

# World Traveller

INSPIRED BY  
onatravel

ISSUE 143 | MARCH 2020 | COMPLIMENTARY COPY

## A BEGINNERS' GUIDE TO JAPAN

## CHANGE OF SCENE

Is modern-day  
Goa still the  
paradise of old?

**STAYCATIONS**  
**READER OFFERS**  
**TRENDING PLACES**  
**WIN A LUXURY STAY**

# STEP INTO HISTORY

From the moon-like landscape of Wadi Rum to soaking up the Dead Sea's salty goodness, Jordan's treasures beg rediscovery

Follow the  
jet set to  
the Athens  
Riviera







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# TOES CURLING INTO FINE SAND

The aquamarine blue waves of the Indian Ocean gently unfolding on the golden shore. A fresh coconut sipped in the shade of wind-whispering palms. A (not to long) bask in the early morning or late afternoon sun. A cool-off in the vast expanse of sun-glittering sea. Some of the delights of a Sri Lankan beach.

Where beaches are concerned you will be spoilt for choice in Sri Lanka. Beaches totaling 1,340Km fringe the island, from the long-established tourist destinations of the southern coast, to the vast beaches of the deep south, and the less-visited expanses of the north and east. No matter what time of the year, you can find a beach that is in season and just waiting to welcome you to its warm sands.

 TROPICAL  
AND BRIGHT  
SRI LANKA





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# Welcome note

From that bonding break you had with your college friends before making your way in the big wide world, to the very first time you set off solo in search of adventure, and that 'pinch me' exotic beach holiday you triumphantly ticked off your list –

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if nostalgia is driving your travel decisions currently then this month's stories are sure to resonate.

In this issue, our six-page feature on Jordan delves into the kingdom's many treasures, revealing why the destination is ripe for rediscovering (page 54).

Plus, let travel writer Nick Redman's return to Goa open your eyes to why this beach party paradise now appeals to grown-ups, too (page 42).

Of course, if you're discovering a country for the very first time then you'll need a really good guide, which is exactly what makes our easy-peasy beginners' guide to Japan (page 24) a keeper.

For more top tips and inspiration, check out our expanded Globetrotter section (from page 13), which is packed with ideas, from the coolest glamping spots in the UAE to the very best places to eat in New York, according to a top chef.

Happy travels,

**Faye Bartle**



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## FIVE THINGS WE LEARNED THIS ISSUE:

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In Jordan the dirtier you get, the fresher you'll feel – slather yourself in nourishing Dead Sea mud and you'll know exactly what we mean, p54

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The preserved remains of Saint Francis Xavier, inside Goa's Basilica of Bom Jesus, was assaulted in 1953 by a pilgrim who bit off a big toe and tried to run away with it, p42

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There are complex rules around tea ceremonies in Japan, including where to sit and how to handle your cups, p24







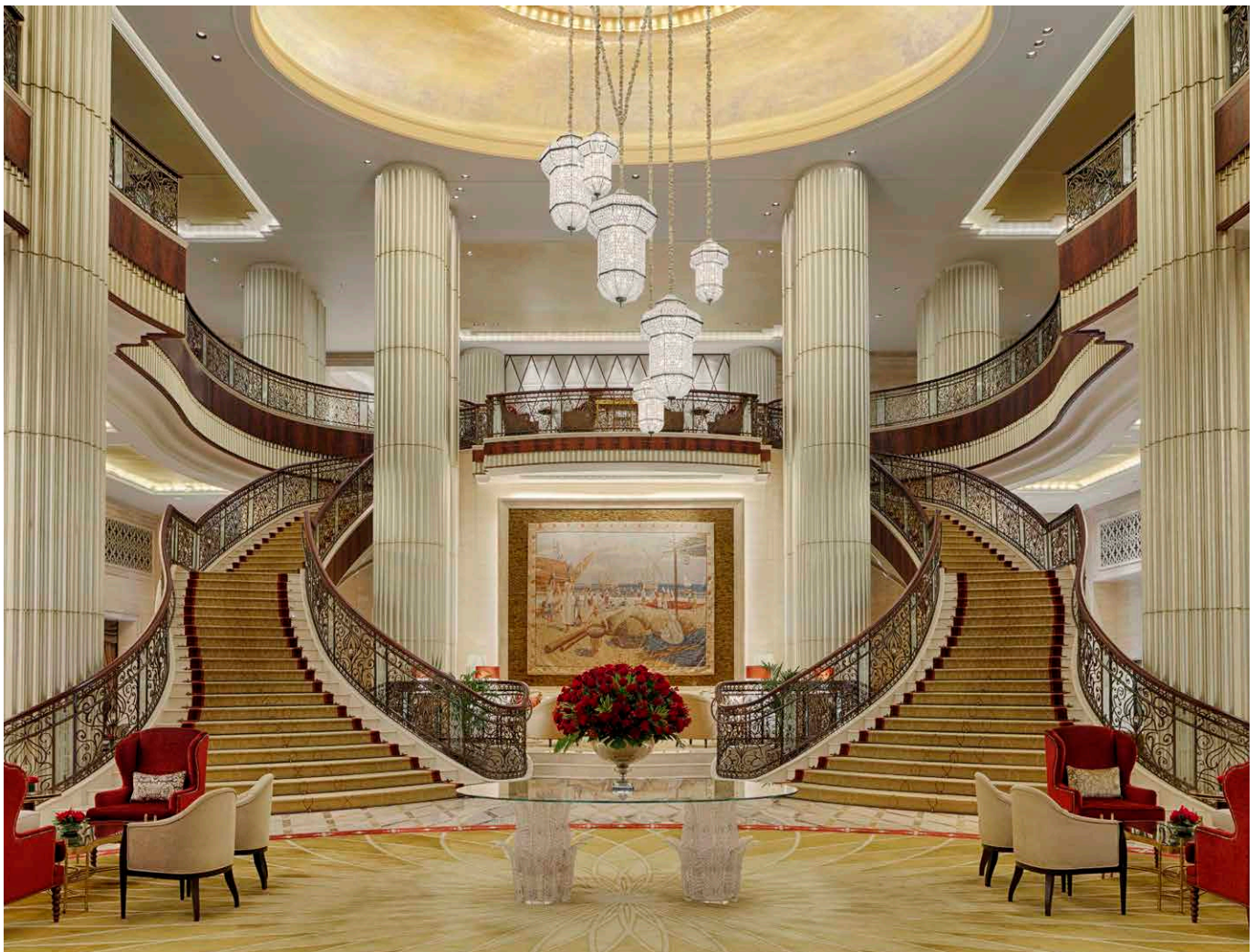
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Feel in need of a break? We have a couple more reasons to book a weekend escape.

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## TRAVEL OFFERS

It's time we sent you packing. Choose your next adventure from our exclusive offers.



# Wellness Haven at Saray Spa.

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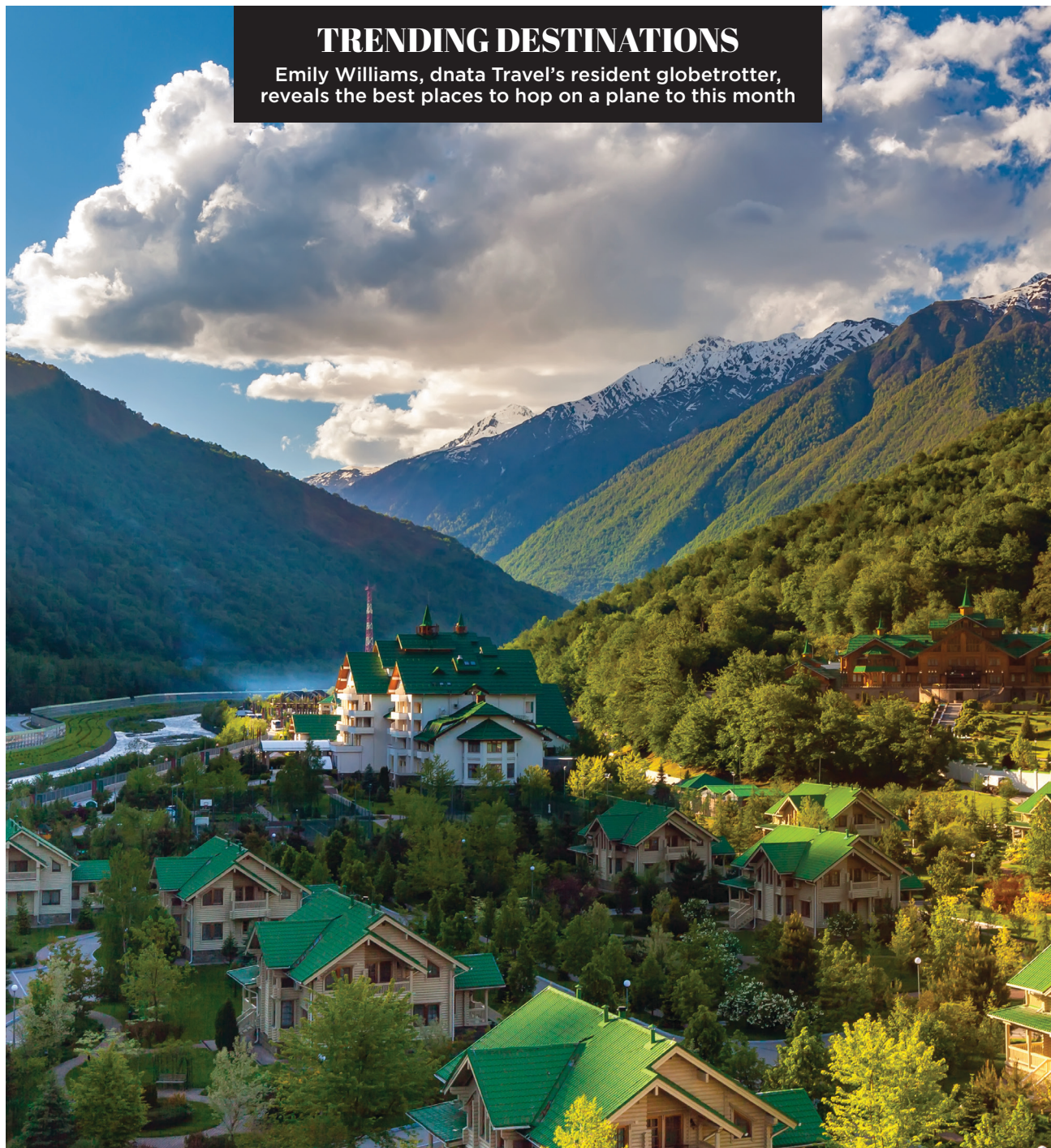
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## TRENDING DESTINATIONS

Emily Williams, dnata Travel's resident globetrotter, reveals the best places to hop on a plane to this month



### Sochi

Situated between the Black Sea and the Caucasus Mountains, this seaside city lures travellers with its subtropical climate and sunny weather (it enjoys around 300 days of guaranteed rays each year). In March, the palm-filled Arboretum Botanical Gardens is the perfect setting for a stroll, the sprawling Black Sea beaches are yours to unwind on, and the streets brim with vibrant markets. Out of town, Krasnaya Polyana offers smooth slopes to whizz down.

**Highlights** **1** Check out the vibrant street art that punctuates the urban areas, including the cheeky Albert Einstein portrait near Sochi railway station. **2** Delve into the city's rich past at the Museum of Sochi History, which also displays the Soyuz 9 spacecraft that broke records with its near 18-day flight in 1970. **3** As the only place in Russia that produces tea, it would be remiss not to taste Sochi's own brew. You can sip a cuppa in a traditional log house at Dagomys Tea Plantation.





## Addis Ababa

Amid rolling hills on the border of the Great Rift Valley, Ethiopia's sprawling capital offers exotic wonders in spades. Here, you can savour some of the world's finest Arabica coffee, admire the city's thriving art scene, bag local goodies at Mercato market, or tuck into the delicious injera, a staple dish that bursts with zesty flavours. Nature lovers can explore Debre Zeyit's stunning landscape, and take the chance to spot rare wildlife in the Simien Mountains.

**Highlights** **1** Get a close-up look at the Skeleton of Lucy, the world's oldest discovered skeleton (estimated to be 3.2 million years old) at the National Museum of Ethiopia. **2** Get plugged into the lively music scene by catching a performance by the traditional *azmari* (Ethiopian singer-musicians) who'll treat your ears to everything from contemporary Ethio-jazz to funky Ethio-pop. **3** Watch the sun rise over the rolling hills of Yekka before making your way down to explore the nearby 700-year-old rock-hewn church of Washa Michael.





## Almaty

Boasting a glorious backdrop of the snowcapped Zailiysky Alatau, the leafy city of Almaty, in Kazakhstan, lures ski enthusiasts with its frost-rimmed trails covered with cloud-like snow. March is when the fresh powder is at its deepest, delivering glorious days on the slopes. Back in the city centre, visit the bustling Green Bazaar, discover the city's café culture, admire its unique architecture and plunge into the finest Russian baths (we rate the Arasan Baths).

**Highlights** **1** Admire the architectural splendour of the candy-coloured Zenkov Cathedral, one of Almaty's few surviving tsarist-era buildings. **2** Escape the city and bask in the natural beauty of Big Almaty Lake. The alpine lake's striking teal hue and mountain backdrop makes it one of the most beautifully surreal spots in the country. **3** Awaken your inner Beatlemania and make a beeline for the Beatles Statue of Almaty near the artistic Almaty Tower, which was created by artist Eduard Kazaryan to pay homage to the sensational band.





## Rio de Janeiro

With shimmering beaches, lushly forested mountains, samba-fuelled nightlife and crowd-roaring football matches, this tropical party city is a feast for all the senses. Copacabana Beach is the city's main draw, with dozens of oceanfront hotels and sidewalk restaurants lining its shores. Beyond all of that, a myriad of adventures await; go hiking in the Tijuca rainforest, sail across Baía de Guanabara and dance to the samba beat on the smooth slopes of Pedra do Sal rock.

