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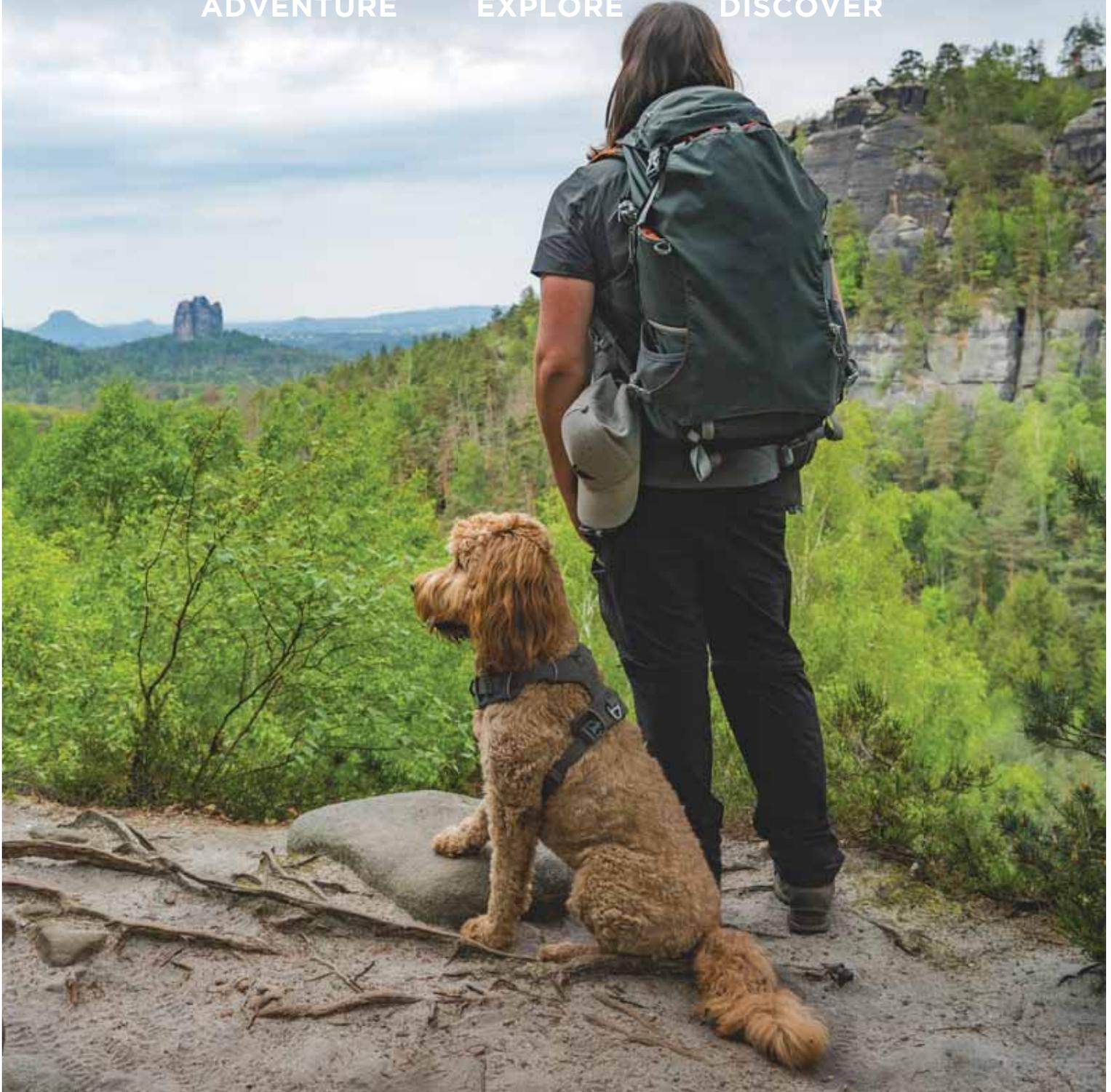
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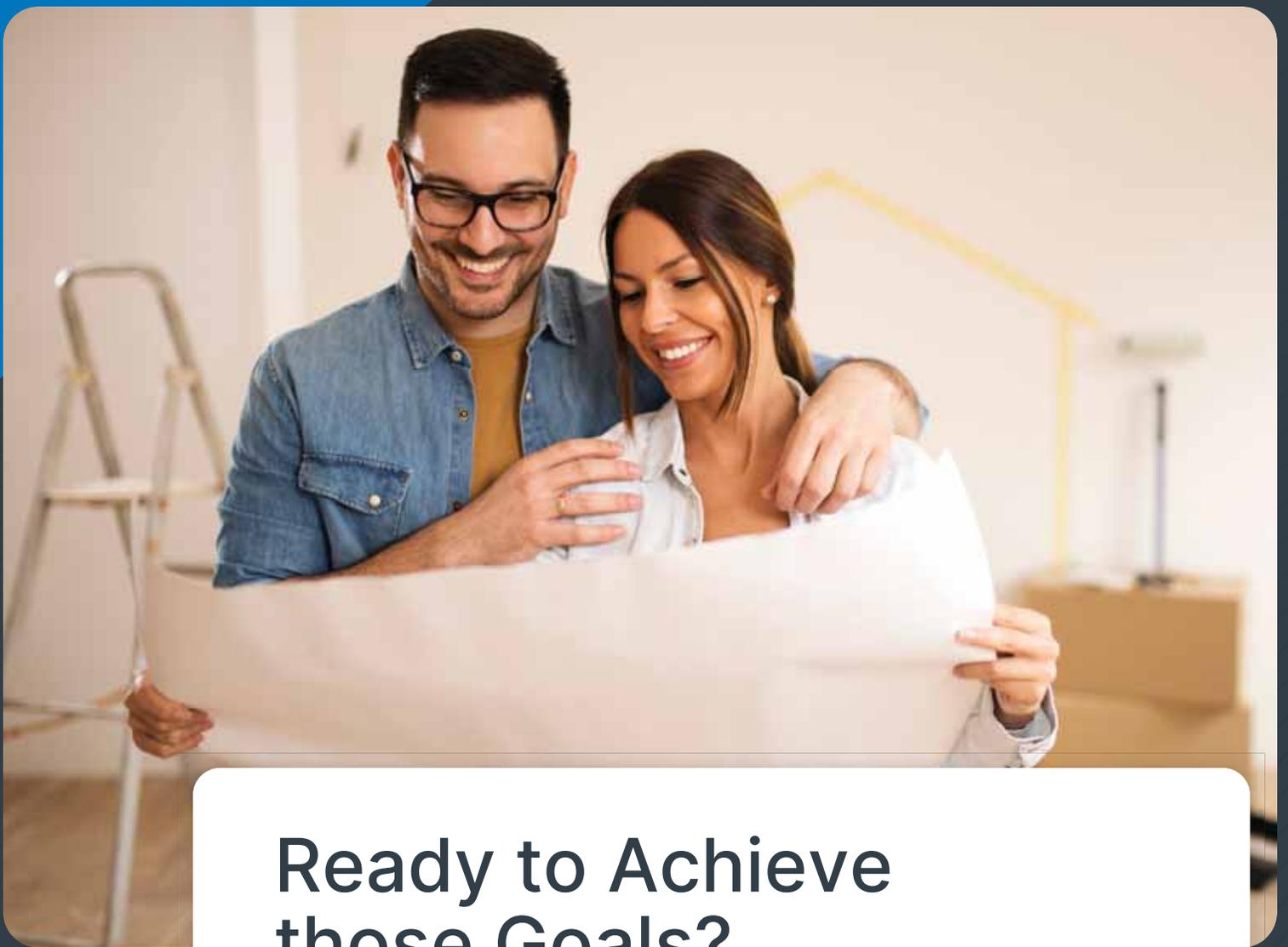
EUROPE

ADVENTURE

EXPLORE

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EDITOR'S LETTER



Kat Nickola
Publishing and Media Design,
Lead Editor
Stars and Stripes Europe

*“Live in the sunshine,
swim the sea,
Drink the wild air’s salubrity.”*

— from “Merlin’s Song” by Ralph Waldo Emerson

The world turns, and spring warms into summer as we thaw out from winter’s cold, shed our coats and get down to the important work of celebrating a new season.

This edition of “Stripes Europe” is exactly that: a celebration of new seasons. Whether it’s your first season in Europe, your tenth or your last, we hope the stories here will help you enjoy this time and place. From incredible food and art to vast landscapes and the trails that wind through them, the warm months in Europe are full of options.

Travel underground or into the wilds to experience the natural beauty of this continent. Dip your toes into the world of Formula 1 racing, nerd out at a Lord of the Rings cafe or discover your favorite French butter.

Not sure where to go or what to do? Take the quiz to find your ideal vacation. Hit the trails, take in a museum, eat the best meals or lock in on the next best game.

No matter how you spend your spring and summer, savor the experiences and know that the Stars and Stripes team here in Europe is here for you. ■



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PHOTO BY KAT NICKOLA



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PHOTO BY TAMALA MALERK



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**American
Red Cross**

Service to the Armed Forces

In an Emergency, You Can Call the American Red Cross

In times of emergency, the American Red Cross helps our U.S. military communities worldwide communicate with their loved ones and helps facilitate their return home through our Hero Care Network “Red Cross Emergency Messages” program. The Hero Care Network is free and available 24/7.

Eligibility includes:

- All active-duty military members
- All personnel working under the Status of Armed Forces Agreement (SOFA) including Department of War personnel, contractors and their family members

How it works:

Military families can initiate an emergency message either online, over the phone or through the Hero Care App. The Red Cross verifies the emergency and notifies the service member’s military command, so they can make an educated decision regarding the possibility of emergency leave. The Red Cross also connects eligible military members and veterans to financial assistance provided by Military Aid Societies. Assistance can include funds for emergency travel, emergency food, shelter and more.

“Coming from a military background, I like working alongside the military and helping these service members get back home for these emergencies because I know how important it is... to these families.”

Ciana Naputi has dedicated six years to supporting military families as a Hero Care caseworker. Knowing firsthand the impact Red Cross messages had on her own family fuels her empathy and dedication, ensuring everyone behind the call knows they are not alone. When families call the Hero Care Center, they’ll connect with someone like Ciana who truly understands their challenges, working around the clock to get their service member home.



We encourage families to prepare for emergencies ahead of time by visiting redcross.org/saf, downloading the **FREE** Hero Care App by scanning the QR code or calling a Hero Care specialist at **+1 877-272-7337**.

WHERE Should You Travel NEXT?

By Kat Nickola

What does this trip need to deliver?

Where is this adventure taking place?

ADVENTURE!

Up in the mountains

Kids in tow

Just the two of us

I'm flying solo

Who's coming along?

The whole family will love Au-Schoppernau, Austria!

The Highlands of Scotland are calling.

Dolomites, here I come.



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Off the beaten track

Indiana Jones

James Bond

King Leonidas

Choose a persona

Go scabble around in Orkney's ancient tombs.

Say hi to the sheep, seals and spies in the Faroe Islands.

This. Is. Sparta! (It's really Mani, Greece, but play along.)



In the local culture

In a fortress

In a cave

On a boat

Pick a local accommodation

Head back in time in Bulgaria.

Keep cool in Spain's cave houses.

Pilot your own French houseboat.



RELAXATION...



What does relaxation mean to you?

Good food and shopping

Let's talk budget

High-end

Strut your stuff in Milan.



Middle of the road

Don't forget siesta in Madrid.



Frugally bucolic

It's medieval times in Rothenburg.



Laying on a beach

Pick a poison

Vinho

Chill out in Portugal.



Ron Miel

Time for a resort in Gran Canaria.



Ouzo

Test the blue waters of Zakynthos.



Quiet Places

Choose your sound of silence

Bleating sheep

The Cotswolds are calling.



Church bells

There are 5 villages in the Cinque Terre. Pick one.



Waves crashing

The Hurtigruten: Part ferry, part cruise, all Norway.



Here are suggestions for long weekend trips that are easily accessible to those stationed at NAS Sigonella.

LONG WEEKEND DISCOVERIES

WHILE IN

Sicily

By Anne Delange



Living in Europe has been a luxury that I could never have imagined. Now, living in Sicily has been an amazing experience and I tirelessly advocate traveling while you are here.

Here are suggestions for long weekend trips that are easily accessible to those stationed at NAS Sigonella.





THE CAPITAL REGION

Visiting the capital of Sicily should definitely be up there on your list of places to visit on the island. **Palermo** is about two and a half hours away from NAS Sigonella, making it, in my opinion, a pretty easy drive. You can definitely spend a full weekend roaming around the capital, or you can quickly visit in a day and move on to another town on this side of the island.

Visit the **Teatro Massimo**. This is the largest opera house in Italy and the third largest in Europe. There are also an abundance of churches in Palermo that you can visit. One to check out is the 12th-century church that is also a UNESCO site, **Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio**. Palermo is a great city to spend a couple of days.

For a full weekend, tack on a day in **Cefalu**. This sleepy seaside town is about an hour away from Palermo and offers a picturesque visit. Make your way from Palermo in the morning and hike **Cefalu Rock** to get beautiful views overlooking the town. The hike is about two miles and can take an hour or two depending on your speed. I recommend going early because the hike is mostly unshaded. The **Piazza del Duomo** hosts the Cathedral of Cefalu, which is one of the many UNESCO sites that exist in Sicily. Check out the local specialty of Pasta a Tainanu while you are here visiting.

AROUND TRAPANI

Western Sicily deserves a few days of discovery. Drive three-and-a-half hours away from NAS Sigonella and you can find yourself in the town of **Trapani**. Trapani was once a large port that was based around salt production and tuna fishing. Unfortunately, a lot of the old town suffered bombing from the Second World War. It is still worth visiting and spending the day.

Venture down Corso Vittorio Emmanuelle, and you will find yourself among the important monuments of the town: **Ca-varretta Palace**, **Church of the College Jesuits** and, eventually, **Trapani Cathedral**. Since it is a seaside town, catch the sunset around the *lungomare*, or venture over to the **Ligny Tower**. It is also a museum and has a great view since it's vantage point was once used as a watchtower.

The village of **Erice** is 2,460 ft. above sea level and looks down on the town of Trapani. Erice is a medieval town and has some amazing views of western Sicily. Since it is so high up, be prepared for the winding road up to the town. If you are staying in Trapani, consider taking the funicular up so you don't have to worry about driving up and down. A round-trip ticket currently costs 11 euros. Visit the **Castle of Venus** for impeccable views of the coast. For a sweet treat, make sure to check out **Maria Grammatico Pasticceria** and leave with the shop's famous *Genovese*, a custard-filled pastry. This pastry shop has an amazing history and prides itself on using locally-produced ingredients and Sicilian almonds from Avola!

Take the 30-minute ferry from Trapani and you will find yourself on the beautiful island of **Favignana**. The island isn't big enough for you to need to take your car, instead, hop on the passenger ferry and walk or bike around Favignana. You can rent eBikes on the island, but if you arrive later in the day, you will probably end up with a normal bike as this island is getting popular.

Favignana has many famous and popular beaches that you can check out on your visit. Some may spend the full day in Favignana and catch the ferry back. But, if you want to live it up, book a room for an extra day here and relax. ■

ECOTOURISM

TRAVELING SUSTAINABLY

By Katie Wells



I remember driving down a highway in Texas with a friend when suddenly the wind roared through my ears as she rolled down the passenger-side window and casually let a bag of fast food fly out into the desert. I was shocked. To me, someone who grew up playing by the creek and exploring in the woods, this was a terrible crime. To her, and to many people, it's just what people do. Years later, she brought up the incident and confided in me that she still feels embarrassed. Her travels across the world and visits to more sustainable cities opened her eyes to the impact of such an indifferent attitude toward the environment.

While nature appears invincible and our individual impact seems fleeting, how humans interact with a place matters. Experiencing the culture of a city and the wonders of the natural world while mindfully ensuring they remain unspoiled for generations to come is the heart of sustainable travel.

WHAT ECOTOURISM IS AND WHY IT MATTERS

Ecotourism is a positive alternative to traditional tourism, which can be harmful to the environment and local culture. There are many definitions, but ultimately it focuses on preserving and protecting wildlife, the environment and cultural resources. Many people choose to travel sustainably to reduce their carbon footprint, or simply to experience life in a place more authentically. It is also an opportunity for adventure and fun, experiential learning about nature. Organic farms, eco campsites, biophilic designs, wildlife refuges, green transportation methods and eco-friendly transit are all characteristics that can make up an ecotourism destination.

