

A person wearing a brown hat, a brown jacket, and a colorful striped poncho is walking through a field of tall, dry grass. In the background, there are rolling hills and mountains under a cloudy sky. The overall tone is warm and adventurous.

AUDLEY

# Adventures & escapes

Inspiration for 2021  
and beyond









# WELCOME

If nothing else, 2020 has been a year for reminiscing and for planning. Remembering past travels and looking forward to that next adventure. That's what our new publication is all about. Inside, you'll find inspiration for your 'Where next?' through a collection of trip ideas spanning the world. These are no ordinary itineraries, though. We asked our specialists to capture all that they love about their destination in one route, so you can experience it too.

As you browse through each trip, remember that nothing about Audley is prescribed. Everything you read is solely a suggestion to spark ideas, and each aspect of the trip we create for you will be yours alone to define.

Enjoy reading,

Mark Hanson, Managing Director



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Bordeaux vineyard



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## Italy's quieter side 8-11

Italy specialist Caroline has created a 13-day trip idea that lets you explore popular destinations Venice, Florence, Rome and the Amalfi Coast while still avoiding the worst of the crowds. With intimate tours and private classes, you'll discover the quieter side of Italy's art, food and culture.





## Food & drink 16-19

Grind fragrant spices in an open-air kitchen on Mauritius. Try the art of wine blending in Bordeaux. Whip up a batch of nuoc cham in a Vietnamese garden house. Make pasta in a private kitchen with an Italian nonna. We've scoured the world for experiences that let you get hands-on with your food.



Halema'uma'u Crater, Volcanoes National Park

## Hawaii's landscapes 36-39

Barren black lavascapes, thriving jungles, craters filled with bubbling magma, a coral reef teeming with shoals of fish and the cloud-wreathed peak of a volcano... Hawaii specialist Alex helps you delve into the islands' many and varied ecosystems on this 10-day itinerary idea.



Kirstenbosch Gardens, Cape Town

## First-time South Africa 48-51

Whether you're exploring the cosmopolitan charms of Cape Town, admiring the mountain views from Route 62 or spotting the Big Five in the bush, safari specialist Mike has designed this 13-day suggested trip to help a first-time visitor make the most of their time.



For more than 20 years, our purpose has remained the same — to help you see the world your way by creating meaningful travel experiences shaped around your passions.

We understand that what motivates you to travel is deeply personal. It's why we take time to get to know you and how you want to see the world. We won't just find out how you want to explore, we'll find out how you want to feel. And, by understanding the meaning behind why you want to travel, we can create experiences that will stay with you long after you return home.

From the very first conversation your travel agent has with our specialists, you can rely on us as the dedicated experts who are guiding your plans. Our specialists' relationship with their destination has grown through strong connections, whether they've lived there or explored extensively, and they regularly return to discover more. It's through this blend of passion and knowledge that they can find the travel experiences you're seeking.

Our specialists will take care to hand-pick every aspect of your itinerary, and this includes experiences that make you feel safe and comfortable when you travel. We can guide you to the best places to find space and privacy, from the properties where you stay to the private guides and drivers who escort you.



'It's exciting, planning a trip for a client. You're learning about the inspiration for their trip, and immediately it connects you with one of your own memories, and you know just what to suggest.'

- Sam, Audley specialist





Rice planting in the Isaan region, Thailand

## Our flexibility promise

If you're looking forward to travelling again but want full flexibility in your plans, we promise you can book with us in absolute confidence. You have complete freedom to rearrange your trip without any cost, up to 45 days before you're due to depart, when you book by 31st December 2020 and travel by 31st December 2022.

And, if you're thinking about getting away close to home, we'll give you the flexibility to book a trip to our European destinations with complete confidence. You can cancel your trip up to 14 days before you're due to depart and still receive a full refund, when you book by 31st December 2020 and travel by 14th December 2021\*.

For full details speak to your travel agent.\*

## Putting your well-being first

While life has become less predictable as we've all adjusted to the impacts of the coronavirus, you can always be certain that your safety and well-being are our first priority.

We're constantly researching the advice given by the World Health Organization and by governments, and we're working with our partners to understand what regulations and guidelines are in place in each country.

We have a dedicated team to manage our own country re-opening process. We'll only declare a country open for travel once we're satisfied that all entry requirements can be met, appropriate safety and hygiene measures are in place, and that travel there will be enjoyable and fulfilling for you.



13 DAYS IN

# ITALY

## Classic sights, fewer crowds

Glorious food, a storied history and some of the greatest art in the world make Italy the country that I return to again and again. I'm not the only one, either — this is one of the most-visited destinations in the world. That's why I've crafted an itinerary that lets you enjoy Italy's most popular cities and sights, while steering around the busiest times and areas.

**Caroline** Italy specialist



### TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

- Kayak through the back canals of Venice.
- Create a carnivale mask with a master artisan.
- Hunt for truffles in the Tuscan countryside.
- Explore Capri's waters on a private boat.
- Admire the Sistine Chapel after hours.

### Days 1-3: Venice

There's no better way to arrive in Italy than by taking a private water taxi to your Venetian hotel. After you've settled in, a private boat tour in the evening offers an insider's guide to the city's beloved wine bars, known as bacari, where you can nibble on Venice's small plates (cicchetti). It's also a good introduction to the smaller canals that the locals use, away from the central area. For a more in-depth exploration of the back canals, I suggest a privately led kayak tour the next day. You'll get to admire the city's marble palazzos and sunny campos from the water, as they were meant to be seen.

At a private class with a master mask-maker, you can learn the history of the city's signature carnivale masks. In a canal-side workshop,

they'll show you traditional techniques for creating masks using materials like paint, papier-mâché, beeswax and feathers. In the end, you'll emerge with a deeper understanding of carnivale as well as a mask of your own.

### Days 4-6: Florence

You can take the train from Venice to Florence, or we can arrange a private driver. Either way, I highly recommend taking the time to pause for lunch in Bologna. This red-brick city is home to Europe's oldest university, but often gets overlooked by visitors, despite its prestigious past and luscious food. It's also the self-proclaimed pasta capital of the world — I suggest a plate of the city's signature dish, tagliatelle al ragu, at Trattoria Gianna.

Once you've arrived in Florence, most visitors go to the Piazzale Michelangelo to get good views of the city, but I prefer the Abbazia di San Miniato al Monte. One of the finest Romanesque basilicas in Italy, its glowing frescoes and marble façade are worth the trip — the sweeping views are a glorious bonus.

Whether you're seeing Florence for the first or fiftieth time, I think it's vital to spend some time admiring the art at the Uffizi and Galleria dell'Accademia. Despite visiting more times than I can easily count, I always find something new in the vast collection of transcendent paintings and sculptures. A private tour, led by an art history expert, adds depth and nuance to your appreciation and helps you to avoid the inevitable crowds.



View from St Mark's Square



Caroline studied history and the Italian language at the University of Bologna.

You can't truly appreciate Florence without a visit to the rich Tuscan countryside and the farms and vineyards that flourish there. A guided truffle hunt, with a trained dog, helps you work up an appetite for lunch, accompanied by different wines, at a small family-run vineyard.

### Days 7-9: Rome

Driving from Florence to Rome, it's worth taking time for a private tour of Assisi, followed by a lunch at Orvieto. I like the truffle pasta at Il Malandrino Bistrot, a charming ristorante with red-and-white tablecloths and a location on one of the quieter streets.

**'The Sistine Chapel, in particular, is a revelation without the press of other visitors'**

Once you've settled into your Rome hotel, a night-time tour of the city gives you an introduction if you're a first-time visitor or a new perspective if you've been before. Familiar sights like the Trevi Fountain and Colosseum look different after dark, lit up by floodlights and without the daytime throngs.

The next day, return to the Colosseum with a private guide, who'll add new dimensions to the ancient site. You can also visit the Basilica di San Clemente, a medieval church built atop an early Christian church built atop a Mithraic temple. You can literally walk down through the city's past,

which helped me to put the enormous length of Rome's history into perspective.

For your last night in the Eternal City, an after-hours visit to the Vatican offers a chance to admire some of Europe's greatest artworks in relative quiet — evening admission is strictly limited. The Sistine Chapel, in particular, is a revelation without the press of other visitors.

### MAKE THIS TRIP YOUR OWN

Those with young children might want to slow down the pace and include hands-on activities, such as learning how to fight like a gladiator on the Appian Way.





Burano, Venice



Wood-fired pizza

## Days 10-13: Amalfi Coast

Leave Rome midmorning and you'll pass by Naples at around lunchtime — an excellent excuse to stop at Gino Sorbillo for a slice of pizza. Then, take a few minutes to duck into the out-of-the-way Cappella Sansevero. Inside, you'll see the *Veiled Christ*, a remarkable sculpture that's widely considered to be a rival to Michelangelo's *David*. Despite this, there are rarely more than a few other visitors.

From here, it's a short drive to Herculaneum, a fishing town that was buried in a thick layer of mud when Mount Vesuvius erupted. It's smaller than its better-known counterpart, Pompeii, but much better preserved — you can still see fragile items like clothing and furniture as well as ancient advertisements and delicate mosaics.

Where you stay on the Amalfi Coast depends on what you want to do there. I like the vintage, la-dolce-vita feel of Positano, with its sunny cafes, bustling gelaterias and cliff-side views of the Mediterranean. It's a great base for a hike along the nearby Path of the Gods, a trail that offers some of the best sea views in the region.

On your final day, for the ultimate indulgence, take a private boat to explore Capri. You can spend a day lounging in the sun, sipping prosecco and slipping into the water when the mood takes you. Skip the busy Blue Grotto and ask the skipper to head for the equally photogenic (but quieter) Green Grotto instead.

**From £9,595 per person, including flights, accommodation, activities and transfers.**

## When to go

JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Italy is a year-round destination, but, to avoid crowds, I like to visit in **April**, when spring is in full bloom and the weather is warm and often sunny.

**'We became personally connected to every one of the tour guides that we met.'**

John & Ashley Piazza, visiting Italy

# Experience Europe

Dining with an Athenian, a wine-blending workshop in France, kayaking in Croatia...



## Highlights of Greece

Visit the island of Hydra, dine with an Athenian and discover the local life on Santorini on this 12-day trip idea. You'll also explore the country's ancient heritage at the Parthenon and on the sacred island of Delos.

### Day

- 1-3** Get to know Athens' classical heritage with a privately guided visit to the Acropolis and its museum. The next day, learn about the modern city with a chance to dine with a local in their own home.
- 4-6** A private tour of Milos lets you see where the Venus de Milo was discovered. You can also explore the island's unique geology, including volcanic fields, beaches lined with red and white rocks, and the ghost town of an abandoned mine.
- 7-9** Go beyond Santorini's glitz with a private tour that examines the local life of small, inland towns. Also, take a catamaran tour around the island to see its enormous crater from the sea.
- 10-12** On Mykonos, learn about traditional Mykonian cooking from native resident Teta in a lively cooking class at her home.

**From £5,625 per person\***



## France's Bordeaux & Dordogne

This eight-day self-drive trip recommendation lets you visit the highlights of these regions in southern France. You'll visit storied vineyards, learn the art of wine blending and explore the subterranean river in Padirac Cave.

### Day

- 1-2** From the ferry port at Saint-Malo, you'll drive south to Bordeaux with a stop in Angers for a private walking tour along the way.
- 3** In Bordeaux, you can sample local delicacies, visit a cheese-aging cave and take a wine-blending workshop.
- 4** Drive from Bordeaux to the Dordogne.
- 5** Cruise down the subterranean river in Padirac Cave and stop at a goat's cheese farm for a tasting.
- 6** Visit Josephine Baker's Château des Milandes before exploring the sprawling Gardens of Marqueyssac.
- 7-8** Head back to Bordeaux for one last evening exploring the cobblestone streets and remarkable bistros of the city's medieval old town.

**From £2,550 per person\***



## Croatia's Dalmatian Coast

From the photogenic waterfalls at Krka National Park to the historic walls of Dubrovnik, this ten-day suggested itinerary offers a look at the cities, islands and crystal-clear waters of Croatia's Adriatic coast.

### Day

- 1-2** In Split, take a private tour of Diocletian's Palace and then hike along the scenic trails of Krka National Park.
- 3** Take a ferry to Hvar and drive past olive groves and vineyards, before stopping at one of Hvar's best wineries to enjoy a guided tasting of local wines.
- 4-5** Explore the island on your own and then join your private guide for a kayak trip to the nearby Pakleni Islands.
- 6** With a private guide, take a walking tour of Korčula's walled city, often referred to as 'Little Dubrovnik', before a sunset cruise around the island.
- 7-10** Sample local wines and oysters in Ston on your way to Dubrovnik. There, you can take a private tour of the old town and have some quiet time to enjoy the sun.

**From £4,425 per person\***

Contact your local independent travel agent

\*All prices include flights, accommodation, activities and transfers.



9 DAYS IN

# SRI LANKA

## A bitesize coastal journey

In Sri Lanka, you can begin your day strolling among a lowland tea plantation. You might choose to follow lunch with a visit to a Buddhist temple to admire its fine paintwork. And, you could finish by lounging on a secluded beach as the sun begins to dip. I love the fact that Sri Lanka gives you so many different experiences within such close proximity, even if you're short on time for your trip, and this coastal itinerary showcases just that.

