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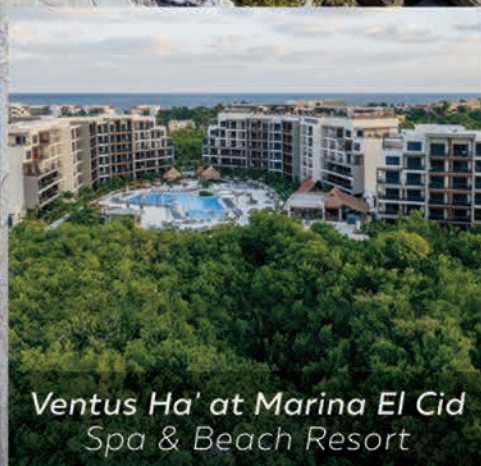
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TRAVEL AND *CELEBRATION* GO HAND-IN-HAND

For me, travel has always felt like a celebration, whether I'm planning a trip, packing for one, or touching down in a new or much-loved destination. The entire process feels special every time, and that awe-inspiring

discovers a destination that rewards lingering. Another writer finds herself in the Azores, making the most of this beautifully unique part of Portugal. We also have a story on experiencing a crowd-free side of Crete, thanks to a stay at secluded Dalabelos Estate. Three rose-tinted cities in southern France make for a scenic road trip packed with history, excellent food and one-of-a-kind culture. And when a visit to Monaco comes complete with a bucket filled with champagne bottles on ice, you know you've chosen wisely, as one writer discovers.

In addition to Europe, we have stories on many other enticing destinations. Our piece on Curaçao proves that no matter how many times you visit this vibrant Caribbean island, you'll find something new that pulls you in and reminds you of why it's so special. We also have a story on the many ways in which all-inclusive Dreams Flora Resort & Spa in Punta Cana is the perfect place for a multigenerational vacation that makes it easy to have fun with family and friends of all ages.

Closer to home, we head to Klahoose Wilderness Resort in British Columbia which connects guests to the land, culture and spirit of the Klahoose First Nation. We also take the road less travelled on Highway 3, where gorgeous scenery and a blissfully slower pace pave the way for an epic Canadian road trip like no other.

And in Saudi Arabia, a new chapter in travel is unfolding. Once closed off, the country is now opening its doors to the world and inviting travellers, women included, to experience its landscapes, history and many unique sites and attractions.

Wherever you find yourself this summer and beyond, I hope these stories remind you that travel is not only about distance or discovery, but about noticing what feels worth celebrating, wherever it appears, even if that's simply celebrating travel itself.

Tammy Cecco

EDITOR IN CHIEF

aspect of discovery is a big part of why *Travel Life* was born.

Celebrating has been on my mind a lot lately, with both of my daughters having recently reached major milestones. One just graduated from high school and the other from university. Watching these important moments unfold has been emotional, exciting and surreal all rolled into one and has made me reflect on the importance of slowing down to appreciate them.

I've found that travel often becomes part of how we can slow down to celebrate life's important moments, from graduations to anniversaries, and sometimes, it's where we go that can also enhance that celebratory spirit. For me, Europe has always been one of those places and coincidentally, it's where my eldest daughter decided to celebrate her graduation from university. She writes about her time in Lisbon (from the food to the culture) for this issue.

Although the summer season in Europe is consistently busy, it remains an iconic place to visit during the warmer months. This issue brings together some of the continent's most dynamic destinations and the food, people, culture and history that make Europe a perennial must-visit.

For starters, one writer spends a month in Croatia with her family where she

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TravelLife is a Canadian luxury travel magazine born from a passion for exploring the world, with the goal of inspiring memorable journeys both near and far.

CONTRIBUTORS

We asked some of our contributors to tell us about a time they've used travel as a way to celebrate.



TAMMY BURNS

GOING CROWD-FREE IN CRETE, PAGE 62

One of my most memorable birthdays will always be the one I spent solo on Crete. For two months, I stayed in a small village with lemon trees in my garden and sheep as my neighbours. For my birthday, I biked to an archaeological site, had dinner in a quiet taverna and drank wine while watching the sunset. It wasn't a flashy celebration, but it felt so special to have an experience like that all to myself.



LISA KADANE

SAUDI ARABIA'S TRAVEL MOMENT HAS ARRIVED, PAGE 34

My husband and I met on the Greek island of Corfu when we were backpacking around Europe after university. He proposed three years later on a trek in Northern India. Since travel is such a big part of our life together, we celebrate the milestone anniversaries with a trip—we spent our 15th anniversary climbing Mt. Kilimanjaro and our 25th touring Belgium's Trappist breweries. With our Pearl Anniversary on the horizon, what better way to celebrate than with a holiday to Watamu, the Kenyan "pearl" of the Indian Ocean.



CHLOE WILDE

A MONTH IN CROATIA TAUGHT ME THE ART OF SLOWING DOWN, PAGE 54

After years of fertility struggles we celebrated our pregnancy by going to New York City for a mini baby moon! It was the perfect weekend, spent walking around the city that never sleeps, soaking up the magic of Central Park and of course, eating pizza.



Editor's Pick

One of my favourite ready to serve cocktails of the summer is from Canadian brand, Collective Arts. Founded in 2013, this Canadian brand fuses innovative beverages with the talents of artists around the world.

Delicious and beautiful all at the same time! Check them out at [CollectiveArtsCreativity.com](https://www.collectiveartscreativity.com) @collectivebrew

TravelLife



SUMMER 2026 ISSUE

From its iconic brightly painted buildings to the pretty flower-filled balconies, Lisbon is always worth exploring.

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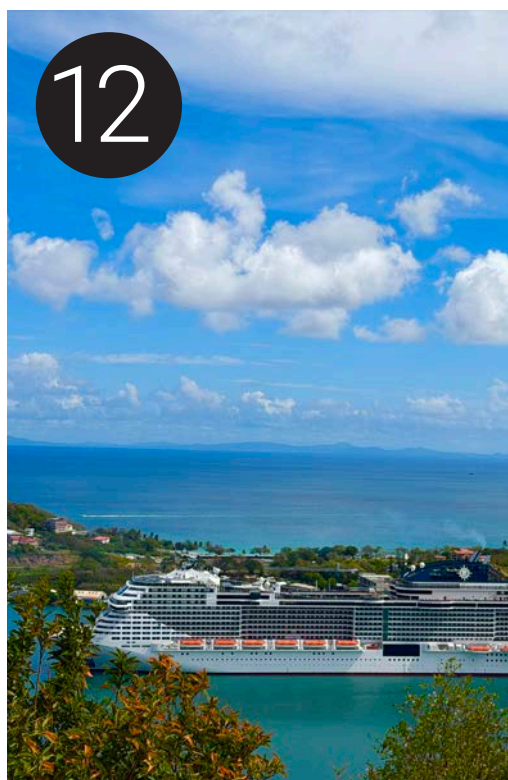
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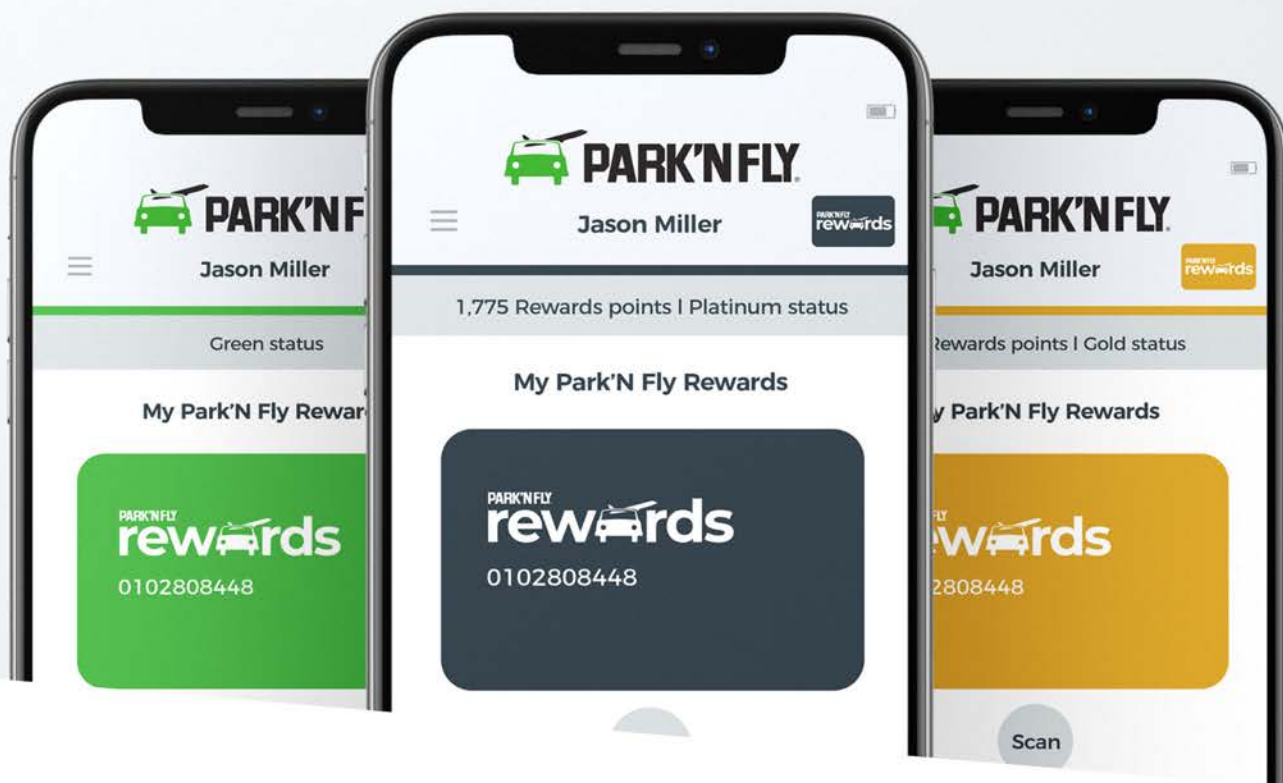


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Of the Moment: Toronto's Love Affair With All Things Japanese

Dining at Sushi Yugen's secluded chef's counter is a Japanese culinary experience like no other in the city

WORDS & PHOTOS BY NICOLA BROWN



Shiromi truffle

Toronto's culinary scene has long been defined by its multiculturalism, but one particular country's influence is taking the city by storm. From viral trends like sushi pops and hambagu steak to hyper-regional ramen noodle shops, ceremonial-grade matcha cafes and Michelin-level omakase experiences, Toronto has developed a seemingly insatiable appetite for all things Japanese.

At a tiny, eight-seat, speakeasy-style chef's counter in a private room inside Sushi Yugen, it's easy to be wooed by the charm of a uniquely Japanese experience. Attenuated from the bustle of the Financial District outside, the restaurant's inner sanctum is reserved for their magnum opus, a 16-course kaiseki-meets-sushi-omakase dinner. So discreet is the setting that there's always a chance you might get seated next to the likes of Canada's men's soccer head coach Jesse Marsch, or filmmaker Guillermo del Toro, both of whom have dined here.



Wagyu udon



Chef Kyohei Igarashi

The experience blends the stylized structure of a traditional kaiseki tasting menu with the intimate piece-by-piece service of a chef's-counter omakase for the ultimate two-in-one homage to the highest forms of Japanese dining. Dishes are determined by chef Kyohei Igarashi's selection of the best ingredients of the day, built around some of the rarest and highest-quality sourcing you'll find in the city, from \$100-per-pound sea perch to rare single-origin sake, directly from Japan. The attention to detail extends well beyond ingredients, with technique, temperature, pacing and presentation adding layers of reverence to each carefully considered moment.

Igarashi quietly and confidently feathers his knife through buttery tuna like only someone with 25 years of Michelin-trained mastery from Tokyo to Dubai could, gently shaping perfectly proportioned mounds of umami-rich sushi rice down to the grain, before passing each piece to each guest by hand.

Frequent collaborations with Michelin-starred chefs and sushi masters from Tokyo to New York brings a world of innovation to this tiny table, where guests have described signature dishes as uniquely reminiscent of an authentic Japanese fine dining experience told through a Canadian lens.

Yet despite the superlative precision, an alluring calmness blankets the room in a way few other fine dining experiences can match. Nothing is expected of you here. You needn't signal your scholarship of Burgundy's best bottles nor suffer the mortification of a decorous misstep. The evening unfolds in unexpectedly comfortable formality, where simple, natural materials form the serene backdrop to an artful culinary performance.

"Early experiences of dining with my father taught me that a restaurant can be more than just food. It can be memory, emotion and care," says manager Kamen Sun, who co-founded the restaurant in 2023 as an homage to the deeply personal passion they both shared for dining.

Indeed, dinner goes a good deal further than the food at Sushi Yugen. This quiet space with a singular focus seems an antidote to modern existence. Perhaps it's this quality that draws us into Japanese culture; a visceral yearning for things that are slower, more tactile, personal and understated. While the rest of the world toils noisily over intangibles, a quieter societal drift is drawing us back toward cultures and traditions that embody the opposite.

FOOD & DRINK

SUSHI YUGEN



Kabocha purin



Mehikari and Kamasu Yawatamaki

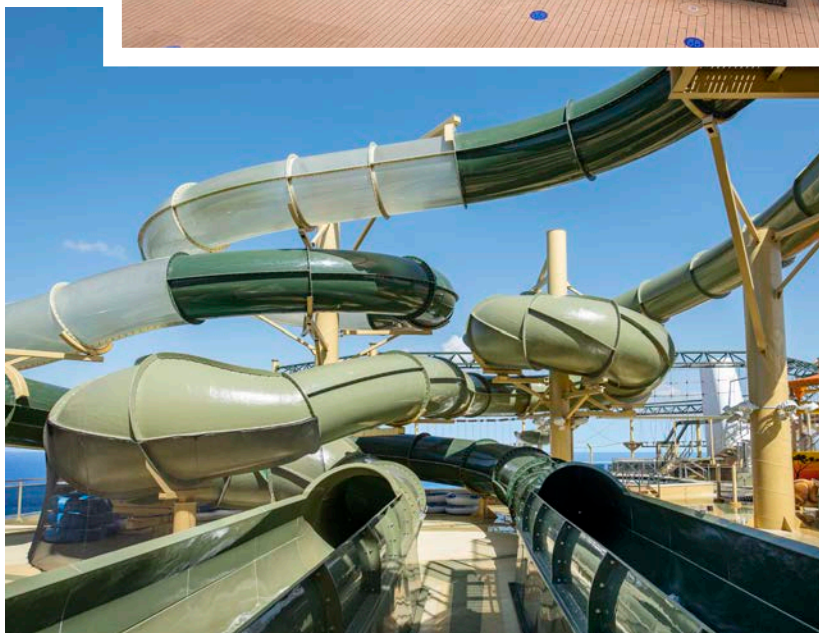
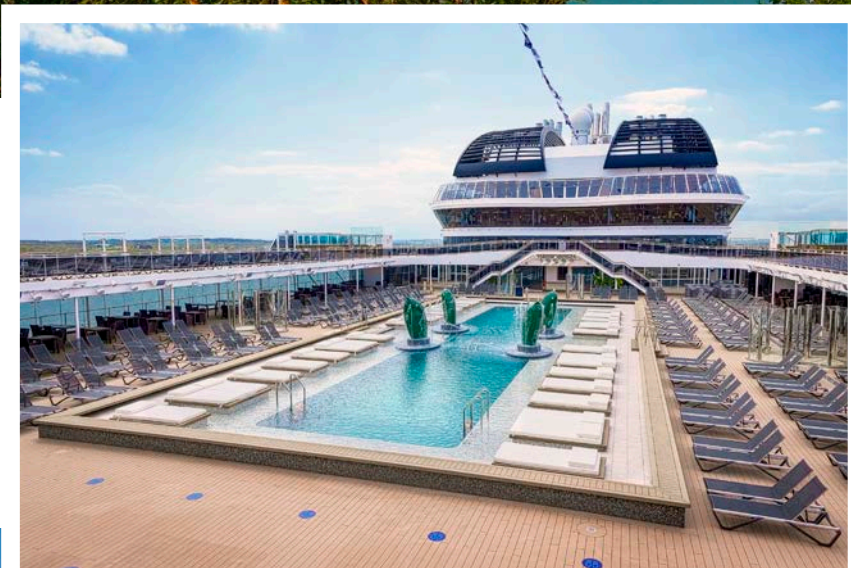


Unagi bowl

My First Cruise Definitely Won't Be My Last

As a first-time cruiser aboard the MSC Virtuosa I realized that one of the best things about this mode of travel is how easy it can be to make the experience entirely your own

BY SHEL ZOLKEWICH



This is a My First Cruise story. And the writer—me—was firm in the belief that I was either going to love it or hate it.

If you're the slightly impatient type like your writer, let it be known that I was Googling upcoming departures and destinations for my next cruise before I even left the ship. So now you know that my first cruise was a resounding success.

What's perhaps most surprising is that I'm a travel writer and I'd never been on a cruise. And when it came to personal travel, well, I was holding fast to an ancient notion that cruises were for old people. I'm embarrassed to admit that I even had that thought. Then an invitation popped into my Inbox, and after divulging it would be my first cruise, this story got its start.

The invitation was for a cruise aboard the MSC Virtuosa in the Caribbean & Antilles, departing from Pointe-a-Pitre, Guadeloupe and disembarking in Fort de France, Martinique.



My first order of business was to locate Guadeloupe, a French-owned group of islands home to 375,000 people in the south Caribbean. It's a laid-back sort of place with over 100 waterfalls, which sadly, I didn't see on this visit. But I did visit Chez Margaux Restaurant where I got my first taste of Ti' Punch (short for petite punch), the island's national drink. A bottle of rum agricole distilled from fresh sugarcane juice arrives on the table, followed by a tidy little silver platter containing a short glass, half a lime and a shot glass of sugar cane syrup. Put on your mixologist hat and have at it. The bottle is left on the table, but I suggest you cork it after two of these dangerously delicious drinks.

And now to the ship. It's easy to see how the MSC Virtuosa can accommodate over 6,000 guests—it's a massive, gleaming beauty with cabin balconies dotting its sides and a swirling waterslide as a crown. There is definitely some lining up to be done as your luggage is whisked away (how will it ever find me?) and you're checked in and handed the almighty cruise card that will get you everything from a morning cappuccino to embarkation back onto the ship after a day out.

I'm assigned cabin 12034 featuring a queen bed and a balcony with a pair of chairs where I enjoy my coffee, magically delivered to my door each morning. And this my friends, is perhaps the very best thing about a cruise. Unpack once. Explore endlessly. And my first adventure is to the buffet. If you've travelled and experienced your share of all-inclusive vacations, the word 'buffet' may strike fear in your heart. Fear not aboard the MSC Virtuosa. I swear I could hear the angels singing as I entered the Marketplace Buffet. The number of stations is clearly into the dozens—pastas, grilled meats, roasted vegetables, cheeses, vegan options, soups, burgers and fries and salad bars that became a daily ritual. And after three days of longing, this gluten-sensitive writer could no longer escape the lure of the wildly popular wood-fired pizzas (and guess what, zero negative effects). Everything is of exceptionally high quality and kept impressively clean, even with seating for over 1,300 guests.