**Highlights** **1** Feast your eyes on the pops of colour of the 2016 Olympic Games inspired Las Etnias graffiti, in the Port District, which holds a Guinness World Record for being the largest spray paint mural by a team. **2** Discover a fascinating collection of over 350,000 artistic works created by psychiatric patients through art therapy at the Images of the Unconscious Museum. **3** Huff and puff your way up the multicoloured mosaic steps of Escadaria Selarón, which were handmade by Chilean-born Jorge Selarón.



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MARCH

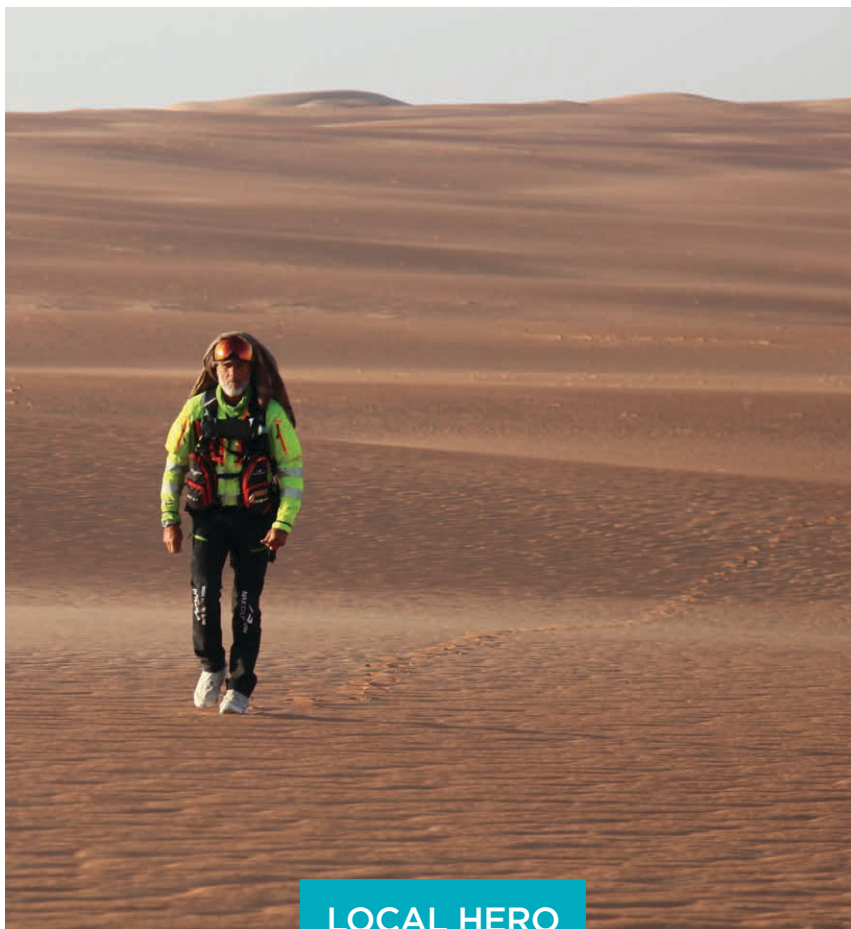
# Globetrotter

Be informed, be inspired,  
be there

## ROCK CHICK

It's International Women's Day on 8 March – the perfect time to treat yourself to that far-flung break you've always dreamed of. Judging by this beautiful photo, you'll find all the seclusion you crave at Amanyara, which is nestled on the shores of an 18,000-acre nature preserve on the Turks and Caicos Islands. Stay in an Ocean Pavilion (pictured) and follow the path leading to the rocky shore where you can immerse yourself in the turquoise waters rich with marine life. Tailored wellness programmes, nourishing alfresco meals and those warming tropical rays await.





## LOCAL HERO

### 'Will I be able to survive?'

We caught up with Max Calderan, who recently became the first man in history to cross the Empty Quarter

**Earlier this year, Italian extreme desert explorer Max Calderan, 52, became** the first person to complete a solo trek across the Rub Al Khali unaided. Starting and ending in Saudi Arabia, his 16-day journey took him across the unbroken 1,100km sea of sand, battling brutal sand storms, 300-metre-high dunes and 36°C temperatures along the way.

A long-time Dubai resident, crossing the barren terrain had been a childhood dream for Calderan, who grew up inspired by the life story of British explorer Wilfred Thesiger.

"I think the whole point of exploration is to finally answer the biggest question a man can face: 'Will I be able to survive?'," he says. The remote landscape, which even migratory birds go out of their way to avoid, was a true test. "Rub Al Khali isn't a matter of kilometres, it's an extreme environment

that nobody has done before. It was the biggest dunes, and the biggest technical and physical difficulties I've ever faced" he reflects. "The most challenging part, however, was travelling alone. Every minute mattered, because a mere mistake could've cost me everything. The only solution is to climb the dunes, hoping to find the right path in order to go beyond them. It was the first time in my life I started to pray in order to come out."

Frequently, the wind would cover Calderan's tracks, and with GPS signal dropping in and out in the remote region, his support team could often not make contact with him for several hours at a time, yet his unwavering determination saw him through: "This journey isn't about physical ability, it's the capability to handle a situation," he says. "This is what makes a difference."

## FOLLOW YOUR ART

Art lovers can enjoy a staycation closer to home this month thanks to these must-see showcases

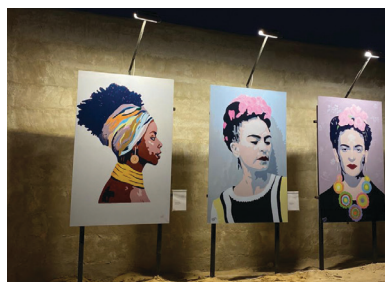
**DUBAI.** Taking place from 25-28 March at Madinat Jumeirah, Art Dubai is welcoming 90 galleries from 38 countries, alongside a compelling line-up of site-specific works, talks and performances. [artdubai.ae](http://artdubai.ae)



**SAUDI ARABIA.** The striking Desert x AIUla exhibition, until 7 March, marks the destination's first contemporary art exhibition, featuring 14 stunning site-specific works to discover. [desertx.org](http://desertx.org)



**RAS AL KHAIMAH.** Luring more than 100 artists from 33 countries, the Ras Al Khaimah Fine Arts Festival, until 31 March at Al Jazirah Al Hamra, champions the power of art. [rakfinearts.ae](http://rakfinearts.ae)



Art Dubai 2019, photo courtesy of Photo Solutions



Bambarakanda Falls



## Chasing waterfalls

Sri Lanka's cascading waterfalls are at their most beautiful at this time of year – here's where to find them

The tallest of them all, **Bambarakanda Falls** is a sight to behold. Situated amid the steep pine forested slopes of Badulla District, this majestic waterfall comes crashing down from a height of 263 metres (863 feet). It's best viewed between March and April when both the waterfall and the river are at their fullest. You'll find it five kilometres away from the A4 Highway (there's a small sign that'll point you in the right direction), but the path can be tricky to navigate so make sure you're wearing your sturdiest footwear. Its remoteness only adds to its splendour – make a day of it by trekking further into the surrounding landscapes.

Sri Lanka is brimming with places that boast their own fascinating tales, and **Asupini Ella** is no different. According to legend, this dramatic waterfall in Aranayake was named

after a king who, upon his return from war, played an ill-fated joke on his loved ones by signalling that he had been killed in action, prompting his distraught wives to jump to their deaths in despair. Admire its haunting beauty and pack your binoculars so you can marvel at the many different bird species that call this lush setting home.

If you could custom-build a picture-perfect waterfall, it may well resemble **St. Clair's Falls** in Talawakele. Tucked away among the verdant green valleys of the Saint Clair Tea Estate, the waterfall cascades over three rocky outcrops into a large pool, creating a scene that's straight out of a fairy-tale. Slip on your swimwear and enjoy a cooling dip in the shimmering water while soaking up its stunning natural beauty.



## WHERE TO EAT IN...

### New York

Michelin-star-winning chef Mathieu Palombino, founder of Motorino, the lip-smackingly good New York pizzeria, shares his favourite Big Apple eateries



**The Belgian-born, French-trained chef first moved to New York in 2000 taking the culinary world by storm by opening his flagship restaurant Motorino (you'll find the latest addition to**

**his worldwide repertoire at JA Ocean View Hotel in Dubai Marina).**

**BREAKFAST** If you only get one chance to eat breakfast in the city, **Joe Junior** in Gramercy is a must-visit. An old-school favourite, the diner serves all the classics; griddle eggs and hash, pancakes, omelettes and fried potatoes. If, by any chance, breakfast turns into a lunch affair, burger lovers in New York swear by their cheeseburger.

**LUNCH** Located in St Mark's Place in the East Village, **Café Mogador** has been serving delectable Moroccan food since 1983, and has always been a favourite of mine. My go-to dish is the lamb tagine, and the couscous is the best you'll ever taste. Be sure to end your meal with a cup of mint tea. For classic New York vibes, **Katz's Deli** [205 E Houston St] should be your bistro of choice. You can call it a tourist trap, but it doesn't get more New York than the pastrami sandwich at Katz's. It holds up perfectly with sour pickles (don't even think about asking for half-sour).



**DINNER** If you're looking for a laid-back spot to chill, **Cipriani Downtown** [376 W Broadway] is sure to impress. Order the zesty chicken curry with rice pilaf. Alternatively, **La Mela** [167 Mulberry St] is the only restaurant worth its weight in Little Italy. My favourite dish is the Spaghetti Alle Vongole, made with fresh clams and plenty of garlic. But you can't go wrong with the Calamari Fritti, either. In the summer, you can eat alfresco. Just save some space for a gelato from **Ferrara Bakery & Cafe** [195 Grand St] on the way back to your hotel.

**FLY AND DRIVE.** It's now even easier to arrange the road trip of your dreams through dnata Travel, which can hook you up with three car rental brands – Hertz Corporation, Dollar Rent a Car and Thrifty Car Rental – around the world. So whether you're dreaming of driving along Australia's Great Ocean Road, America's Route 66, or Scotland's North Coast 500, there's no excuse not to book. [dnatatravelcarrental.com](http://dnatatravelcarrental.com)



The Roof

## 3 REASONS WHY

### CABARET

There was never a shred of doubt that a supper club designed by Ian Schrager (he of New York's legendary Studio 54) for late-night revelry was going to be the city's go-to spot after dark. But this clandestine, velvet-draped spot in the hotel's basement (one way down is via an unmarked door at the side of the hotel's main restaurant) serves up a fair amount of flair both on and off the tables, with innovative cabaret shows backed by excellent food.

### THE ROOF

Conceived as a garden in the sky, this sleek open-air space comprises a lounge setting, bar, restaurant, plunge pool – and one of the finest panoramic views in all of Barcelona. Yet it's the fact that it perches you high among the historic buildings of the city's most atmospheric district (and above the iconic food-filled Santa Caterina Market) that makes this such a special spot to drink-in the unique charm of the city.

### PENTHOUSES

Not content to house just the one penthouse, The Barcelona Edition boasts two. Impeccably styled throughout, they feature separate living, dining and kitchen areas (the latter with its own service entrance) and a marble-lined bathroom complete with an oversized soaking tub, custom-made amenities, and city views. Outside, however, is their finest attraction – a magnificent shaded roof terrace draped in native plants and flowers.

## The Barcelona Edition is the city's coolest spot

Say “*hola*” to this luxury boutique hotel in the culture-packed El Born District





## How to photograph THE EGYPTIAN PYRAMIDS



**Seif Amr (@seifamro) tells us  
how to capture the scale and  
tell a story**

### Set up before sunrise

Arriving early not only means you get the best lighting, but also gives you ample time to set up your shot before the crowds descend.

### Find the perfect spot

Stroll around until you reach a point where all three pyramids align – it's key to achieving the wow factor. I suggest making a beeline for the Panoramic view of the Pyramids, an elevated spot that boasts stunning 360-degree views of the surrounding landscape.

### Know your lenses

When capturing a shot from a distance, I recommend using a narrow lens like the (70-200mm) to increase the depth of field and get the whole scene in focus. This way, your photo stands out.

### Add a human element

If possible, take some companions along for the ride. One of the most striking features of the pyramids is their enormity, and adding people into the frame helps to convey their grand scale.





# 5 OF THE BEST

## Local glamping spots

Comfortably wild and stunningly remote, bed down under the stars at our favourite glamping spots in the UAE

### 1 SEDR TRAILERS RESORT, HATTA

This adventure playground on the banks of Hatta Dam is one of the hippest glamping spots around. Be sure to arrive early, as all the Airstream style trailers are allocated on first come, first served basis. Each have a private viewing deck for soaking up sunset views of the majestic Hatta mountains.

### 2 MLEIHA OVERNIGHT CAMPING EXPERIENCE, SHARJAH

A great choice for history buffs, this curated camping experience by Mleiha Archaeological Centre includes a trip to Mleiha Archaeological Museum, where you can marvel at relics dating to the Stone Age. A barbecue

dinner, stargazing and stories around the campfire follow before you retreat to your tent for the night. The next morning, rise and shine for desert adventures, from guided nature hikes to biking.

### 3 LONG BEACH CAMPGROUND, RAS AL KHAIMAH

If you prefer your camping with a side of sea views, this beachside marvel is sure to impress. Start your day with sunrise yoga on the shore, tackle the waterpark obstacle course and be pampered at the alfresco spa. (Open on Thursdays and Fridays.)

### 4 SONARA CAMP, DUBAI

If tucking into a feast of local dishes while

watching free-roaming wildlife is a holiday goal then this luxe camping spot may be the one for you. Located in the Dubai Desert Conservation Reserve, you can rest your head in one of four nomadic tents (each sleeps up to four people), with a delicious breakfast included.

