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TRAVELLER



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Experience Arizona

While Arizona might be best known for its vast skies and majestic landscapes, this gem of a state is also host to myriad luxury experiences, designed to make the most of its scenic, cultural and culinary delights. From balloon rides to desert wellness retreats, these are some of the options that will turn your Arizona holiday into something truly special.

Flightseeing

Whether by plane, helicopter or hot air balloon, there can be few finer ways to take in the sheer drama of Arizona's canyons and deserts than from the air. Fly high above the likes of Lake Powell, Horseshoe Bend and, of course, the Grand Canyon, landing in secluded spots to explore natural and cultural wonders up close and away from the crowds.

Adventures by rail

If you'd prefer to keep your feet on terra firma, there's a selection of super-scenic rail journeys that allow you to take in the views at a more sedate pace. The Grand Canyon Railway is a real highlight, offering the chance to relive an important part of American history, with the first-class experience in particular, taking in the 65-mile route in style. The Verde Canyon Railroad is another classic, taking guests in true vintage style past red-rock buttresses, abundant wildlife and Native American ruins.

World-class food & wine

Throughout Arizona, you'll be treated to superb food and drink. Indeed, the city of Tucson is a UNESCO City of

Gastronomy, where restaurants showcase the finest and freshest native ingredients across a wide range of classic Arizonan dishes. Don't miss El Guero Canelo's delicious Sonoran hot dogs. Elsewhere, in Phoenix and Scottsdale, award-winning chefs abound, with no fewer than 11 local chefs nominated in the prestigious 2022 James Beard Awards, while further afield you'll find countless examples of fabulous farm-to-fork dining. Then, to wash it all down, you'll find everything from inner-city microbreweries to the award-winning producers of Northern Arizona's Verde Valley and the esteemed Southern Arizona Wine Country.

Wellness

Dotted throughout the state and, in many cases set amid some of western USA's most captivating scenery, are a number of spas and wellness retreats – the perfect antidote for all that exploration. Offering the ultimate in relaxation, guests will typically find classic massages and treatments alongside activities that might range from aerial yoga to fire making, delivering a truly immersive wellness experience. If this sounds like your thing, don't miss a trip to Aji Spa, which combines ancient techniques with native ingredients.



To find out more about holidays to Arizona, call a Wexas specialist on 020 7838 5958.

ARIZONA
GRAND CANYON STATE

Waterworld

One of the books we mention in this issue tells of a childhood spent on a seventy foot yacht. Suzanne Heywood was swept up in her father's dream to follow Captain Cook's third expedition around the world. 'This boat would walk us over the waves, carrying us around the world and back again' she writes. It wasn't as simple as that, no plain sailing here. She was seven. Her father declared "I can't think of a better education than sailing around the world." It was an education of sorts, but not the sort that Heywood longed for, in a classroom on land that didn't pitch and roll through storms and shipwrecks for an entire decade. The book, *Wavewalker*, is a thrilling and terrifying read.

There are no terrifying reads in this issue, but there is 'water, water everywhere' and many a literary drop to drink. So many of the destinations featured have been shaped and defined by seas and rivers.

Singapore, so evocatively captured by Simon Urwin, would never have become the lion of Southeast Asia without its particular position. It boomed and bloomed precisely because it was 'a nexus of ancient maritime trade routes' as Simon says. As was Hoi An, which Simon also writes about.

Istanbul is utterly defined by its position on the Bosphorus, as described by Nick Maes, 'that evocative nexus of where East meets West, where Europe meets Asia.' That all important nexus again, which still influences Turkey's strategic influence today. Many daily trips here for pleasure or work are made by boat, as Nick says 'there are dozens of ferries and tourist boats to choose from', but in swashing style, he charts a gin palace, and floats along a route lined with romantic silhouettes of palaces and minarets, seen from the river that is the heart of the city.

In Venice, the same can be said for the canals and lagoons. The waterways that traverse the city are the essential way to go, and the gondoliers the experts on all the ways to go. We go to school with them in this issue, as Kevin Pilley joins a class that teaches them the intricacies of their trade.

The boatmen who navigate the inland delta of the Okavango are just as skilled, using dugout canoes to gently make their way past hippos and crocodiles in



Amy Sohanpaul
on time and tide



a place of staggering beauty. Jonathan and Angela Scott know it well and capture that beauty through stunning photography, while their words are a reminder of how precarious it is. In Venice the danger is from floods, here it is the threat of drought. For now, all manner of wildlife congregates here – not just the expected hippos and crocodiles, but kingfishers, haughty herons, the stately shy sitatunga antelopes, elephants and giraffes, but also a considerable concentration of lions and leopards – it's not hard to spot them in this enchanted world of its own.

Australia's faraway Kimberley Coast is also a world of its own, in that it is incredibly hard to explore without an expedition-style cruise. James Litston joins one, to find an experience shared with very few outsiders, amidst a landscape preserved in its isolation. 'Were I to be here 200 or even 2,000 years ago, it's likely this landscape would look little different from today', he notes. It remains a place deeply embedded in Aboriginal culture, and he finds ceremonial sites adorned with the oldest known styles of figurative painting. (See our Art of Travel feature for another example of exquisite Aboriginal painting.) He also comes across saltwater crocodiles, dolphins, whales, sharks, and turtles and so many seabirds he feels he's stumbled into a wildlife documentary. His other feature in this issue is a visit to the far more accessible St Kitts, where of course the sea is all.

Closer to home, Emma Willsted, this year's winner of the Bradt Award for Travel Writing, finds a different sort of sea, on Omei, a subtidal island off the western edge of Connemara. It is a haunting and elegiac place, as is her piece, a story of how the waves in their comings and goings have added and taken away from this place over the centuries. In Denmark, Jonathan Lorie follows the Danish Riviera, sampling delicious *smorrebrod* and the waterfront charms of Copenhagen, kayaking among islands in an inland lake, and finding Shakespeare, Karen Blixen and then Kierkegaard along the way.

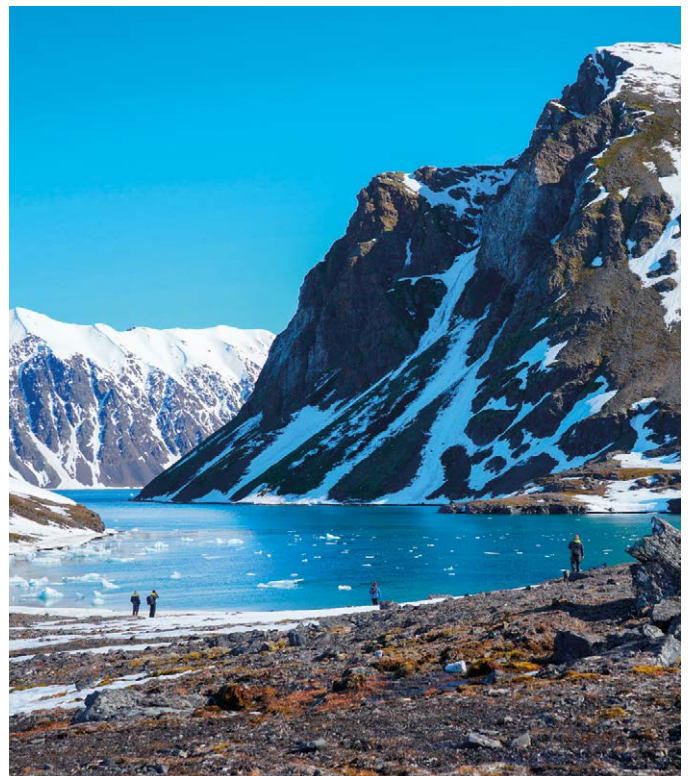
There are pleasures for landlubbers too, with Birmingham, Alabama serving up some serious food; and Azerbaijan serving up some very serious wine; two places and pieces to savour, and much food for thought in our books pages. As I hope there is in all our pages, and that you enjoy their *smorrebrod* style variety.



Pioneers in expedition cruising

Arctic • Antarctica • Rest of World

As recognised world leaders and pioneers in expedition cruising, Swan Hellenic have been taking clients to the planet's remotest regions for more than 70 years. It's a unique heritage, showcased across a globe-spanning range of voyages, packed full of authentic, intimate and unforgettable moments, and complemented by an on-board air of elegant sophistication across their fleet of boutique-luxury ships. Think Scandinavian design, complemented by a wealth of superb amenities, from the very latest ice-class technology to state-of-the-art fitness and spa facilities and world-class dining. You'll find details of their newest ship, *SH Diana*, opposite.



New for 2023: *SH Diana*

Named after the Ancient Roman goddess of light, the moon, hunting and the wilderness, Swan Hellenic's all-new ship, *SH Diana*, will be the largest ship in their three-pronged fleet. Accommodation will be both elegant and spacious, with room for up to 192 guests across 96 stylish staterooms and suites, the vast majority of which feature large balconies. Operated by an on-board team of 140 staff, guests can expect the very highest levels of personal service, showcased across a programme of voyages, with destinations set to include everywhere from the Arctic and Antarctica to a range of off-the-beaten-track ports across the Mediterranean.



Building on the chic, Scandinavian design and outstanding amenities of her sister ships – including al fresco dining options and a heated outdoor pool – *SH Diana* will add in the likes of a dedicated Multifunctional Room next to the Observation Lounge, more dedicated deck space and a private dining room for special occasions.

Perhaps most notably, the ship will also be home to two covered tenders – a comfortable and accessible alternative to the classic Zodiacs traditionally used for expedition landings. Furthermore, a Polar Class 6 ice-strengthened hull combines with extra-large stabilisers to make the overall journey as comfortable as possible, particularly when navigating the wilder waters of the polar regions.

Svalbard in depth

10-day expedition cruise

Sailing out from Longyearbyen, this is your chance to explore the remotest corners of the Svalbard archipelago in style. Keeping eyes peeled for polar bears, you'll sail between majestic glaciers and towering fjords, enjoying daily shore excursions designed to bring you up close to the region's unique landscapes and wildlife. Then, back on board, you'll savour all the luxuries of your Scandi-inspired ship, complete with saunas, Jacuzzis, a state-of-the-art gym, sophisticated dining spaces and a choice of observation areas.

Prices start from £4,815 pp incl. UK airport lounge access, flights, two-nights accommodation, transfers & a 7-day cruise incl. all meals, drinks, excursions & more. For a full itinerary, visit wexas.com/184038.



TRAVELLER

Traveller is Britain's original magazine for intelligent travel. Since 1970 it has reported on the real experience of travelling the world, and many of today's leading explorers and adventurers are on the Editorial Board.

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Mark Beaumont is a record-breaking athlete, broadcaster and an ambassador for charities.

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Fergal Keane OBE is a BBC special correspondent who reported from South Africa for many years, and an acclaimed author.

Sir Robin Knox-Johnston CBE FRINA is the first man to sail non-stop and single-handed around the world, and author of many books on sailing.

Stewart McPherson is a writer, broadcaster, natural history champion and founder of Redfern Natural History Productions.

Sir Christopher Ondaatje CBE OC is chairman of the Ondaatje Foundation and author of ten books, including *Sindh Revisited* and *Journey to the Source of the Nile*.

Sir Michael Palin CBE FRGS is the world's favourite television traveller and a member of *Monty Python's Flying Circus*.

Professor John Prebble BA LLB BCL JSD is an international barrister in tax law, and formerly Dean of Law at Victoria University, Wellington.

Dr Christopher Roads MA PHD FRGS is an expert in the use and history of firearms and former Deputy Director of the Imperial War Museum.

Jonathan Scott is a leading wildlife photographer and presenter of the BBC's *Big Cat Diary*. He is patron of a number of wildlife conservation societies.

John Simpson CBE is the BBC's World Affairs Editor and has reported from 120 countries during his 50+ years with the BBC.

Colin Thubron CBE FRGS FRSL is Britain's most distinguished travel writer, author of award-winning books on Asia and Russia.

Sir Crispin Tickell CCMG KCVO is an eminent environmentalist, leader of the Climate Institute of Washington and Green College Centre.

Every issue we seek out today's most distinguished and interesting travellers to contribute to the magazine

THE PEOPLE BEHIND OUR STORIES



MEGAN MCCUBBIN

is a zoologist, wildlife television presenter and environmental campaigner, and the author of *An Atlas of Endangered Species*.

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BARBARA WEIR

was an artist from the Utopia/Urapuntja region of the Northern Territory of Australia and a major force in Aboriginal art.

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ANTHONY SATTIN

is a journalist and writer who travels extensively in North Africa and the Middle East. His latest book is *Nomads*.

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MARK REYNOLDS

is a writer and editor and a founding editor of *Bookanista*.

For *Traveller* he compiles Bookshelf and other features. He profiles Megan McCubbin.

SEE PAGES 18 & 74



NICK HUNT

is the author of three acclaimed travel books. His debut novel *Red Smoking Mirror* is inspired by journeys through Mexico, Morocco and Spain.

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SIMON URWIN

is an award-winning travel photographer and writer, who has shot in over 75 countries from Antarctica to Afghanistan.

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JONATHAN LORIE

is a former editor of *Traveller*. He is an Associate Lecturer at Bath Spa University and author of *The Travel Writer's Way*.

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JONATHAN & ANGELA SCOTT

are wildlife photographers and documentary makers based in Kenya. In this issue they revisit the Okavango Delta.

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NICK MAES

is a travel writer, novelist and broadcaster who can be found digging his garden on the South Coast when not travelling the world in grand style.

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KEVIN PILLEY

is a former professional cricketer and chief staff writer at *Punch* magazine whose travel writing is published around the world.

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JAMES LITSTON

Australia is a favourite destination for the freelance journalist, who writes about exploring the Kimberley Coast and St Kitts.

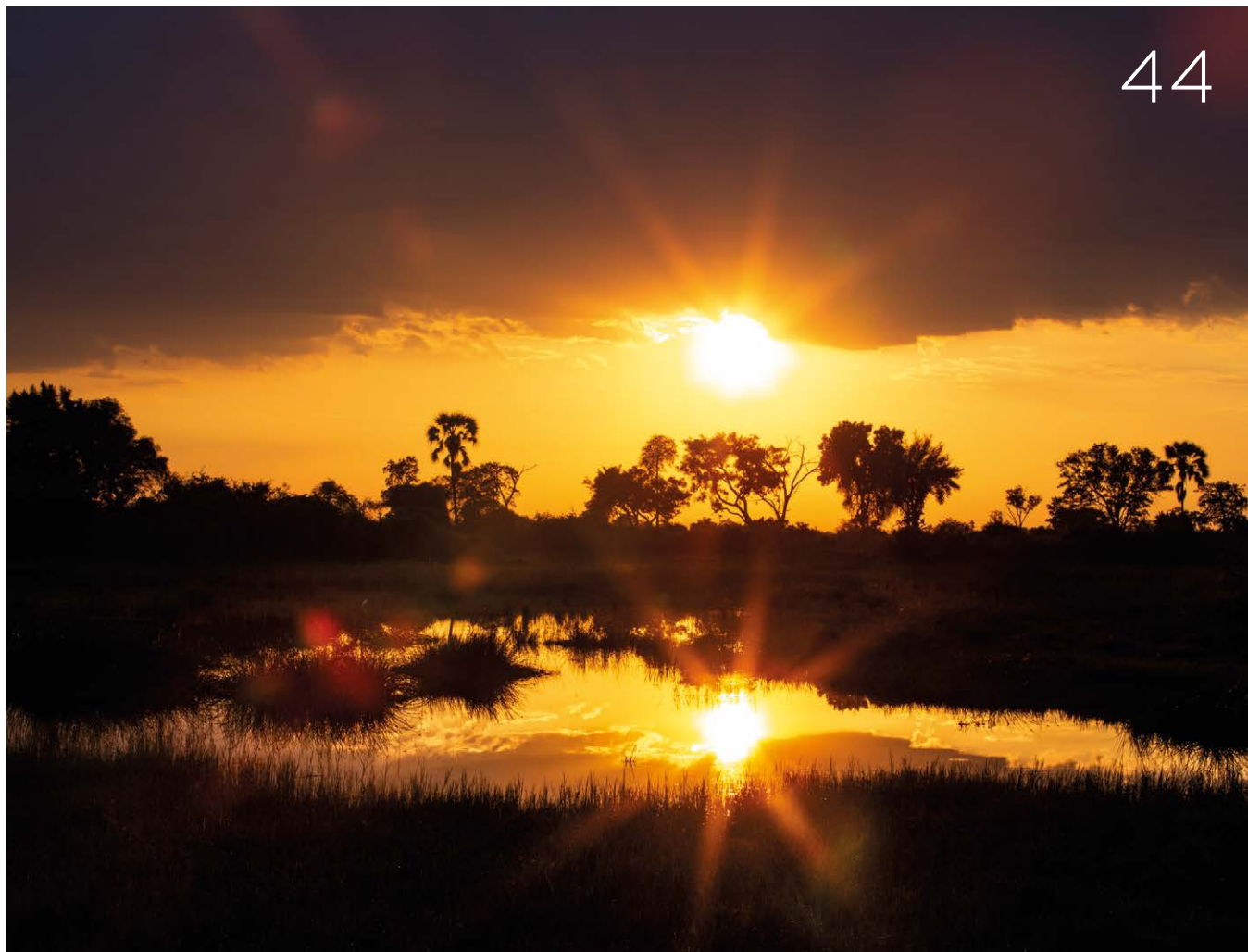
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EMMA WILLSTEED

grew up in Hong Kong fascinated by food and culture, and is completing an MA in Nature and Travel Writing at Bath Spa University.

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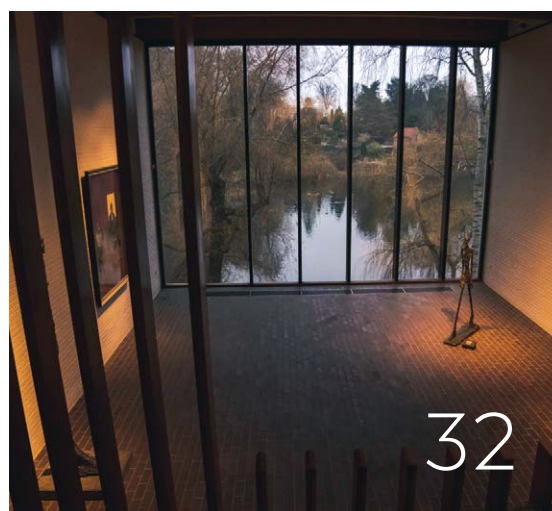
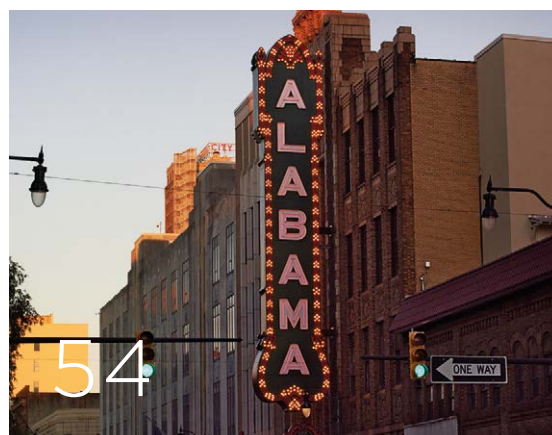
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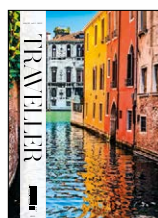
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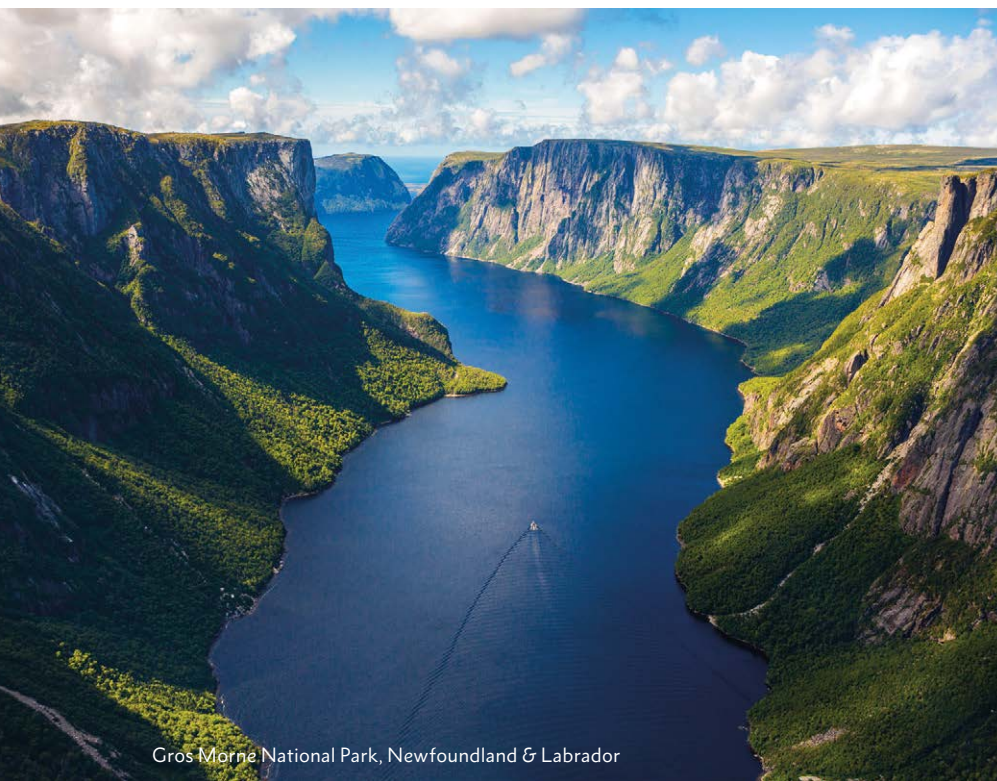
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Gros Morne National Park, Newfoundland & Labrador

ATLANTIC CANADA

Although each of the four provinces that form Canada's easternmost reach has its own distinct charm, there's plenty that they share. Expect everything from warm welcomes and excellent seafood to unique wildlife and a wealth of settlers' heritage. What's more, this well-kept secret is just a six-hour direct flight away from the UK.

New Brunswick

New Brunswick has attracted everyone from British colonists to the holidaying millionaires of the early 20th century. They were all drawn by a rich natural world – an unspoiled wilderness of salmon rivers, old-growth forests and a spectacular coast fissured into craggy islands.

It's all showcased today in a spread of protected regions. Prime among them is the Fundy National Park, where 120km of hiking and biking trails link forest-

clad streams and gurgling waterfalls. Then, on the Bay of Fundy, there are Hopewell Rocks – great sandstone formations chiselled out by the world's highest tides. It's possible to both walk among their beach base and kayak alongside their peaks in the very same day, perhaps throwing in some whale spotting in between.