Traveling can be exhausting, stressful and confusing. It can feel like your one chance to see every popular site that a destination has to offer. Trying to wring everything out of a place in just a few days quickly gets expensive and exhausting. Ecotourism offers a reprieve from that. It forces you to slow your pace and see a place more closely; to appreciate what originally brought people to it. Visiting countries with eco-initiatives is a wonderful and immersive way to share cultures and appreciate natural beauty.

THE 7 PRINCIPLES OF ECOTOURISM

According to Martha Honey of the Center for Responsible Travel, to be considered an ecotourism destination, a place must include these principles:

1. TRAVEL TO NATURAL AREAS
2. MINIMIZE IMPACT
3. BUILD ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS
4. PROVIDE DIRECT FINANCIAL BENEFITS FOR CONSERVATION
5. PROVIDE ECONOMIC BENEFITS AND POWER TO LOCAL COMMUNITIES
6. RESPECT LOCAL CULTURES
7. SUPPORT HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENTS

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PLACES TO VISIT IN EUROPE WITH ECO-INITIATIVES

While planning your adventures across Europe, choosing eco-friendly destinations can be a great way to immerse yourself in local culture and to truly get to know the environment of the place you are visiting. There are so many to choose from and most offer educational programs and hands-on activities. Below are three of Europe's top ecotourism destinations.



ICELAND

A leading country in sustainability, Iceland is full of natural beauty, adventure and relaxation while being incredibly conscious about its sustainability efforts. When it comes to tourists, Iceland makes the rules very clear. Natural areas have signage on where not to go to preserve the land and delicate moss that takes years to regrow. Off-roading is illegal and damaging. Public transport like electric busses and e-bikes are widely available for locals and tourists, especially to popular destination sites.

Main attraction spots like the Blue Lagoon and other geothermal spas are powered by renewable geothermal energy plants. There are no chemicals added to the pools, which is why there are strict rules for washing off before taking a dip. For dining, there are plenty of farm-to-table restaurants and non-imported foods available, especially since a rise in geothermally-heated greenhouses made it possible to grow fresh vegetables year-round. Along with food, the tap water is glacial (even more reason to bring a reusable water bottle) for your adventures across Iceland.





SWEDEN

Sweden is another leading country in ecotourism because of its cutting-edge eco-infrastructure powered by renewable energy. Nature's Best® (The Swedish standard for ecotourism accommodation and tour operation) has recently gained GSTC-Recognized status. This status, awarded by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council, gives more credibility and global recognition to Sweden's ecotourism offerings. By 2045, Sweden has set a goal for full carbon emission neutrality. Due largely to their well-connected transport system, the use of electric buses and smart roads.

The Green Key certificate program, which recognizes accommodations, attractions and restaurants that meet high environmental standards, is another factor in its eco-friendliness. Ninety percent of the hotels hold a Green Key certificate, so it is easy for tourists to book a sustainable place to stay, even if by accident. Stockholm has an incredible sustainable food scene, energy-efficient architecture and abundant green spaces. It even hosts green events and festivals to promote sustainability and environmental awareness like zero-waste markets and eco-fashion shows. Along with all of that, Sweden is for nature lovers, with plenty of wildlife and outdoor activities easily available. "Allemansrätten" is the right to access nature. Nature lovers are encouraged to respectfully explore by camping, hiking, skiing and more, as they wish.

TOP The Blue Lagoon; Reykjavik Iceland cityscape; a narrow street in Stockholm, Sweden; biking is a good way to promote ecotourism in your travels.
BOTTOM Sustainable restaurant and farm, Friðheimar; underground metro station in Stockholm, Sweden

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SIMPLE WAYS TO TRAVEL SUSTAINABLY

- Stay at an eco-friendly hotel or accommodation like a farm.
- Embrace slow travel. Make a scenic journey by train through Switzerland, pedal leisurely past canals in Amsterdam by bike, take a boat taxi in Venice; use e-bikes and public transportation rather than cars or planes.
- Support green spaces within cities.
- Explore nature preserves.
- Savor the culture by eating at restaurants with organic and locally sourced food.
- Purchase street food or groceries from the local fresh market.
- Refill your water bottle, especially in places like Iceland.
- Purchase handmade souvenirs.
- Leave no trace. Pack out what you bring in.
- Be mindful of staying on marked trails and respecting “no touch” rules.

ECO-FRIENDLY ACTIVITIES

- Cycling
- Hiking
- Botany walks
- Birdwatching tours
- Forest bathing
- Responsible wildlife safaris
- Water activities (kayaking or paddle boarding tours, rafting)
- Beach cleaning
- Rehabilitation
- Stay at a farm and learn hands-on about the local agriculture and animals
- Volunteer
- Farm-to-table dining
- Artisanal shopping

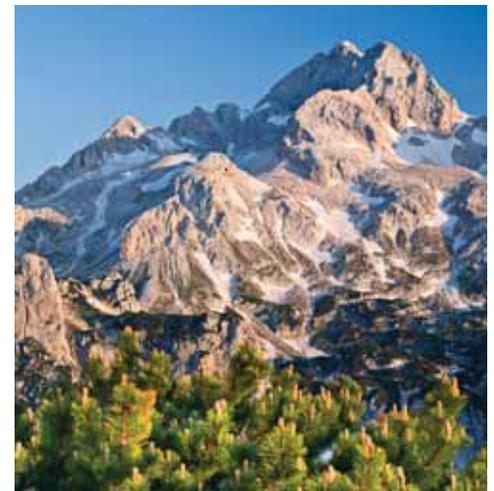


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SLOVENIA

Known as the “Green Capital of Europe,” Slovenia has strict eco-certifications with zero-waste initiatives, bike-friendly infrastructure and preservation efforts. Over 60 percent of the country is protected land. Slow tourism is encouraged. Visitors can visit Triglav National Park, regional parks and nature reserves, enjoy picturesque Lake Bled, explore one of the many car-free city centers like Ljubljana, or hike the expansive Julian Alps.

Along with plenty of green activities, Slovenia has made strong strides regarding zero-waste initiatives. Restaurants, hotels and other tourist accommodation facilities all participate in zero-waste efforts. Near Bled, you can visit the first zero waste hotel, Ribno Alpine Resort, which is surrounded by pristine nature. It has earned a European Zero Waste Business Certification. Glamping is also a big thing in Slovenia and a very green-style accommodation. It’s a great way to be one with nature while still having the creature comforts of home. ■



LEFT Walking through Triglav National Park

FROM THE TOP Ljubljana, Slovenia; the mountains of Triglav National Park; Vintgar Gorge





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Ruzzola

(Pecorino Cheese Rolling)
in Castel Di Lama, Italy

10

Coming in last place is this fight where, unfortunately, no food is actually hurled at other people, rather, it is thrown at specific targets or points. This competition dates back to the Middle Ages and, today, it is recognized by the Italian Sport Federation who hosts several tournaments across the country.



Alevromoutzouromata

(Flour War) in Galaxidi, Greece

What started as a "symbol of resistance to the Ottoman Empire," according to Fodor's has evolved into a food fight that attracts people from all over. The Flour War signifies the beginning of the Greek Orthodox Lent Period, ironically on Clean Monday. Food dye is added to the flour before the fight begins so competitors can know who their competition is.

4

La Merengada

(The Meringue War)
in Vilanova i la Geltrú, Spain

5

This annual event occurs the last Thursday before Lent and is probably the sweetest of the fights on the list. When the man-size meringue is lowered into the crowd, the Batalla de Caramelos (The Candy Fight) begins.



3 Els Enfarinats

(The Floured Ones)
in Ibi, Spain

This flour-related fight garnered a higher ranking than the Flour War in Greece on this list because it also includes the use of fireworks and eggs to stage a fake coup d'état to take over the town.



Cheese Rolling

in Gloucestershire, England

9

Once again, no food is thrown at others in this food fight, but instead, it is rolled down a hill. However, the hill in England is so steep that many competitors struggle to stay on their feet and end up rolling down with the cheese, prompting a higher spot on the list.



Europe's Top 10 Food Fights

By Tamala Malerk

Find your rain poncho and take part in the most epic annual food fights in Europe. The fights are ranked by extremeness, ingredients, messiness and overall sense of "hmm, perhaps I'd like to try this." Also, you can ponder with me why most of them take place in Spain.



2 La Battaglia delle Arance

(Battle of the Oranges) in Ivrea, Italy

This battle lasts a whopping three days, which earns it such a high spot on the list. This is a medieval reenactment of a rebellion against a tyrannical baron. Nine teams compete against each other to throw oranges at the "overlord's people" in carts.

8 La Batalla de Vino

(The Wine Battle)
in Haro, Spain

The first of our Spanish fights to appear on this list occurs annually on June 29, Saint Peter's Day. Nearly 20,000 people gather in traditional white and red attire and douse each other with wine using jugs, bottles, cups and water pistols.



World Custard Pie Championship

in Coxheath, England

While jolly ole' England may not seem like the place for such an event to occur, since 1967, this village in Kent has been hosting a pie-flying competition annually. Teams of four gather in the streets and are awarded points for hitting members of opposing teams with these creamy desserts.



1 La Tomatina

in Buñol, Spain

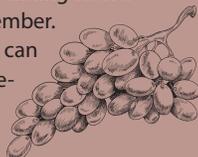
Often lauded as the number one food fight in the world, it is obvious why this ultimate food fight has earned such acclaim. It is the world's biggest food fight and is similar to the Battle of the Oranges: circular fruit is lobbed at participants. However, strict rules dictate that tomatoes must be squished before being thrown. The food fight has grown so famous that spin-off competitions occur in the U.S. and Colombia annually.

Festa des Vermar

(Festival of Grapes)
in Mallorca, Spain

7

Rather than throwing the wine, this fight requires more targeted aiming with a grape fight every September. During the festival, you can also take part in a grape-stomping competition and wine tasting.



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HIKING IN THE LAND OF SPARTANS

3 GREAT HIKES IN MANI, GREECE

Story and Photos by Mic Fleming

This summer, visit the land of the descendants of Spartan warriors and discover the awesome beauty of this rugged, distant place.

Mani is the middle peninsula of the Southern Peloponnese of Greece, reaching to one of the farthest points south in continental Europe. As the cradle of Greek independence, it is known for a fierce fighting spirit, interminable clan warfare and a gritty landscape clawed by craggy gorges and dotted with the stone war towers of its chieftains. The Taygetos (also known as the Taygetus) mountain range runs the peninsula's length. At its tip, is the mythological entrance to Hades.

Today, Mani is prime hiking country. There are three magnificent trails, all overlooking the Messinian Gulf, on which you can test your own spirit. As with all hikes, water, sunscreen and suitable shoes are a must.

EASY

The Stoupa Bike Path skirts the rocky coastline between the sandy beach of Stoupa and the fishing village of Agios Nikolaos. With a paved surface and mostly level, it is enjoyed by walkers, runners, bicyclists and a bedraggled flock of sheep. The springtime flowers are sensational. Summer time offers crystal clear vistas, and a moonlight walk is unforgettable. Although the trail is mentioned in a few guidebooks, you may still find yourself with an open path even in high season. Plan 50 minutes each way, only slowed by the spectacular photo ops. Hike one way, have a coffee or meal and return for a swim.

The town of **Stoupa** is a package tour destination and home to many British expats. It has the sandiest, most kid-friendly beach in the area bordered by many good restaurants on the promenade. The best pizza is at **Olio**; the best brunch is at **Patriko**, both on the beach. In 1917, Nikos Kazantzakis lived in Stoupa, later writing his novel "Zorba the Greek" based on the manager he hired for his venture in a local lignite mine. The novel is set in Crete, but Zorba's mine was in the hills behind the village and the town's Kalogrias beach is where he danced.



Hikes of the Virov Gorge begin in Kardamyli

INTERMEDIATE

The Agios Nikolaos to Platsa Trail begins south of town at Pantazi Beach. Well-blazed, it rises 1,200 feet through the mountain villages of Pigi (pronounced pee-gee) on the way up and through the hamlet of Kotroni on the return. The surface includes fields, some paved sections and *Kalderimi*, the stone donkey paths of earlier centuries which as late as the 1970s were the main paths connecting villages. Even at a deliberate climb, plan three hours to cover the six miles. It's an excellent choice for birdwatchers, who are certain to see a hawk and occasionally eagles. At night, jackals howl down the nearby **Tepeni Gorge**. The view of the coastline from the top of the trail is rated three stars by Michelin.

At the start of the trail, the town of **Agios Nikolaos** (Saint Nicholas) is a working fishing village, although the number of boats going out each day continues to decline. "Discovered" in recent years by travelers fed up with the crowded islands, "Ag Nik," as the Brits call it, is experiencing a high-end upgrade. It has fewer accommodations than the others, but there are excellent restaurant choices. **Ellie's** is the best traditional taverna. Locals claim **Nereids** as the best bar, known affectionately as Aggie's, the name of the owner. And don't miss gelato at **Leonardo's**.

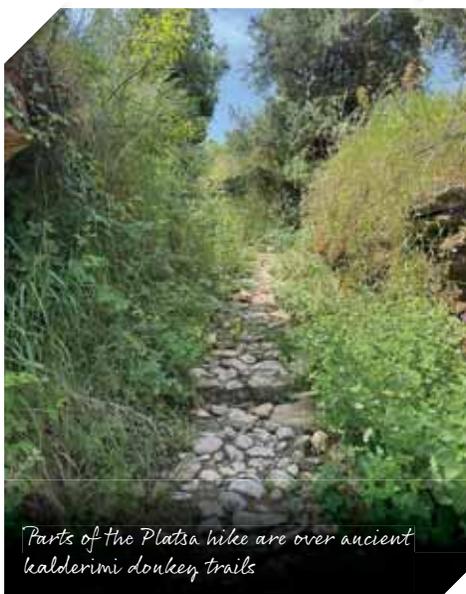
At the end of the trail, the community of **Platsa** was once an important regional center. Today, it is mostly deserted. Wandering around the old stone buildings in the narrow medieval streets of twists and turns lined with walls of bright bougainvillea is a reward in itself before turning around and making your descent. George's *kafenio* (coffee shop) **Oi Mouries** on the village square provides a simple place for a break.



Rocky shoreline of the Stoupa Bike Path



The harbor at Agios Nikolaos



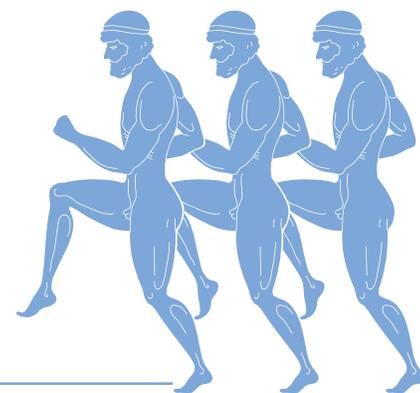
Parts of the Platsa hike are over ancient kalderimi donkey trails

INTERMEDIATE TO CHALLENGING

Viros Gorge hikes start in the village of Kardamyli and offer three distinct routes ranging from four to ten miles and can be completed in three to five hours. The main hike up the gorge includes spectacular rock formations, once-inhabited caves and a bonus of two hidden late medieval monasteries. Further explorations require strenuous, if not expert, skills, such as if you attempt to summit **Profitis Ilias** (Mt. Elijah), the highest mountain in the Peloponnese at 7,890 feet. Hardy Norwegians aren't wrong when they come to Kardamyli to hike the Gorge and relax afterwards at the one of the semi-annual jazz fests. In theory, one could hike the gorge and then go over the Taygetos range as this was once part of the Royal Way from Sparta to its port in Kardamyli.

Kardamyli is listed in "The Iliad" as one of the seven cities offered to Achilles if he would return to the battle. The Mourtzini Tower and other towers founded by the medieval lords of the region overlook the town. It is a popular destination included on Rick Steves' tours.

