



TravelLife

FALL 2026

Belgium
Cambodia
COLOMBIA
Grenada
JAPAN

Plus

MAD FOR MEXICO

A woman wearing a traditional Mayan headdress with a large pink flower and a white face mask with red floral patterns is lighting candles on a Day of the Dead altar. The altar is covered with a woven mat and decorated with marigolds, candles, and small bowls. In the background, another person is visible, and a large, colorful, stylized mask or sculpture is partially visible on the right.

Fairmont
MAYAKOBA

DÍA de MUERTOS

AMONG MARIGOLDS AND CANDLELIGHT

Long before there were candles or marigold paths, there was a bird small enough to cross between worlds unseen, and mythology gave it a single duty: to guide the souls of the departed back to the ones who loved them. This year, Fairmont Mayakoba builds its Día de Muertos celebration around that ancient belief, opening its mangroves, canals, and pristine Caribbean shores from October 30th through November 1st as Zunu the hummingbird is said to lead spirits home.

6-HANDS DINNER IN
COLLABORATION WITH ROBERTO
ALCOCER AND STEVEN MOLNAR



Fairmont
MAYAKOBA

A WEEKEND SET *FOR REMEMBRANCE*

Across three nights, remembrance takes many forms. Inside a candlelit cenote, a symphonic orchestra offers classical renditions of modern music, sound and natural wonder lingering together inside the same space. In the kitchen, tradition becomes technique: a six-hands dinner brings together Michelin-starred chefs Roberto Alcocer and Steve Molnar with Executive Chef Daniel Noguera, dishes rooted in culinary excellence and shared craft for one night only. And at La Laguna, Souls & Legends closes the season the way it began, honoring Mexico's roots through gastronomy and story, an evocative evening, souls remembered and legends made vivid again.

Book your Día de Muertos stay today at fairmont-mayakoba.com/stay or contact mayakoba@fairmont.com.

SYMPHONY IN A CENOTE



SOULS & LEGENDS
DINNER AT LA LAGUNA



CONTRIBUTORS

For this issue, which features our annual Mad for Mexico special section, we asked some of our contributors to tell us about one of their most memorable moments in Mexico.



CYNTHIA DAVID

MEDELLÍN TRANSFORMED, PAGE 32

As the sun set in the port of Veracruz, we emerged from our hotel to find the Zocalo, the city's central square, magically transformed into an open-air ballroom. While a live orchestra played, elegantly dressed couples, men in a traditional guayabera shirt and women in flowing white dresses, swayed in time to the music. The stately dance known as danzón was brought over by Cubans in the late 1800s. It's performed in the square three nights a week.



JESSICA PADYKULA

VISITING GRENADA IS ALWAYS A GOOD IDEA, PAGE 24

When I arrived in Merida it was dark outside and my only goal was to find my hotel and go to bed after a long day of travel. Little did I know, that when I ventured outside in the morning, I would be blown away by the beauty of my surroundings. Stately colonial buildings, leafy plazas, small cafes selling pastries perfect for a midday pick-me-up, grand churches and colourful markets made me fall in love with the city immediately.

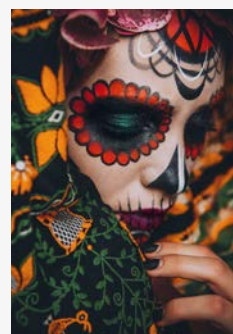


KIM PEMBERTON

A CITY MADE FOR CHOCOLATE-LOVERS, PAGE 10

One of my favourite memories of Mexico is returning to Isla Mujeres with my ex-husband and our two daughters, more than four decades after our honeymoon. Once a sleepy fishing village, the island has since become a globally recognized tourist destination. In 1983, we zoomed around on a scooter, navigating sandy, unpaved streets. This time, the four of us piled into a golf cart and explored the island on vastly improved roads. The experience was different but equally memorable.

TravelLife



FALL 2026 ISSUE

A symbol of Día de los Muertos, the iconic Catrina reminds us that remembering those who came before us is also a celebration of life itself. Rooted in Mexico's rich cultural traditions, this is a time when families gather to honour loved ones and celebrate the memories that keep them close. Vibrant and deeply meaningful, it is a beautiful reflection of Mexico's belief that those we love are never truly forgotten.

Photo by Kiselev Andrey Valerevich

PUBLISHER/ EDITOR IN CHIEF Tammy Cecco

SENIOR CONTRIBUTING EDITOR Jessica Padykula

DIGITAL CONTRIBUTING EDITOR Nicola Brown

DESIGN DIRECTOR Joyce Padilla

PRODUCTION Gregory Alexander

CONTRIBUTORS Kathryn Anderson
Diana Ballon
Mackenzie Cecco
Tammy Cecco
Erica Commisso
Cynthia David
Jessica Padykula
Sangita Patel
Kim Pemberton
Cathy Senecal
Nicole Servinis
Debra Smith
Kayla-Marie Williams

ADVERTISING, SPONSORSHIP, OPPORTUNITIES & EVENT COVERAGE marketing@travellife.ca
Tel: 416.805.5159

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Mad for Mexico

Dive into the pages of our annual **Mad for Mexico** special feature celebrating many of the reasons Canadians return year after year. This is a destination that goes far beyond beautiful beaches—the rich history, exceptional gastronomy and vibrant cultural heritage are sure to captivate.

EDITOR'S LETTER

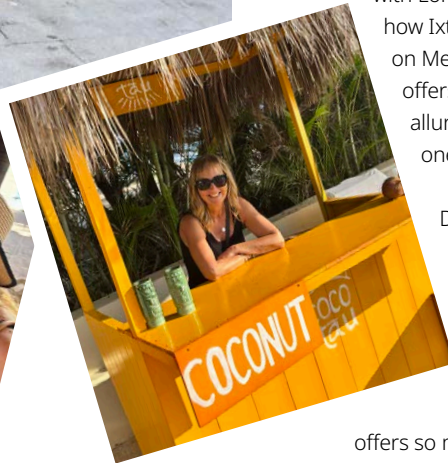
FINDING MEANING IN THE *moments*

In the fall, I often reflect on how the season is uniquely positioned to either propel us forward or induce a certain nostalgia for the carefree nature of summer. This fall, however, I've been thinking a lot about the power of staying present and how that small act can make every moment matter so much more.

Appreciating the here and now is not always easy, as most of us know. But as a lifelong traveller, something I've come to really appreciate about visiting new places, is how travel can anchor us in the moment. The sunset we don't have time to look up for at home suddenly becomes a monumental highlight on a trip, or a meal eaten in front of a screen is replaced by a long lunch with locals that becomes a treasured memory.

Whether I'm enjoying street tacos with my husband or introducing my daughters and son to some of my favourite places, travel has always had the power to keep me present when it matters most. This issue leans into that sentiment, with diverse stories that showcase the many ways in which travel helps us press pause long enough to appreciate exactly where we are.

This is the time of year we curate extra space for our annual Mad for Mexico section as this is one destination that always gives me reason to take pause. There is so much cultural and culinary diversity outside of just beautiful beaches. And even the most luxurious hotels take time to tell Mexico's story, as highlighted in our update on the unique events happening at Fairmont Mayakoba in Riviera Maya leading up to Día de Muertos. One of the country's many traditions that I love, it places a beautiful focus on celebrating life rather than mourning those who have left us.



Elsewhere in our Mad for Mexico special feature, one contributor shares some of the reasons to have Isla Holbox, Isla Contoy and Isla Mujeres on your travel radar. Each small but vibrant island has a personality all its own with worthwhile attractions to match. We also cover some of the many reasons that Canadians have been developing a special relationship with Loreto and a look at how Ixtapa Zihuatanejo on Mexico's Pacific coast offers two endlessly alluring destinations in one vacation.

Diving into the rest of our fall issue we feature a winter visit to Colorado that proves this perennially popular state offers so much more than the epic skiing its known for, from hot spring soaks and excellent golf to phenomenal food. Another writer transports us to the Tohoku region of northeastern Japan, while another takes a luxurious day trip on Belmond's British Pullman Train from London to historic Chatsworth House.

Moving into warmer territory, one writer heads to Medellin and discovers the many ways in which this Colombian city has transcended its violent past and transformed into a welcoming and colourful destination filled with fascinating neighbourhoods. We also have a piece on the Caribbean island of Grenada with its effortless blend of natural beauty, rich culture and stunning beaches you won't soon forget.

Travel is about so much more than going somewhere new; it's an experience that gives us free rein to slow down and really take in where we are. Those moments may seem small at the time, but as I've learned time and again, they're often the ones we remember most.

Here's to a fall travel season filled with memorable moments.

Tammy Cecco
EDITOR IN CHIEF

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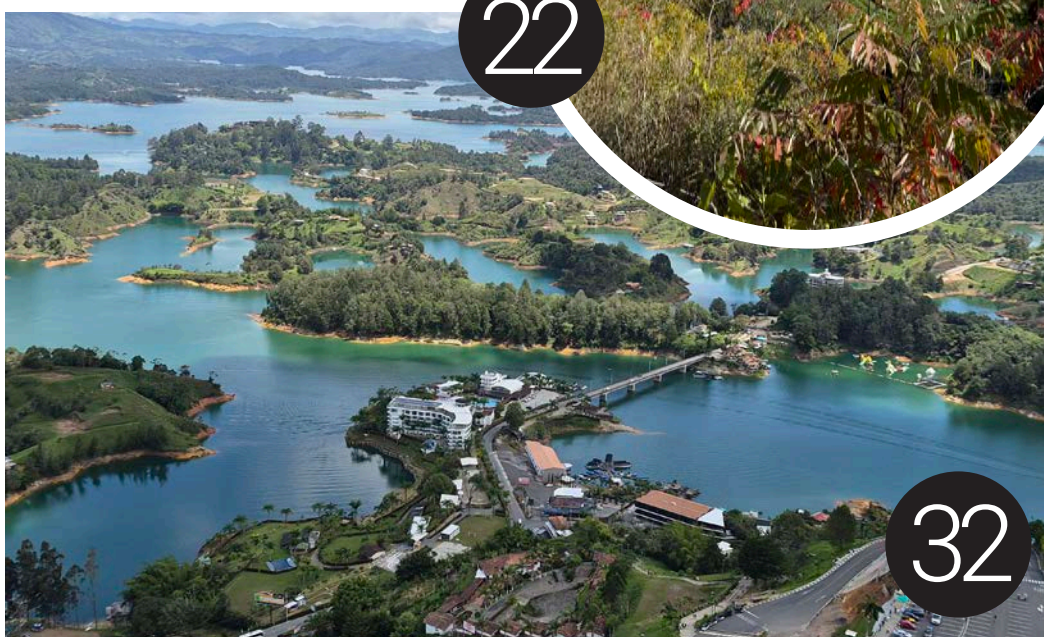
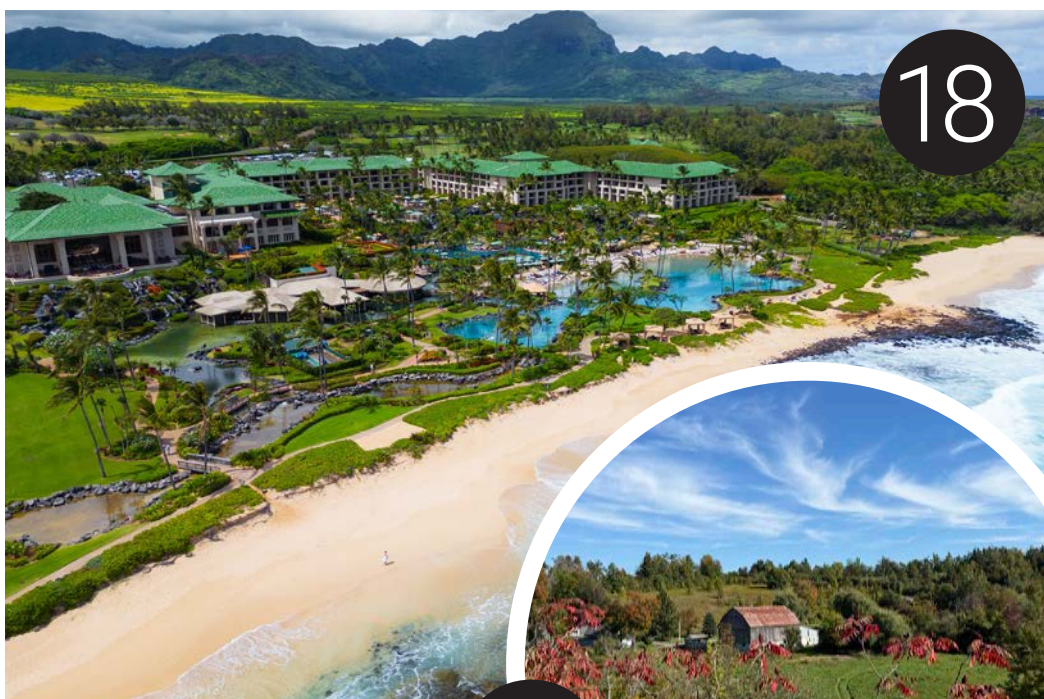
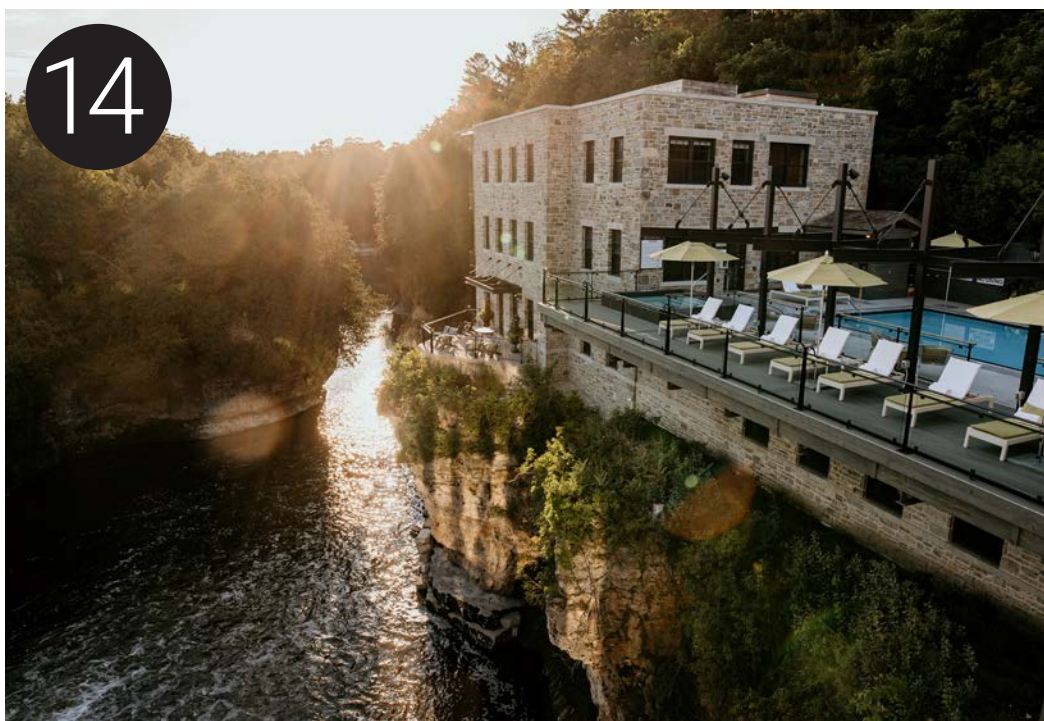


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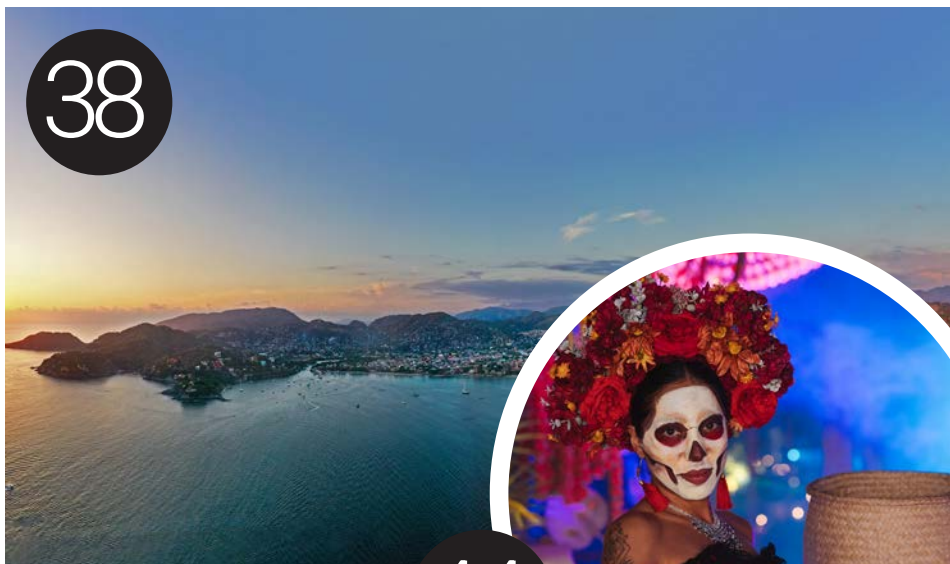
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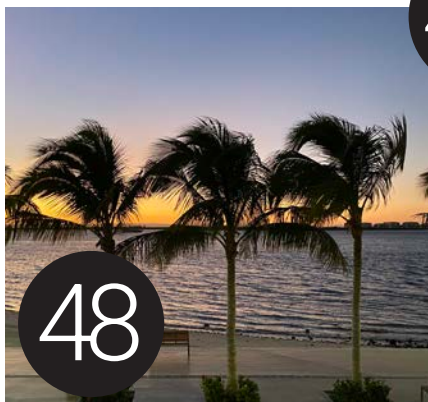
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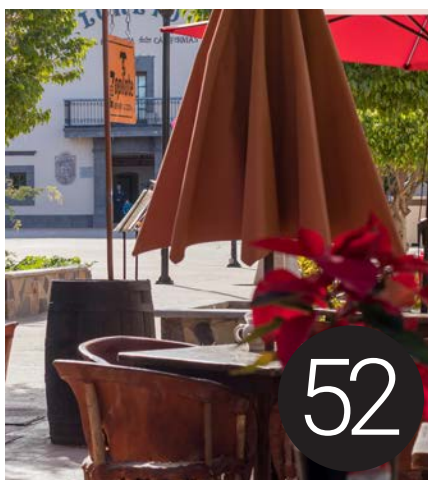
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MAD FOR MEXICO

