

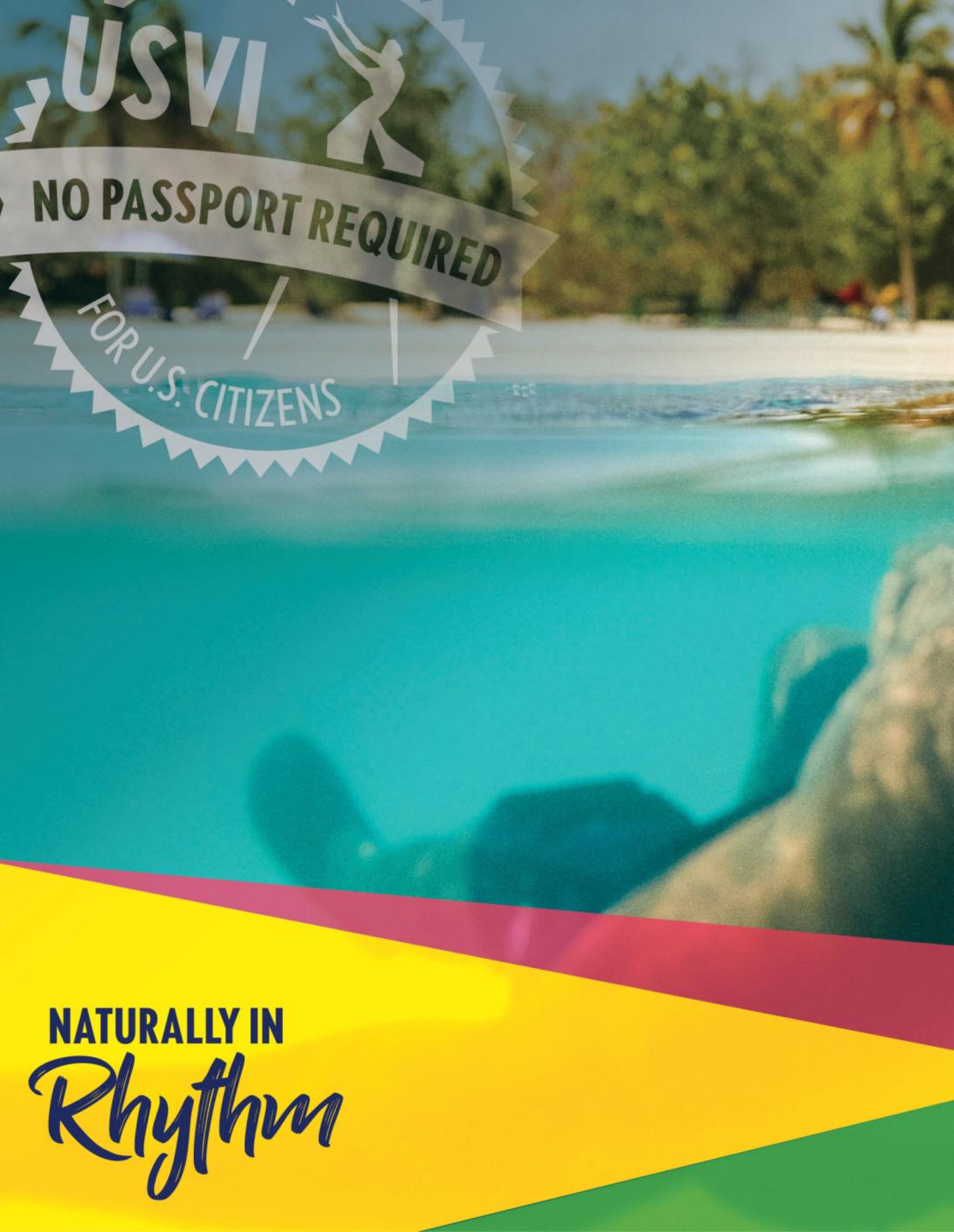




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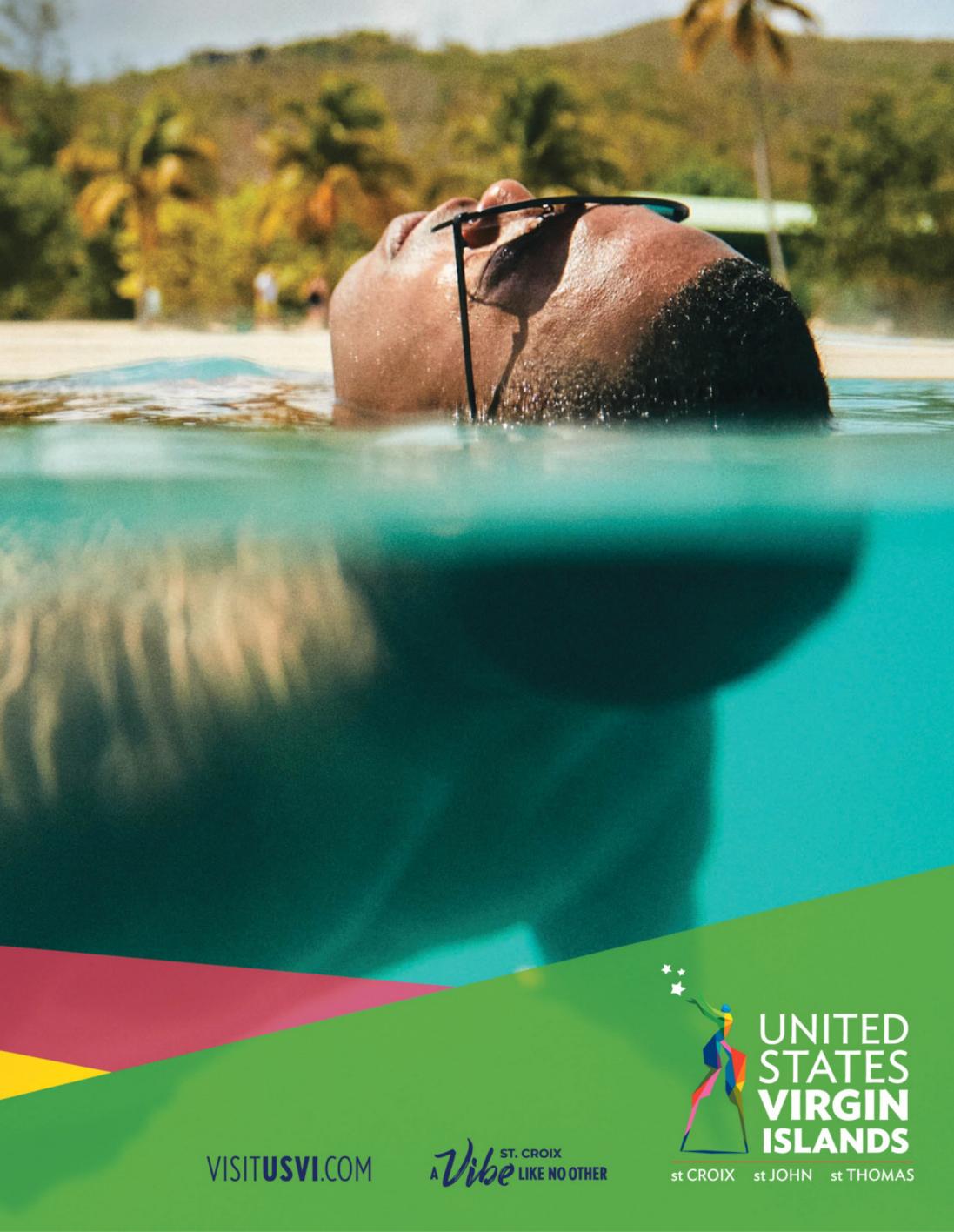


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A Czech city plays second fiddle no longer. An iconic Italian destination reimagines itself. These are the 25 most exciting places around the world to visit next.

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ON THE COVER

In Japan, hanami, or cherry blossom viewing, is the national pastime—and a joyous celebration of spring.

Photograph by Geoff Haggray

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UNPACKED TO GIVE OR NOT TO GIVE?

Columnist Anu Taranath examines the complex dynamics of travelers giving money to people they encounter while on the road.



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ALASKA

AFAR Creative Director Supriya Kalidas recently went in search of the northern lights, and found so much more.

BETWEEN THE LINES

In the early 20th century, the radical De Stijl art movement reshaped the world in bold colors and sharp angles. In Utrecht, the Dutch city where it started, "the style" is still alive.

I SARI WA (IT WILL CONTINUE > INDEFINITELY)

California's Channel Islands National Park calls to the adventurous with its rugged landscapes, rich Indigenous history, and the most biodiverse environment in North America.





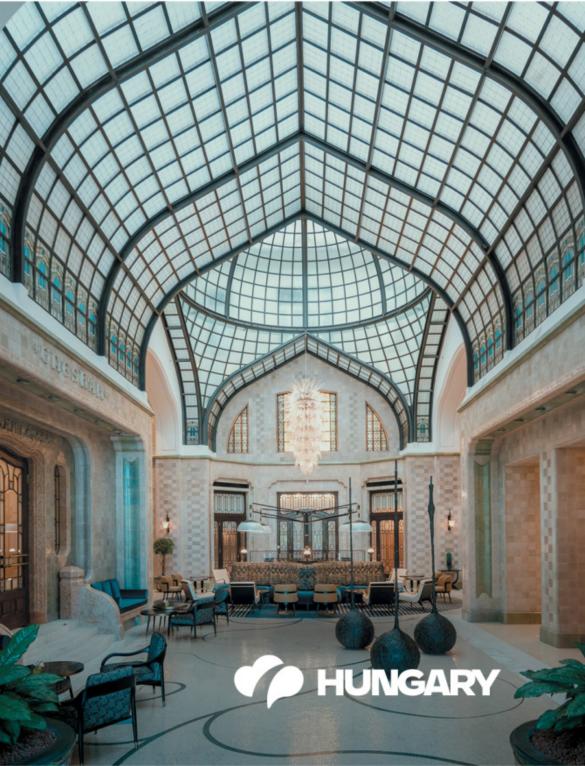
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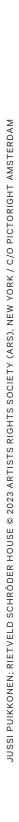
A trip to Tokyo, Osaka, and Kyoto embraces the beauty and brevity—of cherry blossom season in Japan.

ILLUSTRATION: PETE RYAN PHOTOS, CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT: SUPRIYA KALIDAS, JUSTIN FANTL, GEOFF HAGGRAY











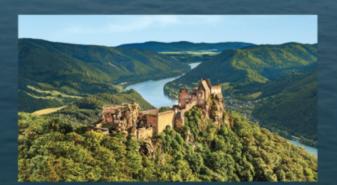


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Explore Charleston



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VP, EDITOR IN CHIEF Julia Cosgrove
EDITORIAL DIRECTOR Sarika Bansal @sarika008
CREATIVE DIRECTOR Supriya Kalidas @supriyakalidas
EXECUTIVE EDITOR Billie Cohen @billietravels
SENIOR DEPUTY EDITOR Jennifer Flowers
@jenniferleeflowers

DEPUTY EDITORS
Tim Chester @timchester,
Katherine LaGrave @kjlagrave
SENIOR TRAVEL NEWS EDITOR

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Michelle Baran @michellehallbaran

SENIOR COMMERCE EDITOR
Lyndsey Matthews @lyndsey_matthews
PHOTO EDITOR Michelle Heimerman @maheimerman

EDITORIAL PRODUCTION MANAGER Kathie Gartrell
SENIOR DESIGNER Elizabeth See @ellsbeths
ASSOCIATE DESTINATIONS EDITOR Chloe Arrojado
ASSOCIATE EDITOR Mae Hamilton @bymaeham
PRODUCTION EDITOR Karen Carmichael @karencarmic

PRODUCTION DESIGNER Myrna Chiu
EDITOR AT LARGE Laura Redman @laura redman

Lisa Abend @lisaabend, Chris Colin @chriscolin3000, Latria Graham @mslatriagraham, Emma John @em_john, Ryan Knighton, Peggy Orenstein @pjorenstein, Anu Taranath @dr.anutaranath, Anya von Bremzen @vonbremzen

COPY EDITOR Elizabeth Bell
PROOFREADERS Pat Tompkins, Kara Williams
SPECIAL CORRESPONDENTS

Fran Golden @fran_golden_cruise, Sally Kohn @sallykohn, Barbara Peterson, Paul Rubio, Victoria M. Walker @vikkie

MARKETING & CREATIVE SERVICES

VP, MARKETING Maggie Gould Markey
@maggiemarkey, maggie@afar.com

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, MARKETING AND

SPECIAL PROJECTS Katie Galeotti @heavenk

BRANDED & SPONSORED CONTENT DIRECTOR

Ami Kealoha @amikealoha

ASSOCIATE DESIGN DIRECTOR Christopher Udemezue

ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, MARKETING ACTIVATIONS

Irene Wang @irenew0201

SENIOR INTEGRATED MARKETING MANAGER

Mary Kennedy @marmar353

INTEGRATED MARKETING MANAGER

Isabelle Martin @isabellefmartin

Maggie Smith @smithxmaggie

MARKETING ACTIVATIONS MANAGER

SALES

SALES, SOUTHWEST

VP, PUBLISHER Bryan Kinkade @bkinkade001, bryan@afar.com, 646-873-6136

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, BRAND PARTNERSHIPS
Onnalee MacDonald @onnaleeafar, onnalee@afar.com, 310-779-5648

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, BRAND PARTNERSHIPS
Laney Boland @laneybeauxland, lboland@afar.com, 646-525-4035

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, BRAND PARTNERSHIPS
CJ Close @close.cj, cjclose@afar.com, 310-701-8977

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CARIBBEAN
Barry Brown barry@afar.com, 917-226-5398

SALES, SOUTHEAST

972-960-2889 **SALES COORDINATOR** Carly Sebouhian @carlyblake419, csebouhian@afar.com, 516-633-5647

Lewis Stafford Company lewisstafford@afar.com,

Colleen Schoch Morell colleen@afar.com, 561-350-5540

AFAR MEDIA LLC

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER Greg Sullivan @gregsul
VP, COFOUNDER Joe Diaz @joediazafar
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JUSSI PUIKKONEN

Photographer

In his approach to photography, Jussi Puikkonen says he aims to reflect his subjects as they truly are. Raised in the Finnish woods and now based in Amsterdam, Puikkonen surveyed the Dutch city of Utrecht in **Between the Lines** (p.82). For this story, he focused on the way the De Stijl movement, a cultural wave that sought to distill objects down to their fundamental forms and colors, shaped the city. "Utrecht is as beautiful as Amsterdam but not as crowded with tourists," he says. Puikkonen also shoots for *Bloomberg*, the *Financial Times*, and *Monocle*. See more of his work on Instagram @jussipuikkonen.



ANNA KIM

Writer

For Where to Go in 2024 (p.64), journalist Anna Kim writes about a place near and dear to her heart—her hometown of Toronto. Kim's family moved there from Seoul when she was five years old. The piece explores the many ways travelers can tap into the city's rich multiculturalism, such as by walking through its historic neighborhoods and sampling the incredible food scene. "Diversity is not just acknowledged [here] but truly embraced," Kim says. She's also written for Fodor's Travel, Tripadvisor, and Matador Network. Follow Kim on Instagram @mytravelanthropy.



ROSALIND CUMMINGS-YEATES

Writer

Rosalind Cummings-Yeates is a Chicago-based travel journalist who covers St. Kitts in **Where to Go in 2024** (p.40). In her article, she reports on the Caribbean island's long history of rum and sugar production, and talks with some of the enterprising local residents who are bringing that legacy into the modern era. "I love the innovative spirit of the Kittitian people," Cummings-Yeates says. "My favorite part of the trip was seeing how proud the rum makers were when explaining how they built their companies." Cummings-Yeates has written for *BBC Travel*, *Time*, and *Lonely Planet*. Keep up with her on Instagram @farsightedgirl.



JUSTIN FANTL

Photographer

Justin Fantl has worked as a commercial and editorial photographer for more than 15 years. Today, he operates a landscape design studio in Santa Barbara, California. He combines his myriad interests in I Sari Wa (It Will Continue Indefinitely) (p.92), a photo essay of southern California's Channel Islands National Park, one of the most biodiverse places in North America and the ancestral home of the Chumash and Gabrieleno-Tongva peoples. "I visited the islands out of curiosity and I immediately fell in love with them," Fantl says. "That was more than three years and two dozen trips ago." His work appears in the *Atlantic*, *Dwell*, and *Rolling Stone*. See more of his photos on Instagram @fantl.

Contributors



GEOFF HAGGRAY

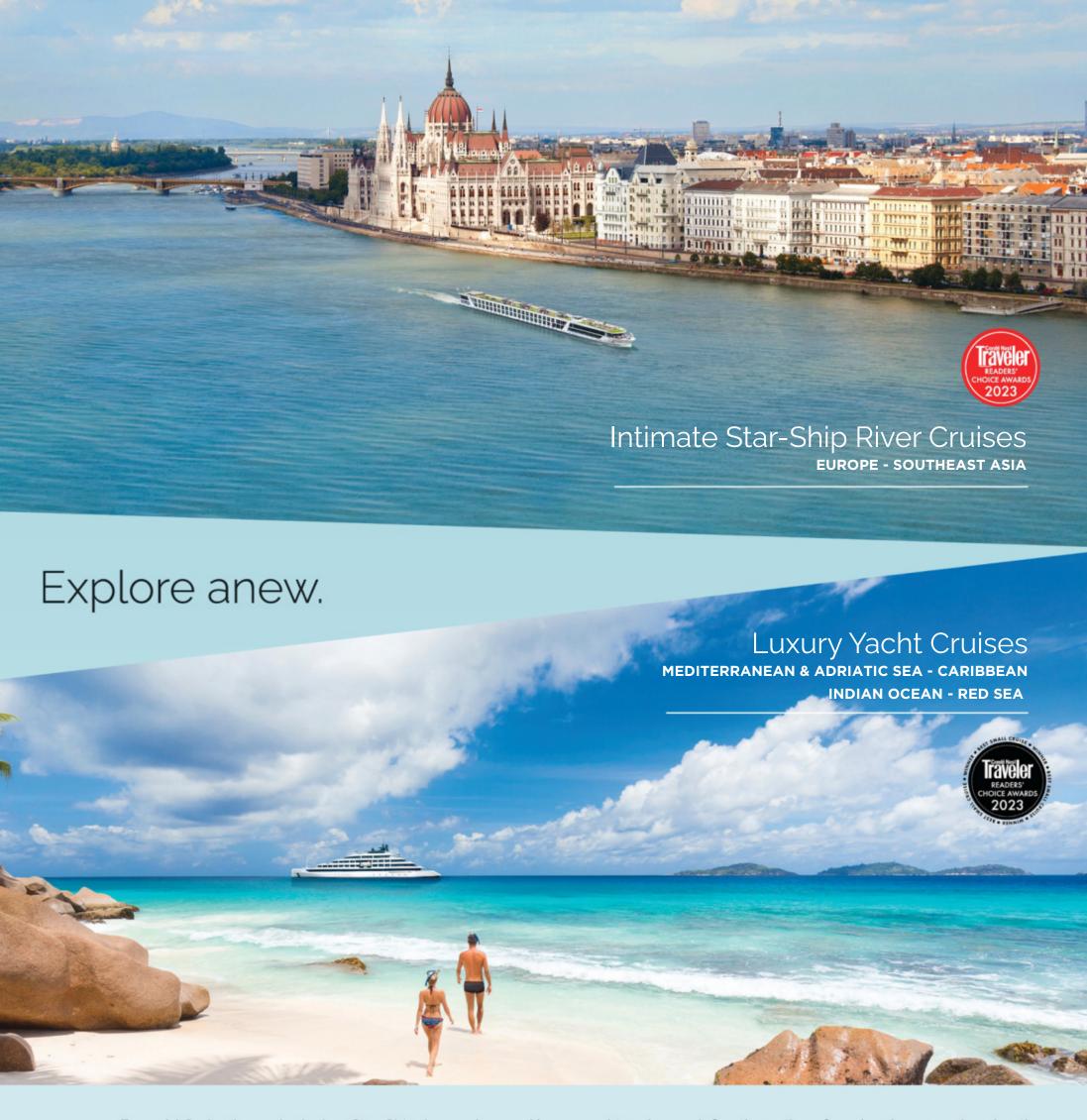
Photographer

East Coast-based photographer Geoff Haggray enjoys capturing a sense of place and time in his images, which have a nostalgic, almost painterly quality. For **In Full Bloom** (p.100), Haggray photographed scenes of *hanami*, or cherry blossom celebrations, in Japan. His subjects include the flowering trees, as well as families and friends gathering underneath the blooms to celebrate the arrival of spring. "I loved being able to take part in hanami," he says. "It's a beautiful example of a nation coming together to simply appreciate nature and spend time with loved ones." Haggray's photos also appear in the *New York Times*, *BuzzFeed*, and *Harper's Bazaar*. Find him on Instagram @geoffhaggray.



LAURA ITZKOWITZ

To say that writer Laura Itzkowitz loves Rome is an understatement—after years of visiting, she moved there permanently in 2019 to be with her (now) husband. Itzkowitz writes about the Eternal City and its new high-end hotels, globally inspired restaurants, and reopened archaeological sites for **Where to Go in 2024** (p.50). "It's worth slowing down and getting a feel for the way Romans live," she says. "There's a lot more to [the city] than the Colosseum." Itzkowitz writes for *Travel + Leisure*, *Condé Nast Traveler*, and *Hemispheres*. Follow her adventures on Instagram @lauraitzkowitz.



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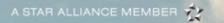
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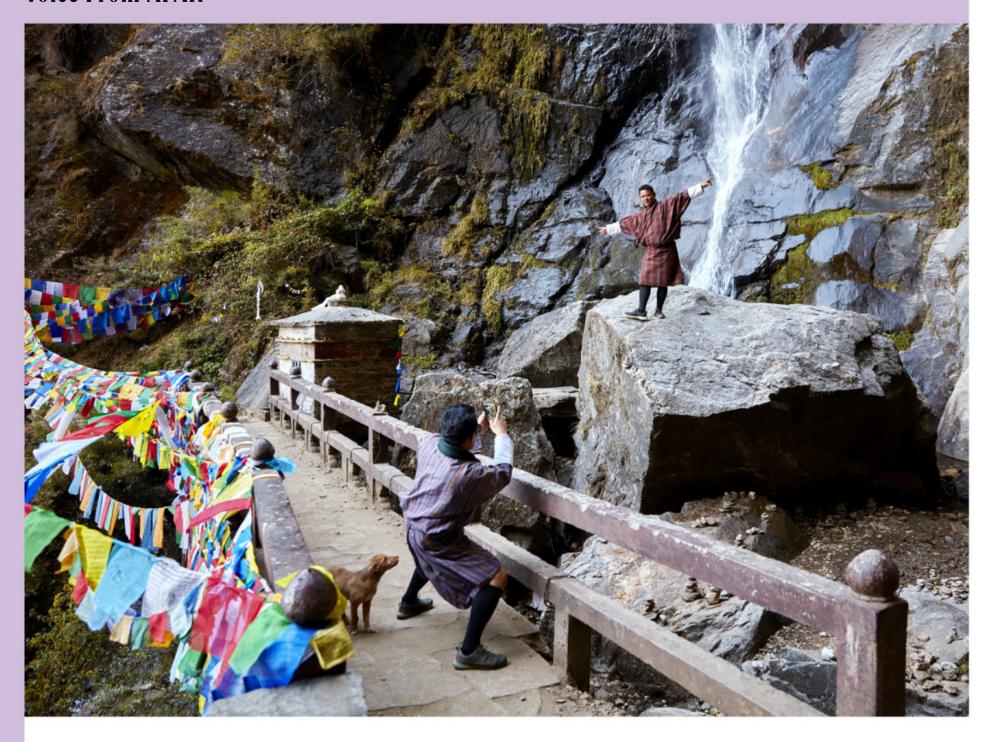
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Voice From AFAR



A New Year of Travel

EARLY SUMMER IS one of my favorite times of the year at AFAR—and not just because half-day Fridays kick off. It's when we start soliciting ideas for our annual Where to Go list. We reach out to our network of writers across the globe to find out where they are, where they've been, and where they think our readers should go in the coming year.

