

#01 | February | 2022

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# Welcome to The Escapist

SPRING EDITION

At Secret Escapes, we hope that 2022 will continue to bring renewed confidence and ease around travel, whether it's around the world or around the corner. To mark this more optimistic time, we are delighted to share our first magazine issue with you, packed full of inspiring trip ideas for your next escape.

Extended periods at home have caused many of us to reflect on the importance of travel - the delight we get from exploring new places and experiencing different cultures - or simply sitting back in the sunshine and soaking up a change of scenery and temperature. Getting away helps to give us valuable perspective on life back home.

So dip into this issue and find new vistas to enjoy. Flirt with an eco-conscious interrail trip through the fjords of Norway, nibble your way along Northern Italy's foodie trail, or explore the jewels that Jordan has to offer. If your heart lies closer to home and you are feeling fresh, find a windswept British peak to conquer or embrace the unique delights of Jersey.

Wherever your next adventure takes you, we hope that this edition of the Escapist will offer inspiration for your next escape.

Happy Travels

**The Secret Escapes Team**

Photo by Shifaaz shamoon on Unsplash



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OUR TOP PICK: UK

# Inside Bristol: food, art & more

by Ellena Kkolos

## Fantastic food scene

**C**reativity and an independent spirit are in Bristol's DNA, and while urban renewal is on the rise, there's a vibrancy and edginess that'll never be lost. With everything from world-class restaurants and a famous film legacy, to legendary artists and musicians, and ground-breaking Brunel architecture, it's no wonder this centre of excellence is often voted one of the best places to live in the UK, and the happiest city in Britain. It also holds status as Britain's first ever green capital – the accolades just keep coming for Bristol!

Bristol's robust restaurant scene is incredibly diverse, whether you're keen for café eats or a slap-up Michelin-star meal. You're spoiled for choice when it comes to beautiful, seasonal menus, but Caper & Cure is a cut above the rest. An informal atmosphere complements ever-changing, British-inspired dishes, all crafted from the best local ingredients. Then, transport yourself to Andalucia at Paco Tapas, where the food is perfectly Spanish yet elevated to Michelin levels thanks to chef Peter Sanchez-Iglesias – the authentic dishes are made with a passion that's palpable.

At the forefront of Bristol's independent café scene since 2000, family-run Avenue Café is a suburban favourite. Their coffee is top quality, their friendly service is unmatched, and the interiors are Instagram-worthy. For 100% vegan bites, head to charming East Village in the heart of Clifton, where homemade sandwiches, cakes and other treats take centre stage.



Hyde & Co © Chris Cooper, [visitbristol.co.uk](http://visitbristol.co.uk)

## Delectable drinking

A trip to the UK's official cider capital wouldn't be complete without sampling the tipples it's famed for. There's nowhere more iconic than The Apple, a beloved Bristol experience where you can sip famously strong cider on a converted Dutch barge. If craft beers are more your bag, Left Handed Giant is a community-owned brewing company with a brewpub overlooking the floating harbour – expect an extensive selection of IPAs, pale ales and stouts to savour.

Hidden in plain sight, Hyde & Co is one of Bristol's first speakeasy bars, celebrated for its award-winning menu of NYC-inspired cocktails. Then there's its sister bar, The Milk Thistle, where eclectic decor meets excep-

tional cocktails for the discerning drinker. Another firm favourite is The White Lion Pub, and with the largest terrace in the South West showing off panoramic views of Clifton Suspension Bridge, it's easy to see why.

## Awe-inspiring art and film

Bristol is a privileged place to discover, connect with, and feel inspired by art. Not only does it celebrate international contemporary art, but it's renowned for an exciting urban art scene – it's the birthplace of Banksy after all, whose much-loved street art is hidden around the city. At one end of the historic harbour is the world-famous Arnolfini, a pioneering space presenting art that's innovative, inclusive and engaging. The other end is home to quirky Spike Island, where championing emerging and established artists in museum-scale galleries is the order of play, every day.

You'll be surprised by how much of Bristol you've already seen; it's a hotbed of production for film and TV, and a featured location in its own right – it's no surprise it garnered UNESCO City of Film status (one of just 18 in the world). The four times Academy Award®-winning Aardman Animations studio proudly calls Bristol home, while Britain's first media centre, the Watershed, offers a diverse film programme in a culturally upbeat venue.



Banksy's *Girl With The Pierced Eardrum*  
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Bristol Museum & Art Gallery  
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*“The Clifton Arcade is a unique place where independent shops sit amid Victorian splendour.”*

### Superb independent shopping

Bristol’s dynamic vibe extends to its burgeoning boutique shopping scene. The Clifton Arcade is a unique place where independent shops – think antiques, jewellery, and traditional sweets – sit amid Victorian splendour. Then wander the maze of quirky stalls and street food at St Nicholas Market. Established in 1743, it’s Bristol’s oldest, most loved market, and home to the largest collection of independent retailers in the city.

A leading store that curates the best of Scandinavian brands and UK designer makers, Mon Pote is a homeware lover’s dream, where beautifully designed products focus on craftsmanship and sustainability. Fancy Plants is a jungle in the city for plant enthusiasts. Deck out your home with indoor plants aplenty, or take part in a workshop and learn a thing or two about plant care.

*Photo: Bristol Old City and St. Nicholas Market by Martyna Bober on Unsplash*

WHERE TO STAY: BRISTOL

# Brooks Guesthouse

## Enjoy hip city slicking with a trendy boutique bolthole in the heart of Bristol

For too-cool living in the southwest’s largest hub of culture and creativity, the trendy Brooks Guesthouse excites with a superb location smack bang in the heart of Bristol. Offering guests a boutique home from home in the city’s historic Old Town, this former sixties office block oozes a hip but comfy style, with a young urban vibe and quirky features to boot. Rubbing shoulders with buzzy markets, historic churches, and converted Georgian banks, this award-winning abode boasts Bristol’s show-stoppers right on its doorstep. Bed down in individually designed guestrooms

that are full of character, with plantation-style shutters, wooden wall panelling, Farrow & Ball paints, and pretty Cole & Son wallpapers, while White Company toiletries wrap things up nicely. But the real highlight here? The hearty breakfasts, which are well worth getting out of bed for in the morning - think everything from a full English, eggs Benedict and French toast to home-made muesli, organic yogurts, and pastries. There’s also an honesty bar for anytime drinks, plus an outdoor courtyard for end-of-day sundowners when the weather’s nice.



**SCAN QR-CODE AND BOOK NOW**



OUR TOP PICK: ABROAD

# Discover Cyprus: Culture, beach & nature

by Ellena Kkolos

At the crossroads of three continents, Cyprus is an ancient treasure that lures people in with its multifaceted personality. Beyond sun-drenched stretches of sand, discover an island with a compelling story, captivating culture, rugged landscapes, and mesmeric tales of mythology all woven within its rich tapestry. There's a long and complex modern-day history, too – after a 1974 invasion by Turkey, the island was split in two, and it remains that way today. From warm Cypriot hospitality and stunning beaches to ancient sites and sleepy mountain villages, experience all that this small but mighty island has to offer.

## Picture-perfect beaches

Caressing sunshine is one of Cyprus' greatest natural resources, and where better to bask in the sun than on the beach. Enjoy endless summers in all corners of the island, starting with Paphos. Coral Bay Beach is a Blue Flag beauty popular with surfers. If you fancy escaping the tourist trails for something more unspoiled, the awe-inspiring Akamas Peninsula is one of the island's least inhabited areas. Here, embrace unending blue-aquamarine waters with a boat ride to beguiling Blue Lagoon.



*“From warm Cypriot hospitality and stunning beaches to ancient sites and sleepy mountain villages, experience all that this small but mighty island has to offer.”*

*Picture-perfect views at the Akamas Peninsula*



*The ruins of Ancient Kourion*

On the edge of Cape Greco National Park in the eastern part of Cyprus you'll find Konnos Bay, where craggy cascades lead down to crystal-clear blue waters. Then, cross the cease-fire line and embark on a scenic journey to the pristine Karpaz Peninsula: from Famagusta to the island's northernmost tip, discover 80 kilometres of deserted stretches and abundant nature.

## Ancient history

For a tiny island, Cyprus has a grand old history. There's a generous sprinkling of archaeological sites, Byzantine churches, and monasteries among the landscape, not to mention tales as old as time. Aphrodite's Rock in Kouklia is one such enthralling tale, where legend has it the goddess of love and beauty rose from the water in 1,200 B.C. to begin her life. Further west in the village

of Episkopi is the ancient Kourion kingdom, famed for its mosaics and amphitheatre. Next, discover Kykkos Monastery, located in mountainous Marathasa Valley – dedicated to the Virgin Mary, this is the island's wealthiest, most lavish monastery.

A trip to the fortified capital, Nicosia, is a lively history lesson in itself; it's the world's last divided capital, with a Greek Cypriot south and occupied Turkish north. Step back in time with a visit to Kyrenia, the jewel in the crown of the Turkish territory, where the postcard-perfect harbour, Belapais village, and hilltop Saint Hilarion Castle await.



*Gorgeous mountain villages await...*

### Cosmopolitan cool

It's not all sprawling sunshine and history lessons here – city slicking is made easy thanks to cultural hubs dotted across the island. Limassol is Cyprus' good-time town, with a vivacious character that's easily absorbed: cosy bars and traditional tavernas line Saripolou Square's authentic old streets, while the striking new marina is a luxe step into the future with its superyachts and villas.

Most people treat the port city of Larnaca as a fleeting pit-stop before moving on, but it's a destination in itself. Alongside its history, like Agios Lazarus Church and Larnaca Fort, you'll find an alluring contemporary flair. Stroll along the beachfront Finikoudes Promenade, before heading to the lively Old Town for cocktails. Then there's Mackenzie for sleek wining and dining, plus late-night entertainment.

### Natural beauty

Protected national parks collide against the coastline, while pine-clad mountains and rugged wine-growing regions juxtapose against fabled ruins. Snow-capped in winter and a break from the searing summer heat, adventures await in the Troodos Mountains. Visit charming villages like Omodos and Kalopanayiotis, discover Millomeri Waterfall and Caledonia Falls in Platres, and witness Kakopetria's pretty architecture. Then head to the highest point in Cyprus for sprawling views, Mount Olympos.

Wine has been part of Cyprus' identity for over 5,000 years, with legendary Commandaria – the world's oldest wine – taking centre stage. Visit

the stunning Pitsilia wine region to savour a taste of the lauded grape at family-run Tsiakkas Winery, and Ekfraseis Winery. Fancy a change of scenery? Steer yourself south to Larnaca, where you'll get to witness migratory birds and flamingos at the expansive Larnaca Salt Lake.



*Vineyards on the island of Cyprus*

WHERE TO STAY: AYIA NAPA

# NissiBlu Beach Resort

## Lose yourself in luxury at a sumptuous five-star beach resort

Envelop yourself in utter luxury at five-star NissiBlu Beach Resort, where deluxe beachfront living is taken to new levels, and an endless expanse of Mediterranean Sea is to be admired. Set on the captivating Ayia Napa coastline, this property is perfectly primed to please the most discerning of travellers. Coupling its famous setting with scintillating decor and an air of modern elegance, this impressive property offers the perfect sea-view retreat for a few superb days of sun, sea, and unrestrained relaxation. With no fewer than six

restaurants and bars on hand for all-day dining, in a variety of unique settings, your tastebuds will be tantalised into infinity. Then there's the striking Genesis Spa, where you can forget all your stresses with a full head-to-toe pampering. Retreating to the comfort and privacy of your accommodation is an effortlessly elegant affair, where the interiors have been beautifully designed to offer guests a stylish yet serene experience - treat yourself to a room with full sea views, for an even greater reason to get out of bed each morning.



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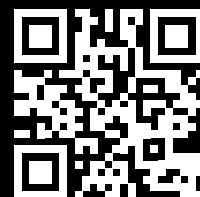
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# How to visit Machu Picchu

by Peter Croucher

When the Spanish sailed over to Peru in 1532, it marked the decline of the Incan Empire. The conquest spread far and wide, and the colonisation of another South American country began. The Incas faded into history, as did their greatest achievement: Machu Picchu, a marvellously constructed and awe-inspiring fortress. Abandoned at the time of the Spanish Conquest, the formidable hilltop citadel fell into obscurity — and thank goodness, because it may not be standing today if it hadn't. For 400 years, it remained untouched until its rediscovery in 1911; another hundred years later, Machu Picchu is now one of the Wonders of the Modern World. Its history for the most part remains shrouded in mystery, which has only increased its touristic appeal to the masses. If you're planning a visit to this iconic Incan landmark, then you should know there's a right way and a wrong way to approach this UNESCO World Heritage site. Read our handy tips to make sure that your walk through history is as smooth as the worn-out steps of Machu Picchu itself.

