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SCOTLAND

EXPLORING THE WILD & WONDERFUL
LANDSCAPES OF THE SCOTTISH HIGHLANDS



MIAMI

Enjoy Caribbean flavors in The Magic City

AUCKLAND

What to do in New Zealand's exciting metropolis

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WELCOME

Dear fellow traveler,

Our Spring 2024 edition of beautiful, reliable, informative *Postcards* magazine is a gift from our agency to you. We're in the business of getting people out into the marvelous world and can't wait to help you turn your ideas into itineraries.

In this issue, we take you from Miami to Auckland, with stops in the sweeping savanna of Kenya, charming Danube River and picturesque Scottish Highlands. Laine Doss, former food editor of the *Miami New Times*, paints a delicious picture of Miami's Caribbean food scene. Take a wild walk on the Isle of Skye, Scotland, with Amy Mutscher and cruise through enchanting landscapes and storybook villages of the Danube Valley with Jeannine Williamson. Read our interview with acclaimed Atlas Ocean Voyages chef Sylwia Stachyra, winner of Bravo's 'Top Chef Poland' competition, who shares her recipe for Quiche Lorraine soup. Finally, pack your bags with the must-have items you'll need for a desert trek.

While it's easy to daydream about far-flung journeys, the reality is that we could all use some help navigating the unknown and unexpected. Our clients are treated to legendary customer service that exceeds expectations, provides complimentary amenities, anticipates issues and handles problems large and small. One call to our agency and you're back on track. Let's get started planning your next vacation. Happy travels!



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INSIDE

SPRING 2024

WEEKENDER

How to spend the perfect weekend in San Juan, Puerto Rico, the multifaceted Caribbean city that abounds with history and culture

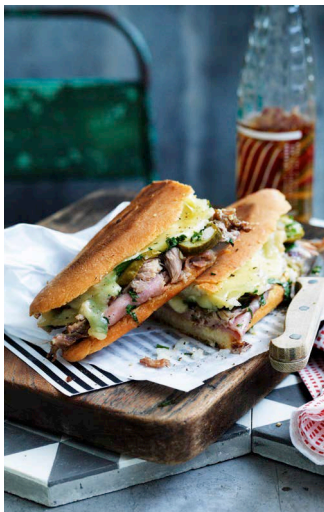
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A TASTE OF MIAMI

Experience the Magic City's plethora of Caribbean dishes – think Cuban-inspired ice cream, Trinidadian chicken thighs and Jamaican curried goat

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IMAGES: BETTY; STOCKFOOD; AWL IMAGES

SCOTTISH HIGHLANDS

Explore the mystique of Scotland's wild west coast on a guided foraging walk with the family

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Ancient castles, steep vineyards and sleepy villages are among the many highlights on a Danube river cruise with Avalon Waterways

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A guide to this thriving metropolis on the North Island of New Zealand and its culturally diverse food, history and art

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Cover: Neist Point Lighthouse on the Isle of Skye, Scotland



Introducing Secrets® Tulum Resort & Beach Club

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Himeji Castle, Kansai, Japan

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35-Day <i>Voyage of the Vikings</i>	20-Jul-24	Roundtrip Boston
53-Day <i>Majestic Japan</i>	1-Sep-24	Roundtrip Seattle
52-Day <i>Majestic Japan</i>	2-Sep-24	Vancouver to Seattle
56-Day <i>Tales of the South Pacific</i>	25-Sep-24	Vancouver to San Diego
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27-Day <i>Amazon Explorer</i>	8-Feb-25	Roundtrip Ft. Lauderdale
35-Day <i>Hawaii, Tahiti & the Marquesas</i>	15-Feb-25	Roundtrip San Diego
29-Day <i>South Pacific Crossing</i>	30-Mar-25	Sydney to Vancouver
28-Day <i>Arctic Circle Solstice</i>	8-Jun-25	Roundtrip Seattle
28-Day <i>Arctic Circle Crossing: Greenland & Iceland</i>	29-Jun-25	Roundtrip Rotterdam
25-Day <i>Canada, New England, Greenland & Iceland</i>	12-Jul-25	Roundtrip Boston
35-Day <i>Voyage of the Vikings</i>	19-Jul-25	Roundtrip Boston



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ICONIC BRIDGES

The Golden Bridge

WHERE: VIETNAM

Located in the Annamite Mountains behind the coastal city of Da Nang, the Golden Bridge is the star attraction of Vietnam's Ba Na Hills Resort. Designed in 2018 by TA Landscape Architecture, the 490-foot floating bridge with gilded rails is clutched by two colossal fiberglass hands.

Ba Na Hills was first developed in 1919 as a French colonial hill station. Today it's an entertainment complex, boasting an indoor amusement park, an alpine rollercoaster, a nine-story Buddha statue and an 18-hole golf course. To reach the bridge and upper park, you must first test your mettle on the world's longest nonstop single-track cable car, the 19,000-foot Ba Na gondola.

But nothing — not even the replica French village complete with Gothic cathedral — could trump the splendor of these mountains. After catching a glimpse of the lush highlands from the Golden Bridge, venture down to explore the fourth-century My Son Sanctuary or go hiking in the nearby Bach Ma National Park.





GO NOW



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Mostar Bridge

WHERE: BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Arching elegantly over the Neretva River in southern Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mostar's Stari Most or 'Old Bridge' is an incredible feat of Ottoman engineering and a symbol of reconciliation.

The humpback stone bridge spans 98 feet and soars 66 feet above the river's summer water level. Completed in 1566 at the end of the reign of Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent, the original structure stood until November 9, 1993, when, during the Balkan Wars, it came under fire and collapsed. In 2004, it was rebuilt according to architect Mimar Hayruddin's original plans, a process cataloged at the Old Bridge Museum.

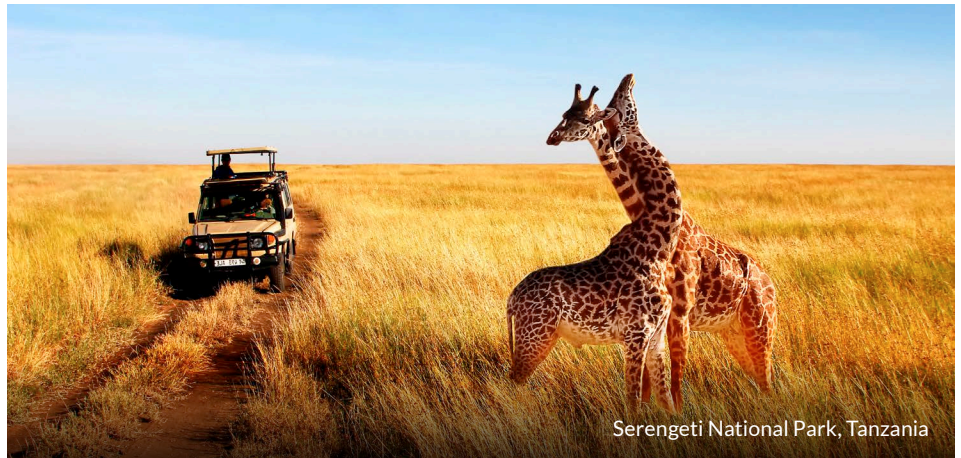
Stari Most is the soul of Mostar: the city is named after the bridge-keepers or 'mostari' who defended it from twin fortified towers, Kula Halebija and Kula Tara. Today, it has different stewards — the daredevil members of the Diving Club, who wow crowds by ceremoniously leaping off the bridge's apex and plunging feet-first into the water in a tradition that dates back to 1664. □



Na Pali Coast, Hawaii

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Serengeti National Park, Tanzania

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The latest on Royal Caribbean's megaships
Icon of the Seas and Utopia of the Seas



Launched in January 2024, *Icon of the Seas* is the biggest cruise ship ever to set sail — its maiden voyage being a roundtrip from Miami to the Caribbean.

Akin to a city on the sea, the gargantuan vessel can accommodate almost 10,000 passengers and crew, and boasts a huge array of activities including a full-scale water park, 20 decks with seven pools and many dining and evening entertainment

options. The ship has been divided into eight 'neighborhoods,' each with its own character and dining choices.

Utopia of the Seas is also set to arrive in summer 2024 — with impressive facilities including 21 dining options, five pools and 23 bars, to name a few. It will offer travelers shorter itineraries including three-night weekend voyages and four-night weekday trips out of Port Canaveral in Florida.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Princess Cruises' Sun Princess to set sail in 2024

Sun Princess will set out to the Mediterranean in spring and summer, followed by the Caribbean in fall — boasting technological additions like wearable devices with a room service function and a pool that transforms into a stage.

Viking launches Viking Vela

Viking Cruises' latest ship, *Viking Vela*, is set to sail in December 2024. With capacity for 998 guests, it will be the largest of all Viking's ships.

EXPLORA II coin

Explora II has kept up the tradition of blessing a journey (in the hope of good fortune) by placing a commemorative coin inside the ship — a lucky charm for maritime laborers in olden days.

Above: *Icon of the Seas* completing a sea trial in Turku, Finland

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Location: San Juan, Puerto Rico



From left: Chef Michel Roux Jr. at *The Wigmore* in London, where Cunard announced their partnership; the Northern Lights, Lofoten Islands, Norway

FOODIE SAILING: CUNARD INTRODUCES QUEEN ANNE

For the first time in 13 years, Cunard is expanding its historic fleet. Its hyper-luxury offering now spans four ships, with new vessel *Queen Anne* being introduced with foodies in mind.

In August 2023, Cunard announced a partnership with renowned chef Michel Roux Jr. who'll be using his expertise to help create a gala menu for *Queen Anne's* Queen's Grill restaurant, and a new menu for onboard pub, the Golden Lion.

Other dining options include the Britannia Restaurant, where white-gloved waiters descend the grand staircase carrying British dishes. There's also the Commodore Club, where guests can relax in a luxurious lounge and sip martinis as a live band plays. On top of that, there's also a pan-Asian restaurant, a Mediterranean spot, a steakhouse, a tapas joint and an Indian restaurant.

EXPANDED ITINERARIES: HURTIGRUTEN ADDS ROUTES

The Norwegian cruise line Hurtigruten has added two new itineraries to its offering in 2024 to mark the company's 130-year anniversary and its history of ferrying Norwegians between remote northern territories. The first is the Svalbard Express, which will transport passengers and cargo to the Arctic archipelago of Svalbard — where polar bears outnumber people — via the Lofoten islands,

Vesterålen and the North Cape. The second is the North Cape Express, carrying guests to Oslo as well as to Norway's most southernly and northernly points, including a scenic cruise through the mighty Hardangerfjord, and the possibility of seeing the majestic Northern Lights.

The cruise line's offering now spans as far as the Arctic tundra to the west coast of Africa, and from the ice fields of Antarctica to the isolated isles of the Galápagos.



IMAGES: CHRISTOPHER ISON; ALAMY

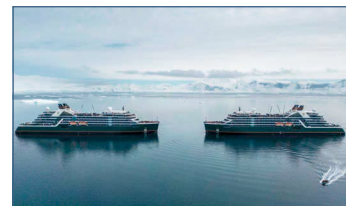


A GREENER WORLD FOR CRUISE LINES

Cruising companies are implementing and celebrating new sustainability initiatives in 2024

A number of cruise lines, including MSC Cruises, have begun introducing new sustainability measures designed to reduce their impact on the seas they sail. One of the key innovations arriving in 2024 is ships powered by liquefied natural gas (LNG) and fuel cell technology. These aim to dramatically decrease the amount of greenhouse gases that the large ships emit, a long-standing issue in the industry.

