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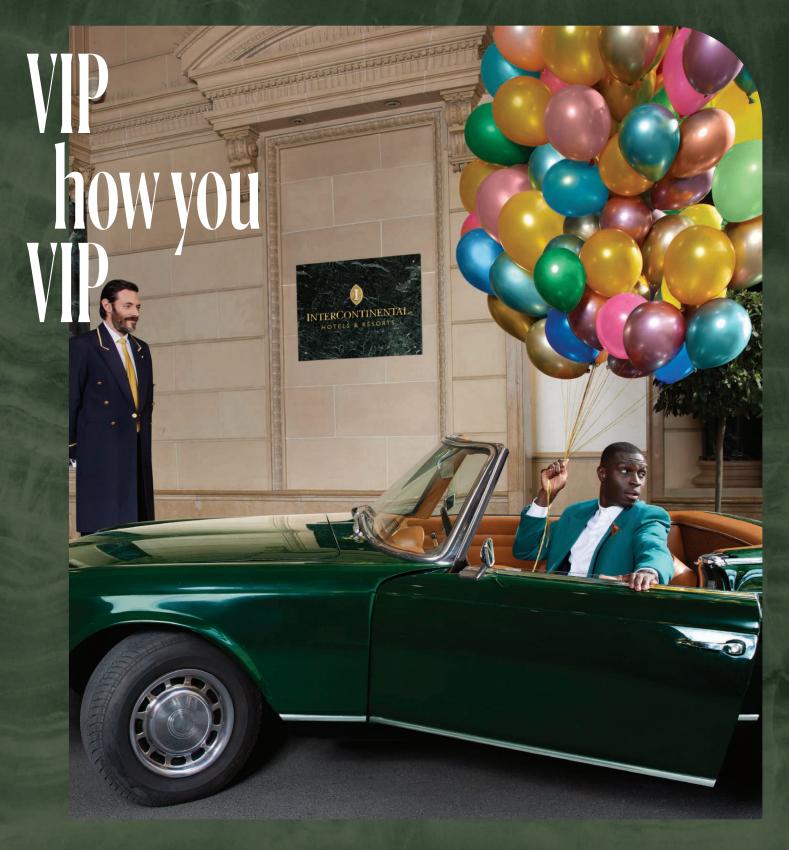
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<u>6</u> January February 2024

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<u>ON THE COVER</u> Pizza hut: Arnarbaer in Snaefellsbaer, Iceland. Photography by Korena Bolding.

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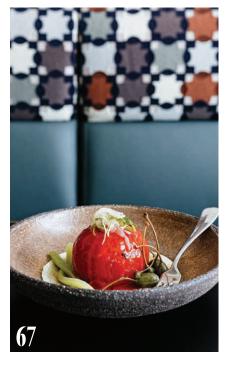


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Europe Is in the Details

S I WRITE THIS, I'm packing for a trip to Cannes. I'd be lying if I said this issue's jazz- and romance-tinged romp through the City of Light didn't persuade me to add a Parisian layover. J.R. Patterson's story zooms in on musical Paris and, in doing so, renders a beloved destination even more compelling. You can practically smell the *frites* on the page.

Sweeping vistas, rolling hills, and world-class dining leave me cold: If you want to convince me to go somewhere, ditch the clichés and serve up a vision of Parisians kicking out jazz standards in a sweaty nightclub, the wind-whipped mane of an Icelandic horse on an Arctic Circle cliff, heated seats and baskets of croissants and the whisper of doors on a first-class Swiss train. I think this is true for most travelers. We crave really getting to know a place through these kinds of small, memorable moments.

Our cover, photographed in Iceland by art director Korena Bolding, distills that concept into one out-there image: a jaunty, sod-roofed pizza joint in remote Snaefellsbaer. Korena's story of circumnavigating Iceland joins floral designer Amy Merrick's ode to some of England's most atmospheric gardens; Adam Erace's departure from the usual chocolate-and-fondue take on Switzerland; a pastry-filled tour of Thessaloníki, Greece; and other unexpected inspiration from Europe.

Of course, there's a practical side to realizing any super-specific travel dream, which is where Virtuoso comes in. Our network – the world's top travel advisors, hotels, tour operators, cruise lines, and more – has the clout to deliver everything from seatside croissants on Swiss trains to Icelandic horse cameos. And if you need help filling in the blanks, Virtuoso advisors are here for that too, armed with knowledge and connections and ready to elevate your next trip beyond sweeping vistas.

MARIKA CAIN EDITORIAL DIRECTOR







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VIRTUOSO

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"The Secret Life of Walter Mitty is a mustwatch to keep that travel spark going.

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"Any 1990s rom-com I'm a romantic at heart."

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"Mysteries with beautiful locations, like Death on the Nile and A Haunting in Venice.⁴

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"It's the perfect time to watch comedies like The Hangover without the kids around.'

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Contributors

"Where was your first trip abroad?"



Photographer Yadid Levy Zichron Ya'acov, Israel "The Sweetest Things," page 67

"I was born in Denmark but moved to Israel when I was one and a half years old. Throughout my childhood, we traveled to Europe about once a year. My first trip without my parents was when I was 16 - I went to Cyprus with three friends for a weeklong motorcycle trip." THE REPORT: "Walking by a colorful little square in the Ladadika district, I was invited to sit with a few young waiters who worked at a nearby restaurant. It was after lunchtime and they weren't busy. Even though they were more than 20 years younger than me, I ended up conversing with them for about three hours. They kept bringing out food and drinks for us. I'll always remember that afternoon in Thessaloníki."

g yadidlevyphotography



Photographer **(lara Tuma** Zürich and Aix-en-Provence "Training Grounds," page 90

"I was practically born with travel DNA, since my parents often journeyed from Switzerland to Italy. My first 'real' trip was at the age of 4, when Dad took us all to Niagara Falls and up the Empire State Building. There was an unexplained detour through Maryland, from which I have vivid memories of the motel pool where I learned how to swim." THE REPORT: "I was taking a ferry from Lucerne to Bürgenstock, and a group of locals was on board, all dressed in hiking pants and hiking shoes. I was impressed to see so many sporty people who were apparently going to start their hike in Bürgenstock, which seemed to be a very steep ascent. Upon landing, I wished them a happy hike - and was stunned to see them stay on the boat and return to Lucerne!" In the second second



Senior Editor Amy Cassell Seattle "Roman Stopover," page 49

"The Bahamas for spring break with several of my girlfriends it's a rite of passage when you go to college in Florida. I can still taste the rum punch." THE REPORT: "At a packed neighborhood restaurant in Rome, my Italian husband was excited for our 3-year-old to taste her first bites of mozzarella di bufala and spaghetti ragù. She refused - and ordered pineapple for dinner instead. But by the end of our trip, she was enjoying cacio e pepe!" amycassell



Writer J.R. Patterson Porto "Parisian Duet," page 72

"A few days in Fiji, as a bewildered 17-year-old leaving home for the first time." THE REPORT: "The Musée de la Musique is Paris' great uncelebrated museum. Its wide collection includes a violin made in 1803 by Claude Pirot, collapsible pianos, and Jean-Marc Nattier's wonderful painting The Music Lesson. During our visit, in-house musician Magali Boyer performed a recital, playing Philip Glass' 'Songs and Poems' and Bach's sixth cello suite on a five-string violoncello piccolo." X@JRPatterson9

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A New Jewel in Venice

The Murano chandeliers, the handmade *seminato* floors, the chinoiserie wallpaper – every corner of **Violino d'Oro** stops guests in their tracks. Co-owners, designers, and aunt-and-niece team Elena and Sara Maestrelli champion Venetian craft and environmental sustainability throughout their 32-room restored palazzo, which opened late last year. The pair sourced eighteenth-century furnishings, as well as newer pieces, locally, including the velvet and brocade drapes that open to reveal canal or street views (the

hotel is a two-minute walk from the Piazza San Marco). The aptly named II Piccolo restaurant – with just nine tables – upholds the hotel's local-sourcing ethos in dishes featuring vegetables grown on nearby Sant'Erasmo Island and fish from the Venetian Lagoon. At II Piccolo Bar, Venetian *cicchetti* (small plates) and rosé Bellinis in glam surroundings make it easy to embrace la dolce vita. *Doubles* from \$858, including breakfast daily and a \$100 dining credit. – Elaine Glusac

Passport

Adrenaline Rush

With record race-viewership numbers, new Grand Prix events in Miami and Las Vegas, and a collective obsession with Netflix's *Formula 1: Drive to Survive* docuseries, F1 is having a moment in the U.S. Travelers are taking that interest abroad, where action-packed races pair nicely with a few days exploring a new city. "F1 races are the hottest sports-travel events I've seen in a long time," says Phoenix-based Virtuoso travel advisor Chad Clark. "The Monaco Grand Prix has always been a dream trip, but now we're seeing major interest in many other destinations worldwide." Virtuoso advisors can go way beyond procuring race tickets – securing podium ceremony access, guided track tours, driver meet and greets, coveted room and restaurant reservations, and transportation in places gridlocked by race traffic. *– Larry Olmsted*



THREE F1 RACES FOR 2024:

• The Monaco Grand Prix, one of the circuit's biggest races, combines the thrill of F1 with Riviera glitz, three-Michelin-starred meals, and rosésoaked beach clubs. Check into the 208-room Hôtel de Paris Monte-Carlo for views of drivers racing through Casino Square. *May 23 through 26*. • Launched as the first F1 race behind the Iron Curtain in 1986, the **Hungarian Grand Prix** is a fan favorite, thanks to its famously twisty track. Post-race, explore Budapest's well-preserved Old Town, with hot-springs baths and buildings dating to Roman times. *July 18 through 21.* • Monza's "Temple of Speed" - the oldest paved track in continental Europe - is home to the venerable **Italian Grand Prix**. From there, it's an easy 30-minute drive into Milan for risotto at Osteria Brunello and shopping on the Quadrilatero d'Oro. *August 29 through September 1.*

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Double Exposure

Call it a trendsetting twofer: For the first time, the World Design Organization has recognized a duo of cross-border cities, San Diego and Tijuana, as the joint **World Design Capital** for 2024. Drawing inspiration from "the same vortex of desert, ocean, surf, sky, sunsets, and stars" – as Carlos de la Mora, the CEO of WDC 2024, puts it – ingenuity on both sides of the border manifests in unique place-based provocations. Spot shamanistic pictographs by the borderless Kumeyaay tribe in the Anza-Borrego Desert near San Diego. Explore the world's densest convergence of Chicano murals emblazoned under the freeways above the city's Barrio Logan. And discover modernism in Tijuana, where the Casa de las Ideas public library is a rectilinear foil to the unmistakably orbicular Cine Bola IMAX at the Centro Cultural Tijuana.

A dynamic series of events, kicking off this month and including the World Design Festival in April, will animate the cities' yearlong reign as WDC. For sensory recalibration, head to the courtyard at San Diego's Salk Institute: At the center of architect Louis Kahn's brutalist masterpiece is a monumental Pacific Ocean-facing travertine courtyard created in collaboration with Mexican architect Luis Barragán. – *Leilani Marie Labong*

The Salk Institute.





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COME AND GET IT

BY KILEY REID (*G.P. Putnam's Sons*) Writer Agatha Paul arrives in Fayetteville, Arkansas, to teach as a visiting professor and conduct research for her third book. Millie Cousins is a rule-abiding resident advisor completing her degree after taking a year off to care for her mom. When interviews with a few of Millie's residents inspire Agatha to shift her book's focus, Millie gives Agatha unfettered access into all of their lives. *Come and Get It* dissects the complicated power dynamics of academia via characters figuring out how they feel about sexuality, money, and race.

PICASSO'S LOVERS

BY JEANNE MACKIN (*Berkley***)** Art journalist Alana is determined to discover a new angle on Picasso for a magazine assignment. Following a clue from her mother, she seeks out the reclusive Sara Murphy, whose memories of Picasso unearth revelations about Alana's own history. Alternating between 1920s bohemian France and New York during the second Red Scare of the 1950s, *Picasso's Lovers* reimagines the lives of the women painted, loved, and ultimately overshadowed by the artist.

THE WOMEN

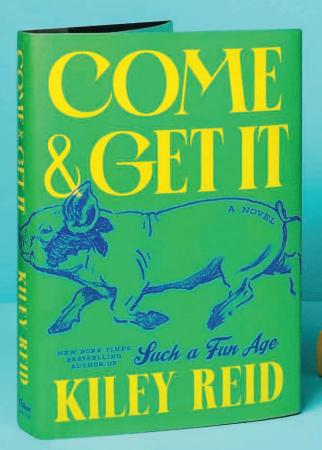
BY KRISTIN HANNAH (*St. Martin's Press*) Hannah's latest ushers readers into the turbulent 1960s through the experiences of an oft-overlooked group: women veterans. Following her brother's deployment, 20-year-old Frankie enlists as an Army nurse with dreams of making it onto the heroes wall in her dad's office. Instead, she's dropped into the horrific reality of the Vietnam War, ill-equipped for the tragedies that will reverberate well past her return to a newly divided, hostile America.

MY BELOVED LIFE

BY AMITAVA KUMAR (Knopf)

In this moving and lyrical portrait of contemporary India, Kumar takes readers into the lives of Jadunath Kunwar and his daughter, Jugnu. As they navigate different countries, changing societies, and shared yet divergent histories, *My Beloved Life* tells the story of searching for meaning and magic in everyday life.

– Melissa L. Amstutz





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Venice Who?

With Venice closed to large cruise ships, three cities have stepped in as the north Adriatic welcoming committee.

IMPROBABLY CREATED from islands in a swampy lagoon, Venice was never ideally suited to be a port of call. When its fishing villages grew into a fierce mercantile power 12 centuries ago, the influential society that would become the Republic of Venice was born. Today, La Serenissima is perched at the intersection of romantic and impractical, despite its cache of some of the world's great architecture and art. But as crowds filled the city's piazzas and canals, the impacts of overtourism became clear, and in 2021, Venice banned cruise ships weighing over 25,000 tons from sailing the Giudecca Canal or docking at the Marittima cruise terminal. Enter the "new" neighboring ports that have taken over as launch pads for cruises in the northern Adriatic - each of them worth exploring in their own right.