## Dig a little deeper

Machu Picchu is the bucket-list destination in Peru, but how much does the average Joe really know about it? Get the most out of your visit by taking some extra time to learn about Incan history, and explore Peruvian culture first before rushing in to snap your photos. This is easy enough to do, as visits to Machu Picchu often coincide with city stops in Cuzco or Lima, both vibrant destinations in their own right. Peru's capital will showcase the best of its cuisine and heritage, both shaped by European colonies through the centuries but remaining distinctly unique. Cuzco, on the other hand, leaves the chaos behind while brimming with antiquity and culture. As the gateway to Machu Picchu, Cuzco offers any traveller plenty of context around the fortress, and your visit will feel more valuable in the long run. It'll also give you ample time to acclimatise to the higher altitude, before you begin your ascent along the Inca Trail.

## Don't wing it

There's plenty of fun to be had in spontaneity, but not when it comes to one of the most popular historic sites in the world. Leave that you-only-live-once philosophy at home and make sure you plan your visit with care. Machu Picchu has a limit of 2,500 visitors a day, and tickets sell fast: be sure to get yours in advance. It's also essential that you visit with a guide, so do your research and book with a reputable company. Knowing how much time you have is also important: are you in it for a whistle-stop day-tour of the citadel, or eager to embark on a week-long hike along the Inca Trail and its fascinating archaeological stops along the way?



## Fancy a lie-in?

They say the early bird catches the worm, but not at Machu Picchu. Most tourists arrive for the 6am opening, and in the past there have been hundreds of people queuing to get in as soon as possible, expecting glorious sunrise shots over the ancient citadel. Well, the early start may not be worth it, after all: there's no guaranteed sunrise, and often the morning mist obscures those coveted insta-shots. Instead, book an afternoon slot, when there are usually fewer people and the sunlight guarantees better snaps for the 'gram. Oh, and the alpacas. You mustn't forget a selfie with the alpacas.



## Read the (metaphorical) rulebook

This might sound obvious, but in the moment it might be tempting to push the boundaries set out by the officials and guides you're with. Not only has the pandemic caused changes to the way Machu Picchu can be visited, but the increased tourist footfall in recent years has also called for a major overhaul of visiting rules. To prevent further deterioration caused by our relentless wanderlust (and the odd overenthusiastic tourist climbing onto buildings for a daring photo opportunity), there are now four organised routes around the site, followed by all tours and guides. So, while there won't be any more roaming through courtyards and running your hands along ruined walls, more than enough magic remains to make this a tantalising trip. There's a myriad of majestic gates, half-tumbled temples, and imperfect palaces to transport you back 400 years, and that's without mentioning the dramatic mountain backdrop and roaring rush of the river 500 metres below completing the scene.

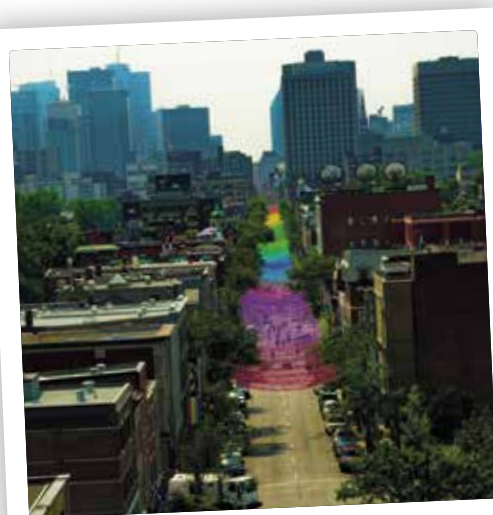
# Snapshots

by Rosie Mulford

Travelling as an LGBTQ+ person can be tricky, but there are many places across the world that are friendly to LGBTQ+ people. These countries have all proven themselves to be places where people of all gender identities and sexual orientations can venture loud and proud.

## 05 Canada

Not long after the Netherlands became the first country to legalise gay marriage in 2001, provinces across Canada began to follow suit, starting with Ontario and British Columbia in 2003. LGBTQ+ friendliness and the legalisation of gay marriage undeniably correlate—if a country's attitudes are liberal enough to be one of the early proponents of gay marriage, that country tends to be a pretty safe place for LGBTQ+ people to visit. For a getaway in Canada, there's no better place to start than Toronto, which is home to the country's largest LGBTQ+ community and one of the world's biggest Pride parades, attended by over a million people every year. Almost every one of Canada's large cities has a gay village—from Toronto's Queer West Village and Church and Wellsley neighbourhoods to Montreal's Le Village Gai, home to the rainbow-clad Beaudry Metro station. Looking for a few gay sights amongst your sightseeing? Toronto's Glad Day Bookshop certainly deserves a visit.



## 04 Malta

Looking for a balance of historical sights and swoon-worthy beaches? Malta gets a check mark on both fronts. According to research, this little island is the second most LGBTQ+ friendly place on earth, so you'll be able to escape into its incredible landscapes with little worry. This melting pot of cultures has been occupied by many different empires over its long history, bringing a combination of cultures together into one small space—so it's no surprise it's one of the most welcoming and tolerant places in the world. Malta has done a complete 180 in the last 10 years. Back in 2013, divorce was illegal here, but then the left-wing Labour party stepped into power and passed a slurry of laws, including anti-discrimination and adoption rights for LGBTQ+ people, and the legalisation of gay marriage, within their first two years. There are few better ways to dive deep into Malta than a walking tour around the capital of Valletta with a local guide, who will take you through its fascinating history of diversity.



## 03 Denmark

Scandinavia is well known for being liberal and welcoming to LGBTQ+ people, and in fact, Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Finland, and Denmark all grace the list of the top 25 most LGBTQ+ friendly places in the world. Denmark's capital, Copenhagen, is as colourful physically as it is metaphorically, and is home to an LGBTQ+ film festival every October. Beyond this, culinary delights abound, cosy cocktail bars are abundant and Copenhagen's top sights are at your fingertips. Tivoli Gardens and Nyhavn are unmissable, and if you want to take in a slice of LGBTQ+ history, pay a visit to Centralhjørnet, the oldest recorded gay bar in the world.



## 02 Uruguay

Now let's fly across the Atlantic Ocean to the Southern Hemisphere. Uruguay certainly won't be the first country that comes to mind when you consider an LGBTQ+ friendly getaway, but it is by a long shot the most progressive country in South America—it's also one of the most sustainable countries on earth, with almost 100% of its electricity being carbon-free. Many will know Uruguay as the ranch capital of the world—its flat, rolling plains are perfect for cattle ranching, so outdoor adventures, like horse riding and hiking, should certainly be on the cards here. But there's much more going on too; the old towns of Montevideo and Colónia del Sacramento are charming for wandering on warm evenings, wineries are abundant and Tango lessons are on hand when you want to get up close and personal.

## 01 Taiwan

Taipei, the capital of Taiwan, is most definitely an LGBTQ+ haven. It was the first country in Asia to legalise gay marriage and is home to Asia's largest Pride parade, a pretty big feat on a continent where many countries do not have LGBTQ+ rights or protect LGBTQ+ people. There are so many must-sees in this fascinating country: Taroko National Park, accessible from Taipei on a scenic train journey, the rainbow houses of Taichung, a real-life anime fantasy in Jiufen, the inspiration for Studio Ghibli's Spirited Away and the Tu'er Shen temple, located in the Yonghe District of Taipei, which pays homage to a Chinese deity who is responsible for love between homosexual people.

TAKE ME NORTH, TAKE ME SOUTH:

# The romance of the interrail

by Oliver Jones

*“...there really isn't a greater joy nor romance than hopping on a carriage at St Pancras and speeding into the heart of Europe”*

## We need to talk about travel

It's time to ditch the short haul hops at 30,000 feet; the views may be good, but they're fleeting, and there really isn't a greater joy nor romance than hopping on a carriage at St. Pancras and speeding into the heart of Europe.

It's not just the emissions you'll spare (14 grams of CO2 emissions per passenger mile vs 285 for flying, according to the European Environment Agency); interrailing is slow travel, and slow travel offers surprising rewards. Longer holidays, less often, minimise our environmental impact, and allow us to explore multiple destinations in a very different way. Plus, night trains are returning across Europe over the coming years, promising even more comfortable progress across the continent. So, with that settled, what exactly could one of these trips offer?

**Well, let's answer a question with a question; north or south?**

*Antwerpen-Centraal Station*

## The north

**Stops: Amsterdam, Lübeck, Copenhagen, Gothenburg, Oslo, Bergen, Lillehammer, Trondheim, Östersund, Stockholm, Copenhagen, Hamburg, Antwerp**

Head north. Steam through the flat lowlands of the Netherlands, across the shoulder of Germany, cross bitter seas and wild waters and climb into the mountains and fjords of Norway. Sounds good, doesn't it?

After a morning of chugging away from the island, alight at **Amsterdam**. Swap the carriage for a boat, exploring the historic and timelessly beautiful Canal Ring. Stop off at one of the city's famed Brown Cafes, preferably Cafe Brandon, a spot that has resisted any change for over 40 years. Don't miss the famous Bloemenmarkt (flower market), nor the Waterlooplein flea market for an easy bargain, and perk up your afternoon with a jenever at the iconic Wynand & Focink Proeflokaal. Feeling dizzy? Time to hop back on the train for a snooze.

**Lübeck**, once the ravishing capital of mercantile power the Hanseatic League, still offers a glimpse at its esteemed heritage. Spires and towers dominate the cityscape. Start at the famous Holstentor gate, a marvellous medieval creation with a good museum inside. Afterwards, pop into Cafe Nederegger, famous for its pure marzipan nut cake. Pull away from Lübeck station, and the high-speed ICE train soon boards a ferry. The crossing lands in Denmark, a triumph of sleek European engineering.

*Holsten Gate, Lübeck, Germany*



*Canal Ring, Amsterdam*

Arrival into **Copenhagen** starts with a cheap bite to eat. Outside of the central station is an unassuming hot dog stand, a delicacy here that is a bonafide local hit. This one in particular, John's, is the best (and cheapest) in the city. After your fill of bread and meat, explore the colourful harbour, bustling shopping streets and curious, hippy commune of Christiania. For more hippy fun, rail north to Sweden's second city, **Gothenburg**. Packed with fantastic art galleries and museums, get your fill of canalside culture before exploring the old leftfield district of Haga. Pretty wooden workers' houses and cobbled streets now offer bustling boutiques and Swedish cafe culture. On to Oslo, the capital of Norway.

Notably lauded as the greenest city in Europe, **Oslo** is a powerhouse of eco cool. Don't miss the impressive Viking long ships at Vikingskipshuset, before Michelin dining and some of the best nightlife in Europe. The tracks lead further west, where the elevation shoots up and the mountains, fjords and ravishing coastline come into view. **Bergen**, Norway's second biggest city, is a world away from the modernist skyline of Oslo. Fringed by snowy mountains, its seafaring heritage is visible in the pretty wooden alleyways of Bryggen and its fish market. Make a detour for the impressive 12th-century Fantoft Stave Church and a heady ride on the Mount Floyen Funicular, before exploring the fjords around the town.



*Trondheim Wharf*

In **Lillehammer**, outdoor lovers flock to this pretty town, nestled in mountains and lakeland. Explore the small town charms before arriving in **Trondheim**, our most northerly stop. This photogenic and historic fishing town is a great mix of cultural experiences and outdoor adventures, with museums and cafe culture competing with the temptation to explore wilderness trails around the town.

With Abba ringing in your ears, rail along to **Östersund**, a remote yet bustling Swedish town that's a bit of a foodie landmark. There's a clutch of great restaurants to try, but best is to take the free ferry across the lake to Tivarsgårds Mejeri, where lake and mountain views complement farm to table dining. Leave the chilly north behind and arrive in the capital, **Stockholm**. This most trendy of European cities offers a wealth of cool and collected experiences, whether it's chic cafe culture at Cafe Pascal or Scandi style at ArkDes design centre. There are old-world charms in abundance too; take a stroll through pastel-coloured Gamla Stan old town for your dose of cobbles and gables.

Take a breather in **Copenhagen** (or hop across to pretty **Malmö** for something a bit different) before entering the Hafencity of **Hamburg**, home to the heady delights only a bustling port town can offer. Side step the modern city streets with their identikit German-ness and head for the hedonistic trappings of St Pauli. Home of the wonderfully

lefty football team, sink into historic dive bars like the affable zum Silbersack, its twenties neon-frontage a beacon of historic port revelry. Join a chorus of classic schlager tunes interspersed with renditions of the Time Warp, before trotting along the loud neon signage of the Reeperbahn. Dine at the last-remaining dockers cafe, Oberhafen Kantine, which tilts dramatically to the left. Hearty Saxonian dishes with an Astra pils finish the evening impeccably. Speed now through the countryside to our final destination - Antwerp.

**Antwerp** is the Belgian capital of cool. Synonymous with daring fashion and university chic, killer clubs and artsy atmosphere, it is – in the same breath – old-school and wonderfully picturesque. If you're feeling flush, head to the Diamond Quarter followed by dinner at The Jane, a two-Michelin-star restaurant inside an old chapel, before a late-night dash back across the Channel.

