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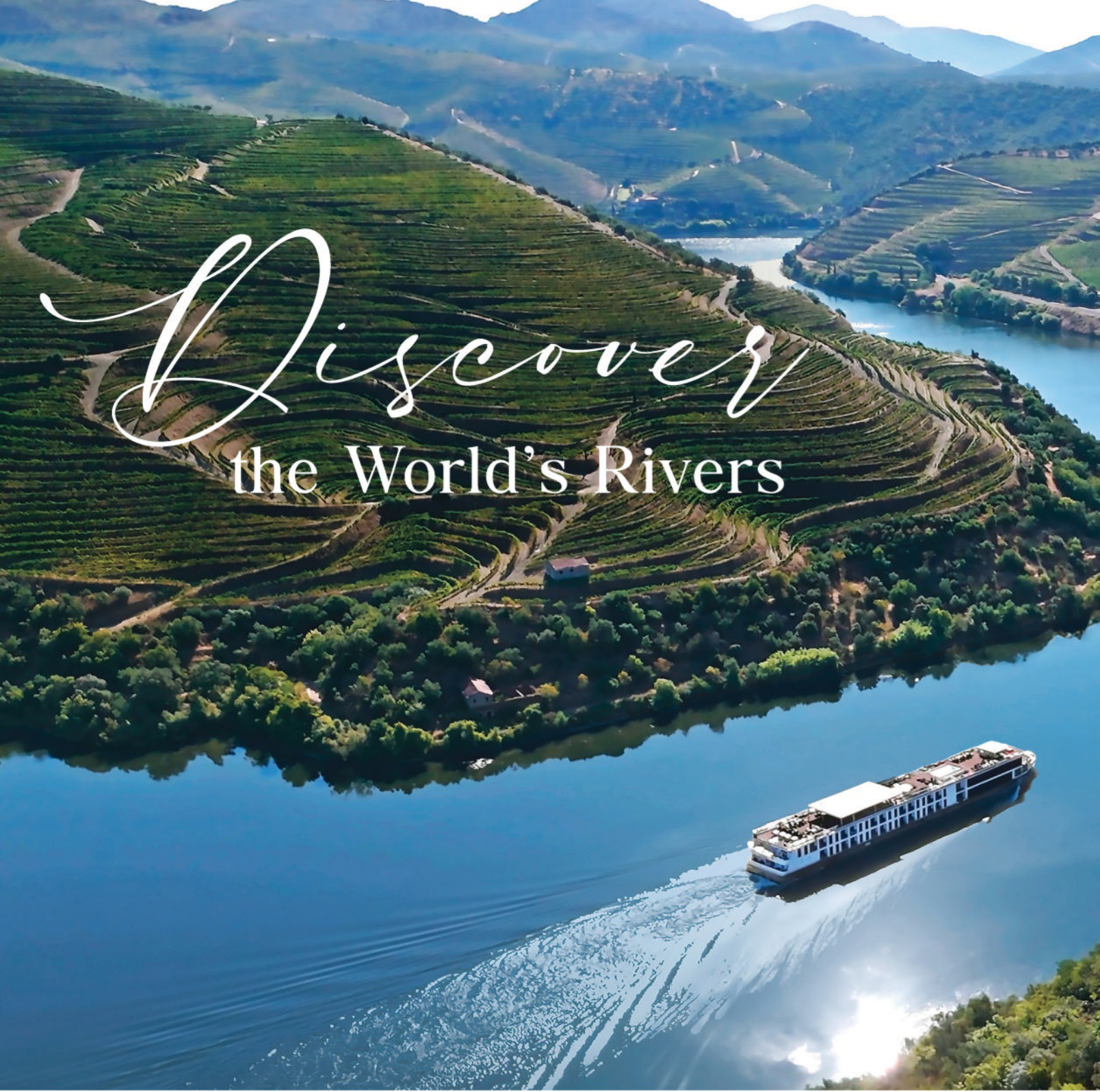
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9 CONFETTI STRIPES WALL, SOUTH END

CONFETTI STRIPES WALL
BY JEN HENSON

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**GOING WITH
THE FLOW**

When in Switzerland, do as the Swiss do—jump in a river. The water's fine.



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**GREAT AMERICAN
CITIES: DETROIT**

Detroit is bursting with creative energy. Three influential residents share what travelers shouldn't miss.

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MOUNTAIN TIME

In Nepal, a 12-day trek to Everest Base Camp takes the paths less traveled.



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YOUR PERFECT İSTANBUL Getaway

With its millennia-spanning heritage and wide array of cultural offerings, culinary jewels and breathtaking vistas that straddle both Europe and Asia, Istanbul is a sublimely beautiful destination—one sure to inspire visitors from all walks of life. To experience the city like a true local during a long weekend there, be sure to enjoy a good many of the following suggestions.

► Topkapı Palace

FOR HISTORY BUFFS

The historic peninsula where İstanbul was born is a true treasure trove, offering a wealth of exceptional landmarks to be explored during a delightful day's stroll starting from Sultanahmet Square.

► Visit the recently renovated **İstanbul Archaeological Museums** to explore masterpieces of antiquity, including an impressive collection of sarcophagi depicting mythological scenes as well as the world's first known love poem carved on terracotta and dating back 4,000 years to the time of the Sumerians.

► **Topkapı Palace**, the former residence of the Ottoman sultans, gives visitors the chance to discover the splendor of the empire's court and the beautifully tiled *harem*—the private chambers where the sovereign lived with his family. The palace is a unique maze of courtyards, pavilions, kiosks and chambers now used as exhibition halls displaying iconic pieces from the renowned collection.

► Feel an enveloping peace under the cascading domes of the **Hagia Sophia**, **Süleymaniye** and **Blue (Sultanahmet) Mosques**. Visit the recently inaugurated **Hagia Sophia History and Experience Museum** to learn the unique story of this awe-inspiring monument.

► Discover the distinct aquatic heritage of the city, including the 6th-century **Basilica Cistern**, a subterranean marvel adorned with columns brought from ancient temples.

FOR CULTURE ENTHUSIASTS

To feel a part of the vibrant city culture, one should venture deeper into the neighborhoods of İstanbul, all inviting microcosms unto themselves. Here is a quick itinerary to follow, from the heart of Beyoğlu to the shores of Kadıköy.

► **İstiklal Street**, the city's famous 2-km pedestrian thoroughfare, has been the center of food, arts and entertainment for more than a century. Start your adventurous walk from **Taksim Square**. This celebrated urban nexus is the city's cultural heartbeat once again, thanks to the renovated **Atatürk Cultural Center (Atatürk Kültür Merkezi)**, a vanguard palace for the performance arts.

► After making its way past several architectural jewels—the alluring 19th-century townhouses and imposing **St. Antuan Church** spring to mind—İstiklal Street makes its way to the Galata neighborhood. Here you'll quickly be swept into the city's buzzing contemporary life, with its wide array of fashion and design studios, art galleries, coffee houses, fine-dining restaurants and scenic terrace lounges all lining the cobbled streets that culminate in the 14th-century **Galata Tower**.

► Next, take a nostalgic ride on the 19th-century underground funicular line, the **Tünel**, connecting Galata to Karaköy. A short distance away, the **Tophane** neighborhood awaits those looking to immerse themselves in the city's contemporary art scene.

▲ Galata Tower



▲ Ortaköy



▲ Arnavutköy



After exploring **İstanbul Modern**, the city's newly reopened modern art destination, designed by Pritzker Prize-winning architect Renzo Piano, continue on to see the full expanse of **Galataport**. This unique 1.5-km waterfront complex boasting the world's first underground cruise ship terminal also offers exclusive fashion stores, art spaces and a fine selection of food and cocktail purveyors on the Bosphorus (İstanbul Strait).

► And here, hop on a ferry from **Karaköy** or **Beşiktaş** for a scenic ride to **Kadıköy** on the city's Asian side. Time permitting, enjoy the sunset over the historic peninsula or turn your attention to the shimmering lights of the recently renovated **Maiden's Tower** as you near the other continent. As a thriving art and cultural district, Kadıköy has an undeniably youthful vibe and lively street energy. Explore the **Kadıköy Market** as well as **Moda Street**, the latter of which will connect you to the wonderful coastal parks that are among the most popular weekend hangout spots for locals and newcomers alike.

FOR FOODIES

From Ottoman palace cuisine and fresh fish from the Bosphorus coast to unique gourmet experiences provided by restaurants making the lists of the world's best, there's so much to explore for dedicated gourmands in this city of never-ending flavors.

► Starting your day with a **classical Turkish breakfast** is a must when you are in İstanbul. Prepare for an expansive feast and its plethora of salty and sweet delectables, including the regional egg dish, *menemen*, cured meats, local cheese and olive varieties, jams, fruits and nuts, and local bread types (the sesame seed-crust *simit* is a favorite), as well as a brimming pot of Turkish black tea, of course!

► **Street food** stalls and vendors are plentiful throughout the city. Delicious options include *simit*, *kestane kebab* (grilled chestnuts) and *köze mısır* (roasted corn), as well as sandwiches of fried fish or mussels, *midye dolma* (mussels stuffed with aromatic rice), *kokoreç* (grilled lamb intestines served in sandwich bread), *lahmacun* (paper thin flatbread with minced meat on top) and *döner kebab*.

► The Karaköy neighborhood has some of the city's best *baklava* shops, where you can explore a huge selection of flaky phyllo sheets that are filled with pistachios, walnuts or almonds before being soaked in syrup—a perfect way to replenish your energy for the remainder of your day ahead.

► Have a feast in a traditional *meyhane*, where a rich selection of *mezes* (cold and hot appetizers) is accompanied by glasses of *raki* (the region's famed anise liqueur)—a terrific setting for long chats among friends and the occasional street musician.

► Indulge in the imaginative tast-

ing menus of a new generation of **restaurants with MICHELIN Star**, celebrating and expounding on Anatolia's rich tradition of recipes and ingredients. These bites are well-paired with local wines, selected from Türkiye's burgeoning boutique vineyards.

FOR STYLE HUNTERS

Find just the right jewelry, fashion items and antiques to take back home with you.

► Visit the **Grand Bazaar (Kapalı Çarşı)** for classics like hamam accessories (olive oil soaps and *peştimal*s) and jewelry, as well as exquisite textiles and kilims. **Spice Bazaar (Mısır Çarşısı)**, on the other hand, has been flourishing since its opening in 1664 with its iconic mounds of spices in a full spectrum of colors and traditional sweets, dried fruits and nuts, as well as freshly roasted Turkish coffee.

► The neighborhood of **Çukurcuma** is a hidden gem for antique lovers. This network of unassuming streets is nestled with cozy shops selling everything from vintage toys to coffee cups, Ottoman-style accessories and furniture.

► **Galataport** and the adjacent **Post Office Fashion Galleria** should be on your itinerary for seeking the best in local fashions and designs.

► With their charming boutiques and flagship stores of local and international brands, **Nişantaşı** and **Bağdat Street** await for a full day of shopping indulgence.

MICHELIN GUIDE İSTANBUL 2024 AT A GLANCE

Enhancing İstanbul's culinary landscape, the 2024 MICHELIN Guide İstanbul showcases the city's dining excellence. Presenting a carefully curated selection of seventy-seven recommended restaurants celebrated for their exceptional quality, the guide applauds İstanbul's refined palate. Recognizing excellence, it highlights restaurants honored with One MICHELIN Star, signifying the city's top-tier culinary offering with Two MICHELIN Star. Additionally, it commends numerous Bib Gourmand spots known for their high-quality meals at exceptional value, alongside eco-responsible restaurants honored with the MICHELIN Green Star. İstanbul's dynamic food scene invites an unforgettable journey through a diverse range of flavors, appealing to the discerning tastes of dedicated food lovers.

77 recommended restaurants:

► 1 Two MICHELIN Star restaurant:

TURK Fatih Tutak

► 6 One MICHELIN Star restaurants:

Arkestra, Sankai by Nagaya, Araka, Nicole, Mikla, Neolokal

► 18 Bib Gourmand restaurants

► 52 selected restaurants

► 2 MICHELIN

Green Star restaurants:

Circle by Vertical, Neolokal

► 1 MICHELIN

Service Award:

Tuğra Restaurant

► 1 MICHELIN

Young Chef Award:

The Red Balloon



▼ Turkish mezes

goturkiye.com



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İstanbul
experiences



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AFAR ANSWERS

HOW TO FIND THE JOY OF AN EPIC TRIP WITH YOUR KIDS

Travel can be the best form of education for children—and their parents. Here's how to make it fun.



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CONNECT NOW AND THEN

On a cruise from Norway to England, an adult daughter looks for new experiences with her mother, who has dementia.

ON THE COVER

The helicopter ride to Everest Base Camp (17,598 feet) offers dramatic views of green valleys, barren brush, and stark glaciers.

Photograph by Michelle Heimerman

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JUST BACK FROM PERU

Hand-size spiders, pink dolphins, and dead anacondas: Afar Deputy Editor Katherine LaGrave tests the limits of her temerity in the Peruvian Amazon.



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HOTELS WE LOVE DREAMING OF GREECE

Greece is experiencing a hotel boom. These are the country's best properties to stay in now—in Athens, Corfu, and beyond.



49

WHERE TO CRUISE NEXT

Seeing the world by ship is unlike any other kind of travel. Find inspiration for your next cruise, from Australia's Kimberley region to southern Brazil.

Kayaks, inflatable skiffs, binoculars, wildlife books, and more. In other words, they have everything you need to get out of your cabin and into the world.



A person wearing a dark jacket and a headlamp stands in a snowy field, looking up at a vibrant aurora borealis in the night sky. The aurora displays streaks of green and pink light. The person's shadow is cast on the snow, and their footprints lead back towards the viewer.

AH-HA MOMENTS HAPPEN HERE.

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CANADA*

Features



Detroit's progress is most visible in its adaptive reuse projects, where husks of historic, sometimes derelict, buildings are being transformed into new centers of culture.

GREAT AMERICAN
CITIES: DETROIT

p.90

SET SAIL ON A JOURNEY OF DISCOVERY

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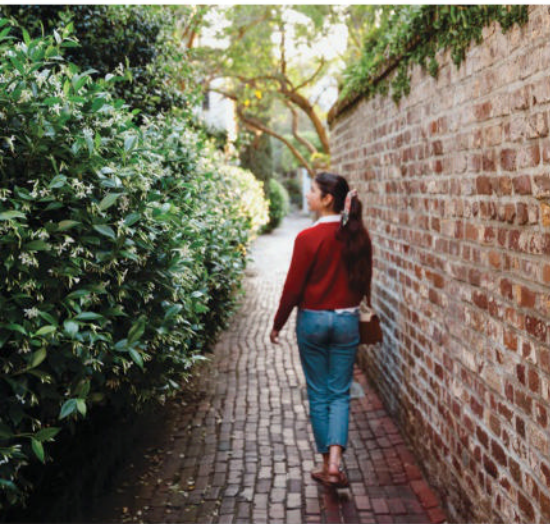
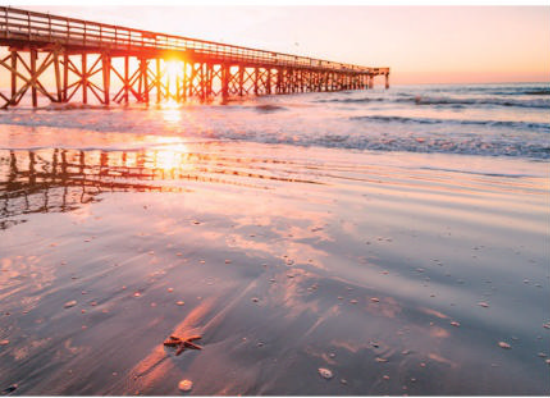


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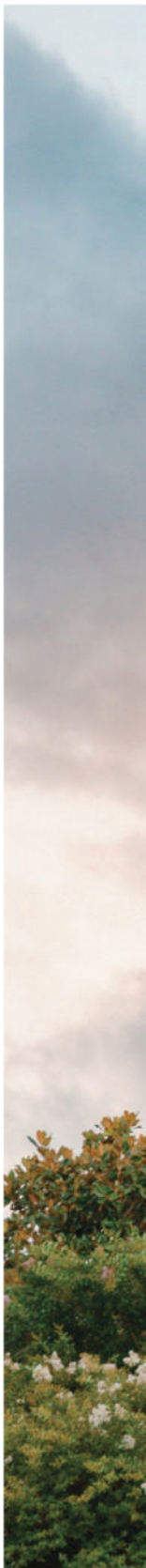


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What was the most epic trip you took in the last year?

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"I traveled to Volcanoes National Park in Rwanda, where I stayed at the safari lodge One&Only Gorilla's Nest and trekked to see mountain gorillas in their natural habitat. It was one of the most exhilarating wildlife encounters I've ever had." —J.F.

"Spring skiing in Italy's Dolomites was nothing short of epic. I explored the vast terrain on hut-to-hut routes, refueled with traditional meals at cozy mountain rifugios, and took in breathtaking alpine views from colorful sun chairs." —M.K.

"During my sabbatical last year, the most memorable experience by far was surfing in the Galápagos. You can ride the waves on San Cristóbal Island and navigate the reef breaks with sea lions, scalloped hammerhead sharks, sea turtles, manta rays, and marine iguanas." —B.K.

"I took a solo excursion to the green (both geographically and environmentally) Samsø island off the coast of Denmark!" —A.B.



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COVER CONTEST

Over the summer, we hosted a contest across Afar's social media channels. Thousands voted on their favorite Afar covers from the last 15 years. Here are the winners.

FIRST PLACE

For Afar's 2018 Epic Trips Issue, writer Freda Moon traveled to Ultima Thule, a luxury adventure lodge in Wrangell-St. Elias National Park & Preserve in Alaska, one of the most remote park units in the country. Guests reach the lodge via bush plane, which provided the perfect vantage point for photographer Brian Flaherty's cover image.

Celebrating a Milestone

FIFTEEN YEARS AGO, we published the first issue of Afar. As cofounder and CEO, I'm so proud of what we have been able to accomplish in the years since.

Since our inception, we've sought to make a positive impact on the world through high-quality storytelling that inspires, enriches, and empowers travelers who care. We're guided by our purpose: to make the world a better place through travel experiences that benefit the traveler personally, support the communities visited, and are sensitive to the effects on our planet.

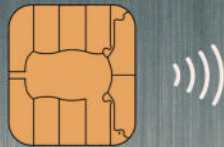
The media industry has faced significant business challenges since we launched. Recently, the remarkable Zita Cobb of Fogo Island Inn in Newfoundland, Canada, told me something that resonated: "It has become increasingly clear to me that it matters very much how things are owned."

Afar is owned by three individuals: myself, my cofounder Joe Diaz, and good friend Ernie Garcia. Today, most media entities are owned by large corporations, which in turn are either owned by private equity firms or are publicly traded. The unfortunate consequence is that, by necessity, they (and particularly private equity ownership) prioritize short-term financial results.



On a six-week trip throughout India in 2007, Afar's cofounders Joe Diaz and Greg Sullivan alighted on the idea for the company.

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We of course are also driven by the bottom line, but not to the exclusion of the values we stand for. We're able to pursue projects that may not have an immediate financial upside, but that serve our readers and showcase our purpose. I hope you see that through our coverage of timely topics including climate, accessibility, community-focused tourism, and many more. Although being independent and small—relative to most of our direct competitors—can sometimes be challenging in terms of resources, I believe it has also served to our advantage.

