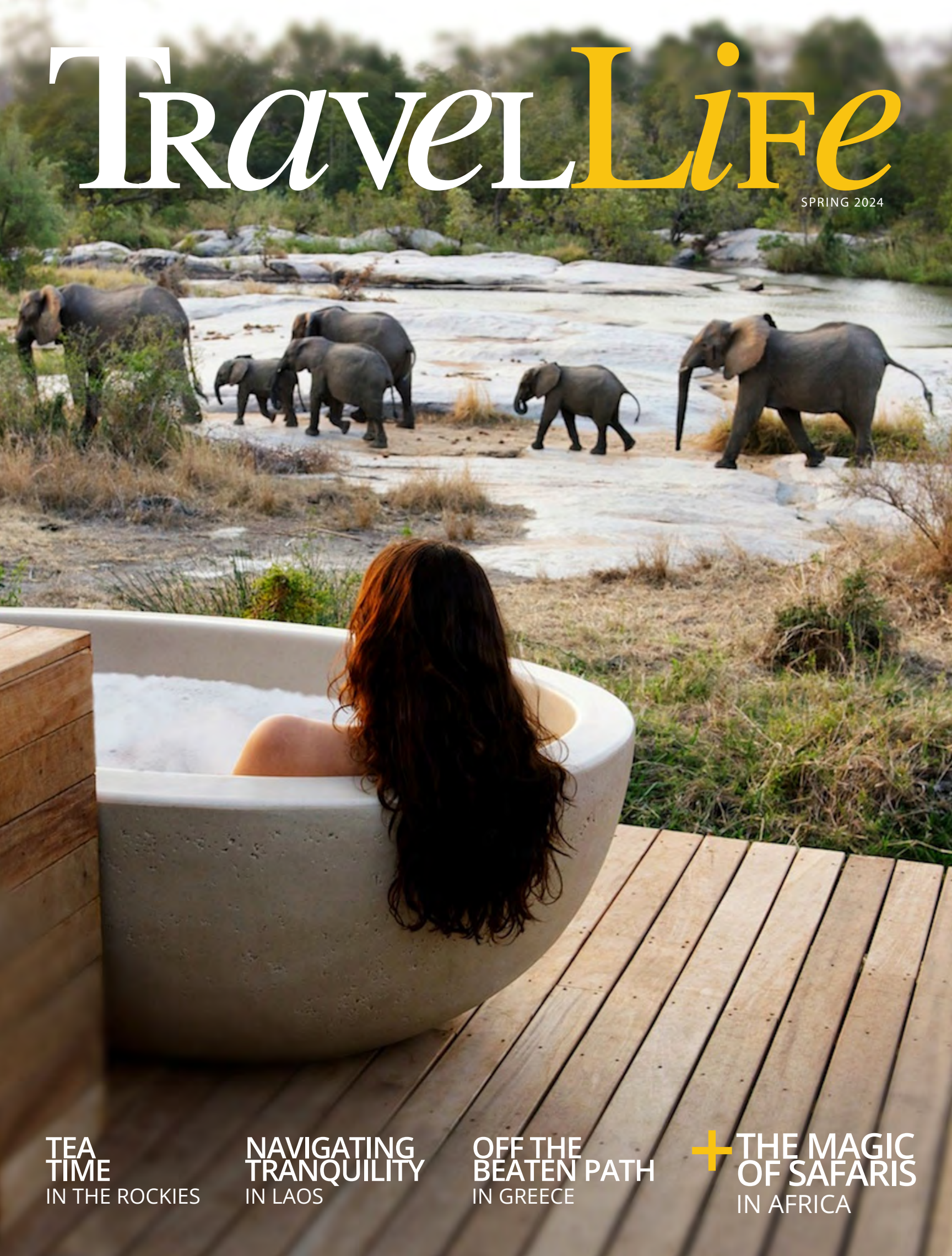


# TravelLife

SPRING 2024



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IN THE ROCKIES

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TRANQUILITY  
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BEATEN PATH  
IN GREECE

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# CONTRIBUTORS

We asked some of our contributors to share their thoughts on the best place to head for a satisfying spring getaway.



## GURDEEP AHLUWALIA

NOT YOUR PARENT'S WINDJAMMER—AND A RESORT GOOD ENOUGH FOR OPRAH, PAGE 24

For a spring getaway, I like Mexico. I want somewhere hot (Toronto still isn't too warm in the spring), easy to get to (short, direct four hour flight), delicious (street tacos in Mexico City or Açaí bowls in Tulum, anyone?) and budget friendly (google 'pesos to CAD'). There's a reason Canadians consistently love Mexico.



## CHARMAINE NORONHA

OH, GIVE ME A HOME WHERE THE BISON ROAM, PAGE 26

My spring escape choice would be Mo'orea in mystical French Polynesia. While it's a bit of a long journey to reach this tropical wonderland, once you land, the dramatic and captivating landscape will reassure you that the journey was worth it. Known for its lush, verdant landscapes, jagged volcanic mountains majestically rising above the sea and golden-hued beaches, it offers breathtaking views and a grounding energy known as mana. If you're not able to visit this spring, look out for my upcoming story on the magical mana that permeates the island!



## JESSICA PADYKULA

A TRANQUIL OASIS IN THE HEART OF PICTON, PAGE 22

Two places that I think are always ideal for a memorable spring escape—especially if you love great food alongside your sightseeing—are New York and Paris. These cities are perpetual go-to destinations for a reason—they consistently deliver a multifaceted experience no matter what type of travel experience you're after, from amazing architecture to gorgeous greenspaces. On a spring visit you'll be avoiding peak season crowds and prices, and we can't forget about the draw of all that amazing food, from street eats to fine dining gems.

# TravelLife



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Greater Kruger National Park  
South Africa  
*Londolozi.com*

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# FRESH, FOCUSED AND FULL OF POTENTIAL

I don't know about you, but when I think about spring and what it means, what often comes to mind is potential. It's a word closely connected to the idea of possibility—something that travel gifts us with. Every flight, every road trip, every new place—they are all examples of potential. Potential for growth, for new connections, for new favourite foods or beaches we can't wait to return to.

That's what this issue is all about; a world where luxury meets wanderlust, and every step is infused with the potential of a new season. For starters, we have a piece on three decadent spas in Palm Springs perfect for a spring (or anytime) reset. Then there's my own experience aboard the new *Celebrity Ascent* where I had the opportunity to indulge in a transformative spa experience that I'm still thinking about.

We also have a look at two distinct luxe resorts in Saint Lucia well worth visiting as well as a visit to Hotel des Grands Voyageurs in Paris where your stay is certain to be steeped in the golden age of travel. I also offer my take on a recent stay at Hotel X in Toronto, with its wealth of amenities that make it a great urban escape.

Active travellers will want to check out one writer's account of a cycling adventure through some of Greece's lesser-known (but must-see) island gems and another



contributor's account of hiking, snorkelling and swimming with majestic whale sharks in western Australia.

Closer to home we have a look at Merrill House in Prince Edward County, a luxury boutique hotel that's also a fine dining restaurant, award-winning wine cellar and a piece of living history. Heading west, don't miss one writer's epic account of witnessing the return of the bison at Saskatchewan's Wanuskewin Heritage Park, a vital aspect of Indigenous cultural history.

Or, if you're heading east, one writer gives us his take on Fox Harb'r, a seaside golf retreat blending simple pleasures with the finer side of life.

For foodies, we have a peek at tonging for oysters in PEI (and enjoying them in their simplicity), a cocktail trail in Banff dedicated to tea-focused libations and a look at a few new and delicious finds perfect for spring (hint: there are adorable Nanaimo bars involved).

Let the allure of spring infuse your travels with a renewed sense of wonder and discovery!

*Tammy Cecco*

TAMMY CECCO  
EDITOR IN CHIEF

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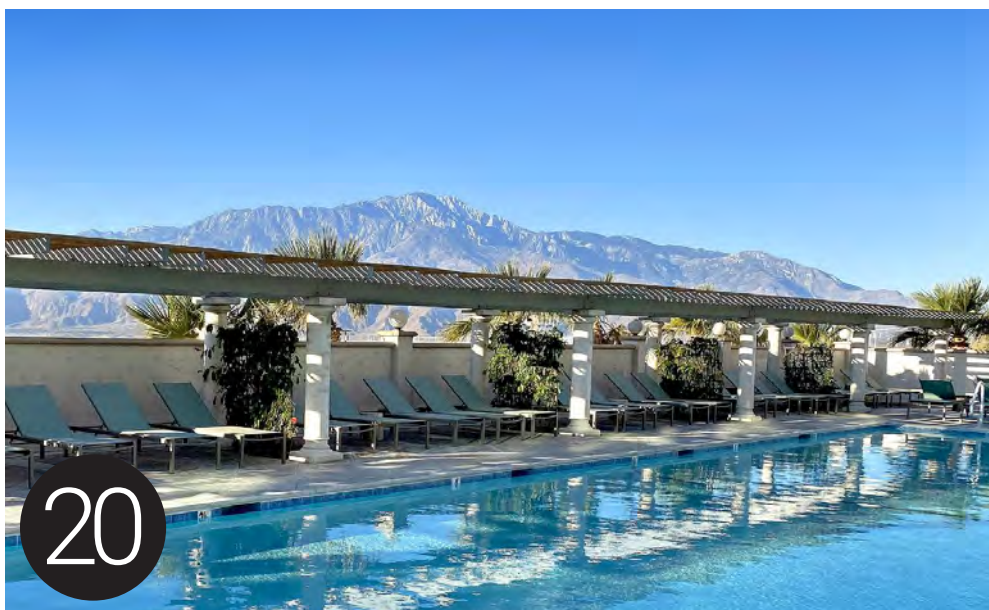
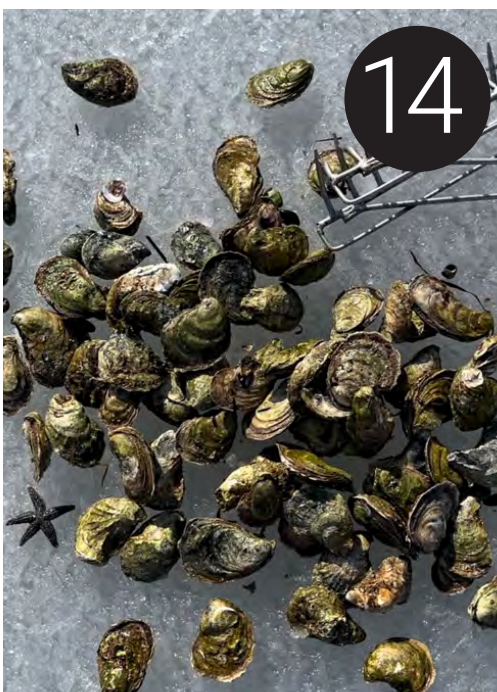


  
THE COLONNADE  
OUTLETS  
AT SAWGRASS MILLS

VALENTINO  
BURBERRY  
MONCLER  
ZIMMERMANN  
CHRISTIAN  
LOUBOUTIN

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# Get Ready For Spring

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# BANI

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# Camp Moonlight *at Whispering Springs*

Camp Moonlight is a very special event at Whispering Springs, Canada's premiere glamping destination. This event creates magical memories for children with physical disabilities and their families. Please join us for an evening at Whispering Spring this fall and learn more about our Camp Moonlight initiative. Come enjoy our beautiful grounds, a delicious gourmet dinner, live music around the campfire and a romantic stay in our luxurious safari tents. All proceeds will go to the Camp Moonlight Giving Fund and our partner charities

*You can help us make a difference*



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## Tips and tricks for staving off the negative effects of crossing time zones in the name of travel

BY MARTHA CHAPMAN

**U**GH. It's back. That woozy, disorienting sensation called jet lag—rearing its head just when I'm supposed to be on my toes, dealing with customs officials, claiming luggage and sorting out where to go next. But all I want is a hot shower, a stiff drink and a good cry.

Jet lag can definitely jeopardize the pleasure of your first couple of days overseas. But is there any way to make it less miserable?

Let's start by looking at where jet lag comes from. We all have body clocks that get disrupted when we cross time zones. In Europe for example, the locals are bright and ready for breakfast when Canadians are still sound asleep in their beds. When people are knocking off work in Hong Kong, it's already 2 a.m. in Vancouver. Add a little sleep deprivation plus culture shock into the mix, and you have the perfect recipe for an unpleasant situation.

