

Wanderlust

TRAVEL MAGAZINE

www.wanderlust.co.uk March 2017

Camino de Santiago

Spain's long distance path – the easy way

Best river cruises

From the Amazon to Kerala's houseboats

Bhutan

Trek homestay-to-homestay to discover hidden villages

Win!

Trips to:
Colombia and the
Channel Islands...
See p4

Wanderlust Travel Photo of the Year

WINNERS REVEALED!

MADAGASCAR

Lemurs, limestone and local life – exploring the far north



First 24 hours: **New Orleans**, Short Break in **Bordeaux** & much more...



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Boats & balloons

A cruise down the Nile remains one of travel's greatest river experiences



THE TEAM

What have they been up to this month?



PHOEBE SMITH

◆ EDITOR ◆

Grabbing a cocktail, a new direct flight and heading to New Orleans...
SEE PAGE 129



TOM HAWKER

◆ PRODUCTION EDITOR ◆

Getting a taste for the Andes by tucking into a plate of Peruvian corn
SEE PAGE 18



GARETH CLARK

◆ SUB EDITOR/WRITER ◆

Making sure he has a drone ready to film his next adventure
SEE PAGE 14



RHODRI ANDREWS

◆ EDITORIAL ASSISTANT ◆

Searching closer to home for the next off-the-radar destination to discover
SEE PAGE 72

Welcome



Every year, we hold our breath as our Photo of the Year competition opens. Can there really be thousands more brilliant pics out there? And every year, we see the entries and go "wow". All through the judging we have the heartbreak of rejecting photos that we would, personally, be very proud of. But the pain is worth it when we end up with

a set of stunning images (p106). I hope you agree – certainly those of you whom we met at this year's Destinations show did!

Only a little time has passed since the UK's big travel shows, when we got a chance to meet you and find out about your travel plans. It was clear to us that river cruising had caught your imagination, so we have produced a round-up of our favourite routes to help inspire you (p42). We also discovered that many of you are fascinated by the idea of doing the Camino de Santiago trail but don't have the time to spare, so we have found a way to do it in just one week (p88).

Oh, and with Bhutan (p56) and Madagascar (p26) high on your (and our) bucket lists, we have squeezed those in too, and much more.

Happy travel dreaming,

Lyn

Lyn Hughes

Editor-In-Chief/Publisher/Co-founder

5 THINGS WE LEARNED THIS ISSUE:

1 Madagascar's sacred *tsingy* rock formations are gestured to by locals with a bent index finger, as a mark of respect; p26

2 Legend says that Buddhism was first brought to Bhutan in the 8th century by a guru riding on the back of a flying tigress; p56

3 Western Australia is about to get a new national park – the remote Houtman Abrolhos Islands; p75

4 You can gain 'eternal forgiveness' by completing a 100km section of the Camino de Santiago trail; p88

5 The Vikings first visited Ireland some 1,200 years ago, leaving a legacy of Norse settlements; p133



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In memory of co-founder & publisher **Paul Morrison**

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Brought to you in part by our photo winners...



SANGHAMITRA SARKAR

Winner of the Icon category in Wanderlust's 2016 Travel Photo of the Year competition (p106)

Sanghamitra's prize-winning shot (p6) expertly combines two icons of India: the yellow *gulal* (powder) of Holi Festival and the marbled extravagance of the Taj Mahal

Mountain, desert, ocean or jungle?

Mountains.

First great travel experience?

A trip to the cold desert of Ladakh, India.

Favourite journey?

When I return to the fresh air of my countryside home in Kalyani, West Bengal, every weekend, after a week of working in the concrete jungle of Kolkata.

Top five places worldwide?

Pangong Lake, Nubra Valley, Kashmir and Munnar (all in India), as well as Bhutan.

Passport stamp you're proudest of?

Mongolia.

Passport stamp you'd most like to have?

Iceland.

Guilty travel pleasure?

On the last evening of any trip, I always love to shop until I'm exhausted. Then, on the return journey, I'm usually embarrassed by my excess baggage.



VITTORIO RICCI

Winner of the Landscape category in Wanderlust's 2016 Travel Photo of the Year competition (p106)

Vittorio's mind-tricking snap (p10) perfectly captures the reflective, watery beauty of Italy's flooded Punta Alberete forest – among the last of its kind in the Po Valley

Mountain, desert, ocean or jungle?

Mountain.

First great travel experience?

On my first time travelling outside Europe in 1996, I self-drove through South Africa's wild parks without a GPS – an adventure that seems older than its 20 years.

Favourite journey?

Western Australia, as a winner of Wanderlust's 2015 Travel Photo of the Year competition. I am very lucky to win this year, too – thanks again!

Top five places worldwide?

South Africa; Namibia; Tanzania; Northern Territory, Australia; Utah, USA.

Passport stamp you're proudest of?

Australia.

Passport stamp you'd most like to have?

Botswana.

Guilty travel pleasure?

Chocolate!



CHRISTOPHER ROCHE

Winner of the People category in Wanderlust's 2016 Travel Photo of the Year competition (p106)

Christopher's shot of Peruvian pilgrims (p12) during the Qoyllur Rit'i festival is a precious glimpse of an ancient rite, as they make the perilous trek to the holy glaciers at 5,600m

Mountain, desert, ocean or jungle?

I've spent lots of time on mountains and oceans, so it'd have to be desert next.

First great travel experience?

Moving to Nigeria from Canada when I was five years of age. Although taking an Interrail trip when I was 18 was a highlight.

Favourite journey?

It's really hard to say. I once had a wonderful and memorable trip across Tanzania with a couple of great friends.

Top five places worldwide?

London, UK; Prague, Czech Republic; Rome, Italy; Istanbul, Turkey; New York City, USA.

Passport stamp you're proudest of?

Kermanshah Province in Iran – we didn't even have a visa when we turned up.

Passport stamp you'd most like to have?

Tibet.

Guilty travel pleasure?

Wax ear plugs.



JULIA WAINWRIGHT

Winner of the Wildlife category in Wanderlust's 2016 Travel Photo of the Year competition (p106)

Watching apex predators hunt is always fascinating, as witnessed by Julia's thrilling image of lions taking down a wildebeest in Tanzania – moments before its death (p8)

Mountain, desert, ocean or jungle?

Why limit myself to just one?

First great travel experience?

My first long-haul trip, which was to Sri Lanka about 25 years ago.

Favourite journey?

They're all special, but my journey up to the Huancavelica region of Peru features very highly on any list.

Top five places worldwide?

Galápagos Islands; the Serengeti, Tanzania; Chettinad, India; Iceland (for the northern lights); Namibia.

Passport stamp you're proudest of?

Libya.

Passport stamp you'd most like to have?

Falkland Islands.

Guilty travel pleasure?

I'm always thinking about my next trip and hate it when one's not in the offing.



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26 Madagascar

Look beyond the tourist beaches of Madagascar's north to discover a wild land teeming with sense-awakening forests, karst formations, wildlife and... chocolate



"Stroll down Frenchman Street, any day, any time, to try food mixed with Creole spices, be greeted like an old friend by locals and visitors, and hear waves of jazz, blues and ragtime oozing from the doorways."
Phoebe Smith



WANDERLUST TRAVEL PHOTO OF THE YEAR

For months, our judges pored over thousands of entries before eventually narrowing them down to a list of finalists and winners. Drum roll, please...



"Everywhere – wedged into narrow cobbled streets, tucked into small squares – you'll find terraces, bars and restaurants. The atmosphere is convivial, lively, civilised, just shy of raucous."
Mary Novakovich



"Germany's 65km stretch of Middle Rhine Valley is truly the fairytale river of popular imagination, studded with castles, medieval villages and hill-top palaces."

Alaska, p22

New Orleans, p129

Peru, p18

WIN!

A two-week trip to Colombia, p82

A four-night break in the Channel Isles, p74

THE TOP PRODUCTS FOR 2017...

Gear of the year, p83



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- 131 Short break: Bordeaux, France** The wine lover's capital is in the midst of a revival, as its buzzing vibe and quaint Old Town show there's more to it than just vineyards
- 133 Travel icon: Ireland's piety sites** The arrival of Catholicism to the Emerald Isle brought with it a wave of medieval architecture, with many of its monastic cities, pilgrim trails and cathedrals still dotting the rolling landscape



88

"On his back a red rucksack wobbled, causing the scallop shell that adorned it to sway in rhythm with his feet. Without speaking a word, I knew instantly where he was headed: Santiago." *Phoebe Smith*



56

"Above me clung the Bumdra Monastery, its gold-tipped roof adorned with ragged prayer flags flapping mantras into the wind, and to the far north rose the freshly minted peaks of the Jomolhari range, serrating the skyline." *Martin Symington*

📍 Ireland, p133

📍 Bordeaux, p131

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"Not just places of prayer, Ireland's piety sites were also social hubs, checkpoints and gateways to towns and villages – time capsules of medieval history."

📍 Houtman Abrolhos Islands, p75

TALKING HEADS

The Eagle Huntress, p20

"Before I graduate I will have to give my eagle, Akkanat, back to the wild. I am sure it will be hard for me to accept but I need to do it."





360°

V i e w f i n d e r



TAJ BEHIND THE COLOUR

Taj Mahal, Agra, Uttar Pradesh, India

Photographer: **Sanghamitra Sarkar**

"One of the true wonders of the world, the Taj Mahal is photographed here behind a veil of yellow *gula* during Holi Festival, when Hindus across India celebrate by throwing coloured powder at one another. By shooting it through a magical haze of yellow particles, I set out to capture the beauty of the Taj Mahal and the spirit of the festival together – both a part of India's unique heritage."

This photo won the Travel Icon category of our annual Travel Photo of the Year competition. Over the following pages, you'll find the winning images of the four amateur categories. For the full list of finalists, see p106



FACING CERTAIN DEATH

Ngorongoro Crater, Tanzania

Photographer: **Julia Wainwright**

"It was with mixed emotions that I watched as a pride of lions took down this pregnant wildebeest. During the struggle that ensued, the dying animal lifted up her head and looked one of the lionesses square in the eye. I'm sure that, at that moment, she knew it was all over."





LANDSCAPE
WINNER

FLOODED WOOD

Punte Alberete, Italy

Photographer: **Vittorio Ricci**

"This part of northern Italy – within the catchment area of the Lamone River – is popular among landscape photographers, who flock to see the hundreds of bird species that nest and breed in its protected grounds. Just as impressive, though, is the riparian forest found within the Po Delta Regional Park, now one of the last remaining examples of this type of woodland within the Po Valley. For this image, an overcast sky and the fresh green of young leaves were the perfect ingredients for capturing the sunken woodland."





DESCENT OF THE UKUKUS

Qullqipunku Glacier, Peru

Photographer: **Christopher Roche**

"Qoyllur Rit'i is a festival that takes place in the Peruvian Andes. A blend of old Incan traditions and Catholic influences, it attracts around 80,000 pilgrims. During the night, bands of Ukukus (pilgrims dressed up as mythological tricksters) head up to the holy glaciers and perform initiation ceremonies at an altitude of around 5,600m, before descending again at dawn – which is when this image was taken."

12 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW THIS MONTH...

Your March essentials: Meet the eagle huntress; time travel in Valencia; self-drive into the sunset; love Peruvian corn; and happy anniversary, Alaska...

1 Travel Issues Drones could film our future travels

Is it a bird? Is it a plane? Oh... it's a drone. No longer just the playthings of rich kids and hobbyists, drones could soon be travelling alongside us, capturing our every moment

Exploring the widescreen horizons of the Gobi Desert or otherworldly glaciers of Iceland always yield some incredible memories. But imagine adding a flying drone to the mix, enlisted to film your every wide-eyed response. That's exactly what one tour operator is offering – trips that link you with professional drone pilots to help capture your own sky-high travel film.

But do we really want that? Not according to certified drone pilot Rob Johnson of Filmuphigh: "I can't think of anything worse than some pesky drone buzzing around while I'm travelling."

Yet tour operator Black Tomato, which is launching the drone tours, believes they're in demand. "People now want their travels to be captured professionally," explains co-founder Tom Marchant. "So we're offering the chance to film adventures from a new perspective." And it seems some of you agree, with our poll finding 55% of you would gladly be accompanied by a drone on your next trip.

It might be worth bearing in mind, though, that drone trips aren't quite

wallet-friendly yet – prices start from £4,000pp. "It'll be a while before these trips go mainstream," explains Sam Shead, technology journalist at *Business Insider UK*. "That's because the technology is still pretty expensive."

It's not just the cost that's a sticking point, either. Rob also highlights issues involving landowner permission, various air traffic restrictions and proximity to others (you can't fly within 50m of someone not under the operator's control in many countries). And

then there are the effects of drones on other travellers: the noise, the distraction, the basic intrusiveness of being filmed without your permission.

"There is very little chance of that on our tours," explains Tom. "We try and stick to very remote corners and don't encourage people to film in busy areas."

So, drone tours might not be filling our skies just yet. In the meantime, we'll worry less about what's overhead and focus on soaking up the places themselves. After all, nothing beats glimpsing the world's grandest landscapes with your own two eyes. And your camera. And your phone...

'At £4,000 per person, it'll be a while before these trips go mainstream'

The new selfie?
Are clouds of personal drones filming our every movement the future of travel?



Alamy, Dreamstime



■ The Nitty Gritty Nowhere to run?

Drone tours are offered in these five places – here's how to avoid them and dodge unwanted eyes...

1 Lofoten Islands, Norway
The remote northern archipelago is known for its dramatic fjords – no shelter there! Instead, see them from inside your own *rorbu* (old fisherman's cabin), making sure to gorge on delicious local stockfish.

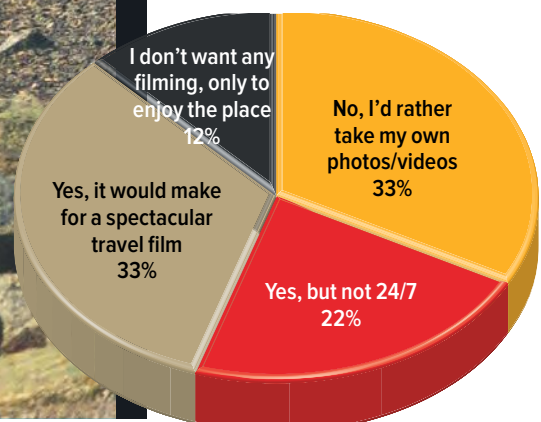
2 Skeleton Coast, Namibia
There's nowhere to hide on this bleak-but-beautiful coastline, so if you can't beat the drones, join them instead, with plane tours offering great views over dunes full of whale bones and shipwrecks.

3 Gunung Rinjani, Indonesia
Before you head for the milky blue crater lake atop this sacred peak, spend some time inside the homes of its cultural guardians, the Sasak people of Senaru village.

4 Victoria Falls, Zambia
You really need to be outside to appreciate this waterfall's might, so trek beneath its thick spray (and away from the drones) at the bottom of Batoka Gorge to get the most awesome perspective.

5 The Great Barrier Reef, Australia
With drones due to capture visitors exploring the Great Barrier Reef and its vast coral swaths, go where prying eyes can't see by taking a dive among the reef's incredible marine life for a far superior view.

■ Online Reader Poll
Would you want your next trip to be filmed by a drone?



New Routes

GO NOW...

World of tomorrow
The City of Arts and Sciences is the jewel of Valencia's modern architectural wonders



2 Visit the past and the future in ever-changing Valencia

? Why go?

Madrid and Barcelona may be Spain's headline acts but Valencia's second-billing could be set to improve: from March, new flights from Glasgow will send even more visitors through its mesmerising maze of historic and innovative marvels.

But this is a city unafraid of change, as demonstrated by the emerald thread of Turia Gardens that snakes its centre – a series of parks and trails created along the former Turia riverbed. At its

mouth lies the futuristic City of Arts and Sciences complex, with its oceanarium, planetarium and museums catapulting wide-eyed arrivals into tomorrow.

But Valencia's winding medieval centre still enchants. The 13th-century Cathedral dominates, but for a peek into the city's silk trade past, head to the gothic exchange hub, Lonja de la Seda, before loading up on a plate of the Valencia-originated classic, *paella*, in the cosmo Barrio del Carmen neighbourhood. March

is also timely for the Las Fallas festival: a frenzy of explosions, parades and fire. For a widescreen view, climb the city wall towers of Torres de Serranos and Quart. From here, you'll wonder why Valencia isn't in the limelight more – but be rather glad it isn't.



Where to stay?

Containing a part of Valencia's old city wall, Caro Hotel (carohotel.com) is near to both Turia Gardens and Old City; doubles from £144.



Get there now!

Ryanair flies twice-weekly from Glasgow (flights from other UK airports available) to Valencia from 27 Mar. From around £100 return; ryanair.com



Or how about this...

British Airways fly twice a week from Heathrow to Murcia and Tallinn from 28 Mar. From £32 each way; ba.com

Virgin Atlantic launches daily Seattle flights on 26 Mar. From £540 return; virginatlantic.com

CINEMA

3 SEE THIS... Viceroy's House

In cinemas from 3 March



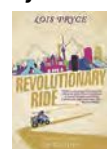
Hugh Bonneville swaps *Downton* for the even grander *Rashtrapati Bhavan* – India's presidential palace – playing the under-pressure Lord Mountbatten as

he oversees the partitioning of India. Balancing out the combustible political and personal tensions on screen is director Gurinder Chadha, with Jodhpur standing in for colonial India.

BOOK

4 READ THIS... Revolutionary Ride

By Lois Pryce (Nicholas Brealey, £15)



Back in 2011, Iran's reputation as a travel destination was up there with North Korea's. Lois Pryce and her motorbike decided to explore this third of the Axis of Evil on a 4,800km journey that saw her negotiate locals, the police and a country tensely teetering between the grip of a fiercely traditional government and the desire for change – an excellent, fascinating read.

TV

5 WATCH THIS... Mission Galápagos

BBC1, Spring (date to be confirmed)



The Galápagos Islands have been a scientific lodestar ever since the *HMS Beagle* first dropped anchor there 200 years ago. Now the BBC are arriving on the state-of-the-art *Alucia* to undertake an ultra-modern expedition to understand these extraordinary islands, the unique wildlife that inhabits them and the threats facing them all.



Go wild for **RWANDA**

Trek through northern Rwanda to see endangered mountain gorillas in their natural habitat

The majestic mountains, rolling hills and lush grassy lowlands of Rwanda create a beautiful wild and untamed piece of Africa. Nicknamed 'the land of a thousand hills', this tiny landlocked country dwarfed by its neighbours is brimming with colossal landscapes and striking scenery. But when it comes to Rwanda, the landscapes often find themselves overlooked as this country is most famously known as the home of mountain gorillas. These endangered and gentle characters, even fiercer than other great apes, can be found deep in the forested Parc National de Volcans – the perfect setting for an epic wildlife-tracking trek with experienced park rangers.

Trekking permits to seek out wild gorilla families are heavily limited, ensuring these majestic creatures live a life as undisturbed as possible while still generating a little income to fund the necessary conservation efforts.

Every day and every trek is different; visitors may watch gorillas collect fruit, nap together or even play with their young. Small hiking groups mean intimate wildlife experiences and incredible memories that last a lifetime, and that's exactly what Rainbow Tours offer. But our Travel Specialists also know that Rwanda has far more to offer than just gorilla treks. That's why our Northern Rwanda tour will get you up-close and personal with wild monkeys and jungle birdlife (and mountain gorillas, of course) before introducing you to the spectacular scenery of Lake Kivu as well as nights spent in Rwanda's dynamic and colourful capital city, Kigali.

● Rainbow Tours' Northern Rwanda; Gorillas & Kivu private tour costs from **£2495pp**

www.rainbowtours.co.uk
020 3588 6115



"Tracking the gorillas in Rwanda is great. As you trek, weather permitting, you'll encounter stunning vistas of the Virunga Volcano Chain and the lakes and villages

below. It is said that gorilla tracking is marginally easier in Rwanda as a number of gorilla groups are located closer to the headquarters, and the terrain is said to be less tricky. The forest is known to be less impenetrable than its counterpart in Uganda and therefore guests are likely to be greeted by awe inspiring moments with the gorillas."

Craig Kaufman
Africa Travel Specialist

World Food

EAT THIS...



TOP TIP

If locating Peruvian corn proves tricky, any ground/crushed corn can be used as a substitute.

6 Get corny with Peru's favourite staple food

The Andean sliver that cuts through Peru is a pretty inhospitable place to live. Yet, as the Inca proved, no peak is too high (or stark) to live on – Choquequirao or Machu Picchu, for example. Just as the Inca's architects defied their surroundings, so, too, did their farmers, growing crops in an impossible setting. And one in particular still dominates the region and the menus that altitude-adjusted travellers will find when they visit.

Corn (specifically the *choclo* variety) has been a part of Andean diets for thousands of years. A hardy crop, able to survive high altitudes, its giant ears are still a staple of the communities here, whether ground into flour or (using purple corn) brewed into a non-alcoholic drink called *chicha morada*.

Over 55 varieties of corn are farmed across Peru – the most anywhere. In the north, grated kernels are added to onion, garlic, tomatoes and chillies to make *pepián* stew, while in colonial Arequipa they prefer *soltero*, a salad of beans, corn, onions and cheese. Even in the Amazon, *inchi cache* is a popular stew of chicken, roasted corn and peanuts.

But up in the Andes they typically keep it simple, baking corn discs (see right) known as *choclos andinos*. It's here where corn really links people to the landscape, says chef Virgilio Martínez, author of *Central*. "In a single bite you can get a sense of the earth that the corn is coming from – the soul of the corn."

This versatile crop is key to discovering the real Peru. So bake a batch of cornbreads and transport yourself to the heart of the Andes.

CHOCLOS ANDINOS

Makes 30

1.2l milk
100g chuncho corn, very finely ground
25g salt
300g Andean butter (or any cow's milk butter)
600g cornflour
8 eggs, separated
120g chullpi corn, crushed

METHOD:

1. In a saucepan, bring the milk to a boil over a medium heat. Add the corn powder and salt and mix well. Stir in the butter and cornflour until incorporated, then remove from the heat. Add the egg yolks, one at a time, waiting to add the next one until each yolk is fully incorporated.
2. In a clean bowl, whip the egg whites until stiff peaks form. Gently fold the corn mixture into the egg whites.
3. Transfer the batter to a container and, using an offset spatula, smooth out the top. Refrigerate the batter for two hours and preheat the oven to 180°C.
4. Cut the batter into six irregular blocks. Dip each block into the chullpi corn to coat on all sides, and then cut each block into 25g pieces. Knead each piece into a ball, and on a firm, flat surface, press each ball into a disc, place in a tray and shape by using round moulds (around 4cm in diameter).
5. Bake the discs for 22 minutes, or until golden brown. Finish off with a blowtorch (or with a short blast under a hot grill).

Central (Phaidon, £40) by Virgilio Martínez. Out now.





WALKING &
HIKING

ST HELENA
ISLAND



A volcanic outcrop in the South Atlantic Ocean, the island of St Helena is a sub-tropical paradise, with rolling hills and a rugged coastline. Its diverse landscapes – from mist-enshrouded cloud forest to ancient desert – offers everything from gentle ambles to challenging hikes, and a chance to discover some of its more than 400 unique endemic species.



St Helena Island
Secret of the South Atlantic

www.sthelenatourism.com

7 THE EAGLE HUNTRESS IS BIG ON HOSPITALTY

■ Five Minutes With...

At the age of 13, Aisholpan Nurgaiv – a member of Mongolia's nomadic Kazakh tribe – and her golden eagle, Akkanat, became the stars of hit documentary *The Eagle Huntress*. Two years after filming, we caught up with her to see what she did next...

How did you start out hunting?

I helped my father from an early age. When he was away he would ask me to look after his golden eagle, giving it sunlight or bringing it into the shade. One day I was feeding my father's bird when I realised that I was actually interested in this.

Where do you hunt with your eagles?

All the eagle hunters live in the Bayan-Olgii province and hunt near the Altai Mountains, where you can see them. This is what I love. Many travellers visit western Mongolia to go horseriding and hiking in the Altai Tavan Bogd NP, but during winter they come to see us hunt foxes with eagles.

Tell us about life in western Mongolia – what can we expect as visitors?

In any nomadic home you can see how we welcome guests. First of all, we offer hot tea with fresh milk. Then you are free to try everything: hand-made cream, butter, *kurt* (a dry, salty cheese). They're all delicious.

In the film you climb down a rock face to catch your own eagle.

Were you scared?

No, I grew up in the Mongolian countryside and the mountains were one place we'd go to play. I would say all the kids from this area have good climbing skills.

You also take part in a big competition.

Did the camera crew not put you off?

The film crew disappeared among the tourists and locals, all of whom had cameras. I was only afraid that the eagle would not recognise me in a crowd of people or it wouldn't hear me when I called her.

Did the filming affect your life at all?

Yes. Hunting with the film crew was far harder than usual. We had to tell them our

plans first, and while they were setting up their cameras they would often scare the foxes away, so we'd have to move on to another hunting ground. Or they'd need to stop in order to change their batteries because they'd frozen and died again.

You're 15 now. How has your life changed since the filming ended?

The best schools in Mongolia invited me to study for free, so I now have a scholarship. I want to be a doctor eventually, but after graduation I will need to study in faraway cities, where I can't hunt with my eagle. I am planning to teach my little sister how to hunt, but before I graduate I will have to say goodbye to Akkanat and give my eagle back to the wild. I am sure it will be hard for me to accept but I need to do it.

***The Eagle Huntress* is out on DVD soon**



8

■ The Big Debate

Should premium-only destinations be allowed?

The island of Palau in the Philippine Sea is proposing to only allow five-star resorts to be built. We asked you: should they be allowed to choose their 'type' of visitor?

YES



Gina Clarke,
Wanderlust reader
"As someone with two kids under five, I think that it's good

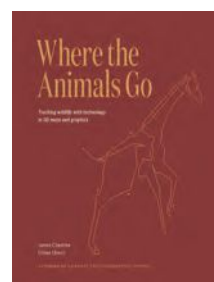
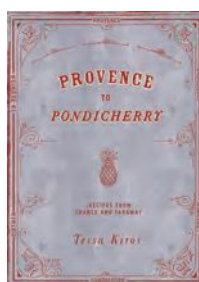
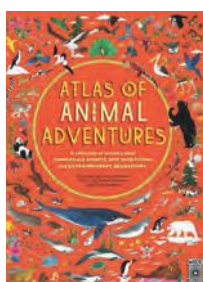
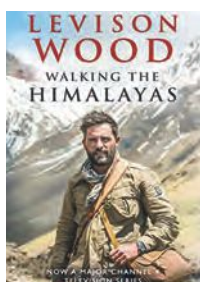
to have places that are aimed at specific travellers, like this or for families. This is often what you find in the big resorts, where there are activities for the children and options for parents to just have time to themselves. With so many different types of holiday being thrown in your direction, it's really handy to have an option to tick where you get a trip that you actually want and is suited specifically to you."

NO



Tabitha Green,
Wanderlust reader
"I suspect that this already happens to a certain degree,

simply because most destinations don't build five-star hotels next to backpacker areas or party resorts. I have seen some places where the party/club crowd have taken over, and others where the non-wealthy are either priced out or made to feel unwelcome. I would prefer to go to places that are neither, but have a more inclusive approach and cater to a variety of people instead."



■ Top titles

9 Have you read the books of the year?

The winners of the Edward Stanford Travel Writing Awards 2016 have been announced...

Edward Stanford
TRAVEL WRITING
AWARDS 2016

Wanderlust Travel Magazine Adventure Travel Book of the Year

WALKING THE HIMALAYAS by Levison Wood

It's easy to be sceptical about a TV tie-in but Wood's account of his five-country trek through the historic range doesn't just expand on his on-screen adventures but exceeds them. An accessible, well-written tale of adventure that adds a real sense of travel and place to the drama, taking the reader on a journey from start to finish.

Specsavers Fiction (with a sense of place)

DO NOT SAY WE HAVE NOTHING

by Madeleine Thien

Combining quality of writing with a great sense of destination, this book takes you into the streets and countryside of China during the Cultural Revolution – you can feel yourself in Tiananmen Square with the protestors.

National Book Tokens Children's Travel Book of the Year

ATLAS OF ANIMAL ADVENTURES by Lucy Letherland,
Rachel Williams & Emily Hawkins

Amazing detail, but simply done – this beautifully illustrated breakdown of nature's most exciting species and spectacles is perfect for both small adventurers and the bigger ones reading it to them.

Food and Travel Magazine Food & Travel Book of the Year

PROVENCE TO PONDICHERY by Tessa Kiros

French cooking, as filtered through its former colonies. An exciting spin on Gallic-inspired cuisine from around the planet.

Destinations Show Illustrated Travel Book of The Year

THE UN-DISCOVERED ISLANDS

by Malachy Tallack & Katie Scott

A fantastical subject – legendary places that were said to once exist – given an equally fantastic cartographic treatment.

London Book Fair Innovation in Travel Publishing

WHERE THE ANIMALS GO

by James Cheshire & Oliver Uberti

Using modern tracking techniques and accessible graphics, this work reveals fresh, conservation-minded insights into species' movements.



Edward Stanford
**Outstanding Contribution
to Travel Writing Award**

MICHAEL PALIN

Having kickstarted the modern TV travelogue, the world's nicest man finally gets his due.

>> See edwardstanfordawards.com for more

10 What's On UK EVENTS

BANFF MOUNTAIN FILM FESTIVAL

Various UK venues, until May 17

www.banff-uk.com

From £11.50. Tickets available from various venues

From Brighton to Pitlochry and across the Irish Sea to Kilkenny, the Banff Mountain Film Festival is back in 2017, with its tour

visiting more places around the UK and Ireland than ever before. Two programmes will cover everything from the story of a quartet of mothers rowing the Atlantic to one man returning to Tasmania's 'Totem Pole' climb 18 years after it left him partially paralysed.

