

ACROSS EUROPE by train The 10 Top Companies Making Travel a Force for Good

p.33

THROUGH JORDAN by bicycle

THE JOURNEYS ISSUE

# Slow Travel Big

SPACE by balloon







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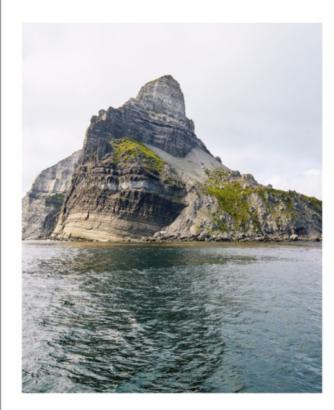
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ILLUSTRATIONS, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: SIMON BAILLY, YOLANDE MUTALE, LAUREN TAMAKI PHOTOS, CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: ASHTON RAY HANSEN, FARIS MUSTAFA

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To create illustrations of deep space, the creative team at Delcan & Co. used scenes generated by the AI program Midjourney, which creates imagery based on text prompts.







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FOUNDERS Greg Sullivan & Joe Diaz

If you had two months to travel, where would you go?

"I dream of visiting

the great gardens

of the U.K., followed

by a cruise around

the Nordic countries."

-c.s.m.

"I've never been to

the other side

of the world, so I

would want to see

some of Japan

and Singapore.

Then I would head

to Australia and

New Zealand, and

maybe even visit French Polynesia if

I had time." -R.T.

"I'd buy a plane ticket to Nairobi and explore nearby countries like Ethiopia. Then I'd head to West Africa maybe Senegal or Ghana. If only I had four months, and not just two!" — J.F.

"I would love to

rent an RV and travel

north to Canada

and explore British

Columbia and

Alberta. Then, I

would journey west

to Alaska." -K.G.

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#### "I'd go to the Argentario Coast in Tuscany to practice Italianand stay at the



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SISONKE MSIMANG

Writer

Author Sisonke Msimang has lived all over the world, from Johannesburg to New York City, but love brought her to her current home of Perth, Australia. In **A Big Family** (p.51), she reflects on how the COVID-19 pandemic forced her family to stop traveling and what that meant for her children. "[Lockdown] offered a way to process my questions around privilege and inequality, as well as my anxieties as a parent," Msimang says. She published her first book, *Always Another Country*, in 2018, and is at work on her first novel. Follow her on Instagram @sisonke\_msimang.



TROY LITTEN

Photographer

San Francisco-based graphic designer and photographer Troy Litten documents his travel adventures and likes to find similarities among the different cultural landscapes he visits. In **Off the Hook** (p.46), he showcases the myriad types of phone booths he's encountered over the years, from Japan to Brazil. "I'm interested in the design of everything that a traveler comes into contact with," Litten says. He also makes art for jigsaw puzzles, which you can find on his Instagram @troylitten.



ANDREW FINDLAY

In **Old Trails** (p.64), Canadian travel journalist Andrew Findlay recounts his 10-day trip mountain biking across parts of the 420-mile-long Jordan Trail. "I didn't know much about Jordan as a country other than approximately where it was," Findlay says. "I was really amazed by the openness, warmth, and generosity of Jordanians, and their willingness to share their culture." Findlay is already looking forward to his next epic adventure: skiing in Chile's Lake District, home to some of the country's most spectacular nature reserves. He's written for *The Narwhal*, *Sierra*, and *Bike* magazine. Keep up with him on Instagram @afindlayjournalist.



JESSICA CAMILLE AGUIRRE

Journalist Jessica Camille Aguirre has covered climate change for 10 years and sees extremes triggered by global warming as the defining story of our times. In **Liftoff** (p.74), she investigates Space Perspective, a Florida-based company offering travelers a trip to the edge of space via a hydrogen-supported hot-air balloon. Aguirre, though, plans on keeping her feet on terra firma. "Space is not for me," she says with a laugh. "I enjoy the pleasures of Earth too much." She recently moved west to complete the Ted Scripps Environmental Journalism Fellowship at the Univeristy of Colorado Boulder. Her work has appeared in *Harper's*, *Vanity Fair*, and *The New York Times Magazine*. Follow her on Twitter or Instagram @jessicacaguirre.

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FARIS MUSTAFA

Writer and Photographer

London native Faris Mustafa first traveled to Singapore in 2014 and immediately fell in love with the city-state's multicultural heritage and diverse food scene. He and his wife have made it their full-time home for the last two years. In **Chill Out** (p.55), Mustafa pens a heartfelt ode to *ice kachang*, the brightly hued shaved ice dessert, and explores its place within Singaporean history and culture. He also photographed the piece. "I loved shooting ice kachang in pastel melamine bowls against the colorful hawker tabletops and showing off [the dish] in all its glory," Mustafa says. See his food and culture photography on Instagram @faris.90210.



RICARDO SANTOS

Illustrator

Based in sunny Lisbon, Portugal, Ricardo Santos has worked as a professional illustrator and graphic designer for the past five years. He specializes in collage. For the **Features Opener** (p.63), Santos used Al-generated images from the software program DALL·E, which churned out compositions with sunsets and intricately-patterned kilim rugs, to depict the letter "A." "I take images, colors, shapes, and types, and put them together and pull them apart until they start saying interesting things," Santos says. Check out his Instagram @dat.rs.

#### AN EARTHLY PARADISE

# CAPPADOCIA

Being a traveler in the land of unrivaled, eccentric landforms and unforgettable sunsets is one of the most intimate and intense natural experiences one can have in a lifetime. As seasons fluctuate, Cappadocia parades its unique personality with each change of wardrobe – displaying its enchantment as a place where history walks hand in hand with Mother Nature.





Cappadocia... A dream of a land, gracefully sparkling in its texture: extraordinary natural settings, mesmerizing vistas from dusk till dawn, wonderous ancient designs carved into the soft rocks, colored balloons greeting fairy chimneys - the natural rock formations - with every pass, and the allure of history taking guests through a journey in time. The sublime story of this land dates back millions of years, to the eruption of the two volcanic mountains of Central Anatolia, the Erciyes and Hasan. The tuff and basalt layering throughout the region was then formed by the wind - hot and cold air, turning the amorphous into the mythic fairy chimneys for miles and miles. As the natural formation completed, humans began to show their faces, adding migrations, invasions and conquering to this storied history. First, it was Christians who fled oppression and violence and made the fairy chimneys their home. After settling, they carved their churches into these very rocks. They engineered complete underground cities, with ventilated living areas and expansive imagination. Today, these ancient structures seek your permission to take you on a magical journey in both time and wonder. Are you ready for the extraordinary?

#### Panoramic view of a fairy tale

Imagine a gigantic, imposing rock stretching towards the sky, and you're standing at its summit. If you're not a plane, a balloon or a hawk, your loftiest view of the land would most likely be from here, the Uçhisar Castle. Along with such spectacle, Uçhisar also has one of the most beautiful walking paths in Cappadocia, forging right through Pigeon Valley. You can wander through the tunnels carved over history by the river's mighty flow while hearing pigeons flap their wings as they leave their nests and soar past giant formations in the valley of awe. Uçhisar was established around the castle as a small village and has grown over time to include the downward slopes. Some claim there were once underground roads, kilometers long, that ran from Uçhisar Castle to the Ihlara Valley beyond, adding even more to this unique history. Today, the castle is surrounded by shops and stalls, selling many souvenirs such as carpets, marble ornaments, mirrors and, of course, flavorsome dried nuts and fruits for your indulgence.

#### The address for the wanderlust

Continuing the mesmerizing discoveries, we arrive at Göreme. Positioned in the center of the region, this scenic town remains calm despite the crowds of visitors that converge. The churning wind and nurturing rainfall over millennia have created the beauty that the town is known for. Listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1985, Göreme casts its enigmatic charm for miles. The churches carved into these soft rocks – and especially the many underground cities such as



Derinkuyu and Kaymaklı - sit in stillness with their mysteries intact. These captivating sanctuary interiors depict the Messiah's life through detailed frescoes alongside painted ornaments continued to this day. One of the most important structures of the Göreme Open Air Museum is, without a doubt, the Dark Church. What makes this relic stand out is none other than its lively frescoes. Dating back to the end of the 11th century and the beginning of the 12th, its name derives from the very little light it receives from a small window in the narthex section. The lack of light has allowed this church to keep its treasures alive, however, letting the frescoes resist the ruthless nature of time itself. Both the church and nar-

thex carry vibrant and impressive depictions from the Bible. It's no wonder this church tops the lists of travelers to the region...

#### Conquering the scenery from up above

As dawn breaks, you can choose to float in the air with great calmness – taking part in the acclaimed hot air balloon adventures... Rock formations dating back millions of years and unimaginable landforms unique to this geography lie beneath. Valleys below offer majestic sceneries from these high altitudes, painting a multi-hued topography – slopes weaved in velvety texture... The land of fairy chimneys has become the center for such re-

nowned ballooning over the past 20 years, and the intoxicating morning aerial adventures have been attracting more and more travelers from all over the world. The balloons, which go up to 500 meters, depart from the trails around Göreme early in the morning. To book yourself one and soak in the alluring wonder from above, visit the companies located in Göreme.

#### A jewel box of a town

Moving east from Göreme, Ürgüp welcomes you to its ceaseless wonders. Aside from it being the largest settlement in Cappadocia, it's also a magnificent source of immersive sights. Its size, history and grandeur combine for a truly unique experience: an Anatolian town bursting with hotels, restaurants, shops, and adjacent to these, mythic cave dwellings captured in time. The stone mansions built on these very rocks are distinct to this location. Besides such details found in every corner, Ürgüp is also the place to cut loose and shake your worries away - here you'll find the best nightlife in Cappadocia!

Your trip would be amiss if you came all this way without trying the delicious Cappadocian wines. This region, holding a well-established winemaking tradition for thousands of years, owes its famous vineyards to the tuff formed by the volcanic activities. Anatolian grapes such as Öküzgözü, Kalecik Karası, Boğazkere, Narince and Emir grow graciously thanks to the rich tuff soil. It gets better! Cappadocia wineries are open for visitation all year long, making your trip possible in any season or at any given moment.

Once in Ürgüp, another stop you'll want to make is Avanos, the cultural epicenter of Cappadocia. Its unusual livelihood is what makes this town so intriguing. As the Kızılırmak River has flowed patiently for eons through Avanos, the soft and oily clay sourced from the riverbeds has been the highlight here –making Avanos the home

of a rich pottery tradition dating back to the Hittites. Each unique flaw in the clay brings out the authentic beauty in these handmade pieces, which are subsequently colored in earthy tones and, of course, turquoise. You can always join a pottery workshop and create your own "happy accident", or maybe shop for goodies in lively bazaars and lighten your mood by the riverside.

While every spot here serves up the best dreamy sunset, one sets itself apart: Red Valley. Located just near Çavuşin Village and Ortahisar, Red Valley draws the most romantic and unforgettable moments as the sky takes on rich crimson red tones. Visitors are encouraged to start their walk through the rare formations the red tuff creates just before sunset, and take their place on the viewing terrace at just the right moment, soaking in all the glamour.

Here, Ortahisar Castle is thought to be one of the first multi-story settlements in the world, making it an architectural find to be sure. The structure, which provided shelter for the historical Silk Road caravans during the Hittite period, is actually a giant fairy chimney in disguise. Being one of the highest spots in the region today, visiting this castle guarantees a view to remember and a teleport back to ancient times.

#### A life engraved in volcanic ash

Your next destination may not radiate its allure from afar but once in, you'll be in awe for sure. Çavuşin Village lies within minutes of Göreme. Once you're in this seemingly ordinary locale, your path will take you among ancient ruins: stone buildings and fairy chimneys making their way to the village square. If you wish to further explore the ruins, just follow the tracks and you'll find yourself in an area famous for its churches and clergy houses. You can access the oldest of these sanctuaries, built between the 1st and

noth centuries, along this path. Extending your walk half an hour, you can reach the churches in Güllüdere and Kızılçukur, though the most enticing site may be inviting you just near the cliff: Saint John the Baptist Church.

Consisting of three valleys, Zelve is most intense in terms of these fairy chimneys. If you want to examine the full beauty of nature, you should start trekking early in the morning. The important churches in the valley are Balıklı, Üzümlü and Geyikli, all hauntingly captivating, illustrating the ancient monastic life.

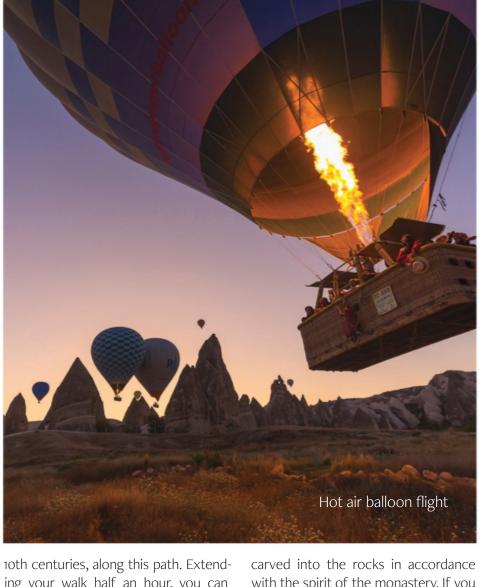
#### A boundless dip into the olden days

If you wish to travel beyond time and explore a world you've never imagined, Ihlara Valley is the place you're looking for. It's known that the 14-kilometer valley has been an important religious center since the early days of Christianity, shining a light on the numerous worship houses and historical living spaces scattered all around. Here, the frescoed churches formed by the geological features of the region are

with the spirit of the monastery. If you wish to discover the architecture and wander inside the magnificent designs, you're in luck. 14 of these churches are open for exploration: the Ağaçaltı, Sümbüllü, Yılanlı, Kokar, Prenliseki, Eğritaş, Direkli, Saint Georgeus, Karagedik, Ala, Bezirhane, Bahattin Samanlığı and Batkın Churches. After descending a 382-step ladder, better gear up for your valley walk that can take up to four hours. Don't let the timing discourage you though: gazebos built on the Melendiz Stream will welcome you for breaks and to rinse your journey down with a cup of tea.

As humans in a vast universe, we sometimes lament that our very own world has become way too familiar; we wonder what else is out there. Nonetheless, even though we get caught in those daily routines, there still lies jewels just waiting to be discovered – precious moments to hold on to. Cappadocia is one of those places allowing you to leave your cares for a while. Given the chance, these lands won't disappoint.









#### **Voice From AFAR**

### The Luxury of Slow Travel

I have fond memories of a trip I took to Zanzibar a few years ago. After what felt like a string of activity-packed holidays, I decided to approach this one differently. My mood-and the unhurried pace of life on the island, located off the coast of Tanzania—dictated the itinerary. A friend and I took walks to the beach and talked about everything from horoscopes to heartache. We took our time at the fruit stalls, chatting with vendors and marveling at the fragrant mangoes. We befriended an auntie who, over spiced tea, told us stories of colorful characters in Stone Town. A week later, I had morphed into an improved version of myself, my shoulders unhunched and my face more prone to smiling.

We've dedicated this issue to stories of slow, ambitious journeys that allow us to understand ourselves and the world in a deeper, more thoughtful way. Contributing writer Emma John travels for a month via train through nine countries, searching for what it means in 2022 to be European (page 84). Jessica Camille Aguirre explores brushing the edge of space in a gentle, nearly carbon-neutral

way (page 74). Writer Andrew Findlay and photographer Kari Medig bicycle through Jordan, a young country layered with centuries of history (page 64). And on page 33, we unveil our 2022 Travel Vanguard honorees: 10 visionary organizations and companies dedicated to changing how we travel, from diversifying who flies airplanes to making hotels more accessible to all.

What journeys do you hope to take in the next year? I'd love to hear from you. Please find me on Instagram @sarika008.





Friends enjoy a picnic lunch in Strasbourg, France, a stop on Emma John's rail journey through Europe (page 84).

Travel well, SARIKA BANSAL Editorial Director

### Revealing Polynesia

Artfully authentic discovery. All-inclusive luxury.
Fall in love with the carefree elegance and genuine hospitality of the South Pacific's most cherished small-ship experience.



#### Easy Does It in Asheville

With a vibrant history expressed in timeless architecture and unmatched, unspoiled nature at its doorstep, slow down to experience more in this North Carolina city.

Asheville's abundance of cultural and scenic delights invite longer stays and off-season travel, making it easy to savor a trip here that's as rewarding as it is responsible.

The **Grove Arcade** is the jewel in Asheville's crown of architectural riches, with Neo-Gothic glass and ornate terracotta housing locally owned boutiques that hint at the wealth of goods waiting to be discovered throughout the city.

Stroll 13 square miles of lush gardens and sip fine wine from the onsite vineyard at George W. Vanderbilt's **Biltmore Estate**, a painstakingly preserved cultural icon still owned by the same family to this day.

Experience the area's heritage as a wellness sanctuary at **Omni Grove Park Inn's**40,000 square-foot underground spa with mineral pools, waterfalls, and even more reasons for an extended—or repeat—trip to Asheville.

#### Accessible, Wild Appalachia

These epic mountain trails lie just outside of the city.

Connecting Ashevillle with the Great Smoky Mountains and beyond, the Blue Ridge Parkway provides a portal to sweeping mountain views and world-class forest trails. See the vibrant rhododendrons, wildflowers, or fall foliage of Craggy Gardens and follow in Michelle and President Obama's footsteps on the family-friendly Craven Gap.

