

Best *of the* Best

FROM TAKING A SPA-CATION IN HELSINKI TO LEARNING HOW TO SWIM IN THE CÔTE D'AZUR, OUR WELL-TRAVELLED WRITERS SHARE THEIR FAVOURITE EXPERIENCES FROM AROUND THE WORLD. TOP PICKS INCLUDE ENJOYING THE BEAUTIFUL VIEW FROM TABLE MOUNTAIN IN SOUTH AFRICA, EXPLORING THE MONASTERIES IN TIBET, GOING ON A BALLOON RIDE IN THE SERENGETI, GETTING LOST IN THE STREETS OF MILAN, AND PLENTY OF OTHER EXTRAORDINARY ADVENTURES NOT TO BE MISSED.



BEST PLACE TO SEE ART

BY DESIGN Most people visiting Barcelona head to Barceloneta beach, or opt to walk along Las Ramblas, but I really enjoy the MACBA (Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona). The architecture is beautiful and there are beanbag chairs you can chill out on in the atrium area after a long day of walking. The street art in the surrounding area is great—don't forget to check out the Keith Haring mural on the wall behind the building. —*Naomi Finlay*

STAFF PICK



BEST RIDE OF YOUR LIFE

PARADISE ON FOUR WHEELS IN PERU

Lauren Jerome,
Senior Editor

An eight-hour South American bus ride may not sound that appealing. While travelling from Lima to Huaraz, though, high into the Peruvian Andes, the ride is unreal. Break out of the urban chaos of the capital into desert-like landscapes and shantytowns, along sand cliffs over the ocean, then onto winding mountain roads climbing up toward the clouds, through lush and incredibly dramatic scenery. A window seat is a must.

BEST ESCAPE FROM THE HEAT

Mexico's Magical Pools

Make a splash at one of the many underground rivers in the Yucatán Peninsula

BY ADAM MCCULLOCH

SWIM IN THE MAYAN UNDERWORLD

next to the easternmost tip of Mexico's point, the Yucatán Peninsula, which is graced with some of the longest underground rivers in the world. Where they break the surface, the crystal clear water creates a natural swimming hole called a cenote. In ancient times these magical pools were both essential water sources and considered entrances to the underworld.

Nearly all Mayan towns in the Yucatán, including the capital city, Mérida, were built around cenotes (even the local Costco has one in the parking lot) and the most striking have stalagmites and stalactites and thick tree roots that lend the caverns the ambience of an overgrown underwater cathedral.

Head to Cuzamá, a town about an hour's drive southeast of Mérida known for its spectacular

cenotes—most notably Chelentun, Chacsinicche and **Bolonchojol**—or hire a local guide on a motorcycle taxi to take you to lesser-known cenotes on private land. In the village of Valladolid, Cenote Zaci closely resembles elegant hanging gardens, while Cenote San Lorenzo, with its high platform and rope swing, makes for a fun splashdown on a hot day.

History buffs should head to Hacienda Viva Sotuta de Peón, a working henequen plantation. The fibre was known as “green gold” thanks to its value during the late 1800s. Today a horse-drawn rail cart takes guests through the henequen fields and to the hacienda's own cenote.



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BEST DESSERTS

WORLDLY WAYS TO SATISFY YOUR SWEET TOOTH

Loosen the belt and get ready to savour these delectable desserts from around the world. BY LISA JACKSON



DONUT DYNAMITE!
Maui, Hawaii

Maui adores the brioche-style donuts of Chef Desiree Parada (a.k.a. “Madame Donut”), which are scratch-made with whimsical toppings. Try her **bacon maple**, fresh from Donut Dynamite!’s cart at the Maui Swap Meet.



KEY LIME PIE
Key West, Fla.

Enjoy the Keys’ signature dessert: tart custard baked in a graham cracker crust. The Blue Heaven serves an epic slice with a “**mile-high**” meringue.



BANANA CHOCOLATE PANCAKES
Thailand

A **street treat** of caramelized bananas wrapped in rice-flour pancakes and drizzled in chocolate sauce and condensed milk. Pick any food cart you’d like, but Chiang Mai’s Night Market is definitely a winner.



DULCE DE LECHE
Argentina

Argentini­ans slather this gooey confection, whose name means “milk candy,” on everything. Visit any café to savour **alfor**, a sandwich cookie filled with dulce de leche and sometimes dipped in chocolate.