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OFF THE COAST OF QUINTANA ROO YOU'LL FIND ISLA HOLBOX, ISLA CONTOY AND ISLA MUJERES, EACH WITH A PERSONALITY ALL ITS OWN

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DISCOVER A DIFFERENT SIDE OF THE MEXICAN CARIBBEAN THROUGH ALL SENSES INCLUSIVE

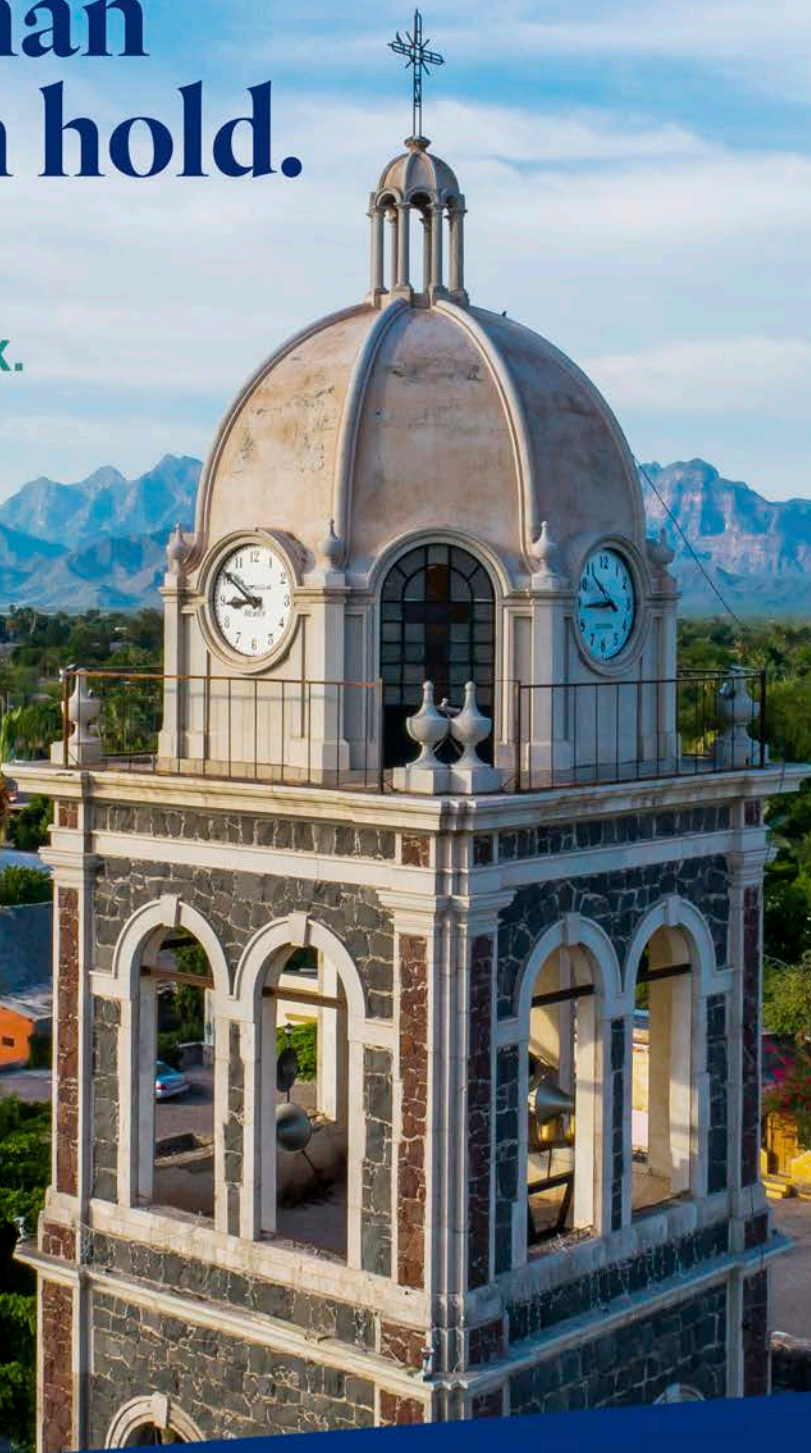
INSIDE CLASE AZUL'S ARCHITECTURAL LOVE LETTERS TO MEXICO

HOW A PREMIUM TEQUILA BRAND IS HONOURING THE COUNTRY OF ITS ROOTS THROUGH ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN THAT BRINGS MEXICO'S CULTURAL RICHNESS TO LIFE



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A City Made for Chocolate-Lovers

Anyone with a sweet tooth, and especially one that leans in the direction of chocolate, will want to visit the medieval city of Bruges

WORDS AND PHOTOS BY KIM PEMBERTON



Bruges is a chocoholic's dream; its medieval streets lined with chocolate shops at every turn. Shop windows overflow with pralines, truffles, bonbons and glossy bars stacked like treasure; each tempting display vying for my attention.

"Chocolate is our gold," my tour guide Inge Denys tells me as we pause outside a shop displaying a huge poster that reads, "There is nothing better than a friend unless it is a friend with chocolate."

The slogan is effective, but Denys offers a quick reality check adding, "not all chocolate is created equal."

If I want the real thing, she says, I need to look for a small plaque by the door depicting a cocoa bean framed by two swans, the city's emblem. It's the mark of the Guild of Bruges Chocolatiers, and a guarantee that the chocolates inside are handcrafted right here in Bruges.

In a city with about 60 chocolate shops (roughly one for every 2,000 residents) that distinction matters.

Across Belgium, more than 2,000 chocolatiers produce approximately 172,000 tonnes each year, which explains why Belgium is widely considered the "chocolate capital of the world."



"There is nothing better than a friend unless it is a friend with chocolate."

Strict laws require chocolate to contain at least 35 per cent pure cocoa and Belgium's chocolate, renowned for its craftsmanship and high-quality ingredients, typically has a higher cocoa count and avoids artificial additives. This deep-rooted commitment to quality isn't surprising since Belgians consider chocolate a source of national pride, worthy of celebration.

In Bruges, for example, there are walking tours dedicated entirely to chocolate shops, including routes that cover much of Katelijnestraat, a street known as "Chocolate Row." This street is chockablock with chocolate shops, including my favourite, Dumon.

This family-run chocolate business started in 1992 and now has three locations in the city. Its flagship store is housed in a historic medieval building, just around the corner from Bruges' main market square.

Dumon is known for creamy chocolates like their classic pralines with hazelnut, and milk and dark chocolates filled with caramel and other traditional flavours, Nele Rosius tells me, who co-owns the shop with her husband Koen.

The Dumon family is still involved. Founder and master chocolatier Stephan Dumon makes the store's sugar-free chocolates from a small factory about 25 minutes away.

Asked about what makes Dumon chocolate so special, Rosius explains, "It's a local brand only in Bruges, made with local chocolate." To find out even more about what sets chocolate in Bruges apart, I take part in a 2.5-hour chocolate making class with Belgium Chocolate Workshop.



Instructor Orpa Naznin first teaches our group of 24 students how to temper the chocolate, which involves stirring it in a special pot until it melts and reaches an exact temperature of 31 degrees.

The tempering process gives the chocolate its glossy shine and helps prevent it from melting easily in your hands. Next, we use a spatula to level off the chocolate we've poured into moulds, filling them only halfway to form the initial praline shells. The moulds are then gently tapped to release any trapped air bubbles.

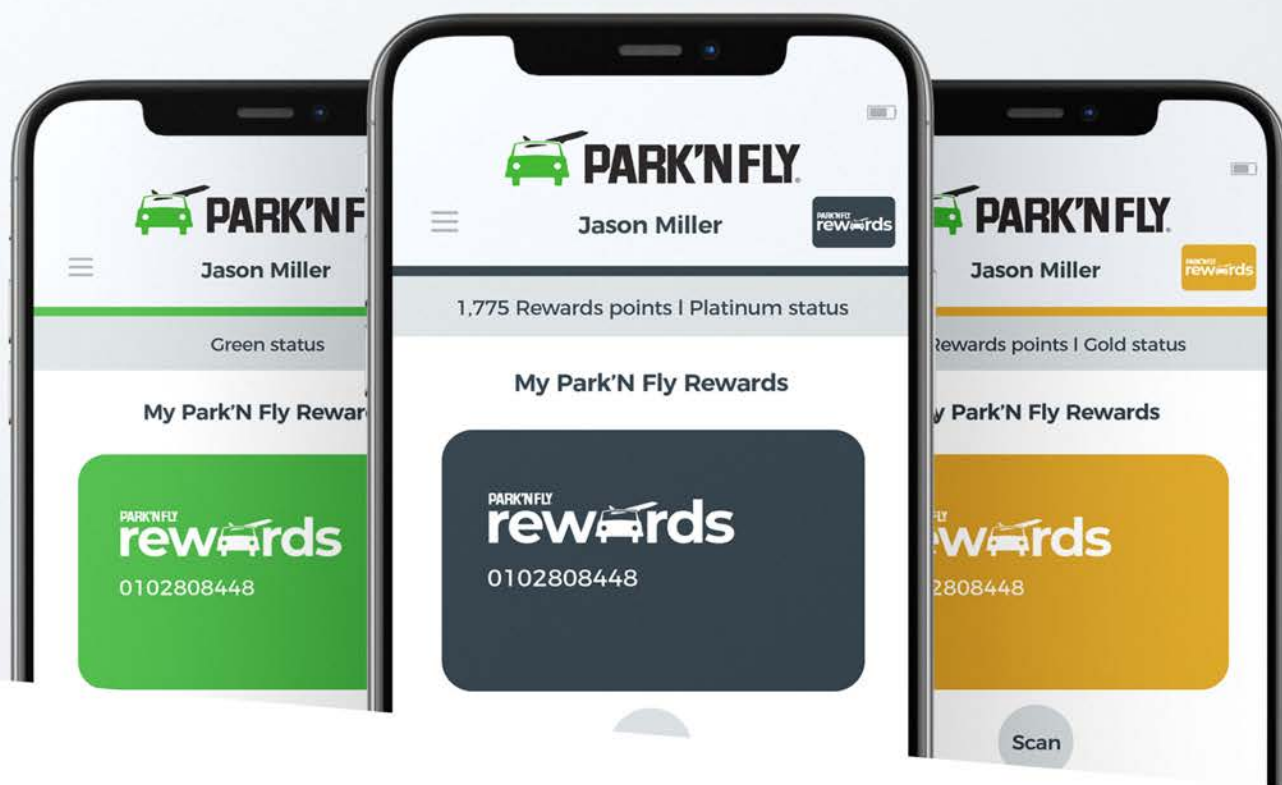
Finally, we prepare the ganache filling, made from melted chocolate, cream, a drop of honey and a flavour of our choice. I chose caramel. After carefully spooning the ganache into the shells, we once again use a spatula to seal them with a final layer of chocolate, completing the praline.

By the time the last mould was set aside, my workspace was messy and the air thick with the rich scent of chocolate.



As I waited for the shells to harden, I realized how much precision and care goes into a treat I had always taken for granted. It's unlikely I'll ever eat a praline so absentmindedly again.

Kim Pemberton visited Bruges on a pre-trip extension with Viking's "Tulips and Windmills" river cruise, which offers excursions like the chocolate making class and city walking tours.



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Elora Mill: The Perfect Escape Close to Home

By Mackenzie Cecco

Sometimes the best getaways are closer than you think. Tucked into the village of Elora, just a short drive from Toronto, Elora Mill Hotel & Spa feels much farther away. Between the limestone buildings, views over the gorge and quiet village streets, it has an almost otherworldly feel without having to leave Ontario.

► Settling In

Our room immediately set the tone for the weekend. Natural wood and rustic details celebrated the property's heritage, while still feeling elegant and refined. The view outside our window was one of my favourite parts, especially in the morning. We had a lazy start one day and ordered breakfast to the room. It turned out to be far from typical room service. I skipped the usual mimosa and ordered Elora Mill's Wake Me Up morning cocktail made with signature espresso, Baileys and Frangelico. Sitting by the window with a beautifully prepared breakfast (including incredible croissants and sourdough bread made in house) overlooking the gorge made a simple morning feel like one of the most memorable parts of the stay.

The year-round outdoor pool was also pleasantly unexpected. Perched above the gorge, the setting is spectacular, with the dramatic landscape creating a beautiful backdrop for a few hours of doing absolutely nothing. The attentive service made it easy to settle in with drinks, snacks and lunch. The perfect way to unwind after a hectic week.

That much needed relaxation continued at the spa. After exceptional massages, we made our way to the outdoor hot tub. And we also took advantage of the sauna and eucalyptus steam room included in each visit to the spa, which extended the treatment into a peaceful afternoon.





► *Postcard Perfect*

We also spent time exploring Elora itself, walking through the village, along the gorge and to Lover's Leap, where the Grand and Irvine rivers meet. Still, returning to the Mill never felt like the end of the day's plans—it was something we looked forward to.

► *A Getaway Worth Repeating*

We visited as summer was coming to an end, but I left already thinking about what it would feel like in the fall or winter. A cozy fireplace, snow falling over the gorge and a soak in the outdoor hot tub would give the Mill an entirely different feel in the winter.

For somewhere so close to Toronto, Elora Mill gave us exactly what I look for in a weekend getaway: a change of scenery, new experiences and the feeling of discovering somewhere I already want to return to.

► *A Culinary Journey*

Dinner at the Elora Mill Restaurant could certainly rival some of Toronto's best restaurants. My advice? Let down your food barriers and say yes to the Celebration Menu consisting of the chef's choice of four beautiful courses with optional wine pairing. It was enjoyed alongside floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the Elora Gorge.



A Place With a Story

Elora Mill's story dates back to the mid-19th century, when Scottish naval captain William Gilkison built the original mill as a thriving manufacturing hub. The eastern portion, now home to the kitchen, once housed the Elora Mill Distillery, where whiskey was produced from 1859 to 1876.

The next chapter is the historic Walser Building, opening soon with nine new guest rooms. Originally built in 1851, it has been carefully restored, preserving its original stone and historic chimney alongside contemporary design. From the sneak peek I got, the Walser Building will be nothing short of spectacular.





A Sense of Wonder at Shinta Mani Angkor

Where thoughtful design, Khmer culture and the timeless temples of Angkor create an unforgettable stay

By Tammy Cecco

Thoughtful Design

There are hotels that provide a beautiful place to sleep, and then there are those that invite you to pause and appreciate the art of travel. From my first steps into the lobby of Shinta Mani Angkor, I was immediately captivated by the thoughtful design and artistic vision of renowned architect Bill Bensley, whose signature flair for storytelling transforms the property into an immersive experience. Shinta Mani Angkor is an artful expression of Cambodian heritage, where thoughtful design and a strong sense of place are woven into every detail of the hotel's hospitality.

A Villa of Our Own

We stayed in one of the 10 Bensley Pool Villas that each have their own private pool, rooftop living areas, butler service and VIP amenities. The villa reflected the same thoughtful design philosophy found throughout the resort and I loved the bold and contrasting colours of the

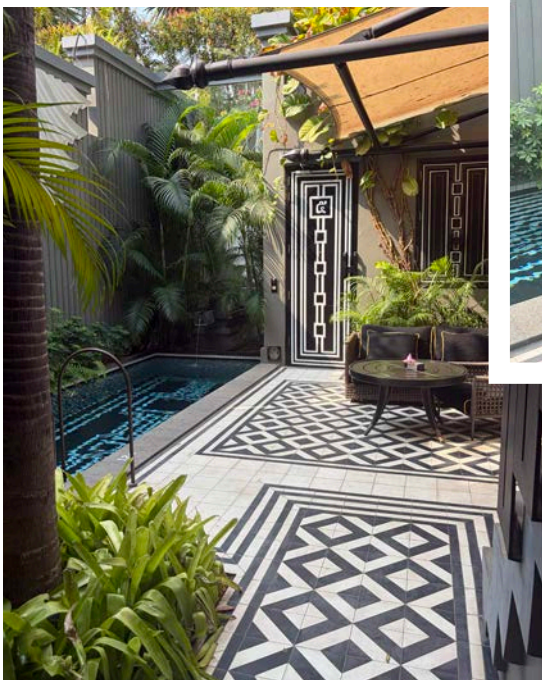


furnishings and how the generous space made you feel like you were in a remote location instead of right on the edge of town. The villa was definitely a welcome retreat after each day exploring the wonders in and around Siem Reap.



