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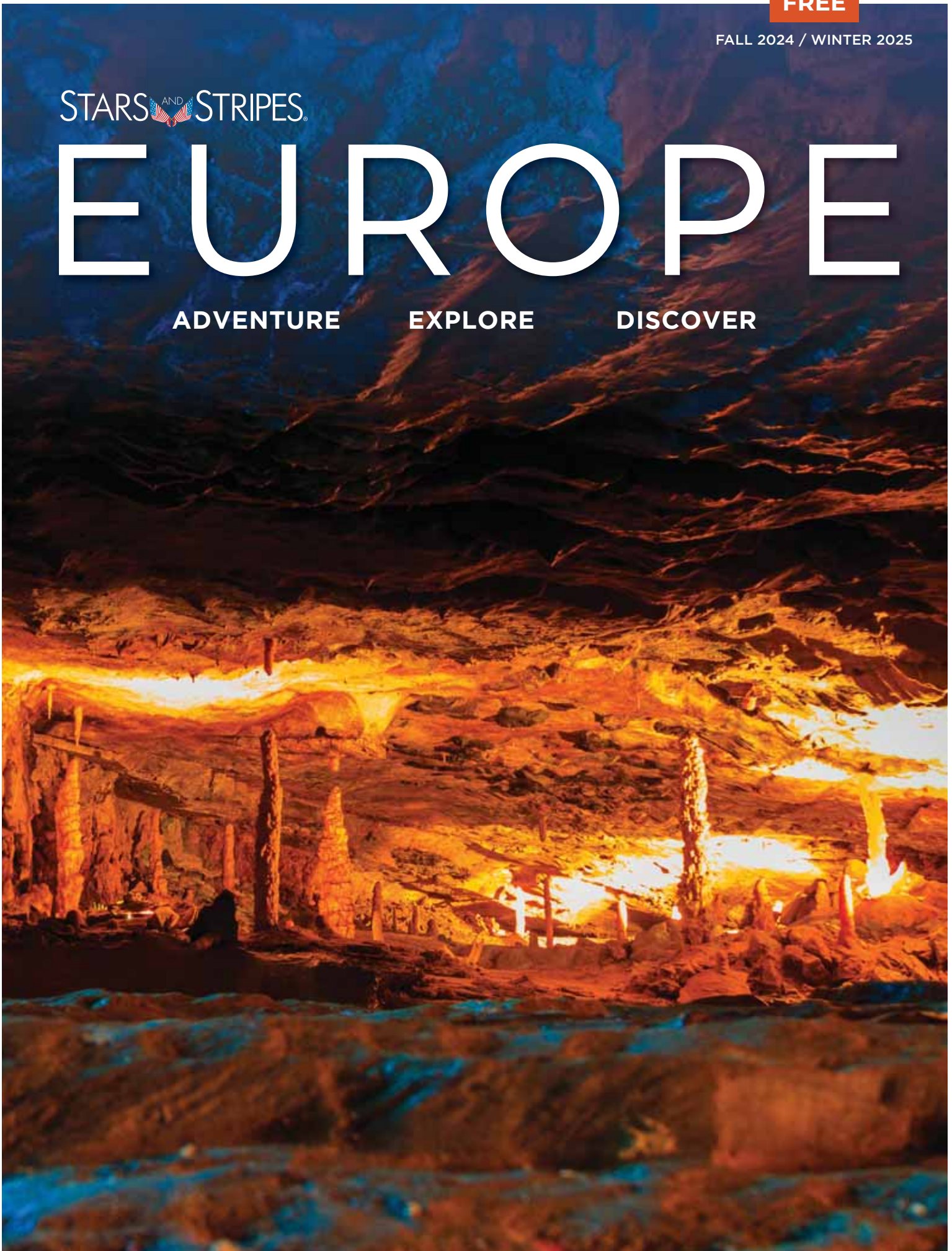
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EDITOR'S LETTER



Kat Nickola
Lead Writer-Editor
Stars and Stripes Europe

“Mythology can be defined as the sacred history of humankind.”

— Gerald Hausman

This fall we are sinking deep into the myths and legends that shape the European landscape. Find out where to visit the secret islands of **Ireland's pirate queen** or head **underground** to discover legends from across the continent. Read why **Germanic epic tales** are the basis of modern fantasy and where you can experience them. Head to **Liechtenstein** for some ghost stories or see where “Wednesday” was **filmed in Romania**.

Being stationed in Europe gives you an advantage for learning the stories behind many of the world's most famous artworks, too. Perhaps you want to explore the surrealist art of **Salvador Dalí** or check off all the real-world pieces from the museum in **Animal Crossing**. Join **Keebler the Dog in Düsseldorf** for an appreciation of Japanese art and culture.

More than anything, experiences bring stories to life, so get dressed up and head back into the sagas at a **medieval feast**. If your travelogue is all about food, then try an Irish brewery tour, dine at **Dracula's Cave** in Italy or float on the **Cheese Barge** in London.

Go! Do! Tell your own tale of adventure. You can trapse through the legendary halls of **Roman Trier** or live out your **luxury shopping** fantasies in Luxembourg. Head further afield to appreciate the magical **aurora in Iceland**, or sleep with the animals at a **zoo stay in France**. New experiences can evolve into legends within your own family.

As colder weather comes in, those stories are perfect for telling while snuggled inside for a **hygge** moment. Later, pull on your **Irish wool sweater** and head out into the crisp air to search for mysterious **photo-worthy mushrooms**. If you are up for an adventure, try **ice climbing**; Europe is a premier place to learn this frozen sport. For a city-based winter tale, head to **Paris** for some crowd-free exploration.

Fall and winter are the perfect time to add a little mystery and mythology into your travel plans. I hope you enjoy the inspiration in this edition of Stripes Europe and write a travel legend of your own.



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**In comparison to the Manufacturer's Recommended Retail Price, where applicable.

Keebler Visits “Little Tokyo” in Düsseldorf

By Angelica Silva



*Doing my best
not to jump in
with the koi.*

©ANGELICA SILVA



©ANGELICA SILVA

Hi! I am Keebler,
a Chihuahua-Boston Terrier mix with a nose for adventure, and I got to spend a tail-wagging day in Düsseldorf with my human family. The city is known for its “Little Tokyo” area. Here is a peek into our fun-filled day, packed with dog-friendly activities that made every moment memorable.



Doggy Walk along the Rhine

We arrived in Düsseldorf on a sunny morning, and my paws tingled with excitement as we headed to the **Rhine River promenade** to stretch our legs after the car ride. The wide path was perfect for a walk, and I loved watching boats glide by as I trotted with my family. I could hear the gentle lapping of the river against the banks and the laughter of people enjoying their morning. There were other dogs, too, and we exchanged friendly sniffs and wagging tails. Of course, I was always on a leash, ensuring I stayed safe and close to my humans.

Lunch at Naniwa

Soon enough, we had all worked up an appetite, so we visited **Naniwa**, a delightful Japanese restaurant. I was relieved that we got to the restaurant early even though there was a small line outside the door already. I waited patiently, enjoying all the amazing smells coming from inside. The line went quickly, and my family was able to peruse the menu while waiting to order. Naniwa offers a range of small plates but is best known for their ramen.

The staff welcomed me with a fresh bowl of water, making me feel right at home while my humans enjoyed their meal. Mom was sure to sneak me a few bites of veggies from her ramen, and it was delicious! I felt like a connoisseur of fine cuisine tasting Japanese food for the first time.

Treats at Bing Go

Afterward, we walked to **Bing Go** for some matcha ice cream and taiyaki. What is taiyaki, you ask? I learned that it is a sweet batter cooked into a fish shape and then filled with warm cream or chocolate. My humans savored the sweet treat, and I got a tiny taste of vanilla. Yum! The friendly atmosphere and the tasty, green and black matcha desserts and the joyful expressions of patrons made it a perfect stop for some delightful people-watching. I even made a few new friends, both human and canine, who could not resist my charming personality and wagging curly tail.

Exploring the Japanese Garden at Nordpark

We ended the day with a peaceful walk through **Nordpark**. This park was a paradise for a dog like me, with vast green lawns and shady trees. There was a small, gated dog park area, but I much prefer to adventure with my humans.

We visited the serene **Japanese Garden**, where the lush greenery and trickling water made me feel calm and content. The meticulously manicured gardens, with their beautiful arrangements of stones, plants and water features, provided a tranquil escape from the hustle and bustle of the city. I loved the peaceful surroundings and the chance to stroll leisurely with my family. The koi pond was especially fascinating; I watched the colorful fish swim gracefully and I did my best to not jump in with them....just to play, of course. Throughout our explorations, I remained on my leash since the park requires it, ensuring I could safely enjoy the surroundings.

Heading Home

As the sun got low on the horizon, casting a golden glow over Nordpark, we took one last moment to reflect on our day before heading home. I leaned against my humans, feeling grateful for the wonderful experiences and how welcoming Düsseldorf was.

Düsseldorf proved to be a fantastic place for a day out with my family, offering a variety of activities that were both fun and relaxing. From the bustling Rhine promenade to the tranquil Japanese Garden, every part of our day was filled with joy and new experiences. I am already wagging my tail in anticipation of our next adventure, wherever it may be. Here's to more adventures and happy tails ahead. ■





Catch Some ZZZs with the Animals in France

By Tamala Malerk

Want to try something new and unique for a fun weekend with the family? How about sleeping next to lions, tigers or bears (oh my!)? Okay, not exactly next to; there is a see-through wall between you and the bears. Escape to France with the family and pick which animals you want to have a sleepover with.



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For those close to the KMC

PARC SAINT CROIX

Across almost 300 acres, Parc Saint Croix offers 56 lodging choices in their nature preserves. In the zoo portion, you can see over 150 different types of animals. Depending on when you visit in the year, you can see how deer shed their antlers and grow new ones. In 2024, they introduced a new trail for visitors: the Voyage de Néo, biodiversity mission. On Neo's Journey, you learn all about biodiversity through canoe trips, barefoot paths, a story-telling tree and an insect crater.

Groups can choose between wilderness-themed lodges that overlook the wolves and deer, forest cabins with large windows with a view into the bear enclosure, intimate rustic huts near the lemurs and budget-minded yurts in the center of the park. For our readers in the KMC area, it is only a two-hour drive away. Your stay includes dinner and breakfast, plus access to the park for two days. Go to parcsaintcroix.com/fr/sejour-nature/les-lodges-nature to book your stay.

For those who love animals and theme parks

PARC LE PAL

Parc Le Pal combines the zoo and amusement park experience. Hop on roller coasters, ride the boats in Alligator Bay or go down the raging river. The animal park is home to roughly 1,000 animals that are the highlight of daily shows and educational activities. Download the Le Pal app on your smartphone to stay up to date on wait times, use the interactive map to find Wi-Fi spots and the restrooms, learn more about the animals with their in-depth digital files and create alerts so you don't miss your favorite show.



End your day with an overnight stay in the Savannah Lodge or the Hippopotamus Lodge. Depending on the option you choose, your accommodations can include entrance into the amusement park, animal park, breakfast and dinner. Reserve at lepal.com/stays.

For those who love ocean critters

MARINELAND



Spend the night at "Europe's largest marine zoo." While there, you can see encounters with dolphins, otters, killer whales, sea lions and more. Throughout the day, make your way to the performance stands where dolphins, orcas and sea lions perform. See not one, but two types of penguins, the King and the Rockhopper, and decide which is your favorite. Download the Marineland app to ensure you don't miss your favorite show. Their conservation efforts mean they do not offer paper maps.

Make the most of your zoo experience by staying at the hotel. Views from the hotel not only include the zoo but, if you are lucky enough, the Mediterranean Sea just a few meters away. You are also a short walk to Adventure Gulf, where three 18-hole mini-golf courses and a climate-controlled indoor gaming room await. Tickets to the zoo must be purchased separately but are available at reception. Book your stay at marineland.fr/acheter-des-billets/notre-hotel.

For those who want to see the world

CERZA SAFARI LOUNGE

More than 1,500 animals from five continents are waiting for you at Cerza Safari Lounge. While at the zoo, you can take the safari train and take pictures of all the animals, or catch a showing at the 3-D cinema. There are two walking trails in the zoo to see all the animals. Walk along the Red Circuit to view wildlife from Africa and others from around while walking on the Yellow Circuit. Walking both trails takes about 2.5 hours.

Groups can choose to stay in eco-lodges, "zoo observatories" and safari tents. Sleepover season is from February to November, and some options will not be available until warmer weather comes. Guests can sleep with views of rhinos, camels or monkeys. The safari tent options are located next to the rhino and Artic wolf enclosures. Make the stay extra special with romantic, birthday and massage options. Your stay includes admission to the park. Book at cerzasafarilodge.com.

For those who want a safari near Paris

WOW SAFARI THOIRY

Wow combines the zoo and safari experience, and is only 40 minutes from Paris. Go on a one-hour safari (in your vehicle or theirs) and then walk around the zoo. Throughout the day, see feedings of the gorillas, red pandas, giraffes, gibbons and more. Those feeling adventurous can zipline over the lions, walk through a trail of bouncy nets or see if they can make their way out of the grassy labyrinth. Everyone will enjoy the world farm where you can meet the woolly pigs, Highland cows and Racka sheep.



Wow offers two options for staying overnight. Guests can lodge in the elephant territory, or in the forest and watch the nocturnal habits of the bears. Make it a special experience with dinner in the safari area or have a birthday party in the zoo. Your overnight stay includes admission to the park, special elephant or bear-related activities, dinner and breakfast. Book your adventure at thoiry.net/les-nuits-de-thoiry. ■

Other fantastic French animal sleepover experiences to check out: Parrot World, Parc Animalier des Pyrénées, EcoZonia, and La Flèche Zoo.



LEGENDS OF Liechtenstein

By Tamala Malerk

*L*iechtenstein is the sixth smallest country in the world. However, there is plenty to do while visiting this tiny nation. You can visit one of its castles, stand in two countries at once at the Swiss-Liechtenstein border, check out a brewery, or go hiking, biking or shopping. Know that wherever you choose to roam, a ghost may follow. Or perchance, that rock you see is more than a simple stone.



THE GUSCHG HERDSMEN'S DOLL

"Chucky" has nothing on this doll. A group of herders and shepherds made a life-size doll out of spare rags. They ate and spoke with the doll; however, they were also known to occasionally beat it.

Fall came and it was time to bring the cows down from the mountains. The men were at the dinner table with the doll, when suddenly she spoke back to them. This terrified the men. According to legend, the doll said, "All of you but one may leave the meadow to bring the animals down into the valley... but one must stay with me." She pointed to the herder of her choice, and he stayed while the rest left.

As the men left to take the cows into the valley, they looked back and saw the man's skin stretched across their mountain hut's roof. Nearby, the doll was laughing.

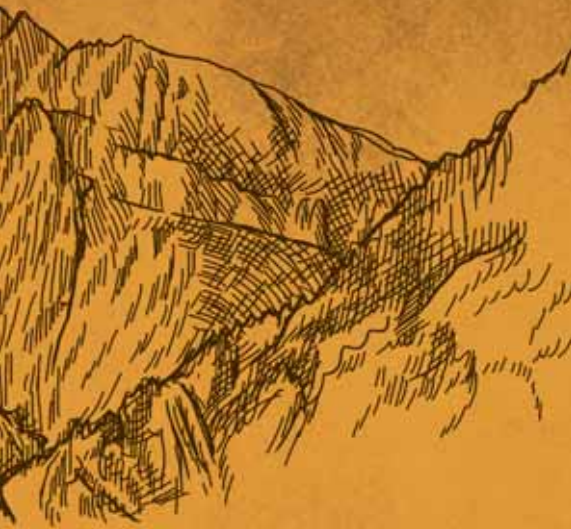
THE THREE SISTERS

The Feast of Assumption occurs every year on Aug. 15 to celebrate the assumption of the Virgin Mary into heaven. One year, three sisters left their village to gather berries. The bells rang, signaling the need for the sisters to return to attend church. One sister felt that they hadn't gathered enough berries and encouraged the others to ignore the bells.

When their baskets were full, they began to walk back to the village. Along the way, a woman stopped them. In some legends she is described as an old woman; in others, she is beautiful. She asked the sisters for some berries and they refused. Then, a halo appeared above the woman, revealing that she was the Virgin Mary.

She chastised the sisters for ignoring the bells and refusing to share their berries. The woman believed the sisters' hearts were made of stone. As punishment, she turned them into giant rocks.

BONUS



GOLDEN BOOS

It is said that there was a Liechtensteinian woman, Barbara Erni, who went all around Europe with a large treasure chest (or backpack, depending on the legend) on her back. She would go to inns with her chest and always asked for it to be put in the room with the inn's valuables, so it would be safely locked away. Once she was in her room for the night, a small man would come out of the box.

Barbara and the man would quickly grab anything valuable and run away. She became known as "The Golden Boos." When she was finally caught, Barbara was put into prison in Vaduz. She was the last person executed in the country by beheading in front of 1,000 spectators in 1784. No one knows what happened to the small man. Perhaps he is still robbing inns.

THE HOUND OF SANTAMERTA

The chapel of St. Mamerta in Triesen is known to locals as "Santamerta." One night, a man was praying in the chapel and a ghost appeared. The ghost told the man to come back with two friends at midnight and he could have a chest of gold, if they could get around the hound guarding the chest. The man returned with his two friends, and they saw the hound with the chest. One of the man's friends was too scared to attempt to get the hound off of the chest. When the friend showed he was afraid, all three men heard a terrifying scream.