BEST FESTIVAL

Euphoria at Semana Santa

Thousands flock to Antigua, Guatemala, for one of the world’s most extravagant celebrations

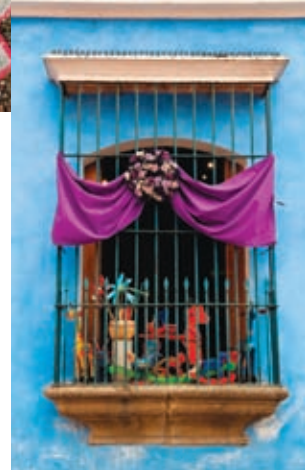
BY VAWN HIMMELSBACH

THERE’S SOMETHING **IN THE AIR** during Semana Santa, or Holy Week, in Antigua. And it’s not just the clouds of incense that accompany the processions winding their way through cobblestone streets blanketed in fresh flowers and coloured sawdust.

There’s excitement in the air, as thousands of people descend upon this town for what’s considered Latin America’s most lavish Holy Week celebration.

Antigua is a worthy destination in its own right—a picturesque colonial town with brightly coloured houses and red tile roofs, ringed by three volcanoes and the Guatemalan highlands. But it transforms during Holy Week.

The festivities begin on Palm Sunday, when robed incense carriers make their way through the streets, followed by floats, called *andas*, carried on the shoulders of the devout. This is a sight in itself, since



the floats—carrying statues of various saints—can weigh up to 7,000 pounds.

The week turns solemn on Good Friday, when the streets are decorated in elaborate carpets made of tinted sawdust, pine needles and flower petals: bougainvillea, chrysanthemums, carnations and roses. After the sun rises, processions parade through the streets, crushing the elaborate carpets beneath their feet.

By Easter Sunday, the tone changes—people dance in the streets, waving ribbons and setting off firecrackers.

Bystanders—religious or not—are welcome to join in the revelry, and may find it impossible not to soak up the euphoria.



FLOWER POWER
Clockwise, from top right: a procession walks by an elaborate carpet; a window adorned with festival decorations; tinted sawdust is used for colourful creations; incense carriers make their way through the streets



You'll want to go to Watkins Glen, N.Y., because it's home to one of the world's most iconic racetracks. Known as The Glen, Watkins Glen International has borne witness to the talents of Jeff Gordon, Mario Andretti and Jackie Stewart, and NASCAR fans still flock there every year. If that's not your thing (and who knows why it wouldn't be?), Watkins Glen and the Finger Lakes area is also a famous, yet totally unpretentious, wine region. There are tastings and vineyard visits galore. Then there are the hiking trails, great restaurants and small towns that exude all-American charm—all within easy reach of our borders.

BEST SUNSETS

Twilight Zones

Some of the most spectacular spots to watch daylight fade into the horizon

BY LISA JACKSON

From the top of a volcano

Maui, Hawaii

One of Maui's most memorable experiences is watching the sun go down from the summit of **Haleakalā**, a massive volcano that dominates the island. At 10,000 feet (3,048 metres), you feel like a bird soaring above the clouds as pastel hues streak across the horizon. Arrive early (parking is limited) and bring warm clothes so you can linger after dusk—the stargazing is incredible.

From an ancient temple

Siem Reap, Cambodia

Angkor Archeological Park contains the scattered remains of the Khmer Empire. It's also where you can scale the **Phnom Bakheng** or Ta Keo temples, and watch daylight dissolve over ancient ruins and the Cambodian jungle.

While cliff jumping

Negril, Jamaica

Craving an adrenaline-laced sundown? Join the circus at **Rick's Café**, famous for its lively cliffside terrace and daredevils who plummet into the ocean from insane heights. Crowds aside, the sunset here is enchanting. For less fanfare, chill at the legendary Rock House Hotel, once Bob Marley's hangout. As the

sky turns cotton-candy pink, enjoy Jamaican cuisine and music, and, if you're gutsy, jump from a secluded bridge into the balmy waves below.

Savouring gourmet cuisine

Big Sur, Calif.

