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Editor’s note

One of the oddities of the magazine industry is that we like to put an issue on sale a full month before its cover date. And so, in this February issue of Lonely Planet magazine, I’ll take the chance to wish you an especially happy New Year. This is also the moment, every year, when we roll out our 52 Best Weekends Away, resolving to keep your diary stuffed with original travel experiences. With such a mash-up of recommendations in our pages, there comes a chance to say why we’re different – hopefully more considerate, engaging and sustainable – and how we can make 2020 more fulfilling for you. Turn to p42 to stretch your cultural horizons, learning how layers of migration have shaped modern Marseille. From p60 you’ll find local people warmly welcoming you, sharing their discoveries in the secret corners of New York. Get more active using the ideas from p76, also taking a nostalgic step back into your childhood. And, from p90, moderate your carbon footprint, with tours by public transport that reveal fresh sides of several of our favourite cities. I’ll (ahem) wrap up by mentioning that our subscriber edition now comes delivered in an easily recycled paper envelope, rather than plastic.

Peter Grunert, group editor
@peter_grunert petervg73

Clockwise, from right: Marseille, the cultural crossroads of the Mediterranean; inside tracks on New York City; five ways to feel like a child again; and uniquely diverting journeys.
FEBRUARY 2020

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Food Drinking
Entertainment
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Explore
THE BEST OF THE MONTH’S NEW TRIP IDEAS

Alternative winter sun in Kerala  Marrakesh, capital of culture  Winter sports in Seefeld  Stay at Fanad Head lighthouse, Co. Donegal  Picasso on paper  A Venetian blinder of a hotel
The beaches and lagoons of Kerala are thought to be one of the original homes of the coconut palm, so if a northern winter sees you looking wistfully to these symbols of tropical ease, it makes sense to set course for the southern Indian state. Temperatures in Kerala don’t vary much through the year, but January and February are the months least likely to be disturbed by monsoon rains. Chief of all unhurried pursuits here is to take a kettuvallam (thatched houseboat) for a few days along the backwaters south of Kochi – the centuries-old Indian Ocean spice-trading hub formerly called Cochin. Keralatourism.org; bookahouseboat.com lists a few kettuvallam rentals.
Over the last 35 years, a shifting spotlight has settled annually on different European cities, and now Africa is set to have its own annual Capitals of Culture programme, with Marrakesh claiming the prize as first holder of the title. The Moroccan capital has always been a strong contender for the role, with such architectural riches as the Badia Palace and Saadian Tombs, as well as the living traditional culture of the medina and its craft shops. But it has also become a hub of contemporary art galleries, while the new Yves Saint Laurent Museum continues to draw praise. Events planned for 2020 include the 1-54 Contemporary African Art Fair and the Africa Dance Biennial.

visitmorocco.com
Winter wunder

While most ski resorts across the Alps like to flag how high their lifts go and how many dizzying black runs they can offer, Seefeld is happy to put its gentler gradients front of shop. This village in the Austrian Tyrol doesn’t lack verticals – it’s watched over by 2,000-metre-plus peaks – but its plateau position means that cross-country skiing is the real pride here. There are more than 150 miles of dedicated trails for this full-body winter workout, weaving between five villages in the ‘Olympiaregion’ (it twice hosted events for winter games held in nearby Innsbruck). Snow cover doesn’t put a stop to hiking in the area either, with choices ranging from hour-long jaunts through the forest to multi-day routes made easier by a luggage-forwarding service. Downhill skiing in Seefeld appeals most to beginners and intermediate levels; there’s one black run for something more challenging. And if you’re here in mid-January, you can watch the masters of ski-jumping try to resist the pull of gravity for as long as possible.

seefeld.com
COUNTY DONEGAL
The Wild Atlantic Way runs for 1,550 miles (if all coastal squiggles are strictly followed) between the seaward end of the Donegal–Northern Ireland border and the fishing port of Kinsale in County Cork. Fifty miles from the start (if driving in this direction), **Malin Head** is the northernmost tip of the island of Ireland, with a sight-line across to Fanad Head, and the chasm of Hell’s Hole, which funnels ocean swells into churning spray.

COUNTY SLIGO
After the route passes the towering sea cliffs of Slieve League in southern Donegal, the coast softens somewhat at the extremities of County Mayo. In between, it passes near the two-mile curve of **Streedagh Strand**. Parts of three wrecked ships from the Spanish Armada sometimes wash up on this beach. Behind it are dunes, a lagoon and Benbulben – Sligo’s answer to those soaring, flat-topped ‘Lost World’ mountains in the Amazon.

5 stops on an Atlantic road trip
If there’s an Irish woollen jumper in your cupboard that has yet to see proper use, give it a fitting holiday on its home country’s Atlantic coast in deepest winter. Bleak weather is precisely what lighthouses such as that at Fanad Head (above), were built for, and three cottages on this promontory in the north of County Donegal are fitted with fireplaces or stoves to dry off by. On a clear day, Ballymastocker Beach has golden sands (if not water temperatures) to rival those of the tropics – though when the waves are beating the rocks, it’s probably board-game time.

Two nights from £250; fanadlighthouse.com

When the wind blows

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Two nights from £250; fanadlighthouse.com

COUNTY GALWAY
A convenient midway point along the Wild Atlantic Way – or a place to split the route into two more manageable parts – Galway is particularly worth visiting in 2020 during its reign as European Capital of Culture (and as one of Lonely Planet’s Best in Travel top ten cities). Music seems to be Galway’s first language, with countless trad sessions in its brightly painted pubs. Buskers are a focus of sightseeing here, not a distraction from it.

COUNTY KERRY
The Atlantic coast’s fragmented geography makes it hard to tell which is Ireland’s most westerly point, but on the mainland, at least, that honour goes to Dunmore Head on the Dingle Peninsula. A loop drive here takes in the possibly 1,200-year-old Gallarus Oratory, cliff-hugging curves at Slea Head and a short trail to Dunmore Head itself, with views beyond to the Blasket Islands, whose last year-round inhabitants left in 1954.

COUNTY CORK
The map of the Game of Thrones universe is partly based on an inverted Emerald Isle – the five ‘fingers’ in northeastern Westeros/southwestern Ireland are the giveaway. Among these peninsulas of Counties Cork and Kerry, Sheep’s Head is the one that most often gets dropped from itineraries, but it has a lonely beauty all its own, and – in the village of Durrus – one of Ireland’s finest artisan cheesemakers.
EXHIBITION

Cut it out

Picasso was a tireless experimenter, and a new exhibition at London’s Royal Academy looks at the part that paper played in his 80-year artistic career. Inventive collages, paper cut-outs and studies for legendary works such as Les Demoiselles d’Avignon are among 300 of his works on show.

Tickets from £18; 25 January–13 April 2020; royalacademy.org.uk
NEW HOTEL

Venetian reinvention

When hotel designers turn their attention to Venice, they often find it hard to resist the gravitational pull of heavy velvet, Murano glass chandeliers and lashings of gilt. The rooms and public spaces at il Palazzo Experimental are not like this: their historic inspiration lies closer to 1960 than 1760. And though the exterior of the old Ca’ Molin remains unchanged, with its typically Venetian Gothic ogee windows, inside is a concoction of dusky pinks, sage greens, terrazzo surfaces and bold curves echoed through furniture, doorways and mirrors. This new venture comes from a group that originally grew out of a Parisian craft cocktail society, so the bar was always going to be a big focus of the hotel planners. The Venetian tradition that mixologists grapple with here is a cocktail heritage that includes both spritz and bellini. The hotel is on Zattere quayside in the Dorsoduro district, neither in the crowded centre (which bore the brunt of the recent flooding in the city) nor wilfully far out. Rooms from £140; palazzoexperimental.com
HIKING IN THE CAUCASUS

Trailblazer

Armenia lies on the crossroads of Asia and Europe, and even – determined interpreters of Biblical clues say – on the site of the Garden of Eden. The mountains of the Lesser Caucasus run the length of the country, and despite their name these summits frequently force walkers to crane their necks. Fractious relations in the region make it tricky to set up long-distance hiking routes (Armenia’s borders with Turkey and Azerbaijan are closed) but enthusiasts are working on one project: the Transcaucasian Trail. Pioneers can help to wear-in this route with Intrepid Travel’s new itinerary, which includes two nights of wild camping, a visit to World Heritage-listed Noravank Monastery, and sampling wines in one of the world’s oldest grape-growing regions.

Ten-day itinerary from £1,085pp. intrepidtravel.com
More reasons to get out there

1. **POOL RESOURCES**
   US-based sharing app Swimply, which links private pool owners with the swim-hungry, has expanded to Australia in time for the southern hemisphere’s summer (swimply.com).

2. **WIDE HORIZONS**
   The vivid and sparsely settled landscapes of Namibia are the setting for a new six-night flying safari, which takes in Kwessi Dunes (pictured), Hoanib Valley Camp with its desert-adapted elephants, and Shipwreck Lodge on the remote Skeleton Coast (bonami.co.uk).

3. **WOODY NOTES**
   France’s national parks family now has its eleventh member: the Parc National de Fôrets, protecting more than 900 square miles of broad-leaved forests and quiet waterways on the Burgundy-Champagne border, three hours’ drive east of Paris (forets-champagne-bourgogne.fr).

4. **SUSTAINABLE STAY**
   On a forested hilltop above San Sebastián, Arima Hotel (named for a Basque word meaning ‘soul’) is the first hotel in Spain and largest in Europe to win a Passivhaus certification for energy efficiency (arimahotel.com).

5. **HOLLYWOOD ON THE TIBER**
   Rome’s Cinecittà studios has brought to the big screen La Dolce Vita and other Fellini classics, epics including Ben Hur and Cleopatra, and even not obviously Italian fare such as Gangs of New York. The new MIAC museum here covers this rich history, and also immersive virtual reality experiences (cinecitta.com).

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A tale of TWO CITIES
Dallas & Fort Worth

Dallas' technicolour skyline as night falls.

Above: Fort Worth's famous longhorn cattle
The twin Texan cities of Dallas and Fort Worth promise a fine mix of rich Western heritage and cosmopolitan exuberance.

Where the West begins
Despite being the 13th largest city in America, Fort Worth still conjures that down-to-earth Western atmosphere that you look for on a visit to Texas, thanks to it being a crucial setting of the great open-range cattle drives of the late 19th century. As a result, the legendary Stockyards are front and centre of Fort Worth’s welcoming embrace. Here you’ll find plenty of authentic Old-West era buildings well worth a visit. Hours of enjoyment also lie in the Western-wear stores, souvenir shops and through the swinging doors of countless saloons. The twice-daily cattle drive along Exchange Ave is a particular spectacle as it features the resplendent-looking longhorns of the Fort Worth Herd.

Licence to grill
All this prime beef makes for a wealth of options if you’re looking for your Texas barbecue fix. Brisket and large juicy steaks are very much the order of the day, as well as succulent pulled pork and sausages, but thankfully there are excellent meat-free options as well. Jalapeno cheese grits are an indulgent Tex-Mex favourite, and the abundant Mexican cuisine comes with enticing vegan and vegetarian choices from burrito bowls to quesadillas.

The 36-block Sundance Square is the ideal place to lazily stroll around any time of day, and here you can take in colourful Western architecture, art galleries, bars and restaurants, while the big fountain offers respite from the Texan sun. Nearby, you’ll also find the seminal Chisholm Trail Memorial, commemorating the cattle drives that form such a vital part of Fort Worth’s history.

For a classic Texan night out, head to Billy Bob’s Texas, proudly claiming the title of world’s largest honky tonk. You can enjoy more than 30 bars, mechanical bull riding and, if you’re lucky, some of country music’s biggest stars. It’s the perfect place for a frozen jalapeño lime margarita and a good old-fashioned jig.

The Big D
When it comes to embodying everything that’s big and bright about the Lone Star State, all roads lead to Dallas. It’s a city that seems to thrive independently of the world around it, so much so that it’s the fastest-growing metropolitan area in the USA. This is where the money is, and it’s not afraid to shout about it.

That said, one of its biggest draws is the Arts District, home to tastefully designed open spaces and illustrious venues like the Dallas Museum of Art. Here exhibits range from Greek, Roman and Etruscan archaeological masterpieces, 1,000-year-old bowls from the Mimbres native peoples of New Mexico and a pre-Columbian Peruvian gold mask, as well as paintings from Picasso, Monet and Van Gogh.

You’ll also find the sleek AT&T Performing Arts Center, made up of four indoor and outdoor venues hosting opera; classic, experimental and musical theatre; ballet and other forms of dance. After the show, head to nearby Downtown & Deep Ellum, where you can merrily hop from taqueria to bar to club, or join the Margarita Mile for a refreshing tipple.

A place in history
Dallas inescapably remains the location of one of the most shocking and tragic events in modern American history – the untimely demise of President John F Kennedy in 1963. Visit renowned locations from that notorious day such as Dealey Plaza and the Grassy Knoll, as well as the Sixth Floor Museum of the former Texas School Book Depository building, from where Lee Harvey Oswald took aim.

For a dose of peace among the metropolis, head to the Dallas Arboretum and Botanical Garden along the shores of White Rock Lake. The idyllic 66-acre garden is home to all manner of flora arranged in themed areas. And if you’re an NFL fan, don’t leave without catching the Dallas Cowboys, one of America’s most successful football teams, in the impressive AT&T Stadium.

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- Photo Challenge: contrast
- Life changer: Madagascar
- Snow-holing on Cairn Gorm
- Snapshot from Agra
- Expat life in Melbourne
- The life lessons of a roving food writer
Photo challenge: Contrast

We reveal the winning images from our latest Instagram challenge, this month on the theme of ‘contrast’.

@lonelyplanetmag

The Great Smoky Mountains, USA, here living up to their name in the fog @karin_marie_photography

I came across more cats than people in the village of Naoussa in Paros @blucoconutphotography
I had recently heard that **Norwich Cathedral** was temporarily housing a helter skelter to give people a better view of some of the 1,000 bosses (stone carvings) that adorn its vaulted ceiling. I knew I didn’t have a big window of opportunity to visit, so I decided to make a mad dash from work. I arrived 15 minutes before closing time and the building was practically empty. The rides on the slide had stopped for the day but I didn’t mind as I got to enjoy this rather strange spectacle in all its quiet glory @thetimeboundtraveller

Near **Mandawa** in India, I saw this brightly dressed woman carrying offerings to the gods @franco_coba
At more than 3,000 metres of altitude, the Shey Palace, Ladakh, has beautiful views towards the Himalayas. I remember Ladakh fondly as a land of Buddhist temples, monks chanting the sacred mantras, bells and prayer flags floating in the wind @shuviy
In Grand Army Plaza, New York, I spotted this eye-catching bed of tulips @sarahhallidayjames

On a photowalk through Strasbourg, I spotted these two men (or one and his shadow?) @AEuropeanEscape

A thermal spring in Yellowstone National Park, from my road trip around the USA @lucy.andthelens

This colourful hook and chain was at the Zeche-Zollverein coal mine in Essen, Germany @ertugokenler
road, reflecting on the trips they made them think a little about Summers are free and an adventure in Scotland.
Like all lemurs, indris are found only in Madagascar, but unlike all other species of lemur, indris have a short, stump-like tail.

Each month, a travel writer reflects on a trip that made them think differently about the world. In this issue, **Emma Gregg** on Madagascar

@Emma_Gregg

An indri’s song was something I’d never heard before. It was as soulful as a husky’s howl and as abstract and mystical as whale song. I thrilled at every note. The forest hung in dense, dewy folds around me. Somewhere deep in the shadows, the melody was becoming a chorus. I had travelled to Madagascar in the hope of seeing lemurs, and we were on the right track. All we had to do was dive into the tangle of trees and perhaps I’d catch a glimpse of something black and white, bounding from branch to branch. The Anjozorobe-Angavo forest corridor, an extensive natural forest in Madagascar’s central highlands, is one of the last strongholds of the indri, one of the largest living lemurs. The mighty tropical hardwoods here are hemmed in by rice fields, pine plantations and villages. As we arrived, shortly after dawn, we heard a different kind of music – young farmers singing to each other in the valley below.

‘Is it a tune you know?’ I asked Toussaint and Sesen, my guides. ‘It’s just a pop song,’ said Sesen. ‘They’re playing with the harmonies.’ To my ears, it was as perfect as a madrigal. Fresh-smelling foliage brushed our shoulders as we hiked. I knew every tree could conceal something fascinating, from swivel-eyed chameleons to sleeping mouse lemurs and tiny frogs, but we pressed on. When at last Toussaint indicated we should leave the path and fight our way uphill through knotted vines, I didn’t hesitate. We were about to encounter the indris. And it would be wonderful.

**THE TAKE AWAY**

I explored with two local guides, two generations apart, and an interpreter from Antananarivo. I realised that Madagascar’s astonishing wildlife and its increasingly rare forests is in theirs and their fellow countrymen’s hands, and we need to do everything in our power to help them safeguard these natural treasures.
When my seven-year-old son Jaineel was on school holiday, we decided to visit Agra in Uttar Pradesh, India. Agra is, of course, famous because of the Taj Mahal but it has several other interesting sights and we thought we’d explore those first. We went to the ‘Baby Taj’ on the suggestion of some locals we asked for tips. The monument is a Mughal mausoleum and was built around 1625. Some people regard it as a draft of the Taj Mahal. We spent a morning exploring the tomb’s different chambers and taking pictures – seeing how excited I get when we visit sights that I want to shoot, Jaineel demanded he had his own camera! At one point, he entered this very old, beautifully designed chamber glowing in the sunlight, and I photographed him coming in, looking around the jewel-box interior and getting ready to capture the scene with his own camera.

Snapshot from Agra

When my seven-year-old son Jaineel was on school holiday, we decided to visit Agra in Uttar Pradesh, India. Agra is, of course, famous because of the Taj Mahal but it has several other interesting sights and we thought we’d explore those first. We went to the ‘Baby Taj’ on the suggestion of some locals we asked for tips. The monument is a Mughal mausoleum and was built around 1625. Some people regard it as a draft of the Taj Mahal. We spent a morning exploring the tomb’s different chambers and taking pictures – seeing how excited I get when we visit sights that I want to shoot, Jaineel demanded he had his own camera! At one point, he entered this very old, beautifully designed chamber glowing in the sunlight, and I photographed him coming in, looking around the jewel-box interior and getting ready to capture the scene with his own camera.

SANDEEP MISTRY is from Gujarat. He plans to visit 50 countries in the world before he turns 50; his twin passions are travel and photography.

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BIG ADVENTURES ON A SMALL ISLAND

Holing-up in the Cairngorms

Oliver Smith finds cold comfort on a snow-holing expedition in the Scottish Highlands

@OliSmithTravel

THERE’S NOTHING LIKE COMING IN from the cold and savouring the miracle of a solid roof above your bed.

It mattered not that, in my case, that roof was a metre of solidly packed snow. Nor indeed that the walls and floor were snow. Or that snow had, over the day, colonised my socks, underpants, ears and other remote crevices, and the water for the tea in my bedside flask had very recently been snow. Outside my snowy den, yet more snow was falling over Cairngorm Plateau. In one sense I had come in from the cold. In another, I had burrowed deep into its chilly embrace.

Snow-holing is digging a hole in the snow to create a shelter, a bit like a more spacious, less scary version of being caught in an avalanche. It’s unlike an igloo, in that it involves hollowing out a little home rather than building one. Where outside temperatures might sink to -20°C, it can reach a comparatively Caribbean 0°C inside a snow hole – enough to save a life in an emergency.

The history of snow-holing is hard to probe because, as Raymond Briggs sagely advised, things made of snow end as a sorry little puddle. In the Cairngorms, the UK’s seasonal centre of snow-holing, the philosophy seems to be ‘the bigger the better’.

Local mountain guide Andy Bateman is the Norman Foster of the Scottish snow hole. I joined him and four others one drizzly February morning to scale Cairn Gorm, laden with equipment and supplies for a night on the mountain. We carried a rolled-up tarpaulin, shovels and saws, items that to a passerby might suggest the disposal of bodies. The landscape around us was muddy and conspicuously snowless, but Andy knew of a deep bank of snow high on the north face that would cling on into late spring.