*Antwerp Guildhalls*



## The South

**Stops: Avignon, Rome, Cinque Terre, Florence, Venice, Milan, Como, Lyon, Paris**

Provence beckons. A mad dash south begins, rolling through the bucolic French interior. Before long, the vineyards and (if you time it right) deep purple lavender fields fill the carriage window. Step out of **Avignon's** central station and make for the grand city gates, heading deep into the medieval heart of this gorgeous Provençal town. If you've ditched the (longer) sleeper train, it's probably time for aperitivo. Head for the small square by Église des Célestins where locals gossip outside bars and kids slurp late night gelatos. In the morning, explore the town's famous residence, the Palais des Papes, the controversial seat of the Pope during the Western Schism. The grand palace is the top of an opulent cake; Avignon is a charmingly well-heeled highlight of the region.

Back to the 'Gare' for a not-so-speedy shunt down to the glamorous Italian Riviera. Depending on how you coordinate your trains, a quick dip into Marseille, Nice or Gerona helps to break up the journey. The journey is worth it, as one affirming glance at **Cinque Terre** will prove; make that five glances. These curious and irresistibly beautiful fishing villages are the stuff of your wildest wanderlust dreams, no matter how 'discovered' they may be. The gentle pastel colours have not faded, nor the marvellous paths that wind across dramatic seacliff to sea-cliff, connecting the villages.



*The Parthenon, Rome*

After a scenic chug along the Riviera coast line, on to **Rome**. Leaving Rome Termini, explore the city on foot. Rome denies any of the modern comforts when it comes to public transport; when it tries, it fails, as is palpably on display on the two line metro map for the city. And the reason is charming to its core; ancient Rome bursts from the streets and piazzas at every turn, halting modernity begrudgingly. The Forum and Colosseum, Trajan's Column, the Pantheon, the temple-complex-turned-cat-sanctuary-&-bus-stop; all are wondrous monuments with a peculiar urban immersiveness, and utterly beguiling. Away from the ancients, an intoxicating mix of style and substance pervades. For cheap eats in touristy areas, head to humble Pastificio near the Spanish Steps. €4 gets you a plate of the day's pasta and a tippale of wine. In the evening, imbibe in trendy Trastevere, but be sure to grab a takeaway tiramisu from legendary pasticceria Bar Pompei for afters.

*Cinque Terre*

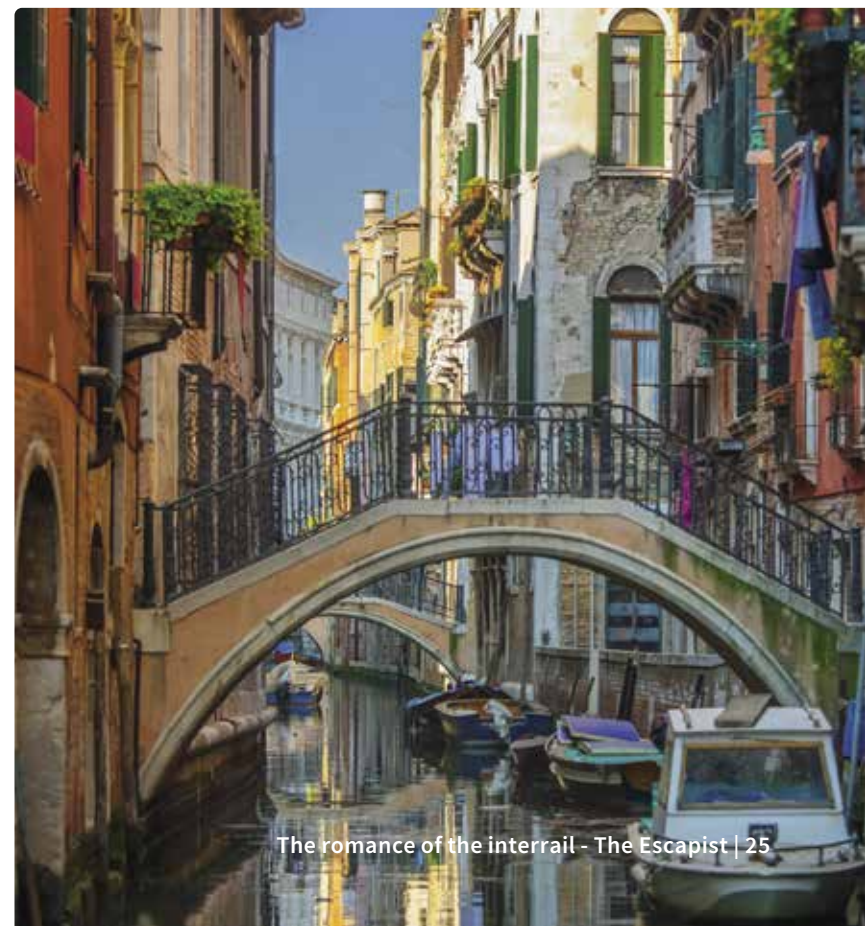
*Duomo di Firenze, Florence*



Head north to the home of the Renaissance, **Florence**. Start at the Uffizi Gallery, where the finest Renaissance works adorn the walls, before heading across the Ponte Vecchio for a clamber to the finest view in the city: piazzale Michelangelo. Hawkers sell beer and wine (cheaper to bring your own) just in time for exquisite Tuscan sunsets over the city's iconic Duomo. In the day, don't miss the best local's lunch spot in the heart of the city - Trattoria Sergio Gozzi. It's a surprisingly rustic and authentic affair, with the option of sampling that famous Florentine steak. Foodie treats also hide at the lauded sandwich shop All'antico Vinaio and at Italy's most famous gelato joint, Vivoli. Belly full, sink back into your carriage and head for Venice.

Train is the best way to arrive in this remarkable city. You forego the horrors of the airport shuttle bus stop, arriving instead to the sleekly-designed station, where your first glimpse of **Venice** will include all the gondola and canal iconicism you could ever want. Time to get lost. Hop over waterways, past looming palaces, soaking up the ravishing scenes. Head to Al Timon for down-to-earth early evening cicchetti and spritz, or if you're near the Rialto Bridge, sip a stupendously cheap and quality wine from the diminutive street-side bacari al Merca. Seafood is king, so head to Venice's oldest osteria Al Bacco for squid ink pasta. You'd be a fool not to explore Basilica di San Marco, the interior is an absolute triumph of ecclesiastical grandeur.

*Typical canal views in Venice*





Head across northern Italy for a dip into fashionable **Milan**. Shopping should be your main concern, chasing the well-heeled nonnas into boutiques and down marbled shopping streets. Soak up the Liberty Style townhouses, the magnificent medievalness of the Duomo, and grab a bottle at Milan's stalwart enoteca, Cotti. Dine heartily on Milanese specialities like cassoela or foiole at the rustic and famous Antica Trattoria della Pesa.



*Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II, Milan*

After all that city hopping, head out for a breather at Lake Como, the Hollywood starlet of northern Italy. This is where those new Milanese outfits flaunt themselves. The return leg draws closer. Leave Italy in a whirlwind, high speeding your way to that sun-kissed confluence, the criminally overlooked city of **Lyon**. This is France's foodie capital, after all, a culturally rich smorgasbord, an amuse bouche into the culinary depths of French gastronomy. Start with the homely bouchons, the down-to-earth bistros where locals lunch. Le Café des Fédérations is a classic of the genre, with Daniel et Denise also a community hit. For something a little grander, Le Grand Réfectoire is a shout. There is much to see and do around pretty Lyon, though you'd be forgiven for feasting your way to your next appointment with the station platform.

*Cathédrale Saint-Jean-Baptiste, Lyon*



*Cafe culture in pretty Montmartre, Paris*

There's a sadness we all feel when a holiday slowly winds to its end. That's why this loose, at times wonderfully impractical itinerary finishes in **Paris**. Whether it's a quick overnight or another week of indulgence, Paris is a fantastic final hoorah to such an ambitious adventure. For immersive views head to the Promenade Plantée, the viaduct-turned-aerial gardens. Jump off for a classic jambon beurre at formica haven Chez Aline. Dinner should be typically un-parisienne, with a visit to Chez Omar, the famed north African brasserie that will rekindle your love of couscous in ways you could never have imagined. Head to Belleville for a tippie, specifically at Aux Folie, Edith Piaf's former haunt.

Bonne nuit. The rest of the city is yours to play with; **London's** is just over an hour away, but what's the rush?

*Where it all started - St Pancras, London*



CLOSE TO HOME,  
FAR FROM ORDINARY

# Jersey: pearl of the Channel Islands

*by Peter Croucher*

**I**t's been a curious two years for travel. We've had to adapt to changes, traffic lights, tests, and all sorts of other bamboozling rules that make travelling seem scary or not worth it. Well, spoiler alert: it's always worth it. If you're still a little wary of planning a far-flung trip, but you're hankering for something new and unexpected, then Jersey is the perfect destination for an adventurous staycation. It's wonderfully easy to get to, whilst still feeling like a bit of an adventure. Once there, discover a dramatic coastline, mile upon mile of peaceful country lanes, fabulous flavours, and a history brimming with fascinating stories.



## Sink your toes into Jersey's soft sands

Jersey proudly boasts the sunniest climate of the British Isles, so it's understandable why people flock here in the summer to bask in European-style weather. All around the coast, sandy beaches and rocky coves crown the island, and each has a distinctive and alluring personality; and thanks to Jersey's petite size, you'll never be further than a 10- or 15-minute drive away from the beach in any direction, meaning you can spend more time doing the things you love (even if that thing is nothing but lying on a beach).

From the ever-popular St. Brelade's Bay to sleepy Bonne Nuit Beach in the north, there's a slice of paradise for any traveller. Explorers will be intrigued by the network of caves at Plémont Beach, while couples might want to stroll hand in hand down St. Ouen's three miles of soft golden sand. Families, too, will feel a world away from the grey skies and pebbled beaches of Brighton: in fact, all thoughts of England will be left behind on the east coast of the island, as views of a distant France make themselves known on

the horizon. It goes without saying that the further south you go, the warmer the weather you'll find: and Beauport Beach entices visitors by having some of the best weather on the island, and is perfectly sheltered from the wind. In fact, plenty of the beaches are protected by Algarve-esque cliffs, making them an ideal spot to enjoy sun-soaked days not too far from home.

One of the most astounding and unexpected surprises of Jersey, you'll find, is Les Ecrehous Reef. Six miles from Jersey's sublime shores, this breathtaking reef could have been plucked from the Indian Ocean due to its aquamarine hues and diversity of marine life – apart from the old fishermen's huts that sprout from the sandy coves, huddled together like clamshells. On the waters themselves, you can sail around the reef and spot bottlenose dolphins leaping over the waves as seagulls soar overhead. It's this thrilling blend of the familiar and unexpected that makes Jersey such a jack-in-the-box of surprises, and a go-to destination for 2022.

© Photo: Andy Le Gresley



*F.l.t.r.: Local food, Vineyards and jam jars at La Mare Wine Estate © Visit Jersey*

*“It would be unforgivable not to mention Jersey’s famed cream teas, made so special by the best and most local dairy products.”*

## Take a bite of Jersey’s fine flavours

It’s a fine thing, to be straddling the borders of two nations: you get to bring the best of each to the table, and when it comes to Jersey’s cuisine, we mean this quite literally. From cosy pubs and inns that pop up along winding country roads, to freshly caught lobster served with buttery Jersey Royals, there’s something at once familiar but unique about the taste sensations available.

For many, Jersey is a living and breathing food market, with an abundance of colour and flavour to suit any palate: you’ll never have to stray far to find a plate of happiness, whether that be at a hotel restaurant, a farm stall, a food market or beach diner. A specialty of theirs? Jersey Oysters, cherry-picked from their beds after being cleansed by the tidal range that reaches the island’s shores. Head to Gorey’s harbourside to taste some of the best seafood on offer while gazing out towards Mont Orgueil Castle and Grouville Bay. Elsewhere, The Seymour Pub impresses with equally sumptuous seafood fare; in fact, you can even see the bay where the oysters are farmed from here, and at low tide you can walk among the beds. And it’s not just the seafood that appeals, either: hearty roasts

with French flair grace the menus of many a pub, just as British ales and beers jostle for space next to Cabernet Sauvignons and French Merlots.

It would be unforgivable not to mention Jersey’s famed cream teas, made so special by the best and most local dairy products. Put a rural spin on your cream tea and visit Greenhills Country House Hotel, where you can nibble on dainty finger sandwiches in the beautifully landscaped gardens; or add a bit of Tuscan glamour to your cream tea at La Mare Wine Estate, where you can dine overlooking their vineyards and slather the estate’s homemade jam onto your scones. For an edgier take on afternoon tea in St. Helier itself, Bohemia’s Afternoon Tea is a must (add bubbles for some extra sparkle - you’re on holiday, after all).

## Deep dive into St. Helier’s history

A tiny island it may be, but you could fill a library with the books that could be written about Jersey’s treacherously fascinating history. From ancient ruins older than Stonehenge to 15th-century abbeys and maze-like war tunnels, see for yourself a chequered past that’s left its legacy upon the island’s landscape.

If you’re travelling over by ferry, one of the first sights to greet you is Elizabeth Castle, an imposing fortress guarding the entrance to the harbour. The castle, a former 16th-century hermitage-turned-abbey, was built under Queen Elizabeth I’s orders and sits on an islet jutting out from the mainland. During low tide, you can walk along the causeway and watch the medieval turrets grow larger as you approach, but most of the time a water taxi will be needed to ferry visitors over. Once there, two fascinating museums take you on a journey through time, starting with the canonisation of a Frankish

missionary (fun fact: this is where St. Helier actually got its name from) and ending with World War II, where the Germans had occupied the castle and weaponised it.