BRISTOL WILDERNESS LECTURES

Bristol, 8 Mar & 22 Mar

www.wildernesslectures.com
Chemistry Theatre, University of Bristol,
BS8 1TS. 7.30pm. From £9. Visit the
website or call 0117 929 9966 to book

Scottish mountaineer Sandy Allan retraces his steps climbing Pakistan's Nanga Parbat (8 Mar) and adventurer Joe Johnstone chats about crossing Mongolia's frozen Lake Khuvsgul by foot (22 Mar).

BRISTOL TRAVELLERS' CLUB

Bristol, 14 Mar

www.marcopolotravel.co.uk

YHA, 14 Narrow Quay, BS1 4QA.

£3.50, with a proportion of the entry fee donated to WaterAid. From 7.10pm. Tickets available on the door

Mike Manson shares his adventures in Guyana, while Paula Cannings and Mandy MacDonald recall travelling in northern Pakistan and China.

GLOBETROTTERS CLUB

Chester, 18 Mar

www.chesterglobetrotters.co.uk

25-27 Grosvenor Street, Chester, CH1 2DD. From 1pm. £3. To book, contact Hanna (01244 383392) or Angela (01244 629930), or simply email chesterbranch@globetrotters.co.uk

Roy Willis narrates his Antarctic voyage, following in the footsteps of Shackleton; Anna Manning and Howard Jennings explain the different faces of Swaziland.

LOOPING THE PLANET BY PEDAL AND PADDLE

Scotland, 27–30 Mar

www.rsgs.org

27 Mar, Dumfries; 28 Mar, Galashiels; 29 Mar, Ayr; 30 Mar, Helensburgh. Times vary. Free to members; £10 for non-members. Book online

Extreme adventurer Sarah Outen invites you to join her as she recalls her mega 4.5-year journey circumnavigating the planet, cycling across Europe, Asia and North America, as well as rowing and kayaking across the North Pacific and a hefty portion of the North Atlantic.

Instant Expert

KNOW YOUR... ALASKA

Wait gains
A brown bear sits
expectantly by
Kodiak Island's
Karluk River for his
dinner to pass by



11

This March marks 150 years since Russia sold Alaska to the USA, now its thrilling history and wild northerly lands are better value than ever

Larger-than-life Alaska is a world of ice-sculpted fjords, clouded mountains and raw tundra. But visitors will find its patchwork human history just as fascinating. Occupied by Alaska Natives for millennia, Russia began colonising the territory in the 18th century, then, fearing its capture by the British, they sold it to the USA for \$7.2m (about \$122m/£100m today) in 1867. This month (30 March) marks 150 years since that sale.

How can I celebrate?

Travellers can join in events honouring the cultures involved in the deal (alaska150.com). These take place across the state but will centre on the city of Sitka, Russian Alaska's former capital and the site of the 1867 official transfer ceremony. Expect plenty of historical

talks and a Russian-American colony concert, while the Sitka Summer Music Festival will have a week dedicated to Russian composers. The newly refurbished Sitka History Museum (sitkahistory.com) is also scheduled to reopen in summer 2017, boasting exhibitions and artefacts from Alaska's native colonisation right through to the present day.

Where can I explore Alaska's Russian legacy?

The Bear's imprint still lingers in Kodiak, the site of the first Russian settlement in 1784 and subsequent brutal conflict with the native Alutiiq people. Visitors can wander its Russian-named streets, spy the blue-domed Orthodox Cathedral and visit the Baranov Museum for Russian-Alaskan history, as well as the Alutiiq Museum, too.

Situated on Baranof Island and accessible only by air or ferry, Sitka also boasts more than a few Russian architectural hallmarks, easily identified in the styling of St Michael's Cathedral and the Russian Bishop's House in nearby Sitka National Historical Park.

Where else should I head?

Soak up Alaska's big eye-watering vistas – and we mean *big*. Wrangell St Elias is the USA's largest national park (Yellowstone NP can fit inside it six times over) and caribou, bison and black bears all roam its icy wilderness.

Elsewhere, tread the wild tundra and taiga forest of Denali NP (celebrating 100 years in 2017), gasp at the glacier-sculpted valleys of Misty Fjords National Monument and for bear-watching head to Hallo Bay in Katmai NP. \$7.2m? Alaska sounds priceless to us.



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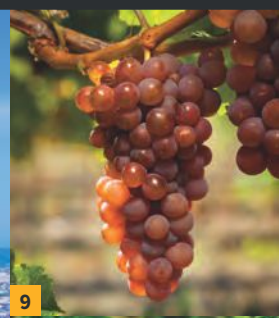
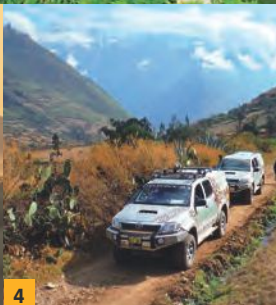
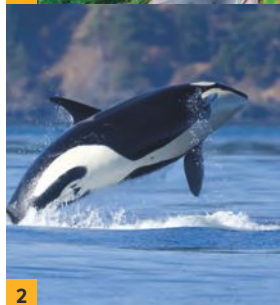


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*Calls to numbers starting 0843 cost up to 4p per minute plus your telephone company's network access charge.

12 Be Inspired HIT THE OPEN ROAD



Getting behind the wheel, cruising past dramatic landscapes, pit-stopping wherever you want to... Nothing quite encapsulates freedom like a road trip. But while doing your own thing is part of the charm of the self-drive experience, booking a tailor-made road trip ensures you won't miss any of the key sights. It also means that you maximise your time on the tarmac and provides a vital safety net in case of any hiccups. So turn that ignition – here are nine trips made of top gear material.

PICKY TRAVELLER

Know when you want to travel but don't know where? Got an activity you long to try but not sure how? Try Wanderlust's Trip Finder: mytripfinder.co.uk

1. Japan

Cruise Hokkaido's wildernesses

In the land of pricey transportation, self-driving northern Japan on **TransIndus' Hokkaido: Land of Fire and Ice** trip makes a lot of sense. See sunset over Hakodate, explore Daisetsuzan NP's peaks (including its highest, Mount Asahi) then finish on the off-the-radar Shiretoko Peninsula amid caldera lakes, whale-rich seas and relaxing thermal falls. Pure freedom – and you can drive on the left!

Who: TransIndus (0844 879 3960; transindus.co.uk)

When: Year round

How long: 15 days

How much: From £4,895 (incl flights)

2. Canada

Wind the west coast with whales

Mountains on one side, ocean on the other – get under the skin of British Columbia with **Discover the World's Pacific Coast B&B Explorer** tour. From Vancouver, make for Victoria's scenic harbourfront before driving off-radar. Mix road and ferry connections to access some lesser-heralded villages, stopping en route in sleepy Salt Spring Island and rainforest-fringed Sooke, then swapping tarmac for water and whales in Ucluelet.

Who: Discover the World (01737 214250; discover-the-world.co.uk)

When: May-Oct

How long: 12 days

How much: From £1,213 (excl flights)

3. Namibia

Explore on four wheels and two feet

Spy big vistas from road and trail on **ATI Holidays' Walking Namibia** trip. Tread wild dunescapes in the Kalahari and Namib deserts and across the rippling Sossusvlei, then take to the wheel. Motor to Germanic Swakopmund, pore over bush paintings and finish in Etosha NP spotting wild elephants and jackals.

Who: ATI Holidays (0808 234 9378; ati-holidays.com)

When: Year round

How long: 15 days

How much: From £1,883 (excl flights)

4. Peru

Three landscapes for the price of one

Chase the ever-changing horizons of the Pan-American Highway on **Wild Frontiers' Peru 4X4: Traverse the Hidden Andes** trip. You'll pit-stop in the Paracas Desert to see the Nazca Lines before crawling Andean ridges to Cusco's Sacred Valley and Machu Picchu. Finish in the Amazon among the wildlife of the Pampa Hermosa reserve.

Who: Wild Frontiers (020 8741 7390; wildfrontierstravel.com)

When: Year round

How long: 16 days

How much: From £2,980 (excl flights)

5. Malaysia

From bright lights to lush coast

Forget Asia's reputation for car-choked tarmac. On **Selective Asia's road-friendly Malaysia Beach & Adventure Self Drive** trip, leave bustling Kuala Lumpur for the jungles of Belum-Temengor and hikes to see its sun bears. Sniff out temples in Penang, finishing in the mangroves and beaches of Langkawi – not a jam in sight.

Who: Selective Asia (01273 670001; selectiveasia.com)

When: Year round

How long: 11 days

How much: From £1,313 (excl flights)

6. Costa Rica

Set yourself loose

Geodyssey's Freedom Self-Drive tour is how a road trip should be: hitting the highway on the hoof (albeit with maps and a GPS). There's no itinerary and you pick from a list of hotels as you go, bagging last-minute deals. So, whether you drive Costa

Rica's beach-fringed coast or skirt canyons and jungle inland, it's a nice choice to have.

Who: Geodyssey (020 7281 7788; geodyssey.co.uk)

When: May-Sep

How long: 7 or 14 nights

How much: From £550 (excl flights)

7. Chile

4x4 across glaciers, peaks and lakes

Four-wheel it on a **Self-drive Chile** trip with **Journey Latin America**. Beginning beneath the snow-capped Andes of hip Santiago, motor past Chile's forest-fringed, volcanic-strewn Lake District, and climax in otherworldly Patagonia by winding ice-carved valleys and sweeping glaciers on the perfect wild drive.

Who: Journey Latin America (020 3811 5482; journeylatinamerica.co.uk)

When: Year round

How long: 14 days

How much: From £3,615 (excl flights)

8. Finland

Drive on the wild(life) side

Ford the rare wonders of eastern Finland on a **Bears, Wolves & Wildlife Adventure** with **Regent Holidays**. Stay in wildlife hides, spotting wolves and bears in the boreal lands near Lake Kuikka, then drive even further off-grid in Kainuu, to look for black bears and golden eagles.

Who: Regent Holidays (020 7666 1290; regent-holidays.co.uk)

When: May-Aug

How long: 7 days

How much: From £1,819 (incl flights)

9. New Zealand

Blaze the wine trail

Explore vineyards galore on **New Zealand In Depth's Top Wines of New Zealand** road trip. Sip merlots in Hawke's Bay, rieslings in Marlborough, and finish with a pinot noir in cosmopolitan Queenstown, toasting your journey in front of the yawning fjords of Milford Sound.

Who: New Zealand In Depth (01298 74040; newzealand-indepth.co.uk)

When: Sep-Feb

How long: 10 days

How much: From £2,200 (excl flights)



MORE ONLINE Have these amazing self-drive trips got you thinking? Want to see more top trip options? Then go to wanderlust.co.uk/174

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Madagascar



Now you see me...
A sportive lemur is hard to spot in the foliage at Lokobe Nature Reserve, Nosy Be, unless you have a good guide...



MAGIC eye

Many travellers dismiss
Madagascar's far north as one big
beach resort, but look a little closer
and you'll find lemurs, limestone
tsingy and a feast for all the senses...

WORDS **PHOEBE SMITH** PHOTOGRAPHS **NEIL S PRICE**

Beyond the beach
(clockwise from this)
Arriving at the village
on Lokobe by pirogue
canoe; a giant day
gecko; the brown
mantella frog and a tiny
Brookesia chameleon;
local women sell their
wares in Nosy Be





The air was thick and humid. Somewhere behind me a twig snapped, its break amplified by the silence. I whizzed around hoping to see something (anything!),

a mammal, a bird, an insect even, but... nothing. Arriving in Madagascar, after so many years of watching wildlife TV shows, I had been expecting to see ring-tailed lemur at every turn, but I was soon discovering that here – much like anywhere in the world – if you want to see animals in the wild, you need patience and, crucially, someone who can help you actually spot them.

Enter Lilovic, my guide. We'd met just a couple of hours earlier on the shores of a tiny fishing hamlet on the island of Nosy Be, an hour from capital Hell-Ville (known by its old colonial name rather than its official title of Andoany). Flung out into the ocean, off Madagascar's north-western tip, most intrepid visitors to Africa's famous Red Island skip this area, as it has a reputation for being more 'beach resort' than 'wildlife heaven'. Instead, they usually rush around the country at breakneck speed, cramming in a plethora of internal flights (many of which get cancelled or alter their departure time at a second's notice) into just two weeks. So, while they see a lot, how much they can take the time to enjoy is another matter. But I had opted to take it slowly,

to linger in the far north and, hopefully, make each wildlife encounter memorable.

My trip started at a gentle pace, as Lilovic led me from the shore down to the sea, his *piroque* (dugout canoe) bobbing on the waves. Getting to Lokobe Nature Reserve was possible only by water, and paddling there, as Madagascar's first settlers might have done some 2,000 years ago, seemed fitting. After all, it was the comparatively late settlement of the island that helped cultivate its huge array of endemic plant and animal species.

around half an hour of pacing through leaves in the heat, I was starting to think there was nothing here but us, then Lilovic stopped dead in his tracks. "Come, come," he gestured, and pointed with his machete to the branches above. There, staring down at me, were the two wide eyes of a sportive lemur. I felt my stomach tingle like I'd just shot off a huge drop on a rollercoaster – and this was only the beginning.

From that moment on, the forest seemed to teem with life. Every time I looked and saw

'Staring at me were the wide eyes of a sportive lemur. My stomach tingled like I'd just shot off a huge drop on a rollercoaster. And this was just the beginning...'

With the sun high and conditions calm, the effort seemed worth it. As we pulled our boat onto the sand, a cackle of excited children ran to greet our arrival and followed us past the wooden huts that dotted the edge of the forest. Soon, however, they lagged behind, their excited screams replaced with the calm stillness of the trees, only the odd rustle of mine and Lilovic's boots disturbing the peace.

I kept my eyes on high alert, turning at every sound to try and spy some of the reserve's famous wild residents. After

nothing, Lilovic's magic eyes would spot something. I'd pass a stack of dead leaves only to have him pick one up and show me a minute *Brookesia* chameleon, thought to be one of the smallest reptiles in the world, its little eyes peering up at me from under high-set brows. I'd duck under a tree branch only for Lilovic to call me back to show me a boa constrictor tightly furled around it. Then there was the birdlife – from the long-tailed paradise flycatcher to the jet-black drongo, sporting a distinctive beak feather ►



Tree huggers

(clockwise from this)

A boa constrictor silently moves through the trees; off to work on Nosy Bay's beach; a leaf-tailed gecko on Lokobe; cacao beans being sorted at Millot Plantation; rush hour in Hell-Ville, Nosy Be



◀ – not to mention tiny brown mantella frogs, luminescent-green giant day geckos and yet more lemurs, this time black ones asleep in the trees in an indistinguishable cluster of arms, legs and clumps of fluff.

Then came Lilovic's *pièce de résistance*. Just as we were strolling out of the forest, he stopped and urged me to look at what appeared to be a stick. "Here, here," he insisted, as I nodded and started to walk away. I couldn't see anything but he kept pointing. Then it happened, like one of those Magic Eye pictures from the early 1990s, where after minutes of staring blankly at a sheet of coloured dots, a three-dimensional object suddenly appears. The stick wasn't a stick after all. It was a leaf-tailed gecko, merging seamlessly with the wood it sat on. I was instantly awestruck. Every detail on it seemed to blend in perfectly, right down to the little white spots that resembled pockets of lichen.

Scents and sensibility

If my eyes had been trained by Lilovic at Lokobe, then my other senses were set

for a workout on the mainland. Taking a speedboat from Nosy Be, I headed next to Ankify with my guide, Mihaja.

We turned north in our 4WD, rattling through the pothole-filled land and bound for the edge of Ankarana Ouest National Park, a destination made famous by its spiny rock formations, known as *tsingy*. I had looked at pictures of these razor-sharp pinnacles in books before I'd left and longed to know how they felt under my fingers. But before I could test my grip, there was a different treat in store: a stop at the Millot Plantation.

"Ylang-ylang," said Axel, the plantation guide, as we strolled through an avenue of wizened-looking trees all hunched over like little old men with walking sticks. The sweet scent permeated my nostrils, overwhelming me with its fragrance as he crushed a leaf between his fingers and held it under my nose. Axel explained that thousands of kilograms of these plants are harvested each year to produce essential oils, which are shipped all over the world.

As we walked, he collected yet more flowers and foliage and handed them to ▶



View with a room
The mud and stick huts at Iharana Bush Camp outside Ankarana Ouest National Park

‘Axel cut off the top of one pod and pulled out a string of pearl-like beans. I felt the slimy innards between my fingers, its tangy smell sweeter than any mango’

◀ me. I inhaled their scents greedily, from combava – the leaves of which had a distinct citrus smell – to vanilla pods, which have to be pollinated by hand here because no insects endemic to Madagascar can do the job. The fragrances kept coming: pine fruit, jasmine, the four spices tree with its musky aroma of pepper, nutmeg, clover and cardamom. Lastly, he handed me a clutch of ravintsara, known locally as “the good leaf” that is used to make an ointment similar to Vicks VapoRub, to help with bad colds.

But it wasn’t just the smell making me smile, the ethos of the place was just as pleasing. “All plants are grown here without any chemicals and checked every day by hand,” explained Axel. “And we try to encourage and teach the local people how to grow them, too. That way we can buy the raw products off them and keep the money within the local community.”

It’s not only oils and spices that are found at Millot, though. The main product here is cacao – the raw ingredient of chocolate. Axel led us through a field of trees with giant pods the size of beer cans. Some were yellow, others green or blushing pink – the premium grade. Taking out a knife, Axel cut off the top of one and pulled out a string of pearl-like beans, gesturing for me to take one. I felt the slimy innards between my fingers, its tangy smell sweeter than any mango. As I chewed on it, a rich flavour exploded in my mouth.

“*Theobroma cacao*, it’s an aphrodisiac – and good for your health,” he explained.

We continued on to a hut where women sorted through the nuggets of cacao – now dried out and resembling large coffee beans – before tipping them into hessian sacks. Here they undergo a process of fermentation over a period of several days, then are dried in the sun before being sorted and exported

abroad to make some of the most expensive French chocolate that you can buy.

As we left Millot and made our way further north, we drove by other plantations. This time, however, I could recognise the odd waft of ylang-ylang or the subtle tones of ravintsara seeping through the window.

Peaking early

We finally reach Iharana Bush Camp later that evening – a cluster of mud and stick houses perched around a lake, just outside the national park. Here, and continuing into the park itself, the landscape formed a flat and sprawling savanna, every so often punctuated with clusters of rocky peaks. But on closer inspection the rises were not single mounds at all, but rather collections of karstic limestone formations known as tsingy – either from the Malagasy word for ‘cannot walk on barefoot’ or ‘pointed peaks’, depending on which guide you speak to.

The next morning I discovered that both descriptions were pretty apt. These needle-like protrusions, formed by water undercutting the limestone and gradually eroding fissures and caves, felt almost forest-like as I climbed between them. They were regarded as sacred by early settlers of Madagascar, who would perform spiritual ►



Fish and chicks
(clockwise from this)
A feather-billed drongo;
Madagascar's signature
baobab tree; landing
the catch of the day at
Eden Lodge, Sambirano
Domain; black lemurs
come alive in the trees

‘On closer inspection the rises were not single mounds at all, but rather collections of karstic limestone formations known as *tsingy* – from the Malagasy word for ‘cannot walk on barefoot’...’



Madagascar

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and to access the many
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sky turn crimson in the sunset. It was slightly surreal to be back on the surface, knowing now exactly what lay beneath.

The eyes have it


My last stop saw me head back to Ankify, then on to the north-west region of Sambirano Domain by boat. Here at Eden Lodge, beside the water, lay a handful of tented rooms surrounded by Madagascar's ubiquitous and friendly looking baobab trees. It was there that I met Philippe, who took me on a stroll over the headland.

We set off early, before sunrise proper, and within half an hour we had already seen more birds than I ever thought possible, from sunbirds to sickle-billed vanga and more. Philippe could identify each one from their call alone, mimicking their chirps as he heard them.

Later, as the sun set, we met by the trees for a night walk around the forest. Now, after several days of learning to use all my senses, I could recognise the call of the black lemurs through the darkness, their screeches gurgling and grunting like a cross between a pig squeal and a power tool struggling to start. I watched as these silhouetted creatures leapt from branch to branch, gorging on mangos before hurling them to the ground – often just centimetres from where we stood – with cries of devilish glee. We ended on the beach, where Philippe told me to turn on my torch. As I did, I gasped as hundreds of crabs scuttled all around me, their bodies white and ghost-like in the beam.

On the final day, I took to the water with a snorkel, keen to see what life lay beneath the waves. Philippe had hoped to show me the turtles that come here to feed, but I only saw what I imagined was the back of one of their shells as it darted off into the coral.

Back on land, he apologised for the lack of activity in the sea, but I was unconcerned. As I sat on my hammock in the afternoon sun, I began to hear the chirps of the birds. While I couldn't identify them, I could now at least tell that there were three different species there. As the breeze swung me from side to side, I could smell the vague scent of lemongrass and smiled. This trip had not only taught me to see more, but also to look closely at places and things that I may not have otherwise bothered with before.

Facing the waves, I relaxed and suddenly noticed something in the water. Just for a second, the head of a turtle popped up, took one look at me, then dived back under the surface. One turned into two, into three, then four. In just a few days, with a little bit of patience, I could now see the unseeable. Lilovic would have been proud. 



Hanging around
A bat rests in the caves inside the tsingy

‘Bats swarmed and swooped around us, effortlessly graceful. I was so distracted that I nearly missed the snake slunk at my feet, its scales glowing blue in our torchlight’

◀ services among these otherworldly formations. Locals like Joe, my guide, would only gesture to them with a bent index finger as a sign of respect. Through a thick French accent he described what he could see in the shapes of the rocks, from people's faces to crocodiles, and like the wooden forests of Lokobe before them, the stones began to come to life before my eyes.

After teetering on some rope bridges that had been precariously slung between peaks, I followed Joe down into one of the caves. Interspersed with tree roots that steadfastly pushed their way through the ground, we felt our way slowly through the tunnels, stopping to gasp every few metres as the quartz in the calcium glistened in the sharp beam of our headtorches.

Later in the afternoon we headed to another set of tsingy, to descend into a cave that was a full kilometre in length. It was here that some of Madagascar's early settlers actually lived, and Joe showed me fragments of ancient pottery that were accompanied by scorch marks from fires.

Before I even saw them I knew what was coming next. The scent of the guano was more pungent than anything I'd smelt before. Then came the siren-like squeals. We emerged into a cavernous room, large enough to fit in several houses, and looked up. There, on the roof, were thousands of bats, readying to go out and hunt for the evening. They swarmed and swooped around us, effortlessly graceful. I was so distracted by them that I nearly missed the snake slunk at my feet, its scales glowing electric blue in our torchlight.

Further on, we found a small rock pool where blind fish lay in wait, having evolved underground without the need for sight. "Some other caves here even have crocodiles," explained Joe, as he gestured to a lone bat trembling on the wall by my head, a giant spider sitting just centimetres from it.

We emerged back into the daylight just as the sun was starting to slump towards the horizon. For the first time in the trip we hurried, heading up to reach a viewpoint on the top of the tsingy, just in time to see the



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Madagascar Footnotes

VITAL STATISTICS

Capital: Antananarivo
Population: 22 million
Languages: Malagasy and French
Time: GMT+3
International dialling code: +261
Visas: Required by UK nationals, with short-stay visas issued on arrival (€25/US\$25/£20) and valid for up to 30 days
Money: Malagasy ariary (MGA), currently around MGA4,047 to the UK£. You are legally required to change money in banks and hotels, though most guides can find you better rates. ATMs are available in Hell-Ville but are not very reliable. Most bars, restaurants and hotels accept credit cards anyway, and many also take Euros.

When to go

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec

■ **Milder and dryer** – pleasantly warm (temperatures around 26°C) with rare showers. The landscape is very green and the *tsingy* can be walked on safely.
 ■ **Rainy season** – expect warmer, more humid temperatures (26–32°C), as well as daily, sometimes torrential, downpours. Cyclones are typically common between January and March.

✚ **Health & safety**
 Consult your doctor before travelling, with vaccinations against diphtheria, hepatitis A and B, tetanus, TB and typhoid advised. Malaria prophylaxis is highly recommended, and take DEET insect repellent and sunscreen with you. Always drink bottled water.

📖 **Further reading & information**
Madagascar (Bradt, 2014)
Madagascar Wildlife (Bradt, 2012)
Madagascar Highlights (Bradt, 2012)
www.madagascar-tourisme.com – Madagascar national tourism board

🌐 **More online**
 Visit www.wanderlust.co.uk/174 for links to more content:

ARCHIVE ARTICLES

- ◆ In search of Madagascar's aye-aye – issue 140
 - ◆ Finding Neverland – issue 123
 - ◆ The *Wanderlust* guide to the best of Madagascar – online exclusive
- PLANNING GUIDES**
- ◆ Madagascar travel guide

THE TRIP

i **Getting there**
 The author travelled with **Rainbow Tours** (rainbowtours.co.uk; 020 7666 1266). A similar seven-night trip to northern Madagascar, including accommodation (see 'Accommodation'), local guides, airport, speedboat and 4WD transfers, park permits, guided trips to Ankarana Ouest, Lokobe and the chocolate plantation, plus activities and most meals from £3,525 per person (including international flights).

✈ **Getting there & around**
 The author flew with **Air Austral** (020 7644 6124, www.airaustral.com, res.airaustral@aviareps.com), who offer flights from the UK via Paris CDG to Nosy Be three times a week from £987 (flight time around 20 hours), including the opportunity of an extended stopover on **Réunion**. On board there are three levels of service: Loisirs (economy), Confort (premium economy) and Club Austral (business class). Taxis are available at Nosy Be airport, but agree a price before travelling. Internal flights are renowned for being cancelled or rescheduled without notice. In planning a trip to this part of the country, try to take advantage of boat and 4WD transfers, which are usually much more reliable.

🛏 **Accommodation**
Nosy Lodge (nosylodge.com) is 40 minutes' drive from the airport, away from the hustle of Hell-Ville. Beach huts overlooking the sea from €75pn (£65).
Eden Lodge (edenlodge.net) is a luxury eco-lodge with thatched huts sheltering safari-style tents among the baobab trees and wild lemurs. From €200pppn (£174).
 Located beneath the tsingy limestone formations is **Iharana Bush Camp** (iharanabushcamp.com). Expect local-style bungalows with some well-placed terraces. Bungalows from €222pn (£193).

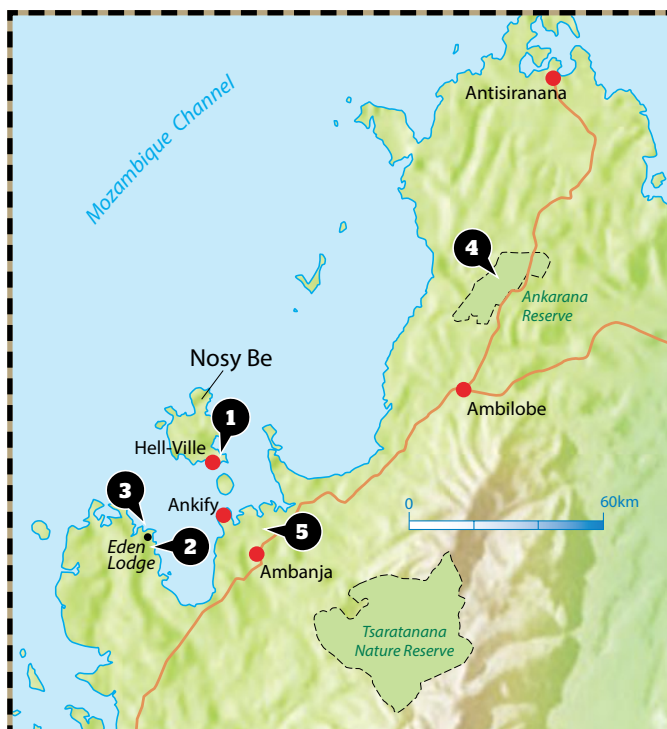
£ **Cost of travel**
 Madagascar has something for all budgets. However, as a long-established destination, prices in Nosy Be are **closer to those of EU cities**. Overall, expect to pay about €13 (£11) for a meal and £2.50 (£2) for a beer or coke. Tipping is expected – be sure to set aside small bills for this.

🍴 **Food & drink**
 French and Western food occupy most hotel menus, but **Malagasy cuisine** (heavily influenced by South-East Asian and Indian spices) is well worth trying. National dish **romazava** – a meat and veg stew – and Zebu steaks are popular, as is seafood. Vegetarians may struggle, but staff can usually adapt dishes to suit.

MADAGASCAR HIGHLIGHTS



- 1 Lokobe Reserve**
Grab a canoe (pictured) and a local guide to head into this lemur-rich reserve, with the chance to spot several varieties of this Madagascar native as well as chameleons, snakes and more.
- 2 A night walk in the woods of Sambirano Domain**
Once the sun sets here, you can't beat an expert-guided stroll through the dark, where lemurs call, bats dart, and crabs scuttle between your feet.
- 3 Snorkelling for sea turtles**
Setting out from Eden Lodge (see 'Accommodation'), this very easy 100m swim to the coral affords a great chance to spy on the green turtles that feed here.
- 4 Ankarana National Park**
Both inside and outside the park, you'll find clusters of otherworldly limestone tsingy. Climb them, then go underground to find the sacred caves beneath.
- 5 Chocolate Plantation, Ambanja**
Follow the journey of chocolate, from cacao pod to fully formed bar, at the plantation near Ambanja. It provides cocoa to the famous Chocolaterie Robert, and you can also learn about ylang-ylang and other home-grown essential oils, as well as vanilla pods and coffee beans.