CHIOGGIA

To travel across the breadth of the Venetian Lagoon is to reveal how large it is. The fish-

ing town of Chioggia, 33 miles south of Venice at the lagoon's terminus, is often called "Little Venice." Indeed, some vistas along the slender canal that divides the island look as though they've been transplanted from its more famous neighbor. Chioggia is home to one of Italy's largest fishing ports, and in April and October the local specialty – fried, soft-shell crabs called *moeche* – appears in restaurants. Regular hour-long panoramic tours cruise the lagoon's southern end, but save time to stroll the Corso del Popolo, along which one of the world's oldest mechanical clock towers rises from the Church of Saint Andrew.

60 Six of **Viking**'s 930-passenger ships sail the eastern Adriatic coast on sevennight itineraries that begin with a full day in port to explore Chioggia, then call on Split, Dubrovnik, Kotor, Corfu, and Katakolon (home of the Olympia archaeological site), en route to Athens. *Departures:* Multiple dates, February 28 through October 31; from \$4,499.

RAVENNA

Lush fifth- and sixth-century artworks cover the interiors of seven of the world's earliest Christian buildings in Ravenna. These colored-glass, gold-leaf-lined tiles used for the UNESCO-listed monuments glow with religious and funerary stories. The city's mosaic heritage is so well established that contemporary tile artists still ply their trade, with half- or full-day classes for beginners at central studios such as Koko Mosaico, which faces the Basilica di Sant'Apollinare Nuovo. Most of this low-key town, located 89 miles south of Venice, can be seen on foot – be sure to visit Dante's tomb and the adjoining Dante Museum, which celebrates Ravenna's most famed resident.

<u>60</u> Royal Caribbean International offers seven-night Greece itineraries out of Ravenna aboard the 3,286-passenger *Explorer of the Seas*, which visits Santorini, Mykonos, and Athens via Piraeus. *Departures: Multiple dates, June 1 through October 5; from \$667.*

TRIESTE

Many non-Italians don't know that this Vienna-by-the-sea, the last stop before Italy kisses Slovenia, is part of *il bel paese*. Located 99 miles east of Venice, Trieste served as a vital seaport for the Austro-Hungarian Empire, but fell into limbo between the world wars – it wasn't formally turned over to Italy until 1954. Yet this tiny pocket of coastal history has made a name for itself, from the Piazza Unità d'Italia (Europe's largest seafront square) to the Caffè San Marco, a favorite haunt of twentieth-century writers. James Joyce lived in Trieste off and on for years, and trailblazing transgender author Jan Morris visited as a soldier in 1946, returning years later to laud this "hallucinatory city" in her writings.

<u>60</u> Circuit the Med aboard **Cunard**'s 2,061-passenger *Queen Victoria* on a 14-night itinerary from Trieste to Barcelona, calling on ports in Croatia, Malta, Italy, France, and Spain. *Departures: Multiple dates, June 3, 2024, through June 2, 2025; from \$1,299. – David Swanson*





Hotel News

New and Noteworthy

Fresh landing pads in familiar places.



COMING SOON

• In West Cairo, Giza Palace – projected to open this spring with 560 guest rooms – puts guests 15 minutes from the hotly anticipated Grand Egyptian Museum and 20 minutes from the pyramids. Nine dining spaces, including spots inside a rooftop *shisha* lounge and a casino, will fill out the marble- and gold-accented palace, illustrated above. *Room rates to be announced. Virtuoso travelers receive break-fast daily and a \$100 hotel credit.*

• The Emory joins a row of London legends, including The Lanesborough and The Berkeley, in early 2024, staking its Knightsbridge claim with dining from Jean-Georges Vongerichten and a four-floor wellness center. A guests-only rooftop with views of Hyde Park crowns the 61-room modern structure. *Room rates to be announced. Virtuoso travelers receive breakfast daily and a \$100 hotel credit.* • Slated to land on Dubai's coast early this year, the 386-room Jumeirah Marsa Al Arab Resort & Residences will cater to travelers in a seafaring state of mind, starting with its 82-berth superyacht marina. Entry-level rooms draw inspiration from Riva yachts, while suites are modeled after Speedsters, and a private beach affords Persian Gulf access. *Room rates to be announced. Virtuoso travelers receive breakfast daily and a \$100 resort credit.*

• Steps from the Santa Monica Pier, the 167-room **Regent Santa Monica Beach** opens this year with a 13,010-square-foot pool deck and a team of beach butlers. The farmers' market is five minutes away via hotel bike, and the Mediterranean-Middle Eastern Michael Mina restaurant provides post-sun refueling. *Room rates to be announced. Virtuoso travelers receive breakfast daily and a \$100 dining credit.*



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Peloponnesian coastline at the **Mandarin Oriental**, **Costa Navarino** (depicted above) never feel far from the Ionian Sea: Terraces, private pools, and full-wall windows overlook Navarino Bay, site of a famed nineteenth-century naval battle. Sipping a cocktail at the terraced Three Admirals Lounge, "you feel like you're on the bow of a ship," says Richmond, Virginia-based Virtuoso travel advisor Martha Rhodes. "The setting is spectacular." *Doubles from \$687, including breakfast daily and a \$100 dining credit.*

• Two city-center Munich landmarks – the former State Bank of Bavaria seat and an aristocratic *palais* – have entered a new era, restored to house the 132-room **Rosewood Munich**, which stands within earshot of the Rathaus-Glockenspiel's daily chimes and is decorated with whimsical illustrations by German artist Olaf Hajek. "The hotel has an at-home Bavarian feel in the best part of the city," says Virtuoso advisor Lyndee Campbell, based in Azusa, California. "And don't miss dinner at nearby Hofbräuhaus – beer, live music, and the best pretzel you'll ever eat." *Doubles from \$764, including breakfast daily and a \$100 hotel credit.*

• Behind the cactus-lined entryway of **Grand Velas Boutique Hotel Los Cabos**, which opened in December, 79 all-inclusive adults-only suites surround an oceanfront infinity pool. "This hotel is for those seeking an intimate, romantic, and quiet boutique experience," says Donna Padilla, a Garden Grove, California-based travel advisor who visited the property while it was under construction. "And best of all, guests have access to the dining, pool, and spa at Grand Velas Los Cabos, just steps away." *Doubles from \$512, including all meals and a \$100 hotel credit.*

• Raffles Boston made a splashy first impression last fall as the brand's 147-room North American debut. Copper accents, inspired by Paul Revere's postwar business, and architectural floral arrangements fill the new skyscraper near Copley Square, which also houses residences. Toronto-based Virtuoso travel advisor Alla Weintraub, who visited the hotel in its first weeks, recommends the octopus skewer at Portuguese restaurant Amar and the Chocolate Layers for dessert. *Doubles from \$875, including breakfast daily and a \$100 hotel credit. – Emma Franke*

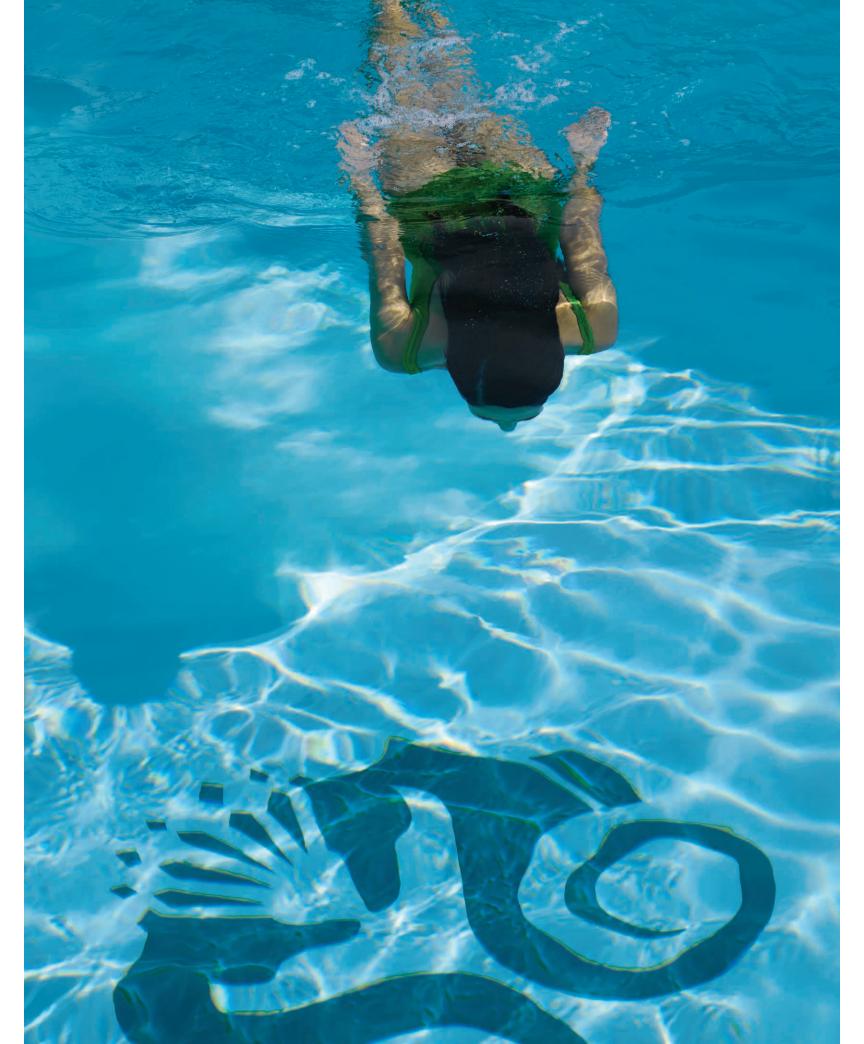
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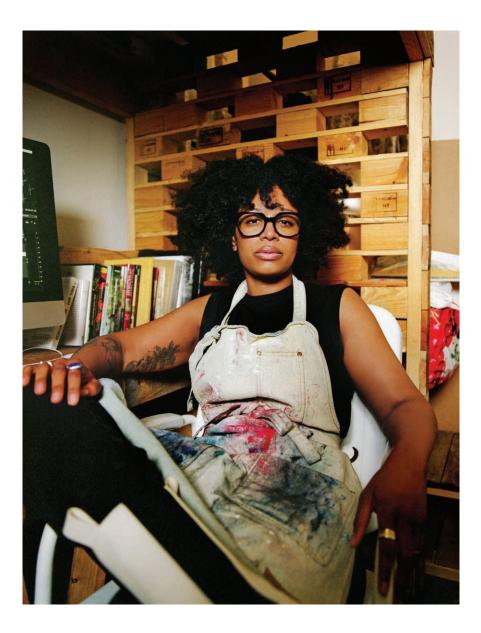
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The Virtuoso Life



North-South Orientation

NYC-based artist Allison Janae Hamilton draws inspiration from the American South. INTERVIEW BY SALLIE LEWIS

LLISON JANAE HAMILTON has called New York City home for almost 20 years, yet her multidisciplinary artwork remains deeply rooted in the landscape of the American South. Born in Kentucky, the visual artist spent her youth in Florida, building forts and climbing trees, and started exploring photography at her family's farm in western Tennessee. "Everything about it is so different from New York," she says of the



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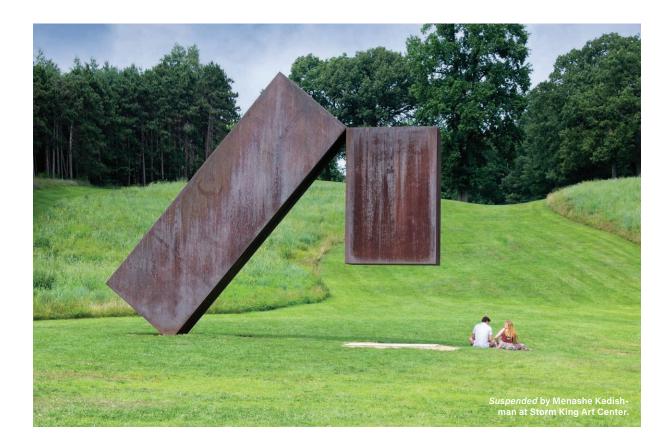
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The Virtuoso Life



property that's housed multiple generations. "It's just a completely different pace – being there resets the nervous system."

Today, Hamilton spends her winters in northern Florida and the rest of the year in New York, though she travels back to the farm - and farther afield - whenever possible. "Something I appreciate about being in the arts is that it does take me to really interesting places," she says. Some of those adventures include a trip to Cuba for the Havana Biennial; a residency workshop in Santander, Spain, with La Fundación Botín; and time in the Mediterranean. "The water there is like velvet," she says. "In Florida, our water is agua colored, but there, it's a deep, deep midnight blue." No matter where she goes, the artist and mother seeks inspiration outdoors. "My art, more than anything, is a story of land and how it contains these different histories and contemporary realities," she says.

ALLISON JANAE HAMILTON'S GUIDE TO NEW YORK CITY

I never thought I would land in New York, which is why I came for an internship during my last semester of college. I figured it was a great opportunity to temporarily live somewhere I would never otherwise live. It wasn't until I arrived and spent time here that I felt incredibly moved by the city's energy and spirit. That was 17 years ago, and I've never left. I still return to my home in northern Florida for a few months out of the year.

In New York, I'm normally at home or in my studio in Chelsea, but when I venture out to enjoy myself, I love going to **Greenwich Village** and strolling its small streets lined with shops and cafés. I also like hanging out with my dog, Percival, during early mornings in **Central Park**. One of my go-to restaurants for lunch is **The Orchard Townhouse** on Tenth Avenue. It's located near my studio and

"The dense population of folks dedicated to creative practices is palpable. It's inspiring and energizing."

has a great outdoor patio. I often pop by and am never disappointed. I also recommend **ABC Cocina**, which you can enter from inside **ABC Carpet & Home**. When I can manage to leave, I like traveling to the **Storm King Art Center**, an open-air museum in the lower Hudson Valley. Back in the city, the dense population of folks dedicated to creative practices is palpable. There are so many vibrant communities devoted to artistic fields in New York, from visual art to film, fashion, theater, music, and dance. It's an incredibly inspiring and energizing place to live. **9**



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City Guide S. 1 milester 4 10.28 T Their Sea Dolla No. -----100 NA SU R * **Big-Time Berlin**

Cool as ever, with a grown-up twist. BY GISELA WILLIAMS PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRISTIAN KERBER

44 January February 2024



Michelin-starred Cookies Cream, natural-wine bar Le Balto, and Berlin Cathedral. Opposite: At Gropius Bau, an exhibit by art group General Idea.