The MSC Virtuosa is classified as a mainstream ship, meaning it's not a luxury liner, although I'm making an "I don't think so" face when I see a pair of Swarovski crystal staircases that serve as the backdrop

of endless photos, or walk into the Sky Lounge with its posh Art Deco vibe overlooking the Atmosphere Pool. These are luxury touches in my books, but there's also plenty of fun to be had—like sliding into an F1 simulator complete with a revving motor and white-knuckle manoeuvres, zipping down the slides at the Savannah Aqua Park, or testing Lady Luck at the Red Gem Casino, which has a superb cocktail menu.

The Caribbean & Antilles cruise starts in Pointe-a-Pitre, Guadeloupe and sails mostly overnight, visiting ports in Castries, Saint Lucia; Bridgetown, Barbados; Kingstown, St Vincent & The Grenadines; Saint Georges, Grenada and Fort de France, Martinique. I had adventures in every port, including ripping through sugar cane fields in a Jeep, sampling biscuit bread from Smith's Delight Bakery and walking the

same dock as Johnny Depp so famously did in *Pirates of the Caribbean*.

We spent only one day at sea, during which I discovered the ship has five pools and nine whirlpools. The largest pool is the Atmosphere and it's where the party happens with a large screen that broadcasts trivia games and



music. There are games in the afternoon, bars to visit to sample a new cocktail and plenty of loungers arranged for maximum sun worshipping. But my favourite was the Horizon Pool, a rather small pool and generally quiet space, located at the very back of the ship with the best view of the ship's wake.

I could go on and on about my time on the MSC Virtuosa, telling you about Vegas-worthy shows at the Grand Theatre and Carousel Lounge and the bright flavours of the French-Vietnamese fusion specialty restaurant, Indochine. So needless to say, this cruise was a most pleasant eye opener. Cruising isn't just for a certain demographic. On this ship, I chatted with families on annual vacations, singles looking to have an easygoing getaway and yes, some mature folks who fell in love with cruising because it's the perfect blend of relaxation and indulgence. No matter your style of travel or personality, a cruise lets you make it your own.



Soaking in Colombia's El Totumo Mud Volcano

Where to experience wellness on the muddy side

By Chris Ryall



I gingerly step down the mud-splattered ladder sprouting out from the mud pit. My feet and eventually my legs descend into the thick mixture that's warm to the touch. I feel a man's hand release my arm from the ladder and he positions me on my back in a full-body mud bath.

Wellness can come in many forms and in this case, it was in the form of a dense, warm volcanic mud bath complimented by an abundance of laughter and cultural quirkiness.

My friend Laura and I booked a Totumo Mud Volcano tour with Beyond the Wall, a tour company based in Cartagena. The El Totumo Mud Volcano is 52 kilometres northeast of Cartagena and is the smallest volcano in Colombia, rising to an unimpressive elevation of just 15 metres.





El Totumo is surrounded by wetlands and saline marshes and according

to local legend it was once a natural volcano spewing fire and lava. A priest in the area believed eruptions were the work of the devil so by soaking the volcano with holy water it miraculously changed into thick mud with proposed healing powers. Legend aside, the volcanic mud does deeply cleanse and detoxify your pores and is rich in minerals like zinc, magnesium and sulfur.

Laura and I climb up the rickety stairs. Don't hang on too tight to the bannisters as they may just break loose. Chalk it all up to being a part

of this totally unpretentious and villager-operated wellness experience. Upon reaching the top we peer out to the flat wetlands below. I hand over my towel and iPhone to our guide Albeiro who immediately starts taking pictures.

There are already a few people soaking in the mud and fun and frivolity reign supreme. Mud baths seem to bring people of all ages and backgrounds together. The male attendants in the pit position Laura and I lengthwise side by side on our backs. The mud is so thick we float as they start individually giving us a massage, front and then back. At this point every inch of our bodies (we are wearing bathing suits) is immersed in this gooey but ultra comforting and therapeutic mud. People with personal space issues may be a bit uncomfortable. I go with the flow and glance over at Laura and we just smile and laugh at this weird but thoroughly enjoyable experience.

After being massaged for about 10 to 15 minutes we try to

stand and move around but it's like resistance training to the 9th degree as the mud is so thick. There is no "floor" but thankfully we don't sink to the bottom of the earth.

We stay in the mud for 20 more minutes and chuckle at each other's head-to-toe mud-laden bodies. We get help as we make our way out of the mud and head down another set of rickety stairs and then a laneway to a lagoon to rinse off.

We are met by two elderly ladies carrying buckets. They lead us into the shallow waters and proceed to wash off the layers of mud. Modesty gets thrown out as they rinse off the mud where the sun doesn't shine!

Suitably rinsed we head back, change and quench our thirst at an open-air stall with a couple of tables and relax with a cold Colombian beer while admiring the feel of our silky smooth skin.

Wellness doesn't always happen at a swanky spa. Sometimes a volcano mud bath in Colombia's wetlands will do just fine.

Tips for Your Mud Bath Experience

- Use a reputable tour operator. Beyond the Wall Cartagena will transport you and manage everything including tip distribution.
- Arrive early in the morning before the crowds.
- Just bring a bathing suit, towel, tip money, camera and change of clothes. Leave jewellery and other valuables behind.
- Don't expect fancy; it's a local, cultural experience so just go with the flow.

DISCOVER THE BEST OF RIVIERA MAYA WITH EL CID RESORTS

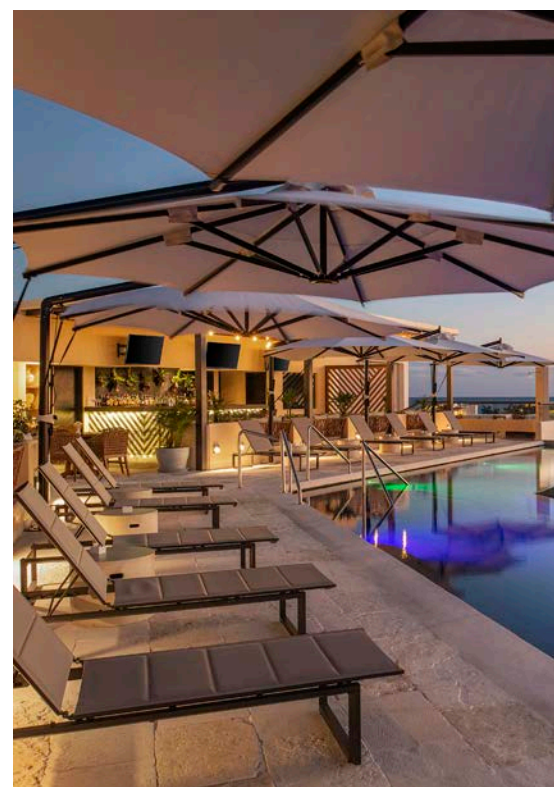
In Riviera Maya, staying with El Cid Resorts means personalized service combined with the perks of three connected properties

Riviera Maya is one of Mexico's most versatile destinations, with long stretches of shoreline, Mayan archeological sites to explore, cenotes to swim in and tropical forests all within easy reach. El Cid Resorts have three properties here, each with its own character, and all linked through a convenient program that lets guests move easily between them to enjoy the best of all three. The result is lots of choice without complication or compromise.



● Hotel Marina El Cid Spa & Beach Resort

Hotel Marina El Cid Spa & Beach Resort is built for variety. Families and groups gravitate to the 22,000-square-foot pool where waterfalls, slides, sun deck, in-water lounge chairs, children's area and a swim-up bar mean everyone has room to spread out. The beachfront location makes it easy to alternate between the pool and the sea, while the full-service marina is a gateway to snorkelling, sailing or deep-sea fishing excursions. When you're not in the pool or hitting the beach, sprawling El Cocay Spa features unique treatments inspired by Mayan traditions in a tranquil setting.





● Ventus at Marina El Cid Spa & Beach Resort

Ventus at Marina El Cid Spa & Beach Resort has a contemporary feel that easily blends comfort and style. Suites are modern and spacious, with large balconies overlooking the water or gardens. Some suites come with a private Jacuzzi or in-room soaker tub, or you can opt for a swim-up suite giving you direct access to the pool right from your terrace. Once you check in, your first stop will likely be the expansive infinity pool, designed to look as if its edge is merging with the ocean. Two Jacuzzis flank the pool and all three overlook a beautiful stretch of white sand dotted with palapas for shade and hammocks for lounging.

● Ventus Ha' at Marina El Cid Spa & Beach Resort

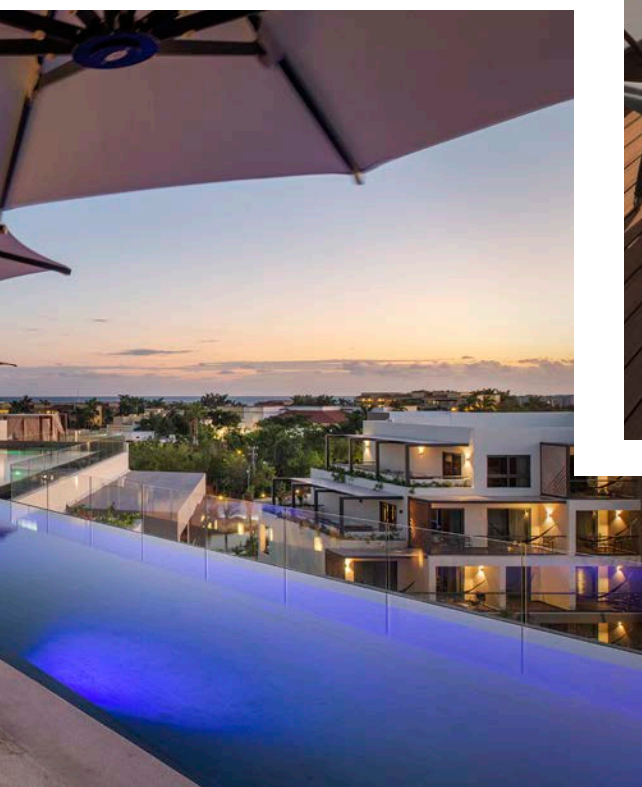
The newest of the three El Cid Resorts, Ventus Ha' at Marina El Cid Spa & Beach Resort, is smaller and distinctly serene. Its boutique-style suites and thoughtful design inspired by the region's many cenotes make it an ideal choice for couples or travellers who prefer calm. Don't miss the adults-only rooftop pool bars, Rûf and Na.Ha., where sunset views of the Caribbean and craft cocktails are the main attractions. While Ventus Ha' at Marina El Cid Spa & Beach Resort emphasizes relaxation, there are enough activities on offer for anyone in the mood for a bit more excitement.

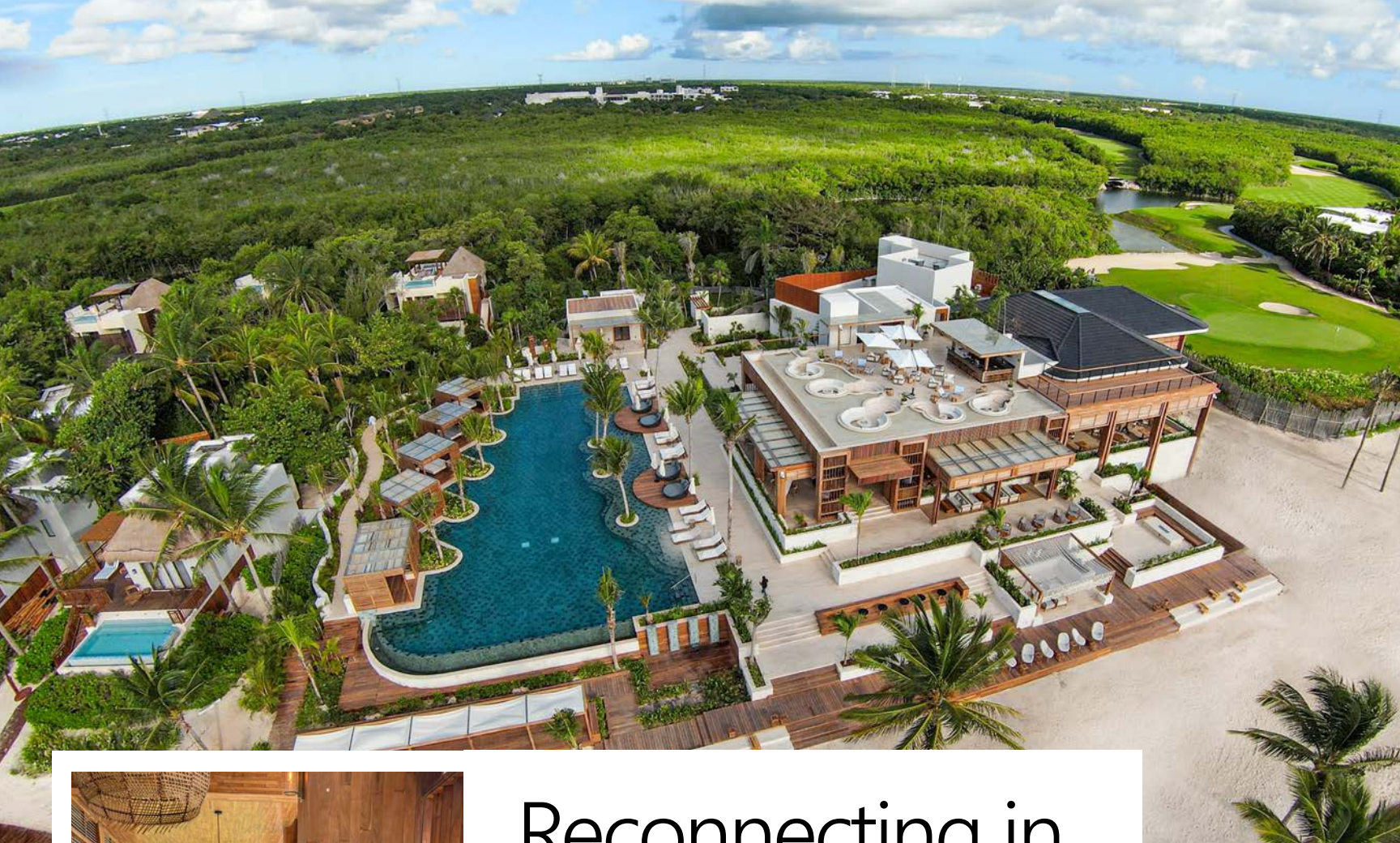


The Perks of Privilege

One of the best parts of staying with El Cid Resorts in Riviera Maya is flexibility. Through the Exchange Privilege program you aren't limited to the offerings of just one property, you can make use of the amenities across the entire El Cid Resorts Riviera Maya

complex. This gives you access to over 31 restaurants and bars, multiple pools—including infinity and adults-only pools—coffee shops, brand new pickleball courts, daily activities programs, Jacuzzis and more, all available regardless of which resort serves as your home base. It's a simple way to expand your experience without extra planning.





Reconnecting in Riviera Maya

Fairmont Mayakoba makes it incredibly easy to enjoy an unforgettable escape with the ones that matter most

BY SANGITA PATEL



Getting away as a couple isn't always easy and though we aim to plan a trip every year, between the kids and our busy schedules, it has been a couple of years since we were able to make it happen. But our recent five days at Fairmont Mayakoba in Mexico's Riviera Maya definitely made up for lost time. It was the ideal couples getaway, which combined rest and relaxation with fun activities we could do together.



Gorgeous Grounds & Beautiful Rooms

DISCOVERIES
RIVIERA MAYA

Fairmont Mayakoba is a large property set on an expansive white sand beach surrounded by mangroves, tropical jungle and fresh water canals. This stunning setting was our first introduction to the property, which provided the perfect blend of nature, fun and luxury throughout our stay.

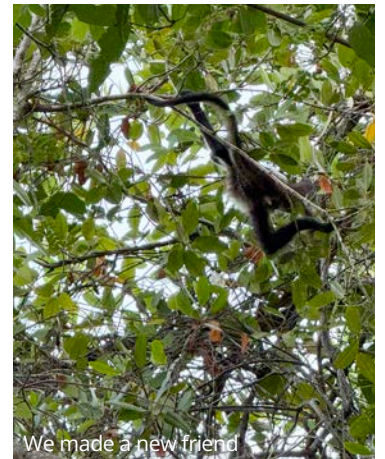
On arrival, we were checked in seamlessly and taken to a boat which wound its way through the many channels in the mangroves to our dock. It was then just a short walk to our room which was steps from the sand and beachfront pool.

The boat ride gave us a good overview of the property, which is surrounded by nearly 600 acres of jungle. Secluded rooms and suites provide privacy and made it easy to unwind. We also had the chance to explore the property on foot and by bike and were greeted with beautiful views at every turn.



What We Loved!

Our room came with butler service and Javier and Joyce were phenomenal, taking care of everything so we could just relax and enjoy the resort. Throughout the property, we met nothing but kind, caring and helpful staff.



We made a new friend

We stayed in a Beach Area Casita which was very well appointed and beautifully decorated. A comfortable bed, large bathroom, plenty of closet space and a large wraparound deck created a peaceful retreat we loved.

Ample Areas to Relax

One thing we noticed almost right away was how easy it is to relax at Fairmont Mayakoba, despite being people who are always on the go. There are so many spots to chill out and trust me when I say we took advantage of as many as we could!

We loved all of the pools, with each one providing a different vibe and atmosphere. There are two infinity pools to choose from with one being for adults only, complete with views of the property's serene lagoon. There's also the huge 10,000-square-foot Las Olas pool with lots of space to spread out.

Each of these areas provides comfortable loungers and palapas or umbrellas for protection from the hot sun. Service was phenomenal with plenty of hardworking staff making sure you are always comfortable, well hydrated and well fed! We had delicious meals poolside and on the beach on a couple of occasions which was idyllic.



What We Loved!

Poolside ceviche was so fresh and flavourful with just the right amount of kick, while grilled shrimp on a fresh salad was a very light and refreshing option.



■ Serenity at the Spa

Peak serenity happened during our couples massage. After an early morning workout at the well-equipped gym, we headed into the stunning Fairmont Spa Mayakoba for a 90 minute treatment tailored to our needs and we both left feeling pampered and relaxed.

The spa offers a wide range of treatments, many of which are inspired by local Mayan traditions. The space blends eye-catching architecture with soothing natural materials, echoing the resort's jungle surroundings. Along with massages, facials, Mayan-inspired therapies and innovative wellness treatments for body and mind round out the menu. There are 20 treatment rooms in total including two suites for couples.

What We Loved!

The entire spa was absolutely gorgeous with tons of amenities, including an outdoor pool area, sauna, plunge pools and a coffee/tea bar with delicious snacks.



■ Activities for Every Interest

The long periods of relaxation were interspersed with some really enjoyable activities. A mixology class at the rooftop bar during sunset was particularly memorable and the mai tais we made were delicious. We also did a cooking class and chef Andres was amazing, teaching us how to make several dishes including guacamole with charred habaneros, panuchos (a traditional Yucatan dish of bean-stuffed fried tortillas) and flautas. In the end we created a really flavourful and beautiful meal.

