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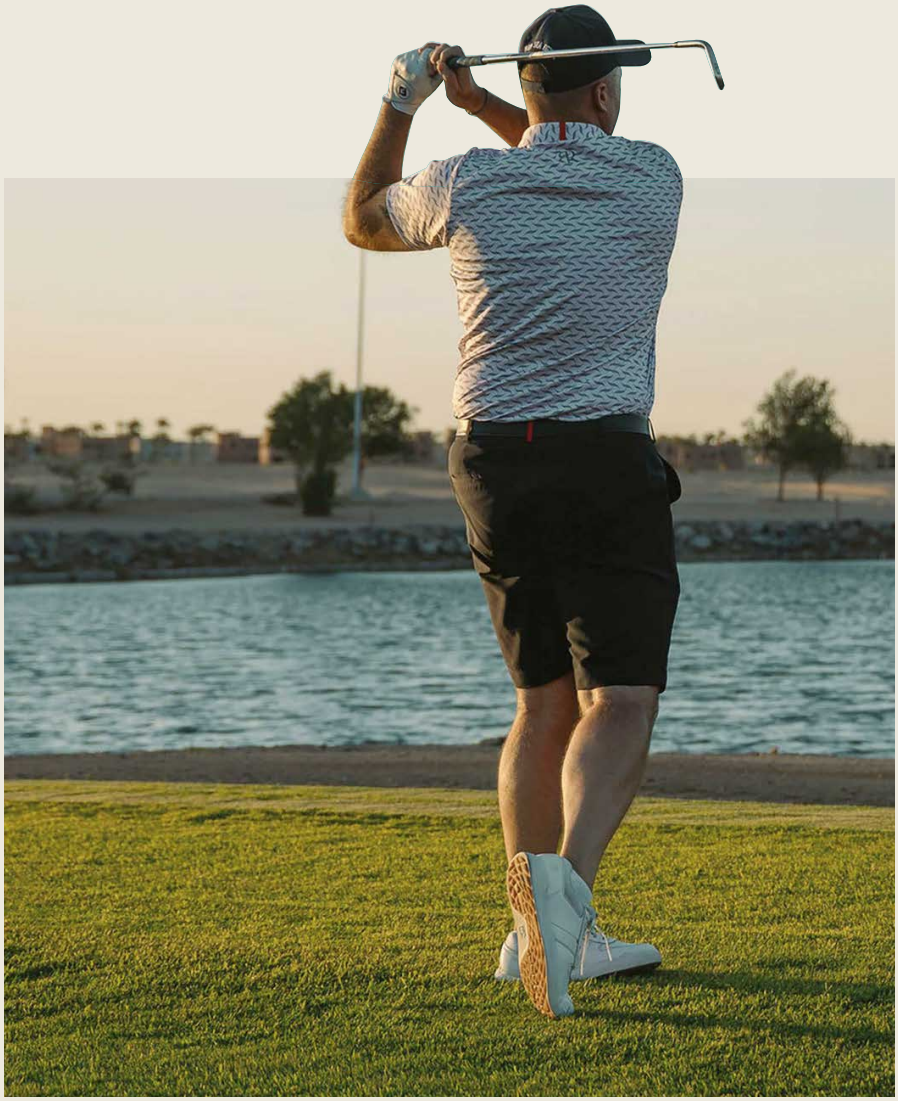
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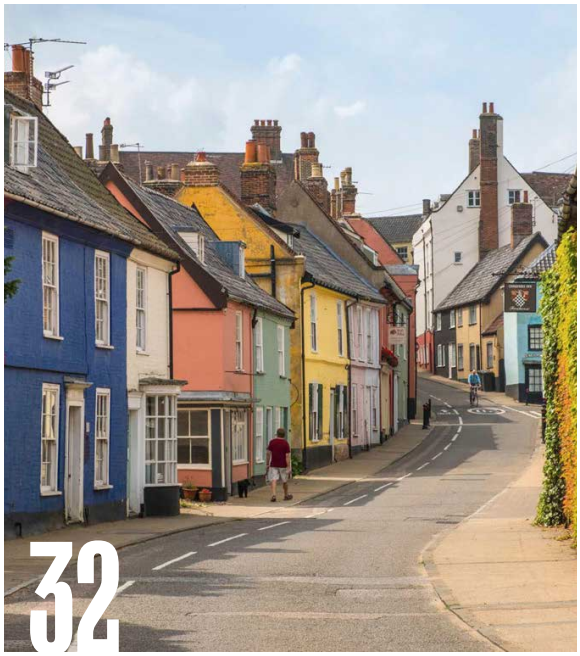
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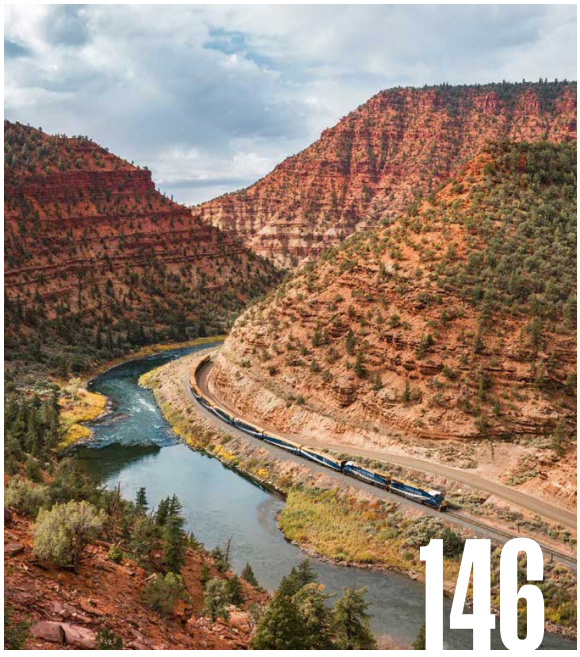


EGYPT
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On the cover.



A camel train passes the pyramids of Giza, Cairo Image: AWL Images



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Contributors

Take a peek behind the scenes of our latest issue with the writers and photographers who made it happen



SARAH GILLESPIE
"My mother is from the central Philippines, and my trip to Negros Island taught me so much more about the region. I had no idea, for instance, that we made such great coffee. Here, Sugar Valley Coffee Farm's owner Teddy Cañete (of the Bukidnon people) is telling me about how he and other Indigenous farmers work together, rather than competing, to negotiate a fair price for all." **PHILIPPINES P.70**



MARCEL THEROUX
"The Tower of the Juche Idea, built to celebrate North Korea's unique version of Marxism, gives an extraordinary view of the capital Pyongyang. With only 15 minutes to get images from the top, Karim Shah, the director joining me for the making of our documentary, chucked me his spare camera. I just tried to keep a steady hand." **NORTH KOREA P.40**



SARAH GIBBONS
"*Quiosque* culture is a defining part of life in Lisbon. These covered stalls are where locals linger over coffee and meet friends for a catch up. Here, I'm taking in the view from Simo's Quiosque at Miradouro de Monte Agudo, *pingado* (espresso with a splash of milk) in hand. Beyond, the city is just beginning to wake up, bathed in the morning sun." **LISBON P.37**



Claire Thomas
"To travel across Egypt is to journey through thousands of years of history. From the pyramids at Giza to the royal tombs of the Valley of the Kings, we encountered the legacy of the civilisation that shaped the country at every step. One truly unforgettable moment, however, came far from the ancient monuments, during a hike to the peak of Mount Sinai. Watching the sun set from the summit was a moment of near-spiritual stillness." **Egypt p.50**



Zoey Goto
"I think I'm about eight or nine hot dogs into my New York hot-dog eating challenge at this point, and things are about to take a turn for the bougie. Myself and photographer Irjaliina are at The Modern restaurant inside MoMA, cheersing with a couple of tiny dogs topped with caviar. Yes, caviar. On a hot dog. It's a whole thing!" **New York City p.130**



Phoebe Harper
"The River Waveney forms the boundary between the East Anglian counties of Norfolk and Suffolk. Its magic was first revealed to me through the writing of Roger Deakin, which framed it as a haven for wildlife and wild swimmers. But for this assignment, I set out in search of the local folklore that fills the surrounding valley — from the wellspring of the legendary Black Shuck to the tales of supernatural phenomena that haunt the reedbeds." **Waveney Valley p.32**

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Our favourite waterways

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Welcome



I blame all my wanderlust on my eldest brother. When I was a kid, he'd bring me back mementos from his many travels. One year it was a pair of Lilliputian-size clogs from Amsterdam, the next it was Guatemalan worry dolls in a tiny bag. But best of all was the papyrus bookmark that sparked a fascination with Egypt, each cartouche and pharaoh's head an enigmatic mystery to unravel.

It doesn't matter how old you are, there's something about this country that fires the imagination. Agatha Christie knew it. So did Florence Nightingale, and Howard Carter and all the other archaeologists who've come to the land of the pharaohs over the centuries. Yet Egypt is far more than the sum of its relics. Which is why in this issue's cover story we're focusing not just on its headline acts but also the local life around them.

We take a slow boat down the Nile to meet the fishermen and village bakers who live on its shores; cycle Luxor's West Bank with a guide who grew up alongside the Colossi of Memnon; and ride into the desert to see how creativity can strike in the most unlikely places. These are just some of the experiences explored in this issue, to help you plan the ultimate trip to Egypt.

I finally made it to Egypt last year — not to see the pyramids and temples, but to hike with the Sinai Bedouin; a profoundly moving experience. I'm already planning to go back, this time to Cairo to visit the new Grand Egyptian Museum and learn a bit more about the world first presented to me on a papyrus bookmark. And I won't be alone: I'll be taking my big brother.

Lorna

Lorna Parkes, executive editor

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Win a stay in Scotland

Enter this month's competition for a chance to spend the weekend at JA Mar Hall, a five-star country estate on the banks of the River Clyde, with the winner and their guest travelling aboard the famed Caledonian Sleeper overnight train. **P. 34**



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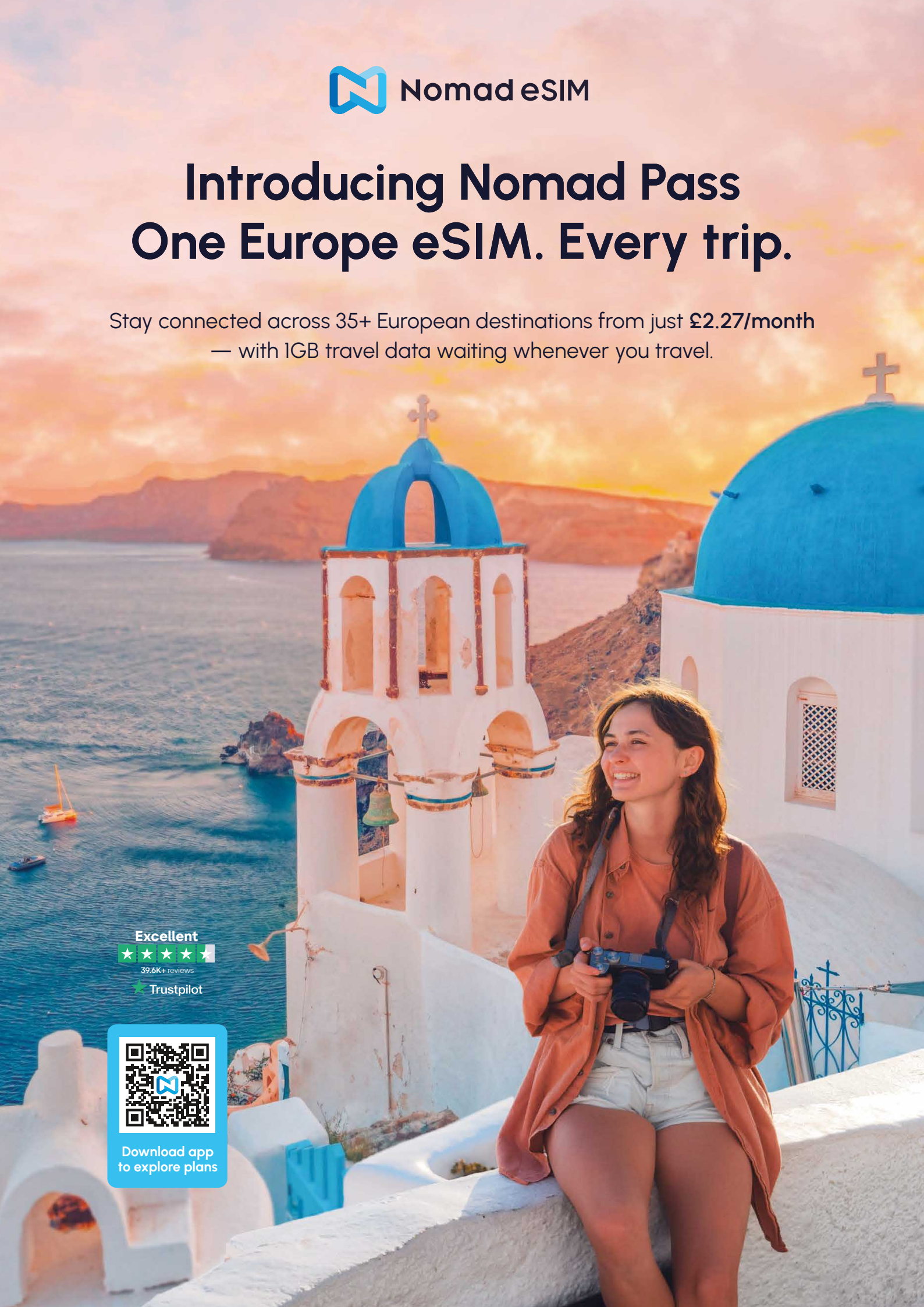
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IMAGE: SOREN SOLKAER

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DO IT NOW

Rome out of season

Visit Italy's timeless capital in autumn to see it transformed into a stage for fleeting spectacles and contemporary festivals

Rome's architecture is iconic, but visit in October and you might find yourself looking up at the sky as much as at the millennia-old ruins and grand cupolas. In the evenings, above landmarks such as St Peter's Basilica (pictured), starlings gather by the hundreds of thousands, painting dark swirls against the setting sun. The birds arrive from northern Europe and remain up until February, making the Eternal City one of the best spots on the mainland to see their murmurations.

It's one of many reasons to visit Italy's capital during shoulder season. Running from 8 September to 15 November, Romaeuropa Festival — the city's flagship contemporary arts event — hosts some 240 performances, spanning concerts, theatre productions and more, across 20 venues in the city. Meanwhile, the *ottobrata* is a month-long celebration of the end of the harvest. In ancient times, Romans would mark the occasion with indulgent day trips to the countryside; today, the tradition is kept alive with festivals that take over entire *rioni* (neighbourhoods). Market stalls, artisanal workshops and live music run well into the evening — when the avian spectacle takes over the skies once again.

romaeuropa.net turismoroma.it

ANGELA LOCATELLI



Poetry in motion

Thousands of culture-lovers will come together for Africa's Lake of Stars Festival from 2 to 4 October. Promoting Malawian culture, it offers a stage for music, theatre, dance and poetry, all on the sandy shores of Lake Malawi, one of the world's deepest lakes. October is an ideal time to visit, with calm, clear waters for activities such as kayaking. lakeofstars.org

DON'T MISS THIS

Many of the fish species in Lake Malawi are endemic, having developed in isolation; a snorkelling tour is the best way to experience them.



new flights

Eyes on the skies

The longest ever commercial flight will launch next year between London and Sydney. New flights to Melbourne are also on the cards, as well as a host of other routes

If you want to know what 22 hours in the air feels like, you can get on Qantas's new direct London to Sydney flight next autumn. The A350 test run landed in Toulouse from Melbourne over the summer, after 24 hours and 24 minutes in the sky — a feat made possible by an additional 20,000-litre fuel tank. When it launches in October 2027, it'll be the longest ever commercial route. And that's not the only news putting Australia in the spotlight — British Airways will launch a new Heathrow to Melbourne route in January, via Kuala Lumpur. It's just in time for the 150th Anniversary Test at Melbourne Cricket Ground from 11 to 15 March and the Men's Rugby World Cup, kicking off in Australia on 1 October. qantas.com britishairways.com

FIVE NEW ROUTES FOR AUTUMN/WINTER

LONDON/ MANCHESTER TO KUUSAMO, FINLAND
A new corner of Finnish Lapland is opening up, with the first flights to Kuusamo. They'll launch with Air Baltic in December, peak Northern Lights season.

MANCHESTER TO CAIRO, EGYPT
This new EasyJet route to Cairo's Sphinx International — near the Pyramids of Giza — finally makes the Egyptian capital accessible from the north by direct flight, from November to March.

LONDON TO COLOMBO, SRI LANKA
British Airways is launching direct flights to Sri Lanka in October, adding more capacity to a route that was previously only served by Sri Lankan Airlines from London.

LONDON TO PRISTINA, KOSOVO
EasyJet will relaunch flights to Kosovo in December after a hiatus of many years. The route to the capital Pristina will put travellers in easy reach of historic towns and mountains.

EDINBURGH TO STRASBOURG, FRANCE
Launching late November, this new winter flight from Jet2 will run to the half-timbered French city for Christmas market season. Manchester and Stansted will also offer the route.



IMAGES: AWL IMAGES; GETTY

Nostalgia travel for original adventurers

Gap-year circuits are returning for backpackers who've grown up. To celebrate its 40th anniversary, tour operator Scott Dunn has launched a series of 'Full Circle' itineraries aimed at the budget explorers of the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s, with a focus on meaningful travel at a more considered pace. The new Vietnam, Thailand & Laos tour includes Michelin-starred dining in Ho Chi Minh City and a private history tour of Bangkok's Khao San Road, in place of banana pancakes and full-moon parties. scottdunn.com







interview

Simon Reeves on going wild

The TV presenter is returning to screens for a second series of *Wilderness*, exploring some of the world's most remote, beautiful places

What's the inspiration behind this series?
There's still life out there we know so little about that's fascinating and furry and glorious to behold. It needs us to understand it, protect it and fight for it. Two places we spotlight in this series that aren't quite on the conservation map are Mongolia's Margaz Mountains and Papua New Guinea's Torricelli Mountains.

Which destination was most challenging?
They were all very powerful journeys and really pushed us to the limit. The tenkile tree kangaroo in the mountain rainforest of Papua New Guinea has never been filmed in the wild, which really drove us forward. It's an area of staggering biodiversity, but trying to climb mountains of vegetation day after day was truly knackering.

Are you always optimistic when you set out?
You never know if you're going to achieve what you set out to do. I didn't think we had a chance of seeing a snow leopard in the Margaz Mountains. Some scientists study them their entire careers and never see them in the wild. You can never quite believe it until the moment you see it.

Which wildlife encounter surprised you most?
Dropping down into the deep blue in Mexico's Sea of Cortez with no reference points around, then seeing the ethereal movement of hammerhead sharks in the water was dreamlike. It's as close as I think I'll ever get to feeling like I'm visiting another planet.

What makes you hopeful after this series?
It showed me the brilliance and passion of local people who are protecting Earth's critical wildlife. I've got faith in other human beings.
INTERVIEW: EMMA AL-MOUSAWI

Wilderness with Simon Reeve airs from 20 September on BBC Two and BBC iPlayer.

Stargazing festivals to light up northern England's Dark Sky Reserves



Thanks to August's solar eclipse, more people than ever will be looking skywards this autumn. There's ample opportunity to do so, too, as a host of astronomy festivals return to northern England's International Dark Sky Reserves. The Yorkshire Dales and North York Moors Dark Skies Fringe Festival will run from 23 October to 1 November. It will include workshops at the new observatory at Danby Lodge, giving visitors the chance to identify galaxies, nebulae and star clusters using professional astronomy equipment. The event coincides with the 10th anniversary of the nearby North Pennines Stargazing Festival (16 October to 1 November). Here, curious visitors will roam the park's darkened hills for guided walks and stargazing suppers. Meanwhile, the Cumbria Dark Skies Festival (23 October to 20 November) is set to include starlit swims at Ullswater in the Lake District. darkskiesnationalparks.org.uk



The freedom of the open road, family style

Demand for family road trips is skyrocketing, revealing a desire for more flexible travel and a dose of soft adventure

Is the era of the family package holiday on the wane? While water slides and beach days hold timeless appeal for kids, research from Sixt this summer found UK online searches for 'family road trips' has rocketed 342% over the past 12 months. As areas of Europe have experienced repeated heatwaves this year, it makes sense families might be looking for alternatives to fly-and-flop holidays. Multi-stop car trips bring flexibility, freedom and adventure, whether that involves sleeping off-grid in a campervan, cruising through national parks or hopping between fairytale towns. And what's outside the windows during the journey can often leave the biggest impression.



ROAD TRIP IDEAS FOR OCTOBER HALF TERM

ROMANTIC ROAD, GERMANY

Neuschwanstein Castle — said to have inspired Disneyland's Sleeping Beauty castle — is one of the highlights of this storybook driving route. In autumn, the forest trails and vineyards will be awash with fiery foliage.

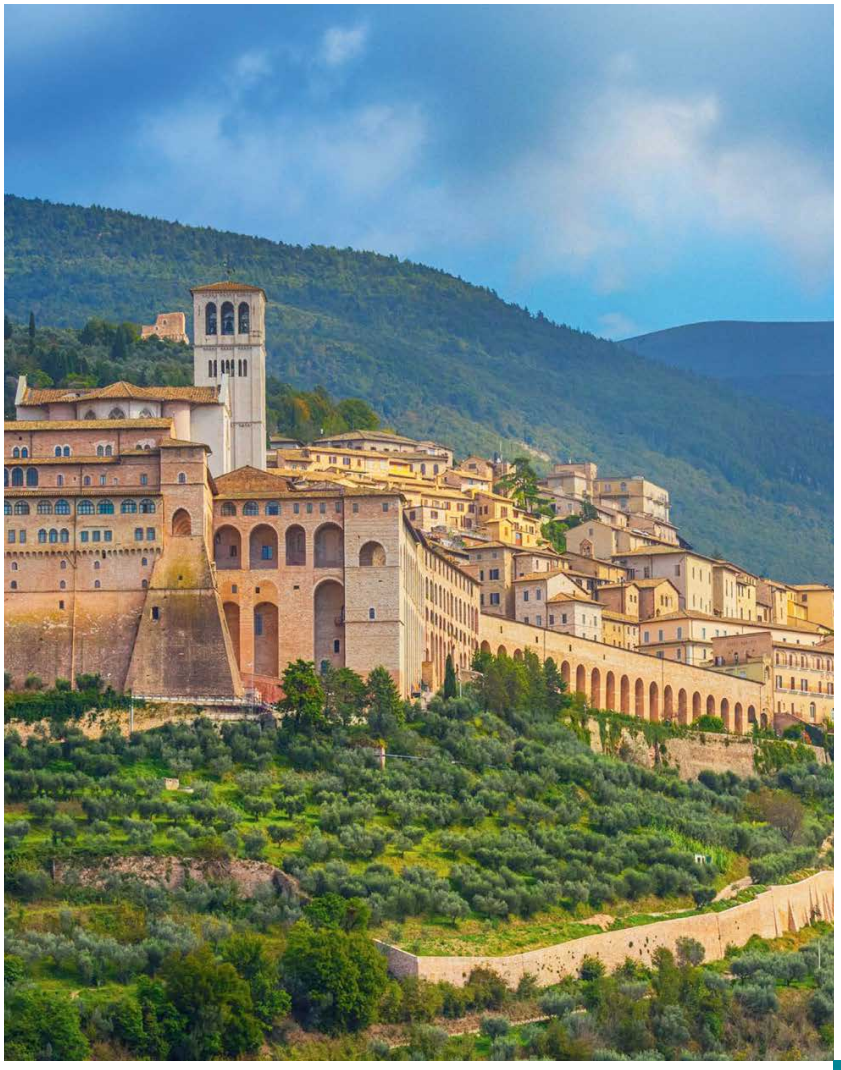
NAMIBIA

Red sand dunes and bone-dry national parks are the backdrop for a self-drive holiday through Namibia. A 4WD vehicle is the way to do it, with pop-up bed tents. Spot the Big Five on safari in Etosha National Park, climb giant sand dunes in Sossusvlei and spot shipwrecks on the Skeleton Coast.

UTAH, US

Slot canyoneering, dinosaur fossil digs, junior ranger programmes — Utah has a lot going on for kids. The Scenic Byway 12 is a good family option. Covering 122 miles, this 'All-American Road' passes hoodoos and waterfalls, traverses Bryce Canyon and Capitol Reef national parks, and can include overnight stays in pioneer wagons.

IMAGES: GETTY; BBC/THE GARDEN/ROCIO LIRA SALAS; TONY MARSH



A pilgrimage to honour a saint

Walking boots at the ready: Italy has just unveiled its biggest hiking network in years. The Way of Francis honours the country's patron saint Francis of Assisi, who founded the Franciscan order of monks. Launched to coincide with the 800th anniversary of his death, the pilgrimage routes span 960 miles and six regions across the forested hills of central Italy, taking in sites associated with his life and legacy. Autumn is an ideal time to go, with cooler temperatures and an increase in pilgrims bringing comaraderie on the trails.

Itinerary options include a route from Florence via the monastery of La Verna in the Tuscan Apennines, where Francis is believed to have received his stigmata (wounds symbolising the crucifixtion of Christ, linked to religious fervour). Or you can walk from Rome past the medieval village of Greccio, site of the first live nativity scene. All paths eventually lead to the hilltop town of Assisi, a Unesco World Heritage site, where Francis was born and remains buried.

Much like the Camino de Santiago, The Way of Francis offers pilgrim passports, which hikers can have stamped along the way; those who complete the final 62 miles to St Francis's tomb on foot will receive a *certificato*. italia.it

BLACK IDENTITY IN THE SPOTLIGHT

A new exhibition at the October Gallery in Bloomsbury, London explores Black identity through photography. Running until 3 October, the show brings together South African photographer Zana Masombuka, whose works celebrate her Ndebele heritage, and Manchester-born artist Benji Reid, known for dream-like self-portraits. It coincides with the start of the UK's Black History Month, which runs throughout October. As part of the programme, ex-US president Barack Obama will visit Belfast, Glasgow and Manchester for a series of live talks on leadership and democracy. octobergallery.co.uk blackhistorymonth.org.uk



IMAGES: GETTY; ZANA MASOMBUKA/THE ARTIST AND OCTOBER GALLERY, LONDON

europe

Wine experiences

With grape harvests in England, Italy and beyond getting underway, it's the perfect time to sample the produce of Europe's myriad, and often unexpected, winegrowing regions

1 ESTONIA
Join new tour operator Wine Safari Estonia for a day trip taking in some of the country's northernmost vineyards. Highlights include Habaja Distillery, which is famed for its punchy berry wines. winesafariestonia.ee

2 SUFFOLK
English oenophiles can follow this East Anglian county's new wine trail, which links eight independent producers. Be sure to stop for small plates and sparkling white at Burnt House Vineyard. visitsuffolk.com

3 ITALY
From 11 October, visitors to Milan will be able to hop aboard FS Treni Turistici's new 'Truffle and Wine' train. The destination is Alba, a medieval town in the Unesco-listed Vineyard Landscape of Piedmont. fstrenituristici.it

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BEST OF THE WORLD NEW HOTELS

National Geographic's top stays

Editors and contributors have scoured the planet for the Best of the World New Hotels 2026 list — here are five highlights, from Europe to the Caribbean





Affordable Caribbean

Jakes Hotel

Treasure Beach, Jamaica

Jakes has long been both a design icon and community tourism pioneer — but now it's also emerged as a testament to local resilience after rebuilding twice in two years following back-to-back hurricanes. Set on the seafront in the remote area of Treasure Beach, its cottages have been resurrected with whimsical details and there's also a redesigned pool. jakeshotel.com

Living culture

The Hanok Heritage Hotel

Yeongwol-gun, South Korea

It took over a decade to build this hotel, a reimagining of a *hanok* (traditional Korean house). Located in a forest, it offers a host of experiences, from architecture tours to tea ceremonies. thehanokheritage.com

Historic flair

Casa Bonavita

Attard, Malta

The 1715 former home of Venetian nobles is leading a wave of palazzi restoration in Malta's rural interior. Opened in May 2026, Casa Bonavita has 17 elegant rooms and a Mediterranean restaurant overseen by Dex Oseman, formerly of London's River Cafe. casabonavita.com



Don't miss

For a full list and reviews of this year's Best of the World New Hotels, visit natgeo.com/bestoftheworld





IMAGES: WOO-KYEONG LEE; BRIE WILLIAMS; ONE&ONLY MOONLIGHT BASIN; JOHN ATHIMARITIS/CHÂTEAU LA COMMARAINE; BOZ GAGOVSKI

Wilderness retreat

One&Only Moonlight Basin

Montana, US

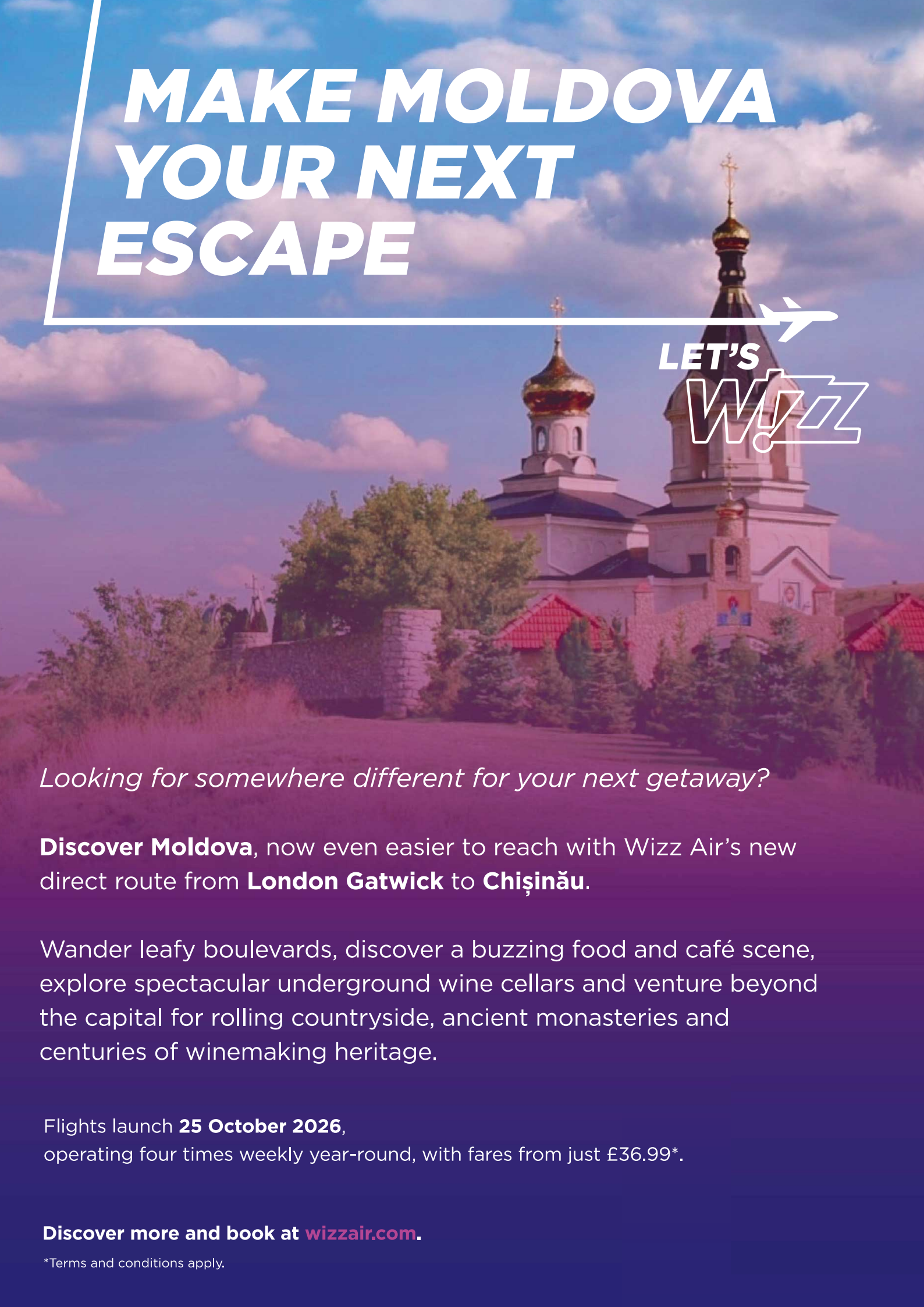
Moose amble past cabin decks and Montana's 3,403-metre Lone Peak looms over this 240-acre alpine retreat bordered by the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. The focus is on the protected wilderness, much of it a migration corridor for elk, bears and bobcats. oneandonlyresorts.com

Premier vintage

Château la Commaraine

Burgundy, France

After a five-year restoration, this 12th-century property has unveiled an exquisitely designed space celebrating Burgundian culture and tradition. Many of the 37 rooms and suites overlook the working vineyard, recognised as a prized premier cru monopole. chateaulacommaraine.com



Looking for somewhere different for your next getaway?

Discover Moldova, now even easier to reach with Wizz Air's new direct route from **London Gatwick** to **Chișinău**.

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operating four times weekly year-round, with fares from just £36.99*.

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*Terms and conditions apply.



The Greek olive harvest runs from October to March

IMAGE: GETTY

IN SEASON

Harvest experiences

Autumn's on the horizon, and these hands-on events — ranging from pumpkin-themed games to oyster gathering — are ripe for the picking

GREECE FARM IN STYLE

The goddess Athena won Athens' patronage by gifting the people of Greece the olive tree — or so the ancient myth goes. The country's olive oil is indeed divine, and the Peloponnese peninsula's microclimate makes for the pepperiest variety. Luxury farmstay Eumelia hosts two five-day Olive Harvest Retreats in late October and early November — experiences include cooking classes and an olive oil massage. eumelia.com

UK PICK YOUR OWN

Whether used in soup or carved to make jack-o'-lanterns, pumpkins are a spooky season staple. Find them at Surrey's Garsons Farm, one of the UK's largest pick-your-own patches. Its Pumpkin Parade runs throughout October and features themed displays, carnival-style games and tens of thousands of homegrown gourds. garsons.co.uk

SWEDEN PLAN A ROAD TRIP

Southern Skåne County is known as 'Sweden's Normandy', and come October its apple trees hang heavy with fruit. Rent a car to discover the local orchards. Highlights include family-run Glorias Äppelgård in the south west, where visitors can pick their own apples. Fifty miles east is Forse Cidergård, which features a craft cider bar set in a converted barn. gloriasappelgard.se forse.se

DENMARK GO ON SAFARI

Wading into low tides off the island of Rømø is a quintessential Danish harvest experience. Oysters are believed to have been on the country's menu since the Stone Age, and between October and April, the frigid waters of the Wadden Sea intensify the mollusc's flavour. Join a guided 'oyster safari' of the sandflats to collect a bucketful of your own, then enjoy them raw or cooked in a stone oven at a nearby hut. tonnisgaard.dk

FRANCE RAISE A TOAST

Situated in the Bordeaux wine region, the medieval town of Saint-Émilion is the spiritual home of Merlot. The annual two-day Fête des Vendanges grape harvest festival is held this year on 10 and 11 October. Come for wine-tasting sessions and tours of some of the 800-odd local vineyards through Unesco-listed countryside. saint-emilion-tourisme.com

RUTALEE BUCH

INSIDE GUIDE

Pintxos in San Sebastián

Basque tapas has been revered for decades and elevated to an artform in the tiny bars of this Spanish surf town

WORDS EDDI FIEGEL ILLUSTRATION MARTIN HAAKE

Some cities are famous for their food, others for their beauty. Occasionally, you find one that's renowned for both; that's very much the case with San Sebastián in the Basque Country. Set on Northern Spain's Atlantic coast, it has an elegant seafront promenade, belle époque sandstone buildings, colonnaded squares and tree-lined boulevards. Its reputation as a gastronomic capital is similarly stellar, with a high concentration of Michelin-starred restaurants. But it's in its tiny pintxos bars, eating standing up surrounded by locals, where visitors can find the soul of the city.

Start your tour in San Sebastián's 19th-century city centre, or **ensanche**, amid hanging hams, pine panelled walls and lively chatter at one of its best-known traditional bars, **Casa Valles** (barvalles.com). This is where the most famous pintxo of them all was invented: the *gilda*, comprising a salty anchovy, punchy green olive and spicy guindilla pepper, threaded onto a cocktail stick. It's best washed down with a glass of locally brewed cider or txakoli, a crisp, white Basque wine.

Just around the corner, you'll find the neo-gothic **Buen Pastor Cathedral**. Translating as 'Good Shepherd', it's home to Spain's largest church organ, as well as magnificent stained glass windows. It's also just yards away from **San Martin Merkatua** (sanmartinmerkatua.com), a smart indoor food market with stalls selling top quality fruit, vegetables, meat and fish, plus some excellent bars.

Fill your lungs with fresh Atlantic air as you stroll with joggers, families and buskers along the palm tree-lined promenade flanking the sweeping curve of **La Concha Beach**. Just past the traditional carousel and grand, twin-towered fin-de-siècle **City Hall** is the 16th-century arched gate to the **Parte Vieja** (Old Town).

Down one of its narrow streets, the minimalist **Muxumartin** (muxumartin.com) is one of several newer bars serving contemporary pintxos amid rough-hewn brick walls. Try the gutsy, prize-winning chicken with ginger and mayonnaise.

In the streets nearby, fanning out from the neo-classical **Plaza de la Constitución**, you'll find bars almost everywhere you look. Be prepared to jostle for a seat at the wooden counter of **Txepetxa** (bartxepetxa.es), which opened in 1925. Its signature pintxo is the *montadito* — a toasted slice of baguette topped with a sliver of anchovy and flavoursome smoked salmon.

The family-run **Ganbara** (ganbarajatetxea.com) is even more popular, with queues stretching round the block at almost any time of day or night. Tuck into mini crab tartlets filled with almost mousse-like flakes of soft crab meat, served in the small bar with walls lined with gilt-framed paintings.

To escape the crowds, head over the Urumea River to **Bar Bergara** (pinchosbergara.es), in the **Gros** neighbourhood. Bergara is credited with having pioneered the modern pintxos concept back in the 1980s. The *champi con gamba brasa* — a grilled, woody mushroom and sweet, succulent prawn on a small metal skewer, dressed with a rich garlic and white wine sauce — is exceptional.

Finally, after exploring the extensive art, photography and archaeology collections at **San Telmo Museum** (santelmomuseoa.eus), indulge in San Sebastián's most famous dessert: Basque burnt cheesecake. Bar-restaurant **La Viña** (lavinarestaurante.com) makes the best, with a gloriously moreish, custard-like centre and a lightly toasted, browned top.

HOW TO DO IT: British Airways flies from London City to San Sebastián in around two hours; many more airlines fly from other UK airports to Bilbao, an hour away by bus or train. Stay at Nobu San Sebastián, where many rooms have sea views, from €279 (£241), B&B. nobuhotels.com


BAR BERGARA
SAN TELMO MUSEUM
LA VIÑA
URUMEA RIVER
SALAMANCA PASEALEKUA
GROS
PLAZA DE LA CONSTITUCIÓN
BAR TXEPETXA
GANBARA
MUXUMARTIN
OLD TOWN
CITY HALL
OKENDO KALEA
BILBAO
SAN SEBASTIAN
FRANCE
BARCELONA
MADRID
PORTUGAL
SPAIN
GARIBAI KALEA
ENSANCHE
ASKATASUNAREN HIRIBIDEA
LA CONCHA BEACH
SAN MARTIN MERKATUA
BUEN PASTOR CATHEDRAL
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RIVERSIDE
LUXURY CRUISES

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil



The Santa Teresa district, overlooking Guanabara Bay

TABLE TALK

Chef and Rio de Janeiro native Rafa Costa E Silva on where to find the city's best cocktails and his favourite place for feijoada

Which restaurants should everyone try in Rio? It depends on the occasion, but for fine dining go to Oseille by Thomas Troisgros [in Ipanema]. It's quite casual, almost like a chef's table set-up with only 16 seats, and he even has DJs playing sometimes. He uses ingredients that are local to Rio. The last time I went, I had scallops and a beurre blanc made with coffee. His father Claude, who's French, also has a small restaurant called Madame Olympe [in Leblon]. It's small, cosy and very romantic. Claude is one of the first non-Brazilian chefs to cook international food using local ingredients. He does seafood like nobody else, like his aged fish cooked over charcoal.

What is the one dish you must try while in Rio? The most traditional dish is *feijoada*, a black bean stew with dried beef, bits of bacon, pork ears and pork feet. It's served with white rice, kale, orange and *farofa*, which is like the dust of cassava. It's a heavy dish, and if you eat it at 2pm or 3pm, you probably won't have dinner. Try it at Aconchego Carioca [in Praça da Bandeira], run by Katia Barbosa. It's a typical Brazilian restaurant and super-casual, a bit like you're at the chef's house.

Where's your favourite place for a drink after work? There's a place in Leblon called Liz Cocktail E Wine. They focus on local ingredients like cachaça, which is our traditional spirit made from sugarcane juice. It's a cute place to relax, whether you're sitting at one of the small tables inside or outside on the balcony. I'm a big fan of their Black Negroni [with Beefeater Gin, Campari, Amaro Averna, Cinzano Rosso and coffee beans].

Is there somewhere you'd recommend for a meal with a view? Aprazível [in Santa Teresa] serves straightforward Brazilian food with views of Rio, which I believe is the most beautiful city in the world. You eat on the top of the mountain, which means you can see half the city. They use ingredients from all over Brazil, and their tapioca is great!

> "**It serves straightforward Brazilian food,** with views of the most beautiful city in the world."

What's your go-to bakery? My favourite one in the entire world is The Slow Bakery [with branches in Botafogo and Jardim Botânico]. Owner Rafa Brito Pereira opened it around the same time as I opened Lasai, and we struggled together at the beginning. He has a bread called Rio Sourdough and that, with a bit of butter on top, is one of the best things you could eat in your life.

Where would you recommend for ice cream? There's a place called Mil Frutas [with multiple locations across the city], and it's cool because it uses fruits that are almost impossible to find anywhere else, like cashew fruit and *cupuaçu* (a chocolatey, tropical fruit native to the Amazonian basin). I don't have a lot of gastronomy memories from my childhood, but Mil Frutas always takes me back to being a kid and eating ice cream. It's been around for a long time.

INTERVIEW: FARIDA ZEYNALOVA



RAFA COSTA E SILVA is chef-owner of the two-Michelin-star Lasai in Rio de Janeiro, where the focus is on seasonal cuisine made using locally sourced ingredients, many of which are grown in the restaurant's own gardens. Lasai relocates to a new site at Sofitel Ipanema in October. lasai.com.br

IMAGES: MINTA EATS; GETTY

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STAY & DO

Water world

A rural hotel in southern Sweden that offers a spa experience of a different sort, and its own sparkling wine to toast the stay

The backdrop

Sweden practically slows to a halt in Halland County, an agricultural region between Gothenburg and Malmö. Narrow roads weave through low hills, the beech forest on either side alternating with meadows presided over by red farmhouses. Every so often, the glint of sunlight off water reveals a lake through the trees. It's a perfectly bucolic introduction to a stay at Ästad Vingård. The former farm has been owned by the Carlsson family since the 1940s and each generation has added their own stamp. The first produced organic milk; the second opened a small cafe and guest rooms; and the third planted vines of solaris grapes in the surrounding fields and turned it into the unique spa hotel you see today.