GO FOR Germany's creative capital, once a huge draw for young artists seeking affordable studios and techno lovers who would dance for two days straight in vast underground clubs, has evolved over the last decade into a sophisticated destination that's also for grown-ups. Visiting gallerists and collectors aren't just buying art, they're buying up sequined Plan C skirts at independent boutiques. World-renowned architects, such as David Chipperfield, are designing modern landmarks - as well as renovating historic cultural institutions like Mies van der Rohe's Neue Nationalgalerie. Stylish natural-wine bars are popping up everywhere, while squats and abandoned spaces have been transformed into dynamic galleries and cultural institutions. Despite the upgrade, Berlin remains a city bubbling with creative and experimental projects - and a place where you can dance all night long.

SEE Many of Berlin's industrial and historic spaces have been appropriated as arts venues. Take the **Boros Collection**, a five-floor private museum in an abandoned WWII bomb shelter in the neighborhood of Mitte. It contains one of the city's most singular family-owned contemporary collections,





Fashion-forward: On the grounds of Charlottenburg Palace and at Andreas Murkudis.



including works from Olafur Eliasson. Open by appointment only Thursday through Sunday; English tours are often booked a month in advance.

Gropius Bau is a favorite of locals for its eclectic exhibitions, great bookshop, and one of the city's best canteens, Beba, a café on the ground floor with a menu inspired by global Jewish cuisines. Beginning in March, check out *Nancy Holt: Circles of Light*, a survey of the artist's photography, sound work, and sculptures.

EAT When it comes to elevated vegan and vegetarian food, Berlin has been pushing the envelope for some time. One of its pioneers is **Cookies Cream**, a loftlike space hidden in an alley just a few blocks from the Brandenburg Gate – it's one of the first vegetarian restaurants in Europe to have earned a Michelin star.

At **Oukan**, a jewel box of a restaurant hidden like an underground club in Mitte, plant-based fine dining gets a stage. Here, offered with the six-course menu is a tea pairing that develops like a haiku. Locals are excited about the arrival of new head chef Timur Yilmaz, a Belgian native with German-Turkish roots and experience at top international kitchens, including Mexico City's Pujol.

DRINK Cozy natural-wine bars are cropping up in every cool corner of the city these days. **Le Balto**, an intimate space in the buzzy Kreuzkölln neighborhood, has checkered maroon-and-white tiles, a mural of the night sky on the ceiling, and backlit shelves of bottles from France, Italy, Slovenia, and the Czech Republic lining the wall.

Material, located in the fashionable Prenzlauer Berg district, has two distinct lives: an excellent coffee shop and bakery by day and a wine bar by night.

SHOP The city's most stylish and beloved concept store has long been **Andreas Murkudis**, which sells fashion-forward brands such as Dries Van Noten, Plan C, and Lutz Huelle in a high-ceilinged space hidden in a courtyard off Potsdamer Strasse.

Artist and milliner **Maryam Keyhani** creates joyful, surreal hats in the shape of giant

meringues or dollops of whipped cream. She only opens her Prenzlauer Berg shop when she feels like it (or when someone calls to make an appointment).

STAY Discreet yet sexy, elegant yet fun, **SO/ Berlin Das Stue** sits on a leafy corner next to Tiergarten Park. Patricia Urquiola's knockout design makes an impression from the moment you enter the hotel, with a crocodile sculpture from Quentin Garel and a tidal wave of lights by Christian Schneider-Moll. Some of the 78 spacious rooms even have views of the animals living in the next-door zoo. *Doubles from* \$383, including breakfast daily and a \$100 dining credit.

When the 41-room **Orania.Berlin** opened its doors in a grand art nouveau-era building, the gritty-cool Kreuzberg neighborhood finally got a stylish place to stay. The ground-floor open-plan lobby and restaurant is both welcoming and theatrical, with two open fireplaces and a raised stage occupied by a Steinway. *Doubles from \$317, including breakfast daily, a complimentary minibar, and a \$100 dining credit.* **9**

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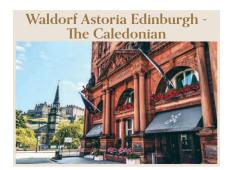
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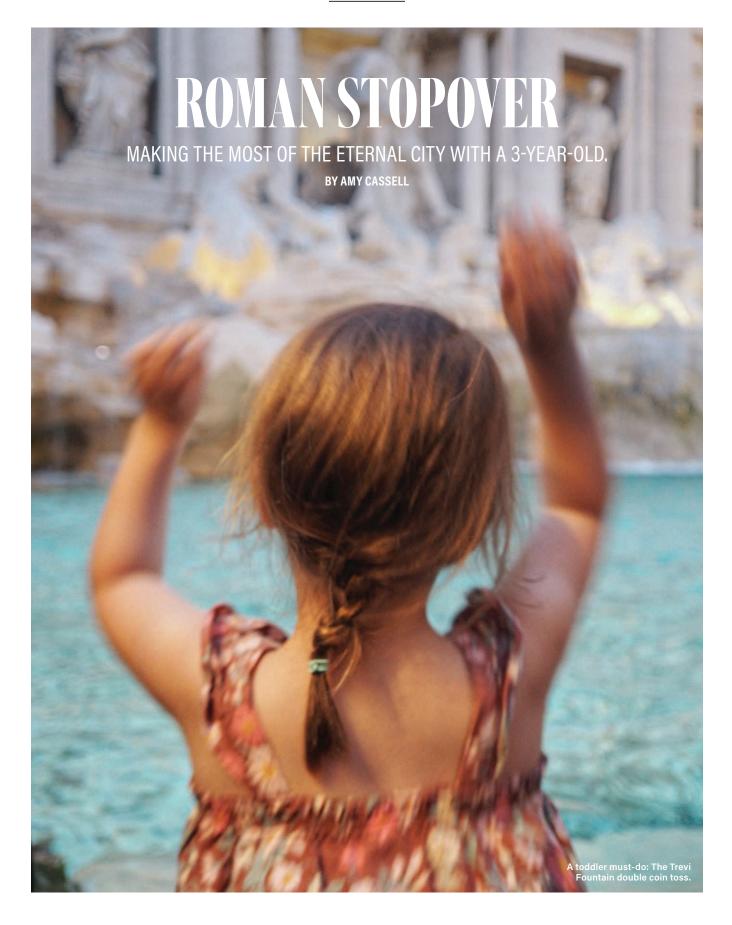


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Family Travel



Family Travel



Rome's sprawl, Giolitti's frozen specialty, and (opposite) pizza-making success.

T TAKES ABOUT 24 hours – three flights, a drive, and a ferry ride – to get from my home on the West Coast of the U.S. to La Maddalena, the tiny island off Sardinia's northeast coast where my husband's family lives. It's a journey *I'd* never want to endure in one go, let alone with our daughter in tow – a beautiful, moody 3-year-old on her first big international trip.

My proposed solution for a late-spring pilgrimage: On our trek to the homeland, we'd break up the long haul by bookending our vacation in Rome, a city I'd (embarrassingly) never visited and had always longed to explore – the history, the bougainvillea-draped storefronts, the creamy mountains of fresh *cacio e pepe*. Sure, the primary goal was to stave off jet-lag-induced breakdowns, but while we were there, we could make the most of it too.

I asked my friends with children, colleagues who'd already conquered toddler travel, and Virtuoso travel advisors who are family-trip experts for their takes. Their advice ran the gamut from "Don't worry about a thing" to "Don't do it" (not kidding). "Italy is one of Europe's most familyfriendly countries," Jessica Griscavage, a Springfield, Virginia-based Virtuoso advisor, told me. "But be aware of pace and packing in too much. Kids want to have free time just like adults. Enjoy a park, go for a bike ride, or have a picnic - it's always great to slow down and take in the local culture."

The park idea was already at the top of my list. As we zipped past ancient ruins and slipped down narrow, Fiat-packed streets on the morning we arrived, Eleanor shouted from her booster seat in the back of the van: "Where is the playground?!" That's exactly why we checked into the Sofitel



FYI

"My favorite family-friendly restaurant in Rome for Sunday brunch is Enoteca Ferrara. Kids have a dedicated place to hang out, with two entertainers who engage them in activities ranging from cooking classes to story time."

– Katie Stewart, Virtuoso travel advisor, Stuttgart, Germany

Roma Villa Borghese, a seven-minute walk from the Villa Borghese, a sprawling, shady park in the middle of the city. It's like Central Park, but with adults dribbling soccer balls past crumbling colonnades and kids filling water guns from the mouth of a 500-year-old stone sarcophagus fountain. Eleanor joined the teeter-tottering elementary schoolers and laughed as she watched the big kids chase their friends and drench each other.

It turns out those super-soaked theatrics were in celebration of the last day of school. It's a Roman tradition, known as *gavettoni*, to splash and play with water at the end of the year, our guide, Valentina Falconi, told us the next day. "When I was a kid, we used to get water from the Trevi Fountain," she said. "But that's not allowed anymore."

We found Falconi through Access Italy, one of Virtuoso's tour connections in the country. They knew the kind of kid-geared day of adventure we needed: hands-on, filled with variety, and featuring enough changes of scenery to appease a short attention span. Oh, and an air-conditioned van for respite from the heat and crowds. And there *were* crowds during our early-June visit: The start of Rome's peak season continues to creep earlier and earlier into the year. If it isn't possible to travel in the off-season, it's a good idea to come in with a plan.

In a private, sunny kitchen off the Via in Arcione, we got our hands doughy and learned how to make Roman pizza. We threw coins in the Trevi Fountain before Falconi led us to even more fountains in the Piazza Navona. She's a seventh-generation Roman and has been a tour guide for over 20 years, the past two with Access Italy, where she works exclusively with families – which meant she was ready to pivot when Eleanor did, and she understood that no 3-year-old wants to hear a ten-minute speech about the Pantheon's oculus. Eleanor loved the one-on-one attention, warming up when Falconi taught her how to sip from the city's *nasoni*, or ancient water fountains. There are 250 of them across Rome, and the water is refreshingly fair game for drinking, thanks to a centuries-old spring-fed aqueduct system.

Every lesson we've tried to instill about not cutting in line went right out the window at Giolitti, Rome's oldest *gelateria*, as we skipped past the dozens of people outside and into the old-school space, which has been open since 1890. The staff ushered us to the back of the shop for a true crash course in gelato making. They put us to *work*: We peeled dozens of bananas, mashed them in a bucket with milk, egg yolks, and sugar, then poured it all into an 80-year-old stand mixer that was taller than Eleanor. After our batch of gelato came out of the blast freezer, Eleanor

Family Travel

went behind the counter to hand out samples of her creation. It's an experience very few people can replicate – Access Italy CEO Simone Amorico told me it's because his dad and the owner of Giolitti are old friends. The final treat: Eleanor got to pick out any flavors of gelato she wanted. A kid in a candy shop's got nothing on a *piccolina* in a *gelateria*.

Sugar crash in full effect, Eleanor fell asleep in her stroller as we arrived at the Colosseum, which gave Falconi the opportunity to switch into adult-tourguide mode and tell us about Emperor Commodus' tiger- and gladiator-filled spectacles in the nearly 2,000-yearold arena, and how its underground tunnels had only recently been restored and made accessible to the public. Eleanor woke up just in time to race off with Falconi in search of Nero, the Colosseum's resident cat.

A WEEK LATER, back from beachhopping on La Maddalena, we headed to the place that would help our tiny trouper cross the finish line of her first big trip: the rarest gem of them all, a Roman hotel with a swimming pool. The pool at Villa Agrippina was a beauty, an oval surrounded by cabanas, gardens, and cypress trees, with chaise-side snacks, the distant sound of the bells ringing in Vatican City, and a few other kids splashing quietly in the shallow end. The hotel had even just launched a summer kids' club. Eleanor flew solo there for a full 12 minutes – just enough time for an adults-only Aperol spritz.

On our final night, we shared plates of pasta Bolognese, *cacio e pepe*, and *mozzarella di bufala* at Osteria Nannarella in the Trastevere neighborhood, then ambled the 30 minutes back to our hotel, stopping for Friday-night street concerts, impromptu dance parties, and *maritozzi* (cream-filled brioche rolls) along the way. People say vacationing with a toddler is the same chaos, different city, but when you've got the right guidance, the best connections, and endless gelato, it can absolutely be a sweet little getaway.



All-Ages Italy

GO Virtuoso travel advisors can work with Access Italy, one of Virtuoso's on-site tour connections in the country, to arrange custom itineraries, private guides, and all the kid-friendly experiences mentioned in this story, plus other exclusive moments such as Vatican treasure hunts, streetart sessions in the San Lorenzo neighborhood, and lessons with soccer pros. Full-day tours with a guide and driver from \$1,600.

Tour company Family Twist specializes in culture-centric, kidfocused excursions in seven European countries. In Rome, kids and teens can take pasta-making classes, channel their inner Michelangelo with a local art teacher, or don a trident, helmet, and sword for a course in gladiator training with a Roman historian. *Two-hour experiences from \$483.*

STAY It's a quick walk to Villa Borghese, the Spanish Steps, and the heart of Rome from the Sofitel Roma Villa Borghese, and after a day exploring, aperitivo hour at the 78-room property's rooftop Settimo is the best way to unwind. The hotel, in a restored nineteenthcentury palazzo, can also connect guests to cinema-themed city tours and VIP shopping experiences with local fashion influencers. Doubles from \$594, including breakfast daily and a \$100 dining credit.

The 110-room Villa Agrippina Gran Meliá is a secluded retreat across the street from Vatican City and near the Trastevere neighborhood. Beyond its showstopper of a pool, there's the sexy Amaro bar, a Clarins & myBlend spa, and Follie, the latest fine-dining project from revered Italian chef Luciano Monosilio. Doubles from \$697, including breakfast daily and a oneway airport transfer. The pool is open seasonally, typically between mid-April and October.