Luckily, there are several coping strategies, including some tips from world-travelling Canadians.

Entrepreneur Adam Schachter of home accessory company The FHE Group travels long-haul at least twice a month (often to Asia), sometimes for as little as two days at a time. His game plan for the flight is donning "fancy jogging pants" and a sweatshirt and avoiding heavy foods for optimal in-flight comfort. Some travellers swear by cloth eyeshades, available at any travel accessory store, and a hoodie to keep light out; while an inflatable neck pillow will keep your head upright as you doze.

Drink lots of water to counteract the dry in-flight air and avoid alcohol, tea or coffee. These are considered diuretics, just the opposite of what you want if you're trying to offset the discomfort of jet lag. Try to keep moving: if you can't walk up and down the plane's aisles, keep your circulation going while in your seat with shoulder rolls, ankle circles and raising alternate knees to your chest.

And on arrival? Peterborough, Ontario-based travel writer Tim Johnson ([timjohnsontravels.com](http://timjohnsontravels.com)), who has 148 countries under his belt figures out when his body will feel the most tired and ensures he's out and active somewhere because, "It's lethal to go to bed at the wrong time." He says his magic hour is 10 p.m. If he can stay up to 10 p.m. local time, he figures he's on the road to recovery.

Canadian business consultant Wayne Dunn ([waynedunne.com](http://waynedunne.com)), spends a great deal of time in Accra, the capital of Ghana in West Africa, and told me his secret is to get used to the local time immediately on arrival. Dunn, who estimates he spends more than half of his time away from North America and describes jet lag as "something I have to endure" also suggests coffee on arrival to stay awake, as well as some physical activity. He adds that fresh air can be a great part of the solution and suggests getting out and walking (rather than giving into the temptation to dive into bed).

Perhaps the best advice may be from legendary traveller and author Pico Iyer, who once wrote: "Because jet lag is so much a part of my life now, I tell myself I will make the most of it; attend to it, enjoy its disruptions, as I would those of a geographically foreign place."



### Here are some additional ideas to help you avoid jetlag:

#### Travel north-south

Since much of jet lag is due to upsetting your body clock, consider sidestepping that when you stay within a time zone or two of home. Mexico City and Peru are just one hour behind Toronto; while Buenos Aires is one hour ahead.

#### Bite the business class bullet

Business class may come with some sticker shock but getting a few quality hours' sleep thanks to flat-bed seats and wondrous duvets on your outbound journey can make all the difference. Some airlines now offer the chance to bid for upgrades using online auctions shortly before your flight.

#### Travel by sea

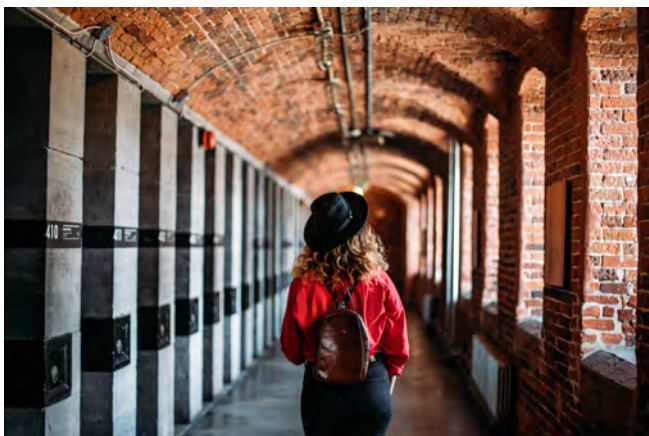
Definitely not the cheapest option but sailing from New York to England on the idyllic Queen Mary 2, you move your watch ahead one hour each day so that on arrival in Southampton you are on local time—and have had a fabulous travel memory to boot.

# HOTELS, REINVENTED

Some of the world's most interesting hotels started as something entirely different

BY MARTHA CHAPMAN

Sure, you can choose a hotel that is part of a chain: reliable with no surprises. But maybe also a bit bland and predictable? Never fear—there are hotels out there that started as something very different, and in their transformation have emerged with an impressive amount of character. Where you bed down for the night may turn out to be the highlight of your vacation. Here are three notable options.



## Saintlo

**WHERE:** Ottawa  
**WAS:** A prison

Clean, affordable accommodation close to Parliament Hill, the ByWard Market and Rideau Canal—what's not to like? Well, there's a small but important detail to consider: the Saintlo Ottawa Jail Hostel was a prison from 1862 to 1972. It all still looks very much like a prison and today there's accommodation for 150 in double or single cells, private rooms and multi-bed dorms beloved by international backpackers. Rates include a generous continental breakfast, a tour of the facility including death row, and a potential ghost sighting. (Some guests are so spooked they have to check out early.) Equal parts creepy and groovy, a night at the Saintlo will provide cocktail party conversation for years to come. [Saintlo.ca](http://Saintlo.ca)



## Marina Hotel

**WHERE:** Reykjavik, Iceland  
**WAS:** A paint factory

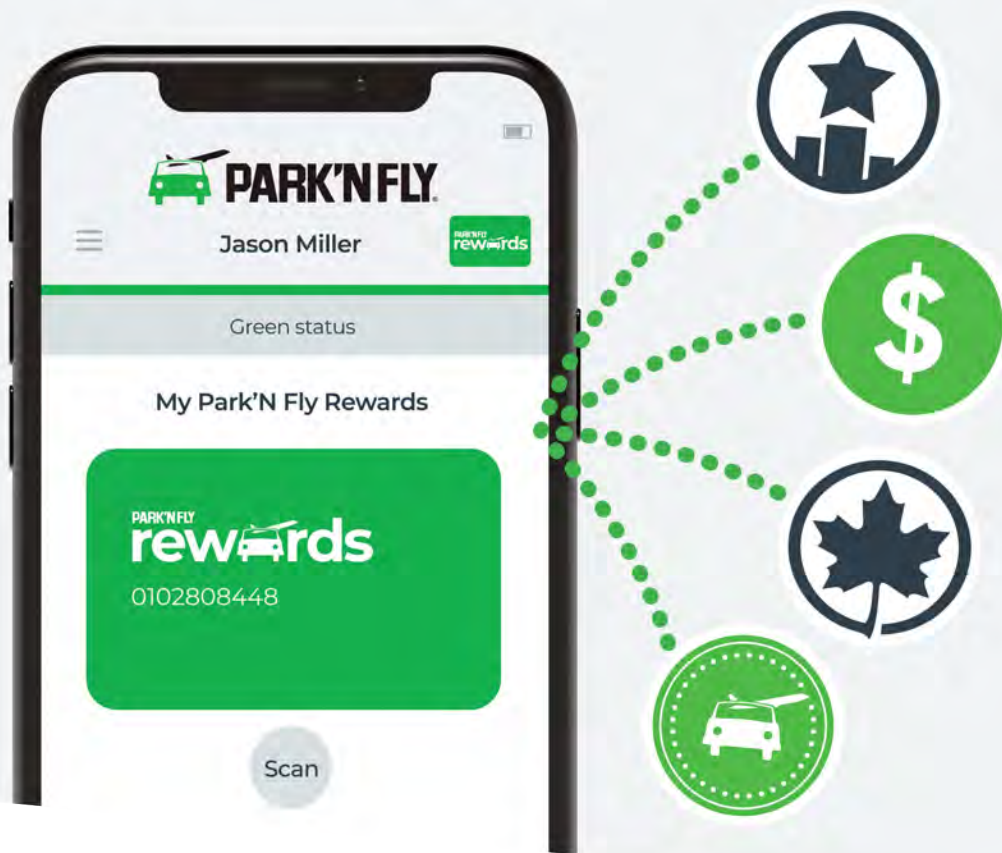
Located steps from the old downtown harbour district in Reykjavik, the 147-room Marina bubbles with Icelandic whimsy. Combining clean, spare Scandinavian style with colourful folk art, the Marina also features a small gym complete with a climbing wall and a lobby bar that on weekends draws the city's in-the-know locals in search of the perfect cocktail. Rooms are spare but comfortable and have flashes of ocean-faring themes (TV remotes dangle from a tiny fishnet and desks face nautical wall charts). Bonus: the Marina is just a few minutes walk from both the famed Penis Museum and the hilariously-popular Baejarins Beztu hot dog stand. Did I say quirky? [bit.ly/42AOEYO](http://bit.ly/42AOEYO)



## Villa Herencia

**WHERE:** San Juan, Puerto Rico  
**WAS:** A convent

Many travellers visit San Juan on their way to a cruise, but it's such a shame to miss the delights found all over Old San Juan—full of colonial architecture, sun-dappled plazas, cobblestone streets, galleries and cafes. It's also home to a hidden gem: the eight-room Villa Herencia. This centuries-old building brims with vintage furniture contrasting with a pop of modern art. Four poster beds are swathed in mosquito nets (unnecessary but dreamy), while the antique-filled lobby boasts restful rocking chairs. No resto or bar here, but continental breakfast is served in the spacious dining room, and a rooftop terrace awaits you and a bottle of wine. Service is friendly and warm. [Villaherencia.com](http://Villaherencia.com)



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# CELEBRATING LOVE AT HOTEL X

Hotel X proves to be an ideal place to stay, play and get pampered with that special someone

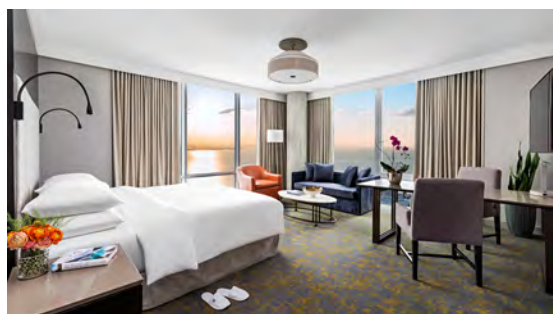
BY TAMMY CECCO

February 14th is a day synonymous with love worldwide. People everywhere rush to secure the perfect dinner reservation, hotel stay, or gesture to express affection for their significant other. This year, I chose to alleviate the pressure and postpone our celebration by a month. After all, shouldn't we cherish our loved ones every day of the year, without the need for a designated holiday? I discovered an ideal spot for this delayed celebration at Hotel X, perfectly situated overlooking Lake Ontario with breathtaking views of the CN Tower—an urban sanctuary in Toronto, just minutes from the downtown core.



## Stay

Although the rooms here are all spacious and well-appointed, it's worth opting for a suite, which provides generous living space and stunning vistas of Lake Ontario or the Toronto skyline. The ability to combine different rooms and suites to customize your needs is a unique option the property offers and a perk that inspired me to think of Hotel X for a future family getaway.



## Pamper

The spa, under the esteemed Guerlain brand, offers an unparalleled pampering experience. Guerlain brings a unique touch to the spa thanks to the elevated amenities and fragrances used in their treatments. Our 90-minute Imperial Relaxation massage was much-needed after the hectic week leading up to our getaway. The therapists were keen on learning our pressure preference and also led us on what's known as the Guerlain olfactory journey, where you have the opportunity to choose a scent that resonates with you to be the base of your own sensory spa journey. This fragrance is then added to the brand's scent base (a secret blend of essential oils).

Following the treatment, we spent 15 minutes in the steam room for further relaxation, and then lingered in the spa lounge, enjoying champagne and exquisite macarons crafted by the hotel's own pastry chef. As we indulged, therapist Lineo not only satisfied

my curiosity about Guerlain but also entertained me with anecdotes about the fragrance house's history and the fascinating stories behind the unique and beautiful bottles showcased on their shelves.



## Dine

With all the great activities on offer, we worked up a considerable appetite. Luckily, exceptional dining experiences are available. From the rooftop views and sushi-inspired menu at Valerie (think spot-on maki rolls alongside wagyu tataki and grilled sea bass), to contemporary North American cuisine at Roses Social, there's something to suit every palate. Look out for special packages that include breakfast or brunch—don't miss the decadent pancake stack with Saskatoon berry compote, Chantilly cream and granola at Roses Social.



