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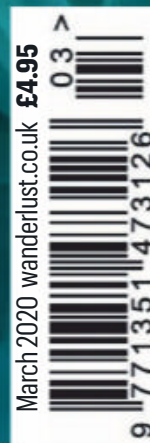
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Welcome...



"Does Wanderlust feature **'green'** travel?" is a question I am frequently asked, to which my answer is that it is a key part of our DNA. But it is heartening to see so many people wakening to the impact of travel and the negative effects that some tourism can have. Over-tourism for instance, is becoming a huge issue in some cities.

Yet there are still many more places that are crying out for visitors. On page 50, I visit **Guyana**, where **eco-tourism** is helping preserve wildlife, forest and communities; parts of **Iceland** have become a honeypot, but a new route highlights little visited areas (p88); and I doubt many people have thought to put **São Tomé** and **Príncipe** on their bucket list (p134). We have also looked at some of the choices we have to make when travelling (p66) and how to ensure they are the right ones. Elsewhere, we highlight the winners of the **Travel Photo of the Year competition** (p116), many of them guaranteed to get your feet itching.

So, enjoy your travels – and travel well.

Lyn

Lyn Hughes

Editor-In-Chief/Co-founder

To fly or not to fly?

Feeling guilty about travelling? We've got tips aplenty to help you travel green p75

Behind the scenes this month...



Would you buy a subscription from these people? Yes, it turned out. The team at the Adventure Travel Show...



...where they met Julia Bradbury, who inspired travellers – and Ed-in-chief Lyn – with her walking tales.



Let the furious arguments begin! The final judging kicks off for the Travel Photo of the Year competition.



Editor-in-chief Lyn gets a misting at the mighty Kaieteur Falls during her trip to Guyana (p50).

HOT OFFERS



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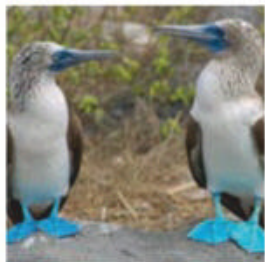


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Contributors

Wanderlust is brought to life by people from all over the planet. Here, we shine a spotlight on our Travel Photo of the Year competition winners – and their most inspiring travel moment...

Stefania Urbini

Landscape – p12

Since she started her travels, Stefania has been collecting memories with her camera, using it to share her emotions about places she's been. Her photo shows us life after dusk in Poland's age-old Białowieża Forest. It's haunting.

Most inspiring

moment: "Seeing Uluru, the giant monolith in the middle of the Australian outback. Walking the perimeter is a spiritual experience in itself, but taking a break at Mutitjulu Waterhole fills your heart with joy."



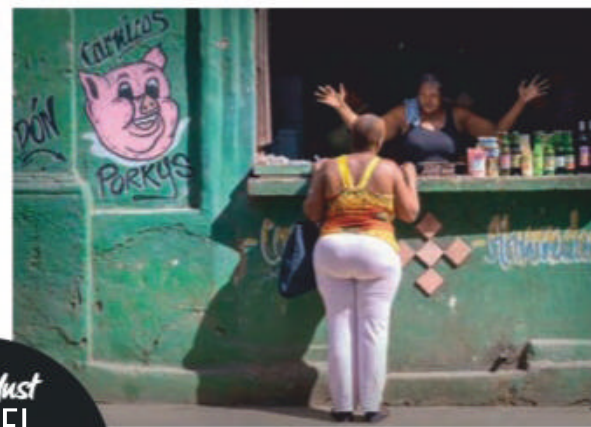
Bun Ngo Leung

People – p14

Cuba, India, Nepal... it's easy to see why Bun Ngo is attracted to these places – colour. It's no surprise that his winning shot captures the brightness of everyday life in Cuba with effortless good humour.

Most inspiring

moment: "Waking up very early on a misty morning in Myanmar to take shots of the sunrise on a small hill overlooking numerous stupas and shepherds driving their flocks down dusty, unpaved roads against the changing morning light."



Wanderlust
TRAVEL
PHOTO OF
THE YEAR
2019

Monika Mazurkiewicz

Travel icons – p16

Monika finds inspiration everywhere, readily admitting her addiction to the shutter-release button. Her candid shot of London's palace guards proves that even the best photos can be taken at the back.

Most inspiring

moment: "I love blue. I remember arriving in Chefchaouen, in Morocco – everything was blue. You could point your camera anywhere and get an ideal photo. It was a feast for the eye."



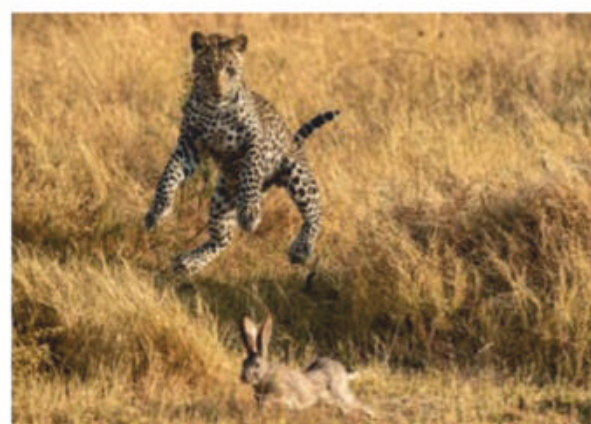
Giovanni Frescura

Wildlife – p18

Giovanni has always loved taking photos, but about ten years ago, he placed his focus on learning more about nature from behind the lens. His photo of a young leopard, out in the open, mid-hunt, will stay with us a long time.

Most inspiring

moment: "Seeing migrating swans on a foggy morning in Sweden. On an iced lake, I heard a noise and then out of nowhere came these swans – like ghosts flying in front of me."



See page 116 for all Travel Photo Of The Year finalists

Incredible !ndia

Meet the beautiful Neelgai, the Indian Wolf, Pelicans,
the Desert Fox, Greater Flamingos, larks,
the Indian Vulture and Wild Ass at Little Rann of Kutch.



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Wanderlust aims to inform and inspire all your travel adventures. We strive to bring you the most trusted and reliable information in the world. That's why we are always upfront about whether our writers have travelled independently or with a tour company. When a tour operator has been used, we always try to use those who've scored a minimum satisfaction rating of 85% from readers in our annual awards and we never guarantee positive coverage. Responsible, conscious and sustainable travel is at the heart of everything we do.

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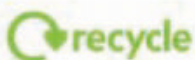
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- Magazine of the Year: Highly Commended

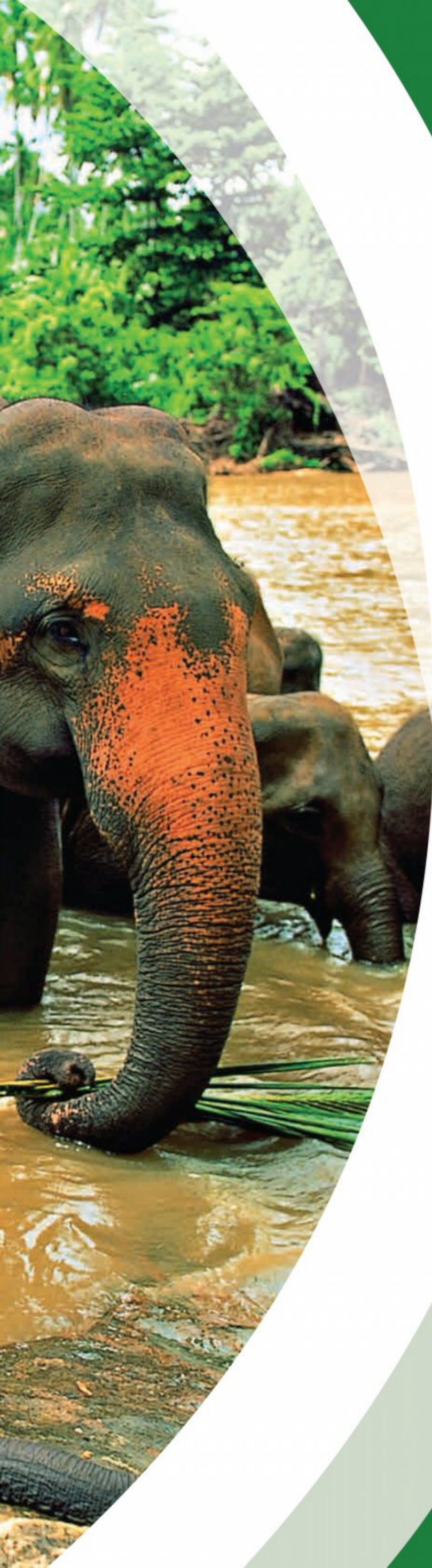
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WanderSleeps: Costa Rica
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Start 2020 in style with our annual review of the year's best gear

“ ”

You can hike one of the longest gorges in Europe, walking in the footsteps of Minoans.

For more on **Julia Bradbury's** walking wonders, see **page 32**



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A dense forest of tall, thin trees, likely birches, with a bright orange and red sunset or sunrise in the background. The trees are silhouetted against the vibrant sky, which is filled with warm, glowing light. The overall mood is mysterious and atmospheric.

**“Trees there were, old as trees can be, huge and grasping with hearts
black as sin. Strange trees that some said walked in the night.”**

Neil Gaiman, author



LANDSCAPE
WINNER

Winter sunset
Poland

Photographer: Stefania Urbini

If trees could talk, the ones in Poland's primeval Białowieża Forest – which once covered most of Central Europe – would be telling a tall tale. Stefania Urbini has captured its 1,000-word story in one atmospheric shot, taken on-the-hoof after a day out snapping woodland birds, catching the sun sinking into the inky birch trees.

Congratulations to all the finalists of this year's Travel Photo of the Year competition. Over the next eight pages you can enjoy the winners of the four competition categories in their full glory; to see the complete shortlist of images, turn to page 116.



ON

CO



PEOPLE
WINNER**You want it that big?**
Havana, Cuba

Photographer: Bun Ngo Leung
Strolling through the streets of Havana, Bun Ngo Leung came upon this colourful scene of a lady haggling outside a butcher's, as the shopkeeper seemingly tries to confirm the size of pork her customer wants to buy. But the graffitied walls and bright clothes also come together to paint a picture of everyday life in Cuba's capital.



TRAVEL
ICON
WINNER**Loose button**
London, UK

Photographer: Monika Mazurkiewicz
The Queen's Life Guards are familiar with order, having guarded London's royal palaces for centuries. Still, things can fall out of place, as Monika Mazurkiewicz found on her late arrival to that afternoon's dismounting ceremony. From the rear, she was "drawn to a white glove emerging from the sea of red coats, checking up on a loose button." Sometimes it pays to be late.

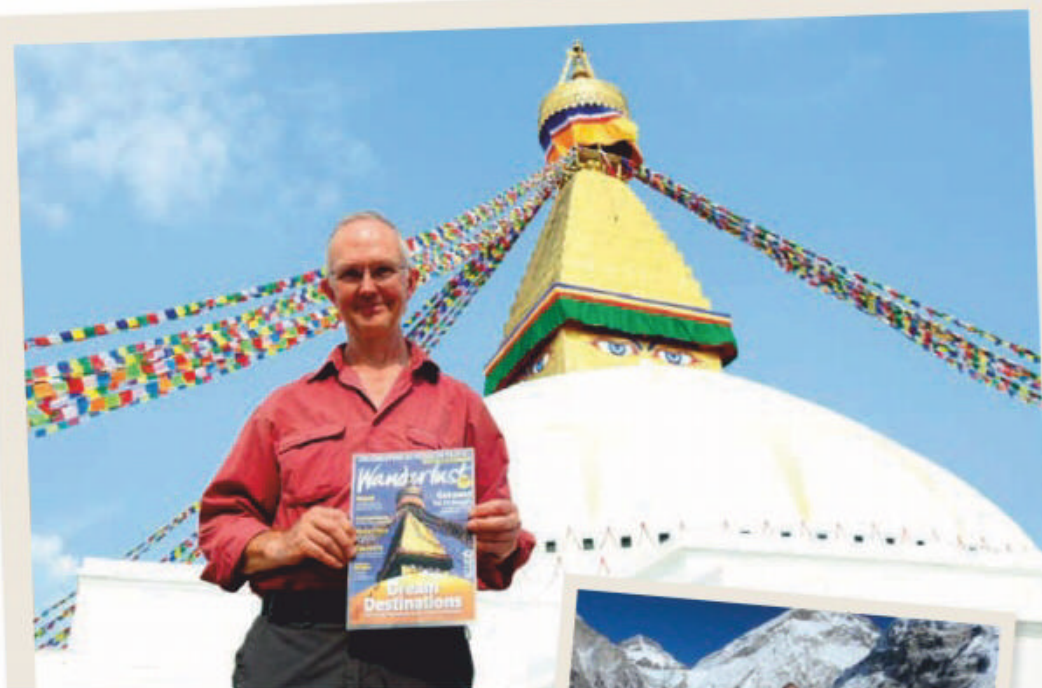


WILDLIFE
WINNER**Hunting wabbits...**
Khwai, Botswana*Photographer: Giovanni Frescura*

Captivated by this rare African scene, Giovanni Frescura snapped this unusual shot of a young leopard out in the open bush, caught in the thrill of the chase. However, while the rabbit avoided the novice hunter, Giovanni tells us that the leopard's mother, an onlooker nearby, wasn't quite as merciful.

Your letters

Your mail and missives: completing a hiking challenge in Nepal, an eye-opening experience in the Arctic, avoiding trouble to explore Chile, Patagonia and Argentina and much more...



Star letter Challenge completed

We have always enjoyed mountain trekking, particularly the wide open spaces, tremendous views and sense of achievement, but we had been uncertain about the Everest Base Camp trek. It came with a reputation for being crowded, covered in litter, and why would you set out to just go halfway up a mountain? However after reading an inspiring article in *Wanderlust* [June 2013] the nagging seed had been planted, and by 2019 we could resist the temptation no longer. As mountain treks go, this one is exceptional: surrounded by 8,000m mountains, the views in every direction are stunning, and the sense of scale was unlike anything that we had experienced before.

Chris & Helen Hartley-Sharpe, via email



Arctic eye-opener

We recently spent 12 days in the Arctic aboard the *Polar Pioneer* with Aurora. We began and ended our trip in Longyearbyen, and travelled as far north as 81 degrees reaching the pack ice. We had an eye-opening moment concerning climate change when we were told that, at the same time the previous year, the lagoon we were on in our Zodiac had formed part of the glacier that was in front of us.

Frances & Tom Samson, via email




SOCIAL TALK

 Remembering a trip to Peru: "Machu Picchu is one place that lives up to its hype."
[@travellustlarry](#)

 Recalling Ethiopia's rock-cut Lalibela: "Was there during the festival of St George. Amazing experience to be there at dawn with the pilgrims who travel from miles around."
[@2WeekTraveller](#)

 Sharing memories of Namibia: "The contrasts and incredible wildlife make this a photographer's dream location."
[Jeremy Painting](#)

 Remembering his favourite things about Pakistan: "Breakfast at Cuckoo's Den, Lahore, and a drive through Margalla Hills in Islamabad."
[Faisal Amjad](#)



Breaking down barriers

Just back from lovely Sri Lanka. We were last there during the 1970s and little has changed. The locals are still smiling, the food is great and the traffic just as manic. The main difference is the presence of – and access to – more national parks. We visited four, including Yala NP, where we saw this tusker. It had broken through the first fencing at the park and this last piece of thin wire stopped him reaching a road.

Derek & Irene Mepham, via email

The age of adventure

After dodging the riots in Santiago, Chile, I had five enchanting days on Easter Island. Then it was back to the mainland where I joined an overland truck for five weeks of camping through Chile, Patagonia and Argentina. At 78, I was old enough to be everyone's grandmother!

Brenda Boulton, via email

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Been somewhere beautiful? Done something amazing? Tag us at #wanderlustmag on Instagram or email your pictures to fromtheroad@wanderlust.co.uk and make us jealous.



✉ "We hiked Lion's Head in Cape Town. It took three hours – the views were out of this world!" **David Townsend & Becca Chambers**



✉ "Visiting Cambodia's Ta Prohm, the *Tomb Raider* temple, where my childhood dream came true." **Marcela Hauptvogelova**



📷 "At Laguna Verde, Bolivia, on the Southwest Circuit from San Pedro de Atacama, Chile, to La Paz." **@travellustlarry**



✉ "Reaching the end of the Carretera Austral in Villa O'Higgins, Chilean Patagonia." **Liz & Adam Tavener**



📷 "Outside a shop in Seminyak on a recent trip to Bali. A fantastic few days exploring the west coast." **@chris.luckett**



📷 "In Glencoe, where a scene from *Skyfall* was filmed. Being a movie fan, this was a must-stop for me." **@maggieszcepanczyk**



✉ "Tips for Angkor Wat: nothing we've read about Angkor Wat conveys how big it is. Wear good shoes!" **Keith & Lorraine Kellett**



📷 "Patrika Gate in Jaipur will give you a sneak peek into the state's vibrant culture and history." **@gameoftonesbysurbhi**



📷 "At the pyramids of Giza. The end of an epic motorbike trip with my boyfriend – six countries in five months." **@ariannameschia**

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like that,**
and then I did"

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TV presenter Julia
Bradbury returns to her
roots to wander the
Greek islands on **p32**

Explore

Food | Culture | Adventure

Travel news **p25** | Carbon-negative Bhutan **p28** | Eating vegan – Japanese-style **p31**
Top 10 community-based tours **p36** | Nordic nirvana with Stockholm vs Helsinki **p40**
Can you fly guilt-free? **p42** | Go green in Vancouver **p44** | Saving Uganda's giraffes **p46**

DREAM SLEEPS

Take an Arctic Bath

Sleep under the
aurora borealis
at this eco-friendly
spa hotel **p34**



A photograph of two divers underwater. The diver in the foreground is a woman with blonde hair, wearing a black wetsuit and a clear diving mask. She is making an 'OK' hand gesture with her right hand. The diver in the background is also wearing a wetsuit and mask, and is also making an 'OK' hand gesture. They are surrounded by coral and small fish in clear blue water.

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The Grapevine

What's getting us talking at Wanderlust Towers



ALL KEYED UP

Can you imagine restoring an area of coral the size of 52 football fields? Well, that's the aim of **Mission: Iconic Reefs**. The **National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration** (NOAA) and its **Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary** are aiming to raise almost \$100 million (£77 million) to restore seven iconic coral reef sites off the Florida Keys (around 278,000 sq m).

From Carysfort Reef to the Eastern Dry Rocks, these reefs – once threatened by cyclones, heat-induced coral bleaching, cold snaps and disease – are now part of one of the biggest coral restoration project proposals ever. The game plan is to implement it over the next 20 years, so there's still time yet.

FOODIE FIRST FOR SOUTH AFRICA

If UNESCO are involved, you know it's good. That's certainly the case for **Overstrand Hermanus** on the Cape Whale Coast, the first South African destination to be awarded the UNESCO stamp for City of Gastronomy. Joining the likes of Parma, San Antonio, Phuket and Bergen, the area, which includes the villages of Rooi Els, Kleinmond, Stamford and Gansbaai, won the title thanks to the farm stalls, wineries, breweries and restaurants dotted along the culinary coastline. We don't need any more of an invitation – time to tuck in!

DATES FOR THE DIARY

26 Feb The Edward Stanford Travel Writing Awards at the London Transport Museum. edwardstanfordawards.com

23 Apr Talk to the travel experts about journeying by yourself at our Solo Travel event, held at the Royal Geographical Society. wanderlust.co.uk

Let it snow!

Did you know you can go skiing in Uzbekistan? If you don't believe us, check into the country's first modern ski resort, **Amirsoy**; it opened at the end of 2019. Located 65km east of Tashkent and covering 9 km sq on the northern slopes of the Maygashkan Mountain, it's been designed as a year-round resort with seven piste runs for skiing – you can try snowmobiling and tubing in the winter or go hiking and mountain biking during the summer. A ski pass starts at UZS 185,000 (£14.75) for adults. amirsoy.com



Buy this!

Sick of being bitten by bugs at night? **We Drifters** have the perfect solution – anti-insect sleepwear. These comfy pjs are made from lightweight bamboo fabric using special technology designed to stop bugs biting you. Best of all, each set comes with socks, a 2-in-1 pillow case and a storage bag. You'll be sleeping blissfully before you know it. £85; wedrifters.co.uk





Trailing Sydney
Take in the sights of Sydney Harbour on the city's new coastal walk

BONZER NEW WALK

See the best of Sydney's coastline on a new 80km walk between two of the city's most iconic surf beaches – Bondi and Manly. The urban walking track around Sydney's Harbour foreshore is signposted with over 350 Aboriginal whale symbol signs and there's a digital walking app that you can download, making the route easy to follow. Explore the trail for a couple of hours or complete the full track over seven days.

Whichever you choose there are plenty of highlights, from famous sights such as Sydney Harbour, to examples of the city's rich heritage at the May Gibbs' Nutcote museum and Aboriginal engravings at Grotto Point.

bonditomanly.com



Donate to Australian wildlife

Following on from the devastating effects of the fires in Australia, *Wanderlust* decided to donate £5 from every subscription sign-up at the Adventure Travel Show in London and Destinations Shows in London and Manchester to **WIRES**, Australia's largest wildlife rescue organisation, to help with the current crisis. We have extended the subscription donation until 16 February. Subscribe now and help donate to a worthy cause. wanderlust.magazine.co.uk



The paradox is that there has never been a time when more people are out of touch with the natural world than there is now.

David Attenborough told Prince William we are in danger of wrecking the world. This year, BBC's *Our Planet Matters* will highlight climate change issues.

DUNG-INFUSED GIN

Fancy a gin infused with elephant dung? You may not think it would work, but South African brand **ibhu** have designed a new gin by extracting botanicals within elephants' waste. Elephants only digest a third of the fruit and flowers they eat, which is what gives Indlovu Gin its unique, earthy flavour. The gin was named Indlovu as this means elephant in Zulu. It costs around R400 (£26). ibhu.co.za



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THE DESTINATION:
BHUTAN

Dzongs of Bhutan
The Tsechu festival at
ancient monastery
Tashichho Dzong



Visit the world's first carbon-negative country for its ancient monasteries, mountain trekking, tropical forests and sacred species, as well some fresh air and your own slice of happiness...

Whoever said Bhutan was the last Shangri-la could well have been right. Its reputation as one of the world's 'greenest' countries is well-earned: tropical lowland forest and Himalayan mountains blanket much of its protected landscape and with its 'sponge-like' forests soaking up more carbon dioxide than it emits, Bhutan became the first carbon-negative nation. But it's not just the government that looks after it. The

locals are also guardians of their sustainable way of life, finding it the key to their happiness.

Visitors can get a sense of this joy in unhurried capital, Thimphu, where the main hustle centres around Tashichho Dzong, an ancient Buddhist monastery, and the civil and royal seats of office, too. While you might not get to see the Dragon King on his way to work, you can still shuffle around the complex to glimpse orange-robed monks deep in reflection, the silence only stirred by the squeak of their prayer wheels.

At night, the whitewashed building lights up, a view best enjoyed from Changangkha Lhakhang, a 12th-century temple. During the day, newborn cries spill out of this shrine to protective deities, often visited by new parents seeking blessings for their babies. One thing you won't see from this panorama is traffic lights – there's not a single one in the city.

If the hills are calling out to you, make your way west of the Black Mountains, where trekkers may stumble across barking deer, Himalayan black bears and even

leopard. Look to the skies for the real highlight, though: black-necked cranes. At Phobjikha Valley's RSPN centre, keen birdspotters can spy these rare birds swooping over glacial glades of open grassland during their winter migration. Those sacred cranes steal the show, at least until they disappear in mid-March; come November, you'll find the locals in full celebration mode, singing and dancing to welcome the birds back to the region at an annual festival. It's an attitude to life that most visitors can't resist.

THE NUMBERS

60

The percentage of land that is required by law to be under forest cover at all times. At least Bhutan can see the forest for the trees.

\$250

The price travellers must pay per day (\$200 certain months, with up to \$40pp supplement for solo travellers and couples). This helps to prevent overtourism, while covering transport, accommodation, food, entry fees and a guide for key sites.

1972

The year former King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, said: "Gross National Happiness is more important than Gross Domestic Product." Well, if his Majesty says so, who are we to disagree?



STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN

TIGER'S NEST MONASTERY

Perched on the cliffside of the upper Paro valley, the Tiger's Nest monastery is the stuff of legend. As the story goes, in the 7th century the Second Buddha hitched a ride on a flying tiger to meditate in a mountain cave, fight demons and convert the locals to Buddhism.

Ten centuries later, it was turned into Paro Taktsang, a monastery marking the site of his arrival. Hike two hours from the valley floor, following hairpin twists and turns, to stand 3,000m above sea level overlooking the valley. Then explore the three temples and the Buddha's cave.

IF YOU ONLY DO THREE THINGS

Go green in Bhutan...



SAY CHEESE

Forget cheese and wine – pair Swiss gouda with Red Panda beer on a tastebud-tickling tour of the fuel-efficient Swiss Farm Project, Bhutan's one and only commercial cheese factory and microbrewery. *Bon appétit!*



BLOOMING WONDERFUL

In winter, snows dusts the Dochula Pass, but in spring, you'll find the white stuff melts to reveal bursts of white magnolia and scarlet rhododendron littering the forest floor. Budding botanists are sure to be pleased with the scents on show.



TAKE A BOW

Pick up a bow and arrow and take a shot at the country's national sport at an archery class in Thimphu or Paro. If you'd rather stay on the rowdy sidelines, head to a *bha cho* (archery field) in any town or village to see how the locals do it.



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EAT THIS...

Kinpira yasai

A warming salad packed full of fresh spring greens, these sweet crunchy vegetables prove that Japan is often more vegan than you think...

When you think of traditional Japanese cuisine, a plant-based

diet may not be what instantly comes to mind. But while you may find sushi, meaty broths and grilled chicken on every Tokyo street corner, served up at specialist *izakayas* (a tapas-style bar), there's also a world of vegan bowls and flavours at your disposal.

This includes *kinpira yasai* – a style of sautéing and simmering crunchy yasai (vegetables) in a *mirin*-soy sauce/sesame-chilli blend that gives the stir-fried veg both a sweet and spicy kick. Or if you want to amp up the nuttiness and 'meat' it up, throw in sesame-fried tofu. If you can get it, chef Tim Anderson, author of *Vegan JapanEasy*, also suggests serving the dish in the Japanese style with "burdock or lotus root".

Although travellers may find vegans thin-on-the-ground in Japan today, the meat-loving nation has deep roots (spiritual and grass-level) in the

lifestyle. The arrival of Buddhism and its vegetarian *shōjin ryōri* cuisine in the 6th century altered the Japanese diet so completely that eating meat became the ultimate taboo. This all changed in the late 19th century, though, after the emperor broke the ancient tradition by eating beef in public, leading livid Buddhist monks to storm the Imperial Palace.

To sample some authentic *shōjin ryōri*, head to Kyoto's *ryokans*, which plate this soul food up for guests. On the outskirts of Kyoto City, try Shigetsu, a restaurant tucked inside the grounds of the UNESCO-listed Tenryū-ji temple. Find your inner zen (or work up an appetite) with a morning stroll in the scenic Sogen Garden, before tucking into miso-baked aubergine, sesame tofu and mushroom-yuzu rice for lunch. After a meal here, you'll struggle not to feel spiritually enlightened. 🍵

Who needs meat?
A bowl of colourful crunchy vegetables is sure to tantalise all taste buds



Vegan JapanEasy by Tim Anderson (Hardie Grant, £22) is out on 5 March



Get the full recipe online

Visit www.wanderlust.co.uk/204



“The Greek Islands’ beauty is completely surprising”

Tapping into Greece's heritage with...

JULIA BRADBURY

The peripatetic TV presenter's new series, *The Greek Islands with Julia Bradbury*, sees her returning to her roots – she talks olive trees, plastic pollution and off-the-beaten trail walks

How did *The Greek Islands* series come about?

It came about with me sitting at my kitchen counter thinking about my Greek roots and the more than 40,000 words in the English language whose etymology is Greek. I wanted to do a series that explored it a bit, and I thought it was time that my mum had a bit of the action on TV because my Dad's got all the glory for the walks.

What was it like returning to your Greek roots?

Me and my mum end up on the isle of Chios, which is where my grandparents are from originally, although they emigrated to Wales. Chios is the world's exporter of Mastiha, which derives from the mastic tree. The people of Chios harvest the resin and they turn it into just about everything... coffee, biscuits or you can just lick it from a spoon. Everyone is somehow involved in the trade, even the old yayas (grandmothers) who sit around these little wooden tables, sifting through the first harvest, talking and singing. It was a really magical experience.

Did anything surprise you?

Well, first of all, the contrast of all the different islands. Corfu has

been invaded many times over the years, by the Italians and the Turkish. I was surprised by the impact of the Italians because it was like being in Venice. The beaches of Crete are beautiful and the interior has these enormous valleys where they grow everything.

And then you go somewhere like Santorini where, in the late 1960s, there was no electricity, and it has now become this luxury destination. We don't want anywhere to suffer from overtourism and a lot of the Greek islands are looking towards Santorini and thinking, "We don't want that. How can we make this more sustainable?"

Is sustainability important?

Yes. I plant trees for carbon offsetting. I also try in all of my stories to cover green issues and raise awareness like I did in Santorini, where tourism has a knock-on effect on plastic pollution. I met this man who runs this charity called Enaleia. The fishing industry in Greece has been decimated by overfishing and a lot of the fisherman aren't aware of the plastic problem so they're picking up the plastic in their nets and then just chucking it back overboard. His charity pays



Not Venice
Julia was surprised by Corfu

them to fish out plastic debris, which then then gets [upcycled].

I'm also trying to promote advancement in the aviation industry, which now accounts for 2% of carbon emissions. It's about putting pressure on the airlines to reduce their single-use plastic, to use a different fuel – there's a new fuel which reduces carbon emissions by 60% – and I think people would be happy to factor that in if they knew the good it was doing.

What were the highlights of the Greek islands?

The beauty of it is completely surprising. I focused on trees, especially the olive grove, with these two amazing boys who had taken over their family business and turned it from being a mass producer of olive

oil to a bespoke specialist producer of this wonderful olive oil that you drink – rather than drizzle on your tomatoes. I interviewed them up a 1,500-year-old olive tree.

What was the walking like?

Crete is amazing for walking. They have a hike through one of the longest gorges in Europe, where you're walking in the footsteps of the Minoans. And I did some walking in Corfu in a little village called Old Perithia. If anyone wants to do hiking in Santorini, there's a guide on the island called Niko who's incredible, and there are amazing trails with fig and fennel trees.

If you had to choose one place to go back to which would it be?

There are over 6,000 Greek islands and I want to go and explore some of the little unspoilt ones, but if I had to pick one, it would be back up the tree with my olive oil boys. 🍵

The Greek Islands with Julia Bradbury is available on ITV Player now.



Read the full interview online

Go to www.wanderlust.co.uk/204

DREAM SLEEP

Arctic Bath, Swedish Lapland



And relax...
Out in the tall
timbers you'll
find the unique
Arctic Bath hotel

Find out why Sweden's newest eco-friendly spa hotel is a breath of fresh air

The Arctic Bath may have been a long time coming (nearly a decade, in fact), but it's well worth the wait. Now, travellers to Sweden's far north can sleep under the swinging lights of the aurora borealis or an undying sun at this cosy wellness retreat, the only one of its kind to freeze into the Lule River in winter and float during summer.

Created by the team behind the nearby Treehotel, much of the Arctic Bath's charm lies in the unique floating stance of its spa and cabins – the root of its lengthy wait time – and eco-friendly design. Woven from naturally felled local pine and

spruce, the circular spa building reflects a log jam in the river: a reminder of the time when the Lule transported timber by the ton.

Beyond *that* design, you can also trot through snow-brushed forests on horseback or zip across the wilderness by husky, returning back to your cabin (floating or grounded on the tree-lined shore) to cosy up by a roaring fire, before wrapping up warm to sit out on your private deck to take in the northern lights (Aug-March) – the souls of the dead, or so Sweden's indigenous Sámi people say. Summer visits bring bear-spotting or moose safari expeditions under the midnight sun (May-July).

Refresh yourself with a sauna (and a plunge in the Lule) before dining on the locally sourced Sámi-style menu. With reindeer outnumbering humans three to one, you can expect fresh, smoked or salted meat, but vegetarian dishes are on offer, too. Slow things down further with a quintessentially Swedish *fika* coffee break with a regional twist: a cheese cube marinating in your brew. This is the time set aside to chew on the good things in life – not difficult on this serene escape to the Arctic. *From 9,600SEKpp per night (around £780), on a half-board basis, including breakfast, dinner, full spa access and spa kit. arcticbath.se*



Get there

Norwegian offers flights from London Gatwick to Luleå via Stockholm from around £157 return. The shortest journey time is 4 hours and 55 minutes. Transfers from the airport to the retreat can be arranged and take around 75 minutes by car.

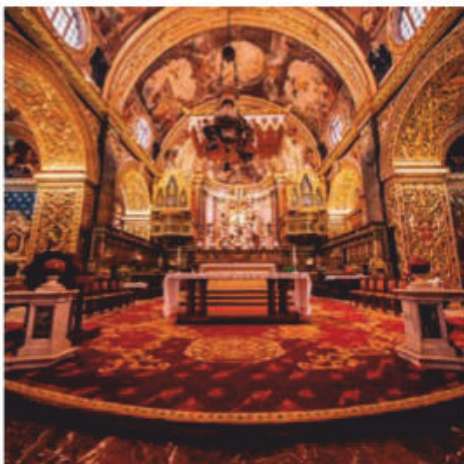
A short break in MALTA

From the historic cities to the action-packed coast, this Mediterranean island is the perfect escape for those short on time...

With over 300 days of sun a year and just three hours from London, Malta makes for a bright short break whenever you decide to go. Add to the mix a rich history and a cuisine as diverse as the culture and you'll want to go sooner rather than later...

CITY EXPLORER

The Phoenicians, Romans and Arabs all settled in Malta, creating a culture-blending skyline best viewed from the coastal town of Sliema. Across the water in the UNESCO-listed capital, Valletta, that centuries-spanning architecture can be studied up close. The limestone facades of the New Parliament Building and Royal Opera House, for instance, hint at Malta's Italian past while St John's Co-Cathedral is home to the world's largest and only signed Caravaggio painting. Nearby, the Casa Rocca Piccola takes you to the 16th century where 400 years of the Maltese nobility's traditions can be seen.



Heading inland to the fortified city of Mdina – dubbed the 'silent city' due to its noise restrictions – medieval history comes alive, with towering palaces and horses clip-clopping down cobbled streets. More Middle Age charm awaits in Birgu – the oldest of the Three Cities. Birgu's slightly younger sisters, Senglea and Cospicua are a good starting point to explore the island's rich Knights Hospitaller history. Don't miss the Baroque buildings and the pretty harbour.

FOOD IN PARADISE

Malta's melting-pot of cultures has also hugely influenced its cuisine. Where you eat is almost just as important as what you eat on the island. For example, a visit to one of Sliema's many sea-front restaurants to enjoy fish caught that morning is a must. Or head to bustling St Johns Square, the perfect place to try a *pastizzi* – a filo pastry stuffed with ricotta cheese or mushy peas.

For a romantic dinner, eat at one of the many restaurants

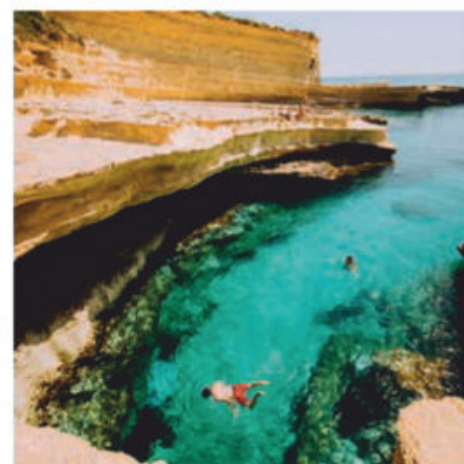


The local lures
(clockwise from this)
Exploring the streets of Valletta;
swimming in St Peter's Pool;
sample fresh seafood;
marvel at St John's Co-Cathedral

surrounded by the honey-coloured monuments of Mdina. For a traditional meal, order a *fenek* (rabbit stew), and pair it with a glass of Maltese wine.

GET OUT THERE

The rugged edges of Malta offer a refreshing place to get active. Escape the crowds by finding a secluded bay on Mellieha's sparkling coastline to windsurf or kayak across the azure surface.



The year-round sunny skies and visibility of the Mediterranean Sea also entices divers. The water is so clear that parrotfish, damselfish and octopus can all be seen through a snorkel mask, while shipwrecks and underwater caves await exploration from those willing to dive down deeper.

Back on dry land, the adventure continues. Hike or horseride through Malta's rural countryside, try one of the 1,300 climbing routes that hang over the sea or whizz through a warren of medieval roads on two wheels. However you spend your time in Malta, you're bound to leave feeling fulfilled, yet aching for more...





The top ten **COMMUNITY-BASED TRIPS**

Visit and stay among local communities and you'll not only get to know a place on a deeper level, but you'll be helping improve lives too

LOCAL HEROES

FOLLOW THE LEADERS IN **MYANMAR (BURMA)**

Let the locals lead you into their culture on **Audley Travel's** bespoke *Classic Myanmar* trip. Not only will they welcome you into their homes, showing you how they live and work, you'll see how your tour combines with charity projects to sustain their traditional way of life.

Along the way, you'll cast nets with fishermen, sleep in stilted teak houses and canoe down Inle Lake at sunset. Then you can cook up a storm on a culinary class with a twist, sourcing your ingredients from Nyaung Shwe villagers, trying your hand at the lingo along the way, before sitting down to dine on your creation.

Who? Audley Travel (01993 833105; audleytravel.com) **When?** Year-round

How long? 16 days **How much?** From £5,890 (including int'l flights)

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

DO SOME GOOD IN **PERU**

Help change the lives of Andean villagers on **World Expeditions' Huilloc Village Healthy Cook Stove Project**. In this secluded corner of the Sacred Valley, see how the villagers have been inhaling toxic smoke with their open-fire stoves – then help fix it. While you trade the stoves in for healthier alternatives, you'll become part of the community, staying in local homes, trying provincial dishes, watching weavers in action and farmers paying tribute to *Pachamama* (Earth Mother).

Who? World Expeditions (0800 0744 135; worldexpeditions.com)

When? March-October 2020 **How long?** 4 days

How much? From £700 (excluding int'l flights)



MOUNTAIN MARVELS

EXPLORE THE MOUNTAINS IN **INDIA**

Head deep *Into the Pindar Valley* and immerse yourself in the culture of rural settlements thriving under the support of **Village Ways**. Travelling like a local, you'll come across five mountain communities, while learning more about their daily work weaving baskets with *ringal* (Himalayan bamboo), sampling honey and learning more about tending the fields. As well as staying in converted traditional 'Berklay' longhouses, you'll camp under the stars, surrounded by snowy peaks.

Who? Village Ways (01223 750049; villageways.com)

When? 15 March, 1 May and 1 October 2020

How long? 12 nights

How much? From £1,436 (excluding int'l flights)



GORILLA GETAWAY

TRACK PRIMATES IN **UGANDA**

Experienced rangers will lead you to Bwindi's endangered mountain gorillas on **Rainbow Tours' Uganda Wildlife & Conservation Small Group Tour**. They aren't the only society you'll encounter in Bwindi, though – poachers-turned-conservation staff are also on hand to share their stories. Trek through Mgahinga Gorilla National Park's rural countryside to visit the indigenous Batwa tribe, too, displaced from their traditional home in the forest. Your tour actively supports the trust resettling them, so you can see the work they are doing firsthand, while interacting with the tribe.

Who? Rainbow Tours (020 7666 1260; rainbowtours.co.uk)

When? 3 October 2020 **How long?** 17 days

How much? From £9,275 (including int'l flights) ►





HIDDEN HOMELAND

WALK IN ANCIENT FOOTSTEPS IN **TASMANIA**

Delve into the sacred homeland of the Palawa people on Tasmania's *Footsteps and Trails* with **AAT Kings** and **Inspiring Journeys**. In the company of an Aboriginal guide, you'll take on the Wukalina Walk: a two-day trek through the dramatic coastal landscapes of the Bay of Fires and Mount William. Learn about their way of life, before making your way down to Hobart for a labyrinthine tour of the Museum of Old and New Art's subterranean galleries and the city's second-oldest vineyard.

Who? AAT Kings and Inspiring Journeys
(inspiringjourneys.com; 020 8225 4220)

When? Selected dates, September-December 2020

How long? 7 days

How much? From £3,185 (excluding int'l flights)

FLOATING FANCY

GO WITH THE FLOW IN **HAIDA GWAI**

Prepare for a stay in a floating community-owned eco-lodge on **Discover the World's** *Discover Haida Gwaii at Ocean House* trip. Soar over sprawling coastlines to get to this rugged Canadian archipelago by helicopter, before seeing black bears and orca in their natural habitats and listening to legends explained by Haida guides. The benefit of all this – you'll be supporting the archipelago's economy, providing locals with jobs and improving their quality of life.

Who? Discover the World (01737 886131; discover-the-world.com)

When? June-September 2020 **How long?** 3 nights

How much? From £3,154 (excluding int'l flights)



CONSERVATION CALLING

MEET THE SAFARI SAVIOURS IN **NAMIBIA**

Help protect wildlife as you journey through community-owned conservancies on an *Expeditionary Mobile Safari in north-west Namibia* with **Natural High Safaris**. No two expeditions are alike – expect changes in weather, wildlife movements, conservation activities and community events to shape your journey through this wilderness, protected by world-renowned conservationists. Search for black rhino, elephant and lions before relaxing in lodges in the Sossusvlei's desert.

Who? Natural High Safaris (01747 830950; naturalhighsafaris.com)

When? April-November 2020 **How long?** 17 days

How much? From £8,350 (excluding int'l flights)



EXPERT EXPEDITION

FIND MAGIC IN **MONGOLIA**

Join the grassroots movement on the small *Gobi Conservation and Research Expedition* with **Eternal Landscapes**. Collect data like a researcher, then track wildlife aplenty in the Gobi Desert's vast wilderness, including falcons, eagles and the successfully reintroduced Przewalski horse at Khustain Nuruu National Park. You can even work alongside an NGO to help protect the endangered Mongolian *khulan* (wild ass).

Who? Eternal Landscapes (07810 280403; eternal-landscapes.co.uk)

When? 6 June 2020 **How long?** 11 days

How much? From \$1,700/ around £1,300 depending on booking numbers (excluding int'l flights)



HERO HIKE

CHECK OFF A COMMUNITY TREK IN **ETHIOPIA**

Get an insight into how locals live on the *Ethiopia: Easter Explorer* trip with **Wild Frontiers**. Taking part in a sustainable future project, you'll hike through villages and across farmland, soaking up the culture as a house guest along the way. You'll also spot UNESCO-stamped attractions, including the Simien Mountains National Park, where gelada baboons and the elusive walia ibex operate. The sacred landscapes of Tigray and Lalibela are on the agenda, too.

Who? Wild Frontiers (020 3925 9623; wildfrontierstravel.com)

When? 12 April 2020 **How long?** 13 days

How much? From £3,645 (excluding int'l flights)



WORLD OF YOUR OWN

TREK TO A LOST CITY IN **COLOMBIA**

Empower local women and indigenous tribes on **G Adventures'** *Lost City Trekking* trip through Sierra Nevada. Working with Wiwa Tours (an indigenous tour agency), this trip opens your eyes to Colombia's ancient worlds, with an expert guide taking you to remote Wiwa camps, where women trade in plant-dyed bags and beaded jewellery: a new source of income created by the tour. Best of all, you'll head to the jungle to spy the lost city of Teyuna, only found a few decades ago. Cleanse your energy before you enter, then beat a path that few others have taken.

Who? G Adventures (gadventures.co.uk; 020 7313 6953)

When? Year-round **How long?** 7 days

How much? From £519 (excluding int'l flights)



Know when you want to travel but don't know where? Got an activity you long to try but not sure how? Try visiting *Wanderlust's* Trip Finder at **www.mytripfinder.co.uk**

Head to Head

Stockholm VERSUS Helsinki

AT A GLANCE

Stockholm

Population

972,647

Total area

188 sq km

Famous for

Its island structure, orange-hued old town and being the birthplace of Swedish pop supergroup ABBA

Helsinki

Population

648,042

Total area

213 sq km

Famous for

World-class design, bursts of Art Deco architecture and the blindingly white Helsinki Cathedral

TOP TIP

With mild summers and snow-soaked winters, we'd say autumn is an underrated time to visit both Helsinki and Stockholm. Expect bursts of red, yellow and orange brightening the foliage, and chilly (but not Arctic!) temps of 6-10°C.

Both of these green destinations appear in the top ten list of the World Happiness Report, so a Scandinavian spring city break ought to put a smile on your face. But, should you opt for Stockholm or Helsinki?

