

POSTCARDS

Inspiration And Insights To Help You Travel Better



COVER STORY

Exploring the flavors that define the Mediterranean island of Malta

CASABLANCA

The best things to do, see and eat in Morocco's largest city

SAN JOSÉ DEL CABO

The Baja California hotspot home to sandy beaches and fresh produce

THE DOLOMITES

A first-timer's guide to the majestic mountain range in the Italian Alps

WELCOME

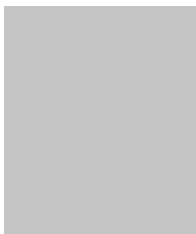
Dear fellow traveler,

This summer, dedicate yourself to adventure and let this issue of *Postcards* be your guide. Our agency is excited at the idea of collaborating on a trip that intertwines thrilling exploration, luxurious comfort and heartfelt hospitality.

In this issue, you'll find inspiring stories about extraordinary artifacts, rich cultures, culinary artistry and natural splendor. We've covered a range of fascinating territories, including the Dolomites, Morocco and the South Pacific: Sarah Gilbert reports from Casablanca, Morocco's largest city, on the most exciting things to do, see and eat, while Caili Elwell takes us on a tour of the best oyster shacks in Maine. Also, don't miss Tristan Kennedy's dispatch from the mighty Italian Alps.

When you're ready to put your ideas into action, just give us a call and we'll take care of the rest: our advisors are passionate about sharing their professional expertise with our readers and fellow travelers. We're ready to create an exceptional vacation that provides you with everlasting memories.

Happy travels!



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IMAGES: VELAS RESORTS; GETTY; AWL IMAGES

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The Mediterranean archipelago of Malta is the ideal getaway for oenophiles and farm-to-table enthusiasts – home to experiences like tasting cold-pressed, native olive oil and sampling wine and cheese in 400-year-old cellars

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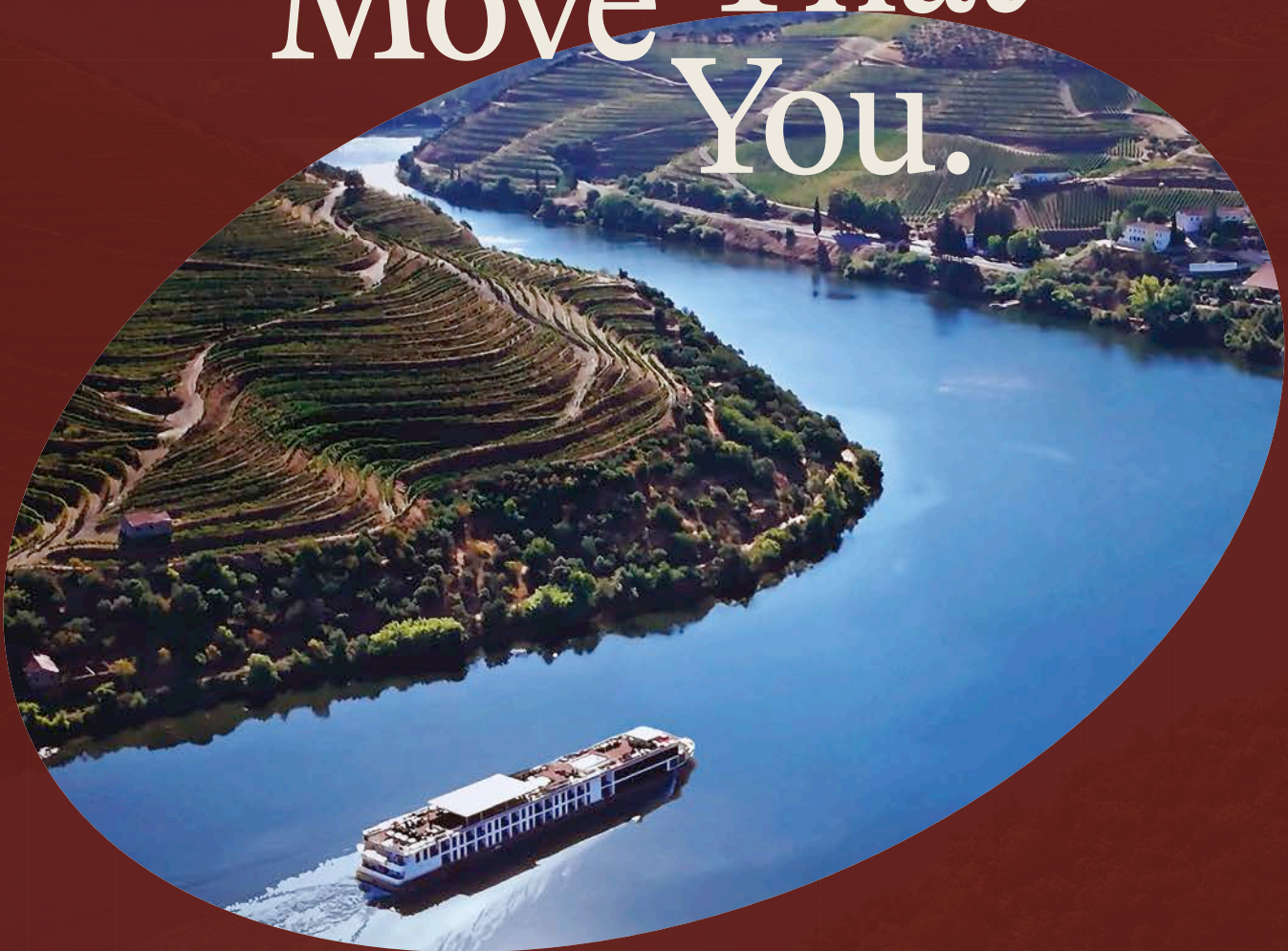
POSTCARDS



COVER: VITTORIOSA (BIRGU) IN VALLETTA, MALTA - AWL IMAGES

Cover: Vittoriosa (Birgu) in Valletta, Malta - AWL Images

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Capture the magic of Christmas along Europe's rivers as early as mid-November on this collection of holiday departures, with celebrations on board and seasonal splendor in every port. Step onto one of the most beautifully adorned ships on the river and create moments you will carry with you for years to come. Enjoy cherished traditions such as a lively tree-trimming party and surprise visits from familiar holiday figures.



Amagna in Vilshofen, Germany



Festive onboard décor



Prague, Czech Republic



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Welcome the new year as you discover remarkable destinations throughout Europe. Celebrate on board or on shore while enjoying extended itineraries that offer a gentler pace and more time for independent exploration. These departures offer a comfortable way to enjoy the scenery, local traditions and the peaceful atmosphere of winter along the rivers.



Traditional market stall



Bordeaux, France



Nuremberg, Germany



Budapest, Hungary



Vienna, Austria



Traditional mulled wine

Christmas *Markets* Cruises

Journey through the heart of Europe along the Danube or Rhine during the most enchanting season of the year, perfect for families and friends who love celebrating together. Pick up a mug of mulled wine and wander through the vibrant stalls of the markets along the rivers, from Vienna, Austria's beloved Rathausplatz with its glowing heart-shaped lights to the traditional charms of Rudesheim's Christmas Market of Nations in Germany.



Strasbourg, France

BUDDHIST TEMPLES

Tiger's Nest Monastery, Bhutan

Clinging to a sheer granite cliff above the Paro Valley in western Bhutan, Tiger's Nest Monastery, officially called Paro Taktsang, is the country's most sacred pilgrimage site. It's clustered around a cave where Guru Rinpoche — the master credited with bringing Vajrayana Buddhism to Bhutan in the eighth century — is said to have meditated after flying in on the back of a tigress.

The present complex dates to 1692 and was painstakingly rebuilt after a fire in 1998. Guests must leave cameras at the door before following the creaking staircases to multiple chapels and smoke-darkened meditation caves, their walls aglow with butter lamps. Monks still live and study here, chanting as Himalayan herb incense floats through the corridors.

With no road access, visitors have to follow a mountain trail involving a 1,700-foot ascent through blue pine forests and fluttering prayer flags, to the highest elevation of around 10,200 feet. Most allow a full day for the four-mile round trip, pausing at a hillside teahouse on the way up to refuel on spiced Ema Datshi (chili cheese) stew and sweet chai. Ponies trot to this halfway point, but the final stretch must be done on foot. For this section, steps descend alongside a thundering waterfall before rising sharply to reveal the monastery's whitewashed walls and gilded square roofs suspended between stone and sky.









Dambulla Cave Temples, Sri Lanka

At a distance, the rock looks solid and unremarkable — a hulking slab rising straight out of Sri Lanka's central plains. Only after the climb do they reveal its secrets: a honeycomb of painted shrines tucked beneath the stone, where centuries of devotion have transformed bare caves into a living place of worship.

More than 150 Buddha statues and roughly 23,000 square feet of frescoes make Dambulla Sri Lanka's largest and best-preserved cave-temple complex. First established in the first century BCE when the exiled King Valagamba sought refuge here, it was embellished by subsequent rulers, including King Nissanka Malla. Recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1991, the shrines have been in continuous use for more than 2,000 years.

Getting there involves scaling more than 350 sun-warmed steps through frangipani trees and past opportunistic macaques that patrol the railings. At the summit, five principal caves open beneath the overhang. Inside, the temperature drops. It houses a 45-foot statue of a reclining Buddha while rows of smaller, seated statues glow in gold leaf, and every flat surface — ceilings included — is adorned with Kandyan-era frescoes painted in saffron, indigo and cinnabar. Vivid scenes from the Jataka tales and the Buddha's life ripple across the rock, each layer of pigment marking centuries of repainting and restoration. Visit early or late to avoid the heat, and linger for the view: from the summit, the tangled jungle landscape of the Cultural Triangle stretches out in every direction, with Sigiriya Rock standing sentinel on the horizon. □



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Left: 57% of parents are planning a trip with grandparents and children

MULTI-GEN TRAVEL ON THE RISE

Shared experiences are the key to attracting multi-generational travelers, with cruises proving particularly popular among this sector

For a growing number of travelers, family time and vacation time are one and the same.

In recent years, multi-generational travel — defined as family members of three or more generations traveling together — has become a noticeable trend. For instance, the 2025 U.S. Family Travel Survey found that 57% of parents were planning a trip with grandparents and children — a 2% increase over 2023. The survey highlighted beach getaways as the most popular pick for multigen trips, with theme parks, national or state parks, active vacations and cruises as additional top choices.

Cruises in particular have become increasingly appealing to multigen travelers. Cruise Lines International Association's 2025 report found that 28% of cruisers travel with three to five generations of their family members. A trip on a ship is uniquely suited to multigen travel, with many lines offering clubs for kids and teens and

family-friendly accommodation options. Most cruise lines also cater to passengers with limited mobility, making them ideal for older travelers.

The trend has become big business, with reports suggesting that multigen travel accounts for 33-40% of the \$270 billion leisure travel market in the U.S. — and the industry has taken notice. Hotels are providing more family suites and flexible room configurations, and resort amenities are increasingly designed to offer something for each generation, such as supervised programs for children and low-key options for grandparents.

Thanks to the benefits of multigen travel, it's already become a way of life for many families. Multigen travelers note that sharing costs and childcare responsibilities can make trips more appealing. However, the most frequently cited benefits of multigen travel are more intangible: they're about fostering deeper connections across generations and creating shared memories.

NEWS IN BRIEF

All eyes on Dominica

With a new international airport slated to open in 2027 and several hotels under construction, Dominica is gearing up for a tourism boom, with a particular focus on sustainability and attracting wellness-focused travelers.

First Marriott in Africa

Africa will get its first Marriott Edition hotel in 2026. The Cape Town Edition in South Africa marks the African debut of the Marriott luxury brand. The V&A Waterfront property will offer views of Table Mountain.

NCL reintroduces two continents

After a two-year hiatus, the *Norwegian Star* will return to South America with 15- and 16-day cruises for the 2027-28 season. Norwegian Cruise Line will also offer 2027-28 Australia itineraries with overnight stays.

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SPOTLIGHT INDEPENDENCE TRAIL IN TEXAS

Recently reopened after a \$54 million reinvention, the Star of the Republic Museum is a key stop on the Texas Independence Trail, which covers more than 200 miles from San Antonio to Galveston. The museum is located by the Brazos River, where colonists announced their separation from Mexico, and today is considered 'Where Texas Became Texas'. Led by General Sam Houston, settlers made their bid for independence in clashes at Mexican strongholds such as Goliad and The Alamo. Exhibits include recovered artifacts that illustrate daily 1850s life in the tiny settlement called Washington in honor of the first American president. The star-shaped museum building also houses the oldest known Lone Star flag, which dates back to 1839.

Use Thompson Austin by Hyatt as your base for tracing the trail. Come evening, step into the hotel's velvet-cloaked speakeasy, The Royale Room, for a Lone Ranger cocktail alongside sizzling steak frites before sampling the nightlife on the state capital's 6th Street.

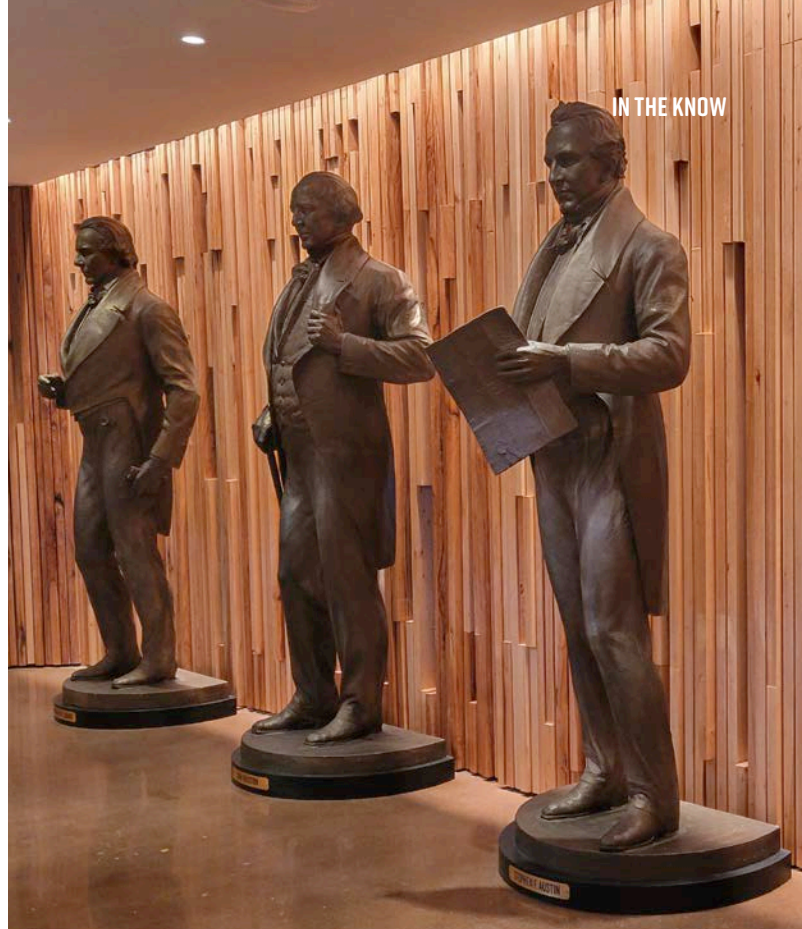
TRENDING ADVENTURE REIGNS SUPREME

Adventure tourism continues to boom as travelers prioritize unique experiences over popular resort destinations. In recent trend reports, countries including India, Japan and Jordan have been recognized as the fastest-growing destinations of 2026. In India, visitors have been prioritizing experiences like Himalayan treks and cycling trips in the country's rainforest regions. According to the Adventure Travel Trade Association, global adventure travel is projected to surpass \$2 trillion by 2032.

Active travel company Backroads Travel states that a wide range of demographic groups are responsible for the adventure travel boom, including women, solo and GenX and millennial travelers.