### 5 FULL MOON CAMPING, ANANTARA SIR BANI YAS ISLAND RESORTS, ABU DHABI

If you want to reconnect with nature, this new camping experience is just the ticket. Your action-packed itinerary includes a walk in the wadi, and a wildlife drive around the stunning island. Available each month during the full moon. *Turn to page 22 for another luxury camping spot we rate...*





# SHORE THING

Magic moments are guaranteed at OBLU SELECT at Sangeli

## Make a secret agent style entrance.

The Maldivian magic begins the moment you touch down at Malé International Airport, with the island nation's sun-drenched resorts either a thrilling seaplane flight or speedboat ride away. Sangeli is a 50-minute speedboat ride from the airport, so get set to feel the wind in your hair as you cruise to shore.

**Stay in an overwater villa.** As luxury holidays go, it's hard to beat the special feeling of staying in your very own villa perched over the ocean. The resort's

Deluxe Overwater Pool Villas have steps leading from your private sundeck down into the lagoon so you can take a restorative swim whenever the mood takes you.

**Live the all-inclusive lifestyle.** Stop worrying about bills racking up and enjoy your castaway-style adventure to the max by going all-inclusive. The Serenity Plan at Sangeli invites you to enjoy the island's luxuries for one price, from dreamy accommodation to mouthwatering dining options, and selected drinks on tap. Plus, it offers all those activities and excursions you'll want to cram into your trip, including sunset fishing and stand-up paddle boarding.

**Swim with the fishes.** A dream destination for snorkelling and scuba diving enthusiasts, the Maldives is teeming with exotic marine life. SSI and PADI courses are available at Sangeli's TGI Dive & Watersports Centre, with a

multi-lingual team of experts on hand to take you on a guided tour of the underwater marvels, including the outer reefs and inner lagoon, which is home to a variety of small reef-fish species.

## Bliss out with a spa treatment.

Hearing the waves lap the shore as you're being pampered adds an extra soothing touch to the experience. Plump for an Ayurvedic treatment at Elena Spa, which enjoys a scenic setting on the resort's One Banyan Island.

A treatment room at Elena Spa



Deluxe Beach Villa with Pool





**OBLU** SELECT  
AT SANGELI • MALDIVES

Witness the fusion of contemporary design with Maldivian touch at OBLU SELECT at Sangeli, located in the north-western tip of the Malé Atoll. An ideal romantic destination, it offers the discerning traveller a hassle-free beach holiday experience, through the resort's unique all-encompassing holiday plan; The SERENITY™ plan. Boasting stand-alone beach villas, water villas and exclusive honeymoon villas, specialty fine dining restaurants and diving and snorkeling in some of the most exotic locations.

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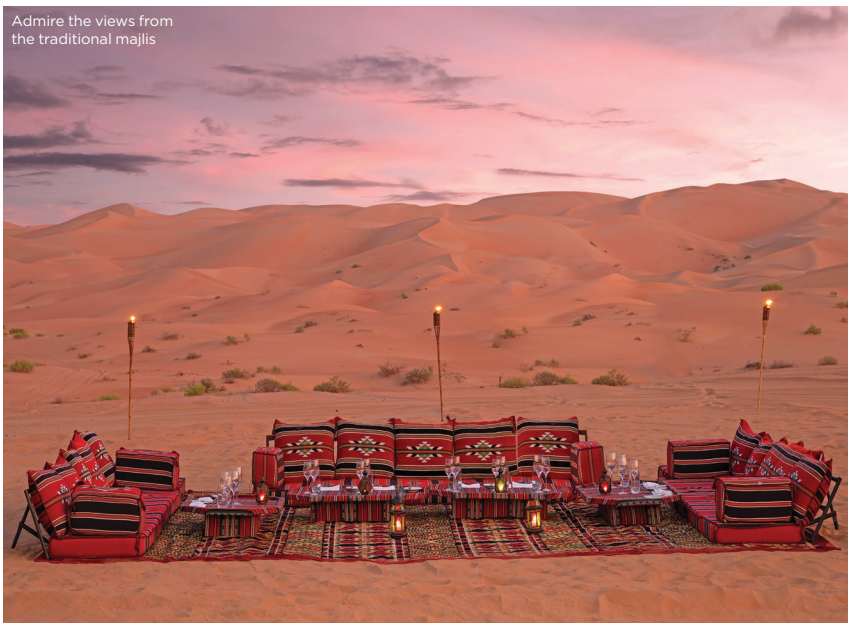
# SHIFTING SANDS

Bed down in the dunes at this luxury resort in the Abu Dhabi desert, which has recently unveiled a captivating new overnight camping experience

**A**s bucket-list travel experiences go, spending a night under the stars in the grounds of the world's most Instagrammable hotel is hard to beat. With its majestic location in the Empty Quarter, on the outskirts of Abu Dhabi (around 90 minutes by car from the city centre), Qasr Al Sarab Desert Resort by Anantara is a magnet for intrepid travellers and its new Camp Nujum, Camp of the Stars experience is attracting a new wave of adventurers.

Blending a Bedouin-style ambience with modern comforts, the camp offers unobstructed views of the caramel-coloured sands and the native wildlife that roams freely, alongside a fantastic line-up of activities to keep you entertained. Arrive in good time to bask in the glow of the setting sun while

Admire the views from the traditional majlis





enjoying Arabic coffee and dates in the majlis. Next, the chefs will whip you up a feast of Arabic food cooked on the sizzling barbecue for dinner.

Those who wish to stay the night in the camp will wake up to a nourishing breakfast followed by a mesmerising show of falcons taking to the sky.

When you return to the main resort, you can set about discovering all of Qasr Al Sarab's original charms – of which there are many. From ancient hammam rituals that put your body through its paces to pampering spa treatments that incorporate indigenous ingredients, sunrise yoga sessions on the sand, and Bedouin style dining at Al Falaj, the resort's serene vibes are the perfect antidote to a busy lifestyle. Make it an experience to remember by staying in

one of the pool villas, which each have their own private plunge pool overlooking the desert. Couples seeking a romantic retreat will find all they need in a One Bedroom Pool Villa, whereas families can enjoy some splashing fun inside a Two or Three Bedroom Pool Villa. With luxurious amenities and intuitive service from a dedicated Villa Host on tap, a personalised experience is guaranteed.

***An overnight stay at Camp Nujum costs Dhs1,600 per person, inclusive of soft drinks, and Dhs2,000 per person with unlimited selected beverages. Special Summer Villa rates start from Dhs1,999 for stays between May to September 2020 and you can book online. To find out more, visit [anantara.com](http://anantara.com)***



A camel caravan in the Empty Quarter

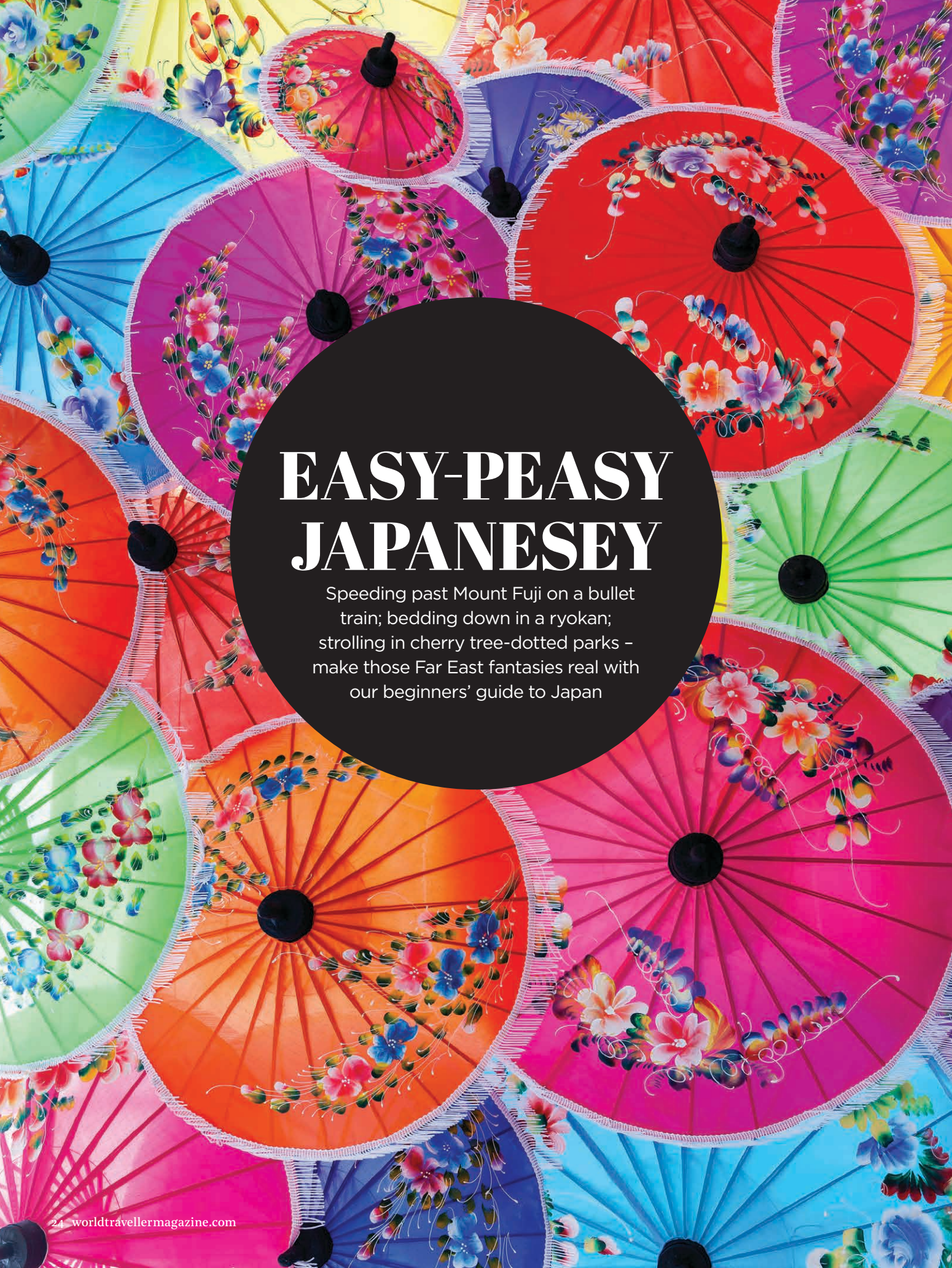


A stunning Pool Villa



An aerial shot of the resort





# EASY-PEASY JAPANESEY

Speeding past Mount Fuji on a bullet train; bedding down in a ryokan; strolling in cherry tree-dotted parks - make those Far East fantasies real with our beginners' guide to Japan



## BIG IN JAPAN

Think of Japan and you'll picture these icons. Here's how to experience them...

### Mount Fuji

Good news: if all you want is a glimpse, on clear days (usually in winter) you can see Fuji-san from some of Tokyo's skyscrapers, or more reliably, out of the window of the Shinkansen bullet train en route to Osaka or Kyoto (about 45 minutes into the journey). Want to get closer? The lakes at Fuji's base — Kawaguchi, Saiko, Shoji and Yamanaka — provide year-round jumping-off points for walks or kayaking trips. But if you're determined to join the thousands who climb to the 3,776-metre summit each year, you'll need to visit between July and early September, and dedicate 11 to 16 hours to the challenging ordeal (see [fujisan-climb.jp](http://fujisan-climb.jp)).

### Geishas

Geishas, and their apprentices, maikos, are traditional artist-entertainers skilled in song, dance and the art of conversation. If you want a one-to-one, expect to shell out — in Kyoto, where you'll find the highest concentration, you'll pay hundreds of dollars for a privately hosted evening, plus more for food and drink (high-end hotels can arrange this). Alternatively, ask your tour operator if it can arrange an affordable group experience, or hang out in Kyoto's historic Gion district at dusk (in Tokyo, try Asakusa's Kannonura Street; in Niigata, the Furumachi district). This is the time the geishas are hurrying to their appointments and you might just spot them for free.

### The Tea Ceremony

Tea ceremonies are silent, meditative events, in which a kimono-wearing host gracefully mixes and serves thick, bitter matcha tea (it's the aesthetics that are the point). There are complex rules about where to sit, how to handle cups and when to eat your wagashi sweets, but you'll get full instructions. Most, such as those available in the tea heartland of Uji (near Kyoto), last about 20 minutes — long enough, if you're doing it the traditional way, kneeling on the tatamimat flooring!

### Ryokans

Traditional inns — with no-shoes allowed tatami floors, shoji paper screens and, often, onsen hot springs — are found throughout Japan. Many are unexpectedly large and modern, with extensive facilities — see [ryokan.or.jp](http://ryokan.or.jp) and [ryokancollection.com](http://ryokancollection.com) for top selections. On arrival, ryokans supply you with yukata robes and slippers, and it's acceptable (expected, in fact) that you'll wear these around the hotel, even in lounges or dining areas. Dinner is often served at a set time, sometimes in your room (don't be late) and will consist of numerous dishes, from sashimi to cockle-warming nabe stew.

Rice, miso soup and pickles will follow, before a light dessert.

### Karaoke

Firstly, don't panic: karaoke bars in Japan have private rooms, so no one will hear you. Secondly, choose a chain with English songs — the best are Big Echo ([bigecho.jp](http://bigecho.jp)), Uta Hiroba ([utahiro.com](http://utahiro.com)) and Karaoke Kan. The price is based on time of day (pre-5pm weekdays is cheapest), time spent (half an hour or an hour), room size, and whether you buy any food and drink packages. Expect to pay from \$4 for a brief Wednesday lunch session, to upwards of \$40pp for a long evening.