The sound made the ghost appear and complain that he would now have to wait another 1,000 years. The ghost, the chest and the hound disappeared. However, the three friends were trapped in the chapel. They were only freed when someone came the next day to ring the church bells.

THE GIRL WHO HAUNTS LIECHTENSTEIN CASTLE

Legend tells of a miller's daughter who dreamed of having more than her simple life allowed. Rich people would go to her father for his work, but never invite him or his daughter to social events. In fact, the wealthy customers would laugh at her desperate attempts to fit in.

Not satisfied, she made a deal with a devil to get an invitation to a fancy ball at the castle. At the ball, no one would dance with her. They immediately recognized her for who she truly was. For the devil only garnered her an invitation, not the other things needed to fit in with high society. Her dress was made of flour sack materials, and she spoke with the accent and dialect of the working class people.

The miller's daughter realized that she would never find a husband. She made a spectacle of herself and would be the laughingstock of the town. Her sadness overwhelmed her. She suffered from a stroke, fell down a flight of stairs and died. Today, her mangled and bloodied corpse haunts the castle. After midnight, she roams the halls asking men she finds to dance with her. She is also insanely jealous of young men and pretty women, and attempts to scratch and bite their faces off. If you are older, you are not safe either. She attacks older people whom she blames for her plight.

Despite its name, the castle the miller's daughter haunts is in Prague and not Liechtenstein. However, it used to belong to the Liechtenstein royal family. ■





Travel Through Time in

..... **TRIER**

By Tamala Malerk

Step back in time on an easy day trip to Germany's oldest city, Trier. Originally called "Augustus Treverorem," Trier was founded in 16 B.C.E. by the Roman Emperor Augustus and briefly spent time as a capital city in the Roman Empire. In its over 2,000-year-old history, it has belonged to the Roman Empire, France, Luxembourg, Spain, Prussia and Germany.

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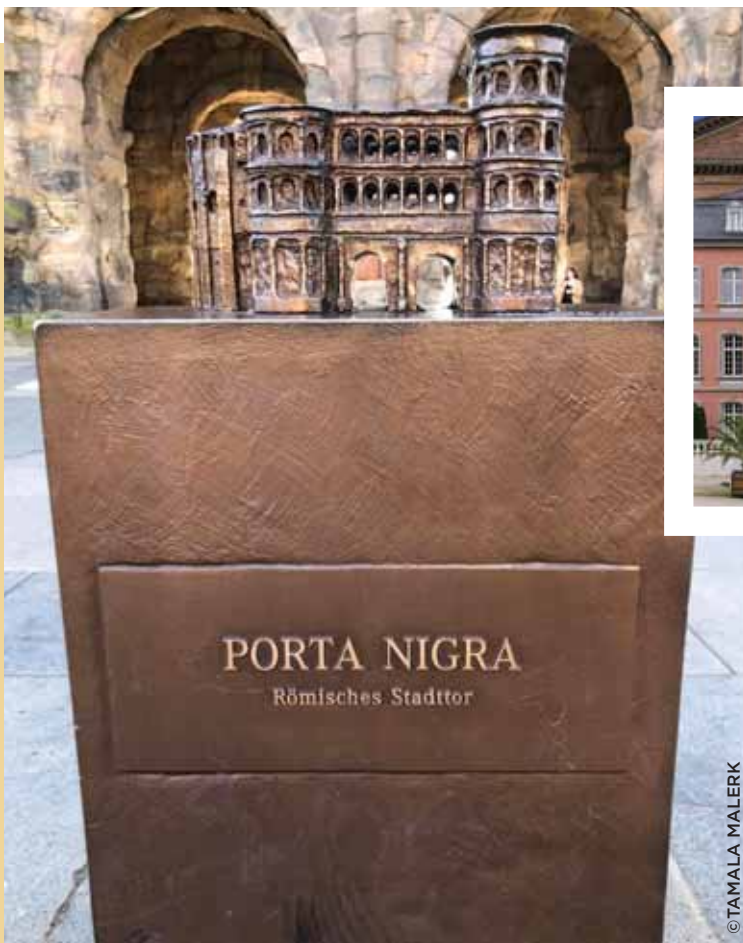
At the top of your list of time travel destinations in Trier should be the **Porta Nigra**, the largest and best preserved Roman gate north of the Alps. Visitors can walk around the exterior of this second-century gate for free, but I highly recommend paying the price of admission to walk up and around the interior for some of the best views of the city and mountains. Serving as a city gate was not its only purpose over the centuries, as you'll find out during your visit. You can fully integrate yourself into the time-traveling experience by taking "The Secret of Porta Nigra" tour. The tour is led by a Roman Centurion who draws the audience in with tales of the gate's history (in German).

Don't be fooled by the name, there is no need to bring your swimsuit to the **Forum Baths** and the **Imperial Baths**. You can marvel at ancient Roman engineering techniques as you wander through underground tunnels and passages and view the aqueduct system that kept the baths functioning at the Imperial Baths. The Forum Baths are still used by the people of Trier today. Every January, wine enthusiasts gather at the Forum Baths for the Wine Forum. People choose from over 200 wines to taste and vote on winners for several categories. The Imperial Baths and Porta Nigra are just two of the nine UNESCO World Heritage sites that exist in Trier.

Re-live some of your favorite scenes from "Gladiator" at the **Amphitheater**, another UNESCO World Heritage Site. The cellars where gladiators and animals would have been brought to the surface are still intact. No games are held there today, but it is the world's 10th-largest preserved Roman amphitheater.

In 310 C.E., Emperor Constantine the Great decided he did not want a simple hall for receiving his audiences (who had the audacity to share their grievances with him). He decided that if he must listen to people complain, he would do it in style. Thus, the **Aude Palatina** was built. It was designed with mosaics, marble floors and porphyry statues. Today it is known as the "Basilica of Constantine." It is another UNESCO site and is used as a Protestant church. You can visit outside of church service hours.

Jump forward in time from the Roman era to the 16th century. Located across from the Landmuseum, is the gorgeous **Electoral Palace**. Before getting up close and personal with the palace, eat a delicious breakfast outside at the museum's cafe, **Café Zeitsprung**. I had my very first German-style breakfast here, and I still wonder why they provide so many jams, Nutella and butters for one croissant. From the café, you can admire the view of the tiny duck pond and the palace's exterior. Keep in mind that access is restricted, but you can schedule guided tours of the foyer, courtyard and "Baroque Room."



Whether you want indoor educational experiences, shopping excursions or ancient outdoor adventures, Trier has something for singles, couples and families of all ages.



The **ANTIKENCARD Trier** will provide you with admission to several Roman sites and museums across Trier that are valid until the end of the calendar year for a reasonable €12 per adult with up to four children under age 18 included in the ticket price.



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©TAMALA MALERK

After breakfast, head to the **Landesmuseum** where you can view exhibits inspired by more than 200,000 years of German history and culture. The museum features over 4,500 objects and has the largest mosaic collection north of the Alps. The museum is also a publishing house and a place of archeological research.

After the museum tour, time hop to the 19th century and visit the birthplace of Karl Marx: **The Karl Marx Haus**. Be warned that this is an unassuming building and my spouse and I walked right past it two or three times before we found it. This house museum not only looks at the life of Marx but also the world he lived in. The museum contains personal artifacts, writings and letters from Marx as well as art based on his life, including a captivating hourglass exhibit. Outside of the house, use the crosswalk with traffic lights shaped in Marx's image.

Today, Trier is filled with delicious food, shopping opportunities, museums and history, and it makes a great day trip. In the heart of Trier is **the Hauptmarkt**. All year long, this marketplace is where you can shop till you drop, then refuel at one of the many restaurants, cafes and coffee shops, and then shop

some more. My spouse and I found an outdoor cafe where we ordered food and drinks. Then we participated in one of our favorite activities of people watching, which included seeing a line of people singing. This winter, from Nov. 22–Dec. 22, make sure to grab a trinket or two from the **Trier Christmas Market** held at the Hauptmarkt.

Speaking of favorable weather, a great place for fun with the entire family when the weather is nice is, **Wildfreigehege Weißhauswald**. Just a few minutes outside of the city center, visit the rare woolly pigs, fallow deer, wild sheep and various breeds of chickens at this wildlife park. The kids (and perhaps a certain writer who is a kid at heart) can even feed the Thuringian Forest Goats. Three walking trails begin in the parking lot with a variety of difficulties for all levels of hikers. Kids can also burn some energy playing on the playgrounds.

If the weather isn't great for hiking outdoors, check out **Trampoline Trier**, the indoor trampoline and fun park. Here you can find indoor roller coasters, bumper cars, climbing areas, a toddler area and more. ■



CLARE ISLAND



STRONGHOLDS OF IRELAND'S PIRATE QUEEN

By Kat Nickola

Grace O'Malley (Irish Gaelic: Gráinne Ó Máille) leaned out of the upstairs window and yelled "I dismiss thee!" to her second husband, whom she had locked out of their castle. It was a bold move, but this Irish woman was anything but meek. She was chief of the Ó Máille (O'Malley) clan, Lord of their territories in Umhaill, captain of their fleet and a pirate.

Tales of this female pirate chief are the stuff of legend and cultural memory. Her story is not recorded in Irish sources since the Ó Máille family book has not survived the centuries, and the monk writers of the Irish annals did not see fit to include a mention of a rogue female leader from Mayo County. The only official accounts are English sources, one even notes her questioning by Queen Elizabeth I. But that story is jumping ahead.

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Grace was born around 1530, as the only legitimate child of the Ó Máille clan chief. Perhaps that is why she was trained in seafaring at a time when such pursuits were typically reserved for men. Her clan controlled the waters around Clew Bay and had built a series of tall, square stronghold castles to guard against attacks from rival clans. She likely grew up at the family's primary residence on Clare Island, situated strategically to protect the bay.

Nowadays, you can still visit Clare Island and what is left of the Ó Máille stronghold. The dark, foreboding block of a structure sits beside the modern pier, protected and hidden by the nearby cliffs. People call it **Castle Gráinne Mhaol** (English: Granuaile, pronounced Gron-yoo-wail), a nickname given to this strong-willed young lady that means "Grace bald."

According to legend, her father planned a trading expedition to Spain and refused to take Grace along. The Ó Máille fleet primarily traded, but also dabbled in occasional coastal raiding and piracy when it suited them. Grace's father didn't allow her on the ships, saying her long red hair would get caught in the ropes. In retaliation, a young Grace cut off all her hair. It isn't known if she took the voyage to Spain, but from then on Grace frequently joined her father at sea and learned military tactics.

You can sail out to Clare Island on the **O'Malley Ferries** (omalleyferries.com). If the fall weather is nice, rent an e-bike from **Shoreline Pursuits** (shoreline-pursuits.ie) and pedal the 3km along the coast to **Clare Island Abbey** where the Ó Máille clan crest still marks the family's burial, and likely Grace's final resting place.

When she was a teenager, Grace was married to the heir of the nearby O'Flaherty (Irish Gaelic: Ó Flaithbheartaigh) clan and moved to their lands south of Clew Bay, living in another island castle on Lough Corrib. During this time, she had three children. Then, Elizabeth I ascended as Queen of England and Ireland. Intent on having control of Irish clan politics, the queen appointed another man as the O'Flaherty chief. In the aftermath, Grace's husband Dónal was murdered, and she successfully and violently defended the castle. Dónal was nicknamed "the cock" for his aggressiveness, so Grace became known as "the hen." The castle she defended was, from then on, known as Hen's Castle which remained in her control. You can still venture out to **Hen's Castle** on boat or kayak tours from operators around the lake. The O'Flaherty's would not submit to a woman chief, so Grace returned to her Ó Máille homeland with a loyal militia of their men.

In her mid-twenties, Grace became chief of the Ó Máille clan when her father died. She led the clan's fleet of over 20 ships in rebelling against the queen's control. They plundered English ships, took a 'toll' from anyone who sailed by, attacked clans that supported the English crown, and built a wealthy chieftom under the guise of trade and fishing. It is said that when her lover was killed, she sailed north to attack an entire clan at their castle.

Having captured her lover's murderers she brought them to abandoned Caher Island for execution. Grace used the many Ó Máille tower castles around Clew Bay to keep control of the area and evade capture. It is possible to see inside one of these: **Kildavent Tower** is open for exploration. Near the tower are the **White Cliffs of Ashleam**, where you can see the wild Atlantic Ocean and make out the **Cliffs of Croaghan**, the tallest sea cliffs in Ireland. Hardy souls can venture up the strenuous, exposed hike to the clifftops from Keem Bay.

When Grace remarried, she is said to have born her fourth child aboard a ship just prior to repelling an attack by Algerian pirates. Her second marriage was, as far as we can tell, a grasp for area dominance. In the agreement, she acquired Rockfleet Castle and its surrounding bay access. It was from here that she so abruptly dismissed her second husband, still well within the traditional one-year allowance for such a break-up. It's easy to stop by **Rockfleet Castle** on the return drive from Kildavent Tower. It is not currently open to the public, but is scenically situated along the water's edge and makes for a lovely rest stop. And, if racking up Ó Máille castles is your vibe, 15 minutes down the road from Rockfleet are the ruins of **Castleaffy Castle**. Though they sit on private property, a small pull-out is convenient for photographing the castle just over the stone wall and taking in the idyllic calm edge of the sound.

CASTLE GRÁINNE MHAOL

Grace used the many Ó Máille tower castles around Clew Bay to keep control of the area and evade capture.



HEN'S CASTLE



KILDAIVENT TOWER



ROCKFLEET CASTLE

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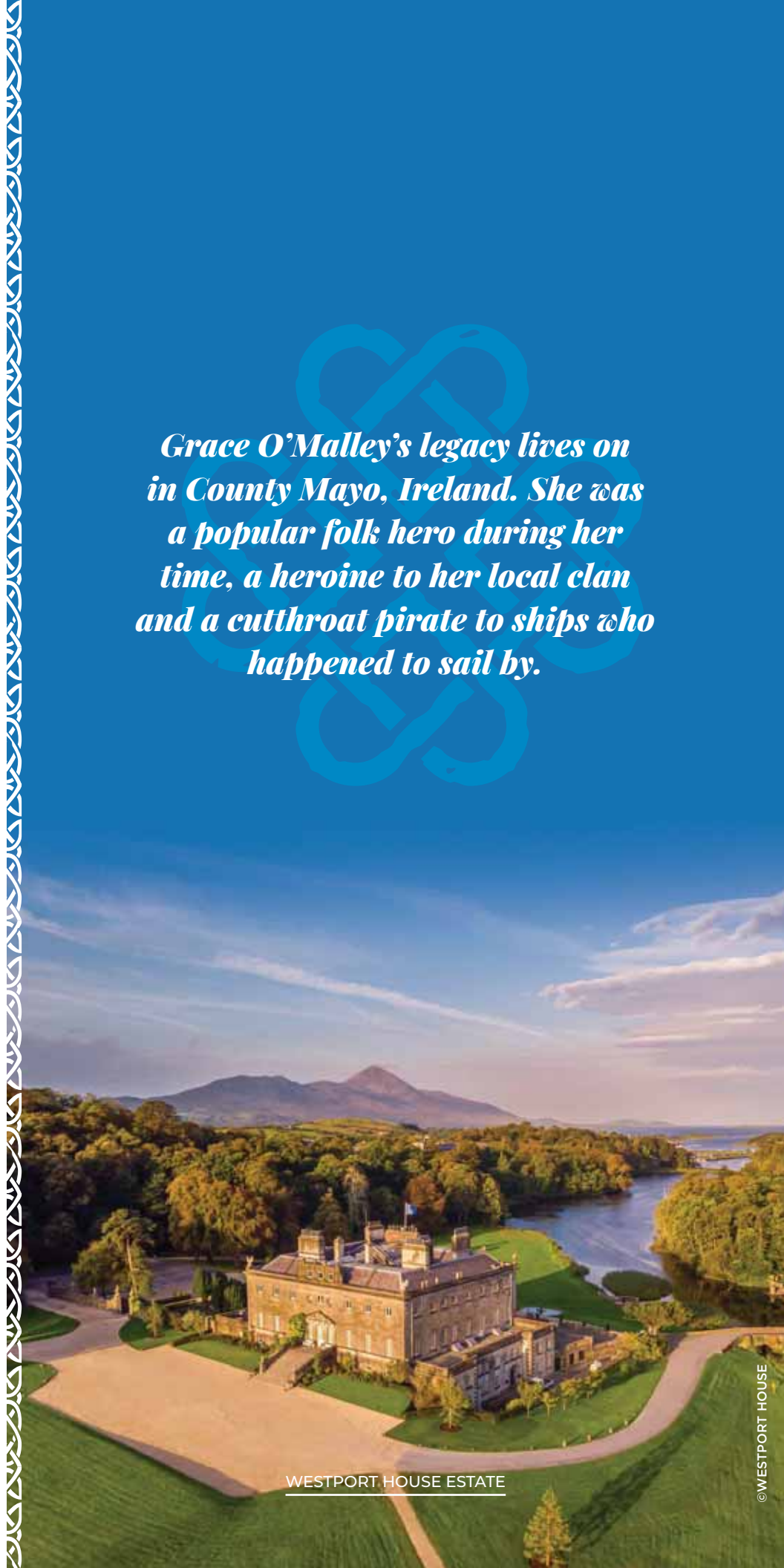
For Grace, the fight against English control was a quest. She became notorious for leading rebels but was willing to give up control for her son. He had been caught by the English navy and was being held for treason. At the same time, Grace's fleet was destroyed. So, she pirated control of an English ship and sailed for London where she was granted an audience with the queen at Greenwich Palace. People lined the Thames River to see the pirate woman sail in. After a diplomatic meeting, the queen agreed to release all her captured relatives in exchange for Grace's subjugation. From then on, the English Navy monitored Grace's fleet, but the Ó Máille clan continued to help the Irish rebels. Grace O'Malley and Queen Elizabeth both died in 1603, the same year England regained full control over Ireland.

