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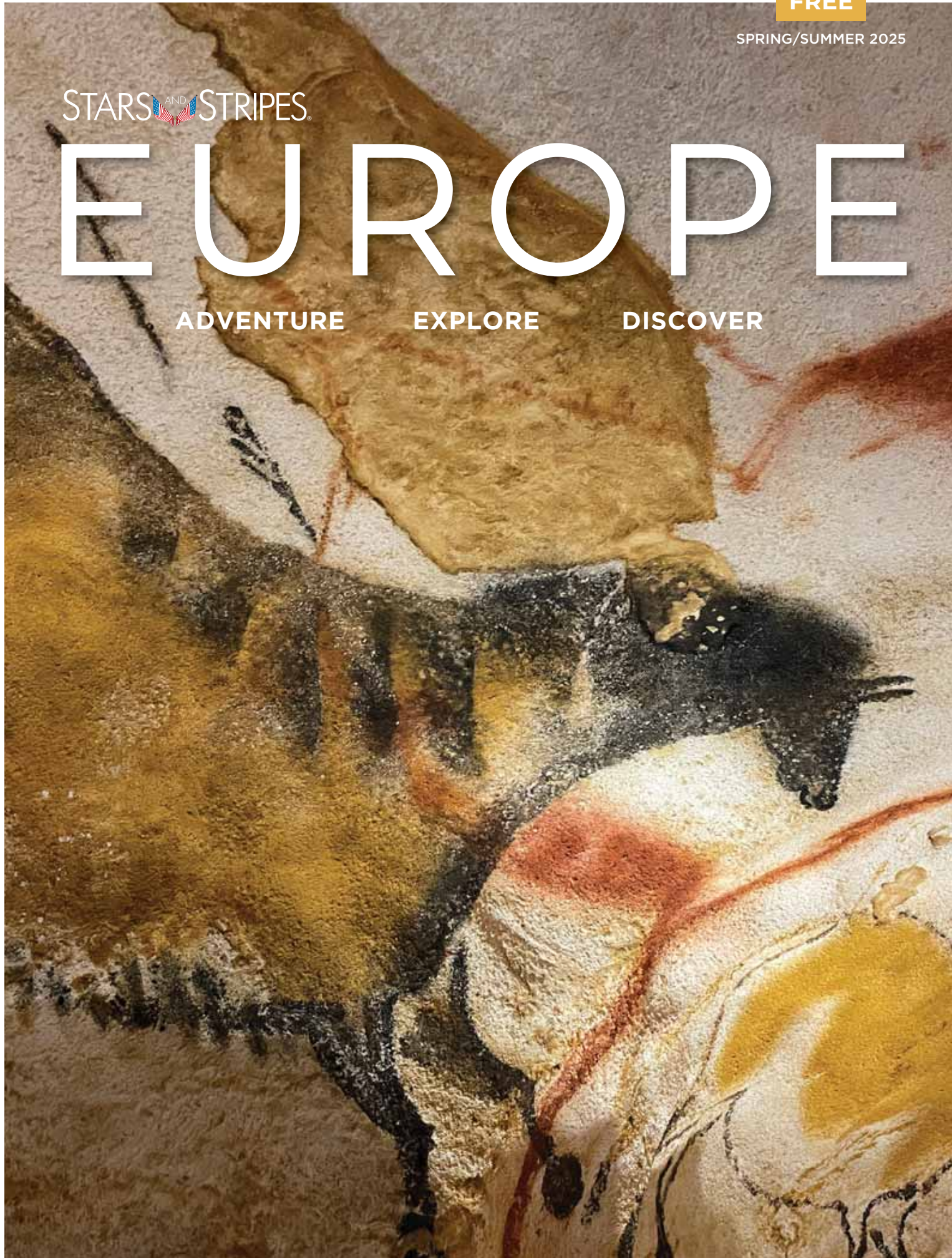
STARS AND STRIPES

EUROPE

ADVENTURE

EXPLORE

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EDITOR'S LETTER



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

"I don't know where I'm going from here, but I promise it won't bore you."

— David Bowie

From dancing at a **fancy ball** in Vienna to viewing the underground prehistoric art galleries of France and experiencing Saxon England at **Bamburgh Castle**, you will end up going unexpected places while in Europe.

This edition of Stripes Europe is ready to help you figure out where to go next. There are trips to off-the-beaten track locations like **Orkney** in far northern Scotland, or **Messenia** on the Greek coast. You will also find information on some thought-provoking destinations like the former concentration camp at **Auschwitz** and the ruins of **Pompeii**.

Where you choose to go may not always be far away. Testing the rides and devouring the food at your local **Kerwe**, mindfully taking in some **forest bathing** near your home or running in a **local race** can all be dynamic experiences. Delving into the world of **Eurovision** or exploring **Viking-themed gaming** can immerse you into new cultures from the comfort of your home.

Perhaps you will go down a rabbit hole and learn about something new like the **Knights Templar** in France, the fantastic **fairy lore** in the U.K., the meaning of **Scottish clan tartans** or the bizarre history behind **Groundhog Day**. For some experiential learning, you can take up **geocaching**, participate in the **Nijmegen Foot March**, place your own **love lock** or try your hand at creating some "British Bake Off" treats.

In fact, food can often be an adventure of its own. You can explore Europe's amazing **food halls** while traveling, take in Kraków's **pierogi festival** or grab a **Kölsch in Köln**.

No matter what your interests are, this edition can inspire your next place to go, and it will be, decidedly, not boring!

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KICKING IT AT A KERWE

By Tamala Malerk

Every March for as long as I can remember, my parents and I would make our way to the Strawberry Festival in Florida. We ate deep fried favorites and were always curious to see any new items introduced that year: deep-fried Oreos and chocolate-covered bacon are two that come to mind. I got my face painted (yes, even as an adult). We stood in the stands and watched up-and-coming and formerly famous bands rock the stage, met the Strawberry Queen, walked around the exhibits from local artists and bakers, shopped the vendors, rode the Ferris wheel and won a goldfish or two from the game alley. The festival is a staple in the town of Plant City, Florida and, unfortunately, I haven't been able to go since moving to Germany. However, there is a German equivalent.

Rather than a local strawberry harvest, for nearly a millennium, Catholics have been celebrating the day on which a town church was consecrated by the bishop or priest. Known as the Kirchweihfest, the consecration involved an official cleansing the new church to rid it of any demons. Traditionally, this day was followed by a town folk festival, the Kerwe (pronounced care-vah) which continued to be celebrated annually.

Throughout the centuries, the Kerwe was a big deal for a town, second only to Christmas. People would clean their houses for days to prepare for out-of-town guests, as well as spend days baking, cooking and prepping delicious fair food. Children received new clothes for the event and young adults used the festival to meet potential marriage partners.





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continued from page 6

Traditionally, the Kerwe lasted two days and included a Sunday visit to church followed by a town procession, a large meal ending with coffee and cake (hence the days of cooking and baking) and dancing in the town square. People put out the "Kirchweih Tree" and decorated festively with flowers and paper. There were also many games and competitions played throughout the day including wrestling, running, sack racing, bird shooting, cattle driving and flag dances.

Today, there isn't much of a religious tone to a Kerwe and individual families no longer have to prepare for days in advance. However, the celebrations are as festive as ever. At larger ones, you will find merry-go-rounds and other traditional fair rides such as Ferris wheels and perhaps a roller coaster or two. Some towns still put up a Kirchweih Tree. There are usually local vendors selling homemade items and crafts. And one tradition that has stuck around is the food.

You will find plenty of beer tents and occasionally wine and cocktail stands. At a Kerwe, you may find sausage, pommes (French fries), pretzel and my personal favorite, Lebkuchenherzen vendors. Lebkuchenherzen are large heart-shaped gingerbread cookies that are decorated with icing, usually with German words and phrases.

Depending on the size of the town or village, a Kerwe may last from one weekend to almost two weeks. You might catch a parade strolling through town. They occur across Germany from spring to autumn. Cities with more than one medieval church may even hold one in the spring and another in the fall. In the larger cities, these events attract thousands of people, so it makes sense to train or bus in or use a park-and-ride service. No matter how you get there, a Kerwe is a fun time for the entire family. ■



Kerwe* near U.S. Bases in 2025

Kaiserslautern Military Community

- Lauterer Kerwe: May 23–June 2 and Oct. 17–27, 2025
- Ramstein: Sept. 19–23, 2025
- Baumholder: Apr. 17–28, 2025 and Sept. 19–22, 2025

USAG Wiesbaden

- Frankfurt: Apr. 11–May 2, 2025 and Sept. 12–28, 2025
- Wiesbaden Villages: There are numerous kerb during weekends in the summer. For dates and locations, scan below:



USAG Stuttgart

- Kirchweih Hedelfingen, Aug. 31 and Sept. 2, 2025
- Kirchweih and Krämermarkt Feuerbach, Sept. 13–15, 2025
- Kirchweih Degerloch, Oct. 25–27, 2025

USAG Bavaria

- Garmisch-Partenkirchen Kirchweih, Oct. 19, 2025
- Munich Kirchweihdult, Oct. 18–26, 2025
- Nuremberg Villages: From May to Sept. there are many local village celebrations. For dates and locations, scan below:



* **NOTE:** Kerwe is a regional term in the Pfalz area. In other areas you may also see "Kirmes," "Kilbe," "Kirchweih," "Kirta" or "Kerb."



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“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**.



LOVELOCK *Bridges*

By Katie Wells

LEGENDS OF THE LOVELOCK BRIDGES

Born from tragedy, the tradition of clasping a lock with two lovers' initials on a scenic bridge originated over a century ago in the small Serbian town of Vrnjačka Banja. During World War I, a schoolteacher, Nada and an army officer, Relja pledged their love to each other on a local bridge, Most Ljubavi or, "The Bridge of Love" by sealing a padlock with their names etched into it before Relja went off to war. However, while battling the Germans in Greece, Relja found a new flame and married her instead. Nada, in her grief, died from the betrayal. Upon hearing the tragic story, women started inscribing their names and their beloved's names on padlocks and clasping them to the bridge, starting the tradition of hope for locking in an everlasting romance.



NOTABLE LOVELOCK BRIDGES TO VISIT

Pont des Arts

Paris, France

When in the city of lights and romance, a bucket list item is placing a lock on the most famous lovelock bridge, Pont des Arts, with your chéri, at least until recently. With over 700,000 locks, the bridge began to buckle under the weight and authorities had to remove the mesh panels covered with them. Beginning in 2008, it became tradition for couples to attach their padlocks to the bridge and throw the keys into the Seine River. While the Pont des Arts bridge can't handle the weight of any more lovelocks and it's illegal to add more, people have started placing them on other Parisian bridges, especially Pont de l'Archevêché near Notre Dame and Pont Neuf. Although it is tradition and quite romantic, the Pont des Arts is an example of the fate of many lovelock bridges across the world being weighed down by the power of love. Unfortunately, the weight can become dangerous and threaten to collapse the structure. An environmentally-friendly alternative is to do a digital lovelock with your sweetie.

