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SPRING 2010

AEGEAN ODYSSEY

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The New Vienna
Austria's Cutting-edge City

SPECIAL SECTION Culinary Travel

A Taste of France
On the Trail of Great Chefs

La Vie en Rouge
Wine Immersion in Bordeaux

Chasing the (White) Gold
Truffle Hunting in Piedmont

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HOURS IN SLOVENIA



EUROPE, YOURS TO DISCOVER!

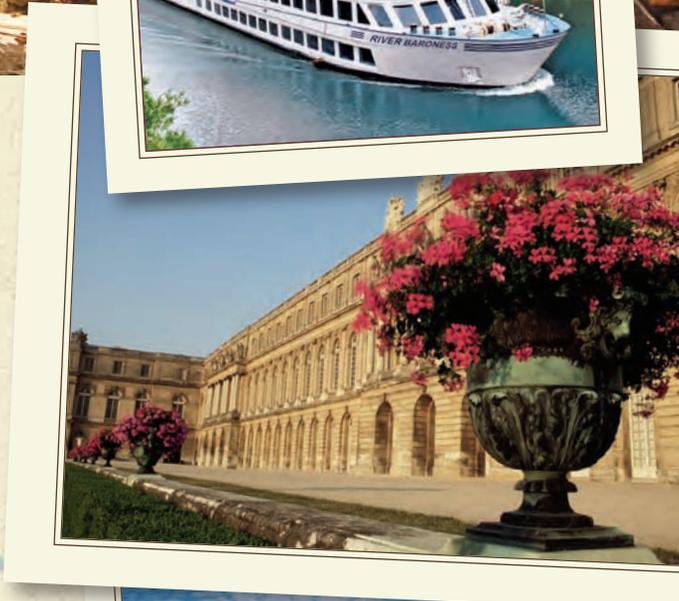
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Cruising

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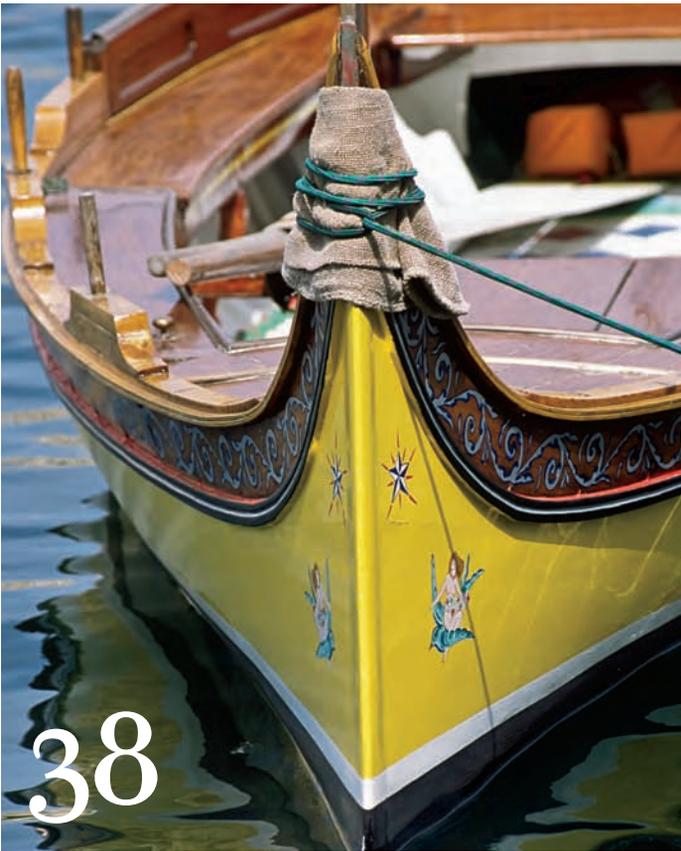
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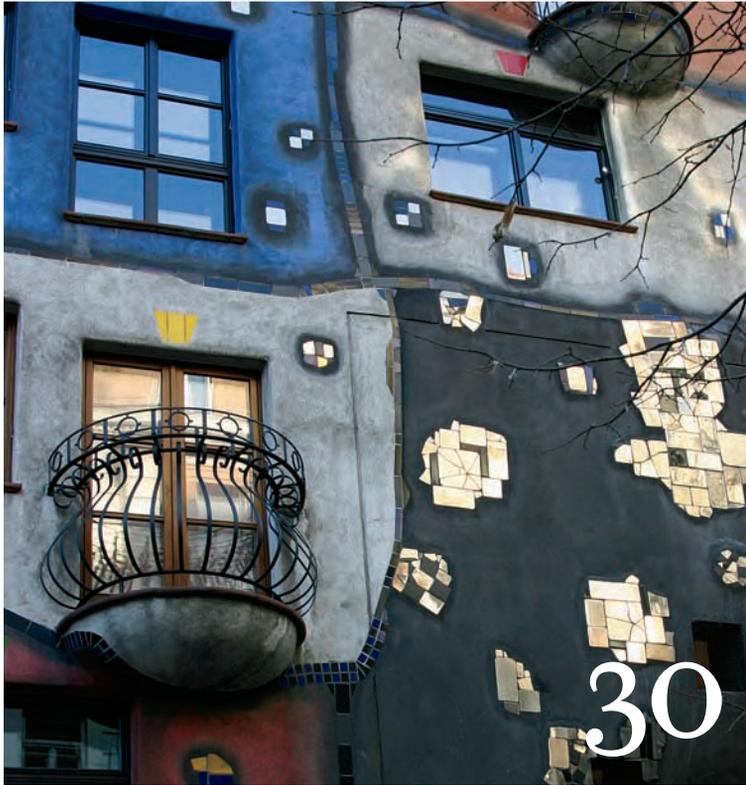
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TICO#1893755

Bon appétit

Food and travel go hand in hand, as inextricably linked as chocolate and caramel. Let's face it: no vacation is a good vacation without at least *some* memorable dining experiences. For me – and most of my friends – one of the most important daily activities while travelling is to ponder when and where we're going to dine; decide which cuisine we're craving that day, which cocktail(s) to enjoy and where to best soak up the local vibe as we indulge ourselves.

Of course, dining is one thing. Learning about food – and how to prepare it – while on vacation takes things to the next level. Culinary travel and epicurean adventures are hot, and movies such as *Julie & Julia* are only stoking the fires of this trend. There's even a tour that winds through Paris and Provence celebrating the culinary genius of Julia Child. There is a renaissance not only in cooking, but also in learning about food and its origins, first-hand and in situ. And where better to start than the motherland of good food: Europe.

Our special *Bon Vivant* culinary travel section focuses on trips and itineraries throughout Europe tailored to the foodie in you. In addition, we'll follow one writer as she goes truffle hunting through Piedmont, discover the venerable



vinegars of Vienna and get reacquainted with whiskey, which has regained its reputation as a status drink. And while some people want to get hands on, others want to get their hands dirty with another growing trend: agrivacations.

If you prefer your meal served in pampered luxury on the high seas, read about the new *Seabourn Odyssey* as it sails the Aegean (page 34), and be sure to check out our special cruise pull-out, filled with enchanting European sailings.

Oenophiles will appreciate 'La Vie en Rouge,' where one of our writers immerses herself (literally) in the wines of Bordeaux (page 26). Plus, get the scoop on some great places to dine in London (page 22) and find recipes and books that honour the food and kitchens of Europe.

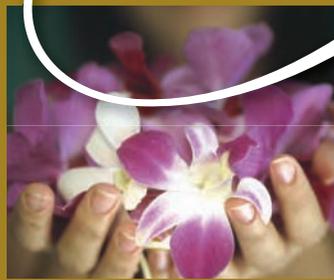
There's more than enough here to tantalize your taste buds and tempt you to travel. And just to give you a little *amuse-bouche* of what's ahead, our next issue of *Vacations* will focus on the United States, Canada, family travel and exotic destinations like Asia and the South Pacific.

In the meantime, *bon voyage* and *bon appétit!* ▣

FEDERICA MARABOLI, EDITOR
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Travel File

Loden green and Austrian crystal



HOTEL IMPERIAL VIENNA – TIMELESS ELEGANCE

The **Hotel Imperial** in Vienna recreates the grandeur and elegance of the Royal Vienna era. This majestic royal palace was originally built in 1863 as the principal Viennese residence of the Prince of Württemberg. Spectacularly located overlooking the historic Ring Boulevard, it is within easy walking distance of the glittering Kärntnerstrasse, the famous State Opera House, Music Hall, St. Stephen's Cathedral and museums.

The palace was transformed into a hotel in 1873 to accommodate high-profile guests for the World's Fair, and since then it has welcomed royalty and celebrities including Queen Elizabeth II and Brangelina. Each room is tastefully furnished with antiques, walls covered in jewel-toned silk and bathrooms made of marble, blending the timeless elegance of 19th-century Vienna with state-of-the-art facilities and amenities.

At the hotel's Café Imperial, ask for the Imperial Tea No. 26, a blend of Darjeeling, green Sencha, bergamot and rose blossoms, and enjoy the world-famous Imperial Torte, which, legend has it, was created in honour of Emperor Franz Josef I. A divine multi-layer extravaganza of marzipan, cocoa and the finest milk chocolate, this torte is a must for all visitors to Vienna.

LODEN VANCOUVER HOTEL

Inspired by the dynamic landscape and waterways of Vancouver, the **Loden** is the newest boutique hotel to crown the city's skyline. Centrally located in fashionable Coal Harbour, it's just a short walk from Stanley Park, as well as the trendy shops and restaurants on Robson Street. This chic retreat combines modern design with natural elements and an earthy palette to create a refreshing urban oasis. Guest rooms feature custom beds, luxe linens, Molton Brown beauty products, yoga mats and a library of wellness DVDs. As an added bonus, a daily infrared spa treatment is available to rejuvenate the body and soul. Stay fit and enjoy Vancouver's outdoors by borrowing a bicycle from the hotel and ride to the seawall or Granville Island.

When it's time to dine, allow your senses to take a journey with chef Marc-André Choquette at **Voya Restaurant & Lounge**. Loden's intimate 80-seat restaurant has a sophisticated decor and features international fusion cuisine that emphasizes fresh local, seasonal and organic ingredients. Before or after dinner, sit back and people-watch as you enjoy a spirited cocktail in the streetside lounge.



Diversions

Innovations and celebrations

Download these: Notable travel iPhone apps

Urbanspoon. Choose restaurants more wisely by checking restaurant reviews searchable by neighbourhood, price point or keywords like 'Thai' or 'vegetarian.'

Lonely Planet Mobile Phrasebooks. With 28 languages available, you'll be able to communicate more easily with this app that shows you the phonetic pronunciation and reads it as well. Though there's a \$10 per language fee, it's well worth it.

SitOrSquat. Gotta go? Finding a public restroom can be tricky in some cities. This app points the way in urban centres in the U.S., Europe, Australia and New Zealand.

The Weather Channel. Find out the details, rain or shine, with a customized list of relevant destinations.



Twitter all-star hitters: Who has the goods on travel?

ZagatBuzz. Stay in the loop on what's happening in foodie and restaurant circles.

NYTimes Travel. Still one of the best sources of travel journalism, the *New York Times* posts late-breaking news, links to features, hotel reviews and more.



CruiseLog. For all things cruise-related, Gene Sloan, *USA Today's* Cruise Log blogger, is the man to follow.

Heather_Poole. Who the heck is she? A flight attendant with a wicked sense of humour and plenty of tales to tell.

WineTravel. If you have a true thirst for imbibing fine vintages, wine educator and travel writer Wink Lorch is a satisfying read.

Openings

In January, **Hôtel Le Germain** opened its latest luxury boutique property in downtown Calgary. It has all the latest bells and whistles – iPod docking stations in all rooms, rainfall showers, ergonomic work spaces and Frette cotton linens. In other Canadian hotel news, the 377-room **Fairmont Pacific Rim** on the Vancouver waterfront is scheduled for opening just before the Winter Olympics, complete with the 11,000-square-foot Willow Stream spa that includes an outdoor patio with water features.

Culture vultures have plenty to celebrate as well, with new museums opening across the globe. The Design Museum Holon in Israel opened on January 31 in a landmark building and Paris's Centre Pompidou is setting up a sister location in Metz for a May opening.

Haute hotels

Luxe designers and international financial players have been lending their trademarks to create hot hotel destinations. From the Swiss Alps to Europe's glamour capitals, there's a new wave of designer brands in town.

Milan's Bold Bulgari Hotel

Now there's a pied-à-terre in the middle of Milan's most elegant district that proclaims all things Bulgari. The designer hotel features black Zimbabwe marble, Vicenza stone and Turkish aphyon to complement its mod tones of caramel and dark chocolate.

Branson's Nightclub in the Swiss Alps

Virgin Group tycoon Richard Branson's alpine hideaway is a favourite among the James Blunt and Hugh Grant crowd. High in the Swiss Alps, his honey pine **The Lodge at Verbier** is equipped with plasma TVs, unlimited Champagne, an indoor pool and steam and spa treatment rooms that just might make you forget to ski.



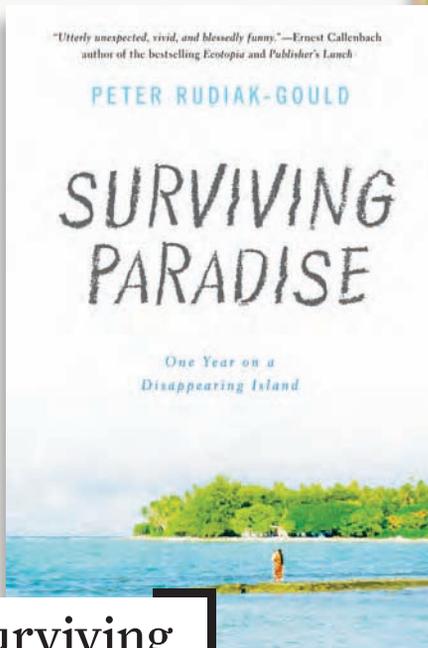
A German Jewel: Breidenbacher Hof

Once an address heralded by kings and queens in the 1800s, the newly revamped **Breidenbacher Hof** is located on **Düsseldorf's** version of Rodeo Drive, **Königsallee**. A major Kuwaiti real estate consortium did a complete facelift on the nine-storey beauty. Suites are styled in gold and vanilla, with full ensuite bathrooms in black marble. No check-in or check-out times mean you can come and go as you please.



Required Reading

Delicious new reads



Surviving Paradise

by Peter Rudiak-Gould

Just a month after his 21st birthday, Rudiak-Gould moved to Ujae, a remote atoll in the Marshall Islands, located 70 miles from the nearest telephone, car, store or tourist and 2,000 miles from the nearest continent. There to teach English, Rudiak-Gould himself becomes a student of life as he experiences culture shock, disillusionment, growth and adventure on his journey. (Union Square Press, \$28.95)



In a Cheesemaker's Kitchen

by Allison Hooper

Twenty-five years ago, well before 'locavorism' was the rage, Hooper co-founded the Vermont Butter & Cheese Company, making cheese "for people who love food and love to cook." This cookbook is an introduction to the art of cheesemaking, explains the intrinsic relationship between agriculture and the cheese we eat and features recipes and interviews with some of the world's most accomplished chefs. (Countryman Press, \$25)



Slow: Life in a Tuscan Town

by Douglas Gayeton

With a combination of arresting portraits and personal handwritten anecdotes from his journey through the heart of Tuscany, Gayeton has created a charming and riveting story: a 'flat film' that celebrates the principles of the Slow Food movement and the people whose lives are devoted to growing, preparing and eating food. A beautiful addition to your coffee table. (Welcome Books, \$62)

Trends: Style Notes



Scent of a Woman

When it came time to revive **Balenciaga's** eponymous designer fragrance (\$110 for 50 ml at Holt Renfrew), the house's edgy creative director Nicolas Ghesquière turned to the extensive archives of founding couturier Cristóbal Balenciaga for inspiration for the bottle design. But for the peppery violet scent inside, he looked to his long-time friend and muse Charlotte Gainsbourg. "It was very important for me to have Charlotte personify my first Balenciaga fragrance," Ghesquière says. "Her unique sense of style, and her graceful and intense talent have always been very inspirational for me." Gainsbourg is a noted French actor and singer (her latest album was produced by Beck, and she scooped Best Actress at the Cannes Film Festival last year for Lars von Trier's *Antichrist*). But she's also the closest thing France has to pop 'royalty' – as the gamine daughter of Gallic singer and provocateur Serge Gainsbourg and English actress and songstress Jane Birkin, for whom Hermès' famous handbag was designed and named.



There's Something About Alice

Tim Burton's much-anticipated Disney version of *Alice in Wonderland* stars Johnny Depp as the Mad Hatter, along with Crispin Glover, Anne Hathaway and Helena Bonham Carter. But Lewis Carroll's eccentricity isn't limited to what the kooky Tim Burton conjures on screen. **You can also wear the whimsy:** Carroll has been the inspiration for designers including Zac Posen, whose latest collection includes plaid Alice mini dresses he dubs "a mash-up between Lewis Carroll and Paloma Picasso."

OPI offers its latest Alice collection with shades like Mad as a Hatter (multicoloured glitter) and Off with Her Red! (\$10.95 at professional salons and spas, 800-341-9999, opi.com). Bad-boy Irish jewellery designer Tom Binns is invited to the mad tea party, too. Along with Swarovski, Binns has created



official limited-edition tie-in pieces including this broken teacup necklace (\$1,000–\$1,500, tombinnsdesign.com) and soon, legendary Paris department store Printemps will display custom Alexander McQueen and Christopher

Kane 'Alice' dresses in its windows. Disney must be smiling like the Cheshire Cat right now.

Trends: Style Notes



Fit to be Tie-Dyed

You may not remember the Summer of Love, but fashion does. All things in fashion being cyclical, bright hippie and **boho ethnic prints and tie-dyes are back in full force**, especially for the beach. The passport to sun and surf comes with these retro prints at cheap-chic trendsetter H&M this winter as sarongs, bikinis and bags for her, and purple, turquoise and fuchsia ombré and dip-dyed trunks and scarves for him – even brightly dyed sandals and mini-kinis for the kids (from \$14, all at H&M, hm.com).



