VOL 53 · NO 2 · 2023

TRAVELLER

£8.95

Atlantic Canada

Fanning out along Canada's Atlantic coast, the provinces of New Brunswick, Newfoundland & Labrador, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island offer a rich variety of travel experiences, from standout seafood to vibrant festivals and national parks teeming with wildlife. Travel to the region is easy, with direct flights to Halifax, Nova Scotia from London. In fact, it's all just a six-hour flight away. Below, you'll find six great reasons why Atlantic Canada should be at the top of your holiday wish list.

1. A coastal destination

With over 43,000 kilometres to explore, Atlantic Canada's coastline offers something for everyone. On Prince Edward Island, sandstone cliffs frame sandy beaches and water warm enough for swimming. Then, to the north, Newfoundland & Labrador is a rugged viewpoint for mighty icebergs on their journey south. Meanwhile, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick share the Bay of Fundy, host to migrating whales and the world's highest tides.

2. Whales & wildlife

With whales in mind, Atlantic Canada is among the best regions on Earth for spotting these magnificent mammals, from Newfoundland & Labrador to Cape Breton Island in Nova Scotia and Grand Manan Island in New Brunswick. Also, along the coast, visitors can spot puffins and other seabirds, while inland, national parks provide a rich habitat for moose, black bears and caribou.

3. Incredible seafood

Seafood lovers rejoice. The freshest lobster, oysters, mussels, scallops, clams, crab and salmon make Atlantic Canada a must for anyone who knows their herring from their halibut. Indeed, you'll be treated to a wide range of culinary delights across the region, from renowned fine-dining restaurants to roadside stands serving delicious fish and chips.

4. Urban experiences

Halifax is the vibrant capital of Nova Scotia and Atlantic Canada's largest city. Stroll the waterfront past historic sites, shops and museums, or head to the harbour for live music in one of the many pubs and restaurants. In Newfoundland & Labrador, St John's is all colourful buildings and a friendly, small-town buzz. Be sure to include some of the region's festivals in your visit, such as the Harvest Music Festival in Fredericton, New Brunswick or the Prince Edward Island International Shellfish Festival in Charlottetown.

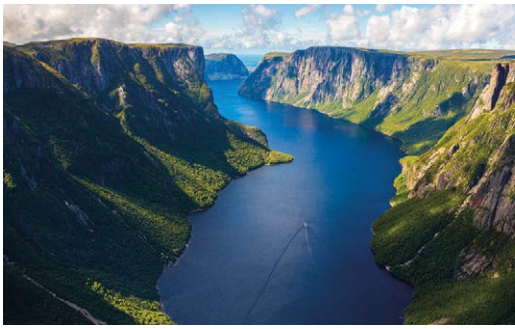
5. Outdoor adventure

Across the provinces, eight national parks and many more provincial parks offer the likes of hiking, cycling, sea kayaking, canoeing, and warm-water swimming. Autumn is a particular delight, with spectacular seasons foliage that rivals even that of New England. Meanwhile, in Newfoundland & Labrador, winter brings everything from husky sledding to snowmobiling.

6. A unique heritage

As you journey through Atlantic Canada, you'll begin to understand the region's rich cultural fabric – a diverse mix of French Acadian, Scottish, Irish, German, African and First Nations. Each has its own unique customs, legends and legacies – compelling stories told through music, dance and cuisine.






To begin your Atlantic Canada adventure, call a Wexas specialist on 020 7838 5958 or visit wexas.com

Atlantic Canada
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CANADA

Reaching for the Heavens

There's a significance to the cover chosen for this issue. There are many within the image itself, taken by Simon Urwin in Angkor Wat, where a Buddhist temple has been symbolically left to be absorbed by the rainforest. There is a circular sense to that. François-René de Chateaubriand (what a name, what a man – historian, diplomat, writer, one of the first French Romantics) once observed: "Forests were the first temples of the divinity, and it is in the forests that men have grasped the first idea of architecture." Through the years many have compared forests to cathedrals, perhaps most notably Theodore Roosevelt, who once stated "A grove of giant redwoods or sequoias should be kept just as we keep a great or beautiful cathedral." (We feature one of Europe's most extraordinary in this issue, the Basilica of Notre-Dame de Fourvière in Lyon).

Closer to home, and closer to now, Sir David Attenborough remarked "Ancient trees are precious. There is little else on Earth that plays host to such a rich community of life within a single living organism." Ancient trees also have an emotional resonance, as was felt by so many when the Sycamore Gap tree was felled. People have scattered ashes there over the years, have made marriage proposals, have been drawn to it for instinctive reasons. That's the significance that prompted this cover, and also, in this issue, a feature on some of the world's most iconic trees. We also feature the iconic Billy Connolly who, sadly, has to fell a tree infested with destructive pine beetles, to prevent the spread. He hugs it first. It's a story set in a place called Horsefly in Canada.

We do also feature a selection of rather different adventures in Canada, should lumberjacking not appeal. There's wonderfully scenic Whistler, with fabulous skiing but also surprisingly cosmopolitan charms in terms of après-ski; and a whole host of wilderness to explore in the National Parks. The Pacific Rim offers exceptional wild coastal beauty. Costa Rica does too, of a rather warmer sort; we've picked a secluded stretch of South Caribbean coastline, close to a natural reserve where endangered species such as the jaguar find refuge. Less endangered but still at-risk big cats need some solitude too. Jonathan and Angie Scott have launched an initiative to look after them while looking at them.

Amy Sohanpaul
pays a tribute to trees

In Samarkand, we find the emphasis on a different sort of preservation, with skilled artisans protecting and restoring some of the most ancient artwork in the world. It's a deep immersion in this fabled Silk Road city, once one of the most important capitals in the world. Kevin Pilley is also immersed in artisan life – but of a more frenetic and aromatic sort, in Fez, lost in an ancient souk that is a UNESCO heritage site overflowing with all the matters of modern Moroccan life – spices to be shopped for, silver to be spun.

Lively, buzzy Sydney seems calm by contrast, in Justine Hardy's refined, elegant and not a little romantic remembrance of a significant moment in her – and indeed in the city's life. The admirable habit of days bracketed by doses of beach life were full of appeal during her time there. In Syracuse, Sicily, summer days are the same, lived around a seaside rhythm, as seen in Francesco Lastrucci's light-filled photo essay of lives dictated by what the waves are doing. Simon Urwin takes to them in calm cruising fashion, along the wild west edges of Norway, taking in spectacular land and seascapes and soaking up stories on stops all along the long way. He learns about traditions that have lasted for centuries, as enduring as the trees we've featured.

One dates back 400 years, another was a small sapling when the United States was born. Perhaps the youngest trees in that feature are the jacarandas. For me they are nostalgia inducing and poignant as I spent so many childhood hours sitting, reading, dreaming and often just hiding in the branches of one, planted by my great-grandfather. In his garden were other trees he'd also planted when he was young; they all had their own distinct personalities, the twisty pomegranate, the fragile mulberry, the sturdy mango tree holding a wooden swing. There is a Greek proverb that salutes "old men who plant trees in whose shade they shall not sit".

There is also, in our pages, a wonderful ode by poet Pascale Petit – *Trees of Song*. Illustrated by Sarah Maycock, it's one of the most beautiful spreads we've ever run. It reflects to an extent, a line from the wise Kahlil Gibran:

Trees are poems the earth writes against the sky.

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.

TRAVELLER is produced by **FIFTH FLOOR PUBLISHING** for:
Wexas Travel, Runway East Borough Market,
20 St Thomas Street, London SE1 9RS
ONLINE wexas.com/traveller-magazine

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WEXAS BLUE MEMBERSHIP £85 per annum (£105 overseas)
WEXAS GOLD MEMBERSHIP £165 per annum (£172 overseas)
Membership includes other publications and benefits
TRAVELLER SUBSCRIPTION £20.85 per annum (£30 overseas)
ADVERTISING Dave Warne
TEL 020 7838 5818 **EMAIL** david.warne@wexas.com
PRINTING Acorn Press, Swindon

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

THE PEOPLE BEHIND OUR STORIES

COLIN THUBRON
is a travel writer and novelist, and an Honorary President of Wexas. In this issue he writes an appreciation of Dervla Murphy.
SEE PAGE 10

SIMON URWIN
is a TV executive turned travel photographer and writer, who has shot in over 75 countries from Antarctica to Afghanistan.
SEE PAGES 18, 32 & 44

FRANCESCO LASTRUCCI
is a freelance photographer born and living in Florence, who travels worldwide on assignments for major magazines.
SEE PAGE 24

BILLY CONNOLLY
is a comedian, musician, presenter and actor. Born and raised in Glasgow, he now lives in America. His new memoir is *Rambling Man*.
SEE PAGE 70

JUSTINE HARDY
is a widely respected author and documentary maker. She is also a trauma psychotherapist and the founder of Healing Kashmir.
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TERRY GAINER
grew up in Banff, where his father was station agent, and subsequently forged a career in tourism and as a rail historian.
SEE PAGE 71

PETER BELLERBY
is a world-renowned globemaker and founder of the artisan studio Bellerby & Co., the only truly bespoke makers of globes in the world.
SEE PAGE 78

JONATHAN & ANGIE SCOTT
are wildlife photographers and documentary makers based in Kenya. In this issue they advocate a new etiquette for African safaris.
SEE PAGE 54

PASCALE PETIT
is a poet who was born in Paris, grew up in France and Wales and lives in Cornwall. Her latest collection is *Tiger Girl*.
SEE PAGE 76

MARK REYNOLDS
is a freelance writer and founding editor of *Bookanista*. For *Traveller* he edits Bookshelf and other publisher-related features.
SEE PAGE 70

SUNNY SINGH
is a London-based writer, novelist and academic. Her latest book is *A Bollywood State of Mind*, about her love of Hindi film.
SEE PAGE 82

KEVIN PILLEY
is a former cricketer and ex-chief staff writer of *Punch* magazine, who writes extensively on travel, lifestyle, food and drink.
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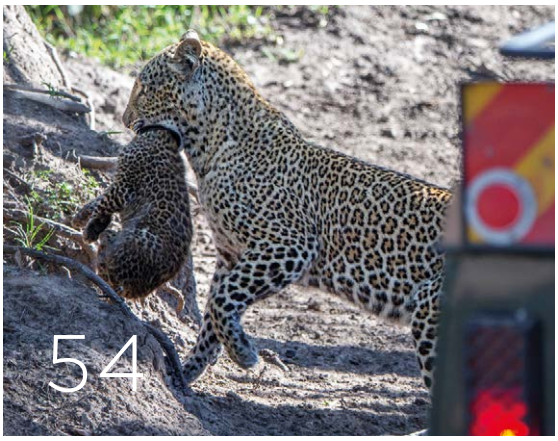
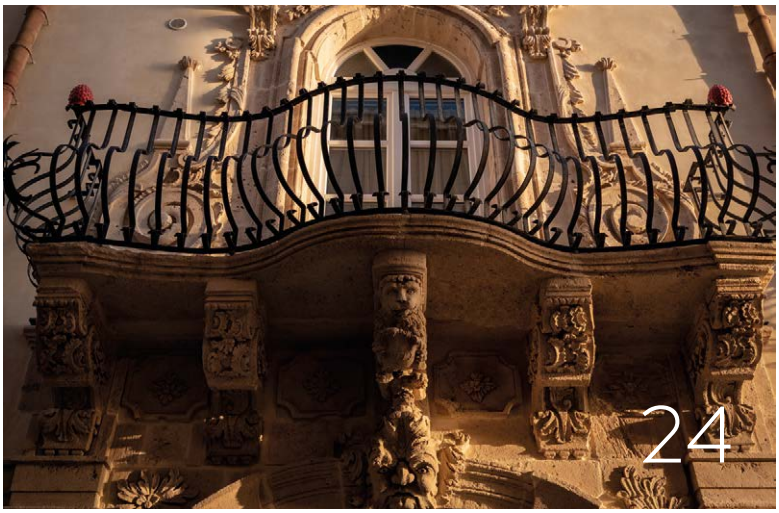
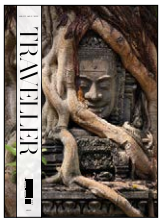
FEATURES





OPINION



On the cover: Cambodia by Simon Urwin.

On these pages (clockwise from left): cruising the Norwegian fjords with Simon Urwin; spicing it up in the souks of Fez with Kevin Pilley; taking extra care on Safari with Jonathan and Angie Scott; Simon Urwin's Angkor Wat; Ortigia, Syracuse by Francesco Lastrucci.

NEWS & REVIEWS

THE SEASONS OF BANFF

In the province of Alberta, Banff National Park is a towering icon of Canada's natural world. Sparkling lakes and majestic mountains dominate a landscape home to wolves, bears, moose and elk. A UNESCO World Heritage Site, its 2,564 square-mile expanse takes in the glittering waters of Lake Louise, while over 1,600-kilometres of hiking trails link sweeping valleys, creaking glaciers, ancient forests and remote towns. First among these is Banff itself, with its vibrant arts and cultural scene, and delightful nearby hot spring – the highest of its kind in Canada. Then, in winter, the park is host to some truly remarkable skiing, with three world-class resorts. Indeed, it's a true year-round destination, as detailed in this seasonal guide.

SPRING

As Banff emerges from the depths of winter, days grow longer, and the valleys and forests come alive with birdsong and wildlife. But, while at lower altitudes, hiking trails are opening up, in the mountains the snow lingers, allowing for late-season skiing and snowboarding at higher altitudes. Of course, you'll also benefit from the wealth of year-round activities available in the towns of Banff and Lake Louise, from wellness and spa centres to cultural experiences. Indeed, spring is the perfect cross-over season, with mild weather, fresh mountain air and fewer visitors than you'll find at the height of summer.

SUMMER

Summer is Banff at its most popular. And, it's easy to see why. The whole park is alive with vibrant nature, from wildflower-filled meadows and verdant, bear-dotted forests to rushing rivers and beautiful waterfalls, while the likes of hiking, biking, horseback riding and rafting are in full swing. Lake Louise is a sparkling jewel in the park's glittering crown, with gondola rides affording the best views. Elsewhere, remote mountain roads open up for spectacular guided tours to the likes of iconic Moraine Lake, while on Lake Minnewanka, you'll have the chance to enjoy Banff's only lake cruise. The Icefields Parkway is another highlight, particularly the guided trips onto the Athabasca Glacier. Just remember, if you're hoping to visit Banff in summer, be sure to book early, as the best lodges and hotels sell out months in advance.

AUTUMN

As the summer crowds head home, autumn in Banff is arguably its most beautiful season. Calm, tranquil and awash with the colours of Fall, you'll find even the most popular trails are delightfully quiet. And, between outdoor activities such as caving and climbing, there are plenty of opportunities for relaxation, be it forest bathing, hot spring soaks or lake paddles. While temperatures are cool, conditions in the early weeks of the season are still ideal for exploration, and seeing the larch trees as they change to vibrant yellow before losing their needles in early October. Just remember to pack some jumpers, particularly for those chillier nights.

WINTER

Far from the shutting up shop, Banff in the winter is a place packed full of possibilities that go far beyond the obvious delights of the national park's three world-leading ski resorts. As Lake Louise freezes over, the likes of skating and sleigh rides bring visitors out onto the icy surface, while in the deep, snow-laden forests, the snowshoeing and husky sledding provide plenty of seasonal thrills. Elsewhere, ice walks bring you right in amongst frozen waterfalls and great frosty formations, while at night, freezing temperatures bring clear skies and some truly exceptional star gazing.

Raw adventure and brimful passions

Left: Portrait of Dervla by Tom Bunning, 2014.

Right: Key West, Florida, *c.* 2008; with daughter Rachel in Madagascar, 1983; Barcelona, 1956.

COLIN THUBRON CELEBRATES THE EVENTFUL LIFE OF EXEMPLARY TRAVELLER **DERVLA MURPHY**

The intoxication of travel can become an end in itself. 'I travel not to go anywhere, but to go,' wrote Robert Louis Stevenson. 'I travel for travel's sake. The great affair is to move.'

Among modern adventurers this compulsion was famously exemplified by the intrepid Dervla Murphy. Few people, in any age, can have travelled a wider range of countries so arduously. It is possible to ascribe this passion to her mother's immobility – crippled by rheumatoid arthritis and grounding her daughter as caregiver for sixteen frustrated years. More likely Dervla Murphy was born with wanderlust.

In her starkly reflective autobiography, *Wheels within Wheels*, she portrayed herself as a morose and sometimes insolent small girl, whose pleasures were the private ones of the imagination. An only child, she recounted to herself endless fanciful stories, and for years of make-believe the teddy bears inhabiting an elm tree in her parents' garden developed uncontrollable characters of their own. In one of her earliest memories Murphy raged at other children intruding on the private magic she created.

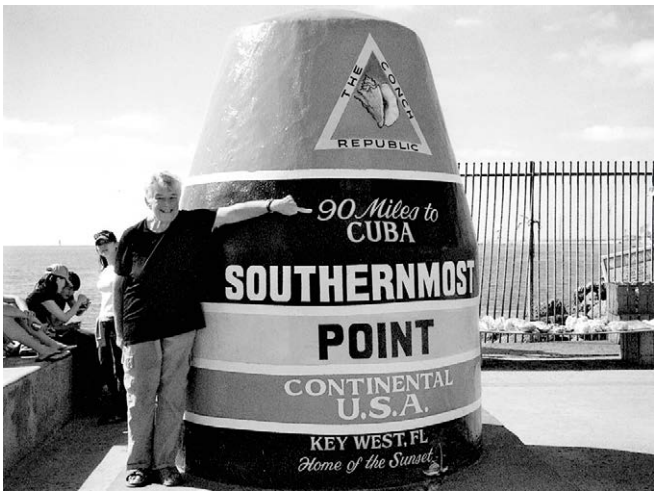
Then, on her tenth birthday, she was given a bicycle and an atlas, and 'a few days later I decided to cycle to India.' The little girl saw nothing odd in this, but she kept silent about it to avoid the condescension of adults. Later she began obsessively reading a haphazard mélange of writers: Shelley, Fielding, George Eliot, Ruskin, Oscar Wilde, Freya Stark.