Hohenzollernbrücke

Köln, Germany

Since 2008, an estimated 350,000 inscribed, painted or decorated padlocks have been added to the "Wall of Love" on the Hohenzollernbrücke, or Cathedral Bridge over the Rhine River. Near the majestic Köln Cathedral, the brightly colored locks bring brightness to the steel bridge. It is still a popular activity and with no regulations in place (yet), as you cross the bridge it is likely that you will see couples adding their lock, gazing out at the river or sharing a kiss as the key sinks to the bottom. The city of Köln has added a virtual lovelock bridge to its website where you can zoom in, choose a lock, and inscribe and personalize it. For more information, visit lovelockbridge.cologne/index.html.

Kładka Bernatek Footbridge

Krakow, Poland

The Kładka Bernatek Footbridge, considered a bridge of love, was built under Podgórze Bridge and allows pedestrians to cross, over the Vistula River. It's a romantic walk with gravity-defying sculptures and is easy to come across connecting the two popular districts of Kazimierz and Podgórze. Because of its easy access, it became a lovelock bridge quickly with thousands of locks lining its path. If you and your partner want to add a lock for unbreakable love, be sure to bring your own as they aren't sold near the bridge. Sadly, like the other bridges, it's rumored the city may cut away large portions of the locks in the near future. So, if you want to see the thousands of locks, or maybe even try to find the oldest one, visit soon.



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W

hile Serbia is home to the original lovelock legend, the tradition didn't rise to popularity until the 2006 film, "Ho Voglia Di Te" (I Want You) aired in Italy. In a popular scene taking place on the Ponte Milvio in Rome, two sweethearts, Step and Babi, seal their love by writing their names on a padlock and attaching it to one of the streetlamps on the bridge before dropping the key in the Tiber River.

Since 2012, when the weight of the locks became an issue (some streetlamps even bent over) the city removed the thousands of padlocks on the Ponte Milvio and enforced a ban on adding more. Adding a lock can cost you a €50 fine. However, this hasn't stopped determined couples as the tradition has resurfaced in recent years. It's not uncommon to find people selling locks by the bridge and lovebirds sneaking theirs onto the bridge by the cover of nightfall. This tradition has spread across Europe and the world where padlocks on bridges create a collective mosaic of stories, shared dreams and wishes.



Like two lovers, bridges connect two parts making them perfect symbols for love. As of 2024, there are 21 notable lovelock bridges around the world. While you may not be able to add a lock of your own to all of them, visiting these bridges before the locks get taken down, can be quite romantic as you are surrounded by the love stories of thousands of other hopeful couples. ■



A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE **KNIGHTS TEMPLAR** IN FRANCE

By Tamala Malerk

The Knights Templar is a group of popular, but secretive, historical figures. You may have heard about them for the first time in a high school history course, or maybe they caught your attention in famous films such as “Kingdom of Heaven” or “The Da Vinci Code.”

The Knights Templar are fascinating, and you can still visit some of their strongholds on your next trip to France.



La Couvertoirade, Aveyron, France

ORIGINS

For 200 years, the Knights Templar was one of the largest and richest organizations in existence. Founded in the 1100s by the Pope to defend the Holy Lands, they were originally called “the poor knights of Christ and of Solomon’s Temple,” but since that was so much to say, it was shortened in French to “les Templiers.”

The knights were known for being warrior monks and helped the Pope reclaim land from different peoples and nations during the Crusades. Easy to spot, they wore a white vestment (tunic or cloak) emblazoned with a red cross and two bars. The white represented the purity of the knights.

COMMANDERIES

Despite being founded by the Catholic Church, the Knights Templar had to be a self-sustaining entity. This led to the creation of Commanderies. These complexes acted as fortresses and bases for the Templars. It is estimated that the Knights Templar constructed 1,000 Commanderies between the 1100s and 1300s. These centers were large enough to have wineries, mines, housing, chapels and mills. The Knights acted as Lords of the Commanderies and were able to fund their Crusades by not only winning battles but also from the profits gained from these complexes.

There are dozens of Commanderies in France still standing today that you can visit. At these Commanderies you may see artifacts, ruins, crypts, old chapels and barns. You can even immerse yourself in the experience and stay overnight at a few of the Commanderies.

DECLINE

While the Knights Templar took vows of poverty and donated large sums of money, they also amassed huge amounts of wealth through their Commanderies and victories in battle. This led to jealousy and resentment from others. King Philip the Fair of France had borrowed money from the Knights Templar to fund his war. Sources disagree on whether the King did not want to pay back the loan or if the Knights refused to loan the money in the first place; either way, their confrontation was the downfall of the Knights Templar.

Members of the organization were accused of acts against the church such as Satanism, heresy, false idol worship and sodomy. Many were arrested and burned at the stake by order of the King of France who also dissolved the Knights Templar officially with the help of the Pope in the 1300s. Conveniently, and in no way suspiciously, most of the Knights Templar’s assets were distributed between the King of France and the King of England.

RESURRECTION

Rumor has it that the Knights Templar continued in secret for many years and that they could be connected to the modern Freemasons of the same name; however, in true secret club fashion, there really isn’t much proof of the connection. What we do know is that the original Knights Templar continued under the leadership of “Grand Masters” for centuries, that these knights passed on their masonry (stone building) knowledge to others in the 1400s and that modern Masonic Knights Templars base their ideals and morality off of the Templars of old.

In 1705, Phillip, Duke of Orleans was named Grand Master and used his position of power to legitimize the organization and remove it from the shadows of secrecy. The Order expanded quickly across France, Germany, Belgium, Switzerland and Britain as a secular organization based around chivalry. It is up to you to draw whatever connections you can between the Templars of old and new. ■



La Couvertourade, Aveyron, France

This well-preserved fortified town was owned by the Knights Templar.

STAY IN AN OLD COMMANDERIE IN FRANCE

- **Auberge de la Commanderie, Saint-Émilion:** Conveniently located in beautiful medieval town of Saint-Émilion, this Commandery also comes with an intriguing history: It was used as the hideout of the Girondins deputies during the French Revolution.
- **Le Domaine de la Commanderie de Ballan, Ballan-Miré:** An hour train ride from Paris, you can enjoy the “slow tourism” approach of the Commandery and the hustle and bustle of the city.
- **Domaine La Commanderie, Boersch:** Located along the Alsace Wine Route, sip wine in the cottage at the commandery where “time stands still.”
- **Chateau la Commanderie, Plaigne:** Stay in a medieval castle or 18th century cottage at this Commandery and have a completely history-themed vacation with the medieval bastide of Mirepoix only 15 minutes away and historic Carcassonne only 45 minutes away.
- **Hostellerie de la Commanderie, Condat-sur-Vézère:** Enjoy modern amenities such as wi-fi and television in rooms that are decorated with period furniture. You can also visit the nearby Lascaux Caves.

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*“Prague with
a dog,”
they said;
but can I
sleep in the
hotel bed?*

— Suzie Q.

PRAGUE

with a dog

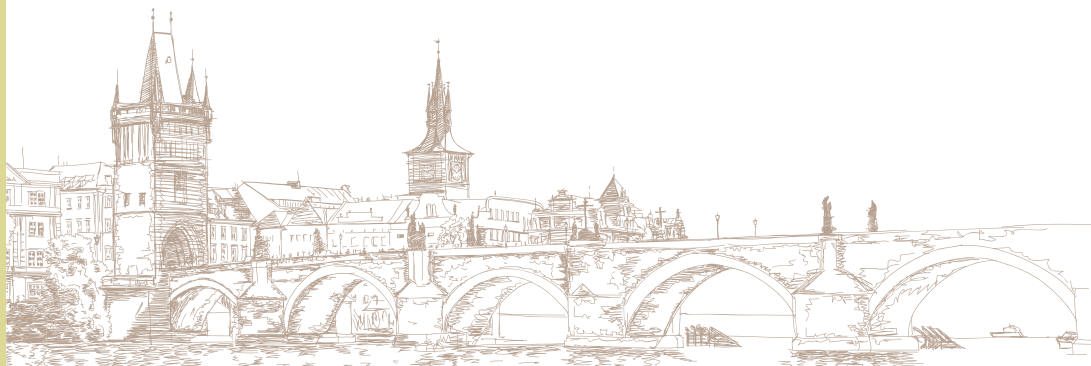
By Suzie Q.

One of my favorite things about living in Europe with my humans is when they take me on adventures! We recently visited Prague, Czechia.

After jumping into the backseat on my travel bed, I zonked out for a nice long nap! We drove to Prague from the Kaiserslautern, Germany area and it took us about six hours to get to our hotel.

This was my first time in Prague! I am not a big fan of walking around cities with lots of crowds, so my humans made sure to plan some activities that I would enjoy instead.

Aside from walking in the area around the hotel, we went on two adventures during our stay in Prague. The first was to the Botanical Gardens. There was a parking lot near the entrance (for a small fee) and we were able to buy our entry tickets from a machine. I felt like a human because I needed a ticket too! My special dog ticket was 100 CZK (about \$4).



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continued from page 14

I enjoyed smelling all the plants and roaming around the many trails through the park. We walked around and saw lots of trees and flowers. We also saw some cheetah statues. At first, I thought they were real and backed off! But my man-person showed me that they were just made out of metal.

Our second adventure was a visit to the Prague Zoo. I have never been to a zoo before because most zoos do not allow dogs. Just like at the Botanical Gardens, my humans had to purchase a special dog entry ticket just for me. My ticket cost 150 CZK (about \$6). When we walked through the turnstile, they had to show it to the zoo staff member.

I did not really care about seeing any of the animals at the zoo, instead I was more interested in the incredible smells. I briefly looked at the polar bears and wolves. The bush dogs, though, were really fascinated by me. They kept looking at me and pawing at the glass; I think they wanted to come play!

I was hoping my humans would buy me a snack from one of the food booths. It smelled like they were serving sausages. Unfortunately, they had other plans. We headed back to the hotel where I got to snack and relax while they went to a hockey game.

We stayed at the Pentahotel in the Karlín neighborhood of Prague. My lady-person had stayed at a Pentahotel before and really liked it. The hotel was really cool! It was dog-friendly and included breakfast for my humans. There were always people around to say "hi" to with a tail wag on the way in and out. Plus, they had a bar and a restaurant my humans enjoyed one night.

There were a few small parks near the hotel that we visited for a couple of my daily bathroom breaks. I saw some dogs playing fetch at one, but I didn't know if they were nice, so I kept my distance. You can never be too careful!

One of my favorite things about traveling is sleeping on a hotel bed. My humans are really smart and brought a fluffy blanket from home so I didn't get any dirt from our city walks on the nice, white linens.

Sadly, our trip had to come to an end, but I look forward to my next adventure! ■





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The Archaeology of Prehistoric Orkney

By Kat Nickola

I pull my hood down over my winter cap as the drizzle turns into a proper rain and I'm about to be drookit (drenched). Hunched over my trowel in the claggie soil of an excavation, I do wonder, but only for a moment, why I chose to study archaeology in Orkney?