Aquarella is the place for sunset cocktails, while **1866 Beer Bar** is the best pub. Vibrant in summer; the village shuts down in winter. The town hosts many yearly events. The next **Kardamili International Jazz Festival** is May 15–24, 2026. The **Taygetos Challenge Race** is an annual event that includes several runs. The next one is March 21–22, 2026. ■



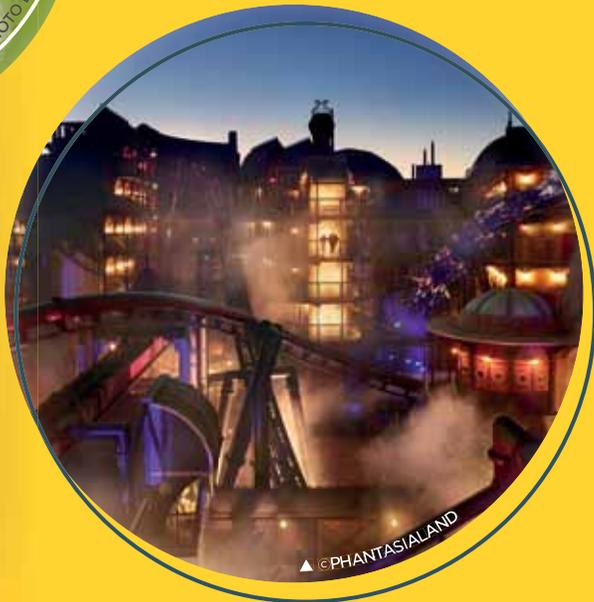
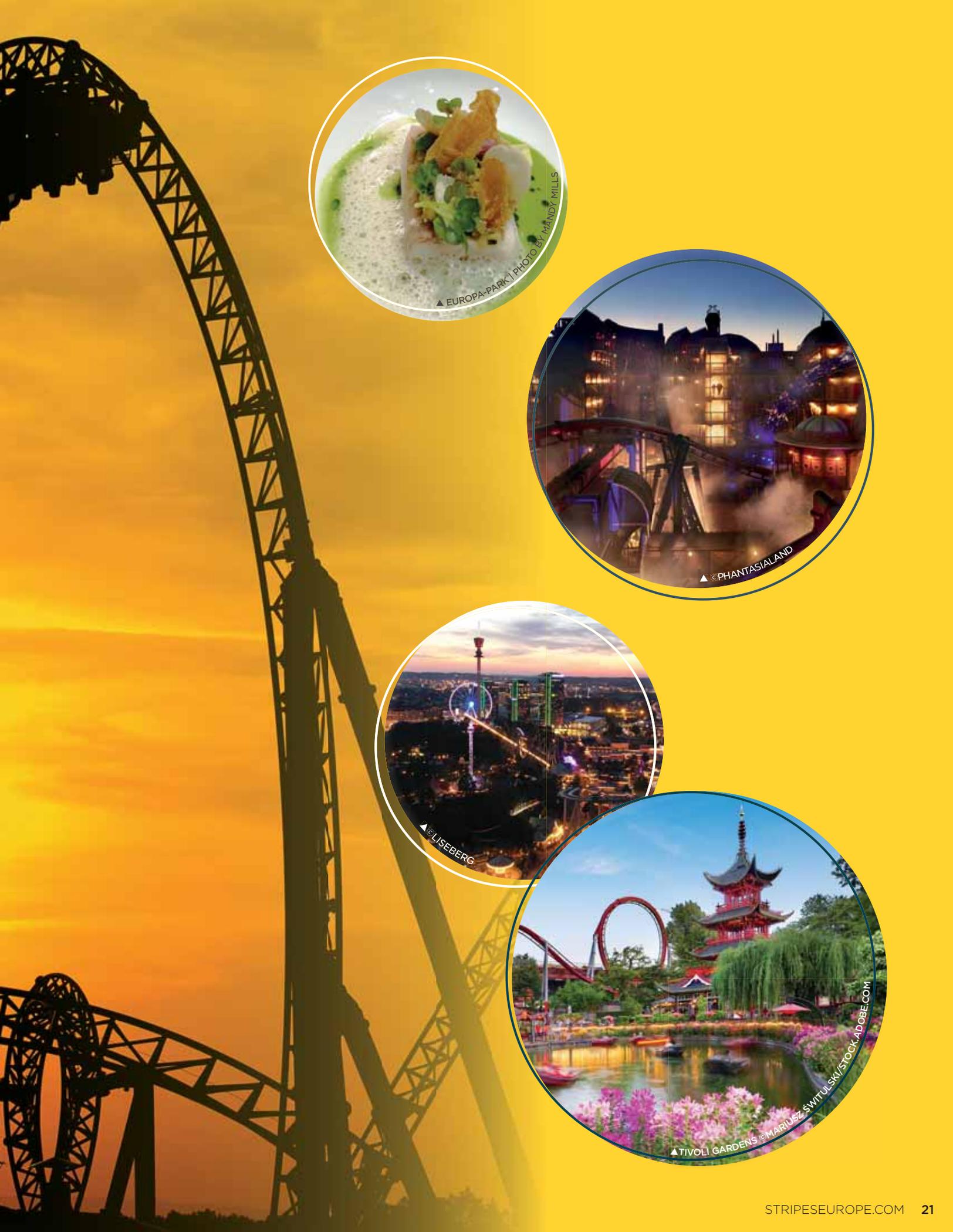
EUROPE'S BEST THEME PARKS GROWN-UP EDITION

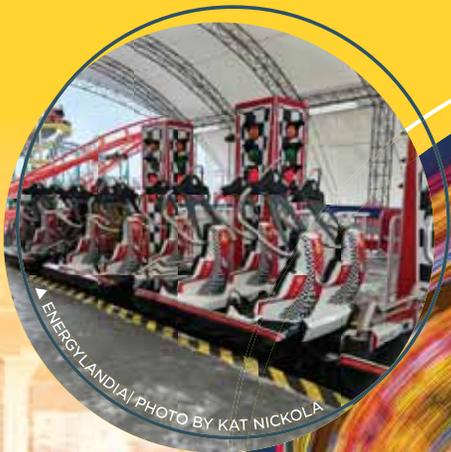
By Mandy Mills

If stroller traffic, families in matching t-shirts and queues for character meet-and-greets are what you picture when you think of theme parks, you're not alone. Luckily, the European theme park scene offers something completely different: **world-class attractions designed for adults.**



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Stripes Europe Society Papers

SPRING 2026, EUROPE

By Tamala Malerk

DEAREST READERS,

It is a melancholy time as you, like me, may feel some post-binge blues after watching the latest season of "Bridgerton." Netflix tried their best to deter the binge with a two-part release, but let's be honest with ourselves, we all finished season four by early March.

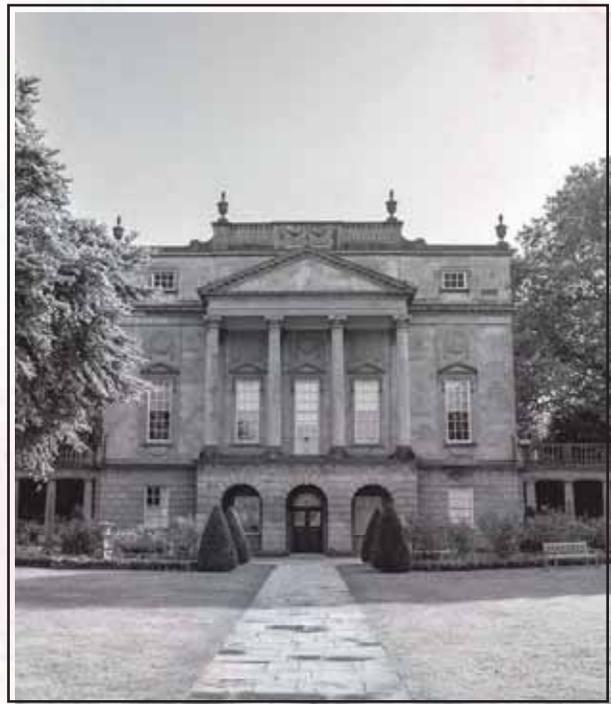
For those who live outside of the ton, "Bridgerton" follows the lives of the Bridgertons, a noble family who spends the social season in early-to-mid 19th-century London living it up in the life of luxury with balls, gowns, love, betrayal, scandal and gossip. Each of the show's seasons centers around a different Bridgerton child (there are eight in total). However, many would argue that Colin Bridgerton's season was more about (spoiler alert) his wife, Penelope Featherington (now Bridgerton). And, Sophie definitely took the attention from Benedict Bridgerton in the latest season.

While we wait for what will dreadfully be another year or two for the next installment, we too can enjoy the social season. For now is the time of year where romance blooms like the flowers and we can promenade throughout the ton and live out our royal dreams (with better electricity and indoor plumbing options) at these "Bridgerton"-inspired locations.

The city of Bath in the U.K. stands in for 19th-century London's Mayfair area for filming (and likely budget) purposes, and much of "Bridgerton's" on-screen plot occurs at destinations you can visit throughout Bath.

HOLBURNE MUSEUM

This gallant museum, also known for being Britain's first fine art museum, acts as the exterior for Lady Danbury's house. As you stroll the exhibit, imagine yourself dancing at the first ball this social season.



©PAWEL PAJOR/STOCK.ADOBE.COM

THE GUILDHALL

You may not recognize Bath's Guildhall from the outside; however, from the inside, you are visually transported to the famous Danbury Ball. If you want to partake in the social season, there are still balls hosted here annually.



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THE ABBEY DELI IN ABBEY GREEN

This adorable deli, where you can grab a bite to eat, stands in for the Modiste shop. Madame Delacroix, the seamstress, ensures that women never have to wear the same dress twice to the many balls of the social season through her work at the Modiste. Parts of Abbey Green also stand in for London's Covent Garden.

GUNTER'S TEA SHOP

This tea shop on Trim Street serves as an important location for the plot of season one. It is here that Daphne and the Duke's ice cream date occurs, as well as the spot where the Duke ends their friendship.



No.1 ROYAL CRESCENT

The exterior of this massive, historical museum acts as the exterior for the Featherington's house. Today, the museum is dedicated to a time just before the "Bridgerton" era, the late 1700s. Though fans of the spin-off series, "Queen Charlotte," might recognize the styles of that time.

BEAUFORD SQUARE

This is the ultimate promenade spot for you and your best friend, or for a chaperoned date. Many of the walking-and-talking scenes along with the carriage and horse rides for the show took place here.

THE ASSEMBLY ROOMS

The Tea Room of this building also stood in for Lady Danbury's ballroom which is where The Duke and Daphne Bridgerton first meet. Today, the rooms are only available to visit on a schedule guided tour as they are under construction.



ALFRED STREET, BATH STREET & EDWARD STREET

Stop at these streets on your promenade which today retain much of their historical architecture. Many of the b-roll shots with extras simply walking around were filmed at these locations, along with the Duke's arrival in town via Bath Street. ■

I have one final insider tip for you dearest gentle readers. To fully immerse yourself in the "Bridgerton" era, make sure to visit Bath every September and embrace your inner Eloise at the Jane Austen Festival.

Yours Truly,

Lady Travelwriter



GAMESCOM REPORT

The Best New Cozy Games Set in Europe

Story and Photos by Kat Nickola

Last fall I went to the world's biggest gaming convention. Attending Gamescom has become an annual event I really look forward to, and not just for the big game announcements.

My favorite part of Gamescom is meeting the independent developers who are at the conference just trying to get their game out into the world. These indie developers (devs) will have their games on in full show; sometimes

the only space they have is a quarter section at a standing table with a small PC screen and poster. Other devs may get larger table space, perhaps a seated table or even a modest display area with theming. The size of their display area can tell you a lot about the size of the company or individuals and how new they are to the gaming scene.

While so many of the AAA games by major big-budget studios are going for first-person-shooters and super-popular massive world-building action-adventure and RPG games, some indie devs are out there making something totally different: cozy games.

Cozy games are low-stress and non-violent, often with open-ended game play. Many of the popular ones are simulators like "Animal Crossing" or, one of my faves "Stardew Valley." Lately, cozy game devs have branched out of the village farming rut, offering story-based games, spooky options and mundane-task sims that allow you to power-wash, mow lawns or pack cars. There are now so many incredible options you can be very specific about your likes and dislikes.

So, at Gamescom as I wandered around the hundreds of games crammed into the indie area last fall, my goal was to find the perfect cozy game set in Europe, bonus points for layers of history or mythology. And, as always, the devs didn't disappoint.



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Here are my favorites, in no particular order:

“Cat Me if You Can”

upcoming release

Play as a cat in a hand-drawn blackline world. Explore locations around the world, including many in Europe to photograph hidden cats and colorize them. At Gamescom, I waited nearly an hour to play the demo for this game, and watching my first cat come to life was worth every minute. Not one to waste time while in line, I spoke with the art director from the Berlin-based company who said that they will ask for community input on new locations to add as the game expands. The backstory to “Cat Me if You Can” is fun: some mystery cat-astrophe removed all mammals except for cats, and all but you are frozen in time, in need of a kitty photographer to snap them back into full living color.



“Jeppe and Oswald”

upcoming release (demo on Steam)

Illustrator Sabine Dully and author Eva Dax write children’s books, and their “Jeppe & Oswald” series has been adapted into a game for kids and families. Playing as Jeppe the pixie (*Hauswichtel* in German), you are tasked with cleaning a forest cottage to pass your house-elf exam. However, a pesky hamster named Oswald makes things difficult. I spent longer than I expected playing this game, finding all the spider webs and cleaning up blueberries. It was also great to chat with Dully and Dax, from Cologne, Germany, who are passionate about kids’ fiction. With colorful storybook graphics, simple directions and a variety of tasks, the “Jeppe and Oswald” world of books, toys and videos just got bigger with this game.

“Strange Antiquities”

released Sept. 17, 2025 on Steam, Epic Games, Switch

Being an apprentice in a small-town occult antiquities shop is challenging as you puzzle out all the mythical symbols, magical items and mysterious townspeople. This game fed my fascination with dark mythology and magical things, but had me obsessed once I discovered that a map was involved. The Bad Viking development company is run by brothers Rob and John Donkin, based in England. They told me about how they scouted out real occult symbols at Oxford’s Ashmolean Museum for inspiration into creating symbols for the game. For any other garden lovers out there, the brothers’ other game set in the same town of Undermere is called “Strange Horticulture” and similarly offers a mysterious narrative dark puzzle about medicinal and witchy ways to use plants.



“Farewell North”

released Aug. 16, 2024 on Steam, Switch, Xbox, PS

Explore the world of the northern Scottish islands as a border collie, all the while bringing life and color back to the land. The deeper story is a mix of overcoming grief, honoring the past and moving into the present. At first, playing as a dog felt light-hearted, but as the game progresses the storyline takes over and I became more emotionally invested. It was truly a gentle walk, though, colorizing the scenery and puzzling the way forward in a way that made the emotional story enjoyable instead of overwhelming.



“The Berlin Apartment”

released Nov. 17, 2025 on Steam, PS, Xbox

While fixing up an old apartment in Berlin, you discover interesting clues and relics that lead you back in time to understand the city’s history through the eyes of one apartment owner. I loved the art style, the moody coloration and seeing all the different apartment iterations. But, what stands out is the story telling. The way it gamifies history, never feeling like a boring school lesson, is fascinating and different. The game is perfect for anyone interested in German World War II and Cold War history. Blue Backpack (formerly BTF Games) is a larger indie dev with 20 employees based in Berlin. If you enjoy the time travel and amazing handmade artwork, try their previous game called “Trüberbrook” for a sci-fi jump to the 1960’s in rural Germany. ■

“Heidi’s Legacy”

upcoming release (demo on Steam)

In this village farming simulator (I couldn’t help but include one), you play as a young woman heading into the Alps to help Grandpa herd goats, forage and fish. Inspired by the “Heidi” novels, the game has calming background music, a pretty watercolor art style and super cute goats. While playing the demo at Gamescom, I chatted with Mélanie & Aurélien, both developers at French game studio, Humble Reeds. They wanted to present a game set in the mountains and focused on the healing power of nature. Using the familiar Heidi story as a baseline was a way to do that while bringing in aspects of intergenerational relationships and community building. Until “Heidi’s Legacy” is released, try their other nature-based game about restoring wetlands and collecting frogs, “Kamaeru.”



This year Gamescom will take place Aug. 26-30, 2026. Scan the QR code to find out more about attending.