Opening this summer, the new Corinthia Rome will sit across from the Piazza del Parlamento with garden dining by chef Carlo Cracco and 81 guest rooms, including a sprawling Historic Suite with a carvedmarble freestanding bathtub. A planned kids' program includes walking tours and treasure hunts. Doubles from \$1,481, including breakfast daily and a \$100 hotel credit. 9

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CALIFORNIA DREAMING

From the Pacific Ocean to the snowcapped Sierras, the glittering cities to the starry deserts, the Golden State captivates. Soak it all in with this trio of vacation ideas.

All about the Beaches

Santa Monica epitomizes California cool, whether you're pedaling a cruiser along an oceanside path, sipping something bubbly under a resort umbrella, or looking out over the Pacific in a solar-powered Ferris wheel. The Southern California city's **lively beach community** embodies the quintessential West Coast lifestyle, best witnessed on the Santa Monica Pier, a destination for fisherfolk, sunset spectators, and carnival fans. Fun in the sun is also on the agenda in Anaheim (a 45-minute drive south), the Orange County staple known for its palmlined vistas, pro sports teams, and Disneyland Resort. Make Anaheim home base for whale-watching excursions and sunset cruises from Newport Beach, and surf lessons up the shore at Huntington Beach.

Culinary Immersion

Across California, farm-to-table dining reigns supreme. Sample the state's agricultural bounty at Napa Valley's best restaurants, which include the vaunted French Laundry and casual Oxbow Public Market. (Sustenance is recommended as you sip your way around some of wine country's **400-plus tasting rooms**.) In Southern California, urban foodie endeavors promise plenty of delicious finds, from West Hollywood's retro Tail o' the Pup hot-dog stand to Cecconi's West Hollywood and Sushi Park, where refined plates come with celebrity sightings. Continue the feast in Beverly Hills, home to some of California's most seminal restaurants, including the original Matsuhisa and chef Wolfgang Puck's first Spago.

The Ultimate Road Trip

You say Pacific Coast Highway, we say dream drive – either way, the stretch between Monterey and Santa Barbara delivers. Set off from Monterey down the PCH en route to Big Sur, stopping to spy sea lions, cypress trees, and tide pools at Point Lobos State Natural Reserve or **hike redwood canyons** at nearby Garrapata State Park. Head slightly inland to pick up Highway 101 in San Luis Obispo, home to a farm trail marked by more than 25 experiences that include greeting alpacas, picking flowers, or making cheese. An hour south, linger in the Santa Ynez Valley to ride horses, bike between grapevines, and toast the region with some of its renowned pinot noir before setting your sights on Santa Barbara.

West Coast highlights, from top: Surfing at Huntington Beach, Napa Valley winetasting, and finishing up a PCH road trip in Santa Barbara.







CHOOSE YOUR ITALY

To find la dolce vita, let the experts look after the details.

T DOESN'T MATTER if you're a first-time traveler to Italy or a bel paese veteran - it's nice to know that everything's taken care of as you wander. Virtuoso travel advisors can work with tour company Classic Vacations to create custom VIP itineraries across the country, including luxe accommodations in iconic hotels, private transfers, and unforgettable experiences. Here, three sample itineraries to inspire an upcoming Italian getaway.

The Classic Jaunt

Here's how to take in the trifecta of **Venice, Florence, and Rome** in ten days: Start from a lagoon-facing suite at Venice's 52-room Londra



Palace, followed by a private city tour and a gondola ride through the canals. In Florence, revel in views of Renaissance architecture from the 63room Hotel Lungarno, marvel at Michelangelo's *David*, learn to cook authentic Tuscan cuisine, and savor world-class wines on a day trip to Chianti. Finally, soak up millennia of history during escorted tours of the Forum, Colosseum, Sistine Chapel, and Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome. Toast it all from the top of the Spanish Steps at the 87-room Hotel Hassler.

The Grand Tour

Begin an epic, two-week journey across Italy in Milan, banishing jet lag at the spa in the 104-room Mandarin Oriental, Milan before seeing da Vinci's *Last Supper* at the Santa Maria delle Grazie. Wine-, art-, and history-filled stops in Lake Como, Florence, and Siena precede a soft landing on the **Amalfi Coast**, where travelers can sail over to Capri, set off for a day roaming Pompeii's ancient streets, and idle in the good life at the 66-room Hotel Santa Caterina. The trip ends in Sicily for a winetasting on Mount Etna and ancient drama at Taormina's Greek theater.

The Unexpected Getaway

Travelers can stray from the well-trodden path on a 12-day, Verona-to-Tuscany tour. From Verona, check into the 106-room Grand Hotel Majestic già Baglioni in Bologna, where miles of porticos reveal one culinary delight after another. Sneak away to Porto Venere, the charming seaside town on Liguria's Gulf of Poets, before exploring the dramatic Cinque Terre by boat or train and returning to the 48-room Grand Hotel Portovenere. Wind down in the **Tuscan countryside** at the 53-room Rosewood Castiglion del Bosco, an ideal base for biking through ancient hill towns and sampling some of the region's award-winning Brunello di Montalcino wines.

Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome.

BEYOND THE TABLE

From its Pyrenees peaks to its sunny Mediterranean coast, Catalonia's culinary heritage runs deep. To taste the best of Spain's vibrant northeastern region, dive into these food- and wine-centric experiences.

Feast on Tradition

Catalonia's geographic diversity paves the way for its beloved *mar i muntanya* (sea and mountain) culinary fusion. In the capital of Barcelona and beyond, plates range from simple and hearty to avant-garde. Hop a traditional **Catalonian sailboat** for snorkeling and swimming in the secluded coves along the Costa Brava, followed by fresh seafood and wine back on board. Inside a fifteenth-century *masia* (country house) in the Garrotxa countryside, chef Fina Puigdevall of the two-Michelin-starred Les Cols showcases sustainably sourced cuisine through her elaborate 21-course tasting menu. (In the winter, at least one of her plates will likely include *calçot*, a green onion endemic to the region and celebrated at an annual festival.)

Trace Ancient Wine Routes

They've been making vino for more than 2,500 years in Catalonia – the region is home to 12 designations of origin and more than 300 wineries. Travelers can set out on one of nine **wine routes** to sample some of the full-bodied reds, dry whites, and sparkling cavas. Stroll through the vineyards of family-run Abadal to learn about its dry-stone storage vats, found only along the Pla de Bages route; descend into the Gaudíinspired cellar at Perinet Estate along the Priorat route; or sip cava and snack on small plates in the garden at Freixenet on the Penedès route, located about a 40-minute drive north of Barcelona.

Bring Home the Liquid Gold

Catalan olive oil skews intense and fruity, but the flavor profiles vary across the region's five designations of origin: Siurana, Les Garrigues, Terra Alta, Baix Ebre-Montsià, and Empordà. Stop by Les Garrigues' Nousegons, a family-owned farm known for its high-quality products, to take a master class in **olive oil tasting**. Or pedal along the Pinell de Brai greenway in Horta to arrive at Identitat, where tastings pair well with views of the neighboring Sant Salvador Monastery. Be sure to leave room in your bike's basket for a couple of souvenir bottles.



From left: Costa Brava beauties, a stop on the Priorat wine route, and an olive oil tasting at Nousegons.

MULTIGENERATIONAL MOMENTS

Bring everyone to Africa for the safari of a lifetime.

SAFARI – AND EVERY JOYOUS, awe-invoking, and thrilling moment that comes with it – makes for peak family bonding. Plunging into the wildlife-rich bush with an expert guide lifts travel to a higher plane of fulfillment. Parents (and grandparents) seeking to introduce their children to the wonders of the world will find a like-minded partner in Micato Safaris. Run by two generations of the Kenyan-born Pinto family, Micato specializes in seamless bespoke adventures highlighted by clan-friendly accommodations, exclusive access, and community visits that showcase the company's commitment to social sustainability.

The Right Guides

Africa is no place for a patchwork itinerary – and no family member should have to be the one in the group who's stuck worrying about whether or not everyone's having a good time. Enter: Micato's **safari directors**, highly credentialed local guides who accompany every Micato safari from beginning to end, choreographing a family's desires and designing age-appropriate activities and encounters. They've got all the details covered and every potential stressor anticipated, so families can forget about the planning and focus on the together time.

Private Spaces

Micato's custom itineraries can base families in **spacious private villas** where, between game drives, they can swim in cloistered pools, gather around a campfire, and spy herds of animals over breakfast on the veranda. Many of these safari villas sit on private concessions, giving families exclusive use of both a villa *and* vast swaths of land. At Kenya's 58,000-acre OI Jogi Wildlife Conservancy, for example, travelers unpack across an eight-cottage, 11-room compound. Safari directors lead families across unpressured savannas to spot prides of lions, magnificent elephants grazing, cheetahs sprinting after their prey, and dazzling migrations of hundreds of thousands of wildebeests, zebras, and gazelles. Daily surprises, from safari walks with baboons to astronomer-led stargazing sessions and helicopter tours, are easily arranged.

Meaningful Experiences

Micato's connections reach far beyond the natural world: Travelers can go jogging with a Maasai warrior through the bush, for example, or read to a classroom of elementary students. The company pursues social justice through its nonprofit Micato-AmericaShare, paying for one child's education for every guest who goes on safari in Africa. In Kenya, travelers can visit Nairobi's Harambee Community Centre to witness the powerful program in action.



Into the savanna in style with a Micato safari director.

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SPEED UP, SLOW DOWN, REPEAT

Race off to Emilia-Romagna, Italy's Motor Valley.

OR DRIVING ENTHUSIASTS, a trip to Italy's Emilia-Romagna region is more than a vacation – it's a pilgrimage. And while it's nicknamed the Motor Valley because it's the birthplace of some of the world's most legendary automotive brands, Emilia-Romagna pairs Italian supercar immersion with coveted culinary traditions. Fast cars and slow food combine for a pleasant journey to this less-traveled corner of northern Italy. Ladies and gentlemen, start your engines.

The History of Vroom

Marquee race cars are still built in the Motor Valley, and some manufacturers – including Lamborghini, Maserati, and Pagani – offer factory tours that allow visitors to watch as made-to-order vehicles roll off the assembly line. Travelers can ogle priceless **vintage race cars** and dive into the history of Italy's most famous automotive rivalry at the Museo Enzo Ferrari and the Lamborghini Museum, while motorcycle aficionados can walk the production line at Ducati, tour the museum, and visit its flagship factory store.

On the Track

Go beyond gawking and get behind the wheel of a thrilling supercar. At the Autodromo di Modena or the Misano World Circuit Marco Simoncelli, amateur drivers can **test-drive a Ferrari** or Lamborghini on professional racetracks. Or take to the open road – your Virtuoso travel advisor can arrange a premium or vintage roadster rental for a more leisurely spin around the Motor Valley. F1 fans should time their trip to coincide with one of Emilia-Romagna's Grand Prix events, held at the legendary Imola Circuit.

Delicious Pursuits

Don't leave Emilia-Romagna without indulging in some of its outstanding culinary experiences. The local delicacies of Parma, including Parmigiano-Reggiano and prosciutto di Parma, have earned UNESCO status, while nearby, in Polesine Parmense, there's an entire museum dedicated to just one cut of charcuterie, culatello di Zibello. In Bologna, travelers can visit **FICO Eataly World**, a 20-acre theme park and experimental farm dedicated to Italian cuisine, while the stars of Modena are Massimo Bottura's legendary Osteria Francescana and the Museo del Balsamico Tradizionale Spilamberto, a park that's built around the history, production, and tasting of balsamic vinegar.

Motor Valley musts, from top: Museo Enzo Ferrari, the Misano World Circuit Marco Simoncelli, and a pit stop in Parma for wine and prosciutto di Parma.







TALL ORDER

A MUCH-ANTICIPATED LINE SHAKES UP THE LUXURY-CRUISE SCENE. By chadner navarro

Preach it, Norway: Pulpit Rock's commanding view of Lysefjorden.

On the Water



ORWEGIANS CONSIDER this hike medium tough," our guide announces as our bus arrives at the trailhead for Pulpit Rock, the iconic cliff that rises nearly 2,000 feet above Lysefjorden just outside the oilrich city of Stavanger. As someone who isn't a descendant of Vikings, I can't say I understand what that means, but I tighten my laces and optimistically take my first step of what is supposed to be a five- to six-hour adventure.

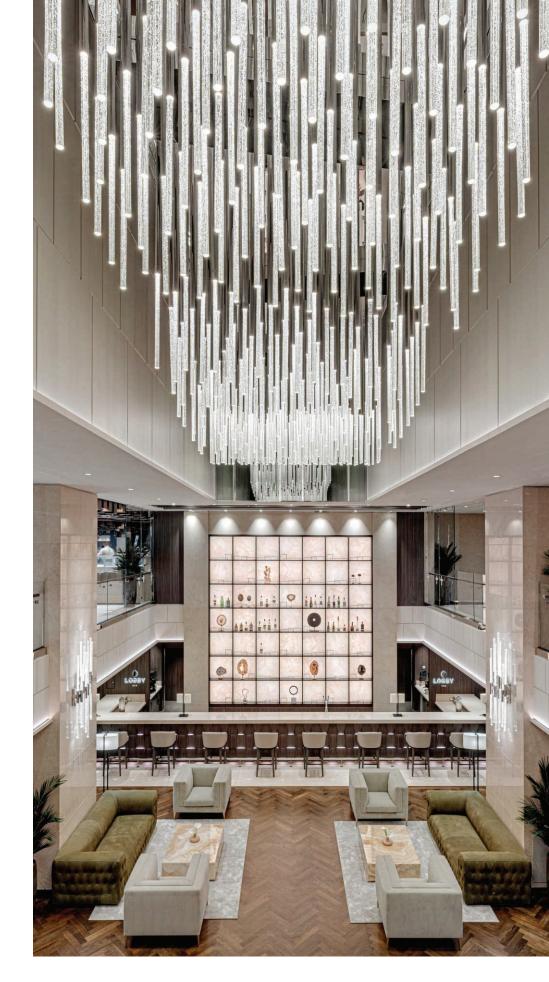
While the trek isn't technically challenging – 300,000 people, including children, do it annually – it requires focus. The terrain changes rapidly. You start marching up a steep incline, your calves screaming for help, then you're meandering around a flat field where there isn't actually a designated path and you spot a small, pebbly beach where fellow hikers are taking a break. But you're also scrabbling over boulders so big that, at five-foot-six, you practically have to do the splits. You stop to reflect: How are people doing this in jeans? Add wind and rain, and it's an experience that feels more like a Norse epic, especially at the top. It's a glorious vista of a shining, shimmering fjord, to be sure, but it's packed. Watching dozens of people attempt to take selfies as a tempest swirls around them is almost as stunning as these iconic Norwegian surrounds.