Extreme Makeovers

The 'Mink Mile' on Toronto's Bloor Street is where international fashion group **Hugo Boss has opened its first Canadian flagship store** (83 Bloor St. W., (416) 925-2677). The sleek facade is clad in striated concrete (the world premiere of the new look that will be adopted by all Hugo Boss stores worldwide) and soars three storeys high – you'd hardly recognize the building that was once Bemelmans, the famous Studio 54 of Bay and Bloor in the '80s. Inside there's 12,000 square feet of various BOSS collections, from BOSS Black, Green and Orange (polos in rainbow hues are \$95 each) to any guy's dream, the premium bespoke BOSS Selection range discreetly tucked upstairs.

Flower Power

He's Canadian, yes, but he's also the latest 'It Brit.' And fresh from a series of free catwalk shows at London's famed Victoria & Albert Museum that featured his favourite collection pieces, **Montreal-born fashion designer Erdem Moralioglu** is tipped to make 2010 his year. *The Evening Standard* has named him one of the 1,000 most influential people in London and first ladies from Sarah Brown (wife of the British prime minister) to Michelle Obama are opting for his gorgeously blurry, digital floral prints. But if you can't afford Erdem's upscale clothes, grab one of his fancy notebooks or journals to jot your travel adventures in – they're all bound in Erdem's elaborate spring silk prints and illustrations, exclusively by posh British stationer Smythson (\$195–\$495, erdem.co.uk and smythson.com). For a taste of couture in Erdem's home province, the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec hosts the hot Victoria & Albert exhibit **The Golden Age of Couture** from February 4 to April 25, 2010 (mnba.qc.ca). The retrospective features hundreds of designs by celebrated post-WW II designers Jacques Fath, Givenchy, Norman Hartnell, Hardy Amies, Stiebel and Balmain.



His, Now Hers

So many women dabbed their man's Laliq Encre Noire cologne on themselves that the company has wisely created a proper feminine version of their award-winning cologne, **Encre Noire Pour Elle** (\$105 for 50 ml eau de parfum at Holt Renfrew). Perfumer Christine Nagel augments the original woody vetiver musk scent with voluptuous warm florals like Sicilian bergamot and Turkish rose, encased in a dramatic black lacquered glass inkwell bottle.



Trends: Style Notes



All Dressed Up

Jessica Jensen first made her name at American niche boutiques with covetable handbags – her latest collection features the traditional leather technique of *intrecciato*, Italian for 'basket weave,' on hobos, satchels, clutches and small leathersgoods. But this spring **Jensen expands her everyday luxury brand with a debut collection of modern dresses**, cut in similarly luxurious Italian cotton. Each of the five styles is an enviably simple and very wearable day-to-night silhouette and echoes the citrus, grape, darkened greys and seafoam greens of her handbag collection (dresses \$498, leathers from \$48–\$1,298 at shopjessicajensen.com). Just pack and go.



But of Kors!

Michael Kors makes it very tempting to be a snowbird this winter. At the end of January the one-man designer brand opened a **new 2,000-square-foot boutique in the Bal Harbour Shops** in Miami, alongside designers such as Lanvin, Oscar de la Renta and Chanel. The glossy shop features exuberant items selected from all Kors categories, from ready-to-wear to accessories, footwear, fragrances, sunglasses and watches. But that's not all: the movie-loving designer also has a **new colour collection for Estée Lauder called Very Hollywood**, featuring bright sunshiny shades like blonde mink, starlet peach and bungalow pink, all packaged in chic beige with gold accents and Miami coral cartons (\$25–\$45 at Estée Lauder counters, esteelauder.com). Hot weather, here we come.



City Snap Guide: London

The city that gave us Shakespeare, Dickens and Virginia Woolf has morphed from dodgy neighbourhoods into a collection of trendy upscale districts. Crammed along the Thames River, Britain's capital is filled with famous landmarks. In between the stone and brick facades, the population of more than seven million loves to converge on its financial, entertainment and cultural hubs. By day, historic sites attract culture buffs. By night, the streets are brightly lit in neon, from the wondrous London Eye Ferris wheel to the advertising screens around Piccadilly Circus. London's calling as it prepares to host the 2012 Summer Olympics.



Trafalgar Square

Ilona Kauremszky

Past and present

Prepare to step back in time as you jostle with modernity in London's many neighbourhoods. Now home to financial powerhouses, the historic centre dubbed 'The City' has Roman ruins scattered amid soaring skyscrapers. In **Westminster**, the political and religious hub radiates pomp and circumstance with the **Houses of Parliament**, **Big Ben** and **Westminster Abbey**. Farther west, **Buckingham Palace** overlooks **St. James's Park** with its trumpeter swans, gardens and sprawling manicured lawns. In **Trafalgar Square**, the statue of Horatio Nelson buttressed by bronze lions presides over the crowds vying for a spot by the fountains. **Canada House** abuts the Square and is open to the public. Entrance is free to many exhibits at the **National Gallery**, which houses one of the world's finest art collections.

Culinary delights

London dining has grown up. The foodie scene rivals that of other big cities and Michelin starred chefs have revamped the once drab bangers and mash culinary landscape into a fusion of Asian, Indian and Caribbean influences. Foodies check out *toptable.com* for the latest on London's finest restos offering the best prices. One example is the artfully decorated **Axis** at **One Aldwych** in **Covent Garden**, which serves yummy British treats like sticky toffee pudding with clotted cream. In trendy **Chelsea**, **Tom Aikens Restaurant** gives contemporary French new meaning as the Michelin star winner uses fresh local ingredients in his creations. Try the foie gras terrine with red wine jelly or the succulently tender roast suckling pig.

Sightseeing

Head to the **London Eye** for a bird's-eye view of the city. See **London Bridge**, **St. Paul's Cathedral**, Buckingham Palace and, of course, the Houses of Parliament. For fast and easy getting around, the Tube drops you off at famous stops like **Piccadilly Circus** and **Knightsbridge**, where world-renowned department store **Harrods** is. Buy an Oyster card, a prepaid public transit pass, and you're set. Enjoy the waterfront on London to Greenwich boats that cruise the **Thames** past London Bridge and **Tower Bridge**. The Tate Boat regularly operates between the two Tate galleries: the **Tate Modern** and the **Tate Britain**. For some nostalgia, double-decker Routemaster buses still shuttle sightseers on two iconic heritage routes, numbers 9 and 15.

That's entertainment

London's entertainment scene is as old as Shakespeare himself. Theatre-goers have their pick of countless venues. For plays by the Bard choose Shakespeare's old stomping ground, the reconstructed **Globe Theatre**, and for one of the oldest theatres in London head to the **Old Vic**. The ultramodern **Royal National Theatre** is big among A-list stars like Helen Mirren. Meanwhile, the **Palace Theatre**, located by **Charing Cross** in the city's West End, stages productions like the zany Aussie musical comedy *Priscilla Queen of the Desert* in its opulent historic opera house. For cheap tickets, head to tkts (formerly known as the Half Price Ticket Booth) in **Leicester Square**.

GET AWAY

London Heathrow Airport has expanded with its new **Terminal 5**, dubbed **T5**. Pamper yourself at the **Elemis Travel Spa** or for last-minute shopping hit the high-end boutiques. For fast, hassle-free transfers, the **Heathrow Express** whisks you to **Paddington Station** in just 15 minutes. For a London-Paris jaunt take the plush **Eurostar** and depart from the newly refurbished **St. Pancras International Station**, which boasts plenty of amenities and luxury shops – as well as the longest Champagne bar in Europe.

Cruise News

Royal Caribbean's *Oasis of the Seas*SM – a destination in itself

*Oasis of the Seas*SM, the largest and most revolutionary ship in the world, lived up to all the hype when it made its global debut in November 2009. It spans an incredible 16 decks, measures 225,282 gross registered tons and can accommodate up to 5,400 guests in 2,700 luxurious staterooms.



Royal Caribbean International's newest innovation is so much more than just a cruise ship. It truly is a destination in itself or, as we overheard some guests say, "a floating city." The cruise line is the first to introduce the new neighbourhood concept of seven unique and distinctly themed areas including **Central Park**, **Boardwalk**, the **Royal Promenade**, the **Pool and Sports Zone**, **Vitality at Sea Spa and Fitness Center**, **Entertainment Place** and **Youth Zone**.

There is so much to see and do onboard that ports of call become secondary and guests may opt to just stay on the ship. Whether you're cruising with your family, your sweetheart or going solo, the *Oasis of the Seas*SM appeals to a wide audience.

The hub and main gathering place on the ship is the cobblestoned Royal Promenade, featuring a shopping mall as long as a football field and covered by magnificent arched skylights called 'crystal canopies.' Make sure to visit the **Rising Tide Bar** – the first moving bar at sea – that travels up and down three decks between the Royal Promenade and Central Park. Central Park, an open-air park at sea, really has to be seen to be believed. The Boardwalk neighbourhood is inspired by the seaside piers of yesteryear. But the real draw is the spectacular **AquaTheater** – the first amphitheatre at sea. There are also two 43-foot rock-climbing walls on either side of the theatre,

a zip-line suspended nine decks above the Boardwalk and a hand-crafted carousel. The Entertainment Place offers unique entertainment including **Dazzles**, a dance lounge that features Broadway musicals, and **Studio B**, which has one of the best ice-skating shows you'll ever see. There's also **Jazz 4 Bar**, **Blaze Nightclub**, **Comedy Live**, a Champagne bar and **Casino Royale**. On Deck 15 you'll find the Pool and Sports Zone – an incredible playground featuring a main pool, a beach, sports pool, and the **H2O Zone**, an aqua park for kids. Be sure to experience one of the whirlpools that hang 15 decks over the side of the ship. If you are looking for tranquility, relax on a teak lounge in the open-air adults-only solarium. The Youth Zone is exclusively for teens. It is 28,800 square feet of pure cool. Teens can play video games, try their hand at DJ Hero, just hang out or go to their own private nightclub. The **Ocean Adventures Club** is for infants and children up to 12 years and each age group has their own special room with activities planned exclusively for them. While the kids are busy, why not enjoy an indulgent treatment at Vitality at Sea Spa and Fitness Center? Grab a healthy bite at the **Vitality Café** or work out at the state-of-the-art fitness centre.

You will never have to eat at the same place twice, what with 28 dining options available. If you're craving a more traditional dining experience,

the three-tiered **Opus Dining Room** offers a wonderful five-course menu and is open for breakfast, lunch and dinner – you can choose traditional assigned seating or the more flexible 'My Time Dining.' For more casual dining, the **Windjammer Marketplace** is open for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Or simply order room service and dine privately on your balcony.

The accommodations available on this magnificent marvel of the seas are like no other, with more than 37 different suite and stateroom categories. Choose from the awesome **Royal Loft Suite**, a 1,524-square-foot suite designed like an urban loft with an 843-square-foot balcony, the **Balcony Suites** or **Staterooms**. Inside cabins take on a new meaning with a balcony that overlooks Central Park or the Royal Promenade. The outside balcony staterooms overlook the ocean and allow for greater privacy.

And, to keep in touch while on board, Guest Services is currently experimenting with a new iPhone concept: each member in your party can sign one out and always stay in touch. Children also receive wrist bands with a monitor and small GPS unit, so you will always know where they are.

*Oasis of the Seas*SM is the largest ship in the world, but you will never feel overwhelmed by its size. Looking for an awe-inspiring voyage that will never disappoint? Try the *Oasis* experience.

DETOURS

Cultural Close-up: Highland Hip

Gritty Glasgow and stately Edinburgh have morphed into the new 'it' cities of the U.K. Creative Glaswegians have transformed Victorian buildings into chic restaurants or sleek galleries celebrating the arts. Meanwhile, the cobbled streets of Edinburgh have become a world stage, with many venues hosting a slew of festivals amid the Gothic architecture. Dust off that Scottish tartan...the Highlands are hip.

HISTORY HOUNDS

Hike past glens, lochs and a countryside dotted with castles and you'll feel as though you've stepped into an historical epic. There's **Stirling Castle**, the monumental bastion of countless sieges; **Loch Ness** and its legendary monster, Nessie; and the perennial favourite, **Edinburgh Castle**. In **Glasgow**,



check out the rich legacy of renowned designer and architect Charles Rennie Mackintosh. The **Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum**, home to 8,000 art pieces, recently underwent a £28-million restoration that features high-tech interactive displays next to rare paintings by the world's great masters. A priceless Mackintosh tea room is one

Ilona Kauremszky sets her sights on Scotland

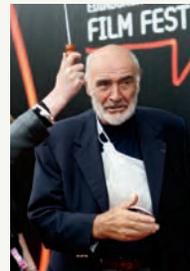
of the museum's new displays. At **George Square**, purchase a ticket for the double-decker hop-on, hop-off bus tour, with a local guide to spin colourful tales about the 21 sites you will encounter.

WORD ON THE STREET

Don't be surprised by the thick brogue or the local dialect of English. *Weegie* is someone from Glasgow; *sounds like a seagull screchin on a wire* means going on and on about something, or butchering a perfectly good song. *Down south* means England and *bonny* means nice or pretty.

FESTIVAL FEVER

Scots love a great party. **Hogmanay**, the annual New Year's bash, is bigger than Christmas. Expect fireworks on **Robert Burns Day** on January 25, a celebration of the beloved



poet's birthday, and kick up your heels at a *ceilidh*, a boot-slapping shindig with plenty of fiddle music. Edinburgh hosts its fair share of festivals: the **Edinburgh International**

Festival (August 13–September 5, 2010); the **Edinburgh Fringe Festival** (August 6–30, 2010); the **Edinburgh International Film Festival** (June 16–27, 2010); and, of course, the **Edinburgh Military Tattoo**. Glaswegians will tell you that they dance and drink more than their neighbours; find out at the **Gourmet Glasgow Food and Drink Festival** and the **World Pipe Band Championships**.

EATS AND TREATS

Scottish grub is no longer about haggis and deep-fried Mars bars; there's a culinary renaissance going on. Posh eateries like **The Kitchin** have even been anointed with a prestigious Michelin star, and owner/chef Tom Kitchin was recently pegged as a 'chef of tomorrow' by French master Alain Ducasse. In Edinburgh, celebrities indulge in chef David Haetzman's modern menu at **The Rutland**, which recently was named 'Most Exciting New Restaurant 2009' at the Scottish Hotel Awards. In the

heart of Glasgow's **Merchant City**, ladies who lunch can be seen at the outdoor patio of **Tuscan Square**, where chef Ferrier Richardson serves healthy Mediterranean fare. **Cafezique**, a new and edgy West End eatery, offers a boho vibe and a clientele that comes for the farm-fresh food. Owner Mhairi Taylor, whose next-door deli has become a popular institution, can often be seen carrying fresh vegetables and chunks of cured pork into the hip bistro. Try the divine **Cullen skink**, a traditional Scottish



soup of fresh haddock morsels and potato chunks in a rich, creamy broth. Prices are reasonable; a two-course lunch starts at £10.

HANG YOUR HAT

Take old haunts, add modern architecture and hip local designers and you get trendy hotels perfect for those looking to sleep in style. Off the **Royal Mile** in Edinburgh, the new **Hotel Missoni** is



dressed in monochromatic black and white, mixed with bold bursts of candy colours. At the western end of **Princes Street**, The Rutland features 12 distinctly glamorous rooms in 'modern baroque' style with the latest high-tech gadgets. Every bedside has a copy of a Rebus murder mystery by local author Ian Rankin. At the new **Saint Judes** boutique hotel in Glasgow, the suites' 'party' aesthetic is no surprise – the owners cut their teeth as local bar proprietors. Some rooms hearken back to disco days with sleek black lamps and faux fur pillows, but the overall vibe is one of cosmopolitan Zen.



Reporting On Location from Italy: Francesca Ponzi

Creating extraordinary experiences is what we do best. As a member of Ensemble Travel® Group, we have access to exclusive programs like Ensemble® On Location, a network of worldwide resources and expert in-destination specialists. Ask us for more information.

What best describes your role?

I work with Ensemble travel agents and their clients to create unique itineraries throughout Italy – everything from the most simple to the most customized journey. Given that I was born and raised here, I have a lot of knowledge and ‘insider tips’ that can really make a difference to the planning. Simply put, I like to think of myself as someone who helps make your dreams of Italy come true!

How did you get started in the travel industry?

I have loved the world of travel since I was a little girl and, being born and raised in Florence, I adore my home city (who wouldn’t?!). I wanted to combine my two passions: helping people to travel and to explore my incredibly beautiful country.

What surprises people the most when they visit Italy?

It does not matter how many times you’ve been to Italy, my country always keeps hidden treasures for every visitor. No matter how often you come, there is always something new and wonderful to discover. Most people spend too much time in the famous cities, but there are also lots of smaller places rich in history and culture

such as Verona and Siena and hundreds of small towns that go unexplored. And how beautiful and peaceful Italy can be in the early spring and fall when the tourist rush has not yet begun!

What is popular now with visitors to Italy?

In the past few years, probably the hottest trends are wine tours, cooking lessons and villa rentals. Italy is well known for its outstanding food and wines – this is absolutely the best place in the world to taste excellent wines, visit the most prestigious cellars and vineyards where they are produced and try authentic and unique meat and fish dishes for the first time.

What is the most exciting vacation package you have coordinated?

Last year I planned a custom three-week itinerary for a large family. They wanted to see most of Italy, starting in Sicily and ending in Milan. I reserved wonderful properties for them and arranged for extraordinary experiences such as an early morning visit to the Vatican Museums in Rome, a dinner with locals in a private home in southern Italy, and even a helicopter tour from Sicily to Puglia. It was the trip of a lifetime for them! ▣



Table setting at Les Sources de Caudalie;
grape harvesting: Le Café Bordelais.



Anita Draycott
immerses herself –
literally – in the wines
of Bordeaux and tests
the phenomenon of
the French paradox.

La Vie

I'd like to believe that there's some truth to the 'French paradox' theory. That's why I'm soaking in a barrel of mineral water and red wine extracts at the Caudalie **Vinothérapie Spa** on the **Château Smith Haut Lafitte** wine estate in **Bordeaux, France**.