Some companies have also introduced bans on single-use plastics, an initiative gaining momentum across many industries. In addition, major line Royal Caribbean has made significant investment into improving the environmental impact of its new Galveston terminal. The Texas jump-off point is considered to be the world's first ever 'zero energy' terminal, generating its energy via on-site solar panels.



TRAVEL TALK

Seabourn ships meet for first time in Antarctica

For the first time, two Seabourn expedition cruises sailed together through the icy passages of the Neko Harbour gateway. The sister ships crossed paths in November, the *Seabourn Pursuit* having just completed its first Antarctic voyage, the *Seabourn Venture* embarking on its second. The crews assembled to greet their passing colleagues and the respective guests celebrated with champagne and caviar.

Disney Lookout Cay at Lighthouse Point, Bahamas

Disney Cruise Line's newest retreat is a private destination in the Bahamas. It embraces the tropical setting and local island culture, blended with the family fun Disney's properties are known for. Set to open in the summer of 2024, the idyllic island resort has areas tailored to relaxed adult travelers and young Disney enthusiasts.

Saudi Arabia World Expo

The Saudi Arabian capital, Riyadh, has been selected to host the World Expo in 2030, opening October 1, 2030, and closing March 31, 2031. The six-month event, which brings countries together, is held once every five years.

Your ultimate guide to *Romantic* *Travel destinations*

When it comes to being in love, everything feels more magical. With your sweetheart cozied up next to you, scenery appears more dazzling, every scent – whether blooming flowers or falling rain – is all the more aromatic, and sharing a meal warms the heart with every bite. Vacationing with your special someone offers opportunities

to delve even deeper into the beauty of the world, and there are certain destinations that inspire a richer sense of romance and intensify intimacy. Whether overlooking the turquoise waters of the Greek Islands, floating above tiny Italian Villages from the basket of a hot air balloon, or falling asleep at a historical property among the vineyards of France, romantic retreats boast profound experiences that are perfect for newlyweds seeking their first galivant across the globe, or couples celebrating decades together. Let us help create a lifetime of memories for you and your partner on your next getaway!

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Destinations



SAN JUAN, PUERTO RICO

A domestic hop to the Puerto Rican capital offers up jungle trails, tranquil beaches and a vibrant, UNESCO-listed historical quarter, says SJ Armstrong

DAY 1

Immerse yourself in Old San Juan as soon as you arrive. Stroll the cobbled lanes, flanked by pastel-colored, classic Spanish townhouses and flower-laden patios, starting out on Calle San Sebastián. Take some time to peer into the niche boutiques and small art galleries spaced out along the popular street, which will carry you almost the whole way to San Juan's fortified frontier. Castillo San Felipe del Morro, which has guarded the islet of Old San Juan since its construction started in 1539, feels as though it sprung from the rocks on Puerto Rico's northern front, its historic walls whipped by the wind and stained the shade of the crag. Start at La Fortaleza and climb between six levels of defensive walls to see where the

Spanish fended off the Dutch, the English and slews of raiding pirate ships. Today, it's the official residence of the governor of Puerto Rico, and it has been since the 16th century. The complex is large and multi-faceted — take one of the regular tours run in English and Spanish, or lounge on its sloping lawn and watch as families gather to play impromptu games or fly kites.

Double back some 15 minutes to rest your legs at El Jibarito, a local favorite serving up traditional Puerto Rican dishes. Grab some pasteles (tamale-style mashed plantain and pork wrapped in banana leaves and steamed) or indulge in a side dish of mofongo (fried plantain mashed by hand) doused with garlic-laced butter.





Clockwise from left: *Juan Diego Falls in El Yunque Rainforest; the common coqui, a frog native to Puerto Rico*

Previous pages, clockwise from top left: *Brightly colored buildings in Old San Juan; pink umbrella art installation on Fortaleza Street in Old San Juan; a beach walkway in San Juan; straw hats for sale in Old San Juan; Condado Beach; stone archways in Castillo San Cristobal; pistachio ice cream; the Puerto Rican flag on the door of an abandoned building; the distinctive dome of the San Juan Cemetery*

Appetite sated, set out east to Castillo San Cristobal, the fortress that has flanked the other side of the old city since 1634. As well as offering its own fascinating military history, the castle is the best place to stop for a panoramic view over Old San Juan and its Caribbean Sea border. From there, head back into the bustle of the inner city along colorful Calle de la Fortaleza, with pit stops to window shop for local handicrafts, ornate jewelry and freshly rolled cigars.

Once the hunger hits again, Café Caleta is only a short walk away. A cafe by day and bar/restaurant by night, it serves up fresh fish ceviche-style, albondigas puertorriqueñas (spiced meatballs) and cured pork shoulder spiced with coffee. Add an accompanying nightcap — an evening in San Juan isn't complete without the rich blended rum ever present in Puerto Rico.

DAY 2

It only takes 45 minutes to drive from San Juan to the only tropical rainforest in the U.S. — El Yunque. Miles of accessible hiking

trails weave through the mountainous terrain, which are bordered by dense thickets of towering tabonuco trees. The hiking routes range in difficulty, with options available for strollers and climbers alike. Take a short jaunt down the Angelito Trail to reach the rejuvenating waters of the Río Mameyes, then ascend the viewing platform on the 90-minute Mount Britton Tower route for panoramic forest vistas, or tackle the more challenging Los Picachos trail — it's worth it for the vantage over the cloud-dusted mountain forest. Hikers hoping to push their limits should take the El Yunque Trail to watch the ecology shift with the altitude or the El Toro track to reach one of the highest points in the Luquillo mountains.

Refuel at El Yunque Rainforest Cafe, which is accessible by road, and which serves freshly fried empanadillas, tortilla-wrapped carnitas and smoothies blended with local forest fruits. After, explore the nearby waterfalls: La Mina, which cascades from 30 feet, is only a 10-minute walk from the cafe and has a cooling lagoon filled with recovering hikers at its base. Though slightly

MOOREA, FRENCH POLYNESIA

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farther afield, in the south of El Yunque, it's worth venturing to the La Canoa Falls to see the Taíno petroglyphs etched by the Indigenous peoples of the forest. Once you've tired of lofty treetops and orchid-dappled forest floors, drive half an hour to Laguna Grande to get ready for the best light show in Puerto Rico.

After pausing to crunch on deep-fried tostones (crisp plantain) dipped in garlic sauce or a comforting bowl of pollo guisado (traditional chicken stew) at a local restaurant in Fajardo, head out to the Laguna Grande to secure a kayak. Just before the sun sets, embark on a gentle paddle between the low hanging boughs of the Red Mangrove Forest. It takes around half an hour to reach the Bioluminescent Lagoon, where every stroke of the paddle sets off a spiral of sapphire sparkles. Caused by billions of plankton swelling on the water's surface, the ripple of a hand drifting in the water or the flap of a passing fish is enough to cast a mini 'Milky Way' over the lagoon. Once you've paddled back

along the glittering streams, head back to San Juan, around a 90-minute drive from Laguna Grande.

DAY 3

After an active day in Puerto Rico's inland forests, it's time to decompress. Recover on one of the sandy beaches that surround San Juan. To stick close to the urban center of the city, head across the bridge from Old San Juan to the upscale, beachfront neighborhood of Condado. A laid-back spot teeming with lounging locals, it offers fine sands and gentle waves, alongside an array of seafront hotels, restaurants and bars. Dine alongside the Boricuas, as locals are known, at lunch at the unassuming Orozco's, where the mofongo is mixed with octopus tendrils or generous chunks of lobster. Alternatively, opt for gouda and papaya croquetas and succulent sea bass at the sleek Mario Pagán's. To add a final special experience to your weekend, book a table at 1919 ahead of time. Its five-course

Above: The view from the San Juan Water and Beach Club Hotel

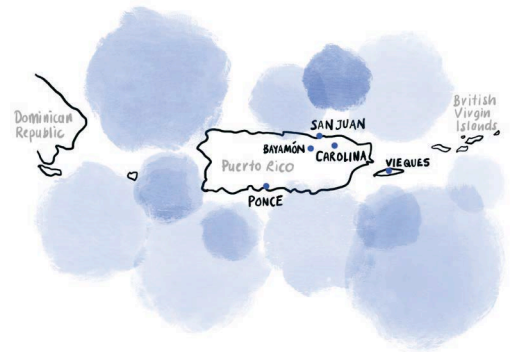


A piña colada cocktail, which was invented in Puerto Rico

menu is designed by world-renowned chef Juan José Cuevas and features dishes like traditional Puerto Rican crudo topped with kristal caviar and poached lobster fresh from the San Juan shore. While away the afternoon with a creamy piña colada and lie on the soft sands that fringe the Caribbean swell — or head to the nearby Condado Lagoon, where it's possible to spot manatees lolling in the waters. You can even rent a kayak here to paddle alongside the gentle giants. Alternatively, the district is home to San Juan's main high-end shopping street, which has a selection of designer brands.

Afterwards, head to La Placita de Santurce, which transforms from a farmers' market to a social hub once the sun starts to set. It's home to some of San Juan's best cocktail bars — start at Asere Kitchen

and Bar, known for its old-school Cuban ambiance and signature passionfruit and habanero mojitos. Stroll amid the art-adorned streets, dodging swirling salsa dancers congregating outside the chinchorros (inexpensive bar-restaurants), in the direction of La Penúltima. Sit with locals at their communal tables and sip on smoky toasted coconut scotch or mezcal mixed with sweet hibiscus. Once you've had a fill of island-inspired cocktails and mocktails, listen for the running rhythms of plena played on hand drums or the African-inspired beats of bomba — both Puerto Rican folklore styles are heard every night in Santurce, home to an array of live music venues. It mingles in the evening air with the distant pulse of reggaeton, omnipresent on its origin isle. □



ESSENTIALS

When to go: The Puerto Rican sun shines year-round, with its coldest month, January, only dipping to 70 degrees. Visit between April and June to avoid the high winter season. August receives the most rainfall.

Currency: USD

Language: Spanish. English is also commonly spoken in the city.

Getting around: Taxis and rideshares are easily sourced in San Juan, as are rental car companies. You can also hop on a public minibus (públicos), the light rail or an AMA bus. Old San Juan is small and easily explored on foot.

BOOK IT NOW

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WINERIES IN FRANCIACORTA

Extending from the southern shore of Lake Iseo toward the city of Brescia, the hills of Franciacorta yield some of Italy's finest sparkling wines, finds Emily Lush

Nourished by morainic soils and fanned by a cooling Alpine breeze from the Val Camonica, Lombardy's Franciacorta district — located an hour's drive from Milan — has been cultivated by vintners since at least the eighth century. Yet it only received DOC status in 1967 (later upgraded to DOCG status exclusively for its sparkling wines).

Made from a blend of chardonnay, pinot nero and pinot bianco grapes

and aged on the lees (dead yeast) for a minimum of 18 months, Franciacorta spumantes are known for being deep, dry and complex. They differ from prosecco in that the second fermentation occurs in the bottle rather than inside a pressurized tank.

The traditions associated with Franciacorta wine are scrupulously upheld by a few dozen family-run estates. Here are five that are well worth knowing about.