"We're seeing a clear trend of guests using travel as a way to connect with like-minded travelers, local communities, the environment and, ultimately, themselves," said Tom Hale, Backroads Founder, President and CEO. "Active travel is becoming part of the rhythm of their lives, and they like creating that rhythm on their own terms, now and into the future."

From top: Star of the Republic Museum in Texas; hiker at Everest Base Camp, Nepal





One of the signature dishes available at Crown Grill, on board the *Diamond Princess*

DINING FIT FOR A PRINCESS

Princess Cruises celebrates its long connection to Asia with new Eastern dining options and an upcoming Japan season

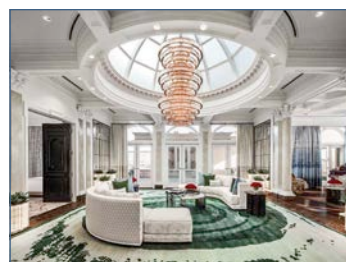
Princess Cruises' *Diamond Princess* has added two new specialty dining venues, Makoto Ocean and Crown Grill. Makoto Ocean, which premiered aboard the *Sun Princess* and *Star Princess*, highlights sushi master chef Makoto Okuwa's Edomae-style sushi, a traditional style that originated in Tokyo in the early 19th century. Other menu highlights include toro tartare and truffle salmon. Cocktails incorporate Japanese ingredients and flavors, such as the kodai no hana, which pairs sake with fresh citrus. The beverage list also includes shochu and Japanese whiskey.

The Crown Grill is a longtime Princess Cruises favorite. Located in the former Savoy Dining Room on Deck 5, the steakhouse has mahogany wood decor and a menu that features the likes of aged beef, chops and seafood. Guests can even season their meal with a selection of gourmet salts from around the globe, as well as choose from a varied wine list.

The *Diamond Princess* will be sailing throughout Asia in 2026, with itineraries originating in Singapore and the Tokyo region. In 2027, the *Diamond Princess* and *Sapphire Princess* will be sailing from the Tokyo region for the entire season — a historic first for the cruise line and its most extensive Japanese season to date. Voyages range from seven to 28 days, with 50 unique itineraries on offer.

“With Makoto Ocean and Crown Grill now onboard *Diamond Princess*, and also recently added to its sister ship *Sapphire Princess*, we're proud to enhance the guest experience as *Diamond Princess* sails across Asia and we look ahead to our dual-ship Japan season in 2027,” says Sami Kohen, Princess Cruises Vice President of Food and Beverage.

Both the *Diamond Princess* and *Sapphire Princess* were built in Japan, so the upcoming Japan season represents a homecoming as well as a celebration of Princess Cruises' long connection to the Asian cruise market.



TRAVEL TALK

Caesars Palace villa redesign

The iconic Las Vegas resort has added luxurious new villas to mark its 60th anniversary. Two rooftop Colosseum Presidential Villas boast over 8,000 square feet of living space and outdoor terraces. The 29 Sky Villas, on the 68th and 69th floors of the Octavius Towers, feature modern design and curated art.

New North American hotel openings for 2026

According to commercial real estate data firm CoStar, New York and Phoenix are the U.S.'s top cities for hotel room openings in 2026, with 4,852 and 3,650, respectively. Other hotspots include Dallas, Orlando and Miami. Meanwhile, a Lodging Econometrics trend report found that Toronto and Vancouver are the leading cities for new hotel construction in Canada.

Holland America Line unveils Legendary Voyages

The cruise line's 2027-28 lineup of Legendary Voyages features cruises in Alaska, the South Pacific, Caribbean and Europe. The 28-47-day itineraries offer overnight stays, regional cuisine and cultural programming. Some sailings feature unique experiences, such as viewing the 2027 solar eclipse from off the coast of Gibraltar. A 100th anniversary Pan Am voyage follows the airline's historic Caribbean route.

Sun, sea and the soul of Cabo



Discover the vibrant spirit of Mexico in Cabo San Lucas, where dramatic desert cliffs rise from sparkling blue waters and every hour feels touched by sunshine. Spend time immersed in this beautiful seaside escape. Sail beneath the iconic El Arco to Lover's Beach and watch for whales and sea lions in the Sea of Cortez. Snorkel among colorful fish and coral reefs, relax on golden sands or dive into Cabo's legendary nightlife with music, dancing and cocktails under the stars. Sail to Mexico with the expert. With over 60 years of experience, Princess connects you to the beauty, flavor and energy of Cabo San Lucas like a true insider.



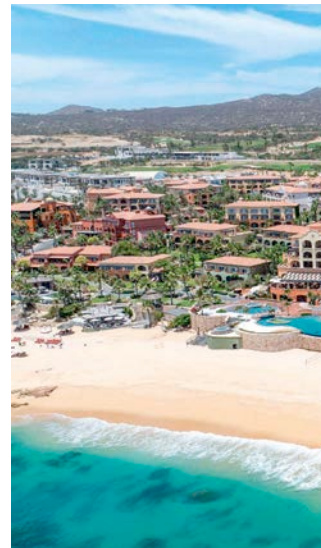
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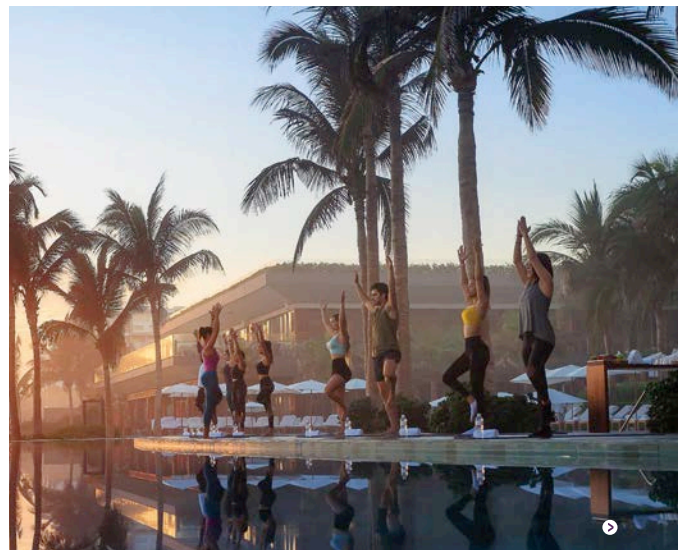
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SAN JOSÉ DEL CABO

This laid-back city on Mexico's Gulf of California abounds with stargazing opportunities, picture-perfect beaches and world-class cuisine to please even the most seasoned gastronome, writes Amy Mutscher





DAY ONE

MORNING

Once you lay eyes on the Baja Peninsula's vast azure waters, it's hard to look away. Resorts positioned along San José del Cabo's beachfront highway offer sweeping views framed by golden sands. First things first — check in to Grand Velas Los Cabos for three days of sun-soaked relaxation, easygoing activities and fine dining. After settling in and enjoying your welcome drink, it's time to explore the lay of the land. Go for a walk around the beautifully landscaped grounds, past three pools where daily instructor-led activities range from aqua Pilates to guided meditation — all designed

to reduce stress and enable recovery. Then, take a moment to admire the succulent garden of native Sonoran Desert plants, where saguaro cacti stand tall with their arms stretched overhead, while agave and golden barrel cacti sit low to the ground among spiky mesquite trees.

AFTERNOON

Spend your first afternoon getting to know Mexican cuisine and viticulture with a tasting course of three ceviches paired with white wines at Del Mar restaurant (at sister property Grand Velas Boutique). Tastings and cooking classes are held throughout both properties,

which include dedicated spaces with ocean views. Mexico was the first country in the Americas to produce wine thanks to Catholic missionaries who started planting vines in Veracruz in the mid-17th century, when Jesuits were permitted to produce communion wines of deep-red mission grapes. Those initial seeds of viticulture have since blossomed into more than 150 wineries in the Baja Peninsula.

The first pairing is a vegan ceviche of watermelon, soaked in ponzu (Japanese citrus sauce) to imbue a meaty flavor, topped with sliced avocado. Wash it down with Tres Raíces sauvignon blanc, which has notes of citrus





Clockwise from left: *Cooking class at Grand Velas Los Cabos; Los Cabos beach; panoramic view of Grand Velas Los Cabos resort*
Previous pages, clockwise from top left: *Shops in San José del Cabo; aerial view of El Arco of Cabo San Lucas; Parroquia San José church; inside Frida restaurant; a dish of kabocha, comté and jicama (Mexican turnip) with truffles at Cocina de Autor; sunrise yoga at Grand Velas Los Cabos resort; the resort spa; in-pool bar at Grand Velas Los Cabos resort; fresh shrimp at Cocina de Autor; aerial view of the beach in San José del Cabo; local mural*

and tropical fruit and a golden-yellow hue.

Next is an aguachile, a variant of ceviche made without the lengthy marination process. Cabrilla fish — typically caught just offshore — is cured with lime juice along with cucumber, serrano peppers, cilantro and red onion. The refreshing citrus-based dish is paired with a pale-yellow sauvignon blanc by Baja California Norte, a family-owned vineyard in the Guadalupe Valley.

Up last is a spiny lobster ceviche. Chunks of firm, sweet lobster flesh are poached in a pico de gallo (salsa) of locally grown mango with star anise. The wine pairing is Monte Xanic sauvignon blanc, well-rounded with hints of white flowers and apples. Later on, take a dip and place an order at

the swim-up bar for an Avo-Colada — Piña Colada with an avocado puree. Retire to your sunlounger and relax as you gaze out to the horizon beyond the infinity pool. Then, walk along the beach, marveling at the powerful, pounding waves before dressing for dinner.

EVENING

For your evening meal, head to Frida, a dining room dedicated to Frida Kahlo. Start with the duck confit tamales, from the Tribute to Corn section of the menu. Slow-cooked duck is wrapped in a velvety coat of huitlacoche — a mushroom-like fungus that grows on corn and considered a delicacy akin to truffles — into square bites accented with a bright green mole sauce, thickened with ground sunflower seeds.

Follow with the traditional tortilla soup, seasoned with dried pasilla chilis and creamy avocados, and poured tableside. A fresh red snapper entree pops with flavor, thanks to a duo of supporting sauces accented with tomatillo and morita chilis. For dessert, it's hard to choose between the churros and the chocolate mousse, so order both. The cacao-flavored mousse with rich mole, topped with a whimsical fried cricket is a nod to ancient Oaxacan cuisine.

Every Thursday night from November to June, there's an Art Walk in downtown San José del Cabo. The streets are teeming with vendors and food trucks. Galleries stay open late and often host special exhibitions and artist talks. Stop off at Galeria de Ida Victoria for a broad variety of displays.

SAN JOSÉ DEL CABO





Paddleboarding at Grand Velas Los Cabos resort
Clockwise from below: Sommelier at Grand Velas Los Cabos resort; Cocina de Autor restaurant; sea lions in the Gulf of California



DAY TWO

MORNING

Wake up early for the 20-minute drive to the marina for a boat tour to Land's End and the iconic El Arco in the Sea of Cortez. Vessels of all kinds — kayaks, stand-up paddleboards and glass-bottom boats — make the round trip. Rancho Tours offers private charters in one-, two- and three-hour increments in pontoon boats helmed by an experienced captain. It's a 10-minute journey to the arch, passing idyllic coves carved from tall cliffs and the popular Lovers Beach. You can spot King Angelfish with their bright orange coloring and yellowtail surgeonfish from the boat deck.

It's also possible to kayak the distance, thanks to several sandy beach pit stops and calm waters along the well-traveled route. You're almost guaranteed to spot a sea lion in the marina, and you could possibly end up seeing manta rays and sea turtles in the harbor, too.

AFTERNOON

Have lunch at one of the many restaurants that line the marina. Local favorites include Los Deseos or Baja Lobster Company, where the outdoor oyster bar serves fresh catch with a view. Order a dozen Baja Nautilus oysters with an ice-cold Pacifico Clara beer and raise a glass while reciting the local mantra, "No bad days in Cabo." Later in the afternoon, meet up with a scent designer in the resort's wellness center to create a customized fragrance that guests can take home in the form of a room spray or essential oil blend. Select from primary aromas and decide how much

of each selection to add to the mixture to create a signature blend. The final product is a sensory reminder of your trip. Then, head back to the room to recharge for the evening with a quick siesta.

EVENING

Tonight's dinner is at Michelin-starred Cocina de Autor at the Grand Velas Los Cabos resort. A visionary tasting menu takes guests on a culinary journey from the coast to the interior of the country. A single oyster — cultivated by Bendito Mar, a regenerative aquaculture sea farm — is dressed with lemon verbena oil and green strawberry, and topped with a shiso blossom from the resort's dedicated farmland in Miraflores. Next is the half-moon scallop, designed to echo the semi-circular shape of the resort and topped with an avocado mousse and seared chilis. Decadent wagyu beef is served in an appealing cube shape and enhanced with beetroot and oestra caviar. Finally, a coconut mousse energized by mango, yuzu and passion fruit is paired with a glass of sparkling moscato.

After dinner, head to the outdoor terrace to participate in the resort's stargazing experience. A former NASA astronomer gives a guided tour of the heavens, pointing out the constellations while detailing how the ancient Maya calendar relates to the night sky. The powerful telescope brings Saturn's rings and Jupiter's moons into focus as you search for shooting stars.



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To enter a Park, both a Theme Park reservation and a valid ticket for the same Park on the same date is required. Theme Park reservations for Kids' Summer Ticket Offer holders are limited in number and subject to the availability of Park reservations allocated to the Kids' Summer Ticket Offer as determined by Disney and Theme Park capacity. Reservation availability for Kids' Summer Ticket Offer holders is not guaranteed for any date, and reservations may be difficult to get for any particular date, especially as the ticket expiration date approaches. To ensure best availability, make reservations early. On any given date, Park reservations may be available for general Theme Park tickets even though Park reservations allocated to the Kids' Summer Ticket Offer are fully reserved. Kids' Summer Ticket Offer holders are not entitled to any reservations Disney makes available to others. Parks, attractions, entertainment, experiences, services, and offerings may be modified, limited in availability or unavailable, and are subject to restrictions, and change or cancellation without notice. Park admission and offerings are not guaranteed. Vacation packages subject to restrictions including *Walt Disney Travel Company Terms and Conditions*.



Aerial view of Santa María Beach
in Los Cabos Tourist Corridor
Below: A humpback whale leaping
out of the Sea of Cortez



IMAGES: BETTY

DAY THREE

MORNING

Rise with the sun and listen for a knock at the door, signaling the arrival of a fresh cappuccino and pastry basket. Then, adjust your binoculars to the horizon and spend a few minutes in search of the marine mammals that attract visitors to this coastline by the million. Humpback and gray whales migrate to the Sea of Cortez from December to April to give birth, drawn by the deep water and protected ecosystems. Dolphins, sea turtles, sea lions and reef sharks are commonly found in this area. Sea animals who commute to the Baja Peninsula annually are the cornerstone of its robust maritime community offering fishing and snorkeling excursions. Consider booking

a private sailing excursion with a dedicated whale-watcher, available from sunrise to sunset. The arrival of whale sharks each November kicks off specialized tours where visitors can swim alongside the ocean's largest fish.

AFTERNOON

Today's wellness agenda reflects a legacy of healing and restoration evident in the Baja region that dates to the Maya civilization. The Mayan temazcal ceremony draws upon elements of water, fire and earth to awaken wisdom passed down by generations. Although you can seek alternative treatment centers, many of today's sweat lodges are now housed in luxurious spa facilities with therapeutic steam baths that

SAN JOSÉ DEL CABO



Sunset at Miramar Bar

ESSENTIALS

When to go: With its desert climate, summer temperatures frequently reach 90F while wintertime highs are in the 60s. December to April is high season for whale-watching in the Baja region.

