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Chora village, Patmos island, Greece



The picturesque harbour of Portofino, Genoa province, Italy

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Preflight

INSPIRATION FOR YOUR WANDERLIST



55

Sweden

What's popping
at the Grand
Hôtel Stockholm.

(SWEDEN) LENNART WEIBULL, (ITALY) PHILIP VILE

89

Villa Escapes
Vacation like
an Italian.





40

Mexico

Ease into the
Riviera Maya.

(MEXICO) WILLIAM JESS LAIRD, (HONG KONG) BEN WELER

8 November December 2023

48

Hong Kong

A fine-feathered evening on Victoria Harbour.



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CONTENTS

November December 2023



99

Where Next

Everywhere you'll want to be in the year ahead.

114 Salad Days

Mexico City chefs throw out the playbook – with delicious results.

122 Meet Me at the Crossroads

An insiders' tour of Istanbul's best dining.

ON THE COVER

A balanced breakfast at The Peninsula Istanbul. Photography by Graydon Herriott.



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Palacio Duhaú - Park Hyatt Buenos Aires, Argentina



Andaz Costa Rica Resort at Peninsula Papagayo

CONTENTS

November December 2023



16 Editor's Note

22 Contributors

25 Passport

36 Cruising

40 Hotel News

44 The Virtuoso Life

Sohla El-Waylly gets lost in Spain.

48 City Guide: Hong Kong

The "Dark Side" steps into the spotlight.

55 The Big Chill

A family holiday in Sweden.

66 Dispatch from the End of the World

Get to know Ushuaia, gateway to Antarctica.

71 Slide Right Up

Big Sky dials in the skier's ski vacation.

89 Thrilla in the Villa

Vacation living gets personal at these dream houses.

95 Winners' Corner

This year's best hotels, cruise lines, tour companies, and more.

132 Gallery

Modern art, steeped in heritage.

(DISH) PIA RIVEROLA, (VILLA) LUKE WHITE PHOTOGRAPHY FOR PROVENCE STYLE/VENDOME PRESS, (EL-WAYLLY) JINGYU LIN/CONTOUR RA BY GETTY IMAGES



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Hungry for What's Next

IN WINTER, our thoughts turn to travel. To be fair, our thoughts also turn to travel in spring, summer, and fall. But there's no feeling quite as delicious as contemplating a fresh calendar with a head full of vacation plans. This issue we want to help inspire yours with our annual Where Next feature. In it you'll find 12 hot destinations for 2024, plus a bonus 12 in our expanded version of the story on Virtuoso.com. Sourced from a cadre of regular contributors and bolstered by insights from Virtuoso advisors and other insiders, our picks span everything from a new take on Barcelona to a crowd-free alternative to the Inca Trail.

Also delicious: this edition's food-and-wine focus, which has us table-hopping from Mexico City, where chefs are blazing tasty trails with veggie-forward menus and global influences, to Istanbul, where we tapped the culinary cognoscenti for their restaurant recommendations.

Elsewhere, we have staff-reported pieces on exclusive vacation villas and private residences; what's new – and remarkable – on the ski scene in Big Sky, Montana; and how to spend a day in port in Ushuaia, Argentina, the starting point for many Antarctic cruises. I even dusted off my keyboard to tell the tale of traveling to Sweden for the holidays with my teenager.

We hope you find food for thought in this issue. Consider it your appetizer for next year's travel feast.



Next in fashion? My family Christmas in Sweden.

MARIKA CAIN
EDITORIAL DIRECTOR



Cover Star

The stack of delicacies on this issue's cover, photographed by the duo of Graydon Herriott, hails from The Peninsula Istanbul, a new hotel that grabbed our attention when it opened earlier this year – so much so that it won Virtuoso's coveted Best New Hotel award. Learn more about The Peninsula and the other award-winning hotels, tour operators, cruise lines, and more on page 95.

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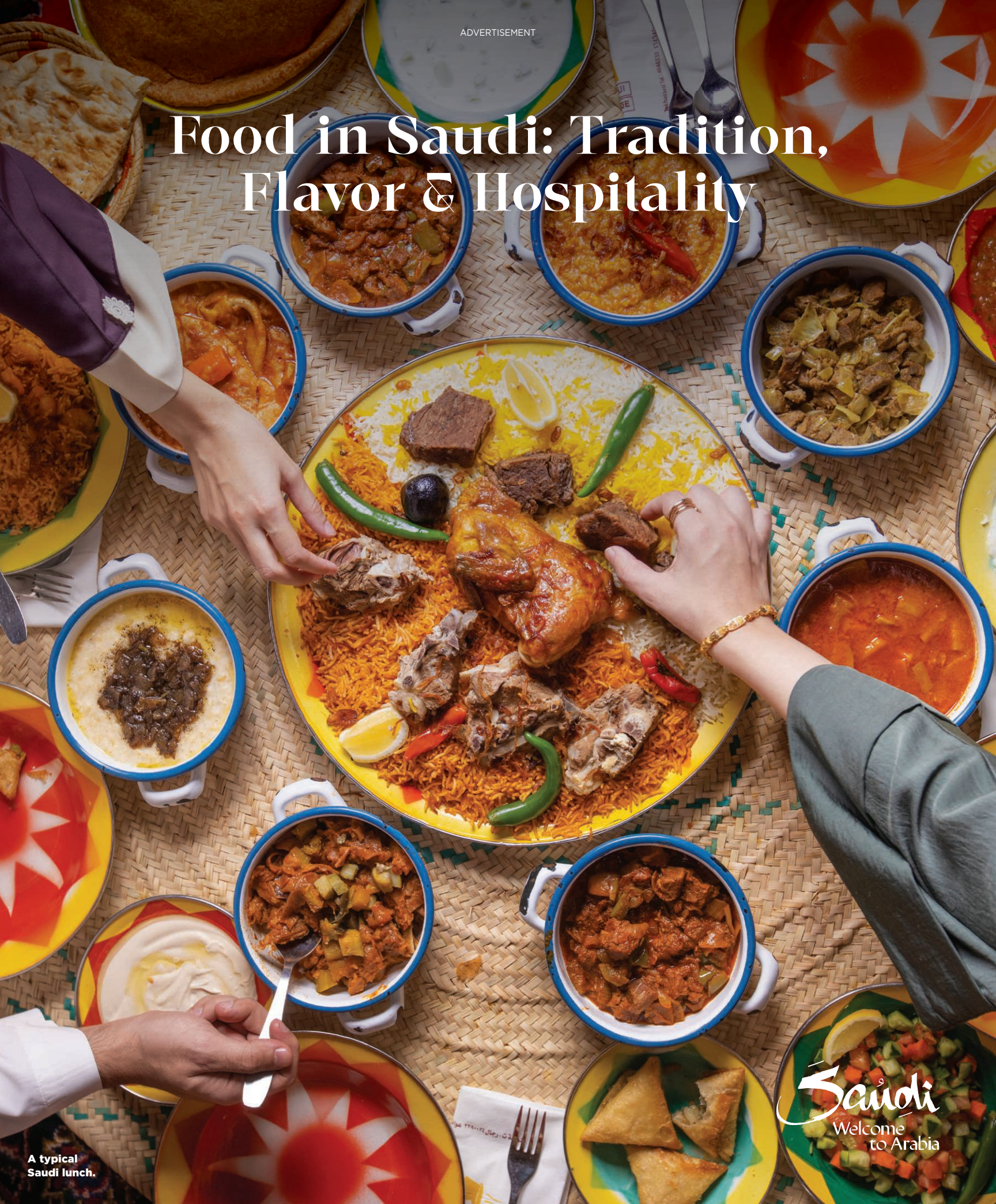


60 YEARS ON
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Food in Saudi: Tradition, Flavor & Hospitality



“Food is a symbol of hospitality,” says Felicia Campbell, an author who specializes in the food of the Arabian Gulf. “As part of Islamic and Bedouin culture, it is a great honor to be able to feed a traveler or anyone who shows up at your doorstep, and this is especially true in Saudi Arabia.”

Foods are largely tied to the terrain: Saudi Arabia is 95 percent desert, and many traditional dishes reflect the ancient trade caravans and nomadic lifestyles of desert dwellers. Basmati rice and spices from the East were transported in long caravans, musky dried black limes came from neighboring Oman, and local dried dates and camel’s milk were essential to the ancient diet. Today, dates – as well as *qahwa*, coffee ground with cardamom pods and flavored with saffron – remain vital to Saudi’s culture of hospitality and are routinely offered to guests entering a home.



Enjoying a meal with a friend.



Stargazing near Elephant Rock.



A kabsa spread.

Breakfast

A typical Saudi breakfast is quite simple, explains Campbell, who has spent years in the Middle East. “It may be dates and *qahwa* or bread with cheese, while dates and coffee will be enjoyed throughout the day,” she says.

Lunch

Lunch is traditionally the main meal of the day, and almost always includes a dish like *kabsa*, a richly spiced rice (every household tends to have its own favorite seasoning blend) that is topped with roasted meat or fish, and a tomato and chili salsa on the side.

Dinner and More

In contemporary homes, dinner is served late and is a lighter meal – often sandwiches or a rich soup. Alcohol is not served in Saudi Arabia, but that doesn’t limit the country’s beverage offerings. Favorites include fresh mango juice, non-alcoholic cocktails, and all types of tea.

**Ready to make delectable discoveries in Saudi?
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THE MAGAZINE



“What’s the
one menu
item you can’t
turn down?”