The Pulpit Rock hike is considered "extreme" by the destination team on *Explora I*, the first ship from brand-new luxury cruise line Explora Journeys. It's the type of activity that might inspire nonbelievers to reconsider their stance on cruising – that it's not just about following a flag-wielding guide around a castle-crowned European village. While there are basic city tours, Explora Journeys' strength is its culturally relevant experiences that connect guests with the regions they're docked in. These might include visiting a private art-restoration laboratory in Rome to see how historic works are brought back to life or learning about the First Nations history of Canada's Prince Edward Island.

So that explains why, on a six-night cruise from Copenhagen to Hamburg, I'm cosplaying as Thor on a mountain. But on the hike down, my legs begin to quiver, and that same obstacle course I conquered on the way up doesn't feel all that familiar this time around. At the bottom, the fitness app on my phone notes I climbed the equivalent of 150 flights – an achievement worth celebrating back on the ship.

Explora I's 461 sea-facing suites and residences are among the largest sailing right now, there are nine dining options (plus 12 bars and lounges), the 7,674-square-foot spa has amenities such as a Himalayan salt cave, and, with a guest-to-staff ratio of 1.25 to 1, service is enviable. "The ship is large enough for passengers to have new experiences each day, but compact enough to still feel like a small-ship luxury yacht experience," says Virtuoso travel advisor Bob Bradley, who cruised on it in October. With bona fides like that (there's even a Rolex shop on board), it's easy for *Explora* I to align with my personal rule about travel: I'll do adventurous things when it's go time, but I want to retreat to a cocoon of modern comfort afterward. This doesn't automatically mean five-star extravagance, but I'm glad that here, it does.

Explora Journeys modeled its ship after Europe's stylish boutique hotels, and it's obvious in the suites and residences, where designer Martin Francis has whipped up a medley of glamour and elegance. A subdued palette of warmwood furniture and off-white tufted leather headboards is punctuated with globally inspired objets d'art throughout. Walk-in wardrobes with seated vanities lead to spacious bathrooms with heated floors and Frette robes. And the balcony on my Ocean Grand Terrace Suite is so big that I'm able to practice yoga on it - a convenient perk, considering the fitness center's yoga classes are often fully booked.



Explora I channels a city hotel vibe with its lobby bar. Opposite: The ship at sea.



But if a hotel's greatness can sometimes be measured by the atmosphere of its lobby bar, *Explora I* finds success with its double-height, chandeliercrowned boîte. Nightly, I'm rubbing elbows with my fellow passengers, from retired and still-working couples to multigenerational families and boisterous friend groups. A fantastic bar is truly the perfect spot to get to know who else might be around, and it's also where I begin to relax from the hike, with a sharp dirty martini.

Picking where to refuel, however, is entirely more difficult. I appreciate that the Emporium Marketplace offers 18 à la minute stations for made-toorder dishes. And my favorite, lunchand-dinner Asian restaurant Sakura, is where I eat my weight in sushi, fried rice, sauteed noodles, dumplings, and bao buns almost daily. Anthology, the fine-dining kitchen, is the ship's marquee reservation (and the only one that requires a supplemental fee), with menus designed by a rotating collection of culinary headliners. "Having a rotating residency from a celebrity chef is a fantastic touch - and an industry first," Bradley says.

For this European leg, the chosen partner is Uliassi, the three-Michelinstarred restaurant in Ancona, Italy, whose team created an eight-course tasting menu highlighting seafood and wines from up and down the boot. The crudo of red shrimp drizzled with mandarin extract and the delicate cuttlefish tagliatelle topped with caviar

Cruise Off to the Med

<u>60</u> Explora Journeys' 992-passenger *Explora I* summers in the Mediterranean. Itineraries such as an eight-night sailing from Barcelona to Athens have excursions that include a private visit to Palau Güell, Gaudí's Gothic-meets-art nouveau masterpiece, as well as a fast-paced tour of Athens' greatest hits by e-bike. *Departure: June 19; from \$5,584.*

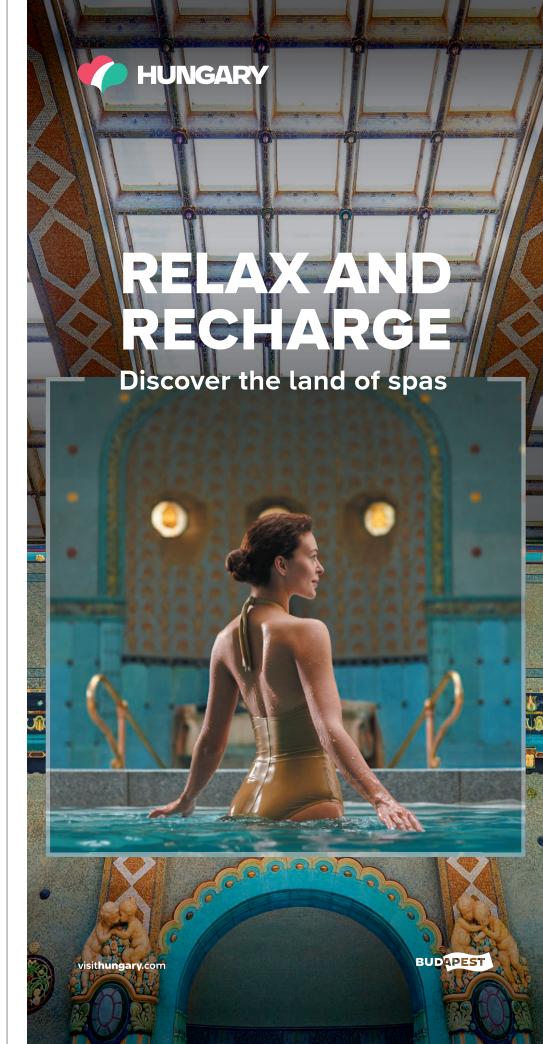
Dive into the eastern Med this season aboard **Regent Seven Seas Cruises**' new 746-passenger *Seven Seas Grandeur*. On a 12-night cruise from Athens to Istanbul, spend time relaxing on Mykonos' glamorous Elia Beach and tackling full-day explorations of Ephesus' ancient ruins. *Departure: May 30; from \$10,945.* Silversea Cruises' 596-passenger ship Silver Moon charts a ten-night, four-country voyage between Rome and Barcelona. In Mallorca, sign up for culinary excursions to spend a day in a local family's manor home, tasting wine and learning how to make Mallorcan delicacies. Departures: August 6 and 16 and October 1; from \$8,800.

Seabourn's 24-night Athens-to-Lisbon itinerary aboard the 229passenger *Seabourn Sojourn* calls at some of the Med's most popular spots. En route, explore the fortified harbor of Malta's capital, Valletta; sample volcanic Canary Islands wines; and soak up the romance of Casablanca. *Departure: June 5; from \$11,999.* will be great for another dinner. But after conquering the Pulpit, I opt for the Med Yacht Club, where a casual meal of thin slices of jamón Ibérico and a bowl of hearty, cheesy *cacio e pepe* is the comfort-food salve my body craves.

Another day, on an excursion from Gothenburg, I tackle a herring buffet before noon in a tiny, picturesque fishing village perched on Sweden's craggy, forested west coast. It's a light lift as far as excursions go, and as soon as I return to the ship, I decide to spend the evening floating from pool to pool. (Four in total and too many hot tubs to count – I try them all.) The Conservatory, the main indoor watering hole, is warm - almost humid - and full of plants as well as children. The smaller, outdoor, adults-only Helios offers panoramic views of the sea that make it a fantastic choice for lazy midday sunbathing sessions.

After a solo day clocking 25,000 steps in search of vintage treasures in Oslo's hipster neighborhood of Grünerløkka, I rush back to the ship for a spa appointment. Is this what balance feels like? I don't know, but when you're cruising, the option is always there to do as little or as much as you want. On *Explora I*, I don't have to feel guilty about leaning on one over the other. Choose both; the cruise delivers.

Explora Journeys had the entire pandemic to refine and finalize what it wanted to be in the increasingly crowded world of luxury cruising. For some, that means dancing the night away with the DJ at Astern Lounge. I, however, am heading to bed by 10 PM so I can make the fitness bootcamp in the morning, before spending the rest of the at-sea day drinking rosé by the pool and eating at Sakura. I'm not saying I've figured out cruising, but when that plate of dumplings materializes in front of me at lunch, it sure feels like it. 9





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Santorini





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Dining

THE SWEETEST THINGS

A TASTING TOUR THROUGH THESSALONÍKI'S DELICIOUS LAYERS.

BY NAOMI TOMKY PHOTOGRAPHY BY YADID LEVY

Custard-filled treats at Trigona Elenidi.

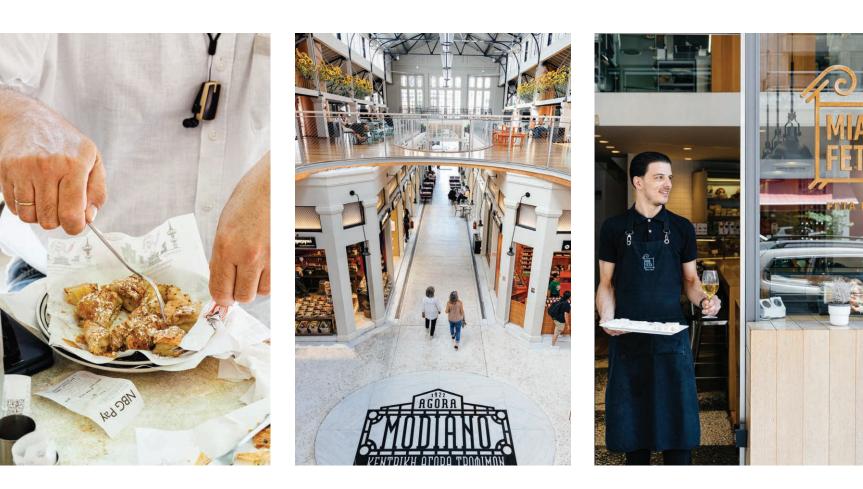


CAME FOR THE *bougatsa*. The flaky breakfast pastry – traditionally made with phyllo dough that's rolled, tossed, and turned until it's thin enough to see through, then filled with custard cream and baked – is one of the most sought-after treats in Thessaloníki, and Bougatsa Bantis, a tiny shop up the hill from the waterfront, is the best place to try it. I ordered all of the four flavors on offer, savoring every strata of crunch.

Overlooking the Thermaic Gulf in northern Greece, Thessaloníki is the country's second-largest metropolis, but its first UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy - an honor it earned in 2021, thanks to a culinary reputation marked by centuries of aristocratic, conquering, crusading, and immigrant inhabitants and their melting pot of recipes and traditions. While the surrounding remnants of ancient civilizations and archaeological sites such as Meteora and Pella remain well preserved, Thessaloníki's food scene constantly reinvents itself, while always staying true to its roots. Those bougatses are just one of many delicious layers to uncover.

Thessaloníki is becoming more popular with North American travelers, says Mina Agnos, president of Virtuoso tour connection Greece by Travelive. "The city is very Greek," Agnos says, "but its diverse history – from Frankish and Ottoman settlers to Arab traders and Jewish people fleeing the Spanish Inquisition – comes through in the culture and cuisine."

The fifteenth-century White Tower and (opposite) a Bougatsa Bantis pastry, Agora Modiano, and Mia Feta Bar.



My stay in Thessaloníki was short – a stop on my family's spring-break road trip through the Balkans – but I packed it with pastry. Fortunately for me (and travelers aboard one of the many ships that call on the city during Greece- and Turkey-centric sailings), Thessaloníki's best restaurants are mostly concentrated in the walkable Old City along the waterfront, making this delicious snacking – and dining – crawl an easy endeavor.

Pastry Pioneers: Bougatsa Bantis

Dimitris Bantis opened Bougatsa Bantis in 1969, setting out to make the Byzantine-era pastry recipes his father brought to Thessaloníki in the 1920s as a refugee from Turkey. His son, Philippos, runs the shop today, one of the few bakeries in the city that make their own dough by hand daily. While Bantis also sells a few other sweet and savory pies, it's the *bougatsa* you're here for. The shop makes four traditional flavors – semolina custard, mixed cheeses, ground veal, and spinach with leeks – daily, but on the weekends, it adds more-creative options to the rows in the glass display cases, such as figs with wine and Gruyère-like *graviera* cheese, or chocolate and tahini.

Hall of Treats: Agora Modiano

After a massive fire in 1917 destroyed a swath of Thessaloníki, the star of the city's ambitious rebuild was the sprawling Agora Modiano, its first covered food market. For decades, the cathedralesque space (the market was built over a former synagogue) served as a culinary core before vendors gradually began to close in the early 2000s as the building fell into disrepair. The market reopened in 2022 following an extensive renovation, inviting visitors to once again stroll beneath its steel-and-glass ceiling and browse some 45 shops, including En Karpo, known for its cookies and almond pastels, and the Chatzis Dessert Shop, one of the best spots for *hanum burek*, a flaky cinnamon and walnut pie.

Fresh off the Block: Mia Feta

At the world's first feta bar, the flights come on cheese platters, not in wine glasses. The space is the creation of the Kourellas family, who founded Greece's first organic dairy in 1960 and opened Mia to showcase its locally produced cheeses. The family's famous feta is featured throughout the menu - crumbled and smoked with fava beans and wild greens, whipped into a mousse in a nettle risotto - but diners can also sample lesser-known local cheeses in tastings arranged by age, animal, and style. Thick, spreadable anevato cheese shone in a dish of veal carpaccio with tomato marmalade and balsamic vinegar cream, then showed up again later for dessert: a platter of five kinds of cheese, including a nutty, cave-aged graviera, the same style Philippos Bantis puts into his fig bougatses.