The term **French paradox** was coined in 1992 by Dr. Serge Renaud, a scientist at Bordeaux University, after years of research. The paradox?



© CHARLES GRAHAM

en Rouge

The French consume one of the world's richest diets, including gobs of butter and cream, unpasteurized cheeses, and let's not forget French pastries, yet they tend to be less obese, live longer and have lower rates of coronary heart disease than folks in other industrialized countries.

The key to this phenomenon, as postulated by Dr. Renaud, is their daily consumption of a glass or two of wine,

preferably red, which contains powerful antioxidants that control blood pressure and reduce clots.

So, if those grapes work their magic internally, what about externally? Coincidentally, in 1993 at the Château Smith Haut Lafitte vineyards where Mathilde Cathiard-Thomas and her husband were taking part in the family grape harvest, they met Professor Vercauteren, the visiting head of the Bordeaux Faculty of Pharmacy. Seeing the heap of grape skins and seeds about to be discarded, Vercauteren remarked that they were wasting "a veritable treasure." Grape skins and pips are rich in polyphenols that fight the free radicals responsible for wear and tear on the body and for aging skin. Mathilde was intrigued. When she discovered a natural mineral spring under some of the vines, she decided to mix the therapeutic water with the grape extracts. *Et voilà*, the world's first



Vinothérapie Spa and a line of **Caudalie** skin care products were born. (Caudalie is a term that describes the length of a wine's aftertaste on the palate. The more caudalies the better.) Here at **Les Sources de Caudalie** visitors can enjoy total wine immersion: spa treatments that include a **Crushed Cabernet Scrub** and a **Pulp Friction Sculpting Massage**, award-winning wines from the estate and hospitality at one of France's most charming country establishments.

It's an 'all in the family' collaboration between Mathilde, who oversees the spa and product line, her sister Alice, who designed and runs the hotel, and parents Florence and Daniel Cathiard, former members of the French national ski team, who operate the organic winery.

Naturally there's fine dining and a 15,000-bottle wine cellar. There's even a bar called French Paradox in honour of the benefits of the grape.

WINE 101

My friend Jiska and I actually began our wine immersion a few days earlier at the **École du Vin** in the city of Bordeaux. For only €25 each we spent the morning learning that Bordeaux is the largest wine-producing region in the world, with 57 appellations and 10,000 estates. No wonder a wine list here can be intimidating. I also gleaned that the gravelly soil on the **left bank** of the **Garonne** and **Gironde** rivers is ideal for **Cabernet Sauvignon**, whereas the limestone and clay soil on the **right bank** is better for **Merlot** and **Cabernet Franc**. We washed down all this knowledge with a tasting of four regional vintages. Unless you're a teetotaler, I recommend this beginner course before you start your exploration of the fruits of the vine. Besides, you'll want to spend

at least a day visiting Bordeaux, the vibrant capital of the region, designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2007. Like a great wine, it too seems to improve with age.

In addition to the benefits of a couple of glasses of wine per day, researchers have also determined that French eating habits contribute to their slim figures and longevity. Instead of gulping down fast food from a styrofoam box, the French tend to spend more time enjoying the pleasures of the table. However, they eat smaller portions of high-quality food and they don't snack. They also walk a lot.

Next to a fine meal and a good bottle of wine, nothing pleases me more than hiking 18 fairways. I discovered that in between all those vines, the Bordeaux area is dotted with a dozen golf courses. The **Golf du Médoc Hôtel & Spa** boasts two of the best. Their **Châteaux** course,



Pool at Les Sources de Caudalie Spa;
bottles of Bordeaux at rest;
room at Les Sources de Caudalie.

host to the 1999 French Open and several other major tournaments, was designed in a Scottish style by architect Bill Coore. The other 18-hole **Vignes** course, by Canadian architect Rod Whitman, has more of a parkland feel. You know you're in wine country because each hole is named after a château or grand cru from the **Médoc** region and the distance markers are in the form of wine bottles. Just a few kilometres away, the **Relais de Margaux Meeting and Resort Hotel, Golf and Spa** is tucked into the heart of the famous vineyards of **Château Margaux**. The 18-hole course runs along the scenic Gironde estuary, with fairways lined by mature oaks and elms and graceful swans gliding around the many ponds.

From Margaux we embarked upon the fabled **D2 Médoc Wine Route**, also known as the **Châteaux Road**. I felt as though I were driving through a prestigious wine list as I passed the estates of **Lafite Rothschild**, **Latour** and **Pichon Longueville**, to name a few.

In the **Pauillac** appellation, approximately a seven-iron from Château Lynch-Bages, owner Jean-Michel Cazes has built a village where his local winegrowers and craftsmen live and work. There's a bazaar selling vintages from the region, a traditional bakery and **Café Lavinal**, a cozy eatery frequented by locals and tourists alike. It was here, in this unpretentious brasserie serving bistro-style dishes such as liver pâté and beef stew, that I enjoyed the best glass of wine in my life (okay, I confess: two glasses). It was a 1998 Château Lynch-Bages. My pal Jiska took a sip and sighed. "It's like the baby Jesus in velvet shorts." Perhaps not exactly the terminology of a true wine connoisseur, but I got her drift. It was certainly divine.

Boy, I hope the French paradox is true. ▣

JACQUELINE SWARTZ

For years I'd heard that **Vienna** was a dreary city stuck in the past, getting by on Mozart and Sachertorte. But anyone who has been there in recent years will tell a different story. Vienna has transformed itself into a city humming with creative energy. The grand 19th-century buildings that so define the city now feature street-level stores and boutiques with cutting-edge design, crafts and clothing. This small, walkable city has a feeling of openness all the more inviting because prices are lower than in other major European capitals.

Musically, electronica, one of whose birthplaces was Vienna, coexists with opera. Chefs are using the plentiful local produce to make creative versions of old classics. A former red-light district, **Gürtel** has become the site of bars and clubs, each one tucked within the arches beneath an elevated railway bridge designed by famed art nouveau architect Otto Wagner, who is also known for his decorative subway stations.

This former capital of the **Hapsburg Empire** can never forget its past, not with so many baroque buildings and formal gardens and so much classical music. But the past that draws me is Vienna's golden *fin de siècle*, the turn of the 20th century, when Vienna was the cultural hub of Europe and the capital of the **Austro-Hungarian Empire**, which encompassed some 15 different nationalities.

What a time: Gustav Klimt was painting *The Kiss*, while Freud was exploring the subconscious. Mahler was composing his heartbreaking music (and lying on Freud's couch anguishing over his wife Alma's infidelity). From the Arts and Crafts movement, known as the Wiener Werkstätte, emerged art deco-like designs that still beguile today. The stylish, provocative eroticism of that time remains part of the Vienna vibe, along with a robust enthusiasm for the arts and design.

In downtown Vienna, for instance, the destination for glassware is **Lobmeyr**. Modern designs are sold by the 187-year-old company (some are displayed in New York's Museum of Modern Art). But the reproductions from the early 1900s still seem fresh and appealing. (Kärntnerstrasse 26)



©SIME / iSTOCK PHOTO



FIN DE SIÈCLE
A NEW VIENNA

HOCHRIEGL

Das System, das Dir passiert wann.



Classic chocolatier Altmann & Kühne, located on the main downtown pedestrian-only shopping street, sells miniature versions of its delicious wares, such as chocolate-covered marzipan and nougat in tiny patterned boxes. One, the winner of a design contest, is in the form of a steamer trunk; another, a hatbox. (Graben 30)

Nowhere is the new, dynamic Vienna linked more creatively to its past than in the **MuseumsQuartier (MQ)**. One of the largest museum districts in the world, it opened in 2001 with museums, restaurants and performance spaces covering an area of 60,000 square metres, with cobblestone quadrangles tying it together and the former Emperor Franz Joseph's baroque cavalry stables as the flagship. The location is ideal. Just beyond are the **Museum of Fine Arts** and the **Hofburg Imperial Palace**; behind them, the up-and-coming **7th District**, with its avant-garde shops and cozy bistros.

"In the beginning, it was difficult to develop the concept, which is absolutely unique in size and variety," remarks MuseumsQuartier director Wolfgang Waldner. But the project became an urban success story. "A whole area came alive," he explains. "Now, when people come to Vienna the MQ is the place to go." On its periphery is **Quartier 21**, with artists' studios and fashion and design shops. It's edgy yet welcoming, like the **Musik Tank**, where the friendly staff invite you to download Viennese music – legally.

When the weather gets warm, moulded plastic seating is spread out in the **MQ courtyard**, in colours that change every year. Designed by architects, these plastic chaises longues are typical of the new Vienna, where contemporary design mixes with grandiose palaces and turn-of-the-century buildings that still look contemporary today.

After lunch at Milo, a casual restaurant/café next to the MQ's architecture museum (**Architekturzentrum Wien**), I walked over to the **Leopold Museum**. If you're looking for Vienna's *fin de siècle*, this is the place to go. It has the world's largest collection of works by figurative painter Egon Schiele; there are also paintings by his teacher, Gustav Klimt, as well as other contemporaries like Oskar Kokoschka. A permanent exhibit called **Vienna 1900** is a *fin-de-siècle* paradise. On the wall are quotations from Sigmund Freud: "The unconscious is the true psychological reality." Freud famously asked "What do women want?" Klimt's paintings of women in frankly

FINE ARTS MUSEUM, MUSEUM CAFÉ (middle)
HUNDERTWASSER HAUS (bottom)

erotic reveries seem to hint at an answer. I put on a set of headphones dangling from a circular couch and listened to Mahler's bittersweet melodies. It was the perfect soundtrack for a time of both elegance and dissonance, with a waning monarchy that would dissolve soon after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in 1914. The shots that started World War I also shattered Vienna's empire.

In the architecture section of the Vienna 1900 exhibit was a video of some of Vienna's famous buildings. The **Secession Building**, which opened in 1898, was the architectural expression of the movement started by Klimt. But who needs a video when the real thing is just across town? The building is resplendent, with its white cubes topped by a gold leaf covered dome. It still functions as a gallery and is well worth visiting.

Across the street, Vienna's most popular market, the **Naschmarkt**, goes on for blocks. Several hundred years old, its outdoor stalls sell local produce (during the spring don't miss the asparagus and apricots), as well as the pastries that Vienna is famous for. Pastries, of course, are best eaten in one of the city's grand cafés. **Café Sperl**, built in 1880, has high ceilings, plush upholstery and brass fittings, and you can linger as long as you want, perhaps over one of the many newspapers attached to wooden sticks. From the extensive coffee menu I chose a *Melange*, the Viennese version of café au lait, and a voluptuous apple strudel with a delicate, thin crust. (www.cafesperl.at)

Viennese cuisine borrows many of the dishes of its neighbours – **Hungary**, the **Czech Republic**, **Slovakia**, even **Italy**. Today, with the fall of the Iron Curtain and the rise of the **European Union**, the neighbours are back, with no passport necessary. Just one more reason Vienna, you might say, is the new Vienna. ▣

SOME FAVOURITES

RESTAURANT

Zum Schwarzen Kameel (the Black Camel) in the chic 1st District. As soon as you enter, there's a busy bar serving open-faced sandwiches and salads. In the next room is an elegant restaurant with gold leaf walls and a noted chef. His luscious specialty is lobster with sauerkraut, in a sauce of lobster broth, cream and paprika. ([Bognergasse 5, www.kameel.at](http://www.kameel.at))

SPA

Hotel Sacher. The historic hotel's large spa opened just three years ago. Peachy beige and black marble create an aura of glamour. The thermal areas – a sauna and steam room with three different kinds of herbs to choose from – add serenity. Playing on the theme of chocolate – the famous Sachertorte cake was invented by the father of the founder of the hotel – the signature treatment is called Dream of Chocolate, and starts with an exfoliation with cocoa beans. ([Philharmonikerstrasse 4, www.sacher.com](http://www.sacher.com))

NEW CAFÉ

Das Möbel. This casual, low-key café, typical of the trendy 7th District, serves great brunches and is known for its stunning furniture, which is available for purchase at the accompanying store. ([Burggasse 10, www.dasmoebel.at](http://www.dasmoebel.at))

EVENTS

Gustav Mahler (1860–1911) is celebrated as an innovative genius and one of the pioneers of 20th-century music. The composer's 150th birthday celebrations will take place in 2010, followed next year by the 100th anniversary of his death. (www.mahler.vienna.info)



(top) THE SECESSION BUILDING
(middle) TYPICAL STAND AT THE NASCHMARKT

Aegean Odyssey

*Toby Saltzman explores
the cradle of civilization
in true luxury aboard
Seabourn's newest yacht*

Flaming torches cast an auspicious glow on the glories of antiquity as we dined under indigo skies in **Ephesus**. Serenaded by the classical strains of the Aegean Chamber Orchestra, we sipped brandies while savouring the glorious evening – compliments of the **Yachts of Seabourn**, staged in the heart of one of the world's most magnificent ancient sites – and the emotions Ephesus aroused. The poignant reverence for sacred shrines: the lone pillar of the **Temple of Artemis** – revered today as one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World – and the house where the Virgin Mary is believed to have sought refuge. We felt as though we were following in the footsteps of history while treading the time-polished marble streets – where Cleopatra once strutted triumphantly to meet Mark Antony – to the vestiges of Greek, Roman and Byzantine cultures. And being awestruck by the towering facade of the **Library of Celsus**, the scope of the **Amphitheatre** and the architectural grace of the **Temple of Hadrian**, its arch resplendent with bas reliefs.

As the torches dimmed, we left Ephesus for the comfort of the **Seabourn Odyssey**, all agreeing that the seven-day **Aegean Odyssey** itinerary had turned out to be more than just a pleasure cruise.

It had become an enthralling voyage in the cradle of civilization on a ship that had proven to be a destination in itself, a floating sanctuary for a discriminating clientele with a penchant for experiencing worldly culture.

To start at the beginning, we boarded the new 450-passenger **Odyssey** in **Istanbul, Turkey**. After touring the boisterous city – its iconic **Blue Mosque** and **Hagia Sophia**, and the splendid Ottoman treasures in **Topkapi Palace** – and haggling for souvenirs in the **Grand Bazaar**, we were delighted to find our spacious balcony suite laden with Champagne, flowers, fresh fruit and personal stationery, and the bar stocked with our pre-selected choices of wine and liquor. After checking out the plush furniture, elegant cabinetry, walk-in closet and granite-clad bathroom with twin sinks, separate shower stall and tub, as well as a personal Internet and entertainment system offering dozens of movies and music on demand, we dashed out to explore the ship.

Having previously sailed on – and loved – all three of Seabourn's original 208-passenger yachts – the **Spirit**, **Pride** and **Legend** – I was eager to see the design innovations of the highly anticipated **Odyssey**. My verdict: dazzling.

STATUE OF APHRODITE OVERLOOKING THE AEGEAN



Outdoors, lovely spaces encourage mingling or solitude. At the top of the ship on Deck 11, the forward terrace is a lofty retreat with double lounges facing the horizon. Glass-walled terraces on Deck 9 overlook the central pool, which is flanked by twin canopied whirlpools. Deck 6 has a whirlpool tucked away romantically in the bow, and Deck 5 has an aft terrace and plunge pool. Meanwhile, absolute solace is available (by half-day reservations) in two spa villas that include a private terrace and whirlpool. The two-storey spa itself – the largest and most lavish on any luxury ship – boasts a hydro-pool and a fitness studio with a Kinesis wall, and offers myriad therapies, from a 24-karat gold facial to Thai massage.

Indoors, a glass-walled circular staircase links the show lounge, three restaurants, bars and casino to Deck 7, the social heart of the ship, called Seabourn Square. It houses the concierge desks, library, computer court, shops, a specialty coffee/pastry bar and an aft terrace that's an airy retreat for quiet reading.

Exploring the *Odyssey* was one thing; experiencing it defined a new dimension in the realm of luxury cruising. Seabourn's legendary style and service – which in our experience meant practically anything you wanted, whenever you wanted it – came to life during the first of the daily sail-away parties as we left Istanbul for the **Bosphorus**, passing quaint fishing villages and ancient ruins, with the band playing on deck as waiters proffered Champagne, caviar and foie gras hors d'œuvres. Dinner that night in the opulent restaurant was a sumptuous affair featuring wines to match the beef tenderloin, Nigerian shrimp, Dover sole and delectable crème brûlée topped with berries. We learned there would be no end to the choices: we were invited to order anything our tastes desired – even items not on the exhaustive menu inspired by celebrated chef Charlie Palmer.

Early next morning we enjoyed breakfast on our balcony while gazing at the turquoise waters and sun-drenched coastal scenery. Approaching the Turkish port of **Dikili**, the guest lecturer put into historic context the treasured art and archaeology we would see during our excursion to ancient **Pergamum** (present-day **Bergama**). For all his





COURTESY OF SEABOARD



Hercules Gate at Ephesus



COURTESY OF SEABOARD

descriptions, we still stood breathless at the **Acropolis**, awed by the **Temple of Athena**, the **Altar of Zeus**, the Roman amphitheatre terraced into the side of a hill and the **Byzantine church** prized as one of the **Seven Churches of Revelation**.

The picturesque resort of **Bodrum** presented quandaries: visit the Turkish market, famed for carpets and leather goods; the flowery gardens of **King Mausolus' Mausoleum**, another of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World; the 15th-century castle of the **Knights of St. John**; the **Museum of Underwater Archaeology**; or try scuba diving amid the **Mediterranean's** lush sea life?

Everyone was on deck as we approached **Santorini**, the southernmost island in the **Greek Cyclades**. The captain circled its surrounding ocean crater, allowing brilliant views of the multi-layered volcanic island, its sparkling white buildings and blue-domed chapels. While oenophiles visited the wineries, other passengers prowled the warren of alleys for local crafts.

A day of pure pleasure followed in the bay at **Milos**, when the captain dropped anchor amid the shimmering azure waters and opened the *Odyssey's* aft marina, allowing all the toys out to play: water skis, kayaks, pedal boats, sailboards, banana boats and rafts.