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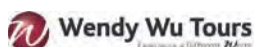
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Floating past St
Goarshausen –
with Katz Castle
looming – on a Rhine
river cruise

Best River Cruises



◀ RHINE Fairytale, castles... and rivers

LENGTH: 1,320km

TIMING: Year-long; December brings incredible winter markets, but berths book up fast. Summer is hot and busy, with the shoulder months (April or September) a good compromise.

THE RIVER: Since the height of the Holy Roman Empire, the Rhine has been the busiest waterway in Europe. But while dense shipping can impact on views in places, its scenery remains the most varied on the continent, ranging from battlefields and vineyards to Baroque palaces and medieval castles, as it trickles out of Switzerland and through western Germany to the Dutch coast.

THE SIGHTS: Germany's 65km stretch of Middle Rhine Valley is the fairytale river of popular imagination, studded with castles, medieval villages and hill-top palaces. Four-day cruises from Strasbourg to Koblenz are a great way to pack this in – along with the Rhineland's vineyards – while avoiding the river's more pragmatic parts. Plus, Strasbourg's Cathedral is among the finest medieval buildings in Europe.

DETOURS: Side trips along Rhine tributary the Moselle reward with classy views, especially on the final hairpin bends between Trier, Germany's oldest city, and Koblenz. Weeklong trips between these cities take in 'wine capital' Bernkastel and medieval Beilstein, overlooked by the imposing Metternich Castle.

KERALA BACKWATERS Drift southern India in a rice barge

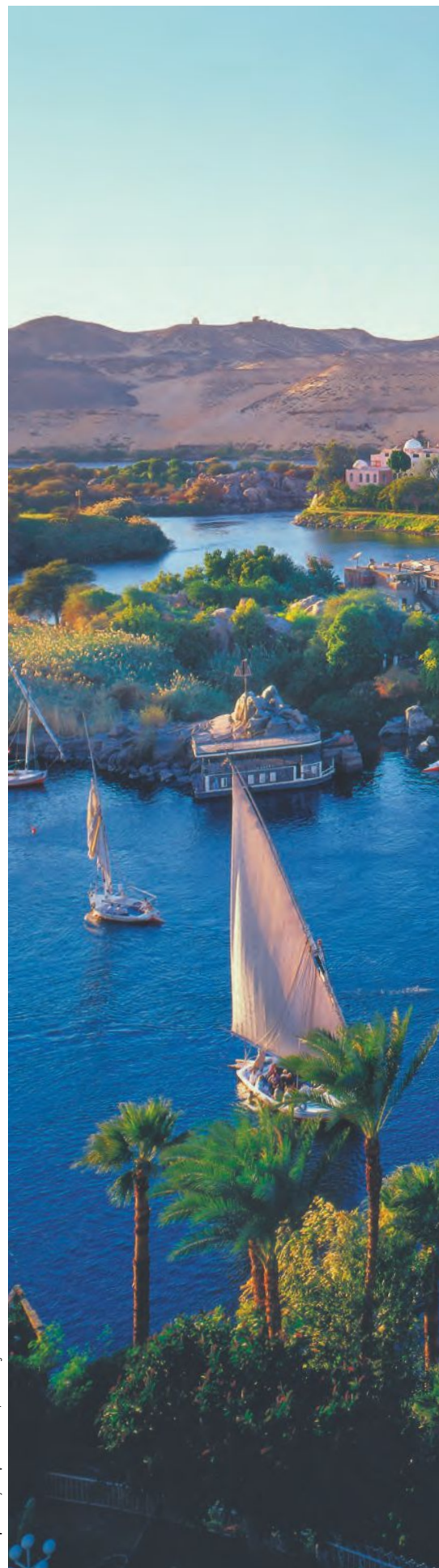
LENGTH: 900km

TIMING: Winter (Nov-Feb) is cooler but can also be quite busy. In monsoon season (Jun-Oct) expect heavy rain in the afternoon.

THE AREA: Kerala's network of canals, lakes, rivers and tributaries offer a slow-motion take on India's south-east, along waterways sketched liberally in mangrove forest and drifting past bird sanctuaries, plantations and vast paddies. Most cruisers amble along in *kettuvallam* (rice barges), dinky houseboats crafted from bamboo and coconut fibres (*coir*), in which time seems to stand still.

THE SIGHTS: Most houseboat cruises set out from Alleppey (Alappuzha). From here, side trips overland to Munnar's Western Ghats and Periyar NP reward with bracing walks and tiger-spotting opportunities respectively, but the main appeal lies in simply drifting. Typical trips meander via the vast lake of Vembanad to the island-clustered village of Kumarakom, all the way to Cochin (Kochi) where sail-like Chinese fishing nets and colonial facades greet your arrival.

DETOURS: Tired of the slow life? Try the Brahmaputra River, which flashes through India's far western states. Eight-day trips sail from Nimati in West Bengal to Guwahati, Assam, with visits to Kaziranga NP (best Nov-Apr) to spy rare one-horned rhinos a worthy side trip.



Previous spread: Jimmy The spread: Dreamstime; 4: Cornes Images

NILE

Return to Egypt

LENGTH: 6,853km

TIMING: Boats sail year-round, but Oct-April is the coolest period, with high season (Dec-Feb) not nearly as busy as it used to be.

THE RIVER: Prior to 2011, a reported 10,000 trips a year were made on the Nile. But recent times have seen that number fall to just a few hundred as troubles elsewhere in the country take effect. Yet the Nile Valley has remained largely untouched by incident, and with London-Luxor flights having since resumed, the ancient waterway should be high on agendas.

THE SIGHTS: The Cairo-to-Aswan 'long Nile' cruise (880km) returned to itineraries in 2015

following a two-decade absence. But with the capital still making the wrong kind of headlines, its southern reaches may prove more attractive.

Set sail from Luxor, in any one of a range of vessels – from a classic small cruise ship, to the Agatha Christie-inspiring *Steam Ship Sudan* or a *dahabeya* houseboat with its giant sails – before exploring vast temples (Karnak, Kom Ombo, Edfu) and ancient necropolises (Valley of the Kings) en route to Aswan. From there, a side trip to Abu Simbel, a pair of huge rock temples hewn out of a mountainside near the Sudanese border, is a must.

DETOURS: Some tours include two-night trips downstream from Aswan aboard a small *felucca* (traditional wooden sailing boat) with mattresses slung on deck for a night under the stars. ►





◀ **DANUBE** Waltz across Eastern Europe

LENGTH: 2,888km

TIMING: Year-long; summer can leave water levels low, so avoid the hotter months (Jun-Jul) to skip potential cancellation disappointments.

THE RIVER: Veining nine countries (and edging another), the Danube stumbles over more borderlines than a four-year-old attempting an

MC Escher colouring-in book. Nineteen nations in total share its basin and, from the Germany's Black Forest to the Black Sea, it seeps through a spectacular array of landscapes, from the vineyards of Austria and Soviet-era architecture of Belgrade to the gorges and peaks of Romania.

THE SIGHTS: Typical trips last around eight days, starting in Nuremberg, Germany, and drifting through Austria to finish in Hungarian capital Budapest. The more adventurous will likely be drawn to the river's eastern fringes, where cruises

usually depart the Baroque Austrian streets of Linz for the Little Carpathians of Slovakia and on through Serbia's 'Iron Gates', the clawed gorges that mark its border with Romania. These trips tend to culminate in Tulcea, which has good links to explore the dramatic Black Sea delta.

DETOURS: For those inclined towards the epic, 24-day cruises incorporate the waterways of Amsterdam and parts of the Rhine and Main rivers before linking up with the Danube Canal in Nuremberg and pushing on to the Black Sea.



MEKONG

Wildlife and pagodas in South-East Asia

LENGTH: 4,350km

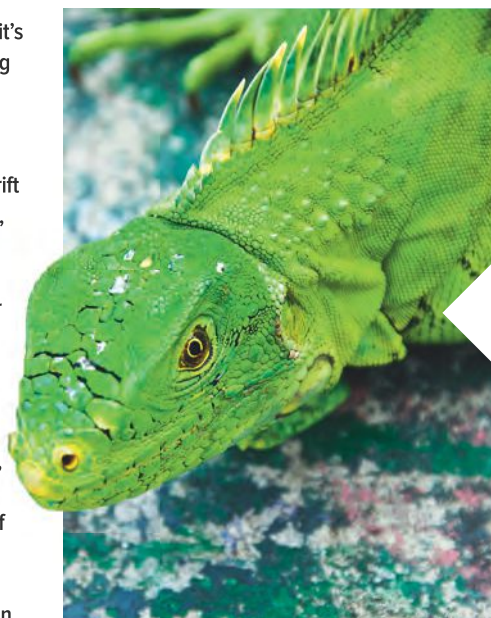
TIMING: Year-round; winter (Nov-Feb) is cooler but tends to be packed, while rainy season (Jun-Oct) is less busy, with heavy – if often fleeting – showers.

THE RIVER: In the heat of a Laotian summer, it's difficult to believe that the source of the Mekong lies high up in the meltwaters of the Himalayas. Today, development along the river remains admirably restrained when compared with the rest of Asia's rivers, a fact appreciated as you drift the lower reaches' bamboo jungle, stilt villages, floating markets, rice fields and pagodas between Laos and the South China Sea.

THE SIGHTS: Typical weeklong cruises either traverse Laos from laid-back Luang Prabang to capital Vientiane, or voyage from Cambodia's Siem Reap to Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam. Along the way, the river's biodiversity almost rivals that of the Amazon, but it's the river's history that compels, with Siem Reap in particular a popular jumping-off point for exploring the ruins of the Angkor temple complex, while the tragic legacies of the Khmer Rouge and Vietnam War resound in

the museums, POW camps and tunnels of Phnom Penh and Ho Chi Minh.

DETOURS: New 14-day trips along the Mekong's upper section begin in late 2017, on what's said to be the first cruises to take in this part of the river. From Vientiane, you'll float over the Chinese border to Jinghong, wandering Laos's Plain of Jars and the Dai villages of Yunnan en route.



AMAZON

Welcome to the jungle

LENGTH: 6,992km

TIMING: Wet season (Dec-May) means better access to the Amazon's smaller tributaries, fewer crowds and spectacular wildlife watching.

THE RIVER: The majority of the world's largest river runs through Brazil and Peru, with the former attracting the bulk of the traffic – and visitors. Legions of vessels prowl the broad, noisy stretches between Manaus and the Colombian border, which is why the adventurous look elsewhere...

THE SIGHTS: The 'alternative' often means Peru, where shallow-bottomed riverboats set out from Iquitos to the Amazon's northern tributaries (Ucayali, Marañon, Tahuayo) all the way to its headwaters. Trips (4-7 days) thread blackwater streams and islands swarming with iguanas to the Pacaya-Samiria reserve, a 20,000 sq km of flooded, wildlife-packed jungle. Pit-stop in river villages, swim with pink river dolphins and soak up one of the most biodiverse places on Earth.

DETOURS: The wildlife reserve and freshwater archipelago of the Anavilhanas lies around 75km upstream from Manaus, Brazil, along the Rio Negro tributary. Go in dry season (May-Nov) when its islands and channels come alive with jaguars, manatees and some spectacular birdlife. ►

Best River Cruises

◀ **HOOGHLY** History and tigers in India's West Bengal

LENGTH: 260km

TIMING: Year-round; October to April brings milder temperatures.

THE RIVER: This West Bengal tributary of the Ganges embraced river tours, after its once-dried up flows were bolstered by a diversion from the main stem. Since then, shallow-draft ships have opened up the route, with weeklong cruises from Farakka to Kolkata ploughed by a handful of luxury craft, pushing deep into West Bengal's storied fringes.

THE SIGHTS: India's imperial west is the incentive here, with visits to Murshidabad and its impossible Palace of 1,000 Doors, which was the seat of the Murghal *nawab* (ruler), as well as the Battlefield of Plassey, where the last independent ruler of the region was defeated by the British in 1757. Stops at the ruined city of Gaur and terracotta temples of Kalna delve even further back into an era and region little explored by visitors.

DETOURS: Trips upstream along the Ganges from Farakka are possible in August/September, when the high waters allow you to journey to the holy city of Varanasi, spying gangetic river dolphins and pilgrimage sites en route.



YANGTZE Ghosts and gorges of China

LENGTH: 6,300km

TIMING: Year-round; spring (Mar-May) and autumn (Sep-Nov) offer cooler breezes and fewer mosquitoes.

THE RIVER: The Yangtze is big! It is said more people live on its banks than in the entire US, and even the boats that cruise it (100-250 passengers) are huge, thanks to local demand and a dearth of low bridges. But it has changed. The controversial Three Gorges Dam has taken its toll, raising water levels and erasing villages along its most popular stretch, between Chongqing and Shanghai. The epic scenery, however, remains breathtaking.

THE SIGHTS: Trips tend to vary between ten-day voyages from Chongqing to Shanghai and abbreviated three/four-day jaunts, usually to the towering gorges of Wuhan, which are part of a longer trip that includes flights to Beijing and Xi'an. Other Yangtze pit-stops include the 'ghost city' of Fengdu (*pictured left*), where a vast 'ghost king' statue cradles a mountainside of monasteries and shrines, before drifting on to the first – and most dramatic – gorge, Xiling, its steep-sided, misty canyons velvety in a lush canvas.

DETOURS: A side-trip to Guilin (1.5-hour flights from Chongqing) rewards with trips on the Li River, floating amid karst rises and terraced hills; meanwhile Suzhou – 30 minutes by train from Shanghai – is the gateway to the old water towns of Jiangsu province, laced with scenic canals and Qing-era gardens.





CHOBE

Cruise Botswana's Big Five

LENGTH: 731km

TIMING: Botswana's dry season (Apr-Oct) sees water sources inland become scarce, improving the chances of spotting wildlife from the river.

THE RIVER: The Chobe is the name given to the lower section of southern Africa's Cuando River, which rises out of Angola, edges

Namibia and northern Botswana before flushing into the mighty Zambezi. Plush river cruisers float its middle reaches, heading out from Kasane, Botswana, and into the wild wetlands of the Okavango Delta and the Chobe National Park.

THE SIGHTS: Most tours include four days on the Chobe River as a part of a longer trip (12-14 days), usually beginning in South Africa's Johannesburg and ending at Zimbabwe's Victoria Falls (*pictured above*).

In between, drift the park's teak and mahogany-riddled banks, as giant marabou stork watch on and great egrets swoop overhead seemingly mocking gravity. River and overland safaris bring you closer to the park's huge herds of elephants and buffalo, with plenty of opportunities to spy big game from the water.

DETOURS: Take advantage of a longer trip to cram in more nature. Many tours can include nights and game drives in South Africa's Kruger NP, known for its large numbers of rare white rhinos. ►



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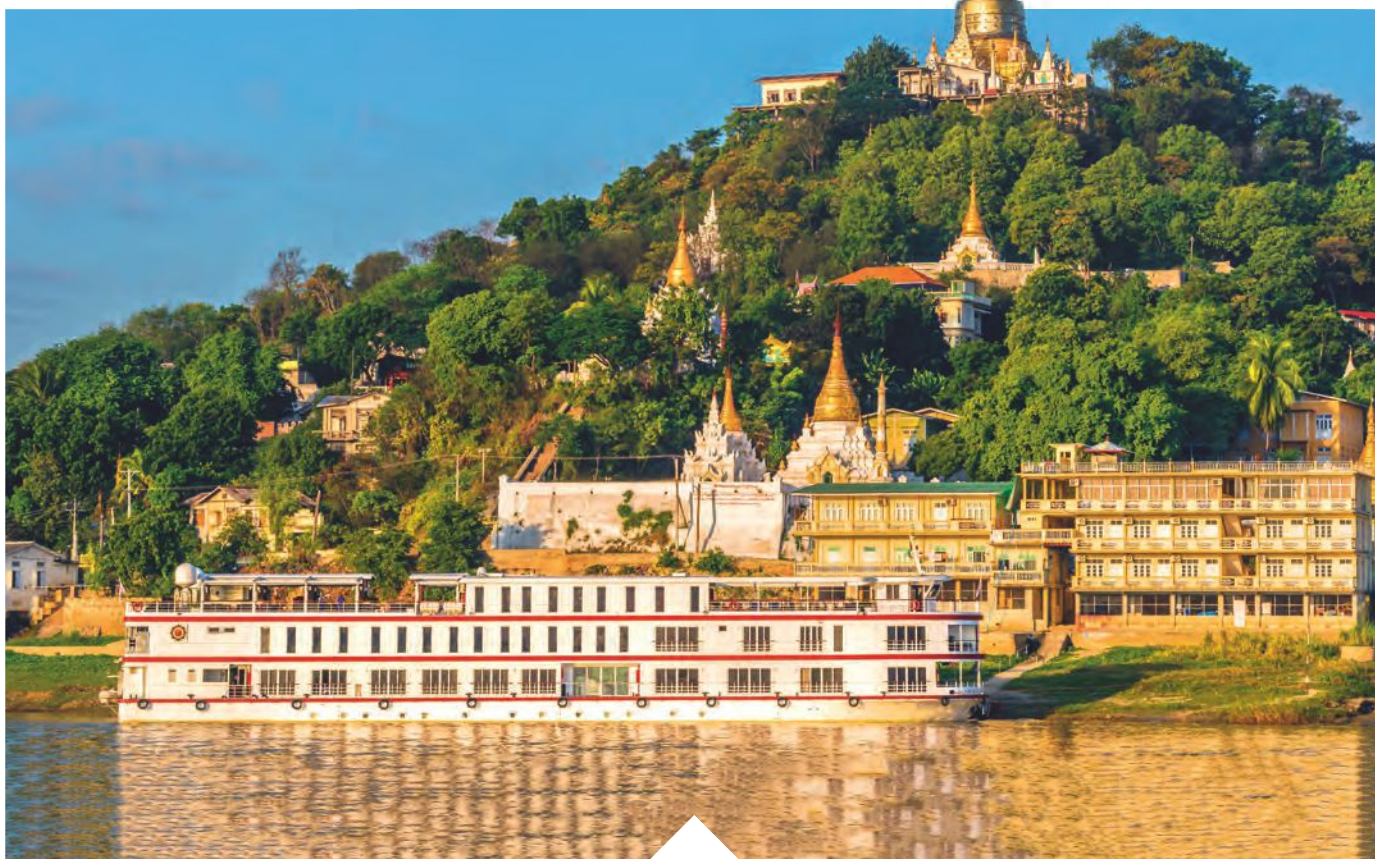
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◀ **IRRAWADDY** Burma (Myanmar) by water

LENGTH: 2,170km

TIMING: Year-round; dry season (Nov-Feb) sees cooler temperatures

THE RIVER: Like South-East Asia's other alpha rivers, the Irrawaddy's Himalayan source offers stark contrast to the hot plains of Burma that most cruisers experience. Here, luxurious colonial-style riverboats regularly skim the waters between Yangon and Mandalay (11-15 days), dipping in at Inle Lake and Bagan.

THE SIGHTS: Two-day cruises from Mandalay to the temple complex of Bagan are a fine way to quickly soak up the region. The city is still flecked with remnants of its colonial heyday, especially around its old docks, while the golden monastery speaks of another era entirely. Both cities feature on the round-trip to Bhamo (11 days), before peaking in the stark gorges and remote villages, such as Katha, of the distant north, near the Chinese border, where fewer visitors tread.

DETOURS: To escape the crowds further, the Chindwin tributary branches off Burma's Upper Irrawaddy and brushes steep-sided

cliffs, lush jungle, and en route to Homalin, with potential land trips across the border to the Indian state of Nagaland – offering a different world entirely.

MISSISSIPPI Birth of a nation

LENGTH: 3,734km

TIMING: Riverboats plunge the lower reaches of the river during winter (Nov-Dec) and summer (Apr-Jun).

THE RIVER: The Mississippi occupies a powerful place in the American imagination, with a crowded history that takes in everything from the American Civil War to the creation of rock 'n' roll as it swerves ten states, its waters still ploughed by giant paddle ships.

THE SIGHTS: It's the lower New Orleans-to-Memphis stretch of this vast river that truly feels like the Mississippi of Mark Twain and the history books. Eight-day cruises typically begin in the 'Big Easy', with stops narrating the birth of modern America, from the harrowing plantations of Oak Alley, which explore the antebellum homesteads that witnessed the heyday of slavery in the US, to the battlefield of Vicksburg, where the Civil War turned in favour of the Yankees. In between lie ageing river towns, wild swamps and rock 'n' roll legends.

DETOURS: Longer cruises along the lower, middle (Cairo, Illinois, to St Louis, Missouri) and upper (St Louis to St Paul, Minnesota) parts of the river are a veritable three-week PhD in Americana. ▶



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◀ VOLGA Russia made easy

LENGTH: 3,530km

TIMING: The bulk of the river is navigable between March and December.

THE RIVER: Stretching from the hills north of Moscow down to the Caspian Sea, the Volga is Russia: impossibly vast and wrinkled with an operatic and turbulent history narrated in the folktales, buildings and cities that line its banks.

THE SIGHTS: The route between Moscow and St Petersburg (10-15 days) is a popular one, following the Volga for part of the way, fording rural villages and some of Europe's largest lakes. But the true Volga experience is found on its lower reaches, strung between Moscow and 'caviar capital' Astrakhan (12 days). This covers 3,000km in a blur of onion-domed cathedrals and (bloody) Red history, pit-stopping at the UNESCO-listed city of Yaroslavl and drifting through the Republic of Tartarstan before pitching into a vast, wild delta speckled with lotus flowers and flamingos.

DETOURS: The Neva River makes up the final stretch of the Moscow-St Petersburg route, seeping from Lake Ladoga through the delta that St Petersburg sits on. It's a quick way to get a taste of Russia and see some fine architecture.

RHONE The reign of terroir

LENGTH: 812km

TIMING: Cruises run from March to November, with grape harvests typically taking place between August and October.



THE RIVER: From the glaciers of Switzerland, the Rhône plunges west through France, branching into the Saône as it pushes on to the Mediterranean. This last stretch is pure gastronomic country, with typical wine-themed cruises traversing Provence and Burgundy aboard small riverboats and barges, pit-stopping at vineyards and crumbling Gallic castles.

THE SIGHTS: Most routes combine both regions (and rivers), usually beginning or ending in Beaune, the heart of the Burgundy region where pinot noir and Chardonnay grapes rule the roost. From there, wend vineyards, châteaux and medieval cities, stopping in gastronomic capital Lyon and finishing in Provençal Arles. Try and include a visit to Camargue, where the Rhône

flows into the sea; this delta is packed with birdlife and crowds of promenading flamingos.

DETOURS: Alternative French wine cruises either combine the Dordogne and Garonne rivers (setting off from Bordeaux) or drift the Loire Valley, an area known for its castles, barges and Sancerres.

MURRAY Australia's answer to the Mississippi

LENGTH: 2,735km

TIMING: Cruises operate year-round on the lower river, but tours further inland rely on the higher waters of spring.

THE RIVER: The 'mighty Murray' shaped Australian history. Back in the 19th century, the river was a major shipping route, ferrying goods across three states (Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia). Today, paddle ships now inch passengers through its lower reaches, edging wildlife reserves and red gum forests.

THE SIGHTS: Luxury steamers line the lower river between Murray Bridge and the old trading posts of Mannum and Morgan (3-7 days). En route, the riverbank hums with wildlife, from wombats and kangaroos to the rich array of birdlife that flits its shores, while weeklong trips typically cram in hikes, small-boat safaris, wine tastings and a visit to the Ngaut Ngaut Aboriginal Reserve.

DETOURS: To explore the reserves, vineyards and tributaries of upstream, swap steamers for a catamaran and overnight stays on land. Weeklong cruises from Echuca, once Oz's busiest inland port, only run in November, when the high water allows. ▶



Best River Cruises



◀ CALEDONIAN CANAL Barging through Scotland

LENGTH: 100km

TIMING: Cruises run between April and October.

THE CANAL: Cutting a gash across northern Scotland from Inverness to Fort William on the west coast, the Great Glen fault carves its way through fen, forest and fell. By 1822, it would also shepherd the Caledonian Canal, a hand-dug waterway using vast lochs (Ness, Lochy, Oich), like stepping stones, to ferry trawlers inland from the North Sea. Today, it's mostly small barges (8-12 people) ploughing its waters on weeklong trips.

THE SIGHTS: The canal's setting is drama enough, especially seen atop a low-slung barge while inching through the Highlands. Soak in the raw beauty of the country's lochs while pit-stopping at Cawdor Castle and cruise the locks of Neptune's Staircase as you descend to the village of Corpach, overshadowed by the mighty Ben Nevis, before warming up with a wee nip at a Scottish whisky tasting.

DETOURS: If you prefer a ship to a barge, cruises from Inverness continue on to the isles off the west coast during summer (May-Sept), visiting Eigg, Skye and the sea loch of Inverie in the remote Knoydart peninsula. Pure isolation.

DOURO Port, parks and Portugal

LENGTH: 897km

TIMING: Year-round; go May or – for barefooted grape-stomping – September.

THE RIVER: From the medieval dockyards of coastal Porto, the Douro winds sun-dappled vineyards, plunging locks, valleys and Portuguese villages to the Spanish border. Its headwaters, however, lie further on in central Spain, with weeklong cruises usually culminating amid the grandiose walls of Salamanca.

THE SIGHTS: Wander the Romanesque streets of Porto before cruising into the Douro Valley for port tastings and visits to traditional Iberian villages such as Pinhão. Upriver, rocky gorges hide nesting griffon vultures, with trips to the Douro Natural Park (straddling the Spanish border) a must. But the highlight is the UNESCO-listed Salamanca, a bustling university town speckled with cathedrals and golden sandstone.

DETOURS: Further south, the Guadiana and Guadalquivir also offer similar under-the-radar escapes on the Portuguese border and Spain's Andalusia region. Cruises thread between Seville and Cádiz, and even splash into the Atlantic to switch rivers as you explore vineyards, national parks and Moorish architecture along the way.

COLUMBIA Go west in the USA

LENGTH: 2,000km

TIMING: Boats run between April and October, but bring plenty of warm clothing – even during summer. Early October sees the grape harvest.

THE RIVER: The Columbia River slips through the Canadian Rockies and over the US border into Washington to the Oregon coast. Together with its main tributary, the Snake River, this stretch is best known as the final part of Lewis and Clark's 1804 expedition into the then-uncharted west.

THE SIGHTS: Small boat and paddlewheel cruises explore the last push of the duo, from Clarkston, Washington, to Astoria on the Pacific coast – albeit in more comfort. Explore the petroglyphs of the deepest river gorge in the US, Hells Canyon, under the watchful gaze of its Bighorn sheep, then push on to the Multnomah Falls. Most cruises take in a trip to Fort Clatsop, the expedition's furthest point in 1805, and give you time to explore the Dalles (the end of the old pioneer wagon route), hip Portland and towering Mount St Helens.

DETOURS: Forget pioneer hardships on a wine cruise along the Columbia between Portland and Vancouver (Washington) – a chance to savour the vineyards and seasonal grape harvesting. **W**

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LIVING ON THE EDGE

Bhutan might seem like a lost world, but it's no longer a stranger to tourism. Yet high in its unspoilt valleys and villages continues a way of life unchanged for decades...

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHS **MARTIN SYMINGTON**

The high life
The 17th-century Taksang monastery is also known as 'Tiger's Nest', owing to a legend that its founder flew there on the back of a magical tigress

A single mesmerising moment. That was all it took to realise a long-held dream. For years I had yearned to explore the far reaches of the secluded kingdom of Bhutan, locked high in the Himalaya between Tibet and India. Then, a few days after I arrived, I emerged from my tent to watch a mantle of dawn cloud etch patterns of light and shadow across the valley floor. Above me clung the Bumdra Monastery, its gold-tipped roof adorned with ragged prayer flags flapping mantras into the wind, and to the far north rose the freshly minted peaks of the Jomolhari range, serrating the skyline. It had been worth the wait.

But the view from the ridge was just the start. I had begun the previous day from the *gompa* (monastery) at Sang Choekhor in western Bhutan's Paro Valley. I wanted to explore the country's remote corners on foot – the only way to touch Bhutan's rural heart and understand its enduring traditions. To do this, I set out on a series of day and overnight hikes, staying in homestays and guesthouses, and experiencing local life along the way.

So, with the pack ponies bringing up the rear, my young guide, Rinzin, and I picked our way through the heady-

scented forest of Paro Valley, full of twisted junipers and glossy rhododendrons threaded with webs of 'old man's beard' (*Clematis vitalba*). Our trail traced a tumbling stream, its course punctuated every now and then by water-turned prayer wheels that filled the air with bell chimes and good karma.

The air and vegetation thinned as we climbed up from the valley, eventually emerging on a yak-grazed clearing at 3,900m where we camped. During the following day's descent, Rinzin pointed out distant outcrops, tiny hermitages where monks meditated in total isolation, often for up to three years. What astonished me was that this was regarded not as a feat of extreme asceticism, but was undertaken as a matter of course by many young Bhutanese men.

What do they do about supplies, or if there is a medical emergency, I pondered aloud? Rinzin's reply was simple: "They send a text message." Of course.