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“Something totally
unfamiliar. Sampling
something new adds
to the adventure.”

~~~~~ Brand Lead **Paula Franklin**

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“French fries.  
The crispier,  
the better.”  
~ Z.K.

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“I never pass on
roasted brussels
sprouts because
they remind me of
my childhood.”

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“What’s your travel hot take?”



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“Salad Days,” page 114



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“Slide Right Up,” page 71



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Toronto

Cover and “Dinner at the Cross-roads,” page 122

“AOKTR: Always OK to Recline. Barack Obama could be sitting behind me, and as soon as the plane is airborne, I’m dropping that seat. But on the flip side, no one should get grumpy about being reclined on. We all do what we must to make flying as bearable as possible.”

THE REPORT: “Polanco surprised me most during this trip to Mexico City. Previously, I’d avoided staying in the Beverly Hills of CDMX, opting for trendier *colonias* like Juárez and Roma. But I fell hard for Polanco’s lush parks and architectural eye candy.”

@adamerace

“It’s OK to hit up the popular spots – they’re popular for a reason. Be your own judge.”

THE REPORT: “I’ve always wanted to travel to Istanbul. I’m especially interested in the architecture, so the chance to draw The Peninsula Istanbul really caught my eye. Illustrating the hotel felt like a visit to this fascinating city.”

@french75studios

“There’s no reason to rush to board the plane. You’re better off relaxing at the gate or a nearby café than standing in line waiting for fellow passengers to get settled.”

THE REPORT: “Get a guide to show you around on your first day in Big Sky. It’s a huge mountain, so knowing what’s what really pays off. You’ll have more fun, hit the best snow, and stay out of trouble on Lone Peak’s steep slopes. Plus, you get to cut the rare lift line – a great perk at the tram.”

@urban_copilot

“Take that stranger up on their invite to a meal at their place. Spending time with people you’ve just met and eating food they’re sharing with their friends or family is one of life’s greatest pleasures and a true gift of travel.”

THE REPORT: “During our stay at the incredible Peninsula Istanbul, a small family of kittens greeted us at our patio door every morning. We have a neighbor cat in Toronto named Crouton who does the same, so it made us feel even more at home.”

@graydonherriott

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Power Shopping

Go to South Africa on safari, come home with 400 iPhone photos and one showstopping frock. This dress, made from recycled polyester and featuring pop-art-style illustrations from graphic designer Phathu Nembilwi, is part of South African designer Thebe Magugu's nine-piece Heritage Series collection. According to Magugu, the illustrations depicting mothers and children across nine African tribes celebrate the literal and figurative weight that mothers carry. Thanks to a partnership with African safari lodge company **Singita**, travelers can shop for the pieces in the boutiques at Singita Sabi Sand and Singita Kruger National Park. Dress, \$535. – Amy Cassell

Napa's New Cabernet

The cabernet sauvignons produced in Napa Valley have long had a reputation for excess – oaky, heavy on the alcohol, very fruit forward – but today's bottles are tasting much lighter and fresher, thanks to old-world-style wine-making methods that are also organic, sustainable, and climate appropriate. Those traditional production techniques are making a comeback, says Sarah Gail Hutcherson, the director of beverage at Napa's 101-room **Carneros Resort and Spa**. "It's leading to bottlings that are full of vitality upon release and can be enjoyed many years down the road."

Winemaker Charles F. Smith III at Smith-Madrone Vineyards & Winery swears by dry-farming strategies for its sloping mountain vineyards, while wineries such as Matthiasson are using few – if any – new oak barrels for aging. Eco-friendly wine-making strategies, including modified pruning techniques and irrigation adjustments, can allow winemakers to harvest grapes earlier in the season so they develop less sweetness – and, as a result, less alcohol. Napa veterans Gamble Family Vineyards have been proponents of this renaissance for years, helping pave the way for other regional producers to leverage the techniques. Says Hutcherson: "This new crop of Napa cabernet gives us the ability to raise more than one glass – *and keep our balance.*" – *Karla Walsh*



Carneros Resort and Spa's
Sarah Gail Hutcherson.



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Fiji Dives Deep

With its warm water, spectacular visibility, and abundant marine life, Fiji has long lured scuba divers. Now, a new partnership between the islands and the Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI) aims to make the country one of the planet's most important destinations for ocean protection. The alliance's key goals: increasing Fiji's designated marine protected areas from 466 to more than 600 by 2030, while also adding more dive sites within them, creating opportunities for divers to take part in efforts such as identifying manta rays at **Kokomo Private Island** resort or collecting turtle DNA samples at **Nanuku Resort Fiji**. (Nondivers can help too, by volunteering to plant mangroves on the coast-line to reduce erosion.) The partnership also enhances a scholarship program for Fijians who want to start dive careers. "The preservation of our oceans is a teaching moment," says Viviana Taubera, a senior marine biologist and PADI open-water scuba instructor at Kokomo Private Island, and a recent Fijian PADI scholarship recipient. "It will benefit us and the generations to come." – *Jill K. Robinson*



In living color: Fiji's
Namena Marine Reserve.

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Dining is an art form, too, with an array of beautifully presented and delicious options onboard, crafted by world-class chefs. Newly designed spaces, including Osteria d'Ovidio and Chef Nobu Matsuhisa's Umi Uma, the only Nobu at sea, offer fine-dining alongside Waterside, where the menu changes every single day to bring guests the freshest, locally sourced ingredients. Whatever you are in the mood for, you will find something enticing to satisfy you, as you watch the world go by.

Crystal has announced new itineraries for 2025 spanning 281 ports in 112 countries. Expect unique shore experiences, enriching onboard programming and renowned entertainment to illuminate your days and nights.

Find out more about Crystal's upcoming voyages by contacting your Virtuoso Travel Advisor.



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Dom for the Holidays

To find the best bottle of bubbly for gifting this season, we went straight to *le professionnel*. Despite his family's deep roots in Bordeaux, winemaker Vincent Chaperon followed his nose northeast to Champagne roughly two decades ago. Today, he's uncorking a new chapter as the *chef de cave* (cellar master) at Dom Pérignon, where he's excited about the house's Rosé Vintage 2009. "It's vibrant, yet fragrant," Chaperon says of the latest release, "which makes a powerful, yet elegant pairing for holiday occasions." The well-traveled winemaker, who has stoked his wanderlust over the years on adventures such as hiking in northern Pakistan and sailing with his family, also plans to give his fellow voyagers sweets from Bordeaux's Saunion *chocolaterie*, Moleskine notebooks, and thought-provoking French literature by Honoré de Balzac. *Rosé Vintage 2009*, \$465, domperignon.com. – Sallie Lewis





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THE NORTH AFRICAN COOKBOOK

BY JEFF KOEHLER (*Phaidon*)

Author and *Virtuoso*, *The Magazine* contributor Koehler researched his latest cookbook for 20 years, traveling to North Africa's Maghreb region – Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya – to collect traditional recipes from chefs and home cooks. The resulting 468-page tome goes well beyond couscous and tagine, capturing the region's true culinary diversity.

SEED TO PLATE, SOIL TO SKY

BY LOIS ELLEN FRANK (*Hachette Go*)

The plant-based recipes in this collection are divided into sections featuring eight Native American-introduced staples – corn, beans, squash, chile peppers, tomatoes, potatoes, vanilla, and cacao. The resulting Southwestern-inspired dishes are flavorful, hearty, and reflective of the stewards who first cooked with the ingredients thousands of years ago.

THE STORY OF PASTA AND HOW TO COOK IT!

BY STEVEN GUARNACCIA (*Phaidon*)

Packed with vivid illustrations of ravioli moons and *dischi volanti* noodles in space, this cookbook, geared toward kids ages 7 to 11, introduces 35 Italian pasta shapes, from farfalle (invented in the 1500s) to *ditalini* (a southern Italian specialty). Each story is accompanied by a hands-on recipe that's doable for aspiring young chefs.

SEAFOOD SIMPLE

BY ERIC RIPERT (*Random House*)

In his latest cookbook, French chef Eric Ripert of Le Bernardin fame preaches the basics: Master your techniques, keep ingredients minimal, and source sustainable seafood whenever possible. The chef guides readers through how to fillet a fish and shuck an oyster, while recipes for dishes such as mussels *marinières* rosé will transport diners straight to Saint-Tropez.

SCANDINAVIAN FROM SCRATCH

BY NICHOLE ACCETTOLA (*Ten Speed Press*)

Go full hygge in your kitchen with a fresh batch of *kanelbullar* (cinnamon buns), cardamom morning buns, or one of the other cakes, cookies, and breads in this collection from Accettola, who owns San Francisco's Kantine bakery. There's also a section dedicated to the *smørrebrød*, Denmark's iconic open-faced sandwich.

MAYDAN

BY ROSE PREVITE WITH MARAH STETS (*Abrams*)

In her debut cookbook, Lebanese American chef Previte shares recipes with origins across the Middle East and North Africa. Beloved dishes from her restaurants (D.C.'s Maydan and Compass Rose) and some of her favorite childhood meals include everything from Georgian *khachapuri* to Tunisian chicken skewers, plus there's an entire chapter dedicated to creating the ultimate dinner-party-worthy mezze spread. – A.C.



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Sea Change

The next generation takes to cruising.

IT'S TRUE – cruising has a “passengers of a certain age” reputation. But as cruise lines shed staid decor and formal dining rooms in favor of active diversions and more adventurous cuisine, they’re turning the heads of younger travelers: A recent survey by industry trade group Cruise Line Industry Association (CLIA) found that 88 percent of millennials who have previously cruised say they plan to sail again, and 77 percent of those who have never cruised would consider a vacation on the high seas. Passenger data collected by CLIA confirms the average age of cruisers has been trending downward, most recently at 46.5 in 2022.

NUCHAO/GETTY IMAGES



CARBONE at ARIA



PRIME Steakhouse at Bellagio



Joël Robuchon



Blue Ribbon at The Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas



MGM RESORTS



Younger cruisers are packing their bags for Caribbean and Mexican Riviera itineraries, says Allison Amini, a San Diego-based Virtuoso travel advisor. "The under-50 crowd tends to take shorter cruises – seven nights or less," she says, adding that they gravitate to forward-thinking lines such as Virgin Voyages, Royal Caribbean, and Celebrity. "The decor on Celebrity's ships is elegant yet easy, and they've eliminated formal night, shaking off stuffiness in favor of casual sophistication. Plus, they've made an effort in their marketing to promote diversity and inclusion."

Nirmal Saverimuttu, CEO of Virgin Voyages, notes that it's not just the millennial and Gen Z crowd seeking alternatives. "We believe strongly that modern consumers are looking for something that feels younger," he says. Virgin doesn't cater to passengers under 18, creating a more adult environment – think tattoo parlors and drag shows – and attracting multi-generational and mom-and-me bookings. "We see a lot of 20-year-olds traveling with their parents because they don't want to do the same cruise they went on when they were 12 years old," he says. Here, three itineraries packed with youth appeal.

"Modern consumers are looking for something that feels younger."

GO Take a long-weekend spin through the Caribbean aboard **Virgin Voyages'** 2,770-passenger *Scarlet Lady*. Sailing round-trip from Miami, hammock-laced five-night itineraries alternate visits to Cozumel, gateway to Mexico's Tulum and Playa del Carmen, and the Dominican Republic's Puerto Plata, where passengers can embark on a jungle hike to the 27 waterfalls and natural slides of Damajagua. *Departures: Multiple dates, November 5, 2023, through April 12, 2024; from \$1,235.*

Canvass a wide swath of Mediterranean beaches and historical sites on a 12-night journey from Barcelona to Athens aboard **Celebrity Cruises'** just-launched, 3,260-passenger *Celebrity Ascent*. Following a stop in Nice, Italian ports include Rome and Naples, while La Spezia is the jumping-off point for Pisa, Florence, or the Cinque Terre. Next, stop by a trio of Greek islands and Kusadasi, Turkey, for excursions to the magnificent ruins of Ephesus. *Departure: May 6, 2024; from \$2,549.*

With a fleet of ships accommodating just 22 to 86 guests, **UnCruise Adventures** specializes in Alaska – and active exploration. A seven-night route aboard the 74-passenger *Wilderness Discoverer* sails from Juneau to Ketchikan, but otherwise skips large ports in favor of kayaking in the remote Misty Fjords National Monument Wilderness, hiking through island landscapes big-ship cruisers only glimpse, and lingering in Frederick Sound with feasting whales. *Departures: Multiple dates, April 28 through September 22, 2024; from \$3,600. – David Swanson*

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From left: A fresh catch and a sunny welcome in Maroma's lobby.

Riviera Maya, Done Right

It's hard to say if it's the single-origin Mexican coffee that appears on suite terraces each morning, the octopus and lobster ceviches for lunch, or the chili-salt-rimmed *mezcalitas* at the shady palapa beach bar, but something about the hacienda lifestyle of Belmond's **Maroma** resort is instantly addictive. Set on 200 acres of tropical jungle 25 miles south of Cancún, the 72-room property recently reopened after a two-year closure for renovations that highlight Mayan culture, handmade art and design, and flavors from the Yucatán and across Mexico.

Among the new additions to its whitewashed stucco facades: ten one- and two-bedroom beachfront suites, Latin America's first

Guerlain spa, and Curtis Stone's open-fire restaurant, Woodend. (Stone's grilled cowboy rib eye for two and charcoal-oven-roasted blue shrimp are review-worthy, but the sleeper hit is a simple cabbage heart charred directly in the coals and served with *salsa macha*.) Sipping, snacking, and hammock siesta-ing aside, guests have their run of the freshly raked beach, as well as diving and snorkeling outings on the world's second-largest barrier reef, sunset cruises, and a host of activities such as a tortilla- and taco-making class and a half-day outing for a privately guided swim through an underground cenote. *Doubles from \$1,095, including breakfast daily and a \$100 resort credit.* – Justin Paul

(TOP) PIA RIVEROLA, (LOBBY) WILLIAM JESS LAIRD

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From the 1906 London landmark known as the Old War Office, Winston Churchill strategized to defeat Adolf Hitler in World War II. Later, in James Bond films, it served as MI6 headquarters. Now, following an eight-year renovation, the stately Whitehall address has reopened as **Raffles London at The OWO**. The late, acclaimed designer Thierry Despont, known for his sensitive adaptations of such historic buildings as the Ritz Paris, transformed the Edwardian Baroque office with its two and a half miles of hallways and two-story marble staircase into a 120-room urban resort with a nine-treatment-room Guerlain spa and a 66-foot swimming pool. Dining options span three bars and nine restaurants – a Japanese rooftop spot with views of Buckingham Palace and a trio of dining spaces from Michelin-starred chef Mauro Colagreco among them. Corner suites named for notable British women, including Churchill's wife, Clementine, occupy cupolas. With period oak paneling, grand fireplaces, and bathtubs designed for unwinding Churchill-style, larger suites such as the Granville, pictured here, pay homage to War Office spies and legends. *Doubles from \$1,370, including breakfast daily and a \$100 hotel credit.* – Elaine Glusac



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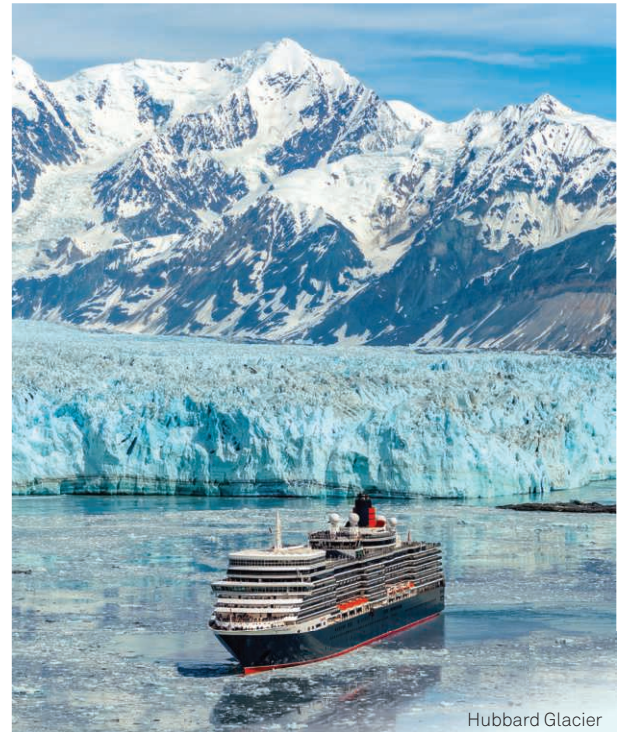
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QUEEN ELIZABETH®



Map-Free in Madrid

Sohla El-Waylly ditches her phone for maximum fun.

INTERVIEW BY SALLIE LEWIS

FOR SOHLA EL-WAYLLY, the L.A.-born, NYC-based culinary creator, writer, video producer, and judge on Max's *The Big Brunch*, a career in cooking once felt more like a pipe dream than a professional reality. "I went to school for economics – I was planning on having a corporate job," she says. A backpacking trip through Europe galvanized her culinary aspirations. "Travel actually inspired me to get into cooking," she

**“It’s more fun
to get lost.
Sometimes you
end up in
a cooler place.”**

says. “I met a lot of people and ate at a lot of cool places.”

Today, the Culinary Institute of America graduate enjoys traveling in her own way, free of itineraries, guidebooks, and even Google Maps. “I don’t like to travel with a phone because it’s too easy,” she explains. “It’s more fun to get lost – and sometimes, you end up in a cooler place.” In September El-Waylly and her husband, Ham, welcomed their first child, and this month she’ll release her debut cookbook, *Start Here: Instructions for Becoming a Better Cook*. “I wanted to write the book that I wish I had when I started cooking,” she says. “It’s not just recipes but answering questions and explaining the whys and hows behind things so people feel more confident in the kitchen.”

SOHLA EL-WAYLLY’S GUIDE TO SPAIN

I don’t get a lot of time to go places, but Spain is really the only place I want to go. What’s great about the triangle formed by **Barcelona**, **Valencia**, and **Madrid** is that, within a very small area, you get to see three distinct facets of Spanish life. Barcelona is metropolitan, while Valencia is very chill, and with its partying, Madrid almost feels like a college town. The best thing is to fly into Barcelona. Once you get there, you’ll of course want to see landmarks like **La Sagrada Família**. My recommendation is to visit before sunrise because there’s no one around but street cleaners. You’re going to be jet-lagged anyway, so you’ll probably be awake. While touring the city, be sure to stop



Madrid stalwart:
Sobrino de Botín.

for tapas and a glass of house *vermut* at **Quimet & Quimet**, a historic, standing-room-only bar in Poble Sec.

From Barcelona, you can easily take the train west to Madrid. Snag a seat, along with some clams and suckling pig, at **Sobrino de Botín** in La Latina – it’s the oldest continuously running restaurant in the world. What’s great about Madrid is there’s lots of nightlife and flamenco. For drinks and dancing until the wee hours, go to a fun nightclub, like the seven-story **Club Kapital** on Atocha. Before heading back to your hotel, walk around the grounds of the city’s **Royal Palace**. It’s

magical in the early-morning hours and feels like you have the place to yourself.

For the last leg of the journey, head back east to Valencia, which is one of my favorite places. The best paella is in Valencia – on my first trip, I went just for that. When you get off the train, head to **Paseo Neptuno**; years ago, I had an unforgettable *arroz negro* made with squid ink and cuttlefish there at a place called **La Pepica**. I only found it because I talked to a stranger, and it blew my mind how delicious it was. If you have any wine left, do as I did and take the rest to nearby **Malvarrosa Beach**, and enjoy it there – it’s an amazing experience. 📍



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Hong Kong's "Dark Side" steps into the spotlight.

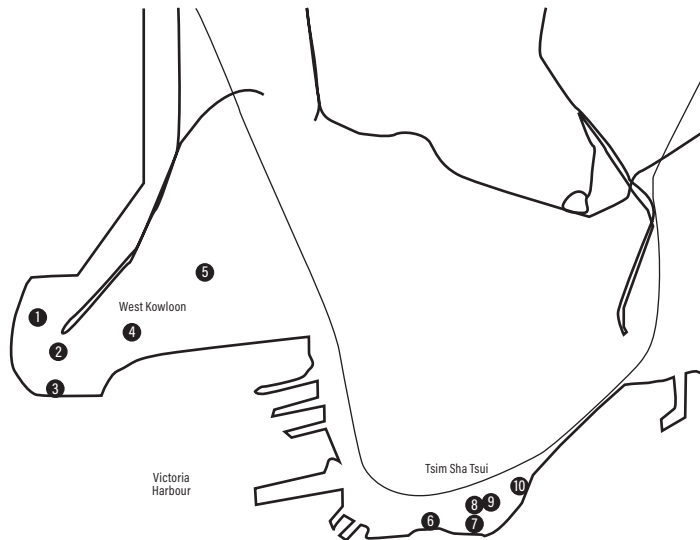
BY KATE SPRINGER PHOTOGRAPHY BY BEN WELLER



DarkSide cocktails, K11 Musea kicks, and twilight on Victoria Harbour. Opposite: Dumplings and wok-fried Wagyu at Lai Ching Heen.