From Craggy Gardens, you can look down and see Black Mountain, a small town whose charm has drawn artists for some 100 years and which offers access to the **Graybeard Trail** among others. More experienced hikers will want to visit **Devil's Courthouse**, where those who summit the sinister-looking rock formation will share in heavenly views with the Peregrine falcons who nest nearby.





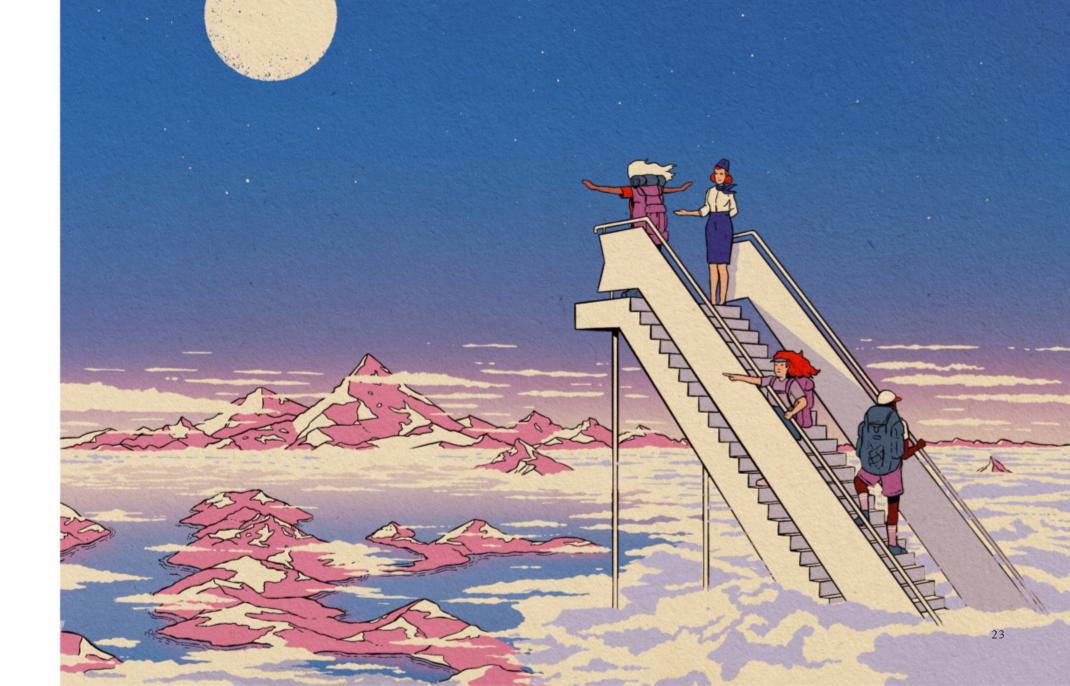
#### Great Expectations

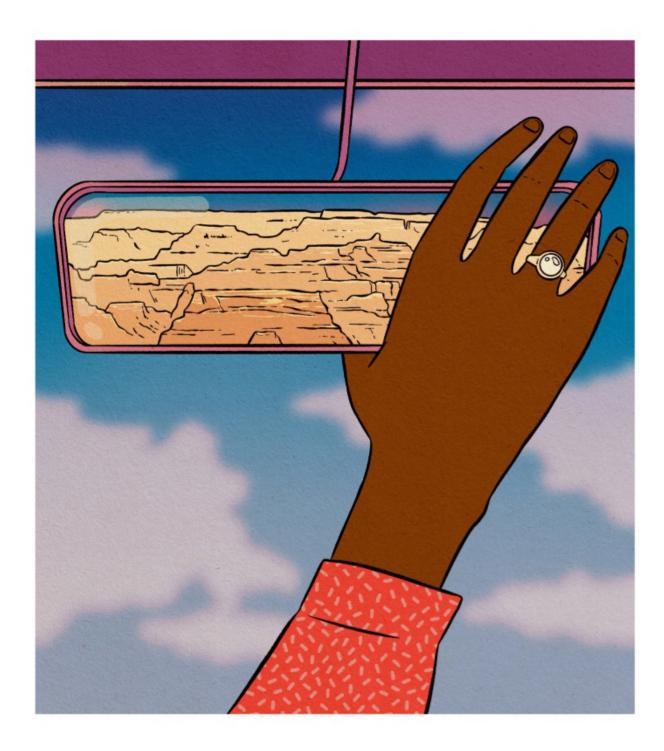
"Once-in-a-lifetime" vacations. "Bucket list" trips. Both are often celebrated as major rewards. In reality, they can mean putting undue pressure on a destination—and on ourselves.

MY DAD WAS INTO stories about pirates and heroes. Coastal regions of the South, thought to contain both, held a special place in his imagination. Those buccaneers, the way my dad told it, were seeking an escape from the conditions society placed on them. Piracy offered folks the chance to take control of their lives. Looking back, I think my father was trying to figure out how to do the same.

In February 2012, after my dad's cancer diagnosis, my family and I set out to visit the Dry Tortugas, a remote archipelago and national park in Florida, in search of something like the adventure my dad had always appreciated. The concept of a bucket list was foreign to my family; we were people of limited means who didn't travel much, so my dad didn't have one. But if he had, the Dry Tortugas would have been on it. We made it as far as the Florida Keys, the access point for the park, but he was too tired to continue traveling.

After my dad's death, I became a type A perfectionist worried about running out of time. And so I drafted a bucket list. I completed some of the things,





but there was precious little joy in doing so. I was so focused on achieving these trips that I missed living them. In one afternoon, I visited the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the Getty, both world-class institutions separated by miles of boulevards and freeways—and shoved experiences that required a whole day into a few hours. Years later, I can't recall a single artwork I saw.

In the decade since my dad's death, I've found that high emotional stakes—this pursuit of a "perfect trip"—can lead to unexpected stressors when things don't go as planned. I've become an advocate for journeys that expand my worldview rather than trips to tick off "Top 10" lists, and I now understand these journeys are part purpose, part serendipity. Before I travel, I ask: *How can I plan a trip that makes me excited to get out of bed every day?* I consider what I want to do at a destination and what I hope to learn there. This inquiry helps me assess my intentions and provides the framework for respecting an area's people and resources.

# I was so focused on achieving these trips that I missed living them.

To avoid overcrowded attractions, I research small businesses and connect with local guides to create tailored itineraries rooted in my interests. I take public transportation to cut down on pollution and carbon emissions. I also leave space for what I call "travel magic": wandering in the drizzle through a rain forest and finding a waterfall or taking an impromptu swim in a little lagoon wreathed in mangroves. Frequently, the unscripted time offers an opportunity to follow up on something I've just learned about, like Bermuda's African Diaspora Heritage Trail, mentioned to me by a local at a bar in Hamilton, the island territory's capital.

As I move through landscapes, I also ask myself how much tension a place can take before something breaks. I make those assessments in real time, and I'm willing to concede some of my desires to respect the place I inhabit in that moment.

In May 2022, I traveled to the Grand Canyon—a childhood dream of mine. Entering one of the country's most popular national parks, I tried to be responsible. I stayed at a locally owned hotel, rode park service transportation, and studied the 11 Indigenous tribes with historic connections to the lands that now comprise the park. Even with this preparation, I still ended up needing to modify my plans.

In every national park I visit, I hike a trail to commemorate my time there. A skilled navigator and competent trekker, I had most of what I needed for the steep, six-mile section of the South Kaibab Trail that led to Skeleton Point,

known for its views of the Colorado River. But it was already later than the recommended start time of 7 a.m. I hadn't told my safety contacts about my trail choice—and I didn't have cell service to notify them.

Each year, approximately 250 hikers require rescue from the Grand Canyon. While I wanted the bragging rights of accomplishing a hard hike, I didn't want to add to that statistic, nor did I want to strain an overtaxed system. Where I once would have pushed on, I opted out. Instead, I stood at the South Rim and sent a prayer out into the universe, hoping that I would one day be able to return, and when I did, that I'd be healthy enough to hike responsibly.

In the end, I think this should always be the goal of big-trip travel: to come back from a place safely with enough memories to sustain us for the moment, some hope that there can be a future in which that place still exists, and the will to think wisely about adventuring again. •

# The world is complicated. Being an ethical traveler doesn't have to be.

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### •

## The Future of Trips

Counting is so 2019. Today, travel is not about ticking off 1,000 places to see before you die. It's about delving deeply into a destination rather than skipping over it like a stone, about engaging with local communities, being mindful of your environmental impact, and spending time with loved ones. These trends hold true for individuals, tour companies, and private itineraries created by travel advisors.

"The future of trips will be very personal," says Erika Richter, spokesperson for the American Society of Travel Advisors—professionals who have seen their currency rise in the pandemic as champions of refunds and advocates for safe travel. "The emotional component of future trips will be just as unique as the person taking the trip," Richter adds.

Here's what to look for in your next journey.

#### **PLANTING A SEED**

Travel's great reset has forged a new dedication to its positive power. In a spring 2022 survey by the travel advisor consortium Virtuoso, 82 percent of travelers said the pandemic made them want to travel more responsibly. The industry has already responded.

"It used to be [that] the best travel anyone could contemplate was 'leave only footprints,'" says Edward Piegza, the by ELAINE GLUSAC

illustrations by TIM PEACOCK



founder of **Classic Journeys**, a tour company that employs local guides and partners with small businesses that keep money in the communities visited. "Now, that goal has been replaced and elevated to 'plant a seed.'" To that end, regenerative tours help travelers leave a place better than they found it, by letting them participate in environmental action or support local residents.

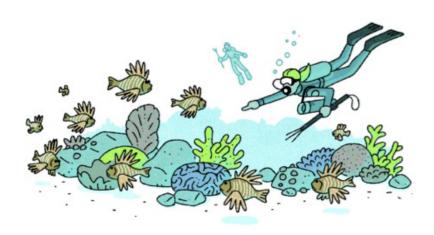




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In Canada, **Tundra North Tours** bases travelers in Inuvik near the new Okpik Arctic Village in the Northwest Territories. The settlement, which is used by members of the Inuvialuit and Gwich'in groups, features sod houses, a sawmill, farm, and fishery. It leans on traditional knowledge to preserve culture and provide employment, inviting visitors to learn about Inuit culture and the Mackenzie Delta.

#### "There is a palpable demand for deeper engagement, cultural experiences, and real-world connectivity."

Tour operator **Responsible Travel** sends scuba divers—and first-timers seeking certification—to the Belize Barrier Reef to help eradicate invasive lionfish. (A single lionfish can reduce a reef's fish population by 80 percent in five weeks.) Last year, the project removed more than 9,000 predators.

New trekking tours in Nepal from Montana-based operator **Adventure Life** pay their guides above-average wages. "It costs a little more, but it's the right thing to do," says Monika Sundem,

Adventure Life's chief executive officer. The company's local partner also prioritizes hiring women and LGBTQ staff.

#### LONGER VACATIONS WITH LOVED ONES

The pandemic heightened the urge to connect with family and friends on longer trips, often taken in multigenerational groups. Advisors and tour operators are catering to this cohort of travelers.

"We've seen a rise in demand for epic once-in-a-lifetime trips," says Justin Francis, the cofounder and CEO of Responsible Travel. He calls it a return to the origins of vacations: longer holidays supplemented with shorter breaks closer to home.

Families are booking private departures with **Tourissimo**, a cycling company in Italy, or organizing their own trips with public bike rentals. Beyond group travel, **Kensington Tours** offers ancestry-focused trips, including an 11-day genealogy trip to Ghana, a center of the colonial slave trade.

Travelers also have an appetite for remote destinations dictating longer stays, on trips such as South America expedition company **Explora**'s new treks across Chile's Atacama Desert and Bolivia's Salar

de Uyuni, or **Hurtigruten Expeditions**' 18-day Alaska sailings that stop at islands in the Aleutian chain and the Bering Sea.

#### IMPROVED CROSS-CULTURAL DIALOGUE

After years of social starvation, travelers are more eager than ever to indulge their cultural curiosity. That has inspired operators to build education into their trips, "not just to learn about the place, but to learn more about ourselves," says Annie Lucas, vice president and a co-owner of **Mir**, a tour operator that specializes in destinations from the Balkans eastward, including Russia, Central Asia, and the Middle East.

In the South Caucasus, a native Georgian guide takes Mir travelers into village homes to learn to make *khinkali* dumplings and see the crafting of *qvevri* clay pots where wine is aged, an 8,000-year-old tradition. This summer, a private group on a custom tour in Poland met with Ukrainian refugees to better understand the war on a personal level.



Black Tomato untethers education from the classroom in its family-focused Field Trip series, including tours that introduce travelers to the cowboy culture of the Llanos region in tropical Colombia. Guests can help with herding on horseback and learn to sing traditional songs.

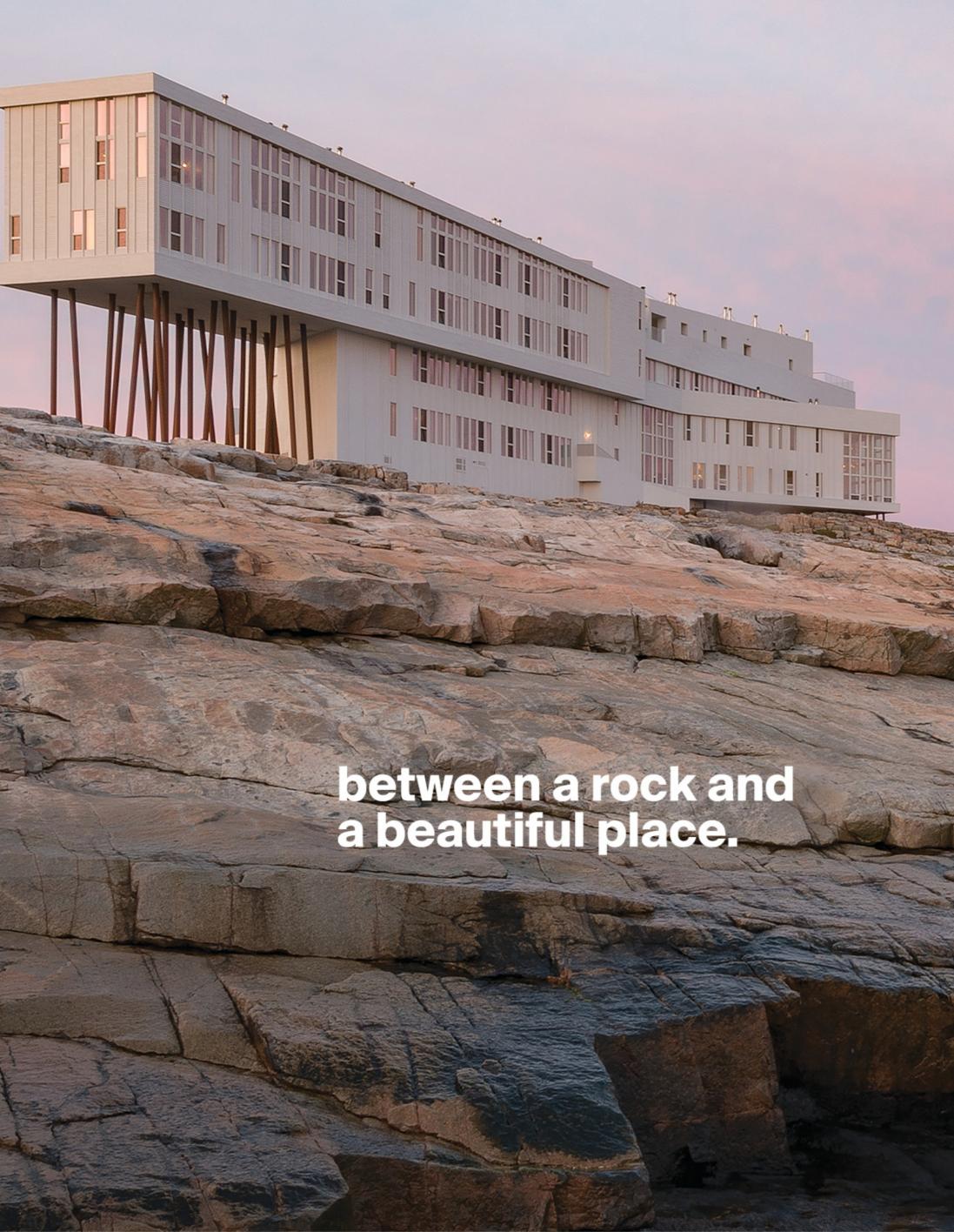
Abercrombie & Kent arranges such people-to-people experiences as bike tours of Nakatindi, a village near Zambia's southern border. Operated through the womenrun Chipego Bike Shop, tour stops include a school, community garden, or clinic. "There is a palpable demand for deeper engagement, cultural experiences, and real-world connectivity," says Keith Sproule, executive director of the travel company's nonprofit arm A&K Philanthropy.



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# THE 2022 TRAVEL WAS CONTROLLED TO THE 20

10 Visionary Companies Changing The Way We Travel

In 2016, we created the Travel Vanguard to honor values-oriented leaders making positive changes in the travel industry. This year, we've expanded our lens to focus on entire organizations that walk the walk to ensure that travel is a force for good.