The hotel

From the vine-stippled hillside at the entrance, Ästad Vingård unfolds like a small village. Pathways lined with wildflowers lead between wooden cottages and around its focal point, Sjöparken: seven oak-clad villas that seem to float on a natural pool, each containing guest rooms with their own private saunas. The interiors are studies in muted elegance: all oatmeal textiles, stone accents and pale wood furnishings, with glass doors opening onto the water. Guests can wake in the morning and jump straight in, as dragonflies settle on the lily pads and skylarks swoop overhead. Beyond these are Logen restaurant, serving hearty, traditional food with a modern spin, and Michelin-starred Äng, which delivers a Scandinavian tasting menu in a modern glasshouse overlooking meadows and lakes. Both draw heavily on seasonal produce from the region.

The experience

You might think a hotel with its own vineyard is remarkable enough in a country as far north as Sweden, but it's water not wine that'll linger in the memory. Ästad Vingård's Sinnenas Spa is a veritable adventure playground of watery experiences. Visitors hop from one to the other, beginning in the indoor spa. Various steam rooms, saunas and pools recall the surrounding beech forest or the nearby coast, each with its own scent and sounds. Guests are pummelled, sprayed and submerged before following woodland trails to other spa environments: perhaps a cold plunge pool hidden in the trees or an underwater sauna where you gently broil as fish drift past the windows. At the end, guests loll on day beds overlooking the fields and order glasses of the hotel's wine, a sparkling white made from those solaris grapes planted on the hillsides. **AMANDA CANNING**

HOW TO DO IT: Rooms start from 3,960 SEK (£308) as part of the Evening Spa Package, which includes a four-course dinner at Logen, an evening in Sinnenas Spa and breakfast. Gothenburg-Landvetter Airport is an 80-minute drive north. astadvingard.se







On the doorstep

To continue your spa journey, head to newly renovated Varbergs Kusthotell, a 30-minute drive away on the west coast. As well as indoor pools and seaweed saunas, the hotel has three outdoor pools, a cold bath house and direct access to the Kattegat Sea. Finish with Nordic afternoon tea by the fire in the salon. varbergskusthotell.se

From top: A sauna house at Sinnenas Spa; Sjöparken rooms sit on a natural pool; afternoon tea at Varbergs Kusthotell

IMAGES: AMANDA CANNING; ÄSTAD VINGÅRD; VARBERGS KUSTHOTELL









UK BREAK

Waveney Valley

In the borderlands of East Anglia, marshes, reed-fringed waterways and medieval market towns play host to weird and eerie folktales

WORDS PHOEBE HARPER

Carving a natural boundary between Norfolk and Suffolk, the River Waveney flows through some of the best of both counties, taking in peaceful water meadows, riverside pubs and wild swimming spots. The surrounding valley's bleakly beautiful landscapes have also inspired a wealth of supernatural tales. Its folkloric heartland is Bungay. Long associated with the legendary hellhound Black Shuck, this charming market town raised an eyebrow or two when it was dubbed the 'Satanist capital of the UK' due to the number of devil-worshippers reported in the 2021 national census.

Where can I uncover the area's folklore?

Bungay's St Mary's Church is the site of one of the most famous Shuck stories. During a thunderstorm in 1577, a black dog with blazing red eyes is said to have burst through the doors and killed a man and boy from the congregation. St Mary's churchyard also hosts the Druid's Stone, a mysterious, gnarled rock that supposedly holds devil-raising powers, should you dare to dance around it 12 times.

You'll spy Shuck's head on the hull of *Big Dog Ferry*. Hop aboard at Beccles Lido for a three-mile trip along the Waveney, docking at the Locks Inn. The community-owned pub sits on a riverbank in the reed-lined backwaters of Geldeston in the Norfolk Broads. It can be reached by following a stretch of the Angles Way, a 93-mile walking path that spans the entire Waveney Valley. Or cross on a boat from Beccles; sailings run from April to October. It's a great spot to catch some folk music, sip ale by the fireside and soak up strange tales from the surrounding marshland. During the storytelling evenings held every third Thursday, you might hear of the Lantern Men — mysterious floating lights that lure unfortunate souls into dykes of unknown depth. bigdogferry.co.uk thelocksinn.com

DID YOU KNOW? The number of people from Bungay who identified as Satanists in the last census was 100 times the national average.

What's the local food scene like?

On the up, thanks in large part to the abundance of regional produce and small businesses. Check out recently opened Baked patisserie for one of its signature pain reubens — half croissant, half pastrami sandwich. For something more substantial, Suffolk Stonehouse offers top-notch pizzas incorporating local ingredients, including Fen Farm Dairy's esteemed Baron Bigod, a sumptuous brie de Meaux-style cheese now found on menus across the country. Stop by the dairy's farmshop to try its famous raw milk, butter and yoghurt before paying a visit to the award-winning Flint Vineyard on the outskirts of Bungay. Offering tours and vine-side tastings, it's best known for its sparkling, tank-fermented white charmat. As this is the heart of barley-growing country, you're spoilt for choice when it comes to beer. Pick up a tipple from the shop at St Peter's Brewery or head to Grain Brewery in Alburgh, which offers brewery tours and has an on-site taproom. bakedonearshamstreet.co.uk suffolkstonehouse.co.uk fenfarmdairy.co.uk flintvineyard.com stpetersbrewery.co.uk

How about an atmospheric place to stay?

In the village of Woodton on the Norfolk side of the river, you'll find Albion Nights, an off-grid eco-retreat whose clutch of handmade cabins, fashioned from reclaimed wood, stand in a peaceful meadow. You may recognise Beech Cabin from Channel 4's *George Clarke's Amazing Spaces*. Soak in a roll-top tub under the stars or pay a visit to nearby Secret Sauna, open year-round. Here, you'll have a serene pocket of the Waveney entirely to yourself, and you can let off steam in the wood-fired sauna before cooling off in the river, keeping an eye out for the resident otters and kingfishers. Elsewhere, Hippersons Boatyard in Beccles offers a selection of houseboats and glamping pods on the grassy banks of the Norfolk Broads. Stay at Albion Nights from £195 per night or Hipperson's Boatyard from £210 per night. Minimum stays of two nights. albionnights.co.uk wainford.co.uk hippersons.co.uk

HOW TO DO IT: Driving is the best way to explore the area, but it's also well connected by rail. The closest train station to Bungay is in Beccles, which you can reach via Greater Anglia services from hubs like London, Cambridge and Ipswich. thesuffolkcoast.co.uk

Clockwise from top left: Cows grazing on the wildlife-rich marshes of Stow Fen at Fen Farm Dairy; Albion Nights' bathtubs; Bridge Street in Bungay; Baron Bigod cheese from Fen Farm Dairy

IMAGES: @WILDKIN.WEDDINGS; ALAMY

COMPETITION



WIN!

A countryside escape in Scotland

The winner and their guest will spend two nights at JA Mar Hall, with the option to travel aboard the famed Caledonian Sleeper train to Glasgow

The experience

Overlooking the Kilpatrick Hills and the rushing waters of the River Clyde, JA Mar Hall is a five-star country house hotel set within 240 acres of park and woodland. The historic estate, located just 20 minutes from Glasgow, recently underwent a £20m refurbishment. Its grand, 19th-century gothic facade conceals spacious suites, a luxurious spa and a private screening room, not to mention a cocktail lounge and contemporary dining spots where Scotland's culinary heritage is given pride of place. It's a stay that deserves a dramatic entrance, which is why the winner and their guest will have the chance to travel overnight aboard the *Caledonian Sleeper,* departing from London: a truly unforgettable way to journey up to Scotland. jaresortshotels.com

The prize

The winner and a guest of their choice will enjoy two nights in a suite at JA Mar Hall, with breakfast and dinner served each night. The trip also includes return travel to Glasgow aboard the *Caledonian Sleeper* in a Club En-suite room for two. Breakfast, guest lounge access at the station and priority access to the onboard Club Car are all provided. The stay and rail journey are subject to availability and must be redeemed by 31 October 2027. Blackout dates apply, including bank holidays and the Christmas period. sleeper.scot

To enter

Answer the question below by visiting natgeotv.com/uk/competitions

Which river does JA Mar Hall look onto?



JA MAR HALL SCOTLAND

CALEDONIAN SLEEPER

Competition closes at 23:59 on 31 October 2026. The winner must be a UK resident and aged 18 or over. The Promoter is APL Media Limited, publisher of *National Geographic Traveller* (UK), Highgate Studios, 53-79 Highgate Road, London NW5 1TL. There is one prize consisting of one stay for up to two people. Only one entry per named entrant and email address will be accepted. The winner will be drawn at random. The prize is subject to availability, non-exchangeable and non-transferable. No cash alternative will be offered. Blackout dates for the rail journey apply as follows: 12 – 30 Oct 2026, 14 – 31 Dec 2026, 1 – 4 Jan 2027, 15 – 21 Feb 2027, 26 March – 18 April 2027, 25 June – 31 Aug 2027 and 11 Oct – 31 Oct 2027. For full T&Cs, visit ngtr.uk/scotland2026

IMAGES: JA MAR HALL; CALEDONIAN SLEEPER



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WHEN IN

Lisbon

Eat, drink and explore like a Lisboeta — from open mic nights and the city's best chicken to quiet sunset spots, this is how to enjoy the Portuguese capital right now

Join Lisbon's creative crowd

For a taste of the city's artistic spirit, catch some local talent at an open mic night — and discover hidden hangouts in the process. Behind a knitting shop, Badassery is one of Lisbon's coolest speakeasies and showcases live music at 'The Shift' event. Enjoy poetry, music and stories at Inner Spaces' monthly gatherings, where dialogue is encouraged between artists and audience. Lisbon Living Room Sessions takes cosy to a whole new level, with intimate monthly events at private homes. badassery.club innerspacescollective.com @lisbonlivingroomsessions

Go on a quiosque crawl

To act like a true Lisboeta, grab your morning *bica* (espresso) or afternoon *imperial* (small beer) at one of the city's *quiosques* (kiosks). The elegant structures dot Lisbon's squares and viewpoints. Some have been reimagined with creative menus, cocktails and community events. Sip a mean spicy margarita at Quiosque do Pipo in Santos; catch golden hour at vibey Simo's Quiosque at the Miradouro do Monte Agudo viewpoint; or people-watch in Praça das Flores. quiosquelisboa.pt @quiosquedopipo @simos_lisboa



DoBeco Gulbenkian coffeeshop
Below: Duck carpaccio, one of Tasca Bica's inventive dishes



Eat a Portuguese speciality

For an elevated take on charcoal-grilled chicken, head to Tasca Bica on Rua da Boavista. Chef-founder Victor Vieira puts poultry centre stage with artfully inventive dishes. Don't miss his signature half chicken dry-aged in umami-rich Ibérico ham fat. It's smoked, roasted and served with house-made piri piri. tascabica.com

Shop local style

Seek out fashion brands, homewares and tasty eats at Stylista Market. With more than 100 stalls, the market takes place four times a year in a leafy setting in Estoril, around half an hour's train ride from Lisbon. Save the date for the autumn market on 10-11 October and winter edition on 21-22 November. mariaguedes.pt

Explore reinvented Marvila

Eastern Lisbon's Marvila district has been gaining a reputation as one of the capital's most exciting creative hubs. The area's coolest address is 8 Marvila, a rough-edged network of former wine warehouses, transformed into an eclectic mix of restaurants, galleries and boutique shops. 8marvila.com

Get lost at the Gulbenkian

The Calouste Gulbenkian Museum houses one of Portugal's best art collections, with pieces ranging from ancient Egyptian artefacts to 20th-century artworks. The gardens are also incredibly pretty. Fuel your visit with coffee and pastries at nearby doBeco. gulbenkian.pt do-beco.com

SARAH GIBBONS

IMAGES: HENRIQUE ISIDORO; LIAM GILLIES



Potong restaurant is set inside a former Chinese pharmacy Right: A room at 21 Carpenter, a boutique hotel in Singapore

MICRO TREND

Thai shophouse revival

Behind weathered wooden doors in Bangkok's Chinatown, entrepeneurs are transforming their ancestral homes into fashionable restaurants and creative spaces

In Bangkok, timeworn shophouses peek out between gleaming high-rises. Widely found across Southeast Asia, these buildings have traditionally functioned as both their owners' places of business and their homes, with stores at the front and living areas at the back. Now, the century-old spaces are being resurrected to house some the city's coolest haunts, from award-winning restaurants and cocktail bars to avant-garde galleries.

While repurposing industrial spaces is nothing new, Bangkok's conversions have taken a different tack. Its shophouses retain their age-old atmosphere, with geometric floor tiles, peeling paint and creaking shutters. And often, their transformation is carried out by descendents of the original owners.

Take Potong, a one-Michelin-star restaurant run by Pichaya 'Pam' Soontornyanakij, the world's top ranked female chef in 2025 according to 50 Best. It's set in a five-storey Sino-Portuguese structure that previously housed four generations of her ancestors and their Chinese herbal pharmacy. According to Pam, shophouses like this were integral to Thailand's largest and most integrated immigrant community. Today, the space is sleek and low-lit, with a ground-floor bar and chilled rooftop area. Much like the building itself, the menu revives Thai-Chinese culture — Pam's pad thai is deconstructed, tamarind-infused and draped in noodles depicting the Thai flag.

Potong is a part of Made in Song Wat, a community dedicated to doing up the historic Song Wat neighbourhood of Chinatown. Its founder, Kiattiwat 'Aui' Srichanwanpen, revamped the ground floor of his family's slipper factory as the cerulean-facaded Play Art House gallery, which has rotating exhibitions by emerging local and international names.

Over in nearby Yaowarat district, four siblings have overseen a sensitive restoration of their ancestral home to create Baan Trok Tua Ngork, a cultural and culinary space that juxtaposes old and new in an ornate building. A few streets away, G.O.D., short for Genius on Drugs, has caused a stir in the mixology world, transforming a dilapidated shophouse into an innovative bar resembling a crumbling gothic cathedral, complete with a piano that appears suspended in midair.

ISABELLE KLIGER



THREE MORE SHOPHOUSES TO VISIT

21 CARPENTER, SINGAPORE

'Day and night, when will we reunite', reads the inscription in the lift of this boutique hotel. It was born out of a former remittance house, from which Chinese migrants dispatched money and letters back to their loved ones. The architects incorporated excerpts of those letters into the property — for example, into the aluminum facade — which has won awards for its thoughtful design. 21carpenter.com.sg

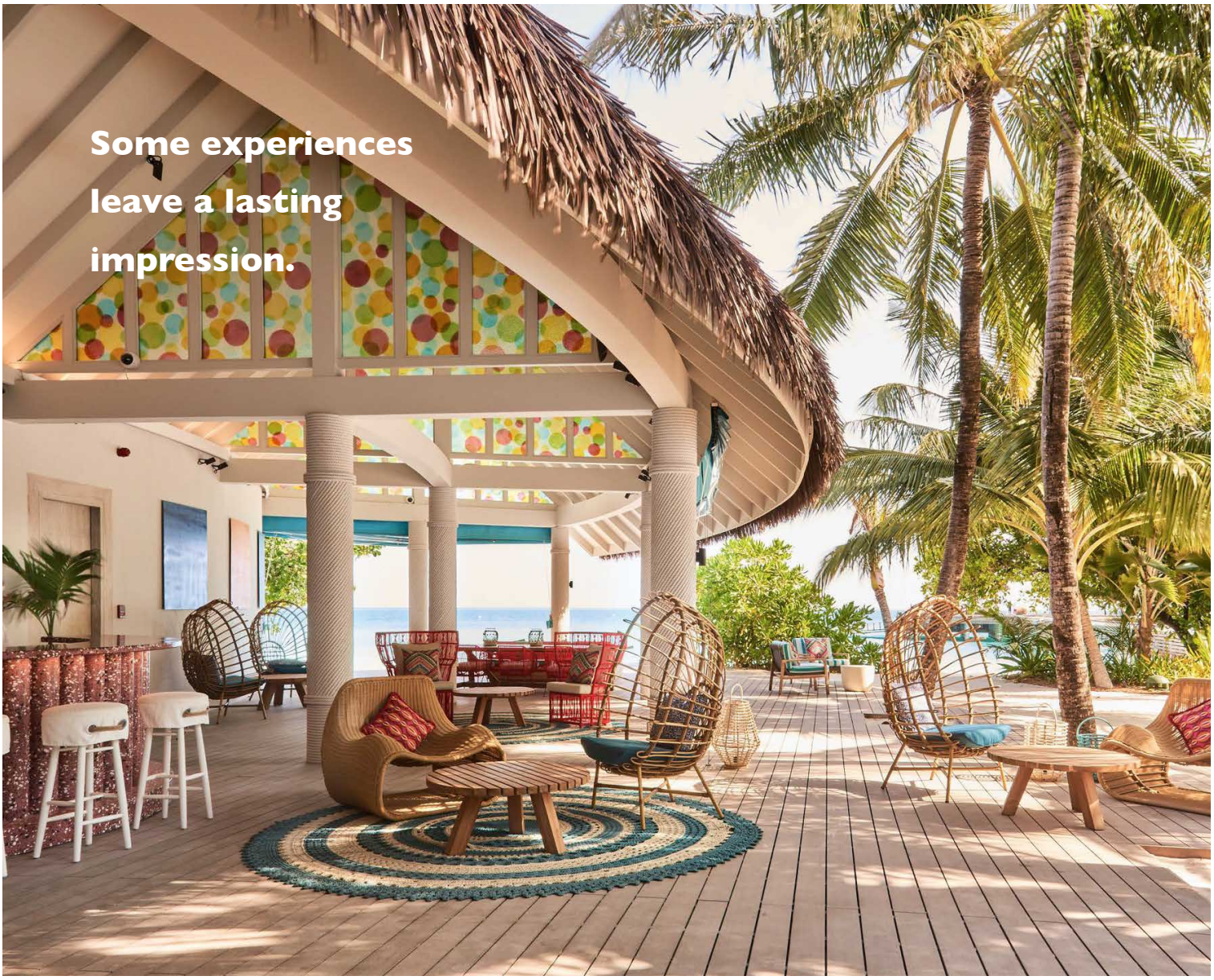
BETTER THAN BLOUSES, GEORGE TOWN, MALAYSIA

This independent Penang-based label transforms Peranakan (a community descended from Chinese migrants to the Malay Peninsula) patterns and traditional batik into contemporary fashion. Browse founder Kang Pei Shern's creations at her studio space, set in a pre-war shophouse in Lebuh Melayu. @betterthanblouses

KITI PANIT, CHIANG MAI, THAILAND

Kiti Panit serves thick, savoury *hang le*, a northern Thai pork curry, in a tastefully restored 130-year-old structure that housed the city's first general store. The fifth-generation descendants of the Chinese immigrants who opened the shop gave their ancestors' abandoned teak-wood mansion a fresh start, restoring the original woodwork and furniture. kitipanit.com

IMAGES: GASTROFILM; 21 CARPENTER







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SPECIAL INTEREST

Into the hermit kingdom

A long-held fascination with North Korea eventually led Marcel Theroux to travel to the most secretive country on Earth, inspiring a novel and dreams of a return

I've been obsessed with North Korea for years. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) — to give it its proper name —is a strange rockpool of communist ideology that's ruled by a dynasty of tyrants with weird haircuts. It treads an odd line between comic and terrifying, threatening its neighbours with nuclear weapons and calling the US President a 'mentally deranged dotard'. The difficulty of visiting and the rumours that swirled around the place only added to its mystique for me. The only way in is on tightly controlled package tours — there's no such thing as independent travel.

And then an opportunity for a visit arose: a travel agent was organising a trip for foreign journalists. As part of a tentative opening to the outside world, North Korea welcomed us in.

When we arrived at the gleaming new airport terminal outside the capital, Pyongyang, we were met by a trio of smartly dressed English-speaking minders, Mr Ri, Mr Kim and Mr Yu. Like every adult I would meet, they wore badges with a picture of one of the ruling family, the Kims, over their hearts. They remained by our sides constantly, greeting us at breakfast each morning and not leaving us until we were ready for bed. There was never a possibility of going out unaccompanied.

Pyongyang reminded me of a more functional, orderly version of the USSR in the 1980s: brutalist architecture, propaganda posters, pedestrians walking as though marshalled by an invisible conductor. I had read so much about the famines, political prisoners and ideological indoctrination, I was taken aback by the air of apparent normality.

We visited a fish farm, a library, the ancestral village of the Kim dynasty, Kim Il Sung University and enormous statues of the Kims. We climbed a monument called the Tower of the Juche Idea, from which Pyongyang looked bizarrely lovely: a sweep of colourful, geometric buildings beside the glittering water of the Taedong River. It was a socialist utopia filtered through the sensibility of Wes Anderson.

The minders were somewhere on the continuum between guides and captors, but they were friendly, even gently teasing. We enjoyed long, boozy meals with them in rather formal restaurants patronised by North Korea's elite. One night, we went to a pizza restaurant where the waitresses performed patriotic songs while we ate pizzas made with North Korean mozzarella. We toasted each other with Soju spirit. Another evening we did karaoke. People find this hard to believe, but Mr Ri's party piece was *Barbie Girl* by Aqua. Yet no crack ever appeared in his ideological commitment to the regime.

> **One night, we** went to a pizza restaurant where the waitresses performed patriotic songs while we ate pizzas made with North Korean mozzarella.

On long bus trips to the demilitarized zone on the border with South Korea and to the seaside town of Wonsan, I could see enough through the windows to be certain the capital was a bubble of relative prosperity enjoyed by a tiny elite. Much of the agriculture was unmechanised. People hoed and tended crops by hand; laundry was washed in rivers; produce moved by ox cart. For all the patriotic talk, the DPRK was clearly much poorer than its high-tech twin to the south.

There were many surprises, too: the ubiquity of mobile phones; the fact that North Koreans had homegrown apps for e-commerce and video-sharing and to play their own versions of *Candy Crush*; the amount and quality of the food we ate. But I left knowing there were huge gaps in my understanding.

The work of filling them in took me on another journey: through the memoirs of defectors; to meetings with the tiny numbers of North Koreans who've sought refuge abroad; to the strange worlds of North Korean poetry, fiction, graphic novels, TV programmes and pop music. Somewhat to my surprise, this obsession eventually bore fruit in a novel, *The Sorcerer of Pyongyang*.

But I still have a feeling of unfinished business and the fascination remains. I'm keen to make a return trip, to hear the eerie strains of *Where Are You, Dear General?* playing through loudspeakers around the capital each morning, to eat cold noodles and to do some more karaoke with Mr Ri.

Marcel Theroux is an author, journalist and presenter. *The Sorcerer of Pyongyang* is published by Corsair (£9.99).



Right: The Korean Central Museum on Kim Il Sung Square in Pyongyang

Did you know?

North Korea has been ruled by three generations of the same family since 1948. First, Kim Il-Sung (the Great Leader), then Kim Jong-Il (the Dear Leader) and now Kim Jong-Un (the Supreme Leader).



IMAGES: URSZULA SOLTYS; MARK EDWARD HARRIS

IN FOCUS

Patagonia cat diaries

Capturing rare pumas in the borderlands of Argentina and Chile

British wildlife and documentary photographer Harry Skeggs travelled to Patagonia earlier this year to shoot the region's largest, most elusive predator: the puma. "After days of finding cats asleep or only partially visible, everything changed on the final morning," he says. He came across a female on her morning hunt beneath the granite towers of Torres del Paine. The hunt ended successfully, with the puma catching a hare and taking it back to her cubs. "Against one of Patagonia's most imposing landscapes, it was the perfect farewell," says Harry.

@harryskeggs







Celebrating Route 66 on its 100th anniversary

"Johnnie Meier has devoted himself to preserving the memorabilia and neon that once beckoned adventurous motorists down the Mother Road. At his wonderfully eccentric Classical Gas Museum in New Mexico, he shared stories that helped me understand how deeply these glowing landmarks represent freedom, possibility and the enduring American Dream."

PHOTOGRAPHY **JEN JUDGE** @JENJUDGEPHOTO









Three tips for food photography

National Geographic Traveller (UK) photographer Karolina Wiercigroch shares her secrets

1 Get the best light

At restaurants, the difference between a dark corner under fluorescent lighting and a window table bathed in natural light can make or break your shot. Whenever possible, I schedule shoots for lunchtime, request a window or outdoor table and arrive as soon as the restaurant opens to maximise my chances of securing the best spot.

2 Capture a sense of place

For travel food photography, my goal goes beyond shooting a mouth-watering dish – I want to give viewers a sense of place, whether it's an atmospheric Azerbaijani teahouse or a laid-back *cevichería* in Cartagena. I use backgrounds and props to tell that story: local textiles, stone or wooden surfaces, distinctive ceramics or sometimes a wider composition that reveals more of the surroundings.

3 Think beyond the plate

Some of my favourite food photographs aren't beautifully plated dishes. To tell a compelling food story, explore local markets, learn about distinctive ingredients and visit the makers behind them. Add a sense of action – whether in a restaurant's kitchen or a workshop by a cheesemaker – and, above all, include people. For me, food is about connection and emotion, and capturing those moments is the most rewarding part of my job.

@karolina_wiercigroch

IN FOCUS



A freediver encounters a sperm whale off the coast of Dominica in the Caribbean. This shot is part of a portfolio voted the People's Choice Winner in the Photography Competition 2026. Head to the website or scan the code to see other images by photographer Bingqian Gao.

PHOTOGRAPHY **BINGQIAN GAO** @NOTSUPERWOMANSUSIE

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Into the winter wilderness with the Matagi

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Each winter, icy winds from the Sea of Japan transform the fir forests of Mount Moriyoshi into surreal sculptures known as juhyo, or ‘snow monsters’. For centuries, these mountains have also been home to the Matagi, traditional hunters whose deep understanding of the forest has been shaped by the region's harsh winters. Explore the silent landscape on snowshoes for an unforgettable glimpse into the wild heart of Northern Akita.




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EGYPT

The long-awaited opening of the Grand Egyptian Museum in Cairo has spurred a renewed passion for the land of the pharaohs — a country so historically rich and storied, it's the trip of a lifetime for many travellers. From stepping into the eternal dusk of Khufu's Great Pyramid to fishing with locals on the Nile, here are all the places and experiences to put on your ultimate Egypt itinerary

WORDS ZOEY GOTO ◆ PHOTOGRAPHY CLAIRE THOMAS





Clockwise from top left: A fisherman from Bisaw village, where food is pulled from the Nile; dahabiya cruises offer more intimacy than a large cruise but more comfort than a felucca; Bisaw Island is etched with farmland; banana crops thrive beside the Nile
Previous pages: Camel riders cross beneath the Pyramids of Giza

1 DIP INTO LOCAL LIFE ALONG THE NILE

Travelling aboard a traditional dahabiya reveals the slow side of life on the Nile — one where fisherfolk ply the waters and families invite guests into their kitchens

A sharp crack echoes across the Nile. Then another. Barefoot in a green-and-white tin boat scarcely wider than his shoulders, fisherman Fahmy Hassan brings a wooden pole crashing down onto the water. Each strike sends spray flying, inadvertently flushing an indignant yellow-footed egret from the reeds.

Earlier that morning, before my group boarded the dinky boats south of Edfu to watch the fishermen of Bisaw Island at work, Fahmy had explained the age-old technique: striking the water sends vibrations rippling through the river, driving fish towards his waiting net. Curious to see if it works, we watch as he begins hauling the net in, hand over hand. For a moment, it looks empty. Then a silver-grey catfish glints beneath the mesh, prompting cheers from both the fishermen and visitors.

"This is nothing," he says with a laugh, holding up the wriggling catch between pinched fingers. On a good day, his net overflows with striped Nile tilapia, caught here since the time of the pharaohs, and enormous bayad catfish, often stretching from his wrist to his shoulder. Some will feed the islanders; others will find their way onto the fine china of fancy Cairo restaurants.

Dressed in an American sports T-shirt, black cargo trousers rolled to his calves and a baseball cap shielding his face from the sun, Fahmy is continuing a tradition that goes back generations. His father taught him to fish these waters, just as his father had before him, he tells me as we row slowly back to land. It's a reminder that the Nile remains Egypt's lifeblood, sustaining the rural communities that dot its banks.

Long before cruise ships arrived, travellers floated south aboard elegant two-sailed *dahabiyas*, relying on the Nile's winds and currents rather than engines. Their passengers included archaeologists, Victorian adventurers and the writer Amelia Edwards, whose 1873 odyssey inspired the classic travelogue *A Thousand Miles up the Nile*, which helped renew public fascination with ancient Egypt.

Following in their footsteps, I'd boarded the 55-metre-long wooden *Safiya* the previous day for a voyage between Edfu and Aswan, a roughly 70-mile, three-night journey in southern Egypt. Rather than dashing from one temple to the next, the plan is to slow down, mooring beside riverside villages where daily life still revolves around the Nile.

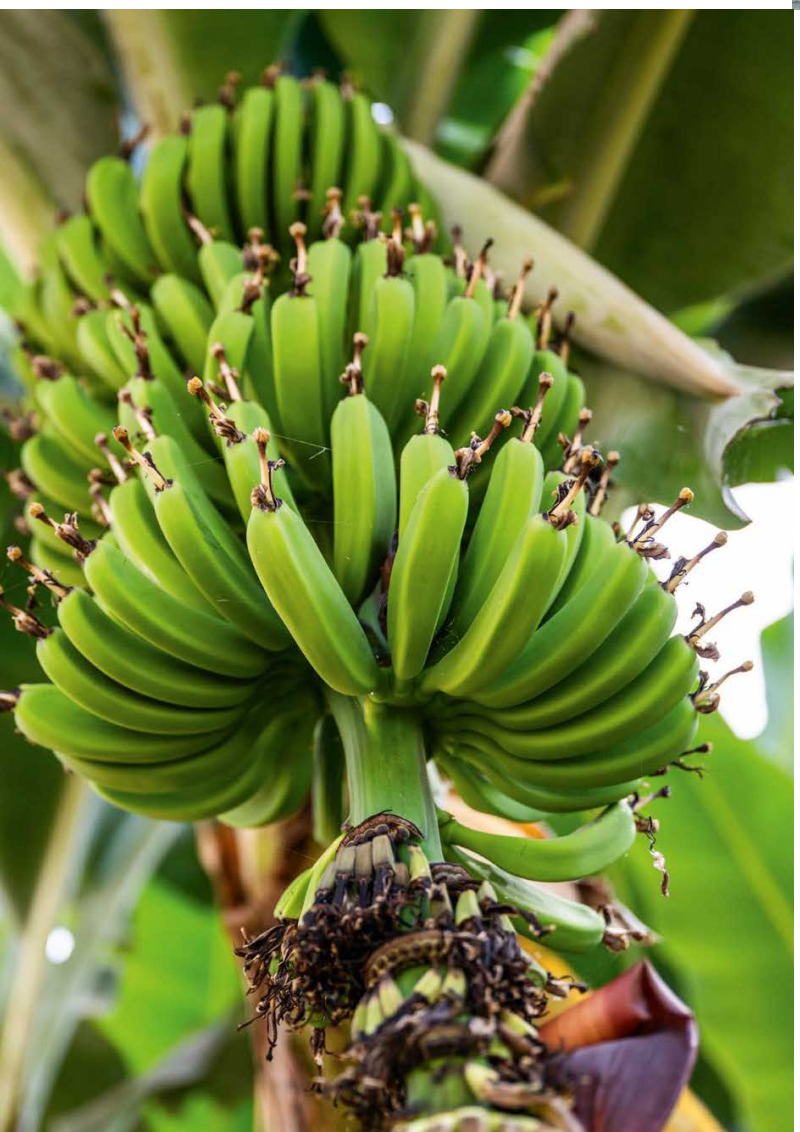
With just 12 cabins, the *Safiya* feels like the Goldilocks of Nile boats: not a tiny felucca, with its basic sleeping quarters and shared facilities, but far more intimate than the mega cruise ships gliding past our sundeck. It doesn't take long to slip into the languid rhythm of life on the *dahabiya*. My cabin is simply furnished but comfortable, its large windows framing an ever-changing panorama, and it's easy to while away an afternoon watching the world drift by.

At the water's edge, children crowd onto a rickety wooden jetty, egging one another on before launching into daredevil backflips, their laughter carrying across the river. One fearless boy even swims out to tap our hull as we pass, cheered on by his friends before turning back triumphantly to shore. A water buffalo watches the excitement with the air of an old hand, half-submerged in the shallows and scarcely glancing at our boat as it glides by.




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Dahabiya Nile Sailing
Safiya





As evening falls, we're ushered off the boat in Al Ramadi Qibli, a small farming settlement on the west bank of the Nile, where fields of date palms stretch back from the river. Beneath a palm-thatched shelter, platters of roast chicken, fragrant rice, *bamya* — okra slow-cooked in a tangy tomato sauce — warm flatbreads and dates are passed down a long communal table. Afterwards, a trio of musicians strikes up on a lute and hand drums, playing late into the night beneath strings of fairy lights.

The following morning, Bisaw Island comes into view up ahead. Home to around 350 people, it sits midstream, its shoreline fringed with banana trees bowing under the weight of ripe fruit and candelabra-like doum palms, whose chestnut-brown fruit is used to make a sweet local drink. This exceptionally fertile land was inhabited only seasonally until 1970, when the completion of the Aswan High Dam brought an end to the Nile's annual floods and allowed permanent communities to take root.

Until recently, the island's relative isolation meant opportunities were largely limited to running the family home, farming or fishing, like for Fahmy. But that's beginning to change, we discover at Bisaw Crafts, a one-room workshop and store that opened in 2025. Inside, 18-year-old Menna Mahmout stands by the window, absent-mindedly watching children chase one another along the dusty lane outside. A black headscarf frames her face and a long tunic dress catches the light with tiny silver sequins. Around her, macrame hangings dangle from wooden poles, while colourful woven bags brighten the studio's whitewashed walls.

"A year ago, women from Cairo came here and taught us crafts like macrame," she says, running her fingers through the neat rows of knots on a cream-coloured wall hanging that takes her a full day to complete. "Then I taught myself the rest on TikTok." She grins as I admire the textiles on display, created by Menna and the collective of 18 other local women. "It's the first business like this on the island. Before, I stayed at home cooking and cleaning, but now I have somewhere to go every morning. It's completely changed my life," she says, adding that one day she'd like to have her own shop.

Bisaw Crafts isn't the only sign that the island is opening up to visitors. We spend the rest of the day wandering through banana groves with a local farmer, learning to make sun bread — paper-thin dough baked in makeshift mud ovens — with a village housewife, Zainab Mustafa, before sharing a home-cooked meal in her family home, its walls washed in turquoise and cerulean.

On our final day we stop in Daraw, a market town some 25 miles north of Aswan, famous for its camel market. We're here for the produce, though: watermelons stacked like overblown beach balls, tubs of dried hibiscus perfuming the air and glossy dates piled into neat pyramids. Back on board, our haul of sun-warmed mangoes is sliced and served on deck with glasses of fresh mint tea as the river slips by.

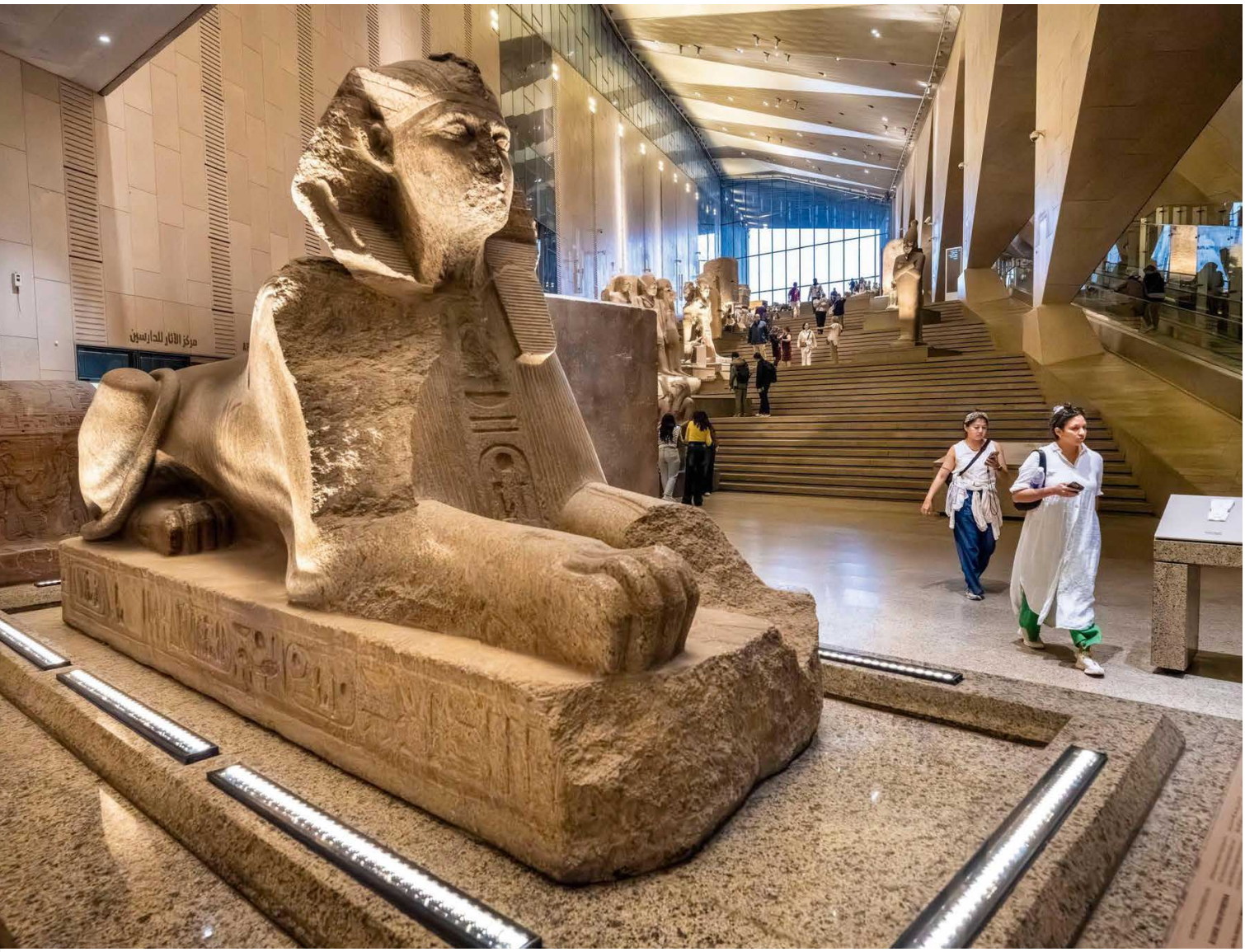
By evening, the Nile has turned the colour of ink. The call to prayer carries across the water as Aswan comes into view, its waterside mosques and temples catching the last of the light. Impressive as they are, it's the people who stay with me long after I step ashore: Fahmy bringing in his nets, Menna knotting macrame in the island's workshop and children diving head-first into the mighty Nile.

HOW TO DO IT ◆ Multi-night cruises aboard the *Safiya* can be included in tour itineraries with Corinthian Travel, which specialises in tailor-made trips to Egypt and other countries in the region. dahabiyanilesailing.com corinthiantravel.co.uk





From left: Traditional boats anchored by the Nile riverbank in Aswan; Zainab Mustafa from Bisaw Island shows off freshly baked sun bread; the sphinx of kings Ramesses II and Merenptah in the Grand Egyptian Museum



2 EXPLORE ANCIENT HISTORY AT A 21ST-CENTURY MUSEUM

The highlights of Cairo's new, long-awaited Grand Egyptian Museum

STATUE OF RAMESSES II

As visitors step past the museum's hieroglyph-adorned facade and into the echoing entrance hall, they're met by the colossal figure of Ramesses II. The 3,200-year-old statue of one of Egypt's most powerful pharaohs stands 11 metres tall. Discovered in 1820 broken in six pieces, it was reassembled and displayed for decades in downtown Cairo. When the Grand Egyptian Museum (GEM) broke ground, it was the first object brought here, and the museum was built around it.

MASK OF TUTANKHAMUN

The 1922 discovery of the tomb of Tutankhamun ignited a worldwide frenzy of interest in the history and art of ancient Egypt. More than 5,000 objects from the boy king's tomb are on display in the GEM. The undisputed star is the kohl-eyed funerary mask, buried with Tutankhamun's mummy, crafted in solid gold. Following accidental damage to its braided beard in 2014, it's been meticulously restored and now gleams in a glass case before a snaking queue.

KHUFU'S SOLAR BOAT

Dating to around 2500 BCE and constructed from cedar wood, the boat of King Khufu was discovered in some 1,200 pieces beside the Great Pyramid of Khufu in 1954. Now displayed in a vast two-storey gallery with elevated viewing platforms, it was painstakingly reassembled using archaeological records. Ancient Egyptians believed the pharaoh would join the sun god Ra on his cosmic journey across the heavens after death, so archaeologists named it a 'solar boat'.

STATUE OF HATSHEPSUT

The story behind this granite statue is truly remarkable. One of the few women to assume full pharaonic power, Hatshepsut ruled during the 18th Dynasty, around 1470 BCE, when kingship was firmly a man's domain. To legitimise her authority, Hatshepsut presented herself in official art and inscriptions as a male ruler, adopting masculine titles and even donning a false beard — as this statue depicts. She's remembered for a largely peaceful reign. tickets.gem.eg

IMAGES: GETTY (FAR LEFT); ALAMY (ABOVE)



3 DISCOVER A MUD CITY OF ARTISTS

Within the maze of sun-dappled courtyards and mud-brick domes of Wissa Wassef Art Centre, artisans are creating vast tapestry masterpieces. Peer through the open doorways of the workshops, and they can be seen studiously weaving hand-dyed wool into towering works that resemble paintings. These works may come to hang in museums and galleries around the world, but only a visit to this centre on the outskirts of Cairo allows you to see the artistry that goes into creating them.

The centre was founded in 1951 by Egyptian architect Ramses Wissa Wassef, to preserve traditional crafts such as weaving, pottery and batik. He taught local children using a radical method: they worked without photographs, sketches or other references, creating entirely from memory and imagination. Today, more than 30 artisans work on site to continue this tradition. The centre operates as a co-op where you can buy textiles directly from them.

HOW TO DO IT ◆ A 15-minute drive east from the Giza pyramids, Wissa Wassef Art Centre makes an easy add-on to a history-filled day. Entry is free but donations are encouraged. wissawassef.com

4 TAKE TO THE SKIES ABOVE LUXOR

Each morning, with the burners roaring into life, balloons rise slowly above Luxor — a colourful flotilla drifting over the temples, tombs and desert hills that most visitors encounter from the ground. The city is Egypt's ballooning capital, with daily launches at dawn. From above, the pharaohs' monuments become part of a much bigger picture: a patchwork of green farmland following the winding ribbon of the Nile before giving way to the ochre desert beyond. Beneath the balloon, you might glimpse the Temple of Hatshepsut, with its striking terraces stepping into the cliffs, and the desert tombs of the Valley of the Queens spread out across the West Bank, where queens and royal children were buried during the New Kingdom period. If conditions are right, you'll also catch a glimpse of the Valley of the Kings in the first light of day, before floating back to the surrounding farmland, where local dogs are waiting to welcome you back down to earth.

HOW TO DO IT ◆ Local operator flights cost from around £80 to £120 per person and last 45-60 minutes, depending on the group size and season. sindbadballoons.com kingtutballoons.com

From left: The wool and cotton used at Wissa Wassef Art Centre are dyed with plants grown in the gardens of the complex; hot air balloons drift over Luxor's West Bank at sunrise













5 STROLL INTO CAIRO'S FOOD HISTORY

A walking tour of the capital offers a delicious window into Egypt's past and present, with cardamom-infused coffee and sweets laced with rosewater

By 8am, the queue outside Borai already stretches along the pavement. Office workers in pressed shirts stand shoulder-to-shoulder with market traders and delivery drivers, all drawn to a hole-in-the-wall kitchen no bigger than a garage. Out front, a bubbling vat of oil crackles away, sending the aroma of garlic and fresh herbs drifting down the street. In one of the world's largest cities, Cairo has no shortage of places to grab breakfast on the go, but this is the one locals are happy to wait in line for.