On her mother's death her repressed ambition burst into action, and she was off on her bike to India. The subsequent book, *Full Tilt*, made her name and became something of a template for the dauntless early travelogues that followed: in Nepal, Ethiopia, India, Kashmir, Peru.

In the galaxy of her travel-writing contemporaries, Dervla Murphy was unique. Not for her the literary manipulations or overwrought description (even fictionalising) of some more writerly writers. She wrote in a down-to-earth style, whose graphic poetry arose as if spontaneously from her subject. Her note-taking was done in diary form during her journeys, often in exacting surroundings, sitting on a sack in the Himalayas by candlelight, or sharing a teahouse floor with Afghan tribesmen.

Hardship came easily to her. She even exulted in it. 'Soon I was discovering for myself that our real material needs are very few,' she wrote, 'and that the extras now presented as "needs" not only endanger true contentment but diminish our human dignity.' Her Spartan travelling placed her beyond the reach of the tourism she hated and drew her closer to the hard lives around her. But solitude was vital. Her preferred transport was by foot, bike or package mule, and she refused guides or escorts. A delight in wilderness – in mountains above all – shines through her writing: 'seeing only hoof prints in the dust, with all around the healing quiet of wild places.'

Over fifty years of travel the injuries she sustained, and the diseases she contracted, were stupendous. In a humorous passage in her *Through Siberia by Accident* she wryly listed them: amoebic dysentery, heatstroke, hepatitis, concussion and a fractured coccyx (in a car accident), a triple tooth abscess, a disabling scorpion

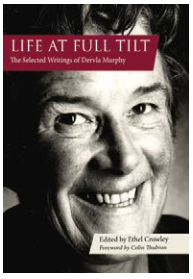


bite, malaria, brucellosis, mumps, gout (from Madagascan alcohol), tick-bite fever. She survived at least five attempted robberies (two sadly successful), numerous rape attempts (unsuccessful), with multiple broken ribs, torn tendons and a fractured pelvis. Only after she was brutally robbed and lay sleepless in a vermin-infested Ethiopian hovel did she disclose that she crawled out shivering into the starlight, broken in spirit.

Yet within the paradigm that readers imagined there beat a complicated heart. The product of a remote father and a mother she heroine-worshipped, Dervla imagined that she inherited from her father 'a certain shyness and gaucherie or tendency to self-effacement.' She recoiled from the publicity that attended her books' publication, and was shy of public speaking. 'Unwittingly,' she wrote, 'my mother gave me an inferiority complex I was never to outgrow.' In her native Lismore she lived reclusively, eschewing creature comforts, even a television or washing machine, let alone a car.

But her sympathies and alertness to injustice grew ever more intense, and midway through her career political concerns brimmed into her books, sometimes replacing their raw adventure. An uncompromising and trenchant book on nuclear power was followed by destinations more immediately controversial than before: Northern Ireland, Romania (after Ceausescu's execution), Rwanda (soon after the genocide), post-apartheid South Africa, Laos, Cuba, the tragedy-riven Balkans, and above all the Palestinian West Bank and Gaza.

Some of her readers regretted her move away from pure adventure. Murphy acknowledged this, but was driven by deeper concerns. Her big-hearted outrage at political corruption and blindness overpowered all else. Even in her earlier books there had been embedded a pressing regard for those among whom she travelled, as well as a distaste for urban life. 'I am utterly repelled by the luxury of my immediate surroundings, and by the noise, bustle and smells of twentieth-century life,' she wrote, emerging into Islamabad after months in the Karakoram mountains. 'I miss the snow-peaks, the silence, the contentment.' These, in the end, absolved all the travails of the road. 'It must only be a matter of time before we go back... when we can leave all jeep-tracks behind and follow small paths over high passes.'



From the foreword to *Life at Full Tilt*, edited by Ethel Crowley Eland, HBK, 336pp, £25

Praise to the Skies

The beautiful white Basilica of Notre-Dame de Fourvière, known by locals as the upside-down elephant, looms over the city of Lyon from its vertiginous position at the top of '*la colline que prie*' (the praying hill).

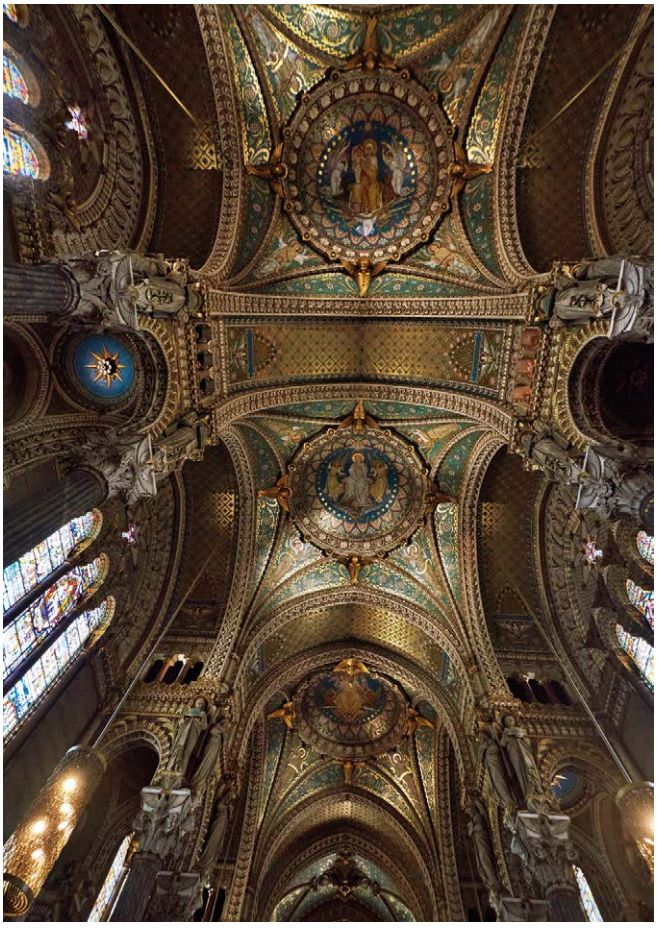
Built in 1872 and consecrated in 1896, the building is dedicated to the Virgin Mary, who is said to have miraculously saved Lyon from the Black Death which otherwise swept an unstoppable and murderous path through the rest of Europe in the mid-1600s.

Attracting more than 2.5 million visitors annually, the basilica is the work of architect Pierre Bossan, who drew from both Romanesque and Byzantine influences: two non-Gothic styles that were eyebrow-raising choices for a religious construction in the 19th century.

Close to the historic site of Lugdunum (the ancient capital of the Gauls), Bossan raised his mighty basilica stretching 86 metres in length and 35 metres wide, its four towers soaring 48 metres into the skies to represent the cardinal values of prudence, temperance, fortitude and justice.

The building's imposing exterior is rivalled only by the magnificent interior where the naves, vaulted spans and arches are supported by a forest of 16 stone columns, and the walls and ceiling are decorated with a startling array of white marble from Carrara, pink granite from the north of Italy and blue marble from Savoy – all inlaid with pieces of green onyx, ebony, ivory, silver and gold.

For all its architectural glories, the highlight of a visit here is a special guided tour (bookable in advance, once a week in English), that takes the visitor along the secret passageways of the basilica's inner sanctum and up to the rooftop. From here, the views are extraordinary – sweeping east to west across a city that boasts more than 2,000 years of history, from the old silk-workers' district of Croix-Rousse, to the cobbled lanes of Vieux-Lyon (home to one of the largest collections of Renaissance architecture in Europe), all the way to the old port district of Confluence, where the waters of the rivers Rhône and Saône meet before lazily wending their way south to the Mediterranean Sea.



The bellows-maker of Fez

KEVIN PILLEY NEGOTIATES HAWKERS, CRAFTWORKERS AND HEADY AROMAS IN THE LABYRINTHINE SOUKS OF MORROCO'S CULTURAL CAPITAL

Khalid makes wind for a living. He produces a great deal of it every working day. He asks you to put your hand out so you can feel its strength.

Khalid is a professional bellows-maker and mender. He is the archetypal Moroccan draughtsman. His office is in the mother of all bazaars and the craziest of all kasbahs.

Enclosed by eight miles of sandstone ramparts, Fez's imperial walled city is the largest car-free urban area in the world and boasts Africa's largest mosque as well as the world's oldest university, Al Quaraouiyine.

160,000 people work in 10,000 alleys dedicated to all the crafts and grafts, traditional and modern. Henna souk is the cosmetic products district, Attarine specialises in spices and the Seffarine quarter copper products.

In 622 the persecuted prophet Muhammad and his followers moved to Yathrib near Mecca. They renamed it Medina, 'The City of the Prophet'. Medinas spread around the world.

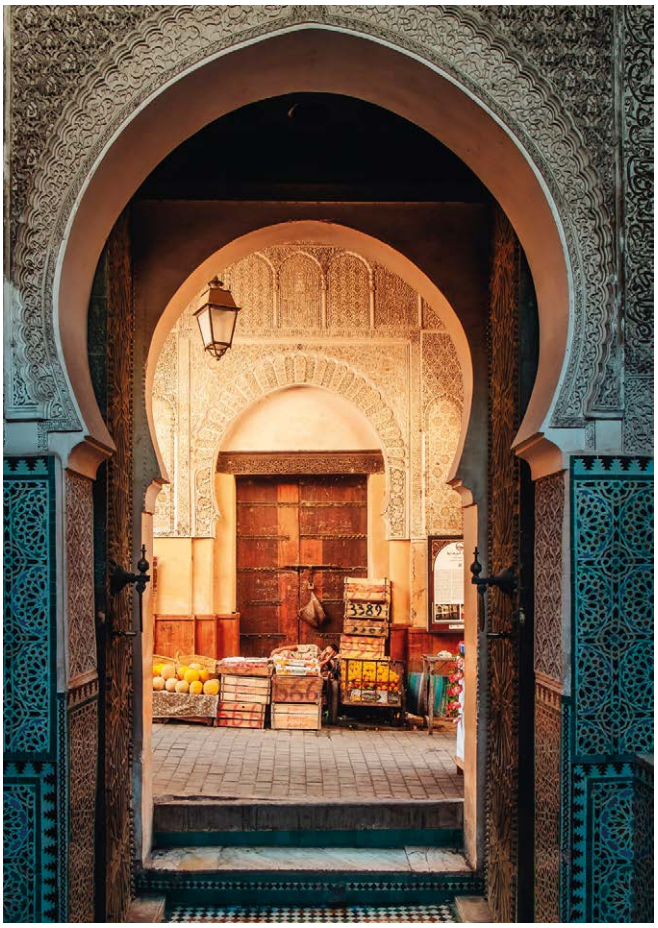
No one much cares in Fez that its ancient 560-acre souk is a UNESCO heritage site. They have shopping to do, dirhams to be made, families to be fed and deals to be struck. As well as Maghrebi tea trays.

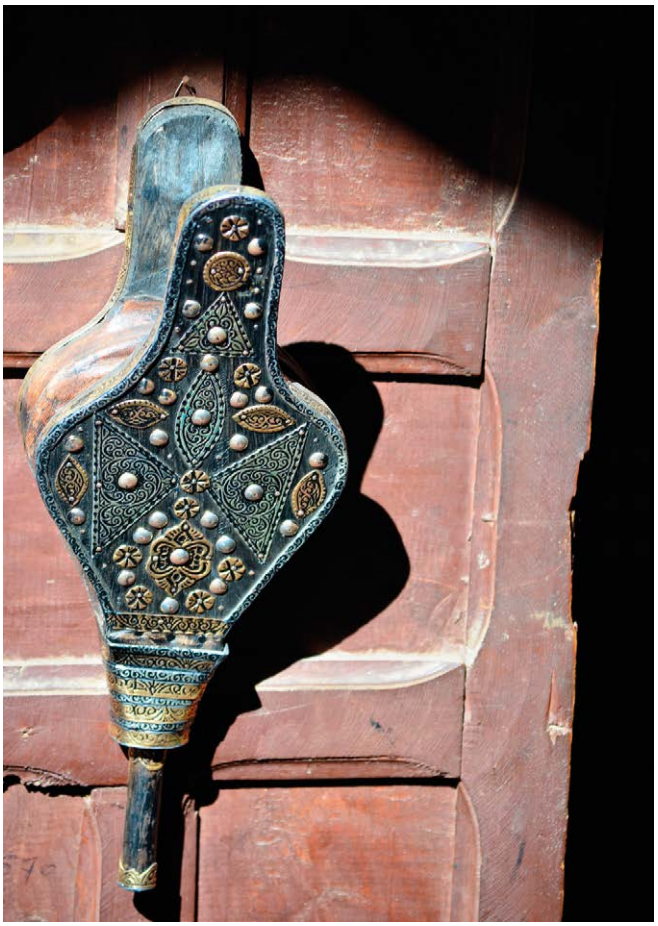
Everywhere silver is hammered, copper chased, wool carded and spun. And all the time you are pushed on by the people behind you and pace-setters in front. You are pulled along by a tide of kafkans, djellabas, gold-tinselled sandals, haiks and qobs. And pursued by cries of "Belek! Belek!" ("Watch out! Watch out!").

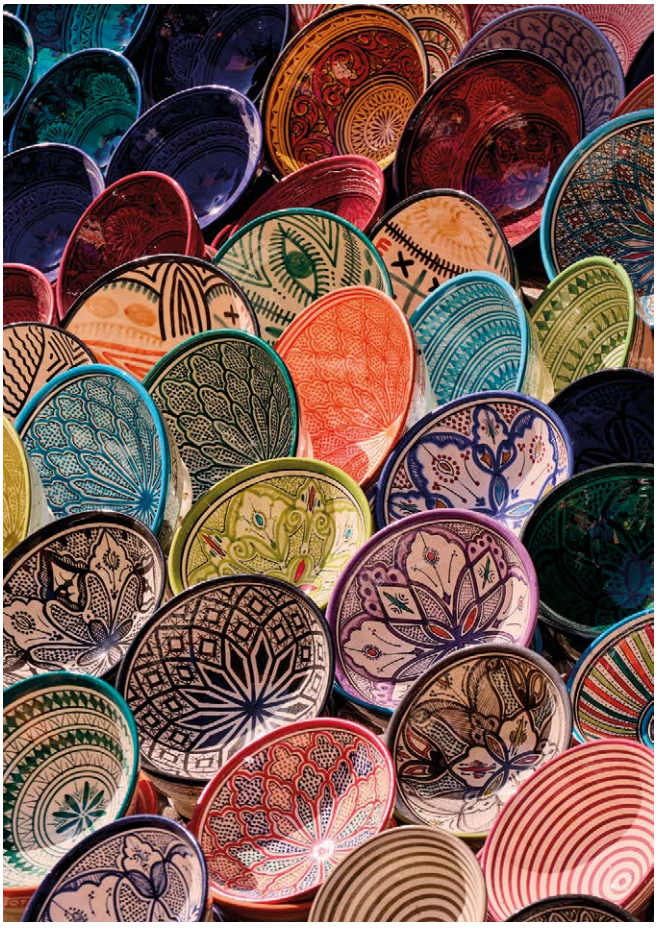
Donkeys carrying cured hides, horses hefting carpets and scooters loaded down with eggs have right of way. For a pound or two, young men will navigate you through it all and introduce you to their father in his underground showroom where you sit on a battered sofa whose arm falls off while he climbs a ladder to show you something you don't want because all you need is a breather.

And then, with a polite "La, shukran" ("No, thanks"), you are back in the maze, the dead ends, windowless high walls, wall-eyes, shisha pipes, 'taqiyah' prayer caps, burnous and shaal cloth, 'shesh' turbans, walking over the cobbles past the kilim carpets, the wedding wear, the pashmina shawls, the desert nomad bling, barad teapots, rugs, embroidered pouffes and babouche slippers.

Recognising your dry scalp, smiling men jump out of nowhere to offer you hair-nourishing argan oil.







But, without making eye contact, you head uphill towards Bab Boujloud gate, one of thirteen entrances to the ninth-century citadel, and into the smell of twenty-first century people, dung, fish, urine and pigeon ammonia from the world's oldest leather tannery, Chouwara. And you look down at the huge inkpots of dye, your guidebook telling you it's "the most odiferous places in the world" and the hawkers that the smell is free and their leatherware negotiable.

Then you are back among the sacks of olives, flour, powdered and flaked almonds, the figs, dates, okra, giant cucumbers and aubergines because you are in the vegetable district of Rcif.

And then come blocks of incense, dhoob sticks and more olives and more bags of clementines and your shin is barked by a passing 'baghrir' crumpet cart and a dead-eyed donkey steps on your toe and the words 'teeming' and 'mad' become inadequate and you find yourself behind a Ronaldo football shirt, surrounded by women staring through burqas at shopping lists on their mobiles.