Yes, Jersey has another unusual string to add to its bow: it’s one of very few British islands to have been occupied by the Germans during the Second World War. If you want to delve deeper into this part of history, then the Jersey War Tunnels are an absolute must (to be honest, you should probably visit anyway, lest we forget). Take a moment in the Garden of Reflection, wander along the War Trail, or let history come to life as you try to break out of an escape room. You’ll hear tales of ordinary lives lived under extraordinary circumstances, and leave with the words and stories of those who have walked through the Tunnels before you. Jersey’s history, like every other facet of the island, is unforgettable and unique, and will certainly enrich any holiday taken to this most curiously British of places.



*Mont Orgueil Castle © Visit Jersey*

*The ancient Dolmens of Jersey © Visit Jersey*



WHERE TO STAY: JERSEY

# The Club Hotel & Spa

## Bringing luxury to the forefront of Jersey

An all-in-one stay awaits at The Club Hotel & Spa, a beautiful boutique in the heart of St. Helier brimming with luxury and style. What makes this the hotel of our choice? Its unrivalled location for one, close to the boutique shops, cafés, and art galleries of the island's capital, as well as easy access to plenty of the brilliant beaches nearby. Closer to home, The Sunday Times-recommended Bohemia Bar & Restaurant dazzles with delightful and innovative cuisine, earning its Michelin stars for 17 years in a row now. There's a tempting tasting menu to sample, as well as a surprise six-course menu on offer,



and a selection of afternoon teas to boot (we mentioned the boozy cream tea earlier). For an all-out pampering experience, nothing sings of luxury like The Club Spa, a sanctuary of calm home to an indoor saltwater pool, a herbal steam room, and tranquil treatment rooms among other things. Another charming attraction is the Cocktail Roof Garden, which exudes a peaceful countryside air that reminds you of Jersey's gorgeous landscapes. With an open-air bar, relaxing music and friendly table service, it's the perfect place to while away a few hours with a gin and tonic in hand, enjoying the Jersey sun.

**SCAN QR-CODE AND BOOK NOW**



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SEASONAL SPECIAL

# Follow northern Italy's foodie trail

by Ellena Kkolos

When it comes to exemplary authentic cuisine, Italy's a bona fide food mecca. An exquisite and diverse country, it has a proud sense of regional identity - one that has led to famed, characteristic dishes in all corners of the country. Flavourful local produce is grown amid rolling landscapes, wine is made within aristocratic vineyards, and hearty recipes are passed down through generations. From Piedmont to Emilia-Romagna, embark on a sensory culinary tour and uncover the gastronomic secrets of this gourmand's paradise.

## Picturesque Piedmont

Start your culinary journey in northern Italy's Piedmont region. This foodie fantasyland has a particularly impressive culinary pedigree, with white truffles, anchovies, Castelmagno cheese, and some of the world's best wines on its roster - and you can drink it all up on this gourmet adventure.

Where better to begin than in the region's capital, Turin? This relatively under-the-radar hub has carved out a culinary name for itself, with a flourishing food scene that continues to grow, whether it's traditional street food or contemporary conscious cuisine. Savour sensational sourdough pizzas from Uagliò before heading to Enoteca



Local markets are always a treat for delicious regional produce

traditional osteria, while family-run Battaglino has a seasonal flair. For a contemporary touch, Zero Enoteca Conviviale is the perfect place to savour natural wines.



Views a-plenty at Langhe country vineyards

Alba is one of the best small towns in Piedmont, and a charming place to stroll and snack on specialities. Home of the fabled white truffle and the official 'truffle capital of the world', there's nowhere better to enjoy the distinctive taste of this delicious delicacy; visit family-run Tartufi Ratti in the heart of the historic centre, which sells quality truffles in a traditional environment. To wash it all down, head to Barolo just 20 minutes away, where you can cherish the tippie it's named after. Set in the Langhe Valley, sip on classic wine while soaking up the surrounding rolling countryside landscapes.

Turin, all domes, mountain backdrops and great food

Botz for good wine in a down-to-earth setting. If it's traditional gelato you're looking for, try Mara dei Boschi or Fiorio, while hearty north Italian dishes and a well-stocked wine cellar await at Scannabue.

From Turin, enjoy a scenic journey to the next stop on your foodie tour, Bra. The birthplace of the Slow Food Movement, this town has become somewhat of a gastronomic pilgrimage site, with its own University of Gastronomic Sciences in the heart of Pollenzo. Classic Piedmontese cuisine is custom here; Murevecchi is a truly



Follow northern Italy's foodie trail - The Escapist | 35



INTENSELY ITALIAN



FROM ITALY WITH LOVE



Riviera towns and villages are more than just a pretty picture..

### Italian Riviera idylls

The next stop on your journey through gastronomy is idyllic Liguria, Italy's answer to the Côte d'Azur. This may be the smallest region in Italy, but it has one of the most diverse regional cuisines in the country thanks to its privileged position, sandwiched between the mountains and the sea. From olive oil and pesto to focaccia and fresh seafood, you'll want to indulge in a taste of everything the Italian Riviera has cooked up.

The teeny tiny fishing village of Camogli is a post-card-pretty place where gorgeously coloured palazzi and houses line the craggy coastline. This relatively low-key location is the ultimate town to treat your tastebuds to focaccia like you've never tasted before - and the best place to do this is local institution, Revello Focacceria. This town is famous for its sunsets, so enjoy sundowners at Il Barcollo Camogli, all before heading to sea-view Ostaia da ò Sigù for fresh seafood - think prawns, mussels, and octopus. Journey across the headland to the crown jewel of the Italian Riviera, Portofino, where crystal-clear turquoise sea reflects the pastel facades of the buildings. This village takes high flying to new levels, with its true

Fresh seafood is par for the course along the Riviera



beauty best experienced from hilltop Castello Brown. Before setting off for the luscious hills, grace Gelateria Gepi with your presence for a scoop or two of traditional gelato. Having worked up an appetite after your scenic stroll, satiate the hunger pangs at Strainer, where evocative views of Liguria and fresh regional flavours go hand in hand - the raw scampi and prawns are a must-try dish. Next, make tracks for Rapallo. This town has an authen-



Rapallo, a down-to-earth coastal town with great food

tically Italian personality, and is brimming with Ligurian culinary revelations. Worthy of your attention is Parla-ComeMangi, a traditional deli-store with an artisanal touch, selling a handpicked selection of cheeses, meats, pasta, and wine. In the early evening, make a pit stop at laid-back Vincanto for a glass of wine in a casual al fresco setting. Then, fresh stuffed pasta and sensational seafood await at Hostaria Vecchia Rapallo.

## Enchanting Emilia-Romagna

A northern Italy culinary quest wouldn't be complete without visiting the epicentre of gastronomy, Emilia-Romagna, which is home to many of Italy's most famous foods, like the coveted Parmigiano Reggiano, balsamic vinegar, and Prosciutto di Parma.

Modena is a good place to start, as it's a town that's renowned for producing all three. There are also few places that hold pasta in such high esteem as Modena: tortelloni, tortelli, garganelli, and passatelli, just to name a few. Dine on cured meats and chunks of parmesan cheese, followed by fresh pasta at Trattoria Bianca, in a classic, laid-back setting, while Massimo Bottura's famous three Michelin-star Osteria Francescana is the place for artfully plated meat and fish dishes.

Known as the 'Food Valley', there's nowhere quite like UNESCO-bestowed Parma when it comes to tantalising your tastebuds, with the area boasting the highest number of certified food products in all the Emilia-Romagna land. Be prepared to be wooed by tradition at Ristorante Cocchi, where a father-son duo offers visitors a classic Parmigiano experience. Sitting just outside the centre, Ai Due Platani adopts the ambience of a typical country trattoria and a menu with a twist on the classics - an ink-red sparkling Lambrusco is the perfect pairing to any dish.

*Bologna, home of the ragu, is ravishingly beautiful*



*Cured meats, fresh pasta and parmesan cheese; heaven.*

Bologna is a mouthwatering final stop that you won't want to miss, with a culinary claim to fame that's significant thanks to ragu alla bolognese - it also has a long history with Italy's favourite dessert, gelato. Cremeria Santo Stefano and Galliera 49 are two of the best gelaterias in town, with flavours like ricotta and fig, and straciatella and chocolate-orange. For a truly authentic bolognese that's been cooked up with 30 years of culinary tradition, there's nowhere better than Trattoria Anna Maria.



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FIVE UNIQUE HOTEL EXPERIENCES

# Mother's Day edit

by Abbie Cohen

*When it comes to a special Mother's Day gift, few can beat the spoiling perks of a hotel getaway - particularly when paired with an experience all mums will love. With these escapes, offer the best kind of thank-you to the most important woman in your life on 27th March.*



## Pampering spa oasis in the New Forest

With its award-winning facilities and setting on the grounds of an 18th-century manor, Careys Manor Hotel excels as a rural spa destination. Go for an uplifting weekend featuring holistic treatments, a hydrotherapy pool, a temple studio and more. Spa days from £149, or book an overnight break on Secret Escapes.



## Creative escape on the Cornish coast

Relaxation is given a unique spin in the wilds of West Cornwall, where Primrose Cottage offers residential pottery courses to help unlock your inner artist - as well as get away from it all with a down-to-earth coastal experience. From £1,290 per person, per course, including meals and a guided excursion.



## Five-star fine dining in Manchester

Refurbished to an incredible standard, The Lowry Hotel's fine dining outpost is a no-brainer for culinary indulgence in central Manchester. Sleep in a sleek suite and feast on two AA Rosette-awarded flavours at the River Restaurant, which features plush decor, iconic views and a terrace.



## Cosy and characterful lodges in Herefordshire

Treat your mother to an idyllic country getaway in Eardisley, where Lomore Estate's lodges and cabins make for a very special escape - complete with a hot tub and fire pit. Take in the 20 acres of beautiful countryside and exhale as your everyday cares float away. Lodges from £140 for two, cabins from £200 for two on Secret Escapes.



## Afternoon tea with a view in the Big Smoke

Elegance knows no bounds at Middle Eight, an exceptional Covent Garden hotel where five-star refinement is given a modern twist. Served on The Balcony with views of the city below, the afternoon tea here is a decadent must-try. Perfect the experience with a stay in a superbly chic guest room or suite, bookable through Secret Escapes.

## GET TO GRIPS WITH GERMANY'S VIBRANT CULTURE IN A TALE OF TWO CITIES...

# Germany in two cities

### Munich

Bavaria's capital city centre is walkable, laid-back and spilling over with charm and traditional architecture. Munich is easy enough to explore in a long weekend, and with a plethora of designer boutiques and award-winning dining spots, this photogenic city offers style and substance in equal measure.

ter accompanies your Helles than a gravy-soaked pork knuckle or a platter of cured meats and pickles. For something a little more refined, the city's Michelin star restaurant scene is a million miles from sausages and sauerkraut. Highlights include the two-starred Tantris with its striking 1970s interior decor in an iconic building. For serious foodies, don't miss the locals' haunt, Viktualien-

of museums and galleries to unpick, like the esteemed Alte Pinakothek, filled with old masters, or the modern MUCA, which features contemporary works by Warhol and Banksy, and the Barbara Gross Galerie which focuses on emerging female artists. The city also boasts several lush outdoor spaces and few are prettier than the sprawling Englischer Garten, with its boating lake, beautiful walks and



© Alpenpanorama, Thomas Klinger, München Tourismus



© Schloss Nymphenburg, muenchen.travel



© English Garden, Francesco Carovillano, München Tourismus

### Bavarian Bites

In-the-know foodies flock to Munich for some of the most sought-after fine dining in Europe, plus the most convivial and delicious pub scene going. Beer halls are plentiful, and the traditional Bavarian cooking is as hearty as it is good value - our favourite, and one for locals, is the Augustiner Bräustuben. Nothing bet-

markt. Once a bustling place for locals to buy essentials for the larder, it has since grown into a must-visit destination for gourmands to sample the local delicacies of the region.

### Galleries & Gardens

Art lovers will be happy to hear there's no shortage of masterpieces to marvel at in Munich. There's a host

romantic waterfront dining at Seehaus restaurant. Better still is the local's gem, alpine river Isar. Walking the city and ogling the ornate Rococo churches and medieval old town is an easy pleasure, with rich cultural experiences at every turn. From beer hall to Michelin affair, what will your Munich trip look like?

### Frankfurt

Known by insiders as one of Europe's hidden gems, Frankfurt is packed with trendy bars and quaint restaurants, diverse cultural experiences and innovative design.

### Destination for design

Start with the pretty Altstadt, or old town. Here, colourful gabled homes in medieval style line small squares and narrow streets, filled with shops and cafes. Art and history lovers will be at home at the city's unique Museum Embankment. This lush area of green space and public parks along the river is punctuated by a whopping 26 renowned museums. The Städel Museum (Germany's oldest museum), the German Architecture Museum and the Museum of Applied Art are notable recommendations.