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HIGH SPEED POPULARITY

BEHIND FORMULA 1'S™ RISE IN POP CULTURE

By Allison McKenzie



For many American teens, watching sports is a standard rite of passage. Traditionally, ones like football and baseball have been at the forefront, but in recent years, Formula 1 has been racing ahead from the back. Race weekends bring excitement—and nervousness—into the minds of many Gen Z watchers.

Formula 1 has exploded in popularity over the last few years, especially among teenagers. The viewership has increased by 63 percent since 2018, with more and more fans being Gen Z. 70 percent of American Gen Z viewers interact with Formula 1 content daily. "F1: The Movie" hit a gross earning of over 631 million at the box office, while the fifth season of "Drive to Survive" had over 570,000 views. Many people attribute it to the intrigue of the drivers, the competitive nature or the spectacle of the race itself.

Formula 1, as the top league of formula racing, is made up of 20 drivers under 10 different teams. While some fans prefer to follow a team as a whole, others prefer to follow individual drivers.

One example of the latter is Brooke Vinson. Vinson, 16, was first interested in the sport because of her family, but she continues her interest because of the drivers, especially Charles Leclerc.

"I just really love his story and all of the hardships he went through, but he is still living his dream of driving for Ferrari," Vinson said.

Alternatively, Arianna Salonga, 12, prefers to follow Ferrari as a team.

"I follow Ferrari, because that's the first team I ever supported, and I'll continue to support them even though we're not having the best season right now," said Salonga. "I truly have faith that we'll have a better car next year, and I think that allows me to continue to support them."

Another reason for the increasing popularity of Formula 1 is the increase in female representation in motorsport. While women are technically allowed to drive for any of the top 10 teams, no one has done so since Giovanna Amati in 1992. In the early 2000s, most fans were male, and its popularity was attributed, by some, to the fact that all the drivers were male and that motorsport was seen as a masculine sport. However, that has changed recently.

Launched in 2023, F1 Academy is a female-only racing league under the formula racing label that is working to train future female drivers. While the Academy is at the Formula 4 level, it works to provide opportunities for female motorsport drivers.

"I think it's great that women are getting more and more included in motorsports, and especially formula racing," said Salonga. "It's very important to have role models like them for young girls who also want to drive in motorsports."

Additionally, since 2018, the female fan base has increased by 42 percent.

Lastly, many Formula 1 fans tune in for the excitement of the race itself. The consistent race schedule makes it easy to follow, and viewers stay for the high-speed thrill they're able to see on screen. According to Vinson, she also continues to stay interested, because of her family. With both her brother and father maintaining interest, she also feels compelled to keep watching. However, she also enjoys following the races and drivers.

"It is quite entertaining, not just the races, but all of the drama that surrounds it too," she said. "It gives me something to look forward to on the weekends."

With all of its influence on pop culture and appeal to students, Formula 1 has undoubtedly made a dent in the minds of many fans.

"I really love the sport, and I honestly can't imagine my life without watching it now," said Salonga. ■

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Nett Hier: The Epic Marketing Campaign Seen Around the World

Story and Photos by Kat Nickola



Way back in the day, like the 90s, the German *Land* (state) of Baden-Württemberg was looking for a way to improve its image. You see, the place had a bit of a reputation for being a little too hard-working, a little too stingy and strict, and a little too hard to understand, what with their distinctive local dialects and regional pride. So, instead of settling for notoriety as a boring work-a-day place full of the bumbling middle class, the land did something any truly commercially minded organization would do and hired a marketing company.

In 1999, the Scholz & Friends advertising agency presented the state with their idea: a tongue-in-cheek slogan that gained a cult following for the funny, almost sarcastic way it allows Baden-Württembergers to make fun of themselves while drawing tourist attention.

Nett hier. Aber waren Sie schon mal in Baden-Württemberg?

Originally the slogan was used as an advertising campaign on busses and trains to draw German holiday-makers to the Land of Baden-Württemberg. However, after 2004, the state began printing and selling stickers for locals to take out into the world. The palm-sized, oval stickers are primarily yellow with a tidy basic print and the state seal. *Nett hier* literally means “[It’s] nice here,” but English versions of the stickers used the phrase “Not bad” instead, giving more nuance to the message. It concludes by recommending a visit to the land.

Not bad. But have you ever been to Baden-Württemberg?

They sold millions. At first they were used to tag sites in Europe, but over the last 20 years they have been found across the globe: From the pyramids of Egypt to Mount Everest’s base camp, the Grand Canyon to Machu Picchu, the locals of Baden-Württemberg have spread their slogan all over the world.

In your travels, keep your eyes peeled for the sticker on light poles, signs, notice boards, electrical boxes, airport baggage carousels, toilet stalls, railings, boats, busses, trains and everything in between.

While the “*Nett hier*” campaign was officially replaced in 2021, buying and tagging with the stickers still remains popular and there are many copycat products out there. The new slogan still uses the iconic yellow coloring with basic black fonts and the words *THE LÄND*. It is a nod to the regional word *Ländle*, a cutesy term that means something like “little country.”

Baden-Württemberg was formed in 1952 when three different states were cobbled together into one. The state takes up the entire southwestern part of Germany and is, apparently, full of residents who can laugh at themselves and take pride in their region. With cities like Stuttgart and Heidelberg, natural regions like the Black Forest and the Bodensee (Lake Constance), and plenty of wineries and festivals, Baden-Württemberg seems like a decent place to be. ■



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Bangin' & Lullin'

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF A B-24 LIBERATOR

By Joseph Walk

Several summers ago, I was relaxing on our back porch in central Pennsylvania when I heard a very familiar rumble created by four massive radial engines; a sound I knew from old movies. I gazed skyward to see a B-17 slowly roar across the clear sky as the Commemorative Air Force flew it back home from an air show. I was simultaneously astounded and thrilled. The engine noise was unmistakable!



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continued from page 34

The most well-known U.S. heavy bombers in World War II were the B-17, B-24 and B-29. The Boeing B-29 "Superfortress" entered the conflict late in the war and has a unique place in military aviation history. The Boeing B-17 "Flying Fortress" is the most venerated heavy bomber from WWII, and for good reason: It could take a pounding and still return to base. It was one tough airplane. But the B-24 "Liberator" remains the most-produced heavy bomber in history.

This is an account about a special B-24. Its serial number was 42-51091 and the crew named her "Bangin' Lulu."

Bangin' Lulu was manufactured with a natural metal finish and was technically a B-24H. The improved H models had an electrically powered nose turret directly above the bombardier that replaced the old "greenhouse" nose. The new turret was designed to fend off frontal attacks better.

The B-24 Liberator was built by Consolidated Aircraft. It flew faster and carried a greater payload a further distance than the B-17. In addition, the unique Davis wing gave the B-24 the ability to cruise at a higher speed and with a longer range compared to other bombers of the day. However, the B-24 had performance problems at slower speeds and was not easy to fly.

Crews complained that the airplane was difficult to maneuver, especially in formation. But the General Staff loved the B-24 and procured about 19,000 of them. There were, amazingly, 21 B-24 Bomber Groups with over 2,000 planes in Europe's Mighty 8th Air Force alone.

Bangin' Lulu was assigned to the 704th Bombardment Squadron (Heavy) at Flixton Field near the village of Bungay in Suffolk, about 90 miles northeast of London. The 704th was part of the 446th Bombardment Group known as the "Bungay Buckaroos." A giant "H" fin flash painted on vertical stabilizers allowed crews to quickly



©JOSEPH WALK

THE CREW OF BANGIN' LULU CIRCA 1944 IN ENGLAND

STANDING (LEFT TO RIGHT): Robert Weideman (Pilot, Ohio), Jerome Joondeph (Co-Pilot, New York), Hector Petri (Navigator, Massachusetts), Robert Taylor (Bombardier, Unknown state of record)

KNEELING (LEFT TO RIGHT): Charles Mullen (Mechanic, Oregon), Cecil Walk (Radio Operator, Pennsylvania), Leonard Olson (Nose Gunner, South Dakota), Robert Morris (Armorer, Mississippi), Berrien Becks (Tail Gunner, Florida), Donald Arrigoni (Waist Gunner, Pennsylvania)



©U.S. AIR FORCE



©TONY NORTH / B-24 BEST WEB

ABOVE: B-24 from above
BELOW: B-24 Liberator 42-51091
"Bangin Lulu" Nose Art

identify 446th aircraft. The 446th was under the command of the 20th Combat Wing, 2nd Air Division, 8th Air Force.

Combat missions for the Group included sorties over Normandy, the Rhineland, Ardennes-Alsace and central Europe. The 446th had an amazing record from 1943 to 1945 with over 7,000 sorties flown while only losing 58 aircraft.

The crew of Bangin' Lulu flew 59 of those combat missions.

The men who flew bombers in WWII were, for the most part, young, patriotic and wanted to "do their part for America." We should remember their bravery and sacrifices; the 8th Air Force suffered over 47,000 casualties with more than 26,000 deaths. Seventeen 8th Air Force airmen won the Congressional Medal of Honor. Statistically, in WWII, serving in the infantry was safer than flying in the 8th Air Force.

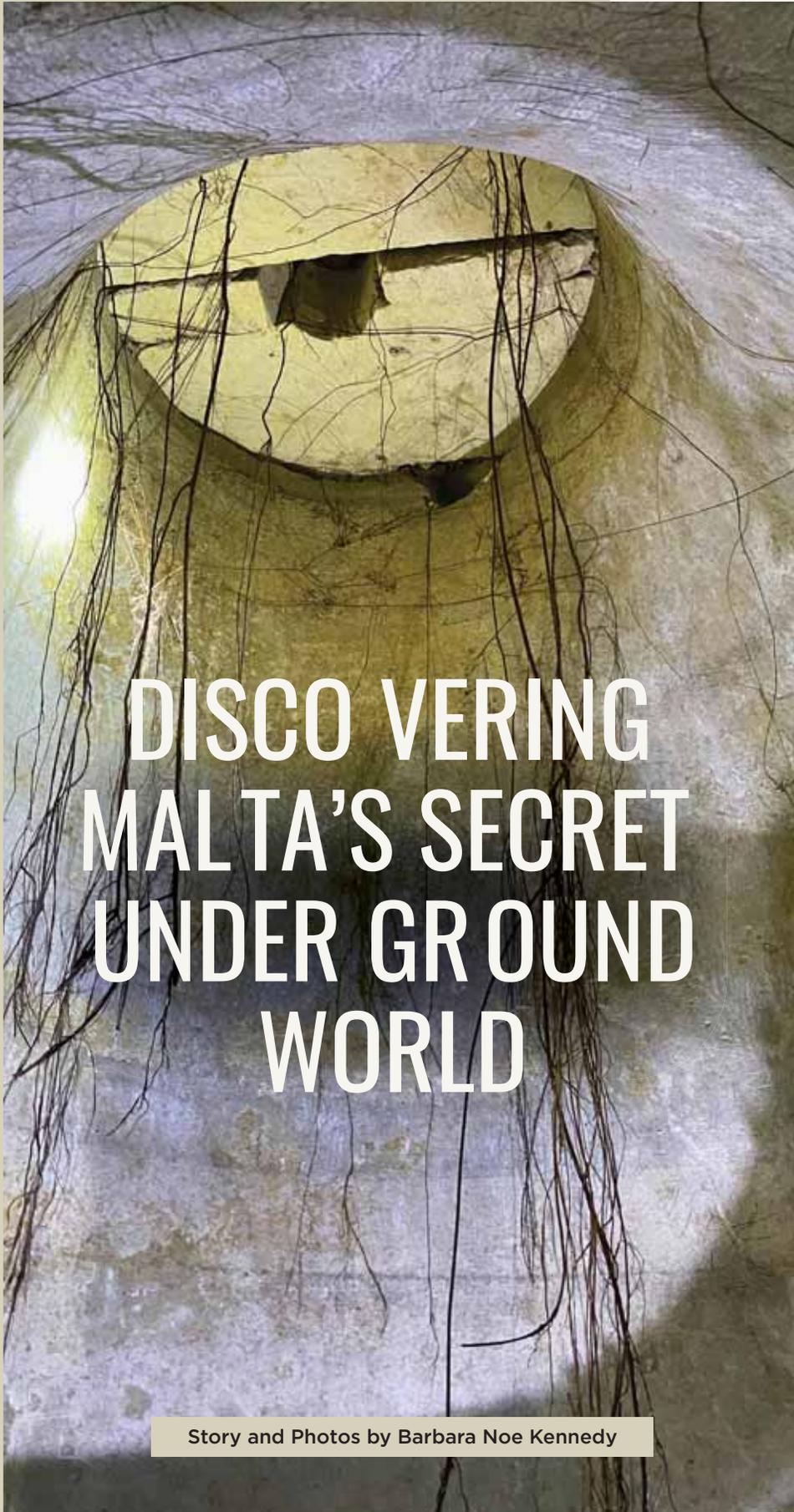
Bangin' Lulu survived the war and returned to the USA, first to Sioux

Falls Army Airfield, then Carswell AFB and finally to Ellington AFB. Like most B-24 Liberators, 42-51091 was scrapped after the war.

13 Liberators currently survive. Only one B-24 is a flyable aircraft and another is being restored to flyable status. The lone flyable Liberator belongs to the Commemorative Air Force. The other are on display at various museums including two in England. One is in hangar five of the RAF Museum London and a second at the Imperial War Museum in Duxford. There is one B-24D at the National Museum of the USAF in Dayton, Ohio. I still have a picture of it that I took back in 1970.

I have a special attachment to Liberator 42-51091. My father signed up with an Army Air Forces recruiter at his local church, went to radio and gunnery school in Yuma, and was Bangin' Lulu's radio operator. He flew 24 missions, earned an Air Medal, was mustered out as a TSgt at war's end, and rarely talked about his wartime service.

He was only 20 years old. ■



DISCOVERING MALTA'S SECRET UNDERGROUND WORLD

Story and Photos by Barbara Noe Kennedy



At first glance, it's easy to miss. Only the modest sign beside Caffè Mauro's outdoor tables hints at something more. "Underground Valletta," it reads.

My guide, Denis Maslennikov, a licensed Maltese heritage expert, leads me around the back, where a narrow stone staircase, chipped from the earth, plunges into darkness. A chill prickles my skin. Beneath the sun-drenched streets of Malta's baroque capital lies a shadow world, an intricate web of tunnels and chambers carved over centuries. First built by the Knights of Malta in the 16th century to store water, these tunnels would later serve a grim purpose: a refuge during World War II's relentless air raids. Never intended for visitors, this subterranean maze remained sealed for decades, until 2021, when a small section opened to the public, evolving into one of Valletta's most intriguing off-the-radar attractions.

"Follow me," Maslennikov says, handing me a hard hat and headlamp. We descend, pausing on a dim-lit platform where a sliver of daylight still glows, our last glimpse of the surface. His flashlight sweeps across the damp walls of an old cistern pocked with graffiti. Faint outlines emerge: the phrase "War on Malta 1941," a Neville Chamberlain caricature and a stark portrait of Hitler.

"These tunnels were used as a shelter during the bombings," Maslennikov explains.

During the war, Malta became a vital Allied base, as well as a target. With the island enduring some of the conflict's heaviest aerial bombardments, the Knights' tunnels were expanded to shelter up to 38,000 civilians over the course of 2.5 years, though no more than 10,000 were here at a time.



We descend deeper into blackness. The air grows thick and musty. Wooden planks line the wet floor, and small stalactites that have formed from dripping water glisten above. My thoughts flicker to rats and cockroaches.

“These tunnels roughly mirror Valletta’s street grid above,” Maslennikov says. “We’re beneath St. John’s Street now.” As we walk the echoing corridor, small, claustrophobic chambers appear on either side where families huddled during bombings. Some of the refugees had salvaged patterned Maltese tiles from the rubble above and laid it on the floors to provide a minimal protection against the damp. Rusted iron anchors still cling to the walls, remnants of makeshift bunkbeds or shelving.

“There was electricity, though it often failed during raids,” Maslennikov says. Carved niches for candles dot the walls, many blackened with soot, while others cradle carvings of saints. In this Catholic nation, prayer must have been constant as bombs thundered above. I ask him if he knew anyone who had used the shelter. “A man who had been a kid here,” he says. “His most horrific memory was the paraffin powder they put on his head for lice.”