The real boon of this trek, however, was that it ended by dropping down to Taktsang Gompa, better known as the Tiger's Nest monastery. Yes, it is possible to reach Bhutan's stellar attraction from above, rather than by trudging the well-beaten track from the valley floor. You don't even need a flying tigress, such as the one revered eighth-century Buddhist master Padmasambhava (aka Guru Rinpoche) rode to reach the dizzying ledge where the temple now stands, at the start of his mission to bring Buddhism to Bhutan. Instead, we ►

'My guide pointed out distant outcrops, tiny hermitages where monks meditate in total isolation for three years, three months, three weeks, three days and three hours'

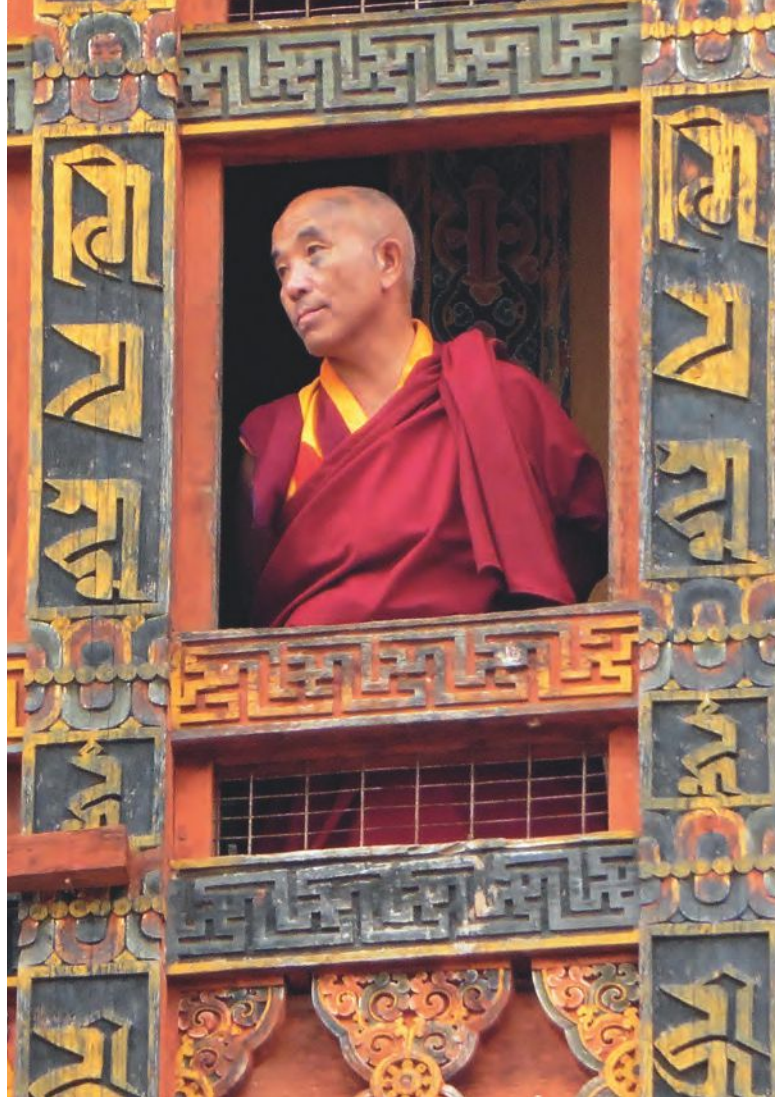


Blowing in the wind
Swaying prayer flags
on the summit of
Bumdra mountain



Bark life
(clockwise from this)
Guide Rinzin Wangchuk
shows how to strip fresh
wood without harming
the tree; Buddhist prayer
wheels, Rinzin drinks
from a sacred spring;
'old man's beard' drapes
the forests of Paro Valley





A day in the life
(clockwise from this)
The rice terraces of
Punakha Valley; Yang
Den milks her cow at the
homestay in Yewakha;
cheese chunks drying
on a string in Choekhor
Valley; a monk looks
out of Punakha Dzong

How green is my valley?
The Mo Chhu river meanders through the Punakha Valley



◀ arrived at Taktsang via a little-trodden trail that plunged through forest and under a thrashing waterfall, before climbing down a series of steel ladders and stone staircases hewn from the mountain itself.

Thousands of visitors to Bhutan – including Royals Will and Kate Cambridge last April – puff their way up to the Tiger's Nest. It's a sight on a par with the Taj Mahal or Machu Picchu, yet despite the readily ingrained images in my head, it still took my breath away. However, it was the unusual manner of our arrival – dropping down from an overnight eyrie far above – that made the experience seem all the more remarkable.

The pursuit of happiness

Tourism is a curiosity in Bhutan. While there is no annual visitor quota here, as some believe, numbers are naturally curbed by the country's 'high value, low impact' policy, which sets most travellers a minimum spend of between US\$200 and US\$290 per person, per day. Of course, even then, those visitors that do make it here still don't get the run of the land. The majority are required to be accompanied by government-licensed guides and to stick to pre-arranged itineraries. They either join tough multi-day camping treks into the high Himalaya, or embark on 'cultural' forays, staying at government-designated hotels full of fellow tourists, to be whisked in groups from gumpa to tsechu (festival) to datse (archery match).

'Our route wove through an agrarian landscape made sacred by creaking prayer wheels, white stone stupas and swaying wire bridges fluttering with multi-coloured prayer flags'

Well, the Buddha termed his teaching 'the middle way', so I felt confident of Guru Rinpoche's blessing in planning a happy medium. My route would combine the trek to the Tiger's Nest with a journey eastwards along Bhutan's 'national highway', stopping off in far-flung valleys and overnighting in villages to witness traditional life up close.

So it was that I arrived at my first homestay, following a day's hike through the rice paddies of the Punakha Valley. I snaked around terraced slopes and bubbling irrigation channels, this time led by another gracious and erudite guide, Lobsang, who showed me how the valley's fabled fertility combined with its reputation as Bhutan's spiritual heartland.

Our route wove an agrarian landscape made sacred by creaking prayer wheels, white stone stupas and wire bridges fluttering with multi-hued prayer flags, known as 'wind horses'. We passed prayer walls carved with the '*Om mani padme hum*' mantra, and houses frescoed with phallic murals (not ribaldry, but a plea for fertility and protection against evil spirits).

As we approached Yewakha village, five-year old Changa ran down the lane to meet us. With shrieks of glee she led this strange foreigner to the wooden-framed farmhouse where her parents, Ap Lotey and Yang Den, were waiting. Chimi Zam, the little girl's granny, was winnowing rice in the courtyard, and nearby a tree trunk notched into a ladder led to my room, where they had laid mattresses on the floor. ►



In your sights
Archery is a national obsession in Bhutan, with the sport taking centre stage at many local festivals and religious holidays



Bhutan

◀ After prayers mumbled before Buddha statues lit by flickering butter candles in the tiny shrine room, it was supper time. School-age siblings Wangmo and Kinley Wanchu were now home and happily chatting and translating, since English – rather remarkably – is the language of education in Bhutan at every level from primary upwards. Sitting in a circle on sofas and the floor, we and the family sipped salty butter tea and crunched *zaw* (popped rice) before devouring beef with buckwheat pancakes and the ubiquitous *ema datshi* (green chillies, sliced and served with oil and cheese).

Wise old Chimi Zam, whose lifespan has encompassed the world at war and the opening up of Bhutan, said that she was pleased we were staying in her village, because when she was young she “did not know that there was a world beyond the mountains”. The Bhutanese government had kept the Switzerland-sized country in almost total isolation until 1974, when it first opened its doors a crack.

“Life is better now,” pronounced the old lady with an impish smile. This led us into a family discussion about ‘Gross National Happiness’, namely Bhutan’s. This, of course, is the country’s much-vaunted policy of marrying economic development with environmental and cultural conservation. In practice, it is the kingdom trying to engage

with the modern world by degrees, without compromising its traditions and spiritual character – its ‘soul’, if you like.

I woke to the smell of woodsmoke and thump of hooves, then joined Yang Den in the cowshed below, where she was hand-milking the stock. We had a go at pumping the butter churn before watching our hostess pour hot water into a bucket of curds to make the cheese we had for breakfast. Meanwhile, Changa helped her father shovel cow dung into a circular cement trough, where it was turned into methane gas, to be pumped via a rubber tube into the kitchen for cooking.

“There is little take-up among tourists for homestays. Perhaps people expect a bit more luxury for their money,” proffered my guide. Well, I guess luxury is a question of perspective, I decided as I shouldered my daypack and noisy little Changa shouted her goodbyes. For me, brief immersion in the lives of these happy, hopeful people was a luxury beyond the indulgent spa hotels typically offered.

I was learning by degrees how closely interwoven the concept of conservation was in traditional Bhutanese culture. My next hike was through the higher, cooler Phobjikha Valley, famed as the wintering ground for some 350 pairs of rare black-necked cranes. I set off at dawn, soundtracked by the faint murmuring of monks ►

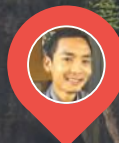
Wheels of fortune
(clockwise from this)
A flight of water-turned prayer wheels in Thimpu Valley; monks descend; drying chillies; Ap Lotey helps his son to tie his *gho*; a mural image of Guru Rinpoche at Jakar Dzong







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Living on a prayer
An elderly woman spins her prayer wheel at Jampey Lhakhang monastery in Bumthang Valley

◀ from the extensive Gangtey Gumpa, where, according to Lobsang, the heavenly birds pay their respects by circling three times when they arrive from Tibet in late October. “Monks, farmers and birds all live in peace and harmony,” he assured me.

From the monastery, we could see down the broad glacial basin, fenced from predators, free of pylons and entirely given over to the sacred cranes. We were too early in the year for them, though we spotted hoopoes and long-tailed magpies on our route through tangles of wild marijuana and forests of blue pine, where local people stripped kindling from trunks in a way that allowed the trees to regenerate. I had seen cork harvested sustainably from trees, but firewood was a first for me. We carried on up a remote adjacent valley where subsistence farmers grew potatoes and buckwheat at homesteads behind wooden stockades, to protect them from bears and leopards. Lobsang was ever-vigilant about animals, though we spotted nothing more threatening than troupes of langur monkeys.

From high way to highway

In its next life, I expect the east/west ‘highway’ to be reincarnated as a fairground ride. The road rollercoasters over giddy passes and plunges into valleys in a carnival of prayer flags, banners and stupas.

‘Hoopoe birds and long-tailed magpies dotted our route past tangles of wild marijuana and forests of blue pine, where locals stripped kindling from trunks in a way that allowed the trees to regenerate’

It needs to zigzag round every contour since this section of the Himalaya is too seismically unstable for tunnels. Work has recently begun on a massive project to widen most of its 270km course between the capital, Thimphu, and Jakar in the Bumthang Valley, our destination. So be warned: for the next five years at least, travelling this dynamited and bulldozed road is going to be slow. For us, unseasonal rain had complicated matters, and we found ourselves tailing a convoy of trucks daubed in classic Bhutanese style – a menagerie of dragons and winged phalluses.

On the plus side, a new mountain airstrip at Jakar meant the option of a 25-minute propeller-plane hop back to Paro. This heavenly blessing allowed us to look forward to a flight across the Himalaya. It also meant a few days in the valleys of the Bumthang region, the furthest flung portion of my trip.

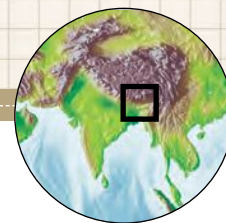
Tiny Jakar had something of a one-horse feel about it, despite being watched over by a huge whitewashed *dzong* (monastery-fortress) on a hill above the town. Red-robed monks flitted across the courtyard, while the incensed darkness within hid hundreds of statues of beatific golden Buddhas and terrifying demons representing the truths of worldly impermanence. It was something to ponder on during the exquisite hike from my homestay in the hamlet of Pang-Ray, along the crystalline Choekhor riverbank.

Chunks of cheese hung on racks outside farmsteads while bright red chillies were dried on the rooftops. Around one corner we stumbled on a game of *khuru* – the throwing of darts fashioned from nails and wood, and flighted with feathers. This is an altogether cheaper and more common version of the exalted national sport of archery. In the game, men – old and young together – were whooping and dancing with glee, all dressed up in their *ghos*, the traditional costume for males that, give or take a *skean dhu* knife and a sporran, seemed to share much of its DNA with the old garb of the Scottish Highlander. The noise and energy of the game was a surprise in this serene valley.

It was then that Bhutan had one last surprise for me up its sleeve. A furious rainstorm delayed my flight back to Paro by a day, by which time there were two days’

worth of passengers for half as many places. It was then that Lobsang had an ingenious idea. Weight rather than the number of seats was the issue, so how did I feel about offering to abandon my bags?

I like to think Guru Rinpoche would have blessed us for embracing the Buddhist philosophy of worldly impermanence. Feeling liberated, I flew out of Bumthang with only hand baggage to my name, a rolling vista of valleys, rivers and sacred peaks unravelling below. It all felt rather fitting. Having chosen the rough comfort of homestays and the country’s rural corners, it seemed that the strange harmony that permeated life here had left its mark on me. I smiled at the thought – one final fleeting contribution to gross national happiness. **W**



Bhutan Footnotes

VITAL STATISTICS

Capital: Thimphu
Population: 750,000
Language: Dzongkha; English is common
Time: GMT+6
International dialling code: +975
Visas & taxes: 'Visa clearance' must be applied for by your tour operator in advance, with visas (US\$40/£33) issued on arrival. Bear in mind that a government-set minimum spend of US\$200 (£165; Jan–Feb, Jun–Aug & Dec) or US\$250 (£205; Mar–May, Sep–Oct) per person per night is factored into all trips; singles and couples also pay a US\$40 (£33) and US\$30ppn (£25) premium respectively. This includes three-star hotels, transport, food and taxes, and is paid in advance.
Money: The Bhutanese Ngultrum (BTN), currently around BTN82 to the UK£. Indian rupees are also widely used. There are few ATMs, but pounds, US dollars and euros can be changed in banks and hotels.

When to go

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec

- Peak season** – The most popular time. Dry, warm and with clear skies.
- Winter** – Cold. Snow often blocks the higher passes, so trekkers beware.
- Spring** A good compromise. Warm with glorious blooms, though often hazy.
- Monsoon** Warm and wet. Low season.

Health & safety
 Be up to date on your diphtheria, polio, hepatitis, tetanus and typhoid jabs. Drink bottled water and try to acclimatise to the high altitude before trekking.

Further reading & information
Bhutan (Lonely Planet, 2014)
Dreams of the Peaceful Dragon (Hodder & Stoughton, 1989) by Katie Hickman – fine travel account of Bhutan
www.tourism.gov.bt – tourism board

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- Exploring mountain monasteries in Bhutan – Issue 142
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 - 7 things you must do in Bhutan – online
- PLANNING GUIDES**
- Bhutan travel guide

THE TRIP

The author travelled with **Mountain Kingdoms** (01453 844400, www.mountainkingdoms.com), which offers a variety of small-group and individual trips. A 13-day bespoke itinerary costs from £3,750 (or £2,950, if joining in Kathmandu; return flight to Paro included) per person based on two sharing. The price includes return flights to London; two nights' B&B at the Hotel Shangri-La in Kathmandu, with airport transfers; all transport in Bhutan, including a driver and guides; the two-day Bumdra trek; an overland journey from Paro to Jakar with day hikes, sightseeing and return flights to Paro; accommodation in hotels, guesthouses and homestays; and all meals.

Getting there
 It is possible to enter Bhutan overland from India, but most tourists arrive at Paro airport. **Drukair – Royal Bhutan Airlines** (drukair.com.bt) is the only permitted carrier, with return flights from cities across Asia, including Delhi, Kathmandu, Mumbai, Bangkok and Singapore, from around US\$400 (£330).

Getting around
 When not on foot, you are driven in a private vehicle or minibus. Four airports handle domestic flights: Paro, Jakar, Gelephu and Yongphulla. If flying between these and Paro, **build in time to return by road** in case of cancellation.

Cost of travel
 Bear in mind that almost all expenses are included in the cost of your tour and 'daily spend' (see 'Visas & taxes'). You need only budget for tips, drinks (beer and soft drinks cost about BTN125 [£1.50] each) and shopping.

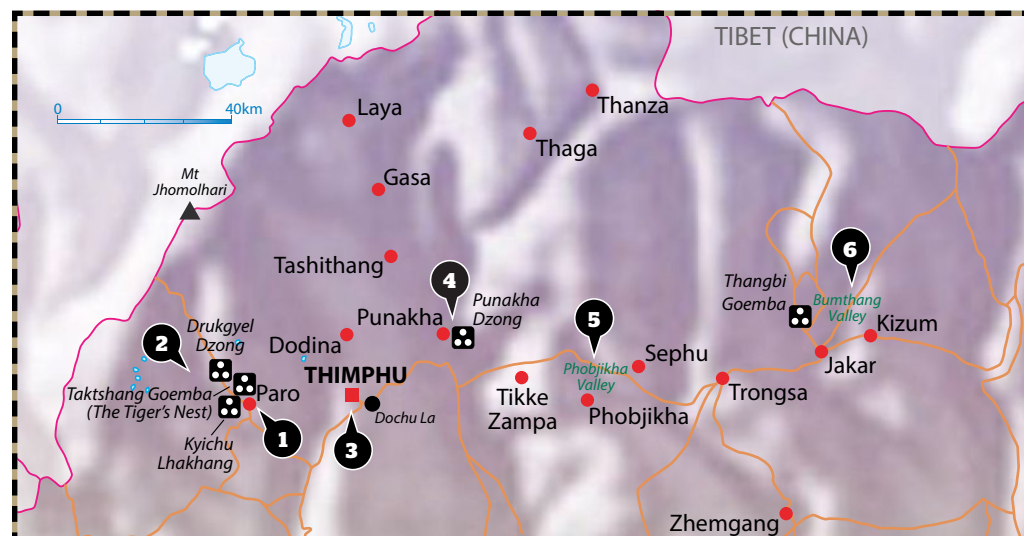
Accommodation
 There are plenty of tourist hotels and guesthouses, built in a traditional style, that offer three-star-ish levels of comfort. **Staying in these will come within your 'minimum daily spend'**, as will homestays where the authenticity of your experience requires privations such as mattresses on floors and outside toilets. At the other end of the scale are the ultra-luxurious resorts, including five by the Aman group (aman.com). These will set you back more, with doubles at the Aman Bumthang costing from £1,100pn.


Food and drink
 Unless you are camping or staying at a homestay, most meals will be **buffets at government-licensed tourist hotels and restaurants**. The Bhutanese devour fiery chillies with everything, though there are usually blander options as well for those with more sensitive palates. Expect a selection of vegetarian and chicken, beef, pork and sometimes river fish dishes. When it comes to a tipple, the local **Druk beer** (in both lager and 'extra-strong' varieties) is decent; some hotels have imported wine at exorbitant prices.

HIGHLIGHTS



- Paro**
An enchanting little town, conveniently lying next to the international airport.
- Bumdra Valley**
A sensational two-day trek, ending at the gravity-defying Tiger's Nest monastery.
- Thimphu**
Buzzing markets, craft shops, and the nearest thing Bhutan has to a big city.
- Punakha**
Bhutan's spiritual capital and home to a stunning dzong (monastery-fortress; pictured). Hike its fertile farming country.
- Phobjikha Valley**
Rich in wildlife; wonderful day hikes.
- Bumthang Region**
Wander icy rivers and sacred sites among the region's far-flung valleys.







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Widescreen scenery
(clockwise from this)
From spying elk amid the scattered green of Great Sand Dunes NP to hiking the Rockies and rafting Aspen, Colorado offers some truly wild escapes



Go wild in scenic Colorado

Explore widescreen landscapes on an adrenaline-fuelled escape with the help of Colorado Tourism Office and Grand American Adventures' small group tours

Home to yawning canyons, staggering peaks and Wild West frontier towns, Colorado almost seems designed for adventures.

Whether hiking, rafting or sandboarding, the state's shifting landscapes boast possibilities in spades. But to make the most of them, it pays to consult the experts, and the combined experience of **Grand American Adventures'** small group tours and the Colorado Tourism Office are the ideal starting point to explore this epic state's untapped wilds...

From dunes to peaks

More recently, Colorado state capital Denver has morphed from frontier hub to a hive for art and food enthusiasts. Better yet is its proximity to the wilderness: on its doorstep lies the Red Rocks, a naturally formed amphitheatre set among trekkable foothills. Beyond there, the state isn't short of

sprawling national parks either; try sandboarding in Great Sand Dunes NP, skimming its glistening ochre ripples, or exploring the 700-year-old Puebloan cave dwellings of UNESCO-listed Mesa Verde NP.

Colorado's rugged scenery lends itself well to thrill-seeking, from edging the steep drops of the Black Canyon of the Gunnison NP to saddling up for a trek along the old frontier mining trails of Telluride's rugged San Juan Mountains. You can even raft the white waters of the Arkansas River, framed by the towering twin peaks of the Maroon Bells.

Pockets of Colorado's history are just as easily explored, with the Victorian buildings of Durango – once a prominent frontier town – well worth visiting. But it's arguably the tundra of Rocky Mountains NP that is the state's biggest gem, as you spy elk, moose and even mountain lions among its crystalline lakes, snowy peaks and wildflower-filled meadows, all accessed by a web of walking

trails. And with over 480km of routes to explore, you'll likely to have them to yourself.

In expert company

Take all the hassle out of your Colorado experience by going on a Grand American Adventures small group tour. The team's expertise in uncovering the must-see places and tucked-away spots helps unlock some of the wildest and most diverse scenery that The Centennial State boasts, with its *Colorado Multi Active* tour being the ideal introduction. The small group sizes mean that you're able to tailor the trip to your own tastes and you needn't worry about the logistics either; that'll all be taken care of, leaving more room (and less stress) to enjoy exactly what you came for: the great USA outdoors.

So pack your bags – Colorado's mix of peaks, parks and frontier history awaits.

Visit **www.grandamericanadventures.com** or call **0333 999 7968** to start planning your American adventure



TRAVEL MASTERCLASS

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**Ethiopia's
salt caravans
– in pictures**
see p78

- **This month's experts include:** Tourist in his own country Dixe Wills, p72
-
- ◆ *Wanderlust* Guide Award winners, p75 ◆ Salty snapper Trevor Cole, p78
-
- ◆ Cycle-fit Dr Jane Wilson-Howarth, p80 ◆ Top gear judge Sean Conway, p83
-

Home comforts

Travelling in your home country is a chance to explore those classic sights that you've always wanted to experience, such as the Lake District



■ The *Wanderlust* Masterclass

Be a tourist in your own backyard

When we think about booking a trip, our thoughts usually turn to foreign lands. But next time, why not try an adventure on home turf instead?

"When we travel overseas, we have a tendency to push ourselves out of our comfort zones," explains *Wanderlust* editor Phoebe Smith, who is also the author of *Wilderness Weekends: Wild Adventures in Britain's Rugged Corners*. "What we need to do is take that same mentality and apply it when we're back home – that way we can

all be tourists in our own backyards." So how do you plan an unfamiliar travel experience in a country you know well? Read on...

Where to go

When looking for inspiration, you'll be sifting through familiar names of places. "But remember, anywhere is a travel destination if you've not visited it before," says Phoebe. "Get a map and look for a town, village or city you've never been to – or only passed through on a train – and head there. You never know what you might find."

And don't just think about the places you want to visit. Consider some locations that

have negative reputations and treat them like places you know nothing about. Research and make it your mission to find somewhere beautiful or interesting in those areas.

"Force yourself to visit places you wouldn't necessarily think of going to. In the past, that's where I've found some little gems," says Dixe Wills, author of *Tiny Churches*.

There's no limit to where you should cast your net, either. "Make sure you explore both what's on your doorstep and at the opposite end of the country," advises Terri Weeks, co-author of *Adventures Around You*. You will often find that the country just opens up before you, full of places you'd

'Get a map and look for a town, village or city you've never been to – or only passed through on a train – and head there. You never know what you might find...'

never considered or heard of. For extra tips, leaf through local guidebooks and turn to your friends and social media for bonus nods to off-the-radar spots.

Make getting there all part of the fun

Flying is part and parcel of going abroad; but if you're staying at home, there's often no need to get airborne. Instead, make the most of travelling on *terra firma* by ensuring the journey is as important as the destination.

As for how you're going to travel, you're spoilt for choice. Buses enforce slow travel and call at lots of stops, offering the opportunity to pit stop at many different places. Arguably, they're also the most 'local' of all public transport – you'll stumble across towns and villages never previously on your radar.

Bicycles are also great for slow travel, and convenient for following your nose and stopping when you spy vistas and places that grab your interest. "I prefer to go by train and take my push bike with me," says Dixe. This means you can go further from home, then explore slowly once you arrive. Also, try to pack a tent in your panniers, so you've got yourself a ready-made cycling tour (plus a very cheap way of travelling).

Trains are quicker and more direct, and perfect for accessing long-distance locations. "The sleeper train between England and Scotland is one of the best ways to travel," adds Phoebe. "It's an experience in itself, adding a nostalgic feel to the journey. Plus, you're covering distance while you sleep, so you don't waste any time that you can spend in the destination."

Many choose to leave their car at home, but don't discount an epic road trip. For example, the recently opened North Coast 500 in Scotland is a strong option for Brits.

Finally, you can't beat walking as a way of exploring, so consider hitting trails where someone else has already mapped out a route of interest for you. "There are so many trails, footpaths and bridleways in the UK," says

Phoebe. "Check out the Long Distance Walkers Association (ldwa.org.uk), where you can search by distance and location for great ideas. It's how I found the Wanderlust Way, a glorious walk through the beautiful countryside outside Grimsby. It's a place that I would never have visited otherwise."

Try something new

You're on home territory and there are no language barriers, foreign currency or any other possible teething problems, so what better time to edge out of your comfort zone and try a new activity.

"Find out what you can do in the area you're heading to and give it a go, even if it's completely alien to you," says Terri. If you're going coastal in the UK, try stand-up paddleboarding or coasteering; or for a bird's-eye view of your newfound location, have a stab at paragliding. Aside from sports, look to add a new interest, such as birdwatching, historic architecture or sampling local foods. If the activities you do are new to you, the setting around you will likely feel more foreign, too.

TOP TIP

Spend your nights somewhere unusual to spice up your trip – whether it's a wild camp, mountain bothy or quirky hotel.

Plan shorter breaks, but take them more often

A huge advantage to travelling at home in the UK is that everything is close by, making a quick trip over the weekend feasible.

"Instead of visiting somewhere abroad for a week or more, travelling in your home country means that you can plan several day trips and weekend breaks throughout the year," advises Terri.

As you won't be shelling out for flights, either, put the cash you've saved towards more mini-breaks, or extend one you've already got planned. Or better still, treat yourself to a nicer hotel or an extra activity.

You've probably always known that there's more to see in your country, but now you've got the tools to explore its hidden wonders in the flesh. There are just no excuses not to get out there, whether it's once, twice or throughout the year. **W**

Case study

EMMA HIGGINS

Blogger Emma shares tips on how she spent a year exploring her home country



How do you approach a staycation?

Start to look at your own country as a traveller, then you realise just

how much there is to see. It always surprises me. I think it's a state of mind: an adventure is whatever makes you feel adventurous. As long as you're pushing yourself outside your own personal comfort zone, then you could be a mile away from home and still be on a thrilling adventure. And if you're in the UK, you're sorted; there's a lot to explore on these wild little isles!

What are the first steps toward booking a staycation?

I would advise people to plan in the same way that they would for a trip abroad. If you usually hire a car, go in your own; if you'd rather get around on public transport, then that's possible, too. I prefer to drive – because if you already have a car, you may as well use it. That way, all you have to worry about is petrol, which usually makes it the cheapest way to get around. But, in general, a staycation means that you can go a little more ad hoc in terms of the things you plan to do because you're more familiar with your surroundings, so winging it is a good way to go!

What does travelling in your country offer compared to being abroad?

The main things are time and money. It takes you less time to get to where you're staying, and it's often cheaper (given you don't pay air fares). For that reason, roaming at home opens your weekend up to travel opportunities. It's often not worth going abroad just for two nights, but a couple of hours' drive away is perfectly manageable.

Any other advice?

Pick somewhere you've always been meaning to go but never got round to. Plan something big or adventurous – like wild camping or a long coastal hike – to make it feel even more exciting. Go with an open mind and the curiosity of a traveller in foreign lands. **W**

See Emma's blog at gottakeepmovin.com

Competition

JERSEY



Mont Orgueil Castle

GUERNSEY



Castle Cornet

WIN a Channel Islands break

Enjoy rugged walks, history-laden lands and fine food in Jersey and Guernsey

Steeped in history, webbed with wild walking trails and fringed by azure waters, the Channel Islands are ideal for tranquil adventures. Only a short hop from the British mainland, Jersey and Guernsey boast raw coastlines and rugged interiors aplenty, while this Easter sees the return of the Channel Islands Heritage Festival (8 April-10 May), when carnivals, art exhibitions, storied walks, cycling tours, watersports and more light up the islands. What's more, we're offering you a chance to join in on the fun...

Take a walk through history

Jersey is home to a long, illustrious past. Trips to its neolithic La Hougue Bie monument reveal a site thought to be one of the world's oldest buildings, predating Egypt's pyramids. Meanwhile, the Tudor-era Elizabeth Castle, marooned on an island off Jersey's coast, may only be reached at low tide but is worth the trip to explore its wind-scarred battlements.

Easier to see are the German fortifications that still festoon Jersey's coastline. They date from when the island was the divide between

German-occupied France and Britain, with trips to the war tunnels at St Helier a must.

Head to the south of Jersey for more natural treasures, such as the beaches of St Brelade's Bay, with St Ouen's Bay on the west coast a hotspot for watersports, especially surfing. Clifftop walks are the best way to spot its rich birdlife – spying swallows, puffins and petrels gliding the salty air – while festival walking tours and kayaking trips help you explore the coast in expert hands.

Lap up big landscapes

For an island only measuring 63 sq km, Guernsey packs in a lot. Legends riddle its shores, from the ill-tempered bailiff Gautier de la Salle to fables of witches and ghosts. Look out for heritage walks in Vazon Bay, Castle Cornet and St Peter Port (where Gautier supposedly lived) during the festival.

Guernsey's headlands in particular are speckled with crumbling stone forts, a nod to the isle's smuggling history. But its waters have other surprises – of the culinary variety. The island is famed for its boat-fresh seafood, with local specialties like 'ormer' (not unlike abalone) best sampled in St Peter Port.

So if you're after wild vistas laced with history, trails and tasty food, you needn't stray further than Jersey and Guernsey. And with the Channel Islands Heritage Festival about to begin, the time to visit is now. So why wait?