GO FOR With its dense neon-lit streets, packed markets, and abundance of local restaurants, Kowloon has long been considered Hong Kong's heart and soul. Often overshadowed by the more polished Hong Kong Island across Victoria Harbour, the "Dark Side," as it's affectionately nicknamed, is buzzing with new energy, thanks to a wellspring of recent arts and culture projects in the waterfront Tsim Sha Tsui and West Kowloon neighborhoods. In Tsim Sha Tsui, the renovated **Hong Kong Museum of Art**, sprawling new **Victoria Dockside** art and design district, and reimagined Avenue of Stars are all a short walk apart. Meanwhile, a ten-minute drive west, the West Kowloon Cultural District – a massive arts development project that took over a decade to complete – is packed with prestigious venues, from the **Xiqu Centre** for Chinese theater to the **M+** museum of visual culture and the **Hong Kong Palace Museum**.

EAT At the Hong Kong Palace Museum, explore more than 900 cultural treasures on loan from Beijing's Palace Museum, then keep the Forbidden City vibes going with lunch at **Xia**. The contemporary Chinese teahouse on the museum's ground floor brings Qing Dynasty imperial cuisine into



1. Xia/Hong Kong Palace Museum
2. Xiqu Centre
3. Rest Coffee Gin
4. Mosu Hong Kong/M+
5. Ascot Chang
6. Hong Kong Museum of Art
7. Lai Ching Heen/Regent Hong Kong
8. K11 Musea
9. Victoria Dockside
10. DarkSide/Rosewood Hong Kong





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City Guide

the modern age in dishes such as braised duck with lotus seed, Chinese lettuce and scallion meatballs, and sweet red-bean-filled rice rolls.

Among the imaginative exhibits and four dining options at the ultramodern M+ is **Mosu Hong Kong**, an outpost of chef Sung Anh's three-Michelin-starred restaurant in Seoul. Its minimalist interiors complement a tasting menu that champions simplicity and seasonality, including sweet-corn tofu in *ajo blanco* (akin to an almond gazpacho), sea eel in *jeonbyeong* (a buckwheat crepe), and Hanwoo *bresaola* and vegetables.

Executive chef Lau Yiu Fai takes travelers on an authentic Cantonese culinary journey at **Lai Ching Heen**, a two-Michelin-starred address overlooking Victoria Harbour from inside the recently renovated Regent Hong Kong. Enlist the restaurant's tea sommelier for pairings with everything from delicate midday dim sum dishes to the eight-course tasting menu for dinner.

DRINK For a front-row seat to sunset over Victoria Harbour, grab a table at **Rest Coffee Gin** in the West Kowloon Art Park. All about specialty coffee by day and craft cocktails by night, this low-key spot specializes in refreshing G&Ts (with more than 80 types of gin on offer), but travelers can't go wrong with the impossibly smooth espresso martini either.

Hong Kongers love a good cocktail bar – and few compare with **DarkSide** at the Rosewood Hong Kong. Plush velvet and live jazz set the tone in this sultry sanctuary, where guests unwind over rare dark spirits (including a barrel-to-glass Pierre Ferrand Grande Champagne cognac), classic cocktails, or novel creations inspired by mah-jongg, one of Hong Kong's most beloved pastimes.

SHOP Brimming with megamalls and thrifty market finds, Tsim Sha Tsui is an oasis for the fashion-obsessed, but **K11 Musea**, a nature- and art-inspired mall covered in 50,000 square feet of green walls, is the pinnacle. The Victoria Dockside space brings together dozens of contemporary artworks and installations with some 250 global brands, from

The West Kowloon Cultural District.



Alexander McQueen to Le Labo, Off-White, and Asia's largest MoMA Design Store.

Buying a bespoke suit is a quintessential Hong Kong sartorial experience – for one of the best, make an appointment at **Ascot Chang**, a 15-minute walk north of the West Kowloon Cultural District, where tailors have been crafting exquisite men's clothing, including classic white poplins, casual jackets, and modern tuxes, since 1953.

STAY Built on the site of the early 1900s Holt's Wharf dockyard, the 413-room **Rosewood Hong Kong** strikes a balance between local heritage and European panache. Rooms and suites feature harbor views, and the hotel is home to 11 globally inspired bars and restaurants, a leafy spa, and an extensive art collection starring works by the likes of Damien Hirst and Lynn Chadwick. *Doubles from \$958, including breakfast daily and a \$100 hotel credit.*

Fresh from a three-year transformation, the 497-room **Regent Hong Kong** reopened this year on the Tsim Sha Tsui waterfront. Designed by Hong Kong-born Chi Wing Lo, the serene interiors welcome guests with castlelike doors and triple-height windows showcasing the harbor. Rooms (60 percent of which face the water) come with king-size beds and Japanese-style soaking tubs. *Doubles from \$767, including breakfast daily and a \$100 dining credit.* 📍



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First Person

The Big Chill

IN SEARCH OF HOLIDAY CHEER AND TEENAGE GOODWILL IN SWEDEN.

BY MARIKA CAIN



OLIA BRICSON/STOCKHOLM PHOTO

Cozy season
in Stockholm



THE PLAN bubbled up midsummer. When I suggested a Swedish Christmas, Oliver not only agreed but insisted. He loved the idea of spending the holiday in a place where the sun rose at 10 and set not long after lunch. Yes, my son said, he absolutely wanted to ride a dogsled and sleep in a hotel made of ice. Buoyed by this rare burst of ninth-grade enthusiasm, I started planning.

We'd bookend a few days in the Arctic Circle – staying at the Icehotel – with time in Stockholm, shopping the Christmas markets, strolling the Old Town, snacking on saffron buns, and toasting each other with glogg and cocoa. We'd bond over dogsledding and seeing the northern lights and exploring a faraway place together. He'd uncover a newfound admiration

for his cool mom. In hindsight, it was a lot to ask of the country of Sweden.

On the heels of garden-variety but exhausting holiday travel snafus (flight canceled, second flight delayed, connection missed), we arrived in Stockholm at 1:30 AM. Our checked bag was not so lucky. We hauled Oliver's small carry-on to the waiting car that whisked us through the long northern night to our hotel. At Ett Hem, an Ilse Crawford-designed jewel box, Room 7 and a king-size bed awaited. You know who doesn't care about an Ilse Crawford-designed jewel box? A travel-weary 14-year-old staring down the barrel of sharing a bed with his mom. "It's a *king-size* bed," I pleaded, delirious with fatigue. "I'll put pillows between us! You'll never know I'm there!" No dice. He decamped to the loveseat;

I rummaged through the few shreds of my own clothing I'd tossed into his carry-on at the last minute and passed out. Memory made.

We slept through breakfast and then some, rolling downstairs to a scene straight from a Nordic fairy tale. Fir boughs draped the living room doorway, a stout tree glowed with white lights next to the piano, candles flickered on every surface, and star lanterns hung from the ceiling. Ett Hem occupies three private houses and cultivates a "rich friend's pied-à-terre" aesthetic: warm herringbone wood floors, velvet sofas, books galore. There's no traditional restaurant, just a couple of chef-staffed open kitchens and a slew of charming nooks and elegant alcoves for dining. We grabbed a table in the courtyard's glass house and plotted our next

move. “Mom, PLEASE stop taking photos – you look like a tourist,” my travel companion said, taking refuge behind his bangs between bites of his burger.

After lunch we ventured out to the one nonnegotiable Stockholm stop on his itinerary: ABBA The Museum, an obvious must for any self-respecting theater kid. I trailed behind Oliver as he took in *actual* costumes worn by Agnetha, Frida, Björn, and Benny and followed the trajectory of their mostly drama-free career, a sort of yin to Fleetwood Mac’s yang. Eventually we were ejected into the gift shop and, one ABBA hoodie the richer, moved on

to mingle with holiday shoppers in the city center.

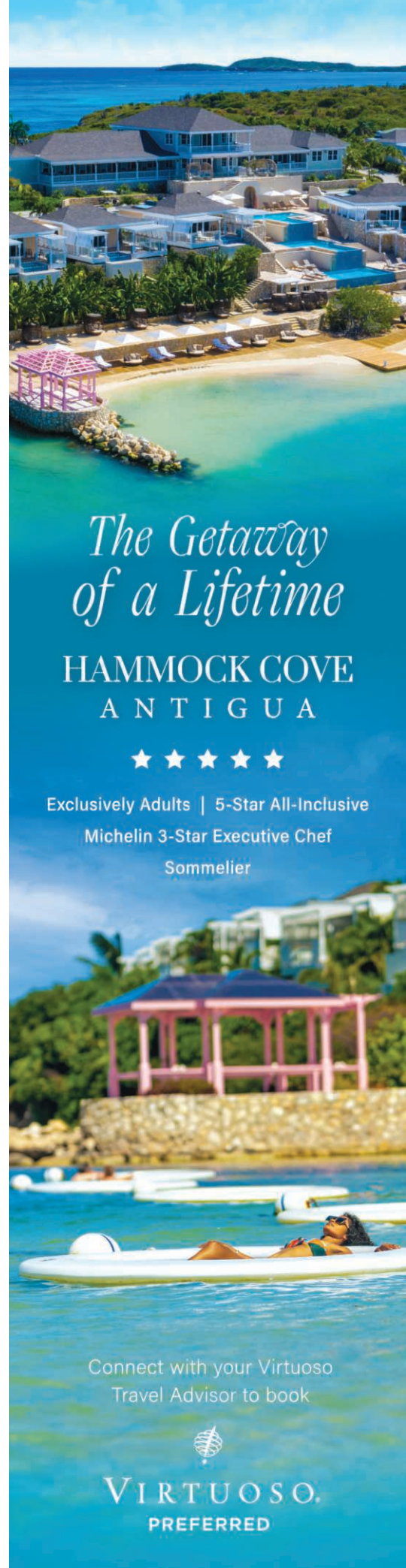
It was December 21, and the Christmas bustle was reaching its peak. At NK, Stockholm’s landmark 1915 department store, a twinkling four-story tree rotated from the ceiling in the colonnaded atrium. Elsewhere, tiered Advent candles and yet more star lanterns glowed in windows as dusk fell around 3 p.m. In restaurants and shops, the forced hyacinths and amaryllises felt like a declaration: In winter’s depths, you can make your own light.

Staving off jet lag, we headed to Old Town to stock up on essentials at the

The Christmas market in Stockholm’s Old Town and (opposite) Ett Hem.



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Cool scene: The Icehotel's entrance.

ASA KLIGER

First Person

Christmas market's cozy huts: glogg for me, with a stack of crisp, heart-shaped *pepparkakor*; Sweden's ubiquitous ginger cookie; a steaming waffle for Oliver; and *tomte* figurines and wooden butter knives for our family back home. Oliver deigned to snap a photo of me with my glogg but declined my dinner offer, so I dropped him at the hotel (where a roll-away bed had appeared in our room) and grabbed my own dinner – and a glass of brut – in town.

One thing we can usually agree on is that we need something sweet, so the next day we caught a ferry in Stockholm Harbour and chugged out past a few of the archipelago's 30,000 islands, some so small they sprouted just a single red cottage, others large enough for the public ferry to stop. My attempts to capture a "boy on boat" portrait garnered mostly dirty looks, so I took my camera outside and watched the archipelago glide by. Linda Wahlström greeted us at the dock on Vaxholm Island and led us on the short walk to her home, where she teaches visitors to make cinnamon buns and runs a small guesthouse with her husband.

Linda's house was warm and clean. Her Christmas tree was charmingly festooned. Her decorating taste was peak *hygge*. I wanted to move in. Oliver, in his element, pushed up his sleeves and joined in the mixing and measuring and chatting with Linda before we sat down to lunch (tomato soup, sandwiches on homemade focaccia, and *julmust*, a root-beer-esque Swedish Christmas soda). When the buns emerged from the oven, expertly knotted by our teenage pastry chef, the sun was already setting.

THE TREETOP STAR of our trip was Christmas in Swedish Lapland. Arriving in Kiruna packs all the drama of landing on some frigid *Star Wars* planet. Our plane touched down on the frozen runway around 1:30 PM, just as twilight was descending – or, more accurately, deepening. Here, at 67 degrees north, the days were even shorter than in Stockholm. The sun wouldn't rise again until the new year.

As we crunched through the snow to the tiny Kiruna terminal, our eyelashes and nose hairs froze. It was 5 degrees Fahrenheit.

Our destination, Jukkasjärvi, just 20 minutes down the road, is home to a tourist attraction that would also be our home for Christmas Eve. The Icehotel is constructed each year from massive blocks harvested from the Torne River. Each spring before the thaw, tons of ice are hauled from its waters and tucked away in cold storage, where they wait to be transformed into November's giant, ephemeral lodgings. The following spring, the whole thing (aside from a few suites and a bar kept cold for year-round use) melts and the process is repeated.

By the time we arrived at the hotel, it was completely dark. The air glittered with gusts of snow, and on cue, the northern lights appeared like some celestial welcome banner. Oliver, in the highest possible act of approval, brandished his phone and started snapping away. We were issued snowsuits, boots, and balaclavas, as was every other visitor, which gave the outdoor scene a sort of Teletubbies-on-ice vibe, everyone waddling around like awestruck toddlers against a backdrop of motionless evergreens frosted in gobs of snow.

Most people who visit the Icehotel just stop for drinks at the Icebar and a wander through its rooms, many conceived by artists. Oliver and I would be spending the night before Christmas swaddled in subzero sleeping bags atop reindeer skins in our own snow-carved suite. One of us was having second thoughts about the whole endeavor: our dogsledding outing, the nighttime snowmobiling, and especially his bed of ice. Out there on the frozen tundra, it was just my will versus one stubborn teen.

I persisted, parting the boy from his video games and the heated lounge the next morning, and following the sound of yipping to the frozen Torne. We installed ourselves on a four-person dogsled with two bundled Brits and a pink-cheeked driver at the helm. The barking crescendoed as we slid into



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Guide MICHELIN

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Dashing through the snow in Jukkasjärvi.

Swedish Essentials

GO Tour operator **50 Degrees North** can organize custom itineraries throughout Sweden, including visits to Vaxholms Bed & Breakfast for cinnamon-bun-making lessons, candy-cane-making lessons in Stockholm's Old Town, and stays at the Icehotel in Jukkasjärvi, with dogsledding, snowmobiling, and northern lights viewing. *Pricing varies depending on itinerary.*

STAY On a residential street in Stockholm's Östermalm neighborhood, 22-room **Ett Hem** comprises three 1910 Arts and Crafts-style brick townhouses, filled with homey Swedish modernist furnishings, scads of books and records, fresh flowers, and, in place of stand-alone restaurants, two open kitchens where guests are welcome. Meals can be taken in an array of lounges and dining rooms, and in the courtyard's glass house (or outdoors in warmer months). *Doubles from \$442, including breakfast daily and a \$100 hotel credit.*

The flag-festooned **Grand Hôtel Stockholm** presides over the city's waterfront, looking very much like many stately old city hotels. But inside, the 1874 building is a warren of surprises, from its subterranean spa and Versailles-inspired ballroom to the cavalcade of decor styles throughout its 279 rooms, including a two-story Attic Suite with its shocking-blue wrought-iron stair railing and bold wallpaper, and the Flag Suite with its porthole windows and spiral staircase to a glass-bubble lookout tower. *Doubles from \$353, including breakfast daily and a \$100 dining credit.*

motion, picking up speed across the snowy expanse. Snug houses decked out in white lights hugged the banks, and a family passed on a snowmobile towing a child of 3 or 4 on her own tiny sled. In my seat behind Oliver, I didn't have to see his face to know he was loving it. When the dogs stopped barking, there was just the sound of runners on snow and the big Arctic sky slowly turning pink with the not-quite-sunrise.

Later, there was a starry snowmobile drive through the woods to a firelit hut, where we sipped hot lingonberry juice and politely masticated bowls of moose goulash. There was the night in our suite of ice, where, insulated from the world by three-foot-thick frozen walls, we slept cocooned in silence inside our industrial-strength sleeping bags. There was Christmas morning, where I gave Oliver a bracelet from the hotel gift shop, and he gave me some caramels he'd packed from home. There were a few more lazy days in Stockholm – including a reunion with our luggage – at the elegant Grand Hôtel, shopping for souvenirs at home-decor institution Svenskt Tenn, ordering burgers and Champagne (for me) in the hotel bar, and grazing through the *julbord*, a traditional Swedish Christmas feast of approximately 3,000 types of smoked and pickled fish, Swedish meatballs, and house-brand aquavit. There were protracted silences and refusals to visit the Vasa Museum, which houses an entire seventeenth-century warship excavated from the muck of Stockholm Harbour. There were doubts that this trip had been a good idea.

And then there was our return home, complete with someone's repeated wearing of an ABBA sweatshirt, retellings of the snowmobile ride, sharing of northern lights photos, and casual bragging. One thing about teenagers is that they don't always shout their newfound admiration for their cool mom from the rooftops. Several months later, I asked Oliver in passing what he thought our best-ever trip had been. "Oh," he said, "definitely Sweden." ♡



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CANADA*

THE PEAK BEAUTY OF THE CANADIAN ROCKIES

A winter adventure in the Canadian Rockies is about more than fresh powder—its glittering snow-covered landscapes and towering peaks will leave you with a newfound sense of awe for the natural world.

Gazing up at the Canadian Rockies is like looking back in time. The jagged peaks of limestone and shale were sculpted by ice sheets 14,000 years ago, and the glacial sediment left behind gives Alberta's lakes and rivers their bright turquoise luster. It's been home to Indigenous nations for 10,000 years, and to fossils that long predate the dinosaurs. In fact, high in the mountains of Yoho and Kootenay national parks, paleontologists found the oldest evidence of complex life on Earth.

Despite being known as one of the most rugged and imposing landscapes in North America, the Canadian Rockies are surprisingly easy to travel around, whether by car, scenic rail, or snowshoes. And winter is the perfect time to take part in both high-octane activities, such as fat biking and downhill skiing, or more relaxed pursuits (think sleigh rides past frozen lakes). Wherever the journey leads, you'll walk away with a renewed sense of wonder—for the sheer beauty of the scenery, for Indigenous stewardship of the land, and for nature's incredible power to endure.



📍 Métis Crossing, Alberta

Winter Reflections

The bears might be settling in for a long snooze, but don't let that fool you—Alberta is an exhilarating playground for travelers who love to make the most out of winter. The eight-day Stories of Canada: Winter in Alberta tour, hosted by Entrée Destinations, offers an intimate journey through a commanding landscape with unique views of snowcapped peaks and frozen waterfalls, from the ground and from the air. You'll also connect with Indigenous perspectives, both contemporary and traditional.

The trip starts with two days in Kananaskis Country, which means lots of chances for winter activity: snowshoeing through the forests of Peter Lougheed Provincial Park, cross-country skiing across 50 miles of groomed trails, or taking a ride on a fat bike, whose giant tires give serious traction on hardpack snow. In Banff, a visit to Carter-Ryan Gallery provides another angle on Alberta's legendary mountains, through the bold colors and pop landscapes of contemporary

Indigenous artist Jason Carter, from Little Red River Cree Nation.

Another chance to expand your view comes with a tour of the snowy cliffs and craggy corridors that surround Banff, where a local tour operator helps you decipher ancient canyon pictographs from an Indigenous perspective. Then, hitch a private helicopter ride around Mount Assiniboine, one of the tallest mountains in the Rockies, surrounded by waterfalls of ice.

End your journey in Smoky Lake at Métis Crossing, a cultural gathering center designed and run by Métis people. You'll learn how reconciliation efforts returned wild bison to traditional Métis land, 160 years after being driven to near extinction by settlers. (Keep your eyes peeled for the seven fuzzy red calves recently born to the herd.) And you'll spend your final evening in one of the Crossing's Sky Watching Domes—the perfect place to reflect on the different journeys that shaped this region while navigating the stars above.

📍 SPOTTED LOCAL TRICKS

Skijoring is the fastest-growing winter sport in North America, and in January 2024, the action-packed show swings through Banff. Watch as trick skiers pulled by horses (at 40 miles per hour!) thrill the crowd in this quintessentially Canadian snow rodeo.



Longview, Alberta



📍 **SPOTTED**
LOCAL CULTURE

Mother-daughter duo Matricia and Mackenzie Brown are the forces behind Warrior Women, an award-winning Cree drumming group whose powerful music connects audiences to Indigenous stories of the land around Jasper and to melodies dating back centuries.

📍 Abraham Lake, Alberta



The Sky's the Limit

It can be easy to forget how vast Canada is. Before the Canadian Pacific Railway linked one coast to another in the late 19th century, it was faster and cheaper to travel from Vancouver to Hong Kong than it was to travel to Halifax. The two-day journey from Vancouver, British Columbia, to Jasper, Alberta, on VIA Rail's Canadian Train is the ideal way to be immersed in breathtaking winter scenery. The Skyline car's observation dome gives you a 180-degree view while rolling past snow-blanketed farmland, frozen rivers, and old-growth forests. This is where Canada by Design's seven-day Luxury Winter Snow Train to the Canadian Rockies tour begins.