Healing With Heart

At the hotel's Khmer Tonics Spa, wellness took on an entirely new meaning. Our massage treatments were unlike anything I had experienced, but the most memorable was a blind massage, performed by a visually impaired therapist as part of the spa's commitment to employing and training blind people from the local community. Having a blind mother, the experience held an especially personal meaning for me. The care extended beyond the treatments, with beautifully blended teas catered to our preferences. The spa manager even accompanied me to a local shop to buy some wonderful blends to take home. It was a beautiful reminder that true wellness is as much about human connection as it is about relaxation.





Where History Takes Your Breath Away

No visit to Siem Reap would be complete without experiencing Angkor Wat. Standing before this extraordinary temple complex, with its intricate stone carvings and monumental architecture, is a humbling experience. The scale of this UNESCO World Heritage Site is remarkable, but it is the craftsmanship and the stories embedded in the stone that truly capture the imagination. We carefully planned our visit for sunrise, and it was well worth the early morning wake up call. I captured some magnificent photos, but no image could quite convey the beauty of that moment. In the end, I found myself putting my phone down and simply being present as the sun slowly rose over Angkor Wat. It was a moment that felt far more beautiful for having been experienced rather than captured.

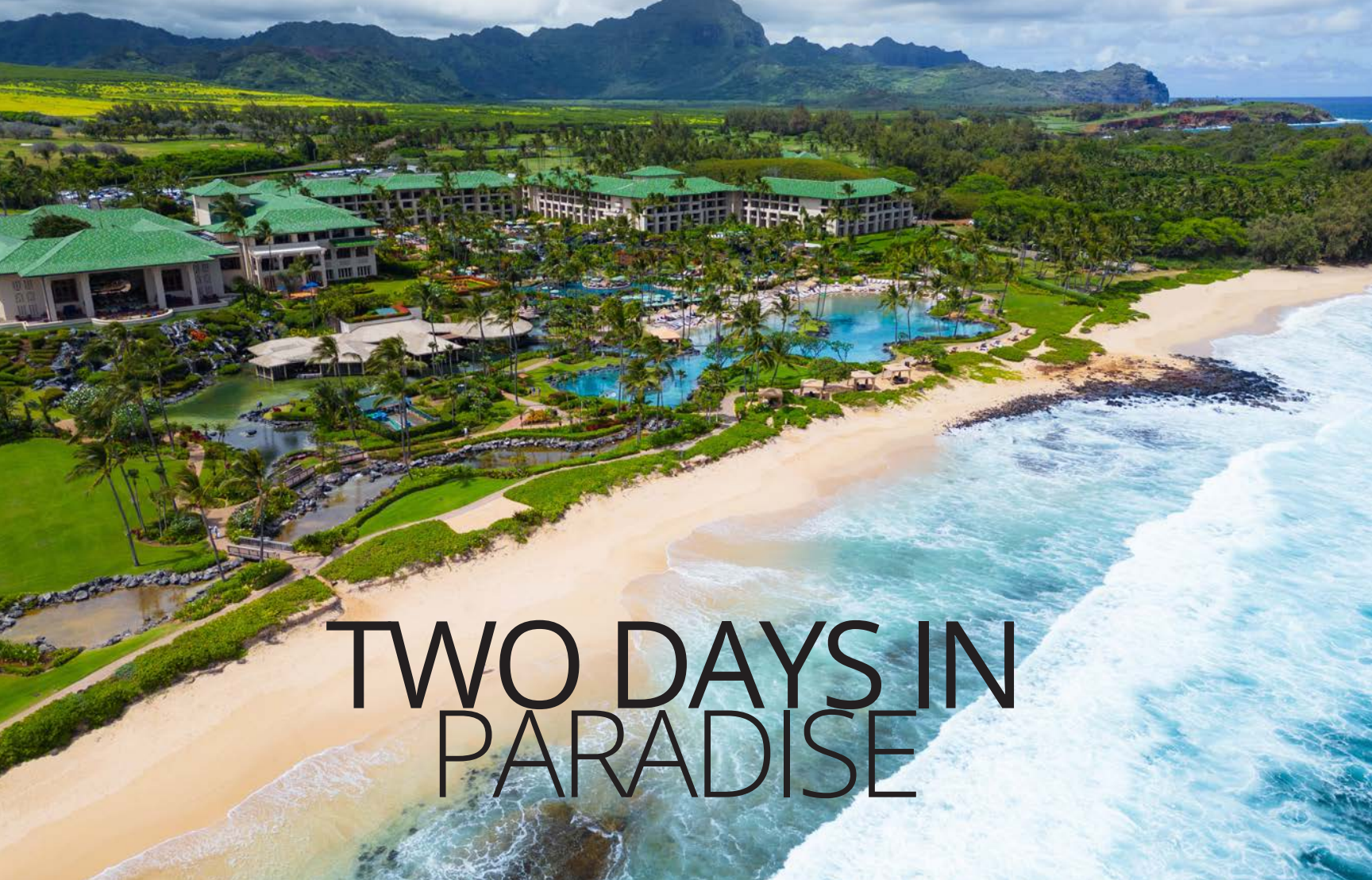
Siem Reap, Beyond the Temples

Siem Reap offers so much more than a gateway to ancient temples. The town has a lively personality, with its markets, cafés, restaurants and vibrant street life. Our timing brought an unexpected delight: we were there during Choul Chnam Thmey, Cambodia's traditional New Year celebration, meaning "Enter the New Year." Rather than simply observing the festivities, venturing into town in the evening meant becoming part of the celebration, with water sprayed from water guns and talcum powder dusting revelers. The traditions carry a beautiful symbolism—washing away the past and welcoming the new year with a clean slate. For us, it was an unforgettable glimpse into the spirit of renewal and Cambodian culture.



The Art of Staying Somewhere Special

Our time at Shinta Mani Angkor was more than a luxurious escape. It was an opportunity to experience Cambodia through design, culture and history, with a beautiful villa to return to and the vibrant spirit of Siem Reap just beyond its doors. In a destination as captivating as this, the right hotel does more than provide a place to stay, it becomes a memorable part of the journey.



A STAY AT THE GRAND HYATT KAUAI RESORT & SPA TURNED OUT TO BE THE PERFECT END TO A HAWAII VACATION

By Sangita Patel

After eight days of exploring Kauai—hiking, adventuring, getting muddy, chasing waterfalls and trying to take in as much of the island as possible—my husband and I were ready for one thing: doing absolutely nothing.

So, we packed up and drove from Kauai's east side to the sunny south shore for the final two days of our trip at the Grand Hyatt Kauai Resort & Spa. The moment we walked through the open-air entrance, I knew we had made the right decision.

There's something about this resort that immediately makes you exhale. Lush greenery spills out of seemingly every corner, tropical flowers add bursts of colour, and beyond the lobby you catch your first glimpse of blue—pools, lagoons and in the distance, the Pacific Ocean. The property feels less like a hotel and more like its own little tropical world.

RELAXATION DONE RIGHT

After more than a week of excursions, our agenda at the hotel was wonderfully simple: pool, eat, relax, repeat. And this is a resort built for exactly that. The Grand Hyatt Kauai has multilevel pools, waterfalls, a lava-rock-lined lazy river, a 150-foot waterslide and an enormous 1.5-acre saltwater lagoon. There's even a quieter adults only pool area when you want to escape the action.

One day we enjoyed a VIP cabana overlooking the lagoon. If you're planning a true "do nothing" day, this is where I would splurge. We had shade when we wanted it, beautiful views and everything we needed to settle in for



hours. This was vacation mode activated. For anyone who wants to take their relaxation up a notch, the resort's Anara Spa offers a varied list of treatments incorporating natural botanicals in a beautiful open air tropical garden.

And then there are the unexpected residents you might spot when you have the time to linger. Walk toward the beach and you may see Hawaiian monk seals resting along the shoreline—one of those wonderful Kauai moments that makes you stop whatever you're doing and simply watch. Back at the resort, colourful parrots have become part of the experience too; the property even includes a scheduled "Parrot Talk" among its guest activities where you can learn more about these beautiful birds.

COME HUNGRY

One thing I quickly learned: make your dinner reservations early, especially if you're travelling with a larger group. Our standout dinner was at Tidepools, and the setting alone is worth the reservation. Thatched-roof bungalows sit over a koi-filled lagoon at the base of a waterfall, creating one of those distinctly Hawaiian dining experiences where the atmosphere is almost as memorable as the meal. The menu focuses on island-inspired cuisine using local ingredients, including lots of fresh fish and steak. Everything we ate was delicious, but naturally I remember dessert the most. The molten lava cake was a standout.



OTHER THINGS TO DO

As tempting as it is to never leave the resort, make time to explore nearby Poipu. One of our favourite little outings was just a few minutes away. We headed to the beach and spotted sea turtles—another reminder that on Kauai, wildlife has a habit of casually appearing and completely stealing your attention. Then came an important Hawaiian culinary mission: finding Puka Dog for a Hawaiian-style hot dog. Think hot dogs with a deliciously tropical twist, and yes, they absolutely lived up to the hype. Meanwhile, my husband decided to get adventurous on a board in the water while I happily remained on land cheering him on—which, for anyone familiar with my relationship with deep water, was exactly where I belonged.

While we didn't have time to participate this time, the resort offers a whole host of unique cultural experiences to take part in, from lei making and hula lessons, to ukelele lessons and blending your own Hawaiian bath salts.

THE PERFECT ENDING

Kauai is an island that makes you want to explore. There are mountains to hike, waterfalls to discover, beaches to find and roads that practically beg you to pull over just to take in the view. But sometimes the best part of an adventure is knowing when to stop. Our two days at the Grand Hyatt Kauai gave us exactly that.

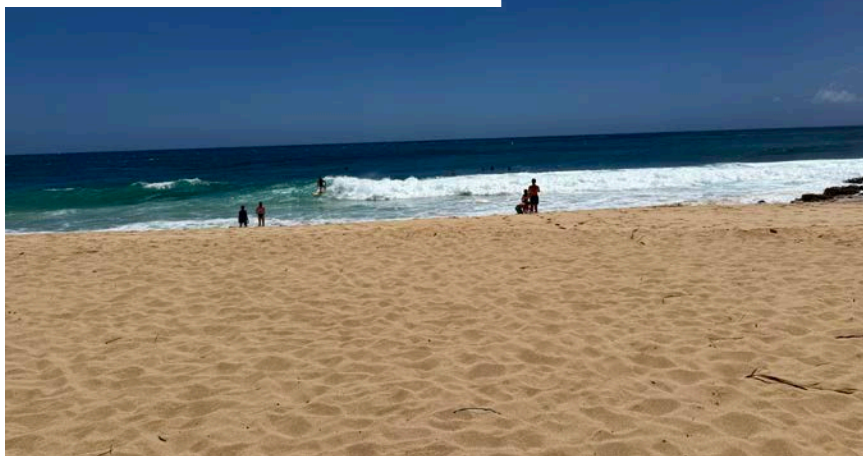
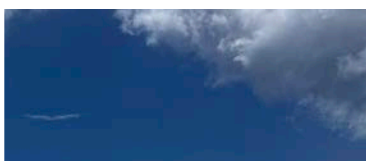
We slowed down. We ate well. We floated. We laughed. We watched the ocean. And after eight days of chasing adventure around the island, it turned out that ending our trip by doing almost nothing was one of my favourite

parts. The trips we remember aren't always about how much we managed to see. Sometimes they're about the places that gave us enough time to simply be together.

Our journey took place before Hurricane Lowell impacted Kauai. Our hearts go out to those who call this beautiful island home, and we look forward to returning with our family and experiencing its beauty once again.



Tidepools





Colorado in February: A Six-Day Adventure That Redefined Winter Travel

Much more than a world class ski destination, Colorado in winter has something for everyone

BY KAYLA-MARIE WILLIAMS

When my friend Desiree and I boarded our direct Air Canada flight from Toronto to Denver, we envisioned the quintessential Colorado winter getaway: snow-covered peaks, fresh powder and cozy après-ski afternoons. What I didn't imagine was teeing off in sunglasses and a T-shirt just hours after landing.

Over six whirlwind days, we journeyed from Denver to Winter Park, Copper Mountain, Glenwood Springs and Aspen Snowmass, discovering firsthand that Colorado is far more than a winter ski destination. From championship golf courses and scenic train rides to soothing hot springs and vibrant mountain towns, each stop revealed another side of the state—and another reason to fall in love with it.

► Trading Snow Boots for Golf Shoes

I swiped the glaring buzzer of my 4:30 a.m. alarm to the right. There was no chance of oversleeping or missing our 8:30 a.m. flight to Denver. By noon, we had landed, collected our luggage and hopped aboard Denver's convenient A-Line train and made our way into the downtown core. Our first home base was the beautiful Limelight Denver, a modern hotel perfectly positioned for exploring the city's cultural and culinary scene.

Known for its 300 days of sunshine and low humidity, Denver provides the ideal backdrop for year-round activities. I was pleasantly surprised when local golf courses were open and ready for business. An afternoon tee time was a must.

Most Canadian golfers are accustomed to frozen fairways in February, so the experience felt surreal as we arrived at Fossil Trace Golf Club in Golden. Snow-capped Rocky Mountains framed the horizon while the afternoon sun warmed the fairways. We spent the round laughing at the novelty of playing golf in short sleeves while friends back home were shovelling snow.

It was our first glimpse into Colorado's unique ability to offer multiple seasons at once. On the ride back, our Uber driver Steve became an unexpected ambassador for the state. A lifelong Colorado resident, he proudly told us he'd already summited 38 of Colorado's 58 famous fourteeners—mountains exceeding 14,000 feet in elevation. His one piece of advice? "You have to see Red Rocks." He was right.

Photos simply cannot capture the scale and beauty of Red Rocks Park and Amphitheatre. Even without a concert taking place, the natural sandstone formations were breathtaking. Locals climbed the amphitheater steps for evening exercise.

► Relearning the Slopes at Winter Park

The next morning, we traded golf clubs for ski boots. Boarding the Winter Park Express, we settled in for one of Colorado's most scenic journeys. The two-and-a-half-hour train ride carried us from downtown Denver directly into the mountains, revealing sweeping valleys, snow-covered forests, winding rivers and endless peaks along the way.

The views alone made the trip worthwhile. Arriving at Winter Park Resort, we stepped into a skier's paradise. It had been more than a decade since I had clipped into a pair of skis, so I was grateful to spend the morning with my instructor Donny, who has been teaching at Winter Park for nearly four decades. Patient, encouraging and endlessly entertaining, he quickly helped me regain confidence on the slopes.

► Mountain Roads and New Challenges

The following morning began with one final Denver treat: brunch at Ajax. I still think about their decadent and savoury charred sweet potato dish. Then it was time to hit the road. Driving west on Interstate 70 felt like embarking on a classic American road trip. Under clear blue skies, we wound through mountain passes and made a quick stop in Idaho Springs, the historic town where Colorado's gold rush began.



Soon we arrived at Copper Mountain, home to over 2,500 acres of alpine adventure. It was here that my confidence may have exceeded my skiing ability. Let's just say I gained a little more speed than intended on one particular run and was just about to kiss the ground when I recovered safely. While the experience was slightly terrifying in the moment, it has already become one of those stories that grows funnier every time I think about it.

► Soaking in Colorado's Slower Side

Our next stop was Glenwood Springs, which offered a welcome change of pace. The scenic drive from Copper Mountain brought us to Hotel Colorado, one of the state's most historic properties and our home for the night. That afternoon we headed to Iron Mountain Hot Springs. Perched along the Colorado River, the hot springs provided one of the most memorable moments of the trip. As the sun dipped behind the mountains, we floated in naturally heated mineral pools, surrounded by spectacular scenery.



The contrast between the cool mountain air and warm water created a sense of relaxation that only Colorado seems capable of delivering.

► Aspen Snowmass: Where Adventure Meets Luxury

Our final stop brought us to Aspen Snowmass, where mountain adventure seamlessly blends with refined luxury. Before arriving, we made one memorable stop in Glenwood Springs at Sweet Coloradough. Between the incredible selection of fresh pastries and the staff's infectious sense of humour, it quickly became one of our favourite hidden gems of the trip.

From there, we settled into Snowmass Village, a picturesque mountain community surrounded by some of Colorado's most spectacular peaks. We quickly discovered there's just as much to enjoy off the slopes.