The showstopper on California's Pacific Coast Highway is Big Sur, a stretch of dramatic oceanside road that's considered one of America's top coastal drives. At dusk, dine at the **Sierra Mar**, a posh restaurant that's perched more than 365 metres above the surf. Patrons enjoy exquisite cuisine while the sun melts into the sea outside the floor-to-ceiling windows.

On the ancient rocks of Sedona

Sedona, Ariz.

Most flock to Sedona for the red rocks that tower like cathedrals in the sky. At twilight, these sandstone mountains beam brilliant orange, purple and red hues, offering fantastic photo opportunities. The best place to capture the show? Stake out a spot at the **Sedona Airport Overlook**. Though the overlook itself is seemingly unromantic, you'll get spectacular long-distance views of the mountains.

Take a sunset dive at Rick's Café



1. Tourists wait for the sunset at Haleakalā National Park in Maui.
2. Cambodia's Phnom Bakheng temple is a popular spot to watch the sun go down.
3. A cliffdiver from Rick's Café in Negril enjoys the twilight.
4. Sierra Mar's floor-to-ceiling windows offer unobstructed views in Big Sur.
5. A photographer captures the view from the Sedona Airport Overlook in Arizona.

BEST AND MOST NOVEL
ICE CREAM DESSERTBALI'S
ES DOGER
BLENDS
SWEET,
SAVOURY

On the Indonesian island of Bali, sample a frozen treat whose devotees are as passionate as Italians are when it comes to pasta or gelato. The dish, called *es doger*, is a specialty at The Mulia Resort in Nusa Dua, where it starts with ice cream made from coconut milk and sugar water. Then comes the fun part: choosing from a kaleidoscopic array of sweet and savoury Indonesian toppings, like green *pacar cina*, made from red tapioca pearls; *kolang kaling*, or atap seed; fermented cassava; jackfruit; rose syrup and white toast. Ice cream, revolutionized.

—Adam McCulloch



BEST WAY TO SWIM

The Ultimate Lesson

Dive in with celebrity-status swimming instructor Pierre Gruneberg in stunning Côte d'Azur

Some people never age. Eighty-five-year-old Pierre Gruneberg, with his signature, conical straw sombrero worn at a rakish angle, greets me beside Grand-Hotel du Cap-Ferrat's iconic saltwater swimming pool. Though the glittering teal-coloured waves of the Mediterranean Sea vie for my attention; though jet-setters languorously supine on poolside lounges are surely famous actresses or headline-making entrepreneurs, I can't take my eyes off Gruneberg. Fit, sinewy and looking every bit the box-office idol, he has invited me to lunch. Touted as the world's most famous (and innovative) swimming instructor, Gruneberg, who swims a mile every morning in the sea, uses a unique, patented technique that features a salad bowl filled with water to teach students the proper breathing techniques before they even enter the pool. "People are less challenged by fitness and muscle use than the simple act of breathing," he says. He has held the title of *maitre nageur* (which means swimming instructor) at this hotel for more than six decades. Immersed in the glamour exuded by the South of France, he has taught the likes of Picasso, Paul McCartney, David Niven, Ralph Lauren and Bono how to swim. Nearly every student becomes a friend—Domenico Dolce (of Dolce & Gabbana) showed his appreciation with an invitation to a Milan fashion show; writer/artist Jean Cocteau gave the swimming maven a sketch. "I'll never retire," says Gruneberg, the milky white palatial hotel above him, the sea below, and the pool, appropriately, at his feet. —Becca Hensley



BEST CAMEL RIDE

A Desert Jaunt in Abu Dhabi

Saddle up with Qasr Al Sarab Desert Resort

Even before I see the mountainous corkscrews of golden sand, whorled and sculpted by nature like a pastry chef's best meringue, I expect something exotic. That's because I'm headed to Abu Dhabi's evocatively named Empty Quarter, the longest continuous sand desert expanse in the world. Amid the hills, I glimpse what seems like a mirage. Like an oasis within the infinite swath, with nothing else in view but sand and an immense sky, fortress-like Qasr Al Sarab Desert Resort comes into view. A luxurious resort, created by member states of the United Arab Emirates to preserve and promote Arabian culture, it fuses into the landscape. The traditionally clad staff welcomes me with dates and cardamom-laced coffee at check-in, then leads me to a room positioned to allow for both sunrise and sunset vistas. Today, though, I'll spend dusk in the desert atop a camel. On one of the resort's sunset treks, I scramble into the saddle of a festooned, one-humped dromedary to plod through the sand, a guide by my side. As we tramp, I sway gently side to side. Gazelles come from nowhere only to instantly disappear again—and the sun falls into the horizon's unearthly plum-coloured canvas. —*Becca Hensley*



BEST PLACE FOR AN EASY RIVER RIDE

Raft the Bow

Knee-deep with the kids in Banff, Alta.