## Play

Hotel X has an impressive array of activities. My husband and I recently discovered a love of tennis, which inspired our getaway theme. The hotel's four indoor tennis courts surrounded by floor to ceiling windows did not disappoint and provided the perfect setting for our match. The abundance of natural light made us forget we were indoors, and a lesson with Jade, an enthusiastic and competent coach, added to our enjoyment.



Beyond tennis, other racquet sports available are squash on one of the eight glass-backed courts or try your hand at pickleball. If racquet sports aren't your thing, workout fanatics will love the state-of-the-art fitness centre with over 50 pieces of Technogym equipment. Families will appreciate the 3,000-square-foot children's play centre, all included with your stay. For city residents, membership options provide exclusive benefits, including access to Guerlain Spa with discounts and monthly treatments included with select memberships.



# Tasty Tidbits



What's old is new again, thanks to some memorable food and drink finds perfect for spring

BY ALISON KENT

## A CALIFORNIA LOW DESERT GEM

It's been a century since Tinseltown stars and A-listers first flocked to Palm Springs and began adopting it as their "Hollywood Hideaway." Consequently, this Coachella Valley gem has bloomed like a desert rose into the getaway destination of choice for those seeking anything from kitschy escapes to lavish layovers.

Life House Palm Springs Hotel may be thoroughly modern, yet boasts a glimmer of Old Hollywood glamour. As the story goes, a one-time film star fleeing the doldrums of stardom came to this site in search of a more natural lifestyle, and in doing so, set out to create the ultimate desert hideaway we have to enjoy today.

Named for renowned desert conservationist, Minerva Hamilton Hoyt, from whom said ex-film star gleaned inspiration, Minerva's at Life House is the hotel's indoor/outdoor bar, restaurant and pool house, serving up plant-forward fare and classic cocktails with a twist.



Recipe by: Alison Kent

### DESERT ESPRESSO MARTINI

Makes: 1 cocktail

- 1 ½ oz vodka (or vanilla vodka)
- 1 oz coffee liqueur
- ½ oz mezcal
- 1 oz brewed espresso, cooled
- Ice cubes
- 3 coffee beans

- Fill a cocktail shaker with ice cubes. Add vodka, coffee liqueur, mezcal and espresso. Shake vigorously.
- Strain into a martini glass. Garnish with coffee beans.

## A BELOVED TREAT FROM B.C.

Layers of chocolate ganache on a chocolate-coconut crumb crust, with luscious custard in-between, Nanaimo bars have been a quintessential Canadian favourite for generations. But they've never looked or tasted quite like these! Made in Vancouver and BIPOC-owned and operated, Northern Bars are gorgeous, indulgent little (two-) bites of bliss. They're made with premium ingredients and come in four All-Canadian flavours: Classic, Saskatoon Berry and Lemon, Smokey Maple, and Apple and Cinnamon. The packaging is also a knockout—designed by Canadian artist, David Arias, and depicting some of Vancouver's signature landmarks.

\*\*\*Vancouverites and West Coast vacationers take note: plans are underway to give away 1,000 Northern Bars at their Granville Island booth on Canada Day.\*\*\*



A beloved treat-Northern Bars

## A RENEWED NEIGHBOURHOOD SPACE IN ONTARIO

Following renovations, the restaurant group formerly known as Earth to Table: Bread Bar has reopened its doors newly rebranded as BARDŌ [pronounced: "bar-dough"]. All the fan favourites remain on offer, including crave-able shared plates, hearty sandwiches and stone-baked pizzas. With locations in Hamilton and Guelph (next up, Elora, ON), BARDŌ may have rolled out a new name, yet remains committed as ever to bringing exceptional, locally sourced ingredients to the table.



Bardo's sweet cherry pie

# Wild Oyster Tonging in Prince Edward Island

There's a subtle but immersive beauty in slowing down to truly appreciate where our food comes from

BY PAUL LILLAKAS

Chef Paul Lillakas is the former food editor of Canadian Living magazine and a Chopped Canada champion. He's also a TV personality, private chef, writer, and recipe developer. The Estonian-Canadian chef is a Cityline regular, offering tips, tricks and fun and unique recipes.



There are but few experiences in a chef's life that one might consider life-affirming. On a recent trip to Prince Edward Island I had just such a day. I had the privilege of being welcomed to Tranquility Cove in Georgetown, a pleasant 45-minute drive from Charlottetown, to participate in some wild oyster tonging. In other words, we went to harvest oysters through the ice and taste them right there where they grow naturally! For a wild food enthusiast, it doesn't get any more exciting than that.

Captain Perry Gotell, the owner, greeted us with a big smile and a nod to how lucky we were to have solid ice on the water that day, a non-guarantee

during this fluctuating winter! After a short tour of the property, he quickly demonstrated how the tongs (essentially a 12-foot-long pair of scissors made from two enormous rakes) work. Next, he led us onto the ice, which was frozen atop the Brudenell River, where he made short work of chain-sawing a rectangular hole right into the ice. Using the tongs to rustle up oysters from the sandy seafloor we eagerly awaited the moment of truth, when the clasped rakes emerged from the water gripping oysters, mussels and even a few starfish! As a bald eagle circled above, I couldn't help but take stock of what a stunning place I was in.





Back onshore, Perry and his lovely sister Cindy treated us to freshly steamed mussels, we shucked oysters and enjoyed warm apple cider. Next to a campfire, they shared charming stories of island life and a connection to food and gave this city guy a much-needed infusion of East Coast hospitality. Their warmth and generosity truly moved me. The oysters were plump and briny, the anecdotes thoughtful and enlightening.

This enriching trip to Prince Edward Island provided a valuable lesson in slowing down, discovering where our food comes from and the importance of sharing it with the good folks around us. I would highly recommend finding the time to visit and experience it for yourself.

## Fun Fact

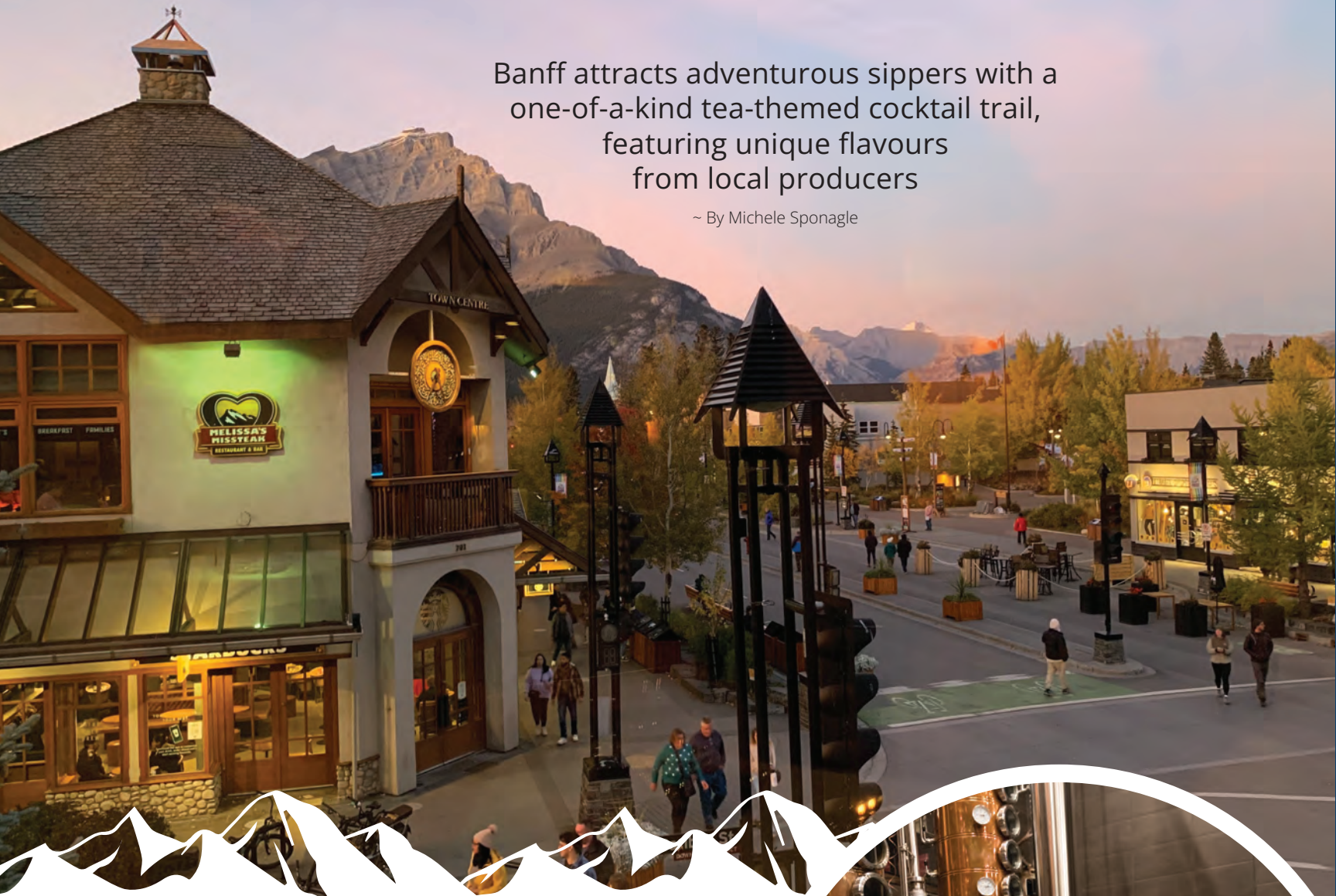


Did you know that oysters harvested during the winter months will be larger than those harvested in the warmer months? That's because, during the late winter, they are conserving energy to spawn in the spring and will therefore have a greater "meat yield". Captain Perry suggests tasting the oysters first without any condiments so you can truly appreciate their fresh and salty flavour profile. After that, a small dot of hot sauce, horseradish or fresh lemon juice is all you need!

# TEATIME IN THE ROCKIES

Banff attracts adventurous sippers with a one-of-a-kind tea-themed cocktail trail, featuring unique flavours from local producers

~ By Michele Sponagle



Besides stunning scenery, mountains and a dynamic culinary scene, there's a new reason to visit Banff—a tea-themed cocktail trail, freshly launched in 2023. It's a collaboration between two local producers—Jolene's Tea House and Park Distillery. Each cocktail showcases teas skillfully blended with organic ingredients by local tea master Jolene Brewster and artisanal spirits from the only distillery located in a Canadian national park.

Sip your way along the trail and you'll discover tasty creations representing Banff's best. Non-imbibers can enjoy it, too. Booze-free versions of all seven featured cocktails are available for the asking.

Quench your thirst with these 'tea-rific' cocktails.





### MATCHA COLADA

It's a 'matcha' made in heaven. Hello Sunshine, a local haunt known for its modern Japanese cuisine, is well represented in this frosty blended cocktail made with Canadian rye, matcha tea and matcha bitters. The earthiness of matcha (finely ground green tea leaves) is balanced with a hint of sweetness from pineapple and the creaminess of coconut milk. After a couple of drinks and some sushi, head to the karaoke rooms for some moonlight serenading.

### SICILIAN 75

It's not surprising an elegant Italian eatery like Lupo would offer an equally elegant tea cocktail. Served in a wine flute, this contemporary spin on a classic French 75 (gin, champagne and lemon juice) is a not-too-sweet version with dry gin, Aperol, Chambord, grapefruit gin and Jolene's Teahouse Scarlet Berry syrup. It pairs well with the restaurant's house-made pasta, especially the mafaldine al limone, featuring long noodles with ruffled edges and lemon.



### MOUNTAIN MARG

Start your tea cocktail crawl at ground zero—Park Distillery on Banff Avenue. Take a free distillery tour before you order this refreshing spin on a margarita. It's made with Park's own Vanilla Vodka, coconut tequila, triple sec, wild blueberry tea and a kick of lime. It has ground coconut instead of salt around the rim for an added tropical punch. It's sweet, sour and sublime.

### MAPLE OLD FASHIONED

The Bear Street Tavern's offering on the tea cocktail trail is unapologetically Canadian. It's a booze-forward drink with maple rye, bourbon, tea syrup made with the buds of wild roses (Alberta's official flower) and black walnut bitters. It's an ideal drink for chasing away a chill and enjoying alongside the laidback eatery's famous pizzas. Try The Bison, topped with smoked bison, mozzarella and caramelized onions.