Out of more than 100 nominees, this year's honorees include hotels, tour operators, a tourism board, a flight school, and a tech-savvy nonprofit. They work across all seven continents, and they're grappling with everything from social and racial justice to accessibility and climate change. Read on to learn about the inspiring companies transforming the way we travel.

by Jennifer Flowers

Illustrations by Alice Hoffmann







**IF YOU'RE A WOMAN** or a person of color in the United States, your likelihood of becoming a professional pilot is slim: According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2021, 94 percent of all aircraft pilots were male and 93 percent were white.

In addition to revealing a huge inequality issue, these statistics also show that flight schools are missing out on opportunities to find the nation's best and brightest next-gen

aviation talent, according to Dana Donati, CEO of the new United Aviate Academy (UAA).

That's why, in December 2021, United Airlines launched UAA. The academy is diversifying aviation, as well as responding to a dwindling aviation workforce and the prohibitively high cost of flight schools approved by the Federal Aviation Administration.

The academy's mission is to create the broadest pool of exceptional candidates possible by removing financial hurdles and addressing the industry's poor track record of recruitment efforts among diverse communities. For Donati, the mission feels personal. "Being a female in aviation, I know firsthand the barriers and financial struggle I faced to accomplish my own goals and dreams," she says.

UAA is the first flight school owned by a major U.S. airline, and it intends to train 5,000 pilots by 2030, with

UNITED AVIATE ACADEMY

## FOR DIVERSIFYING AVIATION

50 percent of students identifying as women or people of color. The inaugural class has already exceeded that goal, at 80 percent.

UAA reaches prospective students through alliances with such groups as the Organization of Black Aerospace Professionals, Women in Aviation International, Latino Pilots Association, and the National Gay Pilots Association. It works with historically Black colleges and universities, including Hampton University in Virginia and Elizabeth City State University in North Carolina. United Airlines also partnered with JPMorgan Chase to create scholarships for students needing assistance. Students train at the academy for 12 months before they fly for a United Express partner for two years, then eventually transition to United Airlines.

"It's important to have a diverse pilot population," says Donati of UAA's ambitions, "because diversity of people means diversity of mind." Student planes sit on a runway at the Phoenix Goodyear Airport in Arizona, where United Aviate Academy is based.



# MICHAEL TUREK

# FOR PUTTING COMMUNITY FIRST



**VOLCANOES SAFARIS**, which celebrated its 25th anniversary this year, offers one of the best ways to see the endangered mountain gorillas of East Africa. But what sets the company apart is its long-standing commitment to making people a top priority for the business.

Founded by Praveen Moman, who was born in Uganda and spent his child-hood exploring the gorilla habitats of the Virunga Mountains, Volcanoes Safaris runs four lodges in Uganda and Rwanda. Moman launched the company three years after the 1994 Rwandan genocide. "The dream was so strong that I didn't really work out all the different components initially," he recalls. "But I just thought that this was a wonderful land-scape that needed protecting, and one day, hopefully, it can help people here earn a living as it once did."

An early player in the post-genocide return of tourism, Volcanoes led the way in bringing hospitality jobs back while also protecting communities that coexist with wildlife. The company overwhelmingly hires staff from East Africa's Great Lakes region, where many families have been impacted by war and displacement. Women comprise more than 50 percent of the current management staff.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the company partnered with the German Investment Corporation to offer relief to

more than 10,000 people near its lodges, in the form of masks, water tanks, handwashing facilities, food donations, and more.

"If you want the wildlife to have a future, then your focus has to be on the communities," says Moman, who believes local people should be driving conservation, rather than having it imposed on them. "They need that land for farming and food, to be able to build a home, to send their kids to school, and to have an economic livelihood. Conservation has to be part of the economic chain."



In 2013, Volcanoes Safaris started a tea processing cooperative near the Bwindi Impenetrable Forest in Uganda.

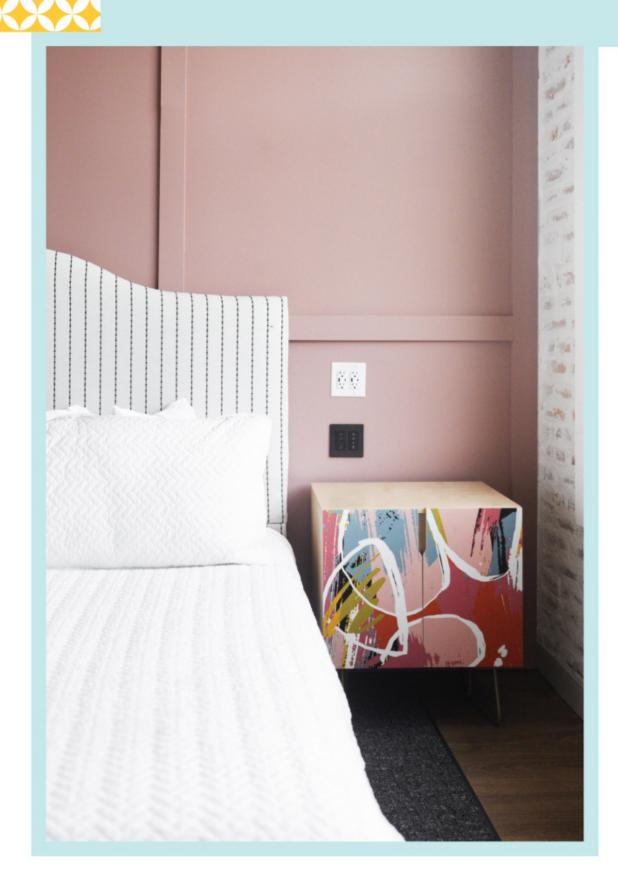
THE SCHOOLHOUSE HOTEL



### FOR COMMITTING TO ACCESSIBILITY







A guest room at the Schoolhouse Hotel in White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia, features soothing colors and wheelchair-friendly carpeting. **MORE THAN 60 MILLION** Americans live with a disability, but the majority of hotels in the United States only comply with the bare minimum accessibility requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act, according to Charlie Hammerman.

Hammerman founded the Schoolhouse Hotel, the world's first boutique property to incorporate accessibility into every part of the guest experience. Hammerman, whose daughter has cerebral palsy, is an attorney who left his Merrill Lynch job in 2007 to create the non-profit Disability Opportunity Fund (DOF), which invests in small businesses that focus on accessibility solutions.

Opened in May 2022 in White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia, the Schoolhouse Hotel is the DOF's first hotel project. "You're designing an experience for different types of needs, and you are not going to cover every disability," Hammerman says. "So we decided we're going to try and think of 99 percent of them and anticipate new things that come up."

The team consulted with experts on everything from visual and hearing impairment to neurodiversity. They did away with an early plan for ballroom wall sconces, because an unnecessary light source could potentially disrupt visual clarity for those relying on sign language or lipreading. Experts did virtual walk-throughs to help fine-tune color tones, room brightness, and carpeting texture and advised on a meditation room for visitors to retreat to when overwhelmed. The 30 guest rooms are equipped with voice command technology that connects to the front desk.

Hammerman is hoping to set an example for hotels that aren't tapping into the \$13 trillion in annual disposable income that the disability market represents. "We want the Schoolhouse Hotel to be a showcase," he says. "We want the Marriotts, the Hyatts, and the Hiltons to stay here. We're a nice little boutique hotel, but they can also learn from us."







THE TRAVEL CORPORATION

# FOR MEASURING SUSTAINABILITY EFFORTS

whether you're floating past centuries-old villages on a cruise along Austria's Danube River or learning about Aboriginal fishing techniques near Australia's Great Barrier Reef, the trips you take through The Travel Corporation's brands are now being measured against the company's sustainability strategy.

The Travel Corporation (TTC), which owns and runs 40 travel brands, including Uniworld Boutique River Cruises, Red Carnation Hotels, Contiki, and Trafalgar Tours, released its first-ever annual Impact Report in May 2022. The report tracks the company's progress against 11 sustainability goals aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Among TTC's aims to reach by 2025: using 50 percent electricity through renewable sources, combating overtourism by expanding offerings to less visited regions by 20 percent,



and reducing food waste by 50 percent. TTC also ensures that all wildlife experiences adhere to an animal welfare policy created in partnership with World Animal Protection, a London-based nonprofit.

The first report, which captures data from 2020 and 2021, is part of a five-year strategy called How We Tread Right. Reporting creates transparency, accord-

ing to Shannon Guihan, chief sustainability officer for TTC. "Data doesn't lie, and it helps us to identify what's working and what's not, enabling us to shift gears to ensure the best results," Guihan says. "From the travelers' perspective, it allows them to do their research and make their own decisions as to what travel provider is walking the walk."

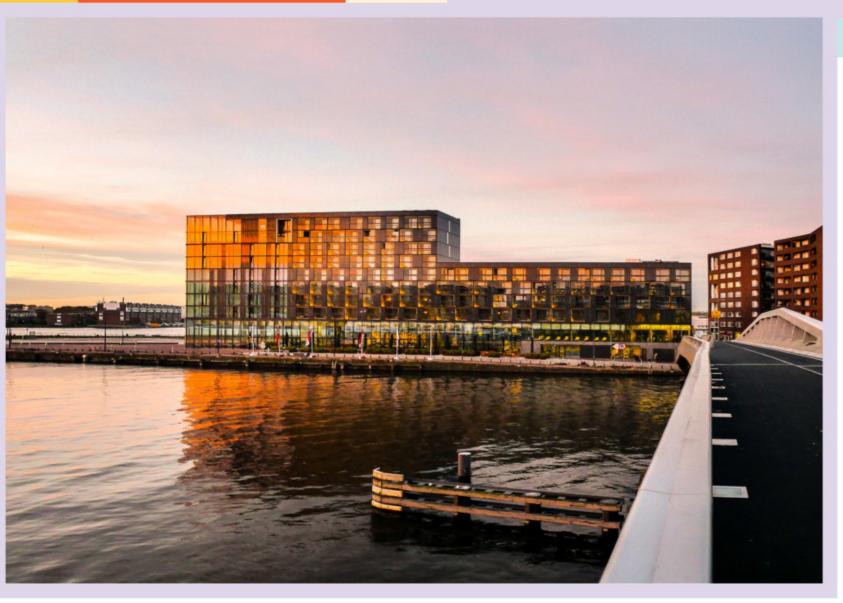
As its sustainability strategy unfolds, TTC is becoming increasingly ambitious. Since the launch of its strategy in 2020, the company's primary goal is to achieve net zero. In the spring of 2022, it submitted its greenhouse gas emissions targets for review by the Science Based Targets initiative. Once approved, TTC will become the largest privately held travel company with verified science-based reduction targets.

Linc Walker
(above right),
a guide with
Australia's
Down Under
Tours (a Travel
Corporation
brand), shows a
sand crab to a
traveler.

#### TRAVALYST

# FOR EMPOWERING TRAVELERS





Hotel Jakarta, located in Amsterdam, was one of the first members of Travalyst's Travel Sustainable program.

**MORE THAN 80 PERCENT** of international travelers today, according to a recent survey by Booking.com, say sustainable travel is of vital importance. Yet travel companies have had few ways of showing potential customers how their hotel or flight is a green choice.

Enter Travalyst, a nonprofit founded in 2019 by Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex. It offers information and tools that help conscientious travelers make more informed choices about what to book.

Travalyst brought together global companies with powerful digital platforms—including Tripadvisor, Booking.com, and more recently Google and Expedia Group—to create common sustainability measurement standards in both hotels and aviation.

"We know that to truly make sustainable travel mainstream, it's not going to be one company or one organization or one nonprofit," says Travalyst CEO Sally Davey. "It has to be a collective effort."

For hotels, the coalition created a set of sustainability standards that includes running on 100 percent renewable energy and investing a certain amount of revenue back into community and conservation

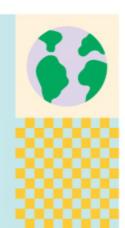
projects. The measurements were rolled out in the form of Booking.com's Travel Sustainable badge in 2021, followed soon after by Google Travel's hotel search tool, which now includes an "eco-certified" filter. For flight data, the coalition aligned Skyscanner's emissions calculator with Google's, so that consumers can simply search for flights and opt for one with lower carbon emissions.

Travalyst is now identifying other key partners and expanding its independent advisory group. The advisory group includes Dr. Anna Spenceley, chair of the World Commission on Protected Areas (part of the International Union for Conservation of Nature), and Jeremy Smith, the cofounder of Tourism Declares a Climate Emergency.

"Many consumers don't realize just how profound tourism is as a sector," Davey says. "Travel is an incredibly powerful force for good when done right. As consumers, we can truly make an impact by making better choices."



### FOR ELIMINATING PLASTICS





**HOTEL BRAND SIX SENSES** has, since its founding in 1995, considered environmental sustainability to be a key aspect of luxury and wellness. And as Six Senses continues to evolve—with 21 hotels and resorts in 17 countries, many in remote, biodiverse settings—so does its commitment to do right by the planet.

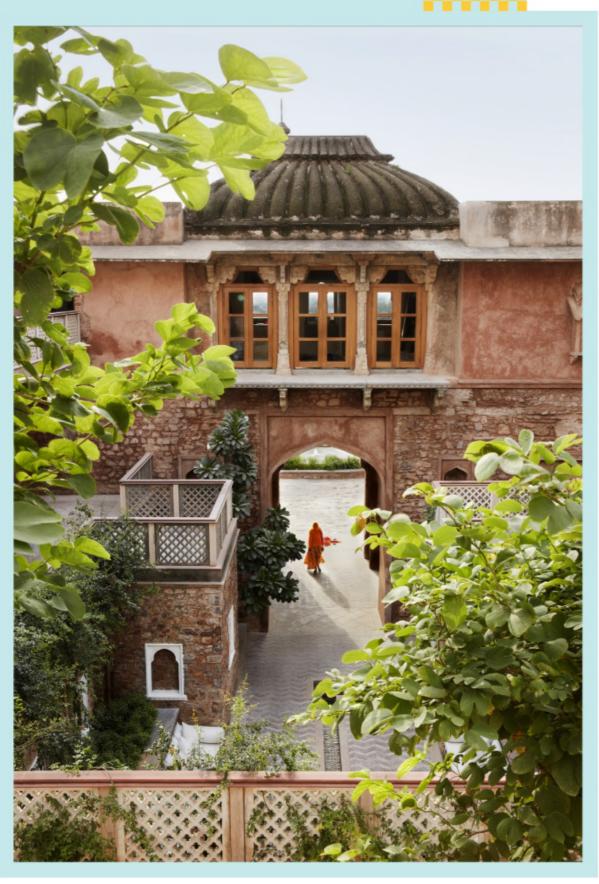
"Sustainability is part of who we are," says CEO Neil Jacobs. "How we build, operate, and engage with the community encapsulates our philosophy. We've been doing it for close to 30 years, and it's engrained in our company culture."

In 2020, Six Senses was one of the first signatories to join the U.N. Global Tourism Plastics Initiative. The company's biggest push today is plastic elimination: This year, it worked to remove every scrap of single-use plastic from the guest experience, and it is now tackling single-use plastic in back-of-house operations.

All Six Senses properties have full-time sustainability officers who identify projects that will make the biggest impact. At the recently opened Six Senses Fort Barwara, in India's arid Rajasthan state, a rewilding effort is helping to combat desertification. In the Maldives, Six Senses Laamu has a team of on-site biologists dedicated to marine conservation. Six Senses Yao Noi in Thailand installed filters that

deliver clean drinking water to more than 107,000 residents.

According to Jacobs, the long-term goal is to preserve the places their guests travel far to experience. Because beyond high-thread-count sheets or sumptuous spas, the experience of a thriving, bio-diverse destination is the ultimate luxury.



Six Senses Fort Barwara was originally a 14th-century fort owned by a royal Rajasthani family.

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#### **USTOA & INNOVATION NORWAY**

### FOR COMBATING CLIMATE CHANGE





On hybrid-electric ships, travelers to Norway can pass fishing villages like Henningsvær.

IN MAY 2022, 40 travel executives from around the world gathered in Bodø, Norway, to discuss how their businesses needed to evolve to address climate change. They tried some of Norway's most eco-friendly travel experiences, including Brim Explorer's silent fjord tours on a hybrid-electric ship. They heard from such speakers as Wanjiku "Wawa" Gatheru, founder of Black Girl Environmentalist, a community rooted in principles of environmental justice.

They had gathered as part of the first-ever Sustainability is Responsibility summit, which was hosted by the United States Tour Operators Association (USTOA) and Innovation Norway, a government-owned company that brings exports, investments, and tourism under one strategic umbrella. At the summit, Innovation Norway shared the practical logistics of meeting its climate goals, including how to navigate financial and governmental hurdles.

Norway, a world leader in sustainability, is tackling climate change with metrics that have been approved by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council. The country aims to end all sales of new gasoline vehicles by 2025. Today, thanks to tax incentives, more than half of new cars purchased in Norway are electric. By 2026, western Norway's fjords will only allow zero-emission electric ferries, cruise ships, and tourist boats. By 2030, the capital city of Oslo plans to have lowered 95 percent of its carbon emissions.

"We are in the first stage of building a sustainability community that will move forward for the next 50 years," says Terry Dale, president of the USTOA, the travel trade association representing close to \$19 billion in revenue and 9.8 million annual travelers. "Everyone was very transparent and honest and willing to share."