Currency: Mexican pesos

Language: Spanish, with English widely spoken

Getting around: Car rentals, taxis and ride shares are widely available.

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incorporate detoxifying local herbs and medicinal tonics. Indulge in a hot stone massage, a black algae facial or a sea salt scrub for a restorative afternoon. Try it for yourself at the Playa Grande Spa by Solmar.

EVENING

Sunset over the Pacific is a worthwhile event in itself. Head to Miramar Bar, an elegant terrace with cocktails, comfortable loungers and cozy firepits. Once the sun goes down, head upstairs to Velas 10 for dinner. Word has gotten out about the tomahawk steak — their version of the dramatic beef ribeye entree is served on a stone of Himalayan salt to maintain the temperature. For sides, order the chimichurri, horseradish or cowboy sauce and complete the meal with truffled frites. Extend your final evening by heading back to Miramar to stargaze and sip a lemongrass-flavored Ranch Water as your nightcap. □

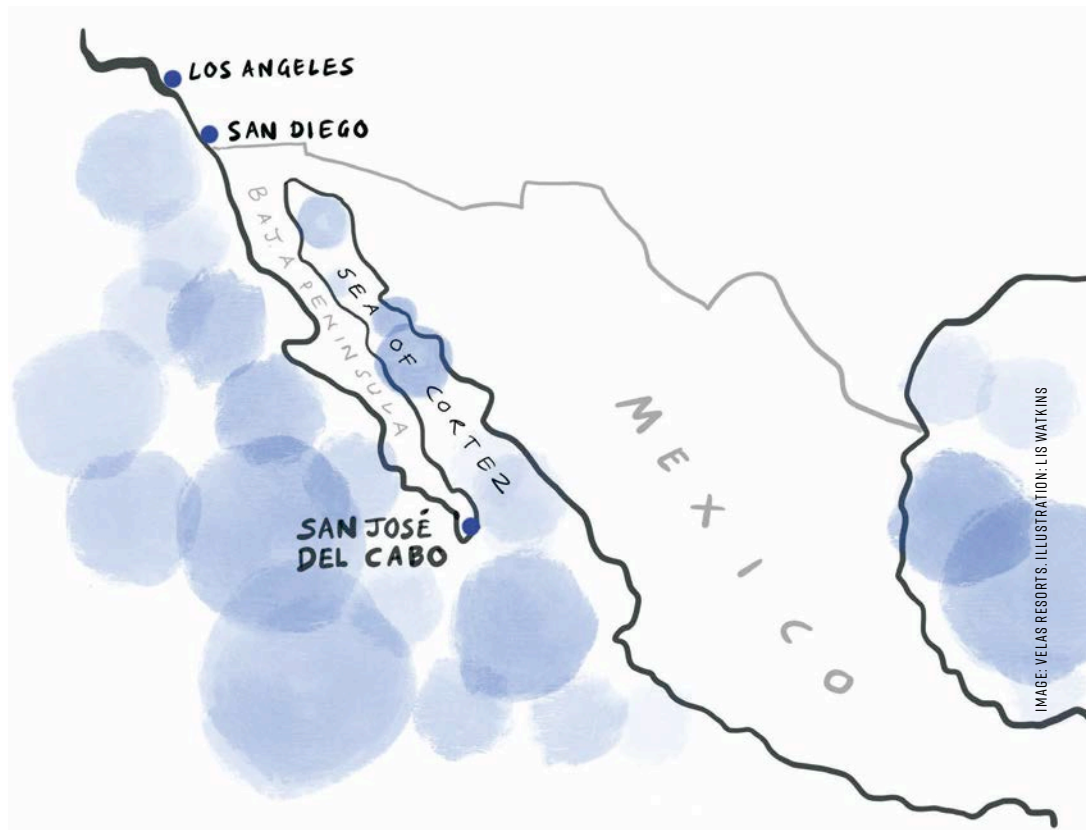


IMAGE: VELAS RESORTS. ILLUSTRATION: LIS WATKINS

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Nobu Hotel Los Cabos

Nobu's first hotel in Mexico is a fusion of Japanese minimalism and local craftsmanship. Sitting on the southernmost tip of the Baja Peninsula, Nobu Hotel Los Cabos has mesmerizing views of sparkling sapphire waters, stretching as far as the eye can see. The hotel offers 200 guest rooms and suites, a luxurious spa, infinity pools, private cabanas and a variety of bars and dining options, including a Nobu restaurant on the beach. It doesn't get any better than that.

ME Cabo by Meliá

Only a few steps from downtown Cabo, ME Cabo by Meliá is beautifully positioned on the only swimmable beach in Los Cabos, with spectacular views of the famous Arch. A place where design, art, music and service co-exist in perfect harmony, the hotel offers every imaginable comfort and luxury. This adults-only beach resort is the perfect fit for couples, friend groups reunions and bachelorette/bachelor parties, especially those drawn to the international DJs spinning at the Taboo Beach Club.



The Cape, A Thompson Hotel

With most rooms boasting oceans views, The Cape, a Thompson Hotel designed by Javier Sanchez, is a boutique hotel like no other. It's a fresh and vibrant approach to Los Cabos luxury — a singular beachfront retreat commanding a contour of the cape where every room and vantage point overlooks El Arco and the Bahia Cabo San Lucas horizon. This luxury resort features 159 well-appointed guest rooms, suites, residences and villas — all with unobstructed views — as well as its signature restaurant: Manta, led by acclaimed chef Enrique Olvera.



EUROPEAN BEER FESTIVALS

Centuries-old brewing traditions meet modern craft creativity on Europe's continent-sprawling beer festival circuit, writes Emily Lush



1 OKTOBERFEST, GERMANY

The world's largest beer festival draws more than six million visitors to Munich's Theresienwiese fairgrounds. Tents seat up to 10,000 people, brass bands play oompah tunes and waitresses carry armfuls of one-liter steins through the crowd. Only six of Munich's historic breweries are allowed to serve, pouring specially brewed Oktoberfestbier that's maltier and boozier than your average lager. Between rounds, visitors graze on giant pretzels, white sausages and pork knuckle.

2 PETERBOROUGH BEER FESTIVAL, UK

Held each August beneath sprawling white marquees on the grassy riverside embankment, the focus here is firmly on cask-conditioned, naturally carbonated beer. Hundreds of real ales, porters and milds are gravity-poured or hand-pumped into half-pint tasting glasses. There are also dedicated bars for cider and international brews, while the food offering includes pies, Scotch eggs and ploughman's plates eaten at shared tables.

3 BELGIAN BEER WEEKEND, BELGIUM

Each September, Brussels' Grand Place transforms into a vast open-air beer hall lined with wooden chalets. More than 50 Belgian breweries take part, pouring upwards of 500 beers across three days. The Belgian Brewers Association-curated lineup puts the nation's heritage on pour: expect tart, spontaneously fermented lambics, rustic farmhouse saisons and tripels and authentic Trappist ales.



THREE MORE: ALTERNATIVE FESTIVALS

Mikkeller Beer Celebration, Denmark

Every spring, this craft beer festival brings together more than 100 breweries from Europe, North America and Japan, many pouring experimental beers created for the event.

Pilsner Fest, Czech Republic

This festival celebrates the birthplace of pale lager at the historic Urquell Brewery, where copper kettles and underground cellars tell the story of its origin. At 6:42 pm — a nod to 1842, the year the world's first golden lager was brewed here — thousands raise their glasses in a synchronized toast.

Warsaw Beer Festival, Poland

Billed as a 'carnival of craftsmanship', creatives — from cheesemakers to comic book illustrators — exhibit alongside 50-odd breweries. Baltic porters, hazy IPAs and Grodziskie — an oak-smoked wheat beer — cascade from the taps, while a shuttle bus links the party with Warsaw's best bars.

IMAGES: MUNICHEN TOURISMUS WERNER BOEHM; GETTY; SHUTTERSTOCK



OYSTER SHACKS IN MAINE

In the New England coastal state, oysters are both a delicacy and a staple of daily life, says Caili Elwell

Old Atlantic currents, a rugged shoreline and generations of harvesters have shaped the clean, briny flavor of oysters in Maine — a state celebrated for its vibrant seafood culture. Fossil shells left by the Wabanaki — a group of five First Nations peoples native to an area straddling the Canadian border in the northeastern corner of North America — suggest that oysters have been consumed in the Gulf of Maine for millennia. Over time, their numbers declined due to environmental changes, but in the mid-20th century

there was a significant push by Maine to revive oysters. Today, the state is home to over 100 farms, which together produce around 11 million oysters a year. For visitors, there is a plethora of shacks inviting them to experience this cultural mainstay first hand, whether seated at a harbor bar, a roadside stand or alongside a tranquil working river. Each offers its own atmosphere but all share the same essential ingredient: a deep connection to the sea. These are five of our favorite oyster shacks not to miss on your next visit.

← J'S OYSTER BAR

J's Oyster Bar has been a mainstay of Portland's working waterfront since 1976. Set on a wooden pier, the small, no-frills seafood restaurant — with seating indoors and on an outdoor patio — looks and feels like an extension of the harbor itself. In the main bar area, the sound of oyster knives cracking shells mixes with conversation and the occasional cry of a gull. Oysters arrive from nearby Casco Bay, tasting crisp, cold and unmistakably like they've just been plucked fresh from the ocean. The menu also includes a range of chowders, stews and sides. Harbor views through weathered windows remind visitors just how short the sea-to-table journey can be.



↑ THE SHUCK STATION

The Shuck Station captures the relaxed spirit of Maine summers. Housed in a cheerful roadside stand along the Damariscotta River, in Newcastle, it serves oysters in an open-air setting surrounded by trees and sunlight. Colorful paint, picnic tables and string lights all play a role in giving this joint a homely, welcoming vibe. The oysters here are harvested locally and known for their balanced flavor and smooth finish. Guests tend to linger outside; the experience feels unhurried and authentic, encouraging visitors to slow down and savor both the oysters and their surroundings.



← THE SHOP BY ISLAND CREEK OYSTERS

The Shop — operated by Island Creek Oysters, a New England aquaculture company — offers a refined but approachable oyster experience. The bivalves are presented neatly on ice and staff guide guests through different selections, explaining how water conditions influence flavor. The minimalist setting focuses attention on the oysters themselves, reinforcing their status as the true centerpiece. It's the perfect place in which to explore the culture of oysters in Maine and gain a deeper understanding of the state's thriving aquaculture scene.

→ EVENTIDE OYSTER CO.

Eventide Oyster Co. is a modern interpretation of the traditional oyster bar. Opened in 2012, the restaurant helped spark renewed interest in regional oyster varieties. Inside, a bright marble counter displays oysters on crushed ice, each labeled by origin and flavor profile. Guests can sample multiple varieties side by side, noticing subtle differences — from buttery and mild to sharply saline. Despite its contemporary feel, Eventide remains rooted in New England's maritime heritage. The experience is both educational and indulgent, fostering a deeper appreciation of the diversity found within Maine's coastal waters.



← GLIDDEN POINT OYSTER FARMS

At Glidden Point Oyster Farms, visitors can experience oysters at their freshest. Located on the scenic Damariscotta River, the farm allows guests to not only see oyster cages floating in the calm waters but also to learn about the growing process. They can also buy oysters and shuck them on site, experiencing the joy of sampling a regional specialty at source, surrounded by working equipment and a picturesque coast. Glidden Point highlights the role of environment and careful cultivation in producing exceptional oysters. This is the place to come to witness Maine's oyster tradition in its purest form.

A close-up photograph of an olive branch with several dark olives. The background is a blurred, warm-toned building, likely a traditional Maltese structure. The lighting is bright and natural, highlighting the texture of the leaves and the smooth surface of the olives.

Green pearls & liquid gold

Whether it's local farmers championing native olives or tasting sessions in 400-year-old wine cellars, the Mediterranean archipelago of Malta offers a plethora of culinary experiences for oenophiles and farm-to-table enthusiasts alike, says Daniela Frendo





rumble echoes over the valley, momentarily drowning out all other sounds. As the plane continues its descent, it quickly becomes a small silhouette in the sky and everything is quiet again, save for the leaves rustling in the wind and the hum of traffic in the distance. It's peaceful out here – in this swath of cultivated fields in central Malta, fringed by busy arterial roads and bustling commercial towns, with the airport just a short drive away. It's an overcast day and there's the threat of rain in the air, but I feel sheltered by the lush foliage of the trees at Ta' Xmun Olive Grove.

"This is my refuge," says Charles Bugeja. "Even in the hot summer months, this place offers some respite."

Charles inherited the olive grove from his father, and since retiring, he's been able to dedicate more time to the trees. It's here

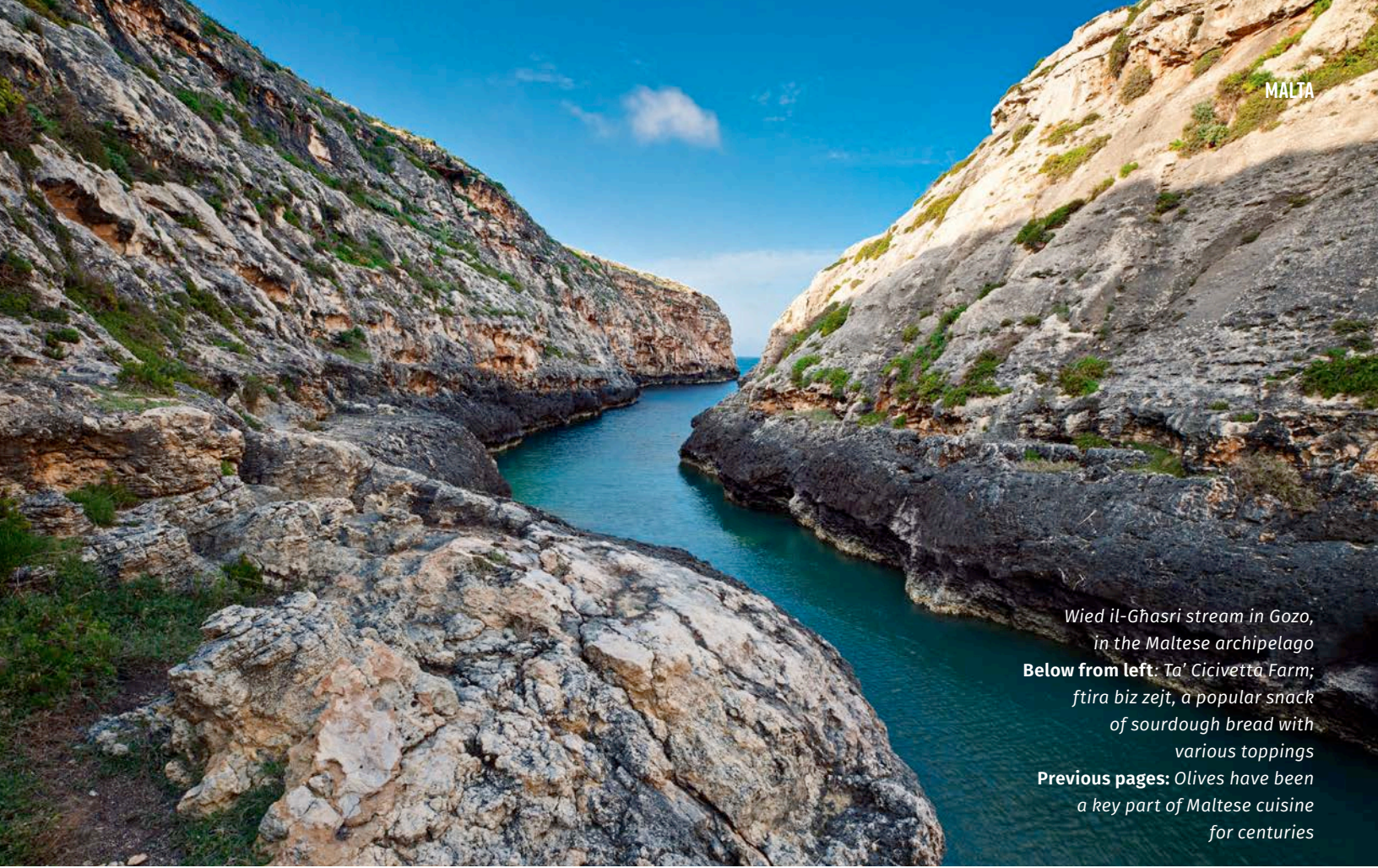
he produces his own extra virgin olive oil, which has earned recognition both locally and abroad.