A traditional Japanese tea ceremony



Women wear the traditional Japanese kimono while strolling through a park in Osaka that's bursting with cherry blossom

## Onsen

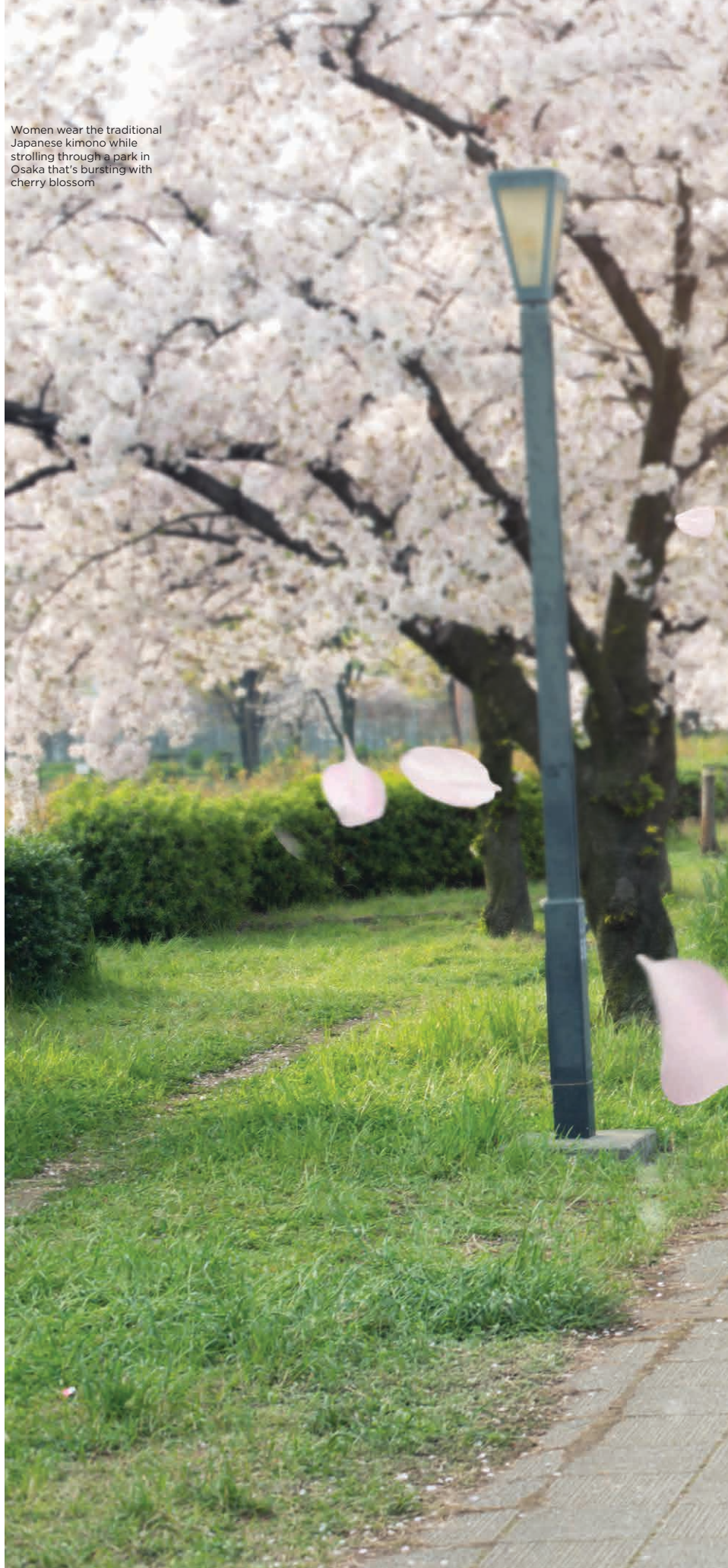
You may have a romantic vision of steaming rock pools cloaked in forest — and, while these do exist, know that the majority of onsen hot springs are slightly clinical indoor affairs. With very few exceptions, genders are strictly separated and swimming costumes are banned (it's birthday suits only, folks). Almost every onsen posts guidelines inside the bathing areas to avoid foreigner faux pas, but the other main rules are: no tattoos allowed (if you have a small one, cover it with a plaster); wash your body thoroughly with soap before entering the pools (sit on the shower stool, don't stand); and never let your small towel (there to protect your modesty) touch the water — when bathing, simply rest it on your head or leave it at the side.

## Sumo

Catching a sumo tournament in action can be tricky, as basho only occur six times a year, in Tokyo, Osaka, Nagoya or Fukuoka. If your visit coincides, buy tickets online, then pop in anytime during the daylong sessions (a couple of hours is usually enough). If not, you can still get a sumo 'experience' by visiting Tokyo's Ryogoku district's stables (beya), where the wrestlers live and train. Ask your tour operator to arrange.

## Bullet Trains

The famously fast Shinkansen (which can reach up to 320kph) isn't one train, but a network that runs between the country's main hubs. Comfy and faultlessly punctual, it's a no-brainer way to get between Tokyo and Kyoto, and plenty of other places, too, if you invest in a Japan Rail Pass. But the pass excludes transport on Nozomi, the fastest train service, so if your heart is set on zipping along at top speeds, you'll need to splash out separately.





### Cherry Blossom

From a barely-there flush to neon bright bubble-gum, Japan has countless varieties of sakura (cherry trees) in a thousand shades of pink. In Tokyo's Ueno Park and Shinjuku Gyoen, friends congregate to clink glasses under rosy canopies; elsewhere, you'll often find trees surrounding important cultural spots, such as castles. And while April is when they're most famously blooming, flowers can be spotted as early as February in the country's southern reaches. No worries, then, if you can't make peak sakura season: come earlier — in February or March — when the equally beautiful, but lesser-known, plum blossoms are on show.





## THE FIRST-TIMER'S ADVENTURE

You're finally going to the Land of the Rising Sun. But where to start? Right here, with our essential two-week, step-by-step guide to the must-sees

### Days 1-2

#### TOKYO, FOR CAPITAL FUN

You've arrived! At your Tokyo airport, start by picking up the Japan Rail Pass you booked in advance via [jrailpass.com](http://jrailpass.com). You'll need it: the next two weeks will involve a lot of train journeys. For now, you have two days to explore Japan's mesmerising, frenetic capital.

### Day 3

#### NIKKO, FOR SCENERY AND SHRINES

Sensory overload? Time to head away from the capital on a day-trip. Aim for Nikko, tucked in mountains to the north, where forests envelop the opulent Toshogu Shrine, the last resting place of Tokugawa Ieyasu, the 17th-century Shogun. Along with nearby Futarasan Shrine and the Rinno-ji Buddhist temple,

it is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and is well worth the fiddly journey (30 minutes by the Shinkansen bullet and local trains, then a 30-minute walk) for its 42 structures, wrought by 15,000 artisans and adorned with gold leaf and carvings (spot the 'Hear no evil, speak no evil, see no evil' monkeys at the stable). Keep your energy levels up with a trout pressed-sushi ekiben (boxed lunch) from Tobu Nikko station or try the local speciality yuba (soy milk skin) from Nikko Yubamaki ZEN, between the station and the shrine.

### Day 4

#### KAMAKURA, FOR SEASIDE AND HISTORY (OR MORE TOKYO)

Desperate for one more day in Tokyo? Now's your chance. Otherwise, hop

on the Yokosuka main-line train from Tokyo station, bound for historic Kamakura (about one hour). This walkable seaside town, easily seen in a day, was once the political heart of medieval Japan and is studded with shrines, temples and a vast, 13-metre-high Great Buddha, its bronze exterior now green after eight centuries of typhoons and tsunamis. Wander down to Yuigahama Beach — a favourite with surfers — and stock up on bird-shaped Hato Sable cookies by the station, before returning to Tokyo.

### Days 5-6

#### HAKONE, FOR HOT SPRINGS

Hakone, a popular mountain spa retreat, can be done as a day-trip from Tokyo (trains go regularly from Shinjuku



station; 90 minutes), but as you're here to unwind, allow two nights — the area is famous for its onsen hot springs. Take a speedy morning Odakyu Line 'Romance Car' (not included in your rail pass: buy a two-day Hakone Freepass, which includes this quick train and all Hakone transport). Look out for the iconic profile of Mount Fuji on the way, before dropping your bags at KAI Hakone, a tatami-matted ryokan with onsen overlooking rushing streams and forest. You'll be back later for a soak, an in-room massage and a multi-course, traditional ryokan feast taken in a private dining room. But first, get out. Take in the active volcanic scenery on Hakone's classic, well-signposted sightseeing circuit: a cliff-hugging bus ride, followed by a half-hour cruise across Lake Ashi, a cable car over

steaming, sulphur-bleached landscapes, a vertiginous funicular and then, finally, a winding historic train, operated by a white-gloved conductor. Factor in stops at the waterside Hakone Shrine, shop-stuffed Gora town and Owakudani, to eat a 'black egg' (cooked in sulphur springs, it's said to lengthen your life by seven years) — the route takes five to six hours. The next day, spend a low-key morning wandering round the Hakone Open-Air Museum or one of the many other museums, or bob in soaking tubs mocked up to look like giant bowls of ramen or saké at hot-spring theme park Yunessun. Genders are mixed and swimming costumes worn. Now hike the hills prior to sweet fermented rice drinks at 400-year-old Amazake-chaya Tea House, a brief bus ride east of the Hakone Shrine.



Soak up the steamy views at Ōwakudani, a volcanic valley with active sulphur vents and hot springs



## Days 7-9

### KYOTO, FOR CULTURE

Rise early for the train from Hakone-Yumoto station to Odawara city (a 15-minute ride) and join the Tokaido Shinkansen bullet train westbound to Kyoto (two to three hours). Steeped in centuries of history, the ancient imperial capital is Japan's cultural heart, with 17 UNESCO World Heritage sites. Mitigate the inevitable crowds by avoiding the cherry blossom and autumn seasons, and by renting bikes or sharing taxis instead of enduring the squeeze of the busy bus network. It's also worth hitting major sites early.

Visit the Imperial Palace and 17th-century Nijo Castle on arrival. Then check in at Enso Anjo, a hotel spread over five historic buildings. A walk away is the Nishiki produce market and Yasaka Shrine, beautifully illuminated at night. At 5.30pm, spot geishas in nearby Gion and Pontocho areas. Don't be fooled by costumed tourists — and reckon on crowds. Kyoto's eastern edge is fringed with noteworthy Buddhist temples. Spend day two on foot, starting at 6am at Kiyomizu-dera for a tranquil start in this, the city's most popular temple. By 8am it's busy, so head for Sannenzaka and Ninenzaka slopes for teahouses old and new (try the Starbucks Tea Parlour, in a 100-year-old house). Marvel at grand-scale Chion-in temple and eclectic Nanzen-

ji, with its giant pines, rock garden and aqueduct, as you head north towards the gorgeous Philosopher's Path for a 30-minute canal-side stroll to Ginkaku-ji, the Silver Pavilion (spoiler alert — it's not silver, but the rock garden is sublime). There's a whole range of places to eat en route: try Jugo (opposite Mirokuin temple), or book Monk for seven hyper-local courses, including chrysanthemum pizza.

Start day three bright and early, photographing Kinkaku-ji, the Golden Pavilion, as soon as it opens at 9am, before clambering aboard Kyoto's only remaining tram, destination Arashiyama (22 minutes), to marvel at the towering Kitasaga Bamboo Grove. Spend the afternoon absorbed in temple contemplation (known as zazen) at Shorin-ji temple or winding down in a real Kyoto sento (public bath house).

Alternatively, head south to the famous Fushimi Inari Taisha Shrine and make the two-hour-plus hike through the tunnel of torii gates to the summit of Mount Inari. Raise a final glass to Kyoto while sipping your way through the Fushimi Saké District, before taking an evening Shinkansen bullet train west to Hiroshima (1hr 40min).

## Days 10-12

### HIROSHIMA, FOR REFLECTION

Be prepared for strong emotions when visiting the city that was the world's first to suffer an atomic bombing. Don't rush it: allow a full day in the contemplative Peace Memorial Park, entering via the Aioi bridge, the bomb's intended target on August 6, 1945. Across the Motoyasu river stands the A-Bomb Dome, one of a few buildings left standing. Onwards into the park is the Children's Peace Monument, topped with the figure of child victim Sadako Sasaki beneath an origami crane. Steel yourself for the Peace Memorial Museum, which includes a devastating exhibition of personal stories and artefacts. Later, for relief, take an evening bicycle tour along the riverside, passing Hiroshima Castle, followed by an izakaya crawl around un-touristy Yokogawa neighbourhood.

Spend the next day exploring contemporary Hiroshima, with a downloadable architecture trail from Arch-Walk Hiroshima, featuring everything from public toilets resembling an origami crane to an incinerator created by Yoshio Taniguchi, the architect behind the smooth 2004 extension of MoMA in New York.

Take time to reflect at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial









## Days 13-14

Miyajima, for stunning spaces  
Make your final stop the vermilion 'floating' O-torii (Grand Gate) at Itsukushima Jinja a UNESCO-designated shrine on stilts in the Seto Inland Sea, off the island of Miyajima. Just 40 minutes from Hiroshima by train, you can 'do' Miyajima on a long day from Hiroshima, but it's better without the day-trippers. Check in at cheerful Mikuniya guesthouse by the shrine, and visit at 6.30am, when Ikutsushima opens, and you'll have its floating halls and walkways to yourself;

alternatively, go late afternoon, when the trails on Mount Misen — the 535-metre hiking peak at the island's centre — are deserted again. Check tide times ([visit-miyajima-japan.com](http://visit-miyajima-japan.com)) if you want to snap the O-torii 'floating', or take a sea-kayak tour ([paddlepark.com](http://paddlepark.com)). Miyajima is renowned for its wildlife, such as the tame deer in Omoto Park and naughty monkeys at the summit of Mount Misen, but Mikuniya warns guests to look out for tanuki (Japanese racoon dogs), which run off with people's shoes.