Sailing through the narrow waters to **Nafplion** the next morning, anticipation soared for the treasured antiquities of the Mycenaean people of the Peloponnese, who flourished from 1900 BC to 1125 BC, including the **Treasury of Atreus** (also known as **Agamemnon's Tomb**) in **Mycenae**. Standing inside the millennia-old Treasury of Atreus – a mammoth domed tomb with no interior supporting walls – reminded us of the amazing expertise of the ancient world's vanished societies and the priceless value of their archaeological legacies, as well as our reasons for visiting this corner of the world.

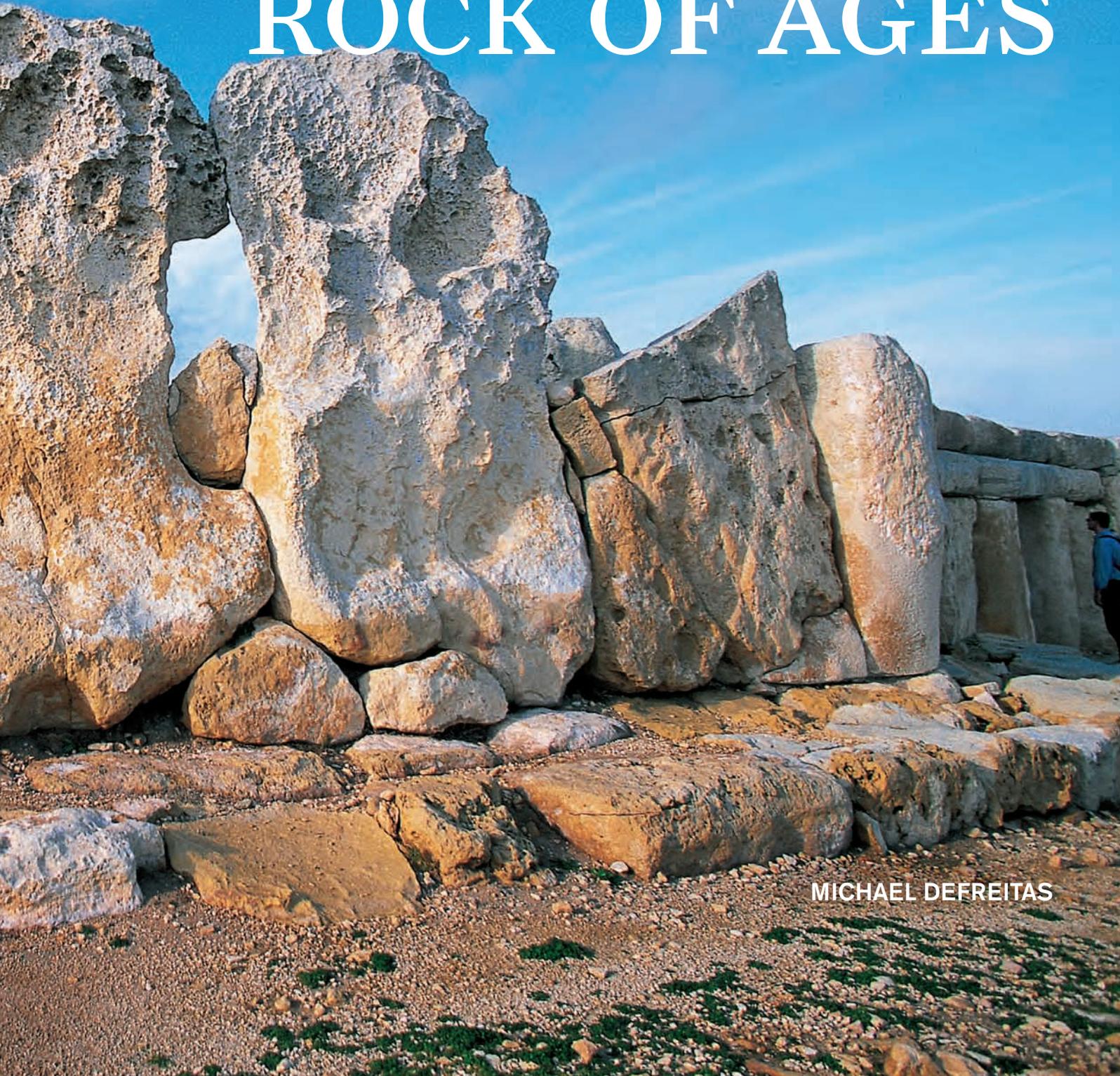
Praise for the *Odyssey* abounded as we lingered on deck for the final sail-away festivities en route to **Piraeus, Greece**. And it's no wonder. Life aboard the *Seabourn Odyssey* is simply sublime. ▣



Hagar Qim, ruins of the Solar Temple

© STEPHAN STOLZFUSS

MALTA: ROCK OF AGES



MICHAEL DEFREITAS

As I stepped through the low archway of **Hagar Qim** – one of Malta’s prehistoric megalithic temples – it was like stepping through a time portal. I entered a courtyard circled with immense upright stones, the largest almost seven metres high and weighing about 20 tonnes. Around the courtyard were four chambers or apses, arranged like a giant cloverleaf. Each apse contained sacrificial altars and stone benches.

Many archaeologists believe the more than 5,000-year-old temple to be the oldest free-standing monument in the world – predating both the Egyptian pyramids and Stonehenge by almost 1,000 years. It’s certainly the oldest site of its kind in Europe, and in 1980 UNESCO designated it a World Heritage Site (one of three in Malta).

MALTA’S MELTING POT

For millennia, the azure **Mediterranean** has nourished a succession of civilizations, prompting many historians to refer to it as ‘the cradle of Western civilization.’ And smack dab in the middle of this cradle, at the crossroads of Europe, Africa and the Middle East, lie the tiny, captivating islands of Malta.

Over the past 7,000 years, the Phoenicians, Romans, Knights of St. John, Normans, Turks, Spanish, French and British have all added their own ingredients to the country’s culturally eclectic melting pot. No other European country offers a more diverse blend of history and culture in such a small package (only Vatican City, San Marino, Monaco and Liechtenstein are smaller).

Malta’s language, religion and cuisine are the more obvious examples of its pot-luck culture. **Maltese**, the national language, is a Semitic tongue fused with **North African dialects, Arabic, Italian, French and English** (the second official language). The main religion is Roman Catholicism (Malta is one of the most Roman Catholic countries in the world), but the country’s constitution provides for freedom of religion, so you will also find a number of Mormon, Jewish, Protestant, Muslim and even Buddhist congregations. Like its language, Malta’s cuisine is a simmering mélange of **Sicilian, Tunisian, Spanish and French** influences. The country’s national dish is the spicy, Sicilian-inspired *stuffat tal-fenek* (rabbit stew).

VALLETTA - THE FORTRESS CITY

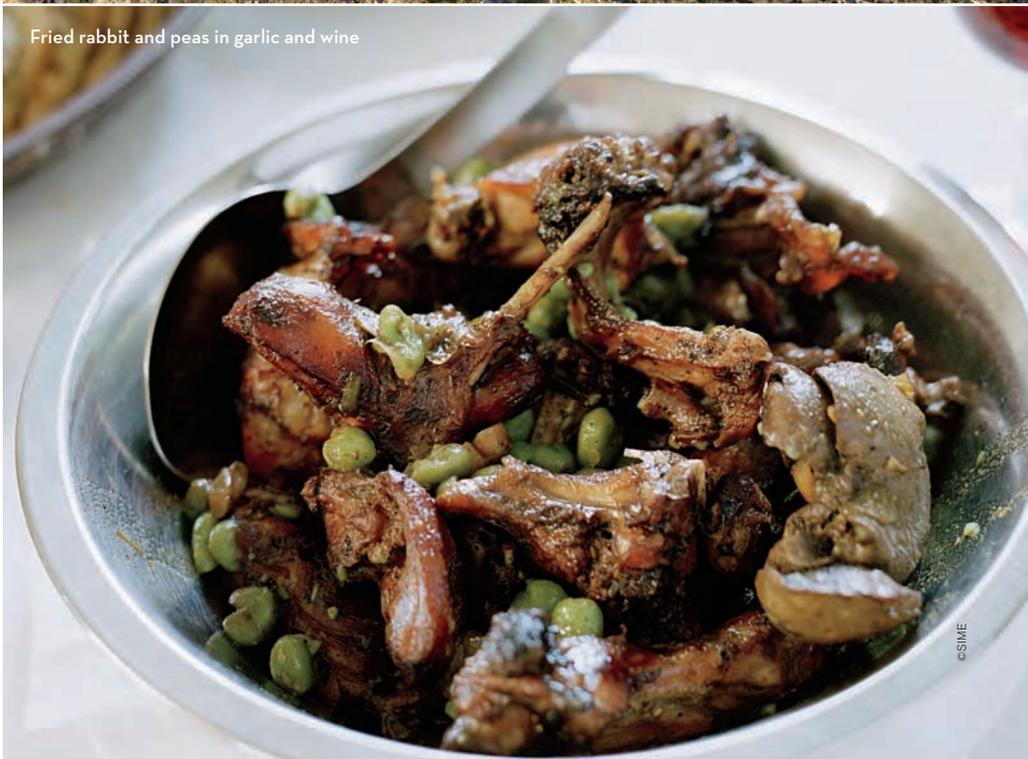
When UNESCO designated **Valletta** a World Heritage Site in 1980, it referred to Malta’s small capital as “one of the most



Bus in Valletta



View near Fungus Rock, Gozo



Fried rabbit and peas in garlic and wine



Grand Master's Palace, Neptune Courtyard

concentrated historic areas in the world.” Valletta is famous for its well-preserved baroque architecture and massive fortifications that ring **Grand Harbour** – among the largest in the Mediterranean.

Votive statues and majestic 16th- and 17th-century baroque structures like the **National Museum of Fine Arts**, a 1571 rococo palace and the 1574 **Sacra Infermeria** line many of the city’s narrow cobblestone streets.

The country’s most significant historical event occurred in 1565, when about 600 **Knights of St. John** (the origin of the St. John’s Ambulance organization), along with 6,000 soldiers and townsfolk, held the massive 40,000-strong Turkish army of Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent at bay for four months until help arrived.

OTHER MAIN ISLAND DISTRACTIONS

Perched atop a low rocky rise near the country’s west coast sits the aristocratic walled city of **Mdina**, affectionately called the **Silent City** because cars are banned inside the city walls. Malta’s oldest city, Mdina was the country’s political centre from 800 BC until the rise of Valletta in the mid-1500s.

Wander through the quiet, narrow cobblestone streets lined with intimate cafés and shops or visit the famous **Catacombs of St. Paul and St. Agatha’s Crypt** just outside the city walls in the village of **Rabat**.

Tucked into a deep bay on the southeast coast, colourful **Marsaxlokk** is Malta’s most photographed village and one of the country’s oldest ports (circa 870 BC). Hundreds of small fishing vessels (or *luzzu*) painted in traditional red, yellow, blue and green bob in the bay’s quiet water. Painted on the prow of each boat are the ‘eyes of Osiris,’ which fishermen believe help guide them home safely.

West of Marsaxlokk, the sea’s relentless pounding has carved out six huge caves along Malta’s rugged south coast. The largest and most impressive is the 45-metre-high **Blue Grotto** with its magnificent cobalt blue waters (caused by sunlight reflecting off the cave’s sandy bottom). Get there early in the morning, when reflected sunlight dances across the various mineral deposits in the cave walls to produce a rainbow of blue, orange, purple and green highlights.

GOZO...THE ISLAND OF MYTHS AND MIRACLES

Malta’s smaller, less populated and more rural sister, **Gozo**, has similar distractions as its bigger sibling, but much better

beaches. It’s where residents from the big island come to relax.

The wide ochre sands of **Ramla il-Hamra** beach, one of Malta’s loveliest, fringe the north coast near **Xaghra**. It’s a popular vacation spot for winter-weary Europeans. A trail on the west side of the beach leads up the terraced headland to **Calypso’s Cave**, named after the place where legend has it the beautiful nymph Calypso kept Odysseus as a ‘prisoner of love,’ as Homer related in the epic *Odyssey*. The smaller and less crowded strands of **Hondoq ir-Rummien**, **Mgarr ix-Xini** and **San Blas Bay** are popular with young couples.

Despite its roll call of rulers, Malta is not a precinct of Rome, a Turkish outpost or a remnant of colonial Britain, but a rare Mediterranean microcosm. Its remote location keeps the tourist masses at bay, and its sun-drenched beaches, ancient ruins, baroque architecture and old-world multicultural charm create the perfect backdrop for a unique European experience. ▣

MALTA’S MUST-DOs:

Peperoncino

Located in Balluta, just north of Valletta, the cozy Peperoncino restaurant with its intimate terrace and Maltese ambience brings new meaning to the words ‘fresh fish.’ Diners select the seafood they want and tell the chef how they want it prepared.

Hypogeum

Located in Hal-Saflieni on the main island, the Hypogeum (3000 BC–2500 BC) is the only prehistoric underground temple in the world. Originally used as a sanctuary, it became a necropolis (cemetery) during Roman times.

Malta’s Buses

No visit would be complete without a ride on one of Malta’s 500 antique buses. These red, white and orange relics are not only fun to ride, but also an efficient way to explore the island.

Ggantija Temples

Gozo’s two prehistoric Ggantija Temples date from around 3600 BC–3000 BC. Some resident archaeologists argue that they are older than Hagar Qim.

Blue Lagoon

Tiny Comino Island lies halfway between Gozo and Malta. The island’s main attraction, the turquoise Blue Lagoon, appeared in the movie *Troy*, starring Brad Pitt, and offers fabulous snorkelling and swimming.



Luzzu fishing boat

©DEGREE

©MICHAEL DEPRETAS



36 HOURS IN SLOVENIA

Debra Conkey

What country was named the No. 5 destination in the world by *National Geographic Traveler* in late 2009 for “balancing tourism with cultural and historical preservation”? Which city has all the charm of **Prague** – without the tourist hordes – and blends Slavic, Italian and Austrian cultures in an Old World, yet modern, setting?

Tiny **Slovenia**, with its dome- and steeple-studded capital city of **Ljubljana** (pronounced lu-blee-ah-nah) – once part of the former **Yugoslavia** – is the perfect stop for a short visit. Bordered by the **Adriatic Sea, Italy, Austria, Hungary** and **Croatia**, Slovenia is a friendly country where many people speak English, and where the prices are even friendlier.



LAKE BLEĐ

The mix of Austrian baroque, Viennese *Jugendstil* (art nouveau), modern and medieval architecture in Ljubljana's Old Town centre is part of its appeal. From **Venice**, you can reach the city in four or five hours by train, and it's within a day's journey from **Munich**, **Vienna**, **Salzburg** and **Budapest**.

After reading about its similarities to Prague, I squeezed Ljubljana into my itinerary en route to **Croatia**. But a private guide is essential. When time is short, you'll get a more thorough grasp of history and culture from a local's perspective than you will from a guidebook.

WEDNESDAY

London to Ljubljana

12:20 a.m.

After a short flight on the Slovenian carrier Adria Airways from London, we arrive in Ljubljana just past midnight. (EasyJet has flights, too, though not daily.) We relax in the comfortable art nouveau landmark, **Grand Hotel Union**, just steps from colourful Prešeren Square.

Ljubljana to Lake Bled

8:00 a.m. to 9:20 a.m.

After a scrumptious buffet breakfast at the hotel, including cheese blintzes and thick hot chocolate, we catch the 8:00 a.m. bus to **Lake Bled** for less than €7. The on-board polka music quickly transports us to simpler times, as do the alpine meadows, small mountain villages and jagged peaks whizzing past the windows.

Romantic Lake Bled

9:30 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.

Since our eventual destination is the sun-kissed coast of nearby Croatia, I am surprised by the area's Swiss-like alpine landscape (though Slovenia is about half the size of Switzerland). Tina, our guide, explains that 52 percent of Slovenia is covered with forest. At Lake Bled, we gaze at a tiny storybook island dominated by the quaint **Pilgrimage Church of the Assumption of Mary** – the site of wedding ceremonies where by tradition grooms carry their brides up 99 steps to prove they're strong enough for marriage.

You can take a local *pletna* boat to the island, or work off Bled's famous kremšnita custard cream cake by rowing your own rental boat there. The ruins of a medieval castle on a cliff above the lake complete the setting (a 20-minute hike to the castle offers a panoramic view of the lake and mountains). Tina is a big foodie and recommends the seafood and pasta at **Ostarija Peglezen** (reservations required), where "it feels like you're eating in someone's dining room" and **Vila Prešeren**, in an "upscale location, but right on the lake, so it's worth it to enjoy great salads, sandwiches and desserts."

Tito's Villa

11:15 a.m.

We stop briefly at **Vila Bled**, once the summer home of former Yugoslavian President Tito who, for more than 30 years, maintained a cultural tolerance among people with deeply held national identities spread among six republics – though he kept the peace with an iron fist. After his death in 1980, Yugoslavia eventually split apart with the ensuing civil war. Once the setting for visiting international dignitaries, Vila Bled is now a sumptuous **Relais & Châteaux** hotel with a great restaurant. Tina recommends **Lectar** in the town of **Radovljica**, about five kilometres from Bled, as the place with "the best Slovene food in the whole country. It has distinctive Slovene character and a gingerbread cookie workshop."

Bohinj Lake and Picnic

12 noon to 2:00 p.m.

We drive into **Triglav National Park** to **Bohinj Lake**, far removed from the tourist crowds and surrounded by the **Julian Alps**. I photograph the picturesque **St. John the Baptist Church** and a low stone bridge, both reflected in the pristine lake. Nearby, we lunch on local fare that Tina lays out – *ajvar* (a spread of eggplant and red bell peppers), whole grain bread with pumpkin seeds, local cheese, *prsut* (ham), salami and pickles. Afterwards, we taste the Slovenian solution for a long life: homemade brandy. One shot a day. Tina tells us, "We make it with plum schnapps, blueberries, pears and a little sugar."

Triglav National Park

2:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.

We drive over **Vršič Pass**, visit the cherry tree adorned village of **Češnjica**, learn about the tradition of honey-making and stop at the churning **Radovna River** and falls. The rest of the day, we explore tiny alpine villages like **Stara Fužina** and **Pokljuka**, and check out uniquely Slovenian wooden double hayracks in **Studor**, along with its traditional *hišas* (houses). "This is still a traditional area, where kids work as cow herders and stay with the animals for two months in the summer," Tina explains.



