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PLACES IN
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Italian Amore

BACK TO BASICS:
ITALY'S SIMPLE
PLEASURES AND
RUSTIC TREASURES

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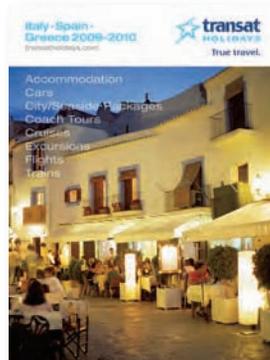
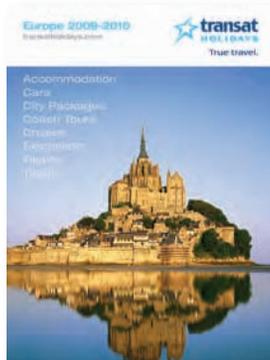
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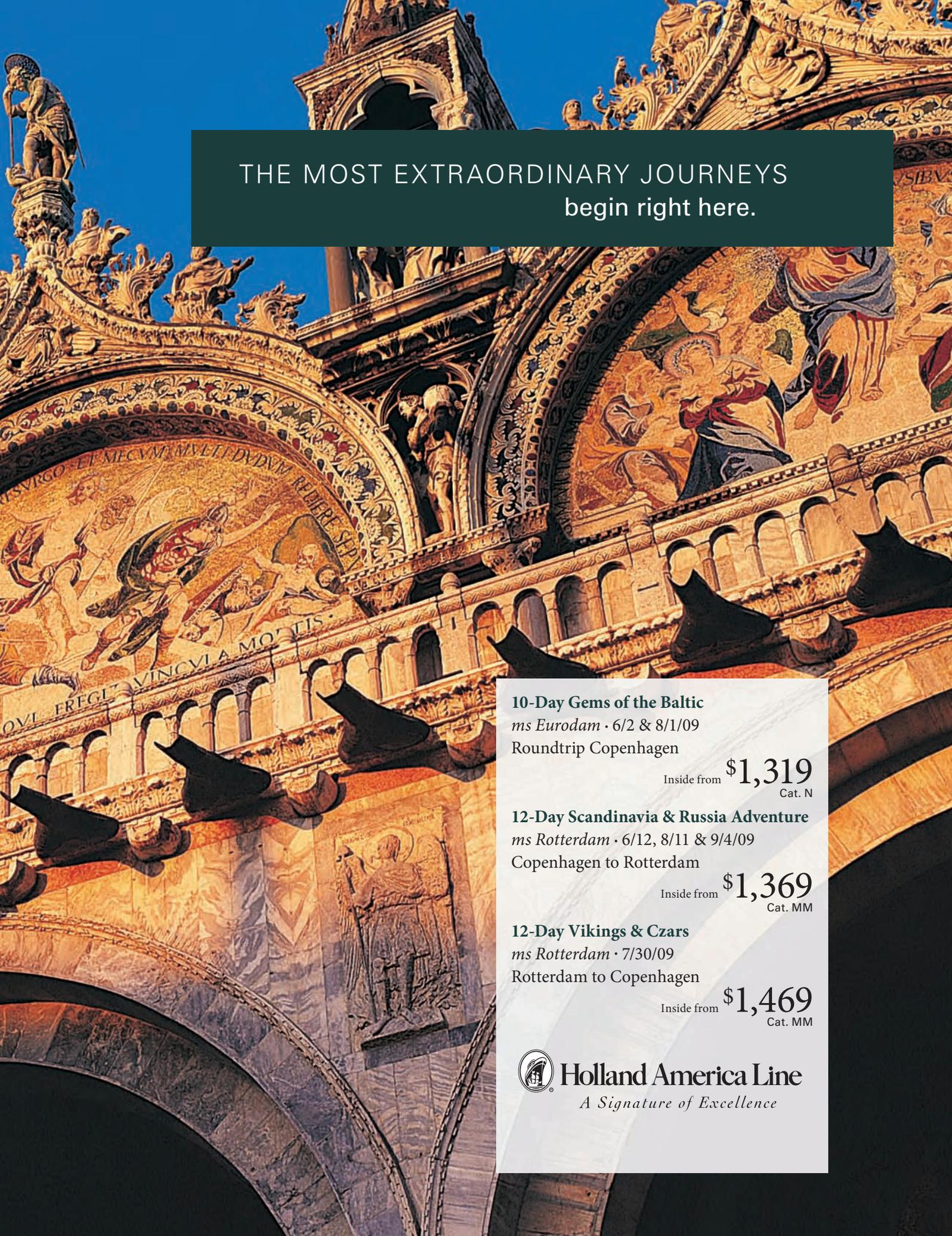
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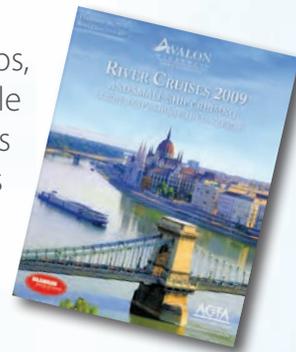


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SPRING 2009

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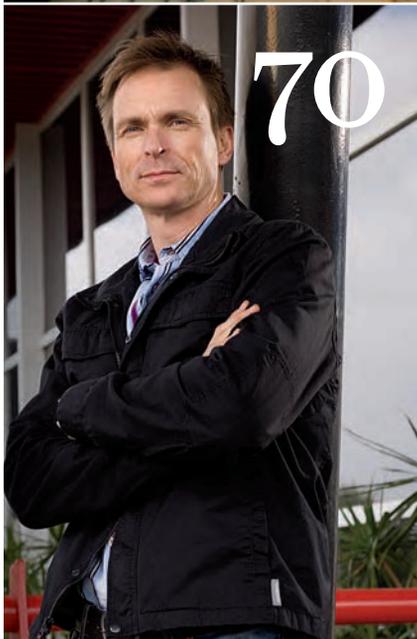
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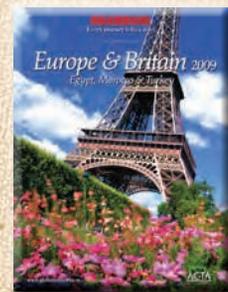
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Italian amore



For a number of years, my grandmother lived a dream life. Residing at turns in San Remo in Italy, Roquebrune Cap Martin and Eze-sur-Mer in France, she enjoyed a lavish and charmed lifestyle usually reserved for movies or make-believe. I still have the stack of letters, sent in those blue and red striped air mail envelopes to our modest address in Canada, where she would recount wonderful weekend drives up to Bordeaux to pick up cases of wine, or numerous evenings spent gambling in the casinos of Monte Carlo. For her, having re-married into French wealth, money was no object.

On my first visit to Europe I was seven years old, and that experience combined two extremes: my mother's small, rustic hometown in Italy, followed by the sophistication and style of my paternal grandmother's adopted home in Monaco. In Italy, I remember taking delight in walking from the neighbour's farm, my maternal grandmother's rough and calloused hand holding mine as I carried a bottle of still-hot milk, fresh from the cow, or devouring the early morning pizza she would bring from the local bakery as a treat. I woke with the rooster to pluck eggs from beneath the hens, learned how to eat hot peppers and even how to ride a bike. Contrasting that, I also experienced first-hand, albeit briefly, the privileged life in southern France: the stunning

views of the Mediterranean from my grandmother's apartment balcony in Roquebrune, luxurious yachts, fine restaurants, the bustling casino and nightlife, the best-smelling soaps in the world and the vivid colours of the bougainvillea that lined every archway.

That trip was to form my dreams of la dolce vita, inspiring a deep connection with, and repeated travels to, this part of the world. Though I've never experienced France like that again, over the years I have added countless more memories of simple pleasures in Europe and realized that dreams needn't be grand, nor come with an exorbitant price tag.

In this back-to-basics issue, we explore Italian amore. Find out why Puglia is the next hot spot, how to find affordable farmhouses in Tuscany and where to eat the best pizza in Naples. Additionally, we go beyond the typical French Riviera to uncover a sweeter side of Nice, accompany one writer on her journey to her father's homeland in the Czech Republic, chart a course through Croatia and more.

While heritage may be a drawing card for some, there is no doubt that many of Europe's simple charms hold a universal and timeless appeal for all who make her acquaintance. *Buon viaggio!* ▣

FEDERICA MARABOLI, EDITOR
editor@ensembletravel.ca

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For the past 23 years, award-winning writer and photographer **Debra Conkey** has operated her own journalism/marketing/public relations company in Laguna Beach, California. A woman of many passions, Debra is also an Ensemble Travel agent who uses a network of connections and her own first-hand experience to create custom travel itineraries for her clients. With extensive travelling under her belt, she likes to visit Italy every other year, and uses her local knowledge to give us tips on how to plan the perfect Tuscan farmhouse villa vacation (page 48).



Owner of **The Etiquette Ladies** and **Louise Fox Protocol Solutions**, **Louise Fox** has been trained and certified at the prestigious Protocol School of Washington and the International School of Protocol in Baltimore. Frequently featured in the media, Louise is also the etiquette coach for the Women's Network top-rated television program *Style by Jury* and makes guest appearances on *Breakfast Television*, *Entertainment Tonight*, *CBC Newsworld* and national radio programs across Canada and the United States. She has been featured in every national newspaper in Canada and in magazines including *Chatelaine*, *Today's Parent* and *Canadian Living*. This issue she gives us a lesson in understanding European hand gestures (page 30).



Marilyn Lazar holds a degree in Communication Studies from Concordia University in Montreal, and currently lives in Toronto where she works as a freelance writer and pilates instructor. Her travels have taken her to destinations as disparate as the Great Barrier Reef in Australia and the game reserves of Africa. She has slept in a tent after whitewater rafting in Idaho, but admits to a penchant for sipping cappuccino al fresco in Tuscany. In this issue, she shares the experience of returning with her father to his roots in Eastern Europe and in the process, discovers much more than just the past (page 52).



Nick Keukenmeester is originally from South Australia and spent six years working in the wine trade in London. He headed up the Wine Department for Harvey Nichols of Knightsbridge, where he found his diploma from the UK's Wine and Spirits Education Trust to be more useful than his arts degree. Nick has travelled extensively throughout the world's wine regions and enjoys the oenophile's dream job as head of Private Client Sales for Lifford Wine Agency in Toronto.



Stephanie Ortenzi is a Toronto food writer who was also a fine dining chef for 16 years. She is a contributor to *The Cook's Essential Food Dictionary* and *The Food Encyclopedia*. In conversation with Lynn Crawford, Executive Chef of Four Seasons New York, Stephanie saw Crawford's effusive warmth, an unbridled passion for food and cooking, and her devotion to her culinary team. "It's no wonder she's so well known for the fierce loyalty of her cooks," said Stephanie, who reports on her virtual tour of Lynn's Caribbean (page 66).

Travel File

Hot hotels: our experts' top picks



RH restaurant

HYATT'S NEW ANDAZ COLLECTION OFFERS A UNIQUE HOTEL EXPERIENCE

Hyatt Hotels & Resorts is creating a new guest experience with their Andaz collection. Combining cool, design-driven environments in vibrant cities with unpretentious service, Andaz is the home-away-from home that you almost *wish* was home.

The brand, launched in 2007 with **Andaz Liverpool Street** in London, welcomed its first North American hotel recently in West Hollywood on Sunset Strip and plans on three more locations in New York and Texas by 2010. Their properties reflect the culture and essential personality of each locale, incorporating elements unique to the destination. Observing an environmentally conscious philosophy the spaces are creatively designed with comfort and sociability in mind. Innovative touches include complimentary 'healthy' mini-bars and a baby service that allows you to pre-order supplies so you don't need to lug them with you.

At the **Andaz West Hollywood** you'll also find a much-awaited new experience in hotel dining at **RH** restaurant. French-trained Chef Sebastien Archambault has created a fresh spin on the 'farm to table' concept, working with local vendors and growers to focus on seasonal and locally sourced organic ingredients. In addition to a menu of signature dishes, **RH** offers a market list. Guests will be able to choose items off this list and customize their own dinner. The restaurant also showcases local wines inspired by boutique vintners celebrating the best of California. In the Californian spirit of openness and sociability, Archambault and his team will work in a kitchen completely open to the 100-seat bar and restaurant. Walk-in coolers feature glass doors so you can watch your entire meal taking shape from storage and preparation to cooking and plating. What to do after dinner? Chat up one of the dedicated, in-the-know 'hosts' who will connect you to what's happening locally. ▣

BEST KEPT SECRET: ISCHIA

Most visitors to Naples normally include a short excursion to the island of Capri. But situated just a few miles off the coast is the lesser known island of Ischia, a mecca for the health-conscious spa set seeking rejuvenation who come to indulge in week-long thermal therapies. Ischia benefits from rich volcanic soil that has created the perfect conditions for thermal spas – some of the largest in the world – as well as fumaroles and natural springs. You'll also find some of the most ideally situated hotels on the Italian peninsula. A favourite among these is the **Mezzatorre Resort and Spa**. Rich in history, the hotel has been designed around a 16th-century watchtower, and perched on a promontory that sweeps majestically into the sea, it is the perfect setting for this intimate and exclusive retreat. Luxurious guest rooms and suites, designed in impeccable Italian style, include terraces that offer glorious views of the Mediterranean. The hotel spa offers a full program of health and wellness services including detoxing, rejuvenation or 'anti-stress' sessions, as well as the thermal therapies. At the end of the day, enjoy traditional Neapolitan cuisine and stunning panoramas at the romantic Chandelier restaurant, located on the cliff-top terrace. Just don't visit in July or August, when Italians typically take their holidays en masse. ▣



Mezzatorre Resort and Spa

Diversions

Stocking up on fun, fries and freebies

Game on

You've spent the day sightseeing and now it's time to kick back in your hotel suite or villa with your travel pals. Sure, you could play cards, but try these amusements:

Wine Opolly Wine drinkers get a taste of the wine business in this Monopoly-inspired game, where players compete by buying wine and grapes. Sounds easy, but import tax and serving faux pas can get in the way. Along the way, there's plenty of fun facts about wine. www.lateforthesky.com

Gravitas Created by Ontario resident Alan Gratias, this 'little box of big questions' turns players into philosophers, and chats into meaningful discussions. Questions are posed about true-life events and lessons learned. The best, most insightful answer, earns the player a card. Three are needed to win, and earn the title of 'philosopher king'. www.gravitasthegame.com



Strange but true travel news



World's coolest beach?

In Dubai, temperatures can reach a sizzling 40 to 50 degrees Celsius. To make its precious guests more comfortable, the new Palazzo Versace has come up with a novel way to chill out. Its beach will have a network of pipes beneath the sand that will absorb heat from the surface. The swimming pool will be refrigerated and giant fans will keep a breeze blowing.