Then, back on dry land, there's plenty of urban intrigue left behind by centuries of would-be settlers. The capital, Fredericton, is a prime example,

its tree-lined riverside setting dotted with Georgian townhouses and stately government buildings. Then, on the coast, Saint John is a fascinating slice of Victorian-era industry, Shediac lets you catch your own dinner in the "lobster capital of the world", and loyalist-built St Andrews by the Sea pairs Tudor-revival charm with a verdant peninsular setting.

Newfoundland & Labrador

It's not just the geography of Canada's easternmost province that sets it apart. Yes, riven fjords, drifting icebergs and craggy islands stand in the way, but it's the still-apparent Irish and British heritage that really makes the region stand out from the mainland.

St. John's, the region's capital and the oldest city in North America, is a vision of colonial charm, with colourful townhouses and stilted fishermen's sheds set to views of drifting ice. Then, on the Irish Loop (the region's premier driving route) you'll be treated to 185 miles of quaint fishing villages, lonely lighthouses and the first permanent European settlement in North America – Ferryland.

However, there's also plenty of natural beauty. In Gros Morne National Park, mountain peaks roll down into spectacular fjords in a series of green-dappled contours – ideal for waterfall hikes and river cruises. Then, the Baccalieu Trail offers a great alternative to the Irish Loop, focusing on rural scenery as it maps the fissured coast of Newfoundland's north-western peninsula. However, if you'd like something extra special, Fogo Island offers the Scandinavian chic of one of the world's finest luxury lodges. It's all wrapped up in a truly wild setting.

Nova Scotia

Nova Scotia's 7,500km of wild coastline were never fully named by its Mi'kmaq First Nation or Scottish and French settlers. Instead, postcard-perfect villages and grand old colonial forts serve only to dot the windswept grandeur of this great peninsula, linked only to the rest of Canada by a short isthmus.

Introductions are made in the historic capital of Halifax, where an 18th-century British fortress looks out over waterfront bars and Victorian-era public gardens. Then, gorgeous drives along the glacier-carved coast will see you between iconic lighthouses, idyllic beaches and UNESCO-listed fishing towns punctuated by merchants' mansions. Ringed by up-and-coming vineyards, there's even Canada's oldest national historic site – Fort Anne.

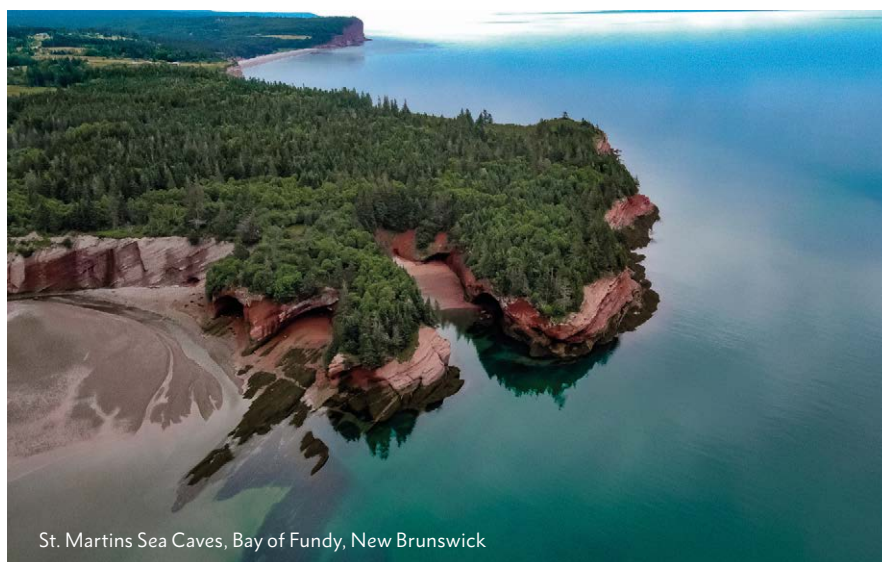
However, for many it's Nova Scotia's Cabot Trail that stands out most. Considered to be one of the top ten scenic drives in the world, it winds for 185 miles around the coast of Cape Breton Island – Nova Scotia's north-eastern reach. It's an absolute treat, darting through old-growth forests, among glacier-scarred rock and over rugged highlands.

Prince Edward Island

Although just 60km at its widest, Canada's smallest province packs a lot in. From burnished red beaches to rolling hinterlands, island life plays out over quaint villages, historic sites and a full spread of outdoors activities. And, it's all animated by some of the friendliest locals you're likely to meet.

Knitting it all together is a series of gorgeous country roads, making for an ideal self-drive trip. You'll expect to stop at thousand-year-old Mi'kmaq settlements, museums on the island's French Acadian heritage and tree-lined Charlottetown – the province's gorgeous redbrick capital. And, if you thought that the island looked like something out of a Victorian childhood idyll, you'd be right. You can visit the titular house of *Anne of Green Gables*.

Termed the "Garden Province", Prince Edward Island also impresses with a rural spectacle. Move back from the kayak-worthy coast and idyllic, red-sand beaches to discover a rolling interior of dense forests – perfect for hiking and cycling. It all informs a rich culinary scene. While Prince Edward potatoes are famous the world over, anywhere that you can pick your lobster right out of a fishing boat is worth a visit.



St. Martins Sea Caves, Bay of Fundy, New Brunswick



Cabot Trail, Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia



East Point, Prince Edward Island

For more information, or to book your Atlantic Canada holiday, call a Wexas specialist on **020 7838 5958** or visit **wexas.com**

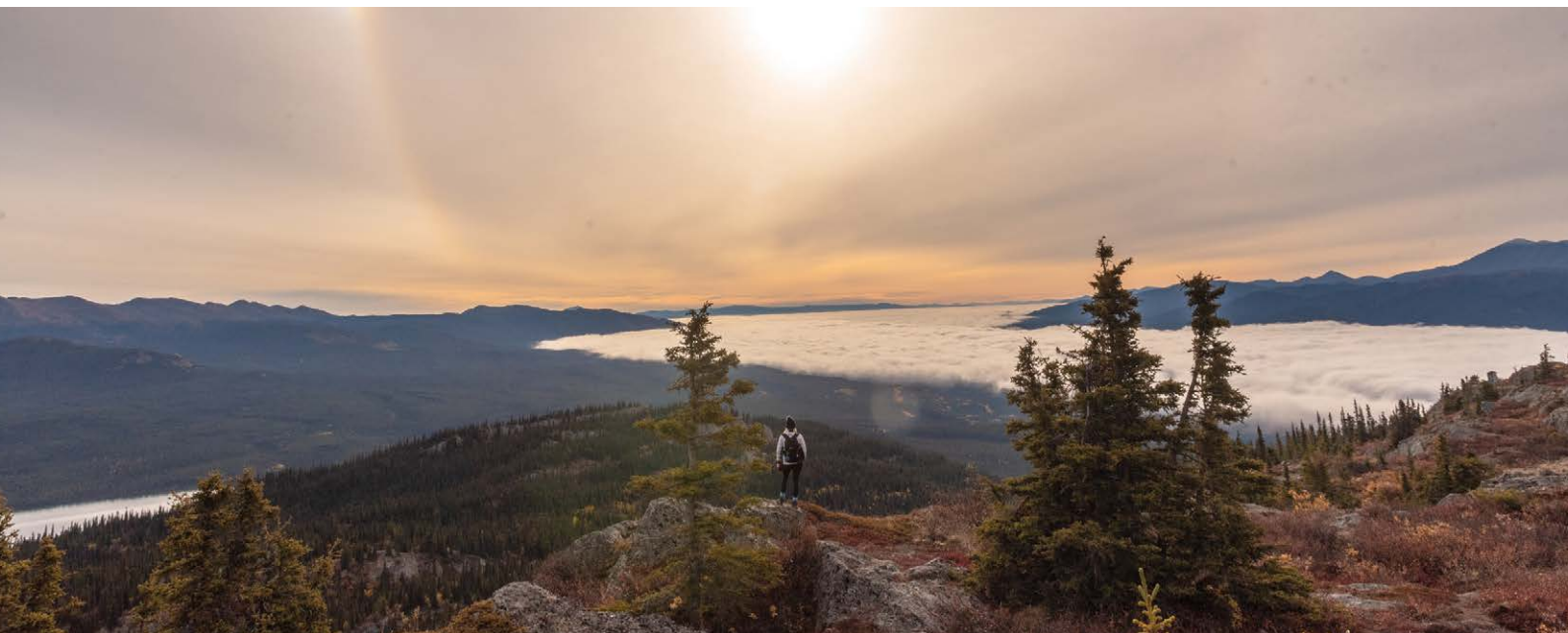


THE YUKON

Northern Lights or Midnight Sun?

Between August and April, the skies above the Yukon wilderness come alive with the dancing ribbons of nature's greatest light show. The allure of the Northern Lights cannot be captured in words – you have to experience it for yourself. Fortunately, the Yukon is perfect for just that, with plenty of tranquil locations offering a near-private front-row seat. Alternatively, join a local guide to head off the beaten track, seeking out the remotest spots for the best displays while benefitting from fascinating expert insight.

Hoping to travel in summer? Flip the switch to experience the endless glow of the magical Midnight Sun. It's the natural wonder that will follow you wherever your Yukon adventure takes you. However and wherever you spend your time, whether on a cultural tour or a hike into nature, you'll enjoy extra-long summer days and a huge helping of warming sunshine.

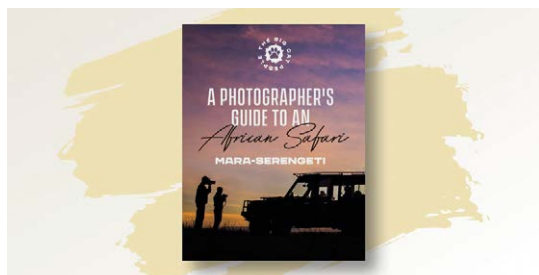


LATEST NEWS FROM OUR HONORARY PRESIDENTS

SPREADING THE WORD

Jonathan and Angela Scott have released the first in a series of ebooks, which set out to impart their decades of experience to help readers deepen their knowledge across a wide variety of topics including photography, careers, wildlife safari and world travel. The first tranche of titles comprises *A Photographer's Guide to An African Safari: Mara-Serengeti*, *Wildlife Photography: The Basics for Beginners* and *10 Iconic Photographs to Inspire Your Creative Journey*. You can also join Jonathan and Angela each week as they delve into some of their favourite topics in *The Big Cat People* podcast, featuring fellow photographers, celebrities, conservationists and more.

jonathanangelascott.com



SIR RANULPH FIENNES: MAD, BAD AND DANGEROUS

For one night only, on 7 September at London's Alexandra Palace Theatre, 'the world's greatest living explorer' goes beyond his record-breaking achievements to give a glimpse of the man behind the myth. Live on stage, he will share stories from his legendary exploits and adventures. From his magical and mischievous childhood and school misdemeanours, to his time in the military and beyond, Ran will also reveal his own personal heroes and the incredible lessons he learnt from them which have informed his hazardous profession.

alexandrapalace.com

THE MONGOLIAN KHAN KHENTII EXPEDITION

From 28 June to 18 July, **Colonel John Blashford-Snell** is leading a Scientific Exploration Society expedition to the Khentii mountain range east of Ulaanbaatar. Much of this remote wilderness is uninhabited and accessible only on foot or horse. Over 1,000 plant species and 50 mammals, including

endangered moose, musk deer, brown bear, wolf and sable are found here, as well as 250 types of birds including hooper swans, spoonbills, egrets and raptors. A rich heritage of human settlement is marked with numerous rock carvings of the Upper Palaeolithic and Stone Age period,



deer stones (or *stelae*) and Bronze Age tombs. There is also the mysterious Great Wall of Chinggis Khaan (Genghis Khan) and numerous other historical sites linked to the legendary leader and warrior. The expedition will be carrying out community aid projects and performing archaeological, biological and zoological tasks with Mongolian scientists. Travel will be by horse and four-wheel-drive vehicles. Accommodation will be in tents provided by local agents. At the end of the expedition there will be two days in the Khustain Nuruu National Park (west of Ulaanbaatar) studying the critically endangered Przewalski's horses and carrying out zoological research.

ses-explore.org



THE ISLANDS OF OKINAWA

Lush jungle, sandy beaches, coral reefs and karate define Japan's Okinawa, a group of 160 subtropical islands, which extend across 700 kilometres of the South China Sea from Kyushu to Yonaguni-jima, almost within sight of Taiwan.

Okinawa Main Island

Stretching more than 100 kilometers from north to south, Okinawa Main Island is the largest and most populated of the archipelago. And, it's the most diverse, too. In the north, dramatic karst landscapes share the spotlight with national-park forests, remote capes and authentic villages, as well as some of Okinawa's most luxurious resorts. Take the chance for an island-hopping adventure, perhaps visiting Ie Island with its emerald waters and seasonal lily and hibiscus flowers, overlooked by craggy Mt. Gusuku. Or, head to Yanbaru to explore verdant forests, wildlife-rich mangroves and limestone peaks on everything from waterfall hikes to kayaking trips.



In the central region, you'll discover Okinawa's creative side, showcased in its famed pottery industry. There are also gorgeous island drives to enjoy, perhaps taking in Yomitan Village with its rich Ryukyu culture, or mixing idyllic beaches with visits to Chatan and Koza – the island's entertainment hubs. Head here for lively shopping and delicious food served in oceanfront restaurants.

The south of the main island is the beating heart of Okinawan culture. Explore the history of the royal family at Shuri Castle Park and the Tama-udun mausoleum, then get spiritual at sacred Sefa Utaki. Enjoy the urban buzz of Naha, or head further south to Itoman or Nanjo for sprawling limestone caves, pristine beaches and to reflect on Okinawa's somber WWII history. You might even want to join a karate class to learn about some of the foundations of the martial art that has its roots in Okinawan culture and history.

Yaeyama Islands

Flung far out in the East China Sea, 400 km south of the main island, the Yaeyama Islands represent Japan's remotest outpost. Still, despite their location, they remain one of Okinawa's most popular destinations, one that offers a rich variety of experiences from exploring wildlife-rich mangroves to diving with hammerhead sharks. And, the beaches are spectacular, too, with powder-soft sands and impossibly clear seas.



Gateway to this subtropical paradise is Ishigaki Island, an idyllic setting with sweeping ocean views and a healthy dose of traditional island culture. Part of Iriomote-Ishigaki National Park, visitors here can enjoy superb stargazing and explore seas rich in wildlife, spotting the likes of sea turtles and manta rays.

There's also the island's cultural heritage to enjoy, showcased in traditional songs and poems that are the fabric of island life. And, be sure to delve into the local craft scene, particularly the unique Ishigaki-yaki pottery, distinguished by its mesmerising blue-green patterns and dark glaze made from the island's mineral ore.

Miyako Islands

Okinawa's premier resort destination, the Miyako Islands are a mostly inhabited chain fanning out from the main and larger Miyako. The subtropical beaches here rival any in the world – unspoiled and fringed by pure white sands and a shimmering sea that's a haven for divers and snorkellers. In fact, life here revolves around the sea, with glass-bottomed boat trips, stand-up paddleboarding and parasailing among a host of waterbound options.

For something altogether more off-the-beaten-track, take the short boat trip to Ogami, a sacred islet known as the "island of the Gods". Just be sure to try the island's specialty of smoked octopus. Known locally as *kakidako*, it takes pride of place on the menu at Ogami's one and only restaurant. Also not to be overlooked is tiny Shimoji Island and its underwater caves.

Kerama Islands

With four inhabited islands – Tokashiki, Zamami, Aka, and Geruma – and many uninhabited ones besides, the Kerama Island chain offers everything from out-and-out beach relaxation to fascinating marine life, showcased across whale watching trips and some of Japan's finest snorkelling and diving. Here, the reef-filled waters are renowned for their transparency and are home to a seemingly endless array of spectacular corals and marine wildlife, including sea turtles. Aka island is a particular favourite for diving and, if you visit during winter, you might even spot a migratory humpback whale. You'll also be spoilt for choice when it comes to beaches, each serving up gorgeous sunsets and delightfully tranquil waters. What's more, due to its close proximity to Naha on the Main Island, it's all easily reached on a day trip.



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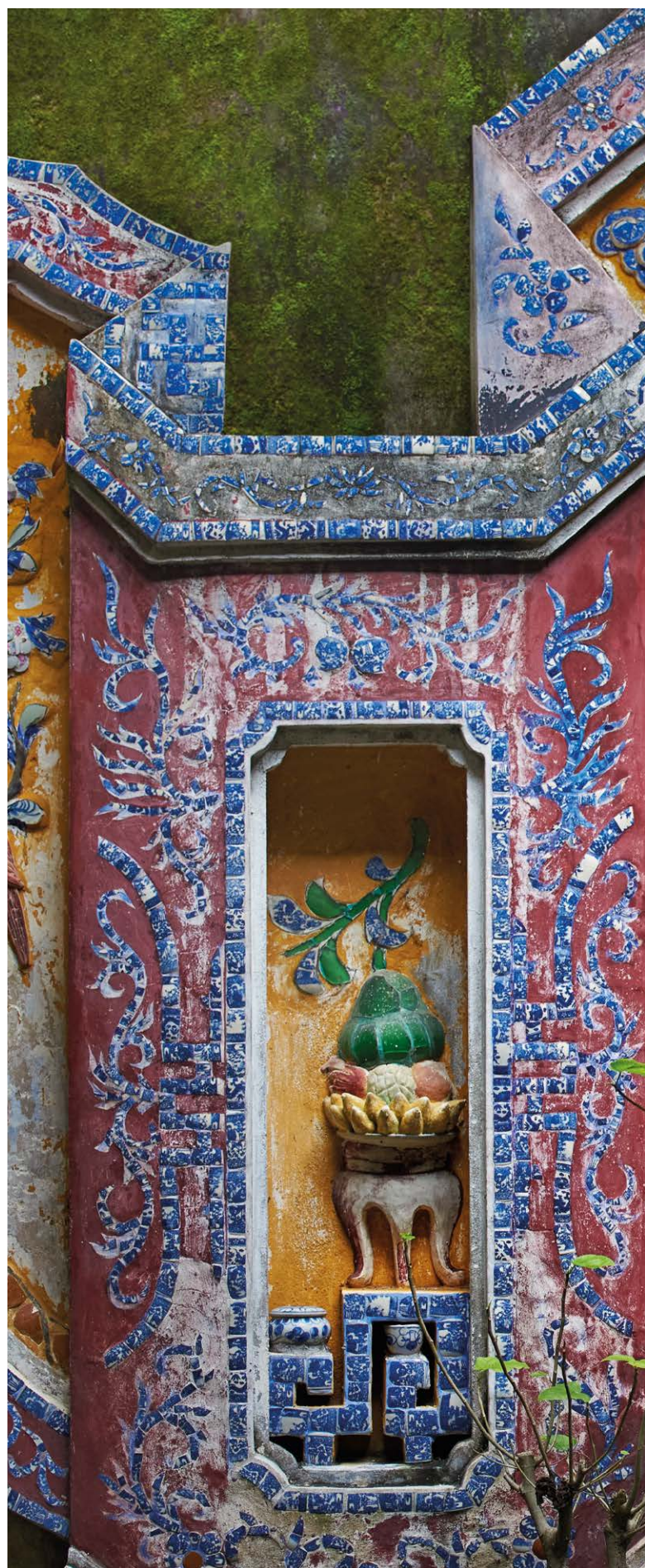
Historical Hoi An

words & picture
Simon Urwin

Hoi An is Vietnam's most atmospheric town, a place that emanates a graceful, timeless air. Standing on the north bank of the Thu Bon River, it was once a key port in Southeast Asia's maritime trading network; records indicate it was active as far back as the 2nd century BCE, when the people of the Sa Huynh culture exchanged their goods with India and China.

Hoi An grew rapidly and reached its peak between the 15th and 19th centuries when the world's great trading nations came to call. Commerce boomed largely thanks to the annual four-month-long spring fair that attracted traders from far and wide: from Southeast Asia came silks, ivory, porcelain, ceramics, elephant tusks, mother-of-pearl and lacquerware; from Europe – textiles, beeswax and weaponry. As the port grew, it swelled with artisans, moneylenders and maritime bureaucrats. Travelling merchants would rent lodgings and storage, and many went on to marry Vietnamese women and settle here, helping to create a rich cultural and architectural fusion of Chinese, Japanese and Vietnamese with European influences.

When silt began to clog the river, Hoi An's days as a successful port began to drift away with the falling tide, leaving behind a uniquely preserved example of a Far Eastern port. More than a thousand timber frame buildings remain, all packed in tight, unbroken rows and topped with moss-covered tiles. Wooden-fronted shophouses, some more than 200 years old, are still inhabited by descendants of prosperous Chinese traders. There is a fine 18th-century Japanese bridge, complete with its own pagoda, and dotted around town are the old Chinese assembly halls that formed the focal point of spiritual and community life – as they still do to this day. The sea trade may have been replaced with tourist traffic, but wandering aimlessly along Hoi An's historic streets, it's possible to imagine the cry of the stevedores, the merchant vessels jostling for position at the dock, the warehouses stacked to the rafters with exotic goods – particularly after dusk when the tens of thousands of shopfront lanterns slowly flicker into life, casting their amber glow across the townscape.





Wild at heart

MARK REYNOLDS IS WOWED BY MEGAN MCCUBBIN'S PASSIONATE DEDICATION TO ENDANGERED SPECIES

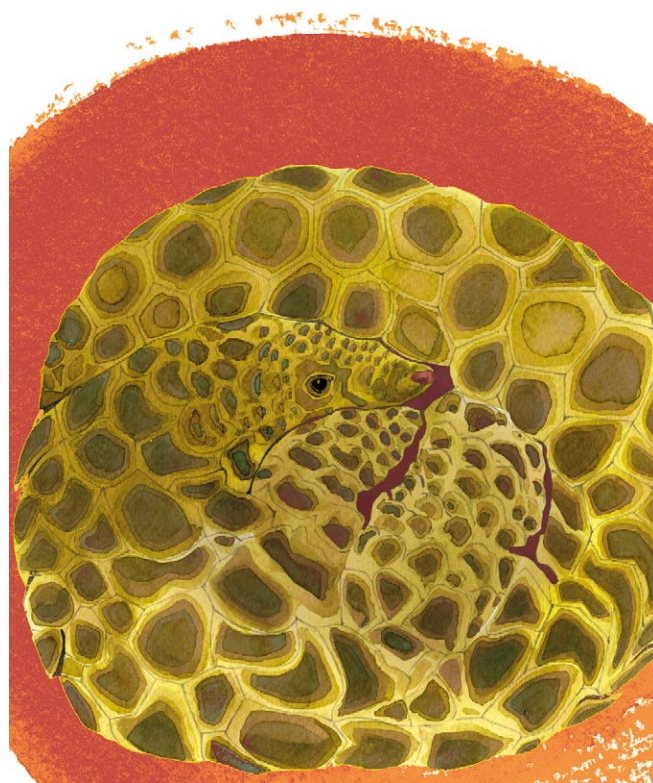
Zoologist, tv presenter and vocal

environmental campaigner Megan McCubbin's interest in animal behaviour, evolution and the illegal wildlife trade stems from a childhood growing up in and around the Isle of Wight Zoo. Now known as the Wildheart Animal Sanctuary, where step-dad Chris Packham's long-time partner Charlotte Corney is Director, the zoo has a proud record of conservation and protecting rescue animals. Megan would also accompany Chris on frequent filming and research trips, becoming still more deeply immersed in the wild.