We also loved taking bike rides around the entire Mayakoba property. Bikes are available throughout the resort and there is a large network of trails winding through the four properties within the Mayakoba complex, around the golf course, through the mangroves and along the beachfront promenade. It was a great way to enjoy our surroundings while getting some exercise together.



Trying our creations



Mixology 101



What We Loved!

A highlight for us was visiting the cenote right on property, a natural cave filled with crystal clear water. Our guide shared a lot of interesting information on the importance of cenotes and their prominence in the region.



Tauro restaurant

What We Loved!

The variety and quality of food was unforgettable but the most memorable and serene meals we had were the laid back breakfasts at Brisas at Maykana. The ocean views were stunning and I still think about the French toast daily!



Unforgettable Dining

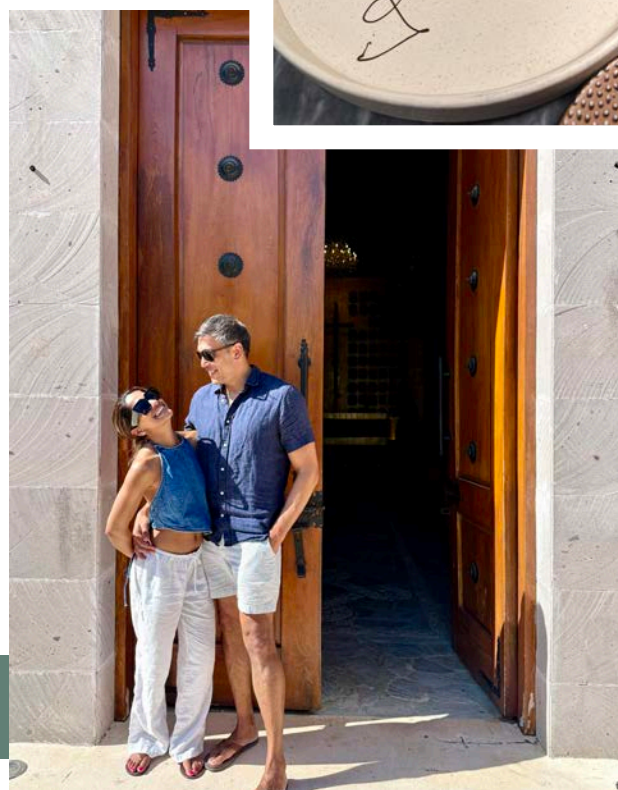
There are several restaurants at Fairmont Mayakoba and every one we tried was excellent. La Laguna serves delicious Mexican food. Grab a seat on the patio overlooking the mangroves and definitely order the beef short rib "birria" which was incredibly tender and packed with flavour.

The fabulous Tauro is a must if you love steak. Prime cuts and an in-house dry-aging program make for standout plates no matter what you order. We also loved the Italian dishes at Bassano where rigatoni a la vodka and the margherita pizza were favourites.

Reasons to Return

Our five days together were truly rejuvenating. We left the resort with amazing memories and felt reconnected and refreshed as a couple. But the resort also has lots to offer families and we will definitely return with our daughters to enjoy some of the family oriented activities and amenities offered.

No matter who you're travelling with, be it a multigenerational clan, group of friends or coming with toddlers or teens, it was evident throughout our stay that Fairmont Mayakoba caters to everyone equally. With its ideal blend of nature and luxury, it's easy to see why so many people make return visits (something we are sure to do).



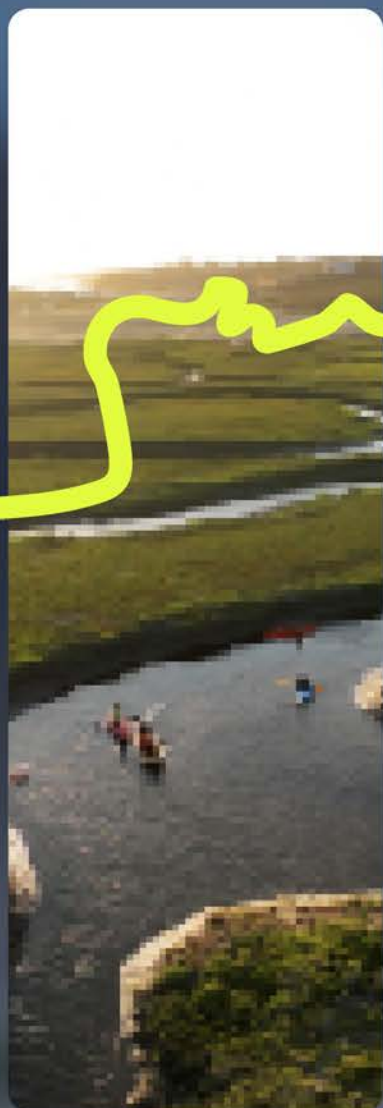
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Scuba Lodge in pretty Pietermaai

Curaçao in Full Colour

No matter how many times you visit this vibrant island, you'll find something new that pulls you in and reminds you of why it's so special

BY JESSICA PADYKULA

Not every destination has the power to stay with you long after you leave, but Curaçao is one of those places. Three trips in and the small Dutch island in the southern Caribbean continues to remind me of all the reasons it deserves (and rewards) repeat visits. This time around I'm surrounded by Curaçao's energy even before I check into my hotel. World Cup fever has taken hold because this will be the nation's first time ever competing in the prestigious sporting event. Everyone is cheering on the Blue Wave (the national football team), and fresh murals featuring swathes of bright blue are everywhere. Island pride is palpable.

While getting swept up in the hype was not something I expected, I wasn't surprised that the swell of local pride made me fall further in love with Curaçao. Whether it's your first or fifth visit, you're travelling solo or with a crowd, there are so many reasons to make time for (and return to) this colourful, enigmatic island.



► A Capital Full of Character

Most likely, your first stop in Curaçao will be its capital of Willemstad. And as far as capital cities go, this one is a gem and a place I could easily wander for hours at a time, only stopping for a batido (fresh fruit smoothie) to cool off and refuel. The UNESCO World Heritage Site feels like stepping into a small town in the Netherlands that's somehow been crossed with a Caribbean island, in the best way possible.

Made up of four districts that include Punda, Otrobanda, Pietermaai, and Scharloo, Willemstad is home to over 700 historical protected buildings and photo-worthy sites at nearly every turn. In terms of the districts themselves, Punda is the area you might recognize from countless postcards showcasing the Handelskade, a colourful waterfront strip lined with brightly-hued cafes, stores and Dutch architecture. Here you'll also find the iconic Queen Emma Bridge that swings open to allow boats into port and divides Punda from Otrobanda.

Fittingly, Otrobanda translates to "the other side" and has its

own unique character. Just as charming as Punda, this area has a bit more of a local feel, with quieter streets and small alleys to explore. Don't miss a visit to Kurá Hulanda Village, a recently restored area complete with winding cobblestone streets, colourful Dutch colonial architecture, pretty patios and courtyards, a hotel and a variety of shops and restaurants.

Pietermaai (sometimes referred to as the Soho of Curaçao) is a trendier area of the island and filled with boutique hotels, cute cafes, concept stores and restaurants. This is where I based myself and it's an ideal spot for leisurely exploration, stopping for a coffee between browsing for unique souvenirs or stylish items for yourself or your home. Make a stop at La Reina, a cozy spot for coffee, snacks, a drink and a well-curated selection of lifestyle items.

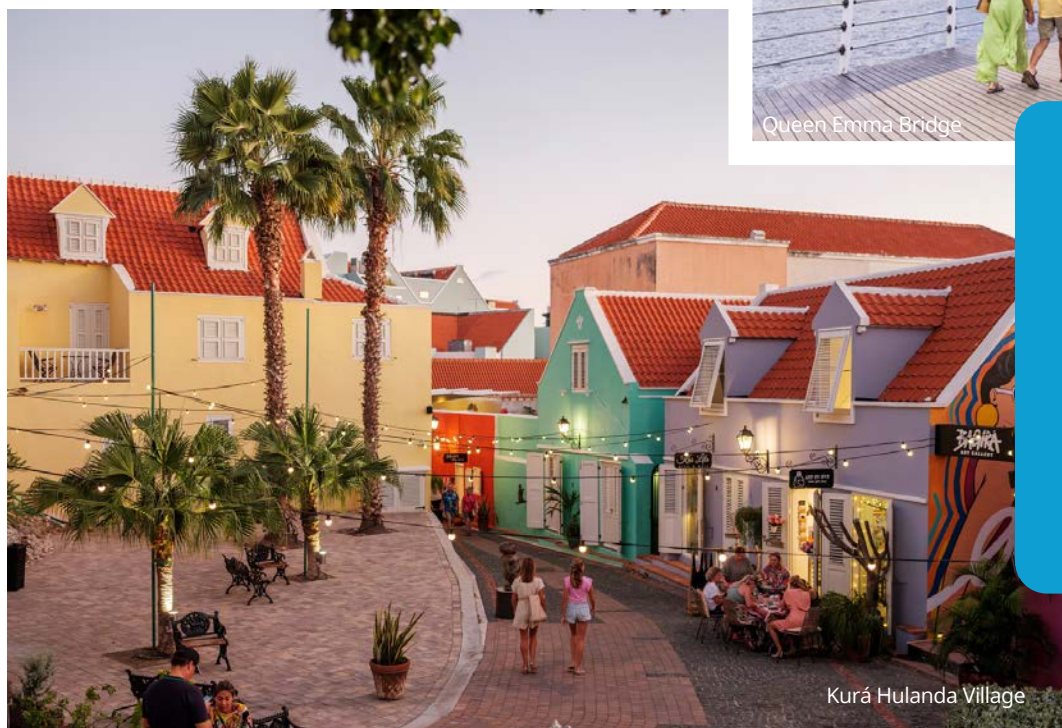
Lastly, Scharloo is the youngest colonial district with an up-and-coming vibe, laid-back local eateries, its own spate of street art and restored buildings that now house offices, art galleries, shops and hotels.



Smoothie stand



Queen Emma Bridge



Kurá Hulanda Village

QUICK TIP

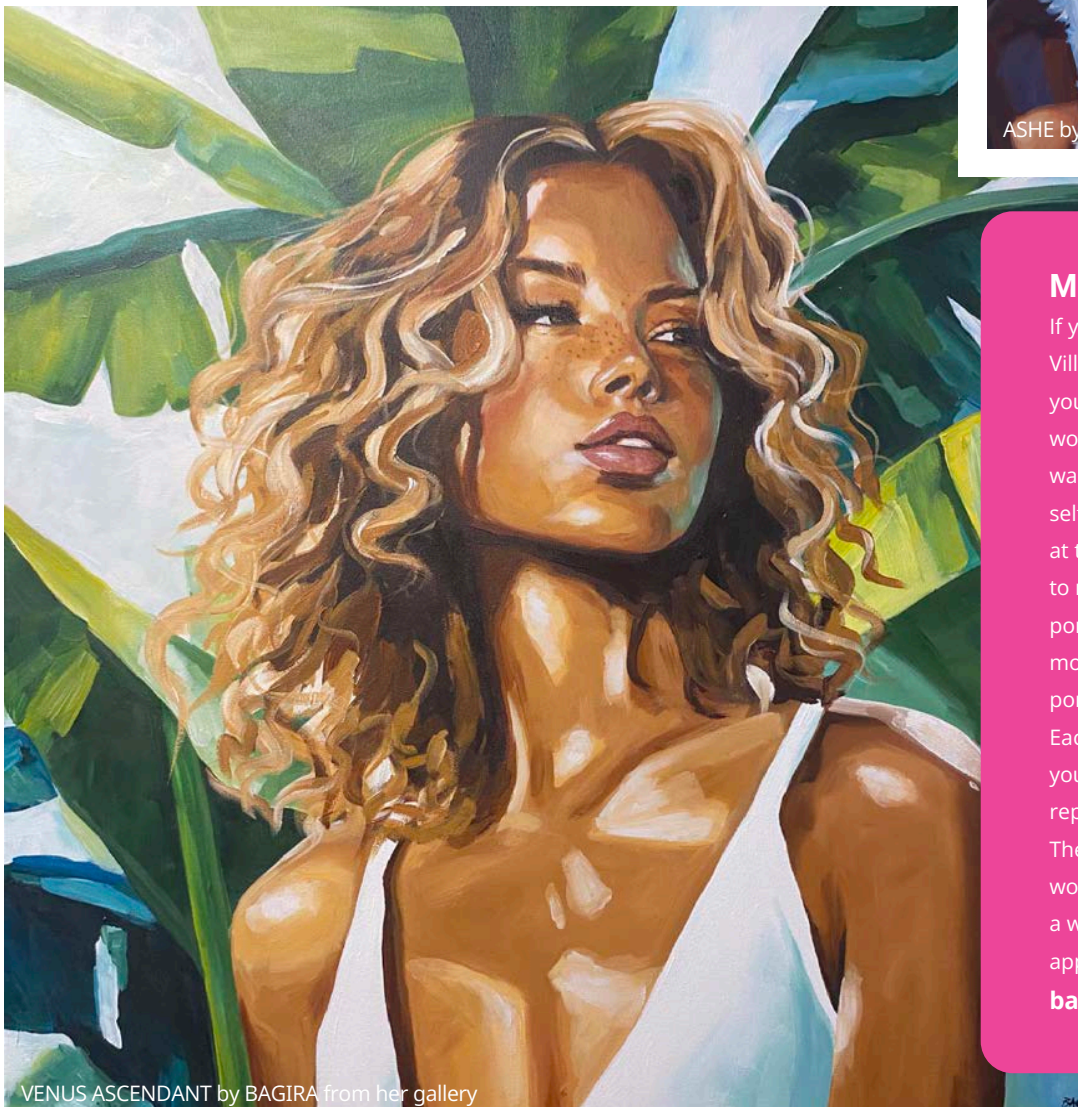
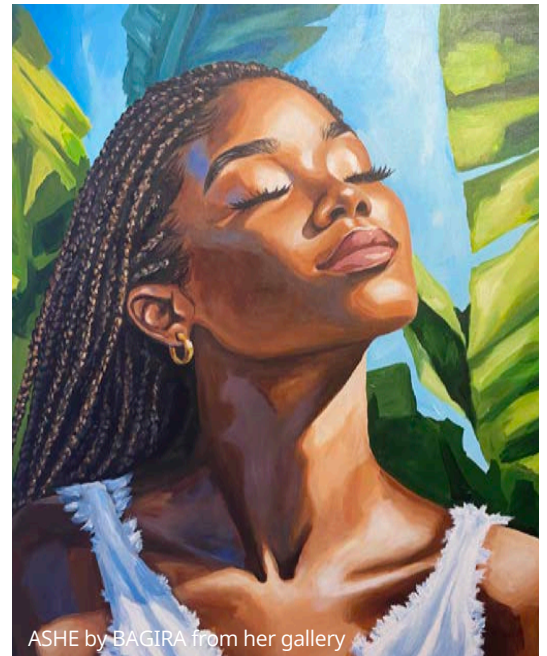
Cute and colourful Scuba Lodge is a long-standing boutique hotel located in Pietermaai with beach access, two pools, a nice restaurant and airy, comfortable rooms. It's well located for exploring Willemstad and the staff are friendly and helpful.

► scubalodge.com

► An Island of Art

One of the things that gives Curaçao its distinctive character is its art scene; something that continues to evolve, with large stretches of wall getting regularly transformed into something that grabs your attention and begs to be photographed. For starters, along with its colourful buildings and European vibe, Willemstad

is also a hub for gorgeous street art, something you will notice almost everywhere and in every neighbourhood, especially when exploring on foot. You can think of the island as an open-air gallery and one that warrants keeping your eyes off of your phone and trained on alleys and side streets that could easily lead you to an epic mural, hidden gallery space, or artist at work.



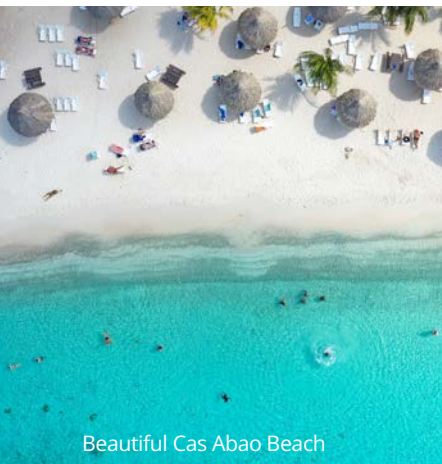
MUST-SEE

If you find yourself in Kurá Hulanda Village (highly recommended), make your way to The Gallery, housing the works of BAGIRA. I stumbled upon it and was instantly entranced. BAGIRA is a self-taught artist who moved to Curaçao at the age of 18. Her talent extends to murals across the island as well as portraits and abstract work. What I was most blown away by were her striking portraits of “people who don’t exist.” Each one is packed with so much soul you’d be forgiven for assuming they represent a living, breathing human. The gallery itself also houses some works by other artists and is laid out in a way conducive to taking your time to appreciate each piece of art.

bagira.art

► A Beach for Every Mood

There are over 35 beaches in Curaçao, each with its own vibe and personality. On this visit I had the chance to spend a lot of time enjoying the ridiculously turquoise water of Cas Abao Beach on the northwestern coast of the island. thanks to a full day tour with Blue Finn Charters. We docked just off the beach (about a leisurely 10-minute swim to shore) and had ample time to swim and snorkel (equipment provided) before enjoying a barbeque lunch with an open bar. The snorkelling here is great even just a few metres from shore.



Beautiful Cas Abao Beach



Resident flamingos

LOCAL TIP

Another lesser-known and secluded swimming area is the beach in the small fishing village of Boka Sami, which my informative guide, Maja Atalita-Vervuurt, describes as, "untouched Curacao."



Boka Tabla

► The Island's Wilder Side

Beyond its beaches and charismatic capital, Curaçao is also home to many worthwhile spots where you can enjoy some nature. First up is Shete Boka National Park which offers otherworldly sites that make you feel as if you're taking a stroll on another planet. Boka means inlet, of which there are several here. And while that might sound fairly ho-hum, it is definitely not. Each boka offers something totally different, from Boka Tabla where huge waves crash into an underground cavern, to Boka Pistol where waves shoot straight up before crashing back down in a dramatic

display. No matter which part of the park you visit you'll hear the sound of crashing waves and experience some surreal scenery.

One of the biggest highlights of my visit this time around was a wander through Hofi Mango, a serene nature park with a fairytale feel and groves of mango, palm and tamarind trees, a cactus garden, quiet hiking trails, a lookout point and even a zipline (sadly closed when I visited). The former colonial plantation offers a burst of green right in the middle of the island that is otherwise on the more arid side. I did a slow meander with an

informative guide and would definitely return on my own to simply enjoy the relaxing expanse of nature and local wildlife.

And you also don't want to miss a peek at Curaçao's many pink flamingos who have taken up residence in and around the island's salt flats, including at Jan Kok and Sint Michiel. Mostly seen on the more rugged west side of the island, these shy yet boldly-hued birds draw many camera-toting visitors. Seeing a large grouping in the wild is quite striking, even from a safe roadside distance.