As the story ideas roll in, I get to vicariously travel the world. I read convincing arguments for cities, regions, and whole countries, before we begin the hard work of whittling those submissions down to the 25 destinations that make the cut.

It's always refreshing to take the travel community's pulse—to learn what's exciting for our team, and to see trends emerge. Old favorites reappear and new places pop up. Italy is on many writers' minds

this year—and every year. Cities across North America jockeyed for attention, including Toronto (page 64). Events often shape travel plans: The Summer Olympics will take over Paris in July (page 38), and the total solar eclipse will draw skygazers across the United States, including the Hill Country in Texas (page 32).

Our list is a global mix that includes Manchester's edgy creative scene (page 60), Uruguay's homegrown winemakers (page 30), and Black art in Los Angeles (page 54). I learned a lot about Brno, Czechia (page 42) —not least how to pronounce it—and enjoyed sharing why travelers should see and help protect Fiji's marine life (page 26).

Working at AFAR for five years has left me with an extensive list of places to experience. This issue's dispatches from our seasoned reporters have added even more ideas to my mental scrapbook. I hope you also find inspiration for 2024.

Happy travels, **TIM CHESTER** *Deputy Editor*

Bhutan (page 62) is encouraging visitors to stay longer and explore further with its recently restored Trans Bhutan Trail.













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4

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While my husband and I were visiting Cartagena, Colombia, we were approached by a mother and her baby. She pointed at the baby, then her stomach, as if to say they were hungry, and held out her palm. I gave her all the pesos I had. Later that day, my husband told me that I had helped fuel a bad industry. Had I? —L.C.

YOUR QUESTION IMMEDIATELY brings to mind the cognitive dissonance we experience when inequities of our world are laid bare. How is it that some people can relax for pleasure abroad while others struggle to have enough food, water, and dignity to make it through the day? Who made this system, and how do we repair it? Such questions can short-





When confronted with our own status as better-off, we can feel overwhelmed by a range of complex emotions.

Yes, from one perspective, your actions were correct. You were moved by the scene and sympathized with another person's situation. In a world that often places greater premium on accumulating profits than on people's well-being, the fleeting connection between you and the young mother matters greatly.

You were, I imagine, also motivated to empty your pockets because she identified—and, in a way, called out—your relative wealth and privilege. That can feel awkward. She knew, and you knew, that you had more than she did. When confronted with our own status as better-off, we can feel overwhelmed by a range of complex emotions. Guilt, shame, and helplessness merge with concern. While you gave the woman the money ostensibly to help her, the exchange may have also helped you discharge the uncomfortable feelings that the interaction raised.

Let's say you had not given her money. Would that have been a better option? Your husband seems suspicious of the "bad industry" in which people either opt to beg or are forced to do so.

We don't know the woman's situation. We don't know if she chose to panhandle in a high-density tourist location because it pays more than other jobs. We don't know if the money will offer her and her baby some solace during an otherwise chaotic day. Or might she be left with just a few pesos after a criminal ringleader takes his share?

For many people without a viable safety net, a blurry line exists between choice and lack of choice. The truth is most people who beg for money do so out of some form of deep financial insecurity. The rationale might differ across

locations and contexts, but the fact remains that economic and social vulnerability is much bigger than you or me.

Emptying our pockets serves as a Band-Aid for the recipient and will not inoculate them from panhandling in the longer term. Likewise, turning away from someone who is asking you for money will probably not help them enjoy more dignity, opportunity, and safety in their lives. You and I and the panhandler are all small fries. We live in a bigger system that perpetuates inequities and gives us relatively few opportunities to face them directly.

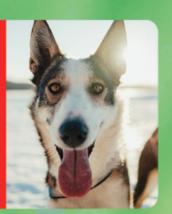
Your question gets at an age-old moral quandary, and I'm not sure there is a right answer. Here is how I often, but not always, approach these situations. Before traveling, I read about what social justice initiatives look like in the region I'm visiting. I try to find out which organizations bring relief to affected people in ethical and thoughtful ways, and I might support their work with a contribution. I ask my friends and colleagues in those places how socially minded locals themselves navigate the inequities they encounter daily. Everywhere in our unequal world, people are coming together to create more stability in local communities in both small and big ways. I might not always know what to do when I am approached by a stranger for money, but I do know I want to be a part of a larger movement of organizations helping advance social and economic equity. It sounds like you do, too.

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 over 30,000 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 lifechanging 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.

RENDEZVOUS FESTIVAL

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



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NORTHERN TALES

Snowmobiling, wildlife viewing, aurora hunting... 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.



NORTHWES



BLACK SPRUCE CABINS

Stay sustainably in the boreal forest. Each cabin boasts a kitchen, spa access, and high-speed internet (although your devices are unlikely to win the battle for attention out here).



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.

CANADA*





AURORA VILLAGE

We're not sure if it's the traditional teepees, authentic Indigenous comfort food, 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.



YUKON



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.

> GREAT SLAVE LAKE

NUNAVUT

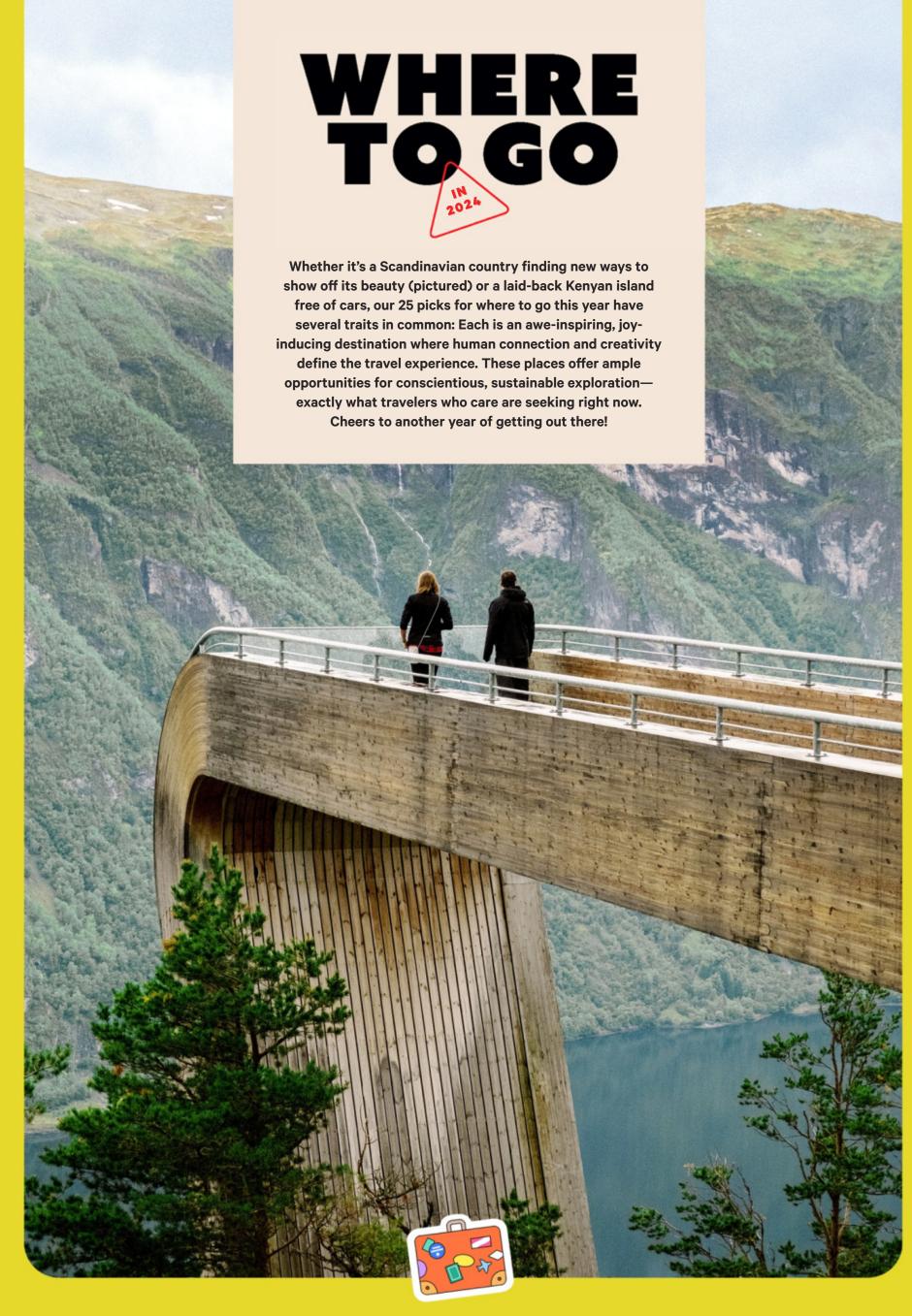
AND AGAIN.

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.

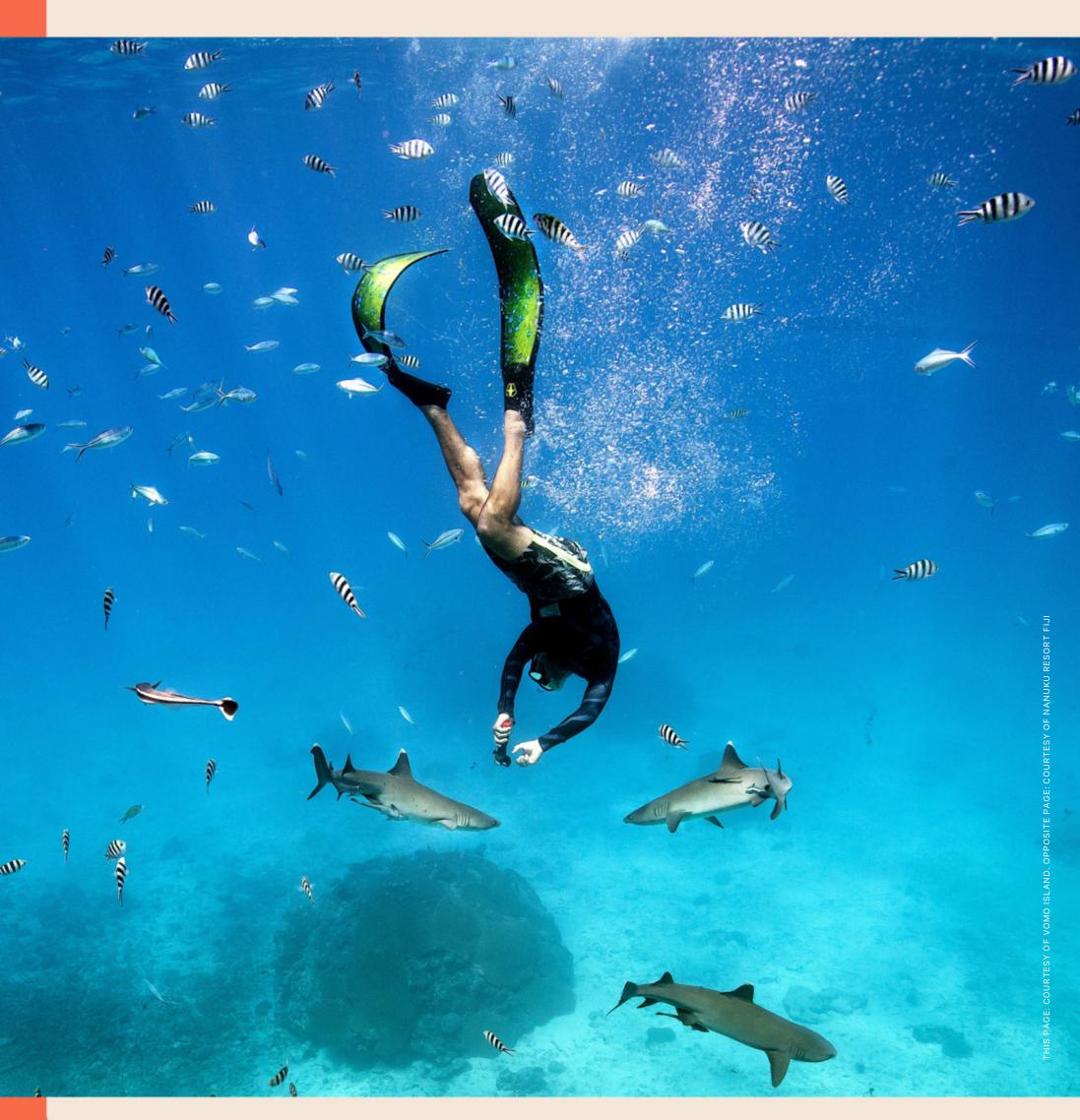
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B.DENE ADVENTURES

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.



WHERE TO GO IN 2024



The South Pacific's vivid

underwater world awaits

conservation-minded visitors.

by TIM CHESTER

• **FIJI'S MARINE LIFE** is famously beautiful: a colorful show of turtles, rays, and sharks swirling amid sun-dappled shades of green and blue. The main stage for this dazzling performance is its array of coral reefs—fragile ecosystems in which the symbiotic relationship between plants and fish plays out daily, their delicate dance a microcosm of our ever more stressed planet.

Given this aquatic world's wonders, it's no surprise that the hotels on the archipelago's 333 islands are at the forefront of marine conservation efforts. In the south, Kokomo Private Island works with local nonprofit Manta Project Fiji to identify, tag, and protect manta rays in the surrounding aquamarine waters. The resort also shows visitors how to swim and snorkel among them peacefully. Six Senses Fiji, meanwhile, planted 600 mangrove saplings in 2022 to provide shelter for marine life, part of a larger ecological restoration project that extends protection to terrestrial species too, including the Pacific boa snake and the critically endangered Fijian crested iguana.

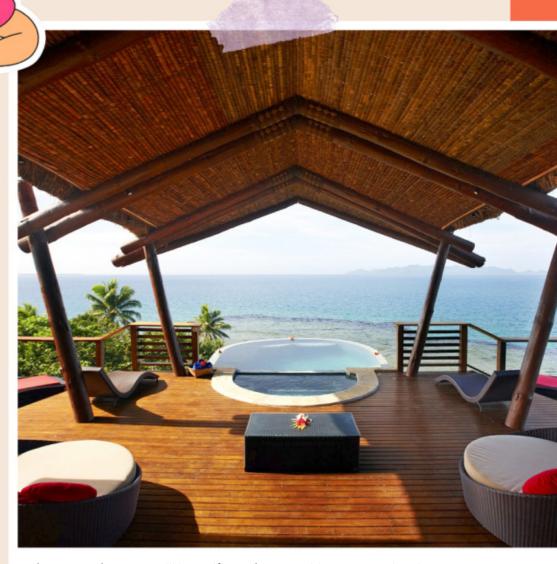
Several resorts have in-house marine biologists. At Vomo Island resort, Laisenia Rokoua oversees such initiatives as coral planting, species identification, and coastal cleanups. On the characteristically dreamy private island, children can make coral "cookies" out of concrete and pieces of living

coral that are then planted in the reef. The hotel has just constructed little "fish houses" to protect the reef's smaller finned residents.

"I get so much enjoyment out of watching our guests participate in these practical activities that really have a positive impact," Rokoua says. "It's a feeling of achievement to be good for the planet and know that a little thing like making a coral cookie can breathe some life back into the ocean."

At Nanuku Resort, on Fiji's largest island of Viti Levu, I observed some of these efforts firsthand. Marine scientist and sustainability manager Kelly-Dawn Bentley showed me how delicate mangrove saplings are nurtured on-site and then planted along the coast near villages, where local communities can witness the carbon-sequestering plants' superpowers as storm protection barriers. Seremaia "Jerry" Delana, Nanuku's sustainability officer, snorkeled with me alongside the resort's reef. He pointed out parrotfish (which nibble away the algae) and the angular metal structures of coral nurseries, which seemed a little incongruous but provide vital support for an ecosystem threatened by spear fishing, storms, and ocean warming.

As we drifted with the currents, spying the hopeful signs of newly planted coral nurturing tiny fish, a distinct lack of other travelers made it even more memorable. Comparatively few people come to experience—and protect—Fiji's splendor. (Some 70,000 came from the United States in 2022, compared to 7.7 million Americans who went to Hawai'i. Fiji welcomed just 636,000 inbound visitors overall in 2022.) That means you "don't have to worry about overtourism," according to Josua "Josh" Cakautini, Nanuku's gregarious cultural ambassador. "There is lots of space on our islands to welcome everyone."



Above: Nanuku Resort Fiji in Pacific Harbour on Viti Levu comprises just a few dozen villas spread across 500 acres—and includes a private island fringed with a reef. Left: Friendly reef sharks swim among guests at Vomo Island resort.

MAKE IT A CRUISE

The 13-night "Fiji, Tonga, Cook Islands & Society Islands" itinerary from Paul Gauguin Cruises stops twice in Fiji and visits tiny Beqa Island, where snorkeling adventures await.

DON'T MISS

Participate in a kava ceremony, in which a mildly intoxicating brew made from the *Piper methysticum* plant is passed among hosts and visitors.

REQUIRED EATING

Try *lovo*, a meal of chicken or pork and root vegetables wrapped in leaves and cooked on top of heated rocks in a pit in the ground.





WHERE TO GO IN 2024 LDONADO URUGUAY



Historically, Uruguay's winemaking has been centered around Montevideo and the Canelones province, but today Maldonado is producing its own compelling vintages.

WHERE TO STAY

Wedged between vineyards and pine trees inland from José Ignacio, the Luz Culinary Wine Lodge opened in 2022 with eight Moroccaninspired suites.

MAKE IT HAPPEN

JSB Journeys can plan wine-oriented trips to Uruguay, with stays in vineyard hotels, tastings, and those all-important designated drivers.



Uruguay's coastal wine region

promises bold reds and

beautiful places to enjoy them.

by JULIA BUCKLEY

• THERE'S SOMETHING in the air in Piriápolis. There always has been: Francisco Piria, an alchemist, founded his Belle Époque seaside resort town here in the 1890s, because he loved the supposedly cosmic energy. And visitors have long flocked to the Maldonado region as a whole for its world-class beach towns: flashy Punta del Este and its bohemian cousin, José Ignacio. Today, however, a visit is all about the wine. Travelers can stroll through family-owned vineyards that unfurl toward the ocean, drink Uruguay's gutsy tannat reds and signature albariño whites, and pair them with the melt-in-your-mouth steaks the country is famous for.

Uruguay's viticulture scene is thriving, and Maldonado on the Atlantic coast is its fastest-growing wine region. In fact, Montevideo's best-known winemakers, Bodega Bouza, have opened the hilltop restaurant Las Espinas in Maldonado,

and are adding a winery in 2024. They're not the only ones. Cerro del Toro—whose tannat varietal was recently dubbed Uruguay's "discovery of the year"—will also open a winery next year.

In this part of the country, enotourism means intimate vineyards and bucolic outdoor tastings. At Bodega Garzón, visitors can ride e-bikes around the sprawling estate to find a spot to savor wine with a picnic. On a rocky bluff with the Atlantic hazy in the distance, the Alto de la Ballena estate hosts tastings of its bottles, including a fresh tannat-viognier blend.

"Most of our wineries are boutique or family owned, and the owners are directly involved in every step of the process," says José Ignacio-based sommelier Soledad Bassini, who has worked in the industry for 25 years. "That brings the wine a lot of character, and for visitors it's like entering someone's home and sharing their routine, traditions, and history."

The abundance of wine experiences led Bassini to create the Mapa del Vino, a map that details Uruguay's boutique vineyards. "Maldonado has everything," she says. "Terroir, ocean, beaches—it's the whole package."



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TEXAS
Travel to the Lone Star State this spring to experience a total eclipse in the heart of Texas.

by MAE HAMILTON

• THE LILTING TRICKLE of a lazy river. The gentle creak of a rope swing hung from a bald cypress branch. A belly full of barbecue and the smell of flowering bluebonnets, musky ashe juniper, and sunscreen in the air. There's nowhere on Earth quite like the rolling landscapes of my childhood: the Texas Hill Country.

Where the boundaries of the Hill Country exactly begin and end are nebulous, but the region spans roughly 31,000 square miles. It's penned in by the Texas High Plains to the north and San Antonio to the south. Austin marks its eastern edge, and the area's rugged topography slowly fades into scrubby high desert mountains toward the west. But most Texans follow a simple rule of thumb: If it ain't hilly, it's probably not the Hill Country.

This year, all eyes are turned to the region, since it falls smack-dab in the path of totality for the 2024 solar eclipse on April 8. As the moon passes between the sun and the Earth, the day will turn to night. North America saw a total eclipse in 2017, but the last time the land now known as Texas experienced one was back in 1397. Visibility will depend on two things: location (the Hill Country will get close to four and a half minutes of totality, out of an ever-possible max of seven and a half) and weather (Central Texas's annual average of 300 sunny days bodes well).

"I know what it feels like to be in the shadow of the moon in the daytime, and it's like nothing you've ever experienced," says Jeff Stone, a former NASA engineer and eclipse enthusiast based in Kerrville, a Hill Country town an hour northwest of San Antonio. "It gets you inside. Between temperature changes and the critters reacting, it's spectacular. It's going to be big."

But after the darkness has passed and eclipse chasers pack up their lawn chairs, there will be plenty of reasons to stick around. To its credit, the Hill Country has no large cities, just a smattering of cute-as-a-button small towns, each with its own personality. The crown jewel is arguably Fredericksburg (population: 11,257), situated about 80 miles west of Austin. The town has deep German roots, a historic downtown with more than 150 local shops, and a booming winery scene (the Texas Hill Country American Viticultural Area is the third largest in the U.S.; organic winery Halter Ranch Texas is a new addition in 2024). Visitors should stop at Fredericksburg's Old German Bakery and Restaurant for schnitzel and potato

REQUIRED LISTENING Don't miss a trip to Luckenbach, the town that Waylon Jennings, Willie Nelson, and the boys sang about going to "get back to the basics of love" in their 1977 hit, "Luckenbach, Texas." There's live music every day at the town's

dance hall.



Above: Spring-fed swimming holes bubble up throughout the Hill Country. Top right: Fredericksburg, Texas, was founded in 1846 by German settlers.

pancakes. Then learn about the town's homesteading past at the Pioneer Museum. For a sweet treat, visit Das Peach Haus, which sells such items as jams, jellies, fruit cobblers, pie fillings, and fresh peaches—Fredericksburg is famous for them.

"I know what it feels like to be in the shadow of the moon in the daytime, and it's like nothing you've ever experienced."