**Anna** Sri Lanka specialist



### TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

- Join an artist for a painted-mask-making workshop.
- Stay within the buttressed walls of Galle Fort.
- Try your hand at cooking a Sri Lankan feast using traditional techniques.
- Cycle through paddy fields, coconut plantations and rural farming communities.

### Days 1-4: Galle

Sitting on a peninsula on Sri Lanka's southwest coast, the fortified city of Galle is surrounded by water on three sides — you can't miss the glimmer of the Indian Ocean as you arrive from the airport. The first thing I suggest you do is take a walking tour along the city's cobbled streets and up onto the stone-wall battlements. Navigating you through gateways and bastions, your private guide can help you get your bearings for your time here, as well as give you a potted introduction to Sri Lankan history — with Galle itself acting as an open-air museum.

A UNESCO World Heritage Site, Galle was built by the Portuguese, enlarged by the Dutch and finished with a few flourishes from the British. Its current custodians, Sri Lanka's

Department of Archaeology, have sensitively restored the fortress city while nurturing a community of boutiques, cafes and museums.

A highlight of Galle is being able to stay within its city walls, in airy rooms decorated with Dutch antiques opening out onto private frangipani-scented courtyards. A selection of properties, including former army barracks, a post office and printers' workshops, have been converted into spacious hotels catering for just a handful of guests each.

The range of independent cafes and restaurants means you can dine well here, too, watching the world pass by from street-side patios or alfresco roof terraces. I recommend seeking out egg hoppers, a signature brunch of eggs cooked into coconut pancakes, and, in the balmy heat of the

afternoon, mango ice cream (with the option of a chilli-flake topping).

You can experience more of Sri Lankan cuisine during a private cooking lesson with Shahira, a Galle resident whose family recipes have been passed down through the generations. Drawing from a culinary repertoire that includes a local take on a biriyani, a feast of freshly caught seafood and a traditional curry, she'll introduce you to Sri Lankan dishes picked by you.

As you explore Galle at dusk, the streets light up with the glow of artisanal shops selling rich-hued textiles, original artwork and brightly painted wooden masks. These masks were originally used in traditional dances but have slowly become an artform in their own right. You can try your hand at painting your own



Galle's fortress walls from the water



Anna's a Sri Lankan cuisine aficionado and loves collecting recipes on her travels.

mask during a privately tutored workshop in the Galle Fort Art Gallery.

Galle is also an ideal base for exploring the surrounding countryside, and, for me, the best way to do this is by bike. On a guided bike ride through nearby rural landscapes, you'll pass inky-blue lakes, villages of clay-tiled homes and paddy fields in neat squares. A short route might take you through Eluvila Bird Sanctuary, a mangrove wetland that attracts the rare blue-eared kingfisher.

**'There's nothing like sunset on a secluded beach, the rich orange Sri Lankan sky turning the sand a shade of rose gold'**

### Days 5-9: Bentota

In the 19th century, the British converted a small fort in Bentota into a rest house, where civil servants would come to relax under the shade of tamarind trees. Still welcoming visitors

looking for a peaceful beach retreat, Bentota stretches lazily along Sri Lanka's west coast.

You'll find long ribbons of yellow sand edged with palm trees and bright patches of purple where flowering plants

send their tendrils of blooms across the sand. A variety of hotels are tucked discreetly among coconut groves, as well as alfresco restaurants

serving fresh lobster, prawns and local curries.

For me, the best option is to stay at one of the small villa-style properties. Either designed or heavily inspired by Sri Lankan architect Geoffrey Bawa, they're built to fuse the outdoors with interior spaces, so you can relax in gardens joined by a series of terraces, balconies and courtyards.

### MAKE THIS TRIP YOUR OWN

If you'd like more of a wildlife focus, we'll suggest a beach base to the east of Galle. You can then take a safari into Bundala National Park or birdwatch in Hiya Forest Reserve.





Traditional hand-painted masks



Galle Fort Lighthouse

From your beachside base, you can take a privately guided tour of a lowland tea estate, wandering between the neatly undulating rows of bushes before sampling a selection of fresh brews. Each estate prides itself on serving the perfect cake as an accompaniment — I have a soft spot for the rich chocolate brownies infused with strong black tea at Handunugoda Tea Estate.

As you explore the island, you'll encounter freshly painted white stupas and golden Buddha statues scattered across the landscape. They often conceal a labyrinth of shrines and cave temples, as you'll find if you take a privately guided tour of one of the larger temple sites. Yatagala cave temple has some of the finest cave paintings I've seen, with every nook decorated with floral motifs and scenes from Buddha's life.

After exploring in the warmth of the day, you can head back to the coast to relax. Your private guide can show you some of the hidden beaches that you can only reach on foot.

Some of these beaches open out onto bays of calm water ideal for swimming or have a tiny beach bar where you can sip a fresh juice. Others are so private that you might be the only visitors. And, I can tell you, there's nothing quite like sunset on a secluded Sri Lankan beach, the rich orange sun turning the sand a shade of rose gold.

**From £2,415 per person, including flights, accommodation, activities and transfers.**

## When to go

JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	-	-	-	-	✓

**December** is a great time to travel. It's particularly quiet and the weather is warm and dry across the south coast.

**'Best trip we've ever had, there was nothing we didn't enjoy'**

Howard Downs & Crescencia Gamez-Lopez,  
visiting Sri Lanka

# Explore the Indian Subcontinent

A train ride across the Rajasthani plains, an elephant-spotting safari, private sandbar dining...



## India's Golden Triangle

The Taj Mahal at sunrise, Mughal forts and going in search of tigers: this nine-day trip idea covers some of India's classic experiences. Other highlights include scenic train rides and meeting the artisans of Jaipur's markets.

### Day

- 1-2** Take a private guided tour of New Delhi and the bazaars of Old Delhi, including India Gate and the President's residence.
- 3** Catch a train across the Rajasthani plains to Agra. On a privately guided tour around the Red Fort, you'll first glimpse the Taj Mahal before getting up close to it at sunrise the next morning.
- 4-5** Visit the abandoned city of Fatehpur Sikri before taking a train to Ranthambore National Park. Here, you'll take game drives to spot leopards, wild dogs, crocodiles and Bengal tigers.
- 6-8** Stay in a family home in Jaipur and tour the highlights of the city with a private guide, including the Amber Fort and the Palace of the Winds.
- 9** Drive across the desert plains back to Delhi for your final night.

**Price from £2,770 per person\***



## Northern Sri Lanka

This 13-day trip idea takes you to Sri Lanka's lesser-visited places, including South-Indian-influenced Jaffna and the remote beaches of the east coast. You'll stand atop Sigiriya Fortress and cycle past Anuradhapura's temples.

### Day

- 1-2** Visit Kandy's botanical gardens and watch a Kandyan dance performance before an evening visit to the Temple of the Tooth.
- 3-4** Climb the steps to Dambulla's 1st-century cave temples. Tour Sigiriya Fortress and the holy city of Polonnaruwa with your private guide, who accompanies you throughout the trip.
- 5-7** Visit the ancient temples, stupas and Buddha statues of Anuradhapura by bike. Nearby is Wilpattu National Park, where you can spot elephants on a safari.
- 8-10** Drive up to Jaffna, Sri Lanka's northernmost tip, for a guided tour exploring its history and Tamil influences.
- 11-12** Relax on golden sands near the fishing port city of Trincomalee.
- 13** Finish with a day to stroll through Colombo's craft markets.

**Price from £3,930 per person\***



## The Maldives & Dubai

If you're looking for seclusion, this ten-day trip idea for the Maldives is it. It gives you the privacy of a remote island getaway, combined with time exploring Dubai's souqs and a 4x4 drive across Arabian Desert dunes.

### Day

- 1-3** You start in Dubai, sampling a traditional futoor breakfast in the Arabian Desert before a 4x4 drive through the Dubai Desert Conservation Reserve. Take a privately guided walking tour of the souqs and ride in an abra (water taxi).
  - 4-10** Spend a week in the Maldives at Huvaafeni Fushi, an indulgent castaway island with just 44 spacious rooms. Your days are free to enjoy at your own pace, but you can choose to relax by your private plunge pool, take treatments in the underwater spa and slip into the infinity pool overlooking the Indian Ocean.
- You could also explore the reef with a marine biologist, take an underwater photography course, picnic on your own private sandbar, or dine on pristine white sand or on a traditional dhoni (wooden sailing boat).

**Price from £4,890 per person\***





Saint-Émilion, Bordeaux, France

# 8 OF THE BEST

## Food & drink experiences

There's nothing like sitting down in a Michelin-starred restaurant to a plate of artfully heaped linguine, coated with a velvety cream sauce and perfumed with shaved white truffles. But sometimes, merely consuming food isn't enough. You might want to learn more: go on a treasure hunt with a dog that sniffs out the truffles, speak with the woman whose family has owned that dairy farm for six generations, and learn to roll out tender pasta by hand. If that resonates with you, we've chosen eight activities from around the world that help shine a light on the destination's food, culture and people.

## 1 Wine blending in Bordeaux, France

Bordeaux's renowned blend might include cabernet sauvignon, merlot, cabernet franc, malbec, petit verdot and even a splash of carménère sometimes. The art of the master blender is to combine those varietals to create a well-balanced profile, using cabernet sauvignon's tannins to mellow the fruity notes of the merlot, for example.

To learn more about the art of wine blending in general — and about the specifics of the prestigious Bordeaux blend — you can take a private workshop when you're visiting the region. Under the guidance of a local sommelier, you'll sample various blends to discern how different ratios taste. You can also learn about the region's long and storied wine history. Not only do you have the chance to learn about Bordeaux and the science of blending, you'll also get an insight into the subtleties of your own palate.

## 3 Cooking with a nonna in Sorrento, Italy

The Sorrentine Peninsula is known for its crystal-blue waters, limestone cliffs and golden sunshine, of course, but also its cuisine. Fishermen draw up exquisitely fresh seafood from the Tyrrhenian Sea, the cliffs are terraced to grow fragrant lemon trees and many different herbs flourish in the bountiful sun. All this plenitude has helped to shape the region's cuisine as distinct from what you'll find elsewhere in Italy.

To learn more about the food of the Sorrentine Peninsula, we can arrange for you to take a private cooking class with Laura, an ebullient grandmother who's a native to the region and a classically trained chef. In her family kitchen, located just outside Sorrento, you can work with Laura to make a three-course meal using her family's recipes. You'll learn traditional skills, like how to make fresh pasta, and use local ingredients to create a meal that you'll then share with Laura and her family.

## 2 Basque gastronomic society, Spain

Though it's relatively small, the Basque Country is known as a hotbed of culinary innovation — the region's chefs collectively boast 32 Michelin stars. This well of talent is fostered by the region's private gastronomic societies. Traditionally closed to outsiders, they're where Basques share recipes and techniques, urging each other to greater culinary heights. Over the years, these hothouses have produced exceptional chefs, as well as residents who appreciate excellent food.

Normally, Basque gastronomic societies are hidden to visitors, but we can arrange for you to get a rare glimpse inside their walls, visiting as a guest of one of the members. While you're there, you'll watch a meal being cooked by locals as you learn about the history of the societies in general and that club specifically. Then you'll sit down to share a communal meal with members of the society.

## 4 Cape Winelands food garden tour in South Africa

One of the oldest farms in South Africa's Cape Dutch tradition, Babylonstoren is also a leader in the country's farm-to-table movement and its sprawling, manicured gardens supply its renowned restaurant, Babel. Humming with bees from the apiary and lively with chickens, the beds are packed with glossy green spinach, cartoonishly bright-red peppers and heavily laden peach trees. Strolling along the tidy, gravel-paved paths, it's easy to see the parallels between this overflowing abundance and the hanging gardens of the hotel's namesake.

Hotel guests are invited to wander through the gardens at whim. However, to truly appreciate all this luscious produce, you can take a guided tour. Led by one of the experienced gardeners, you're encouraged to pluck ripe fruit for nibbling and rub leaves between your fingers to smell as you learn about the art and science that goes into growing such revered food.





Gumbo, New Orleans style



Marie Michelle with her homemade rum

## 5 New Orleans Creole cooking lesson in the USA

New Orleans' cuisine is as distinctive and complex as the city itself, a piquant blend of French, Spanish, Choctaw, Caribbean, West African and even Vietnamese influences. Much like gumbo or jambalaya, this *mélange* of ingredients, when blended together, creates a complex and nuanced whole that's much more than the sum of its parts.

Eating Creole cuisine is a key part of visiting New Orleans, but to really start to unlock the secrets of the Crescent City, we suggest a cooking class. The New Orleans School of Cooking helps outsiders deconstruct traditional dishes like shrimp *étouffée* or even a simple dish, like red beans and rice, that gets a local twist such as pickled pork and andouille sausages. At the school, local chefs give hands-on classes or demonstrations that will help you recreate the dishes at home — you'll also get some insight into the city's history.

## 6 Mauritian kitchen cooking class

Pungent garlic, fiery ginger and sweet cloves — these are just some of the scents that greet you when you visit Marie Michelle and Bridgitte, two grandmothers who offer cooking classes in their traditional open-air kitchen in central Mauritius. The fragrance rises from the women's old-fashioned 'mama baba' — a stone mortar and pestle used to grind fresh spices every day.