By lunchtime we had found our spot and begun to dig. Snow-hole construction is hard work. In our case it meant five full hours of shovelling, sawing, scooping and sweating. People I’ve spoken to often confuse snow holes with ice hotels: posh accommodation built of ice where you are ambushed with champagne, where the Frozen soundtrack tinkles on the Tannoy and there is the constant threat of a proposal in the air. Our snow-holing expedition had no such luxuries: there was a Tupperware box for number twos.

By teatime, the snow hole began to take shape. Two separate teams of diggers met in the middle (with a Channel-Tunnelesque shake of hands). By sunset, Andy had begun smoothing the ceilings into Gothic arches, as if it were a frozen cathedral. A few basic house rules were set (don’t stomp on the roof or wee nearby, for reasons of politeness and structural integrity), and our home for the night was ready.

As a gale gathered outside we ate chorizo stew before crawling into sleeping bags and watching candlelight illuminate the crystalline walls. Over whisky, we reflected on the wisdom of badgers and bears cocooned for the winter, and how, in a few months, our little snowy cave would be meltwater bound for the North Sea. One-by-one, snores struck up, joining in chorus at the cold heart of the mountain.

We had created a little bit of indoors in the great outdoors. And I have never slept better.

The trip in statistics

- 8 hours sleep
- 1 unused Tupperware box
- 1,245 metres of elevation (summit)

For this trip you will need...

An expert guide – novices should not attempt snow-holing under any circumstances. Andy’s company, Scot Mountain Holidays, offers four-night snow-holing expeditions (from £460; scotmountainholidays.com).

What I’ve learned

Building a snow hole means digging deep in every sense.
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Travel writer James Dorsey visits the mercado de brujas, or witches’ market, in the Peruvian capital, Lima

@agingexplorer

February 2020

Spellbound

The women arrive with the dawn, many on overnight buses from the mountains. Their traditional layered petticoats and bowler hats identify them as curanderos (healers) and they gather each week at the witches’ market in Lima, where the faithful wait to be cured.

They are from the mountains, living a life unchanged in centuries: a merging of Catholicism, the Afro-Caribbean religion of Santería and folk superstition, and also the modern world. The healers gather in a huge tent under banners that list their websites and mobile phone numbers, and photos that depict their medical specialties. Business cards detail their healing tools of eggs, coca leaves and even live guinea pigs, all of which they claim can cure anything from broken bones to cancer. Each stall offers displays of fetishes and totems that will cast spells or repel the evil eye, a belief taken seriously here.

I watch as one curandero, a plug of coca leaves tucked in her cheek, slowly passes a guinea pig over the prone body of a woman on a table, then brings it to her ear as if listening to what it has to say. The woman has complained of stomach pains, and the curandero assures her the guinea pig has identified her problem. It is cancer. Not to worry, though, as the curandero now passes an egg over the afflicted spot while chanting an incantation. The woman is then told to rise and go her way. She leaves, believing she is cured. Another man stands on his broken leg after healing hands are laid on it, and walks out of the door without a limp. A lady claims an evil spell has been cast on her unborn child so a hand-held magnet is used to suck out the offending entity. A line of patients, all waiting in faith, applaud as each patient leaves cured.

This is traditional folk medicine in its purest form, and the curanderos have practised it for generations. Lima is a world capital with modern medical facilities and ideals; its people are sophisticated city folk who hold beliefs in both the old and new. A stylishly dressed woman in heels, carrying her baby, grasps my hand as she leaves, tears streaking her face. ‘Gracias a Dios,’ she says. ‘Thank God.’
The lessons of expat life

Moving to a different country can be a struggle, both with red tape and your emotions. Anita Isalska explains how new connections can make it all worthwhile.

Social media gives the expat experience, as it does so many other things, a deceptive gloss. Scrolling through Twitter or Instagram, moving to a different country looks aspirational and brimming with possibility – but the darker side of expat life is usually cropped out of the frame.

I came to understand these highs and lows when I left the UK in 2017. I have met wonderful people and enjoyed amazing opportunities, but moving abroad requires inexhaustible reserves of optimism and resilience. My patience has been tested by visa and passport mix-ups, my belongings have been marooned on a lost shipping container. There are lonely times and tearful Skype sessions. There are frustrating exchanges with multiple tax authorities, and, if your mother’s like mine, she’ll never get your time zone quite right. Welcome to the emotional rollercoaster of expat life.

1. Paperwork becomes an Olympic sport

I never imagined that I would send my WhatsApp conversations to Australia’s immigration authority, but the path to expat life is lined with paperwork, and it leads down strange avenues.

In 2016, my partner and I decided to move to Melbourne. He was born in Australia, so my simplest route was to apply for an unmarried partner visa. Applications quickly snowballed into armfuls of admin, not to mention the online forms that cruelly timed out before I could hit ‘submit’. My visa required evidence that our relationship was genuine, and the metrics were specific. We screen-grabbed text messages (evidence of keeping in contact during periods apart), gathered postcards sent by friends (evidence of residing at the same address) and took group selfies (evidence of our shared social circle). We also needed statements vouching for us: ‘I have witnessed Anita and Matt being physically affectionate on many occasions,’ declared the stiff testimony of one friend.

2. Jet lag can strike both body and soul

After touching down in my adopted city, I wasn’t surprised when jet lag left me sleepless, groggy and hungry at all the wrong hours. But I wasn’t prepared for the...
emotional jet lag. Practically every expat maintains a mental link with their home time zone, and I was no different. At a certain point in the evening, friends and family on the other side of the world would wake and my phone would blaze with notifications. I lit up with the joy of contact, so night after night I’d stay up late to chat on social media. During the day my phone would fall silent; apart from the one person I migrated with, everyone who cared about me was asleep.

Settling in to a new place demands cutting the umbilical cord to home. I kept in touch with friends in the UK but I learned to switch off my phone. Less bleary-eyed, I devoted energy to meeting people in Australia. Gradually, my phone began to trill in the day.

3. CULTURAL DIFFERENCES WILL RECALIBRATE YOUR BRAIN

Moving to a country where you don’t speak the local language is a big leap of faith. But even when there isn’t a literal language barrier, communicating has its hurdles. Expats who migrate between Anglophone countries are not so much lost in translation as tossed on the waves of nuance. My own slang drew blank stares while my efforts to adopt Australian lingo provoked giggles.

Moving abroad is also a crash course in learning how the world sees your home country. To some, my homeland was London, Manchester United and the Queen. The UK was spoken of in the warm, gently dismissive tone that one might use about a lovably eccentric old aunt: the country had charm and a grand history but remained a sepia-tinted throwback, a little island nation past its prime. Seeing my country through the eyes of others broadened my perspective. Meanwhile, I had lessons to learn about Australia. I met protesters rallying against climate change and marching for the rights of Aboriginal people, and I emerged with a deeper understanding of Australia’s social and political battle lines.

4. ‘HOME’ TAKES ON NEW MEANING

Ask an expat where home is, and you’ll get an entire biography or a misty-eyed stare. For the first weeks after migrating, the place you’ve left still feels like home. Little by little, though, budding routines begin to transform your new location into ‘home’.

While expats are busy carving out paths across the unknown – discovering hangouts they’ll return to, meeting friends they can’t remember how they lived without – their former homes are also changing. The people there change too: they move away, marry or divorce. Babies are born and folks fall ill.

Revisiting my former neighbourhood in London, I felt like a curmudgeon lamenting good old days: my favourite café had closed, and what’s with all these new vape shops? My visits back to the UK are filled with joyous reunions and the delight of rediscovery, but also tinged with a sense of mourning. My old haunts aren’t mine. Weddings and funerals I’ve missed weigh heavily. Walking once-familiar streets, memories of my old self leap out and I’m forced to ask: who am I now?

5. LIFE ABROAD HAS A COMPLEX COST

After two years in Melbourne, an opportunity arose for my partner and I to relocate again, to San Francisco. We’ve moved across the world once, we reasoned, so why not do it again? The second time around, surely we would be pros at expat living.

Wandering this strutting peacock of a city, I get a thrill of disbelief that I live somewhere so beautiful. It’s easy to live in an expat bubble, soaking in sunshine and opportunity, before cruising out when you’ve enjoyed your fill. But San Francisco is also a complex and deeply divided city. Housing is a crisis issue, and people drawn here feed rising rents and an eye-watering cost of living. So I changed my focus: if the city and her people are my generous hosts, how can I treat them kindly?

Whether life abroad is permanent or has an expiration date, expats are duty-bound to be part of what makes a city flourish. Perhaps the moment I understood this was when San Francisco began to feel like home.
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What I’ve learned...
as a roving food writer

Anissa Helou is a London-based chef and food writer from Lebanon, known for her books on the cuisine and food culture of the Middle East, the Mediterranean, and North Africa.

There is no such thing as Islamic cuisine, but in the Islamic world there are two staples: bread and rice. In some countries it’s one or the other. Grilled meat kebabs are the common theme.

Hospitality in Muslim countries is so important that most people cook more than they need to in case family or friends drop by. It’s part of people’s faith to be hospitable. In Morocco, they have a round table so that unexpected guests can always squeeze in.

Most people, when they think of Indonesia, don’t think Muslim, even though it’s the most populous Muslim country in the world. Indonesian food is quite different from Middle Eastern food, but satay is the Indonesian version of the kebab.

Iranian cuisine is one of the greatest; I’m totally fascinated by it. It’s very intricate, elaborate, sophisticated and refined. The way they prepare rice is wonderful: it is very fluffy, and the crispy bottom is fabulous. There are so many different ways of cooking rice.

In Kashmir, I had an extraordinary meal at the sister-in-law of a friend of mine. One dish in particular was amazing: yakhni – meat cooked in yoghurt. It was basically the same dish as laban emmoh in Lebanon, which means ‘in its mother’s milk’. Her version was absolutely spectacular.

My idea of comfort food is pasta with bottarga or grey mullet roe. It’s expensive but simple and quick to prepare. Or Lebanese mahshi (stuffed vegetables), which take forever to make.

My mother didn’t actually teach me to cook. But, because I was her kitchen pest, I learned without being taught. I loved watching my mother’s beautiful hands shaping the daintiest and most perfect triangle fatayers (right), then delicately picking them up to line on a baking sheet. I didn’t want to cook when I left Lebanon when I was young, because I didn’t want men to depend on me for their meals.

Initially, my ambition was to write like Simone de Beauvoir. I became a food writer by chance. I thought I could write a book on Lebanese food using my mother’s recipes, and it would be useful to the young Lebanese who had to leave the country because of the civil war in the ’70s and ’80s.

I like to eat in California because of its combination of fabulous produce, great attention to freshness, seasonality, and wonderful chefs cooking beautiful food. In Los Angeles, you have the classics like Chez Panisse and Zuni Café, and I also love Cosecha for fabulous ingredient-led, simple Mexican food.

In countries where there is a serious food culture, home cooks are very resourceful. They rarely waste anything, and they’re also very good at improvising.

Knives are my passion. There’s this huge Turkish chopping knife called a zirh (pictured, top). I bought one in the city of Gaziantep, and it hangs on the wall in my kitchen – everybody is horrified when they see it!

Food is a great topic of conversation. I worked in the art world for 20 years, and when I travelled my life was glamorous but I never really got to know the people. I mean, you talk about art but not with everyone. With food, you can talk to anybody; get into a taxi, start a conversation and the driver will open up.

‘In Morocco, they have a round table so that unexpected guests can squeeze in’
52 Best Weekends Away

Your entire year's-worth of original quick breaks, mapped out right here

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Milan’s Navigli
Canal bustles
at aperitivo hour
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MARSEILLE, THE CITY

What if a sea could have a capital? In a search for the ‘most Mediterranean city in the Mediterranean’, we test the credentials of a French city founded by Greeks, whose eating habits take in all coasts, and where the sun shines more than 300 days a year.

WORDS RORY GOULDING @RGouldingTravel
PHOTOGRAPHS ADRIENNE PITTS @hellopoe
Boats at anchor next to the inlet of Vallon des Auffes.
Opposite: Mucem is a museum that is helping to revive Marseille's pan-Mediterranean links.
AT THE ENTRANCE TO MARSEILLE’S Vieux Port, the sea is having a lively day. Foamy waves slap the breakwaters and mount fruitless assaults on the ramparts of Fort Saint-Jean. It’s a radiant afternoon all the same, and every crenellation in the battlements is occupied: people seated in singles or pairs, with books, music or beer.

The fort was built to guard a harbour that has welcomed Mediterranean travellers since 600 BC, and both played a part in my own unusual reason for coming here. A few years ago I read David Abulafia’s *The Great Sea*, a history of the region, and found myself moved by tales of cities that had once been brilliant crossroads of trade and cultures, before that spark was put out. Sometimes the money simply moved elsewhere, but all too often, ugly politics turned famous Mediterranean ports that had been home to multiple languages and religions into narrower versions of themselves. When I closed my book, I wondered if there was one city where this spirit of the ‘old Mediterranean’ survives, and – warming to my theme – where I would choose as the unofficial capital of the region in the 21st century. I settled on one lead candidate, and set out to test my theory.

Fort Saint-Jean is Exhibit A, not just for its historic significance or being joyfully appropriated for Mediterranean outdoors life, but because it’s one half of Mucem – the Museum of the Civilisations of Europe and the Mediterranean. This bold statement of a museum opened in 2013, as part of Marseille’s turn as European Capital of Culture. Its main, modern component is a striking building clad in a lattice that echoes the water’s ruffled surface. When its construction was first planned, however, the city was not an obvious choice for prestige projects.

‘In Marseille’s history you had some golden periods and some darker times,’ says Adrien Joly, head of development at Mucem, over a coffee at a lattice-dappled table on the museum’s rooftop terrace. In the 19th century, the port grew rich as France’s gateway to its colonies, and after the Suez Canal opened, it was also a favourite stop for many British travellers en route to India. ‘The whole of high society would spend a night in the city, and there was always traffic and merchandise going through.’ Like most big ports, Marseille had its gritty side even at the peak of its wealth, but after WWII it went into decline as empires dissolved and air travel overtook ocean liners. The criminal underworld pictured in *The French Connection* in 1971 was just a foretaste of the city’s troubled reputation by the end of the 20th century.

‘I think we have passed our lowest point and are now going up,’ says Adrien. ‘Mucem is a symbol of Marseille trying to reconnect with its old roots.’ It isn’t the biggest project in town; that would be EuroMéditerranée, the redevelopment of five miles of docks running north from here. But Mucem has helped to boost the number of museum visits in Marseille more than 25-fold, whether that’s from once-sceptical out-of-towners or locals on a lunch break, strolling the dizzying ramparts and walkways.

CITY OF TRAVELLERS

One of the nicknames for the local football club and all-round obsession Olympique de Marseille is ‘les Phocéens’. It’s not often that a sports team comes with classical references, but – as visitors don’t have to wait long to be told – we are in the oldest city in France. Pride in Marseille’s superlatives and extreme frankness about the problems it has been through is a combination I come across several times in conversation here. By that token, city guide Corinne Semerciyan is a true Marseillaise. I meet her on La Canebière, the grand central avenue that runs down to the Vieux Port, past facades both time-worn and restored. One of the statues on the
Marseille’s Neo-Byzantine cathedral dates from the late 19th century.

Left: At work in the Vieux Port’s small fish market

*Nana du Vieux Port* sells good-luck charms made from the opercula (‘trapdoor’ lids) of turban snails. Right: A street in historic Le Panier
19th-century Palais de la Bourse is of the local-born explorer Pytheas, who discovered Britain – from the Mediterranean world’s point of view. ‘It’s important to know that the founders of Marseille didn’t come by land but by sea,’ says Corinne. It was Greek-speaking settlers from Phocaea, on the coast of what is now Turkey, who saw the potential of a natural harbour and founded the city of Massalia some 2,600 years ago. And however strong the Provençal clichés run here (bottles of pastis in cafés, a shop in the Panier district that sells only pétanque supplies), Marseille has always cast its cultural net more widely. If Pytheas is the city’s ancient hero, its most famous adventurers in foreign lands of recent years have been Eric Cantona, with family roots in Sardinia and Barcelona, and Zinedine Zidane, born in the northern suburbs to Algerian Kabyle parents. Corinne herself is of Armenian descent, another community with a long presence in the city. ‘La Canebière is to Marseille what the Champs-Élysées are to Paris,’ she says. ‘The name comes from the word for hemp – like cannabis. It was grown in the marshes here and used to make ropes for ships.’ We walk down to the harbour, where people stop to take reflected selfies under the mirrored ceiling of Norman Foster’s Ombrière, and a handful of fish stalls are the last heirs of a millennia-old tradition. The old-fashioned fishing boats still dotted around follow an Italian design, with a rather phallic ornament at the bow that’s meant to be a fertility symbol. There are more innocuous talismans here too: the Eyes of Saint Lucia, spiral-patterned lids from a species of sea snail, sold for more than six decades by a local legend, ‘Nana du Vieux Port’.

Her sales patter is a masterclass in the Marseillais accent, and like many locals born in Le Panier she has Italian ancestry. The crowded district on the north side of the Vieux Port used to have a quarter known as ‘Little Naples’, but in 1943, Nazi forces and their collaborators decided the streets behind the quays were an irredeemable nest of resistance, and dynamited the lot. Further up the hill, the surviving part of Le Panier is picturesque but not completely prettified. Wooden shutters in faded pastels open onto narrow, shaded streets, decorated liberally with ornamental plants and graffiti.

Marseille’s cathedral stands further down the hill, but in the city’s affections it loses out to a basilica that crowns the skyline on the opposite side of the Vieux Port. A giant, gilded statue of the Madonna and Child has watched the comings and goings in the harbour from the top of Notre-Dame de la Garde for the last 150 years. ‘It’s a Roman Catholic church, of course,’ says Corinne. ‘But for the people of Marseille it’s like a temple. We make ex-voto offerings, including models of ships. Even Muslims will come to place a candle there.’

**OPPOSITE SHORES**

Marseille is 430 miles from the Algerian coast, only 20 miles further than the distance to Paris. Since the coming of railways and good roads, we have largely forgotten that the smoothest transport once ran on water. On a map, the Mediterranean looks like a ragged division between landmasses: Europe to the north, Africa to the south, Asia to the east. But for most of its human history, peoples along its shores had closer links with each other than with the hearts of their respective continents. It’s true that even before land transport improved, the idea of a religious divide along the Mediterranean, between Christianity and Islam, weakened bonds across the sea. Unusual alliances still cropped up, however: in the 16th century, Marseille was the base...
Ex-voto offerings of model boats hang from the mosaic-adorned ceiling in the basilica of Notre-Dame de la Garde.
for a joint Franco-Turkish fleet, aimed at their common enemy, Spain.

Most of the immigration to the city from the south side of the Mediterranean has happened in the last 60 years, and mirrored the reach of the French Empire: Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, and further afield Senegal, Côte d’Ivoire, Cameroon and Mali. In the Noailles district, there are plenty of opportunities to pick up North African syrupy sweets or West African hairstyles in shops along the central Rue d’Aubagne.

The Egyptian community in Marseille is smaller, somewhere over 2,000 people, but it has lucked out with its dedicated cultural association. Near the eastern end of La Canebière, Nour d’Égypte is run by husband-and-wife team Tamer and Agnès Shabana. They began with concerts, Arabic language courses and calligraphy classes, then opened a ‘cantina’ serving Egyptian meals, and have more recently expanded with a deli. When Egyptian-born Tamer came to France, there was nothing of this sort. ‘Imagine you arrive in a country, and don’t know the language and don’t know people,’ he says. ‘I wanted to create a place where you could start, as if you had been welcomed into an Egyptian house.’ Above the cantina with its patterned tiles and brass lamps is a first-floor terrace that matches the love of rooftop life in Egypt and other parts of the Mediterranean. Strains of music drift up from below – Umm Kulthum, the great Egyptian classical diva of the 1940s and ‘50s, dubbed the ‘fourth pyramid’.