With her first solo book *An Atlas of Endangered Species*, Megan sets out to inspire the next generation of environmental activists by sharing her informed appreciation of the natural world. Delightful illustrations by Emily Robertson open each chapter, in which anecdotes, reflections and scientific data are supported by interviews with conservationists in the field who are doing their utmost to protect vulnerable nature. Focusing on twenty endangered species ranging from orangutans and Asian elephants to the flightless kakapo, glow-worms and the lady's slipper orchid, her passion and wonder are underscored by wisdom, wit and focused outrage.

Pangolins' natural defence to roll up in a ball to hide their soft underbellies makes them such easy pickings; they are thought to account for as much as 20 per cent of the global illegal wildlife trade. "They are boiled, sometimes when still alive, before their scales are ripped from

Right: Temminck's ground pangolin by Emily Robertson



their bodies," writes Megan. "They can be either dried, roasted or cooked in oil (or historically boys' urine) and then sold to supposedly help with skin diseases, deafness, nervousness, women possessed by the devil, crying children... The list goes on but the fact remains that pangolin scales have zero medicinal value whatsoever – you may as well bite your fingernails."

She describes equally vividly a trip to Kenya at the age of six where she was thrilled to encounter a wild rhino, and watch vultures, jackals and hyenas feast on a dead giraffe until the carcass was stripped bare. On her first voyage to Antarctica at ten, she was among the last group of non-scientists allowed on Bird Island off the north-west tip of South Georgia, home to tens of thousands of penguins and fur seals as well as a population of nesting wandering albatrosses, where she witnessed a pair of the giant birds displaying to one another in a tender courtship dance.

Orangutans are gravely threatened by illegal hunting and the pet trade, but chiefly by the destruction of their natural habitats, typically for the expansion of palm oil plantations. The World Wildlife Fund estimates that palm oil finds its way into up to 50 per cent of all items sold in supermarkets, including food, toiletries and cosmetics, even clothing. Similarly, sharks are for the most part threatened by commercial fisheries' by-catch, but many cosmetic companies still use shark-derived squalene (liver oil) in lipsticks, moisturisers, sun creams, eye shadows and hair conditioners. So the purchasing choices we make can make a real difference to both species' survival – although both ingredients are routinely disguised under complex scientific names to obstruct detection.

In a chapter on the white-headed vulture, Megan discusses the horrendous consequences of



‘sentinel poisoning’ with the Hawk Conservancy Trust’s Campbell Murn. It’s a practice big-game poachers use to keep vultures away from their kills – and from alerting rangers to their whereabouts. A buffalo or zebra carcass is laced with poison, which the vultures ingest. “It is utterly horrific,” says Murn, “it’s like a wildlife bomb has gone off: there is the poisoned carcass, half-dead tawny eagles, dead vultures, lions and a hyena staggering around. All these animals, everything from the insects all the way up to the largest mammals, get affected. It’s devastating. And if you don’t know what you’re doing or you don’t have the kit to deal with it, then more animals come and get poisoned. The poison doesn’t stop working after the first animals have died.”

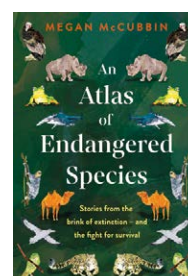
Shocking stuff, but this kind of detail is balanced with gleeful awe and sparkling humour, such as when Megan takes a close-up look at the

back of a sloth to explain a tactic for survival that has served them and their ancestors for 64 million years. Aside from keeping under the radar of predators by remaining practically motionless, “in the microcracks of their fur, you’ll find a whole ecosystem of moths, beetles, parasites, arthropods, fungi and algae, some of which can be found nowhere else on Earth other than on the back of a sloth. It’s a symbiotic, mutually beneficial relationship; these organisms have a safe place to live while the sloths are not only visually camouflaged – thanks to the photosynthetic algae tingeing their fur green – but it also helps them remain inconspicuous in the olfactory sense, as it means they smell just like the jungle they live in.”

The final, provocative choice of species is humans. Not strictly endangered – as yet – but the challenge is on for us to change our habits and mindset to ensure our own survival

along with other species we claim to cherish. “Will we be the animals that consciously destroyed the planet as we knew it, or the ones that learned from our mistakes and managed to turn it around at the last second? We have the fate of the Anthropocene in our hands. The scientists, rangers and conservationists in this book prove that if we are brave enough and loud enough, then we might just be in with a chance to halt extinction rates in their tracks.”

And with voices like Megan’s championing the cause, there’s at least a glimmer of hope for all.



An Atlas of Endangered Species
by Megan McCubbin
Two Roads, HBK,
308pp, £20





By the Bosphorus

NICK MAES IS IMMERSSED IN ISTANBUL

I initially assumed Istanbul drivers weren't perhaps the most road savvy. Why else were there so many bruised eyes and swaddled noses - not to mention the numerous bandaged and bloodied heads bobbing around the bazaars? But then I noticed the wounded were homogenous. The streets are punctuated with tourists who have come over for bargain basement plastic surgery. Who'd have known?

But it's not just those who've had bucket shop nose jobs and bogof hair transplants who stand out. Istanbul's handsome street dogs cut an altogether more superior and dignified appearance. The strays are remarkable for their healthy demeanour - the city looks after their well-being - and aloof coolness. They are tolerant observers of us transient visitors and exude the merest whiff of canine condescension.

When the dogs have had enough of us interlopers they carelessly saunter off into the lanes in search of another distraction. As did I. To my mind the Grand Bazaar's reputation is fabled, reeking of Levantine mystery, silk road riches and oriental exotica. The reality nowadays is somewhat more prosaic. Innumerable stalls are piled high with fake Fendi totes, dodgy Dior lingerie, replica Rolex watches and sham Laurent scarves. The piles of counterfeit tat were wholly resistible - and

disappointing. You have to dig deep into the commercial swirl to find real treasure in the warren of side streets.

Retail therapy and the banter that surrounds it is very much part of the Istanbul experience. The stall holders and shop keepers are brimful of affable bon mots and wisecrack wisdom. One merchant shouted out: "Mr Moustache, you look like an old leather sofa" - he was referring to my leather coat and simultaneously making a bizarre entreaty for me to purchase a new one from him. Another salesman earnestly advised me that it was much better to shop when you're drunk - I was beginning to think he was right. The hurly burly sensory attack makes the very act of shopping into pantomime. I eventually made off with four pairs of thick woollen socks, a kilo of dried black apricots, a midnight blue tiara, half-a-dozen bars of soap and three grams of very expensive saffron. Oh yes I did.

But it was the Spice Bazaar that truly beguiled me. It is a vast treasure chest brimful of every delicacy you can imagine and then some. Beware, I left many pounds lighter of wallet and several kilos heavier of bag. Epicurean bliss. My supermarket sweep put me in need of refreshment and I climbed the azure stairs of Pandeli, a restaurant perched above the entrance to the spice market. Although a bit



touristy, it is worth visiting for the exquisite turquoise İznik tiles alone; and you'll be in good company, the late Queen, Gorbachev and Audrey Hepburn have all dined here too.

Eating out well in the main tourist area of Sultanahmet is, frankly, difficult. There are hundreds of mediocre kebab joints which are fine if you want a snack; but for anything else you'll have to travel further afield. Beyoğlu district is a short taxi ride away and something of a foodie nirvana. Modern Turkish cuisine is to be found in excellent restaurants like Aheste and Yeni Lokanta or you can blow your budget entirely in Michelin starred eateries like Neolokal and Turk.

Getting to any of these places entails a trip across the waters where the Golden Horn meets the Bosphorus, that evocative nexus

of where East meets West, where Europe segues into Asia. The Galata Bridge is lined with fishermen casting off for minnows, their rods constantly twitching like some huge mechanised insect tasting the air. And it was there, immediately between to the two continents that I was jovially fleeced by a shoeshine boy. I called out to him as he passed by pointing out that he'd dropped a brush, and neatly fell into his trap. My good deed for the day was rewarded with his cheerful insistence on cleaning my already spotless hiking boots. I acquiesced. It was only after I'd paid him what I thought was a few bob that I realised I'd given him what he'd normally earn in a day. He could see me coming.

A trip along the Bosphorus is mandatory and rightly so. There are dozens of ferries and tourist boats to choose from – but I decided to

flex the plastic and charter my own gin palace. It was an extravagant gesture, but also rather wonderful. I had the river to myself and drifted past a haunting beauty parade of palaces, mosques and the occasional historic yali and indulged in a romantic and atmospheric portrait of the metropolis. It felt as if the identity of Istanbul is somehow embodied by the stream that runs through it, much more so than that of other cities.

The wealth of the river is apparent in many of the wonderful fish restaurants that the city boasts. Dramatic pescatarian tableau are arranged outside some of them forming a fancy somewhat macabre origami of inverted Black Sea turbot that look swollen and warty and entirely un-fishlike. Tiger striped palamut (bonito) are displayed with their red gills poking out like enormous carnations on a blazer



at a wedding. This is to show their freshness, perhaps it was just a little bit too medicinal.

It was an image that came back to haunt me as I lay in the glorious decrepitude of the Cağaloğlu Hamam. The 18th century bathhouse has tempted all sorts of esteemed visitors over the years, including Omar Sharif, Oprah Winfrey, Kate Moss and Tony Curtis, although not all at the same time. I too have now joined their hallowed ranks and felt fabulously deflated after a sweaty and athletic pummelling from a masseur who was part pugilist, part osteopath – and insanely clean after quite the most intense scrub. It was then, when be-turbaned, wrapped in towels and installed in sepulchral gloom in an antechamber with my fellow scrubees, that I looked as if I too had just had brain surgery or a face lift on a budget.



What was left behind

EMMA WILLSTEED IS CAPTIVATED BY CONNEMARA

I was looking for the midden, but I found a well.

A place of pilgrimage, marked by two knee-high wooden crosses leaning away from the prevailing wind. Saint Féichín's well, where the holy water no longer rises from its source, and now rainwater seeps into its small opening, almost hidden in the grass. All around it, the air holds something in suspension: layers of history and spirituality that I have yet to unpeel.

Sea-rounded lumps of granite are tucked together to form a shrine where expressions of love and loss and hope are set carefully at its heart. A bright-pink Race for Life ribbon, yet to fade, 2013 on the rusting medal; a cockle shell filled with copper coins corroding slowly; a small plastic bottle of holy water. Set back is a teddy bear, stuffing exposed from the midriff down, crispy with salt spray and bleached by the sun. Its one black eye, thoughtful, watches the comings and goings. And there, placed delicately, respectfully, to one side was a perfectly clean human bone, slim like a shin bone, short like a child's.

This is a harsh landscape, formed of granite older than the Atlantic, once part of the mainland and covered in hardwood forests of oak and elm. Omev, off the western edge of Connemara, became a subtidal island when the glaciers melted. Three hours before low tide you can walk from Claddaghduff, a kilometre across the rippled sand. A single road leads to an occasional community, holiday houses that sit blankly for most of the year. The rest are ruins with jagged glass and boarded windows. Omev is low and bleak; enormous boulders testify to raging storms, flung like pebbles high onto its short-grass flats. This is where Saint Féichín founded his monastery in the 7th century, to convert pagans to Christianity.

I keep walking, with the September sun on my left. The blue-green sea glints, deceptively calm, like a Siren drawing me close. But I was forewarned: the treacherous currents will sweep you away to join the centuries of drowned souls circling the islands. I walk across the machair and through the sand dunes, which form and reform with the fickle winds. This is the sand that once covered people's houses so deeply that they had to burrow through, like rabbits, to climb inside.

I am still looking for the midden, but I find a sunken church.

In a hollow, protected from storms and raiders, is an ancient and substantial church built on the monastic remains. The unforgiving winds buried it in sand, and it held its secrets for centuries. In the early 1980s, the local curate, Father Martin Greany, spotted two sections poking up out of the ground. "Curiosity got the better of me," he said. So he gathered a group of local lads, and a digger, and they moved thousands of tonnes of sand. Now its pink granite walls glitter in the sunshine, stone lintels still holding the framework up to the heavens.

Everywhere there are ghosts of those who called this scrap of an island home. The monks, cultured and skilled. The dead in the graveyards, the sea pulling their bones from their resting places and dumping them on beaches to be found and placed by the shrine. Headstones have sunk awkwardly into the ground, names and dates eroded by the abrasive sand-laced winds.

There is pain in the thin, harsh soil. I walk by the lazy beds, their ridges and furrows holding close the stories of hard labour: digging and heaping, digging and heaping. Of famine and poverty. But there is inspiration here too. I climb round the hilltop hideaway of the late poet Richard Murphy, a tiny, hexagonal building with views in all directions. Here, when the ocean was too wild to let him sail to nearby High Island, the seascape could still lift and carry his thoughts.

The low tide unveils the secret world of the shoreline. Mustard-yellow lichen blink in the bright sunshine, the rocks wear seaweed disguises. Pools of water cradle tiny fish, and the sand, soft as velvet, dances gently with the wash of the tide. Everything is resting before the Atlantic sweeps through and rearranges it once more.

I miss the midden when I first walk past it. I circle back, confused. Then it is there, a metre beneath the thin turf's surface, where seas have scoured away the cliff. Seams of dark soil flecked with shells: cockles, whelks and periwinkles. Layers of animal bone and ash. On the sand by my boot is a spiralled shell that has fallen from the midden. I touch it with my fingertip, a tiny connection to someone else's life. The centuries ripple through me as this ancient rubbish heap releases its stories into the wind.

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The Lion City

SIMON URWIN EXPLORES ONE OF SOUTHEAST ASIA'S
MOST INTRIGUING URBAN DESTINATIONS

“Our job is to be like a gentle breeze,” says Jeremy Cheah, the head butler at Raffles Hotel, Singapore, as I take my seat in the white marble Grand Lobby for afternoon tea. “Guests don’t necessarily see us, but they feel our presence, often in subtle ways.”

Cheah, who leads a 24-strong team, nods for a flute of champagne to be brought to the table; he tells me that a key requirement of the butler’s role is second-guessing the needs of guests, and identifying opportunities to make a visit extra special. “It’s not about giving expensive gifts, because any luxury hotel can do that,” he says. “It’s about kindness and thoughtfulness, like when a friend surprises you with a present that’s very personal to you. That’s how we strive to make everyone feel.”

Cheah wishes me ‘bon appétit’ and moves to chat with guests nearby, leaving me to enjoy my three-tiered cake stand of sandwiches, desserts and petits fours that include citrus-and-vanilla Chantilly cream profiteroles, raisin scones with rose petal jam, and a deliciously novel take on the smoked salmon,

cream cheese and cucumber sandwich which is made with squid ink-flavoured bread.

Raffles’ sumptuous afternoon teas, much like Singapore Slings in the Long Bar, are emblematic of a stay at the city’s grand dame, where colonial-era splendour is on display from the moment you arrive and the liveried Sikh doormen greet you with a warm ‘welcome home’ and a tip of the turban.

The hotel opened in 1887, the same year as Queen Victoria’s Golden Jubilee, and is named after Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles, the British statesman credited with founding modern-day Singapore in the 19th century. The city-state has ancient roots though, dating back to at least the third century, and was gifted the name Singapore as early as the 14th century when, according to legend, a Sumatran Prince spotted a lion while out hunting on the Malay Peninsula and was so impressed by his first sighting of the beast that he established a settlement on the spot, naming it in Sanskrit: ‘simha’ (lion) and ‘pura’ (city).





The Lion City was to become an economic tiger; a nexus of ancient maritime trade routes, its tropical waters soon brimmed with all manner of sea-going vessels, from Arab dhows to Chinese junks. The port then caught the eye of the British, who were looking for a way to safeguard trade with the Far East, and so along came Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles, who helped negotiate a treaty with local rulers and established a trading station here in 1819.

The city boomed, attracting large numbers of immigrant workers from across Asia. “Thousands of poor, single Chinese men came looking for work and ended up marrying local women,” says Alvin Yapp. “Their offspring became known as Peranakans, which means ‘locally born’ in Malay.” Yapp, himself a Peranakan, is the owner of The Intan, a house-museum dedicated to their culture, traditionally described as a hybrid of Chinese, Malay and Western. “We were a British colony, so there was a European sensitivity for the finer things in life,” says Yapp who displays more than 5,000 intricate pieces of furniture, enamelware, embroidery and jewellery. “Its influence was one great beauty.”

Singapore’s candy-coloured terraces of Peranakan houses are perhaps the best-known example of this uniquely blended culture and can be seen across the city, which started to take a more organised shape after 1822 when the Raffles Town Plan was implemented to bring a sense of British order to the colony - allotting land to the various segments of society including Government, European and merchant, Chinese and Malay.

What is now Little India – one of Singapore’s most atmospheric neighbourhoods – lay outside that original plan. Originally known as Serangoon, its mangrove swamps were ideal for raising water buffalo (then the workhorses of Singapore, used for road-building and transporting goods). The cattle industry attracted ever-increasing numbers of Indian settlers, especially herdsmen, and up until the 1930s Tamil milkmen could be seen crossing town with their goats and cows taking fresh milk straight to customers’ doorsteps.

The ethnic enclave grew to support a wide variety of subcontinental trades including goldsmiths, sari-makers, spices merchants

Previous page: Harpreet Singh, Raffles doorman.

Above (left to right): Alexys Tjhia and Marcus Koe in their laboratory garden; Singaporean ingredients including toasted coconut, edible flowers, torch ginger and rice coloured blue with the natural dye of the butterfly pea; Ceremony at the Sri Veeramakaliamman temple.



and fortune-tellers, who practised palmistry, numerology and even parrot astrology, in which rose-ringed parakeets would pick out Tarot cards to determine a customer's destiny. There were garland-makers too, who weaved roses, marigolds and jasmine flowers to adorn deities at the temples that were founded here.

The jewel in the crown of Little India's temples is the historic Sri Veeramakaliamman, which dates back to 1855 and is dedicated to the goddess Kali, who Hindus believe protects her devotees by maintaining world order. Many of the early Indian settlers would have turned to her for a sense of security in the strange, foreign land and it remains a focal point for the community to this day.

I visit the temple during a special 10-day festival, a colourful and noisy celebration in which the head priest performs a fire prayer to give extra power to Kali before presenting her with offerings of honey, ghee, silk and flowers. Worshippers from across the city come in large numbers to receive their blessings before heading off to partake in one of Singapore's favourite pastimes: eating.

In Little India, the streets around Sri Veeramakaliamman burst with the flavours of not only Punjab and Bengal, but Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Hong Kong and China too. For the neighbourhood, much like the city itself, has become renowned for its extraordinary mix of ethnically diverse cuisines.

"Whatever you do, don't call it 'fusion food' though," says Paul Liew of Keng Eng Kee, a family-run restaurant (and Singaporean institution) which began life as a hawker stall run by Liew's grandparents, immigrants from China's Hainan Island. "We prefer to call it 'evolved food,'" he says. "My grandparents arrived five years after independence (Singapore became a sovereign state in 1965) with simple recipes from home. Over time, they incorporated different cooking styles and ingredients from the subcontinent and Malay Archipelago, so their cuisine slowly changed and became more inclusive, just like Singapore itself."

Now, the menu at Keng Eng Kee features such eclectic signature dishes as curried fish, crab in Malaysian-inspired chilli sauce, creamy



rice noodles with duck, and perhaps its most memorable dish: pork loin marinated in coffee, sugar, honey and apple jam. Liew brings me a dish to sample and it proves to be surprisingly moreish: the pork tenderised by the citrus in the apple jam, the marinade a delicate blend between sweet and sour, while the coffee adds lingering notes of barbecue and molasses.

As well as one of the most exciting food scenes in Southeast Asia, the city has also become renowned for its forward-thinking approach to the environment, and in 1967 declared its 'garden city' vision to make life more pleasant for residents. Parks, gardens and reserves now cover more than half of Singapore including the striking Gardens by the Bay, a 101-hectare nature park that features two of the world's largest climate-controlled biodomes and a showpiece forest of 'supertrees': futuristic vertical gardens of bromeliads, vines and ferns that rise up to 50m high.

Green initiatives have also been embraced at a community level. Near King Albert Park, I meet Marcus Koe and Alexys Tjhia who have

an experimental garden (with heritage-breed chickens and heirloom fruits and vegetables), where they host private dinners made from home-grown ingredients. "We love to show people what they can produce themselves, no matter how big or small the space available," says Tjhia, who brings rice crackers to the table with a pesto of cashews, garlic and Ulam Raja, a leafy green which when crushed smells like mango. "Because home-grown food plays an important part in reducing imports and also our carbon footprint."

The pair tell me they want to educate people in the crops which are most climate-appropriate too. "You can't grow potatoes and strawberries here; they have to be shipped in," says Koe, who brings out next a rice salad made with toasted coconut, cranberry hibiscus, torch ginger, peanuts and edible flowers. "But you can grow taro (a starchy root vegetable), papayas, bananas and all of these beautiful ingredients," he adds. "With good food, we want to inspire people to play their part in improving life in the Lion City, and make it as green, healthy and habitable as it's possible for any city to be."

Above (left to right): Peranakan houses on Joo Chiat Road; 'Supertrees' at Gardens by the Bay.

Right: Mother-of-pearl detail on a Peranakan chair, The Intan.



The Danish Riviera

JONATHAN LORIE SAMPLES SOME SCANDINAVIAN SHORELINE

“Look out for whales!” yelled my teenage son as we rattled our bikes along a woodland path above a cliff. Below us green waves licked pebbly coves, behind us red cottages edged fields of corn. We freewheeled down a final slope to a hundred-year-old wooden farmhouse turned gallery, where he found hot chocolate and I found modern art, on a gentle lawn by the summer sea.