Once in Jasper, you'll have two and a half days of unforgettable excursions, set against a backdrop of awe-inspiring natural phenomena. Enjoy an ice walk through Maligne Canyon, where 10,000 years of glacial scraping have left behind a gorge that runs 165 feet deep. Then, take a private helicopter flight for a bird's-eye view of one of the Rockies' coolest sights: Abraham Lake, where every winter, pockets of methane gas trapped beneath the frozen water create an extraordinary landscape of suspended bubbles.

The nights hold even more opportunities to explore the surroundings. Settle in under a warm blanket for a cozy evening sleigh ride around Lake Louise, and then look up to the skies. The northern lights are most active in Alberta from September to mid-May, and while you can't expect to see them on any given night, they've been known to surprise. The world's largest dark sky preserve can be found at Jasper Planetarium, which offers exceptional darkness for engaging in a night of cosmic discovery.

The journey ends in Calgary, where you shouldn't miss a visit to the Indigenous-led theater company, Making Treaty 7, with programming from award-winning Indigenous musicians, dancers, and playwrights.





Johnston Canyon, Alberta

Unparalleled Views & Unforgettable Hues

The Canadian Rockies in the winter are so much more than a study in white. The distinctive blues and jades of Banff's lakes that come from sunlight reflecting off eroded glacial silt are still visible at various points throughout the season, as are the deep-orange mineral pools known as the Paint Pots in Kootenay National Park. A great way to see these vivid colors? Strap on a pair of snowshoes, used by Indigenous peoples for winter travel for at least 6,000 years. Modern snowshoes are a sleek affair—almost like short, nimble skis—and will give you a unique vantage point on the Rockies' landscape.

Backroads' Canadian Rockies Snow Adventure Tour mixes six days of natural wildness with restorative wellness. Highlights include a snowshoe ramble in Kootenay National Park, from the Marble Canyon's emerald waters to the Paint Pots' ochre mineral pools, caused by a buildup of iron oxide in the beds. They look like what you might find on the surface of Mars, but they've been used as decorative pigments by the Ktunaxa people for more than 10,000 years. A gondola ride to the summit of Sulphur Mountain reveals spectacular views over six mountain ranges, which pairs nicely with locally sourced dishes at the panoramic Sky Bistro. Treat yourself to more delicious food at The Maple Leaf Family Restaurant, where Indigenous chef Shane Chartrand celebrates traditional ingredients and showcases family recipes.

This trip offers several opportunities to take it easy while still taking in the great outdoors: one day, settle into a hot tub perched outside by secluded Emerald Lake; the next, enjoy a glass of wine from Post Hotel & Spa's 25,000-bottle cellar while gazing out at Mount Temple's triangular peak. To cap it all off, you can soothe achy muscles with a massage or treatment at the Post's spa, or float in the hotel's indoor saltwater pool while you consider your next adventure.

📍 SPOTTED LOCAL SPIRITS

Banff-based **Park Distillery** is Canada's only distillery located inside a national park. Small-batch spirits are made from limestone-enriched glacial water and high-altitude Alberta grain, while premixed cocktails include a negroni, a manhattan, and (of course) the Canadian classic, a Caesar.

DISPATCH FROM THE END OF THE WORLD

HOW TO SPEND A DAY IN AND AROUND USHUAIA, ARGENTINA'S GATEWAY TO ANTARCTICA.
BY EMMA FRANKE PHOTOGRAPHY BY LUJÁN AGUSTI

ASSISTED BY NICOLÁS DELUCA



Spring sun near Lapataia Bay in the
Patagonian Andes.

FOR CENTURIES, the nomadic Yámana people navigated the waters south of Isla Grande, where the Andes meet the Beagle Channel, in bark canoes, keeping low-burning fires ablaze in their hulls for warmth and light. When Ferdinand Magellan sailed the region, the Yámana bonfires dotting forest and sea inspired him to call it Tierra del Fuego: the land of fire.

Today, Ushuaia is the center of activity in Tierra del Fuego province. Just over three hours by plane from Buenos Aires and separated from the mainland by the Strait of Magellan, it's generally considered the closest launching point for Antarctic expeditions. The staunchly independent port city is a base for Patagonian adventure and coastal Argentinian culture, beckoning skiers who zip among its mountain resorts in winter and summer cruisers and hikers who lean into the town's self-styled identity as *el fin del mundo*. Here's how to make the most of a port call in the world's southernmost city.

10 AM

The port of Ushuaia leads straight to the downtown shopping district, where colorful European-style architecture

creates a bright moment of visual relief against the surrounding Martial Mountains. The first stop for those sailing to Antarctica should be the tourism information center, not for brochures or penguin keychains, but for the passport stamps that verify visits to the White Continent.

Beyond the info center, walk a block to Paseo de los Artesanos, a covered market and workshop where local craftspeople display handmade jewelry, wool garments, and traditional yerba maté gourds. Stroll busy Avenida San Martín on the way to the Maritime Museum, set inside this one-time penal colony's former prison. A gallery of Argentinian paintings depicts the region's ties to the sea, and a reconstructed Yámana bark canoe pays homage to the people who first called the province home. Model ships and fishing yarns set the mood for the day's seafood feast: Ingrid Borgas, a Perth-based Virtuoso travel advisor who has visited Ushuaia twice, recommends paella from cozy Casa de los Mariscos, a bright-pink storefront on the main shopping street.

12:30 PM

Paella plates empty, it's time for the main event: Tierra del Fuego National

Park. Shuttles, taxis, and vintage locomotives run at regular intervals to the park, home to the Post Office at the End of the World. The single-room hut, warmed by a woodstove on brisk days, sells postcards and stamps as snail-mail certification of arrival in the Beagle Channel. Postcards will land in friends' mailboxes a few weeks after the post office's lonely perch on the rocky beachfront becomes a fond memory.

Deeper inside the park, at viewpoints from Lake Acigami and Lapataia Bay – which is also the terminus of the nearly 19,000-mile Pan-American Highway – peat bogs and windswept stands of lenga beeches call to mind the stark woodlands of northern Europe. Sitting at roughly the opposite latitude of the Scottish Highlands, Tierra del Fuego trades stags and hares for wild horses and guanacos. Borgas recommends hiking the five-mile, out-and-back Costera trail, which winds alongside Lapataia Bay's teal waters – with musical accompaniment courtesy of a thriving southern lapwing population.

4 PM

Back in town, toast the day's miles with locally sourced G&Ts at Jeremy Button Gintonería. Post up in its wood-paneled dining room or grab a porch seat by the firepit for a glass of copper-distilled gin, which counts the Patagonian calafate berry among its botanicals. Or go full-on Argentina with the Terere Button, a mixture of house gin, ginger, grapefruit, and yerba maté cordial.

6:30 PM

Beagle Channel seafood stars at family-run Kaupé Restaurant, a hilltop white-tablecloth spot with showstopping bay views. Chef Ernesto Vivian crafts simple preparations accentuated by pours of Mendoza's Lagarde viognier. Opt for the tasting menu to sample both of Ushuaia's must-tries: king crab, served with lemon and tomato, and Patagonian sea bass *en papillote*.





From left: The post office in the park, fresh seafood paella on Avenida San Martín, and a Sweet Gin Symphony at Jeremy Button.

Due South

GO Work through pre-Antarctica adrenaline with a catamaran tour of the Beagle Channel, where sea lion and cormorant sightings are common, before departing on the 132-passenger *Sylvia Earle* for the Antarctic Peninsula on an 11-night sailing with **Aurora Expeditions**. *Departures: Multiple dates, December 11, 2023, through November 22, 2024; from \$14,895.*

Disembark and wander Ushuaia after a four-night voyage from Punta Arenas aboard **Australis Cruises'** 200-passenger *Ventus Australis*. Packed with glacier- and penguin-spotting, the route takes in the Strait of Magellan, Glacier Alley, and the Beagle Channel. *Departures: Multiple dates, November 4, 2023, through April 4, 2024; from \$1,638.*

Following a trip down the Chilean coast, traverse Tierra del Fuego's rugged terrain on horseback or in an all-terrain vehicle on **Oceania Cruises'** South America exploration. The 1,250-passenger *Marina's* 20-night journey continues with three days in the Antarctic Peninsula before blazing north through the Atlantic en route to Buenos Aires. *Departure: February 14, 2024; from \$5,299.*

Crystal overnights in Ushuaia on its 123-night world cruise from Fort Lauderdale to Barcelona. Other highlights on the four-month trip aboard the 740-passenger *Crystal Serenity* include stops in Mozambique, Mumbai, and Tuscany. *Departure: January 7, 2025; from \$66,200.* 📍

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SLIDE RIGHT UP

NEW LIFTS, NO CROWDS, AND ENDLESS TERRAIN –
BIG SKY DIALS IN THE SKIER'S SKI VACATION. BY JUSTIN PAUL



JON HERNICK

Big Sky's Ramcharger 8 was North America's first eight-person lift.



Dropping into the Pinnacles and (opposite) a midmountain lunch at Everett's 8800.

ON A BLUEBIRD DAY, from the top of Lone Peak you can see clear to Yellowstone and the Tetons to the south, Idaho to the west, and across who knows how many hundreds of square miles of Montana wilderness and ranchlands in other directions. But it's not the horizon that draws my gaze: I can't stop looking down; nearly 2,000 vertical feet of pillowy, wind-loaded snow spread out below me – and that's before you hit the tree line. Wide-open Liberty Bowl beckons to the right, as do the more steeply pitched Lenin and Marx runs to the left, in a sort of geopolitical battle for some of the country's preeminent high-alpine resort skiing.

"This look good to you?" my mountain guide asks on our second lap up to the top, nodding toward Lenin. With

that, we're off – and I mean *off*. A few hundred yards down the 11,000-foot peak, he smiles as I pull up beside him to catch my breath, grappling with the altitude. "We don't turn as much up here as you do on Pacific Northwest slopes," he says with a shrug. "Tires you out."

It's about as good an introduction as you could get to Big Sky, the third-largest ski resort in the U.S. behind Park City and Palisades Tahoe. An hour's drive south of Bozeman, the mountain is known for wide-open, big-mountain skiing up top and prime glades, bumps, and cruisers lower down. Guests have their pick of more than 5,800 acres that go from "Let's take this one easy" to "I'm up for the challenge" to "Warren Miller-caliber insanity." (Keep your eyes trained on the upper chutes

and mountain-goat paths, and you'll likely see seasoned locals and visiting crazies hitting what could be considered audition reels.)

What Big Sky *isn't* known for is equally delightful: crowds. Thanks to its size and lack of a nearby major city and interstate feeding it weekend warriors, it's a welcome respite from the Summit County and Utah resort scenes. "What sets Big Sky apart from other resorts is the feeling that I have the whole run to myself," says Rick Reichsfeld, president of ski-vacation tour operator Alpine Adventures, who has skied at more than 100 resorts in 15 countries. "You can let your guard down without worrying about somebody running into you, even in high season."

The latter fact makes Big Sky's slopes especially appealing to families and

Outdoors

beginner-intermediates, who have a wide variety of terrain spread across the lower mountain rather than being hemmed into one area, as is the case at some resorts. And the impressive lift system – including three with heated seats and windscreens to protect against the Northern Rockies’ wind-chill – cuts lines to a fraction of what you’d expect in high season, making it easy to bounce around the hill. Bonus: This season, the new 75-passenger Lone Peak Tram replaces its 15-passenger predecessor, reducing what was perhaps the mountain’s only choke point. Work is also underway on a new gondola that will provide direct access to the tram from the resort’s base.

In fact, until recently, Big Sky’s biggest ding was its dearth of high-end accommodations and amenities. Aside from the billionaire-beloved Yellowstone Club, a private residential estate and ski resort on the mountain’s east flank, it was about what you’d expect



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THE
ESTATE
YOUNTVILLE



A reigning champ of Lone Peak and (opposite) Montage's Alpenglöw bar.

for a no-attitude mountain in western Montana. That changed in late 2021, when the Montage resort opened adjacent to the Yellowstone Club, complete with a bowling alley, tubing hill, and small army of ski concierges to ready guests' gear each morning. The mountain is primed to receive another boost when One&Only opens its first U.S. property on Moonlight Basin next season. But even if the rush is on, Big Sky will never be Aspen or Telluride. Skiers looking for rollicking après-ski or nightlife and walkable Wild West mountain towns will mostly find themselves poling the flats.

NEARLY 23,000 vertical feet and 39 miles covered since the day's first lift, I hand my boots to Montage's ski concierge to be dried and warmed for the next day and, on a tip, make the 20-minute drive to The Riverhouse BBQ. In its gravel parking lot on the bank of the Gallatin River, six-wheeled pickups with Montana plates outnumber rental SUVs. Inside the lodge-like space, metal beer and highway signs fill the wood-paneled walls.

A crew sporting Carhartts and fleece-lined jean jackets holds down part of the packed bar, while servers carry heaping Hill Country-style plates out to lifties from the mountain, college spring-breakers, and dozens of others decked out in pom-pom beanies, Cotopaxi puffers, and souvenir sweat-shirts repping favorite ski towns. It seems like half the mountain is here – and by 9:30, out the door.

By the time I drive back through Town Center, the local-favorite craft brewery, top Neapolitan pizzeria, and sushi lounge have long since called it a night. Big Sky goes to bed early and rises a little more fresh-legged for it – a rarity among ski resort towns. Staring down from Lone Peak, an occasional hoot rising from someone unseen below, I'll take every advantage to get in on its secrets.



Break for Big Sky

STAY The 39-room **Montage Big Sky** opened as the mountain's sole luxury resort, with indoor and outdoor pools, a spa, and fine-dining Cortina, featuring northern Italian dishes and Montana fish and game. This season, the resort will offer kids' group lessons at its on-site ski hill during the holiday season and Presidents' Day weekend; on other dates, kids' club staff will provide round-trip transportation to the ski school's base at Mountain Village. *Doubles from \$570, including breakfast daily and a \$100 resort credit.*

GO Snow-sports specialist **Alpine Adventures** arranges custom ski vacations for groups of any size – from couples to entire ski clubs – at resorts in more than 22 countries. Sample Big Sky trips include six nights for two adults at Montage Big Sky or a condo for a family of four on the edge of Mountain Village – both are ski-in/ski-out and include five days of lift tickets, ski or snowboard rentals, and a rental car from Bozeman. *From \$18,989 and \$11,979, respectively.*

Ski.com customizes ski trips to more than 120 resorts worldwide. For a multigenerational week in Big Sky, consider seven nights in a five-bedroom, 4,000-square-foot, ski-in/ski-out home overlooking Mountain Village and Lone Peak, with five days of lifts, demo snow-sports equipment rental, and a Suburban rental from Bozeman. *From \$26,150 for four adults and two kids.* 📍



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Spacious rooms and suites offer bespoke furnishings. Enjoy guided winetastings and customized spa treatments that harness the therapeutic benefits of the region's signature pinotage grape. Receive 15 percent off when you stay three nights or more through April 30, 2024.

VIRTUOSO AMENITY: A lunch or dinner for two guests per room, per stay.



JIMBARAN, INDONESIA

Raffles Bali



This intimate beachfront oasis offers gorgeous ocean panoramas and captivating sunsets from every private villa.

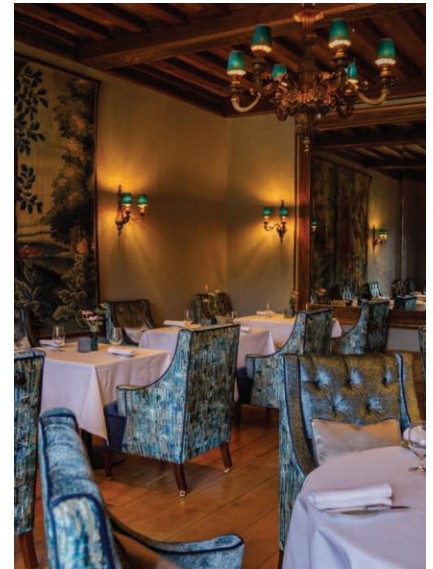
Personal butlers anticipate your every wish and stress vanishes beneath the hands of a healing practitioner in the spa. Soak up some sun at the infinity pool and dine on fresh seafood or Southeast Asian cuisine. Try classic or whimsical cocktails in the bar.

VIRTUOSO AMENITY: \$100 resort credit per stay.



EGHAM, UNITED KINGDOM

Great Fosters



Visit this charming Tudor estate steeped in royal history and located just outside Windsor near the River Thames.

Stroll among 50 acres of iconic gardens featuring a fountain, a Saxon moat, and a sundial gifted by Sir Francis Drake. Treat yourself to a seven-course, Michelin-starred tasting menu and meet the executive head chef when you book the Gastronomic Dinner, Bed & Breakfast package.

VIRTUOSO AMENITY: \$100 hotel credit per stay.



DINNER PARTIES

On board Virgin Voyages' ships, there's a meal for every mood.

VIRGIN VOYAGES is reinventing what cruisers consider standard dining at sea: Across its fleet of three adults-only ships, the line has ditched rigid meal hours, cultivated exciting new global concepts, and said goodbye to buffets. There's no surcharge to visit any of the 20-plus onboard restaurants – from a steak house to a pizza parlor to a culinary magic lab – and each outlet has its own cocktail bar to complement the experience. Don't forget to pack your appetite.

Laid-Back Bites

A floating beach resort calls for comfort food that only a casual joint can deliver. Tee

up a custom pie at The Pizza Place or choose from The Social Club's menu of favorites – hot dogs, soft pretzels, and **boozy milkshakes** – before playing a round on the restaurant's air hockey and foosball tables (or popping into its vintage arcade). At The Galley – a lineup of food-truck-inspired carts dishing out panini, burgers, tacos, sushi, noodles, and more – every cruiser in your crew will be happy. Snack around on an eight-night, round-trip-from-Miami Caribbean jaunt aboard the 2,770-passenger *Scarlet Lady*. Departures: December 14 and December 28, 2024.

Social Gatherings

Cruisers can explore the largest collection of tequila and mezcal at sea over plates of seared mole shrimp and ancho rib eye at the convivial Pink Agave. After dark, Razzle Dazzle goes full glitz, with disco tunes, neon lights, and cocktails from the Red Bar. To mingle with shipmates, head to Gunbae, the **only Korean barbecue at sea** – where the evening starts with a soju drinking game and ends with new friends. Invite them to join you at the beach on Mallorca during a seven-night, round-trip-from-Barcelona sailing on the *Scarlet Lady*. Departures: Multiple dates, May 12 through October 27, 2024.

Elevated Experiences

For a classic chophouse experience, book a table at The Wake and leave room for the seafood tower. Extra Virgin specializes in authentic Italian, from crispy artichokes to potato gnocchi and **gelato served tableside** – it's a fitting meal for a seven-night, round-trip-from-Barcelona voyage on the *Scarlet Lady* that calls on Rome and Tuscany's Marina di Carrara. Pro tip: Visit the modernist Test Kitchen early on – chefs change the menus often to encourage passengers to try it more than once. Departures: Multiple dates, May 19 through October 6, 2024.



A seafood tower worth toasting to at The Wake.

VIRTUOSO BEST OF THE BEST

PARIS, FRANCE

Le Pavillon de la Reine & Spa



This deeply romantic hideaway on the magical Place des Vosges in Le Marais offers quiet luxury in the third arrondissement.

Enjoy all the service, charm, and elegance of a grand palace, with all the understated sophistication of a private home. Sample Parisian fare in a Michelin-starred restaurant and relax over a cocktail or wine in the courtyard. Or soothe your senses with a spa treatment.

VIRTUOSO AMENITY: \$100 hotel credit per stay.



LEVERNOIS, FRANCE

Hostellerie de Levernois



Situated amid lush greenery in the heart of Burgundy vineyards, this slice of paradise effortlessly blends old and new.

At La Table de Levernois, Michelin-starred chef Philippe Augé will delight your taste buds with traditional flavors, prepared with ingredients from the hotel's large organic garden. Enjoy a complimentary fifth night in select categories when you book by December 31, 2023.