In the evening, after a hot shower, I hang my wet clothes over the radiator. Outside, the sky clears and through the window I watch the sun set over the Kirkwall harbor. A massive cruise ship is departing, taking its disappointed and damp patrons with it. A few

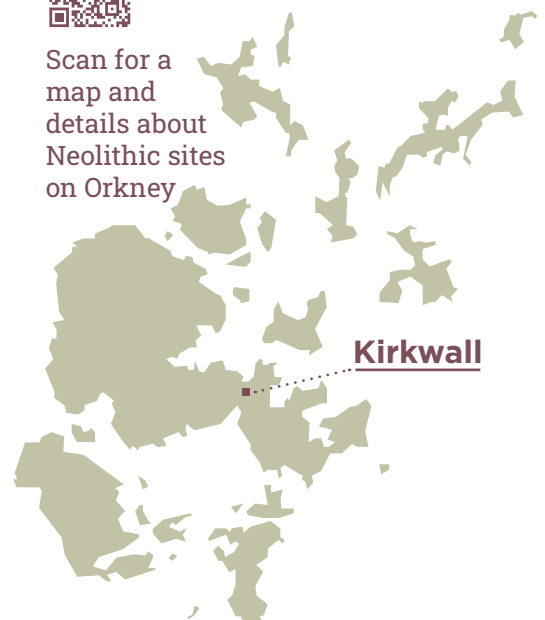
hours on a shore excursion could not capture the magic of Orkney. You need time to adjust to the wind and weather, pop out for a pub evening, and explore the way past and present landscapes intertwine.

The Orkney Islands lie north of the Scottish Highlands. 20 of the 70 islands have permanent citizens, with most living at the largest island, Mainland.

Kirkwall is the largest town in Mainland and it's where I stay when visiting. It feels a bit gray, with the flagstone walkways, stone buildings and chimney stacks puffing smoke into the overcast sky. However, a peedie (small) venture out of town leads to green fields full of sheep, sandy shorelines for fantastic sunny days and a prehistoric legacy even the Vikings found fascinating.



Scan for a map and details about Neolithic sites on Orkney



Tomb Raiding

I'm inside the Maeshowe tomb and the tour guide finally points out the etching I'm here to see. I've gawked at all the Norse graffiti—Viking runes bragging about conquests, but spotting the small, intricate Maeshowe dragon takes my breath away. The creature is so intricate, it's easy to imagine the Norse seeing magic in this tomb that was already thousands of years old.

Maeshowe was built during the Neolithic, around 3000 BC. It is the largest of many such chambered cairns, or stone memorial mounds, from the first known culture that permanently settled in Orkney. It is one such burial structure that I am here excavating with the University of the Highlands and Islands.

On my days off, I prefer crawling around in the lesser-known tombs. At Cuween Hill Chambered Cairn, I shimmy on all-fours through the tight five-meter-long entrance passage into the eerie central chamber. My flashlight is essential to illuminate the side chambers where the remains of both humans and dogs were found.

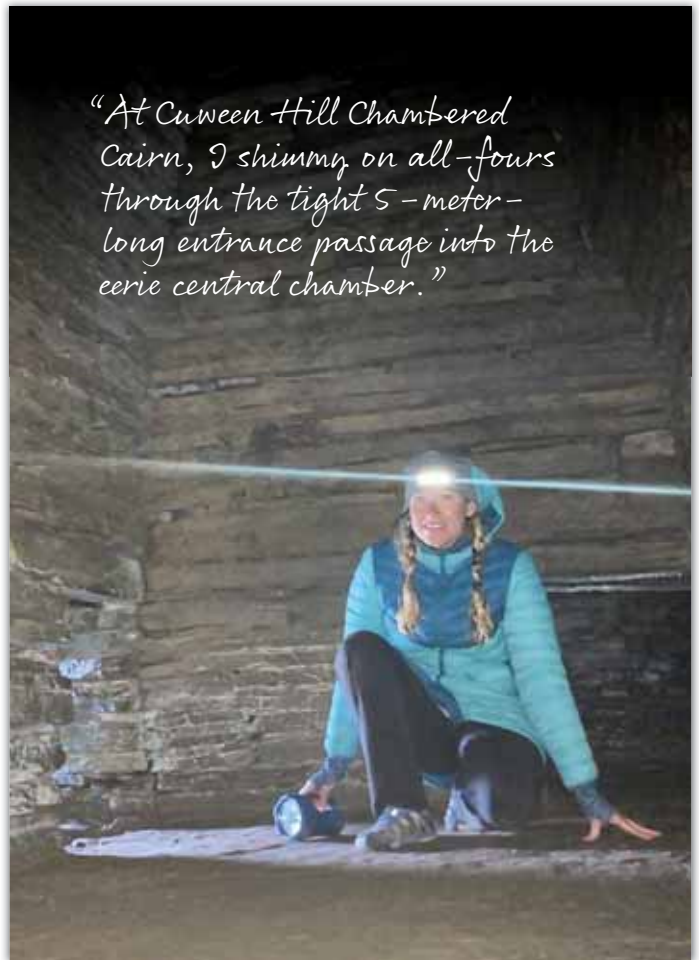
My next sunny day trip finds me hiking from Kirkwall up and over Wideford Hill, enjoying the view south across the Scapa Flow to the islands of South Ronaldsay and Hoy. My boots are soaked walking through the heather-covered moorland and peat bog to the Wideford Chambered Cairn. This tomb has a rooftop sliding metal door and a ladder extending down into the dark interior. After wriggling into the side chambers, I return to the surface, shut the door and lay on the warm grassy roof imagining a Neolithic village down below.

Back at the archaeology dig, it is cold and wet. Orcadian weather is notoriously fickle and changeable. It's August, but I'm forever wearing my waterproofs and woolens while scraping my trowel in a damp trench. My last project trip was during an unexpectedly pleasant and warm week in March (it snowed the day after I left).

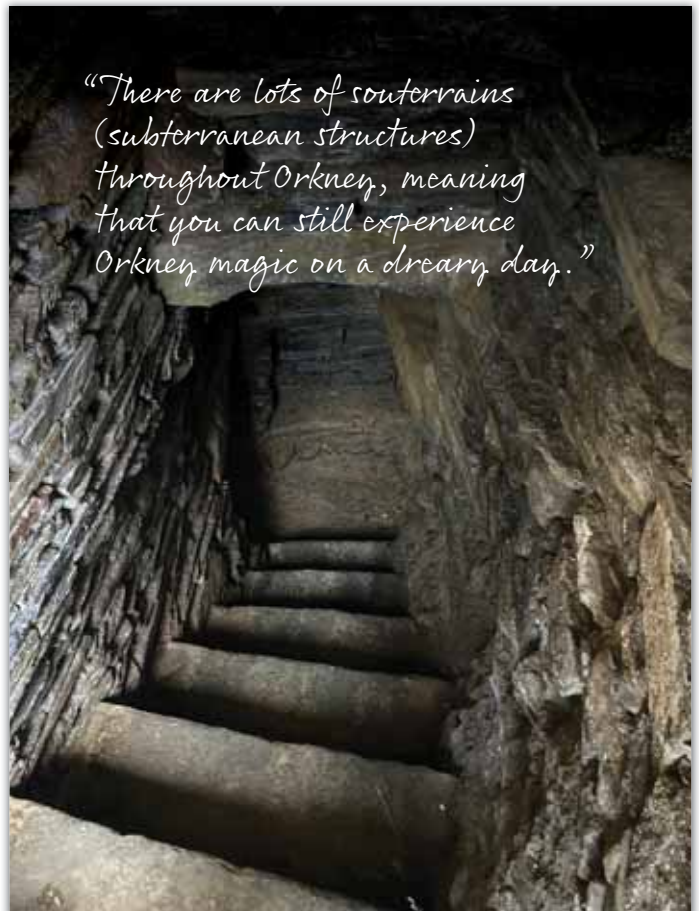
There are lots of souterrains (subterranean structures) throughout Orkney, meaning that you can still experience Orkney magic on a dreary day. You can visit most of them anytime—during the 18 hours of summer daylight, or in the middle of a winter's night. Bring a flashlight. All have been cleared of any archeological artifacts or remains.

My favorite day out finds me taking the car ferry from Tingwall to the island of Rousay where I drive on the southern road, stopping along the way to hike up to four chambered cairns. It's a long slog downhill to the coastal site of Midhowe. Here, sometime around 3500 B.C., the massive Midhowe Chambered Cairn was built with upright stone slabs separating 12 stalls. I enter the site, which lies under a large roof, and walk along the raised walkway to peer down into the long central chamber of this huge burial site.

"At Cuween Hill Chambered Cairn, I shimmy on all-fours through the tight 5-meter-long entrance passage into the eerie central chamber."



"There are lots of souterrains (subterranean structures) throughout Orkney, meaning that you can still experience Orkney magic on a dreary day."



continued from page 19

Prehistoric Towns

Graves were not the only massive stone structures built during the Neolithic in Orkney. The earliest Orcadians were also adept at creating megalithic (large stone) structures for daily life.

Visiting Skara Brae, part of the UNESCO Heritage sites called the "Heart of Neolithic Orkney," is a highlight of my visit. I begin by walking through the recreated home where I can see and feel a bit of daily life 5,000 years ago. I take the path to the shoreline where the village remnants are on display. From the raised walkway I look down into the intricate stone homes and connecting passageways.

While today Orkney seems like it is a remote island on the periphery, there is evidence that Neolithic people saw this landscape differently. Many ancient technologies and ideas originated in Orkney making it a center of prehistoric culture.



"Visiting Skara Brae, part of the UNESCO Heritage sites called the 'Heart of Neolithic Orkney,' is a highlight of my visit."

Stone Circles

Orkney is where the first stone circles were built, an idea that would be copied for generations as people traveled to and from this cultural epicenter, eventually influencing the builders of Stonehenge 1,000 years later. At the Ring of Brodgar, I spend an hour walking around the outside of the henge and its circle of standing stones. It is massive, but still only makes up a portion of the larger complex of settlements, massive structures, tombs and stone circles, much of which predates the Egyptian pyramids.

I spend all day at 'the Ness,' where I can roam inside some of the sites like the houses of the Barnhouse Settlement and the adjacent Stones of Stenness, the oldest standing stone circle in the British Isles. I place my hand on the largest stane in the circle. Sadly, I'm not transported back in time to find a fiery man in a kilt. But I am touching prehistory, and for a moment I connect with a landscape shared by people for thousands of years.

On my final days at the archaeology dig, we laboriously back-fill and close the excavation site. Like the ancestors who built this tomb and the Vikings who settled the area, we also leave our mark—carving a small stone (with a date for future archaeologists) and burying it in a side chamber, becoming part of a long story that began way back in the Neolithic. ■

Resources

- www.Orkney.com
- www.Orkneyology.com
- Historic Scotland App:



“DESTINY is ALL”

AT BAMBURGH CASTLE



By Tamala Malerk

The sounds of Viking chants, music and beating drums fill the air as the voice of Alexander Dreymon says in a deep and alluring tone, “I am Uhtred, son of Uhtred...” then, he dramatically recaps previous episodes and ends with the iconic line of “Destiny is all.”