If you’ve never been to the Danish Riviera, prepare for a surprise. Not only is it one of Europe’s prettiest coasts, it’s also cool enough for kids, restful enough for their parents and less exorbitant than you’d think. This gentle curve of fishing hamlets and fine beaches runs 80 miles north from Copenhagen to the North Sea – and though locals spend their summers here, the British haven’t yet discovered it. So I took my son and daughter there to explore.

We had started in Copenhagen, possibly Europe’s hippest city with its cutting-edge Scandi style. My son and daughter were

wowed by this everywhere – in avant-garde buildings on the waterfront like the glittering Black Diamond library, among sleek clothes and spiky furniture in the designer store Illums Bolighus, and even in our boutique hotel, the minimalist Ibsens on a sidestreet of bookshops. More challenging was the New Nordic cuisine we tried at Vakst, a hipster restaurant whose walls were packed with plant pots and tables filled with pretty but strange-tasting food: salt cod with gooseberries, anyone?

But despite everything that was hip and hyped, my teenagers’ favourite spot in this city was the Tivoli Gardens – an old-fashioned theme park that dates from 1843, since when generations of Danish kids have screamed and laughed on the traditional rollercoaster and the tiny pedal-boats – as did mine. Trends may change but children don’t.

So we drove out along the coast in search of more tradition. Thirty minutes north we found the first of a series of Edwardian





Previous page: View of the Nyhavn district in Copenhagen, with boats and tenement houses along the Nyhavn canal.

Above: Rungstedlund, also known as the Karen Blixen Museum.

Opposite: Nakkehoved Lighthouse in Gilleleje, the northernmost point of the island of Zealand.

seaside villages – Rungsted, where white wooden villas lined a sandy beach and swimmers dived into the sea from creaky wooden jetties. Beyond a marina bobbing with yachts, we found Rungstedlund, a seventeenth-century farmhouse that belonged to one of my heroes, Karen Blixen, the 1930's author of *Out Of Africa*. We wandered through its neo-classical rooms, with their ornate porcelain stoves and gilded mirrors, to her study hung with African spears. In the museum shop, her great-grandniece was chatting with visitors and planning for her wedding there.

Equally historic was our hotel nearby, Kokkedal Castle, a fairytale chateau of icing-sugar facades and sweeping stairways set among woodlands and croquet lawns. That night a wedding party was in full swing, the guests in black tie or ball gowns wafting through its baroque rooms while we hid in the bar and ate sausages. Next morning a polo party took over the back lawn, while we borrowed bicycles and cycled down to the seashore, singing as we went.

Then it was back into our car for a trip into the future, up the coast to Louisiana, Denmark's leading museum of modern art. Perched on a cliff among gardens filled with flowers and sculptures, the place is a sprawl of modernist wood-and-glass cubes crammed with thought-provoking art. The kids were delighted to find a four-foot cigarette stub by Claes Oldenburg, and a mirrored room where spotlights were reflected to infinity, as though we were staring into the stars.

At the museum café we sampled *smorrebrod* – traditional open sandwiches of ham or salmon on dark rye bread – and I warned my daughter that some holiday homework was coming up. For ten miles north lay the castle of Helsingore, better known as Elsinore to students of literature like her. Here Shakespeare set his great tragedy, based on the Viking saga of *Amleth*. It is even imagined that he may have joined a troupe of English actors who toured here in his youth.

The castle was another baroque fantasy, surrounded by granite battlements and crammed with tapestried rooms lit by glittering chandeliers. In one of Europe's longest ballrooms we found Hamlet and Ophelia arguing over love letters – or actors playing them as part of the annual Shakespeare festival. The theme continued at our hotel that night, the nineteenth-century Marienlyst, where they checked us into the Ophelia suite. The hotel's blackened wooden frontage overlooked a tiny beach, and down a grand double stairway we found its restaurant, where fish fresh and salty from the Baltic was served above the waves.

Next day we took a 20-minute detour inland to the vast Lake Esrum, where we hopped into kayaks for a long, slow paddle among islands edged with bullrushes and herons. Dragonflies fluttered past. "I live in a village by the lake," said our kayak instructor. "In autumn we forage in the woods for mushrooms and raspberries. We like to be close to nature here."

At dusk we chugged back to the coast, to the furthest village on the Riviera. Gilleleje had a harbour filled with fishing boats and lanes strewn with white cottages. On the stone quayside we ate seafood at a ramshackle café, then pottered along a clifftop path with views across the quiet waters to Sweden, visible as a dove-grey cliff ten miles off. Below us stretched the loveliest, loneliest stretch of beach, empty of people, dotted with boulders smoothed by the sea.

On a high spot among trees we found a rough-hewn monument of granite, with the words 'Soren Kierkegaard 1813' carved into its mottled face. The great philosopher liked to walk here, for the solitude and peace to think. In his journal he wrote about this place: 'I often stood there and reflected on my past life. The force of the sea and the struggle of the elements made me realise how unimportant I was.'

In that remote spot, I understood what he meant. All I could see was waves and gulls and my children.



Sail of the centuries

JAMES LITSTON DISCOVERS THOUSANDS OF YEARS OF ABORIGINAL HISTORY
ON AN EXPEDITION CRUISE TO AUSTRALIA'S FARAWAY KIMBERLEY COAST

It's peculiarly humbling to come face-to-face with a *wandjina*. Its deeply set and indented eyes seem to fix me in an impenetrable gaze that stares out from an ashen, inscrutable countenance. The flakiness of the paint attests to its staggering antiquity. But it's the absence of a mouth that makes a *wandjina* so startling: a face that's not a face, but something at once awe-inspiring and alien.

Wandjina are spirits revered by the local indigenous people here in coastal parts of the Kimberley, in far north-west Australia. Daubed – some say by the *wandjina* themselves – on the walls of caves and rocky overhangs, they are compelling indicators of the people's long connection to "country".

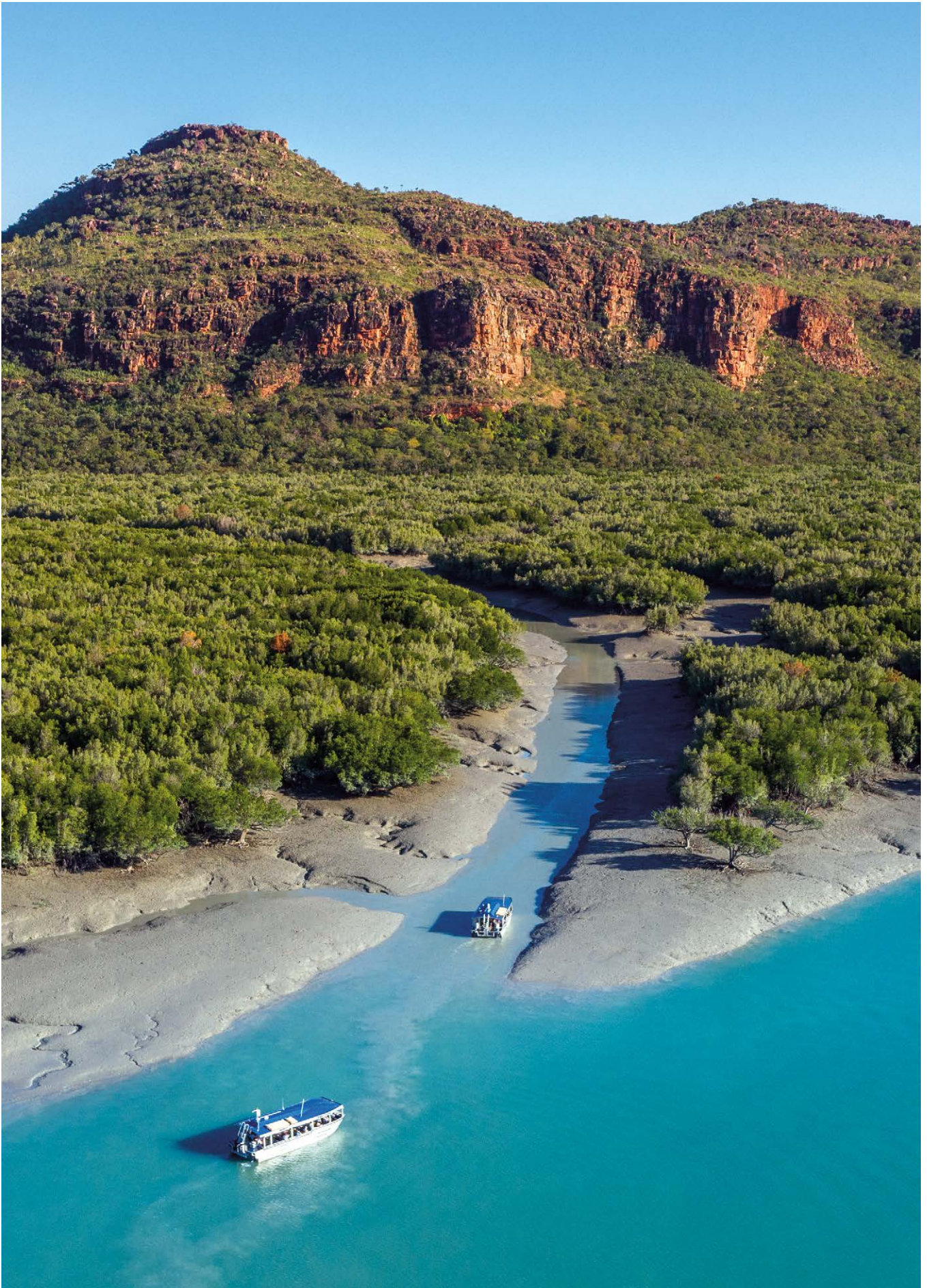
As I sit on the sand and take in this ancient artwork's every detail, our expedition guide tells the *wandjina*'s story. According to local mythology, they are powerful creation ancestors gifted with the ability

to influence weather, water and tides. It's no coincidence that they made their debut in the Kimberley's rock art at the end of the Ice Age. As rising sea levels inundated vast swathes of Aboriginal lands, who but the *wandjina* could be the cause of such a catastrophe? Painted and repainted over countless generations,

their likenesses remain vibrant. It's an extraordinary privilege to meet them.

It's also an experience shared with very few outsiders. I'm on Bigge Island in the Bonaparte Archipelago, which even by Kimberley standards is little-visited and remote. This is one of the world's last



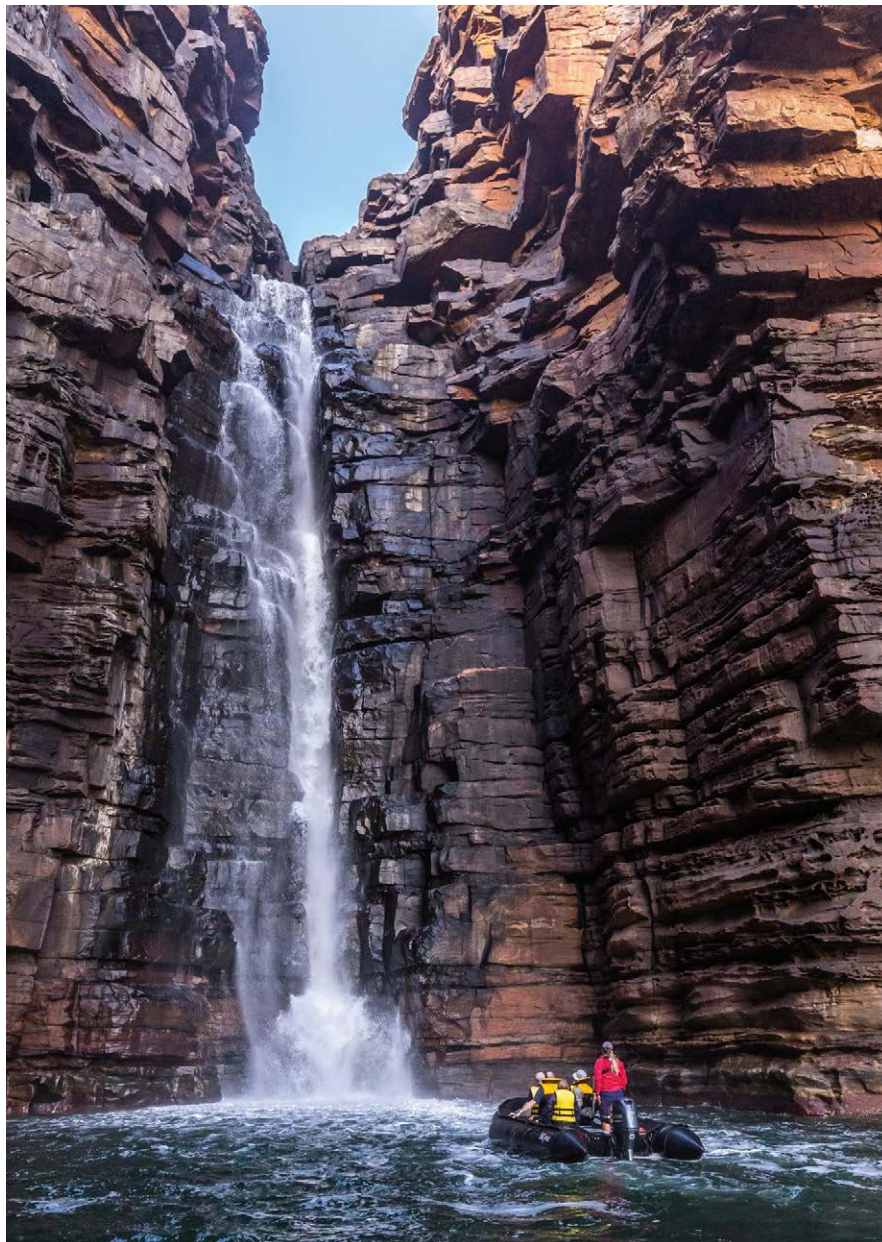


wildernesses: three times the size of England but home to fewer than 40,000 people. It's a scene shaped by water, tectonic pressure and the highest tides in the Southern Hemisphere. What it's not shaped by is Western civilisation. Were I to be here 200 or even 2,000 years ago, it's likely that this landscape would look little different from today.

Infrastructure is sparse, so touring the Kimberley would be troublesome were it not for the expedition-style cruises that ply its unspoiled coast. I'm here with Coral Expeditions whose 120-passenger ship, *Coral Adventurer*, offers seasonal, 10-night trips between Darwin and Broome. "Thirty years ago, when we made the first exploratory cruises in the Kimberley, we had to rely on hand-drawn 'mudmaps' and the knowledge of fishermen and early explorers to navigate the vast and unpredictable coastline," the guide explains as we walk back to Bigge Island's beach. "Today, with decades of experience behind us, not to mention detailed maps, tidal charts and landing notes, we have a level of knowledge that cannot be easily replicated."

It's just as well they're such experts, as there's not much scope for backup in a region so thinly populated. Indeed, we haven't even seen another vessel since setting sail from Broome six days ago. Here on Bigge, the only hint of humans beyond the rock art galleries are the footprints on the beach that we ourselves have just created. In far greater profusion are the tracks of wallabies, turtles and quolls: the wild inhabitants of these untouched isles.

Coral's Kimberley cruises run between April and September, which are the driest months in Australia's tropical north. Early cruises in this calendar are timed to appreciate thundering waterfalls powered by wet-season downpours. As the weeks slip by, the rivers dwindle and the falls become walls of polished rock, the once-verdant landscapes that their rivers drain now desiccated and



dusty. It's a seasonal shift as dramatic as the Kimberley itself.

As the voyage progresses, I witness again and again how deeply Aboriginal culture is embedded in this land. Besides Bigge Island's *wandjina*, we visit burial grounds and ceremonial sites (some of which are still used to this day) plus panels of Gwion Gwion art – among the oldest known styles of figurative painting. But most of all we see images of animals – goannas, crocodiles, fish, birds – that the people either hunted or held in some other esteem.

We also get to see some of these creatures in the flesh: saltwater crocodiles, tawny nurse sharks, dolphins and five types of whale. Our most memorable wildlife encounter comes in the sandy Lacerpede Islands, where we board *Adventurer's* tenders to meet turtles and seabirds in such profusion that it feels as if we've stumbled into a wildlife documentary.

We see more turtles in the very different environment of Montgomery Reef, a coral-encrusted offshore plateau that emerges from the ocean on each falling tide. We arrive in time to catch the reef at its most spectacular, when it cascades with water left behind by the rapidly receding sea. So titanic are the Kimberley's tides that timing is everything here: had our guides got it wrong, we'd be looking at open water instead of this one-of-a-kind scene.

Nowhere is the tidal flux more tangible than in Talbot Bay, where the 12-metre difference between high and low water is about the same height as a four-storey building. At one point on the bay, the incoming seawater surges through two narrow gorges, creating turbulent rapids as it goes. When the tide turns, the water outside falls quicker than that trapped behind the pinch-points, resulting in Horizontal Falls – one of the Kimberley's signature sights.

We reconnect with traditional culture at our penultimate stop, Jar Island, where we head ashore to admire more ancient artworks. At the top of a bone-white beach scarred with the tracks of nesting turtles, I pause to read a sign advising that this land belongs to the Wunambal Gaambera Uunguu people. For us to be here, Coral Expeditions has purchased a permit that supports a sustainable cultural management plan, pumping much-needed funds into indigenous communities and investing in Aboriginal rangers and bush camps. This in turn encourages people (most of whom live in settlements elsewhere) to value, embrace and have pride in their culture and country.

I'm pleased that in some small way my being here is benefitting the people whose proud and ancient history is so entwined with this remarkable land. I'm pretty sure it's something of which the *wandjina* would approve.



School of Gondoliers

KEVIN PILLEY SHARES THE KNOWLEDGE

The classroom was full of thirty semi-conscientious, semi-conscious students. All doing 'The Knowledge'. Venetian-style.

Just as London cabbies have to learn how to navigate around London (known as 'Doing the Knowledge') so do Venice's gondoliers have to learn how to paddle around their own city.

Knowing the shortcuts is as important as knowing the most scenic routes. And how to punt. It saves stitches and helps with tips and public relations. They also need to learn some tourist spiel too. And a bit about the local landmarks.

The lecturer pointed up at the overhead projection and announced in Italian something along the lines of: "This is the *Ponte dei Sospiri*. Or as the Americans call it – The Bridge of Sighs!"

Some of his students smiled. A few giggled. Some bent their heads and scribbled in their notebooks as an aid for memory. "It's a red stop sign," said the lecturer. "You must stop for the traditional kissing of your passengers."

The next slide that came up was of the Palazzo Ducale. The lecturer continued. "Founded in the ninth century, it was the seat of the republic's government and official residence of the Doges. Or as visitors to the city call them – the old gaunt-looking judges!"

The school is located in the Istituto Barbarigo, a catering college in the Castello district. Art history is taught as well as Venetian history. Water law is also part of the core curriculum. Students learn modern languages. Mainly Spanish and English.

But no serenading.

"'One More Cornetto' is not on the timetable!" laughs Anna Michieletto, the school's English teacher. Her module is twenty hours. "It is basic everyday English. Simple workaday phrases like, 'The tour last half an hour and costs so much' and 'And what about a longer ride? In that case the price is so much.' Things like that."

The entrance exam is a rowing test taken by Venice's rowing instructor and examiner Roberto Scanferla who is based at Trinita near the Hotel Bauer.

His apprentices – Fiozzi – must know how to execute a three-point turn and an emergency stop. And know how to reverse. They must learn the Canalway Code.

Basically: *Premi!* (I want to go on the right), *Stali* (I want to pass on the left) and *Sciar!* (Stop!).

"It's is an art which takes years to master," says Scanferla.

"Negotiating the narrow, shallow canals is not easy. The right half of the gondola must be narrower than the left by 24 millimetres or else the gondolier will not be singing. He will be swimming! Especially at *acqua alta* or high water.

"You must know where to put your pole. Your remo. Your oar."

The local nautical society certifies the students who must know the lagoon's navigation systems. The guild assesses whether the aspiring gondoliers are canal-worthy. Successful students then qualify to be apprentices to senior gondoliers – *patrone* – and are then able to buy licences from gondoliers who wish to give up or retire.

The bell rang and the room emptied. The students were glad to get outside. Some lit cigarettes. Some looked at passing girls. Some did both.

"A gondolier needs strong arms and strong lungs!" student Emilio said. "To row the gondola and keep up the running commentary. Gondoliers are first and foremost tourist guides and guides must know their city inside out."

Emilio has always wanted to be a gondolier.

"The gondoliers' is a noble profession and highly respected. So standards have to be kept up and that is what the school has been founded for. Gondoliers are ambassadors for the city. They are the human face of a very human city."

Venice is made up of 117 islands, 150 canals, 450 bridges, thousands of tourists and a lot of pigeons. As well as 475 gondoliers.



The course director is Franco Corton who is planning a gondola museum. "Training is very important, both practically and culturally. The Chamber of Commerce insists gondoliers study thoroughly. They must first train on the Traghetto ferry or gondolene on the Gran Canal. To perfect their oarmanship. They must work hard for their mooring pole." You can also qualify to be a sandolist and operate a sandola, a smaller version of the flat-bottomed icon. And with a more pointed prow.

Says Gondolier School teacher Mrs Angela Tondo Giuduce: "The school is a tourism school. Gondoliers are the front line to meet tourists. Being a gondolier is very popular. People want to meet people and work outside. And they can earn well. But they must first learn the art of the gondolier. That is why the course has been set up."

Twenty-one-year-old Antonio is proud to be a pupil and training to become the next generation of gondoliers.

"Wearing the hooped jersey, the marinera or white jacket, the straw hat and the colours of your district is a great honour. It is a privilege to handle the famous beechwood oar.

"The gondola's guild goes back to 1607. Being a gondolier is very hard work. And not romantic. A gondolier must know every route and everything about that route. He must know about Burano lace and Murano glass as well as the Rialto fish market. You must know how to steer while giving a running commentary. The gondolier is a guide and a chauffeur. He must be prepared for any questions and that requires study.

"Some people are interested in Titian. Some in Vivaldi. Some in

a Bellini cocktail at Harry's Bar. Some in Casanova. Some in pizza! You don't know who is going to step into your boat."

A gondolier must also know about his gondola.

He must know about its symbolic features – the *ferro da prora* (prow-head), the *rebbi* (six teeth of oar after the six districts or *siesteri*). They must know their *paioli* (floorboards) and *lama da poppa* (stern seat) from their *pacheti* (chairs) and *puggioli* (armrests).

And they must know that all gondolas share the same destination. They are cremated in the glass furnaces of Murano.

They don't end up on San Michele, the city's burial island.

History is integral to the gondoliers' course. The first written evidence of gondoliers appears in 1094. The modern Tremontin – one man-gondolas – date to 1750. Canaletto's paintings depict mainly two men gondolas.