Here, you can learn about the different cultures that combine to create the island's culinary profile, including Indian curries, Chinese sauces and a European fondness for rum and sugar cane. Working on their wood-fired stove, you're shown how to prepare dishes like wild boar curry or faratha, a flatbread inspired by Indian roti. You'll also discover local ingredients like sousou, a wrinkly pear-like fruit that tastes like a squash. When you sit down to feast, Marie Michelle may even share her homemade lemon rum, sweetened with muscovado.





Fresh salad ingredients, Hue



Fresh empanadas, Buenos Aires

## 7 Cooking in a family nha vuon in Hue, Vietnam

Hue's imperial heritage means it plays an outsized role in the country's culinary culture. Royal patrons and affluent families put an emphasis on expensive spices and precise techniques. Many of these families lived in nha vuon, single-storey houses with extensive gardens to supply their kitchens.

A guided tour of a local nha vuon begins in the garden, of course, where you'll see jackfruit, plum trees and peanuts growing alongside pineapples and pumpkin vines. Your host will help you pick the ingredients you need for the afternoon meal before you head to the kitchen. There, you'll likely start by mixing up a batch of nuoc cham, the traditional condiment made with chillies, lime, fresh garlic, palm sugar and fish sauce. Then, help to make dishes like mango salad, deep-fried spring rolls and bun thit nuong, a cold rice noodle dish topped with grilled pork and fragrant fresh basil and mint.

## 8 Hands-on cooking in Buenos Aires, Argentina

A perfectly grilled steak, with a deep-brown crust and a meltingly tender, rosy-pink interior, accompanied by a glass of dark, fruity malbec... It's easy to get lost in the obvious charms of Argentinian cuisine. But the country's food is much more than just asado and wine — in addition to Spanish and Italian influences, you'll find hints of the dozens of local indigenous cultures, all blended together. If you want to delve deeper, consider making some time for a hands-on cooking class.

The class begins with a guided trip to the local market, where you can greet vendors and help select ingredients for the day's meal. Then, you'll return to Azai, an airy kitchen space tucked into the leafy Buenos Aires residential area known as Chacarita. With a local chef, you'll learn to make local treats like yerba mate, a caffeine-rich drink, and sweet dessert empanadas, all accompanied by a glass of Argentinian wine.



12 DAYS IN

# THAILAND

## Highlights in a new light

For me, Thailand at its best is the crunch of a fresh spring roll, Bangkok's Grand Palace glittering in the sun or an elephant trumpeting in the jungle. You don't have to follow the crowds to experience the real essence of Thailand. I've created this itinerary with a fresh take on the highlights, taking you from hidden corners of Bangkok to remote jungle and secluded beaches.

**Ian** Thailand specialist



### TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

- Sample Thai cuisine with a Bangkok resident.
- Cruise past fruit and vegetable sellers at a floating market.
- Join a local ranger for a chance to see wild elephants in Kui Buri National Park.
- Ride a portion of the Burma-Thailand Railway.
- Snorkel the clear waters off Koh Samet.

### Days 1-3: Bangkok

Just thinking about Bangkok makes me hungry. So, on arrival, the first thing I suggest you do is take a private food tour with a city resident. You'll see food stalls, markets and hawkers everywhere, so the experienced tastebuds of a local are a welcome guide. They can take you to quiet streets and hidden cafes that few visitors find, enabling you to come to grips with Thai cuisine in peace. I'm partial to sai ua, a large coil of grilled sausage that hails from the north.

This local insight is also invaluable when exploring some of the better-known sights around the city, including the postcard-popular Grand Palace. A guide can plan your day to avoid any busy times, and everyone I met shared an infectious enthusiasm for Thailand.

Bangkok is a city of markets, but they can get busy. Instead, with a private guide, you can head out into the surrounding countryside to float along the waterways of Amphawa. This sleepy riverside town hosts a floating market, where pineapples, bananas and flowers are piled precariously high in narrow boats, their vendor squeezed in at the stern.

### Days 4-5: Kui Buri

Thailand is well known for its elephant sanctuaries, but it's still possible to see these gentle, inquisitive creatures in the wild.

Kui Buri National Park, in central Thailand, has a healthy population of around 250 wild elephants. The forest-covered Tenasserim Hills create a natural arena where you can view the

elephants. You're also likely to see a range of birdlife as well as golden jackal and deer.

There are no private-pool lodges or restaurants here — instead, you'll stay in a locally owned guesthouse in Ruam Thai village, a farming community along the park boundary.

You'll explore the park in an open-top 4x4, accompanied by your private guide and national park ranger. There are a number of points where the vehicle stops and, if safe to do so, you can to step out with the ranger. While sightings are common, you're not here for an up-close encounter. Instead, you're looking to (with any luck) observe the herd from one of the viewing platforms.

And, what a herd. Down in the long grasses, it



Vendors at Amphawa floating market



It was a two-year trip of a lifetime that gave Ian a passion for all things Southeast Asia.

often exceeds 40 elephants, with tiny youngsters tucked under the mothers.

## Days 6-8: Kanchanaburi

While this is a country of photogenic landscapes, I'd say that central Thailand really takes the crown. Lush farmland growing tapioca and papaya gives way to hills blanketed in thick forest, topped with mist in the early-morning light.

The Kwai River cuts through the landscape in a series of tight turquoise curves, with life in the region clustered along its banks. Kanchanaburi,

synonymous with Pierre Boulle's 1952 novel, *The Bridge Over the River Kwai*, makes an ideal base for exploring. You can stay on the river itself, in your own floating thatched-roof villa with a private terrace looking out to the forests of Erawan National Park beyond.

**"Down in the long grasses, the herd often exceeds 40 elephants, with tiny youngsters tucked under the mothers."**

If you're itching to explore, you can kayak, canoe or river raft the waterways, and cycle or trek through the forest. I also suggest a private tour of Erawan Falls, a series of aquamarine pools that are so ideal for swimming, it's hard to believe it isn't a man-made leisure resort. You're shaded by jungle greenery and if you stand still long enough, you

might feel the tickle of fish on your toes.

The natural history here could keep you occupied for days, but it's the modern history of Kanchanaburi that I've found most memorable. Take a tour with a private guide and you'll begin with The Thailand-Burma Railway Centre, a well-designed museum dedicated to preserving the history of the 'Death Railway',

## MAKE THIS TRIP YOUR OWN

If history is your focus, complement your Royal Palace visit with a tour of Ayutthaya, the royal capital for over 400 years and a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Contact your local independent travel agent





Secluded beach on Koh Samet



Wild elephants in Kui Buri

before taking a ride on the train itself. This is where your guide comes into his or her own — they take real pride in being the custodians of the stories belonging to those who lived and died building the route.

### Days 9-12: Koh Samet

Journeying through Thailand, there's something new to see around each corner. On Koh Samet, however, life becomes refreshingly simple. Most of this tiny island is covered in thick jungle, with forested hills to the south that shelter secluded beaches shared by one or two hotels.

Cradled by the mainland in the Gulf of Thailand, it's one of the driest islands in the country, boasting year-round sunshine and bathwater-warm coves.

The Paradee Resort is on a bay of its own, with a private island feel and low-rise thatched villas scattered across the beachfront. I've never really felt the need for shoes here — you step from your bedroom straight onto the beach.

Days are best spent lying languid by the pool or in the sea, where the water's so clear you can see your feet. Snorkel and the stage is set for shoals of fish glittering among the reefs. While diving, I was once lucky enough to see a whale shark silently gliding through the deep.

**Price from £3,240 per person, including flights, accommodation, activities and transfers.**

## When to go

JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓

**January to March** is the best time to visit Thailand for lush, green landscapes adorned with flowers.

**'We were treated like VIPs everywhere we went. Simply outstanding'**

Bill & Hazel Randall,  
visiting Thailand



# Experience Asia

Cycle tours through rural Vietnam, alfresco cooking in Cambodia, a tea ceremony in Japan...



## North to South Vietnam

A traditional junk cruise, cooking in a family home and a private tour of Hanoi are among the highlights of this suggested ten-day trip. You'll explore French-influenced Saigon, imperial Hue and the merchant trading town of Hoi An.

### Day

- 1-2** Get your bearings in Hanoi with a stroll to Hoan Kiem Lake and a private city tour, including Ho Chi Minh's former home.
- 3-4** Cruise around Lan Ha Bay's limestone islets and caves in a traditional private junk, enjoying dinner under the stars.
- 5-6** Sample Hue's highlights, including the citadel and royal mausoleums, before trying your hand at trucchi, bamboo paper art. Cycle through rural Hue and stay in a traditional garden house.
- 7-8** Stroll Hoi An's 16th-century streets with a private guide and take a drive out to the ancient Cham ruins at My Son, a series of Hindu temples surrounded by jungle.
- 9-10** Zip around Saigon on the back of a Vespa, pausing to sample culinary delicacies along the way. Take a private tour out to a quiet village on the Mekong Delta, with lunch in a local family home.

**From £2,990 per person \***



## The highlights of Cambodia

This 13-day trip idea gives you a cross-section of Cambodian culture, including a private tour of the more secluded temples of Angkor, cocktail tasting in Phnom Penh and an alfresco cooking lesson in a Kampot pepper plantation.

### Day

- 1-3** Watch sunrise over Angkor Wat before breakfast overlooking the Royal Bathing Pool. Explore the lesser-known temples of Angkor by bicycle, and walk among the intricately carved ruins at Banteay Srei.
- 4-5** Take an audio tour by private cyclo rickshaw of Battambang, Cambodia's little-visited second city, followed by a private street-food cooking lesson.
- 6-7** Take in Phnom Penh's modern history with a privately guided tour. Finish your time here by enjoying skybar cocktails with views over the city.
- 8-9** Spend a day at one of Kampot's finest pepper plantations, watching the picking process and creating pepper-infused dishes in a private alfresco cooking lesson.
- 10-13** Stroll along the secluded white-sand beaches of Koh Rong Island.

**From £3,395 per person \***



## Central Japan

From Tokyo's skyscrapers to the temples and gardens of Kyoto, you'll experience the many contrasts of Japan on this suggested nine-day trip. Highlights include a stay in a traditional ryokan and a bento box cooking lesson.

### Day

- 1-3** Get an introduction to Japanese life on a privately guided tour of Tokyo. Explore the modern entertainment district of Shinjuku then take a boat cruise from Hamarikyu Gardens to the atmospheric Sensei-Shrine.
- 4** Wander around Matsumoto's merchant district in the Japanese Alps and visit Crow Castle.
- 5** Hike the Nakasendo Highway, a former samurai route, from Tsumago through cedar forests, villages and paddy fields.
- 6-8** Try origami and don a kimono for a tea ceremony in Kyoto. Take a privately guided tour of the geisha district of Gion.
- 9** A bullet train whisks you back to Tokyo for a leisurely privately guided stroll through the Imperial Palace Gardens.

**From £3,995 per person \***

Contact your local independent travel agent

\*All prices include flights, accommodation, activities and transfers.



12 DAYS IN

# NEW ZEALAND

## Both islands in two weeks

What I love about New Zealand is seeing its one-of-a-kind wildlife, tasting high-quality food and drink, and enjoying the freedom of its many hiking trails. And, as this 12-day trip shows, you don't have to set aside three weeks or more to experience it all. I've included suggestions on how to make the most of your time along the way as you take in mountains, glaciers, vineyards and fjords across both islands.

**Joe** New Zealand specialist



### TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

- See kiwis behind the scenes at a wildlife sanctuary.
- Learn about Māori beliefs and customs on a tour of Rotorua's sacred landscapes.
- Cycle between Blenheim's vineyards, tasting as you go.
- Pass between mountains aboard the TranzAlpine train.
- Heli-hike on the Franz Josef Glacier.

### Day 1: Auckland

Enjoy a leisurely first day as you adjust to the new time zone. You could take a ferry across Auckland Harbour to the suburb of Devonport for lunch by the waterfront. If jetlag hasn't hit, climb North Head, a volcanic cone overlooking Torpedo Bay.

### Days 2-3: Rotorua

On your drive to Rotorua, you can stop en route at the Waitomo Glowworm Caves. A boat takes you through caverns spangled with pinpricks of green light: hundreds of thousands of glowworms.

In Rotorua, we have an exclusive arrangement with Rainbow Springs Nature Park so you can

watch staff behind the scenes as they weigh and measure young kiwis. The facility helps ensure they reach adulthood and can be safely introduced to the wild.

This region of New Zealand is particularly steeped in Māori culture. Taking a 4x4 tour with a Ngāti Pikiao guide opens you to the beliefs and customs of this iwi (tribe). You're taken through sacred landscapes to viewpoints few others know about, all while hearing Ngāti Pikiao myths and legends.

### Days 4-5: Blenheim

After flying south to Blenheim, I recommend collecting a car to follow the 33-km (20-mile) Queen Charlotte Drive, which curls around the shoreline of the Marlborough Sounds between

Havelock and Picton. You're greeted with a new, equally captivating view with every turn of a corner, the glistening waters met by gently sloping hills coated in native forest. Pause to walk up the Cullen Lookout Track for views over the sky-blue water of Mahau Sound.