In case you missed it, “The Last Kingdom” is a five-season BBC show (also available on Netflix in Europe) that culminated in a Netflix movie, “Seven Kings Must Die.” It follows the adventures of fictional character, Uhtred, a Saxon kidnapped by Vikings in his youth, who struggles with an identity crisis while trying to reclaim the throne of Bebbanburg (modern-day Bamburgh) from his Saxon uncle. He constantly loses lovers to whatever medieval peril or enemy befalls them and begrudgingly aligns himself to King Alfred, all while he and his merry band of misfits are shirtless more than the plot requires.

All jokes aside, it is one of the few shows that doesn’t suffer from a loss in quality as the seasons go on. I cried at the end of the movie, which acts as a series finale for reasons I won’t spoil for you. The show is based on a series of books, “The Saxon Stories” by Bernard Cornwell, and you can act out all of your favorite scenes, whether from the books or the television show, by visiting Bamburgh Castle.

While Uhtred is fictionalized, he seems to be based on a composite of English nobles. Bamburgh Castle, the fortress at the center of Uhtred’s journey, very much needed an Uhtred as it changed hands from Saxons to Normans to monarchs and then private owners over thousands of years. It was the first castle in England to be destroyed by gunfire; it cost over one million pounds to restore it to its former glory in the early 1900s. That is equivalent to over one billion pounds in today’s currency, according to the Bank of England.

Bamburgh Castle has several **interior State Rooms** that you can tour filled with ancient, medieval, renaissance and modern artifacts along with interactive exhibits where you can listen to the current owner describe some of the history. In these rooms, you can play electronic games guessing who won historical battles at the castle and dig up digital fossils and remnants in displays that are probably meant for children but that my spouse and I had a blast playing.

We also got to see costumes and props at the temporary “**The Last Kingdom**” **exhibit**, which included a throne specifically for us to sit on for pictures. Touring the State Rooms and connected chapel ends in a two-room gift shop where you can shop for “The Last Kingdom” merchandise along with prints from artists and typical gift shop items.

The castle is also home to the **Armstrong and Aviation Museum** which features airplanes and artifacts from both World Wars. The most moving part of this museum was the Air Force song lyrics on the wall from WWII about service members who died in combat.

If you get hungry while walking through the nine acres of castle grounds, fear not, there are two places where you can grab a bite to eat. For small bites like a pastry or sausage roll and tea, head over to the Tack Room. For warm ciabattas and specialty jacket potatoes, make your way to the Clock Tower Café. I mean, what is better than a cheese-smothered potato whilst learning about Vikings?

Bamburgh Castle is a great way to spend a day in northern England. It is conveniently located less than 20 miles from the **Holy Island of Lindisfarne**, so you can have a Viking-filled getaway. Be sure to arrive when they open to avoid the crowds. In 2025, “The Last Kingdom” exhibit will be on display from Feb. 8th–Nov. 2nd. The exterior areas are dog-friendly and its location on a beach makes for great photographs on a sunny day as the waves crash upon the sand. To learn more about the castle, their events and to book your tickets, go to bamburghcastle.com. ■



“I mean, what is better than a cheese-smothered potato whilst learning about Vikings?”

FOREST BATHING

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a light green long-sleeved shirt and dark pants, is sitting on a large, weathered log in a forest. She is looking up towards the trees. The forest is lush with green foliage and sunlight filtering through the canopy.

By Katie Wells

Dear reader,

I know life can get overwhelming sometimes, you're not alone. Let's get away from work, school or the house and step into the forest. For this moment, drop your shoulders and let your tongue fall from the roof of your mouth. Imagine closing your eyes, then, slowly, draw a deep breath in.

Can you hear the birds chattering softly and the lulling swoosh of the wind as tall pines sway?

Serene moments are what many people seek when practicing forest bathing, or *Shinrin-Yoku* an ancient and honored ritual originating in Japan. It is simply the practice of wandering in the forest, typically alone, to create distance from everyday stresses and the loud buzz of technology, crowds and traffic. It allows an individual to meditate and absorb the healing properties of being in nature along with connecting back to oneself.

In Germany, the practice is known as *Waldbaden*, derived from the word *Waldeinsamkeit*, meaning "solitude of the forest." With lush and dense forests like the Black Forest, it's not surprising that people have been practicing mindfulness by taking long daily walks among the trees for centuries.

In recent years, forest medicine, an evidence-based preventative medicine has been on the rise as there have been more studies conducted to better understand the effects of forest environments on human health. It has been confirmed that the phytoncides, a type of oil, that trees release into the forest air increase NK activity, the number of NK cells, and the levels of anti-cancer proteins (perforin, granzymes, granulysin) in people. NK cells are white blood cells that destroy infected cells and cancer cells in the body. Phytoncides also lower the stress hormone, cortisol, lowers blood pressure and, most importantly, can decrease an individual's risk of illnesses and cancer. Some studies have shown through blood tests and urinalysis that the effects of forest bathing for a couple of hours just once or twice have lasting benefits for over thirty days.

Forest bathing and grounding, or 'earthing' go hand-in-hand or maybe more nose-and-foot. While breathing in the phytoncides in the forest air has its own health benefits, taking your shoes off and feeling the moss between your toes also has researched benefits that include reduced stress, controlled blood pressure, increased blood flow and reduced inflammation. Making direct contact with electrons on the earth's surface is believed to stabilize one's physiology. The overall conclusions of these studies: returning to nature is simply good for body, mind and soul.

There are many spa resorts that offer forest bathing to their guests, some with guided tours. Plus, you can soak in the added relaxation benefits of spa treatments. In the Rheinland-Pfalz area, the Spa Resort of Boppard offers a guided retreat. Bavaria has many programs for practicing forest bathing. The Bavaria Spas Association has initiated the "Forest Health" project, developed from the research and practice of forest bathing. Forest bathing master, Elke Seidel guides guests of ALEXBAD Spa through Fichtelgebirge Nature Park as part of a five-day program. Krafquelle Waldhauser offers guided meditation and yoga forest bathing experiences in Bavaria's oldest national park. In the Harz Mountains, small groups are led by a forest bathing trainer at Altenau Resort. A simple Google search will pull up experiences like these and self-guided suggestions for forest bathing all throughout Germany and Europe. Although, as long as you have a forest nearby, you can begin practicing the peaceful art of *Shinrin-yoku*, *Waldbaden* or forest bathing.

Sincerely,

Katie



A guide to forest bathing

- **Turn off or silence** any devices.
- **Move at a slow pace** so you can see and feel more.
- **Breathe** deeply.
- **Take moments to stop.** Stand or sit and just observe what is around you: colors, textures, sounds and smells.
- Don't forget to **look up and all around you.** You'd be surprised at the things you miss looking only at the path ahead.
- If you struggle to let go of thinking about problems or to-do lists, **you can play a little game** with yourself. Pick a color like purple and note everywhere in the forest you spot it. Maybe you see wild blackberries, violets or a funky mushroom hiding by the roots of a stump.
- **Don't keep track of time**, allow yourself to be present and enjoy escaping the constraints of everyday life.
- **Bring a thermos of hot tea.** Find a spot to stop and sit on the ground or on a stump while you sip your drink slowly.
- **Ground yourself** by reaching out and feeling the bark of a tree or some soft moss. Even better, go barefoot. ■

RACING AROUND EUROPE

By Kat Nickola

In the dark hours of a Sunday morning, I stepped off the edge of an iron bridge 40 meters above the Nervion River in Bilbao, Spain. Rappelling down to the shoreline was a welcome relief. After attempting to race 300 kilometers across the Basque country, blisters were forming on my blisters, and I needed a shower and some sleep.

By this time, my team of four had kayaked in the sea, trekked overland, navigated cold dark forests, lugged bags, found checkpoints, mountain biked in the nighttime rain, napped at a bus stop, tramped through a cave, rappelled down multiple cliffs and waterfalls, ate little and slept less for the previous three days. We didn't require all 72 hours to complete the 10 stages of the 300km course, but we also didn't hit every checkpoint. Happily, we earned a completion.

ADVENTURE RACING

The **Basque Expedition Race** my team finished was part of the European Adventure Racing World Series (ARWS) European Circuit. Sometimes called an expedition race or raid, these multi-day events don't just test endurance in multiple sports, but also a team's ability to navigate without electronic devices through an unmarked course in the wilderness to find checkpoints along the way.

Sound like grueling fun?

Visit www.arworldseries.com with your team.

OBSTACLE COURSES

If an adventure race is too much, you can always try a one-day obstacle race. Common in the U.S., these have become hugely popular across Europe. Some are muddy, others are urban, and all of them seem to be competing for bragging rights on THE MOST intensity, difficulty and rigor.

- **Toughest** | toughest.se | Touted as the best obstacle races in Europe, these Scandinavian-based events take in the local scenery.
- **Mud Masters** | mudmasters.com | If getting filthy is the goal, this is your obstacle course, with events in Germany and the Netherlands.
- **Inferno** | infernorun.it | With beach and mud editions, this Italian obstacle series also has training camps across Italy.
- **Tough Mudder** | toughmudder.de | This worldwide obstacle race staple has competitions in Germany, France and the U.K.
- **Spartan Races** | uk.spartan.com | Parent company to the Tough Mudder series, the Spartan Races offer more variety in obstacle types, race lengths and occur across Europe.
- **Wolf Runs** | thewolfrun.com | With races in spring, summer and autumn, the Wolf Run trilogy of events are held in England.

Heading to the U.K.?

At timeoutdoors.com you can find sporting events of all kinds across the country.



©KAT NICKOLA

BICYCLE RACES

Whether you are a roadie, ride BMX, crush the mountain bike trails or enjoy another cycling sport there are events for you. Cycling is huge in Europe, so expect fanatics from clubs alongside casual riders.

For serious racers in Germany, look into the Bund Deutscher Radfahrer e.V. (BDR) – the German Cycling Federation. The BDR oversees all official races and championship series for road cycling, track racing, cyclocross, mountain biking, BMX, indoor cycling and trials riding. To race you must have a BDR membership (Mitgliedschaft), obtained by either joining the local club (Vereine) or becoming an individual member via your regional BDR office (Landesverbände).

- **BDR** | www.rad-net.de

There are also plenty of independent local races and events open to the public. Try these two websites to find one near you.

- **Radsport Events** | radsport-events.de
In Germany, Denmark, the Netherlands, Belgium Austria, Switzerland and adjacent alpine regions. The website is in German, click “Umkreissuche” for a handy map search.
- **Battistrada** | battistrada.com | For larger events across Europe, in English and with easy sorting by biking type or location.

Would you rather watch a race?

In July, you can catch the riders on the Tour de France, www.letour.fr/en/overall-route.

TRIATHLON

My first segway into racing was via a triathlon. This sport is great for having variety in your training and cool scenery during the race. They come in shorter spring distances, intermediate and Olympic distances, and the long well-known Ironman. In Europe, small local triathlons are hard to find; instead it is popular to find series put out by triathlon organizations.