## Got more time?

**These three stops are also perfect for first-timers — sandwich one or all between Kyoto and Hiroshima**

### NAOSHIMA (1-3 DAYS)

Japan's 'art island' is Insta-famous thanks to its Yayoi Kusama spotted pumpkin sculptures, perched along the silvery-blue coastline. But art lovers will find a lot more to get excited about here, with three Tadao Ando-designed contemporary museums, including clifftop Benesse House (also a hotel, it's the place to stay). Don't miss the Art House Project, a series of quirky installations inside homes in a local village. You can see everything in a day or two, but allow a third if you want to visit some of Naoshima's neighbouring Setouchi Islands — less famous, but also art-filled.

### OSAKA (1-2 DAYS)

Japan's third-largest city is more compact and gritty (locals would say more fun) than Tokyo. It's just a 15-minute bullet train ride from Kyoto, too. Get stuck into okonomiyaki pancakes and shopping in neon Dotonbori; wander around the Kuromon Ichiba wet market (nearby 'kitchen street' Sennichimae Doguyasuji is famous for cheap Japanese crockery), and stroll by whitewashed Osaka castle (a reconstruction, but still pretty).

### NARA (1-2 DAYS)

Japan's 8th-century capital is a mini-Kyoto, with temples, landscaped gardens, tile-roofed Edo-era teahouses and roaming sika deer (adorable, although they bite). Gawp at the Buddha at Todai-ji, see the oldest wood structures on the planet at Horyu-ji, and pop over to Naramachi, the Old Town.

**This image:** O-torii rises from the sea  
**Right:** The Japanese sika deer is known for its distinctive spots





An aerial photograph of a tropical beach. The water is a vibrant turquoise color, transitioning to a lighter, sandy hue near the shore. A small, red beach hut with a matching umbrella stands on the white sand. The overall scene is serene and idyllic, representing the travel inspiration offered by the website.

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The historical Plaza  
de España in Seville

# Postcards

Stories from journeys  
far and wide

SEVILLE p36

GOA p42

ATHENS p48



**This page:** Boiled octopus in a spicy sauce **Opposite:** Seville heirloom oranges, which grow in abundance, taste sour like a lime and are delicious as a marmalade







# Orange crush

Seething — and scorching — in summer, Seville extends a calm, sun-warmed welcome out of season. Perfect, says Alicia Miller, for lazy sightseeing and laid-back tapas trawls



Clearly, someone had made a mistake. Not us: the paper-wrapped cones of glossy picante and mound of Manchego cheese that we'd devoured, perched on wooden stools in the riverside Triana Market, had been an exquisite choice. As was the foot-long bocadillo sandwich, with its crunchy, olive-oily bread.

The glasses of crisp fino sherry had evaporated, somehow, but plumping for their tangy freshness had been no error. No, the mistake was with our bill — because there's just no way that magnificent lunch had cost only \$15. Then again, that's Seville. The Mary Poppins of off-season city breaks, it's practically perfect in every way. Meal prices are low, even for platters of fat prawns or long-aged jamón. There is a buzzy nightlife and just the right amount of culture: enough to fill a long weekend, not enough to cause ticklist-induced stress. Best of all for my friend Katelyn and me — in desperate need of a midwinter minibreak — Seville has sunshine. Set inland near where Spain dips down to kiss Morocco, even in February, when Madrid may shiver with zero-degree lows and Barcelona's beaches can be swept by chilly winds, Seville is bathed in rays. More than that, Seville is Spain, or at least how you might imagine it. The Old Town, with its cobbled alleyways and wrought-iron-festooned houses, brims with pocket-sized tapas bars and chic shops selling felt sombreros. Vast sun-beaten squares give way to boulevards featuring weathered churches, from which emerge regal old ladies, dressed elegantly in black. Moorish tiling awaits in the shade of orange trees, while markets display ripe tomatoes bigger than a boxer's fist. And, loveliest of all, streets ring out with the rhythmic click of flamenco — after all, that visceral, stirring art form was born right here. For all these reasons — plus that friendly February weather forecast — after years of letting Seville languish on our must-go lists, Katelyn and I had finally taken the plunge and booked. As we stepped off the airport shuttle bus and onto Avenida Carlos V in the city centre, the sky was radiant blue, bare but for a wisp of cloud. Our hotel, Alfonso XIII, was no less cheering a sight: a rambling pile, commissioned by

## ‘THE SUN STREAMED DOWN, BUT UNDER SHADY ARCHWAYS LADIES IN RUFFLED DRESSES PERFORMED FLAMENCO FOR SPARE EUROS’

Spanish royalty for the 1929 Exposition, it echoes the drama of Andalucían Moorish builds with elaborate marble floors, an archway-lined open-air courtyard, and intricate gold and blue tiling. Seville's chicest descend here to drain glasses of orange wine, as sticky-sweet as liquid marmalade, to gossip over afternoon tea, or to people-watch on terraces. And for this long weekend — we had three days planned in the city — we'd join them. 'Are you sure we can afford this?' Katelyn whispered nervously as we climbed the grand staircase; bellboys whisking our bags away, coiffed ladies drifting by us to the lobby. But price wasn't a problem. Being low season, this Moorish-magnificent pad's rates had dipped below \$250 per night — a fraction of what they'd be in spring or autumn. With ample time to explore the city, we could dedicate equal time to lazy lie-ins. We could chatter over magnificent brunches and watch grey-haired local businessmen strike deals over pan con tomate. Here, even doing nothing would feel like sightseeing... And, with winter weather like this, doing nothing would be bliss — as we learnt that afternoon, strolling along Seville's snaking river. Shuffling aimlessly, we revelled in the sun-sparkle on the waters. In that moment, museums or palaces seemed beside the point: we didn't need anything more than this gorgeous afternoon, with street performers' prancing puppets in the warm streets or kids clutching ice cream, laughing as they passed by. That evening, it was time to explore properly. The sun was setting and we plunged into Seville's photogenic ancient streets just as dusky skies washed everything in violet. We stumbled on pocket squares littered with tables of sangria-sipping locals, down sleepy alleys, wooden

doors, slightly ajar, hinted at tranquil, fountained courtyards. In the rambling cathedral square, we paused — the towering palms, minaret-style tower and desert-gold stone formed a striking, exotic vision in the still evening light. Pretty it all was, but it was dinner time, and now we needed more than postcard views to satiate us. Zigzagging around a few more corners, we found an atmospheric old tapas bar and pressed open the door. In Seville, tapas bars aren't just places to eat: they're societal melting pots. On any given evening, in any given bar, you'll see families catching up over croquettes and salmorejo (bread-thickened tomato soup); twentysomething friends gossiping over grilled razor clams; flat-capped old men nibbling melty cheeks and thick-cut fries. All perch at polished wooden tables, then, it's on to the next plate, the next bar, the next conversation. Whether you're in an old stalwart, peeling bull-fight posters lining walls and hams hung from the ceiling, or a slick modern space turning out dressed-up dishes — and Seville has plenty of both — it always plays out the same. Everyone eats, and celebrates, as if it's their last meal. Katelyn and I slipped in the side door of Casa Morales — mustard-yellow, and lined with broad terracotta sherry vats. Silver-haired couples in smart gilets leaned over the bar, relaying drink orders and grabbing plates of paprika-drenched octopus and salt cod on toast. We took a moment to survey the scene then joined them, emerging with our own spread to scoff. We clinked glasses merrily, seeing them off in a single gulp. The atmosphere was infectious — is there anywhere on Earth quite as joyful as Spain? Certainly, no-one we met was going to let a little thing like winter get in the way of a good party.

Credit: Alicia Miller / The Sunday Times Travel Magazine / News Licensing

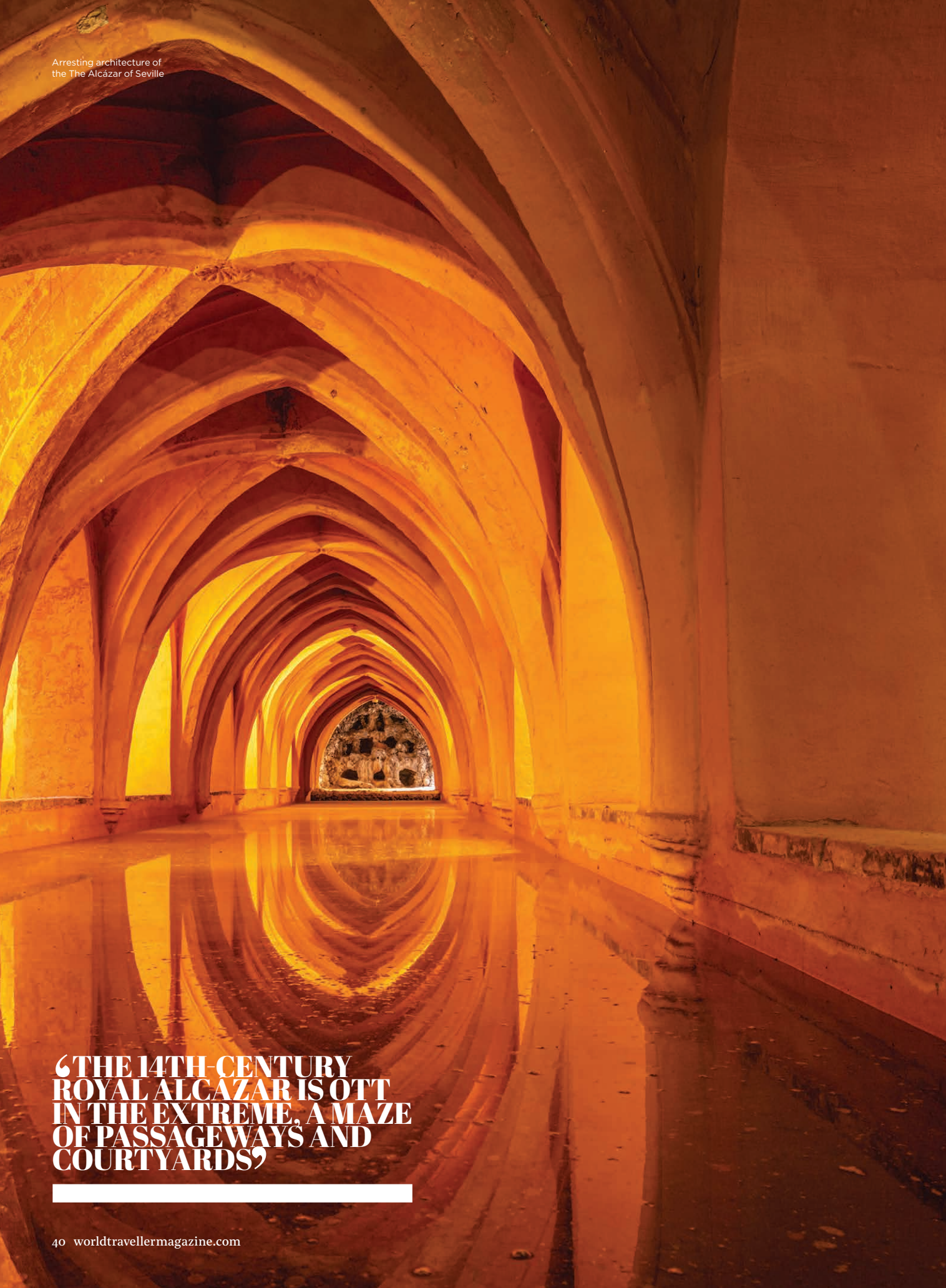




**This page, clockwise from above left:**  
 Colourful ceramic tiles adorn the alcoves and arches of the Plaza de España; a flamenco dancer flutters her fan; the old city comes to life in the evenings; traditional Spanish tortilla is a must-try







Arresting architecture of  
the Alcázar of Seville

**‘THE 14TH-CENTURY  
ROYAL ALCAZAR IS OTT  
IN THE EXTREME, A MAZE  
OF PASSAGEWAYS AND  
COURTYARDS’**

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As for the next morning — we didn't quite see it. Our tapas bar stop had turned into a crawl — after all, it is the local way to make multiple stops in a night, nibbling a little at each place. But perhaps we overdid it. We emerged from our hotel just as the clocks hit noon, determined to blow the cobwebs from our brains. A day spent outside in the 18°C sunshine seemed the perfect remedy, and so we made for Seville's headliner sight: the 14th-century Royal Alcázar. This palace, originally Moorish, is OTT in the extreme. Its stone walls rise imposingly over the old centre; inside, a maze of passageways and courtyards reveal elaborate tiling and intricate yeseria plasterwork. Wandering around the palace, far less busy than it would be in high season, gave us goose pimples. We padded across the room in which Christopher Columbus bowed to Queen Isabella; we spotted orange trees in a sunken garden; we squinted under a ceiling shimmering with gold. By the time we emerged from the all-consuming depths, we felt simultaneously enriched and exhausted. Thankfully, there was nothing else on the agenda for the day — so we could, from there, simply mooch about. Winter is the best time for this in Seville, when the afternoon is warm, but never so hot you lose hours to shady siestas. There are plenty of sights, sure, but the best bits of the city are somewhat intangible. Head down a pedestrianised shopping street; wander past gilded bakeries stuffed with cream-filled cakes; climb up the cathedral belltower to look out over the city's jagged tile roofs — any one of these will give you that Seville feeling. Visit museums, but don't get too caught up in the art. In the late afternoon, the squares of the Museo de Bellas Artes are even more enticing than its Murillo masterpieces. And whatever you do, always factor in time for a lazy lunch. Our post-Alcázar feast at Triana Market, was a three-hour job. You'll never really 'do' Seville, though, until you experience flamenco. It's easy to write off this solemn song and dance as being for tourists, but ask a local and they'll disagree. They say the warbling

voices and foot-stomping beats evoke something deep; to them, flamenco says something words alone cannot express. One night, we shuffled into the Museo del Baile Flamenco and took our place on chairs by a small stage. In that cramped, warm room, we unknowingly boarded an emotional rollercoaster: hearing women wail; watching men stride thunderously across the stage as if headed for battle. We couldn't understand the words, but we felt the pain in their song; knew the urgency in their steps. It was an intense — and singularly Spanish — experience. On our last afternoon, after our last lunch — this time on battered squid and buttery prawns at the Feria Market, in the grungier, hipper north — we had time to kill before our flight. So we headed to Plaza de España, a square not far from our hotel. And what a square. Ringed by a Moorish-inspired building, with elaborate tiling, sculpted by a waterway and crowned with a fountain, it was a pure Seville masterpiece. The sun streamed down, but under shady archways ladies in ruffled dresses performed flamenco for spare euros; across the water pedal-boats chugged. On one side lay a park — a tranquil treasure trove of knobbly Liana trees. Keen to make the most of our last hours of warm weather, we fixed ourselves into one of Plaza de España's tiled alcoves. Maybe it was the sun, but conversation soon faltered and we felt our eyelids droop. It wasn't until the sun had shifted behind a cloud, plunging us into semi-shade, that we checked the time. 'Already 4pm?' exclaimed Katelyn, checking her phone. 'That must be a mistake.' No mistake. The slow, gentle pace of Seville had made the day rush past us. 'We should probably leave for the airport...' Her voice quickly trailed off. A shared look said it all. As the clouds shifted, and we were once again delivered into sun, we leaned back against the warm tiles. After all, when you find a city break that's practically perfect in every way, you need to close your eyes and savour it, even for just a few minutes more.