According to Hege Barnes, Innovation Norway's regional director for the Americas, sustainability is never a fixed point and requires continuous collaboration and improvement. "There's a term in Norway called *dugnad* that means 'everybody on deck,'" she says. "We all must help make this happen. You need constant education and a constant reminder that even small things can make a big difference."





**INTREPID TRAVEL** 

### FOR DRIVING BOOKINGS THROUGH RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL

Hikers with Intrepid Travel walk toward Annapurna Base Camp in Nepal. became carbon neutral. In 2018, it became the travel industry's largest B Corporation—that is, a certified social enterprise. In 2019, it hired a climate scientist, Dr. Susanne Etti, to lead the organization's decarbonization efforts for its trips and its global operations. In 2020, Intrepid became the world's first global tour operator to create verified science-based emission targets. And by 2035, the company wants its emissions to be in line with the Paris Agreement threshold of 1.5 degrees Celsius.

Meanwhile, the company has grown rapidly, having doubled its revenue between 2016 and 2020, according to CEO James Thornton. "We can be commercially successful, but we

can also have a very strong purpose," Thornton says. "And if you get those two things right, having a strong purpose can drive commercial success, and having strong commercial success means you can invest more in your purpose activities."

Intrepid's next area of focus is to become a more active participant in racial and social justice, which Thornton sees as intersecting with environmental justice. In 2019, the company created a Reconciliation

Action Plan to strengthen ties with First Nations groups in Australia. Meanwhile, U.S.-based offices are creating relationships with BIPOC-owned businesses and representatives from such groups as the Crow Nation, the Lakota people, and the National Blacks in Travel and Tourism Collaborative. Intrepid's U.S. itineraries now include an experience in South Dakota told from an Indigenous perspective.

"[In the past], we've been much more climate-driven than social injustice-driven," Thornton says. "And that's why we're starting to take those first progressive steps in terms of including BIPOC voices."

#### VIRGINIA TOURISM CORPORATION

### FOR WELCOMING EVERYONE



IN 2019, as the Virginia Tourism Corporation (VTC) prepared to commemorate the quadricentennial of the arrival of Africans to Virginia, the company surveyed Black visitors regarding their experiences in the state.

"Some of the reactions were 'We did not feel welcomed, 'We were talked down to,' 'We were not told the truth,' and 'We were not given the whole story," recalls Rita McClenny, the CEO of VTC, which partnered with the marketing firm JMI on the survey.

For McClenny, a Black woman born and raised in Virginia, these responses weren't surprising. But the hard data served as the catalyst she felt the organization needed to drive a more inclusive approach to tourism. "Images do make a difference. If I don't see myself in the story, then I don't believe necessarily that I'm welcome there, because no one looks like me."

Using these insights, VTC adopted a wide-ranging approach to making Black travelers feel more welcome in Virginia, working closely with its ad agency, destination marketing organizations, and freelance photographers. Since 2018, the organization's 12-person board went from including only one Black woman to having five people of color. VTC has worked with iconic Virginia museums and sites, including Montpelier, Monticello, Jamestown, and Fort Monroe National Monument, to tell parts of Black history that had been forgotten or buried. Monticello now showcases the lives of prominent Black residents such as Sally Hemings, a woman born into slavery in Virginia who had several children with Thomas Jefferson—a story most docents previously weren't equipped to tell, McClenny says.

VTC is starting to see the impact of its efforts. In

2021, the company's annual Visitor Profile survey showed 74 percent of Black travelers to Virginia were "very satisfied" with their trip that year, a rate on par with that of leisure travelers overall. But the work is never done, according to McClenny. Her team is strategizing on highlighting Black history as part of the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution in 2026, while also ramping up efforts to identify and remove biases against other groups, including Asian Americans, LGBTQ travelers,

"It's all about protecting what we honor," McClenny says, "and preserving your beliefs to share with others to appreciate. It comes down to love." •



A couple enjoys a treetop adventure near downtown Williamsburg, Virginia.



and visitors with disabilities.

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# Off the Hook

Photographer, graphic designer, and world traveler Troy Litten has a soft spot for objects of a bygone era. His longtime obsession: pay phones around the globe.

**Photographs by Troy Litten** 





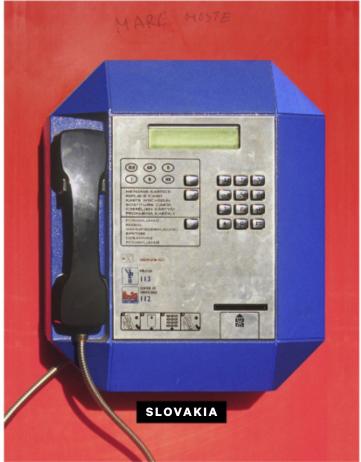






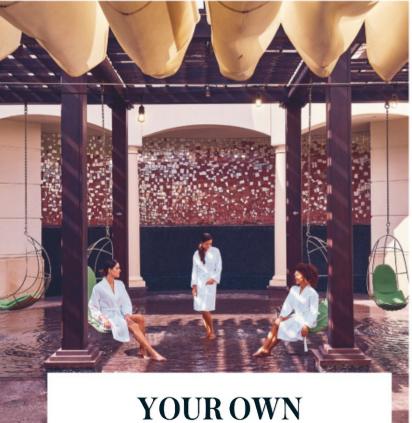










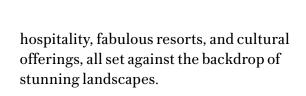


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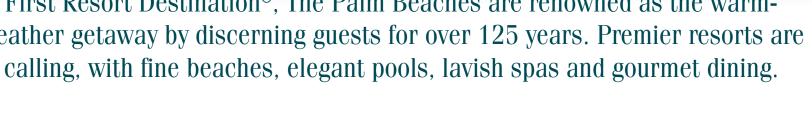
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English so well and constantly face the question "Where are you from?" Within a couple of years of arriving, it became clear that, for their emotional health, our kids needed to know that the world was far noisier and more complex than Perth. So we watched the news together and talked about earthquakes and elections. I bought them a globe and spun it, calling out the names of places our fingers landed. I wanted them to know that the world was big and there were places where they were not the minority. I wanted them to know there were places where history loomed large and majestic. I wanted them to know they belonged in all these places as much as anyone. I wanted them to be comfortable everywhere.

identity, in enabling me to see my surroundings in new ways, to understand the long, proud histories of people and places that I now realize weren't featured in my children's school textbooks. My husband and I were convinced that travel would teach our kids to be curious and compassionate, that they would learn how to navigate discomfort and celebrate difference. When we went on family vacations, I asked my children what they observed about the streets of Ubud, Bali, or about the landscape on the drive from Johannesburg to Durban, South Africa.

My daughter would focus on the trees in every new destination and observe how different they were from trees in Perth. In Ubud, the trees were greener, with much larger leaves. Johannesburg had majestic jacarandas that reached across the city's old streets. My sixyear-old son insisted on picking up all the trash on the beach in Bali. His class had been learning about the impact of plastic on the environment, and he told us he wanted to "make Bali as clean as Perth to save the turtles." When we traveled as a family, I felt the idealistic part of my identity take over. Every trip was an opportunity to learn out loud, to take pleasure in our connections and differences with others.

Then the pandemic hit. Western Australia closed its borders in March 2020 and enacted one of the strictest quarantine regimes and travel bans in the world. Suddenly, my husband and I were able to complete work contracts virtually. I didn't have to get on planes, since there was this tool called videoconferencing that had never felt compelling and soon became the only option.

The bans were highly successful from a public health perspective. We lived in splendid isolation, with near-zero community transmission of COVID-19. Our mask mandates were lax, we did not get sick, and we did not experience the lockdowns that defined the pandemic for so many people. The mining industry and generous government benefits buoyed the economy, and when shots were rolled out, Western Australia achieved a remarkable 98.1 percent double vaccination rate.

It was joyous at first, but the novelty soon wore off. The continuing border closures grew to be especially tough



I AM THE CHILD of a freedom fighter and an accountant. My idealistic father left South Africa when he was 19 due to his anti-apartheid actions. My pragmatic mother was the top student in her newly independent country of Swaziland, now named Eswatini. I was born there, grew up in Lusaka, Nairobi, and Ottawa, and as an adult have spent most of my time living in major cities, including New York and Johannesburg. I see myself as a blend of my parents: a pragmatic idealist. I travel for practical reasons—and also because I love the bustle of chaotic streets, the rhythms of markets, and the feeling of limitless possibility.

And yet, for the last eight years, I have found myself living in Western Australia, in Perth, where there is little bustle, there are few markets, and daily life is very, well, predictable. Here, the idealist in me often feels defeated by the pragmatist.

Johannesburg is an energetic, fast-paced city, but for all its merits, it doesn't sit on a body of water. So, though my husband and I both feel deeply connected to South Africa, by the time our daughter was five and our son two, in 2013, we also felt exhausted and frazzled. My husband was born and raised in Perth, where he spent his childhood clambering on the idyllic sand dunes across the street from his family's house. He was pining for home. And so we went.

In the beginning, our life in Perth was great. We bought an early 1900s cottage less than 15 minutes from the beach where my husband grew up. Our children became as comfortable in the water as they were on land, and when they rode their bikes around the neighborhood, we never worried about their safety. Still, it didn't take long to realize that living in a remote, majority-white city had downsides I hadn't fully anticipated.

Although my children now have Australian accents and play sports, some people consider them outsiders since their skin is brown. They have been commended for speaking on those of us who had family overseas. When a beloved uncle died in South Africa, I couldn't risk leaving Perth, because there was no guarantee I would be let back in again. As others got back to "normal," our borders remained firmly closed. We weren't locked down, but we were most definitely shut in

My children had last visited South Africa in 2017, when they were nine and six years old. I worried about how all this time without travel would alter their connection to the country and how it would make them less global. My children grew so sheltered that when we went into Perth's Chinatown, they were frightened by the sight of a homeless man stretched out on the sidewalk. I had imagined raising fearless little beings who would brave their way through the world. Instead, they'd begun to seem fragile, insular, and unaware of their privilege. They were turning into little pragmatists before my eyes, playing life safe.

IN MARCH 2022, after 697 days, Western Australia reopened its border. I recall listening to the announcement on the radio, and then falling into a seated position on the coffee table, weeping.

I flew to Johannesburg three weeks later, by myself. I had graves to visit and more tears to shed about loved ones COVID-19 had taken from us. I wanted to do that on my own, to have space to grieve without worrying about managing my kids, whom I suspected would need to have their hands held in new ways.

Ten days later, my husband and kids joined me for a homecoming that was nothing short of remarkable. My son had just turned 11 and my daughter would soon be 14. They spent their first 48 hours feeling anxious, constantly checking their TikTok accounts on their iPads.

But their cousins wouldn't allow them to disappear into the digital world. Within days, my kids were pulled into the specialness of the not-quite-sibling love that defines cousinhood. There was something solid and enduring about watching them laze around with their long limbs, looking alike and different all at the same time. It was a marvel to observe.

In South Africa, my children were exactly who they are in Australia: respectful, kind, and patient kids who know how to make their aunties laugh and who give their grandfather the hugs he needs. No great cultural divide separated them from their cousins. They watched the same shows, listened to similar music, and played the same games. There were local variations and lots of teasing about accents, but their connection to family was durable and their relationship with the world secure.

As I watched these sweet family moments unfold, I realized that I had once approached travel as an escape and as an opportunity to teach our kids how to live fuller, more emotionally robust lives. My husband and I wanted them to be defined by their travel experiences. On this trip, I finally understood that living

emotionally robust lives is not a function of travel. Instead, my children's identities as caring, sensitive young people will define their travel experiences; it will help them deal with the practical realities of travel while keeping their hearts open to its rewards.

One of my favorite memories of the trip was the time 20 of us—my family is large!—traveled to Kruger National Park. We drove a convoy of cars through the bush, kids in the back, guidebooks out, binoculars on. I listened to the cousins tell one another tall tales, bet on who would see a lion first (we saw no lions), and just be kids. And then we came upon a group of elephants. There could have been 20 or more. Our cars stopped and we watched them cross the road in front of us: mothers and babies and old ones and bigger ones. Marvelous and ancient. My daughter piped up from the back, "What a big family! Just like us."

# As I watched these sweet family moments unfold, I realized that I had once approached travel as an escape.

I'm hopeful that my future travels will be less fraught with the weight of what I want my kids to learn. Since returning to Perth, I've looked at other people with the same awe that my daughter brought to our elephant viewing. There is something important in realizing that travel is ultimately about being able to observe a distant place and people with recognition. To look at others and say, "What a big family! Just like us."





# See it and be moved.



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# Chill Out

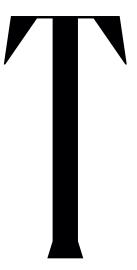
In steamy Singapore, ice kachang is a choose-your-own cooldown adventure.

Photographs and text by Faris Mustafa



In the world of ice kachang, toppings—from fruit to tapioca pearls—are considered an art form.





**THE SINGAPORE SUN** is high in the afternoon sky, the heavy air sticky with humidity. I, however, am unfazed. I'm standing in the shaded comfort of ABC Brickworks, one of Singapore's oldest hawker centers, waiting patiently in line at the Jin Jin Dessert stall. And any moment now, I'll be savoring the sweet, sweet chill of *ice kachang*.

As the line creeps forward, I watch as local office workers—women in skirts and heels, men in short-sleeved shirts and pressed pants—return to their tables holding towers of shaved ice on a bed of beans (kachang means "bean" in Malay) and smothered in fruit, jellies, and neon-colored syrups.

Many chilled and frozen desserts are available in this relentlessly hot island nation located one degree north of the equator. But ice kachang—which dates to the mid–20th century—holds a special place in the heart of Singaporeans young and old.

It wasn't exactly love at first sight for me. Until I moved to Singapore full-time, I visited the city-state frequently. For years, I passed the ubiquitous stalls hawking the psychedelically colored treat . . . and just kept on walking. I thought it would be much too sweet, and at the time, I had a no-fluorescent-foods policy.

In 2016, a friend finally convinced me to give it a try. I was hot, hungry, and thirsty—and ice kachang was a revelation. As I took my first bite, waves of flavor washed over my tongue. The dessert was extremely light, absolutely refreshing, and sweet, though much less cloying than I'd believed it would be. It was an almost medicinal experience: The combination of ice and sugar restored my hydration levels and



boosted my blood sugar, just the remedy for an overheated traveler.

To this day, I love observing the ice kachang assembly process, and this visit to ABC Brickworks is no different. As I near the front of the line, I watch as Ewan Tang, co-owner of the Jin Jin stall, works. First, he places a scoop of cooked, sweetened adzuki beans and a scoop of jellylike *attap chee* (palm seeds) into a bowl. He then places the bowl beneath a machine that transforms a chunk of block ice into a snowy pile of shaved ice. From there, things get more interesting—and more colorful. Tang drizzles condensed milk and the

The combination of ice and sugar restored my hydration levels and boosted my blood sugar, just the remedy for an overheated traveler.

diner's desired syrup (from rose to sarsaparilla to pandan leaf) and adds the customer's preferred toppings, which might include sweet corn kernels, peanuts, durian fruit, jackfruit, mango, the jellied coconut known as *nata de coco* . . . the list goes on.

While a traditional "recipe" exists for ice kachang—gula melaka (palm sugar) syrup, beans, and condensed milk—these days, the variations are endless. When it's my turn to order, I go with strawberry

syrup and nata de coco, my go-to flavor combination, then join the office workers at the yellow tables spread throughout the hawker center. I eat quickly, using a wide soup spoon to shovel up the ice before it melts. Some people like to leave the final dregs; others, myself included, drain the remainder as if it were leftover milk in a cereal bowl. I lean back. Six years and countless bowls in, ice kachang still has the power to satiate and cool.



**IT'S ANOTHER HUMID** evening when I meet Shermay Lee, a chef, award-winning cookbook author, and authority on Singapore heritage cuisine. Lee is the niece of Singapore's founding father, Lee Kuan Yew, and now runs her own product line, Shermay's Singapore Fine Food. We're sipping tea at

a mutual friend's house as she shares the, admittedly hazy, history of ice kachang.

Shaved ice, of course, is not original to this part of the world. Historians believe that in the mid–19th century, ships began to import naturally occurring ice to places such as Hawai'i, where people would painstakingly shave blocks of ice by hand. This





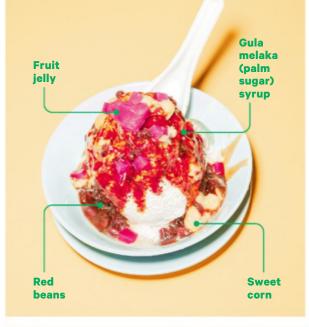






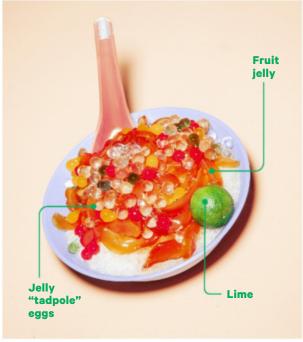
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To make ice kachang, vendors shave ice into a bowl. Then comes a scoop of condensed milk and toppings, such as gula melaka syrup and pandanleaf jellies. Opposite page:
One of Singapore's 100-plus hawker centers.