Blenheim's many vineyards are best explored by bike with a private local guide who'll lead you to the best wineries for your tastes. The region is renowned for its sauvignon blanc, but I'd urge you also to try the chardonnay, which has a crisp, clear taste unlike any you find elsewhere. In the evening, enjoy a wine-paired dinner at Arbour, one of the region's best restaurants.

### Days 6-7: Kaikoura

Take a leisurely drive down the coast to



Wooden bridge across Lake Wanaka



Joe lived in Wellington for four years, exploring New Zealand's entire length.

Kaikoura. The town's name means 'to eat crayfish' in the local Māori language, so your first stop should be Nin's Bin, a tiny seafood restaurant housed in an old caravan right on the beach that's renowned for its fresh crayfish.

Kaikoura is New Zealand's whale-watching capital, but you can also take boat trips to see albatrosses nesting on the cliffsides or to watch dusky dolphins doing acrobatics among the waves. If conditions allow, you can enter the water with a snorkel — I found I got a much better sense of the dolphins' speed and agility from the water.

**'I got a much better sense of the dolphins' speed and agility from the water'**

## Day 8: Christchurch

On the drive down to Christchurch, you pass through the Waipara wine region. I like to stop at the family-run Black Estate winery for lunch overlooking vines heavy with grapes.

Christchurch has risen from the rubble of the 2011 earthquake. You'll find food markets where you can grab all manner of street food and fresh produce. For something special, though, you could enjoy a four-course dinner aboard a heritage tram, which circles the city as the sun sets, giving you views of the cathedral and river.

## Days 9-10: Franz Josef Glacier

Passing between beech-covered valleys, past glacier-fed rivers and through some of the country's highest mountains, the TranzAlpine train to Greymouth provides non-stop scenery. We can select the best seats for you to take in the views, which you can also enjoy from the open-air carriage. Then, driving down the west

### MAKE THIS TRIP YOUR OWN

Stay for longer by visiting the Bay of Islands to see more sacred Māori sites, kayaking in Abel Tasman National Park and taking an overnight cruise on Doubtful Sound.

Contact your local independent travel agent





Blenheim vineyard, Marlborough



Franz Josef Glacier hike

coast to Franz Josef, I suggest stopping to stretch your legs at Hokitika Gorge, known for its glowing milky-blue waters.

A helicopter flight in this region sums up what New Zealand is all about: untouched scenery. Snowy peaks stretch across to the ocean, and you can see the country's largest peak, Mount Cook, looming in the distance. Landing on Franz Josef Glacier, you have time to explore ice canyons and caves with your guide.

## Days 11-12: Queenstown

The drive I enjoy most in New Zealand takes you along the wave-beaten west coast, through moisture-rich forest and over Haast Pass's glacier-clad mountains, passing lakes that sparkle like jewels. You can stop off at

viewpoints, picnic spots and hiking tracks along the way. I like pausing to see Roaring Billy Falls in Mount Aspiring National Park and the glassy waters of Lake Wānaka, where you could hike up Mount Iron for views across the water.

Your final day is spent in Queenstown. You could join a jet-boat safari along the Dart River, winding through shallow glacial waterways before walking through native beech forest with your guide. In the evening, head to Onsen Hot Pools for a soak at sunset, toasting your trip with a drink as you look out over The Remarkables mountain range.

**From £4,250 per person, including flights, accommodation, activities and transfers.**

## When to go

JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓	*	*	*	✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓

I like the vibrancy and freshness of spring. In **November**, lambs dot the hillsides, birdsong fills the air and the blooms of pōhutukawa trees tinge the landscape red.

**'The trip you helped us arrange, so competently, has been an utter delight'**

Norman & Marie Webb,  
visiting New Zealand

# Experience Australasia

Surf lessons on Australia's beaches, a train across the rusty Outback, volcanic hikes in New Zealand...



## Australia's Outback

On this 12-day trip suggestion, you'll travel from north to south across the Australian Outback in comfort aboard The Ghan train, pausing en route to explore remote towns and fly out to Uluru. Either side, spend time in the cities of Darwin and Adelaide.

### Days

- 1-3** Explore Darwin and tour surrounding wetlands by float plane and fan boat, spotting saltwater crocodiles.
- 4-6** Fly out to a working cattle station to try activities like fishing, horse riding and cattle mustering.
- 7** Return to Darwin and enjoy a final evening in the city.
- 8-10** Spend three days journeying across the heart of Australia aboard The Ghan train. En route, you could fly out to Uluru, take a cruise through the Nitmiluk Gorge and tour a historic opal-mining town.
- 11-12** Explore Adelaide, enjoying the greenery of its parks, its alfresco restaurants and its Aboriginal art galleries.

**From £6,980 per person\***



## Southeast Australia self-drive

Coastal drives along wave-lashed clifftops, hikes that lead to waterfalls and ancient rock art, and time to relax or surf on golden sands: this 18-day trip idea shows you the best of Australia's southeastern corner, taking in three key cities as you go.

### Days

- 1-2** Explore Adelaide's markets and beaches.
- 3-4** Enjoy wine tasting in the Barossa Valley.
- 5-6** Look out for ancient rock art while hiking in the Grampians National Park.
- 7** Hop between Port Fairy's art galleries.
- 8-9** Drive the Great Ocean Road to Apollo Bay, passing the 12 Apostles sea stacks.
- 10-12** Drive along the coast to Melbourne and explore the city's sights on a walking tour.
- 13-14** Fly to Sydney. Join a surfing lesson on Bondi Beach and stroll the Rocks District.
- 15-16** Go walking in the Blue Mountains, independently and with a local guide.
- 17-18** End your trip seeing a performance at the Sydney Opera House.

**From £4,425 per person\***



## New Zealand's North Island

You'll have time to explore the North Island in depth on this 16-day suggested road trip. Steeped in Māori culture and alive with volcanic landscapes, the island is also home to black- and white-sand beaches and striking coastal drives.

### Days

- 1-2** Tour Auckland and its surroundings with a private Māori guide.
- 3-4** Visit the Coromandel Peninsula's Hot Water Beach and discover hidden coves.
- 5-6** Follow the coast round to Whakatāne and stroll its beaches and ancient forests.
- 7-8** Browse Gisborne's Māori museums and try surfing from white-sand beaches.
- 9-10** Tour Hawke's Bay's vineyards and explore Napier's Art-Deco buildings with a guide.
- 11-12** Walk through the steaming volcanic landscape of Tongariro National Park.
- 13-14** Hike the slopes of Mount Taranaki or relax on New Plymouth's beaches.
- 15-16** See Waitomo's glowworm caves by boat, then return to Auckland for your flight.

**From £4,160 per person\***

Contact your local independent travel agent

\*All prices include flights, accommodation, activities and transfers.





Wolves in Yellowstone National Park

# 8 OF THE BEST

## Wildlife experiences

Nothing awakens your senses like a stand-out wildlife encounter, or even the build up to it. Whether you're trekking through rainforest in search of primates, each crack of a twig and rustle of a branch setting your heart racing, or crossing the African savannah as your eyes scan the horizon for a particular animal, you're completely present in that moment. There are countless ways to feel closer to the natural world, but here we've rounded up eight wildlife experiences you'll continue to recount long after you've returned home.

## 1 Africa's Great Migration by hot-air balloon

The Great Migration sees some 1.5 million wildebeest move in a constant circuit between Kenya's Masai Mara and Tanzania's Serengeti. The herds follow the rains in roughly the same pattern each year, their presence attracting the attention of hungry predators. While you can see the action on game drives, a hot-air balloon flight gives you a better sense of the migration's scale.

You'll rise into the sky just as the sun does, the plains below bathed in a buttery-yellow glow. Dawn is when many animals are at their most active, and you'll see wildebeest, zebra and antelope grazing in hundreds-strong herds. Unmistakable grey lumps indicate elephant clustered around waterholes, and you might see big cats setting up a morning hunt. You'll be welcomed back to earth with a Champagne breakfast set up in the bush.

## 3 Rainforest walking in Borneo's Danum Valley

Travel through Borneo and you might notice that the Danum Valley is a popular topic of conversation. Everyone who's been lucky enough to visit can't stop talking about it. Those who haven't lap up stories of rare pygmy elephant sightings, flying squirrel encounters and the holy grail of Borneo's wildlife experiences, seeing a wild orangutan.

Set in an area of pristine primary rainforest, there's just one lodge to stay in: Borneo Rainforest Lodge, a cluster of spacious riverside chalets. The surrounding undulating topography is latticed with jungle trails, with viewpoints to look right over the forest canopy below. The wildlife has a vast area to roam, so this isn't about crossing off a list of species. Instead, with a wildlife expert to guide you, it's about finding yourself in a remote spot of deep jungle, making brief eye contact with a wild orangutan that might not glimpse humans again for weeks or months.

## 2 Wolf tracking in Yellowstone National Park, USA

While the southern half of Yellowstone is known for its steaming geysers and bubbling mudpots, the north is where you'll have the best chance of seeing the park's wildlife, most notably, wolves. You can join a wolf-tracking tour with an experienced naturalist guide who knows this area like the back of their hand.

You set off before dawn, arriving in the Lamar Valley as the rising sun shines its first golden rays across the landscape. Your guide will set you up with binoculars and telescopes and talk you through what you're seeing. Large herds of bison will already be up and grazing, their breath steaming in the crisp air, alongside pronghorns and elk. But, nothing beats the sight of a wolf pack running across the ridgeline, rolling around in play or howling into the wind.

## 4 New Zealand kiwi encounter

Flightless, rotund and almost fluffy in appearance, it's sometimes easy to forget kiwis — New Zealand's national bird — are birds at all. Notoriously elusive, they're difficult to spot in the wild, and not just because their numbers are in drastic decline: they're also nocturnal.

But, stay on tiny Kapiti Island, which lies just off North Island's west coast, and you can take a night-time tour with expert guides who know the best places to encounter kiwis rummaging in the undergrowth. After settling into your safari-style tent, you'll sit down to dinner as your guides go over the evening's plans, sharing tips on how to spot some of the island's 1,200 resident kiwis. You'll then head out into the night, your senses on alert as you listen out for telltale signs of kiwis' presence, hopefully returning to your tent triumphant.





Polar bear in the Arctic

## 5 Polar bear encounters in the Arctic

Seeking out wildlife in the Arctic can feel particularly intrepid. On an expedition cruise to the Svalbard archipelago, schedules are tied to the whims of the weather, but, this inherent flexibility also allows the expedition leader to divert to see any wildlife in the locality. You won't know exactly when you might see a polar bear, but Svalbard has the highest concentration of them in the Arctic, so your chances are good.

When a bear is sighted, be prepared to quickly hop into a Zodiac (a motor-powered dinghy) to get a better look. Appearing warm-cream in the white glow of the snow, they're easy to spot as they pad across the ice. You might even be woken at night if there's a bear close enough to view from the ship, the sun often dipped low on the horizon casting an eerie half-light.



## 7 Gorilla habituation in Uganda

Hiking through Uganda's Bwindi Impenetrable Forest, the trees clear to reveal a scene few others have witnessed, and one that remains under serious threat: a troop of mountain gorillas. Some sit munching on leaves in pensive silence. Younger ones squabble as they tumble through the branches. And the large silverback lazes, stretched out, in the dappled sunlight. We can arrange for you to be right there, just a few steps away.

In the southern Rushaga area of Bwindi, you can help one of two gorilla troops become accustomed to non-invasive human presence, ensuring conservation work to save the species can continue. In a group of no more than four people, you'll receive a briefing from the research team, who'll then lead you into the forest. Steep ascents, tangled vegetation and high altitude mean the trek can be challenging, but you're rewarded with up to four hours observing the gorillas in their natural habitat.



## 6 Quetzal walking tour in Costa Rica

You could easily devote a whole trip to Costa Rica's birdlife, but the star of the feathered show is arguably the resplendent quetzal. Both genders are beloved for their iridescent plumage in shades of green that range from lime and ultramarine to rich emerald. The males are defined by twin tail feathers that cross in a wishbone arch.

As they're a bird of the cloudforest, your best opportunity to see them is in and around the sleepy hamlet of San Gerardo de Dota. On an early morning walk with a birdwatching guide, you'll often spot them feeding on the fruit trees lining the village roads before you've even entered a reserve. There's also the chance to see a supporting cast of other species, including silky fly-catchers, peg-billed finches and coppery-headed emerald hummingbirds, all endemic to the area.