"We have two indigenous cultivars at this grove," he explains. "Tal-Bidni and Tal-Bajda."

The Bidni olive is a small dark fruit, almost violet in color when ripe. It's known for yielding high-quality oil with a distinct peppery taste. This endemic tree is believed to date back to Roman rule in Malta, when olive oil was already in production. In fact, excavations just outside Mdina – the ancient citadel that once served as Malta's capital – uncovered a Roman domus (house) complete with a stone olive press. Coincidentally, the pressing mill where Charles takes his olives is not very far from this historic site.

"Ideally, Bidni olives should be cold pressed as soon as they're picked," he tells me, and I immediately sense the challenge.

There aren't many pressing mills on the island, and when the harvest is good, farmers with trucks loaded with olive crates can be seen queuing for hours by the roadside. For Charles, timing is everything. He makes an appointment with the millers and spends a day at the grove harvesting the Bidni olives so they can be pressed within 24 hours. This quick process helps preserve the polyphenols in the olives, which lend flavor and freshness to the oil. Fast milling also maintains low acidity, which is essential for extra virgin standards.



Wied il-Ghasri stream in Gozo, in the Maltese archipelago
Below from left: Ta' Cicivetta Farm; ftira biz zejt, a popular snack of sourdough bread with various toppings
Previous pages: Olives have been a key part of Maltese cuisine for centuries





BOOMING TOURISM

Just over four million tourists visited Malta in 2025, marking a 13% increase over the previous year. The island nation lies between Sicily and Libya and was ruled by several powers, including the Phoenicians, Romans, Arabs, Normans, the Knights of St. John and the British, before finally gaining independence in 1964. It's an ideal destination for lovers of European history, with megalithic temples that date back to 3600 BCE and a vibrant Baroque capital, Valletta, which is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

But Malta is also the perfect place to wind down and enjoy the laid-back, Mediterranean life. While many tourists flock to the island's sandy beaches, rural areas also offer rejuvenating breaks away from the crowds.

Ta' Xmun Olive Grove is in the town of Zebbug, which is incidentally the Maltese word for 'olives' — the name is likely attributed to the numerous olive trees that once characterized the town. Nowadays, it's a jumble of limestone houses and concrete flats perched above Wied is-Sewda (The Black Valley), where fields like Charles's are nestled among rubble walls. Though

tucked away from the beaten path, people from different corners of the world still find their way here.

"Tourists visit us specifically for the oil," Charles says.

While he welcomes the interest, he wants to keep things small and simple. For him, the priority is to provide an authentic experience where people can truly learn about the trees and the harvesting process — and of course, try the Bidni oil.

But not all olives are harvested for oil. The other indigenous cultivar, Tal-Bajda — a rare variety that was once nearly extinct — produces fleshier fruits that are used in traditional Maltese dishes like rabbit stew. Today, there are only around 70 such trees across the island, including a handful at Charles's grove.

"It's also known as the Maltese Pearl Olive because it starts green and turns very pale when ripe," Charles explains.

He stops abruptly at a tree and snaps off a dead branch. "Olive trees are strong and hardy," he says, "but they need constant tending, dry wood can cause problems if it's not removed."

There are many other things that could harm an olive tree: pests such as fruit flies

From top clockwise:
A traditional Maltese wine-tasting platter with local appetizers; Lower Barrakka gardens in Valletta; olives at Ta' Xmun Olive Grove





“

*Tritons' Fountain
—which sits just
outside the City Gate
of Malta — consists
of three bronze
mythological gods
of the sea*



and weevils, lack of rain during critical growth stages, warmer-than-usual winters that reduce flowering and strong winds that can blow away blossoms before the olives have time to set. But Charles has come up with clever ways to combat some of these problems.

“We don’t use pesticides on the trees,” he says proudly. “Do you see that white thing around the trees?” He points to the sash of cotton wool tied around the lower part of the trunks. “It’s to stop weevils from getting to the leaves.”

As I peer closer at the wool, I find it dotted with the tiny beetle-like insects that emerge from the soil at night to feed on the leaves.

“I also have an app that tells me if the trees have olive flies,” he says, ushering me toward a solar-powered monitor. “It even detects the water levels in the soil and the temperature.”

To protect the grove from the strong winds that often batter the country,

Charles has lined the perimeter with Cipressino olive trees, which act as windbreaks thanks to their upright conical shape and dense foliage.

THE ART OF OLIVE OIL TASTING

As a local, I use olive oil almost every day. After all, it’s a staple of the Maltese diet, along with honey, tomato paste, sun-dried tomatoes, capers and sheep’s milk cheese.

But when Charles asks me if I’ve ever truly tasted olive oil, my answer is no.

“Real extra virgin olive oil tastes nothing like the mass-produced kind you find in shops,” he says, as we step into the stone-built room in the grove.

Here, Charles keeps stainless steel tanks filled with Bidni oil. After a few weeks of settling, the oil is carefully transferred into clean tanks to separate it from the sediment. In the summer months, Charles moves the tanks to

Clockwise from left:
Siggiewi Church of St. Nicholas; cheesemaker Tony Farrugia from Ta Zeppi Farm in Siggiewi; Meet the sheep at Ta Zeppi Farm



Four more: farm-to-table experiences

Ta' Betta Wine Estates

Perched on terraced hillsides, Ta' Betta Wine Estates specializes in fine wines that reflect the country's unique terroir. There are around 15,000 vines planted on this 10-acre estate, including merlot, syrah and chardonnay, which thrive alongside fig, carob and olive trees. It's the ideal place to visit if you want an intimate wine-tasting experience. Ta' Betta also offers exclusive picnics in the vineyards with local delicacies like cheeses and olives, and a bottle of their own artisanal wine. The estate is in a rural area known as Gircanti, which forms part of Siggiewi: an old village with an impressive Baroque church dedicated to St. Nicholas.

Ta' Zeppi Farm

Charles from Ta' Xmun sources some of the cheese for the olive-oil tasting from Ta Zeppi Farm, also located in Siggiewi. This small, family-run business, headed up by Joseph Borg, is an agricultural project that focuses on sheep farming and artisan cheese-making, as well as making a fantastic extra virgin olive oil. They also specialize in the traditional gbejna (cheeselet made from sheep's milk) and fresh ricotta, and all their products have been certified as being produced using organic farming methods. If you find yourself in the area, you can just walk into the farm and meet the sheep before sampling some of the fantastic cheeses.

Tulliera Farm Deli

This farm-to-fork destination endorses sustainable agriculture and Maltese farming traditions. What was once degraded land has been transformed into productive fields and pastures through careful restoration efforts. Located in Delimara, on the south coast of Malta, the farm is home to several native animals like goats, cows, sheep and hens. The team produces an array of fresh products including pasture-raised eggs, raw honey, goat dairy and hand-harvested sea salt, all of which are sold at the on-site farm shop. There's a growing interest in slow food culture on the island; visit Tulliera if you want to get your hands on some authentic, home-made products.

Ta' Cicivetta Farm

This farm is in a charming, family-run estate tucked in the countryside near the hilltop village of Rabat. The farmhouse itself dates to 1914. The owners restored it in 2019 and have preserved many of the original limestone features, including a working traditional water fountain. The property is surrounded by olive trees, citrus groves and terraced fields, offering a real sense of rural life as well as an immersive culinary experience. You can learn how to make classic Maltese snacks like pastizzi (savory pastries stuffed with ricotta or mushy peas) and hobz biz zejt (crusty sandwiches with olive oil, tomatoes, tuna, capers, olives and cheeselets).

Explore more *flavors*



Top three restaurants

Diar il-Bniet

Diar il-Bniet, in Dingli, has become a local favorite in recent years. This farm-to-table enterprise is dedicated to preserving Maltese agricultural traditions and cuisine. It has a restaurant, farm shop and working fields, all centered on locally grown and responsibly sourced produce. The menu is seasonal and based on authentic meals, which include timpana (baked macaroni) and home-made ravioli. The farm shop offers artisan foods like jams made with local strawberries, pomegranates and prickly pears. Diar il-Bniet also has a restaurant in the center of Rabat, overlooking the Basilica of St. Paul.

United Restaurant

Mgarr is an agricultural village in the north of Malta that's mostly known for its traditional Maltese restaurants and the annual strawberry festival. United Restaurant is a long-standing favorite among locals, with gorgeous rustic decor and honest, home-style cooking. Popular starters include snails, fish soup, rabbit liver and marinated octopus, while mains include rabbit fried in garlic and stewed quail.

Trabuxu Bistro

In recent years, Valletta has become Malta's gastronomical hub, with bistros and restaurants specializing in modern Mediterranean dishes and Asian fusions. One such place is Trabuxu Bistro on South Street, which has a seasonal menu that combines Italian cuisine with Maltese staples like rabbit, sea bream and fresh tuna. There's also Trabuxu Wine Bar on Strait Street, which is in a 400-year-old stone cellar and has a vast selection of wines and French farmhouse cheeses.



the basement of his house where temperatures are cooler.

"Fifteen degrees (59F) is the sweet spot," he explains. "If it's kept in warmer temperatures, the oil will oxidize faster and lose quality."

He unscrews the lid on a tank and, as I lean over for a sniff, my lungs are instantly filled with a pleasant, earthy aroma. Next, it's time to taste the Bidni oil. I sit at a table on the patio while Charles pours oil from a colorful jug into a small cup.

"First, take a small sip and swish it around in your mouth," Charles says. "It will make your throat burn, but that's a testament to the quality. If it makes you cough, it's even better."

I feel a little hesitant, but I try the oil anyway. It's thick and peppery,

and I can feel it coating the inside of my mouth. Then my throat feels like it's on fire and my eyes begin to water.

"You can drink the rest," Charles says. "It will taste nicer this time."

Sure enough, I'm now able to truly enjoy the flavors of the oil — the slight bitterness of the olives, nutty undertones and a hint of something else — but I'm not quite sure what.

"Rosemary and wild thyme," Charles tells me. "Olive trees can absorb the essences of the herbs that grow around them, which comes through subtly in the oil."

Charles brings out slices of bread, so I can enjoy it the Mediterranean way. No other condiments are needed — no salt, pepper or balsamic

Above: *Homemade cappelletti at Trabuxu Bistro*



Enjoy sunset in Valletta while sipping on local wine

ESSENTIALS

When to go: The best time to visit is from September to May, avoiding the summer crowds and the intense heat. The winter months are much quieter and temperatures are mild, though expect a mix of sunshine, rainfall and strong winds.

Currency: Euro

Language: Maltese and English are the official languages, and many locals also speak Italian.

Getting around: Public transport will get you to most attractions in Malta, but journeys can be long and the buses crowded. If you'd like to visit rural areas, the easiest way to get there is by car (note that in Malta driving is on the left-hand side). Ride-hailing apps like Bolt and Uber are also available.

Fun fact: In the summer months, many towns across Malta and Gozo celebrate their patron saints with lavish festas, which last several days. These typically involve fireworks and marching bands, and see the streets draped in colorful decorations.

BOOK IT NOW

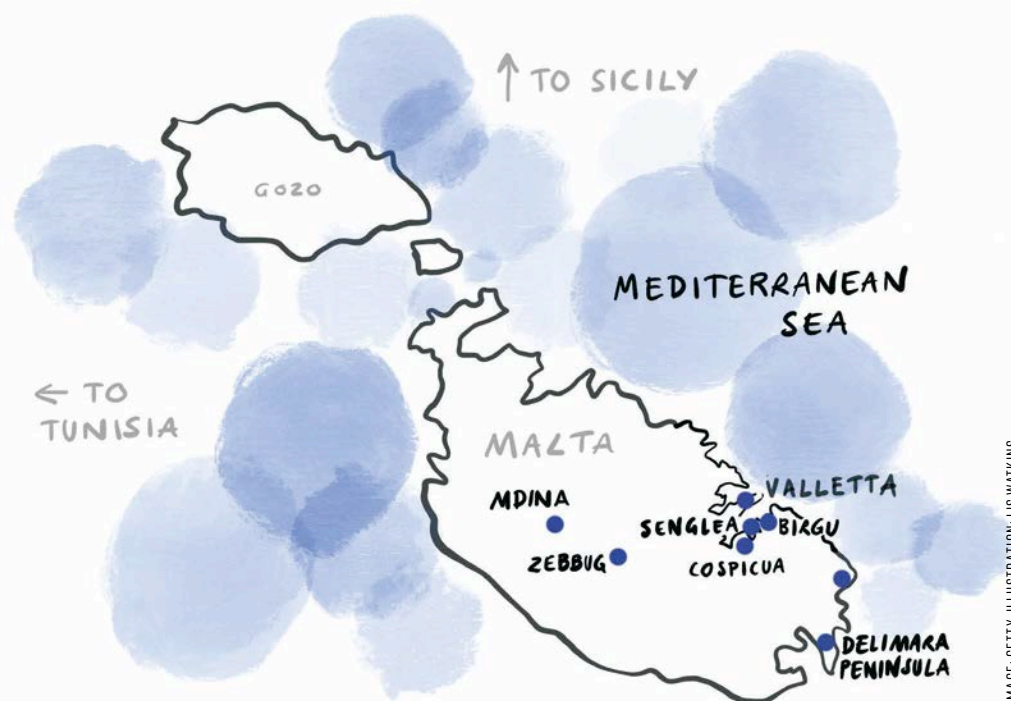
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CALL US TO BOOK YOUR TRIP TO MALTA

(Charles balks even at the thought). I simply dip the fresh bread into the oil, allowing it to soak for a moment, and take a bite.

Meanwhile, Charles steps back inside and returns with a gbejna. He picked it up from a nearby farmer just before my visit and drizzled it with oil. The creamy tanginess of the cheese blends perfectly with the nuttiness of the oil and it all melts together in my mouth: a simple pairing packed with pure, unfiltered flavor.

As I take another bite of the bread and oil, I can't help but think to myself: Malta is a country racing to keep pace with the growing demands of tourism, but agricultural places like Ta' Xmun offer a chance to slow down and savor the country's food heritage — one peppery, golden drop at a time. □



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THE Dolomites ARE CALLING

Everything you need to know about the majestic mountain range in northeastern Italy – where breathtaking Alpine scenery, hearty local cuisine and endless outdoor adventure are delivered in equal measure, writes Tristan Kennedy



The Dolomites are among the most dramatic mountains on the planet. Characterized by sheer cliffs, jagged peaks

and craggy spires more romantic than the ruins of any gothic abbey, these pale rock monoliths began life as coral reefs 250 million years ago, before being thrust skyward by the collision of tectonic plates. Split between the Italian regions of Veneto and Trentino-Alto Adige, the mountains take their name from Déodat Gratet de Dolomieu, the 18th-century French scientist who first identified the mineral dolomite, which was named in his honor. Their unusual geology gives rise to breathtaking landscapes that have attracted tourists and adventurers since the 1850s. But these days, the Dolomites are just as well known for their distinctive culture — defined by excellent local food and wine, and warm, Italian hospitality.