But why were the tunnels here in the first place? As we turn onto St. Lucia Street, Maslennikov shines his flashlight upward, tracing a smaller arched outline that dates from the Knights’ time and had been expanded into the broader tunnel. “Different parts were added at different times,” he says. Malta became the headquarters of the Knights of St. John in 1530, granted to them by Holy Roman Emperor Charles V. After their dramatic victory in the Great Siege of 1565 against the Ottoman Empire, the Knights began building a new fortified capital.

“If Malta had lost,” Maslennikov says, “the history of the Mediterranean would be completely different.”

Following the siege, Valletta was declared the new capital, perched on a peninsula between two harbors, one of them the Mediterranean’s deepest. Pope Pius V sent military engineer Francesco Laparelli to design the fortress city, Europe’s first planned city, while Philip II of Spain sent funds. But there was one major problem: “There was no source of fresh water,” Maslennikov says. To survive, residents had to dig deep. Builders carved into Malta’s limestone to create underground cisterns to collect rainwater, repurposing excavated stone for churches, palaces and fortifications above.

I follow Maslennikov into a vast, two-story chamber, one of the original reservoirs. “It was built near St. John’s Co-Cathedral because they needed the stone,” he says. Tree roots dangle from ceiling cracks like pale fingers reaching down from the grave. “They grow 5 or 10 centimeters a day,” he adds. The collection of rainwater alone wasn’t enough for the growing city. Eventually, the Knights turned to the freshwater springs of Rabat and Dingli in Malta’s highlands. With funds from Grand Master Alof de Wignacourt, they built an aboveground aqueduct and a network of underground galleries—an ambitious project completed in 1615 that delivered spring water directly to Valletta’s cisterns. The result: year-round reserves, ornate fountains and a flourishing capital.

As Maslennikov leads me up the final stairs, I’m thankful to see daylight again. But my head spins with all I’ve seen—fear, faith and fortitude—all buried beneath the beauty of Valletta. ■



HOW TO BOOK

Heritage Malta organizes tours Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays; check the website www.heritagemalta.mt/explore/underground-valletta for available times. Tickets are €15 for adults; children under 6 are not allowed. It is not accessible to wheelchairs and people needing walking aids. Visitors must wear closed-toe, comfortable walking shoes; people with flip-flops, heels, and sandals will be turned away.

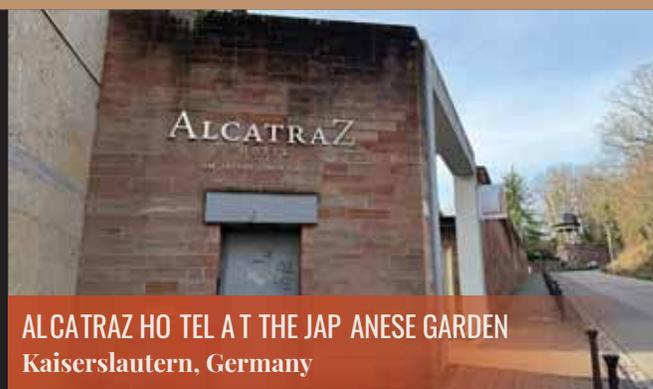
Looking for a unique hotel experience on your travels?
Why not check out one of these hotels that used to house criminals?

EAT, SLEEP & DRINK BEHIND BARS IN THESE PRISONS

By Tamala Malerk



A cell door in Karosta Prison, Liepāja, Latvia — the only military prison in Europe that is open for tourists



ALCATRAZ HOTEL AT THE JAPANESE GARDEN Kaiserslautern, Germany

Those in the KMC area in Germany can have a staycation at this local former-prison hotel. This locale housed prisoners until the 1970s, including philosopher Frederick Engels and Hamburg journalist, Johann August Wirth, who in the 1830s called for the end of monarchies. You can choose to stay in an authentic “cell” room or choose more comfortable accommodations such as single and double rooms. They go all-in at Alcatraz; you can even enjoy a cocktail behind bars. alcatraz-hotel.com



MALMAISON Oxford, U.K.

I have actually had the pleasure of staying at this hotel, so I can offer some personal insight into this one. This former prison very much leans into the jail aesthetic with the interior design. It is minimally lit; the doors are heavy and many of the windows have bars over them. The walls are adorned with celebrity mug shots including Snoop Dog and Eminem. However, the actual amenities such as the restrooms and furniture are up-to-date and perfectly comfortable (much higher than prison standards). malmaison.com/locations/oxford



BARABA S Luzern, Switzerland

©BARABAS

This prison-hotel also doubles as an art exhibition, so many people can enjoy the various unique qualities of a stay. The hotel was a prison until 1998 and in the 1970s housed an artist who served time for being a conscientious objector. He painted a fresco on the wall in his cell of all the things he missed, and it is still there today. All rooms are referred to as “cells” but have been fitted with modern and cozy accoutrements: There is even an option for “VIP Criminals.” barabas-luzern.ch

HET ARRESTHUIS Roermond, Netherlands

Staying at this prison-hotel is quite a paradox: What was once a place to house those considered the lowest of society, now hosts people in luxurious five-star accommodations. The prison itself dates back to the 1860s and closed in the early 2000s. After the current director took custody of the building, he had it spiritually cleansed in 2009 and opened its doors as a hotel in 2011, occasionally inviting former prisoners to come speak. You can stay in a cell-room or in one of the four suites aptly named “The Judge,” “The Jailer,” “The Director” and “The Lawyer.” hetarresthuis.nl



KAR OSTA PRISON Liepāja, Latvia

Those who want the ultimate prison experience without actually being charged with a felony should check in to the only military prison in Europe that is open for tourists. Its doors opened over 100 years ago and stopped hosting prisoners in 1997. Those wishing to see the prison can only do so on a guided tour (English is an option). The bravest of souls can stay overnight with prior reservations but only in certain months of the year. You can choose to sleep on a wooden bench, on Soviet-era house furniture or a bare wooden bed. Beware though, “Ghost Hunters International” called this prison “the most ghost haunted place in the world.” Rations? Your choice of an officers’ breakfast or a prisoners’ breakfast. karosta.lv



HÔTEL LA PRISON Béziers, France

©ERIC / STOCK.ADOBE.COM

The conversion for this prison-turned-hotel did not occur until 2023, but nonetheless, there are plenty of cells awaiting your stay. While most of what made this a prison, the bars on the windows, the community showers and the straw beds are gone, you can see graffiti from the former inmates on the walls and stroll the walkways of the original structure. There are a variety of room choices for comfort levels, depending on how closely you want it to feel like a cell. beziers-hotel-la-prison.com



LÅNGHOLMEN HOTEL Stockholm, Sweden

This hotel served as a prison for over 100 years until 1975. Now, you can stay in different-sized “cells” that are fitted with modern amenities and furniture. Each cell-stay includes a free breakfast buffet and entrance to the onsite museum. To learn more about this hotel’s criminal past, visit the Prison Museum which is open every day (even for those not staying at the hotel). langholmen.com/hotell



CELICA HOSTEL Ljubljana, Slovenia

©MIHA MALLY/ HOSTEL CELICA

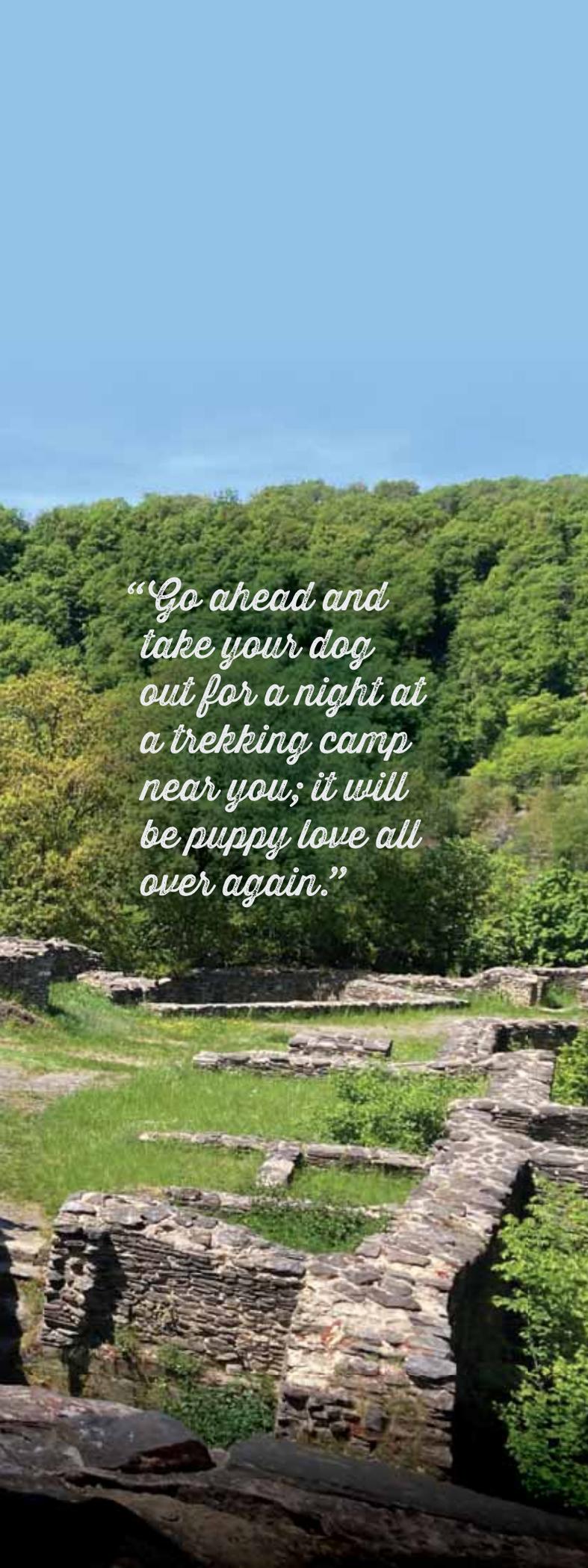
Okay this is a hostel, rather than a true hotel; however, don’t knock it off your list just yet. 20 former prison cells have been converted into themed rooms with some of the “cells” having gorgeous art painted on the walls. Hostel guests can take a free guided tour every day to learn about the special stories behind each of the former prison’s cells. hostelcelica.com ■

Paws on the Path

Wild Camping at a Trekkingplätze in Germany

By Slim Jim





“Go ahead and take your dog out for a night at a trekking camp near you; it will be puppy love all over again.”

When my forever family adopted me from the dog pound and brought me home, I soon realized that I'd hit the jackpot. After only a week, we went backpacking! We went on a long doggy walk until Boss Mom found a shady spot to pitch our tent. My new family carried everything on their backs in big blue bags. I just trotted along, pulling them with my leash while leading the way and sniffing out vermin.

That first campout, I surprised everyone by finding some incredibly delicious things to roll in before bolting into the tent with the beautiful fragrance. I snuggled what the family called “stink” deep into a sleeping bag. You're welcome! And, while I keep my backstory to myself, it was obvious to the fam that I was at home in a tent and was trustworthy as a good boy.

In the States, we camped a lot! The fam filled their backpacks with water, food, a tiny stove and pot, a little mug and bowl for each of us (mine is blue), sleeping bags and pads to scrape into dog nests, little lights for their heads, a red bag that Boss Mom used when someone was hurt, and one small tent for all five of us to dog pile into. Sometimes I only had to drag them a short way, other times I ran along trails for miles before they pitched the tent.

Then, we moved to Germany, and I wondered why we weren't camping. We went on long doggy walks in the forest all the time. It was wonderfully full of squirrels and dead leaves, but I was confused about why we never set up the tent. Boss Mom finally figured out that in Europe they call backpacking “trekking” and the laws here are different. She can't just use the one hiking trail and then spend hours finding the *perfect spot* to pitch the tent. Instead, it's the other way around. There is a designated *Trekking-plätze* (trekking camp) that she reserves online and then she picks the perfect trail to get us there. With so many trails in Germany, she may take us on a quick doggy walk or a long hike.

Although it isn't the same, and sometimes Boss Mom gets frustrated because the camp she wants is not available, I'm still glad we get to backpack. The trekking campsites are really nice. They have fire pits with benches and outhouses to sniff. The camps allow more than one tent as well, so Boss Mom pays for them all to give us some solitude.

Go ahead and take your dog out for a night at a trekking camp near you; it will be puppy love all over again. Most trekking camps are open from spring to fall and must be booked in advance. Fires are only permitted in fire pits; they will be banned if the local forest fire risk level is high.

Trekking Camps in Baden-Württemberg

(NEAR USAG STUTTGART)

BLACK FOREST | 21 CAMPS

www.trekking-schwarzwald.de

The campsites in the magical *Schwarzwald* allow hikers to sleep deep in the woods or near streams and waterfalls.

SWABIAN-FRANCONIAN FOREST NATURE PARK | 3 CAMPS

trekking.naturpark-sfw.de

With short three-kilometer hikes, the trekking camps in the Naturpark Schwäbisch-Fränkischer Wald are great options for beginning backpackers.

UPPER DANUBE NATURE PARK 5 CAMPS

www.trekking-obere-donau.de

Naturpark Obere Donau is an area of limestone rock formations and rivers. A few of the sites are in forest clearings, while others are in wooded valleys.



PHOTO BY KAT NICKOLA



Trekking Camps in Bavaria and Saxony

(NEAR GRAFENWÖHR, VILSECK AND ANSBACH)

BAVARIAN FOREST | 2 CAMPS

www.bayerischer-wald.org

East of Regensburg, the *Bayerischer Wald* was Germany's first national park. It is made up of a large forest crisscrossed with cycling trails and rivers, plus holiday towns and small villages.

FRACONIAN FOREST | 8 CAMPS

www.frankenwald-tourismus.de/draussen/trekking

Many of the *Frankenwald* sites are at high points with views over the forests that inspired story-book characters like Snow White.

SAXON SWITZERLAND

NATIONAL PARK | 58 CAMPS

nationalpark-saechsische-schweiz.de/freieubernachten-boofen

Uniquely, the numerous campsites in this national park can only be used by folks who are rock climbing. They cannot be reserved and lack amenities but are free and open summer to winter: June 16–Jan. 31.

STEIGER FOREST | 11 CAMPS

www.trekkingerlebnis.de

Each site in the *Steigerwald* has a link to the local community. There are two long distance loops that connect select camps for multi-day hikes.

THE SPESSART | 5 CAMPS

www.trekkingspessart.de

Der Spessart is a low mountain range along the northern Bavarian border, east of the Rhine valley, making these wooded camps almost equidistant from U.S. bases near Ansbach, Stuttgart and Kaiserslautern.

UPPER PALATINATE FOREST

3 CAMPS

www.oberpfaelzerwald.de/wandern/trekking

The *Oberpfälzer Wald* is a state forest along the low mountain range that forms Germany's border with Czechia.



Trekking Camps in the Rheinland-Pfalz & Saarland

(NEAR THE KMC, BAUMHOLDER
AND WIESBADEN)

HUNSRÜCK-HOCHWALD | 3 CAMPS
[www.nlphh.de/essen-trinken-uebernachten/
trekking-camps](http://www.nlphh.de/essen-trinken-uebernachten/trekking-camps)

With platforms for only two tents, these forest camps are more secluded than others on the list. However, no fires are permitted.

MOSEL | 3 CAMPS
www.moselregion.com/uebernachten/trekkingplaetze
Along the Mosel River, you can choose to camp in an orchard, high along the riverbanks in the vineyards or even on a ridgetop with a stunning view.

PALATINATE FOREST | 15 CAMPS
www.trekking-pfalz.de
Scattered across the *Pfälzerwald*, these camps have a lot of variety. You may choose to camp near castle ruins, in valleys or forested hills. Some require minimal hiking to access, making them nice choices for beginners.

SAAR-HUNSRÜCK-STEIG | 5 CAMPS
[www.saarschleifenland.de/erleben/Wandern/
saar-hunsrueck-steig](http://www.saarschleifenland.de/erleben/Wandern/saar-hunsrueck-steig)
Traversing 415 km from the Mosel River to the Rhine, this trail has five remote trekking camps available even if you aren't hiking the whole route. No fires.

SOONWALDSTEIG | 5 CAMPS
www.soonwaldsteig.de/en/trekking-camps
The *Soonwaldsteig* is an 85 km hiking trail from Kirn to Bingen, but each segment and trekking camp can be treated individually. Camping at Schmidzburg (castle) is a must-do experience.