Want fries with that?

In Belgium, fries have been elevated to gourmet fare, so perhaps it's not too surprising that the city of Bruges recently opened a museum to pay homage to one of the world's most popular snacks. The Frit Museum shows the curious, and controversial, evolution of fries and sells them in paper cones. It claims that it was the Belgians who invented them in the 1700s. A word to the wise: Whatever you do, don't call them French fries!



Stealing beauty: Luxe toiletries

We know **everyone goes for the gold** when it comes to hotel toiletries and complimentary items worth taking home. As an added amenity to help fill rooms with guests these days, many properties have upped the ante when it comes to those little extras. Here's where we've found good stuff to stock up on:

Opus Hotels in Vancouver/Montreal and the **Four Seasons in Maui/Chicago** offer French line L'Occitane, while the **Four Seasons in Paris** and The Hazelton in Toronto opt for Bulgari goodies. The Simpson House in Santa Barbara, California has Kiehl's fabulous toiletries for the taking, and The Tides South Beach carries Molton Brown from England. Stock up on generous sizes of Gianni Versace's line at the Palazzo Versace on Australia's Gold Coast. Meanwhile, boutique chain Hotel Indigo goes green with Aveda's plant-based products.



Packing List

Must-have accessories for your next trip

Wrist Watch

When you don't want to be weighed down by a wallet or purse, the **PacSafe WristSafe Wrist Wallet** keeps your money and passport safe with concealed tamperproof zipper pulls and release buckle. www.pacsafe.com



Tough Stuff

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Trends: Style Notes

Style, culture and beauty



HUSSEIN CHAYALAN SPRING/SUMMER 2007, © CHRIS MOORE

London

Nobody does over-the-top opulence quite like the Russians, and at London's **Victoria and Albert Museum**, the **Magnificence of the Tsars** (think Imperial Russia) is on glorious, extravagant view with coronation costumes and court dress spanning two centuries (until March 2, vam.ac.uk). Meanwhile, on the Thames, the **Design Museum** honours renegade conceptual designer **Hussein Chayalan**, who was twice named British Designer of the Year, with a thorough look at his pioneering work, which crosses the boundaries of architecture, science, fashion and technology. The exhibit is worth visiting for the futuristic light bulb dress alone: it features a staggering 15,000 flickering LED lights (on view from January 22 to May 17, 2009, designmuseum.org).



Paris

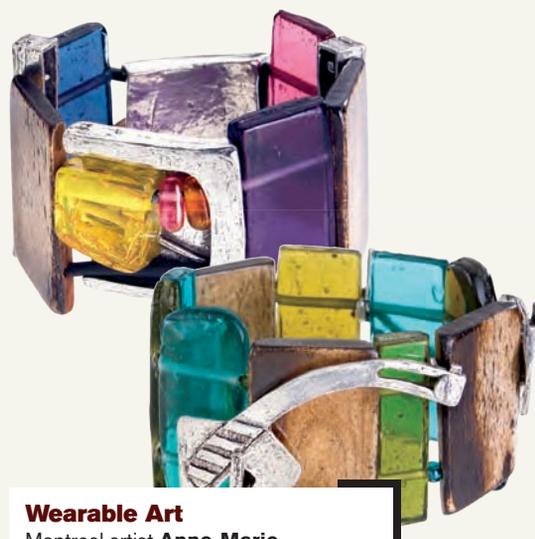
Across the pond in Paris at the **Palais du Louvre**, the **Musée des Arts Décoratifs** celebrates Parisian designer **Sonia Rykiel's** 40 years of style with the first major retrospective dedicated to the groundbreaking feminist fashionista. The exhibit includes a thematic exploration of more than 200 outfits dating back to 1968 as well as extensive editorial photographs and streaming runway video (through April 19, 2009, 107 rue de Rivoli, Paris, lesartsdecoratifs.fr).

Trends: Style Notes



The Road to Morocco

After a turbulent year, stalwart Canadian designer **Linda Lundström** regrouped and now she's back with a renewed focus and a stylish new direction. Her breakout spring collection is streamlined, modern and yes, we'll say it – much more fashionable. She pairs chic, packable linen trousers with deconstructed jackets and serene, asymmetrical shift dresses. Both the collection's newfound simplicity and crisp, neutral oyster and desert palette were inspired by Morocco (hence the name Marrakesh Express). "The idea is that it's dusty and sandy going through mountains and deserts," divulges the globe-trotting designer. "I have a really rich fantasy life that I live in when I'm designing. I write the story and dress the characters for it. I even imagined a pith helmet and a carpetbag!" (\$79–\$395 in sizes 2–24, lindalundstrom.com).



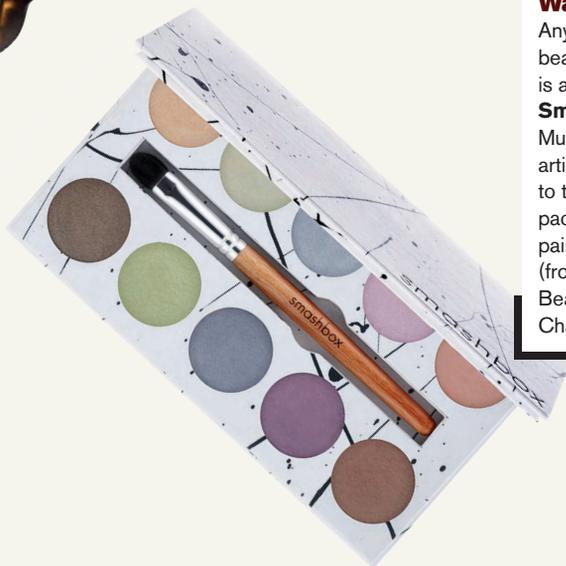
Wearable Art

Montreal artist **Anne-Marie Chagnon's** exclusive jewels for Cirque du Soleil are seen (and sold) around the world. Closer to home, her eclectic pieces make a bold statement, whatever the language: for spring, each unique and hand-crafted bracelet, ring, necklace or earring mixes fine tin, pewter, colourful glass, resin and wood (bracelet \$115, for retailers visit annemariechagnon.com).



Eye Spy

On the heels of launching his heady jewel-box perfume last fall, American jeweller **David Yurman** is now creating precious pieces for the eyes. Mimicking his fine baubles, the temples and arms are scattered with his trademark hand-set coloured gemstones, like these mosaic tortoise shades featuring bold citrine stones set in 18kt gold bezels. The collection debuts this month. (\$1,335–\$1,635 depending on stone selection, at Josephson Opticians exclusively across Canada until the end of March 2009, josephson.ca).



War Paint

Any self-respecting gallerista (or beauty junkie) believes that makeup is art and for spring, so does **Smashbox**. Their limited-edition Muse collection takes the idea of an artist's palette literally, right down to the splattered Pollock-inspired packaging, with soft Monet hues to paint and decorate the human canvas (from \$16 at Shoppers Drug Mart Beauty Boutiques, The Shopping Channel and Sephora).

Trends: Style Notes



It's in the Bag

Historic French luggage maker **Louis Vuitton** now offers its best-selling Damier canvas pattern in guy-friendly black and gunmetal grey and calls it Damier Graphite. It comes in all sizes, from a sleek iPhone sleeve to a soft travel briefcase with distinctive calf handle protectors (\$240–\$1,850 at Louis Vuitton, 866-VUITTON, vuitton.com).

The Great Escape

It's a bit of a cheat but in the dead of winter, **Lancaster** knows we need all the help we can get. Its new sun-centric collections put a new complexion on winter pallor with products like Fast-Dry Bronze Water Spray, a seriously streak-free self-tanning formula that goes on as promised. The portable sun makeup collection's Easy Face Bronzer Brush is grab-and-go convenience: it's a brilliant all-in-one wand that dispenses powder from the barrel of the brush, comes in two shades and contains SPF 12 (\$32–\$36 at select Shoppers Drug Mart stores in March).



Hey Mister DJ

Oh-so-hip **Hotel Costes** in Paris is famous for its coveted music compilations but its house scent – wafting from soaps, room sprays and candles peppered throughout the lobby, restaurant and suites – comes a close second. The spicy, woody rose blend, created for the hotel by master perfumer Olivia Giacobetti, has notes of coriander, bay and lavender and is now available as bath gels, body lotions and an actual perfume. It's the scent of Paris in the spring, with a hipster twist (\$165 for 125 ml eau de parfum at Noor, 866-710-6667, nooryorkville.com).



Trends: Style Notes



London Calling

An Art Deco box found in London by Hannah MacGibbon, the creative director at **Chloé**, became the inspiration for the unique blush leather butterfly case that holds the company's newest perfume, *Lisy*. The petite purse spray is a rich, floral variation of Chloé's original scent, with notes of piquant pink peppercorns, sandalwood and rose (\$140 for 15 ml in leather case, exclusively at Holt Renfrew in March).

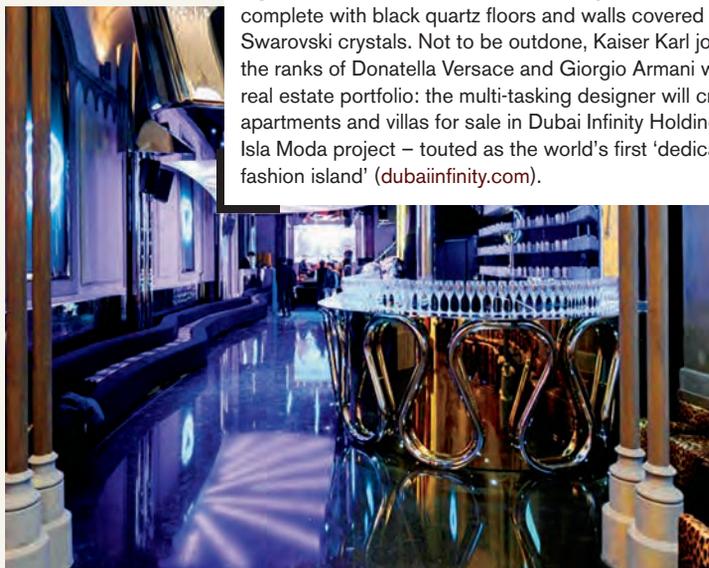


Hope in a Jar

In time to combat chapped winter skin and the dry cabin air of frequent flights, **Origins** extends its best-selling Youthtopia collection with Age-Correcting Serum. The elixir contains rhodiola, the legendary adaptogenic herb linked to longevity and helps firm and reenergize skin with amalaki complex, known in the Himalayas as 'the fruit of immortality.' If only! (\$69 for 30 ml at select The Bay locations, origins.com).

Bridging the Gulf

Ivana Trump knows how to live the good life and she's taken the party to Dubai. The first and ex-Mrs. Trump has a haute hotel called Le Diamond on the waterfront of the UAE capital and just before Christmas, her good friend **Roberto Cavalli** threw open the doors of his first nightclub-cum-retail mecca at the nearby **Fairmont Hotel**, complete with black quartz floors and walls covered in Swarovski crystals. Not to be outdone, Kaiser Karl joins the ranks of Donatella Versace and Giorgio Armani with a real estate portfolio: the multi-tasking designer will create apartments and villas for sale in Dubai Infinity Holdings' Isla Moda project – touted as the world's first 'dedicated fashion island' (dubaiinfinity.com).



Seductive Scents

Can't afford the airfare to the souqs of Muscat? Get a whiff of the Middle East with **Amouage** luxury perfumes, originally founded by the Sultanate of Oman 25 years ago. Each fragrance in the niche range, whether for men or women, includes notes of Omani frankincense, the aromatic resin used in incense that for centuries was more precious than gold. Amouage's world-famous sweet and musky signature fragrance is made with both frankincense and Yemeni myrrh (\$300 for 100 ml eau de parfum at The Perfume Shoppe in Vancouver and Andrew's in Toronto).

Places to Go

In Germany, car marketing has been elevated to an entirely new level of showmanship. Dealership envy has manifested itself in a most unusual and interesting way with the construction of colossal tourism venues in the form of automobile museums. Volkswagen, manufacturer of the humble Beetle, started it all back in 2000 with Autostadt (Car City) in Wolfsburg. Not to be outdone, just down the road in Stuttgart, Mercedes-Benz opened a spiral display of steel, glass and concrete in 2006, and last year BMW World turned on its lights in Munich. Now, Porsche's own 5,600 square metre marvel – which appears to hover in the air courtesy of three reinforced concrete cores – has been under construction in Stuttgart and just opened at the beginning of February. Apart from several exhibits, the Porsche Museum includes two restaurants, a coffee bar, shops and even a cigar lounge where you can toast the arrival of your new roadster. 



LUXURY, SOPHISTICATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP



Pool view

The Fairmont Mayakoba strikes a perfect balance between luxury travel and environmental responsibility

Sophisticated travellers, known for their penchant for posh resorts, doting service and private beaches, have been adding a new prerequisite to their vacation experience: ecological stewardship. Exclusive vacation destinations are now proudly showcasing environmental practices that have been in place for years, but have only recently captured the interest and expectations of visiting guests.

Fairmont Hotels & Resorts is the pioneer of the Green Partnership program, a comprehensive commitment to sustainable best practices for the hotel industry. Lyn Santos, environmental services manager at the Fairmont Mayakoba in Mexico's Mayan Riviera, has been both overseeing and showcasing this 45-acre luxury community from its initial construction and development to the present day. The sightline from the resort's lobby spans a mangrove jungle, crystal clear lagoons and a stunning ocean shoreline, which Santos explains represents the perfect marriage of ecological preservation and ecotourism – all within a luxury resort.

While five-star treatment is still defined by service excellence and exclusivity, environmental concern is an important element. Guests are not only treated to a sophisticated vacation experience; they also enjoy some of the world's most natural protected beauty. To explore Fairmont's responsible tourism activities or to request a Green Partnership Guide book, go to www.fairmont.com/environment. 

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Travel Frequently?

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Canadians who travel frequently may be spending more than needed on travel insurance. A recent RBC Insurance/Ipsos Reid survey reports that 43 per cent of Canadians aren't aware of annual travel insurance plans.

However, for travellers who take multiple trips a year for business, short cross-border shopping trips or any other type of vacation, purchasing a multi-trip annual plan can save them money and ensure they have the necessary coverage – especially for last minute trips – without having to worry about purchasing travel insurance every time they plan a trip.