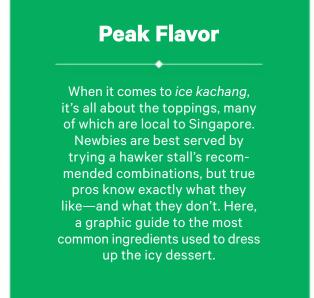


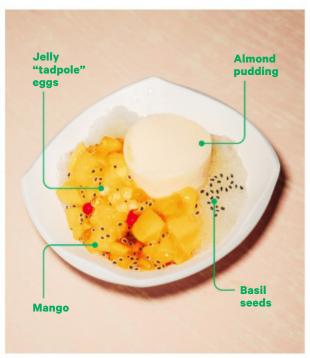
















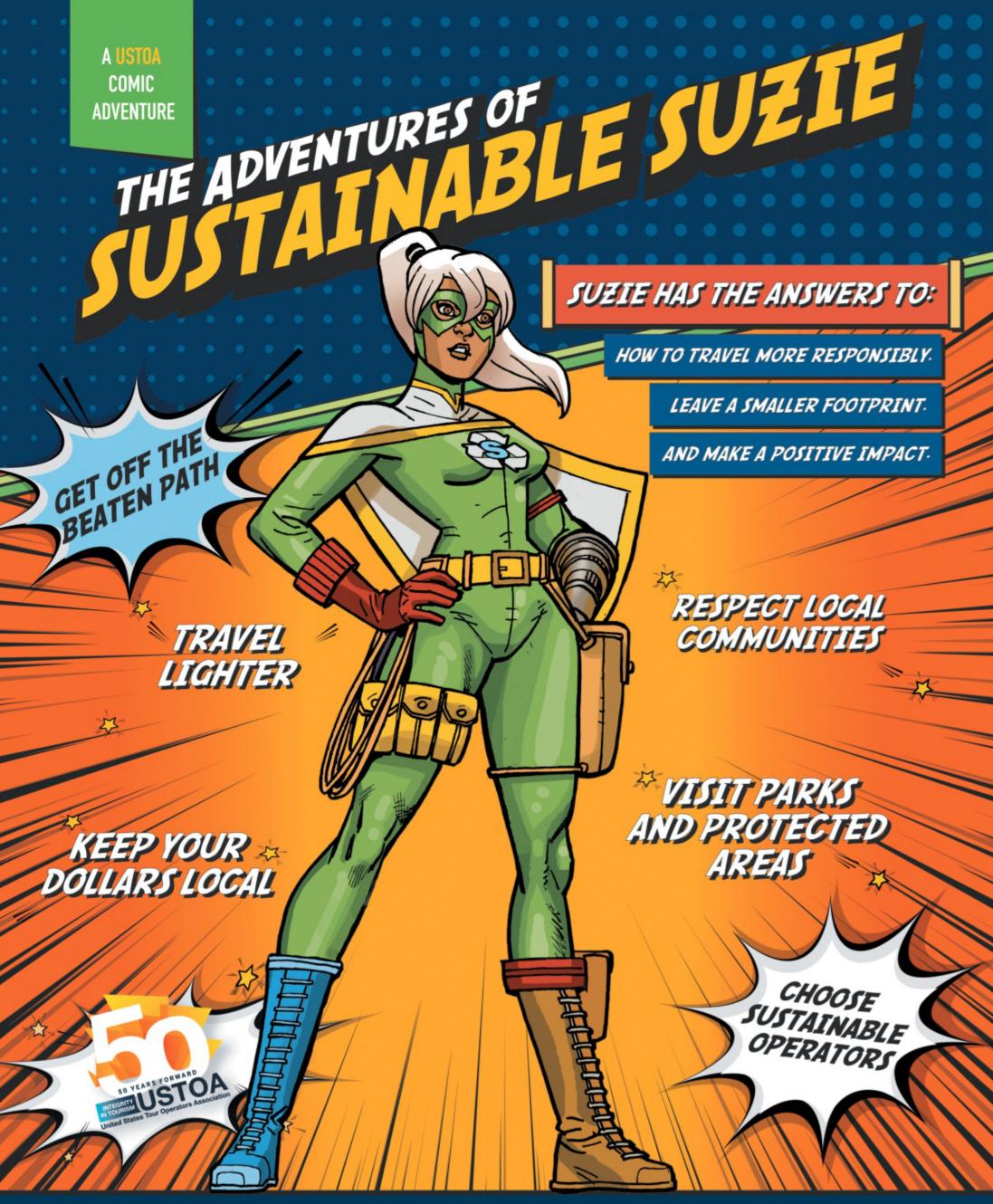
changed when freezers were introduced in the 1940s, Lee says. In Singapore and Malaysia—once a united country—ingenious street vendors used this newfangled machine to create large blocks of ice, which they then transformed into a fluffy powder using hand-cranked ice shavers. Vendors would scoop the ice into a compact sphere—known as an ice ball—drown it in syrup, and serve it as a snack meant to be eaten with the hands.

Over the years, as the nation evolved (Singapore gained its independence in 1965), the ice ball morphed into ice kachang as we know it: a tower of shaved ice best eaten with a spoon. Now, Lee says, there's a tendency for ice kachang hawkers to try to outdo one another with over-the-top flavor combinations.

(Singaporeans have a friendly but serious rivalry with Malaysians about who makes the best ice kachang.)

"In a sense, the ice ball-to-ice kachang evolution reflects progress in a post-World War II era," Lee explains. "[We went] from eating it with bare hands on the streets of old Singapore to having the luxury of sitting at a hawker center with a table and stool under a roof with a fan."

Lee says that things continued in much the same way until the early 2000s. As younger Singaporeans sought work outside the food industry, and even off the island, ice kachang—and the multigenerational hawker stalls selling it—became endangered. In 2011, the government stepped



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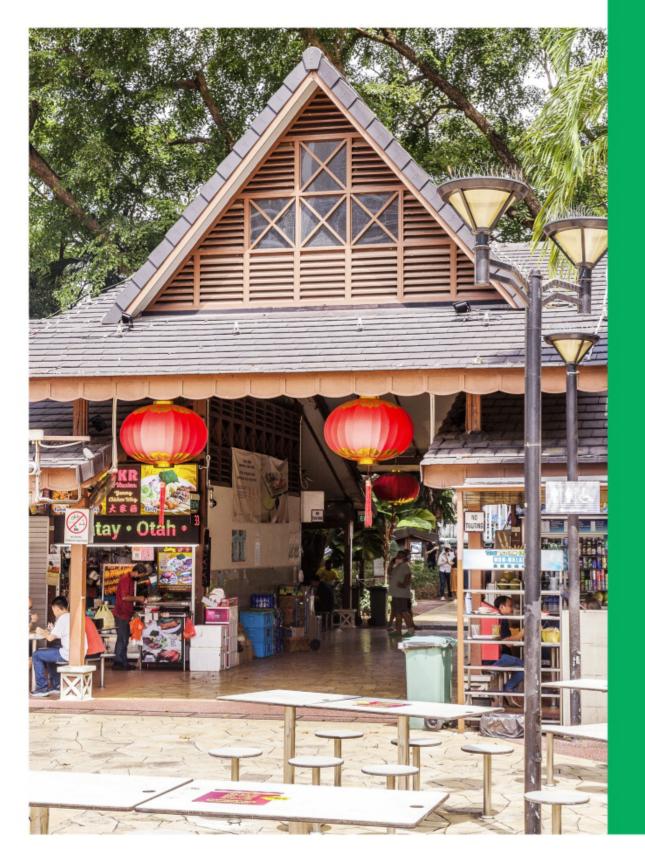
in, creating programs and offering grants to, in part, encourage young people to learn the trade. The government also worked with hawker stall owners on succession planning. In December 2020, UNESCO added hawker culture to its list of Intangible Cultural Heritage traditions.

At the time, Singapore was in one of its many COVID-19 lockdowns and hawker centers were closed for dining. Some stall owners had pivoted to offering delivery service, but that wasn't possible for those making ice kachang. The news, however abstract, was a little lift to the spirit—a reminder of the role of hawker centers in Singapore cuisine.

As I leave Lee, I reflect both on her words and on the past few years. Thanks to government support and the recent easing of COVID-19 restrictions, most stalls have reopened and are as busy today as they once were.

On my journey home, in fact, I pass by a hawker center so lively and brightly lit it's like a beacon. Inside, people sit around tables, laughing and talking, many of them dipping spoons into those technicolor towers, those symbols of place and national identity. It feels like a revelation.

In Singapore, one of the best ways to escape the heat (and eat well) is to spend an afternoon in a shaded hawker center.





### Where to Try Ice Kachang in Singapore

Ice kachang is the gold standard of frozen desserts on the island. But there are many shaved-ice variations to try, including cendol, shaved ice finished with green rice-flour jellies flavored with pandan leaf, and kakigori, made with fluffier ice and topped more simply with syrups and condensed milk. Here's where to eat up and chill out.

#### JIN JIN DESSERT

ABC Brickworks Market & Food Centre

Ewan Tang and Calvin Ho are known for their intricate desserts, including ice kachang and their own creative concoctions. Try their Gangster Ice, a potent blend of mango, durian, and snow ice (shaved ice made from a mix of water and condensed milk).

#### **BLANCO COURT**

Old Airport Road Food Centre

The affable Tans, a husband-and-wife team, serve more than 30 varieties of ice kachang, using such local ingredients as soursop fruit, grass jelly (made from the bitter cincau plant), and sea coconut (the fruit of the palmyra palm). Their Tadpole Sea Coconut—shaved ice topped with fruit and "tadpole" eggs made of flavored jelly—is one of the most refreshing dishes you'll eat on the island.

#### LIKE PUDDING

Golden Mile Food Centre

When it comes to ice kachang and cendol, Chen Hsien Yi, a Taiwanese immigrant, and his three sons focus more on the toppings than the syrups. For something different, try one of their Taiwanese specialties, including snow ice and soursop ice jelly, which is similar to Jell-O.

#### TIAN LIANG YUAN

Alexandra Village Food Centre

If you want ice kachang in its purest form—shaved ice, adzuki beans, *gula melaka* syrup, and condensed milk—visit Tian Liang Yuan. Bonus: The stall is in a hawker center that's frequented primarily by locals and is virtually unknown to tourists.

#### LIANG LIANG GARDEN

Tiong Bahru Market

This stall is known for its creative pairings: think mango and durian, or honey and aloe vera. The pièce de résistance is Dinosaur ice kachang, which substitutes Milo, the chocolate-flavored malted milk powder, for syrup.





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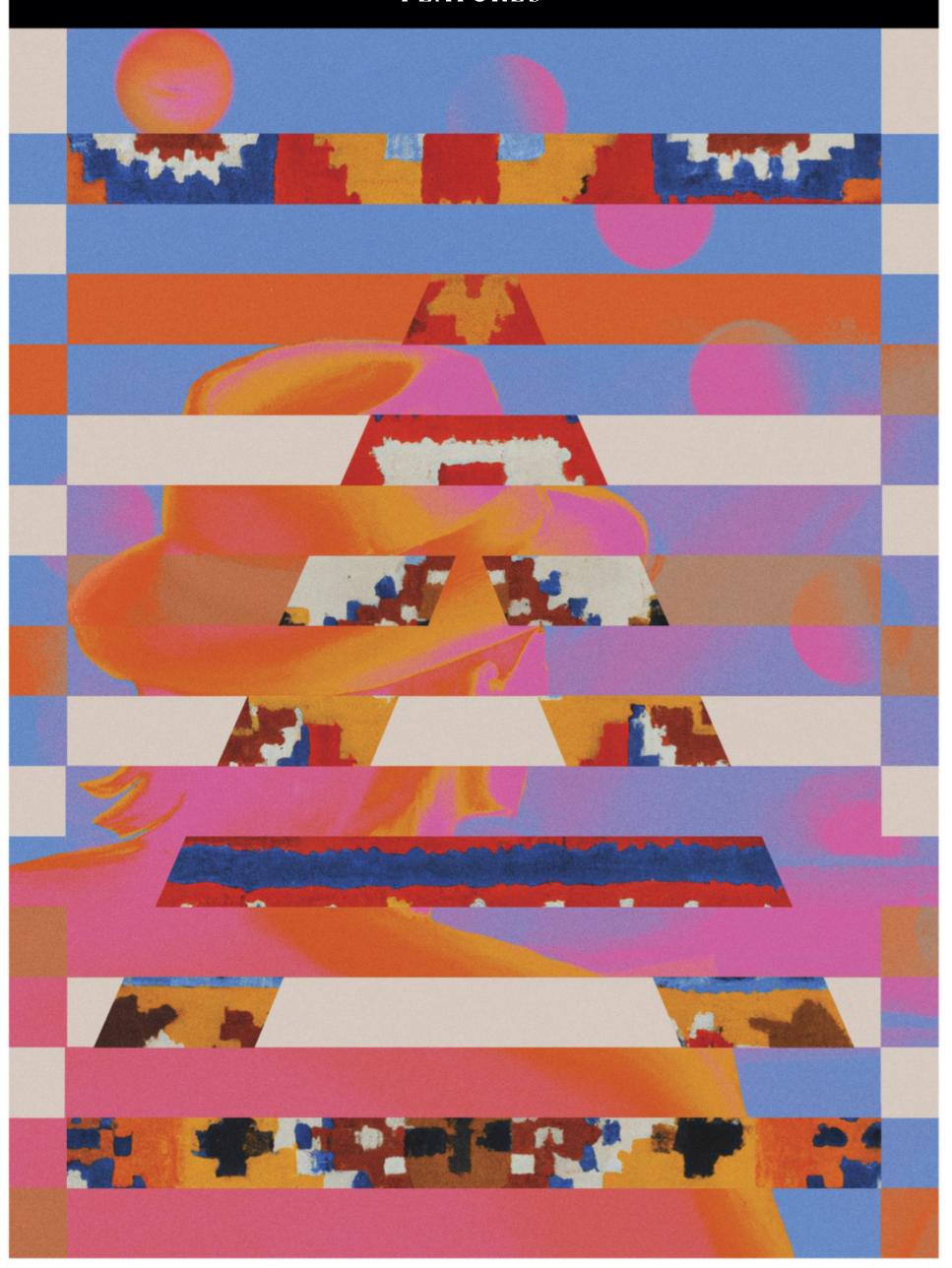
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### **FEATURES**









"Yalla, yalla!" Sari Husseini called out in Arabic. "Let's go!"

With 10 miles of trail ahead, we pedaled away from Jebel es Saffaha, a mountain in southern Jordan with a long narrow ridge leading to its summit. To the west, the Arabah Valley cut a swath next to the Israel-Jordan border. To the east, the Ard as Sawwan Desert unfolded into a shimmering haze toward Saudi Arabia.

In the spring of 2022, photographer Kari Medig and I set off with our mountain bikes, a pickup truck, and our guide, Sari, to ride on sections of the Jordan Trail, a recently established 420-mile hiking route—with plenty of parallel biking paths—that traverses the length of the country. Sari, who owns the Amman-based company Cycling Jordan, rode with us, and a driver shuttled us between sections of the trail in his truck. We started our journey in the hilltop village of Umm Qais in the forested northwest and 10 days later ended in the Red Sea port city of Aqaba.

The Jordan Trail officially opened in 2017, after two years of work linking ancient trade routes and footpaths. The ambition is to support rural economies and encourage travelers to explore the nation's diverse landscapes. "I love the fact that the Jordan Trail connects the country north to south, like a bridge or human highway, connecting villages, building relationships," Wael Sabanekh, a Jordan Trail Association founding member, told me. "I see the trail as a way to preserve our nature and grow it instead of demolishing it to build another holiday

residence or another highway or street."

For thousands of years, the land now known as Jordan was the crucible of trade in the biblical world. The country is layered with the monuments of Islamic kings, Roman conquerors, Crusaders, Ottoman rulers, and others. Jordan gained independence from British colonial rule in 1946.

As we rode along the trail, what struck Kari and me most was the warmth and openness of Jordanians we encountered on the way. Close to Siq al-Barid, also known as Little Petra, we happened upon a group of men celebrating Eid al-Fitr, the holiday marking the end of Ramadan, and we made an impromptu stop.

The group included, among others, an imam who was quick to laugh. As if by magic, one of the men coaxed flames from a handful of twigs, arranged rocks around it, and put a kettle on for tea.

Tea led to a generous invitation for a late-afternoon lunch. Kari and I took off our bike helmets and joined the men on a red blanket spread on the ground next to two SUVs parked at angles to block the wind.

Two hours later, Sari rose from the ground where a dozen of us sat cross-legged. Light was fading.

"Shukran," he said, holding his right hand to his heart, thanking our trailside hosts. Bellies—and hearts—full, we hopped back onto our mountain bikes and rode on through a rocky landscape glowing golden in the early evening light.

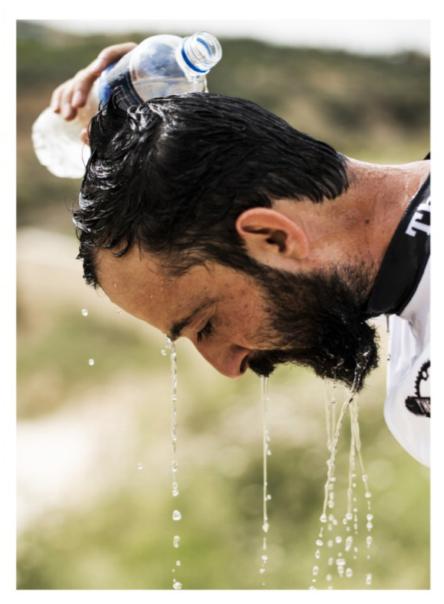
Previous page: One morning, before the sun rose too high, Kari and I played around with our mountain bikes on the grippy sandstone of Wadi Rum, the surreal desert situated along the southeastern border between Jordan and Saudi Arabia.