← GUIDO BERLUCCHI

Start where it all began at this historic property in Borgonato, where in 1961 a visionary vintner named Franco Ziliani invented sparkling Franciacorta by using Champagne's Metodo Classico to elevate the local table wines. Now the region's largest producer, Guido Berlucchi boasts 1,273 acres of vineyards, producing 4.5 million bottles of Franciacorta DOCG annually — a process overseen by Ziliani's three sons. A tasting here includes a visit to the 17th-century Palazzo Lana, where you'll gather around the Botticino marble fireplace before venturing down into the cellar to behold a bottle of 1961 vintage.



↑ CA' DEL BOSCO

A giant gilded sundial greets visitors at the gates of Ca' del Bosco, an estate in Erbusco where wine and art dovetail. Crafted by local sculptor Arnaldo Pomodoro, it's one of many site-specific works designed to echo the beauty of the vineyards, first planted in 1968. After the meandering sculpture garden, the vaulted tunnels of the barrel room feel all the more snug. It's here visitors can taste Franciacorta Cuvée Prestige DOCG, five reds and a pair of whites, all made with traditional varietals.

ILLUSTRATIONS: LIS WATKINS



← RONCO CALINO

Located near the town of Rovato (Lombardy's unofficial gastronomic capital), the organic vines on this 32-acre property arc northward toward Lake Iseo. Winemakers Paolo and Lara Radici favor pinot noir for their aromatic wines, including the Rosé Radijan, a 100% pinot noir Franciacorta with notes of juniper balsam. Tastings at the winery are intimate affairs, accompanied by grissini and Parmigiano-Reggiano. For the annual Franciacorta Summer Festival (May to September), the couple often invite local chefs to oversee their gourmet vineyard picnics.

→ RICCI CURBASTRO

Tracing its roots back to 1885, Ricci Curbastro marries heritage and innovation. It became an exclusively organic producer in 2017 — a year after becoming the first estate in Lombardy to earn the Equalitas-Sustainable Wine standard. From using solar energy to power their operations to re-greening the landscape with centenary mulberry hedges and even fostering biodiversity with an in-house brood of endangered Romagnola chickens, the Curbastro family are custodians of the land with posterity in mind. As if to serve as a constant reminder of this, the estate's oenology museum catalogs thousands of items linked to the area's agrarian traditions.



← VILLA FRANCIACORTA

Located in a 15th-century village in the Monticelli Brusati area, bounded by terraced vineyards and accessed via a Roman road once traveled by Virgil, Villa Franciacorta was founded in 1960 by Alessandro Bianchi and has been producing Franciacorta DOC since 1974. Signature wines, including the exuberant Briquette Rosé Demi-Sec, use patented endemic yeasts in a process overseen by microbiologists from the University of Florence. This is a real family affair: Alessandro's daughter Roberta led the restoration of the drystone houses that once belonged to the village's sharecroppers, transforming the agriturismo arm, Villa Gradoni, into 22 self-contained apartments and an osteria. □



KENYA'S MAASAI MARA

In the Maasai Mara, leopards dangle their dinners from acacia trees, elephants saunter over the savanna and prides of lions bask in the African sun, says SJ Armstrong



1 BIG CAT CUBS

Tumbling over their own toes and prowling after passing butterflies, Kenya's big cats are a lot less intimidating in their infancy. Visit Maasai Mara in February, when lionesses begin to introduce their cubs to the pride. Socializing with their own species for the first time, the tiny predators are being trained to stalk small prey, gorging on gazelles their mothers drag home and dodging hyenas throughout their early months. Leopards and cheetahs both begin raising their cubs around the same season.

2 GREAT WILDEBEEST MIGRATION

Between June and November, some 1.5 million wildebeest descend upon Maasai Mara. Following the rain and the mineral-rich soil, immense herds traverse the Kenyan and Tanzanian plains, navigating crocodile-infested waters and big cat hunting grounds. The wildebeest are joined by zebras, gazelles and eland. Though precise timings are unpredictable, the herds typically arrive in Maasai Mara from late July to early August.

3 BLACK RHINO RESTORATION

There are less than 50 black rhinos left in Maasai Mara; plagued by ivory poachers, their population decreased by 98% between 1960 and 1995. Conservationists have undertaken painstaking efforts to boost their numbers, and to introduce travelers to the rare giants. Take a day trip to the grounds of Mara Plains Camp for a chance to spot this most elusive of Africa's 'Big 5' in the high grasses.



THREE MORE: NATURE HOTSPOTS

Lake Nakuru

Tinted pink by flocks of flamingos year-round, Lake Nakuru's surface is rarely left tranquil. Rare wading birds like white pelicans and Malagasy pond herons roam the algae-rich waters under the watchful eye of greater spotted eagles and Rüppell's vultures.

Kisite-Mpunguti Marine National Park

With so many major mammals roaming inland, Kenya's coastline is often unjustly overlooked. Head to Kisite-Mpunguti Marine National Park for a chance to swim with pods of dolphins, sea turtles and cute, curious clown fish.

Mount Kenya

Mount Kenya is renowned among avid hikers, but its wildlife offering draws nature-lovers to extreme heights. Help abandoned or injured critters at the conservancy's animal orphanage and learn about Kenya's recent success in rewilding its highlands with the Mountain Bongo Breeding program.

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Walk

ON THE

wild side

On the west coast of Scotland lies an island that encapsulates much of the country's mystique — though it has a famous distillery, its best produce can be found on a guided foraging walk, says Amy Mutscher

I didn't expect to see a coiled adder sunning itself upon a rock as the first creature encounter on our trip to Scotland. A pod of dolphins, a friendly seal, perhaps, or even an otter backstroking in the nearby loch — but not a snake. Scotland's craggy, black-bouldered west coast has witnessed Viking raids, Norman conquest and Highland clearances, but today it's all incredibly peaceful. Lush green ferns act as ground cover to the damp soil, and wrack — a brown, hair-like seaweed — litters the shoreline as the sun fights for dominance over a weight of dark gray clouds.

Clad in waterproof boots and hooded jackets, my extended family and I have gathered here for our annual overseas

odyssey. On this balmy August summer morning, after months of planning, email exchanges and Instagram tracking, I finally meet local guide Mitchell Partridge and his black and white border collie.

Before we arrived, Mitchell and I had discussed a fishing excursion but scuttled the idea when we amassed more travel companions. Instead, he suggested foraging for mushrooms and edible plants on a forest trek, which intrigued my teens, so we signed up for a walk to explore Scotland's wild coast, which included a history of the Isle of Skye.

Our adventure begins at the doorstep of our guesthouse, the ancestral hunting lodge of Clan Macdonald, one of Scotland's






largest clans. By way of introduction, Mitchell clarifies that he's no tour guide, but a ghillie, the difference being that ghillies accompany guests on fishing, hunting or deer stalking expeditions in the Scottish Highlands and live the lifestyle they're demonstrating.

Mitchell has a strong ethos of self-sufficiency, eating with the seasons and sourcing his own meat and seafood. Indeed, he has the tactical skills to live sustainably off of his homeland in ways that city dwellers like us can only dream about. He learned bushcraft during his time in the military. After leaving the army, he developed his expertise by studying the local flora and fauna. When it comes to foraging for mushrooms, his advice is "don't munch on a hunch," and he's even listed as a chanterelle supplier on our lodge's dinner menu.

As we step carefully along the rocky shoreline of Loch na Dal and enter the dense woods, Mitchell describes his everyday life. At his home on a nearby cove, he operates lobster traps for his own sustenance and as a valuable trading commodity. He's an expert fly fisherman, and takes out groups of anglers in search of salmon, rainbow trout, sea trout and wild brown trout. His handiness on the water is well known in the local community, and he's often summoned for rescue efforts — like a recent stranding event that didn't end so well for a pod of beached whales.

Hiking in Scotland is distinctive for that squish you feel when you step into the peaty soil. You'd think the ground would be dry — given that it's August and the weather is sunny and warm — but the land holds on to the coffee-colored groundwater, evidenced on our shoes after even the briefest trek. 

From left: *Quiraing mountains on the Isle of Skye; a couple relaxing harborside in Portree, Skye*

Previous pages: *Colorful sunset at Sligachan, Isle of Skye*





As we walk, Mitchell teaches us about mushroom anatomy and how to tell if a mushroom is a friend or foe. The cap is one of several characteristics — from a typical convex form to conical and bell-shaped — but it's an important one. Flip it over to examine underneath the cap, and notice if you see gills, ridges or pores. Gills can be deceptive, as there are both true and false gills, so it's a good thing we're being guided by a professional.

In fact, being with a field guide, we're in compliance with the Scottish Wild Mushroom Code, which mandates that people should contact the land manager before collecting for any purpose. True to the spirit of community land use, we only gather about a dozen chanterelles for our group to have a taste, and leave plenty in the ground to nourish the ecosystem.

My sister Ashley locates the first hedgehog fungus, to our knowledge at least, of the season. Mitchell congratulates her for spotting this edible mushroom, which grows best during the autumn months. We pause to observe a horse's hoof fungus growing from a dying, moss-covered birch tree. This gaudy fungus is inedible but useful as tinder for starting fires.

Meanwhile, we're also keeping an eye out for signs of red deer activity: mainly hoofprints in the mud and scrapings on trees. The Scottish Highlands are home to this majestic animal that is the largest land mammal in the UK. Mature stags boast an impressive rack of antlers, of the kind that we've often seen displayed over building entrances and fireplace hearths.

Mitchell points out some blueberry bushes. The birds have stripped them

From left: *The 300-year-old packhorse bridge over the Dulnain River in Carrbridge; a brown Highland cow on Skye*





*Loch Beinn a' Mheadhoin in the
Scottish Highlands* >

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clean on the highest branches, but we can reach berries that beaks can't. Soon, our fingers and teeth are stained purple, and we've had our fill of tart wild blueberries. Walking and talking outdoors, sharing a taste of the forest, dodging miniature flying pests, I can't help but feel this is a bonding experience we'll relive around the dinner table for years to come.

As we enter a clearing, Mitchell spots campervans parked illegally along the private road. Hikers have the 'right to roam,' meaning they can access the land, but it's forbidden to park on privately owned acreage. In the summer, streams of loaded campervans seeking a remote spot base themselves on the Isle of Skye.

It's a conflict becoming more common as travelers search for an idyllic vista without understanding local ownership rights.

The #RecreateResponsibly movement seeks to educate travelers about the use of public lands and how to practice sensible stewardship abiding by 'leave no trace' principles. In Scotland, the right to roam is an established tradition enshrined in the Land Reform Act of 2003 that encompasses care for the environment aligned with shared interests and individual accountability.

REACHING THE ISLE OF SKYE

For day-trippers, traversing the Skye Bridge across Loch Alsh to the Isle of Skye is an unmissable experience. It's a long drive from cities like Edinburgh, Glasgow and Inverness to this remote seaboard — home to enchanting fishing villages, salty breezes and expansive views. One of Scotland's best-known castles is located just off the road a



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WALKING AND TALKING OUTDOORS, SHARING A TASTE OF THE FOREST, DODGING MINIATURE FLYING PESTS — I CAN'T HELP BUT FEEL THIS IS A BONDING EXPERIENCE WE'LL RELIVE AROUND THE DINNER TABLE FOR YEARS TO COME

few miles from the iconic Skye Bridge. Based on the pictures, I expected Eilean Donan Castle to be an abandoned outpost, but it's actually a well-developed tourist attraction with an enticing cafe, a gift shop supplied with locally made goods and a helpful information center.

We head inside and discover Irn-Bru, the carbonated, orange soda considered Scotland's other national drink, after whisky. What does it taste like? That's part of the lore. No one can agree on a common description — but it's definitely not orange-flavored, nor is it as sweet as American sodas.