Four yards – squeros – still build and repair gondolas. It takes 500 hours to build and one gondola can cost \$10,000. Weighing over 1000 lbs, a gondola is made out of 280 pieces of wood. Oak for the planking, larch for the bottom and fir, cherry, elm, beech, nut, satin and little steel aluminum in strategic places elsewhere.

Until the sixteenth century the gondola was painted different colours and luxuriously decorated.

Aristocrats even had competitions to discover who had the most sumptuous gondola. The gondola was the customised car of its day.

They were a status symbol with great pose value. Now all gondolas must be black.

Piloting a gondola isn't easy sailing. You have to factor in wave motion and wave push. It's highly technical stuff. You have to be familiar with concepts like rowlock torque.

Says graduate gondolier Tommasio: "Courting couples taking to the water don't know how highly technical a gondola is! We obtain an elevated hydrodynamic efficiency by a leaning to the right and the gondoliere can create on the 'forcolla' (a torque of major forces that make the gondola go in the opposite way to its natural direction therefore increasing its propulsive efficiency!)

"In other words hard graft! We must learn our trade in school and out on the lagoon. It is elbow grease and physics, being a gondolier.

"Venice is a very human city. And gondoliers are the human face. We must be a mine of information. And up to date.

"St Mark's Campanile bell tower is 99 metres high and was built in 1912. Some people know that. But not many that it has just been fitted with a giant titanium support belt. To stop it from toppling."

Up until now the gondolier's profession was passed down from father to son. Until the 1990s only those born in Venice could become gondoliers.

Now you must have the right qualifications and the right diploma. To prove you know your stuff.

So, when in Venice, do as the Venetians do. If you want to know anything about Venice don't ask a policeman. Ask a gondolier.







An Ode to The Okavango

words & pictures
Jonathan and Angela Scott



Given that we have spent much of our lives on safari in the Mara-Serengeti in East Africa, people often ask us where else in Africa we love to visit in our quest for memorable images. Angie was born in Africa and brought up in Tanzania, with the Serengeti her family's favourite camping destination. I first visited the Maasai Mara National Reserve and adjoining Serengeti National Park in Tanzania in 1974 when travelling overland from London to Johannesburg. That journey opened my eyes to just how different North Africa is to East and Central Africa and how different they are to Southern Africa. Many people think 'Africa', and lump all 54 countries together, particularly when trouble is brewing in one part of the continent. Sadly, when that happens the temptation is for visitors to simply abandon the whole region as a holiday destination. The reality is generally very different. Talk to your travel agent and the people on the ground where

you are planning your next safari. Let them be your guide – not just the media and travel advisories.

Our philosophy is that life should be viewed as a constant adventure, travelling with a purpose to nurture body and soul. A particular favourite is the Okavango Delta in Botswana, often referred to as the Jewel Of The Kalahari, a watery wonderland of palm fringed islands marooned by crystal-clear waters, where herds of buffalo and elephants gather in the dry season. This is an ornithologists paradise boasting over 400 species of birds from tiny malachite kingfishers to saddle-billed storks with 9 foot wingspans. It is one of the best places to view the giant buff coloured Pel's Fishing Owl that I first saw in the company of legendary naturalists and wildlife photographers Tim and June Liversedge when I stayed on their 18 foot tall houseboat, the Sitatunga, in 1975. They encouraged me to pursue

my quest to become a wildlife artist and photographer, allowing me to believe that I really could fulfil my dream of forging a life among wild creatures in Africa. More importantly, they inspired me through witnessing the strength of their personal and working partnership, to imagine that I too could find love and fulfilment, as I did 32 years ago when I met Angie, the lady with the long blonde hair.

The gift of the opportunity to live and breathe wild Africa on board the Sitatunga, with the haunting cry of fish eagles echoing in my ears, was beyond my wildest imaginings. Each day we would chug quietly along river channels fringed by towering stands of papyrus. Hidden in their midst were the shy sitatunga antelope that every visitor wanted to see, the males sporting lyre shaped horns with ivory tips. From the towering top deck you could see them stepping lightly over the reed beds, their long pointed cloven



hooves keeping them afloat. We would embark into lightweight aluminium boats to explore the narrowest pathways, at times making a hurried retreat when faced by a bull hippo with ivory canines flashing in the sun, determined to bar our way. On other occasions we would round a corner to find ourselves amidst a family of elephants eagerly sucking up trunkfuls of water or enjoying a cooling bath with their boisterous calves.

The joy of a safari to the Okavango is that you can savour a mix of land based activities along with soothing travels on the water, admiring pied kingfishers hovering for prey or stately grey herons poised motionless among the shallows. You may wish to visit two camps offering different scenic and game viewing options according to their location. If you love big cats then the Delta is the place to be, with lion and leopard sightings an every day occurrence. The Moremi Game Reserve

boasts a healthy wild dog population of 150 to 200 animals with perhaps 700 in Botswana. In 1996 we filmed Mombo Pack in Moremi for my television series *Dawn to Dusk*.

Unlike the Mara-Serengeti where mass tourism is the norm, in Botswana tourism is built around a high-cost low-volume business model with small camps and lodges offering a high standard of accommodation and dining experience, with far fewer vehicles on game drives, and access by private charter aircraft. Be sure to do your homework before you decide where and when you are going to stay – June to October is best. Check out the kinds of vehicles you will be travelling in – are they photography friendly – and particularly whether you will be expected to share game drives. If you are travelling with a group allocated its own vehicles that is preferable. But if you can afford to hire a private vehicle even better. It will give you

maximum flexibility as to when you depart in the morning, whether or not to have breakfast first or take a picnic, and how long you wish to stay sighting.

There are reasons for concern: the Okavango catchment is expected to experience less rainfall as well as higher temperatures as a result of global warming. Research highlights that climate change is reducing the volume of water reaching the Delta by increasing evaporation from soils and rivers, and transpiration by vegetation. Levels of poaching for bushmeat is also a concern, as well as the threat of the illegal trade in ivory and rhino horn.

For now it remains an enchanted wilderness. The travel industry must promote sustainable, low impact forms of tourism while supporting conservation initiatives to ensure the Delta's long term future.



The Caribbean paradise with history, rum and rattling trains

ST KITTS OFFERS MORE THAN FLY-AND-FLOP HOLIDAYS, AS **JAMES LITSTON** DISCOVERS

Jetlagged, early morning starts are the downside of Caribbean holidays; but being the first down to breakfast has its advantages. From the restaurant's beachfront terrace here at the Park Hyatt St Kitts, I'm looking across The Narrows strait towards sister island Nevis, whose mountain peak is hidden behind clouds. It's exactly how Christopher Columbus first saw it, prompting him to name it after the "nieves" (snow) he knew from the white-capped peaks back home in Spain. Soon the strengthening sun will burn away these morning clouds and other guests will arrive to plunder the breakfast buffet; but for now, apart from the waiter dutifully topping up my coffee for the umpteenth time, I've got this peaceful, palm-fringed scene to myself.

With its beachfront views, this spot is a Caribbean paradise cliché. Stretching along an almost-private bay on the sparsely developed Southeast Peninsula, the Park Hyatt is exclusive, high-end and incredibly relaxing: the perfect place for a chic and indulgent, fly-and-flop beach break. My days here thus far have been spent oscillating between the sandy beach, adults-only pool and my room's own private deck, from where those Nevis views constantly change as the clouds scud across the sky and the sun arcs slowly around to the west.

I could very easily stick to this unchallenging regime and not set foot outside the hotel beyond popping for lunch at a nearby beach bar. But while

there's a lot to be said for such a leisurely, do-nothing kind of escape, it would surely be an injustice on such a diverse and varied isle. As a result, I'm splitting my stay between here and a hotel in the north of the island so as to effectively upgrade my trip to two holidays in one.

When the time comes to relocate, I make the most of the journey by packing in some sightseeing en route. As the driver negotiates the twists and turns along the peninsula, I get to marvel at the coastal scenery – all wave-pounded cliffs and gorgeous blue bays – that I'd been too knackered to notice on the way in from the airport a few days before.

We're soon in Basseterre, the capital, on whose fringes we stop at the terminus of the St Kitts Scenic Railway. Built to carry sugar cane from the island's 200-odd plantations back when this was the mainstay of the Kittitian economy, it fell out of use when the sugar industry collapsed. It has since been restored as one of St Kitts' most unique tourist attractions and is the last working railroad in the Caribbean Islands.

I climb aboard and, with a whistle, the train begins to rattle out of town and into the countryside. Its gentle, 10mph pace would be frustrating were this my daily commute, but it's just right for taking in the views of local villages, forested peaks and black-sand Atlantic beaches where leatherback turtles crawl ashore at night to lay their eggs.

For much of the way, we pass through scrubby grasslands that once were sugarcane fields, punctuated here and there by the stone chimneys and broken walls of former sugar estates. The landscape becomes ever greener as we venture further north, passing vegetable plots laid out in neat rows, and fruit trees heavy with papayas and mangoes.

I get to taste some of this island bounty when the tour ends back in Basseterre. At a waterfront diner that's busy with locals, I order saltfish with a side of provisions: a mix of steamed pumpkin, squash and taro served with delicious coconut dumplings. Then, after lunch, I relocate to Fairview Great House, a restored plantation owner's home on the outskirts of Basseterre, where I round off a tour of the house with a sampling of several flavours of St Kitts rum. The combination of alcohol and sticky mid-afternoon heat combines with the soporific cooing of doves to get me in the mood for a post-lunch nap.

But that sleepy vibe is soon dispelled on arrival at Belle Mont Farm, my next base. It sits atop Kittitian Hill, a former fruit farm on Mount Liamuiga, and is accessed via an avenue of trees whose twisted branches look magical in the lovely late-afternoon light. It's a promising portent of what lies ahead.

As I'm escorted to my cottage – one of 50 units scattered among guava, banana and mango trees – I'm blown away by its lofty dimensions and views of the sea far



below. The colonial-style decor includes a magnificent open-air bathroom and louvered, fold-back French windows that give onto a private infinity pool. I say "wow" a lot as I settle in and make myself at home in the cottage; then head off to explore the rest of the resort.

The ethos here is sustainable luxury with a farm-to-table focus that sees as much as possible produced, grown or manufactured on-site or nearby. At the hilltop Great House restaurant, I tuck into a farm-fresh supper as sunset colours the scene across the sea towards Statia, the adjacent isle, and a chorus of cicadas and tree frogs announces the day's shift into dusk.

There's plenty more to experience up at this end of St Kitts. I could tackle the hiking trails that scale Mount Liamuiga: a dormant volcano whose rainforested flanks swirl with shifting clouds, adding to its atmosphere. I could visit the bastions, barracks and impenetrable



walls of mighty Brimstone Hill Fortress (a World Heritage Site that's often called "the Gibraltar of the West Indies") or pop down to Old Road Rum, a historic site that's bringing traditional rum production back to St Kitts – even down to plans to reignite sugar-growing to supply its own raw material.

But the lure of that private pool at my cottage sanctuary proves far too strong to resist. But that's OK, I tell myself. Holidays are meant to be relaxing. Besides, I reason, St Kitts is not the sort of place you just visit once; so it's always a good idea to leave at least one or two adventures for next time.





5 reasons to visit *The Seychelles Islands*

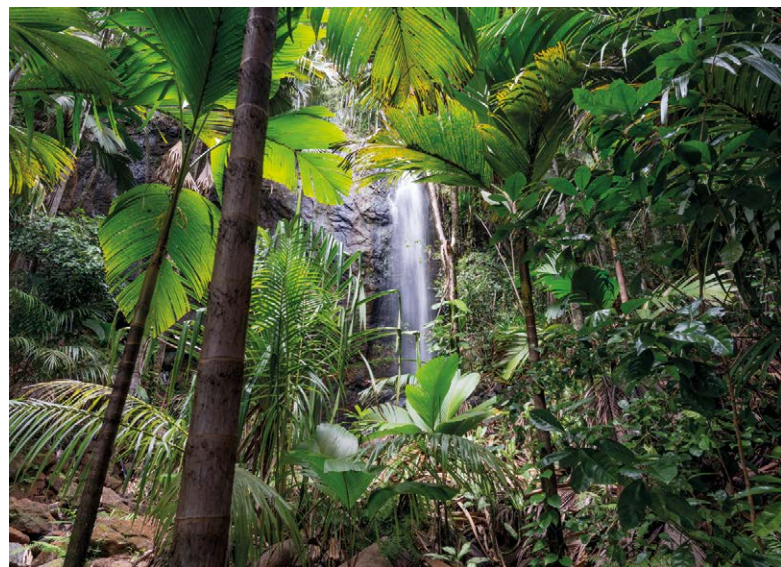
Breathtaking beaches, crystal-clear seas and amazing nature and wildlife – the Seychelles Islands represent the ultimate tropical paradise. Here, you'll discover five reasons why this sun-kissed idyll should be at the top of your travel wishlist for 2023 and beyond.

1. Abundant nature

Uninhabited by humans throughout most of history, the wildlife on the Seychelles Islands had plenty of time to evolve. Through careful supervision from the Seychellois, the islands remain one of nature's last pristine sanctuaries making it an exciting destination for naturalists, ornithologists and eco-tourists alike.

2. Spectacular beaches

Across the archipelago's 115 islands, you'll find a beach for every occasion and every mood. In fact, every island has its own signature spots, ranging from the more popular beaches filled with life and bustle to those most secluded spots – the Seychelles Islands of postcards and glossy magazines.



3. Plenty of activities

If spending hours on the beach isn't for you, you needn't worry. The Seychelles Islands are bursting with activities, both adventurous and laid back. If diving, sailing or fishing are your thing, then there are options in abundance. Likewise, hikers are well catered to with a host of well-marked trails cutting through verdant forests and along untouched coastlines.

4. Exciting food & culture

A visit to the Seychelles Islands is something akin to entering the home of a large family with roots in all four corners of the globe. Visitors will find a vibrant culture that mixes African, European and Asian influences, reflected in the country's music, dance and, of course, cuisine. Expect superb seafood and palate-warming Creole dishes flavoured with chilli, turmeric and ginger.

5. The perfect island-hopping destination

Lastly, while many potential visitors might see the Seychelles Islands as somewhere to go, stay, relax, then leave, there's also plenty of potential for exploration. Perhaps you'll discover Mahé's mountains and Victoria's capital bustle, before heading off to La Digue for rum shacks and swaying palms. Or, discover Praslin's lush rainforests before heading to Silhouette Island to discover shady walking trails and some of the Indian Ocean's finest snorkelling.



Dinner Table of the South

words & pictures Simon Urwin

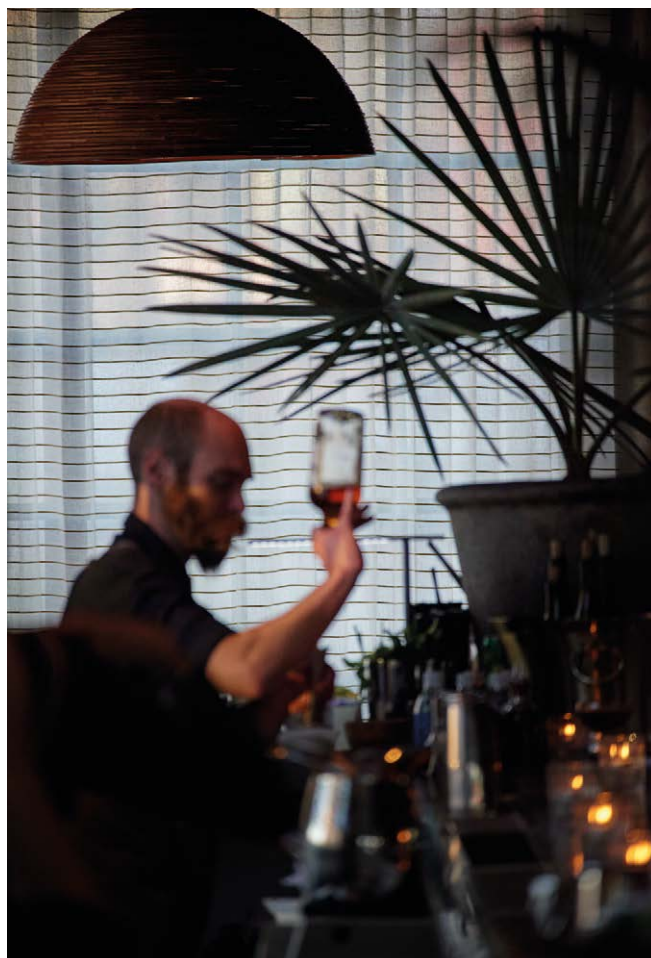
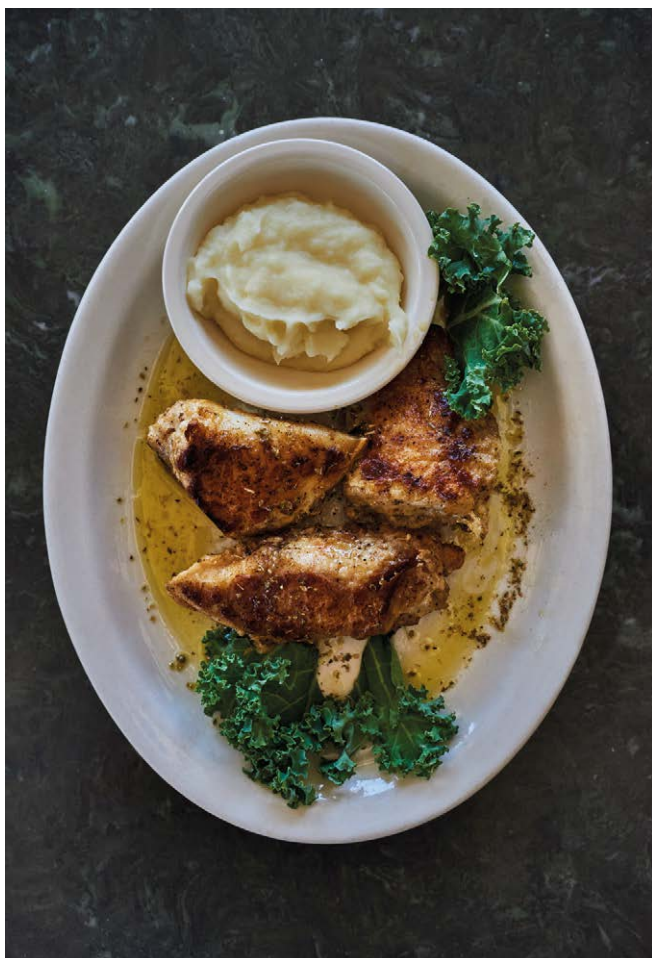
Founded in 1871, Birmingham, Alabama, was once the leading industrial centre of the Deep South, known as the 'Magic City' during its iron and steel heyday. Today, it bears a moniker of a different kind: 'Dinner Table of the South', thanks to its burgeoning food scene, with a wide range of restaurants – from the classic to the contemporary – offering menus that are richly imbued with a sense of history, nostalgia and warm Southern hospitality.

I spend my day in the city – named after its British counterpart – visiting two distinctive, award-winning establishments – starting with lunch at the homely Bright Star, the Yellowhammer State's oldest restaurant, located in Bessemer, some 13 miles south-west of downtown. Recognised by the James Beard Foundation (the Oscars of cooking) as one of 'America's Classics', it was opened in 1907 by Tom Bonduris, originally from the village of Peleta in the Peloponnese region of Greece. "He came in search of a better life and found a safe haven here," says my server, Sonya Twitty. "That's why he called it the Bright Star."

Bonduris was one of thousands of Greeks who crossed the Atlantic at the turn of the century,







uprooted by hard times and propelled across the waves by limited opportunities in their homeland. He arrived in the South to find the city booming, and like many of his compatriots quickly saw an opportunity to make money serving foundry and furnace workers with comfort food. “At one point, 95% of all the restaurants in and around Birmingham were owned by Greeks,” Twitty explains. “They served Southern dishes with touches of the Mediterranean: lemons, herbs, olive oil; it’s something we’re still doing to this day.”

Twitty takes me to the Bright Star’s main dining room which dates back to 1914 and features the original murals that were painted by itinerant European artists in exchange for food and lodgings. She then brings a selection from the menu, starting with a bowl of hearty seafood gumbo alongside a green salad topped with tart, salty feta cheese. Next comes one of their

signature dishes and a Southern classic: snapper throat (the succulent, steaky cut of meat from the underside of the fish behind the gills) which is grilled Greek-style with oregano and olive oil, and paired with belt-loosening sides of creamed corn and pureed potato. Twitty refuses to let me leave until I’ve tried one of their renowned desserts. I relent and choose the Lemon Ice Box – a creamy concoction of condensed milk, lemon and eggs. “That’s the thing about Southern hospitality, it’s impossible to resist,” she says, delivering a slice to the table. “We’ll treat you good in so many different ways, you have to like at least one of them.”

In the late afternoon I drive across town to Birmingham’s Lakeview neighbourhood for dinner at Automatic Seafood and Oysters, for which owner and executive chef Adam Evans recently won the James Beard Award for ‘Best Chef in the South.’ “One important thing



from the get-go: I wanted this place to be open seven days a week," says Evans, a native of Mussel Shoals, AL, who learned his trade in fine-dining restaurant kitchens in New York, New Orleans and Atlanta. "Many places only work five days, but I wanted folk to feel welcome all the time. I guess it's a Southern thing." Having converted the industrial building (a former sprinkler manufacturing facility) into a stylish space full of ocean colours, he settled on offering a seasonal seafood menu – inspired by happy summers spent as a child on Alabama's beaches and eating in its Gulf Shore restaurants. To ensure the finest, freshest ingredients, he then employed a fisherman to dive and spear-catch exclusively for the restaurant – including popular Gulf species as snapper as well as less-well-known varieties such as pompano, amberjack and triggerfish.

I take a counter seat to sample some of Evans's own suggestions from the menu. First come

briny Alabama oysters on the half-shell followed by a bowl of crab claws in a punchy citrus-herb marinade. I pick a glass of crisp white wine to accompany the next dish: mangrove snapper on a bed of apple and radish, and topped with pieces of crispy fish's swim bladder – an ingenious creation which tastes like a marine version of pork crackling. The highlight of the evening though is undoubtedly an Asian-inspired snapper throat served with chilli butter, lime and farm pickles which is perfectly spiced, full of complex and bright flavours, and as good as anything I've tasted in travels throughout Asia and the Far East. "People have all these misconceptions about Alabama," says Evans. "But there's way more to food here than just barbecue and meat-and-three. The dining scene is exciting, it's evolving fast and just keeps getting better. I think if folks come and try it for themselves, they'll be surprised, not only by the quality, but by how much thought and love goes into our cooking."