Annual insurance plans are perfect for:

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- Frequent vacationers
- Cross-border shoppers
- Canadians with relatives in another province/country
- Canadians who live close to the U.S. border

If you are still unsure about the value of travel insurance, consider these questions:

- How much money would you lose if you had to cancel or interrupt your trip?
- How much would you have to pay for a one-way last minute ticket home?
- If you became ill or injured, would your emergency medical expenses be covered? Would you have to pay these costs up front?
- Would your hotel and meal expenses be paid if you had to stay at your destination longer than expected?
- Who would you call if you were faced with a medical emergency in a foreign country?

For more information on travel insurance from RBC Insurance please contact your Ensemble travel professional today.



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Cultural Close-up: Moscow



Interior of GUM, Red Square

“Do let’s go to Moscow.
We must go. Please!
There’s nowhere in the
world like Moscow.”
Anton Chekhov (1860–1904)
Three Sisters, Act 3

Olya Boyko invites us to take Chekhov’s advice.

Over the past 11 centuries, a small medieval town perched on the banks of a meandering river has changed unrecognizably to its current standing as Europe’s largest metropolis. Today, Moscow is a city of contrasts: crowded street markets overlook one-of-a-kind upscale boutiques; glossy golden domes of Orthodox churches and luxurious Baroque-inspired imperial estates compete with the skyscrapers and ultra-modern glass buildings of the 21st century. Nowhere else can you find such a unique and controversial marriage of old and new.

If Moscow is the centre of Russia, the Kremlin is certainly its heart. Inside the famous red-brick wall you’ll find a complex of cathedrals, palaces and museums, as well as the Russian president’s official residence. The huge all-gold-and-marble **Grand Palace** was home to the tsar’s family when they visited from then capital St. Petersburg. Today it is an official venue for Moscow’s major political and social events. The central and most important part of the complex is **Cathedral Square**, which served as the site of coronation and funeral processions for the Russian tsars and religious leaders. Every Saturday from April to November, you can watch the elaborate changing of the guard ceremony, precisely set to music from the President’s Orchestra. Tickets are approximately \$35 and include tours of all the churches on the Square. Many of the buildings are now open to the public, including the Diamond Fund and the Armory Museum, where you can view the private art and jewellery collections of Russian tsars, the famous Fabergé eggs and much more.

Just outside the **Kremlin Wall** is Moscow’s most recognizable icon, **Red Square**. Despite the popular yet misleading impression that its name is taken from Russia’s Soviet past, it actually originates from the old Russian word for ‘beautiful’. Nowadays, Red Square is host to modern pop concerts and public gatherings. The performance arts are a big deal for Russians and there is no shortage of concerts, operas, plays and, of course, ballets to choose from. Make time for a visit to the Bolshoi Theatre or

the Moscow Conservatory, where you can often find chamber or symphony tickets for only a few dollars minutes before the performance.

For fashionistas, Moscow is a shopping paradise. The luxurious department store GUM, now the city’s biggest shopping mecca, is also home of the exclusive Dior Beauty Institute, where you can pamper yourself with signature massages and beauty treatments in rooms with spectacular views of Red Square. Located in the outskirts of the city, **Crocus City Mall** offers a vast array of high-fashion designer boutiques, while the cobblestone pedestrian **Stoleshnikov Lane** and **Tretyakovsky Proyezd** are outdoor alternatives, placing exclusive Russian designers among established European designer brands.

To discover Russian gastronomy, a trip to **Cafe Pushkin** is a must. Executive chef Andrey Makhov serves traditional home-style fare including *pelmeni* (dumplings), magnificent borscht, lamb stew, *blini*, beef Stroganoff and *okroshka*, a cold summer soup. On the second floor, ‘library hall’, guests can enjoy seared grey beluga caviar, Pozharsky cutlets, poached goose breast with Siberian pine nut sauce and traditional Russian desserts with local berries and fragrant honey. Explore the cuisine of former Soviet republics at **Uzbekistan** and **Ganatsvale**, where specialties include juicy *shashlik* (kebob), *khinkali* (large lamb dumplings), *lobio* (heartly bean stew) and *satsivi* (roasted chicken with herbs in walnut garlic sauce).

If you’re looking to bring some of the epicurean delights back home, or at least to your hotel room, visit the **Eliseevsky** grocery store, located just 10 minutes from Red Square. You’ll find the finest examples of Russian specialties – soft and hard cheeses, fish, caviar, honey and pastries – brought in daily from across the country.

Living on a grand scale is a quintessential facet of culture in Russia, and the country’s charismatic capital proves it. So why not take Anton Chekhov’s advice and **do let’s go to Moscow!** 

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City Guide: Paris on a Budget

Anita Draycott



Paris on a budget? Mais oui!



Some might opine that 'budget Paris' is an oxymoron but I beg to differ. Many of the pleasures in the city that Ernest Hemingway described as 'a moveable feast' are free and there are savvy ways to scrimp and save. And just because you haven't won the lottery doesn't mean you can't indulge in a few frivolous fantasies. Here's how to make the most of your euros in the City of Lights.

CALLING ALL CULTURE VULTURES

Buy a Museum Pass (two days €30; four days €45; 6 days €60) at tourist offices, museums or Metro stations for admission to more than 60 museums and monuments, including the Louvre, the Rodin and Picasso museums, plus the grand châteaux at Versailles and Fontainebleau. Unlimited visits and no waiting in lines. You may also order online: www.parismuseumpass.com

LA 'RUE MOUFF'

One of the liveliest streets on the Left Bank, rue Mouffetard is crammed with cheap and cheerful Greek, Lebanese and French restaurants, and bargain *crêperies*. In the mood for a picnic? The bustling market (closed Mondays) is just the place to fill your basket with wine, cheese, a rotisserie chicken and a baguette.



ONE SCOOP OR TWO?

If heaven ever froze over, some say it would be served in an ice cream cone at Berthillon on the charming Île St-Louis (behind Notre Dame). Try the Grand Marnier.

www.berthillon.fr



PAY YOUR RESPECTS

If ever there were a who's who of cemeteries, it would have to be Père-Lachaise. Named after Louis XV's confessor, Father Lachaise, this 43-hectare park is the final resting place of Molière, Edith Piaf, Chopin, Proust and rock star Jim Morrison, to name but a few. Oscar Wilde's Egyptian-style gravestone is covered with lipstick kisses.



www.pere-lachaise.com

SOMETHING OLD

Name it and you'll most likely find it at the Marché aux Puces (flea market) at the Porte de Clignancourt Métro. (Open Saturday to Monday.) The eclectic array includes jewellery, military uniforms, tapestries, antique dolls and vintage Louis Vuitton trunks. When you've worked up an appetite, head to Chez Louise, where a songstress belts out Edith Piaf. It's kitschy and the food is mediocre but great fun, especially on a rainy day.

WINDOW-LICKING

The French say *lèche vitrines* for window shopping, which literally means window-licking. No society creates more delicious window displays. Entertain yourself with a stroll down the fashionable rue Faubourg St-Honoré. At Hermès (number 24), test your willpower to see if you can resist the ultimate French status item, a silk scarf (about €265) or tie.

READY FOR A SPLURGE?

By now you've saved so many euros you deserve a splurge. Head to the Four Seasons George V, named 'world's best international city hotel' for eight consecutive years by Andrew Harper's *Hideaway Report*. Parisians regularly nip into the stunning lobby just to admire the dramatic floral creations of Jeff Leatham. His massive clear vases might be filled with black calla lilies or exotic tulips. The hotel delights all of the senses. At Le Cinq (awarded two Michelin stars) enjoy chef Eric Briffard's artichoke pie with black truffles followed by semi-smoked lobster roasted in an herb infusion. Finish with a crispy apple tart. And as long as you're feeling indulgent, pamper yourself with the spa's All Chocolate Package, consisting of a body scrub, wrap and massage, all using cocoa beans (€330 for two-and-a-half hours of chocoholic bliss).

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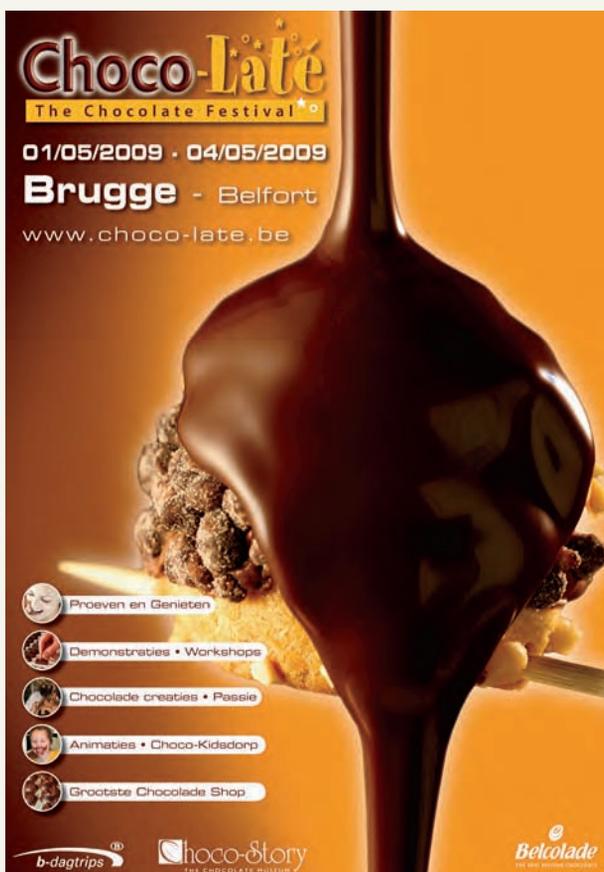


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It's a Date: Europe

Michele Sponagle offers a guide to Europe's best spring events.

Thinking of heading to Europe this spring? Book your holiday to coincide with its best festivals and most popular annual events. We've compiled this handy calendar to help you track Europe's prime festivals.



FOOD AND DRINK

April 16–19, 2009 International Gourmet Fair. Madrid, Spain

It's all about eating, drinking and being merry with 700 regional, national and international exhibitors. Spain's restaurant awards will be handed out and the fastest knives in Europe will compete in the national ham carving contest.

May 1–4, 2009 Choco-Laté Chocolate Festival. Bruges, Belgium

There's no sweeter event, with chocolate tastings, chocolate art and sculpture demonstrations and even a Choco Kids village, where children can participate in games and paint using chocolate.

May 1–10, 2009 Spirit of Speyside Whisky Festival. Speyside, Scotland



This five-day event celebrates the national tippie with a festival that features educational seminars, cooking demos and plenty of opportunities for sipping, of course.

May 30–31, 2009 Fête des Fromages. Rocamadour, France

This cute-as-a-button village in southern France salutes the *cabécou*, a raw goat's milk cheese, and farmhouse cheese with tastings, markets, demonstrations and competitions.



MUSIC



May 1–June 30, 2009 Vienna Festival. Vienna, Austria

Though this five-week event also includes dance and theatre, it's especially strong on the music front.

May 12–June 3, 2009 Prague Spring International Music Festival. Prague, Czech Republic

If you can fit just one music festival into your schedule, this is the one. It's renowned for the high calibre of performers.

June 21, 2009 Paris Fête de la Musique. Paris, France

Professionals and amateurs have a chance to play music and join in the celebration of sound in this city-wide event.

CULTURE

April 25–May 25, 2009 Swiss National Circus Knie. Zurich, Switzerland

For 200 years, the Circus Knie has been entertaining crowds around the world with clowns, comedians, artists, its famous elephant and horse acts and an unusual seal show. Young or old, this show is a hit with spectators.



May 2, 2009 Rhine in Flames. Bonn, North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany

A series of mind-blowing pyrotechnic spectacles, this grand event lights up the sky above the River Rhine. Watch from the picturesque towns of Bonn, Oberwesel, Bingen, St. Goarshausen, St. Goar, Rudesheim and Linz am Rhein.

May 10, 2009 The Cat Parade. Ypres, Belgium

Every three years, the Flanders town of Ypres goes crazy for kitties as all things feline are celebrated in a day of parties and parades that is famous around the world.



DANCE

May 3–10, 2009 Munich Ballet Week. Munich, Germany

The talents of the Bavarian State Ballet are showcased during its 20th anniversary year with works especially created for the event.

FILM

March 13–15, 2009 European Independent Film Festival. Paris, France

Film buffs can discover the next Steven Spielberg at this festival that celebrates the very best in independent filmmaking talent from around the world.

GARDENS AND NATURE



April 17–19, 2009 RHS Spring Flower Show. Cardiff, Wales

Need advice, ideas and tips on how to make your garden a showstopper? Visitors can view displays of spring flowers, floral marquees and the contenders for the coveted RHS medals.

May 7–10, 2009 International Rose Festival. Grasse, France

In the city known for its perfume industry, roses are the focus of this festival, established in the 16th century. Here, roses are serious business, with fierce competition among the growers.

May 19–27, 2009 London Chelsea Flower Show. London, England

There is plenty of inspiration to be found here for green thumbs. Regarded as the best show of its kind in Europe, this is an event you can truly dig. 

YES, NO, MAYBE 'SO...

Louise Fox provides a short guide to understanding hand gestures across Europe and avoiding some potentially embarrassing mistakes.

Gestures and body signals are shortcuts to communication and if you're travelling abroad they can come in handy to get your message across. But they can also muddy the waters if you take for granted what they actually mean and what you *think* they mean. Before you give the 'thumbs up,' nod 'yes' or beckon to your waiter, **stop!** Think about where you are and what you are trying to say or you could be in for a big surprise.



Illustration by Frank Viva, Viva & Co.

A-OK

Consider the A-OK signal (fingers and thumb connecting in a circle). Your hotelier in France asks you if your room is satisfactory. You flash the A-OK sign and are met with an irritated shrug and frown as your hotelier suggests you might be happier elsewhere. Clearly what we think of as OK is not OK in France, where this gesture means 'zero' or 'worthless.' In Italy, Malta and Greece this signal is an insult and means 'You're an asshole' or that you might be gay, while in Germany and Brazil it represents female genitalia. Oops! Certainly not what you had in mind.

THUMBS UP

Perhaps you should have given the 'thumbs up' to your French hotelier. Surely that would be understood? While in many European countries it might be recognized as a North American sign, it is least recognized in Italy, Sardinia and Greece, where it is a rude signal. In Germany you have just signalled the number one, while in Spain you've made a political statement by showing your support for the Basque separatist movement. That could land you in hot water. It's a good thing you aren't visiting Australia because you've just given the equivalent of 'up yours!'

FINGER SQUEEZE

If you had shown your French hotelier the 'finger squeeze' by squeezing the thumb and forefinger tightly together, he would have known your room was perfect. But elsewhere in the Mediterranean it's another vulgar depiction of a woman's genitalia.