Tamer sees not just the historical links between France and Egypt, but also a kinship between two millennia-old ports at opposite ends of the Mediterranean. Alexandria feels a lot like Marseille, with its buildings in the Haussmann style,” he says. ‘You have a similar climate, and similar rhythms of life. It seems not too foreign.’ Agnès, at least, is firmly rooted in Marseille. ‘Now many people like this city, but before you either loved it or hated it,’ she says. ‘I wouldn’t live anywhere else in France.’

**MELTING POT**

I come round further to her point of view as I take the steepest bus ride I’ve ever experienced up the hill to Notre-Dame de la Garde, which feels much higher from its panoramic terrace than it appears from the quayside of the Vieux Port. Inside is a golden mosaic ceiling that would have done a Byzantine emperor proud, and hanging from it are garlands of miniature wooden ships. It’s a feast day, and standing room only. Overwhelmed by the crowds and incense, I head outside to the wrap-around balcony.

Marseille has one of the most impressive natural settings of any European city, with great outcrops of pale rock all around, and offshore islands including the Château d’If, the notorious prison in *The Count of Monte Cristo*. I am drawn back down to the coast by the promise of bouillabaisse, the rich seafood stew that was supposedly invented in the Vieux Port as a way to use up all the fish that was too ugly to sell. These days it’s an event of a meal, but one that many chefs cut corners on. Chez Fonfon is a place to satisfy traditionalists: in a light-filled restaurant overlooking an inlet crowded with small boats, waiters patrol with a big white tureen for top-ups of the broth. Many dishes have a similar origin story – a humble recipe driven by working needs, later ‘discovered’ and fancified for a white-tablecloth setting. But even the landward flavours of this ambiguous dish make up a Mediterranean journey in miniature, from robust garlic to costly saffron, via tomato, fennel and olive oil. Diners begin by floating little crouton rafts in the soup, weighted
‘I wanted to create a place where you could start, as if you had been welcomed into an Egyptian house’

Léa Skenadji works at Balady, the deli linked to Nour d’Égypte.

Opposite: The start of the long walk down from Notre-Dame de la Garde.
with spoonfuls of aioli or rouille sauce, before tackling a separate plate of rascasse (scorpionfish) and other inhabitants of the Mediterranean’s rocky recesses.

Afterwards, I wander outside to the Vallon des Auffes, where the boats sway in unison as if the inlet were breathing in and out. Passing under the stone-arched bridge that carries the coast-hugging Corniche Kennedy, I reach a cove where the clear water is broken by the splash of people diving from the rocks or by the slow wakes from stand-up paddleboards. Above it on one side is a 1920s monument dedicated to France’s WWI deaths ‘in the Orient and distant lands’, shaped like a gateway that frames the sea horizon.

Marseille’s grander constructions feel all the more surprising given that it hasn’t governed a country of its own – not even Provence – since Julius Caesar conquered it in 49 BC. The city it lost its independence to is also the only one that has ever ruled all the shores of the Mediterranean at once. But as an official capital of the region, Rome had one glaring flaw: it lies inland, separated from views of the great, wide blue. In Marseille, by contrast, the sea fills roadside panoramas, the leisure hours of its inhabitants, their dinner tables and their stories. I feel that the vacancy for the Mediterranean’s crown has gone on long enough, even if it would be hard to get all Marseillais to agree. This isn’t a city that vies to be a capital, and surely that’s the best kind of capital there is.

Rory Goulding travelled with support from Atout France. He was glad to have a chance to practise his French, and his pétanque.

Opposite: A meal of bouillabaisse at Chez Fonfon comes in two courses
GETTING THERE
Various airlines fly to Marseille Provence airport from the UK (from £75; easyjet.com). Marseille’s main station is the terminus for rail journeys from London on Eurostar and TGV – the quickest make the trip in under seven hours, including transfer time in Lille or Paris. There are three or four direct London to Marseille Eurostar trains per week from May to mid-September, taking 6½ hours (from £120; eurostar.com).

GETTING AROUND
Much of central Marseille is walkable, if hilly. Two metro lines, two tram lines and plenty of buses make up the remainder – a Pass XL for £9.50 allows unlimited rides for 72 hours (rtm.fr). A Marseille Pass (£32 for 48 hours) adds discounts at museums and other attractions.

WHERE TO STAY
Three blocks back from the old harbour, Vertigo Vieux-Port is a hostel with an extra degree of style, thanks to such touches as murals by local artists and architectural features including original wooden beams in the dorms and private rooms (double room from £50; hotelvertigo.fr).

Hôtel Maison Montgrand and its two annexes occupy a street of 18th- and 19th-century houses in one of central Marseille’s grander districts. Bedrooms have pared-back furnishings and colour schemes, while the breakfast room has the tall ceilings and vintage ornament of an elegant salon. The bamboo-filled garden courtyard is a highlight, with a corner for playing boules (from £95; hotel-maison-montgrand.com).

A former hospital in an 18th-century building has found new use as the InterContinental Marseille – Hôtel Dieu. From its hillside perch in Le Panier, it has a commanding view toward the Vieux Port. Earth tones in the bedrooms echo the city’s on-show geology (from £190; marseille.intercontinental.com).

FURTHER INFORMATION
Our Provence & the Côte d’Azur guidebook (£13.99) covers Marseille in its chapter on Bouches-du-Rhône, which you can also download as a stand-alone PDF (£2.99; shop.lonelyplanet.com). For more trip ideas, see marseille-tourisme.com and france.fr.
MARSEILLE IN SIX EXPERIENCES

1. Take in a changing Marseille along with superb sea views at Mucem – the Museum of the Civilisations of Europe and the Mediterranean. Though its permanent collection on display is comparatively small so far, it augments this with changing exhibitions on topics as varied as the Tunisian Revolution, the art of Jean Dubuffet or a history of toys in Marseille (£8.50; mucem.org).

2. Explore the streets of Le Panier, stopping at shops such as Le Bazar de César, which sells olive oil soap (lebazardecesar.com), and Maison de la Boule, for all metallic ball needs (museedelaboule.com). La Vieille Charité is a gorgeous, arcaded 17th-century former almshouse now home to museums of Mediterranean archaeology and arts (entry from £4; vieille-charite-marseille.com).

3. Long in city legend and short in transit, Le Ferry Boat (pronounced ‘boîte’ in French, like the word for box) still shuttles across the Vieux Port at ten-minute intervals, surviving many attempts to end the 140-year-old service (single fare 45p). From its southern pier beside Place aux Huiles, it’s a short walk to Sylvain Depuichaffray, a patisserie and café serving croissants and more elaborate tarts (sylvaindepuichaffray.fr).

4. At the foot of Rue d’Aubagne, Maison Empereur has been running since 1827, and is stocked with all the kitchenware and other household goods you never knew you needed, from grapefruit knives to pastry crimpers (empereur.fr). Nearby Épicerie L’idéal (pictured) sells vinegars, oils, pasta and other regional staples, and also serves light meals (epicerielideal.com).

5. Let the Shabana family welcome you to the opposite end of the Med at Nour d’Égypte; its cantina and roof terrace are popular for Sunday brunch (mixed platter £11; nourdegypte.com). Stroll up Boulevard Longchamp to reach Parc Longchamp, a rare expanse of greenery in central Marseille, fronted by a colonnaded building that’s the height of 19th-century pomp.

6. You’ll see plenty of restaurants in town touting bouillabaisse, but beware cut-price promises. Among the cabanons (fishermen’s cabins) huddled around the inlet of Vallon des Auffes, Chez Fonfon is a legitimately famous place for the two-part fish stew, and – untypically – there is no minimum group size to order it here (bouillabaisse £46pp; chez-fonfon.com).
Drop-out weekends

From rolling dunes to remote cottages, calming forests to castaway islands, these peaceful places are perfectly suited to a weekend of wellness. Turn up, turn off...

1. Camp-out at the edge of Spain

For most pilgrims bound for northwestern Spain, the holy city of Santiago de Compostela is the final destination. Venture a few miles further west, out into the Atlantic, and you’ll find sanctuary in the Cíes Islands (pictured right) – a pilgrimage point for migratory birds, in whose waters whales and dolphins are often seen. With no cars, no hotels and a cap on visitor numbers, solitude is sacrosanct here. Take a ferry from the port of Vigo before filling a couple of days climbing to its lonely lighthouses, exploring coves where pirates once lay at anchor, and pitching your tent beside its crescent-shaped beaches (camping is the only way to accommodate yourself on these islands).

Tent hire from £42 per day; campingislascies.com

2. Pitch up in distant Saharan Sands

The Sahara sprawls across more than three million square miles – you couldn’t see all of them in a weekend, of course, but you can get a taste at Erg Chigaga (pictured above) – a sand dune system on the northwestern cusp of the desert in Morocco, a universe away from the clamour of Marrakesh (and, come to think of it, the rest of the wider world). Deep in the dunes is the Erg Chigaga luxury desert camp: a cluster of Berber tents in total solitude. You might choose to escape the midday heat in palatial pitches with Moorish furnishings, spending balmy evenings camel riding in search of oases, or nights by the campfire under starlit skies, listening to the winds in the sand.

Three-day tours of Erg Chigaga Desert Camp out of Marrakesh from £620pp, with two travelling; desertcampmorocco.com

3. For most pilgrims bound for northwestern Spain, the holy city of Santiago de Compostela is the final destination. Venture a few miles further west, out into the Atlantic, and you’ll find sanctuary in the Cíes Islands (pictured right) – a pilgrimage point for migratory birds, in whose waters whales and dolphins are often seen. With no cars, no hotels and a cap on visitor numbers, solitude is sacrosanct here. Take a ferry from the port of Vigo before filling a couple of days climbing to its lonely lighthouses, exploring coves where pirates once lay at anchor, and pitching your tent beside its crescent-shaped beaches (camping is the only way to accommodate yourself on these islands).

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The Japanese art of shinrin-yoku translates as ‘forest bathing’—nothing to do with woodland bathtubs, it instead focuses on the restorative effects of spending time in the forest. If you don’t fancy the stress of a long-haul flight to the Land of the Rising Sun, you can instead make for the Urnatur retreat (pictured left), in the more convenient but equally peaceful woods of central Sweden. Here, forest bathing weekends comprise an agenda of meditation, lying in hammocks gazing up at the forest canopy and interludes for traditional Chinese qigong meditation. Weekend forest dwellers sleep in a choice of turf-roofed huts, a Japanese-inspired cabin, and even tree houses perched high in the pines, with nesting birds as your neighbours.

Two-day retreats from £235pp, double-sleeper treehouse from £600 for two nights; urnatur.se

Ty Uchaf is set on an old Roman road that crosses Snowdonia. The cottage can only be reached by a 15-minute stroll up the hill from the parking place. The path leads you along higgledy-piggledy flagstones, past oak woodlands and tumbling streams. The reward is a 17th-century cottage adrift from the world below: with no television or wifi, silent but for the bleating of sheep. Days might be spent stomping the mountainous slopes around Betws-y-Coed, and nights whiled away in the cottage, listening to the crackle of the stove.

Three nights from £146, sleeps two; landmarktrust.org.uk
6

Plan a Renaissance hillwalk to Florence

Tuscan hills – a distant silhouette of spires, towers and terracotta rooftops – and without another tourist in sight. InnTravel offers a three-day self-guided walking holiday through the Mugello Hills to Florence, along old drovers’ roads and through vineyards and olive groves. Midway, hikers stay in Fiesole – the town whose prospect of Florence (pictured) inspired Old Masters, and was immortalised in EM Forster’s A Room with a View. Its balconies and verandas are a fine place to rest weary legs and see the Tuscan capital (and indeed the world) afresh. ✦ Three-day itinerary from £565pp; inntravel.co.uk

7

Cast-away off Iceland

A mile long and a quarter of a mile wide, Flatey translates from Icelandic, rather drably, as ‘flat island’ – though that’s not its distinguishing geographical feature. It’s stubbornly parked in the North Atlantic – a 90-minute ferry ride from the Icelandic mainland – and its colourful houses, pebbly bays and windswept meadows are the perfect place to disappear off the map for a weekend, right on the farthest reaches of Western Europe. Become a castaway, and you might meet some (or indeed all) of its six year-round inhabitants, check in at the solitary hotel housed in old harbour warehouses, or plan a coast-to-coast mini-expedition, with no company but the Arctic terns and puffins who call Flatey home. ✦ Flatey’s hotel opens June to August, rooms from £210; hotelflatey.is
Olympic weekends

Get into gear for Tokyo 2020 by strolling the length of a marathon or learning how to kayak a white-water river. These Olympic-inspired weekends see amateur athletes win golden memories instead of gold medals.

Slovenia’s River Soča offers the kind of white-water no artificial course can contrive – an aquamarine current, foaming waterfalls and the peaks of the Julian Alps as the spectators. Channel the spirit of Olympians as you join a two-day kayaking course from the adventure hub Bovec, learning how to navigate the rapids as you splash southward through karst landscapes towards the Adriatic. Leave at least an afternoon to dry off in the Slovenian capital, Ljubljana – climb the castle hill, idle under café parasols, or cross its Triple Bridge, from which you can watch the far more serene River Ljubljanica drift on by.

+ Two-day kayaking courses from £110; raftingslovenia.com
If Olympic cycling in Japan gives you a hankering for an epic bike ride on a faraway archipelago, head to the new Hebridean Way (pictured left) – a cycling route the length of the Outer Hebrides. At 185 miles, it’s a shade longer than the men’s road race in Tokyo, and its ten islands, two ferry rides and six causeways might be a bit much for a long weekend. If you’d rather take it easy, stick to the Isle of Lewis and Harris, pedalling south from Stornoway until the summits of North Harris rise over the boggy landscape. Spend the night in Tarbert before arriving at the beaches of South Harris, and lose hours listening to the cycle of the tides.

Sport-climbing will be one of five new disciplines making their Olympic debuts in Tokyo this summer. When dawn breaks for the athletes in the Land of the Rising Sun, the last rays of the day will be lighting up the craggy Atlantic coast of Ireland. It’s here, amid the karst scenery of The Burren, that the most wide-ranging of Go Beyond Adventure’s three Irish rock-climbing courses takes place. An often eerie landscape of fissured limestone gives plenty of material to cover over two days, whether for novices or old climbing hands. Come evening, catch a traditional music session in one of the pubs around the village of Doolin.

Get to grips with Irish geology the active way

The national unity and jubilation of London 2012 may feel like a lifetime ago – so do your best to bring it back, re-enacting famous feats of athleticism at the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, where facilities are open to the public. Book a cycling experience at the indoor velodrome to channel the spirit of Victoria Pendleton, freestyle like Michael Phelps with a splash in the London Aquatics Centre or make like Mo Farah, joining a hosted run round the park. If minimal-effort, backside-based speed records are more your thing, climb to the top of the ArcelorMittal Orbit tower for a ride on the world’s fastest tunnel slide, whizzing high over the London Stadium and the River Lea without so much as breaking a sweat.

The section from Padstow to Fistral Beach in Newquay is almost exactly the length of a marathon – with the added bonus that, unlike Olympic runners, you can stop for pints, pasties and pee breaks, or indeed a night or two of sleep. Departing Padstow, you’ll pass the sands of Harlyn Bay and Constantine Bay, craggy sea stacks and windy headlands, stopping for the night at the National Trust Beach Head Bunkhouse (or, a few miles further on, the more luxurious The Scarlet at Mawgan Porth). On the second day, continue due south to Newquay, where the surfers’ haunt of Fistral Beach offers fish and chips at the finishing line.
Ski on the rooftops of Copenhagen

If the waste incinerator is the star attraction of a city, chances are you might want to reconsider your holiday plans. That school of thinking doesn’t hold sway in Copenhagen however, with the recent opening of CopenHill – a waste-to-energy plant on the island of Amager, topped by the world’s most peculiar artificial ski slope. It may not have the glamour of sometime Winter Olympic resorts like St Moritz and Innsbruck, but skiers can at least hit the slopes year round, enjoying views from the piste over the docks of the Danish capital, and planning après-ski in waterfront Nyhavn beyond. Alternatively, while you’re on Amager, take a detour south to the Kastrup Sea Bath – a striking conch-shaped structure, and the perfect place for a heat of cold-water swimming in the Øresund strait.

† Skiing from £5 per hour; copenhill.dk, visitcopenhagen.com
2 Days In 4 Ways

A city rich in adventures, New York offers limitless possibilities for weekend fun. Here, four in-the-know locals – a dancer, a chef, a mixologist and a curator – give us their unique takes on a perfect weekend.

ASTOLDTO ORLA THOMAS @OrlaThomas
PHOTOGRAPHS MATT DUTILE @mattdutile
New York is a city of opportunities. People come here from all over the world to achieve their dreams and I love the diversity that creates: the sense of constant cultural exchange.

The dancer Yannick Lebrun is a modern dancer with Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater (alvinailey.org). Originally from French Guiana, he moved to New York 15 years ago and lives in Washington Heights.
FRIDAY NIGHT
When not performing, you’ll often find me in the audience. A favourite venue is the New York City Center (nycitycenter.org), a historic building with a varied season: concert dance as well as Broadway productions. The Joyce Theater (joyce.org) in Chelsea is another amazing venue – it’s a small stage, with performers and audience so close it gives a real sense of warmth. After, I’d eat at TAO Downtown (taodowntown.com), which serves Asian fusion food. I eat healthily but I don’t have a strict regimen; I like fried rice. Later I’d head to Le Bain (lebainnewyork.com) a rooftop club at the top of the Standard Hotel, for a vodka and ginger nightcap. It’s a super-cool place with fantastic views over the Hudson River. There’s a tiny pool, so people party until they end up in the water.

SATURDAY MORNING
Around noon, I’d have brunch – a big thing in New York. The Wild Son (thewildsonnyc.com) is beautiful. It’s a cozy space with healthy juices and good pancakes. Afterwards, I’d walk around the Meatpacking District, admiring the architecture and stopping by some of the cute shops. I can always find unique sneakers at Sneakersnstuff (pictured right; sneakersnstuff.com) and the design is fantastic. It’s like an Apple Store, with huge glass doors, and shoes displayed on wood tables. I love a comfortable sneaker, for walking or rehearsing ballets.

SATURDAY AFTERNOON
When I want to relax, I head to Central Park’s Sheep Meadow (centralparknyc.org): a huge, calm, green space where I go to reconnect with nature. I like to take off my shoes and feel the grass beneath my feet. If the weather is cold I’d walk among Soho’s small streets instead. Vive la Crêpe (vivelacrepe.fr) is a great spot for a crêpe and a coffee; I enjoy finding French things in the city. Back home our culture is a mix of French and Creole, and my mum used to make crêpes. Nutella-banana is the best.

SATURDAY EVENING
Diverse, with a great vibe and people, Harlem is where I feel most at home. People will come all the way from Brooklyn for a night at the Red Rooster (redroosterharlem.com). You’re drawn in from the street by the music, you can see people inside having a great time. Everybody’s chill, and the decor looks like a vintage bazaar – full of antique cameras and clocks, portraits of black icons and old books – so it doesn’t feel uptight. Their restaurant is great quality (try their chicken and waffle) and, underground, there’s an atmospheric place to dance. I love a good beat to dance to.

SUNDAY MORNING
I’d start with eggs benedict at Community Food & Juice (communityrestaurant.com). Everything is so fresh, the staff are friendly and, at one of the shared tables, you feel part of a community. Later, I’d work out, or head for an appointment downtown. When preparing for a season I book a class at Gyrotonic on Broadway (gyrotoniconbroadway.com). This is a practice that allows you to build strength and reach maximum flexibility. Alternatively, I might have a session at Advanced Cryo NYC (advancedcryonyc.com). Cryotherapy is a tool for muscle recovery. You step into a tube and the temperature is brought down to -170˚C for three minutes. It’s intense, but afterwards I have less tension. For pure relaxation, I’d head for Aire Ancient Baths (pictured above; beaire.com) in Tribeca. It’s very dark, with flickering candles, and pools at different temperatures – I like the flotation one, with Dead Sea salt.