Before it grew into the modern capital of 4 million people, Amman was a city of seven hills. The hilltop archaelogical site of Jabal al-Qala'a affords a bird's-eye view of old Amman's narrow streets. It is rich with ruins, including the Temple of Hercules, pictured here.













Clockwise from top left: Visitors can live like a Bedouin—well, sort of—at Martian Desert Camp in Wadi Rum, where they can walk on silky sand, share communal meals, and sleep in versions of traditional Bedouin tents; guide Sari Husseini cools off on the trail; travelers visit the ruins of Umm ar-Rasas, built by the Romans as a military fortress during the 3rd century; hospitality is an art in Jordan, where breaking bread with strangers could mean sharing a platter of spicy chicken and rice (as pictured), fresh pomegranate juice, or maqluba (a slowly simmered dish of rice, chicken, potatoes, and vegetables served inverted on a plate).

### How to Experience Jordan

Royal Jordanian Airlines offers direct flights to Amman from Chicago's O'Hare International and New York's John F. Kennedy airports, while United Airlines operates a nonstop flight from Dulles International near Washington, D.C.

Spring and fall are the best seasons to visit. With daytime temperatures reaching the low 80s and cool nights in the 60s, the weather is perfect for visiting historic sites and exploring the Jordan Trail.

The trail remains a work in progress. Trail improvements are ongoing, as are efforts to expand rural tourism in and around the 75 communities the route passes through, including guide training and the development of homestay opportunities for hikers. For the truly ambitious, the Jordan Trail Association hosts an annual thru-hike every October, a nearly 40-day

trek that starts at \$4,500 and includes guides, all meals and accommodation, transfers from Amman, and a support vehicle.

Experience Jordan
Adventures runs a wide
range of guided excursions, such as a one-day
hike around Umm Qais
and the Roman ruins
of Gadara (starting at \$175
per person including
lunch with a local family).
A nine-day adventure
features hiking a scenic
section of the Jordan
Trail from Dana to Petra,

swimming in the Dead Sea, and visiting the otherworldly landscape of Wadi Rum (starting at \$1,495 per person). The company also offers the custom Best of the Jordan Bike Trail, a nine-day cycling trip starting at \$300 per day for the luxury option. For travelers looking to experience a lesser known side of Amman, consider joining Diana Sarhan, who leads walking tours with her company Dtour, through Jabal al-Weibdeh, the fascinating bohemian neighborhood where Christianity and Islam intermingle and liberal attitudes prevail. It's full of treasures such as Darat al Funun, a gallery located in a terraced 1920s villa, and other attractions, including cafés and the Beit Sitti cooking school, where travelers can learn to make Jordanian dishes.



Jordan's population has swelled in the past decade, with people fleeing conflict in neighboring Syria and Palestine. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, some 675,000 Syrian refugees and more than 2 million Palestinians are living in Jordan. While passing through Deir Alla, a city on the Jordan Valley Highway, we met this young boy joyfully pedaling in circles in a gas station parking lot and sporting the flag of Palestine on his elongated bicycle.



This page: Archaeologists using radiocarbon dating believe camels were first domesticated on the Arabian Peninsula sometime around 1000 B.C.E. In the deserts of southern Jordan, camels transported goods in great caravans that traveled the spice trade routes and enriched the city of Petra. They are still used as pack animals today.

Opposite page: Many Bedouins retain a semi-nomadic existence, living in tents with their families and tending livestock on the land. Ahmad Saideen (pictured), owner of Martian Desert Camp, has used his heritage and resources to develop a thriving tourism business around the culture and landscape of Wadi Rum.









It was a fine spring evening in New York City, and the Goldberg brothers were at an event to consider the proposition of traveling to space. They had tippled a few cocktails, their mood was convivial, and, from their posture of repose on the fifth floor of the private club Zero Bond, the notion sounded very tempting. "The idea of being able to see the world from afar is pretty interesting," Eric Goldberg said. "I do think there is an appeal to it," Mike agreed. "Going to space is fucking cool. I don't want to sound obnoxious, but you can go to a lot of places on Earth—not everybody gets to go to space."

It wasn't just the exclusivity of spacegoing that enthralled them, though. The real allure was the possibility of transcendence. As though describing a hallucinogenic trip, the terms used by explorers and astronauts to recount reaching the limits of the atmosphere depict something like experiencing the sublime. "I floated out of my seat and over to the window, and there was the coast of Africa coming up over the horizon," the former astronaut Jeffrey Hoffman told me by phone a few weeks after the Zero Bond event. "I saw the curvature of the Earth and the thin blue line of the atmosphere. You're looking back at Earth from an environment that doesn't support any life. That's when I really started to appreciate how wonderful Earth is."

What Hoffman described is what has been called the Overview Effect, a phenomenon chronicled by astronauts to describe a sudden sense of awe or divine recognition that they feel when they depart from the planet and then turn and look back at it: a lump of rock spinning through the universe distinguished by its protective shroud of exhalations—the cumulative effect of the living enabling life.

Teasing this kind of cognitive convulsion has become a key selling point in the growing space tourism industry, led by firms founded by Richard Branson, Jeff Bezos, and Elon Musk and joined by an ever-expanding number of smaller companies offering space experiences. "Will leaving Earth bring you closer to it?" asks a Virgin Galactic

advertisement. Blue Origin declares on its website that the view of Earth from space is "life changing." SpaceX quotes the late NASA astronaut Sally Ride saying her perspective on the planet from above made her appreciate the fragility of human life.

These three companies, founded by technologists with space ambitions that extend far beyond short commercial flights for tourists, have taken dozens of people to space in the past couple of years, spearheading what is forecast to be a \$3 billion industry within the decade. In September 2021, the first all-civilian flight launched into orbit, followed by a Japanese billionaire's self-funded trip to the International Space Station (ISS); the same billionaire contracted SpaceX for the first civilian moon mission, slated for 2023. Earlier this year, in April, a crew of wealthy businessmen also visited the ISS on a flight coordinated by SpaceX and another company, Axiom Space. Extrapolating from the ticket prices that have been made public, the average cost for these trips to the ISS is more than \$50 million per passenger. Effectively, that makes visiting the ISS one of the most exclusive journeys available.

There are cheaper options for obtaining the Overview Effect, including staying in suborbital flight. (Orbital flights, like those to the ISS, reach velocities that allow them to escape the gravitational pull of the planet and encircle it; suborbital flights, like those proffered by Blue Origin and Virgin Galactic, reach space for a few moments, then return to Earth.) But the Goldbergs were at Zero Bond to consider a third option, established by two of the original members of the eight-person crew that inhabited Biosphere 2, a fantastical 1990s project to advance space travel by creating a closed ecological system in the Arizona desert.

Space Perspective, founded in 2019 by wife-and-husband duo Jane Poynter and Taber MacCallum, offers flights in a capsule attached to a hot-air balloon that are set to launch in 2024. The balloon ascends to a height of 20 miles above the planet, far short of the 62-mile-high Kármán line, recognized by the Fédération Aéronautique Internationale as the boundary between Earth's atmosphere and space, but high enough to see partial curvature, when the Earth's horizon begins to reveal its roundness. It is billed as the first luxury spaceflight experience. The deep leather seats, soft lighting, and immaculately polite bartender at Zero Bond were no accident—they gestured at the kind of adventure Space Perspective intends to offer. This is an image of space travel not as a spartan excursion into a pitiless void but as a kind of transcendental cocktail party in the sky.

As a carbon-neutral company requiring almost none of the fossil fuels for its trips that rocket launchers rely on, Space Perspective promises something else, too: exoneration from the sticky moral problems most commonly associated with space tourism. A rocket launch can burn 11,000 gallons of fossil fuel per second during liftoff, and a space shuttle takes around eight and a half minutes to reach orbit. Between the environmental cost and the astronomical price of a ticket—set against the backdrop of planetary climate breakdown and the erosion of basic social protections—some of the civilians paying millions to rocket into space over the past year haven't seemed much like travelers in search of sublimity; to people like the Goldbergs, they've seemed treacherously out of touch. Instead of a spiritual seeker on a righteous quest for nirvana, a certain kind of space tourist has appeared more like a modern-day Orpheus, who, in the instant that he peers behind him for reassurance from the most beautiful sight imaginable, dooms himself to live without it for eternity.





Jane Poynter, 60, still believes in the transformative power of sending civilians to space, even if she's trying to do things a little differently. Before her event at Zero Bond, I met her at the Rose Center for Earth and Space at the American Museum of Natural History on Manhattan's Upper West Side, where, instead of looking at simulations of planets, we sat on a bench in the dark and talked in too-loud-for-museum voices about the urge to go to space. Poynter was 29 when she sealed herself inside Biosphere 2 for two years to see whether the ecosystem she and others had built, with financing from the nephew of a Texas oil tycoon, could sustain human life. The experiment proved fraught, weighted by the scope of its own ambition, but Poynter and her crewmates saw their mission through, despite hunger and oxygen deprivation.

While living in Biosphere 2, Poynter started the Paragon Space Development Corporation, her first space exploration company, with MacCallum and a third collaborator, Grant Anderson. The trio and their researchers at the company

developed life support tools and other systems for NASA; they also advised Elon Musk while he was establishing SpaceX. In 2011, Poynter and MacCallum were contacted by a Google engineer named Alan Eustace who wanted to break the record for the world's highest skydive. Along with two other parties, they created a space suit that would replace the need for a pressurized capsule—which skydivers who jump from great heights often use for the ride up—and sent Eustace to a record-

breaking altitude of 135,890 feet using an age-old technology: a balloon.

That became the seed of a company called World View, founded by Poynter and MacCallum, which promised to take tourists to the edge of space via balloon. Those journeys never materialized, and Poynter and MacCallum eventually left World View and started Space Perspective three years ago. Poynter sees the company's mission as one that is in step with the other spacefaring ventures: to make the experience of visiting space accessible to more people, whether they're in it for the Overview Effect, for the exclusivity, to live out astronaut fantasies, or to be part of something that feels like the future. "Here's the way to think about space travel," she told me. "Aviation, in the beginning, was for wealthy people and governments. Now, people rely on it for delivery, for bringing the family closer—it's affecting so much of our lives. The same will be true of space travel."

Using balloons to reach such heights isn't unprecedented. Aeronauts—the balloon-piloting explorers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries—became heroes (or they perished) as they traveled to elevations unknown to science; in 1862, two British aeronauts reached an estimated 37,000 feet, the upper end of a modern airplane's cruising altitude, to help advance studies on the atmosphere. MacCallum's father, an astrophysicist, used balloons to send telescopes to space—one of the precedents that prompted MacCallum and Poynter to explore the same technology for Eustace's flight and then for Space Perspective. Today, balloons are deployed without human passengers to gather meteorological data and to study the effects of radiation on equipment and astronauts. NASA has had an office devoted to ballooning for more than 30 years.

One of Space Perspective's main talking points is that the history of ballooning and the frequency of scientific telescope and other research launches show that the technology is established, making it a safe way to travel to space. Many research balloons use light gases like hydrogen and helium, leaving an opening at the bottom for excess to escape and allowing them to reach higher altitudes than traditional hot-air balloons. The research balloons can reach roughly 22 miles above the Earth, expanding to the size of a football stadium when fully inflated, large enough to contain the Statue of Liberty. This will also be the case with the Space Perspective balloons—buoyed primarily by hydrogen, due to a worldwide helium shortage—that lift its passenger capsules. (Hydrogen also powered the infamous *Hindenburg* airship, but as Poynter is quick to point out, that vessel wasn't a balloon.) Since the flights won't reach zero gravity, passengers won't need training or specialized gear such as

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in the sky.

helmets or oxygen masks, and they'll be able to walk around the capsule after liftoff.

But high-altitude ballooning is still new in the field of passenger travel, and a balloon on a test flight for World View exploded during liftoff in 2017. (No one was seriously injured.) Poynter believes that the method is safe, with built-in redundancies, and

Space Perspective isn't the only company trying to develop the technology; its competitors include World View and EOS-X Space, a European space ballooning company. If anything, the trips are designed to be the opposite of fear inducing: Passengers will ascend slowly for two hours, spend another two hours hovering over Florida and the Bahamas (where they can look down and see the thin blue line of the atmosphere and the waters of the Atlantic), and descend for a final two hours before splashing down in the

# The (New) Space Race SPACEX Space travel is all extremes: The

Space travel is all extremes: The prices are high; the minutes of floating can be few. And with these three billionaire-backed companies leading the way, business is booming.

#### BLUE ORIGIN

Founded in 2000 by Amazon Executive Chair Jeff Bezos, Blue Origin launches travelers on 11-minute jaunts. Previous customers include wealthy business executives and *Star Trek*'s William Shatner.

Prep: Two days of training include touring the New Shepard rocket, experiencing launch simulations, and learning to conduct oneself in zero gravity.

Price: Bezos has kept the cost for rides on the reusable rocket under wraps. In an auction for its first crewed flight in July 2021, the winning bid was \$28 million for a single rider.

**Experience:** Sixty-two miles above Earth, passengers enjoy a few minutes of floating weightlessly while peering out

of their own windows (nearly 43 by 29 inches, the biggest on the market) before the capsule glides back down to the desert.

Did You Know? New Shepard climbs just above the Kármán line, considered the start of space by the leading international record-keeping organization Fédération Aéronautique Internationale.

Led by tech magnate Elon Musk, SpaceX offers the only tours into orbit. Just eight people—lucky individuals, über-rich businesspeople, and a retired astronaut among them—have traveled with SpaceX. For these tours, the company uses the same rocket, Falcon 9, and gumdrop-shaped spacecraft, the Dragon, that it does to shuttle NASA astronauts to the International Space Station (ISS).

**Prep:** One crew underwent months of centrifuge spins, fighter jet flights, launch and re-entry rehearsals, and even climbed snowy Mount Rainier for team bonding.



**Did You Know?** Astronauts say SpaceX's launch brings long, rough g-forces, thrusting about 4.5 times Earth's gravity onto passengers.

return to Earth was delayed

ended with a splash into the

by weather. Both journeys

Atlantic Ocean.

spaceplane, which can function in Earth's atmosphere and outer space. As with any flight, the journey starts on a runway. The spaceplane piggybacks on another plane to 50,000 feet before the rocket ignites and the craft ascends.

Armour space suits and boots.

**Price:** \$450,000

**Experience:** The 90-minute flight peaks at an elevation of around 53 miles: below the Kármán line, but past the 50-mile mark that NASA and the Federal Aviation Administration consider the start of space. Passengers

Did You Know? In 2019, Beth Moses, Virgin Galactic's Chief Astronaut Instructor, became the first woman to fly to space on a commercial vehicle. In July 2021, she made a second trip aboard the same vessel.

Gulf of Mexico. "We're so used to thinking of spaceflight as high g's, space suits, and the uncomfortable white utilitarian interiors of the capsule, and we said, 'To hell with all of that,'" Poynter told the crowd at Zero Bond. "This technology allows us to offer this incredibly gentle flight. You go into space at 12 miles an hour; it's silent when it launches. It's graceful."

Operating out of the Kennedy Space Center in Florida, Poynter and her team developed the 200-square-foot vessel—a prototype has already been sent on unmanned test journeys—intended to capture this new vision of a space experience, with configurable seating facing nearly floor-length windows. In renderings, tropical fronds and tiny herb gardens are interspersed among deep lounge chairs outfitted with drink trays. Martini shakers sit next to champagne chilling in a bucket of ice.

A few months before their second round of fundraising, which pulled in \$17 million last May after an initial round had raised more than \$40 million, Space Perspective announced that Miami restaurateur David Grutman would consult on its hospitality experience. Poynter describes each flight as bespoke to the preferences of the eight passengers on board, with menus, music, and lighting customized to specific tastes. At \$125,000 per ticket for a six-hour flight, the price is clearly geared toward a certain clientele, but the cost is significantly less than flying with Blue Origin or SpaceX. And even though few people I spoke with at the Zero Bond event left committed to Space Perspective that evening, enthusiasm is there: As of August 2022, almost 900 tickets for flights have been purchased. Poynter and MacCallum soon noticed that half the tickets sold were to groups that booked the entire capsule, which is when they realized that whatever kind of experience nosing toward outer space may be, it's one that people want to share.



Whether the great undertaking of space travel for its metaphysical revelations can outweigh its material waste is a question of how to measure purpose. There are no hard statistics on the degree to which people who experience the Overview Effect become committed environmentalists, and it certainly isn't clear whether a lifetime of environmental advocacy can compensate for the emissions of some spaceflights. That's obviously not the point of missions operated by astronauts who are seeking to gather data and expand humanity's understanding of the universe. But for many of the multiplying number of

journeys to space that are tailored to transport a tourist, the meaning of these flights is measured in large part by personal and existential transformation.

Dr. Deana Weibel, a cultural anthropologist and professor at Michigan's Grand Valley State University who has studied the effect of space travel and the ways it is described—often in religious terms—has observed that the people drawn to space exploration often understand their lives to be part of a greater destiny. For those to whom space travel is important, tourism may be a poor term to capture what might be better called a pilgrimage.