YES OR NO

We all know nodding your head up and down is 'yes' and back and forth is 'no.' Right? Not if you are in parts of Greece, Bosnia and Bulgaria. What we take for granted means precisely the opposite in those countries. There, tilting the whole head from side to side means 'no', while in Italy, Malta and Tunisia tossing the head back quickly and raising the eyebrows means 'no.' However, use this in Scandinavia and Germany and you may get company, because there you are beckoning to someone to come on over.

COME HERE

Even beckoning is not straightforward. Having lunch and want to get the attention of your waiter? In North America, we raise our hand with our three fingers curled and index finger and thumb pointing up. But if you do this in Germany, don't be surprised when your waiter brings you two waters or two beers because you have just signalled you want two of something.

We might also beckon by extending our arm, palm up and curling our index finger in and out. In most of Europe this gesture is used only to beckon animals, so it's considered very impolite if used to signal people. If you see someone extending his arm, hand out, palm down, making a sweeping motion with his fingers, are you mystified? Is he itchy? No, that is the preferred method of signalling 'come here' in most of Europe, except in France, where to call over your waiter just wait to catch his eye and then nod your head back quickly.

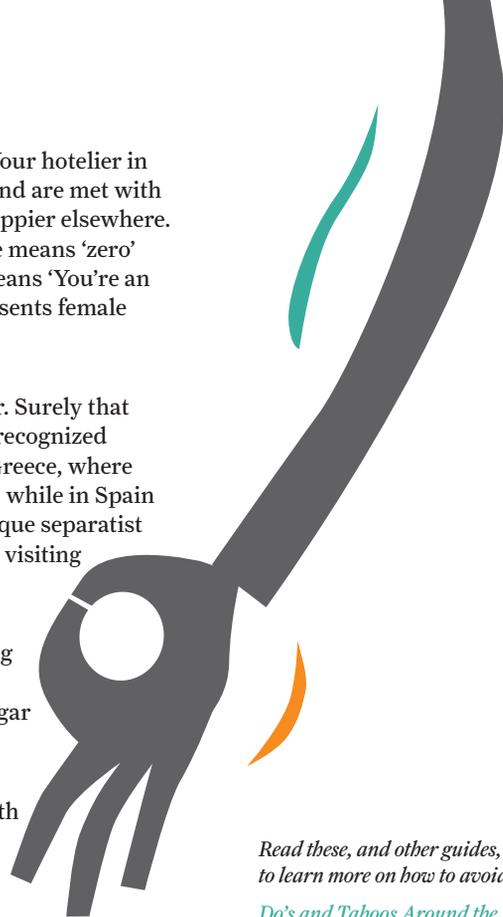
GOODBYE

Confused? Just wave goodbye. Wait a minute...our North American goodbye with hand up, palm out, wrist stiff and a back-and-forth motion with the whole forearm and hand means 'no' in most of Europe. Their way of waving 'hello' or 'goodbye' is with the arm up, palm out and the hand bobbing up and down at the wrist. That is except for the Italians and Greeks, who wave 'goodbye' with arm out, palm facing in towards the face and curling the fingers back and forth, similar to our beckoning sign.

DEVIL'S HORNS

Whatever you do, don't give the signal that in our culture is usually reserved for 'rocking on' at concerts. In Italy, the index and pinky fingers raised and pointing towards someone, with palm down, means that a man is '*cornuto*' – or that his wife is having an affair. Be prepared to run away fast, as many men will take great offense to this and get understandably agitated. It could also indicate that you are either giving or warding off the 'evil eye', which is insulting either way. The same gesture with fingers pointing down also signifies bad luck. Avoid this one at all costs.

Definitely, you'll need to do your homework before using gestures abroad, as it really is a language of its own. Or just keep your hands to yourself. But not in your pockets. In Belgium, France, Sweden and Finland, that's considered very rude! ❗



Read these, and other guides, by Roger Axtell to learn more on how to avoid travel missteps:

*Do's and Taboos Around the World
3rd Edition*

*Gestures – The Do's and Taboos of
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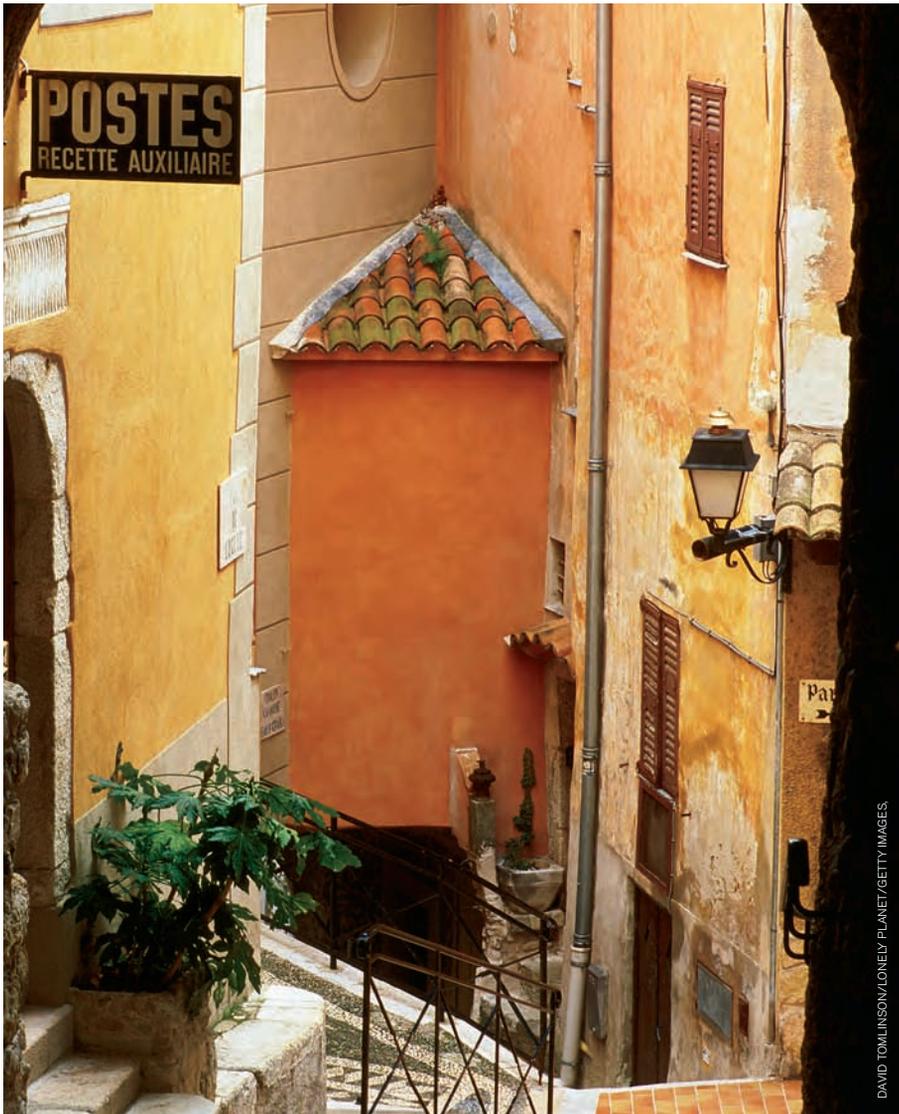
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The Undiscovered

Skip the casinos and yachts for a sweeter side of the Côte d'Azur
Anita Draycott

French

Think French Riviera and what comes to mind? Glamour and glitz. Bronzed, bare-breasted babes on the beach at St. Tropez. Formula One and high rollers in flashy Ferraris racing down the vertiginous corniche to Monte Carlo's baccarat tables. Stars born and scorned by the movie moguls at the Cannes Film Festival.

That's all true. But there's a sweeter, gentler side of the Côte d'Azur too, especially in the off-season. The climate is still blissfully mild, the scenery ravishing and the Mediterranean cuisine delicious. You can play golf in the morning and head to the Alps for an



Village laneway; a view over Roquebrune; the ubiquitous lemon tree.

Riviera

afternoon on the ski slopes. Best of all, you won't have to contend with traffic jams and hordes of summer tourists so horrendous that movie producer Samuel Goldwyn once scoffed, "Nobody goes there anymore. It's too crowded."

MAGICAL MENTON

Balanced between the sea, the mountains and the Italian border at the far eastern end of the Côte d'Azur, Menton remains a relatively undiscovered gem with a climate so balmy that lemons blossom all year long. The citrus capital of France, Menton also has a large population of retirees. But any comparisons with

Florida end there. There are no early-bird dinner specials and the closest Menton comes to Disney World is its Lemon Festival every February/March, when whimsical floats festooned with millions of citrus fruits are paraded through the streets.

In the late 1800s Menton became a favourite winter retreat for the British after Henry Bennett, physician to Queen Victoria, came to stay as a treatment for his tuberculosis. Soon the Queen herself and aristocrats from France, Russia and Germany started making pilgrimages to Menton, described by Dr. Bennett as "where the Alps fall into the sea." As it turned out, the climate was too humid to cure tuberculosis but villas and tropical gardens flourished under the Mediterranean sun. France's most temperate garden, Villa Maria Serena, sits high above the town with exotic palm trees framing views of the Garavan Marina.

Menton is the kind of place where I could happily reside. Like practically everyone else on the Riviera, I'd own a poodle or two and I'd grow oranges in my backyard - not exactly the life of a jet-setter but Monte Carlo is just next door.

Just two kilometres away from Menton - and Monte Carlo - you'll find the medieval seaside village of Roquebrune Cap Martin, perched 300 metres above the water's edge.



Perfume essential oils, Grasse; lavender fields in Provence; shaved black truffles.

Wind your way through the maze of arched walkways and architecturally stunning luxury villas, built right into the mountainside, to reach the 11th-century castle that offers breathtaking views of the Mediterranean. It's no surprise that Roquebrune was the inspiration and resting place for statesmen, royalty and famous artists alike.

NEXT STOP NICE

The nicest part of Nice is the Cours Saleya in the old town. Join the locals at the thriving daily (except Mondays) food and flower market. At the far end you'll spot a yellow house where artist Henri Matisse lived and captured the unique luminosity of the Côte d'Azur in his paintings. You might want to take a picnic up to the Colline du Château, a quiet park with panoramic views of the coastline. Another good stroll is along the Promenade des Anglais that runs the length of Nice's waterfront. When it's time for a break, drop into the Hotel Negresco, a neoclassic Riviera landmark, for a flute of Champagne.

FOLLOW YOUR NOSE TO GRASSE

About 17 kilometres from Nice, nestled in the Provence hills, lies the charming and somewhat sleepy (by comparison) town of Grasse, perfume capital of the world.

Thanks to its mild microclimate and ideal growing conditions, you can literally follow your nose to Grasse. In winter golden mimosa brightens the hillsides. Summer brings the heady scent of lavender, roses and orange blossoms, followed by jasmine in the fall.

Grasse didn't always smell this sweet. Back in the 16th century it was a town of tanners, who discovered that aromatic herbs helped overcome the stench and improved the quality of the leather. Back in those days, the most important status symbol an aristocratic Italian could flaunt was a pair of perfumed gloves, and Grasse, at the encouragement of famed



Florentine Catherine de Medici, became the main supplier. As the demand for gloves decreased, the tanners turned to perfume-making. By the 18th century, Grasse was the world leader in scent production and remains so today.

In *parfumeries* all around town, famous 'noses' have perfected the art of putting seductive scents into bottles for such prestigious houses as Chanel, Guerlain and Dior. And while those secret formulas and laboratories are off-limits to tourists, three perfume factories (Fragonard, Molinard and Galimard) encourage visitors by offering free multi-language tours.

At Molinard, you can book a two-hour workshop and concoct your very own cologne. My creation made me sneeze but it certainly gave me an appreciation of the process.

RECREATIONAL PURSUITS

If you find a game of golf more seductive than a vial of perfume, there are several fine courses in the vicinity. Minutes from Grasse, the Saint Donat Golf Country Club meanders around an old estate that once supplied jasmine to the Grasse perfume houses. Also nearby is the Royal Mougins Golf Club with its signature number two hole complete with waterfalls and a pond.

If skiing is your passion, Isola 2000 in the Southern Alps is less than two hours from Nice. Lacking the pretension of Courcheval or Mégeve, Isola, with 50 runs at all levels of difficulty, is ideal for families or those lacking mink parkas.

GOURMET'S DELIGHT

In the south of France you are never far from a memorable meal. The famous Le Moulin de Mougins restaurant, in the posh town of Mougins, offers afternoon cooking classes. For a dinner splurge, sample chef Alain Llorca's 12-course tapas menu.

Set on a hill with magnificent views of the Grasse countryside, La Bastide Saint-Antoine takes the flavours and aromas of Provence to new heights. Just one spoonful of chef Jacques Chibois' *mousseux de foie gras aux lames de truffes*, a rich, velvety soup of goose liver spiked with thin slices of truffles, reminds me of a quote by the French poet Charles Baudelaire. "Decadence must be considered the high point of civilization." *Touché.* ❏

Dazzling Dubrovnik

With a customized itinerary and the help of local connections, Debra Conkey shares insider tips on how to get around Dubrovnik



High noon. This was not the time to embark on a mile-long ramble around the thick fortified walls of ancient Dubrovnik, a powerful mercantile republic for 700 years. We had intended to head to the town centre earlier but, the night before, our Croatia Airlines flight had been delayed from **Pula in Istria**. So Nino, the owner of the apartment where we were staying, had delivered us to our room long past midnight, thus postponing our morning walk to soak up the view.

And oh, what a view. Our balcony overlooked Dubrovnik's tiny harbour and wondrous pedestrian-friendly town, declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1979. At sunrise, I rose to marvel as the sun slowly illuminated – creeping from back to front – church steeples, fortress towers and luxurious yachts lining the harbour. The ancient town seemed to float above the shimmering crystal clear turquoise Mediterranean, jutting majestically into the sea.

Clinging to its freedom and fortified past, Croatia's southern coastal city repelled Venetian and Turkish invaders in the Middle Ages and, more recently, during what Croats call their 'homeland war' fought for independence from Yugoslavia. Today, this 'Pearl of the Adriatic' is a favourite stop for cruise ships, tours and independent travellers.

Why go now? The Croatian kuna favours the dollar by more than four to one, so you can visit one of the world's most historic and dazzling cities at bargain rates. Here's how I recommend getting the most out of your Dubrovnik experience.

STROLL THE CITY WALL Meandering along the 13th-century defensive walls is the most popular way to get the lay of the land – and the sea. But avoid midday, as there is little shade. Hire a guide or buy an audio tour with your entrance ticket for a good excuse to stop and take in the views around every corner. If you'd rather race (not recommended), the walk will take an hour, but we strolled and

Terracotta roofs of old-town Dubrovnik contrast with the azure Adriatic Sea, a sight that may have prompted George Bernard Shaw to call it "paradise on earth."

photographed for five. In fact, spending hours on the wall is perfect for a first-time visitor, so allow plenty of time. Bring lots of water – or stop at a shaded oasis for freshly squeezed orange juice, as we did. Start at the Pile Gate, climb the Minceta Tower for a panoramic view, then proceed clockwise for a mostly downhill walk. (We unfortunately entered at the Pile Gate for a mostly uphill climb.)