Inside, seven brothers — not related by blood, but all nursed by the same woman and so considered family in Egypt — work with choreographed precision. Fava beans, soaked for 12 hours, disappear into a grinder with onions, garlic, leeks and fistfuls of parsley until the mixture turns green enough to stain the fingers. The paste is shaped into little patties, scattered with sesame seeds and baptised with a hiss in hot oil.

"This is Egypt's answer to falafel," my tour guide Lamiaa Taher says as we collect our *taamiya* sandwiches, wrapped in paper, from across the stainless-steel counter. I tear one open, revealing a steaming, spongey centre beneath its crisp bronze crust. They're wrapped in warm *baladi* flatbread with a drizzle of nutty *tahina*, the Egyptian version of tahini, made from ground sesame seeds, lemon, garlic and orange blossom water. It's the fresher, more herbaceous cousin of chickpea falafel. "Once you eat it, you don't need anything else," Lamiaa warns with an easy grin, her face framed by a neat black bob.

Which presents something of a challenge. This is the first of several stops on a street food tour through downtown Cairo with female-founded company Bellies En-Route. With little more than an Arabic sign above the door and no online presence, Borai is the kind of place I wouldn't have discovered on my own. It's a fitting introduction to Egyptian cooking, a cuisine rooted in agricultural traditions and shaped by influences from the Mediterranean, the Middle East and Africa, heavy on cumin and coriander.

As we wander deeper into Wust El-Balad, a timeworn belle époque quarter, I momentarily forget I'm in Egypt. Broad boulevards and apartment blocks with decorative wrought-iron balconies feel distinctly Parisian. "That's exactly what Khedive Ismail wanted," Lamiaa says. Inspired by time spent in France, the Egyptian ruler remodelled the district in the late 19th century in a European style.

Our next stop could easily pass for a Greek taverna, with its whitewashed stone walls and cobalt-blue shutters, despite the incongruous name of Fish & Chips. But it serves what Lamiaa calls the queen of Egyptian food: *molokhia*. "It's not a soup, not a stew; it's something entirely its own," she says. Finely chopped jute leaves are simmered in a broth until they develop a glossy, silky consistency, then finished with ghee, garlic and coriander. Said to date back to the pharaohs, its rich, earthy flavour soon wins me over. I scrape the bowl clean beneath black-and-white portraits of Egypt's silver-screen icons from the 1930s, 40s and 50s — a reminder of when Cairo was known as the Hollywood of the Middle East.

No Egyptian meal is complete without a cup of Arabic coffee, so we head to Wardet El Yaman, a tiny corner cafe that's been brewing it since 1925. "This is the kind of coffee you'd be served in someone's home," Lamiaa says, handing me a small cup of what looks like green tea, scented with cardamom and served with a date on the side to sweeten things. Traditionally associated with Bedouin communities, the beans are sun-dried before roasting, giving the coffee a heady kick.

Finally, we stop to pick up syrupy treats laid out on round trays in glass cases at a sweet shop near Tawfikia Square, a pedestrianised quarter lined with cafes, bakeries and food stalls. "Cairo's love affair with sweets goes back to the Fatimid dynasty, which ruled Egypt from 969 to 1171," Lamiaa says. With sugar an expensive luxury at the time, elaborate confectionery became a status symbol of wealth and power. "Many of the sweets still sold here today date back to that era." I leave with a box of *basbousa*, a semolina cake scented with rosewater — one of the fragrant flavours that arrived in Cairo along medieval trade routes.

In Cairo, history is as much in its neighbourhood cafes and breakfast stalls as it is in its monuments and museums. To experience it, you just need to know where to look.

HOW TO DO IT ◆ Bellies En-Route's downtown Cairo food tour includes at least seven stops, over four to five hours. From $72 (£54) per person, minimum two people. belliesenroute.com

IMAGES: GETTY (TOP LEFT); ALAMY (TOP RIGHT)

Clockwise from top left: Old Cairo, south of the city centre, is home to many Christian sites including the Greek Orthodox Church of Saint George; Egypt's version of falafel is deep-fried on the streets of the capital; vintage portraits of Egyptian film stars decorate the interior of Fish & Chips restaurant in downtown Cairo; the traditional Egyptian dish of molokhia, served with baba ghanoush, tahina, salad, fried aubergine and savoury pastries

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6 CAMP WITH THE BEDOUIN OF SINAI

In the folds of ochre rock that make up northeast Egypt's arid Sinai region, the Jebeliya people have lived side by side with the monks of St Catherine's Monastery for hundreds of years. The sixth-century Christian complex still attracts pilgrims from all over the world, who come to see the burning bush and tour the surrounding rock-hewn chapels. But what makes an even greater impression are the hiking tours the local Jebeliya Bedouin lead into the mountain range towering above the monastery. Days are spent quietly, beginning with the smell of coffee beans roasted by your guide on an open fire, and ending with nights under the stars, camping in remote Bedouin community gardens. The walking is biblically epic and beautiful, wending through giant canyons and silent valleys, passing tiny hermit chapels, before climbing Mount Sinai — where Moses is said to have received the Ten Commandments.

HOW TO DO IT ◆ Walking tours with Bedouin-run tour company Sinai Hikes can be tailored to suit your fitness level and schedule. Prices start at around $135 (£100) per person, per day. sinaihikes.com

7 FIND RELIGION IN THE CAVES OF MOKATTAM

A 'Garbage City' in Cairo's eastern Mokattam Hills might not sound like an obvious stop on your tour, but don't let the name deter you. The largely Coptic Christian residents of Manshiyat Naser — who have collected and sorted the capital's waste for generations — have also spent years chiselling into the limestone cliffs to create some of Egypt's most unique religious monuments. The cavernous chapel chambers and intricate carvings of angels, saints and Bible verses were sculpted as places of worship by Cairo's garbage-collecting Zabbaleen community. Visitors are welcomed in on tours with guide Adham El Sharkawy, who grew up here. Discover both the architecture — including a vast semi-open-air sanctuary capable of hosting up to 20,000 worshippers — and how the Zabbaleen have created one of the world's most efficient informal recycling systems, reusing around 80% of what they collect.

HOW TO DO IT ◆ The City of Garbage Collectors tour costs 400 EGP (£6) for a half day or 600 EGP (£9) for a full day. cityofrecycling.wixsite.com/website



Below: St Catherine's Monastery was built in the foothills of Mount Sinai, crafted from the mountain's rock so it blends in with its surroundings



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8 PADDLE THE NILE IN ASWAN

'Egypt is the gift of the Nile,' said the Greek historian Herodotus, of the river that sustained one of the world's greatest civilisations in the unforgiving desert. Spend a little time around Aswan and it's easy to see why the Nile remains so revered. In this southern Egyptian stretch, the waterway is scattered with an archipelago of lush green islands, ideal for slow exploration.

A kayak is the best way to get up close to it all. While larger boats stick to the mainstream, paddlers can slip into back channels to see monuments lining the banks from a different perspective. On a guided outing travellers can paddle to Philae Temple, the island sanctuary where some of Egypt's last hieroglyphic inscriptions were carved around 394 CE. For those wanting more time on the water, the company also runs multi-day kayak expeditions between Aswan and Luxor.

HOW TO DO IT ◆ A 90-minute kayaking trip costs $15 (£11) per person, including all equipment, minimum two people. jjjamaicaboats.com

9 EXPLORE THE VALLEY OF KINGS

Painted more than 3,000 years ago, some of the frescoes and hieroglyphs inside the Valley of the Kings' tombs look as though they were daubed within this lifetime, so astonishing is their preservation. It's the reason why these scorched hills 30 minutes from Luxor have become one of Egypt's greatest attractions. New Kingdom pharaohs carved more than 60 tombs into the cliffs here as their final resting place. Duck through an unassuming doorway and descend down narrow passageways leading deep into the rock, and you might find murals and carved reliefs of brilliant blues, reds and ochres covering chamber walls.

The sprawling necropolis has survived both tomb robbers and flash floods, and tourism here is carefully managed. It's worth paying extra for access to several further tombs, including those of Seti I, Ramesses IV and Tutankhamun.

HOW TO DO IT ◆ Visit early to avoid the heat and bring a fan. Tickets are best bought in advance online or by card on site. egymonuments.gov.eg



Right: Kayaking on the Nile enables travellers to access quiet back channels



10 TOUR LUXOR ON TWO WHEELS

One of the world's great open-air museums, Luxor's West Bank is also a living, breathing neighbourhood best explored by bicycle

A coach rumbles past and, for a fleeting moment, I feel a pang of envy for the air-conditioned cocoon its passengers are almost certainly enjoying. Then I look around. From behind tinted windows, they're missing the street theatre playing out around us. "Cycling is the best way to really see Luxor," Sayed Setouhy calls over his shoulder, his crown of cropped black curls silhouetted against the sun. "You have the freedom to stop, take pictures and discover things that people in cars and coaches don't."

It's morning in Luxor and the city on the banks of the Nile is limbering up for the day. Gaggles of schoolchildren in matching uniforms chat at the roadside as a donkey cart clip-clops past. Laundry flaps from balconies, while dogs lie sprawled in scraps of shade, untroubled by the day's gathering pace.

I'm on Luxor's West Bank, a stretch of farmland, village streets and ancient monuments that's perfect for exploring on two wheels. Many of its star attractions lie surprisingly close together, making it possible to pedal between tombs and everyday life in a matter of minutes. Sayed, who trained as a lawyer, now helps run his father's bike-hire business and leads rides through his home city.

With my cherry-red push bike, we pedal past fields thick with banana trees until the Colossi of Memnon loom up ahead. We brake before them as Sayed explains what we're looking at. "These are the gateway to the tombs," he says, gesturing to the statues, "originally built to guard the mortuary temple of Pharaoh Amenhotep III." It's hard to imagine now, but they once marked the entrance to one of ancient Egypt's most lavish temple complexes, most of which has since been lost to the ravages of time.

The statues depict seated kings, their once-proud faces weathered into little more than flat smudges, still turned towards the rising sun. We tip our heads back to take in the hulking figures, each 18 metres high, now just steps from the commotion of the road. Visitors have been gazing up at them since the Greco-Roman period.

The Colossi are merely a curtain-raiser for the West Bank's riches: the Valley of the Kings, where pharaohs were buried in elaborately decorated tombs; the Tombs of the Nobles; Queen Hatshepsut's dramatic temple, chiselled into cliffs that rise almost vertically; and Deir el-Medina, the village of the artisans who decorated the royal tombs.

We cycle on, passing neighbourhood cafes gearing up for the midday rush, then leave our bikes outside Medinet Habu. This vast mortuary temple was built for Ramesses III and later enclosed within a larger walled complex. "What I like about this place is that you can see how it kept changing," Sayed says. "Instead of one temple frozen in time, it feels like you're walking through several different temples in a single visit." We step inside to take in the towering gateway pylons and weathered reliefs, fragments of colour still clinging to the stone in places.

A few streets away lies Old Qurna, an abandoned village built directly over ancient burial grounds dating back 3,500 years. For much of the 19th and 20th centuries, it was also home to families who built newer dwellings among the ruins of Thebes. "People were living here up until the early 2000s," Sayed recalls. "Then, as more tombs were discovered beneath the houses, residents were gradually relocated by the government to a new settlement." Today, roofless rooms rise above gaping holes in the ground, where the doorways to a handful of tombs are just visible, like the opened windows of an Advent calendar.

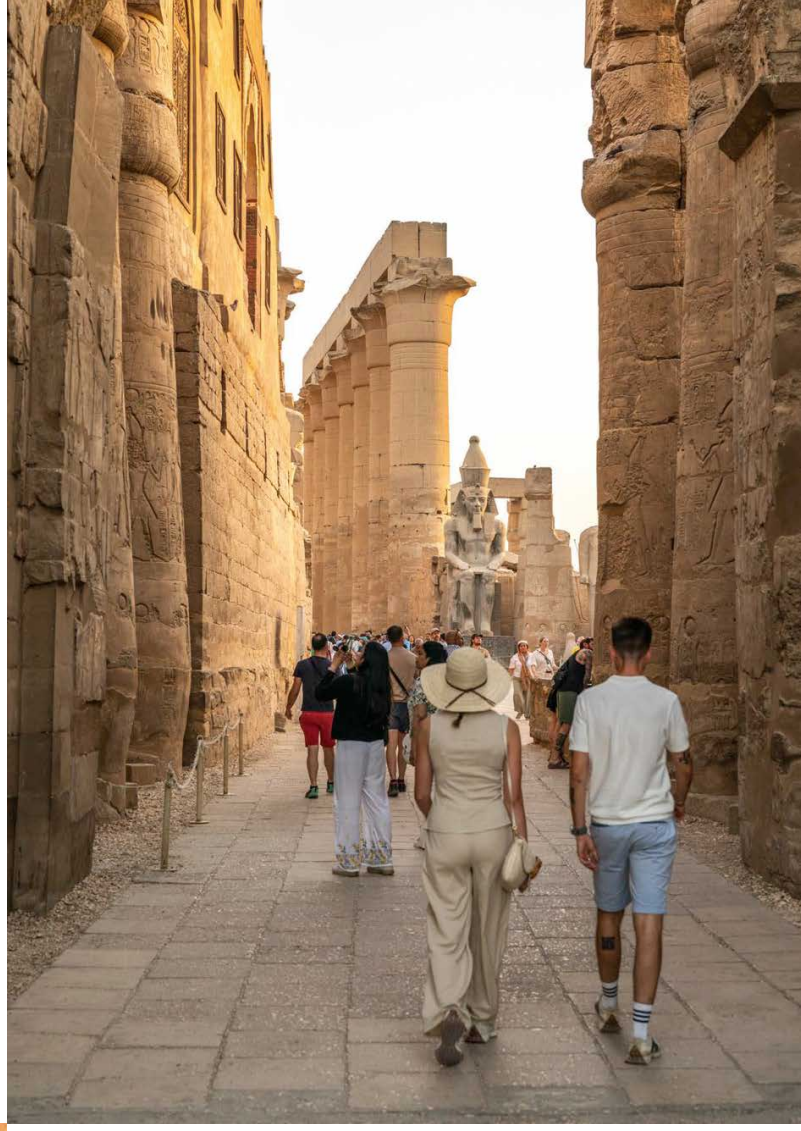
We pedal closer to the base of the mountain, which is honeycombed with tombs and dotted with cube-like houses. A team of around 10 archaeologists is sifting through the dirt at an active dig metres from the roadside. Sayed shrugs. "New things are being discovered all the time here," he says.

HOW TO DO IT ◆ Stay at Hotel Al Moudira on Luxor's West Bank, which has a working farm and pool. Rooms from $275 (£207). Cycling tours of Luxor's West Bank can be arranged as part of Corinthian Travel's touring packages. moudira.com corinthiantravel.co.uk

◆ **The longest total eclipse of the 21st century will turn day to night over Luxor on 2 August 2027, for a total of six minutes and 22 seconds**

Clockwise from top left: The Colossi of Memnon can easily be seen from the saddle on biking tours; Luxor Temple on the east bank of the Nile; the tomb of Ramesses V and Ramesses VI in the Valley of the Kings is richly decorated; sunrise over the farmland of Luxor's West Bank


PHOENIX
PHOENIX



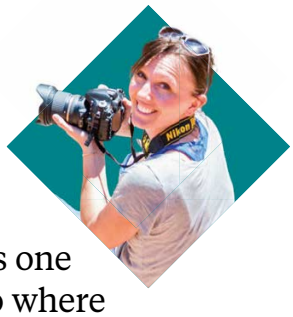






11 DIVE THE RED SEA AT DAHAB

Around her job as a photographer, Cairo-based Claire Thomas likes to escape to the coast



"Of all Egypt's Red Sea destinations, Dahab is my favourite. It started out as a hippie hangout and its laid-back vibe is one of the reasons why I love it. But it's also where I learned to dive. Each morning, I'd slip beneath the surface into crystal-clear water, surrounded by coral gardens and clouds of reef fish. From Dahab, you can also be in the foothills of the Sinai range in about 20 minutes. What keeps drawing me back is the rare meeting of desert, mountains and sea."

12 TAKE A VIP PYRAMID TOUR

Standing in front of the Pyramids of Giza is one thing — gliding between them as a VIP in an open-sided golf buggy is quite another. As the breeze cuts through the heat, you'll cruise across the plateau, absorbing the extraordinary scale of the scattered structures that have stood for some 4,500 years — an enduring symbol of Egypt's Pharaonic dynasties. As well as pausing at highlights such as the Great Sphinx and Valley Temple, travellers still have the opportunity to venture inside the Great Pyramid. The oldest and tallest of the distinctive structures, it was built as a royal tomb for King Khufu between 2551 and 2528 BCE. After you've burrowed deep to find the womb-like King's Chamber, the buggy driver will be waiting outside to whisk you to an air-conditioned lounge for cold drinks and snacks.

HOW TO DO IT ◆ Since 2025, vehicle access within the archaeological zone has been restricted; the VIP upgrade gives travellers their own buggy and driver. A three-hour trip costs around $130 (£96) per person; book through tour operators. corinthiantravel.co.uk

IMAGE: GETTY (ABOVE)





Camels can still be ridden around the Pyramids of Giza
Above from left: Around Dahab, desert mountains meet the Red Sea; Elsayed Mahmoud at the pottery wheel in Tunis Village, Faiyum

13 MEET THE POTTERS OF TUNIS VILLAGE

It's been almost 50 years since a Swiss artist moved to the desert, unexpectedly inspiring a community of Egyptian ceramicists

"Sixty years ago, this was just a small village, much like any other in Egypt," Elsayed Mahmoud says, dropping a fist-sized lump of clay onto a spinning potter's wheel with a satisfying thud. All that changed in the early 1980s, when the Swiss ceramist Evelyne Porret moved to Tunis Village and opened its first pottery school, pinning it on the map.

"She saw village kids playing with mud and thought, why not teach them pottery? People thought she was crazy at the time," Elsayed says, laughing. "But the pottery started selling through showrooms and became a good income for the villagers."

Ceramics are now the village's calling card. Perched above Lake Qarun, a saltwater pool in the Faiyum Oasis, it's still little more than a few streets lined with bougainvillea and olive trees. Yet this artisan community, around a three-hour drive south west of Cairo, is home to a remarkable concentration of 55 studios and pottery boutiques. And travellers flock here for the distinctive ceramics.

Having strolled the village, I linger at Youssef's Pottery, where Elsayed has spontaneously offered me a turn at the wheel. It's not as unusual as it sounds, as many workshops here operate with a strikingly informal set-up. Against a backdrop of sherbet-yellow walls displaying plates painted with swaying palms, he shows me the ropes. At 18, he's already spent nearly half his life honing his craft, having first taken up pottery after watching his older brother at the wheel. "I'd come here after school and spend a whole year just trying to make the perfect cup," he recalls.

The painstaking apprenticeship paid off. He can now shape a symmetrical vase in minutes, a feat he demonstrates with the confidence of someone who's done it thousands of times before. It's a hard act to follow, but I slip on an apron and take my turn. My finished piece isn't up to Elsayed's standards, but as I arrange to collect it later, it feels satisfying to have made something tangible from a brief visit.

Outside, a couple of visitors wander past carrying freshly glazed mugs and a stack of plates wrapped in newspaper. Elsayed nods towards them. "When Evelyne started, there were only six students," he says. "Now, people come from all over the world because of what those kids learned here." As the pair disappear around the corner, another visitor arrives expectantly at the workshop door and takes a seat, ready to try their hand at the potter's wheel.

HOW TO DO IT ◆ Stay at Lazib Inn Resort and Spa, in the heart of Tunis Village, surrounded by pottery studios. A superior suite costs from $276 (£205), B&B. lazibinn.com @youssefpotterytunis



Left: Created in the 1970s, the lake in Faiyum Oasis has become a refuge for wildlife as well as an adventure hotspot

14 RIDE THROUGH THE SURREAL WILD WEST

There's something about arriving at Wadi El Rayan that makes you want to rub your eyes to ensure they're not playing tricks on you. In the middle of Egypt's baking-hot Western Desert, a waterfall cascades loudly as people roll up their trousers and dip their feet in. Nearby, a sapphire-blue lake shimmers invitingly on the horizon, a handful of boats ferrying day-trippers out onto the water.

This is no mirage, conjured up after days of trekking across sweeping desert dunes. It's part of a larger national park in the Faiyum Oasis, home to two man-made lakes and the country's best-known waterfalls. It was created in the 1970s, when agricultural drainage water was diverted into a desert basin, transforming a hyper-arid expanse into a watery refuge for wildlife and adventurous travellers alike.

Situated about an hour south west of the city of Faiyum and a two-hour drive from Cairo, Wadi El Rayan has become a popular escape for those looking to cool off when the thermometer rises. Shops and restaurants have sprung up nearby, serving local dishes such as duck slow-cooked under coals buried in the desert sand.

The surrounding powdery dunes, home to rare species including the diminutive fennec fox, provide a playground for thrill-seekers, too. The rippling dunes can be up to 100 metres high and several tour operators offer sandboarding as part of day-long desert safaris, often combined with 4WD rides.

The incongruous landscape continues some 30 miles south west at Wadi al-Hitan (Valley of the Whales), where fossilised remains of ancient whales strewn across the parched sands add a further layer of strangeness. They belong to a time 40 million years ago, when North Africa was submerged beneath the Tethys Sea.

An open-air exhibit enables you to walk around prehistoric whale skeletons, half-buried in the sand, their rib cages and vertebrae poking through, offering a glimpse into the evolution of early marine life in this region. The site's small Fossils and Climate Change Museum was added in 2016, helping guests make sense of one of the world's most curious and important paleontological sites.

HOW TO DO IT ◆ Memphis Tours runs a one-day Faiyum tour from Cairo. It costs from $154 (£115) per person. memphistours.com

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE & AROUND

British Airways and EgyptAir fly direct from Heathrow to Cairo, while Wizz Air operates direct flights from Luton. EasyJet flies to Luxor from Gatwick. ba.com egyptair.com wizzair.com easyjet.com

Average flight time: 5h.

In Cairo, the metro is useful for some downtown journeys, while Uber, taxis and pre-booked drivers are often more practical for sightseeing. Domestic flights and overnight sleeper trains connect Cairo with Luxor and Aswan, while Nile cruises provide a more leisurely way to travel between Upper Egypt's riverside sights.

WHEN TO GO

October to April offers the most comfortable conditions. At this time of year, Cairo experiences mild days of around 20C to 28C, while southern Egypt, including Luxor and Aswan, is generally warmer, with daytime highs of around 23C to 35C. Summer – June to August – can be fiercely hot, especially in southern Egypt, where temperatures often top 40C.

MORE INFO

Tutankhamun's Trumpet: The Story of Ancient Egypt in 100 Objects, by Toby Wilkinson, £12.99

The Cairo Trilogy, by Egyptian Nobel Prize-winner Naguib Mahfouz

Uncovering Ancient Egypt with Bettany Hughes UK tour runs 30 October-18 November fane.co.uk/bettany-hughes

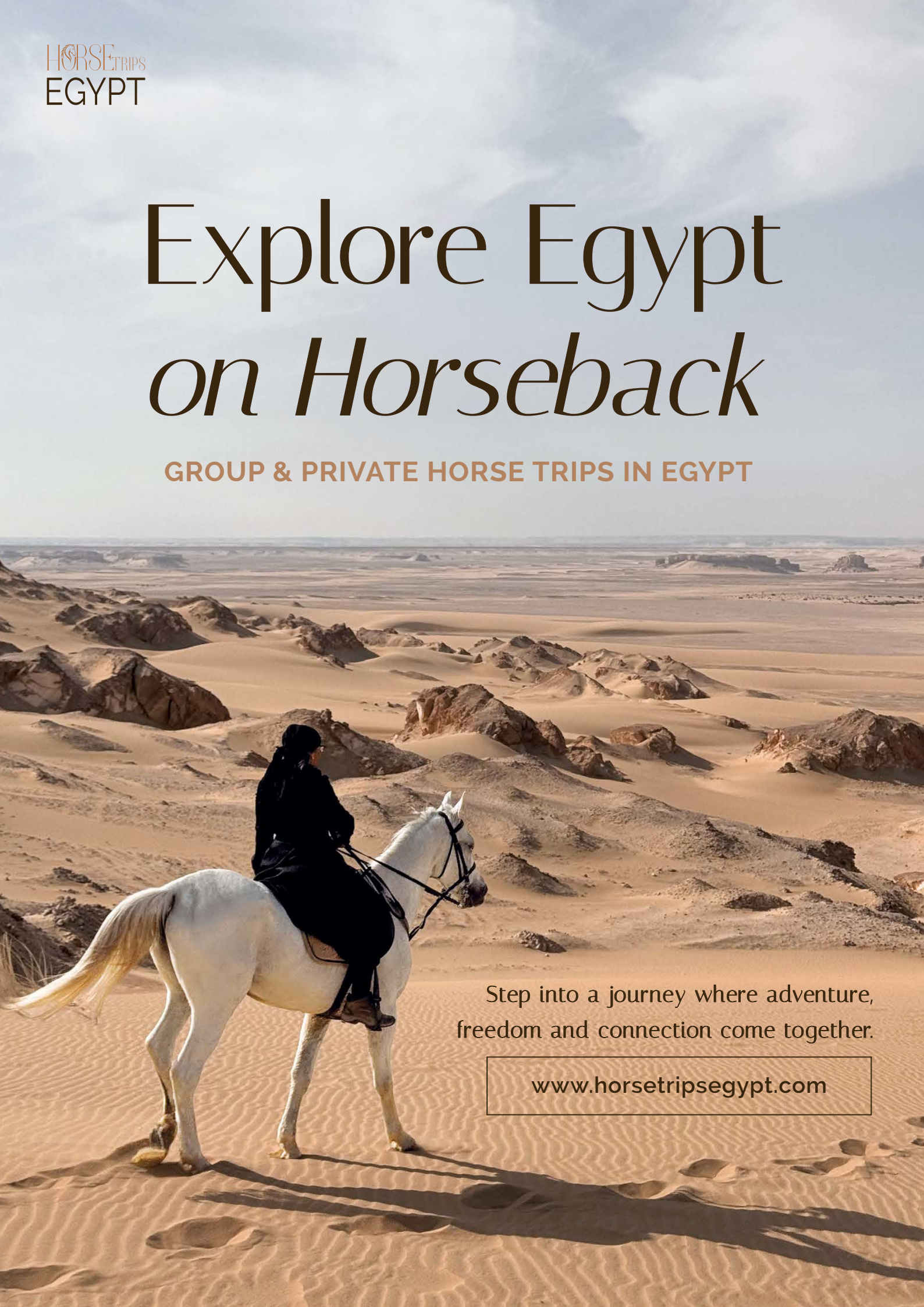
HOW TO DO IT

Corinthian Travel offers a 12-day Immersive Egypt: The Safiya Dahabiya Experience from £5,495 per person, based on two sharing. This includes visits to the Pyramids of Giza and the Grand Egyptian Museum, a four-night Nile cruise from Esna to Aswan and a desert safari to the Valley of the Whales. Hotels, sightseeing entrance fees, most meals, an Egyptologist guide and domestic flights are included. Excludes international flights. corinthiantravel.co.uk

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New

In the central Philippines, the Visayan Islands' tropical beaches are a backdrop for deeply rooted communities who are working to preserve locals' unique way of life — inviting visitors to share in complex culinary traditions and heritage crafts, and explore the reclaimed relics of the sugar trade

WORDS: SARAH GILLESPIE. PHOTOGRAPHY: BEN PIPE

horizons





The Hiligaynon language of the central Philippines is filled with mouthwatering onomatopoeia. There's *lagting* (scraping and tapping cutlery), *tamsak* (smacking lips) and *harakhak* (cackling laughter). But the word that comes to mind as I tuck in to a brioche bun filled with *ginamos*, a pungent paste made from fish or shrimps, is *mananam* (umami). It's based on the sound one makes when eating something delicious, and spills out as soon as I finish my meal — to the delight of Ramon 'Chinchin' Uy Jr, owner of organic restaurant Lanai by Fresh Start.

We're in the city of Bacolod on Negros island, my launchpad for exploring the area to see how locals like Chinchin are preserving and promoting its culture. Though best known for the white-sand resort of Boracay, the central Philippines encompasses hundreds of islands, including Negros and the Western Visayas. A great number of these outposts are home to the Hiligaynon people: the biggest ethnolinguistic group in Bacolod, united by a shared language, food and culture. Nowhere is that clearer than sat at Chinchin's long, communal table, where *lagting*, *tamsak* and *harakhak* form the backing track to our conversation.

Chinchin is wearing a black T-shirt emblazoned with the red snail logo of the Slow Food movement. Broad-shouldered and straight-backed, he radiates vitality — living testament to the quality of his ingredients. He hands me a cocktail made from gin and batwan, a sour, marble-sized green fruit native to this region. "If batwan disappears, our culture will disappear," he says. "We don't want to use truffles or caviar; we want to maximise the potential of our own ingredients." Ninety-eight per cent of what's served at Lanai is either grown on Chinchin's farm or is hyper-local to the island.

The region's produce is just one aspect of its cultural heritage, which, historically, has been overlooked. It's a legacy of Manila-centric colonial policies and the 1937 elevation of Manila's language, Tagalog, to the Philippines' official language, along with English. Joining us at the table are Jason and Virna Tan, a charismatic husband-and-wife duo in their fifties who will be my guides for the week and who have witnessed the consequences of this bias. "School subjects are taught in Tagalog, which is a bit weird because nobody here speaks it," says Jason, adjusting his square-rimmed glasses. "And they only teach national history, not local history. It's sad."

But there are signs of a cultural resurgence. Iloilo, on Panay island, became the Philippines' first Unesco Creative City of Gastronomy in 2023. New music, art and museums, such as Iloilo's National Museum Western Visayas, celebrate the culture. And in 2025, Bacolod was selected to host the first Terra Madre Asia and Pacific — an event with its origins in Italy's Slow Food Movement, which aims to preserve traditional foods. Chinchin co-founded Slow Food Negros in 2012 and was instrumental in securing this honour.

On the night of our dinner, the event — comprising five days of pop-ups, talks and tastings — has just finished. Many chefs have stuck around to forage in the provinces or explore the markets, intrigued by the area's reputation as a place of heritage ingredients and deep-rooted traditions.

Searching for Sugarlandia

The next day, Jason and Virna take me to Bacolod Central Market. Along the way, we pass honking jeepneys (public buses originally converted from military jeeps), canary-yellow tricycles and a jumble of buildings that recall the Philippines' former colonists: Spanish-style

Clockwise from top left: Valleys in the area were once full of sugar plantations; playing mahjong in Bacolod; Lanai restaurant uses hyper-local farm ingredients; a visitor outside The Ruins, Bacolod
Previous pages: Suyac Island in Negros region is famed for its mangroves and bamboo boardwalks



















Clockwise from top left: The Ruins, a regenerated sugar plantation mansion; Bacolod's arts district; Negros island is home to many restored haciendas; Criollo Cacao is a native ingredient that's at risk of disappearing

arches, US-style clapboard. Murals of grinning, feather-framed masks evoke Masskara, the city's biggest festival.

The market is a sprawl of stalls under a corrugated iron roof, where sellers call out in the sing-song tone of Hiligaynon. *Uga* (dried fish), batwan and *ginamos* assail my nostrils, but what's most surprising is the abundance of sweet snacks. There's *budbud*, *baye-baye*, *kalamay hati*, *suman latik*: all variations on sticky rice with brown sugar.

Since the Spanish era, sugar has shaped Western Visayas and its neighbouring islands, where Filipinos worked in appalling conditions on the estates. Negros, which was — and still is — the centre of the industry, acquired the nickname 'Sugarlandia'. Virna tells me that Negrenses are redefining this "crop of oppression", converting haciendas into agritourism sites and opening their ancestors' sugar mansions to visitors.

In the afternoon, we drive north to reach one such enterprise. The buildings thin out until the car windows frame only banana trees, their leaves slick with humidity, then field after field of tall, pale-green sugarcane. Workers sit astride lumbering carabao buffaloes or stand atop lorries, using machetes to hack the canes into transportable pieces.

After about 20 minutes, we reach The Ruins: the gutted remains of an early 20th-century, American-era mansion, now a favourite sunset hangout with a gift shop and restaurant. Young groups of friends in sleek shirts and dresses wander palm-shaded gardens lined with glowing yellow lanterns, stopping to pose for photos under Italianate arches.

It's not just the architecture that draws people here, it's the story. In 1911, Maria Braganza died after a miscarriage; her heartbroken husband, the *haciendero* (plantation owner) Don Mariano Lacson, built the mansion on his sugar plantation in her memory. During the Second World War, however, Filipino guerrillas burned the building down to prevent Japanese invaders from using it.

While sipping a lemonade at the restaurant, I meet Don Mariano's great-grandson Raymund Javellana, who took over the neglected estate in 2005. "The canes were so tall, you couldn't even see the fountain," he says, his eyes sparkling with humour.

Raymund hired a landscaper to clean up the garden, then told his friends about his plans to make it a visitor attraction. "'Nobody's going to come here,' they said. Deep inside, I thought: 'I'm going to prove you wrong,'" he tells me, before revealing that many homes are still used by the descendants of those who built them. "We're very proud of what our ancestors left us," he says.

The next day, I come across another, more intact home in the municipality of Manapla, on Negros's northwest coast. Set within sugar plantations and manicured gardens, the Gaston Ancestral House is a living museum wrapped in balustrades, its entire facade painted creamy white. A light breeze breathes the scent of pine into the rooms, gently ruffling the silver hair of Joey Gaston. With granular attention to detail, he guides me through the home his *haciendero* grandfather, Jose 'Panggoy' Gaston, built in the 1930s.

I step across native balayong wood floors, admire chairs backed with rattan woven using the Filipino *solihiya* technique and peer into display cabinets crammed with silver and carved with pineapple motifs. At the balcony, Joey encourages me to take off my sandals and stand on the cool tiles, as he tells me about his passion for keeping the building alive.

Black sheep

From the splashy murals of Bacolod to the beautifully preserved mansions of the wider province, the Negrenses' keen sense of aesthetics is undeniable, and my guide Jason has a theory why. "The conservative families of Iloilo sent their black sheep sons — their gamblers and their drunkards — to plant sugarcane here and become rich," he says. "But the ones with vices are also the artistic ones."

The next day, Jason takes me to visit a project that shows what he means. Ten miles south of Bacolod, on the edge of Bago City, we pull up at a row of low, iron-roofed buildings. Here is Tumandok Crafts Industries, a workshop and store. Owner Josephine Locsin shows me around; scattered coconut husks and scraps of Indigenous T'nalak woven cloth indicate the workers have just downed tools for lunch.

Initially Josephine sold products by Negros artisans but, when the local sugar mill closed in the 1990s, she established a

Three festivals worth a look

Dinagyang

Taking place in Iloilo each January, one of the Philippines' most extravagant festivals pits the city's schools and *barangays* (neighbourhoods) against each other in a big-budget tribal dance contest. Routines draw from Animist, Catholic and Indigenous imagery and are performed to a pounding soundtrack of live drums. Tickets for the main Sunday competition go on sale in December and sell out within hours, but the many street processions are free. facebook.com/iloilodinagyangofficial

Masskara

Each October in Bacolod, dancers don smiling masks ringed by a glittering corona of jewels and feathers and compete to be crowned victor; on the fringes are street-food markets, live concerts and even a *lola* (grandmother) pageant.

Manggahan

This eccentric Guimaras festival marks mango harvest season every May. There's an all-you-can-eat mango buffet, speed-eating contests, a profusion of mango-based products for sale and a street-dance competition involving mango-themed props and costumes. guimarasmanggahan.com

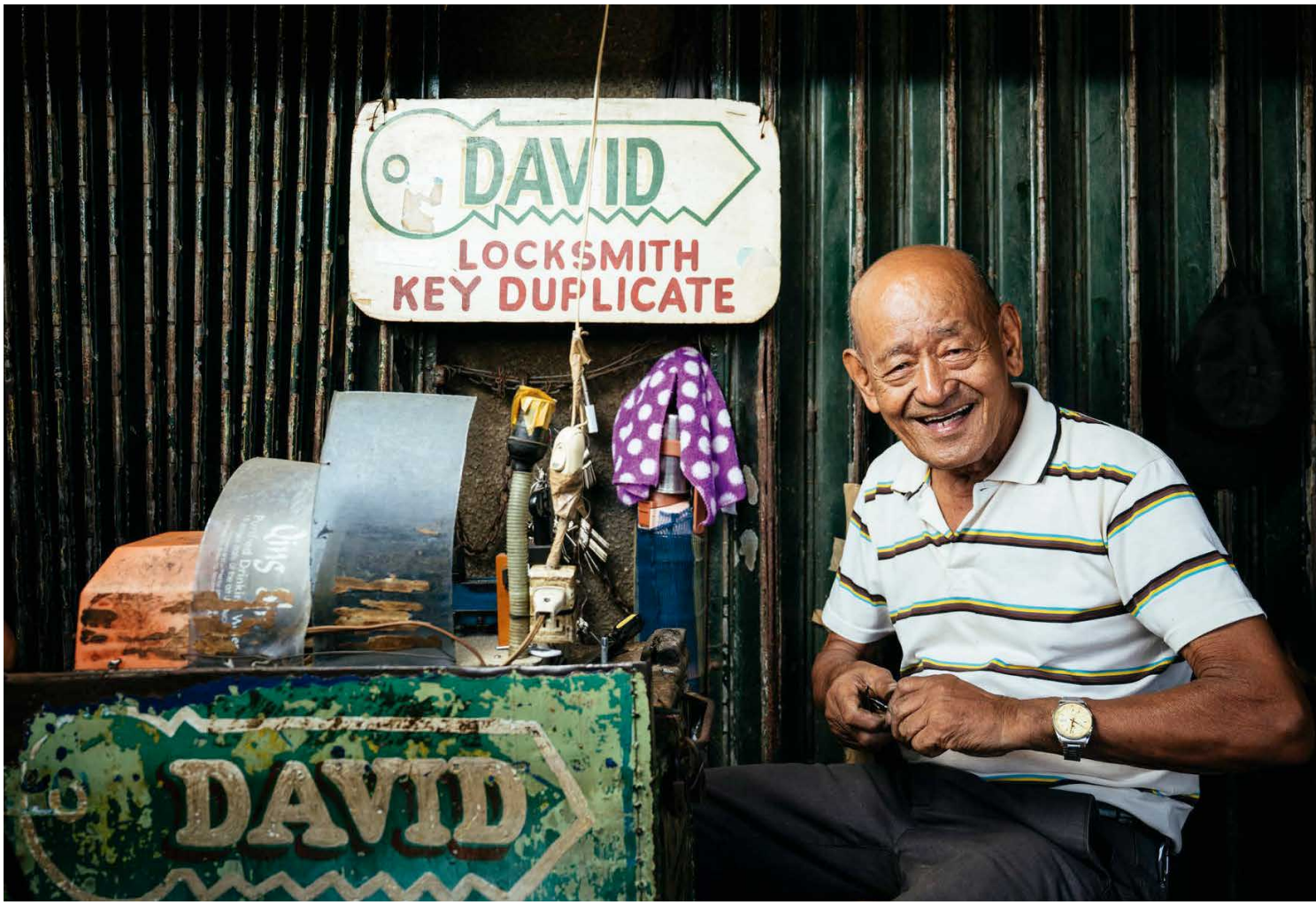




Passing canary-yellow tricycles and a jumble of buildings that recall the Philippines' former colonists, we reach Bacolod Central Market. Under a corrugated iron roof, among the sprawl of stalls, sellers call out in the sing-song tone of the Hiligaynon language.



Clockwise from top left: Portraits of the street sellers and market stallholders of Bacolod — Danilo Rafinian, Virginia Guillen, David Laranang, Emil Pamintalan and Stella Martinez at Bacolod Central Market


DAVID
LOCKSMITH
KEY DUPLICATE
DAVID











Where the river sets the table

Two and a half hours south of Metro Manila, Villa Escudero has been a working plantation since 1872, with a landscape still shaped by agriculture and generations of Filipino tradition. *Carabao*-drawn carts, cultural shows, bamboo rafts, *nipa* thatch cottages along the Labasin River and a museum tracing over four centuries of Philippine history offer different ways to experience the estate. At the Labasin Spillway, lunch is served in spring-fed waters, surrounded by groves, birdsong and the rhythms of rural life.

A living portrait of the Philippines

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Above: At 7 Hectares' aquaculture plot, native seafood species are being reared and served on tasting menus
Following page, from left: Chef Gus Sibayan stir-fries mangrove crabs at 7 Hectares; the restaurant's modern take on ukoy (fritters), on a bed of gulaman seaweed

factory to provide employment for its former workers. "They have beautiful stories," she says, gathering her long, glossy hair over one shoulder. "Some were addicts before, some were drunkards, but now they've let go of that. My dream was for them to have their own businesses — several of them have done that."

Josephine realised that lamination — the application of polyester resin to coconut shells, to toughen them — could also be applied to Capiz shells, so she trained her new employees in this skill. Named after a province on Panay, Capiz windowpane oysters are one of the region's best-known exports, used for homewares and clothing worldwide. Laminated, they became yet more versatile. I see them inlaid into tables, clocks and frames, their shine illuminating palm tree and bamboo designs. Fragments are laid out so visitors can create their own jewellery using these pearlescent sea treasures.

Two hours' drive north, Jason, Virna and I come to the coastal community of Purok Bougainvillea, in the city of Sagay, to explore a community tourism project by celebrated Sagay artist Nune Alvarado. We swap the car for a *trisikad* (pedicab) that's painted with flower motifs and powered by young guide, Rhoda Hit. She wears a brown cap and a floral blouse as bright as the bougainvillea stem she hands me.

Within moments, the grey concrete of Sagay gives way to a living gallery, where everything from the chapel to the convenience store is painted. This is Pinta Balay, Rhoda tells me over the creaking of *trisikad* wheels — an area where homeowners have eagerly offered up their properties for Nune to use as an urban canvas.

A key artist in the Philippines' Social Realism movement, which began in the 1970s, Nune's most harrowing works have drawn attention to the plight of Negros's sugar workers. Here, though, his work is more abstract and bright. In sunrise oranges and hibiscus reds, his swirls and triangles seem to bobble like cockscombs or bristle like hedgehogs. Some are up to two storeys high.

Eventually, we emerge onto the black sands of Margaha, where a beachfront, bamboo-built cafe called Kape Albarako gleams with Nune's signature blues, pinks and greens. It's run by the artist's wife Sally Alvarado. Though her husband now struggles with worsening dementia, Sally tells me she and the local government are campaigning to have him named an official National Artist of the Philippines. "Nune has always fought for the masses through his work," says Sally, placing a tray of homemade pastries on the table with delicate hands. "He's loved by his community; for me, that's already an award." However, she believes securing this designation would also win more funding for Sagay's arts and community programmes and encourage more Negrenses to stay in the province rather than migrate to the capital, as so many do.





Loading the ark

The next day, I meet Kiko Torno, one of few Filipinos to have moved in the other direction, away from Manila — at least, part-time. Some 17 miles north of Bacolod, we're bumping along a rural track in Enrique B Magalona municipality. On either side, fishponds sweat under the hot sun, drooping coconut palms shimmer in the haze and dragonflies flash by.

Once a full-time 'city boy' working in advertising, Kiko now spends half of each month at sustainable aquaculture plot, 7 Hectares. He retains a home in Manila, so he can promote his produce through pop-ups and tastings.

"I was trying to get out of corporate life," says Kiko, who, with his long silver hair and faded blue jeans, looks more like a rockstar than a marketing man. "I noticed that the quality of fish in Manila was declining; I wanted to spread awareness of the seafood quality in Negros."

After taking an aquaculture course, Kiko and his Negrense wife, Gretchen, turned this abandoned tiger prawn farm into a sustainable marine farm cultivating several species, including barramundi and horn snails. "My main objective is to preserve the island's native species," he says.