A WILD BITE

If you've never heard of lionfish, they are very beautiful but extremely invasive; hoovering up local species of fish (including juveniles) and wreaking havoc on reefs. But I also learned they happen to be delicious and catching and cooking them has become a form of protecting the waters of Curaçao and beyond. Lionfish Caribbean has taken up this mantle and its team of divers are taking back the reefs, one lionfish at a time. I stopped by to learn more about the initiative and also to have lunch. My battered lionfish was crispy and really tasty with a squeeze of lime and a swipe of housemade garlic aioli. Other dishes include sashimi, fish and chips, ceviche and tacos.

Curaçao's colourful reputation is well deserved, but the island's appeal runs deeper than its vibrant façades and clear waters (as big of a draw as those remain). The island invites visitors to look beyond the obvious, rewarding those who venture past the postcard views with discoveries that are every bit as memorable as the island's famous hues. Even after three visits, I know there will always be so much more to discover.



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One Resort, Three Generations, Countless Memories



Dreams Flora Resort & Spa

All-inclusive Dreams Flora Resort & Spa in Punta Cana turned out to be the perfect place to reconnect with family of all ages

BY KAYLA-MARIE WILLIAMS

Family vacations can be difficult to plan, especially when you're trying to satisfy multiple generations. Grandparents may be looking for quiet spots to relax, parents want convenience and activities, while kids need plenty of opportunities to play and explore. Finding a destination that caters to everyone isn't always easy, but Dreams Flora Resort & Spa in Punta Cana manages to strike that balance very well.

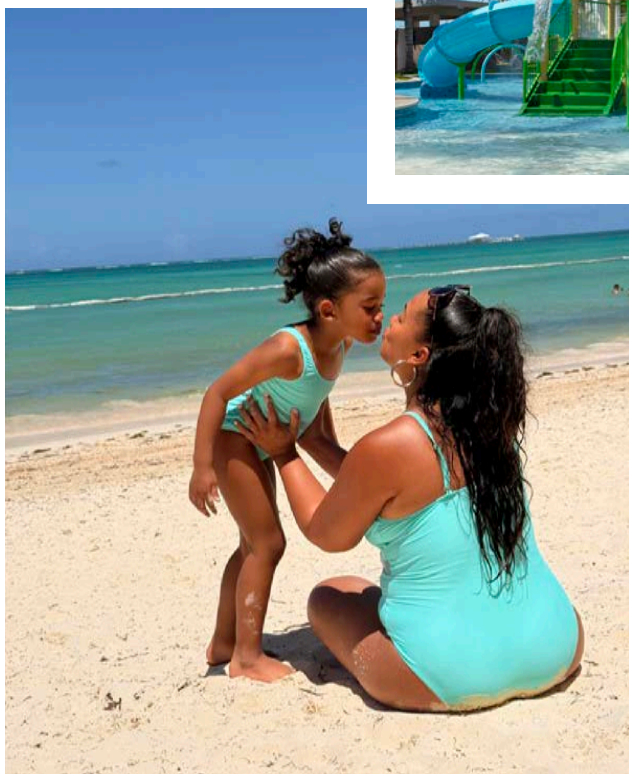
During a recent stay with my family, I quickly discovered why this all-inclusive resort has become a popular choice for families travelling together. From spacious accommodations and beautiful pools to attentive staff and endless activities, the property creates an environment where every member of the family can enjoy their vacation at their own pace while still making memories together.



Something for Every Generation

This multigenerational trip included my 4-year-old daughter Kennedy, my aunt Rose who is in her late 60s, my college best friend Vonye who just celebrated turning 40 and me, a millennial mom at 37. From water aerobics that had my aunt and daughter practicing their aqua moves, to beachside cabanas where we dozed off to the cool breeze of the Caribbean Sea, to the tranquility of an open air spa or Spanish lessons offered by the entertainment team, there was plenty to choose from.

Throughout our stay, each person had the chance to pursue their own interests, making it easy to avoid the feeling of being tied to a rigid schedule.



Spacious Rooms Designed for Family Comfort

Travelling with family, your room becomes more than just a place to sleep; it is essentially home base for post-pool siestas, downtime and getting ready for dinner and evening entertainment. The rooms are modern and bright offering plenty of space to spread out after a day in the sun. Whether you're travelling as a family of four or coordinating accommodations for a larger family group, the resort's room options make it easy to unwind throughout your stay.

And if you decide to indulge as a Preferred Club guest, your stay is immediately elevated with the help of a butler. Our personal butler was Isaías, a true gem who was always there to assist. He would send morning text messages letting me know about all of the activities for the day and even helped plan a special birthday cake surprise. He was funny, kind and always willing to help during our trip.

Pools, Beach Days and Endless Entertainment

At the heart of the resort experience are the impressive outdoor spaces at Dreams Flora. There are multiple pools that allow guests to meander between energetic family fun and quieter, adult-only areas. It was lovely having the option to play in the pool with my daughter for hours on end then make my way over to the adult section and charge my batteries lounging in the shade.

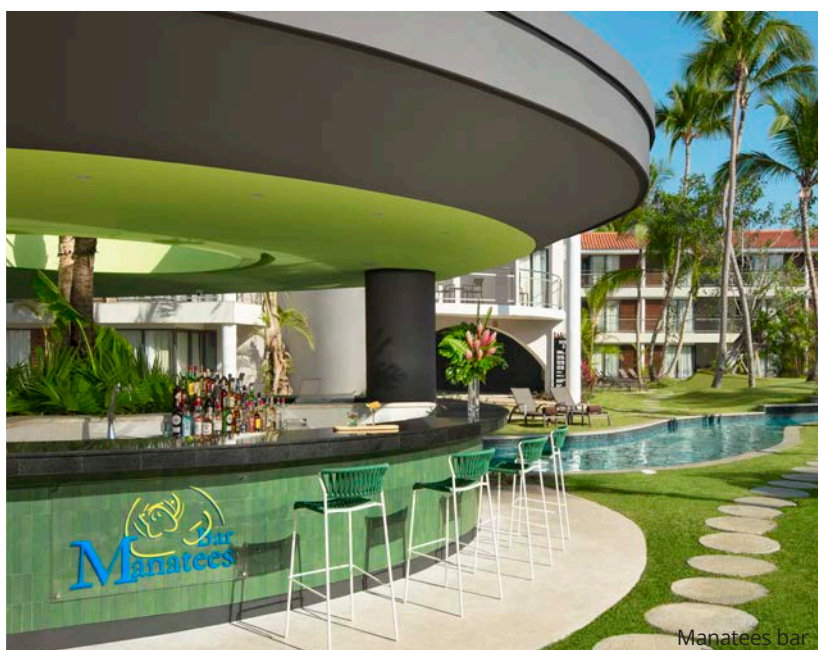


Preferred Club Family Pool



The layout of the resort is very walkable, with clear signs to help you navigate the entire property. The waterslides and children's water park really stole the show for my daughter and I.

For anyone young at heart, the waterslides really are such a fun touch and a must try. The beach did not disappoint either, with soft sand, warm water and lots of shoreline to enjoy. Beyond the pools and beach, the daily programming brought high energy throughout the resort. Each night, the four of us danced and sang along with the entertainment crew on the main stage. From Beyonce to 80s rock and trending dances, the team knew how to keep the vibes going night in and night out.



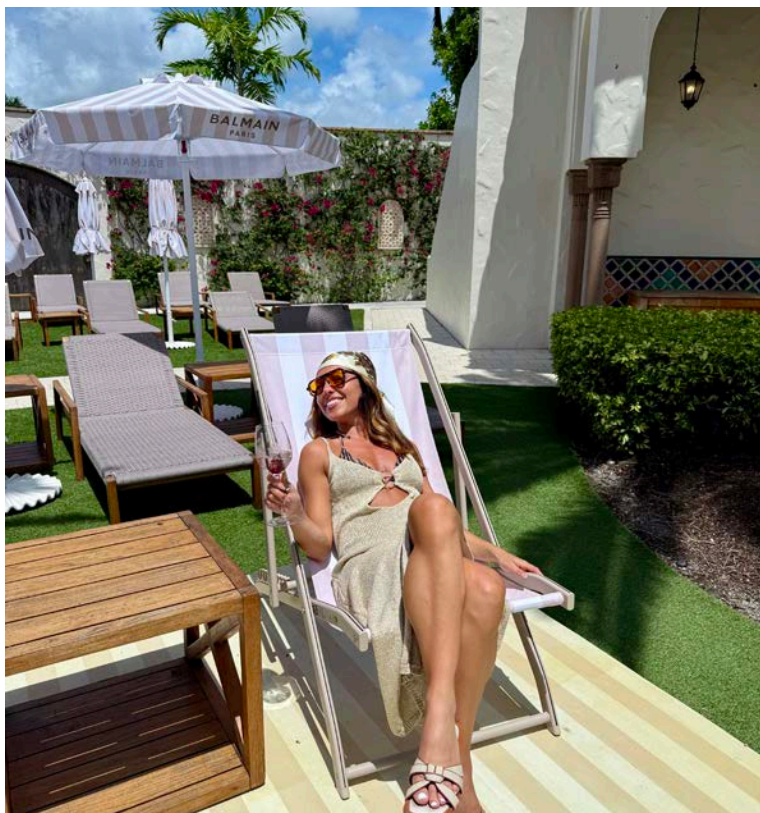
Creating Memories That Last

Each morning, I was the first to wake so I could enjoy the solitude of watching the sun rise while walking the beach, then head up to the newly renovated gym for a strength

workout before breakfast. Our days were filled with soaking up the sun, unlimited cannonballs into the pool and making new friends from around the world. It was a chance to bring my aunt, who is like a grandmother to my daughter, to a place where she could relax as a show of appreciation for all the amazing help she gives me year-round. It was making core memories with my daughter who seems to be growing faster than I can keep up with. And it was a chance to reunite and celebrate 20 years of friendship with a dear friend.

For seven days, Dreams Flora Resort & Spa provided the perfect backdrop for the kind of vacation we will talk about long after the tan lines are gone.





The Palm Beaches, Reimagined

Returning to Florida's First Resort Destination reveals that true luxury isn't just found in oceanfront resorts, it's woven into the unforgettable experiences that define The Palm Beaches

BY NICOLE SERVINIS

There are destinations that impress you the first time. Then there are destinations that reveal themselves the second. I've visited The Palm Beaches before, where I strolled Worth Avenue, admired the grandeur of Palm Beach and experienced the sunshine that has drawn visitors here for more than a century. But on this return visit, I discovered something entirely different.

Beyond the polished façades and postcard-perfect beaches lies a destination that understands luxury on a deeper level. Yes, there are world-class resorts, oceanfront views and impeccable service—but there are also stories. Stories of visionaries who shaped the region, artists who continue to be inspired by it, chefs who elevate local ingredients and experiences that leave a lasting impression long after you've left.

Stretching across 39 distinct cities and towns from Jupiter to Boca Raton, The Palm Beaches offer countless ways to experience South Florida.

► Two Stays, Two Distinct Personalities

Every great trip begins with where you lay your head, and this journey offered two very different interpretations of Palm Beach luxury.



► The Ben: West Palm's Social Hub

Situated along the waterfront in downtown West Palm Beach, The Ben, Autograph Collection, immediately sets a vibrant tone. I arrived to a refreshing paloma cocktail before settling into a room overlooking the Intracoastal Waterway. What I loved most about The Ben was its energy. The rooftop pool feels like the centre of the action, with sweeping water views, stylish cabanas and Spruzzo Restaurant drawing both hotel guests and locals. On a Thursday evening, the rooftop buzzed with conversation and energy—a reminder that some of the best hotel restaurants have become destinations in their own right.

Dinner alone is worth the visit. A tuna tartare brightened with local citrus, avocado and cucumber arrived delicately plated alongside crisp malanga chips. The wagyu-and-prawn "Land & Sea" entrée delivered some of the most memorable flavours of the trip, while the dark chocolate mousse cake provided a decadent finish. Perhaps its greatest luxury, however, is location. The Ben places visitors within walking distance of museums, restaurants, shopping and waterfront strolls, making it an ideal launchpad for exploring West Palm Beach.

► The Boca Raton: A Destination in Itself

If The Ben is vibrant and connected to the city, The Boca Raton feels like its own world. Spanning 200 waterfront acres, the iconic resort encompasses five distinct hotels, a private beach club, championship golf course, marina, luxury spa and an impressive collection of restaurants—all connected by water taxis and complimentary shuttles.

I checked into The Bungalows, a residential-style retreat offering more than 1,200 square feet of thoughtfully designed living space. Complete with two bedrooms, two bathrooms, a full kitchen and access to a private pool, it feels less like a hotel room and more like your own Palm Beach residence. Guests can spend the morning lounging at the Beach Club, the afternoon cruising the Intracoastal Waterway and the evening dining at one of the property's acclaimed restaurants, all without ever leaving the resort.

One sunset boat ride offered front-row views of some of South Florida's most spectacular celebrity waterfront estates, including the home of Billy Joel. Watching the sky shift from gold to pink across the Intracoastal was a reminder that sometimes slowing down is the ultimate luxury.



The resort is also investing heavily in its future. The Boca Raton Golf Club is currently undergoing a comprehensive reimagining set to be ready this fall. Led by renowned golf architect Brian Silva, his vision will preserve the

course's historic character while introducing refined strategy, improved flow and state-of-the-art turf and irrigation systems. Once complete, the transformation is expected to position The Boca Raton among the premier golf destinations in South Florida.

For food lovers, the resort offers no shortage of options. Brunch at The Flamingo Grill comes complete with an indulgent bacon bar that has developed a devoted following. At Marisol, Mediterranean flavours shine through house-made pasta, perfectly prepared lamb and a baklava-inspired dessert that has become a destination dish in its own right.

The resort will also host the third annual Artisans of Wine & Food Festival from January 14–17, 2027, bringing together celebrated chefs, Napa Valley wineries and culinary enthusiasts for what has become the largest Napa-focused food and wine event outside of Napa Valley.

► Where Art and History Tell the Story

Luxury isn't only about where you stay, it's also about understanding the place you're visiting. The Norton Museum of Art, Florida's oldest art museum, proved to be one of the highlights of my trip. Founded in 1941 by Ralph and Elizabeth Norton, the institution continues to evolve while remaining deeply connected to its roots.

Inside, I wandered through exhibits exploring how artists create emotion and atmosphere. Massive Polaroid works by Matthew Brandt, colourful glass installations by Dale Chihuly and the striking graphite landscapes of Teresita Fernández each offered a different lens through which to view the world. Outside, sculpture gardens shaded by tropical greenery create a peaceful oasis that encourages visitors to linger.

History comes alive just a few kilometres away at the Henry Morrison Flagler Museum. Standing inside Whitehall, Flagler's 75-room Gilded Age mansion, it's impossible not to marvel at the ambition that helped shape modern Florida tourism. Completed in just 18 months at a cost of \$4 million in 1902 (roughly \$146 million today), the home represented extraordinary wealth, but also extraordinary vision.

Flagler connected West Palm Beach and Palm Beach through railways and bridges, transforming the area from an isolated outpost into a world-renowned destination. More than a century later, visitors continue to benefit from the infrastructure and tourism industry he helped create.



► The Art of Indulgence

Some destinations are best experienced through your taste buds. Palm

Beach Meats offered one of the most surprising culinary experiences of the trip. Part butcher shop, part deli, part two-time Michelin-recognized restaurant, the concept reflects owner-driven passion at its finest. Known for premium Wagyu and a commitment to zero-waste practices, the restaurant has cultivated a loyal following through exceptional ingredients and creative execution. The cheesesteak and burger, originally weekend specials, became so popular they earned permanent spots on the menu. Watching customers take their first bite, it was easy to understand why.

For something more refined, Le Colonial delivers elegant Vietnamese-inspired cuisine in one of Palm Beach's most beautiful dining rooms.

Of course, no Palm Beach itinerary is complete without a seafood feast by the water. At Benny's on the Beach, I embraced vacation mode fully with Max's Piña Colada served in a pineapple and a sprawling seafood meal featuring snow crab legs, Key West pink shrimp, littleneck clams, andouille sausage, corn and potatoes drenched in Old Bay butter. Corvina Seafood Grill delivered another memorable meal, particularly its Salmon Sunset Roll and impeccably fresh daily catches.



► Luxury in the Pause

The Palm Beaches excel at indulgence, but they also understand the importance of slowing down. At Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa, before my treatment even began, I was invited to select a signature scent designed to revive, relax, or restore—setting the tone for a highly personalized experience. Guests are also offered a taste of manuka honey sourced from local bees, a thoughtful detail that immediately connects you to the destination.

Following a restorative 60-minute massage, I spent time exploring the spa's expansive indoor and outdoor wellness spaces. From hanging garden swings and secluded relaxation lounges to steam rooms, saunas and hot tubs, every corner is designed to encourage you to slow down. As the Florida sun beams down, attendants circulate with chilled towels and frozen grapes—a thoughtful touch that elevates the experience from relaxing to truly indulgent.

For travellers looking to explore a different side of Boca Raton, Gumbo Limbo Nature Center is worth adding to the itinerary. The 20-acre coastal preserve offers elevated boardwalks through a rare tropical hammock forest, butterfly gardens, marine exhibits and an observation tower overlooking the barrier island. It's a reminder that some of Florida's greatest luxuries aren't found inside a resort at all, but in the natural beauty that surrounds it.

► Why the Palm Beaches Keep Calling Me Back

The Palm Beaches are often associated with luxury, and rightly so. But this trip reminded me that the most memorable luxury isn't always tangible. It's found in smaller details like a sunset viewed from a rooftop overlooking the Intracoastal, in a chef's passion for perfecting a dish, or in a century-old mansion that tells the story of a destination's beginnings. The first time I visited The Palm Beaches, I fell in love with the destination. The second time, I fell in love with the stories behind it. And that's what keeps me coming back.

SAUDI ARABIA'S TRAVEL MOMENT HAS ARRIVED

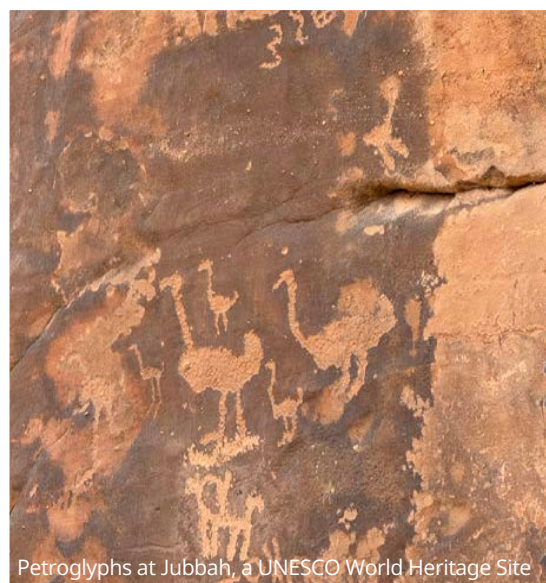
Closed off for decades, the kingdom is now welcoming
all travellers, including women

WORDS & PHOTOS BY LISA KADANE





A'arif Fort in Ha'il



Petroglyphs at Jubbah, a UNESCO World Heritage Site



In Saudi Arabia, hospitality begins with coffee and dates.