To visit County Mayo's famous pirate sites, it is best to base yourself in the quaint village of **Westport**. There, you can find pubs with fireside seating, a scenic tree-lined river walk, and unique local shops. The town is adjacent to the **Westport House** estate, land owned by the decedents of Grace O'Malley. On a tour of the house, you can see the dungeons from the original Ó Máille clan fort. The grounds are worth exploring to find the Grace O'Malley statue or have fun at the outdoor adventure park. It is open primarily on weekends during the fall until Christmas, and daily in summer.

Grace O'Malley's legacy lives on in County Mayo, Ireland. She was a popular folk hero during her time, a heroine to her local clan and a cutthroat pirate to ships who happened to sail by. A bold chief and military leader, she has earned her moniker as Ireland's Pirate Queen. ■



Grace O'Malley's legacy lives on in County Mayo, Ireland. She was a popular folk hero during her time, a heroine to her local clan and a cutthroat pirate to ships who happened to sail by.



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A man and a woman in medieval attire are seated at a table in a rustic, stone-walled setting. The man, on the left, has a beard and is wearing a dark tunic with a green and gold pattern. The woman, on the right, is wearing a red dress and a dark headscarf with a red band. They are both smiling and looking towards each other. The table in front of them is set with a large, ornate glass vessel, a plate of food, and two lit candles in glass holders. The background features a stone wall and a window with a white curtain.

GET YOUR FILL AT THESE FANTASTIC FEASTS

By Stacy Roman

Thinking of the Middle Ages often conjures up images of dashing knights, noble lords and ladies seated upon thrones and, of course, an enormous wooden table surrounded by jovial guests ready to do some serious damage to a giant turkey leg and a large goblet of mead. If you have ever wanted to experience a more authentic version of Medieval Times, you're in luck! After all, you are in Europe, home to incredible castles and opportunities to step back in time. Here are five fantastic places to experience a feast fit for kings and queens.

Bunratty Castle and Folk Park *Bunratty, Ireland*

Stroll through the grounds of this 15th-century Irish fortress and folk park. Complete with a fairy garden for little ones, a replica Victorian-era village street and a Regency garden reminiscent of "Bridgerton," it is easy to work up an appetite by exploring the area. The award-winning evening banquet is not to be missed. Sip on mead and nosh on ribs or chicken while being entertained by minstrels and tales from the days of yore. Book tickets at www.bunrattycastle.ie.

Cochem Castle *Cochem, Germany*

Within day-trip distance of Kaiserslautern and Wiesbaden, this beautifully restored castle is perched high above the Mosel River and award-winning vineyards. Treat yourself to the Knight's Meal. This four-hour spectacle is full of medieval comfort food, music, entertainment and, of course, Mosel wine. While turkey thighs and pork hocks are the meal's highlights, vegetarian options are also available. To make reservations, visit reichsburg-cochem.de.



Take a step away from the ordinary and head back in time. Enjoy a unique and one-of-a-kind dining experience at a medieval banquet—no cheering for knights required.

Schönbrunn Palace

Vienna, Austria

If harkening back to the Middle Ages is not quite your cup of mead, Schönbrunn Palace in Vienna offers a more civilized affair. Held in the ornate palace orangery where Mozart once played, enjoy a three-course meal and a classical concert courtesy of the Schönbrunn Palace Orchestra. Admission starts at 107 euros per person. Book your visit at www.palaceconcertsvienna.com/en.

Coombe Abbey Hotel

Coventry, U.K.

A little over two hours west of RAF Lakenheath is the medieval market town of Coventry. Just on the outskirts of the city is the Coombe Abbey Hotel. This impeccably restored manor was once one of England's prominent monasteries and also a home for royalty. Visitors can step back in time and enjoy a raucous and rousing four-course feast with wine and various cocktails. Keep the festivities going with a post-show

after-party, or stay in one of their themed hotel rooms. The feast is for more mature audiences, ages 18 and older. To reserve your spot, visit www.coombeabbey.com.

Medieval Tavern U Krále Brabantského

Prague, Czechia

Known for iconic panoramas of the Charles Bridge, Prague Castle and picturesque Old Town Square, the Medieval Tavern U Krále Brabantského whisks visitors into the

dark underground. Translated as "King of Brabant," the oldest tavern in Prague opened in 1375 and was notorious for the secret dealings of kings and smugglers. Diners can choose between a three- or five-course meal with unlimited drinks. Belly dancers, fire breathers and sword fighters will entertain and enchant you. Book your tickets at www.krcmabrabant.cz/en. ■



IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF A SAGA

By Kat Nickola

A lot of English histories gloss over the early Middle Ages in Germany. I mean, after the Romans left, wasn't it the Dark Ages? This was the time of dragons guarding hoards, invisibility cloaks, underwater nixies, magic and a chivalrous Attila the Hun. At least, that is what the legends say.

Many of these legends were written during the "Migration Period" of northern European history, from around 300 to 600 AD when tribal groups were invading and being displaced. This is when the Angles and Saxons went to England, the Goths descended from Scandinavia and when the Huns arrived from the eastern plains. Stories of great leaders from the time mixed with fantastical tales of dragons or gods and they became legends told around fires by bards and skalds for centuries. These were finally written down in many different places as Christianity brought literacy northward in the 1000s–1400s.

Each written manuscript has its own version of the story, and they vary greatly by location. The "Nibelungenlied" (Nee-bull-OONG-en-leeed) is the most popular in Germany. The oldest known versions are from three complete manuscripts written in the 1200s.

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MONUMENT TO THE NIBELUNGS

continued from page 24

“NIBELUNGENLIED” THE OLD HIGH GERMAN VERSION

Princess Kriemhild from Worms is the hero of this story. She is known for her beauty, so many young men hope to court her, including a prince from Xanten named Siegfried. But her three brothers are very protective. Siegfried takes on knightly duties for her brother King Gunther and helps him defeat the Saxons and Danes. His valor finally sways Gunther into allowing the two to meet, and Kriemhild soon finds herself in love with Siegfried.

You can walk in the footsteps of Kriemhild and Siegfried in **Worms**. As the historic seat of the Burgundian kings, this city really did host royalty. From fountains in the city squares to the stone Siegfried tossed over the cathedral, the legend is found all over town. In fact, Worms touts itself the “Nibelungenstadt.” Venture to the Torturplatz to walk along the city wall, parts of which have been in the same place since 360 AD. Siegfried’s traditional burial mound (an art installation) nobly sits opposite the city tower which holds the Nibelungenlied Museum (closed at the time of writing).

Siegfried comes with a reputation since he has conquered the lands of the Nibelung (maybe Norway) where there are dwarves and giants.

He wields the legendary sword Balmung, which he won from the Nibelung princes. He tricked a guardian dwarf to earn the *Tarnkappe* (invisibility cloak) and claimed the Nibelung’s golden hoard. There are plenty of other tales of Siegfried’s daring adventures, but most impressive is that on his way to Worms he slayed a dragon that lived under a mountain so he could bathe in its blood and become invincible (except a small spot he missed because a leaf was covering it).

The **Drachenfels** across the Rhine River from Bonn is where Siegfried slayed this unfortunate dragon. You can visit this hill at the end of a uniquely high ridgeline from Königswinter, where you catch the *Drachenfelsbahn*, a historic cog railway ascending the mountain. With a one-way ticket up, you can see the sights as you walk back down the mountain. At the top, explore the ruins of Drachenfels Castle and be sure to find the carving of a dragon. After admiring the view, head down the trail to the ornate *Drachenburg*, a late 19th-century palace built in the romantic style of a fantasy past. Next is the perfect rest stop: *The Winzerhäuschen*, where you can grab lunch in the beergarten of an adorable half-timbered house with an impeccable view of the river. The last attraction before you’ve made it all the way down the hill is *Drachenwelt* (Dragon World). This kitschy place is worth a visit to see the reptile zoo, the dragon’s cave and the *Nibelungenhalle* with murals from the legendary story.



THE NIBELUNGENSTEIG

After Kriemhild and Siegfried meet, the legend takes a bit of a tangent. King Gunther asks Siegfried to travel with him to an island in the far north (maybe Iceland). He wants to woo a magical queen named Brünhild, who kills any man who attempts her challenge and fails. He wins, thanks to Siegfried and the invisibility cloak.

Back in Germany, Kriemhild finally marries Siegfried. They are madly in love and return to Xanten where Siegfried rules as the king of the Nibelungs. Years pass. They are happy. But, trouble is brewing back home.

Today, in Xanten you can retrace the lovers’ story at the **Siegfried Museum**. There are plenty of versions and variations of the “Nibelungenlied”, and the museum features a comprehensive collection of historic books and retellings. It also illustrates the significance of the legend across regions and throughout time. While in Xanten, you should also visit Germany’s largest open-air archaeological park: APX. This area had been one of the largest Roman cities in Europe before its downfall led to the Migration Period of “Nibelungenlied” legend.

“

There are plenty of other tales of Siegfried’s daring adventures, but most impressive is that on his way to Worms he slayed a dragon that lived under a mountain so he could bathe in its blood and become invincible.”



DRACHENFELS

One of Gunther’s henchmen plots to kill Siegfried to get the Nibelung gold for the king. The couple are tricked into returning to Worms. Then the henchman gets Kriemhild to reveal Siegfried’s vulnerability. Siegfried is speared through the shoulders while hunting across the Rhine River. While the henchman claims it was an accident Kriemhild suspects the truth and vows revenge on her whole family.

The golden hoard is stolen from Kriemhild by her brother’s henchman and secreted away. It is still supposedly hidden somewhere along the Rhine River. From then on, the family uses the Nibelung name as a title, since they have now claimed the dwarven gold.

*For the adventurous, the 130km **Nibelungensteig** is a Siegfried-themed trail on the east bank of the Rhine. It traverses the Odenwald, up and over boulder-strewn mountains where the Nibelung people hunted and where Siegfried is killed. There are dragon sculptures and knight’s castles looming over the forest in villages along the way. You can earn a trail pin by getting your hiking pass stamped at each stage.*



HAGEN MONUMENT

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Etzel (Atilla the Hun), the most powerful ruler at the time. Though she is not in love, her marriage is the beginning of a plot to destroy her brother Gunther. She travels to Vienna for the wedding and becomes a powerful queen. More years pass (Kriemhild plays the long game) and schemes to get her family to visit the Hunnic Empire. King Gunther arrives with a 1,000-man entourage of knights “just in case” things get heated. Along the way, they are warned by some nixies (water spirits) in the Danube that only one man will return alive.

It all comes to a bloody end when Kriemhild instigates confusion and fighting between her brother and the Huns. King Gunther is defeated, and both he and his scheming henchman are brought to her for pardons. But, Kriemhild has her final revenge and beheads them both.

*The secret burial place of the Nibelung’s golden hoard, known as the **Rhinegold**, was never revealed. However, in 2014 a buried hoard was found near Ruelzheim in one of the many former courses of the Rhine as it has shifted over time. Such hoards are very rare in Germany. It was dated to 405–406 AD, perfect timing to potentially be the lost Nibelung’s hoard. ■*



EMBRACING HYGGGE

*& European Traditions
of Coziness*

By Katie Wells

As the summer crescendo of insects and birds starts to lull, winter winds drift in and vegetation drops its last seeds to the ground, we are reminded to soften our busy pace of life and settle into the softer rhythm of the year's end. All over the world, different cultures have routines and traditions to do this, yet none embody the snugness of winter as a way of life like the Danish do.

To understand how to adopt the cozy-life mentality, we must first look at the Danish way of being, *Hygge*. Pronounced (hoo-gah). *Hygge* has many translations like, "coziness" or "cocoa by candlelight." The word can be traced back to the Middle Ages, derived from the old Norwegian, *hugga* meaning "protected from the outside." The first appearance of the Danish adaptation was recorded in the 18th century and has been embedded in the Danish lexicon since. While Christmastime is peak *hygge*, year-round the Danish light their homes with warm twinkly lights, line their furniture with furs, sip meditatively on cups of hot beverages and apply a methodology of slowing down to appreciate the small moments in life.

A few tips for a more *hyggelig* lifestyle:

1. Create a warm, welcoming space.

By lighting candles, dimming the lights, putting on a pair of slouchy socks, and popping cinnamon buns or another hearty treat in the oven, you can encourage coziness for yourself and your loved ones.

2. Practice mindfulness.

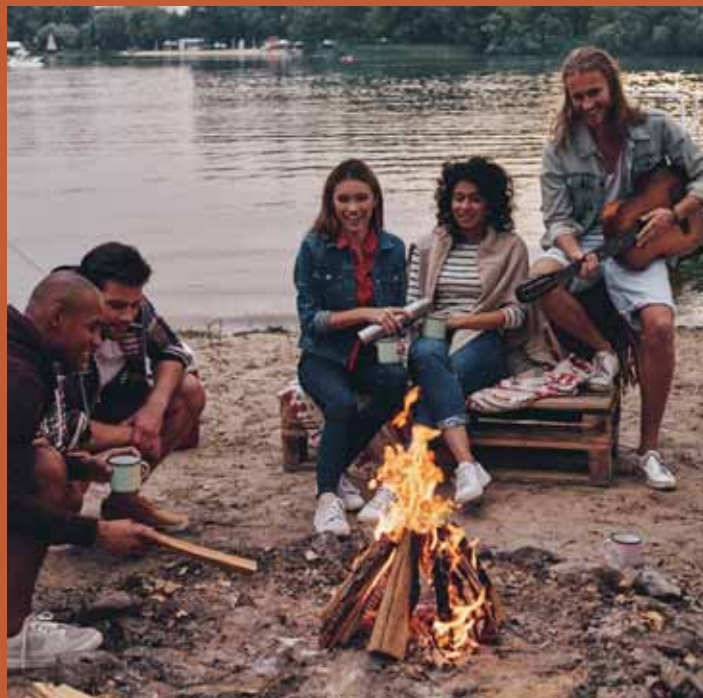
Hygge embodies being present to create joy even in seemingly insignificant things. This can be something as simple as switching on a salt lamp, noticing how soft your pet's fur feels as they sit next to you on the couch, or focusing on the taste and texture of each bite of your meal.

3. Nourish connections.

Invite friends over for a night of boardgames by the fire or set up an outdoor movie screening in the summer. Connect with yourself by listening to music, reading a book or hiking in the forest.

4. Comforting food.

Hearty breads, stews and warm glogg provide comfort and fill the home with delicious smells. A popular Danish treat for Christmas is *Æbleskiver*, or Danish pancake balls. They are served hot with powdered sugar or jam. Specialty pans are even sold for them.



While hygge is very much a full-embodyed lifestyle, many other countries practice similar rituals to find happiness such as Japan's *Ikigai* (reason for being), or southern Africa's *Ubuntu* (I am, because we are). Below are a few European practices you might consider adopting for the winter season or even year-round.

Gemütlichkeit

In Germany, *Gemütlichkeit* is more of a feeling that hits you. It is a creation of friendliness, good cheer and belonging. It is the state of warmth often felt at beer gardens or Christmas markets. Especially in older villages, Germans have a strong sense of community and togetherness. The song "Ein prost der Gemütlichkeit" (a toast to coziness) is played at traditional, community events and embodies this feeling. A contrary German practice that is also *hyggelig* is *Waldeinsamkeit* or, forest loneliness. It describes the feeling of enlightenment and inspiration that comes from roaming the forest alone.

Gezelligheid

The Dutch word *Gezelligheid* does not have a direct translation but could be summed up as a sense of heartwarming comradery. It is more often practiced outside the home when having a good time with others. Meeting friends for a beer at a vintage bar could be considered *gezellig* due

to the cozy atmosphere and sense of human connection. A birthday party, gathering at a park or having a nice family dinner could also be *gezellig*.

Coorie

Coorie derives from an old Scottish word that means to nestle or snuggle. Similar to *hygge*, it teaches us to appreciate the simple moments in life. It is embracing harsh weather and appreciating the comfort of coming back inside. *Coorie* even has its own terminology to help describe the feeling. An example of this is *Stravaig*, meaning to wander without purpose, just enjoying wandering for wanderings sake. *Driech* is used to describe the worst of Scottish weather that demands you indulge in a hot scotch broth or hot toddy while curling up with a good book. Skipping stones over the loch, a polar swim or dancing around the living room with friends all embody the *coorie* lifestyle.

Koselig

In Norway, *Koselig* translates to "cozy" and encompasses moments of comfort, generosity and friendliness. The feeling centers more around being in a social setting, rather than being alone. It has a more focused connection to nature and the outdoors. Like Germans and Scots, Norwegians embrace going outside despite the weather because it is a mood-booster. Going on

a ski trip, having a big bonfire, or even chatting on the phone with a friend while on a walk is considered *koselig*.

Mysa

Mysa is the Swedish word for cozy and, like *hygge*, it embodies living one's life presently and surrounded by warmth and happiness. A steadfast Swedish ritual that perfectly captures this is *Fika*, which is when you take a pause out of your day to enjoy a long-lasting coffee break accompanied by a sugary pastry and good company. Ducking into a warm coffee shop out of the cold rain with a friend and sitting with your hands wrapped around a steaming mug of joe would be *mys-fika*.