About 25 miles southwest, Kerrville will hold an eclipse festival in Louise Hays Park on April 8, with science talks, musical acts, and children's programming planned—plus, NASA will be live

streaming the celestial event from the park. Kerrville is near the headwaters of the Guadalupe River too. Take in the scenery by renting a kayak and hitting the river; keep an eye out for native fish, plants, and birds including painted buntings.

Another 25 miles south of Kerrville is the Cowboy Capital of the World—Bandera. The downtown strip looks as if it were plucked out of a spaghetti western: Gunfight reenactments take place monthly at the visitor center, and there are several dude ranches in the area, including the fifth-generation Dixie Dude Ranch. Bandera is also ideal for stargazing, since its county is part of the Hill Country Alliance Night Sky Program, which works to reduce light pollution through advocacy and changes in environmental legislation.

Due to the Edwards Aquifer (one of the most productive in the world), 12 river headwaters begin in the Hill Country. The rivers here are generally gentle and blue as can be, and the locations of prime swimming holes are furtively guarded by Texans in the know (a visitor's best bet is to head to a state park, such as Inks Lake). And because these waters are slightly acidic, the Hill Country is studded with thousands of limestone caves. Many are open for tours, including Longhorn Cavern State Park, the "national cave of Texas."

Most visitors in 2024 will be looking up, but if they take time to look around, they'll find bona fide Texan beauty and culture. To quote Davy Crockett after losing his Tennessee bid for U.S. Congress in 1835, "You may all go to hell, and I will go to Texas"—and the Hill Country may be as close to heaven as one can get on Earth.



Skywatchers in the Hill Country saw two minutes of the annular eclipse in October 2023. When the solar eclipse arrives in April 2024, they'll get more than four minutes of totality.

WHERE TO STAY

Accommodations are selling out for the big day (April 8). Check traveltexas.com, visitfredericksburgtx .com, and kerrvilletexascvb.com for event and accommodation info. A standout for any time of year is Fredericksburg's Hoffman Haus, a boutique hotel that delivers breakfast to each room at 9 a.m. in a picnic basket.

REQUIRED EATING

No trip to Texas would be complete without a healthy dose of barbecue, and Lockhart (35 miles south of Austin) is the official Barbecue Capital of the state. Don't miss Smitty's Market for its traditional flavors or Barbs B Q, which is owned by three women—a rarity in the traditionally male-dominated Texas scene.



Music In Washington, DC

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THE WHARF

A gem of the Southwest Waterfront neighborhood, the riverside hub shines with rooftop dining, luxury lodging and electric entertainment. The Anthem draws in the masses for marquee shows like The Killers, Brandi Carlile and Wu-Tang Clan. Emerging artists connect with crowds in intimate spaces at Union Stage and Pearl Street Warehouse, which features rock, bluegrass and R&B.

JOE RUSSO'S ALMOST DEAD

Anthem

GEORGETOWN

Discover the rhythm of Georgetown beyond the historic charm, chic shops and bustling cafes. The nation's oldest continuing jazz supper club, Blues Alley, has been hosting world-class musicians and captivating guests with soulful sounds for decades. Mr. Smith's of Georgetown showcases sing-along songs as a karaoke piano bar, while Georgetown Piano Bar entertains with dueling talent.

Blues Alley

U STREET

Buzzing with rich history and a mix of international restaurants, U Street is best known for its vibrant nightlife and music scene. The legendary 9:30 Club has become a bucket list item with eclectic lineups including breakout bands and prominent performers. Next door, the Atlantis has made waves in its first year, championed and inaugurated by hometown hero Dave Grohl and the Foo Fighters.

9:30 Club © John Shore

THE CLASSICS

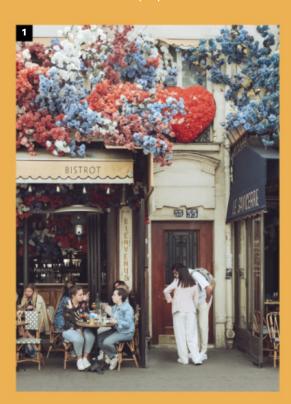
WHERE TO GO IN 2024

This is the year to visit, or revisit, these timeless spots.

by MICHAEL CALLAHAN

1. PARIS

The City of Light has been preparing to host the 2024 Summer Olympic Games and the Paralympics with signature French élan. (Swimming events in the Seine! BMX freestyle on the Place de la Concorde!) "There is much to consider if you want to be in Paris for the Olympics," says Martha King, whose namesake travel agency is helping visitors who want to attend the Games. There are more than 3,500 combinations of Olympic events and



sessions; hopeful attendees should act quickly, King says. The city is, of course, festive throughout the year and worth a trip any time. Before April 2, travelers can enjoy the Mark Rothko exhibition at the Frank Gehry–designed Fondation Louis Vuitton. Afterward, head to the Left Bank for a champagne spritz and Eiffel Tower views on the rooftop of the recently opened Hôtel Dame des Arts.

2. MACHU PICCHU

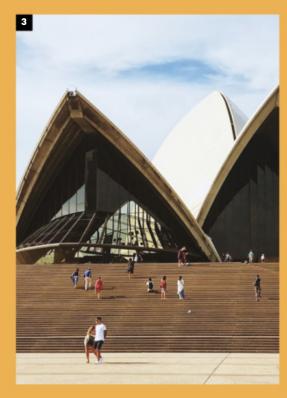
Peru's most popular attraction can sometimes seem to buckle under the weight of its visitors. Now, Intrepid Travel is offering a way to experience a lesser-known side of the Sacred Valley, using not the popular



Inca Trail but a route based on the nearby Quarry Trail. In addition to seeing Machu Picchu, the itinerary features the dramatic Perolniyoc Cascade waterfall; an Inca quarry that gave the original trail its name; and a viewpoint, called Wayrapunku, that overlooks the village of Ollantaytambo, whose ruins include the 900-year-old Temple of the Sun.

3. SYDNEY

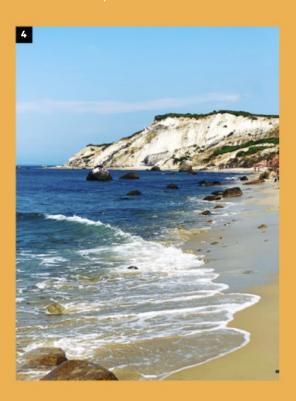
"shells," the Sydney Opera House turned
50 in October 2023 to great fanfare. Take
the official Backstage Tour at 7 a.m., then
return for dinner at the new Indigenous



restaurant, Midden, located within the compound. Its menu centers native Australian ingredients in such dishes as seared pork belly with bush honey and Sydney rock oysters with wattleseed vinaigrette. Check out the Opera House's 2024 special programming, including the London International Animation Festival in January. Or consider a trip in May or June for the annual festival Vivid Sydney when art and light installations transform the harbor into a mind-bending light show

4. MARTHA'S VINEYARD

It was the book that made people afraid to go into the water: *Jaws*. Celebrate its 50th anniversary in 2024 with a tour of sites on Martha's Vineyard where the movie was



filmed in 1974. Beyond the realm of the great white shark, explore the quintessential New England beauty of the 87-square-mile island: the dramatic clay cliffs of Aquinnah that appear to change color throughout the day; Offshore Ale Company, which serves malty fish and chips; and the 148-year-old carousel in Oak Bluffs, the oldest in the country. Trips in the shoulder seasons, late spring and early fall, promise mild weather and a respite from the island's infamous summer traffic.



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ST. KITTS



WHERE TO GO IN 2024

Local artisans are reclaiming the Caribbean island's complicated

past—through rum.

by ROSALIND CUMMINGS-YEATES

• ST. KITTS, IN THE eastern Caribbean, is an island of thick rainforests and sunny beaches. But during its early colonial era it was blanketed with sugar plantations that were farmed by enslaved African people. Much of the crop was turned into rum, creating a lucrative business for the British. After St. Kitts gained independence in 1983 and shut down its cane sugar production in 2005 (it couldn't compete with the global industry's turn to beet sugar), the legacy of Kittitian rum was not forgotten. Now two locally owned companies are reviving the island's distilling heritage with a proud Kittitian spin.

"We have a tradition of making rum called hammond, or bush rum," says Roger Brisbane, the founder of Hibiscus Spirits and owner of beachside restaurant Spice Mill. "People made it in the mountains. This was roots-style, over a coal pot with contraptions to distill the alcohol from the

molasses." Today, his company blends regionally sourced rum with tart hibiscus, a nod to a Caribbean Christmas drink called sorrel.

Jack Widdowson is also building on the island's history. Archaeologists unearthed a 17th-century distillery on the former plantation where he grew up, and in 2020, he founded the Old Road Rum Company there. For now he's blending signature bottles (using molasses-based rum from other Caribbean countries) while renovating the distillery so it can produce 100 percent Kittitian rum again.

The Kittitian RumMaster experience from the St. Kitts Tourism Authority introduces visitors to both projects. But as Widdowson explains, "A visit to Old Road Rum is not merely a historical tour or tasting session. It's an opportunity to be part of an evolving narrative that respects the past while shaping a new chapter for rum production in St. Kitts."



Jack Widdowson, founder of the Old Road Rum Company, says experts believe that a distillery found on his property produced rum sometime between 1676 and 1681. He is fundraising to restore it.

MAKE IT A CRUISE

Windstar's seven-day "Classic Caribbean" cruise stops at several islands, including St. Kitts for a history and rum-tasting tour.

WHERE TO STAY

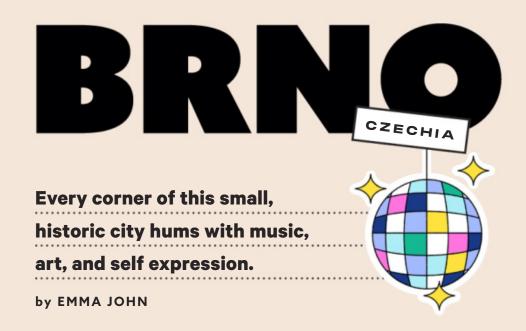
The seven-suite, 11-room Sunset Reef resort overlooks the Caribbean Sea and uses solar and geothermal energy. Farther north on the island, Belle Mont Farm is a collection of hillside luxury cottages that offers a farm-to-table experience with meals such as grilled mahi-mahi and roasted carrots with herbs.



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• **PRONOUNCED BURR-NO**, ideally with a luxuriously rolled "r," Czechia's second-largest city is roughly a quarter the size of Prague and receives almost none of its international tourists. Yet it is Brno, not the capital, that has been designated one of UNESCO's Cities of Music, honoring its thriving network of bars, nightclubs, and concert spaces, along with its world-class festival calendar. The scene here offers everything from the banjo punk of homegrown band Poletíme to JazzFestBrno, whose 2024 performers include Grammy Award-winning singer Samara Joy. Between the golf ball—shaped and acoustically advanced Sono Centrum venue and the imposing medieval walls of Špilberk Castle (where the city's philharmonic performs), there are few spots in Brno that aren't pressed into musical service.

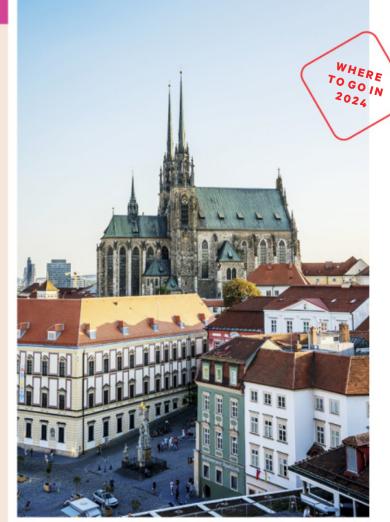
In the summer, it's the streets themselves—lined with a quirky confusion of communist-era slab blocks, confectionery-colored art nouveau mansions, and sleek modernist villas—that reverberate. In July the Pop Messe festival, now in its fourth year, draws alternative music headliners from across Europe. In August, free outdoor gigs spill across Brno's compact center during the annual Music Marathon. Some take place in the city's many hidden courtyards, others in busy squares including the Vegetable Market, where artists play live alongside fruit stalls and food trucks.

Brno's clubs and nightlife, meanwhile, have long skewed away from the mainstream. "Here there was always a strong underground scene," says Martin Kozumplík, who runs one of the city's most popular venues, Kabinet Múz. "Growing up in the time of communism, it felt like everyone played in a band."

With floor-to-ceiling windows and houseplant decor, Kabinet Múz is a vegan café by day, serving fried tofu "sushi" bowls and fragrant homemade soups while playing vinyl from its own record label. At



Tour operator Tic Brno offers English-language outings with experts on local cultural features, from art nouveau architecture to baroque monuments. One tour focuses on the city's theaters and music venues. Brno houses Europe's second-largest ossuary: 50,000 human skeletons are collected in the catacombs beneath St. Jacob's Square. The repository of bones dating from the 15th to the 18th centuries was discovered 22 years ago, and the ossuary was opened to the public in 2012.



Brno's bar scene comes alive at 4pokoje (opposite page) near the likes of the Cathedral of St. Peter and Paul (left).

night, a 300-strong clientele drinks *pivo* (beer) in the back room during indie rock or electronica shows.

The city's history as the capital of Moravia—a winemaking region with a deep corresponding tradition of folk song and dance—has some bearing on its musical culture, as does its easy distance to the larger cities of Vienna and Prague, since performers often stop here on their tours. Honoring the bicentennial of 19th-century Bohemian composer Bedřich Smetana, renowned for his operas and symphonic poems, 2024 has been declared a national Year of Czech Music, and Brno will be a focal point of the celebrations.

Brno's artistic streak extends beyond music. The recently reopened Museum of Applied Arts, founded in 1873 and housed in a three-story Renaissance revival palazzo with fin-de-siècle interiors, has been transformed by the Czech architect Ivan Koleček. Exhibits include Lucie Koldová's modern, elegantly curved chairs and tables that float alongside catwalks suspended across a light-filled atrium. There's even a café inspired by 2001: A Space Odyssey, where a robot arm delivers you a cappuccino with your own picture appearing in the foam.

Meanwhile, a new gastronomy is blossoming in Brno; try farm-to-table bistro Atelier or Italian spot Castellana Trattoria. At the creative cocktail bar Super Panda Circus, drinks are served as part of a storytelling experience in which guests play a role. Visitors should stay at the 37-room Hotel Avion, which reopened in 2022 after six years of renovation and many decades of decay. It's a classic of the city's 1920s love for functionalist design and an architectural oddity at only 26 feet wide—the kind of place you wouldn't find anywhere else but Brno.

TANGLER



A historically international

city embraces its artsy national identity.

by MARK ELLWOOD



• WITH A SKYLINE that resembles a handful of dice tossed haphazardly on the cliffside, Tangier has long stood apart from other Moroccan cities. For several decades in the 20th century, it was administered by a cluster of foreign countries, including Italy and Spain. It lured writers and artists from Europe and the United States, imparting a cosmopolitan vibe that still lingers today. In the past five years, though, Morocco's northernmost city has reconnected with its national roots.

In 2018, Africa's first high-speed train line made it possible to travel between Casablanca and Tangier in two hours; it was part of an extensive infrastructure investment to bolster the region. The arrival of new luxury hotels is a boon, including the 133-room Fairmont

Tazi Palace and the Villa Mabrouka, a boutique 12-room makeover of Yves Saint Laurent's onetime home by fashion designer Jasper Conran. Waldorf Astoria will join them, likely in early 2025.

The city's two main squares, the Grand Socco and Petit Socco, showcase the talent of creative Moroccans. In the larger square, idle over a coffee at Cinémathèque de Tanger, a historic cultural venue that first opened in 1938 and was refurbished in the mid-2000s by French-Moroccan artist Yto Barrada. Just outside the medina, Las Chicas focuses on Moroccan-made homewares, clothing, and organic wellness products by the women-owned Zoā Beauty; sip a mint tea, or *atay*, here, too. Farther afield, Alma Kitchen, owned by a local jeweler and her photographer husband, serves dishes such as charred eggplant and anise-and-cardamom spiced potatoes.

Stop by El Morocco Club, a piano bar and restaurant inspired by, and named after, the louche New York City nightclub that opened in the 1930s.

Today the club—with its monochromatic photos and zebra-print sofas—is the perfect shorthand for old and new Tangier in one.

In 1956, Tangier was reintegrated into the newly independent Moroccan state

STAY LONGER

Visit the mural-filled coastal town of Asilah, 30 miles south of Tangier. After a day on Paradise Beach, stay at PGH La Palmeraie Polo Club, which offers morning oceanside pony rides.





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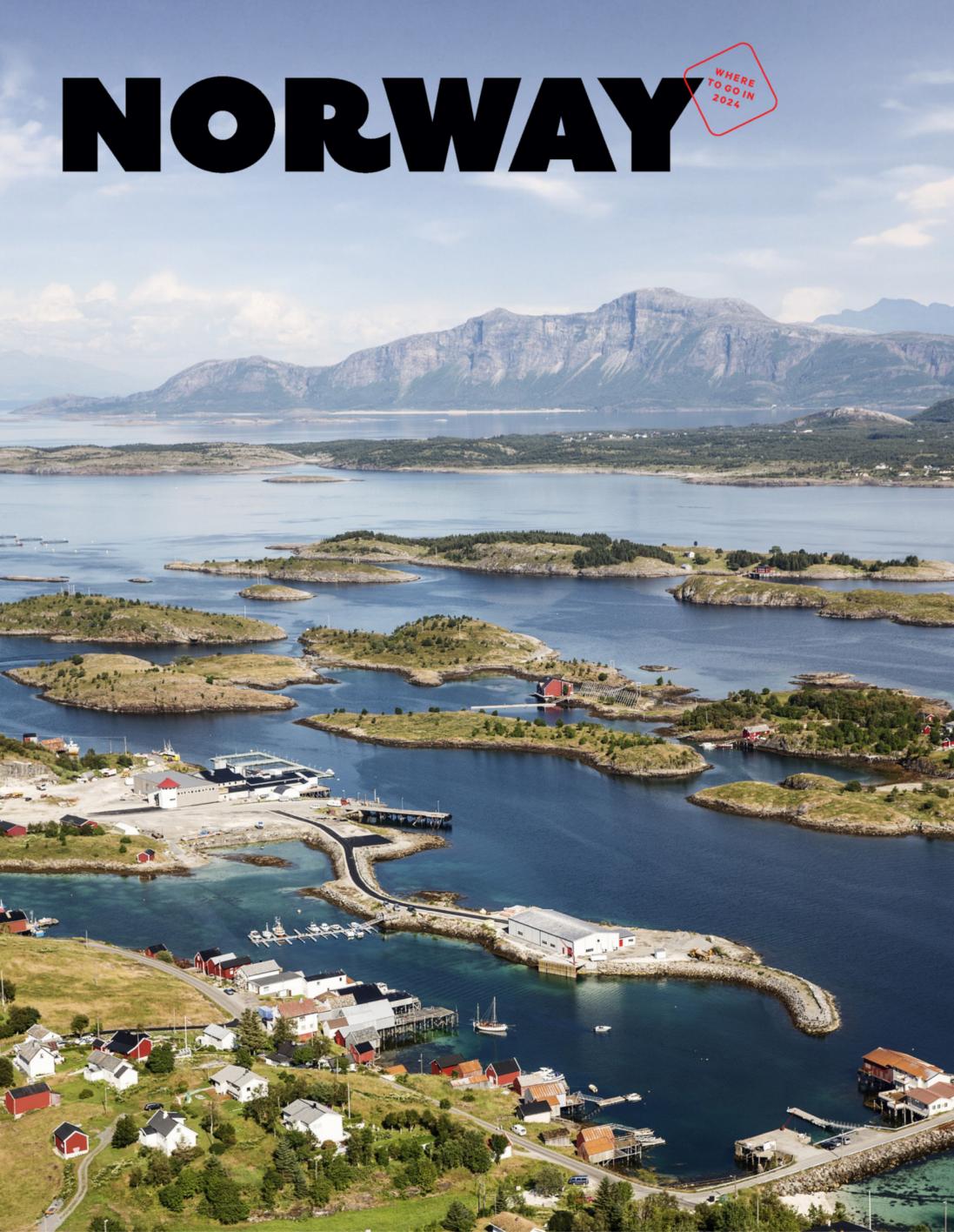
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Greener travel ideas invite visitors

to explore Norway's Arctic culture,
world-class restaurants, and
famous fjords in new ways.
by LAURA HALL

• **ANY GIVEN YEAR,** Norway is a great place to feel the awe of nature, and that experience is getting even better. Starting in 2024, there will be more opportunities to take in the beauty and bounty of the country—and, in true Norwegian style, these travel adventures are also kinder to the Earth.

"We believe that a good place to live is a good place to visit," says Hege Vibeke Barnes, a managing director of the destination marketing organization Innovation Norway, a 2022 AFAR Travel Vanguard honoree. "New itineraries give travelers access to more localized, in-depth experiences and to a larger and less explored part of the country," she says. "They can get closer to the real, authentic Norway in a low-impact and high-quality way."

The country's trains offer travelers views of cloud-grazing mountains, sharp-edged fjords, and cascading waterfalls. Visitors will be able to spend more time enjoying those land-scapes with a few rail projects coming soon: the electric Norient Express, a multiday train from Bergen to Trondheim that will include stops in Voss and the Olympic city of Lillehammer; and a set of long-distance hybrid-electric trains, called Flirt Nex, that will replace older vehicles on the Bergen-Oslo line, which is considered one of the most beautiful routes in the world.

Norway's fjords are also renowned, and there's nothing like the beauty of seeing them from the water. Tour operator SailNorway lets travelers take in the Helgeland coast while also participating in beach cleanups to keep those shorelines pristine. Brim Explorer runs silent fjord tours on hybrid-electric boats in Lofoten, Tromsø, and Oslo, all the better to spot orcas and white-tailed eagles. By 2026, Norway's government will require that all cruise ships and tourist boats in the UNESCO-designated West Norwegian Fjords be zero-emission. What's more, Norwegian cruise line Hurtigruten has prototyped an all-electric passenger ship for an itinerary along the entire coast.

The country makes it easy to drive in an ecological way as well. One out of every five cars here is electric, and internal-combustion engine vehicles will no longer be sold after 2025. So hop in an EV to Kristiansand to see the world's largest collection of Nordic modernist art at the Kunstsilo, a grain siloturned-museum, opening in 2024. Or venture north to Bodø, one of Europe's three 2024 Capitals of Culture and the first Arctic destination to hold the title. Throughout the year, the seaside town will celebrate its special location, showcasing art, community, and culture from an Arctic perspective. Events will include a Sami stage show about land rights and global warming and an unlikely opera about stockfish.



based on local ingredients. Opposite page: Bodø is a 2024 European Capital of Culture.

MAKE IT HAPPEN

Tour company Up Norway can custom-tailor journeys of the country and is a certified B Corp.

WHERE TO STAY

Norway is known for wooden architecture. The 177-room Wood Hotel Bodø, coming in 2024, sits on a mountain-side 10 minutes from the heart of the city, with a café, wellness area, heated pool, and rooftop dining. (Another place to check out: Wood Hotel by Frich in the town of Brumunddal. It's one of the tallest timber buildings in the world and overlooks the country's largest lake.)

In 2024, the New Nordic Food Manifesto marks the 20th anniversary of its commitment to regional, seasonal, ethical cuisine. Sample it at Michelin-starred Lysverket in Bergen, where chef Christopher Haatuft uses crops from urban gardens for his hyperlocal menu. Or try Credo in Trondheim, where chef Heidi Bjerkan hangs portraits of the cows that provide the dairy products. (Her eatery also has a Michelin star, plus a Green Star for its sustainable practices.)