©SIEGFRIED STOLZFUSS



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(top) CHURCH ON AN ISLAND ON LAKE BLEB
(bottom) BRANDY AND HONEY DRINK



Ljubljana at Night
8:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.

Back in Ljubljana, we join a friendly crowd in the lively square and riverfront promenade, then sample a Slovenian ‘peasant’s feast’ featuring grilled sausage, roast meats, dried pork chops, cabbage, turnips and buckwheat dumplings, finishing with *gibanica* cake at the woodsy **Sokol**. The atmosphere is great, but the food only average. For traditional Slovenian food, Tina recommends **Abecedarium** for breakfast (located in the oldest house in town) and **Zlata Ribica** for seafood, both by the riverbank in the Old Town. Her favourite restaurant, though, is the stylish but relaxed Italian-style **Cubo** – with ever-changing homemade meals. Finally, an “absolute must for awesome cakes and gelato” is **Kavarna Zvezda**.

THURSDAY

8:00 a.m. to 2:55 p.m.
Ljubljana Stroll

Awakening to the haunting ringing of church bells, we soon walk through cobblestoned **Prešeren Square**, cross the ornate Venetian-style **Triple Bridge** and wander into the riverside **Central Market**. We ride the funicular up the hillside to the 16th-century castle (€6 round trip for two), admiring the view and watching the preparations for an evening concert. My favourite activity is simply strolling along the tree-covered riverfront, where mellow college students and locals drink *bela kavas* (café lattes), eat gelato, drink at trendy pubs and hang out along the emerald-green river that winds through town. We nibble pizza on the scenic outdoor terrace of **Ljubljanski Dvor** before bidding a reluctant farewell and hop the train to Croatia. ▣



COUNTRY LIFE (top)
LJUBLJANICA RIVER (middle)
PREŠEREN SQUARE IN LJUBLJANA (bottom)

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Bon Vivant

Adventures in Culinary Travel



Introduction

Bon Vivant

You know who you are. You're the one who takes secret pleasure in a wrong turn on a country road where the only place to stop for directions is a farmer's stand selling fresh local produce. You're the one who insists on literally walking that extra mile down a cobblestone street to follow your nose to what you know must be a fabulous bakery. And you firmly believe that a growling stomach is travel's ultimate reward – for it always leads you to exotic flavours and fresh food ideas. You know who you are, and so do we. You are a Bon Vivant.

Call it a culinary compass or a gourmet gut-feeling, but it's what makes us tick, and we're only too thrilled to be able to share this passion with you. Inside this special section, you'll find a collection of adventures to suit any foodie's fancy, whether it involves sailing the high seas with a Master Chef, exploring a small European town and discovering the delicacies of its local artisans or plucking grapes straight from a vine in a family-owned vineyard.

Although we hope to satiate your appetite for adventure in the following pages, we know that the craving for new tastes and



destinations is constant, as is ours. When it strikes, come join us and our team of Bon Vivant bloggers who share the tales of their taste buds' travels. You're sure to find inspiration – whether it's for your next vacation or your next meal. After all, living the good life starts with a delicious dream.

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Other Unique Experiences

See our guide featuring a selection of ideas for other unique experiences in Europe!

- Outdoor Exploration • In Pursuit of Art & Culture
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Vienna's Liquid Gold

The *Gegenbauer* shop in Vienna's *Naschmarkt* offers some of the world's best and costliest vinegars – and a few vinegar-derived products you've probably never heard of.

DAVID LASKER

At the *Gegenbauer* stall in the *Naschmarkt*, Vienna's biggest and best-known food market, glass apothecary flasks are arrayed along the display shelves like chips in a paint-store colour chart: vinegars infused with apricot, black currant, early gold apple, elderberry, James Grieve apple, plum, quince, rowanberry, sour cherry and dozens more. Quite a revelation to one accustomed to seeing vinegar in shades of red, white and balsamic brown.

Here you'll find beer vinegar (adds dash to pork), red pepper vinegar (just the thing for goulash) and tomato vinegar (mates with tomato and mozzarella). *Gegenbauer* even sells asparagus vinegar, a hot item in May, when almost every menu in Austria sparkles with fresh *spargel* (white asparagus) as a side dish or soup.

At *Gegenbauer*, 'Bouvier' signifies more than Jacqueline Kennedy's maiden name. I learned this as company spokesman Wolfgang Hawlik squeezed vinegar made from that particular white wine grape onto the back of my hand with an eye dropper.

"We have lost the ability to taste and to concentrate on a single flavour," said Hawlik, his reddish-blond beard a match for the precious liquid.

I licked. Anticipating the familiar, lip-puckering astringency, I was greeted by an altogether different sensation. An intense, sweet-sour grape taste blossomed under



my tongue. This was indeed a flavour to concentrate on.

If this suggests a wine tasting, *Gegenbauer* prices, ranging from €19 to €32 per 250 ml bottle, certainly approach those of fine wines.

The potent flavour derives from an unusual manufacturing process. Vinegar makers usually make their product from wine with 12 or 13 percent alcohol, which leaves an acidic, sour taste when fermented into vinegar. To compensate, they dilute the vinegar with water.

"Our winemakers stop the fermentation at six percent acidity," says company founder Erwin

“I was greeted by an altogether different sensation.”

Gegenbauer. "At this point, only some of the fruit sugars have fermented. This gives a harmony between the sweet and sour without having to add ingredients or dilute with water. No one else produces vinegar this way."

Why not? "Everyone thinks vinegar should be cheap," he adds. "Half vinegar and half water is half the price. But this product will have only half as many natural ingredients and half the taste and aroma."

The cottage-industry nature of *Gegenbauer's* business further ensures that its products will never be cheap. To obtain supplies for its blueberry vinegar, for instance, the company places ads in local newspapers, asking people to go blueberry-picking in the woods. "We can't certify the vinegar as an organic product because they're wild blueberries," Hawlik explains. "Nobody kept records on when they were planted and what was done to them. But the vinegar is organic in the truest sense."



This is an important point in a country where nearly 20 percent of farmers operate organically – the highest proportion in the world.

Naschmarkt shops are family run, which accounts for much of the market's charm. Gegenbauer is no exception. Erwin Gegenbauer's grandfather Ignaz acquired a vegetable-pickling firm in 1929. His father expanded it into Austria's biggest supplier of pickled goods. Erwin, now 48, gradually took over the reins. In 1992 he sold the 600-person company so that he could concentrate on his passion: gourmet vinegars. Today, his 10-person firm offers about 70 vinegars.

Hawlik considers the company's best vinegar to be the 10-year-old muscatel balsamic. This past May, *Feinschmecker*, the German gourmet magazine, ranked it among the top five balsamic vinegars in the world (the other contenders being traditional Italian balsamics from Modena or Reggio Emilia).

Vinegar gets better the longer it is stored. But aging balsamic vinegar is not like aging wine or brandy, where essences from the oak casks gradually infuse into the liquor, adding complexity. "We don't want the vinegar to acquire the aroma of the wood barrel," Hawlik says. "We want to retain the flavour of the fruit."

To that end, Gegenbauer uses old barrels from which the oak accents have long since leached away. They lie in a location that would horrify wine lovers: on the factory roof, where, on hot days, the vinegar literally cooks. The water in the vinegar slowly evaporates through the pores in the wood, making the balsamic vinegar thicker and sweeter. "The Italians sometimes add sugar and caramel to thicken the vinegar, but we don't."



“A welcome alternative to chocolate sauce as an ice-cream topping.”

Gegenbauer's sweeter balsamics make a welcome alternative to chocolate sauce as an ice-cream topping. A few candy manufacturers use them in chocolate fillings.

More exotic are the tiny, tasty crystals that develop as the balsamic vinegar matures. To get at them, a worker clammers about in the big barrels and removes the residue by gently scratching the inside of the barrel with a needle. Gram for gram, the crystals cost as much as white truffles.

Then there are the drinking vinegars. Strictly speaking, they are 'noble sours,' not vinegars, because they have only three percent acidity versus vinegar's six percent. In Austria, the threshold for driving under the influence is 0.05 percent blood alcohol compared to North America's usual 0.08. Thanks to this formidable restriction on drinking and driving, noble sours are favoured as an alcohol-free schnapps or digestive after a meal. "They're nutritious and you won't lose your driver's licence," Hawlik advises.

IF YOU GO

The Naschmarkt is an easy walk from the tourist mecca of the Museum Quarter and the bustling Mariahilferstrasse, Vienna's main shopping street. Or take the U1, U2 or U4 subway line to Karlsplatz. Reservations for monthly guided tours of the vinegar brewery (€20) are available through www.gegenbauer.at.

WHERE TO GET IT IN NORTH AMERICA

Available online at www.cubemarketplace.com, www.dibruno.com, www.epicurepantry.com and at Dean & DeLuca specialty stores in New York, www.deandeluca.com. Wallsé, a Michelin award-winning contemporary Austrian restaurant, offers four cocktails made with Gegenbauer noble sours (344 West 11th Street, New York, (212) 352-2300, www.wallserrestaurant.com).

Cruise

Holland America Line

The Culinary Arts Center, presented by *Food & Wine Magazine*, provides guests on select Holland America cruises the opportunity to experience demonstrations and hands-on classes conducted by top chefs, wine experts, and leading cookbook authors from the pages of *Food & Wine Magazine*. On board all sailings, you will learn tricks-of-the-trade from top professionals, try your hand at preparing dishes and taste wines representative of the specific ports-of-call you will visit. Guests on selected cruises will also receive *Food & Wine* recipe cards and wine tasting notes that you may take home along with copies of the magazine. Other opportunities might include book signings, question and answer sessions, specially designed dinner menus and more.

Vitaly Paley

Executive Chef, Owner Paley's Place, Portland (James Beard Award Recipient)

Aboard *ms Statendam*, 7-Day Northbound Glacier Discovery, May 16, 2010

From CDN\$919, Inside category K.

The 2005 winner of the James Beard Award for Best Chef Northwest, Vitaly and his wife Kimberly opened Paley's Place in 1995 in Portland, WA. It's been recognized in *Gourmet* as one of America's Top 50 Restaurants, and Zagat has chosen it as one of America's Top Restaurants for the past three consecutive years. Vitaly and Kimberly published *The Paley's Place Cookbook: Recipes and Stories from the Pacific Northwest* in October 2008. The book was named Best Regional Cookbook on Epicurious.com and was one of the Top 15 Cookbooks of 2008 on the AOL Food Channel.



Lars Kronmark

Executive Chef Instructor – The Culinary Institute of America, Napa Valley, CA

Aboard *ms Nieuw Amsterdam*, 10-Day Mediterranean Inaugural, Jul 07, 2010

From CDN\$1,739, Inside category K.

Denmark native Lars Kronmark is a graduate of the Restaurant and Apprenticeship School in Copenhagen. He travelled to Mexico with Rick Bayless, and Italy and Spain with the International Olive Oil Council. He helped launch the China Educational Project in 2001. Before joining the Culinary Institute of America's Greystone faculty, Chef Kronmark spent fourteen years as a senior chef instructor at the California Culinary Academy, and was hand-picked from the finest culinary educators in the United States to open the Culinary Institute of America at Greystone in August 1995.

David McMillan

Corp Exec Chef Consilient Restaurants, Dallas & LA

Aboard *ms Nieuw Amsterdam*, 12-Day Mediterranean Tapestry, Aug 07, 2010

From CDN\$2,379, Inside category K.

California native David McMillan studied fine arts at Boston University before a European trip reaffirmed his culinary desires. A chef and caterer for top-rated restaurants, hotels, Hollywood celebrities and world dignitaries, David was formerly in charge at Café König in Baden Baden. He has worked with some of Europe's most prestigious wine châteaux, was corporate chef for Hyatt hotels and executive chef at the Peninsula Hotel of Beverly Hills. At the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games, David was executive chef for the World Broadcasters division. In 2008, David joined Consilient Restaurants as their Corporate Executive Chef.

“On board all sailings, you will learn **tricks-of-the-trade** from top professionals.”

Richard Chamberlain

Executive Chef, Chamberlain's Steak and Chophouse – Dallas, TX; ENVY in Las Vegas, NV

Aboard *ms Nieuw Amsterdam*, 12-Day Mediterranean Empires, Sep 24, 2010

From CDN\$2,619, Oceanview category K.

Considered one of America's leading chefs, Chamberlain is the owner of Chamberlain's Steak and Chophouse in Dallas, named one of *Bon Appétit's* top new restaurants shortly after opening in 1993. He and the restaurant have garnered stellar reviews and accolades from premier publications, including “One of America's Top Tables,” from *Gourmet* and “One of America's Top Restaurants,” from *Zagat Guide*. Richard also opened the award-winning Fish Market Grill and Tarragon at Elk Mountain, an ultra-luxury resort in Colorado. Most recently, he joined forces with The Renaissance Las Vegas to open ENVY The Steakhouse, one of most exclusive new restaurants in Las Vegas.



French Kitchens Get the Female Touch

MADELINE LAFRAMBOISE

France's culinary world has traditionally been a *métier d'hommes*, a macho, male bastion where women were unwelcome. Despite these odds, two gutsy gals have helped change France's gastronomic landscape, refining it with a womanly touch.

Culinary pioneer Julia Child first discovered the glories of French food in the fifties, when the American living in France as a diplomat's wife eventually learned to perfect 524 classic French recipes in her tiny kitchen, including the difficult Béarnaise sauce with its timely tarragon vinegar reduction. The recent film release *Julie & Julia* chronicles the life and times of the venerable chef whose penchant for French cuisine changed the North American culinary world.

Now Julia lovers can retrace her steps with tour operators who prowl the back alleys of Paris and wander through the meadows of Provence in search of fresh ingredients. The culinary tour operator Tour de Forks (www.tourdeforks.com) is offering 'A Taste of Julia Child's Paris & Provence,' a self-guided or group tour created by Kathy Morton and Debra Fioritto, recipients of the 2006 Julia Child Endowment Fund Scholarship. Kathy and Debra drew from their own culinary expertise along with inspiration from Julia's treasured memoir, *My Life in France*, to create the itinerary.



The seven-night tour starts at the Left Bank's legendary Hotel Pont Royal, where Julia and her husband Paul first stayed. Foodies will take a lesson at Julia's alma mater, the illustrious Le Cordon Bleu in Paris. In Provence, the idyllic town of Les Baux is where you'll explore Julia's haunts, including a visit to her former home, the charming farmhouse La Pitchoune.

Chef Anne-Sophie Pic, the proprietor of La Maison Pic in Valence, recently regained a third Michelin star for her family's restaurant. She is the only female chef in France to have earned three Michelin stars in over 50 years.

The coveted prize had first been awarded to Anne-Sophie's grandfather André in 1934. Her father Jacques secured a third Michelin *macaron* for 19 years from 1973 until his passing in 1992. The death of Jacques inevitably led the family restaurant to lose a star. Inspired, Madame Pic made it her mission to recapture the three stars as a tribute to her loving *père*.

They say that on the day of the Michelin announcements in 2007, chef's heads figuratively rolled like Marie Antoinette's as several venerable Paris restos, which had held three Michelin stars for over 30 years, were demoted to two.

Before turning 40, the self-taught chef was crowned *la reine de la cuisine française* (the queen of French cooking) at this shrine of French cuisine, located off Avenue Victor Hugo. *Time* magazine, in a cover story called 'Twenty-Five Visionaries,' placed her number three and described the creative icon as a "tiny woman with fierce ambition."

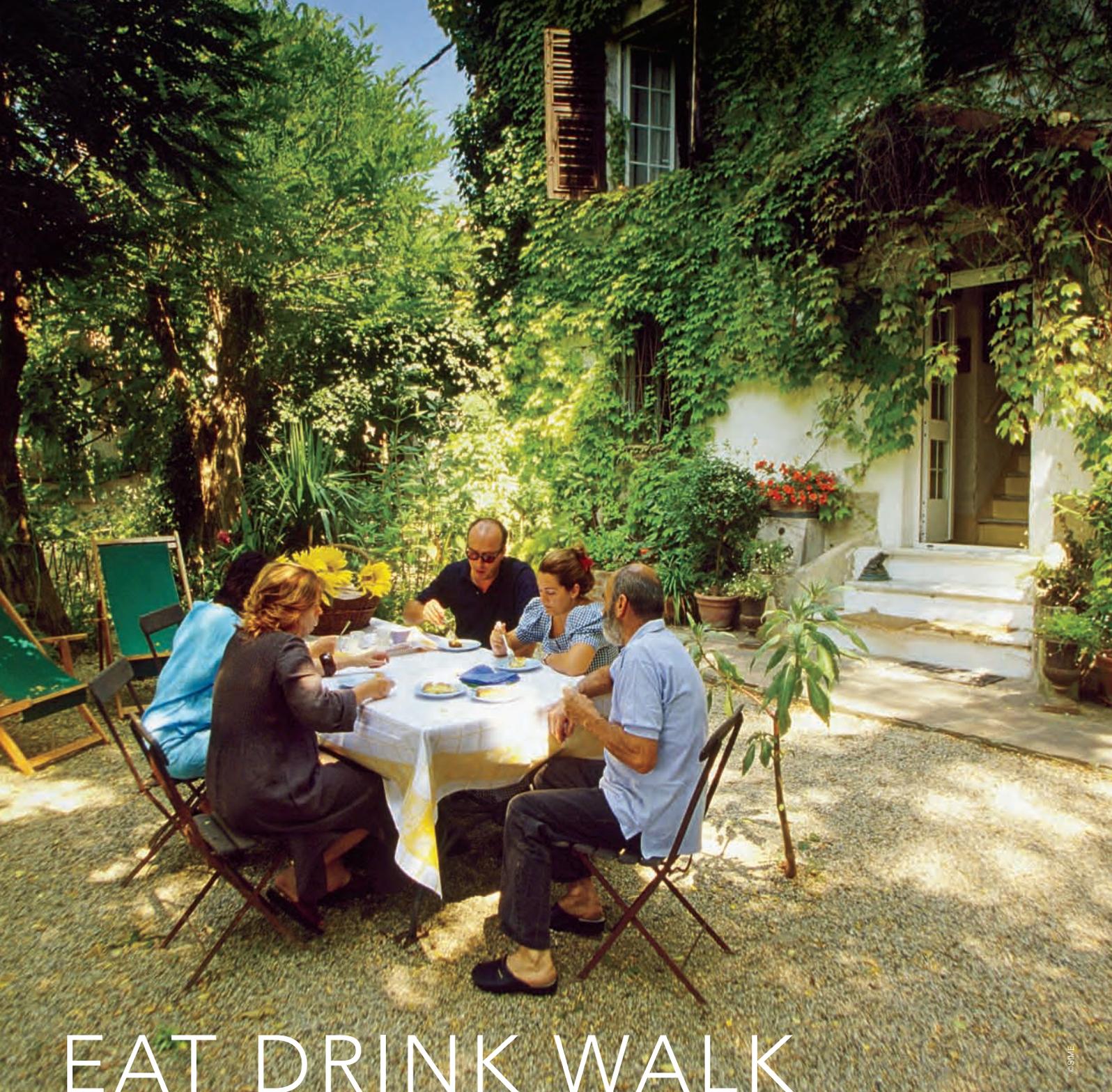
Growing up in a chef's family, aromas wafted from the restaurant's kitchen up to her second-floor bedroom at the quaint roadside hotel. It seemed like Anne-Sophie's destiny to one day take over the culinary reins.