Dessert Goals: Trigona Elenidi

In 1959, Pontic Greek refugee Georgios Elenidis tried to boost business at his family's milk shop by turning his product into a satiny custard, which he sold in syrup-dipped cones of baked phyllo. It worked, and today, the trigona rivals the bougatsa as one of Thessaloníki's most beloved pastries. In Trigona Elenidi's minimalist shop along the wide waterfront promenade, I ended up in line behind parents ordering a box of 30 for a party, their kids ogling the empty, palm-size triangles on the marble counter, watching as each one was piped full of custard to order. That made-to-order ethos cements the shop's reputation as the first and best, keeping the pastry crisp enough to shatter into the pillow of thick, rich filling.

Dinner Theater: Olympos Naoussa

Thessaloníki faces the water, its buildings perched on a hillside like audience members in an ancient amphitheater. The star of the show each evening is the sun sinking over the Thermaic Gulf, and the best seats are at Olympos Naoussa. The fine-dining stalwart was the city's go-to for prominent families and glamorous visitors between 1927 and 1993 (save for a brief interlude when German forces used it as a cabaret hall during World War II). New owners gave the space a thorough makeover in 2022, carrying on the name and paying homage to the building's original belle epoque design. My glass of salmonhued xinomavro matched an early stage of the sunset, and the sun's rays glinted off a brass Sputnik chandelier as servers in starched coats poured white asparagus velouté over scallops tableside. Later, I ordered an armenovil - a caramelized almond semifreddo over a crisp golden cookie that the menu described as a deconstructed nougat. The dessert, a spin on a local favorite ice-cream cake, was a proper finale for a Thessaloníki introduction.



Northern Exposure

60 Virtuoso advisors can work with on-site tour connection Greece by Travelive to arrange bespoke travel in Thessaloníki – the city is often part of a northern Greece ancient history deepdive or an Athens add-on. Spend a few nights at the new 127-room One&Only Aesthesis on the Athenian Riviera, then hop a one-hour flight to Thessaloníki for museum visits, market tours, and private pastry tastings. Departures: Any day through 2025.

Dive into Greece and Turkey on **Crystal**'s 17-night Istanbul-to-Athens sailing. The 740-passenger *Crystal Serenity* stops for an overnight in Thessaloníki, where travelers can head to nearby Pella or Mount Olympus or strike out on their own for *bougatsa*. Additional calls include Kusadasi, Mykonos, Páros, and more. *Departure: May 2; from \$6,300.*

A full day in Thessaloníki is one of six calls on **Celebrity Cruises**' seven-night Greece-centric voyage, round-trip from Athens on the 2,170-passenger *Celebrity Infinity*. Cruisers take a cooking class in Mykonos, stay late in Santorini to see the sunset, and sip *tsipouro* (a grape-distilled spirit) in Volos. *Departures: Multiple dates*, *May 25 through August 17; from \$934.*

Viking Ocean Cruises' ten-night roundtrip-from-Athens jaunt in the Aegean on the 930-passenger Viking Venus focuses on Greece's ancient treasures. A low-season departure translates to fewer crowds at the Acropolis and on Santorini's narrow streets, while a day in Thessaloníki allows time for visits to the Museum of the Royal Tombs of Aigai or a guided tour focused on exploring the city's Jewish heritage. Departure: February 3, 2025; from \$4,999. ♥

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Parisian DIR

The river, the romance, and all that jazz.

BY J.R. PATTERSON

Photography by Stefan Fuertbauer

Late nights at Caveau de la Huchette and (opposite) live music on the Seine at La Péniche le Marcounet.

ln music

everything is about balance, said Franz Liszt, the Hungarian composer, pianist, and master of musical technique. True fluid musicality cannot begin, he said, until musicians consider their two hands as a single unit, rather than separate appendages working independently. Travel as a duo is no different. With the wrong partner it's an atonal disaster, where the tempo is forced and the instruments are out of tune. The right person, however, makes you better, more observant, more curious.

S. and I knew a thing or two about music. We played in the same orchestra in Porto – she the flute, I the violin. We were also a new pairing, slightly past the sight-reading stage but still learning each other's phrasing. What we needed was a trip to practice our joint melody, harmony, and rhythm.

Liszt had lived in Paris in the 1820s, teaching and performing concerts alongside his friend and fellow emigrant Frédéric Chopin. From the city, too, came the soft sounds of Saint-Saëns, the rousing operas of Bizet, the foppish ivory tickling of Cole Porter, the raspy vibrato of Édith Piaf, the thump of Daft Punk. Paris was a city of music, the perfect place for a duet.

IN A CITY SO BIG, so full and rakish, it's foolish to go without a plan. It's also foolish to imagine any plan will stick. We had a plan, S. and I: a weekend of music, moving from hall to bar to club in a broad sweep of auditory pleasure.

Our first stop was meant to be an evening of Vivaldi and Schubert at La Madeleine Church, in the city center. But the plane was late, and the train was late, and the view from the Madame



From left: Jazz artist Kareen Guiock-Thuram at Sunside/Sunset, a Seine moment, and La Chope des Puces.

Rêve hotel – across the zinc roofs to the milk drop of the Sacré-Coeur – was too good, and so was the bottle of Côtes du Rhône waiting in the room. And the Royal Opéra café was simply too nice to pass by without stopping for a little apéritif before the concert, nor could we help window-shopping along the rue Saint-Honoré. By the time we reached the Madeleine, the doors were shut firm against us. No matter; some things cannot be rushed.

We happily retreated to Le Colibri nearby, to a silky roast chicken with fries, and some apple tart, before heading out in search of somewhere to work it off. If eating an entire bird before going dancing has a Midwestern sound to it, it's not the only transcontinental similarity between the republics. Like a pair of siblings with a generation between them, France and America are recognizable but incomprehensible to the other. Yet the soundscape of Paris owes much to the U.S.; it belongs



as much to Aaron Copland and Sidney Bechet as to Serge Gainsbourg and Françoise Hardy. France took to jazz the way America took to *frites*, and Caveau de la Huchette was the place to hear it.

Every evening, on a crowded side street in the Latin Quarter, Caveau de la Huchette offers night owls (the first set begins at 9:30 PM) the opportunity to hear blues, jazz, and swing in its subterranean cavern space. The Michel Pastre Big Band was our night's entertainment. In a musty fug of hot air, they rolled through a set of jazz standards: "Fly Me to the Moon," "April in Paris," "There Will Never Be Another You" – the kind of music that's been played here since the late 1940s.

The band was tight, all side-glances and steely looks as they raced to find the key after Pastre zipped off on his saxophonist. The bass didn't walk so much as run a decathlon. The walls dripped. The dance floor heaved, with plenty of

We had a plan, S. and I: a weekend of music, moving from hall to bar to club in a broad sweep of auditory pleasure.





fleet-footed Frenchmen eager to offer themselves for a quick lesson. We left after midnight, coated with a film of sweat, tired but happy together as we threaded our way through the lively cream-colored streets.

THE NEXT CIOBNING, we took the Metro north to Saint-Ouen. The neighborhood is sometimes known as the world's attic – its various markets sell every conceivable curio and bauble from the past 150 years: paintings, knickers, empty matchboxes, scrimshaw, hat racks, gas masks. There was a prevailing obsession with all things Steve McQueen, crystalline, and Jazz Age.

We were seeking out a musical cornerstone of that era – La Chope des Puces, a small café on rue des Rosiers that was the heart of jazz manouche, the "gypsy jazz" style that sprang from Paris in the 1930s. I was looking forward to joining the dedicated musicians, disciples of Django Reinhardt and Stéphane Grappelli, who gathered there each weekend to play those classic, anise-tinged songs.

Expectation became disappointment when, instead of a crèche of wicker chairs and glasses of pastis, we were met with a metal shutter. "*Malchance*," said the matron of the restaurant next door. Bad luck. The owner, she said, had gone on vacation. "*Reviens dans deux semaines, mon cher.*" But we couldn't return in two weeks.

I'd hit a sour note, but S. knew how to take up the melody. She drew me through the warren of Montmartre, that cradle of Parisian creativity; past Au Lapin Agile, the cabaret that's been open since 1860; past the Place Jean-Marais, where Zaz, the bosky-voiced chanteuse, famously sang her hit "Je Veux"; past the homes of the composer Erik Satie and the singer Dalida. Finally, near the Moulin Rouge, she found me an instrument shop where I could play Stephane Wrembel tunes on a guitar until my manouche blues were cured.

I amused myself while S. learned of the Quartier Rouge, a bar in the twentieth arrondissement that did a little swing show on weekends. We hustled across town to make the 6 PM start, arriving even before the band. They appeared in parts: a guitar, a double bass, a drum kit, a trumpet. A short conference, a few glasses of Chartreuse, and they were off. A couple of hours later, so were we, S. sidewinding in the direction of the Seine. In Paris, there was always another show, never enough time.

"It's not just jazz here," Nicolás Ruiz, stage name Gaüd, told me, as he was preparing to play a set at the Péniche le Marcounet barge, which regularly hosts musicians at its dock on the river. He'd come to Paris from Venezuela and was slogging away as a gigging musician. "There's a little bit of everything: Brazilian, Cuban, even Celtic."

In the end, we made again for the Left Bank and the Église Saint-Ephrem des Syriaques, where we heard Natalia Kadyrova play Chopin and Tchaikovsky by candlelight. The church, like many in Paris, offers regular classical music concerts, sometimes for free. From Chopin's mind to Kadyrova's fingers to our ears was a compression of 200 years – or perhaps an unlimited amount of time – into a few short minutes. Chopin was the master of *tempo rubato* and used it to show that time was never absolute, only relative. In music, everything – Chopin's piano, Liszt's wisdom, the warmth of S. beside me in the pew – happens at once. The truth of musical expression frees us from any rhythmic bond. And when I looked at S., her eyes closed listening to the music, I could feel that she, too, knew the best moments arrived right when they were meant to.

WE CIET NONE of the so-called Parisian rudeness they tell you about, only smiling people willing to use their English, Italian, and Spanish against our flailing French. Not that Paris has changed. It was still bougainvillea, *pain au chocolat*,

FYI

"I loved Studio de l'Ermitage – a local jazz and world-music concert hall in the twentieth arrondissement that's well worth the trek. I saw a fantastic samba group there – the hall was packed, and the crowd had amazing energy, singing along and dancing as the musicians performed around card tables. I'll be recommending it to all my music lovers."

– Kimberly Denison, Virtuoso travel advisor, Meridian, Mississippi warm red wine, and whip-thin girls eating fat pieces of cake. The air was still tinted with nicotine and sump and almonds. You will still see three, five, ten people a day you won't be able to get out of your head. It's a city of spontaneity, gaiety, and laughter – that was our Paris.

The early evening of our last day found us on the right bank of the Seine. The sun still carried its heat, and the quay was lined with sun chairs and parasols, kiddie areas and pétanque pitches, watercraft and buskers. A flutist played the theme from *Cinema Paradiso*, a cellist sawed earnestly at Bach's Cello Suites, and the regular cadre of acoustic folkies crooned an endless repetition of "Ain't No Sunshine," "Imagine," and "Hallelujah." Later in the night, small bands with electric setups would appear, playing rock music against the dark water.

Ahead of us, the promenade was filled with dancers. The rise and fall of their arms as partner spun partner was like the rotating crankshaft of an engine. A DJ, empowered by a small amplifier, issued forth a Latin rhythm. I asked him if this was a regular thing. He pouted and bobbled his head. "Let's say it's regularly impromptu." Habitual unpredictability seemed very Parisian. We joined in, clumsily swinging each other among a licorice allsorts of carousers, a flurry of whipping hair and sweating brows.

The night before, Ruiz had told us we'd find the best jazz on the rue des Lombards. We took his recommendation and found ourselves on the street near the



Marais, which was more like a path, tight with restaurants and clubs from which leaked snatches of rock, pop, and techno. We slipped into the Sunside/Sunset jazz club, where the Karim Blal Trio was playing. In the little stone hollow of the space, we sat right behind the pianist; each trill, each chord was right under our gaze. Paris encourages such proximity, in the same way it encourages speaking your mind, body odor, and hanky-panky.

Here, in the miasma of free jazz, time was again displaced, lost, sublimated into an ether of sound. The musicians themselves were lost in it – the thubbing bass strings, the *kish* of the highhat cymbal, fingers scurrying over the piano keys. You can see eternity pass over a musician's face in a second – and your partner's, when you have the same idea to depart.

Out in the street, the blonde darkness unique to Paris had crept over the city. The Eiffel Tower twinkled. They were still dancing at Caveau de la Huchette, still busking and twirling along the Seine, still singing in Montmartre. The sounds of Paris were all around us, and all of them were sweeter for being in the right company. Side by side, we continued down the street, our two hands making one unit.

An encore on rue Cler, known for its local markets, and (opposite) people-watching near the Louvre.



City of Music

60 At **Caveau de la Huchette**, open since 1946 in the Latin Quarter, visitors descend into the tiny, subterranean, brick-walled bar for live jazz and swing every night. (Eagleeyed travelers might recognize the club from the 2016 film *La La Land*.)

The piano and the small tiled stage at the **Quartier Rouge**, a laid-back bistro in the twentieth arrondissement, play host to impromptu jam sessions and listening parties.

Look for the barge docked on the right bank of the Seine near Pont Marie to find La Péniche le Marcounet, a private-event space with public performances on many nights and a sprawling terrace in the summer. The eighteenth-century Église Saint-Ephrem des Syriaques, around the corner from the Sorbonne, holds classical music concerts inside its acoustic-friendly space.

Sunside/Sunset shares a first arrondissement rue des Lombards address with some of the city's best jazz venues; inside, two spaces host nightly performances from acoustic acts to electronic musicians.