Norway's culinary approach reflects the country's regard for nature. As Anne Gunn Rosvold, founder of outdoor-activity tour company Bergen Base Camp, notes, "We often hear guests saying how beautiful [Norway] is, how much drama and contrast the nature offers, and how fresh and clean it is." The projects now in the works will help locals and travelers alike continue to explore—and preserve—that beauty.

2024 CAPITALS

Four places celebrating wins this year

by TIM CHESTER & BILLIE COHEN

1. SAN DIEGO & TIJUANA World Design Capital 2024

Cross-border collaboration is the theme here, as these two cities, just 20 miles apart, share the World Design Organization's biennial designation. That translates to a series of events in both places. *La Frontera*, an exhibition focused on jewelry design, will take place January 27 to August 4 at San Diego's Mingei International Museum and February 16 to June 9 at the Tijuana Cultural Center (CECUT). In September, the weeklong World Design Experience, an interactive



showcase of design, will appear at multiple venues in San Diego. Additional travel-worthy art and architecture await: In San Diego, seek out the Salk Institute, a landmark of modern concrete buildings, or the University of California San Diego's geometric Geisel Library (named for Dr. Seuss); in Tijuana, visit CECUT (above) for its dramatic dome and garden full of replica Mesoamerican sculptures.

2. WEIFANG, CHINA Culture City of East Asia 2024

This eastern Chinese city between Beijing and Shanghai is often proclaimed the kite

capital of the world, thanks to its annual international kite festival each April that draws tens of thousands of people, and the Weifang World Kite Museum, where five exhibition halls explore the craftsmanship and folklore of kites. But Weifang works to protect *all* of its cultural heritage, with a focus on preserving traditions that earned it status as a UNESCO Creative City of Crafts and Folk Art in 2021. For example, Shihuyuan Intangible Cultural Heritage



Park teaches visitors about art forms including clay modeling and paper cutting, as well as kites. Travelers can try their hand at kite-making and wood-block printing at Yangjiabu Folk Art Grand View Garden. A thriving evening food market scene ensures a delicious end to a day; try barbecued seafood or *chao tian guo*, a dish of pork offal and pickled vegetables wrapped in a thin pancake.

3. VALENCIA, SPAIN European Green Capital 2024

Valencia, the 2,150-year-old city on Spain's east coast, earned the title of European Green Capital 2024 by passing muster in 12 categories, including air, noise, nature and biodiversity, and energy efficiency. See this in action with a stroll through the city center's old town (home to Valencia Cathedral, which is said to house the Holy Grail). Or wander Turia Garden, nearly



six miles of green space along a former riverbed crossed by bridges built in various centuries. Cyclists can see the city from 125 miles of bike lanes.

4. TARTU, ESTONIA European Capital of Culture 2024

Tartu's cobblestoned, café-filled town square (below) is just the start of its charm. One of three European Capitals of Culture for this year, it has plenty to offer any time—from professional productions at Estonia's oldest theater (est. 1870) to



pop-up bars and art shows in the Sovietera "garage box" sheds still found behind homes. But the celebrations are even more reason to visit this southern part of the country: a show of Soviet-era DIY inventions (April 24–December 31); an Estonian folklore concert by the Paris Philharmonic choir (June 15); and events that show off the region's forests, hills, and lakes, including an outdoor sculpture exhibit near the town of Otepää, about 30 miles south (May 25–September 15).

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ROME



Sophisticated new hotels

and increased access to

archaeological sites offer fresh

reasons to visit the Eternal City.

by LAURA ITZKOWITZ

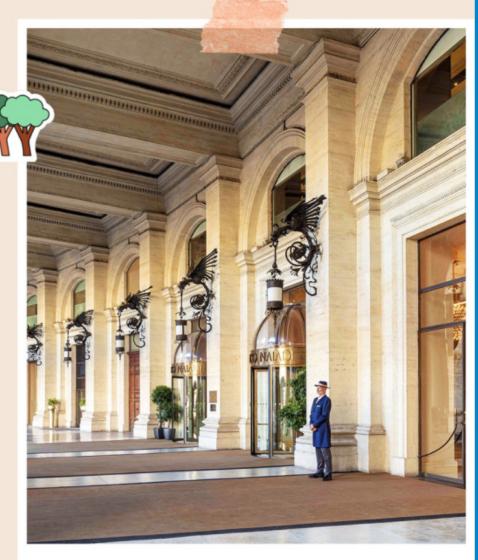
• THE MEAL STARTED WITH octopus carpaccio, wagyu beef gyoza, and yellowtail sushi. After my husband and I polished that off, the waiter set down Ibérico pork marinated in soy and truffle. Seated on a snaking banquette at Seen by Olivier, the rooftop restaurant at the new Anantara Palazzo Naiadi hotel, we enjoyed dish after dish. When I first lived in Rome back in 2009, I was hard-pressed to find such globally inspired fare; though it is a major European capital, it had tended to the traditional. But the Eternal City is changing.

Anantara is one of several hotel brands imbuing the city with a more international flair. Just in 2023, InterContinental, Bulgari, Edition, and Six Senses each debuted new properties in Rome. In the pipeline: hotels by Four Seasons, Rosewood, Nobu, and more. "Rome is coming out of a crazy year full of visitors and openings," says Elisa Valeria Bove, CEO of the private tour company Roma Experience. "Before, people stayed in Rome for two or three days. Now people stay five, six days, or even a week."

Bove and others in the city's tourism industry hope that the influx of top-tier hotels, with all of their amenities and culinary options, will attract more affluent travelers who spend more time and money, boosting the economy and encouraging visitors to go beyond the most famous (and crowded) attractions.

"Rome has always been a hit-and-run tourism destination for people to check off the Vatican and Colosseum," Bove says. "But now people are more open to seeing other things—and Rome offers so much. You would need a lifetime to explore it all."

I have lived here permanently since 2019 and can attest to how many secrets the city holds—if visitors take the time to look. Travelers can picnic in the shadow of ancient aqueducts at the Parco degli Acquedotti; admire Renaissance-era frescoes by Raphael in the Church of Santa Maria della Pace; see how one of the city's modern aristocratic families lives at Palazzo Colonna, part of which is open to the public on Fridays and Saturdays; or visit contemporary art galleries in San Lorenzo, a neighborhood that's become one of Rome's artsiest enclaves.



From left: The restaurant Anima at the Rome Edition hotel serves regional fare; the Anantara Palazzo Naiadi hotel combines traditional Italian architecture with elevated cuisine.

WHERE TO STAY

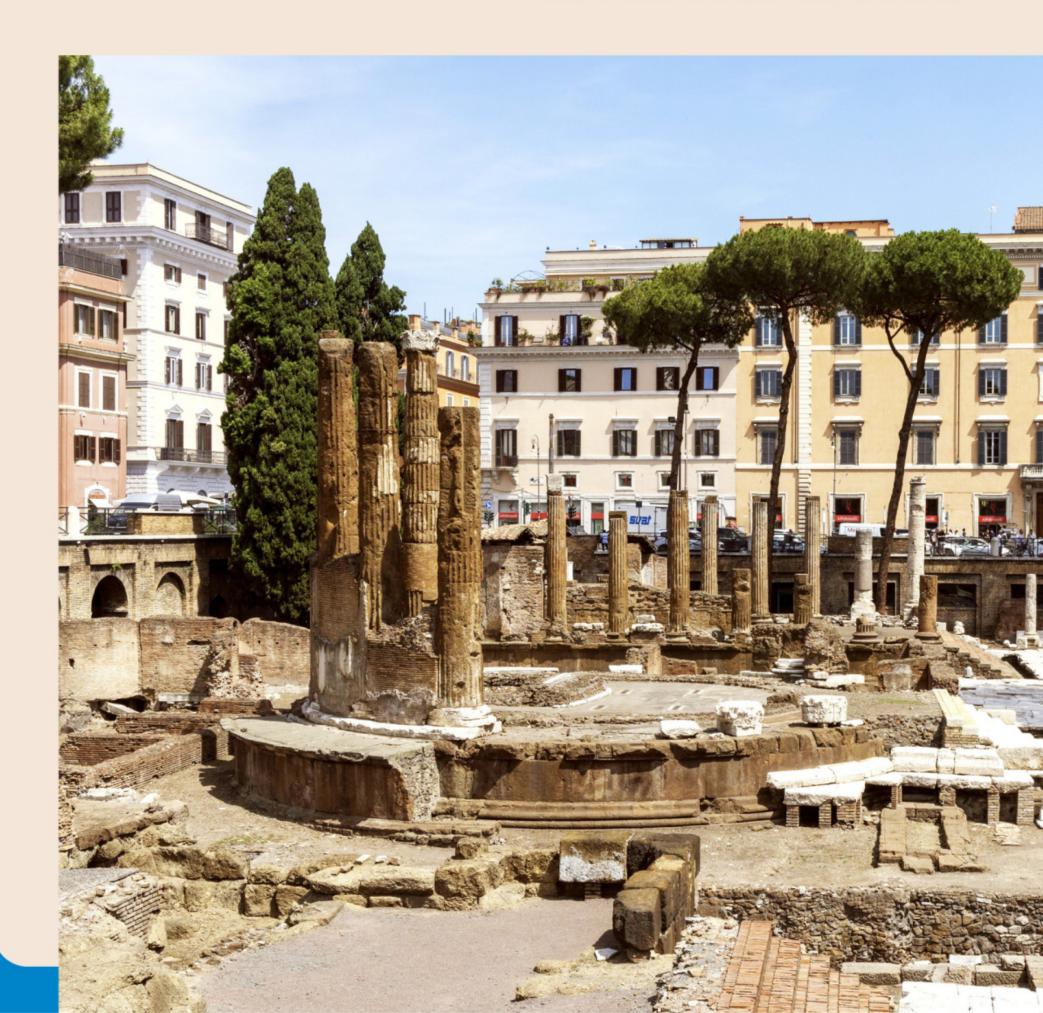
Six Senses Rome opened in March 2023 with a sleek yet earthy design, some of the city's best spa and wellness offerings, and a 100 percent green power supply.

It's not surprising that Rome continues to change and adapt; after all, it has incorporated foreign ideas and ways of life since the days of the Roman Empire. Today there's evidence everywhere of how the city continues to dig up its past and rebuild its present. I thought about that during a recent visit to Largo di Torre Argentina—the archaeological site where Julius Caesar was assassinated. Medieval buildings had obscured the ruins until Benito Mussolini razed the pre-Renaissance structures in the 1920s, in the name of progress. Since then, the area had languished until funding from luxury brand

Bulgari helped it open to the public in June 2023. Though I had walked past these ruins countless times, seeing archival photos of the excavations in the new exhibition space was a poignant reminder that progress ebbs and flows.

About a mile north, there's a massive, ongoing renovation at Piazza Augusto Imperatore, where Mussolini tore down more of the city in the 1930s to create a plaza paying homage to the eponymous Roman emperor (and establish himself as his successor). Since June 2023, the square has been home to the 114-room Bulgari Hotel Roma, which has two restaurants by chef Niko Romito (co-owner of the three-Michelin-starred Reale in Abruzzo, a region east of Rome). The next phase of the project will see the square surrounding the Mausoleum of Augustus redesigned with paved walkways and gardens.

It's not surprising that Rome continues to change and adapt; after all, it has incorporated foreign ideas and ways of life since the days of the Roman Empire.



WHERE TO GO IN 2024



WORTH A DETOUR

Visit the nearby Tuscia region for its palaces, including the pentagonal Palazzo Farnese in the town of Caprarola. Twenty miles north is Sacro Bosco di Bomarzo, a Renaissance-era garden filled with mythical creatures carved into rock.

REQUIRED EATING

The quartet of Roman pastas—carbonara, amatriciana, gricia, and cacio e pepe—are each made with a few simple ingredients and served across the city.



The way Romans think about wellness is changing, too. Before this year, I never would have imagined that I would do a sound healing meditation, but that's just what happened when I checked into the Six Senses Rome. In the past, spa offerings have tended to focus more on beauty than on a holistic vision of health, but global brands such as Six Senses and Anantara are expanding the range of treatments available, while honoring the city's history with the addition of Roman bath circuits.

Efforts are also being made to improve public transportation both inside and outside of Rome: As of July 2023, a new high-speed train service on Sundays links Rome to Pompeii in less than two hours. Previously, the trip required multiple trains and took nearly three hours; now, travelers can use Rome as a base to see the ruins. In the city, an expansion of metro line C is underway. The opening of a stop near the Roman Forum is projected for 2025, in time for the Jubilee year, a Catholic celebration of faith and forgiveness.

"There's a bit more buzz, more motivation to tidy things up," says Francesca Tozzi, the general manager of the Six Senses Rome. "Rome shouldn't be seen as a hub to get from Fiumicino [airport] to Tuscany or the Amalfi Coast. People should experience the city for all that it offers."



From left: Old sites, such as the Largo di Torre Argentina, juxtapose with modern life in Rome; Artisan is one of many bars in the San Lorenzo neighborhood.

EMIL JOHN RAVELO

at the Aster hotel is a new addition to L.A.'s rooftop dining scene.

Above: Lemon Grove



The city continues to reinvent itself in restaurants, on rooftops, and at a new public space focused on Black art.

by KRISTIN BRASWELL

• **GROWING UP IN** Los Angeles, I always felt it was so spread out that nothing quite tempted me to leave my neighborhood. Now, as an adult who recently returned from living in New York, I'm willing to battle traffic and get to know more of the city. From contemporary art exhibits at the Broad downtown to sunny afternoons spent at Hollywood's new restaurant and garden atop the Aster hotel, L.A. offers cultural and outdoor experiences all year round.

In February, the largest public art project devoted to Black artists in the United States will open here. The 1.3-mile-long open-air museum, called Destination Crenshaw, will be filled with permanent and temporary

outdoor installations featuring works by more than 100 Black artists displayed across four acres of green space. Established and emerging creatives will include painter Kehinde Wiley, artist and sculptor Melvin Edwards, and graffiti artists the RTN crew.

"The creative energy of the Black community in South L.A. drives popular art that's born locally, copied nationally, and consumed globally," says Jason Foster, Destination Crenshaw's president and COO. "Nonetheless, these artists have received neither the public acknowledgment nor economic advantage from decades of creative productivity. Destination Crenshaw powerfully makes this case, visually stamping South L.A. as the West Coast's cradle of Black creativity."

The city's food scene is thriving, too—a reflection of its diverse residents. Chef Rashida Holmes's pop-up, Bridgetown Roti, will open its first brick-and-mortar location in 2024, bringing Caribbean cookery to East Hollywood. The Row DTLA complex is a one-stop shop for global fare, including omakase at Hayato and wood-fired dishes at Chris Bianco's celebrated Pizzeria Bianco. Plenty of reasons to explore the city more deeply—and venture further afield.

FIND YOUR BLISS IN ST. LUCIA

Paradise awaits on this Caribbean island and at its resorts that offer something more.

With the iconic twin peaks of the Pitons rising above the horizon, miles of white-sand beaches, and a lush tropical rainforest, you couldn't ask for a more idyllic setting for a Caribbean vacation than St. Lucia. For the ultimate in culinary, aquatic, and land adventures—or if you just want time to unwind and rejuvenate your body, mind, and soul—this is the place. Plan your perfect getaway with our recommendations for the island's top hotels and resorts.





ANSE CHASTANET

Set on a 600-acre estate with two powder-soft beaches bordering pristine coral reefs, Anse Chastanet has 49 individually styled rooms that each narrate a tale of island culture. In addition to the diverse dining options encompassing Creole, East Indian, and vegan cuisines, you'll enjoy excellent diving and easy adventure activities with 12 miles of hiking and biking trails.

AnseChastanet.com





BODYHOLIDAY

BodyHoliday offers a distinctive, all-inclusive experience of wellness that, thanks to its location on a crescent beach, is also an active seaside vacation. Founded on the pillars of relaxation, therapeutic care, exercise, and nutrition, the resort's philosophy focuses on the needs and desires of modern travelers seeking a 360-degree healthful getaway. Daily spa treatments, classes, and activities are included.

TheBodyHoliday.com





LADERA

Ladera is situated on a volcanic ridge between the two Pitons of Saint Lucia with a 1,000-foot drop to the Caribbean Sea below. Enjoy the sublime romantic experience of staying in one of Ladera's suites featuring one wall that's open directly to the outdoors, affording panoramas of the mountains and expanses of ocean, and complete with a private pool.

Ladera.com



THE LANDINGS

This all-inclusive tropical sanctuary on one of St. Lucia's most celebrated beaches boasts plenty for the whole family. Three restaurants, two bars, a spa and fitness center, tennis courts, watersports, four pools, the Kids Club, and daily activities make the beachfront all-suite resort ideal for all ages. Plus, some of the fully equipped one-to-three bedroom accommodations come with a private butler.

LandingsStLucia.com





STOLENTIME

At this adults-only haven specializing in mental and emotional well-being, you can be as active as you choose. It's all about taking time for yourself and your needs. You can visit the boutique Spa in the Water Garden, lounge along the little river that runs through the all-inclusive resort, participate in art and meditation classes on the beach, or simply relax.

StolenTime.com







Travel to a dreamy

East African island that

encourages visitors to

slow down and appreciate

life without cars.

by SARIKA BANSAL

• **WALKING THE SANDY,** winding streets of Shela—a village on the southeastern coast of Kenya's Lamu Island—is an exercise in trusting the process. The island is essentially free of motor vehicles, and the alleyways are only wide enough for pedestrians and donkeys. Even after visiting a dozen times, I take it as a given that I will get lost. I also trust that Shela is small enough that I will eventually stumble upon that carved wooden door I passed earlier, that patch of fiery fuchsia bougainvillea, or that mosque with the atonal call to prayer singer, and I will find my way once again.

Lamu Island, which today has a population of about 25,000, was established more than 700 years ago. Its prominent Swahili culture is a rare fusion of Bantu, Arab, Persian, European, and Indian traditions. For centuries, Lamu was a strategic trading post for the Arab world—dealing in minerals, mangrove wood, game trophies, and enslaved people, the last banned in 1873. Its dozens of mosques and annual Maulidi festival, which celebrates the birth of the prophet Muhammed every October, have made it an important site for Islam.

The island has widely eschewed large-scale development, and that is a point of pride. Lamu Town, located a few minutes north of Shela by motorboat, was named a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2001 for its "close-knit" and "well-preserved" society. Signs request that visitors cover their shoulders and knees in public, to preserve the island's conservative culture. Most buildings echo traditional Swahili architectural norms: thick, white-plastered exteriors, often adorned with coral; *barazas*, or terraces; and decorative wooden doors. And in 2019, Lamu successfully rejected a plan to build a coal power plant in the county, arguing irreparable harm to the area's culture and ecology.



"Our government makes sure the culture of Lamu will exist for many years to come," says Muhidin Athman, assistant to Lamu County's speaker. "If you want to come with your Jet Ski or motorbike, nobody wants it on the island."

Visitors can fill their days with such activities as snorkeling or kitesurfing, but an action-packed agenda would miss the real invitation that Lamu offers: to embrace a slower pace of life. Most hotels, such as the Jannah in Shela (created by Anna Trzebinski, founder of the art-forward Eden Hotel in Nairobi), tout chic Swahili-style furniture for lounging. Visitors can browse shops such as Aman for flowy



garments and Natural Lamu for skincare products. Walking tours of Lamu Town showcase its distinctive history.

From left: Swahili architecture features such elements as coral exteriors, decorative doors, and thatched roofs;

Lamu hosts several events a year, including competitive dhow races and a yoga festival.

REQUIRED EATING

Swahili curry, which is ubiquitous on the island, features fresh coconut milk and spices such as cinnamon, turmeric, and cloves.

delivers sea views, a high-end fusion restaurant,

and lime-and-ginger dawa cocktails.

LOCAL LORE

It is believed that a Chinese ship sank near the Lamu archipelago 600 years ago. Survivors found their way to Shanga Village, where their descendants still live today. Some of my most blissful moments in Lamu took place on wooden dhow sailboats, eating samosas and admiring the way white egrets pop against the archipelago's dense mangrove forests. Once, during a new moon, my friends and I sailed at midnight. In the absence of light pollution, hundreds of stars flickered in the inky sky, and, to our childlike delight, bioluminescent creatures danced in the waters below. Trusting the process, we jumped in the water, bathing ourselves in an ethereal green glow.

GREAT AMERICAN CITIES

Culture, history, food, and science: Why you should make a trip to these four U.S. favorites in 2024.

by AMY S. ECKERT

WHERE TO GO IN 2024

1. SEATTLE

In a city known for the outdoors, Seattle's cultural offerings take the spotlight in 2024. The Museum of History and Industry uses games, videos, and other interactive displays to examine the confluence of tradition and modernism in Roots of Wisdom: Native Knowledge. Shared Science (through March 3). The Seattle Art Museum pays homage to Alexander Calder (below) with Calder: In Motion, an exhibition that spans the sculptor's career (through August 4). Henry Art Gallery on the University of Washington campus showcases multimedia and social-justice artist Hank Willis Thomas in LOVERULES (February 24–August 4). And the Seattle Aquarium's redesigned Ocean Pavilion will open summer 2024, featuring sharks, rays, coral, and mangroves in a reef ecosystem.



2. DETROIT

Detroit's Michigan Central, a Beaux-Arts former train station, has been reimagined as a transportation R&D lab with retail, dining, and community spaces—just one example of how everything old is new again in this city. The Motown Museum

will roll out a \$65 million upgrade throughout 2024 that includes performance spaces, interactive exhibits, and a music education center. The hip Cambria Hotel (in a 1936 radio broadcasting building by Albert Kahn, one of Detroit's great architects) is the latest in a string of landmarks



refashioned as boutique hotels. And a new glass-and-steel tower on the site of the 1927 Hudson's store will open a 48th-floor observation deck in 2024.

3. PHILADELPHIA

make a beeline to Philly this year. The city garnered more restaurant and chef awards than any other at the 2023 James Beard Foundation competition.

Make time to try the seasonal tasting menu at Friday Saturday Sunday, which won Outstanding Restaurant, or Thai cuisine at Kalaya (top right), where Chutatip "Nok" Suntaranon nabbed Best Chef:

Mid-Atlantic. On the art side, the Rodin Museum is hosting a sculpture exhibition, Rodin's Hands, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art will feature In the Right Place, recognizing the pioneering photographers Barbara Crane, Melissa Shook, and Carol Tabask



4. CHARLESTON

When the International African American Museum (below) opened its doors in 2023, Charleston put itself at the top of must-see lists for 2024 and beyond. Exhibitions share the many facets of the African American story, delving into slavery and the civil rights movement along with modern-day challenges and triumphs. A genealogy center helps families search for their histories too. Stay at one of two new city additions: the Palmetto Hotel, where the contemporary decor is accented by works from Charleston artists of the early 1900s; or the Pinch, a stylish boutique property with a bike share program, sailing tours, and a kitchen in every room.







MARCHESTER

For years, the British city has been nurturing its arts scene with creativity, brains, and patience.

Now the investment is about to pay off.

by BILLIE COHEN



• LET'S START BY SAYING that you know more about Manchester than you think you do—that the northern England city of red-brick Victorian buildings, old universities, and public squares already lives in your pop-culture subconscious, the backdrop for era-defining events that outshone the city itself.

