

Guests can now enjoy over a dozen choices of complimentary Yoga and Pilates classes offered each week, and there is also an air-conditioned fitness centre, and personally curated full week retreats with all kinds of wellness add-ons can be requested year-round. They also mindfully skewed their culinary offerings to include health-conscious offerings like organic smoothies and juices with energy-boosting superfoods and created dedicated plant-based menus alongside their regular fare. They are now known as having some of the best vegan fare on the island. But there's far more to enjoy than green cuisine here; they also have a surprisingly eclectic range of culinary choices on site.

The Chophouse, their signature formal indoor restaurant (think crisp white linens, fine wines, and classic cuts of premium meat,) shares its space with Omakase Japanese Sushi Bar, a sleek, modern bamboo-bedecked spot under the same roof. Ike's Bistro, their alfresco poolside enclave, leans toward Mediterranean influences, but they also host regular special nights featuring local Aruban fare or lobster and shrimp combos. And now, they also offer guests a premium all-inclusive option that includes all restaurants plus great drinks at their Pega-Pega Beach Bar, cocktail and lunch service on the beach, and room service. They also set out to employ environmentally friendly operating programs which garnered them the status of becoming a Green Globe Platinum Certified Resort, and their oceanfront Spa del Sol is an enchanting Balinese style eco-oasis where you can enjoy soothing seaside treatments.

A sweet stay for night and day...

I've stayed here often over the years, and though the 71 rooms are modern and comfortable with first rate amenities with a choice of garden or ocean views, they are a tad on the small side. Except for one. I've been coveting a stay at their one and only 'Deluxe One Bedroom Suite' for ages. It's usually booked. But on my last visit, I lucked out! It boasts a large, private furnished corner wrap-around sea view balcony; a spacious living/dining room dining area with a table that seats four, a well-equipped kitchenette including a wine refrigerator, and a luxurious spa-like bathroom with an inviting rainfall shower. I hated to leave it.... but electric nightlife was waiting!

Although this resort exudes the ultimate Zen vibe throughout, if you're seeking to get out and about at night for live music, hot casino action, and a vast choice of cool bars and trendy, lively eateries, head to Alhambra Casino's big alfresco mall right across the street from their front lobby! That's another reason that their location is the best of all possible worlds. ■

WWW.MANCHEBO.COM





courtyard offers vibrant nightlife with live music, and it's also steps from the famous Queen Emma floating pontoon foot bridge that leads to Punda's colorful 'handelskade' typically seen on Curaçao postcards. And the rainbow-lit arches of that bridge over the water at night is a fabulous sight.

77

Resort-Wide Enhancements

Wind Creek Hospitality acquired the property in 2017, (though it still operates under the Renaissance brand,) and set out to reimagine the resort top-to-bottom. The \$12 million renovation is complete, and it's spectacular. All 223 guestrooms were redesigned with refreshing pops of vibrant color and high-tech modern amenities, but for me, the biggest surprise was the bathroom in my executive suite. It had a marble whirlpool bath! Frequently, when resorts renovate they replace the bathtub with a rain shower affair these days. But here, they chose a few deluxe suites to go in the opposite direction and create a luxurious spa vibe escape. I loved it. Other stand-out improvements were the complete refresh of the lobby, the addition of a modern video arcade, the complete upgrade of their glitzy Wind Creek Casino, an overhaul of their signature Nautilus Restaurant (wonderful breakfast buffets there), enhancement of the fitness centre, and the addition of a Starbucks within. All the improvements add a fresh new vitality to the historic old quarter.

Enlist a 'Navigator' for Island Explorations

You can't beat this location as an ideal base to explore the vibrant downtown full of stunning outdoor art districts, colonial architecture, museums, trendy restaurants and bars, and historic sites, on foot. But there's so much more to this enchanting island than Willemstad. All Renaissance resorts have complimentary "Navigator Programs" where you can receive expert help from their staff 'navigators' to curate personal island-wide exploring itineraries to best suit your interests. Use them. ■

visit: [HTTP://BIT.LY/4FqLJS7](http://bit.ly/4FqLJS7)

Renaissance Wind Creek Curaçao Resort

Reimagining The Cornerstone of Curaçao's Colorful Capital

by Susan Campbell

I marveled the first time I set foot on their "infinity beach" and swam in the saltwater pond perched above a rocky cliff that cascades down to the sea right in the heart of downtown Willemstad. That was in 2010. And this unique signature element of the Renaissance Wind Creek Curaçao Resort is just as awe-inspiring today as it was back then. But much has changed since, and I was delighted to discover all the improvements during a recent stay. First, there is now a freshwater infinity pool beside the infinity beach, and you can also have spa services and dinners on the sand. The beach club bar has been upgraded, but now you can walk a few steps down below to enjoy the gala revelry at the newly constructed Margaritaville's 5 o'Clock Somewhere Bar & Grill. It's open to the

public, and popular with cruise passengers making their way into town from the terminal right beside it. And when a cruise ship arrives to dock, you'll witness an optical illusion where it appears as if the vessel is about to sail right onto the sand! Very cool.

The Rif Fort Connection

Another unique element of this resort is that it's literally connected to the historic Rif Fort built in 1828. The old bastion of defence remains mostly intact and is part of the UNESCO World Heritage Sites encompassing the capital. But now the stone walls and cannon-strewn cobblestone paths wind through a vast array of shops, restaurants, bars, and even cinemas as part of the Renaissance Mall. On weekends, the inner



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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

A Timeless Retreat at The Phoenicia Malta: A Hotel Where Heritage Meets Luxury

Article by Judi Cohen (Traveling Judi), photography by Judi and The Phoenicia Malta



Our recent stay at The Phoenicia Malta was nothing short of extraordinary. Nestled near Valletta's UNESCO-listed core, the hotel's location offers the best of both worlds: immediate access to Malta's historic capital, and luxury exclusive accommodations. The building retains its original Art Deco design and a quiet reverence to its past.