EAT, DRINK AND BE MERRY We wanted to enjoy a scenic outdoor lunch by the Old Town harbour, so we chose local favourite **Lokanda Peskarija**. Possibly inspired by the orange tiled roofs (and uphill jaunt), I guzzled three Fantas as my companion and I shared with gusto a bubbling pot of seafood risotto, along with fresh crusty bread. We also sampled the regional specialty, *rozata*, a decadent crème caramel desert that is definitely worth ordering!

Although we unfortunately didn't have time to try it, the authentic Bosnian cuisine at **Taj Mahal**, located near the Orthodox church, comes highly recommended by our friend Susan McDaniel, a teacher who visits Croatia yearly. "Try *cevapcici*, *burek* and *Bosanska kafa* (Bosnian coffee)," she suggests. Ivan and Christiane Mandukich, a local couple who run guided tours of the area, agree and offer **Posat** as yet another option. "With typical Croatian cuisine, it also has a beautiful view of the city walls from its terrace and the house wine is from a local vineyard in Konavle. We love the grilled sea bass and mixed seafood grill."

Stroll down the main Placa – or *Stradun* – where locals hang out for people-watching, ice cream and *kafa* (coffee). Perhaps you'll watch the brightly costumed town guards as they march through town, or hang out by the **Onofrio Fountain**. Built in 1438 by famous Italian architect Onofrio della Cava, the large circular fountain acts as a popular gathering place.

CHECK OUT LOCAL MONASTERIES

AND CHURCHES German-born Christiane, who lives in Dubrovnik with her Yugoslavian-born husband, suggests visiting local landmarks like the **Franciscan monastery** (with its 15th-century cloister and pharmacy – one of the oldest in Europe), **Dominican monastery**, **Church of St. Blaise**, the patron saint of Dubrovnik, the baroque 18th-century **Cathedral**, the **Rector's Palace** and the tiny **synagogue** (the second oldest still active synagogue in Europe).

MEMORIALS Make time for the **War Photo Unlimited** gallery, which depicts war images of conflicts around the world. However, Dubrovnik's War Memorial is equally powerful. "Photography shot during wartime is worth seeing. I have viewed similar images in Sarajevo, and they are always chilling," McDaniel says.

DAY TRIPPING While in Mostar, I was able to view war photography that showed the famous bombed-out bridge – which, over time, had become a symbol as a peace bridge that united various cultures and faiths. You can easily tour either **Mostar** in **Bosnia-Herzegovina** (the correct way to refer to the region) or **Montenegro**, two exotic and historic locales. We could have crammed more sights in with a tour, but enjoyed driving along the coast, stopping at the green patchwork **Neretva River Delta** viewpoint, then proceeding inland to an artist's village, **Pocitelj**. (Pilgrims may also visit nearby **Medugorje**, where residents have reported seeing visions of the Virgin Mary.)

The highlight in Mostar was our wonderful guide, Ajla Bajgoric, who explained to us how they dealt with 'the conflict' of the early '90s: "We have dark humour...joking about how eating pasta was good for us during the food shortages, which is how we survived the war." He walked us through a mosque and down the coppersmith's street in the Old Town – the *Stari Grad* – and proudly showed us the Old Bridge, which had survived over four centuries – even Hitler's tanks – only to be destroyed during the recent war.

ISLAND HOPPING To experience the essence of the Dalmatian Coast, spend a couple of nights on **Korcula Island**, a mini-Dubrovnik where Marco Polo was born. Ferry schedules can be tricky –

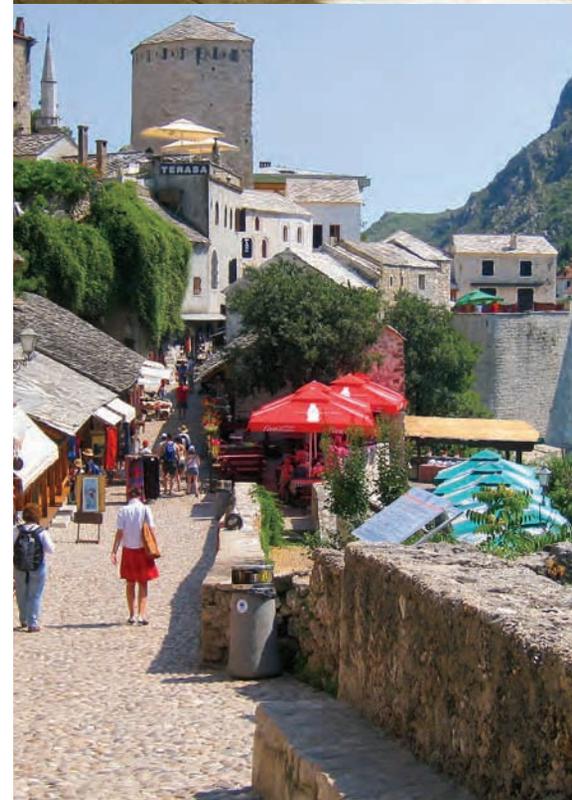
on our trip I had to carefully plan this excursion so that when we departed, we could travel to Hvar for a four-hour tour, then head to **Split** for a short tour and finally, hop onto the four-and-a-half-hour SNAV hydrofoil to Ancona, Italy.

While in Korcula, we drank local Rukatac wine and tucked into a black risotto with squid ink and cuttlefish at **Morski Konjic** (Little Seahorse) along the waterfront. Another interesting dish, combining smoked tuna carpaccio with white chocolate shavings, was surprisingly tasty. Make sure you also stop at the family-run **Grubinjac Grill**, just outside the Old Town in Zrnovo. Housed in an authentic stone house with green shutters, the Skokandic family offers exceptional grilled meats and fresh produce from their garden.

ISTRIA: CROATIA'S TUSCANY When I explained to a Croatian woman back in the U.S. that we were spending time in coastal **Rovinj** and **Pula** in the north and Dubrovnik and Korcula in the south, her response was, "Those places aren't Croatia." Many in the interior feel the authentic flavour lies not in the touristy coast, but in Istrian hill towns like **Motovun**, the tiny village of **Hum** and, my favourite, the colourful artist's village of **Groznjan**.

Venetian-influenced **Rovinj** (ro-veen), perched atop a hill overlooking the Adriatic, is incredibly picturesque. We enjoyed walking through cobblestone alleys, past stone buildings with green shutters and colourful doors, to the prize at the top – the **Church of St. Eufemia**. Toma Longinovic, a professor of Slavic literature at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, has lived in Rovinj since he was two. "My actor father, Zoran, joined their burgeoning arts community in the late '50s. During the '60s and '70s, Rovinj was a veritable meeting place for all the artists in the former Yugoslavia, regardless of their national background. Istria retains that feel even these days, proud to have resisted the virus of nationalism spreading through the Balkans." Longinovic's favourite waterfront restaurant is **Scuba**, which offers pizza, seafood, grilled meats and salads: "everything Istria is known for – the meeting of surf and turf, the Italians and the Slavs." ▣

Clockwise from top left: Internal courtyard of the Franciscan monastery; a typical meal of grilled fish and wine; early morning market; the Mostar Bridge.





PUGLIA'S SIMPLE PLEASURES

*Combining natural beauty
and authentic old-world charm
with an emerging style and rustic
culinary scene makes Puglia
southern Italy's next hot spot*
David L. Miller

Experienced travellers frequently chart new territory to discover each annual holiday. I know I do. My travel companions are now more often suggesting vacations away from the historically popular destinations, fuelled by individual desires to explore life beyond densely populated tourist centres. My neighbours, fresh from a tour of France, spoke passionately about the city of Lyon, whose rich diversity has earned it the label 'the other Paris', and Poland's relatively undiscovered Krakow is where my young niece and her friends went last summer, drawn by its unique and edgy vibe. In Italy, one such region still exists – literally – in the 'heel of the boot', and has drawn a growing number of visitors in recent years: the region of Puglia. Beyond the inescapable beauty of the Adriatic Sea and a visible historical diversity that reflects its many invasions, this southeastern part of Italy is known best for its authentic simplicity and a lifestyle we all aspire to, but seem to never get.

Thinking back to childhood, I remember my father bringing home "Learn to Speak Italian in 100 Days" record albums and my mother sporting fashionable new headscarves and big sunglasses as they excitedly spoke of planning the trip of a lifetime. At school, Miss Phillips would teach us about a nation 'shaped like a boot' in geography class, and I would run home to share with Mom a newfound knowledge of this much talked about vacation destination. Too young to understand culture, but old enough to relate to adventure, 'the boot' was more than a unique shape on the world map; it had a particular draw that was becoming deeply ingrained in my young mind. My grandparents, of middle European background, shared stories of the 'old country' at every family visit. They were teaching me culture, but I just didn't know it yet. With each

Ornamental pinnacles adorn the typical cone-shaped roofs in the *trulli* village of Alberobello, Italy. They customarily feature painted planetary symbols, the evil eye, crosses or hearts.



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VINCENZO LOMBARDO/PHOTODISC/GETTY IMAGES



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weekend visit, more and more mystique and intrigue filled my head about this land so far away.

As an adult, my fascination with Italy has proven to show no boundaries. Over the years, I have enjoyed multiple visits to fast-paced, urban Milan in the north, finding personal alignment with its modern, design-based world of commerce. But recently, my life desires have turned toward the opposite, and I found myself listening intently as travel friends waxed poetic about Puglia. To them, Puglia represents a very attractive, even sensual, slice of life.

And how right they were! Upon arrival, our group was quickly immersed in the old-world charm, savouring the aroma and taste of freshly baked *rustici* – a popular breakfast pastry – while enjoying a morning stroll through town. In the evenings we warmed to the simplicity of vegetable-based dishes served in family-owned eateries, laughing at the owner’s animation as he drizzled local artisan oils on our catch of the day. While the resto-lounges of Milan may offer fashion-forward servers with a chic attitude, the family restaurants of Puglia offer evenings of storytelling, wine drinking and food for the soul. A writer in my travel guide accurately suggested that, for visitors, the “soul in this boot will be found in food: simply prepared fresh (and preserved) vegetables, beans, bitter greens and lentils, a lot of it organic.” As self-proclaimed urban foodies, perhaps a bit fatigued with gastro-technology and other esoteric forms of culinary insanity, solace was quickly unearthed with these rustic masterpieces delivered with modest simplicity, charm and laughter. The crowd favourite, by far, was the morning stroll down to the town bakeries. Second only to fishermen who toil the early hours of morning at sea, the town bakers are at it well before dawn, stoking the wood-fired ovens for another day’s yield of focaccia and oversized – well, huge actually – loaves of perfectly bronzed bread.

Regione Puglia is home to five provinces, with a population of some four million passionate people. Its unique geography provides structure to this southeastern portion of Italy, jutting into the Ionian and Adriatic seas towards Albania, and forming the Gulf of Taranto to the west. As a gateway to both the east and the west, the region is rich in historical diversity, and as a port of call, an attraction to all at sea.

My initial visit found me quite taken with the endless rows of olive trees blanketing the fields, a considerable colour contrast to the bright blue hues of the Adriatic. The towns and cities are defined by ubiquitous conical dry stone roofs known as *trulli* – from the Greek word *trullos* – suggesting suburban design sensibilities from centuries ago. These grey stone roofs, all pointing upward in compact village-like configurations,

mark each of the valley settlements, adding yet another sense of uniqueness to the region. The tips of each structure are often painted with signs of the zodiac, good luck symbols or devotional renderings. But don't be fooled: many of the *masserias* (fortified farmhouses) are being turned into stylish retreats with a boutique feel. We spent several nights in Ostuni, locally known as *Città Bianca* (white city), at a luxury *trulli* villa, completely retro-fitted with modern amenities and a private swimming pool. The uniqueness of living under a cone for our holiday provided us with both a sense of history and subtle spirituality, yet our living quarters were totally refined with luxury amenities and special finishing touches.

Flying in, the view from above symbolically portrays the dichotomy of the Puglian experience: the seduction of fresh, healthy country living with its food provided by local organic farmers against a backdrop of history, density and urban diversity. Miles of rolling farmland is sometimes helped along with irrigation aqueducts, allowing for productive and fertile soils. It is reported that half of Italy's durum wheat (think pasta) comes from the region, grown in harmony with olives, almonds and grapes. These staples of Italian life are harvested only minutes away from the town centres, ensuring a freshness we could only dream of back home.

Growing up in Hamilton, a Canadian city known over the decades for its abundance of Italian families, I felt a certain *simpatico* with my Puglian experiences. I vividly recall as a young boy the regular Saturday morning ritual with my grandmother as we would walk over to the farmer's market on Ottawa Street, she bickering with the bakers, fishmongers and meat cutters. The best part of these weekly outings was the flavourful treats offered by the various proprietors. Pastries warm from the baker's oven, samples of spicy smoked sausages from the butcher who always had a pencil tucked behind his ear, and fresh fruits from the rugged farmer who smiled perennially despite an absence of a few front teeth. Call it *déjà vu*, or perhaps just a momentary return to youthful innocence, but when the old Pugliese baker smiled at me and offered a piece of bread still warm from the stone, I was transported back in time and found my eyes filling with emotion. I remembered reaching out and holding the hand of my grandmother as I did so long ago. Moments like this are not captured on film; they just stay permanently etched in one's mind as a personal bond with the authentic warmth of southern Italy. ▣



Right A baker holds fresh, hot loaves from the stone oven; figs ripening on the tree in Apulia.

ALAN BECKER/STONE/GETTY IMAGES

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Tuscan Treasures

DEBRA CONKEY

On our first visit to Italy 12 years ago, we rented a two-storey apartment in the tiny hamlet of Badia a Montemuro in the heart of Tuscany. Upon arrival, I knocked on the first door I laid eyes on, which was slowly opened by a tiny 90-year-old woman named Bruna.

Bruna had a wide, crooked smile, a sweet but weathered face, and a slow, hunched gait. I asked about a name and she turned and cackled something high-pitched and indecipherable into the phone. The owner soon came running down the road with our key. This was the start of our love affair with all things Italian: the people, the hill towns, the landscapes and, ah, the food.