When we were in the throes of the COVID-19 pandemic, many people who love Afar reached out with concern. The overriding message was that Afar is an important and much-needed voice in the world of travel. Thankfully, we were able to survive and come back stronger than ever financially, doubly committed to encouraging travelers—and the travel industry—to be better.

Thanks to everyone who has supported us along the way. Here's to another 15 years. Together, we can help make the world better through travel.

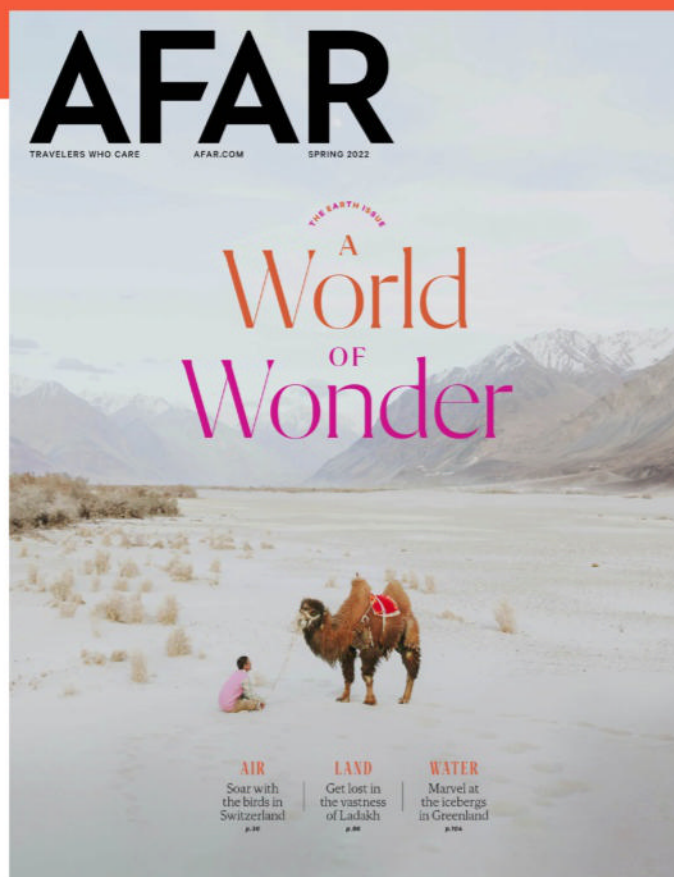
Good travels,

GREG SULLIVAN

Cofounder and CEO



Afar's first issue hit newsstands in August 2009.



SECOND PLACE

For our 2022 Earth Issue, photographer Yuri Andries captured a moment of repose between a rare double-humped camel and its handler in Ladakh, India. During his time in the region, Andries explored Himalayan landscapes and got a glimpse into the lives of Buddhist monks, schoolchildren, and Indian soldiers.

RUNNERS UP (FROM LEFT)

When this image of archery practice in Paro, Bhutan, came in from photographer Frédéric Lagrange, our team knew that we had our 2019 Happiness Issue cover. Fittingly, in the cover story, contributing writer Ryan Knighton visited wellness retreats in this country between China and India.

Photographer Alex Crétey Systemans shot this 2016 cover at Kenya's Angama Mara safari lodge, where the land belongs to the Maasai people. The lodge, writes Mark Byrnes, encourages "a kind of porousness [between guests and] the larger Maasai community."



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60 miles long and 14 communities strong, there are things you can only do in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. Check out some of the experiences that make people call this place The Beach.



Broadway at the Beach

The SkyWheel

You can't see all 60 miles of Myrtle Beach's ocean views at once, but a ride on the SkyWheel is the closest you can get. It's the largest observation wheel on the East Coast, and with their new sunrise flights, you can enjoy coffee, pastries, and views of the sunrise over the Atlantic in a private climate-controlled gondola.



Brookgreen Gardens

It's on many must-see lists in Myrtle Beach for a reason. Brookgreen Gardens became the first public botanical and sculpture garden in 1932 and currently displays American art, 250-year-old live oak trees, palmetto palms, a butterfly garden and more. Its Lowcountry Zoo and historical trail also exhibits and protects native species and historical sites.

J&L Kayaking Tours

With the Intracoastal Waterway, you can get out on wake-free water for a relaxing experience with nature. The J&L guides will take you and a small group around either Little River or Huntington Beach State Park to learn about the various marshes and marine life while you paddle away to sunset views.

Luxury Beachfront Picnic

Take alfresco dining to the next level with a luxury picnic on the beach. Beach Picnic Co has packages you can choose from that include a full dinner with a table, pillows, cutlery, and beautiful decor. It's the perfect private romantic picnic – with no cleanup involved.

Hammock Shops Village

The modern hammock design is said to come from an old 1800s riverboat captain named Joshua John Ward. His family opened The Original Hammock Shop in Pawleys Island in 1938, and today, you can watch craftspeople weave hammocks in the same style as “Cap’n Josh” once did.



J&L Kayaking Tours

Sandy Island Preserve

Part nature preserve, part private village – Sandy Island is both the largest protected freshwater island on the East Coast and also home to descendants of the Gullah people, an African American ethnic group. Only accessible by boat, you can tour the island, learn about the culture of the Gullah people, hike trails, kayak, and more.



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How to Find the Joy of an Epic Trip with Your Kids

Traveling with kids is not always easy. On a recent trip to Cabo San Lucas, Mexico, with my three boys (age 8 and twins age 3), one tried to board a flight to Seattle, another dusted our seats with pretzel crumbs, and the third nicked his finger in the luggage carousel. But it was all worth it once we arrived; I will never forget the looks of wonder on their faces as they released baby turtles into the sea.

Family travel can have immense benefits for the whole clan. In a 2023 survey from the Family Travel Association, 82 percent of respondents said the experience brings them closer, 79 percent said it enriches a child's education, and 73 percent said it makes them better global citizens. A third believed it made them better parents. Here are tips for planning and enjoying an epic vacation *avec enfants*.

Dream big

Take a moment to consider what would make a really memorable

trip—beyond the constraints of time, budget, and your own sanity. If the kids are older, can they help brainstorm places to visit, or things to see and do? Use maps, photos, stories, and movies set in the location—anything that gets their minds spinning with promise. Do you want to go somewhere you know well, so you already have the lay of the land, or to an unfamiliar spot, so everyone can share the thrill of discovery?

Set expectations

Don't pack too much into the suitcase or the itinerary. "You don't need to bring that much stuff to entertain kids," says Afar Editorial Director Sarika Bansal, whose toddler happily spent an hour giving river rocks a bath during a camping trip. Bansal has rethought her own expectations too: "I've realized the folly of trying to visit two museums, a fancy restaurant, and a hip neighborhood all in one day. And that's OK! I don't need to see it all."

Cari Gray concurs. The founder and CEO of Gray & Co. not only designs customized active trips, but is also a parent of a 12-year-old who's been to 31 countries. When planning family trips for her clients, she prioritizes multiple-night stays in locations instead of single-night stops, a strategy that allows kids to settle in and have a good sleep. "If you can see one part of the world more deeply, we strongly recommend that," says Gray, who's also a member of Afar's Travel Advisory Council. "Nothing spoils a vacation day more than a kid who hasn't slept or had time to deal with jet lag."

Heather Greenwood Davis, a travel writer who also runs the Globetrotting Mama blog, has traveled with her children (now 19 and 22) since they were born, including a yearlong round-the-world trip. She says she learned to keep details on a "need-to-know basis with little ones," adding that it's "better to surprise than disappoint."

Try new things, together

Travel is inherently educational and mind-opening for kids, but you can up your game by getting creative with their interests. Have a manga fan? Visit bookstores in Tokyo. Have a swimmer? Don snorkel masks and take the plunge in Belize. Think, too, about how to create traditions—perhaps with a

cooking class—and inspire curiosity and empathy by meeting local people. Let older children plan a day. Journal together.

Sarah Dusek, owner of Few & Far, a carbon-neutral tour company, says she helps families make memories together by "finding unique and extraordinary things to do, whether that's swimming with pink dolphins in the Amazon or meeting meerkats in Botswana." She's also a firm believer in showing children how travel can positively impact local ecosystems and communities. "When they're young, they get to see the good that travel can do, and that instills that superpower of traveling well."

Embrace the tricky parts

Things will go wrong. Lean into that. Be glass-half-full, even if the neon, sugary, other half of the glass is all over your pants. Bansal says that she's stopped stressing about long-haul flights with her daughter: "I've recast them as an opportunity to spend valuable quality time together."

Above all, be kind to the kids—and yourselves. As Greenwood Davis explains, "navigating those hurdles helps to build resilience. Travel allowed [my children] the space to grow and then bring back what they learned about the world and themselves to their classrooms and neighborhoods." **A**

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Now and Then

Travel can heal, but not in ways we may expect.

*Writer **Ashlea Halpern** boards a cruise with her mother, who has dementia, with the hope of bringing them both joy and connection.*

Illustrations by Ece Erten





WE WERE FIVE HOURS INTO our transatlantic flight when I noticed my mom restarting the same movie she'd just finished. I began to point it out but stopped myself. *Why make her feel bad if she's enjoying it?* But later, when she confused our layover in Amsterdam with a trip to the mall, I reminded her that we were headed to Norway to board a Viking cruise that would take us around the British Isles, stopping in Scotland, Ireland, Northern Ireland, Wales, and England.

"Oh, OK," she said. Twenty minutes later, she asked again where we were going.

My mom was 67 when she was diagnosed with early-onset dementia, but her memory took a dive after the sudden death of my father in the fall of 2023. As with many people living with memory loss, the smallest changes feel seismic—and losing her husband of 48 years was an atom bomb. Now 72, her decline has been fast and furious, the accompanying depression merciless in its all-consuming fervor.

This was a woman who once took great pride in her appearance—a peacocking Leo who wore big jewelry and bigger turbans. She was a blue-ribbon seamstress, dulcimer player, dog lover, and Wiccan who held séances in our basement. She was the most talented self-taught artist I knew. She raised me, her only child, to believe that every person is as happy as they choose to be. Before the pandemic, we traveled together every few years: China, Spain, Morocco, Ireland, Japan, Iceland. I was the adventurer and she was the extrovert. Agreeing on an itinerary was challenging, because our interests and activity levels were always divergent, but we struck a happy balance in cruising, largely because we could do our own thing by day and reunite at dinner.

I'd planned this trip with the hope of reconnecting—first as mother and daughter but also as a form of DIY reminiscence therapy, in which dementia patients take a walk down memory lane to spark joy and find

comfort in their recollections. I'd chosen Viking's two-week "British Isles Explorer" voyage from Bergen, Norway, to London, because I thought my mom would appreciate the itinerary's Beatles-themed tour of Liverpool.

The Fab Four were always on rotation in my mom's art studio, and we'd spent hours bonding over their songs and debating which Beatle was the cutest. I hoped the music might trigger some positive memories in dementia's grueling fog; hoped, in some way, it would be an opportunity for her to rediscover her old self. Other excursions—such as hiking in the Scottish Highlands—I'd bookmarked as just for me. Immersing myself in the beauty of the natural world had become something of a last refuge in recent months. It was a way to escape, however temporarily, a new reality: that our roles as mother and child were forever reversed.

M

MY MOM'S BEWILDERMENT did not abate upon boarding the *Viking Venus* in Bergen. She asked repeatedly where we were ported, where we were sailing to, and if we had stayed in this "hotel" before. It was like traveling with a ghost: She was here but she was not all there.

In some ways, hers is the cruelest stage of dementia—terrifying for the sufferer, who knows they're losing their memory but is powerless to stop it, and exhausting for the caregiver, who answers the same questions 10, 12, 20 times a day, a witness to the distressingly fast yet agonizingly slow disintegration of a human mind.

It became clear my hopes of reconnecting during excursions would need to be curbed. The first week, my mom insisted she was "perfectly content" with drawing in the deserted lounges while the rest of the passengers disembarked in port. I knew the attentive crew would assist her if she got disoriented, but I still felt guilty leaving her. Every minute we weren't spending together felt like a minute wasted—a memory we weren't making, even if only one of us would remember it.

I went out anyway. I hiked 14 miles along the towering White Cliffs of Dover in Kent, England, and spent hours browsing preserved organs and other chamber-of-horror curiosities at the Surgeons' Hall Museums in Edinburgh, Scotland. In Invergordon, a town in the Scottish Highlands, I wandered to a community garden where I befriended a bonneted woman sitting on a bench with flowers in her lap. The octogenarian wore time on her face like a pile of unfolded laundry but was keen as the sharpest No. 2 pencil at explaining local politics.

Why couldn't that be my mom? I wondered bitterly. We used to talk for hours about everything and nothing. Now, she doesn't even ask how my day was.

Shaking off self-pity, I sleuthed out a food truck targeted at cruise ship workers and ordered a cup of *dinuguan*, a Filipino pork blood stew, to go. If my mom wouldn't engage with the world, I'd bring the world to her.

N

NINE DAYS INTO the cruise, we pulled into Liverpool—the port I'd been waiting for. I imagined the twin shadows of dementia and depression parting and that, at least for the duration of this four-hour shore excursion, all could be well in the world. That was the plan, anyway.



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Viking's Beatles Experience included drive-bys of the Cavern Club and Hard Days Night Hotel, a photo opportunity at Penny Lane, and an audio tour of Strawberry Field. The bus was packed with gleeful Beatles fans belting out Top 40 hits, but my mom just stared blankly out the bus window. When we pulled up to John Lennon's old house, she wouldn't get off. "I'm tired," she said. But we'd come all this way, I begged. "I'm fine right here," she said.

How foolish of me to think a silly Beatles tour could lift her from this black hole. "I'm tired" was code—not just tired today, but tired of living.

Seeing all those happy-go-lucky vacationers on that bus, I was consumed with envy. Here were people my mom's age and older who still had all their faculties, who could walk for hours in port without complaining about screaming back pain, who twisted and shouted to a Beatles cover band at a party on the pool deck long after my mom crawled into bed. They were all still so full of life. Their refusal to spend their golden years withering on the vine was inspiring. I didn't begrudge them their joie de vivre. I just wished I could steal a little bit of that sunshine for my own mother.

A

AS OFTEN HAPPENS IN TRAVEL, the worst day of our cruise was followed by the best. I had booked a solo shore excursion to Cwm Idwal, Wales' first nature reserve. It was a blue-sky morning, perfectly cloudless, as our group drove through a valley dotted with sheep farms and buttery yellow gorse flowers. The scenery floored me, but I was even more enthralled by the company, making fast friends with a cardiothoracic surgeon and his charming husband. Like so many caretakers, I feel guilty admitting when I get overwhelmed; my burden, after all, is finite. But being in the nature reserve offered a much-needed release.

When I reconnected with my mom on the ship that evening, I found her in good spirits. "I finished my drawing," she beamed, holding it up for me to see. It was a spot-on portrait of my

two-year-old son, Julian. I didn't see it coming, but this was my mom's twist-and-shout moment.

I realized then that I needed to meet my mom where she was, to accept the reality about who she can no longer be, and to look for the silver linings anyway. This lesson couldn't have come soon enough. Standing in front of Stonehenge a few days later, my mom was gobsmacked not by the prehistoric stone circle but by the satiny-white clouds suspended like shaving cream above it. She begged me to take a picture, and I obliged, a dozen times over, capturing the clouds' blazing edges as the sun slinked out of view.

I realized then that I needed to meet my mom where she was, to accept the reality about who she can no longer be, and to look for the silver linings anyway.

The more I looked for the rays piercing through the gloom, the more I saw them: the awe my mom showed when she spotted a rare double rainbow over a choppy gray sea in Northern Ireland; how she stood on the balcony of our stateroom, waving enthusiastically to the lone bagpiper bidding the ship adieu in Invergordon; the way her old self emerged every now and again. A few days before the cruise ended, during afternoon tea, she flagged down a handsome waiter. "Damn! Let me get a look at you," she said, as he stood, turning red. When he hustled away, she winked at me. "Old women can get away with saying stuff like that," she said. Here she was again: the mother I'd been trying my hardest to summon.

T

THE DAY BEFORE WE DISEMBARKED, our room steward, Wayan, stopped me in the hallway and said how special it was for me to spend this time with my mother. He lost his own mom seven years ago and still misses her. *Whatever time we get is a gift*, he said, eyes misting over. I took his hands and thanked him for taking such good care of us.

Our final night on the ship, my mom retired early and I moseyed down to the atrium, where a pianist was playing "Memory" from *Cats*. A bit on the nose, but I felt myself growing weepy anyway.

My mother is still with me, but she slips a little further away each passing day. Logically, I know the dissolve is preparing me for life without her; in that way, maybe the stitch-by-stitch unraveling makes letting go easier. It won't be long before she won't know who I am and I'll likely be looking skyward, taking pictures of the clouds and whispering the lyrics Paul McCartney wrote about his own mother, who died of cancer when he was 14. *Let it be, let it be, let it be.* **A**

Ashlea Halpern wrote about Route 66 in the Summer 2024 issue of *Afar*. Illustrator Ece Erten lives in New York City.

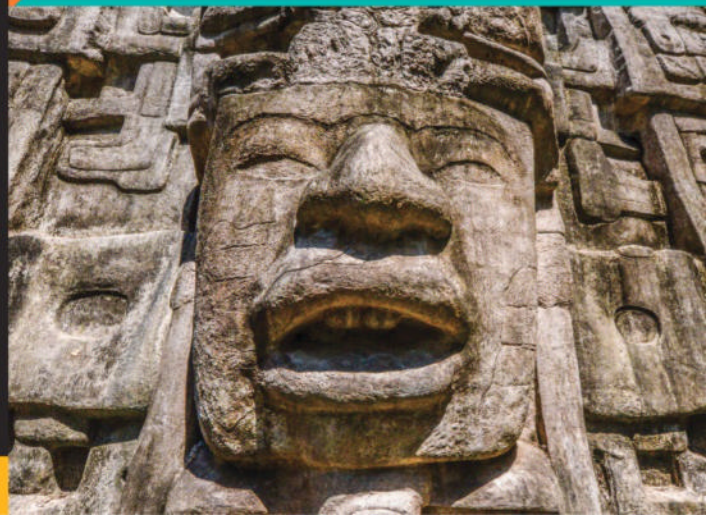




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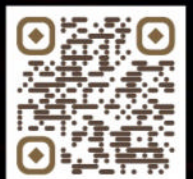
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HOTELS WE LOVE

Dreaming of Greece

by Nicola Chilton

EVERY YEAR, Greece sees a flock of visitors heading to its beaches, drawn by that perfect recipe of shimmering Aegean waters, whitewashed walls, and a euphoric vacation vibe. And while there's certainly an allure to that, it's equally delightful to venture inland to lesser-known historical sites, friendly mountain villages, and arty urban neighborhoods. Thankfully, a number of intriguing hotels offer bases for getting to know the many different sides of Greece, showcasing everything from ancient history to culinary heritage—set against, of course, those reliably scenic backdrops.

As part of Afar's Hotels We Love series of the world's best properties, here are 12 hotels in Greece that gives travelers deeper, richer experiences, and outstanding design and service. See more at afar.com/hotelswelove.

Guests lounge and leap at the beach club at the Wild Hotel by Interni in Mykonos, Greece.