Avoiding the heavy béchamel sauces of traditional French cooking, Pic favours seafood and innovative cooking methods with an Asian touch. Her fresh, minimalist cuisine incorporates ingredients such as abalone, *céteau* (a type of small sole), baby squid stuffed with pasta and pesto sauce, along with Jacques Pic's sea bass with caviar, the renowned dish invented by her father in 1971. It's seafood supreme. That's no accident. Her grandfather created a crayfish gratin that was the talk of France, and now it's her turn to pay homage to *la mer*.

“Two gutsy gals have helped change France's gastronomic landscape.”

Ironically, her hometown is near Lyon, the place where three other great female chefs were bestowed with France's supreme culinary award in 1933. Her predecessors, dubbed '*les mères de Lyon*' – Eugénie Brazier, Marie Bourgeois and Marguerite Bise – once rolled up their sleeves and ladled out rich soups and sauces to the 'tarmac tourists,' who ventured on Route Nationale 7, the famous *route des vacances* from Paris to Nice.

Now it's chef Pic's turn. A culinary destination, La Maison Pic is ready to entertain the most discerning palate.



EAT DRINK WALK

Truffle hunting and discovering the pleasures of the Italian table on a walking romp through Piedmont

ANITA DRAYCOTT

It's hard to believe that the nugget resembling a knobby potato that a dog has just dug out of the ground is worth a fortune. But then I take a whiff. How can I describe the heady aroma? Is it earth, musk, garlic, honey, hay? Whatever it is, it's intoxicating. We've discovered the elusive 'white gold' of Alba. And the hunt has just begun.

I had booked myself on a gourmet romp of the Piedmont area of northern Italy with Italian Connection. And today I can tick off

truffle hunting from my list of things to do before I die.

Seductive and mysterious, truffles were thought to be an aphrodisiac by the ancient Greeks and Romans. Their exorbitant price (up to \$6,000 per kilogram) is due to their unpredictable growth habits and the fact that no one has been able to cultivate these fungi, which grow in a symbiotic relationship with the roots of oak, hazelnut and poplar trees. Normally a truffle hunter, known as



“We’ve discovered the elusive ‘white gold’ of Alba. And the hunt has just begun.”

a *trifulau*, works alone, never divulging the whereabouts of his truffle troves. In fact, canines have been poisoned and kidnapped for ransom in this dog-eat-dog quest for diamonds in the rough. But thanks to our guides, Peter Blackman and Daniela Bigatti, *trifulau* Ermanno Scaglione has agreed to lead us through the forest at Castelgherlone, a wine estate outside Alba.

Just as the fungi and tree roots have a special relationship, so do Ermanno and his adorable mutt, Mara.

“Aspetta,” calls Ermanno after Mara unearths another truffle. She obediently waits until he exchanges the nugget, about the size of a golf ball, for a piece of kibble.

Ermanno explains that it took about three months to train Mara. By putting some bits of truffle in her food she acquired a taste for them and now associates that taste and smell with food. Ermanno then taught Mara

to fetch balls scented with truffles. Eventually, he buried the balls deeper and farther away.

Originally pigs were employed to hunt truffles but they were too hard to train and often gobbled up the prize before the *trifulau* could lay his hands on it.

It takes about three months for winter white truffles to mature, at which point their spores release that addictive aroma from beneath the earth. Often the truffle hunter and his dog have their best luck early in the autumn evenings, when the cold air keeps the scent close to the ground.



After about two hours of tromping through the woods, Ermanno’s pockets are full. We head up to his friend Luca Tosello’s winery for some sips of Barbera, Dolcetto and Nebbiolo vintages, a picnic of cheeses liberally sprinkled with truffle shavings and salami also infused with the pricey fungi.

The coveted *tartufo bianco* from the Langhe region, considered the finest in the world, inspired Alba’s annual fall truffle fair, now in its 79th year. Later in the afternoon we followed the throng along Via Vittorio Emanuele making its way to the Palatartufo, the fair’s market, where you can buy whole white and black truffles, robust wines from the region, mountain cheeses and all manner of gourmet items infused with truffles, from olive oil to sea salt to ravioli. Admission is two euros; 10 euros if you want a glass with which to sample the many wines.

You can literally follow your nose to the Palatartufo as the unmistakable truffle aroma wafts from the entrance and mingles with the smell of chocolate from the nearby Ferrero Rocher factory.

Alba’s White Truffle Fair, from mid-September to early December, includes cooking competitions, outdoor markets and charity auctions. I’m told that the donkey palio is hilarious, unlike its serious horse race counterpart in Siena.

The grand finale to our truffle binge was dinner at a country inn where it’s possible to B.Y.O.T. Indeed, Peter who had purchased about €300 worth of white gold from Ermanno, turned the bounty over to the



chef. The raw truffles were presented on a bed of uncooked Arborio rice in the middle of the table. We passed them around and, using special truffle slicers fitted with stainless steel blades, shaved liberal portions over a local sausage with creamy sauce, porcini risotto and scrambled eggs. Yes, it was a once-in-a-lifetime indulgence.

Thankfully, each day included a six- to 15-kilometre walk to counterbalance our intake of remarkable food and wine. Leaving Alba, we tromped through vineyards and up to the town of Barbaresco for a wine tasting and lunch. Most of us napped in the van while our guides drove us to Lake Orta and its medieval cobblestone village, Orta San Giulio, where we had plenty of free time to explore the town or take a boat over to Isola

“ Yes, it was a once-in-a-lifetime indulgence. ”

San Giulio, known as the Island of Silence and dominated by a baroque basilica.

That night we were treated to real home cooking. Chef Lili used to run an excellent restaurant in Orta that our guides frequented. However, because she'd closed her restaurant and was in the process of seeking a new location, Lili invited our group to her mother's house for porcini risotto (yes, more truffles), beef braised in Barolo wine and silky panna cotta.

Going on an authentic truffle hunt and dinner at a friend's home are just a couple of examples of what makes Italian Connection tours unique. Founder Anita Iaconangelo seeks off-the-beaten-track trails and experiences. High above Lake Orta, for example, we followed a series of mule paths to an idyllic spot by a stream where Peter had laid out a picnic of local cheeses, cured meats, olives, fresh bread and a chestnut cake.

On the last day we hiked up the Monte Mottarone and took a breather at the top to photograph the spectacular views of Monte Rosa, the tallest peak in the Swiss Alps, and lakes Maggiore and Orta shimmering below. From there we rode the funicular down to the shores of Stresa on Lake Maggiore. Early in the 1900s Stresa became a stop on the Grand Tour for wealthy Brits and Europeans. Not to be missed is a boat ride over to the aptly named Isola Bella (Beautiful Island) where a palace complete





with fantastic baroque gardens filled with statuary, terraces of perfumed tropical plants and strutting albino peacocks was built for Count Borromeo. Here, nothing succeeds like excess.

We began our final evening with cocktails at the Grand Hotel des Iles Borromees, which must be just as palatial now as it was when Ernest Hemingway used it as his setting for a romantic tryst in *A Farewell to Arms*.

For dinner Peter and Daniela found a quaint trattoria up in the hills that was once a tram station. Over plenty of robust Piedmont wine and a multi-course feast, our group

exchanged addresses, toasted our superb guides and discussed various strategies on how to cram all of our souvenir bottles of wine, grappa and truffle oil and packages of dried porcini mushrooms, pasta and Arborio rice into our luggage. I think of them as training aids for my next romp through Italy. After all, Anita recommends that the best way to prepare for one of her authentic adventures is to "get out and walk, eat pasta and drink wine." Those are marching orders I can follow with great gusto.

Truffle Trivia

The record price paid for a single white truffle was set in December 2007, when Macau billionaire and casino tycoon Stanley Ho paid US\$330,000 at a charity auction for a specimen weighing 1.5 kilograms.

The Italian white truffle is considered to be superior in smell and taste to the French black truffle. It should be eaten raw in thin shavings over bland foods such as pasta, rice and eggs.

Store truffles unwashed, wrapped in a paper or cloth towel in a sealed glass jar in the refrigerator and use within 15 days.

Truffle oil is much cheaper and wonderful drizzled over scrambled eggs and wild mushroom soup.

For information on Alba's White Truffle Fair, visit www.fieradeltartufo.org/en.

Cruise

Crystal Cruises

Savour a *zarzuela de mariscos* in Barcelona, *pasta con le sarde* in Taormina, *bouillabaisse* in Cannes and the exceptional wines of Tuscany on a gastronomic journey to favourite destinations.

Cruise 0312: Taste of the Mediterranean

Venice to Barcelona
May 25 to June 6, 2010
12 Days (3 sea days) aboard *Crystal Serenity*

Offers: 2-for-1 Fares » \$1,000 As You Wish Shipboard Credit » Free Air » Price Guarantee » Crystal Family Memories Program »

Theme: Crystal Wine & Food Festival



Food Expert André Soltner

André is the former owner of Lutèce, a legendary, 4-star, classic French restaurant in New York. He now teaches at the French Culinary Institute and is an award-winning 'Master Chef of France.'

Wine Expert Doug Frost

Doug is one of only three people in the world to achieve the distinctions of both 'Master Sommelier' and 'Master of Wine.' He is the author of three books: *Uncorking Wine*,

On Wine, and *Far from Ordinary Spanish Wine Buying Guide*. Doug is the wine and spirits consultant for United Airlines and writes about wine and spirits for numerous publications, including *Santé* and *Cheers* magazines, and the James Beard award-winning *Kansas City Star* food section. He is also Director of the Jefferson Cup Invitational Wine Competition and founding partner of Beverage Alcohol Resource, an educational and consulting beverage company.



Cruise

Princess® Cruise Line

It's not just a meal. It is a food extravaganza!

Imagine having the Executive Chef of a luxurious cruise ship prepare a multi-course feast just for you and another nine guests. Well, it can become your reality.

Princess Cruises® provides a small group of 10 with an incredible evening filled with mouth-watering delicacies and exquisite wines. The evening begins with a visit to the galley and then onto a night full of memorable tastes, sights and conversation. Over a glass of French champagne served



with appetizers such as *foie gras* and *ceviche*, the Executive Chef presents the menu for the evening. Then, the banquet commences. Course after course is presented, discussed and enjoyed and paired with the finest of wines. As you enjoy dessert, the Executive Chef returns for a post-dinner discussion with the specially invited guests. And to top off this great experience, each guest receives a copy of the best-selling Princess cookbook *Courses: A Culinary Journey*.

Guests who intend to partake of this feast must reserve immediately upon arrival on the ship to ensure their spot. There will be an additional fee of \$75 per guest.

Sample Galley Dinner Menu

Flambé of Skewed Pork Tenderloin
Bloody Mary Sorbet
Grilled Lobster Tail
Filet Mignon
Lamb Chops
Risotto & Market Vegetables
Parfait



Cruise

Cunard®

Opulent, magnificent, elegant – these are just a few words to describe life on Cunard's majestic vessels which truly reflect 'living the good life.'

Dining on board is always a special event. Whether guests choose the ship's spectacular dining room or one of the alternative restaurants, the experience is one-of-a-kind.



66 Dining on board is always a special event. 99

Jean-Marie Zimmermann and Todd English are two incredibly talented chefs among the team that create the most memorable menus.

Chef Zimmermann, Cunard's Global Culinary Ambassador and winner of a coveted Michelin star, ensures every dish served meets his high standards.

This commitment to quality extends to *Queen Mary 2®* and *Queen Victoria®*'s specialty dining, including namesake restaurant of Boston's star chef, Todd English, whose delectable dishes push boundaries of creative Mediterranean cuisine. His philosophy for the Todd English restaurant* is simple: "I want guests to feel like these restaurants are similar to out-of-the-way gems they discover when they travel to new cities – after all, the ships are really like cities themselves."



*Surcharge applies. Reservations required.

Artichoke Guacamole

Ingredients:

- 6 large fresh, frozen, or canned artichoke bottoms, including stem except for 1/2 inch
- 1/2 small red onion, finely chopped
- 1 large beefsteak tomato, chopped
- 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice (about 1/2 lemon)
- 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 teaspoon toasted sesame oil
- 1/3 cup chopped scallions
- 3 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro leaves
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1/2 teaspoon black pepper

Place the artichoke bottoms in a small saucepan, cover with water, and bring to a boil over high heat. Reduce the heat to medium-low and cook until the artichokes are very soft, about 20 minutes. Drain.

• When they are cool enough to handle, finely chop the artichokes and place in a medium-size mixing bowl. Add the onion, tomato, lemon juice, olive oil, sesame oil, scallions, cilantro, salt, and pepper and gently mash with a fork.

Cruise

Avalon

Expand your horizons on an Avalon Waterways wine-themed river cruise. Learn the differences between an Austrian Grüner Veltliner and a French Sauvignon Blanc. A distinguished wine authority explains how various grape varieties are cultivated, and teaches you what to look for in a good wine. Visit a wine village and taste the wines to test your new-found talent. This is an adventure Bacchus himself would enjoy!

Windmills, Vineyards & Paris Wine River Cruise

Amsterdam to Paris – July 31, 2010
Category E, Indigo Deck, CDN \$4,855

Book by March 31, 2010 and save an additional \$500 per person/\$1,000 per couple

Vineyards, vintages, varietals and some very fine wines are the focus of this exciting itinerary. As you leisurely float past the legendary vineyards along the Rhine and Moselle rivers, a distinguished wine authority will describe how grape varieties are cultivated, and will teach you what to look for in a good wine. On board your ship, the luxurious *Avalon Affinity*, participate in regional tastings, attend fascinating lectures on French and German wines, and be pampered at a food and wine pairing gala dinner.



“ Vineyards, vintages, varietals and some very fine wines. ”

The Legendary Danube Wine River Cruise

Prague to Budapest – October 27, 2010
Category E, CDN \$3,160

Enhance your knowledge and love of European wines on our exhilarating 'The Legendary Danube Wine River Cruise.' Learn the differences between an Austrian Grüner Veltliner and a German Riesling Spätlese – and a whole lot more! A distinguished wine authority will describe how grape varieties are cultivated, and will teach you what to look for in a good wine. Participate in a wine tasting excursion in Prague, marvel at Austria's legendary Wachau Wine Valley, and consider visiting the Wine Academy or a typical Wachau wine cellar in Melk. On board your ship, the splendid *Avalon Tranquility*, attend an Austrian sweet wine lecture and tasting, and be pampered at a food and wine pairing gala dinner.

Burgundy & Provence Wine River Cruise

Paris to Côte d'Azur –
August 21 & October 30, 2010
Category E, From CDN \$3,652

This beautiful itinerary appeals to wine connoisseurs and amateur enthusiasts alike! On board, listen as one of Avalon's wine authorities explains how grape varieties are cultivated and teaches you what to look for in a good wine. Visit a wine cave in Beaune, and participate in tasting excursions of France's famed Burgundy, Chardonnay, and Châteauneuf-du-Pape wines. On board your ship, the magnificent *Avalon Scenery*, attend a Beaujolais wine tasting, a food and wine pairing gala dinner, and a scrumptious wine and chocolate tasting. Another adventure Bacchus himself would enjoy!



AVALON
WATERWAYS®
From here, it's another world™

Tour

Trafalgar Tours

'Be My Guest' for authentic dining experiences in Italy, Spain, Portugal and France operated by Trafalgar Tours.

Trafalgar Tours brings European hospitality to life with the 'Be My Guest' feature included in many of their escorted tours. Each of these unique experiences will be hosted by a local family, from an 18th-century farmhouse-winery in Tuscany to a old traditional Italian home in Sorrento overlooking the Bay of Naples. Guests will get a glimpse into the culture and lifestyle of their host family. It's a great once-in-a-lifetime experience.

66 You will enjoy a home-cooked meal prepared by 'mamma' — exclusively for you. 99



Seville, Spain

Nothing typifies an evening in Seville like visiting a bodega in the Barrio Santa Cruz. Trafalgar Tours lets you experience the real Seville at a typical Spanish bodega. Guests will be treated to a hearty welcome and a glass of local Manzanilla sherry. Enjoy a tasty selection of tapas and other specialties while soaking up the charm and atmosphere.

Sorrento, Italy

High up in the hills of Sorrento, you will be welcomed into a traditional family home set amongst lemon groves and a winery. Sample some of the boutique wines produced on the estate and learn about the entire wine-making process. Later, while overlooking the spectacular Bay of Naples and surrounded by the fresh aroma of lemon groves, you will enjoy a home-cooked meal prepared by 'mamma' — exclusively for you!



TRAFALGAR
rediscover the romance of travel.

Cruise

Oceania Cruises

Since the inception of Oceania Cruises, their ships have delivered an unparalleled onboard experience. This tradition proudly continues with the refined *Marina*, the newest ship to personify the Oceania experience.