BY KARAN SMITH

BANFF IS GORGEOUS. It doesn't matter from what angle; even from a gas station parking lot, its proximity to the majestic Rocky Mountains is hard to beat. But Banff can be full of life, too: on its glitzy main street, in the gondola lineup, on the highway out to the campground when traffic stalls behind mountain goats crossing the road. One way to savour its beauty, and feel like you are in the middle of a national park, is to take a raft ride on the aquamarine **Bow River.** And unlike many wilderness sports, rafting is ideal for all ages. So my troop—husband and three kids under seven—climbs into the orange raft with the other tourists.

We peacefully float past stunning view upon view, from the towering Fairmont Banff Springs hotel to the granite face of Mount Rundle. Our Rocky Mountain Raft Tours guide lets our children try their hand at the oars. At a break mid-way, he pulls the raft onto a sandy shore. My kids shed their shoes and hop out into the clear, shallow water, which originated in the Bow Glacier and is destined for Hudson's Bay. It feels like the perfect way to experience the country's oldest national park—jump right in.

BEST SPA DESTINATIONS

TRAVEL-WORTHY RETREATS

Desperate to de-stress? Find your happy place at one of these blissful destinations.

BY LISA JACKSON



SOAK UP THE AZORES

Portugal

These nine islands have been trending since the 16th century for their incredible geothermal resources. Soak in **Caldeira Velha**, a waterfall on the slope of the Fogo volcano.



R&R

Rotorua, New Zealand

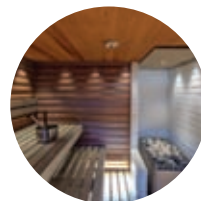
Dubbed "Sulphur City," Rotorua has a slew of spa offerings—from soaking in a thermal stream to indulging in traditional Maori massage. Enjoy a treatment or soak in one of the 27 thermal pools at the **Polynesian Spa.**



HOLISTIC HEALING

Chandler, Ariz.

Unwind at **Aji Spa & Salon**, Arizona's only Native American-owned spa. Treatments are inspired by ancient traditions. The Blue Coyote body wrap coats your body in sky-blue Azulene mud from the banks of the Gila River.



FEEL THE HEAT

Helsinki, Finland

Finns have bathed in hot steam for centuries, and an icy lake dip post-sweat is part of the ritual. Helsinki's **Langvik Congress Wellness Hotel** offers first-rate modern and traditional saunas.

PHOTOGRAPHY: [ABU DHABI] COURTESY OF QASR AL SARAB; [BOW RIVER] © BERT HOERICH/ALAMY; [BAGAN] © SIMÉ/ISTOCK PHOTO; [PORTUGAL] WESTEND61/GETTY IMAGES; [THAILAND] © CARMO CORREIA/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO; [TOFINO] DOUG MCKINLAY/GETTY IMAGES (ALL OTHERS) COURTESY OF SPAS



BEST ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE

EXPLORE THE RUINS IN MYANMAR While tourists flock to Machu Picchu in Peru and Angkor Wat in Cambodia, one of the world's most impressive archaeological sites isn't well known—yet. In Myanmar, along the Ayeyarwaddy River, lie the ruins of Bagan (formerly Pagan), which was at the height of its powers from the ninth to the 13th centuries and eventually became a centre of Buddhist learning. Today it's one of the most important archaeological sites in Asia, with more than 2,200 Buddhist temples, shrines and pagodas. It's easy to spend days exploring these sanctuaries, many with colourful murals or hidden stairways to platforms with 360-degree views across the temple-studded plain. —*Vawn Himmelsbach*

STAFF PICK



BEST FOOD TOUR

SWITZERLAND & THE CHOCOLATE FACTORY

Stephanie Bomba, Managing Editor

Sure, you can see the Matterhorn up close in Zermatt, or learn to snowboard in Champéry, but no trip to Switzerland is complete without a stop in Broc, near Gruyères. It is here you will learn about the history of chocolate making at La Maison Cailler—the Swiss chocolate factory—while watching the bars get made. The best part? The tour concludes with all the free chocolate samples you can eat.