IMARET

Kavala

Set along Kavala's old city walls, Imaret has reimagined an Ottoman-era institution for religion and education into a 20-room hotel. It's a big piece of history for a small town, and one that Imaret embraces fully. Dormitories have been transformed into guest suites, while the building's original water cistern has been reborn as an indoor pool and its hammam is once again filled with steam. The hotel is as lovely in summer, when you can enjoy the courtyard pool, as it is on winter afternoons, sipping wine by the fireplace with a cat curled up at your feet. *From \$740/night*



Imaret

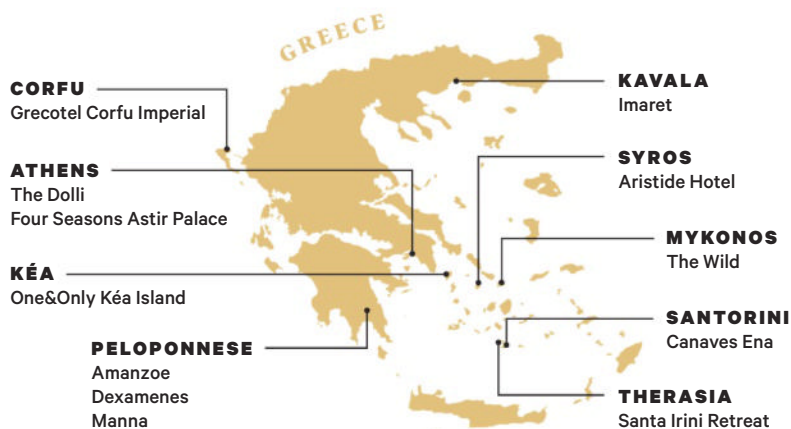


The Dolli

SANTA IRINI RETREAT

Therasia

The tranquil island of Therasia is the antithesis of its tourist-thronged neighbor Santorini, just 10 minutes away by boat. The mood is captured perfectly at Santa Irini Retreat, a six-room escape with a refreshing pool that offers spectacular views of the caldera and the other surrounding islands of Folegandros, Sikinos, and Ios. Recharge with the help of yoga sessions, wine tastings, and meals with vegetables from the estate's garden. The villa also provides the perfect jumping-off point for getting to know the island's many archeological sites, churches, swimming coves, and vineyards. *From \$645/night*



THE DOLLI

Central Athens

Athens is full of boutique hotels, but you don't have to worry about experiencing an Instagram-vs-reality moment at the Dolli. The hotel's much-photographed rooftop pool is even better in real life than it is in the photos. Go in the early morning when its mirrorlike surface reflects the Parthenon, midafternoon to cool off from the Athens heat, or for sundowners when the illuminated Acropolis radiates over the city. The 46 guest rooms are equally delightful, with high ceilings and minimalist decor, despite the Dolli's location on one of the Greek capital's busiest streets. Look for original artwork by Jean Cocteau and Pablo Picasso in the lobby. *From \$590/night*



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Vouliagmeni, Athens Riviera

When the Four Seasons opened on the Athens Riviera in 2019, it breathed new life into an area that had been synonymous with the bold and beautiful since the 1960s. Keeping to its mid-century roots, the 303-room property spreads along a pine-covered peninsula and leans into a retro-chic design that delivers seaside glamour. Spa treatments are inspired by ancient Greek techniques, such as the Giosi Foot Ritual with peppermint exfoliation and massage. *From \$730/night*

GRECOTEL CORFU IMPERIAL

Kommeno Peninsula, Corfu

Set on a peninsula marked with sea coves and formal gardens, the accommodations at Corfu Imperial include everything from 350-square-foot deluxe rooms and swim-up bungalows to private estates. A new collection of waterfront villas and palazzi opened in summer of 2024, along with penthouse suites and family rooms. Yali Seafood Restaurant serves the catch of the day alfresco on its floating deck. *From \$344/night*

Four Seasons Astir Palace Hotel Athens

ARISTIDE HOTEL

Syros

Though Syros is often overlooked in favor of its Cycladic neighbors, the neoclassical architecture of the island's main town, Ermoupoli, is a draw in itself. Set in a restored mansion near the sea, the nine-suite Aristide Hotel is a sight to behold with Doric columns, sculpted plaster ceilings, and oak floors. Some suites come with plunge pools or stone baths. Food centers on island produce, served in the shaded garden for breakfast and on the sea-view rooftop in the evening. *From \$330/night*

AMANZOE

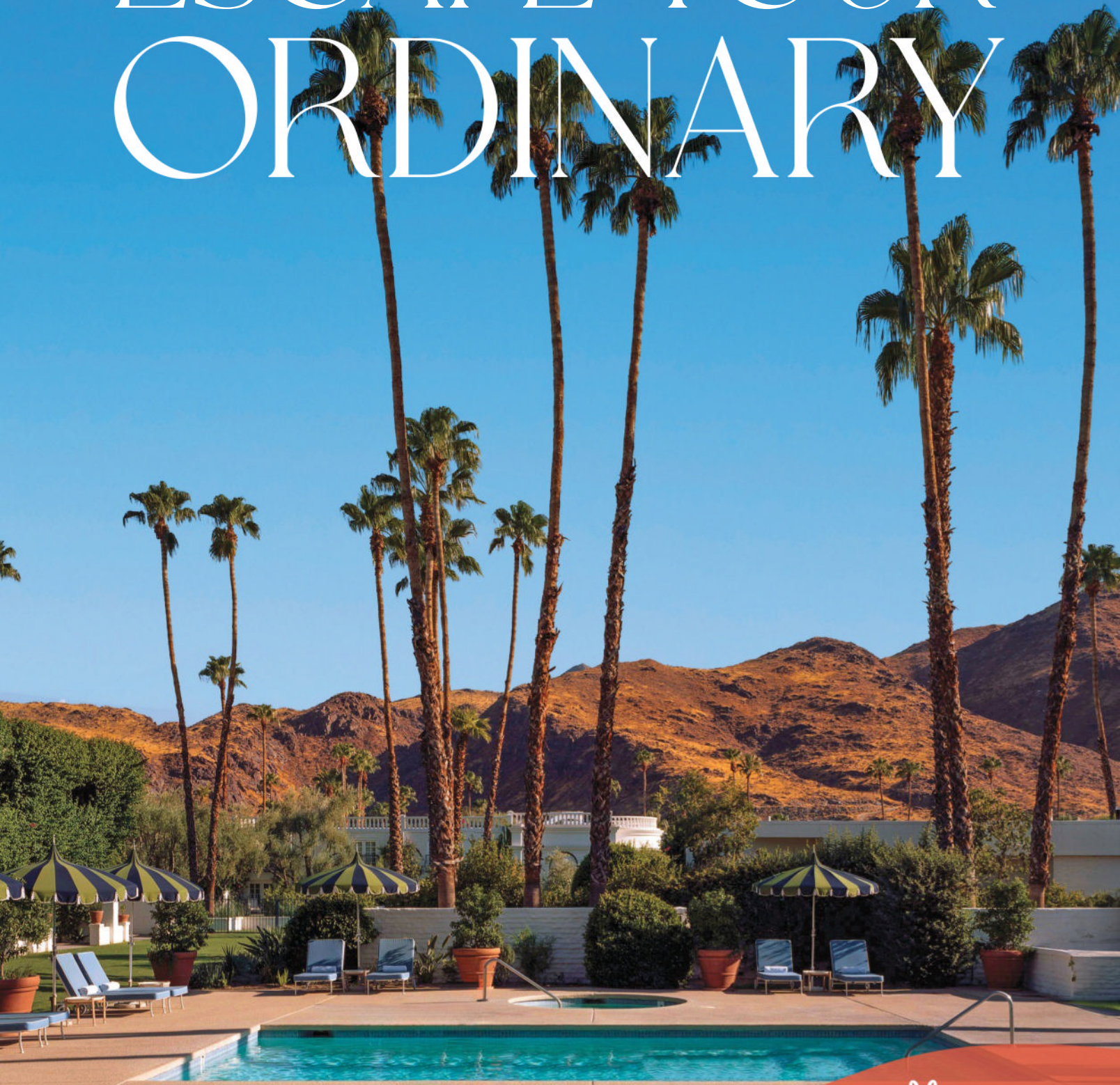
Porto Heli, Peloponnese

Since Aman Resorts opened Amanzoe on the east coast of the Peloponnese Peninsula in 2012, it has become a much-loved retreat for its monumental architecture, soaring columns, and vast expanses of marble that call to mind Greece's ancient historical sites. Water sports and island-hopping cruises can be arranged from the resort's beach club, which has four pools, cabanas, a Japanese restaurant, and a seaside spa. Guests have a choice of lavish accommodations: 41 pavilions or a collection of larger villas with one to nine rooms. *From \$1,945/night*



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CANAVES ENA*Santorini*

Canaves Ena reimagines a long-time favorite hotel, which originally opened in 1985 in the family owners' 17th-century wine caves. Today, the property is made up of 18 neutral-hued suites that let the landscape take center stage, plus private pools, verandas, and alfresco dining areas—all with views of the Aegean Sea and Santorini's famous caldera. Adami restaurant offers Greek classics such as *sfakiani pita* (cheese pie) and *kleftiko* (a roasted lamb dish). For an education in Santorini grapes, join a wine tasting. *From \$700/night*

**ONE&ONLY
KÉA ISLAND***Kéa*

A new resort is shining a spotlight on under-the-radar Kéa, the closest of the Cyclades islands to Athens. Opened in June of 2024, One&Only Kéa Island's 63 hillside villas look over a channel that hosts some of the Mediterranean's best wreck diving. The spacious villas have curved ceilings that echo the domes of the white churches found throughout the islands. Guests can join experiences such as underwater explorations with a local divemaster and hikes led by archaeologists. *From \$1,910/night*

*One&Only Kéa Island*



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THE WILD

Mykonos

Located on the more laid-back side of party-hard Mykonos, the Wild Hotel by Interni conveys a different character of the island, in a spot where hardy fishing crews used to keep their boats. Today, the 40 rooms, suites, and villas display a rustic-chic Cycladic flair, with rough stone, bare wood, and whitewashed plaster. Yet, this being Mykonos, it retains a sense of style in its carefully curated interiors, clifftop infinity pool, and secluded beach sheltered from the island's notoriously strong summer winds. Dining ranges from classic taverna dishes to Greek Japanese cuisine. A new *trata*, a traditional fishing boat, offers guests sailing adventures at dusk and dawn. *From \$400/night*

The Wild Hotel by Interni



DEXAMENES

Kourouta, Peloponnese

Set on a quiet beach on the west coast of the Peloponnese, the 36-room Dexamenes is a century-old former wine factory that played a key role in the region's industrial history. Restored by father-and-son team Nikos and Dimitris Karaflos, the old wine tanks now house sleek rooms, and a cozy gastro-tavern set in the onetime engine room extends into a courtyard, where grapes were once off-loaded from horse carts. Two huge metal silos at the center of it all function as spaces for spa treatments and yoga. *From \$165/night*

MANNA

Arcadia, Peloponnese

Opened in 2023, Manna has become a hit with Athenians looking to escape the city. Located deep in the mountains of the Peloponnese, the retreat couldn't feel farther away from urban life. A converted former sanatorium dating back to 1929, the 32-room hotel fully reflects its setting. The on-site restaurant serves hyperlocal ingredients—foraged truffles, golden fir honey—and spa treatments are inspired by Greek mythology, like the Lousios Hair and Scalp Ritual, named after the river where baby Zeus is said to have bathed. *From \$260/night* **A**



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EDITED BY ANNE BANAS

COSTA RICA

Experience a wind-powered ship
that feels more like a private yacht.
by Jeri Clausing

SAILING ALONG the Pacific Coast of Costa Rica under full wind power, with fishing lines cast off the back for a catch to supplement the dinner menu, it was hard to believe I was on a cruise ship.

Instead, the 136-passenger *Sea Cloud Spirit*, which launched in 2021, feels like a private yacht. Guests can jump off the ship's swim deck directly into the ocean, snorkel and paddleboard along the reefs of uninhabited islands, or simply spend a day relaxing under the billowing sails. It's what Sea Cloud Cruises calls "gentle tourism." I call it unmatched relaxation.

I traveled on the 11-day "Natural Wonders, Engineering Marvels" itinerary, which took us from Puntarenas to the Panama Canal along the Pacific coast. Our small ship was able to venture where larger ones cannot go, such as the town of Puerto Jiménez on the biodiverse Osa Peninsula. And we could focus on sustainable activities away from heavily trafficked areas.

Our first port was Playa Panamá, a beach in Costa Rica's Guanacaste Province, where we visited a local ranch that hopes to preserve a more traditional way of life by opening up to limited groups of tourists. We started with lessons in tortilla making and coffee roasting, then went horseback riding with the ranch owner and his grandson. In Golfito, we visited La Perica Sloth Garden, which is run by a family who discovered a sloth habitat while they were building trails to help their aging grandmother walk the property. After that, our stops became even more remote, including a beach on Panama's Isla Mogo Mogo where we snorkeled, and an island in the San Blas archipelago inhabited by the Guna (also known as Kuna), Indigenous people who create colorful *mola* textiles that they wear and sell.

Onboard, there's also a focus on sharing more about the local communities and wildlife. I listened to fascinating lectures on the history of the Panama Canal and the culture of the Guna people. I sat in the cool breeze while dining on Costa Rican-inspired fare such as coffee-crusted skirt steak. And of course, I enjoyed the most local cuisine of all—the fresh tuna, snapper, and mahi-mahi caught off the back deck while we sailed.



This page: Costa Rica is home to about 5 percent of the planet's biodiversity. Previous page: The *Sea Cloud Spirit* combines traditional rigging with modern amenities.

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: IMAGEBROKER.COM/ALAMY;
CHRISTIAN HEEB/LAIF/REUX; MICHELE WESTMORELAND



ALASKA

THE US-BASED company UnCruise Adventures is known for its intimate sailings. With a fleet of nine expedition vessels and yachts that tap out at 22 to 86 guests, UnCruise ships can nimbly scoot in and out of smaller ports—and once there, they provide the things that truly matter on an Alaskan expedition: kayaks, inflatable skiffs, binoculars, hiking poles, wildlife books, and more. In other words, they have everything you need to get out of your cabin and into the world. Current itineraries take in Prince William Sound, Glacier Bay, and the Inside Passage. And starting in 2025, the 36-passenger *Safari Explorer* will head to the 1,200-mile-long Aleutian Islands chain (or Unangam Tanangin in the Aleut language), where stops include Akutan Island, which is an active volcano, and Dutch Harbor, the crab-fishing port featured on *Deadliest Catch*. —Nicholas DeRenzo

for
Glaciers and
Wildlife



Glacier Bay National Park spans 3.3 million acres.

SYDNEY TO SINGAPORE

OCEANIA'S 670-passenger *Regatta* sails from Sydney to Singapore, visiting the eastern coast of Australia and Bali and Komodo in Indonesia along the way. Highlights include rainforest roaming in Cairns and two days spent among the culture and coral reefs of Papua New Guinea. You'll be onboard for 20 days and can enjoy your downtime at the Aquamar Spa + Vitality Center, the casino, and four different restaurants serving anything from poolside burgers to afternoon tea. Additionally, nearly three-quarters of the 342 staterooms and suites have a veranda, and suites come with butler service. —Michelle Baran

for
Adventure
Across
Islands



Regatta passengers can go snorkeling in Papua New Guinea's thriving coral reefs.

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NORWEGIAN FJORDS

THE CRAGGY coastline of Norway stretches for more than 63,000 miles, and the most stylish way to experience it is aboard the MS *Queen Anne*, Cunard's first new ship in 14 years. The dramatic fjords and aurora borealis displays are matched by the ship's elegant interiors, and while you might normally pack a parka for an itinerary that spends this much time above the Arctic Circle, don't forget your gown or tuxedo for gala nights—this is Cunard, after all. Befitting its status as a classic British institution, the cruise line has partnered with astrophotographer John Maclean, a fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society, who leads talks on the northern lights on select sailings. —ND

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AUSTRALIA

Connect with Indigenous culture on a journey into Australia's Kimberley region.
by Kendall Hill

IT'S DAWN on the Indian Ocean when we board Zodiacs and zoom off into Lalang-gaddam Marine Park on north-western Australia's Kimberley coast. An ancient stone plateau, the nearly two-billion-year-old Yowjab (Montgomery Reef), rises in the receding tide. It's like finding Atlantis or, in this case, the world's largest inshore reef, a 150-square-mile mass rapidly materializing on either side of us.

For the past three decades, cruise lines have regarded and sold the Kimberley as a "wilderness" destination. In truth, though, the region—which is comparable in size to California but with a total population of only 35,000 people—encompasses the traditional homelands of 30 First Nations peoples, who originally settled this area at least 45,000 years ago.

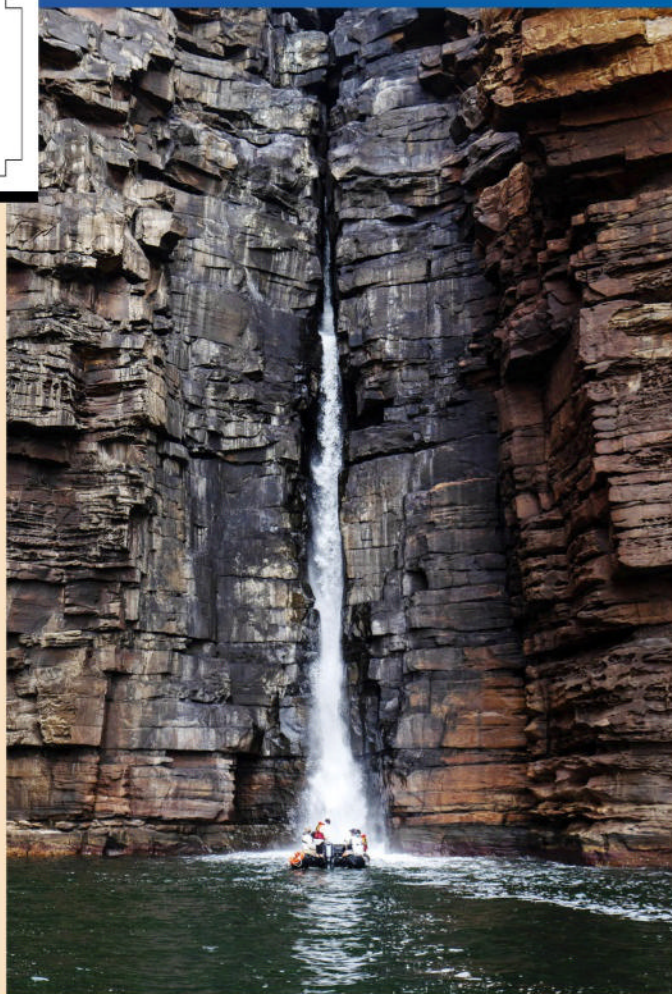
Seabourn is the first cruise line to start to address that oversight, by reaching out to Dambimangari rangers to partner as expedition guides and naming another tribe, the Wunambal Gaambara, as godparents (or *garrangarru*, a word that describes a mother or listener) of its latest ship, the 132-suite *Seabourn Pursuit*.

The *Pursuit* is the line's second purpose-built expedition vessel, equipped with high-tech gear (two six-person submarines, 24 Zodiacs, and a high-definition camera that transmits live feeds from up to two miles away) as well as unrivaled deck space for easy wildlife viewing. The 10-day "Kimberley Expedition: Waterfalls & Wandjinias" itinerary is a 1,252-nautical-mile voyage between Darwin and Broome through the territories of saltwater crocodiles, dolphins, birds of prey, turtles, whales, and reef sharks.