### AFTER 8

The brandy snifter this cocktail is served in at The Bison may be a hint this is a drink meant to be savoured. Blended with vodka, creme de cacao, Alpine peppermint tea and lemon, it has delicious aromas you'll want to sniff before sipping. It has a warming effect—like a cozy wool sweater. Enjoy it alongside the bison short rib, served with cheesy mashed potatoes and roasted cauliflower salad.

### MEADOW MINT

At the chalet-inspired Bluebird, guests come for expertly grilled cuts of Alberta beef, hearty breakfasts (order the soufflé-like pancakes) and thick slices of key lime pie. Such decadence can be balanced with a cocktail that almost tastes healthy. Its tea-based cocktail combines dry gin, Seedlip Garden (an herbaceous, no-alcohol distilled spirit), citrus and delightfully minty tea. Light and bright, it may just replace mimosas as the go-to brunch staple.



### CUCUMBER GIN SMASH

Gently sweet, this cocktail from 3 Bears Brewery has notes of cucumber, green apple, lemon and peppermint with dry gin as the base spirit. Come for happy hour (daily from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m.) and sip it with light bites, like chicharrones (fried pork rinds), shrimp bao buns and waffle fries slathered in gooey cheese sauce. If beer is more your thing, order a flight of six—all brewed on-site with fresh Rocky Mountain water.



# Luxury and Renewal on the High Seas

Celebrity Cruises' new *Celebrity Ascent* offers a bounty of high-end experiences, including a spa that caters to your every need

BY TAMMY CECCO

*"The sea, once it casts its spell, holds one in its net of wonder forever."*

Jacques Cousteau's famous words were fittingly used to introduce the extensive and innovative services on offer at the spa on the new *Celebrity Ascent*. I knew as soon as I saw the treatments—inspired by the sea, the earth and the air—that I needed to make time to indulge on my two-day inaugural voyage. It turns out that this quote also captures essence of the other wonders found on *Ascent*. It's no surprise the ship recently nabbed the coveted Forbes Four Star Award alongside four other ships in the Celebrity line up.

Sailing on the inaugural voyage meant being part of the naming ceremony and all the accompanying festivities, including the maritime tradition of breaking a champagne bottle on the ship's hull. It was inspiring to hear from Laura Hodges Bethge, President of Celebrity Cruises and learn about some of the philosophy behind the brand and the newest ship born under the Edge Series. "*Celebrity Ascent* has been designed to feed our guests travel wanderlust and provide unique experiences that they will covet and love."

Bethge isn't the only female involved in lovingly caring for this magnificent ship. Captain Sandy Yawn, renowned from Bravo TV's *Below Deck* franchise, and her sister Michelle Dunham, founder of the Jacksonville School for Autism, have become the industry's first co-godmothers of the *Ascent*. Cruise ships have "godmothers" because the practice is thought to bring good luck and protection to the vessel.



Naming ceremony for *Celebrity Ascent*



Spa Float Room



That night though, I slept deeply and woke up with a newfound sense of purpose. I felt lighter on my feet and less bloated, while my skin appeared smoother and I looked more rested than I had in weeks.

The differences may not have been visible to those around me, but I felt it and immediately began thinking about how I could implement more healthy practices into my hectic lifestyle.

For just a short cruise experience, my time on *Celebrity Ascent* was transformative in so many ways.

## A transformative spa experience

One of the most memorable aspects of my voyage was undoubtedly my spa experience. The spa offers innovative signature treatments steeped in holistic philosophy, while also seamlessly integrating the latest technologies. My spa journey commenced with a visit to the Thermal Suite, a serene start essential for preparing the mind and body for an exceptional spa session. The Thermal Suite features eight distinct elements meticulously designed to alleviate stress and promote tranquility. One of my favourite experiences was the Float Room, where I gently swung and swayed into a state of total relaxation, enveloped in a cozy basket chair, floor-to-ceiling sea-view windows included.



## Cutting-edge treatments

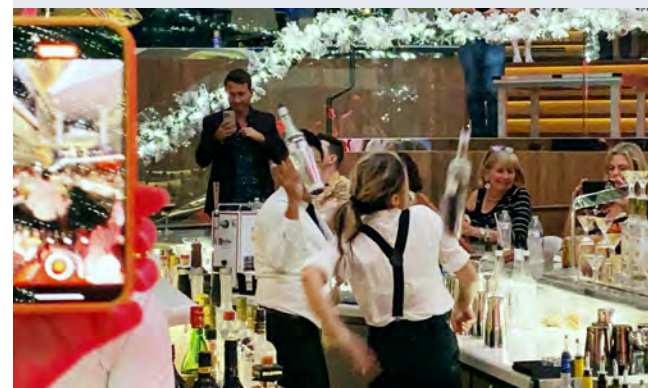
Had I spent a week onboard, I would have certainly treated myself to one of the Biotech facial treatments, which harness active ingredients and cutting-edge technology to revitalize skin by boosting cellular energy. These treatments, alongside the advanced offerings of the Med Spa, could have left every guest feeling rejuvenated. Instead, I chose a treatment that celebrities have been embracing: IV therapy. Despite some initial nervousness, I was reassured that these treatments were meticulously designed by doctors to infuse essential vitamins and minerals directly into the bloodstream. Among the numerous advantages are enhanced immune function, hydration, heightened energy levels and metabolism, detoxification, improved sleep quality and accelerated healing.

Following a questionnaire and consultation with my nurse practitioner, a customized IV cocktail was prepared to address my specific requirements. For the next hour and a half, I reclined on a spa lounge overlooking the sea. Gradually, I succumbed to complete relaxation as I closed my eyes and experienced the refreshing sensation of pure nutrients flowing into my veins. I must admit that upon leaving, I didn't immediately feel revitalized; rather, I experienced a sense of lethargy, which I was informed could be a temporary effect of the treatment.

## Highlights on the high seas

Here are some of the things I loved most about sailing with *Celebrity Cruises* and the *Ascent*:

- Spacious staterooms with welcoming décor featuring warm earth tones, and the Infinite Veranda that allows you to bring the outside in. Simply push a button and walk out to the water's edge right from your living space.
- An exceptional culinary experience with globally inspired meals at 32 distinctive food and beverage outlets. Notably, *Le Voyage* by chef Daniel Boulud stood out with its newly designed menu.
- The vibrant social scene of the Martini Bar in the Grand Plaza where an endless array of unique martinis and other innovative libations were on offer and the action never stopped—including the entertainment provided by the bartenders (reminiscent of Tom Cruise's juggling antics in the movie *Cocktail*).



- *Celebrity's* vision to achieve Destination Net Zero by 2050. They have already begun to pave the way by sailing some of the most sustainable ships in the industry, using AI to predict food consumption, enabling them to cut food waste by 35 per cent and adapting elevators so they generate their own power.

# Palm Springs Ignites Your Wellness Journey

Embark on an exhilarating escape to three Palm Springs spas amidst breathtaking desert scenery and towering mountains

BY PARM PARMAR



## ► A Tranquil Haven

Nestled in Desert Hot Springs, the epicentre of underground mineral springs, Azure Palm Hot Springs Resort is just a short drive from downtown Palm Springs. The resort's appeal is understated from the outside, but once you tour the property, you realize it has many alluring extras.

The resort opened in 2021 after extensive remodelling. There is an inviting spring-

fed lap pool, five outdoor hot tubs and the landscaping blends seamlessly into the surroundings. Mineral water from the pools is recycled to water the vegetation.

Hot springs flow throughout the town, yet this resort stands out with its distinctive offerings. Guests can indulge in the revitalizing experience of the Himalayan Salt Room and savour nutritious options at the Azure Palm Café.

Additionally, the resort provides opportunities for rejuvenation through

juice cleansing and yoga retreats. With a focus on holistic and Korean spa techniques, the array of treatments positions the resort as a leader in skincare and haircare.

The water is loaded with minerals—silica, calcium, magnesium phosphate and traces of lithium leave your skin silky and smooth. If you stay overnight the spa suites contain personal mineral soaking tubs but no TVs or telephones.



Azure Palm hot springs mineral pool



Séc-he Spa lobby

### ► Ancient Healing at the Spa at Séc-he

Embracing the tradition of “taking the waters,” I sink into my private mineral water tub, marveling at soaking in water that has flowed beneath the city for over 12,000 years. Once acclimated to the warmth, fifteen minutes in this 90-degree mineral pool soothes the body. Afterward, spending another 20 minutes in the zero-edge mineral pool, basking in the sunshine and warm water, is pure bliss.

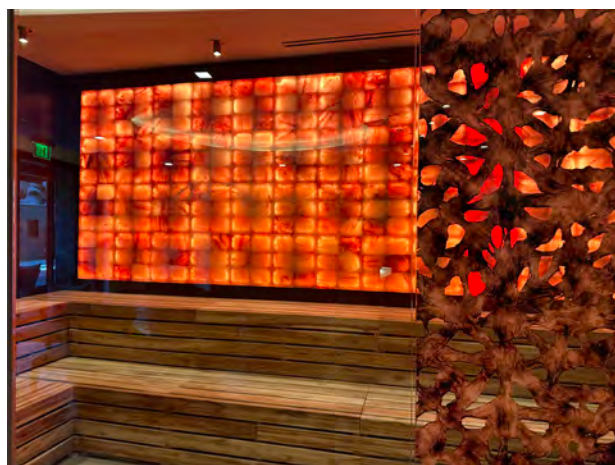
The Spa at Séc-he is a breathtaking expanse covering 73,000 square feet that opened on April 4, 2023, atop a hot mineral spring owned by the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians. Situated in the Agua Caliente Cultural Plaza, adjacent to the Agua Caliente Cultural Museum

and Casino Palm Springs, it's the sole hot mineral spring facility in the region.

A stunning communal lounge area with two halotherapy salt caves serves as the central hub, connecting treatment rooms to the pool deck.

A day pass includes access to salt rooms, a grounding room, a healing water tub, a menthol sauna and a eucalyptus aromatherapy shower. Additional services such as massages, body scrubs, wraps, facials and scalp massages can be added for an extra indulgence.

**Pro Tips:** Plan for a full day at the spa to enjoy salt rooms, meditation lounges and pools. Visit the Agua Caliente Cultural Museum to delve into the tribe's rich history.



Salt room at Spa Séc-he

### ► Spa Rosa's Radiance

Drip, drip—oil drops cascade down my spine, gently massaged into my back as part of the Desert Raindrop massage, while I enjoy the scent of seven distinct aromatherapy oils derived from native desert botanicals. This soothing treatment targets tension and overworked muscles, extending its therapeutic touch to the hands and feet. After the session, my therapist recommends a brief stint in the eucalyptus steam room before enjoying the poolside amenities.

I choose the river bench Jacuzzi, resembling a secluded grotto with its warm temperature and cascading waterfalls, offering serene relief to my back, neck and shoulders.

Spa Rosa debuted at Tommy Bahama Miramonte Resort & Spa in November 2023, nestled among the lush citrus-filled landscape with a terrace offering breathtaking views of the Santa Rosa Mountains. Alongside traditional offerings like facials and body wraps, the spa boasts unique experiences like yin yoga, outdoor aerial classes and



shaman-led hikes. The spa's amenities include a well-appointed locker room with lavish showers and plush robes. For those seeking mementos, the spa boutique offers an array of clothing and unique items.

**Pro Tips:** Arrive early to indulge in the eucalyptus steam room and pool facilities. Consider enhancing your massage with a sound bath and treating yourself to a Rose Quartz Facial.



Spa Rosa relaxation room



Tommy Bahama Miramonte Resort & Spa exterior

Nestled amidst the affluent Indian Wells area, the Tommy Bahama Miramonte Resort & Spa seamlessly merges island charm with desert luxury. Spread across 11 acres, it boasts 215 spacious, well-appointed suites and five villa suites.

Enjoy coastal-inspired cuisine at Grapefruit Basil restaurant and tropical cocktails at Chiki Palm bar by the pool, with stunning views of the Santa Rosa Mountains. For a healthy alternative, pick your own oranges and lemons on the property for juicing.

Unwind by the tranquil pools by day, then gather around a crackling fire pit as night falls for a soothing end to your day.