After carving through fresh snow in the morning, we laced up our skates at the outdoor rink, gathered around the fire pits to make s'mores, then capped off the afternoon with happy hour at Venga Venga, where mango margaritas were the perfect reward.

Often associated with celebrities, designer boutiques and luxury travel, Aspen proved to be far more approachable than its reputation suggests. The walkable downtown is filled with art galleries, inviting restaurants and beautifully preserved architecture, making it just as enjoyable to explore as it is to photograph.

After six days of golf, skiing, train rides, road trips, hot springs and unforgettable meals, Aspen Snowmass felt like the perfect finale to an adventure that continually exceeded our expectations.

► More Than a Winter Destination

Six days barely scratched the surface of everything Colorado has to offer, yet somehow we packed in an unforgettable collection of experiences and memories. We golfed in February, rode a train through the Rockies, rediscovered our love of skiing, wandered charming mountain towns, soaked in natural hot springs, savoured incredible meals and met locals whose passion for sharing their home was as memorable as the landscapes themselves. For two Canadian friends chasing adventure, Colorado exceeded every expectation.



Tip for Canadian Travellers

For Canadians planning their own ski getaway, Aspen Snowmass has introduced a new option worth considering. The 2026/27 Flex Pass offers four to seven days of skiing that can be used at any time throughout the season, with no blackout dates or requirement to ski consecutive days. It gives international visitors the freedom to build an itinerary that fits their schedule while exploring all four mountains at their own pace.

CHASING FALL

The ultimate Ontario road trip to Ottawa

BY NICOLE SERVINIS



My favourite season in Ontario has always been autumn. There's something about those few fleeting weeks when the province turns auburn, burnt orange, deep red and golden yellow that makes even familiar places feel entirely new. Maybe that's why fall always gives me the urge to get in the car and go somewhere. This time, my boyfriend and I pointed the

car east toward a place we Canadians sometimes forget to explore: our own nation's capital.

Ottawa is close enough to Toronto for a long weekend, but far enough away to feel like you've actually escaped. The drive is roughly four to five hours, but with a few strategic stops along the way, it hardly feels like it.

Stop One: Doube's Trestle Bridge

Our first detour took us to Doube's Trestle Bridge in the Kawartha Lakes region. The massive pedestrian bridge stretches high above the valley offering panoramic views of the surrounding landscape covered in fall colour. After some time in the car, it was the perfect excuse to stretch our legs, breathe in the crisp air and remind ourselves why road trips are sometimes better than simply getting from point A to point B.

Coffee in Perth

Perth is one of those Ontario towns that practically demands you slow down. We stopped at Coutts Coffee Roastery & Cafe for a caffeine break before wandering past some of the shops and boutiques downtown. My order? A slush cappuccino which was incredibly refreshing and exactly the kind of little treat you remember from a road trip.

Lunch in Almonte

Almonte is a postcard-worthy small town that might convince you to abandon your itinerary altogether and stay awhile. Downtown is lined with independent boutiques, bakeries and restaurants, with the Mississippi River running right through it. For lunch, we grabbed a patio table at Joe's Italian Kitchen overlooking the rushing water in the heart of downtown. Afterwards we walked the Almonte Riverwalk. The path takes you alongside the river and over the rapids, with historic buildings and fall foliage framing the view.

A Grand Arrival at Fairmont Château Laurier

This iconic castle-like landmark has stood beside Parliament Hill for more than a century and feels woven into the history of Ottawa itself. Yet despite its grandeur, our room still felt warm and comfortable, balancing historic charm with modern luxuries. One upgrade I would recommend is opting for the Fairmont Gold Experience. The private check-in alone made arriving feel effortless, but access to the lounge—with breakfast, coffee and snacks made it feel like a hotel within a hotel. You also don't need to venture far for an impressive dinner. Akira Back, located inside the hotel, brings together Japanese cuisine with Korean influences and the chef's modern, playful approach.



Do Something That Scares You

The Great Canadian Bungee had been

on my bucket list for a while. It's the highest jump in the country and takes place over a striking limestone quarry surrounded by wilderness. The moments before the jump reminded me of sitting at the very top of a roller coaster: that split second when your stomach knows what's about to happen before your brain has fully agreed to it. There's nothing quite like the feeling of letting go, flying through the air and realizing, once it's over, that you actually did the thing you were afraid to do.



Boutique Ottawa: The Metcalfe Hotel

The Metcalfe Hotel by Gray Collection delivers more of a boutique experience while keeping you right in the centre of the action. Its location is excellent—just a few blocks from Parliament Hill, the Rideau Canal and plenty of restaurants, which meant we could park the car and explore much of the city on foot. Valet parking made arrival especially stress-free and the service throughout our stay was fantastic. But perhaps the greatest endorsement came from our bed. It was so comfortable that one evening we abandoned our plans entirely, ordered in and stayed in bed.

A Dinner Worth Leaving the Hotel For

When we did venture back out, Giulia delivered one of the best meals I've had in a long time. The atmosphere hits that sweet spot between casual and romantic. There's indoor and outdoor

seating, room for families and strollers and the space doesn't feel uncomfortably crowded. We ordered the Sweet Tony pizza along with the pasta of the day, followed by soft-serve gelato with a seasonal pumpkin twist and every bite delivered.

See Ottawa Slowly

Some of my favourite moments in Ottawa were the simplest ones: running and walking along the Rideau Canal, wandering through Major's Hill Park and exploring the shops and restaurants of ByWard Market. And if you're visiting during fall, leave room for one more drive. Head north toward Wakefield, Quebec where the changing leaves alone are worth crossing the provincial border for. Make your way toward the historic Wakefield Mill and covered bridge area which is impossibly picturesque in autumn.

The Road Trip Is the Trip

This trip reminded me how much there is to discover practically in our own backyard, from lunch beside the rapids in Almonte to jumping 200 feet over a quarry to hours spent driving through some of the most beautiful fall colours Ontario has to offer. The best part of a road trip isn't the place you're trying to get to, it's everything you find along the way.

The Best Car for the Ride

The 2027 Honda HR-V EX-L Navi is a compact SUV that ended up being an ideal road-trip companion. The size makes it easy to navigate city streets, while the AWD and comfortable cabin give you that reassuring SUV feel on the highway. We also appreciated the adaptive cruise control, wireless phone charging and a one-touch power moonroof which was particularly lovely while driving beneath a canopy of fall colours.



Visiting Grenada is Always a Good Idea

The aptly named “Spice Isle” more than lives up to its moniker but also offers so much more to enjoy

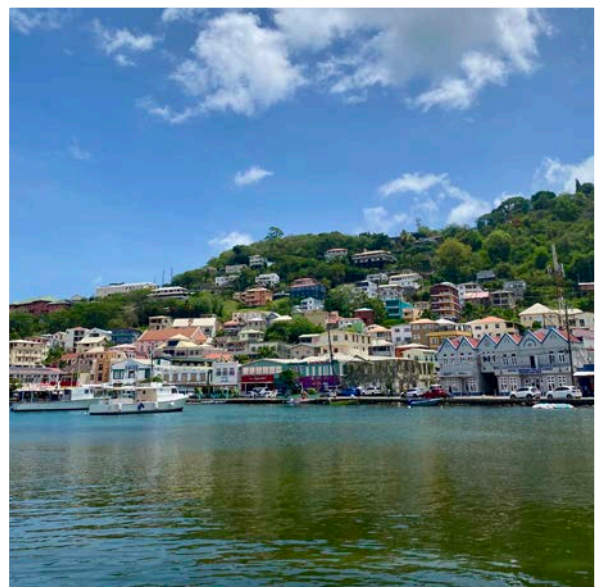
BY JESSICA PADYKULA

I have been travelling to various parts of the Caribbean since I was a child and although each island offers something unique, some tend to stand out more than others. Grenada is one of those places. There are beautiful beaches aplenty, waterfalls that demand to be photographed from multiple angles, a captivating capital city with seemingly endless nooks and crannies to explore and natural beauty that extends from inviting white sand to verdant hills spiked with scenic hiking trails.

Referred to as the “Spice Isle,” Grenada is known for its extensive nutmeg production, but fragrance that pulls you directly into the moment runs deep here and goes well beyond what you might use to enhance a holiday cookie recipe.

Grand Anse beach

It's in the crease of a fresh bay leaf, emitting a savoury, comforting scent slightly warmer than that from the leaves I toss into soup stocks and sauces back home. Then there's the crisp, herbaceous notes that jump out as I slowly crush a leaf of what our guide, Roger refers to as “Cuban Oregano” or “Big Thyme.” It grows everywhere on the island and is used for both its culinary and purported medicinal purposes. Roger also points out cinnamon, anise and lemongrass as we make our way across the island. Not to mention the many pomegranate, papaya, avocado and lime trees we come across.





If herbs and fruit trees weren't enough, you can rest assured your sweet tooth will be satisfied in Grenada. I thought I knew a lot about chocolate before I went on a tour at Belmont Estate, but that experience left me with a whole cache of new information about what it really means to go from bean to bar. Dating back to the late 1600s, this sprawling property grows everything from mangos and avocados to cashews and limes. But the star of the show here is cocoa. A comprehensive tour takes you from seeing the cocoa pod (and tasting its fruit) to the meticulous process of sorting the dried cocoa beans by hand, straight through to packaging the bars and dating them (also done by hand).

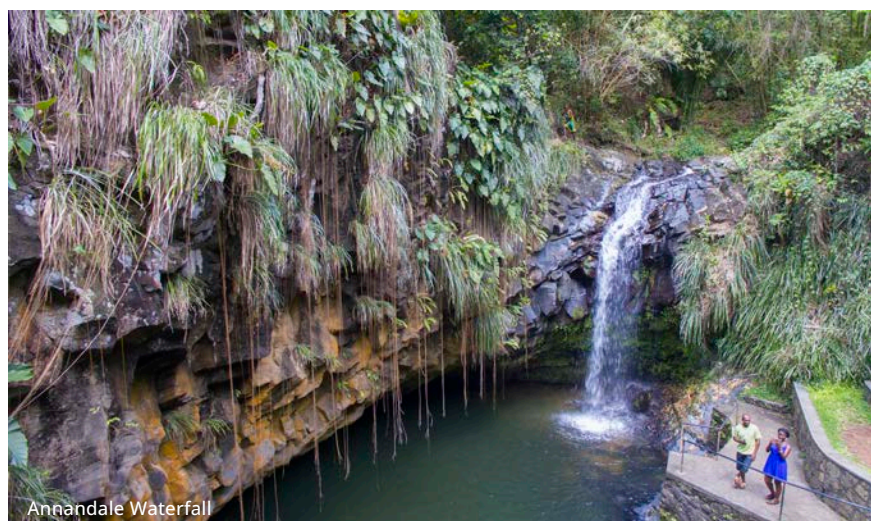
It's also at Belmont Estate where you have the chance to try a hot chocolate beverage like you've never had it before. That's because it's cocoa tea. The flavour is similar to hot chocolate but instead of mixing a powder with hot water or milk, balls of pure cocoa (often blended with other spices like cinnamon and nutmeg) are steeped before sweetened condensed milk is added. The flavour is warm, slightly sweet and something you want to keep going back to, much like the island itself.



Nutmeg, mace and allspice

Spending a morning wandering around the vibrant capital of St. George's turned out to be a great way to get a deeper feel for the island. St. George's Market, though quiet when I visit, still emanated the energy that makes me love markets the world over. Vendors are chatty but not pushy and there are spices galore to bargain over, along with local produce. The capital, like the rest of the island, is hilly—I dubbed it the "San Francisco of the Caribbean" for a reason. Beyond the hills and market area, St. George's and its winding streets filled with colourful buildings were made for aimless exploring.

Whether before or after Belmont Estate, make a stop at the adorable House of Chocolate, a mini museum, café and shop in St. George's dedicated to all things cocoa. When I stop by, my companions and I find ourselves right at the beginning of what turns out to be a very informative talk on the history and cultural importance of cocoa in Grenada, which included multiple delicious samples.



Annandale Waterfall

A complete change of pace and scenery awaits at Annandale Waterfall & Forest Park. The light rain starting up as I arrive just enhances the tropical vibes and makes me giddy as I forge ahead towards the 30-foot waterfall, which sits majestically amidst bright green foliage, made even brighter by the rainfall. There are several waterfalls in Grenada, but this is one of the easiest to get to, just 20 minutes from St. George's. While I didn't opt to jump in, you can swim in the calm pool below the falls.



Buildings of St. George's



Belmont Estate

For even more nature, head to Grand Etang National Park which was established in 1906 and covers over 3,000 acres of tropical rainforest. The aforementioned rain wasn't conducive to a hike during my visit, but just being there was enough to hammer home the point that Grenada is a gem when it comes to natural beauty. I was particularly awed by Grand Etang Lake, set in the crater of an extinct volcano. It was shrouded in fog as I explored the area, but that made it all the more ethereal and otherworldly.

While at the park, you might also encounter some Mona monkeys, which have fluffy white faces, a long tail and the focused gait of an office worker on the way to a meeting. They are wild, but they have become used to the presence of humans so there are ample opportunities for cute photos of these small but charismatic creatures.

Outside of beaches and tropical forest, one of Grenada's most unique attractions is the underwater sculpture park, located in Molinere-Beauséjour Marine Protected Area. Created in 2006 by British artist Jason de Caires Taylor, the park now features over 80 life-size stone statues. The sculptures themselves serve as an artificial reef that has been promoting coral growth. Book a snorkeling tour with Grenada's Eco Dive to get up close to the submerged sculptures and learn more about them. The short boat ride from stunning Grand Anse beach is as scenic as it is relaxing.

Grenada is a multifaceted island that refuses to be pinned down. It's got an angle for every camera and a place for every travel passion. The allure of spices and white sand might draw you in, but you will likely stay (and come back for) a whole lot more.

Must-Stay: Cocoa Cove Resort

If it's seclusion you crave, along with the feeling you've just discovered a private oasis on an already-stunning island, Cocoa Cove Resort is an excellent choice. With just nine spacious villas on a private postcard-perfect two acres in Grenada's Fort Jeudy, this boutique property expertly treads the line between luxe and laid-back. Close enough to some of the island's main attractions yet secluded enough to let you melt right into vacation mode, Cocoa Cove is an ideal spot to base yourself in Grenada, whether travelling as a couple or with friends and family.

My first stop after dropping my bags was the expansive infinity pool overlooking the ocean where many photos were taken. Friendly resort staff set up a WhatsApp group for your villa so you can get in touch about whatever you need (from in-room breakfast orders to extra towels). Every villa has its own patio or balcony, full kitchen and well-appointed living area, in addition to comfortable bedrooms. Founded by British owners Mark and Jennifer following a transatlantic sailing journey to Grenada, the ethos here is on personalized hospitality that highlights the best Grenada has to offer.

cocoacove-grenada.com



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Embracing Japan's Culture One *Outfit* at a Time

The Tohoku region of northeastern Japan is filled with unique experiences that immerse you in everything that makes this area worth visiting

— BY CATHY SENECA —

Haneto dancer

*Water falls quickly
Nature's cold tap refreshes
Clears my mind so well*

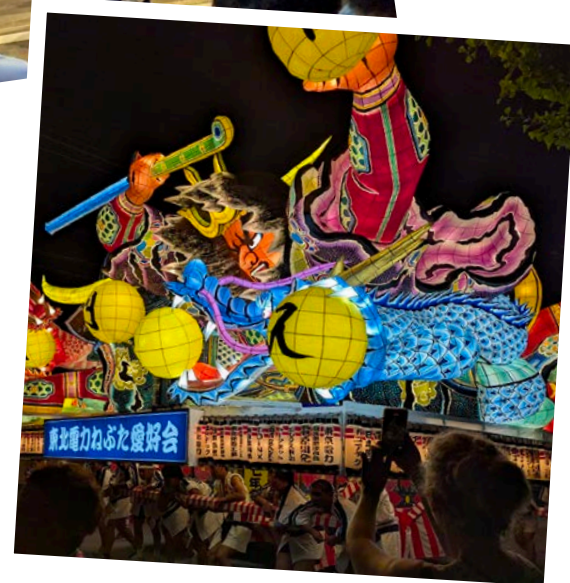
*I*n 1689, when renowned Haiku poet Basho went on a five-month trek to northern Japan, he called it the back of beyond. Now, with shinkansen (fast trains) and expressways, Tohoku is easily accessible for those who want to experience its vivid history. And perhaps write their own haiku, as I did above.

Tohoku, flanked by the Sea of Japan and Pacific Ocean, makes up the northeastern third of the island of Honshu, Japan's main island. Far from the crowds, rich agricultural valleys sit in the shadows of mountains. Incredible experiences—from sword handling to mountain worship to festival dancing—echo ancient legends and traditions of the Indigenous Emishi people who once lived here.

During my visit, I wielded a samurai sword in a black doji robe, chanted under a streaming waterfall clad head to toe in white, and in a hat the size of a picnic basket, I danced in a jingly ensemble at the epic Nebuta Festival.