SUNDAY EVENING
I’d end with a cocktail and a performance at the Blue Note Jazz Bar (bluenotejazz.com), where legendary musicians come to play. I like the atmosphere of this area around Washington Street Park. It’s on the edge of Greenwich Village but more laid-back, and full of tattoo shops. At Caribbean restaurant Negril Village (negrilnyc.com) there’s some crossover with French Guianese cuisine. I’d order shrimp roti or curried chicken, and a rum punch. I do love a rum punch, and it’s the perfect fuel for some fun in the club downstairs, listening to dancehall reggae and feeling a little bit closer to home.
The chef
Emily Yuen is executive chef of modern Japanese restaurant Bessou (bessou.nyc). From Vancouver, she has lived everywhere from Singapore to Melbourne, and now calls Williamsburg, Brooklyn, home.

FRIDAY NIGHT
One of my favourite places in my neighbourhood of Williamsburg is Aurora (aurorabk.com) a casual Italian restaurant that’s really seasonal. Every year they do a very simple and fresh fava bean, mint, lemon and ricotta salad, and they always have great bread. After, I’d head to Fresh Kills (freshkillsbar.com) but I don’t drink alcohol, so I’d order one of their mocktails; I still want to feel included when I’m out with my friends. I like their Old Tom Gin, made with ginger, lime juice, mint and soda water and served with candied ginger on a stick. It’s fresh and citrusy, not too sweet.

SATURDAY MORNING
I’d go out for breakfast or brunch at Reunion (reunionyc.com), a Mediterranean place around the corner from my house where I know the owners. I like to support local businesses, and they do a really great shakshuka, a Middle Eastern baked eggs dish, served with challah (pictured right). It’s a comforting place, with lots of little knick-knacks on display – radios, a bike hanging from the wall – and cookbooks about Tel Aviv food. After, I’d wander over to McCarren Park Greenmarket (grownyc.org/greenmarket) in Greenpoint to look at all the produce; everything from radishes to
SUNDAY MORNING

I’d have breakfast at home, probably English muffins (which my husband and I acquired a taste for while living in London) topped with butter, jam, bacon and a fried egg; an Americanised British breakfast that’s sweet, salty and so good. Then I’d head to Chelsea Market (chelseamarket.com), which is full of grocery and other stores and different places to eat; my favourite is Los Tacos No.1 (lostacos1.com); I’d get one of their hibiscus sodas and an El Pastor pork taco with pineapple, adding radishes and salsa verde before eating standing at the counter. Mexican food isn’t that good in Canada, but when I moved here I started eating a lot more of it because it’s much more authentic. Afterwards I’d head to Seed + Mill (seedandmill.com) which specialises in halva and tahini. I’d get a soft-serve tahini ice-cream topped with halva crumbles.

SUNDAY EVENING

If I’m not at home, hosting friends, I’d eat at Hanon (facebook.com/hanonbrooklyn), which specialises in udon. They hand-make their noodles, which always taste really fresh and chewy: the texture you’re looking for in udon. Their signature noodle is made from barley shoots and bamboo, so it’s dark green and tastes a little bit more earthy. On a Sunday I want to be somewhere I know, somewhere comforting and easy, to ease myself gently into the week.
The mixologist

Lynnette Marrero is a freelance beverage director and consultant for clients including the Peruvian-inspired Llama Restaurant group – which includes Llama Inn, Llama San and Llamita. Born and raised in Brooklyn, she’s been a mixologist for 15 years and now lives in the Lower East Side.

New York is a place with a beat – and it moves. If you take a metro somewhere and then start walking and exploring, you’ll get so much more out of the city. Peer in the windows, see where people are going and make your own wonderful discoveries.
FRIDAY NIGHT
To unwind after work, I’d make a reservation at Banzarbar (banzarbar.com), a secret bar upstairs at Freemans Restaurant that has a beautifully curated menu focused on food and drink pairings and lower-proof cocktails. Eryn Reece uses champagnes and verjus – a byproduct of winemaking – to create some unique flavours. It does this crazy octopus dish called ‘the kraken’ and a drink made with mastika, a Greek ingredient rarely used in cocktails. The interior has an expedition feel, with objects like a rattan chair and a spear creating a look of colonial collectivism. Plush stools sit at the round bar, which I think is more social; you can see the choreography of the bar and feel part of what’s happening.

SATURDAY MORNING
I’m going to do what everyone wants to do on a Saturday morning: get brunch. I’d head to Russ & Daughters Café (russanddaughters.com) for a classic smoked fish bagel. It’s an elegant spot, with simple white walls and a long shelf full of fermenting items like peppers and beets. A really good pickle is an icon of New York: it’s part of the immigrant culture brought in, but a fun West Village quirkiness too. I’d get a snack to tide me over; at The Whitney (whitney.org) is one of the city’s best museum experiences, and walking there from the West Village over cobblestone streets is charming, a taste of old New York. I’d head first to the top floor bar, which has views over the Hudson River, and get an Aperol spritz. It’s the perfect museum cocktail: light, fresh and colourful. I’d sit outside, looking over the sculptures, before exploring its collection of American Art. I especially like the Warhols, and there’s always something interesting going on.

The best part of New York is walking around, hitting a destination and then stopping for another cocktail. Next I’d head over to Katana Kitten (katanakitten.com), a Japanese-American bar with a really good beer list and highball menu. My favourite is the shiso gin and tonic which, like many of its drinks, is bright and colourful. The bartenders are very playful and the look of the place is ‘Japan’ in that there’s a bit of pop culture brought in, but a fun West Village quirkiness too. I’d get a snack to tide me over; the cruditées are so good, cut just right.

SATURDAY EVENING
New York has little pockets where great things cluster, and Doyers Street is one such. Chinese Tuxedo (chinesetuxedo.com) is in a former opera house and everything, from the food to the hospitality to the design, is wonderful. It’s a great place for sharing small dishes, and every one is spot-on, especially the mushroom dumplings. It’s usually pretty packed so I’d sit at the bar to watch the mixologists work. I love the Terracotta Warrior cocktail – it’s made with raicilla, which is distilled from agave, but has more earthiness than tequila.

Later I’d walk a few blocks west to The Django (thedjangonyc.com), an elegant, tucked-away room where you can get a classic cocktail like a martini and hear some awesome jazz. The other night I walked in on a twelve-piece band doing their thing and it was like I’d stumbled on Wynton Marsalis in his prime – but it was their open mic night.

SUNDAY MORNING
My guilty-pleasure-dive-bar is Mother’s Ruin (motherstruinnyc.com), which does a killer all day brunch and a really good falafel burger, and bloody marys. There’s always a young artist playing and its cocktails are given funny names – their slushie machine is called Kathleen Turner. It’s as fun at three in the afternoon as it is at three in the morning.

SUNDAY AFTERNOON
Starting to wind down, I’d hit a few of my favourite bars in the Lower East Side, maybe Fat Radish (thefatradish.com) for a cocktail or Bacaro (bacaronyc.com) for a glass of wine. I like to walk the smaller sidestreets, where you’ll find more local people and discover special things. I’ll end up at Il Posto Accanto (pictured below; ilpostoaacantanyc.com) for a light dinner. Its meatballs are incredible – you can smell them cooking from morning – as is their Italian wine list. The staff hasn’t changed in 15 years, easily; it’s run by a tattooed Roman woman called Beatrice and her husband Julio, a Dominican New Yorker. You get this vibe of a place and people who’ve been in the city forever.
The curator

Cecilia Alemani is director and chief curator of High Line Art, a public art programme (thehighline.org). Italian, she swapped Milan for New York 15 years ago, and has always lived downtown – in the Lower East Side or the East Village.

FRIDAY NIGHT

Around 6pm I’ll head to Angel’s Share (8 Stuyvesant St), a speakeasy in the East Village, hidden behind the nondescript dining room of a Korean restaurant – for a cocktail before it gets too crowded. New York bars tend to be loud, but this is somewhere you can have a conversation; a place with a magical atmosphere. One drink, Smoke gets in your eyes, is made with Japanese whisky and comes with a burning piece of charcoal under the glass. I enjoy the ritual.

SATURDAY MORNING

My job is also my passion: I do art all weekend. One of my favourite places is Governors Island (pictured below; govisland.com), which you can reach by ferry. In the 1800s it was used as a military base, but in the last ten years it’s been turned into a public park. It’s a surreal place, where you can experience an old, mysterious side to the city. There are remnants of a fort, military barracks, an abandoned pool, and breathtaking views of Manhattan skyline, just as you see it in the movies. You forget you’re in a city because, there, you’re not. No tall buildings, no cars; you can rent a bike or a tricycle, or set out on foot. I always seek out the commission by the British artist Rachel Whiteread. She explores the idea of negative spaces that objects leave behind, and has cast the inside of a wooden cabin in cement, conjuring the romantic idea of 19th century poets who wrote in such places. It’s installed in this beautiful elevated spot, from which you can also see the Statue of Liberty.

SATURDAY AFTERNOON

I’ll have lunch at Flora (florabarnyc.com), an amazing restaurant inside the Met Breuer,
a Brutalist building designed by Marcel Breuer. Set within a basement courtyard, there’s beautiful light and extraordinary food. I particularly like the appetiser made with raw shrimp, uni (sea urchin) and seaweed; a weird thing that’s very yummy.

Next, I’d head to Soho. Built in the 1800s, this was an industrial neighbourhood, but in the 1940s the warehouses and factories started to be abandoned and in the ‘60s, artists moved in to get a cheap loft space. Now there are some incredible permanent installations of American Minimalism that, if you didn’t know they were there, you would never stumble on, like Earth Room and The Broken Kilometer (diaart.org). The movement began in New York in the ’60s and ’70s and its ‘father’ is Donald Judd, who made objects that don’t seem to be sculptures spectacular by their placement. The Judd Foundation (pictured bottom left; juddfoundation.org) preserves his living and working spaces as he left them.

SATURDAY EVENING
I’d meet a friend for dinner at Bohemian, another hidden place, in the same building as the artist Jean-Michel Basquiat’s old studio in NoHo. You usually need to be invited or recommended to get a table, but if you email them (see playearth.jp), you might just get in! The exterior is ‘downtown’ in feel (graffiti and posters), the food is inexpensive Japanese – they’re good with meat.

SUNDAY MORNING
Dim sum then galleries is a New York Sunday ritual – because they’re next to each other, it makes sense. Jing Fong (jingfongny.com) is the biggest restaurant I’ve ever been to, and eating there feels like being in a photograph by Andreas Gursky, who takes pictures of surreal places that are vast in scale. Even with seating for 800, it’s so good and so cheap there’s still a line sometimes. When it’s your turn they call you, dramatically, with a mic and seat you at a shared round table. It’s a cliché of what a Chinese restaurant looks like (red walls and hanging golden dragons) but very authentic. Ladies go around with carts piled with steaming bamboo baskets.

The Lower East Side galleries aren’t on the ground floor, so you need to know where they are and ring the bell. They take you inside places you wouldn’t normally be able to go; in Chelsea the gallery spaces are all the same, but here they’re more like apartments, some unrefurbished. Inside, you keep bumping into the same people, doing the rounds. My favourite commercial galleries are 47 Canal (47canal.us), JTT (jttnyc.com) and Participant (participantinc.org), a non-profit space that shows more underground art. You can see work by people who might be in MoMa in five years’ time, but you get to see them here for free before they’re ingested by the institutions.

SUNDAY AFTERNOON
In the evening, I’d head back to the East Village for dinner at Lucien (luciennyc.com), a restaurant that’s very much an artists’ hangout. The walls are covered with pictures of notable people that have been there, and you can get a good, inexpensive steak frites or something else very French. It’s fun, unpretentious, and you never know who you might see.
GETTING THERE
Multiple airlines fly from the UK, with prices starting from £250 (britishairways.com). Don’t forget to apply for your ESTA before heading to the airport.

GETTING AROUND
MetroCards are the swipe-cards for all of NYC’s public transport. You can purchase and add value at machines at any station (mta.info/metrocard). However, they’re being gradually phased out in favour of the contactless OMNY system (for credit/debit cards, prepaid cards or mobile app).

FURTHER INFORMATION
For short trips to the Big Apple, pick up our Pocket New York City guide (£7.99); our New York City has all your needs for a longer stay (£14.99). You can also download the guide from our Guides app. The tourist board is at nycgo.com.

VISAS
British passport holders should apply for an online ESTA (visa waiver). An ESTA lasts for two years from the date of approval. The online application normally only takes about 20 minutes (£11; esta.cbp.dhs.gov/esta).

MAP KEY
- Aire Ancient Baths
- Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater
- angel’s Share
- Aurora
- Bacaro
- Banzabar
- Bessou
- Blue Note Jazz Bar
- Brooklyn Bridge Park
- Chelsea Market
- Chinese Tuxedo
- Community Food & Juice
- Domino Park
- Downtown Boathouse
- Fat Radish
- Flora
- Fresh Kills
- Governors Island
- Gyrotone on Broadway
- Hanon
- Il Posto Accanto
- Jing Fang
- Joyce Theater
- Katana Kitten
- Le Bain
- Le Sia
- Leyenda
- Llama Inn
- Lucien
- McCarren Park
- Greenmarket
- Meet Fresh
- Mother’s Ruin
- Negril Village
- New York City Center
- Red Rooster
- Reunion
- Russ & Daughters Café
- Sheep Meadow
- Sneakersnstuff
- TAO Downtown
- The Django
- The Judd Foundation
- The Whitney
- The Wild Stag
- Vive la Crêpe

SLEEPING
- Greenwich Hotel
- Harlem Rhapsody
- TWA Hotel
New York for free

KAYAK ON THE RIVER
Downtown Boathouse on Pier 26 offers free, walk-up, 20-minute kayaking sessions (including equipment) on the Hudson River at weekends and on some weekday evenings. Check out hudsonriverpark.org for more activities here and at Piers 84 and 96, including kayaking and stand-up paddle boarding (downtownboathouse.org).

GO FOR A WALK
For an inside take on NYC, book a walking tour in the neighbourhood of your choice led by an enthusiastic local volunteer from Big Apple Greeter. You’ll be matched with a guide who suits your needs, whether that means speaking Spanish, knowing American Sign Language, or where to find the best wheelchair-accessible spots in the city. Reserve at least four weeks in advance (bigapplegreeter.org).

CATCH THE FERRY
Staten Islanders know these hulking orange ferries as commuter vehicles, while Manhattanites think of them as their secret, romantic vessels for a spring-day escape. But many tourists are also wise to the charms of the Staten Island Ferry, whose 25-minute, 5.2-mile journey between Lower Manhattan and the Staten Island neighbourhood of St George is one of NYC’s finest free adventures (siferry.com).

PLAY IN THE PARK
The 85-acre Brooklyn Bridge Park is one of Brooklyn’s best-loved attractions. Wrapping itself around a 1.3-mile bend on the East River, the post-industrial site has revitalised a once-barren stretch of shoreline, turning a series of abandoned piers into landscaped parkland with jaw-dropping views of Manhattan. There’s lots to see and do here, with playgrounds, walkways and lawns galore (brooklynbridgepark.org).

LOOK AT ART
Further cementing its status as Brooklyn’s coolest neighbourhood is the Bushwick Collective, an outdoor gallery of murals by some of the most talented street artists in NYC and beyond. The works change regularly, and can be found mainly along Jefferson and Troutman Streets between Cypress and Knickerbocker Avenues, with others along Gardner Avenue, north of Flushing Avenue (instagram.com/thebushwickcollective).

WHERE TO STAY

BUDGET
Harlem Flophouse
Harlem’s Jazz Age is reborn in this 1890s townhouse. Its four rooms are decked out with brass beds, vintage radios, and the bathrooms are shared, and there’s no air-con and or TVs (from £75; harlemflophouse.com).

MID-RANGE
TWA Hotel
Architect Eero Saarinen’s landmark 1962 TWA Flight Center at JFK airport has been revamped as a hotel that screams ‘Golden Age of Travel’. From one of NYC’s coolest pools (a rooftop plane-spotter’s paradise) to Connie (a 1958 Lockheed Constellation that’s now a cocktail bar), this is retro-traveller-geekery at its finest (from £195; twahotel.com).

TOP END
Greenwich Hotel
From the plush drawing room to a lantern-lit pool in an actual 18th-century Japanese farmhouse, nothing about Robert De Niro’s hotel is generic. Each of the 88 unique rooms has aged-wood floors and bathrooms with Carrara marble or Moroccan tiling. French windows open onto Tuscan-inspired inner courtyards in some rooms. There’s extra luxury at the upscale Shibui Spa and ‘urban Italian’ taverna Locanda Verde (from £500; thegreenwichhotel.com).
Sleep in the car

Planes, trains and automobiles can be great spots for grabbing a night’s sleep – try these weekends inside surprising, strange (and wholly stationary) ex-modes of transport.

Go off road in a camping coach in Dorset

Rail-borne comfort doesn’t get any better than the High Cross Camping Coach: a century-old carriage that once clattered along the London, Brighton and South Coast Railway and now sits in a field in Dorset. Interiors are a study in Victoriana – brass luggage racks, leather window straps and William Morris curtains. It’s perfect for jaunts along the Jurassic Coast – you could visit the ochre cliffs at West Bay, shingly Chesil Beach and picturesque Weymouth and Dorchester, terminating at the camping coach at day’s end, cosying up to the wood-burning stove.

Two nights from £210; campingcoach.co.uk

Stay in a rotor-home in Lancashire

The Westland Lynx helicopter saw action in the Falklands, Iraq and the Balkans, and now the Ream Hills Holiday Park in Lancashire. The holiday park version (pictured below) isn’t operational (you may be relieved to find a television and also a microwave sitting where the controls should be). But on the plus side, any ordinary civilian can book a weekend stay inside the X-ray Zulu 676 helicopter, and re-enact scenes from Apocalypse Now among the wooden lodges and hot tubs of a holiday park in rural Lancashire. There’s also a small veranda where you can put up a parasol precariously close to the rotor. If you fancy ascending to greater heights, take a 15-minute drive to Blackpool and climb 150m up its wrought-iron tower.

From £110 per night; reamhills.co.uk

Park up in Stuttgart’s Car Hotel

Sleeping at the wheel is encouraged at Stuttgart’s V8 Hotel, where rooms and suites are themed around motorsports, the beds formed of the chassis of illustrious cars. You might choose the Le Mans room, dream of the open road in the Route 66 room, or hose yourself down in the car-wash room (pictured above), where the brushes hang directly over the pillows. There’s plenty more to entertain petrolheads over a long weekend in Stuttgart: Porsche and Mercedes have headquarters and museums close by. Better still, hop in a car and take a spin westward, where scenic roads wind the wooded hills and fairytale towns of the Black Forest.

Rooms from £105; v8hotel.de
An old van parked in the woods might sound like a matter for the authorities rather than a classic choice for a weekend away. Unless, of course, it happens to be a half-timbered vintage Mercedes campervan, parked in a shady olive grove in Portugal’s Alto Alentejo (pictured left). Going off-grid for a weekend here has its own idiosyncrasies – water comes from a nearby spring, a hot outdoor shower comes courtesy of a solar panel on the roof, olive oil comes from a nearby farm and companionship comes from a pair of donkeys wandering the groves. Should you feel the need to venture out of your field to points further afield, the surrounding Parque Natural da Serra de São Mamede is one of Portugal’s unsung corners, with little whitewashed towns, clifftop castles and wooded hills rising towards the Spanish border.

+ ‘The Olive Grove’ from £50 per night; canopyandstars.co.uk

Book a jumbo getaway in Stockholm

On most airliners, fully flat beds come with a first-class ticket and a price of thousands of pounds. Not so at Jumbostay – a 747-200 parked between the runways of Stockholm’s Arlanda airport. The only downside is that you’ll wake up still parked on the tarmac at Stockholm. Nevertheless, this stationary hotel-in-a-plane offers thrills not commonly experienced on normal airlines – eating breakfast in a small café in the nose-cone, staying in cabins inside one of four hollowed-out jet engines, or splashing out on the cockpit suite where you can lie in a double bed and jab at the controls with your toes.