Jólabókaflóð

While *Jólabókaflóð* meaning, "Christmas book flood" is more of a one-day-tradition rather than a lifestyle, it embodies a coziness and togetherness that make it worth mentioning. This unique tradition reflects Iceland's love for literature as it involves giving and receiving books. The heart of this tradition is in the joy of reading those books snuggled up together on a cold winter's night with a warm fire, a mug of hot cocoa, Icelandic chocolates and specialty beer. A deep sense of connection that could be carried out year-round. ■





A NON-FORAGER'S
GUIDE TO DISCOVERING

Vibrant Mushrooms

IN THE

Palatinate Forest

By Katie Wells

Aesthetic, squishy, and odd *waldpilze* or, mushrooms have made their way into pop culture, recipes and home décor all-over the world. In Germany, there seems to be an even deeper appreciation for the fungi as mushroom foraging baskets are prepped every autumn, and people set off into the forest to hunt for a plethora of species.

One of my favorite pastimes since moving to Germany, has been taking my two dogs on long forest hikes. As each year passes, my eyes have grown to notice the subtle seasonal changes in the shrubbery and the types of mushrooms and fungi that vibrantly dot my regular routes. It's become an exciting activity to spot a new species or a peculiar cluster and to send pictures to a

mushroom-loving friend living in Florida. We "ooh" and "aah" over them together, wondering what magic they possess or if they could be fairy rings.

Here is a quick overview of some mushrooms found in the Pfälzerwald, or Palatinate Forest. It might be fun to take the kids out to try identifying (not touching or eating) the mushrooms on this list. Mushrooms also make wonderful subjects for a photography walk in the woods. You might make new discoveries. It seems each year I'm surprised by new species.

In the words of writer Terry Pratchett, "All fungi are edible. Some fungi are edible only once."

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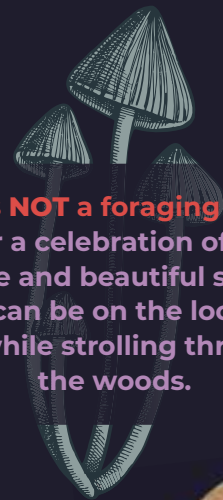
Hair Ice, Gnomes Beard, or Ice Wool

Exidiopsis Effusa

On a frosty morning walk in the forest, I spotted what looked like a giant, fluffy white caterpillar. As I got nearer to this magical creature, it appeared to be a strange formation of ice. Hair ice is a peculiar thing. It's not 100 percent fungus, nor is it simply ice. Temperatures need to be below zero degrees Celsius and there must be moisture in the air for the threads of ice to form on damp, rotting wood. In these conditions, the rotting branches push water to the surface that combines with a fungus called **Exidiopsis Effusa**. This creates delicate, wintery crystal formations. If you're able to spot Hair Ice you're lucky, as the occurrence is quite special.



This is NOT a foraging guide, rather a celebration of some unique and beautiful species you can be on the lookout for while strolling through the woods.



The Classic Fairy Tale Toadstool, Fly Agaric

Amanita Muscaria

This adorable, iconic mushroom is Germany's Glückspilz or "Lucky Mushroom," and is a positive omen when spotted. It is believed that you will have good fortune in the coming year. It typically grows at the base of pine trees and people like to search for them around Christmastime, which makes them a symbol of Christmas in Germany. Although it is a beloved mushroom all over the world, **Amanita Muscaria** is poisonous, so it's best not to pick them and to simply admire them from afar.



Clustered Wood Lover, Sulphur Tuft

Hypholoma Fasciculare

Unlike the Old Man of the Woods, **Hypholoma Fasciculare**, are socialites and form as a large group. They are abundant in Germany and their bright sulphur-yellow caps make them easy to spot in a lush green forest. They like to feed on stumps and can also be seen in grass feeding on root systems just beneath the surface of the soil. Despite their fun color and bulbous, gummy-like appearance, this is another poisonous mushroom that is better left untouched.



The Parasol Mushroom

Macrolepiota Procera

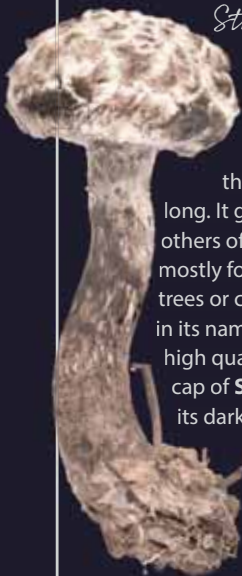
This mushroom has a rounded cap that expands as it grows. At full maturity, the cap flattens out making it look like a parasol, or if it expands outwards enough, an umbrella that has been flipped inside-out by the wind. *Macrolepiota Procera* has been grown for culinary purposes in Germany, although in the wild it can be easily confused with the Shaggy Parasol mushroom which causes upset stomach. These mushrooms are fun to look for because they can be all shapes and sizes. You could easily have a competition for who finds the largest and most parasol-like.



Old Man of the Woods

Strobilomyces Floccopus

This odd mushroom looks a bit like a marshmallow that caught flame for too long. It grows alone and not with others of the same species and is mostly found at the base of oak trees or conifers. Although "old" is in its name, it is far from feeble. The high quantity of melanin gives the cap of **Strobilomyces Floccopus** its dark color and helps protect it from harsh environments. It can even survive in areas with radiation exposure.



Silky Rosegill

Volvariella Bombycina

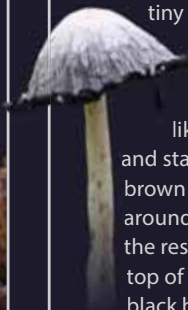
This elegant, ivory mushroom looks like a little lamp glowing in the shadowed hollows or roots of trees. It has the faint, crisp smell of a radish. However, it is advised by foraging experts not to eat them, as they are easily confused with the extremely poisonous Destroying Angel, *Amanita Virosa*. **Volvariella Bombycina** is bell shaped and has silky hair-like fibers that adorn the cap. You can find it growing on hardwoods that are weak or close to death. If you peek underneath the cap, you might find a peachy-pink color like a conch shell.



Inky Caps

Coprinopsis Atramentaria

Out of all the mushrooms I've seen on my hikes, **Coprinopsis Atramentaria** charmed me the most. I found them clustered as if in a happy conversation on a moss-covered tree stump. Their purplish color and inky black rims were fairytale-esque, making it easy to imagine tiny toads sheltering beneath them during a rainfall. Inky Caps vary in shape and size, though they typically look like bells. They arise after rain and start off with a light whitish-brown or grey color. The dark ring around the edges quickly overtakes the rest of the cap, turning the whole top of the mushroom a shiny, inky black by full maturity. ■





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Where to see Dalí

By Katie Wells

As a young teen, my older brother gifted me a large poster of a strange painting called “Swans Reflecting Elephants” (1937) by Salvador Dalí. At the time, elephants were my favorite animal. I hung the painting on the wall above my bed. At first, I didn’t see any elephants, only swans swimming in a lake with a couple of odd clouds hanging overhead. But I kept doing a double take as something about the painting seemed surreal. Finally, I saw in the reflection of the lake, the mirroring image of the swans and gnarled trees behind them created three beautiful elephants. It quickly became my favorite piece of artwork.

Soon the painting had a trance-like hold on me. I’d stare at it for long stretches of time and other double images started to emerge. What looked like a large rock also appeared to be a lion, and within the lion’s face, I found the shoulders of a man whose silhouette became clear to me as he stood with hands in his pocket in front of the rock. I wondered what other hidden images I might find in the painting. It was such an interesting concept to me that I became enamored with Dalí’s Surrealist style, and later for my final high school art portfolio I compiled my own paintings and illustrations of people hidden within images of nature and animals.

I loved that poster. Unfortunately for me, the original painting is privately owned. Now that I live in Europe, there is an opportunity to see many other works by Dalí, so I’ve compiled a list of places where you can be transported into his strange, mystical realms.

The Dalinian Triangle

There are three primary Dalí dedicated museums in the Costa Brava region of Catalonia, Spain lovingly referred to as **The Dalinian Triangle**. For more information about these three sites, visit Salvador-dali.org

Dalí Theater-Museum | Figueres, Spain

Dalí was born in Figueres, Spain in 1904. In 1960, the mayor of his hometown asked that he donate a piece of artwork to be hung at the Museu de l’Empordà. Dalí wanted to give more back to the town, so instead decided to build his own museum so that his art could live on in Figueres.

The Figueres Municipal Theatre’s lobby hosted his very first exhibition; however, it was nearly destroyed in air raids during the Spanish Civil War, which made it a perfect location to rebuild. Dalí had a huge hand in the building, installation and concept of the museum. Each room is designed to be viewed wholly so that viewers can feel as though they are in a living painting. The museum houses over 2,400 of Dalí’s works from paintings to manuscripts. He also wanted other artists to be featured, so works by Evarist Vallès and Antoni Pitxot are also on display.

Dalí’s work is far from redundant. He was a true visionary and worked in various styles and mediums like Surrealism, Freudian dreamscapes and mystical nuclearism. Prominent works at the museum include: Dalí’s last painting, “The Swallow’s Tail” (1983), and “Galatea of the Spheres” (1952), which depicts his wife Gala and is a synthesis of Renaissance art and atomic theory. Also on display is “Leda Atomica” (1949), inspired by atoms from the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings. For his final resting place, Dalí decided to be buried in the museum and his crypt is now part of it.



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“

“Surrealism is destructive, but it destroys only what it considers to be shackles limiting our vision” – Salvador Dalí

”

Salvador Dalí House | Port Lligat, Spain

Formerly Dalí's main home and workshop, this museum showcases the artist's work and offers a deeper look into his personal life. With a large white egg balanced on top of the roof, you can't miss the house overlooking the sea. It has been exceptionally well preserved. Mirroring his artwork, the labyrinth structure, décor and design are meant to be unsettling and whimsical. Some of the staircases lead nowhere, there are false doors and windows have varying shapes and sizes.



Gala Dalí Castle | Púbol, Spain

In the small village of Púbol is the castle museum, formerly Gala's private home which Dalí gifted to her. It features the unconventional life the lovers had together. After her death, Dalí moved in, and it is where he completed his last painting. He lived there until a fire broke out and he spent the rest of his days at the Theatre-Museum.

The house has paintings Dalí gifted Gala and the garden is decorated with his sculptures of long-legged elephants. You can view Gala's privately owned collection of artworks and learn more about the life of Dalí's muse.

Dalí Elsewhere in Europe



Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum | Madrid, Spain

“Dream Caused by the Flight of a Bee Around a Pomegranate a Second Before Awakening” (1944)

This portraiture piece features Dalí's muse and love of his entire life, Elena Dyakonova, whom he called Gala. She modeled in many of his paintings. This piece is a dreamy delirium and while another of Dalí's most iconic paintings, *“The Elephants”* (1948) is housed at the Salvador Dalí Museum in St. Petersburg, Florida, you can see an elephant in a similar style in the background of this painting. For more information, visit museothyssen.org.

The Tate Modern | London, England

“Metamorphosis of Narcissus” (1973)

This painting is Dalí's interpretation of the Greek myth of Narcissus. He played with double images to capture the essence of the story. This was one of his first paintings made with the Paranoiac Critical method, which is rooted in spontaneity and irrationality to achieve a sense of delirium. The painting plays with Freudian themes, self-reflection and overall obscurity. This piece is on display in the Monsieur Vénus room, which explores different approaches to the human form. In the past, Dalí's work inspired a themed tasting menu at the museum which always blends art with unique experiences. For more information, visit tate.org.uk.

Reina Sofia | Madrid, Spain

“The Great Masturbator” (1929)

A “saucy exploration of Freudian fantasy,” Dalí kept this personal piece until his death in 1989. Some of the elements of the painting are said to relate to traumatic experiences he suffered from in his youth and other conditions he suffered from at a more mature age. Dalí used surrealism to play with themes of fantasy, dreams, psychology and cosmic being. There are 24 Dalí works on display here, including a masterful realism painting of his sister, *“Girl at the Window”* (1924). For more information, visit museoreinasofia.es.

Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen | Rotterdam, The Netherlands

“Couple With Their Heads Full of Clouds” (1936)

This seemingly charming diptych painting features double portraits of Dalí and Gala. The two separate panels converse with one another to depict dormant childhood memories of a blissful state in contrast to an inhospitable desert landscape. One of Dalí's most recognizable symbols, the burning giraffe, is found in this painting. In his words it represents “apocalyptic masculinity.” In this painting, the burning giraffe suggests the impending catastrophes of the Spanish Civil War. For more information, visit boijmans.nl.

Dalí Paris | France

There are over 300 artworks from a private collection featured here near the heart of Montmartre. This collection is more light-hearted emphasizing erotic, dreamy and funny drawings and sculptures by Dalí. What makes this museum unique is that the collection of sketches and drawings here are not widely known by the public, so you might find pieces you never knew existed. You can also see famous sculptures like *“The Space Elephant”* (1980) or *“Alice and Wonderland”* (1977), which depicted his own state of feeling in-between reality and a dream world. While Dalí was working on his Don Quixote series of engravings in Montmartre, the self-proclaimed Empress Lucie Valore suggested Dalí become Emperor. He accepted, but the affair never came to be. For more information, visit daliparis.com. ■

Animal Crossing

• Art IRL

By Kat Nickola

All 43 pieces of art in the game “Animal Crossing™: New Horizons” are genuine artworks from museums around the world. Their in-game names like “Wistful Painting” or “Ancient Statue” reflect the artistic style, but it’s unclear exactly why they were renamed. And, while you might encounter fakes in the game (thanks to that sneaky fox, Redd), in real life the art is owned by museums around the world.

To see every piece of art on display, you would need to travel to 12 countries. While in Europe, you can feasibly see 28 of the artworks in Animal Crossing. Here is where to go:

PARIS, FRANCE

There are a whopping eight art pieces from Animal Crossing in Paris. Some of the most famous are at the **Louvre**, including paintings of the “Mona Lisa,” “Liberty Leading the People” and statues of “Venus de Milo” and “Winged Victory.” From there, it’s a lovely walk through the Tuileries Garden and across the Seine on the wooden pedestrian bridge (perhaps you need to leave your own love padlock) to the **Musée d’Orsay**, where you can take in Millet’s “The Gleaners,” Manet’s “The Fifer” and “Cézanne’s “Apples and Oranges.” A 15-minute walk away is your last destination: the garden behind the **Rodin Museum** where you can consider life’s great questions beside “The Thinker.”

ITALY

Each of the six Animal Crossing artworks in Italy are at different museums, so these will take some planning. In Venice, Leonardo’s “Vitruvian Man” is on display at the **Gallerie dell’Accademia**. While in Florence, visit the **Accademia Gallery** for Michelangelo’s “David.” You can then walk past the city’s main sights on the way to the **Uffizi Gallery** for Botticelli’s “The Birth of Venus.” If you visit Rome, you can see the “Discobolus” statue at the **Palazzo Massimo** (part of the National Roman Museum) near the Termini train station. This guy is not the original lost bronze by Myron, but a marble version from antiquity. Down the road at the **Musei Capitolini**, check out the “Capitoline Wolf,” a bronze sculpture of



the city's foundlings Romulus and Remus and their she-wolf rescuer. Lastly, Italy is an easy place to see one of Hokusai's "Great Wave" woodcut prints. It is new to Verona and on display at the Palazzo Maffei Casa Museo. Visit greatwavetoday.com for other exhibition schedules.

LONDON, ENGLAND

London is the next big hitter, where you can cross off five pieces of Animal Crossing art. Start at the **Tate Britain** along the banks of the Thames and cry for a drowning "Ophelia." A quick hop on the 87 bus will drop you at the **National Gallery** to see "Sunflowers" by Van Gogh and "The Fighting Temeraire" by Turner. From there, it's a quick 10-minute walk down the Strand to **The Courtauld Gallery** to take in Manet's "A Bar at the Folies-Bergère." Finally, head to the **British Museum** where you can try to translate the Rosetta Stone.

BERLIN, GERMANY

If you happen to be in Berlin, you can cross off two paintings by visiting the Museumsinsel (Museum Island). Be grateful you are not on the "Isle of the Dead" by Böcklin, which is on display at the **Alte Nationalgalerie**. There are additional copies of this uniquely dark piece at kunst (art) museums in Basel and Leipzig. Across the courtyard in the **Neues Museum** is the famous bust of Nefertiti.

THE NETHERLANDS

Three artworks from Animal Crossing can be found in The Netherlands. There are two paintings by Dutch artist Johannes Vermeer, and they are, frustratingly, at two different museums. "Girl with a Pearl Earring" is at the **Mauritshuis** in The Hague, while "The Milkmaid" is on display at the **Rijksmuseum** in Amsterdam. Just down the hall from this is Rembrandt's "The Night Watch," in its own dedicated gallery.

VIENNA, AUSTRIA

At the **Kunsthistorisches Museum** in Vienna, you can see two pieces: "The Hunters in the Snow" and "Summer." This painting of a woman's profile made of fruit is one of four that each represents a season. It is displayed with "Winter," the only other surviving original, and "Fire" and "Water," from a similar series.

MADRID, SPAIN

There are two Animal Crossing art museum paintings on display at the **Museo del Prado** in Madrid. "Las Meninas" is prominently displayed in Room 12. Down the hall, in Room 38 is "The Clothed Maja" by Goya, beside its mysterious companion piece "The Naked Maja."