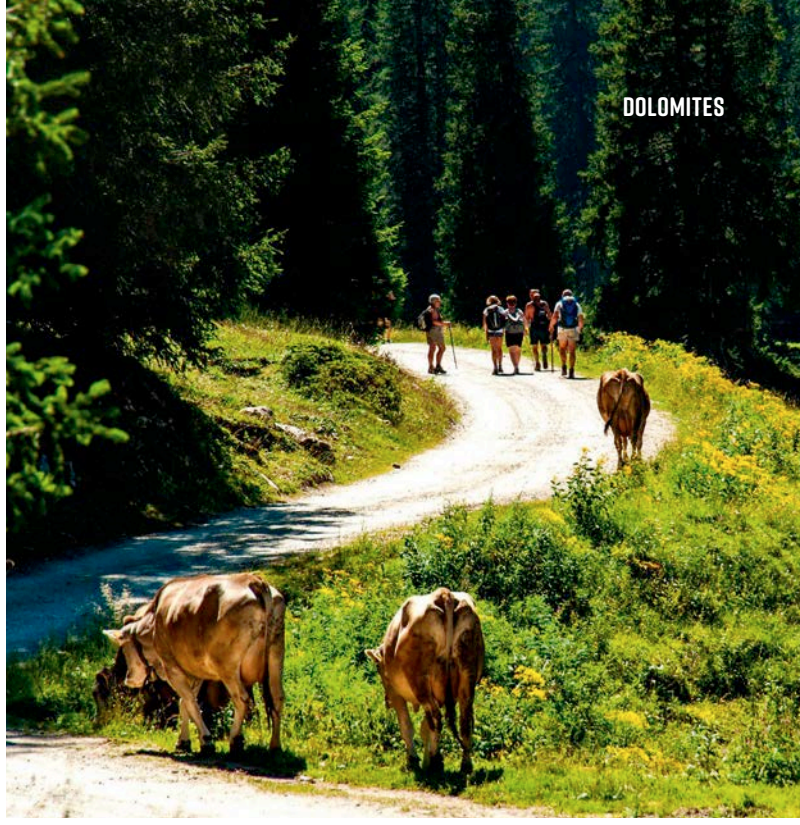
Each of the nine mountain groups that make up the Dolomites UNESCO World Heritage Site has its own quirks, but there are characteristics that they all share. The valleys are dotted with picturesque villages and verdant vineyards. Higher up, you'll find stunning mountain lakes, thick forests that turn gold and orange in the fall, and excellent walking trails. Meanwhile the rocky peaks themselves offer opportunities for more serious adventure. There's fantastic skiing in winter, while the region offers some of the best rock climbing in the world throughout spring and summer.

Clockwise from left: A hiker at Lake Sorapis with Dito di Dio peak in the background; Madonna di Campiglio in Brenta; a wood carving of a face in San Martino di Castrozza

Previous pages: The village of Santa Maddalena in Val di Funes



IMAGES: AWL IMAGES - ALAMY



DOLOMITES





Clockwise from top: *Alpine meadows in San Martino di Castrozza; a stele from World War I commemorating soldiers; Vigo-Catinaccio cable car at Ciampedie, Val di Fassa*

Due to overtourism, several of the best-known attractions, including Lake Braies, the Three Peaks of Lavedo and the high Alpine meadow of Alpe di Siusi, have been forced to restrict visitor numbers during the peak summer months. But while all of these are beautiful, they're not unique — the region is full of crystal Alpine lakes, soaring summits and rolling pastures flanked by phalanx-like peaks. And if you know where to go, it's perfectly possible to escape into mountains that are almost as empty as when Dolomieu himself passed through some 250 years ago.

CORTINA D'AMPEZZO

Often dubbed the queen of the Dolomites, Cortina d'Ampezzo combines some of the region's most iconic mountain views with old-world Alpine glamour. Sitting in a broad valley ringed by peaks — the Tofane, Cristallo and Sorapis massifs rise dramatically on all sides — the town became a favorite with Austrian royals in the 1800s, before exploding in popularity with the growth of skiing in the 20th century.

Ernest Hemingway visited — and wrote a short story about it — in the 1920s. And in the postwar period, when it hosted the 1956 Winter Olympics (seven decades before this year's extravaganza), it was the fashionable place to go skiing, attracting the likes of Brigitte Bardot, Frank Sinatra and Sophia Loren. These days, summer visitors come for panoramic hikes, made easily accessible by ski lifts that can whisk

you up thousands of feet in a matter of minutes. Evenings are for aperitivi on Corso Italia, the storied central street where climbers, hikers and fur-wearing Milanese mingle.

POZZA DI FASSA & VIGO DI FASSA

Technically, Pozza di Fassa and Vigo di Fassa are separate towns, but in reality they feel like one ribbon-like settlement, which stretches out along the Val di Fassa, one of the Dolomites' most visually striking valleys. This is one of the centers of the Ladin language — an ancient Alpine tongue that's only spoken in certain areas of the range — and the culture is subtly different from what you find elsewhere in the region. Pozza di Fassa and Vigo di Fassa are less flashy than Cortina (think wooden farmhouses with flower-filled balconies as opposed to grand old Alpine hotels) but the scenery is equally beautiful, and they have the added advantage of natural hot springs. In summer, this valley, flanked on one side by the Rosengarten Group, is among the best places to appreciate the phenomenon that Italian-speakers call *enrosadira*, and Germans call *alpenglow* — when the sunset paints the pale cliffs red and orange.

SAN MARTINO DI CASTROZZA

On the southern edge of the Dolomites, San Martino di Castrozza sits beneath one of the region's most spectacular skylines — the Pale di San Martino mountains. The village is blessedly quiet compared to

FIVE MOUNTAIN HUTS WORTH THE WALK

A long lunch in a rifugio (mountain hut) is a rite of passage in the Dolomites. Originally built to accommodate shepherds, or later soldiers and mountaineers, these refuges range from cowsheds to comfortable inns.

Rifugio Passo Principe

Set among the towering peaks of the Catinaccio massif, this feels remote, despite being reachable on foot from a valley parking lot in two and a half hours. The atmosphere inside is welcoming and the food is excellent.

Rifugio Rosetta

Perched above the ski resort town of San Martino di Castrozza (see left), the Rifugio Rosetta is accessible by cable car and sits amid spectacular landscape. From the hut, trails lead to panoramic viewpoints, while the hut itself boasts an impressive sun terrace.

Rifugio Montanara

Accessible via lift or a gentle hike, this refuge provides one of the most rewarding viewpoints in the Brenta Dolomites. This one is for travelers seeking spectacular views over Lake Molveno without a strenuous climb.

Tuff Alm

Although it's a stone's throw from Alpe di Siusi, Tuff Alm attracts fewer crowds. It's gorgeous in fall, when the larch trees turn, and the food is a cut above your average rifugio fare, with real care taken over presentation.

Rifugio Tissi

Perched opposite the immense Monte Civetta, this hut involves a longer hike — three and a half hours from the nearest cable car — but the reward is the sense of standing face-to-face with one of the Alps' great wonders.

“

The emerald green Lake Dobbiaco — roughly half the size of Lake Braies — is just as mesmerizing and offers visitors opportunities for boating, picnics and circular walks



some of the Dolomites' more celebrated destinations and retains a nostalgic belle époque feel. Walking trails begin almost in town, while cable cars offer easy access to high meadows and panoramic viewpoints, making this one of the best bases for moderate hikes as well as more demanding climbs.

DOBBIACO

Dobbiaco — or Toblach, as it's known among the German-speaking locals — sits in the upper Pusteria valley, and serves as a great gateway town to the Tre Cime di Lavaredo, perhaps the Dolomites' most iconic peaks. Wide cycling and walking paths connect the town with nearby lakes and valleys, including postcard-perfect Lake Braies. Both the iconic three peaks and the lake are best avoided during peak season, when the crowds are at their worst. But despite being close to these Instagrammable attractions, Dobbiaco manages to remain relatively low key, with an atmosphere that feels relaxed and outdoors-focused.

TIRES

While nearby Alpe di Siusi is one of the most photographed places in the Dolomites, the small village of Tires, tucked around the other side of the Catinaccio massif, offers a quieter alternative. Here, visitors can expect pastures, forest walks and family-run inns.

The surrounding Sciliar-Catinaccio Natural Park offers accessible walking routes with immense views. The village

isn't big, but if you can get a hotel room, it's an excellent choice for a quieter getaway while still enjoying classic Dolomite scenery.

MADONNA DI CAMPIGLIO

Madonna di Campiglio is probably the best place to base yourself if you want to explore the Brenta Dolomites — the westernmost of the nine UNESCO-recognized mountain groups. While the infrastructure for walking, climbing and mountain biking is excellent here, the Brenta Dolomites tend to attract fewer crowds in summer than some of their eastern cousins, and their peaks and passes often feel wilder and more rugged. The town and its surrounding satellite settlements balance old-world charm with modern comforts. In winter, the ski area is a favorite with Milanese second-home owners, and Madonna is home to more than one Michelin-starred restaurant. But not everything is super high end here, and despite its reputation as a fashionable resort, Madonna remains remarkably accessible — offering spectacular scenery without requiring strenuous effort.

HISTORY & HERITAGE

While they're now synonymous with Italy, the Dolomites have not always been Italian. For more than 500 years, this area was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and Austria's influence is still visible in the region's onion-domed churches, hearty cuisine, accordion-powered folk music and lederhosen-like traditional dress — particularly in the autonomous province

Clockwise from top: Rifugio Tuckett, a flag bearer in the Province of Bolzano/Bozen; Madonna di Campiglio
Previous pages: Lake Dobbiaco in South Tyrol





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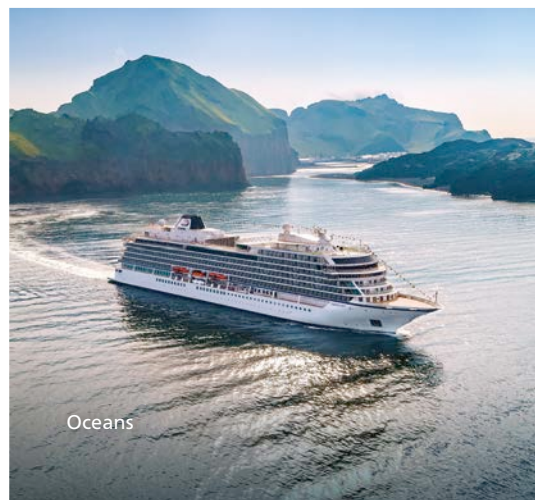
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of Alto Adige (or Südtirol, as the locals call it) where German is still widely spoken. If the region's history is reflected in its language, it's also written into the rock. Walk the streets of Trento, capital of the Trentino autonomous province, to see the fossilized forms of the sea creatures whose shells created the mountains, preserved in the pink Dolomite stone of the pavements.

The Dolomites might be incredibly peaceful today, but this wasn't always the case. During World War I, the conflict which finally ended Austrian rule of the region, pitched battles were fought among these mountains, with soldiers from both sides tunneling into the cliffs and glaciers, laying explosives and setting off avalanches to gain an advantage over the enemy. Today, many of the old fortifications have been turned into museums commemorating the horrors of the White War. But it's not uncommon to see old bullet casings, rusty mess tins or strings of barbed wire on secluded trails to this day.

FOOD & DRINK

Dolomite cuisine reflects the region's cultural crossroads and multi-ethnic history blending Italian, Austrian and Ladin influences into something distinctly Alpine. It majors in hearty mountain fare — cured meats and local cheeses, sausages, venison stews, canederli (dumplings), sauerkraut and the omnipresent polenta are all as typical as Italian classics like pasta or pizza. Mountain huts or rifugi (see page 53), play a key role in the food experience. And if the food occasionally feels Austrian, the attitude toward food is pure Italian. Many walking trails lead to rifugi serving excellent three-, four- or even five-course meals, and lunches become leisurely affairs.

Wine-lovers will find excellent whites from Alto Adige, home of grapes like gewürztraminer, and reds made of teroldego from Trentino. Trentodoc, the region's answer to Prosecco, is increasingly gaining an international reputation, too — Ferrari trentodoc is often sprayed instead of Champagne at Formula One races.

From left: View of the vineyards and the church of Saints Quirico and Giulitta in Termeno commune; a typical charcuterie board in the Dolomites

DOLOMITES



Bikers riding on a mountain ridge in the Dolomites

ADVENTURE

While the sheer cliffs seem built for extreme sports, adventure in the Dolomites doesn't have to involve risk. For many visitors, the joy lies in accessible mountain experiences where the scenery rather than the climb takes your breath away. The infrastructure is excellent, with well-signposted walking trails suited for all abilities, and cable cars allowing hikers to start high rather than beginning every hike from the valley floor.

Cycling paths connect many towns, while e-bikes now make steeper mountain biking more manageable. The Dolomites are also the birthplace of the via ferrata — climbing routes with ladders and fixed cables for safety, offering high altitude climbing without requiring much technical skill.

In winter, skiing remains the region's main draw, with interconnected pistes suitable for intermediate skiers and outstanding mountain panoramas. □

ESSENTIALS

When to go: The Dolomites can get crowded in summer, so the best time to visit is in shoulder seasons — May to June and September to November, when the weather can still be warm enough to hike in just a T-shirt. Some rifugi only open from June to September, but many will open for weekends year-round.

Currency: Euro

Language: Italian is spoken everywhere, German is widely used in Südtirol, and Ladin is spoken in particular valleys. Almost everyone working in tourist-facing jobs speaks English.

Getting around: Trains and buses are excellent in Italy, and the most popular spots are served by public transport. That said, for more independence, it's still worth renting a car.

Did you know? The Dolomites has a few obscure languages — such as Mòcheno, an ancient form of Bavarian spoken by around 2,000 people in three towns of the Fersina Valley, in Trentino.