PHOTO BY KAT NICKOLA

Trekking Camps in North Rhine-Westphalia

(NEAR SPANGDAHLEM, SHAPE)

EIFEL NATURE PARK | 24 CAMPS

www.trekking-eifel.de

All camps in the Eifel have wooden tent platforms; two tents can be reserved for each shared platform, so for privacy, book both. There is a lot of different scenery; the website has recommendations based on interest. No fires.

ROTHAAR MOUNTAINS NATURE PARK

6 CAMPS

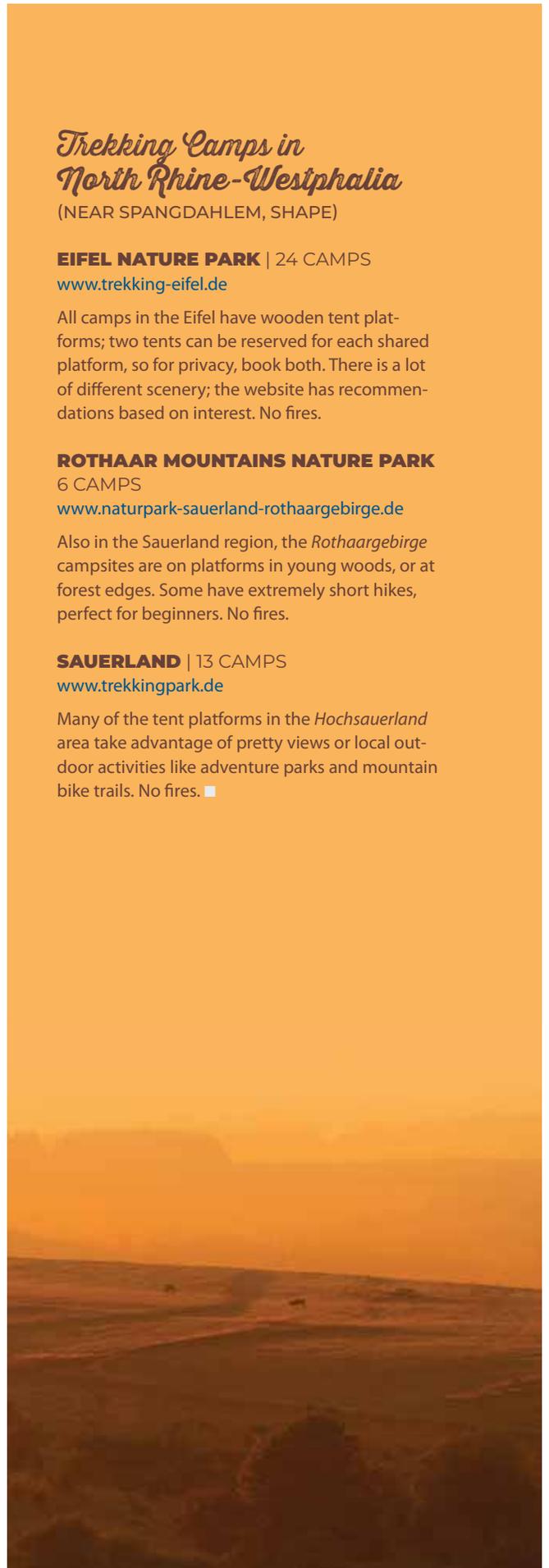
www.naturpark-sauerland-rothaargebirge.de

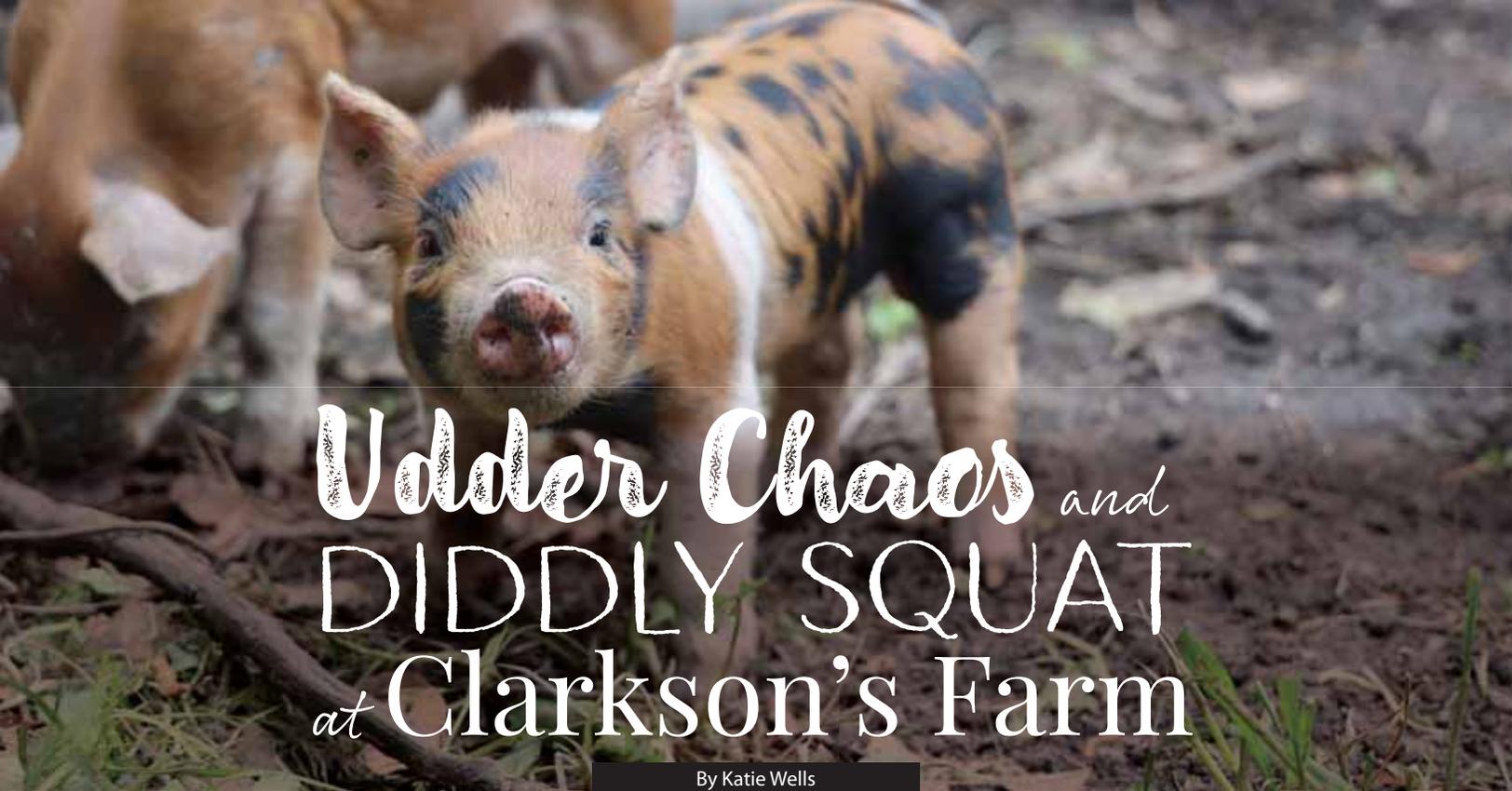
Also in the Sauerland region, the *Rothaargebirge* campsites are on platforms in young woods, or at forest edges. Some have extremely short hikes, perfect for beginners. No fires.

SAUERLAND | 13 CAMPS

www.trekkingpark.de

Many of the tent platforms in the *Hochsauerland* area take advantage of pretty views or local outdoor activities like adventure parks and mountain bike trails. No fires. ■





Udder Chaos and DIDDLY SQUAT at Clarkson's Farm

By Katie Wells

If you find yourself driving through Chadlington in the tranquil Cotswold region of England and spot an obnoxiously oversized and impractical Lamborghini tractor blocking the road, you're not nuts. It's most certainly former "Top Gear" star, Jeremy Clarkson. And while it may appear he is wreaking havoc, he's actually been up to quite a bit of good. In his own words, "I did a thing!"



For those who haven't watched, "Clarkson's Farm" began as a sort of comedic docuseries about Jeremy and his no-nonsense girlfriend Lisa as they endeavor to start a successful farm. Along the way, viewers get to know friends like straight-shooting farming guru Kaleb, endearingly misunderstood (due to his accent) Gerald and, of course, "Cheerful" Charlie, who, despite being well-meaning, is nearly always the bearer of bad news.

"I did a thing!"

While Jeremy has faced many trials and tribulations, especially with the ever-foreboding Council, after four seasons, farmers from all over the world agree he has done a great deal of good for the industry. Not only does the show represent the hardships of farming, specifically in the U.K., but it also humanizes farmers as people who deeply care about their land. Jeremy has started calling attention to the need for more local support and changes in overly complicated regulations.

Mild spoilers ahead

I never thought a show about farming would turn into a comfort. With each new season, my home fills with laughter at the misadventures, worry when the crew is down on their luck, like the dreadful year of record-breaking rain, and cheers at the survival of runt pig, Richard Ham. The show doesn't shy away from the good, bad or ugly. But that's what makes it wholesome.

There are a few places fans can visit to feel like part of the Clarkson's Farm family. You may even get to chat with Jeremy and other farm friends.

The Diddly Squat Farm Shop

The shop's conception began when the farm accidentally produced over 40 tons of potatoes and has since been filled with other products straight from the farm, like Bee Juice Honey or Jeremy's own Hawkstone beer and the "best hamburgers...in the world." The shop sells only local products... well, mostly (don't ask Lisa). On the same site, you can stop for a coffee, a Hawkstone and one of those burgers at the **Big View Café**.

The Farmer's Dog Pub

In season four, Jeremy sifted through pub after pub to find a location for his latest brainchild. The Farmer's Dog finally opened August 2024. It serves British-reared meat and pub classics made from locally sourced foods, along with Hawkstone Beer. If you can't get a seat at the Farmer's Dog, pop into the **Farmer's Puppy Bar and Kitchen** for the same menu highlights. After your meal, you can stop at **Hops and Chops**, a butcher and bottle shop at the restaurant.

It seems each season showcases one of Jeremy and Lisa's newest endeavors. Perhaps in season five, set to release Spring 2026, we will see a Jeremy-proof tool line or Clarkson's farm school. ■

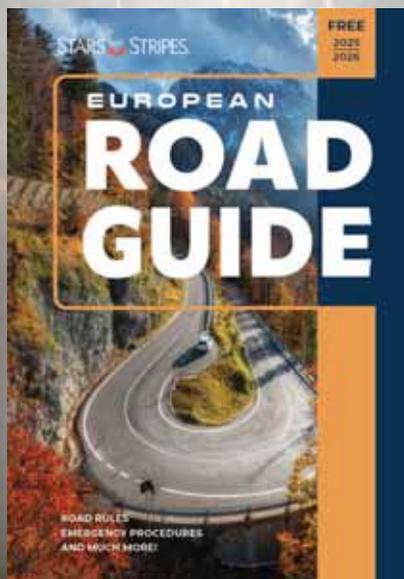


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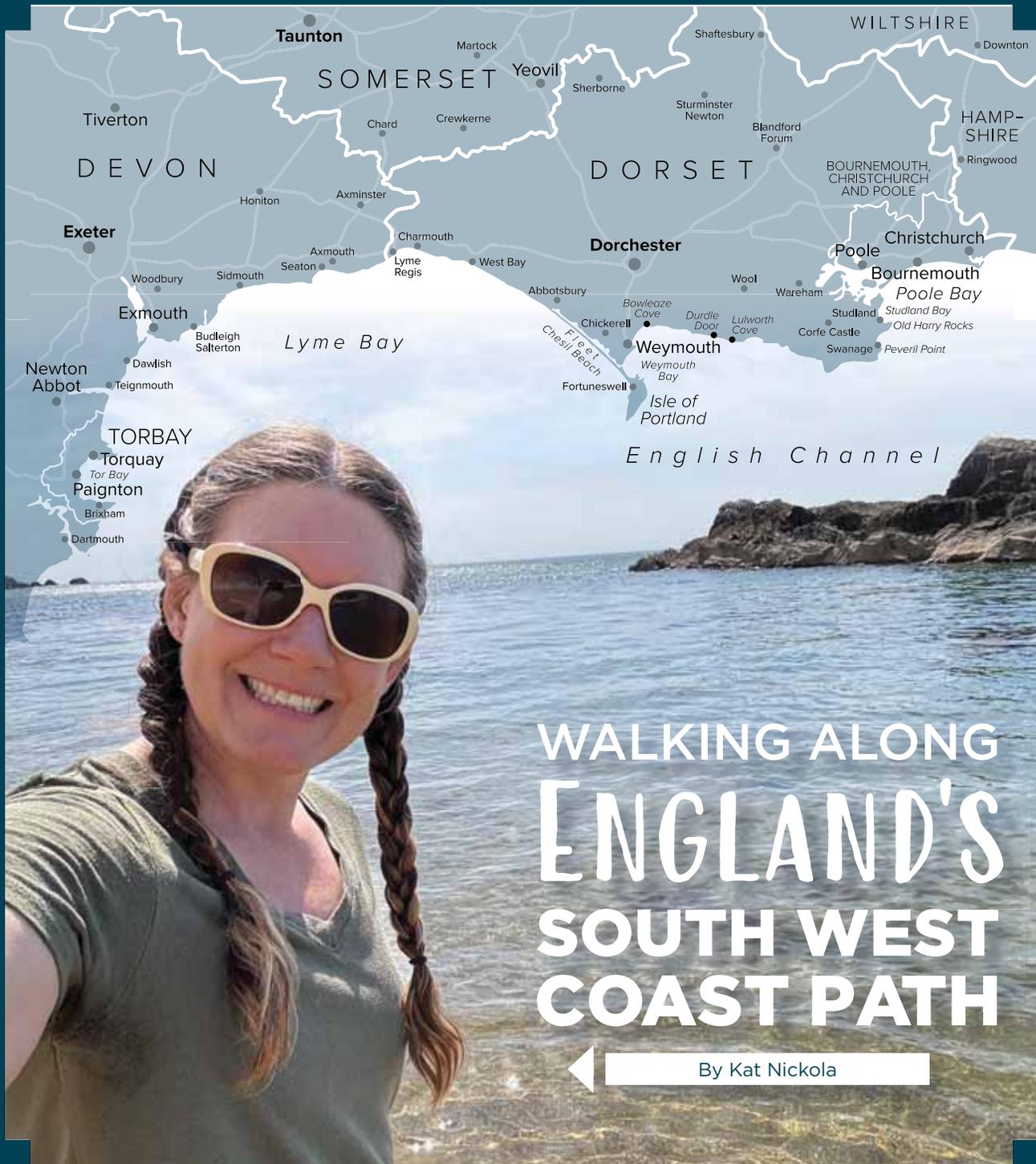
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WALKING ALONG ENGLAND'S SOUTH WEST COAST PATH

By Kat Nickola

As I dip my toes in the cold water, for a short moment I think about going for a swim. The May sun is shining on the pebbly beach, warming the white chalk cliffs that surround the vacant strand where I begin to wade in. I am completely alone, and my feet are sore from a stone I ignored in my boot during this morning's hike. Who would mind if I quickly stripped down for a swim?

I hear the laughing and deep undercurrent of chatter. Just visible at the cliff top is a small crowd deciding whether they will take the steep stairway trail down to the famous Durdle Door beach. Over there, just on the other side of the headland cliff that encloses my secluded spot at Man O'War beach, a gaggle of day trippers are trying for the perfect photo op with one of the Dorset coast's most famous limestone arches. I roll up my pants and opt for a nice wade in the cold water just in case another wanderer notices the inconspicuous trail away from the crowds leading down to my cozy spot.

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SEE OUR AD ON PAGE #29

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West Coast Path, a 630-mile walking trail that does what it says on the tin; traverses the southwest coast. It begins in Minehead, Somerset and circles all the way to Poole Harbor in Dorset, where I am out for a day hike. The trail was first used in the 1800s as a way for the coastal guards to patrol against smugglers. Nowadays, it offers a tranquil escape for walkers who primarily tackle it in small sections, taking weekend or day trips to enjoy segments. Walking the entire path in one trip can also be done, with hikers packing for day hikes and staying in local villages or campgrounds along the way.