A Storied Beginning

The Phoenicia Malta is a gem, steeped in history, that was Malta's first five-star hotel opening in 1947. The hotel project was led by Lady Margaret Strickland and designed in elegant Art Deco style using Maltese limestone on the bastion walls outside Valletta.

Among the most celebrated guests were Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip, who frequently stayed at the Phoenicia between 1949 and 1951, while he was posted in Malta. The young couple often danced in the Grand Ballroom. Queen Elizabeth's signature remains in the lobby guestbook.

The hotel has also hosted numerous actors including, Alec Guinness, Oliver Reed, Gérard Depardieu, Joaquin Phoenix (during *Gladiator*), Helen Mirren, and Arnold Schwarzenegger.



Rooms & Views

Our Executive Balcony Room (approximately 23 square meters) was elegant with a private balcony with a sweeping view of the harbor with cruise ships glistening in the sun. The decor with muted blues and whites, and a well-designed marble bathroom, Aqua di Parma amenities and complimentary coffee and mini bar stocked with non-alcoholic drinks was luxurious, quiet and comfortable.

The hotel has a total of 132 rooms and suites, many with lovely balconies and dramatic views of the water and the historic city of Valletta.

Dining

Breakfast outdoors at the Contessa Conservatory was a delight with our server bringing hot cappuccino within minutes of being seated. The extensive buffet was beautifully displayed with a selection of freshly baked pastries, local cheeses, smoked fish, made-to-order omelets, and some Maltese dishes. Eggs and other options could be selected from the a la carte menu as well.

A highlight of our stay was an unforgettable dinner at Contessa, the fine-dining restaurant. Seasonal Mediterranean fare like prawn crudo with Gozo olive oil, fritto misto, or seafood platters as well as steaks were on the menu. The curated wine list included local Maltese varietals.

We were hosted at dinner by The Phoenicia's Director of Sales and Marketing, Andrew Strickland, who went above and beyond in making us feel welcome. Andrew's family members included the builders of the hotel, and he is the third generation working as a hotelier at the Phoenicia Malta. Following dinner, Andrew invited us to join him at the Malta Fashion Week event held directly in

front of the hotel. Seated for the fashion show, with Valletta's walls lit up behind us, was an experience we won't soon forget.

Pool & Gardens

Our time at the Bastion infinity pool sipping cold drinks and soaking in the magnificent views of the ancient fortification and surrounding Maltese landscapes was magical. The seven-acre gardens provided an oasis of lush greenery, a welcome escape from the crowds in Valletta's busy, narrow streets.

Spa & Wellness

The Phoenicia Spa & Wellness Facility includes a heated indoor pool, gym, steam, sauna and salt rooms, multi-jet showers, and spa treatment rooms with preserved 16th-century walls visible from the windows. I indulged in a 50-minute Himalayan Salt Stone massage, a restorative treat. That left me feeling completely relaxed and renewed after a long day of touring.

Why Stay at The Phoenicia Malta

Choosing the Phoenicia is stepping into living history while enjoying all the comforts of modern luxury. Its proximity to Valletta's UNESCO-designated core, and just a 20-minute ride from the airport makes it a perfect base for exploring Malta. The property's timeless Art Deco elegance, storied guest list, award-winning dining, spa sanctuary and iconic pool, and the exemplary service, left me longing for another few days to steep in all that the hotel offered.

I am already planning a longer stay at the Phoenicia Malta on my next visit! ■

WWW.PHOENICIAMALTA.COM



The Kempinski San Lawrentz *An Elegant Hideaway on Gozo Island*

Article & photography by Nicholas Kontis

*I*f a pampered accommodation is what you need to enhance your visit to Malta, consider the Kempinski San Lawrentz. The only luxury brand on Malta's serene and scenic sister island of Gozo, it's the perfect blend of a lavish stay with local charm — a haven for pure relaxation.

Tropical gardens embrace the 323,000-square-foot property, which will undergo a multi-tier renovation during its next off-season. "Due to our mild climate, our travel season begins in April and does not end until November," said marketing coordinator Clive Rotin, a native Gozitan. "The main selling point of our hotel is the three swimming pools, as we receive many families and couples wishing to relax."

Family rooms are a part of the room mix. In all, the Kempinski blends luxury with modern comforts in its 142 units, all with pool or garden views. Five suites have private decks, and extended-stay guests may opt for residences.

The San Lawrentz offers a half-dozen choices for dining and drinking — and in-room dining is also available 24 hours a day.

Breakfast, served daily at L'Ortolan, includes such a la carte options as eggs Benedict and eggs Royal. The Arja Patisserie offers espresso and coffee drinks, loose teas, ginger beer, Gozitan craft beer and cider.

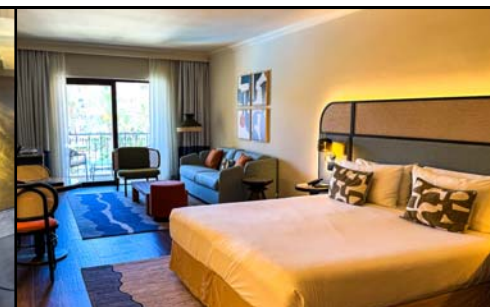
L-Istorja is a traditional gourmet steakhouse with an eclectic menu of local fusion dishes, including a pâté of local rabbit with onion marmalade and mustard seeds. Ravioli al Plin incorporates Maltese sausage in a walnut filling. The chef's venison filet, with a rub of coffee and chocolate, is perfectly seared. Adjacent is Il-Baldakkin Gastrobar, its menu complemented by a cocktail bar with just about any spirit you can name. I imbibed a coconut-aged Negroni: The bartender explained it had been aged inside of a coconut for three days, enhancing its smoothness.