We've returned to Italy every other year since then – sometimes twice a year. Our preferred accommodations are ancient stone farmhouses (renovated) or farmhouses divided into apartments. But I never think of them as apartments. They still capture that Tuscan farmhouse

feel and are quite spacious, with bedrooms, living room, kitchen and dining room. (Or you can also get a more elegant villa, whatever your taste.) Our first apartment had a balcony overlooking the tiny square. We'd sit there every morning, me sipping hot chocolate, and my companion cappuccino from the tiny restaurant across the square – and we'd yell 'buon giorno' (good morning) to the old women who dragged their chairs into the sun in front of an old chapel.

When we're in Tuscany, we visit our friends Andrea and Andreina in that small hamlet (yes, those are their real names). They cry when they see us. We always hug, like long-lost friends. That first year, they invited us to dinner on the terrace of their ancient home. (Sadly, Bruna died the year we met her.)

Andrea and Andreina enjoy country living, rejecting the hustle and crowds of Florence. He, though classically trained, became *il postino* – the postman.



She works at the travel agency in nearby Radda, one of our favourite fortified towns in Chianti. We enjoyed fresh vegetables from their garden, homemade pizza from their stone oven, local wine and cheeses, and talked - in broken English and Italian - about American actors like Kevin Costner, politics, and Andrea's frustration at not being able to open a restaurant in his hamlet (something about local tradition). This year, we took a hydrofoil from Split, Croatia to Ancona, Italy, and headed up the *autostrada* towards the heart of Italy: Toscana.

We met the owner in Radda and followed him up a dirt road that was supposed to be the lesser of two evils. It wasn't. We knew the road would be a little rocky (the description advised against low-riding sports cars), but not *this* rocky.

But the view was jaw-droppingly spectacular. Our two-bedroom farmhouse, located in a 15th-century hamlet, was set in a panorama of vineyards - a table and chairs on the edge of the property with a front-row view of paradise. We ate dinner there on many evenings, watching the occasional firefly streak by.

You, too, can rent a villa or farmhouse like this and experience living like a local. Visit the co-op for groceries like fresh buffalo mozzarella, ripe tomatoes or freshly made green and yellow ravioli ready for the boiling pot. Here are some ideas to help you plan your farmhouse stay.

WORK WITH AN AGENT WHO KNOWS THE PROPERTIES I've been renting farmhouses from the same travel agent for many years. I knew exactly what I was getting into regarding the road





© ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/ROLF WESCHKE

because of my careful perusal of the property description, but I often asked detailed questions about the location (high on a hill, please), the proximity of distant roads (no road noise, please, while we're outside drinking our Chianti), and such. I made sure our rental car had plenty of clearance, but still took a chance with the road. But I'd been warned.

A knowledgeable agent can help you get your dream villa or farmhouse and avoid mishaps that could torpedo your own little paradise.

DECIDE WHO WILL GO First decide who you'd like to spend a week or two with. Consider who would share rooms, how many bathrooms you need (some only have one or the second bathroom may only have a sink), number of bedrooms and types of beds – doubles, singles, pull-out sofas, lofts.

DESIGNATE A TRIP LEADER Hold a group meeting and get everyone to discuss their hopes and dreams – and basic needs. Then pick a leader to work with the agent.

CONSIDER ALL THE COSTS Farmhouses and villas can be relative bargains when split among friends or families. They can range from \$1,500 to \$35,000 a week. But ask if the price includes water, electricity, gas, heating, cleaning fees and the deposit. Many don't.

PLAN AIRFARE CAREFULLY Most farmhouse rentals are from Saturday to Saturday, so plan to arrive a day or two early and stay in either Rome or Florence before heading into the countryside.

PLAN FOR PRIVACY – OR NOT Decide if you want a stand-alone farmhouse or villa, a farmhouse divided into apartments, and whether you want the owner present or not. Consider staying in an *agriturismo*, where you can experience Tuscan farm life first-hand (and taste the wine, olive oil and, often, home-cooked meals).

CONSIDER MULTIPLE CAR RENTALS I value my friendships, so when we visited Tuscany several years ago, we rented two cars (stick shifts will save you money). Our friends could speed around the countryside with the best of the Italian drivers, while we preferred to ramble.

RELAX One of the best attributes of farmhouse living is being able to sleep in, eat breakfast at your own table and still be able to visit a hill town or two each day. One day, swim and sit by the pool or read a book on your terrace, then take a nap. You might actually come back from your vacation refreshed.

GO WITH THE FLOW Yes, the countryside is more serene than the city; however, the first few nights we stayed in Badia, the locals started repairing a roof – with a hammer – at the crack of dawn. On this year's trip, a tractor tending the vineyards awakened us the first day. These are the facts of farm life. Savour the fact that you're in a real hamlet, among authentic people.

BUY TRAVEL INSURANCE Before you put down a deposit, ask about the cancellation policy. Once you get close to your arrival date, you'll forfeit the entire week's fee if you have to cancel for illness (or the illness of a family member). Travel insurance can help protect your investment.

PLAN TO EAT WELL Leave the diet at home – trust me on this one. Ask your agent to book local restaurants, cooking classes, wine tours – even a local cook for your farmhouse. Our favourite local ristorante in our beloved Badia a Montemuro is *l'Osteria Rifugio del Chianti*. We delight in a simple menu that still lists chicken breasts as 'chicken chests' and 'fresh fries' for French fries. And the fresh bruschetta, grilled meats, freshly made *tagliatelle al funghi* (pasta with mushrooms) and homemade ravioli with meat sauce. We cherish the rotund chef-owner, Franco, who pours us a *digestivo* liqueur – then drinks them down with us – at the end of the meal. It was here we learned about the best dessert of all: homemade biscotti dipped into *vin santo* (holy wine). ▣

Contact your Ensemble Travel Agent for details on Ensemble Villas & Vacation Homes in Tuscany and beyond.

Left The setting sun casts a warm amber glow on the Chianti Volpaia vineyard.

A scenic view of Prague, Czech Republic, featuring a large green dome, a stone tower, and a boat on the Vltava River. The image shows a mix of historical architecture, including a prominent green dome and a tall stone tower, with a boat on the water in the foreground. The sky is overcast with soft light.

MEMOIRS OF THE Czech Republic

Marilyn Lazar shares
her personal journey back
to her father's land



Like many little girls, I always viewed my father as the stuff that heroes are made of. As a grown woman, I had the opportunity to travel with him back to his birthplace, looking for pieces to the jigsaw puzzle of our family life. Given that this trip was to the Czech Republic, a jewel among Eastern European destinations, it was not only a personal journey, but also every traveller's dream experience: dramatic contrasts in architecture, larger-than-life historical and political backdrops, fine museums, well-preserved palaces, spectacular spas and reasonable prices.

There are direct flights to Prague or short connecting flights via other European cities. It's not hard to get to the Czech Republic, but upon arrival, I truly feel like I have entered a different world. Previous travel to other European destinations has not prepared me; I am struck by both the similarities and the differences.

In a child-like sense, I had expected this place to resemble the black and white photographs that my parents had managed to salvage and bring with them when they emigrated in 1948. Instead, I find Prague to be a bright, colourful metropolis. It lives up to its name of the 'City of Spires'; dynamic roof lines catch the glinting sun to engaging effect. The characterless grey concrete box-like structures left behind by the communist era stand in stark contrast with these beautifully restored heritage buildings.

I am a bit surprised by the language barrier. I grew up hearing many languages, including Czech and Hungarian. However, the Slavic alphabet makes reading signs tricky and I really cannot make out the foreign sound of conversations. Luckily, many residents can make themselves understood in English and are tolerant of tourist attempts at communication. We cheerfully adopt recognizable terms such as our rented 'autopuchnik' vehicle and the juicy 'nectarinkis' we enjoy at the market in the old town square.

We wander Amerincan Street in search of my parents' old apartment building. Passersby are extremely interested in our search and helpful. When we finally find it, we are buzzed in by strangers who share stories and beer.

Meals range from cheap and cheerful to elegant courtyard affairs. Bratwurst, goulash, dumplings, *spätzle* and sauerkraut. Coffee and strudel with *schlag*. Not to mention ample venues to enjoy great local lager al fresco.



Left A view of the Charles Bridge.



Walking tours are an ideal way to approach old cities like Prague and can be joined conveniently at many locations throughout the old city, often at bus stops. Trace the steps of many generations through the Lesser Quarter. Touch the spot on the Charles Bridge, reputed to bring luck, and shiny from palms that came before yours. I could almost hear the cheering crowds from decades ago in Wenceslav Square, over the American music which is now piped in.

We grab the funicular up to the top of the town. There, we stroll through the stately Grand Pupp Hotel, which housed the army during the war. The high ceilings and ornate mouldings speak of glamour and aristocracy.

Back in the central square, the famous clock tower impresses: on the hour, life-size rotating figures come to the windows to greet the crowds that gather like...well, like clockwork. A pretty Roma (once known as gypsy) girl strolls by, begging, baby at her exposed breast. Terms like 'gypsy' and 'bohemian' actually have their origin in Czech history, though their cultural meaning has been altered over time.

The palace creates a majestic view from many parts of Prague. Up close, it is breathtaking. Royally clad guards with stony expressions remain impervious to our smiles. Hiring a private guide proves most worthwhile. She makes sense of the vast space and long history in the short time we have allocated to tour. To delve a little deeper, we hire another private guide through our hotel to accompany us in the following days. I highly recommend doing this, as she brought to life many historical moments and provided insight into the life of Czech people today.

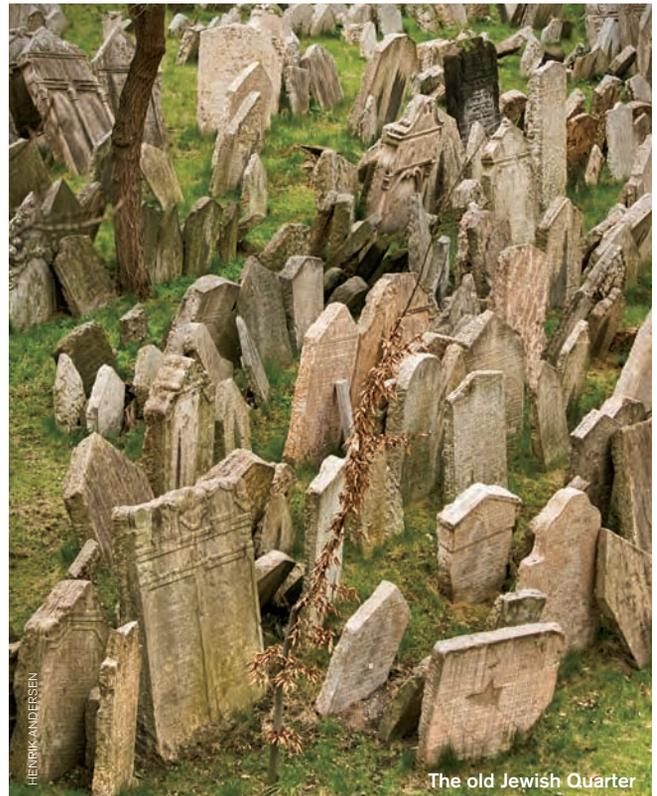
The old Jewish Quarter is a worthwhile destination: converging throngs of tourists where no viable Jewish community remains. A 600-year-old synagogue is at its epicentre. It is called the 'alteneue' or old/new because it is comprised of two distinct sections. Former U.S. secretary of state Madeleine Albright found her family's name on the wall among the endless list of those who were taken by the Nazis. There is a cemetery where the headstones include names of famous figures and ancient scholars. There are several museums including displays of children's art created in concentration camps. The work reflects love of learning, appreciation for culture and dignity in the face of unfathomable loss. There are also displays of items used in Jewish daily life which hold countless untold stories.

Geographically and historically, Prague is situated near many important places. I am surprised to see a road sign for Dresden, Germany and to be offered a plane ride to Marienbad and Francesbad in France. We take a day trip to visit two sites commemorating the atrocities of the Holocaust – the town of Terezin and the Monument of Lidice. As my parents were Holocaust survivors, these sites are integral to the trip and not to be missed. However, I recommend them to every tourist. Though unspeakably sad, both also contain beautiful works of art and tell timeless tales of great courage and humanity.

Don't miss the town of Karlovy Vary (that's the Czech name – Carlsbad is the German). The Colonnade is so beautiful it looks like a Disney World façade: sandblasted columns, bridges and fountains maintained in complete artistic integrity. Tourists follow the age-old protocol of buying porcelain drinking vessels and tasting from each of 12 fountains of varying temperature and mineral content. The 13th and last drink is the all-important 'pastoral'. Having been reared on good old Canadian tap water, I can't manage to swallow too much of any of the tepid, mineralized stuff despite a wealth of purported health benefits for various internal organs.

I prefer the water treatments available for the body's largest organ: the skin. One-time sanatoriums are now beautiful spas offering invigorating wraps, scrubs and rinses with said waters possessing almost mythical qualities. Boutiques offer beautiful antiques, rugs, jewellery, crystal and porcelain.