VOLCANO THERAPY
Arenal, Costa Rica

The geothermal pools at **Tabacon Grand Spa Thermal Resort** are completely natural, carved from a river heated by a volcano. Hunt for secluded coves...or the swim-up bar.



WINE & WELLNESS
Paso Robles, Calif.

At **Allegretto Vineyard Resort**, indulge in a grapevine-inspired aromassage. Fitness and meditation classes are held in a French-style abbey and in the vineyard.



MID-CONTINENT
Iceland

Set in a lava field straddling continental plates, the **Blue Lagoon** offers a wondrous spa experience. Soak in the geothermal pool's milky seawater while aurora-gazing.



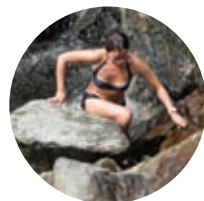
THE BLISSFUL & BIZARRE
Thailand

Discover a playground of weird (skin-sucking fish that exfoliate your feet) and wonderful (\$7 massages) spa treatments. Spas are everywhere in Thailand, but **Chiva Som** is truly exceptional and a fave among celebrities.



CELEB-SPOTTING
Palm Springs, Calif.

Hollywood unwinds in the therapeutic waters of this desert oasis. At **Two Bunch Palms Spa Resort**, look for A-listers in mud baths or geothermal pools.



WONDERFULLY WILD
Tofino, B.C.

For rustic and remote, take a seaplane to **Hot Springs Cove**. Here, thermal waters cascade down a waterfall into rocky bathing pools.



BEST CITY TO HAVE A BALL

DANCE THE NIGHT AWAY IN VIENNA

Step into a fairy tale with waltz lessons and a Cinderella-style ball in regal Vienna, Austria. The city where the ball tradition began under the tutelage of emperor Joseph II in the 18th century, Vienna holds more than 450 balls annually—most of them during Carnival season in January and February. Taken extremely seriously by the Austrians, the balls are set in such places as palaces and last all night. The evening ends in the wee hours with a horse-drawn carriage ride and goulash in a classic Viennese coffeehouse—a local ritual. —*Becca Hensley*

BEST PLACE TO GET LOST

Milan's Mazes

Navigating the city's labyrinthine roads can be wonderfully confusing

BY STEVEN BOCHENEK

IT BOASTS LEONARDO DA VINCI'S *Last Supper* and the world's fifth-largest church, it has the most famous (and only beautiful) shopping mall and the greatest opera house—but simply getting around Milan is its own adventure.

Both the financial capital of Italy and the design capital of the world, Milan's a city of perpetually bustling strivers and well-dressed commuters, obliterating stereotypes of sleepy *paesani* at four-hour lunches. That energy is multiplied by traffic chaos; unlike Canada's cities, whose grids favour four directions, Milan exploits all 360 degrees.

Just look at a map. At first glance, you could say it looks like the concentric circles in a pond after a rock is tossed into it. Then, you could say the map looks more like the inner workings of a clock. But in reality, it's more like you threw a rock at that clock and broke it. You will get lost.



So how do you navigate the city? Lose the car.

Driving is ugly here (the air's polluted) and discouraged by more than just design. Meandering streets suddenly reverse direction, become pedestrian-only or change names. Like a broken clock, driving and parking here will make you late. Walk or take public transit instead.

Better still, rent and return publicly owned and maintained bicycles from any of the more than 240 bikeMi stations. Then lose yourself! Ride an inner ring road—"Via Carducci *seemed* straight at first"—and find yourself unexpectedly back enjoying the same view 30 minutes later.

On luckier occasions, you'll discover roads that function as wormholes, inexplicably cutting 20 minutes from your ride. It's wonderfully confusing.

WALK THIS WAY
[top] Milan's Duomo, as seen from Corso Vittorio Emanuele II; [left] the neighbourhood of Porta Nuova

TOP 5 AREAS TO LOSE YOURSELF

Navigli

Vital to this landlocked city's one-time evolution, Navigli's canals linked Milan to the Adriatic Sea.