On *Marina's* maiden voyage from Barcelona to Miami on January 22, 2011, culinary enthusiasts will discover the many indulgences, aboard this beautiful vessel starting with Oceania Cruises' signature "finest cuisine at sea" in six restaurants, including two new gourmet venues – Jacques and Red Ginger. Enjoy exclusive food and wine pairings at La Reserve or host a private dinner party at Privée. For special coffees and snacks, there is Baristas Coffee Bar. The new Bon Appétit Culinary Center offers hands-on cooking instruction under the guidance of master chefs. Similarly, artists-in-residence teach fine arts in the Artist Loft, a new enrichment centre. Intimate lounges abound. Accommodations in every category are incredibly spacious, especially with regard to the lavish bathrooms.

Oceania's partnership with Master Chef Jacques Pépin soars to a new level aboard *Marina*. Dine at Jacques, the eminent Chef's first restaurant to bear his name on land or sea, and you will be instantly struck by the sensory pleasures. Luscious aromas waft from the gleaming glass and brass show rotisserie in the room's heart, where duck, pork, chicken and veal roast slowly, sealing in their succulent flavors. Handsomely decorated with rich fabrics, heirloom antiques, pickled wood furnishings and art from Jacques' personal collection, it resembles a classic Parisian bistro. Exceedingly comfortable and chic, the ambience is pure French, as is the cosmopolitan yet wonderfully approachable cuisine.

Chef Pépin has taken the classics, deconstructed them, and then ingeniously re-created each remarkable dish. This is



coq au vin as you have never tasted it before. Rotisserie-roasted chicken falls off the bone, bursting with flavour. His Steak Frites pairs the succulence of prime beef with the crisp sweetness of *pommes de terre*. At Jacques, simple classic French cuisine becomes incredibly elegant and, of course, absolutely *magnifique*.

In the Bon Appétit Culinary Center aboard *Marina* – the only hands-on cooking school at sea – you will learn how to prepare a variety of exquisite dishes in a state-of-the-art culinary studio under the tutelage of Master Chefs from around the world. You'll experience the regional flavours of the destinations by using fresh, locally purchased produce, meats and fish. Imagine accompanying *Marina's* chefs while shopping for porcini mushrooms in a quaint village market, or selecting freshly caught seafood along the waterfront.

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European Legends Cruise with Jacques Pépin

Copenhagen to Lisbon
August 10, 2010 aboard Oceania's *Insignia*

World-renowned Master Chef and Oceania Cruises' Executive Culinary Director, Jacques Pépin, hosts this culinary sojourn delving into seven countries in 14 days. Guests will be treated to specially designed signature menus, engaging lectures, culinary demonstrations, book signings and much more.

Bridging the northern reaches of Europe and the western shores of the Iberian Peninsula, this voyage stands out by blending marquee destinations with several unique treasures and even brand new ones – medieval Brest and enchanting La Rochelle.

“You will be
instantly struck
by the sensory
pleasures.”



Istria's Culinary Evolution

STEPHANIE ORTENZI

The Croatian peninsula of Istria hangs like a cluster of grapes from the Slovenian border, a stone's throw from Italy.

Like a child of divorced parents, Istria's custody volleyed back and forth depending on the era's spoils of war. In the 15th century, Austria and Venice split the peninsula in half. At the end of the 18th century, Austria took all of Istria, but it reverted to Italian rule in 1919 for approximately 25 years. Then Yugoslavia claimed it after World War II, until the Independence of Croatia in 1991.

Because of the long Italian influence, Italianate cooking is prevalent: pasta, pizza and prized olive oil. Austria's influences can be seen in pastry and Germanic styles of charcuterie. Slavic accents take the form of hearty stews with flavourful spicing.

With these influences, Istria has carved out a unique heritage of indigenous artisanal foods. *Prsut* is similar to prosciutto, but it's smoked and more flavourful than its Italian cousin. Slices of fresh *prsut* are often delicately sautéed in olive oil and finished with a splash of wine. *Pag* is a sheep's milk cheese from the town of the same name. *Pag* of various ages often appears as a cheese course for comparative tasting.

Istria is also home to a prodigious wine industry, which has recently begun to export its vintages. Visitors are as likely to take a wine tour as they are an olive oil tour to taste a range of award-winning oils. The peninsula's other treasure is the abundant



©SIME
SEASIDE DINING

truffle, used in just about everything, including sweets.

The cuisine specializes in fresh, simple fish and seafood. Fish always gets a light touch, most often grilled, stewed, baked in sea salt or served raw. *Buzara* is a braising style with tomatoes, garlic, herbs and white wine or lemon. Cutting-edge chefs are cooking *sous vide* style, a method of cooking food in vacuum-packed bags immersed in hot, temperature-controlled water kept at a low heat for a long period of time, which intensifies the inherent flavours and keeps food juicy.

For casually rustic food, Istria has the *konoba*, a family-run trattoria with groaning boards of hearty food. Many of them use the *cripnja* or *peka*, a large cast-iron pot on legs with a perforated lid that is designed to go into a wood stove on top of hot embers. It gets hot fast and stays hot, imparting smoky flavours to lamb, pork, large pieces of fish or vegetables.

Istrian restaurant culture is cosmopolitan, though critics consistently laud three Istrian restaurants, each of them on the Adriatic seaboard.

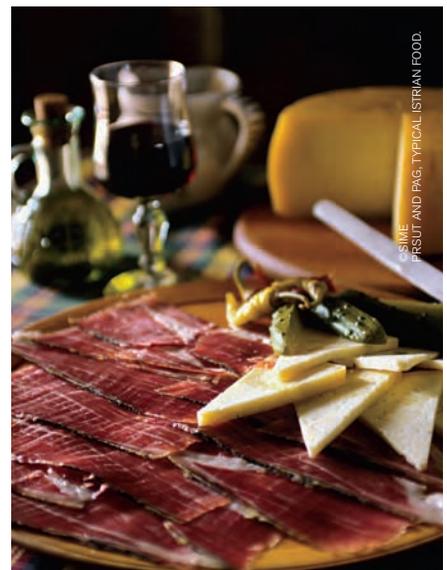
In the small port town of Novigrad in the north, **Damir e Ornela** serves 'Istrian sushi,' which is actually sashimi, since rice in Istria is usually turned into risotto. Damir also fries and grills, but people consistently swarm to the busy 28-seat *boite* for its thin slivers of fresh fish anointed with local olive oil.

Some of Damir's surprising matches are sashimi with truffle, or raw sole with polenta and wild asparagus. Damir's daughter, *Mattea*, has also taken up the sashimi knife while her mother, *Ornela*, makes the restaurant's pasta.

Monte is in Rovinj, in the middle of the coast, a spot for posh Italian-Istrian food and bold flavours done in a modern style. As a starter, you may be presented with a quartet of miniatures to taste: *prsut* with melon foam, a sashimi sampler, foie gras and tapenade. The house favours degustation menus with wines matched to courses along



©SIME
BOTTLE OF MOSCATO WINE



©SIME
PRŠUT AND PAG, TYPICAL ISTRIAN FOOD.

66 Istria has carved out a unique heritage of indigenous, artisanal foods. 99

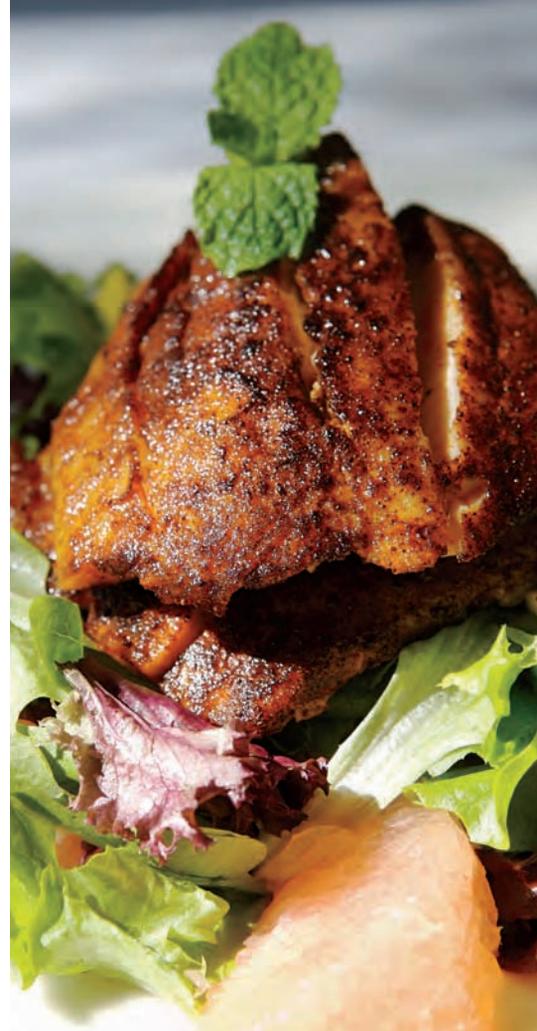
the lines of pepper gelée, calamari stuffed with shrimp, horseradish foam on half-seared tuna and lemon presented four ways: sorbet, gelée, cake and foam.

The ultimate in Istrian dining is at **Valsabbion** in the southern town of Pula. Famous for a theatrical presentation of clams cooked in black salt, Valsabbion is also an exclusive 10-room hotel with spa and al fresco dining overlooking the bay. The kitchen consistently takes top honours for haute cuisine built around the Istrian terroir. A degustation menu might include an olive oil aperitif, olive butter for the house-made bread, truffled risotto, scallops in squid-ink pasta with wild asparagus, an intermezzo sorbet with lavender, a wild fruit cup and fennel ice cream with chocolate and sea salt.

Baked salt-crust fish

Serves 6

- 5 lbs whole sea bream or snapper, scaled, fins and gills removed
 - 8 egg whites beaten into stiff peaks
 - 4 cups sea salt
 - 4 twigs fresh thyme
 - 4 bay leaves
 - lemon wedges
 - good olive oil
- Preheat oven to 400°F (approximately 200°C)
 - Fold the salt into the egg whites
 - Line a tray or large casserole with parchment paper
 - Spread one-third of the salt and egg white mixture as a base for the fish
 - Stuff the fish with thyme and place in the centre of the salt and egg white mixture
 - Cover the fish with the remainder of the salt and egg white mixture and stud with bay leaves
 - Bake for 40 minutes and let rest for 10 minutes
 - To serve, crack open the crust with the back of a spoon
 - Pull the crust and skin carefully away from the meat, and serve with lemon and olive oil
 - Serve as a fish course with a green salad



Cruise

Silversea Cruises

To the delight of all sea-bound foodies, Silversea, through its exclusive partnership with Relais & Châteaux, has just introduced L'École des Chefs, a new interactive cooking school that will be featured on 11 of the cruise lines' voyages in 2010.

The Relais & Châteaux L'École des Chefs program offers guests a special culinary curriculum and entertaining events hosted by Silversea executive chef David Bilsland. Educated in classic French cooking, Bilsland's career includes several years as a chef instructor at the prestigious Le Cordon Bleu culinary school in London.



The curriculum for each of these cruises is carefully designed to celebrate the cultural flavour of the ship's itinerary. Highlights include specialized workshops covering a range of topics from basic knife skills and kitchen terminology to sauces and baking; cooking demonstrations with wine pairings and interactive Q&A sessions; lively cooking competitions between Chef Bilsland and the ship's own culinary team; a 'Lunch and Learn' event offering small groups of guests a chance to sample a delicious meal of specially prepared dishes; and inspired 'Take It Home' recipes that will give guests an edge when entertaining at home.

Also offered on certain voyages is a 'Market to the Plate' experience that provides an escorted tour of a local market followed by a cooking class, and a 'Culinary Outing,' an instructor-escorted excursion to a local restaurant, hotel or other venue where guests can enjoy a unique culinary exploration.

SILVERSEA



The Whisky Generation

NICK KEUKENMEESTER

Everything old is new again. Bartenders who might once have given blank stares at requests for cocktails like the Rusty Nail are now well-versed in whisky-based recipes. Thanks in part to television shows like *Boston Legal* and *Mad Men*, the spirit that was once considered an 'old man's drink' is gaining popularity with a younger generation, for whom whisky represents power, intelligence and style.

Whether you call it 'Scotch' or 'whisky' (from the Gaelic 'uisge beatha' or 'water of life'), the best place to enjoy a 'wee dram' is, of course, Scotland.

What is Scotch? It's whisky. Whisky is a spirit made from barley, and sometimes other grains, which is crushed, soaked and fermented into a beer-like liquid called wash. The wash is then distilled into a clear spirit, which is aged in oak barrels to imbue it with colour and flavour complexity. Sounds complicated? It is.

When you are in Scotland, don't ask for a 'Scotch.' Ask for 'whisky' if you want a blend or 'malt' if you want a single malt. And just as important, never refer to a Scottish person as 'Scotch'!

Blended Scotch whiskies vary from cheap brands to well-known names such as Chivas Regal and Johnnie Walker. 'Blended' refers to the fact that both malted barley and other grains (unmalted barley, wheat and corn) are distilled. Grain whisky can be distilled in a continuous (Coffey) still to help keep costs down. The better examples like Johnnie Walker Black Label retain a characteristic flavour while offering more smoothness than malts.

Single malts are highly sought after by collectors. They are made entirely from malted barley and are distilled in old-fashioned pot stills. 'Single' means they come from just one distillery, whereas 'vatted' malts blend the malts of several distilleries.

Malt styles can be divided into regions: Islay, Highland, Lowland and the lesser-known Campbeltown (which no longer produces anything of great interest).

The Lowlands, near the English border, tend to produce malts used in blended whisky that offers a softer character and flavour.

Islay is an island halfway to Ireland. Try saying that quickly. Here the whiskies have a distinctly peaty (seaweed and salt) aroma and flavour. This is due to the local water and the fact that the barley is dried on peat fires. Lagavulin and Ardbeg are two key brands from this area.

The Highlands include Speyside and contain most of the famous brands like Glenfiddich and Glenmorangie, but also include the Island whiskies. I encourage anyone who enjoys a dram to explore them. Talisker from the Isle of Skye shows interesting spice and peat.

66 As important to the Scottish experience as the Stone of Scone or Loch Ness. 99

In the heart of Edinburgh and an easy walk from the castle is an attraction called The Scotch Whisky Experience. This is about as cheesy as it gets, but don't let that put you off. Amid the mechanical mannequins and audiovisual displays are some fascinating facts along with wonderful whiskies to taste. One fact I learned is that in the 1820s King George IV discovered whisky. Since royalty were the 'Brangelinas' of the day, the English public soon followed suit. Later in the century Europe caught on to whisky after a phylloxera infestation devastated the French wine industry and made Cognac hard to find. This gave Scotch the international following that it has kept to this day.

Most retailers in Edinburgh or Glasgow have samples for tasting, or you could immerse yourself by visiting a distillery or two when in the Highlands.

However you do it, you will be experiencing something as important to the Scottish character as the Stone of Scone or Loch Ness.



When to drink whisky...

I know it sounds crazy, but the variety of styles and flavours means that pairing whiskies with foods can be quite exciting. You don't have to serve haggis. Smoked salmon, minted lamb, cheeses, pickled dishes and Japanese food all work, just for starters.

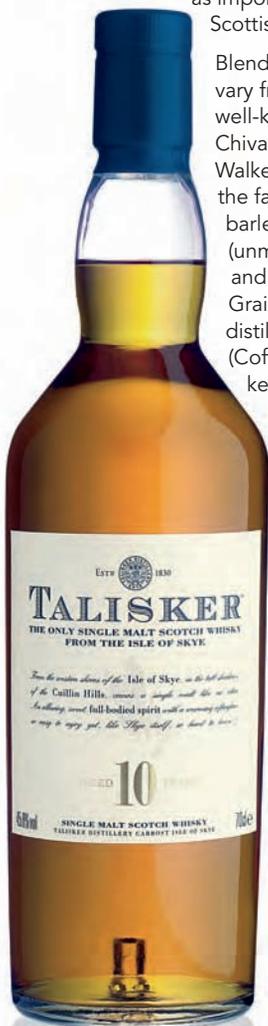
How to spell whisky...

Whisky is made all over the world, including Japan, Finland, Germany and Taiwan. The spelling 'whiskey' tends to be reserved for those made in the U.S. and Ireland. (Ironically, the spelling was changed to distinguish them from the once-inferior Scottish product!) The spelling 'whisky' is used for Scotch, Canadian and Welsh whisky. (In 2000, Penderyn Distillery started production of single malt whisky in Wales, the first since 1894. The tiny distillery is in the Brecon Beacons and makes stunning whisky.)

How to drink whisky...

If you want to taste the whisky add a little pure spring water. I know the distiller has spent much time and effort trying to take the water out of the whisky, but a little water brings out the flavour. Ice is fine for a refreshing drink but the colder temperature masks the flavours.

The Scotch Whisky Experience is located on the Royal Mile, at the top of Castle Hill adjacent to Edinburgh Castle, so you won't be the only tourist. A standard tour and tasting costs around £12. Children are welcome...but not for the tasting. (0131 220 0441)



Tour

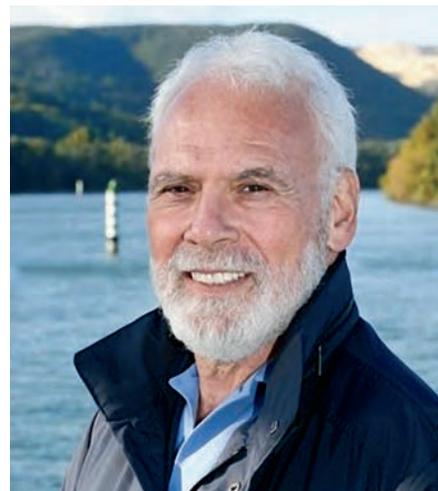
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Geneva to Crans-Montana to Lausanne. Enjoy an afternoon in Geneva with Burt Wolf, the host of the public television series *Travels & Traditions*, with lunch in Café Papon followed by a tour of Lake Geneva on an antique steamboat. This area is one of the great cheese producing regions of Switzerland. Discover why *raclette* is the ultimate melted cheese dish at lunch at the Chateau de Villa in Sierre. The most mountainous region in Switzerland is called the Valais. Ascend by cable car to Bettmerhorn to see the Aletsch Glacier with wonderful views of Switzerland's most famous mountain – the Matterhorn. Board the mountain train to reach Zermatt, a picturesque cluster of rustic chalets at the foot of the magnificent Matterhorn. The Valais is also the largest wine producing area in Switzerland. Visit the wine museum at Aigle Calse and enjoy a wine tasting at Chillon Castle. Discover Charlie Chaplin's contribution to chocolate during your



excursion to Vevey. Your tour ends with a lovely farewell dinner and many culinary memories of this beautiful area of Switzerland.