Azerbaijan: Cradle of Wine

words & pictures
Simon Urwin

“Whatever you do, don’t call Azerbaijani wine a ‘New World’ wine,” says sommelier Zaur Nasibli, as he pours me a glass of Sary Gelin, a Chardonnay blended with Rkatsiteli, a Caucasian grape variety with distinctively spicy-floral flavours. “It’s anything but; this is probably the oldest winemaking place on earth. We even have the proof.”

In the Tovuz Winery tasting room in the capital Baku, Nasibli then uncorks a bottle of red Karabakh for me to try. “Archaeologists have found evidence of winemaking in western Azerbaijan from as far back as 6,000 years ago,” he explains, while I sip on the jammy, fruity mix of Merlot and Mdrassa grapes. “That’s centuries before it arrived in Mediterranean Europe. Our ancient Shomutepe culture may have fermented grapes even earlier than that. In short, we’ve been making and drinking wine here for a very long time, probably even before our oenophile neighbours in Georgia.”

Nasibli goes on to tell me over the next glass – a sparkling Coing made from quinces – that even after the coming of Islam in the 7th century, Azerbaijanis continued their custom of making wine and fruit liquors in *qup* (clay pots buried underground), bypassing the religious ban on alcohol by drinking it out of sight. “Winemaking is one of our greatest traditions, celebrated throughout our history in art, poetry and literature. It is very much a part of who we are.”

Despite such deep, historic roots, it wasn’t until the mid-19th century that the first fully fledged commercial wine company was launched in Azerbaijan by Germans fleeing their homeland amid the chaos of the Napoleonic Wars. They founded the small town of Helenendorf (now Goygol) and established successful wineries in the surrounding hills with vines they carried all the way from Württemberg, a region famous for its red wines. After Lenin claimed the Caucasus in 1920-1, the Azerbaijani Soviet Republic was formed in 1936 and it went on to become one of the USSR’s top wine producers. But high consumption of wines and alcohol in general soon became a problem amongst the population and in 1985 Mikhail Gorbachev launched a temperance campaign, closing down vodka distilleries and destroying most of Azerbaijan’s vineyards. His ‘dry law’ backfired spectacularly though; production of moonshine soared, while state revenues from wine tumbled leading to high inflation, and so it was finally abandoned in 1987.

Post-independence in 1991, it was beer culture that first boomed in Azerbaijan as the government began negotiating with Western oil companies over its Caspian Sea oil reserves, notably BP. British workers subsequently arrived in their droves and Baku is still said to have more pubs than mosques. By the early 2000s, attention switched back to wine. The revival of viticulture began with the widespread replanting of many of the destroyed vineyards. Expert winemakers were invited from





France and Italy to help develop award-winning brands that in turn inspired many more boutique operations, colloquially known as garage wineries.

To try some of their output, I head to the must-visit Kefli, ('tipsy' in the local language), Baku's first dedicated wine bar located just outside the crenellated fortress walls of the Old City, run by Rüfat Shirinov and Ivan Uvarov. "We are always looking for rare wines to showcase," says Uvarov, who kicks off my tasting with a glass of Azerbaijan's first amber wine, followed by a rich, fruity blackcurrant wine, made in small monthly batches of just 25 bottles. "It's important that every wine comes with its own story too," adds Shirinov, who arrives at the table with a plummy red Madrassa. "This one comes from a winery close to Baku; the owner found some old *qup* on his property and decided to put them to good use once more." Shirinov and Uvarov tell me that a key part of their mission is to empower smaller operations and encourage experimentation: their wine list now includes bottles produced by a chicken factory manager turned vintner and a Pét-nat (pétillant naturel, a naturally sparkling wine) made as a side hustle by an Azerbaijani doctor. "We are all about shaking things up and helping wine flourish here by offering a high-quality selection that is curated with our own natural sense of rebellion," says Shirinov. "We might be new on the wine scene, but Azerbaijani wine has an incredible heritage. What we're doing is essentially thousands and thousands of years old."





HAVILA VOYAGES

Pair the scenic delights of Norway's classic coastal route with a brand-new ship designed with comfort and the environment in mind.



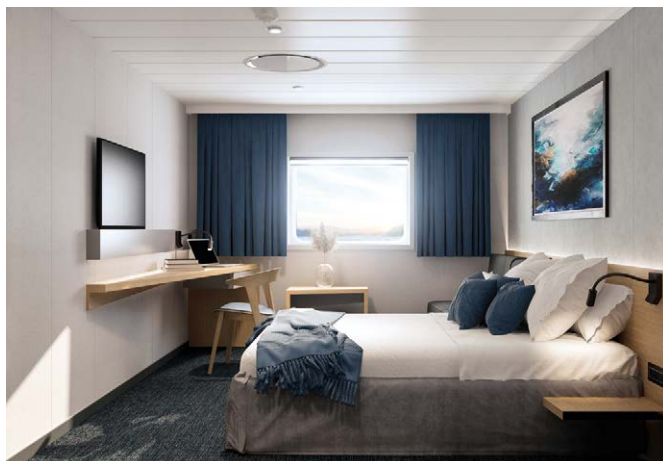
Routes & seasons

With departure dates throughout the year, guests have the chance to experience the best of Norway through the seasons, exploring dramatic fjords and far-flung archipelagos under either the Midnight Sun or those magical Northern Lights. Choose between the full-length route between Bergen and Kirkenes, perhaps tagging on a stay at the iconic Kirkenes Snowhotel, or opt for a shorter section, sailing either between Tromsø and Trondheim or Trondheim and Bergen. These shorter routes are perfect for those looking to combine a cruise with other parts of mainland Norway. Otherwise, you might choose to put your Havila experience front and centre, taking the full voyage from Bergen to Kirkenes and back again. The possibilities are almost endless.

New ships, spacious cabins

Havila's brand-new fleet of ships offer some of the most advanced environmental technologies in the industry, including the world's largest battery pack which allows for up to four hours' emission-free sailing. That's alongside an energy-efficient hull design and use of natural gas, which cuts CO₂ emissions by up to 30%.

But that's not all, as guests will also enjoy a host of modern comforts, including exceptionally spacious cabins and suites, many with panoramic sea views, some with balconies and, in the case of the stunning Lighthouse Suite, even a private Jacuzzi. Whichever you choose, you'll be treated to the likes of complimentary WiFi, USB ports and stylish Nordic-inspired design.



Seasonal dining, inspired by local culture

Havila's on-board dining has a firm focus on local, seasonal ingredients, with Norwegian food culture informing menus which are, in turn, inspired by the route the ships' sail. In fact, at the main Havrand Restaurant, you'll swap between menus as you move along the coast, with dishes inspired by four distinct regions, showcasing everything from summer fruits and berries to succulent reindeer, king crab and delicious Arctic char. Other dining options include the Havly cafe, where guests can enjoy coffee and cake as well as light lunches and simple dinners, and the elegant Hildring, where a five-course fine-dining menu pays tribute to the many flavours of Norway, with a special emphasis on seafood.

Excursions

While you'll enjoy your time on board, you'll also want to step ashore to explore all the Norwegian coast has to offer. In summer, UNESCO-listed fjords set the scene for spectacular hikes, fishing trips and strolls among historic towns. Get up close to nature on RIB boat safaris in search of sea eagles, meet huskies near Tromsø, get acquainted with Sami locals and gaze out over the Barents Sea from mainland Europe's most northerly point. Then, in winter, the likes of husky sledding and snowmobiling is illuminated by majestic swirls of the Northern Lights. Whatever you choose, you'll enjoy the services of expert guides who'll be on hand to add colour, intrigue and humour to your holiday experience.

HAVILA GOLD

Upgrade your cruise to Havila Gold for a host of added extras:

Food & beverage

- Optional free upgrade to the fine-dining restaurant, Hildring, with its exclusive five-course menu
- Havila Gold exclusive extra meal choices at breakfast and dinner
- A selection of premium choice coffee
- Non-alcoholic beverage package, available from all serving points on board

Service

- Welcome drink and snacks in the Havblikk Bar & Lounge
- Welcome pack in your cabin on arrival
- No cover charge for self-ordering room service
- 20% discount on selected items in the Havila shop

Speak to Wexas about adding Havila Gold to your booking.



Wexas offers a range of holiday options with Havila.

For more information, call a Wexas specialist on **020 7838 5958** or visit **wexas.com/havila-cruises**



10 THINGS TO DO IN *Alberta*

From world-leading festivals to cultural experiences and wildlife encounters, here are ten great reasons why Alberta should be at the top of your 2023 travel wish-list.

1. Explore the Alberta Badlands

Step back to the time of the dinosaurs in one of Alberta's hidden wonders – the rugged and spectacular Badlands.

2. Experience winter in Banff

Banff in the winter provides a whole new palette of activities including skiing, snowboarding, snowshoeing, ice skating, and so much more!

3. Discover incredible scenery in Waterton

The prairies of Alberta meet the peaks of the Rocky Mountains at Waterton Lakes National Park. Hike to discover crystal-clear lakes, thundering waterfalls and rainbow-coloured streams.

4. Go in search of wildlife in Jasper

From bear to elk, wildlife can be found in every corner of Jasper National Park. Indeed, this vast protected area is home to all the mountain species, including elusive wolverines and golden eagles.

5. Feed your inner foodie

Bolstered by top chefs, superb produce and award-winning restaurants, Alberta has become a culinary destination in its own right.

6. Get lost in the dark sky

Enjoy some of the best stargazing in the world with a trip to a Parks Canada Dark-Sky Preserve – a place dedicated to preserving the night sky

7. Visit the Calgary Stampede

Home to one of the world's largest rodeos, this 10-day festival features everything from parades, stage shows and concerts to agricultural competitions, chuckwagon racing and First Nations exhibitions.

8. Uncover a rare gem in Canmore

Often overlooked, pretty Canmore offers hiking, fishing and wildlife in summer, and cross-country skiing and husky sledding in winter.

9. Experience urban renewal in Edmonton

Alberta's capital has come a long way in recent times. Find out what the fuss is about as you contrast its chic shopping with its world-class fringe festival.

10. Explore indigenous cultures

From the beat of Jasper's Warrior Women to the rich history of the Mahakin Trails and Metis Crossing, take the chance to delve into the rich heritage of Alberta's indigenous population.

HOTELS

Pousada Mosteiro Amares

Amares



Once a Cistercian Monastery, now a National Heritage site, the Mosteiro Amares provides guests today with a version of a more worldly paradise, situated beside a dramatic river valley. The three-year restoration of this 12th century building has been a careful one, preserving the original (and leaving the stunning cloister entirely untouched) while catering for current day earthly comforts. The rooms retain the simplicity of the original monks' cells, with wood flooring, stone lined windowsills, a few with balconies, while the ensuite bathrooms are indulgent marble affairs with rainforest showers over the baths.

The building is steeped in charm, great stone walls, a vast terrace perched above the valley, a bar with an immense fireplace, a fountain in a hallway of arches which gushes with fresh mountain water. The restaurant is in the old kitchen of the monastery, with the original chimney still in place, with stoves cut into the stone and a slab of granite table which has endured through the centuries and is now where breakfast and dessert buffets are served. Wines are mostly based on Portugal's finest, while the menu is hearty, with traditional dishes such as Bacalhau (cod) and Caldo Verde (a vibrant green soup popular throughout Portugal), interspersed with ravioli and risottos.

There is also a picnic menu available on request, and there are so many places on the doorstep perfect for eating outdoors, the hotel being surrounded by wonderful landscapes and spots beside the river to enjoy. It's also close to Portugal's only National Park, the Geres, where a Roman road forms one trail through a space of lagoons and waterfalls and forest, where some of Europe's remaining wolves roam, as do wild boars and Ibex. There are otters and salamanders, about 15 bat species (most of these endangered) and well over a hundred bird species.

The historic city of Braga is within easy reach too, with so many churches it is often referred to as the Portuguese Rome. The splendid cathedral is the repository for fine sacred art, and its old, pedestrian-only narrow lanes make exploring a pleasure.

Back in the blessed grounds of the Mosteiro Amares, after a day of exploration, a charming outdoor pool nestled in a glade awaits, or if there's energy left to burn, a tennis court set in a low meadow. The reading room and the cossetting bar provide beautiful spaces to relax in when the day is done.



WILDLIFE IN CANADA



Whether its bears, beavers, whales or giant herds of migrating caribou, Canada's majestic landscapes are alive with wildlife. Below you'll find six incredible encounters, taking in everywhere from the Arctic wilds of Manitoba to the spectacular seascapes of the Atlantic coast.

Spot spirit bears in British Columbia

On remote Princess Royal Island, British Columbia's Great Bear Rainforest is home to the rare Kermode (spirit) bear. These elusive bears, which have inspired generations of Aboriginal myths and legends, can be spotted on tours by land or boat, their white coats contrasting with the dark green of their forest surrounds – a truly awe-inspiring sight.

Live alongside belugas in Nunavut

Every year, playful beluga whales congregate in pods at the mouths of several Nunavut rivers for five weeks in summer. The best way to see them? Head to Arctic Watch, a far-flung camp where some 2,000 belugas come to play, mate, and nurse their young just offshore.

Cross paths with huge herds of caribou

Every year, some 250,000 Qamanirijuaq Caribou thunder across Canada's north, representing one of the largest mass migrations on earth. In spring, the caribou head towards the open tundra, while in autumn they head south to spend winter among the trees. On both of these journeys, they pass by the Arctic Haven lodge in Nunavut.

Marvel at polar bears in Manitoba

Nicknamed "The Polar Bear Capital of the World," the town of Churchill lies on the migratory path of these incredible animals, offering prime polar bear-viewing for much of the year. Photograph them from a distance as they frolic in the flowers or come face-to-face with them from the comfort and safety of a Tundra Buggy®.

Get close to baby seals in Québec

Québec's Magdalen Islands attract hundreds of thousands of harp seals to their shores for two to three weeks every winter. These silver-grey seals are friendly enough that you can get right up close to photograph the adults and their impossibly cute pups.

Share the water with whales in Atlantic Canada

Over 20 species of whales migrate along the East Coast of Canada each year, making it one of the best places in the world to spot these incredible marine mammals. Everything from blue whales, to humpbacks, to orcas can be observed in their summer habitats, on board Zodiacs, modern cruisers and even traditional tall ships.

Pousada Palacio de Estoi

Faro



A heady mix of Neoclassical, Rococo and Art Nouveau

architecture, the Palacio Estoi is one of the most distinctive and distinguished luxury hotels in the Algarve. The views from this restored nineteenth century palace are just as heady, mountains and the sea. Conveniently close to Faro, it manages to feel far away from it all, a world of its own set in French-style gardens. There are indoor gardens too, flourishing along hallways, bringing the serenity of the outside inside. It also brings some of Faro's culture, art and history inside, collaborating with the Faro Municipal Museum to showcase a collection reflecting the history of the region and its Roman, Islamic and Classical influences displayed in a dedicated exhibition space. There's history in as well as on the walls here - the reception area is in the old chapel of the palace, common areas on the third floor ensconced in the original palace halls and the restaurant accessed through the old palace kitchen.

Rooms and suites are tucked away in tranquility in a new wing to allow for more space and modern accessories, all sleek in contrast to the ornate main building. Lines are clean, the mood in each, large or small, is both cosy and airy. Each opens out on to a private balcony facing south, inviting guests to make the most of every sunny day, as does the wonderful

outdoor pool. The spa offers more pampering, with a heated indoor pool, a Turkish bath, a sauna and treatments that smell delicious and almost edible, involving combinations of brown sugar, passion fruit, orange and honey.

For actual deliciousness, the Visconde restaurant is renown for its classics, such as the seafood cataplana, but also for contemporary creations based on local produce. A wonderful terrace serves both restaurant meals and bar snacks as well as fine wine and cocktails while enjoying expansive views of the Algarve countryside. For a taste of exceptional countryside, the nearby Ria Formosa Natural Park, considered to be one of the 'Seven Natural Wonders of Portugal', is a wondrous haven of marshland, canals, sandy beaches and islands, palm trees and prickly pear cacti, birds and fish flitting through this special space.

Hiking and boat trips can be arranged with the help of the hotel - the local beaches and islands are splendid. So too are the cultural pleasures of the region. The village of Estoi itself is all charm, close to the Roman ruins of Milreu, rich with mosaics and in atmosphere. And of course there are all the treasures of Faro to discover along the cobbled streets of the old town and in its museums and Gothic cathedral.

MANITOBA

CANADA'S HEART IS CALLING



For most destinations, the chance of just one world-class wildlife experience is enough. But, in the province of Manitoba in Canada's longitudinal centre, its northern sub-Arctic wilderness offers no fewer than three. In short, this is one of the best places in the world to spot polar bears, the oh-so-adorable beluga whales and some 285 species of birds, from eagles to owls.

Flying out from the province's cultured capital, Winnipeg, adventurers that make the journey out to the frontier town of Churchill are greeted by the great barren beauty of Hudson Bay and its surrounding sub-Arctic tundra. This is polar bear country. Here, you'll be taken out in all-terrain vehicles and on nature walks to search for these majestic creatures, with the chance of movingly up-close encounters. Keep your eyes peeled for Arctic wolf, fox and herds of caribou as well – they're all brought to life by expert guides and naturalist presentations alike.

Then, head out in Zodiac boats onto the frigid waters of Hudson Bay to search for the inimitable beluga whale. These extremely social creatures live in pods that can reach into the hundreds. What's more, their famed bulbous forehead

is wonderfully flexible, meaning they can make different facial expressions. Just don't forget to also look skywards for snowy owls, falcons and even that great icon of North America – the bald eagle.

Each night, you'll bed down in an atmospheric log cabin, relax by an open fire and enjoy the best in Canadian hospitality. Seal River Heritage Lodge is a particular highlight. This early entrant into the National Geographic Unique Lodges of the World collection is a further flight hop from Churchill, bringing you deeper into the Manitoban wilds for truly isolated wildlife experiences. The fabulous food and wine – featured in the best-selling Blueberries & Polar Bears cookbooks by the lodge's founding chefs – doesn't hurt, either.

A 9-day escorted tour is available with Wexas from £10,640 per person and includes flights, UK airport lounge access, 2 nights in Winnipeg & 5 nights at Seal River Lodge with selected meals. Visit wexas.com/103853.

To find out more about a holiday to Manitoba, call a Wexas specialist on 020 7838 5958.

Pestana Palacio do Freixo

Porto



This is not just a hotel, it's a National Monument. The Palacio do Freixo was awarded that honour in 1910, but has been an architectural wonder for far longer than that, built and designed in the eighteenth century by the eminent architect Nicolau Nasoni, full on baroque sumptuousness, set right beside the River Douro in splendid sprawling gardens.

Carefully contemporary in style, with warm wooden tones and sleek furniture, rooms are situated in an ancient and atmospheric mill building, many overlooking the beguiling river, from either immense windows or balconies. Room service is available, but there are a myriad of dining options here, to suit every mood.

By far the grandest is Palatium, where antique frescoes line the walls and regional dishes and wine fill the tables. Seafood is sparkling fresh, meat is sourced from local pastures, the finest Portuguese wines are matched with every dish. Although all is authentic, based mostly on traditional Portuguese dishes, the menu is as sophisticated as the surroundings. From fresh Atlantic oysters to seafood bisque, from guinea fowl with spiced apple and almonds to an intense chocolate dessert served with champagne sorbet, there's something to tantalise

every palate. There's all-day delicious dining in the Nasoni Bar, where the striking art vies with striking riverside views, and a well-judged balance between light and substantial choices, some traditional, but there is also an international and Italian influence at play, with burgers, linguini with shrimps, panna cotta with berries and port wine amongst the options. Nasoni is an ideal spot for an evening cocktail too. During the sunny day, hours pass happily at the Promenade Pool Bar, with sandwiches and snacks and salads for sustenance after a swim or two.

The pool is a literal highlight here, up high on the rooftop with splendid views of both the river and gardens. There is also a heated indoor pool, alongside a sauna and Turkish bath. There's a fitness centre available but as Porto is a city best explored on foot, along the river and amidst some truly enchanting attractions, that might not be necessary. Meander along the river, follow the traces of the city wall, lose yourself in a mosaic of old houses, small shops and welcoming restaurants, and above all, make your way up the hill to the Cathedral. The historic centre of the city is a World Heritage site, and every stroll reveals a treasure, perhaps the Tower of Clerics, convents and churches, or the Port Wine museum. If it's not a walking sort of day, take to the river in a boat and drift past it all on a dreamy journey.

Safaris in Australia

Alongside their reputation for fine wines and glorious scenery, South Australia and Western Australia are home to some of the country's most iconic wildlife encounters. You'll find the best of them over these pages, and discover why these spectacular states should be top of your list for your next wildlife holiday.

The wildlife of South Australia

Wildlife is everywhere in South Australia, a state which features an astonishing 24 national parks, over 1,500 species of plants and a wide variety of native wildlife. And, from the ocean to the outback, its vibrant natural world is showcased alongside its celebrated wine production and thriving food scene, creating the perfect holiday destination.

Kangaroo Island

This is Australia at its wild best. Just a 30-minute flight from Adelaide, or a 45-minute ferry ride from Cape Jervis, Kangaroo Island offers unparalleled opportunities to encounter unique Australian wildlife in its natural habitat. Often referred to as Australia's Galápagos, the biodiversity here is staggering. There are kangaroos, of course (60,000 compared to the island's 5,000 full-time human inhabitants), but that's just the tip of the iceberg. From rare sealions, seals

and koalas to the prehistoric echidna – a sort of spiny anteater – your days will be packed full of astonishing discoveries, with expert guides and rangers on hand throughout your stay.

Eyre Peninsula

Close to the border with Western Australia, this off-the-beaten-track gem is well worth making time for. Where the ocean meets the outback, there's the chance to swim with dolphins and sealions on one day, and seek out emus, kangaroos and koalas the next. Join a cycling tour or safari to take in the best of it, joining some of the best guides in the business who'll bring it all to life.

Flinders Ranges

A five-hour drive north of Adelaide, via the Clare Valley wine region, Flinders Ranges is a rugged home to the likes of grey-fronted honeyeaters, Lake Eyre dragons, wedge-tailed



A local's view...

Craig Wickham is the owner of Exceptional Kangaroo Island, an award-winning tour company, which showcases a range of adventure, food, wine, and cultural experiences on Kangaroo Island

"It's probably no surprise, having grown up on Kangaroo Island and lived in Africa for a year, that the concept of wildlife safari is close to my heart. What's not to love about sharing superb food and wine out in the bush and observing wild animals only metres away?"