For more information, check out [visitgreaterpalmsprings.com](http://visitgreaterpalmsprings.com).



# A Tranquil Oasis in the Heart of Picton

— BY JESSICA PADYKULA —

## History and an impeccable eye for design meet in the middle at Merrill House—home to sumptuous rooms, incredible food and top-notch service

Going somewhere new can feel like an opportunity to completely reset. Side-stepping your usual routine, whether via an overseas adventure or weekend road trip—has the potential to vastly improve your outlook, and a three-day visit to Prince Edward County did exactly that for me.

As much as I love Prince Edward County and all it has to offer, it was *where* I stayed that ended up having the deepest impact. I walked into Merrill House exhausted after a long drive, and emotionally depleted after a long few months wherein everything that could go wrong, did go wrong. But this place transported me. For the first time in a very long time, I couldn't stop smiling.

### ► An Historic Start

The boutique luxury hotel is housed in a fully restored Gothic Revival mansion first completed in 1878. Current owner Jordan Martin de Rosales completed a major restoration of Merrill House in 2019. The impeccable space is many things—a living museum dedicated to the history of the house and the area, a fine dining restaurant, an award-winning wine cellar and a space showcasing de Rosales' exceptional eye for design.

### ► Sumptuous Spaces

Merrill House is comprised of 15 uniquely designed rooms and suites

of varying sizes, each telling its own story and housing its own collection of art, antiques and other items that work together to create a cohesive design story. The wallpaper alone here is worthy of its own series of photo essays. All rooms feature French linens, mini-themed libraries and heated towel racks in the bathrooms.

The Owner's Suite, where I had the pleasure of staying, is decorated with covetable items collected by the owner throughout his travels. The mini bar is stocked with local wines, beers and ciders; toiletries are custom-made (and available for purchase, which I highly recommend), and turn-down service includes housemade chocolate chip cookies and personalized pillow scenting.

### ► Memorable Meals

Undoubtedly, one of the highlights of my visit was the hotel's restaurant. Gourmet breakfast by chef Lili Sullivan includes fresh-squeezed orange juice, fresh fruit and an ultra-flakey croissant. Then choose from a variety of hot dishes,



from fluffy lemon-ricotta pancakes to perfectly poached eggs on avocado toast. Dinner, courtesy of executive chef Michael Sullivan, is French fine dining at its best. Sophisticated but unfussy, the menu leans on local produce and layers flavours in a way that makes each bite better than the last. The Merrill Salad—comprised of baby spinach, Boston lettuce, apple, candied pecans, aged local cheddar and a house cider dressing—is something I’m still thinking about.

► **Extras & Amenities**

When you’re not enjoying a meal and a glass of wine, or out exploring the area, the on-site barrel sauna is an ideal spot to unwind, as is the adjacent outdoor fireplace. If you plan on touring any of the region’s many wineries, pick up a wine-tasting passport from the front desk



which gets you tastings at 12 handpicked wineries. If you only have time for one, make it laid-back Lighthall Vineyards, which also makes excellent cheeses. The only thing more impressive than the property itself has to be the outstanding service. Helpful yet unobtrusive, the staff here creates an ambiance of calm efficiency. Expect thoughtful advice about what to see and do in the area, which made the entire stay even more memorable. Merrill House is more than a hotel; it’s an invitation to reset, recharge and savour



life’s finer moments. My stay here went a long way toward helping shift my mind-set and reminding me that there can be beauty everywhere you turn.

# EXQUISITE *Escape*

BY GURDEEP AHLUWALIA

Make your way to Saint Lucia for stunning scenery and unforgettable hospitality at two distinct properties



Aerial view of Windjammer Landing Resort & Residences

## ► Not your parent's Windjammer

Windjammer Landing Resort & Residences just got a makeover. Tucked neatly into the hills of Labrelotte Bay, this Canadian-owned resort has been a popular vacation spot since it opened in 1989. If you've been here before or you're one of the lucky regulars who have been utilizing Windjammer as a timeshare—well, you may notice some changes.

The trigger was pulled on a multi-million-dollar renovation in 2023 that, in a word, has given Windjammer some serious “zhuzh.” You'll notice marked improvements to many of the common areas and lobbies, as well as upgrades to the villas and higher-end resort features like the spa. While it was my first time at the property, the overall vibe at the resort has been drastically improved based on the photos and videos I've seen pre-renovation. The reception area now feels more open and airy, with marble floors, grand chandeliers and modern, clean décor. You'll also notice a fully renovated

Dragonfly—the resort's main restaurant, a refreshed spa and modernized furniture and colour schemes throughout.

The big new feature is the addition of the Ocean Point Residences—a mix of two and three-bedroom luxury villas fit for a king. The villa I stayed in was 3,300 square feet of indoor luxury, plus a 600 square foot outdoor terrace complete with an infinity pool and five access points from the suite. The three-bedroom beauty I was afforded was stacked with a full kitchen, smart home technology, three bathrooms and FIVE(!) showers, including an outdoor rainfall that quickly became my feature of

choice. If you haven't been to Windjammer—or you haven't been in a while—you'll want to check yourself into an Ocean Point Residence, because this is not your parent's Windjammer.



## ► If It's Good Enough For Oprah...

What's more impressive: that nature-soaked Ladera Resort is situated on a UNESCO World Heritage site, or that Oprah Winfrey stayed here and reportedly loved it? This boutique 37-room resort is a bit of a paradox: it's rustic and nestled on a volcanic ridgeline 1,000 feet above the Caribbean Sea—yet it's equipped with modern luxuries like a 24-hour cellphone butler, tablet and keyless wristband entry to your suite.

The best way to describe Ladera is that it feels like you're living in a postcard. The sprawling views of the famous Pitons from your open-air bedroom are enough to keep you off your phone and astutely present.

What took Ladera from a place with an incredible vantage point and otherworldly



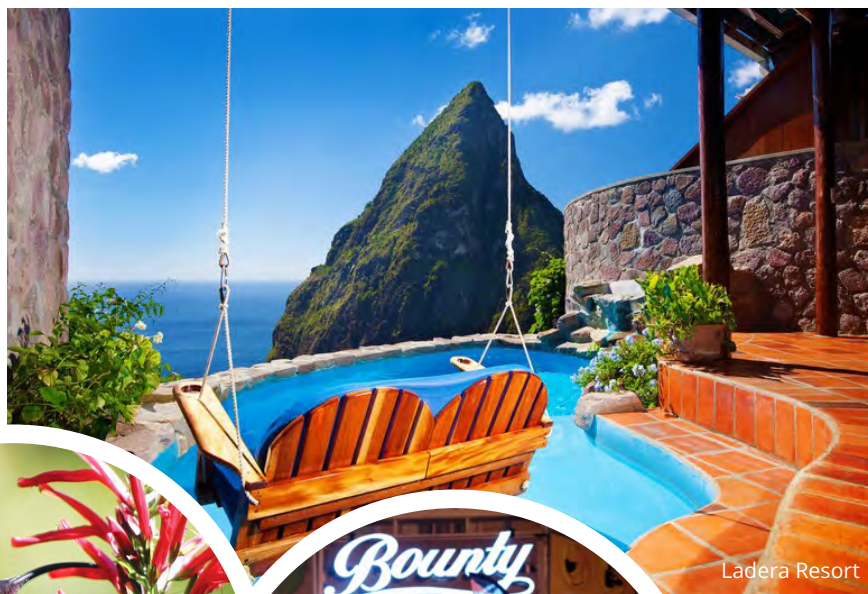
View from the room at Ladera Resort

view was the TLC. The food and service were exceptional from morning to night. You could feel the attention to detail with every course, every cocktail and the meticulousness of the staff. The multi-course dinner with pairings in the wine cellar is exquisite; one of those three-hour dining experiences that will leave you wondering what you did to deserve this.

As a bonus—but quite central to Ladera's ethos—the resort is extremely environmentally conscious and largely self-sustained. The finishes, décor and furniture throughout are constructed and hand-

carved from locally sourced materials, often made on-site in the workshop by local Saint Lucian artists and builders. You can also go on a morning hike on the property and pick your produce from the gardens, which you then hand to the chef to prepare for your dinner that evening—a farm-to-table experience in which you have a helping hand.

The brand new spa was under construction on my visit but promises to be open by spring 2024. An excuse to go back, I conclude.



Ladera Resort



Hummingbirds at Ladera Resort



Fish Fry party in Gros Islet

## ► Friday Night Fish Fry

The Gros Islet Fish Fry is basically a big neighbourhood block party.

Think giant speakers on the street blasting soca, reggae and dance music, people grooving everywhere, and—my favourite part—food shacks and drink stands lining the packed streets. The tourists (myself included) seem to arrive around 7 p.m., which the locals later tell me with a laugh is, “too early.” It starts to fill in around 10 p.m. when the Saint Lucians roll in. The drinks of choice are local Piton beer and the rum punch, which is way too sweet for my taste, but that opinion is strongly in the minority. Pro tip: find a driver you like and try to use the same person for the entirety of your stay. Our driver accompanied us to the party and made sure to take us to the food and drink stands with the best prices and tastiest treats.

## ► Around The Island

You can't make a trip to this beautiful tropical paradise without taking in some of the sights. Here are a couple of highlights.

## ► Talk Muddy To Me

Sulphur Springs is pretty close to Ladera Resort, so I had to check it out. The volcano is said to be dormant and hasn't erupted since the 1700s, and I'm told it's the world's only drive-in volcano—meaning you don't have to walk much so it attracts plenty of tourists daily. The mud baths are said to be detoxifying and contain healing properties, but most people seem to simply enjoy the warm temperature of the mud baths (around 45 degrees Celsius) and the child-like appeal of covering yourself in solidifying mud, before hosing yourself down.



# Oh, Give Me A Home Where the Bison Roam

Saskatchewan's Wanuskewin Heritage Park has heralded the return of bison, a vital aspect of Indigenous cultural history

BY CHARMAINE NORONHA

On a sunny, cloudless day, the rolling grasslands on the plains of Saskatchewan are dotted with bison roaming the lands. I'm struck by the vastness of this seemingly limitless landscape that stretches beyond the horizon, but I'm even more struck by the beauty of these beasts. Strong, but solemn. Peaceful, yet powerful. And most profoundly, the original keepers of this land, reunited with their ancestors' home after 150 years.

Deep, low bellows accompanied by thundering hooves resonated across these plains in 2019. It was the sound of six bison arriving on lands that were once home to their ancestors: Wanuskewin. Their arrival rustled a wave of emotion among those who heralded the return of the species to the region, as well as in Indigenous communities who had also called these plains their home and native land for centuries.

It was the first time in 150 years that a bison had set foot on the ground in Wanuskewin, a sacred site and gathering place for more than 6,400 years for the people of the Northern Plains—the Blackfoot, Cree, Ojibwa, Assiniboine, Nakota and Dakota—who all followed bison herds here.

Sunlight filters into the airy visitor centre at Wanuskewin Heritage Park as Craig Thoms, the site's bison manager, tells me that the Great Plains in North America was home to 26 to 30 million bison around 400 years ago. The Northern Plains people travelled to

Wanuskewin for trade and hunting, as the site contained a notable bison jump, a cliff formation used to hunt and kill plains bison in mass quantities, and flat prairie lands perfect for setting up teepees.



However, what followed was a dark chapter in history, written via the arrival of European settlers in the 1600-1700s, who brought disease, overhunting and the loss of bison habitat. By the 1890s, there were just 1,200 bison, says Thoms.

"They were nearly extinct, so when we welcomed six Northern Plains bison from Grasslands National Park in partnership with





glimpse of spiritual and ceremonial aspects of Indigenous culture.

"It wasn't an archaeologist that found the petroglyphs, it was the bison eating the vegetation, scratching away at the dirt, rolling around like they do, which then revealed them to us.

Parks Canada back to Wanuskewin in 2019, it was not only historically significant but very culturally significant," he says. "Northern Plains people have a deep connection with bison. They are viewed as kin, as family, so it's a very deep relationship; an interconnectedness and an interdependence with bison."

The initial six-bison herd was later joined by an additional five animals from the United States with ancestral ties to Yellowstone National Park. The herd has now grown to 31 bison with a few more calves expected this spring.