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IMAGE: GETTY. ILLUSTRATION: LIS WATKINS

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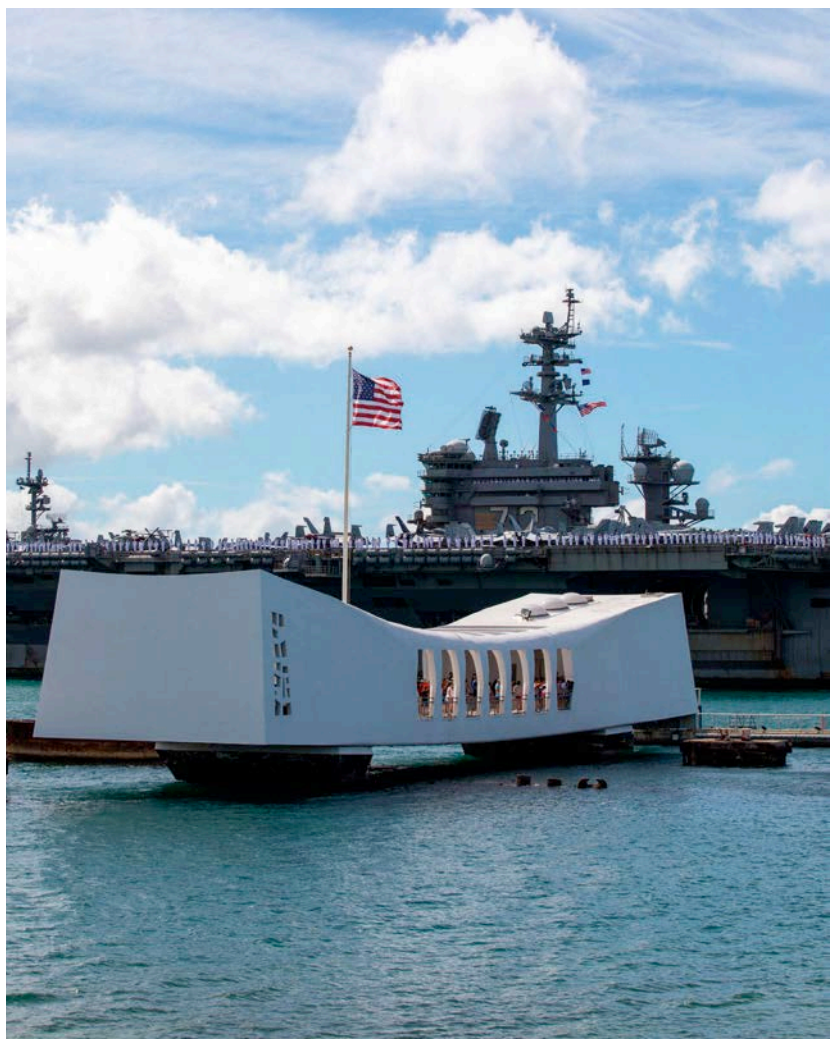
Treasure Islands

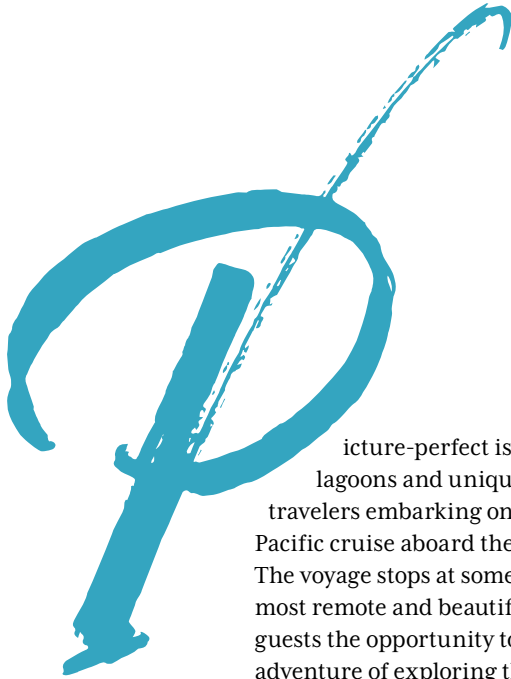
Embark on a journey with Norwegian Cruise Line through the sun-drenched isles of the South Pacific, writes Tiare Tuuhia



IMAGES: NORWEGIAN CRUISE LINE; FOUR SEASONS HOTELS AND RESORTS







Picture-perfect islands, turquoise lagoons and unique cultures await travelers embarking on the 12-day South Pacific cruise aboard the *Norwegian Spirit*. The voyage stops at some of the world's most remote and beautiful islands, giving guests the opportunity to experience the adventure of exploring the natural world, meeting friendly locals or just relaxing on a beach in heavenly surroundings.

The cruise begins in bustling Honolulu on Oahu, where modern city and island life intertwine. From Honolulu, the ship makes stops in Kauai and the Big Island of Hawaii, each renowned for their beautiful landscapes — think lush rainforests, majestic waterfalls and active volcanoes.

The route then continues south for a few days at sea — this is the perfect opportunity to spot migrating humpback whales or dolphins swimming beside the ship. Sailing into French Polynesian waters, the next stopover is glamorous Bora Bora — island luxury and wild beauty at its best. From here, the *Norwegian Spirit* heads to Moorea with its azure lagoon, then ends in Tahiti's sunny capital, Papeete.

Honolulu, Oahu

Board the *Norwegian Spirit* in Honolulu, Hawaii's buzzing capital city. A full night and day to explore is just enough time to experience the best the city has to offer.

It's the sort of place where guests can go surfing in the morning, eat at a fine-dining restaurant at lunch, shop till they drop in the afternoon and hike up to a volcanic crater at sunset.

The city's stunning natural surrounds are one of its best features. Honolulu, meaning 'sheltered bay' in Hawaiian, is flanked by the iconic Waikiki Beach on one side and protected by the magnificent Koolau mountain range on the other. To the southeast of the city looms Diamond Head, a volcanic crater and popular hiking spot with panoramic views over Honolulu.

Waikiki's long, gentle waves make this the ideal spot to learn to surf or try outrigger canoeing. If that's not your thing, sunbathing on the beach or sipping drinks at one of the hotels is the perfect way to relax into your vacation.

History buffs will love exploring Honolulu's fascinating historical sites, such as Pearl Harbor National Memorial, which includes the poignant *USS Arizona* Memorial and Pearl Harbor Aviation Museum. In downtown Honolulu, the opulent Iolani Palace stands out for its unique European-inspired Hawaiian architecture. It's also the only royal palace in the U.S. and was home to Hawaii's last monarch, Queen Liliuokalani. It's possible to tour the fully restored palace with a guide or self-guided audio.

Clockwise from top:

Aerial view of Diamond Head Crater with Honolulu cityscape in the distance; *USS Arizona* Memorial; 'Surfer on a Wave' sculpture, Queens Beach, Honolulu

Previous pages:

Norwegian Spirit out at sea; the *Four Seasons Bora Bora* from above

Nawiliwili, Kauai

Kauai, known as the ‘Garden Isle’, has perhaps the most spectacular natural environment in the Hawaiian chain. From the rugged Na Pali coastline with its towering cliffs and waterfalls, to lush valleys, rainforests, untouched beaches and red dirt canyons, it’s an awe-inspiring place.

The *Norwegian Spirit* docks in Nawiliwili, a sleepy isle where only 3% of the land is developed. From the cruise terminal, it’s a 10-15 minute walk to Kalapaki Beach, a beautiful stretch of sand with calm waters. The dock is also conveniently close to shops and restaurants.

For a bit of sightseeing, take a tour or drive to the Waimea Canyon, the ‘Grand Canyon of the Pacific’ or cruise down the magical Wailua River. The Wailua winds past ancient Hawaiian heiau (temples),

verdant jungle and waterfalls. One of the best stops on the river is the Fern Grotto, a massive cave dripping in tropical foliage.

The stunning Na Pali Coast, northwest of the island, is best appreciated from the air or on the water. A scenic flight over Kauai and Na Pali often ends up being the favorite part of the trip for guests. Seeing the jagged emerald cliffs from the water is no less breathtaking – tour providers offer everything from luxury catamarans to snorkeling trips along the coastline.

Kauai also hosts some of the Hawaii’s best luaus (a traditional Hawaiian celebration). Experience the beauty of Hawaiian culture with authentic food, as well as song and dance performances. The Smith Family Garden Luau and Luau Kalamaku are both well worth your time.

Clockwise from right: Aerial view of the Na Pali Coast on Kauai island, Hawaii; Magnum’s Champagne & Wine Bar on board the *Norwegian Spirit*



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At sea

Day 10

Bora Bora, French Polynesia

Day 11

Raiatea, French Polynesia

Day 12

Moorea, French Polynesia





“

Queen’s Bath — an ocean pool on the north shore of Kauai — is one of the most beautiful sights on Hawaii’s fourth-largest island. It’s strongly recommended to visit only during summer months, when the waves are calm and the paths less slippery

Kona, Hawaii

The Hawaiian archipelago's biggest island, Hawaii, known simply as the 'Big Island', is also the youngest in geological terms. It's home to four active volcanoes, with Kilauea still erupting regularly. Visit Hawaii Volcanoes National Park to learn more and walk across the otherworldly landscape created by cooled black lava.

The region's volcanic soil provides the perfect environment for growing Kona coffee beans, known for their compelling flavor profile. Many coffee farms, which offer tours and coffee tastings, are located on the western slopes of Mauna Loa and Hualalai volcanoes. For a kid-friendly alternative, check out the cacao farms near Kona – a few offer tours and chocolate tastings as well.

Coffee aside, Kealahou Bay, located just 30 minutes' drive south of Kona, offers crystalline waters and spectacular snorkeling opportunities. The vibrant reef is home to a wide array of marine life including green sea turtles and schools of colorful reef fish. The Bay is also known as the site where infamous explorer Captain Cook died at the hands of the Native Hawaiians in 1779.

For more of a glimpse into Hawaiian history and culture, head to Puuhonua o Honaunau National Historical Park. This wonderful open-air park showcases ancient royal grounds, fishponds and heiau built of lava rock. In ancient times, the site was also a place of refuge, where wrongdoers could go to seek absolution.



Clockwise from top left: *Wooden carvings of Hawaiian gods at Puuhonua o Honaunau National Historical Park on the Big Island; a snorkeling excursion in the shallow waters of the Bora Bora lagoon; overwater suites at Four Seasons Bora Bora; The Thermal Suite on board the Norwegian Spirit*

Previous pages: *Queen's Bath in Kauai, Hawaii*

“

HEAD OUT ONTO THE LAGOON BY BOAT OR PADDLEBOARD FOR BEAUTIFUL VIEWS OF THE ISLAND AND A CLOSER LOOK AT THE COLORFUL REEF AND ITS SCHOOLS OF TROPICAL FISH

Bora Bora, French Polynesia

Bora Bora — the name alone conjures up images of honeymoon heaven, with overwater bungalows overlooking a sapphire lagoon and swaying palms on pristine beaches. Locals here are mostly Polynesian but many have Chinese, European and American ancestry — a legacy left by colonization, labor migration and the islands' former U.S. military base. Bora Borans are immensely proud of their culture and heritage; and, like most Polynesians, very welcoming to visitors.

Head out onto the lagoon by boat or paddleboard for beautiful views of the island and a closer look at the colorful reef and its schools of tropical fish.

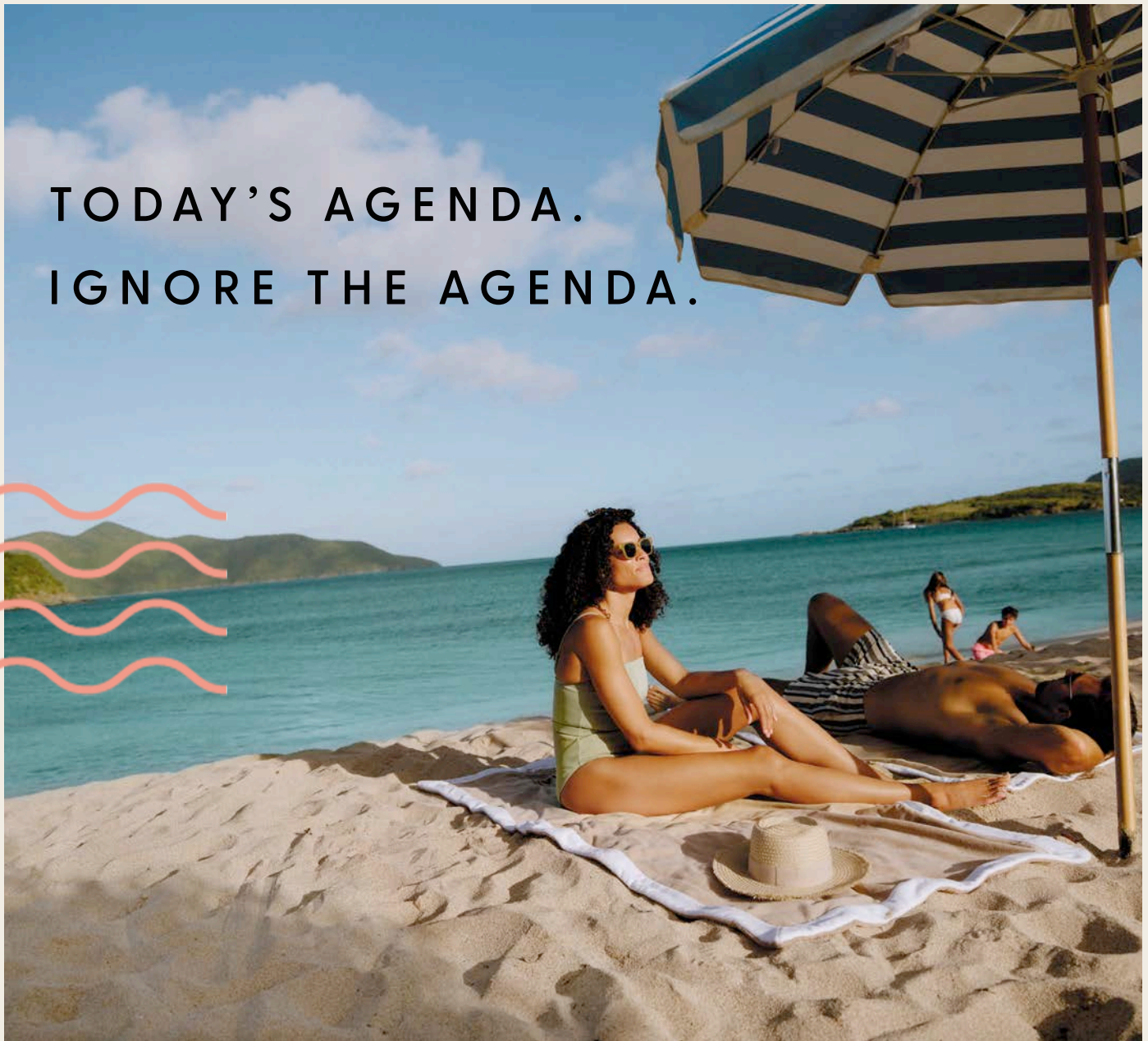
Divers here will be rewarded with an array of marine life including eagle rays, manta rays and sharks in balmy waters. Between August and November, look out for majestic humpback whales — this is when these gentle giants travel through the islands as part of their annual migration.

In Vaitape, the island's main town, shop around for black pearls and handicrafts, or simply sample local food while people-watching. Alternatively, rent a scooter and zip around the island taking in the sights. A stop at Matira Beach, to admire the immaculate white sand and turquoise water, is a must.



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Raiatea, French Polynesia

Raiatea is known as the ‘Sacred Island’. This is the spiritual heartland of French Polynesia, the first island in the archipelago to be settled and the location of the Taputapuatea marae (temple). In pre-colonial times, this was a gathering place and religious center for islanders from across the Pacific, including Hawaii, New Zealand and the Cook Islands. Visiting the 1,000-year-old marae today can be a powerful experience – the Taputapuatea area includes multiple stone structures and tiki, and is best visited with a local guide for deeper understanding.

Despite its spiritual importance and status as the second biggest of the Society Islands – French Polynesia’s central chain – Raiatea feels laid-back. Traffic is light outside Uturoa, the main town, and the island itself is like a giant tropical garden, complete with waterfalls and towering peaks. Its only river, the Faaroa, is unique – the one navigable river in all of French Polynesia. Take a paddleboard or kayak tour and marvel at the vibrant surrounds.

Raiatea is also a hiker’s paradise. The Mount Temehani hike, though long and difficult, is the most famous. Temehani Plateau, reaching above 3,000 feet, is home to around 30 endemic plants that grow nowhere else in the world. These include a remarkable white flower, known as the tiare apetahi, which has become an emblem of the island.

Off-island, Raiatea has an impressive lagoon which shelters both Raiatea and the neighboring island of Tahaa. The lagoon offers some incredible scuba diving opportunities with clear waters and an abundance of marine life. The *Nordby* Shipwreck dive and the Teavapiti Pass drift dive are some of the best.