KRAKOW, POLAND

The final Europe-based painting from Animal Crossing is da Vinci's "Lady with an Ermine." This symbolic portrait has often been compared to his "Mona Lisa," with some art historians favoring the "Ermine" as a superior work. Da Vinci only ever painted four portraits of women. ■

Animal Crossing: New Horizons artworks and where to find their real-life counterparts.

- **Academic Painting** | "Vitruvian Man" By Leonardo da Vinci | Gallerie dell'Accademia
- **Amazing Painting** | "The Night Watch" By Rembrandt van Rijn | Rijksmuseum
- **Basic Painting** | "The Blue Boy" By Thomas Gainsborough | Huntington Library
- **Calm Painting** | "A Sunday Afternoon on The Island of La Grande Jatte" By Georges Seurat | Art Institute of Chicago
- **Common Painting** | "The Gleaners" By Jean-François Millet | Musée d'Orsay
- **Detailed Painting** | "Rooster and Hen with Hydrangeas" By Itō Jakuchū | Los Angeles County Museum of Art (not on display)
- **Dynamic Painting** | "The Great Wave of Kanagawa" By Hokusai | greatwavetoday.com
- **Famous Painting** | "Mona Lisa" By Leonardo da Vinci | Louvre Museum
- **Flowery Painting** | "Sunflowers" By Vincent van Gogh | National Gallery
- **Glowing Painting** | "The Fighting Temeraire" By J.M.W. Turner | National Gallery
- **Graceful Painting** | "Beauty Looking Back" By Hishikawa Moronobu | Tokyo National Museum
- **Jolly Painting** | "Summer" By Giuseppe Arcimboldo | Kunsthistorisches Museum
- **Moody Painting** | "The Sower" By Jean-François Millet | Museum of Fine Arts
- **Moving Painting** | "The Birth of Venus" By Sandro Botticelli | Uffizi Gallery
- **Mysterious Painting** | "Isle of the Dead" By Arnold Böcklin | Alte Nationalgalerie
- **Nice Painting** | "The Fifer" By Édouard Manet | Musée d'Orsay
- **Perfect Painting** | "Apples and Oranges" By Paul Cézanne | Musée d'Orsay
- **Proper Painting** | "A Bar at the Folies-Bergère" By Édouard Manet | The Courtauld Gallery
- **Quaint Painting** | "The Milkmaid" By Johannes Vermeer | Rijksmuseum
- **Scary Painting** | "Kabuki Actor Ōtani Oniji III as Yakko Edobei" By Tōshūsai Sharaku | Metropolitan Museum of Art
- **Scenic Painting** | "The Hunters in the Snow" By Pieter Bruegel the Elder | Kunsthistorisches Museum
- **Serene Painting** | "Lady with an Ermine" By Leonardo da Vinci | Czartoryski Museum
- **Sinking Painting** | "Ophelia" By John Everett Millais | Tate Britain
- **Solemn Painting** | "Las Meninas" By Diego Velázquez | Museo Nacional del Prado
- **Twinkling Painting** | "The Starry Night" By Vincent van Gogh | Museum of Modern Art
- **Warm Painting** | "The Clothed Maja" By Francisco Goya | Museo del Prado
- **Wild Painting Left Half and Wild Painting Right Half** | "Folding Screen of Fūjin and Raijin" By Tawaraya Sōtatsu | Tokyo National Museum
- **Wistful Painting** | "Girl with a Pearl Earring" By Johannes Vermeer | Mauritshuis
- **Worthy Painting** | "Liberty Leading the People" By Eugène Delacroix | Louvre Museum
- **Ancient Statue** | "Shakōki dogū" | Tokyo National Museum
- **Beautiful Statue** | "Venus de Milo" By Alexandros of Antioch | Louvre Museum
- **Familiar Statue** | "The Thinker" By Auguste Rodin | Rodin Museum
- **Gallant Statue** | "David" By Michelangelo | Accademia Gallery
- **Great Statue** | "Statue of Kamehameha" By Thomas Ridgeway Gould | Ali'iōlani Hale
- **Informative Statue** | "Rosetta Stone" | British Museum
- **Motherly Statue** | "Capitoline Wolf" | Musei Capitolini
- **Mystic Statue** | "Bust of Nefertiti" By Thutmose | Neues Museum
- **Robust Statue** | "The Discobolus" By Myron of Eleutherae | Pallazzo Massimo
- **Rock-head Statue** | "Olmec colossal head 1" | Museo de Antropologia de Xalapa
- **Tremendous Statue** | "Houmuwu Ding" | National Museum of China
- **Valiant Statue** | "Winged Victory of Samothrace" | Louvre Museum
- **Warrior Statue** | "Terracotta Army soldier" | Emperor Qinshihuang's Mausoleum Site Museum

NEVERMORE AND MORE:

“WEDNESDAY”

ROMANIAN FILMING LOCATIONS

By Katie Wells



Calling all
**funky fangs,
furs, stoners
and scales!**



continued on page 40



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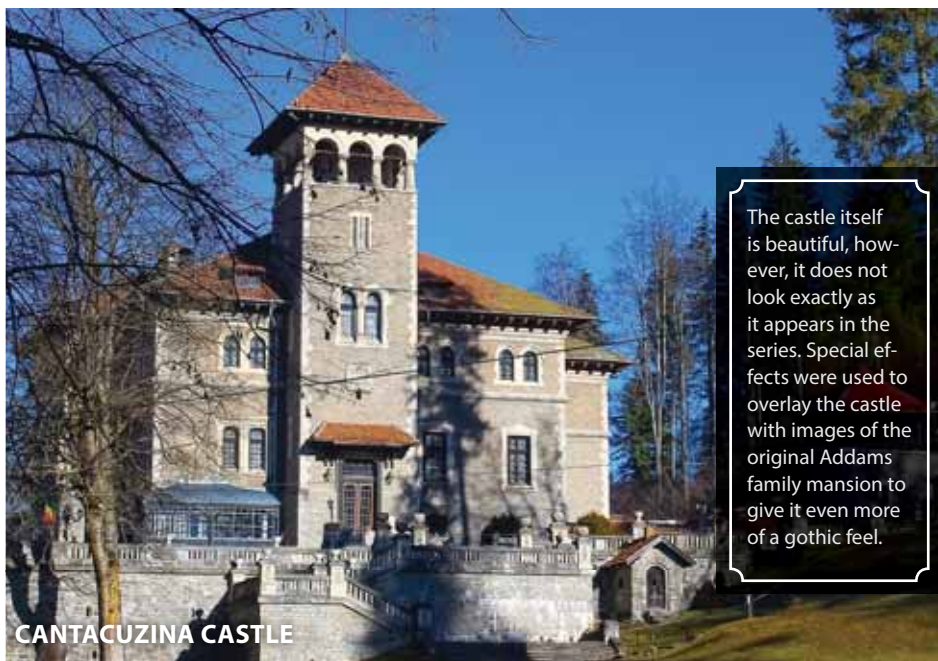
SEE OUR AD ON PAGE #2

Let's go back to autumn 2022 for a moment. Something mysterious and spooky snaps through the air; there's been a goth subculture renaissance and you can't get the surfer-punk twang of the genius Frankensteined-genre-blend of "Goo Goo Muck" by The Cramps out of your head. With the viral song haunting your social media, it's nearly impossible to not feel the urge to swing your arms in the air, distort your body and imitate Wednesday Addams (Jenna Ortega's) iconic dance scene. Every time you open TikTok, the song replays and you sink deeper into the nightmarish world of Jericho and Nevermore.

The re-envisioned Netflix series "Wednesday" produced by Tim Burton, rose to fame with its charming macabre small-town vibes and revival of the highly likeable, and ever so slightly demented Wednesday Addams. It's easy to see how this hit show sparked a gothic subculture revival amongst its fans. While waiting for the second season to return in 2025, you can visit some of the beautiful filming locations in Romania to relive the series while you wait. Most of these filming locations are within the Romanian capital, Bucharest, making multiple sites easy to hit.



GARĂ REGALĂ



CANTACUZINA CASTLE

The castle itself is beautiful, however, it does not look exactly as it appears in the series. Special effects were used to overlay the castle with images of the original Addams family mansion to give it even more of a gothic feel.

EXTERIOR SCENES

CANTACUZINA CASTLE BUȘTENI, ROMANIA

This stunning neo-Romanian castle is used for exterior scenes of the main location of the series, Nevermore Academy, the school for misfits, clairvoyants, shapeshifters, gorgons and social pariahs. Cantacuzina Castle was built in 1911 and used as a summer residence for Prince Grigore Catntacuzino until 1930. When ownership shifted to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, it was restored and opened to the public. The castle was influenced by Brâncovenesc architecture which mixes elements of Ottoman, Byzantine and late Renaissance detailing and is perfect for capturing a whimsigoth boarding school aesthetic. The seclusion of the castle location in the Carpathian Mountains, makes it feel even more like you are stepping away from reality and into the pocket of murder-mystery-laced fantasy.

The castle is open to visitors and hosts many events including exhibitions and concerts. It keeps beautiful grounds with a grotto, gardens and a fountain. Art from Dali, da Vinci, and Van Gogh are also on display here, along with gorgeous Roman stained glass. For more information, you can visit Cantacuzinocastle.com.

GARĂ REGALĂ SINAIA, ROMANIA

Seen as Jericho Train Station in "Wednesday," this "Royal Train Station" serves Sinaia in Romania's Bușteni Region. It is a town and resort in Central Romania's Bucegi Mountains. It was built in 1881 and reserved only for use by the royal family so they could be closer to their summer residence, Peleş Castle. On the outside of the station, you can view murals and sculptures of significant fig-

ures in Romanian history. Inside you can explore neoclassical decorations such as bronze railings and chandeliers. The train station also offers tourists one-day trips to various locations like Peleş Castle which is now a museum with Klimt frescos and stained-glass windows.

BUCHAREST BOTANICAL GARDEN BUCHAREST, ROMANIA

This beautiful garden with over 10,000 different species of plants was used as a stand-in for Nevermore's greenhouse. The greenhouse made a perfect classroom setting for students to learn about botany and herbology. The greenhouses are open to visitors and the garden is now a part of Bucharest University's Botanical Institute. Visitors can explore a wide range of exotic plant species, see impressive water pond displays and stroll through a lovely rose garden. There is a special section of the garden called Grandma's Garden Sector that models traditional Romanian gardens in which medicinal plants, fruit trees, vegetables, aromatics, flowers and shrubs work symbiotically. There is also an Herbarium and Botanical Museum onsite where you can feel like a student learning how to make an herbal book or by viewing one of many collections such as seeds or fossil plants. For more information, you can visit Gradina-botanica.unibuc.ro.

LAKE BRĂNEȘTI BUCHAREST, ROMANIA

Just east of Bucharest, surrounded by rolling hills and lush forest is Lake Brănești, or what viewers know as Jericho River in the series, where scenes for the annual Poe Cup Canoe Race were filmed. You can pack a picnic, have a lovely day at the lake and imagine what it might be like to watch the four main factions' horror-esque, heavily Poe-inspired decorated canoes compete mercilessly for the winning title.



INTERIOR SCENES

DINAMO POOL

BUCHAREST, ROMANIA

Dinamo Pool serves as the exceptionally large school pool at Nancy Reagan High School. The pool scene where Wednesday infamously releases the piranhas on her classmates is the catalyst for the beginning of her story. Upon being expelled, she must start her new life at Nevermore Academy. Dinamo Pool is one of Romania's oldest and most renowned pools in Romania and has served as a training center for the Romanian National Team. Top swimmers still practice here. You can find out more about single swims and visiting at csdinamo.eu.

BUFTEA STUDIOS

BUCHAREST, ROMANIA

Although Jericho is a real place in Vermont, the entire town of Jericho was constructed at Buftea Studios in Romania for filming. This includes the popular Weathervane Coffee Shop that the students regularly hang out at. Buftea Studio is Eastern Europe's largest and longest-established film studio with over 500 internationally successful movies and TV series produced since 1957. A history of almost 70 years of cinema.

You can book a tour that will take you through the studio's indoor and outdoor stages, set constructions and onset restaurant, and enjoy your own (imaginary) moment in the spotlight. To book a tour you can visit, studiourilebuftea.ro.

PALATUL MONTEORU

BUCHAREST, ROMANIA

Built in 1874 and renovated by famous architect Ion Mincu, this historic house and monument was used as the Romanian Writer's Union HQ until 2013. In 2015, it was transformed into a multicultural center used to host live music events. For "Wednesday," it features in many of the interior shots of Nevermore Academy including Principal Weems' office. The French eclectic style, painted stucco ceilings and monumental staircase make it an elegant, yet unique backdrop for Wednesday to make her entrance in her stunning, vintage, black ballgown at the Raven Ball, where she dances her iconic dance.

CASA NICULESCU-DOROBANTU

BUCHAREST, ROMANIA

This French neogothic mansion was built in the 1900s for Tatiana Niculescu-Dorobantu, one of four daughters of Ion C. Brătianu, the former Prime Minister of Romania. It was designed by architect, Grigore Cerchez to be mysterious and beautiful. This mansion was also used for interior shots of Nevermore Academy. You might recognize the ancient looking corridors of the school here. The mansion resembles a Gothic church with details such as gargoyles, pointed arches and imposing windows that help create a glam-goth allure. It is open to the public and currently for sale.

Romania has gorgeous landscapes, adorned castles, hearty regional cuisine and vampire-lore, and now brings the chimerical world of Wednesday to life. It's worth a visit. Who knows, maybe whilst there you'll fall into a mystery yourself. ■



CASA NICULESCU-DOROBANTU

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LAKE BRĂNEȘTI



PALATUL MONTEORU

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Winter in Paris

By Katie Wells

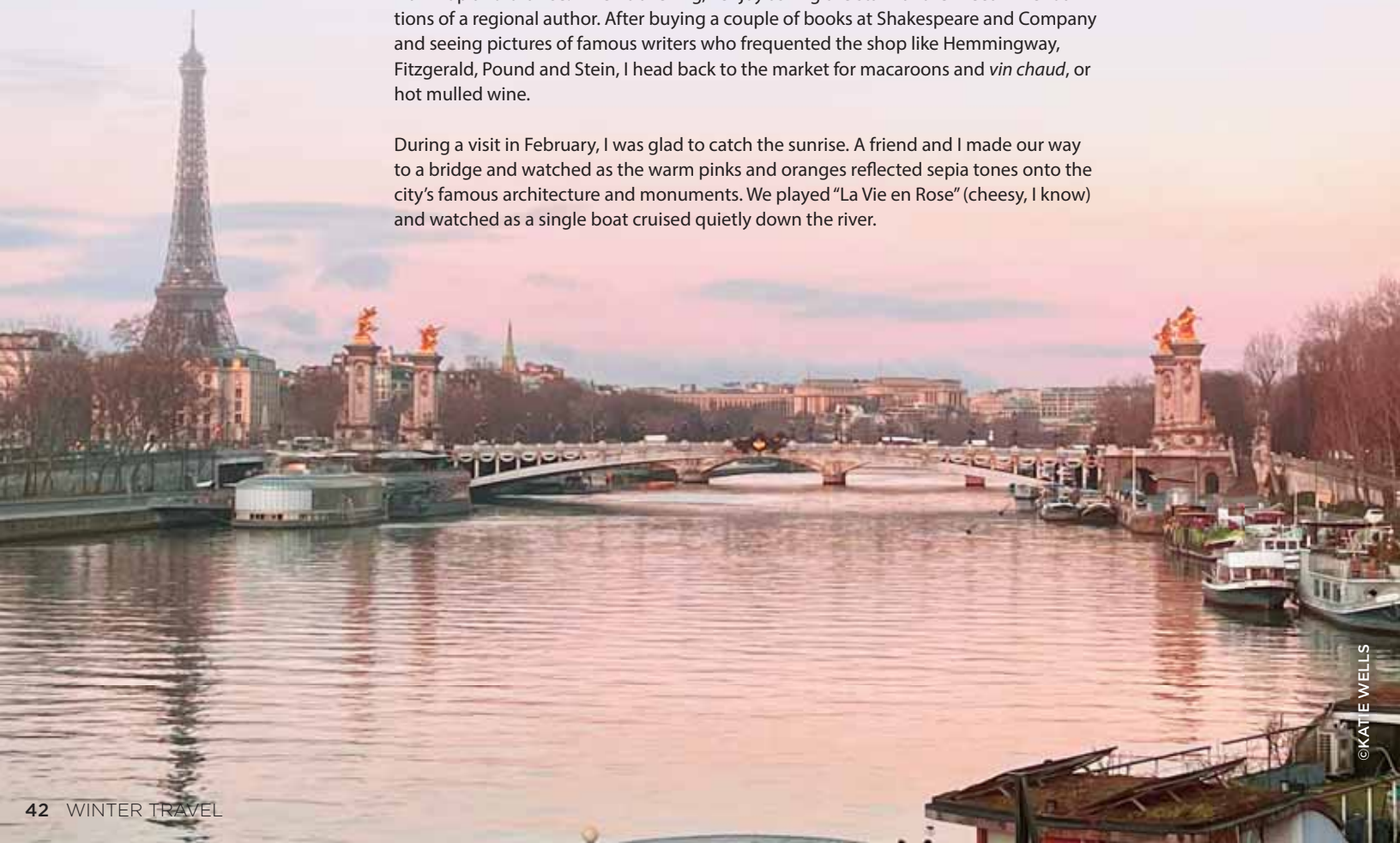
Oh Paris, the city that breathes romance. Since moving to Germany, I find myself travelling to Paris in the colder months.