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Cruise

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Each of Seabourn's five luxurious yachts offers extraordinary dining experiences. Choose to dine on deck in one of their al fresco eateries, or at your request, you can have dinner from The Restaurant served course-by-course in your suite, complete with white linens, fine china and silver service.

Celebrated chef Charlie Palmer delivers on all levels, with an innovative menu that fills the senses with wonder. From traditional fine dining in the open-seating Restaurant and an eclectic and adventurous menu in Restaurant 2 to themed dining in The Colonnade and

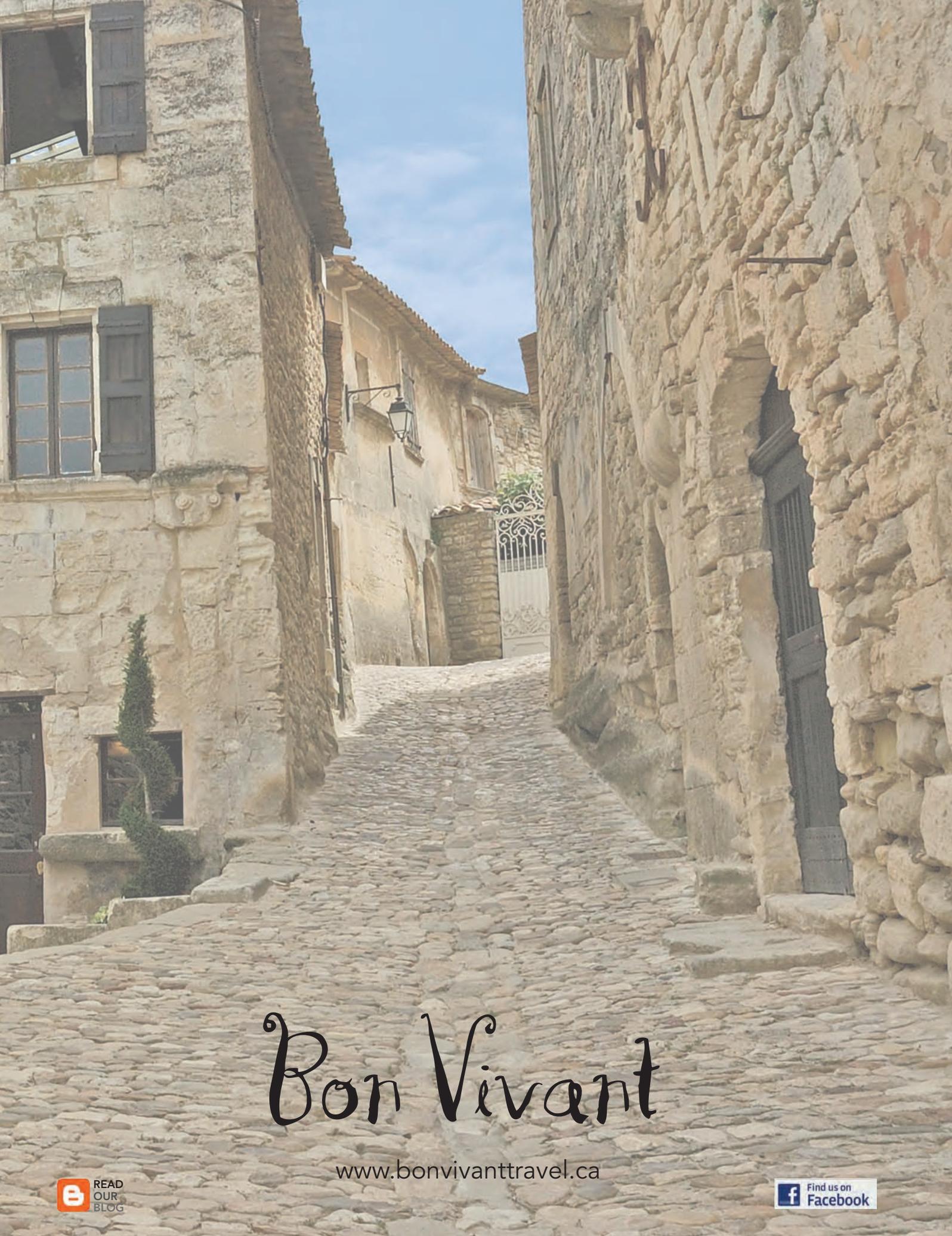


more casual fare in the Patio Grill, Seabourn's acclaimed made-to-order dining experience is enhanced by their personal custom of welcoming you like an honoured guest – whose preferences are carefully noted, then thoughtfully indulged every night.

Perhaps that's why Seabourn has been honoured with the prestigious International Five Star Diamond Award for the last 13 years and was ranked Top Cruise Line Food in *Condé Nast Traveler's* 2007 Reader's Poll.

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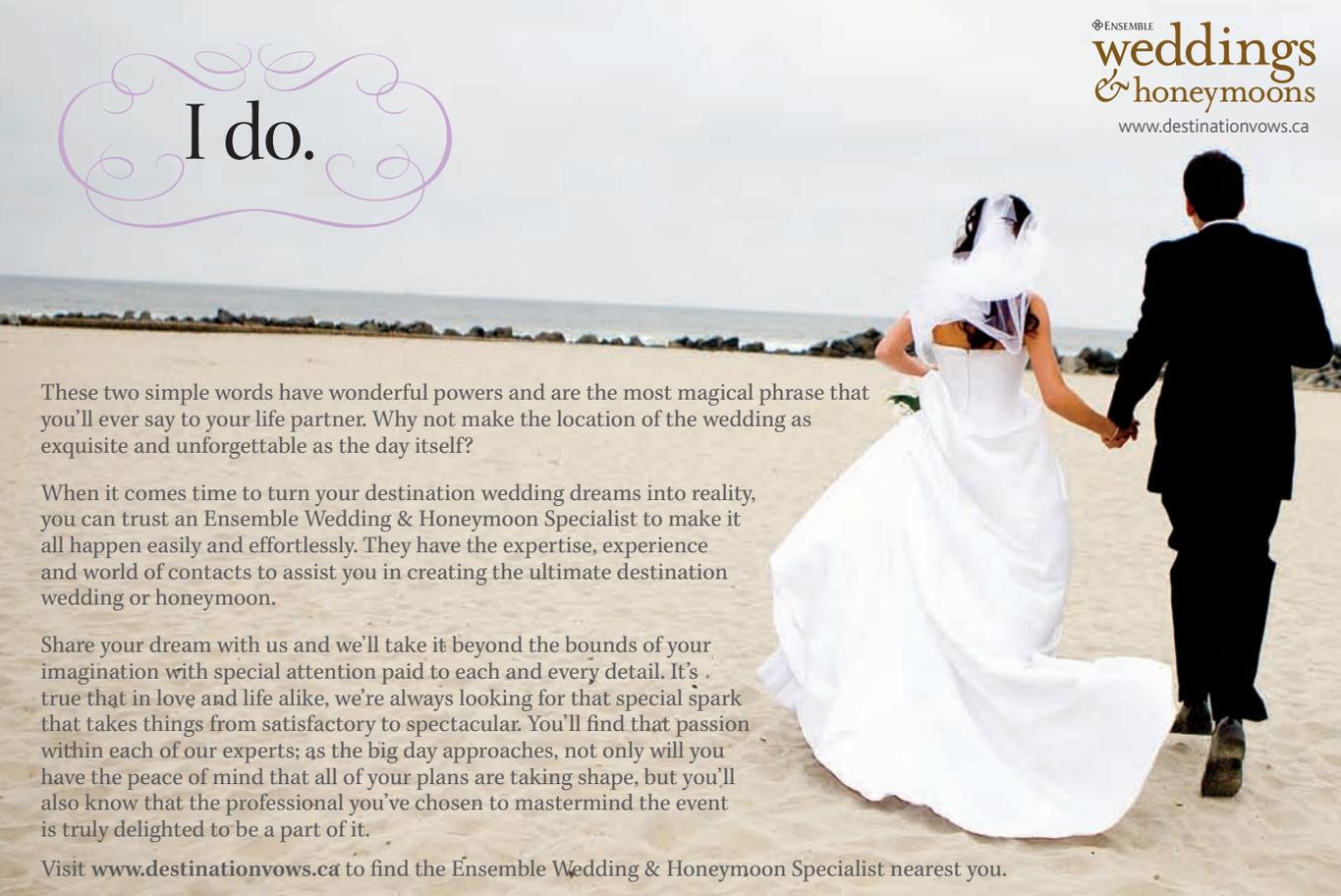
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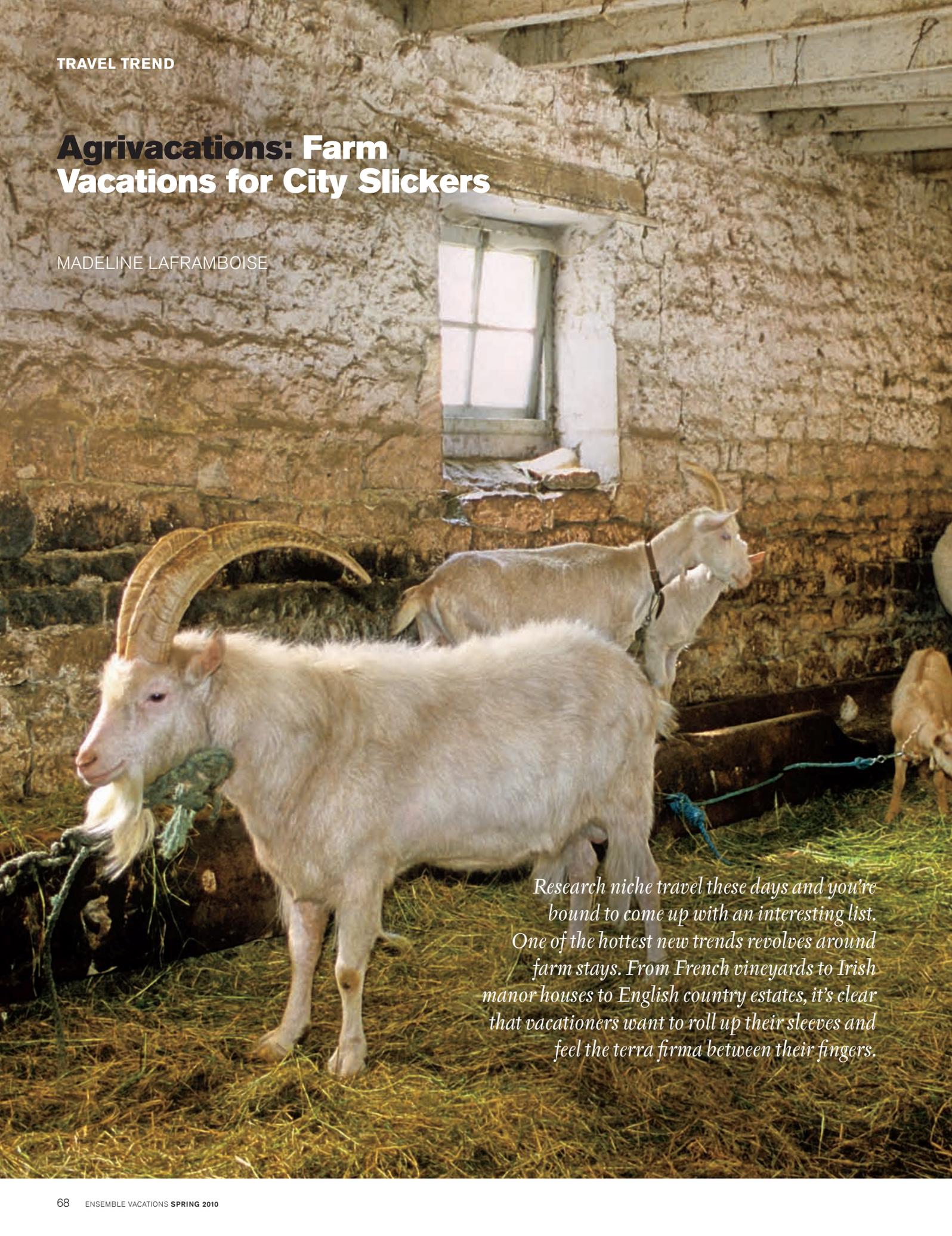
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Agrivacations: Farm Vacations for City Slickers

MADELINE LAFRAMBOISE



Research niche travel these days and you're bound to come up with an interesting list. One of the hottest new trends revolves around farm stays. From French vineyards to Irish manor houses to English country estates, it's clear that vacationers want to roll up their sleeves and feel the terra firma between their fingers.



AGRITOURISM IS BIG BUSINESS IN EUROPE. For instance, ever since 1985 the Italian government has given farmers tax breaks to play host to visitors. In Ireland, agritourism is considered economic development, with regions like **County Kildare** having its own rural development company called **KELT** to provide funding to local agritourism projects.

There are NGOs worldwide that specialize in agrivacations. **World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF)**, in existence since 1971, first planted its roots in the U.K. to offer volunteers a chance to work on a farm. Today the agricultural vacation network is an international movement.

Here's a selection of European agritourism hot spots:

Ireland

On the Emerald Isle a green thumb is in vogue. The Irish Tourism Office's website lists more than 80 visitor farms. Children can run through the sheep meadows at **Barradrum Farm**. Friends can gather at **Fairymount Farm**, an organic farm in **Tipperary**, to fish in the lake. For authentic rural experiences, Irish Farmhouse Holidays Association has an affordable selection of B&B farms.

Scotland

At the foot of a nature reserve in the **Scottish Highlands**, the bucolic beauty of **Bluebell Croft** appears like a dream. Here guests can wander the sustainable working croft interlaced with pastures and an organic farm amid cows, geese and chickens. Gather a basket of free-range eggs and head to the kitchen for a wee talk.

France

Bestselling author Peter Mayle's book *A Year in Provence*, about a man's quest to grow a garden in a small French village, spawned a movement of urbanites fleeing to these quaint towns. The French Tourism Office makes it easy to connect you with your inner Mayle. There is a network of more than 5,800 farms across France including B&Bs and cottages with a large sampling of activities. We loved **Rucher de la Cala Mélosa**, a honey farm in the south of France. Beekeeper Sophie Berton brims with enthusiasm as she reveals the bees' sweet secrets.

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Cyprus

Nestled in the Mediterranean Sea, Cyprus is the mythical birthplace of Aphrodite. But agritourism is another huge claim to fame. The EU heralded Cyprus's stunning Troodos region as one of the 10 best 'European Destinations of Excellence.' Imagine tilling the soil amid the many UNESCO World Heritage Sites, such as ancient monasteries like Kykkos tucked in the Troodos Mountains.

Czech Republic

The Cold War is over and the Bohemian woods, once *verboten*, are now open to outdoor adventurers who love to sample the pilsener as well as pick up a hoe at a nearby farm. A consortium of agritourism businesses has developed **Holidays in the Countryside** with a listing of more than 100 farms, summer houses and B&Bs. Reasonably priced accommodations, coupled with proceeds going to the European Centre for Eco Agro Tourism, a Czech non-profit organization, make this experience a popular giveback getaway.

Switzerland

Picture Brown Swiss heifers surrounded by the Alps, with the occasional yodeller thrown in for good measure. This picture-postcard image is a common sight for smitten Swiss nature lovers. Farmers are also showing their stuff, with many participating in agritourism organizations. There's **Ferien auf dem Bauernhof**, Switzerland's largest farm tour operator, with more than 200 farms available for bookings, and **Tourisme Rural**, with more than 280 properties in the French-speaking part of Switzerland.

Destinations across the Continent, Ireland and the U.K. are appealing more than ever to this burgeoning crowd of back-to-the-land enthusiasts. It's a chance to learn traditional methods in ancient lands and discover a whole new world in the Old World. ▣

For more information on agrivacations, contact your Ensemble Travel® agent.

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GRAVITAS QUOTIENT

No stranger to travel, **Jeanne Beker**, Canada's best-known fashionista, made her career trotting around the globe to report from the runways of the world's best fashion designers. The former editor-in-chief of *FQ* and *SIR* magazines, author and most recently judge on CTV's *Canada's Next Top Model* got philosophical to answer some GRAVITAS questions.

Why is it worrisome to be content?

Because you run the risk of losing your drive to explore and discover.

What are you going to do about growing old?

Grow more tolerant.

At what point do you realize a friendship is not working?

When you can't be honest with each other anymore.

What is your inner imperative?

Honesty.

Who do you wish would call you?

Karl Lagerfeld.

What is the point of all the struggle?

To learn how to stop.

What have you not got from your life so far that you hope to get?

Ultimate peace of mind.

How can you tell love is in the air?

You can feel all the butterflies.

What gets you blissed out?

The sun pouring through my farmhouse's bedroom window.

What magic elixir would you like to create?

A tonic for relieving heartache.

Why should we dance more?

Because walking pales in comparison.

If you knew the truth, how would you reveal it?

On Twitter. That usually spreads the word pretty fast...

What do you understand by the expression 'you have to suffer to be beautiful'?

Wearing Christian Louboutin stilettos all night!

What is the best way to test your dog's IQ?

Compare him to your cat.

What is the best way to get your confidence back?

Listen to your favourite old rock music at full volume.

If you were assigned a life coach with a mandate to change you, what would you get him or her to do?

Tell him or her to go jump in the lake. I don't want to be changed by anyone... ▽



GRAVITAS THE GAME

Invented by Canadian **Alan Gratias** after hosting a particularly interesting dinner party, Gravitas is a game of discovery – of who we are and how we live. There are no dice or cards, just questions with no right or wrong answers. Although the game calls for reflection, you can make it as lighthearted as you wish. The player with the highest Gravitas Quotient (GQ) wins! Why not test your own GQ? Find out more about the game at www.gravitasthegame.com.

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