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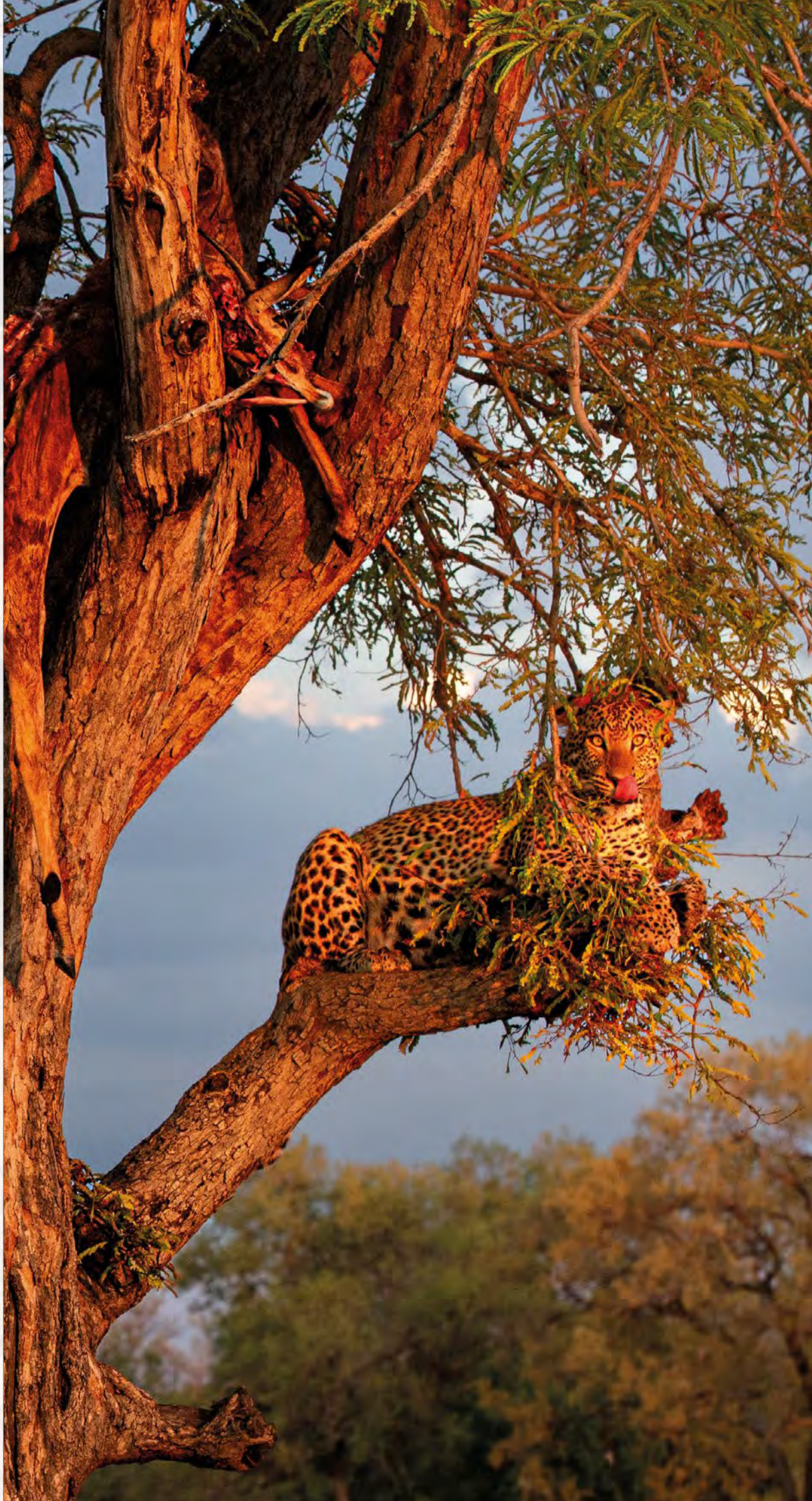
TRAVELLER



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WINTER IN LUCERNE



In the heart of Switzerland, the enchanting lakeside city of Lucerne shines bright with a jam-packed calendar of cultural events in winter. And, with the snow-laden slopes and picturesque villages of the Swiss Alps nearby, it's a wonderfully versatile destination for a festive break.

Old Town delights

Brimming with ornate, fresco-adorned buildings, cosy squares and lantern-lit cobbled streets, the historic centre of Lucerne (Altstadt) is a pleasure to explore – especially when illuminated by twinkly Christmas lights. Be sure to also take a leisurely stroll across the Kapellbrücke, Europe's oldest covered wooden bridge.

Advent Opening

Lucerne's Christmas festivities officially get underway with the Advent Opening ceremony on Europaplatz, featuring live music, dance shows, ice skating, Santa's procession and the decoration of a large Christmas tree. It takes place on 22 November 2025.

Christmas markets

There's no better way to soak up the festive spirit in Lucerne than by visiting the Christmas market on Franziskanerplatz, running from 4–21 December 2025. It's among the prettiest in Switzerland, with dozens of warmly-lit wooden stalls selling everything from mulled wine and sausages to sweet treats and artisan handicrafts. Rudolf's Christmas Spectacle, meanwhile, offers a similarly jolly experience at Inseli Park.

Ice Magic

Outside the Lucerne Cultural and Congress Centre, Europaplatz is transformed into a lakeside ice rink flanked by festive chalets and pavilions, open from 12 November 2025 – 2 January 2026. It's free to use, and skates can be rented on-site. There's also a stage hosting concerts, making this a wonderful place to spend an evening with friends and family.

Lilu Light Festival

Just as Lucerne's Christmas celebrations are over, the city springs back into life with the Lilu Light Festival. From 15 – 25 January 2026, the Water Tower, townhouses, churches and alleyways of the city centre are illuminated by a dazzling array of light installations, courtesy of artists from all around the world.

Lucerne Carnival

As winter draws towards a close, the annual Lucerne Carnival takes place, starting on 12 February 2026 and marked by a 'Big Bang' explosion at Kapellplatz. This is followed by further colourful costumed street parades, musical performances and plenty more traditional festivities, drawing to a close on 17 February.

Lake cruises

Hopping aboard a cruise on Lake Lucerne is a fabulous way to take in the region's gorgeous scenery in full winter colours. Think soaring, snow-capped peaks and frosty, forested shores punctuated by idyllic, postcard-worthy villages. Special culinary-themed cruises, meanwhile, offer the chance to sample the region's gastronomic delights while gliding across the water.

Mountain adventures

Whether it's a journey aboard the Pilatusbahn (the world's steepest cogwheel railway), a winter hike on Mount Rigi or skiing at Mount Titlis, Lucerne is perfectly placed for a whole host of day trips among the spectacular mountains of Central Switzerland.

To find out more about holidays to Lucerne, call Wexas on 020 7838 5958.

swi⁺zerland

Sound and Vision

It didn't have to happen, but it did. Just one look at the splendid leopard that graces the cover of this issue and a read through the ode to Tanzania by Jonathan and Angela Scott; and oops. A reflex. On goes 'Africa' by Toto. The silliness of the stretched out 'Serengeti' in the lyrics gets me every time:

Sure as Kilimanjaro rises up like Olympus
Over the Serengetee...

There are so many things that are wrong with this refrain, not least the premise and pacing. But those who love Africa recognise the emotion behind the anthem. I'm pretty certain neither Jon nor Angie sing along to it, but their love and passion for the continent rings true and clear in their words and amazing photography.

As if that selected track wasn't shaming enough, it is also impossible (for me only I'm sure) to read anything rodeo without thinking of Glen Campbell's 'Rhinestone Cowboy', which takes far worse liberties in making lyrics fit:

There's been a lot of compromisin'
On the road to my horizon'

Simon Urwin uses his words and pictures with no compromisin' at all in depicting Canada's cowboy culture. As flamboyant and as theatrical the action appears, rodeos here are a celebration of the expertise required to run a successful ranch. It's a special day out for visitors lucky enough to witness the spectacle, but it's a day-to-day part of actual cowboy life.

Thankfully the soundtrack in the background didn't go quite as far as walking into Cairo to the tune an Eighties hit I shan't (and probably don't need to) mention. There are some standards after all. Justine Hardy's are impeccable, her layered knowledge of Egypt past and present take us into the heart of Cairo and the contradictions that echo through the city. Reading it, poetry not pop was uppermost, as she quotes from Shelley's 'Ozymandias', a seminal salute to power turned to powder in the desert:



Amy Sohanpaul
tunes into the world



... Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away

The shadow of Shelley lingers in Kevin Pilley's entertaining piece about Genoa. As the most romantic of the Romantic poets, Shelley was smitten by Italy. He was never to leave, drowning in the Gulf of Poets, amidst the beautiful backdrop that is the Ligurian coast.

Francesco Lastrucci's glorious photographs take in another beautiful coastline – Crete's wonderful western beaches, that run along a dramatic landscape of sheer cliffs, plunging canyons and a ghost village now haunted by goats. Japan has its own coastal wonders, some subtropical and lined by white sand. In this issue we visit some magical faraway islands in the southwest of Okinawa, which offer fabulous diving amidst rare corals. Norway has its share of spectacular shoreline, lined by legendary fjords. Richard Lyon climbs a stairway to heavenly views.

If heaven truly is a place on earth, there's a taste of it in Amritsar, where the Golden Temple houses the Guru Granth Sahib, the holy book seen by Sikhs as a living, eternal guru. The temple itself is tranquillity at the heart of the city, a sacred site where the cacophony of the city is stilled by the sounds of *shabads* – the hymns contained within the Guru Granth Sahib.

Robert Macfarlane finds himself in a different sort of temple – the living cathedral that is the cloud forest of Los Cedros in Ecuador. He is perhaps the best nature writer in Britain at the moment, and this extract shows us why is he considered so, each word redolent and necessary.

We also have another perfect piece of writing, courtesy of Clarisse Beeby, who walks and talks us through Cape Town. It's such a vivid and evocative piece, reading it is an immersive experience. The music returned at this point, as the South African national anthem is one of the most beautiful in the world – very little excuse is needed to play it. Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika – God Bless Africa.

(She's waiting there for you.)

THE BEST OF WINTER IN

Alberta



The Rocky Mountains of Alberta are a magnificent sight to behold in winter, as the Canadian province's soaring peaks and coniferous forests become thickly draped in snow and its lakes transform into glistening sheets of ice. To give you a taste of the many adventures on offer, these are the top 10 winter experiences for the province.

1. Ice Bubbles & Glacier Heli Tour

Take to the skies on a spectacular helicopter flight, soaring above the mighty mountains and glaciers of the Alberta Rockies before tucking into a delicious hot lunch back on the ground. You'll then be driven to Abraham Lake for a short hike to discover its famous ice bubbles – an extraordinary spectacle only seen in the winter months when the lake freezes over.

2. Johnston Canyon Frozen Falls Adventure

This guided hike takes you along steel catwalks built into the walls of Johnston Canyon, one of Banff National Park's most striking attractions. First, you'll enter a cave to marvel at the frozen Lower Falls, before continuing to the mesmerising Upper Falls, where gigantic icicles form a glittering, frozen column that extends up to 30 metres. Along the way, you'll learn all about the history of the canyon and the wildlife that inhabits it.



3. Maligne Canyon Ice Walk

As the deepest accessible canyon in Jasper National Park, reaching depths of over 50 metres, Maligne Canyon is a perfect destination to marvel at awe-inspiring ice formations and frozen waterfalls up close. On this three-hour tour, you'll venture far inside the canyon, passing by countless naturally frozen sculptures that offer an endless stream of incredible photo opportunities.

4. Jasper Dark Sky Planetarium

Jasper National Park is home to the world's largest accessible dark sky preserve, with minimal light pollution creating optimal conditions for stargazing and night-sky photography. Its 38-seat planetarium hosts interactive tours presented by expert astronomers, while guided tour packages offer the chance to gaze into space using powerful telescopes. With a slice of good fortune, the Northern Lights might also make an appearance.

5. Jasper Winter Wildlife and Foodie Tour

Venture out with knowledgeable outdoor guides in search of Jasper's famed wildlife amid the stunning landscapes of the Athabasca Valley. Along the way, keep your eyes peeled for the likes of elk, deer, mountain goats, and possibly even wolves. Then, you'll head back into town for a foodie tour, stopping by four local restaurants to taste delicious dishes accompanied by specially selected alcoholic beverages.

6. Lake Louise Sleigh Ride

Cosy up with snug blankets in a traditional horse-drawn sleigh as you trace the idyllic frozen shore of Lake Louise, breathing that crisp winter air and taking in sublime views of the Victoria Glacier and the surrounding mountains. Whether you're seeking a fun-filled family outing or a romantic experience for two, this enchanting journey is sure to stir the soul.

7. Jasper Dog Sledding

There's something uniquely exhilarating about gliding across the snow-blanketed wilderness of the Alberta Rockies by dog sled – a traditional mode of transport that's deeply rooted in Canada's cultural heritage. After a brief introduction, you'll have the opportunity to try your hand at 'mushing', driving your own sled pulled by a team of energetic huskies, or you may wish to simply sit back and take in the views while someone else does the steering.

8. Banff Gondola

Take a ride on the Banff Gondola to the summit of Sulphur Mountain for sweeping, panoramic views of the Canadian Rockies and Bow Valley. The journey takes just eight

minutes, reaching an altitude of 2,281 metres above sea level. Upon reaching the top, it's well worth strolling along the Summit Ridge interpretive boardwalk to access the ultimate vantage point.

9. Electric Fat Biking

Suitable for experienced cyclists and rookies alike, electric fat biking is easy to get to grips with, making it an ideal way for riders of all skill levels to navigate the scenic trails of Banff National Park. You'll wind your way between snow-laden forests, frozen rivers and epic mountain backdrops with plenty of time for photo stops and fascinating insights from your expert guide.

10. Jasper Snowshoe Tour

Equipped with snowshoes, designed to distribute your weight for hiking on loosely packed snow, you'll set off to explore some of Jasper National Park's most beautiful landscapes with a knowledgeable guide leading the way. You'll learn about the area's history, geology and ecology while searching for animal tracks and listening for the song of mountain chickadee birds.

CANADA'S ALBERTA



TRAVELLER

Traveller is Britain's original magazine for intelligent travel. Since 1970 it has reported on the real experience of travelling the world, and many of today's leading explorers and adventurers are on the Editorial Board.

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amy@fifthfloorpublishing.com

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TEL 020 7838 5958 EMAIL mail@wexas.com

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ADVERTISING Dave Warne

TEL 020 7838 5818 EMAIL david.warne@wexas.com

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Every issue we seek out today's most distinguished and interesting travellers to contribute to the magazine

THE PEOPLE BEHIND OUR STORIES



ROBERT MACFARLANE

is an internationally renowned writer and speaker on nature, people and place. His latest book is *Is a River Alive?*

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JUSTINE HARDY

is a widely respected author and documentary maker. She is also a trauma psychotherapist and the founder of Healing Kashmir.

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SIMON URWIN

is an award-winning travel photographer and writer, who has shot in over 75 countries from Antarctica to Afghanistan.

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JONATHAN & ANGELA SCOTT

are wildlife photographers and documentary makers based in Kenya. In this issue their focus is Tanzanian safari.

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KEVIN PILLEY

is a former cricketer and ex-chief staff writer of *Punch* magazine, who writes extensively on travel, lifestyle, food and drink.

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FRANCESCO LASTRUCCI

is a documentary photographer who focuses on editorial stories and long-term personal projects in Colombia, India and the Mediterranean.

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RICHARD LYON

is a traveller and writer who lives with his dog Max in a converted water tank in Edinburgh.

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CLARISSE BEEBY

is a food-lover turned writer, who's passionate about exploring the beauty of the world through taste, culture and travel.

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SINEAN CALLERY

is a translator and tour guide with an interest in human-powered adventures and ethical tourism as a means to bridge cultural divides.

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MARK REYNOLDS

is a freelance writer and editor and founding editor of *Bookanista*. For *Traveller* he compiles Bookshelf and other features.

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KATHRYN HURLOCK

is a historian at Manchester Metropolitan University, focusing on religious activities from the Middle Ages to the present.

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SAM DALRYMPLE

is a historian, author and filmmaker. His first book, *Shattered Lands*, is a chronicle of the break-up of the colonial Indian Empire.

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5 UNFORGETTABLE EUROPEAN ESCAPES BY ANANTARA HOTELS & RESORTS



Anantara Hotels & Resorts aren't just places to stay; they offer authentic and enriching travel experiences that ensure every journey remains long in the memory. Think unbeatable locations, top-tier hospitality, world-class spas and gastronomic excellence, all wrapped up in one ultra-stylish package. Each one provides a window into local culture and traditions, too – whether it's a city centre hotel, a countryside retreat or a beachfront resort. That holds true across its fabulous European collection, with standout properties dotted throughout the continent's most desirable destinations, from Budapest to the Amalfi Coast.

1. Anantara Palais Hansen Vienna Hotel

A grand Neo-Renaissance palace reborn as one of Vienna's most opulent hotels, Anantara Palais Hansen takes pride of place on the famous Ringstrasse boulevard, occupying a coveted position within 15-20 minutes' walk of iconic landmarks including St. Stephen's Cathedral and Hofburg Palace. Its elegant design simultaneously pays homage to the city's heritage while providing a sanctuary of utmost luxury. Michelin-starred restaurant, EDVARD, presents an innovative gastronomic journey based on seasonal, foraged ingredients, alongside Theo's Lounge & Bar, which serves as a delightful spot for light snacks, afternoon tea, expertly-mixed cocktails and exquisite wines in the inner courtyard.

And when it comes to wellness, the Anantara Spa invites guests to unwind with soothing treatments, a hydrothermal circuit, a Finnish sauna and a steam bath.

2. Anantara Convento di Amalfi Grand Hotel

The fragrant scent of lemon groves swirls through the air at Anantara Convento di Amalfi Grand Hotel, beautifully set within a 13th-century former Capuchin convent on a cliffside overlooking the Tyrrhenian Sea. It retains its original chapel and cloisters, seamlessly blending historical splendour with 21st-century luxuries, glorious views and a profound sense of serenity and seclusion. The town centre of Amalfi, meanwhile, is just a 10-minute stroll away. Most of the rooms

and suites are sea-facing, featuring terracotta tiling, lime-washed walls, marble-tiled bathrooms and, in some cases, private Jacuzzis and spacious terraces. Gourmet cuisine is, of course, central to the experience, both at the signature Italian restaurant, Dei Cappuccini, and La Locanda Della Canonica, which specialises in authentic Neapolitan pizzas. Between cooling off in the infinity pool, unwinding at the Anantara Spa and soaking up the sunshine on flower-lined balconies, there's endless scope for relaxation.

3. Anantara New York Palace Budapest Hotel

Housed within an ornate Belle Époque palace in Budapest's atmospheric seventh district, Anantara New York Palace is a magnificent base from which to explore the Hungarian capital. Its intricate façade gives way to richly-adorned interiors, where marble columns, Murano chandeliers and frescoed ceilings evoke the grandeur of a bygone era. The New York Café, once a favourite haunt of artists and writers, is revered for its gilded interiors and lavish afternoon teas, while the White Salon and Atrium restaurants further enhance the outstanding culinary lineup. After a day of sightseeing, there's no better place to rest and recharge than the spa, where guests can indulge in signature treatments, take a dip in the heated pool and make use of rainforest showers, a Finnish sauna and an aromatherapy steam room.

4. Anantara Villa Padierna Palace Benahavís Marbella Resort

Nestled among lush gardens of palm and cypress trees in the rolling hills between Marbella, Benahavís and Estepona, Anantara Villa Padierna Palace is perfectly positioned within striking distance of the famed beaches and prestigious golf courses of Spain's Costa del Sol. But the palace is a

destination in its own right, with extensive wellness and leisure facilities ranging from a private racquet club to a state-of-the-art spa with a sea salt hammam, Greek and Finnish saunas, a trio of aromatherapy baths and plunge pools of varying temperatures. The dining scene, meanwhile, is bound to impress even the most discerning of palettes, with an eclectic choice of restaurants covering Andalusian favourites, Italian classics, Middle Eastern specialities and Japanese fine dining.

5. Anantara Palazzo Naiadi Rome Hotel

Commanding a central position on Rome's Piazza della Repubblica, Anantara Palazzo Naiadi places guests within easy reach of the city's myriad historic treasures, including the National Roman Museum, the Trevi Fountain and the Basilica di Santa Maria Maggiore. The hotel's resplendent neoclassical façade makes an immediate impression, leading into interiors defined by stately grandeur – from elegant rooms and suites to a soaring lobby adorned with white colonnades and a dazzling Murano glass chandelier. The rooftop bar and swimming pool also offer a welcome respite from the city's bustle, while the Anantara Spa combines Eastern and Western wellness therapies in a tranquil setting. Dining is a true highlight, too, spanning the refined INEO restaurant, the more casual SEEN by Olivier, and the bountiful La Fontana breakfast experience.





Indigenous experiences in Atlantic Canada

Indigenous communities have called Atlantic Canada home for thousands of years, carving out a unique way of life founded on a deep connection with nature and a remarkable spirit of resilience. To celebrate and show appreciation for Canada's First Nations heritage, National Indigenous Peoples Day is celebrated every June.

Communities such as the Mi'kmaq, Innu, Inuit, Beothuk, Maliseet and Abenaki have created rich cultures across the four Atlantic Canada provinces of New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island. As such, visitors to the region have the opportunity to immerse themselves in the fascinating history of the First Nations people and experience their millenia-old traditions firsthand.