"I'm so excited to see the bison here on the land again because of the gifts and the teachings that they're going to bring," says Elder Mary Lee, a Cree woman who leads tours at Wanuskewin.

The gifts and teachings the bison have already brought are monumental. They're not only helping to restore native grasses but also the balance between animals, land and humans. Furthermore, they've helped to uncover the stories behind these lands.

As the bison roamed the park, their hoof steps and movements helped uncover four petroglyphs in Wanuskewin Heritage Park, estimated to date back anywhere between 300 and 1,800 years, though taken in context with historic events they're likely 1,000 years old, says Thoms.

Archaeologists note that the stones are evidence of the culture that existed before European explorers made contact with Indigenous people living on the land. An elder who provides a tour and storytelling on site has said the petroglyphs give a

They're a gift in so many ways," explains Thoms.

As we tour the bison viewing trail in a pick-up truck, the animals are unphased by our presence, but my tour group and I are taken by theirs. A Canadian safari of sorts, we station the vehicle in optimal viewing spots while the mighty mammals wander about. The sound of cameras clicking are interspersed by the quiet "wow-ing" from the tour group.

At this moment, all I can hear in my head are the lyrics to "Home on the Range."

*"Oh, give me a home where the buffalo roam,  
Where the deer and the antelope play,  
Where seldom is heard a discouraging word  
and the skies are not cloudy all day."*



*Dakota Dunes Resort*

It's a mission that Wanuskewin Heritage Park is fulfilling.

"One of the park's knowledge keepers who used to work here shared with me that this valley is our university," Thoms tells me. "Everything that has happened here in terms of culture, tradition, art for so many—we're talking about Blackfoot culture, Cree culture, Dakota, Nakota, Lakota, Dene—all happened in this one meeting place. And we're so honoured to breathe life back into these lands."

## Where to stay:

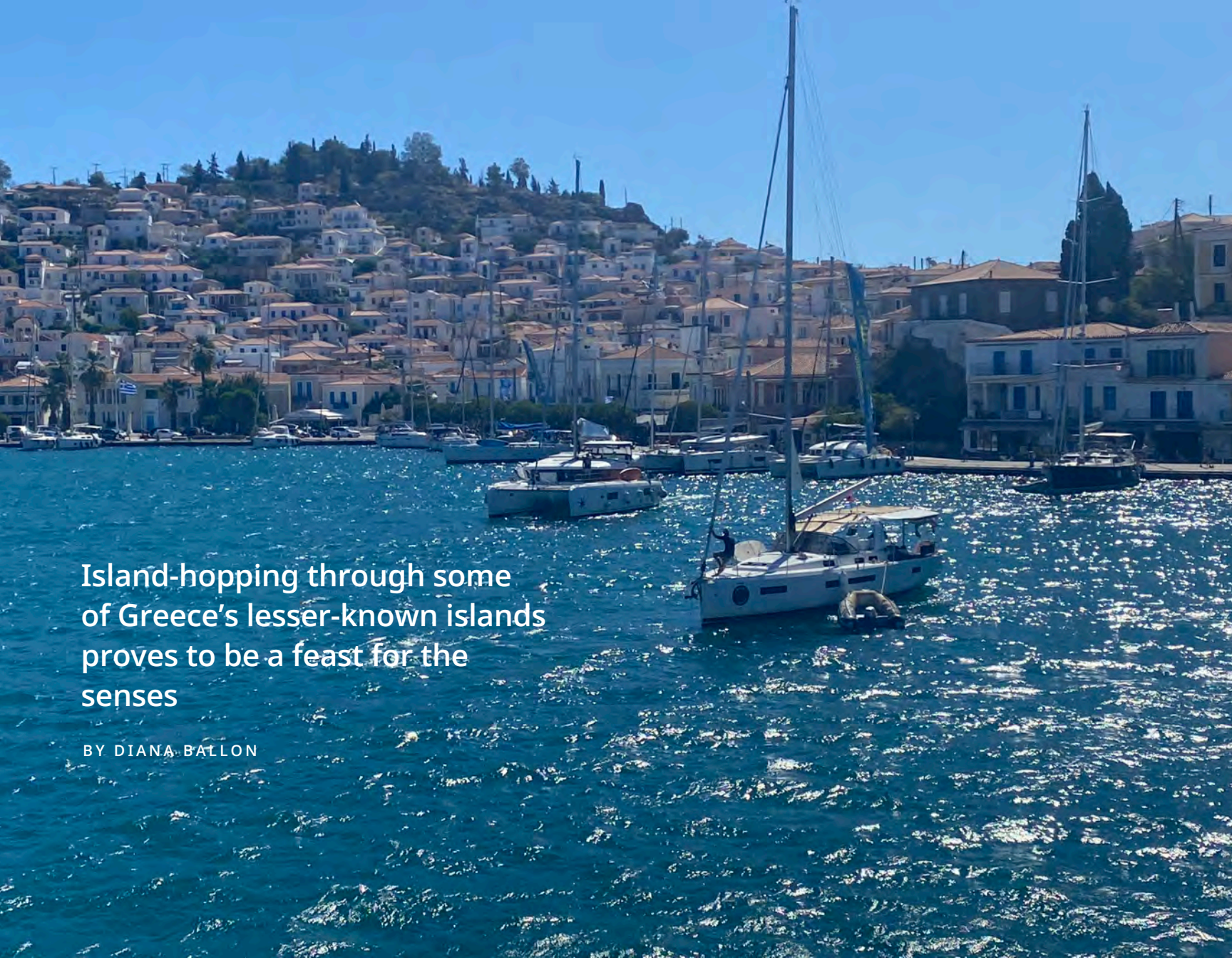


### Dakota Dunes Resort

Dakota Dunes Resort & Casino is an Indigenous-owned and operated resort located on traditional Whitecap Dakota Unceded Territory, at the height of the South Saskatchewan River Valley Basin. Saskatoon's first full-service resort experience, the 155-room property is a tribute in design to the historic Whitecap First Nation. The hotel features angular window trims and exterior wood panels that echo the traditional tipi.

The word "Dakota" means "friend" or "ally," and the Dakota way of life emphasizes respect for others and the environment. As such, the resort offers a bevy of cultural and outdoor adventures. I was fortunate to partake in a stargazing tour that included Dakota interpretation and a traditional bannock, tea and jam.

# OFF THE BEATEN TRACK IN GREECE



Island-hopping through some of Greece's lesser-known islands proves to be a feast for the senses

BY DIANA BALLON

In Greece, beauty is abundant. Prices are reasonable, the food is delicious, nature's bounty is plentiful and archeological sites document a fascinating past just waiting to be explored.

With 227 inhabited islands to choose from, and the mainland rich in historical sites, the big question is, what part of Greece should I explore first?

Over three weeks, I decided to visit less touristed areas of the country and to do so in September, which is still hot, but more temperate and less busy than other times of the year.



Karathona Beach



Streets of Nafplio



Acropolis Stadium



Ancient Theatre of Epidaurus



Transporting building supplies on the car-free island of Hydra



A bar in Nafplio

## Peloponnese, THE MAINLAND

To begin, I booked a week-long cycling trip with Exodus Travels to explore parts of the Peloponnese, a popular area in the southern part of the country, along with the nearby island of Poros. I had travelled with Exodus on other trips and loved the local guides, the well-mapped routes and the camaraderie that develops in small-group experiences. This trip was no exception.

We set out from Athens on a Monday morning when roads leading to one of only two designated bike trails in the city were still relatively quiet. Within 13 kilometres, we arrived at the port of Piraeus, where we boarded a ferry for a three-hour trip to the island of Poros, a popular destination for Athenians because of its proximity to the capital. Once there, we cycled around the town and up to the temple of Poseidon, with a beautiful view of the island.

The next day we had a walking tour of the island before taking a five-minute ferry to Galatas on the Peloponnese mainland. From there we cycled through quiet hamlets and olive trees and then began our ascent along the coastline, the Aegean Sea sparkling below. We cycled through the ancient town of Trizina and then eventually arrived at Epidaurus, where—the next day—we visited its famous amphitheatre. Constructed in the 4th century BC, its masterful design means that even a clap from the stage at the bottom of this massive theatre can be heard at the top.



After visiting the theatre, we cycled along quiet mountain roads down to Tolo, a laidback seaside town that I loved.

The next day of our cycling was my favourite: it began with a visit to the coastal town of Nafplio, considered one of the most beautiful cities in Greece. Originally the capital in the early 1800s, it remains a beautifully constructed and romantic city with pretty cobblestone streets, Venetian castles, and neoclassical buildings. Many of our group climbed the 857 stairs to the well-preserved Palamidi fortress for a panoramic view from above. We then cycled along a narrow coastal path and stopped for a swim and a delicious picnic lunch.

In the afternoon, we said goodbye to the coast and cycled to Mycenae, a 4,000-year-old civilization in the heart of the Peloponnese. We walked through the Lion's Gate, the famous entrance to this citadel built in the 13th century BC; visited the tombs of Clytemnestra and Agamemnon; and explored the archaeological museum on site.

On our last cycling day, we began with a challenging uphill ride to the stadium and archaeological site of Ancient Nemea before descending to Palivou Estate, one of more than 30 wineries in the important Greek wine region of Nemea. Although a great wine tasting, I decided to show some restraint with more than 40 kilometres still to cycle that afternoon! We cycled along mostly quiet roads until we reached the famous Corinth canal, which divides the Ionian Sea on one side from the Aegean Sea on the other, transforming



the peninsula into an island. After passing over the canal's short walkway, we soon arrived at Loutraki, a touristy seaside resort where we would spend our last evening and morning before heading back about 1.5 hours by bus to Athens the next day.

After this challenging cycling trip, I then had a more chill vacation on two spectacular islands.





## Tinos, THE CYCLADES

Tinos is the third largest of the Cycladic islands, a group of islands in the Aegean Sea that includes more well-known destinations like Santorini and Mykonos. Despite being less discovered, I would argue that Tinos is no less beautiful, with many stunning beaches. Built on a steep hill, you can look up to see its rows of parallel stone-wall terraces that traverse its rocky terrain, with stone walkways that connect many of its 50 or so villages. The landscape is dotted with windmills and geometrically-designed dovecotes, the latter once used by Venetians to breed pigeons.

One of the highlights of our time on Tinos was visiting the enchanting village of Pyrgos. Akin to “an open-air marble museum,” this smooth white stone is everywhere—on its buildings and streets and churches, used for intricate carvings sculpted onto archways and doorways, and formed into the shape of birds and other items for sale in its boutiques. Visit the Museum of Marble Craft to learn about how this stone has been excavated and the craft and technique required for its carving.

Tinos is also a gem for its food and wine. Visit the restaurant To Thalassaki next to the water at Ysternia Bay on the western

part of Tinos for local dishes at their finest. Or arrange a visit to one of the island’s wineries such as Ballis, Volacus and Vaptistis.

## Hydra, SARONIC ISLANDS

I had wanted to visit Hydra ever since I was a kid growing up in Montreal, and I saw photos of this island where the famed Leonard Cohen had lived, written and played music back in the sixties.

When we first arrived by ferry, I was initially dismayed to discover its horseshoe-shaped port teeming with tourists, and its many donkeys now used mainly to haul building supplies and other equipment rather than people, as I had imagined.

But walk just a few minutes up from the port, and you can get lost in its narrow windy paths and hardly pass a soul (at least when we went in late September). You don’t have to walk far to discover a pretty cocktail bar overlooking the water, a rockface you can jump off of for a swim, or a taverna where you can sit and enjoy a carafe of wine on a cobblestone square under the shade of some olive trees.

## SLEEPING OVER

Stay in the hub at a romantic boutique hotel in Hydra Town. Or take the complimentary five-minute ferry or half-

hour walk along the coast to the luxurious Mandraki Beach Resort. Once the home of Admiral Andreas Miaoulis, commander of the naval forces during the Greek War of Independence, the bay here was used to build and launch ships during the 1800s. With strict building codes, original structures have been maintained.

The resort is located on the island’s only sandy beach and has 13 identical single-level suites fronting the beach, each with its own private pool, as well as four suites in the main building, including their premier “tower suite” with a private terrace. Seaside accommodations are designed using natural materials, such as peaked-wood ceilings, marble floors and exposed stone walls to create a warm, earthy feel.