***Inspired to travel? To book a trip, call 800 DNATA or visit [dnatatravel.com](http://dnatatravel.com)***







# Return to paradise

**Goa** was the place for hippies, happy-clappies and other work-shirking hedonists. But times have changed. Nick Redman — a winter idler there decades ago — returns to discover its modern day appeal



Low and cubic above the sands of Vagator, it could be a clutter of giant white shoeboxes. Set against the familiar Indian beach scene

of crowds in rainbow fabrics and cattle, it might be LA. Whatever the vibe, my hotel — W Goa — is unlike the digs I recall from my first trip to India's hippie-chic paradise three decades ago. Which is a good thing, I think, as I check in for a few days.

The housey-pulsy music emanating from the hotel's Woobar is gentle, if relentless: the way once-clubbers now saddled with careers and mortgages are supposed to like it. I watch liquid sunsets from the indoor-outdoor lobby ('Living Room', in W Hotels-speak). I eat sushi and Thai at the restaurant, Spice Traders. And after 36 hours amid the sherbet-hued, purposefully mismatched modern furniture, I feel I've moved in with Ken and Barbie.

Call me a terminal nostalgic, but I'd always yearned to return to India, to Goa's golden sands — minus the mosquitoes, hard beds and new best friends with hygiene issues I'd encountered aged 25. Older and wider, I've sought the happy medium: a smart resort beside the same beach where I laid my (awful, embroidered) hat all those years ago. I'm far from Calangute and Candolim, irreparably changed by '90s development. And if Vagator Beach has gone massmarket (damn those jet-skis), the hotel does do a good Mojito: doctor's orders for a willing-but-wimpy India returnee, last here when T'Pau ruled the charts.

I relax into the clifftop pool scene, which morphs at dusk into a club of sorts. A DJ inside what looks like half an enormous eggshell plays for the rich and shameless from California, Italy, Mumbai and Dubai. I teeter on to the dance floor and it's all very Goa for grown-ups, although maybe I'm too grown-up — after a 7.15am Bollywood fitness workout on the lawn, I feel about 85. True, I did want somewhere comfy and contemporary, which the hotel is, but after another 24 hours of bass pulse and loud sofas, I realise I also want somewhere peaceful

The majestic Fort Aguada, on Sinquerim Beach, was built by the Portuguese



## ‘I’D LOOKED NORTH TO ASHWEM, SOUTH TO INFINITY — THERE WAS NO SIGN OF DEVELOPMENT, IT WAS AS IF I WAS GAZING AT A PHOTO OF MY ‘80S NOSTALGIA’

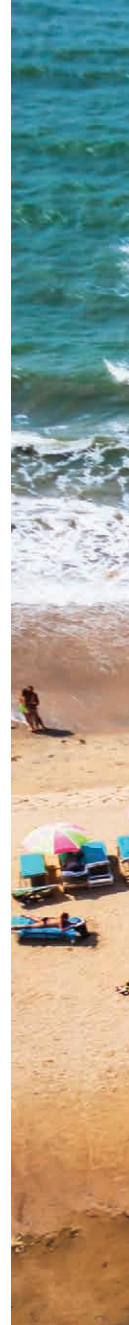
and genuinely Goan, too — if only for a day off. Two front-desk staff listen in and confer discreetly. One traces a finger north up a map, as if searching for buried treasure: Ashwem, a \$12, 40-minute taxi ride away.

Next day, as the drive takes me inland, it's not long before I'm getting reassuring flickers of real India: a flash of a cricket match, the teams clad in yellow; a swirl of shoppers and scooters around a white church in a small town, Siolem (Goa is 45% Catholic and only 55% Hindu). At a lonely junction a temple emerges, in shades of fizzy Love Hearts: pink, peach, blue and mint; then Ashwem. Refreshingly, it's how I recall Goa. Mostly...

‘Vous avez réservé une table?’

Valentine is the niece of Florence from Provence, long-time proprietor of La Plage restaurant. It basks below palms, sandy underfoot, accessed from the beach via lantern-topped carved doors. No speaker blare, no tie-dye, just deckchairs at low tables and dangling lamps.

Have I struck (old) gold? The place seemed to be working a grown-up Goa theme, serving mackerel tarts with tapenade or royal crab and seafood risotto to bikini'd guests from Moscow and Rome, to discreetly moneyed Mumbaikers and to start-up entrepreneurs from Bangalore. I could have stayed all day on the vast sands: accepting good-natured entreaties to having a foot massage; ducking into a







Goan seafood curry is traditionally served with kokum juice and small prawns

beach-shack bar for a sweet-salt lime soda; perusing the Eurasian-fusion bags and espadrilles sold by Yashu, the nut-brown-tanned Sardinian, who was part of a low-key community here for six months of the year. 'Morjim, Arambol, Ashwem... This northern part is hippie-chic Goa now,' she told me.

I said it was all terribly chi-chi, which may have sounded like a bad thing — she searched for a response. 'You will like the south of Goa. Amazing. Cola Beach.'

Barefoot hippie beauty? I took note.

Anand, who picked me up the next morning for a few days of discovery, was the calmest guide a grown-up-Goaseeker could wish for, and the most informative: 'Back in the '60s

the hippies first found their 'natural' uniform, here,' he explained, as we motored off past waterlogged meadows of listless buffaloes. 'Even in the '90s it was a trend for Indian people to come to the beaches and "sightsee", as it were. They'd never seen white people like that before.' In 2001, the phenomenon propelled Goa to Bollywood fame in the coming-of-age drama *Dil Chahta Hai* (What the Heart Wants).

'And the much-loved Chapora Fort was a key location,' he said. 'Which really added to the film's popularity.'

I told Anand I'd climbed up to it from W Goa in the silver dawn light that morning. I'd loved its worn rust-red walls; I'd looked north to Ashwem, south to infinity — there was no



# CICADAS CHATTERED IN THE UPLIT UNDERGROWTH; A SLATE-GREY-BLUE INFINITY POOL SLAPPED SPORADICALLY; WHITE STARS WERE PIN-SHARP, FAR ABOVE THE PALMS?

sign of development, it was as if I was gazing at a photo of my '80s nostalgia. I'd seen trawlers trailing white foam, heading home full of mackerel and catfish. Looking out over space-blue Arabian Sea horizons, Chapora is one of many Goan forts of heart-stopping drama, even more so for their plainness: stony memorials of Muslim rule, then centuries of Portuguese domination — not until 1961 did the latter end 450 years of control, decades after the British.

Later that tranquil day, under a cloudless sky, I'd walked the empty ramparts of Reis Magos Fort. It rose over the Mandovi estuary (where the Goan capital, Panaji, clusters) radiating calm, with its white walls and scarlet pan tiles, and even the original cannons still trained on the skyline over which old enemies appeared. Less serene, though, was the Death Hole, fed with boiling oil to deep-fry those who breached the gates; and grim, too, were the cells of solitary confinement: 'Used in the '50s Goa Liberation Movement,' said Anand, 'when Reis Magos was a prison.'

Sobering thoughts for a beachgoer — but I was loving having left my lounger. If I hadn't, I'd never have seen the churches of abandoned Old Goa (the precursor to Panaji town). Finished off by malaria, it was a mausoleum of ancient faith caught in slow-grow jungle, haunted and divine. In the Chapel of the Weeping Cross, gold Corinthian columns supported the side altars. In the Basilica of Bom Jesus — resplendent in lung-pink stone — an official with a mic tried heroically, but hopelessly, to halt the selfies with the preserved remains of Saint Francis Xavier. The mummy was assaulted in 1953 by a pilgrim who bit off a big toe and tried to run away with it. You don't get foot treatments like that in Ashwem.

We moved on to lovely Panaji, faintly evocative of Lisbon or Madrid. With wrought-iron window grilles and a ripple

of roof tiles, Panaji's cobbled Fontainhas quarter is the most concentrated chunk of old Portugal in Goa. Cool dishevelment hung around the drowsy late-pm streets: the facades painted indigo and turmeric; alleys brimming with plants; the bakery, Confeitaria 31 de Janeiro, 75 years old, filled with rose-topped chocolate cakes.

I left Vagator the next day, for Ahilya by the Sea, a remarkable — very grown-up — boutique hideaway full of the owner's finds from Turkey, Burma and beyond. That night, I could make out the glow of Panaji from its lawns: a rim of urban orange and white light far across the black estuary waters. Cicadas chattered in the uplit undergrowth; a slate-grey-blue infinity pool slapped sporadically; white stars were pin-sharp, far above the palms — a lonely moment to make you shiver, realising the speeding arc of our time on Earth, which only later decades reveal as real. But chef Jason made edifying Goan-infused dishes for us guests to eat under the banyan tree: chilli fish of the day in coconut milk, and masala mussels in shells as big as castanets.

Only the beach was lacking. There was a fine one, but it was a working one, for vivid fishermen's boats, not swimmers. Yet by moving down here from Vagator, Anand advised, I could search more easily for Goa's promised beautiful barefoot south. One morning, after a 6am breakfast, we set off, fuzz-gold light upon the tarmac ahead. Full-on Goan scenes of memory were soon unfolding. We passed once-elegant bungalows, low-roofed at crossroads, peering from greenery like Lisbon ladies who had moved here in colonial times, only to lose their money and minds, ageing in lichen, liver-spotted solitude.

The Portuguese brought chillies from Africa; cashew-nut trees from Brazil, too, to control soil erosion during the Monsoon. These produce violently scarlet 'apples', which hang like evil

fruit in a fairy tale. The Western Ghats began to rise, clad in dewy deciduous forest — teak, Indian rosewood — and we neared Chandor village, for the venerable Menezes Braganza House. Here was a musty, magical reminder of how historic Goa actually is, if you travel away from its touristy shores. Distantly related to the Portuguese family who built it 350 years ago, stern Judith led us past the Wedgwood set brought by the East India Company; the dining chairs ('Same type Queen Elizabeth uses in her Buckingham Palace'); the crystal chandelier from Belgium and the ablation set from Macau.

No photos,' Judith barked, admonishing a French couple. 'Always ask permission before you take.' She softened to tell the concluding story of family wealth sucked away by Goa's 1962 land reforms: 'I am overburdened, but God is always there to bless you.' And she was back on form for the 'voluntary' donations: 'This is my contribution box,' she said, with a flip of the lid and a rebuke to the French duo: 'It's 300 rupees, not 200.'

With that fond farewell, we were en route to the beaches of southern Goa where, if ever I come back, I want to spend an eternity. Agonda was so less 'Riviera' than the north, with simple cottages fronted by porches of wicker chairs in which retired people from Europe sat. Further south, at Palolem, was Alan from Londob with mates: here for a month for the 12<sup>th</sup> year running. 'There were more dogs than humans then, same as now.'

Later that day, one of two blissed-out ladies — in a car coming the other way — said, 'You're going to paradise,' when we asked for directions to Cola Beach. The approach was stony-bumpy, but finally I glimpsed sea and a flash of glampy canvas: Cola Beach Exclusive Tented Resort. I ordered a drink as the sun sank and already wished I could stay a whole winter. The rinse of the surf. The peace of the bay. It was as if time hadn't happened. I'd found it: grown-up and unruined. I promised myself I'd not wait another 30 years. By then, Goa, I'll be gone.

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Vibrant bungalows and towering palm trees on Palolem Beach





# Star Attraction

Ella Buchan heads to the **Athens Riviera**, a sun-drenched stretch of coast that's once again appealing to the jet set





**I**dip my toe in gingerly, then swiftly draw it back. Swirling and circling below the water's surface like tiny, shrunken sharks are lead-grey garra rufa, or 'doctor fish,' which have a peculiar taste for dead skin.

On my second attempt, I wade straight into the middle of the lake, trying not to think about what's lurking within these shallow, brackish waters. Instead, I focus on what's above them: the near-vertical limestone cliffs that wrap dramatically around the water; the lone lesser kestrel silhouetted against the cloudless sky; the sparrow-sized, tangerine-coloured dragonfly that flits past my nose.

I sense a sandpapery smooch on my ankle and lunge into a messy front crawl, splashing past a bobbing, chattering group of Greek women. Their eyes crinkle in brief amusement before they return to their conversation.

What would Jackie Onassis make of this, I wonder. I'm not sure the former first lady, or indeed any of the 1960s starry set who holidayed here on the Athens coast, would have relished having their toes nibbled, even if it is a bona fide spa treatment. Jackie O bathed in Lake Vouliagmeni (where I am now), a cavern whose roof collapsed circa 320BCE, the rock eroded by salt water and hot springs. The allure of taking these temperate, mineral-rich thermal waters has drawn people for centuries; so too the honeyed sandy beaches that lace the coastline south of Athens.