Gazebo serves a Japanese menu in an al fresco setting that overlooks the beautiful gardens and grounds. Sushi rolls, nigiri, sashimi, ceviche and teppanyaki, cooked to perfection on a griddle, make Gazebo a favorite alternative to local cuisine. Midday diners often prefer the Pool Bar, which offers shelter from the sun while serving signature cocktails, burgers, sandwiches, salads, poke bowls, ice cream and sorbet.

Gozo's island heritage has inspired the Luxury Spa Ayurveda Center. The immersive spa menu includes the 80-minute "Salt & Sun Journey," a combination massage, sea-salt scrub and wrap. The 110-minute "Mediterranean Glow Journey" is an aroma massage, wrap and hydrating marine facial. The Oriental Hammam (Turkish Bath) provides a relaxing sanctuary after an overload of island exploration. There's also a fully equipped fitness center for guests who wish to work off calories from the excellent Kempinski meals.

The eco-friendly property is fully sustainable. "On top of the new hotel looks, eco-friendly practices are dear to our hearts," said general manager Eike Claussen. "We are reinforcing our commitment to environmental projects to preserve Gozo's natural beauty." ■

WWW.KEMPINSKI.COM



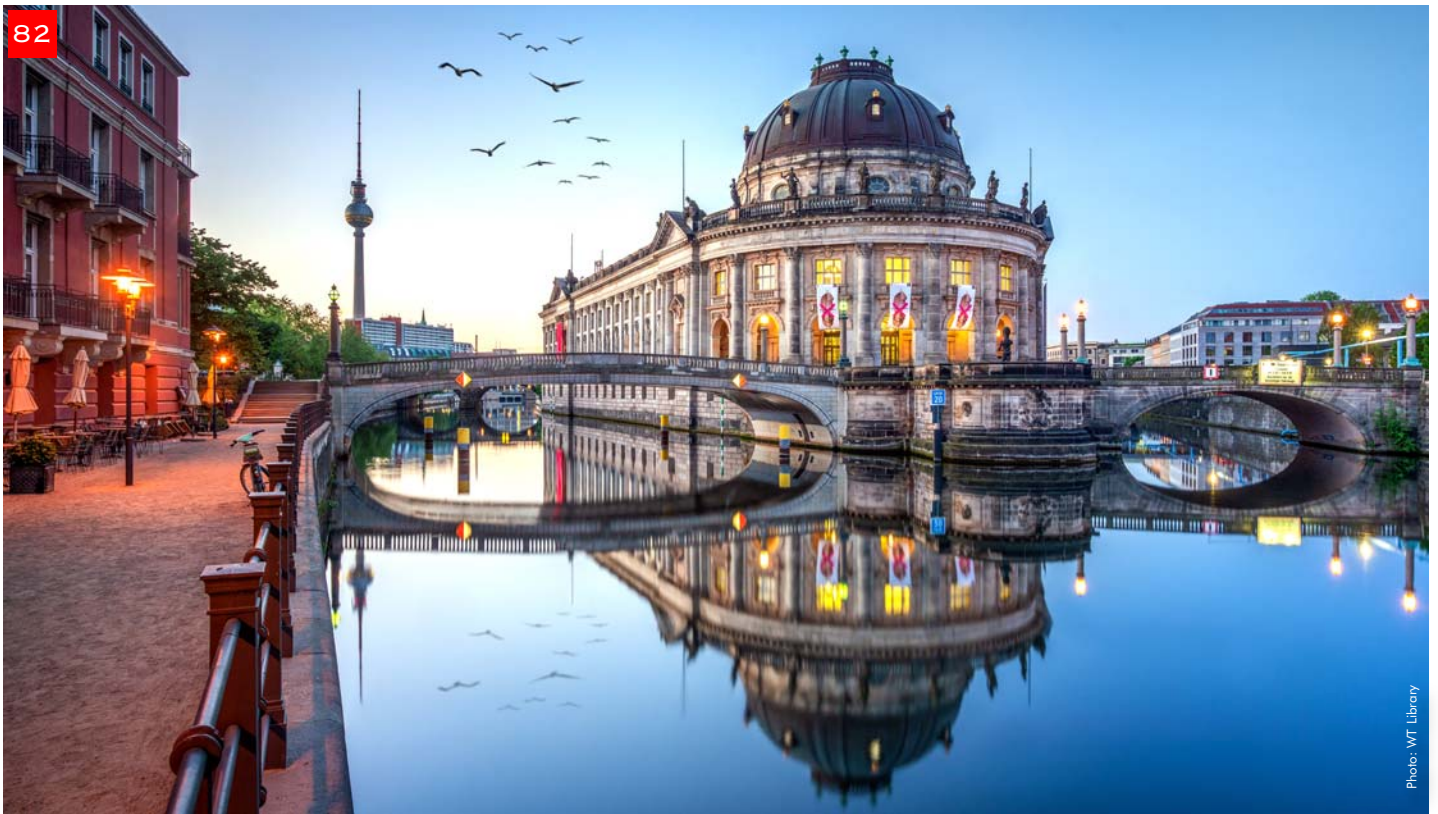


Photo: WT Library

Memories and Marvels: Exploring the Many Sides of Berlin

Article and photography by Jennifer Merrick

A few of the pictures at the Berlin Wall Memorial looked like they could have jumped out of my high school yearbook. One young man in a red front and longer hair in the back. “Business in the front, party in the back,” we used to joke about the mullet. Judging by his wide smile and shiny eyes, he looked like he enjoyed a good party, too. The year was 1986, and like the others whose photographs were here (and they were almost all young men), he died attempting to cross the Berlin Wall.