Porta Nuova

Towering above all, offering inhabitants occasional Alpine vistas, Milan's space-age glass and steel neighbourhood remains primarily pedestrian-oriented.

Cimitero Monumentale

A small city itself, Cimitero Monumentale features silent avenues crowded with melancholic sculptures to Milan's wealthiest and illustrious deceased.

Parco Sempione

This public green space tastefully separates massive architectural treasures Sforzesco Castle and Napoleon's triumphal arch.

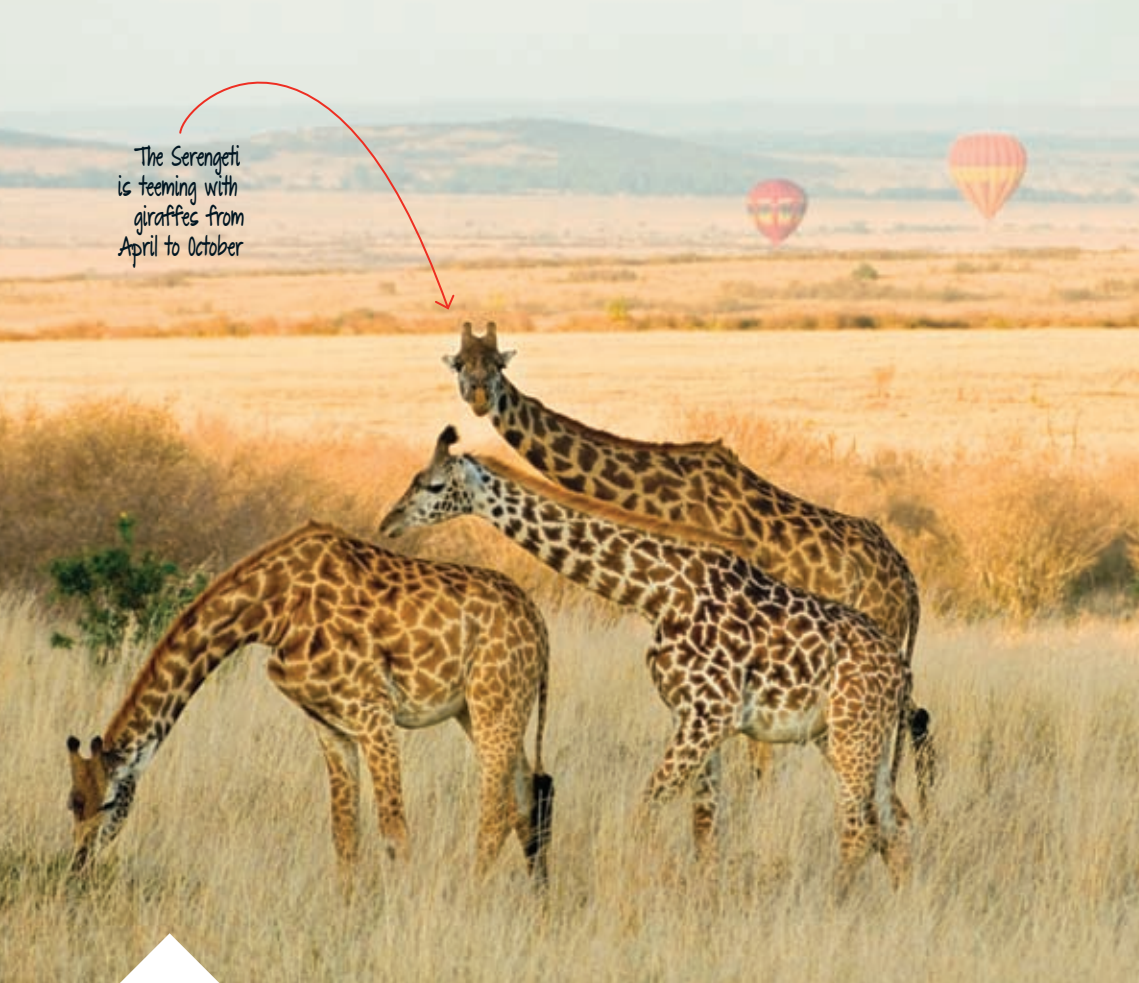
Brera

Public and private galleries are hidden amid claustrophobic cobblestone walkways. La Scala opera house is south of the Brera district and flanks the Galleria mall, which spills you into the piazza fronting Milan's Duomo—that wantonly beautiful cathedral so immense and ornate, you'll get lost there too.