I'll always be grateful to my father for our trip to the Czech Republic. The journey back for him represented a giant step forward for me. I learned more about him and in turn myself; his personal history and that of our forebears was refracted through me. I thought it might be heavy. In fact, we shared many laughs every day. The journey had been paid in spiritual spades. ▣



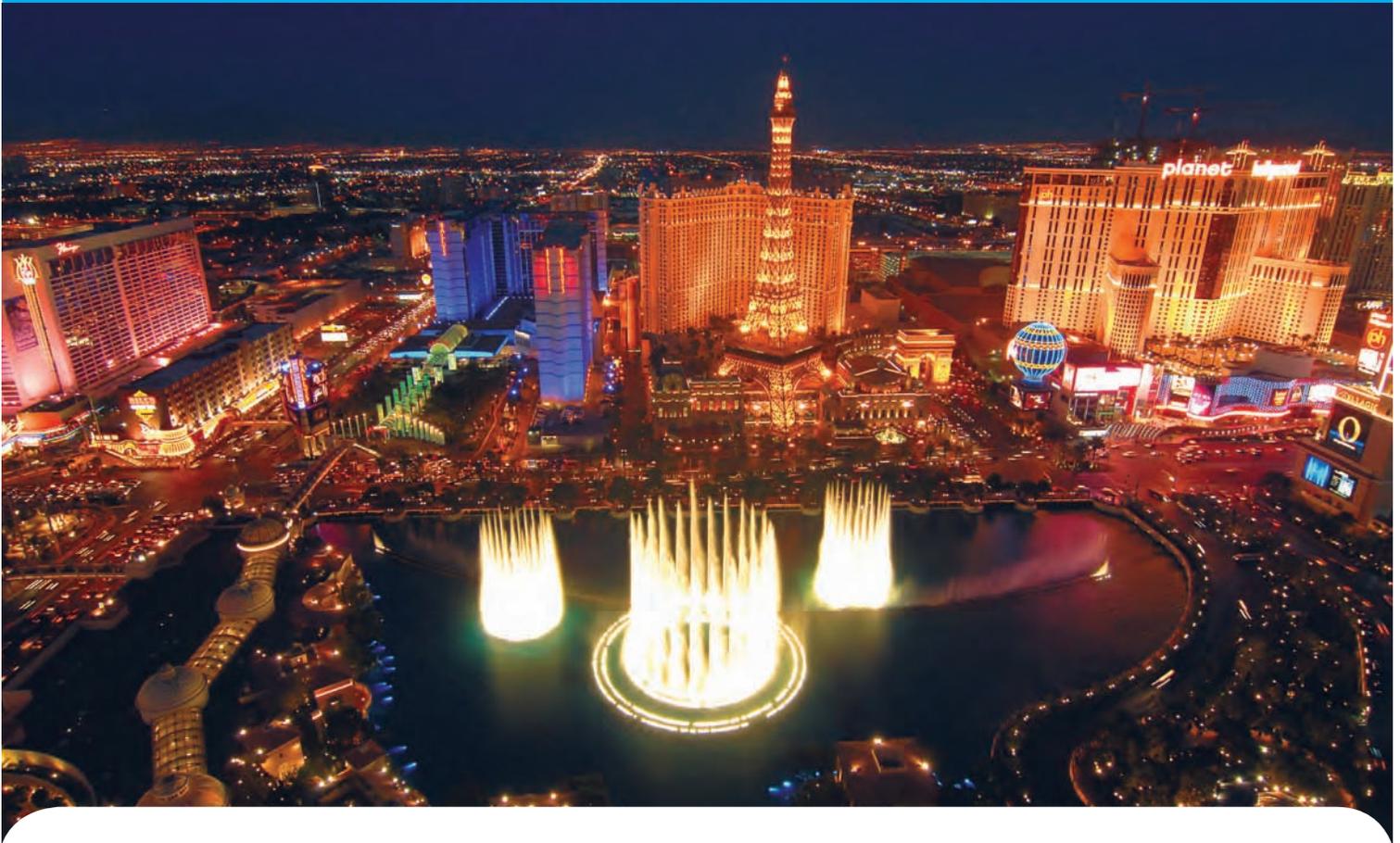
The spa town of Karlovy Vary, featured in the 2006 Bond film *Casino Royale*.



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Worldly Delights: Old World Wines

Great value European wines are not a myth. **Nick Keukenmeester** explains how, with a little research and willingness to experiment, you can find them right here at home.



I often hear people complain that there are no good value European wines. When you travel in Europe you learn this isn't true. The trouble is that once you get back, that obscure red you loved from the Isle of Capri can't be found (and was it just the sunsets that made it so wonderful?). Although you tried something different while away, you fall into your old buying habits. Don't be shy - venture out and discover the gems right here at home. You just have to find regions and producers that are overlooked by others to find a bargain and drink like the locals (somewhere far away).

Look for southern **Italy** (Puglia, Sicilia, Basilicata) and red grapes you don't know (Negroamaro, Nero d'Avola, Aglianico). You will be amazed at the concentration and it will cost less than your standard Aussie Shiraz. Or rather than drinking Barolo, drink the wines the people of Piemonte keep for themselves. Barbera is a rich, chocolatey red grape that coats the mouth with flavour. It is much less expensive and easier to drink than the average Nebbiolo-based wine from this region. Traditional producers like Michele Chiarlo are often more famous for Barbera than Barolo. Delicate whites from the Cortese (in Gavi) or Arneis grapes can also make stunning and inexpensive wines.

One region that remains terribly neglected is the Douro in **Portugal**, the home of port. Dry table wines are now being made from port grapes such as Touriga Nacional, Tinta Roriz and many others you can't pronounce. They are rich with fruit, have deep tannins and a great balancing acidity; worthy of the cellar or a big meal. And don't forget port itself. One of the reasons so many

GETTY IMAGES

great houses like Quinta do Noval are now making dry wines is because they can't get a sensible price for their Late Bottled Vintage (LBV) ports and other styles. Value for money is amazing when you open your mind to great sweet fortified wine.

Lesser known areas in **Spain** can offer great value, too. Abadia Retuerta sits just a few miles outside the famed Ribera del Duero. It is about half the price of estates within, but their geographical misfortune is our gain. They make great Tempranillo-based wines (the noble red grape of Spain), with fruit and earthy power not associated with traditional dried-out Rioja. Neglected regions such as Toro, Rueda and Jumilla offer Monastrel (Mourvedre), Garnacha (Grenache), Tempranillo and even crisp white Verdejo wines at a fraction of their worth.

Even in **France**, there are excellent wines at keen prices. Look for the wines of the Languedoc-Roussillon or consider Beaujolais. This is red Burgundy, but made with the fruity and aromatic Gamay grape rather than its more admired neighbour Pinot Noir. Here grapes from great 'cru' such as Morgon or Fleury make wines of excellence. Elegant Beaujolais Villages can be great with or without food. Note: I mean Beaujolais Villages, not Beaujolais Nouveau. I would rather drink dishwater than that over-hyped rubbish and I don't want you drinking it either. Beaujolais Villages from producers such as Louis Jadot are available in most provinces for under \$20. ▣

Quinta do Noval LBV Port

- British Columbia:** \$32.99 retail in government liquor stores
- Alberta:** \$33.99 private retail stores
- Manitoba:** \$34.50 private retail stores
- Ontario:** \$16.99 per 375 ml bottle (Lifford Wine Agency)

Quinta do Noval 10-Yr-Old Tawny

- Alberta:** \$44.99 private retail stores
- Manitoba:** \$45.95 private retail stores
- Ontario:** \$20.95 per 375 ml bottle (Lifford Wine Agency)

Abadia Retuerta Rivola

- British Columbia:** \$26.99 (Altovin)
- Ontario:** \$24.95 (Lifford Wine Agency)
- Quebec:** \$19.75 (Altovin)
- Nova Scotia:** \$20.55 (Innovative Beverages)

Michele Chiarlo Barbera d'Asti Le Orme

- British Columbia:** \$23.99 (Altovin)
- Alberta:** \$19.95 (Altovin)
- Ontario:** \$21.50 (Lifford Wine Agency)
- Quebec:** \$17.00 (SAQ)



Worldly Delights: Prague

With favourable nods from the likes of Michelin and Gordon Ramsay, Prague is the new mecca of epicurean delight. **Stephanie Ortenzi** visits seven restaurants all foodies should put on their list.



Prague is a city of spires; like sharp Gothic exclamations that say there are many surprises here. Cuisine is one of them.

The city's gastronomic revival began with the Velvet Revolution in 1989, the Czech Republic's poetic response to the Iron Curtain. The movement captured the country's historic persona of elegance, aristocracy and cultural sophistication.

Two decades later, Prague's culinary identity emerges as among the world's best.

In March 2008, Prague was granted a Michelin star, Central Europe's first. It went to **Allegro**, the restaurant in the Four Seasons Hotel Prague. Chef Andrea Accordi has an haute repertoire to match the luxurious sensibility of the hotel. He has a reputation for Asian spicing – Chinese anise, Szechuan pepper, cardamom, citronella, licorice, ginger, galangal and lemongrass – a holdover from a stint in Bangkok, but his main thrust is Italian. He is said to have imported a Tuscan farmer to show his North Bohemian supplier how to make real ricotta.

Accordi's food is authentic and traditional, but very modern. His dishes are exquisite. A recent lunch antipasto is called Variation on Blue Fin Tuna: mint-scented tartar, lime gelée, Pantelleria capers, seared in a peanut and pepper crust, borlotti beans, red onion and grapefruit salad, medallions poached in olive oil on artichokes, mustard and dill sauce.

Prague has become a city of foodies. The republic's first culinary institute just opened. Professionals and amateurs vie

for sold-out seats in classes given by the city's celebrity chefs. The big break-out success on TV is a cooking show. Czech wines take six golds at the Concours Mondial de Bruxelles.

Then, as an endorsement of the city's gastronomic chops, Gordon Ramsay opens the Prague version of Maze, his most recent London restaurant success, in the Hilton Prague. Ramsay is saying there's a market here for modern, sophisticated cuisine. He would know.

In 2006 and 2007, three restaurants – Aromi, Brasserie M and Le Terroir – were given the *Bibendum*, recognition of good quality at a reasonable price by Michelin standards.

Aromi is also known as *Enoteca con Cucina*, Italian for 'a wine cellar with a kitchen,' making its priorities perfectly clear. The extensive wine list is unapologetically Italian. The warm, relaxed room of brick and wood delivers authentic Italian fare, but for the discerning business and cosmo crowd the kitchen likes to sex it up a bit with trendy foams. The kitchen's soul is made of pasta. They're imaginative and conservatively modern, which means they offer something contemporary while never losing hold of tradition. Consider pumpkin ravioli with chanterelles and grappa; pappardelle with duck ragout; and spaghetti with garlic, oil, chili peppers and tuna tartare.

Brasserie M is as French as Aromi is Italian, with classics like duck rilette and steak tartare. Similarly, it takes traditional on an interesting ride. Here's a dish not likely to be tasted anywhere else: a warm

filet of smoked salmon with a pequillo pepper jus, jasmine rice and roasted fennel. Brasserie M is a place to grab a midday sandwich, have a casual, quality, bistro-style meal or a full-on epicure's evening.

Le Terroir delivers what it says it is: the French concept that wherever we are, there is a unique goodness to the land, its food and its animals – and that's what we should eat. This restaurant's vision is directed by local sensibilities: the owner and chef are both Czech, and the former is also a formidable sommelier, with the good sense to give Czech wines their due. He's put seven on his list of European superstar wines. They love their cheeses at Le Terroir – a recent tasting menu had two cheese courses, one Italian and one French – twice the occasion to pair great wines with great cheeses.

To experience the diversity and details that round out Prague's culinary portrait, try one of these three restaurants:

David is a beloved throw-back (beef carpaccio with garlic dressing and curls of parmesan cheese) for dishes worth preserving, and a lover of Bohemian classics that continue to endure in Prague. Specialties like crispy duck and self-described old-fashioned goulash with dumplings get the honoured treatment they deserve, with home-style flourishes.

Le Degustation is the beloved of local cognoscenti who say that no one in Prague does tasting menus better. Only three menus are offered, seven courses each, in three styles: market fresh, continental or Bohemian. Organic products from local producers are given modern handling. Standouts from a recent menu: poached Prague ham, wild poultry soup, barley dumpling, smoked beef tongue, chickpea purée, roasted onion with marjoram, South Bohemian rabbit.

The Sushi Bar epitomizes Prague's culinary confidence. Everywhere else, sushi is left to an expat Japanese master. Here, instead, six Czech hipsters earned themselves a reputation for the best sushi in Central Europe. The long, slim room has only three tables, but a lengthy eating bar. ▣

Worldly Delights: Recipe

Bohemian Crispy Duck

SERVES 4

Ingredients:

- 1 large duck 5 to 6 lbs
- 1 tbsp paprika
- 4 large medium-sweet apples
- 1 tsp toasted caraway seeds
- 1 lb sauerkraut
- 2 bay leaves
- 1 cup dry white wine
- salt and pepper to taste

Directions:

Preheat oven to 400° F. Peel and core the apples and grate coarsely. Combine the apples and sauerkraut. Add caraway seeds and season. Wash and dry the bird, season the interior and exterior with salt and pepper. Pierce the bird's thick skin thoroughly with a fork or the tip of a paring knife, being careful not to pierce the flesh underneath. Sprinkle the paprika all over the bird, including the cavity and work it into the skin by hand. Fill the bird's cavity as tightly as possible with the apple mixture. Insert one bay leaf at the top of the bird, and the other toward the centre. Close the opening securely with skewers or butcher's twine. Place the remainder of the apple mixture in the pan as a base for the bird and lay it on top. Splash the bird with wine, and place it in the oven. Baste the bird every 15 minutes, removing excess fat each time. If the bottom of the pan becomes too dry and threatens to burn, add water to keep it moist. The key to the bird's crispiness while keeping the flesh tender and moist is regular and even basting with juices and fat. At the two-hour mark, check for doneness by piercing between the thigh and the bottom of the breast to see if the juices run clear. If the top of the bird gets too dark, cover it with foil.

Worldly Delights: Naples

Stephanie Ortenzi finds the five best bets for pizza.



Naples is dead serious about pizza. The European Union is involved. There are codified rules, and Neapolitans will kick up a fuss if anyone strays.

Cooks prepare pizzas at Naples' Trianon Pizzeria



JON SPRULL/AXON/GETTY IMAGES

Horrified by the rapid spread of global fast food and frozen 'pizza' that disgraced its original incarnation, a group of Neapolitans formed the *Verace Pizza Napoletana Association* in 1984. Along with the government of Italy, they have set out very precise guidelines for what is deemed worthy of bearing the authentic Neapolitan pizza label.

As a general overview, it is supposed to be made with mozzarella from the southern Apennines. Cow's milk, or *fiore di latte*, mozzarella is preferred over buffalo mozzarella, which can soak the crust. The tomatoes should be locally grown San Marzano, a variety with more flesh. The basil garnish must be fresh and only a leaf or two should be used. The pizza itself must be round, 0.3 cm thick at the centre, the crust no thicker than 2 cm and with a diameter no larger than 35 cm. It must be cooked in a wood-fired oven at about 450° F in no less than 40 seconds and no more than 90. And that's pretty much how it is all over Naples.

Pizza is a single-portion food, crisp, slightly burnt on the bottom and often folded charmingly into quarters, *al fazzoletto* (as a handkerchief) – handy for those times you're zooming around on the back of your *ragazzo's* Vespa.

At the top of the heap of Naples' best pizzerias is **Da Michele**, the favourite of purists and multitudes more. The unassuming boïte serves only two kinds of pizza: **Margherita**, named for the queen who apparently loved hers with nothing more than tomato, mozzarella and basil; and the further minimalist **marinara**, with tomato, garlic and oregano.

Locals will line up outdoors for an hour or more for just one of these gems. Luckily, they don't sit for a usual two-hour grazing; once they finally get to the front of the line, order and take a seat, they're ready to leave happy and sated in about 20 minutes.