This is where a heckler famously shouted "Judas" as Bob Dylan played the electric guitar, where punk band the Sex Pistols shook the walls outside of London for the first time, where mathematician and codebreaker Alan Turing set the wheels in motion for AI and lived his final days, and where Factory Records and the Haçienda nightclub ignited the 1980s "Madchester" era with all-night dance parties led by hometown bands New Order and the Stone Roses.

Today it's perhaps the city's overcast and rainy days, or the lingering industrial-revolution image from when it was the cotton-manufacturing capital of the world, or the rowdiness of its rival football teams (City and United) that have made its creative heartbeat harder to hear. But

WHERE TOGOIN 2024

WHERE TO STAY

In early 2024, Marriott will open the Reach at Piccadilly, a Tribute Portfolio hotel, with 215 rooms on hip Ducie Street overlooking the revived Rochdale Canal.

TAKE A WALK

It's a short train ride to get out into nature. In about an hour, you can reach trails in Peak District National Park and the hilly Pennine countryside.

GO BACK IN TIME

Visitors can tour the oldest surviving public library in the English-speaking world (Chetham's, founded in 1653) and visit fishmonger stalls from 1873 that have been turned into artist studios (Manchester Craft and Design Centre).

Above: Historic spots like Sinclair's Oyster Bar and the Corn Exchange have welcomed visitors for centuries. Left: Modern cultural events such as Factory International's Free Your Mind are vaulting the city forward.

Manchester has been slowly, steadily turning up the volume of its cultural pulse, and it's starting to come through loud and clear.

"I think this is the moment when the wider culture and arts scene is finally coming into the prominence that it deserves," says John McGrath, artistic director and chief executive of Factory International, which has been running the acclaimed biennial Manchester International Festival since 2007. "A big part of that is to do with the Manchester City Council. They had a vision over the last 15, even 20 years that culture should be at the heart of the city's future."

One of the most visible successes of that effort is Factory International's new Aviva Studios, a striking white building that

> allows the organization to commission and host innovative programming beyond the 18-day time frame of the festival, which returns in 2025. The space officially launched in fall 2023 with a wild burst of imagination called Free Your Mind, a cinematic dance event based on The Matrix dreamed up by director Danny Boyle (Slumdog Millionaire), choreographer Kenrick Sandy and composer Michael Asante (cofounders of the Olivier Award-winning hip-hop dance theater company Boy Blue), and a team of other artists. The mash-ups will continue in 2024 with ARK, a multimedia experience from Laurie Anderson, and City of Floating Sounds, composer Huang Ruo's interactive symphony project that guides audiences around Manchester and culminates in a concert back at Aviva Studios.

> Manchester is also about to become the home of the largest live entertainment arena in the United Kingdom: the 23,500-capacity Co-Op Live, backed by pop star Harry Styles, among others. Opening in April 2024 with a lineup that includes Take That, the Jonas Brothers, and Eric Clapton, it was carefully designed to make music sound good. And to do good too: The building uses solar panels and rainwater, and proceeds will contribute more than a million dollars to charity annually through the Co-Op Foundation.

Innovation isn't limited to new venues, either. The 135-year-old Manchester Museum reopened in February 2023 after an \$18.4 million renovation with a mission to reevaluate Britain's colonial past and build relationships with communities locally and around the world. Its new permanent South Asia Gallery—curated by a group of educators, artists, students, community leaders, and others from the South Asian diaspora—is a colorful, invigorating, and hopeful example.

It's one of the many ways that Manchester, a city with origins dating back to Roman times, is proving that it has no problem keeping up with the modern moment—and pushing itself into the future.

BHUTAN

Trek through a South Asian

country where conservation rules.

by KATHLEEN RELLIHAN

• **THE LAST REMAINING** Buddhist kingdom in the world is not easy to reach, but that's what makes arriving even more rewarding. As our pilot landed between 18,000-foot Himalayan peaks at Bhutan's Paro International Airport (which looks more like a temple), I could see that I was in a place unlike anywhere else.

Bhutan only opened its doors to tourism in 1974 and has put measures in place to make sure that tourists don't overrun its pristine nature or long-preserved culture. With a strong conservation mindset, it is the world's first carbonnegative country: 60 percent of its landscape must be covered in forest, and tourists have always been required to pay a daily fee. Since 2022, the fee has been used to support local environmental and community projects.

Starting in September 2023, Bhutan halved its surcharge to \$100 per day to attract more travelers. Visitors are encouraged to stay longer to experience the country's new and renovated five-star hotels, such as Zhiwa Ling Heritage, and Beyond Punakha River Lodge, and Pemako Punakha, all of which were required to be built in the traditional Bhutanese style. And with the restoration of the Trans Bhutan Trail, visitors can explore new parts of the country.

I hiked the historic pilgrimage route—which dates back to the 16th century and fell into disrepair decades ago—soon after it reopened in 2022. We were some of the first foreigners to walk through remote villages on our way to see fortresses and stupas.

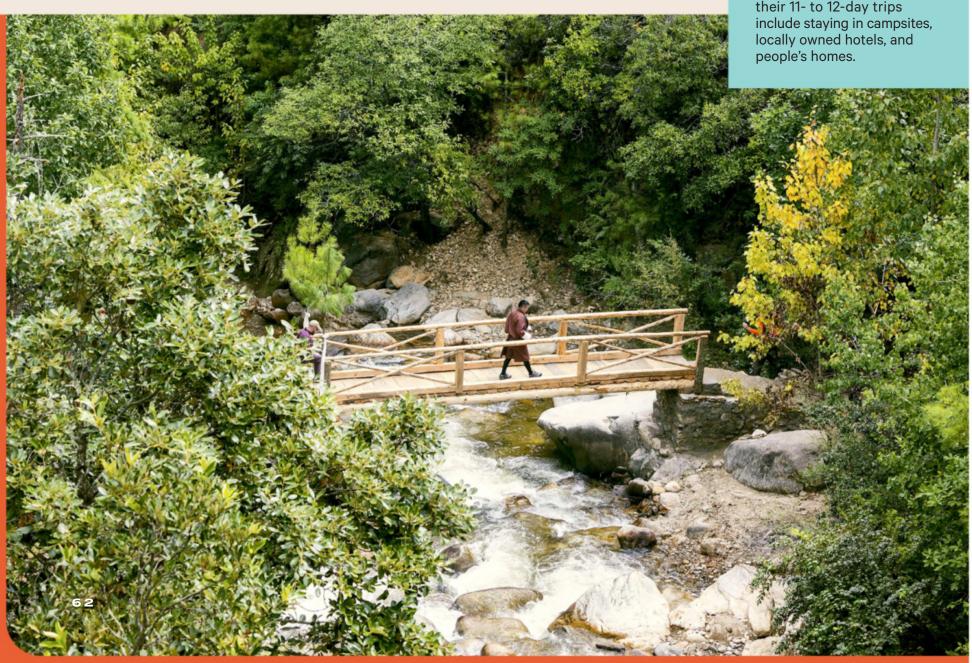
It was easy to understand Bhutan's deep reverence for nature as we trekked through thick pine forests

and skirted fog-blanketed mountains—some with peaks that have never been summited to avoid disturbing the spirits. Learning that made walking under their shadow feel only more sacred.

The 250-mile-long Trans Bhutan Trail passes through villages and valleys, alongside dozens of Buddhist stupas and temples.

MAKE IT HAPPEN

Community-driven tourism company G Adventures led the first group tours on the Trans Bhutan Trail in 2022; their 11- to 12-day trips include staying in campsites, locally owned hotels, and people's homes.



New Year, Always Asheville

Inventive hotels, historic sites, and Appalachian eats add to the vibrancy of this must-see Blue Ridge Mountain city in North Carolina.

by Joanne O'Sullivan

As an Asheville local, I'm used to out-of-town guests who delight in having an in-the-know guide. For return and first-time visitors who are after insider knowledge, I'm pleased to share these new and notable restaurants, hotels, and cultural experiences debuting this year.

F. Scott Fitzgerald traveled to Asheville often with his wife and muse Zelda. Today, the city pays tribute to her with Zelda Dearest, a boutique hotel that opened last fall in three turn-of-thecentury residences. I was happy to see how The Radical, one of the newest River Arts District (RAD) hotels, creatively repurposed a threestory brick warehouse with commissioned local art in interiors by Wes Anderson's set designer Kris Moran. Plus, you can savor dining at lauded restaurateur Jacob Sessoms' Golden Hour and enjoy French Broad River views at the hotel's rooftop bar, already a popular gathering spot at sunset and beyond.

Years in the making, the Black Cultural Heritage Trail features locations in the RAD and across the city. It highlights Asheville's Black history with stops including Allen High School, Nina Simone's alma mater.

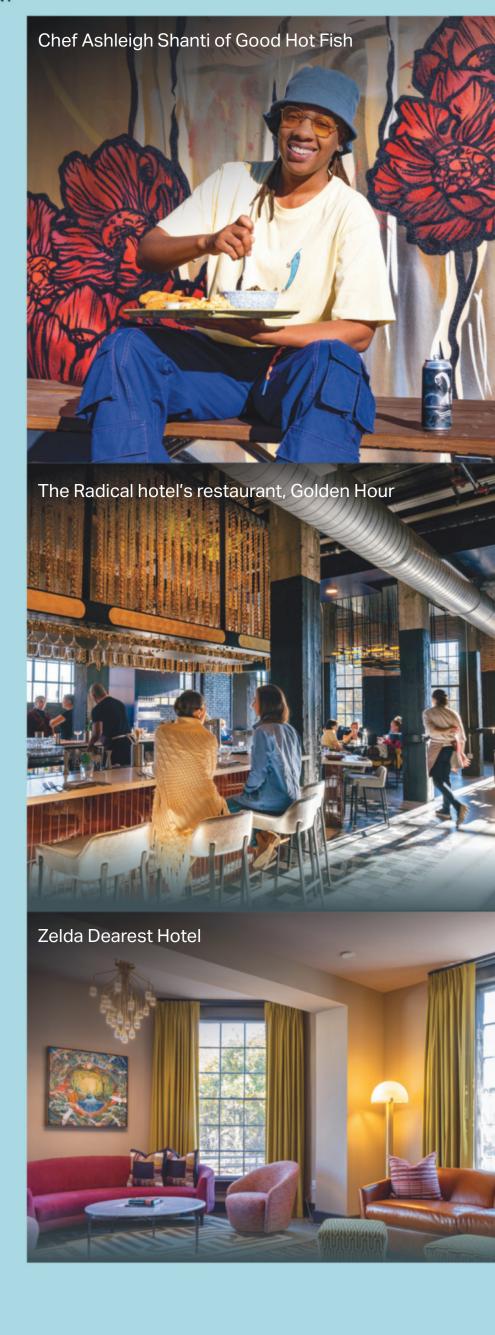
Plan your trip at afar.com/ AlwaysAsheville

A Fresh Catch

One of the South's most renowned chefs lands a permanent location for her restaurant steeped in heritage.

Fish camp cooking is a Southern tradition, one that inspired Ashleigh Shanti's **Good Hot Fish**, a new fast-casual spot in Asheville's South Slope. After perfecting the idea through pop-up versions throughout the region, the James Beard Awardnominated chef and 2022 *Top Chef* contestant launched her long-awaited concept in **Burial Beer's** new music venue **Eulogy**.

The menu, which offers dishes such as fried catfish and okra, baked beans, and, of course, hush puppies, showcases local suppliers like **Sunburst Trout**Farms—the source for her signature dish, the "trout baloney" sandwich.

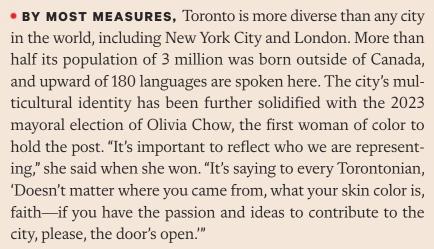




TADRONI CANADA ROBERTO

Canada's most diverse city
offers a year-round celebration
of multiculturalism.

by ANNA KIM



My family immigrated to Toronto 36 years ago from Korea. Growing up, my social circle gave me insights into other cultures. My friends' potluck dinner tables featured crispy Peking duck, spicy lamb *rogan josh*, and *sundubu jjigae* (tofu stew)—and candid conversations about how to navigate our "blended" Canadian identities.

Travelers who visit today can tap into the city's incredible diversity by visiting some of its historic neighborhoods. In downtown Toronto, Kensington Market is a bohemian area with vintage boutiques, specialty groceries, and bakeries. At the restaurant Birria Catrina, try the namesake dish, a complex, slow-cooked Mexican beef stew. Nearby, Rikki Tikki offers modern twists on Indian fare, such as a spiced lamb shank. Between May and October, Pedestrian Sundays feature local vendors and live music.

Parkdale, in Toronto's West End, has a rich history of immigrants settling here from Poland, the Philippines, Jamaica, and beyond. Today, it's home to Little Tibet, with one of the largest Tibetan populations outside Asia. Stop by the casual eatery Loga's Corner for *momos*, dumplings that are either steamed or fried and stuffed with paneer or chicken.

Toronto's Koreatown is worth a visit for its food as well as its nightlife. Exercise your vocal cords at one of the neighborhood's karaoke joints, then treat yourself to pork bone soup at the Owl of Minerva, which is open 24 hours.



WHERE TO STAY

Located in the city's Financial District, the Shangri-La Toronto is a luxury hotel known for spectacular views of the skyline and a modern Asian design aesthetic.

GO DEEPER

Bruce Bell's popular 90-minute walking tour dives into the city's history and pop culture.

Greater Toronto has an extensive public transportation system, and visitors should use it to venture deeper into the city's suburban neighborhoods. A thriving Somali community lives in the enclave of Rexdale. The restaurant Istar, located in Westown Plaza, serves one of the area's best Somali samosas, savory and layered with rich spices.

In addition to homier regional eats, Toronto's gastronomy scene is booming. New Michelin star honorees include Restaurant 20 Victoria, which serves a seasonal seven-course meal, and the highend Japanese restaurant Kappo Sato.

The city's festivals and special events also showcase its multiculturalism. June will see the biannual Indigenous Fashion Arts Festival, which spotlights textiles and crafts from more than 100 designers and artists. At the Toronto Caribbean Carnival, over a million visitors gather every August to dance to the rhythms of calypso, soca, and reggae music while wearing elaborate outfits of feathers, beads, and sequins. And on October 5, the all-night celebration Nuit Blanche will display contemporary artwork with the theme of "Bridging Distance"—a concept that many Torontonians, including myself, can identify with.



Above: Aside from English and French, some of the languages spoken in Toronto include Mandarin, Spanish, Tamil, and Tagalog. Left: Almost 6 percent of Toronto's population has Caribbean roots, celebrated at the annual Carnival.



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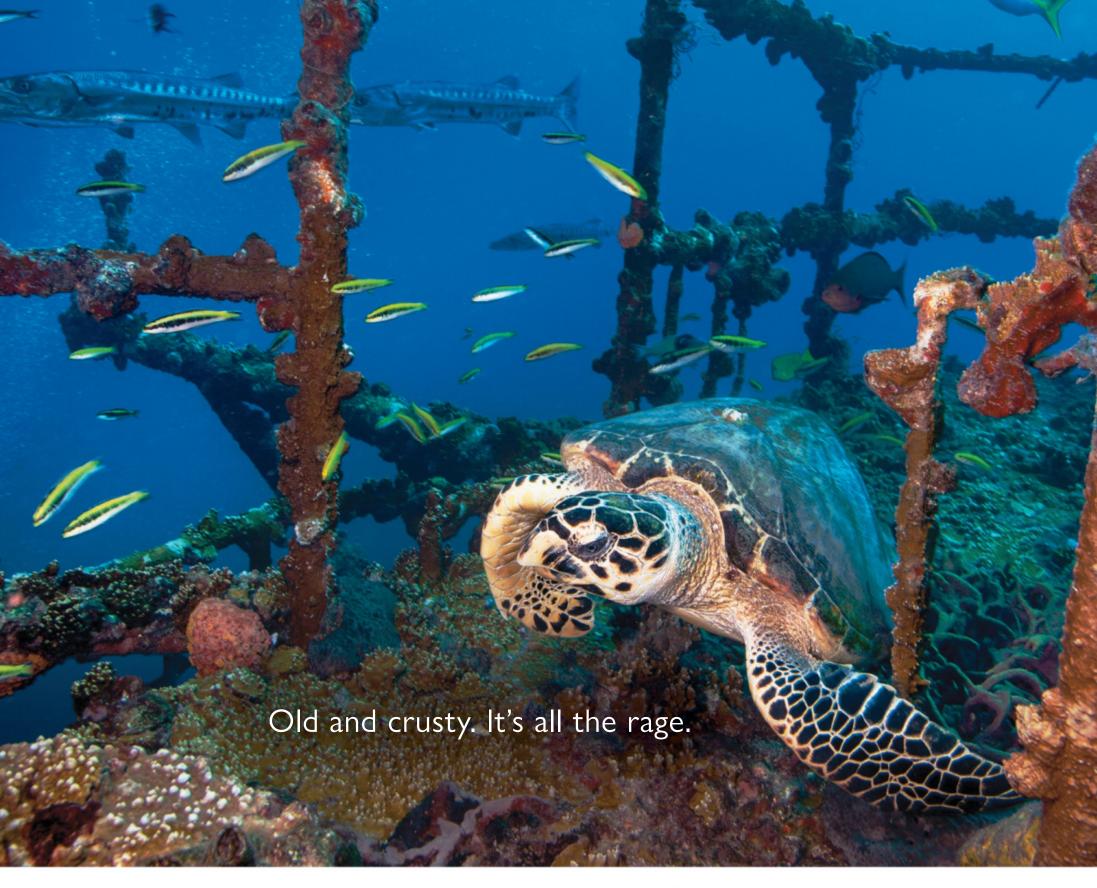
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A balance of natural beauty and cultural exchange, the Keys boast a history of fine art, fine dining, and the good life. Having inspired the likes of Robert Frost and Tennessee Williams, these 120 miles of coral cay continue as a hotbed of expression today, from the historic Red Barn Theater to the new Truman Waterfront Park Amphitheater. And with stylish accommodations including the Marquesa Hotel and Little Palm Island Resort and Spa, and stunning beachfront campsites like Curry Hammock State Park, the Keys welcome one and all.

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Dive Into the Sun-Drenched Arts Renaissance of St. Pete/Clearwater

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Enter a colorful world unto itself with an escape to St. Pete/Clearwater. Home to some of America's best beaches, the sugary white sands and emerald waters are a port of entry for an eye-opening journey into Florida's Gulf Coast culture. Discover a flourishing arts community, pushing the area forward with a renewed sense of creativity, innovation, and inclusion. Shift your perspective with a surreal afternoon at the **Salvador**

Dalí Museum or take a walk

on the wild side at **The James Museum of Western & Wildlife Art**. Prefer to enjoy life *en plein air*? Catch a show at **The Sound at Coachman Park**, downtown Clearwater's new waterfront concert venue, o simply soak in the famed Florida

Park, downtown Clearwater's new waterfront concert venue, or simply soak in the famed Florida sun with a stroll along 35 miles of incomparable coastline. There's a more vibrant side of life in St. Pete/Clearwater, and it invites you with open arms.

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St. Pete/Clearwater's artistic soul extends beyond its world-class museums, with unmissable street art throughout its 24 distinct cities. The **St. Petersburg** Arts Alliance hosts their ArtWalk monthly and, with more than 600 works across the region, the **SHINE Mural Festival** transforms St. Pete into an outdoor gallery each October. At **The Factory** in St. Pete's Warehouse Arts **District**, the **Fairgrounds** is a kaleidoscopic celebration of everything unmistakably Floridian.



Island And Island Thing.

AmeliaIsland.com





<u>Timeless Island Oasis Offers</u> <u>Millions of Ways to Unwind</u>

Amelia Island is a gateway to good times, with an abundance of opportunities to relax, rejuvenate, and revel in nature.

In Northeast Florida, there's a peaceful place where wellness is a way of life, where you can enjoy fewer crowds and slow down to enjoy the simple things. Whether it's a stroll to the **farmer's market**, beachside yoga, or a sublime spa day, Amelia Island offers ample ways to feel your best. And with mild winters, you're free all year to sip wine on a charming cottage terrace in historic downtown **Fernandina Beach**, cozy up at sunset with a loved one

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Join an eco-tour to explore biodiversity while learning how to help conserve it. Embrace the occasion for a horseback ride on the beach and see the rare winter birds who call Edens like **Egans Creek** their home.

Be well at AmeliaIsland.com

What's On Deck on Amelia Island

Amelia Island is extremely relaxing, but it's anything but sleepy with a calendar filled with events throughout the year. They include the Amelia Island Concours Week (February 29-March 3, 2024) when The Amelia Concours d'Elegance brings hundreds of rare vehicles, auctions, driving experiences, and more; and the Isle of 8 Flags Shrimp Festival (May 3-5, 2024) celebrates the island's history as the birthplace of modern shrimping with delicious food, live music, and family-friendly fun.





South Walton's Unique Wavelength Goes Beyond the Gulf

With vast stretches of white-sand beaches, endless outdoor adventures, and award-winning cuisine, few destinations are more freeing than South Walton.

South Walton is a multifaceted jewel of the Northwest
Florida coast, with 16 eclectic neighborhoods bordering 26 miles of sugar-sand beaches pairing comfort and adventure. From stylish accommodations and superb boutiques, art galleries, and restaurants to an abundance of outdoor activities amid expansive, unspoiled

nature, this seaside setting offers its own brand of fun and relaxation, all within easy reach.

Located on the Florida
Panhandle along the Gulf of
Mexico, South Walton boasts the
15,000-acre **Point Washington State Forest**, four sprawling
state parks, and 15 coastal
dune lakes to explore by kayak,





paddleboard, and on foot. Whether it's fishing in **Choctawhatchee Bay**, biking past sand dunes and marsh lakes on the 19-mile **Timpoochee Trail**, or spotting white ibis, piping plover, and other local birds at **Deer Lake**, each day offers something new to explore throughout South Walton.

Even more excitement awaits with the beautiful architecture and charming town center of **Rosemary Beach** and the championship-level golf courses of **Sandestin**. Those who love shopping will have much to discover throughout South Walton's mix of chic boutiques. Foodies will relish the fusion of flavors created by

renowned chefs showcasing freshfrom-the-Gulf seafood and locally sourced ingredients found across more than 200 restaurants. And, as the sun makes its spectacular evening splash into the Gulf, the beach offers a front-row seat to the greatest show in town.

What's more, all these delights are closer than you think. Getting to South Walton is a breeze by land or air, with Northwest Florida Beaches International Airport (ECP) and Destin-Fort Walton Beach Airport (VPS) less than 25 miles away.

Plan your getaway at VisitSouthWalton.com



YOUR GETAWAY. YOUR HOMECOMING.

South Walton's turquoise water, 26 miles of sugar-white sand, and 16 beach neighborhoods in Northwest Florida effortlessly blend natural beauty, modern amenities, world class cuisine, and small town charm that draw people together year after year.