A butcher cuts the throat of a cockerel, saying a prayer for its soul, and you go through a giant studded door into a 'sahn' courtyard with a fountain, terracotta 'zellij' mosaic tiles with their expressions of the ordering of cosmic intelligence, and then somehow you are in a mausoleum and next to a Saadian pavilion and now a Koranic madrasa school, a riad, a dar and a maison du tissage.

And then, having given up map reading, you are among rabbits, turkeys, scrawny kittens, and pass an old man selling five live snails. And the flies climb over the king's face and jump onto some tripe. "The king of Morocco chose a wife from Fez," smiles the butcher looking at the framed photo by his offal.

Then, through an arch, come more bags of couscous, chickpeas, flour and more weighing scales, 'Jben' cheese, 'jabane' (nougat), jars of 'sefna' (broken vermicelli), honey and sesame pretzels and, seeing how hot you are, a stallholder kind-heartedly sprays your face with rose water while a man repairs a pear-shaped 12-string oud lute.

Over his head hang fretless ginbri, Berber drums and 'mizwid' bagpipes. Behind are tapes offering Chaabi folk, Berber ritual, Gnawa kickback, classical Malhun and sufi brotherhood.

Behind a Gareth Bale football top, you walk on passing a Cyber Club and a camel's head with bluebottles nesting in its eyelashes, and an unofficial guide now in tow reminds you that Fez was probably the largest city in the world in 1170. And tells you that the past is still alive and functioning.

Taped Imams call the city to prayer and it is all vaguely menacing but somehow safe, and the smell of petrol mixes with the cedar shavings from the joinery and cabinet-makers' workshops, and then a man is rubbing amber soap up your forearm and offering you kohl sticks and demonstrating eye-liner antiseptic and you are invited into every café to enjoy mint gunpowder tea and "la terrasse avec vue panoramique."

And now brushing through silk scarves, you pass bamboo calligraphy quills, electricity shops, SIM card shops, fake watches, barber shops, tailors and wedding wear emporiums offering their customers marigold tea. And then the 'khlii' dried meat section and, a few yards on, Oussame wants you to taste his thin unbleached 'warka' bread used for pastillas. He will also sell you a pigeon to use as a filling. "I smell your money," he says.

A young man sleeps in a wheelbarrow. Children rush past. You cross a scummy river and are confronted with mountains of salt, 'sfenj' doughnuts, mallow leaves, Ras el hanout (Moroccan masala) and 'meskouta' yoghurt cakes, and then Zouhir the toothless butcher who you saw slaughtering a cockerel and is now making kefta meatballs waves at you again and you get a waft of curcuma (turmeric) and pass flip-flop shops and almonds grilling on braziers, and then you find yourself in an apothecary where Ali sells saffron, £1 turtles and Almofadal viagra.

Up a passage a one-armed man tempts you with ceramic tagines and 'slimani' ceiling lamps and an old man holds out an upside-down turkey while below you, cross-legged, an even older man you may have seen before begs you to bid on his five live snails.

Then, as if a lamp has been rubbed, there is snaggle-toothed Khalid (or someone resembling him) asking "Ça va?" And holding out his hand-crafted, "very good performing" inlaid fire stoker and inviting you to feel his nozzle and admire his valves and giving you a very good price.

"Beldi! Beldi!" (Traditional! Traditional!") he says, pumping the flies away from your face. And, distracted by another ass, the inlaid blowing bag has been bought and you agree with Paul Bowles that "Fez is a city that not everyone can like." But will always remember. Especially whenever you look at your Fazzi medina-bought rambooz, which is now an ornament because it broke the first time it was used. Two days after returning from Morocco's original City of the Profit.

The Pearl of the World

SIMON URWIN TAKES THE GOLDEN ROAD TO SAMARKAND AND MARVELS AT THE MAJESTIC BLUE-TILED BUILDINGS AND EXTRAORDINARY CULINARY TRADITIONS OF UZBEKISTAN'S FABLED SILK ROAD CITY

"It is good to take your time," says Ravshan Halimov as he measures out copper powder on a set of weighing scales. "When you hurry, it means the devil is controlling you and the end result won't be good. But if you have patience, it means God is present, and you're capable of magnificent things."

Halimov, a fifth-generation artisan, whose family have carried out restoration work on some of Samarkand's most important buildings, then begins mixing the powder with water and deftly applying the resulting paint to a cracked and fading

ceramic, part of a renovation project on a 16th-century mosque.

"I see it as a form of divine worship to tend to the artworks of Samarkand," he explains, as his paintbrush delicately brings the tile's calligraphy back to life. "And it is vital work. The city has been known since ancient times as 'the pearl of the world', a place synonymous with great beauty. It is my responsibility to keep it so."

The earliest evidence of Samarkand's passion for visual splendour can be seen in the Afrosiab murals, which date back to the 7th century, and once adorned the walls of a palace located to the northeast of the modern city. In natural pigments, including vivid aquamarine, they depict a grand procession of envoys, ambassadors and dignitaries: one man is seen wearing the skin of a snow leopard (and is thought to come from mountainous Tibet); other figures appear to hail from China and are carrying gifts of cocoons and silks.

From the murals, it's clear to see that Samarkand was a prosperous and cosmopolitan hub along the Silk Road. But the small oasis city would go on to be transformed into one of the greatest capitals the world has ever known, when in 1370 the warlord Timur made it the headquarters of his vast and mighty empire, one that encompassed much of Central Asia, modern-day Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as parts of Pakistan, North India and Turkey.

Under Timur's iron fist, great madrassas, mosques, palaces, mausoleums and caravanserais were constructed and turned into dazzling works of art with elaborately decorated tilework. Timurid architecture reached its zenith with the building of the iconic Registan, an ensemble of three exquisite madrassas around a central square whose beauty has been praised by chroniclers for thousands of years ever since.

By the 14th century, the Registan had become the commercial heart of the Timurid empire, where merchants arrived from the four corners of the world to trade in spices and furs, embroidered silk and precious stones. It's since been moved and now stands in the shadow of the Bibi Khanym Mosque, built by Timur's wife as a gift to her

husband – a building so immense it required a team of 450 elephants to help with its construction.

The modern-day bazaar is a no-less-colourful affair than its earlier iteration, as armies of kholas (or elderly ladies; khola is an affection term like 'auntie') sweep amongst the stalls in their glittering frocks and diamante shoes, flashing gold-toothed smiles. They come in search of non (bread), a vital part of Uzbek culinary culture which accompanies every meal.

"There are many variations of non, but in Samarkand it has a darker crust and is sometimes made with ghee," says bread-seller Markhabo Rakhmatova as she carefully arranges a display of fresh loaves. She tells me that the key to good bread is baking it in a hot tandir oven with fruit-tree wood (to impart a delicate floral-woody flavour), and stamping the loaves with traditional, patterned chekich. "Chekich (bread stamps) are not just for decoration, though," she explains. "They produce fine prick holes that release steam. That stops the centre of the loaf from rising and keeps it crisp, while allowing the outer ring to remain chewy and soft like a bagel."

Rakhmatova goes on to tell me that in Samarkand the humble loaf is considered sacred, so much so that nonvoys (bakers) perform purifying ablutions and say a prayer before bread-making can get underway. But its sanctity pales into comparison with the devotion that surrounds plov: a slow-cooked pilaf of rice, vegetables, meat, spices and sour raisins.

To sample some, I head to Rayyan, one of more than 50 dedicated plov restaurants in the city. (The name Rayyan refers to the gates of paradise in the Islamic tradition which open on judgement day; the only people allowed to enter are those that have fasted during Ramadan.)

In the kitchen, I meet the restaurant's oshpaz (plov masterchef), Shokhrukh Ziyayev. As he sweats over a kazan (plov cauldron), he tells me that he takes his job very seriously. "If guests do not finish their plate, the oshpaz can be known to take his own life," he says, sternly. "That's how important plov is in Uzbek culture."

Legend has it that plov was first invented for the emperor Timur who

ordered his chefs to create a dish that would enable his soldiers to march on their stomachs during campaigns. Today, it is popular for providing stamina of a different kind. "Plov is widely believed to have aphrodisiac qualities," Ziyayev explains. "Some women rub oil from the bottom of the kazan in their eyebrows to increase their beauty, while men drink it as a form of natural Viagra."

As he serves me a portion (slow-cooked for four hours, and served with a tomato and dill salad with sour cream on the side), he tells me that Uzbek men like to joke that 'plov' actually means foreplay, and that Thursday is the most popular day for conceiving a child. As a result, the best meat is reserved for this day to give men extra sexual power.

"It is thought that the Prophet Mohammed was conceived on a Thursday which is why it is a special day," he says, topping up my plate. "So, if you want your baby to be intelligent, well behaved and blessed by the angels, this is the day to do it. Only after saying a prayer to rid the bedroom of devils so the love-making is pure, though," he insists. "And always after a plate of plov."

First spread (clockwise from top left): Afrosiyab mural, featuring dignitaries carrying sacrificial clubs and a flock of geese; The façade of Ulug Beg Madrassa, Registan; Ravshan Halimov measures out copper powder in his restoration workshop.

Previous spread: Façade of the entrance to Gur-i Amir, the tomb of Timurlane.

Clockwise from top left: Markhabo Rakhmatova (left) arranges her display of non bread; The Registan illuminated at night; Chekich (bread stamps) for sale in the main bazaar.

An Ode to Ortigia

words & pictures
Francesco Lastrucci

The small island of Ortigia, the historic centre of Syracuse, has been inhabited for over 3,000 years and is listed as a UNESCO landmark for its 'remarkable testimony of the Mediterranean cultures of the centuries.' Connected to the mainland and the rest of Syracuse town by a bridge, Ortigia was colonised by the Greeks in the 8th century BC, and is home to many myths. The Greeks built several temples in Ortigia, the most important surviving today is the Temple of Apollo, and the island soon became their religious and political centre. After, the Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Byzantines, Normans, Aragonese, Castilians and Bourbons all left their traces. Today Ortigia represents some of the best examples of Sicilian baroque.

Opening spread: A view of the cliffs of Pirilina beach and ruins of old houses and barracks from WWII in Plemmirio. Plemmirio is a natural reserve covering the Maddalena peninsula just south of Syracuse and facing Ortigia, seen in the background, at 1 km distance as the crow flies. The area is popular for locals, divers and hikers thanks to its crystalline waters and the panoramic trails along the cliffs. Many ancient Greek and Roman ships were wrecked in front of Plemmirio. In its emerald green seabed an abundance of amphorae, plating and other archaeological treasures were found.

Previous pages: The free-of-charge Solarium Forte Vigliena is perhaps Ortigia's most popular bathing spot. The platform is rebuilt early every summer next to the historical fort on the eastern seafront of Lungomare di Levante and dismantled at the end of the season.

Vegetation detail and ruined wall of an old farmhouse in the Plemmirio area on a 6 km trail along the coast from Punta della Mola to Capo Murro di Porco embracing white cliffs, ancient ruins and farmhouses surrounded by Mediterranean scrub.

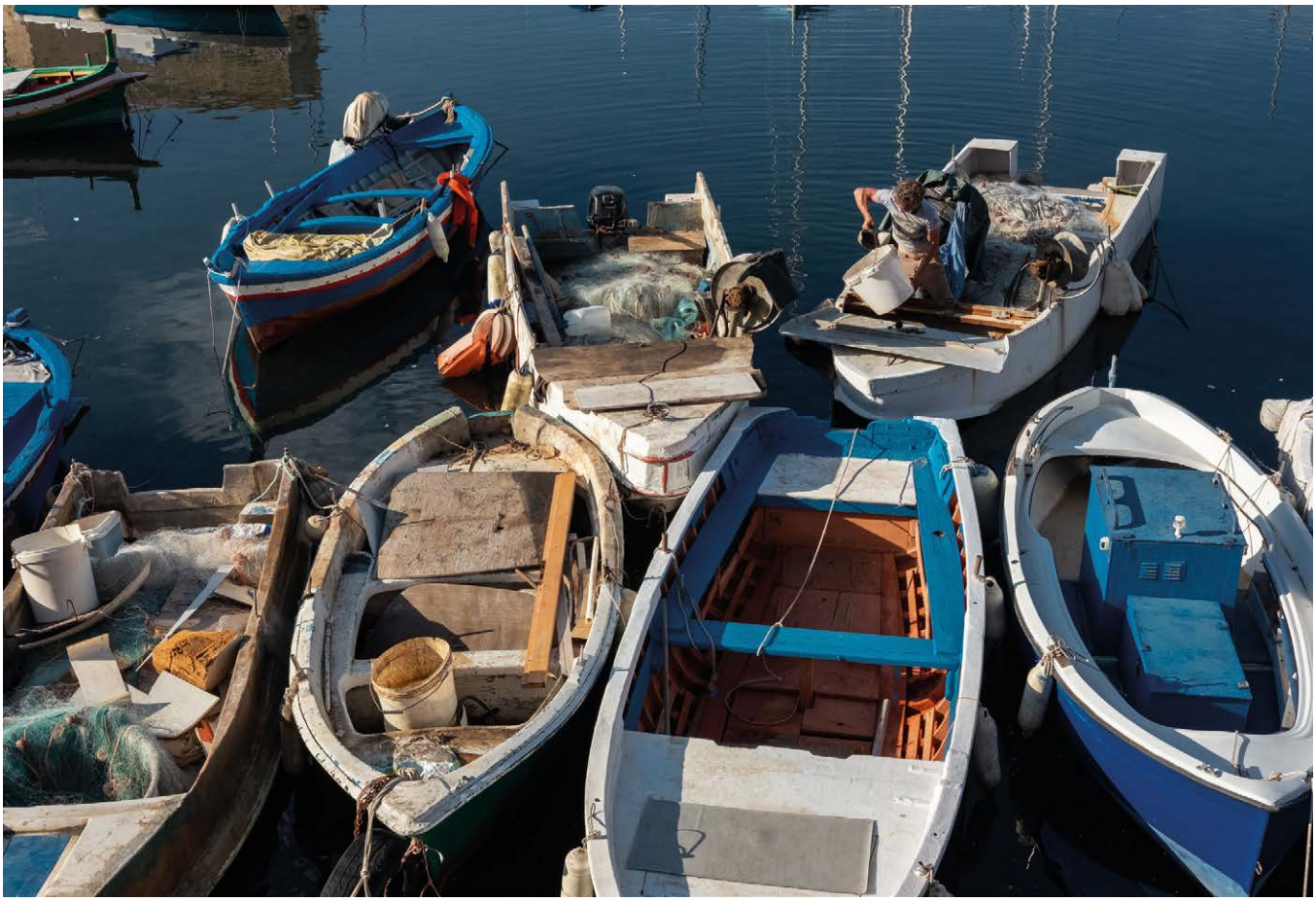
Opposite: A window reflects the sky in Via Nizza, on the Lungomare di Levante on a sunny morning.

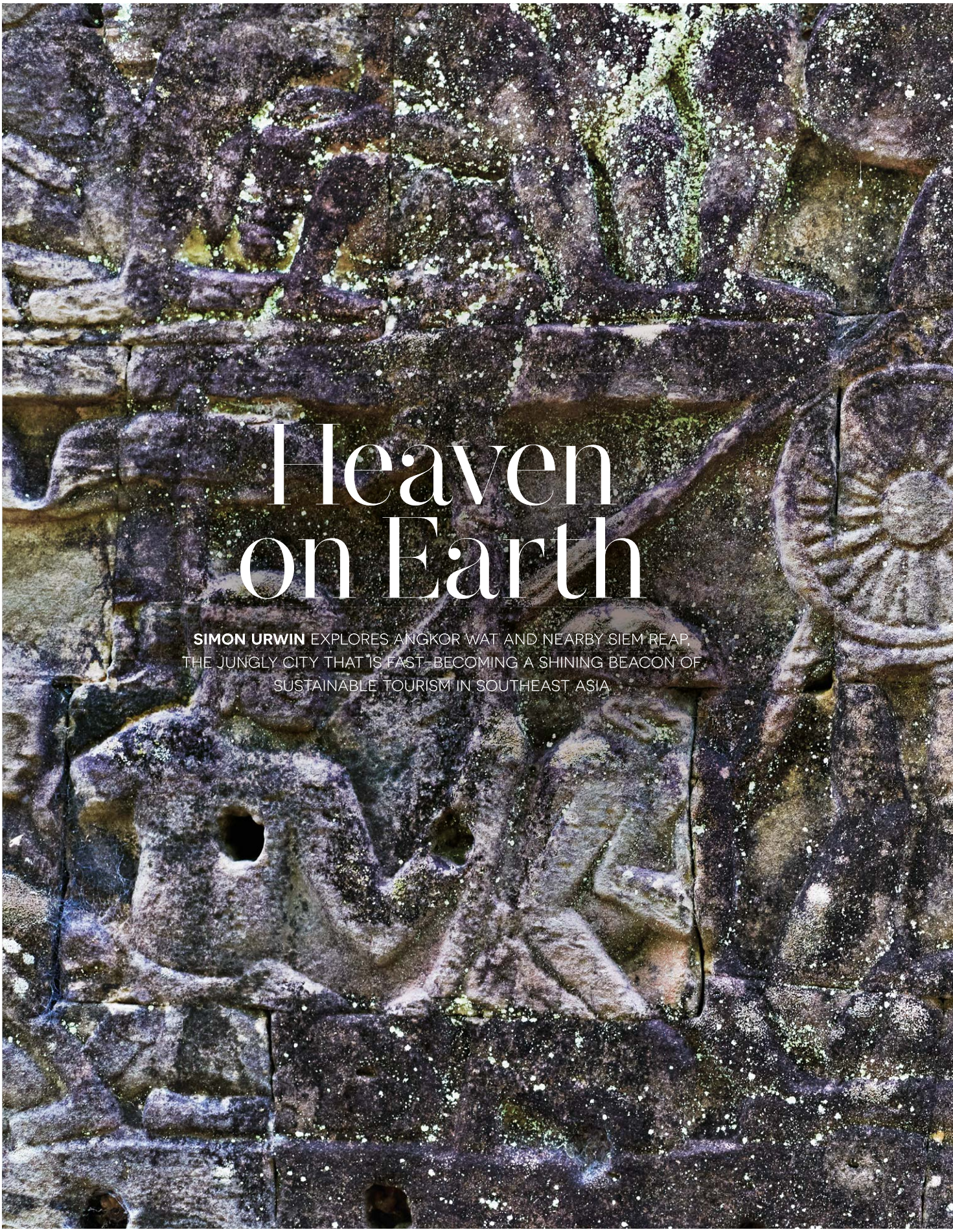
Following spread (clockwise from left): Waves crash on the rocks of the eastern side of Ortigia island in the early morning. Fresh water flows under its limestone rock, fed by a deep water table. Among the freshwater springs the most famous is the Fonte Aretusa, an enchanted place in the heart of Ortigia. This walled pool of fresh water dotted by papyrus plants and surrounded by a lush garden just a few steps from Piazza Duomo and the seafront, tells the legend of Arethusa, a nymph who, chased by the river god Alpheus, asked the goddess Artemis for help. The latter transformed her into a source of freshwater. Alpheus, in love, transformed himself into a river and crossed the sea to reunite with Arethusa.