STOCKHOLM

CULTURE

The sprawling archipelago that makes up Stockholm is punctuated by royal palaces, 13th century architecture and scattered with Swedish history. In the present, it is one of Europe's premier museum destinations, while its gardens and coffeehouses are perfect for *fika* (coffee, cake and a chat).



HELSINKI

Despite serving as capital for 200 years, Helsinki still has a coastal charm (*pictured*) that lingers as you wander into the centre: a mix of avenues, stylish stores and coffee shops, as well as the spectacular cathedral. The city feels well-organised, not surprising given the Finnish affinity for clean design.

TRAILS

Around 30% of Stockholm is green, so it's easy to find a park to explore. Forty minutes south of the city, Tyresta National Park's serene lakes and swathes of tall pine forest – look out for roe deer and mountain hare among the trees. An hour away, sections around Lake Mälaren are also ideal for ambles or cycles.



Sipoonkorpi is the closest national park to Helsinki. Under an hour's drive away, you'll find numerous marked nature trails (ranging from an effortless 1km to a more tricky-terrain 5km) – all through the park's seemingly never-ending spruce forest. Nuuksio (*pictured*), also within easy reach, is a mix of forest and mirror-esque lakes.

MUSEUMS

Stockholm is awash with museums, so head to Djurgården and start exploring. There's the interactive ABBA Museum, imposing Vasa Museum – preserving a sunken ship from 1628 – as well as the Nobel Prize Museum (*pictured*). For a breath of (real) fresh air, the old-school village in Skansen is the world's oldest open-air museum.



The Finnish capital's offerings focus on art and design. Kiasma is a contemporary art lover's playground, while Amos Rex houses a collection of futuristic work. The Designmuseo in Kaartinkaupunki is the top ticket for devotees to the Finnish aesthetic, with an exhibit featuring furniture, clothing, prints and more.

ISLANDS

Stockholm's 14 well-connected islands boast a diverse array of old and new. Riddarholmen and Stadsholmen islets combine to make up Gamla Stan (*pictured*), the colourful and well-preserved old town. Modern Södermalm, on the other hand, has a voguish photography exhibition, trendy shops and even trendier eateries.



A 15-minute ferry ride from Helsinki's Market Square is the UNESCO-listed Suomenlinna, a star-shaped sea fortress, swarmed by nature and spread across six connected islands. Created in the 18th century when Finland was still part of Sweden, it remained a military base until 1972. It exists today as a cultural treasure.

VERDICT: There's much to admire in these Nordic capitals and plenty of cafés to collapse in after a busy day's sightseeing. Stockholm may have a slightly broader appeal for the classic city break fan, while contemporary design devotees will be delighted with Helsinki.



STOCKHOLM



Nordic architecture
(clockwise from top left)
Colourful Stortorget is the
oldest public square in
Stockholm's Gamla Stan;
the 69m-long Vasa warship
sank on its maiden voyage;
Suomenlinna is Helsinki's
maritime fortress;
a white-walled Lutheran
cathedral dominates
Helsinki's skyline



HELSINKI



The Conscious Traveller

More and more travellers are debating whether to fly or not in an attempt to be more eco-conscious. **Emma Thomson** takes a look at both sides of the debate

Air travel: friend or foe?



To fly or not to fly has become the most pressing question among travellers in recent years. This was highlighted three years ago when Swedish singer Staffan Lindberg announced he had given up flying because the carbon footprint was too great. It launched a nationwide flight-shame movement that has now gained worldwide traction thanks to

Greta Thunberg, the Extinction Rebellion protests and a new UK Flight Free 2020 campaign that is currently being copied in France and Canada.

Flights do emit more carbon emissions per passenger than any other form of transport, but does this mean we shouldn't fly at all? Reports reveal the average British holidaymaker only takes a short-haul flight every two years and a long-haul flight every five years. The majority of us are not frequent flyers spurred on by airline-alliance schemes and incentives, and most of us do not travel business class (where the seats take up more room and reduce the number of passengers to share the carbon footprint). Furthermore, aviation accounts for just under 3% of global carbon emissions compared to 25% for electricity and heat production and 24% for agriculture and forestry.

However, there's no denying there is an impact and flying short- or long-haul doesn't really make a difference. Short-distance routes use more fuel taking off and landing and depart with more empty seats, while longer flights accrue more emissions due to distance.


Grants are being given to speed up research into electrification and sustainable bio-based aviation fuels. However, unlike the car, advancement is minimal because electric motors can't get a 41,000kg plane off the ground and the arable lands required to produce enough viable biofuel would be vast and unsustainable.

And, sadly, carbon-offsetting flights – the practice of paying a little extra to support an initiative that cancels out the carbon dioxide emitted on a flight by investing in tree-planting projects, wind farms, etc – isn't always an effective solution either. The travel company Responsible Travel reports: “a 2017 study commissioned by the European Commission, found that 85% of offset projects under the Kyoto Protocol's Clean Development Mechanism had

failed to reduce emissions and, from 2021, the EU will stop allowing offsets to be counted towards emissions reductions targets.”

But boycotting air travel overlooks the huge social impact. Hilary Bradt, founder of award-winning Bradt Travel Guides, says: “there's the very strong argument that reducing tourism to the developing world [most easily reached by air travel] will have a disastrous effect on those countries dependent on the tourist dollar. We in the travel business have seen similar effects when there is

political upheaval – small businesses collapse, wildlife suffers, hotel employees lose their jobs. We owe it to the countries in Africa, Asia and South America to encourage responsible tourism and that means flying.”

Perhaps the solution is to stick to our allocated ‘carbon budget’ – the amount of carbon dioxide emissions we can emit while still limiting a global temperature rise of 2% as per the 2015 Paris Agreement. The World Resources Institute has calculated it should be 2.3 tonnes per year per person and, for example, an economy-class return flight from London to New York emits an estimated 1.67 tonnes of carbon dioxide per passenger. Perhaps instead of not flying, we just need to manage that allowance. Like all things, it's about balance. 

The British Guild of Travel Writers' Travel Writer of the Year 2019, Emma is a regular contributor to Wanderlust, as well as to The Daily Telegraph, The Times and Bradt Travel Guides.



Flights do emit more carbon emissions per passenger than any other form of transport, but does this mean we shouldn't fly at all?

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A whale of a time

Orcas can be spotted in the waters between Vancouver Island and the mainland

**TRY THIS...**

Vancouver

Watch orcas breach, cycle Stanley Park, or take a sustainable foodie tour in Canada's gateway to the great outdoors and one of the world's greenest cities

Take a city tour to spy whales in the water

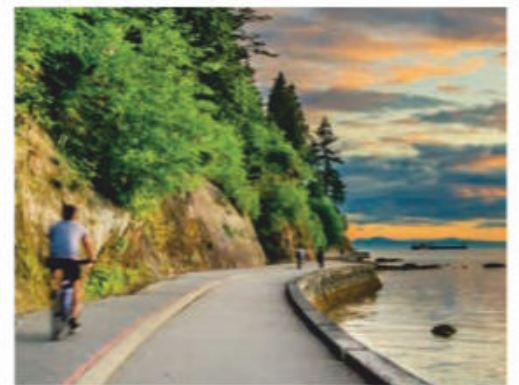
With a spout of water as they surface to breathe and a giant splash as they return down to the depths below, whale-watching is an unforgettable experience – especially when you can do it just a stone's throw away from the hustle and bustle of the city.

From March to October, thousands of whales migrate through the waters between Vancouver Island and the mainland – from humpbacks to grey and minke whales. But the real stars of the city's coastline are the orcas that can be spotted between May and

October. Whether you go kayaking, take a high-speed Zodiac, cruise or seaplane, this is one of the best places on the planet to spy these marine mammals. While you're on the water, keep a look out for sea lions, otters and dolphins in the Salish Sea and seabirds soaring overhead.

Prince of Whales Whale & Marine Wildlife Adventures offer a half-day tour departing from downtown Vancouver on a semi-covered 74-person cruiser with an expert marine mammal guide.

Half-day tour, from £100, 3-5 hours; princeofwhales.com/whale-watching-adventure-tour/vancouver/half-day-whale-watching-vancouver



Alternatively... Go cycling in an urban rainforest

Vancouver has an extensive network of cycle paths, but if you're looking for a tranquil escape in the heart of the city, then Stanley Park is the perfect green space. Rent a bike near Denman Street and cycle along the 9km Seawall for views of the ocean, mountains and Lions Gate Bridge. Rent or explore the park's 4 km sq of temperate rainforest, gardens, beaches, wildlife and historical landmarks on a tour.

2 hour 30 minutes, £37; getyourguide.co.uk

Join a sustainable foodie tour

Grab your reusable shopping bag and head to Granville Island. Since the 1970s, this waterfront spot has been transformed from industrial wasteland to Vancouver's main cultural and culinary hub. What's more, it's working towards being a zero waste island. Take a foodie tour for a guilt-free shopping spree and taste of local produce.

2 hours, £38, various dates; foodietours.ca/granville-island-market-tour



Take a hike up Mother Nature's Stairmaster

Up for a challenge? Hike the Grouse Grind, a 2.9km trail up Grouse Mountain, also known as 'Mother Nature's Stairmaster', for a mountain top adventure. The peak of Vancouver boasts views from 1,127m above the city, and you can visit a wildlife refuge or dine at The Observatory. The GetYourGuide tour also includes a walk along Capilano Suspension Bridge.

6 hours 30 minutes, £105; getyourguide.co.uk

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A close-up photograph of a mountain gorilla clinging to a thick, moss-covered tree trunk. The gorilla is looking slightly to the right with a calm expression. The background is a soft-focus view of a dense tropical forest with various green plants and palm fronds.

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CORRESPONDENT REPORT

Mark Stratton

The return of Uganda's giraffes

Uganda may be known for its gorillas, but as the country works on a translocation programme to protect its giraffes, it's time the world's tallest animal gets some much-needed attention...

It's being called a 'silent extinction'. Not because of the quiet nature of giraffe, but because their decline across Africa is scarcely reported. I tried to imagine a safari without them. Their big eyes and diva eyelashes staring watchful, ready to launch into a slow-motion rocking gallop if I veered too close.

"Most people don't realise how threatened they are," said Dr Julian Fennessy, of Giraffe Conservation Foundation. Giraffe have declined by about 30% since the mid-1980s down to around 111,000. Threats

High profile
(top) Mark Stratton;
Nubian giraffes at
Murchison Falls National
Park waiting to be
translocated to Pian
Upe Reserve

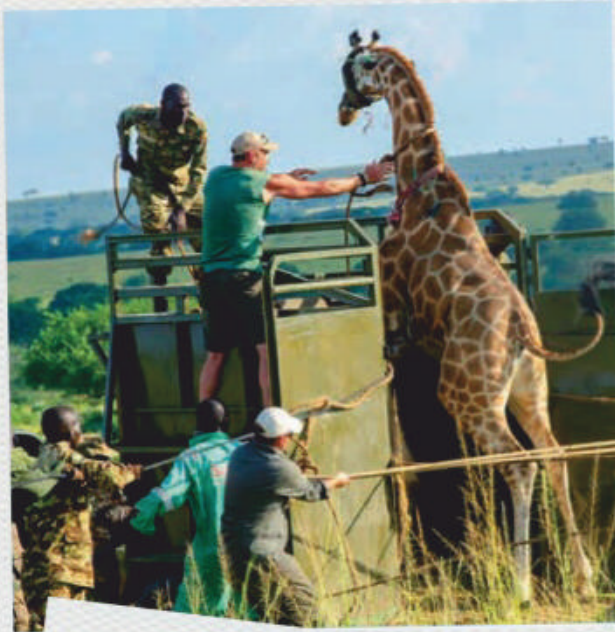
include hunting, habitat loss, snares, and the trade of body parts.

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species conference last August recognised this concern and upgraded the giraffe on its register to tighten up against illegal and unsustainable trade. Yet they remain in urgent need of our help.

This has become even more pressing, because giraffes are now taxonomically recognised as four genetically distinct species (Maasai, Southern, reticulated and Northern) of which the latter are estimated to

number a perilous 5,600 individuals. If you subdivide the northern giraffe into its three recognised subspecies (west African, Kordofan and Nubian) then each of these populations are critically endangered.

It was the Nubian subspecies (population around 3,000) that I went to see in Uganda. A translocation programme is underway from their core population in Murchison Falls National Park. The aim is to create satellite populations around Uganda, including to the remote north-east where Pian Upe Reserve



Moving day
(clockwise from top left)
One of the giraffes in a temporary holding pen at Murchison Falls NP; staff and vets from the Uganda Wildlife Authority loading the giraffes at the national park for translocation to Pian Upe; on the move; sedating the giraffes

is witnessing the return of giraffes for the first time since 1996.

Pian Upe is Uganda's second largest protected area covering 2,043 sq km. It was one of Africa's great game viewing reserves in the 1950s before several decades of violent ethnic conflict gripped the Karamoja region, decimating its wildlife for bushmeat. "No rangers could work here as it was so dangerous. The animals were left unprotected," explained senior warden, Christopher Masaba.

A six-hour drive north from Kampala, the final 60km followed a mud road that was so potholed and flooded that the truck carrying the first batch of five giraffe in late October got stuck. "We needed to hire a tractor to pull us out," said Dr Robert Aruho, a wildlife vet with Uganda Wildlife Authority.

When the truck arrived, it got stuck again and was unable to deposit them in a temporary holding pen, so they were allowed to gallop off the back of the truck and flee into the reserve.

In all, 15 giraffe (11 female and four male) have been translocated with the aim of re-establishing a breeding giraffe population and

they are being monitored daily by an anti-poaching team.

It's hoped they will flourish like the population at Murchison Falls, where numbers have risen from around 300 in the mid-90s to some 1,650 today – over 50% of the world's Nubian subspecies. But why translocate them if they are doing so well at Murchison?

"We can't have all our eggs in one basket. It's a unique opportunity for us to act now and create viable satellite populations to potentially reverse extinction before it might happen," said Aruho. He explained how a century ago at Lake Mburo an entire giraffe population was wiped out by the ungulate disease rinderpest and now there is uncertainty in Murchison as oil exploration is underway.

It's hoped 25 more giraffe will be translocated in 2020 and Aruho believes Pian Upe will comfortably support 700 giraffes in the future.



There's been a huge decline in the giraffes' landscape, but most people don't realise how threatened they are

For now, the 15 have settled well. Giraffe tend to form loose affiliations and satellite-tracking devices attached to the ossicones on their heads, show the second and third batch arrivals have mixed.

I tracked them for several days on foot with the anti-poaching rangers, but the tall grasses restricted me to just fleeting distant sightings. We ascended a wind-burnished inselberg called Hyena Hill scanning for them. But they have blended well into an extensive savannah, which is also home to impala, roan, oribi, as well as leopards and cheetah.

"This isn't an experiment for the giraffes," smiled Masaba. "President Museveni once asked if we [conservationists] could talk about something else in Uganda other than gorillas? So now we can talk about our giraffes," he added. "They have returned home." 🦒



3 AUTHENTIC ADVENTURES YOU CAN HAVE IN 2020

From spying wildlife in Costa Rica's national parks to cooking with locals on a little-visited Greek island, authenticity is at the very heart of these trips...

Meeting the locals. Seeing a different side to a place. Experiencing a destination authentically as well as responsibly is more important to us than ever and tour operator **Sunvil** shares the same values. Get under the skin of a country on one of these trips...

1 COSTA RICA Take a walk on the wild side

Costa Rica's motto is authentic in itself – *Pura Vida* (Pure Life) – and Sunvil's tour, *An Introduction to Costa Rica, its rainforests, volcanoes, beaches and rich culture* offers just that. When you're out of the city, your everyday neighbours will be the animals, such is the rich diversity of Costa Rica's wildlife.

The wetlands, rivers and lagoons of Tortuguero National Park, for example, will put you nose-to-snout with three-toed sloths, caiman, spider and howler monkeys. A village tour gives you the chance to meet Tortuguero's locals, fierce guardians of their verdant home.

Next, visit the landscapes of Arenal Volcano National Park, where thermal pools are fed by waterfalls and wildlife frolics among the emerald slopes. Pair nature with a shot of adrenaline, by white-water rafting, mountain biking or hiking.

The tranquil Nicoya Peninsula is the ideal antidote to high-octane adventure, where you can tap into the secrets of the remarkably long-living locals and relax on palm-pocked beaches licked by iridescent coral reefs.





Get under the skin
(Clockwise from this)
Hike in Costa Rica's
Arenal National Park;
stay in the Greek
town of Myrina;
meet São Tomé's
and Príncipe's locals
and visit the beaches.

2 SÃO TOMÉ AND PRÍNCIPE

Size doesn't matter

Floating off the western coast of Africa, São Tomé and Príncipe are a remote pair of islands making up the continent's second-smallest nation. But the size is irrelevant, with the duo packing in history, chocolate heritage and wild delights.

Sunvil's *Culture and Tradition on São Tomé and Príncipe* trip offers a deep dive into the islands. Start in São Tomé's namesake capital where the Portuguese's 500-year rule is evident in the architecture and art. Nossa Senhora da Graça is one of Africa's oldest cathedrals, while Europe also



influenced many of the local dances – take a workshop to try out Kizomba, Socopé and more. Beyond the capital, you'll explore and learn about the pristine rainforest, which even to this day is still used like a natural pharmacy by the locals.

Hop over to São Tomé's little sister, Príncipe – once the world's largest producer of cocoa – to see some of the plantations. Unravel the bean-to-bar process at a working factory and stay in a once-abandoned plantation house, now restored to its former colonial grandeur.

Further island exploration will have you stumbling upon champagne-coloured beaches and a day cruise to the Bay of Needles will leave you gasping at its cloud-baiting volcanic phonolite towers – a scene unchanged for millennia.



3 GREECE

Lift the lid on Lemnos

Far-flung in the northern Aegean Sea and away from Greece's hotspots, Lemnos harbours a local culture and rocky scenery largely free from visitors. Sunvil's *Activity and experience holiday on Lemnos* unpicks the island's charming heart, beginning in its capital, Myrina, which is overlooked by craggy volcanic rocks and a Venetian castle. Its two waterfronts (named 'Roman' and 'Turkish') tell the story of a once-divided town, while Lemnos' rugged landscape is a walker's dream. A half-day hike will have you traversing a mosaic of otherworldly vistas and ending among the windmills of Kontias. Plati beach offers a long stretch of golden sand – a fine place to relax after a long day's walk.

A wider island tour reveals Lemnos' litter of ancient ruins, tiny mountain villages and sun-soaked vineyards, which you can explore leisurely. Stop to sample the local food and don't miss a visit to a family-owned ouzery to taste the national drink. You'll be staying close to plenty of tavernas which honour the island's cooking heritage, but

if you'd like to get more hands-on, join a culinary class with local cook Rena and whip up some traditional dishes, accompanied by salads and cheeses straight from Rena's farm, offering a fulfilling ending to the trip.

ABOUT THE EXPERTS

Sunvil is a family-run company with 50 years' experience of helping visitors discover a destination's 'real side', so they know a thing or two about authentic travel. Their specialists hand-pick accommodation that ensures you never stray from the local vibe, have unrivalled off-the-beaten-track knowledge and a true passion for taking travellers beyond a country's mainstream scenes.

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WORDS LYN HUGHES

GUYANA

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Agents of Shield
Set within the Guiana
Shield, Kaieteur Falls is
one of the world's most
powerful waterfalls

We

heard them before we saw them. Strange chattering, barks and snuffling noises that I couldn't place as I scanned the bird-rich waters of the lake that surrounded us. For a moment I thought back to the stories I had been told of spirits in Guyana's lakes and forests. Then we saw the bobbing heads of a family of giant river otters looking at us, shouting half indignantly as if questioning our presence.

Behind them, five black caiman were crossing the lake in a flotilla. Herons and egrets flanked the shallows and banks, while jacanas padded across floating vegetation. The high branches of the trees surrounding the lake were alive with yet more birds as well as three different species of monkey: howler, brown-bearded saki and brown capuchin. Down below, eagle-eyed kingfishers scanned the waters intently, before dive-bombing for fish and I marvelled that I had never seen such a concentration before. The wildlife was so prolific that it was hard to know where to look next.

Land of giants

I'd only arrived at Guyana's renowned Karanambu Lodge in the south-west Rupununi region a few hours earlier. It had been on my travel wishlist for years, ever since I had seen coverage of its work in rescuing and rehabilitating giant river otters. This was all down to a remarkable woman, the late Diane McTurk. Although she passed away in 2016, her family still run the lodge and the Karanambu Trust, working to protect the habitats here while also ensuring local communities benefit.

Three rescued otter cubs were being raised at the Lodge during my visit, so when we took an outing along the Rupununi River and saw a family group of nine in the wild, it was all the more special – even when they were shouting at us.

Having preserved most of its rainforest, Guyana – known for its biodiversity – often gets called a 'Land of Giants' as it is home to many 'giants' of the natural world. One of its most celebrated species is the giant water lily known as *Victoria amazonica*, the leaves of which can grow to 3m in diameter. It flowers at sunset and we pulled up to a tranquil spot just as dusk fell.

A new flower opened in front of us, its colour a pure white, unlike the surrounding pink lilies. At this stage the flower is female, and it gives out a strong odour which attracts beetles. As we sat in the boat sipping rum punch, we watched as dozens of beetles flew in to feed. Once pollinated the ►

Not like the otters
Giant river otters are just one of the 'giants' in the 'Land of the Giants' that can be seen along the banks and swimming in the waters of the Rupununi River

Previous page Sarah Marshall This page Naturepi





◀ lily changes sex overnight and the following day the flower opens a different colour.

Darkness had truly fallen as we headed back to the lodge, our torches catching the light of caiman eyes. Fish were splashing and jumping everywhere around us, a reminder that the rivers here hold at least 400 species. They were certainly lively and I started with shock as a fish jumped into the boat. As we proceeded, several more jumped in and we threw them back into the water.

Grassroots

While Karanambu is run by a family who originally settled there in the 1920s, many of Guyana's

eco-lodges are owned and operated by local Amerindian communities. Rewa Lodge is one of these and has garnered many accolades among lovers of wild places.

Set on the confluence of two rivers – the Rupununi and Rewa – the only way in is by boat. On arrival, I was greeted by Rudy (Rudolph Edwards), one of the managers and the community's current *Tashao* or chief.

The village is 800m from the lodge and has a population of around 300 people from five different tribes, but mostly Makushi. From the 1960s to 1990s this village used to hunt and trade in wildlife, but by 2000 the area had lost much of



Your pad or mine?
(clockwise from left)

A boat trip to see the giant water lilies; a red howler monkey; giant river otters playing by the river bank; Rewa Lodge; a juvenile black caiman on a giant lily pad; its white female flower



Simon Chubb; Sarah Marshall; Naturepl

the once abundant nature. Around that time Rudy started to hear about how wildlife tourism could provide a sustainable future for the community. By 2003 they had planned to open an eco-lodge and got some help and advice from a couple of lodges which had already opened. However, there were still many hurdles, including convincing everyone that the tourism venture would work.

“The communities in the area were used to trapping and poaching. We had to stop taking wildlife and convince others not to,” said Rudy. The world’s largest scaled freshwater fish is found here, the arapaima gigas, an ancient dinosaur of the deep that grows to over 2m in length and breathes air. “We said no harvesting of the fish and it worked. But after five years we were struggling as there were no jobs yet and no benefit.”

By 2005, the lodge had opened although the next challenge was how to attract customers. “We didn’t know marketing.” It had just two customers in its first year, but it has now grown to 200 a year.

This is true grassroots tourism, with the community running it and benefitting. Rudy took me to see the nearby village, where a newly consecrated church, a health centre, nursery school and primary school were all funded through the lodge. “We didn’t know our environment was so beautiful and that people from other lands would want to see it. Now we understand the true meaning of tourism.”

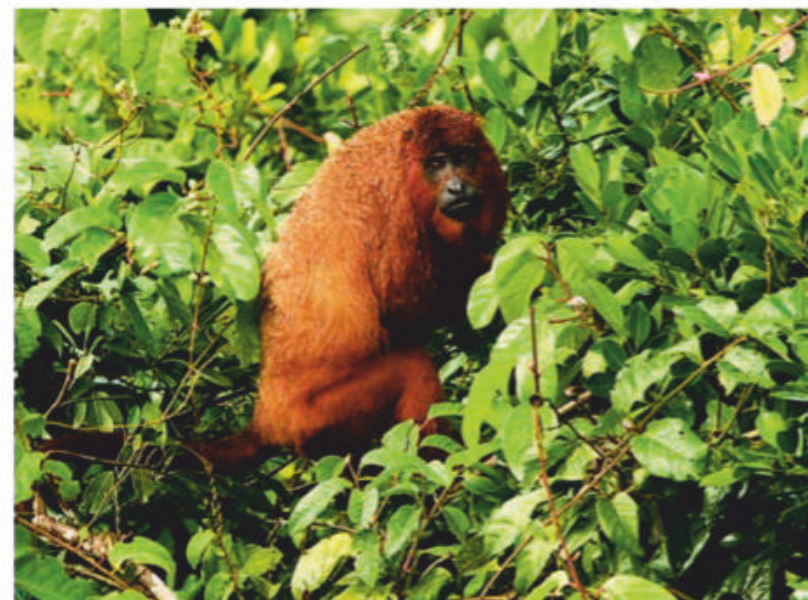
Wild web

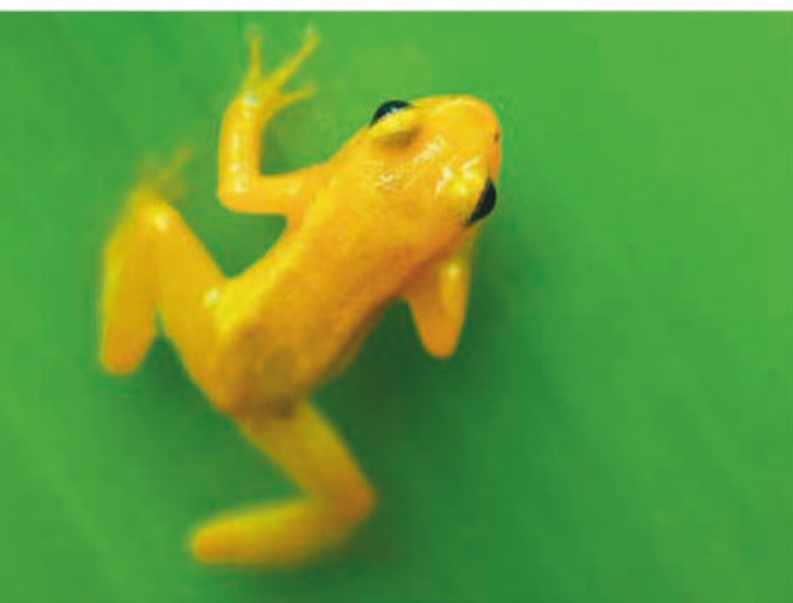
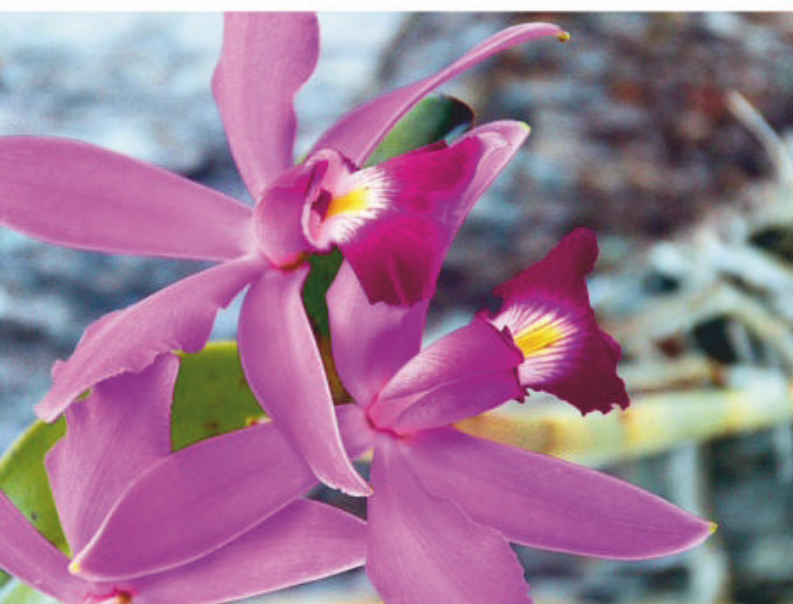
Wildlife continues to increase, with jaguars now sometimes seen hunting for turtle eggs on the sandy beaches that fringe the river. There is a limited catch and release programme with the arapaima fish that fishermen from around the world pay a lot of money to come and do.

We took a number of boat excursions to different spots where we walked on jungle trails. One took us to a lake where we watched the sun set as the giant lilies exploded into a riot of colour, and Rudy told us of the sand monster that reputedly lives in a neighbouring lake. The next morning we took a boat on another lake that’s home to over 400 arapaima fish and we kept catching glimpses of them as they popped up to the surface of the inky water to breathe.

Later that day, we took the boat upriver past sandbanks covered in clouds of yellow butterflies. As we chugged past one sandy beach, several terns made it clear they were angry at our presence, threatening to dive-bomb us until we moved far enough away. Further on, a capybara with a baby sat at the water’s edge startled to see us. A closer look at offshore logs would reveal sunbathing turtles of various sizes, while ospreys and other raptors sat sentinel in the treetops.

The weather was changeable – brilliant sunshine had us slapping on extra sun lotion and then ►





‘Later that day, we took the boat upriver past sandbanks covered in clouds of yellow butterflies’

Down stream
(clockwise from this image)
Rainforest excursion; a golden rocket frog at Kaieteur Falls; Warapoka's Tashao (chief); vivid local flora; Rewa Lodge

◀ a few minutes later would come a downpour of warm rain. Eventually we pulled into the bank and took a woodland trail, leaves crunching below our feet. We could hear spider monkeys moving in the trees, while in the distance howler monkeys called.

Stopping at a mound, Rudy crouched in front of a hole and prodded the entrance with a long twig. To our surprise, a huge spider appeared, hoping for a tasty meal. “This is the goliath bird-eating spider,” Rudy announced. “They don’t usually eat birds, but they can if they get the opportunity.” The largest arachnid in the world is an opportunistic feeder but it must have been disappointed to find itself being stared at by beasts it couldn’t eat.

Back at the boat, our boatman had been busy fishing and had caught four peacock bass. We headed off back down the river as the sun started to set. To our surprise, the boat pulled into the base of a large, steep sandbank. We got out and were met by the sight of a team from the lodge making a fire and setting out camp chairs. Drinks were served as darkness fell, and a bright moon bathed us in its light. Meanwhile the bass were barbecued and we ate to a soundtrack of jungle noises and a frog chorus.

Flying the nest

With the success of community-based eco-tourism, others are looking to see if they can move into low-level tourism too, and Rewa helps advise them. At the village of Warapoka in north-east Guyana, we were the first official tourists – even the paint on the walls of the guesthouse was still not dry.

As with so many places in Guyana, just getting there was an adventure, with an internal flight over rainforest as far as the eye could see, followed by a three-hour boat journey passing houses on stilts, fishermen and myriad exotic birds.

Eventually, we turned off the Waini River into a quiet channel, fringed by mangroves, and overhung with trees. As we rounded a bend into bright sunshine, the village of Warapoka came into sight, distinguished by the large granite boulders scattered around it. We were met on the jetty by members of the village committee and walked ▶

‘Mists were swirling below the Kaieteur Falls. Patches would gradually clear to reveal deep green vegetation along the sides of the river gorge’

◀ the short distance to the guesthouse where a lunch of fish, okra, beans, plantain and rice awaited, all from the village, as was the accompanying lime juice.

“Even the coffee is from here,” said Jeremy, head of the tourism committee, explaining that the community is pretty much self-sufficient. However, what they don’t have is much in the way of employment, and so they are hoping that tourism will bring some much welcomed revenue and jobs, and help keep young people here.

They are fortunate enough to have two harpy eagle nests within walking distance of the village, and another a boat ride away. The largest eagle in the Americas, the harpy is an increasingly threatened species, and to see one is a real coup. Unfortunately we were not to be lucky on this occasion.

However, in Warapoka, it was the exposure to the everyday life of the Warrau people that was to prove interesting. There has been a settlement here for over 1,000 years, and shell middens around the village are an indication that shellfish were once found here. Today, cassava is the staple, and taking an early morning walk around the village we spotted a woman making cassava bread over an open fire. Pauline shyly smiled at us when we asked if we could watch, and she explained the laborious process involved in taking cassava root to flour.

We bumped into one of the older women of the village who introduced herself as Auntie Irene, and

explained that she is in her 70s and has nearly 100 grandchildren. “You are welcome in our community. I like to meet people, to talk to them – come and see me at my home.” When we asked where she lived, her answer was, “Under the mango tree.” Later that day, we found the right tree and Auntie Irene’s home. She showed us how to make a hammock in the traditional way with fibres from a local tree, rolling them on her thigh to make cord. Then she showed us a candle made of beeswax and explained this used to be the main source of lighting in the village.

The conversation turned to myths and legends, and of the spirits, *jumbies*, that used to coexist in the village when Irene was young. “We used to hear them at night. But those times are over now. Maybe the *jumbies* are going further into the bush.” She gave a rueful smile.

Taking the fall

While Auntie Irene had seen many changes in her community, Guyana had been a step back in time for me. Around 80% of the country is rainforest and that, combined with the long boat journeys, rich wildlife and lack of commercialism, gave a feeling of true exploration and adventure. Other than the small party I was travelling with, in ten days I’d only met two other visitors. But Guyana is home to one of the world’s great natural wonders, and I was heading there next, for my final stop. Would this be where all the tourists were?

Set within the Guiana Shield, a huge ancient plateau, Kaieteur Falls is one of the world’s most powerful waterfalls. One legend has the name Kaieteur coming from Old Kai, a chief who sacrificed himself to the Great Spirit Maikonaima by canoeing over the waterfall to save his people.

It is a 55-minute flight from Georgetown, provided the weather is behaving, and so makes a popular day trip. Cloud masked my view of the falls flying in, and the pilot headed straight for the airstrip. There, a few dozen visitors had either just arrived too, or were hanging around waiting to fly back out. We waited until most people had left and then set off to explore.

Wildlife in the mist
(clockwise from this image)
Guyana looks like a *Lost World*
when cloaked in fog;
a Guianan cock-of-the-rock;
the boulders at Warapoka





Within room or so we entered a fantastical *Lost World*, with wraiths of fog adding to the atmosphere. Kaieteur National Park has its own micro-environment with several new species to science still being discovered here and nearby. We walked through a mysterious forest, and into an area covered with otherworldly giant bromeliads. We searched down their leaves for tiny golden rocket frogs living in the axil.

We could hear the calls of one of the country's most iconic birds and followed the sounds to a patch of woodland, where a flutter of orange caught our eye. Sure enough there was a Guianan cock-of-the-rock, and then another. Eventually we could see five males spread out around the trees, their dazzling colours and feathery tendrils giving them a decidedly dashing look. This was a known cock-of-the-rock lek, and they were all showing off, competing for a female's attentions.

Leaving them, we took a narrow path through rocks and scrambled up for a glorious full-on view of the Falls. There they were in all their splendour, even more impressive than I had ever imagined.

We stayed in a hut overnight, cooking food that we had brought with us. A heavy fog had fallen outside, adding to the otherworldly atmosphere. I almost fancied I could hear a *jumbie* in the distance. I woke to a light drizzle and strolled to the top of the Falls.

Mists were swirling below. Patches would gradually clear to reveal deep green vegetation along the sides of the river gorge. Our guide appeared with coffee and we sipped a civilised brew as we stood by the Falls, dumbfounded that there was not a soul in sight. Indeed, probably not within many miles. And, as had struck me many times throughout the trip, it felt as if we had the whole of this extraordinary land to ourselves. ►

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Image taken by Tim Russell on MotMot holiday in Trinidad & Tobago



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wallahs of the
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We are the sunrise
on the Keralan
backwaters and
the sunset over the
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Footnotes

Guyana

THE TRIP

The author was a guest of **Cox & Kings** (020 3642 0861; coxandkings.co.uk) which offers a 15-day *Guyana: The Caribbean Amazon* tour from £5,245pp (two sharing). The trip includes 13 nights' full-board accommodation, international flights from London (and a light aircraft flight), all transfers and guided excursions (including boat trips) with an English-speaking guide.

Vital statistics

Capital: Georgetown
Population: 778,000
Language: English plus Creole and Amerindian dialects
Time: GMT-4
International dialling code: +592
Visas: Not required by UK nationals for trips of up to 30 days.
Money: Guyanese dollar (GYD), currently around G\$266 to the UK£. Note that Guyana is still a largely cash-based economy. Don't rely on your credit card.

When to go

May to August: This is the rainy season, when it's particularly heavy in the country's interior.
December: There are lighter rains in the country's interior, known as the '**cashew rains**'. The rest of the year is the dry season but, being a tropical forest, there can be showers. The average temperature is 26.8°C. Humidity is generally high.

WHAT TO TAKE

Exploring the interior involves long boat trips and jungle walks. The following are essential: insect repellent, sun protection, hat, lightweight waterproof, binoculars, good walking shoes and power-cut aiding torch.



Health & safety

Take care in Georgetown, especially after dark. Guyana is generally **safe and friendly**. Healthwise, it's worth being up to date with your jabs. Don't skimp on sun protection and insect repellent. The malaria risk depends upon where you are visiting so take expert advice.

Getting there & around

Virgin Atlantic (virginatlantic.com) flies from London Gatwick via Bridgetown from £659 return; the shortest journey time is around 13 hours. **American Airways** (aa.com) operates flights from London Heathrow via New York from £705 return; the shortest journey time is around 17 hours. Cheddi Jagan International Airport is 41km south of Georgetown. The one-hour taxi journey costs G\$5,000-6,000 (around £20) – it's wise to organise a transfer, especially if arriving after dark.

The easiest and safest way to get around Georgetown is by **taxi**. Travelling around the country is more difficult as the **few roads are not in good condition**, and some places are best or only accessed by river. If you're travelling independently, look into internal flights. Travelling with a tour operator or guide is recommended.



Accommodation

Georgetown: Dating back to the 1840s, **Cara Lodge** (caralodge.com) is a beautiful heritage hotel, and the place to stay as Mick Jagger and many celebrities will testify. Doubles from US\$145/£111.

Alternatively, **Kings Hotel & Residences** (kingshotel.gy/) offers spacious rooms and a popular bistro and (sometimes noisy) bar. Doubles from US\$150/£115.

The Interior: Note that accommodation is often simple compared to safari lodges in Africa. But hosts are welcoming, and food is fresh and local. Just getting to **Rewa Ecolodge** (rewaecolodge.com/) is an adventure as it's set on the confluence of two rivers and only



Chasing waterfalls
 Kaieteur Falls is full of culture and folklore; (above) a great horned owl

Guyana highlights

Explore Georgetown

The capital's British and Dutch heritage has resulted in some beautiful (if crumbling) colonial buildings. Mix in a strong Caribbean influence, and you have a melting pot of culture. Sights are low-key but include St George's Cathedral, one of the largest wooden structures in the

world. Friendly manatees hang out in the botanical gardens and National Park.

Backyard Café, Georgetown

Chef Delven Adams runs Georgetown's hippest and tiniest restaurant in his backyard. Reservation needed.

Iwokrama Canopy Walkway

The Iwokrama Reserve protects one of the last pristine rainforests in the world; around 200 species of mammal, and 500 birds call it home, as well as black caiman, giant river otters and jaguars. The walkway gives a unique perspective of the forest.

Community tourism

Guyana is a shining example of how community-owned lodges can work, with several Amerindian communities now running successful places to stay. The result is more jobs, funds for education and healthcare, and culture and wildlife being conserved.

◀ accessed by boat. Double occupancy for a Benam bedroom costs G\$8,190 (£30).

Like Rewa, **Surama Ecolodge** (suramaecolodge.com/) is Amerindian-owned and run and has led the way in community tourism in Guyana. It's surrounded by savannah, mountains and forest, so a large range of experiences are on offer. The Surama Sampler tour with three nights, full board, accommodation and guiding is from US\$450 (£343.)

The **Karanambu Lodge** (karanambustrustandlodge.org) is a former cattle ranch set on the savannah lands of the North Rupununi area. Known for its giant river otters, the varied habitats result in good sightings of giant anteaters and incredible birdwatching. Doubles from \$US260 (£199).

Atta Rainforest Lodge (attarainforestlodge.com/) is set near the base of the Iwokrama Canopy Walkway and gives the opportunity to explore the walkway at all hours. A good spot for keen birders, it's also possible to visit a cock-of-the-rock lek from here. Doubles from £188.

Food & drink

Guyanese cuisine is a mix of Caribbean, Amerindian, Chinese and a huge range of other influences. The national dish is **pepperpot**, an Amerindian stew made with meat and cassareep, an extract of cassava. The dish will last indefinitely if boiled up. **Cassava** has become a staple ingredient, and is turned into *farine*, a grain eaten on its own or made into



TOP TIP

Be prepared for a digital detox! Communications are limited in the interior.

different types of bread and snacks. Rum is the liquor of choice; Guyana produces some of the best in the world. The local beer is **Banks**.

Further reading & information

Guyana (Bradt Travel Guides, 2018)
Wild Coast: Travels on South America's Untamed Edge (Profile Books, 2012), by John Gimlette
guyanatourism.com

More online

Visit www.wanderlust.co.uk/204

Planning guides

Guyana Travel Guide

Archive article

- Guyana: Instant Expert – issue 166
- 7 things you must do in Guyana – online

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CANADA

WITH A CONSCIENCE

Flight Centre shares how best to experience Canada's natural beauty and how you can travel responsibly too...



As one of the most beautiful and diverse destinations to be found, Canada proves a fitting example of the importance of responsible travel where even the simplest of changes to our travel choices can have a positive impact in the protection of its natural wonders. This is where **Flight Centre** can help. The local expertise of its globe-trotting team sets it apart from many other tour operators: they have the knowledge you need to create an eco-friendly itinerary, and make booking a breeze. Here, six Flight Centre experts reveal their top tips for responsible travel...

Jade Albert



Countries visited: 10

Favourite city:

Halifax

Top tip:

Canada is simply incredible and with its renowned natural beauty, it's small wonder that there is such a strong focus on sustainability.

Foodies should visit Vancouver in British Columbia where many restaurants and vendors participate in the 100-Mile Diet; sourcing their product from within a 100-mile radius, boosting their local economy, reducing the carbon footprint and helping put Vancouver on the map as one of the best gastronomical destinations on the planet.

If you're looking for an unforgettable and eco-friendly accommodation, check out the Fogo Island Inn in Newfoundland. This award-winning property invests 100% of its operating surplus into the local community and runs loads of sustainability initiatives too, so you can become one with nature while enjoying five-star luxury. Hot tub anyone?

Mahul Patel



Countries visited: 17

Favourite city:

Vancouver

Top tip:

I love Vancouver. Not only does it boast the smallest carbon footprint of any North American city but it also has an action plan to become the world's 'Greenest

City' in 2020 and has an abundance of eco-friendly hotels, attractions and tours.

I would recommend staying at The Fairmont Waterfront for its views and Ocean Wise-certified restaurant, ARC. It partners with local fishermen to ensure the catch is sustainably sourced and has its own rooftop garden so all the herbs are freshly picked.

I'd also suggest taking an Eagle Wing tour for whale-watching. Based in Victoria, it's the first 100% carbon neutral whale tour operator in Canada, as its catamarans reduce underwater sound and shore erosion. It's an incredible way to experience these amazing animals without harming their habitat.

Emily Cater



Countries visited: 38

Favourite city:

Toronto

Top tip:

On a recent holiday to Toronto, I was really impressed with how eco-conscious and green the city is becoming, particularly some of the local businesses and hospitality.

During my trip, I stayed at the Westin Harbour Castle Hotel and loved its rooftop garden where they grow herbs and vegetables and even produce honey. You've just got to try its gourmet dinner feast prepared by chef Corbin Tomaszewski - everything is seasonal, locally-sourced and just delicious, with a real sense of farm-to-table dining.



Alexandra Cronin



Countries visited: 23

Favourite city:

Vancouver

Top tip:

Chugging into Jasper on the *Rocky Mountaineer* from Vancouver is a proper Canadian experience. Not only will you sample delicious dishes onboard, like local sockeye salmon, but the glass dome of the train's GoldLeaf Service also afford the best views of the town and its encircling peaks.

Located at the start of the Icefields Parkway, Jasper is one of my favourite places for seeing wildlife, especially around the majestic Maligne Lake. Grab yourself a packed lunch and drive 45 minutes south-east to the biggest natural lake in the Canadian Rockies, idyllic, rain or shine. It snowed when I went, but I still spotted three black bears during the drive, together with elk, chipmunks and more.

Hannah Littlewood



Countries visited: 36

Favourite city:

Kelowna

Top tip:

Canada is all about the great outdoors, and in the summer it's perfect for getting out on the water on a canoe or paddleboard adventure. If you like to get off the beaten track, head to Revelstoke; home to the Columbia Mountains and the glistening Lake Revelstoke this is a real water sports haven.