With the Indigenous Tourism Association of Prince Edward Island (ITAPEI) winning the prestigious 'Provincial or Territorial Association of the Year' accolade at the 2025 ITAC Indigenous Tourism Awards, Atlantic Canada is being recognised for its dedication to collaboration and building a resilient Indigenous tourism industry. Here, we've rounded up the most enriching Indigenous experiences across the four provinces of Atlantic Canada.



New Brunswick

Home to 15 distinct First Nation communities, including the Mi'kmaq, Maliseet and the Passamaquoddy, New Brunswick offers a fascinating insight into Atlantic Canada's rich Indigenous heritage. A good place to start is to familiarise yourself with the Indigenous names for the province's towns, rivers and landmarks; for instance, Fredericton, the capital, is known as See-dahn-sis in the Maliseet language. You could also attend a powwow (a traditional performance of singing and dancing), a smudging ceremony (in which sacred herbs are burned to purify the body, mind, heart and spirit) or an Indigenous craft workshop. All of these unique experiences will leave you with a much greater understanding and appreciation of New Brunswick's rich history as seen through the eyes of its First Nations people.

Newfoundland & Labrador

The largest of Atlantic Canada's four provinces, Newfoundland and Labrador's history of human habitation stretches back around 9,000 years. In and among the province's sprawling forests, majestic fjords, windswept coastlines and iceberg-dotted waters, Indigenous communities have forged a profound understanding of our planet that has evolved from ancient hunter-gatherer practices originally forged in the Arctic to a more modern way of living that retains a strong appreciation for nature and culture. Visitors can learn about the province's four main Indigenous groups – the Inuit, Southern Inuit (formerly the Labrador Inuit-Metis), Innu, and the Mi'kmaq – through the likes of immersive forest walks, guided boat tours, cultural workshops and traditional food experiences.

Nova Scotia

For more than 13,000 years, the Mi'kmaq people have called Nova Scotia home, enriching the province's communities with their legends, art, music and spirituality. There are myriad ways to delve into this unique culture, such as storytelling and traditional hand drum-making workshops at Membertou Heritage Park; a guided hike along the cultural trail on Goat Island, home of Eskasoni Cultural Journeys; or a walking tour exploring the ancient petroglyphs dotted along the picturesque shores of Kejimikujik National Park and National Historic Site. The Millbrook Cultural & Heritage Centre near Truro, meanwhile, provides a detailed insight into the language, culture and enduring spirit of the Mi'kmaq through a series of informative exhibits, alongside a souvenir shop that supports local Indigenous businesses.

Prince Edward Island

It may be Canada's smallest province in terms of land area, but what Prince Edward island lacks in size it more than makes up for in natural splendour and cultural treasures – as recognised by its prestigious accolade of 'Provincial or Territorial Association of the Year' at the 2025 ITAC Indigenous Tourism Awards. In the Mi'kmaq language, the island's name is Epekwitk, meaning "something lying in the water". At the Lennox Island Mi'kmaq Cultural Centre, visitors can learn about traditional crafts, drumming, and the deep spiritual connection to the land and sea, while Atlantic Canada's only Indigenous theatre company, Mi'kmaq Heritage Actors, showcases the history of the Mi'kmaq people through stories, songs, teachings and traditional dancing.



Atlantic Canada
New Brunswick • Prince Edward Island
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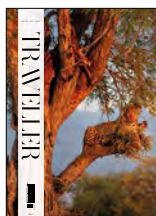
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Leopard by Jonathan and Angela Scott

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New releases to inspire and inform

Hard rock and still waters

Freycinet National Park on

Tasmania's east coast is a place of wild beauty, where towering pink-hued mountains the Hazards shadow the landscape. At their foot are the alluring calm, blue waters of Wineglass Bay.

The waters off the Freycinet Peninsula are regularly visited by whales, particularly humpbacks, in the winter months. Bennetts wallabies, pademelons and echidnas are commonly seen on land, while seals may be spotted resting on rocks. Freycinet is also a great place to see birds ranging from small nectar-feeders to white-bellied sea eagles or Australasian gannets. Wildflowers and orchids are also common throughout the year.

Formed over 400 million years, the Freycinet Peninsula is effectively two eroded blocks of granite – the Hazards and the peninsula of Mount Graham and Mount Freycinet – connected by the sand isthmus that forms Wineglass Bay. Coastal forests beckon keen hikers, while gourmands delight in local seafood and cool-climate wines. The park is home to some of Australia's finest luxury lodges, or you can even rent your own private island.

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LUXURY EUROPEAN RAIL JOURNEYS

Beautifully restored vintage trains, immaculate service and exquisite gourmet dining go hand in hand on Belmond's luxury rail journeys, transporting guests in unparalleled comfort and style between some of the world's most captivating destinations. As firmly established industry leaders, Belmond takes great pride in celebrating the golden age of luxury rail travel, drawing inspiration from the past while continually looking towards the future. While the Venice Simplon-Orient-Express is renowned for its iconic European journeys, the British Pullman, Royal Scotsman and Britannic Explorer offer a splendid selection of routes closer to home, each one paying homage to Britain's pioneering railway history.

Venice Simplon-Orient-Express

Rightly revered as Europe's most luxurious train, the Venice Simplon-Orient-Express is the pinnacle of rail travel on the continent. Stepping aboard its legendary gold-and-blue carriages feels like entering a world of timeless elegance, where 1920s-inspired Art Deco interiors set the scene for lavish afternoon teas, decadent multi-course dining and expertly-mixed artisan cocktails, gently soundtracked by the soothing tones of live piano music. By night, its cabins and suites transform into plush sleeping quarters adorned with ultra-soft bed linens, polished wooden panelling and marble-tiled bathrooms. Grand Suites, meanwhile, offer spacious lounge areas, along with private dining, free-flowing Champagne and 24-hour butler service. From the bustling bazaars of Istanbul and the romantic canals of Venice to the stately palaces of Vienna and the enchanting boulevards of Paris, there's no more opulent way to travel between Europe's great cities.



Belmond British Pullman

This meticulously restored 1920s train has played host to numerous royals and esteemed movie stars over the years, gracefully sweeping between Britain's rural delights and historic cities on a series of beguiling day trips departing from London. A seamless blend of antique-style marquetry, hand-stitched fabrics, heritage upholstery and vintage lighting create an ambience of utmost sophistication, befitting of a true icon of British travel. Integral to the British Pullman experience is sumptuous cuisine, with afternoon teas and five-course feasts prepared by a prestigious lineup of award-winning chefs using the finest British produce. Whether it's a classic jaunt to Oxford or Bath, a round-trip gliding through the Kentish countryside, a day excursion to Blenheim Palace or even an immersive Moving Murder Mystery, a journey aboard the British Pullman is bound to leave a profound and lasting impression.

Belmond Royal Scotsman

Belmond's Royal Scotsman offers a completely unique perspective on the Scottish Highlands, combining the glamour of a luxury sleeper train with the feel of an Edwardian country home. With capacity for just 36 guests, it's an exclusive and intimate experience, traversing some of Britain's most dramatic landscapes – from heather-cloaked glens and mirror-like lochs to storied castles and private estates. Its carriages are richly decorated with mahogany veneers, tweed furnishings and traditional tartans, evoking a refined yet inviting ambience. Dining is certainly a highlight, with seasonal menus drawing on the finest, locally sourced Scottish produce, served in a pair of elegant dining cars. There's even a dedicated spa carriage where guests can unwind with rejuvenating wellness treatments. Whether winding through the rugged mountains or stopping for a private whisky tasting, each itinerary – ranging from two to seven nights – provides a fascinating window to the cultural heritage and natural splendour of Scotland.

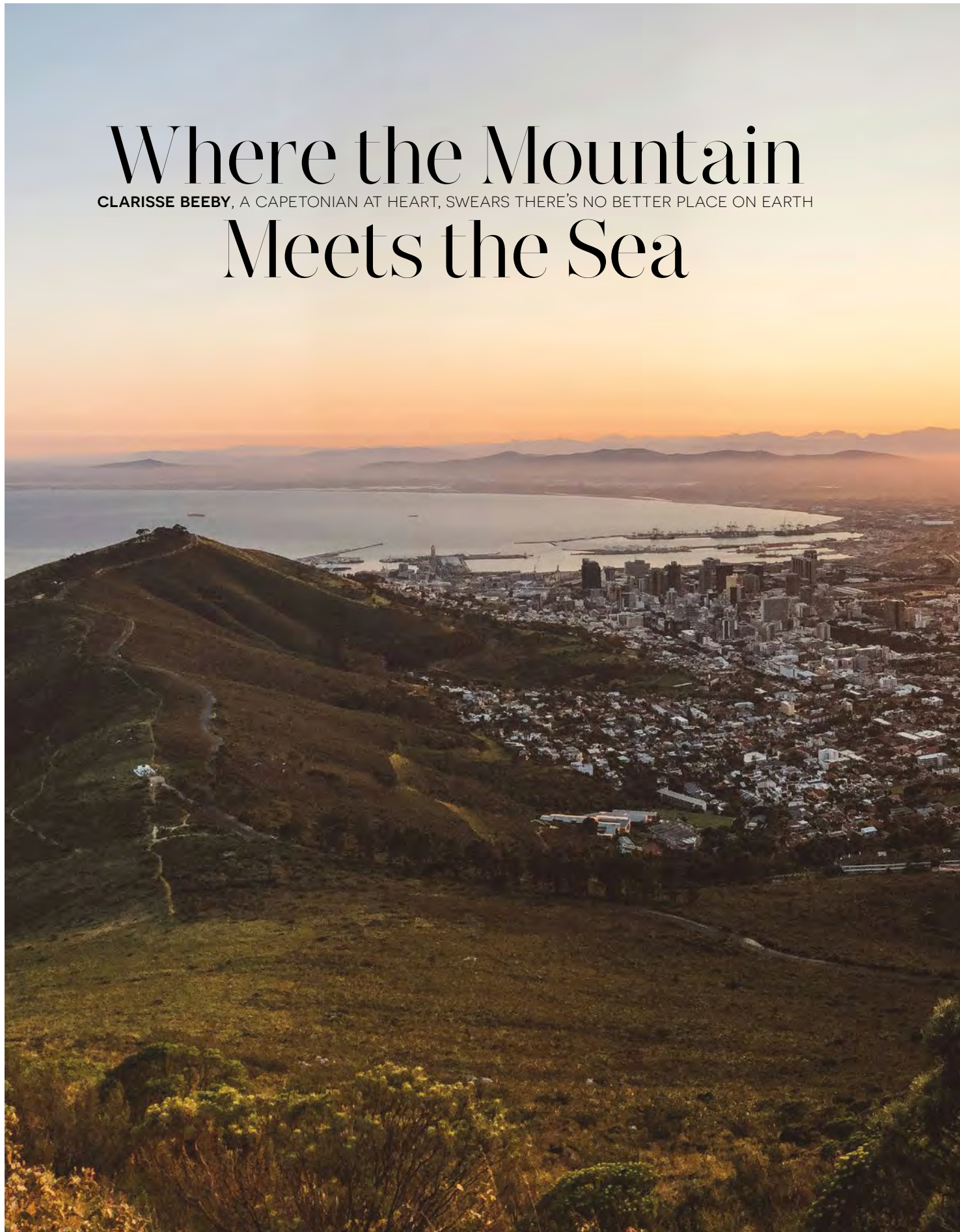


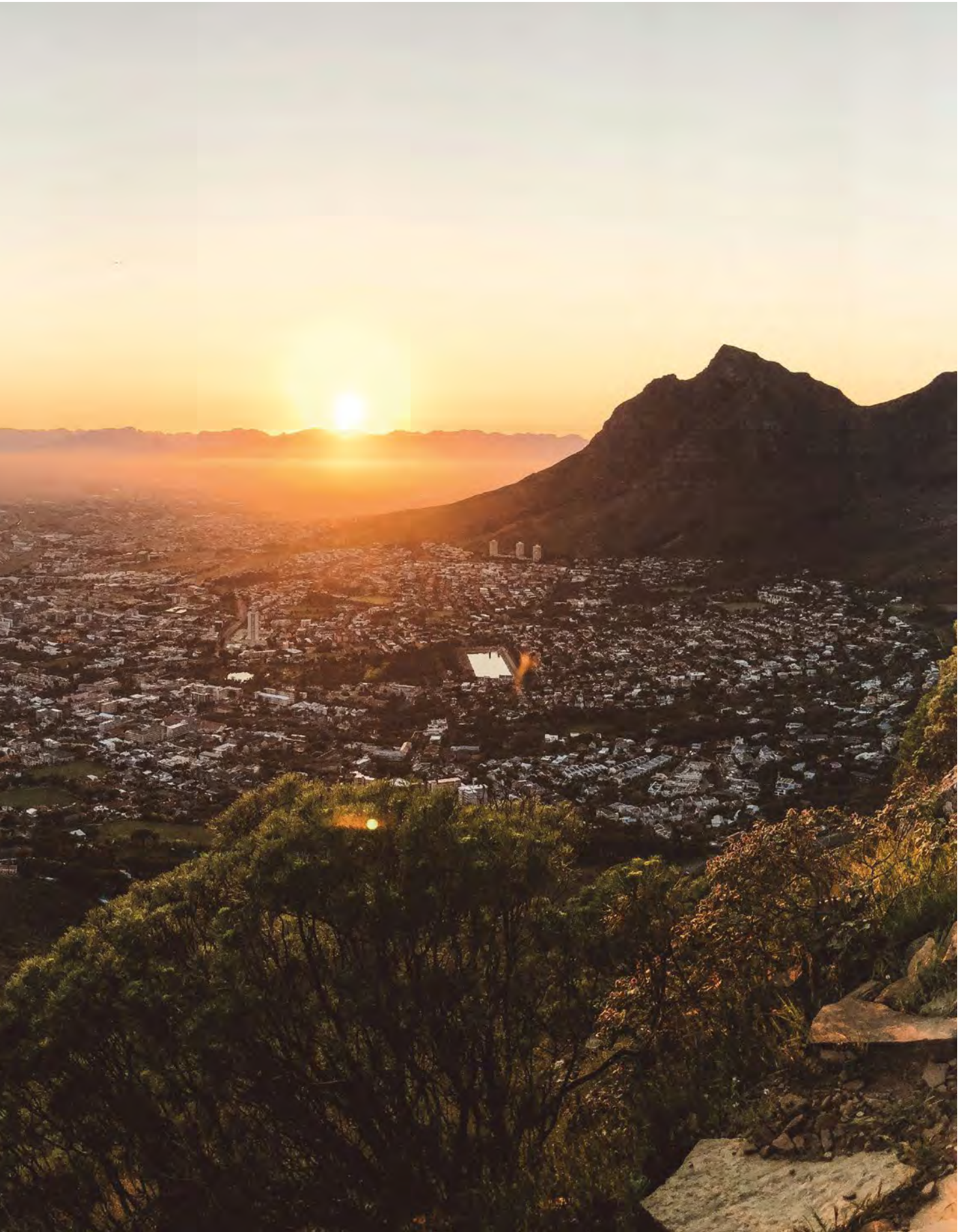
Belmond Britannic Explorer

The newest addition to Belmond's luxury rail collection, Britannic Explorer takes to the rails on its inaugural journey in July 2025. Departing from London Victoria, this brand-new luxury sleeper train will meander between idyllic countryside, historic cities and charming villages on a selection of immersive itineraries taking in the very best of the Cornish coast, the Lake District and the Welsh countryside. Along the way, guests are treated to delectable dishes crafted by Michelin-starred chef Simon Rogan (renowned for spearheading the UK's farm-to-fork movement), as well as bountiful afternoon teas and innovative cocktails, craft beers and artisan gins in the Observation Car. Much like its culinary offering, the Britannic Explorer's interior aesthetics are also unapologetically British, with a colour palette inspired by the lush countryside of England and Wales. An array of off-train excursions, meanwhile, presents the opportunity to explore the rich cultural tapestry and natural beauty of each destination.

Where the Mountain Meets the Sea

CLARISSE BEEBY, A CAPETONIAN AT HEART, SWEARS THERE'S NO BETTER PLACE ON EARTH







By the second morning in Cape Town,

I've stopped checking the time and started watching the light. The city does not rise shyly. It surges up. A wall of mountain, plastered in pink and peach with the first glimmers of sunlight, throws its arms around the patchwork of neighbourhoods – Bo-Kaap's bright cubes, Sea Point's trim promenades, Constantia's crisscross of vineyards – and holds them, lovingly, against the sapphire push of the Atlantic.

My host, a woman named Raesa who speaks English, Afrikaans and a fast-moving Cape Malay hybrid of the two, serves me rooibos tea in a chipped china cup and suggests, with a wink, that I climb Lion's Head before the tourists wake up and slow the view down. I take the bait. At dawn, the path is a soft scratch across the mountainside. I climb with the wind – a typical Southeaster, or the Cape Doctor, as it's locally known – at my back, the city still sleeping below, except for a trail runner with a headlamp and two teenagers carrying a Bluetooth speaker and a bottle of Coke. At the summit, we are all silent. The

sea on one side. The City Bowl on the other. Table Mountain behind me, flat and regal.

Cape Town invites you to move – through space, through history, and through meals eaten with your hands. One evening, I enjoy a lively dinner at Rands, a township *chisa nyama* (Zulu word for barbecue) joint in Khayelitsha where meat is currency and community is gospel. A man with a beer *boep* (belly) hands me a wooden board stacked with sizzling boerewors and flame-licked chicken wings dripping in a 'secret sauce'. Beside me, a woman in heels drenches pap (soft maize porridge) in a lick of *chakalaka* (spicy vegetable relish), smiling as she eyes the jovial crowd starting to gather around the DJ. "This is why we *braai* (Afrikaans word for barbecue)," she says, gesturing at the smoke curling up from steel drums and the patrons breaking it down in pantsula (a local South African dance style). "It brings people together."

Another night, I wind my way to Bo-Kaap, drawn by the smell of cardamom and clove drifting through the rainbow-painted streets. There, in a corner café called Biesmiellah,

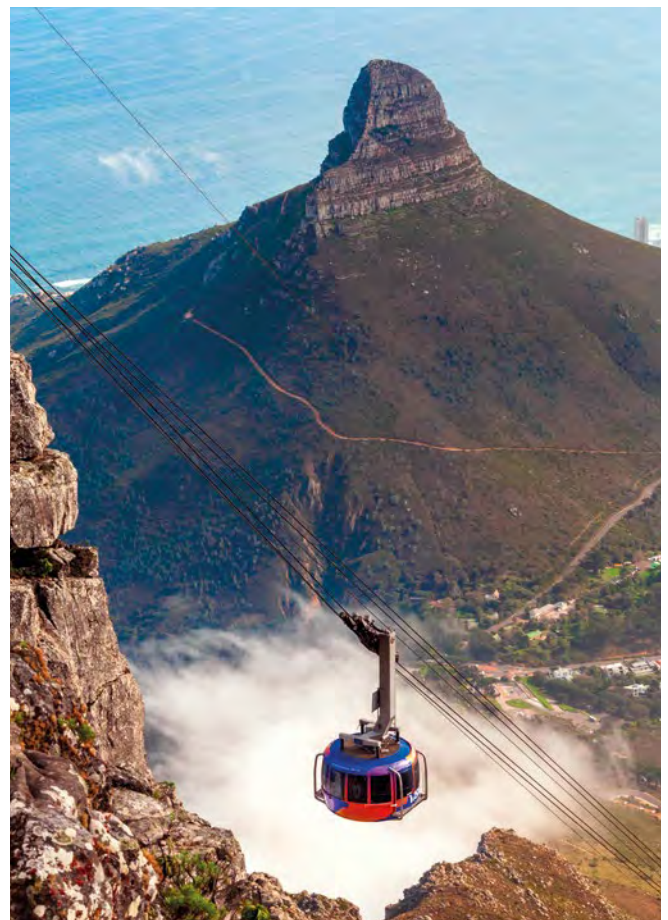
a bowl of bobotie arrives: a golden cap of baked egg custard gives way to curried mince, sweet with raisins and sharp with vinegar. "Taste that?" the waiter asks. "That's 300 years of survival." He tells me that the recipe – part Dutch, part Indonesian, part Muslim resistance – traces back to the slaves brought to the Cape in the 17th century.

At breakfast. At lunch. At dinner. Table Mountain watches me, always. On one blue-sky morning, I ascend by cable car, ears popping, the floor rotating beneath my feet as if the city must be viewed from every angle at once. At the top, tourists pose for photos, arms stretched toward invisible gods. But step beyond the lookout, past a patch of fynbos (indigenous flora) freckled with dusty pink proteas and golden pincushions, and there's stillness. A *dassie* (like a fluffy, overfed guinea pig) watches me with the bored tolerance of a creature who's seen too many of us. From here, I start to understand the mountain's pull – not just its scale or status as one of the New 7 Wonders of Nature, but the way it centres the city, fixes it in place. Capetonians orbit

it instinctively. And when that tablecloth of cloud slips over the summit, everyone in Cape Town feels slightly adrift, as if their compass has vanished into the mist.

Later that day, I take a leisurely drive south along Chapman's Peak, the kind of road that makes your chest expand with the scenery. I stop at Noordhoek Beach – empty save a single horse and its sun-leathered rider – then carry on to Simon's Town, where tuxedoed penguins waddle along Boulders Beach as if late for a wedding. When they swim, it's like watching a joke unfold in reverse: silly creatures transformed into torpedoes of grace.