At that time, Berlin was the epicenter of the Cold War and the Berlin Wall, a physical manifestation of the Iron Curtain. As a teenager growing up far from these concrete borders, Berlin to me was the setting of spy novels I used to read: a shadowy landscape of double agents, mole hunts and whispered defections. But just three years later, that image was replaced with jubilant revellers dancing on top of the wall that had crumbled overnight. On November 9th, 1989, Berlin became a symbol of freedom and an optimistic new world of unity and peace. I was in university then, and couldn't

wait to see history in the making. As soon as I could, I traveled and taught in Eastern Europe and the stories I heard of the nocturnal scene in Europe's ‘cool capital’ cemented my image of a freedom-loving city.

But I never made it to Berlin until this summer, 35 years later. What I found was neither an outpost of Cold War mythology or a hedonistic party culture, though elements of both still linger. Today, Berlin is an intriguing and vivacious metropolis that defies definitions. It wears its unvarnished history and



Photo: Philip Kosche



culture on its sleeve, whether it's palaces or watchtowers, opera houses or techno clubs, greenspace or graffiti, boisterous youthful-ness or refined stateliness.

One local put it more succinctly: "Whatever you come for, you can find in Berlin." Here were a few of our best finds:

Exploring Museumsinsel (Museum Island)

Bordered by the Spree River and the Kupfergraben Canal, this UNESCO World Heritage site is a literal island (The city's waterways are a predominant feature of its landscape, and Berlin has more bridges than Venice). Five world-class museums make the island their home: *Altes Museum* (Old Museum), *Neues Museum* (New Museum), *Alte Nationalgalerie* (Old National Gallery), *Bode Museum* and *Pergamon Museum*. Not only are they each worth checking out on their own merit, but the Museum Island's grounds are a pleasure to stroll around in. Surrounded by these grand institutions, groups of friends and family lounge on the grass around the fountain, buskers perform and tourists snap selfies. We took a couple of photos, too. And then we enjoyed the same view from above and toasted the day with a sunset drink at Baret, the rooftop bar on top of the Humboldt Forum, a museum dedicated to human history, art and culture.

Relaxing in Berlin's Calm Oases

Germany's capital is one of the greenest in Europe, with green spaces making up roughly a third of its total area. *Tiergarten* is the emerald crown jewel of Berlin's extensive park system with 210 hectares of parkland right in the middle of the city. Once the former hunting grounds of Prussian kings, it's now enjoyed by locals and visitors alike who come to walk its treelined trails, watch graceful swans swim in its ponds or cycle on its paths, which was exactly what we spent a morning doing.

Even more relaxing was our day at *Vabali Spa*. This five-acre complex includes 10 saunas, three steam baths, four pools, massage/treatment rooms and a lovely Asian-

inspired restaurant. Special sessions include sound-bathing and guided meditation. Our day at Vabali felt like a mini vacation from our vacation.

Admiring the Art of the East Side Gallery

This longest stretch of the remaining Berlin Wall (1.3 kilometres) is now an outdoor exhibition with murals and messages. Some are whimsical while others are thought-provoking. The most famous -- the kiss between Brezhnev and Honecker -- still stops visitors in their tracks. After strolling along the wall and admiring the works, we wandered down to the river, where young Berliners and international students lounged in floating hostels and riverside watering holes.

Delving Deeper into History

The *DDR Museum* offers an immersive glimpse into everyday life in East Germany during the Cold War. Interactive exhibits include a typical East Berlin apartment and the iconic Trabant automobile, which brought back memories of friends driving me around when I lived in Hungary in the early 90s.

Equally compelling is the *Palace of Tears* (Tränenpalast), the former border crossing at Friedrichstraße railway station. Named for the tearful farewells that took place there, the museum focuses on the personal -- stories of separations, contents of suitcases and small acts of defiance. One exhibit features contraband items that were smuggled in, like Playboy magazines and Jehovah witness pamphlets (in laundry detergent boxes) and another was the narrow, claustrophobic customs corridor people had to go through. Behind the glass was an officer's hat and the stamp and pad used to validate those who were approved.

Pedaling through Cold War History

To get a better sense of the Berlin Wall's impact on the city, we joined a guided bike tour with Berlin on Bike, led by historian and guide Brandon Nash. We followed parts of the Wall Trail and stopped at points of interest, including watchtowers, ghost stations and memorial sites.

"Many people don't realize that the wall didn't just divide Berlin, it encircled West Berlin entirely," explained Brendan.

At *Mauerpark* (Wall Park), a city green space where people now picnic on the grass and browse a Sunday flea market, Brendan showed us a picture of the same spot looking like a war zone with barbed wire and concrete everywhere. "We're standing in no-man's land," he said and explained that the divide had inner and outer walls with an open strip between them, where guards in watch towers could shoot anyone trying to escape.

We continued to the official *Berlin Wall Memorial*, the most comprehensive site for understanding the structure of the wall and its human cost. There are several outdoor exhibits, including the Window of Remembrance, which is dedicated to the people who died at the wall. It was there that I saw the smiling young man from 1986. Thirty-five years suddenly didn't feel so long ago.

When you go:

Getting There: Berlin is easily accessible, with direct flights from several major North American cities, including New York, Los Angeles and Miami. New this year is Air Transat's direct route from Toronto.

Where to Stay: A budget-friendly choice is the *Aletto Hotel at Potsdamer Platz*, which offers Italian-inspired design, modern amenities, and is steps from the U-Bahn. For a luxury retreat, *SO/ Berlin Das Stue* is a fashion-forward boutique hotel set in a former embassy, discreetly tucked away beside the Tiergarten and Berlin Zoo.

Where to Eat: Like the city itself, you can find anything you fancy in Berlin from a classic *Currywurst at Currywolf* to an unforgettable Michelin-starred locavore dining experience at *Nobelhart & Schmutzig*. ■

WWW.VISITBERLIN.DE/EN





A Visit to the Coffee Estates of Chiapas

Article and photography by Nicholas Kontis

Mexico's southernmost state of Chiapas oozes steamy tropical rainforest jungles, fertile and pine-forested mountains, and standout colonial cities and towns. Known for its cobblestone streets, baroque buildings and elegant plazas, San Cristóbal de las Casas is on many a traveler's radar.