Kiko's enthusiasm for local produce is infused into the multi-course menus he and chef Gus Sibayan serve at 7 Hectares. When we meet later that day, Gus is stir-frying mangrove crabs and whipping up acidic batwan dressings under a palm-roof canopy. Every ingredient is sourced either from the farm or local communities, he tells me, before serving up an earthy-tasting soup. It's a Western Visayan vegetable dish known as *laswa*, topped with a white *diwal* (angel-wing clam) — prized for its custard-like texture and flavour. Once overfished almost to extinction, it's making a comeback thanks to a restricted fishing season.

Similarly, *tultul* — an artisanal sea salt — is recovering since the government changed restrictions on selling uniodised salts in 2024. Gus grates it over courses and I discover its subtle, creamy flavour. He explains it's made by burning seawater-soaked driftwood, mixing more seawater into the ashes, then boiling the strained solution with coconut milk.

Batwan, *diwal* and *tultul* are all in the Slow Food movement's Ark of Taste, a catalogue of native ingredients that are at risk of disappearing. But thanks to the efforts of pioneers such as Kiko, these precious ingredients — and their associated traditions — now have a decent chance of survival.

"I'm up for this game; I'm up for the fight," says Kiko. "I just need to get the word out."

One of the most significant words in the Hiligaynon language is *padayon*: to continue, to persist, to endure. Here, I see it everywhere: in the gold-edged ripples on the fishpond, in the flakes of *tultul* still glittering on Gus's grater and in the smoke that curls from the wood fire, vanishing into perfumed air.

essentials

GETTING THERE & AROUND

Qatar Airways, Singapore Airlines and Cathay Pacific offer flights from UK airports to Manila and Cebu via their hubs. Once there, fly to Bacolod with Cebu Pacific or Philippine Airlines. qatarairways.com singaporeair.com cathaypacific.com cebupacificair.com philippineairlines.com

Average flight time: 15h30m.

Taxis in the Philippines are cheap and plentiful; flag one down or use the Grab app. Alternatively, it's possible to pre-book a driver through rental companies such as Meca J. grab.com meca-j.com

WHEN TO GO

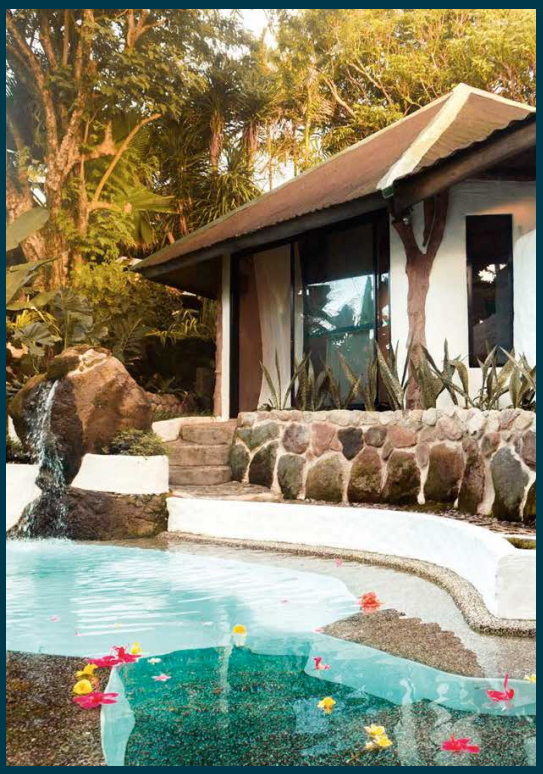
Dry season (December to May) brings average daily temperatures of 28C and clearer skies. The wet season (June to October) brings showers, higher humidity and occasional storm disruption.

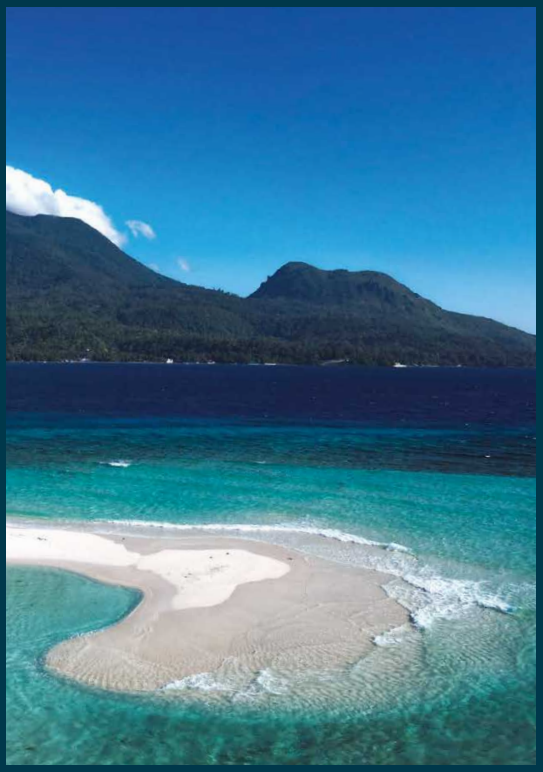
HOW TO DO IT

Regent Holidays offers a 14-day Culture and Cuisine of the Philippines tour from £4,985 per person, including private transfers, excursions such as a 10-course dinner at 7 Hectares, and all flights. regent-holidays.co.uk

BALIHAO
Camiguin, Philippines

Experience Balihao







Boutique Resort on Camiguin Island, Philippines

Balihao is a quiet escape shaped by its natural surroundings. Set between lush gardens, mountains and the sea, the resort was designed to work with the land rather than compete with it. Each villa has a private pool, tropical garden and views of the sea and mountains, with sunsets unfolding each evening. It's a place for those drawn to a slower way of living, with good food, thoughtful design and art at its heart. Traditional Filipino influences meet contemporary ideas, creating comfortable spaces that feel rooted in their surroundings.

Set on Camiguin, a small volcanic island known for its waterfalls, springs, reefs and beaches, Balihao offers a chance to experience a quieter side of the Philippines. The island was recently named by ***The New York Times*** as one of its **52 Places to Go**, putting Camiguin firmly on the map as a destination worth discovering.

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THE TIME-TRAVELLER'S GUIDE TO LONDON

The River Thames is the soul of England's capital. Along its hallowed banks, it's possible to glimpse the past lives and possible futures of one of the world's most storied cities

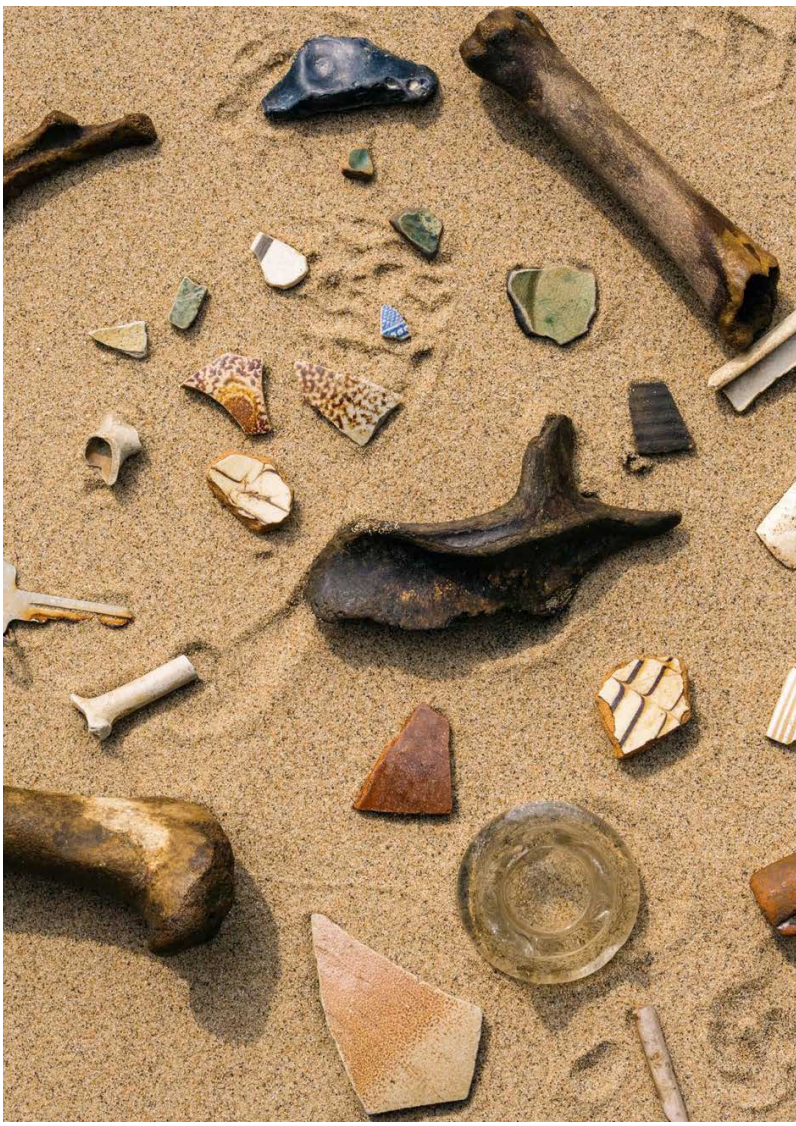
WORDS: SAM KEMP. PHOTOGRAPHY: AMY HEYCOCK









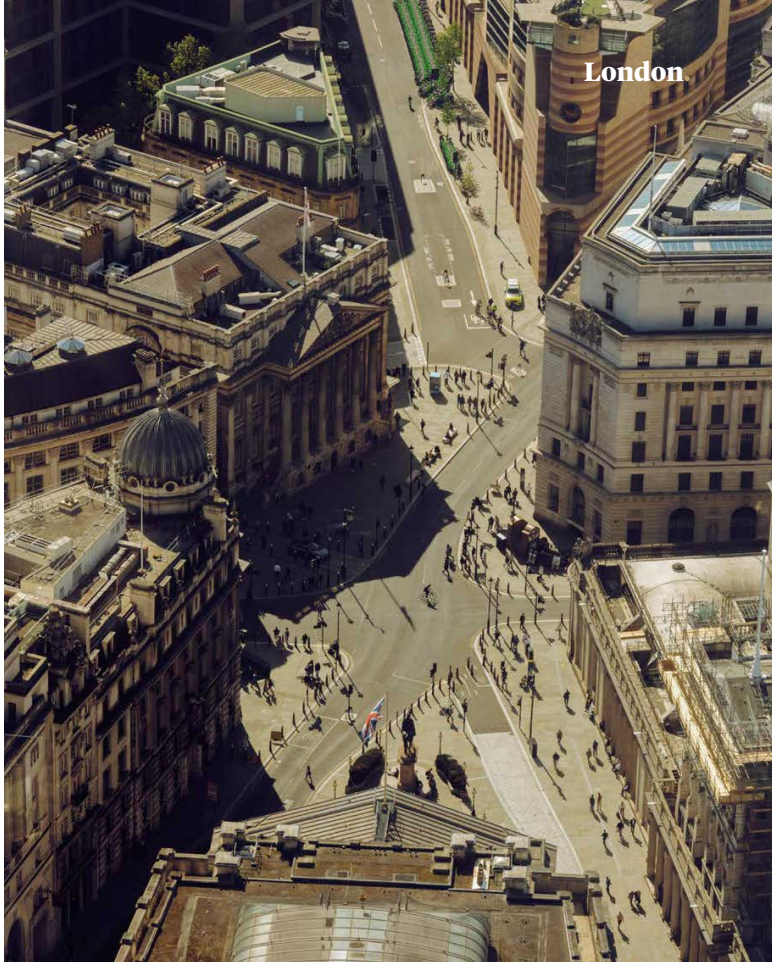


Dr Roula Pappa has seen a London few people can imagine. It's a land empty of humans, the Thames a vast and churning thing that cuts through savannah, lily-padded pools and open woodland thick with oak and pine. The air is heavy with tropical heat, the reed-lined riverbanks teeming with life hungry to devour other life.

When we meet, however, it's in the familiar surroundings of Kensington's Natural History Museum. She holds her lanyard to a security door and beeps us into a warren of underground corridors. Above us, visitors flow into the entrance hall, slack-jawed under the whale skeleton hanging from the ceiling.

Slowly, the strip lights fizz into life, illuminating a room of gleaming wooden cabinets. She pulls the handle of one labelled 'Trafalgar' and lifts out a crescent of mottled ivory, cupping it with both hands. It's what I've come here to see: the canine tooth of a hippopotamus that swam in the Thames 125,000 years ago, a time when temperatures were around 2C warmer than today. "This one lived below Nelson's Column," she reveals. "It dates to the last interglacial period, when the Thames would have been far wider."





As senior curator of fossil mammals collections, Roula knows how to dress the part, her waistcoat shaggy with something I'd like to believe is mammoth fur. The archives she studies, representing a period of 65 million years, are home to remnants of some of the city's most surprising former inhabitants, from the cave lions that prowled the site of The National Gallery to the straight-tusked elephants that once roamed The Strand, many of them unearthed in the geological terraces left by the flow of the ancestral Thames.

"Seeing what's underneath gives you a completely different view of London," Roula tells me, opening another cabinet to reveal the toffee-brown skull of a woolly rhinoceros. "My role has given me the opportunity to see how its environment and ecosystems have changed over millions of years — to perceive a wider, deeper sort of time."

This is the Thames's power. It warps our sense of time by virtue of its grand old age, allowing us, even if only for a fleeting moment, to see the city for the complex creature it truly is. The Thames is the oldest thing in London and will be here long after the city is gone. What better way, then, to get to know the capital than with a meander along the river's banks, meeting the people shaped by its flow. And my own meander begins one morning with a rather startling discovery.

PAST

The sun is still tinting the clouds above St Paul's pink when I happen upon the first bone. It's gnarled and angular. A hip perhaps, reddened from age and still bearing traces of the blade that cleaved it. Then comes the femur, followed by a cracked windpipe — so fragile it nearly shatters as I pull it from the foreshore's jumble of stone and driftwood.

Clutching my grisly findings, I hurry along the riverbank to seek out the expertise of Marilyn Greene, whose eyes are soon grazing the intricacies of the bone. She stays silent for a long time, running a hand through her dark ponytail. My brain whirs. "I think they once belonged to a cow," she says finally. I'm surprised by my own disappointment. So not a Celtic warrior, then.

"I've never found a body," Marilyn reveals, largely out of sympathy. "But I have a colleague who found a bit of human skull; it turned out to be Roman. Somebody else uncovered a 17th-century child burial right here on the foreshore. They had to call the police, but by the time they came, the water had covered it over again."

Marilyn's familiar with the Thames's habit of spitting up the dead. She's a mudlark: a person licensed by the Port of London Authority to search the riverside for remnants of the city's past. Today, she's here on behalf

From far left: Dr Roula Pappa assesses fossils in The Natural History Museum archives; the museum's exterior; mudlarking with the Thames Explorer Trust; the City of London inhabits what was ancient Londinium; bones, pottery shards and other mudlarking discoveries
Previous pages: London and the Thames seen from above

of the Thames Explorer Trust. She's heading up a foreshore exploration tour between the northern tip of Millennium Bridge and the petrified stumps of Queenhithe, an ancient dock opposite Shakespeare's Globe where Saxon coins stamped with portraits of Alfred the Great were once found buried in the clay.

"The original mudlarks were the poorest of the poor," Marilyn explains as my group gathers on the foreshore, the thatched roof of Shakespeare's Globe staring down on our anorak-clad ranks — comprised of everyone from young museum curators to amateur detectorists. "In the 18th and 19th centuries, they were the people who couldn't make money any other way. They'd come down at low tide, probably without shoes, and search for lumps of coal to sell."

Modern mudlarks are drawn more by the prospect of uncovering something astonishing. "The best discovery I know of occurred in the 1830s, near where they were going to build London Bridge," Marilyn tells me as we walk east towards Queenhithe, occasionally dropping down to pluck shards of pottery and Victorian hairpins from between moss-clad mooring posts. "They found the head of the Roman emperor Hadrian. Not his actual head, of course, but the bronze one now







Clockwise from right: Eel Pie Island is full of eccentric houses; the boathouses on the edge of the island; local artist Molly Butt; a swirl of colour on Molly's workbench

in the British Museum. They never found the body, so maybe you'll be lucky."

Over the years, the Thames's waters have given up all manner of remarkable things: the skull of a neolithic man, a flint hand axe, an Iron Age shield, a Celtic scabbard decorated with a dragon motif, a figurine of Apollo with its legs amputated, and several Roman effigies of Horus, the son of Isis. Some are thought to be ritual offerings — a reminder that the Thames was once a hallowed place; somewhere warriors' swords were said to have been sunk in the hope they might find their owners in the afterlife.

We gather our finds and place them on a crescent of pale sand below the embankment wall. Roman tableware and pieces of green-glazed Tudor ceramics are laid out next to oyster shells — possible relics from when the molluscs were a staple food for many Londoners. Marilyn picks over the haul, gravitating to a pipe bulb carved with the initials of its owner. "It's 1600s, I'd say," she conjectures. "I like to think Samuel Pepys smoked one of these while he was watching the Great Fire of London. The fire was great for mudlarks today, because everyone threw their belongings into the water, then knocked down the burnt-out houses and pushed them into the river, too."

Suddenly, Marilyn notices the water lapping quietly towards us. "The tide's coming in; we'd better go." We hurry back up the set of old stone stairs that brought us down to the foreshore, leaving the hungry tide to consume all that we've pulled from its depths.

PRESENT

I head west, the offices of central London soon giving way to the redbrick mansions and pink magnolias along Chelsea Embankment, the tea-brown waters below spliced by a single clipper.

There was a time, according to author and biographer Peter Ackroyd, when so many boats filled the Thames that it was possible to travel from one bank to another simply by stepping from deck to deck. It's said that thousands of people slept on the water, especially during the 1600s, when it was felt the river might offer some protection from fire and plague.

The Thames remains a sanctuary, not least for Molly Butt, one of the artists working on Eel Pie Island, a nine-acre teardrop of land that now plays host to an insulated community of creatives and self-declared eccentrics. I find it where Twickenham's Georgian terraces back onto the river. After pausing to watch some rowers glide by, I stroll over the narrow footbridge onto the island, its

MUDLARKING IN NUMBERS

180

The number of Bronze Age bladed weapons in the collections of the London Museum, around half of which were pulled from the Thames.

2664

The serial number etched onto the bottom of a mysterious ceramic egg found on the foreshore in 2012. It turned out to be one of 5,000 placed in the river by an anonymous artist, known as Anon, in 2012.

18-25

The likely age range of an early Bronze Age woman whose skull was found on the shore of the Thames in Mortlake, West London.







banks wreathed by drooping willows. In the 18th and 19th centuries, crowds gathered here to sample pies filled with locally caught eels. Now privately owned, the island opens to the public for a couple of days each summer, when its artists welcome visitors into their studios.

I meet Molly in Eel Pie's working boatyard, one of the last on the Thames. Though she's tall as a pine, she's dwarfed by the ruby-red pleasure barge hung above the slipway, its hull smooth and curved as a pecan. Inside her studio, every inch of space is filled with pots of paint, the air rich with the scent of bergamot and violet. The walls are a patchwork of finished and unfinished works: cubist canvases in which the landscape of Eel Pie Island has been obliterated into its constituent parts of meadow, concrete, sunlight and water. "The river has always been a part of my work," she tells me, picking up a brush and dabbing at a patch of blue. "Because you can look at water in the same way as a painting: you have the surface of it and then what's underneath."

Eel Pie Island has long attracted those who lean into counterculture. For a time, a ballroom on the island hosted shows by everyone from The Rolling Stones to Pink Floyd and a young David Bowie. By the end of the 1960s, the adjoining hotel was home to around 100 radical anarchists, and by 1970 it was the largest hippie commune in the UK. "I think it was down to it being part of London but also ever so slightly removed," Molly says, guiding me through a patch of woodland carpeted with the year's first wild garlic. "It was always a bit wild and tucked away."

For people like Molly, the river represents a sort of freedom, a sense of being untethered from the culture of the wider city. It's the same for Natalie Hill and Inigo Lapwood. They're the brains behind Theatreship, a non-profit performing arts venue in Canary Wharf, one of the city's main financial districts. In a part of London that's dedicated to the transactional, it's a defiant outlier, hosting the Songs on the Water event, a free folk singaround in which people are invited to connect over traditional songs — all performed in the belly of a renovated cargo ship built in 1913.

I pay it a visit that evening, finding myself below its bundled sails just as a surge of white-collared workers — tidal as the river itself — begin flowing below the district's forest of glass towers. Wobbling over the gangplank, I slip into the ship's amber-lit cabin and order myself a pint of inky porter, the bar's shelves lined with enough booze to turn the Thames to punch. Around me, a gregarious crowd has gathered: moustachioed

SMALL BUT MIGHTY

Eel Pie Island has many notable former residents, including Trevor Baylis, who invented the wind-up radio, and founding members of Mystery Jets, an indie band formed on the island in 2003.

Clockwise from top left: St Paul's Cathedral as seen from Millennium Bridge; magnolia flowers in Chelsea Physic Garden; Lileth Chinn hosts Theatreship's Songs on the Water; fish and chips at the Prospect of Whitby





musicians, tailors, students, burger-flippers and besuited office workers all huddled around the same clutch of dark-wood tables. “There’s a real alchemy to port cities,” says Natalie from the opposite side of the bar, her hair woven into a plait. “This ship used to carry cargo from all over the world, bringing new things into London. Today, it’s not cargo but music, films and ideas.”

The singing gets underway with just one voice, that of Lileth Chinn. She performs from memory and without accompaniment, her refrain picked up by the other regulars until the entire cabin is resonating with a thick drone of harmonising voices. The song ends, only for a new one — a shanty — to rise from a Latin American man wearing a Five Guys T-shirt, then another from a silver-haired Irishman who, at the end of his second verse, pulls out a pennywhistle that had been concealed in his jacket pocket.

We hear tunes from all corners of the UK and Ireland; songs of gamekeepers and postmen, shipwrights and doomed sailors. There’s something clairvoyant about the whole experience, as though in lending our voices to these songs, we’re summoning the people who penned them. “Many of the sea songs we sing here were once written to unite people from different backgrounds in shared labour,” Inigo tells me later. “Just like those working songs, the river reminds us that this city was built on collective effort and shared spaces. The river is part of the inheritance of everyone in London, and we all have a collective entitlement to it.”

Your Stage Awaits

The Yasaka Kaikan, once a sanctuary nestled beside the brilliance of Gion's performing arts, begins a new chapter—revitalized, yet deeply rooted in its legacy. The Imperial Hotel, Kyoto welcomes you to a timeless retreat where comfort takes center stage in every moment you spend.



IMPERIAL HOTEL
KYOTO

DID YOU KNOW?

During the medieval period, Venetian galleys carrying silks and spices would moor around the Tower of London, each one guarded by a troop of archers.



The Longplayer lighthouse looks out from Trinity Buoy Wharf in east London
Below: The interior of Wapping's Prospect of Whitby



FUTURE

The following day, I cycle east into the former docklands around Wapping, peddling below plane trees and old warehouses painted with adverts for whale oil. It's thirsty work and I soon find myself in the Prospect of Whitby pub, initially built in the 16th century and once so insalubrious it was nicknamed the Devil's Tavern. It's dark and low beamed, every nook and cranny festooned with storm lanterns and pieces of rigging.

I find a table overlooking Executioner's Dock — a patch of silver-lipped water where pirates once met their end — and take a moment to watch the river trundling along its course. The Thames has long been the site of daydreams, and has prompted artists and writers to imagine strange future worlds. Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley looked out onto the river in the 19th century and imagined a London in which the city had dissolved into a web of reed-lined islets. It's apt, then, that the Thames should play host to a creative project that may well outlive the capital — *Longplayer*, a 1,000-year-long musical composition that began playing on 31 December 1999 and, if all goes to plan, should reach the end of its first cycle in 2999.

I find its official home in the unlikeliest of places: a honey-brick lighthouse tucked away in Poplar's Trinity Buoy Wharf, an arts and culture hub where repurposed shipping containers look out over the funnels of old steamships. Like the O2 Arena just across the water, *Longplayer* was prompted by the coming of the new millennium, a period that saw its creator Jem Finer contemplating the vastness of a 1,000-year timespan. In response, he decided to make six recordings of himself playing different brass singing bowls, the kind used by Buddhist monks. He then



Left: Ansuman Biswas in the lantern room of the Longplayer lighthouse, which was once used by the inventor Michael Faraday

looped the pieces, setting them at different speeds and configuring them so they'd only sync-up again in exactly one millennium.

"That's what was interesting to us: thinking about how to convey a sense of that kind of time," says Jem's long-term collaborator Ansuman Biswas when I meet him in the lighthouse's lantern room — a bulb of latticed glass where the music's interlacing overtones promptly turn my mind to jelly. "I guess you could create a sculpture, but music is really the purest art form to express questions of time, because it happens in time. It needs time in order to flow."

Ansuman is just one of the trustees charged with ensuring this leviathan of a composition survives at least its first 1,000-year cycle. Dressed in a set of dark-blue overalls, the Longplayer Trust's standard uniform, he guides me down the spiral staircase and into the main hall, where we find racks of singing bowls laid out in concentric circles, a symbolic representation of the music. I stand in the centre of it all, letting the sound seep into me.

For something so shapeless, the music has a powerful grip, the overlapping harmonics of each bowl forging music that seems to be always starting afresh. Like the Thames itself, it never holds the same shape twice, and its lifespan prompts me to reconsider my own place in time. "A big part of what you're experiencing when you listen to the piece is the length of it," Ansuman says, joining me in the centre. "You're being asked to imagine that it started possibly before you were born and that it will end after you're dead."

Outside, the sun is dipping low, the Thames throwing out ripples of lavender as the tide swells. Just before we say goodbye, I take the opportunity to ask Ansuman something that's been bugging me since I arrived: if he were to look out from the lantern room in exactly 974 years, what would he see? "A forest," he says without hesitation. "But mine isn't a dystopia. It's a beautiful, vibrant ecosystem."

As I follow the river back west, I can't help but imagine Ansuman's forest covering the city around me, patches of oak, beech and lime spreading outwards until they've consumed every inch of grey. The skyscrapers have shrunk to worn out stumps, tiny compared to the great arc of water sweeping through the London Basin, its depths bleeding into a mosaic of lagoons strung with pink lotus flowers and marigolds. It's funny, but I can almost picture a hippo swimming by.

essentials

HOW TO GET AROUND

It's possible to visit many of the places mentioned by walking or cycling the Thames Path, a riverside trail that, within Greater London, stretches for nearly 80 miles between Hampton Court and the Thames Barrier in Greenwich. You can also hop aboard a river bus service. thamesclippers.com

WHAT TO DO

The Natural History Museum runs behind-the-scenes tours from £25. nhm.ac.uk

Take a group mudlarking tour with Thames Explorer Trust for £30. thames-explorer.org.uk

For info on Eel Pie Artists' studio open days, see eelpieislandartists.co.uk

Theatreship is moored a short walk from South Quay DLR station, with Songs on the Water hosted every other Monday. theatreship.co.uk

The Longplayer lighthouse is open every weekend. longplayer.org

WHERE TO SLEEP

Sea Containers London is a riverfront hotel on the South Bank with direct access onto the Thames Path and contemporary nautical nods throughout. The ground floor hosts a restaurant as well as a cocktail bar by award-winning mixologist Mr Lyan. From £215. seacontainerslondon.com

Locke at Broken Wharf is a collection of apartments close to Millenium Bridge. The studios come with fully fitted kitchens and there's a bar and lounge overlooking the water. From £153. lockeliving.com

WHERE TO DRINK

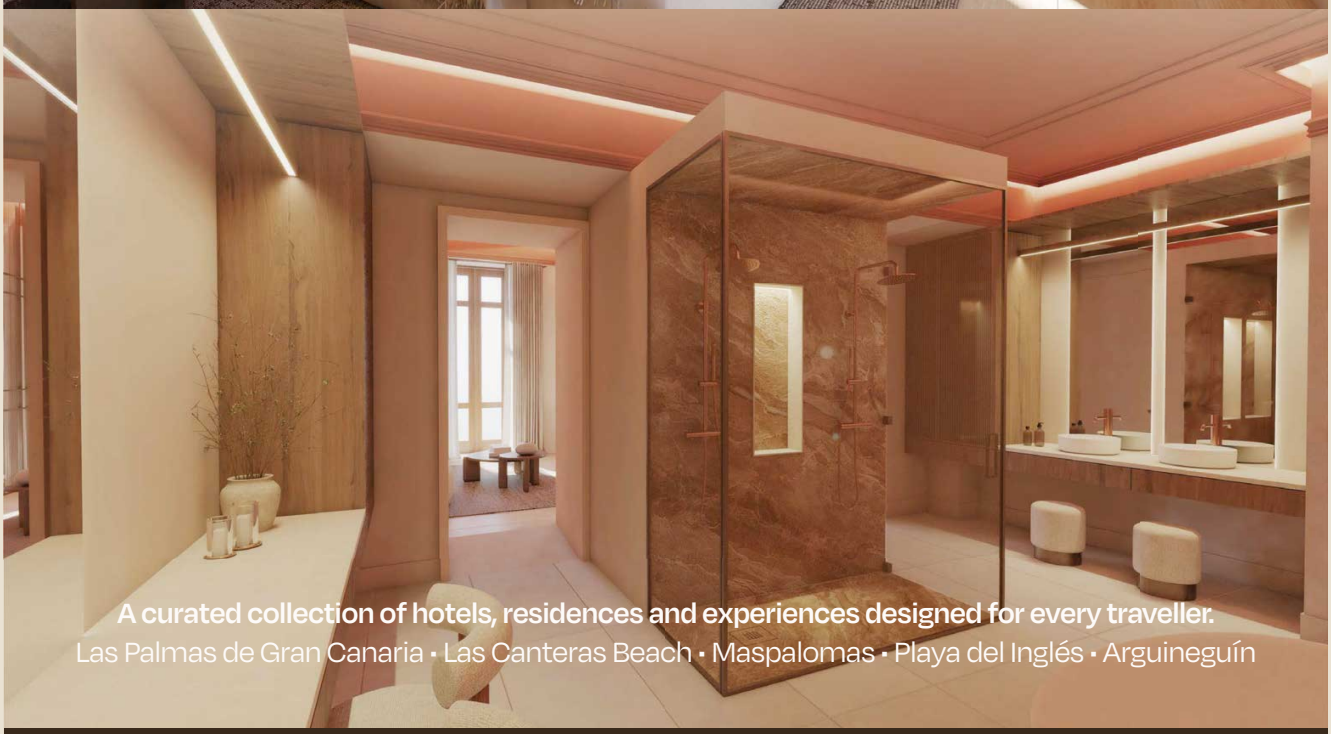
The Prospect of Whitby is one of many historical Thameside pubs used by those who worked on and around the river. The Grapes in Limehouse (co-owned by Sir Ian McKellen) serves a mean pint of bitter, while The Mayflower in Rotherhithe is named after the fabled ship that moored at the same spot before setting out for the New World. greeneking.co.uk thegrapes.co.uk mayflowerpub.co.uk

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SEEING AN IMMENSE NUMBER OF CREATURES ASSEMBLED IN ONE PLACE IS A PHENOMENON WORTH TRAVELLING FOR. HERE'S WHEN, WHERE AND HOW TO EXPERIENCE SOME OF NATURE'S WILDEST GATHERINGS

WORDS: SARAH BAXTER

IMAGE: ALAMY

1

MONARCH BUTTERFLIES

LOCATION: **MEXICO**
WHEN TO GO: **DECEMBER TO MARCH**

How does an insect the weight of a paperclip make a journey of 3,000 miles? That's the feat of the extraordinary monarch butterfly, which somehow flutters from its summer breeding grounds — spread across Canada and the American northeast — to a patch of oyamel fir forest in the highlands west of Mexico City. Most only survive for a month or so but, in autumn, a generation emerges that lives eight times as long, capable of making this perilous trip.

How they know where to go is a mystery — the butterflies that migrate are the great-great-grandchildren of those that left Mexico the previous spring. No matter, the results are spectacular: millions upon millions of orange-black wings blanketing trees, raining like tickertape. The Monarch Butterfly Biosphere Reserve, in the mountains of Michoacán state, is home to more than half of the overwintering colonies of the monarch butterfly's eastern population. The sanctuary of El Rosario is easiest to reach; lesser-visited Sierra Chincua can be explored on horseback. The colourful, cobblestoned Mineral de Angangueo makes a good base.
A six-day Wildlife Worldwide trip costs from £4,495 per person, including accommodation, most meals and guided sanctuary visits, excluding flights. *wildlifeworldwide.com*

2

REINDEER

LOCATION: **NORWAY**
WHEN TO GO: **APRIL TO MAY**

The Indigenous Sámi of Europe's far north work to their own calendar. Their year has eight seasons, and *giđđa* (spring) means melting snows, fast-increasing daylight and reindeer on the move: around April, the animals start migrating from their inland pastures towards the coast for summer grazing. Norway has around 275,000 reindeer, some wild, but mostly semi-domesticated herds that are ushered across the country's Arctic plateaus by Sámi families whose livelihoods have depended on the practice for generations.

Finnmarksvidda, an empty vastness of low hills, glacial lakes, pine barrens, birch woods and bogs in northernmost Norway, is a Sámi stronghold, where a few operators offer the chance to join the herders on the move. Days are shaped by the reindeer and the weather, perhaps involving sledding, snowmobiling or feeding the animals, followed by sharing stories around the fire, feasting on Arctic fish and sleeping in *lavvus* (traditional tents). Seeing swathes of animals trot across the tundra is a treat; being immersed in Sámi culture is an even greater privilege.
A five-day trip with Visit Natives costs from €3,690 (£3,157) per person, including lavvu accommodation, meals and Arctic kit, excluding flights. *visitnatives.com*





The Sardine Run, off South Africa's coast, provides a buffet for larger marine animals
Left: Norway has around 275,000 reindeer, most semi-domesticated by the Sámi
Previous page: Butterflies swarm El Rosario sanctuary, in Mexico's Monarch Butterfly Biosphere Reserve

3
SARDINES

LOCATION: **SOUTH AFRICA**
WHEN TO GO: **JUNE TO JULY**

A strange thing happens off the South African coast each winter in the Southern Hemisphere: sardines in their millions, maybe billions, swarm north from Cape Agulhas, following a cold current towards the Indian Ocean. Strange, because it doesn't benefit the sardines at all. But it's a bumper buffet for other creatures: dolphins, tuna, seals, sharks, orcas and whales, plus dive-bombing cormorants, gannets and gulls. The result is marine mayhem. The sardines become silvery shape-shifting bait balls, chased down by great gangs of hungry predators and pierced by an avian invasion from above. Fish numbers have plunged in recent decades and the Sardine Run has become less predictable, but it's still known as one of Earth's greatest shoals. Activity peaks off Eastern Cape province, with boat trips leaving from towns such as Port St Johns and Gqeberha (formerly Port Elizabeth, handy for Addo Elephant National Park, too). Diving amid this chaos is thrilling, if challenging; snorkellers can launch into the action more quickly. Or, stay on board to watch the feasting frenzy from above.
An 11-day Sardine Run trip with Dive Worldwide costs from £3,675 per person, including flights, half-board accommodation and snorkelling/diving. diveworldwide.com

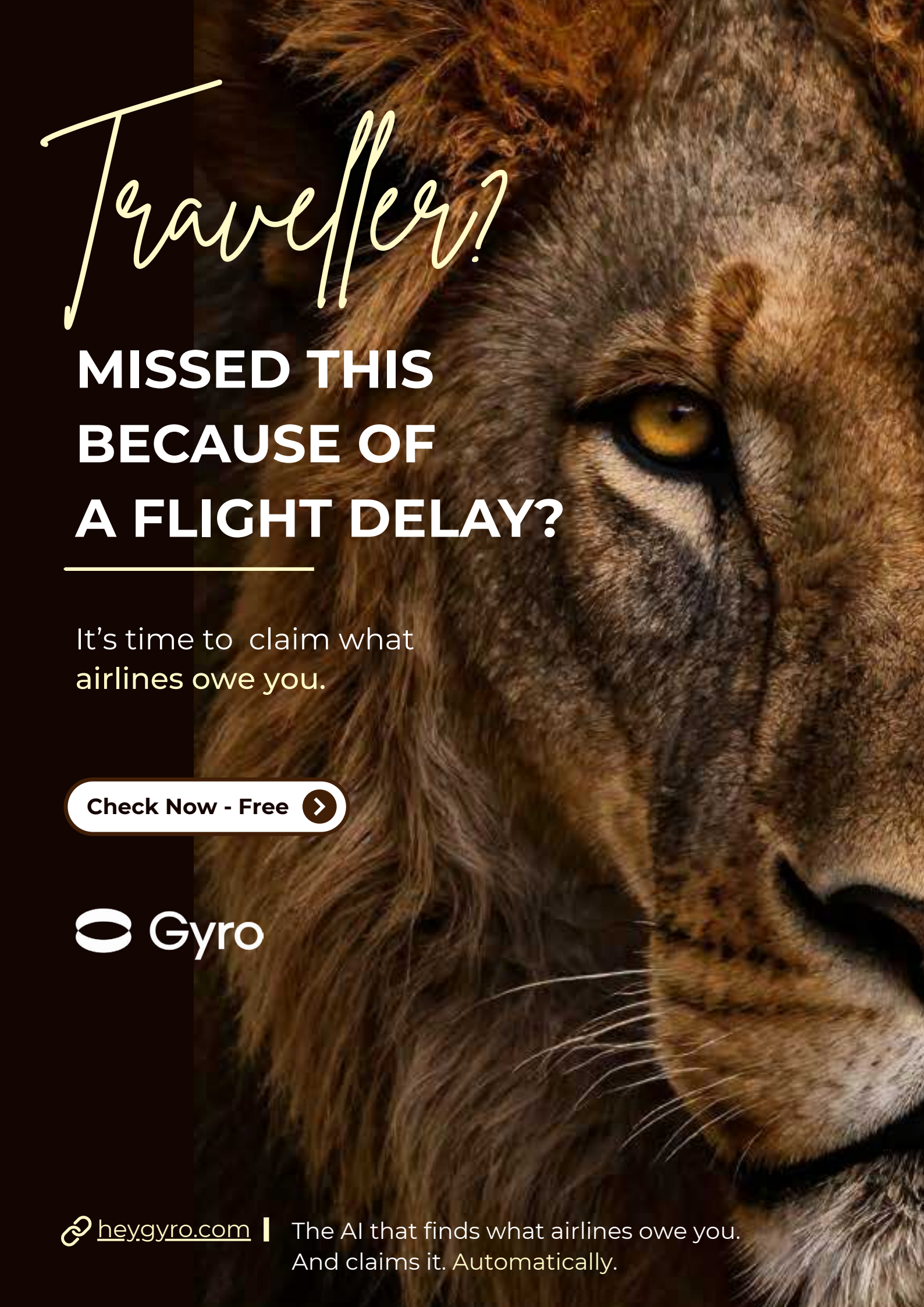
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PELICANS

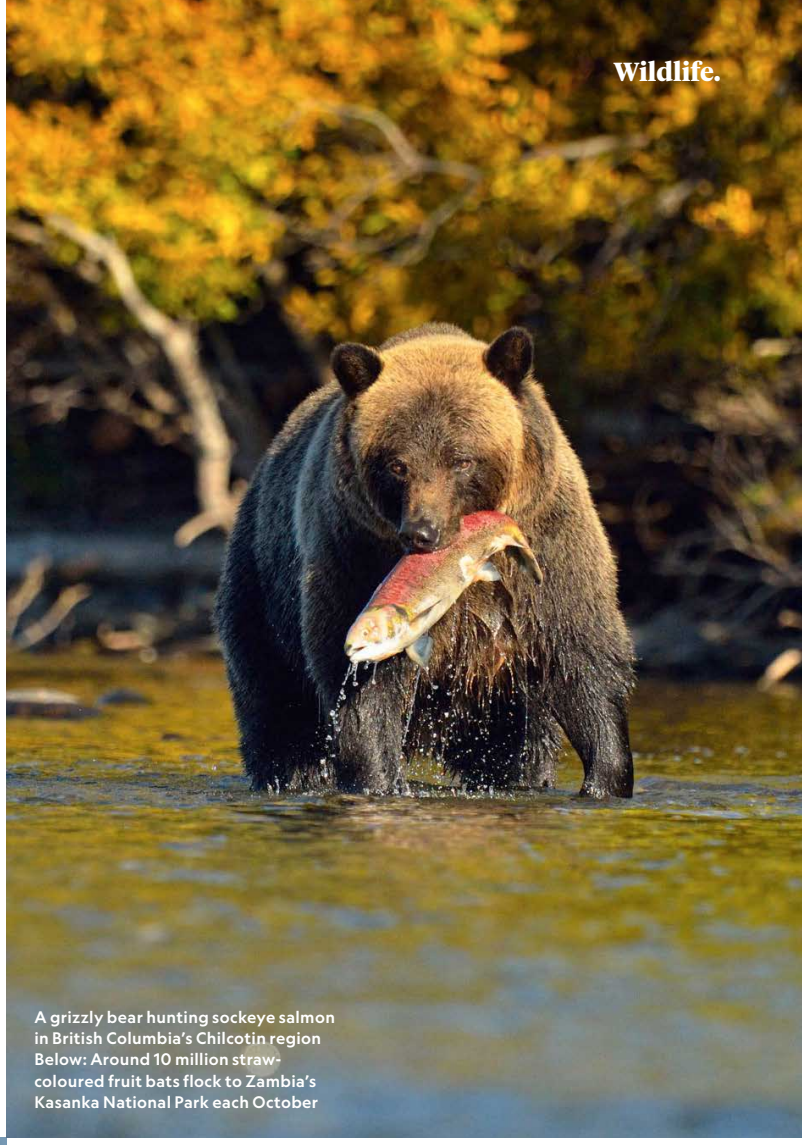
LOCATION: **ROMANIA**
WHEN TO GO: **MAY TO JULY**

With their massive bills and bodies, capacious pouches and wide, powerful wings, pelicans look both immensely impressive and distinctly prehistoric. Come spring, around 32,000 of them — mostly great whites, plus a significant scoop of dalmatians, the biggest species — leave their winter hangouts and make for Europe's largest natural wetland, the Danube Delta. This splurge of rivers, lakes, marshes, forest, sandbars and reedbeds spreads mostly across eastern Romania. It's a paradise for the pelicans, as well as other birds such as herons, storks and white-tailed eagles.

The pelicans begin arriving in March, but May is an ideal time to visit, when colonies are a-bustle, large pods gather for herd-fishing and adults are in full breeding splendour, their great gular pouches beaming bright-orange. June, on the other hand, is good for spying chicks, and July the time to go for sheer numbers. Navigate the delta on boat trips with licensed guides (mandatory for exploring core areas) or stay on a floating hotel for 24/7 avian action.
Bunica Maria offers a three-day birding package from €300 (£255) per person, including accommodation and meals. A four-day, full-board floating hotel trip with Ibis Tours costs from €1,050 (£898) per person. bunicamaria.com ibistours.ro

IMAGES: ALAMY


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A grizzly bear hunting sockeye salmon in British Columbia's Chilcotin region
Below: Around 10 million straw-coloured fruit bats flock to Zambia's Kasanka National Park each October

5
SALMON

LOCATION: **CANADA**
WHEN TO GO: **JULY TO OCTOBER**

No migration is easy, but the journey of the Pacific Northwest salmon reads like a Greek tragedy. Born in fresh water, they head out to sea, mature for a few years, then navigate back to their natal streams using the earth's magnetic fields and their own sense of smell. They battle against the flow, leaping rapids, dodging grizzlies and eagles, only to spawn — and then die. It's a privilege to witness this fatal journey, either from the riverbank, as the fish fling themselves from the froth, or in the water amid the shoals.