Virtuoso travel advisors work with French on-site tour connection **Découvertes** to craft bespoke itineraries in Paris that can include jazz-club hopping, museum tours, live music performances, neighborhood deep dives, and more. *Private half-day tours from \$756.* **STAY** At the 82-room **Hôtel Madame Rêve**, housed in a former post office building on the rue du Louvre, guests settle into sleek rooms with wood-paneled walls and leather furniture, flooded in natural light. Drinks are upstairs on one of the city's largest rooftop terraces. *Doubles from \$536, including breakfast daily and a \$100 hotel credit.*

For all its sleek design and contemporary art, the real masterpieces at **SO/ Paris** are the views of the Seine, the Eiffel Tower, or Parisian rooftops from each of the 162 rooms' floorto-ceiling windows. The Right Bank beauty is also home to a rooftop bar and club, and a spa with a hammam. *Doubles from \$536, including breakfast daily and a \$100 hotel credit.* **9**



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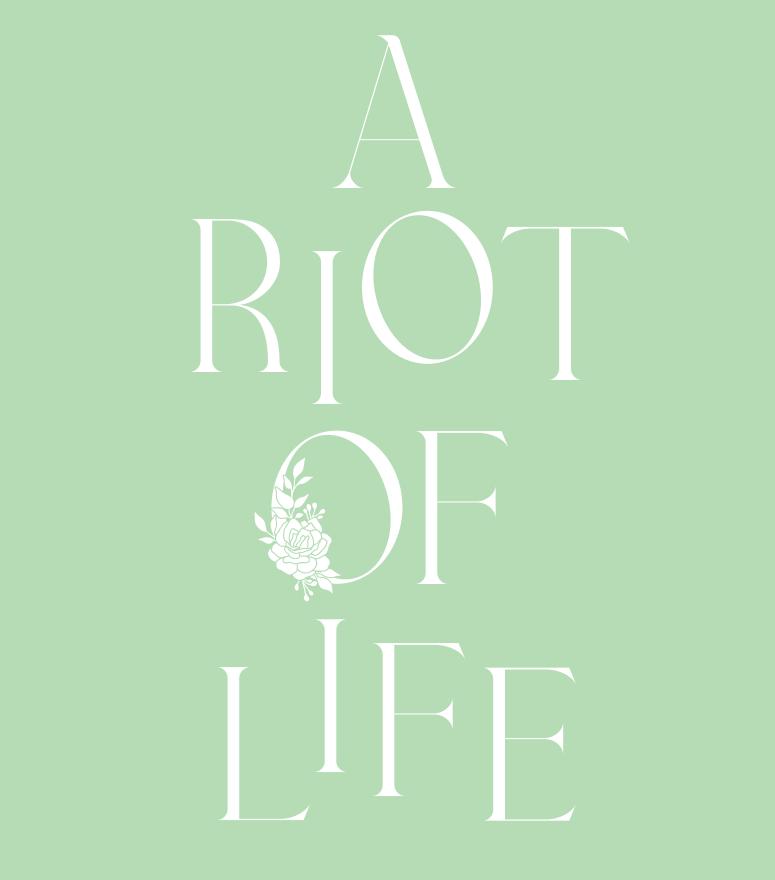




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STOPPING TO SMELL THE ROSES IN ENGLAND'S GLORIOUS GARDENS. STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY AMY MERRICK

<u>82</u> January February 2024









YOU GO ON A PILGRIMAGE to see English gardens, please let it be in June, when the rural lanes sway with wild roses, and hedgerows of white hawthorn and frothy cow parsley lead the way. And if you do go in June, you really should head to the bucolic corner I think of as "Bloomsbury country" (for its ties to the early twentieth-century literary and intellectual group), just an hour-and-a-half drive south of London. There you'll find the most soulful and charming gardens Britain has to offer that is, if you don't mind the whiteknuckle drive through those same impossibly narrow, flower-strewn lanes.

England is a country of gardeners, and the electrifying Great Dixter is

Grand landscaping gestures at Great Dixter.



Flower borders bloom chockablock with annuals, tropical banana trees, snapdragons, and towering fennel, each more glowingly Technicolor than the last.

the first port of call for all those serious about seriously outrageous plants. Home of the late twentieth-century garden writer Christopher Lloyd, Great Dixter is set against the backdrop of a fifteenth-century manor house, with oversize, abstract topiary atop a meadow studded with wild orchids. Flower borders bloom chockablock with annuals, tropical banana trees, snapdragons, and towering fennel, each more glowingly Technicolor than the last. An orchestrated riot of nature, Great Dixter elevates the eccentric ethos of English cottage gardening.

Half an hour down the road and off a small dirt track is poet and gardener Vita Sackville-West's famed Sissinghurst, perhaps the most romantic garden in England. At this abandoned Tudor castle transformed into a voluptuous secret garden in the 1930s, I found its famous white garden heaped with roses, foxgloves, and lilies, all in shimmery shades of silver and white. Billowing masses of flowers softened the formality of the yew-hedged garden rooms surrounding Sackville-West's writing tower, especially her collection of 200 heirloom roses. It's hard not to fall in love with Sissinghurst, where romance literally scents the air.

Charleston, less than an hour's drive southwest, is the true center

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Down the Garden Path

<u>60</u> NoteWorthy, a Virtuoso on-site tour connection in the UK, can work with travel advisors to organize custom itineraries with visits to Great Dixter, Sissinghurst, Charleston, and Monk's House, as well as an array of private gardens not typically available for public viewing. *Pricing varies*.

Abercrombie & Kent's garden-focused, nine-day small-group tour in May includes visits to Sissinghurst and Great Dixter, makes a foray into the Cotswolds' Kiftsgate Court Gardens, and culminates with a spin through London's famed Chelsea Flower Show, including a four-course on-site luncheon. *Departure: May 15; from \$14,295.*



of Bloomsbury country, as it was home to two of the group's linchpins, bon vivant artists Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant. The walled garden acted as a living canvas for the pair, old-fashioned flowers rubbing shoulders with fruit trees and vegetables joyfully crammed in higgledy-piggledy, elevated with sculptures made by friends and visitors after World War I. The garden's spirit isn't bound by convention to remain outside; its artistic owners bedecked each surface in the farmhouse with murals and handiwork, from bathtubs to lampshades, each a work of art in its own right.

A trip to Charleston wouldn't be complete without stopping by the nearby former home of Vanessa's sister, Virginia Woolf, which is open from late March through mid-November. With its perfectly formed small flower beds, orchard, and greenhouse, Monk's House is perhaps the humblest of all, and the most tender too. A simple

FYI

"June is a great month to visit, but these gardens are still ideal from May through October. They'll have a bit of mud outside of June, so pack hardier shoes and something to wrap up in if you're visiting then. The gardens' cafés can get busy; we recommend a wonderful English country pub for a spot of lunch."

- Nicola Butler, owner and managing director, NoteWorthy

mown path through the apple trees leads to Woolf's writing room, and it's easy to picture the quiet mornings she spent in the shade of that same chestnut tree, her words infused with the grace of her meadow beyond. What a gift to be a houseguest of the ghosts of these greats, wandering down their garden paths, smelling their roses, if only for an afternoon. **9**



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TRAINING GROUNDS





A CLASSIC RAIL JOURNEY THROUGH SWITZERLAND REVEALS A WEALTH OF UPSTART DESIGNERS, ARTISTS, AND CHEFS. BY ADAM ERACE Photography by Clara Tuma



HE DIRECT TRAIN TO LUCERNE leaves Zürich station twice an hour. This is an ordinary, unremarkable Swiss train in that it's fanatically punctual, tidy, and plain. I board with no time for coffee and watch through drizzled windows as the train zips through Switzerland's financial epicenter, skirts the shores of Lake Zürich, and carves around the crown of Lake Zug to Rooterberg, the country's smallest mountain (elevation 2,760 feet), before scooting into Lucerne station less than an hour later.

From the biggest city to its highest peak, wherever you want to go in Switzerland, you can get there on the country's 2,029 miles of tracks – the highest density in Europe. My six-day itinerary from Zürich to Interlaken lake-hops among four famous bodies of water, today's take on a Swiss Grand Tour stacked with all the customary mountains and palace hotels, sure, but also a vanguard arts scene, upstart restaurants, and a new generation of craftspeople and entrepreneurs who are all doing more with less in one of the world's most expensive countries. My mission is to go deeper – less chocolate and fondue, more pupusas and passion-fruit muffins, like those at Café Tacuba, a Lucerne roastery whose Salvadoran owner, Manolo Gonzalez, is among the quarter of the Swiss population that's foreign-born.

"In the beginning we were roasting on the street, selling one, two cappuccinos a day," Gonzalez says. Most Swiss are used to Italian-style espresso, he notes, which doesn't work for Tacuba's delicate roasts. "They said, 'You're not from here; you don't understand coffee.' "He persevered, and they eventually came around: Last year, Gonzalez opened Tacuba's second location, where I order the flagship Los Laureles roast, sourced from the farm that's been in his family since 1932. Maybe





Café Tacuba owner Manolo Gonzalez and Lucerne's Chapel Bridge, Europe's oldest surviving covered bridge.



it's just because I'm jet-lagged and severely decaffeinated, but it's the best cup I've ever had. I get notes of blood orange and blonde caramel. I get a second wind.

Arrayed around a northwest-pointing finger of the lake, Lucerne is compact and walkable, with one of its most iconic sites, Chapel Bridge, charting a shortcut between the old and new parts of town. Built in the fourteenth century, the covered timber passage adjoins the scenic promenade hugging the lakeshore. Mount Pilatus looms in the distance like the city's terrestrial landlord, never out of sight as I follow the path to the Swiss Museum of Transport to admire its collection of dinosaur locomotives and dashing vintage sports cars, and back to the resplendent Mandarin Oriental Palace, a 1906 landmark that recently reopened following a five-year renovation. The house negroni tingles with chili liqueur, and the bed in my lakeview suite sends me to sleep for 12 hours, until the next train.





Strolling Lausanne and ceramist Béatrice Durandard's wares at Poterie du Tunnel.



THE DIRECT TRAIN TO LAUSANNE leaves Lucerne every 60 minutes. This is an ordinary, unremarkable Swiss train in that it's fanatically punctual, tidy, and plain. The tracks squiggle northwest, pivot at an interchange, then soar through shipshape suburbs into the cantons of Fribourg – where the signs change from German to French – and Vaud, before arriving at Lausanne. From the rooftop deck of my suite at the Beau-Rivage Palace I can see Évian-les-Bains, famous for its bottled water, on Lake Geneva's French shore. You can take the ferry across to drink Evian from its source, but I don't recommend it. You have your whole life to drink water.

A better bet: a glass of clementine-colored Sicilian catarratto bianco at La Station, a snug, young natural-wine spot where the bartender's T-shirt feels like an affirmation: *Where Dreamers Become Doers*. Almost against logic, millennial and Gen Z dreamers are definitely doing in Lausanne.

"To open your own place is so eye-wateringly expensive in any Swiss city, but maybe more so in Lausanne," says Rhys Williams, who created Deli Social, a smart minimalist café, with his wife, designer Emily Groves. In addition to serving impeccable sandwiches and pastries, the space doubles as a design incubator to springboard artists and entrepreneurs and build collaboration between creatives in the city. Their coffee cups come from potter Béatrice Durandard, who recently opened a studio, Poterie du Tunnel, with two fellow ceramists down the street. When I pop into the atelier, varying sizes and shapes of vessels and vases cover every surface in an ombré of earthy tans, wheats, and mochas, interjected with the occasional exclamation of blue. The pieces look so polished, it's hard to believe Durandard's only been throwing clay since 2020.

From Poterie du Tunnel – art on an intimate scale – it's a 15-minute walk to art on a grand scale at Plateforme 10, a museum complex that opened in 2022 in the graveyard of Lausanne's old train repair hangar. "We're always fighting with Geneva for who has the cooler museums," Olivier Müller, Plateforme 10's head of communication, says as we take in the pedestrian plaza outside the Musée Cantonal des Beaux-Arts, where teens sun themselves like blasé geckos on giant angled concrete lily pads. During the pandemic, young skaters made this square their de facto clubhouse. Prior to the grand opening, Müller says, "One of the questions was, 'Are you going to get rid of them?'" He shakes his head. "No, never. This space has to be democratic."

Inside, the collection includes Degas sculptures and ebulliently kinetic Alice Bailly abstracts, but it's the surrealist portraits that stand out: Félix Labisse's portrait of his friend, French actor Jean-Louis Barrault, rendered with the greenishgray complexion and ghoulish cheekbones of an undertaker (some friend); Niklaus Stoecklin's painting of Tatjana Barbakoff, a Chinese-Latvian Jewish dancer who sat for this simultaneously coquettish and melancholic portrait in 1929 – 15 years before her murder in Auschwitz.

Restaurateurs Delphine Veillon and Johans Valdivia (she's Vaudois, he's Peruvian) run the museum's imaginative café, Le Nabi. The sun-flooded, monochromatic space focuses attention on the exuberant cooking from chefs Bruno Andrade and Victoria Poinsot, whose petite menu reveres creativity, color, and local producers. My server loves a dish called Le Navet, so I order it, even though the only words I can pick out on the French menu are "parsley cream." That cream is an electricgreen pool inlaid with darker-green dots of ramp puree. In the center rises an ivory island of tender oyster mushrooms and a sweet but mustardy root vegetable I can't quite place.

"*Le navet*," the server explains. "I don't know how to say it in English." Google Translate to the rescue: turnip.

He rolls it over: "Tur-nup ..."

"Turnip."

"Like turn *up*?" He turns his palms to the ceiling and raises the roof. Not quite, but exactly.



THE DIRECT TRAIN TO INTERLAKEN leaves Montreux four times a day. This is an ordinary, unremarkable Swiss train in that it's fanatically punctual and tidy, but it's hardly plain. The doors to the "prestige" class of this navy cruiser whisper open into a panoramic, window-walled carriage. I find my leather throne, fire up the seat heater, and accept a basket of croissants.

Good as the GoldenPass Express looks, its unseen engineering is what's truly extraordinary. These cars adjust their height and wheel gauges to jump tracks, eliminating the time-immemorial train switch on this iconic route. The train twists up the vineyard-laced hills above Montreux, past castles and villas – every switchback a better view of the Alps mirrored in Lake Geneva – through the forest and farmland, and eventually, past Gstaad's luxury chalets to Interlaken.