VIRTUOSO AMENITY: A winetasting for two guests, per stay.



SAINTE-SABINE, FRANCE

Château Sainte Sabine



At the heart of this sixteenth-century castle in Burgundy, the gastronomic restaurant Lassey piques the interest of gourmets.

In his rustic and flavorful dishes, chef Benjamin Linard revisits classic cuisine and creates meals that place local produce at the center of his recipes, flavored with handpicked wild herbs. Enjoy a complimentary fifth night in select categories when you stay through April 30, 2024.

VIRTUOSO AMENITY: A winetasting for two guests, per stay.



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WINTER WONDERLAND

Snow-covered cobblestoned streets, Nordic-inspired spas, and plenty of holiday cheer — November through March is a magical time to visit Québec's charming capital city.

From Skis to Saunas

Come winter, there's no shortage of snowfall in Québec City. Travelers can don a pair of skis for exhilarating downhill adventures at Massif de Charlevoix and Mont-Sainte-Anne, two ski areas just minutes from downtown Québec City. Afterward, stop by the Hôtel de Glace, North America's only ice hotel (open from January through March), to appreciate its otherworldly subzero architecture and sip a cocktail served in a carved-ice glass. Reward these chilly pursuits with a steam bath and dry sauna at the **Strøm Nordic Spa**, a serene space overlooking the Saint Lawrence River.

Dreamy Evenings in Old Québec

Walking through Old Québec, a 400-year-old UNESCO World Heritage site, feels like entering a fairy-tale snow-globe scene, and December adds extra sparkle. Grab a pair of snowshoes for a walk through the Plains of Abraham, a former battlefield in the heart of Old Québec, or stroll over to Dufferin Terrace, a riverfront wooden promenade, to hop in a nineteenth-century toboggan for a classic Québec City thrill ride. Silver and gold Christmas trees and gigantic translucent snowflakes projected onto brick buildings lead the way to the city's annual German Christmas Market, where travelers can shop for holiday trinkets and fill their stomachs with bratwurst, *amandes caramélisées* (caramelized almonds), and mulled wine. The perfect nightcap: ice-skating on the **outdoor rink** in the picturesque Place D'Youville.

A Landmark Stay

There's no better perch than the **Fairmont Le Château Frontenac**, a 610-room, Renaissance-style castle that towers over Old Québec and the Saint Lawrence River. Guests settle into charming rooms and suites (some named after famous hotel guests such as Elizabeth II and Winston Churchill), and over the holidays, extra perks include Sunday-morning visits from Santa, gourmet Christmas meals, and a black-tie New Year's Eve fete. The hotel's team of nine Golden Key concierges can arrange soothing treatments in the Moment Spa before planning the perfect day exploring Old Québec. *Virtuoso travelers receive breakfast daily and a \$100 dining credit.*



DELICIOUS EXCURSIONS

On an Oceania Cruises sailing, port calls go way beyond the standard fare.

WITH FRENCH LEGEND Jacques Pépin at the helm as executive culinary director, onboard Culinary Centers for hands-on cooking classes, and food-centric excursions that delve deeply into local traditions, Oceania Cruises delights gastronomes at sea. (Bonus: The line's new all-inclusive fares – which include round-trip airfare, airport transfers, celebratory drinks, shore excursions, and more – mean passengers don't have to worry about a thing when setting sail.) From indulging in a Polynesian barbecue to sipping vino at a tenth-generation Italian winery, these shore excursions offer a sample of what cruisers can savor.

Nordic Immersion

During a stop in Copenhagen on a 21-night Stockholm-to-Amsterdam voyage aboard the 670-passenger *Sirena*, cruisers can experience the epicenter of New Nordic Cuisine in Denmark's capital. A chef from the ship's Culinary Center leads travelers through the bustling

stalls of the celebrated Torvehallerne food hall for some progressive grazing before everyone heads to the esteemed **Copenhagen Cooking and Food Academy** for a private lunch showcasing the resident chef's Scandinavian ingredients and cutting-edge techniques. *Departure: September 24, 2024.*

The Essence of Sicily

On a nine-night Mediterranean sailing from Athens to Monte Carlo, the 1,200-passenger *Vista* calls on Sicily, where wine aficionados can disembark at cliffside Taormina to meet a local sommelier for a walk through time: Travelers visit an ancient Greco-Roman theater and a Renaissance palazzo en route to the Barone di Villagrande, a tenth-generation **Mount Etna vintner**. A member of the winery's Nicolosi family greets the group before a four-course lunch paired with estate wines, followed by a stroll through the vineyards and underground cellars. *Departure: August 14, 2024.*



Straight to the Source

When the *Vista* calls on San Juan, Puerto Rico, during an 11-night Caribbean sailing round-trip from Miami, passengers can disembark for a visit to Manatí's Frutos del Guacabo hydroponic farm. On the chef-led adventure, they get a crash course in cheesemaking by helping milk one of the resident goats, then sample everything from nutrient-packed microgreens to organic marmalades before returning to the ship's Culinary Center to prepare a **Puerto Rican meal** with ingredients from the farm. *Departure: January 19, 2024.*

Sweet Treats

On the same 11-night Caribbean sailing aboard the *Vista*, chocolate lovers will fall for Saint Lucia, where they can learn how the treat is made, from cacao bean to bar. On a field trip to the famous **Hotel Chocolat** organic farm, travelers walk the fields, then witness how cacao beans are dried, roasted, ground, conched, and tempered into a glossy liquid.

During an on-site chocolate-inspired lunch, cacao's savory and sweet characteristics inspire each course. *Departure: January 19, 2024.*

A Polynesian Feast

The halfway mark on a 29-night Los Angeles-to-Auckland itinerary aboard the 670-passenger *Insignia* is French Polynesia, where cruisers can join one of the ship's chefs for a stroll through the flowering taro, manioc, and breadfruit plantations of Nuku Hiva. The capital of the Marquesas, this dreamy island is dotted with temples and tikis and is known for its pristine beaches. Along with soaking in the sun, passengers can learn how to cook in a traditional *ahi ma'a*, or underground oven, where **heated volcanic stones** roast everything from pork to banana pudding. Local chefs spill their secrets over *ka'aku* – breadfruit and coconut milk – as an aperitif before lunch. *Departure: January 14, 2024.*

From far left: Oceania Cruises' *Sirena*, Copenhagen's Torvehallerne food hall, a Greco-Roman theater in Taormina, and the *Vista* in the Caribbean.



VIRTUOSO BEST OF THE BEST

YOUNTVILLE, CALIFORNIA

The Estate Yountville



Tucked within the renowned Napa Valley wine region, this estate offers an exclusive new lifestyle destination.

A definitive foodie experience comes to life among the esteemed restaurants, acclaimed spa, and signature vineyard of this 22-acre village-within-a-village. Enjoy up to 15 percent off when you visit by December 31, 2024, and book at least 14 days prior to check-in.

VIRTUOSO AMENITY: \$100 hotel credit per stay.

THE
ESTATE
YOUNTVILLE

SINGAPORE

Shangri-La Singapore



An extraordinary escape awaits in the lush tropical sanctuary of Shangri-La Singapore.

Step into a world of luxury at Shangri-La Singapore's Valley Wing, an exclusive accommodation of choice for heads of state, executive leaders, and discerning travelers. Retreat to the only hotel sanctuary in the city with open gardens, 11 dining concepts, and a vast array of luxurious amenities.

VIRTUOSO AMENITY: \$100 hotel credit per stay.

SHANGRI-LA
SINGAPORE

SARATOGA, WYOMING

The Brush Creek Luxury Ranch Collection



Embrace the true spirit of the American West at this private luxury ranch situated on 30,000 acres of mountain wilderness.

Enjoy all-inclusive lodging, gourmet cuisine, alcohol, and over 40 activities, including horseback riding, a gun range, ice fishing, and more. Receive one free night plus one à la carte experience (such as snowmobiling or distillery tasting) when you stay three nights or more between January 1 and April 20, 2024.

VIRTUOSO AMENITY: \$100 resort credit per stay.

BRUSH CREEK RANCH

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ESCAPE TO LA PAZ

Break from winter and find some sunshine in Mexico.

DESERT MEETS the sea in La Paz, the enchanting capital of Mexico's Baja California Sur state. Open-air pursuits abound year-round – travelers can sandboard down dunes in the morning and snorkel in the Sea of Cortés after lunch – but the destination truly comes alive from November through March, when temperatures are mild, marine life is active, and there's no snow in sight.

Coastal Cuisine

Stretching for three miles along the Sea of Cortés, La Paz's famous *malecón* (boardwalk) is lined with art installations and restaurants that showcase the bounty of the region's **locally sourced seafood**. Make reservations for Nemi, a contemporary *cocina* with a robust local wine list and a rotating 15-plate tasting menu featuring dishes such as fresh softshell crab and chocolate clams. Farther down the strip, the verdant patio at Casa Marte is an idyllic lunch spot for trying a regional specialty: Baja-style fried shrimp tacos with shredded cabbage and avocado sauce.

On the Water

The Sea of Cortés, known as the “world's aquarium,” is home to nearly 39 percent of the planet's marine mammals. Activities such as scuba diving, snorkeling, and sea kayaking give travelers a chance to witness dolphins, manta rays, orcas, and majestic **whale sharks**, which migrate to these warm waters every October through April. Virtuoso travel advisors can arrange instructor-led swims near the giants or book boat tours to Espíritu Santo Island, where hundreds of sea lions swim about in the surrounding gentle, shallow waters.

Epic Golden Hours

La Paz is known as the **City of 365 Sunsets**, and while toasting to the kaleidoscopic display with a *damiana* (local herbal liqueur) margarita on the *malecón* is great, the best view is from a rooftop of one of the many restaurants along the boardwalk, where the sky changes to orange as the sun dips. The hike to Playa Balandra is also a worthwhile trek that pairs the sunset with the tranquil waves of Balandra Bay.



Mexico delights, from left: Softshell crab at Nemi, La Paz's *malecón*, and a whale shark sighting in the Sea of Cortés.

VIRTUOSO BEST OF THE BEST

PROVIDENCIALES, TURKS AND CAICOS

The Shore Club Turks and Caicos



Defined by a spirit of relaxation and adventure, this resort delivers breathtaking views of secluded Long Bay Beach.

Experience a variety of culinary adventures and atmospheres in four restaurants and five bars. Work out in the fitness facilities and play a game of tennis. Explore land and sea on complimentary bikes, sea kayaks, paddleboards, and catamarans. Plus, indulge in a visit to Dune Spa.

VIRTUOSO AMENITY: \$100 resort credit per stay.



PROVIDENCIALES, TURKS AND CAICOS

The Palms Turks and Caicos



Experience peace and tranquility at the heart of Grace Bay Beach, one of the most beautiful white-sand beaches in the world.

Whether you're tempted by local delicacies or fusion cuisine, enjoy an array of dining choices among six restaurants. Begin a journey of bliss at the Spa, lounge by the infinity pool, browse among courtyard shops, and enjoy available water-sports equipment.

VIRTUOSO AMENITY: \$100 resort credit per stay.



BALI, INDONESIA

Mandapa, a Ritz-Carlton Reserve



Perched on top of a cliff where a valley meets the Ayung River, this retreat offers much more than beautiful scenery.

There's a feast for the senses in Mandapa Spa and at Kubu, a distinctive dining venue. Executive chef Bayu Retno Timur caters to guests' dietary needs, presenting Mediterranean-inspired cuisine with a focus on fresh ingredients in à la carte and tailored degustation menus.

VIRTUOSO AMENITY: \$100 resort credit per stay.



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STARS OF THE SHOW

Where to eat right now in Vancouver, British Columbia's cool coastal city.

AS IF SNOWCAPPED MOUNTAINS, old-growth forests, and cobalt-blue waters weren't enough to plan a trip to Vancouver, the city's restaurants are the enticing cherry on top. Michelin's inaugural Vancouver Guide, released last year, celebrates the city's already exciting dining scene, fueled by multicultural influence and unrivaled access to locally and sustainably sourced seafood and produce. For a proper introduction, make plans to explore these vibrant neighborhoods.

Beachfront Hangouts

The beach looking out to the North Shore Mountains might attract travelers to the **laid-back Kitsilano neighborhood**, but its restaurants keep them around. At the sleek AnnaLena, for example, chef and owner Michael Robbins offers regularly changing menus, numbered like chapters in a book, that feature dishes such as Hokkaido scallops with chanterelles, peaches, and confit lobster, and black truffle corn and alkaline noodles in a beef broth. The page-turning affair ends with thyme ice cream topped with glazed cherries and hazelnuts.

Foraged Finds

In the center of Vancouver, **Mount Pleasant** is an eclectic pocket of lively record stores, bars, and cafés. Start at the Michelin-starred Published on Main, a spot inspired by eighteenth-century English public houses. Chef Gus Stieffenhofer-Brandson forages, ferments, smokes, and otherwise inventively prepares all his ingredients – not a surprise when you learn that he spent a summer working at the legendary Noma in Copenhagen. Settle in for the tasting menu or choose from 30 à la carte dishes – recent favorites have included torched *hiramasa* kingfish, roasted carrots in a cashew cilantro sauce, and *aebleskiver*, a savory Danish doughnut filled with stewed herbs.

Multicultural Feasts

Vancouver's **Chinatown**, the third largest in North America, is known for its dynamic arts and culture spaces, dim sum destinations, and two of the city's most popular Michelin-starred restaurants: Kissa Tanto and Barbara. (Pro tip: Make sure to grab reservations for each ASAP.) Kissa Tanto's dishes fuse Italian and Japanese ingredients to great result – think spaghetti with Wagyu ragù, tomato, and Japanese curry, or spring salmon with an olive Saikyo miso emulsion. Down the street at the ultramodern, 14-seat Barbara, the three-course menu features nine small, shareable plates, such as Dungeness crab with orange blossom vin and lamb croquette with tahini yogurt.

Brunch Champions

Just south of Chinatown, the converted warehouse district of **Yaletown** is home to some of Vancouver's best boutiques, breweries, and brunch spots. One standout for the latter: Nightshade, a plant-based, Michelin Bib Gourmand restaurant. In a minimalist space beneath glitzy chandeliers, weekend revelers dig into mochi waffles, mushroom and feta turnovers, or a negroni made with strawberry-infused gin.



From top: Vancouver's skyline, Published on Main's English-style dining room, and a plant-based stunner at Nightshade.

VIRTUOSO BEST OF THE BEST

SAN SEBASTIÁN, SPAIN

Nobu Hotel San Sebastián



Culture and gastronomy mix with sleek design in this lavish lifestyle destination overlooking stunning La Concha Bay.

Savor a celebration of flavors and masterfully created cocktails in the restaurant and bar overseen by renowned chef Nobu Matsuhisa. Discover hidden gems, try a Japanese *kobido* massage, and receive 20 percent off when you stay four nights or more by March 31, 2024.

VIRTUOSO AMENITY: \$100 food and beverage credit per stay.

NOBU HOTEL
SAN SEBASTIÁN

SAN JOSÉ DEL CABO, MEXICO

One&Only Palmilla



The spirit of the holiday season envelops the lush grounds of this Baja resort with joy, cheer, and cherished traditions.

Enjoy an assortment of festive dining and curated entertainment, as well as access to the resort's New Year's Eve celebration when you stay on December 31, 2023. You can also play golf and bask in seclusion on one of the few swimmable beaches in Los Cabos.

VIRTUOSO AMENITY: \$150 resort credit per stay.

One&Only
PALMILLA
Los Cabos

ATLANTA, GEORGIA

Thompson Buckhead



Design meets urban luxury at an elegant boutique hotel tucked into one of Atlanta's most desirable neighborhoods.

Refined rooms and luxury suites feature floor-to-ceiling windows and panoramic views of Buckhead or the Atlanta skyline. Custom furnishings, locally curated minibars, and spa-like bathrooms create an idyllic space to lounge and recharge before setting out to explore.

VIRTUOSO AMENITY: \$100 hotel credit per stay.

THOMPSON
BUCKHEAD

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TREASURE HUNTING

Where to forage for and feast on Istria's illustrious truffles.

ISTRIANS HAVE BEEN digging up black truffles for generations, but it wasn't until 1999 – when Giancarlo Zigante and his dog unearthed a nearly three-pound white truffle in the Mirna River Valley – that the world started paying attention. Istria, a heart-shaped peninsula on Croatia's northeast coast, is only the second destination in Europe (after Piedmont, Italy) where the rare aromatic fungus, known to be much more powerful and fragrant than its black counterpart, grows in the wild. The moist, fertile soil of the region's oak forests fosters the truffles' growth – and while black truffles can be found year-round, the white ones



are harvested only between October and December, when the weather is cooler. Whether travelers want to get their hands dirty in search of the delicious commodity or simply experience it shaved over a bed of pasta, Istria's truffle hunters and chefs are ready to share.

On the Hunt

Istria's **truffle-hunting families** – including the Karlićs, Pietro&Pietro, and others – take visitors into the peninsula's oak forests to collect black and white truffles. Just outside Buzet, known as the City of Truffles, third-generation hunter Visnja Prodan of Prodan Tartufi regularly hosts excursions (along with her dogs) to sniff out the fungi. If the search is successful, truffle-topped scrambled eggs and truffle-spiked jam on bread with truffle-laden cheese await back at the farm. Just east of Buzet in Motovun, travelers meet Nikola Tarandek, who's been hunting for truffles in the shadow of Istria's medieval hill towns since he was 12 years old. On a hike through the Motovun Forest, Tarandek helps spot where truffles are hiding, then accompanies travelers to a local café for a taste of the bounty.

At the Table

Supplied by the region's hunters, many Istrian restaurants highlight local truffles on their menus – while black truffles are often cooked into dishes, white truffles are best served raw, like a fragrant, fresh condiment. At Michelin Guide-listed Restaurant Zigante in the medieval village of Livade, the gnocchi with pumpkin and wine are topped with **shaved fresh white truffles**. For a truffle-packed surprise, head to the 17-seat Konoba Toklarija, a rustic tavern near the small village of Sovinjak, where inventive chef Nevio Sirotic presents a menu based on his mood and what's available seasonally. And at San Rocco in the hillside town of Brtonigla and Konoba Stari Podrum in Momjan, travelers can savor white truffles in their most basic yet decadent form: grated over a bowl of simple pasta and cheese.

An Istrian staple: Scrambled eggs with freshly grated truffles from Pietro&Pietro.

SPOTLIGHT ON: UNIWORLD BOUTIQUE RIVER CRUISES

CHANGE OF SCENERY

On Uniworld Boutique River Cruises' collection of cruise-and-rail itineraries, travelers seamlessly pair opulent sailings with romantic train journeys.



Castles, Vineyards, and Dracula

Eastern Europe's medieval heart meets the elegant Austro-Hungarian Empire on this six-country, 14-night journey. Travelers board the Golden Eagle Danube Express train in Istanbul to travel to Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria, a place known as the **City of the Tsars** for its concentration of palaces. Then it's on to Romania for a private dinner at the fourteenth-century Bran Castle, the inspiration for Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, and a tour of medieval Sighisoara, where it's believed the real-life count was born. Upon arrival in Budapest, travelers transfer to Uniworld's 130-passenger *River Duchess* for seven nights on the Danube visiting Vienna's palaces, museums, concert halls, and the UNESCO World Heritage landscape of Austria's vineyard-filled Wachau Valley before disembarking in Nuremberg, Germany. *Departure: May 10, 2024.*

Danube Delights and Alpine Wonders