If bald eagle-spotting, beautiful waterfalls and hidden coves don't get your adrenaline pumping then challenge yourself to white-water rafting and take on the rapids of the Illecillewaet River. To relax, pack a picnic and go to Williamson Lake for a leisurely afternoon and a dip in the warmest waters in the area.

Sarah Howland



Countries visited: 12

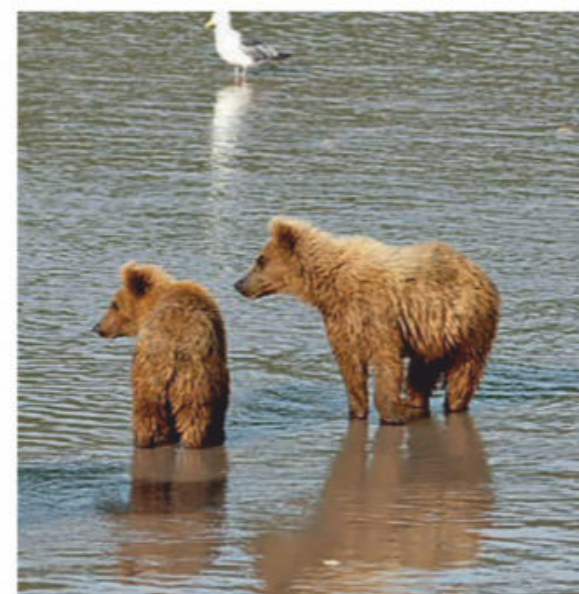
Favourite city:

Vancouver

Top tip:

I've stayed at a few hotels in Canada, but The Fairmont Royal York in Toronto is my favourite as it was one of the first to get its own beehive and produce its own honey, setting a trend throughout the Fairmont hotel chain.

I am also lucky enough to have been on the *Rocky Mountaineer*, which encourages a lower impact than travelling by car, to help protect the environment. They also work closely with the Fairmont - luxury done sensibly.



SEE CANADA WITH FLIGHT CENTRE

All of these tips come from Flight Centre's expert staff, who are based everywhere from Head Office to high-street stores all over the world. Armed with their insider knowledge and excellent contacts, they can tailor-make your perfect holiday to Canada, combining its best cities and natural wonders.

PLAN YOUR DREAM HOLIDAY

You too can travel on the *Rocky Mountaineer* with Flight Centre's 9-day itinerary, priced from £3,135 per person. This includes direct flights with WestJet, transfers, hand-picked accommodation, a *Journey through the Clouds* in SilverLeaf Service and tours.

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CANADA FOR GLOWING HEARTS

WESTJET





G O I N G

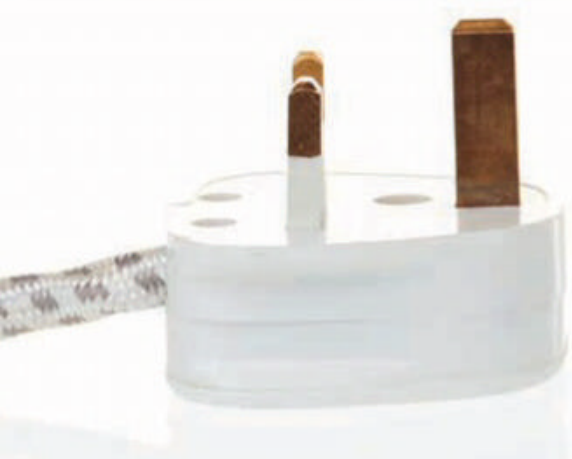
From packing tips before you go to steps you can take on your return home, here are some inspirational ideas to help make your travels more responsible

Costa classic
The Arenal Volcano is just one highlight to find in celebrated eco-destination Costa Rica

GREEN

BEFORE YOU GO

There's plenty you can do to help offset the effects of your travel before you even leave the house – from reducing energy waste in your home to what to pack and where you choose to go...



Eco-proof your home

Make sure your home isn't wasting energy while you're away. Unplug all your electronics – just not your fridge or freezer – or ensure switches are off. You can also turn down the thermostat as there's no point keeping the temperature high while you're not around. If you have a newspaper or magazine delivered to your house, why not suspend the service for the time you're away to save on paper and delivery?

Finally, make sure you've recycled everything. If you're packing new toiletries or medication, leave any packaging at home. Land waste in foreign countries can be problematic so it's best to reduce the amount of waste you produce abroad. It may not be as easy to recycle overseas as it is in the UK and you don't want to add to a landfill.

TOP TIP
It may not save a huge amount but rather than printing your airline ticket, why not go paper-free and use the boarding pass on your phone?

Choose an eco-friendly destination

When planning your journey let your conscience be your guide; choose somewhere with a green ethos. Do your research. Is there a public transport system, a cycle network, local food markets or volunteer programmes? There are an increasing number of destinations working to become more eco-friendly.

In 2016, France became the first country in the world to announce a total ban on the manufacture and sale of single-use plastic cups, cutlery, plates and takeaway boxes by 2020. Finland's 'Be more like a Finn' campaign and New Zealand's 'Tiaki Promise'

both encourage visitors to make a pledge to respect the country's nature, culture and inhabitants during their stay. Meanwhile, Iceland's 'Kranavatn Challenge' gave the country's tap water a luxury branding to give people an incentive to save on plastic bottled water and drink running water instead.


Unfortunately, though, the more a destination is promoted, the more people tend to flock to it. In order to avoid overburdening popular places, try to buck the trend or travel out of season.

Pack light

The heavier planes and trains are, the more fuel they use, so why not lend a helping hand by only taking what's necessary. When laying out your clothes, think about how you can adapt outfits to wear again. Take a reusable water bottle and coffee cup, as well as recyclable shopping bags.

Packing your toiletry bag is key, too. Reduce plastic waste by taking a bamboo toothbrush. Decant products such as shampoo and conditioner into reusable bottles to save on plastic or – even better – use a shampoo bar. If you do have to take liquids in plastic bottles, take them home afterwards to reuse. Try to ensure all your products are biodegradable and check your sunscreen is reef safe so you're not polluting the environment.





Hitting the eco-heights
Make the ascent to the Tiger's Nest Monastery in carbon-negative Bhutan; (below) kayaking in Copenhagen

5 eco-friendly destinations

1 Costa Rica

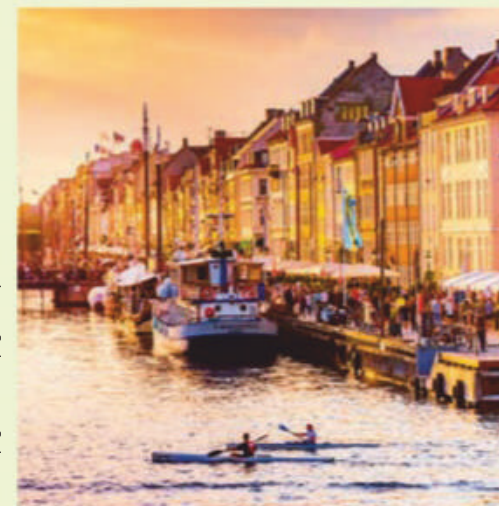
Named a United Nations Champion of the Earth in 2019 – one of the highest environmental honours – Costa Rica is also set to become the world's first plastic-free and carbon-neutral country by 2021. Plans include banning plastics and fossil fuels, using renewable energy and growing the country's protected areas. As one of the most biodiverse places on earth, it's a must-visit.

2 Bhutan

This small nation on the eastern edge of the Himalayas was the world's first carbon-negative country. While it produces 1.5m tonnes of carbon every year, this is absorbed by planting trees (Bhutan is 72% woodland) and using hydroelectric power and electric vehicles. Visit for its monasteries, ancient traditions and cuisine, but stay for its mountains, forests and fresh air (see p28).

3 Copenhagen

This Danish city has set itself the ambitious target of becoming the world's first carbon-neutral capital by 2025. It plans to do this by shifting to renewable energy and producing enough green power to offset its remaining emissions. Take in the Nordhavn neighbourhood's green design and architecture or sample ►



Previous page: AWL This page: Alamy; Shutterstock; AWL; Samsonite

◀ some of the city's famous gastronomical delights by eating local and organic food.

4 Iceland

One of the greenest countries in the world, Iceland has an Environmental Performance Index of 78.6. Over 99% of its electricity production and 80% of its energy production is generated from geothermal and hydropower. As well as a chance to see the northern lights, Iceland boasts geothermal baths,

unspoiled mountains and glaciers, clear waters and abundant wildlife.

5 Gothenburg

As the hometown of Swedish climate change campaigner Greta Thunberg, it may not be a big surprise that Gothenburg is hailed by the Global Destination Sustainability Index as the most sustainable city in the world. Explore its urban parkland or go for a ride on its extensive cycle network to get to know this emerging west coast destination.



Glowing green

The northern lights – and Mount Kirkjufell – aren't the only reason to visit Iceland; (above) Gothenburg City Hall



GETTING THERE & AROUND

While we all know that flying has a huge impact on the environment, it's not always possible to avoid. Do try other methods of transportation, but if you must fly, there are ways to reduce your carbon footprint.

Flying

If you're travelling by plane, spend a little more money and fly direct. Taking off and landing actually uses more fuel than being in the air. It may be more expensive, but it's quicker, easier – and just think of your carbon footprint! Many airlines now offer the option to offset your CO2 emissions during booking or at the airport. To learn about carbon offsetting, see p166.

Save on the plane

There's plenty that air passengers can do to help while they're on board, too. If you want to reduce plastic waste, say no to headphones and blankets in plastic wrapping, bring your own reusable bottle and possibly even a bamboo spork. If you're on a shorter flight, you could save money and take your own food.

TOP TIP

If you're flying, why not choose an IATA (International Air Transport Association) member airline that offers carbon offset programmes.



5 airlines going green

A growing number of airlines are looking to make their services greener, from plastic on board to the fuel they use.

1 Hi Fly

The Portuguese charter airline has completed its first plastic-free flight trial. It aims to be the first plastic-free airline at the end of this year.

2 Norwegian

The airline pledged to become climate-neutral by 2050. It has introduced the option for customers to offset their carbon footprint during booking and have upcycled old uniforms to sell as sustainable products such as toiletry bags.

3 Scandinavian Airlines

In November, SAS announced that its new food packaging design will save 51,000kg of plastic a year. Passengers are also able to opt to buy biofuel instead of conventional fuel when booking.

4 easyJet

The no-frills airline has announced that it is operating net-zero carbon flights across its whole network by offsetting the carbon emission from the fuel of every flight.

5 Emirates

The airline is not only significantly reducing its greenhouse gas emissions across its food manufacturing service, but it is also reviewing how it approaches plastic waste. ►



Alternative travel

◀ If you're choosing an alternative method of travel to flying, there is still lots to consider. It's not just a question of opting for a train or a boat; other things to look at include the type of engine, the number of passengers, the journey duration, the speed and fuel type.

Train

Trains may be slower, but they could save you money and lower your carbon footprint, especially if you choose an electric or even hydro-powered train instead of a diesel one (again do your research – some slower trains may be more energy-efficient). A trip from London to Ljubljana, Slovenia, emits 42kg per passenger by train compared to approximately 268kg by plane according to EcoPassenger, who operate an online calculator that compares the impact of different transport options.

Not only do trains emit less carbon, but they often carry more people making them even more efficient when it comes to energy-saving. Plus, if you travel by train, you get to see a country;



indeed, the train journey can be an experience in itself. Book the *Eastern & Oriental Express*, for example, a slow train that travels through South-East Asia, and you can sit back, relax and not only enjoy the view, but also a taste of fine dining and elegant comfort.

Boat

Travelling by boat isn't necessarily greener: cruise ships can emit up to three times more carbon emissions than aeroplanes. However, you could sail emission-free, board an electric boat or take a kayaking holiday. Boats may take longer and can cost more than a flight, but they offer a different perspective.

Public transport

Using public transport is not only much more eco-friendly than driving (as there's more people travelling per gallon of fuel), it's also a great way to see a country – whether that's journeying across a continent by bus or using a hop-on/hop-off service in a city to see the sights. Of course, if the transport happens to be electric or uses alternative fuel, then that's one step better.

Walk or rent a bike

The best way to avoid a carbon footprint is to make real footprints! Why not explore your chosen destination on foot or by bike. You'll discover new routes and get to take in more of your surroundings, and you'll feel all the better for it as you'll be breathing in fresh air and enjoying the exercise. Plus, if you rent a bike, you'll save some money!

Rent a hybrid or electric car

If you do want to drive, try renting a hybrid or electric car. Hire companies such as Avis and Budget have fuel-efficient options and some hotels offer accommodation discounts if you're travelling in an electric car. There are also things you can do while driving to save on fuel. Avoid quick stops and starts, make sure your tyres are always inflated to the correct amount, don't idle on the roads and keep to the speed limit. If you're travelling long distances make sure to keep your load light and save on fuel.

Fast solutions

(clockwise from this)
A *shinkansen* bullet train powers past Mount Fuji;
Hurtigruten's hybrid-powered *MS Roald Amundsen*; cycling Cuba



TOP TIP
Save money on
hotels by travelling
cross country by
campervan or
use a liftshare
service like
BlaBlaCar to get to
your destination
more cheaply.

5 alternative ways to get around

1 Take a river cruise

Wendy Wu Tours' new eco-friendly vessel, *Victoria Mekong*, is now offering four new group tours and two private tours through Cambodia and Vietnam by river cruise. The boat boasts an advanced water purification system, uses solar power to heat water and aims to reduce its plastic usage.

2 Travel by ferry

Ferries are generally a greener option than flying. Norway will see five new electric passenger ferries hit the water in 2021. The new vessels being launched by Boreal Sjø will run between Oslo City Hall and the Oslofjord islands.

3 Ride in an electric safari car

At Ol Pejeta Bush Camp in Kenya's Ol Pejeta Conservancy, Asilia is one of the first safari operators to launch an electric car safari. Not only is the vehicle more quiet and steady, it also emits less pollution into the park than a typical safari jeep, for a much more sustainable wildlife experience.

4 Journey by Eurail

Travelling by train already cuts carbon emissions, so if you buy a Eurail Pass, an all-in-one rail ticket that gives flexible access to most trains across Europe, you'll be making one of the greenest choices. The average CO2 emission on a train trip is about three times less per person than travelling by car and four times less than by plane.

5 Board a green cruise ship

Hurtigruten's *MS Roald Amundsen* has been dubbed the world's greenest cruise ship. The combination of diesel and electric motors allows it to sail purely on battery power in sensitive areas with much less noise and lower emissions. MSC Cruises recently announced it will be building two new ships powered by Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG). ►

AWL: Claire Boobyer

DURING YOUR STAY

◀ Sleep green

If you don't want to spend money on a hotel, you could choose instead to camp under the stars or stay with a friend – after all, the best way to see a country is with a local.

But if you must use a hotel – as is often the reality of the situation – then try to select accommodation with third-party certification. Do some research into their environmental policies. What goods and services do they use? Do they have good waste management? Don't overlook small hotels. Often they are the more eco-friendly choice.

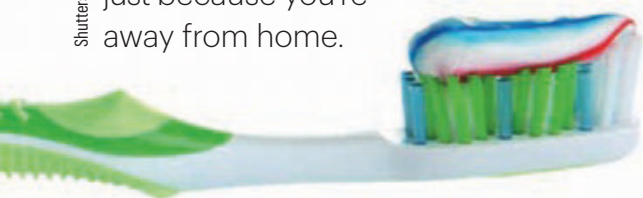
Eat local

By eating local or organic food you are reducing your carbon emissions as your food doesn't have to travel far. It also means you're supporting local farmers and benefitting the local economy. Order à la carte instead of buffet to avoid food waste. Research restaurants before you dine out to ensure an eco-friendly menu.

At the hotel

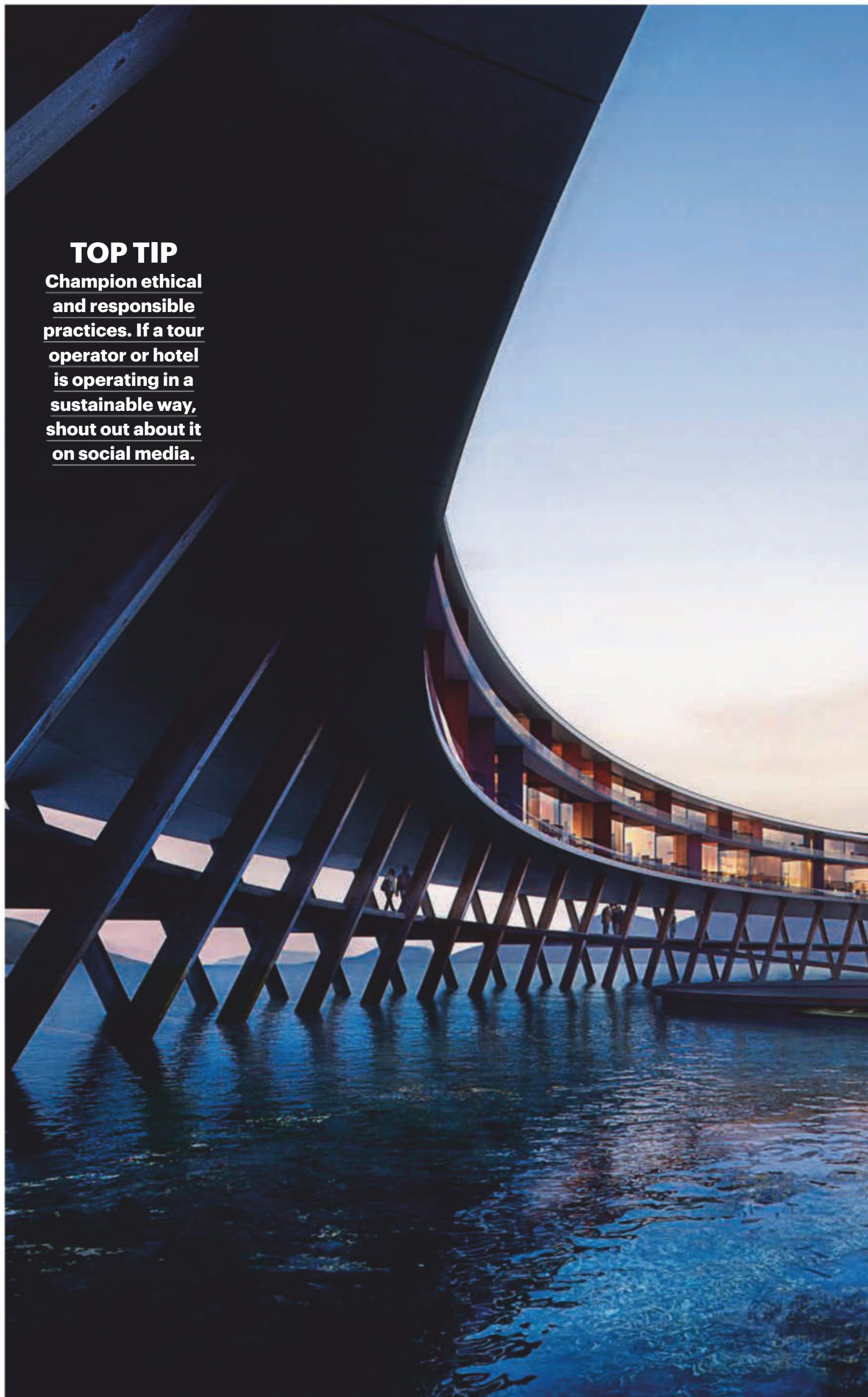
There are also steps you can take yourself while staying at a hotel to reduce your impact on the environment. Keep your showers short, turn off the tap while brushing your teeth and don't use the hotel's laundry and cleaning services to save on water. Turn off the TV, lights and air conditioning when you leave the room and reuse your linen and towels. Your habits shouldn't change just because you're away from home.

Shutterstock: Snobhetta Plompmoza; Max Seigal Photography



TOP TIP

Champion ethical and responsible practices. If a tour operator or hotel is operating in a sustainable way, shout out about it on social media.



Positive energy
The building of Svart involved mixing modern design and green concepts



5 eco-friendly hotels

1 Svart Norway

Located just above the Arctic Circle, Svart will be the world's first energy-positive hotel when it opens to guests in 2021. The circular property has a 360-degree view of the Svartisen glacier, and aims to reduce its yearly energy consumption by 85% compared to other modern hotels, by using solar energy. svart.com

2 Jetwing Surf Sri Lanka

Experience a piece of eco-luxury on the beaches of Arugam Bay on Sri Lanka's south-eastern coast. The hotel's construction and design has been inspired by nature with structures made from wood, palm leaves and dried iluk grass, built to create as little disturbance to the surrounding vegetation as possible. Where feasible, natural ventilation and lighting is used and waste water is biologically treated to protect the natural habitat. jetwinghotels.com

3 Garonga Safari Camp South Africa

Get back to nature in more ways than one at this luxury tented camp in the Makalai Conservancy. The camp does everything it can to reduce its carbon footprint including using solar panels for 30% of its energy consumption. The property also has a heater pump system to reduce electrical power by 80%, and a bio-gas system to turn food and natural waste into natural gas to cook with. Used water is filtered and cleaned so it can be fed back into the camp's waterhole for the animals. garonga.com

4 El Nido Resorts Philippines

The four resorts in Palawan live by a green ethos, which includes buying their products and employing staff locally, giving guests the opportunities to experience nature and the area's culture, and building new sustainability programmes every year. As well as green design and architecture, the resorts offer sustainable menus and plenty of nature-based activities in their verdant environment. elnidoresorts.com

5 Soneva Kiri Thailand

Soneva is committed to sustainability across all its resorts, but at Soneva Kiri it has developed a Carbon Calculator to monitor the full footprint of its operations; from energy consumption to freight, food, paper, waste and water. soneva.com ►



Jetwing jewels
(clockwise from this)
Jetwing Lagoon's verdant exterior; suite sensations at Jetwing Blue; lounge in Jetwing Yala's lobby; and bathroom bliss at Jetwing Lake.



Simply SUSTAINABLE

How to make sure your hotel is as environmentally friendly as possible

With the pressures of global warming, we're all looking for ways we can cut our carbon footprint and travel more responsibly. The decision of where to stay during your trip is a big factor so it's good to know hotels – like **Jetwing Hotels** in Sri Lanka – are rising to the challenge and that there's plenty you can do to help too. Consider these aspects of your hotel...

SINGLE-USE PLASTICS

It's not only good practice to bring your own re-usable bottle on adventures but just as important is to choose a hotel that takes steps to reduce its plastic waste and encourage reusable alternatives. This could take the shape of providing in-room glass water bottles and glass amenity containers

(Jetwing's onsite bottling plants clean and reuse these across its family of hotels); replacing plastic with cane, reed and other eco-materials; and sourcing local produce, doing away with packaging from imported goods and helping local community businesses too.

RENEWABLE ENERGY

It's worth researching just how green your accommodation is, namely whether they try to mitigate the release of global warming gases by using renewable sources and energy



efficient processes. Jetwing's Sri Lankan properties utilise two major sources of renewable energy; biomass and solar. Biomass sees hot water boilers fuelled by sustainably harvested cinnamon wood that, due to its fast cropping cycle, can rapidly sequester the carbon emitted.

There are also solar solutions that have been implemented at the Jetwing Blue, Jetwing Lagoon, Jetwing Yala and Jetwing Lake that, together with other initiatives, mean 60% of the group's total energy requirement is met by renewable energy. A very sunny state of affairs to be sure.

WATER

Freshwater is precious. Reusing towels, closing taps and taking showers are all mindful measures a guest can take but is your hotel making water conservation a priority too? This starts from flow rate fittings and

rainwater harvesting methods, through to onsite treatment plants; something that Jetwing is tackling by reusing any wastewater for other on-site purposes. Jetwing Yala, situated in the arid zone of Sri Lanka, goes one step further in its water management, operating a reverse osmosis plant to desalinate salt water.

Sustainable strides have played an important part in Jetwing's expansion from the six-roomed Blue Oceanic Beach Hotel – today's Jetwing Blue – to an island-wide family of over 40 properties. Energy, carbon, water and waste are all areas to consider when choosing a responsible hotel, so pick one that offers a great stay but is also invested in doing good for the future too.





Be an ethical consumer

◀ Your choices about *who* you travel with are often as important as *how* you travel. Do your research and pick ethical tour operators who are also working to protect the planet; you want to be travelling with companies who respect people and nature. Smaller tours have less impact on the environment. Where possible use local and choose your tours wisely. Are they authentic experiences? Support local communities and sustainable tourism. For some of our favourite community-based trips in 2020, see p36.

TOP TIP
If you want to buy souvenirs to support local communities make sure you're buying sustainable products. Watch out for rare wood, animal horn and coral.

5 eco-friendly tour companies

1 Steppes Travel

As well as ensuring they are carbon balanced, Steppes Travel run the *Steppes Fund for Change*: book any trip and £25 of your money goes towards funding women's empowerment and wildlife conservation programmes, with another £25 going towards a UK tree planting scheme and a nuclear fusion researcher at Oxford University. steppestravel.com

2 G Adventures

G Adventures set up the *Planeterra Foundation* in 2003 to help the communities affected by the social and environmental impacts of tourism by empowering them to develop and conserve their culture. gadventures.co.uk

3 Responsible Travel

Since 2001 Responsible Travel has been an agency representing eco-friendly tours and trips that focus on local culture and people, independent business and wildlife conservation. The organisation campaigns for positive change through its 'give back' programme. responsibletravel.com

4 Intrepid Travel

Carbon neutral since 2010, Intrepid was not only the first global tour operator to end elephant rides, but with the not-for-profit *Intrepid Foundation*, they're now also investing, among other things, into a project in Tasmania, Australia to help restore kelp forests. intrepidtravel.com

5 Audley Travel

Audley Travel work closely with local communities to ensure responsible travel is at the heart of what they do. The operator has an animal welfare and sustainability policy; its charity of the year for 2020-21 is Plastic Oceans UK. audleytravel.com ►

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Wanderlust

Take care of the environment

◀ If you want to visit pristine beaches, breathe in fresh mountain air and wander through a picturesque town with clean streets, you need to care and respect for the environments you're travelling to and through.

Don't litter – even better, pick up litter if you see it. If nature calls, do your business responsibly. Don't leave toilet paper. Protect natural habitats by watching where you walk and sticking to paths. Instead of dune bashing on a four-wheel-drive trip, take an ethical camel trek to explore the desert. And when diving, protect the reefs by tucking in your equipment so you don't touch or damage the coral.

Get back to nature

In order to protect the environment, we also have to protect its inhabitants. Animals play an important part in keeping

ecosystems healthy and so we need to play our part in safeguarding their future. Wildlife trips can be life-changing experiences, but do your research and choose companies carefully. Don't ride elephants or pet lions and stay away from dolphin tours that lure the animals towards boats with food. Act responsibly by not feeding wild animals and keeping your distance.

There are a number of organisations working to promote animal-friendly travel. PETA (the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) has launched awards to celebrate businesses meeting the demand for vegan and animal-friendly travel products. Ryanair won the 2019 Best In-Flight Meal for its vegan lasagne, while Virgin Trains got the award for Best Trainline for Vegan Food. There is a growing trend for meat-free, plant-based food.

TOP TIP

Clean your boots! Transporting seeds and insect eggs to different locations could lead to invasive species.



Gorillas in the mist
A mountain gorilla observes tourists in the forest

5 sustainable wildlife experiences

1 Gorilla tracking in Rwanda and Uganda

There are only around 1,000 gorillas left in the wild but, thanks to eco-tourism, numbers are on the rise. The price of visiting is high, and rules are strict, but you'll not only be experiencing a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, you'll be helping protect the gorillas and support local communities too.

2 Take a small boat to the Galápagos

While too much tourism on fragile ecosystems such as the Galápagos can have a negative impact, the funds generated are also used for conservation in the area. The Galápagos Island NP have strict guidelines to follow to protect the islands' unique flora and fauna, but small boat trips are a great way to see the wildlife, such as the giant tortoises, and help make a difference.

3 See tigers in India

Areas with the highest density of tigers in India is also where eco-tourism thrives. While this does not mean tourism is directly beneficial for tigers, the funds raised from environmentally conscious visitors are having a positive impact by helping protect tigers from poachers. Try Bandhavgarh National Park and Kanha NP in Madhya Pradesh.

4 Whale-watching in Iceland

Iceland may not have banned whale hunting yet, but the way forward is to support whale-watching trips in the country, making them more valuable alive than dead. Book with tour operators who follow strict guidelines – don't get too close or make too much noise. Other places to whale-watch include the Azores and New Zealand.

5 See polar bears on an Arctic cruise

Seeing a polar bear in its natural environment can make you understand the importance of conserving them and this is increasingly important as the ice continues to melt and the polar bear's habitat is encroached upon. ►

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GETTING HOME

◀ Your eco-journey doesn't come to an end when you return home after a trip. As well as your usual green lifestyle, there are actions you can take to protect the planet. Firstly, don't leave any waste such as half empty toiletry products and used batteries when

you're packing to go home. It will most likely be thrown out and end up in landfill. Rather take waste home and recycle it if possible. Why not donate to a tree planting scheme or get involved yourself? Most importantly, you can retrospectively offset your carbon

footprint. See p166 on how to calculate your emissions and what to do to neutralise the damage. And finally, you can donate to grassroots organisations working to protect the communities you visit and minimise the impact visitors have on places. ▶

TOP TIP
While you can recycle waste, unwanted clothes can be donated before you leave or on your return.



Tree planting
Donate to a tree planting scheme or get involved yourself to help minimise the impact of your travels

Natural high

A tourist slows down to take in a view in the Scottish Highlands



TAKE THE SLOWER ROUTE

◀ If you don't want to feel guilty about your travels, there are many things you can do. Small choices make a big difference. But perhaps the most important one is to go slow.

Instead of rushing your journey, take a longer trip. See more of the country. Turn off your digital devices, spend more time outdoors, get back to nature, breathe in the fresh air. Enjoy the planet you're trying to protect. And if you spend

more time planning and finding people and places with green practices, you'll have an even better experience, not only because those places will be better preserved for longer, but because you'll know you've done everything in your power to prevent further damage.

According to Skyscanner's Global Travel Trends 2020 report, Premium Economy bookings on long-haul flights were up 8% and one out of

TOP TIP
Make the time to get involved in local activities.
Join an arts or gardening club, go to a concert. Do what the locals do to learn more about the place and people.

five customers chose their 'Greener Choice' label for more sustainable flight options, showing the trend within the industry is for slower, longer, greener travel.

Over the last quarter-century, the Wanderlust team have consistently found that travellers want to make a real difference – and often, with a small amount of research, they really can. After all, there's no need to let your journey cost the earth. 🌱

Incredible & ethical WILDLIFE EXPERIENCES

Animal antics
(clockwise from this)
Meet the residents of the
Galápagos; spot sloths in
Costa Rica; walk with
elephants in Cambodia



From walking with elephants to paddling with penguins, these sustainable wildlife adventures will take you closer to the action...

Wildlife encounters can be both memorable and humbling, but considering the sustainability of a trip has become increasingly important. From spying sloths in the rainforest to relaxing on sea lion-strewn beaches, **Holiday Architects** reveal three of their most responsible wildlife tours...

1 Hop between islands

Blue-footed boobies and tortoises hog the land while sharks, sea lions and penguins fill the sea: the Galápagos Island's scale and diversity of wildlife is unrivalled. And due to ongoing protection measures, you're bound to see a mix of animals.

Hop from island to island to study their varied topography and inhabitants, while learning about the many conservation projects in place to protect them. Due to only ever having had positive interactions with

humans, the wildlife here is very tame and you'll be astonished by their fearlessness of people.

2 Walk with giants

Visit Cambodia's Elephant Valley to see ten rescued ellies living out their retirement. A guide will lead you through 6.5 sq km of lime-green forest, where the gentle giants roam, bathe and socialise. And you'll be safe in the knowledge that you're giving something back while you watch.

The Elephant Valley Project makes huge efforts to not just protect the rescued elephants in their care, but also those still surviving in the wild. They also offer support to the locals and



have so far helped over 2,000 people with stable jobs and healthcare. Your visit ensures the continuation of this support.

3 Laze with sloths

Over 26% of Costa Rica is made up of protected areas with more than 5% of the existing biodiversity in the world calling Costa Rica home, so there's plenty of wildlife on display here.

Start with the country's most laid-back residents – sloths. Spot the slow-moving creatures while paddling a kayak through the mangrove forests of Manuel Antonio NP, or while hiking

through Arenal Rainforest. Look out for the caiman, turtles and squirrel monkeys that can also be found in Arenal Rainforest.

A guide can take you on the most animal-rich route, teaching you about the surrounding endemic flora and fauna as you pass it.

Whichever of these trips you choose, you can be sure that it will be a responsible one.

THE WILDLIFE EXPERTS

Holiday Architects has been sending people to far-flung places since 2010. Now with 29 destinations – each with its own experts and website – and with two *Wanderlust Reader Travel* awards, you can trust HA with your wildlife trip. Its expert team will get to know you and your holiday wishes, before designing the perfect itinerary.





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Bountiful BELIZE



Immerse yourself in unspoilt landscapes, an abundance of wildlife and some truly sustainable eco-lodge escapes in Belize...

Travelling responsibly is easy in Belize, due to the country's goal to become a world leader in sustainable tourism. With eco-lodges scattered across the pristine rainforest and along the unspoilt Caribbean coast, the highest population of jaguars on the planet and a whopping 28% of territory set aside to ensure the preservation of the flora and fauna, you're in for a wild and responsible adventure. Here's

how to best enjoy all that bountiful Belize has to offer...

ON THE PROWL

Head to south-central Belize to hike through over 500 sq km of lush, green rainforest that makes up the Cocksomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary. Set up in 1990, this is the world's first wilderness sanctuary for jaguars. And with Belize boasting the biggest population of the big cats on the planet,

you'll be in the best possible place to spot them.

Take it slow on the nature trail, not just to increase your chances of seeing jaguar, but also for the opportunity to get an eyeful of the puma, ocelot, tapir and over 300 types of tropical birds that also call this neck of the woods home. At the end of the guided tour, cool off by plunging into one of the many emerald waterfalls splashed through the rainforest.

BENEATH THE SURFACE

Belize's blue worlds are just as well cared for as its green ones: strict protection plans are in place and single-use plastics are being phased out to ensure the marine life of the aquamarine waters can thrive now and in the future. And it's working. The Belize Barrier Reef, for example, has been removed from the list of threatened World Heritage Sites, thanks to the island's positive climate action. See the underwater haven for yourself by donning a snorkel mask and looking down at myriad fish, seahorses, turtles and even the odd manatee and nurse shark.

Another of the country's top snorkelling spots is Caye Caulker. So clear are the iridescent waters surrounding this island off the coast of Belize that you don't even need to get your hair wet to see the marine life here. Float across the surface to see sharks, stingrays, turtles and eels less than two metres beneath you.

Just south of Caye Caulker lies Belize's holy grail of diving – the Blue Hole. At 300 metres wide and 125 metres deep, this pool of azure water can be seen from space, and is unsurprisingly pockmarked with many top diving and snorkelling spots. A rainbow of tropical fish



can be seen by snorkelling around the shallow edges, while diving in deeper allows you to swim between giant limestone stalactites while spying reef, nurse and blacktip sharks alongside the colourful and alien-like invertebrate life.

A BIRDER'S PARADISE

It's not just Belize's waters that are brimming with life, its skies are too, with over 500 species of birds flying over the country. One of the best places to spot them is in the Cayo District's Mountain Pine Ridge Forest Reserve. Trek past the rolling, granite hillsides, see trickling waterfalls, breathe in the scent of pine and keep your eyes to the skies to spy feathered treasures. Rare sights to look out for include the orange-breasted falcon and the impressive king vulture.

There's more adventure to be had here: place your binoculars to one side to admire the orchids



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and ferns on the forest floors, enter the 20m mouth of the Rio Frio Cave or to swim at the base of the 45m Big Rock Falls.

ANCIENT EXPLORER

As well as its wildlife, Belize is also making fierce efforts to protect its history-rich temples, palaces and pyramids, left strewn across the country by the Mayan civilisation. Make a beeline for the west of Belize, where it doesn't take too much

of an imagination to see how these vast structures were once home to some of the two million people of the Mayan empire.

Climb the western edge of the Mayan Mountains to gaze on the almost perfectly preserved steps of Caracol – the largest man-made monument in Belize. The nearby Xunantunich, or 'Stone Woman' is also worth exploring and offers great views of the sun-bleached pyramid of El Castillo. Had enough of hiking? Why not explore the ruins on horseback?

However you spend your time in Belize, you're bound to return home with memories that will stay with you for a long time, and the reassuring feeling that Belize will remain a protected, wild haven for even longer.



belize





NORTHERN

Volcanoes, whales, the northern lights and few tourists. Driving the new Arctic

ICELAND

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHS **GRAEME GREEN**

DELIGHTS

Coast Way in Iceland's remote north is the ideal antidote to its 'busy' south



Hooves thundered along the beach, kicking up a storm of black sand. Clinging tightly to the reins, I looked up as a squadron of pink-footed geese flew over northern Iceland's Skagafjörður Bay. Across the ocean, breaks in the cloud threw patches of sunlight onto the long, curved back of Tindastóll mountain in the distance.

"Icelanders are very proud of their horses," my guide, Johanna Dirks, interjected as we slowed the pace of our horses. "When the Vikings came from Norway, they could only conquer Iceland because they brought their strongest horses. There are only these horses in Iceland and they're very strong."

Riding an Icelandic horse along a black sand beach is about as Icelandic an experience as you can get, short of the northern lights appearing and Björk providing a live soundtrack. But this was also – one hairy moment aside – one of the most peaceful and memorable experiences I've

had on a horse, not least because of the wild setting and the absence of any other people.

Heading north

I'd come to Iceland to drive the new Arctic Coast Way and find the north's remote landscapes. The route, which launched in June last year, runs between Hvammstangi on the north-west coast to Bakkafjörður in the even quieter, sparsely populated north-east. Like Ireland's Wild Atlantic Way and Scotland's North Coast 500, it was created to shine a light on lesser-known, less-visited parts of the country.

Iceland has around 350,000 inhabitants (and 460,000 sheep), but receives over two million tourists each year. Most of that's concentrated around Reykjavik, the Golden Circle and the south-west, which can mean overcrowding and heavy traffic. But there's plenty of space to explore along the Arctic Coast Way's 900km of coastal roads, as you loop around rugged peninsulas close to the Arctic Circle, taking in fishing villages, farmland, mountains, bizarre rock formations, quirky ►

'Riding an Icelandic horse along a black sand beach is about as Icelandic an experience you can get'

ICELAND

◀ lighthouses and colourful churches. For me, it was a chance to get far away from crowds, to experience some of Iceland's timeless, otherworldly locations that I'd never visited before and hopefully to see the northern lights and a few whales along the Way, nature allowing.

I'd picked up a car from Keflavík International Airport, near Reykjavík, and headed three hours north to the fjord-side town of Hvammstangi, the gateway to the Arctic Coast Way. The next morning, I started the jagged route eastwards by heading up the Vatnsnes peninsula, stopping to photograph Skarðsviti lighthouse and to hike along the coast at Svalbard beach and Illugastaðir, where harbour seals peered back at me from the waves. The gravel road cut through ragged, weather-beaten landscapes, marsh and moorland littered with craggy volcanic rocks.

"Iceland's not just about the sights. It's about the elements," guesthouse owner Gisli Egill Hrafnsson told me in Blönduós. I felt the full force of these elements driving around Skagi peninsula the next day. Horses braced against the wind and lashing rain. Tractors sat idle on secluded farms. Thick cloud engulfed the island of Drangey out at sea and hid 989m-high Tindastóll, sinking my plans to hike up it.

Horse valley

From the town of Sauðárkrókur, I drove out the next day to hillside stables in Helluland that are home to 100 horses.

'The coast-hugging road dipped, rolled and climbed high over the ocean. North Iceland's hills came alive under the sun'

"Technically, they're ponies," Johanna whispered. "But Icelanders have no word for 'pony', just '*hestar*' for 'horse'. Icelanders are very proud, so we say it's a horse."

We trotted along a quiet road with views over the sand banks in the fjord, myself astride the light brown horse Bylur. "Icelandic horses are very calm and sure-footed," Johanna told me. Bylur took the cue perfectly and decided to be anything but calm, bolting along the road, ignoring my attempts to bring him under control. Racing over uneven grass banks, I struggled for balance, one foot coming loose from the stirrup. I just managed to stay on, Bylur slowing as we reached a barbed wire fence.

That heart-quickener out of the way, we lumbered calmly down to the black sand of Borgarsandur, waves breaking softly on the shore. I followed Johanna's lead and we sped along the coast, more in control this time, an exhilarating ride towards Tindastóll and the town.

Veering into grassy dunes, we saw a group of horses running from one meadow to another outside Sauðárkrókur. "Many Icelanders own horses here, either for their farm, to get around, or just for fun," Johanna told me. "This area of north Iceland is known as the 'horse valley'."

I continued north-east by car up into mountainous Tröllaskagi (Troll Peninsula). With Skagafjörður on my side, the coast-hugging road dipped, rolled and climbed high over the ocean. So desolate in bad weather, north Iceland's green fields, hills and mountains came alive under the sun. I saw neat red and white

churches and a farm's silo tower, half-white, half-orange, like a giant cigarette stubbed into the ground. Elegant horses grazed in fields by the road, foals lazing in warm long grass.

After a night in the fjord-side fishing town of Siglufjörður at the northern end of the peninsula, I reached the old herring factories further south-east at Hjalteyri, now a base for Strýtan Dive Centre. "Iceland's surrounded by ocean," instructor Erlendur Bogason said. "It's almost like we're meant to be afraid. We're only just starting to learn what's beneath the water."

Geared up in neoprene dry suits, we motored into the fjord in an orange RIB boat. The water didn't look inviting, a hard rain and a coating of snow on the mountains adding to the wintry feel. North Atlantic Ocean waters here can be 5°C beneath the surface. But the diving at the Arnarnesstrýtan site is unique, with hydrothermal chimneys that pump out jets of hot water that's travelled from the Icelandic Highlands.

"I'll show you my friends," Erlendur promised with a proud smile, as we jumped off the boat. We descended, following a line into the depths. Erlendur's 'friends' came to greet us, a gang of cod expecting a feed. Taking a few large mussels from his waist bag, he smashed the shells and dished out brunch.

A far odder fish arrived, a giant wolffish with a grey-blue appearance and a strangely expressive, alien-like face. It was as obedient and docile as a dog welcoming her owner. Erlendur cracked open a mussel and fed her, batting off the more aggressive cod. A familiar friend, Erlendur calls this wolffish

Stone Age Stefanie. "She's lost her teeth, so I have to feed the shellfish to her. She can't bite the shell," he later explained.

We saw more wolffish swimming, others guarding eggs in dark nooks beneath rocks. Atlantic wolffish numbers are declining, though. I was told the causes were still uncertain, but climate change and overfishing could be factors.

Erlendur pointed ahead to where hot water was leaking out of a rock chimney. I took off my glove, the cold ocean biting, and put my hand cautiously into the heart of the stream, which alternated between pleasantly warm and close-to-scalding; the thermals can hit 82°C. I could've happily stayed there all day, the underwater equivalent of sitting by a fire.

From nearby Árskógssandur harbour, I took a detour from the Way and made the evening ferry crossing north again to Hrisey, the second largest island in Iceland, out in Eyjafjörður fjord. In early morning light, I walked past the village's striking protestant church and met a few of the island's resident Ptarmigans, hurrying across lawns in white furry boots. Fishermen out in their boats were being mobbed by seagulls as I made my way to a duck pond at the tip of the island. I picked up a hiking trail and crossed through mossy moorland from one side of the island to the other side, finding great, silent expanses devoid of other people.

A bit of a fluke

Back on the mainland, I reached Akureyri, the capital of the north and a popular base for whale-watching and northern ►



Free reign
(clockwise from top)
The Arctic Coast Way road between Skagafjörður and Siglufjörður; Icelanders are proud of their horses; cigarette-esque silo between Skagafjörður and Siglufjörður; (previous page) riding a horse on a black sand beach near Sauðárkrúkur





Beyond the sea
(clockwise from top left)
The blocky orange lighthouse
at Raufarhöfn; the gannet
colony on Stóri Karl;
Skjálfandi Bay is a prime
feeding ground for whales;
the striking protestant church
on Hrisey island; a humpback
whale fluking





‘Waves collapsed onto dark rocks as I looked ocean-wards and wondered how far from where I stood the Arctic began’

◀ lights tours. After dark, I set out in a cramped little mini bus with a group of tourists and local guide Thor Hjálmarsson. We drove north, hoping to see the aurora borealis, though a low activity rating of two and solid cloud cover made that prospect unlikely. Thor’s ‘bright side’ outlook that “the worst that can happen will be some fresh air and hot chocolate” was how the night panned out. A week into my trip, the northern lights had resolutely failed to make themselves known.