The next day, half the group heads for a whisky tasting at Talisker Distillery in the seaside village of Carbost, on Loch Harport. Those under age break off to visit the hilltop home of Louise Mackenzie — proprietor of Lou Lou Designs — who repurposes vintage Harris tweed fabrics into purses, travel bags and hair accessories.

Louise usually displays her inventory at different farmers' markets, but today she's letting us browse her studio shelves for souvenirs. She relates the ongoing saga of



*Eilean Donan Castle
near Kyle of Lochalsh*



The town of Portree

renovations to her home that started life as a schoolhouse and was converted by her joiner husband. He also built her workroom, accentuated with bright yellow windowsills and a front door in the same shade.

Portree is the capital town of Skye, attracting lunchtime diners perusing menus, influencers framing their shot of the pastel-colored buildings fronting the harbor, and campervans resupplying at the nearby grocery store.

Somehow, we're hungry again, so we seek out the Isle of Skye Baking Company for sandwiches and shortbread. There's also cranberry and sultana bannocks, pumpkin seed oat cakes or feta and spinach scones. With our sweet and savory pastries, we congregate on picnic benches out front to recap and plot our next move. The Irn-Bru donut is a surprise hit, and the

buttery lavender shortbread is heaven on a plate.

With foraged chanterelles tucked into a leather shoulder bag, Mitchell scouts level ground for a bush fire. Ever the ghillie, he's packed his own burner and propane tank, so we'll leave no evidence after our cookout. He's learned some important mushroom preparation tips from his time delivering ingredients to the kitchen of our lodge. The chef advised him to bring plenty of salted, grass-fed butter.

We're not roughing it right now. Our bounty sautéing in sizzling butter blends with the fresh seaside air producing an all-consuming scent. As we pass the warm pan around our family circle, each taking forkfuls of roasted chanterelles, I recognize this as one of those cherished moments that I'd like to live over and over again. □



ESSENTIALS

When to go: The best time to visit the Scottish Highlands is during the summer, between May and September. Weather conditions during winter months can be wildly unpredictable with low temperatures, winds and snowfall all a possibility.

Currency: British Pound.

\$1 = 0.78 GBP

Language: The main language is English. Scottish Gaelic and Scots are also spoken in some parts.

Getting around: One of the best ways to explore the highlights of the Scottish Highlands is on a guided tour. Car, coach and cruise/ferry are all excellent options for traversing the region.



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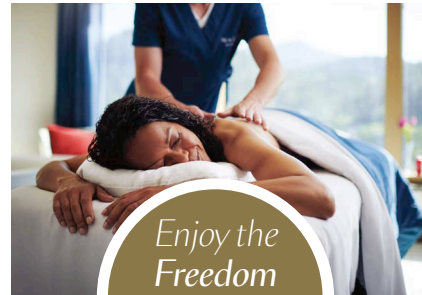
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QUEEN ELIZABETH®

A TASTE OF MIAMI

From Cuban-inspired ice cream to Trinidadian chicken thighs, Miami is home to plenty of Caribbean flavors, says Laine Doss



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INA DE BETTY

Miami is a city of many cultures. This is partly thanks to its close proximity to the Caribbean. Founded in 1896, it became home first to Bahamians, who traveled here in search of construction and culinary work; Haitian immigrants, feeling their country's harsh political regime in the 1960s and 70s; and Cubans opposed to Fidel Castro's regime. Visitors from Jamaica, the Dominican Republic and other Caribbean nations also put down roots here, making it a true melting pot.

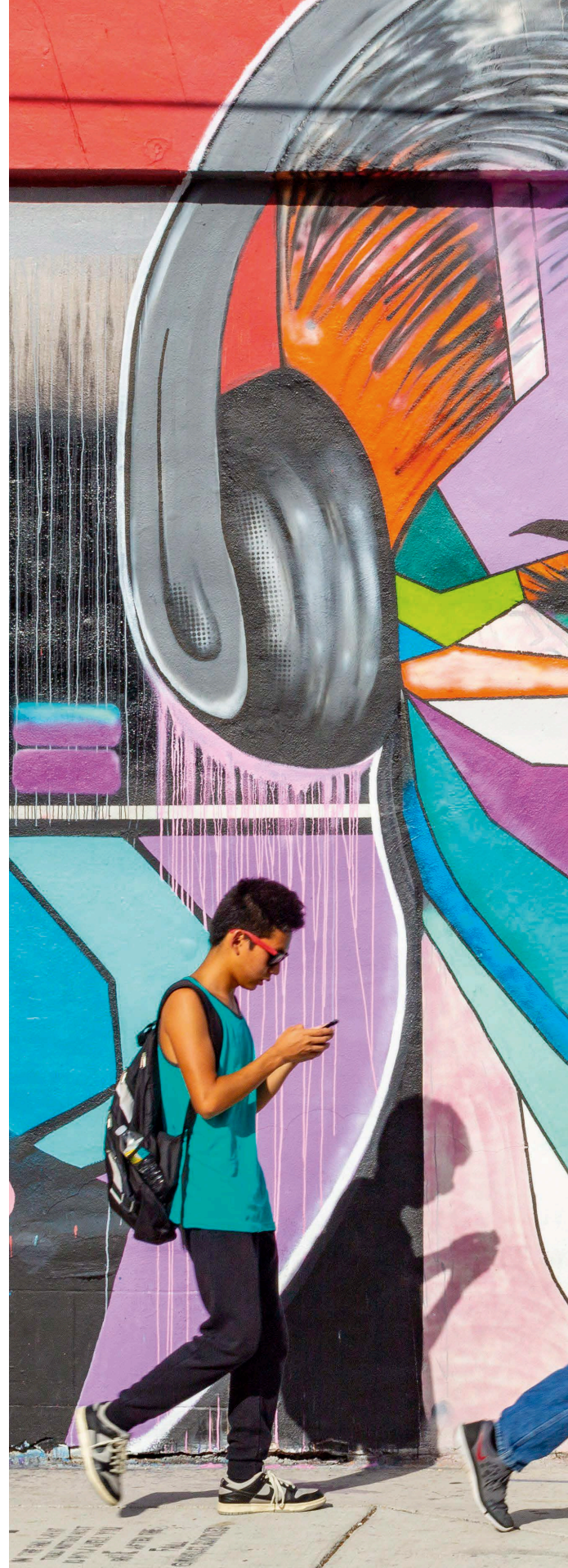
While most visitors to The Magic City gravitate toward its beaches, to get a true taste of Miami, you'll need to travel beyond the tourist hotspots — to neighborhoods like Little Haiti, Little Havana, Coconut Grove and Wynwood, where generations of immigrants from the Caribbean built new lives for themselves.

Little Havana's Calle Ocho is the center of Cuban life in the city, and a walk down the vibrant street yields a cornucopia of sights and sounds. Here, you can purchase a hand-rolled cigar or enjoy some sugar cane juice pressed to order at one of the many fruit stands lining



From left: Thai-style charred cabbage chicken salad at The Katherine Restaurant; the vibrant Wynwood Art District

Previous pages: Neon lights on Ocean Drive, Miami Beach





IMAGES: THE KATHERINE; ANIL IMAGES

the streets. To escape Miami's balmy weather, head to Azucar Ice Cream, where owner Suzy Battle uses fresh, local ingredients for a 'farm to cone' experience. Battle digs deep into her Cuban-American roots to create flavors like 'Cuatro Leche' (a take on a Cuban tres leches cake featuring a cafe con leche made with rich, strong Cuban coffee and Oreo cookies), and the 'Burn in Hell, Fidel' — rich chocolate ice cream with a great kick of cayenne pepper which tingles the lips, before the cool sweetness of the ice cream cools the tongue before things get too spicy.

A few blocks east, Cafe La Trova, named after Cuban 'trova' music, offers an immersive supper club experience. James Beard-winning chef Michelle Bernstein has teamed up with world-renowned mixologist Julio Cabrera to create a menu that elevates staples like croquetas and ropa vieja (shredded beef and vegetables) and drinks such as mojitos. La Trova offers live music nightly, with band members playing on a stage festooned with a laundry line filled with clothes as if you're partying on the streets of Havana circa 1957. At the bar, Cabrera and his fellow cantineros (bartenders) throw together daiquiris — tossing the liquid from shaker to shaker in a spectacular feat of showmanship. From time to time, the cantineros join the band, playing percussion instruments from behind the bar. The arroz con pollo is the standout dish — a steaming offering of fragrant saffron rice accompanied by half a succulent free-range chicken that's been deboned.

It might be slightly counter-intuitive, but for the best Jamaican jerk chicken, you have to travel to Little Haiti. Pearlina Murray and her late husband, Clifford, opened Clive's Cafe in the late 1980s in Miami's Wynwood neighborhood. A few years ago, the little restaurant relocated to Little Haiti. Decorated in wood paneling, with a sound system consisting of a radio playing reggae



Clockwise from left: A Cuban sandwich with ham, roasted pork and cheese; an aerial view of South Beach; Calle Ocho in the Latino neighborhood of Little Havana



TOP THREE: CUBAN FLAVORS OF MIAMI

Coffee

Loaded with caffeine, Cuban coffee is made using a strong, dark blend of coffee beans sweetened with a thick layer of sugar foam. Head to one of the cafes in Little Havana to give it a try.

Sandwich

The pinnacle of on-the-go food in Miami, the Cuban sandwich holds a very special place here. Think delicious ham, roast pork, Swiss cheese and dill pickles, all stuffed inside a toasted Cuban roll.

Arepa

Found all over Latin America, arepas in Miami are made using cheese sandwiched in between two corn pancakes. Best served smeared with butter.





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The restaurant also serves up a fragrant curried chicken or goat, house-made patties and cracked conch. On weekends, Clive's offers mannish water, a goat soup that's believed to be an aphrodisiac



Colorful street in
Miami Beach

Above: Grilled chicken and
beef rice in Little Haiti



music, Clive's is neither fancy nor trendy. Yet people in the know (including regular Lenny Kravitz) come here for plentiful plates of home cooking. The jerk chicken brings a pleasant heat, and is served with two sides — the mac and cheese — a thick slice of solid cheese and noodle casserole — and the rice and peas, which are both excellent. The restaurant also serves up a fragrant curried chicken or goat, house-made patties and cracked conch. On weekends, Clive's also offers mannish water, a goat soup that's believed to be an aphrodisiac.

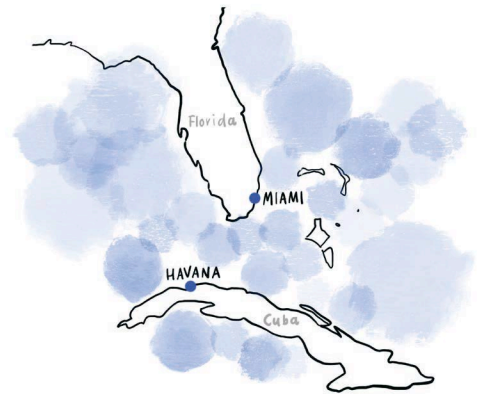
If you want to take advantage of Miami's warm climate by dining al fresco, there's no better spot than Naomi's Garden, also in Little Haiti. Three decades ago, Yaron Yemini and his wife Shula opened this tiny restaurant that looked more like a shack than a dining establishment. The couple started out by serving Israeli food, but little by little, the local Haitian ladies who worked in the kitchen started making the food they grew up with. Today, Naomi's offers some of the best Haitian food in the area in a lush garden setting. The one-page menu asks you to choose one main dish (oxtail, fried chicken, fried snapper, goat stew, jerk jackfruit and spinach stew are just a few of the options), then add sides such as rice and peas, collard greens, plantain, steamed vegetables and macaroni. You can further customize your meal with pickled vegetables and spicy Haitian



Above: A *maduro old fashioned* at Cafe La Trova, Little Havana

pikliz (a blend of pickled cabbage, carrots, bell peppers and scotch bonnet peppers that's deceptively spicy — go easy on this, as the heat from the scotch bonnets creeps up on you with every mouthful). The garden patio — filled with greenery — is the perfect respite from Miami's hustle and bustle and overpriced, ultra-hip restaurants. Where else can you get a meal cooked with love and served in a peaceful garden setting for under \$20 in the middle of one of America's busiest cities?