The Athens Riviera, which gained its moniker in the 1950s, wiggles for 40-odd miles from the hectic ferry port of Piraeus, southwest of Athens, down to Cape Sounio, where the Temple of Poseidon, with its butter-yellow marble pillars, keeps watch. In the mid-century 'golden age of travel', when those with fat wallets and flexible schedules could jet around the world in style, this area rivalled the Côte d'Azur. Now the Four Seasons Astir Palace, which opened last summer, is bringing back some of that glamour following



# ‘THE ALLURE OF TAKING THESE TEMPERATE, MINERAL-RICH THERMAL WATERS HAS DRAWN PEOPLE FOR CENTURIES’

a two-year renovation estimated to have cost about \$150m.

This is the Greek debut of the luxury chain, which has refurbished Astir Palace, once the crowning glory of the Astir (‘star’) resort complex on the pine-clad Vouliagmeni Peninsula, which curls into the Aegean just north of the lake. The Astir project was started in 1954 as part of the postwar Greek government’s drive to attract tourists and cater for a growing Athenian upper class. First came the chic daytime hangout Astir

Beach, in 1959, its muscovado-like sand dotted with sunbeds and umbrellas. Then, two years later, 61 discreet bungalows launched the hotel.

The peninsula is scattered with kiosks and cafés, while a short walk in either direction leads to sleek restaurants perched on the bluffs, and public beaches where locals spread their towels and eat grilled seafood at open-sided tavernas.

For two decades, this was the place to see and not be seen, provided you could afford it. Members of the Athenian







**Opening pages:** Arion Sea View Room **These pages, clockwise from left:** A luxe marble bathroom; a room with a view; and the picturesque Astir Marina – all Four Seasons Astir Palace Hotel Athens







elite booked up the bungalows and Hollywood followed suit.

Joan Collins, Charlton Heston, Tony Curtis, Sean Connery, Jane Fonda... all came for the seclusion. Both Jimmy Carter and Nelson Mandela slept in the Presidential Suite at Arion, which opened in 1967 as the resort's first hotel building, followed by Nafsika in 1980.

Frank Sinatra darted through the kitchens to escape fans. Brigitte Bardot allegedly employed a lookalike to sunbathe for the cameras while she ordered room service. And the shipping magnate Aristotle Onassis — known as a big tipper and a loud laughter — was a regular guest with his wife, Jackie O. Apparently this is where his daughter, Christina, learnt to waterski as a teenager.

Barack Obama was the hotel's last celebrity guest before it closed for a much-needed refurbishment in 2016. "Talk to any Athenians and they'll tell you a story about this place," says Melissa

Zormpa, a member of the marketing team. "Their grandma stayed here, their parents worked here, they used to come to the beach..."

Many have returned to find out what's changed — and the answer is, quite a bit. The main buildings, Arion and Nafsika, have new bars and restaurants — Mercato, an Italian trattoria with a huge sea-view terrace, and the seafood-focused Pelagos. The suites have been overhauled, with marble bathrooms, marshmallowy beds and contemporary Greek artwork. The main pool has sprouted an olive grove, with trees in planters dotted around the water. It probably didn't have underwater speakers in the 1960s. Nor did Bardot have her sunscreen applied in a computerised booth, which coats bodies in a fine mist similar to a tanning spray.

Yet there's a distinctly 1960s vibe to much of the décor, including the gold and pink accents in the cocktail lounge. The cigar bar, Aristotle's, pays homage

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to Onassis, while the waterside Taverna 37 remains in its original spot, serving classics such as saganaki (baked prawns in a rich tomato and feta stew) and sea urchin, which dissolves softly and saltily on the tongue.

The bungalows, still in their original shells, are most redolent of that golden era. The interiors have had a plush makeover, while the black-and-white awnings over the huge terraces are new (if decidedly retro). A few have private infinity pools, which wasn't a thing in the 1960s.





**These pages, above:** An aerial view of the tip of the pine-clad peninsula where the Four Seasons Astir Palace Hotel Athens is located

**Below:** The Ancient Greek temple of Poseidon at Cape Sounion

Amid the pines, and away from the hotel's pools, restaurants and general bustle, the bungalows are soothing retreats in a blue and grey palette that complements the Aegean.

I follow a path scattered with pine cones down to a deserted beach (the hotel has three) and wade into the shimmering teal water as a blood-orange sun seeps into the sea. A school of small fish casts wriggly shadows on the sandy seabed. They don't seem remotely interested in my feet, which is probably just as well. (Though I did eventually give in to the garra rufa and their ticklish kisses.) The cool dusk air sharpens the scents of jasmine, sage and pine. The coast's glitzy past feels just a whisper away. There's no question that the Athens Riviera has star quality — and now it's ready to shimmy into the spotlight again.

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**This page:** Soar up, up and away in a hot air balloon  
**Opposite:** A beachside hotel in Aqaba; W Amman; Belt Sitti cooking class

# the long weekend

## *Jordan*

Get carried away by the Hashemite Kingdom's compelling mix of ancient sites, natural gems, and family-friendly adventures





Awash with natural beauty, ancient cities, mineral-rich waters and swirling swathes of desert, Jordan is home to some of the most mesmerising sites in the Middle East. Zealous crusaders and adventurers have put their stamp on the country through the centuries, with striking monuments that still stand tall today. Deep within the desolate rugged mountains lies the stone city of Petra, one of the New Seven Wonders of the World and a treasured UNESCO Heritage Site. Ancient Roman architecture, from imposing pillars, to ceremonial gates, characterise the captivating city of Jerash, while you can lose yourself in the lunar-like landscape of Wadi Rum. If you're seeking a beach break with a splash of adventure, however, head to Aqaba – Jordan's sun-kissed city on the Red Sea that's fun for all the family.

## ROOM TO BREATHE

Sleep amid the dunes, wake up to sparkling sea views and swoon to the romance of it all

### Stay off-grid

Only accessible by four-wheel drive, **Rahayeb Desert Camp** invites you to a night of blissful isolation in the Wadi Rum desert. You won't find any of the trademarks of Arabian opulence here – the interiors are exquisitely simple, but it's the magical experiences on offer that make this a winner. You can spend hours gazing at the shifting sands, take to the sky in a hot air balloon, or commandeer the telescope for a spot of stargazing.

### Stay eco-friendly

Tucked away in the heart of the mountainous Dana Biosphere Reserve, **Feynan Ecolodge**, the country's first eco-lodge of its kind, utilises solar power as its only source of electricity. In the evenings, rooms are illuminated by hundreds of candles and a blend of white-washed walls, stone floors and traditional furnishings add a thoughtful design touch.

### Stay luxurious

Add the ultimate wow factor to your trip with a stay at **W Amman**. Check into a cool Corner Suite for fabulous city views, or upgrade yourself for a signature top floor experience. Choose from the Wow Suite or E Wow Suite – both of which come complete with a DJ booth, drinks station, Jacuzzi, huge living spaces, and, of course, panoramic floor-to-ceiling city vistas.



### Stay afloat

With stunning sea views and a private beach, **Kempinski Hotel Aqaba Red Sea** makes the most of its Dead Sea address. People come here to float in the sea's salty goodness and bask in its healing powers (you can smother yourself in therapeutic mud along the shore). There's also an impressive array of places to eat, as well as a pampering spa. You'll also find crowd pulling attractions, such as Mujib Nature Reserve, just a short drive away.

## What's cooking

**Cook like a local and savour the flavour of Jordanian cuisine**



### Beit Sitti

Whip up a feast of traditional dishes at one of the best cooking schools in Jordan. Created by three sisters carrying on their grandmother's legacy and dedication to culinary traditions, the school offers a coveted chance to immerse yourself in the foodie scene by learning how to prepare and cook locally sourced produce to create a new spin on traditional flavours. [beitsitti.com](http://beitsitti.com)

### Petra Kitchen

Collect fresh ingredients from the local market that you can use to create Jordanian specialities, including delicious maqluba and zesty fattoush. From the most basic chopping to the elegant presentation of mezza, this class captures the spirit of Levantine cuisine. [petrakitchen.com](http://petrakitchen.com)



## Historic moments

Home to several ancient civilisations, such as the Nabataeans, Romans and Byzantines, Jordan will captivate you with its deep-seated history. Marvel at the some of the oldest human statues in the world, discovered at the Neolithic site of 'Ain Ghazal (which dates to around 6,000 BCE), at **The Jordan Museum** in Amman. The museum also displays some of the Dead Sea Scrolls written in Aramaic characters, alongside an array of cultural gems, including detailed insights into Bedouin life and the many languages that evolved in Jordan. Make **Jordan Archaeological Museum** your next stop. Located inside the Citadel of Amman, the museum houses artefacts from different archaeological sites around the country, ranging from the Paleolithic to the Islamic Era. The citadel is also home to the striking Roman Temple of Hercules dating back to the 2nd century, as well as the Umayyad Palace from the 8th century. Meanwhile, in downtown Amman, **Jordan Folklore Museum** showcases an inspiring collection of Jordanian and Palestinian heritage items, such as costumes, musical instruments, handicrafts, and mosaics.



## A BRUSH WITH NATURE

Immerse yourself in the country's natural wonders

### The largest one

Tucked away within staggeringly beautiful red-rock escarpments along the face of the Great Rift Valley, **Dana Biosphere Reserve** is the only reserve encompassing Jordan's four different bio-geographical zones. Lush vegetation thrives here, and it's home to a number of rare animal species (some of which are known to be endangered, including the sand cat, the Syrian serin, the lesser kestrel and the Blanford's fox).

### The lowest one

At 410 metres below sea level, **Mujib Nature Reserve** surrounds **Wadi Mujib**, a deep canyon that cuts through majestic rugged highlands and trickles into the Dead Sea. Originally home to the Nubian ibex, one of the most beautiful mountain goats in the world (which was once a symbol of the moon God during the reign of the Queen of Sheba), the reserve now supports a surprising variety of migratory birds, such as white storks and levant sparrows, making it perfect for twitchers.

### The historic one

With archaeological ruins scattered in its woodlands and surrounding villages, **Ajloun Forest Reserve** brims with history and intrigue. Many people come here simply to explore the beautiful natural

surroundings peppered with evergreen oak, pine, carob, wild pistachio and wild strawberry trees. Others come to admire the endangered animals wondering around, including the graceful roe deer, striped hyenas, crested porcupines and stone martens. Go in the spring, when the reserve transforms into a mesmerising carpet of black iris, orchids and wild tulips.

## HIGH AND MIGHTY

Wander through the chambers where true knights once lived

In Jordan, history lies within its reddened dunes with the stoic desert castles that dot its sandy terrains speaking of its ancient tales. East of Amman, **Qasr Amra** is not only a surviving symbol of the Umayyad Dynasty, but also a representation of the architectural and artistic wonders of the 8th century. The UNESCO World

Heritage Site boasts emotive, stunningly coloured frescoes, all depicted in a playful medieval reverie with artistic details influenced by Byzantine artwork. Brooding **Qasr Al-Kharanah** also makes our list as arguably the most photogenic of all the desert castles. However, you'll feel like T.E. Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia) when you visit **Qasr Azraq**, the Roman fort that was rebuilt in the 13th century and used by the British archaeologist and military strategist during the Arab Revolt in 1917. Be sure to take a peek at his former room, which was constructed with arrow slits for strategic views.





These pages, clockwise from this image: Dana Biosphere Reserve; bask in the healing powers of the Dead Sea; uncover Jordan's underwater world; Qasr Amra; a snapshot from inside The Jordan Museum

THE LONG WEEKEND

## WELL AND GOOD

Spend a day at the largest natural spa on the planet, the Dead Sea, which is famous for its mineral-rich salty waters you can float in. You can access it via Amman Touristic Beach or one of the many hotels and resorts that offer access. Plus, for a touch of luxury, sample these salty spa treatments...

**THE NOURISHING BODY WRAP:** In Jordan, the muddier you get, the fresher you'll feel. Slather yourself with Dead Sea mud and experience its special cleansing, purifying and moisturising powers.

**Treatment to try:** The 50-minute Relaxing Mud full body wrap with facial and soothing scalp massage at Vitalia Spa, the Dead Sea Spa Resort.

**THE EXFOLIATING SALT SCRUB:** With its deep cleansing and detoxifying properties, it comes as no surprise that Dead Sea salt is a coveted ingredient in body scrubs.

**Treatment to try:** The 45-minute Dead Sea Salt Polish at The Ishtar Spa by Resense, Kempinski Hotel Ishtar Dead Sea.

**THE COMPLEXION-BOOSTING FACIAL:** Plump for a Dead Sea mud facial and you'll be rewarded with a dewy complexion. Tag on a steam treatment and you'll emerge a fresher, more youthful looking version of your former self.

**Treatment to try:** The 50-minute Healing Mud Facial at Zara Spa, Mövenpick Resort & Spa Dead Sea.



## UNDER THE SEA

Admire the crystal-clear waters, coral gardens and colourful fish that Aqaba is so well known for

### CEDAR PRIDE DIVE SITE

Resting on a bed of two coral gardens, this famous dive site is perhaps the most photogenic boat wreck in the Red Sea. Here, you'll find magnificent sea fans, basket stars, rainbows of fish shimmering in the sunlight and beautifully mature, multi-coloured corals growing from bow to stern.

### JAPANESE GARDEN DIVE SITE

South of the Cedar Pride, this dive site is highly accessible from most diving centres, making it the perfect spot for beginners. An underwater kaleidoscope of lionfish, angelfish and schools of snapper and butterfly fish delivers a truly spectacular scene. Look out for Hawksbill turtles, which can be spotted at times, as well as Napoleon fish and even the occasional barracuda.

### THE TANK AND SEVEN SISTERS

Even though this dive site is a mere five metres below sea level, it lures dive enthusiasts of all skill levels due

to its uniqueness. After all, it's not every day you get to see an old sunken American anti-aircraft tank surrounded by all types of wondrous sea life, including the quirky warty frogfish and stone fish.