The resort’s restaurant, Captain M, serves delicious Mediterranean-fusion cuisine, inspired by Greek gastronomy. Dine waterside with an elaborate breakfast included with your stay. Try their beach menu at lunch with bao buns and massive club sandwiches—or order from their sushi menu. For dinner, enjoy popular dishes like cauliflower salad, octopus carpaccio, and dry-aged meats.



Offering more than just golf, this seaside retreat delivers the simple pleasures of the finer side of life

BY DOUG WALLACE

# Fox Harb'r Fun

There's nothing like a cocktail cruise on an 18-metre yacht at sunset to make you feel welcome; all my cares melting into the waves of the Northumberland Strait. In fact, it feels like the perfect segue from my arrival at Nova Scotia's venerable Fox Harb'r Golf Resort & Spa via private jet. Shoes kicked off, I'm handed a flute of Brut sparkling from the resort's own vineyard.

Founded by Ron Joyce of Tim Hortons fame in 2000, and now carried forward by his son Steven Joyce, Fox Harb'r is a 445-hectare paradise and an exclusive golf haven anchored to 88 luxury townhouse-style suites. A massive convention and event centre opened in 2022. Support comes in the form of dozens of amenities, including a private airstrip and hangar, a deep-water marina, a luxe spa and junior Olympic-sized swimming pool, and a hunting lodge. Yes, this is a lifestyle I could get used to.

"Mr. Joyce coined a phrase we still like to use—that we are 'luxury without pretension,'" says resort president Kevin Toth. "The atmosphere is luxurious while still approachable—high quality, yet still comfortable." He says that half of those



checking in are straight-ahead leisure guests and half are corporate groups who are "adding a leisure component to their trip, incorporating a golf experience or one of our activities within their itineraries."



Fresh Halibut



A one-of-a-kind welcome on the resort yacht

I feel like I've entered a community rather than a golf resort. Guests whizz by waving from their golf carts, people stop to offer directions, kitchen staff ride past me with what looks like a fabulous lunch. It's a busy sort of place, workers maintaining the grounds, half-ton trucks adding to the notion that something big is on the horizon.

That something is a massive redesign of the resort's 100-hectare golf course, which is on its way to doubling in size. Two of the best golf architects in the world—Canadians Tom McBroom and Doug Carrick—are working together to expand the current course, splitting it

into two 18-hole courses: a links course to be ready by May 2025 and a parkland course slated for completion mid-season 2026. Each will include half of the original course.

When you're not out golfing, taking a lesson at the Golf Academy, or devouring decadent seafood from the very capable Fox Harb'r kitchen, there are many

other activities to work in before happy hour. A pontoon boat will take you to visit the herd of seals that congregates just down the shoreline and fishing is easily arranged with the resort's boat captain. Sea kayaking leads to even more seals. The hunting lodge is the hub for a variety of sporty stuff, all of it fun.

The recreation team takes us through the art of archery and axe-throwing, as well as sport shooting. Headphones firmly in place, we take our cues from the guide, who explains the finer points of hitting the various clay pigeons and their launching

points. I manage to conjure up my inner farm boy and miss only one shot.

We return to the lodge the next day to sample more of the kitchen's handiwork, which keeps to the unstuffy theme. "We focus on regional cuisine, which by its very nature is approachable," Toth says, "and we have the best wine list east of Montreal." I concur. And while there is caviar—this is a luxury resort, after all—it's from Acadian sturgeon.

After dessert, we move to the fire pit outside. An attendant appears almost out of nowhere with all the necessary fixings for s'mores. Yes, I can absolutely have dessert twice, thank you. It's just one more simple pleasantry that makes Fox Harb'r one of a kind.



Learning the basics of sport shooting



**“Mr. Joyce coined a phrase we still like to use—that we are ‘luxury without pretension,’ ”**

-Resort president  
Kevin Toth

# NAVIGATING TRANQUILITY IN LAOS

An intriguing and  
memorable journey on  
an Upper Mekong cruise

BY JUDI COHEN

Experiences like my recent cruise aboard the charming teakwood 28-passenger RV Pandaw Champa on the Upper Mekong in Laos fuel my passion for small ship expedition cruising. Over the last decade, my husband and I have cruised on small river ships in Myanmar, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand and India, however the Upper Mekong was one of the most intriguing yet!



Boarding a long tail boat to take us upstream to meet the Champa Pandaw

## Embracing Slow Travel

Cruising on the largely untouristed Upper Mekong provided an intimate encounter with the gentle pace of Laotian life. Our route remained largely as planned although the water level in the Mekong was very low near Vientiane, necessitating an exhilarating seven-hour longtail-boat ride to meet the ship upstream. As with other small-ship expeditions, we have come to expect changes to our daily routine based on river conditions and weather.

For example, morning mist delayed our planned sail aways on some days, yet I enjoyed the eerie and mysterious mood it created. While our captain was skilled at reading the water, he needed to be able to see it to avoid rocks and sandbanks.

## Life Aboard the RV Champa Pandaw

We had ample time for onboard enrichment and entertainment, from cooking demonstrations and language classes to cultural performances and every moment added layers to our understanding of Laos. Nights were illuminated with live entertainment, including a memorable BBQ dinner and party on a deserted sandbank where we sent paper lanterns into the starlit sky.

Our Thai chefs curated authentic East Asian meals, showcasing the region's diverse flavours. From buffet-style breakfasts with fresh fruits and eggs cooked-to-order to noodle bars, delicious soups and fresh fish, every meal became a celebration of locally sourced ingredients.



Onboard cooking demonstration



Fresh local eggs at the market



## Changes Afoot

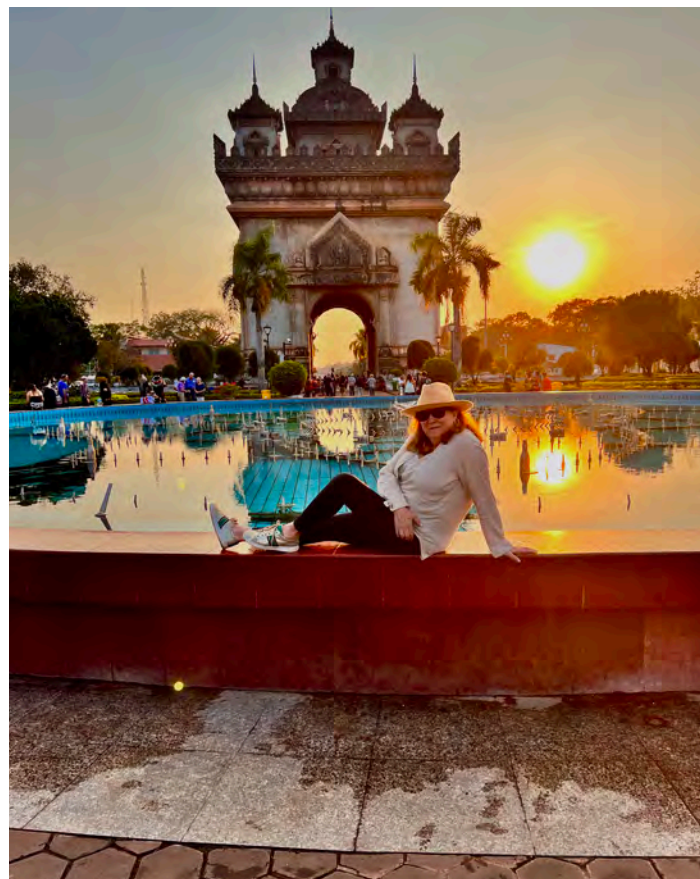
While the Upper Mekong retains an air of timeless tranquility, the region is not immune to the winds of change. As Laos opens its doors to tourism, there's a delicate dance between preserving its cultural heritage and embracing the benefits of economic development.

The Xayaburi Dam is the first of several hydroelectric dams being constructed on the Laos section of the Mekong. Our boat brushed up against the concrete walls of the narrow lock and it was such a tight fit we were able to reach out and touch the walls ourselves. The grandiose Xayaburi Dam seemed like such an odd sight in an otherwise undeveloped portion of the river.

Built in 2019 and financed by Thai companies (with most of the electricity going to Thailand), the residents of Laos receive little benefit from these dams, yet entire villages must be disrupted and relocated to higher land as water levels change with the operation of the dams. Further up the river, construction had begun on one of the next of five dams in Laos.



Watching the Champa Pandaw as it rises in the lock chamber at the Xayaburi Dam



Sunset at the Patuxai Victory Gate in Vientiane

## Vientiane

We were welcomed to Laos via its capital city, Vientiane, which exudes a laid-back charm with its French colonial architecture and bustling markets. While there are over 100 temples in Vientiane, we visited only two. The Sisaket Museum and Temple, constructed in 1818 is the only temple that survived after the city was burned down in 1828 and has over 10,000 Buddhas made of bronze inside. We also went to the golden Pha That Luang stupa, dating back to the 3rd century AD (rebuilt in the 1930s) and regarded as the most important national monument in Laos. Our sunset visit to the Patuxai Victory Gate, a seven-storey arch with carved walls and ceilings and paintings of Gods and elephants, reminded me of the Arc de Triomphe in Paris (with fewer cars).



Jungle Kuang Si Waterfall

## Luang Prabang

Luang Prabang, a UNESCO World Heritage site and the former capital of Laos is a cultural and spiritual hub that captures the essence of the country. I walked by boutique hotels, art galleries, morning markets and cafes alongside centuries-old temples, creating a harmonious blend of old and new. This was a huge difference from the small, isolated villages I'd seen thus far in Laos.

Walking with our guide before sunrise to a large monastery in the centre of town, we sat on small stools with baskets of sticky rice to give alms as hundreds of saffron-robed monks walked by with their tins open to receive offerings. By sunrise, we made our way to the busy morning market with vendors selling fresh meat, riverweed, coloured eggs, fried rats and bats and all varieties of seafood.

Our ship docked for two nights so we could visit the Jungle Kuang Si Waterfall, the Muang Khay Village Buffalo Farm and the Kuang Si Bear Rescue Centre. I could easily have spent many more days exploring Luang Prabang.



The Teak Bridge in Luang Prabang

## Embracing Sustainable and Eco-conscious Tourism

Small ship cruising in all destinations carries a responsibility to tread lightly on the fragile ecosystems and cultures encountered along the way. Pandaw Cruises collaborates with local communities to ensure tourism benefits both visitors and hosts. From eco-friendly practices on board to supporting local initiatives, responsible tourism plays a pivotal role in preserving the pristine beauty of the Upper Mekong.

As our ship gracefully approached Chiang Khong, Thailand, I felt sad to be leaving but grateful to have experienced my time on the Upper Mekong. Slow travel in Laos left me with an appreciation for the country's culture and history amid the winds of transformation in an uncharted future.



## Highlights Along the Upper Mekong

The Upper Mekong is not just a waterway; it's a lifeline for the communities that line its banks living in traditional stilted villages. I welcomed the intimate encounters and the gentle pace of Laotian life. Villagers often engage in fishing, cultivating rice paddies and creating traditional handicrafts. At times I felt like this journey was a living documentary, witnessing scenes of daily life that have remained unchanged for generations.



Game drive with Londolzi Game Reserve

# The Magic of Safaris

Every safari experience has the potential to offer something new, exciting and unforgettable

BY RUTH ATHERLEY

Sitting in an open-air vehicle in the African bush as a pride of lions grooms themselves in the sun mere feet away feels more Hollywood than reality. It conjures up scenes from iconic films like *Out of Africa*, *The African Queen* and even the animated movie, *The Lion King*. The thing is, it is real life—and the experience is life-changing.

Africa is vast and incredibly diverse, with many regions renowned for their safaris. Countries like Botswana, Kenya, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe are some of the top safari destinations. I have been to South Africa and Kenya for game drives and plan to get to all of these destinations because they each offer a magic uniquely their own.



Leopard spotting on a game drive with Salas Camp



# South Africa

South Africa was where I first went on safari and the country, its people, the stunning landscapes and the incredible wildlife all make the region a huge draw. South Africa is known for safari tours and offers many opportunities to view the “Big Five” (lion, elephant, buffalo, leopard and rhinoceros).