"We love to share our island with enthusiastic visitors, and our space with wildlife. Leaving enough room for nature means we can move through the landscape and observe sea lions, kangaroos, wallabies, koalas, echidnas and many brightly coloured birds, all in their natural environment."

eagles and the rare yellow-footed rock wallaby, now making its comeback following a concerted rewilding programme. It's also a region hugely rich in First Life fossils, putting today's encounters into the wider evolutionary context. Lastly, don't miss out on experiencing the local Adnyamathanha culture – the chance to explore nature through indigenous eyes will elevate your stay far beyond a normal wildlife holiday.

The wildlife of Western Australia

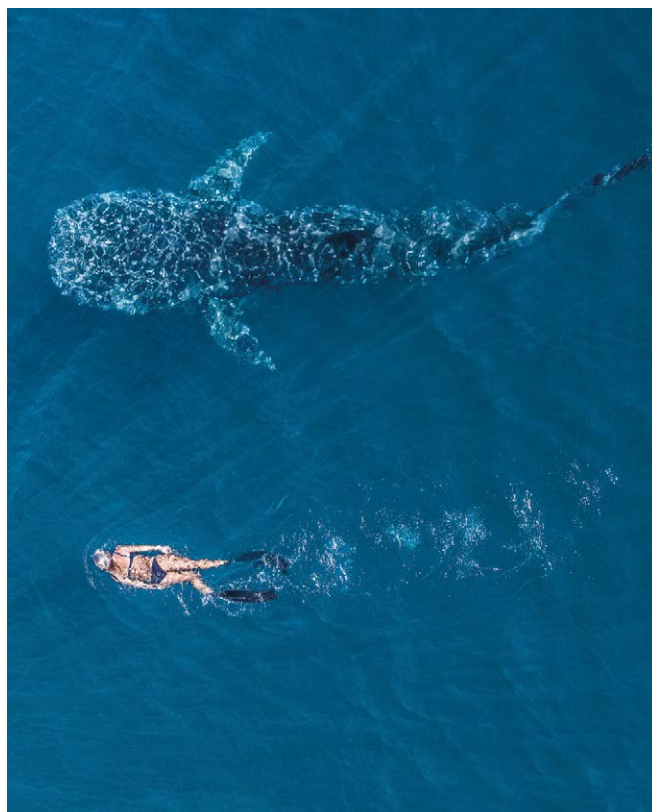
From the deserts of the far north to the woodlands and wildflowers of the south, Western Australia's natural world is as diverse as it is beautiful. Home to an incredible 70 per cent of Australia's mammals, with 25 species endemic to the state, it's a state teeming with wildlife, enjoyed everywhere from its idyllic islands to its magnificent national parks and World Heritage coral reefs.

Rottneest Island

Just a short ferry ride from Perth, Rottneest is something of a natural paradise. With car-free roads and bikes as the main form of transport, myriad species have made their home among its quiet coves and sandy bays. Spend a day exploring its coastlines and you're likely to see colonies of long-nose fur seals, catch glimpses of playful dolphins, spot shoals of tropical fish darting between coral reefs and come face-to-face with the island's star turn – the delightfully cute quokka.

Ningaloo Reef

A two-hour flight north of Perth, Ningaloo Reef is like entering another world. On the coast, great sweeps of white sand slope down to an impossibly clear sea, which in turn gives way to the world's largest fringing coral reef. Spanning more than 160 miles, this unique ecosystem supports a dazzling array of wildlife, from oceanic rays to humpbacks and whale sharks. Meanwhile, safaris inland offer close-up encounters with emus, rock wallabies and kangaroos in Cape Range National Park – a Kimberley in miniature.



A local's view...

Brooke Pyke lives and works as a tour guide at Ningaloo Reef and won the Female Fifty Fathoms Awards at last year's Ocean Photographer of the Year awards.

"My job is to take photos of the incredible marine life we see at Ningaloo Reef, and our guests who get to swim with them. The reef here is teeming with life and we are so lucky to have a healthy population of large marine animals such as manta rays, whale sharks, migrating humpbacks and many other pelagic species.

"Ningaloo is just one of those places that gives you a sense of magic, and it never stops surprising me and showing me new things; it's like living inside a David Attenborough documentary. Each night I fall asleep wondering what new experience the ocean will give us the next day."



Mindscales

Barbara Weir was born in 1945 at Bundy River Station in the Utopia/Urapuntja region of the Northern Territory, the daughter of Utopia artist Minnie Pwerle and Irish station owner Jack Weir. One of Aboriginal Australia's Stolen Generation, her mixed heritage meant she had to be hidden from government patrols when they visited her area in order to avoid being taken away. As is customary for Aboriginal families, she was raised by an aunt; in her case the famous artist Emily Kame Kngwarreye, who kept her niece safe

from European authorities for over seven years. She was finally discovered at the age of nine and taken away by Native Welfare to be fostered out, first to a family in Alice Springs, then to one in Victoria, and finally to one in Darwin. Her family thought she had been killed, and over the following ten years there was no contact between them.

She married Field Officer Mervyn Torres and in 1969 moved to Papunya, where she rediscovered her family, and began the slow process of familiarising



herself with indigenous culture. In 1977, with six children in tow, she returned permanently to Utopia, supported by her aunt, who taught her women's law and ceremony. In 1985 she was honoured for playing a major role in a successful land rights claim by being appointed the first woman president of Urapuntja Council.

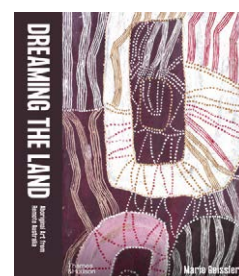
Also known for her *Grass Seed Dreaming* paintings – luminous, intricately detailed linear renderings of rippling grass – in the *My Mother's Country* series, staccato dotting introduces a subtle cosmic dimension to her work, coupled with contrasting colour blocks or background infill – each area defining a place of singular significance.

Dotted lines represent rivers or ancestral travelling routes; concentric circles denote meeting places, campsites, ceremonial or rock holes.

She started painting professionally in 1990, subsequently exhibiting across Australia, in France, Germany, Japan, the USA, Mexico and Fiji, and becoming a vital force in professionalising the Aboriginal arts industry. She painted continuously until October 2022 when she had a stroke. She passed away in the Royal Adelaide Hospital in January 2023.

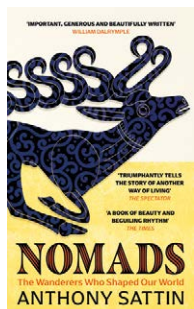
***Dreaming the Land* by Marie Geissler**
Thames & Hudson, Hbk, 364pp, £50

Above: *My Mother's Country*, 2008
 by Barbara Weir
 Synthetic polymer
 paint on linen
 190 x 400 cm



In the Zagros Mountains, Iran

by Anthony Sattin



A young man walks towards me with a stick slung across his shoulders and a flock at his feet. The sheep, in front, beside and behind him, are as chaotic

as meltwater in the nearby stream and they carry him down the path like a crowd of rowdy children. An older man follows, weatherworn but still strong, a rifle over his left shoulder. He clicks his tongue to encourage them forward. Behind him are two women on donkeys, one older than the other, and I guess they are his wife and daughter. They look strong women, but then it is a tough life beneath the shard peaks of the Zagros Mountains. Other donkeys carry their belongings, bundled inside heavy rust-and-brown cloth that the women have woven and will soon repurpose as door-flaps when the tents are set up.

There are few trees at this altitude, but the snow has melted and there is intense beauty and excellent grazing in the valley blanketed with irises, dwarf tulips and other spring flowers. The family are smiling as they lead their sheep and grey-and-white goats along the rock-strewn track towards me, the bucks sporting majestic swept-back horns. And I am smiling with them, swept up by the excitement of the Bakhtiari tribe's annual migration from the plains into the mountains in search of summer pasture.

Everywhere there was beauty. If I were a photographer, I would have captured the shifting shadows and slanting sunbeams of afternoon as they tinted the snow mountains pink and cast gold across the surface of the stream. If I were a composer, I would have harmonised the rumble of water with the clunk of stones shifting across the riverbed, the buzzing of bees, the clanking of bells and the whistling and whooping of men bringing the flocks in for the night. There was beauty in all. But I am a writer and, barefoot and slightly sun-struck, I pulled out a pencil to note the pure quality of light in the blue sky, the way that colours, especially yellows, popped in the green valley and the sudden chill that descended as soon as the sun dropped behind the crest. Late that night, the nomads' tents glowed like embers across the river, the moon shone full above the mountain ridge and I fell asleep wondering how Byron had known that 'Not vainly did the early Persian make/ His altar the high places and the peak... there to seek the Spirit...' My spirits were soaring in that high place and I felt a deep welling of joy.

Over the next couple of days, one of the nomad families introduced me to their valley and their people – and the many challenges of being a herder in the Zagros Mountains in the twenty-first century. They told me about plants in the valley, the animals that passed wild above our heads and others that lived on the higher slopes. They knew all that could grow there, what to encourage, what to fear. They talked about the journey they had made from the hot lowlands into the

mountains and how they would walk back again when the earth began to freeze beneath their feet, a journey their ancestors had made long before anyone began keeping records. I have heard similar stories from Bedouin and Berbers in North Africa and the Middle East, where I have spent much of my adult life, from Tuareg and Wodaabe beyond the mudhouses and libraries of Timbuktu, from swift young Maasai, flashes of orange across the red East African bush, from nomads on the edge of the Thar Desert in India, on boats in the Andaman Sea, in the uplands of Kyrgyzstan and elsewhere in Asia. Whether with Berber or Bedouin, gaucho or Moken, conversation always seemed to settle on the same issues, on continuity, on pride in belonging, on being in harmony with their surroundings, respecting all that nature offers and on the difficulties of living a nomadic life when governments wanted them to settle.

These people all reminded me of a sublime harmony that exists with the natural world. They knew their environment in a way that can only be acquired through living on equal footing with everything in that world, not in domination, through a recognition that we humans are dependent on our surroundings, something those of us who live in towns and cities too easily forget. The Bakhtiari know the significance of each tone of their herds' bleating, when they are content, or hungry, or threatened, whether a birth or death is near, just as they know how to read the clouds, and the scents carried on the winds. The more I watched and listened, the more I was reminded that we had all lived this way once – and not so very long ago, in the greater scheme of human things.

From the introduction to *Nomads*
John Murray, PBK, 368pp, £12.99



Walkers' Rome

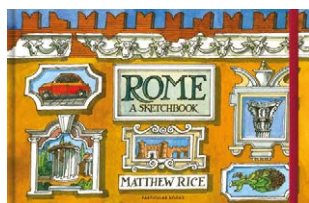
by Matthew Rice

The best tip for Rome visitors comes from the novelist

Elizabeth Bowen's *A Time in Rome*, which was written in 1960 but remains useful. Don't, she firmly suggests, take either taxi or the bus... just walk. It is a slightly counter-intuitive command when getting to know a large capital city, but it really works. By walking the city, you gradually map its baffling complexities and understand its topography. Rome, nevertheless, remains extremely big – being an Imperial capital, a manifestation of papal power and a massive statement of nineteenth-century nationalism. All this makes those Bowen-inspired walks quite serious expeditions. Similarly, seeking out a particular Byzantine church or writhing baroque angel can turn into a five-mile round trip very easily, one offering such tempting diversions that the carefully planned route may need serious modifications. These might take the form of a glimpse of a glittering altar, an ice cream or, indeed, when exhaustion (or one o'clock) comes round... a *trattoria* with paper tablecloths, a short menu and a single remaining empty table beckoning one inside.

Rome: A Sketchbook by Matthew Rice

Particular Books, Hbk, 208pp, £20



Above: The Pantheon, dominating its piazza for 2,000 years.

The Diomedes

by Matthew Hollis

Summers he would sail for Alaska
working the crabbers as deckhand or galley;
autumns returning with old-weather stories of
clam catchers, fur trappers, and the twin isles
of Diomed: two miles and a continent between them;
and how, in winter, when the straits froze over,
the islanders could walk from one to the other,
crossing the sheet for family, scrimshaw,
soapstone, to marry, passing the date line
that ran through the channel, stepping
between days as they went.

As far as I know he doesn't go back;
if he did, he'd hear that only the fearless
now track on foot, the pack no longer dependable
for walrus, ski-plane or the human step.

Even now, there's something to his story
I find difficult to fathom. At home, in London,
listening to my neighbours' raised voices
or catching the man opposite dressing,
I wonder what it is we will do to be neighbourly,
how part of us longs for it to matter that much,
to be willing to nudge our skin-boat into the waves,
to be between floe and another;
half-way from home, in no safety, unsure
if we're headed for tomorrow or yesterday.



Earth House
Matthew Hollis



from *Earth House*
Bloodaxe Books, Hbk,
112pp, £14.99



The best of Valencia

Well known for its heady mix of cutting-edge architecture, old-quarter heritage, open green spaces and regional gastronomy, Valencia is something of a hidden gem among Spain's headline-grabbing icons. Here, you'll discover six must-do experiences in this port city located on the country's south-east Mediterranean coast.

1. Barrio del Carmen

This is your chance to embrace Valencia's rich and varied history and cultural heritage. Located at the north-west corner of the historic centre, it's home to everything from churches and convents to 11th-century Moorish fortifications. The Church of San Nicolás de Bari and San Pedro Mártir, with its intricately painted vaulted ceiling, is an absolute highlight.

2. Central Market

Valencian cuisine is rightly lauded throughout Spain and beyond. Discover the region's rich variety of local produce in the Central Market, the biggest market – a modernist marvel host to more than 1,200 stalls. Be sure to pause for tapas at the Central Bar, where local dishes are prepared to perfection under the watchful eye of chef Ricard Camarena.

3. La Lonja World Heritage Site

This grand gothic monument was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1996. Exceptionally well preserved, the 15th-century building was originally the city's silk exchange, its grand halls, soaring twisted pillars and stunning coffered ceilings flanked by a pair of pretty, citrus gardens. This really is one of the city's must-see attractions.

4. Turia Garden

Encompassing nine kilometres of green space, this gorgeous green space is one of the largest urban parks in Spain. Explore its network of paths on foot, bike or Segway, pausing to relax in bars and cafés where extensive terracing looks out across a series of historic bridges, some dating back to the 15th century.

5. Valencia Aquarium Oceanografic

If the famously sunny weather takes a turn, the city's aquarium is on hand to provide all the diversion you'll need. As the largest aquarium in Europe, it's host to an impressive 45,000 creatures and 500 different species. Step past the avant-garde exterior to explore exhibits on everything from the world's wetlands to the Arctic and Antarctic oceans. There's even an underwater restaurant.

6. Valencia's beaches

Of course, when the sun does come out to play, you'll want to head to the beach. And, this is where Valencia, as a city break destination, really excels. Both in the city itself and in its outlying suburbs – easily reached by bus or even bike – you'll be treated to mile after mile of gorgeous, golden sands, all with blue flags flying high. Either make a day of it, or head to the shores in the evening for dinner and glass of wine at sunset. Perfection.

Get lost just beyond your doorstep

Mark Reynolds readies himself for endless European and Scandinavian adventures

Compiled by a team of travel experts, *Europe by Train* brings together 50 hand-picked itineraries between Europe's must-see destinations, while introducing vital less-visited stops along the way. Featuring a mix of short trips and epic adventures, regional and cross-continent itineraries, it provides endless inspiration together with practical ticketing tips and suggested detours to extend your trip. Vintage icons like the *Venice Simplon-Orient-Express*, its upstart rival the *Golden Eagle Danube Express*, and heritage steam trains like *The Jacobite* (a.k.a. the *Hogwart's Express*) in the Scottish Highlands still

hold a deep allure, but new high-speed services and revamped sleeper trains are opening up exciting new vistas. Fancy a three-week loop around the Mediterranean from Málaga to Naples via Valencia, Barcelona, Montpellier, Marseille, Monte Carlo, Genoa and Livorno? *Europe by Train* will get you there. Or if you were thinking of taking the new Eurostar route to Amsterdam, why not make it the start of a northern European tour of bustling ports and Baltic beaches from Groningen to Gdansk via Berlin? If you prefer to keep it local, the Interloire line drops you between Orléans, Blois, Amboise, Tours,

Angers and Nantes with short hops of 20 minutes to an hour, leaving ample time to take in a land of fairy-tale castles, medieval towns and fantastic food and wine. Or in the north, plot a two-week trip around the idyllic beach resorts and historic country towns of Brittany and Normandy. The iconic bright-red carriages of the *Bernina Express* run along the highest railway in the Alps, from Chur to Tirano, winding its way through 55 tunnels and over 196 bridges. Or you can ride the narrow-gauge FEVE line to explore Spain's northern coast between Bilbao and Ferral at sightseer's speed, crawling by rolling hills, dramatic beachside cliffs, the dynamic cities of Santander and Oviedo and the snaggleteeth peaks of the Parque Nacional de los Picos de Europa.



***Europe by Train*
by DK Eyewitness**
272pp, PBK £14.99
EBOOK £5.99

From the Arctic tundra and serene forests of Sweden to the spectacular fjords of Norway, a plethora of enchanting lakes in Finland and the Ice Sheet of Greenland, seasoned trekker Cam Honan's *Wanderlust Nordics* offers endless hiking options across a breathtaking variety of landscapes. St Olav's Way is a 360-mile medieval pilgrim trail from Selånger on the east coast of Sweden to the port city of Trondheim in Norway, retracing historical events in the life of the Viking warrior king. The mountains, sandy beaches, rugged cliffs and lush forests of Sweden's 80-mile High Coast Trail offers sights ranging from the colourful cottages, weathered fishing huts and boathouses of the Ulvön islands in the Örnköldsvik archipelago, the spruce forests of Balesudden Nature Reserve and crystal-clear Lake Balestjärnen. The three-day (38-mile) Herajärvi Trail through Koli National Park, six hours north-east of Helsinki, features tranquil forests and meadows, high peaks and mesmerising views across the vast Lake Pielinen shoreline. Or in Greenland, escape the relative bustle of Ilulissat with a there-and-back two-day (26-mile) hike

to the tiny former Dutch trading post of Oqaatsut, where the H8 restaurant offers a gourmet dining experience in the unlikelyst of settings, and marvel all the way at views over iceberg-studded Disko Bay. Within the boundaries of southern Iceland's Skaftafell Nature Reserve, witness the country's highest mountain (Hvannadalshnjúkur), largest glacier (Vatnajökull), richest birch forest (Bæjarstaðarskógur), and tallest waterfall (Morsárfoss), where the short but awesome trails are enclosed by two further glaciers and the world's largest outwash plain. In Norway, experience the wild reindeer, stony peaks and lichen-

laden plateaux of the Rondale Triangle, or take a break from the southern fjords to edge as far as you dare along the famous Trolltunga (Troll's Tongue) suspended over Lake Ringedalsvatnet.



***Wanderlust Nordics* by Cam Honan**
gestalten, HBK, 300pp, £40



Beyond the prairies

Wherever you travel in Saskatchewan, nature is never far away. Even at the centre of its major cities – Regina and Saskatoon – you're just minutes away from impressive landscapes and wide-open spaces. But life in the city also goes beyond Saskatchewan's incredible natural world, blending dynamic cosmopolitan energy with fantastic art, sumptuous food and drink, and activities showcasing both history and diversity.

A CAPITAL DESTINATION

Named in honour of Queen Victoria, Regina is Saskatchewan's unassuming capital, whose highlights include the Saskatchewan Legislative Building. Completed in 1912, it's one of the grandest historical buildings in Western Canada, while its setting – Wascana Centre – is a 930-hectare green space that rivals Central Park in New York.

HOME OF THE MOUNTED POLICE

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) Academy, "Depot" Division, has been a fixture in Regina since 1885. It's where every member of Canada's iconic force is trained as a cadet. The colourful RCMP Sunset-Retreat Ceremony is a not-to-be-missed summer tradition, while the state-of-the-art RCMP Heritage Centre is open year round.

PERFECTING THE CRAFT

Regina and Saskatoon have earned reputations for impressive craft beer and spirits. In Regina's Warehouse District, Bushwacker Brewpub and Rebellion Brewing Co. are attractions in their own right, while a short drive outside the city, award-winning Last Mountain Distillery produces its famous dill pickle vodka. In Saskatoon, enjoy a pint at 9 Mile Legacy Brewing Co., or at one of the many other microbreweries in the city. Just outside of Saskatoon, Black Fox Farm & Distillery concocts gin and liqueurs from products grown on the working farm.

FOR ART AND FOOD LOVERS

Saskatoon has made international headlines for the opening of the Remai Modern art museum, which houses the world's largest collection of Picasso linocut prints (more than 400 pieces), along with almost two-dozen ceramic works by the Spanish master. Meanwhile, the city's vibrant food scene continues to attract attention, its innovative chefs having created appetising new tastes by combining prairie sensibilities with world-infused flavours.

A RIVER RUNS THROUGH IT

More than 100 km of riverbank paths wind through Saskatoon along the tree-lined banks of the mighty South Saskatchewan River. See Saskatoon from the water aboard the top deck of The Prairie Lily riverboat, perhaps with a relaxing afternoon sightseeing tour or a classic dinner cruise. Evening sunset cruises showcase the colourful spectacle of Saskatchewan's "Living Skies."

MORE THAN 6,400 YEARS OF HISTORY

Wanuskewin Heritage Park, on the northern edge of Saskatoon, has long been a spiritual gathering place for Indigenous peoples. It's the longest, continuously operating archaeological dig site in Canada and has yielded evidence of human occupation dating back more than 6,400 years. In the summer, overnight tipi stays and traditional dance performances connect visitors to the past.

You might also like...



IN THE SHADOW OF THE MOUNTAIN
by Silvia Vasquez-Lavado
Monoray, PBK,
384pp, £9.99

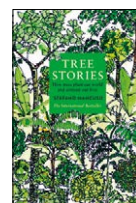
The 2023 Stanford

Travel Book of the Year is a remarkable story of strength, compassion and awe as the author leads five young women on an ascent of Everest to confront their personal traumas.



AAM AASTHA
by Charles Fréger
Thames & Hudson,
HBK, 324pp, £30
A photographic celebration of Indian

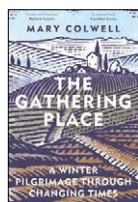
folk culture and religious ritual bursting with vivid colour and exuberant costumes representing gods, goddesses, wild nature and legendary heroes.



TREE STORIES
by Stefano Mancuso
Profile Books, HBK,
224pp, £14.99

Straddling art, politics, science and

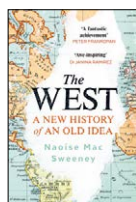
crime, remarkable trees that have shaped human history, from the slipperiness of the banana skin to Stradivarius' red spruces and the French Revolution's Liberty Tree.