Finally, half an hour north of Miami, chef Timon Balloo and his wife Marissa Katherine have opened The Katherine Restaurant in Fort Lauderdale. There, Balloo taps into his Trinidadian and Chinese roots (and his travels with his wife) to serve a menu that's extremely personal. This melange of flavors takes many forms and the menu ranges from a pasta dish the couple shared in Italy and fries topped with steamed clams to sweet-and-spicy chicken wings. The tender jerk-thighs are a highlight, served over kale braised in coconut milk with a side of plantain. And, though The Katherine doesn't serve a traditional Caribbean menu, dishes like the roasted carrots offer hints of Caribbean flavors such as nutmeg, allspice, ginger and clove. □



ESSENTIALS

When to go: Miami experiences a year-round tropical climate. The winter months (particularly November-March) are ideal for winter sunshine and cooler temperatures.

Currency: USD

Language: English, although Spanish is also widely spoken among the Latino community

Getting around: Renting a car is the easiest and most convenient way of traveling around Miami. The city also offers an efficient metro, rail and tram system, as well as bike rentals — a great way to explore the coastline.



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DREAMING OF

Ancient castles, steep vineyards, vibrant cities and sleepy villages are among the many sights on a cruise through Europe with Avalon Waterways, says Jeannine Williamson



THE DANUBE

Europe's second-longest river is a feast for all the senses, especially when sailed. Whether it's musical Vienna, where even the horses at the Spanish Riding School perform dressage movements to classical tunes, pretty Austrian winemaking towns serving fruity Grüner Veltliner, or Budapest where delectable dishes are spiced with fiery red paprika – there's something new to experience in every stop along the way.

Setting off from Passau in southern Germany and ending in Budapest, the Danube Dreams (Eastbound) cruise is a fascinating voyage of discovery which sails through four countries and takes in three very different capital cities. In between sailing and soaking up the history and atmosphere of culture-rich towns and villages, guests can also hike through beautiful countryside and visit atmospheric bars and restaurants to try local specialties. Here's our guide to some of the many highlights and things to do on this Avalon Waterways itinerary.





IMAGES: AVALON WATERWAYS



Clockwise from right: *The Panorama Suite aboard Avalon View passing Dürnstein, Austria; Panorama Lounge; Passau in Germany*

Previous pages: *The Hungarian Parliament Building on the Danube river in Budapest*



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Linz, Austria

Day 4

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Day 5

Vienna, Austria

Day 6

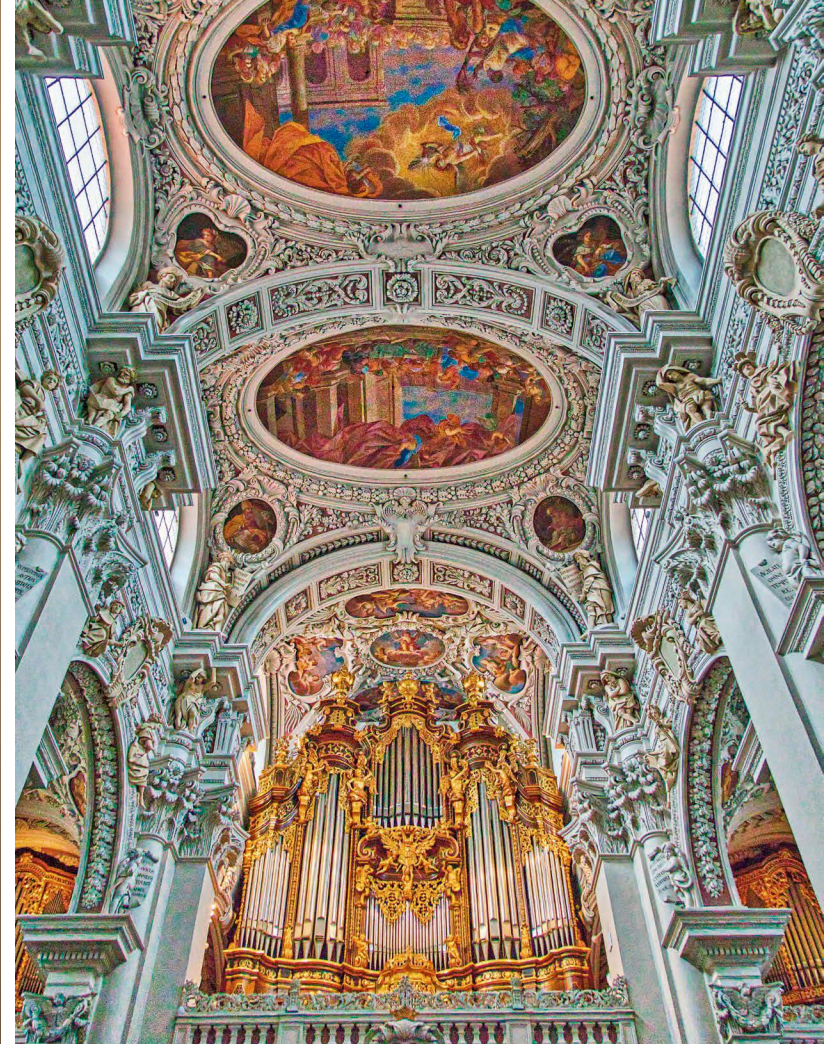
Bratislava, Slovakia

Day 7

Budapest, Hungary

Day 8

Budapest (disembarkation)



PASSAU

Known as the City of Three Rivers, Passau sits at the confluence of the Danube, Inn and Ilz. In 1662, following a devastating fire, it was rebuilt in the Italian baroque style, earning it the additional nickname, the Bavarian Venice.

Beyond the riverside promenade, there's a picture-postcard Old Town where the squares are lined with the former homes of wealthy merchants. Wandering the narrow streets, it's impossible to miss St. Stephen's Cathedral, rebuilt in 1682 on the highest spot in the historic neighborhood. Its other claim to fame is having one of the world's biggest church organs, with 17,974 pipes and 233 registers; you can buy tickets for the rousing daily recitals starting at noon.

On the way back to the ship, keep an eye (and ear) out for the 14th-century town hall on the waterfront. The building is home to Bavaria's largest glockenspiel clock, and several times a day the melodious chimes

ring out across the city. If you're feeling energetic, you can climb a 'heavenly ladder' of 321 covered steps to the pilgrimage church of Mariahilf, across a bridge on the Inn side of the river, or join your Avalon adventure host for a hike next to the Ilz.

Then relax in the afternoon as your ship crosses into Austria and navigates the Schlägen Oxbow, a dramatic horseshoe bend on the Danube.

LINZ

Austria's third-largest city is a vibrant UNESCO City of Media Arts and a former European Capital of Culture. The overnight mooring spot is close to the futuristic and eye-catching Ars Electronica, which is lit by a changing kaleidoscope of colors at night. The following morning, take a look inside this amazing high-tech arts center, which includes a thought-provoking new artificial intelligence exhibition. Or visit the equally striking Schlossmuseum, which combines

From left: Traditionally styled dirndl dresses for sale in Linz, Austria; St. Stephen's Cathedral, Passau, Germany; The colorful flower beds and the Palace at Mirabell Gardens Salzburg, Austria



From Beethoven to Brahms, and of course Johann Strauss, composer of *The Blue Danube*, Vienna has a rich musical heritage

historic and modern architecture.

It's a 15-minute walk, much of it through green parkland, to Hauptplatz, which is one of Austria's largest city squares. The centerpiece is a 65-foot white marble column built in 1723, in gratitude for the city having survived disasters, and as a protection against fire, war and plague. From here it's an easy stroll to the Old Town with its colorful mix of medieval and renaissance buildings. Stop and admire the white facade of Mozarthaus, where Mozart wrote his *Linz Symphony* in 1783. For a different perspective of the city, take a 20-minute scenic ride on the Pöstlingberg mountain tram from Hauptplatz.

Linz is also a jumping-off point for day tours to Salzburg, a must-do experience for fans of the classic movie *The Sound of Music*. A highlight is Mirabell Gardens

with the instantly recognizable steps where Maria and the von Trapp children sang *Do-Re-Mi*. Afterward you can follow in their footsteps and skip around the fountain that is also featured in the same scene.

YBBS-DÜRNSTEIN

Ybbs is an interesting and lesser-known port of call. Here is the first hydro-electric power plant on the Danube, and on the waterfront you can take photos next to one of the original turbine propellers installed in 1959. Be sure to visit Melk Abbey – widely regarded as Europe's most spectacular baroque monastery. It's perched on a promontory 140 feet above the river, while inside there's a corridor lined with portraits of Austrian rulers, and a huge library with 90,000 volumes beneath beautiful ceiling paintings.





Hotel Sacher ice cream cart in Vienna, Austria

Alternatively, take a tour to Artstetten Castle. Topped with distinctive onion-domed towers, it's the tranquil final resting place of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria and his wife Sophie, Duchess of Hohenberg, whose assassinations in 1914 helped to spark the First World War.

Next up is the breathtaking 25-mile UNESCO-listed Wachau Valley. It's arguably the most beautiful stretch of the Danube, lined with vineyards, apricot orchards and historic buildings, so be sure to be out on the sundeck to take in the panoramic views.

Take a photo of Dürnstein's pastel blue and white Augustinian abbey and walk through the old fortified gate at the eastern end of town. It leads to the quaint Hauptstrasse, a street filled with small shops. To stretch your legs a bit more, hike to the ruins of the 12th-century castle where England's King Richard I — Richard the Lionheart — was imprisoned.

VIENNA

The elegant Austrian capital is brimming with impressive buildings such as the Hofburg, one of the world's biggest palaces. For seven centuries, the great Habsburg Empire was ruled from this vast palace, where there are tours of the sumptuous private rooms and state apartments.

In the center of Vienna, the landmark St. Stephen's Cathedral is one of Austria's finest Gothic buildings — it's definitely worth climbing the 343 steps of the south tower for panoramic views over the cityscape.

From here you can walk to the Spanish Riding School, where the 'dancing' white stallions — which are actually born black — are put through their paces during morning exercise sessions held in the grand chandeliered school. Tickets for afternoon stable tours, as well as special performances, are available to purchase.



TOP THREE FOODS TO TRY

Linzertorte

Vienna has chocolatey Sachertorte, but you can also savor a slice of culinary history in Linz. Dating back to the 17th century, the lesser-known Linzertorte is thought to be the oldest cake named after a city. Topped by a lattice of golden pastry, it's made with ground nuts, with a redcurrant jam filling.

Pralines

Tempting chocolate pralines have been produced in Passau for more than 200 years and confectioners still make them by hand. Ingredients include caramelized almonds and plump apricots, grown in orchards by the Danube and soaked in liqueur. Some are decorated with edible gold leaf.