Maybe it's because in the winter carbs are extra delicious. Or maybe it's the soft French café music, a Parisian walking with a small evergreen on their shoulder and the backdrop of Renaissance architecture that makes the city feel like a dream state. Everything is slowed down and I can stroll for longer when the weather is cool and there are less crowds. Taking in the beautiful sites feels more intimate when they are not obstructed by bobbing heads and smart phones reaching into the sky. I dare to say, I almost feel like a local myself.

Special Christmas light displays brighten the city in November and December, and Paris has 15–20 pop-up Christmas markets to visit. I favor **le Marché de Noël de Paris Notre-Dame** because the grand cathedral is in the background and Père Noël, or “Father Christmas” was there when I visited in December with my dad.

It's also only a few hundred feet from the famous **Shakespeare and Company** English bookstore, open since 1951. Colder weather is perfect for ducking into a bookshop to warm-up and browse. When travelling, I enjoy asking the staff for their recommendations of a regional author. After buying a couple of books at Shakespeare and Company and seeing pictures of famous writers who frequented the shop like Hemmingway, Fitzgerald, Pound and Stein, I head back to the market for macarons and *vin chaud*, or hot mulled wine.

During a visit in February, I was glad to catch the sunrise. A friend and I made our way to a bridge and watched as the warm pinks and oranges reflected sepia tones onto the city's famous architecture and monuments. We played “La Vie en Rose” (cheesy, I know) and watched as a single boat cruised quietly down the river.



So how to spend a quick Winter weekend in Paris?

A day for walking

My itinerary takes an early ICE train from Kaiserslautern, Germany so I can get to the city in time for coffee or lunch. I'll reluctantly share my favorite tip, which is, after storing my luggage with the hotel, I walk to **Café Kitsune** at the Louvre location. It might just be my favorite coffee shop in the world. I order a mochaccino then make my way upstairs where the seating overlooks the gates that lead to the Louvre. It's not a magnificent view, but it is full of Paris vibes. The coffee comes with a little swan or heart in the foam. It's rich with notes of fruit and dark chocolate, and the staff really care about what they do. To me, it's the perfect way to soak in the fact that I'm in Paris, and recharge before journeying out.



I enjoy walking around the courtyard of the Louvre. Just seeing the architectural detailing on the buildings and the glass pyramid is breathtaking. The courtyard gets amazing sun, so when it's out you will find people lounging on the concrete blocks and soaking it up along with the views. From there, I like to hit a main attraction, such as the **Eiffel Tower**. Of course, if I see something interesting along the way, I pop in. To break up the walk from the Opéra area to the Eiffel Tower I make a slight detour across the river to **NoGlu**, an all gluten-free boulangerie with delicious eclairs and croque monsieur's.

I like to book a hotel in the Opéra neighborhood between the 2nd and 9th Arrondissement because the hotels are a bit more affordable. It is centrally located between the Arc de Triomphe and Eiffel Tower, and so close to the Louvre, Musée d'Orsay and the Tuileries Garden.

After a rest at my hotel, I find a specifically French cuisine restaurant. If you haven't had a French rotisserie chicken in the winter, I highly recommend it to warm your belly and soul. The blend of French butter, tarragon, and rosemary basted onto the skin are simply savory. For an appetizer, you can't go wrong with a traditional French onion soup, cheese bubbling over the brim of the cup.

Once it's dark, I make my way to the **Arc De Triumph**. Tickets purchased online are good for anytime during operating hours on that date. Another perk of winter is that admission is free every first Sunday from November until March. I usually taxi one way after all the walking from the day. What I like about going at night is that once at the top, you have a birds-eye view of Paris and can see the Eiffel Tower lit up.

You can also see the flame burning at the **Tomb of the Unknown Soldier**, which celebrated its 100th anniversary in November 2023. Soaking in the views from the top of the monument and seeing the miles of walking you just covered, is a wonderful way to end the day.



Museum days

The next day or two is a great time to explore museums. Again, in winter there are less tourists, so you can spend more time with some of the world's most cherished artworks and less time pushing through crowds. After seeing one of my favorite paintings, Monet's smaller version of "Water Lilies" at the **Musée d'Orsay** I found the cutest Christmas ornament of Monet with a paintbrush in his pocket and a waterlily on his lapel. They also had Van Gogh with a sunflower. If you love art like me, I highly recommend **The Louvre**, **The Musée d'Orsay**, and **Musée de l'Orangerie**. Seeing an opera or touring the **Palais Garnier** is another must. It's one of the most famous opera houses in the world, made famous by "Phantom of the Opera." This is also a great time of year to take cooking or baking classes and impress your holiday company when you arrive home with fresh croissants or French roast chicken.

Winter is for slowing down, and while you can pack a lot into a weekend in Paris, it's nice to take a more leisurely approach, hitting one or two main attractions each day, and then simply enjoying strolls, letting your nose carry you to the Christmas markets via smells of roasted chestnuts, and enjoying the rich flavors of French cuisine. ■





ICE CLIMBING IN EUROPE

By Kat Nickola

For all those rock climbers or winter hikers out there ready to stretch their skills, Europe is a great place to start ice climbing.

Your goal is simple enough: climb up a cliff made of ice. But, in this winter sport the conditions can vary year-to-year and even day-to-day. That is because the ice that you are climbing is formed seasonally. Often, an ice fall will develop in places where water slowly trickles from cracks in a cliff. Over the season it will change as more water emerges from the ground to trickle down, solidify and build the ice flow. Sometimes entire waterfalls freeze and can be climbed, while in other places you can climb the edges of glaciers.

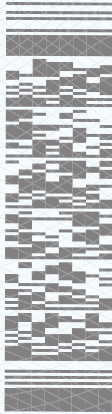
The sport of ice climbing is comparable to rock climbing, in that you will use a harness, rope and helmet for safety. Beyond that, the gear is a bit different. You have two small, specially designed ice axes—one for each hand—to grip the ice and stabilize yourself while climbing upward. It is also necessary to wear rigid mountaineering boots with C3 crampons. These are very stiff and have multi-directional spikes to help grasp the ice, including forward-facing spikes at the toe to help you get a foothold for moving up. Lastly, you will need appropriate cold-weather clothes. Dress in layers and use an outer shell jacket and side-zip pants that can handle some abrasion against the ice. ■

Where to learn

Newbies looking for lessons can find outfitters and guides at the major ice climbing hubs across Europe. These hotspots are also perfect for seasoned ice climbers.



Les Ecrins, France



Europe's highest concentration of ice climbs are in the mountains of the Parc National des Écrins. This section of the French Alps is full of canyons and valleys where the waterflows consistently freeze every year. There is also a big annual ice festival at the end of January in the Freissinières Valley with exhibitions, competitions and plenty of workshops. Festivals are a great way to learn about the sport, try out some gear and take a class to help you learn ice climbing skills.

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PLEASE BE AT THE



Ötztal, Austria

There are so many places to ice climb in Austria that it makes for an easy day trip to add to any winter skiing holiday. Almost every ski resort or hotel can connect you with a tour or mountain guide ready to take you on the ice. For the most options and an ice-focused trip, head to the Ötztal (Ötz Valley) west of Innsbruck. Between the villages of Längenfeld and Sölden there are dozens of frozen waterfalls just waiting to be climbed.

Flight

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Dolomites, Italy

It seems like the Dolomites are a hotspot for every mountain sport, and ice climbing is no exception. The tall spires and high alpine waterfalls make perfect ice falls ready for climbers once the freezing season begins. The Val Gardena area is surrounded with ice climbing options. There are high, exposed routes on rock faces, but also deep, intimate spaces in hidden valleys.

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Saas-Fee, Switzerland

There is a reason the Ice Climbing World Cup is held in Saas-Fee every year. This spot offers the unique experience of climbing the edge of a glacier, with routes for beginners and advanced climbers spanning this long icy cliff. There are also two other public ice climbing parks where they 'farm' ice to create an artificial ice wall: the Ice Climbing Dome and the Ice Tower in Kalbermatten.

GATE CLOSES 15 MINUTES BEFORE



Rjukan, Norway

For guaranteed ice and frozen temperatures, Norway is your destination. Rjukan is one of the most popular ice climbing destinations in the world. This small village is nestled at the bottom of a steep valley, meaning it doesn't get direct sunlight for months in the winter. Because of this, the ice climbing season lasts significantly longer, from November to March, than at ice walls in the Alps. There are over 190 frozen waterfalls that line the sides of the valley, meaning you can get to climbs quickly, spend a cold (short) day on the ice and be back in town in no time.

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LEGENDARY UNDER GROUND LOCATIONS

By Kat Nickola



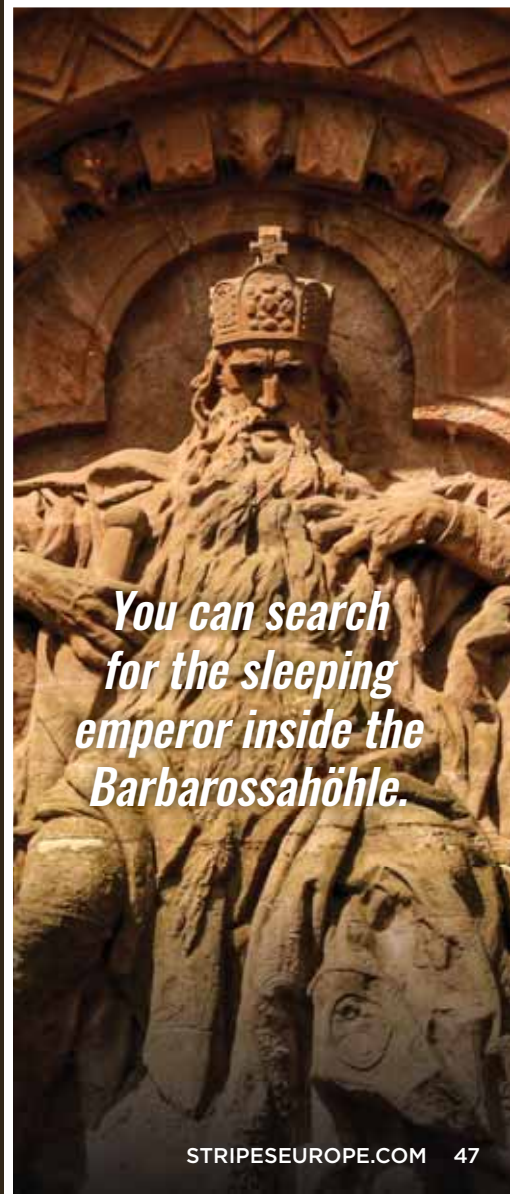
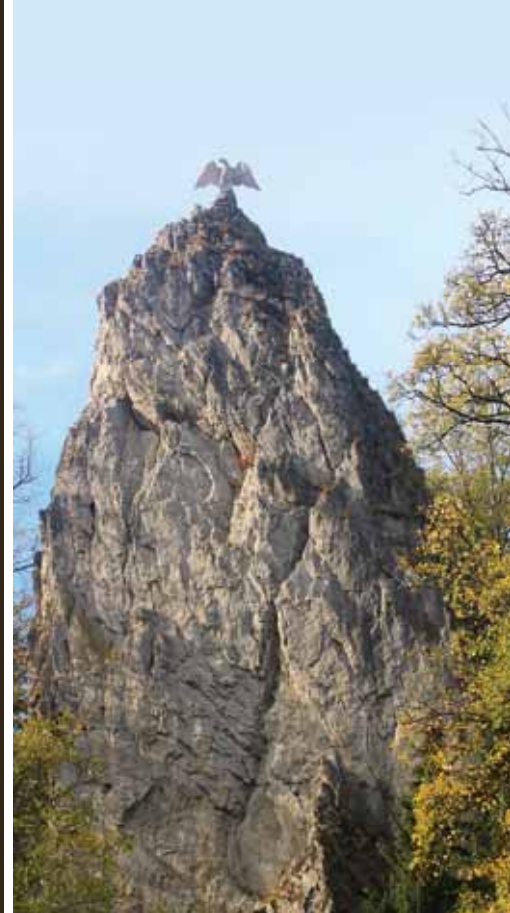
DWARFS AND KINGS IN THE HARZ MOUNTAINS OF GERMANY

It's easy to see why the thick forests and dramatic rocky outcroppings of the Harz Mountains are steeped in myth and legend. This misty limestone upland became a safe haven for pagans during Charlemagne's eighth-century Christianization campaigns. It is a lingering heritage that means each stream, cave or cliff has a specific story about the fairy, dwarf, gnome or witch that protects it. These stories formed the basis for many of the Brothers Grimm tales, and many more were translated into English in 1885 by Canadian author Maria Elise Turner Lauder.

One such legend is that of the dwarf King Hübich. Harz dwarves are an ancient group who live in underground caves and mine their riches. Now, they are seldom seen, but in times past, they would play with human children or help people in the forest. One day, two teenagers argued over who could climb to the top of a rock spire and one got stuck on top. The entrance to King Hübich's kingdom was underneath, so the dwarf king helped the youth down and took him into the mountain to see his vast kingdom where the walls glittered and crystal chandeliers lit the way. The youth was gifted a pile of gold and silver, but King Hübich made him promise to protect the rock spire and not allow others to shoot birds from it. He kept his promise and you can still, to this day visit the Hübichenstein rock spire in Bad Grund and hike (or drive) the König Hübich Route to the Höhlen Erlebnis Zentrum (Cave Experience Center).

In another legend, a dwarf guards a special cavern under the Kyffhäuser Mountain range. Inside, Kaiser Frederick I Barbarossa is enchanted and asleep on an ivory chair at a marble table. His red beard has grown so long it covers the entire table. Ghosts of his old courtiers still wait on him when he wakes every hundred years to see if there are still ravens flying around the mountain. When the ravens have gone, he will return to lead Germany. You can search for the sleeping emperor inside the Barbarossahöhle (cave). Barbarossa is considered one of the greatest German leaders of the Holy Roman Empire, and his reign during this "first Reich" has been glorified by subsequent leaders. This is why a monument sits atop a ruined medieval castle at the Kyffhäuser Denkmal.

The entire Harz Mountain region is full of tourist caves and mines. Mining for silver, copper, lead and zinc defined the area from the 16th to 19th centuries, but the tradition goes back thousands of years. At the Rammelsberg Museum, you can take a mine train deep inside this UNESCO heritage site.



You can search for the sleeping emperor inside the Barbarossahöhle.



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A DRAGON-FIGHTING SAINT IN BEATENBERG, SWITZERLAND

Take a glance at the Beatenberg city crest and you'll see a green dragon and what appears to be a monk smiting him with a wand and a book. It is the image of Saint Beatus defeating the dragon. Born sometime in the first century in Scotland, a young man named Suetonius (not the historian) spent his childhood in Ireland where he was converted to Christianity by the missionary Barnabas. He changed his name to Beatus and traveled to Rome and to see Saint Peter who sent him to preach in the Alps. Eventually, he met people from a village on Lake Thun who said a local dragon was devastating the area. Beatus found the dragon's cave and used his pilgrim's staff to fight the dragon who fell dead into the lake.



Beatus established his hermitage in the dragon's cave. He welcomed travelers and locals alike, blessing people and helping to heal the sick. He died in A.D. 112 and was buried in a tomb at the cave's entrance. The place became a pilgrimage site and Beatus became revered as a saint because of the healing that took place at his graveside. You can still visit the St. Beatus Höhlen (caves) today. The area is said to retain a high level of life force and healing energies. A powerful underwater river flows through parts of the cave system and cascades out in a series of waterfalls.

Above the caves, is the Beatenberg (Beatus' Mountain), known for gorgeous views over Lake Thun and family-friendly winter sports. The St. Beatus caves are one of the highlights along the Jakobsweg (St. James' Way), the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage route through Switzerland. You can also arrive via the BLS ferry from either Interlaken West or Thun.