Fishing boats at the marina by the bridge connecting Ortigia island with the centre of Syracuse town. There are nine historic districts of Ortigia, built on the ancient intersections of the Greco-Roman streets: these include the Graziella and Sperduta districts to the north-east close to the port, historically home to fishermen and traders, the Bottari district to the north-west, inhabited by artisans, the Giudecca (Jewish quarter) to the south-east, the Duomo district and the Castello di Maniace district to the south-west, which mainly became an area of noble palaces.

A fisherman on the eastern waterfront at sunrise.


VIA
NIZZA





Heaven on Earth

SIMON URWIN EXPLORES ANGKOR WAT AND NEARBY SIEM REAP, THE JUNGLY CITY THAT IS FAST-BECOMING A SHINING BEACON OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

"The deep flavour comes from the pig's backbone I use to make the stock," says Lok Socheat, as she brings a steaming bowl of *kuy teav* to my table. "The garlic and chilli give a kick to start the day, while the noodles, beef and beansprouts fill you up for the rest of the morning."

It's just after sunrise, and I'm taking a break from temple viewing in the Srah Srang Noodle Shop, a simple bamboo construction in a jungle clearing near the ruins of Ta Prohm. Opposite me, and also enjoying the traditional Cambodian breakfast broth, is a saffron-robed monk named Cheatok Lon, who effortlessly spins rice noodles around a pair of chopsticks in between sonorous slurps of the soup. Lon tells me he has travelled 10km from his monastery in Siem Reap, having first risen at 4am for two hours of meditation. "I come because the *kuy teav* here is the best," he says, while squeezing an extra dash of lime into his bowl. "But mostly, I come because it's near one of the most sacred places in Cambodia: Angkor Wat. Food feels a little more spiritual when you come to eat it here."

Considered the very heart and soul of Cambodia, the temples of the Angkor Wat archaeological complex are amongst the most extraordinary buildings to be conceived by the human mind. Covering more than 400

Previous spread: 12th-century engravings depicting circus acrobats at the Bayon Temple, Angkor Wat.

Clockwise from top left: Kuy Teav – the traditional Khmer breakfast; Lok Socheat in the kitchen of her noodle shop; monk Cheatok Lon.

acres, the 70 or so monuments still standing represent only the scattered remains of the mighty Khmer Empire's former capital, a vast political, religious and social centre which at its peak boasted a population of more than a million people, at a time when London was a comparative flyspeck on the map with no more than 50,000 inhabitants.

The epicentre of the site is Angkor Wat itself, the largest religious structure on earth. Construction here began in 1122; six thousand elephants were used to carry stone from a quarry 50km away (more stone than was used in the largest Egyptian pyramid),


ELIA
greek
kitchen

Left: Street view, Siem Reap.

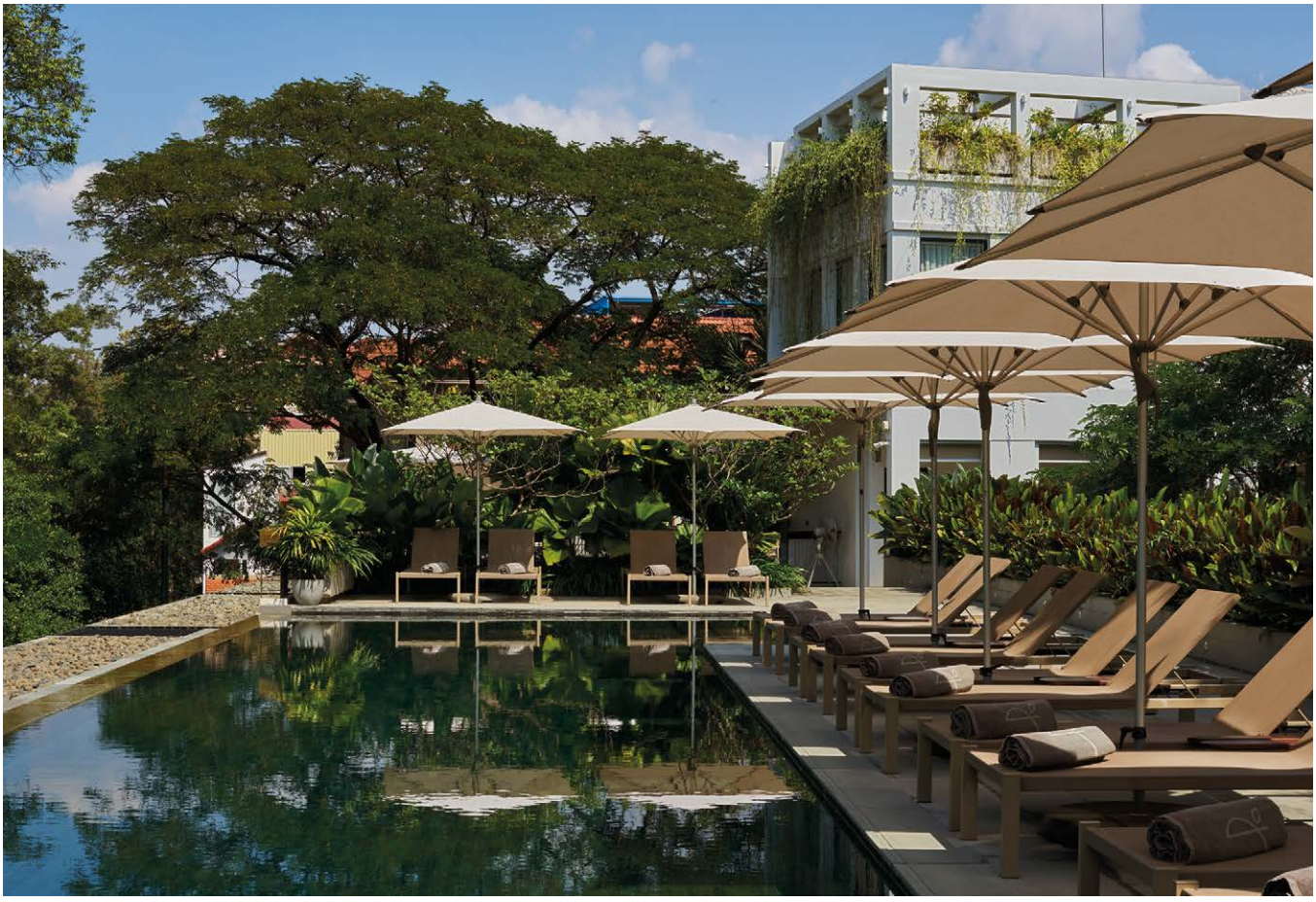
Below: Rooftop pool at Treeline Urban Resort.

before an estimated half-million people toiled for 32 years to create a figurative heaven on earth, consisting of five iconic corncob towers surrounded by 800-metre-long galleries of bas-reliefs. Along with the Gothic towers of 12th-century Bayon Temple (which is adorned with more than 11,000 carved figures including animal processions and circus acrobats), and the atmospheric Ta Prohm (a Buddhist temple purposefully left to slowly dissolve into the surrounding rain forest), the Angkor Wat archaeological complex is recognised as one of the Seven Wonders of the World, and has rightly become a once-in-a-lifetime must-see attraction for travellers heading to Southeast Asia.

As a result, Angkor Wat has transformed the fortunes of nearby Siem Reap, which was little more than a sleepy village when French explorers came across the crumbling site in the 19th century. Since then, it has turned from backwater to tropical boomtown, the unofficial tourism capital of Cambodia, where millions of global visitors now descend every year to temple-hop before heading for the restaurants, bars, boutiques and fish pedicure joints that sprawl around raucous Pub Street in the heart of downtown.

Somehow, despite the unfettered development, Siem Reap has managed to retain its small-town charm, and while the tourism industry undeniably puts enormous pressure on local resources and the environment, a growing number of businesses are putting the considerable influx of visitors to positive use.

One of those is Little Red Fox Espresso in the up-and-coming shopping district of Kandal Village, which co-founder David Stirling runs with ethical entrepreneurship in mind. "Many Cambodians get caught in the cycle of debt repayment when they open up a coffee cart," he says. "But our team here go through a proper internship: learning management skills, costing, how to buy local, how to reduce waste, so that one day they might be inspired to open up a small, successful business of their own. It creates a ripple effect that is not just good for them, but for the whole Cambodian economy."



Above (left to right): A monk lost in contemplation, Angkor Wat; Ta Prohm temple.

The coffee shop – which also turns grinds into body scrub, and offers a come-collect service so that organic waste can be turned into garden compost – is a member of Collective for Good, an organisation of local tourist businesses which are committed to environmental, social and economic good practices. "It's a rigorous process to join the group to make sure that there is no greenwashing going on, which is now ubiquitous – not just in Siem Reap, but all over the world," he says. "A special QR code allows travellers to see who the members are so they can then make more informed decisions about how they spend their money. It ultimately means making a difference to the lives of many people, not just one or two."

Located across the breezy Siem Reap River from Kandal Village is another member of the collective: the Treeline Urban Resort, where sustainability goes hand-in-hand with sleek and minimalist style. The hotel, one of the finest addresses in Siem Reap, goes to great efforts to reduce its environmental footprint with a variety of eco-conscious schemes including tree planting, heating water with solar energy, even hand-making palm-leaf boxes for guests' takeout meals and picnics. The hotel also supports a number of community initiatives: they employ a local curator to oversee a programme that promotes Cambodian artists (whose work is then exhibited for sale at the

hotel), and there is wide use of handicrafts in the interior design from a Tonlé Sap Lake project nearby which turns water hyacinths into basketware – to both control the invasive species and give women of the lake's floating villages new money-making opportunities.

Key though, has been eliminating single-use plastic, a challenging undertaking in a country where tourism produces 4.6 million plastic bottles every month and where there is little or no recycling. "We wanted to go beyond just removing water bottles from the rooms though," says General Manager, Joni Aker. "We wanted to lose plastic from the supply chain altogether."

Aker and the Treeline team duly undertook training from Plastic Free Southeast Asia (an NGO that helps businesses to become leaders in sustainable tourism), a process which also involved educating and incentivising the hotel's providers of fresh food and clean laundry to stop using plastic too. "It's not been easy, but we're making good progress," she says. "The ambition is to inspire not only other businesses, but also to get tourists to think more deeply – not only about where they stay and where they eat, but how they visit somewhere like Angkor Wat. By making just a few changes, we all have a chance of leaving the world in a better shape than how we found it."

A Golden Age

JUSTINE HARDY IN AUSTRALIA IN THE BICENTENARY, 1988

Memory is a fine drug in a fragile time. During those long locked down days of 2020, the rabbit warrens of bits and pieces from the past served many of us well as a quiet reprieve from manic Zoom fitness sessions, sourdough pummelling and entire home redesigning. It did not take much to yearn for distraction each time the Great Bobbing Blonde bounced to the Downing Street podium for another 5pm press conference, flanked by increasingly forlorn scientific advisors. Any trap door of memory would do, anything but the Bobbity Blonde. Even usually ignored newspaper sections suddenly had an attraction all their own.

And so, in the dark days of another looming lockdown, when it was becoming clear that Christmas was about to be cancelled, and so as to avoid the 5pm dirge, the property section of a Sunday paper suddenly became a useful aside. What I had not expected was that it would be a genius of a diversion, presenting as just a short announcement about a famously loved deli café in Sydney's chicest street having been sold. Immediately a trap door sprang wide.

I was twenty-two, and heaven's gates had been flung open to me as Australia embraced its bicentenary and I was splashing about in my own taste of early adult freedom. Sydney felt a city where absolutely everything was possible. I was an over-confident student and very jejune journalist, roundly having the piss taken out of my Pommieness on a daily basis – a helpful life lesson that a sense of entitlement was not a good passport to carry. Instead, ebullience, enthusiasm and have-a-go-Joey-ism was the mood, rewritten every day on Bondi Beach in the tiny arcs of sand kicked up by the pre-office surf boys, out to grab a wave before the working day, pelting down wet sands, huge boards aloft, seeming as light as balsa wood.

It was giddy, the idea of being able to go to the beach before work, part of a magic kingdom to a youngster who's working life teeth had been cut schlepping to tube stations in the dark, both morning and evening, beaches being only places to dream of for holidays, chimera's for a shimmering future.

I landed in Sydney's Paddington, a joyous place, coming alive in every way in the late 1980s, bursting into another kind of gay-embrace as the city began to come to the fore as one of the gay capitals of a changing world. The painted and filigreed streets, balconies and verandas, seemed to mirror the mood in a pastel celebration of Mardi Gras life.

The next-door area was Woollahra, one of the most elegant suburbs, though not in the sense that we think of them. In Sydney, every different part of the city is a suburb, whether sub- or central. Woollahra was where I had my first taste of what café life really meant. Earlier experiences around Holborn had been based on Luncheon Vouchers and instant coffee in plastic cups that burnt your fingers, chocolate powder glaggy atop not very frothy milk. So Zigolini's, 107 Queen Street, marked a turning point. At 6am you could sit watching the early light through the gum trees, drinking a perfect macchiato. How pretentious but, having only ever had burning-finger-plastic-cup coffee, the more pretentious the better. It felt erotic, a first fully fleshed flirtation with the adult world.

The big glass counter had serried ranks of pastries that a girl from South Oxfordshire, conditioned to believe that even a chocolate éclair was only for the louche, seemed to represent both poetry and a whole new adventure in flavour. Cardamom and rosewater had not made it into the McVitie's and Clubs of away matches pack lunches, so Baklava and Patchi Mamoul seemed akin to breaking bread with Rumi and Hafez.

And from the Persian poets to Darlinghurst, Darling Point and Rosebay, the areas with harbour beaches, away from the ocean rips, where I could swim inside the shark nets, and dry in the early sun. All of this before taking the bus to Redfern, then regarded as down at heel, though now another inner-city hot spot with Sydney's skill and re-inventing and restoring from the inside out. To go to work in a city of eucalyptus trees, the scent carried on warm evening winds as I walked home from work, was to touch the unimaginable that sparked and sparked again every atom of imagination.

Into the Midnight Sun

SIMON URWIN EMBARKS ON ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST BEAUTIFUL CRUISE JOURNEYS ALONG THE WILD WEST COAST OF NORWAY

Previous page: Lofoten Islands.

Above (left to right): Susan Fosse knitwear; Bryggeloftet & Stuene Restaurant.

Right: Tromsø harbour sauna.

The ship's clock has only just struck 3am when the waters of the Norwegian Sea suddenly catch fire. Just above a line of coastal mountains, the sun rips through a layer of storm clouds, and in an instant, the entire panorama – from shore to sky – is a riot of black, gold and burning orange.

I'm watching this extraordinary natural spectacle from the deck of the *Viking Mars*, mid-way through a 15-day cruise which first began in Greenwich before skimming through the Shetlands and Orkneys en route to what is arguably the highlight of the voyage: the wild west coast of Norway.

The *Mars* has been sailing overnight from Tromsø, a likeable city where hardy locals like to plunge into the seaweed-green harbour waters after a steam in the sauna. This morning's jaw-dropping light show is a fitting prelude to the drama of our next port of call 150 miles south: the Lofoten Islands, an archipelago of dagger-sharp peaks that clings to the very edge of Europe.

I disembark at Meknes and meet up with Lofoten native Rolf Malnes. We jump aboard his RIB and soon are zipping across Arctic waters warmed by the Gulf Stream and rich in stockfish. A pair of sea eagles follow us, arrowing and diving. "Despite an eight-foot wingspan, they are not good hunters," says Malnes. "But they are clever. They let other birds do the hard work, then swoop in to steal their prey at the last minute."

As we speed past scattered fishermen's cottages that hunker under turfed roofs – an old Viking construction method – Malnes tells me the area has been widely settled for more than a thousand years. "Back in the 1980s, a farmer on Vestvågøy stumbled across pot shards in his fields; it led to the discovery of a 250-foot longhouse from around 500AD, the largest Viking building ever found," he says. "The Vikings of Lofoten were clearly powerful and prosperous. They brought home great riches from their raids on England, France and Germany." The reason for their success was simple, he tells me: they were excellent seamen with the fastest, most advanced vessels of the time. "Their ships didn't need harbours, so they could land on any beach and plunder towns,

castles and monasteries before any defences could be organised. It's how they ended up terrorising much of Europe for almost two hundred years."