- **Deutsch Triathlon Union (DTU)**
triathlondeutschland.de | List of triathlons across Germany.
- **World Triathlon** | triathlon.org | International organization with a European series.
- **Ahotu** | ahotu.com | Multi-sport events across Europe.



RUNNING EVENTS

Much like in the States, there are running events like 5Ks and fun runs across Europe all year. Local events are still very much advertised via the free local newspaper or your community's website. A simple Google search for a location and run distance is also quite effective since 5K, 10K and marathon are keywords everywhere. However, there are also a few great resources for larger, regional runs.

- **Park Run** | parkrun.com
Non-competitive 5K runs every Saturday across Europe.
- **Ahotu** | ahotu.com | Across Europe and not just running events.
- **Trail Running** | www.trailrunning.de/termine
In Germany, Austria, Switzerland and France.
- **Marathon.de** | www.marathon.de
Marathons and smaller runs in Germany, Austria, Switzerland.

“There are also plenty of independent local races and events open to the public.”

BUCKET LIST EVENTS

- **Dolomiti Superbike**
dolomitisuperbike.com/en | Legendary mountain bike ride in the Italian Alps.
- **Ultra-Trail du Mont-Blanc**
montblanc.utmb.world | Ultramarathon in the French Alps.
- **Three Peaks Challenge**
threepeakschallenge.uk | Climb the three highest peaks of Scotland, England and Wales.
- **Athens Marathon**
athensauthenticmarathon.gr | Run on the Greek route that started it all.
- **Norseman** | nxtri.com | Race across Norway in the toughest triathlon on the planet. ■

By Katie Wells

THE FOUR DAYS MARCH

Crowds cheer, children slap candy into sweaty hands, and locals' gift beautiful gladiolas as a symbol of strength and victory to tired military members and civilians from all over the globe as they cross the finish line having marched 100 miles over four days.

Ruck marches are a long-standing tradition within military organizations. They are a test of physical endurance, build comradery and even personal relationships with people from other countries. In Europe, The Nijmegen Foot March is one of the largest that individuals can partake in.



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BELOW IS AN INTERVIEW WITH DEREK BURNS AND TIM W., TWO ARMY SOLDIERS, AS THEY RECALL THEIR PERSONAL EXPERIENCES OF THE EVENT.

What is the Nijmegen foot march and who can participate?

Derek: "The official name the Dutch people call the event is the "4 Days March". Civilians and military personnel participate in a daily back-to-back-to-back-to-back walk/ruck march throughout rural Holland in July. Individuals from countries around the world (mostly Europe) participate. Nearly anyone can participate! There are teenagers all the way through some people in their 90s."

Tim: "The Nijmegen Foot March is a four-day event. It has been going on for over 100 years and is open for military and civilians."

What is required of military members?

Derek: "Each day is roughly the same distance, which totals around 100 miles across the four days! Military competitors carry around 20 lbs. and wear their service's operational uniform."

Tim: "Military members have to be in uniform for their respective country and must at all times be carrying 22 lbs. in their rucksacks, not including water."

Did you face challenges?

Derek: "For the military marchers, I believe it is working as a functioning unit with your teammates. Every person has their own unique strengths and needs, and finding the balance to ensure that everyone on the team succeeds is a daily challenge during the march."

Tim: "The challenges were the distance in [and] of itself because training-wise it was a lot of prework. My team started training six months prior to the event. We rucked with heavier weight to try and make it easier for the actual event, about 45 lbs. Rucking 25 miles per day back-to-back takes a toll on your feet. It was important to take care of our feet, wrapping them, elevating them, soaking them and also staying hydrated. Getting up early was the hardest part."

What was the best part?

Derek: "The community aspect! I was already close with my teammates, but I was able to socialize with so many other military participants in an environment that is built for fun! The location where all military participants reside during the event, Camp Heumensoord, is engrained in my memory for some of the best moments I experienced while in the military!"

Tim: "Seeing the whole town being festive. Getting to interact with other militaries from different countries was really fun. A lot of other militaries had small events going on during downtime which was cool to participate in. One country had a medieval wooden throne with a person sitting atop it. Another person





TOP The location where all military participants reside during the event, Camp Heumensoord.

ABOVE LEFT The medal given to participants of the Four Days March.

ABOVE RIGHT At Camp Heumensoord, camp currency coins are used for drinks and snacks.

RIGHT At the finish line, locals gift gladiolas as a symbol of strength and victory.



had a dulled axe and circled the crowd, picking someone out and asking, "What have you brought for the king?" If they had nothing, they would bestow them a silly nickname then make them sign a certificate saying they were 'knighted' with the silly name before shooing them off."

Do you have any advice?

Derek: "Bring all the US/Service Branch patches you can spare! Take care of your feet! Socialize with the foreign military teams!"

Tim: "Train. The sooner the better! Make sure you have motivated people to march with. I don't think I could have done it by myself. You might need new boots in preparation as well. But break them in before the march."

Tell me more about some of the traditions during the event.

Derek: "There is nothing more special than marching on the final day and reaching the final few miles through the city of Nijmegen. The entire route is lined with tens of thousands of people cheering for those marching."

Tim: "We got there a few days before the event started. The day before, the military does the two-mile Sunset March to a memorial site that honors soldiers that fought in Operation Market Garden in WWII. Sadly, on the night of the march there weren't enough seats on the bus, so we weren't able to go. But some of the other foreign national teams were handing out free food and drinks and they invited us, so we got to socialize with them, eat, drink and be merry!"

What made this event special?

Derek: "My team, the other competitors, Camp Heumensoord, the beauty [of the] Holland scenery, the medal and the finish line!"

Tim: "It was the most well-known ruck march that I've heard of since joining the military. It has a long tradition. I had a deep sense of accomplishment being a part of the community and a great time doing it with my team. It was a nice bonding experience."

Were there any other memorable moments?

Derek: "Having my friends and coworkers share photos of me from the official YouTube livestream of the event was quite a memory to have and one that I showcase forever now as a great reminder of the event!"

Tim: "Via Gladiola. Once you're officially done with the march you still have a couple more kilos to go. You can drop all your weight, walk down the street with everyone cheering and playing music, giving you food and drinks and at that point you know it's done so you get your fourth wind if you will, because at that point you've exhausted your other winds, you're just tired." ■



Viking-Style Gaming

By Kat Nickola

The Vikings and their culture are captivating, and while you are stationed in Europe it can be interesting to delve into Norse history or religion. You can visit Viking sites in their former stomping grounds at authentic places like Gamla Uppsala and Birka in Sweden, the Roskilde Viking Ship Museum in Denmark, the Lofotr Viking Museum in Norway, the Thingvellir National Park in Iceland, and the Jorvik Viking Center in England.

For a day-to-day travel escape immersing yourself into a game with a Viking connection can be both fun and fascinating. Here are 10 video games for various ages and on a variety of platforms that offer fun Norse theming and may just pique your interest in other aspects of Nordic heritage.



God of War™

PC, PlayStation | Mature players (17+)

This staple mythology-based video game series entered the world of Nordic lore in 2018 with the release of their second-era God of War and the subsequent Ragnarök game in 2022. These single-player action role-playing games follow Kratos and his son Atreus in their new life in the Nordic world where they travel through the nine realms of Norse belief interacting with gods like Thor, Odin, Freya and Loki. They feature realistic-looking graphics with monster-fighting gore and occasional foul language.

Assassin's Creed Valhalla

PC, PlayStation, Xbox | Mature players (17+)

There are 13 installments of the popular Assassins Creed series. In the Valhalla edition, you find yourself in a single-player role-playing game as Viking Eivor Varinsdottir as they raid England. The game is historically rich and well-researched, allowing you to interact with individuals like Alfred the Great and Ivar Ragnarsson alongside legendary characters like Ragnar Lothbrok and gods like Loki, Thor and Fenrir. Graphics are realistic with violence and gore against other humans and monsters.

Hellblade

PC, PlayStation, Nintendo Switch (first game only), Xbox | Mature Players (17+)

The first version of Hellblade, released in 2017, was titled Senua's Sacrifice and follows protagonist Senua—a Pict warrior—as she navigates the realms of Norse mythology after her village is attacked. It is a single-player horror fantasy role-playing game that delves deep into Senua's psychological experience to defeat the darkness. A sequel titled Senua's Saga: Hellblade II was released in 2024 and takes the story to Viking-era Iceland. Both games feature realistic graphics with violence, gore and horror, plus a mental health warning.

The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim®

PC, PlayStation, Nintendo Switch, Xbox
Mature Players (17+)

One of the most famous and classic role-playing game series, The Elder Scrolls offers open-world gaming in a fantasy world. The fifth installment, Skyrim, takes place in a Norse-like northern part of the world on a continent called Nirn where the architecture, culture and mythology feel very Viking-esque. This game was made in 2011 and a remastered version came out in 2017.

“

For a day-to-day travel escape immersing yourself into a game with a Viking connection can be both fun and fascinating.

”

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Bramble the Mountain King

PC, PlayStation, Nintendo Switch, Xbox
Mature Players (17+)

This occasionally creepy single-player game is an adventure into the dark world of Nordic folk tales. You play as a young boy named Olle as he tries to save his sister from the troll who kidnapped her. Olle encounters witches, gnomes, fairies and other folkloric creatures passed down over generations from the religion of the Vikings into Swedish legends as he tackles puzzles and challenges along the way. It has artistically illustrated realistic graphics, frightening gory boss battles and plenty of jump scares.

Clash of Clans

Mobile | Everyone (10+)

A strategy game for both iOS and Android mobile devices, Clash of Clans is an online multiplayer game set in a fantasy world that blends in a Norse cultural feel. As the village chief, you build your town and train a band of fighters to raid other towns and join other villages as clan communities. It is a top-down cartoon-style game with mild violence and is free to download and play; there are fees for particular game items.

Dolmenjord—Viking Islands

PC, Mac OS, Nintendo Switch | Everyone (6+)

Set in Viking villages, this simple, yet fun puzzle game has 60 levels to figure out. The goal is to rearrange the homes and walkways in new villages to allow access to the port. The challenge comes with the shape and geography of each new island your Vikings encounter. This inexpensive game has top-down play with cartoon-style graphics for casual gameplay and brain stimulation.

Röki

PC, PlayStation, Mac OS, Nintendo Switch, Xbox
Everyone (10+)

This single-player role-playing adventure game is a romp through the fantasy of Scandinavian folklore. You play as Tove as she traverses the northern wilderness looking for a way to reach her brother who has been taken by the dark monster Röki. Through the forest and snow-covered landscapes, you must solve puzzles and codes based on the stories of Norse creatures like the jötunn, nixies and trolls. The illustrated graphics are pretty, and the gameplay is pleasantly slower paced.

Spirit of the North

PC, PlayStation, Nintendo Switch, Xbox
Everyone (6+)

In this peaceful single-player game, you play a red fox following the path presented, solving puzzles along the way and finding clues about the humans who have now gone. There is no dialogue or text to read, though mystical runes appear to help guide you past the obviously Norse-inspired remnants of a culture. The realistic animation is attractive and the non-traditional, yet linear, gameplay past Icelandic landscapes is relaxing.