Goulash

Hungary's hearty and warming national dish was first cooked by shepherds and herdsmen. Visitors are often surprised to find the paprika-seasoned dish of slow-cooked beef and vegetables resembles soup. If you prefer a stew, order székelygulyás which is made with added sauerkraut and a thicker sauce.

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From top: Michalska Street and Michael's Gate (Michalska brana), Bratislava, Slovakia; the statue of Cumil, the happy sewage worker, Bratislava, Slovakia

Speaking of stables, the MuseumsQuartier, known as MQ for short, is housed in the former imperial court stable complex on the edge of the historic center. It's one of the world's ten largest cultural complexes. From Beethoven to Brahms, and of course Johann Strauss, composer of The Blue Danube, Vienna has a rich musical heritage. In the House of Music museum, you can even conduct a virtual orchestra.

Viennese coffee culture is an institution. So much so, the city's atmospheric wood-paneled coffee houses are on UNESCO's cultural heritage list. And while there are many imitations, the Hotel Sacher opposite the ornate opera house is the birthplace of Sachertorte, a rich chocolate cake. Although there's always a line outside, it's worth it.

BRATISLAVA

The compact Slovakian capital is a delight — with streets dotted with art installations, murals and statues, and a main square lined with cafes and interesting shops. Lofty Michael's Gate and its tower are all that remain of the city's original fortifications, and lead to the Old Town. Look out for Cumil, a fun bronze figure emerging from a manhole. He's one of Bratislava's most photographed sights, along with a Napoleonic soldier leaning over the back of a street bench.

For a bird's eye view over the Danube, join an Avalon adventure host for a hike to the four-towered castle overlooking the river and the Old Town. The former seat of rulers, today it houses the Museum of History. For a very different viewpoint, take the 45-second





Left: The Szechenyi Baths in Budapest's main Varosliget park is the largest in the Hungarian capital

elevator ride to the top of the 300-foot UFO tower (built to resemble an unidentified flying object) next to the river. On a clear day you can see for more than 60 miles.

BUDAPEST

Divided in two by the Danube, the Hungarian capital is a city of two very distinct halves. The quieter, hilly Buda side is topped by the impressive castle and palace complex, which dates back to the 13th century and is now home to several museums including the Hungarian National Gallery and Budapest Historical Museum. To save walking, take the funicular railway to the top and then wander through charming cobbled streets lined with medieval shops and houses. On the busier Pest bank, the main downtown area, there are grand sights such as the parliament building, opera house and statue-lined Heroes Square, plus fantastic shopping streets, such as Andrassy Avenue, Budapest's grand central boulevard. Attractions along

the riverbank include the Great Market, next to Liberty Bridge, which is a good place to pick up paprika, honey, embroidery and folk art. Just south of the parliament is Shoes on the Danube, a poignant memorial to Jews who were shot beside the river during the Second World War.

A fun way of getting around is the easy-to-navigate metro system, the first in mainland Europe. Don't forget to bring your swimsuit as Budapest has more hot thermal springs than any other capital city. Szechenyi is the largest, with 15 indoor baths and three extravagant outdoor pools, and Gellert — built in 1918 in the Art Nouveau style — has wonderful architecture including stained glass windows and tall columns. As you'll be docked overnight, be sure to check out one of Budapest's ruin bars that have sprung up inside derelict buildings. One of the biggest and most popular is Szimpla Kert in the Jewish Quarter, next to the colorful Karavan street food court. □



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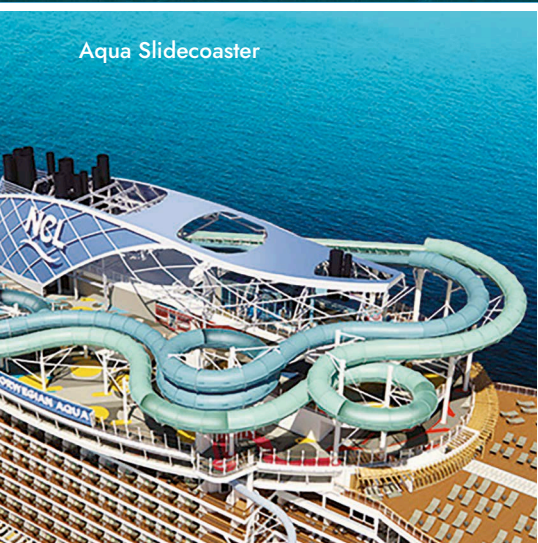
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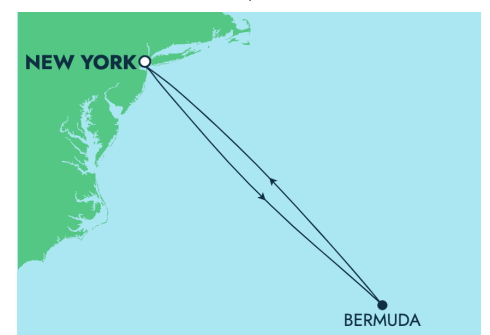


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WINNING RECIPES

Sylwia Stachyra, winner of *Top Chef Poland* in 2018, on working with Atlas Ocean Voyages and her favorite travel destinations

How did you become a chef?

I knew I was destined to be a chef from an early age. I moved to London and trained at Gordon Ramsay's Savoy Grill and studied at Bournemouth College. I've achieved an NVQ3 chef's degree, run two restaurants and created several successful concepts for gastronomic businesses.

How did you end up working with a cruise line?

I've spent years traveling and cooking on yachts, visiting places and getting to know different cultures, which made a huge impact on me and my cooking style. Every place is a new adventure filled with the tastes of regional specialties and the aromas of the best spices. I absorb the world's cuisines with my whole being, but I'm never fully satisfied. I still have an appetite for more.

What does your work with Atlas Ocean Voyages involve?

One of my favorite parts of the Epicurean Expeditions on the voyages is the yachtsman's cook-off, where the guests get to be the contestants and I get to be the judge.

It's fun for everyone. I also host cooking demonstrations where I take explorers on a culinary journey, talking about the textures and flavors of the food.

Where do you love to travel?

My taste buds have been shaped by my travels: England, Turkey, Italy, Monaco, Spain, Japan, Cyprus and more. My passion is French cuisine, and I love using local ingredients wherever I go to create dishes that conquer palates and hearts. My signature flavor is adding a pinch of Asian spices to make unique dishes that combine with and complement regional favorites.

How do you add local, seasonal ingredients at sea?

One of the best parts of traveling is visiting the local markets. The color and vibrant atmosphere inspire all the senses, which in turn inspires me to use what I find in port to create something fantastic on board. My travels have helped to give even more variety to my dishes.

Above from left:
World Navigator®
at sea; chef Sylwia
Stachyra; La Salle
Garnier in Monaco

TOP THREE

1 Which ingredient couldn't you live without?

Potatoes, because you can grow them worldwide and they're so versatile.

2 Which city in the world does the best food?

I can't choose just one, as every place has its own unique cuisine and inspires my own style.

3 Which drink makes the perfect sundowner?

You can never go wrong with Champagne.



QUICHE LORRAINE SOUP: LEEK AND PARMESAN CREAM SOUP WITH QUAIL EGG AND BACON

INGREDIENTS

3 medium leeks, trimmed (keeping only the white and pale green parts)
 2 tbsp of canola or olive oil
 4oz butter
 20oz half and half
 16oz heavy cream
 8oz Parmesan cheese, shaved or grated
 Salt & pepper, to taste
 4 slices of bacon
 4 quail eggs
 3 tbsp white wine vinegar
 Fresh chives, chopped for garnish

METHOD

PREPARE SOUP

- ❶ Chop leeks. Using a colander, wash well to remove any dirt or sand, then drain.
- ❷ In a medium saucepan, over medium heat, melt oil and butter together. Slowly add chopped leeks and sauté until transparent.
- ❸ Add milk and cream to leeks; cook over medium

heat until liquid is reduced by half, stirring occasionally.

- ❹ Add the cheese, salt and pepper to the soup and heat until cheese is melted, stirring frequently.
- ❺ Pour soup into a blender and blend until smooth.
- ❻ Pour through a sieve and return to saucepan. Ladle into bowls and place one quail egg, bacon pieces and chives to garnish. Serve immediately. Prepare quail eggs and bacon while soup is reducing.

QUAIL EGGS

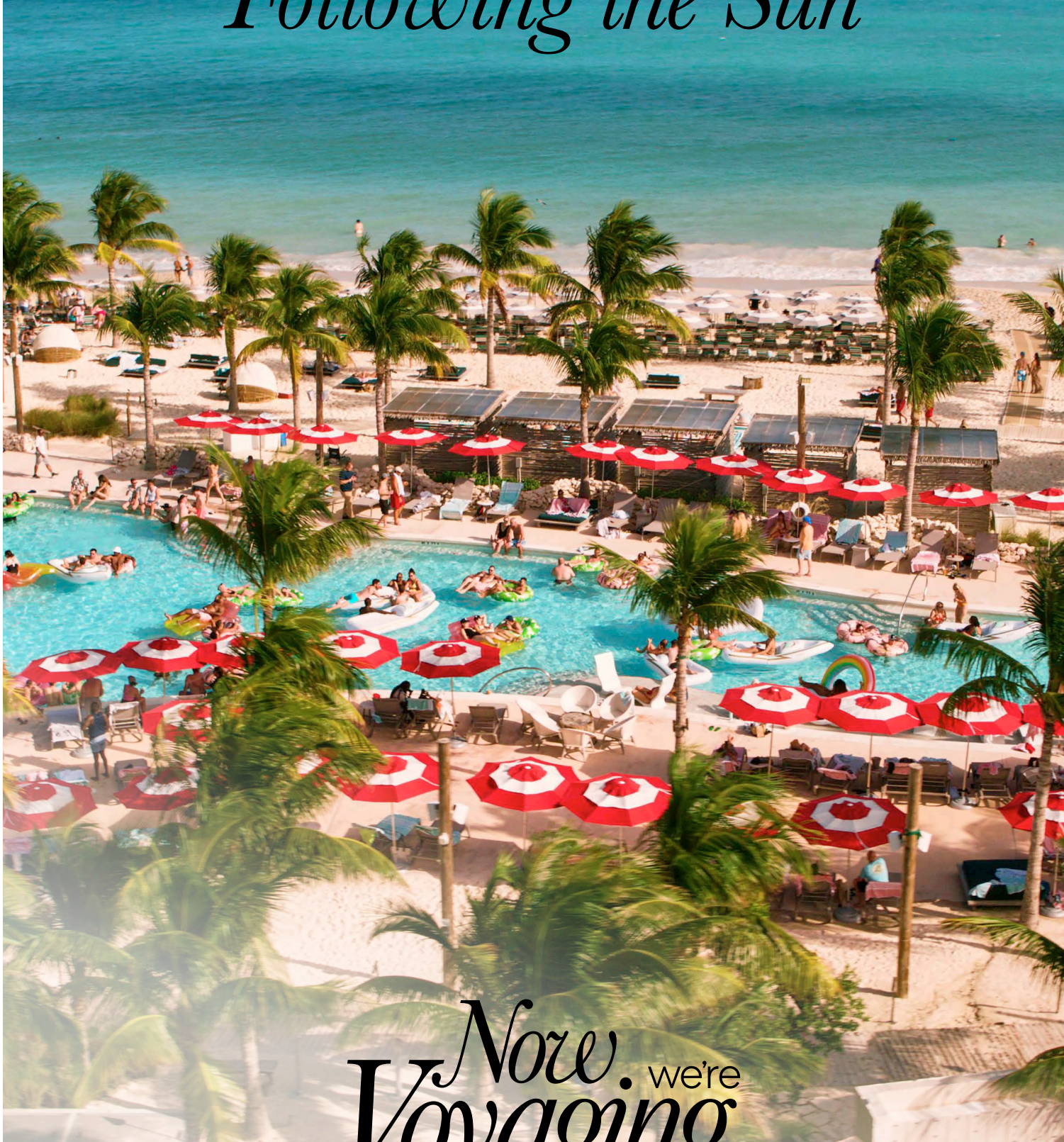
- ❶ Fill a small saucepan $\frac{3}{4}$ full of water and bring to a boil.
- ❷ Add eggs and cook for 2 mins and 20 seconds.
- ❸ Remove eggs from hot water and place in a medium bowl filled with water and ice, add white wine vinegar. Set aside for one hour.
- ❹ Remove shells from eggs and cut in half. Season with salt and pepper.