Nature put on more of a show along the coast at the fishing village of Húsavík, the north coast’s whale-watching epicentre. On a warm clear afternoon, we chugged out into Skjálfandi Bay in a traditional oak fishing boat. The bay’s a prime feeding ground for whales, a combination of Arctic and Atlantic currents and freshwater from two rivers creating a nutrient-rich area with high volumes of krill. Humpback, blue and minke whales, harbour porpoise and white-beaked dolphins all feed here.

An hour out from the harbour, we spotted the first spout, as a humpback broke the surface, huffing. After a few breaths, the long black back curved through the water and the fluke rose as it took a deep dive. “They spend 90 per cent of their lives underwater,” Mike Smith, the British onboard whale expert,

explained. “A dive can be anything up to 10 minutes. But they always have to come up to the surface to take a breath.”

There was another humpback in the area. We watched as the pair alternately surfaced, breathed and displayed their flukes before dives. “Fluke markings are as distinctive as our fingerprints,” Mike said. “These ones are adults. The biggest one would be around 15m and would weigh around 30,000-35,000kg. The largest humpbacks can be around 18m and weigh 40,000kg, as much as eight African elephants.”

The captain turned the boat and started back towards Húsavík. From nowhere, another humpback leapt out of the water a couple of hundred metres away and flopped noisily. We saw it breach a few more times, leaping and splashing, before this one too showed us its flukes and went below. “The humpback’s the most acrobatic of all whale species,” Smith said. “The most common theory is that breaching’s for communication.”

That night, I drove into the dark hills around Húsavík. After striking out every night when hunting for northern lights, I stood on the hillside in bracing wind. With a full moon, the clouds had a ghostly feel. Then, something started to happen. Stars became visible through breaks in the cloud and shapes ►



Seeing the light
The Skarðsviti lighthouse
on the Vatnsnes peninsula;
(left) finally catching the
northern lights near Húsavík
after lucking out every
other night

◀ began to form. Waves of silvery dust were cast across the night sky. The display didn't last long. I set my cameras to a low shutter speed and captured green and purple smears above the ocean and hills around Húsavík. Then, they were gone. Whales by day, northern lights by night. Not a bad day in north Iceland.

Lighting the way home

Beginning the final leg, the Way continued into the Tjörnes peninsula and Ásbyrgi, a horseshoe-shaped canyon known as the Shelter of the Gods. Here I hiked up Eyjan hill to look out over an ocean of autumnal yellow birch woodland.

"Not many people go where you're going," guesthouse owner Salbjörg Matthíasdóttir told me as I studied maps the next morning. The area's waterfalls, especially powerful Dettifoss, receive plenty of tourists doing the 'Diamond Circle' loop, but few go further into the north-east.

At the tip of the austere Melrakkaslétta peninsula, I lurched along a track of moving stones and abandoned fishing nets to the lighthouse at Hraunhafnartangi, which locals say is the northernmost point on mainland Iceland (though Rifstangi, nearby on the peninsula, is also mentioned). Waves collapsed onto dark rocks as I looked ocean-wards and wondered how far from where I was standing the Arctic began. Iceland's Grímsey island is within the Arctic Circle, but on the mainland this is as close as you can get: around 3km. Driving down the peninsula's east coast, I stopped at Raufarhöfn, Iceland's northernmost village, to look at the blocky orange lighthouse and the newly constructed Arctic Henge, a Pagan-inspired circle of basalt archways.

The Arctic Coast Way finishes at Bakkafjörður, but before my final stop, I made one last detour into the isolated Langanes peninsula. I spent my final evening driving along the coast and through deserted moorland to the Skoruvík cliffs.

From a metal platform high above the ocean, I looked out at Stóri Karl, a column of black rock and home to one of Iceland's largest gannet colonies. Noisy fulmars and kittiwakes nested in the grassy cliffs. Northern gannets took flight, gliding over white frothy waves, while others came in to land, struggling to find a clear space on the column's rounded summit. There were too many birds to count on there, little clusters of yellow-tinged adults, black-feathered young and chicks with fluffy grey down. For the first time on this trip, I'd found a part of north Iceland that looked a little crowded. ►



*'Green and purple
smears were cast
across the night sky
above Húsavík'*



Climate change in north Iceland

Mourners gathered in Iceland in 2014 for a strange funeral: not a person's, but a glacier's. The 700-year-old Okjökull glacier in west Iceland was declared a 'victim' of climate change. A memorial plaque stated not only that it was the first Icelandic glacier to lose its status as a glacier, but that "in the next 200 years, all our glaciers are expected to follow the same path."

Babsi Neubarth, a guide on Whale Watching Akureyri boats believes climate change is changing whales' behaviours. "Not so many whales come into the fjords. If there isn't the food, they'll stay further out. We see icebergs coming into the fjords now, too."

Climate change is causing the Gulf Stream – which brings warm, nutrient-rich waters to north Iceland – to move, which will impact on marine life, and on local people's diets and livelihoods. "The changes in temperature are in many ways affecting the ecosystem," said Gisli Egill Hrafnsson at Brimslóð Atelier Guesthouse. "For a fishing nation, this could have a major impact on the economy and the sustainability of sparsely populated areas that depend on fishing."

Across north Iceland, horse experts have claimed climate change is making grass more 'sugary', so the country's horses are becoming fat, and scuba divers have observed local waters getting colder. Others have reported warmer, longer summers, but that generally the north is getting more rain, more thick grey cloud cover and more storms. Iceland's extreme weather is getting more extreme.



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Footnotes

North Iceland

THE TRIP

Discover the World

(01737 888 466; discover-the-world.com) offers tailor-made self-drive holidays and escorted tours to the north of Iceland. Its 11-night *Arctic Coast Way self-drive* trip, available between May and September, costs from £1,604pp based on two sharing, including hotel accommodation with breakfast, car rental and exclusive iDiscover App.

A 3-hour horseriding tour with **Iceland Horse Tours** (icelandhorsetours.com) costs 13,000 ISK pp (£82).

Scuba diving in Eyjafjörður with **Strýtan Dive Center** (strytan.is) costs from 30,000 ISK to 40,000 ISK pp (£190–£253), including dry suit and equipment rental.

Whale-watching tours with **North Sailing** in Húsavík (northsailing.is) cost 10,690 ISK (£68).

Northern Lights tours from Akureyri with **Saga Travel** (sagatravel.is) cost 9,900 ISK pp (£63).



TOP TIP

Be prepared for all kinds of weather. North Iceland's weather is changeable, and it can get wet and cold, so carry rain jackets and layers of warm clothing, especially if you're planning to be out at night watching the northern lights.

Vital statistics

Capital: Reykjavík

Population: 350,000

Language: Icelandic, with English commonly spoken.

Time: GMT

International dialling code: +354

Visas: UK nationals don't need a visa to travel to Iceland.

Money: Icelandic króna (ISK), currently around 159 to the UK£. Cash machines can be found in larger towns, but not in remote areas so it's good to carry cash. Cards are accepted at most hotels, restaurants and petrol stations.

When to go

June–August: Summer offers warmer weather (although not guaranteed) and the midnight sun, as well as more birds, including puffins. There's a better chance of spotting whales, but it's also the busiest time of the year for tourists.

September–March: The northern lights are best in the dark winter months, although in northern Iceland the weather can be grim and conditions difficult at this time. September is good for experiencing the autumn colours and still offers a chance of seeing the northern lights.

Health & safety

Rough gravel roads around peninsulas often have loose stones and potholes. Drive carefully – speed limits are there for a reason. **Petrol stations are scarce** in remote areas so keep your eye on your fuel and ensure your phone is always charged.

Getting there & around

Several airlines fly to Reykjavík from the UK airports. **British Airways** (returns from London Heathrow to Reykjavík from £114; ba.com; 0344 493 0125) and **Icelandair** (returns from London Heathrow to Reykjavík

Big fish
Atlantic wolffish
can be spotted
en route



from £127; icelandair.co.uk; 020 7874 1000). **Air Iceland Connect** (airicelandconnect.com) has one-way flights between Reykjavík and Egilsstaðir in east Iceland (to start or finish the Arctic Coast Way) from £130, including baggage.

Domestic airlines serve hubs, including Akureyri, and it's possible to get buses to main towns and villages around Iceland's ring road.

To explore the Arctic Coast Way freely, you need to **hire a car**, ideally a 4WD. Renting a 4WD for 12 days with Europcar (europcar.is) with pick-up and return at Keflavík International Airport costs £790.50, or £881.91 for a one-way drop-off at Egilsstaðir airport.

Cost of travel

Iceland isn't cheap. A glass of beer costs around 1,000 ISK (£6.50) to 1,400 ISK (£9), while a main course at a restaurant costs from 2,500 ISK (£16) to 6,000 ISK (£38). Petrol is around 239 ISK (£1.50) per litre and diesel is around 231 ISK (£1.45). You should budget around £250 for petrol for the 12-day trip.

Accommodation

Camping is possible and there are hostels in Akureyri, but north Iceland mostly has guesthouses and hotels.

Brimslóð Atelier Guesthouse (Blönduós, brimslodguesthouse.is) is a stylish new guesthouse on the seafront, with a modern restaurant. Doubles from 28,380 ISK (£178).

Hótel Tindastóll (Sauðárkrúkur; arctichotel.is) is Iceland's oldest hotel; cosy doubles from 17,000 ISK (£107).

Sigló Hótel (Siglufjörður; siglohotel.is) is a stylish hotel on the waterfront; doubles from 28,000 ISK (£176).

Hótel Skúlagarður (Ásbyrgi; skulagardur.is), close to Ásbyrgi ►



At the dock of the bay
A boat in the harbour
at Siglufjörður

7 cool stops on the Arctic Coast Way

1 Geitafell Seafood Restaurant

Their signature fish soup is the main draw to Geitafell Seafood Restaurant on the Vatnsnes peninsula. But it's also worth ordering the Skyr cake, a light, creamy cheese cake with blueberry jam. geitafell.is

2 1238: Battle of Iceland museum

The new opened modern exhibition space tells the story

of the country's bloody civil war, with a Virtual Reality set-up so you can get in on the action.

3 Bjorboðin

Bjorboðin (the Beer Spa) at Árskógssandur has big wooden bathtubs filled with 'young beer' and bath oils for a relaxing soak, with your own beer tap by the tub-side. bjorbodin.is

4 Baccalá Bar

Set inside a Viking boat,

Baccalá Bar is on the harbour of Hauganes. Try the traditional Icelandic dish that gives the place its name, *baccalá*, or salted cod. ektafiskur.is

5 Strikið

Though it only gets used 30 or so times per year, Strikið (strikid.is) has Akureyri's only rooftop terrace. At any time of year, though, you can find windows looking out onto the fjord and striking church.

6 Naustið

Set inside a striking yellow wooden house, which dates back to 1929, Naustið restaurant in Húsavík has a warm, laidback feel and hearty local food.

7 GeoSea

The stylish, new GeoSea Geothermal Baths has modern pools filled with naturally heated water at around 35-39°C to soak in and views out across Skjálfandi Bay. geosea.is



◀ canyon, is on a sheep farm, with a restaurant serving local produce. Doubles from 18,000 ISK (£113).

Ytra Lón Farm Lodge (Þorshöfn; ytralon.is) has self-catering units and a restaurant in the Langanes peninsula. Two-person studio apartments from 16,993 ISK (£107).

Food & drink

With farming and fishing dominating life in north Iceland, there's **lamb**

TOP TIP
An aurora borealis light show can never be guaranteed, but as with so many natural phenomena, persistence often pays off, so don't give up.

and fish on most menus in north Iceland. **Skyr**, the yoghurt-like soft cheese, crops up often in desserts. Whaling is a contentious issue in Iceland. **Don't eat whale meat** and avoid restaurants that serve it.

Further reading & info

Lonely Planet: Iceland (May 2019). For more info, see arcticcoastway.is, northiceland.is and promoteiceland.is.

More online

Visit www.wanderlust.co.uk/204

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WORDS **ALEX ROBINSON**



1

LAPA RIOS

Lapa Rios lodge sits on the edge of Corcovado National Park – the largest tract of primary tropical forest on the Pacific coast of Central

America – and there's nowhere you're more likely to see jaguars. Or find jungle suites with better from-the-bed views: over rolling, rainforest-swathed hills to the shimmering blue Golfo Dulce. The lodge generates its own natural gas (from kitchen-scrap-fed pigs), has a solar heating system, grows its own fruit and vegetables and has been supporting local schools for over 25 years.

Bungalow doubles from £675 per night, full board with transfers; laparios.com

Joshua Roper; Alamy

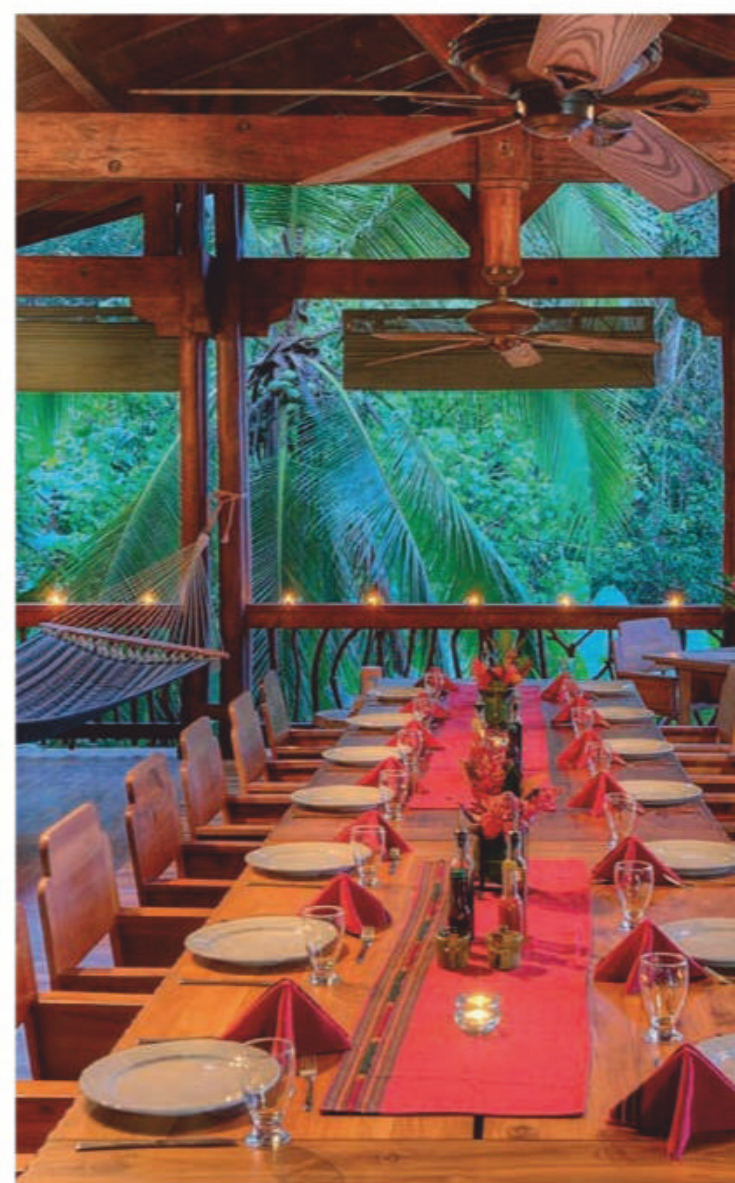


2 PLAYA NICUESA

Set on a lush tropical fjord between rainforest ridges and ribbons of black sand beach – and reachable only by boat

– Playa Nicuesa is Eden-like. Rooms are gathered in a tranquil tropical garden fragrant with mangoes and brilliant with scarlet heliconia, and it's easy to do nothing but swim in the deep blue Pacific or watch the horizon meditatively from the shoreside yoga deck. But there is plenty to do – kayaking through the mangroves, fishing for skipjack tuna or canyoning up mountain streams to icy waterfalls.

Cabins from £390 per night per room (two nights required) full board with transfers; nicuesalodge.com



3 PACUARÉ

Getting to this rainforest retreat, lost in rugged hills near the tiny town of Turrialba, is an adventure in itself: the only way in is by whitewater raft – on a rushing, rapid-run river. Despite the remoteness, suites are fitted with honey-coloured hardwoods and have balcony terraces with private plunge pools. All is sustainable – from the on-site generated electricity and the construction materials, to the support for local indigenous communities.

Double rooms from £815 per night (two nights required), full board with transfers and tours; pacuarelodge.com ►



4

LA TORTUGA

La Tortuga lodge sits in the heart of wild Tortuguero National Park on Costa Rica's jungle-carpeted Caribbean coast: arguably the best location in the Americas to see hatchling turtles. Come in early autumn when thousands wriggle free of the sand on the reserve's sweeping two-mile-long beaches and head for the gently lapping waves. You can also take a boat ride on the crocodile-filled rivers, walk the birdwatching trails or simply relax and watch toucans flap across the sky above the infinity pool, or capuchin monkeys picking palm nuts.

Double rooms from £180 per night, including breakfast; tortugalodge.com

5

BUNGALOWS ACHE

With reggae music, jerk chicken and Bounty-Bar-white beaches, Costa Rica's north-eastern coast may feel like the Caribbean, but it's continentally wild. Fan-cooled rooms in Ache's rustic wooden huts are simple, but sloths snooze in the trees, and palm-sized butterflies kiss the creamy orchids in the flower-filled garden. Mornings start with the raucous calls of howler monkeys in the adjacent national park, where ocelot still pad through the trees at night – and the reef-sheltered Playa Blanca beach is literally on the doorstep.

Twin cabins from £40 per night; bungalowsache.com



6

RIO PERDIDO

Costa Rica is not all rainforest. The dry south-west is cactus-sprinkled dry forest, which bursts into bloom after the first rains of spring. Rio Perdido is one of the few lodges lying here – in a private reserve under the shadow of the hulking Miravalles volcano. Hot rivers ooze from the mountain, through steaming canyons that cut through the trees and flow into natural bathing pools. Stilted rooms perch pod-like in glades, while the main building sits on a ridge, its vast balcony perfectly positioned for a bird's eye view of twittering tanagers.

Bungalow doubles from £180 per night, room only; rioperdido.com

7

LA QUINTA SARAPIQUI

Costa Rica's northern cattle pastures are regrowing as forest, thanks to the efforts of farmers-turned-wildlife keepers like the Jenkins family of La Quinta. For over 30 years they have been at the cutting edge of Costa Rican conservational tourism and their ranch-turned-wildlife lodge has a maximum five CST leaves – the highest ranking in the stringent national eco-tourism scheme. Alongside rainforest excursions (in Braulio Carrillo National Park), guests can participate in community activities such as tree planting (offsetting that flight carbon) and cocoa roasting.

Double rooms from £84 per night; hotellaquintasarapiqui.com



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Austria

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verdant woodland, and crystal-clear lakes just waiting to be leapt into.

Winding pathways meander throughout, helping those who wish to wander; in fact, there's 24,000km worth of marked hiking trails and 6,000km of mountain bike tracks to find and countless outdoor activities to try. Charming alpine villages with friendly locals, hearty dishes served in

cosy mountain huts, and lively summer festivals all add to the appeal after an action-packed day of exploration.

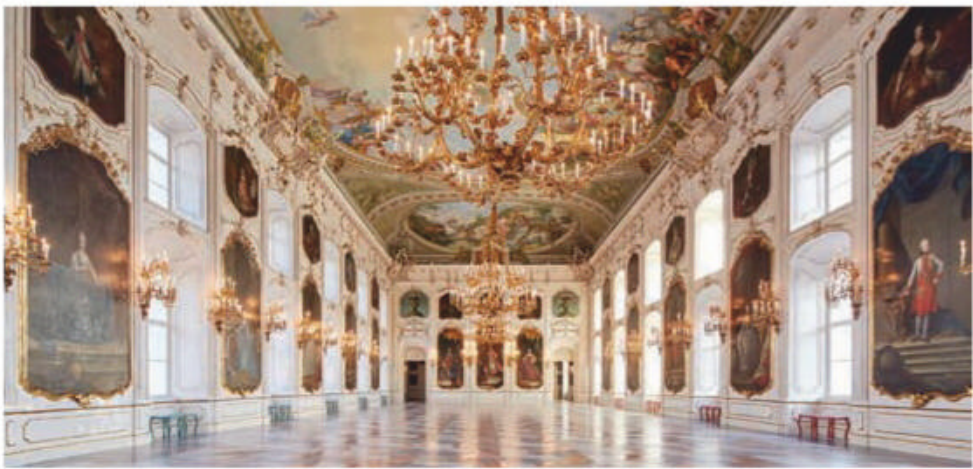
But with so much to explore, where to start? Over the next few pages, you'll discover exactly what each different area of Tirol has to offer and why your next summer adventure to the heart of the Alps will have you coming back for more...

For more information go to **TYROL.COM/HIKING**

INNSBRUCK
*The perfect mix of city
& countryside*

As the capital of Tirol, Innsbruck offers the best of both worlds; delivering urban flair with countryside idyll. It's easy to pair the energy of the city with the rural calm to be found in any of the 40 towns and villages dotted throughout the region. Some can be found in Inn Valley, others are perched high on the mountain plateaus, but all offer an abundance of activities and alpine adventures.

Take the time to explore Innsbruck and you'll quickly uncover its imperial heritage as you walk in the footsteps of the Habsburgs at the Imperial Palace or admire the Golden Roof in its medieval old town. The city has many museums too, along with a varied restaurant scene, colourful shops to explore and a packed summer schedule of events, from concerts to live theatre.

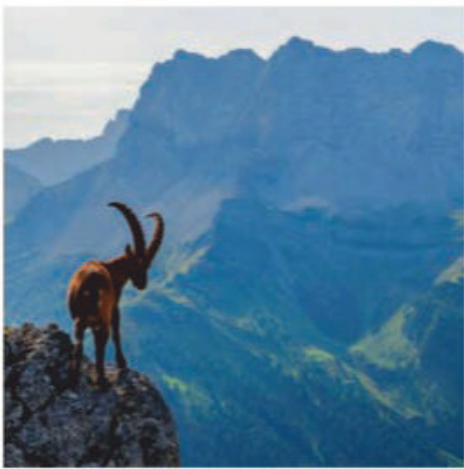


But, even when you stay in Innsbruck's bustling city centre, the cable car station here can take you to the calm of the mountains in just 25 minutes.

The city is nestled up against the Nordkette mountain range and the top of Innsbruck is located at 2,300m at Hafelekar peak. The Nordkette cable car ride up this behemoth traverses over forests, jagged rocks and the River Inn and, once you emerge from the blanket of clouds, you can then enjoy what's been playfully dubbed 'the highest city stroll in the Alps' for its ease of access.

The Nordkette is also the gateway to Karwendel; a nature reserve boasting 727sq km of untamed countryside. It's the ideal hiking spot, especially for those seeking multi-day hikes as the mountain huts here offer overnight accommodation, in addition to a good place to enjoy a bite to eat. As you explore, be sure to keep a watchful eye out for the alpine ibex that roam in the wilds and on the ridges here too.

Mountain bikes are allowed on any of the toll roads in the Karwendel with 14 bike trails available, but if you're



in the mood for some thrilling downhill runs, you'll want to check out Innsbruck's Bike Park in Muttereralp. Here you can find trails tailored to different levels of ability ('The Wild One' lives up to its fast-paced namesake!) or for something more sedate why not try some of the routes in the wider region, such as the 'Cycle and savour route in the Inn Valley' that runs alongside the River Inn and gives riders the chance to stop at 25 different places of gastronomic interest. There's no limit to the diverse variety of experiences Innsbruck can provide.



City delights
(clockwise from top left)
The Giant Hall in the Imperial Palace in Innsbruck; ibex on top of the mountain range; view of the Inn River and the Nordkette mountain range

LHP: Tirol Werbung, Jens Schwarz (Place: Scheffau, Hintersteiner See) RHP: Innsbruck Tourismus, Christian Vorhofer

Path to adventure
(clockwise from this)
The beautiful city of
Kitzbühel from above;
Alpine meadows and
the Hornbahn Cable
Car; Lake Schwarzsee



KITZBÜHEL

The hiker's paradise

Imagine meandering through fragrant forests, strolling in lush meadows or trekking along panoramic alpine pathways. The paths that cross verdant Kitzbühel in Tirol and the surrounding holiday villages of Reith, Aurach and Jochberg can offer all this, as you climb to the region's highest summits.

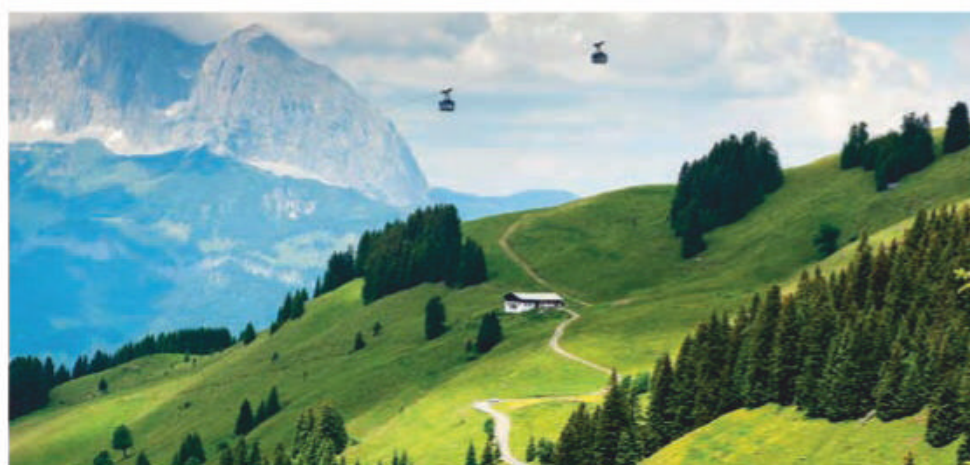
Hahnenkamm is perhaps the most famous of these, complete with adventures accessible to all levels of fitness. For 860m of adrenaline try the



'Streif Live' hike. As well as the chance to stare into the abyss from the steepest sections of the course, the path also features four infotainment LCD panels that offer a glimpse into one of the most dangerous downhill runs in the world. The hike ends with the ski heroes immortalised at Legends Park.

The Kitzbüheler Horn can be reached with a ride on the Hornbahn cable car which climbs 2,000m. Upon arrival, continue on foot to the top to find the 360-degree viewing tower and then, as you wander down the mountain, prepare to find yourself adrift in a sea of colourful mountain flora at the Alpine Flower Garden.

5km south of Kitzbühel is the village of Aurach, which can be found at the foot of the gentle Kitzbühel Südberge range. Thanks to its timber houses, lovingly tended gardens and lofty church steeple, the village is a popular subject for painters and photographers



alike. It's a charming gateway to enjoy summer hikes from.

All this exercise in the mountain air is bound to have you feeling peckish so a pitstop at a mountain hut (dotted along many hiking paths) will have you tucking into some hearty fare.

There are plenty of gourmet restaurants to be found too, especially in the busy hub of Kitzbühel, which boasts a rich history and a town centre that's more than 750 years old. Here you'll find traditional arts and crafts alongside shopping for international luxury brands, and accommodation that ranges

from five-star hotels to family-run guesthouses. The people of Kitzbühel also have strong ties to their hometown, which is why it regularly plays host to cultural festivals. KITZ Summer Nights (2020 dates: 4 June – 27 August) sees pop-up concerts in its streets and evening cinema screenings in the town centre. 2020 will also see the 8th Film Festival Kitzbühel (24 – 30 August) take place – an opportunity to share in the work of some diverse and fledgling cinematic talent before you put those captivating mountains into the frame.

ST. ANTON AM ARLBERG

Feel the benefit of the mountains

A host of energising experiences await in St. Anton am Arlberg. This cosy village in Austrian Tirol has only 2,500 residents, so you can expect true Tirolean hospitality as you spend your summer in the mountains and find more than 300km of footpaths.

With so many different routes to try, walkers may often find themselves drinking in those alpine landscapes in tranquil solitude; an opportunity to breathe deep and experience

true calm. In fact, exercise in the fresh air at moderate altitudes has been found to boost health and physical well-being, adding to the many reasons to get out there. A clearly marked signposting system offers detailed information about each path's destination, route, distance, time and difficulty, but you can also go with an authorised mountain guide for information on natural spectacles, sites of interest, local flora and tips

for more technically challenging trekking routes.

For those who like exploring on two wheels, there are several sports shops that can help with e-bike rentals or if you time your visit for the E-Bike Fest (June 19-21) you can test the latest models in and around the Tirolean village, and head out into the mountains on small-group guided tours.

In July, fitness fans can take on the challenge of the Arlberger Wadlbeisser, a 13.5km obstacle course; or in September, visitors can admire the Alpine Cattle Drive and Country Festival, which sees cows decorated in wild flowers and herded back into the valley to symbolise a trouble-free summer on mountain pastures. Speaking of trouble-free, September also sees the annual Mountain Yoga Festival, a great opportunity for enthusiasts to learn new techniques from yoga experts and to centre the mind in a natural alpine setting.



Getting to St. Anton am Arlberg is stress-free too. Railjet trains, the Venice-Simplon Orient-Express and other direct services stop at the train station, located a stone's throw from the village centre. If flying, the nearest airport is Innsbruck and, once you arrive, the St. Anton Summer Card is a great way to make the most of your time. Available between 20 June - 27 September, the card is offered free of charge from your first night and offers a variety of perks to help you better explore the region and enjoy a feel-good holiday.



Feel-good factors
(from top down)
Alpine Cattle Drive in St. Anton; E-Bike Fest in St. Anton; panoramic views in the Arlberg Mountains



LHP: Kitzbühel Tourismus; Shutterstock RHP: Alamy; TVB St. Anton am Arlberg, Patrick Baetz

Floral charm

(clockwise from this)
Quaint farm houses and
lots of nature in the village
of Alpbach; the impressive
Matzen Palace; idyllic Lake
Reintaler in Kramsach



ALPBACHTAL

Village charm & gorge-ous views

Between the Kitzbühel Alps and the Rofan Range lies picturesque Alpbachtal, a region of Tirol with quaint villages hidden among its rolling hills and piercing peaks.

Alpbach is a prime example. Not only is it the largest village in Alpbachtal Valley but it has also been officially recognised as 'the most beautiful in Austria' and this is in no small part thanks to its traditional timber houses and the pretty flower boxes that adorn them. Hikes

and bike trails around this tranquil village will often lead to hidden gems. The easy-going 'Alpbach Nature and Heritage Trail' traipses past historical sights and down the Mühlbach Path of Contemplation – a route that encourages you to pause and reflect by each one of its natural sculptures – or you can look to scale to the top of the Wiedersbergerhorn, accessible via the Wiedersbergerhornbahn funicular just outside the village.



Next to the River Inn sits the historic town of Rattenberg. With just 400 inhabitants, it's Austria's smallest but famous throughout the valley thanks to its medieval centre and artisanal glass craft. Must-visit sites of interest include the Augustinian Museum, which houses more than nine centuries of Tirolean art, and the Glass Factory Kisslinger to see the glass blowers at work.

If castles charm you, then keep heading west from Brixlegg, to get to the fairytale like Matzen Castle. From here are several paths that lead up to Reith im Alpbachtal, an attractive village with herb gardens and a lake at its centre, from which you can take the Reitherkogelbahn to ramble on Reither Kogel, complete with impressive vistas over the Ziller and Inn valleys.

To cool down from the heat of the summer day, head north from the banks of the Inn to the municipality of Kramsach.



There are four lakes popular with swimmers to find here and this area is also renowned for the Tirol Farmstead Museum, which offers a fascinating insight into a past way of life.

Be sure to traverse the Tiefenbach Gorge trail (found between Kramsach and Brandenburg) to hear the rush of the Brandenberger Ache Rivers' torrents or take to the pathways of Kaiser Gorge, once said to be a favourite of Emperor Franz Josef and his beloved wife Sisi, centuries ago. You'd be hard-pressed not to be charmed by this region too.

WILDSCHÖNAU

Take a walk on the wild side

With a name that literally means wild and beautiful, the high valley of Wildschönau makes for a fitting location to enjoy a relaxing walking holiday in the heart of Austrian Tirol. Strung along this high valley in the Kitzbühel Alps are four villages – Niderau, Oberau, Auffach and Thierbach – with 260 working farms dotted throughout and a host of themed trails to enjoy.

More than 300km of well-tended walking paths cross

an area that, rather than steep and craggy, encompass far gentler, grass-covered slopes with walks through forests, meadows and ravines. Easy walks are found mostly in the valley, with village circuits or those that traipse into Kundl Gorge. Intermediate routes go to the alms and higher pastures above 1,500m and advanced hikes climb on to the higher peaks found above 2,000m, where the Grosser Beil mountain can also be found.

Connecting the Wildschönau valley with the village of Kundl (in Inn Valley) is the Kundl Gorge. Not only is it considered to be one of the most beautiful in Austria, but it can only be accessed in the warmer months (between 20 May – 14 September). Embark on the 3.5km Gorge Walk and you'll have 200m cliffs towering high above you with the rush of



white-water river pounding below. This majesty of nature will undoubtedly leave a lasting impression, so much so that perhaps you'll believe the local legends that it was split by a dragon many years ago?

There are plenty of themed trails to try too. The Healing Herbs Trail was established just last year and can be found on the Auenweg Path from Niderau. Information boards bring the local flora's characteristics and healing properties to the fore, and if this route leaves you pining for more, pay a visit to the Herb

Garden at Salcherhof Farm, above the village of Auffach. Wildschönau also has seven 'Walking for Enjoyment' routes, each with a culinary theme and giving prominence to Tirolean specialties, made with local ingredients fresh from farms.

Hospitality and tradition play a big part in local life here and in the summer, the cable cars, farming museum, guided walks and more are all free with the Wildschönau Card. It all feeds into the friendly atmosphere of the valley, which will soon have you cheerily saying *Griass-di* (Good Day) with the locals.



Wild walks
(from top down)
Kundl Gorge in
Wildschönau; delicious
local cuisine in the local
huts; hiking in the
beautiful Wildschönau



Mountain marvels
(clockwise from this)
Hiking in the Tiroler
Zugspitz Arena; enjoy
a boat ride on lake
Heiterwanger See;
summer in the Tiroler
Zugspitz Arena

TIROLER ZUGSPITZ ARENA

Admire Austria from a different perspective

The views in Tiroler Zugspitz Arena are not to be missed. Located on the border of Austria and Germany, this area of Tirol encompasses seven villages – Ehrwald, Lermoos, Biberwier, Berwang, Bichlbach, Heiterwang am See and Namlos – with the majestic Zugspitze mountain, towering above. Summer brings with it the chance to explore this region by hike or by bike, but there are also many other ways to nab some inspiring views.



Standing at 2,962m high, the Zugspitze is impressive, but more so from the top where, on a clear day, you can see the mountains of four countries. Even better, its viewing platform can easily be reached in just ten minutes thanks to the Tiroler Zugspitzbahn cable car. While here, check out the 'Fascination Zugspitze' museum that tells the history of the mountain and its cableways and if you time your summer trip right, you can enjoy special events from sunrise ascents or Zugspitze Oktoberfest, dubbed 'the highest in the world'.

Fancy a different angle of the mountain? Try the Almkopfbahn cable car from Bichlbach. As you climb up 1,600m, not only will you be treated to views of Zugspitze and lake Heiterwanger See, but you can do so with a gondola breakfast, complete with table setting,



regional delicacies and a glass of prosecco. Once you arrive at the top, there are hikes to enjoy as well as mountain scooters available for hire and be sure to stop by the mountain hut Heiterwanger Hochalm, renowned for its schnapps.

The Tiroler Zugspitz Arena offers some great lakeside vistas too. Seebensee is arguably one of the finest thanks to its brilliant turquoise colour and can be reached on a variety of trails from Ehrwald or Biberwier. Or, there's the Drachensee (the 'Dragon Lake') the highest in the region

at 1,910m, which can be found just a little further above. Keep on climbing to find the Coburger Hütte for great views and even better food.

If you want to get onto the water, go to the lake Heiterwanger See and Plansee where you can try stand-up paddle boarding from the SUP station, next to the hotel Fischer am See, with the option of sunset tours and night time excursions beneath star-filled skies.

No matter how you explore the Tiroler Zugspitz Arena, great views come guaranteed.

ST. JOHANN IN TIROL

Peaks, labyrinths, moors & more

St. Johann in Tirol is situated next to Kitzbühel, making it a great spot from which to tread the 200km of hiking trails to be found between Kitzbüheler Horn and the Wilder Kaiser. There are natural spectacles such as the Griesbach Gorge in Erpfendorf to find and areas of natural conservation and beauty, such as the Kaiserbachal Valley, to wander in; all equating to an active and relaxing break.

With its far-reaching views across the Kitzbüheler Alpen,

a ride on the Harschbichlbahn Cable Car up the Kitzbühel Horn is an experience in itself. This is also a convenient way to enjoy the multitude of activities and routes to be found on the mountain, with two stopping points: the mid-way station at Koasaburg; and the top station at Harschbichl.

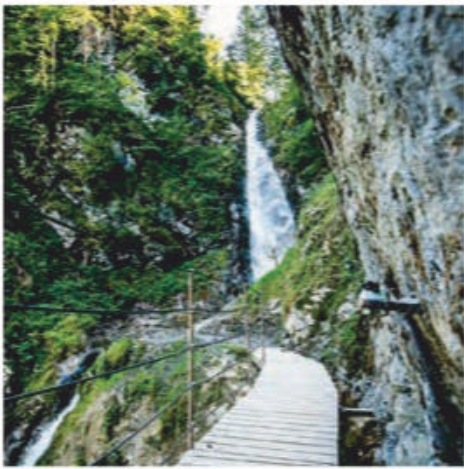
From Harschbichl, the 6km Horn Panorama Circuit is a popular choice that climbs up to the summit with paths crossing alpine pastures and

narrow ridges, and plenty of viewing points along the way.

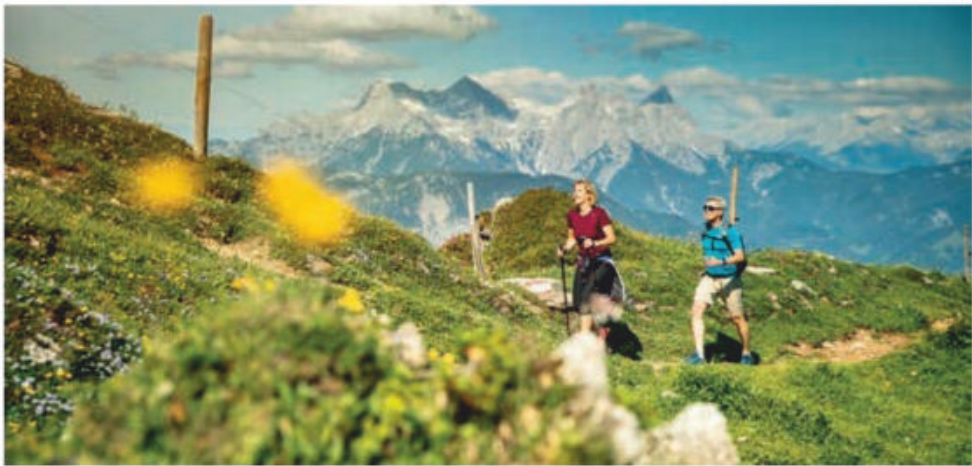
Meanwhile, the single-track Harschbichl Trail from Koasaburg will be of special interest for mountain bikers. Winding down from the mid-way station to the valley floor, expect to fly through forest thickets and emerald fields, over bridges and, on the final stretch, see the Wilder Kaiser Mountains and the Leukental Valley set before you.

Kletterwald Hornpark is a tree top adventure park that can also be found by the cable car's middle station, with climbing courses and zip lines to brave, and for an alternative return journey to the valley, why not try a thrilling three-wheeled descent on a mountain cart?

If you're searching for some unique hiking opportunities, then St. Johann in Tirol won't disappoint. An easy walk to the Eifersbacher Waterfall in Winkl-Schattseite is perfect to escape the summer heat,



with paths that pass under shady forests and the cool spray of spring water to enjoy. Then there are the forest trails of Teufelsgrasse near Gasteig guaranteed to set adventurers' passions alight with thin labyrinthic passages carved straight into the rock. Moreover, don't miss the moors on the south-eastern side of the Kaiser mountains; there are two loop trails that peacefully meander through these natural gems of the Wilder Kaiser, with information panels to find about the unique flora and fauna. What 'moor' could you ask for?



Revel in nature
(from top down)
Take the trail to
Eifersbacher
Waterfall; hike on
Kitzbüheler Horn;
enjoy the views over
St. Johann in Tirol



On the trail
(clockwise from this)
Hiking in the Zillertal;
take on the challenge of
an elevated multi-day
trek; or stroll in low lying
alpine meadows

ZILLERTAL

Get back to nature

The Zillertal Valley may begin gently sloping from the small town of Strass to Mayrhofen, but keep climbing south, higher through the narrow Zemtäl and on to the Hintertux glacier, and you'll quickly learn why this region is considered to be the cradle of alpine mountaineering; with plenty of outdoor adventures to be enjoyed in unspoiled nature.

Zillertal Alps Nature Park takes the headline in this respect. Extending from the mountaineering village of Ginzling up to its highest peak of Hochfeiler (at 3,509m), the park's pristine landscapes and range in altitude levels makes it perfect for hiking and rock climbing. In the park, plunging ravines have given shape to five tributary valleys, locally known as Gründe, with the summits of the Zillertal Alps' main ridge looming above.



Together with other reserves in Tirol it forms one of the largest associations of nature reserves in the Alps and has extraordinarily high levels of biodiversity, so it's worth trekking with one of the park's experienced guides to find the many animals and species of plants that call this park home. A special summer programme of these hikes take place between May and October, and with 30 diverse themes there's bound to be a trek that can pique your interest: from herbal trails to wildlife walks to even heading out with accomplished



Austrian mountaineer, Peter Habeler, to the summit of the Ahornspitze mountain.

The Hintertux Glacier makes for an interesting spot. Not only is this somewhere where you can ski year-round, but there are plenty of other activities too, such as guided glacier tours, a Spannagel Caves expedition, or scaling the Olperer Mountain that towers over the pistes (daredevil climbers have the option of abseiling back down).

If long distance hikes are more your pace, then Zillertal has many multi-stage and

challenging ascents to try. 'Around the Reichenspitze' is one that's best attempted from mid-June to early September as a multi-day, four-stage hike with lakes, cosy huts, and rugged terrain stretching before you.

With Zillertal so large, e-bikes can help you get to those remote summits and huts that might otherwise be out of reach and with most of the region's hotels family-owned you can expect service with a personal touch. All that's left is for you to get out there, explore and enjoy.



Now in its
15TH YEAR

Nominations for 2020 are now open!

If your guide turned your trip into an unforgettable experience, we want to hear about them.

The **Wanderlust World Guide Awards** were launched in December 2005 to recognise the unsung heroes of the travel world – guides and tour leaders. The judging process is long and challenging, so the more insight you provide on your guide, the better for our judges. The winners will be announced at a life-affirming celebration at London's Royal Geographical Society on 30 September 2020.

You can make a difference. Nominate your outstanding guide and make sure they get the recognition they deserve! In addition, some of the winners will receive a bursary of up to £5,000 to spend on community projects or to further their education and qualifications.



Last chance to nominate! Closes 28 February

www.WorldGuideAwards.com

THE JUDGES

Lyn Hughes

*Wanderlust co-founder
& editor-in-chief*

William Gray

Photographer & journalist

Paul Goldstein

*Wildlife photographer
& guide*

Paul Harris

*Travel & landscape
photographer*

Kav Dadfar

Photographer

Kevin Harris

Texas

Ann Watt

Texas

Rebecca Newton

Nikon

Annalisa Davies

Nikon

Michelle Kyles

Destinations

Rob Debenham

Destinations

A person is walking on a sand dune at sunset. The dunes are illuminated by the warm, golden light of the setting sun, creating long shadows and a serene atmosphere. The person is seen from behind, walking away from the viewer towards the horizon. The sky is a deep blue, and the sand is a rich orange-gold color.

Wanderlust TRAVEL PHOTO OF THE YEAR 2019

Our judges have once again gone through over 9,000 entries to narrow down the finalists of travel's biggest amateur photography contest. Turn over to find out who's won a once-in-a-lifetime photo commission to Texas...



Landscape



◀ **WINNER** (SEE PAGE 12)

Winter sunset

Poland

Stefania Urbini, Manager

Nikon D750, Nikkor 200-400mm f/4

@ 400mm, 1/100 sec @ f/8,

ISO 200, tripod

Judges' comments: "Superb light.

The simple composition of tightly packed birch trees has a wonderful atmosphere and stillness."

The magnificence of the desert

① (SEE PREVIOUS PAGE)

Khara Desert, Isfahan Province, Iran

Babak Mehrafshar,

Electronic engineer

Nikon D7500, Sigma 150-500mm

f/5-6.3 @ 150mm, 1/320 sec @ f/5,

ISO 320

Judges' comments: "A striking shot.