If you're the type of traveller who likes to go off the beaten path to seek out a city's up-and-coming areas, check out the Bahnhofsviertel, Gallus

and Nordend neighbourhoods. These are the go-to spots for creatives moving to the area, with frequent new openings. It's in these 'local' enclaves that you'll find some of the least traditional but also most edgy and unusual spots to dine and shop.



© Frankfurt am Main, Skyline, Francesco Carovillano

### Franks and Apples

From traditional food markets to conceptual restaurants, Frankfurt is a foodie hotspot.

Make a pit stop at the legendary Kleinmarkthalle, a famous indoor food market offering 160 stands under one roof. It's the perfect spot to taste local and regional delicacies, brought in fresh each day. If you're looking for a memorable dining experience, try Freitagsküche on a Friday evening for inventive dishes cooked by rotation of guest chefs. For something low-key and on the move, grab a fresh fish kebab from Dönerboot, the fast food boat that is for many a Main pilgrimage. For something historic, don't miss the city's famous apple wine. From as early as the 16th century, apple wine has been ingrained in Frankfurt's culture. This aromatic, low-alcohol tippel is traditionally drunk neat from a highball glass. With several dedicated apple wine pubs in the city, you'll be a fit-in Frankfurter in no time.

## Get me there!



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# How to plan the perfect year

by Emma McWhinney

## 03 March

What the Emerald Isle lacks in good weather, it makes up for with the warmth of its welcome; so head to **Dublin** for a pint (or five) of the black stuff and a craic-ing good time to honour St Paddy. Five days of Irish revelry kick off on 14th March, with the main parade on 17th set to be the biggest ever.



## 05 May

Rub shoulders with the glitterati with a trip to **Cannes** during its world famous festival. Each year, this French Riviera grande dame, with its glamorous nightlife, sensational yachts, Michelin-star dining and beautiful old town, welcomes the world's best in film for a week-long celebration.

## 04 April

Nobody reveres flowers more highly than the **Japanese**, especially in Spring's breathtaking cherry blossom season, when the country comes alive with delicate white and pink blooms. In Tokyo, head to Ueno Park or Shinjuku Gyoen National Garden to sip a sake and tuck into a bento box under the bud-laden trees.



## 06 June

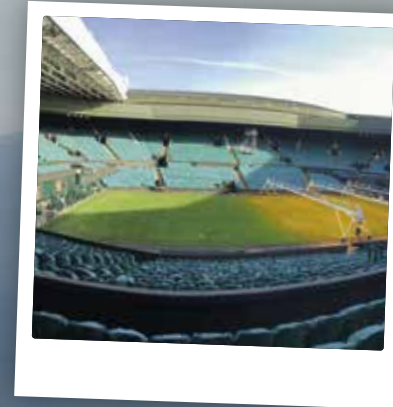
Witness opera in a truly spectacular setting at northern Italy's **Verona** Opera Festival (17th June - 4th September) which takes place in a 2,000 year old Roman amphitheatre, the largest open air venue in the world. Productions include Carmen, Nabucco, La Traviata, Turandot, and Aida.

## SECRET ESCAPES CALENDAR

*From penguins in Antarctica to opera in Italy - don't miss a thing in 2022 with our guide to the world's top events.*

## 07 July

Game, set, match! Head to the **Wimbledon Tennis Championships** for two weeks of strawberries, Pimms and tense head to heads (27th June-10th July). If you haven't been able to bag a court ticket, join the ground pass queues early and head to Murray Mound to watch the action on the big screen.

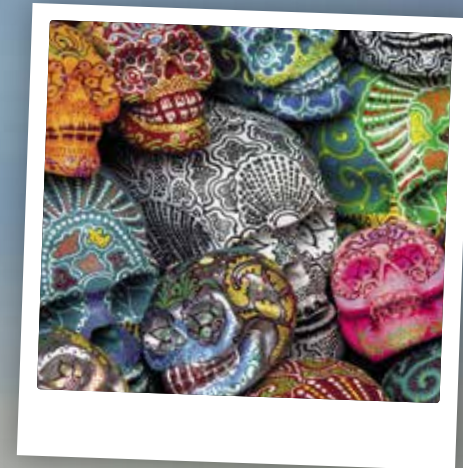


## 08 August

Celebrating its 75th anniversary, **Edinburgh's** world-famous fringe festival is a must-do this year (5th - 29th August). Spend your August venue-hopping your way through this magical city (with a whisky pit-stop or two) to experience the very best in the UK's up and coming theatre, comedy and music scenes.

## 09 September

Oompah bands, Bratwurst, Bavarian beer - the unholy trinity of hedonism. Having been cancelled for the last three years, **Munich's** Oktoberfest (17th September-3rd October) is set to make up for lost time; so don a dirndl, lace up your lederhosen and grab a mug of the locally brewed (and very strong) beer. 'Prost'!



## 11 November

If you love Hallowe'en, **Mexico's** Day of the Dead will be right up your alley. While Dia de los Muertos is a time for Mexicans to honour their deceased relatives, the celebrations are anything but morbid; festivities include street food, elaborate costumes and parades to celebrate the lives of loved ones.

## 10 October

As the nights draw in, brighten up darker days with a trip to **Iceland** to glimpse the elusive Northern Lights casting their laser-like streaks across the inky sky. Just a short flight from the UK and one of the best places to see the swirling pink and green clouds, it's time to get to work on that bucket list.



## 12 December

2022 sees a World Cup with a difference; the first one in the Middle East and the first to kick off in the winter. Football fanatics can soothe winter blues by heading to **Qatar**. With glamorous cities, sun-kissed beaches, desert safaris and more, the football might be coming home, but you might not want to.

## 01 January

With penguin hatchings beginning in December and temperatures 'soaring' to just below freezing in January, it's the perfect time to visit **Antarctica**. At this time of year, atomic bright sunlight lasts up to 24 hours a day, so you'll have plenty of chances to witness penguin chicks' 'happy feet' first hand.



## 02 February

Beat the winter blues with toe-tapping good vibes at a **Caribbean carnival**. Originally starting in Trinidad and Tobago, most of the islands now participate in this celebratory feast; so shake a tail feather and grab a rum to join revellers on the pure-white sands of the Dominican Republic, Curacao and more.

## NEW OPENINGS

# On our radar

by Emma McWhinney

*From a new Italian trattoria in London to an epic treehouse in the Peak District, these are the new UK openings that have caught our eye.*

## Hotels

### **Callow Hall, Ashbourne, Peak District**

Nestled within 35 acres of perfectly manicured grounds and with views over the majestic rolling hills of the Peak District, Callow Hall, which opened in September 2021, ticks every box for a quintessentially English getaway. Location aside, this 19th century manor house by the Wildhive Group perfectly blends the old with the new; expect boutique interiors from Isabella Worsely, acclaimed seasonal dining at the glass-fronted Garden Room, a Coach House spa, romantic woodland accommodation, and from January 2022, spectacular self-catering treehouses.

### **Wild Thyme and Honey, near Cirencester, Cotswolds**

Opening its doors in December 2021, Wild Thyme and Honey is the latest showstopper on the Cotswold's hotel scene. Near Gloucestershire's Cirencester, it's perfectly placed for visiting the honey-coloured villages that make the Cotswolds a British bucket list stalwart. Set within The Crown at Ampney Brook pub, this boutique inn is home to 24 pastel-hued bedrooms and suites; take your pick from a babbling brook view, a roll top bath, or your own living room. Whichever room you choose, you'll enjoy Bramley bath products, Nespresso machines and a decanter of home-brewed sloe gin.

### **Bodmin Jail Hotel, Bodmin, Cornwall**

Spending the night in the slammer has never looked so good. Dating back to the 11th century and converted into a prison 300 years ago, Bodmin Jail is a hotel with history. Six years and £55 million later, this derelict clink is now a luxury 70-room hotel with stylish suites, a fine dining restaurant and a cosy tavern. Playing to its penitentiary architecture, you'll find sweeping galleries, industrial chic design and four floors of exposed staircases. What's more, its mid Cornwall location is perfect for exploring the best of Kernow, with the Eden Project, the Lost Gardens of Heligan, Padstow and Perranporth Beach all within reach.



© Photo: Paul Winch-Furniss

## Restaurants

### **Brutto, Farringdon, London**

A slice of Florence has arrived in the heart of Farringdon. Expectations were high for Brutto, the newly-opened Tuscan-style trattoria from Polpo's Russell Norman. And luckily, with its rustic flavours and low lit ambience, this unpretentious spot hasn't disappointed. With a name meaning 'ugly', this spot is far from it; refined yet laid back, you'll find charming red and white check tablecloths, dark wood furnishings and authentic dishes including pork with caperberries, warming beef shin stew and of course, tiramisu. And the cherry on the Florentine? You can actually pre-book a table and it's dog friendly.



© Photo: Rebecca Hope

### **The Lawn, North Berwick, Scotland**

They say the grass isn't always greener, but at The Lawn, it is. Housed inside the newly refurbished Marine North Berwick Hotel, and headed up by former Masterchef: The Professionals contestant, Chris Niven, this beautiful restaurant opened in July 2021. Championing local Scottish produce, you'll be able to settle into a cosy, low-lit leather booth to tuck in to game from West Lothian Castle, seafood fresh off the Seacliffe fishing boats, home-grown vegetables and ingredients foraged from the surrounding area. Food aside, the East Lothian setting boasts atmospheric views of Firth of Forth, North Berwick golf course, Bass Rock and the beach.



© Mickeys Beach

### **Mickeys Beach, Exmouth, Devon**

It's not every day that a Michelin-star chef opens a laid-back, beachside restaurant with panoramic views of Devon's coastline and the Exe Estuary, but with Mickeys Beach Bar & Restaurant, Michael Caines has done just that. An ode to the relaxed beach tavernas of the Balearics and Greece, this coastal spot invites true escapism, with floor to ceiling windows, a large terrace and of course, the freshest seafood in town. Tuck into the catch of the day, charcoal grilled meats, rotisserie chicken or pizza from the revolving pizza oven come day or night. And to wash it all down? Sample a local Devonshire cider or three.

# The Greek mainland

## OFF-SEASON ADVENTURES

by Oliver Jones

**O**n the Greek mainland, there's a surprising collection of destinations to explore. White peaks and fir forest trails, winding pistes and hearty rural delicacies await in a clutch of mountainside villages. This is not your everyday Greece getaway; this is Greece in the off-season, where there's a truly remarkable set of gorgeous villages, towns and landscapes to explore.

### **Karpenisi**

Nestled in a picturesque mountain landscape, Karpenisi is an outdoor lover's dream. In winter, skiing on Mount Velouchi is a popular pastime, and the retreat back to Karpenisi promises cobbled streets, village restaurants with farm-to-table dining, and hearty winter classics like country sausage, wild boar, Katiki cheese and more. Don't miss the breathtaking road to Proussos Monastery, nor the incredible hikes amongst pine forests and waterfalls that dot the region.



### **Stemnitsa**

Set along the gorge of the Lousios River amongst the fir forests is this charming village. Traditional crafts, specifically silver and goldsmithing, have put this small spot on the map. Head for the Folklore Museum to discover the artisan heritage of the place, before ogling the remarkable monastery carved into the lofty rockface of the gorge.



### **Grevena**

This bustling town deep in the Macedonian countryside is a playground of outdoor adventure and foodie offerings. In winter, the local ski centre is a hotspot for snowborne activities, though even as the snow melts away, there's enough local beauty in the fir forests, gorges, mountains and iconic stone bridge to fill your days with beguiling hikes. Don't miss the town's famous mushroom picking, before sinking into a local restaurant and sampling the unique cuisine of this northern town.



### **Kastoria**

This charming lakeside town is filled with history and natural beauty. Around the lake, a trail winds through bird sanctuaries and natural wonders like Dragon's Cave, where subterranean lakes and stalactites add an unconventional beauty to your itinerary. The town is filled with Byzantine churches and aristocratic mansions, with local delicacies and homely tavernas filling your evenings.

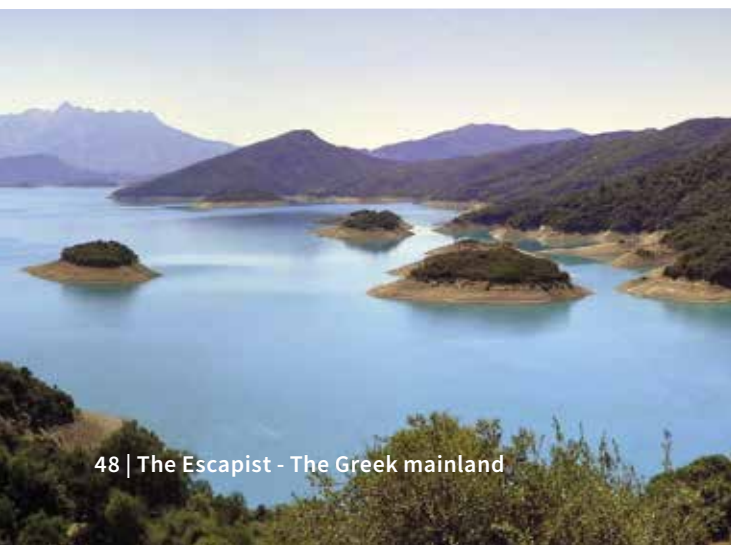
### **Kalabaka**

The landscape that surrounds this town is, with little hyperbole intended, utterly unique. Vast rock formations jut from the earth, with a sprawl of red-roofed townhouses spilling from their heights. The town offers all the tavernas and shops you could want, though most notable is the spiritual heritage of the place. This is base camp for Meteora, one of the most beguiling spiritual sites in the world. The monastery is, rather literally, built in the heavens, with ravishing views to be enjoyed along the magnificent trails that clamber up this rocky landscape.