During my Zodiac excursion, Dambimangari ranger Adrian Lane shared his tribe's stories. While we were at Freshwater Cove, a Worrorra man showed us a rock overhang painted with *wandjina* creator spirits at least as old as Egypt's pyramids.

On Ngula (Jar Island), we were cleansed with smoke in a welcome ceremony, and treated to a *junba* dance performance by Wunambal Gaambara men.

As Lane tells it, when Seabourn approached him to join its team, giving him the opportunity to share his culture with cruise passengers, "that really lit the flame in my soul to say, 'Let's go now.'"



From top: Guests on an excursion view King George Falls; Wunambal Gaambara people perform a daylong naming ceremony on Ngula (Jar Island).

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for
A River Less
Cruised

THE GANGES RIVER

FOR NEARLY 10 years, Uniworld Boutique River Cruises has been sailing along the boisterous, busy, sacred, and serene Ganges and its tributaries. In the process, it has enabled travelers to access city centers such as Kolkata, as well as wilderness areas and historic sites like the early 19th-century Hindu temple complex in Kalna, consisting of 108 Shiv Mandir structures situated in concentric circles. The all-suite, 56-passenger *Ganges Voyager II* offers a glimpse into a world where daily life revolves around the legendary waterway—viewed from the comfort of a floating hotel with spacious staterooms, colorful public areas, and meals served in the elegant East India restaurant. Trips can be extended on land with a pre- or post-sail tour of Udaipur and Varanasi, or a ride on the iconic Maharajas' Express train from New Delhi to Mumbai. —MB

The Ganges flows through Varanasi, one of the holiest cities in the Hindu religion.

CANADA AND ALASKA

OPERATING EXCLUSIVELY IN British Columbia and Alaska, Maple Leaf Adventures runs three small and unconventional boats: a 120-year-old schooner from Vancouver (holding eight guests), a 112-year-old tugboat from Victoria (12 guests), and a catamaran (24 guests). Each of the sailings thoughtfully connects travelers with the water, wildlife, and culture of the region. Destinations include the fjords and coves of Desolation Sound and the huge, unspoiled tract of biodiverse land known as the Great Bear Rainforest, which the company helps protect by dedicating time to conservation, cleanup, and education. Maple Leaf also collaborates with First Nations communities on its itineraries. For example, a Haida elder storyteller is a crew member on trips in the Haida Gwaii archipelago. —Billie Cohen



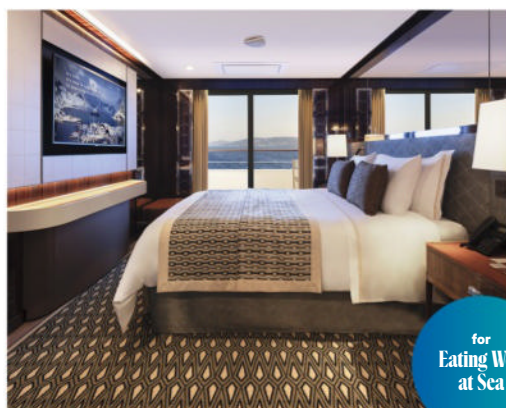
for
A Wilder Side
of Canada

The Great Bear Rainforest is home to spirit bears, rare black bears with creamy fur.

ITALY AND GREECE

WHEN IT FIRST arrived on the cruise scene in 2021, Atlas Ocean Voyages made a name for itself thanks to its 198-passenger yacht-style expedition vessels that provided comfort and luxury in some of the most extreme polar regions in the world. But Atlas also sails its ships in the warmer waters of the Mediterranean, emphasizing cuisine through its Epicurean Expeditions, which may include a dairy farm tour in Mykonos, wine and ouzo outings in Santorini, and a Sicilian pizza-cooking demonstration in the Aeolian Islands. —MB

Cruises on Atlas Ocean Voyages include butler service, open bars, and high tea.



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Expedition

GREENLAND


A SHINY NEW international airport set to open this winter in Nuuk, Greenland's capital, will revolutionize the cruising experience on the world's largest island. Because HX (Hurtigruten Expeditions) ships will no longer need to bring passengers across the Atlantic from Iceland, they'll spend more time in the iceberg- and whale-dotted waters of Greenland, sailing farther up the coast than ever before. Conditions are unpredictable in the Arctic (did we mention icebergs?), so the experience can be a true *expedition*: Some planned ports might have to change, causing you to literally go with the flow. One day, you might help a scientist collect plankton samples off the side of a Zodiac; another, you could visit a tiny Inuit village with crayon-box-colored houses, catch your own cod with local anglers, or hike to a UNESCO-protected ice fjord. —ND



HX's Greenland expedition cruises give travelers a taste of island life, ice fjords, and the freshest local foods.



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ansechastanet.com



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windjammer-landing.com



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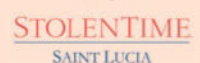
thebodyholiday.com



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DORADO BEACH, A RITZ-CARLTON RESERVE

Set on a powdery stretch of sand and ensconced in lush natural foliage, Ritz-Carlton's Dorado Beach is an oceanfront sanctuary. Each of the rooms here offers expansive views of the glimmering sea. Blissfully private and luxurious, this exclusive resort features plenty of signature amenities, including a tree house for massages.

Dorado Beach
A RITZ-CARLTON RESERVE



LA CONCHA SAN JUAN RESORT

Stay in the heart of the action at La Concha Resort, which boasts unbeatable beach and city access. By day, flock to the plush loungers at one of three oceanside pools; by night, sip tropical cocktails and mingle with other guests in the vibrant, open-air lobby.

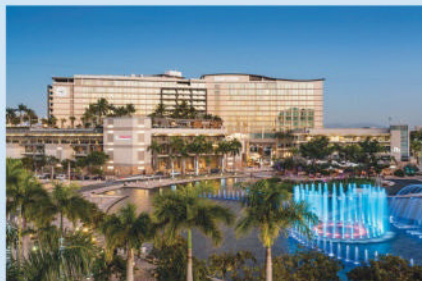
La Concha
A RENAISSANCE RESORT



SAN JUAN MARRIOTT RESORT & STELLARIS CASINO

The San Juan Marriott Resort & Stellaris Casino is a beachfront oasis in lively, colorful San Juan. From the lobby casino to the palm-tree-lined pools, every space here invites utter relaxation and enjoyment. Plus, the resort's beach is widely regarded as one of the most beautiful in the area.

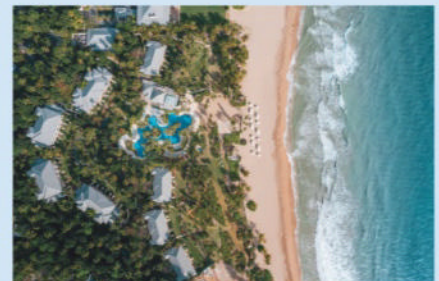

MARRIOTT RESORT
SAN JUAN
STELLARIS CASINO



SHERATON PUERTO RICO RESORT & CASINO

An icon of San Juan's buzzy entertainment district, the Sheraton Puerto Rico Resort & Casino is brimming with exciting on-site amenities. Aside from the 24/7 casino, there's a full-service spa, various gourmet dining options, and a romantic rooftop infinity pool with prime city views.


SHERATON
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A tranquil stay awaits when choosing the St. Regis, where every detail is impeccably curated. Guests can enjoy upscale dining, spa treatments, a golf course, and more. And the location—an idyllic beach near the foothills of El Yunque National Forest—is sublime.


ST REGIS
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for
Island
Hopping

THE SOUTH PACIFIC

CHANNELING THE WAYFINDERS who navigated these waters thousands of years ago, the small-ship cruise line Windstar is charting an adventurous new course through French Polynesia. Adding to island-hopping itineraries that include such classics as Bora Bora and Tahiti, Windstar recently introduced a 14-day route that sails out to the Marquesas, a farther-afield archipelago that reality TV fans may recognize as a filming location for *Survivor*. Out here, you'll stop in Fatu Hiva, where local people make beautiful tapa cloth out of tree bark; Hiva Oa, which is home to the region's largest tiki statues; and Nuku Hiva, where wild horses stroll through green valleys under rocky peaks. —ND

The Marquesas Islands are an archipelago about 900 miles northeast of Tahiti.



for
Beaches,
Villages, and
Cities

THE SOUTH AMERICAN COAST

IN THE WORLD of expedition cruising, mainland South America is often relegated to a jumping-off point for destinations such as Antarctica, the Falklands, or the Galápagos. But Scenic's 13-day "Rhythms of the Brazilian Coastline" itinerary invites cruisers to stop and stay awhile, linking major cities, unsung coastal villages, and secluded beaches. The 228-passenger yacht departs from Buenos Aires and stops in Uruguay at Montevideo and the "St. Tropez of South America" (Punta del Este) before port-hopping up the Brazilian coast. Visits include the forested Ilha de São Sebastião, teeming with acrobatic capuchin monkeys; Búzios, a sleepy fishing village that became an upscale beach resort after Brigitte Bardot holidayed here in the '60s; and Pontal do Sul, a nature reserve that can be seen with the help of the ship's submersible. —ND

Rio de Janeiro's Ipanema Beach is one of the most famous spots on Brazil's coast.



Oudong, Cambodia's former capital, is the site of a prominent monastery.

VIETNAM AND CAMBODIA ON THE MEKONG

for
A Cultural
Deep Dive

RIVER CRUISE line AmaWaterways has been plying the Mekong since 2009 and is gearing up to add a second 124-passenger vessel in 2026. The itineraries mix tours of vibrant urban centers such as Ho Chi Minh City and Phnom Penh with time in river towns and floating villages. Added bonus: The dining rooms pay homage to Southeast Asian cuisine via menu items that include a soothing pho noodle soup served at breakfast. Weeklong itineraries can be enhanced with pre- and post-cruise extensions to the famous temples of Angkor Archaeological Park in Cambodia or the limestone islands of Ha Long Bay in Vietnam. —MB

 DWEJRA BAY, GOZO

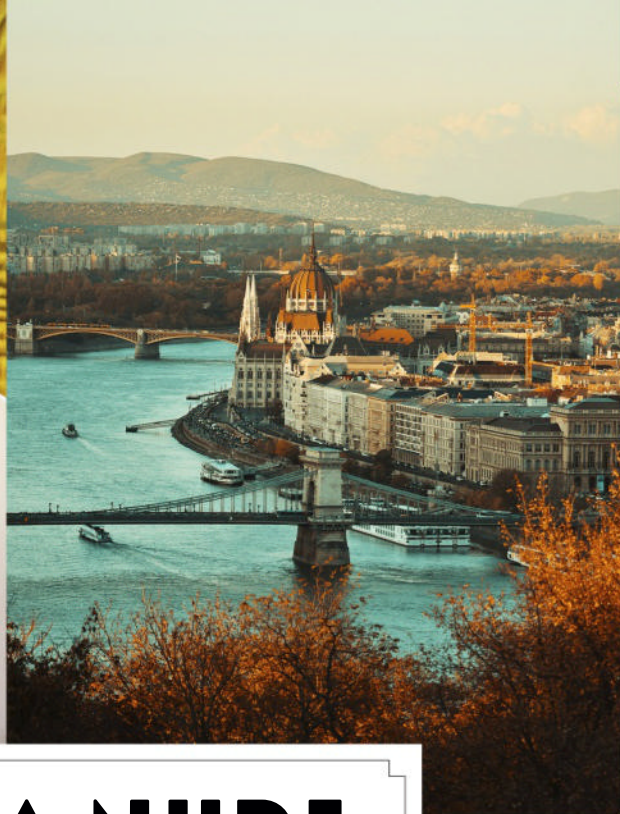
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Malta's slow-paced sister island, Gozo's, colors and flavors are brought out by the radiant skies above it and the blue Mediterranean sea that surrounds its spectacular coast, awaiting discovery and exploration.



VisitMalta



THE DANUBE

This luxury sailing isn't a travel experience—it's a lifestyle.
by Nicole Edenedo

I SMILED as I passed the Palm Court. Inside, a DJ was playing music, and guests were roaring with laughter and clinking their glasses. Signs of a good night, I thought. It wasn't the first time during this Danube River cruise that I felt like I was enjoying life on the boat just as much as—if not more than—the excursions to some of Europe's most beloved cities.

Over the past few days I'd been sailing from Budapest to Vienna on Riverside Luxury Cruises' *Riverside Mozart*, and I'd noticed something else too. Extravagances like champagne and caviar had become part of my regular diet, I'd grown accustomed to spa treatments with high-end products from Natura Bissé, and I'd been spoiled by the amount of breathing room on board. Riverside is known for its large suites (instead of cabins), grandiose lounge areas, butler service for everyone, and restaurants with menus that reflect the region.

Speaking of which, I took time to indulge in a meal of lamb and risotto before suiting up for a night excursion in

Hungary's capital. The tour brought guests to Szimpla Kert, one of Budapest's "ruin bars" that have been transformed from bombed-out WWII-era buildings into trendy nightclubs. Neon signs and disco balls lit graffiti-spattered rooms where different styles of music—house, hip-hop, pop—had the crowd dancing. Night excursions aren't the norm on river cruises, so it was thrilling to experience the city's after-dark scene and then get to return to the comforts of the *Mozart*.

Other shore outings were equally rich with culture and history. In Vienna, for example, I watched the world-renowned Lipizzaner horses march through their morning routines at the Spanish Riding School, which has been dedicated to the preservation of classical dressage techniques since the early 1700s. No equestrian skills were required to appreciate their beauty and precision. Just as no special skills were required to appreciate the caviar, champagne, massage, and three-course dinner waiting for me back on board.

Riverside Mozart offers locally influenced menus at its restaurants onboard and night excursions in Budapest, Hungary.

A photograph of two Black women sitting on the edge of a swimming pool, laughing joyfully. The woman on the left is wearing a dark blue t-shirt with a small circular logo and olive green shorts. The woman on the right is wearing a leopard print one-piece swimsuit. They are both looking upwards and to the right. The background is a lush, green, hilly landscape. The overall mood is joyful and adventurous.

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THE NILE RIVER

GEOFFREY KENT, the founder of Abercrombie & Kent (A&K), was inspired to create luxury Nile River cruises back in the 1970s, during an encounter with actor David Niven on the set of Agatha Christie's *Death on the Nile*. Today, the company's Egypt river fleet still captures that throwback charm: Its ships are small, ranging from a converted *dahabiya* (wooden sailboat) that accommodates 12 guests to a modern 80-person vessel with panoramic windows in every cabin. A&K's network of experts includes Egyptologists and fixers who can arrange anything from dinners within ancient temples to private after-hours access inside the Pyramids of Giza. The newest ship, arriving in 2026 and available for private charters, will offer 32 rooms with floor-to-ceiling windows and some of the largest suites on the Nile. —MB

for
A More Regal
Nile Cruise



A&K's small-ship Nile cruises visit locations including the Temple of Edfu and the Pyramids of Giza.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: COURTESY OF SANCTUARY RETREATS; COURTESY OF ABERCROMBIE & KENT;
COURTESY OF SANCTUARY RETREATS; EMILY SLADE PHOTOGRAPHY

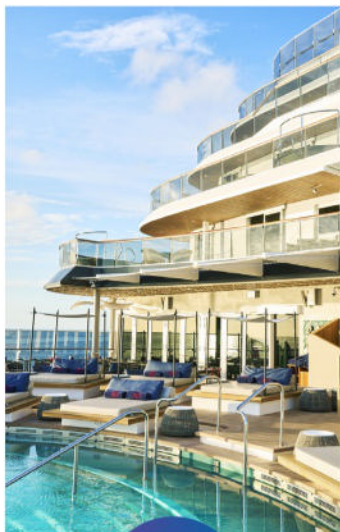
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for
Luxury... With
the Kids

MIAMI AND THE LESSER ANTILLES

EXPLORA JOURNEYS launched in 2023 as a boutique cruise line from the European company MSC Group, with elegant interiors and stellar food. It's also family-friendly: Fares are discounted as much as 50 percent for children, suites connect to accommodate family groups, and a supervised Nautilus Club is available for kids ages 6 to 17. The 922-passenger *Explora I* has a much more intimate feel than other ships that ply this route carrying thousands, but it still feels grand, thanks to details such as a lobby with soaring ceilings, an art gallery, and staterooms with walk-in closets—not to mention that almost a third of the ship's real estate is dedicated to outdoor space. On this itinerary out of Miami, passengers sail to Anguilla (for white sand beaches), Dominica (with its pristine cloud forest), St. Lucia (home to hot springs and waterfalls), and Barbados (marked by lively celebrations throughout the year). —MB

The Explora I has four pools and several places to lounge, including a whiskey bar.

PORTUGAL'S DOURO RIVER



for
Wine
Lovers

AVALON WATERWAYS is known, among other things, for its Panorama Suites with windows that make every room feel more open—and

now travelers can enjoy that experience on Portugal's Douro River. The 102-passenger *Avalon Alegria* introduced an eight-day itinerary that begins in the seaside city of Porto and meanders through the Alto Douro Wine Region, a UNESCO World Heritage site, before visiting the Renaissance city of Salamanca, Spain. In addition to sightseeing tours, Avalon offers more active and immersive outings, such as a biologist-led biking trip in Porto and wine tasting at one of the oldest farms in the Douro Valley. —MB

Port wine is one of Porto's biggest draws.

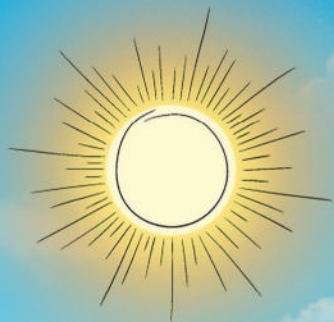
AFRICA

for
A Continental
Sampler

ALONG THE WEST coast of Africa, countries such as Angola and Senegal are making themselves more accessible to international visitors. Silversea's ultra-luxe 23-day itinerary provides a sampler, hopscotching from Cape Town, South Africa, up the African coast and finally docking in Lisbon, Portugal. Shore excursions highlight the diverse cultures lining the Atlantic: In Ghana, for instance, you could learn how to smoke fish in a Chorkor oven or upcycle bottles into glass beads, while you might taste baobab juice or a rice dish called *benachin* during a home visit in Gambia. In addition, the trip visits areas of astounding natural beauty, including an island off the Namibian coast teeming with penguins and a pink salt lake in Senegal that's up for UNESCO World Heritage status. —ND

A cruise along the African coast takes in everything from sandy beaches to lively cities.





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CORINTH CANAL

Squeeze through a man-made marvel barely wider than the ship.
by Fran Golden

I WAS PERHAPS a little nervous for our voyage through Greece's Corinth Canal, the narrowest and deepest man-made canal in the world. Our yacht, Windstar Cruises' 312-passenger *Star Legend*, was about 63 feet wide. The canal was just 18 feet wider.

This was a rarefied experience. Only a few small-ship cruise lines operate through the canal, just a handful of trips each year that are mostly for repositioning purposes. But for travelers, a trip through the Corinth Canal is an opportunity to experience an engineering wonder that is arguably more thrilling than the Suez: The nearly four-mile-long, lockless trench was begun under Roman Emperor Nero's rule in 67 C.E., completed in 1893, and recently reopened after a few years of repairs.