HOW TO WIN

JerseyTravel.com and *GuernseyTravel.com* are offering the chance to win a four-night break (two nights each on the islands of Jersey and Guernsey) for two, including flights. To be in with a chance of winning, simply answer the following question:

Q: Which famous poet and novelist spent his time in exile in both Jersey and Guernsey?

(a) Oscar Wilde (b) George Eliot (c) Victor Hugo

To enter and for full terms and conditions, go to wanderlust.co.uk/competitions or send your answer to the *Wanderlust* office (address p2). The closing date for entry is 15 March, 2017. State 'no offers' if you'd rather not be contacted by *Wanderlust* or its sponsors.



JerseyTravel.com



GuernseyTravel.com

For more information, call **01534 496659** or visit **www.jerseytravel.com/wanderlust** and **www.guernseytravel.com/wanderlust**



DID YOU KNOW?

This archipelago was made to be seen. Its name derives from the Portuguese 'abre os olhos', meaning 'open your eyes'.

National treasure
Currently visited mainly by lobster fishermen, the islands of Houtman Abrolhos are soon to become Australia's newest national park

Instant Expert

Houtman Abrolhos Islands

I've never heard of them...

Perhaps because this pristine archipelago is largely off-limits to all but a small number of day-trippers and lobster fishermen. Not to be confused with Brazil's similarly named archipelago, the Houtman Abrolhos stretches to over 120 isles off the coast of Western Australia, around 60km from Geraldton.

Ok. So why are we talking about them?

Because the islands are set to become Australia's newest national park in late 2017. An otherwise untouched archipelago, its new status will offer facilities for those wishing to stay longer (overnight stays are currently not permitted), with floating hotels and campsites planned. However, the designation only covers the land, it will still share its waters with local fishermen.

So what is there to see?

A number of local cruises currently stop off at the lush Wooded Island, where you can explore mangroves and inland lakes, spying over 40 species of seabird, including the rare endemic Australian lesser noddy as well as little shearwaters and eastern reef herons.

The islands' main draw, however, is its reef-laden waters, making for a diver's (and snorkeller's) dream. Glide alongside Australian sea lions, stingrays, dolphins and schools of tropical fish, all drawn to the vast coral playground that frames the archipelago.

Anything else?

It's not just fish you can spot in the waters off the Houtman Abrolhos. Over 50 historic shipwrecks speckle the seabed, including Dutch East India Company vessel the *Batavia* (named after the colonial Dutch name for Jakarta). The ship wrecked near Beacon Island in 1629, whereupon a brutal, murderous mutiny decimated the survivors. Dive among the wreck on Morning Reef or head to Geraldton on mainland Western Australia and the town's namesake museum for a deeper insight into the ship's ill-fated voyage. A bloodthirsty tale worth hearing.

5 of the best...

GUIDES IN THE WORLD

As our World Guide Award competition opens we look back at our winners...



Luca Alfatti (2012)

A guidebook and driver rolled into one, Luca displayed an unbridled commitment to ensure everyone had the trip of a lifetime. He has even inspired others to become guides.



Deana Zabaldo (2013)

An American by birth, but Nepal is where Deana's heart lies.

Her knowledge of its language, culture and religion impressed everyone that she guided, and she has also co-founded a non-profit fund in Nepal that directly benefits local people.



Efrain Valles (2014)

From his humble beginnings as a street kid in Cusco, Efrain

overcame all the odds to lead treks across Peru for well over a decade, sparing time to also volunteer for various local charities. A truly selfless ambassador for his country.



Mark Steadman (2015)

Mark has long been the epitome of all

a guide should be: enthusiastic knowledgeable, warm. He has also developed a tight-knit bond with the communities in which he guides, especially in Laos, where he has set up an education foundation.



Samer Saied (2016)

Also known as 'Mr Egypt', Samer's passion for his native country proved infectious with those he guided. The ultimate ambassador for his nation, he has brought Egypt's rich history to life for countless travellers, leaving no stone unturned.

But who's next? Visit

www.worldguideawards.com to nominate your best guide

ASK THE EXPERTS

Escaping the beached masses of Grenada; riding the rails of Europe; pedalling the Lancashire Cycleway; and scouring the Nova Scotia coast for whales – our experts put you in the know

THE EXPERTS



LIZZIE WILLIAMS

Author of Footprint's *Grenada, St Vincent & the Grenadines* guide (footprinttravelguides.com)



NICKY GARDNER

Writer and author of European Rail Timetable Ltd's *Europe by Rail* (europeanrailtimetable.eu)



JON SPARKS

Photographer, writer and author of *Cicerone's The Lancashire Cycleway* guidebook (cicerone.co.uk)



DAVID ORKIN

Freelance travel writer and author of Bradt's *Nova Scotia* guidebook (bradtguides.com)

Q I'm heading to Grenada in the Caribbean. Where are its best off-the-beaten-track escapes?

Edward Packham, via email

A Grenada's south-west corner, around the sands of Grand Anse, is the main focus of tourism here, while just a 15-minute drive north lies St George's, the capital and a strong contender for the prettiest harbour on the island. Make time for a stroll and lunch at one of its waterfront seafood restaurants before exploring the rest of the island.

Striking into the north takes you to more off-the-beaten-track locations, but given the island's size, nothing is more than a half-day trip from any hotel in the south-west. Take the east coast road, which curves alongside the Atlantic. Along the way, stop at La Sagesse Bay's beautiful and near-deserted beach; the Belmont Estate, to learn about the island's nutmeg and cocoa heritage; the historic River Antoine Rum Distillery; and, when in season (April-August), organise a night-time leatherback turtle-watching excursion in Levera NP.

Alternatively, the west coast road passes through old fishing villages with fine views of the brilliantly blue Caribbean Sea, while Grand Etang NP's lusciously green canopy of towering mahogany and teak trees lies in the cool mountainous interior.

If you have a couple of days to spare, I highly recommend a visit to one of the least developed Caribbean islands, Carriacou

– a dependency of Grenada, reached by a short flight or ferry ride. Explore its tiny, very friendly main town of Hillsborough, snorkel on pristine coral reefs and watch the sun set on glorious Paradise Beach, which really does live up to its name.

Lizzie Williams, author of Footprint's Grenada, St Vincent & the Grenadines guidebook

Q I want to spend a week travelling Europe by rail, but I'm not sure where to start. Any ideas?

Jennifer Ferguson, via email

A You can take in a lot with a full week. Start in London with a high-speed dash to Paris on the Eurostar, then continue on to the Swiss shores of Lake Geneva, where Lausanne makes a good first night's stay. Kick off the next morning with the boat to Montreux, from where a marvellous mountain railroad tracks north-east via Gstaad and Interlaken to Lucerne.

After a day or two in Switzerland, why not head east over the Arlberg route to Innsbruck in the Austrian Tyrol? From Innsbruck, there's a marvellous railway line north to Mittenwald in Bavaria, from where it's a short hop on to Munich. Then it's on to Heidelberg and the classic, not to mention pretty, Rhine Valley route to Koblenz and Cologne. From there, it's just around five hours' train ride back to London, changing in Brussels along the way.

You'll probably not want to travel every single day. Lucerne

Southern comfort

St George's harbour is one of the prettiest spots on Grenada, but head north to beat the crowds



and Mittenwald are both attractive choices for a two-night stop.

Use Interrail or buy point-to-point tickets, booking well in advance for the best deals. Loco2.com is a good place to check for budget travel tickets on European rail lines.

Nicky Gardner, co-author of European Rail Timetable Ltd's Europe By Rail guidebook

Q I want to tackle the Lancashire Cycleway. How can I split it up over the course of a week?

Calum McBride, via email

A As you may already know, the Lancashire Cycleway totals around 425km. Spread over a week, that averages just under 60km of cycling a day.

I suggest dividing the main route up into 12 stages, using convenient villages as markers. Some of these



■ Insiders' Guide to...

BHUTAN



Gina Eckersley, product manager at adventure tour operator Exodus (exodus.co.uk), shares her favourite sights, festivals and things to do in Bhutan...

SEE A FESTIVAL: The main religious festivals in Bhutan are known as *tsechus* and are celebrated in monasteries across the country. It's well worth trying to catch a 'fire blessing', where the locals run through a burning archway to free themselves from their sins of the past year.

HIDDEN TREASURES: You're likely familiar with the stunning Tiger's Nest (Taktsang) Monastery, perched impossibly on a cliff edge in the Paro Valley, but Bhutan is full of special places. The incredible Dochula pass boasts 108 stupas along with fine views at its summit, while the lesser-visited Cheri Monastery boasts a chance to spy mountain goral (a type of wild goat) en route. Lastly, the sub-tropical Punakha Valley has a remarkable fortress – the second-ever built in Bhutan.

WHEN TO GO: Most of Bhutan's festivals take place in spring and autumn, whereas trekking tends to be best between October and December, as the weather is generally clear and sunny. From March to May, watch Bhutan's 45 wild species of rhododendron burst into life.

GET ACTIVE: For adventure lovers, Bhutan is a great place to see on foot. Treks head out into remote areas and you can camp among some stunning Himalayan views. Cycling is relatively new here, but the challenging high passes make for a truly dramatic ride!



'Grenada's west coast road passes through old fishing villages with fine views of the brilliantly blue Caribbean Sea'

can easily be combined into longer stages, though, if you want to fit them into a week's schedule.

If arriving by train, the best plan is to make for Lancaster, even though it's not the official start of the cycleway. This gives you a fairly easy first day's ride on to Hornby, after which potential overnight stops would be Whalley (transfer to Southern Loop), Holcombe Brook, Croston, Bilsborrow (transfer back to Northern Loop mid-stage) and then on to Great Eccleston.

In a week's cycle (following this route), the toughest – albeit not the longest – day would be the third,

with just over 80km (including 1,300m of climbing) to cover. The fourth day would actually be longer but also much easier, especially later on. The final two days provide much simpler going and could well be combined into one day's cycle.

Of course, that is only one way of cycling this route, and even a brief study of the local area will suggest other permutations. Perhaps try using different stopping points or varying stage lengths. After all, planning the route is half the fun.

Jon Sparks, author of Cicerone's *The Lancashire Cycleway* guidebook

Q Where and when can I spot whales in Nova Scotia?

Gemma Rowley, via email

A Canada's Nova Scotia is one of the best places in the world to go whale-watching, both in terms of quantity and variety – 21 whale species cruise its coastal waters. Baleen (eg minke, humpback, fin and north Atlantic right) whales are drawn by the huge amounts of plankton and krill that gather where the cold outflow of the Bay of Fundy meets the warm Gulf Stream waters. Both orca and fish-eating toothed whales (eg pilot and sperm) are found in the Gulf of St Lawrence and Cabot Strait. Visitor numbers tend to be highest from around late July to mid-September.

Although trips are offered from various places in the province

(including Halifax and Lunenburg), two particular areas are stand-outs. One is the northern Cape Breton Island (ships depart from Pleasant Bay or Bay St Lawrence). For me, though, the best whale-watching trips leave from the Digby Neck region, specifically Westport on Brier Island and Freeport and Tiverton on adjacent Long Island.

Various operators offer between two- and five-hour boat trips for around CAN\$50-85 (£30-£50). Choose between a 'normal' boat and a small high-speed Zodiac (or Zodiac-like) inflatable boat. On many whale-watching boat tours, sightings of porpoises, dolphins, seals and pelagic seabirds can be seen around Nova Scotia, and are often added bonuses for any eagle-eyed watchers.

David Orkin, author of *Bradt's Nova Scotia* guidebook

TAKE BETTER TRAVEL PHOTOS




Winner of the
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2016 'Portfolio' category,
Trevor Cole shows us
how to tell a story through
a collection of photos...

The caravans of the Afar tribe traverse Ethiopia's Danakil Desert as part of an eight-day cycle, travelling from lush highlands down to one of the most inhospitable places on Earth. Here, salt is harvested by hand in temperatures of over 50°C, ready to be loaded onto the arriving caravans.

I love that this ancient trade still exists. So, to capture these shots, I spent two days in the desert watching the camel trains set out at dawn and return at dusk. It was hard to choose just a small selection of images, but I went with these (*pictured*), as I felt they represented the diversity of life in the desert as well as the resilience of the Afar.

I wanted to show the interaction that exists here between people and the land, from the camel trains and salt workers to the Afar tribeswomen and, finally, the men hefting 50kg bags of salt, which are increasingly now transported by truck – marking a possible end to the caravans. A good portfolio can truly tell a story. 

You can see Trevor Cole's winning Travel Photo of the Year 2016 portfolio [here](http://www.trevcole.500px.com). See more of his work at trevcole.500px.com



1 Gain the trust of the locals

It is normally very difficult to photograph the women of the Afar tribe. In this case, the village I went to was remote but its inhabitants proved to be more amenable. Nevertheless, I always try to interact with my subject and spend time getting to know them. This helps create an ambience that allows you to get the best shot possible.





2 Capture people and their environment

I would advise to always look for the unique and, where possible, endeavour to capture the diversity of any culture. People are often a reflection of the land and environment around them, in which they live and work. So try to take a series of shots that show both, as well as the two interacting with each other.



3 Consider using different filters

When shooting in the harsh shadows of the sun, I sometimes use an ND soft-edge filter to balance the contrast. Also, at certain times of the year, the water table here rises, creating a mirror-like veneer on the ground. A polariser can be used to enhance this effect, as seen in the camel train shots (*pictured, below and top-right*).



4 Good shots take great planning

I first visited the Danakil Desert in 2007, so I knew what was possible. But planning the camel 'shoot' was imperative. The light at dawn and dusk truly enhanced the shots, and while conditions (such as the water reflections) often varied from day to day, the perspectives that I got were a product of planning my positions in advance.





TRAVEL CLINIC

with Doctor Jane



It's a long way back
Reduce the risk of
potential injury on
long-distance rides
by preparing properly

Ticket to ride

Long-distance cycling might seem like an easy way to see the world. But it pays to prepare, say **Dr Jane Wilson-Howarth** and physiotherapist **Alex Howarth**, or risk cutting your trip short...

ON TWO WHEELS

It is tempting to assume that travelling long distances by bicycle is gentler on your body than, say, hiking or walking. But depending on how far you plan to pedal, a certain level of preparation is always wise.

There are many kinds of long-distance cycle trip, from a solo five-day Lakes and Dales Loop around Cumbria to a border-crossing tour of Cambodia and Vietnam. Homework should include noting the gradient and climate, which determines your training. For example, if you're going to mountainous regions, gradients can be simulated by riding in a very high gear.

In general, though, any and all preparation should involve some physical conditioning. The aim is to lessen the potential impact on your body, reducing the risk of future injury. So, if you are going to be carrying your kit with you, it is worth going on a trial cycle day fully laden first.

Ideally start by preparing your body (and bike) at least a month before departure to build up

your fitness. It's one thing to be able to go for a long ride, but to pedal for several days in a row is harder on the body. Your back, neck, knees and, sometimes, wrists are the most likely areas to feel the strain while cycling.

Reduce your risk of pain by ensuring the bike fits you. Most bike shops, tour companies and hire outlets will adjust the bike to suit your size and shape. Try to organise in advance of your ride and you'll be in a position to increase your efficiency, reduce the stress on your body and manage your load easier.

WHERE IT HURTS

The most common cause of back and neck pain while cycling is poor positioning. Pedalling for hours in one position puts more strain on the body and demands good core strength and

endurance. Without this, there is a higher risk of injury, and the strain is exacerbated if you're in the wrong position. Wrist pain, for example, suggests too much weight is going through the arms – you should be aiming to keep your wrists in a neutral position. But this, and problems like it, can be solved by adjusting the bike to compensate.

Knee pain in cyclists is often due to overload. Pedalling is an activity dominated by your quadriceps, which means that the muscles on the front of the thigh are working much harder than any other muscle group. If this load is higher than you are used to, or sustained over a far longer period than normal, there is an increased risk of pain in the front of the knee. Managing this requires some training.

TOP TIP

It might sound simple, but having a bike that fits your shape and size can reduce the risk of injuring yourself.

The adjacent programme ('Get pedal ready') will go some way to prepare you for the increased load on your body and help to spread it between the various muscles of the legs. The most important thing, though, is to ensure that you go on steadily longer rides in the build-up to your trip, so that the extra load isn't a shock to your system.

ACCIDENTS

Be prepared to deal with any scrapes that might occur in the possible event of taking a tumble from your bike. Sliding along a tarmacked surface can mean that a graze acquires small pieces of road in it. These need to be washed out or healing won't



happen. Pouring or squirting tap water into a scrape is probably the best way of removing debris (don't worry about the water quality), then apply a firm dressing to stem any bleeding.

Make sure also that the kind of cycling you intend to do is covered by any insurance policy that you take out, especially if doing an extreme route. Cycle trips can be great fun, but the better you prepare the more you'll enjoy it, and your risk of injury will be minimised.

Alex Howarth is a chartered physiotherapist and keen cyclist, often dabbling in duathlons. Dr Jane Wilson-Howarth never seems to have her bike adjusted; visit her website at wilson-howarth.com

Get pedal ready

Build the strength to spend long hours in the saddle by doing four sets of 15-to-20 repetitions (on alternate days) of the following exercises...

STEP UPS

Why? This works all the major muscles in your legs and helps build power for steep ascents.

How: First place a foot on a high step or chair; step up, then back down, but avoid pushing off with your standing leg.

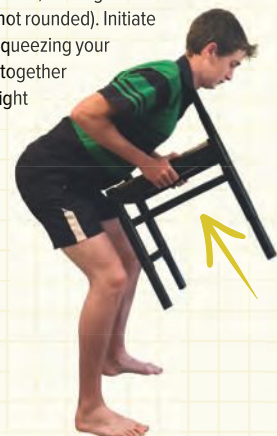


2

BENT-OVER ROWS

Why? This will build the strength in your upper back, to reduce the risk of neck and shoulder pain while cycling.

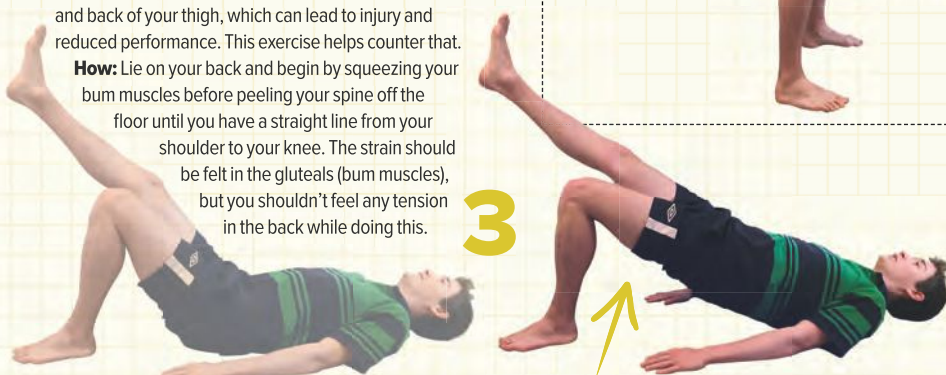
How: Before doing this exercise, ensure that you warm up your core in advance. When ready, bend your knees, then bend your back to an angle parallel to the ground, making sure to keep it straight (not rounded). Initiate the exercise by squeezing your shoulder blades together and pulling a weight (eg a chair) towards your body. Then slowly lower.



HIP BRIDGES

Why? As cycling is very quad-dominated, it is easy to get an imbalance between the muscles on the front and back of your thigh, which can lead to injury and reduced performance. This exercise helps counter that.

How: Lie on your back and begin by squeezing your bum muscles before peeling your spine off the floor until you have a straight line from your shoulder to your knee. The strain should be felt in the gluteals (bum muscles), but you shouldn't feel any tension in the back while doing this.



3



PLANK

Why? A strong core is vital if you're going to be spending many hours in the saddle; holding the plank position for measured intervals helps to build endurance.

How: Adopt the 'press up' position, resting on your forearms. Hold this for 30 seconds at a time, switching between the two arm positions (pictured) to make it harder.

4

WIN a trip to Colombia with *Tucan Travel*



See cities, jungles and meet the locals with the adventure travel experts

Sweeping Andes ranges, time-frozen colonial cities, wildlife-rich rainforests and welcoming people. Colombia is a country bursting with a wild variety of landscapes but often it sinks under many a traveller's radar.

Tucan Travel is ideally placed to show you Colombia, drawing on years of providing all-encompassing, enriching and authentic adventures across Latin America. The Tucan Travel ethos is to put you in touch with those who know it best – the locals. This year sees Tucan Travel marking their 30th anniversary. They're celebrating it in the best possible way, offering you and a friend the chance to win a place on their two-week Classic Colombia trip – an exhilarating overview that reveals the true essence of this diverse, vibrant country – plus £1,000 contribution towards flights.

Buzzing cities, balmy sands

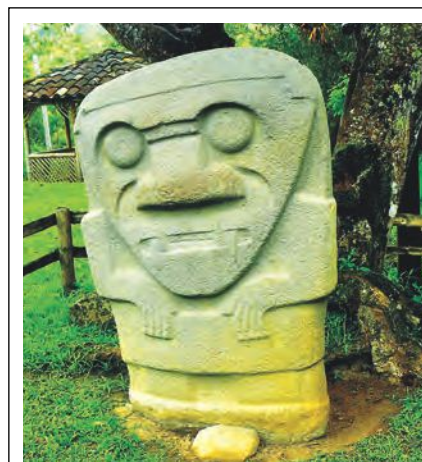
With its mix of history and surrounding wilderness, capital Bogotá is the perfect place to start your journey through Colombia. Its streets bare witness to the legacy of Simón Bolívar – instrumental in freeing Colombia from Spanish rule – and its long-established gold trade. Climb Monserrate for a wholesome

last glimpse of the city, before moving on to spy the mysterious statues that populate the pre-Columbian sites near San Agustín and the whitewashed architecture of Popayán.

As you navigate Colombia, you'll be able to experience its diverse cultures first-hand: the salsa notes of Afro-Colombian Cali, the colonial plaza and narrow streets of Villa de Leyva, and the red-tiled roofs of Barichara, a gateway to the canyons and ostriches of Chicamocha National Park.

Fly north to Colombia's Caribbean coast, to where it all began – Santa Marta, the country's oldest city. Its Spanish roots are still apparent throughout the old town and it makes for the ideal base to tread Tayrona National Park. Snake through verdant rainforest and spot, with any luck, red howler monkeys, condors and iguanas. The park grips the coastline, its coral-rich waters a haven for snorkelling.

Finish by wandering the labyrinthine streets and mazy fortress of Cartagena and taking a relaxing wallow in the mud of Volcán de Lodo El Totumo – reputedly great for your complexion, letting the earth soak into your skin and soul. There is a buffet of cultures, vistas and traditions waiting to be experienced in Colombia, and Tucan Travel have the expertise and experience needed to help you capture its wild, wonderful spirit.



HOW TO WIN

Tucan Travel is offering you and a friend the chance to each win a place on its 14-day *Classic Colombia* trip, comprised of all accommodation, transport and £1,000 towards flight costs. To be in with a chance of winning, answer the following:

Q: When did Colombia first declare its independence from Spain?

(a) 1710 (b) 1750 (c) 1810



To enter and for full terms and conditions, go to wanderlust.co.uk/ competitions or send your answer to the *Wanderlust* office (address p2). The closing date is 15 March 2017. State 'no offers' if you'd rather not be contacted by *Wanderlust* or its sponsors.



Wanderlust **GEAR OF THE YEAR 2017**

Want to know the best kit to take on your travels? Check out the winners of this year's Gear of the Year Awards and your packing will be literally in the bag...

HOW IT WAS JUDGED

In December 2016, gear manufacturers were asked to submit one piece of kit per category.

An expert panel of judges scored each item on its merits for travellers, taking into account the product's versatility, weight, size, durability and features that would be key for travellers. This year, the judges were: Sean Conway, writer and adventurer; Paul Goodyer, founder of Nomad Travel Stores; Phoebe Smith, *Wanderlust* editor; and Rob Johnson, mountain instructor and certified drone pilot at FilmUpHigh.com



**BEST
TRAVEL
TROUSERS**

1



**BEST
WATER-
PROOF
JACKET**

3



**BEST
TRAVEL
TOP**

4

Wanderlust
**GEAR
OF THE
YEAR
2017**



**BEST
ACCESSORY**

2

1 FJÄLLRÄVEN, Abisko Lite Trekking Zip-Off Trousers, £130

Judges' comments: "Super versatile, super comfy and well designed."

Runners-up: Craghoppers NosiLife Pro Trousers and Sherpa Naulo Pant

2 LIFESTRAW, LifeStraw Steel, £55

Judges' comments: "If you're heading somewhere with questionable water, this will be the most vital accessory you can pack – and it's so easy to use."

Runner-up: Rohan Trail Socks

3 BERGHAUS, Hyper Jacket, £120

Judges' comments: "This is the perfect waterproof if you're travelling to a destination where rain can catch you out unexpectedly – it's light, small and competitively priced."

Runner-up: Sherpa Lithang Jacket

4 CRAGHOPPERS, NosiLife Pro Shirt, £65

Judges' comments: "Smart and useful with loads of added extras – this shirt was built with travellers in mind."

Runner-up: Mountain Equipment Redline LS Tee



**BEST
LUGGAGE**

5

5 OSPREY, Meridian, £250

Judges' comments: "Practical, sturdy, versatile, and it looks pretty great to boot – a clear winner."

Runners-up: Eagle Creek ORV Trunk and Fjällräven SplitPack

6 PATAGONIA, Nano Puff Jacket, £175

Judges' comments: "It's great to see a jacket that not only performs well but also ranks green credentials as importantly as performance."

Runner-up: Arc'teryx Atom SL Hoody

7 SCARPA, Mojito GTX, £135

Judges' comments: "Scarpa are renowned for their excellent footwear,

including climbing shoes and boots. Here we see them take the best of both these worlds and distill it into a shoe that looks great even with jeans. A definite travel essential."

Runners-up: AKU Bellamont Plus and Ridgemont Monty Hi Boot

8 OSPREY, Talon 22, £90

Judges' comments: "A nifty pack that offers lots of easy-to-reach pockets on the hip belt, to allow access to your phone, keys or maybe a snack. You can also attach a bike helmet to it, making it super versatile."

Runners-up: Mammut Creon Guide 35L and Regatta Blackfell Hydro Pack 20L



Wanderlust

TRAVEL MAGAZINE

www.wanderlust.co.uk March 2017

Camino de Santiago

Spain's long distance path – the easy way

Best river cruises

From the Amazon to Kerala's houseboats

Bhutan

Trek homestay-to-homestay to discover hidden villages

Win!

Trips to:
Colombia, and the
Channel Islands...
See p4

Wanderlust Travel Photo of the Year

WINNERS REVEALED!

MADAGASCAR

Lemurs, limestone and local life – exploring the far north



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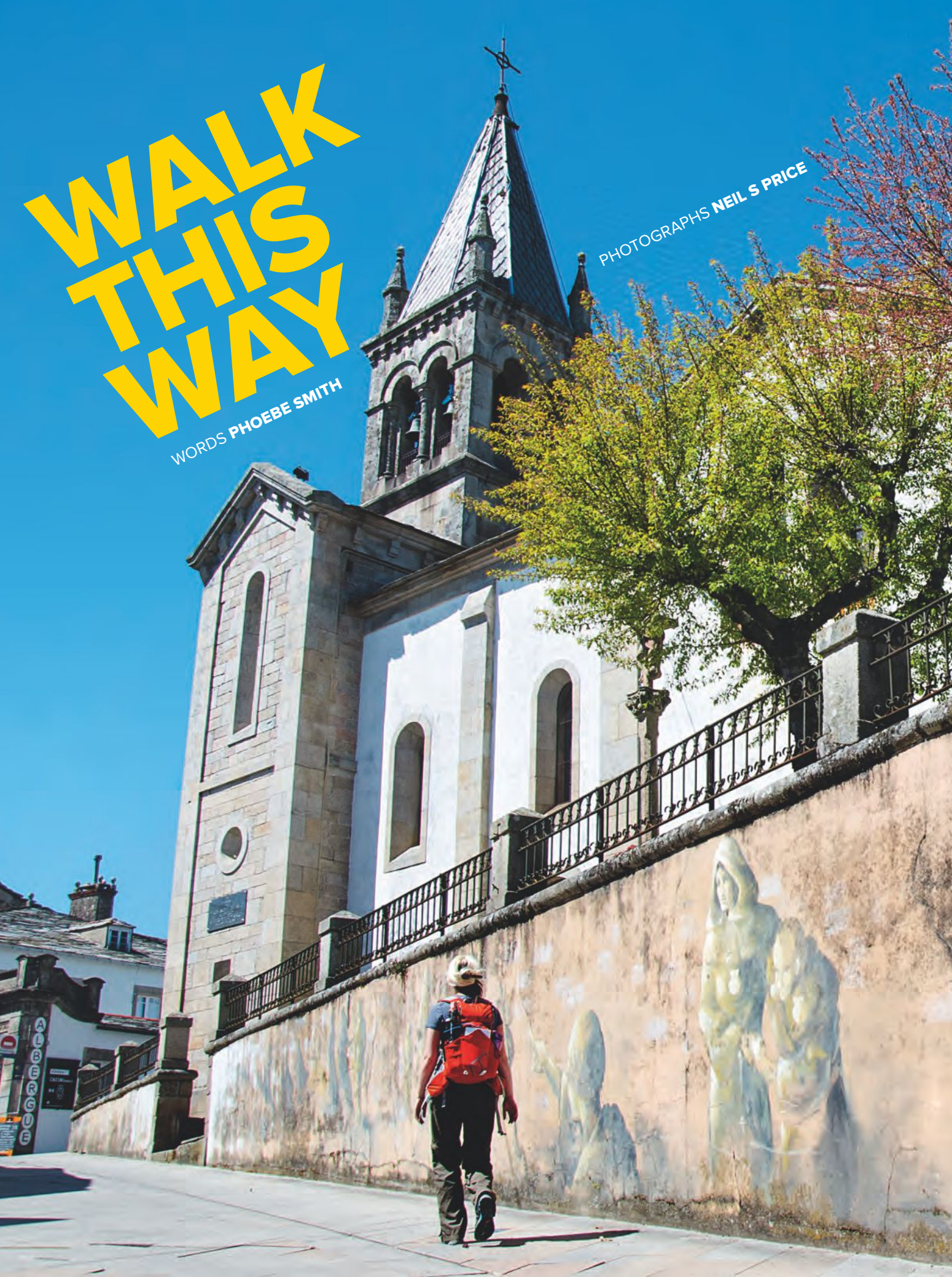
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WALK THIS WAY

WORDS PHOEBE SMITH

PHOTOGRAPHS NEIL S PRICE



Want to tackle the Camino de Santiago trail but only have a week to spare and don't want to rough it? Do the last 100km and skip the albergues to earn eternal forgiveness in unsaintly luxury...