BACON

- ❶ Fry bacon slices in skillet until crispy and drain on a paper towel. Cut into small pieces and set aside.



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CITY GUIDE

Auckland

The thriving New Zealand metropolis is a culturally diverse hub of food, art and Maori history, says Petrina Darrah





PRICELAWERIOUS COPERS

CORPUS HOMINI

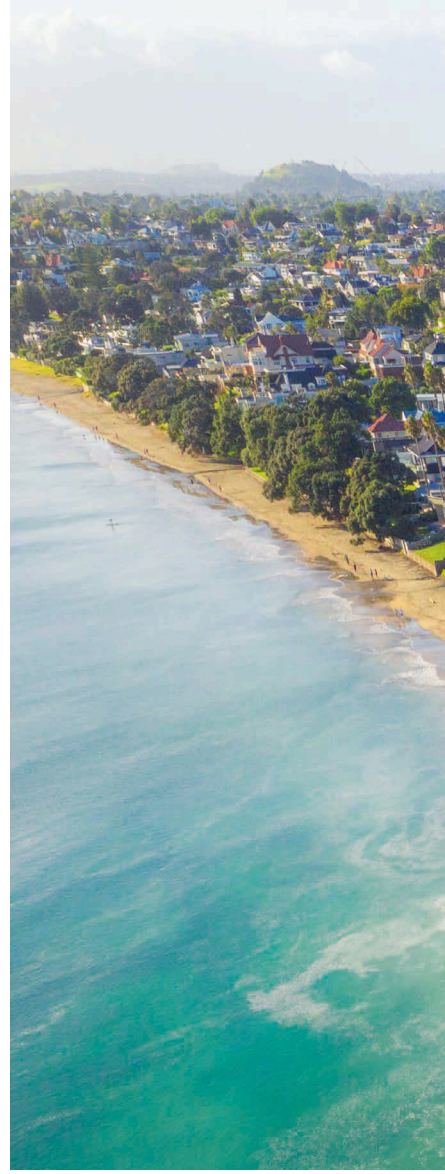
Pincerced between two harbors, studded with volcanic cones, and within easy reach of both islands and beaches, Auckland is the perfect combination of natural beauty and urban sophistication.

In the space of a single day, visitors can hike through rainforest in the Waitakere Ranges to the west, swim in a white-sand bay on the east coast and toast sunset from a rooftop bar before dining at a world-class restaurant.

Most international travelers arrive into New Zealand via Auckland Airport, and the city is a fitting start point for any journey. While some visitors might see Auckland as merely a stopover on the way to the South Island, those who linger soon realize the city has many of the elements that make New Zealand so alluring.

Auckland is the country's largest city, home to 1.6 million people (around a third of New Zealand's population). Of this number, roughly 40% were born overseas, giving the city huge diversity in food, festivals and art. Thanks to its close proximity to Asia, Chinese New Year and Diwali are key fixtures in Auckland's calendar of events, while the city's large community of people from Pacific nations means markets in the south of the city offer the chance to browse Samoan, Tongan and Niuean arts and crafts such as tapa (cloth), and lavalava (a clothing item).

With all this to explore, it's easy for visitors to understand why the Indigenous Maori name for Auckland is Tamaki Makaurau, which loosely translates as 'Tamaki, desired by many'.



Clockwise from above: *The coastal Takapuna district; Piha beach; a cyclist on One Tree Hill*

Previous pages: *Auckland skyline*



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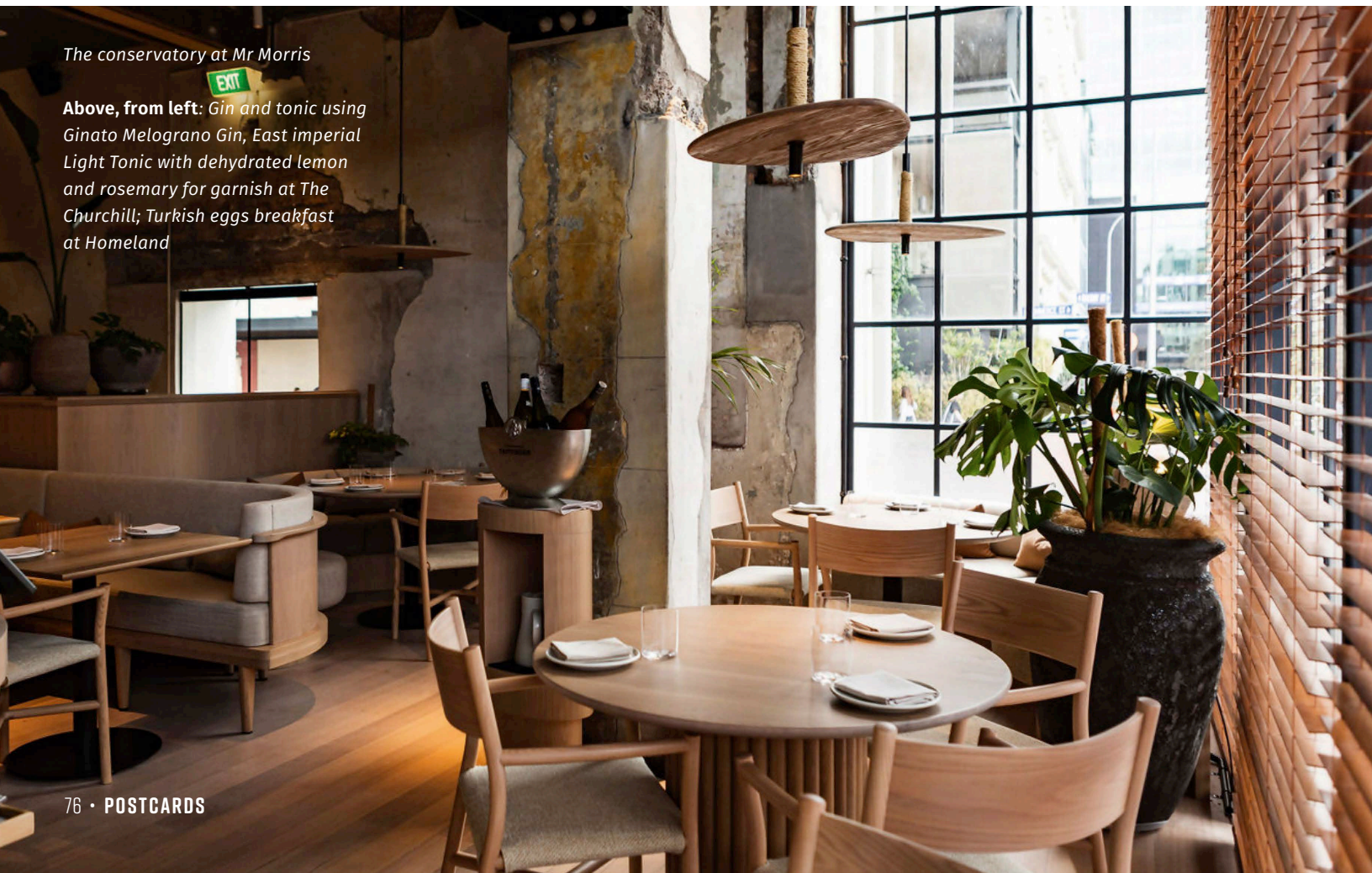
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In recent years, the city has seen a rise in popularity of native cuisine, with prominent chefs celebrating Maori and Pacific culinary influences



The conservatory at Mr Morris

Above, from left: *Gin and tonic using Ginato Melograno Gin, East imperial Light Tonic with dehydrated lemon and rosemary for garnish at The Churchill; Turkish eggs breakfast at Homeland*





BEST OF THE REST

Visit Auckland's beaches

On the west coast of Auckland lies a string of vast, windswept black-sand beaches. Head to Piha to watch surfers careen through frothing waves, or Muriwai to see an impressive gannet colony.

Shop on Ponsonby and Karangahape Roads

Both Ponsonby Road and the adjacent Karangahape Road (often called simply 'K Road') are hubs of local designers. Find locally made gifts and souvenirs at Crushes or the Poi Room, fragrances inspired by Maori myths at perfumery Curio Noir, and fashion from New Zealand designers like Kate Sylvester and Juliette Hogan.

Dine in the Sky Tower

The views from the top of this Auckland landmark are superb. To really take it all in, go for dinner at Orbit 360 Dining — the restaurant rotates once an hour, providing sweeping panoramas of the city.

Visit Matakana

An hour north of Auckland, Matakana Village hosts an artisanal farmers' market every Saturday, which makes for a fabulous day out when combined with a visit to one of the stunning nearby beaches such as Omaha or Tawharanui.

FOOD

Auckland's cultural diversity is most visible in its food scene. It's as easy to find hand-pulled noodles or Peking duck as it is Andalusian-style pork pinchitos.

In recent years, Maori cuisine has grown in popularity, as have dishes with Pacific culinary influences. Modern New Zealand restaurants such as Ahi, Onslow and Mr Morris have menus that read like highlight reels of the best of the nation's bounty of seafood and produce — wild shot deer from the South Island, green-lipped mussels from the Marlborough Sounds, paua (sea snails) from the Chatham Islands, and kumara (a type of sweet potato) harvested from fields just a few hours south of Auckland.

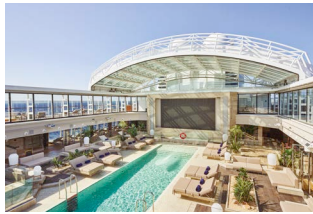
At Homeland, chef Peter Gordon's 'food embassy for Aotearoa and the Pacific', the menu features dishes cooked in the traditional Maori *hanga*, or earth oven, style. Meanwhile, the restaurant's cooking school offers the chance to learn how to make classic New Zealand food at home. Check their program for upcoming classes.

Ada, a restaurant in the central Grey Lynn neighborhood, also serves hanga meat and vegetables, as well as other Maori foods like fried bread and manuka-smoked tarakihi (a type of fish).

One of the city's newest openings is Metita in the SkyCity precinct. Named after chef Michael Meredith's mother, in honor of her cooking, the restaurant features dishes inspired by Meredith's upbringing in Samoa — the likes of fried pork hock and fire-roasted tua tua (clams).