The use of leading lines draws you in."

RUNNER-UP

② **Cloudy UFO**

Crimean Peninsula, Demerdzhi Mountain, Ukraine

Elena Pakhalyuk, Computer engineer

Canon EOS 6D, EF 70-200mm f/2.8L II

USM @ 88mm, 1/4000 @ f/16, ISO 400

Judges' comments: "Venticular clouds gild any image, but they are notoriously tough to embrace into an effective photo. Top marks for this – unusual, almost mythical."

HIGHLY COMMENDED

③ **Misty morning in Mandalay**

Mandalay, Myanmar (Burma)

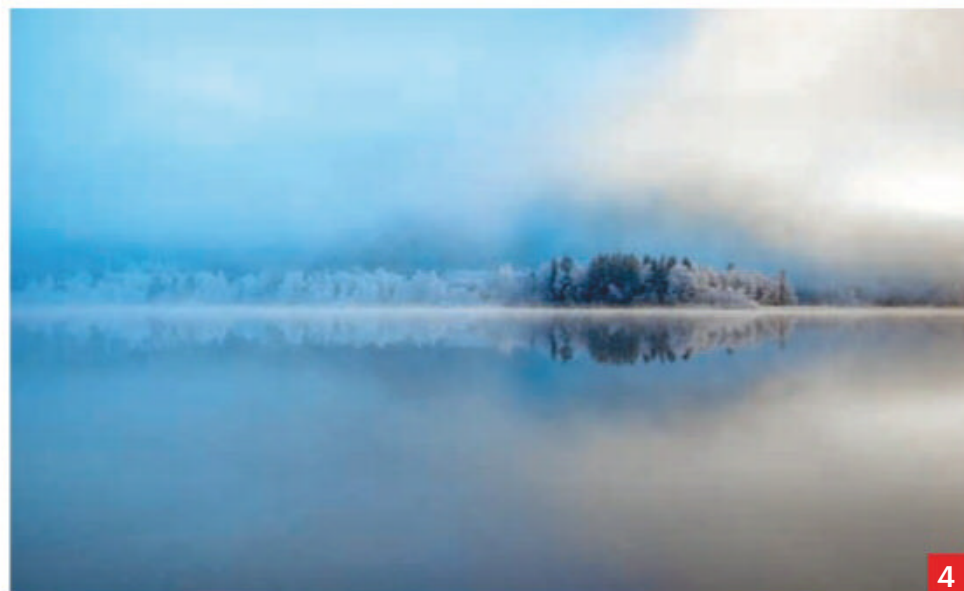
Aung ThuYa, Government officer

Canon EOS 60D, Canon 70-200mm

f/2.8L @ 160mm, 1/160 sec @ f/7.1,

ISO 100

Judges' comments: "Soft morning light with the bonus of mist adds a wonderful moody atmosphere, punctuated by the temple towers. Strong use of the diagonal."



4 Tranquillity

Norway

Effy Varley, PA

Canon EOS 550D, Canon EF-S10-22mm f/3.5-4.5 USM @ 22mm, 1/100 sec @ f/5.6, ISO 1/100

Judges' comments: "Lovely, calming landscape, no disruptions and cool colours."

5 Early spring

Iceland

Pawel Kamionka, Manager

Olympus OM-D E-M5 Mark II, Olympus 40-150mm f/2.8 @ 55mm, 1/640 sec @ f/9, ISO 200

Judges' comments: "Evokes the raw beauty and harshness of Iceland out of season."

6 On the edge of the world

Ura-Guba, Murmansk Oblast, Russia

Vitaliy Novikov, Firefighter

Nikon D600, Nikkor 14-24mm f/2.8G @ 14mm, 13 sec @ f/5.6, ISO 640

Judges' comments: "Unusual northern lights image. Strong composition: there's a full moon and that aurora's not easy to capture." ►



5



6



◀ **7 Three peaks in the mist**

China

Alex Harford,

Technical SEO manager

Canon Powershot G1 X Mark III,
15–45mm @ 45mm, 1/800 @ f/7.1,
ISO 125

Judges' comments: "If you look in the Oxford English Dictionary under moody, you should see this picture. It is a gorgeous, unexpected study of an area that's often photographed."

8 The Rock

Drangarnir, Vágar, Faroe Islands

Pawel Zygmunt, Airline staff

Nikon D810, Nikkor 16–35mm f/4 @
16mm, 0.5 sec @ f/9, ISO 64

Judges' comments: "Love the positioning and capture of the colourful sky behind the dark rock formation. There's a great contrast between the ruggedness versus the softer waterline and sky."

9 Norwegian dreams

Lofoten Islands, Norway

Donald Yip, IT engineer

DJI Mavic Air drone, 1/1200 sec
@ f/2.8, ISO 100

Judges' comments: "We see many images of the Fredvang bridges, but rarely with such beautiful light and composition."



8



9

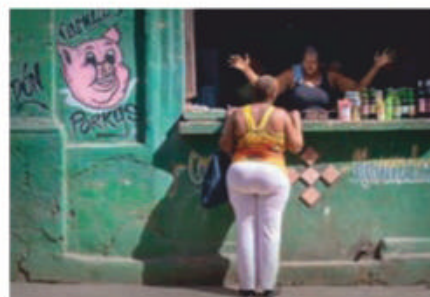


1

People



2



WINNER (SEE P14) **You want it *that* big?**

Havana, Cuba

Bun Ngo Leung, Retired

Sony A7 Mk I, Leica R 70-210mm f/4,
1/200 sec @ f/8, ISO 200

Judges' comments: "Love the story this tells. The colours and setting provide vibrancy and life. Great humour."

RUNNER-UP

① A celebration of Hindu tradition

Dhaka, Bangladesh

Muhammad Amdad, Hossain Student

Canon EOS 5D Mk II, Canon EF 50mm f/1.8L STM @ 50mm, 1/40 sec @ f/6.3, ISO 4000

Judges' comments: "Wow! To capture so much in one image is sublime. This is not an image that you just glance at. It's one you gorge yourself on. Superb at every level."

HIGHLY COMMENDED

② Old woman

Lorestan Province, Iran

Meisam Abdoli, Librarian

Canon EOS 80D, Canon EF-S 18-135mm f/3.5-5.6 IS USM @ 50mm, 1/125 sec @ f/4.5, ISO 500

Judges' comments: "Beautifully executed black and white – incredible tone and texture. The lack of eye contact somehow makes the portrait more engaging. There's a story behind this face, which keeps you interested." ►

PEOPLE



3

3 Fishing net

Nha Trang, Khánh Hòa, Vietnam

Khanh Phan Thi, Banker

Mavic 2 pro drone, 28mm f/2.8L,
1/40 sec @ f/3.2, ISO 100

Judges' comments: "Instantly draws my eye. The fabric looks so fluid and water-like. Looks like artwork."

4 Mountain farmer

South Tyrol, Italy

*Josef Hinterleitner,
Machine technician*

Canon 5D Mk III, Canon EF 17-40mm
f/4 IS USM @ 20mm, 1/100 sec @ f/4,
ISO 200

Judges' comments: "I love how much character and personality this image has. The pose is fierce."



4



5

5 Hope

Tabriz, Iran

Milad Jalilian

Nikon D810, Sigma APO 70-200mm

f/2.8 @ 200mm, 1/200 sec

@ f/2.8, ISO 125

Judges' comments: "Draws you back again and again wanting to get to know these characters."

6 Colourful fishing

West Bengal/Jharkhand border, India

Debasish Chakraborty,

School teacher

Nikon D810, Nikon 24-70mm f/2.8

@ 48mm, 1/400 sec @ f/9, ISO 800

Judges' comments: "Lovely composition and a bright expression of these fisherwomen's pride in their own independence."



6

7 Incendies

St Petersburg, Russia

Pavel Galkin, Cook

Sony Alpha DSLR-A700, Tamron AF

70-300mm f/4-5.6 Di LD Macro 1:2

@ 300mm, 1/200 sec @ f/5.6,

ISO 800

Judges' comments: "A bit grainy, but as a moment of highly sensitive reportage, it is superb."



7

8 Human canvas

Ethiopia

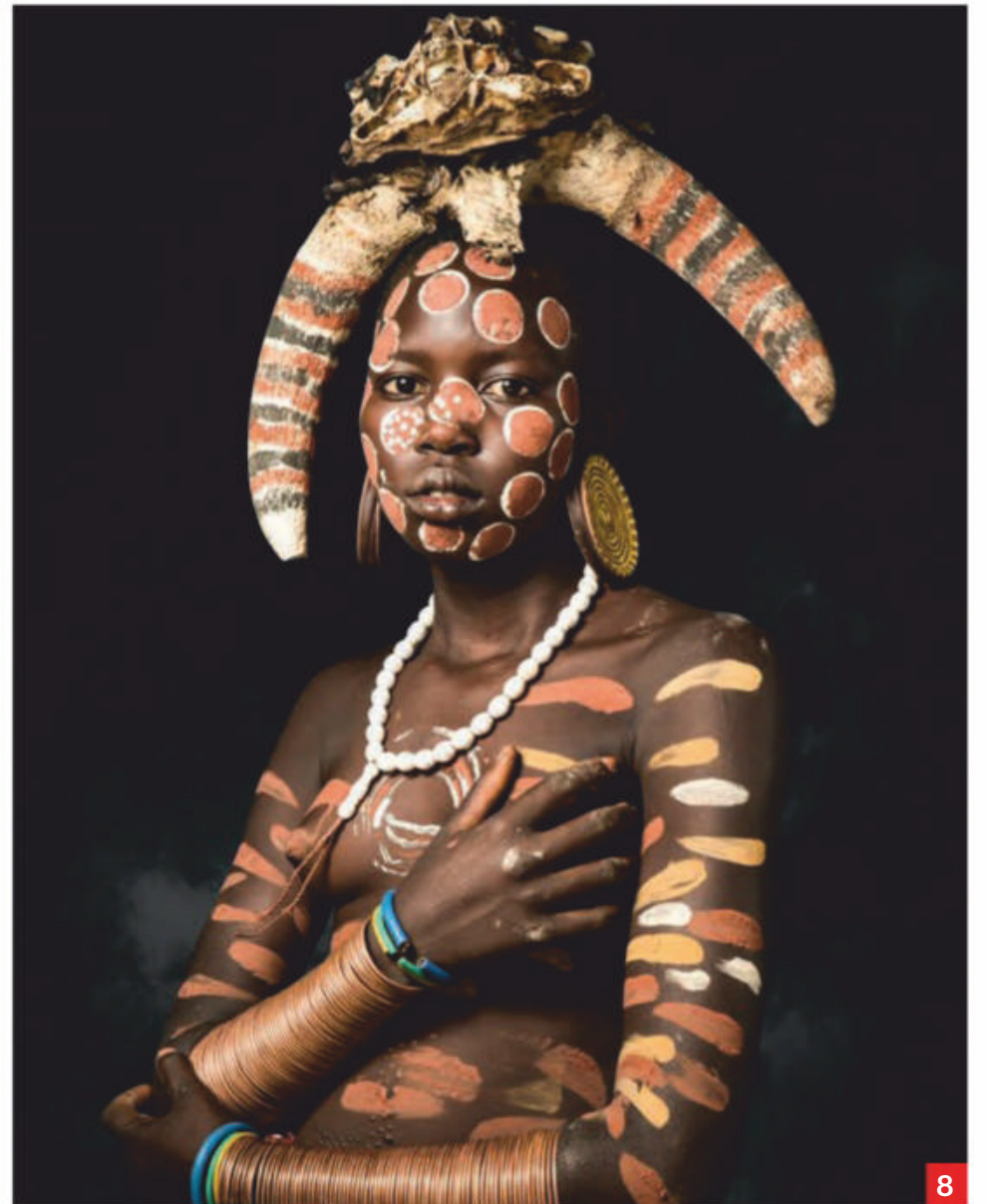
Biljana Jurukovski, Registered nurse

Nikon D810, Tamron SP 24-70mm

f/2.8 Di VC USD G2 @ 70mm, 1/250

sec @ f/7.1, ISO 640

Judges' comments: "Stunning portrait. Excellent technically." ►



8





9

◀ **9 Krishnas with colours**

Uttar Pradesh, India

Sanghamitra Sarkar, Doctor

Nikon D750, Nikkor AF-S 24-120mm
f/4 @ 38mm, 1/400 sec @ f/4, ISO 250

Judges' comments: "Full of vibrancy, colour and life. A great sense of mischief." ▶



1

Travel Icons



HIGHLY COMMENDED

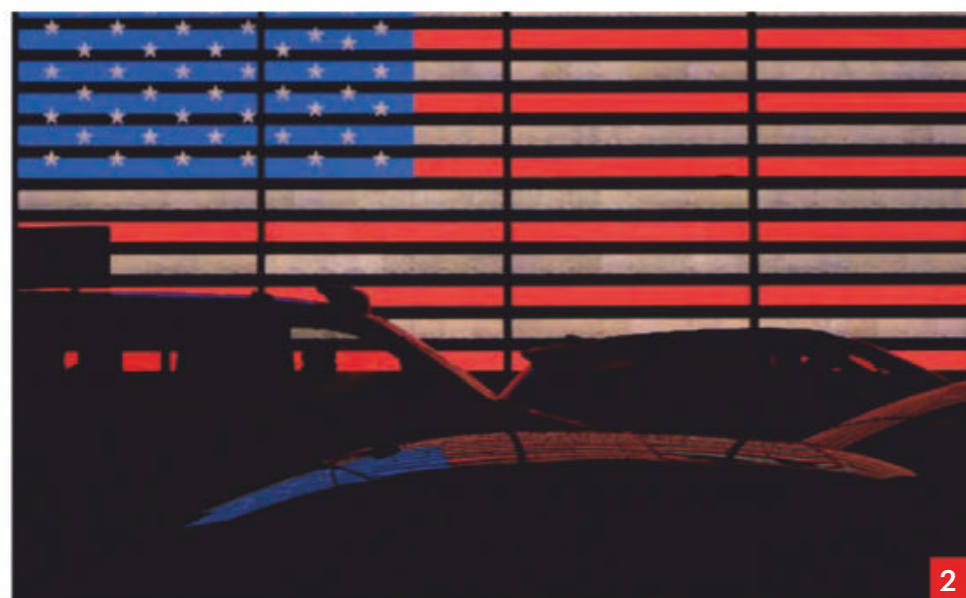
2 USA A-OK

Times Square, New York, USA

Philip Tomlinson, Architect

Canon EOS 750D, Canon EF
17-55mm f/2.8 @ 37mm, 1/640 sec @
f/4, ISO 100

Judges' comments: "Bright and
strong. Made by the reflection
on the roof of the car."



2

WINNER (SEE PAGE 16)

Loose button

London, UK

Monika Mazurkiewicz, Dental nurse

Canon EOS 5D Mk III, Canon EF
70-300mm f/4-5.6L IS USM @
300mm, 1/1000 sec @ f/5.6, ISO 1250

Judges' comments: "A sneak peek
behind the formality of the occasion.
Great composition and makes
you smile."

RUNNER-UP

1 Into the London Eye

London, UK

Monika Mazurkiewicz, Dental nurse

Canon EOS 5D Mk III, Canon EF
70-300mm f/4-5.6L IS USM @
300mm, 1/4000 sec @ f/14, ISO 1250

Judges' comments: "Razor-sharp and
well framed. Monotone except for
smoke makes it even more striking."

3 Bazaar

Kashan, Isfahan, Iran

Ali Asghar Yousefi, Unemployed

Canon EOS 7D, Canon EF-S
18-135mm f/3.5-5.6 IS STM @ 18mm,
1/500 sec @ f/3.5, ISO 100

Judges' comments: "Very striking.
All the elements work strongly
together – the diagonal of the
building offset by the figure in black,
while framed by dramatic clouds."



3



4

4 Lady in the rain

Seville, Spain

Barry Pope,

Retired business consultant

Canon EOS 600D, Canon EF-S

18-55mm f/3.5-5.6 III @ 55mm,

1/80 sec @ f/5.6, ISO 200

Judges' comments: "Beautifully atmospheric and haunting shot."

5 Bringing in the catch

Binh Minh fish market, Quang Nam, Vietnam

Dave McKay, Retired

Canon 1DX Mk 11, Canon 24-105mm

f/4L IS USM @ 47mm, 1/1250 sec @

f/9, ISO 800

Judges' comments: "An unusual snapshot of a traditional Vietnamese fishing community."



5

6 Colourful village

Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari Province, Iran

Babak Mehrafshar,

Electronic engineer

Canon EOS 70D, Sigma 17-50mm

@ 50mm, 1/160 sec @ f/7.1, ISO 250

Judges' comments: "Love this. The colours, layers, the woman in the middle of the shot all work perfectly together." ►



6



◀ **7 Luckenbach. Population: 3**

Luckenbach, Texas, USA

Rebecca Banks,

Public relations director

iPhone X, 4mm, 1/750 sec @ f/1.8, ISO 20

Judges' comments: "Transports you to small-town America."

8 Classic rainbow

Havana, Cuba

Pablo Borrego,

Management consultant

Canon EOS 5D Mk III, Canon EF 24-70mm f/2.8L II USM @ 70mm, 1/1250 @ f/7.1, ISO 200

Judges' comments: "We've seen cars in Cuba a million times, but this unusual angle and strong pattern lifts the image. The figure opening the boot adds movement and interest."

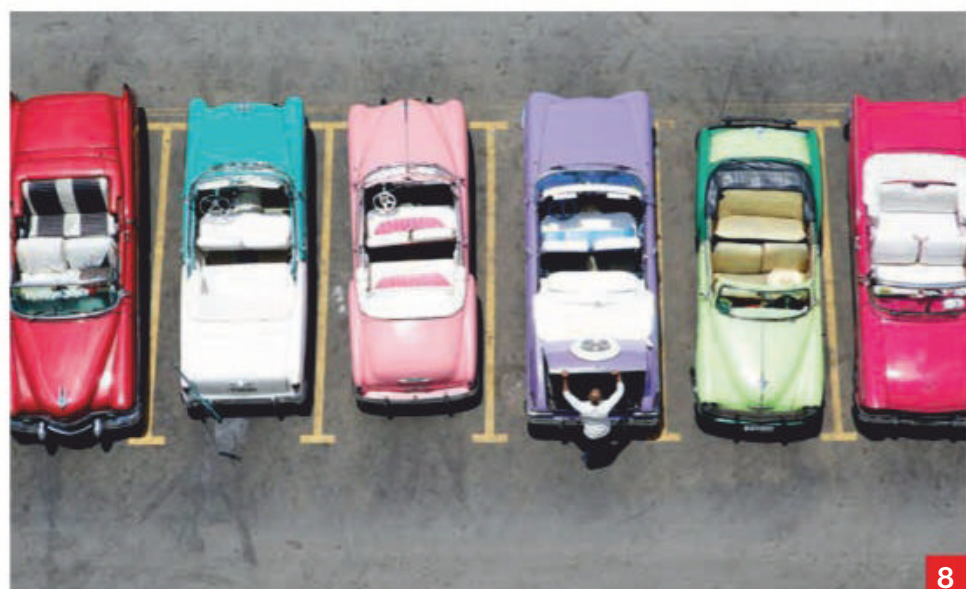
9 Maze

Isfahan, Iran

MohammadReza, Masoumi Teacher

Nikon D800, Nikkor 14-24mm f/2.8 @ 15mm, 1/60 sec @ f/5.6, ISO 5000

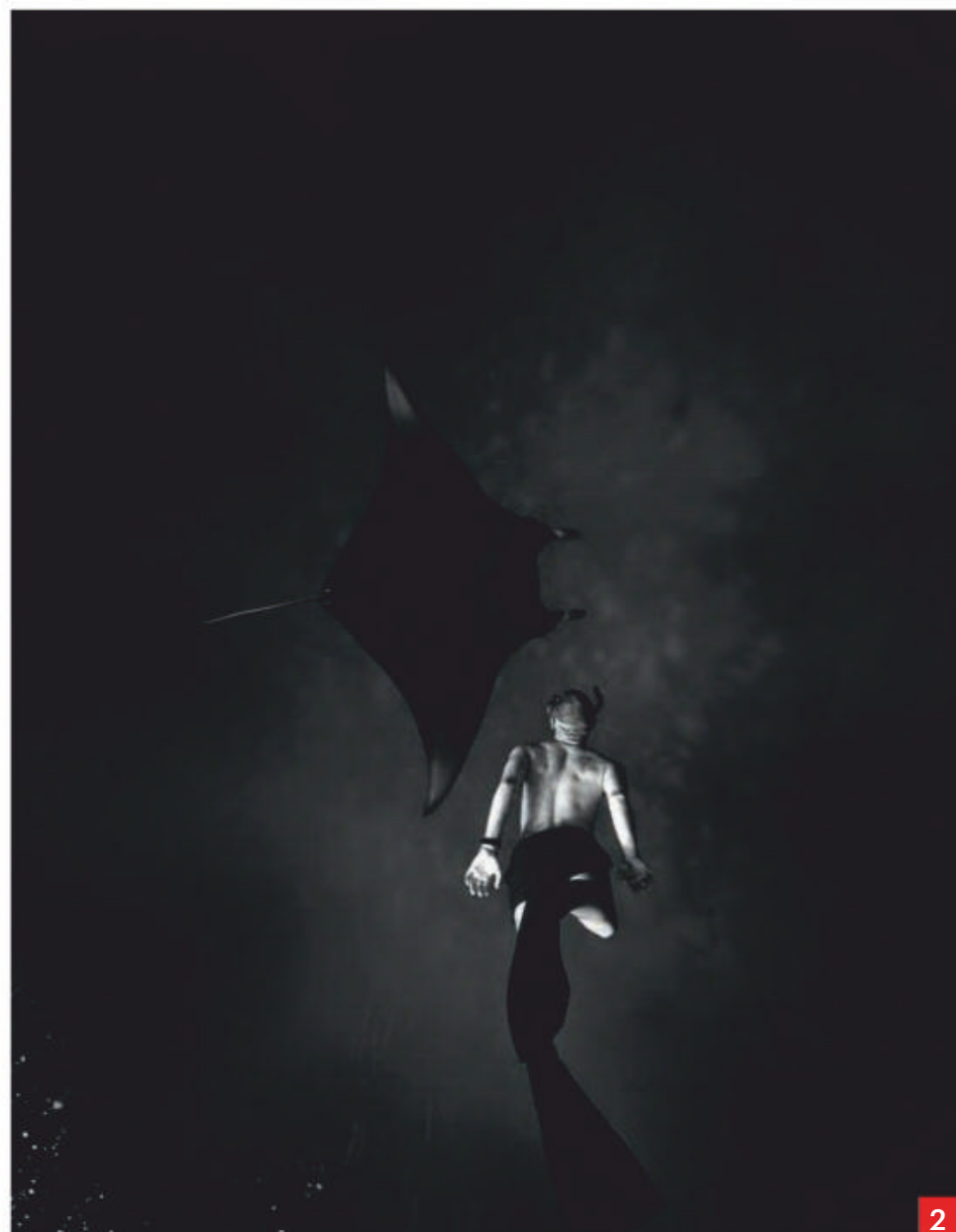
Judges' comments: "The wonderful honeycomb pattern – thanks to the fabulous design of these old Iranian pigeon houses – really draw your eyes in to it."



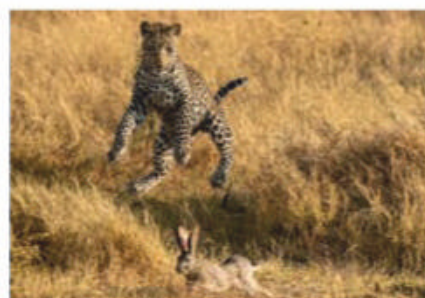


1

Wildlife



2



WINNER (SEE P18) **Hunting wabbits...**

Khwai, Botswana

Giovanni Frescura, Lawyer

Canon 7D Mk II, Canon 70-200mm f/2.8L IS II USM @ 200mm, 1/2500 sec @ f/5, ISO 500

Judges' comments: "The leopard looks as surprised as I'm sure the photographer was. Razor-sharp – look at those eyes. Technically difficult and superbly captured."

RUNNER-UP

① Symphony at the waterhole

Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, South Africa

Prelena Soma Owen, General manager

Canon EOS 1D X Mk I, Canon EF 600mm f/4L II USM @ 600mm, 1/1250 sec @ f/9, ISO 1600

Judges' comments: "So much detail. It's like a jigsaw puzzle. You can look at it for ages."

HIGHLY COMMENDED

② Togetherness

Maldives

Ruta Prendiukaite, Pre-press operator

GoPro Hero4 @ 3mm, 1/320 sec @ f/2.8, ISO 100

Judges' comments: "It's such a powerful shot – really striking to the eye and draws you in. Black and white treatment works well." ►

◀ COMMENDED

③ Food

Pisa, Italy

Giovanni Frescura, Lawyer

Canon 7D, Canon 300mm f/2.8 Is
(plus 1.4x extender) @ 420mm,
1/3200 sec @ f/5.6, ISO 400

Judges' comments: "This is not an accidental photo. It is sumptuous, clean, a frankly ridiculously good depth of field. There is so much anticipation, which is always high-carat value in any image."



3

④ Polar majesty

Jackson Island, Franz Josef
Land, Russia

Christopher Marsham, Retired

Sony A9, Sony G Zeiss 100-400mm
f/4.5 @ 400mm, 1/1250 sec @ f/10,
ISO 400

Judges' comments: "Unusual shot and lots to look at. Great placement of subject."



4

⑤ I see you

Belize

Ruta Prendiukaite,

Pre-press operator

Nikon D750, Micro-Nikkor 105mm
f/2.8 @ 105mm, 1/800 sec
@ f/7.1, ISO 1000

Judges' comments: "Perfect framing. Pin sharp."



5



6

COMMENDED

6 Arctic fox

Hornstrandir, Iceland

Deborah Dunderdale, Police officer

Canon 1DX, Canon EF 200-400mm

f/4L IS USM @ 280mm, 1/1000 sec

@ f/5.6, ISO 800

Judges' comments: "As a portrait this is sensational. There's tremendous engagement and a beautiful background."



7

7 Whale shark encounter

Teluk Cenderawasih National Park, West Papua, Indonesia

Marco Zaffignani, Social worker

GoPro Hero6 @ 3mm, 1/700 sec

@ f/2.8, ISO 100

Judges' comments: "Really grabs your attention. We couldn't stop looking at this."

8 Whakarewarewa wild wallaby

Rotorua, New Zealand

Johnny Hendrikus, Videographer

Panasonic Lumix GH5 with

Metabones Speedbooster,

Canon EF 70-200mm f/4L USM

@ 101mm, 1/640 sec @ f/4, ISO 200

Judges' comments: "Great central focus. Love the way the light draws down the middle of the image."

9 Blue in the Arctic

Iceland

Giovanni Frescura, Lawyer

Canon 1DX Mk II, Canon 300mm

f/2.8 IS USM @ 300mm, 1/5000 sec

@ f/2.8, ISO 640

Judges' comments: "You can feel the cold just looking at this poor fox."



8



9

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR WINNERS!

Our four category winners have won a photography trip to **Texas** to capture the Lone Star State's best angles – from great cities to vast wildernesses.

Our four category runner-up photographers have each won a **Nikon D3500 camera** and an AF-P DX NIKKOR 18-55mm VR lens.

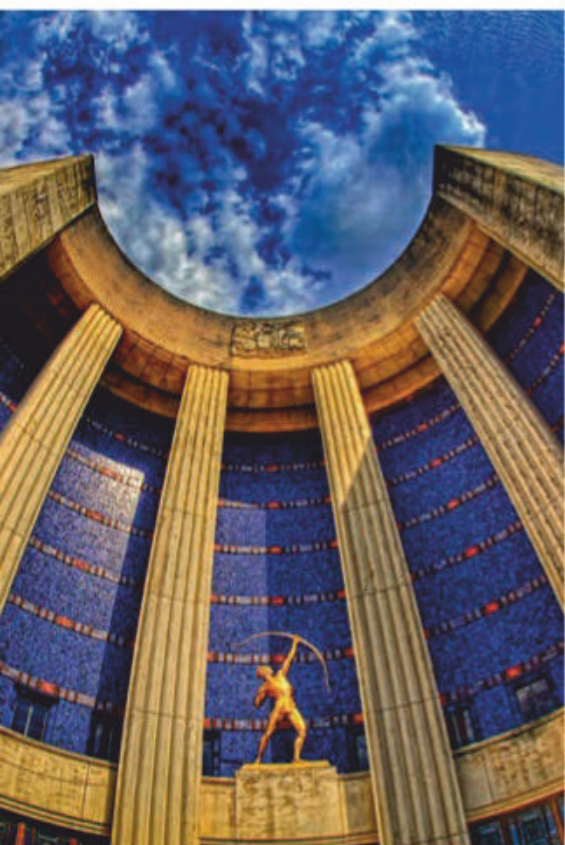
BUT WHAT DID YOU THINK?

Find out who won the audience vote at this year's *Destinations Travel Show* next issue.

Think you know TEXAS? *Think again...*

Texas treats

(clockwise from this) Enchanted Rock, Fredericksburg; Modern Art Museum, Fort Worth; River Walk, San Antonio; live music in Austin; Buffalo Bayou Park; The Hall of State, Dallas.



Try these road trips and experience the Lone Star State like a local...

DALLAS, SAN ANTONIO & FORT WORTH

A trio packed with personality, cultural sights and some seriously fantastic food

Start your adventure in **Dallas**, where glimmering skyscrapers meet tangible history – starting at Dealey Plaza, the birthplace of Dallas and later the location of a significant moment in the USA's history. Learn all about the life and legacy of President John F. Kennedy at the Sixth Floor Museum before delving

into the city's blooming beauty at the 66-acre Dallas Arboretum and Botanical Garden, or its burgeoning creative scene in the atmospheric Arts District.

The old red-brick warehouses of the Historic West End have been transformed into thriving bars and restaurants and across the Trinity River you'll find Trinity Groves, packed with restaurants like the family-run Mexican favourite Beto & Son. Nearby, Bishop Arts District also has a lively local scene: make a beeline for Emporium Pies for a tasty slice (or two).

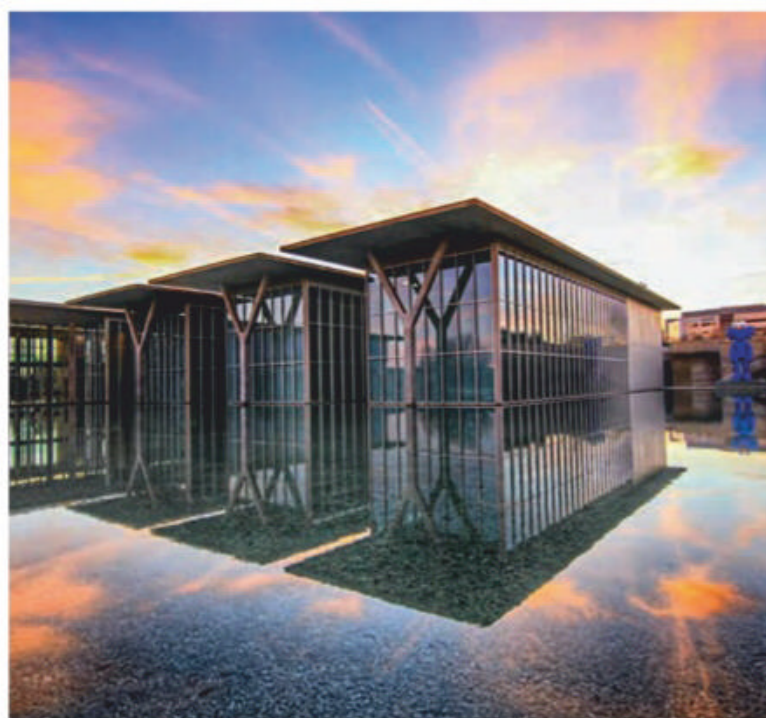
For a night out on the town, venture east of downtown to Deep Ellum. This neighbourhood is known for its rich musical history and continues to be a hub for live music in the city today. It's the place to be to listen to swinging jazz and moody blues.

A half-hour drive or TRE train ride to the west, **Fort Worth** lives up to its nickname: the 'city of cowboys and culture'. You can learn about the Wild West's pioneering women at the National Cowgirl Museum, tour the Cultural District's five

museums and witness the twice-daily cattle drive at the Stockyards National Historic District. You'll want to spend a few days (at least) to tuck into the city's food scene, with its cowboy-sized portions and BBQ-meets-TexMex menus, and to quench your thirst at its home-grown breweries found on the Fort Worth Ale Trail. Be sure to barrel on down to the Firestone & Robertson Distilling Co. too for a dram of distinctly Texan bourbon whiskey.

Home to rich history and vibrant culture, **San Antonio** sits 420km to the south. The city's five Spanish colonial missions form the only UNESCO World Heritage site in Texas. Explore the historic Alamo battlefield or experience a mariachi mass at the still active Catholic parish at Mission San Jose.

Follow the River Walk and you'll find the culinary-centric Pearl District, scenic river boat tours, live music and trails for hiking, biking and birding. Take time for shopping at Market Square – the largest Mexican market outside of Mexico – or check out the city's art scene at the all-new Ruby City contemporary art centre, exhibiting pieces from some of the state's most exciting artists in a modernist structure.



HOUSTON, AUSTIN, BANDERA & FREDERICKSBURG

Get to the heart of Texas with this mix of unexpected urban experiences & cowboy culture

Houston and its growing list of trendy neighbourhoods makes for a great starting point. Take the time to mingle with the locals and uncover offbeat spots, such as Smither Park with its abstract sculptures or eye-popping street murals (the outrageous rainbow streaks across midtown store Biscuit are an easy find) then unwind in the 160-acre urban oasis of Buffalo Bayou Park, with its bike trails and beautiful gardens. For an out-of-this-world experience,

be sure not to miss the Space Center Houston and then its westward to **Austin**.

Home to more than 250 live music venues, it's easy to see why Austin has been dubbed the 'Live Music Capital of the World'. Jam downtown to the Sixth Street district and put 'Parish' on your playlist as this venue is known as one of the best, staging all kinds of music from rock 'n' roll to bluegrass and jazz.

There are some top outdoor activities to enjoy from here too. Mount Bonnell is located in Covert Park and, as the highest point in Austin, a steady climb up its 102-stairs rewards with far reaching views. Alternatively, travel 23 miles west to find the Hamilton Pools Preserve,

a swimming hole that boasts emerald waters and a 15m waterfall for a refreshing dip.

Keep making your way out west and you'll soon enter Texas Hill Country to find **Bandera** and **Fredericksburg** – two small settlements that promise some big Texan experiences. Known as the 'Cowboy Capital of the World', Bandera keeps this tradition alive with Dude Ranches to stay in and authentic hands-on experiences to try; from trail riding to kicking up your heels at a Honky Tonk.

Fredericksburg was originally founded by German settlers so hearty eats and refreshing brews come as standard on its visitor menu. As well as the chance to tour vineyards, breweries and farms, Enchanted Rock is a popular place to hike and, for something unusual, visit the Old Tunnel State Park at sunset to see millions of bats take to the skies on mass.

There's so much to surprise in Texas, you only need know where to look. To help, Flight Centre has trips such as the 11-night *Texan Trails* that can be individually tailored. Flights from Heathrow take ten hours and British Airways flies direct to Austin-Bergstrom, Dallas Fort Worth and Houston International.

For more information, visit texasicons.co.uk



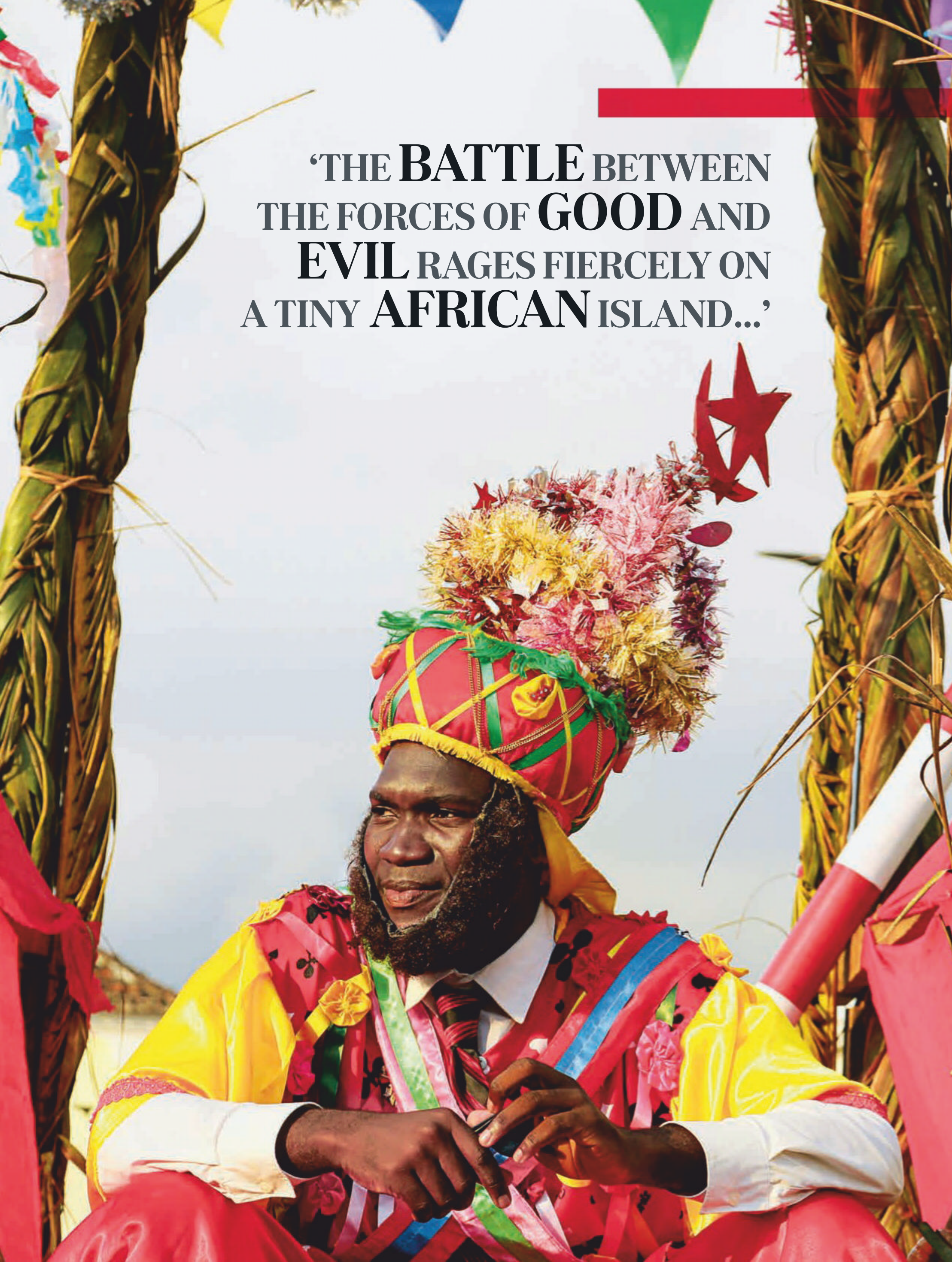
CENTRE STAGE IN SÃO TOMÉ & PRÍNCIPE

Few people venture to this two-island African nation – but visitors in August will see its streets and culture come alive

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHS **PAUL BLOOMFIELD**



**‘THE BATTLE BETWEEN
THE FORCES OF GOOD AND
EVIL RAGES FIERCELY ON
A TINY AFRICAN ISLAND...’**





‘...STRANGELY, I’M NONE TOO SURE WHOSE SIDE I’M ON’

You see, bad is cool. Fearsome warriors enveloped in hellfire yellow and Hades red stomp and swagger to pounding drums and ear-piercing whistles. They sport Stygian shades and swarthy beards, and shake lances and rattle sabres with chin-jutting brio. There’s Feiticeiro, the Sorcerer. There’s Rei Diabolo, Rei Burlante and Rei Tempeste – the Devil King, the Swindler King and the Storm King. Gigante, the Giant, overshadows all.

God’s army is a tepid bunch in comparison, clad in wan white and blue, plodding and staid. No wonder the crowd cheers the other side: today, the Devil has the good music.

One thing is certain, though: ‘good’ will triumph – it always does in the Auto de Floripes, Príncipe’s annual street-theatre clash between fiery Moors and cool Christians in which I’d been caught up – and, like most

around me, I rue the inevitable. But then things are often a bit mixed up on the more-petite partner in Africa’s second-smallest nation, São Tomé and Príncipe.

To say that this former Portuguese colony is off the tourist trail would be a monumental understatement. Fewer than 30,000 visitors annually come to São Tomé, nudging the equator in the Gulf of Guinea; only a fraction of those add the 150km hop north-east to Príncipe. Why? Well, accommodation and inter-island transport are limited, but mostly, I suspect, few travellers visit because few travellers have visited.

Sure, things don’t always go as you might like – and not just the outcome of the Auto de Floripes. Poverty is widespread, tourist services uneven, and the *leve-leve* (sloooooow) pace occasionally frustrating. Yet with its emerald forests, volcanic crags and turquoise waters, delectable seafood, warm smiles, a fascinating (if not

untroubled) history and rich biodiversity – the archipelago has been dubbed the ‘Galápagos of Africa’ – Príncipe boasts an A-grade travel CV. I ventured here to check its cultural and natural credentials, timing my visit for mid-August when the island’s pocket-sized capital, Santo António, stages this epic medieval battle re-enactment.

Seeds of history

Stopping on São Tomé en route, I took the opportunity to explore the larger island’s natural and cultural heritage with local guide Jeremiah, who provided a potted history as we chugged along the east coast road. “According to tradition, Portuguese sailors landed here on 21 December 1470, at that time the feast of St Thomas – hence the island’s name – reaching Príncipe the following month,” he began. “Enslaved people from mainland Africa were shipped in to work sugar-cane plantations; ►

Prepare for battle
(left) A Moros warrior takes time out before facing the Cristianos (above) at the Auto de Floripes street festival; (previous page) the Devil’s army prove that bad is cool

Sights & sounds

(clockwise from right) Pico Cão Grande is the most prominent of the volcanic peaks on the islands; a local boy; cocoa drying; a sign in the national park; a beach near Água Izé on São Tomé; a band member warms up; fish is left in the sun to dry; a Moros horn blower, ruins at Ribéria Izé; (below) the old hospital at Água Izé

◀ coffee and then cacao were introduced a couple of centuries later.” After slavery was abolished in 1869, plantation owners recruited contract workers (*serviçais*) – essentially slaves in all but name – from Angola, Mozambique and, particularly, Cape Verde; many were stranded here after promised tickets home failed to materialise. Their communities lined our route into the rural south.

Yellow minibuses buzzed past us as we drove beneath blazing flame trees, dodging young girls lugging bottles of palm wine and boys riding homemade wooden scooters. Black kites wheeled above the shoreline, scouting for fish and rats, while pigs snuffled free-range through the roadside scrub.

Just beyond the Abade River, where women spread a kaleidoscopic patchwork of drying laundry on the rocks, we arrived at Roça Água Izé. One of the islands’ largest cacao plantations (*roças*), spanning around 2,600 sq km, by the early 20th century it was worked by some 2,500 *serviçais* overseen by a handful of Europeans. At its peak, the country was the world’s largest exporter of cacao, but after independence from the Portuguese in 1975, the industry withered. Perhaps 1,000 descendants

of those workers still live in the crumbling buildings at Água Izé.

This plantation is a far cry from visions of Scarlett O’Hara-style Deep South glamour, though it’s a vibrant community with corner shops, bars, a school and church. We trundled along broken stone roads past vestigial railway tracks – the remains of a 50km network – to park under a breadfruit tree outside a building that exuded a rueful air of eroded grandeur: the plantation hospital, once among the best in West Africa.

From there we roamed the residential district, among giggling children, chickens scratching in the dust and snoozing dogs. Tired, paint-peeling homes stand in tight-packed rows like back-to-backs in a northern mill town, albeit one steaming in 27°C heat, with cacao beans and fish drying on the cobbles.