The ruins of Palenque and Yaxchilán are two of the most spectacular archeological sites in the Mayan world. The surrounding jungle remains unscathed, home to cacophonous howler monkeys, brightly colored toucans, and various cats including jaguars and ocelots.

Chiapas produces cacao, mangoes, avocados, bananas and rum, but in the misty highlands of the Soconusco region, there is another treasure: At an elevation of 1,800 to 3,750 feet, along the Ruta del Café (the "Coffee Road"), you'll find some of the most sought-after coffee in the world.

In the late 19th Century, noting that Hamburg, Germany, was the world's largest coffee port, Mexican President Porfirio Díaz began pursuing investors from Germany and Switzerland to emigrate to Mexico and establish coffee estates. The Sierra Madre de Chiapas offered a dense but fertile jungle, ripe for the production of "green gold" (oro verde) for those willing to work the land. After a coffee futures exchange opened in

Hamburg in 1887, 24 million bags of coffee were traded in the first year and a half. Germany remained at the forefront of the coffee trade until the Second World War; decades later, it recovered, and Hamburg is again the leading importer of coffee in Europe.

The fincas (coffee estates) of Chiapas, meanwhile, have thrived. While Ruta del Café farms adhere to traditional methods of cultivation, the Starbucks chain is today one of its largest customers. Nearly 400 million coffee plants produce the region's essential, aromatic brew, which draws from its environment with tasting notes of tropical fruits, cinnamon, almond and dark chocolate.



Many fincas are perched above Tapachula, the second largest city in Chiapas, near the border of Guatemala, and are still run by descendants of original settlers. Many of them welcome tourists, offering rooms, tours, guided hikes, wellness activities, fine dining, and immersion into coffee and flower production.

Finca Argovia

Founded by a family from the Aargau region of Switzerland, Finca Argovia is a leader in sustainability as well as hospitality — a coffee plantation and flower house with a stylish boutique hotel. Owner Bruno Giesemann speaks with unabashed affection for his home.

"We cherish our land and are grateful to live where the Mayans have lived for over 3,000 years," Giesemann says. The land has changed him. "I came to the farm, and all that I cared about was being the largest coffee producer in Mexico. Now I changed my ways." Today, Argovia is a champion of organic farming. The concept is regenerative, one of rebuilding the soil and ecosystem. Coffee beans are cleaned and treated at the finca's own water treatment plant. Discarded coffee hulls are crushed into compost.

The grounds of this finca are a showcase for sustainable balance and Giesemann's passion for eco-agriculture. In addition to coffee production, the owner has devoted many acres to ginger blossoms, orchids, heliconias and other exotic flowers. His varied plans to protect and enrich the healthy forest soil have earned citations from Conservation International, The Rainforest Alliance, the National Organic Program, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the European Union.

Fifteen wooden cabins and casitas (now a part of the Tesoros lodging brand) nestle amid the lush jungle foliage. Other than an outdoor swimming pool and wellness area, there are few frills. There's no need for phones or televisions. Guests grow accustomed to leaving their room doors ajar, welcoming the sights, sounds and smells of the

surrounding nature preserve. A curious deer might drop in unannounced. The melodic calls of tropical mockingbirds and green parakeets replace alarm clocks. Many of the birds — over 200 species — get their water from banana plants, so there are few mosquitoes.

"We understand hospitality as users rather than deliverers," said Giesemann. "Through years of being on the land, we learned what we liked and did not like, making sure that our visitors spend their time and money to have the best guest experience. That's our responsibility."

Guests have the option of an intense coffee experience, either a full-day tour or a moderated version. Although a two-night stay is the norm, it would be easy to spend a week in these magical surroundings, from hiking the mountains to exploring the nearby Pacific coast. Birdwatching, fishing, turtle conservation, and visits to cacao plantations are possible activities. Giesemann himself guides a sunrise hike through the coffee plantation and jungle-shaded banana plants, the climax of which is an astonishing view of 13,425-foot Volcán Tacana. As the finca works with indigenous communities, guests have a unique opportunity to meet local people.

Other coffee estates

Each of the numerous farms along the Ruta del Café has its unique character, flavor profiles and cultivation methods. These are a few of them:

Finca Hamburgo is known for high-altitude coffee grown at elevations above 4,000 feet, Hamburgo can promise its guests cooler temperatures and a respite from the sweltering Chiapas heat. Founder Arthur Erich Edelmänn moved his family from Perleberg, Germany, to Chiapas in 1888. Like all early settlers, the Edelmanns had the arduous task of planting thousands of coffee plants into the sheer hillside. They ran power from their own hydroelectric plant to process the coffee beans. Today, coffee production continues to flourish.

The magnificent Finca offers six rooms and two suites along a wrap-around porch, opening to sweeping panoramas of the verdant mountains. A small museum showcases photos and artifacts from the finca's 19th-century inception. The restaurant serves German beer. The farm offers guided tours where visitors may learn about the coffee production process, from planting to harvesting.

Finca El Triunfo is part of the El Triunfo Biosphere Reserve, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Visitors who walk through the luxuriant highland forest learn about the sustainable practices that produce a high-quality coffee renowned for its complex flavors.

Finca La Selva is in the heart of the Lacandon jungle, where shade-grown plants are the specialty. As elsewhere, there's an emphasis on biodiversity and environmental conservation.

Finca San Francisco lies at 5,000 feet elevation in a coniferous forest. Besides coffee, it features a botanical garden of 3.7 acres, specializing in such tropical flowers as anthuriums, orchids and birds of paradise. Two cozy rooms provide accommodation.