Saintly stroll
Following in the footsteps of over a thousand years of pilgrims hiking through the Galician town of Sarria

He emerged from the shade of an old eucalyptus tree, his shadow stretched long and spindly in the afternoon light. In his hand he held

a wooden staff, gripping it tightly with each step. On his back a red rucksack wobbled, causing the scallop shell that adorned it to sway in rhythm with his feet. Without speaking a word, I knew instantly where he was headed: Santiago de Compostela.

Here, just outside the Spanish town of Sarria, nearly everyone was walking in the same direction. It's through this small Galician enclave that the Camino de Santiago, arguably the world's most famous long-distance walking trail, passes. For over 1,000 years people from across the world have trodden its numerous routes, many on a pilgrimage – religious or otherwise – to the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela.

There are, of course, many different ways to get there. The official number of paths is 23, with starting points as far flung as Valencia, Malaga, Lisbon (Portugal), Paris (France) Geneva (Switzerland) and beyond. But seeing as a pilgrimage can start from your own doorstep, there are endless options.

My own journey began near Sarria, on a Spanish section of the Camino Francés (the French Way), which starts some 800km from Santiago in the Pyrenean foothills of St Jean Pied de Port, France. But Sarria has one special claim to fame: it marks just over 100km to the cathedral – the minimum distance required to turn a trek into a pilgrimage and for walkers to receive a *Compostela* certificate (not to mention eternal forgiveness). What's more, it can be handily squeezed into a single week.

When I booked this trip, having opted for the easier option of a luggage transfer service (to ease my walking load) and stays in family-run farms and B&Bs (to avoid the dorm-like *albergues*), I'd felt pretty smug. But catching sight of this pilgrim among the trees, who'd obviously been on the trail for many weeks, made me finger the rucksack straps of my lightweight daypack uncomfortably. Would a week's walk really make me feel like I had qualified for a *Compostela*? I was about to find out... ►



DAY ONE



◀ SAMOS to SARRIA

Distance: **15km**

Blister count: **0**



The church bell echoed as I walked into the courtyard, the imposing facade of Samos Monastery blotting out the

rising sun momentarily, causing me to shiver. “We open at 10.30am,” came a cry from a small wooden door, and I looked to see a monk, dressed head to toe in brown robes, smiling. Though many start their 100km Camino in Sarria, I wanted to go a little further out, and so began in this sleepy hamlet of Samos, deep in the Galician countryside. It meant I would walk just a few hours on my first day, making it the perfect way to warm up plane-weary limbs.

I took a pew on the steps and unpeeled my orange from breakfast while scanning my surrounds. Sunday seemed an appropriate day to start a pilgrimage, whether you’re religious or not. And it appeared that everything else had taken its cue from the church. The bees buzzed lazily in the breeze, the grass swayed hypnotically and, one by one, in no particular hurry, the pilgrims started to arrive, all waiting for the monastery doors to open.

When they finally did, the monk was ready to stamp our *credenciales* – pilgrim passports that mark how far you’ve come – something you have to do at least twice each day on the Camino, to prove that you’ve walked it.

I headed out, looking for my first scallop shell waymarker to point me in the direction of Santiago. I followed it out of town, tracing

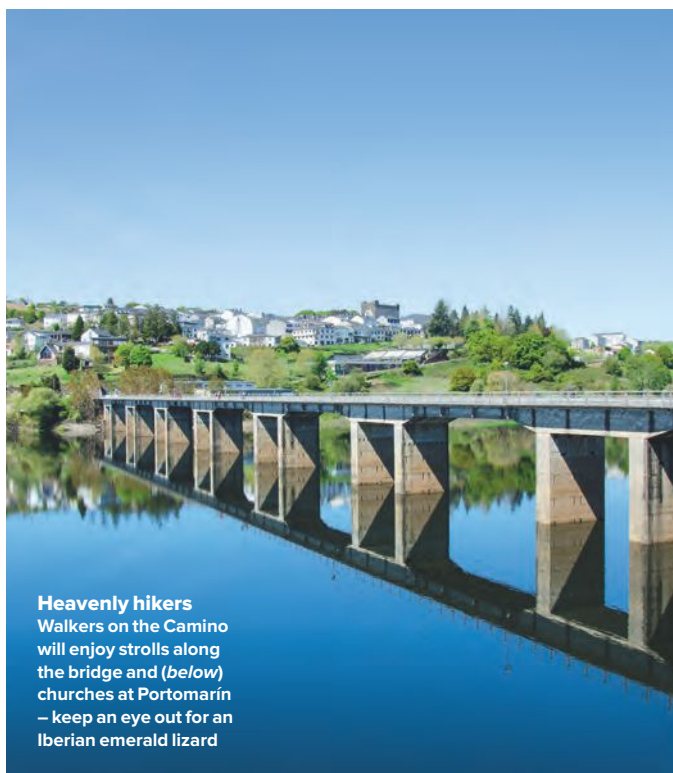
a river into the countryside, where my first “*Buen Camino*” – the greeting called to pilgrims by locals and fellow hikers – came from a shepherd walking his dog. He spoke only Galician, and my Spanish (Castilian) is limited, so a few smiles and nods was all we could exchange. But it made me feel like my journey had really begun.

The rest of the afternoon was spent strolling past grazing cows, tiny churches, cobbled farmhouses and small tavernas where I could grab a sandwich. It all felt very civilised, very doable. The final stretch saw more pilgrims emerging from albergues, freshly fuelled on stew and beer, before ending in Sarria. As I watched the sun set from the terrace, supping Galician wine and listening to the chanting coming from the adjacent church, all was divine.

Serene stays

Inside the walls of Samos Monastery; (above, from left) the bridge out of Sarria; Samos’ cloisters; the distinct waymarkers of the Camino de Santiago





Heavenly hikers
Walkers on the Camino will enjoy strolls along the bridge and (below) churches at Portomarín – keep an eye out for an Iberian emerald lizard



DAY TWO



SARRIA to PORTOMARÍN

Distance: **24km**

Blister count: **0**



A tree-lined trail saw me out of Sarria. The Galicia region has some of the highest rainfall in Spain, making it lush and green, while much of this part of the land splits into smallholdings. After walking through what seemed like endless fields, I suddenly emerged

into a cluster of farmsteads where men and women of all ages worked the fields by hand rather than using modern machinery.

I passed two such workers in a field before the hamlet of Barbadelo, not long after seeing the hardy-looking pilgrim who made me question my own credentials. The track wound up and down rolling hillocks and alongside rocky walls where Iberian emerald lizards soaked up the warmth, their blue and green backs glistening in the sunshine.

By the time I reached the bridge at Portomarín, my feet felt hot and raw. The town itself used to sit much lower on the river, but when the watercourse was dammed to form a reservoir in the 1960s, much of the historic old town was moved uphill, brick by brick. To access it requires climbing the steps to the gateway (through which it gets its name). As I ascended them, I thought that if real pilgrimages require a certain level of pain, my feet were starting to play ball... ►

DAY THREE

◀ PORTOMARÍN to PALAS DE REI

Distance: **26km**

Blister count: **2**



Everyone seemed to be racing out of Portomarín. I watched them go as I hobbled over the cobbles, my taped-up feet preventing me from picking up the pace. But my enforced slow-down gave me time to appreciate the little things more.

I suddenly noticed that every brick on the church had a number painted on it, back from when it was moved up from the water and painstakingly put back together. Going slow allowed me the opportunity to chat to an older lady, walking the last rookm with

her grandson (who was already well ahead). She told me that slow and steady was the only way to do the Camino.

But the best reward came outside the village of Castromaior. While the speedier pilgrims ploughed on, I spotted a sign just off the trail. I made my way over and saw that, just behind the rise, sat an Iron Age archaeological site. Hidden by its own earthworks, I strolled between grassy humps to find a cluster of ancient walls.

Here I stood gazing over the landscape, beckoning other walkers to take a look at this hidden relic and watching their faces light up as they were shown something unexpected just off the path. Before I left, the final person I showed handed me

a scallop shell, complete with the cross of St James emblazoned on it, as a thank you. Tying it to my rucksack, I began to feel that little bit more pilgrim-like.

Arriving at Palas de Rei, the little town was alive with the buzz of hikers. But I wasn't sticking around. Instead, I was met by Suso, the owner of a little 300-year-old farm a few miles away.

"I grew those vegetables right here," he said as I spooned a hearty helping into my mouth that evening. "The cheese comes from the dairy up the road, and the fruit I picked here this morning." That evening I sat in the heart of the countryside, fat on delicious local grub, thoughts of walking and blisters far from my mind.



Soul food

From churches to locally sourced grub – and hidden earthworks at Castromaior (above) – the Camino offers it all

PALAS DE REI to ARZÚA

Distance: 30km

Blister count: 5



The number of pilgrims seemed to be rising in direct correlation with the number of blisters I was getting. Spying yellow arrows was no longer necessary – looking for other walkers was just as effective.

The temperature soared well above 30°C, making any patch of shade – no matter how small – a much-longed-for blessing. The scent of pine needles on the dusty floor merged with the waft of the sweetened odour of manure from the

farmers' fields, while noisy chatter from other walkers came and went in pockets as I passed school groups, families and cyclists. But there were certain moments where everyone – no matter how big the group – would be struck silent, whether by a church perfectly lit in the sunlight; a well-positioned stream, ideal for cooling off aching limbs; or even an unsignposted, unnamed viewpoint that was, nevertheless, stop-you-in-your-tracks gorgeous.

I could smell Melide before I even saw a sign. Here, local vendors boil up batches of octopus for a Galician delicacy known as *polbo á feira*. As I passed, several were offered to me on sticks, their tentacles curled up,

their bodies glowing a deep sunburnt red. Despite being merely a large town, after several days on the Camino it felt like a bustling metropolis. I hurried through and was soon back in the countryside.

Here I passed an albergue, the dorm-like hostels often run by monks and nuns, where pilgrims typically rush to secure a bed for the night (they're first come, first served). Instead, I carried on to the town of Arzúa, where my ride to another countryside escape awaited.

As I walked to my room, a French lady emerged from next door. "You're walking the Camino?" she asked. I nodded. "I've always wanted to do that. Buen Camino!" I went to bed, feeling just a bit more like a pilgrim. ►



Keep on moo-vin'
Leaving the busy town of Melide means passing through farmlands and forests – all while following the shells...



Pilgrims' progress
Treading through eucalyptus trees and ancient forests on the penultimate day, where memorials to walkers who died on the path line the route...



DAY FIVE

◀ ARZÚA to A RÚA

Distance: **18km**

Blister count: **7**



At first I thought it was just another marker stone, but then I spotted the copper shoes, turned green by the elements.

Here, after leaving the town of Arzúa with a band of merry *peregrinos* (pilgrims) and around halfway into my penultimate day, was a memorial to someone who hadn't made the journey all the way to Santiago. It was a little stone shrine wishing others a good journey in remembrance of those who didn't last the course. Many lay stones along the route markers, which is said to symbolise leaving their worries behind, and if this first memorial was anything to go by, people walking the Camino shed a lot of worries.

As I continued, the trees thickened either side of me and more memorials appeared. Some were just small piles of stones; others much larger plaques screwed into stone walls. I slowed my pace as I passed them, keen to soak up the part of the trail that the others had missed out on, walking with their names swimming in my head, thinking how lucky I was to be there.



DAY SIX

A RÚA to SANTIAGO

Distance: **23km**

Blister count: **9**



It was still dark when I awoke, stirred from my sleep by the regular tap-tap of walking poles outside my window. Today was

the final push to the cathedral. It was raining hard, the sky an eddying swirl of greys, but the mood was far from miserable. There were fewer people on the route now; the weather, along with the walkers' eagerness to finish, had meant that a bubble of pilgrims passed through much earlier. So I curved my way happily through tiny villages, where shutters were still firmly closed, enjoying the solitude.

At Lavacolla, I stopped by a little stream – the place where pilgrims many years ago washed before presenting themselves at church. Here the trail seemed to change, and suddenly I was aware of a lot more people. Fast-food stalls lined the route and it took on more of a festival feel. Some hikers looked a little lost, so close to the end and not sure whether or not they should finish or prolong the experience. I couldn't blame them; after only six days of walking I had already become habitually attuned to the process. It was so deliciously simple: get up, eat, then walk from A to B.

Before I knew it, I had reached Monte do Gozo (aka 'the mountain of joy'). This was traditionally the area where – just 3km from Santiago – pilgrims would catch sight of the steeples of the cathedral, drop to their knees and weep. By this point, many were already in 'finish mode' and didn't even stop. But if my blistered feet had taught me anything, it's that the Camino is a walk to savour.

I left the path to hike a further ten minutes to the statue of two pilgrims, which boasted the views down to the cathedral and city beyond. Despite the drizzle, I could finally make out its spires and felt a peculiarly bittersweet sense of elation surge through me.

Later, there would be time for the final walk into town, to experience the overwhelming



Altered perceptions
Arriving at the altar that is said to hold the remains of St James and collecting a Compostela can be a transformative experience for hikers



buzz of thousands of people hurrying around the streets of this holy city, then to join the queues of peregrinos, all waiting to show their completed passports at the cathedral office in order to receive their Compostela. Time enough to watch in awe as the giant *botafumeiro* incense vessel swung through the halls of Cathedral de Santiago to the sound of nuns singing, while the air was cleansed in great plumes of smoke.

But for now, there was this view. I stood in the rain for as long as I could before turning back to the path. As I did, I passed a puddle and caught sight of my reflection. With my well-worn walking boots, my stick clasped firmly in hand and my scallop shell swinging freely from my rucksack, the person in the water cut a familiar figure to the one I'd seen back in Sarria. But now that pilgrim was me. When it comes to the Camino, it seems that just a few days and 100km is all it takes to truly see a transformation. **W**



WIN

Camino de Santiago

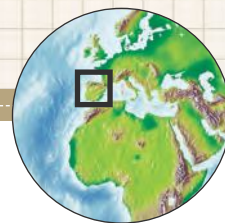
Short break

What type of shell is the symbol of the Camino?

- A) Scallop Shell
- B) Mussel Shell
- C) Oyster Shell

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Camino de Santiago Footnotes

VITAL STATISTICS

Camino de Santiago – Last 100km
Start: Samos **End:** Santiago de Compostela
Languages: Spanish (Galician)
Time: GMT+1
International dialling code: +34
Visas: Not required by UK nationals for stays of up to three months
Money: Euro (€), currently around €1.18 to the UK£. There are some ATMs in the major towns but taking cash is advised, especially if you want/need to buy snacks and drinks en route. Most restaurants, bars and hotels accept credit cards.

When to go

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec

- **Winter** – it can get cold, and fewer attractions will be open along the route.
- **Best time** – warmer weather, less rain and everything should be open. Avoid July and August's high-season crowds and prices. Some *albergues* will fill fast.
- **Shoulder season** – high chance of rain with temperatures cold in the morning. Not all accommodation will be open.

Health & safety
 No specific jabs required. Water is usually safe to drink from public fountains, but check for signs advising otherwise. The weather changes fast, so bring layers, sunscreen and a hat. Insect spray is useful.

Further reading & information
The Way of St James: Spain (Cicerone, 2013); *Camino de Santiago* (Footprint Focus Guide, 2013) – useful guidebooks
www.csj.org.uk – official site for the Confraternity of St James; good for advice and buying your passport pre-trip
www.turismo.gal – official website for the Galicia region
www.spain.info – official website for the Spanish tourist board

More online
 Visit www.wanderlust.co.uk/174 for links to more content:

ARCHIVE ARTICLES

- ◆ 7 things I wish I'd known before walking the Camino de Santiago – online exclusive
- ◆ Last 24 hours in... Santiago de Compostela – issue 171
- ◆ Under £250 – Cycling the Camino – issue 128

PLANNING GUIDES

- ◆ Spain Travel Guide

THE TRIP

i The author travelled with **Explore** (www.explore.co.uk; 01252 883 670) on a nine-day *Self-Guided Camino de Santiago* trip. Prices from £515 per person (excluding flights) for any dates between April and October, including walking maps and step-by-step notes, accommodation (see 'Accommodation'), breakfast each day and some evening meals.

Getting there & around

✈ Ryanair (ryanair.com) offer direct flights to Santiago de Compostela, Spain from London Stansted every day except Thursday and Saturday. Flight time is around two hours; returns from £32. **Iberia** (iberia.com) also runs daily flights there to and from the UK via its hub in Madrid. From Santiago, daily trains connect you to Sarria (2.5 hours; from €24.50/£21.50 one way), from where you can either start the 100km walk or get a taxi to take you on to Samos. For more information, see trainline.eu.

Accommodation

🛏 There's a host of accommodation options dotted along the last 100km of the Camino now, thanks to its increasing popularity. For a bargain stay, try the local government-owned *albergues* (pilgrim hostels; often mixed dorms), which are usually staffed by volunteers or nuns/monks who want to help pilgrims on their way. You can pay as little as €5 (£4.50) for



one night, with stays typically restricted to just a single night. Private *albergues* are a little more expensive but often serve food and can have smaller shared rooms. For those after more comfort, there are lots of family-run hotels, agro-tourism stays and B&Bs, including the following recommendations by the author.
 The **Hotel Carris Alfonso IX** in Sarria (alfonsoix.com/en; doubles from €70/£61pn) is well located for the town centre, as is Portomarín's **Pousada de Portomarín** (pousadadeportomarín.es; doubles from €70/£61pn). Elsewhere, in Palas de Rei a pre-arranged transfer can take you to beautifully restored farmhouse **A Parada Das Bestas** (aparadadasbestas.com; from €65/£57pn), which has stone-walled rooms and a fine locally grown menu.
 For a break from the busy town of Arzúa, head to the family-run **Casa Lucas** (casa-lucas.com/en; from €50/£44pn) for a night in the Spanish countryside, a home-cooked dinner and free pick-up

from the Camino. Right on the route itself, however, and just 19km from Santiago, is the handy **Hotel O Acivro** in A Rúa (oacivro.com/Inicio-ing.htm; doubles from around €47/£42pn), which also has an on-site restaurant that serves delicious evening meals (from €13/£11.50).
 Lastly, facing one of the entrances to Santiago's cathedral is the converted 16th-century monastery of **Hospedería San Martín Pinario** (hsanmartinpinario.com; doubles from €63/£55pn), which has modern 'cells' and is a fitting end to your pilgrimage.

Food & drink

🍴 Along 'The Way' are ample cafés and *albergues* that offer food and drink – mainly sandwiches and fruit. At night, look for special '**Pilgrim menus**' – typically a bargain three courses with a glass of wine for under €10 (£8.50; sometimes even under €5/£4.50). Expect soup, broth (*caldos gallegos* is the classic pork-and-bean Galician stew) or salad for starters; seafood or meat with potatoes for main (most have a vegetarian option); and cheesecake or ice cream for dessert.
 The last 100km of the walk is in Galicia where **seafood is king**; try local speciality **polbo á feira** – boiled octopus, chopped up and seasoned with paprika. In Arzúa, try the **cheese** (softer than the usual *tetilla* found in the region – so called as it resembles a lady's breast) alongside some *pan Gallego* (a soft, brown Galician bread). And don't forget to sample the **tartas Ancano** (almond-flavoured 'pilgrim tart') in Portomarín; it's found all along The Way but is best from the bakery there.



Walked the Camino? Try another Way...

From tracing the footsteps of Japanese emperors to circling Tibet's holiest peak, find enlightenment on pilgrim paths – the easy way...



Kumano Kodo, Japan

TOTAL DISTANCE: Various (easy way: 40km)

TIMING: Various (easy way: two days)

START: Takijiri-oji

FINISH: Kumano

The remote and sprawling mountains of the Kii Peninsula have been the setting for one of Japan's most important Buddhist pilgrimages for a 1,000 years. Historically, it was walked by aristocrats and emperors seeking the promise of happiness in the afterlife. Today, the Kumano Kodo makes up a network of four different trails, each homing in on one or more of a trio of holy shrines: Hongu Taisha, Hayatama Taisha and Nachi Taisha, collectively known as the Kumano Sanzan.

Wandering in Kumano's spiritual countryside provides an almost otherworldly backdrop, with temples and shrines studding the waterfall-laced mountains and cedar notes filling the air. Along

with the Camino de Santiago, it is also the only other pilgrimage trail to be UNESCO listed.

THE EASY WAY: A two-day walk along the Nakahechi route from Takijiri-oji to Hongu Taisha offers a simple but complete glimpse of a Japanese pilgrim's life. Overnight in Tanabe before getting a bus to your start point, Takijiri-oji, the spiritual entrance to the Kumano mountains. From here, climb the steep trail past age-old cedar trees, mist-shrouded villages and clues to the pilgrim trail's past, from legendary statues and crumbling teahouses to holy springs. Spy intricately designed shrines en route, before gazing upon the multi-eaved Hongu Taisha, one of the sacred trio and the perfect conclusion to your pilgrimage. Here, exhibitions and an information desk will help explain the spiritual import of the route and the history behind this wondrous, mountainous land.

MORE INFO: tb-kumano.jp/en/kumano-kodo

Mount Kailash, Tibet

TOTAL DISTANCE: 52km

TIMING: 3 days

START: Darchen

FINISH: Darchen

Hidden in a corner of the Transhimalaya in Tibet lies the holy charcoal peak of Mount Kailash (6,714m). Revered as a sacred peak across four religions (Hinduism, Jainism and both Tibetan Buddhism and Bön), its summit has never been climbed. Instead, pilgrims circumambulate its base along a 52km trail. One journey around it is said to cleanse a lifetime's sins; however, devout followers don't stop there – 108 circuits holds the promise of enlightenment.

THE EASY WAY: There is only one route: a three-day base trek at high altitude. But you can lighten your load by hiring a porter (¥210 [£25] per day) in Darchen – the hike's start and end point. Pass crumbling stupas, mantra-carved rocks and monasteries as you meander the slopes. The Dolma La Pass on day two may be daunting, but it is also the key to the mountain's sacred past, with pilgrims leaving offerings near a prayer boulder, and a wealth of cave temples and shrines lying beyond.



Via Francigena, Europe

TOTAL DISTANCE: 1,800km

RECOMMENDED TIME: 3 months

START: Canterbury, UK

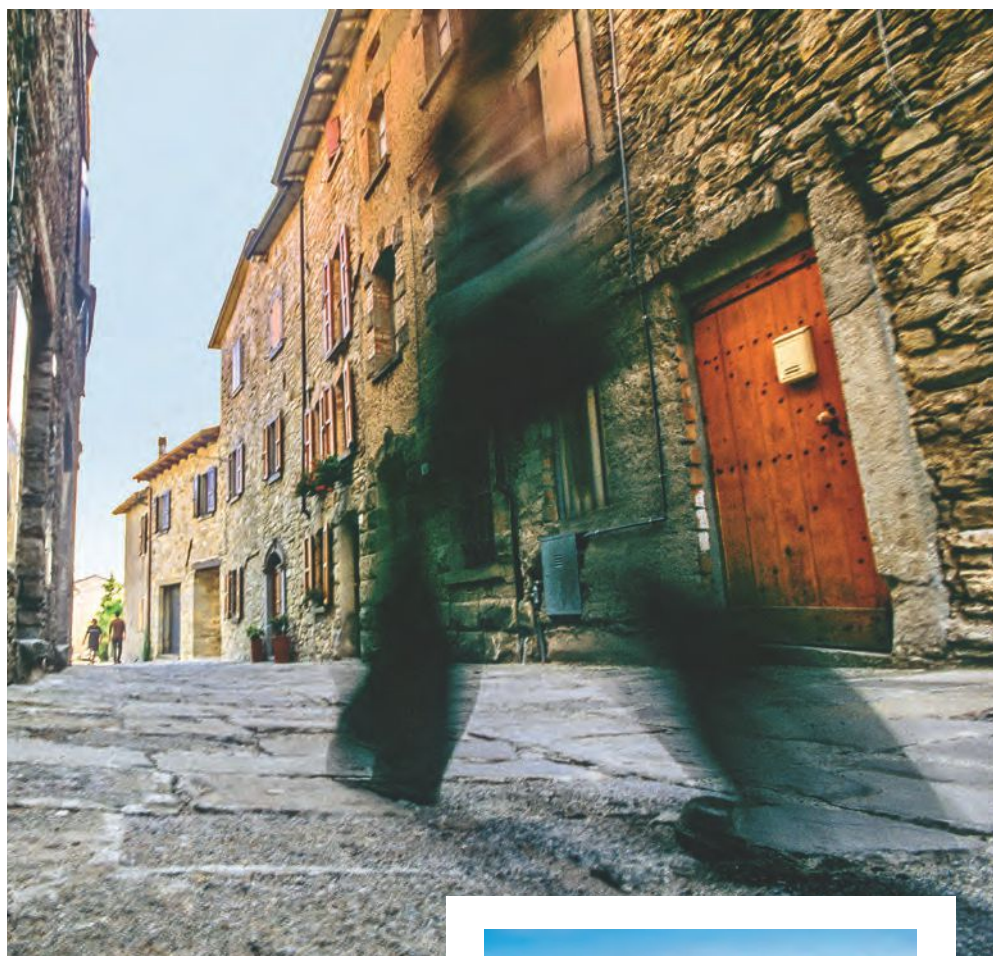
FINISH: Rome, Italy

All roads may not lead to Rome anymore, but this ancient route still does. A former thoroughfare linking Northern Europe to the Italian capital, it became an important passage for Christian pilgrims and merchants from the Middle Ages onwards. Today, the path is split into 16 sections, hopping across the Channel from Kent and weaving France's Champagne region, the Swiss Alps and the hills of Tuscany en route to Rome.

THE EASY WAY: Haven't got a few months to spare? Take on the final, all-Italian 100km section of the Via Francigena to Rome. Like the Camino, the last 100 is the minimum amount required to earn your 'Testimonium' certificate. Lace up in medieval Viterbo and stroll through the leafy woodland of the Lazio countryside, passing through buzzing market villages.

Spy decaying signs of Roman reign en route in crumbling amphitheatres and walled towns before glimpsing the Eternal City spectacularly from Monte Mario. Then, a procession along the Viale Angelico yields your first glimpse of the pastel blue dome of St Peter's Basilica and the Vatican City beyond. The perfect Roman ramble.

MORE INFO: viefrancigene.org/en



St Cuthbert's Way, UK

TOTAL DISTANCE: 100km

RECOMMENDED TIME: 4-6 days

START: Melrose, Scotland

FINISH: Holy Island, England

Straddling the England-Scotland border, St Cuthbert's Way tracks the life of its namesake saint from his days at Melrose Abbey in the Scottish Borders to his death on Northumberland's Holy Island of Lindisfarne. The route is steeped in history, with much of the landscape bearing the scars of multiple medieval Anglo-Scottish feuds, passing sites such as Cessford Castle and the battlefield of Ancrum Moor. Prehistoric settlements, hillforts and tales of legend also speckle the route, offering a good local history primer.

THE EASY WAY: With so much going on, it helps that you can pack your bags into the back of a taxi in the evening, with several firms offering a courier service from stops along the route to your accommodation. That way, you can spy the rugged Cheviot Hills, tread the heather-laden moors of Northumberland NP and finish along the Pilgrims' Path causeway to Lindisfarne, safe in the knowledge that your belongings will be patiently waiting for you at the other end. Handily, the route can also be soaked up in shorter stages, dividing the trail into five manageable day-length sections.

MORE INFO: stcuthbertsway.info



Aussie Camino, Australia

TOTAL DISTANCE: 228km


RECOMMENDED TIME: 8-12 days

START: Portland, Victoria

FINISH: Penola, South Australia

This route was created in 2013 as an Antipodean alternative to the Camino de Santiago. It takes its inspiration from the traditions of its European counterpart (you get a guidebook, scallop shell and passport) and is based on the life and travels of Australian nun St Mary of the Cross MacKillop.

THE EASY WAY: Though designed to be walked independently, the Aussie Camino hosts several guided walks per year, with a back-up vehicle to lug your gear. Much of the first half hugs clifftop paths along sandy dunes, passing seal colonies at Cape Bridgewater, coastal heathland and ancient remnants of the native Gunditjmarra people. The Camino then veers further inland, zigzagging over old railway lines to Penola.

MORE INFO: aussiecamino.org 

FROM THE ROAD

Letters, tips, photos & exploits from you, our endlessly adventurous readers



■ Your Story

Tokyo: Oishi!

Reader **Suzy Pope** won our 'Cities' online writing competition with this mouthwatering tale of Tokyo street food...



The tick and fizzle of battered prawns gently frying set my stomach rumbling. Squat shopfronts lined the narrow Sunamachi street in Tokyo's Ginza District. Lanterns and streamers hung from every lamp post. A mushroom parade of umbrellas ruffled in hurried apology as lone cyclists slowly picked their way through the crowd – bicycle bells are too rude for Tokyo, so every front wheel that gently noses into the back of your leg is a surprise.