From top: Dancers during Heiva dance festival in Raiatea, French Polynesia; hikers in Raiatea



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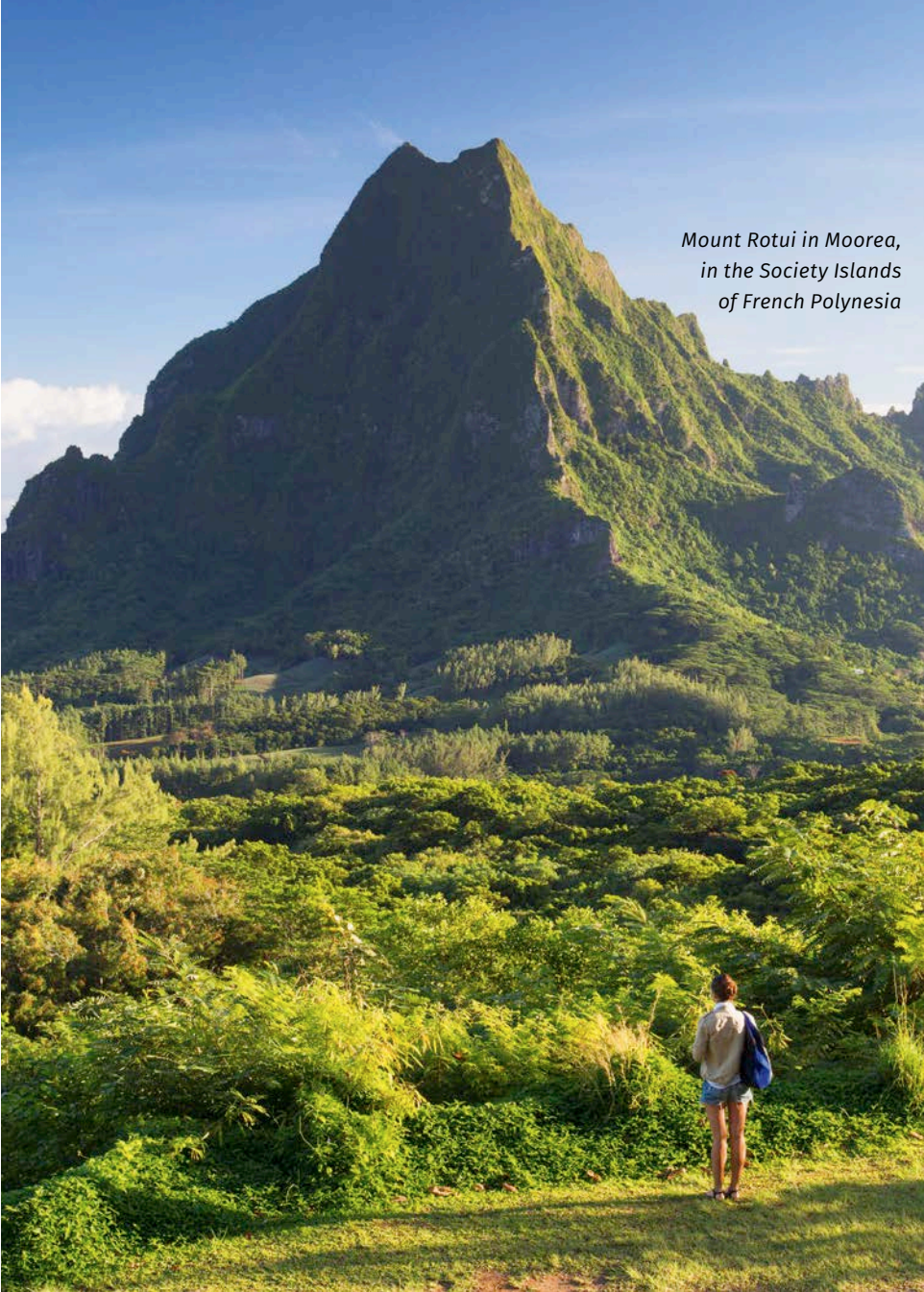
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Mount Rotui in Moorea,
in the Society Islands
of French Polynesia

Moorea, French Polynesia

Moorea feels like a scene from a pop-up fairytale, thanks to the island's jagged green peaks, palm-lined beaches and cerulean lagoon. Located just 45 minutes by ferry from Tahiti, Moorea is known locally as Tahiti's 'sister island' and is a popular vacation spot for locals and tourists alike.

Head out onto the island's lagoon for an unforgettable day on the water. Snorkel with blacktip sharks and rays on the sandbank on Moorea's northwest side. Continue west to Motu Tiahura and Motu Fareone — two tiny sand islets in the middle of the lagoon — for one of the island's most beautiful spots. The easiest way to get around on the lagoon is by

boat; it's possible to hire one, though boat tours — which usually include a barbecue lunch — are a popular option. Jet ski tours are another fun way to experience the lagoon.

On land, Moorea is just as breathtaking. For a lazy day, try Temae Beach for white sand, coconut palms and snorkeling with a view of Tahiti. Inland, the fertile Opunohu Valley is just as impressive as the lagoon. Drive or bike through pineapple fields, mape (Polynesian chestnut) forests and important archaeological sites, then take in some of Moorea's best panoramic views at the Belvedere lookout, from which Moorea's two great bays are visible.



TOP THREE ANIMALS TO SPOT:

1 Green sea turtle

Considered sacred in Polynesian cultures, green sea turtles are traditionally associated with wisdom, good luck and longevity. They can be seen swimming gracefully through the shallow waters and reefs along the coasts of South Pacific islands; or if you're lucky, you might spot one resting on the beach.

2 Humpback whale

Watching a giant humpback whale diving, playing or spouting is an unforgettable experience. Spot these majestic creatures between November and April around Hawaii, and from July to November in French Polynesia, on their annual migrations through the Pacific. Lookout for the telltale 'blows' on the water, when the whales surface to exhale.

3 Great frigatebird

The great frigatebird's instantly recognizable forked tail, black body and giant wingspan (up to six feet) make it easy to spot in Pacific skies (often close to shorelines). These birds are fun to watch while hunting, as they steal prey from smaller birds by chasing them until they drop their catch. Males have bright-red throats that they can inflate like a balloon to attract a mate.



Yachts in harbor in Papeete, Tahiti

ESSENTIALS

When to go: May through October are best for sunny, clear skies. November to April is the wet season, so come prepared for varying levels of rain depending on where in the islands you are.

Currency: U.S. dollar in Hawaii; French Pacific francs in French Polynesia.

Language: English and Hawaiian in Hawaii. French and Tahitian in French Polynesia.

Getting around: The easiest way to get around in the islands is often to book a boat or land tour; public transport tends to be scarce and unreliable, and taxis are first come, first served.

Fun fact: On the islands, wearing a flower behind your right ear means you're single; left side means you're taken.

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Papeete (Tahiti) French Polynesia

The *Norwegian Spirit* makes its final stop in Papeete, French Polynesia's bustling capital. On an average weekday, Papeete is a hive of activity, with women shopping in brightly colored dresses and groups of Tahitian ukulele players singing on street corners. While the city can be hot and dusty, it's the best place to experience local life. Wander around Papeete market for souvenirs and snacks, explore wonderful street art or walk along the waterfront watching the ferries and vaa (double-hulled canoes) go by.

Outside Papeete, adventurers will love exploring Papenoo Valley in Tahiti's interior. Largely uninhabited, the lush, green valley is dotted with gushing waterfalls and ancient stone marae. At the far end of the island, tiny Teahupo'o is renowned for its reef break, and was the surf site during the Paris 2024 Olympic Games. From May to August, hop on a taxi boat past the reef to see some of the world's most powerful waves up close during prime surfing season. □



IMAGE: AWL IMAGES; ILLUSTRATION: LIS WATKINS



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CITY GUIDE

CASABLANCA

Facing the Atlantic, Casablanca — known to locals as ‘Casa’ — is Morocco’s largest and most modern metropolis, a place where industry and creativity flourish side by side, says Sarah Gilbert

Over its long history, Casablanca has been in a constant state of reinvention — home to a mix of Amazigh (Berber), Arab, African and European influences. The winding, whitewashed alleys of the compact old medina — where the souks are still more for locals than visitors — shed light on its once-diverse population, exemplified by a synagogue, a church and a mosque all located within touching distance.

What Casablanca lacks in ancient sights, it makes up for in striking 20th-century architecture, where geometric neoclassical edifices rub shoulders with ornate neo-Moorish facades, symmetrical art deco structures and sleek modernist towers. And its groundbreaking architectural projects continue apace.

It’s also home to some of Morocco’s best restaurants, with a new generation of chefs taking the country’s abundance of fresh produce and creating a fine-dining fusion that caters to international taste buds, while a well-heeled crowd sips creative cocktails overlooking the Atlantic rollers.

Beyond the urban sprawl lies a sensational shoreline. On weekends, the waterfront walkway from the magnificent Hassan II Mosque to the historic El Hank lighthouse is packed with promenading families and love-struck couples. You can even learn to surf in the novice-friendly waves.

As for transport, Africa’s first high-speed train links the city to Morocco’s capital, Rabat, and bohemian Tangier. And, as the country gears up to co-host the 2030 FIFA World Cup alongside Spain and Portugal, there’ll also be a fast track to Marrakech.

CASABLANCA

Clockwise from top left: Interior arches and mosaic tile work inside Hassan II Mosque; Dar Dada restaurant in the old medina; Cinema Rialto, an example of French colonial architecture; the colorful detailing of the Hassan II Mosque; a traditional Moroccan market selling souvenir bowls; tea is an important part of Moroccan culture

Previous pages: Front view of the Hassan II Mosque and its 689-foot minaret

CULTURE

Casablanca's most iconic landmark is the Hassan II Mosque, with its 689-foot-high minaret — the world's second-tallest — towering above the skyline. The site partly juts out over the ocean, following a Quranic verse that states: 'the throne of God was upon the water.' This opulent mosque holds up to 25,000 worshippers inside and a farther 80,000 in the vast courtyard.

It's a masterclass in Moroccan craftsmanship that took six years, around 6,000 master artisans and thousands more workers to build, from the hand-carved cedarwood ceiling and lace-like stucco to the colossal titanium and brass doors. The only Moroccan mosque open to non-Muslims, it offers guided tours outside prayer times; you can also visit with a private guide.

Downtown Casablanca has a rich 20th-century architectural heritage, and a good place to start is buzzy Place Mohammed V. The Wilaya (local government building) dominates the south side, its gothic and Islamic echoes topped by a modernist clock tower, while the Palais de Justice embodies neo-Moorish style. To the north, La Poste Centrale is resplendent in art nouveau-style mosaics, while the Bank Al-Maghrib is wrapped in carved stucco.

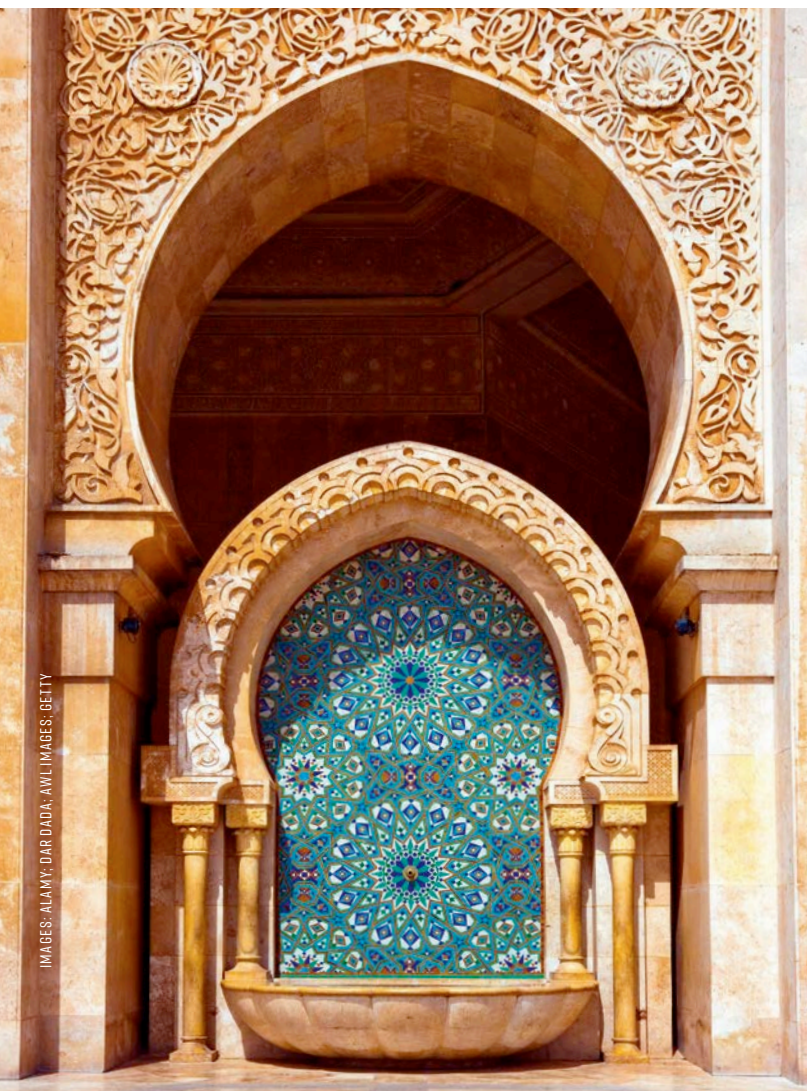
To the west is the dazzlingly white, ultra-contemporary Casablanca Grand Theater, which will be one of Africa's largest theaters when it opens. For more imposing edifices, stroll along Boulevard Mohammed V, dubbed the 'Moroccan Champs-Élysées', or take a tour with an architect from Casamémoire, an organization dedicated to preserving the city's architectural legacy.

Other architectural gems have been reborn as museums and galleries, including the neo-Moorish Villa Carl Ficke, built in 1913 for a German entrepreneur, which is now the Casablanca Memory Museum, and the Villa des Arts, set in a stunning 1930s villa, which holds regular art exhibitions, workshops and events. The delightful Abderrahman Slaoui Foundation Museum is tucked into an art deco townhouse, with Orientalist travel posters, ornate Amazigh jewelry and exquisite perfume bottles among the Moroccan decorative arts on display. And the city is also home to the Museum of Moroccan Judaism, the only museum in the Arab world dedicated to Jewish history and culture.

Casa's contemporary arts scene is booming, with independent galleries such as L'Atelier 21, La Galerie 38 and Loft Art Gallery showcasing established and emerging local artists. You'll find art on the streets, too, with organizations such as Sbagha Bagha and Casamouja inviting Moroccan and international artists to paint monumental murals on the city walls. Take a street art tour with Alouane Bladi, a non-profit that creates programs for artists and schoolkids.

The city also has a jam-packed festival calendar. In July, Anfa Park south of the center plays host to Jazzablanca, with 10 days of concerts by well-known and up-and-coming artists from Morocco and around the globe. While jazz remains at its heart, everything from funk to fusion features on the line-up. In the same month, the Alif Festival showcases modern Arabic music, while in September, L'Boulevard puts the spotlight on urban music.





IMAGES: ALAMY, DAR DADA, AWE IMAGES, BETTY

HISTORY

Around the seventh century BCE, a small Amazigh trading port was established in the now-exclusive seaside suburb of Anfa. It was utilized by the Phoenicians and the Romans, and by the early 15th century, it had become a safe haven for pirates. They became such a threat that the Portuguese sent ships to destroy the port in 1468, returning in 1515 to rebuild it, erecting fortifications and naming it Casa Branca ('White House', translated into Arabic as Ad-Dar al-Bayda).

The Portuguese abandoned the colony in 1755 after much of it was destroyed by the devastating Lisbon earthquake, and it wasn't until around 1770 that the whitewashed medina was reconstructed by the Alaouite sultan Muhammad ben Abdallah — making it the newest major city in the country.

By the mid-1800s, a booming Europe turned to Morocco for supplies of wool and grain, and merchants flocked back to the city. The Spanish renamed it Casablanca, and by the beginning of the 20th century, the French had secured permission to build an artificial harbor.

Increased trade brought prosperity to the region, but influence from and interference by the Europeans — particularly the French — also caused resentment. When violence erupted, the French sent in troops and took Casablanca in 1907. By 1912, Morocco was a French-controlled protectorate with Casablanca as its main port.