The *Mars* sets sail from the Lofotens later that afternoon. We spend a full day on the open ocean where the view from my stateroom is a beautiful carousel of sea-ravaged scenery bathed in platinum-bright Nordic light. As time passes, the shoreline begins to edge ever closer to the port and starboard sides, and as we enter the 10-mile-long Geirangerfjord, one of Norway's most spectacular bodies of water, it feels almost within touching distance.

Above the near-silent purr of the ship's engines, the only sound is rushing water tumbling a thousand feet down the cliffs of the glacier-carved inlet. Few cascades are quite so pretty as the Seven Sisters, who, according to local folklore, like to dance playfully on one side of the fjord while the single *Friaren* ("the suitor") waterfall flirts with them from the other, the parties destined never to meet.

We drop anchor by the tiny village of Geiranger and I head ashore to the Eagle's Bend viewpoint, a thrilling drive marked by 11 hairpin turns. Breathing in the pine-scented air, it's easy to see why Geirangerfjord (alongside Nærøyfjord) are the only natural landscapes in Norway to have been inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List. Of the 200 or so fjords along the country's west coast, they remain the least touched by modern life, with Alpine forests rich in moose, lynx and wolverine (an animal similar to a badger), that graze freely on the carpets of wild blueberries and chanterelle mushrooms.

Next day – our final of the cruise – we arrive to a knifing wind and drizzle in Bergen, a city which famously 'enjoys' 293 days of rain every year. The ship docks just a short walk from the wharfside area of Bryggen, whose centuries-old wooden buildings were once the regional headquarters of the Hansa.

The Hansa (from the German word for 'association'), or Hanseatic League, was founded in the late medieval era by a group of German merchant communities, a kind of early EU that went on to dominate trade in northern Europe from the 13th to the 15th century. More than 150 cities were once part of their vast trading network that stretched all the way from Iceland to Russia, and from Scotland to France.

In 1350, Bergen was designated one of the League's four major overseas offices – alongside Bruges, London and Novgorod – and here, at Bryggen the Hansa built their own city within a city where *Deutsch* was the lingua franca and the residents prayed in German in their own dedicated church of St. Mary's. German laws were the order of the day too, and the Teutonic outpost was kept in line by a council of men in Lübeck, six hundred miles away.

The city grew rich, particularly from the monopoly on the trade in dried, salted stockfish brought from the Lofoten Islands. "It could be kept for up to 25 years and was still good enough to eat after all that time," says Hilde Arnesen, an historian at Schøtsuene, a complex of restored assembly rooms where Hanseatic merchants once met for meals and socialising. "Dried stockfish was five times lighter to carry than fresh fish so it was perfect for trading; it was in great demand all over the continent too because Europe was mostly Catholic at the time. They'd always eat fish on Fridays, even during Lent."

Bergen's Hanseatic neighbourhood flourished for more than 400 years, as the German merchants constructed an ever-growing grid pattern of gabled homes, offices and storerooms made from stone in order to protect their goods against the risk of fire. "You can still see old grains of fish salt in the walls," says Susan Fosse, a knitwear designer who owns a shop on Bellgården Street in the atmospheric tangle of lanes that abut the quayside. "My great-grandfather kept his smoked salmon in one of those storerooms. As a child, I'd go around town with him selling to all the fish shops and collecting money. Trading is in the blood of all the people who live here."

Fosse tells me that she bases her own knitwear designs on historic patterns she unearthed during extensive textile research. "They are full of meaning: some are based on the pagan

Right: Geirangerfjord.

cross, others are to ward off evil," she says. "Many are from nature. The eight-leafed rose is very traditional, as are small dots called '*lusekofte*' – '*lus*' is Norwegian for gnat." Fosse goes on to explain that the different Norwegian communities would have their own unique patterns – particularly for sweaters. "If a fisherman fell overboard and drowned, they'd know exactly where he came from. So, knitwear wasn't just to keep you warm, it was part of your identity."

Throughout its Hanseatic history, all kinds of arts and crafts flourished in Bryggen and wider Bergen. Successful merchants liked to display their wealth by commissioning silversmiths to create ostentatious silverware – from candelabras to punchbowls, and coffee pots to serving trays. "The demand for silversmithing was so great, that by the mid 1800s, there were likely more silversmiths here than anywhere else in Scandinavia," says Lise Redfern, the CEO of Arven, Norway's oldest gold and silver manufacturer, which stands behind Bryggen, between St Mary's Church and Bergenhus Fortress.

Redfern leads me around Arven's clattering workshop which is famed for its production of elegant cutlery. "The best known of our 21 designs is the rose pattern," she says. "It was originally created in 1906 for the coronation of King Haakon, whose wife was Princess Maud of England." (Maud was the daughter of King Edward VII who in turn was the second child of Queen Victoria.) "That's why the ties between the Norwegian and British royal families are so strong. It's why the British royals still come to Norway on their holidays."

I step outside to find a heavy squall has set in over the city, and so take shelter in Bryggeloftet & Stuene, a restaurant on Vågen harbour that is steeped in maritime heritage. Over a plate of *reinsdyrfilet* (grilled reindeer with lingonberries in game sauce), I take the opportunity to reflect on my days at sea and this most extraordinary of voyages: one that not only allows for a unique vantage point on some of Europe's most dramatic landscapes, but follows in the wake of those ancient seafarers, warriors and traders who have helped shape the history and destiny of an entire continent.

Above (left to right): Street art, Bergen; Interior detail, Bryggeloftet & Stuene Restaurant.

Right: Knøsesmauet, Bergen.

Coast of Riches

The road that runs along the South Caribbean coast comes to a stop here in Manzanillo, a mere twenty miles from Panama. It's well worth the ride to disembark in this unspoilt spot. Nearby Puerto Viejo bustles with boutique shops and restaurants and a Caribbean vibe with a rich Rastafarian culture, but Manzanillo is more about the sound of the waves and the rustling of palm trees.

Costa Rica is a small country but has enough diversity to fill a continent. Rainforests teeming with wildlife, volcanoes, waterfalls, and oceans on either side. The Pacific shoreline has its own thrills, but on this coast, life is a bit more languid. Limpid water and the sheer density of coral reefs make it a diving and snorkelling paradise, warm glass-clear water flickering with the luminous shades of tropical fish.

There's more to marvel at in the surrounding Gandoca-Manzanillo Wildlife Refuge – mostly comprising of tropical rainforest but mangrove and palm swamps too, as well as pristine beaches where turtles come to nest. Other endangered species – elusive – hide out here – jaguars and ocelots among them. Overhead, birds as jewel bright as those tropical fish flit between the branches.

Watch out for wildlife

JONATHAN AND **ANGIE SCOTT** INTRODUCE AN INITIATIVE TO MAKE SAFARIS SAFER FOR ALL

Wildlife tourism to parks and reserves generates much-needed currency for local economies, with some of the revenue going towards managing protected areas and helping local communities living with wildlife to meet their development needs. However, getting the right balance between the financial benefits of tourism and the wellbeing of the natural environment is no easy matter. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the Greater Maasai Mara ecosystem in Kenya. The overdevelopment of tourism facilities in and around the Maasai Mara National Reserve has resulted in swarms of vehicles criss-crossing the landscape in search of predator sightings, leading to scenes of utter chaos.

In an attempt to reconnect people to the idea that a healthy natural environment is essential to life itself, we founded the non-profit Sacred Nature Initiative in 2021, which takes an ecosystem approach in partnership with stakeholders such as the Maasai Mara Wildlife Conservancy Association in helping to safeguard the welfare of local communities and wellbeing of protected areas, while developing sustainable and attractive tourism products. Encouraging a strong culture of good practice – a *Safari Etiquette* – would go some way to transforming the dream of having the Greater Mara declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site into a reality. It is an accolade that has to be earned.

Rather than a code of behaviour or conduct, we chose the word 'etiquette' to convey a sense of politeness and good manners towards the wildlife, safari companions and local communities. These are what we have found to be the key elements of safari etiquette:

1] Responsibility of camps and lodges. It is vital that camps and lodges provide a comprehensive briefing on safari etiquette for all visitors before they set out on their first game drive.

2] The Mara-Serengeti ecosystem is a year-round destination. It's not just about witnessing the great migration and finding big cats. Guides should take time to explore the extraordinary diversity of fauna and flora to be witnessed with visitors, engaging them and educating them on the interconnectedness of all living things.

3] Respect Protected Area rules and regulations. Adequate rules and regulations are already in place to help ensure that the wellbeing of the wild animals – and the safety of visitors – is respected at all times. Once guides and visitors are made aware that breach of the regulations is taken seriously by the authorities and that this is supported by *all* tourism stakeholders, then ill-discipline can be stopped in its tracks.

4] Combatting ticket fraud. National parks and reserves lose millions of dollars annually due to fraud. Guests should ask for and carry a valid entrance ticket for each day they visit, irrespective of whether the cost is included in the safari.

5] Your driver/guide. If you feel that he or she is driving too fast or too close to the animals, politely let them know your feelings. It is contrary to regulations to get out of the vehicle at river crossing sites when wildebeest and zebras are crossing. These are life or death moments and you may inadvertently cause the animals to stop crossing and panic, possibly even injuring themselves. In the process you may rob a predator lying in ambush of a meal.

6] It is not permitted to sit or stand on the roof of the safari vehicle. Sitting or standing on the roof exposes more of you to the wildlife. This is more likely to make them nervous, and guests could fall or injure themselves.

7] Try to keep as quiet as possible when approaching and stopping at a sighting. Be courteous and considerate to other vehicles so they can enjoy a good view too. Ask your guide politely not to use their phone or radio while at a sighting.

8] Encircling wildlife closes off their intended entry and exit route. Please do not drive directly opposite other guests, potentially positioning yourself in their photograph.

9] If a predator is on the move, particularly if it wants to hunt, give it space.

10] If watching a mother with young. Be particularly careful of the way she is responding. If she looks nervous or wants to move, back off or leave.

11] In high-density tourism destinations we would encourage the authorities to close off den sites. This does happen at times but not everyone complies. Mothers have been forced to move from secure den sites due to the close approach of safari vehicles.

12] All driver-guides should have Bronze certification from the Kenya Professional Guides Association. An affordable National Safari Guide's Certification process is long overdue. It would help to elevate standards of guiding as a profession and validate the important role it plays in delivering a quality experience to visitors while safeguarding the natural environment. Guide qualifications being non-compulsory and unmonitored is the single biggest problem facing the tourism industry.

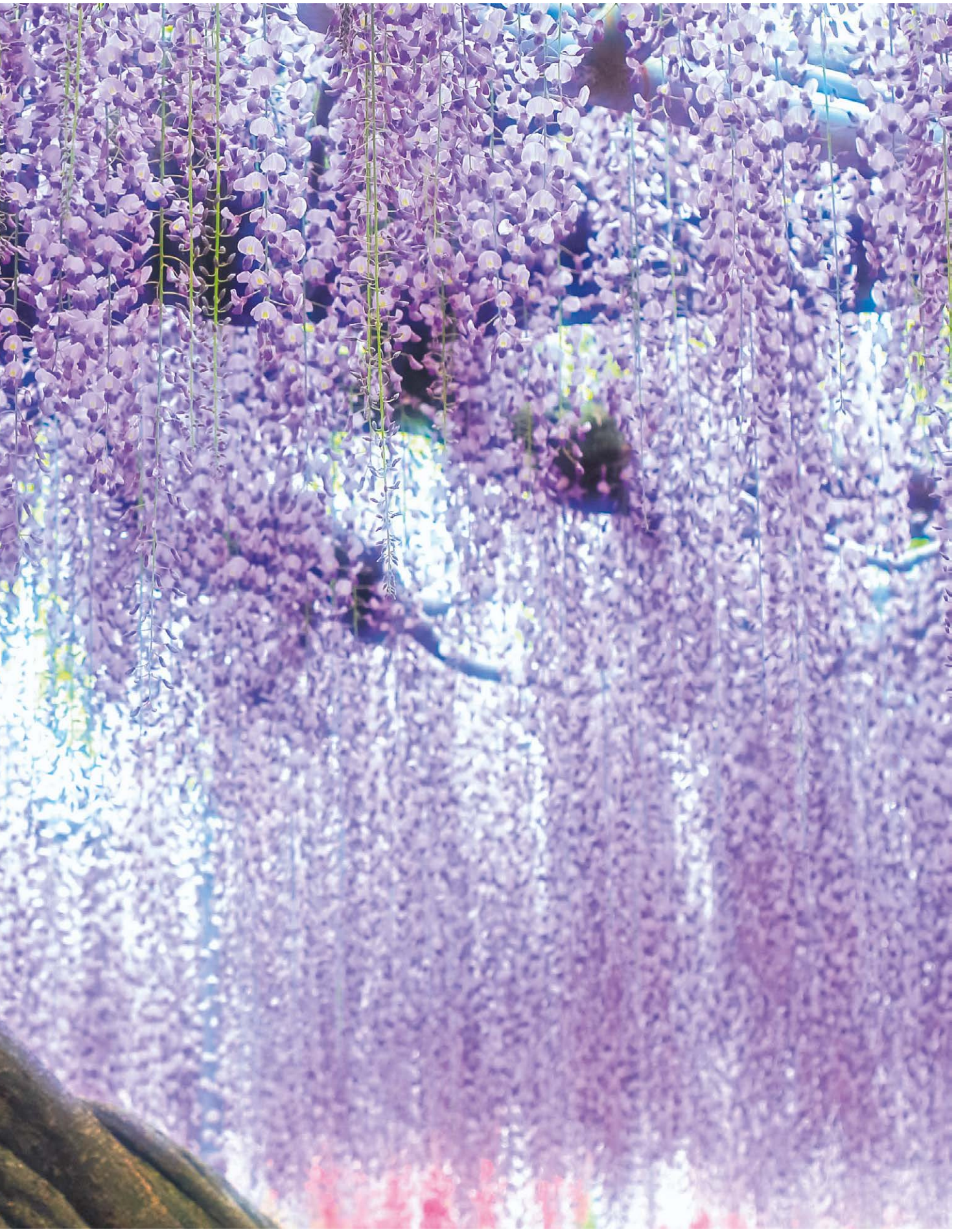
13] It has become common practice in the MMNR for photographers to utilise customised 4x4 vehicles with low-angle facilities. Examples are open-sided vehicles cut down to the floor, or vehicles with a door that can be lowered, allowing guests to lie on the floor in full view of the animals. There is no justification for this.

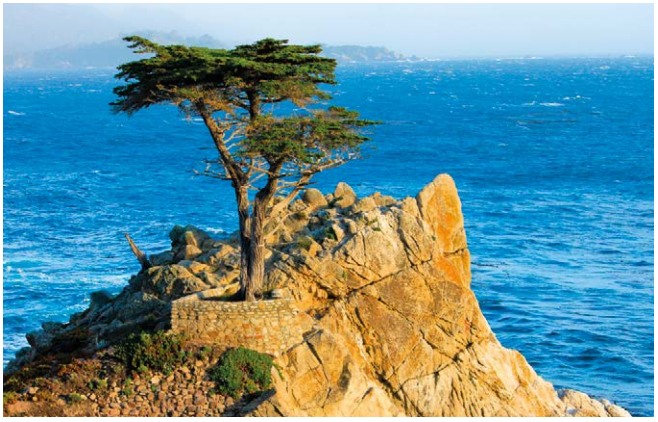
14] It has been scientifically proven that the presence of vehicles does impose a degree of stress on wildlife, regardless of how habituated the animals may appear. This can be minimised if *Safari Etiquette* protocols are respected and enforced as necessary.

15] The responsibility of being a photographer. The intense desire to 'get the shot', whether as a selfie on a smart phone or taken with a 600mm telephoto, has exacerbated poor standards of guiding with financial incentives – a handsome gratuity – the reward.

16] Big cats and vehicles. There was a time when allowing a cheetah to jump up onto vehicles was considered acceptable. It isn't, and we acknowledge the part *Big Cat Diary* played in allowing people to think it was. It is the responsibility of all guides to move away if they think a big cat may try to climb up onto their vehicle or lie in its shadow.

17] Film crews and off-road permits for stills photographers. It has become common practice for professional photographers and their clients to be granted off-road permits for a fee. This has no merit in such a highly sought-after tourism destination as the Maasai Mara. Exceptions might be a *National Geographic* photographer whose article reaches millions of potential visitors to Kenya. Ideally no more than one film crew would be allowed to operate in the same area at the same time, and off-road permits for visitors would be discontinued. They promote disharmony among other guests, can be subject to abuse, and are likely to exacerbate bad behaviour that does not align with *Safari Etiquette*.





Magical Faraway Trees

The picture on the preceding page is of one of the 350 blooming wisteria that flourish in Ashikaga Flower Park, north of Tokyo. The most famous of them all, thought to be 150 years old, was transported here as it began to struggle where it first grew. It took a dedicated team of tree lovers to save it, to move it to this floral park, where it, and its wisteria family, thrive and cascade in shades of pink through to purple. When lit up during the park's Flower Garden of Lights display, the trees are especially enchanting, but they are at their most fairytale between April and May. This is also when the more than million cherry trees in Japan blossom – Sakura Season. Trees are taken seriously in Japan, so these weeks are festival like, with picnics and parties, and over the centuries, have been celebrated in art and poetry too. The Edo-era poet Onitsura said:

And so the spring buds burst,
And so I gaze.