THE GATHERING PLACE
by Mary Colwell
Bloomsbury, HBK,
276pp, £17.99

The veteran solo walker undertakes

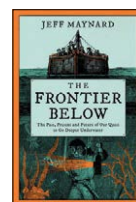
a 500-mile journey of body and soul along the Camino Francés in northern Spain at a time of pandemic, political upheaval and climate and biodiversity emergency.



THE WEST by Naoíse Mac Sweeney
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A radical reckoning of how notions of The West have distorted our

understanding of history, told through fourteen lives from a formidable Roman matriarch to a progressive Islamic scholar.



THE FRONTIER BELOW
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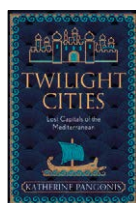
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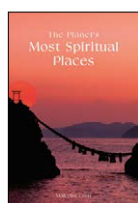
with spellbinding storytelling, a revelatory study of lost empires of the Mediterranean, charting the fates of ancient Tyre, Carthage, Syracuse, Ravenna and Antioch.



CITY PARKS
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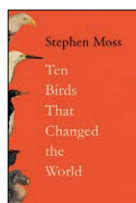
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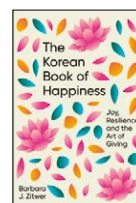
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THE KOREAN BOOK OF HAPPINESS
by Barbara J. Zwitter
Short Books, HBK, 192pp, £12.99

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and deeply personal mix of memoir, travelogue, guidebook and cultural commentary spliced with delicious recipes and magical moments of understanding and connection.

TRAVEL OREGON



With Oregon's geography staggering from wild beaches and dense forests to undulating river valleys and snow-capped mountains, it's no surprise that it hosts more scenic byways than any other state. And, in among it all, you'll also find North America's full spectrum of civilisation, whether sleepy fishing villages and award-winning wineries or frontier towns and the urbane cool of Portland.

Its residents, too, are just as diverse as their state, from indigenous tribes and old-school outdoorsmen to a new wave of artisan urbanites. But, one thing they all share is a fierce devotion to where they live and its natural world. Indeed, the best way to experience Oregon is through their infectious passion, by engaging with the state's lauded network of local guides. Talk to your Wexas specialist about a naturalist-led hike, an insider's tour of a top winery or a behind-the-scenes tasting at a regional producer. Each specialist will get right to the heart of their area of expertise, bringing it to life.

To inspire further, we've picked out seven regions that best demonstrate the state's rich diversity. Remember, it's just a direct British Airways flight away from London Heathrow.

1. The coast

Spanning nearly 400 miles, the rugged Oregon coastline is a wild affair of dramatic rock formations, whirlpools and a near-endless spread of windswept beaches. It's all interspersed with the likes of historic homes and lonely lighthouses, serving as waypoints to everything from fishing and whale-watching trips to hikes and rounds of golf.

2. Portland

Surely inspired by its imposing mountain backdrop, Portland is one of America's great centres of creativity – something realised across its craftspeople, musicians and culinary masters. It also invites its natural surroundings in, with more than 200 parks and gardens ideal for walks and bike rides. This really is a city alive.

3. Mt. Hood & the Columbia River Gorge

Positioned alongside the mighty Columbia River Gorge, you may know iconic Mt. Hood as the world's second-most-climbed mountain and the host of North America's only year-round ski season. However, you should take the region as a whole, with its medley of forest-carpeted cliffs, giant

waterways and, yes, snowy peaks setting the scene for quaint riverfront towns and a rich variety of outdoors activities.

4. The Willamette Valley

As it has been since the time of the pioneers, this is Oregon's agricultural heartland. And today, while its gently undulating green contours make for ideal hiking or cycling, they're also terraced into pretty vineyards. Don't also miss out on the food markets and farm-to-table dining.

5. Southern Oregon

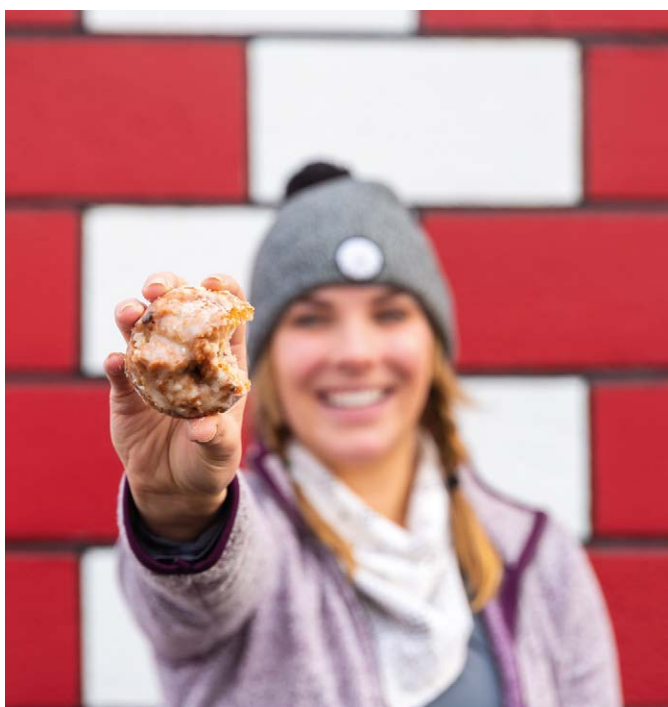
From high-desert country to lush valleys and clear-blue lakes, Oregon's south is wonderfully varied. One moment you could be enjoying some fishing or rafting, and the next mountain biking or hiking through beautifully barren shrublands. Then, relive the 19th century in gold-rush-era towns, now home to excellent wineries and artist communities.

6. Central Oregon

A tale of two seasons, central Oregon's sunny summers and snowy winters means plenty of adventure. That could be a full complement of snowy fun or cowboy dreams brought to life with mountain retreats and fly-fishing escapades. And, its convergence of mountain ranges and river plateaus is troubled by unique, volcanic features.

7. Eastern Oregon

The spirit of the Wild West is alive and well in Eastern Oregon, a spectacular region where giant, snow-capped peaks look down onto rolling hills, complex desert lands and wild, rushing rivers – landscapes tailor-made for adventure. And, wherever you look, the indelible footprint of 19th-century explorers Lewis and Clark, the Nez Perce Native American Chief Joseph and the Oregon Trail pioneers who lived in or passed through this region still permeate its unique culture.



Oregon Fly-Drive

Discover the wonders of Oregon's unspoilt coastlines, pulsating cities and incredible landscapes as you hit the highway on a state-spanning road trip. Highlights include Portland – the 'City of Roses', Newport and its wine-country surrounds, historic Florence and the stunning beauty of the Oregon Dunes National Recreation Area. You'll also take in two of the state's icons, pausing to admire the riverine perfection of Grants Pass and the always-spectacular Crater Lake National Park.

Prices start from £2,440 per person incl. return flights, car hire & 10 nights accommodation. For a full itinerary, visit [wexas.com/134035](https://www.wexas.com/134035) or call **020 7838 5958**.

At the Riverside

True luxury returns to Europe's waterways



A river cruise is surely one of the most relaxing and immersive ways to explore Europe's great waterways. And, with the launch of their fleet of luxury ships and programme of all-inclusive itineraries, all-new Riverside Luxury Cruises are set to offer some of the most stylish voyages around. And, with voyages ranging from three nights to 14 nights, there are options for everyone from first timers to seasoned river cruisers alike.

Riverside Mozart

Sailing the Danube for the first time in 2023, Riverside Mozart will offer the ultimate in river cruise luxury across a range of hand-crafted itineraries. With a suite-to-crew ratio of 1:1, guests can expect the very best in on-board service, rivalling the world's finest hotels. It's all played out against a backdrop of world-class facilities.

All-suite accommodation

Mozart's butler-served suites are among the most spacious of any river cruise line, with the smallest measuring an impressive 20 sqm and the Owner's Suite coming in at an extravagant 82 sqm. Whichever you choose, you can expect sleek furnishings, sophisticated artworks and colours designed to match the palette of the Danube itself.

There's also the added treat of in-suite hors d'oeuvres and a daily canapé service. Be sure to book a Symphony Suite or above for a French balcony.

Destination dining

The on-board dining is a real highlight, with a choice of four gourmet restaurants, plus an on-deck barbecue, and menus ranging from Italian to



Treasure of the Danube Eastbound

Sailing out from Vienna's exquisite architecture and rich musical heritage, this in-depth journey charts the mighty Danube east, calling in at medieval towns and villages in Austria, Slovakia and Hungary. Sailing the gorgeous Wachau Valley, you'll pause in pretty Dürnstein, famed for its white wines and castle ruins, and then Melk with its glorious Benedictine abbey. The ancient towns of Linz and Bratislava are next, before Esztergom's grand basilica paves the way for your arrival into Budapest and your journey's end.

Prices start from £3,195 per person for a 7-night cruise incl. flights & transfers and travelling on a premium all-inclusive basis.

Call 020 7838 5958 or visit [wexas.com/184102](https://www.wexas.com/184102) for a full itinerary.

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tapas to modern interpretations of crown dishes from the former Habsburg Empire of Austria-Hungary. Guests will also see speciality boards change as the ship moves along its route, showcasing ingredients and dishes unique to each region. It's all part of Riverside's immersive approach.

Exceptional facilities

Between daily curated excursions – more of which later – you'll have time to relax at the ship's indoor pool, take a break at the sauna, steam room and Jacuzzi, unwind with a massage or work out at the gym. There's also a

spacious sun deck, and a wrap-around deck designed for walking and jogging.

Daily excursion choices

Covering art, architecture, history, nature and cuisine, Riverside's excursions are tailor-made to bring every destination, and every port of call, to life. You'll be treated to everything from castle visits to world-class museums and food and wine tastings, all in the company of expert guides. Plus, with free time available in selected ports, complimentary bike hire allows you to take things at your own pace.

Riverside Ravel

Also launching in 2023, Riverside Ravel will offer all the same luxuries as Riverside Mozart, but with design and dining steered towards its routes along France's idyllic Rhône and Saône rivers. As such, you can expect the very best in on-board refinement, paired with sumptuous French cuisine and some of the world's finest wines.



RIVERSIDE
LUXURY CRUISES



Day 1: Spend your first day in the heart of Singapore's Civic District, where colonial buildings and modern skyscrapers sit side by side, as do flavours old and new. For lunch, make a beeline for Lau Pa Sat. Formerly a fish market located along the waterfront, this distinctive building's architecture harks back to the Victorian era, and was gazetted as a national monument in 1973. The space now celebrates traditional fare and new flavours, showcased in traditional hawker stalls and modern food outlets. Dig into local favourites such as *chai tow kway* (a savoury dish made with white radish, eggs and chilli paste), or *satay* (grilled meat skewers) from the stalls on Satay Street.

Before you leave, be sure to pay a visit to Food Folks – Singapore's first food-and-retail blended space, devoted to selling local brands and producers. Of course, you'll want to sample the delectable confections from Ji Xiang Ang Ku Kueh.

Spend the rest of the afternoon exploring Singapore's rich heritage at the National Museum of Singapore, or take a walk through Fort Canning's Spice Garden before heading to dinner at Pó. Located within the beautifully restored Warehouse Hotel, this restaurant serves up reimagined local classics. Then, round off your first day in Singapore with a visit at Mama Diam. This hidden speakeasy bar pays homage to the traditional provision shops that dot the local neighbourhoods, and serves drinks that pay homage to local favourites such as *kopi* (black coffee) and *bandung* (condensed milk with rose cordial).

Day 2: As a modern metropolis and former trade port, Singapore has long been a melting pot of flavours from across the globe. Devote your second day to experiencing the world on a plate, in the cultural hotbed of



Singapore for foodies

Singapore is the perfect destination for foodies looking to tantalise their tastebuds, boasting world-famous hawker fare, Michelin-starred restaurants and Mod-Sin Cuisine – a fusion of traditional tastes and ingredients with bold culinary experimentation. Here's how to make the most of three food-filled days in this capital of culinary creativity.

Chinatown. For lunch, pay a visit to the Michelin-starred Cloudstreet, where the menu marries the flavours of East and West – think Sri Lankan curry made with Western Australian crayfish or grilled oysters seasoned with betel leaves and lime.

With batteries recharged, there's time to enjoy some shopping and sightseeing in Chinatown itself, taking in the beautiful architecture of Sri Mariamman Temple and tasting your way through the treats at Tong Heng Traditional Cantonese Pastries, where egg tarts and red bean pastries are among a host of delicious delicacies.

This evening, Avenue 87 is an excellent option. Helmed by local chefs Glen Tay and Alex Phan, the restaurant taps on its founding duo's travels abroad to present a range of inspired dishes. Expect to be tantalised by creations such as beef short rib with char siew and scallions to softshell crab served with paneer and black pepper.

Alternatively, take the time to discover the multisensory delights of Little India. Komala Villas is the ideal spot for dinner, its South Asian specialities having tempted locals and visitors alike for over 70 years. Then, round

off your night at The Elephant Room, a modern bar that pays homage to the myriad charms of the heritage district it calls home, with cocktails taking their names from famous streets and historical sites. Sample a Buffalo Road cocktail—made with Pink Guava Distillate and Lime— or try the Race Course Plantation, a mix of Indian Rum, Himalayan salt and sugarcane.

Day 3: Today, you'll discover traditional delicacies in the Katong-Joo Chiat, a centre of Peranakan culture – a hybrid of Chinese, Malay and Western traditions. Perhaps head to local's favourite Chin Mee Chin, which has been serving delicious baked goods and breakfasts to hungry Singaporeans since 1925. The menu comprises a mix of old-fashioned dishes and tantalising treats for those with a sweet tooth. Kickstart the day with a breakfast of toast and *kaya* – a jam made from coconut – paired with soft boiled eggs and coffee. Just be sure to save space for pastries – their cream horn and chocolate tart is a must.

With lunch beckoning, savour a local classic at Katong Mei Wei Boneless Chicken Rice, located in the basement of Katong Shopping Centre, before discovering Peranakan culture at



Rumah Bebe, admiring the pastel-hued houses along Koon Seng Road, and shopping for savoury nonya dumplings at Kim Choo Kueh Chang.

End your culinary adventure with an evening's deep dive into local cookery. Run by famed local chef Damian D'Silva, Rempapa serves traditional Singaporean dishes, from plates of aromatic *nasi lemak* (rice cooked in coconut milk and pandan leaves, served with a variety of side dishes) to bowls of spicy chicken curry.

Feeling hungry? Call a Wexas Far East specialist on 020 7838 5958 to begin your own culinary journey through Singapore.



SINGAPORE & SENTOSA IN STYLE

7-DAY LUXURY HOLIDAY

This curated itinerary will see you stay in a pair of lavish hotels, kicking off with a Marina Bay icon before escaping to the picture-perfect beaches of Sentosa Island. You'll also be treated to private tours of the city's rich heritage past, including a river cruise and an indulgent afternoon tea experience at Raffles Hotel. There are plenty of other hidden gems to discover as well, from the bustling hawker markets and historic temples to green nature trails and hip local coffee houses.

Prices start from £3,210 pp. incl. flights, private transfers, selected touring & 5 nights accommodation. For more details, visit wexas.com/154174.

Spiritual oases and scorching heat

Nick Hunt is inspired by ancient monuments, remote cultures and pristine nature

TEOTIHUACÁN, MEXICO

After months of travelling slowly through Guatemala and Mexico, I was taken in hand by a bunch of mad hippies who drove me to Teotihuacán, the pre-Aztec ceremonial centre outside Mexico City. The Avenue of the Dead, the Pyramid of the Moon and the impossibly vast Pyramid of the Sun – 220 metres high, and the third largest pyramid in the world – had a powerful effect on me. I'd never before seen architecture so alien or terrifying. I'd been awake for 32 hours, so the experience had a hallucinatory, slightly nightmarish edge. Now it feels like something from the realms of fantasy.

FES, MOROCCO

In the ancient walled city of Fes I came across a chicken's foot, bright yellow, lying in the dust. Further on, there was another – and another, and another. I followed them through the streets like a fairytale breadcrumb trail, and eventually I overtook two small boys dragging a kind of sledge piled high with chickens' feet. Every time it hit a bump, another foot would tumble off. Around me were men in hooded djellabas, women in veils, archways and alleys, donkeys loaded high with goods, and the stench of tanneries. It was the first time I'd experienced true culture shock – and it was wonderful.

SIERRA DE LOS CUCHUMATANES, GUATEMALA

For three days I crossed the Guatemalan highlands with a fifteen-year-old boy called Juan, a horse called Chapulín (Grasshopper), and a nameless black dog that decided to join our party. Juan was K'iche' Maya, and every day he understood less of the languages spoken around us, as we passed through the territories of other Mayan tribes. On the third day, the dog ran off and killed a lamb outside a village, and we were surrounded by an angry, jostling crowd. Juan looked terrified, but I offered to buy the lamb and everything calmed down.



Nick Hunt is the author of three travel books, two of which were finalists for the Edward Stanford Travel Award. His debut novel *Red Smoking Mirror* is an alternate history inspired by journeys through Mexico, Morocco and Spain. Swift Press, Hbk, 272pp, £14.99

People watched in astonishment as the dog then ate the entire lamb, bones and all, even the wool. Our journey continued, and neither of us spoke about the incident again.

TAMIL NADU, INDIA

I'd been to the north of India twice before, but never to the tropical south. Tamil Nadu was like stepping into a totally different country. My memories are kaleidoscopic, a visual assault of incredible colour, verdant trees dripping with roots, huge knobby fruits stacked by the roads, and painted temples teeming with an extraordinary array of gods. Later I read that Hinduism is considered the world's last classical religion, a polytheistic pantheon like that of ancient Greece and Rome, or the Aztecs and the Maya, and I was inspired by that idea. Once, we all had many gods, festooned with joyful colours.

CÓRDOBA, SPAIN

I went to Córdoba with the intention of doing some serious work on my novel, which had hit a tricky patch. Unfortunately I timed my stay with an unprecedented heatwave. It was too hot to think, let alone to write, so I spent my afternoons in a daze and my evenings wandering the streets, which form a winding labyrinth of bright white and dusty yellow. This city was once the heart of Islamic al-Andalus, and Moorish influence is strong, but nowhere more so than in the Mezquita: the great mosque, now a cathedral, where a forest of columns and arches stretches as far as the eye can see, inlaid with jasper, marble and onyx, with golden Catholic shrines dazzling suddenly out of the gloom – an extraordinary example of religions and cultures merging. Apart from the Mezquita, the place I found solace during that insanely hot week was by the banks of the Guadalquivir (which the Moors called al-Wadi l-Kabir), the beautiful green river that runs through Andalusia. Here I sat, cooled by the breeze, decided not to worry about my novel, and watched the white egrets fly.

EXPERIENCE SRI LANKA



Sri Lanka gave its ancient name – Serendib – to an old English word for luck, serendipity, and since ancient times it has been known as the jewel of the Indian Ocean. Marco Polo called it 'the finest island of its size in the world' and today it is one of Asia's finest destinations – a heady mix of vibrant cultures, tropical landscapes and living history. The coast is justifiably famous for its tropical beaches, easy snorkelling and world-class surf. But, inland there are astonishments at every turn: ruined cities where monks and pilgrims worship, colonial towns where Europe and Asia meet and mingle, mountain walks to breathtaking viewpoints, and real jungle where leopards still lurk in the wild. In fact, Sri Lanka has the highest concentration of leopards in the world, along with 5,800 wild elephants roaming the dense rainforests. You could even try diving with blue whales and dolphins in Kalpitiya.

Hotels offer the highest levels of luxury and service. Designer style and delicious cuisine reflect the refinement of this exquisite destination, drawn from age-old local traditions. Think swaying palms, outdoor spas, blue lagoons and beachfront villas, accompanied by fragrant curries and perfect and personalised service.

Wherever your Sri Lanka adventure takes you, you'll have the chance to enjoy some truly memorable experiences, from its energetic cities to its glorious coast and spellbinding natural world. Perhaps you'll begin on the south coast, uncovering the history and mystery of Galle Fort, before heading north to explore Tea Country, travelling by train from lakeside Kandy and dropping into fragrant tea estates for private factory visits, before returning to sleep in a spectacular plantation house. Then, go wild in Yala National Park and let a local guide lead you on a 4x4 safari in search of rare leopard and sloth bears. You could even supercharge your wildlife encounter by timing your holiday to coincide with the coming together of elephant super-herds in Minneriya National Park. Of course, you'll also want to join a local drive-guide to explore the Cultural Triangle's UNESCO and archaeological sites, from the cave temples of Dambulla to the rock-top fortress of Sigiriya, both vital nods to the country's rich heritage and storied past.

Lastly, take a break from it all and spend time in a mindfulness retreat enjoying Ayurvedic spa treatments or learning the principles of yoga from a guru. Dotted throughout the country, they're a window on an altogether more spiritual world.

VILLA D'ESTE: 150 YEARS OF LUXURY IN LAKE COMO



There can be few more romantic places in the world than Italy's Lake Como. And, there can be few more romantic retreats than Villa d'Este, a grand former residence of the aristocracy which, since 1873, has served as one of the finest accommodations in all of Europe.

Celebrating 150 years as a hotel in 2023, this elegant former home to princesses, marquises and tsars welcomes its guests with great marbled pillars, high-ceilinged rooms, lavish artworks and, yes, unmatched views across the great, glittering waters of Lake Como. Whether a room, suite or villa, guests will be treated to the utmost in traditional Italian luxury.

It's all enjoyed, of course, alongside the very finest gastronomy. Executive chef Michele Zambanini has worked tirelessly to create the finest and freshest seasonal menus, showcased across a range of venues, from the Veranda, with its magnificent garden and lake views, to the Grill – chic yet informal, located close to the Queen's Pavilion and serving dishes steeped in the Mediterranean tradition. Elsewhere, light bites and sumptuous afternoon teas can be taken at Canova Bar and on the lake terrace, with an evening accompaniment of live piano adding to the convivial atmosphere.

Naturally, the Villa d'Este experience extends far beyond the rooms and kitchens. There's a wellness centre, gym, sauna and tennis courts all on site to help while away the hours, while the famous pontoon swimming pool, floating on the lake, is an iconic highlight. Golfers, too, are well catered for both on and off site, with putting greens at the hotel itself and the superb Golf Club Villa d'Este just 12 kilometres away.

Indeed, for guests who want to get out and explore – and who wouldn't? – there are options ranging from guided boat trips to vintage yachting and gorgeous, rambling hikes among the hills of Northern Italy.



VILLA D'ESTE
LAGO DI COMO

To find out more about Villa D'Este, call a Wexas specialist on 020 7838 5958.