Everywhere you look, it's a city rampant with contradictions. Gleaming glass-walled shopping centres shadowed by corrugated iron shacks. Fine dining restaurants that plate local ingredients with tweezers, steps away from street stalls where you can buy three samoosas and a Coke for less than a quid. One evening, I find both in the same place: the Oranjezicht City Farm Market, where linen-clad locals sip kombucha beside dreadlocked kids licking



chocolate from their fingers. Much like Cape Town herself, it's a melting pot of cultures: sticky pork belly on a pillowy bao bun, crispy bitterballen dipped in tangy mustard or soft, puffy *vetkoek* (deep-fried bread) slathered in sweet apricot jam – nothing is out of place here. I sit on wooden benches, beanbags and bar stools. I drink fynbos gin and craft beer, black coffee and pinotage. I eat five different desserts and justify every bite. A young chef with a neck tattoo and a white apron tells me, “The food scene here is about mixing it up. Past meets present meets whatever we find in the pantry.”

Before the wave of *‘magie vol, oogies toe’* hits (that point of contentment when your stomach is blissfully full and your eyes get heavy, ready for a nap), I head to the V&A Waterfront and take the ferry to Robben Island. The guide, once imprisoned here, walks us through the cells with the weariness of repetition. “This was Mandela’s cell,” he says, pausing by a narrow concrete rectangle. “He was here for 18 years. You’re here for 18 minutes.” I look in and feel time collapse. The sea is glittering just beyond the bars.

Back in the city, I need air. I meander through the Company’s Garden, where squirrels perform acrobatics for crumbs and elderly men debate politics beneath oaks planted in 1652. A boy sells roses from a bucket. I buy one and leave it on a bench, just to watch what happens. I find myself strolling the Sea Point Promenade as the sun folds into the horizon. Children zip past on scooters. Couples walk their dogs. A man juggles while jogging. Cape Town, it turns out, does not brood for long. Even its darkest memories are met with movement.

By the time the beat of the African drums finds you – half-lost in a coastal haze somewhere between Green Point and Camp’s Bay – you’ve already fallen under Cape Town’s spell. It creeps in slowly, slyly. And when it’s time to leave, you’ll notice it suddenly: how deeply the place has settled into your bones. As I sip coffee at a steampunk café that takes its beans – and its brass pipework – seriously, the waitress asks what I’ll miss most. I say the food. She smiles. “You mean the food, the view, and the people who argue about both at the same table?” Indeed, that’s exactly what I’ll miss, and so much more.



WHEN TO GO

November to March are ideal for visiting Cape Town, the Garden Route and KwaZulu Natal, which enjoy summer temperatures during our winter months.

For wildlife viewing in Kruger and whale watching in Hermanus, May to September are best.

WHERE TO STAY

MOUNT NELSON HOTEL, located in the Gardens area of Cape Town, is a luxurious and leafy retreat close to the city's best attractions.

LEEU HOUSE & ESTATES,

FRANSCHHOEK is a beautiful Cape Dutch house, now an exclusive 12 room hotel, in the heart of Franschhoek village. Leeu Estates is both country Manor House and boutique winery. Guests can sample the charms of both, not least innovative cuisine and fine wines.

THE OYSTER BOX in KwaZulu Natal is enviably located on Umhlanga's beachfront, overlooking the Indian Ocean and has long been lauded as one of South Africa's finest seaside hotels.

EARTH LODGE offers just 12 Luxury Suites and one Luxury Villa in the wildlife-rich private reserve of Sabi Sabi in the Greater Kruger. Each suite has an indoor-outdoor lounge leading to a private pool. The wilderness lies just beyond and all around.

ROVOS RAIL journeys are ones passengers would happily spend more time on. Some journeys only last 48 hours, others 16 nights, taking in the best of South Africa. The beautifully rebuilt wood-panelled trains feature fully appointed suites (with en-suites), dining cars, a lounge and observation car. Watch the wonders of South Africa at your leisure in fabulous comfort in old-fashioned style.

A South African sojourn

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In a word
hayibo [hai-bo]
(Zulu)

all-purpose exclamation of surprise, disbelief or irritation (lit. 'definitely not!')

FURTHER READING

ALAN PATON'S CRY, THE BELOVED COUNTRY (1948) is an impassioned portrait of a black man's country under white man's law. **NADINE GORDIMER** was a leading voice in the anti-apartheid movement, whose key works include **THE CONSERVATIONIST** (1974), **BURGER'S DAUGHTER** (1979) and **JULY'S PEOPLE** (1981). **J.M. COETZEE's** acclaimed novels about colonialism, identity, power and human suffering include **WAITING FOR THE BARBARIANS** (1980) and **DISGRACE** (1999). **DAMON GALGUT** is one of South Africa's most prominent contemporary authors, whose best-known novels are **THE GOOD DOCTOR** (2003) and **THE IMPOSTOR** (2008).


FIRST PERSON/TOP SIGHTS
from destination specialist
Katrin Rummer

There are so many top spots to choose from in South Africa, that combined itineraries make perfect and exciting sense. One fabulous example is spending time in cosmopolitan Cape Town, then heading to the winelands and perhaps hopping on the luxury of Rovos Rail or the Blue Train and taking in Victoria, or Kruger game reserve. It's easy to arrange extensions to relax and enjoy the stunning coastline (and in season, whale watching) at Grootbos; or add on beach stays in KwaZulu Natal, or even Mozambique or Mauritius.





Forever Crete

words & pictures
Francesco Lastrucci

A road trip to Western Crete can't miss its big star, Balos Lagoon, in the northwest tip of the island. Famous for its crystal clear turquoise waters and white and pink sands, it's a postcard-perfect landscape that enchants every visitor. Celebrity comes at a price and the place becomes incredibly crowded in high season. To see the most vivid shades and enjoy a more peaceful experience, it is advisable to visit Balos early in the morning before the boat trips arrive. During the summer season, the early hours of the day offer ideal conditions for spectacular photographs and a serene atmosphere.

The whole area of Gramvousa peninsula, including Balos, is a protected habitat that is home to rare species such as Eleonora's falcon, the cormorant and the monk seal, as well as the *Caretta caretta* turtle.



Just one hour south of Balos is Elafonisi, featuring all the shades of blue and turquoise. The Monastery of Panagia Chrisoskalitissa, just before Elafonisi, makes a great stop. This is one of the most evocative and spiritual places in Crete, built on a 35-metre-high rock with vast views around.

In the southwest, the Sfakia region is known for its dramatic landscape, combining high mountains with steep gorges, traditional villages and pristine secluded beaches, mostly only accessible by boat or hiking. Its main village is Hora Sfakion, a small coastal hamlet on the Libyan Sea from where the boats to the beaches depart, making it an ideal base camp for excursions in the region.

Many of Crete's most impressive and deepest canyons are in this area: Samaria, Imbros and Aredena, which is perhaps one of the most spectacular and less-travelled gorges in southwestern Crete. The striking 7km-long canyon offers adventure, dramatic scenery and a deep dive into the wild beauty of the Lefka Ori (White Mountains).

It's hiking start point can be reached by an spectacular hairpin road that climbs up from Sfakia. Here the barren brown landscape is dotted by the ubiquitous goats and offers expansive views of the Libyan sea to the south.

Aradena is a ghost village abandoned after a blood feud in the 20th century. Today the place is fascinating with goats roaming the preserved stone architecture and ruins overrun by scent-filled flora. A whitewashed church perched on the edge of the canyon marks the trail that descends into the gorge.

The hike at the bottom of the canyon ends in the secluded, rocky beach of Marmara, with turquoise waters and a welcoming taverna. From here a boat or a path will connect with Loutro, the other star hamlet of the area, a traffic-free theatre of white cubes and tavernas serving the catch of the day and embracing crystalline waters. Hibiscus, pomegranates, rosemary, thyme and Mediterranean scrub fringe the paths and surround the houses.

Previous page: Balos Lagoon

Above: Steps to the monastery of Panagia Chrisoskalitissa; Church bell in Aradena

Opposite: Loutro bay

Overleaf, clockwise from top left: Goats above Sfakia; Aradena gorge; Pomegranate detail around Loutro; Interior of the church of Panagia Chrisoskalitissa monastery





WHEN TO GO

Crete is a summer destination and most of the hotels are only open between April and October. Its peak months are July and August, we recommend visiting in May or June, September or October. For the best combination of blue skies and quiet streets, visit at the beginning or end of the season in May or October.

WHERE TO STAY

ELOUNDA BEACH RESORT & VILLAS is as escapist as it comes, with waterfront suites, bungalows and villas with private heated pools; and a sumptuous spa. The gardens are glorious, and dining here is a delight, featuring fabulous seafood and Cretan specialities.

CAYO EXCLUSIVE RESORT & SPA offers infinity pools, an open-air amphitheatre and a rejuvenating spa. It's a five-star beautifully designed terraced resort, with stunning sea views. Dining options are extensive and delicious, under the direction of Greek Michelin-starred chef Lefteris Lazarou.

FURTHER READING

NIKOS KAZANTZAKIS (1883–1957) is Crete's most celebrated writer, whose novels **ZORBA THE GREEK** and **THE LAST TEMPTATION OF CHRIST** were adapted for film by **MICHAEL CACOYANNIS** and **MARTIN SCORSESE**. Also of note is his final autobiographical novel **REPORT TO GRECO**.

BARRY UNSWORTH'S CRETE is an illuminating study of the rich heritage and fierce spirit of the island through the ages.

Adventures in the Aegean

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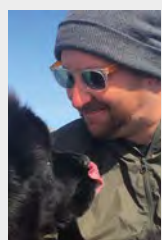
“There is a kind of flame in Crete – let us call it “soul” – something more powerful than either life or death. There is pride, obstinacy, valour, and together with these something else inexpressible and imponderable, something which makes you rejoice that you are a human being, and at the same time tremble.”

Kobayashi Issa

FIRST PERSON/TOP SIGHTS
from destination specialist
Andy Austen

Combined with an ancient history and culture, you will find some of Greece's best restaurants tucked away in the fishing village of Elounda, on the east coast, and a beach with pale-pink sands on the west coast. Its capital Heraklion boasts a history going back to the Minoans, combined with a thriving cafe, gallery and restaurant scene. The port town of Agios Nikolaos retains the atmosphere of a quiet fishing village. Small fishing boats bob in the marina, and tavernas serve farm-to-table menus. You can also

visit the site of one of Europe's last leper colonies Spinalonga by boat to explore the island. Our favourite recommendation on Crete is Elounda, once a sleepy fishing village, Elounda has become a summer destination for excellent beach and luxury hotels. From here you can stroll along any of the coastal paths that branch out and watch the sun set behind mountains. Finally in Chania, you can find in the old town how the Venetian and Turkish left their stamp on it, leaving it a mix of narrow streets and brightly painted historic buildings converted into small shops and traditional tavernas.



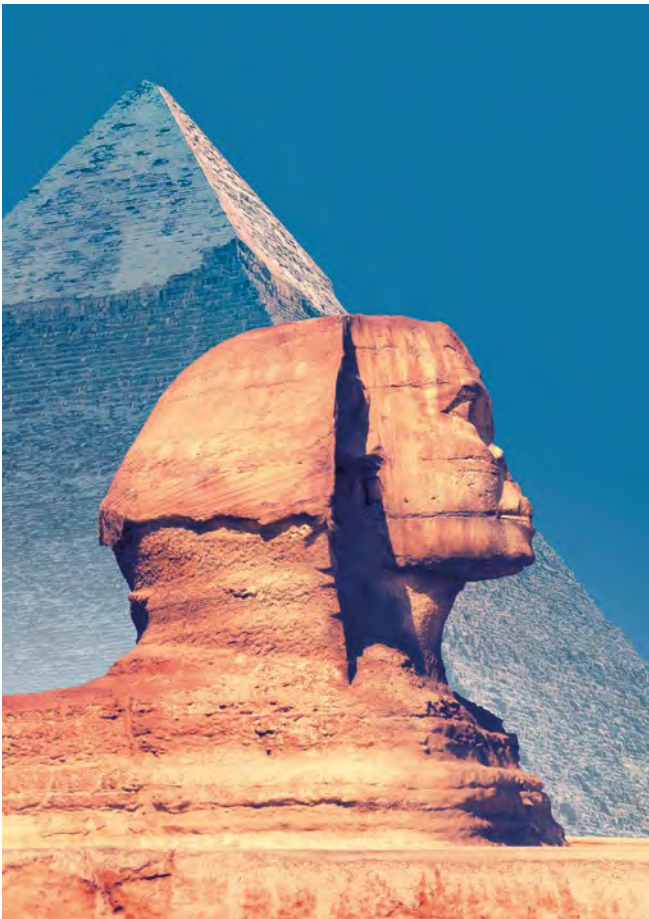


Chaos and Stillness

JUSTINE HARDY CONTRASTS CAIRO'S PAST AND PRESENT

An animated pharaoh reaches from a billboard, an extended arm sweeping across all before him, while midnight taxi hawkers flick cigarette stubs out of their car windows and the airport police honk to move them along. The fine-featured young monarch is beautifully made up, the kohl around his eyes a bit more Elizabeth Taylor than Giza. Beneath his elegant fingers, his immediate kingdom is a sea of blaring horns, clogging all the routes from the airport to the Qism of Zamalek, an island of embassies, hotels and trees. Outside our hotel there is a donkey parked beside a Porsche. Both vehicles are fully loaded, the donkey with old newspapers and hung about with string bags of empty cans, the car with youngsters drinking very late-night bubble tea. This is Cairo now, classical and car crash, bubble tea and rat-catchers astride skittering donkeys.

This is not the Cairo of Naguib Mahfouz, the Egyptian Laureate and weaver of history and human frailty, and it is his work that has been my guide to his city. The late author's Cairo Trilogy, 'Palace Walk', 'Palace of Desire' and 'Sugar Street', has led me through Cairo across forty years, from when I first came when I was eighteen to now frequent trips. His novels portray one merchant family, from the time of the Egyptian Revolution against the British in 1919 through to the end of the Second World War. These are not street-by-street guides, though the titles are named after roads of the old Cairo in which Mahfouz grew up. They are instead a filigreed portrait of spirit and time, fragments and whole pieces, some of which still remain in corners of the city. It is the Cairo of tradition and family life during a time when history was cracking open the old world of the city's medieval streets and systems.



A century after the setting of the beginning of his trilogy, Mahfouz wrote:

‘We are passing through a very sensitive time, and on the whole, this country is facing very big problems.’

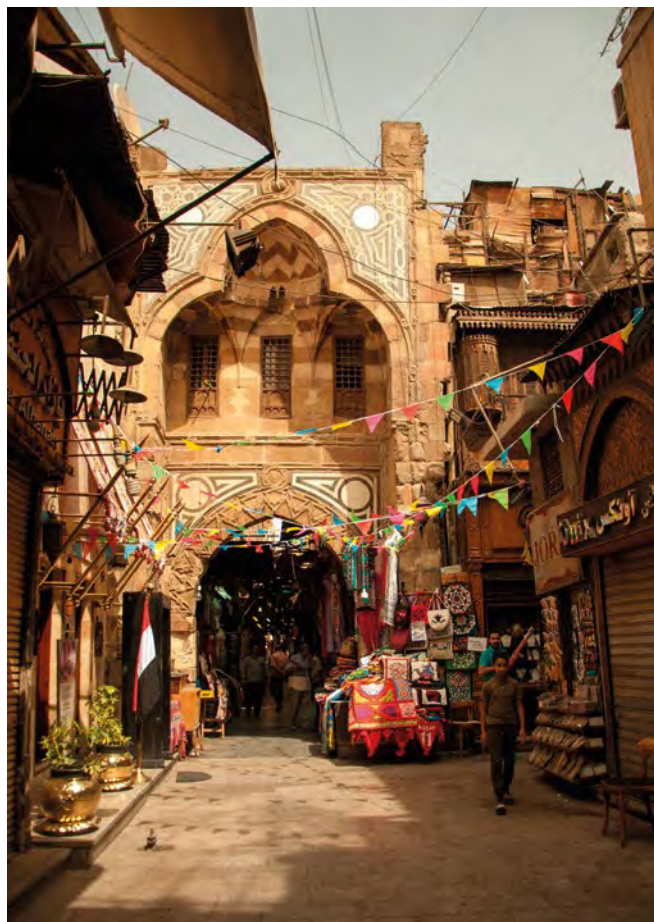
As a statement it could be dropped down at almost any point in Egypt’s history: as the pyramids rose on the backs of slaves; as Mahfouz’ characters navigated another overlord thousands of years later on the back of that ‘war to end all wars’; as thousands of predominantly women packed Tahrir, ‘Freedom’ Square early into the next century, raging against police brutality, their president and state controls. It is the same again now, as waves of Palestinian refugees drag their way from yet another immutable devastation, Cairenes trying to find the balance between welcoming the bombed and battered and their collective guilt as their government drowns this generation of refugees in bureaucracy.

These shadows and scars of war are as much a part of the city as the party boats passing the hotels of Zamalek, each aspect as far from removed from the other as those who were destined to be entombed within the pyramids were from those who built them. This is not intended as a lecture but simply as an illustration of Cairo’s place in so many wars, ranging from Julius Caesar’s desire for Egypt

to Netanyahu's ideal for Palestinian resettlement in The Sinai. The chaos and stillness continue unchanged, the rat catcher's donkey existing alongside human design of such genius that just to look at them is to be a grain of sand.

This is not just the genius of the world of the elegant gesticulating pharaoh at the airport. It is of this time too. The very newly opened Great Museum of Egypt in Giza is a staggering creation of the entire history of the country drawn together in a celebration of stone and light, air and space. The clatter of the city falls away as you enter, the vast statue of Rameses II holding court, his eleven metres held in proportion by all that soars around him.

The statue tells another story of both ancient and modern Egypt. It was found again in the early nineteenth century, broken into six pieces at Mit Rahina, near Memphis, more than three thousand years since it was hewn. This was the 'King of Kings', named Oxymandias by the ancient Greeks. 'Two vast and trunkless legs of stone' and the nearby 'shattered visage' with its 'sneer of cold command' epitomised the thrum of excitement around the rediscovery of the broken parts of the great ruler of the New Kingdom, immortalised again in Shelley's poem of the same name. The 're-membering' of the warrior king took more than a century. Rameses was raised again by Prime Minister Nasser in Hadid Square, near the city's main



station, those 'legs of stone' implanted right next door to all that was beginning to move so fast in the modernising Egypt in 1955. Hadid Square became Rameses Square and tourists and travellers passed him by in their millions, as ever they had. Another half century passed before the polluted air began to eat into Rameses. A shorter era followed, a decade during while he was laid back down again so that he could be moved, amidst great and formal ceremony from Central Cairo to Giza, while the country rose and fell in protest.

He stands again now, central to the atrium of the new museum. If you are there as the sun moves through the late afternoon sky, you witness what a new generation of architectural geniuses, the Taiwanese-Irish architecture team, heneghan-peng, learnt from those practitioners of another world and time.

Close to the end of his life Mahfouz wrote that, 'In Egypt today most people are concerned with getting bread to eat. Only some of the educated understand how democracy works. Don't cry because it's over. Smile because it happened. All our dreams can come true, if we have the courage to pursue them.'

You can but smile as late light strikes Rameses II and every other piece of statuary of the pharaohs, their palaces and their afterlife on the Grand Staircase in this museum where every fragment of Egypt under the sun is drawn together, once again.

WHEN TO GO

October to April is good for travel to Cairo (and Egypt generally). The coolest months are December to January when daytime temperatures can drop below 20°C - but even in October and April daytime temperatures tend to stay below 30°C for much of the time. Rainfall is very low all year round.

WHERE TO STAY

ST REGIS CAIRO offers 362 impeccably crafted rooms, suites and serviced apartment. Ideally positioned with views across the Nile and Old Cairo. 24hr butler service.

FOUR SEASONS HOTEL CAIRO AT NILE PLAZA sits in the heart of downtown Cairo, on the banks of the Nile. Supremely luxurious, with fine dining and an award-winning spa.

MARRIOTT MENA HOUSE GIZA is a 5-star hotel located at the base of the Pyramids. Modern luxury, 24-hour dining and the best pyramid views in town.

SOFITEL LEGEND OLD CATARACT is an iconic Victorian palace on a pink granite cliff overlooking Elephantine Island on the bank of the Nile. Romantic and steeped in history – former guests include Winston Churchill and Agatha Christie.

HILTON LUXOR RESORT & SPA is the best hotel in Luxor, offering felucca sailing and horseback and camelback tours.

FURTHER READING

PALACE WALK is the first novel in Nobel Prize-winner **NAGUIB MAHFOUZ**' epic masterwork 'The Cairo Trilogy'. **IN THE EYE OF THE SUN** and **THE MAP OF LOVE** by journalist and political commentator **AHDAF SOUEIF** take an intimate look into the lives of modern Arab women. **THE YACUBIAN BUILDING** BY ALAA-AL-

Escape into Egypt

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In a word

yalla beena (Egyptian Arabic) 'Let's go!'

used when crossing the street, finishing up dinner, or starting an activity

ASWAN is a scathing and incisive portrayal of Egyptian society since the Revolution of 1952.

FIRST PERSON/TOP SIGHTS
from destination specialist
David Warne

A Nile cruise is an iconic travel experience that should be on anyone's bucket list. The classic 4-night cruise takes in all the highlights but the longer 7-night cruises allows for a slower, more relaxed sightseeing schedule. Even if not staying there, take afternoon tea at the iconic Sofitel Legend Old Cataract Hotel in Aswan, overlooking the Nile (go late afternoon for sunset). The long-awaited Grand Egyptian Museum opens in July 2025, located near to the Pyramids,

which will present over 100,000 pharaonic artefacts, the first time ever including the full collection from Tutankhamen's tomb in one place. For a Raiders of the Lost Ark style experience, pay the small extra to enter the Great Pyramid of Giza and walk up the impressive ramp to the burial chamber deep inside the pyramid. Allow more time in Cairo than you might expect – don't try and do 'Cairo in a day' – aside from the pyramids and ancient historical sites, there is so much history from the Middle Ages, including Saladin's Citadel, the Al-Azhar and Muhammad Ali mosques, the Coptic Christian quarter, and the chaotic but wonderful Khan el-Khalili market, one of the best markets in the world dating from the 14th century.