DRINK

Head to Ponsonby Road, one of Auckland's hippest drinking and dining streets, lined with classy cocktail joints and wine bars. Deadshot is a favorite among locals, famous for having no menu — drinks are made according to the patrons' whims. Beau is a must-visit wine bar, with a menu featuring wines from around New Zealand. Try pinot noir from Martinborough or Central Otago, or zesty sauvignon blanc from Marlborough. To pair views with a drink, head to The



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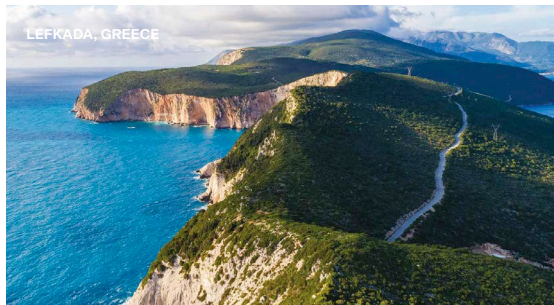
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A walk to the summit of Maungawhau is a highlight of any visit to Auckland, thanks to its impressive crater, which is said to be the home of Mataaho, the guardian of secrets hidden in the earth

Churchill, a gin bar located on the 20th floor of the Four Points by Sheraton Auckland hotel. Try locally made gins flavored with New Zealand botanicals, like the Sandymount Distillery's Ti Kouka Forest Gin, which showcases native produce such as kawakawa leaves, manuka honey and harakeke (flax) seeds.

MAORI CULTURE

One of the more curious aspects of Auckland is its geography – it's built on a volcanic field. A handful of cones are still visible scattered across the skyline. As well as providing lofty vantage points, these volcanic pinnacles – 'maunga' in the Maori language – hold a great deal of Maori history.

Before Europeans arrived, the maunga were the sites of fortified villages. The most impressive of these is Mount Eden/ Maungawhau, which was one of the largest and most elaborate settlements of its type in New Zealand. A walk to the summit of Maungawhau is a highlight of any visit to Auckland, thanks to the impressive crater, which is said to be the home of Mataaho, the guardian of secrets hidden in the earth. The remnants of terracing for houses, food pits and ditches dug for defense are still visible. The Te Ipu Korero o Maungawhau/ Maungawhau Visitor Experience Centre



A traditional Maori waka boat at the Auckland War Memorial Museum

Above: Waitangi Treaty Grounds at Maori Meeting House

IMAGES: AWL IMAGES



is free to visit and explains the history of Auckland's maunga and their significance to Maori people.

Auckland Museum is another excellent place to visit to learn more about Maori culture. Te Marae atea Maori Court, set in the heart of the museum, presents the past, present and future of Maori in Aotearoa (the Maori-language name for New Zealand) through a range of masterpieces such as a full-sized, ornately carved meeting house and Te Toki a Tapiri, one of the last traditional war canoes. The museum also hosts two Maori cultural performances daily, which include the world-famous haka.

ISLANDS

One of the best things about Auckland is its proximity to islands in the glittering Hauraki Gulf. Waiheke Island is a premier day-trip destination. A 40-minute ferry ride is all it takes to be whisked off to this

island of white-sand beaches and boutique vineyards. Sip shiraz or Bordeaux-style blends at one of Waiheke's cellar doors, or go for a decadent lunch at Tantalus Estate, Mudbrick Vineyard & Restaurant, or Te Motu, where dishes are made from vegetables plucked from the onsite garden. Stop by The Oyster Inn in the village of Oneroa to taste oysters harvested the same day from the pristine waters off the southeast of the island.

Another island worth visiting is Tiritiri Matangi, a sanctuary for rare native birds. Walking trails weave around the countryside, and guided walks help visitors spot birds such as saddlebacks and takahes, which are extinct on the mainland.

Catch the ferry to Rangitoto Island, a towering volcanic cone that dominates the Auckland skyline. A short hike through pohutukawa forest and rocky lava fields to the summit affords sweeping views back towards the city.

Above: *Vines at Mudbrick Vineyard & Restaurant, Waiheke Island*

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Karanga Plaza in the Wynyard Quarter

HOTELS

Most of Auckland's top hotels are scattered along the waterfront, spread between the Viaduct Harbour and the sleek Britomart Precinct.

Park Hyatt Auckland is a luxury hotel right on the water's edge in Wynyard Quarter, complete with floor-to-ceiling windows offering views across the marina and out to the Waitemata Harbour. The sleek, modern hotel has a strong sense of place, with natural and locally sourced materials and references to Maori arts and heritage throughout. A stone's throw away is Sofitel Auckland Viaduct Harbour, a luxury hotel with a distinctive French style.

Eco-conscious travelers will be impressed by the sustainability credentials of the five-star Hotel Britomart in downtown Auckland. Thanks to a focus on optimizing energy and reducing waste, the hotel has almost halved its emissions in the past year. All of the 99 timber-lined rooms come with built-in sofas, handmade ceramics and locally-sourced snacks. For a premium experience check out the top-floor Landing Suites, which have spacious terraces and unsurpassed views of Waitemata Harbour.

Meanwhile, for a convenient stay, it's hard to beat the InterContinental Auckland hotel, which has the downtown ferry terminal on one side, and the glossy Commercial Bay shopping precinct on the other. □



ESSENTIALS

When to go: Visit between February and April to enjoy warm, settled weather and for austral summer events such as the free outdoor cinema in Silo Park, or the popular Lantern Festival over Chinese New Year.
Currency: New Zealand dollar
Language: English, but te reo Maori is common on a lot of signage.
Getting around: Auckland's center is sprawling and challenging to cover on foot. From here, ferries and buses run to the main attractions. Further afield, public transport isn't efficient. Most people use Uber or Ola within the city, or private vehicles to reach places like the western beaches.



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Vinha Boutique Hotel

Porto, Portugal

Opened in 2021, the five-star Vinha Boutique Hotel is one of Portugal's most exclusive properties, heralded for its timeless style, unsurpassed range of services and unique gastronomic offerings overseen by two-Michelin-starred chef Henrique Sá Pessoa. Nestled within eight acres of gardens and lakes facing the magical Douro River, this enchanting historical mansion celebrates the best of Portugal, pampering each guest with personalized pleasures imbued with Portuguese culture and hospitality.

Antica Torre Tornabuoni

Florence, Italy

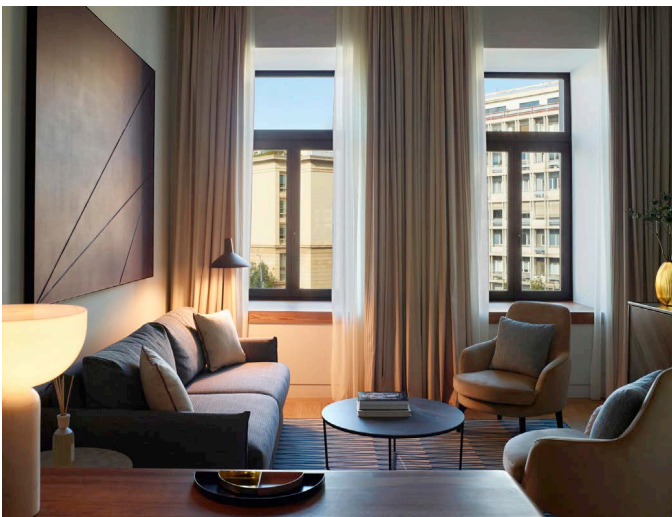
Set against a magnificent backdrop of Italian architecture along one of the city's most exclusive streets, Antica Torre Tornabuoni creates an ambiance of timeless elegance in the heart of Florence. With a prime location just steps away from the famous Santa Trinita bridge and a breathtaking rooftop terrace overlooking the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore and the great monuments of the Oltrarno, Antica Torre is perfectly placed for those wishing to immerse themselves in the rich and vibrant Florentine culture.



xenodocheio Milos

Athens, Greece

Renowned chef Costas Spiliadis sets the culinary stage at Athens' first gastronomy-focused, five-star hotel, xenodocheio Milos. His artful Mediterranean dishes reflect the hotel's elegant blend of luxury and Greek tradition, evident in its 42 individually styled rooms and suites, which feature high ceilings, marble bathrooms and spacious terraces. With stunning views of Athens' Lycabettus Hill and Old Parliament House from select rooms, the hotel is the perfect pairing of exquisite dining and upscale accommodations.



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DESERT ESSENTIALS

Our pick of must-have items for a desert getaway



1 SunGod Sierras
Scratch- and impact-resistant, with 100% UV protection and interchangeable lenses — these are the only sunglasses you'll need in the desert. They come with a lifetime guarantee, too. \$90 • sungod.co

2 La Roche-Posay Anthelios Melt-In Milk Sunscreen for Face & Body SPF 100
The brand's highest-protection formula can be used all over — including face and scalp. It's oil-free and perfect for sensitive skin. \$27 • laroche-posay.us

3 Hydro Flask 40 oz Wide Mouth
Stay hydrated in the desert sun with this insulated, durable and leakproof water bottle. It keeps water cold for 24 hours, and the wide mouth is perfect for adding ice cubes. \$50 • hydroflask.com

4 Lululemon Women's Wide Brim Bucket Hat
This carefully crafted hat has a longer brim on one side, both for extra facial protection and the oft-forgotten neck, too. Made with water-resistant fabric, just in case. \$57 • lululemon.com

5 Garza Marfa Desert Shawl
Hand spun and woven, this part-wool, part-cotton shawl is super soft and perfect for keeping warm on cool desert nights. Available in multiple colors. \$205 • garzamarfa.com

6 The North Face VECTIV Exploris 2 Mid FUTURELIGHT™ Leather Boots
Put your best foot forward in all terrain — these boots are breathable and waterproof, and the mid-height is great for ankle support. \$185 • thenorthface.com

1



2



3



4



5



6



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Silva Ranger 2.0

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Dalvey Voyager Compass

This uber-luxurious compass is robust, precision-engineered and can also be engraved to make the perfect gift for an adventurous loved one. \$125 · dalvey.com

RAINBOW RIVER, COLOMBIA

Time it just right, and this remote Colombian river will reveal its kaleidoscope of colors, says Emily Lush



In central Colombia's Meta department, three unique ecosystems — the Andes, the Amazon and the Orinoco Basin — coalesce to produce an area of outstanding biodiversity. While some flock to the remote Serrania de la Macarena mountains to see its 500 species of bird or 50 varieties of orchid, the national park's biggest draw is undoubtedly Caño Cristales (Rainbow River), a 62-mile-long water channel dubbed the 'river that ran away from paradise.'

It does indeed look supernatural: at certain times of the year, the fast-flowing river appears vibrant shades of red, white, green, black and yellow. While the official color count is five, visitors report observing dozens of hues, from deep magenta to iridescent amber. It's the endemic plant *Rhyncholaxis clavigera* (a riverweed rather than an algae) that's responsible for the phenomenon; exposure to different levels of sunlight and unique mineral compositions cause it to change its appearance. The 'liquid rainbow' it paints is only visible after the rainy season, typically between May and November. For peak saturation, visit between July and October.

The Caño Cristales was first documented in 1969 when a group of cattle farmers stumbled on the riverweed. Closed to tourists for several decades as a result of Colombia's internal conflict, Macarena National Park is now one of the region's biggest attractions, with a daily cap established to ensure the longevity of its peculiar flora. Visitors must obtain a permit before embarking on a three- to four-day tour of the river system, where 10 newly mapped ecotourism trails allow for easy exploration of the river and its tributaries.

Swimming is only permitted in designated areas, and bathers are prohibited from wearing deodorant, sunscreen or bug spray.



ESSENTIALS

Because of its isolated location and fragile nature, visits to Macarena National Park must be accompanied by a licensed guide. Multi-day expeditions along the Rainbow River — traveling either by foot or by boat — can be organized through outfitters in the nearest town of La Macarena, a 90-minute flight from Bogota.

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