Ha'il

Elegantly dressed in a silver-trimmed abaya and a pink hijab, Fatima Oliyan fills my tiny porcelain coffee cup only halfway.

"If you fill the cup full that means you don't want the guest to stay," Oliyan explains to our group of eight women travellers sitting inside the parlour of her home in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

Made from green coffee beans and spiced with cardamom, cloves and saffron, the camel-coloured Arabian coffee isn't just a midday pick-me-up—it's a sign of hospitality that's always served with dates. We sample raw dates, sesame-coated date balls and homemade date cookies before tucking into mandi, a slow-cooked chicken and rice dish, while talking about work and family life.

It's a warm welcome repeated throughout my stay in a country that only opened to western leisure travellers in 2019. Our tour group is offered coffee and dates in museums, banks and hotel lobbies around the kingdom. More than once, strangers stop to offer an exuberant, "Welcome to Saudi Arabia!"

I'm on a women's expedition with Intrepid Travel that takes me from the booming capital and its new \$22.5-billion metro, to the resort city of Jeddah on the Red Sea. Led by a woman, the trip is designed to show female travellers the social transformation happening for Saudis like Oliyan, since the country began loosening restrictions on dress and gender norms as part of Vision 2030, the country's ambitious plan to modernize and diversify its economy.

"A lot of people around the world have this idea about Saudi Arabia—people think we live in the desert and women always cover up," says Sara Aljohani, our tour guide. "I'm glad for people to see it in person and not on the news."

The country is enormous and there's a lot to take in. As our van drives north from Riyadh toward Ha'il and the ancient petroglyphs of Jubbah, then on to AlUla in the northwest, the landscape seems to swallow us up. Shifting tangerine dunes stretch toward distant mountains veiled in a dusky haze. Like a scene out of *Lawrence of Arabia*, we spy camels crossing valleys of shimmering sand. It's as scenic as it is surreal.



Elephant Rock Alula

► ALULA: A TOURISM OASIS

"The landscape here, it blows my mind," says fellow traveller Anthea Nolan, an Australian who's had a lifelong fascination with Saudi Arabia and wanted to see the changes happening in real time.

The region of Alula is the country's tourism star, with sights like Elephant Rock, a sandstone monolith in the shape of a wayward pachyderm, and Hegra, a UNESCO World Heritage Site where over 140 (and counting) Nabataean tombs have been carved into sandstone cliffs like those in neighbouring Jordan,



"It's so great to see so many women working here," says Nolan.

Later, we wander through Alula Old Town, past restored mud-brick buildings that now house boutiques and cafes. The city feels timeless and modern all at once. Women in black abayas sit in groups, while men wearing white thobes and checkered head scarves stroll nearby. Though

we're dressed conservatively, our group is obviously western, but nobody bats an eye.

"Not being Muslim has not impacted our travels in any way," remarks Hilary Eaton, an American on the tour. "I've never met such genuinely nice people."



Seven intrepid travellers and two guides at Al Diriyah near Riyadh

► MEDINA: THE ENLIGHTENED CITY

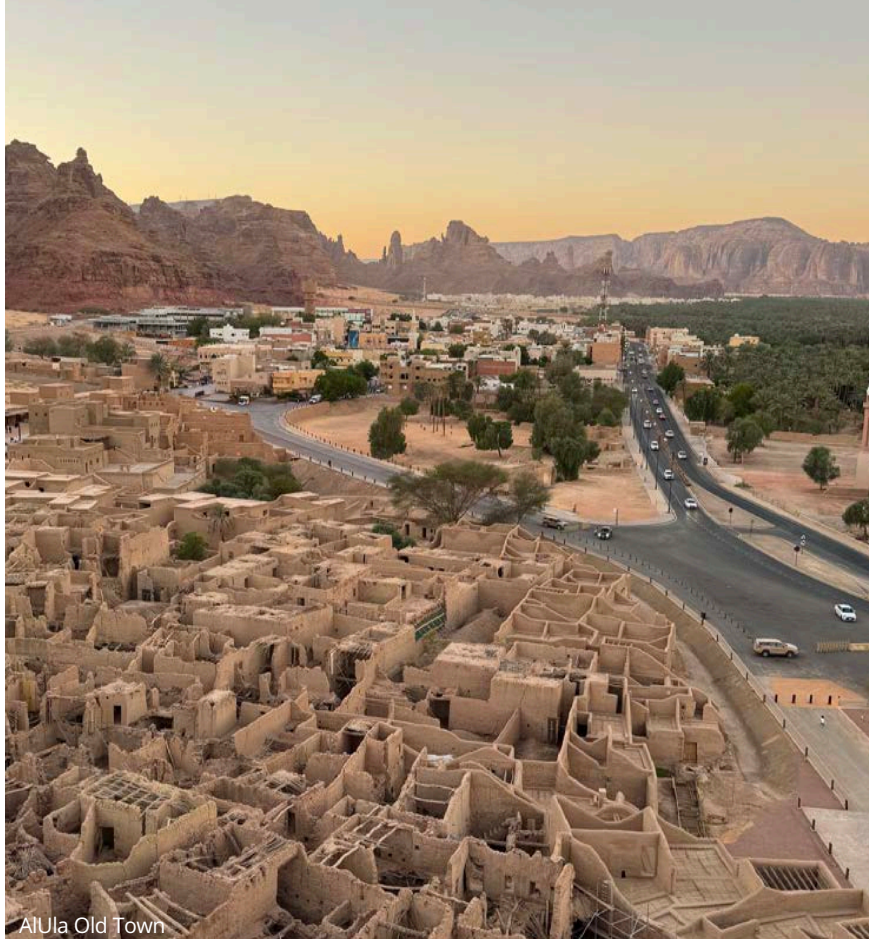
The hospitality continues in Medina, the kingdom's second holiest city. Prior to 2019, Medina was closed to non-Muslims. Now, our group dons abayas and hijabs and follows Rola Jalloun into the female section of Masjid Quba, the original mosque of Islam where pilgrims from around the world come to pray.

A university professor, Jalloun works part time as a tour guide because she enjoys sharing her culture with tourists and talking about the country's seismic social changes. Women can now drive, get divorced if they're not happy and choose how to dress.

"Even as a parent, I don't have the authority to force my daughter to be covered," says Jalloun, who, like many women, still dresses traditionally. "In 15 to 20 years, there's going to be more and more change, especially for the next generation."



Guide Rola Jalloun inside the Quba Mosque



AlUla Old Town

► JEDDAH: GATEWAY TO THE RED SEA

We see small glimpses of change everywhere, from groups of school girls wearing open abayas that reveal jeans and tank tops underneath, to female friends shopping together unescorted. But the biggest surprise comes in Jeddah, the most progressive Saudi city.

Here we take a boat to an offshore reef to snorkel, then spend the afternoon at La Maison D'Obhur, a women-only beach club. Set between high walls facing the aquamarine water of the Red Sea, private day spas like this one are a relatively new phenomenon; an oasis for women to dress—or undress—how they like. After 10 days of seeing women in black abayas, it's a bit of a shock to see Saudi gals in one-piece suits and bikinis, laughing together, sharing a shisha pipe and sipping mocktails in the sun.



Aljohani, our guide, wears a swim skirt over her one piece and says this is how she dresses at co-ed beaches in Jeddah with her friends. It's heartening to see so many women enjoying themselves at the beach, on their own terms.

I leave Saudi Arabia with a better understanding of a complicated country, along with a kilogram of sweet, soft medjool dates that I'll offer to guests in my home. I'm positive that Saudi Arabia's warm hospitality and the women behind it, will stay with me long after the dates are gone.



Al Diriyah



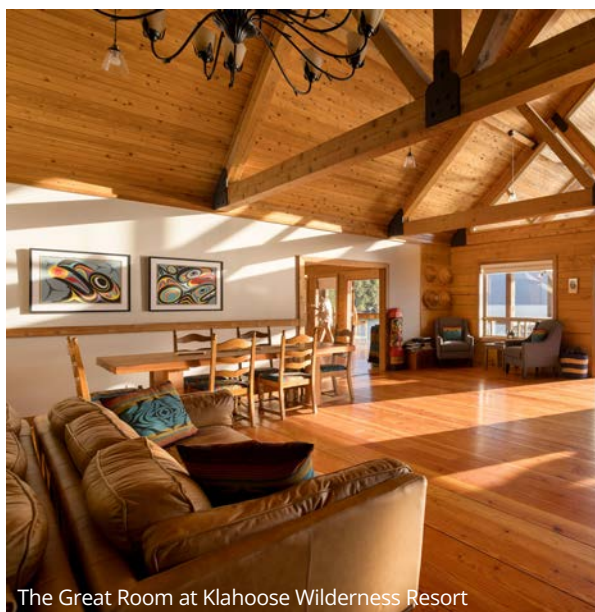
Al Musawka Market in Unaizah

An Indigenous—Owned Experience in British Columbia: Culture, Sustainability and Connection

Klahoose Wilderness Resort connects guests to the land, culture and spirit of the Klahoose People

By Sabrina Pirillo





Ecological conservation; cultural preservation; remarkable experiences. These are just some of the statements that make up the tourism experiences in beautiful British Columbia. Staying at the Fairmont Waterfront in Vancouver before heading to the Indigenous-owned Klahoose Wilderness Resort set me up for an appreciation of everything British Columbia does right.

North Shore Mountains rising above the harbour, the hotel's wellness program extends year-round, with an invigorating guided run along the Seawall and poolside meditations offered until the end of August.

I soaked up Vancouver's coastal tranquility in advance of my flight to Powell River, followed by a scenic drive bringing me to the north end of BC's Sunshine Coast. Lund is known as the 'End of the Road' due to its location at Mile 0 of Highway 101, which is part of the Pacific Coastal Highway, one of the longest highway networks in the world, running along the mainland coast from Canada to Chile. This is where my journey begins.

Steps from a myriad of Vancouver landmarks, shops and eateries, Fairmont Waterfront has its own lush rooftop garden and apiary which are utilized in the hotel's culinary and cocktail programs, including the Fairmont's own Waterfront Gin. Surrounded by majestic views of the





Klahoose Wilderness Resort

A 45-minute boat ride from Lund brought me to the secluded and off-grid eco-resort, Klahoose Wilderness Resort. Located on the lands of the toq qaymix^W (Klahoose) People in Desolation Sound, the property previously operated as a fishing lodge before its transition to a Klahoose First Nation Owned Eco Resort.

Abundant in land, water and cultural resources, the Klahoose ancestors have maintained these natural resources for thousands of years.

As we rounded the corner, I could see staff waiting to greet us on the dock, where a Klahoose Welcome Song by Drew Blaney of the Tla'amin Nation marked our arrival into this spiritual experience. After our greeting, we are taken to our assigned rooms. Lodge Rooms and Cedar Cabins are filled with the scent of cedar and vistas look out onto the Homfray Channel and Desolation Sound. The property holds an average of fourteen guests, making it an intimate experience in this untouched sanctuary.



Tuna appetizer

Packages range from 3, 4 or 7-night accommodations and (depending on the package) include tours, Indigenous cultural experiences, all meals and snacks, use of resort amenities, a reusable Klahoose Wilderness Resort stainless steel water bottle and complimentary shuttle to and from the resort. For longer stays, fishing charters and helicopter adventures are offered (for an additional fee) as an optional activity or excursion.

When it comes to gastronomy, dining off the land is key. The culinary program draws inspiration from the nutrient-rich waters of the Salish Sea, the farm-to-table communities along coastal British Columbia and ingredients foraged from the surrounding rainforest.



The Cultural Experiences

I spent my mornings escaping into nature. Hiking in the temperate rainforest that surrounds the resort offered quiet reflection and restoration, followed by cool dips in the Homfray Channel and relaxing moments in the wood-fired cedar sauna situated at the end of the floating dock. I took part in Indigenous cultural ceremonies like spiritual bathing, a cleansing ritual through cold-water dunking at Ahpokum, a nearby Klahoose village; and a traditional cedar brushing ceremony, a traditional ritual for cleansing and grounding.

Wildlife experiences include whale watching led by Indigenous guides, spotting mountain peaks, cascading waterfalls and watching for marine life (May-August) and grizzly bear viewing tours where you'll take a boat to the end of the Toba Inlet (late-August to October). Off-the-grid tours include seeing how the resort generates their own hydro

power and water with a sustainable micro hydro system that powers the entire property.

I also learned how to make jewellery out of cedar and listened intently to cultural sharing and storytelling. Learning about the Klahoose Nation is the heartbeat of this experience. Getting to spend time with Elder Jerry Francis, cultural interpreter and bear viewing guide of the Klahoose First Nation, was an honour and a privilege I won't soon forget. He spoke about his tribe, what his childhood was like and his experience being in a residential school.

This intimate connection with First Nation Elders—who generously share their stories and deepen our understanding of their land—captures the true spirit of Klahoose Wilderness Resort.

Sharing in these moments, I have left this special place truly humbled with gratitude.



TAKING THE ROAD Less Travelled

Trade the well-trod Trans-Canada Highway for the quieter, more meandering Highway 3 to experience a wholly different slice of the country

By Suzanne Morphet



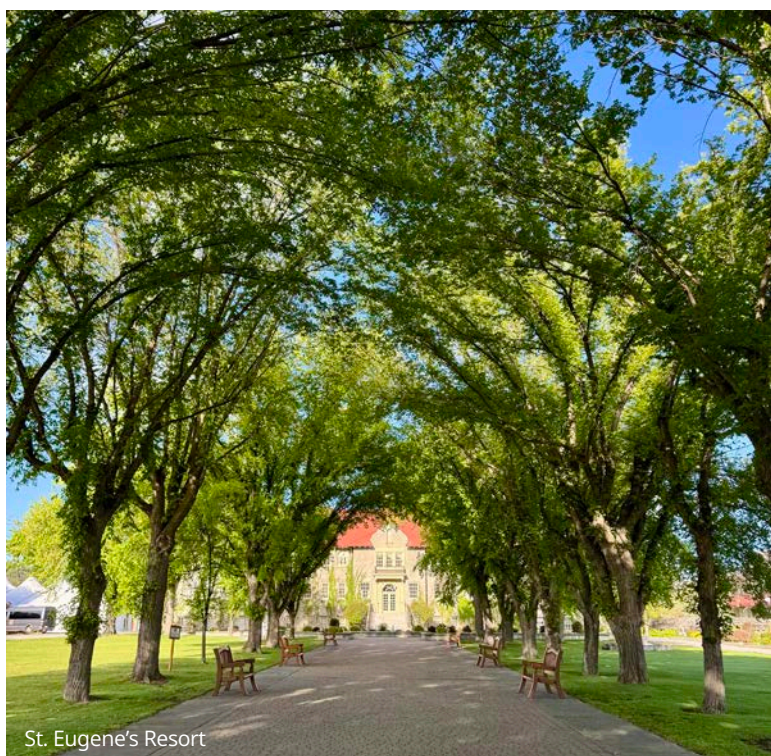
Long before tourists and truckers took the Trans-Canada Highway through Canada's Rocky Mountains, they drove the much slower, more meandering Highway 3.

Today, this historic road, also known as the Crowsnest Highway, still leads less hurried travellers through small mountain towns and gorgeous scenery with few other vehicles.

Cruise the Crowsnest from Cranbrook, BC TO LETHBRIDGE, ALBERTA

Highway 3 begins at Hope, BC and ends at Medicine Hat, Alberta, making it more than 1,000 kilometres. But there's no need to do it all in one go. Last spring, I drove with a girlfriend from Cranbrook to Lethbridge and back over one week, with lots of time to explore.

Start your adventure in Cranbrook at St Eugene's Resort, a former residential school, now a resort owned by the Ktunaxa (k-too-nah-ha) Nation and Shuswap Indian band. In the spirit of reconciliation, learn the history behind the former school in the Ktunaxa Interpretive Centre or take a tour with a former resident. The expansive property includes a Les Furber-designed 18-hole golf course along the fast-flowing St. Mary River.



St. Eugene's Resort

Hit the road and take time for Kimberley

Once home to an enormous lead-zinc mine, Kimberley has transformed itself into an outdoor paradise for hikers, cyclists and skiers. It's worth the short detour from Highway 3. Even if you're not an avid mountain biker (and I'm not), you can pick up e-mountain bikes from Black Dog Cycle and Ski and you'll be amazed by how easy it is to peddle gentle trails through forests and wildflower meadows on two electric wheels.



Find your fancy in Fernie

When you arrive in Fernie, you've reached the Rockies. The town's architecturally grand brick buildings surprise and delight first-timers. Ditto for the town's coffee culture. Get caffeinated at Rooftop Coffee Roasters, then take a heritage walking tour or hike to Castle Rock for expansive views and breathe in the delicious scent of a sun-warmed conifer forest.

A big truck and a mountain that moves

Continuing east from Fernie, you'll go through Sparwood, BC and pass the world's largest tandem axle truck, a bright green behemoth built for open pit mining. It's no longer in use, but simply a tourist attraction.

Another, more sombre site, is the Frank Slide, just east of the



BC/Alberta border. In 1903, one side of Turtle Mountain slid away, burying homes, businesses and people under tons of rock. It was the deadliest

landslide in Canada's history, killing dozens of people asleep in their beds.

Wildlife and wildfires

A short detour from Highway 3 at Pincher Station brings you to one of the least visited national parks in Canada's Rockies, Waterton Lakes. Yet the scenery and the wildlife are no less spectacular or visible than in Banff and Jasper National Parks.

On my visit in late May, we watched black bears grazing by the roadside, fox kits playing on a sunny slope, mountain goats climbing sheer ridges and a bighorn sheep strutting down the middle of a road. And deer, plenty of deer!



Check into the historic Prince of Wales Hotel for a taste of early 20th century hospitality. Rooms are small but the views over Upper Waterton Lake are huge. Kilted male staff serve afternoon tea along with dainty sandwiches and pastries in the Royal Stewart Dining Room.

To learn more about the park's natural and human history, take a boat tour with the Waterton Shoreline Cruise Company. You'll hear about the unusually severe wildfire in 2017 that blazed through almost half the park.

Head for the prairies

Drive back to Highway 3 and head northeast to Lethbridge, Alberta. Enroute, another small detour leads to Head-Smashed-In-Buffalo Jump, a UNESCO World Heritage Site where Plains people hunted bison for thousands of years.

Reaching Lethbridge, you've arrived in one of Canada's driest and sunniest cities. The Oldman River has cut deeply into the soft prairie soil over thousands of years, creating a lush valley, sweetly scented with cottonwood trees and alive with birdsong.



Cami Tanner, co-owner of The Conscious Café

Lethbridge has a huge cattle industry, so I was shocked to discover a fully vegan restaurant, The Conscious Café, where just about everything is made from scratch, including sourdough bread. Their Ruby Reuben Revival sandwich will have you re-thinking beef.

Taking the less-travelled Highway 3 is a journey filled with surprises, unforgettable scenery and the chance to spend some quality time off the beaten path.