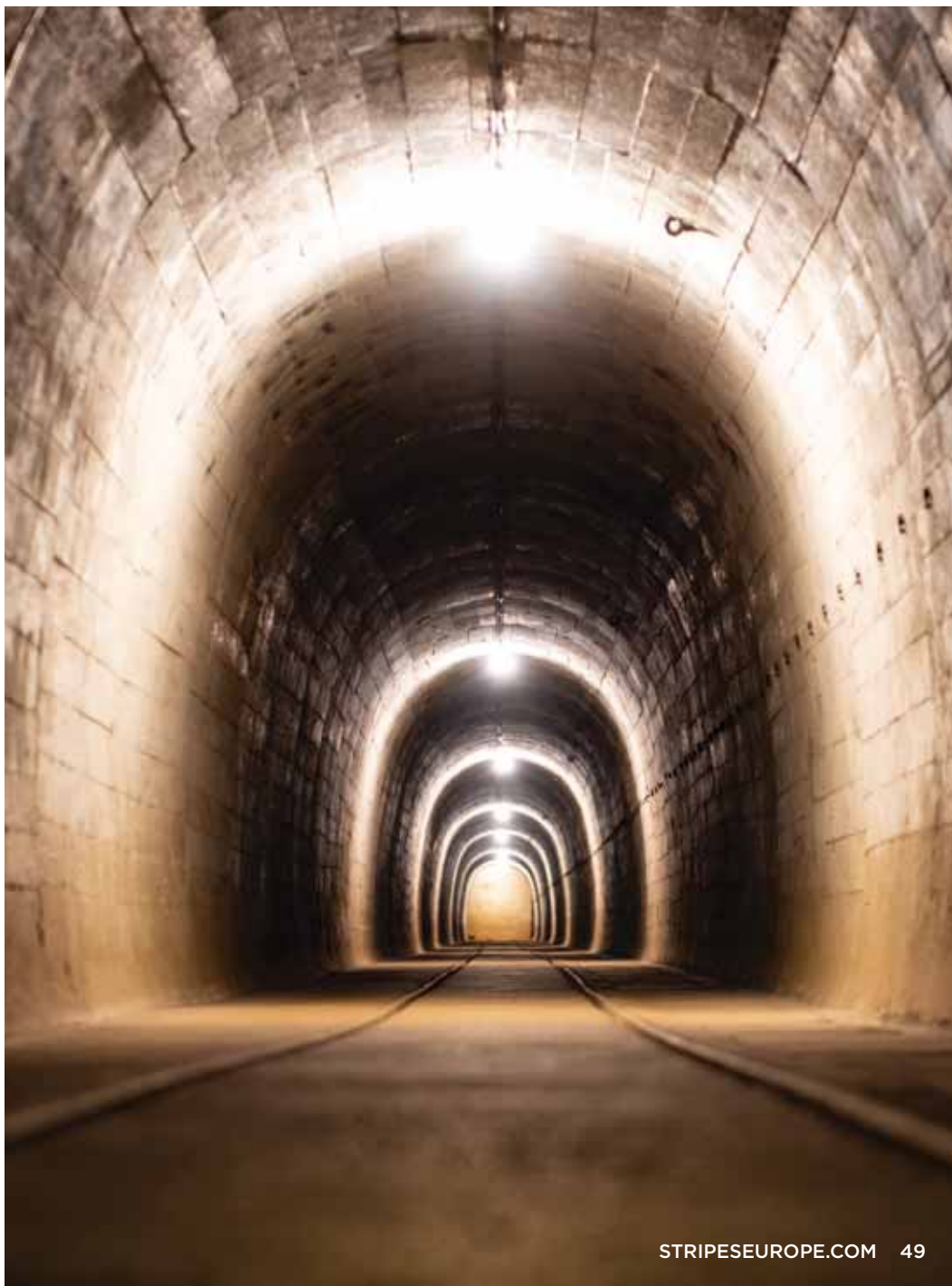
THE SECRET NAZI OSTWALL IN POLAND

After World War I, the Treaty of Versailles explicitly prevented Germany from building fortifications along their borders. But plans to secretly secure the eastern border with Poland were being hatched as early as 1927, and with Hitler's rise to power as Chancellor in 1933, development took off. The "Ostwall," or eastern wall, was established as a series of natural waterway barriers. However, a strip of land between the Oder and Warta rivers was a natural gateway that needed extra fortifications. A "fortified arch" between the rivers was built piecemeal beginning in 1934 as seemingly incongruous structures and anti-tank barriers.

The secret construction project was 80km long and officially approved by Hitler during his visit in 1935. The entire route was divided into three sections, with each containing around 100 facilities armed with modern weaponry. The true secret though, was below ground where over 35 kilometers of tunnels connected the buildings in the central section. There were workshops, storage spaces, social areas and barracks large enough to house 24,000 soldiers. Train tracks and stations were built in the underground space and a "main traffic road" connected it all together. At the start of World War II, however, efforts were needed elsewhere, so the project was halted with much of the above-ground work left unfinished. The front didn't see much action during the war and was used as a Daimler aircraft engine factory. Finally, in January of 1945, the small crew stationed at the facility was overrun by Russian forces.

The central section was centered around the town of Międzyrzec and is now called the Międzyrzecki Fortified Region or MRU. There are two areas open to the public with guided-tour access. The MRU Museum and Fortifications in Pniewo has year-round underground tours that range in length and adventure. Only 10 minutes down the road is a second access point at the Boryszyn Loop where you can book either a walking or biking tour of the underground spaces.

The MRU tunnels were highly suspected of being the hiding place for Nazi treasures and stolen artworks; however, as of now, none have been found. The tunnels were abandoned after the war and most ground-level buildings were destroyed or looted. As a result, the MRU is now the largest bat refuge in Europe with thousands of nocturnal residents from 12 different species.



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THE SNEAKY WATER SPIRIT OF NAPLES, ITALY

The ancient Greeks founded a settlement at Naples in the eighth century BC. They were the first to dig underground aqueducts to transport water around town. Later, Romans found huge, deep veins of lightweight volcanic tuff under the city. They carved blocks from the tuff and brought them to the surface to build, leaving large open caverns underground. Over time these caverns were used as water cisterns, with more aqueducts, wells and access tunnels added to them throughout the centuries.

Inside this intricate network of underground canals, "Monaciello," which means "little monk" in Neapolitan can access the city's houses, villas and palaces. This little spirit is the only one who truly knows all the secrets below Naples. He is the remnant of a historical "pozzari," the workers who maintained the supply system and kept the waterways clear and clean. Monaciello remembers that people didn't pay him well and is the one to blame when tricks get played and coins are stolen. He can cause mischief and has been known to harass women. On the other hand, he will also help people by leaving a few coins when they are in dire straits. Perhaps you will run into Manaciello on a tour at Napoli Sotterranea, where you get to see the ancient Greek and Roman ruins and old tunnels.

Another option to get underground is at the Galleria Borbonica. This tunnel was created in 1853 by Ferdinand II Bourbon, King of Naples. He feared citizen uprisings and wanted the tunnel to connect the royal palace with the local military compound. It is a huge underground space, designed to allow a carriage to carry the king to safety, and for troops to move unnoticed. During its construction, the diggers encountered other aqueducts and cisterns and had to reroute several times. Bourbon's escape was used during WWII as a shelter, and later a storage unit for impounded vehicles. There are various tours through the tunnel and its many off-shoots, including an adventure tour that concludes by floating on a raft through a now-flooded abandoned subway tunnel. Look out for Monaciello along the way. ■

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Exploring the NORTHERN LIGHTS

By Katie Wells

The aurora borealis has long been mythologized throughout the world. Many beliefs and stories center around the ethereal lights that paint the night sky.

Indigenous American stories center around a spiritual connection to the deceased. Many suggest the northern lights are spirits holding torches to guide recently departed souls through the abyss and into the land of brightness and plenty. The Cree believed the lights were a way to communicate with their ancestors and when dogs barked at the lights it was because they recognized their lost companions.

When the aurora appears further south in continental Europe, it can take on a deep red glow which led to the belief that it was a sinister omen warning of danger or war. Greco-Roman mythology personified the phenomenon through the goddess Aurora, who embodied the dawn as the sibling of Sun and Moon. Every day, Aurora raced across the sky in her chariot leaving behind a ribbon of colors to alert her brother and sister to the breaking of the new day.

Some of the most unique depictions of the northern lights are born out of northern European and U.K. countries. In Orkney, Scotland, the lights are called the “Merry Dancers,” the dancers being fallen angels or sky warriors engaged in an epic battle. Estonians believed the northern lights were mystical sleighs taking guests to a wedding celebration in the heavens. Swedish fishermen thought they were reflections of giant schools of herring swimming nearby, a sign of good fortune and a hefty catch. In Norse mythology, the lights were reflections bouncing off the shields and armor of the Valkyrie.

The Danish romanticized the lights, believing that they occurred because of swans competing to see who could swim furthest north. Some of the swans swam too far and became trapped in the ice. When they flapped their wings to break free, flurries of light were created in the dark sky. In Iceland, auroras are intertwined with the most primal human experience: childbirth. The luminescence was said to alleviate the pains of labor.

A commonality within these world-wide myths and legends is that they depict the northern lights as having a deep connection to the human condition and bridging the realms between reality and spirituality. While much of the lights can be explained by science, there is still an otherworldliness about them that excites us and makes sightings of their ephemeral beauty a special experience.

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Finding the Aurora in Iceland

Iceland sits at a latitude of 64 degrees north, ideally located for geomagnetic activity. The extreme dark of the Icelandic winter and minimal light pollution also make it the perfect place to chase the northern lights. The best times to see the aurora borealis in Iceland is between October and March as the night sky is at its darkest. Prime sightings typically occur between 11 p.m. and midnight. To find the northern lights on a starry night, look for Polaris, or the North Star which shines near true north. To find it more easily look for the big spoon in the sky as the constellation known as "The Big Dipper" points to the bright star. If a green arc is visible, then there is a good chance you will have a sighting.

To get to Iceland, you will likely fly. The main airport is Keflavík International, close to Reykjavík. Reykjavík is a vibrant city that makes for a great launch pad to explore Iceland via rental car or multi-day guided tours. A neat opportunity that Icelandair offers is a stopover program for transatlantic flights. So, if you are planning a trip from Europe to the United States or vice versa, you can stay in Iceland for up to seven days before being charged any additional airfare. If you are traveling from Denmark, you can take the M/S Norröna ferry and even bring your car.

In Iceland, taking a tour with an experienced guide can increase your chances of seeing the northern lights. Guides know exactly what to look for, and if you are not able to see them on the night of your tour, many companies offer

a second chance for free. It is wise to plan the northern lights excursion early on in your trip, so you have time to try again if needed. There are even northern lights boat tours offered where you have the chance to view them from the sea and can, perhaps, imagine some very far north Danish swans shooting gusts of colors into the sky from the icy waters.

Iceland has many incredible landscapes that make for memorable viewings of the aurora. Thingvellir National Park, Ásbyrgi Canyon, and Kirkjufell Mountain are notable places to go with open space and less light pollution. The Westfjords have the longest hours of darkness and less cloud cover, making this area the most ideal to see them. Or, if you want a more relaxed trip, you may be lucky to see the aurora as you soak in the thermal springs of the Blue Lagoon.

While the northern lights may be the main focus of your Iceland trip, the land of fire and ice has many other can't-miss sites such as Diamond Beach, where chunks of icebergs wash up on the black sand shore and resemble diamonds; Reynisfjara Black Sand Beach and Basalt Columns, which closely resemble northern Ireland's Giants Causeway and has been used for filming locations such as in "Game of Thrones;" and the Golden Circle which encompasses stunning geographic sites like Gullfoss Waterfall, Gullfossgljúfur Canyon and the Great Geyser, Strokkur.



Whale watching, puffin tours and ice climbing are other activities you won't want to miss while in Iceland. While you are enjoying all Iceland has to offer, keep an eye on the sky as you never know when the aurora might make an appearance.



What exactly is the aurora borealis, why is it so elusive, and how has it come to be?

The aurora borealis, or northern lights are an ancient light display in the night sky that have enchanted humankind for thousands of years, inspiring myths and legends. Typically, they are only visible where Earth's magnetic fields are strongest: near the north pole above a latitude of 60 degrees north, or in the south pole at latitudes below 60 degrees south. The southern lights are called the aurora australis.

2024 has been a big year for viewing the northern lights due to an exceptionally strong G5-level geomagnetic storm. On May 10–11, you may have read about the rare sightings or were lucky enough to experience the lights, viewable as far south as the Carolinas in the United States and Italy in Europe. This year the sun is nearing the end of an eleven-year cycle. At the end of each cycle the sun becomes more active as it prepares for its magnetic fields to flip polarities. This causes extra activity from the sun with higher volumes of solar flares and coronal mass ejections, which are clouds of charged particles. When these charged particles are launched, they travel 150 million kilometers along the Earth's magnetic field and collide with gases in the Earth's atmosphere. These collisions create flashes that fill our sky up with light.

Depending on the state of electrons, gases present in the atmosphere and altitude, those flashes can take on different colors that create the northern lights. Higher levels of solar activity lead to more vibrant displays.

- For red hues, excited atomic oxygen at high altitudes above 150 miles (241km) must be present. Excited atomic oxygen can be thought of as an electron that's been given extra energy by absorbing a photon or colliding into another atom.
- Green is the most frequently seen color during northern lights sightings. It also forms when excited atomic oxygen is present in the atmosphere; however, it occurs at lower altitudes, up to 150 miles (241km).
- Blue is the rarest color seen when viewing the northern lights because nitrogen alone produces blue, and it can only be seen at altitudes below 60 miles (96.6km).
- Purple is another less common color of the aurora and is seen when ionized molecular nitrogen is present at an altitude above 60 miles (96.6km). ■



Brewery Tours of IRELAND

By Tamala Malerk

I first encountered Irish beer when I was waiting tables in college at an “Irish” sports bar. I quickly found out that the only thing that made it Irish was serving corned beef on St. Patrick’s Day and the Guinness that we poured from our taps. Nonetheless, I was intrigued by Ireland’s brews.

As the air gets brisk and we ease into the winter months, nothing sounds better than staying indoors, taking a brewery tour and warming up my insides with a hearty Irish stout.

THE WICKLOW BREWERY

Location: Redcross, Wicklow

History: The brewery dates back to 1978 when Violet and Robert Williams decided to turn their farm into a holiday park. Today, you will not only find a pub and brewery, but also a popular filming location. Productions like “Savage Eye,” “Christmas Perfection” and “Chasing Leprechauns” have filmed here.

Tour Information: Wicklow offers two types of tours, which must be booked at least one day in advance. Book the “Beer and Tour” at wicklowbrewery.ie/wicklow-brewery-tours, or call (+353) (0404) 41661 to book the “Tour with Food and Beer.”

- **Beer and Tour** | Daily 2 p.m. | €20 per person. | 18+
- **Brewery Tour with Food & Beer Pairing** | Daily 2 p.m. | €75 per person. | 18+

FRANCISCAN WELL BREWERY

Location: Sunday’s Well, Cork

History: This historic space is surrounded by the walls of an old Franciscan monastery. Legend says that water from the monastery’s well had healing properties and people traveled from all over to drink it. Today, it is home to a brewery, distillery and pizza place.

Tour Information: Book tours online at franwellbar.com/calendar.

- **The Ultimate Craft Beer Experience** | Thurs. – Sun. 3 p.m. | €15 per person. €20 to add the “pour your own stout” experience.

SMITHWICK’S EXPERIENCE

Location: Kilkenny, Kilkenny

History: John Smithwick began brewing in Kilkenny in the 1700s. Nine generations of Smithwick men have followed in John’s footsteps.

Tour Information: You can choose from two types of tours. On the first Thursday of the month, they offer sensory-friendly tours. Book all tours online at smithwicksexperience.com/tickets.

- **Smithwick’s Experience** | Daily 11 a.m. – 5 p.m. | From €18 per person. Children 6 and under are free. | All ages
- **Masters of Ale Experience** | Fri. and Sat. 5:20 p.m. | From €50 per person. | 18+

WALLED CITY BREWERY

Location: Ebrington Square, Derry-Londonderry

History: Walled City has been serving customers since 2015. Today, Walled City hosts a Michelin-starred chef at its restaurant as well as a taproom where you can take a masterclass, attend a Gin or Jazz Festival and so much more. To date, they have brewed more than 500 different varieties of beer.

Tour Information: Book tours online at walledcitybrewery.com/tourandtasting.

- **Tour and Tasting** | Fri. – Sat. 2 and 4 p.m. and Sun. 2 p.m. | £15 per person | 18+

SULLIVAN'S BREWING COMPANY

Location: Gardens, Kilkenny

History: Their history dates back to 1702 and includes lost horse bets and fires. Nowadays, they serve award-winning beer along with pizza, nachos and hamburgers.

Tour Information: Tours, known as "Tasting Talks" must be pre-booked online at info@sullivanstaproom.com.

KINNEGAR BREWERY

Location: Letterkenny, Donegal

History: In 2011, Kinnegar began with four beers. Today, they brew 12 different types along with seasonal specials.

Tour Information: They offer three types of tours. The five-minute intro tour is free and requires no advanced booking. You can book the other two tours online at kinnegarbrewing.ie/tours.

- **Advanced Tour** | Fridays 5 p.m. | €10 per person
- **Deep Dive Tour** | Fridays 5 p.m. | €20 per person

MUNSTER BREWERY

Location: Youghal, Cork

History: Amidst a recession in 2013, the Hyde brothers decided to open the brewery. It worked out so well for them that they had to move to a bigger place in 2016. Today, they brew three beers and a kombucha.

Tour Information: Tours must be booked in advance; but they are not picky how: call, email, DM on social media, or mail them a letter. Tours are €10 per person and are cash only. Learn more at munsterbrewery.com/brewery-tours.

HOPE BEER

Location: Kilbarrack, Dublin

History: In 2015, four friends came together to found Hope Beer. Today, they brew five beers year-round, two seasonals and several limited-edition beers.

Tour Information: Book tours online at hopebeer.ie/brewery-tours-dublin.

- **Brewery Tour** | Thurs. – Fri. 5 p.m. and Sat. 4 p.m. | €20 per person.

KILLARNEY BREWING & DISTILLING CO.

Location: Killarney, Kerry

History: The founders met each other across the pond in Chicago in 2011. They opened their first brewery in 2015. In 2022, they opened another location, "Ireland's largest independently owned brewery, distillery, and visitor center."

Tour Information: Book tours online at killarneybrewingdistilling.com/book-a-tour.

- **Brewery Tour** | Daily 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. | €24.50 per adult, €13.50 per child. | All ages

GUINNESS STOREHOUSE

Location: St. James's Gate, Dublin

History: Of course, we couldn't feature brewery tours in Ireland without featuring the most famous one. In 1759, Arthur Price, aka Arthur Guinness, had so much faith in his brewing that he signed a 9,000-year lease on St. James Gate Brewery. In 1967, the first Guinness factory outside of Ireland and the U.K. opened in Nigeria. Today, you can drink Guinness in over 150 countries worldwide.