DreamWorks Dragons: Dawn of New Riders

PC, PlayStation, Nintendo Switch, Xbox
Everyone (10+)

Based on the popular book series and DreamWorks animated films and shows, this adventure game leans into the fictional world of dragon-riding Vikings. As a single player, you get to take on the role of dragon Patch to battle enemies, tackle puzzles and solve the question of Patch's origin. The graphics in this top-down role-playing game mimic those of the well-known animated series. ■

WHAT IS EUROVISION?

You may recognize it from the extravagant performances or, perhaps, you've seen the Will Farrell movie, but what exactly is this thing called Eurovision that has Europeans crazed every May?



By Kat Nickola

©SARAH LOUISE BENNETT / EBU

THE BASICS

What, why, where and when?

Officially called the **Eurovision Song Contest**, this is a massive competition where a single song by a particular local artist represents each participating European country. It is intended to give exposure to rising musical talent and is organized by the European Broadcasting Union (EBU). The first contest was held in 1956, and it has expanded yearly since then.

Switzerland won the contest in 2024 with artist Nemo (photo on the left) singing "The Code." Being the winning country means that Switzerland will host Eurovision in 2025.

 **Basel, Switzerland**  **May 13-17**  www.eurovision.tv

HOW IT WORKS

Who gets to perform?

It is up to each country to decide how their representative song and musical artist is selected. Some have selection boards while others run contests. However, they must adhere to these criteria:

1. Any EBU member country can submit an act.
2. Only one act from each country.
3. The lead vocalist must be over 18 years old.
4. The song must be an original composition.
5. The song must be new, and not publicly released.
6. The performance (lead vocals) must be sung live.
7. Songs are limited to three minutes.
8. One act cannot have more than six performers on stage.

There is no rule preventing 'famous' acts from performing, but the heart of the contest is to bring new voices and sounds into the mainstream. Plenty of countries send regionally famous singers who can potentially gain some international exposure.

How does voting work?

To be honest, it is a bit complex and was updated recently in 2024. Winners of both Semi-Finals are determined by public voting, and your location determines your voting window with priority for voters in participating European countries. The Grand Final is determined by the votes of both a jury and public opinion.

To vote from Europe, visit www.eurovision.tv/vote during the performances.

What else?

You also need to know that the host country—this year that is Switzerland—and the 'big five' countries of France, Germany, Italy, Spain and the U.K. are guaranteed entry to the Grand Final because of their role within the EBU.



READY TO WATCH?

There are three live performances:
Two Semi-Finals, and a Grand Final.

Visit www.eurovision.tv/how-to-watch for streaming options, or use your TV scan to find the local public television station. ■



In Germany, it is ARD1.



In Italy, find RAI.



In the U.K., visit the BBC.



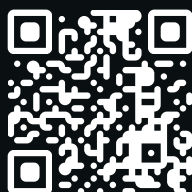
In Poland, tune in to TVP.



In Spain, look for RTVE.

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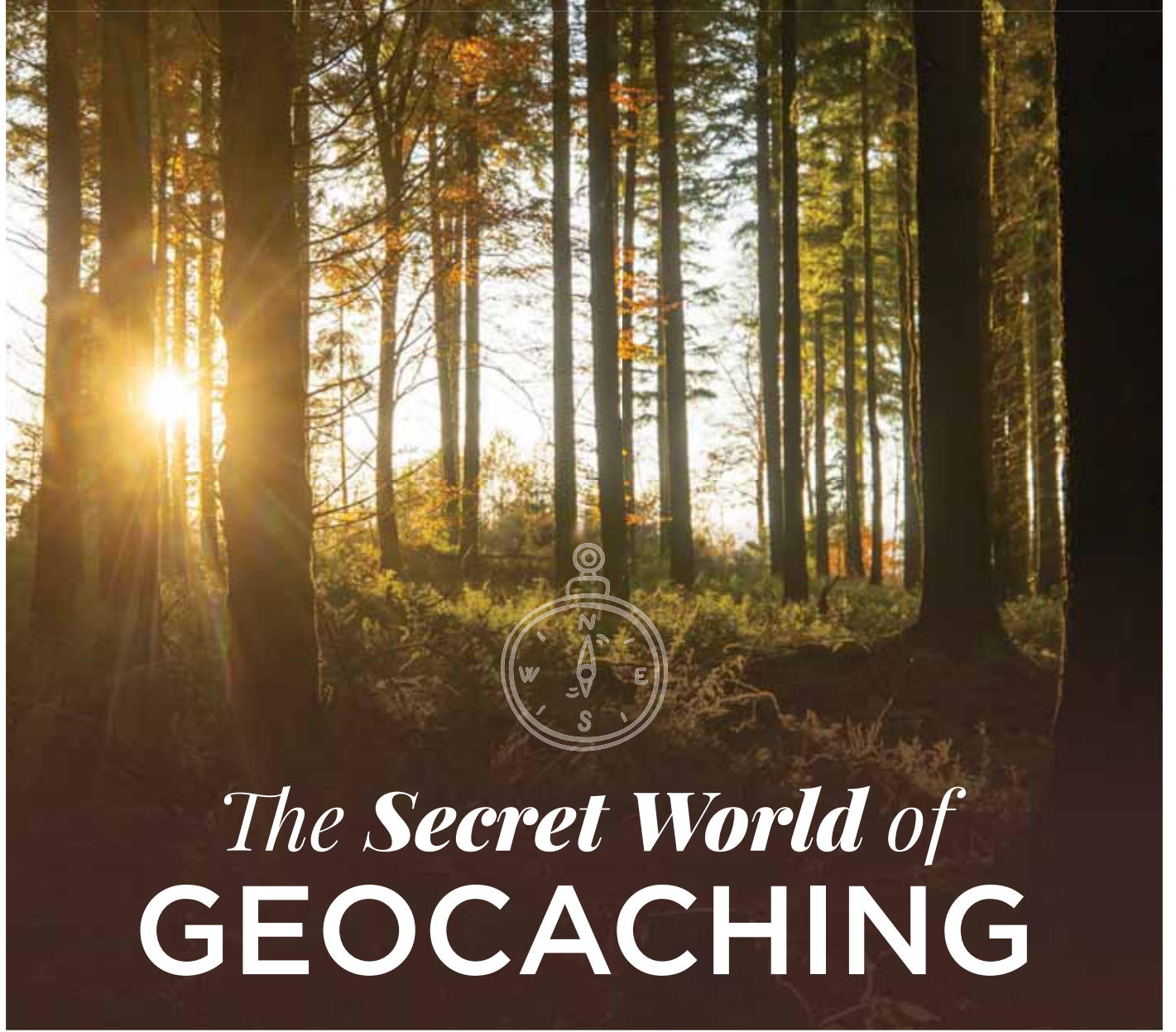
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The Secret World of **GEOCACHING**

By Kat Nickola



I'm hunched over and using the light on my phone to navigate the twists and turns of an underground World War I bunker. My daughter kindly points out a massive spider and I cringe in the dark, camp space. All morning, we have been exploring the corrugated metal structures, historic trenches and dark caves as the cold fog slowly lifts. Suddenly, I hear my husband and son call from a side cave, "We found it!" My daughter and I rush past the block walls and duck under a low rocky ceiling to find them pulling a modern plastic container out of a rubble pile. "Any swag?" I ask.

We've just found a geocache. As a lunch-sized container, it's rated as a "large." Inside are various items to trade. We grab a bouncy ball and place one of our cactus clips inside. Then we dig out the logbook, sign it and seal the case back up, hiding it again for the next person.

This is geocaching, and looping in a few finds during our travels has taken us to amazing places.



Geocaching Basics

There are geocaches all over the world. They range from micro-sized items that can barely hold a minuscule roll of paper to large containers as big as dumpsters. The fun is in the secretive nature of navigating to and finding a cache.

The primary goal in geocaching is simply to find the hidden container and sign the logbook.

In urban areas, this can be tricky, sneaky fun, since it's a major faux pas to be spotted uncovering a cache by regular folks walking past (muggles in cache parlance). Urban caches are often super-well camouflaged as well, mimicking bolts, magnetized to signs and often blending into the landscape so well that they are hiding in plain sight. In wilderness spots, navigation may be the biggest challenge. A phone GPS cannot always be relied on, and you may need to go off-trail, delve into caves or even rappel to find the toughest wild caches.

All geocaches are registered at www.geocaching.com and you must make an account in order to play. Registration is free and a great way to start. You can use the website to discover caches you'd like to find, but I highly recommend using the Geocaching App since it allows you to search for caches near you, log your finds on-the-go and can help with basic navigation. If you get really into it like my family, then a paid membership gets you access to all the caches and helpful resources on the app like filtering and downloading details.

On the App, you can use a map to choose a cache to go find. Each cache has a star rating out of five on how difficult it is to find, how tough the terrain is, and its size. You'll also find a small description and a hint if you are having trouble; in Europe these are often in the local language, so be prepared to translate. There is a "Navigate" button that offers a basic straight-line distance gauge and compass. Lastly, there is the "Log cache" button for you to click once you've completed the mission and signed the log in the container. Always bring a pen, and you may want to carry a small collection of tiny treasures like the cactus clips my family offers. Caches larger than the 'micro' size may have tradeable swag, these are usually small items you can take if you leave a replacement. This aspect is especially fun for kids! ■



“
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logbook.”

Try These Geocaches Near You

Germany

Batcave | GC2ZACA

Near the KMC, poke around in a local cave to find this cache great for trading swag.

Wald der Märchen | GC8KAAZ

Near Grafenwöhr, this is the first cache in a series of 22 caches along a 4km loop that are all fairy-tale themed.

Nächster Halt: Wallgraben | GC45NWC

A unique urban cache in Stuttgart, this one is big enough for swag and travel bugs.

United Kingdom

Narrow Minded | GC1TK6P

This popular cache near London's King's Cross station is hidden along a canal towpath.

The Jubilee Line #13 | GC3MRK7

Near RAF Lakenheath, this cache is hidden in the woodlands full of birds.

The Winchester Geese | GC13ZAG

In London, this is a fun travel bug (TB) "hotel" where people trade trackable swag.

Italy

Vesuvius - Il Gran Cono/ The Big Cone | GC4A2N8

If you are visiting Mount Vesuvius, this is a great cache to add to your trip up the mountain.

First Malcesine | GC1Z4MY

A favorite for those visiting Lake Garda, this cache is worth the climb.

IL TETTO DELL'ETNA | GC8JVNE

This geocache is a great way to add fun and exploration to your visit up Mount Etna.



The *Badger* that Became a *Groundhog*:

THE EUROPEAN ORIGINS OF GROUNDHOG DAY

By Tamala Malerk



Every year on February 2nd, Americans who are tired of dealing with shoveling snow, bundling up and slipping on ice, wait with bated (visible) breath to see if Punxsutawney Phil, the famous groundhog, sees his shadow when he emerges from his burrow. If he does, it's six more weeks of winter; if he doesn't, people can start planning their first short-sleeved outfits of the spring season. Freezing Americans should not get their hopes up: Out of the roughly 150 years of his predictions, Phil has predicted a longer winter over 100 times.