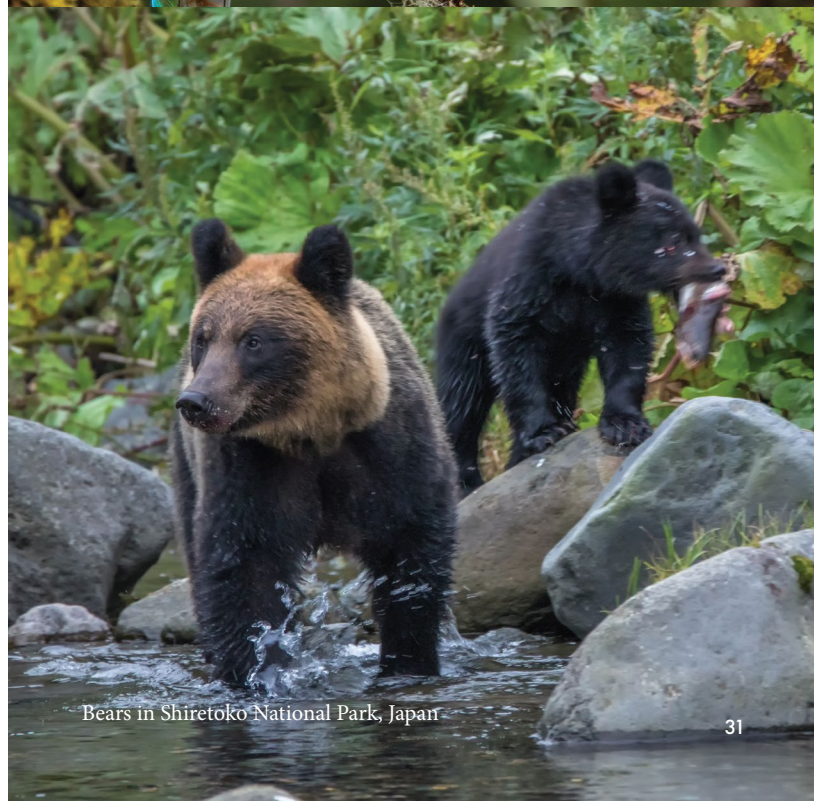


Resplendent quetzal

## 8 Bear watching in Japan

You might not have Japan on your radar for top wildlife experiences, but therein lies its beauty. Hokkaido, Japan's northernmost island, is home to just 5% of the country's human population. With wild, open grasslands, primeval forests and vivid-blue caldera lakes, it's Japan's final frontier, where bears roam and sea lions thrive.

Shiretoko National Park, a volcanic peninsula circled by a single road, is capped with thick alpine forest. You can take a boat cruise which hugs the steep cliffs of the coastline, the bluffs giving way to rocky beaches where brown bears come to feed, rest and play. From the boat, you can watch at a respectful distance, binoculars to hand. It's also possible to cruise further along the coast, from the nearby town of Rausu, where the ocean floor plunges to a deep-sea valley. The warm water attracts humpbacks, minke whales and orcas, as well as sea lions.



Bears in Shiretoko National Park, Japan

Contact your local independent travel agent



10 DAYS IN

# PERU

## The Amazon & the Inca

Peru is defined by the Inca people, the Andes Mountains and the Amazon River, but I also love its innovative culinary scene. I designed this itinerary to capture the essential highlights of the country, with several days exploring the Amazon's unique ecosystem and visits to some of the most impressive Inca ruins, including Machu Picchu, while making sure you get to enjoy Peru's cutting-edge cuisine.

**Katie** Peru specialist



### TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

- Take night walks through the Amazon rainforest.
- Discover Cusco's Inca heritage.
- Dine at one of the world's best restaurants, overlooking an Inca ruin in the Sacred Valley.
- Hike the final stage of the Inca Trail to the Sun Gate.
- Explore Machu Picchu with a private guide.

### Days 1-4: the Amazon

After landing in Lima, you'll wake early to head deep into the heart of the Amazon rainforest. You reach the Tambopata Research Center via a five-hour canoe ride up the river that gives you an eye-opening introduction to the ecosystem.

Far from most human habitation, the forest teems with life. Your lodge started as a scientific outpost, and researchers still use it as a base for studying the area's rich wildlife. I suggest spending at least three nights here to take advantage of the twice-daily guided outings.

You might wake up early for a canoe ride to the largest claylick on the river, to admire the flocks of brightly feathered macaws that gather there. In the evening, you can climb the

canopy walkway and use binoculars to watch the monkeys, birds and bats that flit through the leafy canopy. A night walk will give you a chance to see the frogs, snakes, tarantulas and other creatures that fill the dark with noises.

### Days 5-6: Cusco

Getting to Cusco requires most of a day, and I suggest you plan for a quiet night to let your body adjust to the altitude. If you do have some energy, consider taking a taxi up to San Blas, a trendy area overlooking the old town. The cafes boast balconies where you can enjoy a drink while watching the sun set over the mountains.

The next day, a private city tour offers a good introduction to the one-time capital of the Inca Empire. The city's history is literally

written in its stones; massive Inca-carved stone foundations are overlaid with colonial architecture. A highlight is Koricancha, the Inca's sumptuous Temple of the Sun, which the Spanish invaders converted to Santo Domingo church. In the evening, you can explore the city's vibrant culinary scene by joining a cooking class in making some of the country's signature dishes, including different types of ceviche or perhaps tamales with quinoa.

### Days 7-8: the Sacred Valley

Today, you'll meet your private guide, who'll stay with you for the rest of the trip. If you can, plan to leave the city on a Sunday so you can stop at the Chinchero Market as you head into the Sacred Valley. Unlike Pisac Market, which is mainly a tourist stop, this is a once-a-week



Llamas at Machu Picchu



Katie's love for South America has only grown since she first visited at age 22.

market that's frequented primarily by locals. Also, take a few minutes to duck into the local church — the plain exterior hides an interior densely painted in religious scenes.

Another hour up the valley, MIL Centro is one of the world's most highly rated restaurants, run by superstar chef Virgilio Martínez. The leisurely multi-course lunch menu uses traditional techniques and ingredients available at 3,500 m (11,500 ft) above sea level. And, of course, there's the view. The restaurant sits right above the Moray ruins, concentric terraces carved into the mountain by the Inca.

**'A night walk will give you a chance to see the frogs, snakes, tarantulas and other creatures that fill the dark with noises'**

The next day, you can enjoy the landscape in a more active way with a scenic mountain bike ride. Coasting down the steep slopes on gentle switchbacks, you'll pass traditional Andean communities where the way of life hasn't changed much since the Spanish arrived nearly 500 years ago.

### Days 9-10: Machu Picchu

A full hike of the Inca Trail takes most of four days. Instead, I prefer the KM 104 hike, a challenging one-day route up the mountains to the Sun Gate. Your day begins very early with a ride to

Ollantaytambo train station to head deeper into the mountains. With wide windows and a see-through ceiling, the Vistadome train offers the best views of the surrounding mountains.

Eventually, the train lets you off at the trailhead. The first part of the trek is a steady, continuous climb up a narrow path, some of it made from stairs carved right into the stone.

### MAKE THIS TRIP YOUR OWN

To learn more about the history and culture of the different indigenous peoples who live in Peru, you can visit the Uros' floating islands of Lake Titicaca.

Contact your local independent travel agent





Squirrel monkeys



Moray, Sacred Valley

The steep route eventually brings you to Wiñay Wayna, a collection of Inca terraces that spill down the mountainside and contain the remains of spring-fed baths. You can only reach these ruins on foot, so you'll likely have the site all to yourself.

From Wiñay Wayna, it's another hour to the Sun Gate, where you'll get your first glimpse of Machu Picchu itself. The citadel is often obscured by clouds, but if you wait a moment, it often clears.

It's usually late afternoon by the time you reach the site, so you'll head for your hotel. For the ultimate indulgence, you can stay at the Belmond Sanctuary Lodge, just outside the site, but most people stay down in Aguas Calientes and take the shuttle bus back up to the citadel.

Your guide can help unravel some of the mysteries that still linger around Machu Picchu, a city built, inhabited and abandoned all in just 100 years. I always try to find a moment to pause and just breathe in the majesty of the architecture as well as the surrounding mountains.

After lunch, you'll head back down to Aguas Calientes for an idle afternoon before catching the Hiram Bingham at 5pm. The train is outfitted with an observation deck and open bar, so you can spend your evening watching the sunset with a pisco sour as you return to Cuzco to begin your trip home.

**From £3,620 per person, including flights, accommodation, activities and transfers.**

## When to go

JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

The best time to visit Peru is during the dry season between **May and September**, especially if you plan to go on a trek.

**'The trip was planned beautifully and ran smoothly'**

Simon Shulman, visiting Peru

# Experience South America

Glacier sightings in Argentina, stargazing in Chile's Atacama Desert, tortoises in the Galapagos...



## Buenos Aires, Patagonia & Iguazú

Sail the milky waters of Lago Argentino to visit the Perito Moreno Glacier, watch sultry tango in Buenos Aires, explore the Lake District and gaze at the might of Iguazú Falls on this 13-day suggested itinerary of Argentina's highlights.

### Day

- 1-3** Arriving in Buenos Aires, wander through the cultural capital on your own before taking a tour of its best-known sights, including La Boca and Recoleta.
- 4-6** Los Glaciares National Park takes several days to fully appreciate. A highlight is the chance to sail across Lago Argentino and gaze at the creaking face of the Perito Moreno Glacier.
- 7-9** Get your bearings in the Lake District with a guided tour of Bariloche. Then, you'll have time on your own to hike amid the region's glacial lakes, emerald forests and extinct snow-capped volcanoes.
- 10-13** Visit both the Argentinian and Brazilian sides of Iguazú Falls, where you can admire its sheer overwhelming size, exploring by foot and by boat.

**From £4,050 per person\***



## Classic Chile

This wide-ranging 14-day trip idea includes a visit to the dazzling-white Atacama Salt Flat, a chance to cross the Chacao Channel by ferry to take in the island of Chiloe, and views of Paine Massif in Torres del Paine National Park.

### Day

- 1-2** Land in Santiago and take a privately guided tour of the city.
- 3-5** Try to count the stars in the sky and the flamingoes in the salt flats during these three days of exploring the Atacama Desert and high altiplano.
- 6-7** Hike or raft in the Vicente Pérez Rosales National Park and visit Osorno Volcano.
- 8** Continue to enjoy the landscapes of the Lake District with hikes in Alerce Andino National Park's native larch forests.
- 9-11** With a guide from your lodge, head out into Torres del Paine National Park to admire the raw natural beauty, including the jagged peaks of Paine Massif.
- 12-14** Return to Santiago for one last night of exploration.

**From £6,490 per person\***



## Quito & the Galapagos

This suggested trip gives you 13 days to delve into the many faces of Ecuador, including the colonial city of Quito, traditional markets, indigenous villages in the Highlands and the Galapagos Islands with their fearless wildlife.

### Days

- 1-4** Visit the Equatorial Monument on a guided city tour of Quito. Other highlights include Otavalo market and a walk around a volcanic crater lake.
- 5-6** Board your ship for the Galapagos Islands, including Galapaguera de Cerro Colorado, where you'll see giant tortoises in their natural habitat.
- 7-9** Continue to explore the archipelago from your ship. You can snorkel or swim in Gardner Bay, where you might see sea lions. Spot myriad bird species from Punta Suarez and Cormorant Point. You'll also visit the Post Office, an 18th-century barrel used by sailors and visitors for centuries to exchange mail.
- 10-13** Relax on the beaches of Finch Bay for a few days.

**From £7,995 per person\***



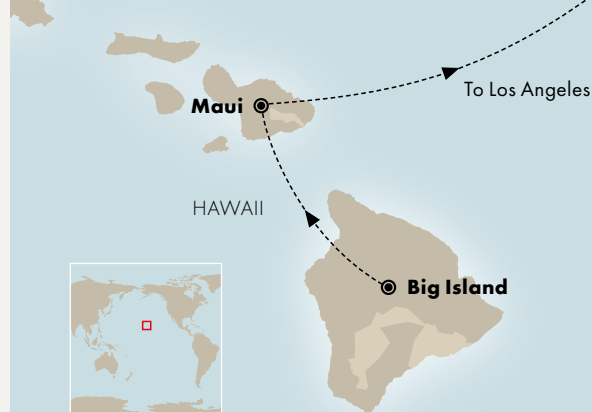
10 DAYS IN

# HAWAII

## Elemental landscapes

Black-sand beaches lapped by Pacific-blue waves, verdant jungles and starkly bare lava fields, vibrant coral reefs teeming with sea life and a night sky spangled with stars — I think the ideal Hawaii itinerary takes advantage of the archipelago's distinctive landscapes and ecologies. I prefer an active trip, so I've spread out activities across the ten days that let you explore the islands, while also leaving you lots of time for relaxing by the water.

**Alex** USA specialist



### TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

- Snorkel with graceful manta rays.
- Stargaze from the highest mountain in the Pacific.
- Watch the sunrise from the peak of Haleakalā.
- Explore Hawaii Volcanoes National Park with a private guide.
- Buy banana bread on the scenic Highway to Hana.

### Days 1-5: Big Island

When you land on Big Island, it's impossible to miss the massive, soaring bulk of Mauna Kea, the tallest point in the state. The volcano's peak offers uniquely clear skies for guided stargazing in the evening of your first day here.

Accompanied by an astronomer, you'll drive past the end of the road and continue on a bumpy, dirty path to arrive at the summit just before sundown. Neither words nor photos can capture the glory of watching the sun sink into the ocean, spreading a warm glow of orange and gold on the water.

Once the light fades, your guide will set up a powerful telescope to help you pick out the constellations among the multitudes of

twinkling stars. Astronomers from around the world come here for the unimpeded views of the night sky, including NASA, and it's easy to see why. When I visited last, I got to peer at the individual rings of Saturn and the moons of Jupiter, and even glimpsed the silver wink of the International Space Station.

The next day, take a picnic lunch to Honomalino Bay, a tiny, tucked-away beach that's known mostly to locals. You'll access it via a short, 15-minute hike through dense greenery. Backed by palm trees, this half-mile stretch of salt-and-pepper sand is usually very quiet, with just a few others enjoying the water.