The town of Campbell River, on Vancouver Island's east coast, is the self-proclaimed 'salmon capital of the world', and the top spot for snorkelling with the chinook, coho, chum, pink and sockeye fighting to return home. Floating in the swift current, you might see hundreds, even thousands, of salmon swim past — and possibly some bears hanging about. From the banks, you can watch salmon leaping two metres into the air, perhaps only to be snatched by those waiting bears. From mid-August to late October, the Homalco First Nation run bear-watching trips to Bute Inlet.
Snorkelling kit rental costs C$48 (£25) per person from Oceanfix Dive Centre. Bute Inlet day trips cost C$528 (£280) per person. *oceanfix.ca* *homalcotours.com*



6
FRUIT BATS

LOCATION: **ZAMBIA**
WHEN TO GO: **OCTOBER TO DECEMBER**

The wildebeest in Kenya and Tanzania might grab the headlines, but the world's biggest mammal migration happens further south. Kasanka National Park is one of Zambia's smallest and, come October, around 10 million straw-coloured fruit bats overwhelm the remote enclave. By day, they weigh down the trees, wrapped snugly amid the leaves. But at dusk they take flight, creating a deafening, whirling maelstrom of leathery wings as they seek supper — the bats weigh around 250g and can consume the same in fruit every night. At dawn they return, the maelstrom in reverse.

A good 10-hour drive from the capital of Lusaka, Kasanka National Park is offbeat, but tree hides and viewing platforms ensure the safari-goers who do make the effort get front-row seats. And it isn't just bats: 114 mammal species have been recorded, from elephant to sitatunga antelope, plus 450 bird species. A trip here combines well with relatively nearby South Luangwa National Park, home to prolific wildlife and pioneering walking safaris.
A seven-day Fruit Bat Safari with Expert Africa costs from £4,490 per person, including full-board accommodation and activities, excluding flights. *expertafrica.com*

IMAGES: ALAMY



A humpback whale breaching off the coast of Queensland, Australia

7

HUMPBACK WHALES

LOCATION: **AUSTRALIA**
WHEN TO GO: **JULY TO OCTOBER**

Every year, 60,000-plus humpbacks migrate from Antarctica to the coasts of Australia and back, a round-trip of between 5,000 and 10,000 miles. It's one of the world's longest migrations, by one of the most charismatic whales. These mammoth show-offs perform acrobatic breaches, slap their mighty flukes, wave their long flippers and even burst into complex song. They can be seen around much of Australia, but the laid-back Queensland city of Hervey Bay is a hotspot: of the 40,000 humpbacks that travel the country's eastern seaboard, more than 30% are thought to pause here, with numbers peaking in August and September.

The sandy bulk of K'gari (formerly Fraser Island) — also worth a visit — provides a protective barrier, creating a sheltered pit stop where females and their calves like to rest and play. Many companies offer whale-watching trips: look for responsible operators with guides and on-board hydrophones so you can hear the whales singing. Regulations prohibit boats from approaching within 100 metres, though humpbacks often choose to approach boats themselves.

A three-hour Pacific Whale Foundation Eco-Adventures Australia trip costs A$133 (£70) per person; boats have hydrophones and ticket sales support research. pacificwhale.com.au

IN NUMBERS

6 MILLION

The number of antelope — mostly white-eared kob, plus tiang, Mongalla gazelle and bohor reedbuck — involved in the Nile Migration of South Sudan, the largest movement of land mammals anywhere on the planet.

50,000

The approximate distance, in miles, travelled by the diminutive Arctic tern, which flies from pole to pole every year, between Greenland and Antarctica's Weddell Sea.

4

The number of generations involved in the globe skimmer dragonfly's 16,0000-mile relay migration across the Indian Ocean — as insects die, their offspring take up the baton.

7,000

The altitude, in metres, that can be reached by the bar-headed goose, which crosses the Himalayas during the course of its migration from breeding grounds in Mongolia, Tibet and northern China to its overwintering sites in India.

200,000

The number of caribou in the Porcupine herd, which travels around 830 miles between the Yukon and Alaska and back again. It's the longest migration of any terrestrial mammal.

100 MILLION+

The estimated number of red crabs on Australia's Christmas Island. They migrate from the inland forests to the ocean to spawn in October and November each year.

IMAGE: GETTY

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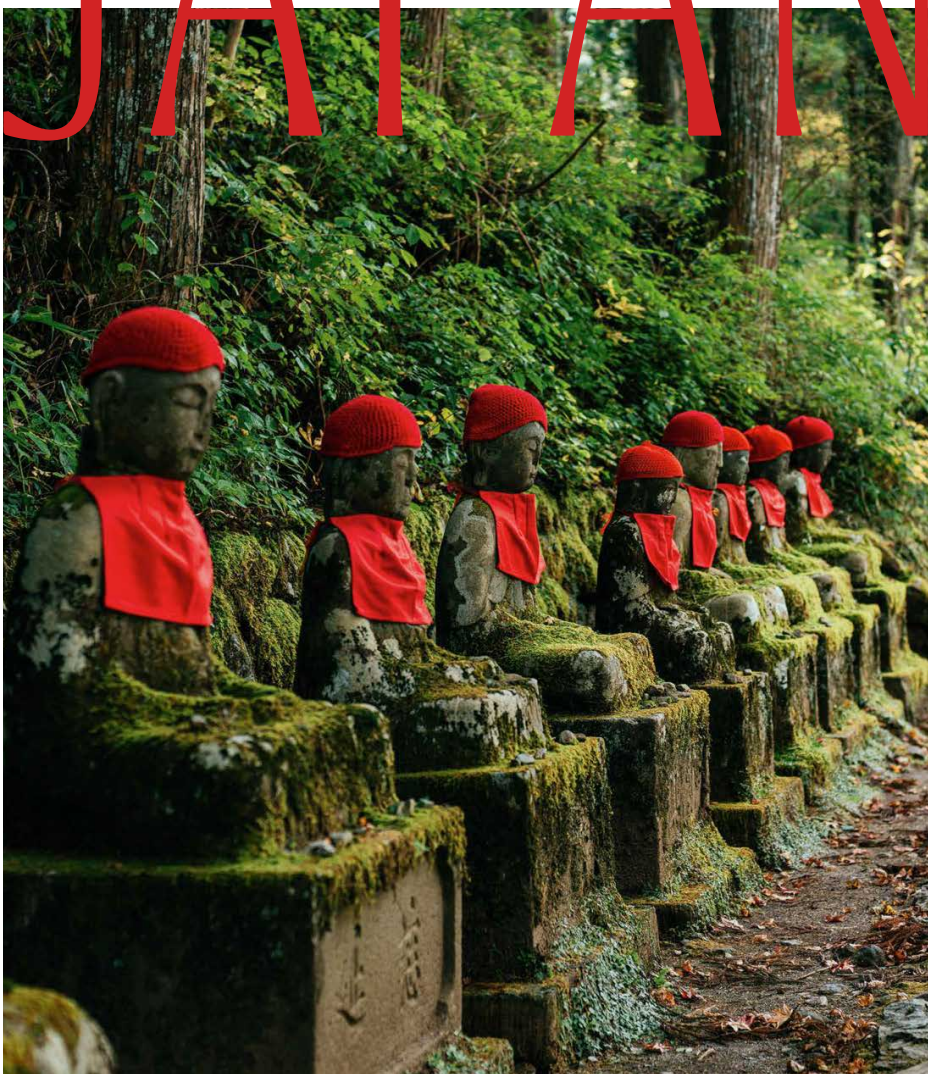
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NIKKO JAPAN



With a name that means 'sunlight', the town of Nikko in Tochigi Prefecture, north of Tokyo, is intimately bound to the seasons, its shifting landscapes and treasured shrines drawing in pilgrims and travellers over the centuries

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY: MARK PARREN TAYLOR



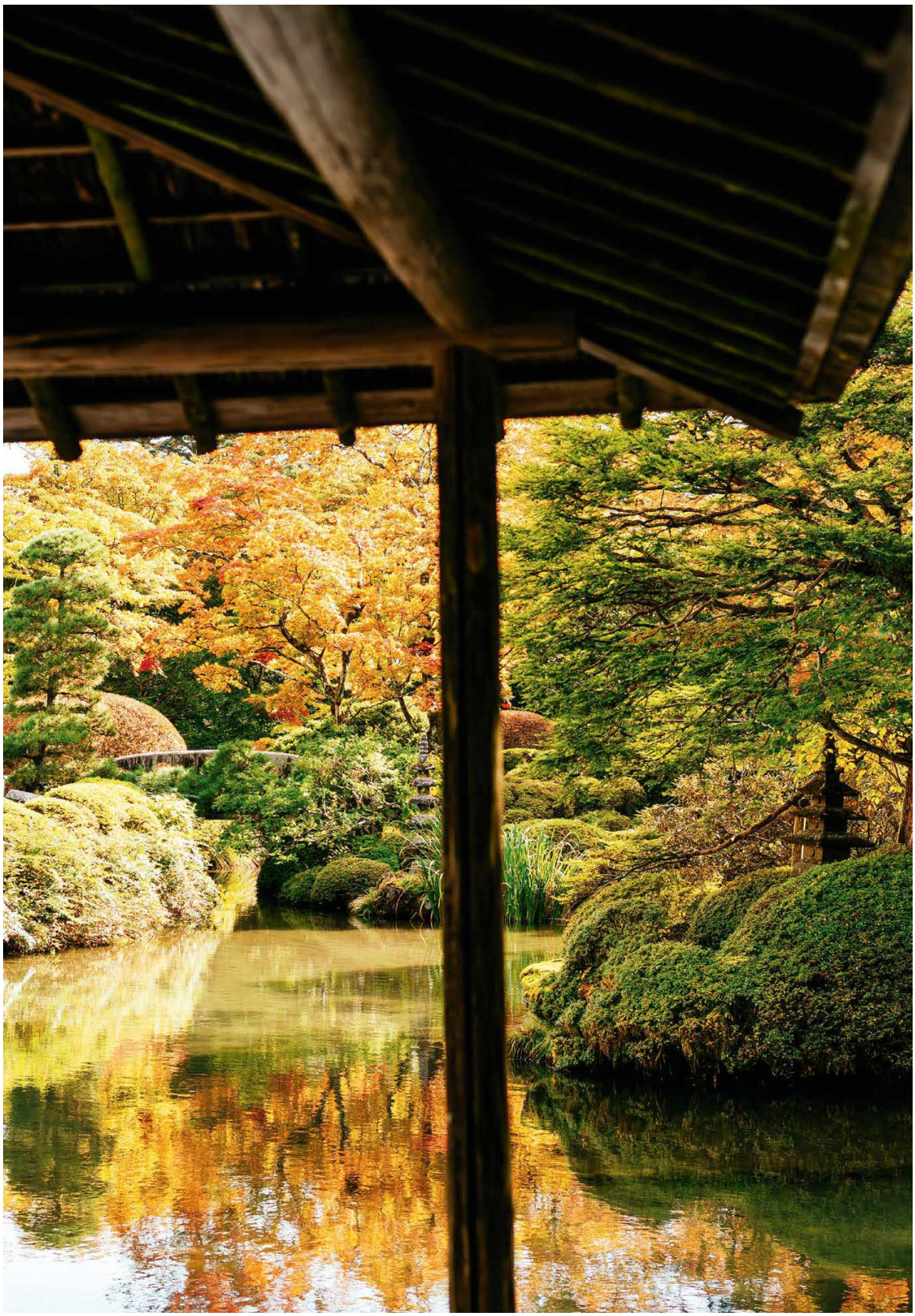








In April, nature-lovers and culture hunters converge on mountainous, cedar-forested Nikko National Park for the Yayoi Festival, which is more than 1,200 years old. Held in Futarasan Shrine, this event celebrates the arrival of spring with processions and musical performances. From the end of the 19th century, Japan's emperors would arrive in summer — when the heat in Tokyo is stifling — to spend the season at their residence, Tamozawa Imperial Villa, cooled by the mountain breeze. The imperial family stopped using the villa in 1947 — it's now a museum with 106 rooms, known for being one of Japan's largest wooden buildings.



In September, Nikko's Unesco-listed complex of two shrines and a temple, arranged on the mountain slopes, is ablaze with the green, bronze and gold of the changing foliage. The autumn colours are out in Shoyo-en, once the private garden of a high-ranking monk at the Buddhist temple, Nikkosan Rinnoji. Also part of the complex is the intricately carved 17th-century Toshogu Shrine, which holds the tomb of Tokugawa Ieyasu, a powerful shogun who ruled Japan for more than 250 years. Nikko's cuisine reflects the season's earthy colours, particularly local speciality *yuba* (soy milk skin), served with udon noodles and mountain vegetables.












純米大吟醸
清閑
Japanese Sake
Junmai Daiginjyo
SEIKAI



From December, a freeze from the north grips the region. Nikko's snow-clad mountains are home to several ice farms, where great slabs of spring-water ice are formed and then stored in hay-insulated sheds. Some of that ice heads to the bar at the Ritz-Carlton hotel in the national park, chilling a Japanese whisky or a cocktail made with regional strawberries. The region's rice-based sake is also best brewed in winter, with the icy air resulting in a long, slow fermentation. Award-winning examples can be enjoyed at family-run Watanabe Sahei brewery in downtown Nikko.



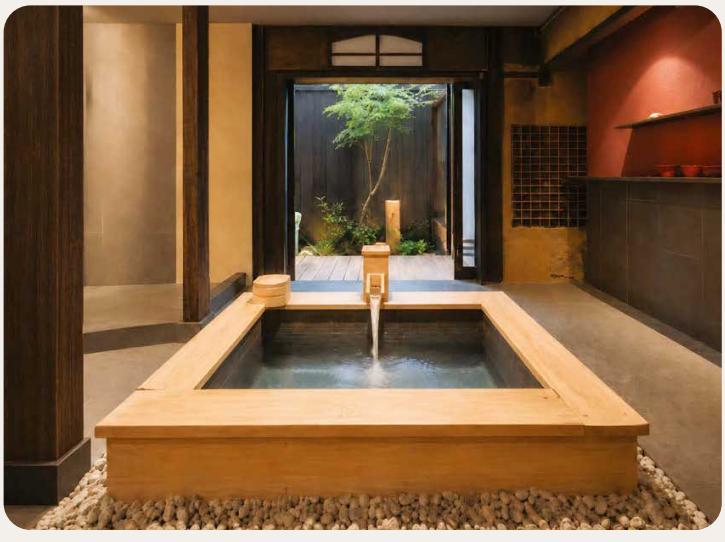
Within the national park, Chuzenji is the country's highest natural lake and the source of the Daiya River, which thunders through Nikko on its way south. Boulders along its course are frosted with snow in winter, but the river runs too fast to freeze. It rushes past the Tamozawa Imperial Villa, slowing only as it reaches the Watanabe Sahei sake brewery, whose well it feeds. The vermillion-hued Shinkyo Bridge makes a suitably grand entrance to Nikko's Unesco-listed shrines and temples, carrying pedestrians over the inky water. Built in 1636, the bridge belongs to Futarasan Shrine — which waits for the Yayoi Festival to return in spring.

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A sparkling view



FOLLOW THE WINDING PATHWAYS THAT CARVE THROUGH THE HILLS OF NORTHEAST ITALY'S PROSECCO REGION TO DISCOVER HOW THE BUBBLY IS INTERTWINED WITH LOCAL CULTURE – AND THAT THERE'S MUCH MORE TO THIS VENERABLE WINE THAN ITS PARTY REPUTATION MIGHT SUGGEST

WORDS: ALICIA MILLER
PHOTOGRAPHY: MURRAY ORR





Clockwise from top left: Tasting room at Ca'Salina, a Valdobbiadene winery that makes a non-sparkling wine from glera grapes; CastelBrando is set on a limestone cliff overlooking the Valmareno Valley; the hotel's interiors feature wood panelling and ornate windows; the bedrooms at CastelBrando come with sconces and drapes
Previous pages from left: A section of the hike, from San Pietro di Barbozza to Follina; prosecco at Trattoria alla Cima

We're an incongruous match, the hotel and I.

The rambling medieval castle accommodation crowns a cliffside, and is complete with vast ballrooms and suits of armour, along with a decidedly swanky spa and aristocratic interiors. Below it, the sweeping valley view is flanked by neat rows of vineyards and an Italian storybook village. And me? Sweaty, red-faced and breathless from the steep 370-metre climb to the castle's apex, in scorching 32C sunshine — I'm certainly no princess. Yet, given that I've just completed the final nine-mile leg of a multi-day hiking trip through the Prosecco region, my inelegant arrival to CastelBrando, in the Veneto village of Cison di Valmarino, still has me feeling royally satisfied.

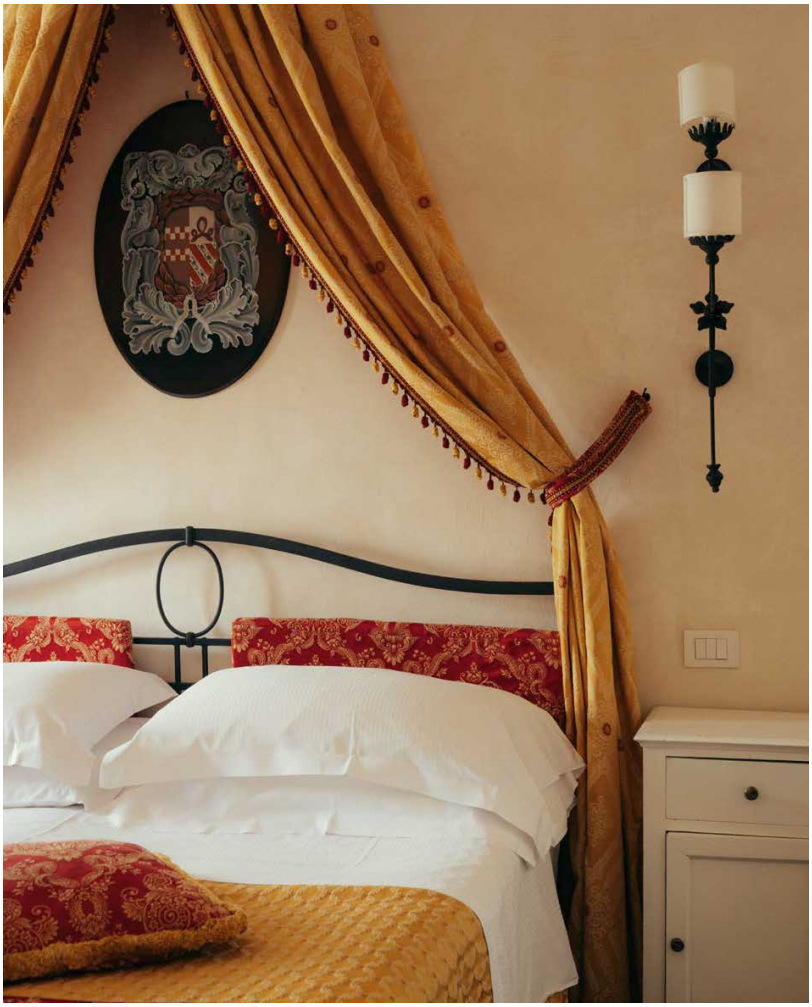
A few days earlier, when I'd first glimpsed the Prosecco area during my car transfer, I'd spied a wine region like any other — undulating hills carpeted in vines and punctuated with sleepy, sun-baked towns. Zooming past fields of grapes on the roadside, I caught a brief sight of sleek vineyard tasting rooms and felt I could almost taste the characteristic fruit-forward sweetness of the fizzy wine that's long been the UK's favourite party tipple. However, I was about to get a different perspective by exploring the region on foot.

Secluded in the foothills of the Alps, some 50 miles north of Venice, the wine region is crisscrossed by hiking paths. They include the 32-mile Prosecco Hills Trail, which runs through the heart of the Unesco-listed terrain. The region's 50,000-acre core area, the Conegliano Valdobbiadene DOCG, is particularly well-suited for walking. As it has Italy's highest-quality classification for the sparkling wine, seen as the 'grand cru' of the prosecco world, it's also well-suited for tastings. And now, tour operator Inntravel's recently launched six-day itinerary promises to take care of all of the logistics, providing detailed route maps, transferring luggage between hotels, and organising a wine-tasting and some spa time.

With little more than a hotel breakfast in my stomach and a light day pack on my back, I strike out from my first hotel in Susegana, on the edge of the Conegliano Valdobbiadene DOCG area, one sunny morning. It isn't long







before the town begins to fall away, with a settlement of small houses opening onto a municipal football pitch surrounded by vines — surely the Italian idyll, if there ever was one. I begin to climb a wooded path, where shade saves me from the intensifying heat of the day. The sounds of the road dim to nothingness, the chorus of cicadas rises to replace its hum.

I cross a tumbling stream where silvery-blue dragonflies flit and catch sight of a deer in a far-off wooded glade. Part-way into my eight-mile walk, I scale a hill to the ruined Castello di Collalto where, amid a patch of shade, I pause to munch the simple cheese and ham sandwich the hotel supplied as birds chirp above.

Onwards & upwards

Through the four hours of climbs and descents, my near-constant companions are vineyards. Ripening in the early July sunshine above gnarled trunks, young glera grapes sit coddled in leaves. The hero of prosecco wine, fresh and floral glera grows well here and almost nowhere else. It thrives on the slopes of these ribboning valleys, Unesco-listed for their



unique 'hogback' terraces — vine-supporting ledges carved into the steep ridges. The more grapes I pass, the thirstier I become; by mid-afternoon when I arrive at pretty Pieve di Soligo, I'm desperate for my first taste.

At the town's Cal Monda winery, owner Stefano Dalla Betta greets me. "Have you been waiting long? I was taking a nap!" he says, running his hand through his wild dark hair as he walks me to the edge of the vineyard.

Standing by the vines, he sweeps an arm towards the rows. "Prosecco was born here," he begins, "because of the natural and human element. The natural element is the hills — our fantastic gold — plus the soil and wind. The human element, our people in the past, who for centuries handmade the hillside terraces for the vines." Stefano is quick to point out that his family's modest 10 acres differ from the large-scale norm — and the mass-produced prosecco sold in the supermarket. We wander along terraces that date back to the 1600s, pausing to see his beehives, bat houses and organic vegetable garden.

"We follow a philosophy of biodiversity. When we all live together, animals and nature, everything is very strong. So, we don't cut the grass, we try not to use chemicals. Everything here's done by hand." He points to a sudden movement amid the vines. "This is no machine; this is my brother Massimo!" Right on cue, weather-wizened Massimo pops his head through a gap in the leaves before waving his secateurs in greeting and moving on.

Stefano goes on to explain why he pushes against the region's monocropping trend, pointing to the three houses that back onto the vineyard. "My brothers and I, we live there. And we don't want to drink pesticides every day. This is our life. But also, we make food, and we have a responsibility. If we don't have biodiversity, we have nothing." He waves for me to sit down at a table dotted with plates of nibbles and some polished glasses. "Very good prosecco, salami, formaggio," he says, simply.

Corks are popped and I drink in the fruity-sweetness I expect from prosecco, while nibbling on locally made slivers of ham, nutty cheese and prosecco-infused biscuits. Then, Stefano pulls out something I've not seen before.

"This is a *col fondo*," he explains. "It's how prosecco used to be made, before it was produced in big steel tanks, like a lab." He pours the cloudy, yellow-tinged sparkling liquid into my glass. Fermented in bottle with the yeast left unfiltered, a centuries-old technique quite different to today's production methods, it's characterful and nutty — somewhere between a prosecco, champagne and natural wine.

Did you know?
The majority of prosecco gets its sparkle via the charmat (tank) method, where the secondary fermentation takes place in a stainless steel tank before bottling. It's cheaper to produce than traditional champagne-style wine (fully fermented in the bottle), but also suits the fresh, fruity character of the local glera grapes.



Clockwise from top left: A platter of imbriago cheese and salumi accompany the prosecco at Cal Monda winery in Pieve di Soligo; walkers pass a vineyard in Santo Stefano; winemaker Stefano Dalla Betta at Cal Monda





We get lost in chat and, before long, the clouds are closing in and lightning forks the sky — an electric charge breaking through the day's heat. Still wearing his bar apron, Stefano ushers me into his car. "I'll drop you at my favourite *enoteca* (wine bar) for dinner," he shouts, as the first rain drops begin to fall.

So far, en route, it seems I've already seen a lot of vineyards, but when it's time to tackle the next major walk from Pieve di Soligo to San Pietro di Barbozza — a pretty hamlet on the outskirts of Valdobbiadene town — things ramp up a notch. The gently rolling terrain of my first day sharpens to steep parallel valleys and peaks, nearly all of them carpeted in vines; the characteristic boar's back landscape I've been told about. A couple of hours into my six-mile walk and I'm surrounded by vast acreages of grapes on all sides. With no one else in sight, I'm tempted to pluck and sample a ripening orb from the vines (I don't). The gnarled old plants cling to precipitous slopes, baking in the heat, inaccessible with modern machinery and barely reachable on foot. I wonder how anyone manages to harvest them. Suddenly, a bottle of Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore DOCG for £15 in the shop seems like a ridiculous bargain.

By the time I near the final 390-metre summit to the hamlet of San Pietro di Barbozza, the view is jaw-dropping, and my phone battery is on its last legs because of all the photos I've





been taking. My legs are worn, too, and with sweat slicking my brow, I reward myself with a sit down at Osteria alla Terrazza for a Negroni sbagliato — made with prosecco rather than the usual gin — plus a platter of hams, cheeses and warm home-baked focaccia. The venue is aptly named, its broad terrace overlooking patchworked vineyards, small hamlets and the walking path that brought me here.

I'm treated to an even better view that evening from the terrace of Trattoria alla Cima, accessible via a free shuttle transfer from my hotel, Municipio 1815 in San Pietro. The glut of rustic tasting rooms within easy walking distance was tempting, but I'm ready for something more refined. And the family-owned restaurant, about a mile away, draws diners for its sweeping valley vistas, flame-grilled steaks and own-label prosecco.

Owner Isidoro Rebuli fills my glass with his take on *col fondo*. "My favourite," he says, as I take a sip. Then, I tuck into the signature prosecco-infused risotto, laced with fresh mint and a swirl of honey, jewelled with edible flowers. It's herbal, floral, savoury and sweet, much like the wine that accompanies it.

In the UK, prosecco is considered a party drink or aperitif, but here I see people drinking it to accompany salads, fish and pasta. Even with the steak, I ask Isidoro? "Maybe not the steak," he says with a laugh, as a thick wedge of Italian beef lands on my table, glistening and charred. Veneto, of course, is home to celebrated reds like amarone and valpolicella — tempting, but I stick with sparkling.

A fizz for all occasions

Inntravel's itinerary alternates hiking days to new hotel bases with loop walks that let you take in wineries at your own pace. With my eye on the region's trailblazers, the next day I make a beeline for a contemporary vineyard south of San Pietro di Barbozza, in the tiny Cartizze Prosecco sub-region. Here, in this compact 267-acre area, some of the very best prosecco terroir is said to exist, and winemaker Pietro de Conti is trying to raise its profile with storytelling about old vines and organic methods. After I taste his delicious, bone-dry Cartizze PDC Extra Brut, he walks me out to his vineyards to show off the centenarian glera vines, stretching as tall as trees.

Following a recommendation from a friend, I take a brief taxi ride to a prosecco-region winemaker who is, in fact, not making prosecco at all. "I literally don't care about making prosecco," baseball-cap-wearing Arno Cattel tells me, speaking softly in his stripped-back tasting room, a former wine co-op from which his father launched Costadilà in 2005. His winery's bottlings — all natural, all orange — are largely made from a blend of historic





Clockwise from far left: Tortelli at Trattoria alla Cima in Valdobbiadene; the village of San Pietro di Barbozza in the prosecco-producing sub-region of Cartizze; vintners at Cartizze PDC winery; the view from Osteria alla Terrazza



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From left: Arno Cattel at Costadilà; rabbit and polenta, served at Enoteca del Corte del Medà in Pieve di Soligo

Prosecco DOC is Italy's largest designated winemaking region, taking in almost 90,000 acres of its northern hill country. However, the premium Unesco-listed DOCG region covers just over 21,000 acres and its output amounts to about 10% of total production.

white grape varieties like bianchetta and boschera, sourced largely from old, higher-altitude vineyards, planted long before prosecco rose to international prominence. "When my father started the project, everyone said he was crazy. They all thought it was simple: plant some glera, sell the grapes and get rich," the 30-year-old explains. "But my father wanted to make wine. Here, we get grapes from people we trust and make real wine. It's a circular thing. We should be supporting people who care about the land."

The taxi ride back to the hotel is a treat, but my thighs aren't off the hook yet; the next day, it's time to tackle a few more hills on my final major walking stretch to clifftop CastelBrando. Setting off from San Pietro di Barbozza, the landscape alters from its previous dramatic undulation, melting into softer peaks. Descending into the pretty village of Follina, a historic wool town, the valley floor flattens and I wander between cafes and shops into a Cistercian monastery. Its archways and basilica are empty and, away from the midday sun, I take a moment for quiet contemplation.

My afternoon meander brings me past a charming old waterway with a hidden shrine, through grassy meadows and via the tiny hamlet of Valmareno, all entirely invisible from the main road. Then, it's the final push up a rocky, wooded slope to the castle — a vast fortress with more than 2,000 years of history, an on-site dungeon, chapel, several restaurants and, of course, my hotel for the night.

The staff seem completely unperturbed by my sweaty state — they've seen it all before. Nor do they care that, after dropping my bag off in my room, I head straight down to the hotel's rambling spa. I spend hours floating in hydrotherapy pools overlooking the hills, soothing my sore feet in the Kneipp bath before napping in the Himalayan salt room. After the exertion of the past few days, it feels well-deserved.

By the time I descend to the terrace restaurant for dinner, the light is waning and, once again, I'm thirsty. Sommelier Melanie Fontana arrives at my table, and I don't hesitate to ask if I can taste a local prosecco. She soon reappears with not one, but two glasses.

The first is pale straw in colour, the second golden. Melanie explains how the former, fresh and zingy, is made from the valley floor, and the other, richer and sweeter, from a few hills over.

"People think prosecco is all the same," she says, as a pizza arrives at my table and couples clink glasses around us, "but there's always another side of prosecco to discover."

TOP THREE
LOCAL FOOD STOPS

CORTE DEL MEDÀ

Descend two floors into a cellar below the streets of Pieve di Soligo to find soft strands of tagliatelle turned out by the talented chef and hearty, herby rabbit served on mounds of polenta. The wine list features pours from a variety of prosecco producers, including Cal Monda. 77vintido.shop

RISTORO COLLAGÙ

Between Pieve di Soligo and Follina, this unpretentious, romantic spot serves simple plates on red-and-white checkerboard tablecloths. The family's own homemade salami and Sopressa are accompanied by their *col fondo*-style prosecco wines. lerivedenadal.com

DE RICARDO

For a true local hangout in the heart of Valdobbiadene — and a break from all the local fizz — head to this popular craft beer bar. Old barrels are used as tables, quirky street art lines the walls and the food is simple, with sharing platters of cured meats and cheese or sandwiches. dericardo.it





From left: Massimo Dalla Betta tends to the vines at Cal Monda; breakfast at Hotel Municipo 1815 in San Pietro di Barbozza

Sleep

MUNICIPIO 1815, SAN PIETRO DI BARBOZZA

With a plum position overlooking valleys around Valdobbiadene, this is a dreamy hotel base for walkers who want to strike out to the plethora of local wineries — the closest is right next door. Gourmet breakfasts served on the sunny terrace kick-start your day. From €211 (£181), B&B. municipio1815.it

HOTEL CASTELBRANDO, CISON DAL VALMARINO

It's not every day that you get to stay in one of Europe's largest, oldest castles, at the foot of the Alps. Despite CastelBrando's singular location, rooms are good value, and two restaurants cater to different price points. The vast spa is worth a full afternoon. From €149 (£127). castelbrando.it

HOTEL CONTA, PIEVE DI SOLIGO

Homely and friendly, this hotel just off the main square of Pieve di Soligo has a bar area where you can taste an impressive selection of local prosecco. Some rooms come with a separate lounge area containing a sofa bed, making them handy if you're travelling as a family. From €90 (£77). hotelconta.it

Do

LA FIADORA

A historic waterway that lines the walking route between Follina and Valmareno, below CastelBrando, La Fiadora was the powerhouse behind Follina's once-thriving wool industry. As you walk, look out for the Grotto of the Madonna, a little shrine tucked under the trees.

CASTELLO DI COLLALTO, SUSEGANA

These 12th-century castle ruins, neighbouring church and bell tower, are an atmospheric stop on the walk from Susegana. Check out the remnants of a medieval washing spot in the nearby river, too.

MOLINETTO DELLA CRODA, REFRONTOLO

This 17th-century mill, set on a riverbank by a pretty waterfall in the hilltop hamlet of Refrontolo, has been meticulously restored — transporting you back to the days when Prosecco was a humble agricultural region rather than a world-renowned bubbly powerhouse. The interior features seasonally changing exhibitions and, if you're lucky, you might even see the mill in action, grinding corn for polenta. molinettodellacroda.it

Shop

LA BOTTEGA DEL PROSECCO, VALDOBBIADENE

This prosecco shop in the heart of Valdobbiadene has plenty to choose from, including bottles from small, organic vineyards. labottegadelprosecco.it

DOLCI SINFONIE, PIEVE DI SOLIGO

What's an Italian trip without gelato? This ice cream shop in the town square of Pieve di Soligo is the locals' favourite. Piazza Vittorio Emanuele II, 34. @gelateriadolcisinfonie

L'OSTERIA SENZ'OSTE, VALDOBBIADENE

A gimmick signifying the ultimate commercialisation of prosecco — or just a bit of fun? However you view it, this vending machine selling bottles of prosecco just outside San Pietro di Barbozza is a popular spot. osteriasenzoste.it

Essentials

Flights from the UK to Venice, which is around an hour's drive from the Prosecco region, are available with multiple airlines and take around two hours.

A seven-night self-guided Walking the Prosecco Hills trip with Inntravel, graded as 'moderate', costs from £1,208 per person, including B&B accommodation, some meals, walking route notes, luggage transfers and more. inntravel.co.uk

HOTEL

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OKLAHOMA CITY

Where nations meet

Cutting-edge galleries, museums and creative spaces offer powerful ways to connect with Oklahoma's Native American cultures. Words: Jennifer Barger



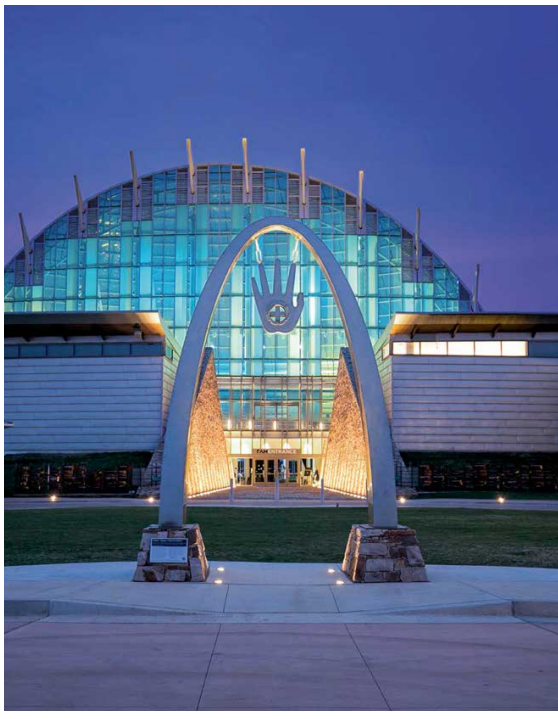
With roots stretching across the US, Oklahoma is home to 39 federally recognised Native American tribal nations, including the Wyandotte Nation and the Absentee-Shawnee Tribe. Today, almost 20% of the state's inhabitants identify as Native American, making it one of the largest Indigenous populations in North America.

While a handful of Indigenous nations have lived in what's now Oklahoma for millennia, many others trace their presence here to the Indian Removal Act of 1830, which forcibly displaced Native American peoples from their ancestral homelands to what was then known as Indian Territory. "We come from the East Coast, the West Coast and everywhere in between," says Kelli Mosteller (Citizen Potawatomi Nation), executive director and CEO of the First Americans Museum in Oklahoma City. The city offers visitors the chance to gain an understanding of this complex history while experiencing the state's living Indigenous cultures through its museums, Indigenous-owned businesses, festivals and cultural centres.

Begin your visit at the First Americans Museum in Oklahoma City, which opened in 2021 and occupies a striking building on the banks of the Oklahoma River. Its sweeping, curvilinear design, formed from two intersecting architectural curves, allows the building and its grounds to function as a giant cosmological clock.

Inside, the galleries "showcase how the story of this country plays out through the lens of Indigenous diplomatic relations", says Kelli. "From the Indian Removal Act to the Land Run and the McGirt Decision, Oklahoma has been at the centre of pivotal moments in American history and Indian law." Displays range from intricately beaded clothing and ceremonial pottery to immersive multimedia installations exploring Indigenous cultures, histories and traditional beliefs.

"We're not a history museum; we're a museum of living Native cultures," says Kelli. "We show visitors the vibrancy of contemporary Native life through experiences such as games, powwows and [contemporary] art." The attraction is also home to two restaurants serving Indigenous-inspired cuisine made with local produce.



Elsewhere, the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum explores the stories of Oklahoma's 39 tribal nations through artworks and artefacts, from schoolchildren's sketches and 1930s paintings to tribal records. Outside, the family-focused Liichokoshkomo', an interactive outdoor village, brings Indigenous cultures to life with full-scale replicas of a Puebloan cliff dwelling and a Kiowa tipi. The village also offers hands-on activities — for example, children can grind corn, plot constellations and listen to traditional stories.

Two larger-than-life Apache warriors cast in bronze greet visitors by the Oklahoma History Center. Created by celebrated Chiricahua Apache artist Allan Houser,



Liichokoshkomo', at the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum
Left, from top: Red Earth Festival; First Americans Museum

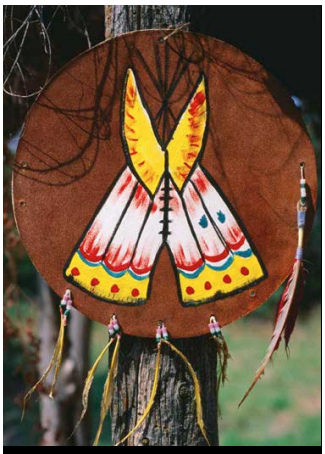
the monumental sculpture sets the tone for the museum's displays on tribal histories. Inside, the We Are Who We Were gallery brings together music, photographs, artworks and oral histories to show how the events of the 20th century continue to shape tribal life and culture.

Contemporary art offers another window into Oklahoma City's Indigenous communities. Just a short walk from the First Americans Museum, Exhibit C Gallery is a modern space owned by the Chickasaw Nation. Its crisp, white-walled galleries feature paintings, sculptures and fine art by First American artists from Oklahoma and around the world, all of which are available to buy. The shop stocks artisan gifts, from chocolates and books to jewellery and homewares. Another Downtown stop is the Red Earth Art Center, which displays Native art from across the US and hosts seasonal events. "There are also many public art displays from Native muralists and sculptors," Kelli says. She recommends *Strength of the Woman*, a mural by Steven Grounds and J Nicole Hatfield on the Sheridan Avenue underpass in the lively Bricktown neighbourhood. Round off your stay at Skydance Brewing Co, with pours shaped by traditions and local ingredients such as seasonal sour ales brewed with berries or watermelon.

PLAN YOUR TRIP

Flights to Oklahoma City are available from Heathrow, Manchester and Edinburgh via major US hubs to Will Rogers International Airport. Once in the city, the Oklahoma City Streetcar links many Downtown attractions. Taxis, hire cars, Embark buses and the Spokies bike-share scheme provide additional ways to get around. For more information, go to *visitokc.com*

VISIT OKLAHOMA CITY



FOUR INDIGENOUS FESTIVALS IN OKLAHOMA CITY

1 INDIAN HILLS POW WOW

July

Expect traditional gourd dancing, drumming and singing, alongside Native American arts and crafts, at this free multi-day event.

2 RED EARTH FESTIVAL

August

More than 100 Indigenous artists from across the US gather for a two-day art market plus cultural performances and demonstrations.

3 SUMMER & WINTER SOLSTICE CELEBRATIONS

June & December

Held at the First Americans Museum, these seasonal events mark the year's longest and shortest days with dances, ceremonies and cultural activities.

4 INDIGENOUS PEOPLES DAY

October

Join the celebrations at the First Americans Museum for a day of storytelling, live music, cultural performances and family-friendly activities.

IMAGES: GETTY; VISIT OKLAHOMA CITY

THIS IS BRANDED CONTENT. IT DOES NOT NECESSARILY REFLECT THE VIEWS OF NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC, NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC TRAVELLER (UK) OR THEIR EDITORIAL STAFFS.

long weekend

Troodos Mountains

Offering a cooler alternative to the island's coast, the hilly interior of Cyprus also has nature trails, cutting-edge wineries and villages where artisanal practices endure

WORDS **ORLA THOMAS**

An island nation in the Mediterranean's eastern fringes, Cyprus sits at the intersection of three continents — a geographical position that's profoundly shaped its history. Annexed by an endless parade of empires — including the Greeks, Romans, Byzantines and Ottomans — in 1878, Cyprus became a British protectorate. These last rulers chose the lofty, leafy Troodos Mountains as their summer capital to escape the heat of the coast, and it's still favoured by locals from spring to autumn.

Cyprus became independent in 1960, but vestiges of its storied past are everywhere, from its ancestral grapes, mavro and xynisteri, to mural-washed churches hidden among the hills and turn-of-the-century mansions left by long-gone grandees. The village of Platres, once a royal retreat, is an ideal base from which to explore the region. Short, scenic drives lead to villages where the old ways are still prized and local, seasonal food is championed. On the fringes of these communities are abundant opportunities for exploring this wildly beautiful terrain on foot, with easily navigable paths that reveal its timeless landscapes.

DAY ONE: SCENERY & STARGAZING

Morning

Just outside Platres, the two-mile Caledonia Trail follows the path taken by a late 19th-century expedition party from Scotland, who were so struck by the terrain's resemblance to home they gave it the country's Latin name. Begin your journey in their footsteps at Psilo Dendro Trout Farm & Restaurant, ascending along the banks of the Kryos Potamos River — occasionally trip-trapping over wooden bridges and stepping stones — until you reach the 12-metre-high Caledonia Waterfall.

Afternoon

Park up on the outskirts of Vouni village, nine miles south, then wander its quiet cobbled alleyways and traditional wood-balconied houses, home to 200 people and countless swallow and swift nests. The friendly owner of Lenia's Tavern on Timiou Prodromou is a mezze-master — sit at one of the colourful outdoor tables to try dishes like *koupepia* (stuffed vine leaves) and *keftedes* (meatballs). Afterwards, stroll over to Plateia, one of Cyprus's prettiest coffeeshops, established in 1908. With its fresh white-and-blue exterior and tree-shaded terrace, it's an appealing place to watch the world go by. Also well worth visiting is the village of Pelendri, a half-hour drive north — home to the Church of the Holy Cross, one of 10 painted churches in the region recognised by Unesco. Just outside the village, Tsiakkas Winery also offers tours and tastings, and has knockout views. tsiakkaswinery.com

Evening

Tuck in to fresh salads at Pelendri's Symposio Tavern, which grows many of its own vegetables in a small kitchen garden. From here, it's a 20-minute drive to the Troodos Observatory in Agradia, built in 2024 at an altitude of 1,250 metres to offer the clearest possible views for its astronomer-led stargazing experience. For a better look at its spaceship-like architecture, consider visiting during daylight for a solar observation session. symposiocyprus.com troodosobservatory.com

Clockwise from top: The Artemis Trail is a circular route around the summit of Mount Olympus; artisanal red-clay pottery has long been produced in many of Troodos's villages; a typical Cypriot spread at Symposio Tavern in Pelendri

IMAGES: KIRILL MAKAROV; CYPRUS DEPUTY MINISTRY OF TOURISM; SYMPOSIO TAVERN







DAY TWO: WALKS & WINE

Morning

The original Mount Olympus, mythological home of the gods, is in mainland Greece — but Cyprus's tallest peak has the same name, and even mere mortals can tackle the five-mile hike around its summit. Named after the goddess of nature, the Artemis Trail begins and ends in the car park for the Cyprus Ski Club. In summer, hikers can expect pinecones and needles crunching underfoot from the extensive forest cover; the occasional cuckoo call; and high-altitude views all the way to the coast.