This ritual has occurred in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania since the 1800s, one assumes with different groundhogs. Yet, there is a belief that Punxsutawney Phil is immortal due to an “elixir of life” he takes every summer. However, while this is a fairly American practice today, Groundhog Day, like many immigrant Americans of the 1800s, has European origins.

According to the BBC, as far back as 5,000 years ago, Europeans attempted to guess when spring would arrive by observing when badgers, and other hibernating animals, emerged from their dens after winter hibernation. As Christianity spread throughout Europe, this practice was combined with the Christian holiday of Lichtmess/Candlemas on February 2nd.

The practice came to America with Swiss and German immigrants in the 17 and 1800s. When they immigrated, the German practice was known as “Bauernregeln” (farmer’s rules), and the badger or the hedgehog were the “go-to” animals. The prediction was for only four more weeks of winter in Germany, rather than six like in America. This was not the only thing to change when the practice traveled across the Atlantic.

The first official celebration of the most popular Punxsutawney practice was in 1877 in nearby Gobbler’s Knob, when a groundhog, because badgers are not native to the area, was consulted. At this first event the groundhog’s “Inner Circle” was established, according to the Library of Congress. The Inner Circle is a group of sharply dressed men donning fancy suits and top hats to whom the groundhog reveals his prediction. While the practice dates back so far, Phil didn’t get his famous name until the 1960s.

Today, the practice has spread all over the United States. Washington D.C. even has its own groundhog, Potomac Phil. Potomac Phil, unlike his immortal counterpart, is a stuffed groundhog who magically reports not only climate, but also gives political predictions to his Inner Circle.

If you do not have a local event, in the U.S. or Europe, you can celebrate by putting on your fanciest suit and hat, watching the popular 1990s movie named after the holiday, singing a groundhog carol, or go all out and cook a groundhog based off recipes from some early American cookbooks. ■



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A WEEKEND IN *Köln*

By Tamala Malerk

As one of the top 10 largest and most popular cities in Germany, I knew that I would have plenty to see and do in Köln (Cologne), but what to do with only 48 hours? As a self-proclaimed history buff and overall nerd, I wanted to see what I could squeeze into a weekend.

As my spouse and I were sharing a schnitzel and “Halve Hahn” (a giant block of gouda cheese and rye roll) and sipping on one of Köln’s famous “Kölsch” beers, we noticed an enormous building across the street with the word “Museum” painted on it. Of course, we had to check it out. As we purchased our tickets, the woman behind the counter asked if we wanted to purchase admission to one or both museums. What a nice surprise, two museums in one building!

Museum Schnütgen has a vast collection of medieval art, including some beautiful stained glass pieces, in one of the oldest churches in Köln. Once we saw all the medieval art we could imagine, we headed back to the center of the building and walked over to the entrance of the **Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum**, where we were greeted by a seven-and-half-meter-high rice granary. It was there we began our exploration of around 65,000 objects highlighting global human culture gathered by travelers in the 18th and 19th centuries and covering a variety of themes, from religion to history and artifacts.

Directly across from our two-in-one museum surprise was the **Römisches Germanisches (Roman German) Museum** at the **Belgisches Haus (Belgium house)**, which has two floors of exhibits and artifacts. As a huge fan of ancient history, this was my spouse’s number one “thing to do.” I learned about the important role the Rhine River played for the Roman Empire and gazed in awe at the ancient artifacts, glass and jewelry on display.

Next to the Belgian house was a retail shop known as **Games Workshops**, which makes the popular miniature wargame “Warhammer.” For those unfamiliar with Warhammer, it can be played in many formats: as a video game, online, as an app or, in its “IRL” (in real life) form, as a strategy tabletop game where you get crafty by assembling and painting your miniature figures before dueling it out with

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Nestled within a global fashion hub, the brand new Moxy Outletcity Metzingen is perfectly positioned in the heart of Metzingen seamlessly blending style and convenience. Welcome to AtTheMoxy as you step into the vibrant and well lit lobby, you will be immersed in contemporary and creatively adorned decor, thoughtfully complemented by modern amenities including a cutting edge video wall.

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Award-winning architecture and that metropolitan feeling in a stimulating neighborhood with mountains, castles, and the idyllic, romantic half-timbered house-aesthetic in a wine growing city: the region surrounding Metzingen is well-worth seeing and rightly one of the most attractive tourism regions in Germany. At the base of the Swabian Alb biosphere reserve, you can not only recharge your batteries, but also enjoy a variety of outdoor leisure activities.

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others. As we entered the shop, we were greeted by the nicest guy behind the counter, who spoke to us in English. Little did we know we had just stumbled upon the largest Warhammer store outside of the United Kingdom. We didn't have time to sit in for a full game, but it is good to know the store is there for when we do.

“With only a short time to spend in Köln, make sure to quickly get a picture of the Dom. It cannot be missed in the city center and is the third-largest Gothic-style cathedral in the world.”

History nerds like chocolate too, especially when we get to learn about it while trying some. I mistakenly assumed that the **Schokoladen Museum** would be primarily about tasting and not learning. Don't get me wrong, the museum offered plenty of opportunities to consume chocolate in many different forms, but you also get to learn so much about it touring three floors worth of chocolate facts, exhibits and the factory floor. At the beginning of the tour, we were handed a hollow bunny to eat at our leisure. We looked at chocolate-making machinery from the 1800s and classic molds, not only learning about the history of chocolate, but also the modern-day methods of ethically making chocolate. Across one floor, we walked through the multi-step process of creating chocolate, like melting the sugar, mixing the ingredients and molding the treats. I got to eat a tiny square of chocolate fresh out of the machine!

On the next level, there were chocolatiers molding the chocolate into some of our favorite shapes. There was also a fountain cascading with chocolate, and I got to behold the astounding view of the sun blazing on the Rhine River as I ate a waffle stick dipped in chocolate straight from the fountain. It's also possible to order a custom-made chocolate bar that will be ready in 45 minutes (about the amount of time it takes to finish exploring the exhibits) for around six euros. At the museum exit, there is one last chance to score some free chocolate from a bowl of individual chocolate pieces. There is even a cafe on-site, where I drank hot liquid Lindt chocolate smothered in whipped cream.

With only a short time to spend in Köln, make sure to quickly get a picture of the Dom. It cannot be missed in the city center and is the third-largest Gothic-style cathedral in the world. On our short trip, we didn't account for the time needed to tour the inside, but still appreciated marveling at the exterior.

There is so much to do in Köln. It's also worth checking out the Hard Rock Café, seeing the Botanical Garden, strolling or taking a boat cruise along the Rhine, watching a football game, checking out the Fragrance Museum or the Zoo or, for more history, visit the former headquarters of the Gestapo. No matter what you are into, Köln has something for a weekend getaway. ■



Museum Schnütgen

© ANNE CZICHOS / STOCK.ADOBE.COM



Römisch Germanisches Museum

© EWY MEDIA / STOCK.ADOBE.COM



Schokoladen Museum

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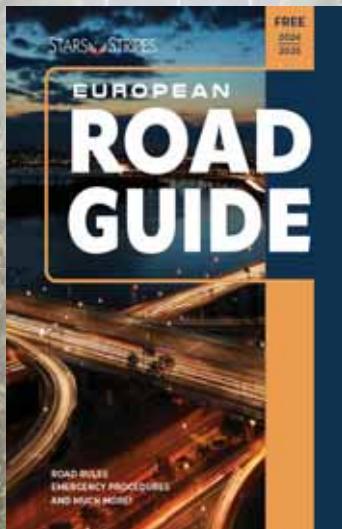
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ATTEND A *Fancy Ball* IN EUROPE

By Katie Wells

Imagine entering a grand room, the ceiling stretches high into adorned, glamorous arches above you, live orchestral music fills the room along with the rhythmic 1-2-3 box step as pairs of people twirl collectively across polished marble floors—a gloved hand reaches out and pulls you in to join the dance. Fancy balls have long been a tradition in Europe, allowing patrons to dress up and feel like royalty for a night. Today, rather than longingly awaiting delivery of an invitation by the window, all one needs is a ticket, which if you're quick enough, can easily be purchased online. Below are just a few balls you can attend while living in Europe.

'The Officers' Ball

VIENNA, AUSTRIA

A long-standing tradition occurring since 1926, the Officers' Ball or, Alt-Neustädter Ball is hosted by the Austrian Armed Forces. It demonstrates Austrian Military Officers' enmeshment into Austrian society, plus the gathering of uniforms from all over the world symbolizes international community. This ball invites all to flaunt gowns and uniforms while dining finely and dancing the night away across 23 halls within the beautiful **Hofburg Palace**. A traditional opening ceremony kicks the night off, and early the next morning a solo trumpeter of the Austrian Guards Music Band plays "Tattoo," signifying the glamorous night's end. For more information about tickets and seat reservations, visit ballderoffiziere.at.

'The Grand Masked Ball

VERSAILLES, FRANCE

Oozing in courtliness and whimsy, this extravagant ball is a recreation of one of King Louis XIV's masquerade balls. There are specially choreographed dancers, performers and artists that give the soiree a blend of grace and rave-like vibes. Visitors often plan a year in advance getting fitted for authentic 17th or 18th-century Baroque costumes and booking hair and makeup artists. To truly feel like

royalty, Paris to Versailles Private Tours offers VIP packages where you can spend the day prior and day-of the ball being fitted for an authentic period costume, sipping champagne, being pampered by stylists and having direct access to the gardens. The event takes place each year in June; however, tickets are capped and often sell out within the first couple of days they are available between December and January. For more information, visit en.chateauversailles.fr.

Grand Ball Carnival

VENICE, ITALY

Annually, in early March, the Russolo family recreates a themed Venetian fairytale-esque ball to celebrate Carnival like the nobility of the past. In the central salon of **Palazzo Ca' Zen ai Frari**, a Baroque palace along the Venetian canals, guests follow a dress code and don historical 18th century costumes paired with elegant masks. The lavish evening starts at 8 p.m. with appetizers, dinner and live performances that reflect the decadence of the era. Later in the night, the atmosphere shifts into a disco party. There are three packages you can choose from, two of which include costume fittings and rentals as well as exclusive entertainment from international artists and commedia dell'arte. To receive a formal invitation from the Russolo family, visit carnival-in-venice.eu. ■





©SIX THE MUSICAL

From the Stage to *Real Life*

By Tamala Malerk



“*Six*”

By Toby Marlow and Lucy Moss | England

“All you Wanna do” is hire a babysitter and see this musical that has swept London and Broadway by storm. It is all about Henry VIII’s six wives who take control of their narrative, replacing their one line in a silly poem as they are “Divorced, beheaded and LIVE!”

SHOW LOCATIONS IN 2025: U.K., Ireland and Spain.
Go to sixthemusical.com to learn more.