Travelers visit seven countries on this 13-night Passau, Germany-to-Venice itinerary, which begins with a week in a stately suite aboard Uniworld's 150-passenger *S.S. Maria Theresa*. The ship glides down the Danube, stopping so cruisers can visit **imperial gems** in Vienna and Salzburg, tour 900-year-old abbeys in the Wachau Valley, and hike to the top of Bratislava Castle in Slovakia. In Budapest, travelers board the Grand Alpine Express for the Austrian Tyrol, the Swiss Alps, and Italy's Lake District. Feast on fondue in Switzerland before descending to Lake Como for a cruise around the Italian town's palazzo-dotted shores, followed by pizza tastings in Milan and a grand finale swing through Slovenia's unsung Julian Alps. *Departure: May 12, 2024.*

Floating Cities and Epic Fortresses

Journey from dolce vita to *Game of Thrones* on Uniworld's 18-night Venice-to-Istanbul cruise-and-rail trip, which begins with a week exploring the **Venetian Lagoon** on the 126-passenger *S.S. La Venezia*. The ship serves as a gilded home base for guided walks in La Serenissima, a private after-hours visit to Saint Mark's Basilica, and immersive tours of Venice's quieter islands. Then it's all aboard the Golden Eagle Danube Express for a whirlwind tour of the Balkans' marquee capitals, from energetic Ljubljana to fortified Dubrovnik, multicultural Skopje, and majestic Istanbul. *Departure: October 4, 2024.*

Above, from left: *Dracula's* Bran Castle in Romania, a stateroom on board Uniworld's *Maria Theresa*, and *La Venezia* from above.

Style

THRILLA IN THE VILLA

HISTORIC HOMES AND HIDDEN RESIDENCES:
VACATION LIVING GETS PERSONAL AT THESE
INTERNATIONAL DREAM HOUSES.
BY JOSIE SEXTON

Phenomenally French: Le Mas
des Poiriers near Avignon.

Style

IF THESE WALLS could talk, they would tell origin stories of Moroccan kings, British novelists, and Austro-Hungarian aristocrats. They would show off their backyard swimming coves and stables of Andalusian horses. They might even gossip about famous houseguests (ahem, Martha Stewart and the Obamas).

When it comes to standing out among top villa rentals, “there’s a lot of competition around the globe, so there’s this sense of keeping up with the Joneses among the homeowners,” says Steve Lassman, vice president of Villas of Distinction, which curates 3,500 international vacation homes – just a drop in the worldwide holiday rental market.

From said Joneses’ family retreats to five-star hotels’ private residences, the bar for stand-alone stays has officially risen, as has their popularity. Among

travelers’ choices: fully stocked (and staffed) kitchens, living spaces built into nature, and a dedicated team of concierges and planners. Gather the friend group, plan that big family reunion, or hide away and relax on your own – whatever your design preference and travel style, these six houses have us ready to hop a flight.

PROVENÇAL FAIRY TALE

Owner Shauna Varvel, her husband, and their five children had spent many summers in the South of France before discovering Le Mas des Poiriers, a buttercream stone farmhouse set on 65 acres along the Rhône River. Soon after, the Varvels fulfilled a dream of gathering in Provence for years to come: They bought the property with its pear orchard and wildflower gardens and set about restoring the seven-bedroom house and two-room cottage.

Nearly a decade later, Varvel gets to enjoy the *mas* near Avignon with her grown kids and grandchildren and otherwise rents the home to vacationers – including, once, the Obamas. A day at the **Villas of Distinction** estate starts leisurely, cozied up under custom canopies amid period antiques. Down in the kitchen, a small team of chefs prepare the farm’s daily delivery, occasionally leading guests in impromptu cooking classes. *From \$105,000 per week, including a \$200 concierge credit.*

VILLA 007

Island Records founder Chris Blackwell famously introduced the world to Bob Marley and the Wailers. Now the music executive promotes Jamaican cultural heritage through another medium: holiday villas. **GoldenEye** is one such Blackwell production, a collection of shiplap cottages built around the





Aegean oasis: Villa Macakizi. Opposite, from left: GoldenEye's Fleming Villa and Reschio's four-bedroom Piantaverna farmhouse.

midcentury home on Oracabessa Bay where Ian Fleming holed up to write the entire James Bond series.

Guests staying in the five-bedroom home can sit at Fleming's wooden desk, while others can settle into one of the clifftop residences or lagoon-front bungalows, a marine sanctuary waiting below the doorstep. Across this effortlessly easygoing property, outdoor showers sheltered by tropical gardens have become signatures of the GoldenEye experience. *Fleming Villa from \$13,545, including breakfast daily and a \$100 dining credit.*

VILLAGE RENAISSANCE

Count Benedikt Bolza was studying architecture in London when his father, a Hungarian refugee turned Austrian publishing magnate, purchased a few thousand hilltop hectares in Umbria. When Bolza returned from university, a lifelong design project awaited

him: Reschio in Lisciano Niccone. Nearly 30 years later, he's still completing his family's vision of restoring its 1,000-year-old castle and some 50 neighboring farmhouses. Veering from their medieval origins while staying true to the region's aesthetic, Bolza has transformed these austere stone structures into expansive refuges, rebuilding the village home by home within the long-abandoned parish.

At the property's heart, the 36-room **Castello di Reschio Hotel** holds storybook surprises, from an underground Roman bathhouse to a stable of purebred Spanish horses. Guests of the Tower Suite are given the keys to five floors, plus a grand rooftop. Villa visitors – Martha Stewart recently among them – enjoy private infinity pools, dining terraces, and secret lavender gardens. *Homes from \$3,360 with a minimum three-night stay, including breakfast daily and a \$100 resort credit.*

Bon Appétit

FRENCH COUNTRY
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Annandale's Seascape and (opposite) rooftop dining with a dip at the Royal Mansour's Grand Riad.

SHEPHERD'S HIDEAWAY

A day at **Annandale** might start with a soundtrack of lambs bleating in the pastures and end with waves gently lapping against the Banks Peninsula shore of New Zealand's Pigeon Bay. Just 50 miles from Christchurch on the South Island, this sheep-and-cattle station set against a wild backdrop makes for a surprisingly modern escape.

To get to the five-bedroom home-
stead and its remote one- to four-bed-
room villas – Seascape, Scrubby Bay,
and the Shepherd's Cottage – guests
take a four-wheel-drive vehicle across

the rugged farmland or a helicopter
direct from Christchurch. Views from
the houses could easily overshadow any
interior design efforts, but architect
Andrew Patterson's reverent glass and
wood spaces hold their own and lend
minimalist style to the environment.
*Villas from \$1,180, including breakfast
daily and a \$100 resort credit.*

RIVIERA DARLING

The Macakizi story begins nearly half a
century ago, when founder Ayla Emiro-
glu moved to the Aegean seaside town of
Bodrum and decided to open a pension

for visiting artists, who in turn flocked
from Istanbul, London, even Holly-
wood. Fast-forward to today: Macakizi
has grown from its humble origins
in the town center to a privileged
seafront address nestled in the hills
across the peninsula.

The newest addition: **Villa Macakizi**
on Paradise Bay sequesters travelers
a quick speedboat ride away from the
hotel's famed social-club scene amid
ten bedrooms and a private dock with
its own party-worthy pool deck. Villa
guests have their pick of sommelier-
curated Turkish wines paired with

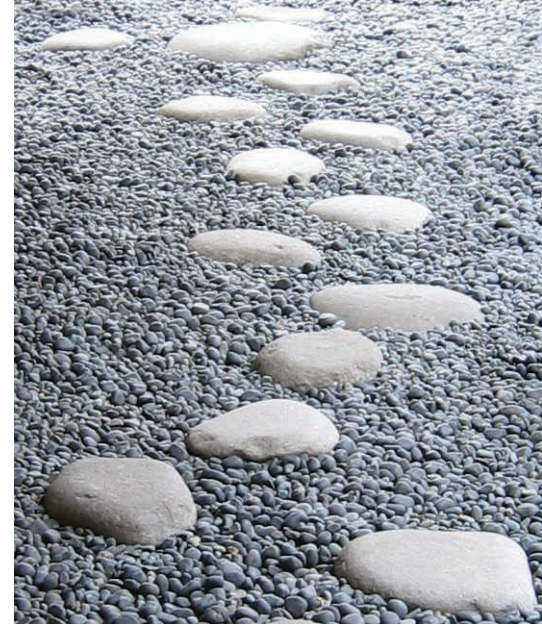
Style

private-chef-prepared dinners after days spent on the water. *Villa Macakizi from \$19,500, including private round-trip airport transfers and breakfast daily.*

ROYAL MEDINA

In the aftermath of Morocco's devastating September earthquake, officials and business owners in the country's tourist centers have reassured travelers that their presence is welcome – necessary even. Thankfully, the **Royal Mansour's** 53 private riads – their courtyards inlaid with jewel-like *bejmat* tiles and crowned with delicate marquetry woodwork – were left unscathed by the disaster.

The hotel inside Marrakech's old city was commissioned by King Mohammed VI and designed as a winding neighborhood of traditional Moroccan houses. The largest of them, the four-bedroom, nearly 20,000-square-foot Grand Riad, holds its own theater, library, and multilevel roof terrace, plus two pools. Across the property, guests come together at four restaurants, three bars, a cooking school, and a palatial spa. Do venture outside into the larger medina, however, to support the many local craftspeople. *Riads from \$1,450, including breakfast daily and a \$100 resort credit.* ♡

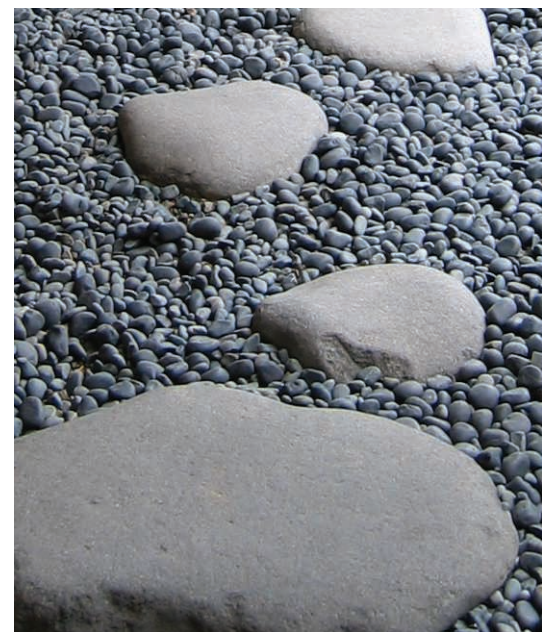


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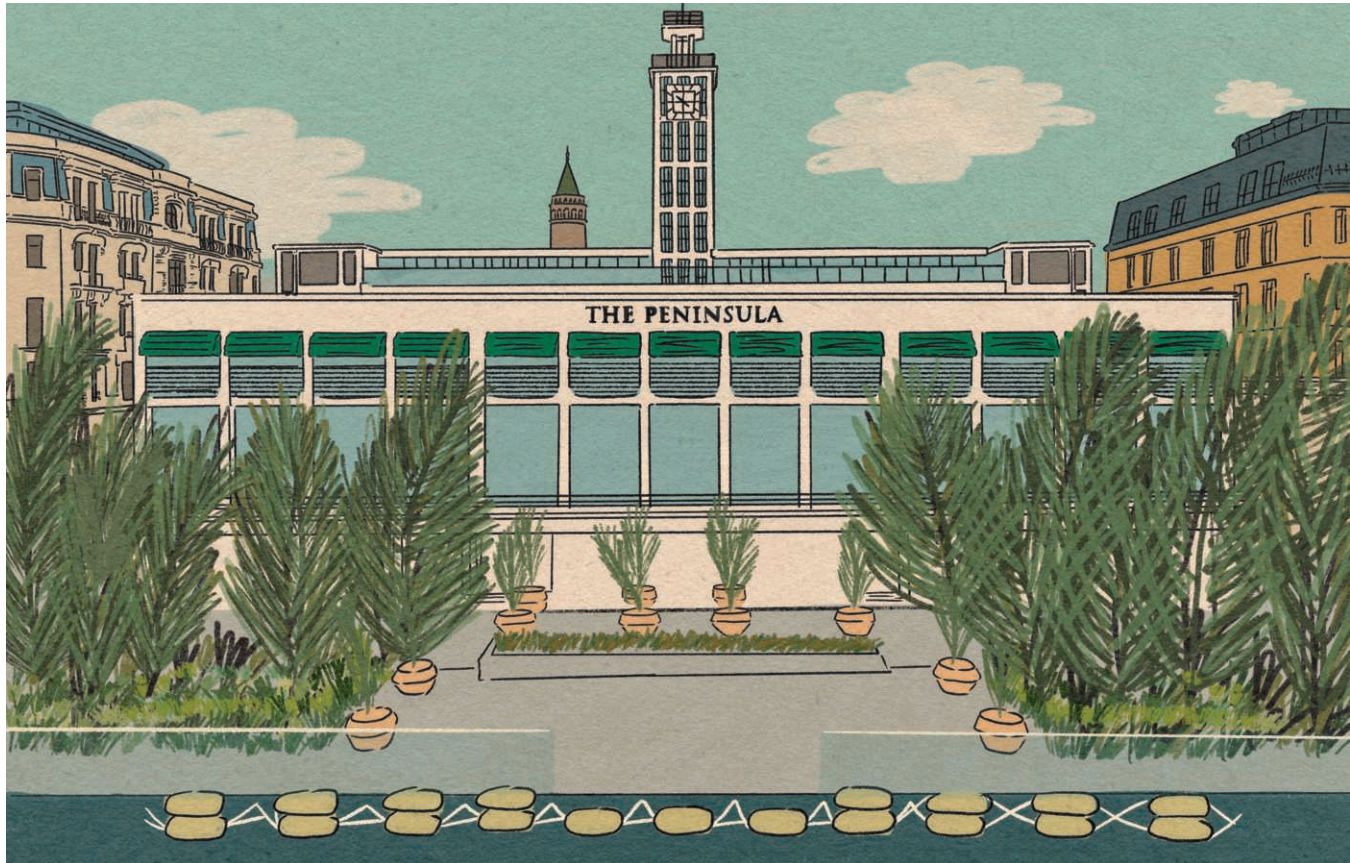
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Winners' Corner

No one knows travel like Virtuoso advisors. Here, the hotels, cruise lines, tour companies, and more that they've voted this year's best.

BY ELAINE GLUSAC ILLUSTRATIONS BY TATYANA ALANIS



HOTELS

BEST NEW HOTEL

The Peninsula Istanbul

Joining the recently renovated Istanbul Modern art museum, the 177-room Peninsula Istanbul is part of the revitalization of Karakoy, one of the city's oldest neighborhoods. The urban resort's three historic buildings and unifying addition on the Bosphorus highlight Turkish culture, from the luxe hammam to the rooftop restaurant and cutting-edge in-room technology. Plus: Peninsula will donate ten euros to earthquake relief in Turkey for every night booked across its portfolio through 2023.

HOTEL OF THE YEAR

San Domenico Palace, Taormina, A Four Seasons Hotel

Long before *The White Lotus* put it on every traveler's wish list, the 111-room resort with a wing in a fresco-filled fourteenth-century convent paired its cinematic setting – atop a cliff on the Ionian Sea,

backdropped by Mount Etna – with insider access to experiences such as private vineyard winetastings and guided volcano treks.

HOTELIER OF THE YEAR

Markos Chaidemenos, Canaves Oia, Luxury Resorts

In 1983, Chaidemenos' parents were among the first to transform the seventeenth-century wine caves in Oia, Santorini, into charismatic hotels. At 16 he began working at reception; now he oversees all five family-owned resorts on the Greek isle. "Hospitality comes from within," Chaidemenos says. "We hire our people by personality, not skill. I can teach a server to hold a tray, but I could never teach them to be positive."



SUSTAINABILITY

PROTECTING THE PLANET

Singita

The ecotourism brand, a collection of African camps, planted 250,000 indigenous trees and shrubs during the construction of its eight-suite Kwitonda Lodge in Rwanda, in a campaign to expand the adjoining preserve for endangered mountain gorillas. By planting even more native trees during their stay, guests can help Singita's efforts to attract forest species back to the region.

SUPPORTING LOCAL ECONOMIES

Micato Safaris

As part of its longtime efforts to ensure locals benefit from tourism, Micato funds educational centers and tuition, and enables East African girls to stay in school by partnering with Huru International, which produces and supplies reusable sanitary pads and offers lessons on sexual and reproductive health.

CELEBRATING CULTURE

Hawai'i Visitors and Convention Bureau, on behalf of Hawai'i Tourism Authority

From the Hawaiian term meaning "to care for," the organization's statewide Malama Hawaii program engages travelers in meaningful volunteer activities, which are more essential than ever following recent wildfires. Activities from beach cleanups to community sewing circles and sanctuary animal care encourage respect for island culture.



BEST AIRLINE

Emirates

Emirates always goes big. Lie-flat seats in business class and fully enclosed private suites in first class (complete with shower spa access), skincare kits from Byredo and Bulgari, and always-available caviar make cramped long-hauls with snoring neighbors a thing of the past.



NICHE TRAVEL

ADVENTURE

Lindblad Expeditions

A pioneer of sustainable cruising in Antarctica and the Galápagos, Lindblad Expeditions continues to innovate. The company's new five-night Alaska itinerary, for instance, skips the megaports in favor of hiking, kayaking, and wildlife-watching near Prince William Sound's tidewater glaciers.

CULINARY

IC Bellagio

For curating *ravioli capresi* master classes on Capri, customizing private food-focused walking tours in Florence, and staffing Lake Como villas with personal chefs, Virtuoso travel advisors turn to the extraordinarily plugged-in on-site tour connection IC Bellagio.

FAMILIES AND CELEBRATIONS

Micato Safaris

This year's double award winner, family-run Micato knows what traveling families need. Private safaris, such as its 13-day Kenya circuit, deliver all the thrills of camel riding and savanna hot-air ballooning from three beloved camps, with ample relaxation time along the way.

ULTRALUXE

Cheval Blanc Paris

The 72-room, Seine-side hotel lives up to its LVMH pedigree with a subterranean Dior spa, the city's longest pool, concierge-arranged visits to private jewelers, and fine-dining restaurant Plénitude, which earned three Michelin stars in its inaugural year.

WELLNESS

Joali Being

On the secluded Maldives island of Bodufushi, the 68-villa Joali Being leads the way to wellness with a yoga pavilion, sound therapy path, and sensory deprivation room. Expert-guided retreats highlight new healing techniques, such as Javier de Prado's craniosacral massage practice.

TOUR EXPERIENCES

BEST ON-SITE TOUR CONNECTION

Southern Crossings

Virtuoso advisors can work with Southern Crossings' local experts to create bespoke explorations in Australia, New Zealand, and the South Pacific that range from sleeping in an underwater suite on the Great Barrier Reef to sharing kava at a village feast in Fiji.

BEST TOUR OPERATOR

Tauck

Exclusive access and top-tier guides distinguish nearly 100-year-old Tauck. Find both on new 2024 itineraries, such as an 11-day Namibia safari that includes stargazing in the planet's least light-polluted place, ATV dune drives, and encounters with baby baboons at a wildlife sanctuary.

BEST TOURISM BOARD

Switzerland Tourism

Spectacular scenery meets sustainability in Switzerland, where trains running punctually over almost 2,000 miles of track connect visitors to luxury resorts such as Alpina Gstaad, car-free destinations including Zermatt, and historic cities from Aarau to Zürich.

CRUISE LINES

BEST OCEAN CRUISE LINE

Silversea Cruises

Upping its own famously high standards, Silversea's new 728-passenger *Silver Nova* offers nine dining venues and aft suites with 270-degree views, all powered by sustainable liquified natural gas. The ship's first grand voyage sails to South America in January, visiting 18 countries in 70 nights.



BEST RIVER CRUISE LINE

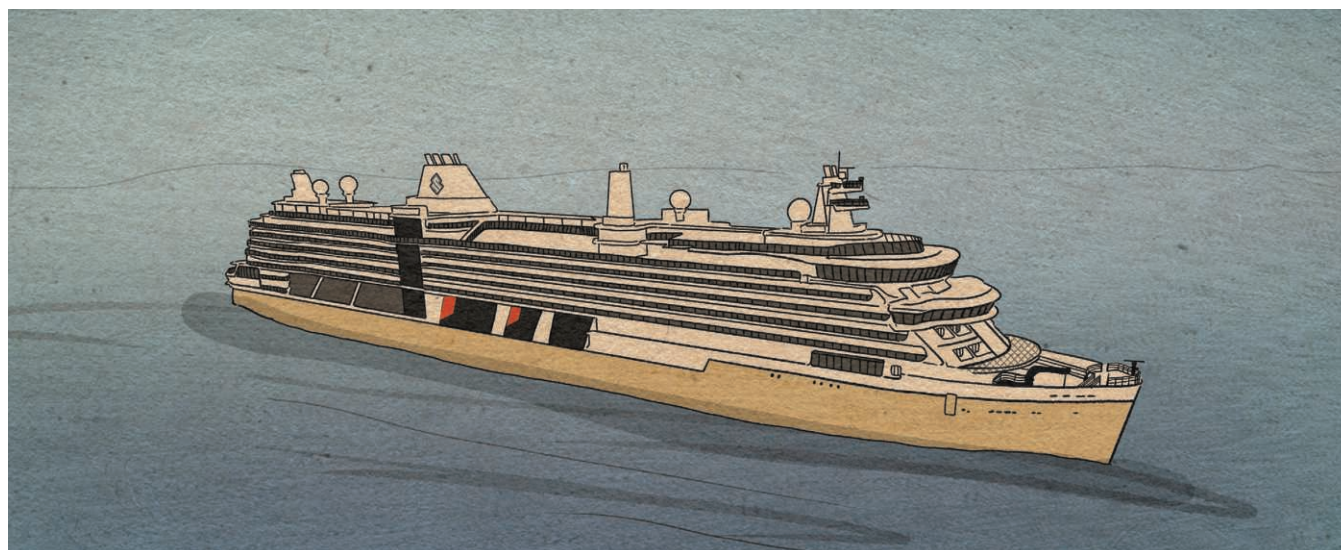
Uniworld Boutique River Cruises

Uniworld's sleek ships ply waterways on four continents. In 2024, an expanded, multi-leg, 54-night sailing traverses the Amazon, Danube, Rhône, and Mekong rivers, among others. Highlights include South America's Iguazú Falls, a private classical concert in Austria, and Vietnam's Ha Long Bay.

BEST EXPEDITION CRUISE LINE

Quark Expeditions

Quark continues to chart new polar courses: Developed with locals in south Greenland, a ten-night expedition aboard the 199-passenger *Ultramarine* includes options to camp overnight on the Tasermiut Fjord, meet the villagers of Aappilattoq, and, employing the ship's two helicopters, land on the Greenland ice sheet. 📍



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WHERE NEXT / 2024

Everywhere you'll want to be in the year ahead.



'TIS THE SEASON to get excited about next year's travels. We've been curating our annual Where Next list for months, talking to Virtuoso advisors, travel-industry friends, and our global network of contributors, gathering intel on the places poised to take the spotlight in 2024. It has us ready to salsa down a South American river, pack our parkas for the new "it" ski destination, and jet across the globe to check into what may very well be the next White Lotus.

Whether your vacation goals are simple or sophisticated, our advice is the same: Lock that trip in now. Beloved European destinations are already booking up for next summer, everybody's gunning for the same suites (on land and at sea), and spots are ultra limited at the under-the-radar gems on this list. Lucky for you, your travel advisor – the secret weapon for making sure you get where you want to go, the way you want to do it – is waiting. So get inspired now and start planning soon.

PARIS

The City of Light gears up for a gold-medal summer.

Paris always draws a crowd, but next July, thousands of international athletes and spectators will descend on the city for the 33rd Summer Olympic Games. The spectacle begins with Parisian flair: For the first time ever, the opening ceremony's parade of nations will take place on boats. Competitors are set to cruise along the Seine from the Austerlitz Bridge to the Eiffel Tower, past revelers and landmarks that include Notre-Dame cathedral, slated to reopen at the end of 2024 after a five-year closure. Secure tickets ASAP (your travel advisor can help), then make plans to toast the Games at Cravan, Moët Hennessy's debut cocktail bar, spread across four floors inside a renovated seventeenth-century

building in the Saint-Germain neighborhood. Later, settle in at Créatures, the lofty summer-only restaurant atop the Galeries Lafayette, where TikTok-famous chef of the moment Julien Sebbag prepares flaky croissants and vegetarian sharing plates alongside championship-worthy views of the city.

GET THERE: Steps from the Opéra, **Kimpton St Honoré's** 1917 art nouveau facade is an appetizer for the elegant style found inside its 149 rooms. Take refuge from the street-level madness at the hotel's Sequoia rooftop bar. *Doubles from \$528, including a welcome amenity, breakfast daily, and a \$100 dining credit.* — Kimberley Lovato



Paris' opening-ceremony stage and (opposite) La Sagrada Família.

WESTEND/GETTY IMAGES

BARCELONA

Witness the Catalan capital's green revolution.

Travelers strolling, nibbling tapas, and window-shopping down the long, wide streets of Barcelona's Eixample district might not realize those *avenidas* and their gridded octagonal blocks were the work of urban planner Ildefons Cerdà, who introduced them after the Old City became too dirty and cramped in the nineteenth century. Later, Antoni Gaudí broke that monotony with dreamlike structures such as Casa Batlló and the near 150-years-in-the-making (and not yet completed) Sagrada Família. Now, the famously congested city is being aerated again with a new set of green lungs. An urban-rejuvenation plan is banishing cars from many Eixample thoroughfares, turning them into tree-lined pedestrian- and bicycle-only avenues, parks, and playgrounds with the goal of creating 21 green streets and large squares each by 2030. Some are already completed, making it easy for travelers to hop among the shops and bars along the Carrer del Consell de Cent. Or they can head off the beaten path to the agricultural Parc Agrari del Baix Llobregat, which celebrates its 20th anniversary in 2024.

GET THERE: Stay in the city center at the recently revamped 120-room **Hotel El Palace Barcelona** – its 15,000-square-foot rooftop, home to a pool, garden, restaurant, and open-air cinema, is one of the largest in Barcelona. *Doubles from \$523, including breakfast daily and a \$100 dining credit.*

– J.R. Patterson





CANADA

The country's Indigenous communities get in the travel game.

Across Canada, growing attention to and support for Indigenous tourism initiatives is helping travelers connect with authentic experiences guided by the people who know their land best. It's a win-win: Travelers gain a deep, respectful understanding and appreciation of Native culture while directly supporting Indigenous communities' livelihoods and ways of life. In Nova Scotia, join Eskasoni First Nation members to participate in smudging ceremonies, drumming circles, and lessons on traditional medicines with local Mi'kmaq hosts. In the far northwest at the Long Ago Peoples Place in the Yukon, Indigenous guides lead explorations through the wilderness, host lunches, and introduce travelers to the culture of the Southern Tutchone people. And in British Columbia's Oliver Osoyoos Wine Country, which produces nearly half of Canada's wine, Osoyoos

Indian Band member and winemaker Justin Hall guides visitors through Nk'Mip Cellars, North America's first Indigenous-owned and -operated winery. "We're stewards of the land," Hall says. "When growing grapes and making wine, we must ensure it will be a valuable resource for the next 10,000 years."