“
*Incredible experiences—from
sword handling to mountain
worship to festival dancing—echo
ancient legends and traditions
of the Indigenous Emishi people
who once lived here.*





Walking on Mt. Haguro



Prepping for waterfall experience



Writer tries to maintain calm while entering waterfall

Ascetic waterfall training

After driving past miles of rice fields and rolling forested mountains, our small band of friends reached Yudonosan Sanrojo, a pilgrims' lodge associated with Mt. Yudono, where we began our ascetic waterfall training experience.

Mt. Haguro, Mt. Gassan and Mt. Yudono are known as the Dewa Sanzan, or the Three Sacred Mountains of Dewa. These peaks have a history of mountain worship stretching back more than 1,400 years and later became an important center of Shugendo. We were there to learn about this Japanese spiritual tradition of mountain asceticism that blends ancient mountain worship, Buddhism, Shinto and other religious influences.

To do so, we were first clad in white, from headbands, white shorts and ritual robes to two-toed tabi socks and straw zori sandals tied around our calves with rope. These proved to be the best nonslip water shoes I've ever had. As we walked to the waterfall, we performed precise rituals—rowing, clapping and chanting—occasionally joined by the deep reverberations of a conch shell. We climbed carefully across massive boulders and up a rocky braided stream to reach the waterfall on the Bonji River.

Guides showed us how to back our way into the falls, where we each had our moment under the two-metre falls to chant and empty the mind. "It's going to hurt," said Toshiki Yoshizumi, our Shugendo practitioner and guide, "but relax and accept nature into yourself. Whatever you feel is right."

I felt wonderful, spiritual or otherwise. The entire tableau—the group of us waist deep in the stream, dressed in white and soaking wet, the roar and mist of the falls—was like a haiku. Simple, yet capturing a profound moment in nature.

“ We were there to learn about this Japanese spiritual tradition of mountain asceticism that blends ancient mountain worship, Buddhism, Shinto and other religious influences.

Walking the historic pilgrimage route up Mt. Haguro, following in the footsteps of generations of pilgrims, was a perfect end to our time learning about this ancient spirituality. The route is lined with centuries old cedar trees, the National Treasure five story pagoda, and a 2,446-step stone stairway leading to the summit and Sanjingosaiden, the main shrine where the deities of all three Dewa Sanzan mountains are enshrined.



Flute players

How to be a Haneto “jumper”

We headed to Aomori, a coastal city on the northern tip of Honshu, to dance in the Nebuta Festival, one of Japan’s most famous festivals.

To dress for the part, I was first wrapped in a pink okoshi, or skirt, by my own personal dresser. Then came the white kimono with black designs—tied by a tasuki string—followed by a shigoki band in yellow with an even brighter shoulder strap. Finally, the hanagasa, a heavy triangular straw hat with yellow, red and green artificial flowers is tied under my chin with a polka dot neckerchief

Once in place behind one of the massive floats, we hopped, danced and chanted enthusiastically. I was mesmerized by the electrifying drumbeats and colours as the coming darkness cooled the air and made the brightly lit floats pop against the night sky.

Two dozen massive, illuminated washi paper floats, nine by seven by five meters, paraded down the streets. Their fragile paper is painted with ancient warlords and historical characters, brows deeply furrowed. Each float is carried by a team of 20 or so men, accompanied by a band of taiko drums, flutes and cymbals and followed by chanting Haneto dancers. It was wildly raucous.



“

I was mesmerized by the electrifying drumbeats and colours as the coming darkness cooled the air and made the brightly lit floats pop against the night sky.

Spirit of the Samurai

From sensational to serious, I donned a traditional black doji for an authentic laido experience in the castle town of Kakunodate, home to cherry blossoms and samurai homes. Katana in hand, we learned side swipes, overhead slashes and proper stances. Pulling the sword out of the scabbard wasn't too difficult. Getting it back in was an exercise in keeping all of one's fingers. For the final highlight, I like to think I dealt with my cardboard bad guy with the composure of Tomoe Gozen, one of Japan's few female samurai.



Iaido Experience

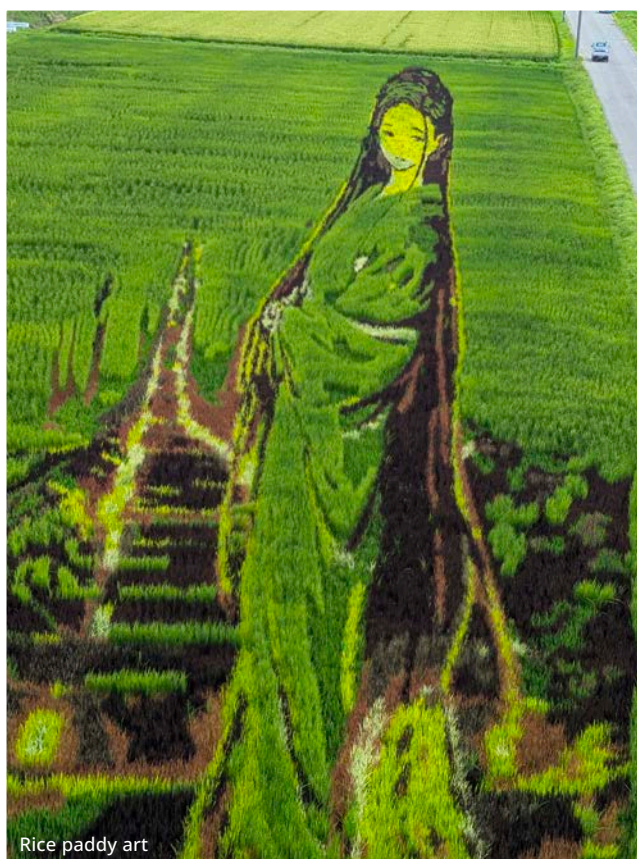


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Katana in hand, we learned side swipes, overhead slashes and proper stances.

Tohoku's northern beauty is filled with options

Anyone who enjoys learning through immersion will love these samurai, ascetic and dance experiences, all enhanced by exceptional local dishes. Options abound to add other sights and activities to create an even more memorable trip. Rice paddy art in Inakadate Village depicts amazing “paintings” made from different colours of rice. Cruising Lake Towada is relaxing, as is an easy five kilometre walk in the dramatic Oirase Gorge. Haikus may come to mind at any moment.



Rice paddy art



Visit japan-guide.com for more information on Tohoku or Japan.

Medellín

TRANSFORMED

This Colombian city has moved well past its previous life as a place known for violence and is now filled with vibrant neighbourhoods well worth exploring

By Cynthia David

Spacious and green, cradled in a valley flanked by a swoosh of mountains reached effortlessly by cable car, Medellín hums with industry and youthful energy. Even the weather cooperates in this City of Eternal Spring. As you stroll through districts like Laureles, feeling perfectly safe, it's impossible to imagine this city was once considered the most dangerous in the world, ground zero in a war waged by drug lord Pablo Escobar and rival guerilla groups in the 1980s and '90s.

Today, Medellín residents, called Paisas, welcome visitors to the neighbourhoods they've

transformed from battlegrounds into vibrant communities pulsing with music and dance. The most famous of them all, once Colombia's most notorious, is Comuna 13, perched on the steep western slopes of the city's San Javier district overlooking downtown.

Tour guide Alex Caro Ruiz led our little band of Canadians, a Chinese visitor and a Slovenian through a maze of narrow streets emblazoned with striking graffiti. At times we almost brushed against the flat-roofed brick houses piled on top of one another. Small, locally-owned food stands and souvenir shops fill every corner. You may even

come across hip-hop crews and breakdancers putting on a high-energy show.

We stopped suddenly before an unlikely landmark: a sleek red electric escalator built directly into the hillside. Rising in six sections over the equivalent of 28 stories, it spares residents the daily climb up and down hundreds of steep concrete steps. More than a convenience, the escalators, like Medellín's innovative subway and cable-car network, have helped connect once-isolated communities to the heart of the city, expanding access to schools, jobs and opportunity while making violence harder to take root.





Guatapé square



Alex, 27, has already witnessed more than most. His family was among thousands who fled to the hilltop community between the 1950s and early 2000s, forced from their land by political violence, drug cartels and paramilitary groups. His grandfather was killed by guerillas. Yet even in Medellín the newcomers could not escape the conflict.

On one landing we found ourselves surrounded by a floor-to ceiling mural, ugly and beautiful at the same time, depicting the Colombian military's largest urban operation ever, Operation Orion. Its goal, to root out the guerillas who controlled Comuna 13's hills. Once again, it was difficult to imagine the streets we had walked flooded with several thousand armed soldiers flanked by tanks and helicopter gunships. But Alex remembers the night of October 16, 2002 vividly. His mother grabbed him and his sister and pulled them under the bed, leaving them to run to the kitchen occasionally for food. The family remained hidden for 26 hours, terrified, as war raged outside their door. Though the operation succeeded, it left many innocent residents dead or "disappeared."

As we climbed higher, we were rewarded with sweeping views of the densely-packed barrio framed by mountains. Below, giant sculptures loomed over the entertainment area, including the head of a Paisa sporting a hat and glasses and a standing figure of Jesus wearing a poncho, bathed in colour.

Later, sitting in his family's new shop tasting coffee and chocolate grown on their farm, Alex spoke briefly about being recruited by a gang at age 13 to sell drugs. Many of his friends died. At 16 he was saved by a training program for tour guides, one of many social programs that sprang up after the government signed the 2016 peace accord with the FARC guerillas. Community leaders across the city still take kids traumatized by war and coach them in rap and dance. Famous artists teach them to create the stunning murals that blanket the city. While proud to share the story of Comuna 13's resilience and transformation, Alex's success represents Medellín's hope for a future without violence.

Pro tip: For the best Comuna 13 experience hire a local guide, be prepared to walk up and down steep steps and don't visit on weekends, when the area is mobbed with visitors.



El Peñol from top



El Peñol stairs

The High Life

Even if you, like me, are afraid of heights, it's worth taking a two-hour road trip from busy Medellín to climb the 65-million-year old black granite monolith called El Peñol. A hefty railing keeps you safe as you zig-zag up the 750 stairs. The view from above is magical, with small islands floating in turquoise waters below. Following your triumph, drive or take a three-wheeled mototaxi to explore the nearby village of Guatapé, where every door, every railing and wall looks freshly painted in vibrant colours. The hand-painted decorative panels or zocalos on the lower facades of homes and businesses depict local history, daily customs and nature, turning the town into an outdoor museum.

A Train Journey Fit for Royalty

British Pullman in Victoria Station

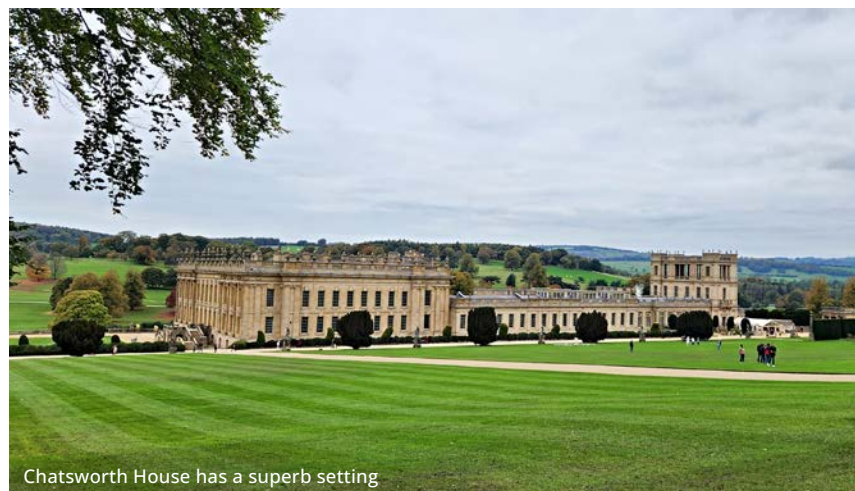
Day tripping in luxury on Belmond's British Pullman Train

Words & photos by Debra Smith

I love trains. Falling asleep between crisp white sheets in a gently rocking sleeper car is one of my first, and fondest, childhood memories. My father was an executive chef on the Canadian National Railway, so our summer holidays were spent travelling by rail with our family pass. In 1959 when Queen Elizabeth II made her cross Canada tour, he prepared our country's specialities for her and Prince Philip: bass, trout, venison and prairie chicken. So, when I received an invitation to travel on the luxurious British Pullman, a Belmond train, I was excited to share a family tradition with my daughter. A mighty 90-tonne diesel engine, the King's Messenger, would be taking us to Chatsworth House in the Peak District of England pulling nine fully restored historic cars that once transported royalty.

■ Fit for a Queen

Queen Victoria was the first monarch to travel by rail in 1869 in a carriage fitted out in pale blue silk and electric lights, starting a royal family tradition of rail travel. Many of the sumptuous Pullman cars on our train were built in the 1920's and 30's and were originally used on the UK portion of the Venice Simplon-Orient-Express route. The days of luxury rail travel faded around



Chatsworth House has a superb setting

1970, but British Pullman rescued carriages from sidings and back gardens where they had been hiding in plain sight, used for summer cottages and greenhouses. Years of careful restoration followed. Adorned with intricate inlaid veneers, lush, patterned carpets, overstuffed wing chairs and brass fittings, the historic cars are shining like new again.

Our journey began at the British Pullman reception lounge in Victoria Station, where the champagne was flowing, a jazz band was playing and guests had time to mingle. There is a dress code for the trip; no denim, shorts, or sneakers allowed, and a few people went all out with fascinators and top hats, but for the most part people were dressed smartly for the occasion.



Ann and George Bentley

■ A Grand Day Out

It was a very special occasion for Ann and George Bentley, who were celebrating their 44th wedding anniversary. "I was looking for something special to do and today's trip included Chatsworth so that was perfect," George told me. Carole Bromley and her best friend were marking the occasion of her 80th birthday, "with many more 80's to come, I hope," she said. And a young man was waiting to pop the question to his fiancée at Chatsworth. He must have had a nervous journey but there was plenty to do as we sped along through the English countryside.

■ Bellinis and Brunch

The train departed exactly on time at 8:40 a.m. and about two hours later we were sipping Bellinis and enjoying a brunch of pastries, fresh berries and yoghurt. This was followed by smoked salmon served with caviar and a poached egg on a toasted English muffin. Sunlight gleamed on the white tablecloth and threw sparkles from the silver cutlery, the fresh flowers in their crystal vase and the polished brass fittings overhead as the green hills rolled by outside our window.

After brunch, we were invited to tour the other eight cars and it was here that I caught a glimpse of the restaurant car staff, hard at work in the small quarters where they create their delicious dishes. The glinting stainless-steel surfaces and superb organizational skills on display reminded me of a miniature version of my father's railroad kitchen. When the dining service is over the kitchen disappears like a magic trick behind rich mahogany panels.

■ History Repeating

Each carriage seats around two dozen guests, and each one has a name and a fascinating background. Ours was Minerva, built in the 1950's and primarily used for state visits. In 1953 it carried visitors from Dover to London for the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. Another notable carriage is Cygnus, which joined the North Yorkshire Moors Railway in 1976, serving as a film set for *Agatha*, with Vanessa Redgrave and Dustin Hoffman. In 2015 the car was completely reimagined, right down to its China pattern, in a collaboration with filmmaker and train aficionado Wes Anderson. It has a delightful pink ceiling trimmed in chrome, the only one of its kind on the train.

We arrived in Chesterfield in the early afternoon to tour Chatsworth, the home of the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire. It was built in 1549 and holds a collection

of European art and ancient and modern sculptures. The extensive grounds were designed by the famous landscape architect Capability Brown, and feature a maze, a Victorian rock garden and a host of impressive fountains and water features. Note: if you're wearing high heels on the train, be sure and switch to something more cobblestone friendly for the tour.

■ Tea for Two

After our outing, back on the train, we toasted our day with glasses of Veuve Clicquot champagne. Our server expertly balanced silver trays and delivered our five-course gourmet dinner as the train rocketed back to London. Local Aylesbury pressed duck terrine was followed by a Kentish gold potato and leek soup, loin of venison with root vegetable puree, pickled blackberries and a red wine sauce. An apple crumble, a selection of British cheeses, petit



A toast to British Pullman



Brunch begins with salmon and caviar

fours and a cup of tea left us completely satisfied. This British Pullman journey was a once-in-a-lifetime event. I feel like Queen Elizabeth II would have approved. Oh, and the young couple? She said yes.

■ If You Go:

The Clermont Victoria, a four-star hotel built in 1862, is one of London's great railway hotels. Guests can walk down a discreet hallway to enter Victoria Station through the original First-Class departure doors to reach British Pullman's track. The 348 rooms were designed to offer a whisper quiet sleep on supremely comfortable beds. Enjoy a bountiful breakfast buffet and late-night sips with locals at The Soak or The Reunion Bar. Buckingham Palace, Hyde Park and Westminster Abbey are a short stroll away. Remember to take your umbrella.



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Mexico is a destination that keeps people coming back for a reason. The beaches are beautiful, the food is fantastic, ancient archaeological sites instantly transport you back in time, and natural beauty ranges from jungles and mangroves to rugged mountains and turquoise water teeming with tropical fish. No matter what draws you to Mexico, there's a good chance you'll make a return visit, and the following pages of our annual *Mad for Mexico* special section highlight many of the reasons why.