### **Zagori**

A lesser-travelled region surrounded by mountains, Zagori is astoundingly beautiful. 46 age-old villages scatter around the area, some with only a handful of residents, their remoteness offering authentic encounters with traditional culture. Glacial lakes, rivers and gorges make the region an incredible hiking destination, with ancient stone bridges criss-crossing the myriad waterways. For a truly remote adventure, Zagori is one for the travel list.





**F**rom the highest highs of breathtaking Ben Nevis to the swooping valleys of the Lake District, the United Kingdom really is a treasure trove of outdoor pursuits. Snow-dusted and rugged or spilling with a wealth of green flora, each trail is unique and more entrancing than the next. Challenge yourself to a new adventure: don your best boots and waterproofs, and follow the call of the wild to these iconic mountaintops.

## AN OUTDOOR-LOVER'S GUIDE TO THE FINEST PEAKS IN THE UK

# Chasing mountains

*by Abbie Cohen*

### Ben Nevis, Scotland

Looking out across a sea of emerald elevations that form the Grampian Mountains, Scotland's highest peak affords surreal vistas quite unlike anywhere else in the United Kingdom. Standing tall at 1,345 metres, it's a whopping sight to behold and an even more challenging one to climb, with an average return journey time of eight hours. Its two varied routes are filled with natural wonder and designed for both intermediate and experienced hikers: the Càrn Mòr Dearg Arête involves a healthy dose of scrambling and steep climbs, while the more popular Mountain Track features a waterfall, zig-zagging trails and the Halfway Lake, a superb marker to stop and enjoy a well-earned snack.



### Snowdon, Wales

Craggy, raw and boasting a tapestry of breathtaking views, Snowdon is a strong contender for topping any outdoor-lover's bucket list. You'll find six (some might argue more) fantastic routes to help you conquer the highest mountain in Wales: amongst these, the Snowdon Ranger Path is the oldest and offers a quiet hike, the Pyg Track is a firm favourite with its jaw-dropping vistas, and the Watkin Path is one for thrill-seekers, complete with diverse scenery that spans woodlands and waterfalls. For the same landscapes but far less effort, the Snowdon Mountain Railway is an interesting means to experience the region's beauty: soak up panoramas of Snowdonia National Park, enjoy a spot of birding, and gaze out into the distance - as far as Ireland, if you're lucky - all from the comfort of this historic train.





## Pen y Fan, Wales

Seek out more of Wales' magnetic natural beauty in the Brecon Beacons, a sprawling national park that's home to Pen y Fan - the tallest mountain in South Wales. Reaching as high as 886 metres, it stuns as an ethereal elevation blanketed in shades of soft green - and with more than one way to reach its summit, you'll soon be back for more. No way is easy by any means, yet each is just as rewarding as you wander past dense forests and fast-flowing waterways, along Lower Neuadd Reservoir and above never-ending valleys. It probably goes without saying that the views are second-to-none all year long - particularly if you're planning your hike around sunrise or sunset.



## Great Gable, England

With England's Western Fells laid out all around and a wide array of picturesque trails to choose from, Great Gable is an unsurprisingly popular pick. It's just a short distance from Scafell Pike, the country's highest peak, and although it may not measure up to its neighbour in height, it certainly holds its own with plenty of character and charm - just as you'd expect from a mountain in the Lake District. In dry weather, take the circular route from Seathwaite via Gillercomb to enjoy a trail peppered with scrambling, waterfalls, steep rocky paths, and unparalleled panoramas from atop the summit. A most satisfying experience, complete with plenty of unique, attention-grabbing vistas, awaits the more seasoned adventurer.



## Cat Bells, England

Take in the marvellous landscapes of Keswick, Borrowdale and Derwentwater as you acquaint yourself with the Cat Bells, a Cumbrian fell that does well at showcasing the Lake District's painterly quality. Spanning around 3.5 miles and reaching an elevation of 451 metres, the three-hour circular route starts with some scrambling and steep sections, but your efforts will be well rewarded by enchanting vistas and a pleasant descent towards a lakeshore path. You'll love sitting down mid-way for some respite, as you soak up the classic scenes and picturesque peaks of England's famous Lakes; and following a day of braving the great outdoors, the town of Keswick is well worth exploring - after all, it was home to poets Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Robert Southey, and is steeped in literary and artistic history.

WHERE TO STAY: SCOTLAND, GLENCOE

# SeaBeds Luxury Lookouts

## Lochside stay with a difference...

The SeaBeds Luxury Lookouts with Hot Tubs are each romantically perched above Loch Linnhe, with stunning mountain and loch views you'll be swooning over for days. They're located in stunning, tranquil woodland of The Dragon's Tooth Golf Course, right at the entrance to the beautiful Glencoe Valley. For outdoorsy types, there's no shortage of things to do, from scaling the mountain challenges of Ben Nevis and sailing for the open water from Loch Linnhe to marveling at the Aonach Eagach ridge on



one side and the Three Sisters, Beinn Fhada, Gairr Aonach and Aonach Dubh on the other. You'll also be a couple of miles from Ballachulish and just over nine miles from Fort William - the bustling Highlands town that's most famous for its magnificent mountain scenery. With all the privacy of a hotel suite and fantastic views of the sea and mountains, indulge in the outdoors with all the modern comforts, complete with outdoor decking, an infinity Jacuzzi, a kitchenette, a super king-size bed, a living area and en-suite facilities.

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THE BUCKET LIST

# The wonders of Jordan

by Rosie Mulford



**T**he Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan shares borders with Syria, Israel and Saudi Arabia, and for this reason many overlook its wonders with questions of safety. But fear not, for Jordan is a Middle Eastern haven; a sanctuary tucked amongst its politically unstable neighbours; a place where the kindness of strangers weaves itself into day-to-day life. Forget Petra, the enchanting desert landscapes and the Roman ruins, for a moment. If you choose only one reason to visit Jordan, out of the many thousands that exist, choose this: the people. Jordanians are generous, kind and welcoming; hospitality here is not an industry or a profession, but a ritual. From taxi drivers to random strangers, Jordanians will welcome you with open arms.

*Martian deserts, UNESCO World Heritage Sites, unforgettable hospitality and boundless antiquities make Jordan a place of true exploratory enlightenment*

The iconic Petra landmark - The Treasury © Photo: Rosie Mulford



## Petra: A city of stone

As one of the Seven Wonders of the World, Petra is a bucket-list stop. This sandstone city was carved from the rock in the 3rd century BCE by the Nabateans, a nomadic Bedouin civilisation who controlled a large swath of the northern Arabian peninsula before the Romans. They were master builders in every sense: experts in hydraulic engineering, iron production, and water irrigation, and accumulated wealth by taxing the long caravans of traders that passed through their territory. But by the 5th century, Petra had fallen to the Romans and the Nabatean kingdom became unimportant, thanks to the flourishing sea trade route, and their land was eventually split between Arab invaders. The city of Petra, once home to 20,000 people, was forgotten to all but a few, whose descendents are the Bedouins that live around Petra today.

These days, every visitor enters Petra in the same way: a long walk on loose sandy ground towards the Siq, a kilometre long, high-walled canyon of striking fired-orange stone. The path meanders between the wave-like canyon walls, until, miraculously, the Treasury appears before your eyes. If you set off towards the Siq soon after 6am, you'll experience the Treasury, known to the Bedouins as Al-Khazneh, in its most tranquil state. One look at its intricate, hand-chiselled facade will leave you in awe - a 40-metre-tall tribute to perseverance in the face of the seemingly impossible.

Some tourists walk the Siq, see the Treasury and turn around, thinking they have seen the only sight worth seeing, the one made famous in the western world by Indiana Jones' galloping crusade. But they could not be more wrong - everything here is worth seeing, and it's estimated that 85% of this once-thriving city still lies undiscovered. The Royal Tombs, carved into a hillside, show what might have been the quarters of the Nabatean rulers, while the Theatre, an 8,000-spectator auditorium, gives evidence of an ancient city alive with culture and celebration.

*A rare glimpse behind the rock-carved facades*



Then there's the High Place of Sacrifice. Up above Petra's jabals, this impressive panorama is well worth the short yet steep climb. Here, so near to the sky, where the tourists and Bedouins, their backpacks and camels, are specks below you, it becomes clear why the Nabateans chose this as their most holy of places.

And finally, the Monastery. Tucked high up in the hills, Ad-Deir is perhaps the most taxing of places to reach, but the one which brings the most heartening sense of achievement. To follow the ancient processional path, 800 deep steps used by the Nabateans and the Romans, feels monumental. Unlike many of the structures in Petra, Ad-Deir contained no tombs, and was therefore determined not to be a mausoleum, as the Treasury is, but a church. A journey up to this mountainous spot, which on clear days offers views all the way to Israel, certainly feels like a pilgrimage.

## A whistlestop tour of Amman

To embrace a Jordanian adventure, the first thing you must do is let go; relax into the rush, embrace spontaneity. And where better to experience it all than Amman, Jordan's sprawling capital.

### **Eat: Hashem's Restaurant**

To truly understand Amman's dining culture, a visit to Hashem's is a rite of passage. Tucked between two exposed concrete buildings with electricity wires running across its fabric roof, you wouldn't look at Hashem's and think 'I bet this is one of the King of Jordan's favourite restaurants' - but it is. There's no menu here, you get what you're given. Crunchy-soft falafel, butter-smooth hummus, smokey moutabel and ful medames, a dish of garlicky mashed fava beans. And there's no cutlery either. Scoop it all up with bite-sized pieces of pillowy flatbread, wash it down with tooth-achingly sweet mint tea and settle into the city as it rushes around you.

*Roman ruins at the Amman Citadel*



### **Drink: Books@Cafe**

Surrounded by plant life with views across the city from its terrace, Books@Cafe on Amman's lively Rainbow Street is a little bit of everything. Part book shop, part art gallery, part cafe, part cocktail and shisha bar, Books@ is where locals, expats and tourists alike go to read, brunch on Saturdays and come together. It was the Middle East's first internet cafe when it opened in 1997, and is now a hub for Amman's LGBTQ+ community, a place that celebrates peace, equality and the liberation.

### **Do: Amman Citadel**

In 63 BCE the Romans conquered much of the Levant, a large area of land which covered modern-day Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine and most of Turkey. The most impressive remnant of Roman history here is undeniably the Amman Citadel. Surveying the city from a mammoth hill, the Citadel has been

occupied since 10,200 BCE - and its history spans a revolving door of civilizations who each contributed to the progression of Amman during its 12,000-year history.

### **Experience: Cooking class**

A taste of Grandma's cooking - that's the aim of cooking class-cum-cultural experience Beit Sitti. In a stone house tucked in the streets of Jabal Al Weibdeh, the oldest neighbourhood in Amman, three generations of the Haddad family come together to teach their grandmother's recipes. On a warm night there's nothing better than sitting on their leafy terrace learning how to make Makloubeh, a dish of cauliflower, rice and chicken, which is flipped when served (makloubeh literally translates to 'upside down'). As the sun sets, the orange sky blends with the sandy-stone buildings as you hear the call to prayer ring out from mosques across the city.

*Jordanian dining - a burst of colour, spice and flavour*



## The wildness of the wadis

Jordan's wadis vary greatly in size and shape, from the gorge-like trail of Wadi Mujib to the arid, mars-like expanse of Wadi Rum. That these other-worldly landscapes vary so much is unsurprising-between mountains and deserts, seas and weaving rivers, Jordan is as biologically diverse as it is beautiful.

Less famous than its sister Wadi Rum, Wadi Mujib is the lowest nature reserve in the world. From its humble beginnings off the side of the Desert Highway, this deep gorge boasts a 1,300m variation in elevation, running through the Karak and Madaba mountains all the way to the Dead Sea, where it spills out 410m below sea level. This winding feat of nature is not just a haven for biodiversity, but a utopia for adrenaline junkies. Spectacular waterfalls, startlingly blue natural pools and ziplines come together to create exciting trails for every adventurer. Even the dry parts of the wadi are thrilling-keep your eyes peeled and you might spot a nubian ibex, of which there are fewer than 10,000 left on earth.

No trip to Jordan is complete without a day and night spent in the never-ending expanse of Wadi Rum. Also known as the Valley of the Moon, Jordan's largest wadi spans 280-square-miles of burnt orange

dirt, other-worldly rock formations and flowing sand dunes marked with circling Jeep tracks. In fact, this desert is a favourite of Hollywood filmmakers, with movies like *The Martian*, *Dune*, *Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker* and Disney's *Aladdin* remake all making use of its unforgettable vistas to bring their fictional worlds to life.