GET THERE: A new collection of immersive, Indigenous- and community-focused tours from **Entrée Canada**, a Virtuoso on-site connection, showcases the experiences highlighted here, plus Arctic pursuits, city jaunts, and more. Virtuoso advisors can also work with Entrée Canada to craft custom itineraries across the country. *Five-day Nova Scotia tours from \$3,370 and eight-day Yukon Territory tours from \$13,750.*

– Carrie Honaker

SACRED VALLEY

A Peruvian trek you haven't heard of – yet.

Sky-high in Peru's Sacred Valley, the 16-mile Quarry Trail meanders past centuries-old ruins and mountain peaks – without the foot traffic of the Inca Trail. “Travelers get all that beautiful Andean scenery more or less to themselves, apart from the odd Quechua village or friendly llama,” says Tom Smith, an executive with Intrepid Travel, the tour company that recently partnered with Peruvian locals to open a new section of the trail. Hikers can now commence four-day Quarry treks with ascents of Qory Sonq'o hill to survey surrounding valleys and original Inca tomb structures, complete with a Machu Picchu finale. Opting for this road less traveled not only lessens footprints on the Inca

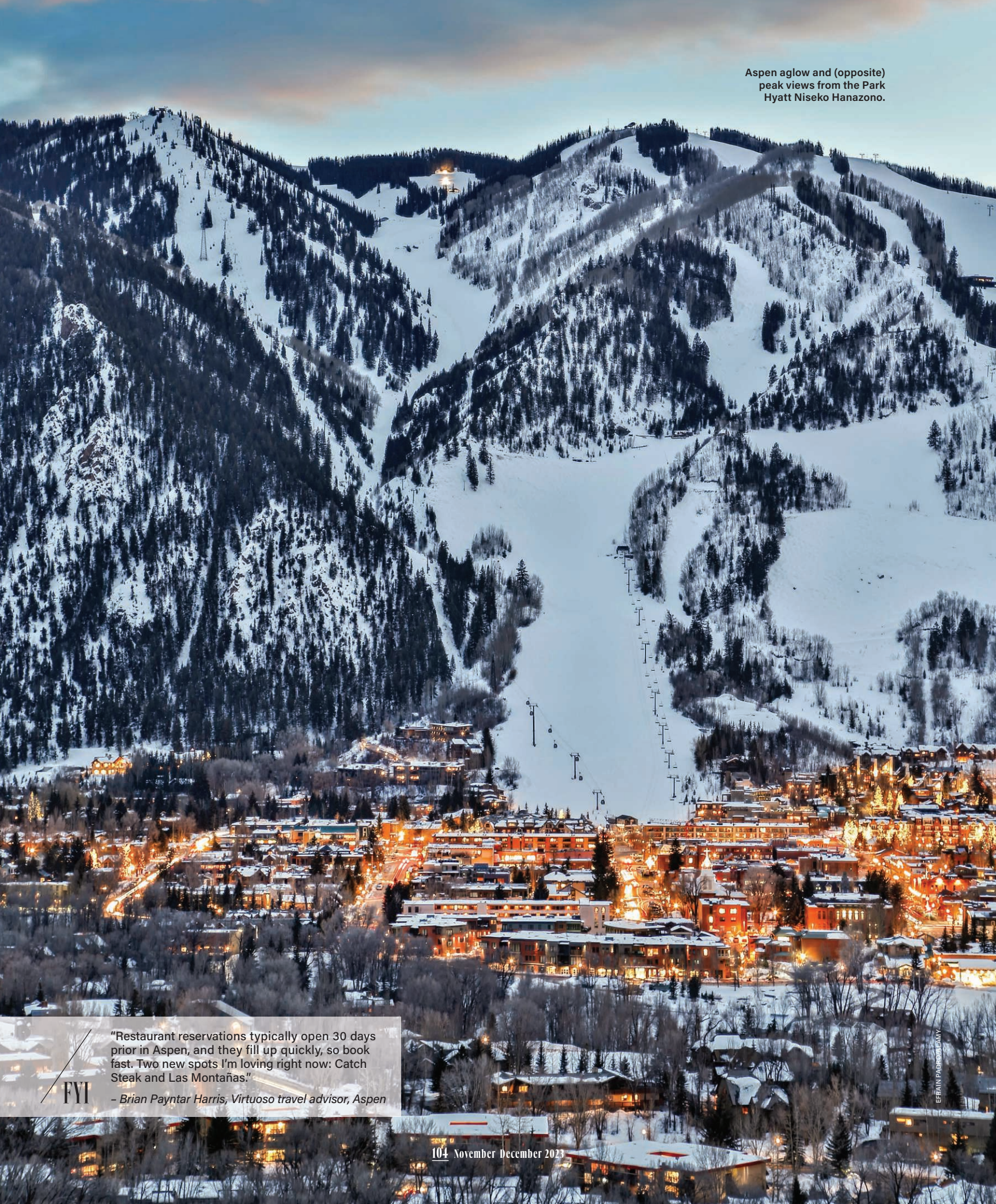
Trail, but also helps spread income to the nearby communities that see tourism as a means to preserve their lands and heritage.

GET THERE: Quarry Trail hikes are a highlight of **Intrepid Travel's** 2024 Peru itineraries, including a ten-day Lima-to-Cusco journey that also visits the Amazon. For every booking, Intrepid makes financial contributions to surrounding villages; Peru trips also support Intrepid partner Awamaki, which creates employment opportunities for Indigenous women artisans. *Departures: Multiple dates, February 18 through December 29, 2024; from \$3,900.* – Joel Centano



STEPHEN PARRY

The Quarry Trail and (opposite) Yukon-based Trondek Hwechin tribe member and artist Jackie Olson, and Nk'Mip Cellars.



Aspen aglow and (opposite)
peak views from the Park
Hyatt Niseko Hanazono.

FYI "Restaurant reservations typically open 30 days prior in Aspen, and they fill up quickly, so book fast. Two new spots I'm loving right now: Catch Steak and Las Montañas."

– Brian Payntar Harris, Virtuoso travel advisor, Aspen

ASPEN

The Colorado resort's on- and off-slope offerings have reached peak glitz.

Already one of the world's poshest mountain destinations, Aspen becomes even more desirable this season with the multimillion-dollar renovation of the Buttermilk Base Area and the unveiling of Hero's, a new 153-acre ski terrain on the upper part of Aspen Mountain. Hero's adds 1,220 vertical feet of powder-cloaked trails and glades to Aspen's vast expanse, and its high-elevation, northeast-facing perch can sustain natural snowfall for longer stretches, meaning it's the pocket of mountain everyone will want to shred this winter. The recent arrival of the Michelin Guide in Colorado is giving Aspen's restaurant scene some extra love, with sleek tasting-menu spot Bosq earning the resort's first Michelin star. For the pinnacle of oh-so-Aspen après-ski, make tracks for the mountaintop AspenX Beach Club, which rings in its third season with more guest DJs and dining options. Even the shopping is getting chicer, with new boutiques from Fusalp, Gucci, Hermès, and Bottega Veneta.

GET THERE: Aspen's sleekest address is **The Little Nell**, a 92-room ski-in/ski-out retreat at the mountain's base. This December, the hotel will debut its renovated spa (with Dr. Barbara Sturm skincare treatments), a redesigned wine bar, and stress-busting, high-tech smart mattresses from Bryte in several of its rooms and suites. *Doubles from \$749, including breakfast daily and a \$100 dining credit.* – Chadner Navarro



NISEKO

Powder to the people in Japan at everybody's next favorite ski destination.

Northern Japan, especially the island of Hokkaido, receives a *lot* of snow – last year, one storm dumped 12 feet, more than some marquee resorts in the Alps get all winter. “Skiing in Japan is no longer a hidden gem: The snowfall is out of the bag, and word has spread about the abundance of fresh powder,” says Rick Reichsfeld, president of tour operator Alpine Adventures. He’s seen a huge increase in interest in Niseko, one of the country’s most popular ski resorts, noting that “travelers who went for the first time last winter were so wowed, they’re ready to go back again with more friends.” But it isn’t just bottomless powder drawing skiers to Niseko: There’s a slate of new luxury hotels, Japan’s muscle-soothing *onsen* (hot springs) baths, Hokkaido’s fresh seafood, and some very good Japanese whiskies (one of the best, Nikka, is distilled locally). “When you add in the incredible sushi, ramen, and hospitality, you’ve got an amazing ski vacation,” Reichsfeld says.

GET THERE: **Alpine Adventures’** custom Niseko tours can include everything from air and ground transfers to ski rentals and lessons, lift tickets, and lodging. Check into the 100-room ski-in/ski-out **Park Hyatt Niseko Hanazono**, which has its own *onsen*, a ski valet and rental shop, and 11 bars and restaurants, including an omakase sushi spot and Niseko’s only cigar lounge. *Doubles from \$270, including breakfast daily and a \$100 hotel credit.* – Larry Olmsted

FYI

Yet another reason to make plans for Japan next year: **Janu Tokyo**, the first outpost of a new hotel brand from Aman, is set to debut this winter in Tokyo’s new Azabudai Hills development. Expect a more social vibe than at its ultra-private (and ultra-luxe) big sister, with 122 rooms and suites, eight restaurants and bars, and a massive 43,000-square-foot wellness center.

ZAMBIA

Set your safari sights on this under-the-radar, wildlife-rich country.

Historically overshadowed by its more tourism-developed neighbors, Zambia's slow and steady focus on safety and conservation has seen it emerge as a major adventure player on the continent. Whether it's swimming beside the mighty Victoria Falls or setting out on foot to see zebras and giraffes in South Luangwa National Park – considered the birthplace of the walking safari – Zambia is all about immersion. Recent big-ticket infrastructure projects across the country encompass some \$360 million in airport renovations, including a major expansion at Lusaka's Kenneth Kaunda International Airport. The extension triples annual passenger capacity from 2 million to 6 million and provides greater global connectivity, starting with this year's launch of the first direct flight between the capital and Cape Town. Another win:

the Zambian government's new 20-year partnership with conservation nonprofit African Parks, which aims to not only improve visitor access across Kafue National Park (via upgraded roads and communications networks), but also strengthen wildlife conservation and rescue efforts within. For travelers, that translates to more lions, elephants, and antelope on their next visit.

GET THERE: A seven-day Zambia safari with **Wilderness** begins near the Zambezi River during three nights at the 12-suite Wilderness Toka Leya, before heading into Kafue National Park to spy wildlife and stay at the six-suite Shumba Camp in the heart of the Busanga Plains. *Departures: Multiple dates, June 1 through October 31, 2024; from \$9,750. – C.N.*



LUIS JIMENEZ BENTO/GETTY IMAGES



Mompox's riverfront perch and (opposite) lechwe antelope in Zambia's Kafue National Park.

THE MAGDALENA RIVER

Get lost in the rhythms of Colombia on a new river-cruise route.

Cutting through Colombia's western half, the Magdalena River was a crucial trade route between the Andes and the Caribbean, and those who still call its banks home comprise a melting pot of Indigenous people and European and African descendants. Late next year, AmaWaterways will become the first major cruise line to take travelers down the Magdalena, on a pair of seven-night itineraries. Calls include the UNESCO World Heritage town of Santa Cruz de Mompox – once a wealthy center for trade and now revered for its well-preserved colonial mansions and churches – and lively Barranquilla, home to Colombia's largest Carnival, which takes place every February. Sailings either begin or end in Cartagena, a colonial gem worthy of a few extra pre- or post-voyage days. Start by exploring the Old Town and

its cobblestoned streets, sixteenth-century pastel homes, and palm-fringed plazas, including the famous Plaza de Bolívar. Then follow the sounds of salsa to the vivid Getsemaní neighborhood, just beyond the city's *murallas* (walls), for spectacular street art, hole-in-the-wall bars, and some of Cartagena's most notable restaurants, including vibrant, contemporary Caribbean fare at Celele.

GET THERE: Seven-night itineraries on AmaWaterways' 60-passenger *AmaMagdalena*, set to launch next November, sail between Cartagena and Barranquilla. (Its 64-passenger sister ship, *AmaMelodia*, will debut in May 2025.) *Departures: Multiple dates, November 9, 2024, through December 31, 2025; from \$3,599.* – Kate Wickers



A Ras Al Khaimah trek and (opposite) Pantelleria in bloom.

RAS AL KHAIMAH

It's high time to explore the United Arab Emirates' capital of adventure.

Skip the glitz and head straight to the desert – before everyone else does. Ras Al Khaimah (or RAK, as it's known by locals) is the northernmost of the seven United Arab Emirates, and with its pristine beaches, terra-cotta dunes, and rugged mountains, it's become the go-to emirate for adventure. Hiking, mountain biking, and zip-lining options abound, and each adrenaline-packed endeavor has its own exhilarating payoff. One option: a zigzagging drive to the top of 6,345-foot Jebel Jais Mountain and a Jais Sunrise cocktail at 1484 by Puro, the UAE's highest restaurant. On another day, travelers can dive deeper into RAK's mountainous backcountry at Wadi Shawka, where a narrow chasm between limestone ridges (it's often filled with shallow rainwater in the winter) leads to a palm-filled oasis.

GET THERE: Most of Ras Al Khaimah's high-end accommodations front the Persian Gulf, including Hayat Island's 351-room **InterContinental Ras Al Khaimah Mina Al Arab Resort and Spa**. The resort has its own beach, and concierges can arrange desert safaris, jaunts to Jebel Jais, and tours of the Suwaidi Pearls farm. *Doubles from \$368, including breakfast daily and a \$100 resort credit.* – Andrew Tarica

FYI

"In Ras Al Khaimah, travelers can learn about the emirate's pearling tradition and gain insight into the lives of divers. Boat through mangroves to reach a floating pearl farm and open oysters for a chance of finding pearls."

– Zeina Zuaiter, Virtuoso travel advisor, New York City



THOMAS LINKEL / ALFRED

PANTELLERIA

In search of la dolce vita – and Italian wine – without the crowds.

It's a trek to reach Pantelleria – which sits between Sicily and Tunisia, a 45-minute flight from Palermo – but for travelers who covet bewitching topography, multicultural soul, and a refreshing absence of high-design flashiness, this tiny, windswept, middle-of-nowhere island is Eden. Volcanic activity whittled Pantelleria's landscape of caldera-formed valleys, mountains, and jagged, cove-dotted coastline, home to ancient stepped-stone terraces and whitewashed, dome-roofed dwellings called *dammusi*. Sunsets are poetic – mystical, even – and they cap off days spent swimming at secluded inlets such as Cala Tramontana or diving into the blue-green sea from a lava perch at Balata dei Turchi. Plan to dedicate at least a day or two to soaking in the island's hot springs – from Specchio di Venere, with its therapeutic mud, to Gadir's ancient Roman stone-hewn bathtubs – then spend the rest of the time visiting the vineyards that blanket the island and popping into family-owned cafés for classic dishes that spotlight Pantelleria's acclaimed capers.

GET THERE: Virtuoso travel advisors can work with on-site tour connection **IC Bellagio** to create custom itineraries on Pantelleria, including boutique accommodations, winetasting excursions, guided hikes, and more.

– Amy Tara Koch



The lush Riviera Nayarit and (opposite) Amanpuri digs.

RIVIERA NAYARIT

Say *hola* to our new favorite long-weekend Mexican getaway.

Getting off the plane and onto the Riviera Nayarit's nearly 200-mile stretch of coastline just became much easier. Travelers can bypass the packed Puerto Vallarta airport in favor of the recently expanded and rechristened Riviera Nayarit International Airport (also known as Tepic), which is poised to welcome routes from new gateways and travelers arriving to catch a glimpse of next April's solar eclipse. The region's hotel game is already A-plus, but there's even more to come in the next couple of years, with some of luxury's biggest names announcing projects in the region. And while Riviera Nayarit's rain-forest-meets-the-sea natural beauty draws beach seekers, the area is now attracting wildlife lovers too. The state's

strict construction regulations, seven natural reserves, and many partnerships with animal protection groups mean that whale-watching boats often get dolphin escorts, sunbathers must safely share the sand with sea turtles, and more than 250 species of birds await eagle-eyed spotters.

GET THERE: **One&Only Mandarin**'s 105 secluded villas, tree houses, and private homes each come with their own plunge pools and hosts. On-site experts guide guests through the property's impressive flora, fauna, and archaeological finds. *Doubles from \$1,043, including breakfast daily and a \$100 hotel credit.* – Naomi Tomky

PHUKET

Thailand's full-moon party island is about to get a Hollywood upgrade.

It started with Maui and followed with Sicily: *The White Lotus* effect, as it's been dubbed, has turbocharged interest in the holiday destinations of the smash HBO series' well-traveled (and less well behaved) characters. For its third season, projected to debut sometime in late 2024, rumor has it that the crew is landing on Thailand's largest island, Phuket, where hijinks will undoubtedly ensue – as well as a real-world surge in popularity. Producers are still mum on which

FYI

"With its stunning beaches and vibrant cultural attractions, Phuket has always been one of my favorite destinations. Laem Singh Beach, nestled between the Kamala and Surin beaches on the island's west coast, is a hidden gem."

– Alex Dunlop, Virtuoso travel advisor, Sydney

resort will serve as the film set – the internet speculates that it might be the recently renovated Amanpuri, which spills down a coconut grove onto a honey-hued beach, or Trisara, with its templelike villas and private infinity pools. Either way, days on Phuket are filled with jungle treks, long-tail boat trips around whisper-quiet bays, and fresh coconuts in the shade of swaying palm trees. More serene still is nearby Koh Yao Yai, where visitors lounge on powder-white beaches, water buffalo graze near roadsides, and the new Anantara Koh Yao Yai Resort & Villas looks out to Phang Nga Bay's dramatic karst formations.

GET THERE: Fresh from a three-month renovation, **Amanpuri's** 84 villas are like tiny Thai temples to beachside bliss. Upping the chill factor: a Kengo Kuma-designed hilltop *izakaya* and a Spa House with a host of hydrotherapy facilities and an alfresco Jacuzzi lounge. *Doubles from \$1,250, including breakfast daily and a \$100 dining credit.* – Chris Schalkx 📍





Explora
JOURNEYS



DINING AT SEA

The culinary riches aboard Explora Journeys take their influences from across the globe, bringing personality, sophistication and a dash of soul to dining at sea – whether in one of the elegant restaurants, by a pool or on a private terrace.

EXPLORA I and EXPLORA II will showcase culinary experiences available across six vibrant restaurants plus in suite dining, as well as in five of the 12 bars and lounges (eight indoor and four outdoor) onboard*. Guests will discover and enjoy diverse flavours from around the world, inspired by the Ocean State of Mind.

The Explora Journeys team looks forward to welcoming guests onboard EXPLORA I, now sailing!

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT YOUR PREFERRED TRAVEL ADVISOR

*Experience fee applicable to two venues



INTRODUCING ANTHOLOGY BY EMMA BENGTSSON

Anthology, defined as a collection of selected cultural works of art, is imagined as a unique culinary stage showcasing global cooking talents and cuisines, provenance and rare ingredients, along with wines by highly coveted winemakers.

Set in an ambiance of refined elegance, with the opportunity to dine al fresco, Anthology offers flawless service in an intimate yet elevated atmosphere where guests are invited to experience menus curated by some of the world's most celebrated guest chefs.

As EXPLORA I reaches the East Coast of North America and the Caribbean, the story of Anthology continues with Chef Emma Bengtsson, the Executive Chef at 'Aquavit' restaurant in New York. Awarded two Michelin stars, this makes Emma the first female Swedish chef to receive such an accolade and only the second in the United States.

Chef Bengtsson brings her creativity and signature dishes inspired by traditional Nordic-style cooking and the vibrant spirit of New York. Offering light and bright dishes with a focus on fresh ingredients, seafood and traditional methods like pickling and preserving.

Guests will enjoy the culinary creations of Anthology by Emma Bengtsson from early October 2023 to April 2025 on board EXPLORA I.



Botánico's patio and
(opposite) tuna tostadas.



SALAD DAYS

Mexico City chefs throw out the playbook – with delicious results.

BY ADAM ERACE Photography by Lindsay Lauckner



THE FIRST THING I ATE

after landing in Mexico City wasn't a taco. It wasn't a churro or a tamale or *guisado* or a hunk of poultry cloaked in velvety mole or any of the other immediately recognizable treasures from the country's vibrant and bottomless culinary canon. The first thing I ate after landing in Mexico City was ... salad. Not just a salad, but *the* salad. The salad to end all salads.

The setting: Botánico, which opened two years ago and unfurls through the courtyard of a celadon art deco building in Condesa. Tables sheltered under a slatted wooden arbor, axolotls circled an inky pond, and, in a wild garden, 40-year-old cacti, strappy palms, and monsteras reached toward the sky. Stylish *chilangos* and their adorable dogs mingled with food-savvy tourists from the coasts, all here for the eats as much as the irresistible scene.

Alejandra Navarro Macías and Ernesto Hernández's menu just calls it *ensalada verde*, almost self-deprecatingly. It was green all right (impeccable lettuces, charred string beans),

but also flamingo-pink from the glistening hearts of sweet fresh figs and ivory from buttery macadamia nuts, grated over the top like Parmesan. It shone with vinaigrette heavily scented with sage, an herb whose wintry woodsy-ness makes it about as natural in salad as passion fruit in pot roast.

Navarro and Hernández have been collaborating for years, and Hernández came up with the dressing on the fly during an event they were catering. "I checked in the fridge and saw there was a lot of sage," said Hernández, whom I found stationed at Botánico's pass in a bright-blue apron, calling out orders for mango-basil meringues and tuna tostadas ignited with *yuzu kosho*. "When we tasted it, we loved it. We both thought we had to use the dressing to make a salad at Botánico." It shouldn't work. But it works inexplicably well.

Navarro, 29, and Hernández, 31, are rising stars of the young, locally conscious, but globally connected culinary community propelling CDMX dining forward. "I think that to get to know a place well, it's essential to eat in its markets, try the street and traditional food," Hernández said. "It's like going to the United States and not eating a burger." (Incidentally, at Botánico he serves an epic ground rib-eye burger, smothered in raclette.) "On the other hand, one of the things that distinguishes Mexico City is its cultural diversity and the many cooks who combine Mexican ingredients with ideas and techniques from other places."

THE CITY'S CULINARY MOVEMENT is now catching its second wave, with the first stirrings occurring back in 2017, when Norma Listman and Saqib Keval opened Masala y Maiz on a sleepy San Miguel Chapultepec street with leafy trees and sidewalks cracked like Kit Kats. It laced together the chefs' Mexican, Indian American, and East African backgrounds – a conversation on migration and colonization expressed through corn, coconut, and other intersectional ingredients.

"We were received very warmly, but as we were sharing a new type of food and a new restaurant culture, it's taken a few years for people to understand our food and our approach," explains Keval, who grew up in California. "We used to write on the menus #nosomosfusion ["we aren't