MAD FOR MEXICO

A Pacific Escape with a Local Soul

From secluded resorts to colourful markets and unforgettable meals, Ixtapa-Zihuatanejo offers far more than a beach getaway

By Kayla-Marie Williams



W

hat if your next Mexican vacation didn't require choosing between a beautiful resort and a more local experience? That was one of my biggest takeaways from my first visit to Ixtapa-Zihuatanejo, a Pacific coast destination in Mexico's Guerrero state where two very different experiences exist just minutes apart.

Ixtapa offers the ease and energy of a resort destination—beaches, pools, golf, restaurants and plenty of opportunities to simply switch off. Zihuatanejo, affectionately known as “Zihua,” moves at a different pace. Its walkable streets, artisans, fish markets and local restaurants invite you to wander and linger. Together, these destinations create something that feels surprisingly versatile.



Perched Above the Pacific

My introduction to Ixtapa was at Cala de Mar Resort & Spa, a cliffside boutique property where the Sierra Madre Mountains meet the Pacific Ocean. With just 59 suites, the resort has an intimate feel and I was blown away by how its architecture seems to embrace rather than compete with its surroundings. My suite opened onto an expansive view of the ocean, complete with a private terrace and pool.

Swimming in the infinity pool, enjoying fish tacos and fresh guacamole, getting lost in my book and dozing off to the sound of waves crashing against the rocks quickly became my definition of peace. Four restaurants, a spa and beautifully designed villas provide everything you need, but the real luxury is the privacy and the feeling of not having to do much of anything to truly enjoy yourself.



Two Sides of the Same Coast

Eventually though, curiosity pulls you beyond the resort. This is where Ixtapa-Zihuatanejo becomes particularly interesting. Ixtapa is the more polished, resort-forward side of the destination, then just minutes away, Zihuatanejo feels like a different world.

The pace slows, streets become places to explore rather than simply pass through, markets bring colour and energy to the neighbourhoods and independent restaurants offer a taste of the region.

Zihuatanejo has earned Mexico's Pueblo Mágico designation, recognizing destinations with distinctive cultural, historical and natural character. Spending time here makes it easy to see why. We wandered through local flea markets, discovering handmade tapestries and crafts from local artisans before continuing through town.

There are unexpected discoveries, too. Perched above Zihuatanejo is the Parthenon, a sprawling Greek-inspired

mansion with a complicated history connected to Mexico's political past. It is certainly not what you expect to find overlooking a Mexican coastal town, which is precisely what makes it memorable. What I loved most was that I didn't have to choose between Ixtapa and Zihuatanejo. I could have the resort experience and the local experience. The quiet morning and the lively evening. A day by the pool and an aimless afternoon wandering through town. It felt like two vacations in one.



“What I loved most was that I didn't have to choose between Ixtapa and Zihuatanejo”

Let Your Hunger Guide You

If the coastline is what first catches your attention, the food is what gives you a deeper understanding of the destination. Ixtapa-Zihuatanejo's culinary scene was one of the highlights of my trip, and the food ranged from incredibly simple to sophisticated. At Carmelita's Cocina Mexicana in Zihuatanejo, I felt like I had been invited into a local grandmother's home. Paco Gonzalez opened the restaurant in 2008, originally calling it "Paco's Tacos." Named after his mother, Carmelita's has since grown into an award-winning family establishment.

That family connection is evident the moment you walk through the doors. The open-air restaurant is filled with the smell of fresh tortillas and the warmth of a kitchen preparing traditional Guerreroense cuisine.

From there, dinner at Angustina Mezcal y Cocina offered a completely different culinary experience. Chef Felipe Meneses has been recognized in the 2024, 2025 and 2026 editions of Guía México Gastronómico, a prestigious guide highlighting 250 of Mexico's notable restaurants.

His approach brings ancestral techniques into a contemporary setting, something we experienced through a five-course tasting that included marlin tacos, octopus paella with chicharrón and a mezcal Old Fashioned, finishing with a chocolate tart and mezcal cherry compote. "Every dish I create is rooted in that legacy and heritage, honouring the ingredients and techniques passed down through generations," chef Meneses explained.

From fish tacos and guacamole overlooking the Pacific to an elevated tasting menu inspired by generations of culinary tradition, the food tells the story of the region in its own way.



"I felt like I had been invited into a local grandmother's home"





“After a morning of wiping out in the ocean, I naturally had to fit a round of golf into my stay as well.”



Beyond the Beach

One cannot (or should not) stay poolside their entire trip. Not when Ixtapa-Zihuatanejo has so much beautiful nature to explore. A sunrise kayak through the mangroves offered a peaceful introduction to the region's natural environment, while a sunset catamaran ride provided a front-row seat to the Pacific as the sky changed colour.

At Playa La Ropa, I traded my lounge chair for a surfboard during a beginner surfing lesson. The instructors at Catcha L'Ola were incredibly encouraging and probably the main reason I managed to stand on my board for a mere few seconds. After a morning of wiping out in the ocean, I naturally had to fit a round of golf into my stay as well.

Palma Real Golf Club is an 18-hole course surrounded by lush landscapes and unexpected wildlife that made the round particularly memorable. Crocodiles could be spotted throughout the course, adding an element of excitement I certainly would never encounter back home in Canada.

For Canadians, Ixtapa-Zihuatanejo may not be the first Mexican destination that comes to mind when planning a vacation. But it deserves a place in the conversation. During peak season, direct flights from Canada with Air Canada and Westjet make getting there especially convenient. I travelled in August with a connection, but the journey was still smooth and straightforward.

More importantly, once you arrive, you have options. You can retreat to a cliffside suite and listen to the waves. You can wander a market, take a surf lesson, play 18 holes, sit down to an exceptional meal or watch the sun disappear into the Pacific from the deck of a catamaran. You can make the vacation as slow, social, adventurous or indulgent as you want. And maybe that's the beauty of Ixtapa-Zihuatanejo: you simply don't have to choose.

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A Weekend of Flavour and Tradition at Fairmont Mayakoba

Fairmont Mayakoba sets the stage for a memorable fall weekend celebrating food, music and Mexican culture



Fairmont Mayakoba is perennially popular for a reason. Set along Mexico's stunning Caribbean coast, the sprawling Riviera Maya resort offers plenty to keep couples, friends, foodies and outdoor enthusiasts happy. This fall however, the property is giving guests even more reasons to visit with a four-day program of special events bringing together food, music and tradition.

Taking place from October 29 to November 1, the weekend offers a series of experiences that make the most of Fairmont Mayakoba's unique features, from the Mexican village inspired El Pueblito and surrounding jungle and mangroves, to the on-site cenote, El Burrodromo. The events also highlight the many ways in which the property sets itself apart, from food and location to an impressive commitment to celebrating Mexican culture and heritage.

The festivities start on October 29 with the Masterclass at El Pueblito, a replica of a classic Mexican village located at the heart of the Mayakoba complex. In collaboration with two Michelin-starred chefs, Roberto Alcocer and Esteban Lluís, the experience is a chance to explore the culinary side of Mexican culture in a setting inspired by the country's historic towns and villages.

The following evening takes things in a decidedly different direction. Symphony in a Cenote on October 30 brings live classical music underground, to one of Mexico's most culturally important and well-known geological wonders. The otherworldly cenote setting will provide a dramatic backdrop for the performance, along with excellent natural acoustics. In addition to the concert, the package includes

canapés, transportation to and from the resort and a bottle of champagne.

On October 31, the focus returns to food with Six-Hands Dinner, bringing together Roberto Alcocer and Esteban Lluís and a Fairmont culinary expert for an evening of collaborative cooking. Hosted at one of the resort's signature restaurants, the dinner is another opportunity to experience the property through its renowned culinary program, with multiple chefs working together to highlight Mexico's diverse ingredients and vibrant flavours.

The series of special events concludes November 1 with one of Mexico's most meaningful cultural traditions, Día de Muertos, a sacred time in the country and a fantastic opportunity to experience local history and traditions. The Souls & Legends dinner at La Laguna invites guests to celebrate the occasion with an evening meal overlooking the mangroves.

A decorative altar will be part of the experience, allowing visitors to learn more about this important tradition centred on remembering and honouring loved ones. The altar will be decorated with photographs, candles, marigolds and offerings as a way to commemorate and welcome back the spirits of those who have left us in a way that is both joyful and respectful.

Together, the unique activities planned for fall reflect the wide range of experiences that can be found at Fairmont Mayakoba, encompassing excellent food, nature and rich cultural tradition. For anyone visiting Riviera Maya, this series of events is an invitation to discover the resort in a whole new way, and very likely find more than a few reasons to stay a little longer (or book a return visit).



Beyond the spate of fall festivities the resort has planned, Fairmont Mayakoba is always worth visiting. With 401 rooms set across 45 acres of mangroves, jungle and waterways, the resort combines airy, contemporary design with luxury amenities and nods to Mexican culture. Guests can enjoy the spa, pools, Greg Norman-designed golf course and a range of dining and bar options, all while remaining close to Riviera Maya's white sand beaches and other attractions.

Fairmont-Mayakoba.com



Isla County

Three islands in Mexico, Three Unique Experiences

Off the coast of Quintana Roo you'll find Isla Holbox, Isla Contoy and Isla Mujeres, each with a personality all its own

By Diana Ballon

Cancun might be a perennially popular draw, but its neighbouring islands offer a completely different type of adventure. Together, the mainland and its nearby islands make for a varied and fun Mexican experience. Beyond the mega resorts it's known for, Cancun is a city with spirit, humming with mariachi bands and other lively performances. The vibrant city is also home to high-end Mexican and international restaurants and a mix of luxurious all-inclusive resorts and quieter boutique hotels.

Staying in Cancun for a week or a few days at a resort can be a relaxing way to spend a holiday. But then cross the turquoise waters of the Caribbean Sea to the islands that lie beyond. Isla Holbox, Isla Contoy and Isla Mujeres are all worth making time for, whether for a day trip or a more extended stay.

On my last visit, I did just that. I spent a few nights unwinding at Secrets Mirabel Cancun Resort & Spa as well as Hyatt Vivid Grand Island. And I also visited all three islands, each with its own pace and its own mode of access.



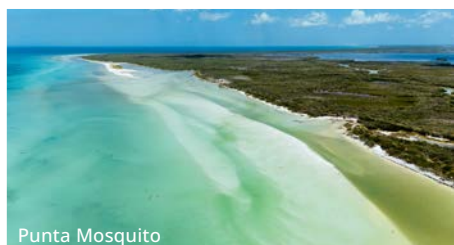


Isla Holbox

Getting to Isla Holbox means a two-hour drive from Cancun to the small town of Chiquilá, followed by a short ferry ride. Once on the island, cars are banned. Transport here is by foot, bicycle, or the occasional golf cart taxi. Holbox is defined as much by what it doesn't have as by what it does: no big resorts, no chain hotels, no big box stores—just a small, charming town with quiet beaches you can't help but linger on.

What it does have in abundance is great dining, stunning boutique hotels overlooking the sea and

natural beauty everywhere you turn. When I visited Holbox I took two island tours. One took me to Cabo Catoche, accessible only by an almost 10-kilometre trip across the water. Along the way, we fished and then ate the catch, prepared by our guide as ceviche when we arrived. We also had time



Punta Mosquito

to stroll an almost deserted beach and snorkel.

Our other boat expedition was a three-island tour. First to see nesting birds from an observation tower next to Isla Pájaros (Bird Island), then to visit Isla de la Pasi3n, almost completely covered in mangroves, but with shallow waters you can wade in. Our final stop was Punta Mosquito, a long sandbar people often reach by wading knee deep from Holbox, forming a line through the water like an aquatic highway.

Back on Holbox, life proceeds leisurely. At the newly opened Ana Y Jose, we enjoyed breakfast overlooking the water and sunsets from their rooftop terrace with a cocktail in hand. Almost next door is N3made Holbox, a luxury wellness retreat with exceptional dining, yoga classes, Pilates and more unique offerings like water sound healing and water therapy.

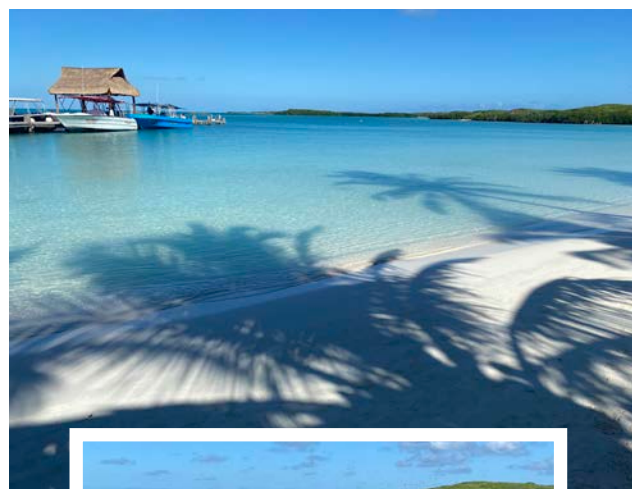
Isla Contoy

One of Mexico's most protected seabird sanctuaries, Isla Contoy has been uninhabited and protected from development for some 60 years. A national park located on an island 40 kilometres from Cancun, Contoy is a place people come to see seabirds, enjoy tranquility and experience a wildlife sanctuary at work.

Access to Contoy is restricted to just 200 visitors per day—100 in the morning and 100 in the afternoon—with visits controlled by a designated number of approved tour operators and only a small section of the island accessible to tourists. Most of the island is protected for turtles, nesting birds

and other wildlife. Half-day excursions start with a sometimes rough boat ride from Isla Mujeres or Cancun and then several hours on the island to enjoy a guided interpretive walk, a climb up its observation tower, a visit to the small museum and a buffet lunch.

Although the waters were churned up the day I was there, I still enjoyed snorkelling in this remote destination. A small coral reef off the southern part of the island marks the beginning of the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef System, which extends as far as the coast of Honduras. More than 250 species of marine life have been identified in the waters around Contoy, including whale sharks, manta rays and spiny lobster.



Isla Mujeres

Just 20 minutes by ferry from Cancun, Isla Mujeres, or the Island of Women, is the most accessible of these three islands. Once there, you can traverse this long, skinny island by golf cart—it's just about seven

kilometres long and less than a kilometre wide. Where you choose to stay depends on the kind of rhythm you're looking for.

Beach and, just a couple of blocks away, Hidalgo Avenue, which is the main pedestrian strip. Here the atmosphere is lively with throngs of restaurants, bars offering 2-for-1 happy hours, taco spots and gelato shops—the songs of Bob Marley and other reggae tunes never too far away.

This high octane north side sits in sharp contrast to the island's south end, where sandy beaches are replaced with dramatic cliffs and a more laid-back vibe. The highlight for me was Punta Sur sculpture park, where you can wander along a narrow path past sculptures depicting various aspects of Mayan culture—the turquoise waters and crashing waves close in the distance. The easternmost point of Mexico, it's a perfect place to watch the sunset.



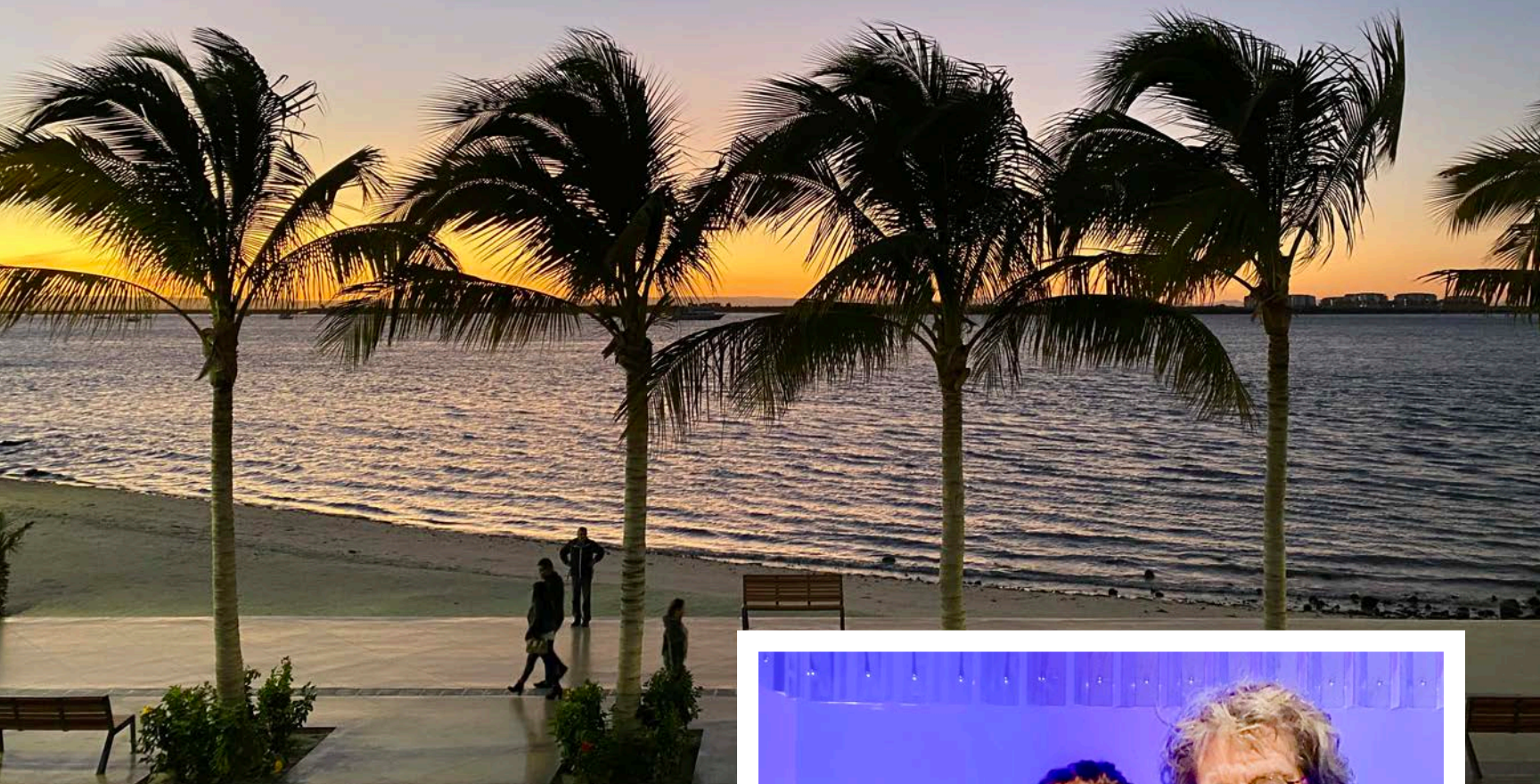
At the north end of the island, you'll find the popular white sand Playa Norte

The next time you visit Cancun, consider making time for a side trip to one (ore more) of these beautiful and multifaceted islands.