"This is the Tempura King," our guide, Miyu, explained. A stocky man in a white chef uniform stood proudly behind a stand bursting with golden battered morsels in all

shapes and sizes. The neat black *kanji* script that displayed the names and prices looked more like poetry than price tags.

"Please, have anything you like," Miyu said, her head dipping in a slight bow.

Sunamachi is a shopping street teeming with 100-yen shops, all selling the same plungers, coat-hangers and greeting cards. Kitchenware spills out of shopfronts, and fresh fruit and vegetables are stacked high.

This street is not on anyone's bucket list. There's no historical lure here, such as in the commercial area around the Imperial Palace; there are no bright neon lights like those found at Akihabara. There is, however, food. Street food. And people. Ordinary



people doing ordinary things, such as shopping for toilet plungers.

I bit into the crisp tempura.

“Good?” Miyu asked. I nodded. “Then you should say ‘*oishi*’, it means yummy.”

We drank tea the colour of algae, mixed with a bamboo whisk until frothy. An iron bell tinkled as men and women popped in and out. Like walking gardens, they carried bunches of flowers and bags of vegetables, greeting the owner like an old friend.

At a small stand where faded J-pop posters peeled from the walls, sleek fish flopped in plastic tubs. A teenage girl cut fresh *sashimi* at lightning speed, looking down as she handed it to us. The fish roe popped in small salty explosions on my tongue.

“Oishi!” I said, and the girl behind the counter beamed and dipped her head.

Further along the street, past a shrine of smiling stone foxes, two large women in chef whites ladled out Japanese-style hot stew into sandwich bags. It was miso-thick with a soy tang, as molten lumps of radish and lotus burned the roof of my mouth.

“Oishi!” I said, and the two women laughed as if I’d said the funniest thing in the world.

Miyu guided us into a warehouse of sake bottles. The chill of early April crept in, and salarymen in crumpled suits skulked around the fluorescent ‘sale’ signs – prices ranged from 100 to 20,000 yen per bottle. Miyu filled a couple of shot glasses. It smelled like something you might use to cleanse a wound.

“Oishi,” I winced.

A crispy minced-tuna cutlet dipped in a sweet teriyaki sauce soaked up the early morning sake. We waddled to a stall selling *yakitori* – meat on a stick – grilled in front of us. I forced each piece of sticky, glazed chicken into the corners of my stomach.

“Oishi,” I wheezed, convinced that I was filled up to my throat with food.

“We have one more stop,” Miyu said.

I hoped it was to buy a toilet plunger.

The stall sold sweets. Little globs of green clung to cocktail sticks, resembling the kind of thing you’d eat in a dystopian future where food is consumed only for nutrients. But if I ate anything else I would have to sacrifice an organ to accommodate it.

“Honestly, I can’t,” I said to Miyu as she held up a green-tea *mochi* sweet.

Her face fell, so I relented. It tasted like grass and felt like a slug sliding down my gullet. But I held on, and eventually the final piece of Sunamachi Street found its way into my stomach – along with everything else.

“Oishi,” I said. But this time I’m not all that sure Miyu believed me.



■ Your Story

24 hours in Tangier

Reader **Daniel Davies-Llewellyn**, a runner-up in our ‘Cities’ online writing competition, recalls his ‘great escape’ from Tangier



As I sprinted up Tangier’s main boulevard, sweat dripping from me, I glanced back over my shoulder. He was still there, running along the opposite pavement and wearing a desperate and determined look. I shot a worried glance at my companions and we took a sharp right into the first shop we saw in an effort to lose our would-be stalker.

Here, we found ourselves in an electrical appliance store, hiding alongside a fridge freezer, hearts pounding. The owner gave us a confused glance – it wasn’t everyday he saw four student backpackers cowering behind his white goods. But let me rewind...

The city of Tangier has seen it all. For more than 2,500 years, people have inhabited this strategic point on the straits dividing Europe and Africa. Almost every power that had ever held interests in this corner of the Mediterranean had left its mark: Romans, Visigoths, Arabs, Portuguese, British and



Spaniards had all been and gone. Between 1923 and 1956, the city was even declared an ‘international zone’, and it became a haven for freebooters, artists, writers, refugees, exiles and criminals, where every kind of questionable activity and vice carried on. All of this was, of course, history by the time I and my friends arrived in 2001, but not even the city’s past prepared us for our imminent culture shock, as we skipped our way over the strait of Gibraltar.

It was midnight when we arrived and piled off the boat. Old men sat in doorways dragging on long pipes, a pair of street cats fought over a scrap of meat, and hypnotic music sounded from a broken upstairs window. Our guide led us along the alleys that criss-crossed the Medina. But it was soon apparent that we weren’t being led to our requested accommodation; instead, desiring a commission, he had taken us to another hotel – clearly doubling as a brothel.

At first light we were up and out of the ‘hotel’, tired but happy to check out. The plan was to catch a sleeper train to Marrakech, leaving us just the day to kill. We wandered the *souk*, ate pastries from a tiny family-run bakery, drank mint tea in Parisian-style cafés and watched the world slowly go by.

By mid afternoon, we headed down to the beach. It was here, on the long sweep of sand to the east of the city, that we were accosted by Monir, a pushy local dealer. But when he realised we weren’t interested in his wares, he exploded, so we ran for it, pursued by an angry spurned Monir, before eventually taking shelter behind a fridge freezer.

Spooked by our experience, we headed back to the port and the 6pm boat to Spain. The city had beaten us. Morocco would elude us this time but I knew I’d be back, and this time I’d be better prepared. White goods stores would not be on the agenda again. **W**

This was an entry in our regular online writing competition. Keep an eye out for the next one at wanderlust.co.uk/mywanderlust

■ Readers' Pictures

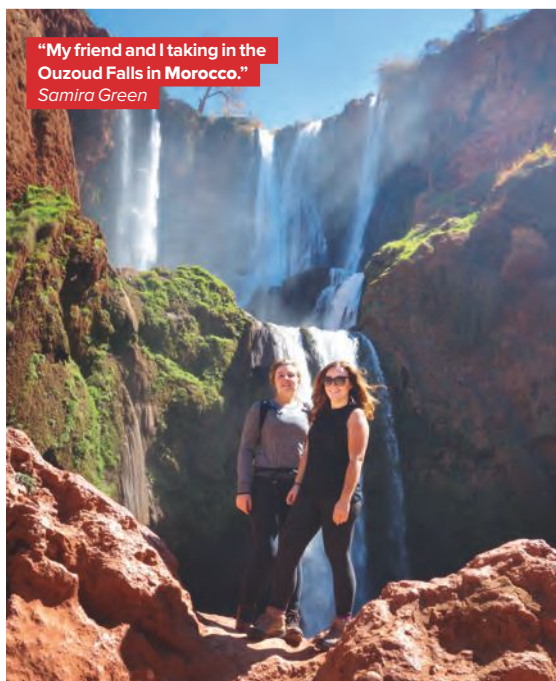
YOUR PHOTOS

Been somewhere beautiful? Done something amazing?

Email fromtheroad@wanderlust.co.uk – make us jealous!



"Getting in touch with my historical side at the breathtaking ancient Roman theatre in Plovdiv, Bulgaria." *Christian Craft*



"My friend and I taking in the Ouzoud Falls in Morocco." *Samira Green*



"My friend Kate showing the local children of south-west Uganda's Kabarole District the photo she had taken of them." *Michele Sandelson*



"On top of Thole La Pass (4,730m) in northern Bhutan, on the way to the base camp at Gangkar Punsum – reportedly the highest unclimbed mountain in the world." David Kiddy



"Cycling like a softy along Burma's U Bein Bridge, near Mandalay – just like on the cover of Wanderlust!" Richard Palmer

Where does your Wanderlust take you?

Every month we ask, 'Where does your Wanderlust take you?', giving you a chance to win a goody bag including a versatile **100% Merino Wool Buff®** – the ultimate travel accessory (from £22 RRP). But can you top Richard (above)? Show us where your Wanderlust takes you and where you take your Wanderlust!

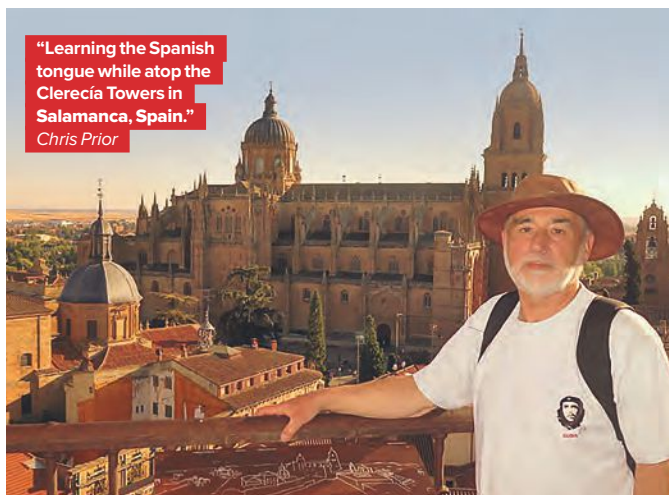
Take your magazine with you on your next trip and share a pic with us. Post it on our Facebook wall, tweet it to us at @wanderlustmag, email it to fromtheroad@wanderlust.co.uk or hashtag it #wanderlustmag on Instagram.



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"Enjoying a hot chocolate after an amazing polar bear encounter in the Arctic." Simonne and Brian Watts



"Learning the Spanish tongue while atop the Clerecía Towers in Salamanca, Spain." Chris Prior



LETTERS

Your mail and missives: this issue, bucket listing Patagonia, trekking through Greenland, seeing Santiago's darker side, and your future trips...

◀ Patagonia dreams

Inspired by a description of Bruce Chatwin's travelogue *In Patagonia* in a recent issue of *Wanderlust* [December 2016/January 2017, issue 172], I decided to buy it. Patagonia, though, was not on my childhood list of dream destinations. As far as these go, I've done most of them – apart from Antarctica. Instead, Patagonia was a realm revealed much later to me, as I took to researching my travels more.

Wanderlust has had a huge part to play in this, with some amazing photos on the forum and a fair few articles on it over the last two years I have been subscribing to the magazine. Of course, the revelations continue, but Patagonia is now definitely on my list. Thanks to *Wanderlust* for not only directing me to this destination, but a classic travelogue, too.

Nandini Chakraborty, Leicester

Horrors in Santiago

Reading your 'Pocket Guide to Santiago, Chile' [February 2017, issue 173] reminded me of a tour we took. Being knowledgeable about the murderous regime of former Chilean leader Augusto Pinochet (1973–1990), we wanted to explore sites that played a part in Santiago's turbulent history.

We visited La Moneda Palace, the site of a massacre known as 'the other 9/11'; secret police bases No 38 Londres and the infamous Villa Grimaldi where victims were tortured and killed; the national football stadium where suspects were held when the regime ran out of alternative

★ STAR LETTER ★

Balkan delights

Following on from your 'Top 50 Trips for 2017' article [February 2017, issue 173], Balkans fans should visit Albania! I went in 2015, after seeing a trip to the Accursed Mountains (pictured) in the magazine. It was stunning.

But my favourite trip last year was trekking the Arctic Circle Trail from the ice sheet to the coast of Greenland. I swam in a lake inside the Circle, which is not something I thought I'd ever say, and I'm looking forward to walking its coast one day.

I hope everyone else has an amazing year of travel ahead.

Emma Halford, via website



space, and where Chilean singer Victor Jara was murdered; and finally, the corner of the National Cemetery that is now dedicated to those killed and 'disappeared' during the regime. It was chilling.

Far from being voyeurism, visiting these dark places serves to remind us all just how easy it is to slip into evil. And in this case, it was also heartening to realise that we'd succeeded in enlightening a young local boy we met along the way as well. Hopefully, he will continue to enlighten others.

Jackie Horsewood, Telford

Travel plans

Having read the *Wanderlust* article covering the best trips for 2017 [February 2017, issue 173], I thought I'd share my past and

future travels with you, in case it offers others some inspiration.

In 2016, I had two big trips. The first was in Japan (where I live), travelling during the off-season (late Feb/early Mar) around Tokyo and the Kanto region to lesser-known places like Gunma, Tochigi and Ibaraki. Nikko was especially lovely, and I wish I had planned more time there.

My other trip was to Estonia, Russia, Finland and Sweden. I enjoyed Finland the most, but Sweden was a very close second. I'd like to go back, but it might be a while before I can, as I am going to California and Mexico in February; Hong Kong (and maybe Singapore) in March; and Canada and possibly Europe or South Korea in the summer.

Rachelle Meilleur, via website

WIN WANDERLUST GOODIES

Each issue, our winning contribution wins a haul of *Wanderlust* gear. This time, congratulations to Emma!



■ Experiences

JUST BACK FROM...



Cape Verde
Wanderlust forum user Jane Baxter spends a fortnight exploring the African isle

The highlight: The music and charm of the city Mindelo.

Must see: Pico do Fogo for its truly spectacular landscape, Santiago for its culture, and Santo Antão for its lush mountains. Mindelo and São Vicente are also great for their music and history.

Top tip: Don't be put off by Cape Verde's 'package beach holiday' reputation. All the islands are different, with interesting things to see if you travel around.



Cautionary tale: Avoid spending much time on the islands with all-inclusive hotels – the other islands are more interesting.

I wish I'd known... How much there is to see and do on some of the islands, and how spectacular the scenery is.

Anything else? A tour of six islands is perfect for two weeks, and you get a good variety of history, culture, music, walks, scenery and beaches, plus the food is great.

This month you have been mostly...

W Enjoying an experience I'll never forget – a fireside gig in the Sahara. [chez_when](#)

T Looking forward to my trip in Sri Lanka. Soon I'll be in Yala National Park! [@PAHarper](#)

W Justifying preconceptions about Croatia. I already knew a bit about Zadar but I never thought I would be so impressed by it until I saw it with my own eyes. [IwanaH](#)

f Having a soft spot for South-East Asia. Vietnam is my favourite place out of everywhere I've been to. I'd love to go again one day. Hoi An is a beautiful land of lanterns at night. [Wendy Baker](#)

T Getting a taste for Silk Road eats. I didn't expect Uzbek

food to be so good – grilled lamb, fresh salads, puffy bread...

[@andreakw](#)

f Remembering the delights that Uzbekistan had to offer.

It is a fantastic country. I went in March 2016 and it is well worth a visit! [Cath Marsland](#)

T Planning my next travels. A nice list of places among [@wanderlustmag's Top 50 Trips](#) – it gives me even more reason to have Antarctica on my list!

[@PenguinNina](#)

W Pushing myself to the physical limit. I took on a formidable bike ride – the Seven Summits trail – in Canada's British Columbia. I was completely drained afterwards! [amandacycles](#)

PHOTO OF THE MONTH

Expedition leader in training, Neko Harbour, Antarctica

[Tabitha Green](#)

On a visit to the Antarctic Peninsula, we stopped at Neko Harbour in Andvord Bay to see the penguins, and for the brave (or foolhardy) to do a polar plunge. This particular gentoo penguin caught my eye because – with the way it had its flipper out, and with our ship in the background – it seemed to me that the little guy was practising to be a tour leader. I also really liked the way our ship was so dwarfed by the mountainous scenery behind, giving just a tiny hint of the vastness of this beautiful white continent.



TALK TO US: Online at www.wanderlust.co.uk/mywanderlust **Email** fromtheroad@wanderlust.co.uk
Mail Wanderlust, 1 Leworth Place, Windsor, SL4 1EB **Twitter** [@wanderlustmag](#)
Facebook www.facebook.com/wanderlusttravelmagazine **Instagram** [@wanderlustmag](#)

THE JUDGES

Lyn Hughes

*Wanderlust co-founder
and editor-in-chief*

Graham Berridge

Wanderlust art director

Paul Goldstein

*Wildlife photographer
and guide*

Paul Harris

*Travel and landscape
photographer*

Keith Wilson

Photojournalist and editor

Rob Hawthorne

*Marketing manager,
Clarion Events (for
Destinations Travel Show)*

Rob Debenham

*Show Manager,
Clarion Events*

Sean Parkin

*Tourism Authority
of Thailand*

Wanderlust



TRAVEL PHOTO OF THE YEAR 2016

Out of the thousands of awe-inspiring images entered into our annual photo contest, our judges finally whittled it down to the very best. Turn over to find out who will be heading off on a photo commission to Thailand...



WINNER (see p6)

Taj behind the colour

Taj Mahal, Agra,
Uttar Pradesh, India

Sanghamitra Sarkar

Neurosurgeon

Nikon D7100, 10-20mm
f/4-5.6 @ 14mm, 1/8000 sec
@ f/7.1, ISO 2000

Judges' comments: "The texture captured here in this shot is genuinely fantastic. Zinging colour!"

HIGHLY COMMENDED

(see previous spread)

1 The swarm

North Pier, Blackpool, UK

Simon Booth

Senior consultant ecologist

Canon EOS-1D X, EF 16-35mm
f/4L IS USM @ 17mm,
1/15 sec @ f/4, ISO 4000

Judges' comments: "Classically British, inescapably dramatic – and then there's that truly gorgeous purple post-sunset murmuration to admire."

RUNNER-UP

**2 The Imam Mosque
by moonlight**

Isfahan, Iran

Ruth Spencer

Doctor

Olympus OM-D E-M5, M.Zuiko
Digital ED 14-150mm f/4-5.6
@ 14mm, 1/40 sec @ f/4, ISO 1250

Judges' comments: "The presence of the shrouded figures adds real depth and frame to this image."

3 Into the blue

Mirissa, Sri Lanka

Joshua Windsor

MA Candidate,

Kingston University

Canon EOS 6D, EF 24-105mm
f/4L IS USM @ 105mm,
2 sec @ f/4, ISO 100, tripod

Judges' comments: "The location here is immediately recognisable – an essential for this category. And looking at this made us all want to revisit it."

4 Hong Kong waterfront

Kowloon, Hong Kong

Chris Hilton

Self-employed window

cleaner/gardener

Sony DSC-RX100 Mark II,
28-100mm f/1.8-4.9 @ 10.4mm,
0.4 sec @ f/2.5, ISO 160

Judges' comments:

"Intentional camera shake is hard to get right – this image still retains its sharpness and a great saturation of colour."

5 Riverbed at

Mont-Saint-Michel

Mont-Saint-Michel,

Normandy, France

Arka Mukhopadhyay

Senior IT consultant

Nikon D90, Tokina 11-16mm f/2.8
@ 11mm, 0.5 sec @ f/11, ISO 200,
B+W circular polariser

Judges' comments: "This is a magnificent use of a wide-angle lens on a tried and tested subject. A truly immaculate composition."







6 Skógafoss

Skógafoss, Iceland

Matt Parry

Marketing manager

Canon EOS 5D Mark III,
EF 24-105mm f/4L IS USM @
105mm, 3.2 sec @ f/4.5, ISO 100,
LEE Filters 0.6 ND Grad

Judges' comments: "This image has an almost dreamlike quality, while the lone figure on view gives it wonderful scale and space for thought."

7 Florence blessing

Basilica of San Miniato al Monte, Florence, Italy

Carolyn Suer

Retired

Fujifilm X-T1, XF 18-135mm
f/3.5-5.6R LM OIS WR @ 49.4mm,
1/550 sec @ f/8, ISO 400

Judges' comments: "As an image of an icon, this is well thought out, superbly crafted and thoughtful. Top work."

8 Snowfall Millennium Bridge
Millennium Bridge, London, UK

Ron Tear

Retired teacher's assistant

Canon EOS 5D, EF 17-40mm
f/4L USM @ 40mm,
1/250 sec @ f/8, ISO 800

Judges' comments: "Cold, snow-bitten and undeniably London. This image has good perspective and has been very well conceived."

9 White horses of the Camargue

Camargue, France

Nathalie Mountain

Creative producer

Nikon D7100, Nikkor 70-300mm
f/4.5-5.6 @ 100mm, 1/640 sec
@ f/5.6, ISO 1000

Judges' comments: "This shot beautifully captures the majesty of these iconic white horses, along with the unique setting of the Camargue."



WINNER (see p10)

Flooded wood
Punte Alberete, Italy

Vittorio Ricci

Government employee

Nikon D70S, 17-35mm f/2.8 @ 30mm, 1/40 sec @ f/7.1, ISO 200, Manfrotto 055 tripod

Judges' comments: "This is just exceptional. It's not an inaccessible shot, anyone can find this sort of scene – but not many could capture it."

RUNNER-UP

1 Land of Narnia
Mourne Mountains,
Northern Ireland

Brian McCready

Quality assurance manager

Nikon D750, 16-35mm f/4 @ 16mm, 1/15 sec @ f/11, ISO 100, ND Grad filter

Judges' comments: "A chocolate box image – but this isn't Milk Tray, this is the finest 100% cocoa Belgian stuff. Beautifully captured."

2 Faces of Brim

Brim, Victoria, Australia

Jason Freeman

Graphic designer

Nikon D600, Nikkor 16-35mm f/4 @ 16mm, 30 sec @ f/11, ISO 100, polarising filter, 10-stop ND filter, tripod

Judges' comments: "The limited palette of sepia tones in which these incredible silos are shot are wonderfully offset by the sweeping blue of the sky."

3 Guests Mountain

Sabalan Mountain,
Ardabil Province, Iran

Reza Isapour

Student

Canon EOS 5D Mark III, EF 70-200mm f/2.8L @ 195mm, 1/400 sec @ f/16, ISO 200

Judges' comments: "Bleak, stark and frankly beautiful – a photo like this doesn't just happen by accident."



4



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6

HIGHLY COMMENDED

④ The Subway

Zion National Park, USA

Vittorio Ricci

Government employee

Nikon D200, 12-24mm f/4 @
13mm, 6 sec @ f/22, ISO 100,
Manfrotto 055 tripod

Judges' comments: "A very beautiful composition – great depth, colour and light – that leads you into the story of the landscape itself."

⑤ The Painted Hills

The Painted Hills,
Mitchell, Oregon

Sophie Carr

Accountant

Canon EOS 5D Mark III, EF
70-200mm F/4L IS USM @
200mm, 1/60 sec @ f/13, ISO 100

Judges' comments: "This is a layer cake of an image, with a sweet balance and fine composition."

⑥ Ice ages

El Chaltén, Los Glaciares
National Park, Argentina

Louise Radestock

Filmmaker

Canon EOS 700D, EF-S 18-55mm
f/3.5-5.6 IS STM @ 18mm,
1/250 sec @ f/10, ISO 100, UV filter

Judges' comments: "A truly dramatic, incredible exposure. It's just superb and it made us intrigued as to where it was."



**7 Tekes landscape
with horses**

Tekes County, Xinjiang Uyghur
Autonomous Region, China

Gunther Riehle

Food technology engineer

Nikon D4, 80-400 mm f/4.5-5.6

@ 300 mm, 1/320 sec @ f/10,

ISO 1250, B+W polarising filter

Judges' comments: "The
contours and light creates an
ephemeral river of a landscape."

8 To the summit

From Scar Crag towards
the summit of Sail Hill,
Lake District, UK

Chris Evans

Retired police officer

Canon PowerShot G15,

6.1-30.5mm @ 13.2mm,

1/125 sec @ f/8, ISO 125

Judges' comments: "The
zigzag pathway gives this
image a real sense of place
and brings out the relationship
we have with the landscape."

9 Ice falls

Goðafoss waterfall, Iceland

Howard Angus

Client services director

Nikon D700, 24-70mm f/2.8

@ 24mm, 5 sec @ f/11, ISO 200,

10-stop ND filter and polariser

Judges' comments: "Black-
and-white often obscures or
disguises poor colour shots.
Not here. This is an immaculate
composition with a very good
use of shutter speed."



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4

WINNER (see p8)**Facing certain death**

Ngorongoro Crater, Tanzania

*Julia Wainwright**Retired programme manager*

Canon EOS-1D X Mark II, EF
200-400mm f/4L IS USM EXT
@ 560mm, 1/2000 sec @ f/6.3,
ISO 5000

Judges' comments: "The eyes
make it! A wonderful capture of
life and death in the wild."

RUNNER-UP**1 Snowy owl**

Quebec, Canada

*Giovanni Frescura**Lawyer*

Canon EOS-1D X, EF 500mm f/4L
IS USM @ 500mm, 1/3200 sec @
f/6.3, ISO 1000, tripod

Judges' comments: "This snowy
owl sings off the page. It's sharp
in both the wing and the eyes,
and the claws are stunning."

2 Game of chaseTadoba National Park,
Maharashtra, India*Greg Poole**Plumber*

Canon EOS 7D Mark II, EF 300mm
f/2.8L IS II USM @ 300mm,
1/2500 sec @ f/3.2, ISO 400

Judges' comments: "Three
airborne tigers – superb! This is
such a difficult thing to see, let
alone capture. It's just an
amazing image. We loved it."

HIGHLY COMMENDED**3 Japanese red-crowned crane courtship**Tsurui-Ito Tancho Sanctuary,
Hokkaido, Japan*Ray Hems**Retired*

Nikon D3, 200-400mm f/4.0 @
400mm, 1/1600 sec @ f/5.6, ISO 200

Judges' comments: "Adoring
the birds' motion – and even
the comedy. These cranes are
compelling, and proof that graft,
patience and fieldcraft do pay off."

4 Ruby topaz hummingbird and gossamer spider

Tobago, Trinidad & Tobago

*Tim Withall**Retired chartered engineer*

Nikon D700, Nikkor 100m
f/2.8 macro @ 105mm, 1/1000
sec @ f/9, ISO 1600, tripod with
remote radio release

Judges' comments: "This
shot catches its main subject
brilliantly on the wing, but still
leaves clues for you to follow."

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5 Adult emperor penguin plus eight chicks in Antarctic snowstorm
Gould Bay, Weddell Sea, Antarctica

Gunther Riehle

Food technology engineer

Nikon D4, 80-400mm f/4.5-5.6 @ 165mm, 1/1600 sec @ f/11, ISO 640, B+W polarising filter

Judges' comments: "This is excellent. It has the 'aah' factor, and it's a brilliant example of animals in their environment."

6 Living on the edge
Gerlache Strait, Antarctica

Christian Wilkinson

Mac operator

Sony Alpha A100, 75-300mm f/4.5-5.6 @ 300mm, 1/1250 sec @ f/8, ISO 200

Judges' comments: "Captures sublimely the vulnerability of wildlife in this harsh and frequently stark landscape."

7 Lions in the rain
Nambiti Private Game Reserve, South Africa

Miguel De Freitas

Accountant

Canon EOS 6D, EF 70-300mm f/4.5-6 IS USM @ 300mm, 1/50 sec @ f/5.6, ISO 200

Judges' comments: "The use of black-and-white sets the tone for this well-composed shot, as the raw power of the big cats are softened by the long grass."

8 Stripes at twilight
Meno a Kwena Tented Camp, Makgadikgadi Pans National Park, Botswana

Rachel Lang

Travel blogger

Canon EOS 70D, EF 100-400mm f/4.5-5.6L IS II USM @ 400mm, 1/200 sec @ f/7.1, ISO 500

Judges' comments: "The peak of the day's last light is captured perfectly at this waterhole."

9 Icy look
Brepollen Bay, Svalbard, Norway

Renato Granieri

Consumer insight consultant

Nikon D4S, 80-400mm f/4.5-5.6 @ 195mm, 1/800 sec @ f/11, ISO 800

Judges' comments: "A truly beautiful study in flight and the architecture of polar ice."



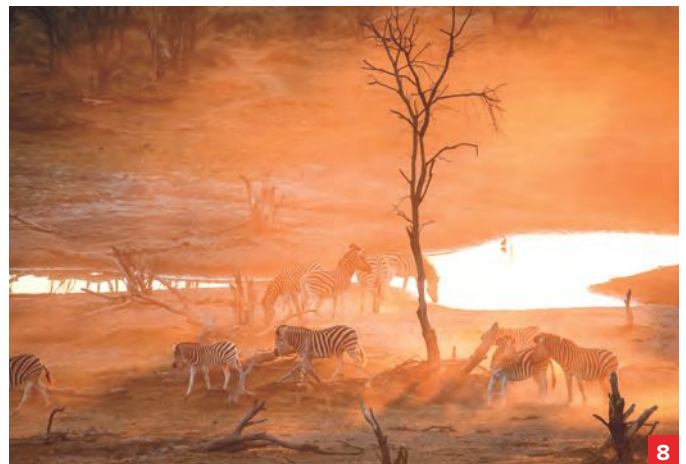
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3

WINNER (see p12)

Descent of the Ukukus
Qullqipunku Glacier, Peru

Christopher Roche

Video director

Nikon D750, Nikkor 24-70mm
f/2.8 @ 28mm, 1/125 sec @ f/9,
ISO 5000

Judges' comments: "Muted colours, a wide-angle lens and visceral texture combine to reveal beauty, culture and calm."

RUNNER-UP

1 Lost in Pushkar
Pushkar, Rajasthan, India

Khairul Anuar Che Ani

Quantity surveyor

Canon EOS 5D Mark III, EF 400mm
f/5.6L USM @ 400mm, 1/800 sec
@ f/6.3, ISO 800

Judges' comments: "Critical focusing and long lens depth of field allows this image to sing."

2 Amsterdam bruin café
Amsterdam, the Netherlands

Victoria Maguire-Rajpaul

PhD student

Nikon D5200, 18-55mm
f/3.5-5.6 @ 42mm, 1/40 sec
@ f/5.3, ISO 3200

Judges' comments: "An everyday event that has been captured beautifully in the style of a true and dedicated documentarian."

3 Rest and the race of life
New Delhi, India

Shaikh Jan Mohammad

Art director

Canon EOS 80D, 18-270mm
@ 46mm, 1/8 sec @ f/4, ISO 100

Judges' comments: "A fine use of low exposure together with the marvellous poise of the recumbent figure combine to make this a remarkable shot."