In contrast to the conviviality of the cherry and wisteria in Japan, in California, a cypress stands in solitude, and has become one of the most iconic symbols of the Monterey Peninsula. It clings on to the coast, its roots locked into a rock as the sea swirls around. It is the Lone Cypress, a mere seedling when the United States declared their independence.

If the Lone Cypress is emblematic of California, the Tree of Life is an emblem of survival. It has grown green out of gold sand for over 400 years, thriving in a desert. It is a landmark in a tiny nation, close to Bahrain's highest point. It is a mesquite, known to have a massive root system, which somehow manages to find water where there seems to be none. Myths have sprung from its survival – some say that Enki, an ancient god of water, protects it.

Many myths are related to the surreal 'upside down' nature of baobab trees, including one that says when it was planted by God it wouldn't stay still so God pulled it up and planted it upside down to stop it moving. An avenue of these deciduous giants stands sentinel next to each other in majestic fashion in Madagascar – so striking that they are considered an unofficial natural monument. They once stood in a forest, but survive together but spaced apart. Another one of Africa's most iconic trees is the jacaranda. They often line avenues too, but unlike the baobabs, they shake their hands across the divide by intermingling their purple festooned branches.

Outdoor adventures and endless days

WITH CHAPTERS COVERING EVERY MONTH, ***WHERE TO GO WHEN: THE AMERICAS*** HIGHLIGHTS THE PERFECT TIME TO VISIT 100 FAVOURITE PLACES NORTH AND SOUTH. HERE ARE OUR PICKS FROM ACROSS CANADA IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE YEAR

Pacific Rim National Park, British Columbia

Experience wild coastal beauty, which in May erupts into the full glory of spring, with gushing waterfalls and flourishing forests. Unfolding along the rugged west coast of Vancouver Island, the Pacific Rim National Park is the oldest protected area of its kind in Canada. Founded on the traditional lands of the Nuu-chah-nulth First Nation, it is bound by the sparkling Pacific Ocean to the west and by forested mountains to the east, while within lies a mix of gnarled old-growth rainforest and long sandy beaches, rocky shorelines, and blue-green waters dotted with emerald isles. Such diverse landscapes attract outdoor enthusiasts, for whom the park is a playground. Head to Ucluelet to explore the backcountry West Coast Trail, or if you are drawn to water, take to a kayak to explore the unspoiled Broken Group Islands, or head to the world-class surfing destination of Long Beach, just south of Tofino.

When else to go

March: for a different experience of the park, head there at the tail end of winter for a spectacular combination of storm and whale watching.

Yukon

This wild northwest Canadian territory offers plenty of adventure. In May, winter has lifted its veil but the nights are still dark enough to see the northern lights. Studded with glacier-fed alpine lakes, icy rivers and frozen tundra, the Yukon's remote, mountainous, and largely uncultivated landscape has changed little over the last 10,000 years. Within this harsh environment, however, life of all kinds blossoms and thrives. In spring, fields of purple prairie crocuses and lupins emerge, while yellow warblers and pink finches flutter around the wetlands. Moose graze in the lush meadows and grizzly bears lumber around the spruce forests. People have made a home here too, of course. The Yukon's capital, Whitehorse, was settled on the banks of the mighty Yukon River and temporarily ballooned in size during the 1896 Klondike Gold Rush. For an unforgettable Yukon experience, camp out surrounded by peaks and glaciers in the Kluane National Park and Reserve. Once darkness falls, sit by a warming campfire and gaze up into the night sky, where, if conditions are just right, you'll see rippling curtains of emerald green and purple lights dancing high in the heavens above.

When else to go

June: experience the Adäka Cultural Festival, the 'coming into the light' event that celebrates Yukon's First Nations culture.

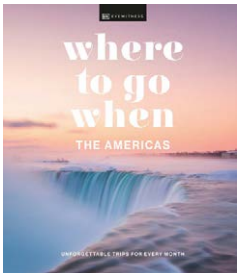
Whistler, British Columbia

It's all about the great outdoors in Whistler. March ushers in sunny days and fresh powder aplenty, allowing for all manner of snow sports. This pretty resort village is cradled in one of the most scenic spots in western Canada. The Whistler and Blackcomb mountains dominate the landscape, with more than 200 ski runs, 16 alpine bowls and three glaciers. Quiet trails through thick forests of fragrant pine and cedar beckon cross-country skiers, while the icy surface of the frozen Green Lake seems purpose-made for ice skating. And then there's heli-skiing, snowtubing, ice climbing, and so much more besides.

When you've had your fill of thrills, Whistler is a surprisingly cosmopolitan place to while away the evening. Enjoy an après-ski craft beer or cocktail at one of the many lounge bars and take in the spectacular scenery.

When else to go

December: visit for plenty of Yuletide cheer, sleigh rides, and an annual film festival.



Where To Go When: The Americas
DK Eyewitness, HBK, 224pp, £20

Quttinirpaaq National Park, Nunavut

A remote, unspoiled landscape dominated by ice, Canada's northernmost national park welcomes intrepid travellers. Quttinirpaaq means 'top of the world' in Inuktitut – a fitting name for this enormous park at the northern tip of Ellesmere Island in Canada's High Arctic. Here, the isolated wilderness of massive ice fields, weather-worn summits and lichen-covered tundra has seen very little human interference and few visitors. You are practically guaranteed a solitary adventure – indeed, your only companion may be the occasional Arctic hare munching on willow roots and sedge. Arrive in June, when there's 24 hours of daylight, and explore on foot a section of the Muskox Way. This valley route has been shaped by migrating musk oxen for over 4,500 years, and they still use it today. There are hundreds of archaeological sites along the path, too – stone tent rings made by the Paleo-Inuit hunter-gatherers who passed through from 2500–1500 BC on their way to Greenland.

When else to go

April: if you're an experienced ski tourer, spring offers excellent snow conditions in the park and relatively stable weather.

HOTELS

Villa Cordevigo
Lake Garda, Italy

Lying in a little once ancient Roman settlement, Villa Cordevigo is an elegant residence designed in the 18th century. It has seen hundreds of years of history, and now hosts guests in impeccably designed rooms and suites. The building itself is understated-grand, with a charming Italianate garden and fountain, a Renaissance chapel and an acclaimed vineyard. The cellar then, is predictably outstanding, providing flights of wine that do due justice to the Michelin star rated restaurant Oseleta, dishing up delights such as langoustine marinated in citrus honey and Wagyu carpaccio with caramalised leeks. More informal but just as delicious fare is served on a pretty terrace restaurant with lovely views. The surrounding park, dotted with trees even older than the building, provides a beautiful space to work off the calories, as does the stunning open air pool. The concierge can organise boat trips on Lake Garda, bespoke days in nearby Verona, and of course, visits to the Villa's own extensive vineyards.

COMO Le Montrachet
Burgundy, France

Located in Puligny-Montrachet, Burgundy's famed Côte-d'Or region, this 19th-century hotel is perfectly placed, with perfectly appointed rooms too. There are just 30, in subtle blues, greens and greys, airy, sophisticated, all très chic. The hotel faces the village square and the ambience seeps in. It's also just metres away from the Le Montrachet vineyard in Burgundy, where some of the world's finest wines are produced, and expertly paired with the seasonal menus served in the truly stunning Le Montrachet Restaurant. Its high wood-beamed ceilings and limestone walls provide a fitting setting for refined French cuisine, featuring the best locally sourced ingredients. An al-fresco alternative can be enjoyed on a spacious terrace, and the hotel organises wine tastings in its noted cellar, entertaining and educational in one heady go with the guidance of an expert sommelier.

The Vintage House Hotel
Douro Valley, Portugal

This gorgeous hotel once housed a 19th-century winery, and continues to offer oenophiles great enjoyment. This extends to all guests now as it is altogether a cosseting haven but given its history and position in the oldest demarcated wine region in the world, wine lovers are especially drawn to its charms. It rests beside the Douro River, in the pretty town of Pinhão, surrounded by vine-clad mountains. Almost all the rooms face the river, so enjoy lovely sunsets. There's a lot to enjoy away from the pretty rooms and their views too. There's a lovely outdoor pool, the old streets of the town to explore, river excursions by boat, and of course, vineyards, port and wine houses galore to discover. At the end of all the explorations there is the excellent Rabelo Restaurant, which extends onto a terrace overlooking the river, and serves traditional and regional fine dining. The Library Bar is the loveliest last retreat of the day, in front of a soothing fireplace with perhaps a fine snifter of port.

Hacienda Zorita
Salamanca, Spain

Christopher Columbus once stayed within the walls of this once monastery. It remains a place redolent with history, still providing accommodation, of an altogether different sort. The thick walls and tiled floors retain the past, but are now thoroughly elegant retreats, with fine furniture and fine views over the Tormes River. The Columbus Bar serves Sangria and small delectable plates, but the gastronomic centre here is Zorita's Kitchen, using ingredients from the Hacienda's farm. There have been farmers here since 1366 – and there are farmers here now, producing the finest Ibérico ham, olive oil, cheese and vegetables. The dishes sit alongside carefully curated pairings from the vast cellar, sourced from the vineyards which cover the surrounding hills. Wine is a theme throughout, with vinotherapy treatments at the spa. There's a sweet outdoor pool too, tapas cooking classes and more. Despite all these delights, the golden sandstone city of Salamanca is not to be missed – it's a UNESCO-listed wonder.

WINTER IN CANADA

Host to some of the Northern Hemisphere's finest ski resorts, Canada already holds the aces when it comes to a winter holiday. But, away from the slopes there are a host of other exceptional experiences, which make this a truly magical destination during the colder months. From chasing the Northern Lights to extraordinary wildlife encounters, you'll find a selection of the best experiences across these pages – a showcase for the Canadian winter.

Chase the Northern Lights in the Yukon

With so much of Canada's wilderness situated north of the Arctic Circle, there are an abundance of locations primed for what is one of winter travel's most iconic experiences – hunting the Northern Lights. Indeed, from the frozen lakes and snow-dusted forests of the remote Northwest Territories to the great, snowy expanse of Manitoba – host to roaming polar bears – Canada offers some of the most thrilling aurora viewing on Earth. It's perhaps the Yukon, however, which offers the best displays, its vast, mountainous wilds untouched by light pollution, leading to truly mesmerising shows of those dancing purples and hypnotic greens.

Sleep in an ice hotel in Québec

While it might be the snowy realms of Swedish Lapland that we most associate with an ice hotel stay, you might not

know that there's another, equally spectacular iteration across the Atlantic in the form of Hotel de Glace – the only one of its kind in North America. And, with its location on the edge of Québec City, guests have the added advantage of being able to enjoy the unique thrill of a night on ice – from the ephemeral artwork to the delights of the ice bar – with all the urban comforts a luxury city break provides.

Stay on remote Fogo Island

Across every province in Canada, you'll find exceptional places to stay. There are some, however, which set the bar that little bit higher. One such hotel is Fogo Island Inn off the coast of Newfoundland and Labrador. Open throughout the year, this innovative design retreat has found its place among Canada's winter scene, combining Scandi-influenced accommodation with a host of specially curated excursions, including the likes of snowshoeing, snowmobiling and tobogganing.

Take a train ride through the Rockies

There's something truly wonderful about a rail journey through the Canadian Rockies. And, while summer adventures will always be popular, a winter trip can be just as magical. The legendary *Canadian* offers just such an itinerary, linking Vancouver and Calgary, and adding in a range of seasonal excursions in the national parks of Jasper and Banff. One day you might be enjoying an ice walk in a spectacular frozen canyon, or travelling by dog sled along frosty forest trails, while the next you'll be enjoying sleigh rides on Lake Louise and looking forward to guided hikes beneath frozen waterfalls.

Go storm watching on Vancouver Island

Powerful winter storms do much to shape the Canadian coastline. But, while it might be your instinct to shy away from the winds and waves, at Wickaninnish Inn on Vancouver Island, they've turned storm watching into one of their most exciting and sought-after activities. In fact, the hotel's design was based on the region's popularity as a storm watching destination, long before it was built. Today, guests can make the most of the provided rain gear and rubber boots to brave the elements along the windswept beach, before retiring to watch the waves from the Shoreline Terrace or Driftwood Café, armed with a glass of wine or steaming cup of cocoa, or from the Cedar Sanctuary – a treatment room with sea views at the Ancient Cedars Spa.

Visit Niagara's frozen falls

It's one of North America's most famous sights. But, while summer brings sun-kissed spray and boat trips beneath the torrents, in winter Niagara Falls takes on a different guise. As thick ice melts during milder spells, it breaks up and drifts downstream, crashing over the falls where it refreezes to create a spectacular formation known as the ice bridge. What's more, during the coldest spells, as the spray and mist freeze, the entire appear to be frozen in time. It's a truly remarkable sight.

Let your hair down at Ottawa's Winterlude Festival

Taking place during the first three weeks of February, this fabulous Ottawa festival is an ode to the Canadian winter – a celebration of the country's unique culture and climate. It's popular, too. Having run since 1979, it now attracts more than 600,000 visitors, who come to enjoy everything from specially curated exhibitions to winter markets, snow tubing, ice carving competitions and even the world's largest skating rink.

Spot ice bubbles at Abraham Lake

Perhaps one of the country's lesser-known winter wonders, this natural phenomenon occurs on Abraham Lake in the wilds of Alberta. Formed by gas released by rotting plants on the lake floor, the sub-zero temperatures cause the bubbles to freeze below the surface, forming spectacular patterns akin to a giant lava lamp. Surrounded by the snow-capped peaks of Mount Michener and Sentinel Mountain, the setting is sublime.

Enjoy a Christmas to remember at Chateau Banff

Of course, for many visitors in December, winter wouldn't be the same without some festive fun. And, there are few better places to get into the Christmas spirit than with a stay at Fairmont Banff Springs in the heart of the Rockies. Expect seasonal dining and a host of activities aimed at making this the ultimate family getaway. Of course, it's all wrapped up in the grand architecture, first-class service and spectacular surroundings of this iconic Alberta hotel.

Hazy days and life on the rails

Billy Connolly tries out an indigenous purification ceremony of prayer and healing, while **Terry Gainer** immerses himself in the Age of Steam in western Canada

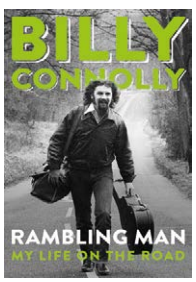
"It was almost time to go home, but before my trip came to an end I had to travel 600 miles south to the Native American settlement of Gitlaxt'aamiks for a traditional sweat lodge ritual. 'What does that involve?' I asked. 'Oh, you're going to be boiled and steamed.' They weren't kidding. Inside the sweat lodge was a steam bath, created by the intermittent pouring of water onto hot rocks. It was pitch black, apart from the glow of the red-hot lava rocks that turned white as they burned.

At times, it was so hot in the sweat lodge I felt like I was sitting on the inside of a volcano just as it's about to erupt. There were five sessions, each one hotter and more intense than the last. At one point, a girl brought in frozen fruit in her Thermos. It was delicious – eating the frozen fruit in the room of fire.

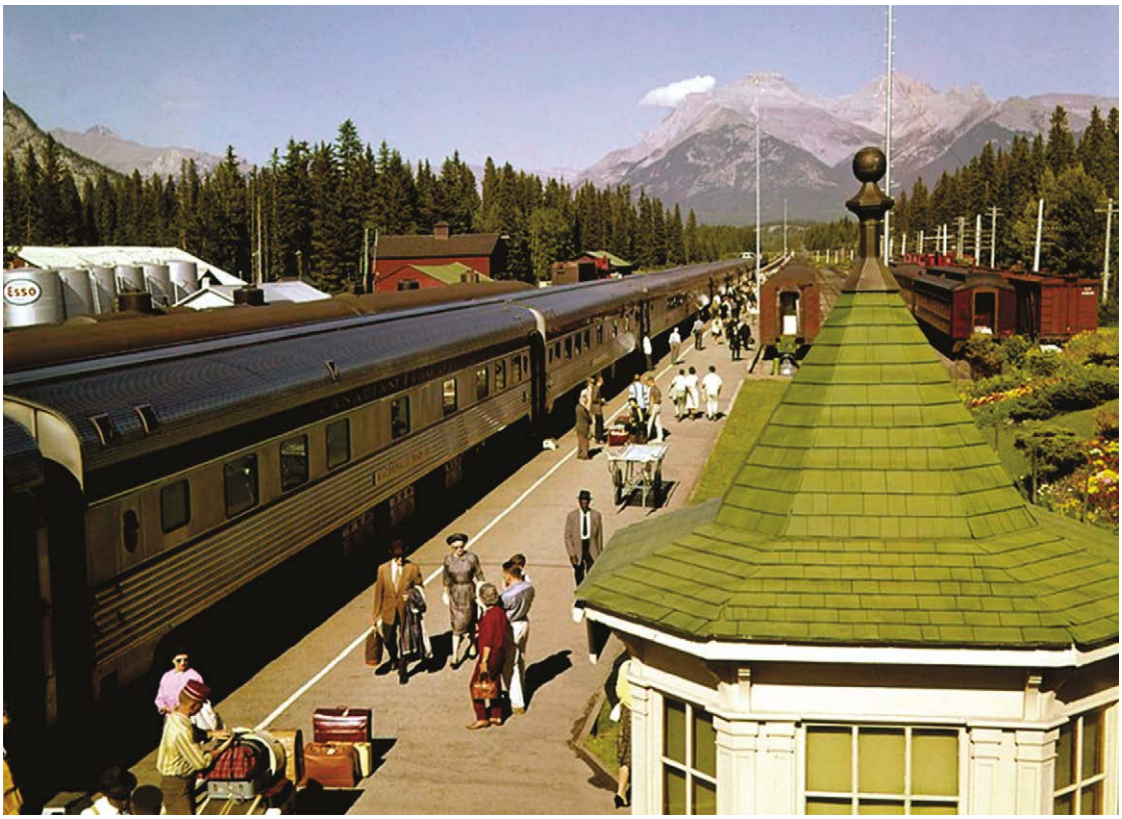
People were saying prayers, chanting and talking openly about all kinds of physical and emotional experiences they'd had, while the temperature continued to climb. People believe the ceremony cleanses you inside and out. It removes negative energy and creates better balance in your life. Another bucket of water would be poured on the rocks and a wave of hot steam would suddenly roll through the circle. The chanting grew louder. Everyone was sweating but, even though it pushed me to the limits of my endurance, it felt peaceful. Some of the men talked about being taken away by the authorities when they were children, happy children, living in their culture. But the authorities insisted they had to be taken away to strange schools and houses all over Canada, where their language and culture was all beaten out of them. Their parents had had no say in it. They weren't allowed to speak their language or eat their food. These grown men were crying at the fire about how much they missed their language and the company of their peers. They said it had all been stolen and it wasn't going to come back. A big muscular man was crying like a baby because of what had been done to him. I was so moved by it.