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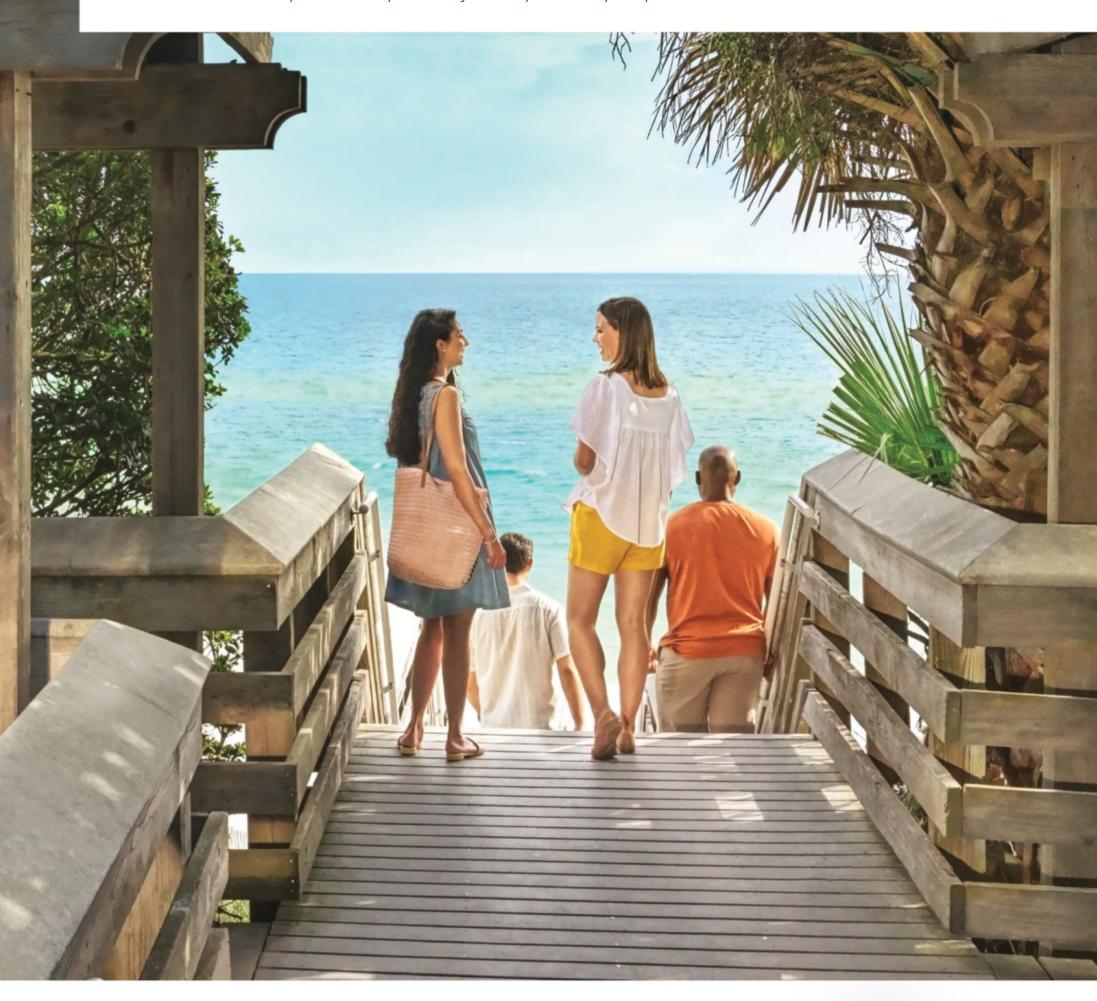
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The Palm Beaches are known as **Florida's Cultural Capital®**, and it's no wonder. Boasting evergreen exhibitions of celebrated art, orchestral performances in historic venues, and a slate of theatrical shows with distinguished guest artists, the constant wave of creative stimulation makes this destination shine in more ways

Warm and welcoming by nature, the coastal community is renowned for sunshine and Atlantic breezes gracing 47 miles of pictureperfect shoreline. And its cultural

than one.

riches attract all types and ages of travelers. With dozens of cultural organizations constantly cooking up fresh ideas, there's always something new to see and do with every visit to The Palm Beaches.

Find more inspiration at PalmBeachesCulture.com



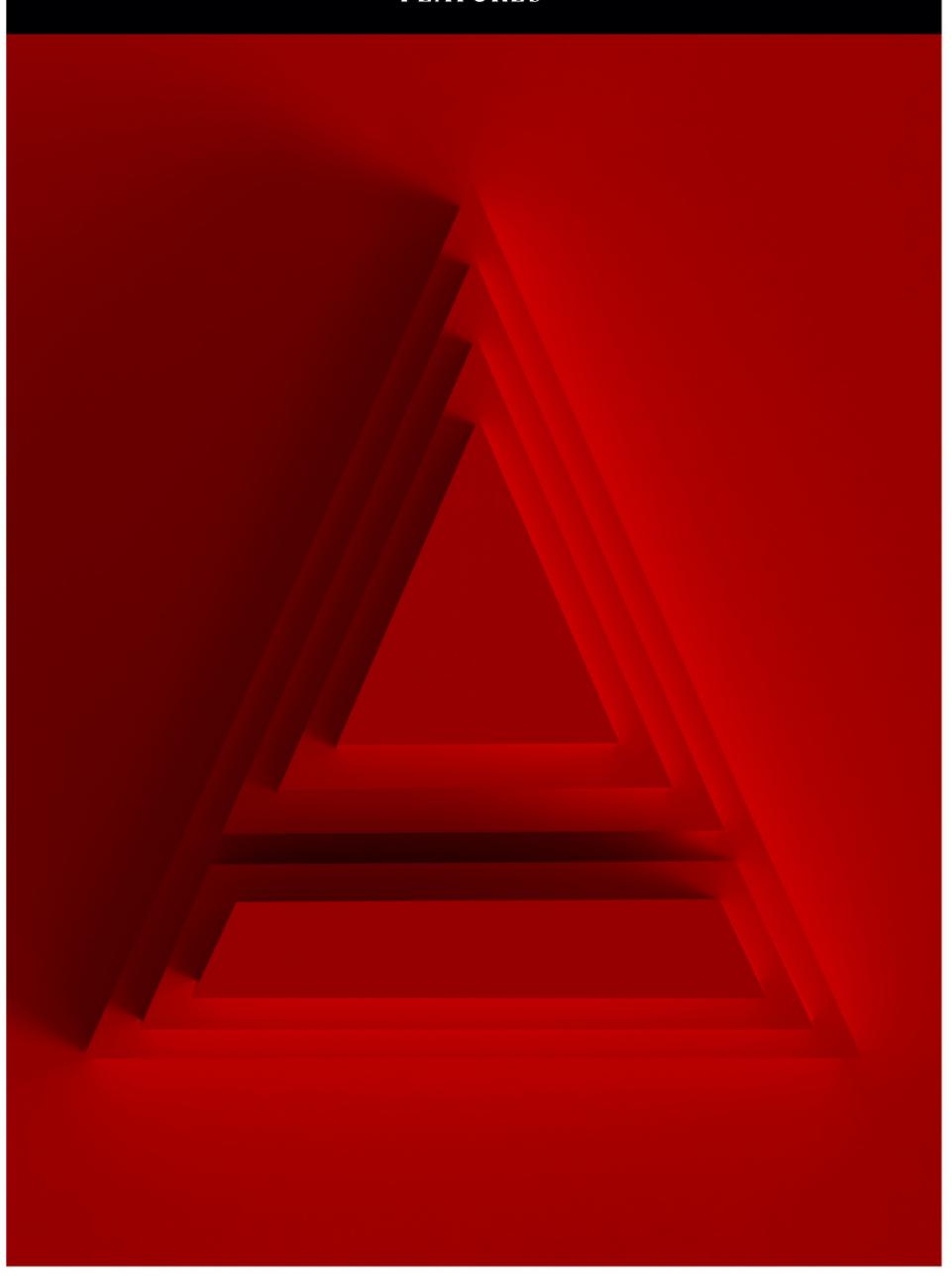
Your Cultural Agenda in The Palm Beaches

- The Boca Raton
 Museum of Art's
 exhibition Smoke &
 Mirrors: Magical
 Thinking in
 Contemporary Art runs
 through May 12.
- Tosca (January 26-28) opens the Palm Beach Opera's 2024 season.
- Mounts Botanical Garden educates visitors with 6,000 species of flora and the Palm Beach Zoo & Conservation Society is home to more than 500 animals.





FEATURES





Between

the

A century after carving a path through Utrecht,

the radical De Stijl art movement is still teaching us

about design and the Netherlands.



Lines





THEY SAY UTRECHT IS where you go for Amsterdam's charms minus the Amsterdam part. The tree-lined canals, cheerful old streets, and orderly mellowness exist here, too, but without the throngs of tourists. An ancient Dutch trading port–turned–university town 33 miles from the capital by car, Utrecht pulls off that European trick of being both historic and edgy in the same breath. Old vaulted wharf cellars, converted into tiny cafés and restaurants and apartments, open onto those canals. Stylish students laugh about stylish things under willow trees. Within an hour of arriving in the city, I watched two scarf-wearing women mount bikes at the Saturday flower market, tuck tulips into their baskets, and pedal off holding hands. You can live your whole life in the United States and never see tulip-bearing cyclists hold hands.

It seemed a terrible miscalculation, not being born Utrechtian, but I had bigger things on my mind—bigger and older and way more arcane. I'd come for a revolution that happened here a century ago, perpetrated by a restless assortment of painters, designers, architects, poets, and musicians. They called themselves De Stijl—the style—and, between 1917 and 1931, they believed they'd found a path to global harmony. The path was geometry and color.

A decade into the 20th century, these artists felt the Netherlands was stuck in the 19th: draped in history, deferent to tradition. As I biked around that first day, I pictured the dark, chandelier-stuffed homes, the old looming churches, the old looming bourgeois values. Around 45 C.E. the emperor Claudius made Utrecht the northern edge of the Roman Empire, and medieval remnants remain, jumbled with the baroque and the Gothic and the Renaissance and the romantic. I imagined the De Stijl artists—Theo van Doesburg, Bart van der Leck, Robert van't Hoff, Jan Wils, Jakob van Domselaer, Piet Mondrian, others—loving this place but anxious to turn the page, and never wanting to see another damned bell tower. And then I imagined everything exploding.

I can't pretend to understand the chaos and terror that World War I ripped across Europe. Twenty million deaths. A crumbling of all things solid. In every direction lay evidence that civilization had failed. To be marooned in the Netherlands for those four years (the country remained neutral throughout the war) was to watch one's restlessness take on an entirely new dimension. As those artists began to find each other, a common sentiment emerged: A fundamentally broken world needs a fundamental overhaul.

As short-lived avant-garde art movements go, it's hard to overstate De Stijl's influence. Scattered around Utrecht and the rest of Holland, there weren't many adherents, but De Stijl's artists would become a powerful current in the river of 20th-century modernism. Mondrian, the group's most famous member, is now one of the planet's most recognizable painters. Without De Stijl there could be no Bauhaus school, no Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, or no legendary Eames House in Los Angeles. To this day, you can see the group's fingerprints in industrial design, graphic art, and typography.

I'm no art historian. What brought me to Utrecht was the story of a pivot—one of those rare moments when history abruptly heaves us from our old lives into something new. This group watched the world collapse and went at what remained with sledgehammers. Out of intellectual curiosity or something more visceral, I wanted to inhale some of that spirit. Inhale it and get my arms around it. What these people had attempted was both lovely and incomprehensible to me, and so I booked a room and went looking.



THE NEXT MORNING was bright and clear. I pedaled my bike past airy cafés spilling out onto jabbering streets. Street art was everywhere, murals were everywhere, including a De Stijl-inflected geometric city-scape painted on a building north of town. In Utrecht's historic center, an artist had installed a neon halo over St. Willibrord's Church, an otherwise dour Gothic-revival number. Turned out it was part of Utrecht Lumen, a series of light installations that switch on at sunset. One of the artists seemed to have shared my interest in tracing history's invisible currents. Near the Domtoren bell tower, every 15 minutes, a line of colored bulbs lit up and steam rose from the street, illuminating what had been the edge of an old Roman fortress.

I can't claim that these installations all felt directly De Stijl-y. But maybe they were the distant offshoot of whatever De Stijl uncorked. Within months of declaring its existence, the group had launched a

magazine and published a full-on utopian manifesto. "The war," it declared, "is destroying the old world with its contents: individual domination in every state." Representative art, with its centering of subjective perspectives, had to go. Through abstraction and a set of strict codes—

Opposite page: The city—home to a major university—has a sizable student population.

Previous page: Utrecht has three different canals.

primary colors only, horizontal and vertical lines but no diagonals or circles—these De Stijl artists would reduce art to its universally understandable, spiritually true essence.

As I biked around, I imagined a once-stuffy town crackling with strange new ideas. The De Stijl artist van Doesburg designed an allnew alphabet, each character mathematically determined. Mondrian





experimented with simple, off-white grids. Van der Leck had begun sketching human figures and then covering them with white paint, so that only basic geometric shapes could shine through. Around 1919, Gerrit Rietveld would produce his iconic *Red Blue Chair*—the first major expression of De Stijl in three dimensions, and a piece so influential that the U.S. architect Philip Johnson eventually donated one to the Museum of Modern Art in New York City.

I wanted to see De Stijl up close. And so on my second morning I rode to an industrial part of town filled with anonymous warehouses. Arriving at the address scrawled on my hand, I hit a buzzer and an unmarked door opened.

A bit of renovation at Utrecht's Centraal Museum meant its De Stijl collection wasn't on view during my trip. But

Opposite page: Once a month, Natascha Drabbe opens the Van Schijndel House her home—to visitors. I finagled a private viewing of the depot where the museum keeps whatever's not on display. The woman who admitted me was named Chantal, and after exacting a promise that I'd divulge no details about the location, she led me down a long hallway to a gray

metal door. We stepped into a vast and quiet space where thousands of paintings hung cheek by jowl on massive sliding panels, in long rows. Next to this room was another, equally vast, and another, and another.

For the next two hours I enjoyed a personal De Stijl tour. Here were private sketchbooks chronicling van Doesburg's creative evolution, there a grid of moody squares and partial circles painted by César Domela-Nieuwenhuis. Tucked away on a shelf like someone's old ski gear was Rietveld's *Red Blue Chair*.

For years I'd stared at these pieces on a screen—partly, if I'm honest, in a state of befuddlement. I found the ideology of De Stijl inscrutable, almost mystically cryptic. (At one point, van Doesburg summarized Mondrian's thinking thus: "vertical = male = space = statics = harmony; horizontal = female = time = dynamics = melody, etc.") But now, nose six inches from canvas, I saw in these pieces something recognizably human. Belied by this tidy red line was the horror of war. In that arrangement of rectangles wasn't arbitrary geometry but desperate hope.

Chantal pulled out another panel and I stared at a Tangram-like scattering of shapes, a piece by the Hungarian artist and graphic designer Vilmos Huszár, who lived in the Netherlands. The familiar slam of abstract art is that it's antiseptic, bloodless. But in the spareness of this painting I saw something else: a mind yearning to strip a failed world down to the studs and rebuild.

At last I said goodbye and biked back to my hotel. This mission of mine—tracing the faded steps of this long-departed art group—had been, at times, hard to explain to myself. But it felt clear now: I was in a beautiful city where some people had taken a big, weird swing. Was it so absurd, I wondered, to think you could remake society with shapes and lines and colors? Well, OK, yes. But I also think irrational conviction is one of humanity's most wonderful features, and demanding logic of it one of our least.



OVER THE NEXT FEW DAYS in Utrecht, I saw and did everything through the lens of De Stijl. On a rowboat in the Oudegracht (old canal), a family laid out a mobile picnic—how would van der Leck have depicted the scene? Those moorhens bobbing mindlessly in the Nieuwegracht—is there a less subjective, more universal way of capturing their essence? One afternoon I stretched out in the grass at Máximapark, west of the city center. All day I'd been listening to the one piano suite I could find from the composer van Domselaer, stark and ominous, and there on the ground I felt it separate the sun and the trees and the footpaths into Mondrian-like units of existence.

I also noticed all the Utrecht that couldn't have happened without De Stijl. On a Sunday morning, I knocked on the door of a home on a quiet cul-de-sac behind St. Peter's Church. A tall, elegant woman unlatched it, as she has for strangers every month for several years.

I found the ideology of De Stijl inscrutable,

almost mystically crypti

But now, nose six inches from canvas, I saw in these pieces something recognizably human.

The architect Mart van Schijndel purchased this former glazier's warehouse in the 1980s and spent the next six years designing a new kind of home and a new way of living. But four years after winning the prestigious Rietveld Award in 1995, van Schijndel died. Natascha Drabbe, his wife, wanted the creation to live on in the public imagination. And so, one Sunday a month, though she still lives there, Drabbe opens the home—called the Van Schijndel House—to visitors.

Stepping inside, I found obvious De Stijl DNA: the colors, the use of vertical and horizontal planes. I found total departures, too. Everything centered on a triangular floor plan, with light pouring in from all angles. As we walked around, Drabbe, an architectural historian, explained how the gentlest choices—windows like so, angles like so—unlock a new way of seeing. I was no longer in a historic building, or in a historic city, but in a cathedral of light and angles. At one point



The AFAR Guide to Utrecht

by Chris Colin

Lively university vibes, frisky nightlife, iconic canals: Utrecht offers much of what nearby Amsterdam does, without the crowds and fuss. (It also has delights all its own. Devotees of Miffy, the cartoon rabbit immortalized by the Dutch artist Dick Bruna, are cheering the recent renovation and expansion of the city's beloved Miffy Museum.) In addition to the classic sites—the Rietveld Schröder House, the Centraal Museum, the Van Schijndel House—the following belong on the traveler's itinerary.

DO

Domtoren

Utrecht's most visible landmark, this 14th-century Gothic bell tower rises 369 elevator-free feet above the city, an athletic attraction as well as a historic one. The heart and bowels of two Holy Roman emperors are allegedly interred here. This is old Utrecht distilled.

De Stijl Bike Tour

In honor of De Stijl's 100th anniversary in 2017, the Utrecht tourism board, in collaboration with the Centraal Museum, designed a bicycle route to traverse the movement's pivotal sites in the province: the old mansion where Gerrit Rietveld first designed furniture, Robert van't Hoff's modernist Villa Henny, a full-scale replica of Mondrian's studio, and more. Running 26 miles between Utrecht and Amersfoort, the gentle ride doubles as an idyllic tour of the surrounding region.

Opposite page, clockwise from top left: Máximapark has ample outdoor seating, plus a butterfly garden; one of the best ways to see Utrecht is by boat; in 2022, Utrecht was named the most bicyclefriendly city in the world; Domtoren is the country's highest church tower. This page, from top: The best time to visit Utrecht is May through September; Ruby Rose is known for its decor, coffee, and wine.

Máximapark

As Utrecht's western edge grew, this urban park came along in 2013, covering 741 gorgeous acres that shouldn't be missed. Crisscrossed with bike paths, canals, gardens, marshes, art installations, and farms, Máximapark is a perfect place for a picnic and an all-day visit.

Art Walk

The painting didn't stop after De Stijl: Contemporary Utrecht is jammed with inventive street art. Take a 1.5-to-2.5-hour walking tour with local operator Greetings from Utrecht to see the literary, the romantic, the notable, and the 3D, or download a map from the company for a self-guided jaunt around town.

STAY

The Nox Hotel Utrecht

A short stroll from Domtoren but tucked away on a quiet side street, this 23-room hotel blends modern with grand: Think hip globe lights in a 17th-century building. Great food awaits in every direction, including at French restaurant Hemel & Aarde downstairs.

Moxy Utrecht

Just outside the historic center, the 172-room property features a canalside terrace—and, yes, an Instagram-ready model of Gerrit Rietveld's famous chair. For a bigger helping of De Stijl, the Centraal Museum is a short bicycle ride away.

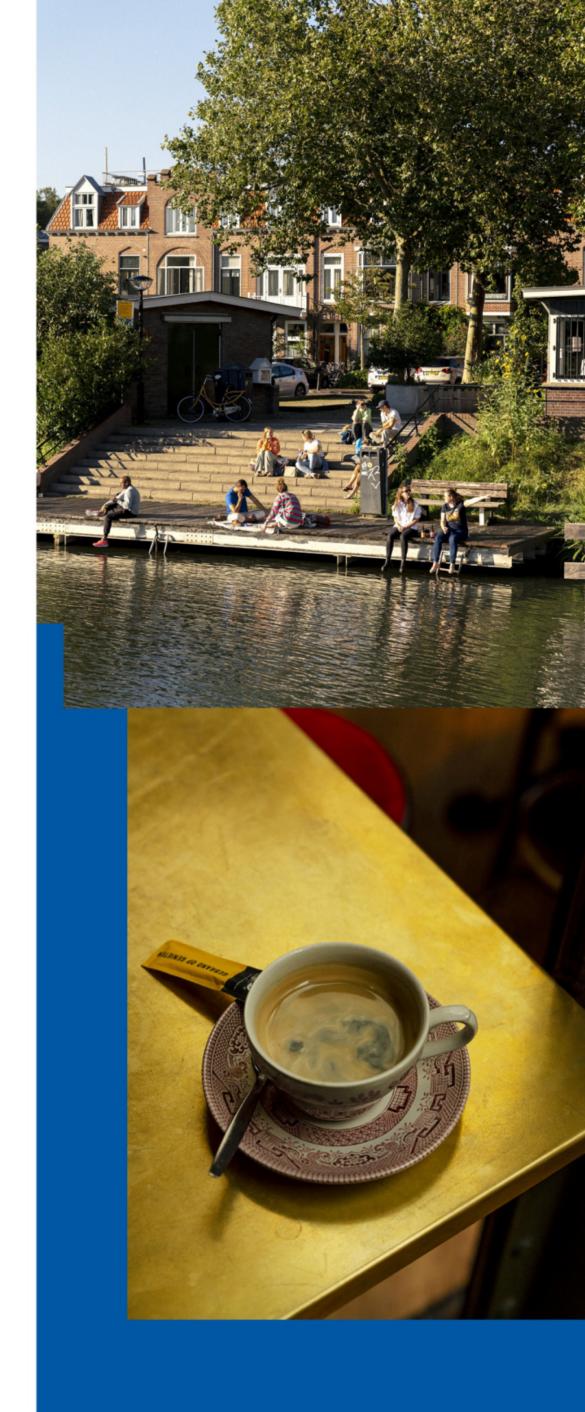
EAT

Watertoren

On the top two floors of a 1907 brick water tower, fine vistas collide with fine dining: haddock with sea buckthorn berry, say, or beetroot with *furikake* and elderflower. The 10th-floor terrace has the panoramic views, but the tables on the ninth encircle the open kitchen, effectively creating a high-end cooking show in the round.

Ruby Rose

Originally a flower shop in a grand 1904 art nouveau building, Ruby Rose is a delightfully garish shrine to all things floral. Next-level charcuterie and salads flesh out the decor (don't miss the burrata). The café is on the Korte Jansstraat, near the sea of tulips and roses that is the Saturday Bloemenmarkt.



we stood watching shadows move along a staircase. Once again I was amid invisible currents set in motion decades ago.

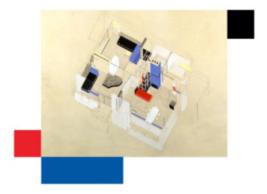
I was, no denying it, on a funny kind of trip. Instead of surfing or cruising wine bars, I was summoning distant artistic vibrations, imagining century-old intellectual ferment. Fanciful as that sounds, it also felt like just the thing for this moment we're in. Travel can be a portal to the obscure, to unfamiliar wavelengths. Sometimes the thing you need most is a marinade of red and blue rectangles, and the hunt for a long-vanished world.