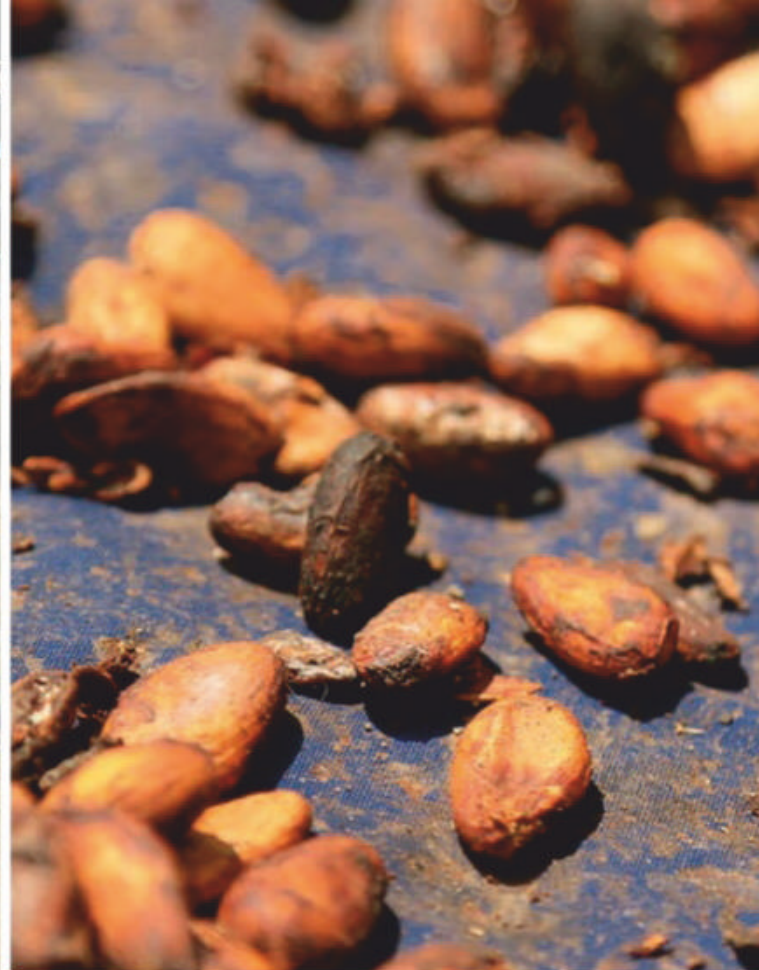
Continuing down to the beach below, we strolled among *dongo* dugout canoes hauled out on the sand after pre-dawn fishing missions by Angolares, descendants – according to legend – of Angolan slaves who escaped a 16th-century shipwreck and founded *quilombos* (Maroon settlements) in the jungly south.

Into the jungle

Continuing south, the road became increasingly winding, the trees denser, the mountains spikier as we traversed the rainforest of Obô National Park. A vast, phallic outcrop loomed from the mist known locally as *leite de voador* (flying fish milk); the 386m-tall phonolitic tower of Pico Cão Grande, the most prominent of the volcanic pinnacles that scrape the sky in the south of both islands. Tsetse flies dive-bombed me ▶

‘At Obô National Park, a phallic outcrop loomed out from the mist known locally as flying fish milk’





◀ mercilessly as I gazed in awe – at both the primeval landscape and the resilience of those labourers forced to hack out plantations from this stifling jungle.

The sentiment recurred that night as I savoured a trio of traditional Santomean stews: *molho do fôgo* (spicy fish), herby *calalú* and *feijoada* (bean stew). Across the restaurant, a dapper septuagenarian guitarist plucked the unmistakable melody of *Sodade* (Longing), made famous by Cape Verdean *morna* queen Cesária Évora. “*Kem mostra bo es kaminj long, es kaminj pa San Tomé?*” he crooned dolefully: “Who showed you this faraway path, this path to São Tomé?”

Over the first seven decades of the 20th century, perhaps 80,000 Cape Verdeans were coerced across to these islands; today, their descendants comprise about half of the 8,000-strong population of Príncipe, where I headed next day on the 35-minute aerial hop from São Tomé.

The flight was thrilling; the landing was nerve-jangling: I feared the little prop plane’s wings would clip the canopy cloaking Príncipe’s rugged hillsides like a blanket of broccoli. Its forest is impenetrably dense, even compared with lush São Tomé and between them, the islands host over 25 endemic bird species – more than the Galápagos, in one-eighth of the land area – plus perhaps 150 endemic



plants. Wild is everywhere; unchecked, nature overtakes all.

The point was reinforced during a coastal stroll to Ribeira Izé, an abandoned plantation established in the early 19th century by iron-willed Maria Correia, a Príncipe-born woman determined to defy gender conventions by ruling her own domain. The yellowed stone ruins of her once-impressive church are clutched in a verdant embrace by liana tendrils and buttress-rooted *oká* (silk cotton) trees, like the root-strangled temples of Angkor.

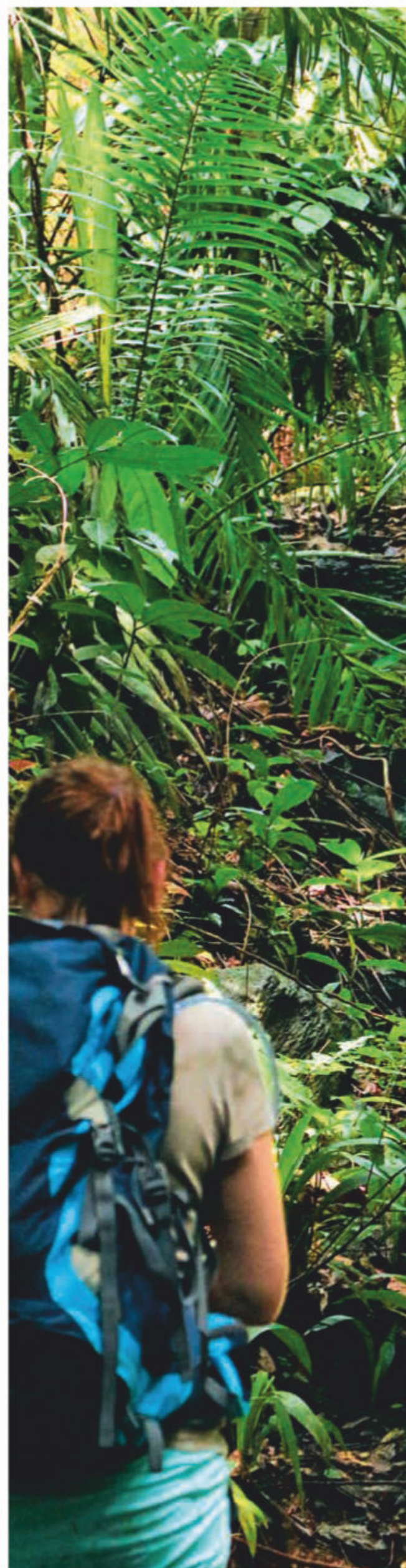
Peaking Pico

Hungry for more nature immersion, next day I set out to summit Pico Papagaio – at 680m, a smidgen taller than Cão Grande, though mercifully less vertiginous. While I waited for my local guide I took a turn around Santo António, proclaimed the ‘world’s smallest capital’. The Vatican City might quibble that point, but it’s certainly diminutive. In five minutes I’d walked its half-dozen or so streets.

In Casa Morabeza, a community initiative supported by the social and conservation-focused NGO Príncipe Trust, I chatted with locals as they crouched over venerable sewing machines, creating appealing bags and clothes with discarded plastics and textiles. At the market I browsed stalls piled with vegetables familiar and less-so – mountains of bulbous gourds and roots alongside carrots and beans – plus homemade hot sauces and stupefying banana varieties.

Driving south with eco-guide Brankinho, tarmac soon morphed into dirt as the track snaked into the hills past wooden shacks and rusty, vine-tangled tractors. The entrance to Príncipe’s share of Obô National Park is marked with a charmingly rustic sign adorned with a turtle, a reminder of the island’s charismatic marine

A trail less travelled
(clockwise from right)
The Pico Papagaio hike;
a woman sewing at Casa
Morabeza, a community
initiative run by the NGO
Príncipe Trust; Brankinho
with a jackfruit



‘Our trek through Obô National Park’s emerald murk started to a soundtrack of trills and squawks’



denizens. From September to April four turtle species nest on its beaches, and I'd watched humpbacks, which cruise past from August to October, breach and lobtail offshore.

Plunging into the emerald murk, our trek started gently enough, to a soundtrack of trills and squawks. Flashes of red feathers betrayed a mob of grey parrots – ubiquitous island emblems – while a characteristic 'pip-pip-pip' above heralded the dazzling endemic Príncipe kingfisher. Brandishing his rusty panga, Brankinho showcased the park's bounty: furry *izaquente*, African breadfruit; red and green peppercorns and chilli plants, introduced by colonists, and yuca, a source of makeshift soap.

The real hike began at the abandoned plantation house of Quintal do Pico, its overgrown garden yielding wild coriander and thyme-like *micocô*. Grappling tree roots, we hauled ourselves up the steep, slippery trail between huge *oká* and tree ferns, over moss-lubricated rocks and rotting logs sprouting fungi in curious shapes and hues: blood-red globes, egg-yolk buttons, crinkled papery bracts. After three hours we emerged onto the peak to be rewarded with views across the island and down to Santo António, besieged by green.

The descent was, if anything, tougher, and I soon ran short on water. Brankinho vanished into the trees, returning with a satisfied smile, a branch and a foraged ►



◀ jackfruit. “*Pau agua*,” he declared, holding the branch above my gaping mouth: “Tree water” – deliciously cool, with a hint of cucumber. I hefted the bulbous jackfruit to test its weight – and spent 20 minutes picking its viscous sap from my fingers.

I needed those fingers clean for lunch at Sheira’s ‘restaurant’ – really a lean-to shack – in Roça Sundry back up north. Like Água Izé, the once-grand Sundry plantation hosts a community descended from *serviçais*; here, though, many work in the newly opened hotel housed in two beautifully renovated colonial houses, where I was to spend my last nights.

Sheira, ladling banana chunks from oil bubbling on her alfresco stove, greeted me with an infectious grin; she’s 50, but looks half that (“My secret? Dance, smile, play football, stay young!”) I tucked into her spicy, *soupy guisado do peixe* (fish stew), then grilled fish with salad, fried banana and rice – a typically simple but tasty island classic – as we chatted with her grandson Benax.

Sheira is the community’s mouthpiece in negotiations over *Terra Prometida* (Promised Land), a new colony being built for the community’s 130-odd families, providing modern housing to replace cramped plantation quarters. “Here we have only one room with two beds for three people,” she observed, showing me her home. “Our new house will have a kitchen, bathroom, separate rooms; we will have a kindergarten, schools, a church, a market.”

But while the community prepares to depart, old ways are being revived at Sundry, not just the elegant colonial houses. Cacao, introduced here in 1822, is once more being transformed into chocolate, albeit at an artisan scale, providing employment for plantation residents.

Such human heritage is as precious as natural treasures, reflected in the island’s designation as a UN Biosphere Reserve. Some aspects are under threat: Lung’iye, the Príncipe dialect, is spoken by just a handful of islanders. Others are thriving – not least the Auto de Floripes, a melange of pseudo-Christian legend and local folklore that

draws pretty much the whole island to Santo António every August.

Good vs evil

Superficially it’s a medieval morality play, based on a *chanson de geste* (French epic poem), introduced to the island by the Portuguese. In brief, the army of Imperador Carlos Magno (Emperor Charlemagne) confronts that of the Saracen Almirante Balão (King Balan), who has stolen holy Christian relics. The Moorish leader’s daughter, Floripes, falls in love with a Christian knight, Guy of Burgundy; a series of vocal battles and stylised skirmishes between Cristianos (Christians) and Moros (Moors) follow at locations across the town before, inevitably, the former triumph. “It’s a story of passion and betrayal, good versus evil,” explained anthropologist Rita Alves, who I encountered at a serendipitous moment mid-clash. “The script has changed little in two centuries.”

Today, though, it’s an all-day sensory spectacle, more carnival than performance, with subtle accents

reflecting ambivalent attitudes towards former colonial masters.

By the time I arrived mid-morning, the action has been hotting up for several hours. I use that description advisedly: the actors, wearing multi-layered costumes, ties, false beards and hats since dawn, must have been sweltering. Still, the fiery-hued Moors marched through the town to the beat of drums and ear-piercing whistles, character names painted on shields – helpful subtitles for onlookers – amassing a boisterous entourage. Meanwhile, the blue-and-white-clad Christians, more solemn but no less strident, loudly denounced the perfidy of the Saracens.

By mid-afternoon, children were buzzing with excitement – and sugar: vendors touted candyfloss, popcorn, octopus, sea snails and crabs. A phalanx of demonic, cane-wielding *bobos* (jesters) shepherded spectators out of the line of fire. Red shield clashed against blue, sword clattered sword. Soldiers fell, rose and fell again, while Floripes looked on from her ‘castle’ and the frenzied action climaxed in a succession of deafening crescendos.

At dusk I retreated. I’d miss the final hours of raging and rhetoric, but of course I knew the Christians would prevail. Though the show has evolved, the script is preserved – just like Príncipe. Its precious heritage – rare wildlife, historic plantations and unique culture are protected by isolation and intent, to be discovered only by those few who venture to this curious, captivating jewel. ►

‘Today the festival is an all-day sensory spectacle, more carnival than performance’

Blazes of colour

(clockwise from far left) Sheira is a community spokesperson in Roça Sundry; a Príncipe kingfisher; street food includes barbecued octopus; good and evil come face to face; crabs at Santo António; the old plantation building in Roça Sundry; a *bobo* plots mischief; (right) Moros watch from their balcony



São Tomé & Príncipe
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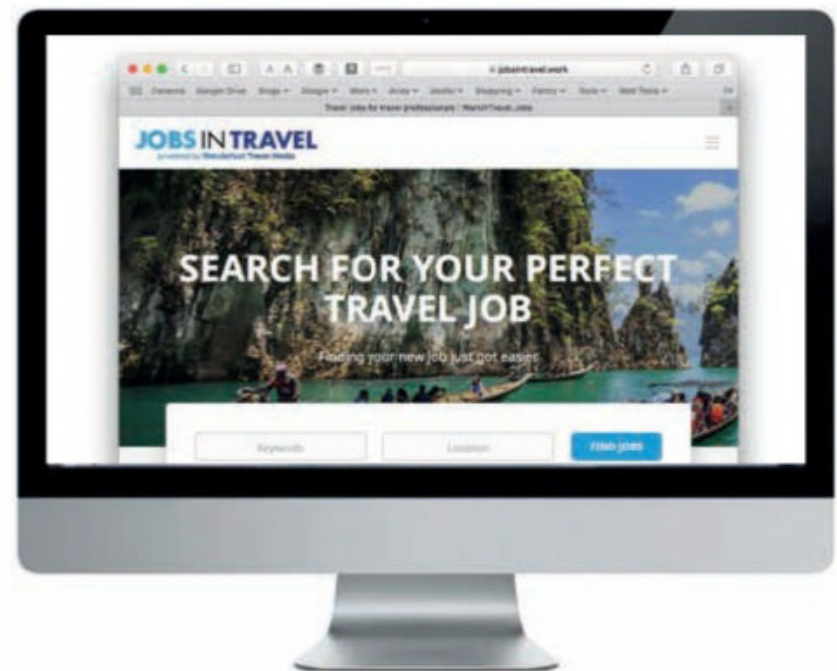
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Footnotes

São Tomé & Príncipe, Africa

THE TRIP

The author travelled with **Rainbow Tours** (020 7666 1260; rainbowtours.co.uk) on a tailor-made trip. An eight-night itinerary, including two nights at Omali Lodge in São Tomé, three nights at Roça Sundy and three at Sundy Praia on Príncipe; breakfasts and dinners; flights; transfers and some activities costs from £3,550pp, based on two people sharing.

Vital statistics

Capital: São Tomé city (Príncipe: Santo António)

Population: 216,000 (8,000 on Príncipe)

Language(s): Portuguese (official), plus several creole languages

Time: GMT (no daylight saving)

International dialling code: +239

Visas: Not required by UK nationals for stays up to 15 days.

Money: Dobra (\$), currently about \$28 to the UK£1. ATMs are rare outside São Tomé city, and credit cards are accepted only at major hotels and resorts. Bring euros to change into dobras.

When to go

June to September: This is the main dry season, although rain is always possible. There's also a short dry season from mid-January to mid-February, which is rather hotter. During these periods, the sky is often cloudy, so conditions are best for hiking – temperatures remain around 27°C.

GEAR TIPS

Bring light, quick-drying clothing, including long-sleeve shirts and trousers for evenings (to avoid mossie bites – there's no risk of cold). If hiking muddy trails in the biosphere reserve, bring lightweight walking shoes or boots.



Humpbacks migrate past Príncipe between August and October.

October to mid-January and mid-February to May: These are the wetter months, when days may switch from clear blue skies to heavy downpours; orchids bloom in the rains. Turtles nest between November and March, with hatchlings racing for the sea from September to April.

Health & safety

Ensure you have had two hepatitis A jabs and your tetanus cover has been boosted in the last 10 years. For other immunisations to consider, check fitfortravel.nhs.net. Malaria is present on São Tomé but rare on Príncipe; cover arms and legs, apply insect repellent in the evenings, and consider prophylaxis. Cuts and grazes quickly become infected in this hot, humid climate – always clean, apply antiseptic and cover. Crime is rare, particularly on Príncipe, but keep an eye on your belongings.

Getting there & around

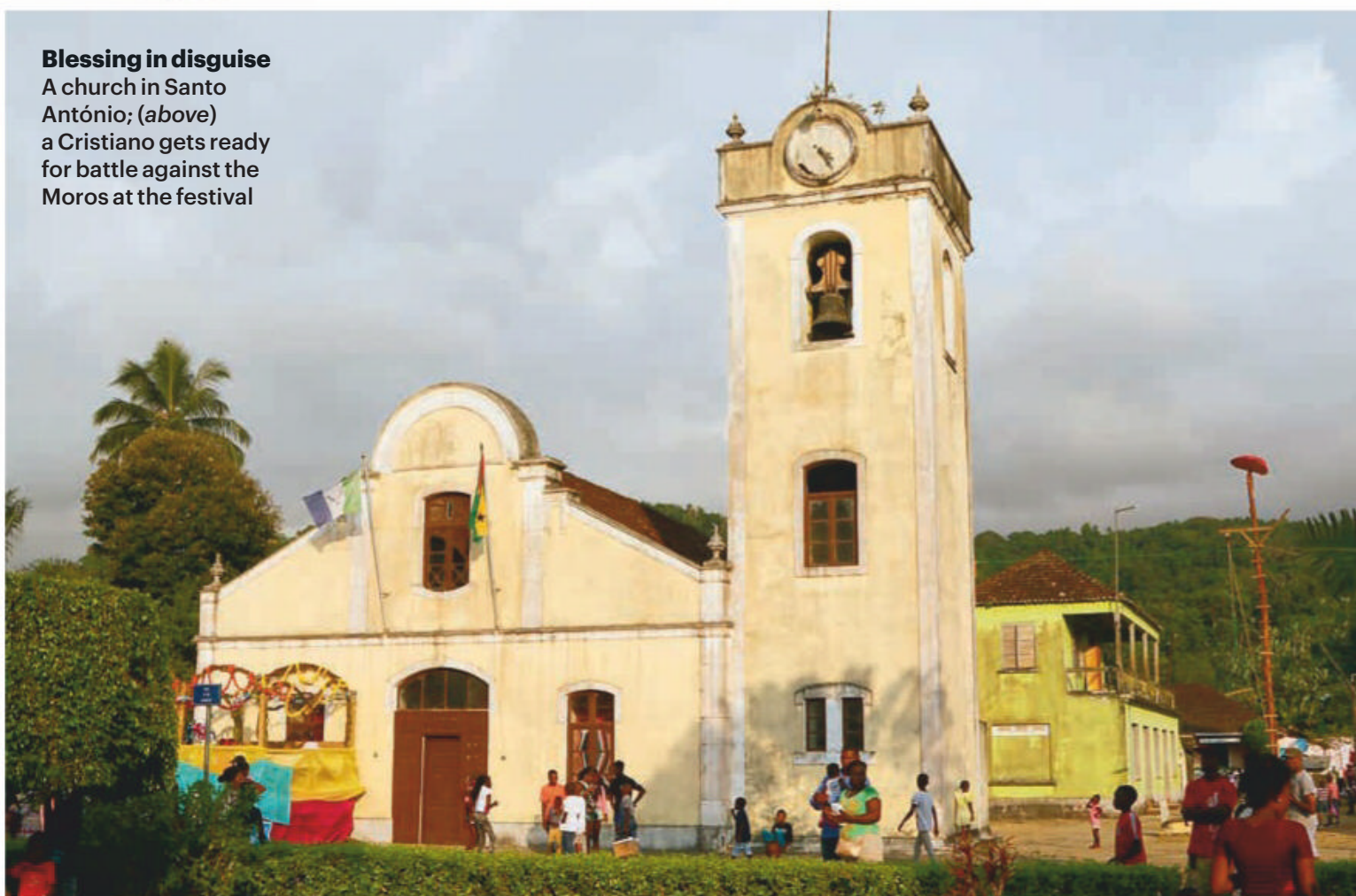
TAP Air Portugal (0345 601 0932; flytap.com) flies from London and Manchester to São Tomé via Lisbon with a short stop in Accra; flight time is around eight



hours, from £742 return. Several airlines, including TAP, offer daily connections from the UK to Lisbon. Ideally allow an overnight stay to be sure of catching the early morning flight to São Tomé.

STP Airways (+351 218 437 040; stp Airways.st), the islands' national carrier, makes the 35-minute hop between São Tomé and Príncipe six times weekly; return fares start at around €170 (£150). Book well in advance for high season. The ferry between the islands takes at least eight hours and is not recommended; a number of ships have sunk, most recently in April 2019. Local transport on São Tomé consists of yellow taxis and shared minibuses running set routes; ►

Blessing in disguise
A church in Santo António; (above) a Cristiano gets ready for battle against the Moros at the festival



8 São Tomé & Príncipe highlights

1 Santo António

The self-proclaimed 'world's smallest capital' is a warm, smiling place. Sip a cold Rosema beer in a shack bar or dance in a weekend disco to *kizomba* (from Angola) and *kadance* (from Angola and Cape Verde).

2 North-east beaches

Praia Boi, with its squeaky-clean golden sand, and Praia Banana are among the planet's most photogenic beaches.

3 Pico Papagaio

'Parrot Mountain' lives up to its name: on the steep, hike to the top of Príncipe's iconic 680m summit you'll hear grey parrots and kingfishers.

4 Roça Sundry

Just one of the island's visitable historic estates, this former plantation offers an insight into the colonial system, as well as a chance to understand modern life for many islanders.

5 Baía das Agulhas

A boat trip to the broad Bay of Spires provides vistas of volcanic pinnacles looming from the dense rainforest that cloaks the south of the island.

6 Praia Grande

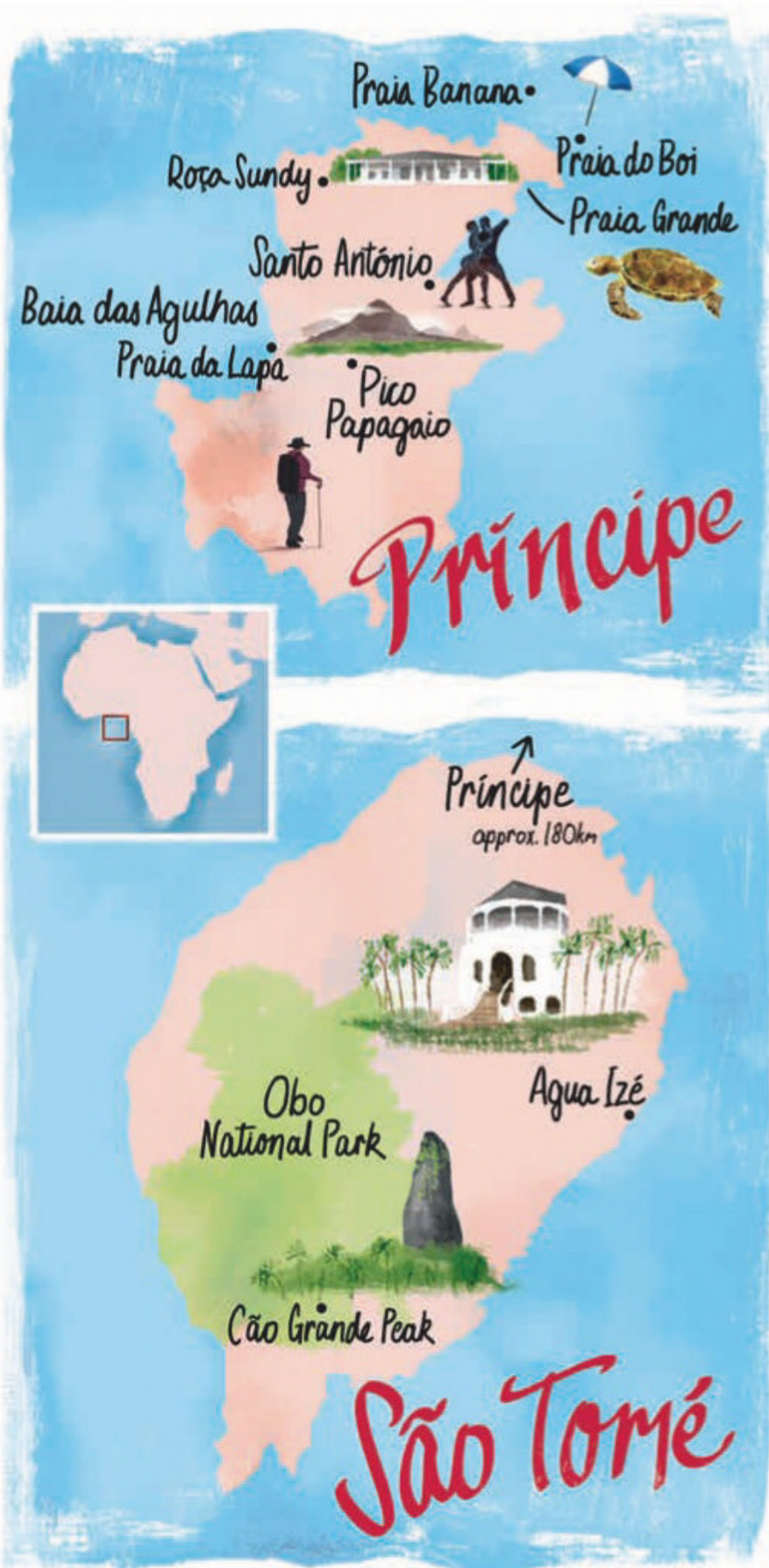
A focal point of turtle conservation efforts; between September and April green, olive ridley, hawksbill and leatherback turtles return to their natal beach to nest.

7 Água Izé

São Tomé's largest plantation is a bustling mini-city, an intriguing place to wander and meet the descendants of *serviçais* (contract workers).

8 Pico Cão Grande

The coastal journey south to this 663m-high phonolitic outcrop traverses Angolar communities and the dense forest of Obô NP, revealing a cross-section of island life.



◀ on Príncipe, there's no public transport as such – locals rely on hitching. A recommended local operator for tours on São Tomé is **Navetur** (+239 222 2122; navetur-equatour.st).

Cost of travel

Theoretically, travel is very **cheap**: basic guesthouses cost from around £20pp, and simple meals are just a few euros, plus perhaps \$35 (€1.20) for a local Rosema beer. However, flights are expensive and most excursions depend on transport organised through hotels. Budget between £150 and £200 daily for a good-standard hotel, food and activities.

Accommodation

On São Tomé, **Omali Lodge** (+239 222 2350; omalilodge.com) has one of the island's best restaurants. It's convenient for the airport. B&B doubles from €250 (£215).

HBD ('Here Be Dragons') runs Omali plus three properties on Príncipe, developing sustainable, low-volume tourism and employing around 600 locals. **Sundy Praia** (+239 999 5000; sundyprincipe.com) consists of stylish tented villas above the namesake beach, with an excellent restaurant. Half-board doubles from \$755 (£650).

Roça Sundry (+239 999 7000; hotelrocasundy.com) has guest rooms in both the beautifully restored grand colonial house and the former stable block. The joy here is meeting the inhabitants

of what was formerly the island's largest plantation. The beach at Sundy Praia is a short walk. Half-board doubles from €220 (£190).

Food & drink

Everyday cuisine is simple – grilled or fried fish, **feijoada** (bean stew), rice and fried bananas or breadfruit is a common meal. Look out for the more traditional dishes, particularly **calulú stew** with fish or chicken, or **molho no fogo**, a spicier fish stew; these generally need to be ordered a day in advance.

Imported Portuguese beers (Sagres and Super Bock) are common, but local **Rosema beer**, sold in unmarked brown bottles, is also fine. Other local favourites include palm wine, sold in bottles stopped with paper twists, and **cacharamba** firewater.

Further reading

São Tomé & Príncipe (Bradt, new edition due February 2020)

Equador by Miguel Sousa Tavares (Bloomsbury, 2009), novel set on the islands during the colonial era. 📖

More online

Visit www.wanderlust.co.uk/204

Planning guides

São Tomé and Príncipe Travel Guide

Archive article

- Remote isles – issue 177
- Tribes and festivals – issue 139

Natural highlights
(clockwise from this)
Gaze out over Lake
Cocibolca; festival fun
on the Caribbean Coast;
and Our Lady of the
Assumption Cathedral
in Granada



and puma, and hundreds of bird species (including the rare Royal flycatcher) at the Indio Maiz Biological Reserve. Make for the Pacific, for some mindful whale-watching from the western coastline and a chance to visit the Chacocente and La Flor Sanctuaries, which protect thousands of nesting turtles.

COASTAL & CULTURAL GEMS

Head east and you can experience all the charm of Nicaragua's Caribbean coast. From the bustling chief port of Bluefields, go south to find the colonial city of Greytown or make your way north to the municipality of Puerto Cabezas. Alternatively, take a boat ride to the paradisaal retreat of The Corn Islands, located 70km offshore, for a recharge.

You'll find a vibrant cultural mix during this exploration, mostly Mestizo and Creole, with a chance to interact with small, indigenous communities, such as the Miskito and Garifuna.

This diversity is something that Nicaragua respects, with languages and traditional ways of life protected in law. It means that when travellers visit, they too can share in this celebration of multi-ethnic and multilingual communities; experiencing traditions and customs that have been passed down for centuries and ensuring that this kind of cultural sustainability can endure for many more.

NICARAGUA

AS NATURE INTENDED

Green is the perfect adjective for Nicaragua. Not only does it apply to the country's lush jungles but also to the raft of responsible measures Nicaragua has introduced to make sure that its areas of pristine and natural beauty stay protected for generations to come. You'll find raw adventure and wild animal encounters in a destination that has designated 30% of its geographical layout to natural reserves – the largest in Central America – along with a desire to welcome visitors to its safe shores in a sustainable manner, encouraging a slower pace of travel so that they may discover its delights to the fullest.

GO WILD

Eco-tourism in 'The Land of Lakes and Volcanoes' doesn't disappoint. With 28 volcanoes, there's a host of escapades to enjoy; from swimming in any of the 14 volcanic lagoons to peering at molten lava from the edge of steaming craters, from caving in volcanic cones to even volcano boarding.

Then there's Lake Cocibolca, a body of water so immense that when it was found by Spanish

explorers they thought it a sea, or take a trip down the San Juan River; dancing through verdant banks on the Nicaraguan side of a natural wonder that's found just a step over from the border of popular Costa Rica.

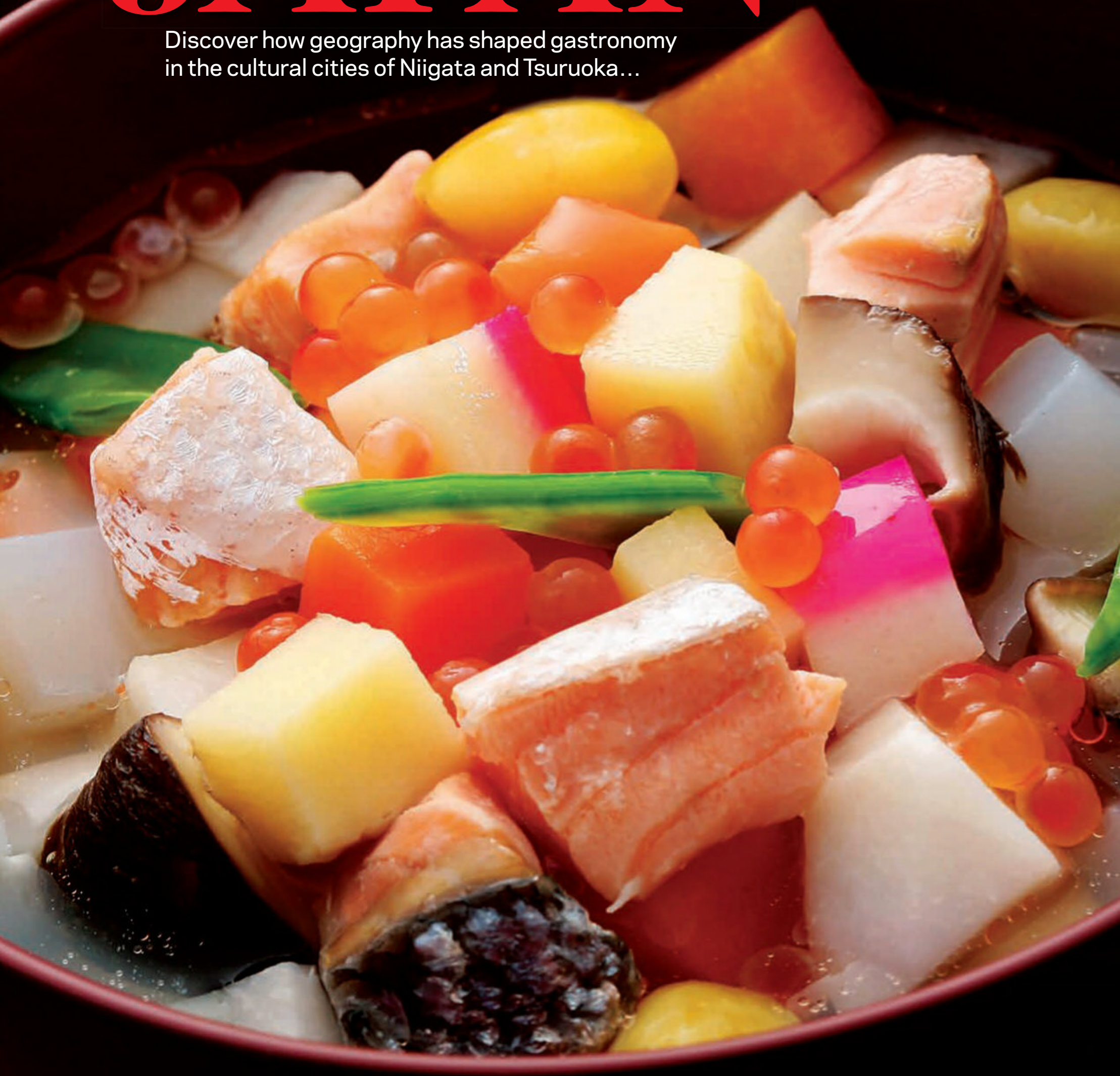
Nature lovers will be surprised by the sheer biodiversity on offer. The Bosawas Biosphere is the largest tropical rainforest north of the Amazon whilst in the south-east, you can spot howler monkeys, jaguars



Nicaragua
As Beautiful as Ever!

A taste of **JAPAN**

Discover how geography has shaped gastronomy
in the cultural cities of Niigata and Tsuruoka...



On the north-east coast of Japan, where mountains roll into rice fields

and waves crash on sandy shores, two historical cities stand out for their gastronomic delights. Harbourside Niigata and mountainous Tsuruoka – located in the Tohoku region of Japan, a few hours from Tokyo by train – have a very different culinary style, but both approach cuisine in a way that celebrates the farmlands, oceans and mountains that surround them. The cities may be 140km apart, but their commitment to the country's natural abundance unites them in reputation: as true culinary capitals of Japan.

NIIGATA SEA SENSATIONS

Niigata is renowned for its seafood. This port city faces the Sea of Japan, where an abundance of fish surge through the warm and cold currents that collide in the water. At the city's Pia Bandai Market – one of the largest fish markets on the east coast – you can see hundreds of varieties of seafood laid out every morning, from giant red



snow crabs to oysters that shine like pearls. Grab a selection of ready-to-eat sashimi to go, or take your fresh-bought seafood to the charcoal grills in the middle of the market, where you can cook up a lunch that sizzles.

Niigata's close relationship with the sea has resulted in other bounty too. In the 1800s – thanks to a maritime shipping route known as the Kitamaebune – Niigata became linked to Kyoto in the south, with the two cities exchanging ingredients, culinary techniques and culture. This heavily influenced Niigata's gastronomic style, resulting in dishes like *noppeijiru* soup – a daily staple available in many local restaurants – where colourful vegetables and seafood were finely chopped in the traditional Kyoto style, but served in soup form to keep



Food for thought
(clockwise from left) A bowl of *noppeijiru* soup; *shojin-ryori* cuisine; Yamabushi monks make the pilgrimage to Dewa Sanzan; experience Pia Bandai Market; see Geigi perform at Saito Villa.

people warm through Niigata's chilling winters.

This maritime trade route also brought with it another cultural gem: Geigi, Niigata's equivalent of Kyoto's Geisha, complete with their white-powdered faces and vibrant kimonos. The rich new population travelling from the south needed rich new means of entertainment, and so the Geigi thrived; and with them, the restaurants and teahouses that the Geigi frequented. You can still experience this special cultural spectacle to this day. At Saito Villa – a traditional Japanese house set among maple trees and bamboo groves – you can spend time in the company of the Geigi, with traditional songs, dance and games to be enjoyed while the koi carp swim lazily in the pond outside.



TSURUOKA MOUNTAIN HIGHS

The city of Tsuruoka, by contrast, didn't receive Kyoto's grand influence. Instead, this rural, mountainous region adopted a more simplistic approach to cuisine. Harsh winters meant locals had to find innovative ways to preserve their mountain vegetables, which is why dozens of varieties of *tsukemono* (pickles) are so prevalent in all the restaurants today. Now they're eaten as Tsuruoka's finest delicacies – but for centuries they represented survival.

It is thanks to this uniquely uncomplicated food culture that Tsuruoka was designated a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy: the only city in Japan to achieve such a feat. The locals take a single, basic ingredient and transform it into something special. Nowhere is this more noticeable than in the collection of colourful dishes that form *shojin-ryori* – the traditionally vegetarian meal of Yamabushi (monks) that Tsuruoka has become famed for.

The region is also home to three of Japan's most sacred mountains – a Japan Heritage



PROMOTIONAL FEATURE

Site collectively known as Dewa Sanzan. Traditionally this was both a Shinto and Buddhist spiritual area, where monks from both religions would live in harmony, foraging for their own vegetarian shojin-ryori from the ingredients found on the mountains: bamboo sprouts in miso, sesame tofu topped with dainty lily bulbs, and mountain vegetables dried in the sun.

However, in the Meiji era of the 1800s, Shinto and Buddhism were officially separated, and Dewa Sanzan followed the path of Shinto under the pression of the government. This also resulted in the removal of any Buddhist influence from the local cuisine. Whereas shojin-ryori had always been vegetarian – following Buddha’s words that no one should eat a creature

trapped in the circle of reincarnation – Shintoism was about letting natural elements become one with the body: and so meat and fish were gradually added to the selection of dishes.

You can sample this Shinto-style for yourself at Saikan’s Pilgrim Lodge (3,500 yen; £23), which sits at the top of Mount Haguro, one of the three sacred peaks. The 40-minute hike up goes through thick cedar forests with waterfalls and deity statues hiding among the trees. You’ll understand why Tsuruoka won the culinary UNESCO designation when you taste it (made even more satisfying thanks to the 2,446 stone steps climbed to reach it) but you can also find shojin-ryori served in 12 other pilgrim lodges at the foot of Mount Haguro too.



A TASTE OF THE PLAINS

One thing Niigata and Tsuruoka have in common are rice fields that stretch far into the horizon. Both regions see heavy snowfall in winter, which brings moisture to the soil, and intense sunlight in summer, creating optimal humidity. This results in some of the best rice in Japan. Niigata’s local brand, Koshihikari, is much sought-after by sushi chefs for its texture, while Tsuruoka’s Tsuyahime rice has for six years in a row been awarded the highest ranking in the annual Japanese Rice Tasting Contest.

For Niigata, this bounty of delicious rice has led to high

quality saké. The conditions are perfect for producing it: the heavy snowfall purifies the air, then creates an abundance of pure fresh water when it melts. This is used to ferment the local rice, resulting in a premium rice wine that is considered one of the best in the country. There are around 90 breweries in Niigata, many of which can be visited for a tour and tasting. Imayotsukasa found near Niigata Station is a well-known brewery. Founded in 1767 it has free tours in English. Or, try and time your visit for ‘Sake no Jin’ for a taste of Niigata’s annual sake festival.

Tsuruoka, on the other hand, uses their award-winning rice in more deferential ways. Locals see rice as a divine gift, and so use it as a main ingredient to food and drink at festivals. On 31 December, one of the largest celebrations takes place on snowy Mount Haguro, where toasted *onigiri* (seasoned rice balls) and hot local saké flows freely, to warm the bodies – and more figuratively the hearts – of participants, ‘purifying them’ for the year ahead.

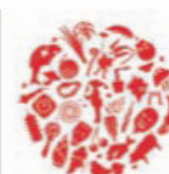
Both cities and their approach to gastronomy can tell you so much about their way of life. They paint a picture of how history, geography and culture can profoundly shape the cuisine of a destination – a very enticing prospect for all travellers.

‘...hot local saké flows freely, to warm the bodies – and more figuratively the hearts – of participants, ‘purifying them’ for the year ahead’



Revel in rice

(top) Tasting sake at Niigata’s Saké no Jin Festival and toasted onigiri; and a shot of the paddy fields that produce the rice that both regions have become so famous for



TSURUOKA
UNESCO
CREATIVE CITY OF
GASTRONOMY

For more information go to nvcb.or.jp/travelguide/en/ or tsuruokacity.com

THIS MONTH ON *Wanderlust.co.uk*



Party time: 2020's world festivals

The party never ends with our rundown of the most exuberant festivals, from flying kites in India, to dancing in New Orleans...

wanderlust.co.uk/WorldFestivals



Unexpected destinations

These gems offer thrilling sights, amazing hospitality and breathtaking views...

wanderlust.co.uk/Unexpected2020



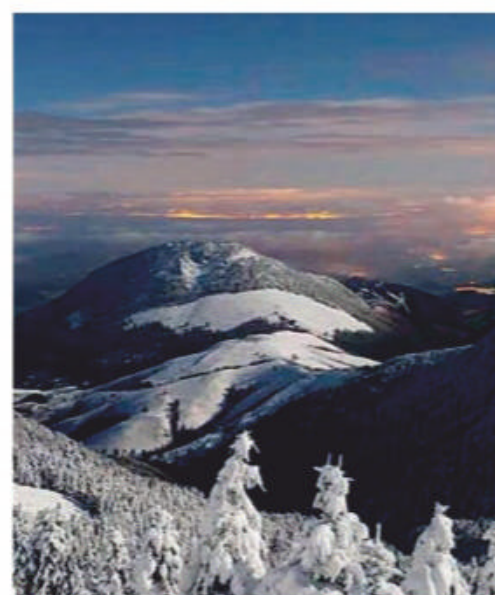
Our wonders

Forget the pyramids, the Parthenon, the Taj Mahal – here's *Wanderlust's* alternative travel wonders, old and new.
wanderlust.co.uk/WorldWonders



Visit Rijeka

Croatia's Culture Capital is under the spotlight, and the secrets of its enviable Adriatic lifestyle are finally out...
wanderlust.co.uk/Rijeka



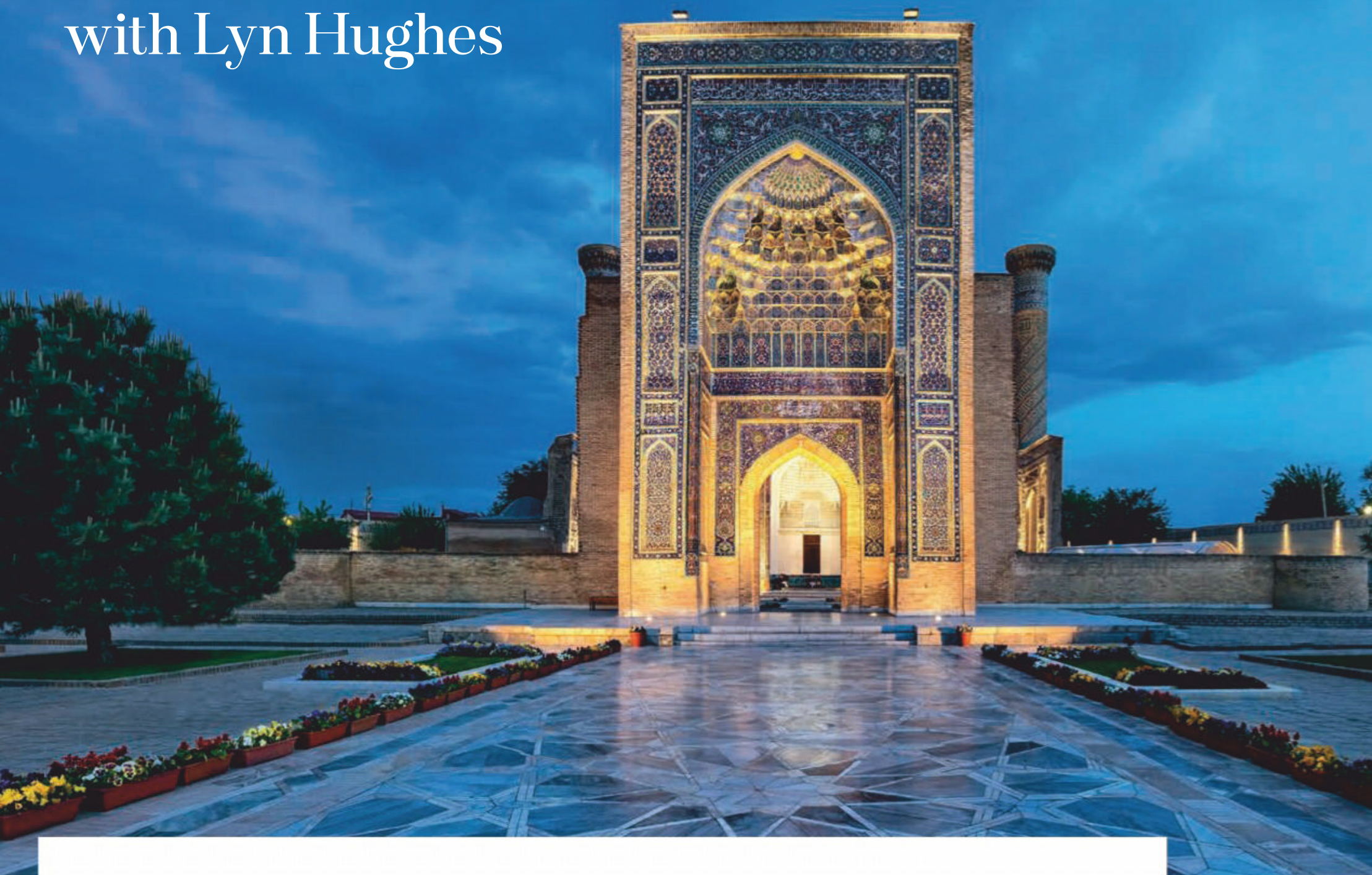
Hidden Barcelona

Go to Girona, head to the coast or seek out the gladiators. Barcelona is more than just a city break...
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TRAVEL WITH THE EXPERTS

Discover Uzbekistan

with Lyn Hughes



DISCOVER SILK ROAD SPLENDOUR – AND UZBEKISTAN'S WILD SIDE – ON OUR EXCLUSIVE JOURNEY

No matter how many photos you've seen of Uzbekistan's Silk Road cities, nothing prepares you for the scale, sumptuousness and richly storied history of Khiva, Bukhara and Samarkand. They're yours to discover on our exclusive trip with Wild Frontiers – as well as taking in the Soviet monuments of Tashkent, and the peaks of Nuratau Reserve.