"In Islam and Christianity and to some extent Judaism, there is an association between God and the heavens, with there being things like angels above us," Weibel told me when we spoke by phone in mid-July. "There's this idea of a great large power, and whether you're speaking in religious terms or astronomical or astrophysics terms, it's up there. And maybe you can understand it better if you go there."

Famously, actor William Shatner told Jeff Bezos after a trip on a Blue Origin flight that seeing space was like seeing death. "There's the blue down there, and the black up there. . . . Is that death? Is that the way death is?" Shatner said. Viewing the thinness of the atmosphere protecting life on Earth against the vastness of the universe, Shatner was struck by how fragile a sheath constitutes the difference between human existence and the lack of it.

If space tourism flourishes, the shape that it takes will determine the contours of life to come. Space Perspective and other ballooning operations—as well as companies such as Blue Origin using alternative fuel, and VR startups trying to re-create the Overview Effect without any travel at all—seem to thread the needle between accounting for the consequences of space travel and making the sublime attainable.

Poynter believes she felt this wonder during her two years in Biosphere 2. "We had the most extraordinary experience of really understanding what it is to live in a finite place," she told me. "We could see the edges of our world, and we were breathing the same oxygen. Our CO2 was making the plants around us. . . . There was this incredible chemical dance that was going on, clearly embedded in our biosphere."

In her Space Perspective pitch, Poynter talks about this recognition often, citing the shift that was transformational in her own life, even though it was very much of this planet. It might be strikingly palpable to voyagers 20 miles above the surface of the Earth, but Poynter found it on Earth, too, just 30 miles outside of Tucson, Arizona, down a winding road in the Sonoran Desert, underneath a ragged shard of mountains that turns purple on those evenings when the sinking sun sets the sky on fire.

Writer Jessica Camille Aguirre is profiled on page 16. This is her first story for AFAR.



BY EMMA JOHN



MILES,



BRITISH
WRITER LEFT
ADRIFT
BY BREXIT,
A CROSSCONTINENTAL
TRAIN TRIP
MIGHT
BE THE BEST
WAY TO
RECONNECT

WITH HER

**EUROPEAN** 

NEIGHBORS.

FOR ONE

GRAPHS BY FELIX BRÜGGEMANN

PHOTO



#### DEPARTURE

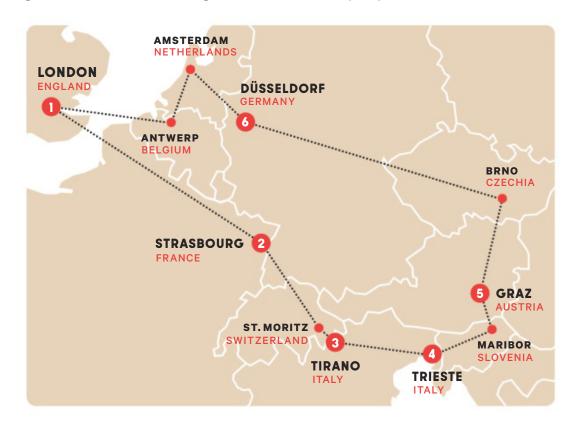
### LONDON, ENGLAND

**LONDON ST. PANCRAS** is quiet this morning. The cavernous railway station is empty of commuters, its coffee shops shuttered. I often travel from here—it's a mere 10-minute bicycle ride from my home—though I rarely see it this early. But then again, I'm rarely embarking on such a long trip.

Usually, I'd be at this station to take a train to the suburbs or the coast. Today, I fold in with the passengers queuing to take the high-speed Eurostar trains that will whisk us from the U.K. to Europe. I've joined them because I am lost-not physically, just philosophically. Six years after the referendum, I still haven't come to terms with Brexit. As a Brit, when my country voted to leave the European Union, I was shocked and furious, bereft at losing the freedoms of work and travel, not to mention the economic and political stability that membership provided. For a long while, I was convinced that someone in power would reverse our fate. Eventually, anger and denial gave way to the more helpless stages of grief. I mourned something I couldn't fully articulate—a symbol of fraternity, a shared hopefulness in a greater good. Joni Mitchell was right: *You don't know what you've got 'til it's gone.* 

The forced removal of my European citizenship only made me less satisfied with my British one, and as soon as pandemic-easing allowed, I hunted for a way to reconnect with the continent that remained—geographically, if not politically—my home address. Trains were the obvious option. And I liked the idea of a trip that wasn't just environmentally sustainable but also seamless, without the constant interruptions of airports and security checks. Europe's interconnected rail networks are, after all, one of the triumphs of cross-border thinking that Britain has decided to opt out of, and would be, I thought, the quickest way to find connection on the ground.

So, I came up with a grand tour: a 25-day, nine-country journey that would begin and end in London—and, hopefully, help me rediscover what it means to be European, even if I'm not, officially, anymore.





From left:
Strasbourg's
medieval
center;
picnickers
on the city's
riverfront.
Previous
page: The
St. Moritz
train station.





### Nº1 LONDON



# STRASBOURG, FRANCE

401 MILES

on a tourist boat navigating the canals of France's Alsatian capital, Strasbourg. There is, perhaps, no more quintessentially European city. With only the Rhine separating it from Germany, Strasbourg spent centuries being claimed by rulers of various domains. It has been independent, German, French, German again, French again—no wonder it has learned to embrace its European identity. So much so that it is now an official capital of Europe, housing a number of EU institutions, which is one of the reasons I've made

it my first stop. I'm also convinced that border cities (such as Strasbourg) will help me get a sense of Europe as a continent, rather than just a collection of individual nations. That these cities will help me embrace both the arbitrariness of borders and how seriously we take them.

Facts tumble out of the boat's speakers, as jumbled and colorful as the architecture that surrounds me. I learn that evidence of some of Europe's ruling peoples—stretching from the Holy Roman Empire of the early 10th century to the Napoleonic one of the 19th—has piled up on the city's banks. Strasbourg's medieval heart is full of half-timbered houses, their vertiginous roofs lined up like so many bottles of riesling, one of the region's most famous wines.

In 1681, France's Louis XIV fancied Alsace as a garden and annexed it. Following the Siege of Strasbourg in 1870, which leveled entire blocks, came the dramatic style change of Neustadt, with its imposing, neoclassical buildings. Shortly after, in 1872, the city's new ruler, Kaiser Wilhelm II, rebuilt government departments and the University of Strasbourg to "Germanize" his newest subjects after their defeat by the Prussians.

It wasn't the last time Alsatians were caught in conflicts between France and Germany. In the Place de la République is a statue of a mother holding her two dying sons, one facing Germany, the other facing France. And while it took time for the population to heal from the effect of two World Wars, the city now manifests a geography of reconciliation.

The boat putters past some post-war housing projects, and then with a glint, Strasbourg's most recent identity reveals itself. Next to the river sits the great glass sweep of the European Parliament. Once a month, it brims with delegates seeking a modern, post-territorial future for the continent. It's empty today—just a symbolic monument to an inscrutable ideal that I long to grasp.

Switzerland's Glacier Express, which must squeeze through the Alps, is known as the "slowest express train in the world."

Nº2
STRASBOURG

TIRANO,
ITALY

362

MILES

BACK AT STRASBOURG'S train station a few days later, I'm ready for the next leg: a 72-hour blitz across Switzerland aboard two of Europe's most spectacular trains, the Glacier Express and the Bernina Express. Switzerland is at the geographic heart of Europe while abstaining from its political community, which can make it seem, to outsiders like me, a rather detached nation. But the country is also dealing with its own EU issues. (Recent talks over the possibility of the country joining the union have been as rocky as the Swiss Alps.) Switzerland, of course, also has an excellent train system, and if you want to get from northeastern France to Italy, you can't avoid a crossing.

After an hour, we've hopped across the French border and the landscape turns instantly Swiss. Brown-and-white cows ruminate in the meadows; houses with chalet roofs are strewn as if someone had absent-mindedly dropped them there. Even the national characteristic of polite efficiency kicks in: When I change trains in Basel, the conductor apologizes for our three-minute-late arrival and assures us that every connecting service has been held.

Aboard the Glacier Express the following morning, I watch the Alps pass by in dramatic gasps. Yesterday, the land undulated gently in evergrowing waves, until tree-covered slopes hovered above us. Today, low

clouds obscure the soaring peaks. We enter the Gotthard Base Tunnel and don't emerge until 20 minutes later. When I look back, I see the mountains folding into each other, like a deck of cards midshuffle, and the horizon disappearing as snow and cloud merge.

It's an unusually holistic experience, taking an Alpine train, with its curved observation roofs and windows placing you insistently in the picture. As we climb through Oberalp Pass, the scenery envelops me until we are finally lifted above the cloud-and-snow line. At the peak, looking down, I see a ribbon of blue that marks the icy beginnings of the Rhine River. On the heels of the architectural density of Strasbourg, the train feels like a welcome bubble a hushed sanctuary in which to drop concerns of identity, borders, and politics, and simply savor the beauty of the continent.

Maybe that's why the follow-up journey, the very next day, catches me in the solar plexus. Climbing onto the gleaming Swiss locomotive, which will descend nearly 6,000 feet to drop me in the northern Italian border town of Tirano, I can't help but wonder how this second Alpine journey could live up to what I've witnessed.

And yet the Bernina Express is somehow more dazzling and more confronting. Streams trickle so close to the windows, I feel I could reach out and touch them. The light reflected from the Morteratsch Glacier invades my eyes and my brain; the magnitude of the mountains is overwhelming. As the train begins its steep slope down to the Poschiavo Valley, I find myself suppressing sudden sobs.

Embarrassed, I turn my face to the window. Then I hear a sniffle and realize the woman in the opposite seat is having a moment too. It turns out she's French Swiss and speaks perfect English. I tell her I'm surprised she's so affected by the mountains, given that she lives with them. "I've never seen them like this before," she tells me.

Seeing home with a fresh perspective—that's what I've wanted from this trip. This small but unexpectedly moving encounter with a stranger feels like a positive omen. We sit in companionable silence, eyes drying.







177 MILES

THERE IS TIME in my schedule for a single day in tiny Tirano, to visit its medieval shrines and modern vine-yards, and then I'm back on the train, continuing east to Trieste, arguably the least Italian part of Italy.

It might be one of the birthplaces of Western civilization, but Italy as a unified country wasn't founded until 1861, and Trieste's identity as an Italian city is even less established. Though it was handed to Italy as part of the 1915 Treaty of London, Trieste's formative years came during the 19th century, when it was the primary seaport for the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Evidence of its Hapsburg heyday is all around, from the monumental

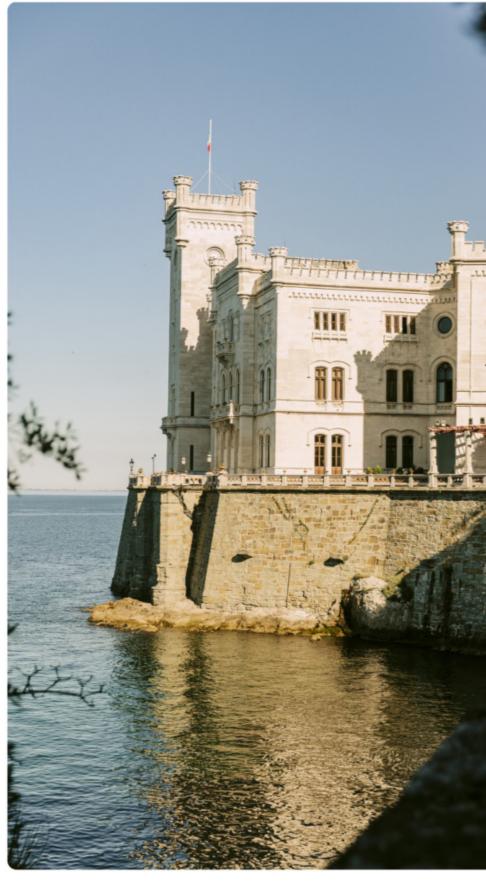
squares and grandiose statues to the elegant cafés where people actually take the time to sit down and drink their espresso.

After a couple of days in the city, I'm enamored with the Viennese-style coffeehouses and their air of cultural salons. On my second night in town, I discover the Caffè San Marco. I've been lured in by its bookshop and tempted by its dinner menu; within minutes, I've also been ambushed by its charismatic owner, Alexandros Delithanassis. He is entertaining several regulars and soon, they have all migrated to my table. Even the chef quits the kitchen to join the discussion of literature, politics, and who is

going to win the upcoming Eurovision Song Contest.

They translate for me from their Triestine dialect, a sort of Venetian Italian sprinkled with vocabulary from many nearby areas, including Germany and the Balkans (the Slovenian border is fewer than 10 miles away). As a port city, Trieste was a multicultural meeting point, and the religious tolerance extended to its citizens up until the early 20th century was unique for Europe. Hence the gold dome and bell towers of the Serbian Orthodox church and the white towers of the Greek one, not to mention the vast synagogue, one of the continent's largest. Alexandros, increasingly animated

From left:
Alexandros
Delithanassis,
the owner
of Trieste's
Caffè San
Marco;
the city's
Miramare
Castle.





by both wine and anti–Ukrainian War sentiment, is pointing at his friends, elucidating their ethnicities. "Serbian! Slovenian! Bosnian! Greek!" He moves my cutlery so he can include the table in his fervent gestures. "When we speak in dialect, we are free!"

Freedom is still a painful subject here, however, as is Italian nationalism. One of the regulars, Tomaž, is the retired headmaster of a Slovenianlanguage high school in Trieste; he explains that the city used to have the highest density of Slovenian people in the world. Then, in the 1920s, shortly after Trieste became part of Italy, the Fascists moved in and persecuted them, burning down the Slovene National Hall, banning their language from being spoken, and purging Slavs from government jobs. Nor were outrages perpetrated on one side alone; there are pits in the hills around Trieste believed to contain the bodies of hundreds of opponents of the Yugoslav Communist Partisan army, who occupied Trieste for 40 days at the end of World War II. Various groups have resisted their uncovering. The truth, it seems, is too painful to face.

Tomaž's Slovenian wife, Nadiya, whose parents experienced oppression, is tired of talking about it all. "Trieste is the epitome of the nonsense of war," she says. From the table, there's a cry of "Brava!" But this is a place to speak of difficult things, to wrestle with the world as it is, not just as we would like it to be. Alexandros is deeply passionate about reviving Trieste's spirit of emancipation, of tolerance and welcome, beneath these vaulted ceilings, which have long made space for the loftiest thoughts and ideals. "The coffee beans make the coffee," he cries, "but the coffeehouse makes the democracy!"

And so the joyfully raucous conversation continues until the small hours, not least because another bottle of wine magically appears whenever anyone suggests leaving. Closing time means nothing, except an excuse to put on Balkan folk tunes. We get up from the table, throw our arms over each others' shoulders, cry opa!, and try to avoid dancing on our neighbors' toes.

# Nº4 TRIESTE (I) GRAZ, AUSTRIA

146 MILES

BUT THIS IS

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WITH THE

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AS THE TRAIN CHUGS out of Trieste a few days later, it winds around the Adriatic Sea, past the fairy-tale white turrets of Miramare Castle and mussel beds winking by the shore. Carving our way inland across the Karst Plateau, I remember a story one of my new friends told me in the café. On a recent hike through these wooded hills, she had stopped in a village whose river marked the edge of Italian territory. One of the residents told her that, in the early part of the 20th century, locals used to be afraid to cross the bridge to the Slovenian side. They had been taught to believe that side was dangerous, even though everyone had friends and even family living there.

Hard borders, soft borders, open borders. Europe's geography may have been determined by its wars, but you can't understand it solely through lines on a map. The ink refuses to stay where you put it; it bleeds across the page, just as people have roamed and traded across the continent, have marched, or fled, or found new homes. I had thought, naively, that when I picked a route through Maribor, Graz, and Vienna, I was following my own whim. I wasn't, of course. I was following an old and well-worn trading route, one that had carried Trieste's cargo back to its Austrian rulers for hundreds of years. Its road was superseded by a railway in the mid-1800s—the very line that now smooths my path and determines my destinations.

I speed through Ljubljana, often admiringly described as one of Europe's most easygoing capitals, and spend a night in Slovenia's second-largest city, Maribor, which is even more chill. Graz, an hour north, proves to be the inverse of Trieste—

From left:
The Rossian
cafè in Graz;
the city's buildings are a mix
of Renaissance
and baroque
architecture.



an Austrian city that wishes it were Italian, where the pizza is as good as the schnitzel. Perhaps this is why I keep accidentally wishing people buongiorno instead of grüß gott. Perhaps not. I've been fumbling through a series of inappropriate greetings and mispronounced apologies throughout the trip, saying por favor to Italian waiters and danke-ing Slovenian ticket collectors. Nothing during this trip makes me feel more insecure than my linguistic incompetence, because



everywhere I arrive, I am met with fluent, smiling English and the shaming suspicion that it is quite possibly my interlocutor's third language.

On my second day in Graz, I take a food tour-this is Austria's culinary capital, after all, thanks to the Mediterranean-influenced climate of the surrounding countryside—and establish a rapport with my guide, David, over pumpkin seed-oil ice cream. He invites me to a house party his friends are throwing to watch the finals of the Eurovision Song Contest. The original reality pop tournament, Eurovision has taken over our TV scheduling once a year since 1956, sucking nearly every European into its orbit. Think The X Factor, but with more outré costumes and realtime geopolitical consequences.