Cowboy Christmas

words & pictures
Simon Urwin

The rodeo culture of Alberta, Canada, is an essential part of the province's identity, first emerging sometime around the late 1800s as European settlers – the majority from England and Scotland – established cattle-ranching operations on the country's vast open prairies.

Influenced by the practices of American cowboys farther south, the ranchers were quick to hone their skills in bronc riding, steer wrestling and calf roping. These in turn inspired a variety of rodeo sports – which served both as entertainment for the wildly remote communities, as well as celebrations of the day-to-day expertise that was required in order for the ranches to prosper.

Informal ranch-based contests were soon followed by Canada's first official rodeo, which was established in 1903 in the settlement of Raymond. Over time, similar events were launched all over the province – from smaller rural gatherings as part of local agricultural fairs, to larger exhibitions of rodeo skills, culminating in the world-renowned Calgary Stampede.

Founded in 1912 by Guy Weadick, a rodeo performer from the United States, the Calgary Stampede

began as a one-off festival honouring cowboy life and the spirit of the Old West. It went on to become a city-wide celebration, and has since grown to become an annual festival – known as “The Greatest Outdoor Show on Earth” – that attracts well over a million visitors over 10 days every July.

The legacy of the Calgary Stampede helped establish Alberta as a global centre for rodeo. Since the 1920s, it has attracted cowboys from all over the North American continent, and contributed to the growth of the rodeo queen, barrel racing, and chuckwagon racing scenes, alongside Indigenous exhibitions that showcase First Nations rodeo traditions as well as Métis and Inuit culture.

The rodeo is now one of Canada's most iconic cultural expressions; and from late spring to early autumn, gatherings great and small can be found province-wide. Much more than mere sport or spectacle, they serve as memorials to Alberta's pioneering past, its agricultural roots, and resilient community spirit. Indeed, they are considered such a high point of the yearly calendar, the summer rodeo season is known affectionately as the “Cowboy Christmas”.





WHEN TO GO

Canada is a year-round destination, but our recommendation would be to enjoy the spring and early summer when good temperatures combine with the last snow on the mountains in Alberta and British Columbia; or autumn for dazzling seasonal colours and less busy roads and hotels. In the east the season is shorter, but Atlantic Canada is a joy to visit from May to September.

WHERE TO STAY

FOGO ISLAND INN is a cutting-edge contemporary hotel off the northeast coast of Newfoundland with floor-to-ceiling windows looking out on the North Atlantic, and cosy wood-burning stoves.

HOTEL SACACOMIE is a wilderness lodge deep in the forest on the edge of the Mastigouche Wildlife Reserve, surrounded by the dense, dark green canopy of the pine forest and gin-clear waters of the eponymous lake.

FAIRMONT CHATEAU LAKE LOUISE, right on the lake, is a stunning base for summer hiking, mountain biking and water sports; and for world-class skiing and alpine activities in winter.

KNIGHT INLET LODGE is an Indigenous-owned wildlife-viewing destination in the heart of the Great Bear Rainforest of British Columbia and a superb base for grizzly viewing and whale watching.

THE WICKANNISH INN in the Pacific Rim National Park is the perfect spot for winter storm watchers, while in summer the driftwood-strewn beaches, whale watching and hiking trails are the main draw.

FURTHER READING

Canada has a wealth of well-known classic and contemporary

Wild at heart

SUGGESTED ITINERARIES

wexas.com/itinerary-offers/the-charms-of-atlantic-canada-146892

wexas.com/itinerary-offers/vancouver-whistler-and-the-rockies-146735

For more information on holidays to Canada, contact Wexas on 020 8125 4185



In a word

poutine

Québec's popular but divisive signature dish of French fries with cheese curds and gravy

fiction including **THE HANDMAID'S TALE** BY MARGARET ATWOOD, **LIFE OF PI** BY YANN MARTEL, **ANNE OF GREEN GABLES** BY L.M. MONTGOMERY, **THE STONE DIARIES** BY CAROL SHIELDS and the **SELECTED STORIES** of ALICE MUNRO. For something a little different, try **THE HEAVINESS OF THINGS THAT FLOAT** BY JENNIFER MANUEL, set among a remote West Coast First Nations community on Vancouver Island; or **LOUISE PENNY'S CHIEF INSPECTOR GAMACHE** mystery series, set in Quebec.

FIRST PERSON/TOP SIGHTS
from destination specialist
Andy Austen

Explore Atlantic Canada on a self-drive tour to take in all the region's natural splendours.

Beginning and ending in Nova Scotia's capital Halifax, take the Lighthouse Route into Lunenburg and continue on to Kejimikujik National Park and Annapolis Royal, from where you can strike out to do some whale watching in the Bay of Fundy. Other highlights include Charlottetown, the Cabot Trail around Cape Breton and the living museum of Louisbourg. Whistler is another ideal gateway to the great Canadian outdoors, set among giant snow-capped peaks. And each summer, the region swaps its ski slopes for biking trails, hiking routes, championship golf courses and a wide array of water sports, hosted by Whistler's five lakes and countless rivers.





The Last Place on Earth

words & pictures
Jonathan and Angela Scott



When my nephew asked me the best

place in Africa to enjoy a family safari he had already narrowed the choice down to Kenya, Tanzania, Botswana and South Africa, with Zambia and Zimbabwe close on their heels as the pick of countries best showcasing the continent's charismatic wildlife. It certainly makes for an animated discussion around the campfire. As much as Angie and I have loved our safaris to Botswana's Okavango Delta – the Jewel of the Kalahari – with its spectacular palm-fringed islands and crystal clear waterways, it wasn't our first choice. Nor was South Africa with its swish private game reserves offering the "big five" experience promising lion, leopard, buffalo, rhino and elephant – plus the possibility of an extension

to savour the mouth-watering wine country of the Western Cape. For a first safari experience it has to be Kenya or Tanzania, boasting the savanna Africa that I had feasted my eyes on as a child growing up in England. If we were to narrow it down even further then we would choose northern Tanzania where Angie grew up, with good road and air connections to safari hotspots and a landscape that is easy on the eye with great access and visibility for the game-watching. Top tip, in general try to spend a minimum of three nights wherever you go to ensure you really soak up the experience. Lake Manyara is a great starting point, with elephants, tree-climbing lions and spectacular aquatic birdlife. Then Ngorongoro Crater, where one or two nights might suffice

in the world's largest intact volcanic caldera, a massive crater formed by a collapsed volcano often described as the 8th Wonder of the World. It's inhabited by elephants, black rhinos, large clans of spotted hyenas and impressive dark-maned lions. And the finale? If ever there was a place demonstrating the unity of all life, then that place is the Serengeti, *The Last Place on Earth* according to author Harold Hayes. Certainly, there is nowhere quite like it, nowhere with such a broad sweep of landscape filled with so many animals.

When I set out overland through Africa in 1974 I was galvanised by the thought of a safari to the Serengeti. Fifteen years earlier, I had sat in a London cinema mesmerised by *Serengeti Shall Not Die*,



a film highlighting the wonder of the land of the great migration with its 1.2 million wildebeest and 200,000 zebras, whose endless wanderings and spectacular river crossings are one of the natural world's greatest spectacles. I could barely contain my excitement as our Bedford truck crossed from Rwanda into Tanzania, skirting the shores of Lake Victoria before rumbling up to the entrance gate marked Serengeti National Park. I was in heaven, my heart bursting with the realisation that there was still a place like this where animals of every description roamed free, a land of high steppes and dry heat with chill nights to temper the equatorial sun. It wasn't long before we saw our first lions (there are still around 3,000 of these big cats in the 25 sq km Serengeti-Mara ecosystem) as we headed east towards the ancient granite outcrops of the Masai Kopjes. Somewhere along the languorous course of the Seronera River, in the centre of the park with its three-billion-year-old rocks, we came across a

leopard, the animal I had most wanted to see, the most sublimely beautiful and graceful of all the big cats.

Many visitors to the Serengeti hope to witness wildebeest and zebras crossing the Mara River, an event that ranks alongside the thrill of seeing coastal brown bears feasting on salmon in Alaska or a breeding colony of emperor penguins tending their chicks in remotest Antarctica. The best time to witness a crossing from the northern Serengeti is typically between mid-July and early September, when the main body of the migration is moving north towards the Maasai Mara in Kenya where Angie and I have spent so many years following the lives of the big cats.

Angie grew up in Dar es Salaam, the largest city and financial hub of Tanzania, nestled along the calm blue waters of the Indian Ocean. It was the start of her lifelong love of the sea, out

each morning exploring the coral reefs with brother David long before the sun rose crisp and golden, feasting on a breakfast of ripe pawpaw, wild mangoes and fresh seafood. It's hard to imagine a better finale to a safari adventure in East Africa than a few days spent soaking up the sun and cooling breeze along the Tanzanian coast, with the chance to sample idyllic white coral beaches and island retreats such as Zanzibar, with Stone Town considered among the oldest and best-preserved Swahili settlements in East Africa, dating back to the 14th century.

And for your next Tanzanian safari adventure? Explore the southern wilderness areas of Selous Game Reserve and Ruaha National Park, together with a visit to Mahale Mountains and Gombe National Parks on the eastern shores of Lake Tanganyika, trekking in the footsteps of wild chimpanzees. Heading out on safari soon becomes a lifelong obsession!

WHEN TO GO

Jun-Oct is dry season and the best for wildlife viewing. It is also the wildebeest migration in the Serengeti. For the calving season, it's best during Jan-Feb. March-May could be wet.

WHERE TO STAY

ARUSHA COFFEE LODGE is the perfect beginning and end to any Tanzanian trip. Impeccably appointed Plantation Houses feature log fires for cool evenings and private terraces or balconies for views of the surrounding coffee fields in the foothills of Mount Meru.

NGORONGORO CRATER CAMP offers the ultimate safari experience, with just ten lavish tents on the rim of the largest extinct volcano in the world. The caldera is home to all the Big Five, and this Abercrombie & Kent property is just 15 minutes from the crater's floor.

ELEWANA SERENGETI MIGRATION CAMP is located within Serengeti National Park, in prime position to witness the wonder of the yearly wildebeest migration. Stay in sublime elevated tents surrounded by 360-degree verandah decks.

ELEWANA TARANGIRE TREETOPS LODGE offers 20 rooms raised high above the canopy of surrounding marula and baobab trees. The Main Lodge at the centre of the camp itself encases a 1000-year old baobab tree.

BREEZES ZANZIBAR is on the southeast coast of the fabled spice island. It's a serene spot with a pristine beach and 74 elegant rooms decorated in exotic Zanzibari style.

FURTHER READING

PARADISE BY ABDULRAZAK GURNAH is an evocative novel about a boy named Yusuf who

Taking in Tanzania

SUGGESTED ITINERARIES

wexas.com/itinerary-offers/tanzania-sky-safari-with-elewana-166079

wexas.com/itinerary-offers/tanzania-safari--zanzibar-beach-101624

For more information on holidays to Tanzania, contact Wexas on 020 4571 9785



'Every bird flies with its own wings.'

Kiswahili proverb



joins a caravan travelling into the interior lands west of Lake Tanganyika at the turn of the 20th century.

THE SHADOW OF KILIMANJARO BY

ERNEST HEMINGWAY is a story collection that evokes the beauty and harsh realities of life in Tanzania.

SERENGETI: THE ETERNAL

BEGINNING BY NIGEL PAVITT

showcases the breathtaking beauty of Serengeti National Park in stunning photographs.

FIRST PERSON/TOP SIGHTS

from destination specialist

Katrin Rummer

The ultimate way to travel Tanzania might just be with a fly safari, including private chauffeur transfers and luxury accommodation. Fly between

all the iconics – the Ngorongoro Crater, the Serengeti and it's staggering wildebeest migration. Game drives are included too, for down to earth views of the wildlife. Combine this with a stay on the spice island of Zanzibar to explore the historic Stone Town, and to relax on some wonderful beaches. Exploring by road is just as enchanting – we have itineraries taking in the best of the country that reflect the vastness and diverse beauty that ranges from coffee plantations to the shores of Lake Manyara, tranquil forests and the vastness of the Serengeti, before a stop on Zanzibar for some sea-breezes and sandy beaches. These itineraries can be enjoyed as a private option as well.





Deepest Japan

REBECCA HALLETT DIVES INTO THE WATERS OF THE YAEYAMA ISLANDS –
A REMOTE ARCHIPELAGO TEEMING WITH DIVERSE AND BEAUTIFUL MARINE LIFE



White sandy beaches, crystal-clear waters and a subtropical climate might seem like a clichéd image of paradise, but if anywhere lives up to that cliché we all dream about, it's the Yaeyama Islands. In the southwest of Okinawa, these faraway islands offer beauty in spades. Yet it's what's beneath that crystal-clear water that makes the Yaeyamas so special.

A haven for divers, these islands promise coral reefs, underwater hot springs, huge rock formations and schools of tropical fish, just offshore. The main island of Ishigaki is a great starting point for underwater adventures. At one popular dive site, near Yonehara, colourful butterfly fish, sea goldies and even sea turtles flit about the reef. Over on the island's southeastern coast, Shirahono-umi is home to one of the largest Ao coral (a rare type of blue coral) networks in the world. And at Manta Scramble, in northwestern Ishigaki, majestic manta rays glide serenely through the sea.

More experienced divers should head to the secluded island of Yonaguni, where the

mysterious Yonaguni Monument beckons beneath the waves. This huge rock formation is so angular and precise that some people argue it's the remains of a civilization thousands of years old. Whether you choose to believe it or not, it's a fascinating, and completely unique place to explore.

MAKE IT HAPPEN

The Yaeyamas are in southwestern Okinawa prefecture and encompass Japan's southernmost and westernmost inhabited islands.

There's good diving year-round, but the main diving season is May to November, when the water is warmest and mantas tend to appear.

The best-connected airport is Ishigaki, one of the islands in the Yaeyamas, with links to Tokyo, Osaka and Naha. The islands are all linked by ferries.

Ultimate Japan by DK Travel
Text by Rebecca Hallett
DK Travel, hbk, 256pp, £25

Previous spread: Coral garden, Ishigaki Island

Above: Clownfish among the coral

Opposite: White sand beach at Ishigaki



WHEN TO GO

The *sakura* cherry blossom season from March to May (or as early as mid-January in Okinawa) is the highlight for many, but autumn (September to November) is also a fantastic time to travel and not as busy as spring. You can ski in Japan, so winter breaks also have a lot to offer.

WHERE TO STAY

PARK HOTEL TOKYO's rooms and Signature Suites are elevated urban sanctuaries blending traditional art and contemporary design with a dynamic view of the city skyline.

HYATT REGENCY KYOTO combines traditional Japanese sensibilities with modern comfort and features. Deluxe rooms and luxury suites have inner garden views and traditional *nijiriguchi* tearooms separated by sliding paper doors.

OSAKA MARRIOTT MIYAKO HOTEL, in Japan's tallest building, offers unparalleled views over the city a stone's throw from the central train station.

KAI HAKONE is a Hoshino Resorts boutique hotel with a hot spring bath open to the forest, where views of Mount Yusaka are accompanied by the babbling sounds of the Sukumo River.

ANA INTERCONTINENTAL ISHIGAKI RESORT is a haven of natural beauty boasting endless horizons of azure water and direct access to Maesato Beach.

FURTHER READING

KOBAYASHI ISSA is one of the four haiku masters in Japan, together with **BASHŌ**, **BUSON** and **SHIKI**.

YASUNARI KAWABATA was the first Japanese writer to win the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1968. His key works include **SNOW COUNTRY**, **BEAUTY AND SADNESS** and **HOUSE OF THE SLEEPING BEAUTIES**.

Ancient and modern

SUGGESTED ITINERARIES

wexas.com/itinerary-offers/best-of-japan-102303

wexas.com/itinerary-offers/highlights-of-japan-and-okinawa-184077

For more information on holidays to Japan, contact Wexas on 020 8125 4274



“

*'What a strange thing!
To be alive
beneath cherry blossoms.'*

Kobayashi Issa

”

BUTTER BY ASAKO YUZUKI is a cult recent bestseller about a gourmet cook and serial killer, and the journalist intent on tracking her down.

NORWEGIAN WOOD BY HARUKI MURAKAMI is the tender tale of first love that launched him as an international literary superstar.

THE CAT AND THE CITY BY NICK BRADLEY is a dizzying cat's-eye ride through the underbelly of Tokyo, combining horror, Sci-Fi and fantasy, detective fiction and manga.

FIRST PERSON/TOP SIGHTS
from destination specialist
Katrin Rummer

Explore Japan away from the 'Golden Route' of Tokyo, Kyoto and

Osaka: add Hiroshima to explore the history and the contemporary arts scene, and also Kanazawa and lesser known Hagi and Matsue for their rich cultural and historical treasures; Takayama and Matsumoto in the Japanese Alps for stunning scenery, nature and its diverse culture; and/or Okinawa to explore stunning islands and beaches. Include a *ryokan* stay (for example in Mijajima, Hagi or Takayama), as well as an *onsen* (hot springs) in Hakone. If availability is tight over cherry blossom season consider a cruise or an escorted tour as an alternative. A trip on the famous Shinkansen bullet train is a must. You can book point-to-point tickets or a rail pass via Wexas.



Into the clouds

ROBERT MACFARLANE VENTURES DEEP WITHIN
THE CLOUD FOREST OF LOS CEDROS

That first night at the high camp, the cloud-forest comes alight.

The fireflies start it, their orange diodes winking on and off as they drift. Then glow-worms in the understorey put tapers to their yellow lanterns. Then the red-ember eyes of kinkajous, bodiless in the dark, click on in the trees. They watch us from the branches with unblinking intent.

Far to our west, a storm slips along the Pacific coast. Blue-white sheet lightning silhouettes forested ridges. Thunder is muted by distance.

Far to our south, Cotopaxi erupts. Its magma chamber churns and slops. A seven-thousand-foot column of ash drifts in the still air.

From the spoil heaps of the mining district of Portovelo-Zamora in south-western Ecuador, mercury leaches slowly into the Puyango-Tumbes River, poisoning it for twenty miles downstream of the gold-processing centres.

In the gold futures markets, the spot price of a troy ounce climbs past \$1,517.

We sit close round the fire in the little clearing, warmed by the blaze, comforted by each other's nearness. At night, at this height, the air is cold. Glimpsed through the cloud-forest canopy, the sky is blue-black clear and salted with stars. These equatorial constellations are odd to me in their orientations.

I have a strong sense of how very far we are from any road; of how deep into the forest we have come.

I realize Giuliana is crying quietly in the shadows. The sudden loss of her father remains so raw. *I am still in the house of death...*

Then she smiles a little through her tears. 'I'm crying from grief,' she says, 'but also out of happiness and relief at what's happened here in the forest, with the river, with you all. At what's been returned to me that I thought I might have lost for ever.'

A night-bird sings, trilling and liquid.

The fire burns down until it is no more than a rough circle of pulsing eyes.



¡Bosques sin Minería!: #JusticiaLosCedros, reads the text on a wall mural in Quito, Ecuador's capital: Forests without Mining!

¡La MINERÍA impulsa el Buen Vivir! reads a roadside advertisement for a copper company: Mining promotes the Good Life!

'Hola!' calls Giuliana suddenly. 'Head torches off! Look around!'

We kill our beams. Slowly, my night-sight simmers into focus – and I see that the trunks, stumps and fallen branches around us are all glowing with a light that is different in kind to any I have seen before. It's a yellow-silver brightness that comes from deep inside the object it illuminates, and it is heatless. I pick up a fragment of what feels like wood but looks more like radiant water. 'The light in this one seems to be rippling,' I say.

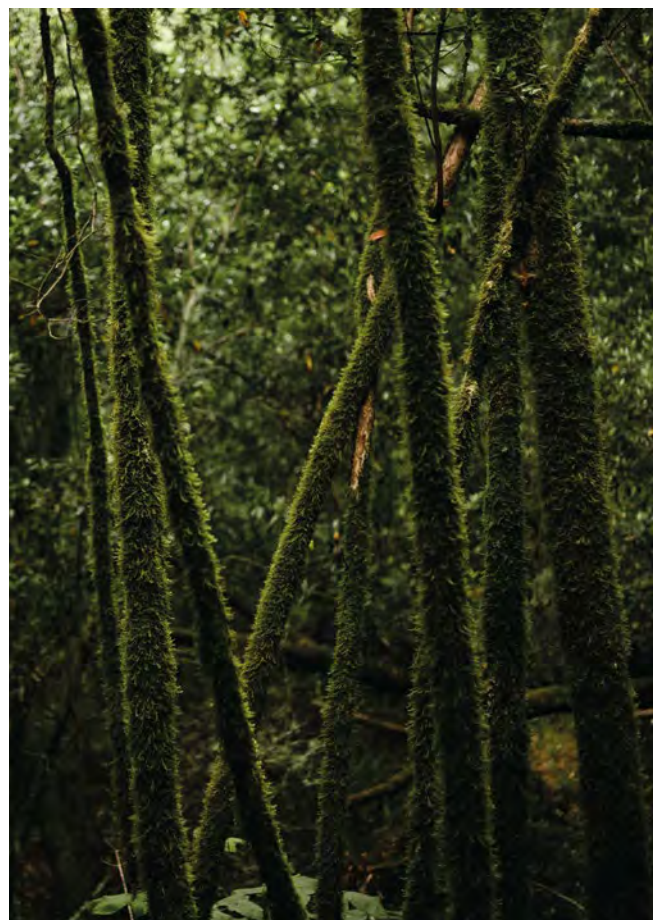
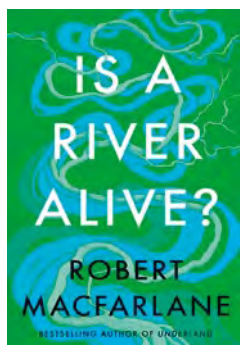
'That's because it's alive,' says Giuliana. 'That glow is mycelial. It's made by the miles of fungal hyphae that are growing through *this wood right now*, as the wood dies. That mycelium will, in the right season, produce bioluminescent mushrooms.'