PHOTOGRAPHY: [MILANI] © SIME/ESTOCK PHOTO; [BALLLOON] © KEVIN MOORE/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO; [DRINKS] COURTESY OF BARS

The Serengeti is teeming with giraffes from April to October



BEST BALLOON RIDE

Lift Off in Tanzania's Serengeti

Spot lions, hippos, gazelle and more while floating over grass and drifting over treetops

Rise before dawn at Four Seasons Safari Lodge Serengeti in Tanzania and embark on an hour-long drive to the hot-air balloon launching pad, keeping an eye out for nocturnal residents such as lions. The balloon lifts off just as the sun's first rays touch the vast grasslands of the green plains.

From April to October, the Serengeti is teeming with gazelle, elephants and giraffes in the tens of thousands. Off-season provides a chance to spot lions hiding in the grass, hippopotamuses returning to wallow in the river after a night spent grazing, and elephant herds cutting a path through the grassland.

African ballooning aficionados know it's not how high but rather how low the balloon pilots go that sets them apart. Skillful aviators can skim across the grass only a few feet from terra firma, then rise over the treetops to spot leopards hiding among the branches.

Finally, the balloon touches down close to a long table set for a scrumptious champagne breakfast, a tradition in place since the late 1700s, when the first balloon pilots from Paris would carry champagne in their baskets. Why? To prove to country folk that they were indeed the king's subjects and not some terrifying beasts from the skies. —Adam McCulloch



BEST COMFORT FOOD

ATLANTA'S FOX BROS. BAR-B-Q

Claire Cooper, Managing Editor

Not exactly a secret, this barbecue hot spot draws crowds of hungry first-timers and regulars alike. A carnivore's delight, **The Everything Plate** gets you just that: juicy pulled pork, unbelievably tender beef brisket, moist chicken, St. Louis-style ribs and perfectly sauced wings. Wash it down with a tall glass of iced tea—they'll even send you home with a last refill in a to-go cup. Now that's Southern hospitality.

BEST COCKTAILS

TOP-NOTCH MIXERS

Sit back and sip renowned international concoctions in the fine establishments that do them justice

BY BECCA HENSLEY



DUKES BAR, LONDON

Ian Fleming conjured the notion of "shaken, not stirred," at this boozy, masculine St. James spot, where the only question asked is: gin or vodka?



THE SAZERAC BAR, NEW ORLEANS

Named for what many believe to be the first cocktail, the storied Sazerac Bar holds court in the refurbished Roosevelt Hotel. Once the lair of celebrities, such as 1930s-era Louisiana governor Huey Long, the bar continues to draw glitterati for its rye and Peychaud libation.



LONG BAR, RAFFLES, SINGAPORE

The likes of Ernest Hemingway quaffed at this tropical gin joint, which once locked away its treasured sling recipe at night. Today, more than 2,000 slings get slung daily.



BAHIA BAR, FOUR SEASONS PUNTA MITA, MEXICO

Serrano chili, cucumber, cilantro and tequila combine to make the Aquachile margarita one of Mexico's most refreshing. Take yours beachside to the sound of rolling waves.

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TRAVEL TIP

BEST TRAIN RIDE

LUXURIOUS JOURNEY IN SCOTLAND

Pack your kilt to don for formal gourmet dining aboard luxury train Belmond Royal Scotsman, which chugs through the lake-dotted and pine tree carpeted hinterlands of jaw-dropping Scotland. With itineraries that incorporate stops at castles, whisky distilleries, heritage houses, glassy lochs and charming hamlets, the nostalgic (and intimate) Royal Scotsman ensures comfort with cosseting private cabins, a panoramic observations car and a mahogany-lined dining chamber. Depart from Edinburgh with programs lasting up to seven nights.