+ Engine rooms from £55; jumbostay.com
Kraków’s food scene has been enigmatic historically, but having been named European Capital of Gastronomic Culture, the city’s kitchens have drawn wider attention. Start a weekend of scoffing with traditional pierogi – Polish dumplings – of which Pierogarnia Krakowiacy serves the best in the Old Town (pierogarniakrakowiacy.eatbu.com). Head south to the old Jewish district in Kazimierz, where restaurants like Ariel serve hearty dishes from the city’s Jewish past – from beetroot soup to cholent, a traditional slow-cooked stew (ariel-krakow.pl). And, for the atmosphere as much as the food, book a table at Pod Aniolami housed in a 13th-century cellar, where meats are grilled over a beech fire (podaniolami.pl).

Georgian cuisine is a crowd pleaser: hearty dumplings, fragrant stews and wines from the nation that, locals say, pioneered viticulture. Get acquainted with the ingredients at the hectic Deserters’ Market – so named after soldiers who fled the Russian Tsar – where you can see stacked jars of pickles, smell fragrant spices and snack on lobiani (bread filled with beans) as you go. Wandering the alleyways of the Old Town you’ll find no shortage of places selling khachapuri – a kind of cheesy, egg pie that’s best explained as the Georgian answer to pizza. Try to get an evening table at Barbarestan – elaborate menus are based on a 19th-century cookbook discovered at a nearby flea market, with dishes making the most of unsung produce such as rabbit and duck.

Get to grips with Polish food history in Kraków

Wander the markets of Tbilisi

Main dishes at Barbarestan from £5; barbarestan.ge
Extremadura is the homeland of Spain’s most magnificent meat: jamón Ibérico de bellota (pictured right), made from pigs that roam the oak forests on the Portuguese border. Curiously, it’s also one of the country’s more undiscovered regions – take a gastronomic pilgrimage to Cáceres, the region’s walled capital, to tour tapas bars in search of said jamón, as well as rustic dishes such as torta del casar – sheep’s milk cheese – and stews of lamb caldereta seasoned with local paprika. One of Spain’s brightest culinary stars, multi-Michelin starred Atrio offers a high-concept take on extremeño ingredients. Otherwise, take a 30-minute drive east from Cáceres to the hilltop town of Trujillo, where you can try moreish migas – breadcrumbs cooked in pork fat and served with chorizo – while gazing out at the sprawling forests where the pigs trot.

+ Menus at Atrio from £100; restauranteatrio.com; see also turismoextremadura.com

Try new Baltic tastes in Riga

The Latvian dessert ‘rupjmaizes kārtojums’, a kind of trifle on a base of dark rye bread, is just one example of how Latvia makes use of a frugal native stock of ingredients in unexpected and satisfying ways. Eat Riga’s culinary tours dispel preconceptions of former Soviet bloc food, and much of the two hours is spent in the vast Riga Central Market, built in the 1930s. Guides help to make sense of a bewildering array of smoked fish and meat, cheeses, preserves, berries and mushrooms. Amid the more booze-focused restaurants in the historic centre, some are serious about showing off Latvian produce. For a higher-end meal Restorāns 3 puts on tasting menus that work-in complex tastes such as roast malt (restaurant3.lv). You could fill a weekend wandering the cobbled streets of Old Riga, but do visit untouristy Brasa district too, to try more authentically Latvian-sourced bites, this time as pairings with the craft brews at Valmiermuiža Beer Embassy (valmiermuiza.lv).

+ Food tours from £21pp; eatriga.lv; see also liveriga.com
Regression sessions

Depart the adult world for one weekend only – from juvenile high jinks in Jordan to learning to ride an electric bike (without stabilisers) in the Alps, these places will inspire childlike wonder in all big kids.

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Muddy the waters in Jordan
Coating yourself in mud is a staple of childhood holidays. At the Dead Sea, it constitutes acceptable behaviour among adults, too. Head to the Jordanian shore of the lake – the lowest dry point on Earth – to smother yourself with mineral-rich Dead Sea mud, the revitalising properties of which have been endorsed by Cleopatra, the Queen of Sheba and Egyptian pharaohs (for whom it was a key component in mummification). Mummification is one of the few treatments not on the menu at the Dead Sea Spa Resort, one of many places offering mud-based therapies along the shore. That said, nothing is quite as much fun as rolling around on muddy beaches and blithely bobbing about on Dead Sea waters – so salty and dense that even grown-ups float without armbands.

+ Day passes to the Dead Sea Spa Resort from £28, rooms from £55; dssh.jo

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Wind back the clock in New York
There’s nothing like the lofty skyscrapers of Manhattan to make anyone feel miniature, and it helps that the Big Apple has no shortage of landmarks to inspire childlike wonder too. Start a big kid’s weekend at the newly reopened FAO Schwarz, a luxury toy company where you can jump about on the famous walk-on piano, as Tom Hanks did in Big (faoschwarz.com). Fast-forward to the 21st century at Lower Manhattan’s Museum of Ice Cream, a series of dream-like spaces themed around ice cream and candy, including a swimming pool filled with hundreds and thousands (museumoficecream.com). And on a lazy Sunday head to the theme parks of Coney Island where you can ride the Cyclone – a rollercoaster, that’s been coaxing screams from New Yorkers since 1927 (lunaparknyc.com).

+ For more on the Stars of the White Nights 2020, see mariinsky.ru

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Stay up past your bedtime in St Petersburg
With short January days and seemingly endless winters, St Petersburg squeezes every drop out of summer: especially during the White Nights from May to July, when the light never quite goes, and locals linger at parties, never quite going to bed. Plan a midsummer weekend around the Stars of the White Nights Festival, the artistic highlight of the season, with performances of works by Wagner, Puccini and Verdi in the Mariinsky Theatre (where Russian tsars and Soviet dignitaries once watched from their boxes). Afterwards, rejoin the masses at the Scarlet Sails – a small-hours celebration on the Neva River, featuring pirate ships and fireworks – and allow a full day of sleeping before you set sail for home.

+ For more on the Stars of the White Nights 2020, see mariinsky.ru
Nærøyfjord was supposedly the place that inspired Arendelle, the setting for Disney’s Frozen. You might be disappointed (or perhaps relieved) that singing snowmen aren’t spotted very often, but it is certainly a landscape that might inspire you to burst into song: soaring cliffs, tiny scarlet farmsteads and leafy meadows, all cascading down to the cold waters of the fjord. To see it at its best, depart Oslo for the Flåm Railway, with trains trundling from the mountaintops down to sea level and the little port of Flåm. The next day, join a RIB tour skimming along Aurlandsfjord and Nærøyfjord. You won’t see any ice palaces, but there is an abundance of icy waterfalls to be seen in winter, sea eagles wheeling about the cliffs above, and keep an eye out for porpoises and seals.

Winter RIB boat rides start at £70; fjordtours.com

On paper, Austria’s Kitzbüheler Alps (pictured) aren’t the easiest spot for a cycling weekend, what with their punishing uphills and relentless switchbacks. Fortunately, they’re also part of the world’s largest e-bike circuit, with 600 miles of trails served by dozens of hire centres and recharging points. As such, with extra volts lightening the load, you can spend more time marvelling at the Tyrolean scenery of Alpine lakes, snowy peaks and whirring chairlifts, and less time delirious with fatigue. Start out in Kitzbühel, before bearing westwards for 20 miles along quiet country lanes towards Hohe Salve – a grassy peak looking out over the Zillertal Alps. At the top you’ll find a restaurant serving schnitzels and weissbier, where you can recharge your own batteries.

Electric bike hire from £34 per day; mountainedge.co.uk. For more ways to get active in the Austrian Alps, see our competition on p129

Learn to ride an (electric) bike in the Austrian Alps

See the Frozen landscapes of Norway

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The great cocktail quest

Birthplace of the aperitivo hour, nowhere does it better than Milan. We test the Italian fashion capital’s finest cocktail bars in search of the perfect pre-dinner drink.

WORDS ORLA THOMAS @orlathomas
PHOTOGRAPHS KEVIN FAINGNAERT @kevinfaingnaert
Clockwise: Aperitivo snacks at MAG Café; glasses ready for service at Marchesi; getting into the spirit at Rita’s Tiki Bar; a waiter at Bar Basso. Opposite: Pasticceria Marchesi’s signature cocktail.
Y KNOWLEDGE OF ITALIAN 
cocktail culture begins and ends with the Aperol spritz. Like many, I took up drinking these in the mid-tens, powerless to resist a marketing campaign that made the alcoholic equivalent of Tango the post-work beverage of choice. But Italy’s most famous aperitivo export belies a subtler drinks culture – and there’s nowhere better to sample it than Milan. When the clock strikes 6pm, the city collectively downs tools, its wide streets suddenly peppered with people holding drinks in traffic-light colours. By 7pm, it seems as though every Milanese citizen has a cocktail in one hand and a breadstick in the other.

The ritual of aperitivo – a pre-dinner drink served with snacks – took off here in the 1920s. The concept rose to prominence alongside Aperol’s bitterer and redder cousin, Campari, produced in the suburb of Sesto San Giovanni and a key ingredient in several classic aperitivo cocktails, including the negroni. Milan took several decades to diversify its drinks list, and the first to ring the changes was Bar Basso. It has not lost its touch: arriving one sunny evening, I have to wade through customers long before I can get to the bar. Standing outside are off-duty models in normcore trainers; men wearing nautical stripes, inked arms and seafaring beards; and women in boxy Chanel jackets clutching either a small dog or a large bag.

At the counter, surrounded by black-tied bartenders dishing out cocktails and small bowls of olives like they’re dealing cards, I find Basso’s owner, Maurizio Stochetto, drinking a Perseghetto. Made with dry vermouth, vodka, sparkling wine and peach juice, the one he hands me is light and inconspicuously boozy. Maurizio prefers it to Basso’s signature cocktail, the Negroni Sbagliato, coined by his father. Using prosecco instead of gin, it is served in a huge goblet known as the Colossus. ‘This is the first place where you could get a cocktail on a street corner,’ says Maurizio, whose family have managed the bar since 1967. ‘Originally, because drinking was not respectable, cocktail bars were small, dark booths.’ His hands spread wide to indicate Basso’s interior, its gilded mirrors and sparkling chandeliers, faux-marble floors and cabinets brimming with bottles. ‘This was something different. It took the experience made fashionable by the American jetset, drinking in the lounges of the big hotels, and brought it to a neighbourhood bar.’

Basso’s neighbours are fancier than most – Marc Newson, designer of the Apple Watch, and Nicolas Ghesquière, creative director of Louis Vuitton, have been in recently. Maurizio seems flabbergasted by Basso’s enduring appeal with Milan’s movers and shakers. ‘I was adopted by the fashion scene 35 years ago, and now Milan has become a Silicon Valley for fashion. If you stay in the same place then the world around you changes, but you still have this amazing relationship with the people who come to your place,’ he says. ‘We have clientele from all walks of life, from age 25 to 85, and many regulars.’

Our conversation is continually interrupted by them, clasping Maurizio into warm handshakes or double-kisses en route to the bar. They’re all here for the same thing, he says – a little interval from the daily business of life. ‘An aperitivo can be something you... APERITIVO: THE BASICS Aperitivo comes from the Latin verb ‘aperire’ meaning ‘to open’, referring to the drink’s intended purpose of stimulating the appetite before dinner. The aperitivo ‘hour’ generally lasts from 6–9pm in Italy, though bars start to fill up around 7pm, and one or two drinks is standard.
share with friends, or do alone, with a little more introspection. But it should be a break from work, and a prelude to something else.’

While most head for dinner nearby, I am whisked in a cab from the narrow streets and red-tiled roofs of the Città Studi to the heart of historic Milan. I jump out at the Piazza del Duomo and pause to take in the Gothic cathedral, its abundance of pinkish marble spires like an ornately iced cake. Next door is Milan’s temple to shopping, the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II. White light streams in through its curved glass ceiling, while the mosaiced floor resembles a night sky, awash with sparkling stars. Men and women in well-cut suits march across it, seemingly inured to their celestial commute. At the Galleria’s centre, shiny black Versace and Prada stores face off. Tucked above the latter, at the top of a short flight of stairs, is Pasticceria Marchesi.

With jars of sugared almonds lining its shelves and glass cabinets filled with fanciful pastries, the venue seems more suited to afternoon tea than aperitivo, but a green-uniformed waitress in a starched apron directs me to the cocktail list. I choose the house special, a Marchesi, which comes in a coupe glass decorated with a helix of lime peel and a dangling olive. Olives, nuts and coin-shaped cheese biscuits. The glass cabinets filled with fanciful pastries, the venue is as I enter, like a gatekeeper to a secret garden.

Around me, people sit around tables in small groups, engaged in conversations that seem comparatively formal after the bonhomie of Bar Basso – they appear more like business associates out for drinks than friends having a catch-up. Peering out of the window over the Galleria, I spot a young woman who seems to have over-extended her aperitivo hour. Giggling, she lowers herself to the floor, spreading her blonde hair across the mosaics to pose for a picture. Her state of disarray reminds me of Maurizio’s rule – that aperitivo should not be the event itself, but a prelude to something. Tonight, in my case, that something is bed.

**CLASSIC APERITIVO DRINKS**

Americano Composed of Campari, vermouth and soda, Gaspare Campari’s Milan bar first served these in the 1860s. Originally called a ‘Milano-Torino’ after the origins of its two key ingredients, it was renamed around the turn of the century due to its popularity with American tourists.

Negroni This epoch-defining drink was coined in 1919, when a Florentine bartender responded to Count Camillo Negroni’s request for a stronger version of the Americano. He obliged by replacing the soda with gin – that’ll do it.

**HE GALLERIA VITTORIO EMANUELE II**

Landmark is Milan’s Eiffel Tower. Its creamy colonnades are so evocative of the city, they were chosen as the motif for the wallpaper of another popular aperitivo spot, which also has a hand-painted ceiling mimicking the arcade’s glass roof. I take the Metro out to the city’s southern fringes to find the place. Noticeably emptier than Milan’s thronging central streets, Porta Romana is a former industrial area made suddenly fashionable by the 2015 opening of the Fondazione Prada. The brainchild of billionaire fashion mogul Miuccia Prada, the gallery and exhibition space in a converted gin distillery is also home to the only bar in the world designed by the filmmaker Wes Anderson: Bar Luce.

Arriving at his bar is like opening the door on a magical kingdom. It sits opposite a building covered top to bottom in gold leaf, so my eyes are already dazzled as I take a seat at one of the Formica tables surrounded by chairs upholstered in Battenberg-cake colours. Consulting a pastel-pink menu embossed with ’50s-style cursive lettering, I order a Selva Toscana, made with Sabatini gin, star anise and pear coulis, sage syrup, lemon juice and soda. Bow-tied waiters work at the mid-century bar, while people feed coins into pinball machines featuring an Anderson character, oddball oceanographer Steve Zissou.

When Bar Luce opened, Wes Anderson remarked that ’it would make a pretty good movie set [and] an even better place to write a movie.’ Tonight, there’s one likely candidate for screenwriter – a pensive young woman tapping away on a laptop – but most of the bar’s exceptionally fashionable customers are staring at their phones. The waiter arrives with my drink and olives, nuts and coin-shaped cheese biscuits. The cocktail, like the bar, is a work of art. Less fruity than Basso’s Perseghetto and less dry than the Vermouth-based Marchesi, it occupies a happy middle place.

After an hour among the intimidatingly well-dressed clientele, I feel in need of something less formal. I make a beeline for the newest opening among the Navigli canal’s run of waterside bars: Rita’s Tiki Room. A Polynesian face carved in wood greets me as I enter, like a gatekeeper to a secret garden. There is greenery everywhere – from the leaf-patterned walls to the hanging baskets cascading vines over the bar stools – and customers sip at drinks that celebrate the bounty of the tropics, garnished with huge slices of fruit, whole leaves and paper parasols. ‘People say this is a good place to forget,’ says co-owner Chiara Buzzi. ‘Here, you lose the idea of time – because it’s so unlike anything else in the city.’

The bar is a homage to Donn ‘the Beachcomber’ Beach, who became the founding father of tiki culture when he opened his eponymous bar in Hollywood in the ’30s – and staff wear Hawaiian shirts to recreate
COCKTAIL HOUR IN MILAN

Cocktails in progress at Bar Luce, designed by Wes Anderson.

Opposite: Aperitivo hour at Pasticceria Marchesi.

A Selva Toscana (left) and a One Way cocktail, served with snacks at Bar Luce.

Right: Pinball machines at the bar feature Wes Anderson characters.
versions of his recipes. The dominant liquor here is rum. I try the Pearl Diver, made with Cuba Gold Rum, orange juice, bitters and honey, which has a richness Chiara tells me comes from the use of ‘fat washing’, a technique that blends a little butter into the drink. It’s a welcome change, its kitsch presentation and sweet flavour the polar opposite of drinks generally favoured by the Milanese. ‘Donn’s vision was to create a place where everything was different, a space to forget and enjoy,’ says Chiara. ‘There’ve been a lot of openings along the Navigli recently, but they’re all posh places and that’s not what we offer. Here, you’re going to have a conversation with the person making your drink.’

**Y THE TIME I EMERGE, THE SUN IS LOW** in the sky. The light reflecting off the canal makes me blink. The pavement tables at the bars and restaurants along the water’s edge are packed, and yet more people stroll between them across the Naviglio Grande’s series of bridges. I bypass the entreating chalkboard signs and waiters offering menus – the aperitivo hour is in full swing, and I have a final destination in mind.

MAG Café has the look of an adventurer’s study, with intriguing ephemera hanging from the walls – mounted wooden animal heads and prints of Frida Kahlo – and a bike and a birdcage dangling from the ceiling. ‘All these things came from our travels. Someone goes away, they bring something back and it goes straight up,’ says manager Francesco Bonazzi, as he mixes a drink at a wooden bar procured from a South American pharmacy. He pauses to show me the signet ring that he and all staff wear on their pinkie finger. ‘It’s a little gift, because we’re like a family, and this bar is the home we share.’ The atmosphere is friendly, convivial – the bartenders work fast but still find time to joke with each other, and greet many of the newly arrived customers by name. ‘The Navigli is like a small village, everyone knows each other,’ Francesco says. ‘But at night – it becomes a party.’

It has the easy familiarity of a neighbourhood bar, but MAG Café’s drinks offering is high-concept. They produce their own botanical spirit, Farmily, bottles of which sit under the countertop, and their themed cocktail list changes every six months. Past topics have included holidays, metro stations and trading, the menu for which was designed to look like a cheque book. Their motto of ‘drink better, not more’ doesn’t change, though, and two drinks perennially on the menu are the Negroni del Marinaio (Sailor’s Negroni) and the Giappone (Japan). I opt for a Giappone, the pale, fresh-looking drink garnished with a sage leaf.

Combining the clean flavours of gin with heady dashes of absinthe and the bubbly fire of ginger beer, it’s quite unlike anything I’ve encountered before. Francesco takes in my reaction eagerly, grinning like a proud parent as he pushes a plate of cured meats, cheese and grissini in my direction. I’ve found a way to drink better – let’s not be coy: it’s the best – and I might just need one more.
Ephemera on display at MAG Café. Left: Two of the bar’s signature cocktails, a Sailor’s Negroni (to the right) and a Japan
GETTING THERE

Milan is served by three airports – the closest to the city is Linate, while Malpensa and Bergamo are a 50-minute drive away. Alitalia, BA, easyjet and Ryanair fly to the city from the UK (from £76; easyjet.com). The train from London to Milan takes 12 hours and requires one change (£110; seat61.com).

GETTING AROUND

It makes sense to buy a two-day pass for the public transport network (£7; atm.it). There’s a good Metro system and bus network, and as traffic can be bad during rush hours it’s quicker to travel this way than by taxi.

FURTHER INFO

Try our Pocket Milan (£7.99) for trip-planning tips, or download the Milan chapter of our Italy guide (£2.99; shop.lonelyplanet.com).

WHO CAN HELP?