Afternoon

Having worked up an appetite, drive half an hour north to Kalopanayiotis — home to pioneering community tourism project Casale Panayiotis. Saddened by the depopulation and decline of the village he'd loved since childhood, John Papadouris bought up empty properties, restoring and converting them to create a charmingly higgledy-piggledy 41-room hotel. It features several cafes and restaurants, including relaxed Byzantino, with its screen-shaded terrace. The restaurant majors in Cypriot flavours — from seasonal produce grown on site to grilled lamb cutlets with lemon and rosemary — all served with sweeping views along the Marathasa Valley.

It's a two-minute walk to the Monastery of St John Lampadistis, a complex of three stone churches built around a cobbled courtyard. Inside are vivid frescoes, some dating to the 13th century, plus intriguing offerings left by pilgrims, such as wax models of babies and body parts. Hop back into the car for the 10-minute climb to Marathasa Wines, which has the look of a mid-century Bond villain's lair. Transparent cylinders offer a window on the different stages of the production process: harvest, fermentation and bottling. Try a glass of ultra-light local white xynisteri. casalepanayiotis.com marathasawines.com

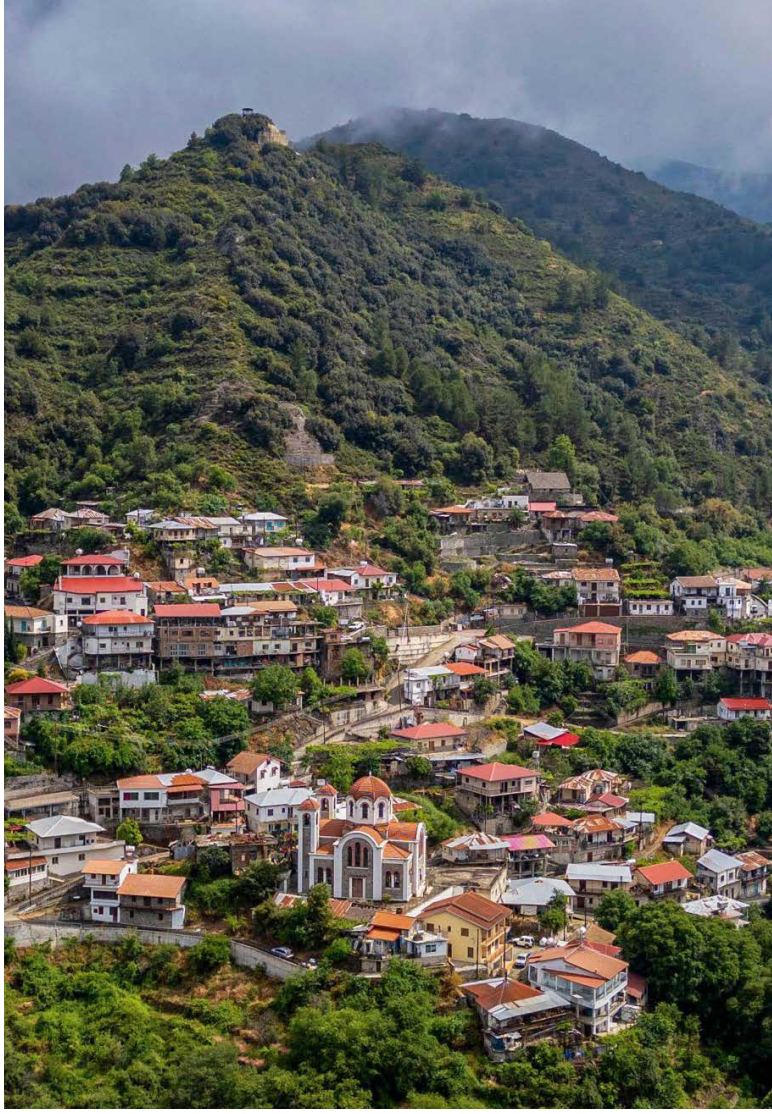
Evening

At first, it might not seem much to look at, but once visitors encounter Kakopetria's old quarter, they fall for it hard and fast. Its handful of narrow streets feature a Greek Orthodox church with a bijou bell tower, historic houses and vine-strewn pergolas — and its pavement cafes are popular for a sundowner. Stop by wood-beamed Linos Inn for mezze starring Cypriot halloumi, served grilled to squeaky perfection. Afterwards, wander to the old watermill, starting point for the 20-minute Vateris Nature Trail, which hugs the Karkotis River. linosinn.com



From left: A coffeehouse on the historic Plateia (square) in the village of Vouni; in the village of Arsos, sweet palouzes are made from thickened grape juice; the village of Moutoullas in the Marathasa Valley





TOP FIVE: LOCAL MAKERS

Phini pottery

This tiny village (also spelled Foini) is known for its decorative red clay ceramics — an art form that's on Unesco's Intangible Heritage List. Local artisans have been making amphora, bowls and cups since the Bronze Age, and the practice is maintained mostly by women *mastorisses* (master potters). Giota Aristidou offers workshops in the studio she inherited from her grandma. heartlandoflegends.com

Vlassides wine

Third-generation winemaker Sophocles Vlassides revitalised his family's business in Koilani after training as an oenologist in California. His vineyard's striking architecture — all clean lines, concrete and glass — reflects the contemporary, sustainable viticulture practised within. Learn about it on a tour, then sample a summery rosé or the oak-aged white alátes ('wings') while overlooking the vines. vlassideswinery.com

Traditional sweets

Elena Markantoni, known as 'Elena the Grape', makes the Cypriot sweet *soutzoukos* at her small shop in the sleepy village of Arsos. Almonds are threaded onto a string and then repeatedly dipped into a vat of *palouzes* (thickened grape juice) to create long, candle-shaped treats. Alternatively, stop by the Willy Wonka-esque Ourania Delights in Phini for jelly-like cubes of *loukoumia*, very similar to Turkish delight. heartlandoflegends.com

Rose cosmetics

Home to an annual spring festival honouring the flower, the village of Agros sits among the terraced hillsides where 90% of Cyprus's aromatic damask roses grow. Established in 1948 by the Tsolakis family, small-scale factory Venus Rose Cosmetics welcomes those interested in learning more about the bloom's antioxidant and antiseptic properties. Visit in May and it's even possible to participate in the harvest. venus-rose.com

Platres's lavender legacy

These fragrant purple flowers were much loved by Queen Victoria and thrived during the British occupation of Cyprus, when Platres was favoured as a royal retreat. Today, the village's Cultural Centre offers a deep dive into this forgotten history, plus various free workshops — from lavender bag-making to decoupage — in a space that's an affectionate homage to a turn-of-the century British cafe. platresvillage.com

HOW TO DO IT

Cyprus has two major airports — Pafos is an hour's drive from Platres, while the journey from Larnaca takes 90 minutes. The 4.5-hour flight operates from cities including London, Manchester, Birmingham and Edinburgh, with airlines such as EasyJet, British Airways, Ryanair and Jet2 offering connections year-round. You'll need a hire car to explore — try Petsas Car Rental. Driving is easygoing; there are no treacherous mountain roads and Cypriots drive on the left. easyjet.com ba.com ryanair.com petsas.com

Many of the 85 rooms at Platres's recently renovated Pendeli Resort have terraces overlooking the green hills. Don't miss the spa — complete with large outdoor pool — or the Med-focused restaurant Ilios. From €175 (£151), B&B. pendeliresort.com

More info: visitcyprus.com

IMAGES: LOUCA PHOTOGRAPHICSTOUDIOS LTD; ALAMY


ONE WAY
DELAYED
GREEN
GEMINI
41




DRINK PAPAYA
The Original
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SIDES & TREATS
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FRESH SMOOTHIES
BANANA BERRY
PAPAYA PRIDE
PINEAPPLE SURPRISE
MIX N MATCH
Mango
Papaya
Banana Daquiri
WELCOME
SINCE 1932

on the menu

Hot dogs

NEW YORK

Traditionally found at street carts and dive bars, this New York staple is being reimagined with fusion flavours and elevated takes that reflect the city's ever-evolving food scene

WORDS **ZOEY GOTO** PHOTOGRAPHY **IRJALIINA PAAVONPERA**

Around the halfway mark of my New York City hot dog crawl, I begin to wonder whether the human body is really designed to consume this many wieners in buns. But it's a skill my tour guide Erica Chambre has nailed. Ahead of me, she darts deftly through the Times Square crowds, no sign of sluggishness despite our full stomachs. Steam billows up from manholes, yellow-cab drivers press impatiently on their horns, and nearly every street corner is marked by the colourful umbrella of a hot dog cart, the scent of grilled meat hanging heavy in the warm afternoon air.

Erica, looking sharp in a blue trilby, waves off the surrounding vendors with seasoned dismissal. "The flavour really isn't worth the gamble for your stomach," she tells me, flicking her hand casually towards the shiny chrome carts. "What we're eating today is on a completely different level."

To prove the point, we head to nearby Hell's Kitchen and duck through the doorway of Rudy's Bar and Grill, a dive bar so dingy it takes a few seconds for my eyes to adjust. Once they do, a vision of pure Americana appears: guys hunched over the bar watching sports on TV screens, Bruce Springsteen rocking through the speakers, and a bartender sliding a hot dog in my direction. The edges of the juicy sausage curl upwards like a mouth breaking into a coy smile. All at once, my appetite returns with a vengeance.

I've come to New York to sample the city's finest hot dogs, beginning with the classics before setting off on my own search for the Big Apple's most extravagant and inventive takes on the sausage staple.

The humble sandwich arrived here in the mid-19th century via waves of German-speaking immigrants. They introduced New Yorkers to the likes of frankfurters, weisswurst and wieners — pork, beef or sometimes veal. In places like Coney Island, enterprising immigrant vendors popularised the sausage in a bread roll and sold it as New York street food: cheap, tasty and good-to-go. A handheld dish tailored for a city that never stopped moving.

"New Yorkers don't really sit down for lunch," Erica says at our next stop, Schaller & Weber, on Manhattan's Upper East Side. She's brought me here in search of the old country — the wursts from Germany that laid the groundwork for the modern hot dog. "The Germans and Austrians arrived here with the idea of a little sausage in a sandwich roll. They took their food and culture and adapted it to the US."

Inside the vintage delicatessen, established in 1937, time appears to have stalled. A faded photograph of a moustachioed accordion-player hangs near the entrance, while pale, weisswurst veal sausages are piled like pyramids behind the glass counter. Through a hole-in-the-wall hatch, we order a couple of pork-and-veal bratwursts. They come in warm pretzel buns and buried beneath tangles of sauerkraut, the sharp hit of vinegar strong enough to clear both the sinuses and the mind.

At the final tour stop on the Upper East Side, we tuck in to our seventh, possibly eighth hot dog of the day. Erica explains that for her there's a rock-steady formula for the perfect hot dog. "This is my favourite," she says of the no-frills version served at Papaya King: the instantly recognisable all-beef frankfurter. The fast-food institution opened in 1932 selling tropical drinks before adapting to its German clientele.

"It's very simple: just a bun, sausage, mustard and ketchup. A couple of bites and it's gone. It's fast-paced food for a fast-paced city," she says, as I savour the rich, grilled beefy snack.

Clockwise from top: The Empire State Building beyond Second Avenue; Papaya King opened in 1932 and moved to its current location in 2024; it serves simple hot dogs with mustard and ketchup

TIMELINE

1860S German-speaking settlers start selling sausages — often served with milk rolls and sauerkraut — from pushcarts in NYC's Bowery district.

1871 Charles Feltman, a German butcher, opens the first permanent stand on Coney Island, selling what were known as Coney Island red hots.

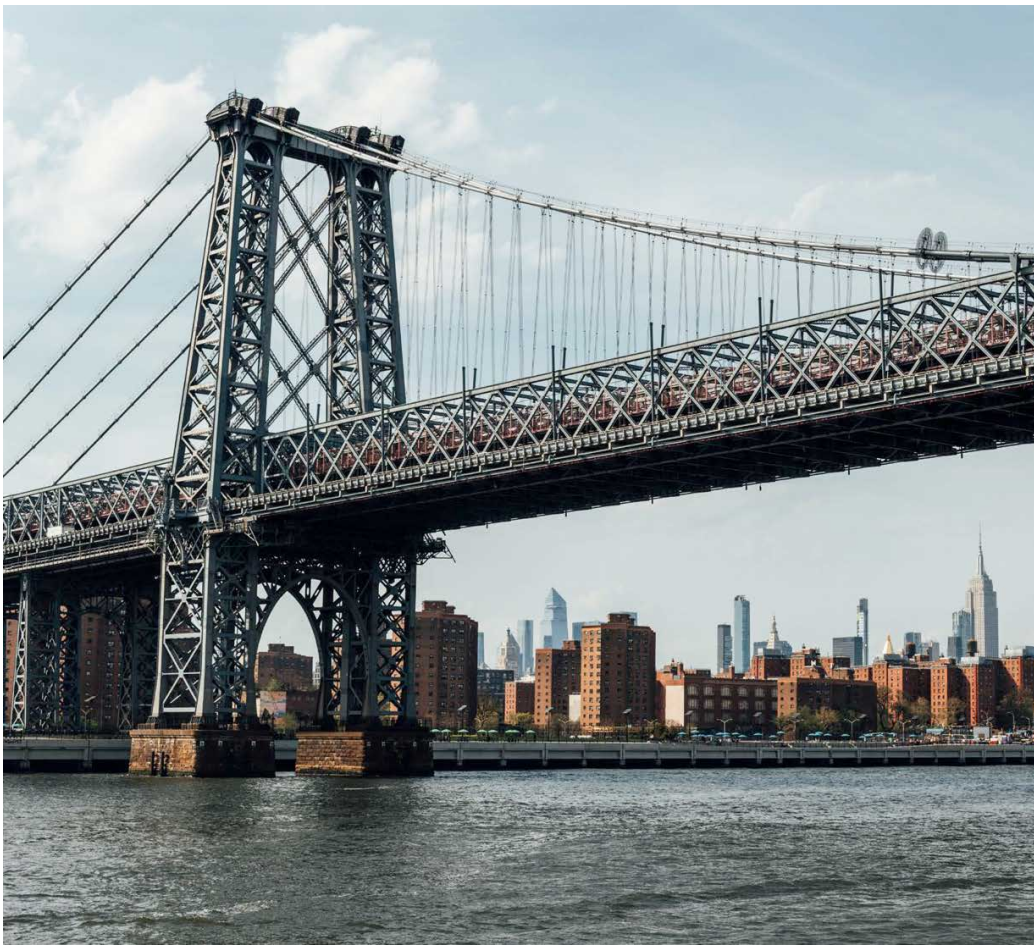
1890S Hot dogs become a standard snack at baseball games in New York, simply dressed with mustard and sauerkraut.

1939 President Franklin D Roosevelt serves hot dogs to a visiting King George VI, who asks for seconds, launching American 'hot dog diplomacy'.

1972 The first official Nathan's Hot Dog Eating Contest is held, starting an Independence Day tradition. Current champ Joey Chestnut eats 76 in 10 minutes.

2024 A sculpture of a hot dog with mustard, by artists Jen Catron and Paul Outlaw, is unveiled in Times Square. It shoots confetti into the air daily at lunchtime.





From left: Caviar hot dogs at The Modern, MoMA; the Williamsburg Bridge links Manhattan and Brooklyn; Chaat Dog owner Pervaiz Shallwani; his hot dogs come in ghee-toasted buns, with mint and masala chaat; a pizza slice at L'Industrie

The high-low

The following day in Midtown Manhattan, it's a different scene altogether. I'm at The Modern, a sleek two-Michelin-starred restaurant cocooned inside the MoMA art gallery. My table looks out onto a sculpture garden lined with large-scale works by the likes of Pablo Picasso and Joan Miró, while the muffled sound of polite conversation drifts across a sea of white-clothed tables.

Chef Sarah Hsieh pulls up a chair and presents me with the restaurant's masterpiece: caviar hot dogs. Two dinky buns each cradle a finger-length sausage topped with loops of pickled shallots, dill and a heaped spoonful of caviar.

"Most people don't expect caviar and hot dogs to make sense together, but somehow they do," the Canadian chef says with a grin, her long black hair tied back and her name embroidered onto her crisp white jacket. Since debuting on the menu three years ago, the unlikely pairing has developed a cult following, and the kitchen now sends out roughly 100 of the luxe little dogs each day.

On the plate, it's a work of art that could rival the canvases just visible through the gallery's windows. But Sarah explains that creating the restaurant's signature indulgence is actually more like a science.

"There were many iterations to get to this point," she recalls. "We started with a potato roll, then migrated to brioche. And the sausage is made especially for us by a secret supplier, to an exacting length so it just peeks out the end of the bun." I finish mine in two delicious mouthfuls, the all-beef sausage tender after being poached and then kissed by the grill, mingling with tiny, salty pearls of caviar that explode in the mouth.

> "The sausage is made especially for us by a secret supplier, to a length that just peeks out of the bun."

The dish's success comes down to taking the old-school nostalgia of a New York hot dog, its smell evoking backyard cookouts and Independence Day feasts, and elevating it to fine-dining standards, Sarah says. "There's something really fun about caviar hot dogs," she concludes. "It's a bit of high-low culture."

Top dog

For my ultimate stop, I head through Brooklyn's tree-lined brownstone streets to the Beer Street South bar. It's here that the South Asian-American hot dog company Chaat Dog can be found slinging wieners on weekends. Behind the bar, a couple of foot-long sausages





sizzle loudly on the griddle before owner Pervaiz Shallwani, sporting black-rimmed glasses and a clipped salt-and-pepper beard.

His South Asian-American street food concept was born in 2017, when the classically trained chef decided to mix the flavours of his life — the Chicago-style hot dogs he'd eaten as a child in Illinois, married with the spices of his family's Pakistani heritage. The chaat element comes from the sweet, savoury and spicy street food snacks often found in South Asia, used as toppings.

"There's really nothing new in this culinary mashup," he says, popping a Vienna beef sausage into a ghee-toasted bun and adding mint and coriander chutney.

"All American food is immigrant food," he adds, scattering tiny balls of dough dusted with masala chaat powder onto my smoking hot dog. People have long come to America with their recipes from home, then blended them with what they found on arrival, creating something entirely new. "The hot dog is the perfect example of this because every immigrant group that comes to America tries to make it their own. It's a blank canvas."

I bite into my chaat dog, and it instantly claims the crown of top dog in New York for me. Not just for the addictive crunch of the chaat topping, which I could happily eat by the handful. Or even the way sweet, salty and spicy play out with chef's-kiss precision. But because, tucked into a toasted bun, this fusion hot dog somehow tastes like the very experience of wandering New York's streets: inventive and joyfully diverse. It's proof that in New York City, you can always teach an old dog new tricks.

HOW TO DO IT

Airlines including British Airways, Virgin Atlantic and Delta fly to New York from UK cities. TWA Hotel at JFK International Airport is set in a former terminal, complete with a concession stand serving classic Feltman's of Coney Island hot dogs. Rooms from $257 (£192). GetYourGuide offers small-group three-hour Manhattan walking tours with hot dog stops. From $111 (£82) per person. twahotel.com getyourguide.com

More info: nyctourism.com

THREE MORE NEW YORK CULINARY CLASSICS

L'INDUSTRIE, VARIOUS LOCATIONS
This artisan pizza joint imports ingredients from Italy but puts a New York spin on things. The sourdough is slow proved, creating a light base. Try it with the signature burrata cheese and optional extras such as fig jam, bacon or truffle. lindustriebk.com

RUSS & DAUGHTERS, VARIOUS LOCATIONS
Start the day the New York way with a chewy, house-made bagel piled high with lox (cured salmon), cream cheese, tomato, onion and capers. Founded in the Lower East Side in 1914, this landmark now offers the staple in Brooklyn, too. russanddaughters.com

MANHATTAN COCKTAIL, MANHATTAN
Invented in the 19th century, this New York cocktail of rye whiskey, sweet vermouth and bitters was a Jazz Age favourite. Sip one beneath the murals in Bemelmans Bar at The Carlyle Hotel, for a splash of Great Gatsby-era glamour. rosewoodhotels.com



IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK (BOTTOM RIGHT)

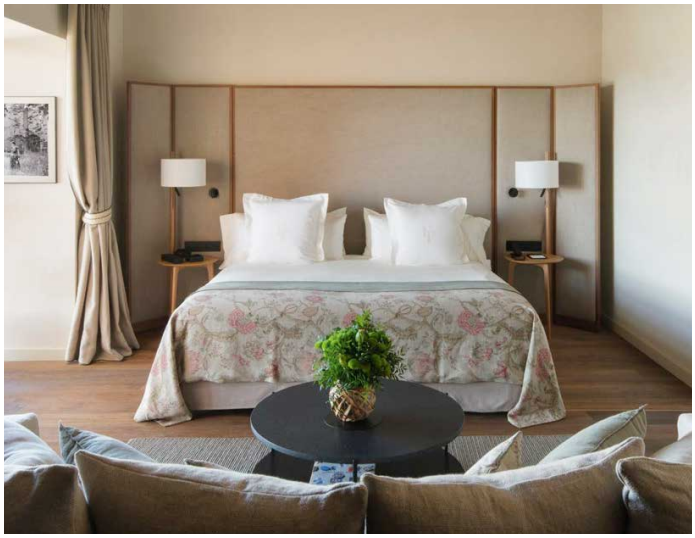


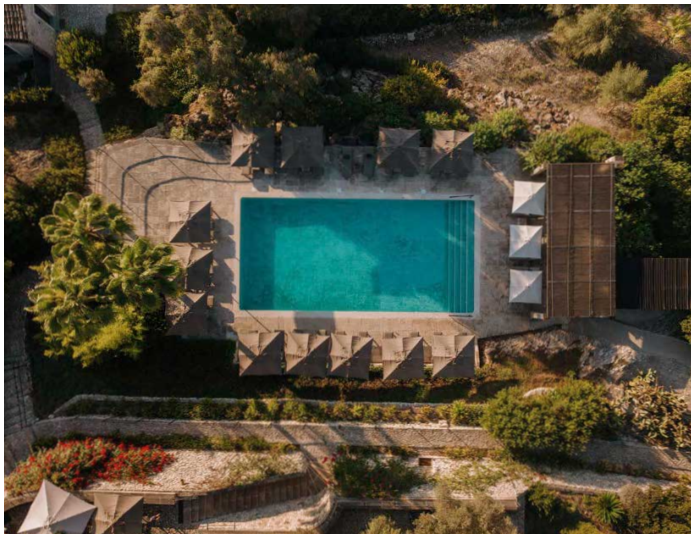
where to stay

Majorca

The largest of Spain's Balearics, Majorca has a hotel scene as diverse as the island itself. In the capital city of Palma, you'll find stylish crash pads and converted palaces, while the peaceful interior — home to charming hilltop villages and the Serra de Tramuntana mountain range — is the place to experience hospitality rooted in the land. Wherever you stay, you'll never be far from the *calas* (coves) of the Mediterranean coast, ideal for lazy beach days and lingering seaside lunches.

WORDS **ORLA THOMAS & LAUREN GAMP**





From left: Valldemossa village in Majorca's Serra de Tramuntana mountains; a suite at Can Ferrereta, where each room is unique; the pool area at Finca Serena

Best for art and design

£££ CAN FERRERETA

Hidden down a side street in the southeastern market town of Santanyi, this property reveals its lustre by degrees. First, the original stone floor and elegant archways of the 17th-century mansion house are on show in the lobby; next, a library stocked with Assouline coffeetable books and vinyl. In the garden beyond, a 25-metre pool sparkles in the sunlight and, under a nearby nasturtium-trailed pergola, diners enjoy zesty salads and jamón croquetas. Naturally, there's also a fine-dining restaurant, located in the former wine cellar, and a white-stone spa. From bijou villas to spacious suites, each of the bright 32 rooms is unique — one even features an original drawing by famed Spanish artist Joan Miró.

ROOMS: From €338 (£288), B&B.

hotelcanferrereta.com **OT**

Best for a rural escape

£££ FINCA SERENA

Serene by name and by nature, this former farmhouse in central Majorca offers a view that induces a feeling of calm — fields lined with cypress trees stretch towards tabletop-shaped Puig de Randa mountain. This sanctuary-like atmosphere extends throughout, from the pool — edged by tall palms and vivid bougainvillea blossom — to the terrace restaurant Jacaranda, where friendly, attentive staff serve a zero-mile menu and wine from the finca's vineyards under twinkling lights. The 25 unpretentiously stylish earth-toned rooms are rich in thoughtful details: a lemon for your G&T, a Bluetooth speaker-slash-lantern for evenings on the private terrace. The nearby town of Montuïri is a good place for a *caña* (small beer).

ROOMS: From €373 (£318), B&B.

unicohotels.com **OT**

ALL RATES QUOTED ARE FOR STANDARD DOUBLES, ROOM-ONLY, UNLESS OTHERWISE STATED. IMAGES: AWL IMAGES; CAN FERRERETA; ÚNICO HOTELS

Best for a boho coast stay

£ BIKINI ISLAND & MOUNTAIN HOTEL ES TRENC

This property on the south coast combines 1960s-inspired interiors with a Club Tropicana-esque pool and beach area, complete with tiki-style umbrellas and retro cocktail glasses. The drinks may not be free, but plenty else is — from bikes and standup paddleboards to sunscreen and yoga classes. Rooms have small balconies and big personalities — king-size beds feature Make Love Not War linen and beaded curtains — while terrace restaurant Neni serves Levantine food beside the ocean. There's a rocky outcrop for sea swimming, and Es Trenc Beach is a 15-minute drive away.

ROOMS: From €150 (£127), B&B.
bikini-hotels.com **OT**

Best for mountain views

££ CA'S XORC — A COUNTRY HIDEAWAY & RESTAURANT

Anticipation builds on the winding drive up to this rustic yet elegant finca, high in the Serra de Tramuntana. The payoff? A Sóller Valley view that extends all the way to the sea. There are various secluded spots from which to take it all in, from shaded pergolas to terrace tables at the bistro. There are 13 rooms in the ivy-covered main house and in two separate garden cottages. Decorative floor tiles, rolltop baths and ivory drapes billowing onto balconies add to the decidedly romantic ambience. The 84-mile Ruta de Pedra en Sec hiking trail is accessible from the driveway — tackle a segment along ancient stone paths, then recover in the hotel's infinity pool.

ROOMS: From €213 (£181), B&B. casxorc.com **LG**

Best for sensory abundance

£££ THE LODGE

Circled by lavender fields and soundtracked by cicadas, this converted farmhouse is a balm for the overstimulated brain. Two dozen pale and interesting bedrooms are scattered across the 388-acre estate, and guests spend their days cycling between the spa and infinity pool or following trails to viewpoints in the foothills of the Serra de Tramuntana. A 13th-century olive mill in the lobby is a reminder of an agricultural abundance that's apparent at the restaurant: watermelon gazpacho is one of the standout dishes served on the softly lit terrace, edged by towering cacti and fragrant rosemary.

ROOMS: From €400 (£339), B&B.
unicohotels.com **OT**





Clockwise from top left: One of Ca's Xorc's 13 bedrooms; Levantine dishes at Bikini Island & Mountain Hotel Es Trenc; the retro-style pool at Bikini Island & Mountain Hotel Es Trenc; the bathrooms at The Lodge feature plenty of natural materials

IMAGES: ALEXANDER RUDOLPH; BIKINI HOTEL ES TRENC/STEVE HERUD; ÚNICO HOTELS







Best for style on a budget

£ BRONDO ARCHITECT HOTEL

Bringing stripped-back industrial style to a pair of 17th-century buildings in the heart of the capital Palma, Brondo has 20 individual rooms that take their names and design inspiration from leading architects. Whether you choose a Zaha Hadid double or a premium Norman Foster (with its own private terrace), expect clean lines, a subtle tonal palette and carefully curated furniture, from mid-century chairs to modern four-poster beds. Restaurant El Bandarra specialises in 'miniature cuisine' like pintxos and tapas; if you want to go bigger, the best of the city is right on your doorstep.

ROOMS: From €134 (£114), B&B. brondoarchitecthotel.com **OT**

Best for a city hideaway

£ £ CAN CERA

In the heart of Palma's wonderfully chaotic old town, the heavy wooden door of this 17th-century mansion opens onto an oasis of calm. A central courtyard bathes the original stonework and sweeping staircase in natural light, while modern artworks and bold pops of colour bring the interior firmly into the present. Guests are handed their very own golden key to access one of 14 grand yet welcoming suites – all plush fabrics and ornate carved wooden details – setting the tone for a characterful stay. Be sure to try the tapas and local wines at the in-house *vermutería* (vermouth bar).

ROOMS: From €279 (£237), B&B. cancerahotel.com **LG**







Best for local life

£ CAN RIBERA BY ZAFIRO

Stay in a small town like Muro and you'll see the island at its most authentic — here, you can join locals in rituals like the *paseo* (a sociable evening stroll) or shopping at the Sunday market. Built in the 19th century, Can Ribera was once the family home of the Plomer sisters, owners of Zafiro Hotels, and it still has the feel of a grand private residence. Breakfast is served in an elegant, panelled dining room, and light-filled, high-ceilinged bedrooms are softened by judiciously deployed pastel and elegant floral tones. The jewel in the crown, however, is the rooftop pool, which looks out over Muro's statuesque gothic church.

ROOMS: From €124 (£105), B&B.
zafirohotels.com **OT**

Best for sustainable luxury

£ £ £ ES RACÓ D'ARTA

Walk through the whitewashed stone entrance of this minimalist country pad in eastern Majorca and it's impossible not to relax. Every detail feels considered, from the soft neutral linens to jute textures echoing the surrounding landscape. Typical Majorcan limestone and exposed timber beams honour the property's farmhouse roots, while Crittall-style windows bring a contemporary edge. Sustainability is key here — Es Racó is powered by geothermal and solar energy, and much of the excellent produce comes from its farm, vineyard, olive groves and beehives. Slow down with daily complimentary yoga and meditation, book in to the superlative spa or rise early for a guided sunrise hike to the summit of Puig des Racó.

ROOMS: From €389 (£331), B&B.
esracodarta.com **LG**

From top: An aerial view of Es Racó d'Arta in the east of the island; a calming social space at Es Racó d'Arta; one of the 21 spacious bedrooms at Can Ribera by Zafiro

IMAGES: ANA LUI PHOTOGRAPHY; ZAFIRO HOTELS

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hotels & more

A stay as unique as you are

marcati.at







Lärchenhof

Natur & Spa Hotel **Seefeld in Tirol**

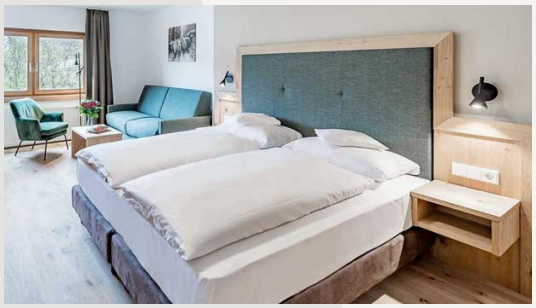
At the four-star Natur & Spa Hotel Lärchenhof, enjoy Alpine flair, family hospitality and the perfect location to relax in nature. Discover our culinary, wellness and service offerings.

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The Summit awaits you in the heart of Seefeld for an exclusive apartment holiday with hotel service. Enjoy carefree holidays with all the freedom you need.









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Our 43 holiday apartments are located in the heart of the Tyrolean Alps. We offer modern apartments, an extensive breakfast, a lounge and a wellness area.

Tirol Seefeld
TIROLS HOCHPLATEAU

take two

Ottawa

Canada's capital city is celebrating its 200th anniversary this year — the perfect excuse to trace how it's evolved through history

WORDS **FLORA NEIGHBOUR**

In 2026, Ottawa is marking its bicentennial — or, more specifically, 200 years since the establishment of Bytown, a lumber camp from which the city later evolved. To celebrate, there's a year-long programme of events ranging from history-themed museum exhibitions to block parties. This mix of old and new underscores each visit to Canada's elegant, walkable capital. You can listen out for the echo of bagpipes during the changing of the guard on Parliament Hill, home to the gothic revival government buildings, all turrets and gargoyles. Then, walk 10 minutes to an industrial taproom in the downtown area, settling in with an innovative fruit-infused pint. Elsewhere, there are opportunities to learn about the Indigenous Algonquin people, on whose territory Ottawa sits, and take in the leafy cityscape, with some 1,300 parks and green spaces. New direct flights from London Gatwick with Air Transat make the city easier to access than ever before.

Clockwise from top: The Rideau Canal was opened in 1832 as a commercial shipping route; the Indigenous hoop dance symbolises the circle of life; Canada's Peace Tower and Parliament Buildings

1 HERITAGE

Immerse yourself in politics

Usually open for visits, Ottawa's parliament buildings are under renovation until 2031. In the meantime, Parliament: The Immersive Experience, located downtown, offers a virtual tour of the Centre Block, home to the House of Commons and Senate chambers. Learn about the influence of decisions made centuries ago, as well as how Canadians are shaping their future today. visit.parl.ca

Cruise a canal

A Unesco World Heritage Site, the Rideau Canal stretches 125 miles from Ottawa to Lake Ontario. It first opened in 1832 for military purposes but instead became used for trade, transport and, now, leisure. On an evening cruise between downtown and Dow's Lake, you'll pass landmarks like the Canadian Museum of Nature, then dock by the castle-like Fairmont Château Laurier hotel as the sun sets behind it. ottawaboatcruise.com

Visit the Museum of History

Glimpse views of the 200-year-old city as you head across the steel truss Alexandra Bridge over the Ottawa River and into Gatineau, Quebec. Watching over the water is the Canadian Museum of History. Here, the Canadian History Hall traces the country's story from its first peoples to the present day, while temporary exhibitions explore everything from stamps to Canadian Impressionism. historymuseum.ca

Discover Indigenous culture

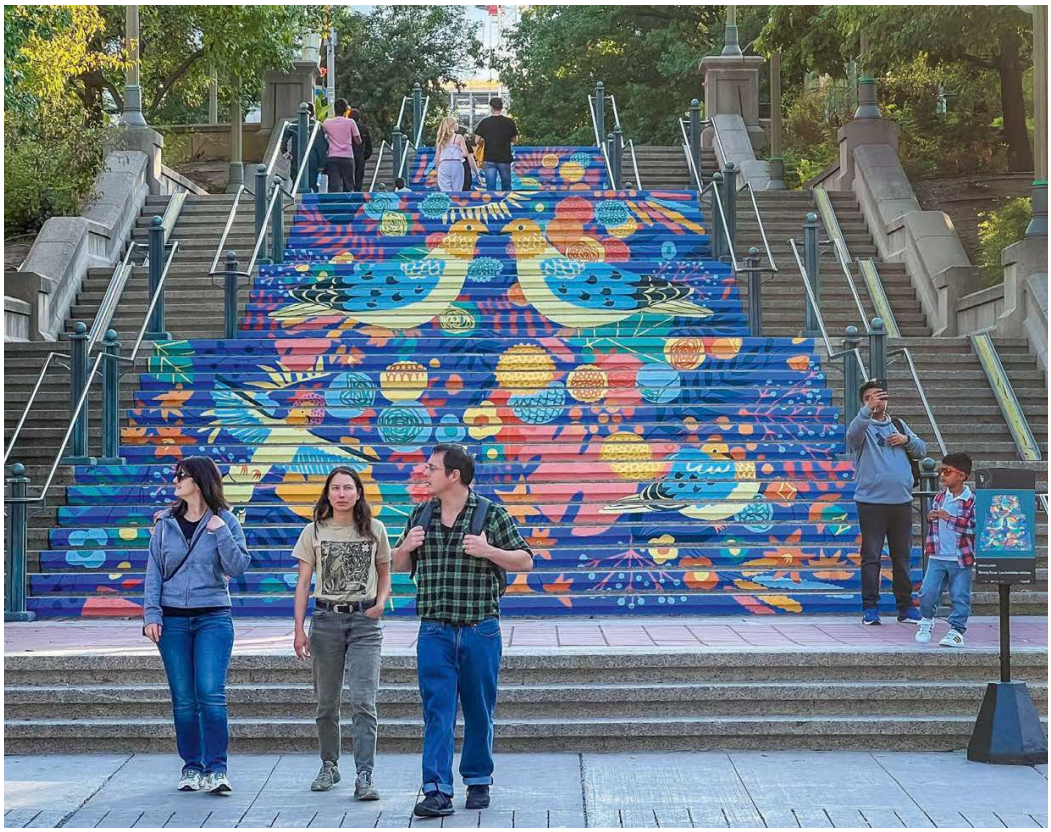
A 20-minute drive from the city, Mādahòkì Farm is a refuge for endangered Ojibwe Spirit horses, Canada's only indigenous equine breed, sacred to the Algonquin Anishinaabe people. A visit gives insight into their thousand-year culture. Meet the animals, learn about their significance from the elders and watch a mesmerising hoop dance, symbolising the connection between wildlife, nature and the circle of life. madahoki.ca

IMAGES: ALAMY; TRACEY LYNNE; GETTY











Cool as ice

Between early January and late February, when temperatures in Ottawa can drop as low as -14C, a five-mile section of the Rideau Canal becomes the world's largest natural ice rink. Skates or sleighs can be rented from operators along the waterway, while stalls serving pastries and dumpling soup set up on the ice.

From top: A colourful mural on York Steps near ByWard Market; ice skaters make their way towards Dow's Lake on the Rideau Canal

HOW TO DO IT

Air Transat flies direct from Gatwick to Ottawa. The century-old Fairmont Château Laurier has rooms from C$255 (£135), B&B.
airtransat.com fairmont.com
ottawatourism.ca

2 MODERN

See contemporary art

Head downtown to the Laurier Avenue Bridge underpass to discover Ottawa-based muralist Cassandra Dickie's frescoes, then to the nearby Glebe neighbourhood for a trail of murals that includes depictions of wildlife. Finish your self-guided tour at the National Gallery of Canada, where a 30ft-high bronze spider by 20th-century French-American artist Louise Bourgeois guards the entrance. The glass-and-granite building houses a collection featuring work by artist and activist Ai Wei Wei. gallery.ca

Watch live sport

Join 24,000 fans and cheer on football team Atlético Ottawa warming up for the Canadian Premier League at TD Place Stadium. The rugby ball-shaped ground is in the sleepy Lansdowne district. In the adjoining arena, catch the Ottawa BlackJacks shooting some hoops or the Ottawa 67's, the junior ice hockey team, charging their opponents. tdplace.ca

Sip creative pints

A zesty wheat beer from Beyond the Pale ByWard Taproom is the perfect start to an evening exploring Ottawa's nightlife. Found in the heart of the beloved ByWard Market area, close to the Totem Pole of Canada landmark, the industrial-style brewery is known for innovative and regularly changing tap beers. Sit on the large outdoor patio, strung with fairy lights — the perfect spot to try a grapefruit-infused Pink Fuzz or a peachy Aromatherapy, or settle in for a personalised tasting. btpshop.ca

'Fly' over the city

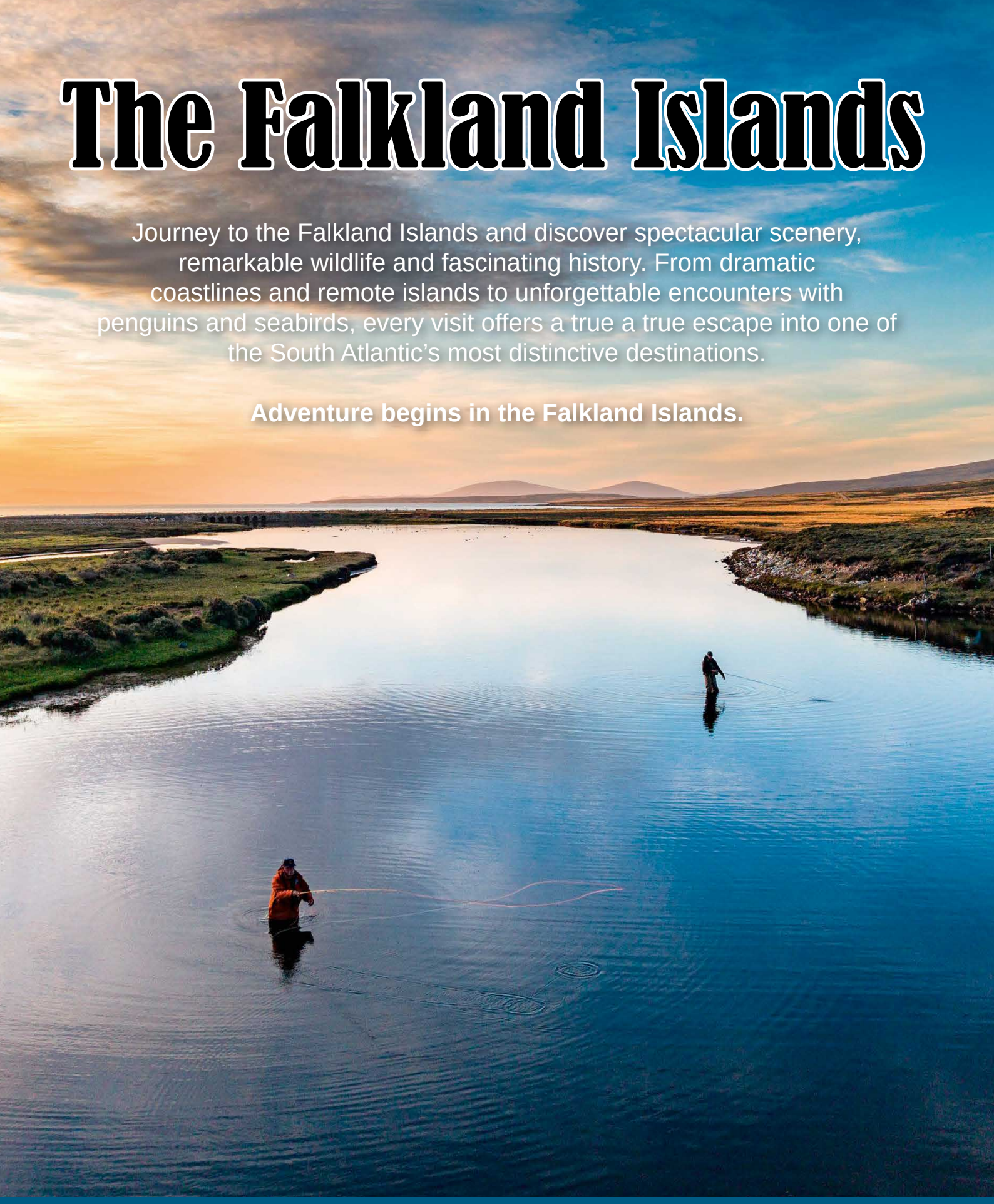
The Interzip Experience is Canada's first cross-provincial zipline, connecting Ottawa with neighbouring Gatineau. Reaching speeds of 30mph, the 425-metre-long experience offers views of the cityscape, Parliament Hill and the Ottawa River — look out for rabbits and raccoons along the banks as you whizz past. Parents and children can 'fly' side by side. interzip.ca

IMAGES: ALAMY

The Falkland Islands

Journey to the Falkland Islands and discover spectacular scenery, remarkable wildlife and fascinating history. From dramatic coastlines and remote islands to unforgettable encounters with penguins and seabirds, every visit offers a true a true escape into one of the South Atlantic's most distinctive destinations.