Occupied by the Nabateans prior to Petra, Wadi Rum's past is certainly as interwoven in the history of Jordan's ancient civilisations as its fellow tourist sites. It also has ties to the western world. Wadi Rum is, to some, most famous for its connection to T.E. Lawrence, also known as Lawrence of Arabia, who was a British Army Officer, archaeologist and diplomat and helped unite Arab tribes to rebel against the Ottoman Empire. His life was chronicled in his

book, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* and later in the 1962 film. Deep in the desert, history buffs and movie fans can visit the remains of the house where Lawrence was said to have lived for a time in 1917.

To truly experience this desert, you should go back to basics. Hot air balloons will have you soaring above the land, and the views are undeniably fantastic, but riding a camel through the desert at sunrise, watching as the glow appears over the mountains and sets the orange earth alight in front of your eyes, is something else all together. For the Bedouins who call Wadi Rum home, camels have been a part of life, a life wildly altered by tourism, for centuries. Many who would have once lived nomadically have instead put down roots and traded the life of their ancestors for

a steady income and guaranteed necessities, like water. Though some may see this as a way of life in ruins, it all comes back, as many things do in Jordan, to hospitality. Welcoming guests is a matter of pride, and this is no different for Bedouins, whose culture stipulates that those travelling through the desert must be helped with water, comfort and shelter. Those travelling through their lands, and their reason for doing so, may have changed, but the response of the Bedouins has not and likely never will.



secret Escapes

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# Ghent

## THE ADORATION CONTINUES

by Oliver Jones

**G**hent is quite possibly one of the finest cities in Europe. The fact that some would pull faces at such a claim goes some way in explaining how this remarkable city falls just shy of people's travel radar. It's a sin; a captivating medieval centre fitted out with spiralling towers and gentle waterways make Ghent irresistibly beautiful, yet the old-world feel belies a youthful heart – a student population thrives here amongst hip bars and coffee hangouts. It encapsulates that special something which fires our love affair with the continental city. It's handsome and historic, but not stuffy nor dull; it offers genuine cultural experiences, and is bloody good fun on the right night.

There's a duality to this: a sliding scale between old and wizened and young and extrovert. Take the art scene (which is one of those calling cards for the Flanders region) - on the one hand you have your grand collection of Flemish Masters, your Bosch and Rubens, adorning the MSK walls in all their grandeur. Yet a stone's throw is the confidently named SMAK with its collection of Warhols and Karel Appels, connected by streets daubed with the work of the latest en vogue street artist.

And if it's icons you want to know about, the theme continues. What is Ghent truly famous for? Probably the 'Adoration of the Mystic Lamb', in the towering St. Bavo's Cathedral – a masterpiece created by the Van Eyck brothers with a tumultuous history worthy of an Indiana Jones romp. Though this isn't the only top hit; let's remember those young students. Ghent's university hippies have achieved something quite incredible; every Thursday, the city goes veggie. In the eco-conscious world we're careering into, this is one of those positive, forward-thinking steps that makes us islanders blush a little. Even better, the city's best restaurants are on board, offering foodies and dedicated carnivores a smorgasbord of vegetarian delights.

And this participation of old and young, traditional and contemporary, is what makes this city so harmoniously vibrant. You'd only need to visit during the Gentse Festeen (ten days of free music and performance in every corner of the

city) to see how uniquely Flemish schlager from white-haired boy bands mixes with the hot new thing from the university halls. Ghent is affectionately dubbed the City of Music after all, and outside of festival time it's worth slipping into one of the city's music bars for a tipple. Take the classic brown cafe (and former brothel) Waterhuis aan de Bierkant - its idyllic waterside location across from the gothic Gravensteen castle is a hub of Belgian beers (literally hundreds) plus live jazz, an intoxicating mix in every sense. And round the corner? The hipper hideaway Hot Club, hidden down an alleyway with almost-daily jazz nights. Imbibe and chin stroke your way through piercing brass and muted hi-hat shuffles; it's a speakeasy sophistication one may not comfortably attribute to Flemish, but therein lies the magic. Ghent, nay, the region around it, is full of these charming little quirks.

Even here, for its chocolate-box, cobbled and gabled streetscapes, there's a regen' warehouse scene. At the edge of the city by the old

*"...this participation of old and young, traditional and contemporary, is what makes this city so harmoniously vibrant."*

port is a hub of consciously modern happenings, with microbrews, faux beaches, parties, galleries, screenings - the full portmanteau of on-trend cultural happenings in post-industrial settings; it's called DOK by the way. If that's all a bit too right on and Gen Z, head back into town, grab some fries with an arterial-tightening helping of mayo, and do what is best to do in Ghent - walk from square to square, dodging tram lines and ogling the can't-be-overstated beauty of this medieval gem. It is quite possibly the finest city in Europe, after all.



*St Michael's Bridge, photo by Bas Bogaerts  
© Stad Gent-Dienst Toerisme*



*Street art in Ghent, photo by Bas Bogaerts  
© Stad Gent-Dienst Toerisme*



*The Ghent Festivities, photo by Bas Bogaerts  
© Stad Gent-Dienst Toerisme*

IN PRAISE OF OPEN WATER

# Swimming alive

by *Miriam Pethania*

**T**he first time I swam in open water was off the shore of one of the remote islands around Bergen, Norway. Despite it being a warmish spring day, the glacier-fed fjord never crept above a bracing 11C, and while the mostly Scandinavian members of my group took to the calm, grey water like dolphins, I just about managed to keep my breath steady for a minute, staying close to the platform for an emergency getaway.

Some years later, having moved to London, my flatmate convinced me to try a dip in the Hampstead Ponds, her floating serenely with a heavily pregnant belly and me, breathless at the momentary shock of cold, then dazed at the summer sun above us. Today, I can't describe anything quite as magical or liberating as the heady combination of open sky and an endless expanse of water. Come rain, sleet or shine, it hits a spot like nothing else, rinsing off the stresses of daily life, whether it's the knock-you-off-your-feet force of a sudden salty wave, or the familiar space of my local lido.

Hardcore open-water enthusiasts have always been a thing: a giddy group who'll insist on running into freezing oceans and lakes, bobble-hatted, shrieking and laughing, before coming out glowing smugly with a natural high. But in the past couple of years, they've gone from a niche oddity to something of a movement. Maybe it's a consequence of feeling so much constraint around us with the disruption of our daily habits, or a yearning to feel as physically free as possible after life ground to a standstill. When temperatures creep higher, many will make a beeline to local lakes, rivers, beaches, and lidos, while a spike in wetsuit sales suggests a good number are more than just fair weather swimmers, willing to suit up in neoprene and silicone for a chance to keep swimming beneath the open sky.

*A Wild Swimming Group take an autumnal swim at Hampstead Heath ponds.*



Part of what makes open-water swimming so appealing is that it's often less about the lengths, and more about returning to something much more primal. Unless you're training for a triathlon, an outdoor swim encourages you to take in your surroundings in a way an indoor pool can't, to slow down your breath, count your strokes, and simply pay attention.

From fluffy clouds and seagull squawks, to nearby hills and mountains, or just the gentle sensation of the current around you, open water invites you out of your mind and into the world. If the thought of sitting on a cushion trying to quiet your thoughts never appealed, the steady sound of rippling water with every stroke might deliver the kind of calm that a meditation app never could. Many swimmers describe the dopamine high of open water, and whether it's from the shock of the colder temperatures or simply spending time in nature, the mental and physical health benefits reported have been making headlines, reputedly easing depression and anxiety, and even reducing the symptoms of chronic pain. It's also quietly, wonderfully, communal. A knowing nod and a smile, a "how's the water today?" to a dripping swimmer coming out as you approach, puts you in a particular club. At the Ladies' Pond in Hampstead, there's a pocket

*A boy diving into Coniston Water in The Lake District, Cumbria*



of sanctuary tucked away in the middle of a busy city. Others report the ease of unburdening heartaches with other swimming strangers, and of course, nothing beats sharing a brew from a Thermos while you both scramble out of soggy suits beneath your dry robes. It's these kinds of tiny mutual moments of vulnerability out in the open world that, I think, gently nudge away the clouds of modern loneliness, and offer an ancient feeling of connection with each other.

With the surge in interest in open-water swimming, the good news is that there are a wealth of places to take a dip, often not far from home. In the UK, we're surrounded - not just by the sea - but by an incredible number of wild and not-so-wild swimming spots. You'll find salt water enthusiasts on every shore, from Pembrokeshire to the Outer Hebrides, while tidal pools provide a more secure way of enjoying the thrill of the ocean. Inland, lakes and ponds are a freshwater paradise, like the scenic pools across the Lake District and Snowdonia, where you might find yourself sharing the crisp, clear water with the local trout. And don't discount the joys of Britain's lidos, a Victorian invention that's still going strong. Sometimes heated, often not, most of them are reliant on community support to survive, and consequently have fiercely loyal swimmers that create a beachside ambience right in the heart of towns and cities around the country.

Nowadays, I pencil in my pilgrimages across the country's vast coastline in between regular lido and lake sessions. My memories are filled with every kind of sky I've swum beneath, from summer mizzle over a Cornish bay to vivid urban sunsets and icy blue winter skies. Every swim quenches an unquellable thirst, to feel the freedom of my body in the vast water, and the delight of being fully alive.

## Some of the UK's best wild and open swimming spots:

- **Porthcurnick Beach, Cornwall:** Sheltered by a sandy cove, this calm National Trust beach is good for a swim or a gentle splash.
- **Windermere, Lake District:** Beloved by poets, artists and swimmers of every kind, with wonderful beaches to dry off on.
- **Fairy Pools, Skye:** The challenging clamber down the bank rewards you with spectacular and surreal blue pools, in this fairy-tale Scottish haven.
- **Llyn Idwal, Snowdonia:** One of Wales' most popular lakes, especially in the summer, surrounded by the beautiful Snowdonia National Park.
- **Hampstead Ponds, London:** Including mixed, men's and ladies' ponds on the sprawling Heath, a wild water haven right in the heart of the capital.
- **Tinside Lido, Plymouth:** A stunning Art Deco masterpiece overlooking the sea.
- **Cotswold Water Park:** A picturesque lake network where you can interweave swims with walks amongst the surrounding nature reserves.

Porthcurno Summer



Fairy Pools, Isle Of Skye, Scottish Highlands, Scotland

## Practical open-water swimming tips:

- **Open water is cooler than you might expect**, even on a hot day - so take time to acclimatise to the colder temperatures, and avoid spending too long - get out before you start shivering. Open water is not the place to be challenging your personal best, so stay within your comfort zone.
- **Warm up with lots of layers** and a hot drink and snacks to minimise after-drop, as your core body will continue cooling for some time afterwards.
- **Proper clothing is a must**, especially for beginners. A bright coloured swim cap and tow float keeps you visible to others, while swim shoes are helpful to protect your feet. If you're going in the cold, a wetsuit designed for cooler temperatures can make a big difference.
- **Swim with others** - as well as the great camaraderie, it's also good to keep an eye on each other to keep everyone safe and having fun.
- **Check the legal stuff** - in the UK, the legal right to swim in wild places can be confusing, so read up on access rights beforehand. Be a responsible swimmer too - don't leave litter or pollution behind, and be considerate to other land and water users.

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## FIVE OF THE UK'S MOST BLISSFUL SPA ESCAPES

# Nature & nurture

by Miriam Pethania

### The outdoorsy Scottish hideaway

If there's anything to take away from the tough slog we've all been through, it's that wellness – in mind, body, and spirit – is always worth making the time for. Dotted around some of the most scenic outposts of the British Isles, you can find a wealth of pampering wonders everywhere from rugged coastal hideaways to lakeside havens, all designed to soothe, smooth, and defuse your aches and worries away. Find your next spa escape at [secretescapes.com](https://secretescapes.com).

Nestled in the heart of Scotland's "Big County", the wild, rambling expanse of Perthshire, you'll find an idyllic country haven set amongst acres of stunning scenery. The mile-long drive that leads you up to the Dunkeld House Hotel is an invitation to leave behind any worldly concerns - instead, take a deep breath of fresh air and prepare to feel relaxed and refreshed. Woodland trails, riverside walks and picturesque waterfalls create a fairytale backdrop, while the warm welcome of the country house lulls you into comfort. The blissful spa takes its inspiration from the Scottish coast, with Hebridean seaweed and coastal minerals in its indulgent and restorative treatments.



### The enchanting lakeside idyll

A muse for poets and painters for centuries, the Lake District has an alluring appeal, with 16 shimmering lakes amidst steep ridges and valleys, carved out by glaciers millennia ago. Perched beside the still waters of the region's largest lake, Windermere, the Macdonald Old England Hotel & Spa is an oasis of calm. Inside the spa, luxurious Elemis treatments are on the menu to refresh and rejuvenate every part of you, along with lakeside afternoon teas to feed your soul. And if the expert hands of the in-house therapists haven't lulled you off to a blissful sleep, follow in the footsteps of the greats and feel inspired by the views all around.