You travel in the company of *Wanderlust's* editor-in-chief Lyn Hughes, swapping tales in local tea houses, seeking out Uzbek's best *plov* (biryani), and delving into the treasures of this ancient cultural crossroads.

HIGHLIGHTS

Step back in time

From Samarkand's 600-year-old Registan – the heart of the Timurid dynasty – to the glittering mosaics and minarets of Khiva, you'll enjoy guided tours of Uzbekistan's well preserved Silk Road cities.

Local life

Featuring a cooking class with a family in Bukhara, and a village homestay in Yangikishlak, this trip includes many opportunities to meet local people – and immerse yourself in their crafts, cuisine and customs.

The Nuratau Reserve

This mountainous region boasts hiking and wildlife watching – there are 160 bird species to spot as well as the endangered Severtzov wild sheep.

Tashkent's many marvels

In Uzbekistan's eclectic capital, 500-year-old madrassahs rub shoulders with Soviet monuments, ancient bazaars, and opulent cultural institutions – such as the Alisher Navoi Opera and Ballet Theatre. You'll also explore the intricately decorated Metro stations – a work of art in their own right.





“

Picture 'the Silk Road' and it's the incredible cities of Uzbekistan that spring to mind. I can't wait to see them but also to meet Uzbek locals and experience some of its natural beauty too.

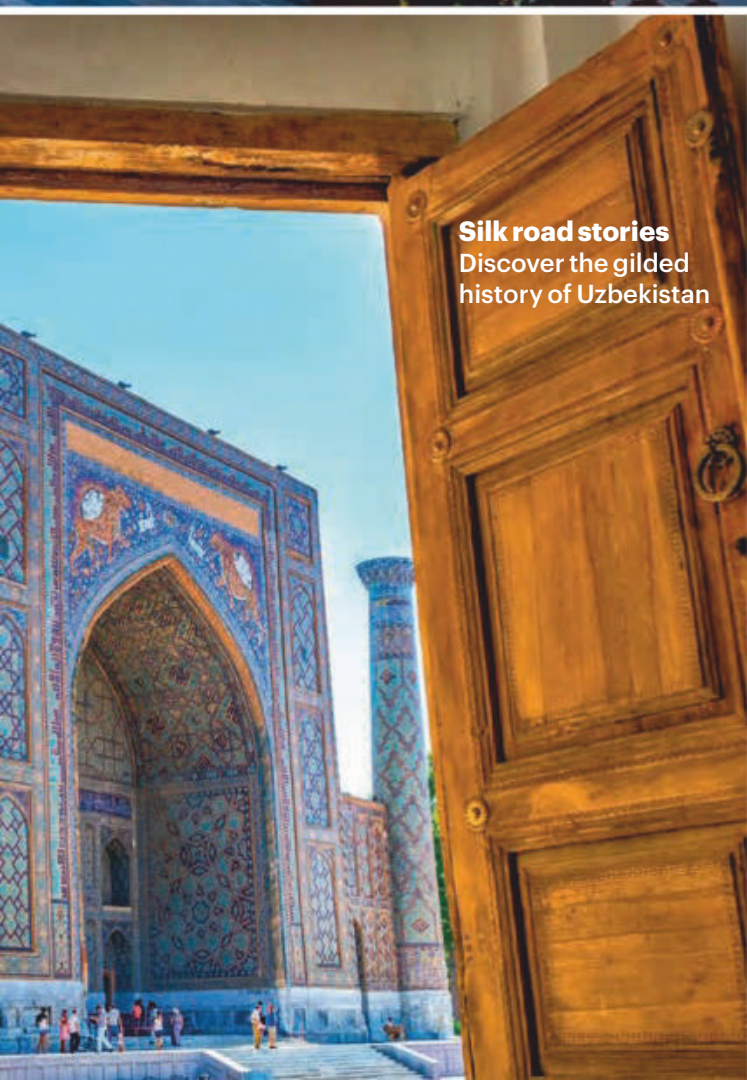
Lyn Hughes



EXPERT BIO LYN HUGHES

You'll be travelling with Wanderlust's award-winning founder and editor Lyn Hughes. She loves venturing where few other travellers tread, so she can't wait to explore the Nuratau Reserve. Lyn and her late husband, Paul Morrison, launched Wanderlust from their spare bedroom in 1993. She's spent the last 26 years travelling all over the world, gathering stories wherever she ventures. Next stop? Uzbekistan...

Silk road stories
Discover the gilded history of Uzbekistan



ITINERARY

- Day 1:** Tashkent
- Day 2:** Tashkent – Samarkand
- Day 3:** Samarkand
- Day 4:** Samarkand – Yangikishlak
- Day 5:** Nuratau Reserve
- Day 6:** Yangikishlak – Bukhara
- Day 7:** Bukhara
- Day 8:** Bukhara – Khiva
- Day 9:** Khiva – Tashkent
- Day 10:** Tashkent

WHAT'S INCLUDED

- A Wild Frontiers tour leader with local guides and drivers
- All accommodation in hotels, plus a remote village homestay in Yangikishlak
- Guided tours of Tashkent, Samarkand, Bukhara and Khiva – plus a cooking class and tea house visit
- All meals, transport and entrance fees (for full itinerary details see online)
- A carbon-offsetting contribution to Eco Act (if booking international flights through Wild Frontiers)
- A maximum group size of 16 people.

BOOKING DETAILS

The dates: 26 August – 4 September, 2020

The price: From £1,895pp*

Call 020 3553 7827 to find out more, or visit wanderlust.co.uk/UzbekJourney

OUR TRAVEL PARTNER



WILD FRONTIERS

*Price based on two sharing. Flights are not included. Subject to availability. Single supplement: £180. This trip is ATOL-protected. For full terms and conditions, go to wanderlust.co.uk/UzbekJourney



TRAVEL WITH THE EXPERTS

Explore Georgia

SEE THE PEARL OF THE CAUCASUS IN A NEW LIGHT ON AN EXCLUSIVE TRIP WITH
AWARD-WINNING GUIDE, WILD FRONTIERS' **DARIO GHIRLANDA**

In search of pristine mountain scenery, celebrated vineyards, and ancient cave towns? Well, Georgia has them all. Best of all, it's still practically undiscovered.

Team up with former *Wanderlust* World Guide Awards winner, Wild Frontiers' Dario Ghirlanda, who'll show you the lesser-explored side of the land on this 11-day small-group tour. Explore Georgia's crown jewels – the current and former capitals of Tbilisi and Mtskheta, where UNESCO-listed gems and hidden treasures go hand in hand – before delving into the remote Tusheti region.

HIGHLIGHTS

Tbilisi

Set on the banks of the Mtkvari River, Georgia's cosmopolitan capital is home to a few cultural gems – don't miss the Narikala Fortress, the Sulphur Baths, the sixth-century Sioni Cathedral and Anchiskhati Basilica.

Food & drink

From Kakheti's famous wine to Tusheti's cheese, all manners of delicacies abound here. Visit a farmers' market, see how yoghurt is made, and dine on home-cooked fare with a local family.

Tusheti National Park

Located to the north of the Greater Caucasus Mountains, Tusheti NP's unspoiled landscapes (*pictured above*) await those who love walking between remote villages. Epic views seem a fitting reward.

Monasteries & fortresses

Sitting starkly in the desert, Davit Gareja's centuries-old monasteries are sure to impress. But the fortresses here aren't too shabby, either – Vardzia's Khertvisi Fortress leads to a cave city, while Akhaltsikhe's Rabat fortress is one of the only Ottoman complexes in the land.



“ ”

Georgia more than lived up to my expectations, thanks to its fabulous scenery, culture, history and people. Oh, and not forgetting the wine. To travel there with Dario was a real pleasure.

Lyn Hughes



EXPERT BIO DARIO GHIRLANDA –

Former Bronze Award-winning guide Dario has been across the world with Wild Frontiers. But Georgia is his next adventure – and you can join him, too.

Born in Rome to Italian/Ethiopian parents, Dario's always had a world view – he moved to Ethiopia aged seven, graduated with degree in Travel & Tourism, and he's even fluent in four languages, too. But it's his total unflappability and sense of fun that never fails to impress his guests.

ITINERARY

Day 1: Tbilisi

Day 2: Tbilisi

Day 3: Tbilisi – Davit Gareja – Kvareli

Day 4: Kvareli – Gremi – Tusheti National Park

Day 5: Tusheti National Park

Day 6: Tusheti National Park

Day 7: Tusheti – Alaverdi – Telavi

Day 8: Telavi – Mtskheta – Gori

Day 9: Gori – Akhaltsikhe – Vardzia

Day 10: Vardzia – Lake Paravani – Tbilisi

Day 11: Tbilisi

WHAT'S INCLUDED

- A Wild Frontiers tour leader with local guides and drivers
- All accommodation in guesthouses and three-star hotels
- All meals, transport and entrance fees (for full itinerary details see online)
- Wine tasting and home-cooked dinner
- A carbon-offsetting contribution to Carbon Clear (if booking international flights through Wild Frontiers)

BOOKING DETAILS

The dates: 25 July – 4 August, 2020

The price: From £1,895pp*

Call 020 3553 9934 to find out more, or visit wanderlust.co.uk/GeorgiaJourney

OUR TRAVEL PARTNER



WILD FRONTIERS

*Price based on two sharing. Flights are not included. Subject to availability. Single supplement: £160. Our travel partner, Wild Frontiers, is AITO-bonded and this trip is ATOL-protected. For full terms and conditions, go to wanderlust.tripsmiths.com/georgiawl

Go green in Georgia
Experience hills and history – including the remote Tusheti NP – on a Wanderlust Journeys adventure





See the real SARAWAK

Tread light and you'll get a rare glimpse into the heart & soul of Borneo...



In Sarawak, fortune favours the intrepid. Malaysia's largest state isn't just beautiful; it's a land of wild encounters, of 140-million-year-old rainforests and unique tribal cultures. Those that tread lightly – who travel slowly and sustainably – will see a side to the region that few others do, for this is a destination that rewards a deeper exploration.

Spend a night in a tribal homestay, and you'll be welcomed as a member of the family. Join a turtle nesting project, and the beach reveals its wild side. Volunteer at an

orangutan sanctuary, and you'll see primates at their most playful. In Sarawak, responsible tourism enriches not only the landscapes and local people – but you too. Here's how you can make your trip count...

FESTIVAL FEVER

From the formidable Iban warriors to the rainforest-dwelling Orang Ulu tribes, Sarawak's indigenous communities have lived in harmony with its wild landscapes for millennia. These tight-knit yet hospitable cultures have, in some areas,

opened up to travellers. For a compelling introduction, visit the Sarawak Craft Council (Kuching) and the Sarawak Cultural Village (Santubong Peninsula) or choose to travel with a responsible operator for a multi-day expedition into the indigenous heartlands. This is an incredible way to see and experience Sarawak's remote settlements and you'll be travelling slowly, staying with families in their wood-built 'longhouses' and sharing in the celebrations of their culture.

Every July, artists from all over the state convene at the Rainforest World Music Festival



too; a three-day celebration of Sarawak's musical heritage – as well as those of indigenous peoples from all over the world – along with workshops, craft displays, and an impressive commitment to sustainability that has seen it ban single-use plastic. It's also working toward a zero-waste goal and collaborates closely with local farmers and entrepreneurs.

Other calendar highlights include Kaul, the Melanaus' festival of spiritual cleansing (April); Sarawak Regatta, a dragon boat tournament in Kuching (November); and the Borneo International Kite Festival in the seaside town of Bintulu (September).

NATURAL PROTECTION

Sarawak's biodiversity is full of surprises. Whether its orangutans joining your hike, the distinctive orange 'do of a rhinoceros hornbill, or the



whiff of a metre-wide rafflesia (the world's largest – and stinkiest – flower) in Gunung Gading, there's always something wild and wonderful for you to discover.

Sarawak is home to Malaysia's highest concentration of Important Birding Areas, including Batang Ai and Pulong Tau national parks, meaning more than 650 of Borneo's bird

species can be spotted in the region. For more flora and fauna encounters, look to the likes of Bako and Kubah national parks, where you can spot native orchids, almost 100 different palm species, and pot-bellied proboscis monkeys.

To pack in added adventure, experienced hikers can tread the 11.3km 'Headhunters Trail' through Gunung Mulu National



Park – with a longboat trip down the Melinau river – or trek between tribal villages in the remote Kelabit Highlands. Kayakers, dip your paddle in the forest-flanked waters of Sungai Sarawak Kiri, a tranquil river just 45 minutes from the capital; cavers, explore the subterranean splendour of Gunung Mulu National Park; and divers, set your sights on Miri-Sibuti Coral Reefs National Park or the shipwrecks along the coast of Kuching.

GIVING BACK

As well as protecting the state's thousands of acres of parks and woodlands, the Sarawak Forestry Corporation (sarawakforestry.com) offers hands-on conservation opportunities with local charities – such as volunteering at an orangutan rehabilitation centre, and releasing hawksbill turtle hatchlings into the ocean. Book the latter, and you'll be staying on Talang-Talang Besar – a tiny island reserve that's far from the beaten track – in the company of dedicated conservation specialists.

Sarawak has adventures aplenty, but it reveals its true treasures to those who linger a little longer and pause to give something back. By travelling responsibly, you'll have the opportunity to connect with Malaysia in a truly meaningful manner – leaving your mark on Borneo in the best possible way.



Sarawak Sensations
(clockwise from top left)
Women in traditional costume; spot orangutans in the trees; rainforest trekking with local tribes; the Rafflesia flower; Gunung Mulu National Park; and a rhinoceros hornbill



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**CUT OUT
AND KEEP
POCKET
GUIDES
P175**



PAGE 169

The Knowledge

Conservation guide award winner Johnny takes us into his lush green 'office'



PAGE 171

Gear of the year

Check out 2020's best gear, judged by our resident gear maestro

PAGE 163

Health

Dr Jane's practical guide to beating the bottom-washing blues while on your travels



PAGE 160

Readers' travel tips

From navigating the Nile to diving along the Sinai Peninsula, here are your best tips and tricks to lose yourself within the golden land of the pharaohs, its ancient legends and dusty pyramids



PAGE 167

The big read: To the Lake

Two lakes, two generations of stories – award-winning writer Kapka Kassabova heads to the southern Balkan states, delving into the origins of her maternal family and stories from the lakes' crossroads; plus all the latest travel reads



PAGE 162

Just back from...

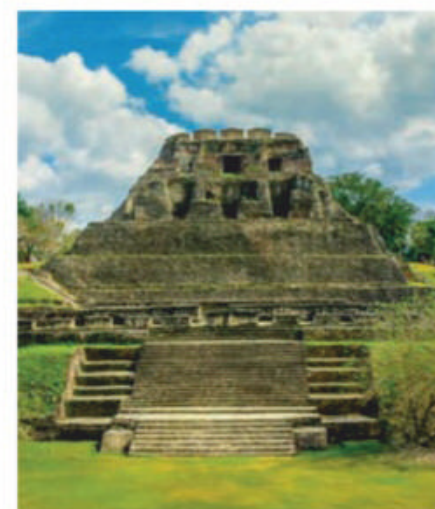
Your latest dispatches from Nova Scotia, dear reader: on hopping over to remote islands, watching whales in the Bay of Fundy and walking along Cape Breton's Cabot Trail



PAGE 186

Real wonders of the world

With its nature parks and waterfront gardens, Singapore's Gardens by the Bay is a leafy Eden in bustling Asia



PAGE 164

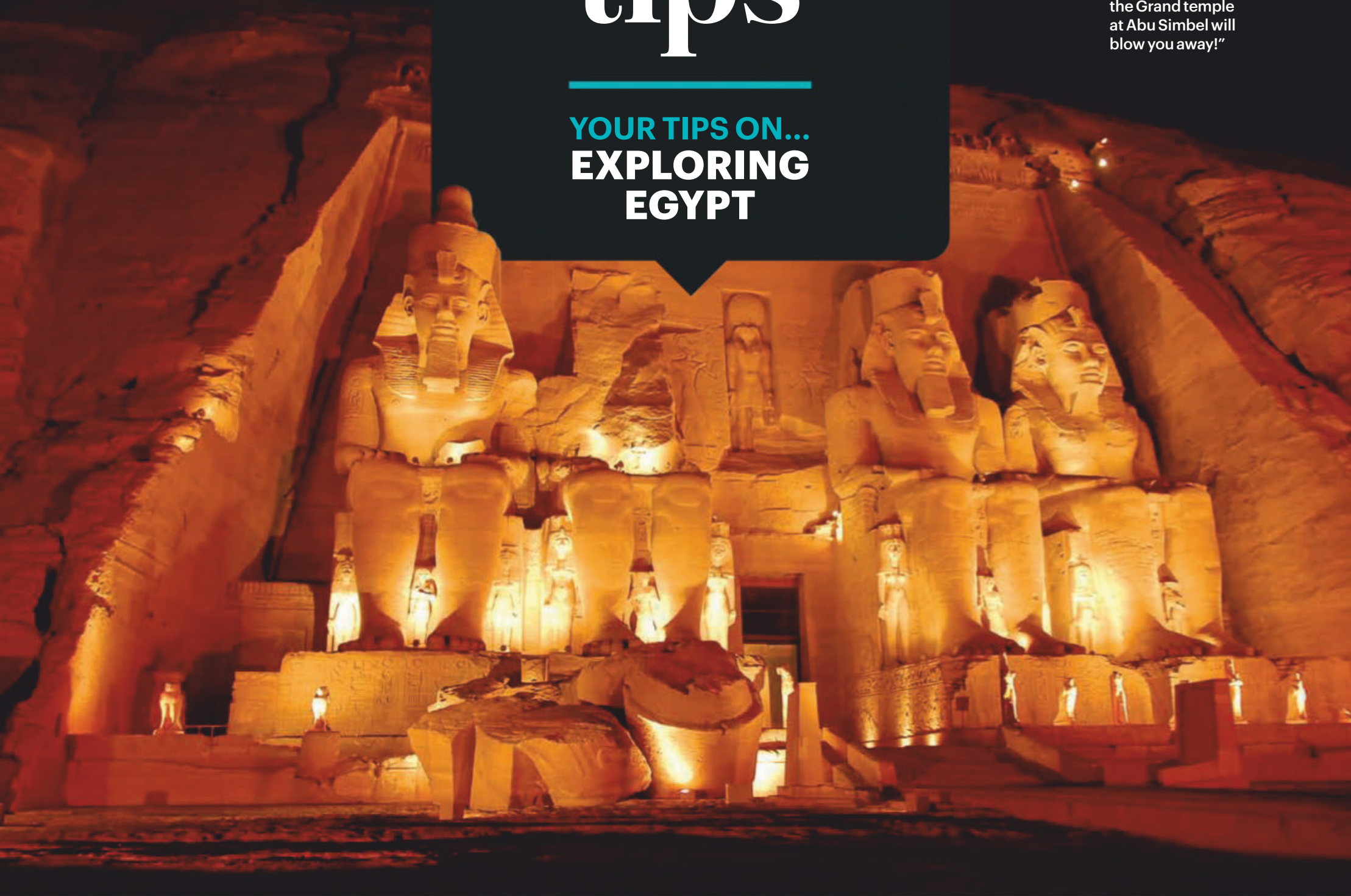
Ask the experts

You asked, so we answered – our experts share their tips to explore underground Mayan ruins, search for pelicans in Greece and take wild city breaks in Bratislava

Travel tips

Ancient art
"After hours of seeing mostly sand as we drove through the desert, the sight of the Grand temple at Abu Simbel will blow you away!"

YOUR TIPS ON... EXPLORING EGYPT



From relaxing on a Nile cruise to learning about local life and exploring ancient temples early in the morning to beat the heat, here are your top tips for visiting Egypt and its many wonders...

Temple of dreams Abu Simbel, Egypt

"One of the best things to do in Egypt is visit Abu Simbel by bus. After hours of seeing mostly sand, the sight of the temple will blow you away. I did it years ago and it's still one of the most striking travel experiences I've ever had."

Sylvia van Oevern

Beat the heat... Egypt

"When visiting sites, leave early for cooler temperatures. Ensure that

you include a river cruise and use anti-mosquito spray throughout the day, covering your arms and ankles at sunrise and sunset. Do some research before you arrive at the sites; it will put the monuments in this fascinating and culture-rich country into context."

Wendy Spencer

...or a hasty retreat Egypt

"Keep a handful of Egyptian coins for persistent toilet attendants who demand prompt payment for two



Here comes the sun
"Get up early for a hot-air balloon ride over the Valley of the Kings," says reader Alison Thackray. "When the sun comes up – wow!"

sheets of extremely thin toilet paper. If you don't have any, try a foreign coin and beat a hasty retreat! I saw a hapless male traveller at the Pyramids of Giza who assured the attendant he had no money – it was all with his wife on the bus. He crept back on with a black eye."

Edith Valerie Roberts

Rolling down the river The Nile, Egypt

"The Nile cruise is so relaxing. You stop at different points to look at temples and learn how the ancient

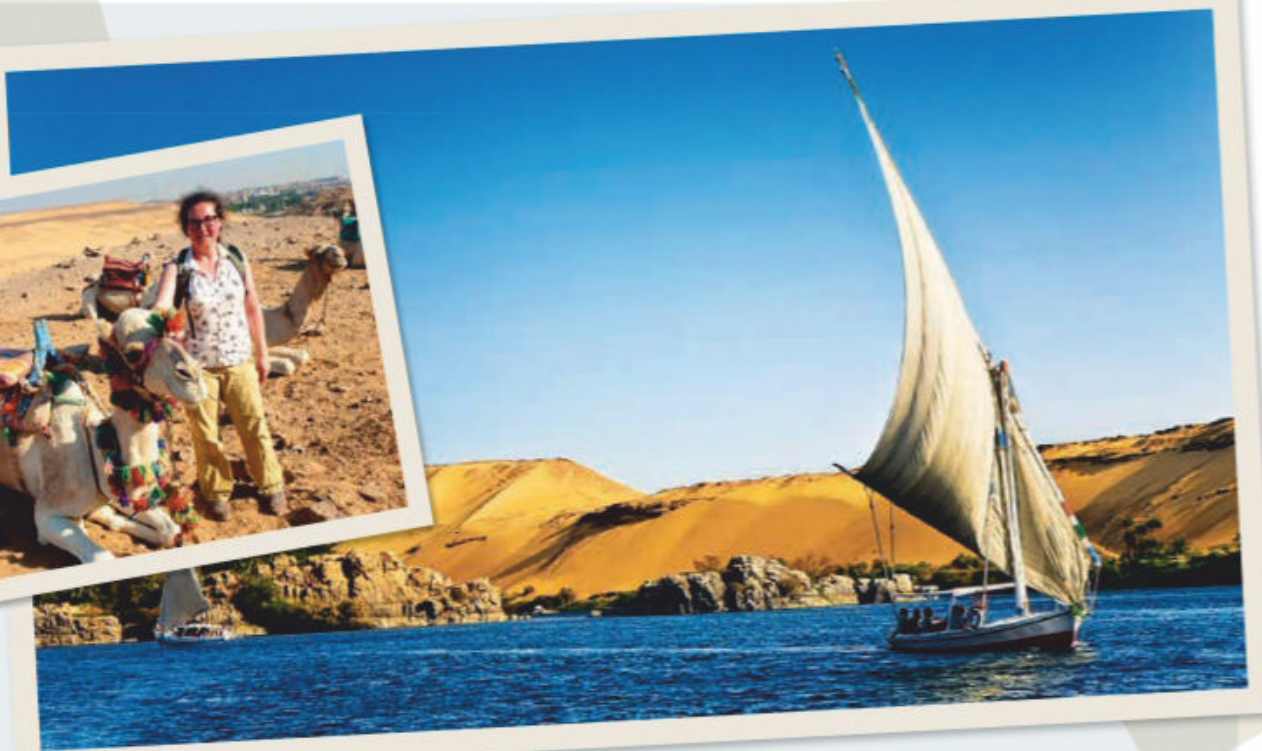
All of the sights

Egypt

"Egypt is a feast for the senses – there's so much to do.

Start in Cairo, then take in the pyramids and Sphinx in Giza, before marvelling at Abu Simbel and sailing in a *felucca* (wooden boat) on the Nile. Cruise to Luxor to see the Valley of the Kings and Queens and Karnak. It wasn't too hot when I went, but it's best to visit Luxor's sites in the early morning."

Eileen O'Herlihy



Egyptians lived and how forward thinking they were. It was great waving to locals standing or swimming by the riverbanks, too. I would not hesitate to do it all again, but next time, I want to sail to Abu Simbel to see the temples carved into the mountainside."

Gail Whiting

Back to horseback

Giza, Egypt

"Go for a guided horse ride at Giza (there are several stables there) and ride out into the desert at dawn. Rise up onto a low ridge with the morning sun glinting on the Pyramids, then let your

horse run (they know the way), galloping straight towards the Great Pyramid. Thrilling!"

Iain MacKenzie

Live & let dive

Sinai Peninsula, Egypt

"Years ago, I travelled in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, which is still one of my favourite destinations. Dahab – Arabic for 'golden' – has several great dive spots nearby; try the Canyon. Alternatively, head out on boat trips from Sharm El Sheikh as you can snorkel past reefs to see turtles, dolphins and thousands of tropical fish."

Aisling Pinchin

Horse tip

Egypt

"Carry plenty of change – people expect *baksheesh* (a small tip) for the smallest service. A policeman I once photographed told me that the police weren't allowed to take it – then reached for the note, saying the ban didn't extend to his horse."

Keith Kellett

Rinse & repeat

Egypt

"Many Egyptian bank notes are worn and dirty from being well used. Always use hand sanitiser straight after handling!"

Lynne Gourley



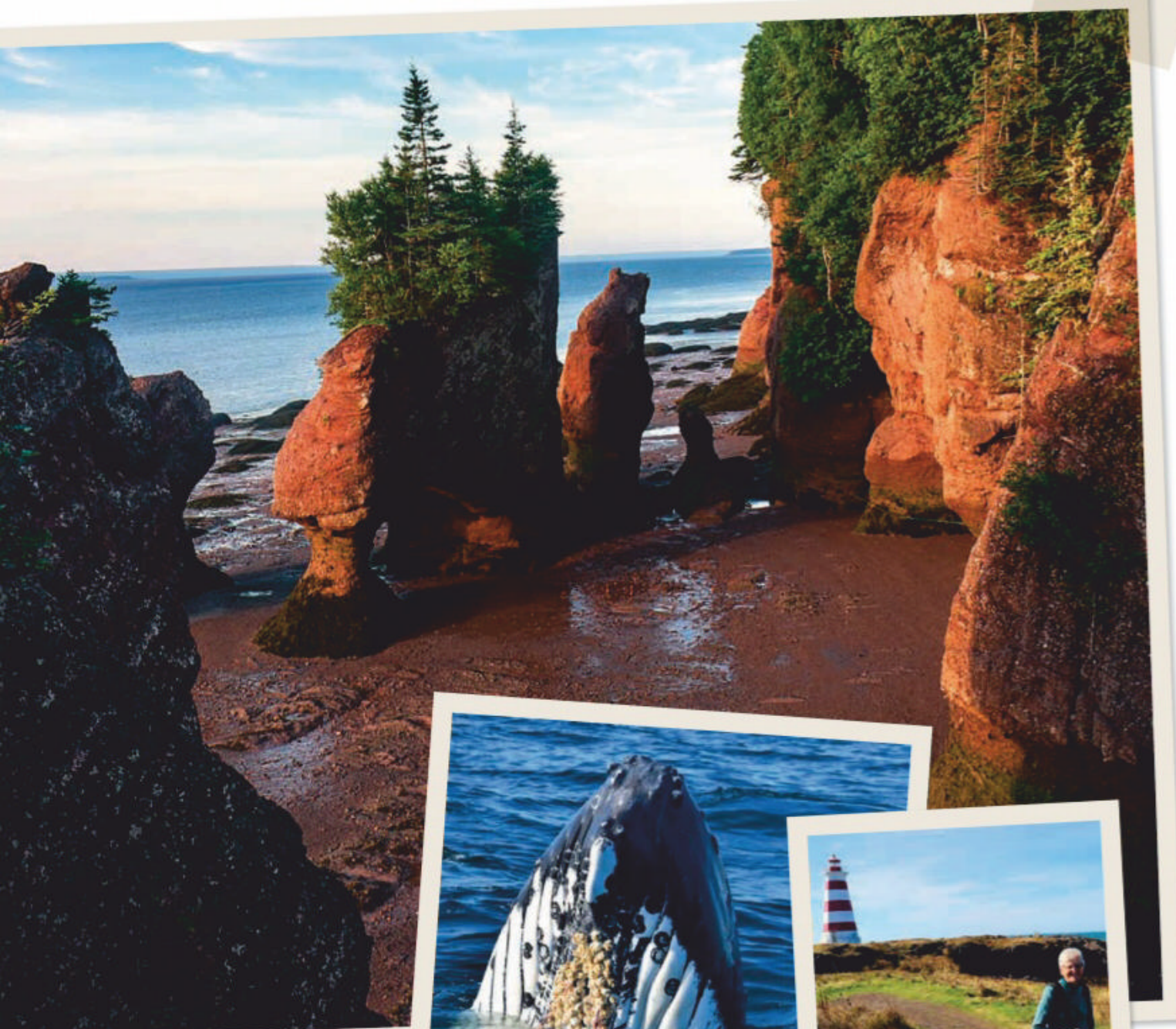
Sign up for Sinai Sinai Peninsula, Egypt

"Although often overlooked by people visiting the famous sites in Egypt, you'll find world-class diving, super friendly Bedouin locals and incredible scenery in the Sinai Peninsula. You can also hike up Mount Sinai or Mount St Catherine with a local guide for fine views and possibly the most beautiful sunset in the world."

Joshua Kurzer



Visit wanderlust.co.uk to submit your tips. Next month's topic is: **Iceland**



JUST BACK FROM...

Nova Scotia

Reader Ann Hunt immerses herself in multi-cultural Canada on a visit around the Maritime Province of Nova Scotia...

The highlight: Canadians are polite and friendly, but Nova Scotians are especially delightful. They are welcoming, helpful and unpretentious.

Must see: Visit the Museum of Immigration in Halifax for a poignant understanding of multi-cultural Canada. Drive down Digby Neck, take the 10-minute ferry to Long Island and then another 10-minute ferry to Brier Island; it's remote, beautiful and yet very accessible. Also take a ferry across the Bay of Fundy to see whales, and spend two or three days visiting Fundy National Park and Hopewell Rocks in New Brunswick. Head up to Cape Breton and enjoy the beautiful Cabot Trail.

Top tip: There's an Airbnb in Freeport, Long Island (airbnb.com/mt/rooms/24321889), with terrific views over the Bay of Fundy. The host provides delicious homemade muffins and cookies.

Cautionary tale: If you're driving be sure to look out for pedestrians. They'll expect you to stop if they want to cross the road!

I wish I'd known... How lovely the province was going to be. I will have to go back.

Anything else? Immerse yourself in the Celtic culture of Cape Breton and visit during the Celtic Colours International Festival in October. See very talented musicians and dancers, and discover how much they value their Scottish and Irish heritage. You'll need to book well in advance. 🇬🇧



wanderlust.co.uk

Just got back from somewhere amazing? Visit **wanderlust.co.uk** or email us at **fromtheroad@wanderlust.co.uk**

Your tales of... TRAVEL KEEPSAKES

DUTCH QUIRK

"One of the most unusual purchases I've made is a pair of bright pink clog slippers from Amsterdam. I haven't the heart to wear them."

Donna Michael

BEARY NICE

"I bought a couple of cute glass polar bears while on holiday in Sarasota, Florida. They did look a bit out of place when the temperature was 28°C, but the air con was quite cold inside the shop."

Alan Mees

JINGLE ALL THE WAY

"My mum is Christmas crazy, so she's always on the lookout for tree ornaments wherever she goes, at any time of year! I've started looking on her behalf and now it's a tradition in my house too – my Christmas tree is covered in baubles and trinkets from my travels."

Kirsty Jones

GLOBAL DRINKS

"I buy a mug from every place I travel to. That way, when I have my own apartment one day, I can use the mugs that I've collected and have a nice way of remembering my travels."

Grace Ronca



Go online to share your travel tales on next month's topic: 'Derailed'



Dr Jane Wilson-Howarth lives in Nepal; you can read her blog at www.wilson-howarth.com

Travel Clinic

with Dr Jane



Learning how to bottom wash when you using squat toilets abroad will help save space, the planet and even your derrière according to **Dr Jane Wilson-Howarth**

Call of nature



I was interested to read in your anniversary edition [issue 200; October 2019] Dr Jane's

comments on bottom-washing. I have seen similar suggestions several times before, but they don't explain how.

So, job done: you are sitting on the toilet seat, knickers or pants around your ankles, jug of water in hand. Presumably the next step is to flex your knees to raise the target area into accessibility, and then you let fly blindly with the water. Even if you manage a 'beginner's luck' direct hit at your first attempt, it leaves two big questions for the uninitiated bottom washer.

Firstly, how do you prevent the dirty water from running down your legs and soaking your knickers and pants, and maybe even leaving a puddle on the floor?

Secondly, do practitioners of this art carry a clean towel around with them, or do they allow their knickers to take the strain? In which case, how do they prevent getting an embarrassing wet patch on their pants if they sit down anytime in the next few hours? Please can we have step-by-step instructions?

Hilary Lamont

Dr Jane says...

I am keen to promote anal cleansing with water because it is healthier and less scratchy than using paper,



folks need to carry less, it is better for the plumbing and also for the planet. The average Brit disposes of the equivalent of 22 trees in their lifetime of toilet paper use. I have become quite a dab hand – so to speak – but it is hard to learn on a normal pedestal-type toilet.

Learners should practise over squat loos and I advise removing all clothing from the waist down at first. Try to organise a water vessel that has a spout and fill it before opening your bowels. Also wet the pan pre-performance so your turd slips away rather than sticking.

Assume a deep squat to defecate. This parts the bum-cheeks so your poo will emerge cleanly. Then pour

Green bottoms

Bottom washing when using a squat toilet will help save on toilet paper; (below) use a jug of water to help wash down below



water onto your tail end. If you manage to maintain the deep squat water and any mess will pour down the inside of your bum-cheeks and into the toilet rather than dribbling down your legs. Sticky or runny turds may mean you'll need to pour more water while wafting your fingers around the anus. If you use plenty of water, this isn't as unpleasant as it sounds, and you'll be able to feel when you are clean.

Toilet training

Generally, the destinations where you use squat toilets are warm so the nether parts dry remarkably quickly, especially if you sweep off any excess water with your hand. When I'm up in the mountains in Nepal though I do carry a small towel with me and this avoids clammy undies.

In many places with good plumbing (the Japanese are the masters of high tech toilets) there are often little water sprays where you can achieve watery anal cleansing on a pedestal toilet without the need to squat. And in these luxurious facilities there will likely be some toilet paper to dab yourself dry. Sometimes there's even an air-dryer. Do be aware that in many low-income countries dropping toilet paper into the loo will cause an unpleasant blockage that someone will have to sort out. Consequently, if there is a basket or bucket for used toilet paper, do please use it. 🌱

Ask the experts

Whether exploring Mayan sites in remote Central America, searching for pelicans on Greek lakes or discovering nature on a city break in Bratislava – our experts share their travel tips

EXPERTS



Sarah Baxter

The travel writer's latest book *Hidden Places: An Inspired Traveller's Guide* (£15; White Lion Publishing) is out on 3 March



Rebecca Nason

The guidebook writer's newest title, *Birds of Greece: Pocket Photo Guides* (£10; Helm, Bloomsbury Publishing) is out now



Tim Burford

The travel writer's latest title, the updated guidebook to *Bratislava* (£13, Bradt), is out now

TRAVELLING OFF THE BEATEN TRACK IN CENTRAL AMERICA

Q We're going to north-east Guatemala to see the ancient ruins of Tikal and thinking of crossing into western Belize to explore Caracol while in the area. Do you know of other offbeat sites we could visit while we're over the border?

Julia Bradford, via email

A It's definitely worth spending longer in Belize. There's plenty to see in this intriguing Central American country, especially hidden away in the western jungly mountains. Caracol, Belize's largest Maya city (and with fewer visitors than Tikal) is a good choice, but you should also head north to the Maya ruins at Xunantunich, accessed via a hand-cranked ferry. Combine a visit with canoeing on the remote Macal River, scanning for wildlife such as the keel-billed toucan (Belize's national bird), and checking in to rustic rainforest lodges.

If you've a desire to travel even further off-grid, the barely-inhabited hills of the Mountain Pine Ridge Forest Reserve are also a good place – seek out Thousand-Foot Falls (actually 1,600ft [485m] tall), explore the wild terrain by mountain bike and on foot, and check out the Río Frio area, riddled with caves.

However, for the most thrilling subterranean adventure, book a trip to the cave of Actun Tunichil Muknal: trek through the jungle, wade and swim inside, then clamber deep into the dark chambers, once used for Maya sacrifices – a human skeleton, cloaked in calcite crystals, can still be seen sparkling on the ground.

Sarah Baxter



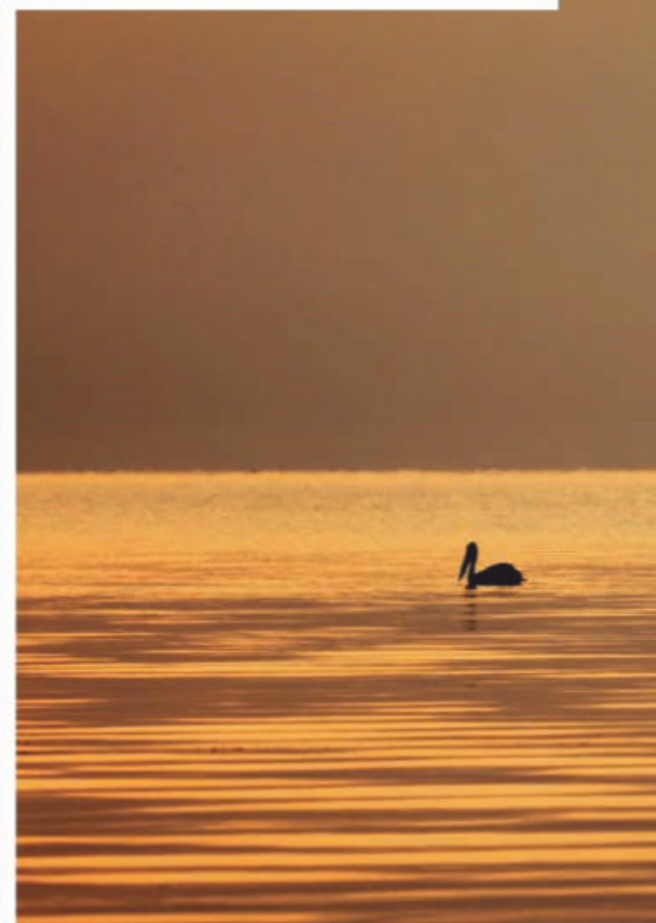
CROSSING GREECE IN SEARCH OF PELICANS

Q I'm visiting the Prespa Lakes in Greece as I hear it's a good destination for birdwatching, especially pelicans. Where is a convenient base to travel out of?

Hyunju Lee, via email

A Prespa Lakes National Park consists of two freshwater lakes nestled in the mountainous north-west corner of Greece. The largest lake, Megali Prespa, is shared between Greece, Albania and North Macedonia and is fringed with Byzantine relics. Mikri Prespa Lake – smaller, shallower and separated from Megali by a thin natural causeway – is lined by reed beds and is the focus of most aquatic birdlife.

The lakes hold one of the largest Dalmatian pelican breeding colonies





in the world, and is also home to the great white pelican, squacco heron, pygmy cormorant and little bittern. Take an evening boat trip to enjoy the pelican spectacle. Late spring is best with various herons, egrets, terns and crakes, and the scarce ferruginous duck breeds here.

Diverse habitats circle the lakes, from wet and alpine meadows, to

bean cultivated farmland and pine forests. On a hike, keep an eye out for skulking warblers and raptors.

Fly into Thessaloniki and drive the three-hour journey to Agios Germanos or Psarades village, close to the lakes. Both make an ideal base, and have good rustic tavernas and accommodation.

Rebecca Nason

Squirreled away (clockwise from top) Bratislava Forest Park is home to red squirrels; pelicans can be spotted on an evening boat trip on Greece's Prespa Lakes; Caracol in Belize is off the popular tourist trail

A WILD TIME IN SLOVAKIA

Q On a long-ish weekend in Bratislava, I also want to see a bit of nature and wildlife. How easy is it to get out of the city?

Penelope Bates, via email

A The Slovakian capital is very well placed for hills, rivers and wetlands, and it's easy to travel by public transport or by bike.

The Little Carpathians mountain range runs north from the Danube river on the western edge of the city, and their southern end is protected by the Bratislava Forest Park (Bratislavský Lesopark). It's thickly forested with beech and oak and criss-crossed with trails, most notably the European E8 trail along the ridge towards the Polish border (and on to Istanbul). Wildlife include roe, fallow and red deer, wild boar and red squirrel, and over 50 species of birds including saker falcons and honey buzzards; you may see salamanders after rain.

There are various access points, including Lesopark (bus 43 from the Železná Studienka station) and Potočná, or head up to the Kamzík TV tower (bus 203 to Koliba then walk, or bus 144 at peak times) and follow the ridge route northwards.

Tim Burford 

Insiders' guide to... SOUTH AFRICA



Anton Walker, Africa Specialist at **Imagine Travel**, gives us his top tips for travel to South Africa...

Where to go... First-timers will want to tick off the usual highlights – Cape Town, the Winelands and the Kruger. For something a little different though, explore the wild flowers and remote scenery of the Northern Cape or head to KwaZulu-Natal, where you can combine the famous battlefields with hiking in the Drakensberg Mountains.

Best time to go... When to go depends on what you want to see. For the best weather in Cape Town, travel from November to March. For the best wildlife sightings in the Kruger, go from June to August. For world-class whale-watching, head to Hermanus from June to November.

Top tip... Climb to the top of Lion's Head – it's less crowded than the path up Table Mountain and you'll enjoy views over Cape Town that include the powerful sight of this iconic mountain.



How to

OFFSET YOUR CARBON FOOTPRINT

Aviation accounts for 2.5% of global carbon emissions, but we don't want to discourage readers from exploring the world. Carbon offsetting can go some way to help us reduce the effects that our travels on the environment.