Finca San Vicente is known for its innovative farming techniques, adapting modern technology to traditional practices. Tours include tastings and discussions on sustainable agriculture.

Getting There

Daily flights to Tapachula airport, in southern Chiapas, operate from Mexico City, Guadalajara, Monterey and Tijuana. As rental cars are not recommended on the mountain roads, both Finca Argovia and Finca Hamburgo will pick up travelers at the airport. The drive from Tapachula to the Ruta del Café takes about 90 minutes. Tuxtla Gutiérrez, the capital of Chiapas, is a 4½-hour drive. ■

WWW.VISIT-MEXICO.MX



Bikeable Buildings and Other Surprises in Bentonville

Article and photography by Jennifer Bain



The electric bike does all the work, whisking me up the outside of a gorgeous, six-storey glass office building along a series of switchbacks. That leaves me free to gawk as I cycle over dozens of mosaics embossed within the concrete ramps that depict local insects lugging precious jewels.

On the roof terrace, a final Venetian glass mosaic — partially obscured by patio furniture — combines those same colourful jewels to spell out an upbeat message.

“Now is better,” it says.

Indeed it is a good time to be alive, and I love how the Ledger, as this co-working space and community hub is called, has infused this short bike journey with Austrian-born, New York-based graphic designer Stefan Sagmeister’s art.

As I study 13 insect species including convergent ladybugs and Hell Creek Cave crayfish, I have to remind myself that what’s touted as the world’s first bikeable building is in Arkansas and not the Netherlands or another bike-friendly country.

I’ve got sweeping views of downtown from the roof terrace but only have eyes for the concrete parking garage right below me that features two shimmering smallmouth bass on its eastern wall.

Made by Sagmeister with 268,946 stainless steel disks, the oversized fish (one the size of a blue whale) are a nod to the Natural State’s abundant waterways and booming outdoor recreation industry.

It’s my third visit to Arkansas, an unsung state between Tennessee and Oklahoma where I’ve kayaked down the Buffalo National River, collected enormous quartz



crystals on a public dig with Avant Mining, and delved into the unique medical bathing history of Hot Springs National Park.

Bentonville, population 63,000, is another hidden gem I decide after going from the tiny Northwest Arkansas National Airport to Yeyo's bright yellow food truck for pork carnitas tacos and then Onyx Coffee Lab for an on-trend golden milk latte.

The fast-growing city calls itself the "mountain biking capital of the world" and has an extensive trail system to prove it. There are city trails, road rides and the Razorback Greenway to explore on the bike of your choice, plus connections to regional systems across Northwest Arkansas.

This is also the headquarters of Walmart, which was founded in 1962 in nearby Rogers by Sam Walton and has grown into the world's largest retailer. What you probably don't know is that Walmart's "New Home Office" — a dozen buildings spread over 350 acres — boasts 11 kilometres of walking and biking paths, more than 1,000 bike parking spots and a rentable bike fleet.

The Walton family is invested in making Bentonville a better place to live.

At the Walmart Museum, inside the original Walton's 5 & 10 Store, a hologram of the late Sam Walton answers questions and his retro office has been recreated. The museum expects to draw more than 400,000 visitors (most of them loyal customers) this year.

Then there's Walmart heiress Alice Walton, Sam's art-loving philanthropist daughter who created the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art as a non-profit charitable organization with free admission.

Designed by renowned architect Moshe Safdie, famous for Montreal's Habitat 67 and Ottawa's National Gallery of Canada, the stunning museum opened in 2011 and sits on 134 acres of Ozarks woods. It's also home to Bachman-Wilson House, designed by renowned architect Frank Lloyd Wright, and has an outdoor art trail.

A gritter satellite location, the Momentary, focuses on contemporary visual and performing arts. It's in a former cheese factory and also has free admission.

On the day that we rent e-bikes from Phat Tire Bike Shop, we tackle the Ledger first and then explore part of the New Home Office before cruising down some of the city's protected bike lanes.

Plan A is to cycle through the Coler Mountain Bike Preserve to Crystal Bridges, but we only get as far as Airship at Coler, an open-air café accessed in the woods, before a downpour. Plan B means we return our rentals, dry off and then drive to the museum for a tour and lunch.

Speaking of the culinary scene, Bentonville punches above its weight on that front, too.

There is that popular Mexican food cart in Bentonville Square. Yeyo's also has brick-and-mortar branches inside the Bentonville 8th Street Market and downtown Rogers. There's a smoked prime rib plate special from Wright's Barbecue, which I walk to from Crystal Bridges.

At Conifer, a farm-to-table restaurant that's fully gluten free, we try almost everything on the short, ever-changing dinner menu but I go back for seconds of the cheddar biscuits with whipped butter.

Breakfast at the Hive in the 21C Museum Hotel features house-made sorghum sausages (it's an ancient grain) and grits made by the War Eagle Mill in Rogers. But I'll always remember dining beside one of the boutique hotel chain/contemporary art museum's four-foot-tall, recycled plastic penguins. Each 21C has its own flock of roving penguins in a signature colour. Bentonville's penguins are green.

"It fits in perfectly with the green landscape you find in Northwest Arkansas," the hotel said on Facebook when announcing the results of a public vote.

Speaking of hotels, I stay at Motto by Hilton. It has ""cleverly compact" rooms with small-



er carbon footprints, flexible social spaces, and a bike storage and valet service. But, more importantly, my room looks right at the Ledger.

It draws people who look like locals — young couples holding hands, new parents pushing strollers and rambunctious kids burning off steam. It also attracts folks like me who are wobbling around on rentals, clearly delighted to bike their first building.