Today, the one-hour crossing lets travelers see the historic feat up close. It also gives them access to the less-visited port of Itea, where they can tour the UNESCO World Heritage site of Delphi, which dates to the second millennium B.C.E. My passage was part of Windstar's eight-day "Aegean Sea Odyssey via the Corinth Canal" itinerary. It offered excursions in Türkiye's ancient Roman city of Ephesus (where we were treated to a white-tablecloth

dinner among the ruins) and Myrina, a seaside town with a Venetian castle on the Greek island of Lemnos.

On canal day, there was a flurry of activity throughout the ship, as everyone tried to figure out the best place to watch. We were met by a tugboat that towed us through, along with local pilots (required by authorities due to the difficulty of the passage) and a guide who provided historical commentary and context.

As we entered, the canal seemed quite manageable. But then it narrowed until there were sheer sand-colored limestone walls mere feet from the sides of the ship. The captain and pilot positioned themselves on the outdoor bridge wings to make sure we didn't scrape the solid rock on either side. I had a moment of trepidation when I realized that if they wanted to, they could reach out and grab the branches of bushes growing on the cliffs.

I saw tourists leaning on overpasses as we slid along beneath them; at the last bridge, bungee jumpers sought an adrenaline rush by bouncing right in front of us. I felt a rush, too, and I breathed deeply as we emerged from the canal, grateful to have witnessed a true engineering tour de force. **A**

The Corinth Canal links the Saronic Gulf and the Gulf of Corinth.



VIEWS YOU'LL WANT TO SEE AGAIN AND AGAIN.

It's pretty impressive how the northern lights never get old, especially for a phenomenon that's been around for millions of years. And, from November to April in the Yukon, we're lucky enough to have some of the world's best spots to view these life-changing lights. Combine that with a ton of daytime adventures (like cross-country skiing or dogsledding across beautiful frozen lakes) and Whitehorse may just make you see winter in a different light.

LIFECHANGINGLIGHTS.COM

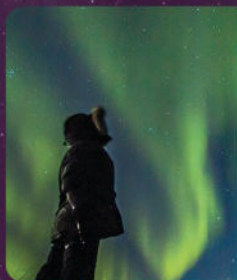
YUKON RENDEZ-VOUS FESTIVAL

Never tried ax throwing, dogsledding, or chainsaw chucking? Check out the yearly festival. Just be sure to hit the pancake breakfast first to avoid chucking chainsaws hungry.



NORTHERN TALES

Snowmobiling, wildlife viewing, aurora viewing... think having so many once-in-a-lifetime experiences in one spot is impressive? Just wait until you realize you can try them all in a week.



WHITEHORSE, YUKON

NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

NORTHERN LIGHTS RESORT & SPA

The only way the northern lights could be better is if they were watched from bed in a cabin with floor-to-ceiling windows. Wait, we just described the Northern Lights Resort & Spa.



SOUTHERN LAKES RESORT

Here cozy cabins meet fine dining—and, yes, we have the best Wiener schnitzel in the Yukon. Enjoy stunning views of the northern lights right from your balcony.



CANADA*

CANADA*



AURORA VILLAGE

We're not sure if it's the traditional teepees, or 360-degree heated viewing seats but, somehow, Aurora Village manages to make the lights even more magical.



SNOWKING WINTER FEST

Any event held in a glacial palace must be special. And once you experience the music, art, and northern lights on display, you'll see why the annual Snowking Festival has its royal reputation.



YELLOWKNIFE, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES



BULLOCKS BISTRO

It wouldn't be very Canadian to brag, so let's just say you'll find some of the best fish and chips in this iconic Yellowknife restaurant, which has fueled hungry light hunters for 30 years.

NUNAVUT

GREAT
SLAVE LAKE

AND AGAIN.

Call us biased, but few bucket list sights deserve the kind of glowing reviews a northern lights experience gets. Especially one that takes place in the Aurora Capital of North America. With breathtaking wilderness, enchanting culture, and a festival hosted in a literal palace made of snow and ice, we'd be tempted to say that the Northwest Territories is straight out of a fairy tale. You know, if we hadn't seen it all with our own eyes, that is.

LIFECHANGINGLIGHTS.COM

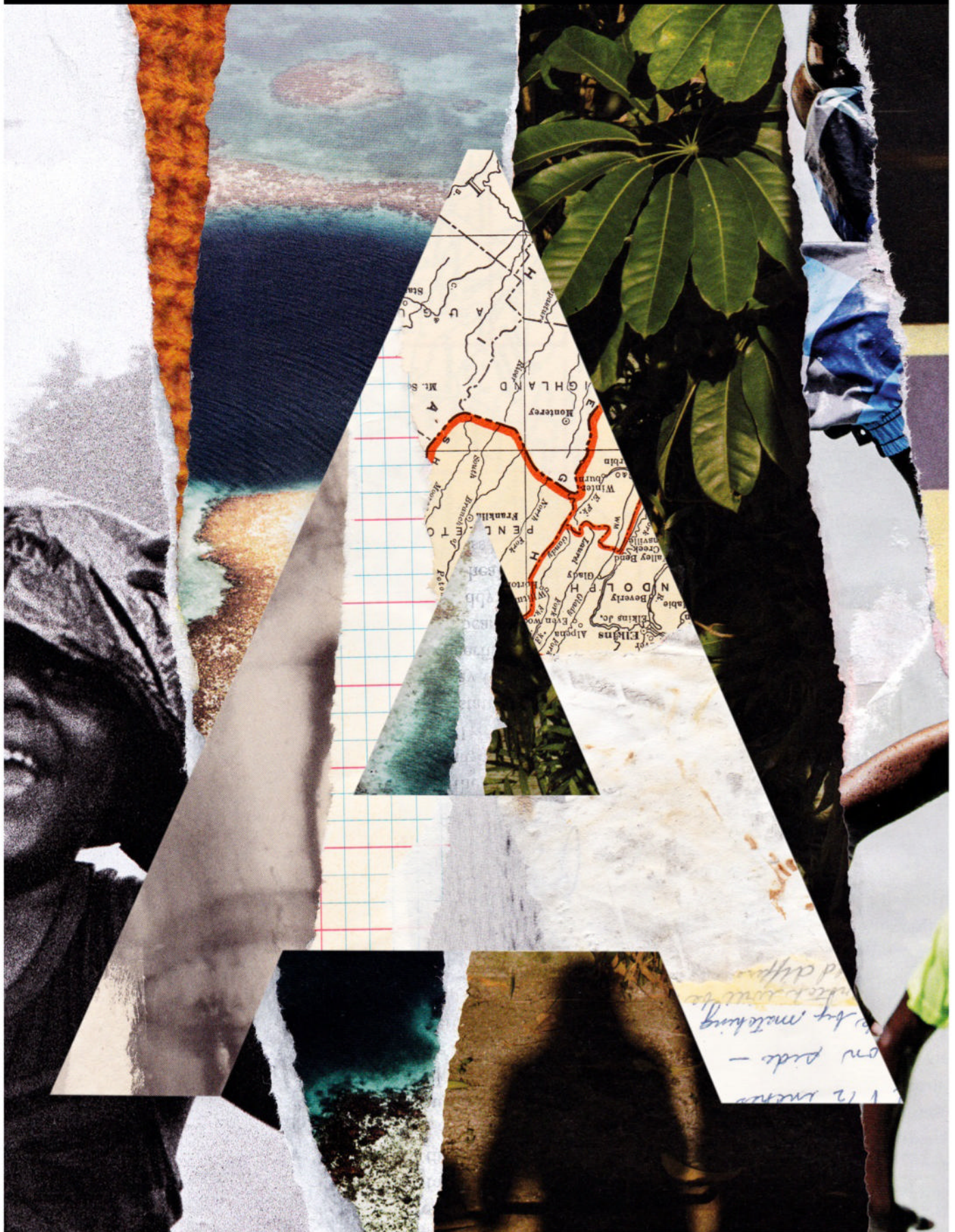


B.DENE ADVENTURES

Listen to traditional drumming, enjoy fish cooked over open fire, and listen as Dene Elders pass on their knowledge and traditions. And that's all before you even see the northern lights.



FEATURES



Art by **MEL HAASCH**

Collage images were sourced from archival Afar issues

Common
With
Flow



Writer **Bonnie Tsui** travels to three Swiss cities to take part in the country's beloved tradition of river swimming.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY
Julia Nimke

ne





This page:
The women's-only Frauenbad Stadthausquai has been an institution on Zurich's Limmat River since 1837.

Previous page: The Limmat River starts in Lake Zurich. For nearly 60 years, thousands of people have jumped into its waters every summer for the annual Zürcher Limmatschwimmen.



TWENTY SUMMERS AGO, my husband, Matt, and I swam down the Aare River in Switzerland with a dog named Arcas. I don't love dogs, which has always felt like a moral failing. But Arcas was special.

He belonged to one of our closest friends, August, who is Swiss German and was spending the year in Bern. Arcas was a puppy then, a rust-red farm dog with one ear up and one ear down who was a little afraid of the water.

Fed by the Bernese Alps, the Aare is known for being cold, fast, and milky blue. It runs through Bern, the capital of Switzerland, past the elegant domes of Parliament and the Gothic cathedral tower that anchors the medieval-era Old City, a UNESCO World Heritage site. We walked a distance upriver before jumping in to let the current take us, and Arcas ran alongside until his fear of being separated from us overcame his fear of the water, propelling him to swim into the river after us.

I learned to swim when I was five, and had swum in the Atlantic and the Aegean, the Caribbean and the Coral Sea. But swimming through an urban environment was novel. What I remember most is the swift embrace of that otherworldly blue, the communal buzz of people in the water, and the thrill of flying down the river with a puppy who looked at everything with new eyes. I did, too. It was the first time I'd seen a river so integrated into city life.

In the years since, I've swum in many more places, and written a book—*Why We Swim* (Algonquin Books, 2020)—about our human relationship with water. But that first experience with the Aare was so formative that I began to wonder about Switzerland's robust river-swimming culture, and why it felt unlike anywhere else. And so in the summer of 2024, I set off for the country to swim in three of its rivers.

From left: Zurich's Flussbad Oberer Letten swimming facility is accessible by public transportation; Basel's fish-shaped swim bags are made locally; Bern's stretch of the Aare River is fast—and cold.

EVERY ONE OF Switzerland's great cities has a river to swim in—often on a lunch hour, sometimes even to commute. Dubbed “the water tower of Europe,” the country holds more than 6 percent of the continent's freshwater reserves; the Rhine, Rhône, Po, Danube, and Adige rivers are all fed by water from the Swiss Alps, and several have their headwaters there. Switzerland's status as the hydrographic center of Europe has influenced the foundation of cities from Bern and Basel to Zurich and Geneva, situating them on key trade routes and strategic crossings. It has also informed the country's indelible river swimming history, which dates back more than 2,000 years.

But starting in the mid-19th century, Swiss rivers were corralled by massive dam construction, canalization, and other initiatives meant to boost industries. Narrowing and rerouting the rivers caused ecological damage, increasing habitat loss and the likelihood of flooding. Over the last several decades, projects to “correct the corrections” and restore waterways to more natural courses have become a priority. A return to river swimming has been an added benefit.

I landed in Zurich in mid-June, on the first truly hot day of the season. After a 12-minute train ride from the airport to downtown, it was an easy stroll over to Flussbad Oberer Letten, a public swimming facility located on the banks of the Limmat River, near the Swiss National Museum. Though it is relatively short, flowing roughly 22 miles from Lake Zurich before meeting up with the Aare, the Limmat runs through the heart of the city.

In the midday heat, sunbathers sprawled on wooden decks; when the scorch became unbearable, they got up, jumped off the diving board, and zipped by on the river, exiting only to do it all over again.

The Limmat is a success story, said Ruedi Bösiger, who directs river restoration and conservation projects for the World Wide Fund for Nature Switzerland. “There's a balance between hydropower needs, clean water where you can swim, and reconnected floodplains downriver,” he told me. “It's challenging, ongoing work. But we appeal to the sense of a river as a common good so everybody can use it.” In other words, the river culture I saw before me was hard won.

I'd left my rolling suitcase at Zurich's main station; after



changing and putting my clothes in a locker, I walked upriver to the farthest entry point on the club's deck. As I stood on the stairs that led into the river, the current tugged at my calves: *Let's go!* I plunged into the water and swam upstream to hold myself in place. I was suddenly, intensely awake, my body shaken free of jet lag, the sun winking every time I turned my head to breathe.

When I paused to tread, the current ushered me downstream to the exit by the main lifeguard office. The guards were friendly, asking me where I was from and giving tips on battling the flow. As we chatted, a fellow swimmer offered to take my picture. Then I walked back up to my original entry point for another round.

It turned out that 20 minutes of swimming against the current in a river juiced by three weeks of rain was plenty exhausting for a first foray. I climbed out, waved goodbye to the lifeguards, picked up my luggage, and got on the train to Basel, a little over an hour away. When I arrived at the Hotel Krafft, my hair was still damp. In my room overlooking the Rhine, a paisley-patterned dry bag was hanging on a hook, beckoning.

It was shaping up to be a two-river day.



SWITZERLAND'S PORTION of the Rhine, which runs more than 230 miles from the Alps to the border with Germany, is a river of a totally different scale from the Limmat. Hundreds of people swimming in the same waterway as ferries, cruise boats, and the cargo ships that transport much of the oil and gasoline for Switzerland would seem to be a bad idea. But on a sizzling day in Basel, everyone gets in.

Doing so is a longstanding tradition. In the 15th century, nuns from Basel's Klingental Abbey sought relief from the heat in the Rhine, and the practice of river swimming became widespread. After officials banned swimming in the Rhine's open areas in the 19th century due to propriety, the Gesellschaft für das Gute und Gemeinnützige, or Society for Common Good, developed four bathing spots.


But by the 1970s, the water had long been polluted. More than a century earlier, textile-dye entrepreneurs established their first factories

along a canal that dumped toxic waste into the Rhine. In 1986, a catastrophic spill and fire at an agrochemical factory sent 30 tons of poisonous materials into the river, turning it red. It was a signal event that led to rigorous safety controls at chemical plants around Basel.

The yearslong effort to clean up the water gave Basel a swimmable river. There is comprehensive daily water testing conducted by a state-of-the-art monitoring station. And every August on a designated day, the official Basler Rheinschwimmen welcomes thousands of people to swim together down the river safely. Today, swimming in the Rhine in Basel is permitted almost everywhere, except for port areas and hazardous zones around bridge pillars and the hydroelectric plant. The city even has its own river swimming guide, with tips on where to enter the water and how to pack a swim bag; the free BachApp has updated water levels and temperature, as well as a map with entry and exit points.

I, too, had safety considerations in mind when I arrived





at the Rhine. By the time I jumped in, it was 5:30 p.m.—happy hour. A fevered chatter hung in the air, the daylight remained long, and swimmers shrieked their way downriver. Floating 10 feet away was my guide, Thomas Flatt, who wore a navy fisherman's cap to keep the sun out of his eyes.

"Are you enjoying?" he asked merrily as he breaststroked over, a dry bag containing his belongings trailing behind. (Basel's preferred style is the *Wickelfisch*, a fish-shaped swim bag that is made locally.) Then he pointed out the *weidlinge*, traditional flat-bottomed punting boats moored ahead, with a word of caution: "OK, now let's watch out."

Flatt, a trim, tanned 55-year-old with the teeth-forward grin of a movie star, is on the board of IG Rheinschwimmen, a volunteer association that advocates for safe public swimming in the Rhine. Swimming in the river, he explained, is a tradition deeply rooted in a Swiss culture that balances individual and collective responsibility.

"There's a tendency in many societies for authorities to forbid or limit activities of their people, instead of getting organized and making it safer for them to make their own decisions. That's why we created the association, to guard the rights of swimmers," he said. Because the Rhine runs through Basel's center, it serves as a major recreation area for the population of nearly 200,000, more than 30 percent of whom are international residents. It is a communal place for different parts of society to come together.

Flatt's point was proven as we were joined on our half-hour swim by several of his friends, who included one Dutchman, two sisters who grew up just outside Basel, and a woman from Ohio who had been living in the city for more than two decades. Basel's urban highlight reel was exhilarating at this time of day, as the high water swept us past the

sun-drenched sidewalk cafés, the riverbanks humming with conversation and the clink of glasses. Though the swim itself mostly involved just floating with the current, we kept an eye on possible exit routes—ladders, stairs, and ramps are also marked on maps posted along the river—and emerged on the right bank before Dreirosenbrücke, the last bridge before the Port of Switzerland, lest we get flushed to France and Germany, whose churches were visible just beyond the bridge.

Before I'd even dried off, my new friends had ordered Aperol spritzes and bread, cheese, olives, and hummus from a riverside buvette, or seasonal pop-up kiosk. We pulled up chairs and discussed river swimming in other Swiss cities—the Rhône in Geneva and the Reuss in Lucerne, the Limmat in Zurich and the Aare in Bern. Everyone agreed that although each river scene had a different character, the everydayness of swimming was such that getting in the water was how you understood the soul of each place. And that caring for the river and ensuring access was part of that appreciation—a kind of communal duty.

The idea crystallized for me the next evening at the 125-year-old Rheinbad Breite swim club, where I met up with Barbara Zimmerli, one of Flatt's friends, with whom I'd swum the day before. During a break between clouds, we walked upriver and floated back down to the club, which reopened last year after a major renovation. Zimmerli helped fundraise for the expansion that restored the bathhouse to its original footprint; it now spans two levels, with changing rooms, showers, lockers, a wintertime sauna, and wood-planked



Opposite page: First-time river swimmers should know their own ability and, when possible, enter the river with a buddy.



This page, from left: Basel has been part of Switzerland since June 1501; Thomas Flatt advocates for safe public swimming in the Rhine.






Swimming in the Rhine is encouraged if the water temperature is above 64 degrees.

decks for sunbathing and hanging out after a river swim. Anyone can drop in and use the facilities for six Swiss francs (\$7), the same price as citywide public pool entry.

Zimmerli lives just uphill from the club—I could throw a rock and hit her window. Over a glass of wine at the club's restaurant, she told me how the rhythm of her days is dictated by the ships moving through the port, the horns warning swimmers downriver, the vicissitudes of wind and temperature and passing weather. On the opposite shore, starting from the beach just below the Museum Tinguely, the Basel-Stadt Sports Department offers lifeguard-supervised swims every Tuesday evening in July and August.

Then Zimmerli showed me a photo from a recent morning when her 15-year-old daughter put her things in a dry bag and swam down the river to class with her friend.

"It's not something that she does all the time," Zimmerli said. "But it's such a nice way to get to school."



THREE DAYS AFTER I jumped in the Limmat and the Rhine, I set off for Bern, an hour south of Basel by train but higher in elevation and 15 degrees cooler, thanks to its position on the plateau between the Alps and the Jura Mountains. Given the city's proximity to its namesake glacier in the Bernese Alps, the Aare River runs colder and faster here than the Rhine does in Basel. Its signature blue-green water is pristine. There are records of swimming in the Aare as early as 1721; today, the practice is on the official list of Switzerland's living traditions.

I arrived on a dismal morning, but the Aare has its devotees no matter the weather. On the way to my hotel, I spotted a gentleman in swim trunks standing waist-deep in the river during a downpour, scrubbing water on his reddened arms and chest, with the stone arches of Parliament and the red-roofed government buildings an improbably grand backdrop. (Lore has it that swimsuits were once hung out to dry on the balcony of the Parliament building facing the river.)