4



5



HIGHLY COMMENDED

4 Kayaw kitchen

Loikaw, Kayah State,
Burma (Myanmar)

Ko Ko Zaw

Telecom engineer

Nikon D750, Nikon Prime D 24mm
f/2.8 @ 24mm, 1/30 sec @ f/3.5,
ISO 1250, Kenko UV filter

Judges' comments: "We could smell the smoke, taste the chillies and even feel the discomfort of the heat in this incredible image."

5 Blue

Butha-Buthe, Lesotho

Bart Brouwer

*International development
professional*

Fujifilm X100S, 23mm @ 23mm,
1/680 sec @ f/2, ISO 400

Judges' comments: "The colour match is impossibly accurate. Without it, this is a good portrait. With it, it's an outstanding one."

6 On the beach

Cliftonville, UK

Ruta Mackelaite

Interior designer

Panasonic DMC-FZ50, Leica DC
Vario-Elmarit 35-420mm f/2.8-3.7
@ 35mm, 1/320 sec @ f/5.6, ISO 100

Judges' comments: "There's an almost graphic quality to this photograph, which stems from the high contrast between the dark clothing of the figures and light background of the beach. Truly eye-catching."

7 Faith

Howrah, West Bengal, India

Abhijit Chatterjee

Company director

Nikon D750, 24-70mm f/2.8

@ 24mm, 1/320 sec @ f/11,
ISO 200, UV filter

Judges' comments: "The wide view of faith on a grand scale is absorbing and, at the same time, also thought provoking."

8 The enchanted

Jodhpur, India

Matthieu Rivart

Finance controller

Nikon D800, 50mm f/1.8G @
50mm, 1/160 sec @ f/3.5, ISO 640

Judges' comments: "Candid, but without seeming posed. The muted background combines well with the gorgeous teal of the subject's clothing to light up a wonderful moment."


9 Faith

Kolkata, West Bengal, India

Shibasish Saha

IT employee

Nikon D7000, Tokina 11-16mm f/2.8
@ 12mm, 1/50 sec @ f/8, ISO 640

Judges' comments: "This image outlines the importance of faith and community, as seen from the photographer's intimate viewpoint." 

Turn to p78 to see the winning entry in the 'Portfolio' section

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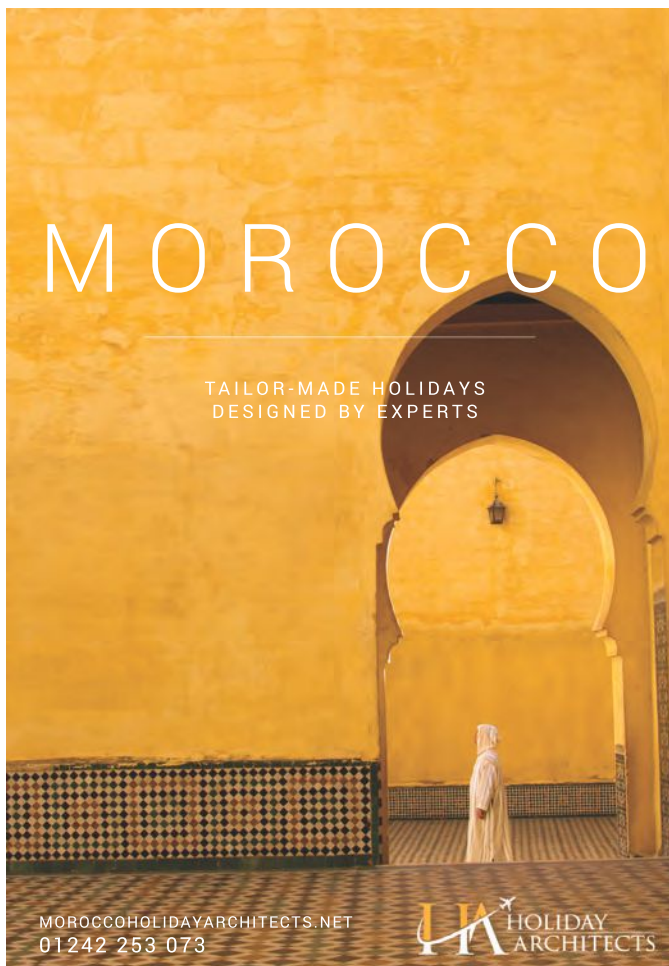


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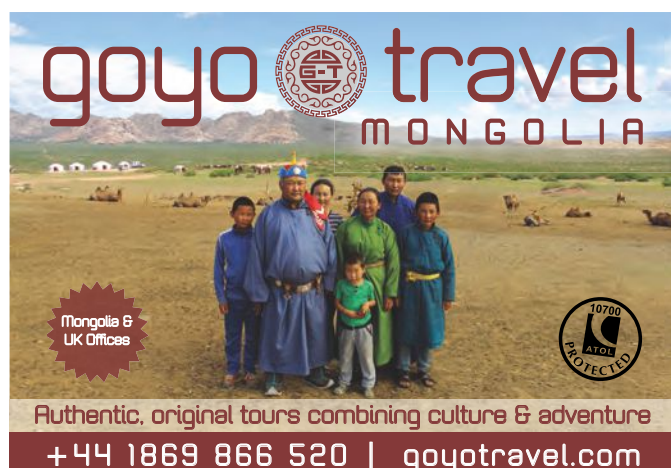
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Based in Winchester, The Natural Travel Collection is a small independent travel company specialising in sustainable tailor-made and small group holidays. We are currently looking for a Product Executive for Wildlife Worldwide and The Travelling Naturalist.

Ideally you will have a minimum of 2 years experience in a similar role and be passionate about travel and wildlife.

For full details visit our blog on www.wildlifeworldwide.com and send your cv and covering letter by 23 February 2017 to [Teresa Bennett teresab@thenaturaltravelcollection.com](mailto:Teresa.Bennett@thenaturaltravelcollection.com)



WILDLIFE
WORLDWIDE

THE TRAVELLING
NATURALIST

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POCKET GUIDES

THE BITS OF THE GUIDEBOOK YOU REALLY NEED



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Fronting up

The vivid porches and facades of Esplanade Avenue are just the tip of the life and colour that seeps through New Orleans' streets



New Orleans, USA

As direct flights launch to the land of Mardi Gras, **Phoebe Smith** shimmies her way to Louisiana, cocktail in hand, to discover what's on offer in the city that never sleeps...

i Before you arrive

Blending French brandy with American rye whiskey, a dash of absinthe (or more often local Herbsaint) and a lump of sugar and lemon peel – from the moment you taste your first sip of New Orleans' signature sazerac cocktail, you know you've arrived somewhere special.

The city fuses elements of the old and new world to create an atmosphere as intoxicating as the drink it's famous for. But its past is just as rich, from the Native Americans who once lived off the Mississippi River to the European explorers who saw the area's value as a trading port and settled here. Convicts, prostitutes and African slaves arrived to work the streets and fields, and out of all this rose a proud Creole community – originally a term to describe white settlers born here of French descent, only to be later applied to those of black ancestry, too.

Today, New Orleans is as shaken and stirred as the drinks that flow freely in Bourbon Street. Stroll

down Frenchmen Street any day, any time to try a cuisine alive with Creole spices, be greeted like an old friend by locals and hear waves of jazz, blues and ragtime oozing from doorways. Come Mardi Gras, the whole city ups its party vibe a few decibels, with floats and festivals filling the streets. And with new direct flights from the UK, your ticket to the celebrations just got a little easier.

✈ At the airport

Louis Armstrong New Orleans International Airport is 16km west of the city centre. Starting from 27 March, British Airways (ba.com) will be launching the first direct flights from the UK, flying four times a week from London Heathrow with a flight time of under ten hours; from £545 return.

British citizens do not require visas for stays of up to 90 days, but you will need to hold a valid ESTA (see p130). At the airport you'll find an info booth, currency exchange and ATMs.

🚌 Getting into town

All the usual car rental companies can be found at the airport. Taxis cost a flat fare of \$36 (£28) for the 20-minute trip to the Central Business District (CBD)/French Quarter – credit cards accepted. You can opt for an Airport Shuttle, which stops at hotels downtown for \$24pp (£19). The Airport-Downtown Express (E2) bus from outside the airport's upper level costs \$2 (£1.50; exact change required) and takes around 40 minutes.

🚌 Other ways to arrive

Greyhound buses (greyhound.com) drop off and pick up from the airport and the Downtown Bus Station (1001 Loyola Avenue). From there, you can head north to Baton Rouge and Lafayette, and onwards via the rest of the cross-country network.

At Union Station (also 1001 Loyola Avenue), you can take the Amtrak train (amtrak.com) heading north to Chicago via Memphis and beyond. ►

HERE'S THE PLAN...

Essential Info

Population: 378,715

Languages: English

Timezone: GMT-6 (Mar–Nov GMT-5)

International dialling code: +1

Visas: Not required by UK nationals. You will need to obtain an ESTA before arrival (<https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov/esta/>); these currently cost \$14 (£11) and are valid for a period of two years.

Currency: US dollar (\$), currently \$1.21 to the £UK.

Highest viewpoint: The best view of the city skyline has to be from the water. Old-style paddleships the *Creole Queen*

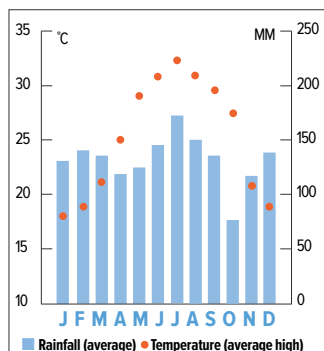
(creolequeen.com) and *Steamboat Natchez* (steamboatnatchez.com) offer two-hour sightseeing cruises along the Mississippi River as well as dinners and jazz. Perfect for getting a skyline photo.

Health issues: Tap water is fine to drink. Be careful of walking alone after dark, especially in the French Quarter and out to Frenchmen Street. It's better to take a cab/Uber to go to the jazz bars.

Recommended guidebook: *New Orleans* (Lonely Planet, 2015); *DK Eyewitness Travel Guide New Orleans* (Dorling Kindersley, 2015).

Web resources: NOLA's official site is neworleansinfo.com; louisianatravel.com; VisitTheUSA.com is a great trip-planning resource for travel beyond the city.

Climate: The city gets hot and humid during summer, hitting the high 30s (°C). June to November is officially hurricane season; spring (Feb–Apr) and autumn (Sep–Oct) are more pleasant and still warm (around 20°C). Winter (Dec–Jan) is low season, when bargains are rife. If you go for Mardi Gras (late Feb), book ahead as places fill up fast.



First Day's Tour

Grab a sugary *beignet* (a New Orleans speciality) and coffee at **Café du Monde** (cafedumonde.com), near Jackson Square (pictured), then start your exploration of the French Quarter with a **cemetery tour** (tourtneworleans.com; \$25/£20) for a grounding in famous past residents, Creole culture and *voodoo* tales. You need a certified guide to enter St Louis Cemetery 1 – where you'll learn how the bodies are 'cooked' in their crypts, and see 'voodoo queen' **Marie Laveau's tomb** (and actor Nicolas Cage's future resting place, if you're interested...).

After the walking tour, grab a Louisiana staple: a *po'boy* (sandwich) from **Killer PoBoys** (killerpoboy.com) at the back of the Erin Rose Bar on Conti Street. Work it off by picking up a bike (and a guide, if you prefer) at the **American Bicycle Company** (bikereentalneworleans.com; from \$10/£8 per hour) to cover more ground. Whizz along the bohemian Marigny and Bywater neighbourhoods, before heading north to check out City Park, complete with (allegedly) the largest grove of oak trees on Earth and the **Morning Call** café



(morningcallcoffeestand.com), to pick up some refreshments and recharge a little.

Later, take the St Charles Streetcar to the Garden District. Follow dinner and a drink (try the *sazerac*) at the **Commander's Palace** (commanderspalace.com) with a cab to Frenchmen Street and the **Spotted Cat Music Club** (spottedcatmusicclub.com), to end the day listening to jazz with locals.

TOP TIP

If it's your first time in the city, don't make the mistake of timing your trip to coincide with Mardi Gras – you'll end up penned into an area just outside your hotel and not get chance to explore. Save the party for a second visit!



Where to Stay

Top end: Soniat House (soniathouse.com) is located in the heart of the French Quarter (pictured). It has just 31 rooms – each unique in its size, shape and decor. There are also wrought-iron balconies, perfect for people-watching when night falls. Doubles from \$295pn (£233).

Mid range: Old No. 77 Hotel & Chandlery (old77hotel.com) started out life as a warehouse for the Port of New Orleans back in 1854. Now it offers a wealth of boutique luxury (think exposed brick

and hardwood floors) just minutes from the French Quarter. It even features a rotating exhibition from a local art school. Doubles from \$115pn (£92).

Budget: The newly opened Hotel Modern (thehotelmodern.com) offers basic rooms on the edge of the Garden District – perfect for those who want to escape the buzz of Bourbon Street. It also has easy access to the St Charles Streetcar, which will take you straight into downtown. Doubles from \$85pn (£68).

Stay or Go?

Stay for a few days, but don't forget that New Orleans can make a great base to explore the bayous and plantations beyond. In the city, do try to sample a **voodoo experience** if you can. Priestess Sallie Ann Glassman holds events on various saint's days at the International House hotel (ihhotel.com), where visitors can either get involved or simply watch.

Outside the city limits, you'll want to get up close and personal with the alligators (pictured) and birdlife along the

bayous. Cajun Encounters offers half-day excursions (cajunencounters.com; from \$29/£23) on powered boats with knowledgeable guides. For something less noisy and more intimate, Canoe and Trail (canoeandtrail.com; from \$59/£47) offers wildlife-watching trips by kayak and canoe.

For a deeper look into Louisiana's past, you have to head to the **plantations**. Whitney (whitneyplantation.com; \$22/£17) and Oak Alley (oakalleyplantation.com; \$22/£17) are highly recommended.

Miroir, miroir...
The addition of the world's largest reflecting pool (Miroir d'Eau) to the Palais de la Bourse has been a big hit with visitors



Bordeaux, France

More than a jumping-off point for wine-lovers swilling their way through the region – a citywide makeover has seen Bordeaux take on a hip new life, says **Mary Novakovich**

The experience was like walking into a street party that you didn't know was happening. By the banks of the River Garonne, dozens of young people were sitting on blankets, eating *saucisson* and drinking wine, enjoying the balmy evening air as lights twinkled from the Pont de Pierre bridge. The curving facade of the 18th-century Palais de la Bourse shimmered in the Miroir d'Eau, a giant reflecting pool that turns into an impromptu paddling pool when the weather warms up.

Go back to the late 1990s and it was a very different scene in Bordeaux. France's wine capital was looking decidedly past its best: years of unchecked car pollution had left its dignified 18th-century architecture covered in grime and dilapidated waterfront warehouses blighted much of the river. But when current presidential hopeful Alain Juppé became mayor in 1995, he put into motion several crucial actions that were to change

the city profoundly. A new tram network in 2003 meant fewer cars and cleaner air, and blackened buildings were sandblasted clean to reveal creamy limestone façades. The riverside was transformed into the city's playground, its wide quayside filled with joggers, strollers, cafés and shops. The Miroir d'Eau came along in 2006, becoming an instant hit.

Bordeaux's students used to flee south to Toulouse to study – now they stay put. The city has a buzz to more than rival its near neighbour, while the heart of its old town still boasts UNESCO status among the cluster of streets dubbed the 'Golden Triangle', where Place du Parlement, Place St-Pierre and Place Camille Jullian meet.

Everywhere – wedged into narrow cobbled streets, tucked into small squares – you'll find terraces, bars and restaurants, with any available outdoor space taken up by café tables. The atmosphere is convivial, lively, civilised, just shy of raucous. The Bordeaux wine that's fuelled the

city since Roman times also goes down pretty nicely with the fresh seafood that is shipped in from the Atlantic coast just an hour away.

This same wine was once key to Bordeaux's prosperity. In the Middle Ages, when the English ruled the Aquitaine region of western France, they developed a taste for the area's rich red wines and exported them back home. The effect on the city was noticeable. By the 18th century, grand boulevards spread through the centre, lined with neo-classical townhouses that elegantly showed off the wealth of their wine-merchant owners.

Now there's the fantastically futuristic La Cité du Vin wine museum, which opened in 2016. Its audacious shape – styled like a giant swirling wine glass – reflects Bordeaux's rejuvenated trailblazing spirit. After years of being bypassed by travellers on their way to the Atlantic coast or the nearby vineyards, Bordeaux is back in the spotlight as a place to linger and savour. ►

◀ HERE'S THE PLAN...

■ Essential Info

When to go: Year round. Spring and autumn are the most pleasant periods. Summer can be scorching, and many restaurants close for several weeks during late July and August. Some regional flights also only run from March to October.

Getting there: EasyJet (easyjet.com) flies from Gatwick, Luton, Belfast, Bristol, Glasgow and Liverpool to Bordeaux from £45 return; flight time is between 90 minutes and two hours. Ryanair (ryanair.com) flies from Stansted and Edinburgh; British Airways (ba.com) from Gatwick; and Flybe (flybe.com) from Birmingham and Southampton.



Getting around: It's easy to walk around the centre, and there's also a bike hire scheme. Buses, trams and boats all use the same tickets, which you can buy for €1.50 (£1.30) each; a day pass costs €4.60 (£4).

Where to stay: Mama Shelter (mamashelter.com) is in a central location and has a rooftop eatery; doubles from €79 (£67). For modern rooms in an 18th-century city-centre townhouse, try Hotel Continental (en.hotel-le-continental.com); doubles from €68 (£58). Central boutique hotel La Maison Bord'eaux (lamaisonbord-eaux.com) has stylish rooms with doubles from €125 (£107).

Where to eat: Laid-back Belle Campagne (belle-campagne.fr) has seasonal food, while Glouton (gloutonlebistrot.com) features a 'bistronomic' menu with a seafood focus.

Further details: See bordeaux-tourisme.co.uk for more information.

TOP TIP

From July, it'll be easier to reach Bordeaux thanks to a new TGV service that cuts the journey time from Paris by rail down to two hours, saving over an hour. You could even add it as a day trip if you're visiting the capital. voyages-sncf.com



Day 1: DISCOVER THE HEART

Most of Bordeaux's main sights are on the left bank of the Garonne. Start amid the 18th-century façades of the **Place de la Comédie** (pictured), then turn into **Rue Sainte-Catherine**, touted as the longest pedestrianised shopping street in Europe.

From here, veer east into the mazy streets around **Place du Parlement**. Here you'll find two leaders of the city's so-called 'bistro brat pack',

Miles (restaurantmiles.com) and **Le Chien de Pavlov**

(lechiendepavlov.com) – both have helped shake up the city's old stuffy image.

Head south to **Rue St-James**, which forms part of the Santiago de Compostela pilgrims' trail, and is tailed by the gothic **Grosse Cloche belfry**. The is street full of oddities, with **Le Vintage Bar** (vintage-bar.fr) worth revisiting for happy hour. For a good-value lunch, grab a garden table in nearby Rue Buhans' **Potato Head** (potatoheadbordeaux.com).

Plunge back into the web of streets and re-emerge via the 15th-century **Porte Cailhau** at the quayside, where you can stroll the promenade and its long line of 18th-century townhouses. You'll soon reach the stunning **Palais de la Bourse** and its **Miroir d'Eau**.



Day 2: SOAK UP THE CULTURE

Hop on a tram northwards to the renovated **Bassins à Flot** riverside district, where the swirl of **La Cité du Vin** (pictured; lacityduvin.com) soon hoves into view. Its entry fee (€20/£17) includes wine-tasting in a rather eye-catching bar and 360° views.

Cross the Garonne to discover one of the city's regeneration success stories. **Darwin** (darwin.camp) used to be a grim military barracks; it now houses a bistro, skate park, organic supermarket, outdoor cinema, music venues and even an urban farm. The warehouse-like **Magasin Général** (magasinegeneral.camp) is a genial spot for lunch and craft beers.

Back in the old town, trawl local history at the **Musée d'Aquitaine** (musee-aquitaine-bordeaux.fr). Exhibits here range from prehistoric cave paintings (found at nearby Lascaux) to harrowing relics of the 18th-century slave trade – another source of Bordeaux's wealth.

For a relaxed introduction to the city's wines, drop by **Aux Quatre Coins du Vin** (aux4coinsduvin.com). It's a brilliantly simple concept: put a preloaded card into the dispensers and choose from a bewildering number of wines in either small or large measures. Knowledgeable staff are always on hand for advice, too.



Day 3: EXPLORE WINE COUNTRY

Sauternes, Pomerol, St-Émilion, Margaux, Pauillac, Médoc – some of the world's most highly prized wines are produced in the vineyards (pictured) surrounding Bordeaux.

The Médoc vineyards are found north of the city in a chunk of land between the Gironde estuary and the Atlantic coast. You can join a 'chateau route' tour of the Médoc area, with tastings at wine estates in Margaux, Pauillac and St-Julien, among others. Bordeaux's tourist office offers half- and full-day tours (from €38/£32) that include transport and tastings.

Alternatively, hire a bicycle from **Pierre Qui Roule** (pierrequiroule.fr;

French only) from €10 (£8.50) a day and explore the vineyards of the **Entre-Deux-Mers** region along the 58km Roger Lapébie Cycle Path, an old railway line that runs along the eastern banks of the Garonne River.

The medieval town of **St-Émilion** is exquisite and only a 30-minute train ride away. Begin at **Maison du Vin** (maisonduvinsaintemilion.com), which has an enormous selection of local wines. Wander narrow streets and stone houses, saving energy for the 196-step climb to the medieval bell tower; this forms part of the vast underground **Église Monolithe**, which can only be visited via a tour. **✓**

Religious epics
The 6th-century
monastic site of
Clonmacnoise – one
of hundreds spread
across Ireland



Ireland's piety sites

Inspired by our article on the Camino we head to Ireland where the rise of Christianity sparked a network of pilgrim trails, Viking cathedrals and mysterious 'beehives'...

Get orientated

Christianity has a long history in the Republic of Ireland, having graced its shores as far back as the 5th century when Palladius (Ireland's first bishop) arrived to spread Catholicism among the Celts. It was during this early period (400–1200 AD) that vast religious buildings started sprouting up across the land, often designed in Benedictine, Franciscan and Augustinian styles. These sites weren't just places of prayer, however, they were also social hubs, checkpoints and gateways to Ireland's towns and villages, meaning today's visitors can now discover a time capsule of medieval history.

Getting there & around

Direct flights go from many UK airports to Dublin. Flight time is from one hour; fares from £26 return. Regular ferries also go to the capital from Holyhead, north Wales (three hours; from £79 one

way), and Liverpool (seven hours; from £59 one way). Dublin is linked by a rail network (irishrail.ie) that covers the country, with a four-day Trekker Pass (€110/£94) offering unlimited train travel. A Leap Visitor Card allows free travel on all buses, trains and trams within the capital (€10/£8.50 for 24 hours).

The visit

Dublin may be the gateway to the Republic, but the capital has its own marvels. The 12th-century St Patrick's Cathedral is one of the icons of medieval Ireland, and still the country's largest church. Others have not been so lucky, though. The 9th-century St Mary's Abbey was once a vast estate until Henry VIII dissolved it in 1539. Today, its two surviving rooms are visitable beneath the streets of the city centre.

Further exploration reveals Dublin's Viking past, when raids and Norse settlements occupied the Irish coast. The finest legacy of this era (800–1170 AD) is

Christ Church Cathedral, the oldest building in Dublin, founded in 1030 AD by the Hiberno-Norse king Sitric Silkenbeard (albeit later rebuilt). Look for St Michan's, too, the former site of a Norse chapel now famed for its crypt full of mummified remains.

Outside the capital, religious sites often used to mark pit stops along medieval routes. South of Dublin lies the 30km St Kevin's Way, winding the weatherbeaten Wicklow Mountains NP to the monastic city of Glendalough. Meanwhile, Kerry's old pilgrimage trail of Cosán na Naomh winds the 12th-century monastic ruins of Kilmalkedar, set on the scenic, windswept Dingle peninsula.

Ireland isn't short of piety sites, from Tipperary's vast Rock of Cashel complex to Offaly's 6th-century Clonmacnoise monastery and the strange 'beehive' retreats found on Skellig Michael (and seen in *Star Wars*), off the coast of Kerry. Exploring them reveals not just their own history, but that of Ireland itself. ►

PIETY SITES OF IRELAND

Ireland's imposing monasteries mostly date back to the 8th or 9th century, an era that was the heyday of Irish arts – a time of lavishly illuminated manuscripts, intricately carved high crosses and rounded towers.



1 Round towers

The round tower, or bell tower, is an elegant structure that tapers to a conical stone roof. They were typically used to spot enemies coming, and were often a place of refuge during the time of Viking raids.

2 Cathedral

The cathedral was often the centrepiece of all Irish monastic sites, as well as a place of worship.

3 Oratory

To build oratories (small medieval chapels), stones were stacked up without mortar. The door provided the only light.

◆ High crosses

Up to the 8th century, high crosses were usually decorated with ornaments. After that, they tended to feature figures. The centre of the cross is almost always occupied by representations of Christ, either on the cross or in his 'glory' pose. Their tops were usually sculpted to resemble a small stone shrine.



Beehive huts

These circular stone buildings served as the living quarters for monks. The most famous are found at Skellig Michael (pictured)



Cross purposes

High crosses in monastic grounds were often visible signs of piety

■ Essentials

Language: English

Time: GMT

Visas: Not required by UK nationals

Money: Euro, currently around €1.14 to the UK£

Health: Take a valid EHIC card



The feature was adapted from Marco Polo's *Travel Handbook: Ireland*, which contains infographics, insider tips, tour suggestions and a large pull-out map. See marco-polo.com

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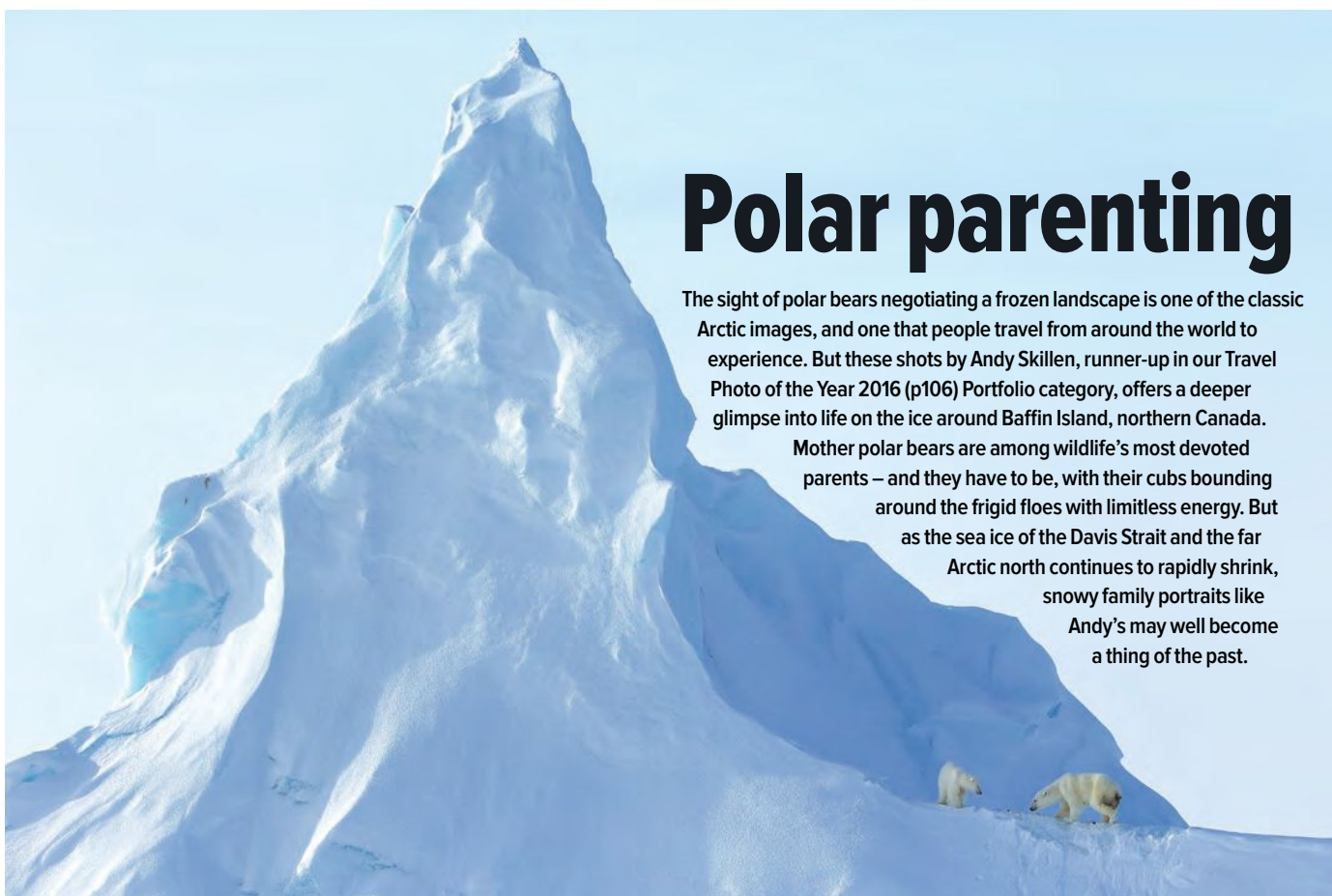




Polar parenting

The sight of polar bears negotiating a frozen landscape is one of the classic Arctic images, and one that people travel from around the world to experience. But these shots by Andy Skillen, runner-up in our Travel Photo of the Year 2016 (p106) Portfolio category, offers a deeper glimpse into life on the ice around Baffin Island, northern Canada.

Mother polar bears are among wildlife's most devoted parents – and they have to be, with their cubs bounding around the frigid floes with limitless energy. But as the sea ice of the Davis Strait and the far Arctic north continues to rapidly shrink, snowy family portraits like Andy's may well become a thing of the past.



GRANTA

Is travel writing dead?

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