I walk across to the rotting stump of a tree on the clearing's edge; the whole stump is shimmering with that water-light, as if a luminous river ran through it. In places the light is latticed; in others it is continuous. When I reach out invisible fingers to touch it, I find that I cannot – but nor can I occlude it. It is beautiful and eerie.

'What we have here this evening is nothing!' says Giuliana. 'If you hit the right night, in the right place, you can see *all* the veins of the forest lit up – you can see that *everything* is connected!'

Then she murmurs, perhaps to herself, 'No one is without another.'

from *Is a River Alive?* by Robert Macfarlane
Hamish Hamilton, HBK, 384pp, £25



WHEN TO GO

A year-round destination, on the mainland June to September are officially the driest and warmest months, but towards the end of the year is popular as the Galapagos become warmer. The best time to go the Galapagos is November to June, with November to December the warmest. For wildlife enthusiasts and those interested in seeing specific animals, each month has its own highlights, from mating rituals to nesting to migrations.

WHERE TO STAY

CASA GANGOTENA is an historic, neoclassical hotel overlooking Quito's famous Plaza San Francisco. With 31 elegantly furnished, high-ceilinged rooms, its chief treasure is a third-floor terrace providing unbeatable views of the plaza and surrounding mountains.

MASHPI LODGE, tucked within a 3,200-acre orchid-filled cloud forest in the heart of the Equatorial Chocó Bio-region, offers unparalleled opportunities to view wildlife.

SACHA LODGE is an exquisite jungle lodge set within a pristine 5,000-acre ecological reserve in the Ecuadorian Amazon with cabins blend seamlessly with the lush surroundings.

FINCH BAY GALAPAGOS HOTEL is a secluded, award-winning hotel just yards from a glorious white-sand beach on the south coast of the island of Santa Cruz in the heart of the Galápagos.

LA PINTA is a luxury yacht carrying up to 48 passengers along with expert naturalist guides for a truly immersive Galapagos cruise experience.

FURTHER READING

CHARLES DARWIN'S VOYAGE OF THE BEAGLE gives a remarkable insight

World of wonders

SUGGESTED ITINERARIES

wexas.com/itinerary-offers/quito-otavalo-galapagos-island-hopping-146145

wexas.com/itinerary-offers/grand-tour-of-ecuador-the-galapagos-101481

For more information on holidays to Ecuador, contact Wexas on 020 8125 5631



“I never dreamed that islands, about fifty or sixty miles apart, and most of them in sight of each other, would have been [so] differently tenanted.” Charles Darwin

into the young naturalist's eye-opening journey to the Galapagos and beyond. **VALVERDE'S GOLD**

BY MARK HONIGSBAUM is an enthralling account of the author's hunt for a legendary hoard of Inca gold deep within the Llangantes National Park. **SAVAGES**

BY JOE KANE is a fascinating portrait of the Huaorani Indians in the Ecuadorian Amazon, and their valiant battle to protect their lands and culture from missionaries and colonists – and the giants of oil exploration. In fiction, seek out **MARÍA FERNANDA AMPUERO**'s captivatingly unfiltered story collection **COCKFIGHT**, and **MÓNICA OJEDA**'s multivoiced novel **JAWBONE**, about adolescent discovery and the fine line between terror and desire.



FIRST PERSON/TOP SIGHTS from destination specialist Katrin Rummer

Combine the history of Quito and the unique biodiversity of the Amazon with perhaps the ultimate in wildlife-watching experiences – a luxury Galápagos cruise. Don't miss out on the Amazon, which is a short, scenic flight over the Andes from Quito and an unforgettable addition. Another real highlight for an extended trip is the Avenue of Volcanoes for its spectacular landscape, snow-capped peaks, traditional villages and Andean culture; and stunning Cuenca, a World Heritage city of red-tiled roofs, cobblestone streets, flowery plazas and fascinating museums.



Cruising the Upper Mekong in unmatched style

Since its inaugural voyage in 2023, Heritage Line Anouvong has been transporting guests in utmost luxury to some of the most remote and picturesque corners of Laos. Seamlessly blending authentic Laotian charm with a touch of French finesse, the ship pairs 10 spacious staterooms and extra-large suites with a host of lavish onboard amenities, including a spa, a cosy bar-lounge and an intimate restaurant.

All staterooms feature floor-to-ceiling windows that open out to French balconies, along with spacious, marble-tiled bathrooms with walk-in showers and complimentary luxury toiletries. The signature suites, meanwhile, are even larger and filled with natural light. Each comes with its own seating area in addition to a private balcony and a Jacuzzi in the bathroom complete with river views, perfect for relaxing on sunny days or warming up on cool winter evenings.

On the upper deck, guests have access to an outdoor wooden terrace fitted with a Jacuzzi pool – perfect for relaxing and cooling off on hot, sunny days. Indeed, Heritage Line Anouvong is the first ship on the Upper Mekong to offer this facility onboard, as well as a small gym offering fabulous views of the ever-shifting scenery.

All meals are included, starting with a sumptuous breakfast each morning. At lunch, skilled chefs prepare an enticing selection of dishes at live show cooking stations, while dinner menus incorporate Asian and international culinary influences, with multi-course offerings that change every day. Guests can also look forward to barbecues and aperitifs on the banks of the river, as well as an open-air gala dinner once on every voyage. Afternoon tea is also served daily.

A captivating journey through Northern Laos aboard

Heritage Line Anouvong

From jungle-carpeted mountains and towering limestone karsts to tranquil riverside villages and pulsating cities brimming with majestic Buddhist temples, Laos is a treasure trove of natural wonders and cultural riches. And, as it continues to go somewhat under-the-radar in comparison to its Southeast Asian neighbours, it retains a distinctly down-to-earth, unassuming character that entices adventurous travellers seeking to venture off the beaten track in search of truly authentic and immersive experiences.

Indeed, there's no better way to get under the skin of this extraordinary country than by embarking on a journey along the Upper Mekong with Heritage Line Anouvong.

From exquisite, all-inclusive meals to elegant accommodation and top-tier hospitality, every moment of this captivating three-night voyage feels like a stay at a floating boutique hotel.

Laos from a unique vantage point

Departing from Luang Prabang, a UNESCO-listed city surrounded by forested mountains at the confluence of the Mekong and Khan rivers, the first stop on Heritage Line Anouvong's voyage is the Pak Ou Caves – two riverside grottoes that house around 4,000 sacred Buddhist statues and images. There's also the chance to go kayaking or visit Ban Muang Keo, a village renowned for its traditional silk weaving and rice whisky distilling. As the sun begins to set, the ship will moor at the village of Ban Khok Phou, where a welcome cocktail and barbecue dinner are served on the sandbank.

The following morning, an optional yoga session is hosted on the upstairs terrace deck before breakfast – an invigorating way to start the day. Visits to two remote villages then offer an immersive introduction to the region's distinct ethnic communities and the rural way of life in this lesser-visited northern region of



Laos. Later on, a traditional dance performance will take place on the ship or on the sandbank, followed by another fabulous dinner and a movie screening in the cosy lounge area.

The final full day of the cruise is sure to be a memorable one, beginning with a bamboo weaving workshop – a wonderful way to get creative while tapping into a long-standing cultural tradition. Then, a visit to Laos' most sustainable elephant sanctuary in the jungle just outside Pakbeng is

sure to be among the highlights of the trip, with a rare opportunity to get up close to these majestic creatures. In the evening, an aperitif and a farewell dinner are served onboard, followed by a bountiful brunch the next morning as the Thai border approaches – the perfect way to round off your Heritage Line Anouvong river cruise in style.

Inspired? See the recommended itinerary below or call Wexas on 020 7838 5958 to start planning your Mekong adventure.



A RIVER JOURNEY FROM LAOS TO THAILAND

14-DAY TAILOR-MADE HOLIDAY

This richly immersive adventure begins in Luang Prabang, a city of ornate Buddhist temples and elegant French architecture in the far north of Laos, where you'll enjoy a street food and cocktail tour, a cooking masterclass and a visit to spectacular waterfalls in the nearby countryside. From here, a three-night cruise aboard Heritage Line Anouvong will bring you to Thailand's Golden Triangle before you fly south to Bangkok for a tour of its famous floating markets.

Prices start from £7,745 pp. incl. flights, private transfers, 8 nights accommodation, 3 -night Mekong river cruise & selected private touring. For more information and a full itinerary, visit [wexas.com/184486](https://www.wexas.com/184486).



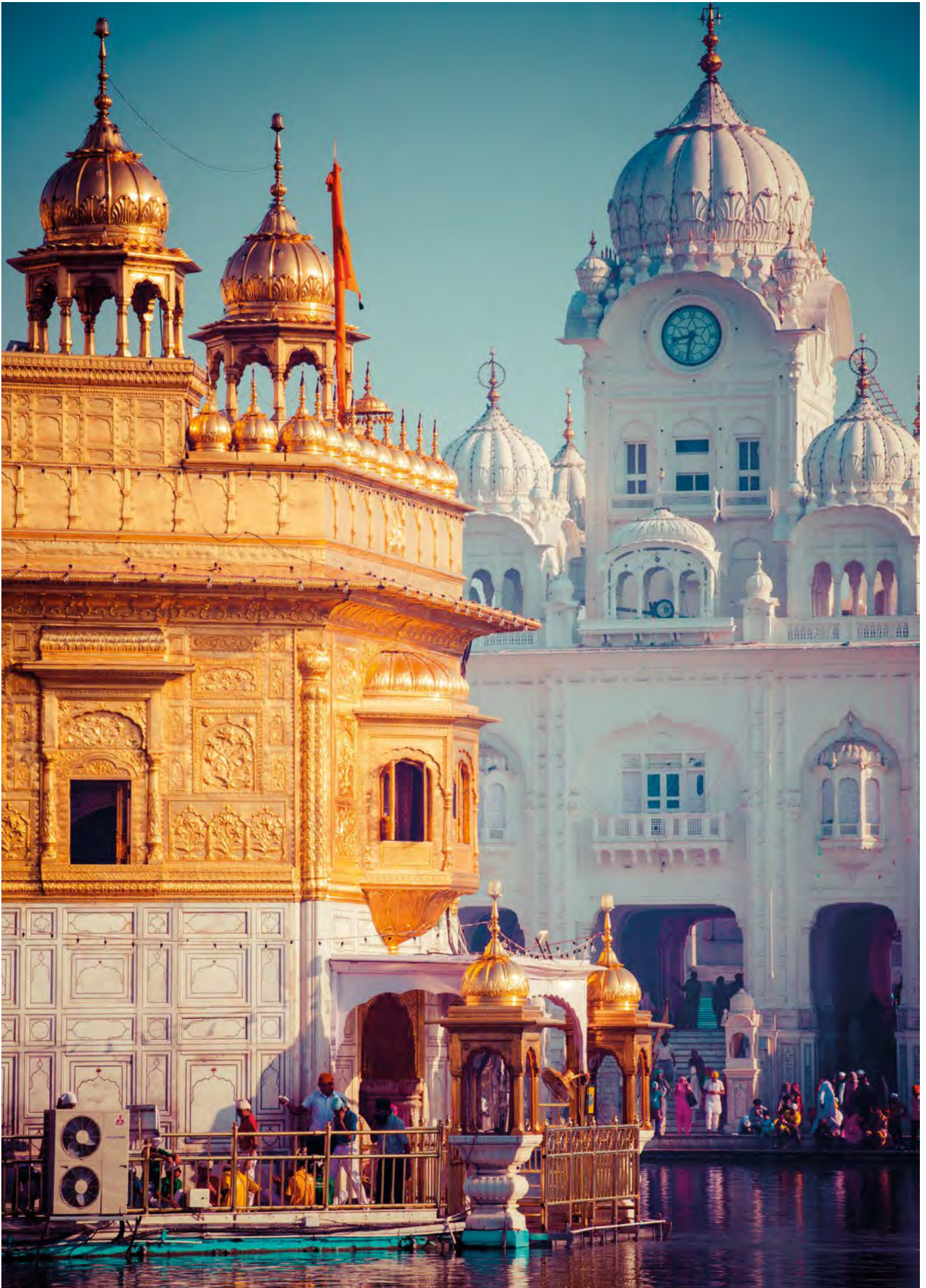
A home for the eternal guru

words
Kathryn Hurlock

In April 2004, the *Times of India* ran a news story about a specially chartered flight leaving the airport at Amritsar, a city of about one million people in the north-western Indian province of Punjab. Those on board were heading for Toronto's Pearson International Airport and travelling in some style, all 150 of them carried across the tarmac to the plane on luxurious cushions, draped in shawls and delivered to their reserved seats by specially selected attendants. They had already been carried on the heads of the same men past crowds of joyous people as they left the city, and were seen off by high officials and members of the Sikh faith. People showered the procession with petals and handed out gifts of biscuits, fruit and religious photographs. Displays of swordsmanship entertained the crowds, and groups of smiling schoolchildren dutifully lined up to wish the passengers well. When they arrived in Toronto

many hours later, the plane was met by the Canadian prime minister, Paul Martin, and Canada's Sikh leaders. From there they were taken to a gurdwara, a Sikh place of worship, before travelling to other gurdwaras across the country.

Each one of the 'passengers' was a copy of the Guru Granth Sahib, the holy book of the Sikh faith. This is revered as a living eternal guru, the source of all spiritual wisdom and advice on how to live. The copies needed by the Canadian Sikhs had to come from Amritsar as nowhere else in the world is allowed to make them, and had to be transported with due reverence. In the city itself, the original Granth Sahib, a collection of texts by the first ten gurus of Sikhism, is kept in the Harmandir or Golden Temple, the holiest place in the Sikh world. Given Amritsar's importance as the home of the Granth





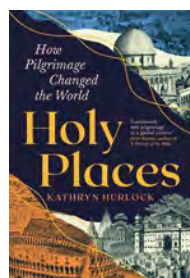
Sahib, the Harmandir and the tank of sacred water which surrounds it, it is not surprising that it is the Sikhs' most important pilgrimage destination too.

Amritsar was never intended as a pilgrimage centre by the faith's founder, Guru Nanak (1469–1539). Born in what is now Pakistan, Nanak was a married clerk and father of two, an otherwise unremarkable man when he disappeared while bathing with a friend in the river. When he emerged unscathed several days later, he declared, 'There is neither Hindu nor Muslim,' and established his own religion. Nanak left his job and embarked on a long tour around India, preaching and singing of his new beliefs. When he eventually returned home, Nanak took his family and founded a new settlement at Kartarpur. People flocked to hear him preach, and he left behind him a community who had settled around him. From there he set off for the place that later became Amritsar, just over thirty miles south of his home: his destination may have been a lake where he simply hoped to meditate. The place was virtually uninhabited, surrounded by forest.

It was only after Guru Nanak died that Amritsar became a place of pilgrimage in his honour, even though Nanak had not been a great advocate of pilgrimage. He thought

it 'barely worth a sesame seed' unless people undertook some form of internal spiritual pilgrimage beforehand. 'Why should I bathe at sacred shrines of pilgrimage?' he asked rhetorically. 'My pilgrimage is spiritual wisdom within, and contemplation on the Shabad.' Even so, he did single out one pool as a special place, which was so effective it was called the 'pool of the nectar of immortality' by Guru Nanak in his poetry. He told his followers, 'sins are washed away by bathing in Amritsar'. Whether he meant the pool at Amritsar in a literal (the water) or metaphorical (bathing the mind in spiritual teaching) sense is debatable. Clearly many have taken his statement literally, and this has made the site important enough to become the home of the Sikh gurus and the location of its eternal guru, the Granth Sahib. Despite this, the influential Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee refuses to acknowledge pilgrimage as part of

Sikhism, perhaps because it seems uncomfortably close to Hindu practice. Perhaps someone should tell that to the thousands who flock to Amritsar every year?



from *Holy Places: How Pilgrimage Changed the World*
Profile Books, HbK, 464pp, £22

WHEN TO GO

October to March, following this it gets very hot and afterwards, quite rainy (monsoon).

WHERE TO STAY

OBEROI AMARVILLAS is just 600 metres from the Taj Mahal – and all rooms and suites offer unrestricted views of this legendary monument to love.

TAJ LAKE PALACE in Udaipur, is the epitome of elegance, a palace floating on Lake Pichola. Formerly a summer haven for the Mewar royal family, it now offers exceptional rooms and suites to visitors.

SAMODE HAVELI is a tranquil retreat from the bustle of Jaipur. With a combination of flower filled courtyards, ornate rooms and a lovely terrace for sundowners, this is the finest stay in town.

ANANDA IN THE HIMALAYAS might just be the world's most renowned holistic wellness retreat. The range of ayurvedic treatments, yoga, meditation, and organic cuisine, combined with heady mountain air brings devotees back yearly.

MAHARAJAS EXPRESS is known as the 'Palace on Wheels', for good reason. Passengers are cocooned in luxury, with butlers on hand and fine dining. It's the ultimate way to experience some of India's most lauded attractions, and offers four handpicked itineraries.

FURTHER READING

R.K. NARAYAN'S SWAMI AND

FRIENDS is the best known of his acclaimed 'Malgudi Days' series.

ARUNDHATI ROY'S THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS won the Booker Prize in 1997, and she writes compellingly in support of human rights and the environment. **VIKRAM SETH** is best known for the epic novel **A SUITABLE BOY**, exploring life and love in Indian society. **MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN** BY **SALMAN RUSHDIE** won

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'In the Great Stories you know who lives, who dies, who finds love, who doesn't. And yet you want to know again. That is their mystery and their magic.'

Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things*

”

the Booker in 1981 and is a modern classic about India's post-Partition transition.

FIRST PERSON/TOP SIGHTS
from destination specialist

Katrin Rummer

For a first visit to India, starting in Delhi and Agra, and then taking in the classic Rajasthani route to Jaipur, Jodhpur and then Udaipur offers a romantic sweep of some of India's most fabled attractions – the layers of history in Delhi, the white marble perfection of the Taj Mahal and the palaces and cities of legendary Rajahs. If time allows, it's worth taking in Bikaner and Jaisalmer as well. It's also well worth combining a version of the above with a side excursion

to view tigers in Ranthambore or Madhya Pradesh. The variety of experiences on offer in India is vast. There are exquisite converted palaces, grand hotels and smaller heritage boutique hotels to choose from, or Ayurvedic wellness retreats, some high in the Himalayas. The historic coastal city of Cochin is fascinating, especially when combined with houseboat tours through the lush Kerala backwaters, with glimpses of village life and spice plantations. Even in the biggest cities, there are chances to have more intimate and bespoke encounters – in Delhi for example, chef-led walking tours and meals with a local family provide another – and delicious – way to savour the flavours of India.



A Lesson in Polo and Pesto

words
Kevin Pilley

The secret to making perfect pesto

is singing an aria while you pulverize your basil.

"Quello ch'o l'ha inventôu, dovievan fâlo santo. / Capio, forest? Cosci se fa o pesto!"

("The person who invented it should become a saint. Understand, stranger? / This is how you make pesto!")

The lyrics and Ligurian dialect of the official pesto anthem are easy to learn. However, mastering the revered Italian culinary art is a long, arduous and often painful one. Be prepared for some tough, crushing love when you visit Genoa – the city of Columbus, palaces, Polo and pesto.

Swinging his head from side to side, the reigning World Pesto Champion looked down at my bowl, shook his head dolefully and delivered his judgment. "This is not pesto. It's sludge."

He winced as he took his tasting spoon away from his mouth. "Outside of Italy, I think you call this mush."

"Claggy," I corrected him. "Or a write-off. Americans have a word for it. Glop."

"What is glop?" he asked.

"Not gourmet," I answered. Mattia *uh-uhed* with a sad, assenting nod.

The St George Cross will always flutter over the Doge's Palace in Genoa, because it has been used by the capital of Liguria since the tenth century. Reputedly, Richard the Lionheart commandeered it and brought it back to England after the Third Crusade. England stopped payments for its use in 1771. The flag will always fly proudly over the city. But not because an Englishman will ever win the World Pesto Championships.

For centuries, non-Italian man and pesto have been sworn enemies. Put a non-Italian in the same room as some supermarket garlic, cheap olive oil, pine kernels and window-sill basil and you have the basic ingredients of a sure-fire culinary catastrophe. As well as the recipe for personal humiliation. Real pesto-making is an art form which no foreigner has so far managed to master. Last year's title was won by 56-year-old naval engineer Mattia Bassi from Acquasanta near Genoa. He used his grandmother's pestle and mortar and

the seven prescribed ingredients to lift the coveted olive wood and gold-wrapped trophy. No non-Italian has ever won the World Pesto crown.

Roberto Panizza owns Il Genovese Restaurant on the city's Via Galata. His family first opened a candied almonds shop in 1947. He is the man behind the biennial World Pesto Championships, held in the Salona del Maggior Consiglio of the Palazzo Ducale. The first was staged in 2006. The next will be in March 2026.

The Romans made a *moretum* paste. The Mediterraneans of the Middle Ages made a garlic and walnut mash (*agliata*). Sicilian red pesto, considered sacrilege by Ligurians, is made with tomatoes and almonds. Calabrians use bell peppers. But there's only one place to learn to be truly green-fingered and that's Genoa – *La Superba* (The Proud One).