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THE ISLE OF MAN

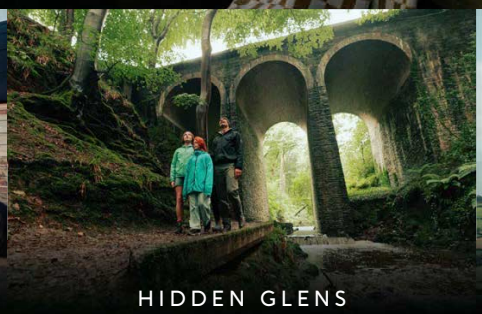
AN EXTRAORDINARY ISLE

As autumn paints the landscape in gold and amber, the Isle of Man offers space to breathe, explore and reconnect. Discover wild coastlines, hidden glens, remarkable wildlife and star-filled skies in the world's first whole nation UNESCO Biosphere.

DISCOVER & RECONNECT THIS AUTUMN



COASTAL WELLNESS



HIDDEN GLENS



SPECTACULAR WALKS

BIOSPHERE ISLE OF MAN

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ONE TO WATCH

SET-JETTING IN MALTA & GOZO

Visit the microstate beloved by film and TV directors

Malta and Gozo's Mediterranean shores are drawing a new generation of fans, thanks to their attractiveness as on-screen dupes for Greece and Italy. This year the tiny, honey-hued nation has starred in a host of new film and TV releases – most notably Christopher Nolan's blockbuster *The Odyssey*, but also the BBC drama *Two Weeks in August* and *Enola Holmes 3*, which was shot in capital Valletta, the fortified town of Mdina and the historic Villa Bologna estate. The latter also featured in 2026's *Pompeii: Out of Time with Tom Hiddleston*. With Malta now poised to appear in other major 2027 productions, the island looks set to become Europe's biggest on-screen star.

IMAGE: JONATHAN STOKES

THE LOWDOWN

What's next for luxury rail travel?

DEMAND FOR SLOWER TRAVEL HAS BOOSTED INTEREST IN PREMIUM RAIL TRIPS, WITH NEW CABINS, TRAINS AND ROUTES ALL OVER THE WORLD

WORDS QIN XIE

It's hard to imagine anywhere that looks more post-apocalyptic than Coober Pedy. At first glance, this small mining town in the Australian Outback seems to be entirely devoid of life. Mountains of brown and white rubble stretch as far as the eye can see; with only patchy scrub clinging to the parched earth, the slightest breeze lifts a plume of suffocating dust. In summer, temperatures can easily breach 50C.

Not that any of it bothers me in my private sleeper cabin on *The Ghan*, a luxury train serving a 1,851-mile transcontinental route between Darwin and Adelaide. The four-day Expedition service starts from A$5,290 (£2,775) for a compact, wood-panelled twin room, with a sofa that staff turn into a sleeping berth, and a large window from which you might spot wild camels pacing on the horizon. Trips combine three-course, regionally inspired meals, described on hand-illustrated menus and served on white linen; an open bar stocked with staggeringly good Australian wines; and curated tours to some of the remotest parts of the country.

Journeys on *The Ghan* are unique, not least because there's no other train that will let you tag on a visit to Uluru — slap-bang in the middle of the Red Centre, miles from anywhere — but luxury rail experiences can be found on every continent save for Antarctica. Despite hefty price tags — from a couple of hundred pounds for a lunch service trundling past bucolic landscapes, to tens of thousands for a multi-day ride in a butler-serviced suite — they're incredibly popular and often sell out months in advance. And demand is on the rise.

Visa's analysis of data from its payment network found expenditure on experiential rail tours rose by 59% between 2019 and 2024, far outpacing the 18% increase in other types of international holidays. According to research from business consulting firm Market Intelo, the industry could be worth around $2.3bn (£1.7bn) by 2034, almost doubling the current $1.2bn (£890m).

Rail operators have responded bu upping the ante. In April, *The Ghan* unveiled the art deco Australis suite, the first of its kind in Australia; at 25sq metres, it has a fixed bed and a pillow menu, a lounge area with marble-top bar, and a butler at the ready. Elsewhere, southern Spain's *Al Ándalus*, where carriages are decorated in faded crimson and gold, celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2026 with a new seven-day itinerary between Madrid and Seville. There are brand-new trains, too. Norway's *Norient Express*, due to debut later this year, will include a gym car on its six-day journeys from Bergen to Trondheim.

Increased sustainability concerns have helped boost rail travel. But, for Eleanor Hardy, luxury rail specialist at global travel agency network Virtuoso, the demand for premium options hinges on how they're perceived. "For many, the train's the destination," she says. "From the moment you arrive at an atmospheric station, the experience feels cinematic: bags already in your suite, Michelin-starred menus and the journey unfolding like a performance." In other words, trains are no longer just a mode of transport — they're an experience in their own right.

The new golden age

Luxury rail travel dates back to the 19th century. Trains like the *Orient Express*, launched in 1883 to serve a cross-continent route between Paris and Istanbul, epitomised comfort and style. They featured hotel-like sleeping compartments, decadent dining cars and white-gloved service. From the mid-20th century, the rise of commercial aviation and cars led to an industry decline; the *Orient Express* officially stopped running in 2009. But its myth lived on. "Documentaries such as Channel 4's *The Orient Express: A Golden Era of Travel* remind travellers of the appeal and romance of slow, scenic journeys," says Alison Nicolle, a rail travel specialist at tour operator The Luxury Holiday Company.

Clockwise from top left: Views from the Indian Pacific train, approaching the Nullarbor; grilled black tiger prawns with egg yolk mustard sauce, on the Golden Eagle Silk Road Express; a bedroom on the Britannic Explorer; cocktails are part of the service on the Golden Eagle Silk Road Express

IMAGES: IRJALIINA PAAVONPERA; GOLDEN EAGLE LUXURY TRAINS; SALVA LÓPEZ













From left: The lounge at Roma Ostiense Station, where travellers wait to board La Dolce Vita Orient Express; admiring the views from the Canyon Spirit; the Canyon Spirit journeys between Denver and Moab

Many modern luxury train carriages evoke that sense of nostalgia with classic designs, updated for contemporary tastes. In some cases, vintage cars are being brought back to life. Unveiled in 2025, Thailand's *The Blue Jasmine*, which runs nine-day round trips from Bangkok via Chiang Mai, features 1960s Japanese sleeper carriages, their walnut-hued wood panelling upgraded by heritage Thai silk brand Jim Thompson.

One of 2027's most anticipated launches is hospitality group Accor's 'revived' *Orient Express*, composed of 17 carriages from the 1920s and 1930s.

Instead of trying to reinvent the wheel, the industry is more focused on catering to the hunger for new experiences in new destinations. "We're increasingly seeing a demand for alternative rail routes and destinations beyond the traditional favourites," says Nicolle. In the past year, The Luxury Holiday Company saw a 400% jump in enquiries for luxury trains in Spain, in many ways an emerging rail destination thanks to the expansion of the country's network. There have been smaller but significant increases in interest in new routes elsewhere, too.

She attributes the trend to considerations around overtourism. "Many travellers are looking for places that offer a slower pace, greater comfort

FIVE NEW LUXURY RAIL EXPERIENCES TO TRY

LONDON TO PENZANCE, BELMOND BRITANNIC EXPLORER

This train's earth-toned cabins are your base for breaks to Cornwall, Wales and the Lake District. The four-day return trip features wine-tasting overlooking St Michael's Mount. belmond.com

COPPER TRAIL, ROVOS RAIL

Journey through several African countries on this 14-day itinerary from Zimbabwe to Angola, which includes a visit to Victoria Falls and game drives in Zambia. There are only two one-way trips a year. rovos.com

THE MIGHTY NULLARBOR, INDIAN PACIFIC

Cross the Nullarbor Plain – a seabed turned desert – on a five-day journey from Perth to Sydney. New for 2026 are two coffee- and cream-toned hotel-style suites. journeybeyondrail.com

MIGHTY 5 EXPLORER, CANYON SPIRIT

See the American West through glass-dome windows. The six-day rail-and-road tour starts with a train ride between Denver and Moab, with overnights in hotels, then explores Utah's national parks by car. canyonspirit.com

VOYAGE TO THE ROOF OF THE WORLD, GOLDEN EAGLE SILK ROAD EXPRESS

This train runs several China routes. The 13-day Beijing to Lhasa tour has detours to meet pandas and see Unesco-listed caves. goldeneagle luxurytrains.com

IMAGES: MR TRIPPER; REBECCA STUMPF; CANYON SPIRIT

and opportunities to experience nature and culture in a more immersive way," says Nicolle. "That helps explain the growing interest in places such as Vienna and Amsterdam, as well as long-haul rail experiences like Canada's *Rocky Mountaineer*."

Perhaps as a result, countries that haven't traditionally been associated with rail are debuting their first luxury services. Finishing touches are being put on *Dreams of the Desert*, which will launch in Saudi Arabia at the end of 2026, with interiors showcasing Islamic geometric motifs. Over in Egypt, the *Guardian of the Nile*, set to run from 2027, markets itself as a 'rail cruise' to the Nile Valley. Uzbekistan is working on the *Samarkand Express*, which will connect four Silk Road cities.

Meanwhile, at The Luxury Holiday Company, demand for rail trips combined with experiences such as cruises, opera packages and tailor-made touring has gone up 30% in the past year. "Rather than treating rail as a standalone experience, travellers are increasingly building entire holidays around it," says Nicolle.

High-end rail packages are already being designed to cater to this shift in mindset. "Luxury travel is no longer about seeing more places, it's about understanding them more deeply," says Paolo Barletta, founder and CEO of Arsenale Group, which creates and operates experiential rail journeys worldwide. A prime example is Italy's *La Dolce Vita Orient Express*, Arsenale Group's first launch in 2025. It offers journeys inspired by the original *Orient Express*, but its greater focus is building immersive trips. On its multi-day itineraries, guests join curated experiences like live music in Matera's Unesco-listed cave dwellings, a 4WD safari up Mount Etna or a round of golf with views of the Adriatic Sea.

Back on board, they're treated to menus curated by Heinz Beck, who heads up Rome's three-Michelin-star La Pergola. Cabins were designed by Milan-based Le Dimore Studio, with colour schemes evocative of Harlequin, a stock character from *commedia dell'arte* (a popular Italian theatre genre). Every detail of the experience has been carefully curated to feel like it could only exist in one place in the world, according to Barletta. "When guests remember a journey, they shouldn't just remember the train," he says. "They should remember the destination, the people they met and the emotional connection they built along the way."

True — I still vividly remember the experiences *The Ghan* opened up for me in the remotest parts of the country: spying crocodile tracks in Nitmiluk Gorge and having dinner under the stars in Alice Springs. Even the simple act of stepping off the carriage to touch the ochre-hued soil felt remarkable, and remains firmly etched in my mind. In the future, luxury rail won't be competing against other trains, says Barletta. "It's competing with luxury resorts, expedition cruises and other forms of experience-led travel."

SPAS ON WHEELS

Wellness is increasingly being added to luxury rail. A big proponent is hospitality group Belmond: its *Britannic Explorer* offers facials crafted with botanicals and mineral formulations on its journeys through the UK's countryside. Meanwhile, Peru's *Andean Explorer*, which travels to 4,500 metres, has signature treatments like 'altitude acclimatising' therapy. And Belmond isn't alone. Day trips on *The Vietage* in Vietnam include a neck and shoulder massage. *The Golden Chariot* in India has and ayurvedic spa. On another Indian train, the *Deccan Odyssey*, there's even a sauna. That's certainly more relaxing than flying.



KIT LIST

Hut-to-hut hiking

HIT THE TRAIL IN STYLE, THEN BED DOWN IN COMFORT WITH THESE ESSENTIAL ITEMS AND ACCESSORIES



LOWA EXPLORER GTX MID

Hut-to-hut hikes typically cross a variety of terrains, so it's important your boots are all-rounders. This pair is at once lightweight and supremely grippy. That doesn't mean missing out on the features of heftier options, with the waterproof membrane standing up to rain and surging streams. £225. lowa.co.uk



BIG AGNES FLY CREEK UL SLEEPING BAG

If you're carrying everything on your back, this compact sleeping bag is what you want in your rucksack. It packs down to just 19cm x 38cm in its stuff sack, thanks to the technical materials it's crafted from: ultralight fabric made out of recycled fishing nets, combined with a premium-grade 850-fill down. €500 (£428). eu.bigagnes.com



SOUNDCORE SLEEP A30

Shared huts can be difficult places to drift off in if you're next to loud sleepers. These Bluetooth earbuds are the perfect solution. Designed for lying on your side, they sit flush inside the ear and come with memory foam tips for added comfort. Download the app, packed with ambient sounds and snore-masking tones. £199.99. soundcore.com



DOCK & BAY QUICK DRY TOWEL

This travel towel is available in an ever-expanding range of bold colourways, which makes it hard to lose in a communal space. Its microfibre fabric dries twice as fast as cotton, so it won't collect a damp smell, and the towel packs down into a pouch measuring just 24cm x 14cm. Available in two sizes. From £30. uk.dockandbay.com



JETBOIL FLASH 1.0L

If you're lucky, your overnight cabins will offer food, but it's still wise to take a small stove with you. This option incorporates an insulated cup to form a cooking system that requires minimal bag space. It brings water to the boil in just two minutes, making it perfect for warm drinks and light meals on the go. The fuel cannister is sold separately. £159.99. trekitt.co.uk



HAGLOFS ALERT MID PANT

Comfort and durability are key when hiking, and these trousers deliver on both fronts. The fabric stretches at the knees for freedom of movement, and you can adjust the fit round your waist and ankles. They're quick drying, too — wash them at night and they're good to go the following morning. £120. haglofs.com



ATOM PACKS THE PULSE 50

This backpack's bottom, side and strap pockets are placed so you can reach what you need without taking it off, helping to sort between on-the-go essentials and items for the hut. There's also a top strap to secure a roll mat – useful to stretch out sore muscles in the evenings after a long day on the trail. £275. atompacks.co.uk



ARC'TERYX COELLE JACKET

This lightweight Gore-Tex jacket keeps bulk to a minimum and is easy to stash away – an excellent companion for long-distance hiking, when size and weight are key. It's streamlined for high performance, offering breathability and protection, even in sustained rain. £350. arcteryx.com

WORDS: NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC TRAVELLER (UK) TEAM. IMAGE: JUANITA ESCOBAR



The private orchid collection of enthusiast Daniel Piedrahíta includes the Rothschild's slipper orchid, which is native to Borneo

BEYOND TRAVEL

What's online?

HEAD TO NATIONALGEOGRAPHIC.COM TO MEET THE FLOWER COLLECTOR HELPING SAVE RARE ORCHID SPECIES, WATCH VIDEOS OF RARELY SEEN NOCTURNAL RAINFOREST ANIMALS AND MORE

ENVIRONMENT

The quest to save the world's rarest orchids

For millions of years, the long-tail *Masdevallia* orchid native to Colombia's cloud forests has survived thanks to pollinators. Today, one of those pollinators is Daniel Piedrahíta, who lives near Medellín and owns one of the world's largest private orchid collections. With habitat loss and black-market trade threatening half of the 30,000 known orchid species, collections like his are invaluable genetic stores for research, propagation and potential reintroduction. Three Medellín labs use his seed stock to cultivate rare orchids — "the only chance to not lose these species", he says.
nationalgeographic.com/environment

ANIMALS

Watch the world of the rainforest at night

At 3am, on a platform 15 metres up Panama's Cocobolo Nature Reserve, ecologist Lucy Hughes scans the rainforest with thermal binoculars. Two Andean porcupines appear as blurs darting along the branches, then step onto a bare limb and finally reveal themselves. It's a rare encounter; many nocturnal rainforest critters are so rarely spotted, their species are listed as 'data deficient'. By climbing into the canopy at night, scientists have been able to record the first up-close, extended videos of these elusive animals in the wild, finally raising the curtain on a largely unseen world.
nationalgeographic.com/animals

HISTORY

The sculptures that rewrote African history

In 1886, the British Royal Niger Company gained mineral rights over central Nigeria's Jos Plateau, rich in tin ore and accessed via an area called Nok. Over the years, fragments of pottery came to light in the mines, but they were largely ignored or destroyed by local Berom workers, who saw them as bad omens. Then, a statuette appeared — a small terracotta monkey head, too striking to be disregarded. Dated to 500 BCE, the piece and other Nok sculptures turned out to be the work of a mysterious, advanced ancient culture — a discovery that shook Europe's understanding of African history.
nationalgeographic.com/history

THE STORY BEHIND

Lederhosen

WITH OKTOBERFEST CELEBRATIONS BREWING IN GERMANY, WE UNPICK THE FESTIVAL'S OFFICIAL COSTUME

They're the chosen outfit of Pinocchio and of little Kurt von Trapp in *The Sound of Music*. They're tight in all the wrong places. And yet, they've endured for centuries. Often intricately embroidered, lederhosen are rarely worn on their own. Rather, they're combined with braces, shirt, knee-length socks and leather shoes to form a costume that's come to represent a distinctly Bavarian style of revelry, despite not really being Bavarian.

It's thought lederhosen were first worn as trousers by the farmers, foresters and hunters of the Middle Ages, not only in Germany but throughout Austria, South Tyrol and Slovenia. These mountainous, wooded regions were a harsh place to eke out a living, and goatskin or sheepskin were the only materials tough enough for the job.

The short lederhosen we know today took shape in the 18th century. The French aristocratic fashion for knee-length culottes led some Bavarian mountain communities to begin cutting their trousers above the knee, giving them greater freedom of movement. By the 19th century, industrialisation was pulling rural people into cities; as their way of life disappeared, so too did their *trachten* (traditional costumes).

Noticing this absence in his home village of Bayrischzell, schoolteacher Joseph Vogl founded the first *trachtenverein* (a society dedicated to the preservation of regional clothing) in 1883. At the time, lederhosen were associated with the rural peasantry, which made them unattractive to many citizens. The clergy even deemed the short garments immoral — not that it stopped Vogl wearing his to church.

The sartorial decision caused nothing less than a national scandal, but Vogl was to find a useful ally in high-profile eccentric King Ludwig II, the so-called 'Swan King' of Bavaria. Fascinated by Germany's past, he wore lederhosen himself and backed Vogl's cause, encouraging men to wear the garment to the first Oktoberfest celebrations in the 1880s.

Lederhosen remain the official costume of the Bavarian beer festival to this day. In fact, Oktoberfest is one of the few places you're likely to look out of place by *not* wearing them.

Do it: The world's biggest Oktoberfest celebration takes place in Munich between 19 September and 4 October 2026. For a pair of high-quality lederhosen, seek out vintage dealers such as Lederhosenwahnsinn, near Olympiapark.

oktoberfest.de lederhosenwahnsinn.de **SAM KEMP**



€1,500
The average starting cost for a pair of Oktoberfest lederhosen from master craftsman Leder Bensmann in Bad Hindelang, Bavaria

80
The number of hours it can take an artisan to hand-embroider lederhosen

4.51m
The width of the largest lederhosen ever made. The giant shorts were crafted by Gerhard Ritsch in 2014



HOW TO

Find lost luggage

FEW MISHAPS CAN DERAIL YOUR TRAVELS FASTER THAN DISCOVERING YOUR BAG HASN'T MADE THE JOURNEY WITH YOU

Bags can be misplaced for all sorts of reasons — technical glitches, human error, tight transfers, security checks or space and weight restrictions. Airline technology firm SITA reported 24 million 'mishandled' bags in 2025, or around five for every 1,000 passengers. Thanks to technological advances, that figure is down from 30 million in 2023 and 2024. Still, it pays to be prepared.

Where possible, choose direct flights or allow plenty of time between connections to reduce the risk of bags going missing in the first place. Keep essentials and valuables in your hand luggage, then split your belongings between suitcases if travelling with a companion, so one missing bag won't leave you without any clothes. Make the bag easy to identify, which will help airport staff should they need to search for it: add labels, remove old tags, slip in a luggage tracker and snap a photo. Taking photos of expensive contents can also come in handy if claiming compensation for lost items.

If your bag doesn't arrive at your destination, go to the airline's baggage desk and file a Property Irregularity Report (PIR). You'll need your baggage tag, flight information and suitcase description. If you have tracker data, ask the airline to share the information internally — you won't be allowed to search for your bag, even if you think you know where it is.

You can use your PIR number to track your case online. Most airlines will reimburse you for essentials you've had to buy while waiting — it's worth checking exact rules, which vary depending on the company — so keep receipts.

If the airline can locate your bag, it will deliver it to you at no cost — keep them updated on your location. If it's still missing after 21 days, it will be considered lost; according to SITA, in 2025 this applied to 4% of mishandled bags. You can claim up to £1,000 for your items from the airline under the Montreal Convention; travel insurance may cover additional losses. **EMMA LUNN**

IMAGES: ALAMY; GETTY

FOUR LUGGAGE TRACKERS

AIRTAG 2

Most iPhone owners have this as their default. Like most trackers, it relies on Bluetooth technology, leveraging Apple's billions of users. When the device moves within range of an iPhone in the brand's network, its location is updated in the in-built Find My app.
£29. apple.com

EUFY SMARTTRACK LINK

This Apple-compatible tracker is cheaper than an AirTag and has a built-in keychain hole (a comparable official AirTag case costs from £15). Unlike the Apple device, the Eufy doesn't offer precision tracking when the device is nearby — you can activate an alarm on it via your phone instead, which can then help you locate it.
£19.99. eufy.com

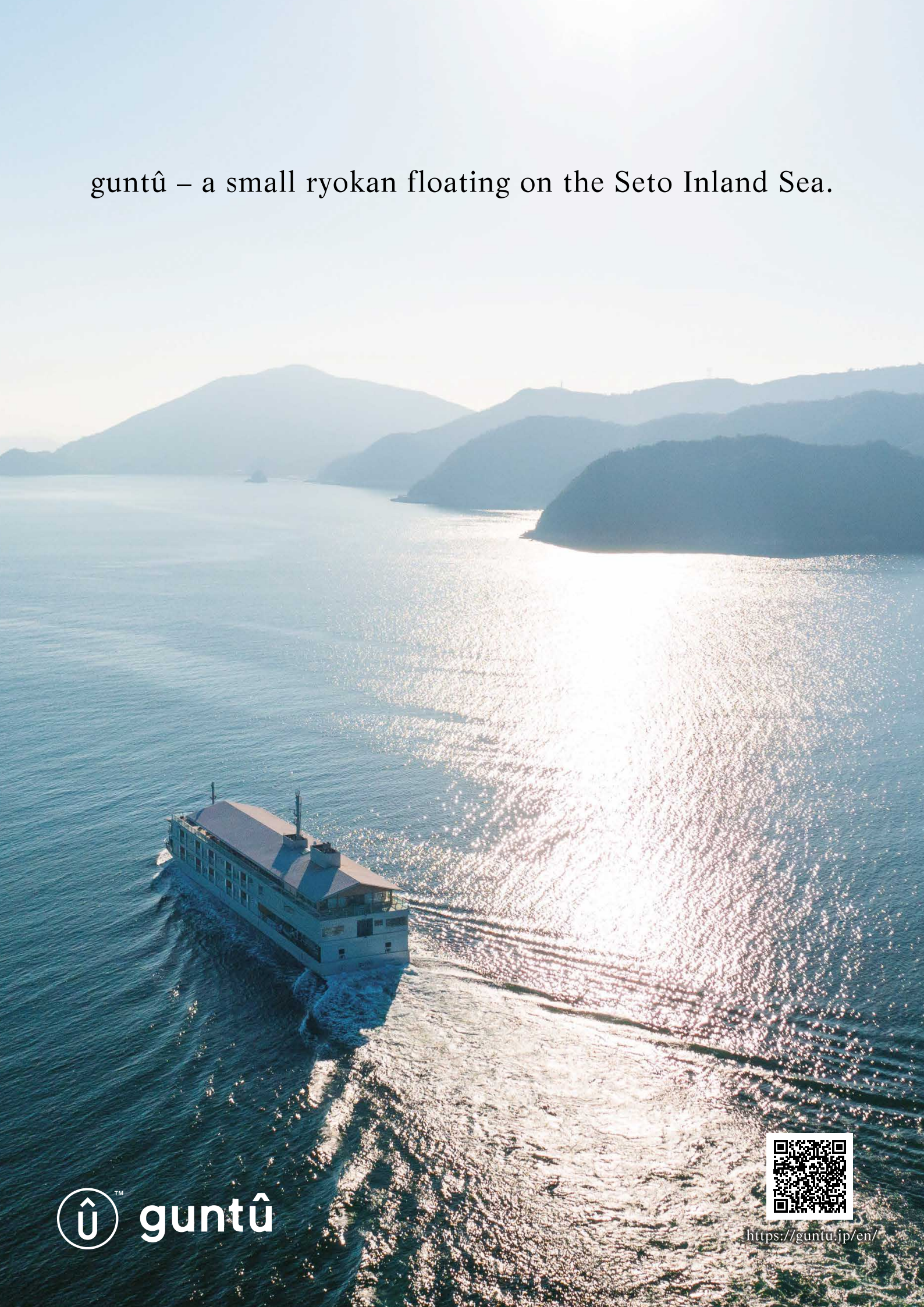
SAMSUNG GALAXY SMARTTAG 2

This luggage tracker is compatible with Samsung products only. It works much like an AirTag, and offers reliable tracking and integration with SmartThings, the brand's own platform for connecting smart devices.
£34. samsung.com

TILE PRO

Using its own Life360 network, this tracker works with both iPhone and Android devices. Features that are built into most other trackers, such as location sharing or 'left behind' alerts (set off when the device isn't moving with you), are only available on a premium plan, which cost from £2.99 a month.
£22.99. life360.com




guntû – a small ryokan floating on the Seto Inland Sea.
guntû
https://guntu.jp/en/

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IMAGE: GETTY

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A guide to izakaya dining

Sit shoulder to shoulder with Japan's after-work crowds, soaking up the energy of this time-honoured pub tradition. Words: Sara Crossley

Glowing red lanterns, smoke unfurling from grills and animated conversations drifting into narrow alleyways — these are often travellers' first clues they've found an *izakaya*. Inside these traditional Japanese pubs, friends and colleagues gather over drinks and a succession of small sharing plates. The tradition traces its roots to the Edo period (1603-1868), when sake shops began allowing customers to drink on site, serving sake alongside simple snacks. Today, *izakayas* remain an integral part of Japan's culture and one of the best places for travellers to experience everyday life. From slow-simmered stew to crisp fried chicken, here are five *izakaya* dishes every visitor should try.

Yakitori

Among the most iconic *izakaya* dishes is yakitori — sizzling chicken skewers cooked over coals. Its origins date back to the Meiji period (1868-1912), when street vendors skewered less desirable cuts of meat. After the Second World War, cheaper poultry became more widely available, transforming this humble snack into an *izakaya* staple. Skewers are typically finished with either salt or *tare* — a glaze of soy sauce, mirin and sugar.

Travellers can try authentic yakitori in Tokyo. Join the Shinbashi district's after-work crowds as they spill into backstreet bars; wander Omoide Yokocho's lantern-lit alleyways; or venture to the Koenji district, where small *izakayas* draw creative locals.

PAIR IT WITH: A Japanese Highball. Whisky and soda refresh the palate between the chargrilled bites.

Sashimi

Meticulously sliced and expertly prepared, sashimi lets the quality of the fish speak for itself. Unlike sushi, these thin slivers are served without rice, and *izakaya* menus feature everything from *maguro* (tuna) and *sake* (salmon) to prized *uni* (sea urchin). Chefs spend years honing their knife skills, tailoring every cut to the fish's texture.

Modern techniques took shape during the Edo period, but it was the introduction of refrigeration in the 1930s that helped spread sashimi's popularity far beyond Japan's coastal communities. For some of the country's finest sashimi, head to *izakayas* around Kanazawa's historic Omicho Market. Ask for the chef's *osusume* (recommendation) to sample the day's freshest catch.

PAIR IT WITH: A chilled *junmai* ginjo sake. The floral aromas complement the fresh seafood without overpowering its flavour.



THREE IZAKAYA ETIQUETTE TIPS

1 EXPECT OTOSHI
Don't be surprised if a small appetiser appears before anyone has ordered. Known as *otoshi*, it's a customary cover charge accepted when taking a table.

2 BEGIN WITH A TOAST
It's common to begin an order with a round of beer. Once everyone's drinks have arrived, raise a glass and say *kanpai* (cheers) before taking a sip.

3 MIND YOUR CHOPSTICKS
No matter where you're dining, make sure you never pass food directly from one pair of chopsticks to another. This action is linked with Buddhist funerals and is considered a Japanese dining taboo.

From far left: Izakayas are popular with both locals and travellers in Japan; gyoza are enjoyed with a dipping sauce made from soy sauce, rice vinegar and la-yu (Japanese chilli oil)
Previous page: A view of Tokyo's skyline, including the city's striking Tokyo Tower

Karaage

Crunchy and golden on the outside, with a juicy chicken centre, *karaage* is one of the most irresistible dishes on an *izakaya* menu. Drawing on Chinese techniques for frying tofu, *karaage,* like yakitori, became a post-war favourite as affordable poultry became more widely available. Bite-sized pieces of chicken thigh are marinated in soy sauce, sake, ginger and garlic before they're lightly coated in potato starch and deep-fried. Its thin, crisp coating helps set it apart from American-style fried chicken.

Tokyo's Ginza district and Usa, a city in Ōita Prefecture on Kyushu Island, both have a long history of making *karaage*, while Nakatsu, on Ōita Prefecture's northern coast, is known as Japan's *karaage* capital.

PAIR IT WITH: A Lemon Sour. *Shochu* (a traditional distilled spirit), fresh lemon juice and soda cut through the rich coating.

Gyoza

These piping-hot, half-moon-shaped parcels are ideal for sharing over drinks. Adapted from Chinese *jiaozi* (dumplings), Japanese gyoza have thinner pastry and a higher ratio of filling. *Yaki* gyoza, the style most commonly served in *izakayas,* are pan-fried before being briefly steamed, creating crisp bases and tender tops. Pork with cabbage and garlic is the classic filling, although seafood and vegetable versions are also popular — all typically enjoyed with soy sauce, rice vinegar or chilli oil.

For some of Japan's best gyoza, head to the cities of Utsunomiya, in Tochigi Prefecture, and Hamamatsu, in Shizuoka Prefecture. The friendly rivalry has made both regions synonymous with the dish.

PAIR IT WITH: A Japanese lager such as Asahi Super Dry or Sapporo. Their clean, dry finish pairs perfectly with the crisp pastry.

Oden

As winter approaches, simmering pots of *oden* become a familiar sight in *izakayas* across Japan. This comforting one-pot dish centres on *dashi* — an umami-rich broth made from *kombu* (kelp) and *katsuobushi* (dried bonito flakes). Ingredients such as daikon radish, tofu and *nerimono* (fish cakes) cook throughout the day until they become tender. *Karashi* (Japanese hot mustard) is traditionally served on the side for an optional kick.

While every region has its own take, Shizuoka Prefecture on the Pacific coast of Honshu Island is particularly renowned for its version, made with a darker broth and beef tendon. Aoba Oden Street in Shizuoka City is one of the best places to try it.

PAIR IT WITH: A warm *junmai* (pure rice) sake. Its smooth, comforting character complements the savoury broth.

IMAGES: GETTY



Akita Inu Tourism

In the forests of Japan's far north, the traditions of the Matagi reveal a way of life shaped by the rhythms of nature, where respect for the mountains remains as important today as it was centuries ago

THE EXPERIENCE

In the far north of Japan's Akita Prefecture lies Northern Akita, a region of deep forests, volcanic mountains and rural communities where life remains closely tied to the natural world. Encompassing Odate, Kosaka, Kita-Akita and Kamikoani, this lesser-known corner of Japan's Tohoku region is perhaps best known as the homeland of the akita inu dog breed. Yet, beyond its famous dogs lies a landscape shaped by a centuries-long relationship between people and nature.

Broad beech forests blanket the mountains and rivers carve through deep valleys, creating a landscape that defines life in Northern Akita. Each season brings its own character: green mountains in spring, lush forests in summer, autumn's brilliant colours and the deep snows of winter. For generations, these rhythms have shaped local traditions, cuisine and daily life, creating a culture inseparable from the environment that surrounds it. Nowhere is this connection more visible than in the traditions of the Matagi — or mountain people.

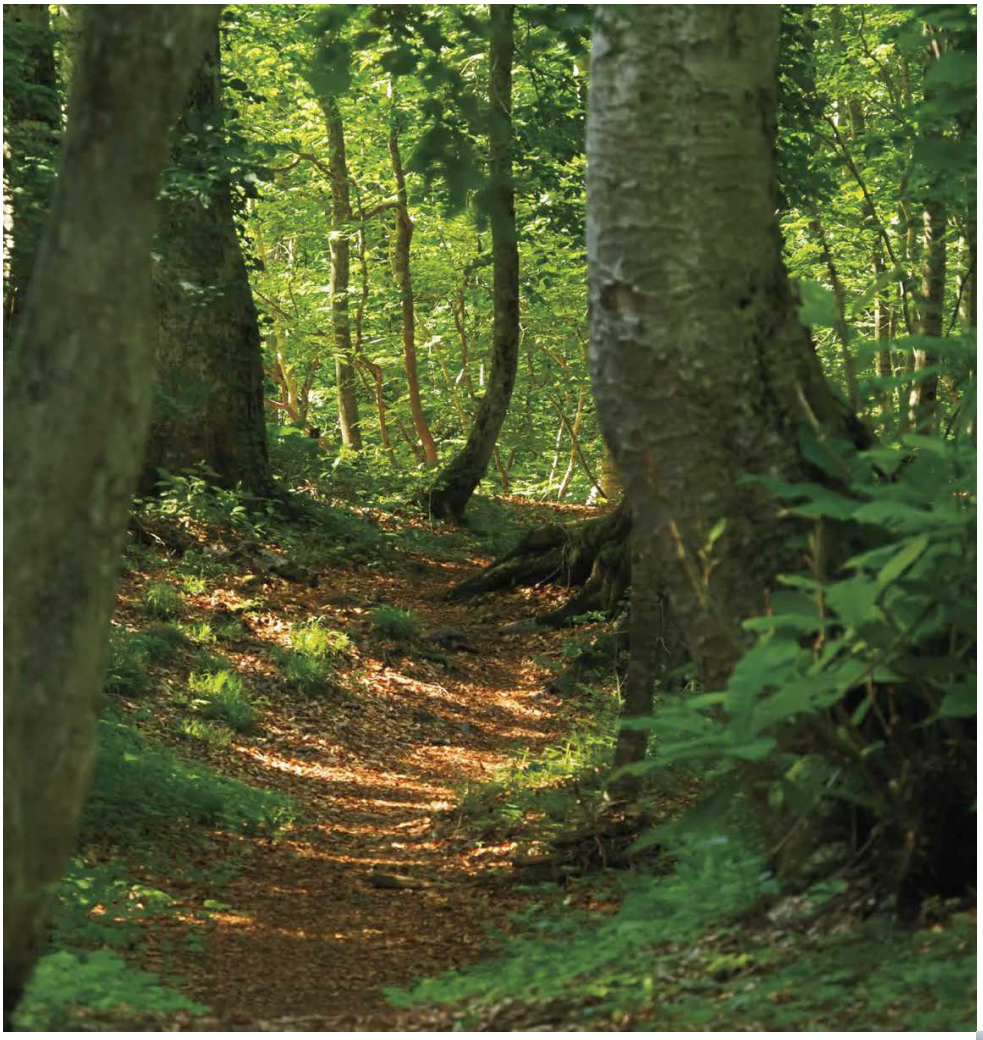
The Matagi's survival depended on their intimate understanding of the landscape, from navigating deep blankets of snow and treacherous ice to recognising the subtle signs of seasonal change. They learned not just to survive here, but ultimately to belong and thrive.

DISCOVERING MATAGI CULTURE

The heartland of Matagi culture lies in the Ani region, where the rhythms of the mountains continue to shape local life. Knowledge of the weather, terrain, wildlife and seasonal resources has been passed down through the generations — from knowing when mountain herbs will emerge after the snow has melted and where the best mushrooms can be found to understanding changing snow conditions to determine safe routes through the forest.

What makes the Matagi culture distinctive is how they see the world. To the Matagi, the mountains aren't wildernesses to be conquered or resources to be exploited. They're a living realm that deserve respect, gratitude and humility. Central to this worldview is Yama-no-Kami, the mountain deity. Animals, plants and everything the mountains provide are regarded as gifts rather than possessions and human beings are seen to exist within nature, not above it.

Like many rural traditions in Japan, Matagi culture has faced significant challenges in the modern era.



INSIDER TIP



SLOW DOWN

Northern Akita mustn't be rushed. The best moments often happen between destinations; for example, taking a quiet mountain road, stopping at a roadside market filled with seasonal produce, discovering local specialities or wandering through peaceful forest landscapes. Travellers should leave extra time in their itineraries to explore without a fixed plan. Follow the changing scenery, enjoy the rhythm of the seasons and take in the small details.

Economic change, depopulation and shifting regulations have transformed mountain communities. Few people rely entirely on the mountains for their livelihoods, and many contemporary Matagi balance ordinary jobs with maintaining traditional knowledge and practices. Yet the culture remains resilient. Younger generations have shown renewed interest in preserving Matagi values and skills, learning from their elders and helping ensure that this unique heritage endures.

Visitors to Northern Akita are invited to explore the deeper cultural and environmental dimensions of the Matagi world through guided forest walks, seasonal foraging experiences, farm stays and conversations with local residents, gaining an insight into values that have shaped life here for generations. These experiences reveal a side of Japan rarely encountered on the country's better-known tourist routes.

The Matagi principles continue to resonate and remain part of everyday life, offering visitors a glimpse into this enduring culture and the chance to discover seasonal foods and explore the mountain landscape. *visitakita.com*



THREE MORE THINGS TO DO



AKITA INU EXPERIENCE

Meet the beloved akita inu in its birthplace of Odate. Here, guests can learn about the breed's history, meet these loyal dogs and discover the story of Hachikō, Japan's most famous canine. Despite his owner's death, Hachikō 'waited' at Shibuya Station in Tokyo for nine years, inspiring an enduring legacy and bronze statue.

ISEDOTAI STONE CIRCLES

Explore one of northern Japan's most remarkable prehistoric spots, part of the Unesco World Heritage-listed Jomon Prehistoric Sites in Northern Japan. Walk among 4,000-year-old stone circles and discover the spiritual traditions, astronomical knowledge and enduring legacy of the Jomon people.

KORAKUKAN THEATRE

Step into Japan's oldest surviving wooden playhouse and experience the golden age of entertainment. This beautifully preserved Meiji-era theatre in Kosaka combines Western architecture and offers live performances, backstage tours and a glimpse into the country's rich cultural heritage.

IMAGES: DAISUKE KONDO; AKITA INU TOURISM



Destinology

Japan's Golden Route provides an incredible introduction to the country's highlights — but journey beyond this well-trodden path for a closer look at Japan's distinct culture, cuisine and historic crafts

THE EXPERIENCE

For first-time visitors, Japan's Golden Route showcases the best of what the country has to offer. It begins in Tokyo, navigating the Shibuya Crossing, before easing into Kyoto's temples, teahouses and artistic *kaiseki* (multi-course seasonal) cuisine. In Osaka, travellers can spend evenings embracing *kuidaore*, meaning 'eat until you drop'. Finally, visitors can visit Hiroshima and the small island of Miyajima, famous for its torii gate — a powerful finale to this far-reaching journey.

However, many believe the magic begins once the bullet train leaves the Golden Route behind. Kanazawa, with its samurai history and scenic gardens, rewards those who choose group tours or independent explorations of its districts. It's a Unesco Creative City of Crafts, and visitors can explore traditions like gold leafing (the art of hammering real gold into thin sheets) and silk dyeing. From there, the landscape rises into the Alps, where Takayama and Kiso-Fukushima retain the spirit of the historic mountain route with timber houses, sake breweries and bubbling onsen. Across the Seto Inland Sea, the island of Shikoku is best known for its 88 Temple Pilgrimage, tracing the footsteps of the Buddhist monk Kūkai.

In Japan, food connects every aspect of life. Each region reveals its own story — from marbled Hida beef in the Alps and Hiroshima-style pancakes to fresh seafood in Kanazawa. Even convenience stores have earned cult status, proving that exquisite food doesn't always come from Michelin-starred spots.

A STANDOUT CHOICE

Whether riding the bullet train or soaking in an onsen, Destinology's experts encourage guests to venture beyond Japan's most popular sites. Every journey is tailored to embrace both the icons and hidden corners. More often than not, it's the offbeat experiences that become the highlights. *tailor-made-holidays.destinology.co.uk/country/japan*

INSIDER TIP

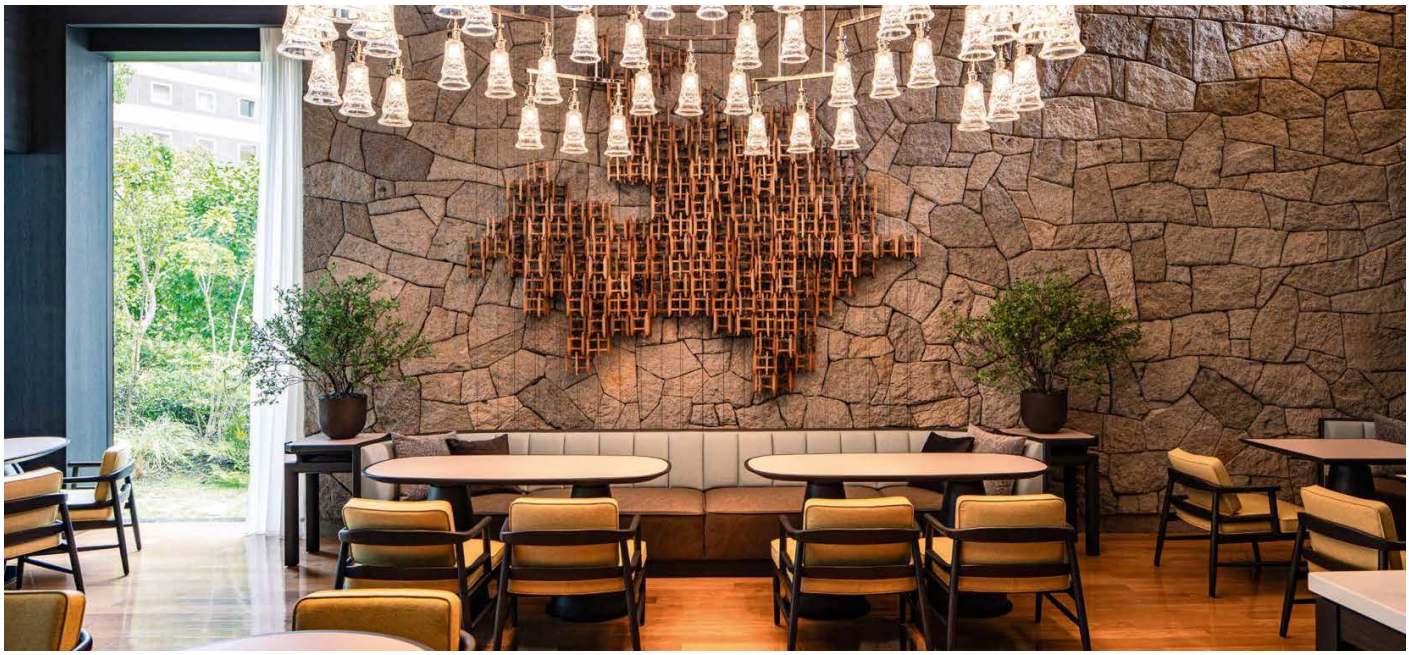


Most travellers head straight from Tokyo to Kyoto, but breaking up the journey with two nights in Kanazawa changes the pace. After arriving by Shinkansen bullet train, visitors will find themselves in a city of authentic geisha districts, where artisans still produce exquisite gold leaf by hand. Rise early to explore Kenroku-en, one of Japan's most beautiful gardens, before slipping into one of the tiny sushi counters surrounding Ōmichō Market for an omakase lunch of freshly caught fish. The city shares many of Kyoto's traditional charms with far fewer visitors.

IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK; ISTOCK

Grand Hyatt Fukuoka

This property offers travellers an ideal base for exploring Fukuoka's cuisine and culture — from the lively yatai food stalls serving ramen and yakitori to the historic temples of Hakata Old Town



THE EXPERIENCE

Canal City Hakata is one of Fukuoka's premier shopping and entertainment areas, located between the riverside district of Tenjin and Hakata Old Town. Its proximity to the river and Hakata's historical landmarks, including Tochoji Temple and Kushida Shrine, makes it an ideal base from which to explore Fukuoka's heritage, cuisine and vibrant city life. Near Canal City, the Kawabata Shopping Arcade preserves the nostalgic charm of post-war Japan. A little further on, across the Naka River, the Yanagibashi Rengo Market, often called Hakata's kitchen, offers a glimpse of local food culture.

Fukuoka is especially loved for its *yatai* food stalls, an evening tradition that brings the city's sociable spirit to life. Travellers can stop by food stalls near Canal City Hakata and along the Nakasu riverside, while Tenjin and Nagahama are also known for their buzzing *yatai* areas. Under the light of lanterns, visitors can enjoy ramen, yakitori and local dishes in an intimate setting where conversations with other travellers is all part of the experience.

A STANDOUT CHOICE

Grand Hyatt Fukuoka is well-positioned for travellers who want to experience Hakata without straying far from the hotel. In 2025, the hotel introduced six new guest rooms designed around the 'Hakata Retreat' concept. These thoughtfully designed spaces are intended for guests seeking comfort, privacy and a deeper connection to the destination. Local character is reflected in each room, while the atmosphere remains calm. After exploring the city, guests can return to a space that feels intimate, restful and distinctly Fukuoka.

Overlooking a tranquil garden, the hotel's Grand Club lounge provides a calm retreat from the energy of the city. Breakfast, evening refreshments and moments of pause between outings can be enjoyed in this serene setting. Within the hotel, Club Olympus also features a pool and fitness spaces, allowing guests to refresh and maintain a sense of wellbeing. Perfectly placed to explore the city, the hotel offers a gateway to the traditions and everyday rhythm of Hakata. *hyatt.com/grand-hyatt/en-US/fukgh-grand-hyatt-fukuoka*

THREE MORE THINGS TO DO



EXPERIENCE JAPANESE TEA CULTURE

Tea ceremonies are central to Japanese culture. Guests in the hotel's Hakata Retreat spaces can prepare matcha, while nearby Rakusuien Garden serves matcha and seasonal sweets. Travellers can also visit Yame, one of Japan's renowned tea-producing regions.

EXPLORE KYUSHU'S POTTERY VILLAGES

Kyushu is known for its ceramic traditions. Travellers can explore the region's pottery villages, each with distinct techniques and styles, including Koishiwara, Karatsu, Agano and Onta ware. Workshops and kiln areas reveal how local clay, craft and daily life are closely connected.

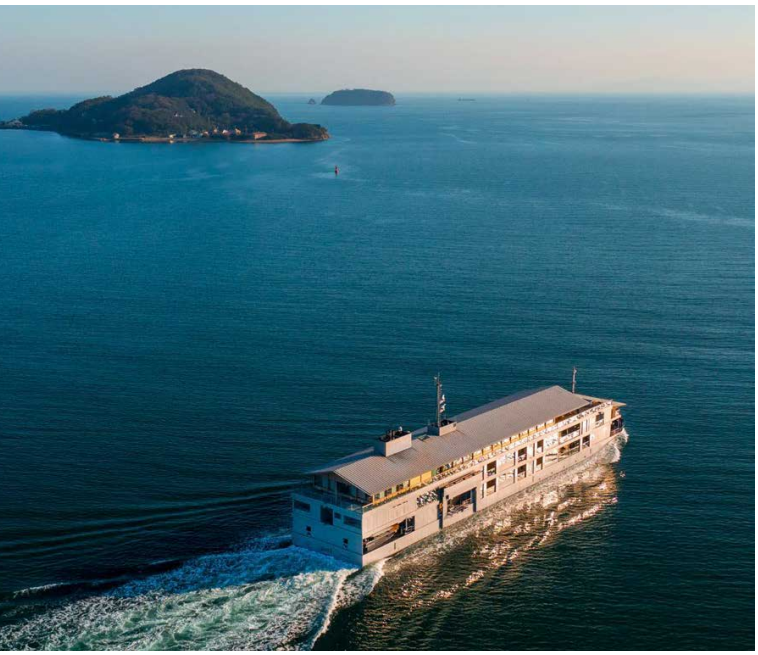
DISCOVER A UNIQUE LOCAL FESTIVAL

Held every July, Hakata Gion Yamakasa is one of Japan's most exciting festivals, attracting around three million visitors each year. Spectators watch dramatic floats race through the streets, showcasing Hakata's community spirit through vibrant costumes.

IMAGES: GRAND HYATT FUKUOKA

guntû

This slow-paced cruise through Japan's Seto Inland Sea encourages guests to savour the little moments — whether relaxing on deck or tasting fresh produce from the Setouchi region





THE EXPERIENCE

Drift across the Seto Inland Sea on *guntû*, a cruise ship that embodies the feeling of staying in a cosy *ryokan* (traditional Japanese inn). Travelling through the heart of the Setouchi region in Western Japan, the ship crosses a breathtaking seascape, which features chains of more than 700 islands. The cruise is slow-paced, with on-board leisure valued just as much as the journey itself. After setting off from the vessel's home port of Bella Vista Marina, the ship spends its nights anchored along island shores and secluded bays.

Designed by architect Yasushi Horibe, *guntû* has 17 wood-panelled cabins and intimate shared spaces. Externally, its silver hull is built to reflect the sunlight and the shifting colours of the water, while its gabled roof mimics the houses that can be seen dotted along Setouchi's coastline. One of the many pleasures on board is the dining experience. Meals are prepared using locally sourced ingredients from producers across the Setouchi region. Guests can choose from a range of fresh seafood, vegetables and meat, which can be grilled or turned into delicate sashimi.

A STANDOUT CHOICE

Regular routes are offered across the eastern, western and central areas of Setouchi. Journeys last between two and three nights, departing in the afternoon and returning in the morning of the final day. Guests are spoilt for choice when it comes to deciding what to do on each day of their trip. Off-ship experiences include a speedboat that can visit nearby islands and give guests an insight into the region's history, nature and local ways. Travellers can also relax on board in either their cabin or the common areas, watching the islands pass by with a drink or enjoying a book.

Located on the port side of the ship's open-air deck, the Engawa is a distinct area inspired by the traditional Japanese engawa space found in temples and traditional homes. It serves as a transition from inside to outside and is a place for guests to reflect on the shifting scenery. The lounge provides a comfortable setting to enjoy traditional Japanese sweets and tea, while other onboard amenities include a sushi bar and communal baths. *guntu.jp/en*

THREE MORE EXPERIENCES



EXPLORE A TREASURE OF THE SETO INLAND SEA

The island of Miyajima is home to the impressive Itsukushima Shrine. Built on the sea itself, the shrine and its torii gate appear to float during high tide. Depending on the itinerary, *guntû* offers visits to Miyajima and other islands, often during the quieter hours of the day.

DISCOVER JAPANESE CULTURE ON BOARD

Guests can take part in onboard cultural programmes such as traditional crafting or trying *wagashi* (Japanese sweets) and tea in the lounge. These local delicacies are prepared in front of travellers by a master confectioner, offering a refined cultural experience.

TAKE TIME TO RELAX AND UNWIND

Designed as a place for reflection and relaxation, guests can choose to join activities on *guntû* or simply spend some quiet time in their suite or communal spaces. Enjoy a drink and incredible views at the engawa terrace, or visit the lounge for a quiet moment to get lost in a book.

IMAGES: ©GUNTÛ



Hilton Hiroshima

A gateway to the Setouchi region, the elegant Hilton Hiroshima places visitors within easy reach of Hiroshima's notable historic sites, as well as the picturesque islands scattered across the tranquil Seto Inland Sea

THE EXPERIENCE

Explore Hiroshima's key landmarks, including the Unesco-listed Hiroshima Peace Memorial, the only building near the hypocentre of the atomic bomb explosion on 6 August 1945 that remains in its original condition. Then, wander through the Shukkeien Garden and the city's lively shopping and dining districts. Sample culinary icons such as Hiroshima-style *okonomiyaki*, layered savoury pancakes made with noodles and seafood, and *momijimanjyu*, maple leaf-shaped cakes filled with sweet bean paste. Beyond the city centre, visit Miyajima Island, home to the Itsukushima Shrine and its famous floating torii gate (a structure marking the boundary between the everyday world and the sacred). Hike up nearby Mount Misen for sweeping sunset views across the Seto Inland Sea.

The 44-mile Shimanami Kaido cycling route spans six islands in the sea connected by suspension bridges, offering travellers the chance to enjoy coastal scenery and try local cuisine along the way. Wildlife enthusiasts can also explore the wider Seto Inland Sea, where oyster farms thrive and a variety of coastal birds inhabit the shorelines.

A STANDOUT CHOICE

Hilton Hiroshima's aesthetic draws inspiration from the surrounding landscape, with traditional crafts and coastal hues. Across 420 guest rooms, including 16 suites, interiors are designed for relaxation, with panoramic views of the city's skyline and the mountains that frame Hiroshima.

Wellness is also a highlight at Hilton Hiroshima. The Spa by L'Occitane embraces nature as its guiding philosophy and features Japan's first dedicated Almond Treatment Room.

Dining is equally distinguished. Sensui is known for its refined Japanese dishes, while Zatta Bar serves crafted cocktails and features live entertainment. Mozaik showcases regional ingredients with global flair, served buffet-style. *hilton.com/en/hotels/hijshhi-hiltonhiroshima*

DID YOU KNOW?



Hiroshima is home to Japan's largest oyster production area, with the Seto Inland Sea yielding nearly 60% of the nation's supply. The best season to try these local delicacies is December to February, when Hiroshima's oysters reach peak size and flavour. Plump, rich and naturally sweet, these oysters have a depth of flavour shaped by the region's calm, mineral-rich waters. They're typically served raw in the shell, accompanied by simple seasonings such as vinegar, *ponzu* (a citrus-based sauce) or a squeeze of lemon to enhance their natural brininess.

IMAGES: HILTON HIROSHIMA; GETTY



InterContinental Osaka

Located in the heart of Osaka's energetic Kita district, this hotel is well placed for shopping, fine dining and day trips to Kyoto, Kobe and Nara

THE EXPERIENCE

Osaka's Kita district is a major transportation and business hub, known for its large department stores and underground shopping centres. InterContinental Osaka lies in the heart of this lively district. The hotel sits just steps away from Osaka and Umeda stations, so travellers can easily set off on day trips to the nearby cities of Kyoto, Kobe and Nara. From a base in the Kita area, visitors easily access the rest of Osaka to learn about the city's history at Osaka Castle, see a traditional Japanese puppet show at the National Bunraku Theatre and explore Sumiyoshi Taisha, one of Osaka's most revered shrines.

A STANDOUT CHOICE

InterContinental Osaka offers guests personalised service and impressive views of the city's skyline. Along with its classic guest rooms, visitors can book one-, two- or three-bed residences, which feature fully equipped kitchens.

Guests staying on the Club InterContinental Floor or in suite rooms receive access to the Club Continental Lounge, where they can enjoy breakfast, afternoon tea and cocktail service throughout their stay. Visitors can also relax in the Japanese Bathhouse, which features dry and steam saunas, as well as the 24-hour fitness centre and indoor swimming pool.

The hotel's five restaurants and bars offer travellers the chance to experience Osaka's vibrant local cuisine. For fine dining, visit Pierre, a Michelin-starred restaurant that serves seasonal dishes prepared using French techniques. Alternatively, head to Noka Roast and Grill for freshly grilled and roasted dishes served semi-buffet style, or enjoy a relaxing afternoon tea at the hotel's Lounge 3-60.

The concierge team also provides exclusive guest experiences through the hotel's Insider Partnerships. Discover the fascinating art of *kintsugi* — a way to restore broken pottery using gold — or take part in a traditional knife-making class at a master blacksmith's workshop. *icosaka.com*

INSIDER TIP



EXPLORE SUMIYOSHI TAISHA, ONE OF JAPAN'S OLDEST SHRINES

Osaka is home to one of the country's oldest shrines, Sumiyoshi Taisha. Travellers can explore its 1,800-year-old history and take in its intriguing *sumiyoshi-zukuri*-style architecture, a particularly simple, ancient-looking form. The ancient site also has a tranquil garden and pond, making it a peaceful place to escape the bustle of the Kita district. On a visit, guests can change into traditional Japanese attire before touring the shrine with a knowledgeable guide.

IMAGES: INTERCONTINENTAL OSAKA; GETTY

The Osaka Station Hotel

Part of Marriott's Autograph Collection, this refined hotel is directly connected to western Japan's largest rail hub, making it an ideal base to explore Osaka and the nearby cities of Kyoto, Nara, Himeji and Hiroshima





THE EXPERIENCE

Found in the Kansai region of Honshu, Osaka is famed for its delicious street food, historic landmarks and rich cultural heritage. The Osaka Station Hotel is located in Umeda, the city's northern commercial hub. Here, underground passages carry a constant flow of people, while recent developments in the area, such as Grand Green Osaka, provide moments for relaxation. In the nearby Tenma neighbourhood, visitors can wander a maze of narrow alleyways with restaurants, bars and food stalls. Meanwhile, around a 10-minute walk from Umeda, the Nakazakicho neighbourhood offers a quieter place to explore, where wooden townhouses now house cafes and small galleries.

A STANDOUT CHOICE

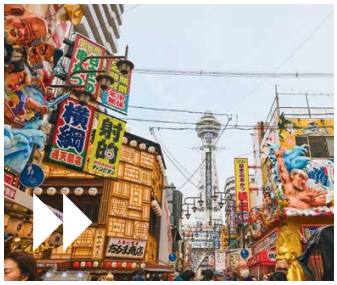
Built on the site of the original Osaka Station, The Osaka Station Hotel, Autograph Collection is a space where history and culture converge. Guests can explore the station's distinct history and see how the railway helped shape the city's modernisation efforts. Directly connected to JR Osaka Station's West Gate — western Japan's largest hub — the hotel offers guests access to the nearby historic cities of Kyoto, Nara, Himeji and Hiroshima.

The hotel's interior draws on the idea of *mitate*, a Japanese aesthetic concept in which one thing is playfully reimagined as another. Rather than referencing the hotel's railway history directly, the sleek design allows it to gently influence the space. The front desk is designed to remind guests of traditional manned ticket gates while original railway components and replicas appear throughout the hotel.

Guest rooms occupy floors 30 to 38 of JP Tower Osaka. Arranged in a square layout, each room's orientation showcases a different side to Osaka and offers expansive views across the city.

Dining reflects Osaka's long-standing reputation as the 'nation's kitchen'. Guests can dine in a restaurant resembling the dining car of a luxury train; try teppanyaki (a method of cooking using a hot plate) prepared in Osaka's traditional *kappo* style, with a blend of Japanese and French techniques; and enjoy an afternoon tea or light meal in the hotel's lobby lounge. *osakastation-hotel.jp/en*

THREE MORE THINGS TO DO



EXPERIENCE THE NIGHTLIFE IN URA-TENMA

Travellers can visit the busy food stalls, bars and restaurants in Tenma's hidden alleyways, which date back to the Shōwa era. Weekday evenings between 6pm to 8pm are considered the sweet spot to visit — it's lively, but not impossible for guests to find a seat.

SPEND THE MORNING AT KUROMON MARKET

Across Kuromon Market's 580-metre arcade, visitors can watch shops prepare for the day in the morning light. It's the ideal time to sample culinary delights from more than 150 shops and stalls, including those selling fresh seafood, Wagyu beef, seasonal fruits and Japanese sweets.

DISCOVER THE JOY OF OSAKA'S CASUAL EATS

Osaka is famous for its delicious and affordable comfort foods, including *takoyaki* (fried balls of batter filled with octopus), *okonomiyaki* (savoury pancakes) and pork buns. Travellers should visit the Shinsekai district to try traditional *kushikatsu* — deep-fried meat or vegetable skewers.

IMAGES: MIYUKI KANEKO (NACASA & PARTNERS INC.); LUMINAR NEO



Onko Chishin

These retreats in Nagasaki Prefecture offer travellers the chance to explore remote archipelagos that have remained largely unchanged for centuries — from the Goto Islands' Onidake volcano to spectacular sunsets on Iki Island

THE EXPERIENCE

Nagasaki Prefecture consists of the northwestern tip of Kyushu (the third-largest of Japan's four main islands) and hundreds of other smaller surrounding islands. Among them are the Goto Islands, at the far western edge of Japan, a remote archipelago that's existed in deliberate seclusion for centuries. It was a refuge for Japan's hidden Christians during religious persecution in the Edo period (1603-1868). Churches and hilltop shrines mark the sites where communities practised their faith in secret for more than 250 years.

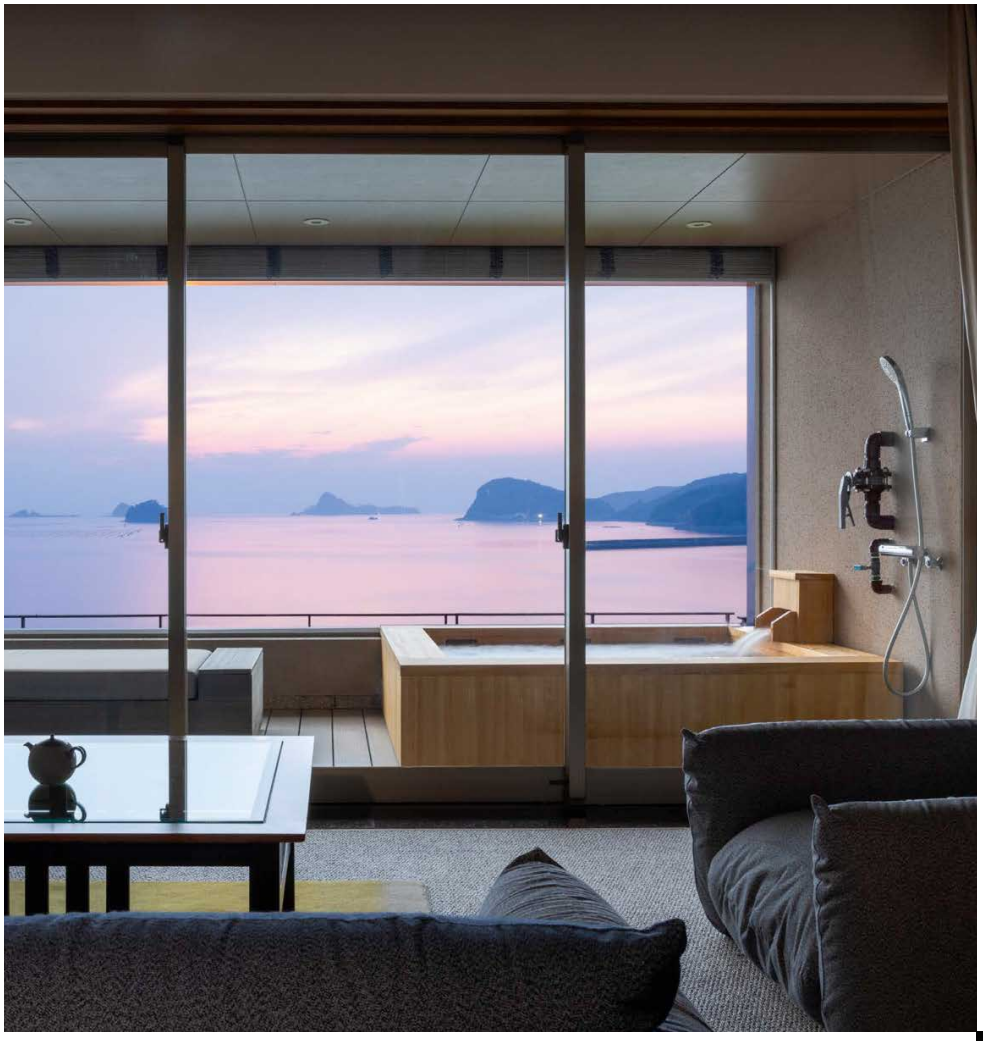
Fukue Island, the largest in the Goto chain, is recognised as a Japanese geopark. The grass-covered cone of Onidake — a volcano that last erupted around 18,000 years ago — rises 315 metres at the island's centre. Meanwhile, the Abunze lava coast is unlike anywhere else in the archipelago, formed when ancient lava flows hardened into over four miles of black shoreline. After dark, stars shine above Onidake, brighter thanks to the island's absence of light pollution.

Iki Island holds a significant place in Japanese mythology. It appears in the *Kojiki*, an ancient Japanese chronicle, as the fifth island made by the gods when Japan was created. This strength of belief tracks into the more than 1,000 shrines and sacred sites situated across a 53sq mile landmass, many predating written records. The island also held a role as the first point of contact between Japan and the Asian mainland — a crossroads whose influence still surfaces in the island's food, dialect and the way locals receive strangers.

A STANDOUT CHOICE

Founded in 2011, Onko Chishin is a Japanese destination hotel company dedicated to rewarding travellers who venture beyond the familiar. Each property in its Retreat Selection gives travellers the chance to explore destinations not often included on popular itineraries.

Across Japan's Nagasaki Prefecture, two retreats offer the chance to explore ancient islands and volcanic landscapes. GOTO RETREAT ray is an oceanfront property on Fukue Island. Created by celebrated designer Yukio Hashimoto, the interiors feature floor-to-ceiling windows that frame the sea, sky and distant silhouette of Onidake's volcanic cone. The retreat's 26 guest rooms each offer private open-air baths fed by a natural hot spring.



DID YOU KNOW?



Iki barley *shochu* has been granted Geographical Indication status from the World Trade Organization. The island has distilled *shochu* the same way for more than 500 years; the recipe includes two parts barley to one part rice *koji* (rice that's gone through saccharification, which is the process of converting starch into simple sugar). The island has seven working distilleries that welcome visitors; the local spirit is floral, smooth and entirely unique to this remote destination.



Dining celebrates local ingredients, including Goto beef. Raised on mineral-rich island pastures, the meat is so rare it's known among Japanese food-lovers as 'phantom wagyu'. It appears alongside the daily catches from local fisherfolk. Meals follow the *kaiseki* tradition — each course is considered an expression of place and season.

On Iki Island, Onko Chishin's IKI RETREAT KAIRI MURAKAMI comprises 12 rooms, each with a private open-air onsen fed by a spring with 1,700 years of recorded history. The baths open directly onto Yunomoto Bay, known for its incredible sunsets. As well as spa treatments using local salts and herbs, guests can enjoy exclusive access to the morning fish auction at Katsumoto Port and see the fresh catch before it's made into dinner later.

In November 2026, Onko Chishin will be opening a new retreat in Kumamoto Prefecture, in the centre of Kyushu island. ASO RETREAT HONO in Minami-Aso village will feature 17 rooms, each with a private hot spring bath and impressive views of Mount Aso, one of Japan's most active volcanoes. *by-onko-chishin.com/en*

THREE MORE ACTIVITIES IN THE GOTO ISLANDS



FOLLOW THE CHRISTIAN HERITAGE TRAIL

Goto features a range of Unesco-listed hilltop churches and shrines, marking the sites where Christian communities practised their faith in secret for more than 250 years during the Edo Period. The landscape here has been left largely unchanged since this era of persecution.

GET ACTIVE ON THE WATER

The Goto Islands' beaches have some of the cleanest waters in Japan. Watersports such as standup paddleboarding and snorkelling are available from the shore, and the relative scarcity of visitors means travellers may find they have the water largely to themselves. It's an island paradise for privacy-lovers.

ISLAND-HOP OFF THE COAST OF FUKUE

For a change of scenery, visitors can charter an island-hopping cruise from GOTO RETREAT ray. A private vessel will trace the outer islands at dawn, passing fishing communities that have worked in these harbours for generations. Luckier visitors might spot the daily catch.

IMAGES: ONKO CHISHIN INC

River Retreat Garaku

This secluded riverside property in Toyama's picturesque Jinzukyō Gorge features an extensive art collection, a natural hot spring bathhouse and a restaurant dedicated to serving local produce, seafood and sake



THE EXPERIENCE

Stretching nearly 10 miles through the mountains of Toyama Prefecture, the Jinzukyō Gorge remains one of Japan's best-kept secrets. Just one hour from Tokyo by plane, or two hours by train, the gorge is a scenic spot to discover year-round — with cherry blossoms in the spring, deep green landscapes in summer, vivid foliage in autumn and snow-wrapped silence in winter. In the nearby city of *Toyama*, travellers can try local crafts, including glassblowing at the Toyama Glass Studio or the intricate joinery of kumiko woodworking with help from local masters.

Just 20 minutes from Toyama station by Shinkansen (high-speed train), travellers can explore Kanazawa, a city known for samurai heritage and refined cuisine. Takayama, with its preserved Edo-period merchant streets, is also easily accessible, located 90 minutes from Toyama by car or local train, while the alpine landscapes of Kamikochi are two hours away.

A STANDOUT CHOICE

River Retreat Garaku sits at the heart of Jinzukyō Gorge, beside the jade-coloured Jinzu River. Some of its 23 guest rooms and suites feature private hot spring baths or saunas. Works by contemporary artists with close ties to the hotel, as well as pieces by emerging glass artists trained in Toyama, can be found throughout the property and in the hotel shop.

The ANNEX, designed by architect Hiroshi Naito, is the hotel's centrepiece, with walls of stacked precast concrete and a lobby opening towards the river. Two gallery spaces anchor a collection of rotating contemporary artworks.

Restaurant Trésonnier holds a Michelin star and Green Star. The chef forages for seasonal wild plants and tends to a dedicated pesticide-free farm. Seafood is sourced directly from Toyama Bay, with dishes prepared using French techniques layered with the region's own traditions of fermentation and ageing. These are complemented by sommelier-guided pairings, including local Toyama sake.

Wellness facilities include a natural hot spring bathhouse and the Spring Day Spa — featuring a sauna, cold carbonated bath, whirlpool bath and outdoor hot spring. *garaku.co.jp/english*

THREE MORE THINGS TO DO



EXPERIENCE A TEA CEREMONY

The Japanese tea ceremony is a meditative ritual rooted in harmony and mindfulness. This traditional way of preparing and drinking tea is at the heart of Japanese culture. Garaku invites guests to experience this age-old tradition in its two tea rooms, both offering a different atmosphere and flavour.

TAKE PART IN A HISTORIC FESTIVAL

Every year from 1-3 September, the nearby town of Yatsuo hosts Owara Kaze no Bon. Dancers glide through lantern-lit streets to the haunting sound of the *kokyū*, a traditional Japanese string instrument. It's a deeply poetic festival that embodies the quiet beauty of Japan.

DISCOVER GOKAYAMA'S RURAL LANDSCAPES

Gokayama, a Unesco World Heritage Site, is home to traditional *gassho*-style farmhouses — known for their steeply pitched thatched roofs. An hour from the hotel by car, the village offers a chance to experience Japan's original rural landscape and enduring local way of life.

IMAGES: RIVER RETREAT GARAKU; TOYAMA CITY TOURISM ASSOCIATION



The Tokyo Station Hotel

Connected to one of Japan's busiest rail hubs, this hotel has more than 100 years of history to explore — along with easy access to plenty of shops, restaurants and cultural landmarks

THE EXPERIENCE

Tokyo Station welcomes hundreds of thousands of passengers each day, connecting visitors to Japan's major cities on the country's famous Shinkansen (bullet train) and across the capital on subway lines. The red-brick Tokyo Station Marunouchi Building opened in 1914 and is one of Japan's most celebrated landmarks. A European-style building designed by Japanese architects, the original structure was damaged during the Second World War, but restored following a major renovation, completed in 2012. While the station is one of Japan's busiest transport hubs, it's also a major shopping and dining destination. Explore shops selling souvenirs and sweets, as well as stores stocking anime and manga merchandise. The surrounding Marunouchi district offers a sophisticated blend of culture and commerce, with museums, galleries, boutique shopping, fine dining, cafes and the Imperial Palace all within walking distance.

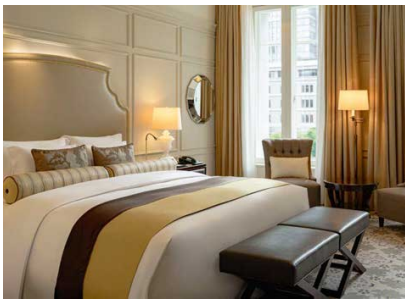
A STANDOUT CHOICE

Celebrating more than a century of history, the Tokyo Station Hotel offers travellers a rare chance to stay within one of Japan's most iconic heritage sites. Opened in 1915 and located inside the Marunouchi station building, which was designated as an Important Cultural Property of Japan in 2003, the hotel offers a blend of history, elegance and personalised hospitality.

Guests can discover Japanese culture through one of the hotel's most celebrated experiences: breakfast in The Atrium. Reserved exclusively for hotel guests, dine among soaring ceilings and original red-brick walls that are more than 100 years old. The extensive buffet includes a variety of international and Japanese dishes, offering visitors an authentic glimpse into local culinary traditions.

The hotel has also launched a long-term conservation initiative, 'From Tokyo for the Forest', which supports the regeneration of forests in Ofunato, Iwate Prefecture. *tokyostationhotel.jp*

INSIDER TIP



Take some time to discover the surrounding Marunouchi district itself. In the heart of the capital, spanning Tokyo Station to the Imperial Palace, wide tree-lined boulevards and European-style brick architecture sit alongside glossy skyscrapers. Ideal for leisurely browsing, elegant boutiques showcase Japanese and international brands, while cafes and fine-dining restaurants fill with locals and international visitors. Its convenient location also makes it an easy starting point for exploring nearby districts such as Nihonbashi and Ginza.

IMAGES: THE TOKYO STATION HOTEL

Travelsphere

Escorted tours of Japan offer visitors the chance to see the country's most famous sites and impressive landscapes with the support of knowledgeable local guides





THE EXPERIENCE

To begin discovering Japan's unique culture, start in Tokyo at the city's oldest temple, Senso-ji. On your tour with Travelsphere, a local guide will explain the history of this landmark and share the customary way to pray. Travellers are invited to put their hands together in the Buddhist prayer position and chant namu kanzeon bosatsu, meaning 'I place my trust in Bodhisattva Kannon' (the goddess of mercy in Japanese Buddhist tradition).

After exploring Tokyo, travellers head towards Mount Fuji and Hakone, stopping at Fujinomiya 5th Station, which is located halfway up the volcano. On the way to Takayama, guests will have the chance to see Matsumoto Castle, a six-storey black building set against the Japanese Alps. Visitors can remove their shoes to climb the steep wooden stairs to the castle's observation deck. In Takayama, travellers can explore the well-preserved old town or search for souvenirs at the morning market that runs along the river.

Kyoto is one of the tour's highlights. While in the city, travellers can visit Kinkaku-ji; the top two floors of this Zen temple are completely covered in gold leaf. Upon travelling to Hiroshima, visitors can explore the Peace Memorial Park, which is home to powerful historic sites including the Atomic Bomb Dome, Cenotaph and Peace Memorial Museum. From the city, a short ferry ride takes travellers to Miyajima island, which is home to the iconic 'floating' torii gate of the Itsukushima Shrine. The shrine is built on stilts over the water, and at high tide, this creates the illusion that it's floating.

A STANDOUT CHOICE

A tour with Travelsphere offers visitors the chance to see Japan's most dynamic sites in the company of a group of fellow travellers. The tour is shaped as much by its people as its sites: local guides and the tour's dedicated holiday director look after guests from start to finish, covering major sights and helping travellers make the most of their free time. Tours offer visitors a fast-paced way of discovering Japan — and every trip is full of surprises. The experience leaves a lasting impression that remains after the tour has ended. *travelsphere.co.uk*

THREE MORE THINGS TO DO



DISCOVER TOKYO AT NIGHT

Explore the Shinjuku district in Tokyo after dark, where brightly lit neon signs cover almost every building and a giant screen in front of one of the world's busiest train stations brings the 3D 'Shinjuku cat' to life. Venture into the narrow alleyways of the Golden Gai district, which is packed with lively bars.

TRY A HANDS-ON SUSHI-MAKING CLASS

To discover Kyoto's rich culinary traditions, travellers can roll up their sleeves for an interactive sushi-making class. A chef will guide visitors through the process of preparing rice, fillings and toppings to create impressive sushi rolls that taste as good as they look.

EXPLORE A UNIQUE RURAL VILLAGE

In Japan's Gifu Prefecture, travellers can visit Shirakawa-go, a small, Unesco-listed village set amongst the mountains. Here, a path leads up to the Ogimachi Castle Observation Deck, which provides visitors with sweeping views across the village and its nearby river.

IMAGES: ADOBESTOCK; SHUTTERSTOCK; GETTY



Visit Kinosaki

This walkable rural town invites guests to take part in a unique onsen-hopping experience and discover the restorative properties of these natural hot springs

THE EXPERIENCE

Escape the crowds of Japan's metropolitan areas and retreat to the serene rural town of Kinosaki Onsen. With over 1,300 years of history, it's one of Japan's oldest hot spring towns. The destination is easily accessible for travellers, with direct trains available from Kyoto and Osaka. According to legend, Kinosaki Onsen was founded when a travelling Buddhist priest named Dochi Shonin received a vision. It told him that if he stayed in the town and prayed for 1,000 days without eating, drinking or sleeping, something good would happen to the local people. Dochi Shonin obeyed the vision's request, and on his 1,000th day of prayer, it's said Kinosaki's hot spring waters miraculously started flowing.

A STANDOUT CHOICE

Inclusivity is at the forefront of Kinosaki's allure. The town's country roads are dotted with multiple tattoo-friendly hot springs — a rarity among Japan's public bathing facilities due to an association between body art and the Japanese mafia. At Kinosaki, the hot springs can be used by all visitors, and the individual *ryokan* (traditional inns) are cosy sanctuaries where guests can retire in the evenings. Most accommodation options include a ticket for guests to access the town's hot springs for free during their stay.

Visitors stroll the streets wearing *yukata* (a light cotton kimono ideal for post-bath relaxation). These traditional garments are the official clothes of the town, and most inns provide them free of charge for guests. As night falls, lanterns illuminate the streets and the town comes alive after dinnertime. Popular evening pastimes include enjoying the hot-spring foot baths.

Outdoor excursions range from visiting the nearby castle town of Izushi, guided walking tours of Kinosaki or trekking up to Onsenji Temple — Kinosaki Onsen's guardian Buddhist temple and the home of the Eleven-Headed Kannon Bodhisattva. *visitkinosaki.com*

INSIDER TIP



The world-famous Kobe beef hails from Kinosaki Onsen's surrounding farms. All Kobe beef cuts come from Tajima cattle — named after their birthplace, the Tajima region of Japan. Multiple towns make up the Tajima region, including Kinosaki Onsen and the entirety of Toyooka City. The proximity of Kinosaki Onsen to the Tajima cattle pastures makes Tajima beef one of the town's must-try specialties. Sample Tajima beef in steak dinners, sandwiched in a burger bun for lunch and as a snack in traditional street foods like beef buns and croquettes.

IMAGES: VISIT KINOSAKI; GETTY



GREAT LITTLE PLACE

Paris

WITH THE JAZZ SUR SEINE FESTIVAL ON THIS MONTH, STAFF AND READERS SHARE THEIR TOP SPOTS IN THE FRENCH CAPITAL

A RETRO **CINEMA**

Cinéma Elysées Lincoln reopened last year after several months of renovations. Inaugurated in 1969, it's one of the last independent arthouse cinemas in the city, and it's found new life as a hybrid venue spanning screenings and events. Its space-age interiors are pretty jaw-dropping, too. @elysees_lincoln

SAM KEMP

A BOOK-LOVER'S RETREAT

Close to the Musée d'Orsay on the Left Bank of the Seine, Librairie 7L is a maze well worth losing yourself in. Founded by Karl Lagerfeld in 1999, the address hosts a sprawling bookshop and private library; the whole thing is stacked with pile upon pile of photography, design, fashion and gardening volumes. librairie7l.com **GILDA BRUNO**



AN URBAN NATURE TRAIL

La Petite Ceinture is a disused 19th-century railway that loops around the city centre. Nature has reclaimed it, and many sections have been opened to the public as walking paths, with stations turned into cafes and restaurants along the way. petiteceinture.org

FRANCESCO PASSAMONTI

FOOD & DRINK

THE PERFECT PAIN SUISSE



La Panifacture is a tiny bakery in the lively 11th arrondissement that's yet to go through the TikTok hype machine. The elaborate lamination on their *viennoiseries* (pastries) is a thing of beauty, and their *pains suisses* (pastries filled with custard and chocolate chips) are the best in the world. @lapanifacture

JESSICA PRUPAS

A VEGETARIAN HAVEN

In a city of incredible cuisine but surprisingly few vegetarian options, La Cantine de Sam in Montmartre is a standout. The restaurant offers a range of healthy and wholesome Middle Eastern veggie dishes at good prices, including salad bowls overflowing with aubergine caviar and falafel. It's all beautifully presented and packed with flavour. lacantinedesam.fr **JAMIE BELL**

A BUZZY DRINKS SPOT

Café Müller, on Rue des Petites Écuries in the 10th, serves carefully curated coffee roasts alongside natural wines from small producers. But it's the eclectic programme of events that keeps me coming back. On any given day, there might be a Lebanese brunch pop-up, an *izakaya* (Japanese pub) night or an alt-electronic DJ set, with the crowd spilling out onto the street. @cafemullerparis

BERKOK YÜKSEL



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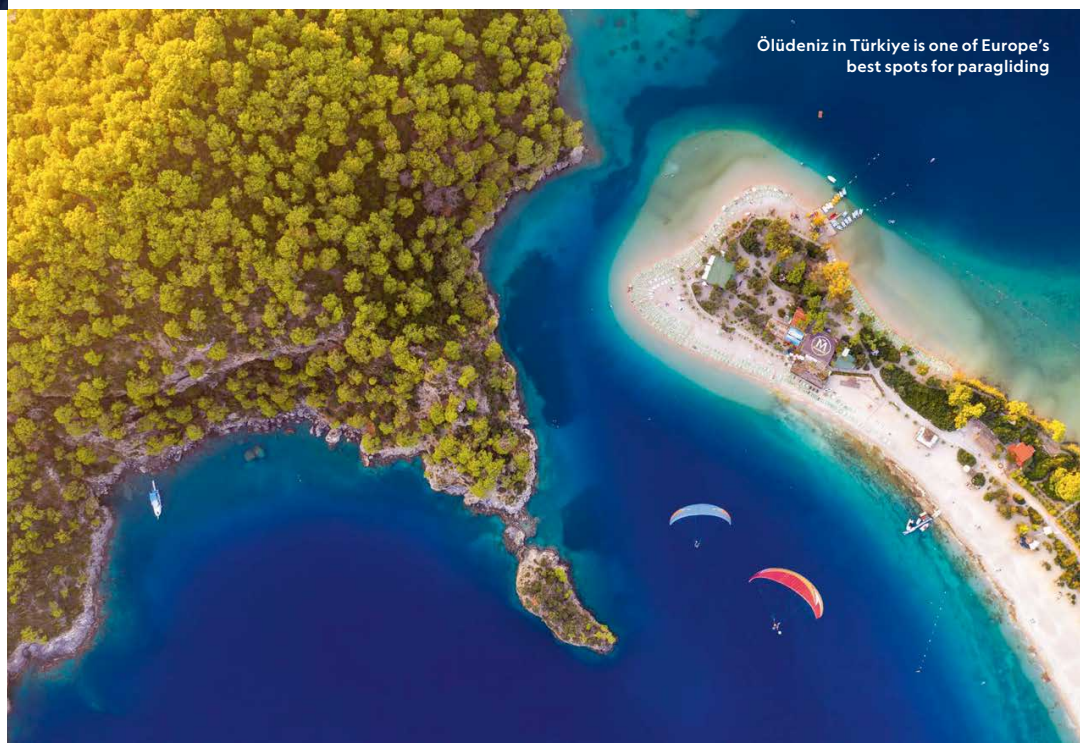
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MY TRAVELS

Vanessa Williams

THE ACTOR AND SINGER ON HER STANDOUT TRAVEL EXPERIENCES, FROM PARAGLIDING IN TÜRKIYE TO SALSA DANCING IN CUBA



Ölüdeniz in Türkiye is one of Europe's best spots for paragliding

What's your first travel memory? Coming to England in 1968, when I was five years old. My uncle was in the Air Force and stationed in Ripon, up in Yorkshire. I remember green grass, playing hide and seek with my cousins and having lots of fun. That was the first time I got on a plane — back then, people made an effort and looked glamorous when getting on the Pan Am transatlantic flight. It was all very exciting and important.

What's the first thing you do in a new destination? I always try to go horse-riding because it allows me to see the landscape differently. When I was doing a musical in Rotterdam, I found a beautiful stable outside the city. We rode through an enormous, gorgeous pine forest and came up to a crest with a beach beneath. We lined up side by side and cantered on it. I did the same with a gaucho in El Calafate, Argentina, riding off-road before finishing the day with fresh bread and beer. None of that would've happened if I hadn't asked, "Where can I ride?" You go into a terrain you never would as a tourist.

Where's the one place you could go back to again and again? Egypt. I've been at least 10 times. There's a peacefulness to travelling up the Nile — it takes you back to how you imagine biblical times. Then you hear a wedding in a town square, with all the joy and hustle and bustle of that, before having cocktails with friends. It feels so exotic yet so comfortable. The other would be the Tahitian islands, for the combination of beaches and mountains. I first went in the 1990s, and there's nothing like pulling in and seeing the massive mountains with their mist and mystery. The sand is like sugar, the water is crystal clear and it's got a really relaxed vibe.

What's the most adventurous thing you've done? Paragliding in Ölüdeniz, Türkiye. You drive up to the top of a mountain and you hope that your co-pilot is certified because they have your life in their hands. Then you're soaring and gliding in the air before landing on the beach. I did it while shooting *The Odyssey* back in 1996. On our days off, we kept seeing people land on the beach and we thought, 'We want to do that.' The fact that you're one of two people with just a parachute was a bit terrifying, but landing safely on the beach felt wonderful.

Where's been your most memorable group trip? I'm part of a group of women who've been travelling together for about 20 years, to Egypt, Argentina, Cuba, Italy. Cuba was fascinating. Our visa was sponsored by art professor Mary Drobny, who took us to artists' houses where there was lots of drumming, singing and dancing. We went to *paladars*, too, which are houses that serve food — it was a chance to go into someone's home and be fed and entertained. I also saw the resilience of making beauty out of no means. It was eye-opening. And dancing with gorgeous guys who know how to salsa is always good.

INTERVIEW: FARIDA ZEYNALOVA

VANESSA WILLIAMS has starred in TV shows including *Ugly Betty* and *Desperate Housewives*. She's currently playing Miranda Priestly in *The Devil Wears Prada* at London's Dominion Theatre and her UK concert run kicks off in February 2027.

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