### The luxury country estate

Set on the banks of the River Tees near the rugged North Yorkshire moors, Rockliffe Hall is a bucolic country paradise. In a lovingly restored 19th-century mansion exuding character and glamour, the sophisticated spa blends cutting-edge technology with tradition. Try a super-charged power nap on the Spa.Wave Bed, where binaural beats and gentle vibrations lull you to a state of deep, healing relaxation. If you'd rather take it slow, find inspiration from the Middle East, with a detoxifying Dead Sea mud ritual followed by a tropical monsoon rain shower. With a charmingly quaint village and countless flora and fauna nearby, you have all you need for a dose of classic country escapism.



### The fresh-faced surf

Serving wellness with a slice of irreverent brightness, Bedruthen Spa combines the fresh Cornish sea breeze with a refreshingly laid back take on wellbeing. A sensory spa garden brings Nordic inspiration to North Cornwall – gaze across the wild Atlantic and slow down in the steam room, before waking up with an ice-cold splash. Fresh and sustainable fare is always on the menu in this eco-chic gem, where a holistic attitude to wellbeing shapes every aspect of your stay. This bright, funky, and dog-friendly setting delivers coastal tranquillity with none of the formality. And if you're tempted by the adrenaline rush of the waves, surf lessons are right on your doorstep.

Sponsored by Sandals

# Stealing a kiss in the Caribbean

## YOUR GUIDE TO THE MOST ROMANTIC SPOTS IN THE ISLAND CHAIN

Looking to long haul your romantic escapes? Make their heart flutter with our guide to the most romantic experiences across our favourite Caribbean islands. From idyllic beach scenes to convivial island fish fries, head for an island escape like no other.

### **English Harbour, Antigua**

The English Harbour is a picture-perfect Caribbean scene, with tropical bays and coves dotted with white sailing boats and luxe yachts. For the inner romantic, head to the Lookout on Shirley Heights, for the best views and the famed Sunday night parties.

**Where to stay: Sandals Grande Antigua**

### **Harbour Island, Bahamas**

This glamorous island is home to one of the Bahamas' most unique sights. The eastern coastline is blessed with remarkable pink beaches, a rare and quite beautiful phenomenon. In the town, pastel-coloured colonial buildings house smart bistros and fine dining spots to unwind in after your beach day.

### **St George's, Grenada**

St George's is a gorgeous harbour town where colourful Georgian architecture lines the edge of the Carenage inlet. Head for the shops and chic cafes, soaking up the town's beauty. Settle on the bay with a rum punch or a coconut water and soak up the atmosphere of one of the prettiest towns in the Caribbean.

**Where to stay: Sandals Grenada**

### **Blue Mountain Peak, Jamaica**

For couples who can't resist the call of adventure, there is the Blue Mountain Peak trail. High in the lush jungle peak of Jamaica, the trail winds through thick rainforest, with stupendously good views as you climb. The best, of course, waits at the summit, with views extending across the verdant sprawl of the Blue Mountains.

**Where to stay: Sandals Montego Bay**

### **Soufrière, St Lucia**

The island's bubbling volcano offers natural spa experiences perfect for a romantic sojourn. Aside from exploring the unique volcanic landscape, there's natural sulphur springs and mud baths to dip into, whose health benefits are renowned. Shower it off in the nearby waterfall for a rejuvenating experience.

**Where to stay: Grande St Lucian**

### **Oistins Fish Fry, Barbados**

Flames spit from oil drum barbecues, calypso bounces around a buzzing crowd, and the irresistible draw of various traders makes Oistins the only place to go on a Friday night in Barbados. Pick from a host of vendors, each rumoured to have the best flying fish, or mac pie, or swordfish – you get the picture. Great food, an electric atmosphere and warm Bajan hospitality awaits.

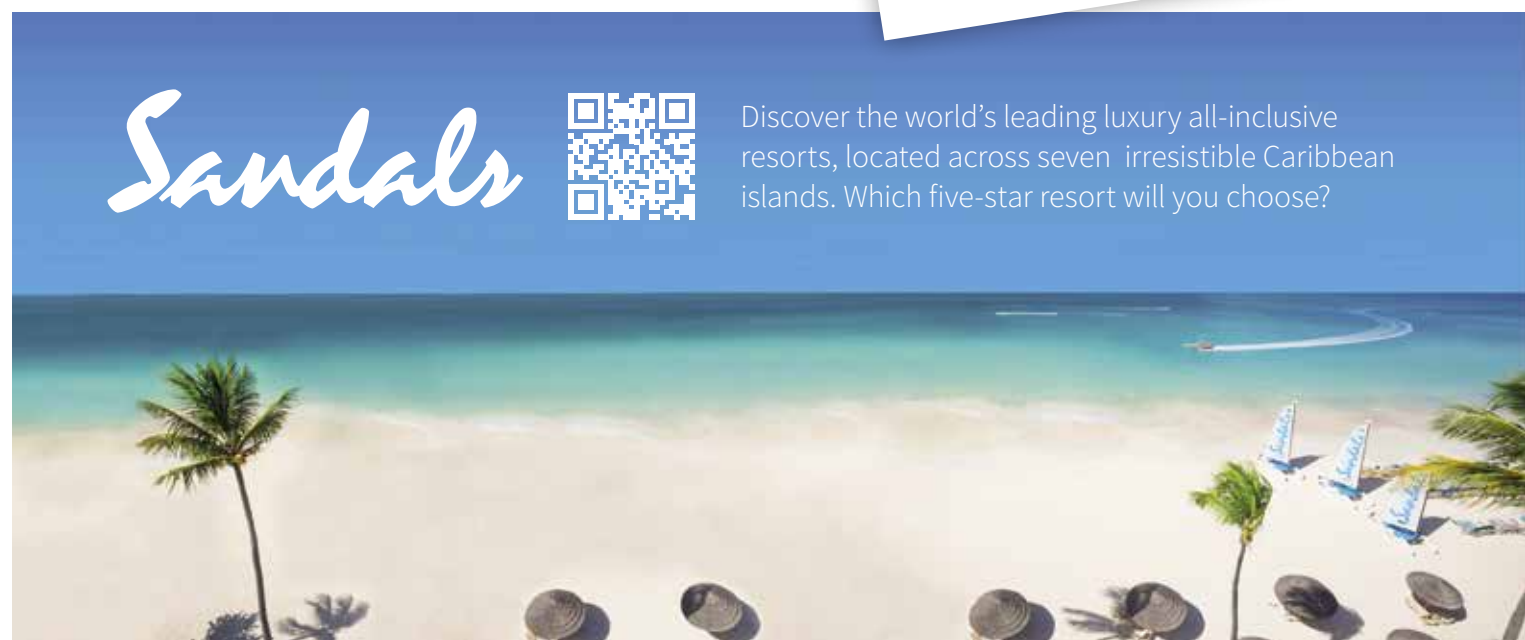
**Where to stay: Sandals Royal Barbados**



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DISCOVER THE CITY WITH LISBON  
NATIVE BRUNO PORTELA, OPERATING  
ANALYST AT SECRET ESCAPES

# My Home: Lisbon

by Rosie Mulford & Bruno Portela

Portugal's hilly, coastal capital city is heralded as one of the coolest cities in Europe, a postcard panorama of pastel-hued buildings, cobblestone streets, and slope-traversing trams. At its heart, Lisbon is a local's city, with a village feel in each of the historic neighbourhoods, the most famous of which are Bairro Alto, Baxia and the Avenida de Liberdade area.

## What to do

Thanks to Lisbon's copious hills (bring your comfiest shoes!), one of the best things to do is soak up the best views of the city and watch it all pass by. There are so many places with incredible views in Lisbon, but these are Bruno's favourites:

- **The Miradouro de São Pedro de Alcântara**, a sprawling green terrace located in the Jardim António Nobre, serves up views of São Jorge Castle and the Tagus River. Chug uphill on the Gloria Funicular (another Lisbon must-do) and survey the red-roofed cityscape
- **The Miradouro de Santa Catarina** combines its charming terrace with unforgettable vistas across the river and Ponte 25 de Abril come sunset. It's here that you'll also find the statue of Adamastor, a mythical sea monster from the epic poem The Lusíads
- **The highest point in the Graça** neighbourhood is Miradouro da Senhora do Monte, and many call this spot the city's best-kept secret, whilst others say it's hands-down the best place to see the city from up on high



The ultimate Portuguese treat - pastéis de nata

## Where to eat and drink

When in Lisbon, eating a Pastéis de Nata is non-negotiable. These small yet legendary custard tarts are one of Portugal's best-known exports, and though many places will argue theirs is the best, they'd be wrong, according to our expert.

Bruno's top Pastéis de Nata hails from **Manteigaria** on Rua do Loreto in Bairro Alto (they also have outposts in the Mercado da Ribeira and Chiado), where the ovens churn out crispy, crumbly, custardy pastéis constantly, all day every day, made with love and pastry kneaded by hand.

**LX Factory** is situated in a building that dates back to 1846, but this hip spot is anything but boring. Packed inside are more than 50 shops, restaurants, coffee shops and bars. You could eat here everyday for a week, so choose wisely—**Malaca Too**, inspired by Portugal's seafaring in the East, and **MezCais LX**, serving creative food and endless mezcal, are particularly special.

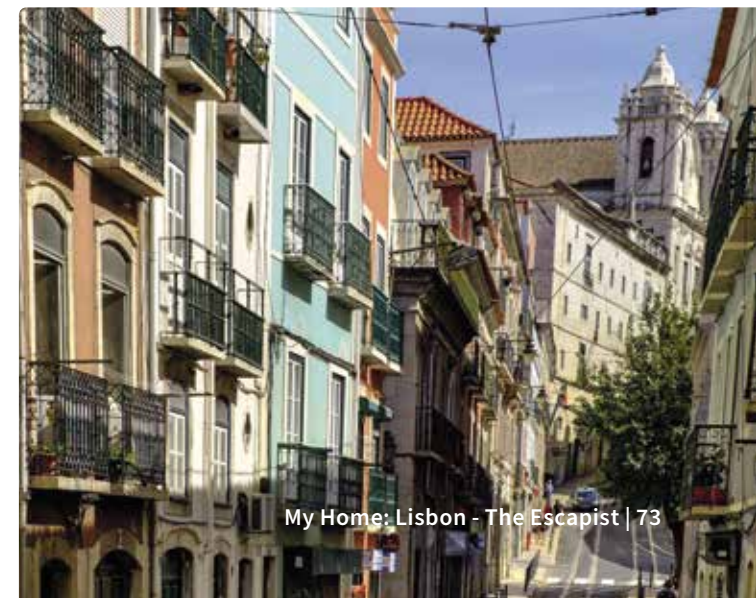
In need of a drink? There's no better way to get to know Lisbon than bar-hopping in **Bairro Alto**—simply wander the streets and see what calls to you.

## Where to stay

As far as locations go, few hotels can boast a better one than **Solar do Castelo**, a member of the Lisbon Heritage Collection. It's the only hotel set within the medieval village of São Jorge Castle, and makes for an unforgettable, historic stay.

The doors of the palace, which was built on the site of the former kitchens of the castle, open out onto a tranquil terrace, where the blue peacocks of the castle tend to wander. Book this and more at [secretescapes.com](https://www.secretescapes.com).

Barrio Alto Neighborhood street scene



# Reading list

GO GREEN WITH THIS ROUND-UP OF  
READS TO HELP INSPIRE ALTERNATIVE  
WAYS OF TRAVELLING

by *Abbie Cohen*



## **Bicycling with Butterflies: My 10,201-Mile Journey Following the Monarch Migration**

By *Sara Dykman*

This 2021 National Outdoor Book Award winner is sure to pique the interest of active types and nature-lovers. Join field researcher Sara Dykman on her adventure-packed mission to pedal along with monarch butterflies, across an epic route spanning three countries.

## **Waypoints: A Journey on Foot**

By *Robert Martineau*

Follow in the author's footsteps as he recounts his 1,000-mile walk across three West African countries, on a journey that blends the wonders of travel, history, spiritualism and solitude. True escapism is guaranteed through this eye-opening read.

## **The Flightless Traveller: 50 Modern Adventures by Land, River and Sea**

By *Emma Gregg*

With its focus on green, air-mile-free travel, this is the perfect pick for eco travellers and guilt-free getaways. Featuring bold imagery and plenty of planning and budgeting advice, it deep-dives into unforgettable journeys by land, river and sea to 50 worldwide destinations.

## **Slow Trains Around Spain: A 3,000-Mile Adventure on 52 Rides**

By *Tom Chesshyre*

See Spain's rich landscapes from a new angle with this fascinating book that invites its readers to explore the brilliance of slow train rides, complete with historic anecdotes - one for lazy travellers looking for a fresh take on this much-loved country.

## **The Green Edit: Travel: Easy tips for the eco-friendly traveller**

By *Juliet Kinsman*

A more direct yet no less interesting take on green travel, this informative guide teaches us how to get to know the world without leaving our mark on it. Plan the perfect low-impact trip with insight by Kinsman, journalist and founder of lauded eco-travel website Bouteco.

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