Along with Da Michele, **Trionfo**, **Brandi**, **Di Matteo** and **Cafasso** are considered to be the top five pizzerias in Naples. They should be thought of like the world's five most beautiful women; number one may have won the contest, but the other four are just as great. Now that's *amore*. ❏

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Indulge Your Senses in Istanbul

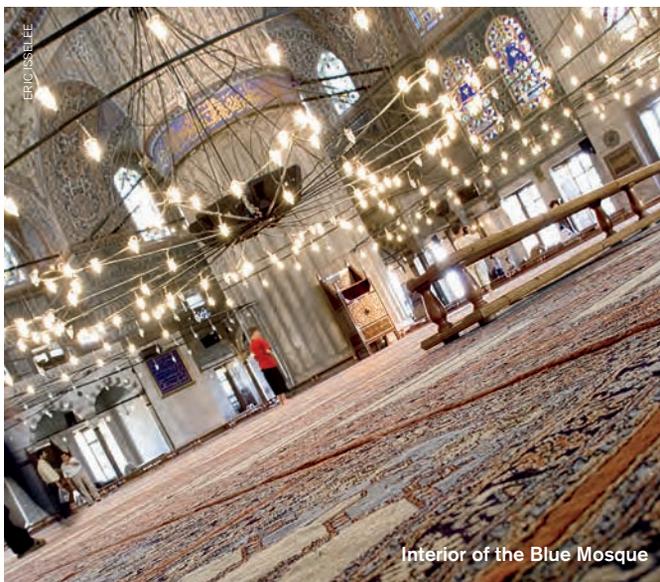


On the shores of the Bosphorus Sea lies the ancient city of Istanbul: the meeting place for Europe and Asia. This is a city of contrasts, where women clad in burkhas walk side by side with others in miniskirts and high heels, where the call from morning prayers mingles with the non-stop bustling at many of the chic local cafes.

This sprawling city has much to offer: ancient ruins left behind by the many conquering civilizations, pilgrimage sites for those seeking spiritual fulfillment, colourful bazaars where one can find incredibly expensive handwoven carpets, luxurious Turkish baths to soothe body and soul and a melting pot of people ready to share their customs and traditions with visitors.

Truly a feast for the senses, Istanbul is a gastronomical cornucopia of Mediterranean, Middle Eastern and Asian cuisine. Those wanting to truly experience its culinary bounty can enrol in cooking classes that range from an afternoon session to a week-long experience.

Carpet weaving and pottery are also strong traditions in Istanbul, and extended tours that visit many of the local craftsmen are also available. If shopping for bargains is your pleasure, then touring the local bazaars is a once-in-a-lifetime experience. And, no visitor to this enchanting city can leave without first enjoying a Turkish bath at one of the many *hamams*. Whether it's just for a few hours or a luxurious 10-day stay, a visit to the *hamams* is the quintessential Turkish experience. ▣



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Crawford's Caribbean

Stephanie Ortenzi



Four Seasons New York Chef and Food Network celebrity Lynn Crawford shares her love of food while cruising the Caribbean.



Chefs are inveterate travellers. Their wanderlust is encouraged early, because a chef's palate is only as good as what she's tasted, and to taste is how we begin to cook. Happily for both chefs and travellers, beautiful and interesting places all have flavours worth the trip.

Nearly 25 years ago, with her culinary education completed, Lynn Crawford left Toronto. She went to explore California's sweeping culinary movement, thanks in part to the agriculture, which was spawning good food alongside good wine.

Today, Crawford is Executive Chef of the Four Seasons Hotel in New York. She was offered the job two years ago, while training to challenge Bobby Flay on *Iron Chef America*. Crawford is the only female Canadian chef who has been invited to the show, and she was getting a lot of notice as the Executive Chef of Toronto's Four Seasons. *Toronto Life* was about to publish a new review of her latest menu when the news broke that she would be moving to Manhattan. Inconsolable, the magazine's food writer James Chatto published the review on his blog as a kind of farewell love letter to a great chef the city would sadly miss.

To say Crawford is passionate about food and cooking is to say that foie gras tastes good. She expresses her

enthusiasm by gesticulating with tattooed hands that carry symbols of deep personal meaning. On *Restaurant Makeover*, now televised in 16 countries, more of her unfettered self becomes public: putting a smart-ass cook in his place ("Did you just call me 'Babe?!'") and tenderly watching a young cook who all of a sudden 'gets it,' because he's tasting one of her sample dishes and he's just learned how good food can taste. Survey her team and you will find fiercely loyal acolytes whom she has prepared with expert training to secure their own success.

In January 2010, as she did two years before, Crawford will take a Caribbean cruise as a guest chef, teacher and a warm, generous spirit who lives to let her love of food spill over. From her New York City kitchen office, this is Lynn's Caribbean.

Nearly 16 years ago, the Four Seasons sent a team to open a resort in Nevis. What was that like for you?

The natural beauty was incredible. I had lemongrass growing eight feet tall in my backyard. But what made the experience truly memorable for me was the local people. I learned so much from them, and once we opened the resort, they were mesmerized by how we layered their culinary traditions and foundations with our own.

You'll be giving many cooking demonstrations on this cruise. How do you like to give classes?

Listen, give me four burners and an oven, and I can have fun. I like to have a lot of space and to have people come up and cook with me. Give me a stage and people who love food, and we'll cook up a storm. These are five-star cruises. Everything is luxurious. A special kitchen built exclusively for these classes is going to be brought on board, with state-of-the-art equipment – everything from induction cooking surfaces to every appliance you can imagine. The food on board is top of the line, and for that, the ship's own galley kitchen is fully loaded.

Toward the end of the trip, there's a gala beach party on a private island with a special meal planned. What's on the menu? It's a grand buffet where the local chefs prepare four whole pigs for slow-cooking

on a spit, basted with a mixture of soy sauce, ginger, garlic and brown sugar. Cooking starts at five in the morning, and the open fire is kept going at an intense heat all day. When it's done, the meat is unbelievably tender. It's the best pork I have ever eaten. I have so much fun with this event. Imagine, this wonderful feast on the beach – grilled lobster, shrimp, red snapper, this gorgeous slow-roasted pig, all of those spices and island flavours in the open air, music and laughter.

What do you like to eat on the islands?

I love the stews the best, and the spice markets on the islands are absolutely mind-blowing. Cinnamon and nutmeg and fenugreek, and the peppercorns, they're spectacular. I love conch fritters. Each island has its own flair with these. I also love jerk – the allspice, cinnamon, scotch bonnet. For a beach event I once cooked at, I turned jerk seasoning into a paste with butter – oh my god, it's all coming back to me. I used it on grilled veal tenderloin. I literally slathered it with the butter and basted it on the barbecue. Phenomenal.

You also do a kind of Kitchen Confidential talk about what it's like being a hotel chef.

What do you like to talk about?

I'm pretty spontaneous. I never go in with a script. I love sharing my experiences of being a chef running a kitchen with a staff of 70. People are fascinated with that, and they're very interested in food. This exchange – sharing this common passion – is very important to me. I love it. And when the questions come, I have no secrets. They want to know everything, and I tell them what's at the heart of it all – how it's all about the food, doing your best, getting the best out of your team and giving your guests the best experience possible.

The demands on your professional life are greater than they've ever been.

How do you stay grounded?

I cook. I care about my team. It's my life. It's about the people around me. It's all about us. I'm a peer with my team. I want to see them succeed. Just today I was having a conversation with one of my sous chefs to find out what he wants for his future and how we're going to get him there. Chefs have to be givers...and I love to give. ▣

Crispy Conch Fritters with Mango Dipping Sauce

Ingredients:

1 cup conch meat, chopped
1/4 cup red peppers, finely diced
1/4 cup yellow peppers, finely diced
2 stalks celery, finely diced
1 bunch green onion, finely chopped
2 tsp garlic, finely chopped
2 tbsp cilantro, chopped
3/4 cup all-purpose flour
1/2 cup milk
1 whole egg
1 tbsp tomato paste
1 quart vegetable oil for frying
salt and pepper to taste

Directions:

Heat the oil to 365° F in a large pot or deep fryer. In a bowl, mix the flour, egg, milk and tomato paste together and season well with salt and pepper. Mix in the conch meat, peppers, celery, green onion, garlic and cilantro. Drop a rounded tablespoon of the mixture into the hot oil and fry until golden brown. Drain on paper towels. Season with salt and pepper and serve warm with the mango dipping sauce.

MANGO DIPPING SAUCE

Ingredients:

2 mangoes, peeled, pitted and sliced
1 tbsp honey
1 tbsp rice wine vinegar
2 tbsp lime juice

Directions:

Purée the mangoes, honey, vinegar and lime juice in a food processor until smooth.

*Recipe prepared by
Executive Chef Lynn Crawford
New York, 2009*

La Dolce Vita

Enjoying the yachting lifestyle on the Amalfi Coast

Wendy Ray Jimenez, Ensemble Travel® agent, Vancouver, BC



The *motoscafi* that picked us up at the airport pier made its way slowly to the dock at St. Mark's Square, giving us ample time to absorb the beautiful vistas of Venice. I had arranged to stay a few days here before sailing the Amalfi Coast for seven nights. As we approached the square, I went over the directions provided by our hotel, which was located only steps away: "With the Basilica behind you, walk down the arcade on the right-hand side of the Square. After the Caffè Quadri turn onto the second street on your right, reach Corte Zorzi passing through the iron gate located in Campo San Gallo. We will be there to greet you!" Family run, the Locanda Orseolo is a charmingly restored Venetian home and our hosts went to every effort to make our stay memorable. We dined at the Rialto Bridge, drank at Harry's Bar – famous not least for inventing the Bellini cocktail and carpaccio, visited the fish market early in the morning and marvelled at how the waterways are used to transport virtually everything from tourists to produce! The hotel staff even arranged for a complimentary private excursion to Murano to view glass blowing by the masters of this art.

After this magical Venetian experience, we were prepped and ready for the next

portion of our Italian journey. The next day we travelled by train to the port of Civitavecchia, where our SeaDream yacht awaited us. Our ship was a sleek vessel dwarfed by the large cruise ships docked around her. One of the pleasures of a smaller line like SeaDream is the boarding experience, which is more like that of boarding a private yacht. With no long queues to wait in, we were quickly relieved of our luggage, escorted on board and greeted by our captain and crew with welcoming smiles and a chilled glass of Champagne.

Once in the cabin, we found our bags already waiting along with personally monogrammed SeaDream pajamas for our use should we wish to sleep under the stars on the yacht's Balinese beds, located on the top deck. For me, there was nothing as luxurious as sleeping in the open air while we sailed into Amalfi, waking to the sight of whitewashed buildings spilling down the hillsides towards the sparkling sea, and our crew offering us our first morning coffee.

The crew-to-guest ratio is almost one-to-one and although everything is first class the atmosphere is relaxed and casual. The staff never hovers, but always seems to be there with what you want exactly at the very moment you want it.

Each port brings the opportunity to participate in a variety of shoreside excursions. We usually chose to take the more informal and complimentary ones, and our favourites included a hike along the rugged cliffs of Bonifacio in Corsica and a mountain bike ride in Sorrento – both led by the captain himself!

When we arrived in Ponza, a small island with a craggy, vividly coloured coastline, the planned excursion was to leave the ship in small groups on Zodiacs for a short ride to a grotto for a swim. A small group of us got off first and suddenly a huge swell came up, so not only could others not leave the ship, but we couldn't re-board! The captain pulled up anchor and proceeded to the port for an alternate excursion while we got to spend an exhilarating morning travelling down the coastline in our Zodiac to meet up with the ship. We instantly bonded with our 'driver' and the other couple who shared this unexpected adventure.

While in Sorrento, we enjoyed yet another unanticipated experience. The majority of guests took the day to visit Pompeii, and while it is definitely a unique and worthwhile destination, a few of us had already 'been there and done that.' We accepted an invitation to accompany the chef on a walking tour while he shopped for provisions. Watching as he carefully surveyed and picked out items for the menu, we had the opportunity to savour everything from locally made limoncello to gelato and cappuccino. For those few splendid hours, I felt more like a local than a tourist, and quietly envied what seemed like a charmed way of life.

However, my favourite 'SeaDream moment' by far was our last afternoon on board the ship, when the captain decided to circle the island of Capri before heading back to Rome. There we were, sitting around the pool in our swimsuits being served chilled Champagne and caviar as we sailed by all the rich and famous on their mega yachts! La dolce vita indeed! ▣

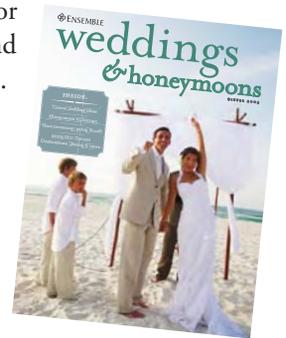


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MY FAVOURITE PLACE

PHIL KEOGHAN, HOST OF *THE AMAZING RACE*, GETS PERSONAL ABOUT HIS MOST MEMORABLE TRAVELS

Michele Sponagle

Phil Keoghan believes strongly in the power of travel to enrich mind, body and soul. The New Zealand-born host of the multi-Emmy winning TV series, *The Amazing Race*, now in its 14th season on CBS and CTV, has visited more than 100 countries. Last year alone, he chalked up more than 465,000 travel miles.

Despite a hectic schedule, he still absolutely loves exploring new places. "Every time I see a plane I'm captivated by the idea that you can board it and be somewhere entirely different in just a matter of hours," he says. "I still haven't become blasé about it. It still blows my mind."

Keoghan credits his love of travel to his parents: "They were born in New Zealand, as was I. When I was two or three years old, we moved to Canada. My dad got posted to the University of Guelph, then became a part of CUSO (the Canadian-based program Canadian University Service Overseas). I lived in Canada for four years, then we went and lived in Antigua for about eight years on and off. During that time, our family travelled extensively throughout the Caribbean and South America - Trinidad, Barbados, Venezuela, Colombia, Argentina. We were constantly moving. When I was ready to go to high school, I went from Antigua back to New Zealand. By then, the travel bug had already bitten me. I've been travelling ever since."

Along the way, Keoghan has had some amazing travel adventures. He has dined on top of a smouldering volcano in Stromboli, Italy, broken a world record for bungee jumping and dived in the world's longest underwater cave. One of his most memorable travel moments came during a visit to Costa Rica: "Once I slept in a tree, 90 feet up, in the jungle. I woke up at 5:30 in the morning. I was just opening my eyes and looking out over the beauty of the mist and the trees, when a monkey popped up right in front of me, screeching as loudly as it could."

If he had to pick just one place that stands out the most among the 100-plus countries he has visited, it would be India. "It has always been my favourite. There's something that happens to you there. It's total sensory overload. You are bombarded by sights and sounds at every turn. And the people are extraordinary. I feel that the ultimate travel experiences aren't about the destination, but the people. What separates one experience from another is who you meet and what happens when you interact with them. That's the true joy of travel." ▣

Phil Keoghan
Host, *The Amazing Race*



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