To get under the skin of Milan’s cocktail culture, consider booking a private two-hour aperitivo tour with a local guide (£37pp; withlocals.com). Your in-the-know host will greet you at popular night-spot, Colonne di San Lorenzo, with a glass of prosecco. They’ll share insights on the city as you wander through the Navigli district, and foot the bill for drinks and snacks at three of the city’s favoured bars.

Where to stay

Budget

Set in a beautifully restored neo-Gothic palazzo with high, vaulted halls and steel-grey marble fireplaces, Babila is a design hostel worthy of Milan. Colourful Scandinavian furniture, Hugo Pratt prints, a music room and playroom (with table football) add comfort and character, and there’s a lovely terrace, a good restaurant and bar that serves cocktails and craft beers (doubles from £75; babilahostel.it).

Mid-range

Guests access nHow Milan, a converted factory in the once-industrial Via Tortona, via a dark tunnel that opens out onto a reception space that could pass as a nightclub. Jellyfish-like lights hang over the check-in desk, and the creative vibe extends to the buffet breakfast, which has a colourful display of rainbow doughnuts and smoothies. Rooms have uplifting messages on the mirrors (“You’re gorgeous!”), wet rooms replete with posh toiletries and vast beds (from £95; nhow-hotels.com).

Top end

With balconies overhanging the Naviglio Grande and vintage furniture selected by collector Raimondo Garau, canal-side Maison Borella offers a touch of class in a dedicated bohemian neighbourhood. Converted from an old casa di ringhiera (railing house), its main rooms are arranged around an inner courtyard draped in ivy and offer charming features such as parquet floors and panelling (from £165; hotelmaisonborella.com).
Where to eat dinner

**Budget**
In a city full of fashion models and fancy-pants restaurants, working-class Trattoria da Pino offers the perfect antidote. Sit elbow-to-elbow at packed wooden tables and enjoy hearty plates of bollito misto (mixed boiled meats), sausages and potatoes, and comforting classic pastas. Arrive early or prepare to queue (meals from £17; Via Cerva 14).

**Mid-range**
Located on the fourth floor of the Mercato del Duomo is chef Niko Romito’s low-key Spazio, a restaurant run by graduates of his culinary school in Abruzzo (home to his three-Michelin-starred restaurant). Reserve a seat in the Sala dell’Albero and you’ll have splendid views over the Duomo while you enjoy delightful unfussy plates of lemony pasta (left), and linguine with broccoli rabe and anchovies (meals from £30; spazionikoromito.com).

**Top end**
The one-Michelin-starred restaurant of talented chef Viviana Varese, Viva Viviana Varese is the pride of food emporium Eataly. The artful furnishings and views over Piazza XXV Aprile are a match for the fine food and playful menu, which focuses on seafood and vegetables. The cleverer the dish, the sillier the name – take, for example, Polp Fiction: roasted octopus served with string beans (meals from £60, tasting menu £110; vivavivianavarese.it).

**Make the perfect aperitivo (at home)**
Once you’ve got your hands on some shiso gin (try cambridgedistillery.co.uk) and made some sage syrup, the recipe for MAG Café’s Giappone is relatively straightforward.

- 20ml dry gin
- 20ml gin with infusion of shiso
- 20ml ginger beer
- 20ml squeezed lime
- 10ml sage syrup
- 3 dashes of absinthe
- 1 dash of cardamom

Sage leaves to garnish
British song weekends

Whether you’re planning a south coast knees-up à la Chas & Dave, or making a musical pilgrimage to Merseyside, these weekends away are all about going for a song.

31
Enjoy a dirty weekend in Salford

The Pogues sang an ode to Salford in Dirty Old Town – of dreams by the canal and love among the gasworks and factories. Songs of romance involving post-industrial regeneration might be harder to write, but it is easier to enjoy a weekend of culture in the city now. In Salford Quays, you can admire the architecture of Imperial War Museum North before visiting the Lowry Art Centre – a permanent collection of LS Lowry’s works, which depict the grimy cityspaces of industrial Northern England. Smiths fans can take the short walk to Salford Lads’ Club, immortalised on the sleeve of The Queen is Dead, where a room is dedicated to the band. Visit Ordsall Hall, a stately home dating to the 15th century, and among the Tudor façades and formal gardens, industrial grit couldn’t seem further away.

See visitsalford.info

32
Have a Weekend Down Margate

In 1982 Chas & Dave sang ‘you can keep the Costa Brava, I’m telling ya mate I’d rather have a day down Margate’ – advice that’s matured like a fine wine, with the resort at its most sprightly in decades. Start in the rebooted Dreamland (pictured right); the original south coast theme park, its ‘Scenic Railway’ rollercoaster celebrates its centenary in 2020. Chas & Dave also advised ‘go on the pier and... have a beer’ – chances are it was the Harbour Arms micropub they were thinking of, where you can sit among seagulls and stacked kegs, looking out over a flotilla of bobbing boats. And though the ‘jellied eels’ of which the duo sang aren’t on the menu, Buoy and Oyster serves some of the best seafood in Thanet – oysters and cockles from Whitstable, crab from Broadstairs, and Kentish-beer-battered fish n’ chips.

See visitmargate.co.uk
**33**

*Take a ride through Glasgow*

Glasgow is a musical powerhouse and a great place for a noisy weekend away. Join a walking tour of the city’s ‘Music Mile’ to visit some of its illustrious venues: among them King Tut’s Wah Wah Hut – a cradle of Britpop, where Oasis were spotted and signed. Catch a performance at the historic Barrowland Ballroom, adorned by a colossal neon sign – possibly the biggest in the UK. The 1960s dance hall was immortalised by Amy Macdonald, who sang, ‘Oh won’t you take a ride with me, Through the Barrowland history, And I’ll sing you a song or two.’ After a night on the town, clear your head and follow the advice of the folk song, taking high roads, low roads or public transport to Loch Lomond, whose bonnie banks are an hour northwest of the city.

† Music Mile tours from £17; glasgowmusiccitytours.com; see also peoplemakeglasgow.com

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**34**

*Cross the Mersey in Liverpool*

For a fraction of a second, Gerry and the Pacemakers were the biggest band in Liverpool when they released *Ferry Cross the Mersey* in 1964. Six decades on, anyone can still buy a ticket to ride the ferry that inspired the famous song, and spend a whole weekend swimming in Liverpoolian maritime heritage. Make for Pier Head to board the colourful Dazzle Ferry (pictured above – its livery designed by Peter Blake, creator of the *Sergeant Pepper* sleeve) for views of the Liver Building and the Royal Albert Dock, from choppy Mersey waters. Disembark at Woodside Terminal to visit the U-boat Story – considerably more sinister than yellow submarines, it instead focuses on German naval history in WWII. Or else make for the harbourside Baltic Triangle – a district of warehouses where Norwegian wood was once stored, its post-industrial spaces now busy with bars and breweries.

† See visitliverpool.com

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**35**

*Do Go Back to Dalston*

Razorlight warned in 2004. But now a weekend there is well advised – browsing the stalls of Ridley Road Market on a Saturday morning, lounging the afternoon away in the Dalston Eastern Curve Garden (pictured right), or climbing to the Dalston Roof Park in summer. In 15 years the food scene here has blossomed: Japanese restaurants Jidori and Brilliant Corners vie with long-standing Turkish stalwarts, Mangal 2 and Cirrik 19 Numara Boy. But nightlife is Dalston’s stock-in-trade, and Dalston Superstore and the Vortex Jazz Club are still pulling in punters from distant postcodes.

† See hackney.gov.uk
Along the line

From clanking old trams to superfast cross-continental commutes, plan a weekend around these commuter lines to go a little deeper, and truly tap in to a city.

36

Travel the lord of the ring roads in Vienna

Ring roads aren’t the first places you’d look for world-class art, culture and architecture, but Vienna’s Unesco-listed Ringstrasse isn’t any old ring road. Created in the mid-19th century on land where medieval fortifications once stood, this never-ending thoroughfare is possibly the grandest in Europe. Sigmund Freud used to compose his thoughts strolling the Ringstrasse, but if you’re pressed for time, compose your travel plans around the historic trams that loop about the capital. Blockbuster stops on the three-mile route include the Natural History Museum, the Austrian Parliament and the State Opera. The jewel in the crown is the 1891-built Kunsthistorisches Museum, with its Old Master-lined corridors and stairwells painted by Gustav Klimt.

Guided tours on the historic Ring tram are £10, or use ordinary service trams 1 and 2; wienerlinien.at

37

Cross continents in Istanbul

Istanbul’s intercontinental commute got easier last year with the opening of Marmaray – the first railway link from the Golden Horn to the eastern shore of the city, zipping under the Bosphorus strait in four minutes. Anyone can use the railway to hop back and forth between continents over a weekend – start by exploring the European side, from the Ottoman majesty of the Blue Mosque to the Byzantine splendour of the Aya Sofya (pictured below), Board Marmaray at Sirkeci station (once the eastern terminus of the Orient Express) and disembark at Üsküdar in Asia. Here it’s easier to get a sense of local life: wandering the fish market, stepping inside silent mosques, spending hours over Turkish coffee at seaside cafés with views back to the Golden Horn.

A single fare on Marmaray costs less than £1; iett.istanbul

38

Island-hop on Stockholm’s Line 18

Stockholm’s metro has been called ‘the world’s longest art gallery’, and it’s a wonder commuters ever disembark, so distracting are its cavernous interchanges, lineside sculptures and murals. Base a weekend around Line 18 and you’ll have many reasons to emerge, with stops at some of the Swedish capital’s greatest hits. Disembark at Gamla Stan to wander its historic alleyways to the Royal Palace, or on the hipster island of Södermalm for artisan coffee and boutiques. Or see a less familiar side to the city at Skogskyrkogården – a Unesco-listed cemetery featuring pioneering Modernist architecture, set in peaceful woodlands.

Single metro tickets from £3; sl.se

39

Slice through London on the Central Line

Woe betide anyone who boards the Central Line during rush hour, when highlights include strangers’ armpits and passive-aggressive passengers. The rest of the time it’s a highway to London’s biggest landmarks: St Paul’s, Oxford Circus, Marble Arch and the boulevards of Notting Hill. Base a weekend around the line and you’ll find it also serves the capital’s more unsung glories: Bethnal Green for the V&A Museum of Childhood, or Holland Park to explore the Japanese gardens – a miraculous pocket of serenity, with koi carp in the ponds and peacocks wandering the grounds. Also try stations at the eastern end of the line – Loughton, Theydon Bois or Buckhurst Hill – trailheads for walks in the ancient woodlands of Epping Forest.

Oyster and contactless payment fares on the Tube from £2.40; tfl.gov.uk
Naples is a stridently artistic city, its churches painted by Caravaggio, its galleries adorned by Grecian statues. This tradition continues underground on Metro Line 1, where stations double as art installations. Toledo (pictured) has a claim to being the most beautiful in the world; bathed in luminous blue light, the station feels like it’s at the bottom of a swimming pool, while Università is decorated with steel sculptures and striking pink surfaces. Plan a weekend around Line 1, which passes a few of the city’s greatest monuments. Get off at Municipio to explore Castel Nuovo – the medieval fortress that was once the seat of Spanish kings – or at Museo to see the city’s National Archaeological Museum, housing exhibits from nearby Pompeii.

Day tickets on the Naples Metro £4; anm.it

Hit the art trail on Naples’ Line 1
That this was the first place in Wales to be named a national park is no surprise. Eryri (‘The Highlands’), as Snowdonia is called in Welsh, is a land of mighty, misty peaks, glacier-scoured valleys and enigmatic lakes (the view from Llyn Idwal is pictured right). It is the only place in Britain outside Scotland where you can stand above 1,000 metres, whether at the summit of Snowdon itself, or the tips of the nearby Carneddau and Glyderau ranges. The national park isn’t solely a playground for mountaineers – it covers a large part of north Wales, taking in forests, beaches and coastal estuaries, as well as historic towns such as Harlech, with its sternly set castle. At times it appears every place name here comes with a legend, from the peak of Cader Idris, named after a giant, to the drowned palace at Bala Lake. And though visitors can take a mini train up to the top of Snowdon, many of the finest views here are only earned by putting on hiking boots.

Find out more about the national park at snowdonia.gov.wales. The atmospheric Pen-y-Gwryd Hotel is deeply linked to mountaineering history (from £115; pyg.co.uk).
second to none – each makes a fitting choice for an active weekend or more in-depth short break

WORDS RORY GOULDING @RGouldingTravel PHOTOGRAPHS BETH SQUIRE @beasquire
Pembrokeshire Coast
OLDING IN ON ITSELF IN countless bays, coves, inlets and assorted crinkles, the coast of Pembrokeshire is a nightmare to measure and a joy to wander along. Almost every spot where the county wets its toes belongs to the national park, with gaps only for the ports of Milford Haven and Fishguard. The Pembrokeshire Coast Path follows the boundary of land and sea as closely as possible, past clouds of heather to the white lighthouse at Strumble Head, or down onto the hidden sands of Barafundle Bay.

As hard-edged as most of this rocky coastline appears, it’s a landscape always shaped by the elements – the Green Bridge (pictured left), a natural rock arch that’s part of the Elegug Stacks, lost a big chunk in a storm two years ago. Pembrokeshire Coast National Park covers not just the mainland, but offshore islands such as Caldey, Ramsey, Skomer and Skokholm. When the weather is playing nice, boat trips out to nature reserves bring sightings of dolphins, porpoises and seals, and bountiful birdlife – puffins, storm petrels, guillemots and gannets. If you’re not loath to get wet, this landscape is the original home of coasteering, and plenty of outfits stand ready to kit you out with helmet and lifejacket ready to scramble and plunge around parts of the Pembrokeshire Coast not easily reached by other means. On the landward side, historic St Davids counts as Britain’s smallest city, while the stones of Pentre Ifan are 5,500-year-old cousins of Stonehenge. Visit pembrokeshirecoast.wales.

On a clifftop in the beachside town of Saundersfoot, St Brides Spa Hotel brings sea tones to its rooms (from £170; stbridesspahotel.com).
Modern Great Britain is brimming with history and culture. With over 1,700 years of occupation, the nation is steeped in traditions, customs, and folklore. The country’s rich cultural heritage is evident in its architecture, language, food, music, and art. From the ancient stone circles of Stonehenge to the vibrant street art of London, Britain is a nation that values its past and embraces its vibrant contemporary culture.

Brecon Beacons

Reen Slopes descend from the highest points in the Brecon Beacons, unlike Snowdonia’s stony summits. But don’t mistake this national park as the tame option: candidates for the SAS on endurance hikes here certainly don’t. The range forms a barrier between the former mining towns of the South Wales Valleys and the thinly populated interior of Powys, with a series of U-shaped gouges left over from the last Ice Age, sometimes harbouring a small lake (such as Llyn y Fan Fach, pictured left). The bare look of most of these mountains makes it easy to see the shape of the land, and the subtleties of changing light. The Brecon Beacons proper make up just one part of the park, which reaches (confusingly) from the Black Mountain in the west to the Black Mountains in the east. The fourth part, Fforest Fawr, is an exception to the minimalist look – an ancient hunting ground of moss-covered woods. Aside from its ridge-line walks and mountain bike trails, the park draws stargazers thanks to dark skies, and book-lovers to Hay-on-Wye at its northern end.

Read up at breconbeacons.org. Find solitude and top breakfasts at Celyn Farm in the Black Mountains (from £82; celynfarm.co.uk).

February 2020
Challenge your fears

Whether you’re scared of heights, dark places, fearsome animals or perhaps a nightmarish combination, these weekends will help beat your innermost fears – and might even be fun.

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Crack your claustrophobia under the Peak District

to most people, the Peak District conjures images of blustery moors, stone villages, Chatsworth House and Bakewell tarts. To a select few it summons subterranean streams and echoing caverns. The Peak District is one of the best places to go caving in the UK – with no shortage of colourfully named caves like Giant’s Hole and Devil’s Arse. The experience will be less frightening if you join a day-long session with Lost Earth Adventures, abseiling waterfalls or searching for fossils by torchlight. Decompress for another day by seeing local wonders above ground – Mam Tor, or the steep hills along Dovedale.

Full-day private tour from £135pp in group of two; lostearthadventures.co.uk

44

Conquer your fear of open water in Malta

St Paul the Apostle was shipwrecked off Malta, swimming to shore where he was welcomed and treated like a god by the islanders. Two millennia later, swimmers can make their way to the Maltese shore from the neighbouring island of Gozo (rather than a Roman galley). It’s one swim planned for the Malta Escape itinerary from SwimTrek, with swimmers based in the Gozitan capital, Victoria. Also on the agenda is a swim along Gozo’s southern coast, with participants front crawling and butterflying their way past fishing villages and craggy limestone cliffs, resting for lunch in the sheltered lagoon of Gozo’s ‘Inland Sea’.

Three nights from £610; swintrek.com

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Overcome fear of flying in Vilnius

Hot-air balloons regularly soar over the African savannah or the plains of Asia. It’s less common to see them hovering directly over a European capital – with the possible exception of Vilnius (pictured below), where balloons are allowed to fly over the spires and towers of the city centre when winds are favourable, touching down in the fields nearby. Soothe your airborne jitters in the basket by concentrating on the capital’s landmarks from on high: the vault of the Neoclassical cathedral, the rooftops of the Baroque Old Town or the restored royal palace. There’s plenty to fill a weekend down on terra firma too: explore the bohemian Užupis district (which jokingly declared itself a breakaway republic), or catch the funicular to Gediminas Hill for a view over the plains of Lithuania, and the big skies from whence you came.

Flights from £85; balloon.lt
45

Lift your spirits and beat vertigo in Amsterdam

Built in the 1950s to transport goods from idling steamboats, the Yays Crane is enjoying a second career as a swanky apartment. Sadly you can’t grab the levers and go freelance with cargo anymore – but the chances are that anyone suffering from vertigo will be distracted by the interiors. A miniature kitchen, freestanding bathtub and living room have been crammed miraculously into three tiny floors, with tall windows that mean you can lie in bed and look out to the chugging boats of the IJ river without even sitting up. Should a weekend here give you an appetite for more high-altitude antics, head to ‘Over the Edge’ (pictured right) – Europe’s highest swing, set 100m up, dangling from the edge of Amsterdam’s A’DAM Tower (adamlookout.com).

Yays Crane Apartment from £330 per night; yays.com

46

Don’t be left in the dark in Tromsø

Being afraid of the dark isn’t an option in Tromsø – not least because the sun is AWOL from late November to mid-January. It’s easy to make the most of these short (or non-existent) days over a weekend: joining dogsled and snowmobile trips through moonlit landscapes, or if you’re feeling brave, torchlit kayaking trips through icy waters. Elements Arctic Camp offers a two-day winter kayaking trip which sees participants staying in candlelit yurts on a small island before paddling into the gloom and listening for the splashes of otters, dolphins and porpoises. Anyone still terrified of the dark at this point might take comfort that the northern lights can suddenly appear, lighting up the skies and reflecting in the fjords below.

£960 for two; elementsarcticcamp.com

47

Never mind the monsters in Asturias

A land of green sierras, rushing rivers, humpbacked bridges and thatched cottages, the Asturian hinterland is among the most sparsely inhabited parts of Spain – when it comes to human beings. This is one of the last redoubts of the critically endangered Cantabrian brown bear. The good news for anyone who’s seen The Revenant is that bears haven’t attacked anyone here for decades, and their diet is largely vegetarian – so book a ‘Browsing for Bears’ weekend with Wild Wolf Experience (with potential cameos from wolves, lynx, golden eagles and griffon vultures). For the best chance of seeing a bear (from a safe distance), arrive in spring when mothers and cubs emerge from their dens, and spend cool mornings scouring the meadows.

Three nights from £1,100; wildwolfexperience.com
Microcosm weekends

Don’t have time to visit all of France, Spain or Italy over a weekend? Fear not: these magnificent and manageable places capture the essence of the countries beyond.