—Becca Hensley

PHOTOGRAPHY: [TABLE MOUNTAIN] © FRIEDRICHMEIER/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO; [MONKS] © RON YUE/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO; [GOBBINS] CHARLES MCOULLAN/GETTY IMAGES



Worth the climb (or the cable car ride): the sweeping view from South Africa's Table Mountain

BEST PLACE TO TAKE A DEEP BREATH

Table Mountain Air

Inhale the view overlooking Cape Town, South Africa

It's the spectacular natural places in the world that make me inhale; make me notice that I am breathing. And I find these moments happen most often on mountaintops. One of the best is South Africa's ancient Table Mountain, the iconic backdrop to Cape Town. True to its name, its flat top takes on a tablecloth appearance when the clouds and wind combine in just the right way.

You can opt to hike to the top: there are dozens of routes and the trails are home to one of the richest floral kingdoms. Or you can ride a cable car in less than five minutes. The view that greets you is no less winning for your lack of sweat. You have a bird's-eye view of the city and its landmarks, from the World Cup stadium to desolate Robben Island, where Nelson Mandela smashed limestone during his long internment. You can also peer out at the adjoining Twelve Apostles mountain range and the Atlantic coastline that was so treacherous for Dutch galleons plying the spice trade. I stop at one of the lookouts, lean into the view and try to memorize the moment—this place—with each deep breath. —Karan Smith





**BEST PLACE
TO HANG OUT
WITH MONKS**

Explore Ancient Tibetan Monasteries

Perfect for travellers who want to partake in Buddhist rituals

BY VAWN HIMMELSBACH

TIBET IS A LAND SHROUDED IN MYSTERY, but once you make

the long journey to the high plateaus of the Himalayas, it's surprisingly accessible to travellers who want to visit monasteries, experience Buddhist customs and even spend time with some monks.

In and around Lhasa, Tibet's capital, visitors can wander through ancient monasteries that smell of juniper incense, where monks continue the centuries-old tradition of studying Buddhist scriptures.

The monks—in their saffron robes and flip-flops—test their mastery of Buddhism during animated philosophical debates. Sera Monastery is known for its **daily debating sessions** held in the courtyard (which are open to the public). Built in 1419, this monastery once housed 9,000 monks; today there are about 600 monks here.

But it's not Tibet's largest monastery. That honour falls to Drepung Monastery, perched on a mountainside in the outskirts of Lhasa. The best time to visit is during the Shoton Festival, one of the largest Buddhist celebrations in Tibet.

Travellers can also join monks and Tibetan pilgrims in a kora (clockwise circumambulation of an object or place of devotion) around one of the many temples or monasteries while spinning golden prayer wheels.

For Buddhists, spinning a prayer wheel is equivalent to saying a prayer—so it's a great way for travellers to boost their karma.



BEST PLACE TO WALK OVER WATER

THRILLS AWAIT AT THE GOBBINS

Step out over the roaring Irish Sea at the Gobbins Cliff Path in Northern Ireland. First built in 1902 and renovated in 2015, the path is a thrilling series of narrow passages that wind past a sandy cove, walkways that cling to steep basalt cliff faces and a bridge that rises 10 metres above the waves. You don't need a miracle to take this walk—just make the 40-minute drive from Belfast—but the views do qualify as otherworldly. —*Kristen Koch*

STAFF PICK



BEST PLACE TO SPEND THE WEEKEND

48 HOURS IN THE WINDY CITY

Mya McNulty,
Art Director

SATURDAY: Start your whirlwind tour in River North at [XOCO](#) for Rick Bayless' fresh breakfast empanadas. Hop on an [Architecture Boat Tour](#) to scope the city's amazing buildings. Grab an iconic Chicago Dog or Italian Beef (or both) at [Portillos](#). Burn it off bowling at [10 Pin](#). Hit up [Shaw's Crab House](#) for happy hour oysters, followed up by [Lou Malnati's](#) for deep dish. Check out the jazz from Al Capone's booth at [Green Mill Jazz Club](#).
SUNDAY: Pop into [Intelligentsia](#) for a quick coffee. Take a selfie with [The Bean](#). Tour Wicker Park and hit up [Big Star](#) for killer street-style tacos, then over to [Emporium](#) for old-school arcade and pinball. Head to [Fulton Market](#) for family-style pork and seafood at [The Publican](#). Cap off the night at the [Signature Lounge](#) on the 96th floor of the John Hancock for tasty cocktails and amazing views of the city. Phew! **CAA**