It wasn't all so theoretical. That week, whenever De Stijl got too esoteric for my limited mainframe, I thought about Truus Schröder-Schräder, a Utrecht native whose collision with De Stijl was refreshingly concrete. In 1911, Truus had married Frits Schröder, a lawyer 11 years her senior. He was a traditional man in a traditional world. She was 22, creative and opinionated and modern and miserable. Frits had promised her a liberated existence—freedom, no children, space to be herself—but delivered instead the conventional burdens of bourgeois Dutch family life. "He promised me all sorts of things, but didn't make good on them," she later said. "He basically tricked me into this."

Her life, her home, her city—she felt trapped in a world not of her design. Then, in 1923, Frits died. Around the time De Stijl was beginning its reset of culture, Truus Schröder-Schräder began her own. She would move out of that dreary, overstuffed home and start fresh with her three kids; not just a new life but a new kind of life. She commissioned Gerrit Rietveld, then a rising star in the world of De Stijl, to design a home for her.

"How do you want to live?" he asked at the start.

It seemed like an obvious question for an architect to ask his client. But how one wanted to live had been a decided matter for so long, particularly for a woman, that Schröder-Schräder found herself with something she'd never had before: options. Over the years to come, the Rietveld Schröder House became the first and only inhabitable interpretation of De Stijl ideals, a pioneering example of modernist architecture. Today, it is a UNESCO World Heritage site.



ON MY SECOND-TO-LAST day I pedaled up to the house, a small white building on the outskirts of town. A handful of people had gathered on the sidewalk, snapping discreet photos as you would of a celebrity.

Inside, sun brightened a series of white and gray planes. Crisp lines contradicted a striking fluidity to the spaces: I felt like I'd crawled into a Mondrian canvas. The difference between inside and outside was to be hazy, Schröder-Schräder had decreed. Walls would be movable, rooms transformable. Her favorite place was the top floor, with its view of the surrounding landscape. Rietveld built her a speaking tube,

so she could communicate with visitors at the door without going downstairs.

At one point, the docent at the house summoned the visitors to the area at the top of the staircase. We gathered around, and she reached over to a crisp white wall, pulled it gently along a track, and thus re-created one of the kids' bedrooms, just as Schröder-Schräder had every night. During the day, she'd push it back the other way, and the upper floor would be open. It sounds like a small thing, a movable wall, but something clicked for me.

If De Stijl sometimes felt impenetrably obscure, I could see its strictures here as ideas that would shape a real person's life, her meals, her mornings. And maybe in a time of turmoil, in an era when the world imposed so much Opposite page: Gerrit Rietveld produced Red Blue Chair around 1919. Fellow De Stijl artist Bart van der Leck suggested Rietveld paint the chair red, blue, yellow, and black.

of its fate on you, a little liberty nudged you closer to a little harmony. And harmony had undeniably blossomed here. Thirty-two years after Schröder-Schräder moved in, Rietveld—by then one of the most celebrated figures of De Stijl—joined her. Over the course of their collaboration, they'd fallen in love. They lived there together for the rest of their lives.

Radical and finicky art movements are mortal things. When van Doesburg dared to introduce diagonal lines into his work, Mondrian left the group in 1923 in protest. That was it: a yearslong friendship undone by the angle of a line. The movement began to take on a more international character, blending at times with dadaism, and when a heart attack killed van Doesburg in 1931 at age 47, De Stijl effectively died, too.

On my last day in Utrecht, a silver sky hung low over town. I bundled up and biked toward the Hogeweidebrug, an arch bridge connecting the city to the western suburbs. I was listening to van Domselaer again, his chords brokensounding and tense.

I'm going to go out on a limb and say De Stijl's aims didn't come to pass, exactly. But in lieu of remaking society, maybe De Stijl effected change at a micro level—a person reflecting on the mere *possibility* that a grid can have mythic powers, a woman sliding open walls each morning to live as she wished.

As I was reaching the Hogeweidebrug, a ragged crescendo was building. I pedaled faster. The Amsterdam-Rijnkanaal below me was wide and slate-colored; a barge heaped with rusty river detritus plowed solemnly north. A man sat by a lamppost on the far side of the river, sketching. A woman pushed a stroller with one hand and texted with the other. Van Domselaer was going berserk, jamming strange notes together, no frills, just the spare essence of something unsettling. Maybe reconfiguring reality is a tall order, but with luck you find a crack in it, and with ink and paint and chords and blueprints you widen it a bit. \triangle

Chris Colin wrote about California's Russian River Valley for AFAR's January/February 2022 issue. Photographer Jussi Puikkonen is profiled on page 14.







WHILE VISITING FAMILY in Santa Barbara, California, photographer Justin Fantl would often admire the chain of rugged islands located more than 20 miles offshore. "Over the years, I kept staring across the channel, watching the light change and distant peaks appear and disappear in the fog," he says. "There was a definite pull and a lot of mystery about what was out there."

Fantl first visited Channel Islands National Park in 2019. The quiet of the archipelago—reachable only by boat—appealed to him. To date, he has made more than two dozen visits and taken nearly 9,000 photographs of the park's sparsely trodden mountains, ancient forests, dramatic sea caves, endemic species, and hints of human history

left by the Chumash and Gabrieleno-Tongva peoples who lived here for thousands of years.

The eight Channel Islands are divided into two geological groups. The northern four are part of the Transverse Ranges, while the southern four are part of the Peninsular Ranges. In 1980, owing to their immense biodiversity, the northern four islands and a small one from the southern grouping were declared Channel Islands National Park, and the surrounding waters were designated a marine sanctuary. Today, one of the Chumash tribal councils—specifically, the Northern Chumash people—has proposed an expansion to that sanctuary to form a 20,000-square-mile ocean conservation zone that would limit offshore oil drilling, protect sacred Chumash sites, and offer marine animals such as gray whales a wider migratory corridor.

Fantl is working on a photo book about what the archipelago looks like at this moment in its long history. "The islands feel a little bit lost in time," he says. "When you're there, you feel like you're at the edge of the earth, removed temporally and geographically. I think there's a certain rawness out there and a perceptible bit of magic." —Sarika Bansal







Previous page:
The Chumash people were among the original inhabitants of the Channel Islands. The phrase i sari wa, which roughly translates to "it will continue indefinitely," describes their indelible relationship with the archipelago.



BIODIVERSITY

Known as "the Galápagos of North America," Channel Islands National Park—and the current 1,470-square-mile marine sanctuary surrounding it—is home to more than 2,000 species of flora and fauna. "There are some species that only exist on the islands," Fantl says. "And not just that, there are some species that only exist on one island." All

told, there are 145 endemic species across the park—including the dwarf island fox, island deer mouse, island spotted skunk, and island scrub-jay—that cannot be found anywhere else on Earth.

Dendrophiles can admire the Santa Cruz Island ironwood tree, found only on three of the islands, or the Torrey pine tree, which lives only on Santa Rosa Island and in San Diego County.

On the beaches and in nearby waters, visitors may encounter elephant seals, dolphins, and sperm whales, plus kelp forests and coral gardens. The park's unusual ecosystem is due to a mix of climate and geology: Two major ocean currents meet here, as do two tectonic plates.

"The islands are, in a way, a living archive."





HUMAN HISTORY

The Channel Islands are home to what might be the oldest human skeleton in North America, the 13,000-year-old Arlington Springs Man. At that time, the four northern islands were a single volcanic landmass. There is further evidence that, beginning around 11,000 years ago, the Gabrieleno-Tongva and Chumash peoples dwelled here, developed tomols, or advanced canoes, and traded with other Indigenous peoples using shell beads as currency. Europeans arrived in the 16th century and devastated local populations by spreading disease and forcibly resettling

communities. By the 19th century, ranchers, whalers, and fishermen occupied several islands. And because of the archipelago's strategic location, the U.S. military used it as a base to watch for Japanese attacks during World War II, as well as for trainings (some areas have military uses today). An estimated 5,000 Chumash people currently live across California.

"When you walk around, you start to learn more about the history," says Fantl. "Maybe you pick up a rock, and it's clear that it was a tool used by Native people. The islands are, in a way, a living archive."



HOW TO VISIT AND EXPERIENCE CHANNEL ISLANDS NATIONAL PARK

Five of the eight Channel Islands comprise a national park (Anacapa, Santa Cruz, Santa Rosa, San Miguel, and Santa Barbara). Most of the park's 300,000 annual visitors enjoy it in the summertime, when the crossing is easier. The land and the surrounding waters hold immense cultural significance to the Chumash people, who believe the Earth Mother. Hutash, created their ancestors on Limuw, now known as Santa Cruz Island.



HOW TO GET THERE

Channel Islands National Park can be reached only by ferry or private boat, or seen by helicopter tour. Island Packers Cruises is the park's official boat concessionaire, with ports located about 60 miles northwest of Los Angeles in Oxnard and Ventura. The trips to Santa Cruz and Anacapa take about an hour each, while journeys to the farther islands take between two and four hours. In harsh weather, the crossing may get rough and, in some cases, the ferry might be unable to dock.

Once on the archipelago, the only transportation options are kayak, foot, or a visitor's own private boat. This makes it one of the least accessible national parks for visitors with mobility issues.

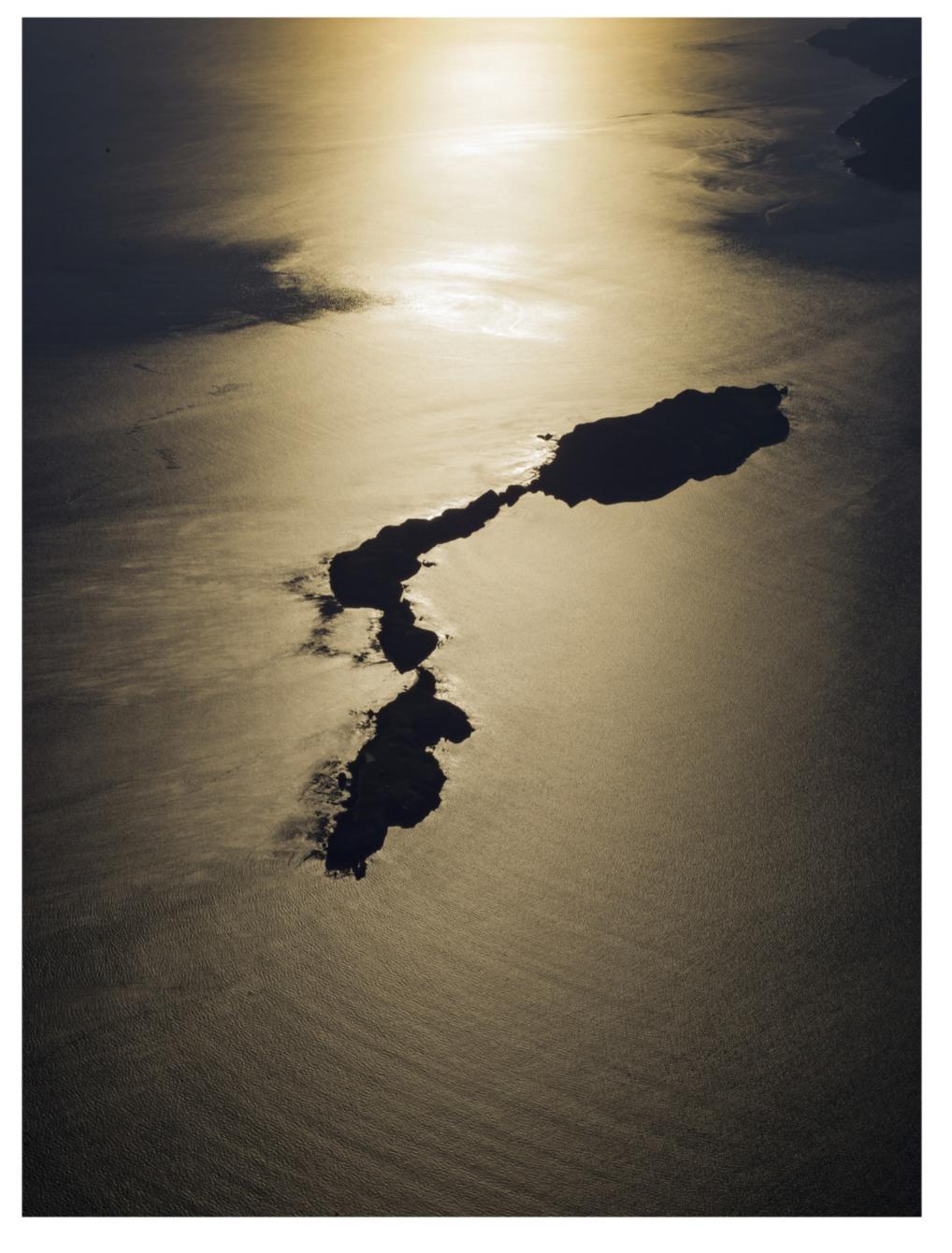
WHAT TO DO

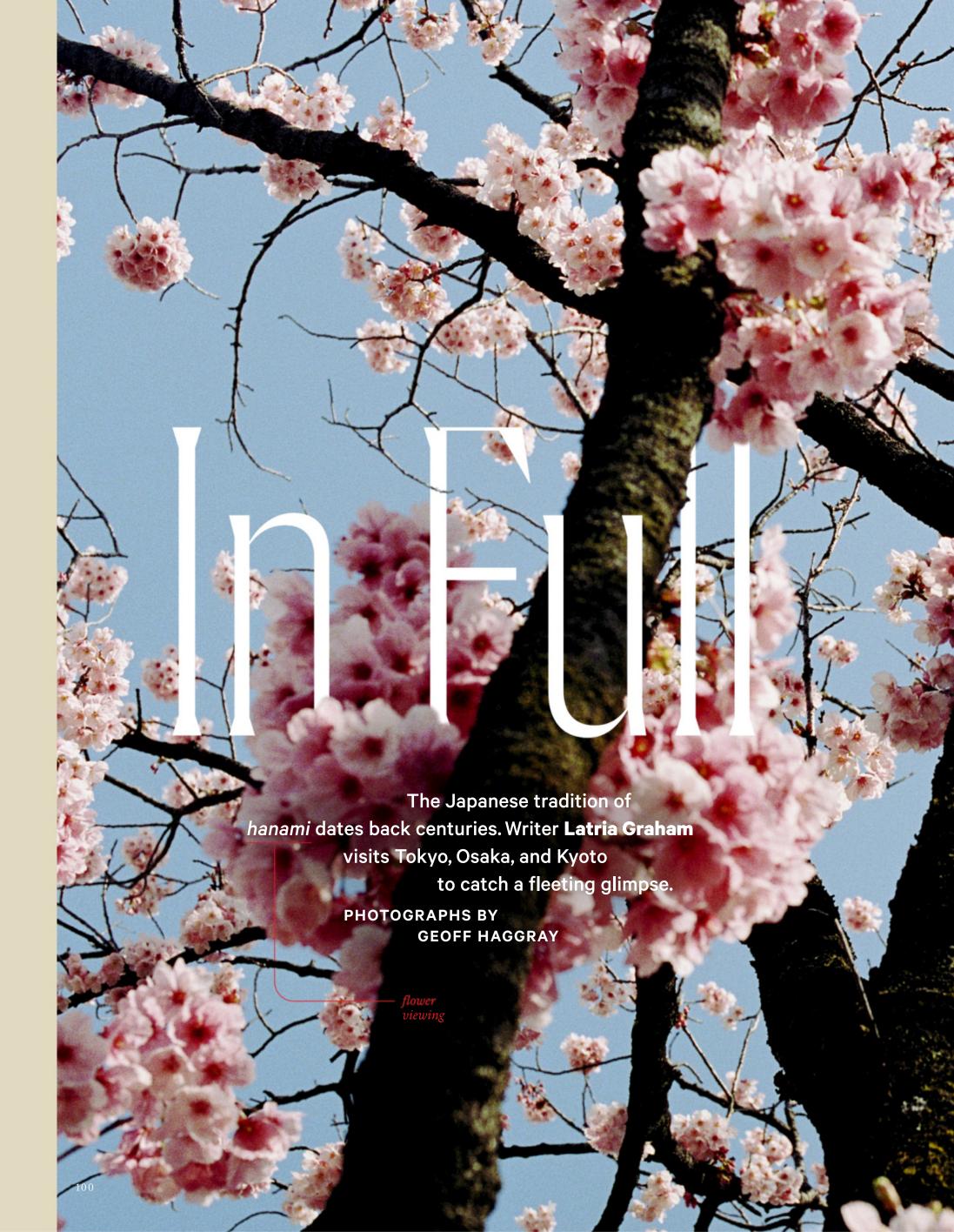
The islands have dozens of marked trails that range in difficulty: Inspiration Point is an hour-long stroll (Anacapa Island), while a visit to Point Bennett is part of a strenuous 16-mile loop where hikers can also observe colonies of seals (San Miguel Island). One of photographer Justin Fantl's favorites is a nine-mile round-trip hike to the striated Lobo Canyon, where the sandstone has been carved by wind, water, and time (Santa Rosa Island).

On ferries to the park, visitors may get lucky and see dolphins or whales. Ocean-life enthusiasts may also consider one of Island Packers Cruises' whale-watching trips; from June to September, take a boat to the marine sanctuary to find humpback and blue whales, and from January to April, look for the gray whale. The company also runs boat tours to spot seals, sea lions, and birds.

Kayakers and snorkelers can rent gear from Channel Islands Adventure Company or Santa Barbara Adventure Company. Many kayak tours include visits to some of the islands' cathedral-like sea caves, such as those near Scorpion Anchorage, a harbor on Santa Cruz Island.

Back on the mainland, visitors can deepen their knowledge of the area's Indigenous history with a visit to the **Chumash Indian Museum** in Thousand Oaks or the **Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History**.









few years ago I decided I wanted a new rhythm for my life, one that wasn't determined by a clock. I even went to therapy to address my anxiety about time. "There is no tiger," the therapist told me. There was no imminent threat in the form of a pred-

ator, no emergency. I argued back that my metaphorical tiger was time—I could not create more of it. And so in the spring of 2023, time on the brain and intent on making some memories, I decided to take a trip to Japan to chase the brief blooming of the sakura, or cherry blossom trees. I wanted to better understand the country's celebration of the ephemeral. I wanted a different way to think about time.

Sakura are deciduous trees. Their English name is a misnomer, as most do not produce cherries. In the early 20th century, Japan presented thousands of the trees to Washington, D.C., as symbols of living friendship. The trees now thrive everywhere from Christchurch, New Zealand, to

Cherry blossoms and chrysanthemums are the two national flowers of Japan.

Macon, Georgia. But the cherry blossom is ubiquitous in Japan, marking significant shrines and temples, lining rivers and canals, and gracing city parks. There's a whole industry behind the celebration of these trees; these short, commemorated cycles of Japan's floral fireworks epitomize the phrase "for a limited time only." Retailers offer their special cherry blossom treats and merchandise for just a few weeks.

"I would venture to say that it is like the stars and stripes of the American flag," says Tokyo Tourism Representative Hisashi Tsumura. "The cherry blossom as the national flower of Japan is far more recognized than the rose for the United States."

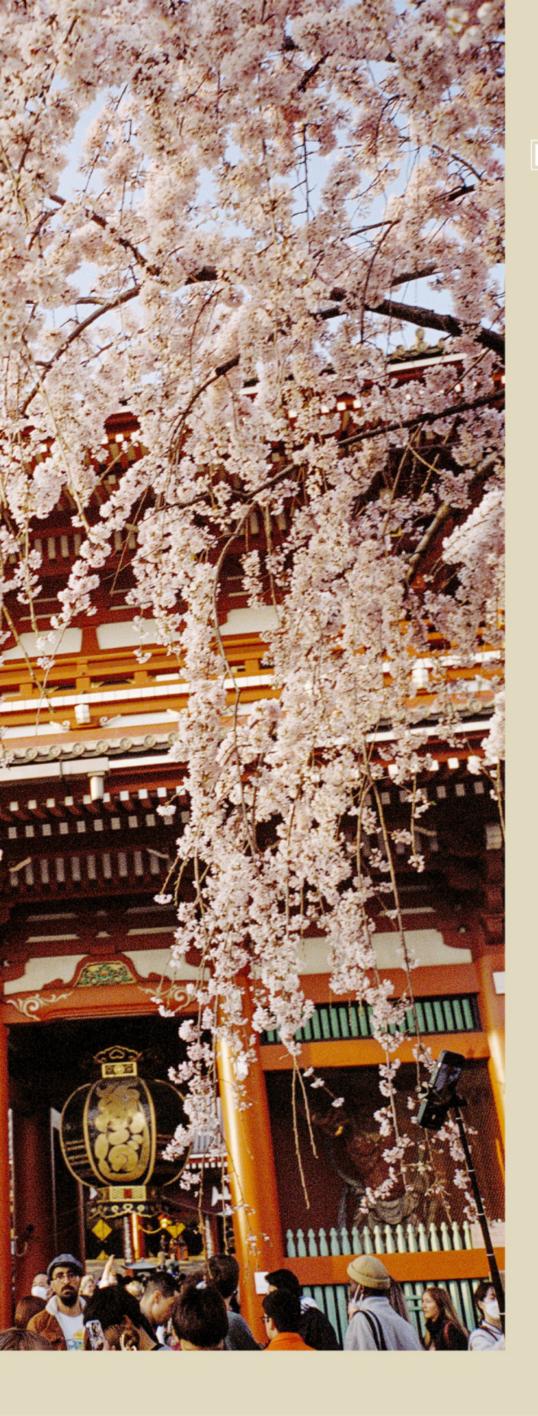
In Japan, the emergence of sakura means winter is over. Multiple variables are responsible for the buds' opening: warm winds, temperatures, precipitation. Planning my trip, I chose three locations (Tokyo, Osaka, Kyoto) with different forecasted bloom dates,

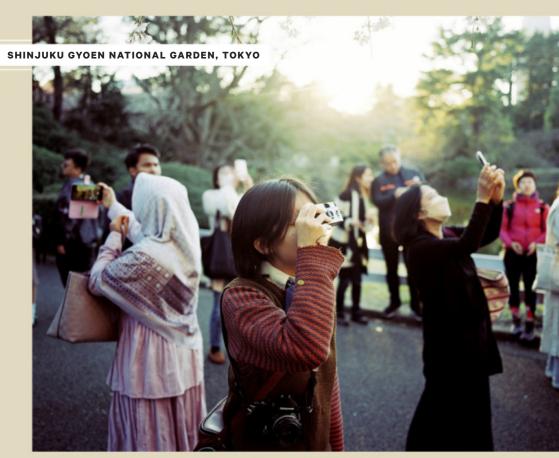
in hopes that somewhere, at some point, the trees would be in full bloom and that I would be able to participate in *hanami*, the custom of viewing and contemplating cherry blossoms.

Sakura represent the coming of spring, the impermanence of beauty, and the cycle of life.

But a full sakura bloom only lasts up to one week before the blossoms wither and become fragile. They are a reminder that life itself is brief. "With sakura's extremely short blossom time, some may feel temporality, others may feel mortality, and others may feel gratitude to be able to enjoy the flowers," Tsumura tells me. "I think that's what makes the cherry blossom a special flower for all of us."