Tour Information: The storehouse offers a variety of tours that you can book in advance at www.guinness-storehouse.com/en/booking. Once a month, Guinness offers sensory-friendly hours.

- **Standard Experience** | Daily | From €20 per adult, youth 5 – 17 from €10, kids under 4 are free.
- **STOUTIE Experience** | Daily | From €28 per person, family tickets available.
- **Guinness Academy** | Daily | From €32 per person, family tickets available.
- **Connoisseur Experience** | Daily | From €95 per person | 18+
- **Guinness Brewery Experience** | Fri. – Sun. once per day | From €350 per person. | 18+ ■



THE MYTH OF THE Aran Sweater

By Kat Nickola

Buying an Aran sweater in Ireland is an experience at the top of many tourist lists. These all-wool cable-knit jumpers are warm, snuggly and stylish: perfect for the damp, chilly climate of the northern isles. However, there is a misconception about their origin.

***Myth:** Aran sweater patterns indicate 'clan' affiliations, religious or auspicious meanings, ancient Celtic symbolism or family heritage.*

It is often said that wives (or fiancées) from the fishing villages of the Aran islands in the west of Ireland would traditionally knit their fisherman husbands particular patterns (for any of the above reasons). This was the method by which a body could be identified when it washed ashore after a fishing vessel was lost at sea.

***Reality:** Ireland has a long history of wool craft, trendsetting and export.*

Sheep have provided wool, milk and meat for people living in northern latitudes since prehistory, and the people living in Ireland capitalized on it. Irish wool was a hot commodity by the 1200s, highly valued and exported across Europe. In the 1600s, however, England asserted dominion over Ireland and created laws to prevent the Irish wool industry from competing with their own. This dramatically depressed the Irish economy and led to a vast smuggling operation. After the Great Famine and mass emigration to America in the mid-1800s, weaving was again encouraged as a scheme to alleviate poverty. Industrial, machine-made wool items quickly became a lucrative export in the 1900s, and that continues today.

After Ireland's independence from England in 1921, the creation of national symbols like a flag and currency also included other emblems that harkened back to an undefined and partially mythological era. The Aran sweater became one of these symbols. Irish-made cable-knit sweaters showed

up in pop culture fiction of the time—a film, a play, a shop-based in the Aran islands. Soon Irish wool was synonymous with cable-knit jumpers and the nostalgia for a rural fishing village of a simpler time.

The popularity of Aran sweaters led to a search for meaning in the stylish patterns. A German textile worker who fled the Nazi regime theorized that the motifs were Celtic, and set up shop in Oxford, where 'historical' woolens sold well. Other commercial weavers discovered that cable patterns were extremely popular exports, especially when marketed as traditional styles for Americans. The Irish diaspora found a strong foothold in the States, and many Americans of Irish descent longed for a connection with a nostalgic 'homeland.' The modern creation of family or clan patterns has become a great selling point.

In Ireland, wool heritage is strong, and the Aran jumper patterns can be seen to symbolize this past century of national identity. To some Irish people the sweaters are clichéd items for tourists that misrepresent their country as being stuck in time, others simply appreciate the natural warmth and water resistance from a practical piece of wool clothing.

I've worn my Aran sweaters on archaeology digs in driving wind and rain up on in the islands of Orkney in Scotland. Mine have front pockets, which are super useful since I treat them as work clothes. They are not clean. The knit pattern is not symbolic. But they indeed live up to the promise of warmth, durability and comfort, regardless of their origin story. ■

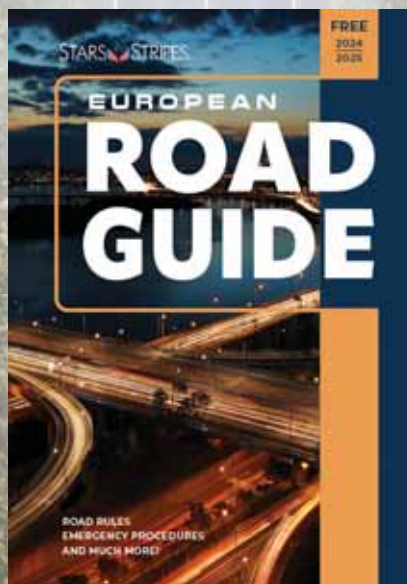
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Luxurious LUXEMBOURG

By Tamala Malerk

When traveling, it is fun to see how much bang you can get for your buck. However, it can also be great to just relax, not worry (too much) about the price and lap up some luxury. Luxembourg City is just the place to unwind and live it up.



The shopping here is unparalleled. For a brief preview of what you can find across the city, check out the **Galeries Lafayette**. While smaller than its Parisian counterpart, this department store is still a great start to a luxury shopping adventure. It has five stories of accessories, perfumes, clothing and home goods. There is a great mix of high-end fashion, including my new favorite brand, Sondra, along with Dior and Claudie Pierlot, as well as more familiar and cost-friendly brands such as Nike, Tommy Hilfiger and Reebok. I resisted the urge to splurge on a Sondra navy blue blazer with matching slacks priced at roughly 600 euros, but I did walk away with a cute hat and city skyline wall décor piece for about 75 euros.

Outside of the department store, you can walk around the city center and find plenty of stand-alone luxury shops. Grab a new bag at the **Louis Vuitton**. Snag a new outfit from **Sondra, Tara Jarmon, or Zapa**. Select a new piece of home décor from German luxury brand, **Villeroy and Boch**, or treat yourself to a **Rolex** watch. If, like me, you can only window-shop at these luxurious places, you can also find cost-friendly places like **H&M, LUSH** and **Sephora**.

All of this shopping will definitely work up an appetite. Treat yourself to a delicious, extravagant cinnamon roll from **Cinnamood**. These oversized tasty treats give Cinnabon a run for their money. Featuring new flavors daily, including vegan options, you will want to grab one (or two) for yourself. My favorites include the speculoos (vegan), the pistachio, and the tiramisu options; however, they all look delicious. **Ladurée**, a Parisian confectionary and bakery, also has a shop where you can sit on damask-covered chairs under glittery crystal chandeliers to sip your tea or taste the cakes, candies, chocolates and macarons off gold-rimmed China. At the **Chocolate House**, you can sip custom hot chocolate drinks and eat cake and pastries across the street from the royal castle; you can even wave at the guards protecting the castle (but don't expect them to wave back). You might just see the Duke and Duchess stop in for a cup.

If you are looking for a multi-course, fancy meal, I highly recommend **Amélys** at Le Royal (more on the hotel soon). While there was no "posted dress code," one would feel underdressed in athleisure wear or old jeans. I would recommend business casual or better dress.

The French cuisine at Amélys is top-notch. One can choose to order *à la carte* from their smaller,



but still varied, menu or choose their weekly rotating "Mosaic Menu" which features set starters, entrees and dessert. We chose *à la carte*. As we ordered our drinks and meals, the server recommended a red wine to pair with my entrée.

After our drinks arrived, another server came around with a basket of bread. Rather than leaving the basket on the table, he asked each of us what kind of bread we would like and presented individual servings of salted and unsalted butter. I chose an Italian bread, and two slices were delicately placed on the small bread plate in front of me.

Prior to our entrées arriving, a server came around with a crumb-brush and wiped away all traces of the just-consumed bread course. They repeated this once more between our entrée and dessert courses.

For my entrée, I selected the lamb chops served with carrots and couscous which paired perfectly with the server's wine recommendation. The lamb was served with a reduction that complemented the flavor of the meat without overpowering it. I ended the meal with a scoop of speculoos cookie ice cream. My friends raved about the vegan stuffed shells, herb butter beef and crème brûlée with Madagascar vanilla seeds. You cannot go wrong with anything on this menu.

Speaking of **Le Royal**, this five-star hotel makes for the premium stay of your luxury trip. There is an on-site wellness center and steamy spa to sweat away the stress. Along with Amélys, there is also the Piano Bar that is open until 1 a.m. to end your night with a cocktail and beautiful music.

As you meander the halls leading to the bar and restaurant, you can view art prints as well as miniature statues and figurines from local stores and artists. See something you like? The concierge will make a phone call and it will be available for you to purchase and take home before the end of your stay.

In my room, there were five different types of pillows on the bed and a number assigned to each pillow. You could enjoy the combination of the pillows or have more of your favorite numbered pillow brought up to your room. There was a large tub as well, so I threw in a bath bomb purchased at Sephora for a relaxing end-of-day soak.

Breakfast was a combination of table service and DIY buffet-style. Hot coffee, tea and cocoa drinks as well as custom-ordered omelets are brought to your table. I booked my stay directly on Le Royale's website, luxembourg.leroyal.com, which allowed me to take advantage of their discounted breakfast buffet package. After I ordered my latte macchiato with the server, I navigated the multi-room buffet. The abundant choices were almost overwhelming! The buffet featured almost anything you could imagine: from the standard fruits, yogurts, deli meats and breads to my personal favorite, American-style bacon and "smoothies of the day." If you are not in the mood for a full buffet, a selection of *à la carte* options can be ordered to your room.

Unfortunately, all opulent escapes must come to an end, but the breakfast buffet at Le Royale was the perfect end to a luxury getaway before returning to reality. ■



THE CHEESE BARGE

in London

By Tamala Malerk

Cheese is such a versatile food. From Lunchables providing midday nourishment as a kid in the '90s to the adult version in the form of a charcuterie board. It brings flavor and texture to tacos, pasta dishes and salads, it gets breaded and deep-fried and so much more. Cheese has been a delicious part of life as far back as I can remember. Needless to say, I love cheese.

While walking around the Paddington area of London, I discovered a floating hub of cheese on the water near the little blue Paddington Bear statue: The Cheese Barge.

No matter if you just want a snack, a light meal, or a multi-course experience (all cheese-related), the Cheese Barge is here for you. I recommend starting with a three-British-cheese sampler with crackers and following that with the Smoked Lincolnshire Poacher cheese Spätzle. Then, you can share the Baked Baron Bigod cheese and finish the experience with a slice of milk chocolate cheesecake. The full menu is only available from noon – 3 p.m. and 5:30 – 9:30 p.m.

Fret not, they offer cheese boards and different types of grilled cheese sandwiches, including my favorite, the Green's Fior di Latte Mozzarella, smoked bacon and chili honey, all day. Don't see one of these suggestions when you visit? They are constantly switching up the menu with new great items for you to try. The Cheese Barge also offers a variety of red, white and orange wines, as well as cocktails and beers to pair with your cheese.

On Thursdays, from late November through late March, they offer a set fondue menu only. Who doesn't have fun with fondue? You get to choose from either the monthly special fondue or the two regular fondues served with a side of cauliflower or truffle mashed potatoes. You can then end your night with the apple and plum crumble.

The Cheese Barge is not a large vessel, so booking in advance is highly recommended, even if you want to hop on in-between meals for a grilled cheese sandwich. Go to thecheesebar.com/paddington to book your table.

For those in other areas of London or the U.K., the Cheese Barge is part of a larger community of cheese-based restaurants under "The Cheese Bar" brand. In London, you can enjoy a cheese-based meal on Columbia Road, at the Seven Dials Market and the Camden Stables Market. You can also find them in North Yorkshire. ■



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GRAB A BITE

AT DRACULA'S CAVE IN TIVOLI, ITALY

Story and Photos by Katie Wells

If you are vacationing in Rome, Tivoli is an easy 40-minute train ride out of the city to a completely different world, geographically and architecturally. It was here, after exploring hiking trails with cascading waterfalls at Villa Gregoriana and living out my Lizzie McGuire dreams of running along the fountains in the Italian Renaissance Garden at Villa D'Este (a UNESCO World Heritage Site), that my family and I stumbled upon a rather unique restaurant, Taverna di Dracula.

After a long morning in warmer-than-usual November weather, we popped into the restaurant, hidden away in the tan, travertine stone village. To our surprise, we had the place to ourselves. The owner came out and greeted us like friends, and he even spoke English. As he handed out menus, he explained that he and his wife cook everything fresh and that some items might take a longer time since they were all homemade dishes. Some of the recipes had even been passed down for centuries. He shared his passion for the legend of Dracula and invited us to go down into "Dracula's cave," below the dining room, where we saw a coffin and a man stuck in the stone wall. Despite the spooky theme, the restaurant was charming and a great place to cool off. We could see the passion for Romanian culture and Dracula in the décor, including the drink coasters and lanterns.

I ordered a chopped salad which was a medley of fresh veggies and hard-boiled egg. It was lovely, though I couldn't help but sneak a few of my husband's sarmale, or Romanian stuffed cabbage rolls. They were so delicious I wished he had more to share, and he probably wished a quarter of his lunch hadn't been highjacked. We were told if

we wanted dessert to order about halfway through our meal so we wouldn't have to wait too long, so we ordered two papanasi, or Romanian sweet cheese donuts, in cherry and blueberry to share. Delightfully, they fit with the theme of Dracula's tavern as the berries stained the white cheese a deep satiny red.

At the end of our meal, the owner came out with free shots of palinka, a traditional Romanian plum brandy (often dubbed as Romanian moonshine), that was so strong we joked maybe he was, in fact, Dracula, and we would be his next meal.

Since the restaurant was quiet that afternoon, we really got to chat with our host a lot. On the TV above us, he showed a slideshow of some beautiful nearby natural areas he recommended we visit. After we paid, thanked him and walked back into the daylight, a mystical calico cat sitting guard on a stump by the Tavern's door bid us farewell.

We had no idea we'd be in Italy eating Romanian food and touring Dracula's cave, but it ended up being a delicious, fun and memorable part of our trip. I've learned that when traveling, it's often the things you don't expect that end up being favorite memories. ■



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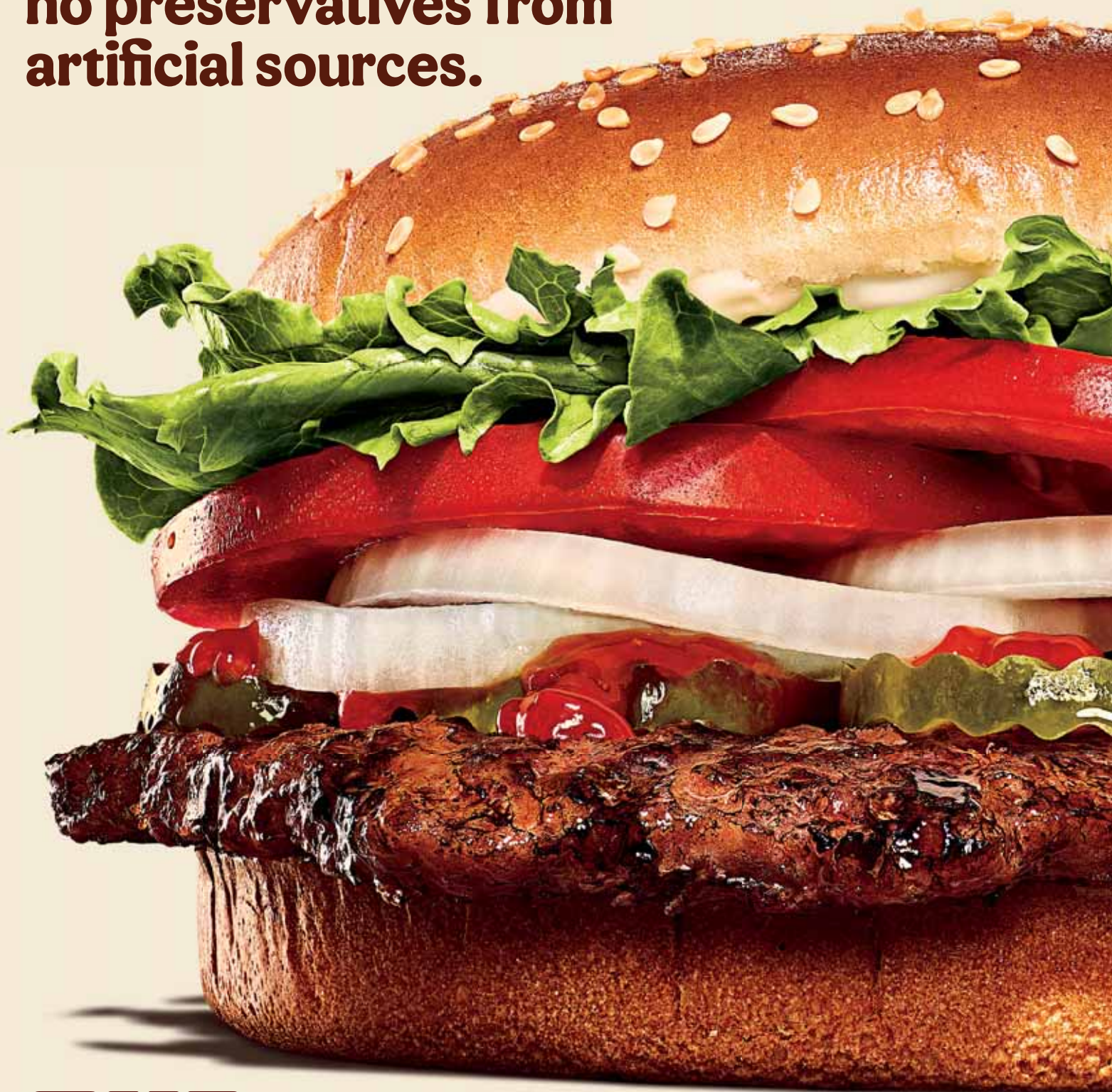
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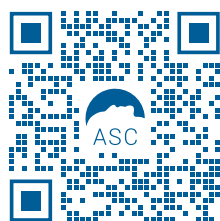


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