Discovering an Unexpected Side of La Paz

Beyond its beaches and marine life, La Paz reveals a creative side shaped by music, art and unexpected encounters

WORDS AND PHOTOS BY KATHRYN ANDERSON



W

hen you think of Mexico, you likely picture turquoise water, beach days and its famous resort scene. I was headed to Baja California Sur with one thing on my mind: whale sharks. Swimming alongside one of these magnificent creatures had been a dream of mine since I first saw a photo and I was finally going to make it happen. Or so I thought.

Instead, the only whale shark I saw was a stuffed-animal version the crew kept on the catamaran. Unseasonably cold weather and rough seas kept us from seeing much of anything, let alone whale sharks. Disappointed, but determined not to let one bad experience derail my trip, I headed into the heart of La Paz.





The Malecón

The city's waterfront malecón stretches five kilometres along the Sea of Cortez, from Marina La Paz in the south to Playa Coromuel in the north. More than a place for a stroll, it feels like an outdoor gallery, with sculptures and artwork reflecting the city's history and its connection to the sea.

Some of the pieces I enjoyed included La Perla, a giant oyster shell with a pearl; El Viejo y El Mar, a sculpture honouring legendary oceanographer Jacques Cousteau and plenty of playful sea-inspired pieces, including sharks, a mermaid and an anchor. I couldn't resist doing a handstand at one of the most popular photo ops, the colourful LA PAZ letters, with the Sea of Cortez in the background.

After a lengthy stroll, I timed dinner just right and was rewarded with a glorious sunset. Golden yellow morphed into fiery orange before turning pink and disappearing over the horizon. From a rooftop patio, I watched the colourful show unfold between swaying palm trees, margarita in hand. By the time the sun disappeared, I had almost forgotten about the day's disappointment.

At night, La Paz Comes Alive

After dark, La Paz revealed another side of itself. Music spilled from restaurants and bars, becoming part of the social fabric rather than simply something happening on a stage. Combined with local food, the malecón and a laid-back nightlife scene, its music gives the city a personality all its own.

Looking for a nightcap, I wandered into a bar that didn't appear to be open yet. I was about to turn around when an enthusiastic man ushered me inside, led me to a table near the front of the stage and welcomed me to stay. I had unknowingly stumbled upon the soft launch of a new venue and my friendly host turned out to be none other than Grammy Award-winning trumpeter Terry Townson.

La Paz's Thriving Jazz Scene

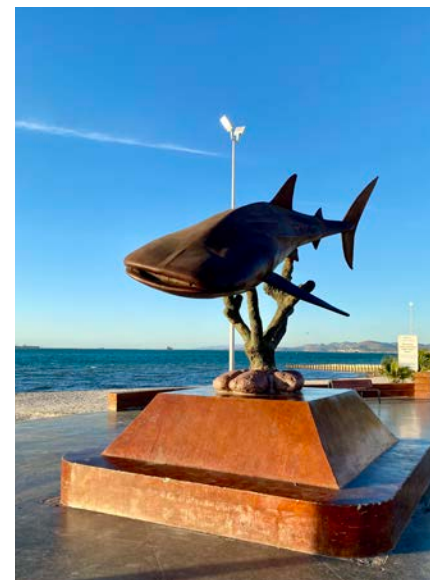
I quickly discovered that jazz has a serious presence in La Paz, with dedicated live music venues, an annual jazz festival and an international community of musicians who have made the city home.

Terry had previously lived in

Vancouver for eight years, where he worked with Canadian musicians including Colin James and Matthew Good. Now based in Mexico, he was performing at the venue's opening that night. Listening to him play his signature custom Carol Brass trumpet was not exactly the nightcap I had envisioned, but it turned out to be far more memorable.

What started as a disappointing day had taken an unexpected turn. I had gone looking for whale sharks and instead found myself standing beside a world-class musician, talking about music and admiring his custom instrument after an evening of live jazz. It was a fitting introduction to a side of La Paz I hadn't known existed: a creative community shaped not only by local artists and musicians, but also by the international characters who have made this laid-back coastal city their home.

I came to Baja California Sur expecting one kind of adventure and found something completely different waiting for me in La Paz. I may not have had the whale shark encounter I came for, but missing it gave me the chance to discover a side of Mexico I never expected to find.





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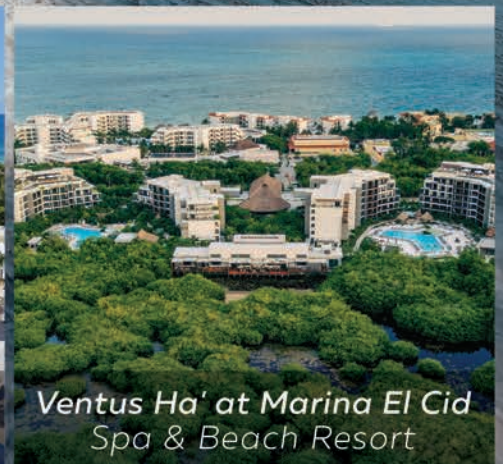
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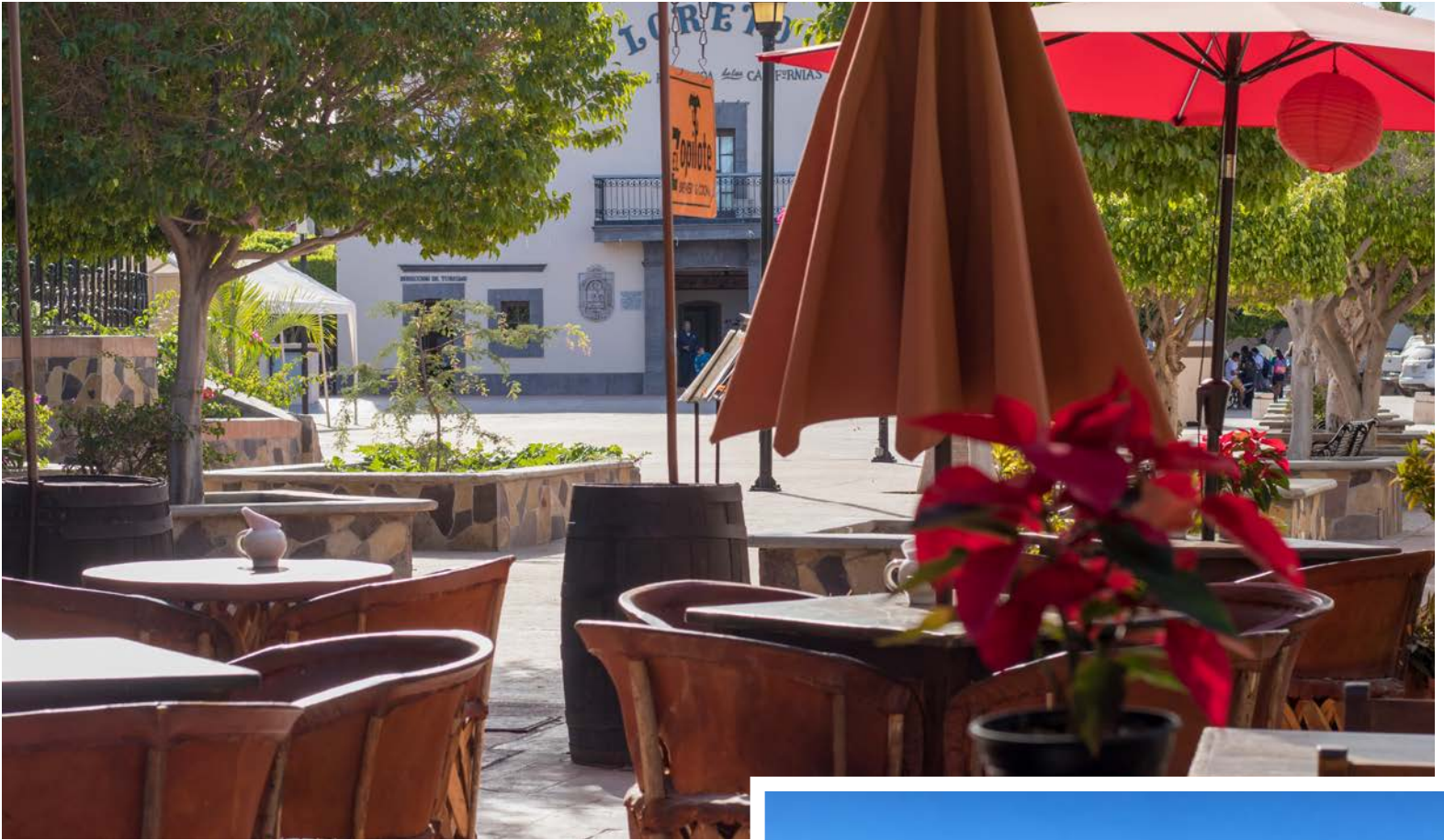
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Why Canadians are Falling in Love with Loreto

Whales may draw visitors to Loreto, but it's the people, slower pace of life and deep connection to nature that keep Canadians coming back

BY KAYLA-MARIE WILLIAMS

Travel has a funny way of surprising you. Sometimes the experiences I anticipate the most become forgettable and instead, it's everything surrounding the experience that ends up having the most impact.

That realization happened aboard a small whale-watching boat on the Sea of Cortez on the second day of my recent stay in Loreto. The water lay still, the Sierra de la Giganta mountains framed the horizon and without warning, a massive blue whale surfaced just metres from our boat. For a few seconds, no one reached for a camera. Everyone was silent. We simply watched.

It wasn't just seeing the world's largest animal a few metres away that had me in awe; it was the feeling that Loreto still allows nature to take centre stage.





After spending several days exploring Loreto this past March, one thing became increasingly clear: while visitors often arrive for the whales or the sunshine, they leave talking about something much bigger. They talk about the slower pace of life, the genuine warmth of the people and the deep respect this community has for protecting the place they call home.

Nestled on the eastern coast of Mexico's Baja California Sur peninsula, Loreto is home to just 18,000 residents. It feels worlds away from the bustling resort cities many Canadians know, offering instead a quieter, more authentic experience where history, nature and community exist in remarkable harmony.

With limited access to the rest of mainland Mexico, locals describe Baja California Sur as feeling like "living on an island." After just a few days, it was easy to understand what they meant. Mornings begin with fishing boats heading out to sea. Afternoons invite leisurely lunches overlooking the water, while evenings are best spent wandering the lively malecón as the moonlight glistens across the sea.

For Ivette Granados, operations manager for Visit Baja California Sur, protecting what makes Loreto special is more than a tourism strategy—it's a community commitment. "Loreto is a tiny town," she explains. "It was the first settlement on the Baja California peninsula in 1697 and the first capital of the Californias. Our history begins here."



"It was the first settlement on the Baja California peninsula in 1697 and the first capital of the Californias. Our history begins here."





Wildlife photographer Joseph Ruiz Cheires

While its historical significance is impressive, Granados believes the town's greatest strength lies in how carefully it balances tourism with conservation. "We know what needs to be done as a community dedicated to tourism," she explains. That commitment is evident everywhere—from the protected waters of the Sea of Cortez to the locally owned cafés and boutiques that line Loreto's charming streets.

Few people understand the area's natural beauty better than award-winning wildlife photographer Joseph Ruiz Cheires, who has spent years documenting the marine life that calls these waters home. Whether he is photographing humpback whales breaching or documenting the annual migration of blue whales, Ruiz Cheires has learned that nature rewards those willing to slow down.

His advice for capturing the perfect wildlife photograph? Patience. "We stay here five or six hours a day," he says. "We go out in the morning during golden hour and wait."

Of course, there's much more to discover beyond the water. One morning was spent teeing up at TPC Danzante Bay, consistently ranked among North America's most spectacular golf courses. Multiple holes on this

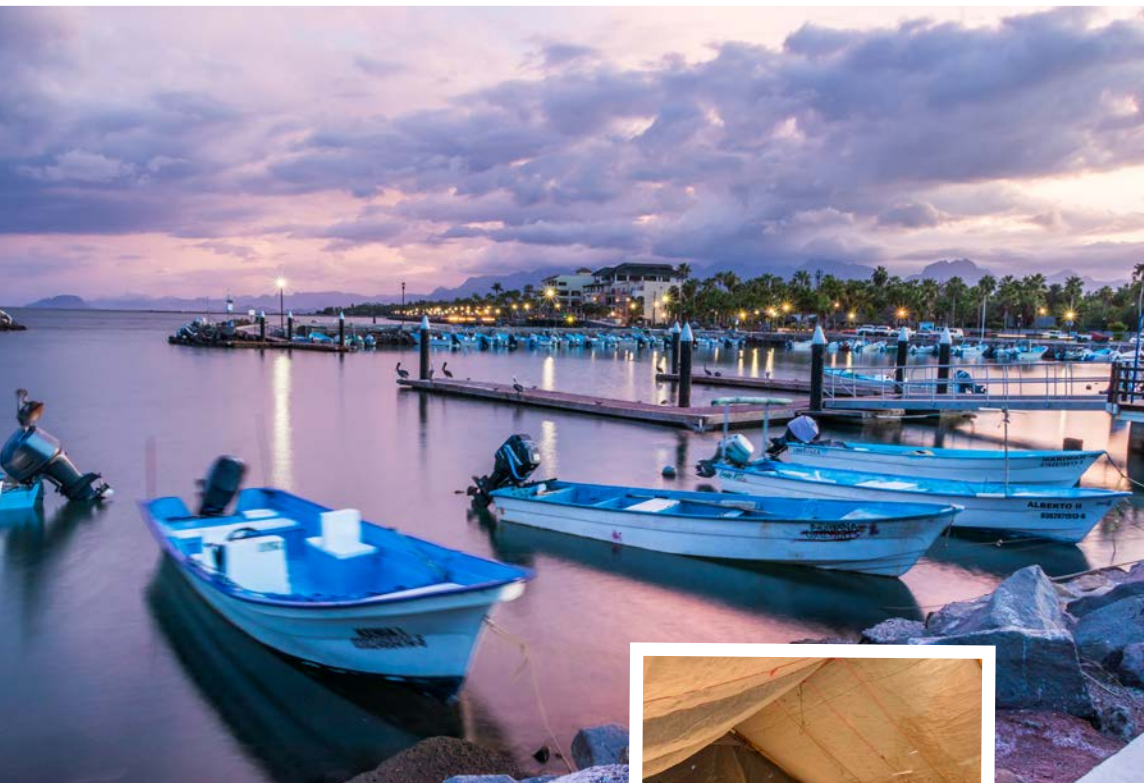
course left me speechless thanks to dramatic mountain backdrops, desert landscapes dotted with towering cardón cacti and panoramic views of the Sea of Cortez.

Another day led us inland to the historic mission town of San Javier, where winding mountain roads reveal a completely different side of Baja California Sur. Walking the cobblestone entryway, San Javier is frozen in time giving you a glimpse into the region's agricultural roots and centuries-old traditions. The visit culminated with an unforgettable evening at San Javier Farm.

A thoughtfully prepared four-course meal including bruschetta and grilled octopus was paired with local Baja wines. Our family-style dinner that night was a celebration of the land, the people who cultivate it and the slower rhythm of life that defines the region.

It remains one of the most memorable dining experiences I've enjoyed while travelling.