Tickled Pink

Three rose-tinted cities in southern France make for a scenic road trip packed with history, excellent food and one-of-a-kind culture

By Diana Ballon

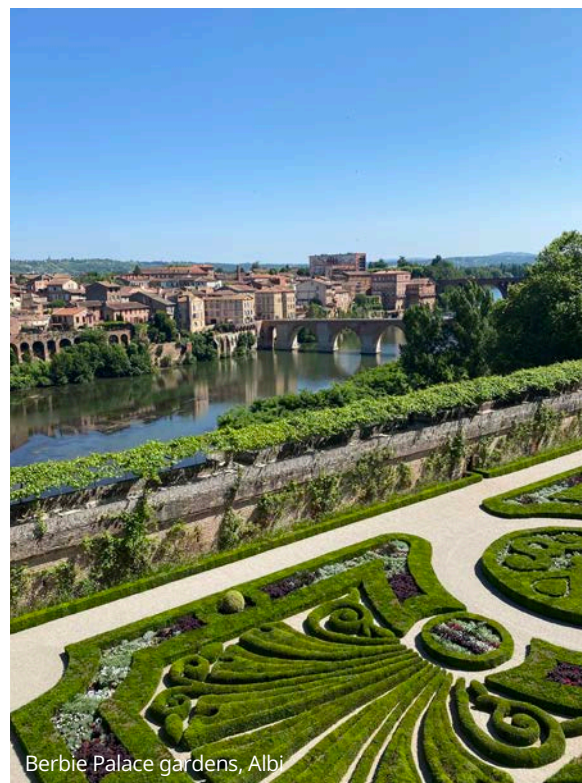


When I first heard about three pink cities in southwestern France I was intrigued. How pink were they? In this case, the colour reference points to the warm, rose-hued terracotta facades of Toulouse, Albi and Montauban. All three are ancient cities that assume a fairytale-like grandeur, with castles and bridges and aqueducts. And they're pink thanks to the clay bricks so many of their structures were built from.

My husband and I decided to do a three-day road trip to these three cities, which all lie within a few hours of each other. I

wanted to discover not just their different shades of pink, but how they differed from each other. Despite their shared colours, each city has its own unique rhythm and culture.

Toulouse, Albi and Montauban form part of the large Occitanie region, a coastal part of southern France west of the Cote d'Azur and east of western Pyrenees Basque Country, but decidedly less expensive and less touristed than either. It is also the largest wine region in the country.



Toulouse

Toulouse gets referred to as a mini Paris for a reason. Soon to be the third most populated city in France, Toulouse is a smaller more laid-back version of the country's capital. Though it's less populated by about a half million residents, Toulouse, like Paris, boasts a vibrant street life. It's hip without being overly gentrified, drawing people to its engineering schools and universities, its reasonable rents, exciting food scene, history and architecture.

On a Saturday afternoon, the city is alive with tourists and locals at tapas bars, restaurants, wine bars and cafés. Some seek out their famous cassoulet (white bean casserole), others the sausage, duck magret or confit and the violet-flavoured pastries Toulouse is known for. The banks of the Canal du Midi and Garonne River, the two waterways that divide this Ville Rose into three, are also popular spots.

Our official introduction to the city is with a two-hour "Great Monuments of Toulouse" tour. We visit the Romanesque Basilica St-Sernin, the Cathedral Saint-Etienne and the Convent of the Jacobins, with its 22-metre high columns like palm trees running down from its vaulted ceiling.

On the main square, our guide shows us the impressive Place du Capitole, which is the seat of the municipal government and opera, housed in a 12th century neoclassical building. Across the street from the city hall, we gaze up at the ceiling of the Galerue des Arcades, where a series of paintings tell the history of the city from prehistoric times to today.

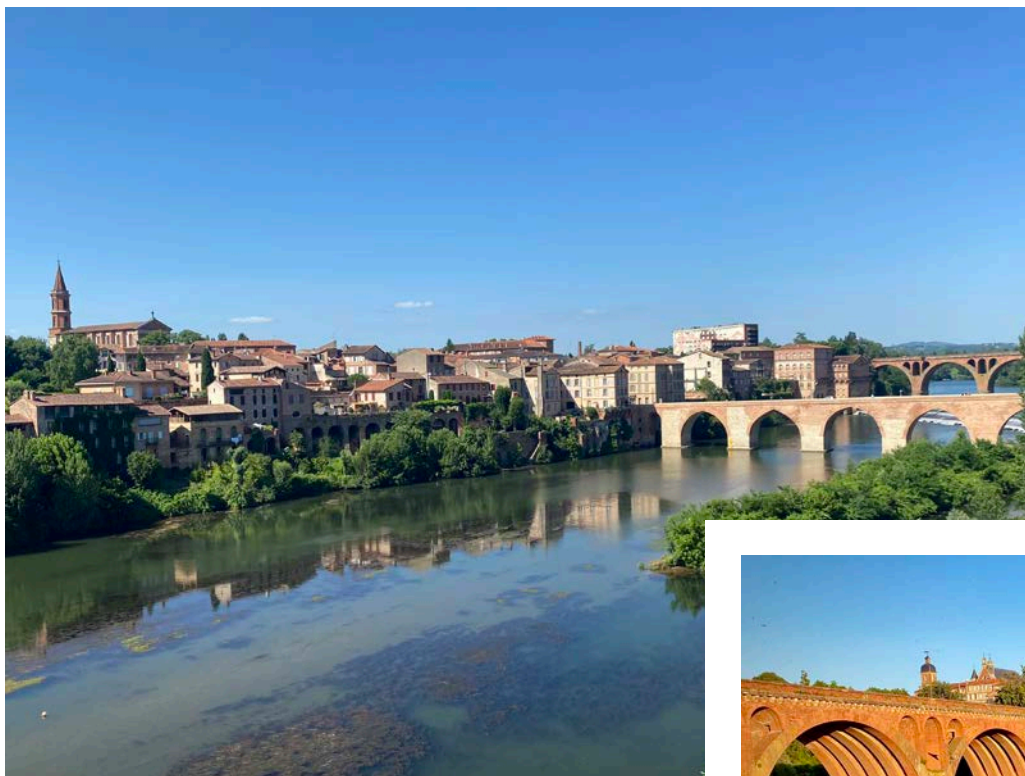
That night we enjoy a Taste of Toulouse wine bar tour with our guide and sommelier Julie Conjeaud. We begin with a visit to Au Père Louis, one of the oldest bars in the city, where we sample their quinquina, a fortified wine infused with quinine, herbs and botanicals. And we end



with a stop at Le 5 Wine Bar, voted best wine bar in the world three years running.

The next morning, a Sunday, we wander over to the Victor Hugo Market, where at 10 a.m. people are already standing around small circular tables outside drinking chilled local wine and supping on oysters, while indoors people buy their fish, produce and cheeses for the week. We then head to the outdoor artisanal market in the St. Aubin quarter, which sells everything from jewellery to clothing and offers cuisine from Moroccan to Indian.





Albi

Often named the Ville Rouge (or “red” vs. pink), the colour of Albi really depends on the shifting light. Its ancient rose-coloured bricks darken to red as the day grows longer. With just over 50,000 residents, this UNESCO World Heritage Site, with its three bridges and three churches, has retained the atmosphere of a medieval town, while at the same time boasting some exceptional heritage sites. Most dominant is Albi’s massive 78-metre high Sainte-Cécile Cathedral. As simple on the outside as it is ornate on the inside, the Catholic church wanted to show the Cathar people, a Christian religious movement known for their asceticism and gender equality, that they too could demonstrate humility and poverty. The Cathar people were later mostly wiped out during the Cathar Crusade of the early 13th century. Inside, its 18,500 square metres of paintings makes it the last completely painted cathedral in Europe.

Nearby is the Berbie Palace, which was once home to various powerful bishops. Built as a fortress with up to five-metre thick walls, it’s surrounded by beautiful 17th century French gardens. Since 1922 it has housed the famous Musée Toulouse-Lautrec, home to the largest public collection in the world of works by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec who was born in Albi



in 1864. His more than 1,000 pieces on display include sketches, posters and paintings, along with works by other artists such as Matisse, Degas and Gauguin.



Spending a night in this medieval town felt like stepping into a three-dimensional postcard. A little waterfall flows outside the window of our room at the Mercure Albi Bastides, a 68-room boutique hotel overlooking the river. Once a mill and later a pasta factory, the hotel’s restaurant La Vermicellerie, with its handmade pastas, is an ode to these origins, and was the perfect place to enjoy a meal on its terrace with a view of the Old Town across the river.



Montauban

As we approach Montauban, a road sign announces the city as a “Ville d’Art et d’Histoire,” a label it earned in 1998 in recognition of its unique culture and rich architectural heritage. Montauban seemed small on arrival, but it is actually one of the largest cities in the northern part of Occitanie when you include the hilly green countryside, farmland and medieval villages that surround it, explains Lauriane Donzelli of Tarn & Garonne Tourism.

“Towns are usually organized around a castle or church but the newer ones develop around squares like this one,” says Donzelli. She is referencing the Place Nationale, the central square in Montauban, bordered by double-vaulted arcades (or arched passageways) on four sides, with a fountain at its centre and restaurants and cafes all around.

We settle in for lunch at Les 5 Bouchons, a Michelin-recommended restaurant where our delicious cucumber and salmon soup and chickpea and shrimp entrée are just two menu items showcasing the fresh seasonal ingredients going into each dish.

We also visit the Ingres Museum, the building itself impressive for once having been a 17th century medieval palace. Our guide Corinne Mercedre starts our tour in the basement where contemporary artists are invited to show their work each season. The month we visit, street artists exhibit a massive open book, a paper airplane and yellow hanging globes. Here, the “new” stands in dramatic juxtaposition with “old” aged-stone walls and vaulted ceilings. One floor up, we marvel at the works of renowned French sculptor Antoine Bourdelle, a student of Rodin and then on the floor above, works by the renowned French painter Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres.

Now back in Toronto, I won’t forget these three cities, where passing days was like looking through rose-coloured glasses. I wish I could have stuck a little piece of red clay brick in my pocket, but the memories are still so vivid there wasn’t any need.





LISBON DURING SANTOS POPULARES: A GRADUATION Celebration LIKE NO OTHER

There is never a bad time to visit Lisbon, but experiencing the city during one of Portugal's most beloved festivals made our trip truly unforgettable

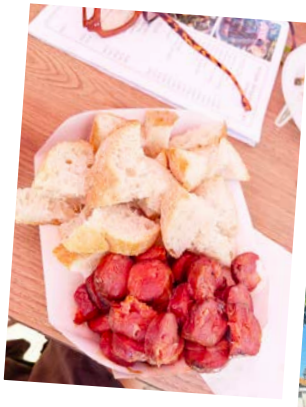
BY MACKENZIE CECCO

My four university friends and I arrived in Lisbon as part of our graduation journey across Europe expecting beautiful architecture, exceptional cuisine and vibrant nightlife. What we didn't expect was to find an entire city celebrating in the streets.

✿ A CITY THAT KNOWS HOW TO CELEBRATE

Every evening, Lisbon came alive with music, dancing and the aroma of traditional Portuguese food being grilled by local vendors. The streets were lined with stalls serving bifanas (traditional pork sandwiches), flavourful chorizo and the festival's signature dish: grilled sardines. While the sardines weren't quite for me, the barbecued chorizo quickly became a favourite.

Unlike many popular European destinations the crowds were filled with locals gathering with family and friends to celebrate a tradition that has been part of the city's culture for generations. It was refreshing to experience Lisbon through the eyes of its locals rather than among overwhelming tourist crowds, and for a few days, it felt as though we had become part of the celebration ourselves.



✿ A NIGHT ON THE TOWN

One of the highlights of our stay was participating in a pub crawl booked through GetYourGuide, operated by Wild Walkers Lisbon Tours. The experience included welcome drinks, VIP entry to several of Lisbon's most popular bars and free admission to one of the city's top nightclubs. It was a fantastic introduction to Lisbon's nightlife and offered the chance to meet fellow travellers from around the world.



The evening took us through some of the city's most iconic nightlife districts, including the famous Pink Street. Known for its colourful umbrellas and lively atmosphere, it was just as captivating during the day as it was after dark. The bartenders were some

of the friendliest people we met during our travels, dancing alongside guests and creating an atmosphere that made everyone feel welcome.

The night concluded at a beachside club overlooking the Atlantic Ocean, an unforgettable setting that perfectly captured Lisbon's energetic spirit. If you're travelling with friends, I highly recommend booking this experience in advance, as it was one of the highlights of our trip.



✿ A HIDDEN GEM BEYOND THE BARS

While Lisbon is renowned for its nightlife, one of the city's most unexpected highlights was the Money Museum. Best of all, admission is completely free.

The museum explores the evolution of currency from ancient civilizations to modern banking through immersive, interactive exhibits. It quickly became one of the most engaging museums I have ever visited, and I left having learned far more than I anticipated. We also heard from a local that scenes from the next season of *La Casa de Papel* (Money Heist) may be filmed there. Whether or not the rumour proves true, it certainly made the experience even more exciting for me as a huge fan of the show.

✿ A FAIRYTALE ESCAPE TO SINTRA

We didn't want to leave Lisbon without venturing to nearby Sintra, home to the magnificent Pena Palace, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. While many visitors choose to take a tuk-tuk or Uber to the top, we opted to hike instead. Despite what social media might suggest, the walk was much more manageable than expected. Surrounded by shaded forest trails, the journey took us roughly 45 minutes to reach the entrance area, followed by another 30-minute walk to the palace itself.

The views along the way made every step worthwhile, and watching the colourful palace emerge through the trees felt like stepping into a real-life fairytale.

✿ SWEET TREATS AND SUNSET VIEWS

No trip to Lisbon would be complete without trying a pastel de nata from one of the most iconic spots to pick one up: Manteigaria. After one bite, I immediately understood why these sweet treats are so famous. The pastry was first created by monks in the 18th century who used leftover egg yolks from convent kitchens. The balance of crisp, flaky pastry and silky, caramelized custard is one of the best desserts I've ever tasted and something I would recommend as an essential Portuguese experience.

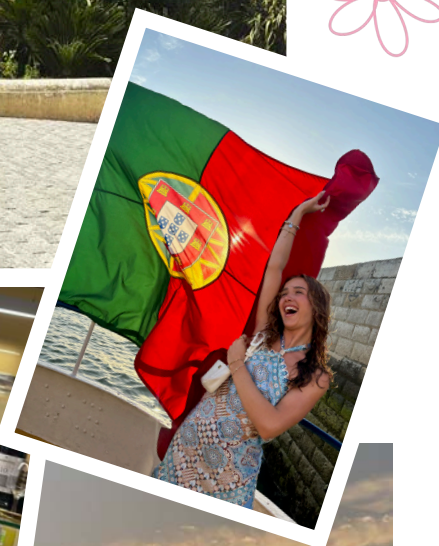
We spent our final evening aboard a sunset cruise along the Tagus River. As the sun dipped below the horizon, we sailed past Cristo Rei (the statue of Christ) and beneath the iconic Ponte 25 de Abril bridge. With music playing, people dancing and the city glowing in the golden evening light, it was the perfect farewell to Portugal.

✿ WHY LISBON SHOULD BE ON YOUR TRAVEL LIST

Lisbon is a city rich in history, culture and tradition, but what stood out most was its unmistakable energy. During Santos Populares, the entire city transforms into one extraordinary celebration.

For five recent graduates looking to create lasting memories before beginning the next chapter of our lives, there could not have been a better destination. If you're planning a visit, consider travelling in June, when Santos Populares fills the streets with music, food and festivities, offering one of the most authentic and unforgettable ways to experience Portugal's vibrant capital.

TRAVEL TIP: I recommend booking excursions in advance through GetYourGuide. Not only is it often more affordable than purchasing tickets on the spot, it also makes organizing your itinerary much easier, allowing you to maximize your time and experience everything Lisbon has to offer.



MONACO: THE VILLE AND THE VILLAGE

When a bucket at your "Bucket List" destination comes filled with champagne bottles on ice, you know you've chosen wisely

By Kathy Buckworth

Monaco has been at the top of my wish list since I watched the Hitchcock classic *To Catch a Thief* as a young woman in my 20's. Grace Kelly would go from that film shot there, to becoming Princess Grace of Monaco upon her marriage to Prince Rainier. The shots of Monaco in the movie showcase its stunning beauty, and that of Grace Kelly herself.

Flash forward 40 or so years and I'm standing just a couple of feet from Prince Albert II, Grace's son, as he welcomes stars, press and fans at the 65th Monte-Carlo Television Festival. While I expected Monaco to serve up luxury, glamour and the sparkling Mediterranean Sea, what I was most surprised and delighted to find out is that underneath the most expensive city in the world to live in is a vibrant history filled with engaged and proud citizens.



Monaco is the second smallest country in the world (Vatican City being the smallest), and covers only two kilometres square. Out of the 40,000 permanent residents only 10,000 are true Monegasques. While the population swells to 70,000 as employees working in the city arrive from Italy and France, the true Monaco residents keep some things entirely to themselves.

For instance, the road that leads up to the old town, or Monaco-Ville, is where you can find the Prince's Palace, the Oceanographic Institute and the St. Nicholas Cathedral where Prince Rainier and Princess Grace were married and are now both interred. Only those with Monaco

license plates are allowed to drive up this road and into the old town, due to the narrow streets and year round congestion. There is an option to take a bus, but it is recommended to walk up the steep castle pathway, as I did, stopping to catch my breath only to then have it taken away by the vistas.

Monegasques are allowed to work in the Monte Carlo Casino, but ever since it opened (in its current building) in 1865 by Prince Charles III, they have not been allowed to gamble. Passports are required upon entry to the casino, and its success has allowed Monaco to abolish personal income tax.





dressed so I went and found my stockings, and then came back and lost my shirt."

Standing in the casino square is the perfect place to watch the parade of ultra expensive sports cars roll by. Within five minutes a McLaren, Lotus and Bugatti pulled up outside the casino, no doubt some literal high rollers, who still had their shirts.

Part of my trip to Monaco included attendance at the TV Festival, which has grown since Laurent Puons took over the management of it in 2012, becoming the preeminent television festival in the world. Prince Albert II was on

For those wanting to try out the famous casino, there is a 20 Euro cover charge, with a 10 Euro voucher returned to you, which can be spent on gambling or drinks. I was proud that my 10 Euros lasted more than 10 minutes, until the slot machine I was using generously donated it back to the principality. There is a dress code at the casino, about which writer Dorothy Parker famously commented, "The Monte Carlo casino refused to admit me until I was properly

hand for both the opening and closing nights, which took place at the Grimaldi Forum, a state of the art convention centre and theatre that his father, Prince Rainier established in 2000. Stars in attendance included Dame Kristin Scott Thomas, Leslie Manville, Kurt Russell, Kevin McKidd and legendary French actors and performers. Fans lined the blue carpet to catch a glimpse of, and potentially a selfie with, their idols.