Last night I stayed in quaint Lulworth and spent the evening poking around the rocks and cliffs of the perfectly shaped cove. It was quiet and calm, and the potential for finding more interesting fossils of shells and undersea life in the white, chalky cliffs sucked me in. I stayed out way too late combing the beach and losing track of time with the summer solstice twilight not fading until after 11p.m.



This morning, from Lulworth Cove, I started walking westward along the coast as the path rose gradually, but insistently, up until I was atop the high cliffs and could see the Isle of Portland 12 miles away. My luck brought me here on this rare, sunny and clear day, so I took advantage of the warm weather and started this little jaunt off the main path. At first, I too, went all the way down to Durdle Door beach, took my requisite pictures and sweated the whole way back up. But then I decided that I just had to figure out how to get to the empty beach on the other side of the headland. It turns out that trail down to Man O'War beach was obvious and well-signed, just a bit overgrown and not able to compete with its famous neighbor.

Down on the beach, I finish wading and relax on the pebbles as my legs regain their feeling from being numbed in the cold water. I eat a snack, drink some water and chill. I have plenty of daylight left to enjoy this moment and finish today's segment of trail.



▲ PHOTOS BY KAT NICKOLA



As one of England's National Trails, the South West Coast Path is an official route and well-signposted with the acorn trail symbol. Most of the track is perched along clifftops above the shore, with lots of elevation change as it follows the coastline up and down into villages. Day hiking is easily done between towns, and local busses and regional trains connect many of them so you can walk one-way. It is highly recommended to book accommodations ahead of time if you will be staying overnight along the trail. Wild camping is not permitted. However, there are campgrounds near many villages for those who would like to sleep in a tent and still have a nice pub nearby. Two companies offer luggage transfers to help you move from place to place: Sherpa Van and Luggage Transfers. In-depth planning help can be found at www.southwestcoastpath.org.uk. ■



HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SOUTH WEST COAST PATH

- ◆ Bright green heather landscapes above contrasting dark, craggy cliffs in the northern portion of Exmoor National Park
- ◆ England's smallest parish church in Culbone
- ◆ Dramatic geology, waterfalls and difficult terrain along the trail south of Harland Quay in the west
- ◆ Tintagel Castle, mythical birthplace of King Arthur
- ◆ Cute villages with cozy pubs and plentiful bed and breakfasts
- ◆ Sandy beaches in the far southwest of Land's End
- ◆ Naval history in Plymouth
- ◆ Burgh Island, only accessible on foot during low tide
- ◆ Fossils on the shoreline below the orange and white cliffs of the southern Jurassic Coast



HUNTING

IN POLAND



By Katie Wells

Hunting in Poland is a long-standing tradition that has deep respect for the land. After a driven hunt, a formal ceremony “Display of the Bag” or *Pokot* is performed. All of the game hunted is laid out in a traditional order, often on a bed of branches or leaves. A bonfire is lit and hunting signals are played on a horn. A “Master of the Hunt” is declared, and respect is given to the animals who lost their lives.



According to **Mhunting Polonia**, the Hunters Code of Ethics states, “The hunter, while practicing hunting and other related activities, shows care for the natural environment and ecological balance; in the case of noticing irregularities, he is not indifferent to them.”

For safety and preservation reasons, hunting is highly regulated, with all game belonging to the state. To hunt in Poland, you must either be a **licensed Polish hunter** (requiring an exam and club membership) or an **international hunting tourist** who arranges a guided hunt through an authorized agency.

If you are a **resident of Poland**, you must pass a hunter’s exam, which includes theoretical knowledge of hunting law, game biology and practical shooting skills. After passing the exam, you will join a hunting association and undergo an apprenticeship where you can get hands-on experience learning from seasoned hunters and by participating in organized hunts. After completing the apprenticeship, a hunter receives their hunting license.

Hunting as a tourist is actually good for Poland. **Hunting tourists** contribute significantly to financing the wildlife and habitat management that Polish hunting associations take on. If you are visiting Poland as an international tourist, you can arrange a guided hunting trip through an authorized agency. You must have a valid hunting license from your home country and provide proof of insurance. You will also be required to hunt with a guide from a local hunting association that manages the area. The Polish Hunting Association (Polski Związek Łowiecki—PZŁ) is a main hunting association and a great place to start.

If you are coming from out of the country, there are a few key regulations to keep in mind and further research. Often, the hunting association you’ve signed up with will help you take care of many of the regulations and legal paperwork, but this can vary depending on who you choose to hunt with.

KEY REGULATIONS:

- Public Safety: There is a zero-tolerance policy for alcohol consumption while carrying a rifle. A 0.0 percent blood alcohol level is required.
- Use of night vision, silencers or electronic calls is prohibited.
- No minors. Hunters must be over 18 to participate.
- Abide by species and season regulations.

WHERE TO HUNT

By region:

- The Małopolska Region (southeast): Open hunting grounds, primarily agricultural land
- Warmia and Masuria Region (northeast): Small hills, forests and many lakes
- Lower Silesia (southwestern): Interesting landscape with fields, meadows, forests and water
- Podlaskie (northeast): Flatland with forests, meadows, swamps and bodies of water.
- Lublin (east): Lowlands with forest

Special areas:

Białowieża Forest: In the Podlaskie region of northeast Poland, this ancient forest is a unique area to hunt in. It has a diverse ecosystem, and here, hunters can find wild bison, red deer, roe deer, wild boar, black grouse and more.

Puszcza Borecka: With its dense vegetation and dozens of small lakes, this area in the northeast of Poland and near Lithuania’s border is home to an abundance of wild animals. Deer and roe deer, lynx, wild boar, ducks and geese are all popular game to hunt. Please note that hunting bison in this area is prohibited.

Puszcza Kampinoska: Just northwest of Warsaw, this forest is bordered on both sides by the Bzura and Vistula rivers which create diverse landscapes including pine forests, swamps and sand dunes. This also means more variety in the species of birds and animals. Hunters seek out wild boar, roe deer, deer, waterfowl and various predators to hunt here.

HUNTING SEASON FOR SOME OF THE MOST SOUGHT-AFTER GAME

The specific dates for the hunting season are typically consistent year to year; however, for a more detailed list of the hunting season, visit sites like mhunting.pl.

Roe Deer Hunting

May 11–Sept. 30

Deer Hunting

Aug. 2–Feb. 28

Mouflon Hunting

Oct. 1–Feb. 28

Wild Boar Hunting

Year Round ■

"I perhaps owe having become a painter to flowers." – Claude Monet

WHERE TO SEE Monet

By Katie Wells

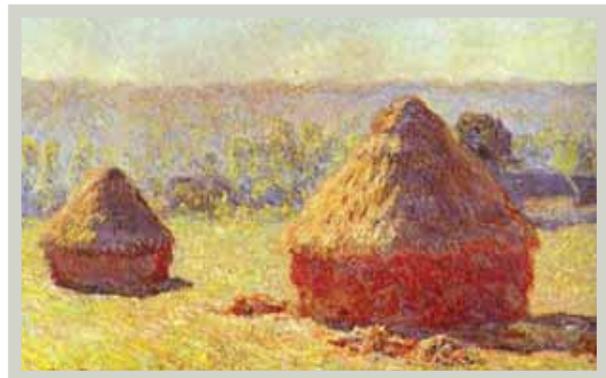
Light, nature, and the people and places known best to him inspired Claude Monet, a French painter and key figure in the Impressionist movement. He adopted the plein-air style of painting mixed with emotive brush strokes to create his famed transient works of art. His paintings depict leisure activities, landscapes and monuments across France, especially in Normandy, Paris and his beloved gardens which he tended at his home in Giverny.

So, where in France can you see Monet's artworks and the places that inspired him?



IMPRESSION SUNRISE

"Impression, soleil levant," or "Impression Sunrise," painted in 1872, is likely Monet's most iconic painting as it inspired the name for the entire Impressionism Movement. The scene from the **Port of Le Havre, France**, depicts the sun pushing through a thick mist and the gentle movement of a boat, or boats, depending on interpretation, through the water. You can see this painting at **Musée Marmottan Monet** in Paris.



HAYSTACKS

From his home in **Giverny**, Monet admired a field where farmers stacked hay after the harvest season. Enamored by the effect the light and changing seasons had on the colors of the hay and the surrounding landscape, he painted a series of around 30 paintings featuring the haystacks. He wanted to capture the effect light and changing weather had on a single subject, an intricate display of the nuances of the landscape surrounding him. You can visit Monet's home in Giverny and see the field he was inspired by. **Musée Marmottan Monet** and **Musée d'Orsay** in Paris both hold significant collections of "Haystacks."



ROUEN CATHEDRAL

Monet's Rouen Cathedral series was a study on light. He painted the western façade of the cathedral at different times of the day and captured how light transforms the emotion and overall essence of the building. He painted 30 canvases of the cathedral switching back and forth between them as the light changed, between 1892 and 1893. While many of them are spread out and privately owned, you can still see some of the collection. Admire the Cathedral itself in Normandy's capital, Rouen, and then head over to **Musée des Beaux-Arts** to view "Rouen Cathedral. The Portal and the Albane Tower. Grey skies." At **Musée d'Orsay** in Paris, you can view five variations of "Rouen Cathedral. The Portal." and "Rouen Cathedral. The Portal and the Saint-Romain Tower." Also in Paris, **Musée Marmottan Monet** has "Rouen Cathedral. Sun effect, end of day."



PHOTO BY KATIE WELLS

WATER LILIES

Perhaps his most well-known and loved series, for the last three decades of Monet's life, he was immersed in painting the water lily pond he created at his home in **Giverny**. With a nearly obsessive attention to detail, he rendered the reflective light on the pond with an interplay of color. He gifted his first two large panels to the Nation of France as a symbol of peace, the day after the armistice, on November 12, 1918. From April 1 – Oct. 31, Monet's Gardens in Giverny are open to visitors. You can stroll through his former inspiration and see the flower garden as well as the water garden with the lilies and the famed Japanese-style bridge. Just down the road is the **Musée des Impressionismes Giverny**. In Spring of 2026, to mark the 100th year since Monet's passing, the museum will host a special exhibit, "Before the Water Lilies. Monet discovers Giverny, 1883-1890."

The **Musée de l'Orangerie** in Paris is home to eight of the large "Nymphéas," or "Water Lilies" series. Viewing them is a truly immersive experience as they are hung side-by-side and match the curvature of two oblong rooms. Natural light pours in from the entrances of the room and alters the paintings to look true to the weather, as nature does. **Musée d'Orsay** in Paris holds a collection of Monet's Water Lily paintings, including "Nymphéas bleus," or "Blue Water Lilies." Several are on display at **Musée Marmottan Monet** which is the only institution to hold the last of the "Japanese Bridge" paintings. ■

MUSIC & IMPRESSIONISM

Many impressionist artists of the time knew each other. So, when Claude Debussy came onto the scene as the founder of musical impressionism, it's no wonder both Claudes appreciated each other's work. It is said, thanks to Monet introducing them, Debussy was inspired by American painter James Abbott McNeill Whistler, who created misty, dark landscape paintings called "Nocturnes." Thus, Debussy's moody piano piece "Nocturnes" was composed. While none of Debussy's music is directly tied to Monet's work, it's undeniable that the two art forms have a conversation. For an elevated sensory experience listen (with headphones) to Claude Debussy's music while viewing Monet's paintings. You might just be completely transported. The songs "Claire de Lune" or "Reverie," would make a lovely companion to a "Water Lilies" painting.



BETTER BUTTER EN FRANCE?

By Katie Wells

Smooth, smoky, salty, sweet, citrusy, herbal, and even plain, *beurre Français*, or French butter, will make one's mouth water just at the thought of it spread across fresh baguettes, melted into a filet of wild-caught salmon, crackling on duck confit or embedded in the flakes of a croissant.

After popping over the border to France from Kaiserslautern, Germany, for a grocery excursion, my spouse and I agree that whichever brand or flavor of butter we try, so long as it is made in France, is never a miss. His favorite is a black garlic and truffle butter, and mine is a citrus and herb one for seafood.

But what makes French butter so delicious and notably different from the stuff we grew up with in the States?

It comes down to three components.

- **Slow churned:** Butter is often churned in small batches and very slowly. This process further develops flavor and results in a smoother, creamier texture.
- **Cultured:** The cream is fermented with live cultures before churning the butter. This contributes to its soft texture and slightly acidic, nutty taste. In the U.S. butter is not cultured, resulting in a milder flavor.
- **Higher fat content:** French butter typically has a high fat content of at least 82 percent. This contributes to its richness and flakiness in French pastries.

The spreadable gold (French butter is often a deeper yellow due to cows' diets of beta carotene-rich grass), while a common staple in most homes, has a rich history. After being more available than olive oil and the "fat of the poor" during the Middle Ages, in the 15th century, it became a symbol of status in France. Later, its ties to nobility were also influenced by religious restrictions on the consumption of animal fats during Lent and on fast days. Only the wealthy could circumvent this by paying for exemptions. This led to the construction of the "Tower of Butter" at Rouen Cathedral in exchange for permission to eat butter during fasting periods. Over time, in the 19th and 20th centuries, it became an essential fat in French cooking and thus more readily available to everyone.

FIVE OF THE BEST BRANDS OF FRENCH BUTTER

1. **Isigny Ste Mère Beurre de Baratte:** This butter is a PDO (Protected Designation of Origin) for being made in Normandy. It is slightly nutty, rich and is also known for its variations with large salt crystals.
2. **Échiré:** An elegant butter, like its gold packaging, that is a staple for chefs from the village of Échiré. The extra-high fat content makes for ultra-creamy, nutty and silky flavor infusions for cooking.
3. **Grand Fermage:** Widely available and affordable across France, this butter is embedded with flakes derived from salt that is hand-harvested at Île de Noirmoutier. It gives a moment of crunch before melting on the tongue. It is special because the cream goes through a process of separation, pasteurization and maturation to develop the acidity before being churned.
4. **Beillevaire:** From the Marais Vendéen region in western France, this butter has a distinct “fresh cream” taste. It is salty and tangy at first but then mellows out into a sweeter flavor.
5. **Beurre Bordier:** This butter has a cult following and comes from Brittany, France. Maybe it’s because the butter is kneaded by hand, or the fact that the cows graze only on organic pastures, but it tastes expensive, velvety, milky and rich.

These are just a few of the popular butterbrands, but there are plenty more argued to be the best. When purchasing butter in France, it may be helpful to know the meaning of these common terms on the labels.

- *Doux* — Soft, unsalted butter
- *Beurre demi-sel* — Partially or half-salted butter
- *Demi-sel gros grains* — Butter with large grains or flakes of sea salt
- *Sel fumé* — Butter with smoked salt
- *Beurre d’ail* — Garlic butter
- *Beurre à la truffe* — Truffle butter
- *Beurre aux fines herbes* — Butter infused with fresh herbs like parsley or wild garlic.
- *Beurre aux agrumes* — Butter with citrus fruits



DISNEY BUTTER

Disneyland Paris uses high-quality French butter, especially from regions like Normandy, which is known for its rich dairy and butter production. You might notice while dining at a restaurant on site that the label on the foil the butter is wrapped has the Isigny label. This is because Walt Disney’s ancestry traces back to the Isigny-sur-Mer commune in Normandy, France.

In 1918, when Walt Disney was 17 years old, he altered his birth certificate so he could serve as a driver in the Red Cross Ambulance Corps in France with hopes of seeing his roots in Normandy. The region inspired his sketches so much, that Mont-Saint-Michel is said to be part of the inspiration for Sleeping Beauty and Cinderella’s castles. The Isigny-Sainte-Mère dairy cooperative is in the village where the Disney family (formerly D’isigny) lived, and is known as one of France’s finest producers of butter, dairy and Dupont d’Isigny salted caramels. If you fall in love with the magic of French butter like Walt did, you can even have it vacuum-sealed at the park for travel back home. ■



PHOTO BY RYAN JOYE

ONE Cafe to Rule Them All: The Shire in Killarney

Story and Photos by Tamala Malerk

Since 2014, a bar has been tucked away down a street in Killarney, Ireland, where one can transport themselves to Middle Earth as if they were in *The Green Dragon* or *The Prancing Pony*.

The Shire is a cafe and bar that is open annually for Lord of the Rings fans or just hungry patrons. Once you walk through the door you can settle in for a nice drink and meal anytime of the day.