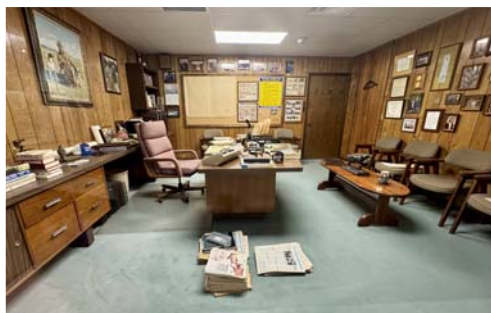
"It is pretty incredible how many trips get taken here in a day," says Aimee Ross, who does bike-based business development here and takes us cycling on that rainy day. "I don't know if anyone's actually counting it."

Someone really should be. The ramps of this unique attraction are open daily from sunrise to sunset in good weather.

I get to return before leaving town, this time walking the ramps (all 1.2 kilometres of them) for a better look at the mosaic critters hauling gems.

Now I know that the seemingly insignificant bugs are quietly collaborating to create something better. Now I understand that the bikeable building doubles as an outdoor art experience and has been designed "to be used, walked, biked, meandered, photographed and shared TO and FOR the public." ■

WWW.VISITBENTONVILLE.COM





A First-Time Visit to Tantalizing Thailand

Article and photography by Randy Mink

It was only my second day in Thailand, but I knew then I'd want to return someday for more of its vibrant street life—a multisensory medley of hole-in-the-wall shops, markets brimming with exotic fruits, and outdoor cooking stalls tucked under canopies of plastic tarps, oversized umbrellas and corrugated metal roofs.

From morning to night, the roads are abuzz with motorcycles, motor scooters and Thailand's iconic tuk-tuks, those three-wheeled vehicles with a bench in back for passengers or a side cart for hauling things.

On this two-week adventure halfway around the world, I wanted to cram in as many authentically Thai experiences as possible—including a tuk-tuk ride—to make

every minute count. Major cities like Bangkok and Chiang Mai, along with rural villages and wilderness areas, provided a well-rounded first-time visit to this trending vacation destination in the heart of Southeast Asia.

Traditional Thai Massage

I am not a spa person, but the art of massage therapy is part of life in Thailand, so I ended up getting three full-body massages during my trip. A reflection of Thailand's ancient wellness traditions, massages are available everywhere, from fancy hotels and jungle hideaways to temples, airport waiting areas and no-frills storefront parlors.

The most rigorous treatment was in Chiang Mai at Let's Relax, a reputable chain. After

a foot washing and change into pajamas, I spent the next hour-and-a-half being pummeled, pounded, pulled, pushed and pressed by a young masseuse who expertly stretched my body with knees, elbows and feet, as well as hands, while I lay on my back and then stomach. Had I had wanted gentler pressure, I could have told her "bow, bow," as my tour guide had advised beforehand. But I chose to endure the real deal.

Awe-inspiring Temples

Gleaming with golden spires and adorned with vividly painted carvings, Buddhist temples brighten the bleakest urban landscape. Most Thais are Buddhist, and these color-splashed houses of worship are pillars of the community.

In Chiang Mai, my hotel was located next door to Wat Chai Mongkol, a place I visited several times just to watch people come and go as they left offerings and went inside to pray. Not far away, the maze-like alleys of Chiang Mai's historic Old City, enclosed by a moat and the original walls, contain more than 40 temples.

My favorite temple experience was at the late 14th-century Wat Phra That Doi Suthep, perched high on a mountain summit overlooking Chiang Mai. Once you arrive at the site of northern Thailand's most revered temple, you can take the funicular railway to the top or, as a true pilgrim would, climb the majestic, 306-step staircase. The vast terrace commands a stunning view of Chiang Mai. We found the orange-robed monks there—and at other temples—to be friendly, and they gladly posed for pictures.

Located inside the Grand Palace complex in Bangkok, Wat Phra Kaew is Thailand's holiest temple and the home of the Emerald Buddha, the nation's greatest treasure. Carved from a single piece of jade, the figure is only 26 inches tall.

Tangled Wires

Thailand's cluttered streetscapes are festooned with thickets of black wires stretching for miles from pole to pole and building to building. A sight to behold and practically a work of art, the slashing lines, whimsical knots, coiled garlands, hanging loops and dangling ends seem to pop up in every picture you take.

Spiderman would have a field day in these tangled webs, which apparently are connected to something that provides power. Instead of going to a museum to see abstract art, just look up and admire the creations of utility workers.

The World's Stinkiest Fruit

Most North Americans have never heard of durian, a fruit common in Southeast Asia. I first encountered the name when checking in to my Chiang Mai hotel. A sign on the front desk indicated that durian was not allowed in guest rooms. I saw a similar sign, with a red slash mark inside a red circle, at a Bangkok subway station.

Durian's smooth, pale yellow flesh comes in a spiky husk about the size of a honeydew melon. Even when it's not cut open, the smell is evident as soon as you walk into a small store. The pungent odor is truly awful. Some have compared it to raw sewage. To me it has hints of onion and artichoke. Durian is sold everywhere—in supermarkets, convenience stores, outdoor markets and roadside stands. You can buy freeze-dried slices in a bag or sample the taste in

cookies, snack chips, cakes, chewing gum and ice cream.

Since my guide knew I was curious about the fruit and its "perfume," she bought me two pieces of freshly cut durian at a produce market in Chiang Mai. I liked the pudding-like texture, but the overpowering scent was off-putting, to say the least. We kept the leftovers in the van for a while, but eventually the driver told us that it had to go—fumes were escaping from the package and into the air-conditioning.

Chiang Mai's Night Market

My best memories of Chiang Mai, a tourist magnet of 200,000 in northwestern Thailand, take me back to the stalls of its famous night market. Hundreds of vendors throng sidewalks, plazas and covered spaces for block after downtown block. A favorite of tourists and locals alike, it's one big party for revelers and curiosity seekers who come to eat, shop and people-watch. Street entertainment could include anything from dance groups to a solo singer belting out 1960s pop tunes. Portrait artists in one passageway add to the festive ambience.