"Pesto is the true taste of Liguria," Roberto told me when we met over lunch and an impromptu pesto lesson at Il Genovese. "Originally it was made with Dutch Gouda cheese, basil, parsley and marjoram. Each contestant has forty minutes to



make their pesto. They are given four bunches of basil, some Sicilian sea salt, Fiore Sardo cheese, 30g of pine nuts, Parmesan and 80cc of doc Italian Riviera extra virgin olive oil.”

“Grandmother Rosetta’s secret was to first crush the garlic and pine nuts together, then set them aside. It’s all in sequence,” Mattia the pesto maestro told me. “To make the best pesto you must use olive oil from one olive variety, the highly valued Taggiasca. As well as Trapani sea salt, and basil which has been granted Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) by the EU. The best basil grows facing the sea. A marble mortar makes all the difference. As does Vessalico garlic which grows in the Arroscia Valley near Liguria’s only ski resort, Monesi.

“Ligurian Pigato wine is a good accompaniment. As is Sciacchetrà Cinque Terre fortified wine made with Bosco, Albarola and Vermentino grapes.”

At the event, between tastings, the thirty judges refresh their palates with apple slices. Last year there were 100 competitors.

Mattia looked at my attempt as it was taken away. The waitress had placed a serviette over it as a mark of embarrassment rather than respect. “With a bit of practice, you can still qualify for next year’s championships,” he said consolingly. “Keep singing the pesto song. It will help you concentrate and keep focused.”

Genoa is a two-level city. Lifts, two funiculars and a cogwheel train connect ground-area neighbourhoods with upper areas – the most famous being the Spianata Castelletto viewpoint. But inside and outside the Barbarossa walls, down the *cuestas* and *caruggi* alleyways (the most atmospheric are Vias San Luca, del Campo and Al Ponte Reale) you can’t get away from pesto and freshly-picked basil leaves.

You must eat your way around the city – taste its *friggitorie* fried arancini couscous, *frisceù di baccalà* cod fritters, *farinta* chickpea crepes, focaccia bread, *gallette del marinaio* (twice-baked ‘sailor’s crackers’), *prescinsêua* local curd cheese, *torta pasqualina* (Easter spinach, chard, cheese and egg pie), *scorfano in carpione* (marinated redfish), and *acciughe* anchovies (also known as or *pan du mà* – the bread of the sea), and *trofie* (short spirals) and *mandilli de sœa* (silk handkerchiefs) pasta.

A typical menu in Genoa – as served at Il Genovese – would be *frisceù* made with ancient wheat flour and fizzy water, fried tripe, *gattafin* fried ravioli from Levanto, fresh ravioli with Tuccu meat sauce and *pansotti* (stuffed pasta) with walnut sauce. As well as stockfish, meatballs and rabbit. Pesto is ever-present.

It is very nearly illegal not to have pesto in Genoa.



The city's chief landmarks are the *Palazzi dei Rolli* – the Palaces of the Scrolls – where the City Government originally hosted notable visitors (mainly bankers). Later, the palaces were used by those on the Grand Tour. Today, *Palazzi dei Rolli* is the collective name for the most prestigious palaces of the historical centre, especially along the so-called *Strade Nuove*, the 'New Streets' built by the Genoese aristocracy at the peak of Genoa's economic power in the 16th and 17th century (Via Giuseppe Garibaldi, formerly Strada Nuova or Via Aurea, Via Cairoli, formerly Strada Nuovissima, and Via Balbi, now the home of the University of Genoa).

The main street Via XX Settembre is named after the day in 1870 when Rome was recaptured from papal 'authorities'. Other landmarks include D'Albertis Castle, which houses the Museo delle Culture del Mondo (Museum of World Cultures), the 1353, 172-step Lanterna lighthouse,





San Lorenzo cathedral with its stone lions, sculpted puppy and unexploded World War II English grenade, the monumental fountain of Piazza de Ferrari, the new Museum of Italian Immigration and the pastel-coloured houses of ancient seaside district and mariners' village of Boccadasse ('the mouth of the donkey').

The Ligurian Riviera around Genoa comprises 21 miles of coastline with villages like Bogliasco, Portofino, Lerici and Cinque Terre with its recently reopened Via Dell'Amore (Path of Love), a paved walk between Riomaggiore and Manarola, one of four sections of the Azzuro Blue Path. Although connected by regular trains, the 'Five Lands' fishing villages are best visited by boat. They get very, very busy in summer. The coastal service from Levanto takes you down to La Spezia, Portovenere, the Gulf of Poets where Shelley drowned and the UNESCO islands of Palmaria, Tino and Tinetto.

The Basilica of Santa Maria Assunta on the hill of Carignano is visible from almost every part of the city. More modern sights are the 'Biscione' and 'Le Lavatrici' (the washing machines) housing complexes, the Aquarium and Museum of the Sea, architect Renzo Piano's Sphere ('The Bubble' or 'The Ball') and the pencil-shaped Matitone skyscraper. Genoa has many parts, each with its own soul.

Columbus's House, where he reputedly lived as a child, is an 18th-century reconstruction of the original which was destroyed by the French naval bombing of 1684. In the Porto Antico, the Palazzo San Giorgio was once the headquarters of the Bank of Saint George, founded in 1407 and closing in 1805. Having been captured leading a Venetian ship against the City State in the Battle of Curzola, Marco Polo was imprisoned in the palace between 1298 and his release in 1299, where, with romance writer Rustichello da Pisa, he wrote his memoirs, *The Travels*

of Marco Polo. Also called *The Description of the World*, *The Book of the Marvels of the World* and, after its initial medieval reception *A Million Lies*.

It is now the home of the Port System Authority. A mosaic of Marco Polo is displayed in the Palazzo Doria-Tursie on Via Giuseppe Garibaldi, which since 1848 has been the city's City Hall.

Henry James described Genoa as "the most winding and incoherent of cities." No one, of course, is allowed to leave without being offered a top tip as to make your own pesto.

Roberto left me with one: "Never use a food processor. That's sacrilege. And immediate disqualification at the championship."

The current pesto world champion left me with another. "Never overheat basil. That's a crime in Liguria. A major insult to a cultural asset."

WHEN TO GO

The best time to visit Italy is during spring and autumn, when temperatures are comfortable and there are fewer crowds. Prices are lower, and the weather is ideal for exploring the length and breadth of the country. Easter is busy, July and August feature high temperatures and more visitors. Many Italians take all of August off – so cities might be a little quieter, but many local restaurants may be closed.

WHERE TO STAY

METROPOLE HOTEL VENICE is just a few steps away from Piazza San Marco in the heart of Venice and overlooks the beautiful lagoon. Rooms and suites offer charming views and interiors filled with authentic Venetian artefacts.

ANANTARA PALAZZO NAIADI is one of Rome's most splendid hotels, in a palazzo fronting the Piazza della Rebbublica. It's an enviable location, within walking distance from the Spanish Steps, the Trevi fountain and Via Veneto. Neoclassical rooms and suites offer sophisticated serenity, and the rooftop terrace overlooking the city is just the spot for a sundowner.

HOTEL LUNGARNO in Florence certainly offers a room with a view. 63 of them, many with terraces overlooking Renaissance masterpieces. This 5-star hotel literally sits over the Arno, and its riverside Michelin starred restaurant is utterly exquisite.

GRAND HOTEL PORTOVENERE sits supremely pretty between the Gulf of Poets in Liguria and the famous Cinque Terra. This 5-star boutique hotel is steps away from boat rides along the Italian Riviera, and an elegant base to explore from. Their Palmaria Restaurant is on a spectacular veranda, with exquisite views and menus.

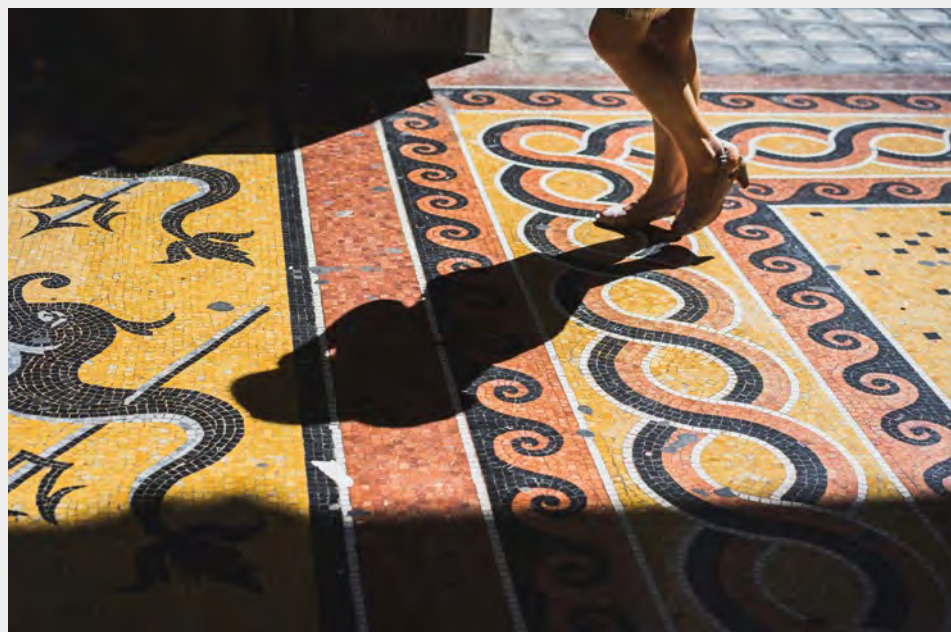
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'Start by doing what's necessary; then do what's possible; and suddenly you are doing the impossible.'

Saint Francis of Assisi

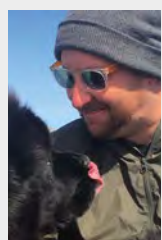
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LE CALETTE is just 2km from the historic centre of Cefalù, a UNESCO site. It's a gorgeous boutique coastal hotel along Caldura Bay, with rooms and suites, glorious gardens, restaurants and bars overlooking the enchanting Mediterranean.

FURTHER READING

ELENA FERRANTE's Neapolitan Novels *MY BRILLIANT FRIEND*, *THE STORY OF A NEW NAME*, *THOSE WHO LEAVE AND THOSE WHO STAY* and *THE STORY OF THE LOST CHILD*.

GIUSEPPE TOMASI DI LAMPEDUSA: THE LEOPARD. ITALO CALVINO: INVISIBLE CITIES, IF ON A WINTER'S NIGHT A TRAVELLER and THE BARON IN THE TREES. UMBERTO ECO: THE NAME OF THE ROSE and FOUCAULT'S PENDULUM.


FIRST PERSON/TOP SIGHTS
from destination specialist
Andy Austen

The Italian Riviera is considered by many to be the most breath-taking stretch of coast in all of Europe. Sheer cliffs run alongside a stunning seascape. This romantic region can be reached from the north – starting from Genoa, Santa Margherita or Portofino – or the south from a base in Portovenere. The five villages of the Cinque Terre can be reached via ferry links, by train or on foot. All ways of reaching the stretch offer their own charms, but all offer fabulous views. The Cinque Terre also offers a perfect contrast with Tuscany, with Pisa acting as the central point to fly into the region to easily access both delights.



THE DIVERSE WONDERS OF *Portugal*

From the UNESCO-listed treasures of Lisbon and Porto to the subtropical volcanic landscapes of the Azores and Madeira, Portugal brims with an astonishing variety of cultural riches and natural wonders.

It's also home to many of Europe's finest beaches, world-class vineyards and a fabulously eclectic culinary scene – both on the mainland and across its far-flung Atlantic archipelagos – making it an endlessly alluring year-round destination. Here, we explore the myriad delights that each of its seven major regions has to offer.

Lisbon

Spread across a series of hillsides where the Tagus River spills out into the Atlantic Ocean, Portugal's capital pulsates with an intoxicating blend of historic landmarks, architectural masterpieces, fascinating museums and gastronomic gems. Vintage yellow trams rattle through the cobbled streets of pastel-coloured neighbourhoods, fado music emanates from bustling bars and restaurants, and artisan bakeries serve up irresistibly delicious pastéis de nata (custard tarts). Venture inland to nearby Sintra, meanwhile, to discover fairytale palaces and a majestic Moorish castle, or travel along the coast to the laid-back beach towns of Estoril and Cascais. .

Porto & North of Portugal

As the largest city in northern Portugal, Porto packs an almighty punch with its enticing mix of cultural attractions, gorgeous architecture, marvellous restaurants and peaceful parks. Its historic centre is a UNESCO World Heritage site, crowned by the 12th-century Sé Cathedral, which sits atop a hill sloping down to the colourful waterfront townhouses of

Ribeira. Across the Dom Luís I Bridge lies Vila Nova de Gaia, a neighbourhood brimming with traditional port wine cellars. Portugal's second city is also a perfect starting point for exploring the Douro Valley (one of Europe's most revered wine regions), Braga (Portugal's oldest city) and the spectacular mountains of Peneda-Gerês (the country's only national park).



Algarve

Famed for its magnificent beaches and year-round sunshine, Portugal's southernmost region is a perennial favourite among international visitors and natives alike. Seaside relaxation may be its most powerful draw, but there's much to discover throughout the Algarve beyond its powder-soft, golden sands. Its coastline is dotted with towns and cities awash with Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque churches, imposing castles, vibrant music scenes and terrific seafood restaurants. There's an abundance of gloriously scenic hiking trails, too, winding between the Algarve's stunning beaches, towering cliffs and hilly, often-overlooked interior.

Centre of Portugal

Centre of Portugal is a region of outstanding natural beauty and ancient towns replete with medieval monasteries, castles and cathedrals. Inland, the colourful city of Coimbra is home to one of Europe's oldest universities, while the fortified hilltop town of Óbidos is renowned for its whitewashed houses, medieval castle and rich literary heritage. Just 60 kilometres south of Porto, lagoon-side Aveiro charms visitors with its picturesque canals, elegant Art Nouveau buildings and superb nearby beaches. Closer to Lisbon, Nazaré and Peniche attract surfers from all around the world to ride their epic waves.

Alentejo

Spanning Portugal's south-central region, east of Lisbon and north of the Algarve, Alentejo is a land of gently rolling hills, sprawling plains, endless vineyards and fragrant olive groves. Here, you can experience an authentic taste of rural Portugal, where life unfolds at a slower pace and crowds are nowhere to be seen. The food is rustic and delicious – generous portions of bread and olives, hearty stews and cured meats – and the wine is excellent and inexpensive. The region's largest city, Évora, hosts a Roman temple, a Gothic cathedral and a whitewashed historic centre – a UNESCO-listed labyrinth of cobbled lanes encircled by medieval walls.

Azores

A sub-tropical archipelago of nine volcanic islands in the mid-Atlantic, the Azores are Portugal's most remote outpost, around 1,500 kilometres west of the mainland. There's an almost mystical aura about these islands, where turquoise lakes fill ancient volcanic craters, jungle-like forests are punctuated by natural hot springs and cascading waterfalls, and bubbling



geysers and fumaroles pierce the Earth's crust. With opportunities to relax on black sand beaches, soak in geothermal pools, hike through the mountains and spot whales and dolphins on marine safaris, the Azores are a true nature lover's paradise.

Madeira

Rugged volcanic mountains, lush laurel forests, deep valleys and soaring coastal cliffs characterise the landscapes of Madeira, a Portuguese island forged by submarine eruptions around five million years ago. One of the best ways to experience its natural splendour is to hike along the levadas – an extensive network of man-made irrigation channels built to carry water from the humid north to the drier south. Madeira also beckons visitors to discover its exotic botanical gardens, lava rock pools, namesake fortified wine and culinary delights, best showcased in the restaurants of the island's captivating capital, Funchal.





Flørli: A Vertical Adventure in the Lysefjord

by
Richard Lyon

From Stavanger's bustling harbour on a crystalline May morning, I bypassed the Preikestolen crowds, opting for a less-traveled path: Flørli, home to the world's longest wooden staircase and a historic power station deep within Norway's majestic Lysefjord.

The Kolumbus passenger ferry journey from Stavanger took approximately two hours, gliding through pristine waters as the Lysefjord revealed itself in dramatic fashion – sheer granite cliffs soaring over 1,000 meters, waterfalls streaming down their faces, and occasional glimpses of Preikestolen. Arriving at the tiny, car-free settlement of Flørli, I was struck by its profound

isolation and tranquility. Once home to around 150 residents supporting the hydroelectric plant, today fewer than a dozen people inhabit this remote outpost year-round. The historic Flørli Power Station, established in 1916 with construction completed in the early 1920s, now serves as both a museum and café. Inside, original machinery and photographs document the remarkable engineering feat accomplished in this remote location. The plant operated until 1999, providing power to communities around the fjord.

What draws most visitors, however, are those infamous 4,444 wooden steps ascending alongside the old pipeline.



Built for maintenance access, this wooden staircase climbs a staggering 740 meters (2,500 feet) from fjord to mountaintop – a vertical challenge not for the faint-hearted.

After a light lunch at the café, I began the relentlessly steep ascent. After just 300 steps, I questioned my decision, yet the increasingly spectacular views compelled me onward. Numbered markers every hundred steps provided both encouragement and a sobering reminder of the climb remaining. Two hours later, breathless and exhilarated, I reached the summit plateau. The panorama was nothing short of spectacular – the entire Lysefjord stretched before me, with snow-capped mountains dominating the eastern horizon.

The Norwegian value of “friluftsliv” – a commitment to outdoor life regardless of hardship – suddenly resonated deeply. This challenging landscape has clearly shaped a people as resilient and impressive as their natural surroundings. Descending proved nearly as demanding, and I returned to Stavanger that evening tired but deeply satisfied. While thousands had seen Preikestolen, I had experienced something equally magnificent yet wonderfully solitary – a perfect embodiment of Norway’s wild heart.





WHEN TO GO

Norway is a year-round destination. Northern Lights season starts in the North in September and can be combined with autumnal hiking and foraging. Whales also return from mid-October to January around Tromsø and Lofoten. Winter activities such as snowmobile, husky and reindeer safaris run from mid-December to the end of March. Summer is temperate from May to September, although June to August can be very busy. To avoid the worst of the crowds, travel in May (when waterfalls are at their best) or September.

WHERE TO STAY

ARCTIC WILDERNESS LODGE is a stunning premium hotel on the banks of the River Alta with fine dining and premium activities that highlight the best of each season. In winter the renowned Sorrisniva Igloo Hotel is rebuilt to a new design.

STORFJORD HOTEL, SKODJE is a quintessential romantic fjordside lodge not far from Alesund and Geiranger.

SVINOYA RORBUER, SVOLVAER and **NUSFJORD ARCTIC RESORT** are favourites in Lofoten with accommodation in converted fisherman's huts.

OPUS XVI, BERGEN is a landmark luxury hotel run by descendants of composer Edvard Grieg.

FURTHER READING

KNUT HAMSUN, winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1920, was a pioneer of psychological fiction whose novels include **HUNGER**, **MYSTERIES**, **PAN** and **VICTORIA**.

SOPHIE'S WORLD BY **JOSTEIN GAARDER**, first published in 1991, is an addictive blend of mystery, philosophy and fantasy.

JO NESBØ'S Harry Hole crime series

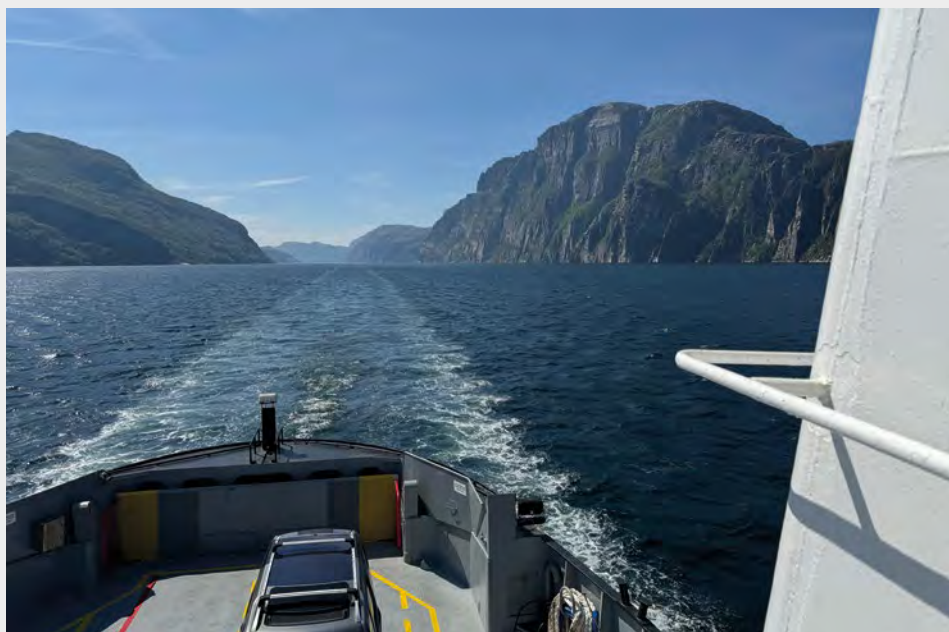
Fjords and beyond

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“

'A shaft of sweetness shoots through me from top to toe when the sun rises.'

Knut Hamsun, Pan

”

comprises thirteen internationally bestsellers to date, from **THE BAT** (1997) to **KILLING MOON** (2022). Jon Fosse, Norway's most recent Nobel laureate (2023), is a novelist, playwright, essayist and poet. His books include the story collection **SCENES FROM A CHILDHOOD** and the novella **ALISS AT THE FIRE**.

KARL OVE KNAUSGÅRD, once a student of Fosse, became an international sensation with his series of six autobiographical novels, **MY STRUGGLE** (2009–11).