In a tenement apartment not far from Graz's university, a dozen of

HARD BORDERS,
SOFT BORDERS, OPEN
BORDERS. EUROPE'S
GEOGRAPHY MAY
HAVE BEEN DETERMINED
BY ITS WARS, BUT
YOU CAN'T UNDERSTAND
IT SOLELY THROUGH
LINES ON A MAP.



us crowd onto the upstairs landing where the hosts have set up a projector, along with every chair and beanbag seat they own. Eurovision has always been a festive event, but since each country is judged by its peers, it's also an oddly diplomatic one, a way to gauge the mood of the nations and how they feel about each other. The U.K. traditionally performs badly—we've come in last five times in the past two decades, and last year managed to score not a single point. That's out of a possible 912.

I squeeze onto a two-person sofa with a couple who kindly explain the non-English lyrics for me. Giacomo is from Italy and René from Austria, so between us we have several horses in the race; our appreciation becomes more vociferous the more acts perform and the more plum schnapps we drink. I listen enviously as they chat

away in any of four languages that suit their need. Perhaps it is pity for my monolingual state that prompts them to ask me what Norway's song is about—it's in English, with the unfathomable title "Give That Wolf a Banana"—but I'm thrilled to be able to contribute to the discussion.

The U.K.'s entry is a solo artist with long hair and a big TikTok following, and he sings a slightly Bowieesque number about going into space. It's, you know, fine. "He's got a good voice!" Giacomo says, which is a far warmer response than I expected or feel it deserves. "I love his beard," René says. I'm surprised when they bring up Brexit—I have been nervous to mention it in polite company on my trip, given how rudely I consider my country to have behaved throughout the process, and I had assumed that Europe felt well rid of us Brits by now. And yet the tone here is not of contempt, but of sorrow. Giacomo says he was so devastated, he cried. "We couldn't believe it," René says. "Britain has been such a fundamental part of Europe's history, and vice versa. It's a huge loss for all of us."

My own reaction had been to hurl cushions around the room in impotent fury. Today, it's heartwarming to bond with Europeans over something intended to break us apart. I tell them how much I regret the lapse of my schoolgirl French, and I pledge, with a passion that surprises me, to start working on it immediately. Travel aside, it has become obvious to me that the best way to maintain my European connection—to defy the dissolution of common interest and shared heritage that Brexit represented—is to be able to communicate freely in a language that's not my own.

The votes come in. We toast each others' successes with more schnapps and discover that my TikTok Brit has done surprisingly well. He ends up coming second behind the performer from Ukraine, whose popular victory is a show of solidarity we all appreciate, and when the credits finally roll, the three of us stumble outside together and onto a tram, another thing that Europeans are great at. Trams, that is, not falling onto them.

**READY TO** 

## HIT THE RAILS?

EUROPEAN TRAIN TRIPPING 101



The all-inclusive passes known as Interrail (for European and U.K. residents) and Eurail (for everyone else) offer the simplest and most flexible way to travel across the continent by train. They're also much more economical than individual same-day tickets.

Through Eurail's website or mobile app, you can purchase the pass that's best for you: anything from four days of travel within a single month (US\$251) to an all-inclusive, three-monthlong trip (US\$920). The app is extremely helpful with planning—you can map out a route without navigating timetables across 33 countries—and also with most midtravel changes. Some specific journeys, including most high-speed international routes, require a reservation and an additional fee (usually less than US\$20); for sleeper trains, you'll need to choose whether to book a seat or a bed.

If you decide to skip a Eurail Pass in favor of individual train lines, you'll get the cheapest tickets by booking in advance. Most tickets go on sale three months before departure and can be purchased through the train company or such third-party providers as thetrainline.com. —Emma John





This page:
In Trieste,
swimmers
and snorkelers enjoy the
Sticco Mare
beach club.
Opposite page:
Eurail offers
travelers a
range of passes
to explore Italy
and beyond.

### Nº5 GRAZ

### DÜSSELDORF, GERMANY

**576 MILES** 

FROM GRAZ, I head to Vienna, because from there I can pick up the Nightjet, an overnight service that will cover the 560 miles to western Germany while I sleep. My train is scheduled to arrive at its final destination in late morning, although I plan to alight earlier, at Bonn. That's why I'm the first on the sleeper carriages to turn in and the first to be wished "schlafen Sie gut!" by the steward. When my alarm beeps me awake at 5:30 a.m., I pull on clothes, wash in my cupboardbasin, and walk the length of the sleeper carriage, where I bump into an apologetic conductor. "No, entschuldigung, Bonn will not be the next stop," he explains. "We are running three hours behind schedule. Construction works required us to use an alternative line. May I bring you some breakfast?"

Whatever irritation I might feel subsides the moment I look out the window. If we hadn't run so late, I wouldn't be watching as we hug the bends in the Rhine, following its winding course. I would never have seen this procession of Rhenish villages in the morning light, with their churches, their watchtowers, their clusters of colorfully trimmed houses, and their seemingly endless profusion of castles—this one on a clifftop, that one by the shore, this one peeking magically from the middle of a forest. It's a river cruise at double speed, and I sit on my bunk transfixed.

At Bonn, finally, I must leave the scenic route and change trains, joining the commuter pack as they whiz north to Düsseldorf. No country today is more committed to the concept of a united Europe than Germany. (Fitting, since it shares borders with nine other countries.) Like many of its sister cities, modern-day Düsseldorf is a largely postwar creation, a miracle of reconstruction, as well as proof of how much Europe has evolved even in the past few decades. Its canal-side boulevard, the Königsallee, is lined with luxury stores; its former factories are loft apartments; its "old town" itself is a reconstruction.



EUROPEAN
TRAIN
TDAVEL

AVE

Cheap flights are Europe's guilty pleasure. The proliferation of short-haul routes and budget airlines over the past couple of decades has made air travel not only the quickest way to hop between countries but also often the most inexpensive.

Some flights will cost less than what you'll spend on taxi fare from the airport.

It's hard to fight back against that kind of market advantage, but the European Union is determined to try. In 2019, rail journeys accounted for only 8 percent of





This page:
Friends enjoy
a sunny day
at Düsseldorf's
Paradise Beach
on the Rhine.
Opposite page:
The city's
Flingern district.

For all of Düsseldorf's wealth and development, however, the rebel spirit that fueled the punk and electronica movements here in the 1970s can still be found, if you know where to look. And Klaus Rosskothen, a graphic designer turned art dealer, has offered to show me. His gallery, Pretty Portal, sits on the quirky Brunnenstrasse, surrounded by other independent businesses: the slow fashion store, the Lebanese deli that hosts a DJ every Friday, the pint-size café next to the cinema. The pavement is beautified with pots of edible plants; Klaus identifies the retired botanist who tends to them on behalf of the entire street.

Painted in vibrant colors on the wall outside Pretty Portal is a masked woman, the work of Fin DAC—the street artist whose 200-foot-tall portrait of Frida Kahlo adorns an apartment building in Mexico. Klaus was a graffiti artist himself back in the 1980s, and for the past 15 years he has been inviting the world's best urban artists to Düsseldorf to leave their mark.

all passenger travel in the EU, but the union wants to triple that by 2050. Rail is also a key part of the European Green Deal, which aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55 percent by 2030. This will require as much as a 90 percent decrease in transport-related emissions.

In 2021, the EU announced the European Year of Rail, an initiative to encourage more train travel. A specially commissioned train, the Connecting Europe Express, went on a 26-country journey to showcase the power of rail and highlight the need for more integrated services across the continent. Investments in high-speed, border-crossing railways have become a priority, with talks underway to create a master plan for a transformation of the continent's network over the next several decades.

Meanwhile, individual countries have been boosting their own rail infrastructure and increasing services, such as the nonstop three-hour Italo route between Milan and Rome.

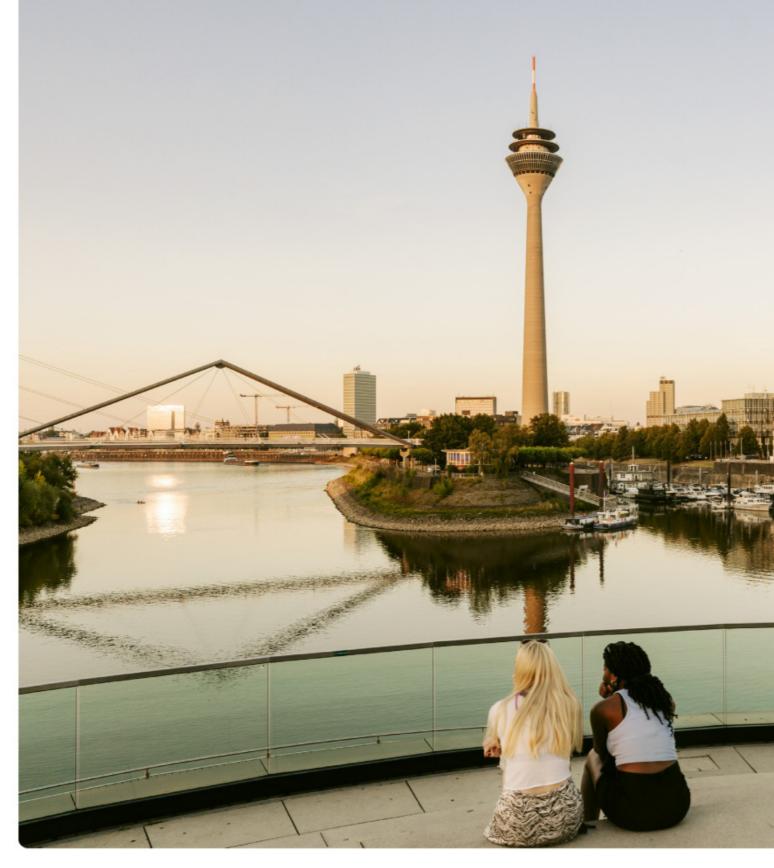
Several countries have revived

or added sleeper services, marketing them as an attractive alternative to flying. France's state railway, SNCF, restored the six-hour night train between Paris and Nice, with tickets starting at US\$20. New Swiss night trains take passengers from Zurich to Budapest or Zagreb, and the Belgian-Dutch European Sleeper line plans to link Brussels and Amsterdam with Prague in a partnership with Czech operator RegioJet. Austria was an early investor in overnight routes; its Nightjet

service now boasts more than 25 destinations.

As countries reinvigorate rail travel, they're actively decreasing short-haul air travel. Austria has been at the forefront of those efforts. The government's financial support of Austrian Airlines during the pandemic was conditional on the company terminating its 50-minute Vienna to Salzburg route. In 2021, France approved a ban on domestic flights for routes where there is an equivalent rail journey that takes less than two and a half hours. —E.J.

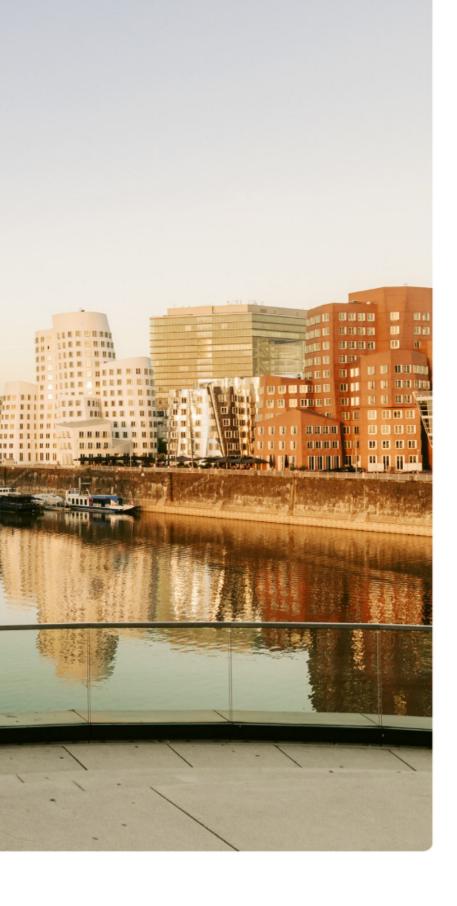
"MAYBE
I'M A
DREAMER,
BUT I LIKE
THE IDEA OF
EUROPE,
THE COURAGE
IT TAKES TO
HAVE THAT
VISION, TO
PURSUE
THIS KIND
OF UNITY."



He drives me to the nearby district of Flingern, pulling up next to a supermarket where a mural of sculptor Joseph Beuys gazes out across the parking lot. The mural is one of Klaus's many commissions, by the Italian duo Orticanoodles, but we're here to see Kiefernstrasse, the street where houses are covered in a riot of bright and joyous murals, which the residents helped choose and design. A darker spirit of anarchy once possessed these buildings—in the 1980s they were squats that housed members of the Baader-Meinhof gang, a leftist militant organization—but today they are celebrated for their creativity, be it in the form of the Chinese dragon slinking its way from pavement to roof, or the house that's a giant crossword puzzle.

On our return, we take a detour past the contemporary architecture of MedienHafen, the redeveloped harbor area, its buildings different in shape and color, and made more compelling by the way they interact with each other. It's not a bad metaphor for Europe, I say, and Klaus chuckles in approval. He is an ardent Europhile, someone who thinks of himself as European first and German second; Düsseldorf is far more multicultural than when he was a kid, which he enjoys. "Maybe I'm a dreamer," he says, "but I like the idea of Europe, the courage it takes to have that vision, to pursue this kind of unity."

Why does his speech make me well up? Is it sentiment, or is it just that, at this stage of the trip, my own vision is getting blurry from fatigue? MedienHafen,
Düsseldorf's
renovated
harbor, features both the
Rhine Tower
and the Neuer
Zollhof complex,
designed by
architect
Frank Gehry.



# Nº 5 DÜSSELDORF U LONDON

297 MILES

PASSING INTO THE Netherlands the following day, I swear I see a dozen silver sousaphones from the window, the instruments playing in formation on a loading dock. But before I can confirm, the industrial park around me morphs into pasture, where cows sprawl about like dogs in the sun. Amsterdam's streets are no less hallucinatory, its tall, wonky buildings threatening to topple on me as I walk beneath them. On the horizontal plane, Dutch cyclists bear down remorselessly from all directions; I'm feeling less a part of Europe and more a character in an arcade game.

I make it to a couple of landmark museums, where I listen to the hundred tongues of global visitors just like me. In the 17th and 18th centuries, Britain's Grand Tourists made trips far longer than mine, visiting the founts of culture in Athens and Rome and Paris—but then they did it in more leisurely circumstances and likely had servants to carry their luggage. We do have something in common, though. The original purpose of such journeys was to educate aristocratic young men (and eventually young women) in the history, culture, and politics of the wider world—to help them understand Britain's place in that world, and to appreciate where so much of what they valued had come from.

The Low Countries nestle tightly together. From Amsterdam, it takes merely two hours to reach Antwerp, Belgium. Soon after arriving, I present myself at the hotel check-in desk with a big smile and a mouthful of poorly accented observations about my *réservation*. The receptionist looks at me, baffled, and asks if we can speak English. Turns out that Antwerp is in the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium.

I'm staying in one of the city's emerging creative districts, a car-free place called the Green Quarter. There's so much that's buzzy here—breweries, restaurants, design ateliers—that it takes a couple of days before I venture to the historic center. When I do, I'm struck by how familiar the architecture is, how much of Europe's style and pattern I've absorbed. Elongated facades squeeze into a cobblestone square, the sort of offbeat grandeur that invites you to smile, not tremble.

On the south side of the old town, behind Antwerp's fashion-conscious shopping streets, I come across the 16th-century church of St. Andrew, whose priest offers to show me around. A vast carved pulpit spreads across the nave like a tree, but Father Rudi preaches from it only a handful of times a year. He's more interested in modern additions, such as a gown by the acclaimed Belgian designer Ann Demeulemeester that now adorns the statue of Mary, or the reconstruction of the Altar of the Minters, completed in 2002. "We installed it when Belgium joined the Euro," he says.

Father Rudi turns out to be passionate about unity, of values and of communities shared across borders. He shows me a series of city guides his parishioners helped produce and picks up the one most relevant to me, titled *How British Is Antwerp?* 

The pamphlet tells the story of Antwerp in terms of British contributions and characters—"so that you will feel more at home here," he says. "Mary Stuart's court ladies, [and other Catholics], came here as religious refugees. English wool merchants made Antwerp very rich. So many nationalities have helped create our history: Norwegian, Danish, Irish. . . . We made these city guides as a sign of our hospitality, to put some of this rigid nationalism we've seen in better context." He chuckles. "Sometimes it's easier to be good friends with anyone other than your neighbors."

I've never thought of Belgians as my neighbors before. But the three-hour train ride from Antwerp to London will be quicker than it would be from London to Edinburgh, a city I've visited dozens of times and with whose citizens I feel a genuine kinship. As my train departs for home the following day, leaving Father Rudi and all my new friends behind, I know I'll be back soon. For it's been good to discover that I'm still welcome in Europe, but even better to learn I'm considered part of the family.

Contributing writer Emma John wrote about immigration in Berlin in the January/February 2020 issue of AFAR. This is photographer Felix Brüggemann's first story for AFAR.

### Wish You Were Here

by LAUREN TAMAKI





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