They have meals for those with the smallest of appetites and for those who eat like a hobbit. The Shire is even dog-friendly, so the entire family can get in on the fun. You can also enjoy signature drinks such as "Hobbit Juice," "Bilbo's Beer," "Frodo's Lager" and "Gandalf's Ale."

When my spouse and I walked in on a winter evening, the place was pretty empty except for the owner standing behind the bar.

This was the time of the year when a lot of restaurants close for a short vacation after the holiday frenzy. Rather than close, he kept the bar open. While we couldn't grab a bite to eat from their lengthy menu, we were happy to sit and have a

beer as he answered questions about the bar.

Memorabilia, art and photos adorn the walls. I took a picture under the circular arch with the famous phrase "One ring to rule them all" and oohed and aahed at the photos of the film's stars who have visited the cafe. No matter what, you are guaranteed to meet a fellow fan, even if it is simply the owner himself.

For those who truly wish to immerse themselves in the atmosphere, The Shire has a few cozy rooms attached to the bar area where you can stay overnight and enjoy a true Irish breakfast in the morning. There are private room options or a dorm-style space for larger groups.

While we visited during the slow season, spring and summer are busy times for The Shire, and you can take your chances walking in, but your safest bet is booking on their website at theshirekillarney.com. ■



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Pasta Sauces of Italy

By Tamala Malerk | Map Designed by Mandy Mills



Al Burro e Sabia Emilia-Romagna

This sauce originated in the Emilia-Romagna area of Italy; yet no one can say when butter and sage were first combined as a sauce because of its simplistic nature. It is commonly used with pasta and gnocchi dishes.



Al Tartufo Umbria and Piedmont

This is one of the more decadent sauces of Italy; however, its elegance derives partly from its simplicity. Originating from the areas of Umbria and Piedmont, its ingredients include butter, Parmigiano-Reggiano and freshly shaved truffle.

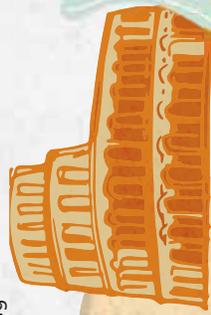
Pesto Genovese Genoa

Another delicious sauce that is made of a few simple ingredients: garlic, pine nuts, basil, olive oil and cheese (typically a pecorino or Parmigiano Reggiano). This is the OG of pesto sauces. The modern version of this sauce originated in Genoa in the mid-1800s; however, some origins date it back to ancient times.



Besciamella Tuscany

Tuscany created their own version of Bechamel sauce known as Besciamella. This is a rich sauce consisting of butter, flour and milk.



Bolognese Bologna

Known as "Ragù alla Bolognese" in Italian, this sauce typically consists of ground meat, onion, garlic, tomato sauce, carrots, stock and a variety of seasonings. It comes from Bologna. This sauce dates back to the 1700s and can be customized to taste as long as there is a base of tomato sauce and ground meat.



Gricia Grisciano

Gricia, more commonly spelled "Gricia" in the modern era, comes from the small village of Grisciano (although today, it may be more associated with Rome). This sauce consists of three ingredients: Pecorino Romano, black pepper and guanciale. Today, there is one place to get Griscia in Grisciano: La Vecchia Ruota.



Amatriciana Amatrice

This sauce, which originated in the city of Amatrice sometime in the 1600s, is very similar to carbonara and also consists of three ingredients: pecorino, guanciale and tomato sauce. It became so popular that it was served at the Pope's court in the 1800s.



Carbonara Rome

Carbonara consists of three basic ingredients: egg, guanciale (a cured pork product) and pecorino cheese. It originated in the Rome region sometime in the 1940s or 1950s (exact origins are not clear). Although it is believed that there are no written records of it before WWII.



Cacio e Pepe Rome

The ingredients of this sauce are entirely listed in the name: Cacio (cheese from sheep's milk) and pepe (black pepper). Water is also used to help create the saucy consistency. Like carbonara, it also originated in Rome; however, it dates back all the way to ancient Roman times.

More than marinara!

Scan below for Stripes Europe's interactive Google map and keep these locations handy during your Italian travels.



Aglio e Olio Naples

Another sauce where the ingredients are in the name: *Aglio*, meaning garlic and *olio*, meaning oil. You can vary up your version with seasonings and cheese, but the purest form is just the two ingredients and was known in Naples' cooking as *cucina povera* (poor cooking. It can be traced back to Neapolitan sailors.



Alla Norma Catania, Sicily

This sauce, made from marinara, eggplant, olive oil, spices, cheese and garlic, has musical origins dating back to 19th-century Sicily. Many believe that this sauce mixed with pasta was created for the opening night of the opera, "Norma."

Pesto Trapanese Trapani, Sicily

Here is a Sicilian take on pesto: almonds (instead of pine nuts), tomatoes (instead of basil), Pecorino, red garlic and olive oil. This embraces the Genoese origins (whose sailors brought their sauce to the area) but adds a coastal cultural flair to the sauce.



Puttanesca Naples

Ironically, this sauce is called putanesca everywhere but its city of origin, Naples, where it is called "aulive e chiapparielle." Origin stories vary; however, this sauce seems to date back to the mid-20th century. It consists of cooked tomatoes, capers, oregano, olives and parsley. Some variations of the sauce also add anchovies, but not in Naples.



Salsa al Limone Campania

This is a tangy sauce that promises a little something different for dinner. Celebrating the coastal location of Campania, this zesty citrus sauce is made from lemon, herbs, garlic and oil. You can swap out the lemon for a blood orange if you really want to change things up.



Allo Scoglio Southern Italy and Sicily

"Allo Scoglio" means from the rocks/reefs and is a perfect name for this seafood sauce that originates in the southern Italy area. Sometimes it is referred to as "frutti di mare," which means "fruits of the sea." Ingredients include squid, mussels, clams, shrimp (prawns), tomato sauce, garlic, olive oil and herbs. ■



Take Flight
for the Thriftiest
Price on These

DISCOUNT AIRLINES

By Tamala Malerk

Getting stationed in Europe can be a dream come true for those who have always fantasized about traveling through gorgeous historical countries. Yet, constant traveling can become a nightmare for your wallet.



20 euros for a plane ticket sounds like something that is too good to be true, but it isn't. You just have to get creative in your definition of conventional air travel. If you are willing to take an extra train and pack lighter, your money can get you farther.

There are some things to keep in mind when traveling on a budget carrier. To keep costs low, you may need to choose an airport a couple of hours by car to your final destination. Calculate the monetary and time costs of getting from the airport via public transit, rental car or taxi services for the most accurate expectations of your travel experience.

My spouse and I like to buy a lot of souvenirs and found that it was actually cheaper to go with a conventional airline when adding in the cost of our carry-ons and checked bags. However, if you are just getting away for a short weekend or aiming for a budget experience, flying on a discount airline with just a backpack for essentials may be the way to go. Want a carry-on? That's extra. Want to pick your seat on the flight or check in at the airport? Also, extra. Need flexibility for travel? Yep, it's extra... you get the point.

As a cost-saving measure, discount airlines may hire fewer staff to get you through check-in and other airport administrative duties. They also save money by not providing as much (if any) entertainment or snacks on the flight. To counter this, give yourself extra time at the airport and bring your own chips, water and amusements.

- I went on the websites of these
- five popular discount airlines to
- test search a flight departing from
- Germany and heading to Spain in
- order to compare experiences.



RYANAIR | ryanair.com

Best for the cheapest options

This is the most popular of the budget airlines; at least, it is the one I have heard most about since moving to Germany four years ago. Ryanair doesn't offer connecting flights, so destination availability is limited to direct flights from the departing airport. Flights may be limited seasonally or only fly on certain days. Keep in mind that the basic fare only includes the cost of your ticket and one small bag that fits under the seat.

EASYJET | easyjet.com

Best for more non-stop options

easyJet was another company that was recommended to me when learning about discount airlines. Similar to Ryanair, easyJet does not offer connecting flights and destination choices are limited by your departure airport. easyJet also draws your attention to location and package deals with less attention to price.

WIZZ AIR | wizzair.com

Best for a little bit of all the discount perks

I found a trend: Again, the destinations are limited by starting airport. If I was flexible on start and end dates, I could come out spending less, but also, I could only travel to/from on Tuesdays and Saturdays. Also, I had to get creative and select a departing flight from Bucharest instead because none of the flights flew out from Germany.

EUROWINGS | eurowings.com

Best for when you want to fly a little further

One of the first things I noticed when booking a flight on Eurowings was that there was an obvious option for a promo code in the top right corner. While the flight options were not as cheap as Ryanair, the promo code let me go down an internet rabbit hole to find potential additional savings.

NORWEGIAN | norwegian.com

Best for those who want options

"See our cheapest flights here" was one of the first things I saw when I opened the Norwegian airline homepage. Similar to Ryanair, price point was one of the main things they want consumers to notice. They offer a LowFare choice which is a barebones, non-refundable, one small under-seat bag option, LowFare+ which offers a few more options for an additional \$100 and the Flex ticket, which is closest to typical airfare and costs 267 percent more (\$332). I could buy two LowFare tickets for less than the price of one Flex. ■

PROS



The website is easy to navigate, and very cheap fares can be found if you are flexible on dates and departure airports



More flights from larger metropolitan cities/airports than Ryanair. I also found a lot of the fine print presented clearly and earlier in the process of booking the flights.



The website was easier to navigate than easyJet.com. The pricing was mid-tier between the prices I found on Ryanair and the pricier options on easyJet.



There were offers for connecting flight options.



Clear and concise information up front.

CONS

No connecting flights mean destinations are limited and fees for simple things like a carry-on or seat reservations add up quickly.

Available flight dates were harder to find, and I had to click through more options instead of being shown available dates upfront.

Similar to Ryanair, there aren't a lot of choices when you travel to/from certain airports.

Mid-tier pricing; nothing really special that stands out.

Missing the "fly cheaper if you go with these dates" options that the other websites feature.



IN THE FIELD

The Stars and Stripes team does get some downtime while out in the field. Here are our favorite beaches and places to swim in Europe.



"Atlas' favorite swim spot is close to home at **Lago di Barcis**. Only a 30-minute drive from Aviano Air Base, this crystal blue lake offers serene views for water lovers looking for a day getaway."

SHELBY GOULDING-MORIN, MARKETING COORDINATOR

"My favorite is **Praia de Buarcos in Portugal**. My brother's family has a vacation house there that's almost next door to the vast swath of sand and surf. It also has a broad promenade that's great for evening walks and an oceanside ice cream stop."

DAVID EDWARDS, EDITOR



"I have been going to the northern Med coast of **L'Escala, Spain** for 45 years. Clean and clear water, white sand with a view of the mountains in the background. This particular beach, about 2 km from L'Escala in Sant Marti D'Empuries is right next to the Roman/Greek Ruins of Empuries."

SEAN ADAMS, MULTIMEDIA ADVERTISING CONSULTANT



"My favorite beach in Europe has been **Jurmala, Latvia**. This beach resort area outside of Riga is less crowded and more affordable than other beach areas in Europe. Plus, with Riga nearby you can squeeze in some history and city life if you need a break from sand and sun."

KRISTEN THOENNES, MARKETING COORDINATOR



"Some of my favorite beaches were along the **Ligurian Coast** in Italy. People head to Cinque Terre and Portofino, but closer to Genoa there are some hidden gems. My personal favorite is a small cliffside beach right down the street from the train station, tucked away in the quiet coastal town of Bogliasco."

KATELIN FRY, MARKETING COORDINATOR



"I really, really loved **Lake Bled, Slovenia**. Aside from the friendly locals and great food, the combination of the castle, forest, and lake views was something I'll never forget."

EMILY NEWTON, MARKETING ASSISTANT

"I like the **Saarland Therme GmbH & Co. KG, in Saarbrücken**. It's a nice get away for all ages and it's not too far away or expensive. Aside from the great staff and many people, it has many saunas, quiet rooms, saltwater pools, large outdoor hot water pool and medium size hot water pool, relaxing music, great food, many resting areas in and outdoors. For the bold and courageous, there is also a floor (not for me) where you can really let your hair down if you get my point!"

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All information current as of March 2026.

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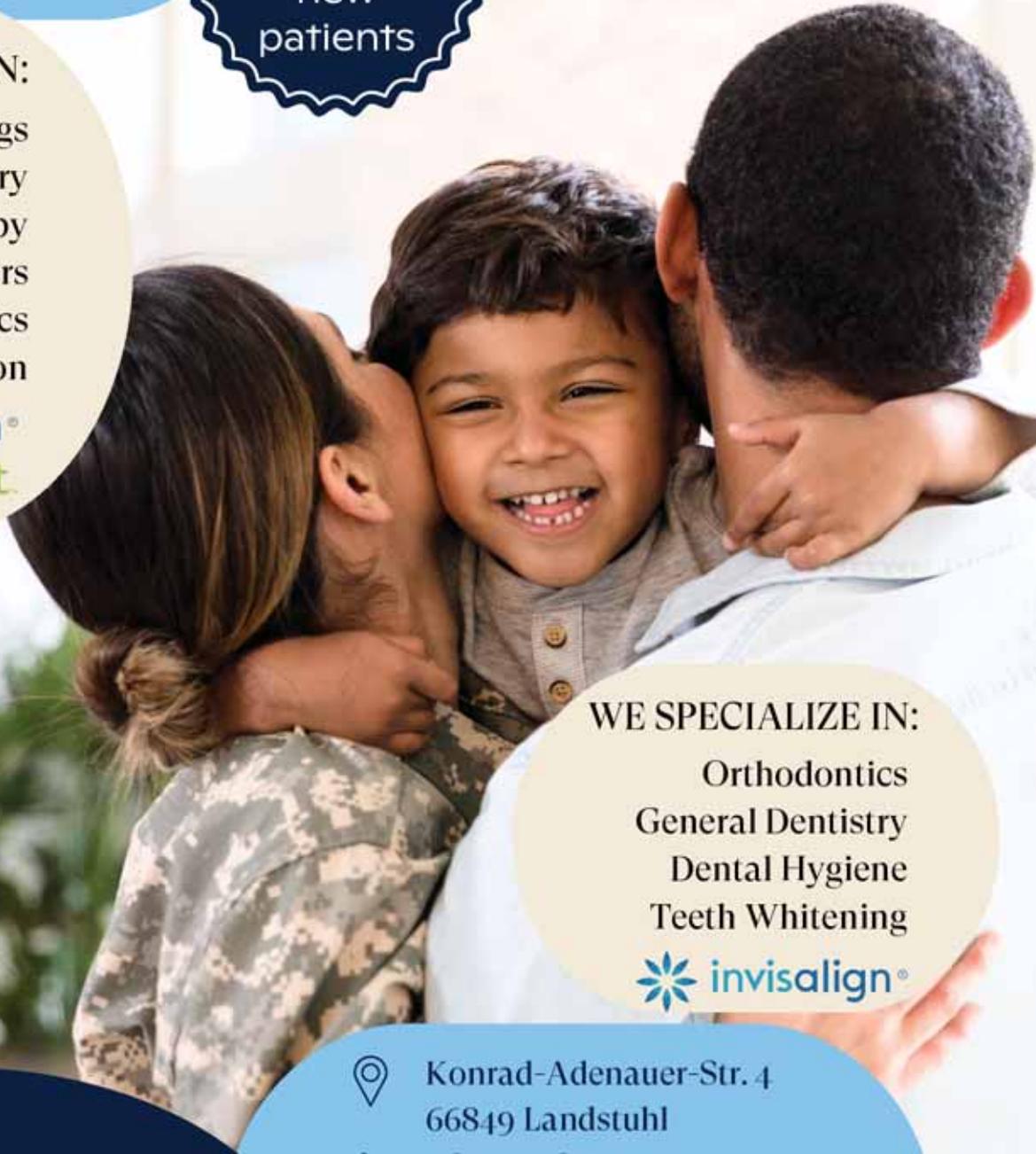


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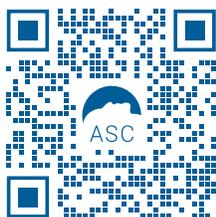


Prof. Dr. H. Schneider is a very well known specialist in sleep disorders such as snoring. Through his decades of research at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, he has the very latest knowledge and help to end dangerous snoring. Snoring bears great risks for your health such as developing diabetes, obesity, poor sleep and even heart attack or stroke.

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