In the evening, you can go swimming with manta rays. Guides use a safe spotlight to attract swarms of tiny plankton, which, in

turn, draw in huge numbers of these elegant creatures, some as wide as I am tall. Face-down in the dark water, holding a flotation device, you'll have ample time to observe their ponderous grace as they flap and glide through the ocean in a slow-motion ballet. Also, the animals seem unafraid of humans and tend to swim very close

After two days of sleeping in, the next morning requires an early start as you drive across the island to meet a local guide for a private tour of Volcanoes National Park. When I went, my guide was Scott, a laid-back and loquacious transplant to the island who was incredibly knowledgeable about the park. He could offer everything from a detailed history of various eruptions to the name of the exact mineral that causes Hawaii's unusual green sand (olivine).



Molokini Crater, Maui



Alex has arranged trips across the whole USA for five years and still likes Hawaii best.

The early morning is entirely worth the effort. You'll likely be the only visitor and can spend the morning admiring the lava flows from the two very active volcanoes that give the park its name. There's also rainforest to explore and the fiery, steaming Halema'uma'u Crater.

The next day offers a different perspective on the park with a helicopter ride that passes over the steaming crater. On the ground, surrounded by volcanoes and dense rainforest, it's easy to think that

Hawaii is huge, but the helicopter ride gives you a chance to appreciate just how small the island is, a green speck in the vast blue Pacific.

**'The sunken crater shelters a thriving reef that teems with silver shoals of fish and other marine life'**

### Days 6-10: Maui

As you fly into Maui's airport, look for Molokini, an volcanic crater located just off the western coast. It's been eroded by time and tides until all that remains is a slim curve of land that

barely peeks over the water. The sunken crater shelters a thriving reef that teems with silver shoals of fish and other marine life. If you want to go snorkeling when you're in Hawaii, this is arguably the best place to do it.

Molokini's land and water are both protected as an official state seabird sanctuary, so access is

carefully controlled. To visit, you'll need to join a small group trip on a catamaran that has all the necessary permits.

On the way back, the captain will also likely stop at the Fingers, a series of sculptural-seeming lava protrusions that attract nesting sea turtles. You can slip into the water and swim with these huge, slow creatures.

### MAKE THIS TRIP YOUR OWN

If you have young children, you might want to skip the sunrise adventures and instead include a few days in Oahu to visit the location where they filmed *Jurassic Park*.





Hiking on Maui

Having thoroughly explored land, sea and sky, your next adventure is on the Highway to Hana, a scenic coastal road that combines all three. The highway winds along the undulating coast, with vast ocean on one side and densely rainforested slopes on the other; the greenery is punctuated by banana-bread vendors, fruit stalls and silvery waterfalls where you can pause for a swim or snack. At the end of the highway, I suggest taking time for lunch at the Travaasa Hana hotel before your drive back.

The next day, watch the sunrise from the summit of Haleakalā. It's a local tradition, so plan in advance to reserve a parking space. Your efforts will be rewarded by the sight of dawn breaking over the gentle clouds. On the drive back down, I like to stop for lunch at Mama's Fish House, the island's best seafood restaurant.



Humpback whale off Maui

Your final day depends on when you visit. In January, February or March, humpback whale pods come to give birth in the calm, warm waters and nurse the calves before heading north to the richer, colder waters of the Arctic. Whale sightings are never guaranteed, of course, but I've rarely heard of a boat from Maui not spotting a whale.

The other nine months of the year, I suggest spending your last day sampling Hawaii's unique selection of pineapple wines at MauiWine.

**From £3,860 per person, including flights, accommodation, activities and transfers.**

## When to go

JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓

Hawaii is a year-round destination, but if you want to see humpback calves, visit in **January, February or March.**

**'We phoned Audley on Friday. By Monday, we had a fully booked tour'**

David & Deanna Pearce, visiting Hawaii

# Experience the United States of America

Wolf tracking in Yellowstone, drives along California's coast, whale watching from Massachusetts...



## Yellowstone & Grand Teton

This ten-day trip idea lets you explore two of the most impressive national parks in the American West. See geothermal sites in Yellowstone, look for elk in Grand Teton and explore the mountain town of Jackson Hole.

### Day

- 1-2** Get your bearings with a tour to introduce you to the wildlife and dynamic landscapes of northern Yellowstone National Park.
- 3-4** Search for bison, elk, deer, bears and even wolves in the Hayden and Lamar Valleys.
- 5-6** In the southern area of the park, which is known for its geothermal features, you can wonder at the rainbowed waters of the Grand Prismatic Spring and see water shoot up from the Old Faithful geyser.
- 7-8** Take a tour to get your bearings in Grand Teton National Park's distinctive mountains, which are home to elk, pronghorn deer and black bears.
- 9-10** You can visit the art galleries and exceptional restaurants of Jackson Hole and go kayaking or mountain biking.

**From £2,990 per person \***



## California's golden coast

Whale watching, the scenic Pacific Coast Highway and a Hollywood studio tour are highlights of this ten-day suggested trip. Visit Alcatraz, cycle across the Golden Gate Bridge and enjoy the golden sands of Pismo Beach.

### Day

- 1-3** Get to know San Francisco with a tour of the infamous Alcatraz Prison, a visit to Chinatown and a guided cycle ride from Fisherman's Wharf across the Golden Gate Bridge.
- 4-5** On a whale watching trip from Monterey, you have a chance of seeing blue whales, Risso's dolphins, humpback whales, northern right whales and orcas.
- 6** Driving along the Pacific Coast Highway, you can admire the rugged cliff-edge coastline and wind-tossed Pacific Ocean before you reach the golden sands of Pismo Beach.
- 7-10** Indulge in the glitz and glamour of Los Angeles, from Beverly Hills and Santa Monica to the Hollywood Sign and the Walk of Fame. We can also arrange for a backstage tour of Warner Bros. Studio.

**From £3,150 per person \***



## Classic New England road trip

From the historic streets of Boston to the small villages of rural Vermont, this 13-day trip idea includes a cog railway to the summit of Mount Washington, a whale watch from Cape Cod and a tour of the Freedom Trail.

### Day

- 1-2** Walk along the Freedom Trail to discover Boston's colonial history and visit Quincy Market and Boston Common.
- 3** Relax on the beach or explore the galleries and cafes of coastal Kennebunkport.
- 4-5** Ride a cog railway up to the summit of Mount Washington, the tallest peak in New Hampshire's White Mountains.
- 6-7** Hike amid the Green Mountains or drive through the rolling hills and pretty villages around Manchester, Vermont.
- 8-9** In Newport, Rhode Island, you might visit one of the town's extravagant Gilded Age mansions to see how the rich once lived.
- 10-13** Whale watch from Falmouth and spend some time exploring Cape Cod's small towns, windswept beaches, golden dunes and romantic lighthouses.

**From £2,305 per person \***





The Lighthouse Restaurant, Baros, the Maldives

# 8 OF THE BEST

## Beach experiences

Sometimes, there's nothing quite like spending the day lying languidly on a secluded patch of powder-soft sand. But, we find it's experiences that get you exploring, tasting, sailing or swimming through these tropical idylls that you remember most after you've returned home. Fine dining on a floating restaurant, canoeing by starlight, private yacht charters; we've curated some of the best ways to immerse yourself in the culture, landscapes or cuisine of your coastal surrounds from across the world.

## 1 Beachside dining, Maldives style

One of the oldest private-island hotels in the Maldives, Baros has a long-held reputation for fine dining. The Lighthouse Restaurant, Baros's flagship, is perched on a jetty, its white roof acting like a beacon long before the rest of the island comes into view. The tables (just a handful, you'll need to pre-book) are spaciouly placed along an overwater deck, with the option to dine under the stars or under a swooping sailcloth canopy.

The French-inspired food features the finest ingredients, from locally sourced oysters and lobsters to black-truffle pasta and saltbush lamb. Choose the Wagyu beef and it's flambéed on a small trolley at your table. There are world-renowned signature dishes on the menu, but there's also a creative mix of Mauritian delicacies, including spiced mahi mahi fillets, lemongrass-infused melon and papaya salad.

## 3 Mauritian spa indulgence

It could be easy to mistake the treatments list at Shanti Maurice's spa for a menu, with ingredients such as coffee, rooibos tea, mint and vanilla all prominent. With a focus on natural ingredients and Ayurvedic principles, the spa has an innovative range of options you might not have seen elsewhere, from rhythmic movement sessions, honey facials and aerial yoga to navarakizhi, a traditional technique to relieve sore muscles using heated packs of rice.

The hotel itself is set on a secluded cove on Mauritius's quiet south coast, surrounded by groves of frangipani trees and bougainvillea blooms. As one of the largest spas in the Indian Ocean, it's prepared to satisfy every whim, from children's yoga sessions to the couples' suite, where you'll be taught how to apply mineral-infused mud onto each other.

## 2 A colonial fortress tour of Saint Kitts

This palm-fringed, silver-beach island has the aesthetics you'd expect from any Caribbean island. But, sleepy Saint Kitts and its smaller sister island, Nevis, are also scattered with British forts, granite churches and 18th-century sugar plantations. Alexander Hamilton was born here, and Nelson married under the shade of a bodhi tree at the Montpelier Plantation Inn, where you can now stay.

Take a guided tour to Brimstone Fortress, a UNESCO World Heritage Site on the western side of Saint Kitts, and you'll get a brief history of the region. There's a small museum, a cemetery and parade grounds, but the highlight of the sprawling complex is the view from Fort George. It's a bit of climb up to this top bastion, but you're rewarded with views across Saint Kitts' coastline to Nevis, and on a clear day, Montserrat.

## 4 Canoe by starlight in Thailand

It's wonderful taking in views of the limestone cliffs and turquoise waters of Phang Nga Bay while lazing by an infinity pool. But, it's even better getting up close, exploring the limestone islets and sea caves by canoe. Joining a marine biologist, you'll navigate nooks and crannies that you can't access any other way. Gently paddling through low-roofed caverns, you'll pass bat colonies and giant stalactites before stopping to dine on a Thai spread of fresh-caught fish, fruits and por pia, a regional take on a spring roll, served with a sweet brown sauce.

The highlight, however, comes at night. Paddling into a remote cove hidden from light pollution, you're treated to quite the show. The stars flicker above, fireflies sparkle around the surrounding undergrowth and in the water, bioluminescent plankton glows.





Beach at Matangi Private Island Resort, Fiji

## 5 A Fijian private beach paradise

Having a slice of island paradise to yourself for the afternoon isn't a new idea, and you can secure your own cove or islet at many coastal resorts. However, not all experiences are created equal, and Fiji's Matangi Private Island Resort has curated something that's hard to beat.

You'll be a castaway on Horseshoe Bay, a great curve of golden sand trimmed with thick jungle, which is only accessible by boat. The bay surrounds your very own cyan-blue lagoon, with a pristine fringing reef of soft coral where parrotfish and angelfish come to feed. There's a thatched-roof pavilion, dressed with cushions and loungers, where you can seek solace from the sun, and you'll be left with kayaks, paddleboards and snorkeling equipment. When you tire of exploring, dine on a picnic of Fijian delicacies, from papaya salads to coconut jellies, washed down with chilled juices and a dash of local rum.



Fly fishing in the Seychelles

## 6 World-class fly fishing in the Seychelles

One of the reasons Alphonse Island is so picturesque is the surrounding wilderness of hard, white-sand flats that surround it. If you're an avid angler, that might catch your attention — and with good reason. With easy wading, clear waters and an abundance of fish, this is arguably one of the best places for saltwater fly fishing on the planet. It's also one of the largest bonefish fisheries in the world, and boasts healthy populations of parrotfish, snapper and eight types of trevally.

The island, hosting a handful of guests in spacious villas, has a team of professional fly-fishing guides to help you make the most of the experience. Working in partnership with the conservation team, the guides lead sustainable fishing activities, with a robust catch-and-release policy. You'll also find a fishing-tackle shop with custom-tied flies and a world-class selection of rods for rent.



Barachois restaurant, Mauritius



Yachts in Tobago Cays

## 7 Dine at a floating Mauritian restaurant

If you'd like an intimate dining experience for a special occasion, or simply an indulgent and unusual treat, this is it. Constance Le Prince Maurice, a luxurious resort with a laid-back ambience, is on a private peninsula on Mauritius's west coast. This is the sort of place where the staff give your sunglasses a polish as you laze by the beach and the bartender remembers your preferred choice of digestif after the first night. You can expect the service at Mauritius's only floating restaurant, Barachois, to be just as discreetly personal.

The restaurant is reached via a walk through mangroves, where a sheltered lagoon looks out across the Indian Ocean. A series of gently lit pontoons are linked by a walkway and while you're waiting for food, gentle reef sharks and fish swim below. The menu showcases Mauritius's mixed heritage of Indian, Creole and French influences, from gourmet samosas to fresh fish.

## 8 A private yacht charter from Petit St. Vincent

Deserving of its title, Petit St. Vincent is the smallest island in the Grenadines chain. It has been touted as one of the best private island stays in the world, and with just a handful of luxury cottages tucked between white-sand coves and thick jungle, it's easy to see why. It's also just a 90-minute sail from Tobago Cays, a pristine horseshoe reef that boasts some of the best sailing and snorkeling in the Caribbean.