FIRST PERSON/TOP SIGHTS from destination specialist Sue McAlinden

Fjord Norway is spectacular, but even that is eclipsed by Lofoten. Even the Norwegians – used to amazing scenery – admit this is

special. Each season has its own highlights. A Northern Lights hotspot in winter, the white sandy beaches and crystal clear waters framed by towering mountain tops come into their own in summer. The extraordinary light favours artists and craftsmen who flock to the area. Every twist in the road reveals a new vista that you will want to stop and capture. Book early for summer peak season if considering self-drive. Alternatively try the environmentally friendly Arctic Route scenic hop-on/hop-off bus tour. Extend your stay and combine with a trip to the quieter neighbouring islands of Vesterålen and Senja. You can also combine with the Havila/Hurtigruten Coastal Route.



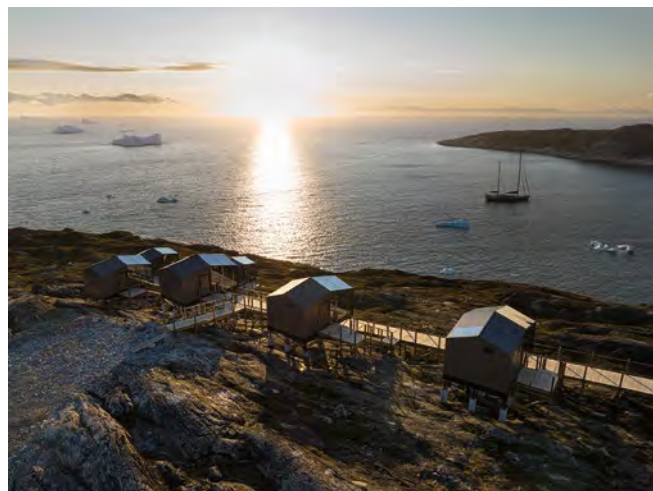
Hotel Arctic

Ilulissat



The Hotel Arctic is an extraordinary place to stay. Set on the shores of Greenland's Ilulissat Icefjord – a UNESCO World Heritage Site – it's the furthest flung four-star hotel in the north. Surrounded by spectacular icebergs, resplendent in every light, it's perfectly positioned for adventure all the way, all year round.

Summer presents the best time to spot whales, which travel here for food in abundant numbers. The hotel offers safaris, with boat trips to spot the numerous species – there are minke whales, humpbacks, fin whales and narwhals in these waters, and the sight of large pods or the spectacular rise of a gigantic humpback bursting forth from and splashing back into the sea are unforgettable experiences. Summer is also the perfect time to head out on a kayak, or on one of the hotel's luxury boat



cruises, as well as setting off for a highland hike during the long days of the midnight sun. Winter winners are dashing husky ride excursions, and, of course, the chance to see the celestial dance of the Northern Lights.

Whatever the weather, the hotel offers a luxurious base, from meals based on the freshest, finest local ingredients; and inviting rooms and suites that offer fabulous views of the Icefjord or the port. Among the accommodation, the Arora Cabins are the standouts – mountain side retreats with panoramic views of the delightfully named Disko Bay. During the summer the vast surrounding windows showcase the illuminated midnight landscape, in the winter the changing colours and magical movement of the Northern Lights.



Arctic Wilderness Lodge

Alta



With just 24 rooms and suites, this Norwegian retreat on the banks of the Alta River is a wonderfully exclusive high Arctic destination. All rooms and suites celebrate the wilderness, with floor to ceiling windows overlooking the river and Arctic beyond. Settle into sumptuous comfort and watch the river run through this wild and lovely expanse during the summer months, in the winter, watch the Northern Lights shimmy and shine above. Winter also offers the chance to stay at the lodge's sister property – the Igloo Hotel, built anew each season. Guests can enjoy sparkling grandeur of the ice-carved interiors with the option of heading back to the comfort of the lodge.

The fun stretches out all year round. Speed off on a snowmobile in search of the Northern Lights or a spot of ice-fishing in the

winter. This is also the perfect time to go reindeer sledding and to experience Sami culture. Take to the river in the summer for some packrafting, or to the skies in a helicopter to survey the splendour below. There are opportunities to go whale watching in a fjord above the Arctic Circle or to saddle up for a horseback ride through the surrounding woods.

On return to the lodge a culinary adventure awaits – their new Maku Restaurant offers a notable menu and overlooks the river. Like all experiences here, the food reflects the best of the seasons. Dishes are based on what's nearest and freshest, from salmon from the Alta, King Crab, Reindeer with lingonberries, to cloudberry based desserts. Life is sweet here, in both sun and snow.



Staying in St Lucia in Style

SINEAN CALLERY INVITES HER MUM TO SAMPLE THE MANY CHARMS OF CALABASH COVE



A colourful stream of pensioners, influencers and honeymooners flows onto the tarmac, melting in the sunshine that washes over us as we leave the plane. Most of us are still long-sleeved and layered, not yet in the Caribbean island uniform of flowy florals. It feels surreal to have come from the damp and dark of our winter to this, and I see my mum's excited smile falter for a moment as the heat hits her. Is this going to be too much for us?

The volcanic island of St Lucia rises jaggedly out of the Caribbean Sea, its profile defined by the peaks of the Gros Piton and the Petit Piton. It enjoys a tropical rainforest climate with average temperatures in the high 20s and enough sun and rain to coat the whole island in luxuriant vegetation. Each rain shower unleashes a fragrant burst of petrichor from the rich earth that nourishes whole seas of banana plantations, nestled amongst wild forests. Tiny lizards scurry away from our footsteps, and jewel-like hummingbirds flit from tree to brightly-blossoming tree. This visual feast is complemented by an acoustic one – a constant, undulating whistle, which we learn comes from a choir of tiny but determined frogs. It is hard to imagine such a sound fading to background noise, but it soon does.

The culture of this island is every bit as colourful as the flora and fauna. Both the French and the British have been colonisers here, and each culture has left its mark. The layering and blending of these influences with the indigenous Carib culture and, most prominently, the African creole culture makes St Lucia feel wildly exotic yet comfortingly familiar all at once. For us, there is an extra bit of familiarity – only two sovereign states in the world are named for women: St Lucia, and our home, Eire.

Calabash Cove Resort & Spa perches on the northwest coast of St Lucia, near to the island's capital Castries and just over an hour's drive from Hewanorra airport. With only 26 rooms, it feels cosy and intimate. Although the resort was fully booked during our stay, we were in our own little bubble at all times, and I can see why honeymooners love this place. A stay here feels like having a piece of paradise to yourself for a while. We were greeted with the sort of humour and easy manner that instantly made us feel at home; our first introduction to the sort of casual kindness that you quickly get used to around here. The general manager, Konrad Wagner, made a point of tracking us down for a chat. No easy task with so many peaceful hideaways – were we swimming at the resort's private beach? Napping in a hammock in the sway of a sea breeze? Or perhaps out exploring

the island? But Mr Wagner has adapted to the lifestyle of this island which knows no rush, and caught us at the weekly champagne reception. We were impressed by the genuine interest he showed in both his guests and his staff. While he was honest about the difficulties presented by resort tourism in a former colony, his love for the island and commitment to great working conditions for his staff was obvious.

All meals take place in the aptly named Windsong restaurant which is open to the sea breeze and offers a panoramic vista of the sea and the ever-changing cloudscapes. But watch out – while some of the island’s birds will serenade you during your meal, cheeky Antillean bullfinches will be more focussed on stealing your jam. The food is fresh and beautifully prepared, with a good mix of familiar favourites and local dishes accompanied by a curated selection of international wines. Luckily, Calabash Cove is the only resort on the island that offers unconditional all-inclusive – even lobster is included.

St Lucia is heaven for outdoor and culture enthusiasts alike – small but packed with stunning natural and cultural gems. Thrillseekers can go ziplining through the rainforest, while those seeking a more relaxed experience can opt for the aerial tram tour. Every Friday night, the village of Gros Islet erupts into a street party, with plenty of local food and drink on offer. There are also various culinary workshops available, including chocolate making classes at one of the island’s cacao farms.

A particularly popular option is a visit to the world’s only drive-in volcano to enjoy another speciality of the island; the Sulphur Springs mud baths near Soufrière. The strong-smelling steam which still rises from the caldera may have been off-putting at first, but it was quickly forgotten as we soaked in several hot mud pools, each filled with a silky- smooth silt. After a blissful wallow, we moved on to the next part of the visit – natural body art. The light grey mud from the pools was allowed to dry, and then it was time for us to get creative, dabbing each other with darker mud until we looked like modern art canvases. The day finished with a quick visit to Toraille waterfall to wash off the last of the mud followed by a delicious local buffet at Fond Doux.

I was eager for a deep dive into creole culture, and there was no one better to provide that than Rhyesa Joseph and Marilyn Hyacinth, local cultural advocates and communicators. Our language class quickly turned into an enlightening sociocultural analysis of the island’s past, present and future, and we learned about the creativity and subtle ingenuity of creole (Kwéyòl). Often dismissed as a bastardisation of French, it actually has strong African roots and was an essential tool

of resistance during colonial times. The language has recently been made part of the school curriculum; a beacon of hope for the future of St Lucian creole culture.

To get a first-hand experience of that culture, we visited Fond Latisab Creole Park. Located in Babonneau, far from the bustling towns and luxury resorts, it showcases some aspects of traditional life in St Lucia. The owner, Canice Thomas, is passionate about bolstering creole culture by sharing its unique customs and crafts. Our visit included a demonstration of traditional sawing, a crash-course on making delicately spiced cassava bread and an introduction to traditional dances. At the end, we got to join in and learn a few steps to a tune whose lyrics translate as “where the wind blows, the wind blows” – which captures the laid-back nature of the locals well.

With so many activities planned, we were both worried that 5 days would be much too short a stay in such a faraway land. Time did funny things in our little island bubble though, stretching and slowing in the most luxurious way. We quickly got used to a routine dictated by St Lucia’s tropical climate. The long hours of sunshine would be briefly interrupted by afternoon rain storms which swept in to bring refreshment. For most guests, this was a great excuse for a nap. But as a pasty person with a love of rain, it was my cue to go for a swim. The skies would darken as rain fizzed on the water, but the air stayed warm and when the clouds cleared, the world was filled with a diffuse golden light. Then it was time to lounge on one of the floating platforms just off shore, feeling the womb-like rock of gentle waves. Occasionally, a yacht on the horizon would birth a flurry of jet skis which glinted white against the endless blue where water and sky meet.

I’ll admit that I was worried about sharing a holiday with my mum – what grown woman wouldn’t be? But how often do we get to enjoy an entirely new experience with our mothers, stepping into something exciting and exotic as two independent adults? I couldn’t have wished for a better travel partner. My time in St Lucia was defined by refreshingly honest conversations, all of which were prompted by my mother’s curious and caring nature. Also, how often do we get to see our mothers fully relaxed? On this little island, with a whole team of people dedicated to our serenity and an island-full of experiences to choose from, one Irish mammy got to stop looking after everything and everyone for a while. Our last evening was spent side-by-side on beach loungers. Being in each other’s company had never been easier, and we enjoyed one last glass of the resort’s finest wine as the sun melted into the purple ocean and the tiny frog symphony intensified.



ICONIC FILM LOCATIONS IN UTAH

Utah is blessed with some of the most dramatic landscapes in the USA, ranging from spectacular, rust-red canyons and mesmerising sandstone arches to colossal buttes and wide open desert plains. Little wonder, therefore, that such epic scenes have formed the backdrop of numerous international movie hits over the years, including the likes of *Indiana Jones* and the *Last Crusade*, *Forrest Gump*, *Independence Day* and *127 hours*, along with numerous classic Westerns.

From Monument Valley to the Bonneville Salt Flats, many of Utah's most cinematic locations can easily be linked on a single road trip through the state's national parks, perhaps combined with a slice of urban cool in the vibrant capital, Salt Lake City – the ultimate adventure for any movie connoisseur.

Monument Valley

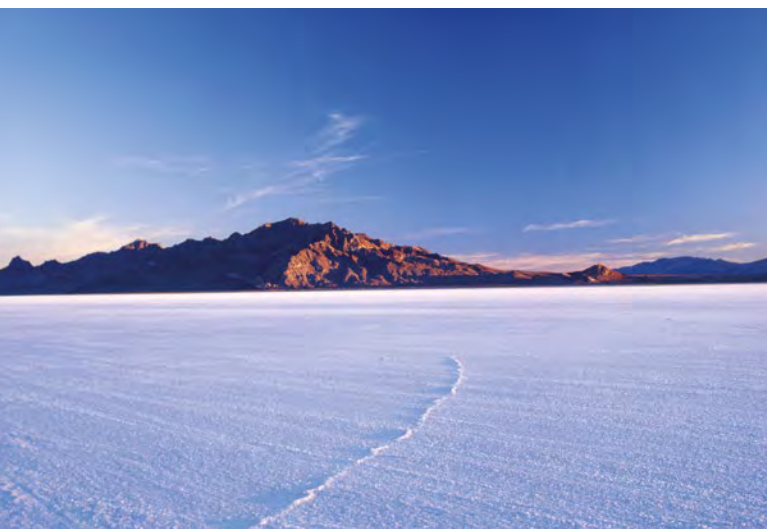
Monument Valley's towering sandstone buttes and vast desert plains have long epitomised the rugged beauty of the American West, making it a favourite location for filmmakers. Its iconic, otherworldly landscapes have starred in countless Westerns, including classics such as John Ford's *Stagecoach* (1939), as well as several more recent blockbusters. The famous highway leading into the valley became immortalised in *Forrest Gump* (1994), while *Back to the Future III* (1990) also showcased its barren, untamed wilderness. Passing through Monument Valley truly feels like stepping into a living postcard of cinematic history.

Dead Horse Point State Park

Perched high above a horseshoe bend in the Colorado River, Dead Horse Point State Park offers some of the most sublime views in Utah. Its sandstone cliffs and deep canyons provided the unforgettable setting for the final scene of *Thelma & Louise* (1991), where the duo's fateful drive into the canyon became an enduring cinematic moment. The park's striking landscapes have also featured in numerous commercials and TV shows, making it a must-see for movie lovers and nature lovers alike.

Bonneville Salt Flats

The otherworldly expanse of the Bonneville Salt Flats are found in the Great Salt Lake Desert in northwestern Utah – an awe-



inspiring, lunar-like landscape that appears to stretch endlessly into the horizon. This vast, gleaming white plain famously doubled as an extraterrestrial landing site in *Independence Day* (1996), adding a surreal backdrop to the film's dramatic scenes, such as Will Smith dragging an alien across the salt flats. With its perfectly flat surface, the area is also a magnet for speed enthusiasts, hosting numerous land-speed record attempts.

Zion National Park

With its soaring sandstone cliffs, verdant valleys and narrow slot canyons, Zion National Park brims with a diverse array of natural wonders. This majestic landscape served as the backdrop for much of *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969), a true classic of the Western genre, following two on-the-run outlaws who produce a string of bank and train robberies. Today, Zion draws adventurous travellers looking to explore its superb hiking trails, while film enthusiasts can retrace the steps of Wild West legends amid the park's breathtaking scenery.

Lake Powell

A man-made reservoir on the Colorado River that straddles the state border between Utah and Arizona, Lake Powell was chosen as the filming location for the epic final scene of *Gravity* (2013), in which Ryan Stone (played by Sandra Bullock) crash-lands back to Earth, swimming to the surface before making her way to shore. Besides its cinematic fame, Lake Powell beckons outdoor enthusiasts with opportunities for the likes of boating, kayaking, water skiing and exploring hidden canyons dotted around the water's edge.

Arches National Park

Arches National Park, with its astonishing collection of over 2,000 natural stone arches (including Delicate Arch, a state symbol of Utah) has provided a suitably dramatic setting for several iconic films – not least the opening scene of *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989). Parts of *Thelma and Louise* were also shot here, making the most of the park's rugged beauty to heighten the story's tension and drama. Exploring this captivating landscape feels like you've arrived onto a Hollywood set, where nature's artistry takes centre stage.

Salt Lake City

Utah's vibrant capital, Salt Lake City, offers a refreshing contrast to the state's abundant natural wonders with its thriving cultural and artistic scene. It featured in coming-of-age classics such *The Sandlot* (1993) and *High School Musical* (2006), while scenes from comedy hit *Legally Blonde 2* (2003) used the Utah State Capitol Building as a stand-in for Washington D.C.'s United States Capitol. In stark contrast, much of the deeply unsettling horror film *Hereditary* (2018), was also filmed in Salt Lake City.



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Interpreting the six seasons

The Arctic is home to around four million people across eight countries. More than 400,000 of these are Indigenous Peoples, who have lived in the Circumpolar North long before the creation of nations and borders. The Indigenous artistry in this region highlights both the challenges and complexities of living in Arctic environments, as well as the Arctic's beauty, vibrancy and spiritual significance.

Exploring life for Indigenous Peoples in North America's Arctic regions, Alaska and Canada, the *Arctic Expressions* exhibition features historic and contemporary works from the British Museum collection to show how these resilient communities live with and adapt to socio-political and environmental changes, and how artistic expression is part of daily life.

Arctic Indigenous Peoples' material culture is rooted in everyday practices and storytelling traditions, often spiritually or figuratively intertwined with the animals and plants that inhabit the region.

***Arctic Expressions* runs at the Kirkleatham Museum, Redcar from 7 June to 28 September 2025.**

Kenojuak Ashevak (1927–2013)
Nunavut Qajanartuk (Our Beautiful Land)
Hand-drawn lithograph on woven paper, 1992

One of the most acclaimed Inuit artists, Kenojuak Ashevak was from the Kinngait community, internationally recognised for its art and printmaking. The six seasons of the Inuit calendar are presented, illustrating how transportation, housing, clothing and animal relationships change with the seasons and how community life is intricately connected to climate. Printed by the West Baffin Eskimo Cooperative, the work was commissioned by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada to commemorate the 1990 signing of the Inuit Land Claim Agreement in Principle. This was a significant step in the creation of Nunavut, an independent, Inuit-run territory since 1999.



JAPAN FOR ALL SEASONS

Japan is a unique and intriguing destination, a place of rich, timeless culture and age-old tradition fused with a modernity that's fast paced and vibrant. This enchanting archipelago has so much to explore that deciding when to visit can be a tough call. Luckily, Japan is a country for all seasons, so you can simply base your decision on the time of year that suits you and your interests best.



Japan in the Spring

From March to May, spring in Japan is a time of optimism and new beginnings. As the weather starts to warm up (although there is still plenty of snow in Hokkaido), the locals like to get outside to enjoy the beauty of nature reawakening. This is the most popular time to visit Japan due to the cherry blossoms (Sakura) – celebrating the hazy pink blooms adds a buzz to the atmosphere – but there are flowers blooming everywhere that are equally as beautiful to behold, such as wisteria and moss phlox, while temples and gardens have meticulously curated collections of blooms to admire. There are also plenty of seasonal treats to enjoy, like Sakura flavoured drinks and foods, which help to get you into the spring spirit.

Japan in the Summer

The summer months, June to August, bring with them fireworks, centuries-old festivals and revelry galore, all a joy to behold. Hot and humid with a rainy season, called 'Tsuyu', from June to mid-July, it is now that the crowds of the spring disperse. Wherever you happen to be travelling you're likely to stumble across a fascinating regional festival or custom, while in August there are colourful parades for Obon, the festival to honour the dead, a time when many locals will travel home to their families to celebrate. July brings the clear skies that allow Mt Fuji to open to climbers and is the perfect time to tour traditional gardens and explore the countryside, both lush and at their very best after the rains.



Japan in the Autumn

Rivalling the spring for the greatest show of natural beauty, the autumn months – September to November – are when temperatures start to cool down but things stay warm and sunny right into November. This is a time to be outside, especially in late October when the leaves begin their gradual change into a spectacular sea of red, yellows and browns, particularly breathtaking (and handily reachable from Tokyo) in the Japanese Alps. Unlike the cherry blossom the autumn colours are slightly more predictable in terms of timings, and they last longer giving more people the opportunity to enjoy them. Also, as it's harvest season you can expect menus full of fresh produce as well as tasty treats like chestnuts, pumpkin soup and sweet persimmons.

Japan in the Winter

For those who don't mind enduring the cold for something truly magical, the winter would be a fantastic time to explore Japan. The days are usually sunny, the popular sights are quiet, and the countryside is given a dazzling winter makeover thanks to the annual snowfall. Tuck into seasonal comfort foods like hot pots, broths, and ramen before heading straight for a soak in a snow-surrounded onsen. But onsens are not just for humans. In the Japanese Alps, a troop of adorable, fluffy snow monkeys also enjoy a soak in their very own hot springs and witnessing them is an endearing experience. At Buddhist temples, the new year is traditionally rung in by a bell tolling 108 times, representing the cleansing of worldly passions.

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Eyes to the East

In *Artists of the Middle East*,

Saeb Eigner shares his intimate knowledge of the stylistic, literary and linguistic histories of the Middle East and North Africa with detailed biographies of almost 100 culturally significant artists from the region, together with concise profiles of 160 additional artists that offer further insight into those shaping this rich cultural landscape. This illuminating resource establishes a dialogue between works that engage with the prominent issues of our age and the ever-changing social, political and religious context of their creation.

Artists of the Middle East:

1900 to Now by Saeb Eigner

Thames & Hudson, Hbk, 400pp, £60



'An artificial make-believe lifestyle fascinates me. I use fake diamonds in paintings, and that's somehow related to the fact that some people want to believe that they're real diamonds. Art is about illusion. It's a manufactured idea in order to reach a certain illusion and expression via artificial methods.' Farhad Moshiri

Above: Farhad Moshiri (b. Shiraz, Iran 1963; d. Tehran, Iran, 2024)

Cherry Orchard (Bagh-e-Gilas), 2008–9
Mixed media: oil and crystals on canvas

on board

170.8 × 170.8 cm (67¼ × 67¼ in.)