While there are many safari lodges (for a range of budgets) throughout the country, one of the most well-known is Londolozi. Sitting on the Sand River in the heart of the Sabi Sand Game Reserve, it is a part of the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park—a growing area that covers six million

acres including Kruger National Park.

Breeding herds of elephants and buffalo roam throughout the land around Londolozi and its concentration of white rhinos and lions are among the highest recorded on the African continent. Along with its luxury accommodation and truly five-star service (in 1993, Londolozi was the first game reserve in the world to be accorded Relais & Châteaux status), the lodge is known for its leopards.

Londolozi is on the higher end for rates—but worth every penny and more. The game drives are exceptional, the rangers and

trackers are knowledgeable, and the accommodations are comfortable and luxurious.



Londolozi Game Reserve, Private Granite Suites Riverview Bath



Londolozi Game Reserve Varty Camp Main Deck



Colourful warriors of Samburu culture



Salas camp migration



Beautifully beaded



A rhino with his feathered companion



Sundowners with Sasaab



Salas Camp-Game Drives



Breakfast on the deck at Solio Lodge

# Kenya

I have been on dozens of game drives in Kenya and am excited to return for more. Some of the best safari experiences in Kenya come from The Safari Collection, which offers stays at several properties, including the highly popular Giraffe Manor. Their lodges allow guests to experience the wildlife and culture of several regions in the country. They also have special packages in the shoulder seasons that are relatively well-priced, given their five-star status.

Their lodges include Sala's Camp, which offers an authentic Masai Mara experience where you glamp in luxury, complete with private plunge pools and glass-fronted tents. It is nestled into the tree-lined banks of the Sand River at the southern tip of the Masai Mara National Reserve. This experience includes the most incredible cookout breakfasts and sundowner cocktails on the savanna. It feels as if you have stepped into a movie scene, and you and the animals are the stars!

Another luxury tented camp is Sasaab—located just outside Samburu National Reserve in Kenya's Northern Frontier District. It is home to a range



Tent with a view at Sasaab

of animals including elephants, cheetahs and wild dogs, as well as the "Samburu Special Five" (beisa oryx, reticulated giraffe, Grevy's zebra, gerenuk antelope and Somali ostrich). Guests often hear the tinkling of bells through the bush and see Samburu herders moving a caravan of camels along their route.

Also in this group is Solio Lodge, made up of five guest cottages with floor-to-ceiling glass windows and private sun decks. Along with the Big Five, Solio Lodge has earned a reputation for its rhino-viewing experiences—with an estimated 200 black and white rhinos calling the area home. It is recognized as one of the most successful private rhino sanctuaries

in East Africa. It sits in the valley between Mount Kenya and the Aberdare Mountains and is the only guest lodge on the 45,000-acre Solio Game Reserve.

Every safari experience offers something unique for the visitor. In fact, it can even be very different day to day at the same lodge. The up-close-and-personal adventures with wildlife, staying in a lodge in the African bush and the knowledge of the rangers and trackers is something special. No matter where you are—you feel like you are in the most incredible place on earth.



Cozy cottage at Solio Lodge



Salas Camp-Keekorok Family Tent

# HOTEL DES GRANDS VOYAGEURS, PARIS

A STAY STEEPED IN THE  
GOLDEN AGE OF TRAVEL

BY MICHELE SPONAGLE



I live for nostalgia. I live in a house built in 1888, complete with a dumb waiter. I collect antiques and vintage items, from travel posters to cocktail shakers. If I could turn back time, I'd love to be one of those passengers who crossed the ocean on a grand vessel with a stack of trunks filled with fabulous clothes.

I think that's why I felt so at home at the Hotel des Grands Voyageurs in Paris where I stayed last November. The 138-room property sits in the heart of the 6th arrondissement, just a two-minute walk from the Saint-Placide metro stop. Fabrizio Casiraghi, the award-winning Italian designer who reimaged the former Holiday Inn, took his inspiration from the golden age of travel and the grand homes of Parisian art collectors.

You can see that come alive as you walk through the doors. Lithographs from Marc Chagall and Gustav Klimt adorn the walls covered with rich mahogany wood panelling. The reception area shares space with a gleaming metal, marble and wood bar—its lit display of top-shelf liquor casting a golden glow.

This is how it might have felt to be on board a luxurious ship like the Queen



Mary when it sailed for the first time in 1936. Nautical touches continue as I head to my room. Thick braided ropes to reinforce the luxury ocean vessel vibe line the corridors.



The rooms also tap into a 1930s and 1940s design aesthetic, borrowing the look of trains and boats from those decades. Think wood and plush velvet finishes, a retro industrial-style desk and Art Deco-inspired, bas-relief sculptures

with travel motifs by François Gilles over the bed.

The golden age of travel spanned from 1830 to 1955 before commercial flights took off in a major way. It was a time when the journey mattered as much as the destination. It took four days to go from New York to England on an ocean liner—a chance to enjoy a slower pace of life. (Today, it's a seven-hour flight.)

Opened in October 2023, Hotel des Grands Voyageurs encourages its guests to wind down, settle in and savour every moment of their stay. One of its suites has a record player with a selection of jazz on vinyl. The lobby bar has oodles of well-padded banquettes where you can linger over reinvented classic cocktails. My favourite is the Lemon Drop Martini, crafted with gin, banana liqueur, fresh lemon juice and yuzu, by charming bar manager, Sacha Zunic.

represent New York and Parisian faves. Moules et frites is featured alongside a grilled cheese and tomato soup combo.

To keep sailing with the vintage cruise theme, order a baked Alaska flamed with absinthe or, as the French call it, l'omelette norvégienne. While there are no sparklers or parade of waiters carrying the dessert aloft to diners, it delivers forkfuls of sweet nostalgia. Bring it on.



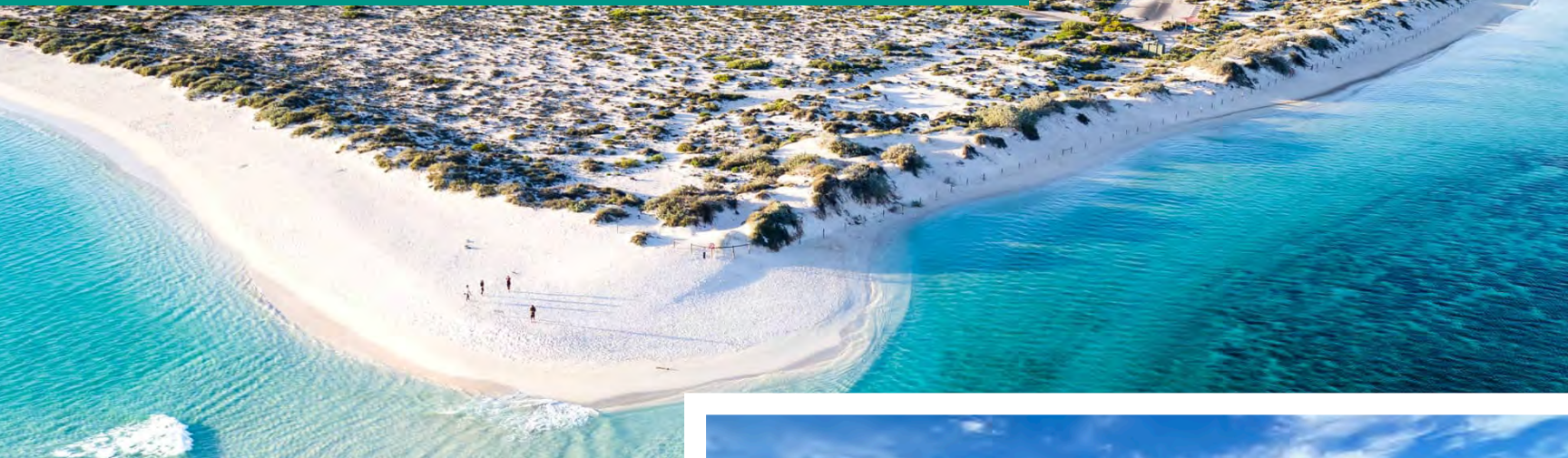
Poppy Bar

Baked Alaska with Absinthe

There's also a hidden speakeasy in the hotel's basement. How very Prohibition era! Poppy accommodates just 40 guests, fitting the modest size of the property, but it's a happening spot to connect with locals and fellow guests. On Saturdays, resident DJs play tunes to get crowds bopping until 2 a.m.

The hotel's on-site restaurant boasts a transatlantic theme, offering dishes that

# The Wild, Wild West



## Western Australia's Ningaloo Coast reveals coral reefs and white-sand beaches, wallabies and whale sharks

BY DOUG WALLACE

**T**he Perth airport is a sea of orange and yellow safety vests at five in the morning—dozens of miners with hardhats heading to work in the iron ore, copper and nickel mines in the north country. After a few days of getting to know Western Australia's capital city, I'm flying north, too, to Exmouth, a tiny town on the tip of Australia's North West Cape.

Like most who visit, I've come to hike the red rocks of Cape Range National Park, to snorkel the coral gardens of Ningaloo Marine Park and to swim with the majestic whale sharks, the world's largest fish. Happily, the whole region is a safe haven for several threatened animal species—humpback whales, manta rays, dugongs, rock wallabies—with many conservation groups working toward their protection.

The 260-metre-long World Heritage-listed Ningaloo Reef is Australia's largest fringing coral reef—as opposed to a barrier reef like the big one on the other side of the continent. The whale sharks, which average around 10 metres in size, call this part of the world home from March through September. As I head out with a dozen or so other people on a boat tour to find this slow-moving, gentle fish, I notice a plane circling overhead—learning later that it spots the shark shadows in the water and alerts the boat captains to let them know where to head.



The adventure team draws us in for a briefing on how we're going to successfully swim alongside the whale shark without bumping into each other or the giant fish itself. It's a strategy that seems complicated at first, yet rolls out like a charm when we reach our first one. We jump into the water in groups of four, get in line with our snorkel guide, and then dip our heads in the water when prompted. I am instantly stunned by the beauty of this graceful creature. The gentle giant swims past us as we watch in a tidy row, its blue-grey spotted skin shimmering in the sunlight just below the surface. Keeping three metres back, we are then allowed to swim along with it. By the time we connect with our third whale shark, I am scooting behind it to swim on its other side where there are fewer snorkelers, and, using my fins with as straight legs as possible, I can keep up—but it doesn't take long to tucker out.

We cap our time in the water with a more relaxed snorkel at a different part of the Ningaloo Reef, watching an octopus change colour seemingly on a whim and having our pictures taken with a little ray who is pretending to sleep in the sand.

The natural attractions on land are equally as beautiful. This includes the 48,000-hectare Cape Range National Park about an hour outside of Exmouth. Our guide relates the natural and human history of the region as we hike along the spectacular red cliffs of the Yardie Creek Gorge. This is definitely off the beaten track—a rocky plateau of rugged limestone and deep canyons. As we amble along, little black-flanked rock wallabies pop out of the sharp rock crevasses to skip past us and small colonies of fruit bats squabble in the trees.

Just when the heat of the day starts to wear me down, it's time for a swim at nearby Turquoise Bay, one of Western Australia's most famous beaches. And as we drift along over the kaleidoscope of coral gardens, my mind wanders, too—to when I'll be planning my return visit.



## When You Go

- Exmouth Dive & Whalesharks Ningaloo is one of the leading tour operators for swimming with whale sharks. Services also include scuba diving, snorkeling and whale-watching tours. [EXMOUTHDIVING.COM.AU](http://EXMOUTHDIVING.COM.AU)
- Exmouth Adventure Company is a small-group ecoadventure outfit offering sea kayaking, snorkeling and hiking, plus beach camping tours and wilderness treks of various lengths. [EXMOUTHADVENTURECO.COM.AU](http://EXMOUTHADVENTURECO.COM.AU)
- Exmouth Escape Resort is a little oasis of self-contained apartments surrounding a large pool and a casual seafood restaurant. Tour packages offer a range of regional experiences. [EXMOUTHESCAPERESORT.COM.AU](http://EXMOUTHESCAPERESORT.COM.AU)
- Whalebone Brewing Co. is Exmouth's top watering hole, brewing inventive craft beers, while a busy kitchen throws together generously portioned pizzas. [WHALEBONEBREWING.COM.AU](http://WHALEBONEBREWING.COM.AU)



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