Mari Gold's wings and owners Norma Listman and Saqib Keval. Opposite: Botánico's *ensalada verde*.



fusion”] so we could talk with diners about the difference between fusion and *mestizaje*,” the term he and Listman use to describe their sociopolitically layered cooking. Now a certified hit, Masala y Maiz has moved to a larger location; in its original space, Mari Gold – their neighborhood-focused restaurant with a relaxed approach to South Asian-Mexican food – has blossomed.

Mari Gold was less a dining room than a dining hallway, with lemonade terrazzo tables down the middle, a cinder-block backyard garden, and the narcotic perfume of fresh-baked scones and piney copal incense inviting you to linger. Three lovely hours slipped away here on my visit, late lunch melting into early dinner like the passion-fruit butter on my

plantain-topped pancakes, good and sticky with house-made *cajeta*. Wings came tossed in fearsome vindaloo, with dabs of raita greened with hoja santa, the sarsaparilla-scented tropical herb. Rolled up like a newspaper, the fermented rice and lentil *dosa* cocooned candy-sweet cherry tomatoes and pineapple-potato *chaat*, and the incredible Mari Gold spin on grilled cheese featured pickled chilies and *quesillo* tinted green with pungent epazote chutney.

After this golden-hour spread, I wandered around the corner to Super Cope and studied the small-batch guava preserves, Oaxacan miso, and natural wines lining the shelves. Listman and Keval opened this tidy grocery as a co-op with their employees, one of several takeaway pivots to



pop up during the pandemic. Jarilla is another, home to local heirloom tomatoes, scalloped tarts snowy with coconut, bottles of olive oil, and cups of iced vermouth. The Roma Norte shop and café comes from another influential Mexican and American twosome, Mercedes Bernal and Rodney Cusic.

When I last visited Mexico City in 2019, Bernal and Cusic had opened Meroma in the neighborhood, and I fell hard for the restaurant: the herbaceous cocktails, the vivid ceviches and smart desserts, the second-story terrace shrouded in whispering foliage like a jungle tree house. As at Masala y Maiz, you could feel something *different* happening there, between the concrete brise-soleil and angular moonroof of the 1980s modernist abode.

Before settling in Bernal's hometown, the couple cooked all over (New York, Rome, London, Jackson Hole), and it showed in how they prepared impeccable Mexican ingredients. Four years later, I found Meroma as bewitching as ever. Blistered fish collar glowed with *guajillo* chile sauce. Bluefin *chutoro* resonated with a white miso marinade and charred hoja santa. Wide pappardelle, dyed black with cuttlefish ink, wove through smoked crème fraîche and beef ragù, the dairy and the meat both sourced from Rancho Cuatro Encinos, an artisanal farm halfway between Mexico City and Veracruz.

Once revolutionary, the mash-up of meticulous local sourcing and global influence that Cusic and Bernal helped establish is now standard operating procedure among many new restaurants in Mexico City. The ecosystem of young, confident chefs is extremely well connected, with ideas flowing easily among them. "It's townie vibes in a city of 23 million people," Cusic said while delivering smooth chocolate *pot de crème* illuminated with passion fruit. Everyone knows everyone, which is how I came to know Filipe Esteveas das Neves, Cusic and Bernal's pal from Imbiss in Juárez, one *colonia* over from Roma.

"This is my spite fried chicken shop," the scruffily bearded, Fernet-Branca-ballcapped Neves told me the next night, after plonking down at my table at his low-lit punk bunker, whose glassless windows overlook a flamenco studio in session across the street. He elaborated over sourdough toast smeared with black-garlic butter: Before Imbiss, Neves, who's from Portugal and went to culinary school in Cape Town, was working for a large restaurant group in Mexico City. "We started doing brunch, which is when I started developing my fried chicken," which the group wanted to spin off into a separate concept – without Neves. They tried to bootleg his recipe. Neves took a swallow from his can of Carta Blanca lager and laughed. "I decided to show them I can do it better, at a fraction of the price, and would open my own fried chicken spot out of spite," an idea familiar to fans of *Curb Your Enthusiasm*.

It was around this time that he met his partner, Ramses Manneck. "Ram asked me if I really wanted to only cook fried chicken for the next three years." Neves didn't, and instead they launched Imbiss, which went through several



Meroma's fish collar with *guajillo* chile sauce. Opposite, clockwise from left: Meroma's dining room, Jarilla's rum-and-vanilla canelés, and Super Cope.



Chef Filipe Esteveao das Neves' fried chicken and radishes with *salsa macha* at Imbiss.

pop-up iterations and locations before settling in its current home on narrow Calle Oslo in Juárez. The menu is rangy, free-spirited, and vegetable-forward: a stunning endive salad (more salads!) with caramelized nuts and dates and a miso-tofu emulsion; crimson Korean-style rice cakes, like chewy gnocchi, in a gochujang-warmed puttanesca; racy *salsa macha*-ed radishes shingled like fish scales over earthy muhammara. But after Neves' story, how could I not try the fried chicken?

Served on a quarter-sheet pan lined with crinkled wax paper, the poultry revenge wore a crackling brown crust. Dynamite bread-and-butter pickles were piled on top, and crème fraîche ranch and hot sauce came on the side for dipping. Even with my awareness of Mexico City's restaurant zeitgeist, did I expect to be crushing a Portuguese chef's American-ish, Korean-ish version of fried chicken? No, I did not, but you go where the story takes you. More than other cities, in Mexico City that can be anywhere.

FYI

"After dinner at Mari Gold, head to Nevería Roxy, one of the most famous ice cream spots in the world, established in 1946. With a retro concept and flavors rooted in tradition, their ice creams will transport you to bygone decades. My tip: Order the Mamey ice cream."

— Fernanda Suárez, Virtuoso travel advisor, Mexico City

CAPITAL HOSPITALITY

STAY When it debuted its nautilus-shell staircase and curving-window-walled suites in 2010, 35-room **Las Alcobas** changed the game in CDMX's chichi but staid Polanco hotel scene. Thirteen years later, it's matured into one of the most discreetly stylish stays in town. Among the exemplary staff are butlers who will fill and scent your bathtub from a menu of botanical infusions. *Doubles from \$550, including breakfast daily and a \$100 spa credit.*

Housed in Torre Libertad, a shimmering, 31-story silo rising from the Reforma, the 189-room **St. Regis Mexico City** boasts some of the capital's largest standard rooms at

nearly 540 square feet. These and the (even larger) suites are classically beige with eggplant accents, providing respite from the chaos of the city below. *Doubles from \$499, including breakfast daily and a \$100 hotel credit.*

The 240-room **Four Seasons Hotel Mexico City** presides over the verdant edge of Chapultepec Park, but if the five-minute walk is too much, the hacienda-style hotel has its own showstopping green space: a large scenic courtyard filled with flowers and mature trees. Book one of the rooms facing the oasis. *Doubles from \$550, including breakfast daily and a \$100 dining credit.* 📍



DIRIYAH

THE CITY OF EARTH





Ciya Sofrasi chef Musa Dagdeviren and (opposite) his lamb and eggplant *meftune*, bulgur pilaf with tomatoes, and roasted green beans.



MEET ME AT THE CROSSROADS

An insiders' tour of Istanbul's best dining.

BY LARRY BLEIBERG Photography by Graydon Herriott

AS I STEP INTO CIYA SOFRASI RESTAURANT



on the Asian side of Istanbul, the melodious call to prayer rings out from a nearby mosque. It echoes down market alleys and through the second-story window of the dining room, where lunch is being served.

The *adhan* evokes tradition and heritage, an ancient announcement connecting the modern city to its cultural past. The same could be said about the platters of food filling the table in front of me. “I’m not trying to make new dishes, but to preserve old ones,” explains Musa Dagdeviren, Turkey’s most famous chef, who opened Ciya Sofrasi in 1998.

Each bite brings unexpected flavors: lamb shoulder with quince, a salad made with hyssop and served with orange and pomegranate. And then the desserts, including a diced pumpkin, tahini, and walnut dish that has me going back for thirds.

Dagdeviren, who publishes a magazine about Turkey’s heirloom foods, is as much a culinary anthropologist as a chef, celebrated in outlets from the *New Yorker* to Netflix’s *Chef’s Table* as a shining star in this emerging global-dining destination. Just last year, Michelin released its first restaurant guide to Istanbul, a recognition long overdue. Located on the edge of the Middle East, at the crossroads of Asia and Europe, the city has for more than 2,500 years witnessed a parade of cultures and cuisines that have merged in beguiling ways.

I’ve come here to discover the best of this fusion. Over the course of a week, I’ll sample some of its finest examples, but I’m also hoping to dig beneath the surface: Where do the city’s chefs, cooks, and bakers go on a day off for a memorable meal? What secrets could they share?

Istanbul Modern's rooftop
reflecting pool and (opposite)
print possibilities outside
Phanar Greek Orthodox College.





Bakers making phyllo for baklava at Karakoy Gulluoglu and (opposite) Turkish coffee and treats at the factory shop.

Take Dagdeviren's dining suggestion, which I have to pry out of him: Kelebek Kofte Piyaz, a modest eatery in a melting pot immigrant neighborhood on the city's European side. The Armenian-style restaurant specializes in mezzes, small-dish appetizers such as mussels with tomato and rice, along with dips, some seasoned with pomegranate seeds and powdered pistachio.

"It's a hidden gem and not very big," Dagdeviren says. "It's like eating with family. I don't want to tell everyone because so many customers will come." I arrive to find a fluorescent-lit dining room that has just a handful of wooden tables – a so-called tradesman's restaurant that appeals to local workers. But the food that lures Dagdeviren across the Bosphorus is well worth the taxi.

I'D VISITED ISTANBUL decades ago on my honeymoon, and my first day back felt like catching up with an old friend. The city has more than doubled in size, to 15 million, adding new office towers and recently opening one of the world's largest airports. But its skyline, punctuated by minarets and palaces, still makes it feel magical – an impression only reinforced when I find the Karakoy Gulluoglu bakery.

If Istanbul had a Willy Wonka, it would be Murat Gullu. Working in a nondescript building near the Bosphorus, he's the sixth generation of his family to turn out what's probably Istanbul's best baklava – the crispy, nutty, buttery sweet. "In Turkey, we eat baklava at every occasion," he says. "It can be for breakfast. It can be the last thing you eat before you go to sleep. We eat it at weddings and at funerals."

Through the windows, I watch beefy men throw flour on marble tables, filling the air with clouds of dust. In a blur,



FYI

"Save time to explore the Cihangir neighborhood, where the bohemian and intellectual Istanbulites hang out. Get lost strolling its narrow nineteenth-century streets, which are full of cafés, antique stores, bookshops, galleries, and even small performance stages."

– Koray Sahmali,
Virtuoso travel agency
owner, Istanbul

they roll out sheets of phyllo dough so thin you can read through it. Gullu calls the men artists: "They have to be as gentle as a pianist with their hands."

The bakers layer up to 40 sheets of the dough with pistachios, walnuts, or hazelnuts, along with sugar-beet syrup and melted butter. You can order the finished product by the piece or box at the bakery's sleek new café near the Galataport cruise terminal. It's even better topped with a dollop of rich clotted cream made from the milk of water buffalo.

When it's time to feast with friends, Gullu's guilty pleasure is Sehzaade Cag Kebap, an open-air diner near the Spice Bazaar. Its specialty is in its name, *cag kebab* – marinated lamb grilled on a giant horizontal spit over a wood fire. Customers weave through communal tables spilling out to the sidewalk and line up in the small dining room to order from the cook, who shaves off thin slices of sizzling meat and serves it with lavash bread, peppers, tomatoes, onions, and a spicy tomato sauce. "It's the opposite of luxury," Gullu says. "But the meat is *so* good. They keep bringing it to you until you tell them to stop."

WHILE ISTANBUL has its share of white-tablecloth dining, many of its most beloved restaurants come from humble origins. Consider the story of Greek immigrant Pandeli Cobanoglu, who opened a lunch cart in the late 1800s, serving meatballs and a bean salad that quickly became legendary.

A restaurant soon followed – and one of its earliest fans was Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the soldier and statesman who went on to become the father of modern Turkey. (Years later the nation's leader would have the chef send prepared food hundreds of miles by train to the capital city of Ankara to serve to diplomatic guests.) Pandeli became the first stop for travelers arriving on the Orient Express train from Paris, attracting everyone from Agatha Christie to Robert De Niro. Today, it's helmed by chef Abdullah Sevim, who started as an apprentice 35 years ago, learning the recipes from Cobanoglu's children.



Pandeli's unassuming entrance in the Spice Bazaar and (opposite, clockwise from top left) the bazaar, tea at Sehzade Cag Kebap, Ciragan Palace's Historical Hammam, and a tomato dish at The Peninsula's Gallada restaurant.

Rather than innovate, Sevim pays homage to Pandeli's place in Istanbul's dining canon with Ottoman-era dishes such as *hunkar begendi* (lamb stew over pureed roasted eggplant) that taste the same as when the spot opened in 1901. The restaurant, located in a hidden corner of the Spice Bazaar, feels just as timeless. Diners climb a winding staircase to a series of jewel-box rooms lined with turquoise tiles, lit by crystal chandeliers, and furnished with dark leather banquettes.

But when Sevim wants someone else to do the cooking, he heads to Yanyali Fehmi Lokantasi, a restaurant with a history nearly as impressive as his own. Started in 1919 by a Greek refugee, the eatery was the first to open on the city's Asian side. The third-generation business specializes in Ottoman palace dishes, and the menu can be dizzying, with up to 100 choices. Sevim recommends starting with classics such as Yanya lamb meatballs wrapped in thin strips of eggplant and lamb kebab baked in parchment paper, and finishing with a dairy dessert like caramel pudding. Customers order cafeteria-style and find seats in the historic building's dining room, where they are served. "It's a spacious place with high ceilings," Sevim says. "I go with my family and friends."

ONE OF THE MORE endearing things about Istanbul is that, despite its size and sprawl, the city feels cozy at mealtime. At nearly every table, families and friends gather to socialize and catch up as they sample mezzes or share *pide*, Turkey's chewy, boat-shaped pizza stuffed with everything from ground lamb to cheese and egg. Food, I can see, is how the city connects across cultures.

This helps explain how Cahide Erel, an internationally acclaimed glass and ceramic artist, happened to open a restaurant. She originally intended to sell artwork and antiques from her gallery, a former soda warehouse in Balat, the once-Jewish neighborhood that's now an eclectic enclave of boutiques and cafés filling Instagram feeds. But she also loved to cook for





A stand selling fresh fruit and juice near Sehzade Cag Kebap.

Turkish Delights

STAY Ciragan Palace Kempinski Istanbul flexes its former Ottoman imperial palace heritage with 317 guest rooms overlooking the Bosphorus and a garden stretching a quarter mile along its banks. The property is also known for its hookah and cigar lounge and Turkish bath-inspired spa. *Doubles from \$625, including breakfast daily and a \$100 hotel credit.*

The Peninsula Istanbul occupies prime real estate in Galataport,

Istanbul's new cruise port. The 177-room hotel combines three historic buildings with a new build and overlooks the Blue Mosque, Hagia Sophia, and Topkapi Palace. *Doubles from \$780, including breakfast daily and a \$100 hotel credit.*

Opened in 2021, the 100-room **Mandarin Oriental Bosphorus, Istanbul** feels like an urban waterfront resort, with six restaurants and bars and a 38,000-square-foot spa and

hammam a few minutes' drive from the heart of the city. *Doubles from \$750, including breakfast daily and a \$100 hotel credit.*

Built in a century-old former tobacco warehouse, the 186-room, chandelier-bedecked **Shangri-La Bosphorus, Istanbul** occupies a waterfront location near the main ferry terminal, with the Asian quarter close at hand. *Doubles from \$520, including breakfast daily and a \$100 hotel credit.*

friends. As Erel tells it, she had no choice but to open Perispri, allowing her to combine her love of art, great food, and hospitality.

Perispri quickly made a name for itself with its expansive Turkish breakfast. Across the country, the morning meal is a national obsession, with an array of offerings designed to kickstart the day by overwhelming the senses. Erel's version doesn't shy from that mission, with a bounty that includes homemade fig jam and marmalade, and house-baked sourdough bread and *simit*, the country's sesame-topped version of a bagel. At one end of the table, platters overflow with eggs and cheeses such as *beyaz peynir*, a sheep's-milk cheese reminiscent of feta. Turn the other way, and there

are walnuts, olives, and dips. The space feels relaxed yet upscale, with seating at antique dining tables and jazz and light classical music playing in the background. Customers may come for breakfast, but they linger over tea.

For my next meal, Erel suggests Kanaat Lokantasi, a cafeteria on the city's Asian side started by an Albanian immigrant in 1933. "I grew up there; I've been eating there for 50 years," she says of the spot known for favorites such as *kadinbudu kofte* ("lady's thighs") – meatballs made from lamb, beef, and rice battered in egg and flour, then fried – and artichokes braised in olive oil.

And then there are the sweets: such as homemade ice cream, syrup-soaked pastries, and *ashure* – a pudding made with chickpeas, barley, raisins, cinnamon, hazelnuts, and walnuts that's also known as "the world's oldest dessert" and "Noah's pudding" (legend says he served it when his ark ran aground on Turkey's Mount Ararat). Although it sounds odd, the dish, reminiscent of a rich rice pudding, is a favorite across the region, traditionally served on religious holidays by Muslims, Christians, and Jews – a sweet commonality across Abrahamic religions.

It's a fitting way to end a meal in a city where flavors have mingled for millennia. "So many cultures and histories have passed through the city," Erel says. "We bring them all to the table."

When I consider my time in Istanbul, it's clear that she's right. Along with kebabs, cheeses, dips, and sweets, for the past week kitchens across this continent-straddling metropolis have served me the city's heritage on a plate. Across the city, I had been dining from a literal melting pot – each tantalizing bite revealing its passage of a delicious story. ♡

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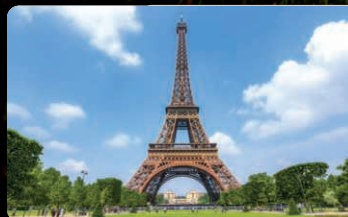
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NYC-based artist Jeffrey Okyere-Agyei, who relocated to the city from Ghana two decades ago, finds inspiration in the Manhattan skyline but also often returns to his roots. In his latest collection, *Sankofa* (an Akan/Twi word that represents gathering wisdom), he bridges traditional African motifs and modern abstract expressionism, incorporating cloth prints from Ghana and other African countries into each piece. Travelers can see the large-format paintings through December at the Park Hyatt New York and maybe even meet the artist: Okyere-Agyei has worked as a bellman at the Midtown hotel for nine years. "Very few people get to do one thing they love, and I've been fortunate to do two things side by side," he says. "It's always humbling when guests find out some of the paintings on display are made by me." Original work available at getsteezartgallery.com. @getsteez

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