"One thing I enjoy is that people here take the time to live in a pleasant way," Princess Grace is quoted as saying in an interview. And it is an extremely pleasant place in which to live. It is a much greener city than you would expect, with 20 per cent of Monaco's territory dedicated to green spaces such as the Princess Grace Rose Garden, the wonders of the Exotic Garden (offering unparalleled views of Monte Carlo), and the Zen escape of the Japanese Gardens. The pebbled beaches are a mix of public and private and are well attended by families and groups, particularly on the weekends. Le Meridien is the only hotel to offer a private beach and is also home to the first Lacoste branded café in the world, as well as their bistro Muse. A mix of modernity and history make this one of the most popular hotels in Monaco.

Foodwise the offerings are exceptional and varied. One of my favourite stops was a small bistro perched off a pier on the Mediterranean, specializing in freshly harvested oysters. Les Perles de Monte-Carlo is known mostly just by Monegasques, but of course anyone can dine there, with a reservation. Fine dining can be found on a rooftop at La Mome Monte-Carlo, as well as seven Michelin

starred restaurants around town. The elegant Hermitage Hotel receives guests for tea and tipples at its brand new cozy bar, Gustav.

Walking around the city, as everyone does, you're passed by runners, young families with strollers, residents with small dogs and the respectful presence of their police force. Monaco is an extremely safe city, with police numbering over 500, and the reputation of being the highest paid police force in the world. Local kids scurry by in their school uniforms, running for the public buses which run frequently. All kids must attend school from the age of three to 18.

While Monaco is known for the cars, the bars, the stars and the glitz and the glamour, I remarked to several Monegasques that it also had the feel of a village and a strong sense of community, to which they heartily agreed.

Grace Kelly was the very definition of Alfred Hitchcock's "cool blonde," and while I might frequently have blonde hair, I was anything but cool about visiting Monaco for the first time. Fans may have lined up to get a glimpse of their favourite stars, but I was busy fangirling over the country itself.

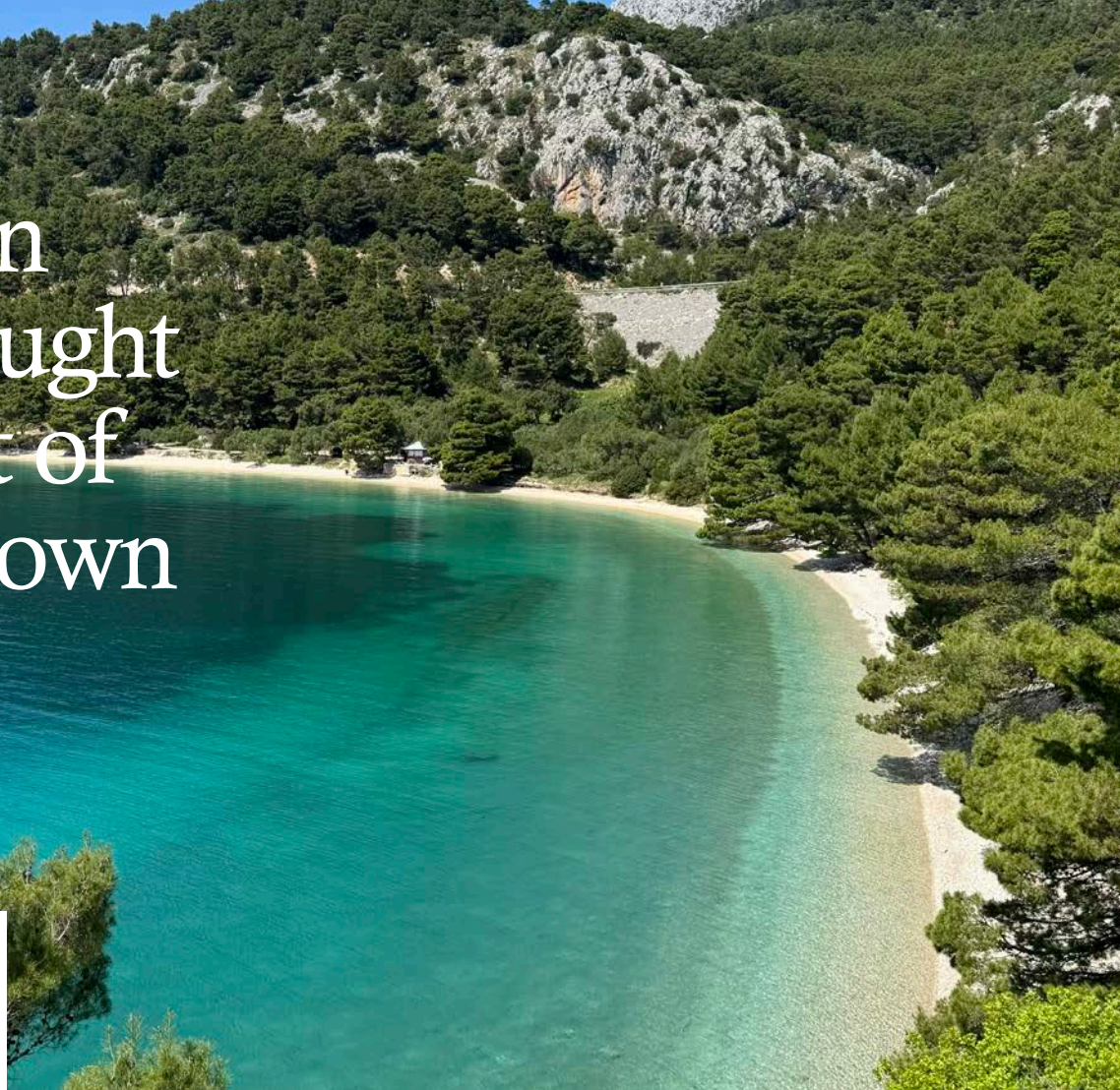
"ONE THING I ENJOY IS THAT PEOPLE HERE TAKE THE TIME TO LIVE IN A PLEASANT WAY."

PRINCESS GRACE



Go to **VisitMonaco.com** for more information

A Month in Croatia Taught Me the Art of Slowing Down



Croatia is a destination that rewards lingering, something our family of three came to appreciate during an unforgettable visit

BY CHLOE WILDE

As a proud Canadian, Canada will always be home, but in December of 2025, our little family of three packed up our life and began the adventure of a lifetime; travelling the world full-time. We left the country on a one-way ticket, bright-eyed and ready to take on the world with our wonderfully curious toddler, Grey. A few months into our global adventure, we made our way across the Montenegro border into Croatia by taxi to begin the longest stretch of our trip so far. We spent a

month exploring the coast along the Adriatic Sea, eventually saying goodbye to the crystal blue waters in exchange for inland adventures.

When people find out we travelled for an entire month in a single country, they often ask how much we managed to see. The truth? Less than we planned but far more than we expected. We came to Croatia expecting to discover a country. Instead, we discovered a different way to travel.



■ Embracing Slow Travel

Before we embarked on this this new way of life, like many type-A travellers I was the queen of lists and schedules in order to maximize every moment. But travelling with a toddler has a way of rewriting your priorities. Suddenly, the wild rainstorm we got caught in after a delicious meal became the core memory rather than the fancy restaurant. A spontaneous swim after playing hide and seek became the highlight of the day. Needing to find a quiet coffee shop in the walled-city of Dubrovnik while Grey napped in the stroller offered a much needed moment of respite and caffeine for mom and dad.

This beautiful country with its sprawling coastline, rugged mountains and untouched forests reminded us of something important: magic happens when you stop trying to see everything and allow a destination to unfold naturally. Here are some of the memories, moments and takeaways that stand out the most.

■ The Adriatic Sea, A True Beauty

The Adriatic is impossibly clear. We could not get over the crispness, the clarity, the shimmering clean water with more shades of blue than I've ever seen in my life. As the sun rose, peaked and made its way west, the hues were mesmerizing. Something we didn't realize before this adventure was that the beaches in Croatia are quite different than other beaches around the world. No sand in sight, only pebbles and river rocks as far as the eye can see. We didn't need to worry about sand in our shoes or murky water. It was all smooth stones, crystal-clear visibility and endless opportunities to jump in. Needless to say, Grey spent hours happily collecting pebbles.



Dubrovnik

■ The Coastal Drive

The drive itself became one of the highlights of our trip. Tip to tail, you can drive the entire length of the country in roughly 12 hours but because we had the luxury and the privilege of time, we took it slow, said yes to detours, enjoyed the slower-paced scenic route and it paid off in dividends. The coastal drive was recommended by every local that learned of our story, beaming with pride as they spoke of their country's natural beauty. Croatia's coastline stretches dramatically along the Adriatic, hugging cliffs, weaving through sleepy villages and revealing jaw-dropping views around seemingly every corner.



■ Cavtat's Slower Rhythm

Our introduction to Croatia came in Cavtat, and it immediately set the tone for the month ahead. A small, quaint town of less than 2,500 people it's much less crowded than Dubrovnik and only 20 kilometres away. Cavtat offered a gentler pace thanks to its relaxed fisherman's village atmosphere and family-friendly pebble beaches. Do yourself a favour and stay at Hotel Croatia Cavtat and get ready to feel like you are on the edge of the world overlooking the Adriatic Sea. If you're lucky, you'll be treated to one of the best sunsets of your life.



■ Dubrovnik's Living History

People immediately think of Dubrovnik when they think of Croatia. Call me cynical but I am often wary of the place that everyone says you should visit when in a new country. But standing within those ancient stone walls, the cynicism melted away. The architecture is grand, history oozes from the walls, and mixed in with the tourists (with their jaws dropped in awe) are locals who live, breathe, eat and sleep in the walled city that so many of us just visit and talk about. Real people, living real lives, in a walled-city that has existed since the 7th century. The historical and cultural significance of it was palpable.

■ Running Solo

One of my favourite travel rituals is exploring a new place by lacing up, throwing on sunscreen, planning a route and heading out on a run. Travelling full-time with a toddler means you rarely have alone time which means solo runs become a great way to explore and take care of your mental health. Throughout the trip, I squeezed in solo runs whenever I could, along waterfront promenades, through coastal towns and on quiet paths overlooking the sea. As a mom travelling with family, feeling safe matters enormously and Croatia consistently gave me that sense of comfort. It's something that may not appear in many guidebooks, but it became one of the most meaningful personal takeaways of our experience.



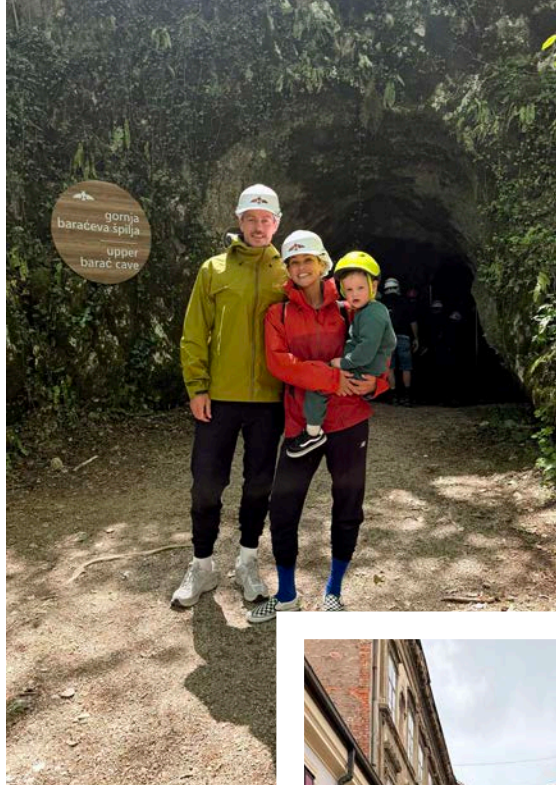
■ The Joy of Travelling at Toddler Speed

Grey may have been the smallest member of our trio, but he ended up being our greatest travel teacher. Everything naturally slows down when you have a 2.5-year old along for the ride. At first, I worried we'd miss a lot of our pre-parent travel rituals like museum-hopping, window-shopping in contemporary design stores and drinking too many coffees in aesthetically pleasing cafes. Our time in Croatia was slower but more intentional. Quality over quantity became our North Star. We noticed hidden alleyways because we stopped for snacks, we met locals because we lingered in cafés, we discovered playgrounds meant to resemble the great walled-city, we embraced slower mornings and earlier evenings, all thanks to Grey.



■ Croatia's Local Wine Culture

One of the unexpected pleasures of the journey was discovering Croatia's wine. Croatia has wonderfully scrumptious wine, which is something we didn't know before our trip. It didn't take us long to realize we never needed to look at a wine list and instead simply asked for the waiter's recommendation. There is nothing quite like a chef's tasting menu where you lean in and experience delicious cuisine paired with even more delicious wine and our evening at Vapor at Hotel Bellevue in Dubrovnik was exactly that type of memorable meal. There's something wonderfully unpretentious about Croatian wine culture where the focus isn't on ceremony, but on enjoying what's local and shared.



■ Plitvice Feels Like Another World

Even after weeks of spectacular coastal scenery, Plitvice Lakes National Park felt entirely different. The UNESCO-listed spot is mystical, dreamlike and almost magical. It's one of those places you have to see to believe and we're so glad we did. The waterfalls seemed to appear from nowhere, wooden pathways floated across crystal clear lakes and the shades of water looked enhanced, as though someone had quietly boosted the saturation settings. It was one of those rare places that exceeded every expectation.



■ Zagreb's Urban Energy

Ending our journey in Zagreb felt like the perfect contrast to the coast. After weeks of sea views and small towns, the city's energy was refreshing. You couldn't help but absorb its creative, youthful and effortlessly cool vibe. Our little trio loved exploring the old part of the city, eating too much gelato and finally indulging Grey and going on the iconic blue transit buses to our final activity in Croatia: a gondola ride up to scenic Sljeme Peak.

Croatia gave us incredible scenery, remarkable history, beautiful hotels, outstanding wine and unforgettable experiences. But perhaps its greatest gift was permission to slow down. In a world that constantly encourages us to do more, see more and move faster, Croatia reminded our little family that sometimes the richest travel experiences happen when you simply stay a little longer and let the destination come to you.

Top Spots to Stay



■ **Hotel Croatia Cavtat:** A short walk from the cute and quaint town of Cavtat, you'll find this five-star resort stunningly situated on a

peninsula jutting into the sea and set within an expanse of forest. Grey and I spent hours walking through the sprawling property amazed at the size of the trees. Treat yourself to a room facing the Adriatic and get ready to fall in love with the

views and walkways built into the cliffside. There's a pretty outdoor pool, two quiet beaches, a spa and even a children'



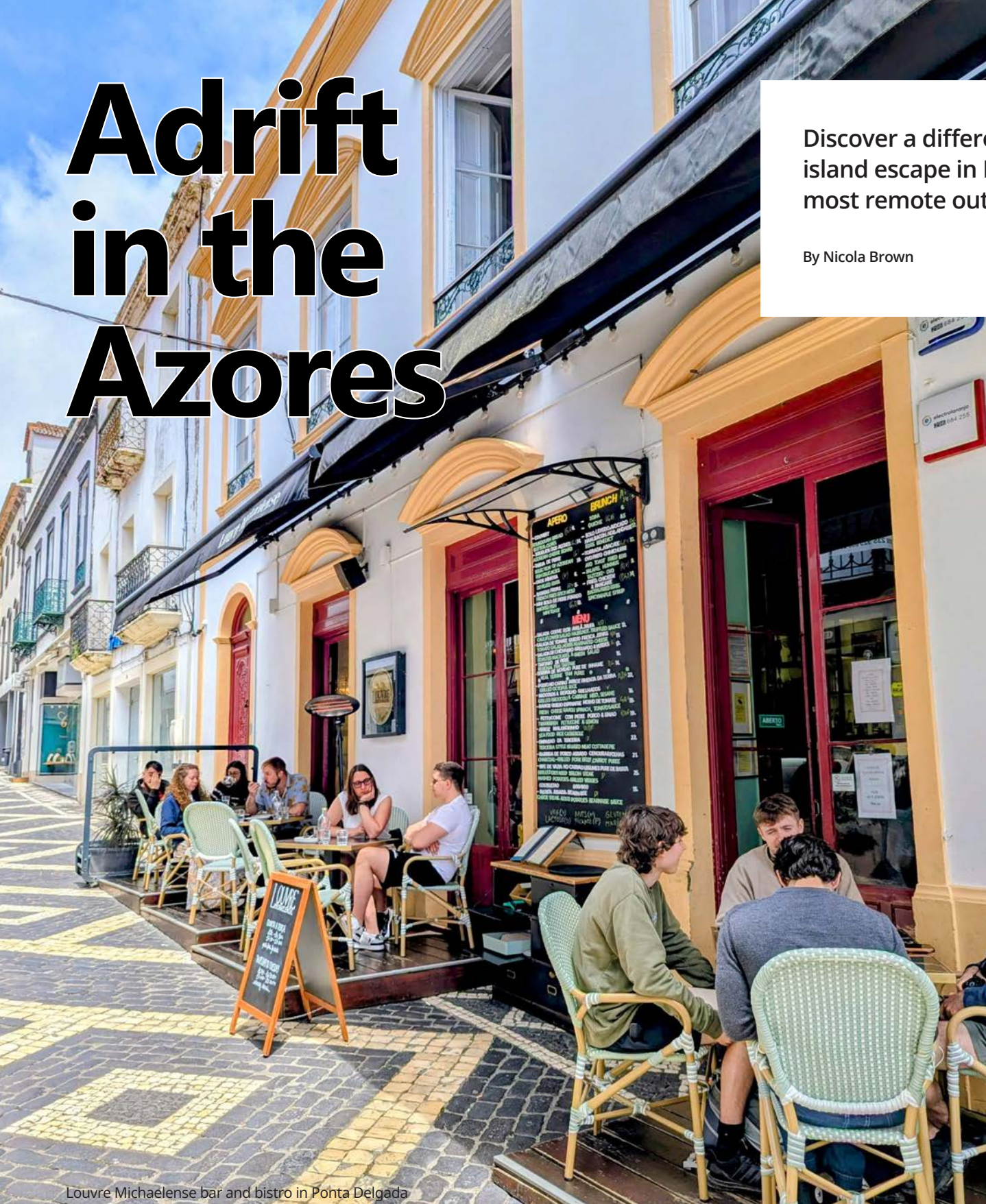
■ **Hotel Dubrovnik Palace:** Step away from the high tourist concentration of the iconic walled-city of Dubrovnik and within 10 minutes by car you can call Hotel Dubrovnik Palace home. There are 308 rooms and suites with private balconies and sea views, plus all the amenities you could ask for. We stayed in a suite and it screamed

New York City chic but the views from the balcony were all Croatia. The real highlight was being able to swim in the Adriatic Sea along a rugged rocky beach surrounded by nature. There are also two outdoor pools and an indoor pool, as well as walking paths throughout the property.

Adrift in the Azores

Discover a different kind of island escape in Portugal's most remote outpost

By Nicola Brown



Louvre Michaelense bar and bistro in Ponta Delgada

On the volcanic island of São Miguel—a mere dot on the map in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean—you can place one foot in a steaming hot spring and the other in a cold-

water stream at the heart of a lush crater valley. Let your brain try to calibrate the juxtaposition while you sip a cup of the mineral-rich waters that pour from little blue-and-white tiled outflows dotted around Furnas, the island's geothermal mecca. This

flow will cleanse your liver, you're told, while the ones around the corner are for hypertension and hangovers. A distinct mineral profile for every ailment. Such is the whole-body deliverance of the Azores.