If Epcot had a Switzerland, Interlaken would be the model, a fairy-tale Swiss-German town of chocolate shops, jewelers, and paragliding outfitters wedged between the fingertips of lakes Thun and Brienz. At first glance, this doesn't seem like a place that will aid my mission, and yet, there's Bernese Wagyu with red kimchi at Radius, in the grande-dame Victoria-Jungfrau hotel, and Alpine cheese foam with magenta gumdrops of beet gnocchi at Alpenblick, a cozy spot with timber Paragliders landing in Interlaken's central Höhematte park.

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walls and cows cross-stitched on the curtains. Among the luxury shops magnetizing Emirati tourists, there's an indie bookseller (Buchhandlung Bödeli), a halal eatery from a Pakistani refugee (Restaurant Shalimar), and a vintage boutique (REPower) founded by former Californian Jessica Powers.

In addition to all this creativity *and* some of the country's best hiking and skiing, the resort town is the jumping-off point for the Top of Europe. The journey begins with another train, this one from Interlaken to Grindelwald Terminal, where travelers board the Eiger Express gondola; its sleek glass cars hang from the four-mile, tri-cable track like huge black pumpkins on a vine. Passengers ascend 4,563 feet in 15 minutes to Eiger Glacier Station, then connect to the famous (and infamous) Jungfrau Railway. During its construction from 1896 to 1912, 30 laborers, mostly young Italian immigrants, died while cleaving limestone for the line. It's hard not to think of them as the scarlet train cars disappear into the darkness of the tunnel that makes up 80 percent of the 5.8-mile-long line.

Twenty-six minutes later, the train emerges at the highest station in Europe – 11,333 feet – and onto another planet. A wide apron of white spans the jagged peaks of Jungfrau and Mönch. The temperature is 14 degrees. Wind-stung tears slow to a crawl and freeze before they can cross my cheekbones. At this moment, frozen in awe and frozen in general, a craving takes root.

"What would you like?" the server asks me at Top of Europe's Restaurant Crystal, where the windows have views of the glacier on which I've temporarily abandoned my compass.

I can confirm they make a very good fondue.

SWISS STORYTELLERS

STAY A belle epoque giantess on Lake Geneva, the 168-room Beau-Rivage Palace is the stuff of hospitality legend, site of the negotiations for the Treaty of Lausanne and the Iran nuclear deal. (It's also home to lighter amusements, such as the chic spa and the inventive tasting menu at Anne-Sophie Pic.) The Panoramic Suite, complete with a rooftop terrace accessed through a push-button sliding skylight, ranks in my top five favorite hotel rooms. Doubles from \$635, including breakfast daily and a \$100 resort credit.

Paragliders land almost on the doorstep of the 216-room Victoria-Jungfrau Grand Hotel & Spa, which faces Interlaken's mountain-silhouetted Höhematte park. The property feels like the city's social nucleus for locals and tourists (there are *a lot* of the latter in Interlaken), who gather for cocktails on the lushly landscaped patio. *Doubles from \$544, including breakfast daily and a \$100 dining credit.*

Fresh off a five-year renovation, the 136-room Mandarin Oriental Palace, Luzern shines from a prime perch on Lake Lucerne, its modern lighting and furniture contrasting nicely with the property's historic bones. Book a lake-view room with doors opening onto Juliet balconies. *Doubles* from \$673, including breakfast daily and a \$100 dining credit. ♀

Alpenblick's local pike perch with artichokes and Maremma olives.

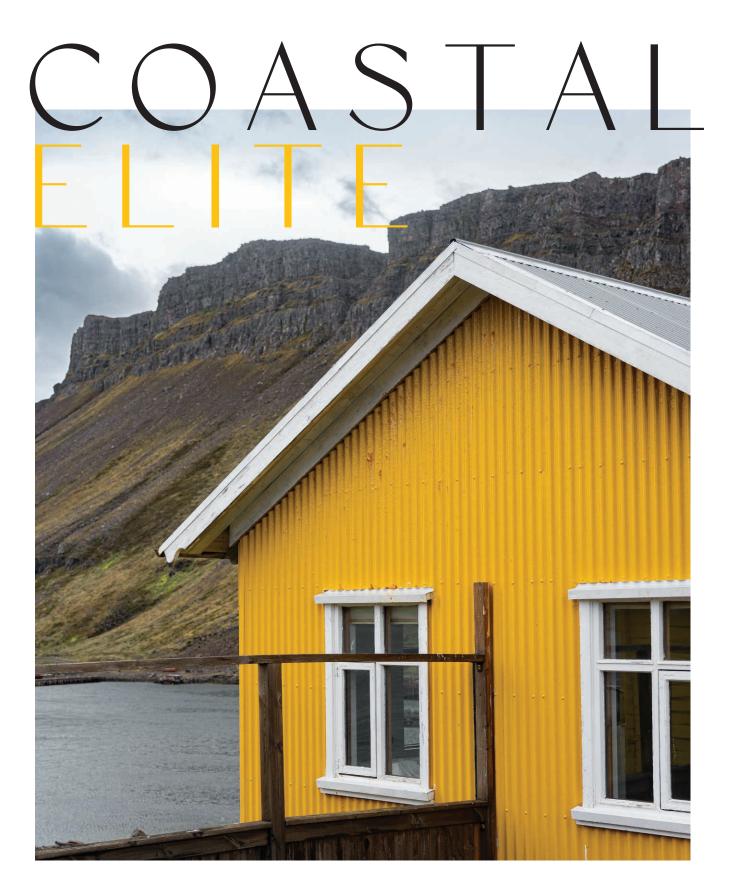






Contact your Virtuoso Travel Advisor today to learn more.

Color-coordinated Icelandic poppies and a Djúpavík dwelling. 1



A RARE VIEW OF ICELAND'S REMOTEST PORTS. Story and photography by Korena Bolding



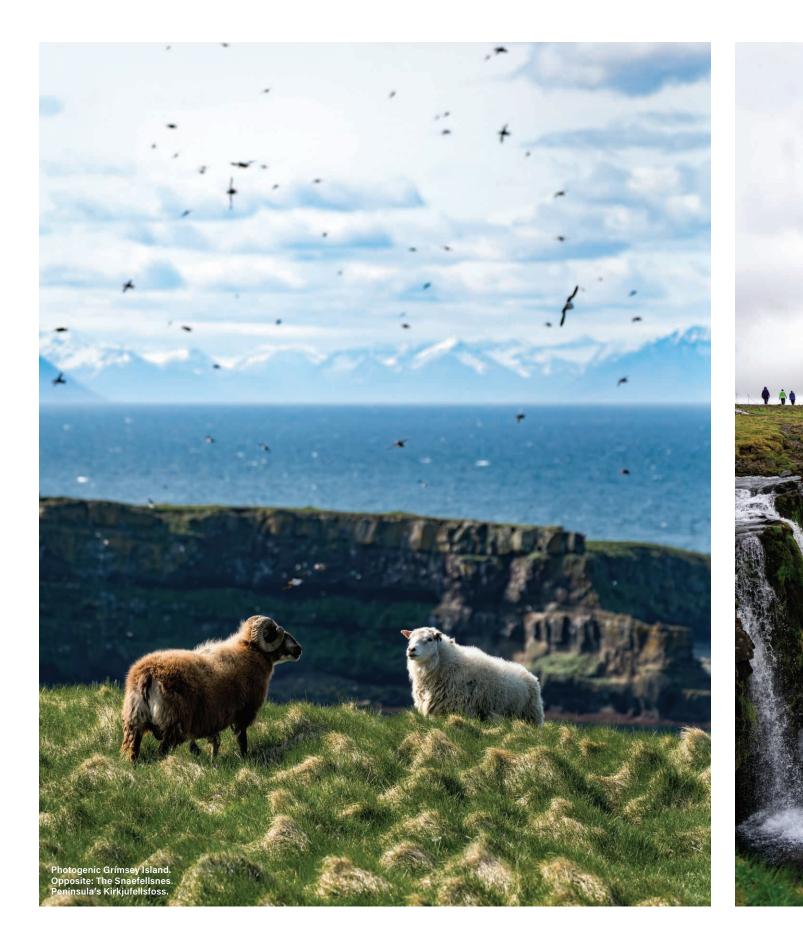
OUR TREK

TO THE OFFICIAL ARCTIC CIRCLE marker on Iceland's tiny Grímsey Island began uneventfully. But then, midway through, I looked up from the trail to find myself surrounded by grazing sheep, hundreds of flying Atlantic puffins, dramatic cliffs, and the sparkling ocean – all in one frame-worthy moment. A few minutes later, three Icelandic horses appeared in the distance, their emo bangs flopping in the chilly wind. Iceland, I quickly realized, is always putting on a show.

It was my first visit to the island nation – a long-awaited chance to photograph the country's dramatic landscapes, feel the spray of largerthan-life waterfalls, and spot those iconic horses. On a ten-night circumnavigation of the country, Aurora Expeditions' 132-passenger *Sylvia Earle* docked in rarely visited ports, which we often had entirely to ourselves. Beginning in Reykjavík, the ship followed a clockwise route to hit Kirkjufellsfoss on the Snaefellsnes Peninsula, the Westfjords in the northwest, and small coastal towns such as Seydisfjördur in the east. In some ports, we boarded a coach, heading inland to cozy villages or adventures on land. Everywhere, papery Icelandic poppies lined sidewalks and paths, blooming from cracks in the asphalt.

Stops in uncrowded far-north ports brought the chance to meet cool locals. In Hjalteyri, along one of Iceland's longest fjords, Strýtan Dive-Center owner Erlendur Bogason displayed shells, coral, and Royal Navy ceramics that his team had recovered on dives in Eyjafjördur, as well

Atlantic puffins, also known as the clowns of the sea, and (opposite) the *Sylvia Earle* in Hólmavík.





as teardrop-shaped guillemot eggshells he'd recently gathered. Adjacent to the dive shop, tanner Lene Zachariassen spun sustainable yarn from natural fibers such as arctic fox hair in a former herring-processing factory. And The Old Bookstore in Flateyri was a thoughtfully curated shop (stationery, pens, ribbons, books, and small home goods) in a Westfjords town of around 267 people, run by fourth-generation owner Eythór Jóvinsson - a reminder that there are creative people bringing beauty to the world even in the most far-flung places.

Downtime at sea passed quickly in the ship's glass-walled library, where I researched the flora and fauna we'd seen along the way (and edited hundreds of puffin photos, naturally). The Sylvia Earle hosts a citizen-science program, which invites travelers to collect data on seabird, whale, and phytoplankton sightings. The majority-female team of ecologists, naturalists, and marine biologists led excursions and hosted lectures on subjects from birdlife to the Icelandic language, which were a hit with my cohort of well-traveled passengers. Since I sailed during the midnight-sun season, I was out on the balcony of my spacious cabin catching good light for photos late into the night.

On our final day, as we cruised back to Reykjavík, the intercom rang out with news of a possible whale sighting, bringing most passengers to the deck. We waited and watched. A whale tail here, a whale tail there, and then, suddenly, a young humpback breached. Iceland couldn't let us leave without one last display.



Clockwise from top left: An Icelandic horse in its element, Eythor Jovinsson and his bookstore, nature's splatter paint on guillemot eggshells, and Lene Zachariassen's knitted animal fibers.



"Iceland is colder, wetter, and windier than you'd expect. Bring layers, good socks, waterproof shoes, and a warm hat (or two). Don't forget your bathing suit for hot-springs dips."

– Maureen "Mo" Smith, Virtuoso travel advisor, Hilton Head Island, South Carolina

Full Circle

<u>60</u> Aurora Expeditions is set to repeat its Iceland circumnavigation this year, round-trip from Reykjavík, over ten nights aboard the 132-passenger *Sylvia Earle.* A stop at Grímsey Island lets travelers hike to the Arctic Circle, and three days in the Westfjords bring the chance of guillemot sightings. *Departure: May 21; from \$11,895.*

On nine-night round-trip sailings from Reykjavík, Lindblad Expeditions' 138-passenger National Geographic Endurance and 148-passenger National Geographic Explorer will stop for hikes, Zodiac cruises, and village visits en route to spots such as Húsavík, site of the first house built in Iceland, and glacier lagoon Jökulsárlón. Departures: Multiple dates, July 4 through August 15; from \$11,172.

A 22-night Iceland and Greenland sailing on **Seabourn**'s 264-passenger *Seabourn Venture* starts and ends in Reykjavík, hitting ports such as Siglufjördur, the northernmost town on mainland Iceland, and puffin paradise Papey Island, before shifting course for iceberg spotting in Greenland's eastern fjords. *Departure: July 25; from \$21,199.* **9**



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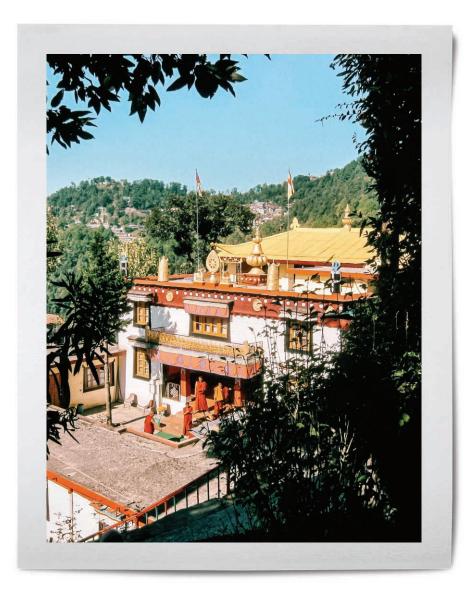


For sample itineraries and pricing, please contact your travel advisor.



Mountain Highs

Milliner Justin Smith's spiritual retreat to the Dalai Lama's Himalayan home.





"Several years ago, my husband, a couple of friends, and I spent ten days in Dharamshala, the northern Indian city that's home to the Dalai Lama. To be that high in the Himalaya, watching eagles and listening to people chanting, takes you to another level in terms of your own mindfulness. We sat for a great time meditating and spent several days walking in the mountains. The Dalai Lama's temple complex was amazing, but on our last morning, we came across a small temple known for its sand mandalas. The energy was unbelievable. It felt like we had been waiting our entire journey for that moment to arrive." Justin Smith's London atelier, J Smith Esquire, is open by appointment. His hats have appeared in The Gilded Age, Disney's Maleficent, and more. •





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