It's these authentic experiences that keep many Canadians returning year after year. Theresa Storm, an award-winning travel writer and photographer from Calgary, has been wintering in Loreto for the past seven years after first visiting when a close friend purchased a home in the area. "There are so many different activities," she explains.



"The days are beautiful and the nights stay cool."





From hiking through the surrounding mountains and discovering waterfalls tucked inside hidden canyons to island adventures, snorkeling and world-class scuba diving, there's always another adventure waiting just outside town. "We start snorkeling in April," Storm tells me. "The days are beautiful and the nights stay cool."

Just as important as the outdoor recreation is the sense of community she has found. "We golf. I go to an aqua fitness class three days a week. There's pickleball, tennis and hiking groups," she adds. "It's really easy to meet people here. As a retiree, as my husband is, that's really important—to build a social community. Places like Loreto do that."

Her experience reflects what many Canadian snowbirds are quietly discovering. Loreto is more than a winter escape. It's somewhere to build friendships with fellow Canadians and with the locals who proudly welcome visitors into their community. And if you're not living the retired life just yet, bringing the entire family or exploring the area as a solo traveller is also welcomed.

There's a quiet confidence about this captivating town. Rich in history, surrounded by breathtaking landscapes and home to one of the most biologically diverse marine ecosystems on the planet, Loreto doesn't try to compete with larger destinations, nor does it need to. Instead, it invites visitors into its way of life.

Through my many conversations with locals, one message surfaced time and again: they are proud to share this remarkable place with the world, but they also hope visitors will respect it, protect it and care for it as they do.



THE FIVES HOTELS: RIVIERA MAYA, BEYOND THE EXPECTED



THE FIVES BEACHFRONT & RESIDENCES

DISCOVER A DIFFERENT SIDE OF THE MEXICAN CARIBBEAN THROUGH ALL SENSES INCLUSIVE®.

For Canadian travellers, Riviera Maya is hardly an unknown destination. Its turquoise Caribbean water, warm climate and easygoing rhythm have made it a natural winter escape for years. Yet familiarity can sometimes flatten a place into a postcard. The real Riviera Maya reveals itself when you move beyond the obvious and allow the destination to unfold through its food, its neighbourhoods, its pace and the people you travel with.

That is where **The Fives Hotels & Residences** has built its point of view. Across four distinctive properties in Playa del Carmen and Puerto Morelos, the collection offers different ways to experience the Mexican Caribbean without forcing every traveller into the same version of a resort holiday. A multigenerational family may want space, variety and the freedom to move at different rhythms. A couple may prefer the intimacy of a smaller adults only retreat, while others may want to stay closer to the energy of town.



What connects each of these experiences is **All Senses Inclusive®**, the hospitality philosophy at the heart of The Fives Hotels. It is less about adding more to a traditional all-inclusive formula and more about designing a stay around the way people actually remember travel. A memorable trip is rarely defined by a list of inclusions. It is remembered through a meal worth talking about

later, the feeling of having enough room to truly settle in, a quiet morning by the water, or the simple pleasure of choosing what to do next without being tied to a rigid schedule.

For The Fives Hotels, that means creating a broader relationship between hotel and destination. Riviera Maya is not treated as a

backdrop but as part of the experience. Guests can enjoy the comforts of the resort while remaining connected to Playa del Carmen, Puerto Morelos, the Caribbean coastline and the region's natural and cultural character.

THE PHILOSOPHY BEHIND THE EXPERIENCE

All Senses Inclusive® comes to life through three defining pillars that shape how guests eat, stay and unwind.

À la Carte All Inclusive® places dining at the centre of the journey. Rather than treating meals as a functional part of the package, The Fives approaches food as one of the most memorable ways to experience a stay. Restaurants, bars, rooftops and social spaces offer different settings throughout the day, giving guests a reason to change pace and follow their appetite. A relaxed lunch may stretch into the afternoon, dinner may become the social centre of the evening, and a rooftop drink may end up being the moment everyone remembers from the trip.



The second pillar, **All Residence Style Suites®**, responds to a need that becomes increasingly important the longer people travel together: space. The Fives was designed around the idea that a hotel room should support the way guests live, not simply the hours they sleep. Residence style configurations, including larger one-, two- and three-bedroom options at The Fives Beach Hotel & Residences, give families, couples and groups room to gather while still allowing privacy.

Joy & Wellness®, the third pillar, takes a similarly broad view of wellbeing. Wellness here is not confined to a spa treatment or fitness class. It can be found in time outdoors, a long meal, or a day that has no agenda beyond enjoying where you are. The Spa by The Fives adds a more traditional layer of restoration, but the philosophy itself is intentionally wider. Feeling well on holiday can be as much about pleasure and connection as it is about discipline.

These three pillars give All Senses Inclusive® its substance. They also help explain why the collection can be consistent without feeling repetitive. The philosophy remains the same, while each hotel interprets it through a very different setting

PLAYA DEL CARMEN, TWO WAYS

At The Fives Beach Hotel & Residences in Playa del Carmen, the experience is designed around the complexity of travelling together. Multigenerational families often want contradictory things from the same holiday and the strength of The Fives Beach is that it does not ask everyone to enjoy the resort in the same way.





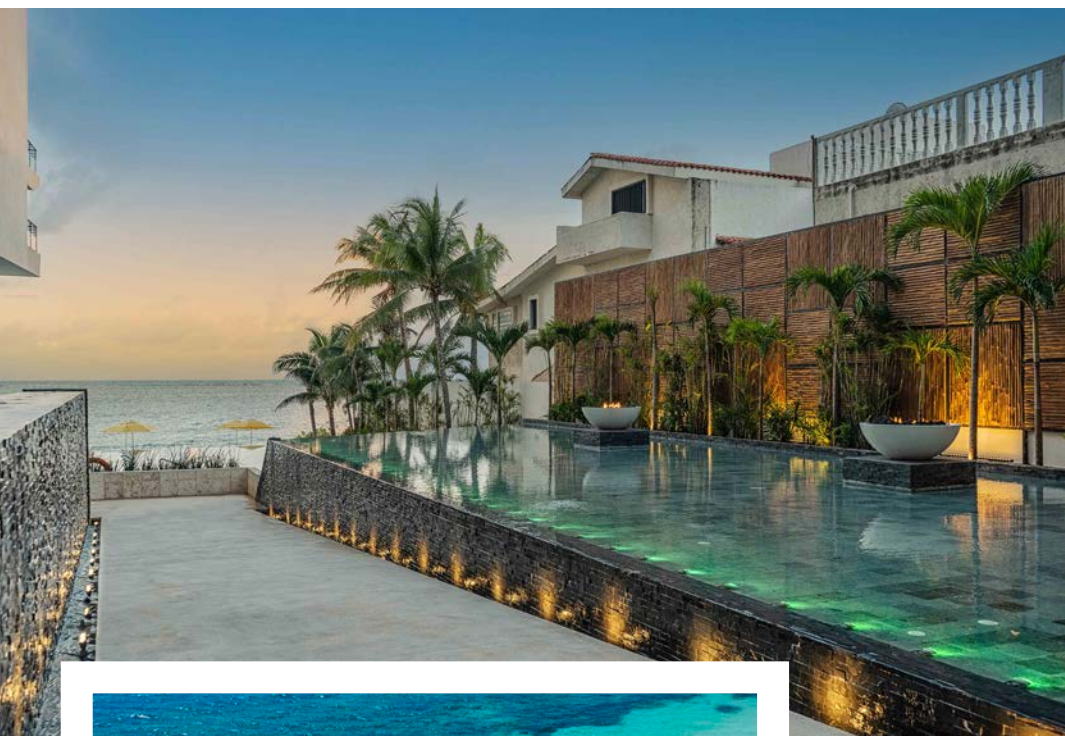
The one-, two-and three-bedroom **Residence Style Suites®** provide the physical space that larger groups need, while the resort itself offers enough variety for everyone to build their own days. There are pools, tropical gardens, beach time, restaurants and bars, **The Spa by The Fives**, **Aluxitos Kids Club** and a dedicated **Teens Club** designed for greater independence.

Nearby, **The Beachfront by The Fives Hotels** presents an entirely different interpretation of Playa del Carmen. With only 43 **Boutique Style Suites®**, this adults only property is quieter, more intimate and deliberately understated. Its positioning, The Whispering Escape, captures the mood well. The experience is built around the sea, Santa Sirena, Agua Mala bar and the luxury of having fewer distractions.

What makes The Beachfront particularly interesting is the way it balances intimacy with access. Guests can enjoy the privacy of a boutique retreat while remaining connected to The Fives Beach through a short shuttle. That makes it possible to move between two moods within the same stay.



THE BEACHFRONT BY THE FIVES HOTELS



The contrast between these two properties says something important about the collection as a whole. The Fives is not trying to define one ideal Riviera Maya holiday. It creates several ways to experience the destination depending on who is travelling, why they are travelling and what kind of rhythm they want once they arrive.

Farther north, **The Fives Oceanfront Puerto Morelos** introduces another side of the Caribbean. Puerto Morelos has long appealed to travellers who value a smaller scale and a stronger sense of local identity. The Fives Oceanfront is shaped around the idea of Boutique Soul by the Sea. Residence style accommodations create an easy, settled feeling, while the **All-Inclusive Optional** format gives guests the freedom to decide how much of their stay they want to keep within the hotel. Al Mare brings dining close to the coast, K'iin Rooftop gives evenings a more elevated social setting and RoMarley Beach House captures the informal side of Caribbean living.



The hotel works especially well for travellers who want the comforts of a resort but still care about the character of the place around them. Puerto Morelos offers a sense of connection to the reef, the sea and the wider Riviera Maya that feels authentic, and for someone who already knows the region, this can make the destination feel fresh again.



The Fives Downtown Playa del Carmen Hotel & Residences, Curio Collection by Hilton, takes the opposite approach. Rather than placing guests at the edge of town, it puts them directly in the middle of it. The hotel is a strong option for travellers who want to experience Playa del Carmen as a city as much as a beach destination.

Its 133 **Residence Style Suites**® create a comfortable base for longer or more independent stays, while Mercatto and Fives Rooftop bring a social dimension to the property. The rooftop, with two infinity pools and views across Playa del Carmen, shifts naturally from daytime relaxation to an evening atmosphere. The appeal lies in the contrast: guests can spend the morning exploring the city, return to the hotel in the afternoon and still end the day with the feeling of being somewhere distinctly Caribbean.

Together, The Fives Oceanfront and The Fives Downtown broaden the usual definition of a Riviera Maya holiday. One leans into the quieter rhythm of Puerto Morelos, while the other embraces the energy of Playa del Carmen.

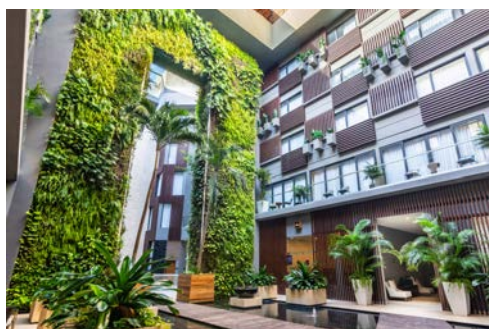
RIVIERA MAYA, BEYOND THE EXPECTED

Perhaps the most compelling thing about Riviera Maya today is that travellers no longer have to choose between familiarity and discovery. The coastline still offers everything that made it famous, but there are increasingly more nuanced ways to experience it.

At **The Fives Hotels & Residences**, that may mean bringing three generations together in a **Residence Style Suite**®, choosing a quiet adults only escape,

spending a few days overlooking the sea in Puerto Morelos, or experiencing Playa del Carmen from a rooftop in the centre of town.

That is ultimately what **All Senses Inclusive**® is designed to deliver. More choice, more space, a stronger relationship with the destination and a greater sense that a Caribbean holiday can still surprise you.



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Inside Clase Azul's Architectural Love Letters to Mexico

How a premium tequila brand is honouring the country of its roots through architecture and design that brings Mexico's cultural richness to life

By Erica Commisso

When premium tequila brand Clase Azul opened Casa de Los Leones in February 2026, the vision was clear: To pay homage to Mexico, the country of the brand's roots, by taking the brightest of local stars across architecture and artistry and tasking them with bringing Mexico's cultural roots to life, to showcase Mexico's design history in a luxurious, modern way.

Casa de los Leones, which translates to House of the Lions, was designed by C Cúbica Arquitectos in collaboration with a group of established and emerging Mexican designers and artisans. The restored home is a sprawling love letter to the country in one of Mexico City's trendiest neighbourhoods, Polanco, and the richly layered environment serves as a functional platform for contemporary Mexican design.



"Casa de los Leones is our homage to Mexico—a sacred home where our roots, our culture, and our future converge," explains founder Arturo Lomelí. "Clase Azul was never meant to live only in a decanter. This house represents a natural

evolution of who we are: a place to gather, to share and to honour Mexican culture through meaningful experiences, hospitality and human connection."



Stepping into it is a wonder of art and bold design, with Mexican craftsmanship taking centre stage. The lobby, for example, features an ornate ceramic tunnel that houses an art installation that changes quarterly. It was done by Oaxacan artist Amador Montes, who also worked with the brand on its first limited-edition mezcal. It's joined by stain-glassed windows and a chandelier in the lounge by artist Thierry Jeannot, stone staircases, polychrome mosaic floors and wrought-iron details that complement bold colours and a flurry of different textures. Works by artist Raul de la Cerda line the space, while custom-designed and curated pieces developed in collaboration with Mexican artisans and designers emphasize natural materials like wood, ceramics (through a partnership with Marva Studios) and textiles.

And so, with the first restoration project and brand home turning out to be a masterpiece, Clase Azul opened a second one, La Hacienda, in May.

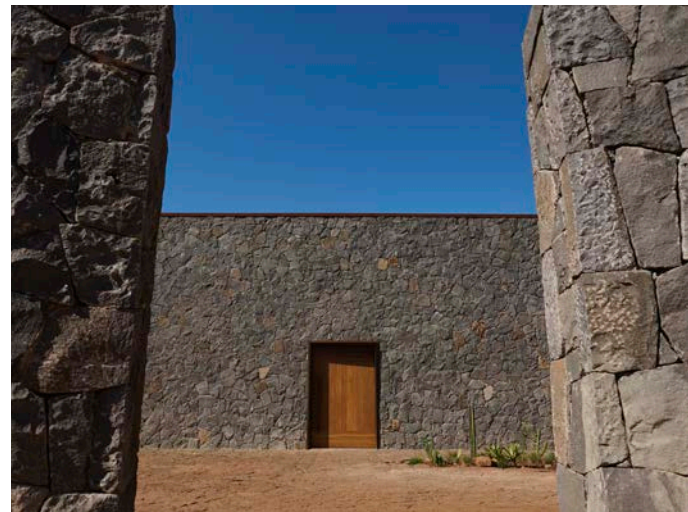
One hour outside of Guadalajara in Los Altos de Jalisco, Clase Azul's second brand home, La Hacienda sprawls over 50 acres of preserved volcanic landscape in the region where Clase Azul was born. Each room tells a story, detailing a rich love for Mexico as well as a history of the tequila brand. The Inspiration Hall, for example, uses video, sound and

sculptural works to showcase Clase Azul's connection to Mexico's land, traditions and people.

"For us, this is more than a destination, it is a tribute," Lomelí says. "La Hacienda reflects our deep gratitude to the land and the people who make our work possible. Every element comes from Mexico, and every decision was made with the intention of honouring and investing back into the country that gave us everything."

For La Hacienda, Clase Azul tapped local businesses including Atelier ARS, Elías Rizo Arquitectos, Estudio Macías Peredo, Tacher Arquitectos, and Huber Design Studio to bring the vision to life, and each firm designed a distinct component in concert with the others to create one cohesive design effort that honours the natural landscape. It also offers three immersive experiences highlighting the culinary excellence, craftsmanship and architectural prowess that makes Mexico what it is. On the property itself, structures built with volcanic stone and earth drawn directly from the site dot the property.

The statement in the entirety of La Hacienda's existence is clear: Clase Azul believes in the richness of Mexican culture, in the power of local craftsmanship, and in the resilience and potential of Mexico itself.



Sustainable Fashion Handmade by Artisans in *Oaxaca*

The Bani Artesanal brand is renewing authentic Mexican traditions using recycled materials to create one-of-a-kind and sustainable products woven on pedal looms.



Every piece celebrates Oaxaca's artisanal heritage and the passion and dedication of Oaxaca artisans through a tradition that has been passed on for generations. Through different techniques, these artisans create an innovative type of texture and design that reflects a blend of history and modern personality with their high-quality handcrafted work.



handbags

Handbags are made of recycled materials and the inside is made out of cotton canvas. The most popular, the "Poka" comes in four sizes: large, medium, small and mini.





✓ **100% Recycled Materials**
Recycled threads on all textiles.

✓ **Artisanal Process**
All products are handmade in different types of looms by Mexican artisans.

✓ **Support Local**
Made by artisans around Mexico innovating designs with their original weaving traditions.

clothing

The Bani clothing line seeks to empower not only the women who wear the pieces, but also the women that create them.

home

Bring a little Mexican style into your home with unique throw pillows and placemats made from recycled cotton.



BANI

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