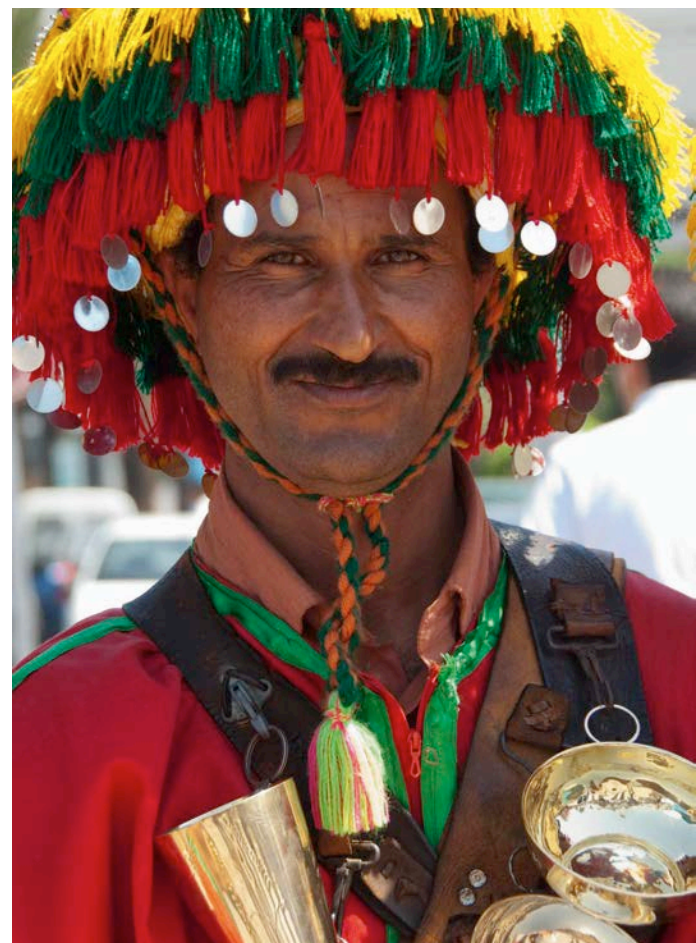
The first resident-general, Hubert Lyautey, hired French architect and urban planner Henri Prost to redesign Casablanca as the protectorate's economic hub and jewel of the French colonies. In turn, Prost enlisted the help of some of Europe's top architects and his wide boulevards and modern urban planning still survive, as does most of its showstopping architecture.

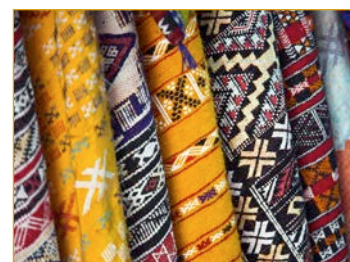
The Quartier Habous, or new medina, was built between 1917 and 1926 as a solution to a housing crisis; it's a mix of traditional Moroccan architecture and a European aesthetic, with wide streets and covered arcades. After independence in 1956, Casablanca began its evolution from a French outpost into Morocco's economic, industrial and financial center, spreading far beyond Lyautey's grand scheme.

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After independence in 1956, Casablanca began its evolution from a French outpost into Morocco's economic, industrial and financial center

Clockwise from right: A view over the medina toward the Hassan II Mosque; carpets for sale in the Quartier Habous; a water-carrier in traditional attire; Arab League Park





BEST OF THE REST: MOROCCAN SOUVENIRS

Carpets

Rugs have been woven in Morocco for millennia, from flat-weave kilims to fine hand-knotted Rabati carpets and shaggy Berber rugs. They're sold everywhere, from city souks to high-end boutiques and rural cooperatives.

Textiles

Weaving is a centuries-old local art form. Shop for scarves, shawls, throws and hammam towels, as well as hand-embroidered table linens and kaftans. Moroccan designers are putting contemporary spins on age-old techniques and, with enough time, you can even commission a unique handwoven fabric.

Leather goods

Fine Moroccan leather is sought after worldwide, and you can buy it in the form of bags, belts and embroidered pouffes. And babouches (traditional slippers) come in myriad colors and make perfect souvenirs. Leather and jackets can be made to order.

Spices

In the souks, cupboard-sized stores overflow with pyramids of colorful, aromatic spices. To create a tasty tajine back home, ask for ras el hanout, a bespoke blend of classic spices such as cardamom, cinnamon, cumin and turmeric.

SHOPPING

While Casablanca doesn't have Marrakech's profusion of shopping options, there's no shortage of things to buy in the souks of Quartier Habous. This is where you'll find everything from silver jewelry and shaggy rugs to beaten brass, carved wood and handcrafted ceramics. The olive market is the place to stock up on olives of every size and hue, as well as olive oil, spices, saffron, argan oil and honey.

Casablanca's main shopping area is in Maarif, just south of Boulevard Mohammed Zerktouni. The food market is popular with locals for its fruit and vegetables, spices and olives, as well as fresh flowers and argan products. And there's all manner of small stores devoted to everything from artisan chocolate to handcrafted ceramics.

Search out more independent boutiques to the west of here in the suburb of Anfa,

where stylish concept store Maison H goes local with statement homewares and handcrafted candles, perfumes and beauty products. Or Zyne, which stocks eco-conscious rattan and velvet shoes handmade by women's cooperatives. Take a coffee break at the branch of Paul on Boulevard d'Anfa, set in the striking Villa Suissa, built in the 1940s by French-Moroccan architect Jean-François Zevaco.

For one-stop shopping, Anfa Place Mall on the Boulevard de la Corniche has a selection of international and Moroccan fashion brands, and stores selling books and beauty products, as well as a Carrefour supermarket where you can pick up Moroccan wine. Farther south along the coast, the expansive Morocco Mall — the largest in all of Africa — is home to around 350 stores, including luxe brands such as Dior, Givenchy and Louis Vuitton.



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FOOD & DRINK

Moroccan cuisine makes good use of spices and sweet-and-savory flavor combinations in quintessential dishes such as tagines, couscous and pastillas. In the old medina, Dar Dada is a beautifully restored riad-turned-restaurant with intricate plasterwork and gleaming zellige tiles, serving tagines with a contemporary twist.

The country's long coastline guarantees a steady supply of fresh fish. At the Central Market, stalls are piled high with calamari, shrimp and monkfish. Plump oysters from Dakhla can be shucked on the spot, and locals have their purchases grilled or fried at one of the market's no-frills cafes, served with just-baked bread and a simple salad.

Near El Hank lighthouse, Le Cabestan is a chic spot with spectacular ocean views and a Mediterranean-inspired menu. Opt for a platter of grilled seafood, perhaps, or salt-crusted sea bass, paired with a creative cocktail. Book ahead for a sunset-view seat.

For Moroccan fine dining, step into Le Jasmine in the Hotel Le Doge, with its stained-glass ceiling and red-velvet banquettes. Or La Grande Table Marocaine on the 23rd floor of the Royal Mansour Casablanca, where dishes such as pigeon pastilla, Oualidia lobster and melt-in-the-mouth lamb come with stellar city views.

For fabulous fusion food, head to Table III — awarded Best Restaurant in Morocco 2026 by 50 Best — where chef Fayçal Bettioui artfully blends Moroccan ingredients, French methods and Japanese flavors.

To satisfy your sweet tooth, head to Pâtisserie Bennis Habous and look out for almond-flavored ghriba (macaroons) and cornes de gazelle, stuffed with almond paste and laced with orange-blossom water.

And while the national drink may be mint tea, Morocco also has a long history of wine production; it's known for full-bodied reds and one-of-a-kind gris (a pale rosé). Award-winning Domaine Ouled Thaleb is around an hour's drive from Casablanca.

From top: The chef at work at Table III; inside Dar Dada restaurant



Le Rooftop at Royal Mansour Casablanca

ESSENTIALS

When to go: Casablanca is a year-round destination, but spring (March to May) and fall (September to November) see milder weather and fewer visitors.

Currency: Moroccan dirham

Languages: Arabic (Darija is the Moroccan vernacular), Amazigh and French; English is widely spoken in tourist areas, and Spanish is spoken in the north.

Getting around: Downtown and Quartier Habous are easily explored on foot. Red, metered petits taxis are inexpensive and plentiful, and there's also a growing tramway network.

Did you know? Al Boraq, Morocco's high-speed train, can whizz you between Casablanca, Rabat and Tangier in just over two hours.

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Guests in our Distinctive Voyages program can explore Casablanca at their own pace with a complimentary private vehicle, driver and English-speaking guide. As an additional benefit, guests on board Silversea Cruises' *Silver Nova* for a nine-day Barcelona-to- Lisbon sailing (via Casablanca) get an In-Suite Caviar & Champagne Experience — all courtesy of our agency. Departs Barcelona, Spain, on November 30, 2026.

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TO CASABLANCA

NIGHTLIFE

The city's namesake film may have been shot in a Hollywood studio, but the art deco interiors, fez-clad bartenders and tinkling piano at Rick's Café bring that famed gin joint to life. It's where you can enjoy cocktails and classic dishes — including Champagne oysters and succulent steaks — as well as live jazz performances.

For spectacular sundowners, head to Le Rooftop at the Royal Mansour Casablanca, where you can dine alfresco on Middle Eastern and Mediterranean-inspired fare — including seafood shawarma or Persian risotto — and drink in the views over a creative cocktail. Or head to the hotel's seductively lit Le Bar for a nightcap amid the echoes of 1950s glamour.

Lounge bars and clubs along the Corniche attract a younger audience, but after dark, the bar area of Le Cabestan draws a sophisticated crowd to drink, dance and gossip as the DJ spins until the early hours. □

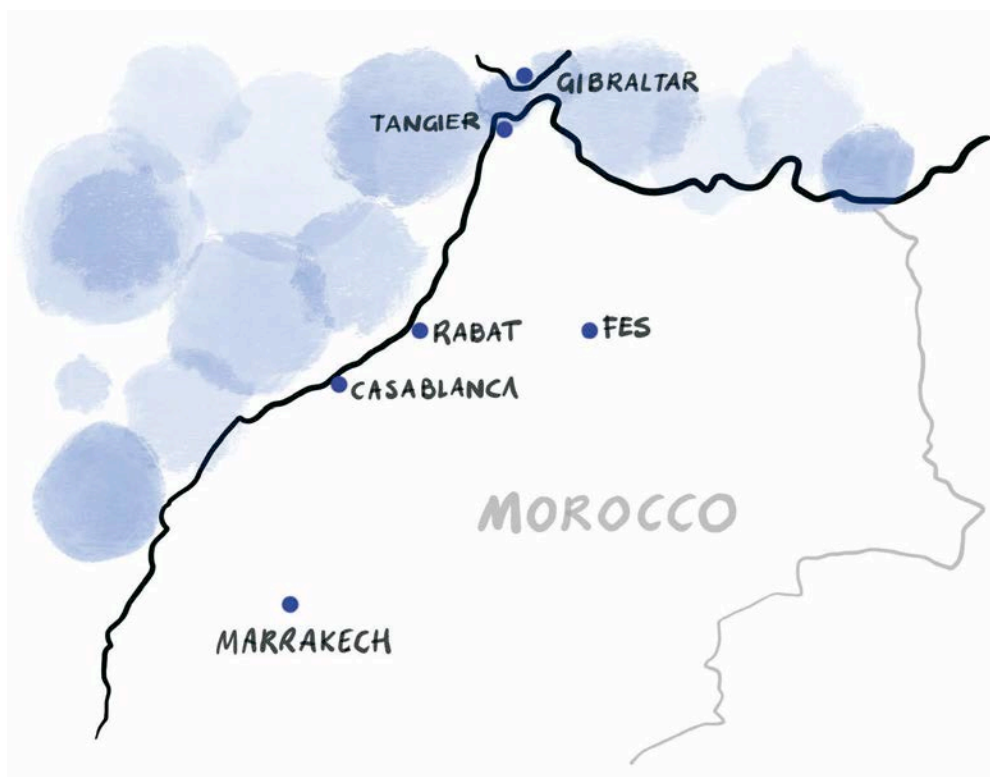


IMAGE: ROYAL MANSOUR COLLECTION - ILLUSTRATION: LIS WATKINS

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THE LOOK OF CASABLANCA

From a wool dinner jacket to an elegant jacquard scarf, these are our favorite travel essentials inspired by the 1942 classic movie

1 Loewe Frayed Wool and Silk-Blend Jacquard Scarf

Elevate simple outfits with this jacquard scarf adorned with intricate motifs. It offers a lightweight feel and is finished with lightly frayed edges and a tan leather tab. \$750, net-a-porter.com

3



5



6



4



2 Charles Tyrwhitt Dinnerwear Jacket

Tailored in rich wool with a slim silhouette, this ivory dinner jacket features classic grosgrain welt pockets, single-breasted fastening and four-button working cuffs. It's ideal for black-tie events. \$449, nordstrom.com

3 Bridgeport Double-Breasted Trench Coat

A water-resistant cotton blend and removable liner help regulate warmth in this double-breasted trench coat. Notched lapels, button-tab cuffs, front welt pockets and a tie belt complete the classic design. \$495, nordstrom.com

4 Turnbull & Asser Velvet Bow Tie

This fully adjustable, self-tie bow tie is hand-sewn in England and an essential for formal occasions. It's made from 100% cotton velvet, lined with silk woven in Suffolk and available in four colors. \$245, turnbullandasser.co.uk

5 Borsalino for Atica Alessandria 214 Fedora

Handcrafted from 100% fur felt, this classic fedora delivers luxury and timeless style in equal measure. Its sleek black finish is complemented by a smooth ribbon. \$340, borsalinoforatica.com

6 Vivien of Holloway White Duchess Dress

Step back in time with the 1950s-inspired Grace dress. A flattering wrap bodice, full-circle skirt and V-shaped back create a feminine silhouette, while duchess satin lends subtle shimmer. \$304, vivienofholloway.com

PERFUMES INSPIRED BY MOROCCO

Aesop Marrakech Intense Eau de Parfum

This bold, spice-laden fragrance blends clove and cardamom with warm sandalwood, softened by jasmine and neroli. \$200, aesop.com



Tauer L'Air du Desert Marocain

Cedar and vetiver combine with coriander and cumin in this evocative scent that captures the essence of a Moroccan desert night. \$169, tauerperfumes.com



Makaan Casablanca Mon Amour

Inspired by the vibrant energy of Casablanca, this alluring scent blends rich sandalwood with soft violet. \$108, makaanfragrances.com





FLAMINGO LAKE, KENYA

Algal blooms stain the water green and turn thousands of flamingos pink at the world's largest permanent desert lake, says Emily Lush

In the far northwest of Kenya's Rift Valley, Lake Turkana unrolls like a vast inland sea, stretching 190 miles from end to end and spilling across the border into Ethiopia. Fed by the Omo River and with nowhere to drain, the lake slowly evaporates under the desert heat — temperatures regularly exceed 100F — concentrating salts and minerals until the water turns strongly alkaline.

Central Island National Park, rising from the middle of the lake, is the remnant of a collapsed volcano. Its craters hold three shallow basins, set like bowls within the caldera. When the conditions are right, tens of thousands of lesser flamingos descend on one of them: Flamingo Lake.

To the Turkana people, the lake is known as Anam Ka'alakol or 'the sea of many fish' — but fish aren't what draws the birds. Flamingos are specialized filter feeders: heads tipped, they sweep their curved bills through the shallows, using comb-like lamellae to strain algae and tiny crustaceans from the water. The pigments in that microscopic soup — cyanobacteria, or blue-green algae that also contributes to the water's electric green glow — accumulate in their feathers and beaks, transforming them into shades of coral. Juveniles born elsewhere arrive here dove gray and only blush pink after months of grazing.

The lake is reached on small wooden fishing boats, their hulls skimming across the opaque surface of what's been nicknamed the Jade Sea. The number of flamingos fluctuates dramatically throughout the year, so for the most reliable sightings, visit between June and September or January and February.

ESSENTIALS

Getting to remote Lake Turkana from Nairobi is a long haul: the journey is roughly 500 miles by road, or can be done via a 90-minute domestic flight to Lodwar, the closest airport. Guided boat crossings to Central Island depart from Kalokol or Eliye Springs. Accommodation options are limited to simple lakeside bungalows and mobile tented camps.

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