Private collection, London

Right: Parviz Tanavoli (b. Tehran, 1937; lives Vancouver, Canada)

Lion and Sword II, 1974

Wool and cotton, Bijar weave

137 × 194 cm (54 × 76½ in.)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art



Opposite: Gazbia Sirry (b. Cairo, Egypt, 1925; d. Cairo, 2021)

L'Institutrice (The Teacher), 1954

Oil on canvas

89.5 × 69.5 cm (35¼ × 27 7/8 in.)

Dalloul Art Foundation, Beirut, Lebanon



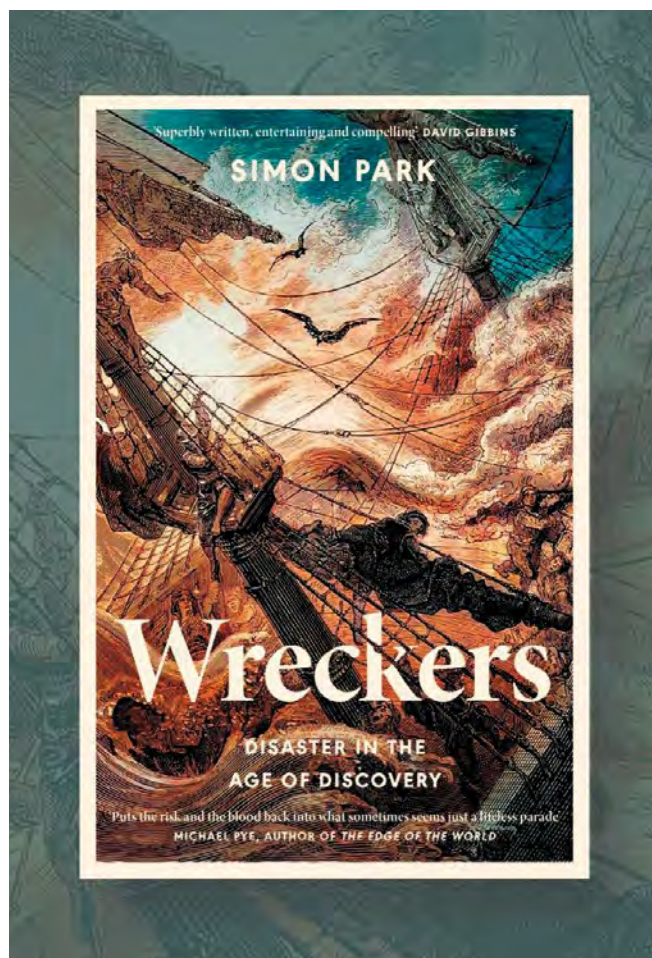
Tall tales on the high seas

At the end of the fifteenth century, men in ships set off from the ports of Europe into the unknown. Tenacious, intrepid, they crossed oceans never before traversed and found lands they had never dreamed of.

But that's far from the full story. When it comes to the first century of European transcontinental voyages by sea and the empires that were built on the back of them, we are too addicted to an action-hero version of history: triumphant beginnings with swashbuckling protagonists. Even recent books that challenge the history of empire struggle to avoid casting European captains as heroes who pushed forward the boundaries of knowledge. Yet building and maintaining an empire was not just a matter of reaching a faraway destination. It was, instead, a violent, messy, improvised process that took place over a long period of time. Disaster frequently struck early colonizers, and when it did, the foundations of empire trembled, even if the edifice did not immediately fall. Individuals, rulers and communities across the world rejected explorers, laughed at them and often set the rules of engagement in trade and territorial expansion despite European attempts to determine the world agenda with their weapons and their arrogance.

As we follow Europeans on their voyages, we learn that they did not just depart out of insatiable curiosity and the spirit of adventure. Europeans knew that West Africa, China and India abounded in goods and gold, so they set their course to these places, seeking a slice of their riches. They hoped that their risky ventures would change their countries' fortunes. But the wreckers' green eyes often led to sinking ships: they stacked them too high with merchandise or bankrupted investors by mistaking worthless rocks for treasure. They killed, abducted and enslaved.

Shipwreck was a fact of life and a persistent worry for seafarers' families, merchants and bureaucrats alike, not just



for their frequency but for the high toll of lives and financial loss involved when a ship did sink. Even when shipwrecks did not occur, many early attempts at colonization failed, with numerous places constantly embattled.

Christopher Columbus died wanting to believe that the Caribbean islands and the coast of South America that he visited were really Asia: he had hoped to reach the riches of China, India and Japan, but hadn't. In returning to such stories of failure, we gain a sense that history as we know it wasn't predestined. Designs for imperial dominion, such as they existed, were constantly redrawn in the light of opposition, catastrophe, new knowledge and persistent errors.

Stories of failure open up a space for something akin to what visual studies scholars call 'potential histories', inviting us to reimagine history, not as a series of predetermined events, but as a space of possibilities – then, now and in the future.

**Adapted from *Wreckers* by Simon Park
Viking, Hbk, 320pp, £25**

Red Clouds Golden Summit



© FABIO NODARI

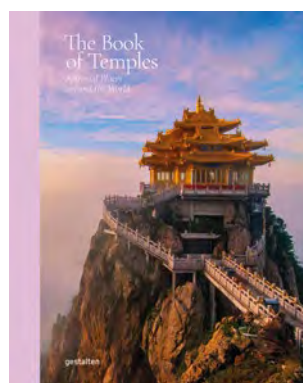
Those who float slowly up towards the summit on the cable car, gliding over the UNESCO-protected forests and rugged landscapes, can understand why Fanjigshan is considered a sacred mountain in Vajrayana Buddhism. Rising dramatically into the sky over the Wulong Mountains in the Chinese province of Guizhou, its highest peak is crowned with two small temples atop a narrow, split rock known poetically as “New Golden Summit” or “Red Clouds Golden Summit”.

The eastern temple is consecrated to Buddha Shakyamuni, the present Buddha, whose teachings on Enlightenment and Nirvana form the foundation of Buddhist philosophy. The western temple is dedicated to Buddha Maitreya, the foretold Buddha, who will appear in a future era.

According to Buddhist thought, we are currently in an age where Shakyamuni’s teachings are gradually weakening, and the world finds itself in moral and spiritual decline. This is described as the “end of the teaching” or the “Age of Degeneration”. When this decline reaches its nadir, and Shakyamuni’s teachings are forgotten, Maitreya, a *bodhisattva*, or enlightened being, will appear to renew the dharma – the teachings of Buddhism – in a way that aligns with the world as it will then exist.

At Fanjigshan, Shakyamuni and Maitreya are depicted together, as in many Buddhist temples, to represent the

coming transition. Crossing the narrow stone bridge between the two temples, one can symbolically enact this passing of the ages.



***The Book of Temples*,
edited by Robert Klanten
and François-Luc Giraldeau
Text by Marianne
Julia Strauss
gestalten, HBK, 288pp, £45**



Do the right thing



In January 2023

The New York Times highlighted a notorious incident of 'aggressive tourism' in

Kenya's Maasai

Mara National Reserve. When two male cheetahs chased and killed a wildebeest calf, they were instantly surrounded by dozens of safari vehicles vying for position for the best camera shot, with woeful disregard for the safety and wellbeing of the endangered animals. This prompted Jonathan and Angela Scott, through their Sacred

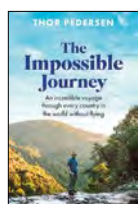
Nature Initiative, to partner with Naroq County Government to set out a *Safari Etiquette* – a protocol to ensure that guides and visitors alike understand how to minimise the impact of their presence on wildlife.

Now Jonathan and Angela have released an indispensable ebook to help every safari-goer experience the magic of the wild with greater responsibility. From choosing the right camp to approaching big cat sightings ethically, *Safari Etiquette* is a vital companion for a meaningful, memorable and respectful safari experience.

Filled with practical tips from planning your trip to understanding animal behaviours, and do's and don'ts on the ground, it sets out to encourage best practice to safeguard the welfare of all animals, protected areas and local communities, while developing and maintaining a mutually beneficial culture of sustainable tourism.

Safari Etiquette: An Essential Guide
by the Sacred Nature Initiative and
Jonathan and Angela Scott
The Big Cat People, ebook, £12.99
Order now from
jonathanangelascott.com/shop/

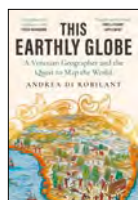
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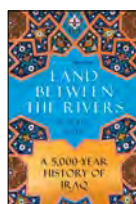
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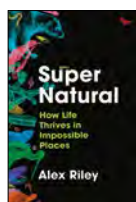
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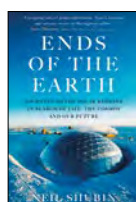
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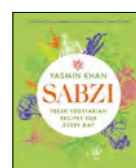
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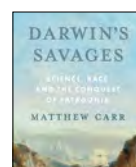
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DARWIN'S SAVAGES

by Matthew Carr
Hurst, HbK, 312pp, £25

In a sweeping account of explorers, soldiers, missionaries, anthropologists and skull-collecting scientists, Carr re-examines the troubling conquest of Argentina's First Peoples in remote Patagonia.

The Kimberley

Why this wilderness region should be on your bucket list

Tucked away in Australia's North West, the Kimberley is a land of staggering beauty, ancient landscapes, and boundless adventure. This vast region is home to some of the most unique natural wonders on Earth, offering travellers the chance to explore rugged gorges, freshwater lakes, and Aboriginal cultural sites. Whether by road, air, or ship, the Kimberley is a place where the journey is as extraordinary as the destination.

A World of Wonders

Cruise close to Horizontal Falls / Garaan-ngaddim, where the ocean rushes through twin narrow gorges, driven by some of the largest tidal movements in the world. This natural phenomenon is just one of the many highlights of an expedition cruise through the Kimberley. Further along the coast, witness the awe-inspiring Montgomery Reef. As the tide recedes, the reef rises from the ocean, revealing a kaleidoscope of cascading waterfalls, vibrant marine life, and swirling currents. Turtles, rays, and birds flock to the exposed reef, offering a spectacular display of nature's wonders. Discover ancient Indigenous rock art. Hike through gorges carved by time or simply sit back and soak in the vastness of the landscape.

In the eastern Kimberley, the Bungle Bungle Range emerges from the landscape, its striped sandstone domes shaped over 350 million years. This World Heritage-listed formation within Purnululu National Park is a sacred place for Traditional Owners and an awe-inspiring sight for those who witness it. For a truly unforgettable perspective, a scenic flight over offers an unmatched view of the vast scale and intricate patterns of the Bungles.



Just south of Kununurra, Lake Argyle spreads across the land like an inland sea. Created by the Ord River Dam, it is a wildlife sanctuary, home to freshwater crocodiles, rock wallabies, and over 240 species of birds. Sunset cruises reveal a tranquil expanse bathed in golden hues, while adventurers can take a refreshing dip in its infinity pool seemingly floating above the water.

Aboriginal Culture and Connection to Country

Home to the world's oldest living culture, the Kimberley is one of the best places in Australia to experience authentic Aboriginal culture. Guided tours offer the opportunity to hear Dreamtime stories, see ancient rock art hidden in caves, and learn traditional ways of living off the land. From mud crabbing in tidal flats in Broome / Rubibi and spear fishing in mangroves on Cape Leveque to storytelling on El Questro Station, these experiences provide rare insight into a way of life that has thrived for tens of thousands of years.

Slip into 'Broome time'

Where the red sands of the outback meet the turquoise waters of the Indian Ocean, Broome offers a captivating



blend of natural beauty and cultural heritage. Explore the town's rich pearly history, visit Gantheaume Point / Minyirr to see ancient dinosaur footprints embedded in the reef rock, see a 'Staircase to the Moon' when the full moon rises over the mangroves of Roebuck Bay / Yawuru Nagulagun or enjoy a sunset camel ride along the stunning 22-metre-long Cable Beach / Walmanyjun.

Epic Road Trips and Aerial Adventures

The legendary Gibb River Road stretches 660 kilometres from Kununurra / Goonoonoorang to Derby, cutting through some of the most rugged and adventurous country on the planet. A true four-wheel-drive experience, the route takes travellers past towering gorges, hidden waterholes, and ancient boab trees and rock art. Each stop – whether El Questro, Manning Gorge, or Bell Gorge / Dalmanyi – reveals another slice of the Kimberley's untamed beauty. There are options to drive yourself or join a small group tour so you can focus on the magnificent scenery.

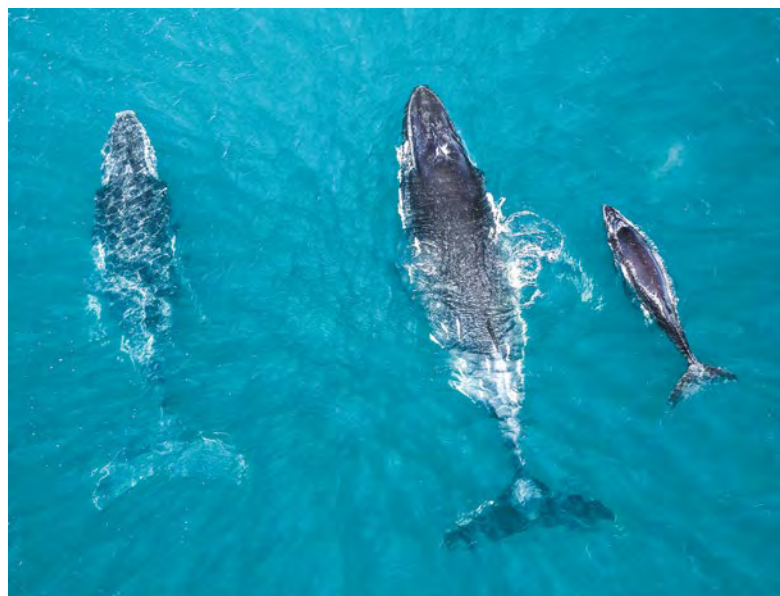
For a different perspective, take to the sky to access thundering waterfalls, heli-hike on vast cattle stations or access secluded coastal retreats. A scenic flight over the Bungle Bungles or Mitchell Falls / Punamii-unpuu is a breathtaking

way to grasp the sheer scale of the land. In the Kimberley, adventure comes in many forms, but one thing is certain – this ancient region leaves a lasting imprint on all who journey through it. The landscapes are otherworldly, the spirit of the land is palpable, and every moment is infused with wonder.

When to go

The Kimberley experiences two distinct seasons – wet and dry. The wet season, which runs from November to March, transforms the land with heavy rains, filling mighty rivers and thundering waterfalls. The dry season from April to October is the best time to explore this magnificent region, with warm days, cool nights, and clear skies. These are the perfect conditions for discovering the Kimberley's hidden swimming holes, hiking through spectacular gorges, and heading out on thrilling four-wheel-drive adventures to explore both outback and coast.

WESTERN AUSTRALIA WALKING ON A DREAM



The Kimberley Coast & Outback: A Ponant & Ghan Expedition

Combine the best of land and sea exploration as you embark on an extraordinary cruise along the Kimberley coast before exploring the iconic Outback aboard the legendary Ghan Expedition train.

Prices from £11,685 pp incl. flights, 4 nights accommodation, 10-night Ponant cruise, 3 nights Ghan Expedition rail journey, selected meals & touring. For more information, visit wexas.com/184489.

Homes from home

Sam Dalrymple is blown away by ancient relics amid urban sprawl

DELHI, INDIA

I have lived in Delhi for twenty-two years now, and when I first moved at the age of six, it was a very different city. Back then, we'd drive through neem, khor and jamun forests to get to the city centre, forests now lost beneath expressways and malls. In two decades, Delhi has swelled into the world's second largest city after Greater Tokyo, and as a result it often gets a bad reputation among travellers as a grotty, chaotic sprawl. Yet it's also one of the most astonishing cities on Earth; a city of endless layers like Rome, Cairo or Istanbul, with each neighbourhood concealing the ruins of forgotten empires. For centuries, caravans crossed the deserts of Rajasthan and the scrublands of the Doab just for a glimpse of this glittering imperial capital, and in the early twentieth century, it was transformed into the second capital of the British Empire. It's a frustrating and intense city in many ways, but one that also teaches you to be calm amidst chaos, and one that sparks endless fascination about the past.

AVEBURY, UK

At thirteen, I moved from India to a boarding school in Wiltshire and learnt, with a shock, that I didn't really know or understand Britain. It felt cold in every sense – socially, emotionally and literally. But I soon found respite at Avebury: a nearby Neolithic stone circle that looped through fields, hedgerows, and even a pub garden. Unlike its famous and far smaller cousin at Stonehenge, at Avebury you can walk among the stones, feel the lichen, and if you're lucky watch as badgers dart into burrows. Here I first became obsessed with the sacred barrows, chalk paths and burial mounds of ancient Britain, and with Britain itself.

BAMIYAN, AFGHANISTAN

Afghanistan is not the most obvious destination for a family half-term holiday. And yet, in October 2014, we made our way to Bamiyan – a high-altitude valley suspended between the Koh-i-Baba and Hindu Kush mountain ranges. Bamiyan means "Place of Shining Light", and the valley is dotted with mulberry orchards and wildflower



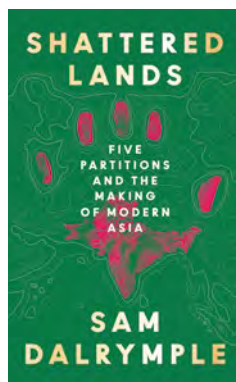
pastures, while Hazara shepherds tend their flocks along ancient rivulets. Bamiyan was once a thriving Buddhist centre, with more caves than Ajanta or Dunhuang, and its two colossal Buddha statues were the tallest standing Buddhas in the world until they were destroyed by the Taliban in 2001. By the end of the trip, I was hooked. Having never been much of a linguist (I wanted to study quantum physics), I enrolled in Persian classes online, and ended up studying the subject at university. Some years later I even made my way back to intern with Turquoise Mountain, Rory Stewart's extraordinary charity dedicated to reviving Afghan heritage. It was the biggest pivot in my life, and I haven't looked back since.

LAHORE, PAKISTAN

In 2017, I moved to Lahore for a month to work on architectural conservation with the Aga Khan Trust for Culture. The city's poetry and historic charm quickly made it my favourite city in the subcontinent. More importantly, Lahore felt surprisingly close to home – its architecture, food, music and layout mirrored Delhi's, despite lying on the opposite side of the world's most militarised border. Like Delhi, Lahore is ancient and was once a cosmopolitan capital of the Ghaznavid, Mughal, and Sikh empires, home to Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Jains and Christians until the upheaval of Partition in 1947. The conversations I had there about Partition transformed my life, leading me to record survivors' memories that have ultimately formed the bedrock of my new book.

MEXICO CITY, MEXICO

The most recent addition to my list, I visited Mexico City this April and it blew me away. Teotihuacan, the vast pyramid city built around the time Jesus was crucified, is arguably the greatest architectural ensemble in the Americas, and there is no better challenge to our Eurasia-centric ideas of classical civilisation. Mexico City's centre, with its beautiful squares, colonial avenues and striking brutalist buildings, is equally impressive. Few places have surprised me as much.



Sam Dalrymple is a historian, author and filmmaker based in Delhi and London. *Shattered Lands*, his chronicle of the break-up of the colonial Indian Empire, is published by William Collins.

8 UNMISSABLE EXPERIENCES IN THE YUKON

Vast, untamed, and breathtakingly beautiful, the Yukon is a land of dramatic contrasts. Occupying Canada's northwestern corner, it's a province of towering peaks, immense glaciers, sprawling boreal forests and shimmering, jewel-toned lakes where adventure awaits at every turn. These are its essential travel experiences.



1. Go flightseeing over Kluane National Park

Soaring above Kluane National Park on a flightseeing adventure is a unique thrill, offering a bird's eye view of snow-capped mountains, glistening icefields, forested valleys and pristine lakes.

2. See the Northern Lights

With a season that runs from August to April, the Yukon is one of the world's best places to spot the Northern Lights. Settle in for a near-private front-row seat to what is nature's ultimate light show.

3. Mush a team of huskies

Venture into the Yukon's vast wilderness with a team of energetic huskies. Carving a path through enchanting frozen landscapes, it's an unforgettable way to connect with the region's natural splendour.

4. Road trip the Klondike and Dempster Highways

These highways are the stuff of road-trip legend. Explore postcard-perfect scenery and cultural landmarks with a thrilling self-drive before embarking on outdoor adventures under the Midnight Sun.

5. Explore the rich history of Dawson City

Visit Dawson City's Dänojà Zho Cultural Centre, or take a tour of the Hammerstone Gallery, to understand the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation people's unique perspective of the Klondike Gold Rush era.

6. Discover Whitehorse

Home to a flourishing art scene, superb museums, scenic boat trips and a network of excellent walking trails, Whitehorse – the Yukon's capital city – is much more than just a base for wilderness adventures.

7. Travel on the White Pass and Yukon Route railway

An exhilarating journey on this historic railroad is a must on any Yukon holiday. Climbing almost 3,000ft, expect cliff-hanging turns and steep mountain passes that twist and turn among the bridges and tunnels.

8. Visit Tombstone Territorial Park

Just south of the Arctic Circle, this region of mountains, permafrost landforms and boreal forests is a wonderful place to hike and camp, and gain an insight into the Yukon's First Nations heritage.

BEST SERVED SCANDINAVIA



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ARCTIC EXPLORATIONS WITH HX

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