The Aare curves around Bern in a hug, and Bern returns the favor by making it easy to swim.

The Swiss capital has several free riverside swimming-pool complexes, including Lorrainebad, built in 1892, and Freibad Marzili, which dates to 1782. The latter, a sprawling expanse with cafés and a swimming channel that attracts as many as 10,000 people in summer, is considered the most beautiful river bath in Switzerland. Bern also has its own specialized duffel for Aare swimming, the *äuä* bag (*äuä* meaning "no way" or "you're joking" in Bernese dialect). Public safety campaigns—"Aare You Safe?"—and signage everywhere prioritize strong swimming skills and knowledge of water conditions and exit routes. Every year in the late fall, a group of hardy swimmers can be found continuing

Clockwise from top left: Barbara Zimmerli helped with the rehabilitation of Basel's Rheinbad Breite swim club; Bern is built around the Aare River; the Flussbad Oberer

Letten riverfront platform in Zurich is a popular summer perch; in Bern, Freibad Marzili has storage lockers for swimmers heading to the pool or Aare River.

the 20-year-old tradition of taking an ice-cold plunge in the Aare.

Though it wasn't autumn during my visit, it did feel that way at times. The next day at Marzili, I eked out a mile in the chilly 50-meter lap pool, then walked 30 feet across the grass and dove into the Aare. A sign on the lawn indicated that the river was 15 degrees Celsius, or 59 degrees Fahrenheit; the pool wasn't much warmer. Earlier, I'd watched as four people jumped in at one of the marked entry ladders just off the footpath that ran alongside the Aare. As they were whisked away to the Marzili exit ramp downriver, they screamed in delight.

The shouts of disbelief, the out-of-control laughter, the ferocious feeling of being alive—this was Swiss river swimming at its finest. But immersing in Swiss river life also meant feeling the undercurrent: the knowledge that the tradition is increasingly vulnerable to colossal shifts wrought by a warming climate.

"[As kids] we used to go to the mountains in the southwestern part of Switzerland and hike 30 minutes from the parking lot to the moraine," said Stefanie Gubler, the head of the Swiss National Park Research Commission, whose focus is on biodiversity, climate change, and impact on ecosystems. "When I go up now, the glacier is gone. Snow is an issue, and the whole river system is suffering from that."

The changes Gubler has observed swing wildly from one year to the next, from extreme heat, drought, and sediment buildup in the rivers to heavy rain, flooding, and rockfall from a destabilized landscape. The month of my visit was plagued by rain and flooding across Switzerland, which pushed most rivers to treacherous highs and filled them with debris.

My last day in Bern coincided with the return of sunny weather, and the arrival of my Swiss friend August and his wife, Jenny. We took a walk with August's mother and her dog to the gardens of Elfenau Park. As we passed the glass-windowed Orangerie, Jenny reminded me that this was where our violinist friend Meesun played during a summer-

time concert series. Meesun had recently told me about the time she'd handed her instrument to a colleague after a performance and floated down the Aare with her dry bag to the train station. Then she got dressed, took the train to the airport, and flew home to Berlin.

Along the path to the Aare, dozens of dogs frolicked, with the snowcapped mountains in the background. We reminisced about Arcas. Later, August told me that when people take their dogs on rafts down the Aare, sometimes the dogs wear life jackets, too.

I thought then about the ways rivers are so core to the lived experience of this place. So many daily goings-on in Switzerland have a delightful, just-add-water version to them. But buoyancy isn't effortless. The work of staying afloat, both literal and metaphorical, requires attention, care, and collective as well as individual responsibility. As do all things worth carrying on. **A**

Bonnie Tsui wrote about Chinatowns for Afar's Summer 2022 issue. Julia Nimke photographed Sicily for Afar's Spring 2024 issue.



The Afar Guide to Zurich, Basel, and Bern

by CAT SPOSATO

Zurich

WHERE TO STAY

Situated just outside of the city center on Adlisberg hill is the **Dolder Grand**. The historic hotel, with 175 rooms and suites, also displays more than 100 works from artists including Salvador Dalí, Joan Miró, and Takashi Murakami.

Baur en Ville opened in 1838 and was considered to be the first luxury hotel in Zurich; the building is now home to the **Mandarin Oriental Savoy**, located in the city's Old Town. Its 80 rooms and suites—some with private rooftops—were redesigned in 2023.

WHAT TO DO

The **Freitag Tower**, which houses the flagship store of Swiss fashion label Freitag, is made from 19 shipping containers stacked on top of each other. Over in the Zurich Nord neighborhood, the converted remains of a defunct machine factory now serve as lattice-work surrounding **MFO-Park**, a public park where visitors can admire plants climbing the trellis-like steel walls.

Catch performances by the Philharmonia Zurich, Zurich Opera, and the Zurich Ballet at the main stage of the

Opernhaus, plus comedy shows, musicals, plays, and children's programs at its second studio, which is known as the **Bernhard Theater**.

WHERE TO EAT

Haus Hiltl, the world's oldest continuously operating vegetarian restaurant, has been serving plant-based meals since 1898. Today, it counts several locations across Zurich, but the original outpost sits at Sihlstrasse 28. Visitors have the option of ordering à la carte or trying everything at the buffet.

A few blocks from the Opernhaus, the **Sternen Grill** serves simple, stellar German fare, including snappy sausages and homemade meatloaf.

Basel

WHERE TO STAY

Originally opened in 1681, the

Grand Hotel Les Trois Rois is one of the oldest city hotels in Europe. It comprises 101 rooms and suites, a full-service gym, a bar, and two restaurants. One of them, Cheval Blanc by Peter Knogl, holds three Michelin stars.

Boutique & Design Hotel Volkshaus Basel has 45 rooms and suites designed by Basel-based architecture firm Herzog & de Meuron. Its "Splash into the Rhine" package includes a breakfast buffet, loaded public transit card, and two swim bags, perfect for long days spent swimming on the Rhine, a mere two blocks away.

For an even closer option, the minimalist four-star boutique **Hotel Krafft**, where writer Bonnie Tsui stayed, is right on the Rhine.

WHAT TO DO

Home to works by Louise Lawler and Vincent van Gogh, **Kunstmuseum Basel** is one of the most significant public



art collections in Switzerland. Five minutes away on foot is **Tinguely Fountain**: In 1977, artist Jean Tinguely arranged 10 industrial sculptures in the middle of a fountain, and the water moves through them to mesmerizing effect.

The **Basler Münster** cathedral—first built in 1500—is a Basel landmark; its two towers offer some of the best views of the city. For \$7, climb 250 stairs to the top.

WHERE TO EAT

Jakob's Basler Leckerly is Switzerland's oldest biscuit manufacturer, dating to 1753. Don't miss its namesake Leckerly biscuits, made with cinnamon, clove, nutmeg, ground almonds, and candied citrus peel.

With two Michelin stars to its name, **Stucki** serves some of the best modern cuisine in Basel, thanks to head chef Tanja Grandits—think tofu topped with green tea *labneh*

and *shiso* tempura, burrata with a tomato fritter, and raspberry tarts paired with yogurt tarragon mousse.

The 95-year-old **Markthalle Basel** has been a hub of community life in the city since its opening. Now, its 35 restaurants spotlight traditional foods from Afghanistan, Argentina, Thailand, Türkiye, and more.

Bern

WHERE TO STAY

The 99-room **Schweizerhof** is Bern's oldest luxury hotel; conveniently, it sits right across from the central train station. The Sky Terrace grants visitors one-of-a-kind panoramic views of the Old City, a UNESCO World Heritage site.

The elegant **Bellevue Palace** is officially owned by the Swiss government, and as such, is the de facto hotel for visiting government officials. Book a

room with majestic views of the Bernese Alps.

WHAT TO DO

For \$29, take a **90-minute tour** of Bern's Old City, including the "Kindlifresserbrunnen" (child-eater fountain) and spots frequented by physicist Albert Einstein and author Friedrich Dürrenmatt. Tours can be booked on the official Bern website (bern.com).

Bern was the home of 20th-century painter Paul Klee; the **Zentrum Paul Klee**, which houses about 40 percent of his art, is located east of the city center. The **Museum of Communication**, which has exhibits on hacking, truth, memory, lying, and privacy, is also worth a stop.

WHERE TO EAT

Restaurant Zoe partners with local farm Hof am Stutz to deliver dishes such as king oyster mushrooms with

fermented garlic, parsley, and buckwheat. In 2023, on top of its Michelin star, Zoe earned a Michelin Green Star for its commitment to sustainability.

The traditional Berner Platte consists of pork knuckle, ham, bacon, sauerkraut, bone marrow, beans, and potatoes. Locals head to **Kornhauskeller Restaurant** for the hearty dish, which is generally available September to May.

To get as close to the Aare River as possible without taking a dip, book a table at the Restaurant Terrasse outpost of **Schwellenmätteli**; it sits right on the riverbank.

Getting Around

Switzerland has an extensive public transportation system. With a **Swiss Travel Pass**, international visitors have unlimited access to all public transport in the country by boat, bus, and train.

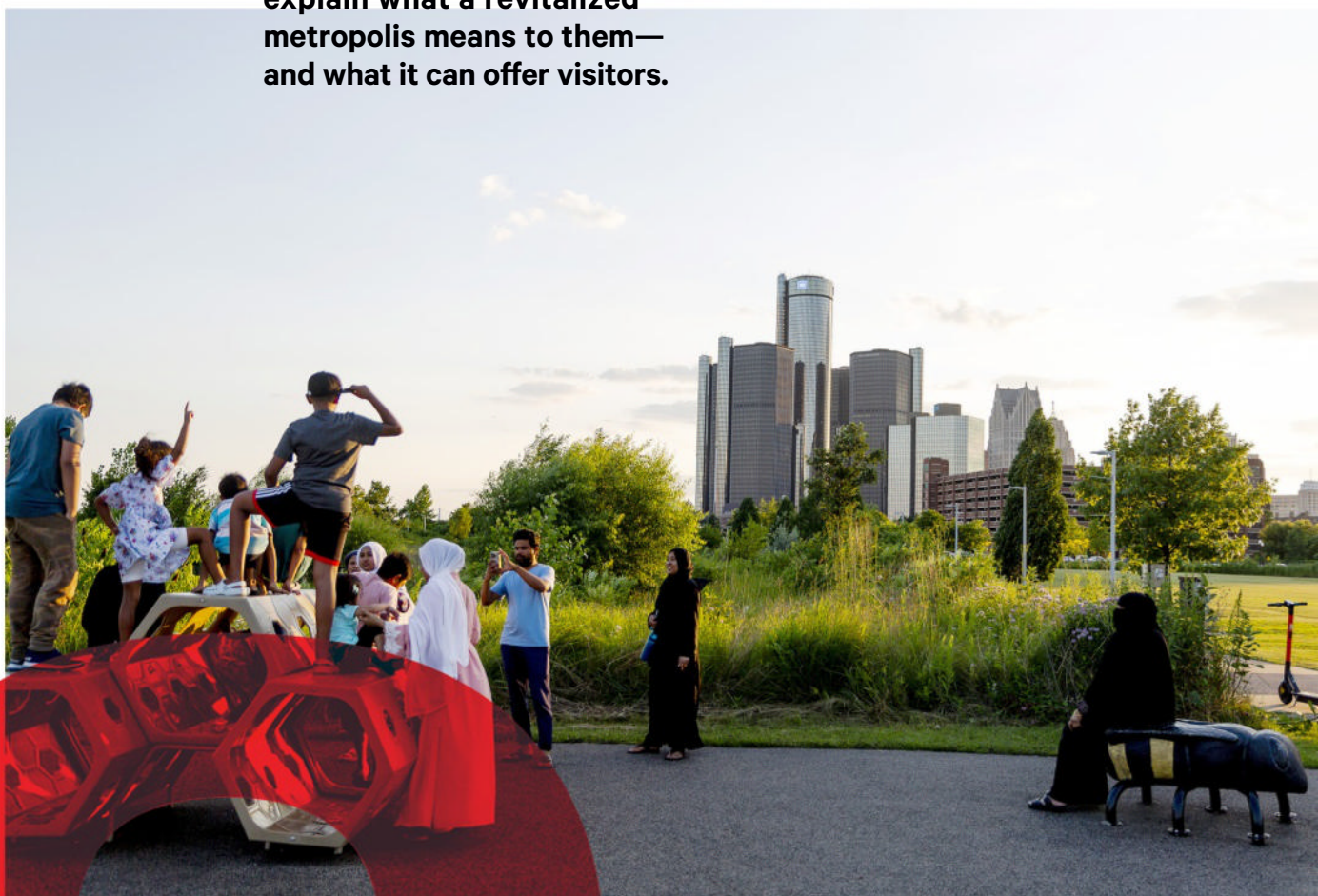
From left: Swimmers enjoy Freibad Marzili in Bern; Restaurant Zoe holds one Michelin star; Markthalle Basel is known for its dome; Jakob's Basler Leckerly is the oldest cookie manufacturer in Switzerland. It also makes crackers.



Great
American
Cities



As Motor City forges a new identity, three influential locals explain what a revitalized metropolis means to them—and what it can offer visitors.



BY
SARAH BENCE

PHOTOGRAPHS BY
**SYLVIA
JARRUS**



IF THESE WALLS COULD TALK

These days, Detroit is often considered in terms of rebirth, revival, and comeback, a path forged and realized after the city's bankruptcy filing in 2013. But that straightforward trajectory—from hopeless cause to creative hub—is a reductionist way to view the place that gave us both Motown and the automobile.

Most Detroiters will tell you not to call it a “comeback,” because the city isn’t going back to how it was. Instead, locals hope that Detroit’s ongoing redevelopment leads to a place with more equal opportunities for its diverse population.

This progress is most visible in its adaptive reuse projects, where husks of historic, sometimes derelict, buildings are being transformed into new centers of culture.

Take Michigan Central, a Beaux-Arts-era abandoned train station that reopened in 2024 as a 30-acre “innovation district” created by Ford Motor Company. The outdoor pavilion hosts public gatherings, while one of the buildings houses tech companies. Or look to the blocks and lots that residents have converted into public artworks. One example is the Heidelberg Project, started in 1986 by artist Tyree Guyton. Over the decades, he’s bedecked a city block with found objects such as stuffed animals, shoes, and entire cars.

We spoke with three Detroit-based leaders about how the city has inspired and shaped them. Sydney G. James is a prolific muralist; James Sumpter serves as executive chef at the new Cambria Hotel; and Robin Terry chairs the board of the Motown Museum. Then read on for our recommendations for where to shop, eat, play, and stay in the Motor City.

SYDNEY G. JAMES

**VISUAL
ARTIST
AND
MURALIST**

Sydney G. James’s striking and realistic murals of Black Detroiters have become synonymous with the city itself. A recipient of a 2017 Kresge Artist Fellowship, James’s artwork has been displayed at Detroit’s Charles H. Wright Museum, the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit, and galleries across six continents. She is also the cofounder of BLKOUT Walls, a local festival that brings together Black muralists.

“I’M A BORN-AND-RAISED second-generation Detroiter. My grandparents came up from the South during the Great Migration. I grew up in Conant Gardens, which is one of the first neighborhoods in Detroit where Black people were allowed to build and own their homes. Growing up, we lived in a house that my dad helped my grandfather build when he was 12. I still live in the area now, in a home I purchased near my mom. It’s a part of Detroit that’s culturally rich in Black love and family.

When I moved to Los Angeles in 2004 to work in television, I knew the move was temporary. Detroit had been on a decline because of government neglect, but I knew it was going to go through a resurgence. I didn’t know what that resurgence was going to look or feel like, but I did know I wanted to be an active part of it, so in 2011, I moved home.

Around that time, I’d started getting into street art. In Detroit, the vacant lots became a space for community art and reclamation. I was asked to take part in the inaugural Murals in the Market festival in 2015, and a month after that, the podcast and newsletter *Daily Detroit* listed my mural *Grind: Live From Detroit City* as one of the 18 best murals in Detroit.

As an artist, my work is very reactionary. I’m inspired by every interaction I have and specifically by the Black women I encounter every day. For instance, my most well-known wall in Detroit is an 8,000-square-foot mural called *Girl with a D Earring*, located on the Chroma building in the North End. My model was Halima Cassells. She’s a North End native and community activist. To me, she represents the essence and power of Detroit. Unlike the original Dutch painting [*Girl with a Pearl Earring* by Johannes Vermeer], I wanted everything about mine to be bold, down to her pink D earring designed by the late Yolanda Nichelle—because Detroit is bold.

On her garment, I painted logos and names of businesses that used to be or are still in the North End neighborhood. I did that because the biggest danger of this redevelopment movement is erasure and forgetting our history. Detroit was never dead, because there were always people living here. It may have looked dilapidated, but it’s always been full of life.”

In her mural *Girl with a D Earring*, artist Sydney G. James includes logos of local businesses, such as Red’s Jazz Shoe Shine Parlor, Underground Resistance, and the Smile Brand.



INGREDIENTS FOR GROWTH

Opened in October 2023, Cambria Hotel Detroit Downtown is one of the more recent in a string of new hotels that reuse older buildings. At 154 rooms, it adds much-needed space for visitors downtown now that the city is attracting more large-scale conventions and events. As executive chef, James Sumpter oversees the hotel's multiple food and beverage options. These include **Cibo**, a Mediterranean restaurant; **Detroit Taco**, a fast-casual Mexican spot; and the recently opened rooftop bar **Cielo**.

"I'VE BEEN THE EXECUTIVE chef for Cambria Hotel for about two years. The journey through construction and opening the hotel was, let me say, an undertaking. The building was the old WWJ radio station, one of the original radio stations with only three letters as opposed to four. That old building is where our hotel lobby is, but then you take a bridge over to the new building with all the hotel rooms. There's a real art deco influence that's been retained.

I'm from Ann Arbor, Michigan. I had my first head chef role at the age of 20 and have worked all over the state, including in sushi bars and wine bars. I came to Detroit a couple of years ago not for a job specifically, but because I wanted to live in this city—a place with a little more excitement and where I could advance my career in a more aggressive way. There are a lot of people like me who came to Detroit to do something interesting.

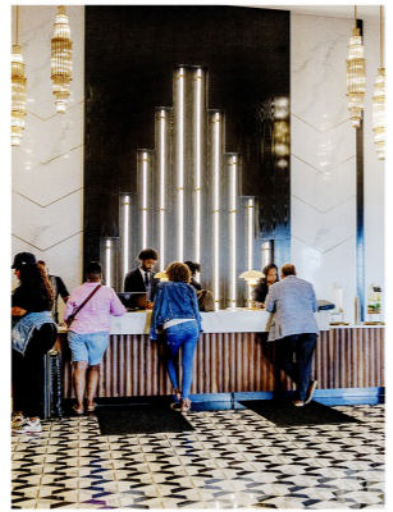
One thing I've noticed is that people in Detroit like exciting new flavors, but they also like soul food. For example, Cibo is a Mediterranean restaurant, but then I've put a twist on that. We have a fried chicken shawarma, but I've added a za'atar buttermilk biscuit and *merguez* sausage gravy on top.

There's also a big farm-to-table focus, because there are actually a lot of urban



EXECUTIVE
CHEF,
CAMBRIA
HOTEL

JAMES SUMPTER



farmers in the area. The 2008 housing crisis hit Detroit really hard, and many properties became vacant for so long that they had to be torn down. People could then buy these lots for dirt cheap and turn them into green spaces. In fact, there's one only a few blocks away from Cibo, called Featherstone Garden. Annie Hakim, the grower, uses sustainable and organic practices, and that's where I often get our heirloom tomatoes, eggplants, and peppers.