Caldeiras and fumaroles of Furnas

Reconnecting with the earth is the defining intention here. It starts with hot spring visits—the botanical garden and 1700s-era thermal spring Parque Terra Nostra is a must. And extends into dinner, a cozido experience where guests prep and slow-cook a traditional Azorean stew—meat, sausage, root vegetables—underground in the steaming vents of the island's caldeiras. It sounds simple enough, and that's the point. But the resulting rich, savoury stew is transportive comfort food at its very best.

Elsewhere, the island's unique soils, topography and climate are home to a bogglingly broad agricultural picture, from dairies and vineyards to pineapple farms and the only commercial tea plantations in Europe. All are easily reachable and well worth visiting by car, dotted through a richly saturated landscape of lush greens, inky blues and ash blacks—like a cross-pollination of tropical Hawaii and northern Scotland. Few such places in the world offer the same chances of witnessing the migration of a rare blue whale, though—the largest animal ever to live on earth—along with 11 other whale species and five species of dolphins, aboard a catamaran off the coast of São Miguel's capital Ponta Delgada.



Gorreana Tea Plantation



Pineapples growing at Plantação de Ananases A. Arruda

At once a wild outpost and a culturally central waypoint, the Azores archipelago has developed a distinct identity since it was discovered and settled in the 1400s. Ponta Delgada's 16th-century cobblestone streets and meticulously detailed architecture are reminiscent of Lisbon, with bustling wine bars and seafood-driven eateries throughout.





Ghosts of the Ocean seaweed gin and tonic



Dinner at Quinta da Jardinete

But surprises you could find nowhere else emerge on the periphery. The Gin Library houses the world's largest collection of gin (over 2,500 bottles) in a petite clifftop perch with sweeping sea views. Local botanicals and garnishes are plucked wild or grown—like Azorean seaweed, lemons, mint and rosemary—for their in-house lineup and beloved cetacean namesake Ghosts of the Ocean.

Nature finds expressive influence in the islands' crisp cool-climate wines, too, whose vines turn harsh growing conditions in porous basalt rock and volcanic ash into bright minerality and salinity. Once a historic orange estate, the family-owned Quinta da Jardinete was the first commercial winery on the island, a quaint terraced vineyard enclosed by wind-blocking basalt rock walls that offers private wine-paired dinners inside the property's former chapel.

Just when you think you've got the Azores sussed, another twist challenges a unified picture. The islands unfold like a patchwork of vignettes borrowed from different places and times, each vaguely reminiscent yet completely new. Perhaps you'll never quite calibrate the contrasts between your feet; perhaps you're not meant to. The Azores offers the time and space to hold it all at once.



Inside The Gin Library



Parque Terra Nostra thermal pool



Octant Ponta Delgada rooftop



Parque Terra Nostra

■ Highlights

Poça da Tia Silvina - publicly accessible hot spring foot baths in Furnas

Parque Terra Nostra - botanical gardens and thermal pool in Furnas

Lagoa das Furnas - crater lake and hot springs where the cozido takes place in Furnas

Gorreana Tea Plantation - Europe's oldest tea plantation on the north coast

Plantação de Ananases A. Arruda - pineapple plantation just outside Ponta Delgada

Quinta da Jardinete - estate winery on the north coast

À Terra - Octant Hotels' chef-driven, locally sourced restaurants in Furnas and Ponta Delgada

The Gin Library - world's largest gin library and bar just outside Ponta Delgada

Santuário Nossa Senhora da Paz - chapel and viewpoint above Vila Franca do Campo on the south coast

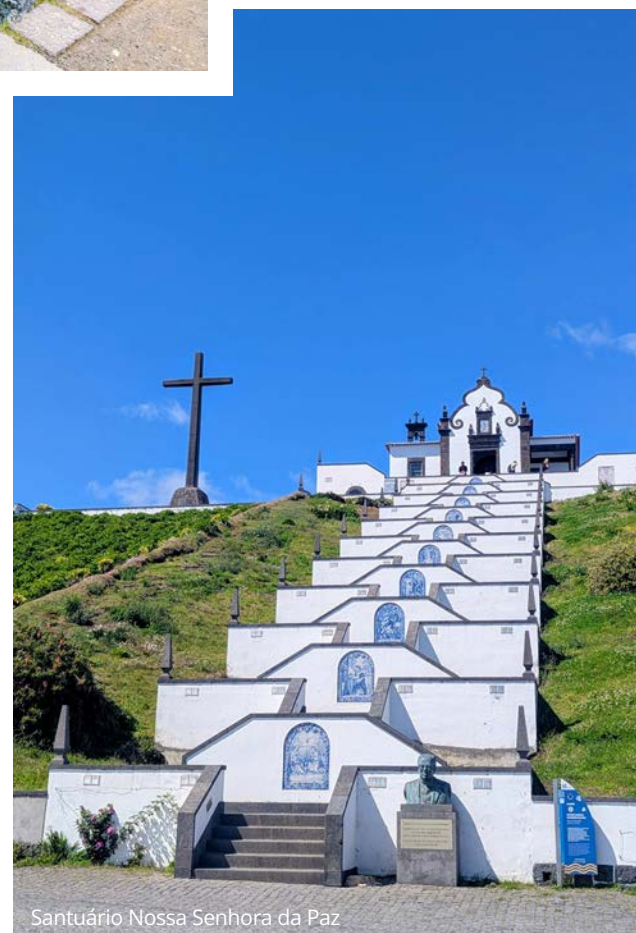
Mercado da Graça - farmer's market in Ponta Delgada

Rei Dos Queijos - local cheese shop adjacent to the farmer's market in Ponta Delgada

Queijadas do Morgado - traditional sweet cake shop in Vila Franca do Campo

Louvre Michaelense - historic bar and bistro in Ponta Delgada

Futurismo Azores Adventures - whale watching tours from Ponta Delgada harbour



Santuário Nossa Senhora da Paz

Know before you go

Whether you choose to make São Miguel's coastal capital of Ponta Delgada or the rural village of Furnas your home base for exploration, each of Octant's two Azores hotels is anchored by an extensive list of regional experiences, led by some of Portugal's warmest locals for an immersive sense of place. Let the concierge piece together your favourites into a curated itinerary—a perfect overview of the island's must-dos—minus the hassle of planning.

While temperatures remain mild year-round (14-21C on average), the Azores is

well known for playing host to four seasons in one day, alternating between sun, wind and rain (though showers in peak and shoulder seasons June-September are usually brief) so pack accordingly. Both hats and rain gear are recommended for daily excursions.

Routes from Toronto and Montreal, including new non-stop seasonal flights from Air Canada and Westjet, make Sao Miguel one of the shortest (5.5 hours departing Toronto) and most affordable flights to Europe.

Going Crowd-Free in Crete

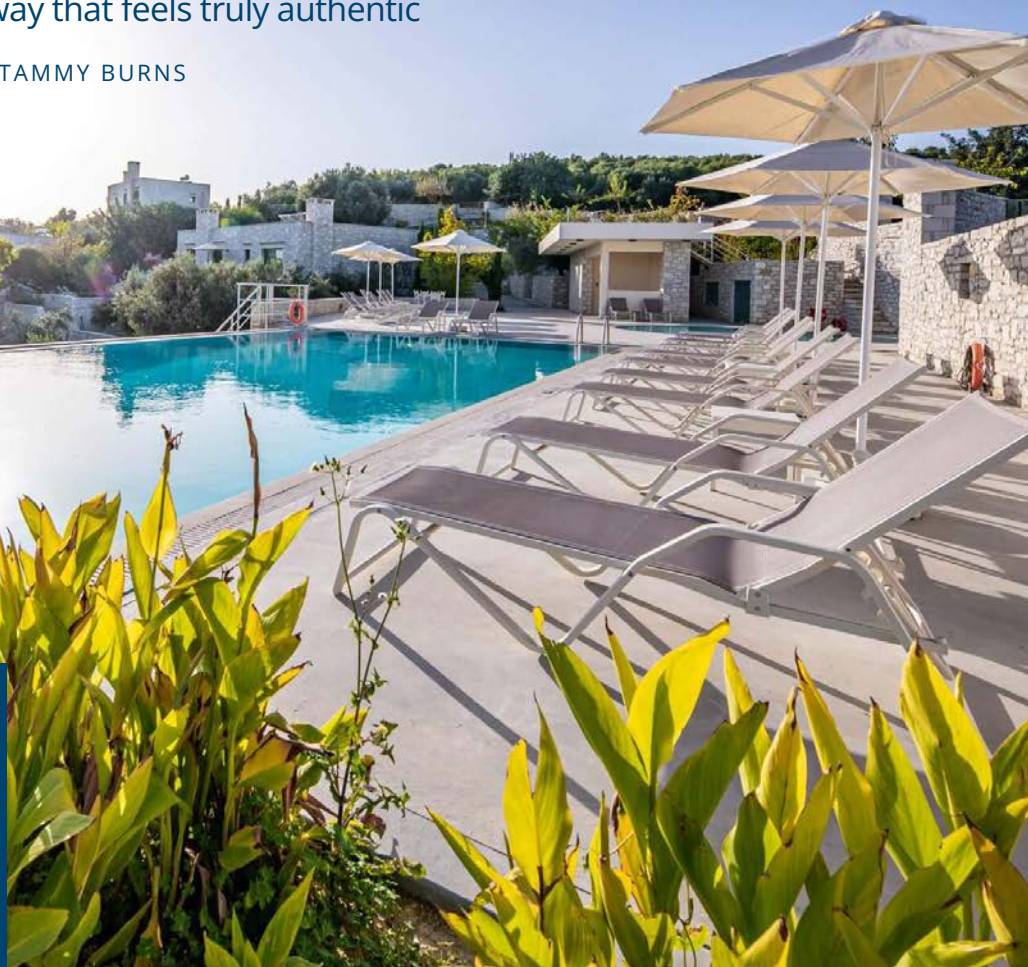
A stay at Dalabelos Estate offers the chance to experience this Greek island in a way that feels truly authentic

BY TAMMY BURNS

In rural Crete, the air smells like thyme and oregano and citrus. It wafts through our villa window, along with the sounds of rooster caws at dawn and the jangle of bells as sheep are herded home at dusk.

While many of Crete's tourists—a record 6.6 million in 2025—head to the massive resorts on the coast, my boyfriend and I are at Dalabelos Estate, an intimate agrotourism retreat in the countryside, to try to connect with the real Crete.

Dalabelos is tucked within the rolling hills of Angeliana, a small agricultural village that's only an hour's drive from the island's main airport in Heraklion. But it's so serene, with sweeping views of olive groves under the shadow of snow-capped Mount Ida, Crete's tallest peak, that I feel like we're a million miles away.



For five generations the property has belonged to the local Petrodaskalakis family, although until 2004, it was mainly olive trees on the land. Today, it includes a large vineyard and an orchard of orange, fig, mulberry, pomegranate, almond, walnut, carob and quince. Vassilis Petrodaskalakis leads guests on tours through the fields (or you can quietly explore on your own), while his wife Maria, a chef, gives hands-on cooking classes in her small kitchen. During harvest season, guests can even participate in olive or grape picking.

Vassilis says he was inspired to start hosting guests after temporarily living on the mainland and missing the music, food and healthy lifestyle of Crete.

"It is a place with a great history and enormous energy," he says. "The mountains, the beaches, the monuments, the natural beauty and people of this island—for me, as a Cretan, it contains all the creative magic of the world."

He explains that Dalabelos gathers all his homeland's graces in one place. "Here, people can coexist with nature and wildlife. They talk, joke, hang out, reflect, learn and taste what the gardens, the crops and the whole cycle of life has to offer."

One morning, while I'm lounging by the infinity pool that overlooks the farm, I spot Vassilis hand-picking vegetables and wild herbs for that evening's dinner—the menu changes daily depending on what's ripened and what Maria is inspired to prepare. It is all organic, farm-to-table and exquisite: delicate zucchini blossoms and vine leaves stuffed with rice and fragrant mint, crispy fennel pies with garlicky tzatziki, smoky slices of apaki (a traditional Cretan cured pork) and the

freshest, sweetest tomatoes I've ever tasted, doused in peppery olive oil and creamy feta.



The wine is sourced from both Dalabelos and neighbouring vineyards, and the obligatory raki, a Cretan digestif that's served with dessert after every dinner across the island, is brewed by Vassilis.

An experimenter, Vassilis asks if we want to try his latest variation: Cretan whiskey, distilled from grapes like raki, but aged in oak barrels. It goes down much smoother than the raki, rich and warm, and even my Scottish partner agrees it's a skilled take on the "water of life." After dinner, we share a few drams in the music room of the main building, where folk instruments line the shelves—Vassilis leads weekly workshops on the history and tradition of Cretan music.

The estate consists of just 10 studios, plus a few cottages and apartments, which means you quickly get to know your fellow guests. At dinner on the terrace one night, sheltered under a mulberry tree canopy, we chat with a couple from England. Like us, they wanted to find a part of Crete that felt far away from the throngs of tourists.

As the sky fades from cornflower blue to cobalt to inky black, out along the sea's edge we spot the bright lights of those coastal resorts. I have no doubt they're beautiful places to stay, but in the quiet stillness, I feel the land soaking into my skin, and I know this is the real Crete we came to see.





A lane in Low Row

In Search of *Wuthering Heights*

A visit to the Yorkshire moors offers a trip back in time and a peek into the world of Emily Bronte

WORDS & PHOTOS BY DEBRA SMITH

A scintillating film version of *Wuthering Heights*, starring Margot Robbie and Jacob Elordi, opened on Valentine's Day 2026. Set jetters who track filming locations know that the movie was filmed on the Yorkshire moors, in tiny towns that have barely changed since 1847, the year Emily Bronte wrote her classic novel. How did this famously introverted writer create a novel so full of passion, betrayal and heartbreak that it still resonates over 175 years later? I visited Yorkshire to find out.

What Is a Moor?

In the story, the moor begins as a childhood playground for Catherine and Heathcliff, and later becomes a battleground, when Heathcliff's unrequited love twists into bitter revenge. "To begin with you should know that a moor is windswept and acidic. It's basically rock and peat and nothing much grows on it, except for heather and some grass and moss," says Andrew Ward from Expedition Yorkshire. He's my guide for a trip from York into Bronte country and Yorkshire National Park, a vast area of 900 square miles (2,330 square kilometres). "At this altitude, about 3,500 feet (1,066 metres) above sea level, the weather is harsh. Even though it rains a lot, very few trees can survive the winds," Ward explains.

It's not a very romantic setting, but there is life here. Red squirrels, hares and hedgehogs

dart through the limestone crags and ravines. Rare Lady's Slipper orchids peek up through the heather while peregrine falcons circle overhead, searching for a meal.

Five Weddings and Ten Funerals

The seemingly desolate landscape where Emily Bronte took her daily walks was full of life and death dramas. Although she led a quiet life in a small rural village, she made a careful study of nature, both animal and human. Her observations sent unforgettable characters careening back and forth between two great houses divided by four miles of moors. Spoiler alert: there is no happy ending in *Wuthering Heights* for Catherine and Heathcliff, and although there are many unfortunate marriages and untimely deaths along the way, their romance remains eternal.



Bronte Country



Hills and Dales

Luddites and Locks

By Bronte's time, the Industrial Revolution was in full swing in Britain. With it came fundamental changes to the textile, coal and iron industries of Yorkshire. Traditional craft workers, weavers and iron workers were replaced by steam driven engines, and a surge of immigrant workers arrived to fuel the huge factories. Patrick Bronte, Emily's father, was an immigrant. An Irish born curate and a Luddite, he was opposed to the new mechanical innovations and their effect on the poor. He would have approved of the first stop on our tour though.

The Five-Rise Locks at Bingley were built in 1774 and they are still the steepest locks in the UK. They are part of a canal system that runs from Leeds to Liverpool. Next to the locks is one of the most charming cafes in Yorkshire, The Five-Rise Locks Café, where it feels as though time stopped in the 18th century, except for the electric lights and the hiss of the coffee machine. Locals gather outside, enjoying a cuppa at the picnic tables. The colourful houseboats on the quiet canal instantly became my own Luddite escape fantasy.

Is Emily Home?

Travelling the eleven kilometres to the Bronte Parsonage in Haworth in a comfortable Mercedes V Class takes only 20 minutes. When Emily Bronte lived here roads were rough and travel was challenging. Aside from her early years spent at school and a failed attempt at school teaching in Brussels, Emily spent almost all her time at her father's two-story sandstone Parsonage, leaving only to attend church services or to walk the hills.

In the small, cozy rooms of the Parsonage you can imagine the Bronte children, Emily, Charlotte, Ann and Branwell huddled on the floor with their toy soldiers creating rich lives and sweeping epic stories for each tiny figure. The house contains many of its original furnishings including an extensive library and the family piano that Emily loved to play.

The Bronte Museum is full of memorabilia and excellent displays that trace the fate of the Bronte family. In its time the Parsonage was a hothouse of short-lived creativity. While Charlotte was writing *Jane Eyre*, Emily penned *Wuthering Heights* and Branwell threw himself into painting and fatal alcoholism in equal measure. A short, stone path leads from the Parsonage, past a cottage garden and the graveyard, to the church where Emily and her family are finally resting in peace.

Romancing the Stones

Leaving the Parsonage we headed for the moors of Yorkshire National Park and the shooting locations of the latest version of *Wuthering Heights*. The landscape is familiar to anyone who watched the BBC series *All Creatures Great and Small*, or *Mission: Impossible – Dead Reckoning Part One*, or ITV's *Downton Abbey*. "Yorkshire is the largest county in the UK at about 5,900 square miles (15,500 square kilometres)", Ward tells me. "It would take many lifetimes to explore all

the hiking trails, waterfalls and limestone caves in this area."

Along the way we drove by the fertile valleys of Yorkshire, called dales, with poetic names like Arkengarthdale and Swaledale. Trees line the banks of the River Swale and the surrounding fields are covered in green grass and clover and dotted with sheep. Stone walls line the narrow roads and stone houses cluster together for company. Filming took place in towns like Low Row, a picture-perfect setting, with cottages set along winding lanes that follow the hillsides into the valleys. Tours of the filming sites are available for movie lovers.



The Bronte Parsonage

Where to Walk the Moors

While filming *Wuthering Heights*, the stars stayed at the historic Simonstone Hall Hotel in Hawes where Margot Robbie reportedly introduced her baby to the resident peacocks. The common areas are uncommonly beautiful, decorated in tones of navy blue

and olive green with views of the expansive stone terrace and the dales in the distance. The twenty guest rooms and suites are furnished in classic English country style with floral wallpaper and comfy oversized beds. Who could resist a walk on the moors before indulging in an afternoon tea service complete with local Wensleydale cheese, or time out in a candle lit soaker tub with a glass of port before enjoying a gourmet meal in the dining room. Set the scene, it's your story.



The Bronte Parsonage in Haworth

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