I shared some things too. I admitted that I sometimes thought I wasn't grateful enough, that I didn't take time often enough to appreciate the life that I'd built, the people around me, and the world in general. It's difficult to explain exactly why or how, but the sweat lodge had a profound effect on me.

The following day I chopped a tree down in a place called Horsefly. A man named Leonard Cecil and his crew of loggers dressed me up in orange clothes and a helmet, and declared I looked the part. We were to fell trees infested with the destructive pine beetle. Dangerous business. Over the course of my trip to the Arctic and through the Northwest Passage, I had started to become such a ruffty-tuffty. I had been a nice tree-hugging hippy when I left home. I thought my wife would barely recognise me in my new Grizzly Adams persona. That's what the raw outdoors will do to you. 'Chainsaw cuts tend not to hurt,' said Leonard. 'I've had shaving cuts that hurt more.' His face was covered with scars, but I didn't like to ask which activity he was worse at – cutting down trees or shaving. He showed me how to use a chainsaw, and I felled a big tree. Naturally, I hugged it first. The sheer power of it falling was extraordinary. Quite a rush. I love the camaraderie of working men, but I was disappointed that nobody shouted 'Timberrrrr!!!' And not one of them was wearing a tartan shirt – I was inconsolable."



***Rambling Man* by Billy Connolly**
Two Roads, HBK, 320pp, £25

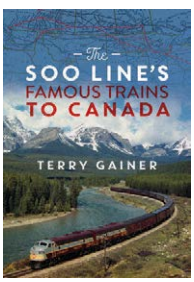


Left: Banff station in 1958. Beyond the kiosk and the rock gardens are the Garden Tracks, with extra livery awaiting the *Mountaineer*. To the left, the *Canadian* has arrived. The redcap, lower left, is a young Terry Gainer. Nicholas Morant, courtesy David Fleming, Encyclopedia of Banff History.

Below: 'Flapper Gals' promote the *Soo-Mountaineer* launch in 1923. Kaufmann and Fabry, courtesy the Soo Line Historical and Technical Society Archives Collection.

Cover image: 1952 promotional shot of the *Mountaineer* at Morant's Curve, photographed by Nicholas Morant, courtesy the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies and Archives.

Terry Gainer was six years old in 1948 when his father Frank was transferred to Banff in the Canadian Rockies as station agent. From their arrival until 1955 the family lived in the residence on the top floor of the station itself. During those years, Terry explored every nook and cranny of the station and the surrounding grounds, watching passengers disembark and savouring the details of each of the eight transcontinental trains that would pass through daily. From 1957 through to the summer of 1962 – the bonanza year of the Seattle World's Fair and the opening of the Trans-Canada Highway – he worked summer jobs, initially as a porter in the baggage room and then as a redcap loading the sleeper cars. Famous trains including the *Montreal-Boston Express*, the *Soo Pacific*, the *Soo-Spokane-Portland Train Deluxe*, the *Winnipeger*, the *Canadian* and the *Soo-Mountaineer* are the stuff of legends. The *Mountaineer* in particular played a huge part in transforming a niche railway line built to serve the agricultural industry into a vital passenger link between the northern United States and Canada's east and west coasts, feeding the burgeoning Canadian Rockies resorts and connecting with the overseas services of Canadian Pacific steamships. *The Soo Line's Famous Trains to Canada* is Terry's richly entertaining, meticulously researched account of the pioneering service and the corporate intrigue and personal rivalries that drove its expansion.



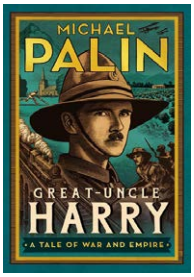
***The Soo Line's Famous Trains to Canada* by Terry Gainer**
Rocky Mountain Books, PBK, 112pp, £17.99

Living history

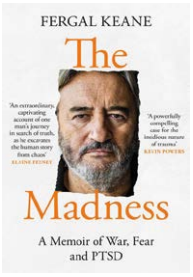
Latest words from our Honorary Presidents

MICHAEL AT CATERPILLAR VALLEY CEMETERY © PAUL REED

Michael Palin's new book is a compelling blend of biography, history, travelogue and personal memoir as he hunts down all he can find about the life of his grandfather's brother Harry, who died on the battlefields of the Somme. Pulling together official documents, diaries, letters, photographs, and titbits of family gossip, he sets out to retrace Great-Uncle Harry's six known journeys, from his home town of Linton in the Herefordshire hills to India and New Zealand where he worked on railways, tea plantations and as a farmhand, then, at the outbreak of WWI, on to the slaughtering grounds of Gallipoli and Flanders and a final, fatal journey to northern France, where he lost his life aged 32. Acknowledging there are gaps in the tale, Palin writes: "One thing I've learnt in this whole detective process is that the past is never as locked as it seems. There is always information hidden away somewhere, and none of it is insignificant. This book is not the end of the story, but part of the constantly evolving process of finding out more about how we live and how we die. And in Harry's case, giving those who've disappeared a voice, and a story to tell."



***Great-Uncle Harry* by Michael Palin**
Hutchinson Heinemann,
HBK, 336pp, £22



Fergal Keane's *The Madness: A Memoir of War, Fear and PTSD*, first published in November 2022, is now out in paperback (William Collins, £12.99). A powerful and heartfelt account of his thirty-year career covering war zones, it examines what draws him to witness human tragedies and atrocities, what motivates him to carry on, and the mental strain he continues to live through. An essential, empathetic handbook for survivors from all walks of life who are in recovery from injury, addiction, breakdown or personal loss.

William Dalrymple has written a foreword in tribute to one of his heroes in *Don McCullin: Journeys across Roman Asia Minor* (Cornucopia Books, £95). The stunningly produced book is the result of three journeys undertaken by McCullin with Barnaby Rogerson in 2019, 2021 and 2022 across the mountains, valleys and coast of western Turkey, and Rogerson provides extensive commentary on the poignant and powerful Roman ruins they went to witness. "Don's war photography is all about noise and dirt and anger and fury," writes Dalrymple, "while here we are transported to a marble world of stillness and silence: the frozen perfection of a Roman nymph; the arresting beauty of a naked Goddess of Love or the young Nemesis, with one perfect breast sensuously exposed; the controlled passion of mounted hunters lost in the chase, spear at the ready for the moment the boar breaks cover; the palpable intensity of the Emperors Nero and Trajan; the haunting face of a Roman priest, darkly cowled. Don's war photography is about anarchy and chaos; this is about the purest essence of classical civilisation. Yet, for his fans, Don's fingerprints are everywhere, and not just in the taste for the dark and remote, the moody and the atmospheric. For these images share his ever-present sense of beauty in wreckage, and that savouring of elegy and loss. That sense of requiem is somehow concentrated in the dark parabolas of these empty Roman theatres with their fallen pillars set against wintry-black mountains."

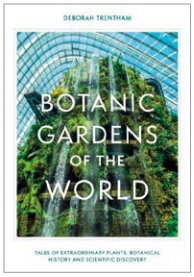
Left: The Mexican Garden at Monserrate has recently been restored. Plants include palms, yuccas, agaves and cycads.

Below: The Palácio de Monserrate, designed for Sir Francis Cook in 1856 by the English architect James T. Knowles, combines Moorish, Arabic and Romantic styles; Built as a ruin, the remains of the church are now engulfed by an Australian rubber tree.

Parque de Monserrate

Sintra, Portugal (1789)

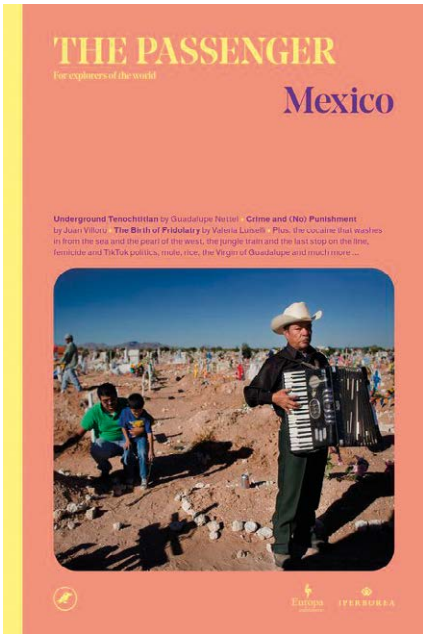
A botanic garden with a difference, Monserrate is a combination of wild rugged landscape with ruins and waterfalls, formal lawned areas, and cacti and succulent gardens. The Garden sits on the lower slopes of the Sintra Mountain, with valleys that create their own microclimates. Sintra has one of the mildest climates in Europe, so the Garden is frost-free, and can grow tender exotics outside in the wider landscape. At its centre is a stunning palace (Palácio de Monserrate), which has a distinctive mixture of different architectural styles. It has been the site of various buildings and gardens for hundreds of years.



Botanic Gardens of the World
by Deborah Trentham
Greenfinch, HBK, 256pp, £30

Going deeper

Mark Reynolds revels in two evolving series that venture beyond the usual scope of travel guides



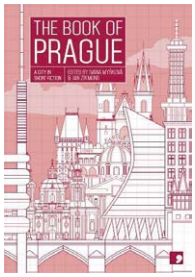
***The Passenger* is a stunning collaboration** between Europa Editions and Italian publisher Iperborea that collects the best new writing, photography and reportage from around the world. With four issues a year, its aim is to break down barriers and introduce the essence of a place. Packed with essays and investigative journalism, original photography and illustrations, charts, unusual facts and observations, each volume offers a unique insight into a different culture, and how history has shaped its present. In place of familiar 'must-see' bucket lists, they portray the shifting culture and identity of a place, the sensibilities of its people, its burning issues, conflicts, and open wounds.

Printed on quality paper and beautifully designed by TomoTomo in Milan, *The Passenger* is a pleasure to hold and to read. "A constant habit of reading international literature – be it in the form of journalism, literary non-fiction, or fiction – can give us a better appreciation of foreign cultures, and the tools to combat stereotypes and clichés," says co-editor Tomaso Biancardi. Highlights of the latest issue, *Mexico*, include Guadalupe Nettel on 'Underground Tenochtitlan' – delving into the ancient customs that live on in the streets of Mexico City; Valeria Luiselli on the legend of Frida Kahlo and the birth of 'Fridolatry'; and Darío Alemán on the controversial Mayan train project connecting Mexico's Caribbean resorts with the south's archaeological sites, crossing – and compromising – traditional communities and old-growth forests. With a fifth of the population identifying as indigenous, Ayuuk-speaking Mixe writer Yasnaya Elena A. Gill also reflects on how language and identity have been suppressed for centuries by Spanish monolingualism.

Launching in 2020, previous volumes cover Japan, Greece, Brazil, Turkey, India, Berlin, Paris, Rome, Ireland, California, Barcelona, Nigeria – and Space – and build into a highly collectible account of life on Earth today and how we got here. Delightfully, *The Passenger*'s logo depicts Huginn ('thought') and Muninn ('memory'), two ravens from Norse mythology whose story symbolises the spirit of the series. Sent off by Odin at dawn, the crows would return each night to sit on the god's shoulders, whispering into his ears whatever knowledge and wisdom they had gathered from the far corners of the world...

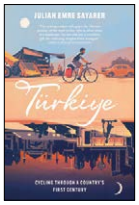
The Passenger: Mexico
Europa Editions, PBK, 192pp, £18.99

The long-running Reading the City series from Comma Press brings together ten stories by ten different authors from a given city – often specially commissioned or translated into English for the first time – to offer diverse impressions of distinct boroughs and neighbourhoods as well as unlocking the subcultures and secrets that ultimately make it the city it is. From an ex-con on compassionate release revisiting his old haunts, only to feel dispossessed by how much the city has changed; to the son of political dissidents in Soviet-era Prague who is condemned to a life of menial jobs; to a young shop assistant in a tourist-friendly antique shop imagining how Prague would now be if Czechoslovakia had stood up to the Nazis, *The Book of Prague* presents a city of myriad layers and multiple histories. Famous for its untouched Gothic and Baroque architecture and its trapped-in-aspic charm, it is also a place that has lived through numerous traumas and learned to conceal its scars – perhaps a little too well.

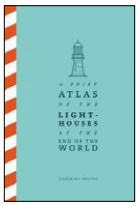


***The Book of Prague*, edited by Ivana Myšková & Jan Zikmund**
Comma Press, PBK, 144pp, £10.99

You might also like…

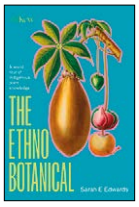


TÜRKIYE
by Julian Sayarer
Arcadia Books, HBK, 368pp, £25
On the eve of modern Türkiye's centenary, the author cycles from the Aegean coast to the Armenian border to present a rich tapestry of the place where Asia, Africa and Europe converge.

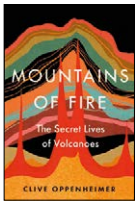


A BRIEF ATLAS OF THE LIGHTHOUSES AT THE END OF THE WORLD
by González Macías Picador, HBK, 160pp, £20
Over thirty tales of the most remote beacons of the seas, accompanied by beautiful illustrations, nautical charts, maps, architectural plans, curious facts, and genuine wonder.

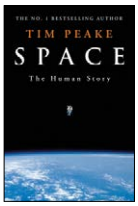
THE MAN WHO LOVED SIBERIA by Roy Jacobsen and Anneliese Pitz
MacLehose Press, HBK, 304pp, £25
A gripping account of 19th-century naturalist Fritz Dörries' travels across challenging terrain to gather material fundamental to our understanding of the world's fauna and flora.



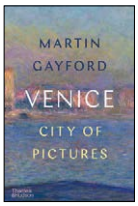
THE ETHNOBOTANICAL
by Dr Sarah Edwards
Greenfinch, HBK, 256pp, £30
To many indigenous peoples, plants have been recognised for centuries as sentient beings, imbued with spirit and agency to help humanity. An exhilarating perspective on how plants sustain us.



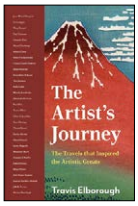
MOUNTAINS OF FIRE
by Clive Oppenheimer
Hodder Press, HBK, 368pp, £25
Blending cultural history, natural science, myth and adventure, a magical reminder that, from Antarctica to Italy, the Sahara to North Korea, human life is profoundly shaped by volcanoes.



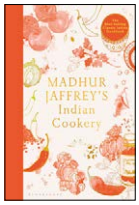
SPACE: THE HUMAN STORY by Tim Peake
Century, HBK, 336pp, £22
The British astronaut chronicles sixty years of space exploration and profiles the remarkable men and women, from Yuri Gagarin to Peggy Whitson, who have forged the way for humanity beyond Earth.



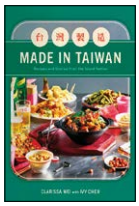
VENICE: CITY OF PICTURES
by Martin Gayford
Thames & Hudson, HBK, 464pp, £30
A visual journey through the past five centuries of 'La Serenissima', a compelling portrait of Venice capturing the work of great painters from Titian and Canaletto to Monet and Turner.



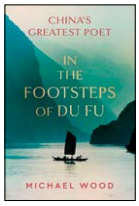
THE ARTIST'S JOURNEY
by Travis Elborough
White Lion Publishing, HBK, 224pp, £20
From arduous treks to city tours, thirty journeys taken by artistic greats revealing the repercussions of those travels on the painters' personal lives and the broader cultural landscape.



MADHUR JAFFREY'S INDIAN COOKERY
Bloomsbury, HBK, 240pp, £20
New recipes join old favourites in this stunning 40th anniversary edition to inspire a new generation of home cooks to master authentic Indian food for all occasions.



MADE IN TAIWAN
by Clarissa Wei
S&S/Simon Element, HBK, 384pp, £30
The Taipei-based food journalist presents an in-depth exploration of the vibrant food and culture of Taiwan, from street snacks to feasts, celebrating the island nation's unique culinary identity.



IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF DU FU by Michael Wood
Simon & Schuster, 192pp, HBK, £16.99
The broadcaster and historian journeys to the places that inspired Du Fu to write some of the best-loved poetry the world has known, on enduring themes of friendship, family and human frailty.