Overall, there is a lot of opportunity here in Detroit. I'm over the stereotypes of angry chefs and the history of misogyny in my profession. In my work, I'm trying to cultivate an environment where people are respected and treated well. The same goes for my personal life. When we first moved here, my wife and I went on a kind of 'church tour' to find one we liked. There's a ridiculous number of beautiful churches in Detroit. We found one near us in Bagley, called Gesu, that has a lot of diversity and a priest with progressive views. In Detroit, we have met interesting people who aren't afraid to rub people the wrong way, in a good way."



Chef James Sumpter often uses seasonal produce grown by Detroit's urban farmers, including from Featherstone Garden, located close to the Cambria Hotel.



CHAIR
OF THE BOARD
OF THE
MOTOWN
MUSEUM

ROBIN TERRY



FOR THE LOVE
OF MUSIC

Robin Terry is the chair of the board of the Motown Museum, which honors the record label that started in Detroit in 1959. The Miracles, the Supremes, the Temptations, and Marvin Gaye are among the influential icons who made music here. Over the past few years, Terry has led a \$65 million expansion project, turning the museum into a 50,000-square-foot campus where visitors can walk through the original recording studio and listen to live concerts in the new Rocket Plaza.

"I'VE SPENT MY WHOLE LIFE in and around Detroit and the Motown music tradition. My grandmother is Esther Gordy Edwards, founder of the Motown Museum and sister to Berry Gordy, who founded the Motown record label.

Growing up, I was surrounded by Motown musicians. My parents met at Motown as employees. So I consider myself to be a product of Motown. I was around people like Smokey Robinson and Diana Ross and even the Jackson 5. They would all come to our home at 918 West Boston, but that was a time when we didn't look at them as celebrities, by any stretch. They were just family.



Artists including Stevie Wonder, the Temptations, and the Jackson 5 all got their start in Studio A of what Robin Terry deems "this little house on West Grand Boulevard called Hitsville, USA."

My mom died of breast cancer when I was 15, and I went to live with my grandmother in downtown Detroit. That made me fall in love with the energy of the city.

After school, my grandmother would make my sister Elesha and me come down to Hitsville [the recording studio and house] and walk people around on tours. We'd also work in a store that, at the time, sold one type of T-shirt and a few coasters made from the centers of vinyl records. In 1985, my grandmother founded the Motown Museum out of her own desire to preserve its history for future generations.

I was so immersed in Motown that I didn't understand the significance of it—culturally or historically. In 2002, I stepped in to help my grandmother as deputy director because of some health challenges she had. Suddenly I was reading emails and listening to voicemails from people all over the world talking about what Motown meant to them. I watched people travel to Detroit just to be in the same space where those individuals I called family built their music careers.

Today, it feels like the museum is growing into its adulthood. Motown is a global sound but it's getting its proper due in Detroit, the city that gave birth to it. And of course, there is more to Detroit than the Motown Museum. We have

cultural institutions but also the River-Walk, which is one of the most beautiful riverfronts in the whole world.

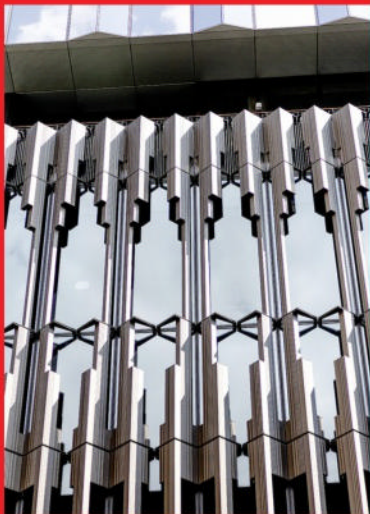
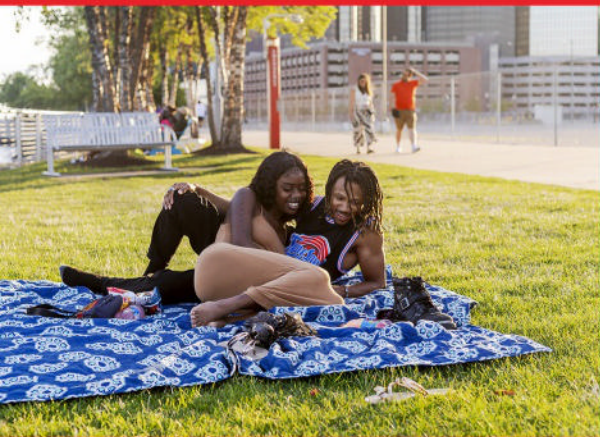
As Detroiters, we often find ourselves in a space of trying to defend a city that is so great. People who don't know it have this perspective about who we are, until they come and learn something different. The people here are resourceful, creative, and have this *can't stop, won't stop* attitude. Ultimately, Detroit is a champion city." **A**

Writer Sarah Bence is from Michigan and based in London. Photographer Sylvia Jarrus is based in Detroit.

HOW TO

EXPLORE DETROIT LIKE A LOCAL

Detroit is best enjoyed neighborhood by neighborhood, including those beyond downtown—such as Midtown (known for its museums), Eastern Market (come hungry!), and historic Corktown. Don't miss cities within the metro area, including Hamtramck, Highland Park, and Dearborn. Use this guide to plan your trip. —SB





WHERE TO EAT

Dining in Detroit starts with its eponymous rectangular, deep-dish pizza. The place to try it is Buddy's—because it's where the square, fluffy local pie was first created, by using steel pans from an automobile factory. Meanwhile, several new hotels are serving notable fare too: At the Godfrey Hotel, Hamilton's elevates classic American food, while Hiroki-San, located in the Book Tower, features ingredients imported weekly from Japan.

Sweet teeth can be satisfied with chocolates from Bon Bon Bon, a cult-favorite salted maple pie slice from Sister Pie, or a nostalgic cone of frozen custard from Huddle Soft Serve (with sprinkles, of course).

For East African eats, head to Baobob Fare and order the 24-hour-marinated *samaki* (flash-fried fish with sweet plantains, stewed yellow lentils, and sautéed onions). The restaurant is owned by wife-and-husband duo Nadia Nijimbere and Hamissi Mamba, 2024 James Beard Award finalists who came to Detroit as refugees from Burundi in 2015. In Dearborn, which became the country's first Arab-majority city last year, Shatila Bakery serves authentic baklava and *knafeh* pastries, while AlTayeb makes Lebanese classics and Qahwah House sells traditional Yemeni imported coffee.

WHERE TO SHOP

Woodward Avenue and Cass Corridor form the shopping core of Detroit. Stop at City Bird for Michigan-themed gifts and at Shinola for handcrafted watches. The Avenue of Fashion (along Livernois and 7 Mile) is an area known for its historically

Black-owned businesses. Everyday fashion is available at Simply Casual, while Three Thirteen sells Detroit-branded clothing. Eastern Market, a sprawling outdoor farmers' market, is Detroit's source for flowers, produce, antiques, and vintage items. In Corktown, swing by John K. King, a maze of more than 1 million used and rare books (among the country's largest bookshops), and Eldorado General Store, a den of locally made trinkets and apothecary items.

WHAT TO DO

There's no shortage of museums here: the Detroit Institute of Arts, Michigan Science Center, the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History, and the Motown Museum, to name a few. The Henry Ford, a museum and historical village complex located 20 minutes outside of downtown Detroit, is one for automobile buffs. In Dearborn, check out the Arab American National Museum.

The Fisher Building and Cadillac Place, both in the New Center district, are Albert Kahn–designed landmarks from Detroit's Roaring Twenties architectural boom. Drop into the Guardian Building downtown for another example (there are guided tours available)—and be sure to look at the tiled ceiling in the lobby.

Spend an afternoon on the 3.5-mile Detroit International RiverWalk, passing natural parkland and views of Windsor, Canada, across the water. Extend your walk by taking the Dequindre Cut path to Eastern Market, part of the planned 27.5-mile Joe Louis Greenway currently under development. Or head to Belle Isle, an island park in the Detroit River with the city's best sunset view.

WHERE TO STAY

The 106-room Siren Hotel, which opened in 2018, stands out as one of the first in the city's wave of boutique hotels that revived notable skyscrapers. This one is located downtown, in the 1926 Wurlitzer Building, which originally sold musical instruments.

The apartment-hotel Roost has a similar backstory. Its mix of studio, one-bedroom, and two-bedroom units is spread across four floors of the 1926 Book Tower, which was renovated and reopened in 2023. Each of the 117 apartments has homey touches such as All-Clad cookware, La Colombe coffee, and live plants.



Vendors sell everything from maracas to apple cider donuts at Eastern Market; florists give away roses downtown, where many buildings have art deco details; the Detroit RiverWalk is a haven for pedestrians, bicyclists, and picnickers alike.



MOUNT EVEREST | 29,032 FT

MOUNTAIN TIME

KHUMJUNG | 12,434 FT

NAMCHE BAZAAR | 11,286 FT

A LONG-DISTANCE TREK THROUGH
NEPAL'S EVEREST REGION OFFERS LESSONS IN SHERPA CULTURE,
RURAL MOUNTAIN LIVING, AND HUMILITY.

by SARIKA BANSAL | *Photographs by* MICHELLE HEIMERMAN

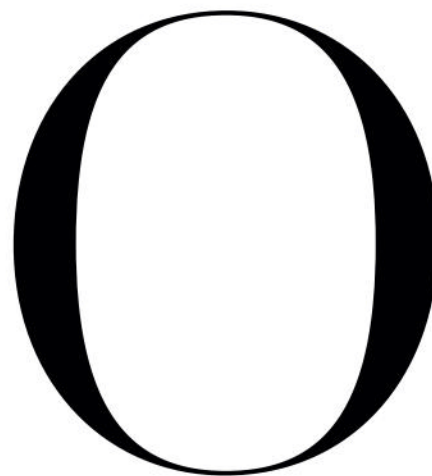
KONGDE LODGE | 13,944 FT





This page:
Throughout the Khumbu region, suspension bridges hang over the Dudh Kosi River, which is fed by waters from Mount Everest.

Previous page:
Kongde Lodge is one of the world's highest resorts, and offers views of the Himalayas.



ON A SUNNY SPRING DAY, I stood at the top of a steep hill in Nepal's Himalayan mountain range. I turned to look at the path I'd just trekked. In the distance I could see the tall pine forest and glacial river I had traversed. Behind me was Pema Choling, a 17th-century Buddhist monastery in the vivid colors and distinctive architectural style seen throughout Nepal's Khumbu region—reds, greens, golds, and a repeating pattern of squares and flowers. Recalling the instructions that my group's guide, Pasang Temba Sherpa, had given me two days prior, I spun the 32 prayer wheels on the front wall: clockwise, with the right hand, and with a positive thought for the universe.

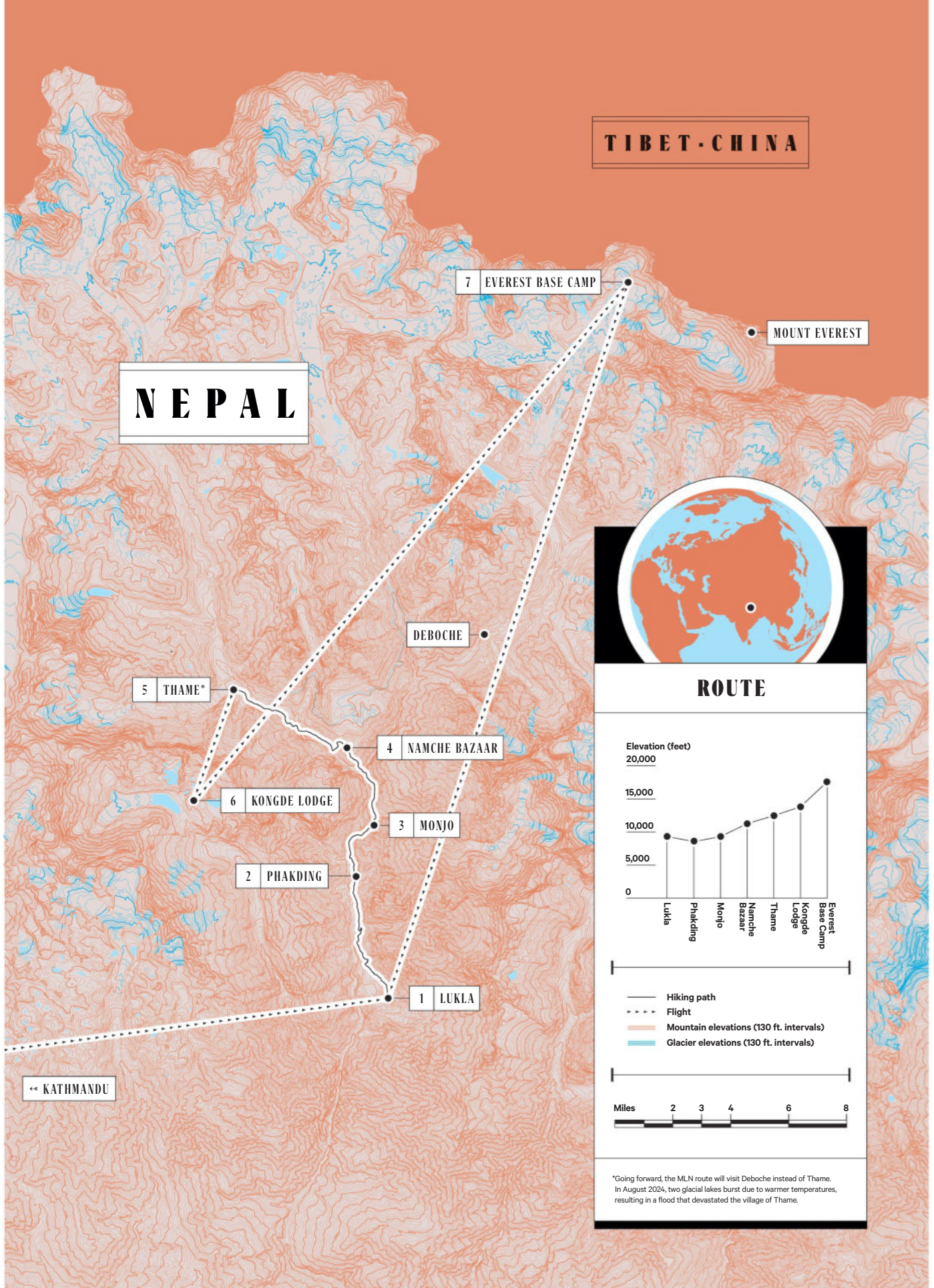
I was on the second day of a 12-day trek run by local hospitality company Mountain Lodges of Nepal (MLN). "We slow people down," said Jason Friedman, a hospitality consultant and director at Sherpa Hospitality Group, the management company that owns and operates MLN. "We see places that most trekkers miss because they want to get to 'Point B.'"

Point B, in this case, is where some of the world's most storied mountaineering tales begin: Everest Base Camp, elevation 17,598 feet. To get there, our itinerary was designed to avoid the "Everest Highway," the colloquial name for the wide trails most travelers use when navigating the region. Instead, our group would zig and zag through ancient paths once followed by monks and traders, sleep in lodges in Nepali villages, and enjoy Himalayan viewpoints few visitors get to experience. We would walk nearly 35 miles, gain more than 8,000 feet in elevation, and take in exceptional vistas during three helicopter rides.

Like many travelers, I had long associated the area with hardcore, fast-paced adventure. And over the past few years, visiting the mountain has felt controversial. Stewards of the land have called it "dirty and crowded," and the mortal dangers it poses to guides, porters, and travelers are well documented. But the premise of this trip had intrigued me, and I wondered, *What would it be like to visit the Everest region in a gentler, less damaging way?*

At Pema Choling Monastery, Lama Nokta Rimbucho sometimes gives individual blessings and prayer scarves to visitors.





LOCATION | LUKLA

ELEVATION IN FEET

9,318

MY JOURNEY TO EVEREST had begun at home in Nairobi, where I prepared for the elevation gains we'd make as we climbed. But it began in earnest with an early morning flight from Kathmandu to Lukla, a village in northeastern Nepal that is a popular first stop for any trekker in the area. From the air, I saw sylvan peaks with crisp origami-like folds and puffy clouds that looked as though they could turn foreboding in a second.

There was no car to pick us up from the airport; in fact, I would not see a motor vehicle for the nearly two weeks I was on the trek. Despite receiving roughly 60,000 visitors a year and being one of the most popular tourism destinations in Nepal, roads here are scarce; goods are carried by humans, yaks, and in select instances, helicopters. On two separate occasions during the trek, I saw porters carrying full-size refrigerators—strapped to their backs and foreheads—up a hill.

From the airport, we walked a short distance to Lukla's main street, which was adorned with Buddhist iconography: prayer flags, prayer wheels, and stupas—sacred dome-shaped structures.

During breakfast at MLN's Lukla Lodge, opened in 2000 in a two-story stone building, the mayor of the rural Khumbu Pasang Lhamu municipality, Mingma Chhiri Sherpa, told me how he is addressing some of the region's challenges when it comes to tourism.

"We are building the first road to connect Lukla to Kathmandu," he said as we ate fruit, freshly baked breads, and Nepali dishes including *aloo roti*, flatbreads served with potatoes that were generously seasoned with ginger and chilies. Today, if you don't fly, the 228-mile journey can take several days by car and foot. By next year, he hopes, people and goods will be able to travel between Nepal's capital and the village in 14 hours. He also shared, with pride, that new electrical lines will soon connect high-altitude villages.

After breakfast, I exited the lodge and walked under the Pasang Lhamu gate. This was the second time I had seen the name of Pasang Lhamu Sherpa; in this case, accompanied by a bust. An activist and a climber, in 1993 she became the first Nepali woman to successfully summit Mount Everest. But on her descent she encountered bad weather, leading to her death. (Her life story was turned into an hour-long documentary, *Pasang*, which debuted at the Santa Barbara International Film Festival in 2022.)

In the 1980s, Pasang Lhamu Sherpa's husband, Lhakpa Sonam Sherpa, created the Sherpa Hospitality Group. Her son Namgyal Sherpa—now the CEO of the group—was traveling with us. Today, the company has 14 lodges in three regions of Nepal, and offers tours and personalized guided treks around Everest and Annapurna.

Namgyal said that running the company has been deeply personal for him. Over time, he's understood the importance of simultaneously honoring his parents' legacy, offering opportunities to his 149 employees, and building something distinctive for Nepal. To that end, both he and Jason Friedman told me, MLN is working to build a "new Nepal"—one that allows travelers to experience the country at a more immersive pace, while celebrating Nepali culture, local entrepreneurship, and environmental sustainability.

"There's so much room for transformation and change," Namgyal said. "We are trying to tell our own stories."

LOCATION | NAMCHE BAZAAR

ELEVATION IN FEET

11,286

AFTER TWO DAYS of gentle trekking, I woke up to begin a morning of steep elevation gain. Our course meandered along the icy Dudh Kosi River, and after 45 minutes, the ascent started, and my steps up the stone stairs felt endless. Every time I thought the path would flatten, I turned a corner and had to crane my neck upward. At one point, I leaned on a rock for a break, and thought of our porters, each of whom was carrying two duffel bags—a load of 70 pounds. By contrast, I had a small day pack filled with snacks, three liters of water, and a rain jacket.