48
Seek the soul of Spain in Madrid and Toledo

Madrid only became a capital in the 16th century – by which time Paris and London were already old hands at the job. But it’s been making up for lost time and – being set in the geographical centre of Spain – it’s a fine place to get an overview of food, art and culture from all points of the peninsula over a weekend. Take a trip to the Mercado de San Miguel to taste Galician seafood and jamón from the Portuguese borderlands; make for the Reina Sofia to see works by Catalan artists Miró and Dali; or visit the National Archaeological Museum to see relics from Mudéjar Andalucia. Madrid is also perfectly poised for a day trip to Toledo (pictured): a far older Iberian capital, its courtyards and battlements echoing the days when the Moors reigned from Gibraltar to the Pyrenees.

+ See esmadrid.com and turismo.toledo.es

49
Seek enlightenment in Thuringia

For all the oompah of Munich, the bohemian brilliance of Berlin or the boisterousness of Hamburg, it’s a tiny town that has the most credible claim to be Germany’s cultural capital. Titans of Teutonic arts gravitated to Weimar. Spend a weekend here to visit the homes of Goethe and Schiller, head to the new Bauhaus Museum to find out how the town influenced 20th-century design, or aimlessly wander its cobbled squares and leafy parklands, paced by the ghosts of Nietzsche, Liszt and Wassily Kandinsky. The surrounding region of Thuringia also inspires mighty thoughts: take a day trip to the trails of the Thuringian Forest – often called the ‘green heart’ of the republic – or scale the battlements at medieval Wartburg Castle, in whose maze of rooms Martin Luther translated the Bible into German.

+ See visit-thuringia.com
Umbria has a justifiable claim to be Italy in miniature, and all the requisite ingredients are here: snowy mountains, sun-soaked hillsides, ancient cities and expansive lakes. Best of all, you can experience much of it on a weekend jaunt based in the capital, Perugia, a hilltop cluster of palazzi and piazze that has evaded the hordes of tourists common in Tuscan towns. Pilgrims walk for days to reach Assisi – from Perugia you can board a 40-minute train-and-bus combo to get there, stepping inside the fresco-swathed basilica of St Francis, patron saint of Italy. The next day, make an even shorter journey west from Perugia to island-dotted Lago Trasimeno, its shores lined with olive groves, oak woodlands and medieval towns – its waters are ripe for a summertime dip.

**See umbriatourism.it**

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The Loire Valley is the France of daydreams: sluggish rivers and misty vineyards, cobbled lanes built for putting Citroën 2CVs. And of course châteaux: moated, medieval, mighty or minor, these are the buildings that, for many, embody the essence of France. Tours is a good base from which to storm a few over a weekend – first take a morning to explore its higgledy-piggledy squares and food markets. From here, it’s an hour’s drive east to Château de Chambord – a hunting lodge that’s the biggest in the Loire (despite never being finished). Close by is the Château de Cheverny, said to be the most perfectly proportioned of castles. And if you grow weary of echoing corridors and oil paintings, head to the grounds of the Château de Villandry west of Tours (the zenith of the French formal garden) or visit some of the many wineries in the region.

**See loirevalley-france.co.uk**

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Legend tells of an angel showing the settlers of Lucerne where exactly to found their city. Even sceptics acknowledge Switzerland’s most beautiful town has an angelic setting – poised between Alpine foothills and the luminous leagues of Lake Lucerne with its rickety 14th-century bridge spanning the River Reuss, and medieval watchtowers watching over the Uri Alps. It’s also a springboard to exploring a region that defines Swissness. Take the ferry from Lucerne to Flüelen, gazing up at a panorama of peaks from the deck; it was near Flüelen that William Tell supposedly undertook his famous apple-shooting antics (as explained in a small museum) while the nearby Rütli meadow is the traditional site for where the nation of Switzerland was first sworn into being in the 13th century.

**See luzern.com**
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THE URBAN EDIT

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Eating in Florence

Excellent ingredients and simple execution are the hallmarks of Florentine cuisine. Quality is superlative in this city, everywhere from traditional trattorie to four-star restaurants.

× GURDULÙ
gurdulu.com
Gurdulu seduces Florentines with razor-sharp design, magnificent craft cocktails and seasonal market cuisine from young local chef Gabriele Andreoni. It’s as much about gourmet aperitivi and cocktails or Tuscan wine flights as dining exceedingly well. In warm weather, cool off over drinks in the shaded courtyard garden.

× IL SANTO BEVITORE
ilsantobevitore.com
Reserve or arrive right at 7.30pm to snag the last table at this address where gastronomes eat by candlelight in a vaulted, bottle-lined interior. The menu is a creative reinvention of seasonal classics: pumpkin gnocchi with hazelnuts, coffee and green-veined blue di capra (goat’s cheese), tagliatelle with hare ragù, garlic cream and sweet Carmignano figs.

× LA BOTTEGA DEL BUON CAFFÈ
borgointhecity.com
Farm to table is the philosophy of this Michelin-starred restaurant where head chef Antonello Sardi mesmerises diners. Veg and herbs arrive from the restaurant’s own farm, Borgo Santo Pietro, in the Sienese hills. Ingredients are fresh, green and natural. Weekday lunches cook up a good-value, four-course lunch menu.

× MERCATO CENTRALE
mercatacentrale.it
A maze of fresh produce at Florence’s oldest, largest food market, on the ground floor of an iron-and-glass structure from 1874. Head to the 1st floor’s buzzing, contemporary food hall with dedicated cookery school and artisan stalls cooking steaks, burgers, tripe panini, vegetarian dishes, pizza, gelato, pastries and pasta.

× OSTERIA IL BUONGUSTAI
ibuongustaifirenze
‘The Gourmand’ is unmissable. Lunchtimes heave with locals and savvy students who flock here for Tuscan home cooking at a snip. The place is brilliantly no-frills – you can watch women in haircaps in the kitchen, while sitting at shared tables and paying in cash.

MESS ABOUT IN A BOAT
View Ponte Vecchio, the Uffizi and other landmarks from a sturdy, inflatable raft on the River Arno. Firenze Rafting runs two-hour trips that depart the riverbanks across the Torre San Niccolò in the Oltrarno and include an aperitif under Ponte Vecchio (firenzerrafting.it).

FLORENCE IN NUMBERS

DATE OF BIRTH
59 BC
Julius Caesar named his garrison town ‘Fluentia’. It was later renamed Florence

SIZE
39.5 square miles

POPULATION
382,000

NUMBER OF VISITORS PER DAY TO THE UFFIZI
13,400

YEARS TAKEN TO BUILD THE DUOMO
140

ESSENTIALS… Tips are not necessary or expected in Italy – service charges are included in bills – so leaving one is entirely your choice.
STARRING ROLE

+ A Room with a View (1986)
+ La Vita è Bella (Life is Beautiful, 1997)
+ Tea with Mussolini (1999)
+ Hannibal, season three (2015)

La Ménagère is a concept café, restaurant, homeware shop and florist. I love the jazz sessions in the basement at weekends from 9pm. It feels like a scene from a glamorous old movie. When friends are in town, I take them to see The Medici Dynasty Show, a one-hour English-language play detailing the last days of the Medici family and their pact to ensure all the family’s artwork remained in Florence after their demise.

BY FLORENCE RESIDENT
NARDIA PLUMRIDGE

LIKE A LOCAL

MAP KEY

**EATING**
- Essenziale
- Gelateria Pasticceria Badiani
- Gurdulù
- Il Santo Bevitore
- Il Teatro del Sale
- La Bottega del Buon Caffè
- Mercato Centrale

**SLEEPING**
- AdAstra
- Hotel Palazzo Guadagni
- Hotel Scoti
- Osteria Il Buongustai

SLEEPING

**BUDGET**
**HOTEL SCOTI**
hotelscoti.com
Between designer boutiques on Florence’s smartest shopping strip, this hidden pensione is a fabulous mix of old-fashioned charm and value for money. Its traditionally styled rooms are spread across the 2nd floor of a 16th-century palazzo; some with lovely views. The frescoed lounge (1780) is stunning.

**MID-RANGE**
**HOTEL PALAZZO GUADAGNI**
palazzoguadagni.com
This romantic hotel overlooking Florence’s liveliest summertime square is legendary – Zeffirelli shot scenes from Tea with Mussolini here. In an artfully revamped Renaissance palace, it has 15 spacious rooms with high ceilings and the odd fresco or fireplace. In summer, cocktails are served on the loggia rooftop terrace with its dreamy views.

**TOP END**
**ADASTRA**
adalystaflorence.com
In a 16th-century palazzo looking over Europe’s largest private walled garden, AdAstra has 14 beautiful rooms adorned with calligraphy, vintage collectibles, claw-foot bathtubs and 19th-century fresco or wooden herringbone floor. Four rooms open onto the terrace with sun loungers, garden views and breakfast tables. There is an honesty bar and complimentary tea and cakes in the lounge.

WHILE YOU’RE HERE

**DRINK** a glass of Chianti Classico with the locals on Piazza Santa Spirito.
**DO** cross the Ponte Vecchio and mosey through the quieter streets of the Oltrarno.
**WATCH** 27-a-side football matches of the Calcio Storico at the Piazza di Santa Croce.

MORE INFO… Pocket Florence & Tuscany (£7.99) // Florence & Tuscany guide (£14.99) // Guides app (free)
Cape Town is a beautiful city crowned by the magnificent Table Mountain National Park. It’s a great place to get active, whether you fancy surfing from one of its beaches or abseiling from the top of its defining landmark.

**BOULDERS PENGUIN COLONY**
**Simon’s Town**
This picturesque area, with enormous boulders dividing sandy coves, is home to a colony of African penguins. A boardwalk runs from the Boulders Visitor Centre at Foxy Beach to Boulders Beach, where you can mingle with the waddling penguins (don’t, however, pet them). The bulk of the colony, which has grown from just two breeding pairs in 1982, seems to hang out at Foxy Beach, where, like nonchalant, stunted supermodels, they blithely ignore the camera-tooting tourists snapping away on the viewing platforms. You can also paddle out to the colony with Kayak Cape Town (kayakcapetown.co.za).

**MUZIENBERG BEACH**
Popular with families, this surf beach is famous for its colourful Victorian bathing chalets.

**WINE DOWN**
South Africa’s wine industry began in 1685, when Governor Simon van der Stel chose the area for its grape-growing potential. The Constantia Wine Route is named after his farm and comprises 15 upmarket wine estates and restaurants (constantiawineroute.com).

Surfboards can be hired and lessons booked along Beach Rd. The sea is generally safer here than elsewhere along the peninsula. At the eastern end of the promenade is a fun water park, Muizenberg Water Slides (muizenbergslides.co.za).

**SEA POINT PROMENADE**
Strolling Sea Point’s promenade is a pleasure shared by Capetonians from all walks of life. Once a white-only area, it’s now a great place to enjoy the city’s multiculturalism. There are kids’ playgrounds, an outdoor gym and public artworks. The coast here is rocky and swimming is dangerous, although you can get in the water at Rocklands Beach.

**TABLE MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK**
[sanparks.org/parks/table_mountain](http://sanparks.org/parks/table_mountain)
The city is dominated by Table Mountain, as well as the adjacent rocky humps of Lion’s Head, Signal Hill and Devil’s Peak. Climbing Table Mountain more than repays the effort but the cableway is an easy option. The park is the venue for adventure activities, such as hiking, rock climbing, abseiling, mountain biking, paragliding, bird-watching, snorkelling and diving.

**ABSEIL AFRICA**
[abseilafrica.co.za](http://abseilafrica.co.za)
The 112m drop from the top of Table Mountain with this long-established outfit is a guaranteed adrenaline rush. Don’t even think of tackling it unless you have a head for heights. You can tag on a guided hike up Platteklip Gorge or just do the hike without the abseil. Abseil Africa also offers kloofing (canyoning) trips. The sport of clambering into and out of kloofs (cliffs or gorges) entails abseiling, climbing, hiking, swimming and jumping.

**ANIMAL OCEAN**
[animalocean.co.za](http://animalocean.co.za)
Although it’s weather-dependent, don’t miss the chance to snorkel or dive off Duiker Island. Chances are you’ll be visited by the playful Cape fur seals that live on the island and swim in the shark-free waters around it. All gear, including neoprene wetsuits, is provided. Trips from Sep–May.

**CAPE TOWN TANDEM PARAGLIDING**
[paraglide.co.za](http://paraglide.co.za)
Feel like James Bond as you paraglide off Lion’s Head, land near the Glen Country Club, and then sink a cocktail at Camps Bay. Novices can arrange a tandem paraglide, where you’re strapped to an experienced flyer. Make enquiries on your first day in Cape Town, as the weather conditions have to be right.

**SLEEPY HOLLOW HORSE RIDING**
[sleepyhollowhorseriding.com](http://sleepyhollowhorseriding.com)
This operation offers two-hour rides along the sandy beach at Noordhoek, as well as one-hour explorations of the mountainous hinterland. Booking is essential. Pony rides are also available.

Cape Town is a beautiful city crowned by the magnificent Table Mountain National Park. It’s a great place to get active, whether you fancy surfing from one of its beaches or abseiling from the top of its defining landmark.

**CAPE TOWN IN NUMBERS**

**DATE OF BIRTH**
1652
when the Dutch pulled up at the base of Table Mountain and established the first European settlement in what is now South Africa.

**SIZE**
155 square miles

**POPULATION**
4 million

**NUMBER OF BLUE FLAG BEACHES**
10

**YEAR FIRST CAPE WINE PRODUCED**
1659

Experience Cape Town from a dizzying height

Where Cape Town locals go

**ESSENTIALS**... Check outdoors events such as March’s Cape Town Cycle Tour and April’s Two Oceans Ultra Marathon at capetown.travel
To splash out I never think twice about booking a table at La Colombe, one of the top restaurants in the country. The food is outstanding, the experience is unpretentious and I’ve never had a bad course there, let alone a bad meal. It’s fairly pricey by local standards, but for visitors to Cape Town, it’s actually a very affordable fine-dining experience.

BY CAPE TOWN RESIDENT LUCY HORNE

SLEEPING

BUDGET
91 LOOP
91loop.co.za
Jo‘burg investors are behind this buzzing place offering a range of rooms, including pods – much like dorm beds but with more privacy. The stylish Honey Badger restaurant and bar on the ground floor has a daily programme of activities – some free – to get guests mingling.

MID-RANGE
WINCHESTER MANSIONS HOTEL
winchester.co.za
Offering a waterfront location (you’ll pay extra for sea-view rooms), this elegant Sea Point institution dates to the 1920s, but adds contemporary appeal to its historic home with a spa and huge pool. There’s a lovely courtyard with a fountain – a romantic place to dine. Harvey’s bar is popular as a sundowner spot, and for its jazz brunch.

TOP END
ELLERMAN HOUSE
ellerman.co.za
Imagine you’ve been invited to stay with a rich, art-collecting Capetonian friend – that’s what the vibe is like at Ellerman House, a mansion overlooking the Atlantic. The rooms are studies in tasteful design, with heated floors, studded headboards, ocean-facing bay windows and artworks. Beautiful gardens and luxe services are all on hand. Two deluxe spa rooms have sliding wooden doors opening onto a pool-deck.

While you’re here

EAT dishes from around the continent, served by singing waiters at Africa Café (africacafe.co.za).

DRINK craft beer at the Devil’s Peak brewery, with mountain views (devilspeak.beer).

SEE Unesco World Heritage site and former prison Robben Island (robben-island.org.za).

More info... Cape Town & the Garden Route (£13.99) // Guides app (free) // lonelyplanet.com/south-africa/cape-town
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Budget Dubai

With its five-star hotels and luxury shopping, Dubai is a playground for the rich and famous. However, local knowledge opens up plenty of budget-friendly experiences. Here’s how to make the most of your time and money.

**AL SERKAL CULTURAL FOUNDATION**
alserkalculturalfoundation.com

This non-profit foundation runs the most dynamic cultural space in the Al Fahidi Historic District. Free galleries showcasing traditional and cutting-edge works by local and international artists orbit a central courtyard anchored by an arty café. Most of the art is for sale, a small shop sells gifts and there’s a reading room and workshop space.

**KITE BEACH**

This long, pristine stretch of white sand, off Jumeirah Rd and next to a mosque, is clean and has lots of activities, such as kitesurfing, beach tennis, beach volleyball and kayaking. There are showers, wifi, toilets and changing facilities, plus food trucks and cafés. Great views of the Burj Al Arab. It gets busy on Friday and Saturday when a seaside market with crafts and gifts sets up.

**GOOD FOR A WANDER**

The Al Fahidi Historic District is a restored heritage area. Its narrow lanes are home to craft shops, museums, cafés, art galleries and hotels. Join a guided tour with the Sheikh Mohammed Centre for Cultural Understanding (dubaiculture.gov.ae).

**ZABEEL PARK**

near Al Jaffiliya station

This sprawling park is a family favourite that includes a lake with boat rides, an adventure playground, barbecue areas and a jogging track. It is also home to the Dubai Frame, which has views of old and modern parts of the city. The park hosts a flea market on the first Saturday of the month (Oct–May) and is home to the Ripe Food and Craft Market, held on Fridays. The market has all you need for a picnic under the palms.

**AROOS DAMASCUS**
cnr Al Muraqqabat Rd & Al Jazeira St

A Dubai restaurant serving Syrian food to adoring crowds since 1980 must be doing something right. A perfect meal on the outdoor terrace would start with hummus and a fattoush salad of toasted bread, tomatoes, onions and mint before moving on to a plate of succulent grilled kebabs.

**INDOOR FOOD MARKET**
citycentredeira.com

Bringing street food under cover to escape the heat is a winning idea. There are around 16 concepts to choose from, ranging from Lebanese to ice cream (sold from a red Mini Cooper). There are communal tables, murals, exposed brick and a backing track to complete the urban feel.

**XVA CAFÉ**

xvahotel.com/cafe

Escape Dubai’s bustle at this courtyard café where the menu offers a rotating menu of vegetarian dishes, such as hummus made with broad beans, aubergine burgers and mojarada (rice topped with lentils, veggies and yoghurt). The cheesecake and mint lemonade are delicious.

**BAHRI BAR**
jumeirah.com

This bar drips with sultry Middle Eastern decor and has a veranda with Persian rugs and sofas perfect for taking in views of the Madinat waterways and the Burj Al Arab. Daily drink deals, bar bites and bands playing jazz and soul make the place a perennial fave among locals and visitors.

**LOCK STOCK AND BARREL**

lsbdubai.com

Since opening in 2016, LSB has been racking up the accolades as living proof that there’s room in bling-blinded Dubai for keeping-it-real party hangouts. The two-level industrially styled joint is the place for mingling with unpretentious folk over cocktails and craft beer, twice weekly live bands and American soul food.

**MEENA BAZAAR**

Al Ghubaiba Rd & Al Fahidi St

Arguably the oldest shopping district in Dubai, the Meena Bazaar is a labyrinth of streets surrounding the Bur Dubai Souq. Shops sell everything from textiles to jewellery and handicrafts and there are restaurants and cafés where you can sample traditional snacks for just a few dirhams. The market is atmospheric at night.

**DUBAI IN NUMBERS**

**DATE OF BIRTH**

3000 BC

when the area was inhabited by nomadic cattle herders

**SIZE**

14 square miles

**POPULATION**

3.137 million

**NUMBER OF SKYSCRAPERS**

190

**NUMBER OF RESIDENT BILLIONAIRES**

30

**ESSENTIALS**... Weigh up different discounts at attractions with the Go Dubai card (gocity.com) or the Dubai Pass (visitdubai.com)
A typical weekend involves early morning paddleboarding at the beach next to Dubai Offshore Sailing Club, which is one of the few shoreline spots that hasn’t yet become too crowded. Lunch at Maison Mathis is another regular haunt; this neighbourhood spot does some of the city’s best pizza and is one of the few places outside a hotel where you can order an afternoon glass of wine. Dinner at Nola Eatery and Social House with its live music and New Orleans-style food is also a regular pick.

BY DUBAI RESIDENT HAYLEY SKIRKA

SLEEPING

BUDGET
XVA HOTEL
xvahotel.com
This riad-style boutique hotel occupies a century-old wind-tower house smack in the Al Fahidi Historic District, off Al Fahidi St. Its 15 compact rooms have whitewashed walls decorated with local art. Most open onto a courtyard (making them slightly dark) with a café where breakfast is served.