# ONCE UPON A TIME

Jordan's fantastic monuments still shine bright today as a beacon of its imperial past

## PETRA

Considered the capital city of the Nabataeans, the lost city of Petra will always remain the crowning glory of ancient Jordan. Rush through the **Siq** (which is the narrow gorge entrance to the city) to reach the iconic **Treasury**, the tomb where most visitors fall in love with Petra. Known locally as **Al Khazneh**, the Hellenistic facade is an astonishing piece of craftsmanship intricately decorated with Corinthian capitals, friezes, figures and more. Similar in its magnificence but far bigger in size, **Ad Deir** is another legendary monument of Petra hidden high in the hills. Don't miss Petra by night, when the place comes alive by the light of a thousand candles.

## JERASH

Here, looming stone colonnades, echoing avenues and ceremonial gates mark the streets where Romans once walked 2,000 years ago. You'll feel the pomp of Rome the minute you enter the city through the triumphal, 13-metre-tall **Hadrian's Arch**. Walk the historical **Colonnaded Street** – still paved with the original stones – and find your way to the **Oval Plaza**. A total of 56 Ionic columns surround the paved oval-shaped limestone plaza, linking the **Cardo Maximus** with the striking **Temple of Zeus**. Meanwhile, stepping onto the sandy track of the **Hippodrome** feels like entering the chariot scene from *Ben Hur*. Watch chariots race and gladiators clash on the site where Roman warriors once battled.

## WADI RUM

With gargantuan rock formations, rippled sand dunes, and clear night skies, Wadi Rum is simply a voyage through time. The ruins of the house where, according to legend, **Lawrence of Arabia** lived during the Arab Revolt against the Ottomans in the World War I is the Wadi's undisputed highlight. Meanwhile, the **inscriptions of Anfaishiyya** cover a stretch of a huge rock face reminding you that this area has been inhabited for millennia. Be on the look out for **Ain Ash-Shallalah**, or 'Lawrence's Spring', a cave in which water gushes from the lush vegetation above, with ancient Arabic carvings adorning its inner walls.





## Works of art

### JORDAN NATIONAL GALLERY OF FINE ARTS

Established in 1980 by the Royal Society of Fine Arts, this quaint but impressive gallery in Jabal Al Weibdeh should be the first on your list if you're looking to get under the skin of the city's contemporary art scene. Collections comprise of more than 2,000 works including paintings, sculptures, photographs and installations.

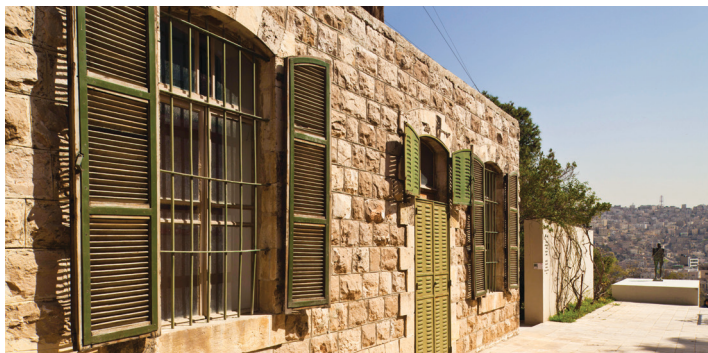
### JACARANDA IMAGES

The only gallery in Amman dedicated solely to all things paper, Jacaranda in Jabal Amman

holds regular exhibitions curated around a concept rather than individual artists. Go see the impressive compilation of provocative print, photography, drawings and etchings.

### DARAT AL FUNUN - THE KHALID SHOMAN FOUNDATION

Housed in six renovated historical buildings with a restored archaeological site in the garden, this well-established gallery has supported artists from the Arab world since 1988. Today, it's considered one of the edgier galleries in Amman, regularly hosting film screenings and innovative art performances throughout the year.



## Ask a local



**Taline Al Rasheed, producer/  
content creator, shares her favourite  
must-have experiences in Jordan**

There's no better way to peel through the different layers of a culture than by traversing its byways and letting its stunning landscape unfold in front of your eyes. Considered the longest hiking route in Jordan, **The Jordan Trail** offers about 40 days of hiking adventure with more than 650 kilometres of rolling wooded hills, rugged wadis and dramatic sands overlooking archaeological treasures that define the kingdom's earthly wonders. So if you love the great outdoors, this hike will be a treat for all your senses. Meanwhile, if you're looking for a unique way to unwind, the spread of orb-like tents at **Sun City Camp** evoke sci-fi fantasies. Set amid the stark, red-hued desert sands of Wadi Rum, it's the perfect place to zone out from the chaotic city life. Here, all you will hear is the whisper of silence, tranquillity and serenity. In the morning, admire the sweeping views of the jagged mountains. But at night, your dreams will shine bright as you gaze up at the star-clustered sky.

Words: Habiba Azab  
Images: With thanks to Jordan Tourism Board



## FUN FOR FAMILIES

**Ma'in Hot Springs Resort & Spa.** Those with older kids in tow will enjoy the novelty of taking a dip in the hot water bubbling from the Earth's core at Ma'in Hot Springs. Situated 264 metres below sea level (around 30km from Madaba), the tranquil oasis is the perfect spot to unwind and enjoy a therapeutic soak. The mineral-rich thermal water tumbles off the hillside in a series of cascading waterfalls and is collected in a variety of pools. The 50-metre-high Family Waterfall, which is a steamy 45°C, is where you want to be.

**The Children's Museum Jordan.** A trip to this brilliantly designed museum in Amman is an absolute joy. One of the best kid-specific attractions in Jordan, the museum has more than 180 indoor and outdoor interactive exhibits so your little ones can load up on knowledge while having fun.

**Amman Waves Aqua Park and Resort.** Let your little ones cool off and enjoy a day of splashing fun in the sun at this popular waterpark. Shoot down the slides – take to the lane racer slide to see who goes fastest – relax in the wave pool, float along the lazy river, play in the castle at the Kiddie Lagoon, and then relax in the shade of the pine and palm trees that dot the park.



THREE WAYS TO EXPERIENCE ABU DHABI...

# Swing into action

There's no shortage of championship courses in Abu Dhabi, so get set for a great golfing holiday

**1** Designed by Kyle Phillips, **Yas Links Abu Dhabi** sits between the sparkling azure waters of the Arabian Gulf and the ultra-modern Yas Marina Circuit on entertainment hub Yas Island, so no matter what hole you're playing, a spectacular view is guaranteed. The slick greens and deep-pot bunkers challenge golf purists to bring their A-game, while the stylish clubhouse invites you for a post-game celebratory dinner.

**2** Located near Abu Dhabi International Airport, **Al Ghazal Golf Club** puts a fresh spin on the sport by swapping green fairways for smooth brown stretches of sand. The challenging all-sand 18-hole course will liven up your game with its fair share of tricky holes. What makes it an extra special experience, however, is the fact that you're teeing off around an archaeological site, which was once where the land met the sea.

**3** If you like to practice your swing surrounded by nature's bounty, then **Saadiyat Beach Golf Club** is the one for you. The captivating 18-hole championship course, designed by golfing legend Gary Player, features three saltwater lakes and more than 60 white-sand bunkers that put all skill levels to the test. Frolicking dolphins are regularly spotted offshore, while native gazelles graze beside the greens. *To find out more, visit [abudhabi.ae](http://abudhabi.ae)*



Photo: Saadiyat Beach Golf Club



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#### STAYCATION

## Al Bustan Palace, a Ritz-Carlton Hotel

This mountainside palace in Muscat dazzles with its old world grandeur

#### THE ROOMS & SUITES

Exuding the romance of a bygone era, the shimmering domes, sandstone turrets and crystal chandeliers of Al Bustan Palace befit its royal title, while wondrous views of the Al Hajar Mountains and Gulf of Oman evoke a fairy-tale charm. Classic meets cutting edge in the recently renovated rooms and suites, with rich furnishings, contemporary artworks and modern technology blending old and new.

#### THE FOOD

Sampling fresh seafood at Beach Pavilion Bar & Grill wows around the clock: think sea and mountain views by day and romantic lighting by night. For authentic Chinese cuisine in a refined setting, head to China Mood, or opt for Turkuaz, which bursts with delectable Turkish flavours.

An elegant afternoon tea experience awaits at the Atrium Tea Lounge, with its dramatic 125-foot-high domed ceiling.

#### THE ACTIVITIES

When you're not filling your feed with Instagram-worthy shots, the private palm-lined beach, six glistening swimming pools and watersports galore offer ample motivation to dive right in. Your little ones will have heaps of fun splashing the day away at the new outdoor Family Aqua Land, or zooming along on the zipline, while you make time for self-care at the resort's luxury spa.

*To find out more, call +968 2479 9666 or visit [ritzcarlton.com/albustanpalace](https://ritzcarlton.com/albustanpalace)*



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#### STAYCATION

## JW Marriott Marquis Dubai

Reach for the sky at the world's tallest five-star hotel

#### **THE ROOMS & SUITES**

Wake up in the clouds and revel in stunning floor-to-ceiling views of the city's futuristic skyline or the turquoise waters of the Arabian Gulf. Sleek suites boast marshmallow soft beddings and soundproof windows for a serene slumber, while Executive Rooms come with perks including complimentary drinks, a continental breakfast and afternoon tea in the Executive Lounge.

#### **THE FOOD**

Foodies are spoilt for choice with more than 14 dining venues on offer. Splurge on a unique sky-high dinner at Prime68 steakhouse before heading for a glitzy nightcap at Vault. To spice it up, Masala Library by Jiggs Kalra serves traditional Indian recipes with a contemporary twist. Meanwhile, the recently opened Garden invites you to a fiesta of culinary delights with its zesty Latin American flavours.

#### **THE ACTIVITIES**

Discover the shiniest gems the city has to offer with top attractions including The Dubai Mall, Burj Khalifa and Dubai Opera right around the corner. After a day out and about, pamper yourself back at the hotel with a mini refresh at Saray Spa. Signature hammam treatments, bespoke facials and holistic rituals draw upon the spa's Arabian heritage for a top-to-toe rejuvenating experience.

*To find out more, call +971 4 414 0000 or visit [jwmarriottmarquisdubailife.com](http://jwmarriottmarquisdubailife.com)*





## Inspiration. Expertly crafted.

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The Andaman, a luxury Collection Resort, Langkawi

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Shangri-La Hotel, Singapore

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Angsana Laguna Phuket

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Hurawalhi Island Resort



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Andaz Dubai The Palm



Taj Jumeirah Lakes Towers



W Muscat



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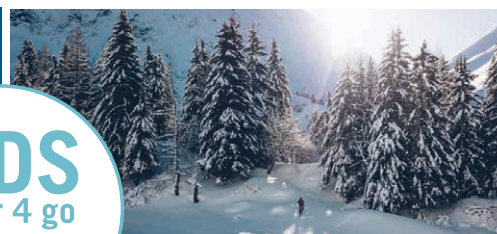


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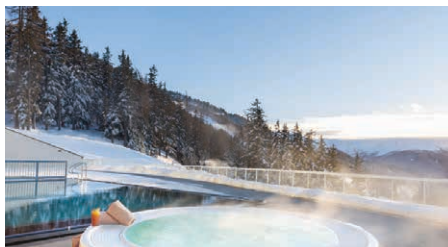
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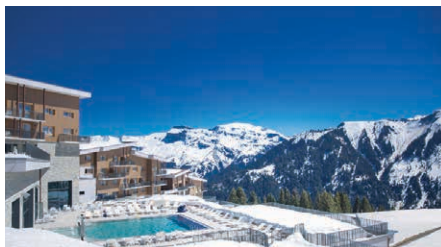
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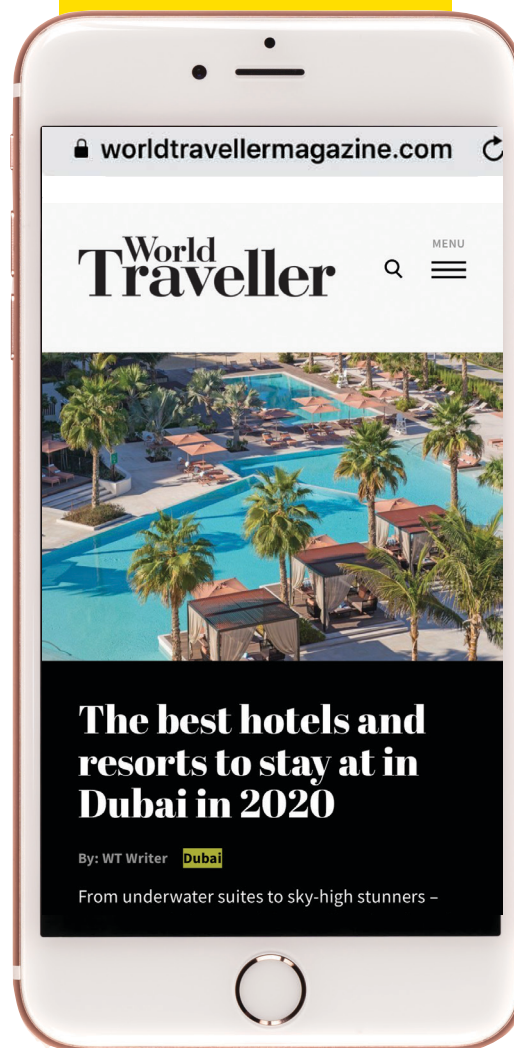
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# Suite dreams

Our monthly finish with a flourish, delving into a suite that has a character and style all of its own



## STUDIO SUITE

Treehouse London

Perched high above the rooftops of London's Langham Place is the city's most unique (and arguably most grammable) hotel. Opened at the end of last year, climb the Treehouse and you'll see it flaunts serious sustainability credentials (real tree trunks in bathrooms) alongside witty notes throughout (this suite features a cuckoo clock, magic eight ball, and that most famous of Londoners, Paddington Bear). As you'd expect in the tree tops, sweeping views come as standard.



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