THE BOOK OF TREE POEMS edited by Ana Sampson, illustrated by Sarah Maycock
Laurence King, HBK, 128pp, £14.99
A delightful anthology of classic and contemporary poems adorned with Sarah Maycock's exquisite watercolours to help us appreciate our arboreal neighbours ever more (*see overleaf*).

Trees of Song

by Pascale Petit

You call us the trees of song
because when night falls
we draw the bows of our branches

against our trunks
and play for our lives.
When the forest gates open

we let you in,
start our day's work
making air, growing wombs

that dream up birds.
It is we who are singing
the leopard and langur,

replacing the ones you kill.
You come dressed as a groom
all in red

with rifles for branches
as if you could marry
your green bride.

We sing the hymns that burn
at the centre of the earth.
We call them up

and they surge through us.
Our bows play so fast
we self-combust

like brides who don't want to marry,
who set themselves alight.
By sunrise all you see

is smoke rising from our stumps
like morning mist,
and our spirits are gone.

© EUAN MYLES

Understanding our place in the infinite universe

by Peter Bellerby

Many of us first encounter a globe as children at school or, if we are lucky, at home. As we spin the globe, our parents or teachers may explain that our home city or town is but a negligible spot on a huge sphere, which is itself tiny and dwarfed by the galaxy and in turn the infinite universe beyond. Gazing at images of our planet, seemingly suspended in a massive void among the stars, there are so many questions that need answering, many of which require a level of knowledge way beyond the comprehension of a young child. Gravity and infinity, for example, are certainly neither easy to explain nor quickly understood even for a grown-up.

Like a lot of children, I was fascinated by the universe – and by extension, globes, the only accurate representation of our planet. I used to pester my parents to buy one of those garish 1970s numbers that you'd see in the Sunday supplements, which opened up to reveal a drinks cabinet, one of the few large floor-standing globes available at the time.

My interest in globes has been a constant ever since. I use Google Maps every day – to find my way to a new part of town or check something online – but it doesn't replace the apparently old-fashioned globe; for me the modern digital map and the globe perform completely different functions.

© BELLERBY & CO.

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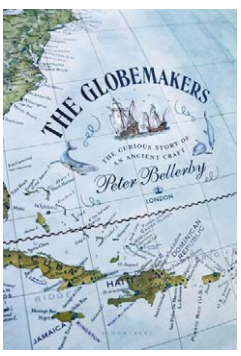
You never use a globe today for directions, and when you look at a map on your phone, you never experience the same awed feeling as you do when you hold a globe in your hand or spin it on its axis. Google Maps might inform, but a globe inspires. Perhaps this is because it gives you a different perspective from a flat map of the world. Whereas on many two-dimensional maps the focus seems to fall on Europe as the apparent centre of the world, the globe is a spherical object on which there can be no preordained centre, and thus each place is of equal significance. In that way, they help us to understand where we are in relation to the rest of the world. Globes remind us of how minuscule – and insignificant – we are.

And how wonderful the world is, a beautiful planet floating in space, spinning within an infinite universe and an evolution of time so long that it is hard to comprehend. The concept of time is difficult enough to fathom when related to a 2,000-year-old giant sequoia tree, let alone a 4.5-billion-year-old planet.



The Globemakers
by Peter Bellerby
Bloomsbury, HBK, 240pp, £25

Opposite: Rashmi at work in the Bellerby & Co. studio.

Above (clockwise from top left): Animalia edition; Peter among the finished products; Celestial globe, using the Earth as an imaginary centre of the universe to map the stars.

NATURAL WONDERS OF Alberta

The Canadian province of Alberta is blessed with myriad natural wonders, from mountainous national parks and glittering lakes to huge glaciers and deep canyons. A joy to explore throughout the seasons, whether by road or rail, it stands apart as one of the most spectacular regions in North America. You'll find a curated collection of eight highlights across these pages – all the inspiration you'll need to plan your Alberta adventure.

Dinosaur Provincial Park

Naturally, many of Alberta's wild regions are enjoyed very much in the here and now. Which is why the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Dinosaur Provincial Park is truly unique. Indeed, a trip to its magical, arid landscape of giant hoodoos, twisted rock formations, is nothing short of a journey back in time. Such is the palaeontological significance of the park that over 50 dinosaur species, and an incredible 400 skeletons, have been discovered here, providing the world's most complete record of the late Cretaceous Period – the time of the T-rex. There are five interpretive hiking trails to see you around the park, as well as the small but excellent Dinosaur Visitors Centre – an offshoot of the renowned Royal Tyrrell Museum in Drumheller.

Johnston Canyon

Idyllically located in the forests between Banff and Lake Louise, Johnston Canyon is a spectacular hiking area of soaring cliffs, rushing rivers and magnificent waterfalls. Open year round, the trail is an easy two- or three-hour hike, crossing narrow bridges and traversing cliff-side catwalks to take in a series of cascades and deep plunge pools, sun-dappled in summer, frozen into magnificent ice sculptures in winter. Suitable for a wide range of ages and abilities, this is Alberta hiking at its accessible best.

Waterton Lakes National Park

Due south of Calgary, where the vast prairies meet the mighty Rocky Mountains, Waterton Lakes National Park is a spellbinding region of forest-clad peaks, pretty streams, gorgeous views and, yes, spectacular lakes. Relatively small in size compared to some of its big-name compatriots, it still packs a lot in, with a network of well-marked trails, perfect for hiking and biking, and a host of other activities tailored to each season. In spring, you might look out for wildflowers along the Red Rock Parkway and migratory birds at Maskinonge Lake, while summer brings incredible star gazing and the most favourable hiking conditions. Then, in autumn, spot rutting elk amid bright yellow larch trees before winter brings with it the likes of snowshoeing, fat biking and cross-country skiing.

Elk Island National Park

This lesser-known national park – a UNESCO designated Biosphere Reserve – is located just 35

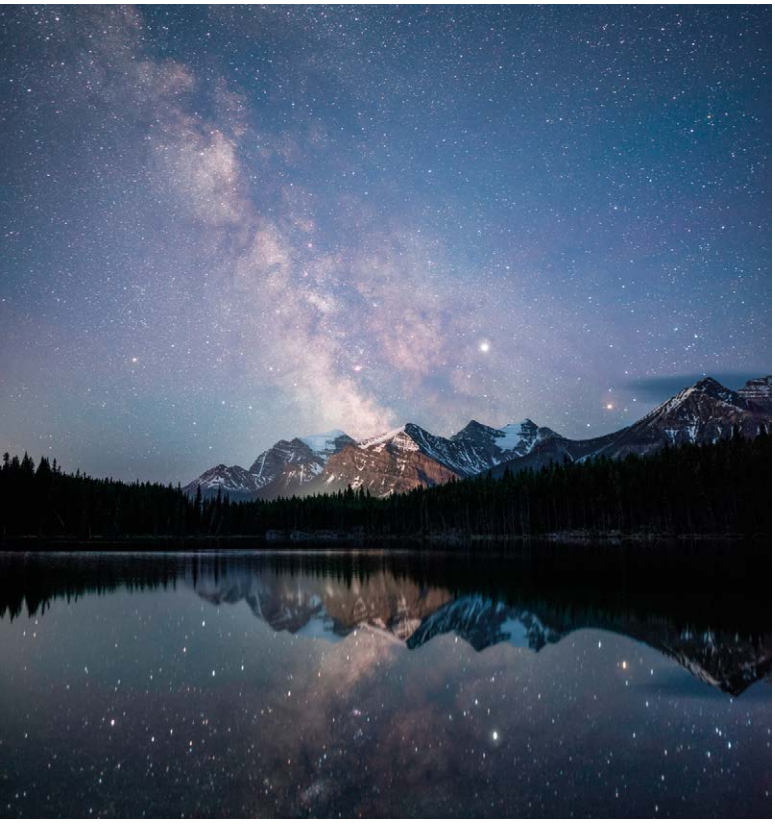
minutes east of Edmonton, where its glassy lakes, rolling hills and star-filled skies set the scene for some superb wildlife encounters. Look out for herds of bison and elk, and hike scenic trails to a number of viewpoints where you might be lucky enough to spot some of the park's 250 species of birds.

Lake Louise

This is Alberta at its most beautiful, and iconic. Pristine wilderness and a seemingly endless array of outdoor adventures await at glorious Lake Louise, coupled with some simply jaw-dropping views. There's a reason it's one of Canada's most photographed sights. It's also a destination for all seasons, with world-class skiing and snowboarding in winter, and hiking from spring through to fall. And, there's even more to Lake Louise than just its natural charms, from wellness retreats to summer festivals, as well as the chance to stay at one of Canada's most famous hotels – the luxurious Fairmont Château Lake Louise.

Icefields Parkway & Athabasca Glacier

Linking Lake Louise with the mountain town of Jasper, the 232-kilometre-long Icefields Parkway is one of the world's great driving routes. Tracing the Continental Divide, the route passes right through the heart of the Rockies, passing great mountain peaks, vast sweeping valleys and mighty glaciers. One of these is



the huge Athabasca Glacier, where Ice Explorer Tours see visitors right on to the endless expanse of the Columbia Icefield. And, there's the chance to take it all in from above, with a walk along the Columbia Icefield Skywalk – a kilometre-long glass walkway suspended above the Sunwapta Valley, offering majestic glacier and waterfall views.

Maligne Canyon

With its scenic bridges and ancient, fossil-rich rock walls, Maligne Canyon is among Jasper National Park's most spectacular natural features, home to dramatic waterfalls linked by a network of narrow channels. This geological marvel is best taken in via the excellent Maligne Canyon hike, while in winter, guided ice walks and a smokehouse restaurant experience at the Maligne Canyon Wilderness Kitchen make it another excellent year-round favourite.

Jasper Dark Skies Preserve

In 2011, Jasper was designated as a Dark Sky Preserve by Canada's Royal Astronomical Society. It's an accolade well deserved, as minimal light pollution and superb air quality create ideal conditions, right across its 11,000 square kilometres. And, alongside the chance to spot far-off planets and distant constellations, in winter you might also be treated to colourful displays of the Northern Lights – a true bucket-list experience.

Light and dark, and lasting connections

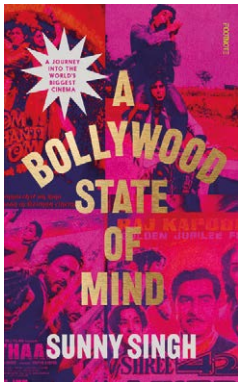
Sunny Singh revisits moments of wonder and belonging

LUXOR, EGYPT

From the moment I arrived at the mostly empty station, I felt eerily at home. The people were familiar, as were the narrow streets of the markets and the disorienting labyrinths of the old town. I wandered through mostly empty monuments, gathered up tennis ball-sized lemons on Banana Island and talked Bollywood movies with guards in the Valley of the Kings. The Raba'a massacre, when hundreds of protesters were killed in Cairo by the military regime, ended the idyll. A strict curfew was imposed. Sporadic gunfire punctured the silence. I spent long hours on my hotel's roof terrace opposite the Luxor Temple, watching how it changed colour from bluish sepia before dawn to early morning muted pinks, burnished gold striped with dark shadows in the afternoon, to cool lemony yellow at dusk. At night, it loomed dark and unlit as the hotel owners invited their half-dozen guests for dinner, shisha and hours of languid conversation. When the curfew finally lifted, I found myself unwilling to leave the unexpected serenity I had encountered.

PETRA, JORDAN

I had spent days wandering through the vast complex, in awe of the beauty and overwhelmed by the warmth of the people who call Petra home. This day my destination was Ad-Deir high in the hills. As I began the climb, one of the camel drivers called, 'Hey, Indian! My brother knows you're coming!' Confused, I smiled and waved, and kept climbing. At the top when I stepped from between the rocks into the open plain, a familiar-looking stranger was waiting. 'My brother told me to expect you,' he grinned, holding out a glass of ruby-coloured juice. He led me to a flat stone with an unbroken view of the monastery and left me alone. I sat for hours, my eyes full of exquisite beauty, my nose thawing as the day warmed up, and my mouth sweetened with pomegranate.



Sunny Singh is a writer, novelist and academic whose books include the acclaimed novel *Hotel Arcadia* and a study of Amitabh Bachchan for the BFI's Film Stars series. Her latest book is *A Bollywood State of Mind* (Footnote Press, £20).

ÎLE DE GORÉE, SENEGAL

On the ferry to the island I found myself fascinated by a group of laughing women in identical red and yellow floral outfits with matching head wraps. On arrival, they disappeared into the narrow streets as I slowly wandered around the 'memory island'. Later, as I meandered back to the ferry, I stumbled upon a square where the women were gathered. Their numbers had swelled. There were pots of rice and *yassa poisson* cooking on open flames. They laughed and chatted. Some formed a line to dance. They nodded and smiled at me, then returned to the celebrations. I marvelled at the complexity, strength and resilience of humans and our cultures.

ETOSHA PAN, NAMIBIA

The drive from Windhoek to Etosha National Park is long and breathtaking. As my car moved over dirt trails, the vast sky lightened slowly, moving from black to purple to pink and blues as dawn approached. The light turned suddenly milky, a moment when the sun hadn't quite risen but the eastern horizon had grown bright. That's when it came into view: the Etosha Pan, a vast, creamy land that stretched as far as the eye could see. Then the sun appeared and the white salt grew blinding to the eye. I sipped tea from a thermos, feeling content, awed, and utterly insignificant.

BARCELONA, SPAIN

Barcelona had not been at the top of my travel list until I was invited to a friend's wedding. I fell in love at first sight. Like most loves, I still have no idea why. After the wedding, I backpacked through much of Spain, taking a route across southern France into Basque country, down to Madrid and then Andalusia and Extremadura. However, after many days, when my bus pulled up at Plaza Catalunya, I had a strange feeling that I had returned home. This was my city! And I promised I would come back to live there. Five years later, I moved there to study and work on my third novel. Even now, it remains a home city.

Yukon
LARGER THAN LIFE

UNESCO World Heritage in THE YUKON

On the banks of the Yukon River, in the remote Canadian sub-arctic, Tr'ondëk-Klondike has been officially inscribed by UNESCO, proudly joining Kluane National Park as the territory's second World Heritage Site, and its first cultural World Heritage Site.

Telling the story of the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation, and how they adapted to the advent of colonialism during the rise and peak of the Klondike Gold Rush, this collection of eight sites – some cultural, some architectural – come together to create a window into the Yukon's unique heritage. As such, visitors can take in everything from First Nations villages and burial sites to colonial forts and museums in the very heart of Dawson City itself – the epicentre of the late 19th-century gold rush.

Indeed, Dawson City – itself a national historic site – resembles a town frozen in time, with elaborate dance halls, wooden boardwalks and historic buildings that hark back to the late 1800s when some 100,000 prospectors arrived in the city seeking their fortune. Today, visitors to Dawson City can immerse themselves in a range of adventures, exploring the region's historical, cultural and outdoor delights. A visit to the Dänojà Zho Cultural Centre, where guests can discover first-hand the unique culture of the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, is a must between June and September. And, don't miss a guided tour of the Hammerstone Gallery in the excellent Dawson City Museum for the chance to further understand the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in perspective of the gold rush era.

Yukon's summer highlights

This fly-drive holiday from Wexas begins in Whitehorse – the Yukon's vibrant capital. Then, it's a journey of ceaseless beauty across magnificent landscapes, taking in the wildlife of Kluane National Park before hopping across the border to Alaska's Tok. Lastly, join the magnificent Top of the World Highway back into the Yukon, where you'll explore the gold rush heritage of Dawson City before completing your loop in Whitehorse.

Prices from £2,665 pp incl. flights, car hire, 9 nights accommodation & entry to the Yukon Wildlife Preserve. To book, visit **wexas.com/104118** or call **020 7858 5958**.

Saskatchewan Canada

Ranching in Saskatchewan

Set amid the wide-open prairies of Saskatchewan, and with everything from horseback rides to cowboy cookouts, La Reata Ranch offers its guests a traditional taste of Canada's Wild West.

Indeed, it's perhaps the ultimate cowboy experience, as the ranch crew brings you out on horseback to help look after the 250-or-so cattle that roam these vast plains. With some 5,000 acres of rolling grassland and nine miles of lake shore to explore, this is a true adventure in the great outdoors.

Naturally, between rides, a whole host of ranch activities await, from swimming and boating to canoeing and even water skiing. Then, there are traditional cookouts, games and steer roping in the day, while at night-time it's all crackling bonfires, live country music and some of the finest star gazing in Canada. You might even find yourself on a trip to the nearby White Bear Saloon for beer, hot wings and the chance to rub shoulders with the locals.

Depending on your route, you'll likely pair your ranch stay with the urban delights of Saskatoon, a vibrant city where you'll enjoy the likes of riverboat tours and walking trails along its tree-lined banks. Trendy neighbourhoods showcase craft breweries, a delicious culinary scene and the city's artistic character. The Remai Modern art gallery houses an impressive collection of Picasso's works.

Alternatively, Saskatchewan's capital, Regina, is packed with provincial history. Its centrepiece, the stately Saskatchewan Legislative Building, is set in one of North America's largest urban parks. The city is also home to the sole basic training academy of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. And, at the Royal Saskatchewan Museum, the world's largest Tyrannosaurus rex is on display. It's an eclectic mix.

Then, if you've time to extend your stay in Saskatchewan further, don't miss its pristine wilderness of rolling hills and rushing rivers. Spot bears and eagles among Prince Albert National Park's old-growth forests, while burrowing owls and roaming bison animate the gorgeous Grasslands National Park.

To find out more about Saskatchewan, call a Wexas specialist on **020 7838 5958**.