MID-RANGE
VIDA DOWNTOWN DUBAI
jumeirah.com/en/hotels-resorts/dubai/al-seef-by-jumeirah
Located in the heart of Al Seef’s meandering walkways, this graceful spot opened in late 2018. Although new, the rooms have been intuitively designed and built to emulate traditional Emirati dwellings, with carved wood features, beams, earth colours and handwoven fabrics. There are courtyards, wind towers and Creek views.

TOP END
PALACE DOWNTOWN
theaddress.com
City explorers with a romantic streak will be utterly enchanted by this low-lying, lakefront contender with its winning alchemy of old-world class and Middle Eastern aesthetics. Rooms are chic and understated, styled in natural tones, and have balconies overlooking Dubai Fountain. Burj Khalifa and Dubai Mall are close by, making it the perfect stay for shopping trips.

WHILE YOU’RE HERE

SEE skyscrapers poking through the clouds from the Burj Khalifa’s observation deck.
DO take a dhow cruise to see how spice, gold and perfume are still delivered to the souqs. 
WATCH ayyalah—a celebratory Bedouin dance performed at the Heritage Village.

MORE INFO… Pocket Dubai (£7.99) // Dubai & Abu Dhabi city guide (£14.99) // Guides app (free)
Nightlife in Manchester

Bold statements and iron-clad self-confidence have long been a thing here, and that’s reflected in Manchester’s epic nightlife – from pubs with pump-poured nostalgia-on-tap to cocktail dens where you can get the perfect sazerac.

**HEALTH WARNING**

Cocktail chemistry at the Alchemist

Cocktail chemistry at the Alchemist

**MANCHESTER IN NUMBERS**

**DATE OF BIRTH**
AD 79

**SIZE**
45 square miles (city), 243 square miles (metro area)

**POPULATION**
547,627 (city), 2.7 million (metro area)

**YEAR PASSENGER TRAIN STATION OPENED**
1830 (it was the world’s first)

**NUMBER OF RESTAURANTS ON CURRY MILE**
70+

**ESSENTIALS**

… Metrolink trams link the centre and neighbouring areas such as Salford (one-day anytime travelcard £2.60; tfgm.com)

**RECOVERY TIME**

A former meat market, Mackie Mayor is now a superb food hall. Try divine pizzas from Honest Crust, perfect pork-belly bao from Baohouse, chargrilled Cornish fish at Fin, and steaks at Tender Cow (mackiemayor.co.uk).

**CASTLE HOTEL**
thecastlehotel.info

Old-fashioned boozers from the 1770s with strong musical heritage: John Peel interviewed Joy Division’s Ian Curtis here in 1979 and some of its fine selection of ales – such as Trooper – are named after songs. There’s a small music venue attached that hosts regular gigs.

**BLACK DOG BALLROOM**
blackdogballroom.co.uk

A basement bar with a speakeasy vibe, but there’s nothing illicit about drinking here: the cocktails are terrific (it runs mixology sessions), the atmosphere is always buzzing and the music always good and loud – DJs spin on Thursday to Saturday nights.

**BRITONS PROTECTION**
50 Great Bridgewater St

Whisky – over 300 different kinds (the Cu Dhub ‘black whisky’ is a treat with its touch of coffee and honey) – is the beverage of choice at this proper English pub that also does home-style meals (pies etc). Open fires in the back rooms and a cozy atmosphere are perfect on a cold evening.

**LIAR’S CLUB**
the liars club.co.uk

A basement bar designed in the style of a speakeasy/tiki lounge, the Liar’s Club serves strong cocktails to an assorted clientele of revellers, students and off-duty bar staff. The atmosphere is great on any night of the week.

**PORT STREET BEER HOUSE**
portstreetbeerhouse.co.uk

Fans of real ale love this Northern Quarter boozer, with its seven hand-pulls, 18 draught lines and more than 100 beers from around the world, including gluten-free ales, saisons, barley wines and imperial stouts. It hosts regular tastings and tap takeovers.

**REFUGE**
refugemcr.co.uk

Occupying what was once the Victorian Gothic ground floor of the Refuge Assurance Building, this is not just Manchester’s most beautiful bar, but arguably its coolest. Its creative director duo, DJs Luke Cowdrey and Justin Crawford, aka the Unabombers, also run Homoelectric, the best club nights in the northwest.

**HOME**
homemcr.org

One of Britain’s best arts centres, HOME has two theatre spaces that host provocative new work in a variety of contexts, from prosenium sets to promenade pieces. The five cinema screens show the latest indie releases as well as classics. There’s also a ground-floor bar and a café that serves good food on the first floor.

**SOUPT KITCHEN**
soup-kitchen.co.uk

By day, this is a typical Northern Quarter canteen-style café, but at night it’s one of the city’s best places to catch live music, with a full schedule of gigs by indie acts passing through town. When the bands are done, the DJs kick in and it often goes until 6am.

Rum ahoy!
A great way to relive Manchester’s days as an industrial powerhouse is at the fascinating Museum of Science & Industry (MOSI, scienceandindustrymuseum.org.uk), which features an array of planes, trains and automobiles as well as the first-ever computer to store a programme in its memory. The exhibits are interesting in themselves, but what’s especially fun is the way they connect to their environment. Many of the weaving machines and engines are operational, and demonstrations take place each day.

The Madchester years of the ’80s and ’90s began when founder of Factory Records, Tony Wilson, opened The Haçienda nightclub. Dance music from the USA arrived, as did ecstasy – everyone in town went ‘mad for it’.

While you’re here

See the collection of British art and European masters at the Manchester Gallery.

Do a tour of Old Trafford and imagine wearing one of those red shirts.

Buy stylish clothes and must-have accessories along King St.

**Budget**

**HATTERS**

hattershostels.com

This relaxed and friendly guesthouse is in a remodelled old house with high ceilings. The lift and porcelain sinks are the only leftovers of this former millinery factory, now one of the best hostels in town. The location is a boon – smack in the heart of the Northern Quarter – so you won’t have to go far to get the best of alternative Manchester.

**Mid-range**

**COW HOLLOW**

cowhollow.co.uk

In a thin 19th-century weavers’ mill, Cow Hollow offers a lot of charm in a compact space. The 16 snug rooms have original beams, brick walls and flashy bathrooms; some have original machinery incorporated into the decor. Luxury touches include Hypnos beds, goose-down duvets, and free prosecco and tapas in the evenings. Reception is in the ground-floor bar.

**Top end**

**GREAT JOHN STREET HOTEL**

electichotels.co.uk

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Centre Pompidou, Paris

The modern art centre, opened in 1977, features on this kids’ apron for training the next generation of French chefs.

- Dutch painter Piet Mondrian lived in Paris for much of his career, but moved to the US during WWII - his 1942 work *New York City I* is part of the Pompidou’s collections, and a design for this tote bag.

- A spectacle case inspired by Roy Lichtenstein’s *Modular Painting with four panels #4* (1969) uses his characteristic comic book-style Ben Day dots.

- Part of Richard Rogers’ and Renzo Piano’s design for the Pompidou was to show off pipes and other services, picked out in colour – as mimicked on this children’s plate.

- ‘Ça va faire crier’ (‘That’ll kick up a storm’) was President Georges Pompidou’s comment on the blueprints, echoed here on a pencilcase.

- Russian-born Wassily Kandinsky was one of the earliest abstract artists – this woven pillow cover shows his 1922 print *Kleine Welten I* (Small Worlds I).

Browse at boutique.centrepompidou.fr
SUPERLATIVE EATS

Madrid

THE MOST CREATIVE ONE

PLATEA
The ornate Carlos III cinema has been transformed into a gourmet food hall, with 12 restaurants and three food stores, as well as cocktail bars. The multilevel seating is now home to restaurants serving an array of cuisines, from Italian to Peruvian. All face the stage area, where cabaret performances, DJs or live cooking shows provide an imaginative backdrop.
plateamadrid.com

THE OLDEST ONE

RESTAURANTE BOTÍN
It's not every day that you can eat in the oldest restaurant in the world (established in 1725). The secret of Botín's staying power is fine cochinillo asado (roast suckling pig) and cordero asado (roast lamb) cooked in wood-fired ovens. The restaurant has also appeared in many novels about Madrid, most notably Ernest Hemingway's The Sun Also Rises.
botin.es

THE BEST-VALUE ONE

PEZ TORTILLA
Every time we come here, this place is full to bursting, which is not surprising given its philosophy of great tortilla (15 kinds!), splendid croquetas (croquettes) and craft beers (more than 70 varieties, with nine on tap). The croquetas with black squid ink or the tortilla with truffle brie and jamón are two stars among many.
peztortilla.com

THE MOST DECORATED ONE

DIVERXO
Madrid’s only three-Michelin-starred restaurant, DiverXo offers its most unusual culinary experience. Chef David Muñoz is something of the enfant terrible of Spain’s cooking scene, favouring what he has described as a ‘brutal’ approach: his team of chefs appear as you’re mid-bite to add surprising new ingredients. The choreographed experience centres on short (2½-hour, seven-course) or long (four-hour, 11-course) menus.
diverxo.com

Beer and tortilla is a classic pairing.
The mojito

The mojito’s origins are in Cuba, that much is for sure. But although bar La Bodeguita del Medio in Havana lays claim to its creation, it’s more likely it was concocted by slaves on the sugarcane fields or based on a drink that was popularised on Sir Francis Drake’s ship when passing through Havana. He was meant to sack the Spanish of their treasures, but instead he gave them liquid gold. More recently, Ernest Hemingway would relieve the heat of Cuba with this refreshingly minty drink. It was a refinement of the mint-sugar-rum-and-lime ‘el Draque’, or ‘Drake’s’, and was first recorded in the 1930s.

Also made famous thanks to the rum-swilling exploits of Ernest Hemingway (who by association instantly sends prices soaring), La Bodeguita del Medio is Havana’s most celebrated bar. Patrons these days are largely tourists, but previously included Salvador Allende, Fidel Castro, Harry Belafonte and Nat King Cole, all of whom left their autographs on the wall. (Empeñado No 207)

‘Aquí jamás estuvo Hemingway’ (Hemingway was never here) reads the sign outside El Chanchullero, with more than a hint of irony. It’s a key point however. Since the American author never frequented this roguish joint in Plaza del Cristo, the price of cocktails has remained refreshingly low, meaning you can get as smashed as he once did. (el-chanchullero.com)

MAKE IT

INGREDIENTS
1 part lime juice
2 parts white rum
1 teaspoon of sugar
mint leaves
soda water

METHOD
✦ Muddle the lime juice, sugar and mint leaves in a glass.
✦ Fill the glass two-thirds full of ice and add the rum.
✦ Pour in soda water to the rim and add a flourish of mint leaves.

DRINK IT

✦ ‘Aquí jamás estuvo Hemingway’ (Hemingway was never here) reads the sign outside El Chanchullero, with more than a hint of irony. It’s a key point however. Since the American author never frequented this roguish joint in Plaza del Cristo, the price of cocktails has remained refreshingly low, meaning you can get as smashed as he once did. (el-chanchullero.com)
Since the area is both vast and ill-defined, it’s best to focus your time on individual kieze (neighbourhoods). The more interesting ones are wedged between the Berlin-Spandau shipping canal in the south and Seestrasse U-Bahn station in the north. A bike comes in handy for exploring this area, perhaps starting in the afternoon in the canal-hugging Sprengelkiez, with its many cafés and restaurants along Tegeler Strasse. A little further north, Leopoldplatz is another hub of action, especially in the pretty townhouse-lined streets to the north, like Malplaquetstrasse. Keep going north to the Englisches Viertel where the Schillerpark and the namesake Unesco-listed 1920s housing estate around it invite exploring or chilling. After-dark diversions are scattered throughout this sprawling district as well. One area to steer towards is Gerichtstrasse and the industrial-flavoured Gerichtshof 23 courtyard complex with its hidden bars, pop-up parties and artists’ and tango studios.

1. TOUR A DISTILLERY
The historic factory Preussische Spirituosen Manufaktur has made premium spirits and liqueurs since 1874 and once Kaiser Wilhelm I of Germany was among its customers. All produced by hand and in limited quantities using ancient equipment, today its Adler label gin and vodka is served in fine drinking parlours, and, is along with other potent potions, sold on-site. Tastings and tours are available by arrangement. [psmberlin.de]

2. LISTEN TO MUSIC IN A CREMATORIUM
The Silent Green Kulturquartier event venue is part of the historic Wedding crematorium and presents mostly experimental music, dance and other performances in the former mourning hall with its striking acoustics. A bit creepy, but very Berlin. There’s also Mars, the daytime restaurant and bar, and outdoor movie nights. [silent-green.net; mars-berlin.net]

3. GO FOR A SWIM AND WATCH THE SUNSET
On a hot summer’s day, cool off at the Strandbar Plötzensee, one of Berlin’s nicest urban swimming lakes. There’s a beach, bathrooms, sports, a children’s playground, kiosk and bar. In the evening, pick up a beer from a späti (convenience store) and trek up to the top of the flak tower in hilly Volkspark Humboldthain to watch the sun set over the city. [strandbad.ploetzensee.de]

4. FORTIFY YOURSELF WITH SAUSAGE BEFORE A NIGHT OUT
For over a quarter of a century, trained butcher Reina Lehmann has plied fans of currywurst (Berlin-style curried sausage) with quality wiener drenched in his own ‘secret’ tomato sauce from Preussische Spirituosen Manufaktur.
this little shack in the historic entrance of the Gesundbrunnen U-Bahn station. Fully fed, you’re ready for a bar crawl around Gesundbrunnen. (curry-baude.de)

5. GO TO A RECITAL IN A STATION

Fancy a piano concert in a former bus and tram repair station? The brainchild of Christoph Schreiber, the unusual non-profit Piano Salon Christophori, in a piano repair shop, holds concerts, mostly by young, highly talented soloists, several times weekly on a donation basis. Make online reservations as early as possible. (konzertfluegel.com)

6. DRINK MICRO-BREWS

Eschenbräu is an earthy microbrewery and much loved neighbourhood spot with a woody cellar pub and chestnut-canopied beer garden. Apart from traditional unfiltered pilsner, dark beer and wheat beer (March to October), it also produces seasonal beers and homemade fruit brandies. Flammkuchen (Alsatian pizza) is served, but you’re also free to bring your own picnic. (eschenbraeu.de)

7. GET CREATIVE

Tucked into an ex-industrial courtyard, Panke is a constantly evolving gallery/bar/club/café collective with a nifty garden hemmed in by the Panke creek. It champions leftfield creativity in a roster of regular events that includes jam sessions, poetry slams and concerts. Go through to the second courtyard, turn right, then left. (pankeculture.com)

8. HAVE A LONG, LAZY BRUNCH

Restore balance after a night out with Sunday brunch at Schraders, where the huge international smörgåsbord spoils you for choice until 3pm (be sure to book). Southeast Asia meets Arabic brass tables and grandma’s plush sofa at the thriving café-lounge-restaurant with an equally eclectic menu. The kitchen also churns out breakfast, burgers, pasta, salads, tapas and mains in many exciting iterations. (schraders-berlin.de)
In the strict class system of old Hawaii, the best surfing spots were kept for the ali‘i (nobles). For kings such as Hawaii’s unifier, Kamehameha I (died 1819), surfing skill was a matter of prestige.

Many surfboards were shaped from koa, a kind of acacia wood that also became a favourite for making ukuleles. In a place where crops grew easily, there was plenty of leisure time for surfing.

Social upheaval after European contact put the survival of the sport at risk, though enough Hawaiians kept it up for a visiting Mark Twain to try ‘surf-bathing’ in 1866. He didn’t master the art.

The greatest reviver of surfing was Honolulu local Duke Kahanamoku – freestyle swimming world record holder from 1912 to 1922. His visit to Sydney in 1915 helped bring surfing to Australia.

Though the wave-lashed North Shore of O‘ahu island became surfing’s new frontier after the 1950s, Waikiki is still its spiritual home, with a garland-draped statue of Duke Kahanamoku.

Wide and golden Waikiki Beach, on the east side of Hawaii’s capital Honolulu, is the cradle of surfing. It was here in the first half of the 20th century that local ‘beachboys’ taught visitors to surf, and they took word of their new hobby home, notably spreading the craze to California and Australia. Riding waves was a traditional pastime in many Polynesian islands, but for Hawaiians ‘he’e nalu’ (‘wave-sliding’) also took on aspects of warrior training and religion. Plenty of modern surfers show a similar devotion to this day.
MY PERFECT DAY

London

Antony Robbins is a speaker, writer and a former director of the Museum of London. He’s also a Blue Badge Tourist Guide (mrlondoner.co.uk).

1. I start the day in Soho with a coffee at Bar Italia, in the building where, in 1926, TV was first transmitted. Soho is London’s former red-light district, and its name derives, surprisingly, from a hunting cry. In the 1530s, the former monastic lands of Soho and Covent Garden were grabbed by Henry VIII so he could hunt deer, hare and fox from nearby Whitehall Palace.

2. Soho was once famous for its textiles, its tailors and its makers. And everyone knows Soho’s Carnaby Street. Lesser known is Newburgh Street, just round the corner. The pretty cobbled thoroughfare is home to independent London jeweller Joy Everley. Over the road is another favourite, Peckham Rye, a bespoke tailor with a rich and colourful history going back to the days of the British Raj.

3. Just north of Covent Garden is the Seven Dials district, comprising ancient streets and repurposed Victorian warehouses. Depicted by Charles Dickens as a dark and dangerous slum, today this is a great place to browse quirky independent shops. Check out the Vintage Showroom and the elegant stationer, Choosing Keeping.

4. The authorities have a somewhat mixed-up approach to street art: should they remove it with high pressure jets or protect it behind perspex? Graffiti is positively encouraged in the Leake Street tunnels in Waterloo. New artists cut their teeth here but their work disappears in days, sprayed over by others eager to make their mark. For lunch, Marie’s Café in nearby Lower Marsh does a great pad Thai.

5. Bankside was once home to smelly industries like breweries, tanneries and vinegar-makers, as well as to riotous Elizabethan theatres and taverns. Today, it’s famous for Borough Market, Tate Modern and the Globe. There’s a bit of grit in the oyster here too. I love its secret histories, like the Crossbones Graveyard: the final resting place of local prostitutes of past centuries.

6. Nearby is All Hallows Church. Blitzed in WWII, it now has an adjoining garden. British electro-pop was born here in 1981 when Depeche Mode cut their seminal album Speak & Spell in the church hall. All that history builds an appetite. I end the day at Casa do Frango, a Portuguese restaurant that only does chicken — but brilliantly. It’s in the former engineering works of WH Willcox, which is a dramatic backdrop for top-quality food and drink.

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The Grossarler Hof takes a few design cues from the rural architecture of the region, and makes something almost castle-like out of it. This mountain retreat is a member of Small Luxury Hotels of the World, and your room here will feel both elegant and cozy. Tiled stoves and wood-grain textures add rustic touches throughout the hotel, whether you're tucking into local venison and farmhouse cheeses over dinners of regional cuisine, or trying out an Alpine-inspired treatment at the Erlenreich Relax & Spa.

The hotel is handily close to one of the main gondola lifts in the village. While skiers hit Grossarl's slopes in winter, Alpine flowers herald the switch to hiking and mountain-biking amid the surrounding peaks, within reach of the lofty wilderness of Hohe Tauern National Park.

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A car rusts away in the ghost town of Kolmanskop, outside Lüderitz in the south of ____. The country is the world’s second least densely populated; only ____, largely covered by the Gobi Desert, is emptier of humans. That sparseness still wasn’t enough, though, when the Sperrgebiet was set up in 1908 to guard one of the world’s richest sources of ____. The public continues to be banned from this expanse, whose name means ‘Prohibited Area’ in ____. The language of the former colonisers is spoken by over 20,000 locals, one of the largest communities outside Europe. Many indigenous languages here include consonants with a ____ sound; these are used almost solely in southern Africa, and are often written with symbols such as ! and //.
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