You can visit from other islands, but from Petit St. Vincent you'll sail in a privately chartered yacht, pausing to enjoy a barbecue of freshly caught fish along the way. Your captain sails around the cay's five uninhabited islands and calm lagoon, dropping anchor wherever you like. There's ample time for snorkeling or swimming, and you can look out for sightings of dolphins, turtles and flying fish.



# CANADA

## The Rockies: a quieter path

A spine of glacier-clad mountains strewn with peacock-blue lakes, the Canadian Rockies are a place I never tire of. Some areas have grown incredibly popular, so I've created a trip that takes you along a quieter route. You'll visit national parks and small mountain towns that are slightly off-grid, go hiking through unspoiled wilderness and spot wildlife as you go.

**Kerry** Canada specialist



### TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

- Hike, kayak and horse ride through the glacial valleys of Waterton Lakes National Park.
- Drive quiet roads through mountains and prairie land.
- Stay in a remote wilderness lodge to immerse yourself in nature and First Nations culture.
- Soar over the Canadian Rockies by helicopter.

### Day 1: Calgary

It's apt to begin your trip in Calgary, which is known as the gateway to the Canadian Rockies. It's a quiet city for most of the year, with the exception of the first two weeks of July when the Calgary Stampede takes place. I visited during this time and found the city was transformed with rodeos, live country and western music and sizzling food stalls.

Even if your visit doesn't coincide with the stampede, you'll find a collection of excellent restaurants to dine in as you look forward to what lies ahead. You can also go up the Calgary Tower, a 190-m (626-ft) observation tower with a revolving restaurant, where you can gaze out across the city and the surrounding prairies.

### Days 2-3: Waterton Lakes National Park

Driving south to Waterton Lakes, which straddles the Canada-US border, you'll follow a quiet, mostly flat road known as the Cowboy Trail. En route, I suggest detouring to the literally named Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump, a steep, grassy cliff once used to drive buffalo to their death. With a guide, you can tour this UNESCO-certified site, used by the Siksika (Black Foot) First Nation and other indigenous plains people for 5,000 years.

As you near Waterton Lakes, I recommend stopping at one of the viewpoints signposted from the road — you'll have prairies on one side and mountains on the other.

Once in Waterton, it feels like you've stumbled upon a local hideaway. With few visitors other than Canadians enjoying a relaxing weekend getaway, the park is an untouched wilderness of steep, glacier-carved valleys filled with glass-clear lakes and dripping with waterfalls. Bison and black bears graze in wildflower meadows, and from a kayak or boat you can often spot moose coming to drink.

Trails lace the forests and meadows, varying in length and difficulty. I enjoyed hiking through aspen and pine trees to reach the emerald waters of Crandell Lake, where you can then sit on smooth rocks to take in the views.

You can also drive the Bison Paddock Loop Road for close-up views of bison, or traverse the land on horseback with a guide.



Grizzly bear in Banff National Park



Kerry grew up in Edmonton, Canada and returns to the country regularly.

## Days 4-5: Fernie

On your next drive, you'll notice the flat prairie land is replaced with forested mountains as you follow winding roads into British Columbia. Halfway up Crowsnest Pass's western slope, you reach the former coal-mining town of Fernie. Its main street is lined with heritage buildings that have barely changed in over a century, watched over by a wall of snow-dusted mountains.

Basing yourself here for a couple of nights gives you a chance to go kayaking or white-water rafting in the Elk Valley's rivers. I'd also take the gondola from

Fernie Alpine Resort to access a network of trails that lead you through the mountains, which are coated with wildflowers in summer.

## Days 6-7: Kootenay National Park

**'Bison and black bears graze in wildflower meadows, and from a kayak or boat you can often spot moose coming to drink'**

The next leg of your journey is the most scenic as you enter the heart of the Canadian Rockies. Kootenay National Park is right on the border of Banff National Park, sharing the same backdrop of sky-punching mountains and sparkling teal lakes, but seeing far fewer visitors.

I suggest staying at Cross River Cabins, a remote wilderness retreat set among pine trees with just a handful of comfortable wooden cabins and traditional tipis. From here, you can take private guided hikes tailored to your fitness, paddle a canoe and spend time with First Nations guides to explore their culture.

## MAKE THIS TRIP YOUR OWN

As an alternative route, from Fernie you could continue west to spend time in Vancouver. En route, stay overnight in the Okanagan wine region to tour its vineyards.





Elk in Waterton Lakes National Park



Kootenay National Park

## Days 8-10: Canmore

I see Canmore as Banff's quieter cousin. Smaller in size, the town's streets are lined with cafes, restaurants, galleries and museums that can provide a change from outdoor pursuits.

You could also head into Banff itself, which is just a 20-minute drive away, to browse its shops, ride the gondola up Sulphur Mountain for views across snow-streaked peaks, or enjoy a quiet stroll around fir-fringed Johnson Lake, on the edge of town.

The Kananaskis Valley is also just a short drive from Canmore. I recommend heading here to hike or bike in the foothills, which are quieter than the well-trodden routes around Banff. You might encounter moose, elk, white-tailed and

mule deer and bighorn sheep.

The highlight of my stay in Canmore, though, was taking a helicopter flight out over the Rockies. A sea of mountains stretches below you, turquoise lakes shining between them. I spotted the distinctive pyramidal peak of Mount Assiniboine — one of the highest mountains in the Canadian Rockies. As we got up close to the Gloria Glacier, which clings to the mountainside, my helicopter cast its shadow against the dazzling snow — a reminder of how small we are compared to this colossal mountain range.

**From £2,865 per person, including flights, accommodation, activities and transfers.**

## When to go

JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
*	*	*	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	*

**June** sees Canada freshly thawed out from winter, so waterfalls flow and lakes are no longer icy. You get warmer temperatures without the crowds that summer brings.

**'Canada is somewhere we'd always wanted to go, but the trip exceeded all expectations'**

Martyn & Deborah O'Driscoll,  
visiting Canada

# Experience Canada

Bear tours along the shoreline, clifftop walks above sparkling fjords, drives to historic lighthouses...



## Bears of British Columbia

From the bright lights of Vancouver to untamed forest, this 15-day trip suggestion gives you a chance to explore the highlights of BC's coast, including time at a secluded bear-watching lodge and a road trip around Vancouver Island.

### Days

- 1-2** Soak up the sights of Vancouver and join a street-food tour.
- 3-4** Fly to Victoria by sea plane. Look for orcas on a whale-watching trip.
- 5-6** Drive across Vancouver Island to Tofino. Explore beaches and forest walks, and take a Zodiac boat trip to spot black bears.
- 7-8** Head to Campbell River, on the north coast. You'll take a trip into Bute Inlet for a chance to spot grizzly bears.
- 9-13** Drive further north along the coast to Port Hardy. From here, take a scenic flight to Great Bear Lodge, nestled in the Great Bear Rainforest. Spend each day seeking black and grizzly bears with naturalist guides — activities vary by season.
- 14-15** Fly back to Vancouver. You have a final night and morning to explore the city.

**From £7,610 per person\***



## Wildlife & culture of rural Québec

With time to explore both Québec City and the peaceful Québécois countryside, this 11-day trip idea has a gentle pace as you spot wildlife, take in dazzling views while hiking around Saguenay Fjord and explore First Nations culture with a stay in the First Nations village of Wendake.

### Days

- 1** Spend the evening in Québec City's historic Old Town.
- 2-4** Drive through the Charlevoix countryside to Baie-Saint-Paul. From here, you'll visit Hautes-Gorges-de-la-Rivière-Malbaie National Park for a privately guided hike and follow trails through Grands-Jardins National Park.
- 5-6** Go whale watching from Tadoussac and follow trails through Saguenay Fjords National Park for views over the water.
- 7-8** Stay at a clifftop wilderness lodge overlooking the Saguenay Fjord. Explore on foot and by canoe.
- 9-11** Listen to First Nations myths and legends around a campfire in a village north of Québec City, then return to the city for a walking tour and further exploration.

**From £2,690 per person\***



## Driving the Maritime provinces

Salty air, brightly painted clapboard houses and wave-cut cliffs: the Maritimes showcase a different side to Canada. This 18-day trip idea takes in three provinces as you soak up the region's seafaring heritage, wave-lashed coast and wild landscapes.

### Days

- 1-2** Visit Halifax's 19th-century fort and waterfront seafood restaurants.
- 3-4** Drive the Lighthouse Route to Lunenburg, then stroll the town's historic streets.
- 5-6** Spend time in affluent Annapolis Royal, via a visit to Kejimikujik National Park.
- 7-8** Hike in Fundy National Park and see the world's highest tides.
- 9-11** Discover Charlottetown's history and stroll along pink-tinged beaches.
- 12** See a replica of the ship that brought the first Scottish settlers over to Pictou.
- 13-16** Drive the scenic Cabot Trail and go hiking in Cape Breton Highlands National Park.
- 17-18** Relax in the quiet village of Charles Cove before returning to Halifax.

**From £3,510 per person\***



# SOUTH AFRICA

## A first-timer's road trip

Time in one of the world's greatest cities, a road trip along untamed coastline and, to top it off, a safari where you'll see all manner of animals: in my eyes, this trip includes everything you could want from a first-time visit to South Africa. I've made sure your time is balanced between guided activities and self-exploration and that, in just two weeks, you'll have experienced the breadth of the country's landscapes, wildlife and cultures.

**Mike** South Africa specialist



### TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

- Hike up Table Mountain with a private guide.
- See big cats, elephant and giraffe on safari.
- Enter the limestone caverns of the Cango Caves.
- Spot seals, dolphins and whales on coastal walks in season.
- Navigate the Storms River by kayak and inflatable raft.

### Days 1-3: Cape Town

I may be biased, but for me, Cape Town is hands-down the best city in the world, and the natural place to begin your trip. There's so much to do here, but top of my list would be hiking up Table Mountain with a private guide who can pick a route in line with your fitness level and interests. You're taken along a path, pausing part way for a picnic of local snacks (think biltong, rusks and rooibos tea). I learned a lot about South Africa's history and the geology of the mountain as we climbed, before finally emerging on the 'tabletop' — the views over the city, ocean and surrounding peaks were a worthy reward for my efforts.

I also recommend exploring the city's meld of cultures through its food. You can join

a walking tour that lets you sample dishes originating from the Bo Kaap district's Cape Malay community — descendants of enslaved people brought over by the Dutch from across South Asia. You'll try samosas, koeksisters (spiced donuts) and bunny chow (hollowed-out bread filled with curry), as well as dishes traditionally eaten by the Xhosa people, like pap (a thick porridge-like dish), and Afrikaans-influenced foods such as vetkoek (fried dough bread filled with well-seasoned ground beef).

To explore outside the city and get a taste for the country's wild landscapes, I suggest a tour of the Cape Point peninsula with a private guide. The day can be adapted to your interests, but generally includes winding coastal drives, time at Boulders Beach, where you can swim or kayak in view of African penguins, and

following trails within the Cape of Good Hope Nature Reserve. Look out for rock hyrax, eland and baboons, and the reds, pinks and purples of the endemic fynbos vegetation.

### Day 4: Swellendam

This small, unassuming town is a two-and-a-half-hour drive east of Cape Town, and one of the oldest Dutch settlements in the country. You'll see examples of Cape Dutch architecture and can visit museums about the town's history, but really your stay here is about relaxing and exploring the surrounding countryside.

I recommend visiting the nearby Bontebok National Park to stroll among protea-studded countryside, joined by herds of bontebok.



Table Mountain, Cape Town



Mike studied in Cape Town and took a road trip from the west coast to Mozambique.

## Days 5-6: Oudtshoorn

The two-and-a-half-hour journey up to Oudtshoorn along Route 62 is one of the country's most scenic drives. You wind up mountain passes that curve to reveal views over hills and valleys.

As you venture further north, the Langeberg Mountains flatten out and greens fade to golden browns as you reach the edge of the Great Karoo, an open semi-desert landscape.

The town of Oudtshoorn exists thanks to its roots in ostrich farming. In the 19th century, the town grew wealthy off the popularity of

using ostrich feathers to adorn ladies' hats across Europe. While ostrich feathers have since fallen out of fashion, you can still visit ostrich farms to learn more of the region's history and see the world's largest bird species.

**'You wind up mountain passes that curve to reveal views over hills and valleys'**

I also like visiting the Cango Caves in this area. You can join a one-hour tour that takes you into vast limestone caverns filled with stalactites and stalagmites the shade of butterscotch. As I walked through the dripping tunnels, my guide pointed out formations that resembled an eagle's beak, an open Bible and an outstretched angel's wing.

## Days 7-9: Plettenberg Bay

Plett (as the locals call it) is known for its long, pristine sweep of sand, where the water is usually calm enough for swimming. The cliffs of the Robberg Peninsula form a backdrop, and you can follow walking trails that weave through the Robberg Nature Reserve to see Cape fur seals, dolphins and sometimes whales.

### MAKE THIS TRIP YOUR OWN

If you're into food and wine, add on time in the Cape Winelands. Tour the vineyards with local expert Pietman Retief and take a food tour on foot around historic Stellenbosch.





Orange breasted sunbird



Robberg Nature Reserve

The densely forested hills and deep ravines of Tsitsikamma National Park are in easy reach. You can follow walking trails through the indigenous forest with a guide who can help pick out the calls of birds and vervet monkeys.