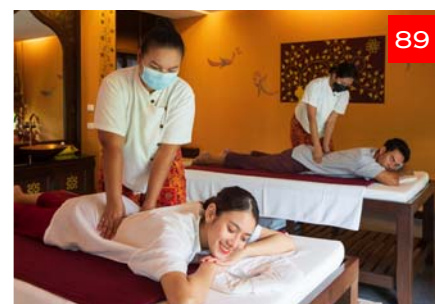
The nightly bazaar, which goes on until midnight, is a good place to pick up a souvenir of Thailand, whether a soccer shirt, batik-print dress, silk scarf, elephant figurine or handwoven pillow or handbag.

From one food vendor I bought sticks of chicken satay coated in spicy peanut sauce. Also tempting were noodle dishes, fried chicken, fried fish, barbecue pork ribs and dumplings filled with pork, crab or shrimp. At a stand griddling up roti (a crepe-like pancake), I treated myself to a double dessert—one roti filled with banana and Nutella, the other with mango. For easy eating, they were cut into squares and came with a pair of little sticks that served as utensils.

Sticky rice (khao niao), the most ubiquitous Thai dessert, also appealed to my sweet tooth. The steamed, short-grain rice is flavored with sweetened coconut milk and topped with slices of fresh mango.

Papaya salad (or som tam), a Thai staple, is another big seller at the bazaar. Sweet, sour, spicy and salty at the same time, the refreshing salad mixes shredded green papaya (not the ripe orange flesh commonly served at hotel breakfast buffets) with fresh garlic, chili spices, tart lime, sugar and salty fish sauce (or a pinch of salt). It might be topped with small pieces of green beans and roasted peanuts.

see following page





Thai Boxing

Muay thai, a martial art related to boxing and kickboxing but distinct from both, is the country's national sport, so I thought I should take in a few rounds. I didn't have to look long for a venue because the Fairtex Boxing Stadium was located in a pavilion neighboring Chiang Mai's night market. For about \$18 US I bought a ticket and watched some pretty intense fighting in a hot arena cooled slightly by a big fan.

This wasn't boxing at the highest professional level, but it satisfied my curiosity, and I witnessed some dramatic knockouts that called for the medical technician to enter the ring. A combat sport for sure, muay thai involves striking with fists and feet, elbows and knees. I was surprised that some of the young competitors hailed from far-flung parts of the world—England, Belgium, United States—as well as from Thailand.

Land of Elephants

A trip highlight was Patara Elephant Conservation, one of many elephant sanctuaries in the mountainous north. At this home to 24 domesticated pachyderms (descendants of beasts of burden in the teak logging industry), I had a chance to bathe one in a muddy creek. From a thatched platform in the forest, our group fed sugar cane, corn and bananas to the thick-skinned giants. Each has a name and its own mahout, or handler.

The number of wild elephants in Thailand has dropped by 70 percent in the last 60 years thanks to poaching and urban encroachment; fewer than 3,000 of the endangered beasts remain. Images of the country's symbolic animal are found in souvenirs of all kinds, from magnets and key-chains to tablecloths and loungewear. Long ago, kings rode elephants into battle, and the tuskers are still associated with royalty. Elephant statues grace royal parks and the Grand Palace compound in Bangkok.

At the beginning of a tropical rainforest hike in southern Thailand's Khao Sok National Park, we encountered a "Beware of Wild Elephants" sign and had to dodge elephant dung along the path. Later, we learned the trail closes when there's more than a 60 percent chance of an elephant encounter. That's reassuring... I think.

On the hike we not only had to contend with rain that made the trail a torrent of orange-red water but with leeches that attached to our skin and sucked our blood. From my sock and later my leg, one of our guides removed the wormy creature with a folded leaf.

Village Life

The Thai government has launched tourism initiatives to help the economies of provincial villages by promoting traditional handicrafts. On a tour from Chiang Mai, our group got a look at how weaving is being revived in a rural community of 460 residents. Under the tutelage of villagers, we had a chance to work with cotton and prepare it for the spinning wheel and loom. Down the road we helped ladies make a dessert by scraping coconut from the shells and mashing sweet potatoes.

At a town in southern Thailand, our tour group had fun meeting students at a school and learning about natural tie-dyeing, a process that uses dyes from the nipa palm. Each of us designed our own cotton fabric as a memento to take home.

Bustling Bangkok

Sprawling, sultry and chaotic, this vast megalopolis of 12 million can be overwhelming. It was the last stop on my two-week tour, and I was a little apprehensive about dealing with the heat, pollution and traffic gridlock. But I learned to pace myself and ended up loving Thailand's capital, wishing I had more than two days to tap into its energy.

Seeing the city from the water provides relief from the congested streets and a different perspective. At a pier on the Chao Phraya River one morning, I boarded a colorfully striped longtail boat for a touristic canal cruise that glided past wooden houses set on stilts, some of them near collapse. Full of photo possibilities, the tour afforded peeks at temples, workshops, floating vendors cooking up meat, verandas hung with laundry and other slices of daily life.

That evening on the river, I set sail on the Saffron dinner boat, enjoying a multi-course meal before taking in the city lights and river traffic from the top deck.

The Saffron departed from Iconsiam, one of the largest indoor shopping malls in Asia. These air-conditioned retail refuges, like the boat cruises, offer welcome escapes from Bangkok's heat and humidity.

At Iconsiam, you can shop for typical souvenirs, try Thai specialties in the food court and patronize high-end retailers like Gucci, Cartier and Louis Vuitton. I stocked up on lightweight elephant-print shirts, shorts, pants and table runners. A vendor on the first level sells fried insects in bulk—grasshoppers, scorpions, crickets, beetles and other creepy sources of crunchy protein for snacking. Yum. ■

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