WY PLANE TOUCHES DOWN in Tokyo at the end of March, and I wonder if I am already late. The winter was slightly warmer than usual, and the city's blooms arrived nine days earlier than predicted. In the taxi from the airport to my hotel, we travel beside the Meguro River and I catch a glimpse of the trees through the rain. Sporting their blooms, they look like cotton candy clouds, in colors ranging from bubblegum to blush. Tokyo is in the middle of a rare multiday storm, with winds so rough I worry they will shake all the petals loose. I worry that by the time the sun comes out the trees will be naked—that I will have come all this way and there will be nothing for me to see, let alone picnic under.

Thwarted by the weather in Tokyo, I take the Shinkansen (bullet train) to Osaka, the third-largest city in Japan. Founded on the alluvial

The Japan Meteorological Agency first predicted cherry blossom flowering in 1953.

deposits of the Yodo and Yamato rivers, Osaka is a place shaped by water. Sakura sit perched above hundreds of canals that run through the center of the city. The cherry blossom trees here are in full bloom, known as *mankai*, and it seems every street corner is punctuated by that eponymous sakura pink, branches reaching out toward the water.

One afternoon I pay a visit to the Osaka Museum of History. The building overlooks the 1954 excavation site of the former Naniwa Palace, the first full-scale Chinese-style palace built in Japan back in 652 C.E. The building burned in 686; another palace, called the (Latter) Naniwa Palace, was built in the same spot in 744.

Jissoji Temple, in the Yamanashi prefecture, has a 2,000-year-old cherry blossom tree likely the oldest in Japan. It was during this time, the Nara period (710–794 C.E.), that hanami came to be. The tradition started when philosophers began to ponder temporality because of the short blooming season of plum and cherry trees. Emperor Saga is often credited with observing the first official hanami celebration, held beneath the pink-petaled sakura in 812 C.E. "When hanami started, it was a very

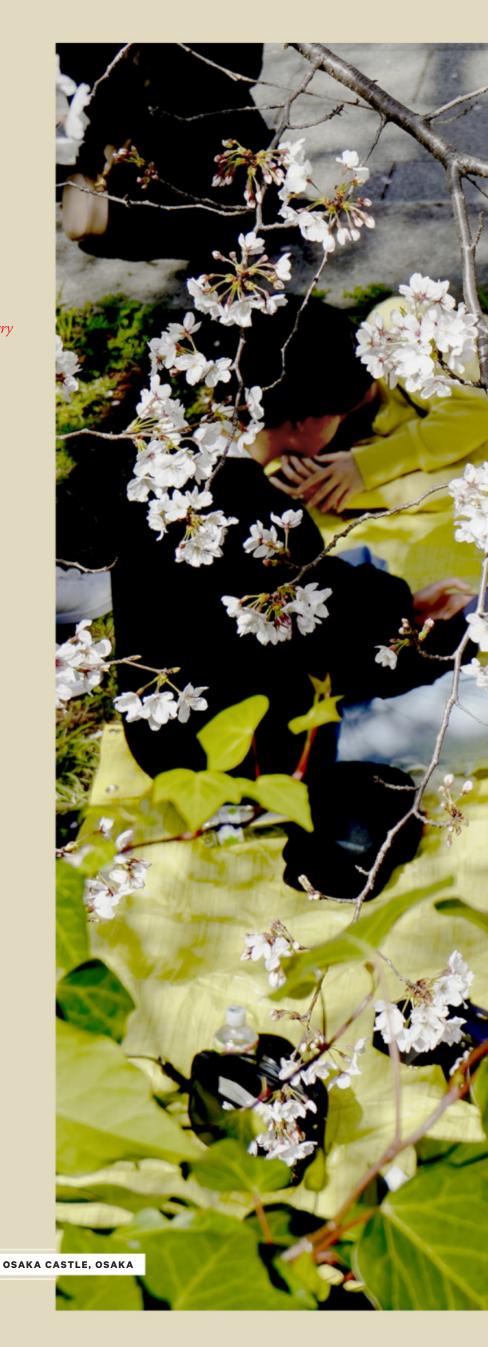
solemn thing," says Tomoyo Kamimura, the senior director of the Language Center at the New York–based Japan Society, a non-profit dedicated to promoting understanding between the U.S. and Japan. "People got together and wrote poems under sakura trees, admiring the beauty of the blossoms and thinking about how the sakura does not last very long. It's about fleeting beauty."

The haikus of Bashō, the famous poet of the Edo period (1603–1868 C.E.), illustrate the multiple meanings of the sakura:

The blossoms unfailing my grief this unopening pouch of poetry

A spring breeze is blowing I'm bursting with laughter
—wishing for flowers

Kamimura tells me that modern hanami is a departure from the way it began: Today, celebrations are more about eating traditional foods and attending festivals. Kamimura herself chooses to participate in "old style" hanami viewings, wandering through parks and contemplating the beauty of the blooms. On this trip I have resolved to try both.





6 Hotels We Love in Japan



TOKYO

AMAN TOKYO

Set in Otemachi, this hotel is known for excellent service. Its 84 guest rooms are a minimalist's dream, with chestnut floors, sliding shoji screens, floor-to-ceiling windows, and stone furo tubs.

MANDARIN ORIENTAL, TOKYO

Occupying the top nine floors of the Nihonbashi Mitsui Tower, the Mandarin Oriental showcases postcard views of Tokyo and its surrounds. The 157 rooms and 22 suites were designed with bonsai trees and sakura motifs.



OSAKA

HOSHINO RESORTS

Free tours of Osaka's famed street food scene are just one of the perks at this familyfriendly resort, located near the city's Tsutenkaku Tower.

CONRAD OSAKA

A stylish sanctuary on Nakanoshima, an island in the city center, the Conrad Osaka has more than 380 artworks. Don't miss a trip to the spa, where services include baths infused with sake and yuzu.



KYOTO

HOTEL THE MITSUI KYOTO

The former residence of the Mitsui clan (one of Japan's most powerful merchant families) is now an exquisitely designed Marriott Luxury Collection property, with 161 rooms around a garden courtyard. Nijo Castle, a UNESCO World Heritage site, is across the street.

КОКИ КУОТО

This elegant retreat—
a member of LXR Hotels &
Resorts by Hilton—
is a 15-minute walk from
Kinkakuji Temple. In
addition to 114 rooms, there
is a tea house, outdoor
swimming pool, and
restaurant with a Chef's
Table experience.

From the history museum's highest floor, I can see Osaka Castle, one of the country's most celebrated landmarks, some two miles north. The sakura trees on the perimeter of the complex are a ribbon of pale pink, and I decide to make my way to them. But navigating to the castle is harder than it appears,

with several layers of moats, walls, and fortresses. After a mile of walking, my body forces me to stop. I sit on a park bench and watch families on their picnic blankets, flying kites, and eating snacks from food stalls. The day is warm and

Hana means "flower(s)" and mi translates to "looking or viewing."

people are using the shade of the trees to keep cool, their bicycles neatly organized in stacks propped against the tree trunks. On a small hill nearby, an older woman and a teen with pigtails play badminton, their teal rackets flashing in the afternoon sun. Children jump up and down the steps of the castle's main tower while their parents take pictures of the flowers, zooming in on the sakura's individual petals.

I don't have time for this, I think to myself as I look around at the bodies in motion, an internal alarm reminding me of my mission. I have somewhere to be. I stand and start walking. But when I reach the innermost tower of the castle, I recognize no one is in as big a rush as I am; it seems that I am the only one feeling this level of urgency. I wonder what would happen if I just slow down. By luck the castle is open an hour later that day, so more people can see the blooms. I pull myself up the staircase railing, eventually reaching the top. The sky is tinged with orange, and I am surrounded by hundreds of sakura trees. I feel relief, and thank my body for getting me here, recalling the long path I took to the tower.

After I descend, I take a photo of Osaka Castle set against a backdrop of cherry trees. I have seen versions of this scene hundreds of times, the stark white of the building accented by blushing petals. Now, after days of waking up and checking the state of the blossoms, I have finally experienced them. And when the sun starts to set, I realize that this moment will never come again, that these same blooms will not be here, that even if I return to this very spot, I will be someone else.

SAKURA BLOOM WHEN several weather elements come together. But climate change is upending everything. Greenhouse gas emissions mean winters are warmer, and the blooms are more unpredictable than ever. In 2021 Kyoto saw its sakura peak on March 26, the earliest date in 1,200 years.

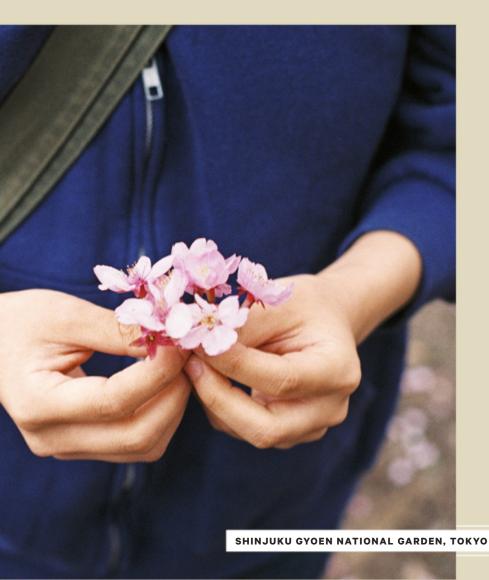
Yoichi Mori, a certified arborist in Kasuga, Fukuoka prefecture, has also noticed the weather changes. "Global warming is happening here," he says. "We don't get snow in areas we should." Mori works with many plant species but says that cherry blossom trees hold a special place. "Many blossoms and flowers inspire me, but none more than the sakura. . . . It symbolizes the Japanese spirit." He marvels at the way the blooms' opening can make an entire society stop and contemplate. "Everybody is so moved, so touched," he says.

Early in Japan's history, the country had three different types of sakura. Through experimentation, soon the number grew. "By breeding these kinds of cherry blossoms, we now have up to maybe 800 different kinds of cherry blossoms," Mori says.









I realize that this moment will never come again, that these same blooms will not be here, that even if I return to this very spot, I will be someone else.

After four days in Osaka, I take the train to Kyoto. One of my first stops is the Kyoto Botanical Gardens to see some of its estimated 450 specimens of sakura. Founded in 1924, it is the oldest public botanical garden in Japan. As I enter the grounds, I am awed by the diversity in size and color of the cherry blossom trees. The Kanzan variety is large and showy, with hot-pink blooms that look closer to a rose than to its much smaller Yoshino kin. I walk around to view the different species—some are short-trunked,

others lithe and long. On the edge of the garden sits a weeping cherry tree, its branches bent downward, sweeping the thick green carpet-like grass around its base. I stand quietly under different blossoms drinking in their smells, which span from slightly nutty and sweet, like amaretto, to a more cloying, warm honey scent. The aroma of spring is encompassing,

The Yoshino varietal makes up 80 percent of Japan's cherry blossom population.

and I revel in it. I weave my way through the garden, body lighter, curiosity piqued. As I step through the exit gate I consider how each tree blooms in its own time; how lucky I am to be here to see it. I realize I haven't looked at my watch once.

Later that same day I have a lunch reservation at Itsuki Chaya Arashiyama Honten, a café located on the small island between the two branches of Kyoto's Katsura River. I walk most of the way to my destination, crossing the Togetsukyo Bridge, which spans the wide, shallow expanse of the water. The riverbank is coated in light pink, a contrast to the chambray-colored sky and the milky clouds above. The water itself is slate gray, making all the living things sprouting and thriving along its banks seem lush.

As I continue walking through the Arashiyama district, I notice a series of tents, their tops decorated in primary colors. It seems there is a sakura festival in the park, not found in any of the guidebooks or blogs I scoured ahead of my trip. I decide that after lunch I will abandon my meticulously created to-do list and instead give in to delight.

I could not have planned a better afternoon. I stand in line at one of the stalls in the park and order glossy candied strawberries on a stick, along with a serving of sakura-flavored mochi (sticky

Mount Yoshino, in the Nara prefecture, has more than 30,000 cherry blossom trees.

rice cakes). I then walk to the river and sit, sharing a bench with another festivalgoer under a thick old tree.

While I enjoy my food, two elementary school–age girls, dressed in *yukata* (unlined kimonos), make their way to the river's pebbled edge to play. I am not part of their scene, but I am not apart from it, either: The energy of the trees, river, and people commemorating spring surround me. As the afternoon edges toward evening, I stand up and shake the petals from my braids, which I've colored pink just for this trip. Sakura season is waning in Kyoto. The petals are falling.





TWO DAYS BEFORE I'm scheduled to return to the U.S., I take the Shinkansen from Kyoto to Tokyo. I sit on the left side of the car, staring out the window, hoping to see Mount Fuji. When it arrives in my sight line, the top of the mountain is still white with snow, stark and sharp against a brilliant blue sky.

For a few minutes I have an unobstructed view, a panorama of the Japanese countryside in bloom at the foot of the mountain. I wonder what Mount Fuji thinks of our contemporary predic-

aments. No matter what we go through, it is there, steadfast, through the turbulence and flux of daily life. In artwork Mount Fuji and sakura are often paired, two defining symbols of Japan's identity that exist on different

Cherry blossom festivals are called sakura matsuri.

ends of the time spectrum: one impermanent, the other forever.

"Oh, you got to see Fuji-san," Yukari Sakamoto exclaims later when I meet her at Tokyo Station. A chef and AFAR contributor who leads market tours in Tokyo, Sakamoto is taking me to visit *depachika*, the basement food halls of department stores, to see how sakura works its way into the country's culinary offerings.

Cherry blossoms are toxic to humans when eaten raw, but edible after undergoing a specific process. At the Takashimaya department store where Sakamoto once worked as a wine sommelier, items featuring cherry blossoms are identified by pink placards, and they number in the hundreds. Cheesecakes, chocolates, biscuits, all in the same light hue. People around us walk with quiet purpose.

Sakamoto explains how the chemical compound coumarin, found in cherry blossoms and leaves, gives the foliage its scent, at times reminiscent of vanilla. As we move from counter to counter, I sniff, then taste, traditional sakura mochi, sakura-flavored *taiyaki* (fish-shaped cakes stuffed with sweet red bean paste), and pink-colored *dango* rice dumplings on a stick, covered in a salty sweet sauce thickened with red bean paste. We stop at Minokichi, a kaiseki restaurant with a 300-year history of serving fish. One of its traditional dishes is *sakurazushi*: sea bream wrapped in rice and draped in a salted cherry blossom leaf. The rice is springy, and the fish flakes apart easily. The floral note of the sakura is the last to reach me. I take another, bigger bite, pleased.

That night, on my last evening in Japan, I arrive at the canalside section of Tennozu Isle waterfront and descend 50 steps to an open-air catamaran. I take a seat in the cen-

Avoid sitting or standing on the roots of cherry blossom trees—it's considered impolite.

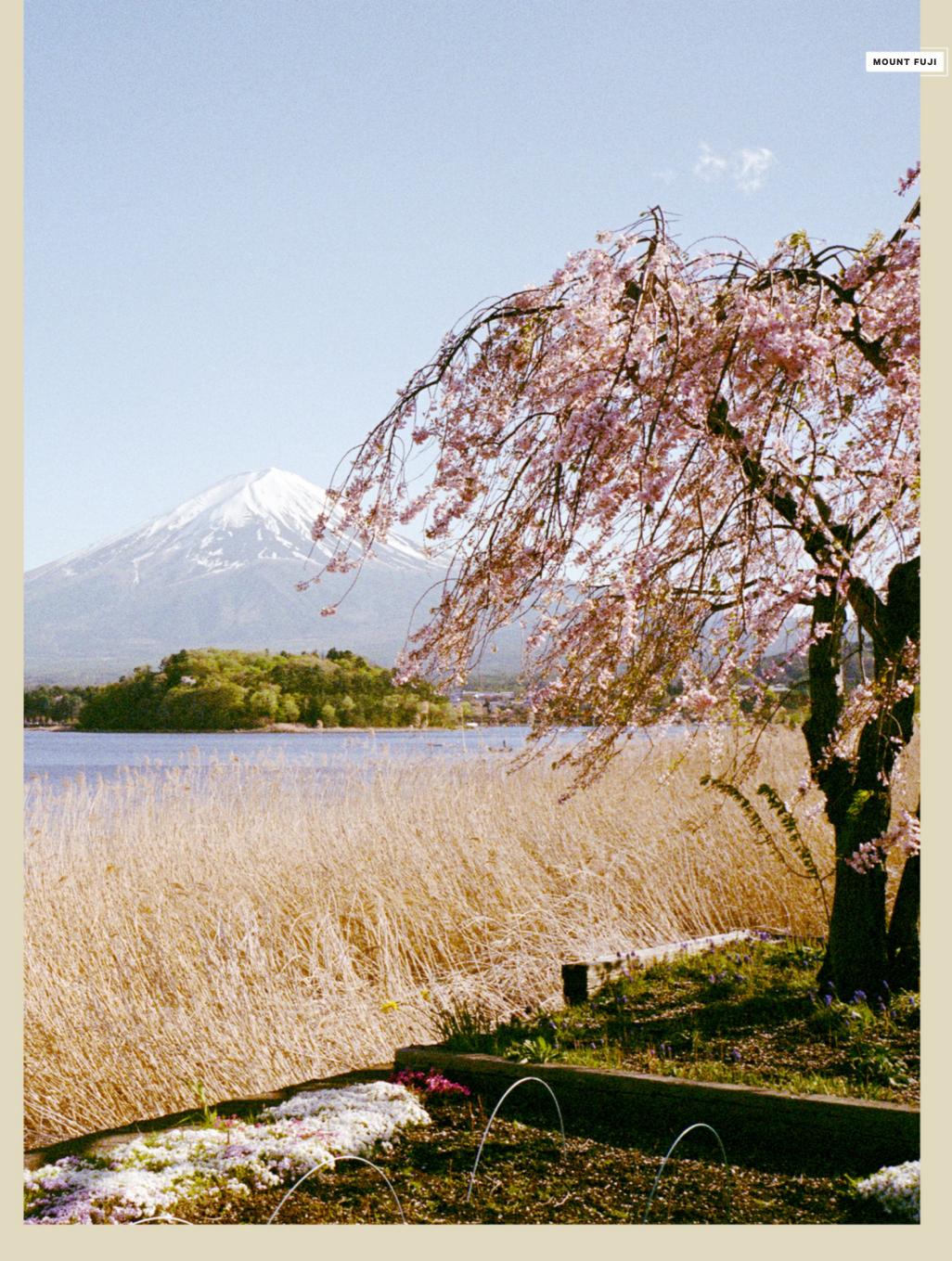
ter and watch other passengers as they board. A handful of businessmen, decked out in navy suits, pull beers from their bags in preparation for the festivities ahead. We are all here to participate in the evening practice of *yozakura*, or observing illuminated cherry blossoms.

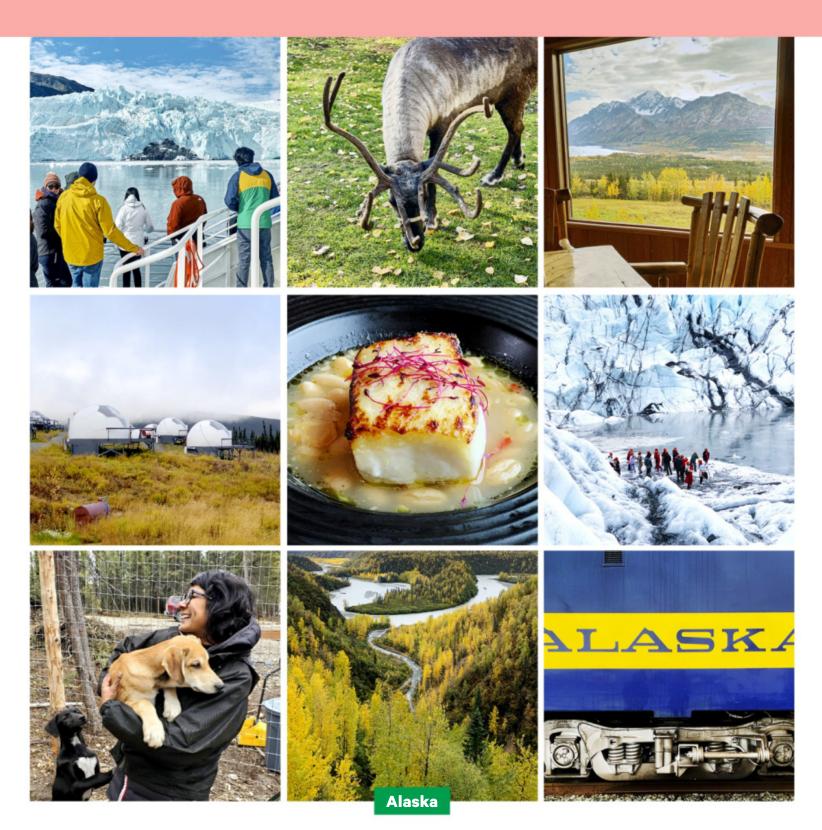
Once everyone is accounted for, the vessel departs and heads deeper into the heart of Tokyo. Sitting in the boat, looking at the land along the canal, we are witnessing the end of sakura season. The petals are dropping, and they land softly in the water before being pulled away by the current. I watch the blush swirl into the black, and think of how I've learned to embrace idleness on this trip, of how I've found reward in observation and patience. We glide forward into the night, slowly, taking our time.





Writer Latria Graham is one of AFAR's Unpacked columnists. Photographer Geoff Haggray is profiled on page 14.





Chasing the Lights

Supriya Kalidas, AFAR Creative Director

I HAD JUST ARRIVED in Fairbanks from Anchorage on the last north-bound train of the season: nearly 12 hours spent snaking through spectacular scenery. Alaska truly comes alive in the fall—an immodest tapestry of golden yellows, earthy reds, and lush greens.

The timing of my trip was important. There was the promise of fewer crowds and peak fall foliage, but the real draw was the possibility of seeing the northern lights. That first night in Fairbanks, I waited with other hopeful travelers for four hours in the cold, necks craned, eyes up to the skies, blinking only because it was biologically necessary. Close to 2 a.m. we were treated to a few seconds of faint, swirling green, and the cameras around me erupted in a cacophony of clicks. Then the skies went abruptly dark. Disappointed and tired, I went to bed. But I would try again.

The following day, with renewed optimism, I drove to Borealis Basecamp, 45 minutes outside of Fairbanks. Surely here, in an igloo hotel designed for aurora viewing, I would be treated to a full show. Once again, I waited patiently as the night stretched into the early morning, but when the first drop of rain hit, my heart sank. I knew the northern lights would remain elusive.

In that moment, however, I also felt gratitude. I had spent the past week taking in a mere whisper of Alaska's offerings: kayaking among jumping salmon and supine otters in Kenai Fjords National Park, hiking the immense Matanuska Glacier, walking among reindeer in the boreal forests of the Goldstream Valley, and sampling some of the freshest halibut I'd ever tasted. It was a reminder that in the 49th state, moments of wonder are not just found in the sky.



Travel to Maui is welcomed and encouraged now more than ever. When you visit accessible areas of Maui with *aloha*, compassion and empathy, your visit helps Maui's economy and Lahaina's ability to rebuild.

To support Maui's ongoing recovery efforts and learn more about Maui travel updates, visit gohawaii.com/malama-maui.





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