I also loved joining a two-hour guided kayaking and inflatable raft trip along the Storms River. You paddle past steep, foliage-draped cliffs that drown out all noise except the gurgling water as it flows between boulders. Toward the end of the trip, for added adrenaline, you can leap into a deeper section of water from two large rocks.

### Days 10-13: The Eastern Cape

It's just a few hours' drive to South Africa's Eastern Cape reserves, but they feel a world away. Landscapes vary from horizon-touching

plains to dense pockets of forest, outcrops and rivers dotted with hippo. All the reserves are malaria-free, making them ideal for families. I particularly like KwanDwe, a private reserve with a varied cast of wildlife. On twice-daily game drives you could encounter the Big Five (though leopard are notoriously elusive), cheetah, giraffe, all manner of antelope and more than 300 bird species.

One evening, we heard a deep roar echoing across the reserve and, following the warning calls of birds and baboons, eventually tracked down two lion, their manes golden in the sun.

**From £3,695 per person, including flights, accommodation, activities and transfers.**

## When to go

JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

**October to April** tends to be warm with little rainfall in these regions, making it a good time for wildlife viewing. For whale watching, visit **May to November**.

**'Every single thing went off like clockwork. Thank you so very much'**

Bob Wallace & Jon Stein,  
visiting South Africa

# Experience Africa

Game drives through open plains, bush walks with Masaai guides, dinners beneath fiery sunsets...



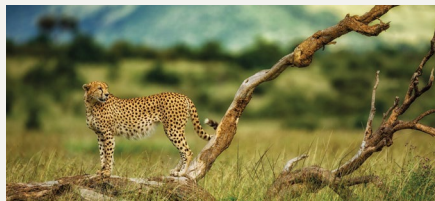
## Northern Tanzania safari

This seven-day sample safari includes time in renowned wildlife areas such as the Ngorongoro Crater and the Serengeti. Game drives from your comfortable camp give you a chance to spot the Big Five and other wildlife.

### Day

- 1** Land in Arusha, which lies in the shadow of Mount Kilimanjaro. You can spend the rest of the day relaxing at your hotel or touring the city with a guide.
- 2-3** You're driven in a private vehicle to Lake Manyara National Park, where you'll watch hippo, flamingoes and other birds in the soda lake's clear blue waters. You then continue on to Karatu, your base for exploring the Ngorongoro Crater. Within this natural bowl, you can spot big cats, black rhino and buffalo on game drives.
- 4-7** You'll stay in a tented camp within the Serengeti National Park, spotting wildlife on private twice-daily game drives. You might see the huge herds of wildebeest that form the Great Migration, and the hungry cheetah, leopard and lion that follow in their wake.

**From £4,750 per person\***



## Kenya safari & Zanzibar

This varied 13-day trip idea takes in the wildlife and landscapes of two Kenyan reserves, including the chance to visit the world's last northern white rhinos. End with a few days relaxing on Zanzibar's dazzling beaches.

### Day

- 1-3** A short light-aircraft flight from Nairobi gets you to the Ol Pejeta Conservancy, known for its healthy rhino populations. Here, you can take twice-daily game drives, including at night, as well as bush walks. The reserve's also home to the last two northern white rhino in the world, which you can visit to learn about how the reserve is protecting the species.
- 4-7** Fly down to the Masai Mara for a safari in Kenya's flagship reserve. You'll stay in a private conservancy where visitor numbers are limited, taking game drives and guided walks with Maasai guides.
- 8-13** Hop back to Nairobi then fly to the pearly shores of Zanzibar for a few days of relaxation. Snorkel in the clear waters, sail aboard a dhow, explore Stone Town's multicultural history and tour the island's spice plantations.

**From £5,960 per person\***



## Namibia self-drive safari

Following this 11-day suggested trip through Namibia, you'll pass red-rock landscapes, desert dunes and shimmering salt pans. You can also drive yourself on safari, focusing on the wildlife that most interests you.

### Day

- 1** Drive from Windhoek to Okonjima Nature Reserve, which rescues and rehabilitates leopard.
- 2-5** See leopard with a guide before driving to Etosha National Park. Here, you can enjoy the freedom of driving yourself or join guided game drives for a local insight. All manner of wildlife gathers around the permanent waterholes in this arid region, and you might see big cats along the side of the road.
- 6-7** Drive north to the sunbaked, red-rock landscape of Damaraland. You might see desert-adapted elephant on game drives, while guided walks open your eyes to smaller species.
- 8-11** See ancient rock art en route to Swakopmund, where you can kayak with seals and spot wildlife in the desert dunes.

**From £3,800 per person\***

Contact your local independent travel agent

\*All prices include flights, accommodation, activities and transfers.





Delphi

# 8 OF THE BEST

## History & architecture experiences

From Egypt's ancient pyramids to Los Angeles' soaring skyline, we've spent decades exploring great architectural works around the world. We know it can be hard to get a new or compelling perspective on these often-busy destinations, so we've uncovered ways for you to see well-known sights in a new light — sometimes literally. We've woken in the hours before dawn to watch the sunrise and explored deep in the jungle by the flickering flames of torches. Here, we've rounded up eight of the most interesting ways you can experience these impressive constructions.

## 1 Go inside Egypt's Bent Pyramid

Hot and close, the narrow passageways inside a pyramid often require you to walk crouched over to avoid cracking your head on the ceiling. However, we think there's no better way to experience ancient Egypt. You can, of course, go inside the Great Pyramid of Cheops, Egypt's best-known attraction. But we also encourage you to visit the necropolis at Dahshur to see both the Red Pyramid and the Bent Pyramid. Built about 2590 BC, these are two of the world's oldest pyramids, each more than 2,500 years old when Cleopatra became pharaoh.

Standing in the open desert, with only a scattered handful of other visitors, you can start to get a sense of the vast age of these monuments. And, once you venture down into the heart of the tomb, you can glimpse the early genius of these ancient architects, including a fragment of the original cedar beams.

## 3 See temples by torchlight in Cambodia

The largest single temple constructed during the Angkor period, Preah Khan is a sprawling complex with narrow corridors and lichen-mottled towers — the whole thing is almost twice the size of Angkor Wat. Due to its remote location, few visitors make it this deep into rural Cambodia, ensuring that a visit here is relatively quiet.

For the chance to explore truly on your own, however, we've cultivated a relationship with the temple to allow you to spend the night. Dine on Khmer cuisine as the sun goes down and the jungle comes alive with the flicker of bats and the hum of insects. Then, with a guide, light a torch and clamber through the interior chambers where the dancing firelight brings the etched figures to eerie life. Once you've had your fill, you'll spend the night in a luxury tent just outside the complex.

## 2 Follow in the footsteps of Greek pilgrims

Once, kings and commoners alike came from across the Greek world to make the long trek to Apollo's mountaintop shrine at Delphi, where they could ask important questions of the Oracle. To understand the importance of the temple complex to the Greek people, we can arrange for you to take a guided hike that follows in the footsteps of those long-ago supplicants.

After meeting your guide near the entrance to the ruins, you'll follow the statue-lined Sacred Way down the gentle slope as your guide explains the historical and mythological importance of the route. The path offers long views over the sparkling blue waters of the distant Gulf of Corinth and a chance to enjoy the countryside, as well as a unique insight into ancient Greek culture. You can even pause in the shade of an olive grove with trees that date back to the classical era.

## 4 Slide down a Los Angeles skyscraper

Generally, children aren't known for deep aesthetic admiration of modern architecture. The Skyslide may be the exception that proves the rule, however. The U.S. Bank Tower is the tallest building in Los Angeles — in fact, it's the tallest American building west of the Mississippi River. Its 70th floor has been converted into OUE Skyspace, an interactive observation terrace where you can soak up panoramic views of the city and landmarks like the Hollywood Sign and Capitol Records.

As lovely as the views are, the real attraction here is the Skyslide. Built out of perfectly clear glass, the slide wraps around the outside of the skyscraper, more than 300 m (1,000 ft) above the pavement below. Riders sit on a mat and rocket down 14 m (45 ft) through the open air, watching the skyline blur outside the enclosed chute. It's a way to get up close and personal with architecture that children can appreciate.





Sydney Harbour Bridge

## 5 Climb across the Sydney Harbour Bridge

The massive, curving silhouette of the Sydney Harbour Bridge echoes the shell-like fins of the city's signature opera house — together, they make the most frequently photographed view of the capital. But, for an altogether less-familiar perspective, you can climb up onto the bridge for sweeping 360-degree views of the city's waterfront, skyline and that renowned opera house.

Led by an expert guide, you can ascend up (and up) into the struts and riggings of the bridge. For safety reasons, you're attached to a static line the whole time, something that you might appreciate when the wind picks up at the peak of the arch, high above the water. We can also arrange for a night climb, particularly during the Vivid festival each May and June, when the city is bathed in vast swathes of shocking magenta, glowing orange and pulsating purple light.



## 7 Cruise Dubrovnik by moonlight

Begun in the 9th century, Dubrovnik's well-preserved walls are the city's biggest attraction. They've drawn visitors for decades and their popularity is only enhanced by the city's starring role in the TV adaptation of *Game of Thrones*. A guided walk around the walls is a vital part of any visit here — the ramparts provide some of the best views over the terracotta roofs of the old town as well as the shimmering waters of the Adriatic. But it can be hard to appreciate the full scope of the fortifications within the swell of visitors.

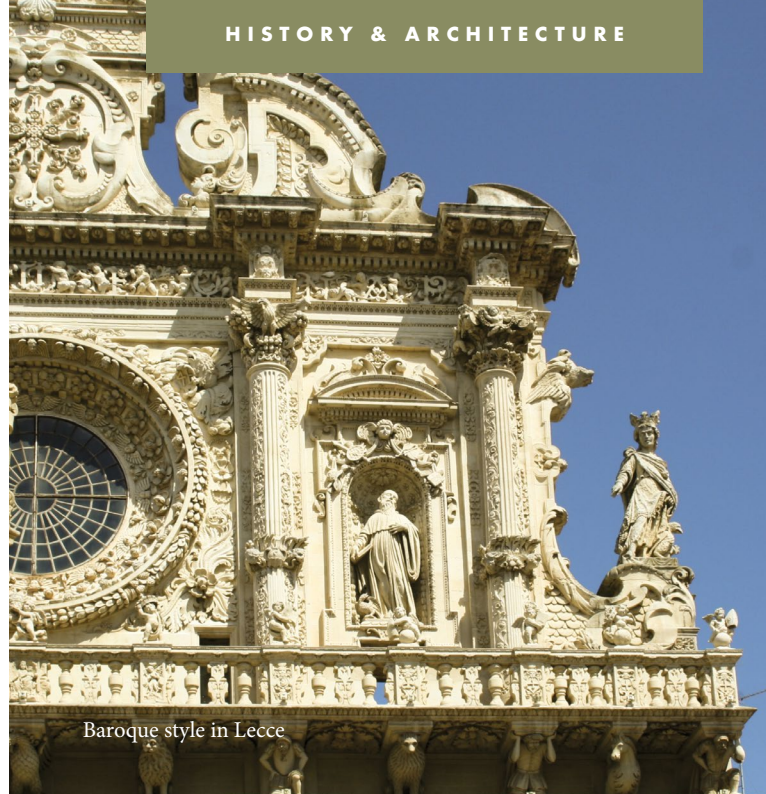
That's why we suggest spending an evening admiring the city from the water. A private sunset cruise offers a waterside perspective far from the throngs. The warm western light reflects off the water and turns the grey limestone a glowing gold as you circumnavigate the city, sipping Champagne and sampling local oysters.



## 6 Cycle through Baroque excess in Lecce

A youthful university city overflowing with exuberant Baroque architecture, Lecce in Italy's heel is known as the 'Florence of the South' for its compact historic core. The buildings in the old town were all built in the 17th century and exhibit the same florid style — the soft local stone was carved into seemingly endless cascades of stone gargoyles, gremlins, flowers, fruits and chubby-cheeked cherubs. The style is so distinctive that it's been given its own designation — Barocco Leccese.

The central area is largely free from cars, and it's easy enough to wander along the narrow streets on foot. But to take in the most impressive examples of the ostentatious stonework, we recommend a guided cycling tour (with an olive oil and wine tasting to end). You'll be able to cover more ground and thus able to see all of the city's best-known sites, including storied balconies that are associated with romantic myths of love lost and won.



Baroque style in Lecce

## 8 Float over Teotihuacán in a hot-air balloon

Located in a mountain-ringed valley north of Mexico City, Teotihuacán was once a major religious capital of Mesoamerica, earning it the modern nickname 'City of the Gods'. The two biggest structures in the complex, the Pyramids of the Sun and the Moon, rival the pyramid at Giza in size. Because they're built on a scale suitable for a deity, it can be hard for mere mortals to grasp the sheer enormity of these weighty structures. Because of this, we suggest making time to enjoy the site from a more heavenly point of view.

The quiet stillness of a hot-air balloon, drifting slowly over the ruins just after dawn, gives you the space and perspective to appreciate Teotihuacán's majesty. As the name suggests, the Pyramid of the Sun was dedicated to a sun god, and there's something deeply fitting about watching the low-angled morning light throw the stepped sides into sharp relief.



Teotihuacán

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