Many conscientious travellers find carbon offsetting confusing, but it's really quite simple. It's a way of 'making up' for CO2 produced as a result of your actions (flying in this instance). Some airlines and online companies let you buy offsets when you book your flight, but if you do it yourself you can choose where your money goes.


First, calculate the amount of CO2 given off by your decision to fly – this can be done via websites such as carbonfootprint.com. Enter your trip details (length and mode of transport, for example,) and it will work out your carbon footprint (units of metric tons of CO2 emitted).

You can then compare possible offset schemes and invest in a project that reduces CO2 levels by the same amount or more, usually environmental projects in developing countries aimed at soaking up CO2 or avoiding future emissions. Many projects have traditionally involved planting trees, but after criticism concerning the quantifiability of the results, offset programmes now tend to revolve around clean energy projects – distributing efficient cooking stoves or low energy light bulbs – projects with

TOP TIP
Take longer
but less frequent
flights, fly direct,
travel in economy
class, choose
greener airlines
and keep your
luggage light –
this can all help
to reduce your
carbon emissions.

quicker savings, and an added social benefit to local communities.

To avoid scams, make sure the scheme has a clean energy certificate from a third-party, such as one from Green-e. Verified offset companies worth considering include NativeEnergy.

The effectiveness of projects is difficult to judge, but the main takeaway is to not use carbon offsetting as an excuse to fly more, but instead as an attempt to be greener and find a balance when it comes to travelling and protecting the environment. 

The cost of travel
As the climate crisis looms ever larger, we all have to do our best to pitch in



Shutterstock

Green Projects

Find out what kind of carbon offsetting projects you can invest in.

- **Energy efficiency:** Save energy and avoid future emissions by switching fuel. Projects to support include funding fuel efficient stoves and clean drinking water programmes, which reduce wood fuel consumption.
- **Forestry:** A number of projects focus on soaking up the CO2 directly by planting

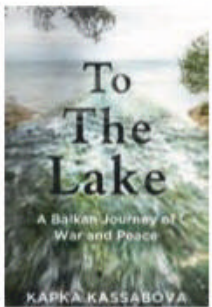
trees and working to protect forests. Unfortunately saplings don't soak up a lot of CO2, so it would take a long time to have any effect; however longer-term it is still helping to offset our actions.

- **Methane capture:** CO2 is not the only greenhouse gas to worry about. Methane is much more powerful and it's released when organic waste breaks down. Capturing methane from landfill sites can also help offset carbon emissions.

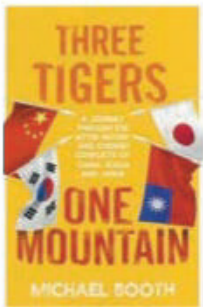
- **Renewable energy:** Funds towards wind farms, hydroelectric and geothermal power plants and solar projects are aimed at saving energy and avoiding future emissions by investing in renewable energy instead. These options are currently thought to be quicker and more permanent solutions.

Book of the month

This month's bookshelf is judging its neighbour.



To The Lake
Kapka Kassabova
Granta, £15



Three Tigers, One Mountain
Michael Booth
Jonathan Cape, £15

The old saying goes 'we have more in common than which divides us'. Well, some countries *did not* get that memo. This month sees two travel titles exploring regions largely through the bitter history that has torn neighbours asunder.

Kapka Kassabova's follow up to her plaudits-laden *Border*, *To The Lake* is another study of people living on complicated boundaries. She follows her family history back to lakes Ohrid and Prespa, sitting on the crossroads of Albania, Macedonia and Greece, where the people are still counting the cost of the centuries of war. With the benefit of being blood – "Whose are you?" she's often asked – Kassabova is able to turn generations of vast political and social upheaval into an intimate portrait of loss.

History and politics are at the heart of *Three Tigers, One Mountain*, with Michael Booth cannily navigating the endless enmity between China, Korea and Japan – with a side trip to Taiwan. As he pieces together an investigation of national grievance, he's baffled by the reserves of resentment he encounters, a self-defeating spoke in the wheels of progress.

What the books share is an understanding of not just the complex history – and there's a lot of history here – of these grudges, but also how they've gone on to become part of the national character, with neighbours defining themselves by who they are not. So that old saying may be true then, but unfortunately it's just as often that what divides us is also what we have in common. **Tom Hawker**

“ ”

If we want a more peaceful world, we must learn peace ourselves. It is the hardest thing.

Kapka Kassabova



Best of the rest



Hidden Places
Sarah Baxter
White Lion Publishing, £15

What is a hidden place? It's a question we ask ourselves a lot, but it seems as though travel journalist and longtime regular *Wanderlust* contributor Sarah Baxter has the answer. Taking us on a wild – and charmingly illustrated – sojourn through 25 obscure locations, Sarah exposes the places we never knew we needed to be. Flip through the artful pages to find secret citadels only reached by foot, the jungle-covered belly of the Mayan underworld, underwater ruins in the Pacific and phantoms in Germany's Black Forest. It's a book to help you plan your next adventure – just don't spread the word.



Gibbous Moon over Lagos
Pamela Watson
Hardie Grant, £15

Out of the villages and into the city is the order of the day for author Pamela Watson, who returns to Africa in a follow-up to her memoir of cycling down the continent's rural backroads. Following her dream to set up a social enterprise in Nigeria's largest city, she finds challenges at every corner, but adventure, too – sunny getaways to the Badagry Creek beach havens, thrilling rescues from the floodplains of the Niger River and tense paper chases with the Nigerian police. But despite being tried and tested, her hope for the future still waxes strong in this tribute to booming Lagos.



The Frozen River: Seeking Silence in the Himalaya
James Crowden
Harper Collins, £17

It's not often that you get the chance to remove yourself from the rest of the world and live alongside a remote Himalayan mountain community. But in 1976, army officer James Crowden left the military behind in order to do just this, travelling to the wilderness of the northern Himalaya to immerse himself in the life of the Zangskari people. Butter traders travelling down the frozen river Leh, villagers in Padum and chanting Buddhist monks bring this epic memoir to life, as James takes us back to a time before mass-tourism existed. What he finds is more than a land of snow and ice, but a place where time stands still, made all the more magical by its solitude. An inspiring look into a world remarkably unaffected by modern life.

WIN! FOUR NIGHTS IN A LUXURY CAMP IN KENYA'S SAMBURU NATIONAL RESERVE

Including entry to the park, two game drives and visits to the Rhino Sanctuary and Reteti Elephant Sanctuary*...

Wake up on a four-poster bed. View the Uaso Nyiro River from your window, where splashing elephants and crocodiles can be spied. Samburu Intrepids Camp turns camping into a treat. And thanks to **Heritage Hotels Ltd**, you could win four nights here...

Wild escape

Situated 345km north of Nairobi, it takes a 50-minute flight followed by a 20-minute drive through the reserve to reach the camp. The remote location means you'll hardly have to step foot outside your room to spy wildlife, although venturing further is well-worth it.



A game drive across the park's dry landscape offers up eyefuls of Samburu's 'special five', including the rare reticulated giraffe, Somali ostrich, Grevy's zebra, gerenuk antelope and Beisa oryx. If you're lucky, you'll glimpse lion and leopard too, images that will likely stay imprinted on your mind's eye for a lifetime.

Next, visit the Rhino Sanctuary, a 5.4 sq km haven for rhino where an expert guide will walk you within metres of these rare creatures. Meet more gentle giants at the Reteti Elephant Sanctuary, which houses orphaned calves until they

are ready to be released back into the wild. The viewing platform offers fine views of them playing.

Green stay

Samburu Intrepids Camp not only offers luxury, but sustainability, too. Samburu Intrepids is very eco-friendly, with solar-powered hot water and biodegradable waste used for compost in the gardens. The camp also supports the local community, which makes up 30% of its workforce. Staying here helps to fund the local primary school, a bee-keeping training project and even a medical service for the villagers. This means you can eat in the shade overlooking the river, enjoy wildlife presentations from naturalists and cool off in the pool, all in the knowledge that you're giving something back. Samburu Intrepids Camp is truly a win-win situation, and hopefully a win for you, too!

*PLEASE NOTE

This prize does **NOT** include international flights or domestic transport



How to win

Heritage Hotels Ltd is offering one winner the chance to win four nights full-board at Samburu Intrepids Camp in a Luxury Double or Luxury Twin Tent, along with two game drives, free entry to Samburu National Reserve, the Rhino Sanctuary and Reteti Elephant Sanctuary. For your chance to win, simply answer this question: **What year was the Samburu National Reserve established?** (a) 1995 (b) 1985 (c) 1975

To enter and for full terms, conditions, and data policies, go to wanderlust.co.uk/competitions or send your answer to the Wanderlust office (address p7) and state 'more info' if you want to be contacted by Wanderlust. The closing date for entry is 11 March 2020.



Lessons from the road

with Johnny Villalobos

Growing up in the Costa Rican countryside inspired Exodus Travels guide **Johnny Villalobos**.

But as our 2019 award-winner for conservation, he explains why he always knew the outdoors would be his office...



“ ”

I can identify about 700 birds by sight and call – it's like knowing 700 languages

I love to work outdoors.

I grew up in the countryside, in Guápiles, so being outdoors all the time is important to me. I wasn't sure I'd be a guide until I started training and found that I liked to be in contact with the environment and that it would be my future office! After 25 years, it's still my office!

Birds are like human beings.

I can identify about 700 birds by sight and call. Their calls are interesting, because they're quite complex. It's like knowing 700 languages, but it's not like I know all of them – it's about identifying behaviour, too. Knowing the distance, elevation or location also helps me to identify them.

It's important to start small.

Children are learning more and more how to do things, but who is taking them out and giving them structured information? That's why I volunteer to educate students on sea turtle projects. It's not just about learning what's what; it's about what turtles do or why they like it here.

Wildlife is about linking little details.

If you go to Africa, your goal is to find the Big Five, but in the tropics you have the 'thousand littles': everything from leafcutter ants and poison dart frogs, to birds following army ants. Why they follow is just a matter of linking the little details.

Corcovado is intense. This national park is one of the most intensely biodiverse places in the world, with lots of wildlife, but not so many people. There are places you can just walk by and find ten to 100 scarlet macaws flying above.

Nature has no boundaries. When I was training, most of the naturalists were biologists working in the field. In a way, they adopted me, making sure that the little kid learned best. They said, "Whatever you learn is not enough. Just keep learning." It's one of the most important things you'll find in nature; it's an open library.



Bird's eye view...
In Corcovado National Park you can see hundreds of scarlet macaws flying above

Things can go bump in the night.

One time we were in the middle of nowhere in the rainforest and this man said, "I couldn't sleep last night – the power generator was on all night!" I told him there were no generators, and he insisted: "Are you saying I'm lying?" But the same day, after dinner, I asked to see his room. When I got there, I saw stone ponds right behind the room. And there was a very loud sound. Using my torch I went around and found a huge bunch of toads. He didn't know whether to cry or laugh. He said, "Johnny, please don't tell anyone." But the whole group was right behind me, laughing!

Change is just round the corner.

Convincing people to do something can be the biggest challenge, especially when you have different backgrounds. But it's not impossible. Recently, the government shared a new plan for 2050 – the big decarbonisation of the economy. It is a challenge, but 99% of our power is generated by renewable sources, and becoming among the world's first carbon-neutral countries is one of the best incentives we've had. 🌱



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AWARD-WINNING EXPERT-LED TOURS & GULET CRUISES



PETER SOMMER
TRAVELS



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EXPERT-LED ARCHAEOLOGICAL & CULTURAL TOURS & GULET CRUISES

Wanderlust GEAR OF THE YEAR 2020

Travel gear with Phoebe Smith



It's that time of the year – where our resident gear guru Phoebe Smith trawls through the best travel gear on the market with her fellow judges to find the ultimate items for 2020. And the winners are...



**BEST
TRAVEL
INSULATED
JACKET**

PARAMO

Torres Alturo Jacket, £225

Staying warm can mean the difference between a good and a great trip – you don't want to think back to your journey to the northern lights and simply remember how cold you were. That's why an insulated jacket is key. Paramo has been ethically making these since the 1980s, giving gainful employment to 'at-risk' women in Colombia and working with the World Land Trust to offset all the carbon produced in the running of the business and never using toxic chemical waterproofing treatments. All this and they've still made a warm insulated jacket that works well.

Due to their Nikwax Analogy insulator fabric (which directs moisture away from the wearer), it will even keep you warm when it gets wet.

paramo-clothing.com

Special mention: The Arc'teryx Proton LT Hoody and Rab's Microlight Alpine Jacket.

KATHMANDU

Transfer 28L Travel Pack, £140

Of all the daypacks submitted, this one was clearly designed with the traveller in mind. Forgo the fact that it looks good and focus on the separate cabin pod that can hold all those little accessories you might need during your flight (earplugs, passport, phone), keeping them easy to access from the overhead locker without pulling your entire bag out. It also has a padded compartment for your laptop, a hipbelt that tucks away, a sleeve that slides over your wheelee handle at the airport for easy lugging, a lockable main zip, raincover, grab handles, a sleeve for your water bottle, and an integrated pocket for a solar charger. And, for that green bonus, its outer fabric is made from recycled plastic bottles.

kathmandu.co.uk

Special mention: Osprey's Archeon 25 and Craghoppers' 30L Rucksack.



**BEST
TRAVEL
DAYPACK
(UNDER
35 LITRES)**



**BEST
TRAVEL
FOOTWEAR**

KEEN

Innate x Sherpa Hiking Boots, £140

Sometimes it pays to team up with companies that share your values – as this winning partnership with comfy footwear legends KEEN and ethical Nepalese kit brand Sherpa proves.

The result here is a superbly comfortable waterproof hiking boot that not only looks good, but which for every sale funds go to support child literacy charity 'Room to Read'. It is also a high-performing boot that is eco-aware. The leather is tanned using a process shown to use less chemicals than traditional methods, the anti-odour control neglects pesticides to go for natural probiotics and the water repellency is PFC (environmentally harmful chemical) free. So you can help the planet, children and your feet.

keenfootwear.com

Special mention: Craghoppers' Salado Hi Boot and Danner's Trail 2650 GTX Mid. ►

◀ CRAGHOPPERS

NosiLife Pro Adventure Trousers, £80

They've been making clothing and accessories specifically designed for adventurous travellers for more than 50 years now, so it's only right that when it comes to the ultimate in travel trousers,

Craghoppers knows the score. With stretch panels making sitting and moving around very comfortable, RFID pockets (to keep your credit cards and passport safe from ID theft scanners), a provided dry bag for your mobile phone, drying loops for hanging up on the road, a sunglasses wipe, sun protection and odour control – these were the best in legwear for travellers. Oh and they repel biting insects for the life of the product too. We're hoping that the next step is that they can actually fly!

craghoppers.com

Special mention: Paramo's Maui and Kathmandu's Flight Men's Stretch Travel Trousers.



FINISTERRE Rainbird Jacket, £110

One aspect in common among the most noteworthy of the waterproof nominations this year was the focus on sustainability – which is superb to see. So it's no surprise that Devon-based manufacturer

Finisterre, who has been creating rain-beating layers made from recycled fabric for more than a decade, has pipped the others to the post with its brand-new offering. Made from 100% recycled polyester and finished with a non-harmful fluorocarbon-free waterproof repellent treatment, and seam-taped throughout, judges were amazed that all this came in at a £110 price tag – a great deal for both the planet and travellers who need a just-in-case option in their suitcase. **finisterre.com**

Special mention: Rohan's Vertex and Salewa's Puez Aqua 3 Powertex.

ICEBREAKER Tech Lite Short Sleeve, £60

When it comes to a travel top perhaps the most important quality – next to it being lightweight – is its ability to stay pong-free. Enter merino wool, a naturally breathable, wicking (moves sweat away from the skin) and non-clammy material that resists odour effectively. Icebreaker have been working with it for more than 20 years and prides itself on having 100% traceable wool products, with all their farms being audited regularly to ensure they follow strict animal welfare standards. The result is products like this standout short sleeve top, which feels so soft and non-itchy it's hard to believe it's wool.

Perfect for layering, naturally renewable, recyclable and biodegradable.

icebreaker.com

Special mention: Craghoppers' Adventure II Shirt and Arc'teryx's Joni ¾ Sleeve Top.





KATHMANDU Hybrid 50L Trolley, £180

The New Zealand company claims another top spot this year for its ingenious rolling hybrid luggage. Featuring a telescopic pull-out pole and two wheels for easy navigating through the airport, it is also easily converted into a backpack with a fold-out harness and an inbuilt and impressively breathable back system. Mesh pockets and a large opening make it easy to pack, as do compression straps and a front pocket. It's lockable, durable and has attachment points so you can also clip on a daypack if needed.

kathmandu.co.uk

Special mention: The Osprey Farpoint Wheels 65 and Berghaus' Expedition Mule 60.

KATADYN

BeFree Water Filtration System, £40

Plastic bottles have dominated our thoughts over the past few years and there's no excuse now for using single-use water bottles – except perhaps if you're travelling in a country where the H₂O source is questionable. But that problem's easily removed with this collapsible drink bottle, winning this category for the second year in a row. Boasting a filter in the lid and a tiny foldaway bottle that will fit in your pocket, you can literally take it anywhere and pop it under any tap or dip it in a stream as it removes protozoa and bacteria as you drink. It's easy to clean, store and use, meaning you really can ditch those nasty plastic bottles wherever your adventures take you.

katadyn.com

Special mention: Nikwax's BaseWash Travel Gel and Craghoppers' NosiLife Sleeping Liner.



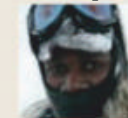
Who were the judges?

Phoebe Smith



An award-winning writer, broadcaster and photographer, Phoebe is *Wanderlust's* travel gear expert and chaired the Gear of the Year judging.

Dwayne Fields



The first black Briton to walk over 400 miles to the magnetic North Pole, Dwayne uses gear regularly on his travels and knows the value of kit that works under pressure.

Paul Goodyer



Paul founded and ran *Nomad Travel* and Nomad Travel Clinics. He has also worked as Logistics Assistant for the TV production company who made BBC's *Beyond Boundaries*.

How the winners were selected

All manufacturers were asked to nominate the item of kit they made in each category which they felt was best for travellers. From the nominations received the judges then meticulously examined the features, weight and credentials of each and made their case for the winners. These were scored to find the standout piece of kit in each category.



Visit our website at wanderlust.co.uk to read Phoebe's full Gear of the Year 2020 round up

EXCLUSIVE WANDERLUST PROMOTION



Wanderlust Reader Event Solo travel evening

Thursday 23 April, Royal Geographical Society, London SW7 2AR

Whether you're a first time solo traveller or not, and whether you prefer to travel with a group, tailor-made or independently, this evening is for you. We'll be looking at the realities of travelling solo, the highs and the (occasional) lows. Our experts will have many a tale to tell and will share their wealth of tips on where and how to go, and how to make the most of your trips.

Find out more: Early bird tickets, including canapés and a welcome drink, available for just £5 until 1 March. Evening starts at 6.30pm | Visit wanderlust.co.uk/events for more information and to book your ticket.

Pocket Guide

Your cut-out and keep travel companion

FIRST 24 HOURS IN... LISBON, PORTUGAL

Green with envy
A view over Lisbon
with São Jorge Castle
on the hill



Lisbon is not only one of the world's oldest cities, rich in culture, it's also this year's European Green Capital and leading the way in urban eco-living, says **Robin McKelvie**

Before you arrive

The Portuguese capital may be in Europe, but walking through the city you could almost be in Africa, Asia or Latin America, with the country's former colonies weaving their exotic influence into the urban fabric.

One of the world's oldest cities, Lisbon boasts a riot of historic castles, palaces and churches. Sitting on the banks of the River Tagus and overlooking the Atlantic Ocean, the hilly metropolis is green in more ways than one. It snared the European Green Capital Award for 2020 in recognition of the strides it has made developing green spaces, waste management, its cycling infrastructure and an efficient,

environmentally friendly public transport network.

Planes tend to fly over the River Tagus, so those seated on the right-hand side will get the best first sight of the city.

At the airport

Wizz Air flies direct from London Luton from £26 return; journey time is around three hours. Lisbon Airport lies 7km north-east of the city centre and has ATMs, car hire and free Wifi. There are plans for a new airport to open in 2022.

Getting into town

There is a metro station at Terminal 1 for fast, easy, 20-minute connections to the centre; single ticket €1.40 (£1.17).

Regular buses service the airport, but have limited luggage capacity. The Aerobus offers more space, free Wifi and USB chargers for €6 return (£5).

Outside rush hour taxis take under 20 minutes – check the meter is on. The fare is around €15 (£12.50). The metro is usually the best option during rush hour. Or go even greener and rent a bike to ride the city's 90km cycle network.

Other ways to arrive

Most long-distance trains stop at Lisbon's Oriente station, which has fast rail connections. It takes around 10 minutes to get into the city centre. The national rail operator is Comboios de Portugal (CP). ▶

ASK A LOCAL

"On Tuesdays and Saturdays, take the morning to visit Feira da Ladra, Lisbon's most iconic flea market. You can buy most kinds of product from Portuguese tiles to a fridge. Just be willing to negotiate. It's quirky and fun. After, visit the Panteão Nacional."

Luana do Bem,
comedian
@luanadobem





◀ First day's tour

Lisbon is a joy to travel around with buses, suburban trains and its famous vintage (as well as modern) trams. Ferries criss-cross the river and there are historic funiculars too. In line with its growing green credentials, the capital also operates a bike sharing scheme to tackle the city's hills.

There are an impressive number of electric car charging points too. Hop aboard the rambling **Tram 28** up towards **Lisbon Castle** (pictured), whose ramparts open up vistas of the sprawling metropole as it spreads its historic tentacles across the River Tagus. Spend your

first morning on the north bank where most of the sights are. From the castle you can amble back down through the **Alfama district** to the central Baixa where **Praça Comércio**, Lisbon's main plaza, evokes the city's glory days. Breathe in all that history and wander the flat grid of streets. This is Lisbon's shopping central area too and large tracts are pedestrianised, with plenty of cafés to pop into for a fortifying Bica coffee. Then hop on a train or tram east to Belém. Here the **Belém Tower** stands proudly as one of the last things sailors would have seen as they left Lisbon during Portugal's Great Age of Discoveries in the 15th and 16th centuries. The vaulting **Monument of the Discoveries** nearby demonstrates the pride many locals still feel for those days. The third of the three essential Belém heritage sites is the **Monasterio de los Jerónimos de Belém**. Reward yourself with a custard tart (known as *pastel de Belém*), from the Pasteleria de Belém. In the evening, enjoy a drink at one of the lively venues in **Cais de Sodré** or board a ferry to **Cacilhas** to take in the city's aquatic setting.



Where to stay?

Hotels are dotted all over the maze of city districts. Business hotels tend to jostle for position around Avenida da Liberdade. **Top end:** You'll feel like royalty at the Pestana Palace (pestanacollection.com) which has been designated a National Monument. Large suites, lush gardens (pictured) and two swimming pools await. Doubles from £157. **Mid range:** The Pousada de Lisboa (pousadas.pt) is run by the same

people and is a superb value option right in the heart of historic Lisbon overlooking the Praça do Comércio. The indoor swimming pool is handy on rainy days. Doubles from £158. **Budget:** Romantic boutique hotel As Janelas Verdes (asjanelasverdes.com) is tucked away on a quiet street. It offers a sense of class without blowing your budget, harking back to a more stately time. Doubles from £101.



Stay or go?

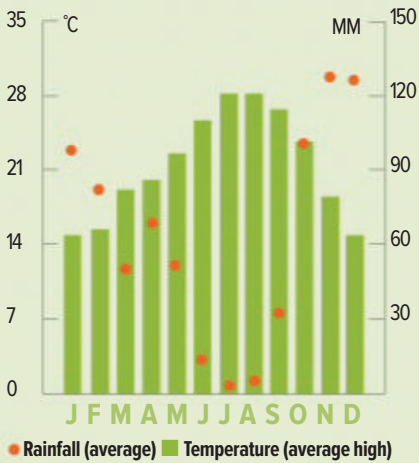
You could avoid burning carbon and stay wandering around this sprawling city for weeks – and you'd still not see everything. But if you're tempted by a day trip, head out to the beachfront suburbs of **Cascais** (pictured) and **Estoril**. The former boasts the better beaches, while Estoril sports a historic casino. Both are serviced by local trains, as is **Sintra**, deep in the hinterland hills. Its palaces and castles hark back as far as Moorish times and they offer respite from the summer heat.

If you want to travel further afield, catch the fast train down from Lisbon Oriente station to the **Algarve**, where starched white beaches and seafood abound in one of Europe's most popular sunshine playgrounds. Break west of the city of Faro for famous resorts like **Albufeira**, **Quinta do Lago** and **Lagos**, or travel east towards the Spanish border to enjoy a quieter world of endless sand dunes protected as part of the **Ria Formosa National Park**.



Need to know

Population: 2.9 million
Language: Portuguese
Time zone: GMT+0
International dialling code: +351
Visas: UK passport holders and citizens of the EU don't currently require a visa.
Currency: Euro (EUR), approximately €1.19 to the UK£, although it fluctuates.
Health issues: There are no major health issues to be aware of, although many visitors avoid the tap water, mainly on taste grounds. Sunburn and sunstroke are real hazards – Lisbon may be a city, but a whole day sightseeing with the sun glaring back off the river offers similar exposure to a day on the beach.
Guidebook: Lonely Planet's *Pocket Lisbon* is a handily sized guide that's broken up into easy-to-navigate chapters themed around the city's different districts. It's an invaluable companion when used alongside a smartphone and map app.
Useful websites: Visit the city tourist office website, *visitlisboa.com*. The national tourist office website, *visitportugal.com*, is also worth checking out. Lisboa Cool (*lisboacool.com*) offers more info and has an easy to use, free and fun app.
Climate: Lisbon is mild and rainy in the winter and warm and sunny in the summer.



Pocket Guide

Your cut-out and keep travel companion

TRAVEL ICON SAN FRANCISCO

The golden touch
A panoramic view of Golden Gate Bridge and San Francisco lit up at night



One of the greenest cities in the US, San Francisco is an eclectic mix of bohemian neighbourhoods, redwood forests, bay views and a golden past...

Get orientated

The 'city by the bay' has long been a hub for pioneers. After first booming during the Gold Rush, it became a bohemian playground for '60s activists calling for peace and love, before Silicon Valley's forward-thinkers dreamed up new marvels to change the way we think. But beyond this history, there's wild coastlines, Pacific vistas and the infamous prison island of Alcatraz to escape to.

But in April, travellers can dive into the past at the iconic Golden Gate Park, soon to mark its 150th birthday with a year-long calendar of events (from 4 April), starting with a free community celebration. Hop on a specially installed, 45m-high observation wheel and you'll

discover views over this urban oasis that stretch from the Pacific to the centre of the city.

But go in summer and you'll meet Karl: the towering fog that cloaks the bay so often that locals named it after a misunderstood giant. It's best not to argue with Karl, though – he burns away by lunch, but the city's redwood forests feel almost unearthly when he smokes over the iconic bridge and through the trails at dawn and dusk.

Getting there & around

British Airways flies direct from London Heathrow to San Francisco (the shortest journey time is around 11 hours and costs from £278 return).

The visit

A good place to kick off your trip is Buena Vista Park, the city's oldest, where you can wander uphill through thickets of coast redwoods and cypress trees to admire dramatic views framing the Bay Area, before diving into the lively Haight Ashbury district. Here you'll capture the eclectic essence of SF, with plenty of iconic street murals (some even dating back to that famous summer of '67) to admire.

The countercultural district is right on your way to the Golden Gate Park, too, where you can find a brief escape from the din of city life. Delve into its lush greenery, go to the Spreckels Temple of Music for free Sunday concerts (April-October) or stroll

through the Japanese tea garden (\$9/£7); The Moon Bridge and the Great Buddha (probably one of the largest outside Asia) are justly celebrated, and if you visit before 10am on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, it's free.

To break out of the city, ferry over to Alcatraz and tour the fortress's underground cells and secret passageways, or visit the windswept Point Reyes National Seashore for its wildlife wonders. Sunny California is a distant memory here, but the sightings of rare tule elk and bobcats roaming the land are well worth it. Elephant seals screech on the shore, too, making their voices heard among the mix – the perfect setting to end your trip. ►

◀ A SHORT WALK

Golden Gate Park

Golden Gate Park is one of the largest urban parks in the world. It stretches from the Pacific Ocean to the centre of San Francisco, forming an oasis of greenery and calm. Within the park an amazing number of activities are possible, both sporting and cultural. The landscaped area around the Music Concourse, with its fountains, plane trees and benches, is the most popular and developed section. Here you can enjoy free Sunday concerts at the Spreckels Temple of Music. Two museums stand on either side of the Concourse, and the Japanese and Shakespeare gardens are in walking distance.



The Spreckels Temple of Music band shell



The Great Buddha, nearly 11 ft (3 m) high, is probably the largest statue of its kind outside Asia.

De Young Museum
The state-of-the-art landmark showcases fine arts from around the world.

The statue of the Apple Cider Press
Sculpted by Thomas Shields-Clarke, it is one of the few monuments to survive from the California Midwinter Fair of 1894.

Miguel de Cervantes
The bust of the Spanish author was sculpted by Jo Mora. He is depicted with his two fictional creations, Don Quixote and Sancho Panza.

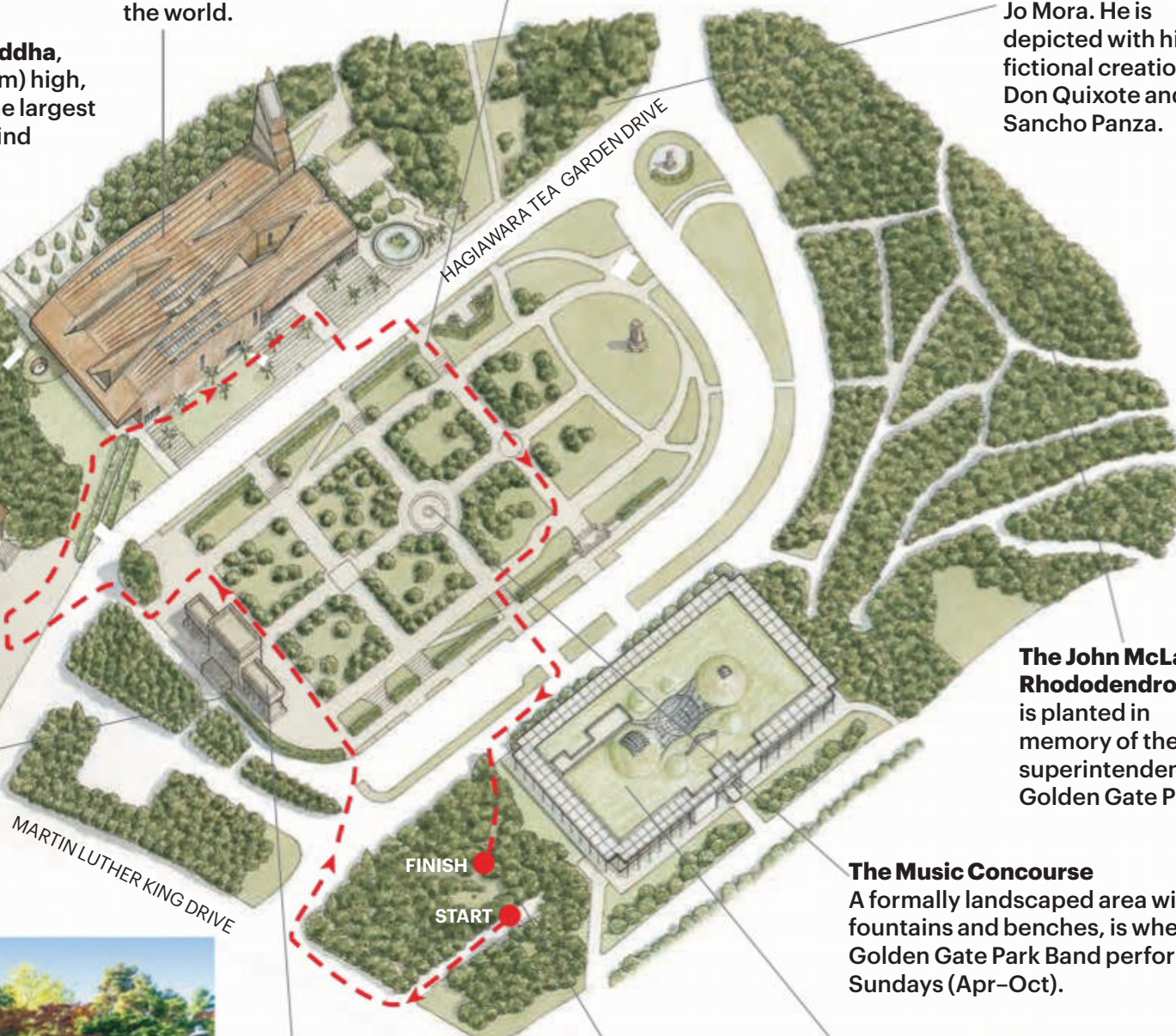
Japanese Tea Garden
With its well-tended plants, the exquisite garden is one of the most attractive areas in the park.

The bridge in the Japanese Tea Garden is known as the Moon Bridge. It arches steeply, and its reflection in the water below forms a perfect circle.

The bust of Verdi reflects the city's passion for opera.



The Japanese Tea Garden, the oldest one of its kind in the USA.



The Spreckels Temple of Music is an ornate band shell, the site for free summer concerts since 1899.

The Shakespeare Garden
The tiny garden holds more than 150 species of plants, all mentioned in Shakespeare's poetry or plays.

The Music Concourse
A formally landscaped area with fountains and benches, is where the Golden Gate Park Band performs on Sundays (Apr–Oct).



The California Academy of Sciences combines an aquarium, a planetarium, a museum and a research facility.

Need to know

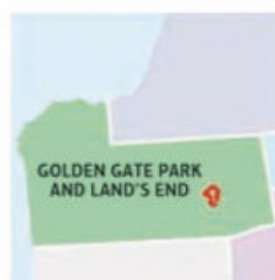
Language: English **Time:** GMT-8

Visas: UK nationals require an ESTA visa waiver for stays of up to 90 days.

Money: US dollar (USD), currently around \$1.30 to the UK£



This feature is adapted from the DK Eyewitness *San Francisco and The Bay Area* travel guide, which contains illustrations, insider tips, tour suggestions and a large pull-out map. See dk.com



Walk distance:
0.5 mile (0.6 km)

Time 10 minutes **Nearest bus** 5.44

Pocket Guide

Your cut-out and keep travel companion

SHORT BREAK IN... CASABLANCA, MOROCCO

High praise
The minaret at Hassan II Mosque is one of the city's main landmarks, standing 210m tall



Take a walk through Casablanca's streets and you'll soon discover why local architects are on a mission to get this Moroccan metropolis UNESCO-listed, says **Sarah Gilbert**

The name Casablanca – along with its namesake film, shot in a Hollywood studio – may conjure up an aura of North African exoticism. The modern reality, though, is that this Atlantic coast city is Morocco's commercial capital, a high-energy, cool metropolis.

But if it lacks the mystery of Marrakech and the fascination of Fez, the 'White City' certainly has no shortage of architectural gems. From 1912 to 1956, Morocco was under French rule and Casablanca was chosen as the base for the protectorate's strategic port. The city grew rapidly and French urban planner, Henri Prost, was instructed to turn it into a city worthy of its position.

Prost sought the help of Europe's top architects and as I walked along the Boulevard Mohammed V – dubbed the Moroccan Champs-Élysées – I marvelled at geometric Neoclassical edifices rubbing shoulders with ornate Neo-Moorish facades, symmetrical Art Deco structures and sleek Modernist towers, all blindingly white against the cobalt-blue sky.

"What was achieved here couldn't have happened anywhere else," explained Rachid Andaloussi, co-founder of non-profit Casamémoire, a group of local architects with a mission to safeguard the city's 20th-century architecture, and get Casablanca UNESCO-listed. "Two cultures met,

mixed and expressed themselves in a unique way,"

There are new flagship projects too. Around the civic hub of Mohammed V Square, Marius Boyer's Wilaya has been joined by the ultra-modern Grand Theatre of Casablanca, designed by a Pritzker-prize-winning architect, Christian de Portzamparc, in collaboration with Andaloussi. While the oceanfront AnfaPlace has created a new zone on the Corniche, with apartments, shops and a hotel.

Visitors can also take in the monumental murals adding colour to several white-walled apartment blocks. Travel in July and watch artists at work for the Sbagha Bagha Casablanca Street Art Festival. ►

ASK A LOCAL

"Discover the faces of Casablanca: Quartier Habous puts the artistry of traditional crafts on display, downtown will take you back to the 1930s and a stroll along the oceanfront Corniche shows a modern Moroccan beach resort."

Lahbib El Moumni,
Architect & Professor
at Casablanca's
School of Architecture



Need to know

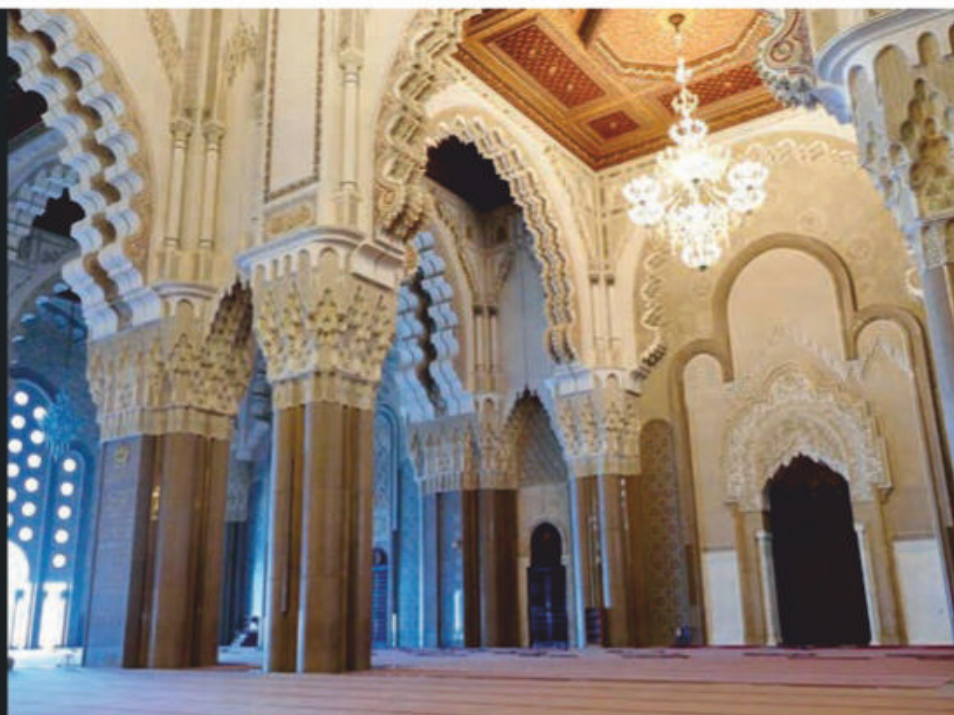
Population: 3.36 million

Time zone: GMT+1.

Currency: Moroccan dirham (MAD), currently approximately Dh12 to the UK£.

When to go: Mild year-round, the best times to visit are spring and autumn. Winter can be cool and rainy, and summer (particularly August) means school holidays and Moroccans escaping to the coast.

Top tip: Buy just-caught fish at the Central Market and ask a nearby café to grill it for you.



Day 1

Start your day with a traditional Moroccan breakfast – try eggs with *khlii* (dried meat) – in the garden restaurant of **La Sqala**, set in an 18th-century bastion in the medina's whitewashed ramparts.

Afterwards, head north to the city's most iconic landmark, the **Hassan II Mosque** (pictured). One of the largest mosques in the world, it's open to non-Muslims on

guided tours (9am, 10am, 11am and 3pm, Dh120/£9.50). The vast prayer hall can hold 25,000 worshippers – another 80,000 can fit in the courtyards outside – and it puts the finest Moroccan crafts on display with hand-carved stucco, painted wood and striking *zellige* (mosaic tilework).

Stroll along the new seafront promenade or grab a taxi to **Anfa**

Beach to lunch alfresco or take a surfing lesson with the Anfa Surf School (Dh150/£12) – the waves are perfect for novices.

Then get to chic **Le Cabestan Ocean View** (le-cabestan.com) in time for sunset – and sundowners – on the terrace. Stay for dinner; the Mediterranean-influenced menu focuses on straight-from-the-sea fish, such as swordfish.



Day 2

Arrange a free **architecture tour** of downtown with Casamémoire (visites.casamemoire@gmail.com, donations encouraged). Highlights might include the tiled facade of the **Grande Poste**, the striking deconsecrated church of **Sacre Coeur** (soon to be a cultural centre) and the city's green lung, the **Parc de la Ligue Arabe**.

Head to the **Quartier Gauthier** in the Ville Nouvelle for lunch at NKOA (facebook.com/nkoafod),

where global inspiration meets Moroccan produce. The nearby **Villa des Arts** showcases contemporary Moroccan artists in an Art Deco setting.

Sky 28 (facebook.com/sky28 tower) at the **Kenzi Tower Hotel** is the place for a cocktail and panoramic views, but end the day at **Rick's Café** (rickscafe.ma), a reimagining of *Casablanca's* celluloid gin joint, with fez-wearing bartenders and live jazz.



Day 3

Take a taxi to the **Quartier Habous**, the picturesque 'new medina', built by the French in the 1930s. Before you hit the souks, stop for a treat at the legendary, family-owned **Pâtisserie Bennis** – perhaps *cornes de gazelle*, crescent-shaped pastries filled with almond paste – that you can enjoy for the cost of a coffee at the old-school **Café Imperial**.

Then browse the tourist-friendly stalls, selling everything from leather *babouche* slippers

(pictured) to handwoven carpets and fragrant spices.

Another 20-minute taxi ride away is the only museum in the Muslim world devoted to Judaism. **The Museum of Moroccan Judaism** (jewishmuseumcasa.com, Dh50/£4, closed Saturdays), traces the history of the country's many Jewish residents.

Later, feast on gourmet Moroccan fare at **Hôtel Le Doge's** Le Jasmine, with its stained-glass ceiling and chandeliers.



4 THINGS TO DO IN CASABLANCA

1 Attend Jazzablanca

Now in its 15th year, the White City's most popular music festival showcases world-renowned and rising jazz, pop and indie artists from Morocco and beyond. Jazzablanca (jazzablanca.com) hosts around seven concerts a day, spread across two venues and four stages, alongside talks, workshops and events.

2 Bag a unique stay

At Hôtel Le Doge Relais & Châteaux (hotelledoge.com), a 1930s villa has been lovingly restored to its former Art Deco grandeur, with a deep red carpeted spiral staircase and 16 rooms, all individually decorated with period furnishings. There's also a Moroccan restaurant, rooftop Spanish restaurant and a small spa.

3 Wander around a must-see museum

The small but perfectly formed Abderrahman Slaoui Foundation Museum (musee-as.ma) has a unique private collection of Moroccan decorative arts, from vintage travel posters to elaborate Berber jewellery and furniture.

4 Take the train

Al Boraq (oncf.ma/fr/Al-boraq) is Morocco's first high-speed train, whizzing from Casablanca Voyageurs Station to Tangier in just over two hours – it's a great day trip. Note the website only takes Moroccan credit cards so buy tickets at the station; a single costs from Dh99 (£7.85).

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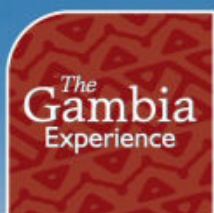
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Gardens by the Bay, Singapore

Singapore is often called 'Asia's greenest city' and at the Gardens by the Bay it's not hard to see why. This futuristic horticultural oasis, covering 101 hectares, highlights how Singapore is leading the way in sustainability by becoming a 'city in a garden'.

Head first to Bay South Garden to explore the three conservatories –


the largest being the Flower Dome – and peruse nine gardens and plants from five different continents before making your way to Floral Fantasy, where you'll journey across four whimsical landscapes. In Cloud Forest, climb through the mist up the 35m-tall Cloud Mountain to see the world's tallest indoor waterfall.

Look up as you exit and you'll spot the iconic Supertree Grove,

DID YOU KNOW?

More than 700 different plant species cover the 18 Supertrees, including Singapore's national flower, the orchid

18 vertical gardens reaching 25-50m in height. Watch the sunset at Bay East Garden for a panoramic skyline view, then return to the grove to see the Supertrees light up to music.

The park has been designed with sustainability in mind by collecting rainwater, generating solar power and using energy-efficient cooling technologies. It's a feast for the senses, and a green phenomenon. 

WHERE craft & beliefs CONVERGE

*B*rihadeeswarar Temple built by Raja Raja Chola I between 1003 and 1010 AD, the temple is known as the 'Great Living Chola Temples', along with Gangaikonda Cholapuram temple and Airavatesvara temple.



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