We crossed a suspension bridge located high above the river. Yaks plodded ahead of our group. Travelers who'd hiked before us had left prayer flags and silk scarves on the handrails. They fluttered off the sides and, at just the right angle, glistened in the sun. I tried not to look down.

More stone steps, more uphill paths, a rhythm. At one point, our guide Pasang Temba stopped and asked us to peer between the fir trees. Himalayan weather is famously unpredictable, but at this moment, the clouds had cleared and the world's highest peak, Mount Everest, stood snow-capped at 29,032 feet. The controversies about the mountain quieted in my mind; instead, I felt the awe that I imagine has inspired centuries of mountaineers. Even from this faraway vantage point, the summit felt sacred.

In the Nepali language, Mount Everest is known as Sagarmatha, which translates to "the head of the sky." Tibetans and the Sherpa people—the original stewards of the region—refer to it as Chomolungma, or "goddess mother of the world." Neither the Nepali nor the Tibetan name was considered by the United Kingdom's Royal Geographical Society in 1865, which instead named the mountain after George Everest, a surveyor general of India.

An estimated 5,000 porters work around Everest, making trips possible for upward of 60,000 annual visitors.







Half an hour later, we entered Namche Bazaar, the first major acclimatization point for trekkers. Starting in the 16th century, the area served as a trading post for Tibetans and Sherpas bartering for items such as yak butter and salt. After Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay became the first known summiteers of Mount Everest on May 29, 1953, hikers began trickling into the region, attempting to recreate the feat. Namche Bazaar allows their bodies to adjust to the lower oxygen levels before continuing farther uphill.

As we traveled through town, I was struck by its size, especially given the lack of roads. We passed restaurants serving hamburgers and sushi, shops selling climbing gear, and vendors hawking handicrafts. Against a backdrop of jagged mountains and a crystal-blue sky, women wrung freshly washed clothes and hung them to dry.

I cut away from the group to walk clockwise around a giant stupa decorated with dozens of prayer wheels, and

**In the Nepali language,
Mount Everest is known as
SAGARMATHA,
which translates to
“THE HEAD OF
THE SKY.”**



a monk named Jabyang beckoned me to sit with him. We spoke for a few minutes in Hindi, my mother tongue and a second (or third) language of many Nepalis I met. He talked about his childhood in Namche Bazaar, his foray into monkhood at the age of 10, and the tourism growth he's seen in his hometown.

Since I was sitting with a monk, I felt compelled to ask him what it meant to live a meaningful life. "Don't harm others and try to do good," he said. "Ever since I started studying to be a monk, I've tried to keep only positive intentions in my heart."

I thanked him for his time and rejoined my trekking group at MLN's Namche Lodge, where happy hour awaited. To quell the altitude-related headache I was developing, the staff made me a bowl of warm garlic soup, a local remedy. As I drank it next to the lodge's fireplace, I felt myself warming up from the inside out.

From left: Garlic soup and a tea break were a welcome relief after a hike in Thame; most lodges feature a mud room where hikers can set down their poles and remove their boots before entering; Gaga Diku Sherpa lives on land her family has owned for centuries.

LOCATION | THE TRAIL

ELEVATION IN FEET

≈12,000

TWO MORNINGS LATER, I noticed the pathways between Namche Bazaar and Thame, our next destination, were lined with carved tablets known as *mani* stones, many of them etched with a six-syllable mantra, *om mani padme hum*. Some stones looked older than others; when I saw one enshrouded in moss, I asked Pasang Temba how old he thought it was. "It's probably been around for 500 years, maybe 600," he estimated.

Later that morning, I asked Namgyal about the mantra. He said that it symbolizes three main facets of Buddhism's teachings. "Om" represents the body, mind, and speech; "mani," a jewel, symbolizes compassion; and "padme," a lotus flower, symbolizes wisdom—including the wisdom to let go of ego. "Hum" is the unification of these elements.

I considered then how modern motivations for long-distance trekking often involve personal achievement and bragging rights. In his book *Mountains of the Mind* (Granta, 2003), which traces the history of mountaineering, Robert Macfarlane wrote, "[Everest] is now a gargantuan, tawdry, frozen Taj Mahal, an elaborately frosted wedding-cake up and down which climbing companies annually yo-yo hundreds of under-experienced clients."

And yet, the region holds the footsteps of so many, over thousands of years, with a variety of intentions. As I walked, I imagined robed monks in the 16th century looking for the perfect spots for their mani stones.

LOCATION | THAME

ELEVATION IN FEET

12,467

A SIGNIFICANT LEFT TURN off the Everest Highway, Thame is best known as the childhood home of Tenzing Norgay. Approaching the MLN Thame Lodge on the fifth day of the trek, we walked along pathways flanked by stone walls that had likely been built over centuries. (*Note: A flood in August 2024, caused by warming temperatures in the region, washed away the lodge and the village of Thame.*)

The next morning, we followed best practices and took a misty acclimatization hike up a nearby hill. That evening, in the lodge's wood-clad lounge, I retreated to a spot near the potbellied fireplace and admired the delicate handpainted



Namche Bazaar is the commercial hub of the Khumbu region. It offers hotels, bakeries, and the Sherpa Culture Museum.

details on the walls. Pasang Temba introduced to us a group of local women, who were wearing matching fur hats and striped skirts. He joined them as they performed songs and dances traditional to the Sherpa community, which praised the beauty of the mountains.

There is DNA evidence that Sherpa people, a Tibetan ethnic group native to both Nepal and Tibet, have evolved over millennia to have higher lung capacity to withstand the brutal conditions in the region. When mountaineers first started visiting Everest in the 1950s, they needed help carrying their bags on challenging trails at such high altitudes. Since the local residents were better adapted for these conditions, trekkers began employing people from the Sherpa community.

I'd learned all that after committing a faux pas a few mornings ago. Over breakfast, I'd carelessly told Namgyal and Pasang Temba that I was impressed by the loads the "sherpas" were carrying. Their faces hid a grimace, and I knew I'd made a mistake. They pointed out that I'd used the word "sherpa" as if it were interchangeable with "porter." Both of their last names were Sherpa, and neither was a porter.

"Some Sherpas are doctors, lawyers, anything you might imagine," Namgyal said. "And this misnomer almost keeps us stuck."

LOCATION

KONGDE LODGE

ELEVATION IN FEET

13,944

ON DAY SEVEN of the trek I hopped in a helicopter, and as we began to rise, ravines opened beneath us, filled with dark green trees, rushing waterfalls, and bright alpine flowers. Glaciers shone in the distance.

Five minutes later, we landed in Kongde, the site of MLN's highest-altitude lodge. It's built on a cliffside that most trekkers do not visit, given its distance from Base Camp and how hard it is to access. But when the skies are clear, as they were that day, the site has a panoramic view of Everest and the surrounding mountains.

Given that we'd spent a week on the trail, I appreciated a day of rest. My fellow trekkers and I took hot showers, refueled with a three-course meal that included homemade pasta, and napped on sofas piled high with pillows in the wood-clad lounge and bar area.

Over warm beverages, we reminisced about what we had seen thus far. At Pema Choling, the 17th-century monastery, we had been the only visitors privy to a once-annual puja ceremony. How lucky we were to witness monks in maroon robes and gold scarves play horns of various lengths, hit gongs, and sing in low, throaty voices.

HOW to DO THIS TRIP

BASIC CONSIDERATIONS

The best times to visit the Khumbu region are April through May and late September through early November. The winters are harsh and snowy, and the monsoon season starts at the beginning of June. In May, the weather is relatively mild, and the rhododendron blooms add welcome pops of color to the valleys. It's worth noting: The official climbing season for Mount Everest is April to May, so there are fewer trekkers in the fall.

OUTFITTERS

Though the region can be visited without a tour operator, there are many benefits to traveling with a reputable one. Your guide can provide expertise about trekking at high altitudes, enable you to get off the main trails, and share knowledge about local culture.

Ask your prospective outfitter about the speed at which they climb, and in particular, whether the trip goes slowly enough to roughly comply with the CDC's recommendation to sleep no more than 1,600 feet higher than the previous night when you're at altitudes of 9,000 feet or more. Ensure the operator follows the adage "Climb high, sleep low"—in other words, they bring trekkers to higher altitudes (and lower oxygen levels) during the day, and return to lower elevations at night.

I traveled on a 12-day trip with **Mountain Lodges of Nepal (MLN)**, which specializes

in small-group travel and covers a route notably different from the "Everest Highway" that many trekkers take. MLN's lodges are considerably higher-end, with electric blankets on every bed and cozy fireplaces in common areas.

FITNESS LEVEL

The MLN trip requires no prior climbing experience and is doable for anyone at an intermediate level of fitness. Jason Friedman, a director at Sherpa Hospitality Group, which owns and operates MLN's lodges, recommends preparing for the trip with hour-long walks, particularly up and down hills. Practice with the shoes, backpack, and walking sticks you will use on the trail.

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS

Altitude sickness is best prevented rather than treated. If possible, spend two nights at every location above 10,000 feet. Talk to your doctor beforehand to see if the medication Diamox would be a good prophylactic. Before beginning on the trail—and while on it—drink more water than normal; the Institute for Altitude Medicine recommends an extra 1 to 1.5 liters of water per day when you are above 5,000 feet.

High-altitude rescue insurance is strongly suggested.

IN KATHMANDU

A trip to Everest will likely begin and end in Kathmandu, Nepal's bustling capital and site of its main international airport. Stay at **Dwarika's Hotel**, which celebrates the architecture and artistry of Nepal: One of its intricately carved doors is from the 13th century; the spa uses essential oils containing local herbs; and its Krishnarpan restaurant serves six- to 22-course meals featuring dishes from across the country. —SB



“Some Sherpas are DOCTORS, LAWYERS, ANYTHING YOU MIGHT IMAGINE. And this misnomer almost keeps us stuck.”



From left: Local women take a selfie to celebrate the building of a stupa, a domed Buddhist shrine; the interior of MLN Kongde Lodge references earlier climbers.

At another monastery the day prior, we had seen some children watering plants in the garden. “Don’t think these kids are pious,” Pasang Temba had said with a laugh. “Parents always send the naughty ones to the monastery.” Inside the building, a member of our group spied a calendar with Pasang Lhamu’s face on it. By then, I had seen the mountaineer’s name and image dozens of times already. This one, however, had a beard and mustache drawn on it. Pasang Temba was right, as usual. The kids here weren’t as straitlaced as I had assumed.

LOCATION | EVEREST BASE CAMP

ELEVATION IN FEET

17,598

I’D SEEN IMAGES of Everest Base Camp when preparing for the trip. But I wasn’t ready for the spectacle of the Tim Burton–esque ice structures, the serpentine streams created from glacial melt, or the feeling of being surrounded by such massive peaks. The only colors visible, aside from man-made structures, were white, brown, gray, and blue. Though the sun was out, the underlying chill was undeniable, and I finally broke out the giant down jacket that I’d had since the start of the trip.

After emerging from the helicopter, we settled into our tents, which were outfitted with carpeting, comfortable cots, and light strips for nighttime. We then headed to the dining tent for lunch and a discussion of the day’s plans: naps—and then a walk.

Our permits allowed us to walk to the Khumbu Icefall (17,999 feet), located half a mile from our camp. To get there, we shuffled on glacial paths carved by climbers. Our group was visiting after the season had formally concluded, which meant that we had only the company of yaks and porters who were clearing the final remains of this high-altitude temporary city.

Seeing the Khumbu Icefall up close, I was struck by the sheer unfriendliness of the giant, sharp ice columns before me. Friedman reminded me that this was the most dangerous part of summitting Everest, in part because climbers need to ascend and descend it several times to acclimatize properly. During the climbing season, guides erect ladders (at danger to themselves) that help trekkers navigate it; even then, I couldn’t fathom traversing this bit of earth.

My footsteps started to slow on the way back to camp. Every few steps, I needed to stop to take a breath. My head started to spin and nausea set in. By the time I arrived in the dining tent, I knew that the altitude had hit me—hard. I also began hearing and seeing rocks falling in the near distance. Everest Base Camp is constantly shifting—it is, after all, on

an ever-moving glacier, and the speed of change has recently increased. As a result, the expedition camps are built anew in slightly different locations each year. During the day, when the sun shines, everything warms up and expands. As evening falls, the temperature suddenly drops and the snow begins to contract, causing cleavages and occasional avalanches.

That night I slept fitfully, listening to the rumbles of contracting snow and willing my nausea to disappear. The next morning, feeling just as poorly from the altitude, several others from the trek and I arranged for a helicopter that would bring us back down to more oxygen-rich air.

LOCATION

LUKLA

ELEVATION IN FEET

9,318

A FEW YEARS AGO, I would have thought it a personal failing to have fallen ill at what was supposed to be the climax of an incredible expedition. Now, in Lukla, I remembered what I'd learned from Jabyang, Namgyal, and Pasang Temba and tried to let go of my ego and think positively about the universe—and more specifically, to appreciate the smaller, slower moments I'd experienced throughout the Khumbu region.

Back in Lukla, we attended the opening of a small permanent exhibition dedicated to Pasang Lhamu's legacy, located next to the gate we had passed on our first day. We learned more about the triumph and tragedy of her life and studied a wall dedicated to Nepali women who have summited Everest.

Someone had the idea to take a group photo with everyone who was part of our trek—the hikers, guides, porters, and others. Half of our group was still at Everest Base Camp, and still, 21 people came into frame.

All these people, and so many others, made this trip possible. Some of them carried my bags at speeds I could only dream of walking, while others generously offered their perspectives on Nepal's political climate; some kept the hills clean for future trekkers, while others gently reminded me of etiquette when approaching a Buddhist monk. Still others shared their own photos from summitting Everest, or translated for me when I met a Sherpa nonagenarian on the trail. Together, they wove a much richer, more complex story than the ones most often told about this sliver of the planet. And walking on paths with them helped me hear it. **A**

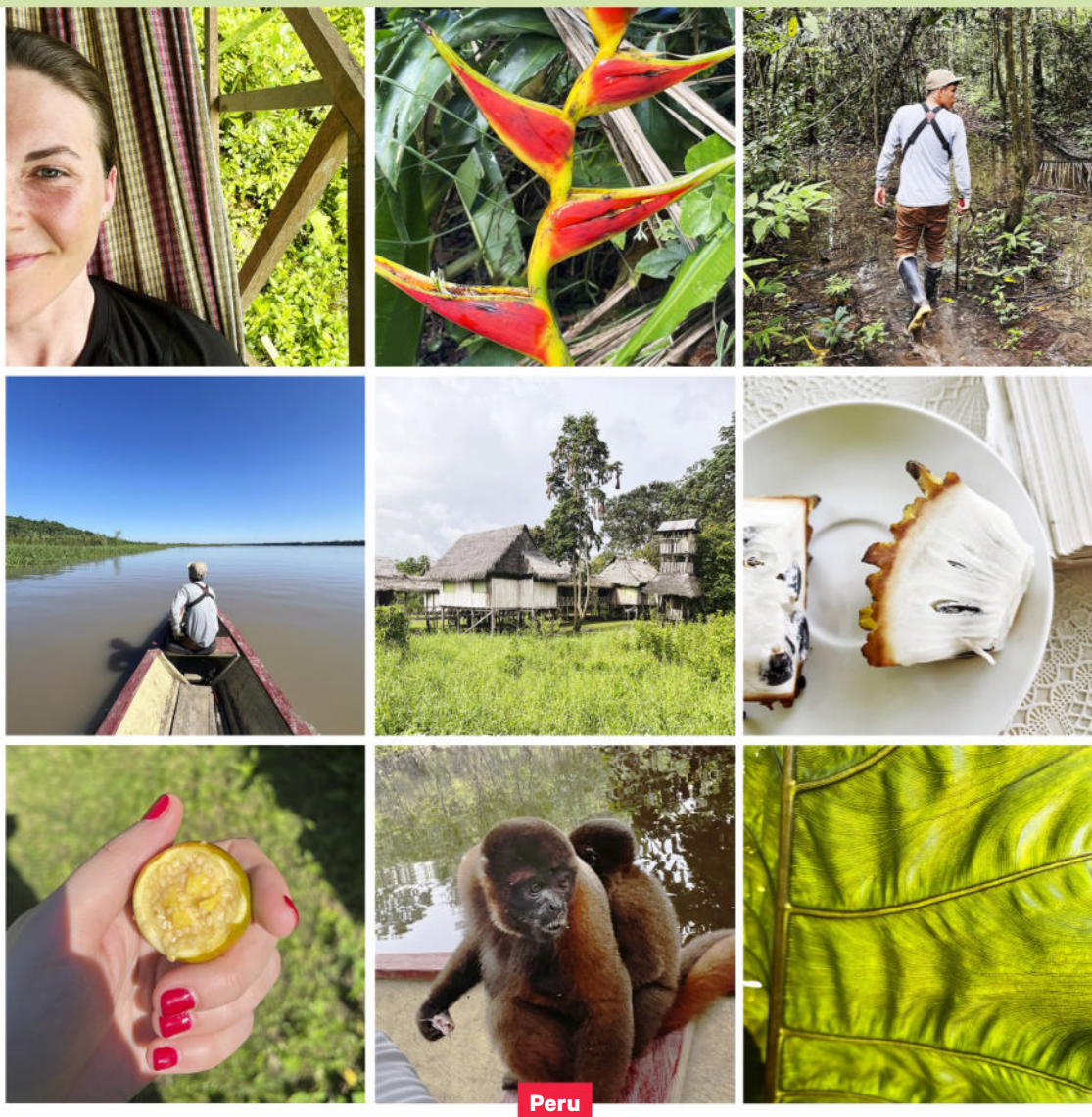
A helicopter takes off from Everest Base Camp. Below, MLN's camp is situated at the edge of the Khumbu Icefall.



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Peru

Brave New World

by Katherine LaGrave, *Afar* Deputy Editor

I'D TAKEN solo trips off the grid: Finnish Lapland, Okinawa, far reaches of New Mexico. And I'd long desired to visit the Peruvian Amazon, part of the world's largest rainforest. But when it came time to book, I hesitated. *No electricity? No cell service? Just . . . me?* It all seemed a little too out there. But I pushed myself outside my comfort zone, and three months later, found myself at a lodge on the Ucayali River, the headwater of the Amazon. "You here alone?" asked another female guest. "Brave."

I didn't feel brave that first night when I noticed a spider the size of my hand on the bed. Or when I heard a thud on the thatched roof, followed by scratching from an unknown source. Still, I felt an eagerness for morning, excited about what awaited.

The next day started early on the water. Pink dolphins surfaced around my carved wooden boat, and the wild world woke up—tropical birds

cawing and hooting, bugs buzzing and chirping. An hour later, I trailed my guide Juan Carlos as he swung his machete through dense rainforest, pausing to point out giant snails, squirrel monkeys, and trees revered by the local community. He showed me how to weave a palm branch into a fan, the way his grandmother had taught him. I pondered the care that went into living in a place like this, and how fortunate I was to witness it.

In the days that followed, I became bolder. Juan Carlos and I searched for caimans and tarantulas at night, the only light cast by our headlamps and the moon. He taught me about medicinal plants, such as achiote, matico, cat's-claw. I swam in the river, only slightly deterred by the dead anaconda I'd seen, the length of a sedan and the circumference of a dinner plate. I mused that these were among the adventures that continually redefine adventure for me. And I had them on my own. **A**



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