***In real life:** Visit the Tower of London where Anne Boylen and many others were beheaded. Make your way to Sudeley Castle in Winchcombe, which was the castle of Catherine Parr. Hever Castle was home to Anne Boleyn and a divorce gift from Henry VIII to Anne of Cleves.*



“*Romeo and Juliet*”

By William Shakespeare | Verona, Italy

Over the course of three days, Romeo is heartbroken over Rosaline, falls in love with Juliet, marries Juliet and both lovers are (spoiler) dead by the end of the story due to a generations-long family feud between the Capulets and Montagues.

SHOW LOCATIONS IN 2025: The musical, opera and ballet will show in cities across Europe including Munich, Venice, Warszawa, Prague and Berlin, plus numerous venues across the U.K.

***In real life:** Shakespeare based this tragedy off of Luigi da Porta’s “A Recently Re-Discovered Story of Two Noble Lovers with Their Pitiful Death Occurred at the Time of Bartolomeo Della Scala” and there are several places in Verona you can visit based off these tales: See Juliet’s tomb, statue and balcony before visiting Romeo’s house and stepping inside the Verona Cathedral where Romeo learned of Juliet’s death.*

“The Phantom of the Opera”

By Andrew Lloyd Webber | France

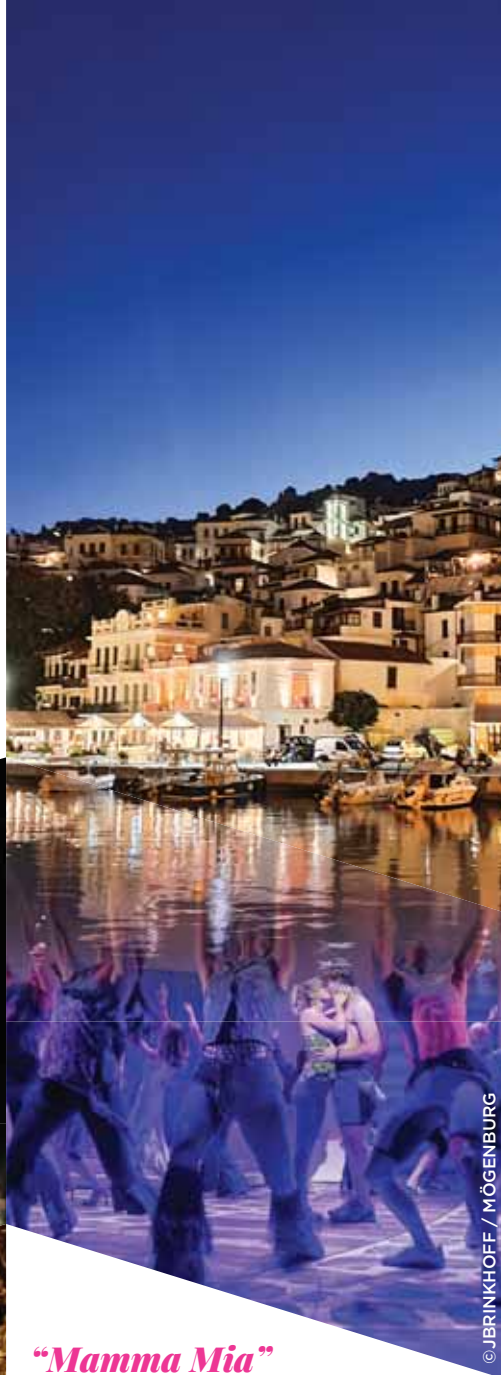
Bring your angel of music and dance your way to this rock opera, which is the second-longest-running musical in the world. Backstabbing, romance, ballet and murder occur as Christine Daae is thrust into stardom, guided by the tragic figure, the Phantom of the Opera.

SHOW LOCATIONS IN 2025: See the show in cities across Europe including London, Antwerp, Prague and Madrid. To find a venue near you, go to thephantomoftheopera.com.

In real life: You can visit Palais Garnier in Paris where most of the musical takes place and snap a picture of Box 5, the Phantom's reserved area, while you are there.

© JOHAN PERSSON / HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE

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“Cabaret”

By Joe Masteroff | Germany

“Maybe This Time” you’ll luck out and get to catch this show live. The story revolves around nightclub singer, Sally Bowles, and the nightlife scene of 1929–1930 Berlin amidst the rise of the Nazi regime. Doomed romances, catchy showtunes and political drama set the stage for this Tony award-winning musical.

SHOW LOCATIONS IN 2025: Catch it at the Playhouse Theater in London and at the Tipi Am Kanzleramt in Berlin (note the Berlin show is in German).

In real life: The musical is based on the actual experiences of British writer Christopher Isherwood, who lived in the Schöneberg district of Berlin from 1929–1933. There is an English-language tour of the neighborhood on Saturdays where you can learn all about the decadent nightlife of the era. Go to isherwoods-neighbourhood.com to learn more. ■



© XAMAX

“Mamma Mia”

By Catherine Johnson | Greece

“Mamma Mia, here we go again” as Sophie tries to figure out the identity of her biological father in time for her upcoming wedding. Abba fans around the world will enjoy this musical.

SHOW LOCATIONS IN 2025: Occurring in the U.K plus an international tour so you can catch the show in cities such as Porto, Paris, Milan and Oxford. For the full list, go to mamma-mia.com/uk-and-international-tour.

In real life: While the musical takes place on a fictional Greek island, Kalokairi, you can visit some of the filming locations of the 2008 film adaptation. Skopelos is the real island Kalokairi is based on. Other locations include Damouchari in Pelion and Skiathos.

If you are a lover of the theatre stationed here in Europe, you are in for a real showstopper. Not only can you see these famous plays set across the continent, but you can also visit the locations that inspired these fantastic shows.

Uncovering Life in POMPEII



By Kat Nickola

"Mom! It's a hippocampus." My 11-year-old son is pointing at a faded fresco of a wild creature with a horse head and snake tail. "Just like Rainbow in Percy Jackson."

I stare at the wall inside what had been a home in ancient Pompeii. "Oh, yes!" I've finally made the connection. He is obsessed with author Rick Riordan's Percy Jackson series, and if I recall correctly, they ride these creatures in the sea at some point.

It isn't the first time he taps into his knowledge of ancient gods. We spot other frescoes in the many excavated houses; we examine floor mosaics and marvel at the remains of a temple.

Slim Jim, my dog, is getting restless in his carrier on my back. We head outside of the villa where he can walk around on his leash. On the main street, the **decumanus maximus**, we spot a fountain and refill our water bottles. It is a hot summer day, so we stay hydrated and take lots of snack breaks in the shade.

Visiting Pompeii is a long hoped-for trip with my son. Riordan's books opened him up to a world of Greek and Roman mythology and made reading less of a struggle. Being able to walk in the footsteps of that ancient period becomes a confirmation of his personal accomplishment.

We are staying at the **Hotel Villa dei Misteri**, which has a great pool to cool off in after a day of travel and dusty exploration of ruins. It is within walking distance to the archaeological park's western entry gate at the ancient **Porta Marina**, meaning we can conveniently enter without needing to worry about transportation. I booked our dated "Ingresso Mattina Plus" tickets ahead of time via a link to TicketOne from the official website at pompeisites.org so we don't have to wait in line or to keep up with a tour. People under 18 are free but still need a ticket.

©KAT NICKOLA

Exploring the site on our own feels exciting. We use the basic park map and spot enough signs to find our way around and understand whether we are in a home, a business or a religious center. However, the details are lacking. For us, the discovery is part of the adventure. My son watched numerous documentaries and read significantly about Pompeii before coming, so he loves playing archaeologist and finding curious little nooks.

He grabs my phone and starts narrating a tour video. "So, this is the bakery. Here is the grindstone..." Slim Jim and I follow along immersing ourselves into the daily lives of the ancient Romans. Having the dog along gives us an extra-casual feeling and we don't worry about seeing it all. We admire the rutted streets, take pictures on the crosswalks and pretend to sell food at the vendor stalls.

After exploring the length of the decumanus maximus, we find ourselves at the other end of the park and pop into the **amphitheater** to briefly play gladiator. It's hot so we stop in the shade of a big pine tree for a break before heading inside the cooler **Palestra Grande** where artifacts like gold jewelry, tiny glass jars and charred loaves of bread pique our interest.

Slim Jim must ride in his carrier when inside the museum. Only pups 10kg or smaller may enter the Pompeii Archaeological Park. They must be kept on a leash the entire time and carried when taken inside a building. There are stray dogs and cats that call the park home; we just steered clear of their space.

After the museum, we walk to the northern part of the park where the larger villas have been uncovered. Inside, colorful frescos and floor mosaics speak to the opulence of the time. In the **Macellum**, we happen upon one of Pompeii's famous body casts; it feels a little disturbing, so we do not pursue finding more.

Pompeii is a massive archaeological park, and we stay all day. There are plenty of places to refill a water bottle, but food is scarce outside of the extremely crowded food court. I am glad to have packed a picnic lunch and snacks.

In the **House of the Faun**, we admire the famous floor mosaic of Alexander the Great and the small statue in the garden that the home is named for. Late in the day, we continue to walk northward out of the city through the **Porta Ercolano**. This shady road leads past intricate tombs to two massive villas included in our 'plus' ticket.

We finish the day at the **Villa dei Misteri**, where some of the most impressive painted rooms really give us insight into what these folks enjoyed.



"We admire the rutted streets, take pictures on the crosswalks and pretend to sell food at the vendor stalls."



"Mom, look, there's a satyr like Grover," my son says. The interpretation board in Room 5 tells us that the large paintings are from around 70 B.C. only about 150 years prior to the eruption of Mount Vesuvius.

When the volcano erupted in 79 B.C., Pompeii and the nearby village of Herculaneum were buried under pyroclastic flows and ashfall that both destroyed everything and preserved a glimpse into life in a Roman town. Ironically, there is no better way to uncover what those lives were like than to walk the abandoned streets of Pompeii and roam its undisturbed ruins. ■



Remembrance and Reflection at **AUSCHWITZ**

By Zoe Nickola

Being at Auschwitz hit me hard. It was a place where so many people lived a fate worse than death, but it felt inexplicably familiar. It looked exactly like an Army barracks, and as a military kid it was incredibly strange and a little scary to feel almost at home in that space, especially with the sun out and flowers growing.

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SEE OUR AD ON PAGE #2

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Dr. Charles A. Smith is an American-trained dentist in Heidelberg and Stuttgart. A Metlife/Preferred Tricare provider, he provides care for the entire family. He is a graduate of the University of Buffalo School of Dental Medicine and an LVI Fellow of the prestigious Las Vegas Institute for Advanced Dental Studies. He provides advanced services such as Smile Makeovers, INVISALIGN, traditional orthodontics, TMJ, implants, and Full Mouth Reconstruction, as well as routine services including cleaning, periodontal treatment, fillings, pediatrics, crowns and root canals.

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SEE OUR AD ON PAGE #67



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I attend Bertha von Suttner IGS, a German high school, and in ninth grade we took a class trip to the **Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau** after spending an entire semester discussing Nazi Germany. We went over the history of World War II in previous years and would cover it in even more personal ways over the next few years as well. In my German school it was presented in a way that says, “this is something that happened in your past and we are never going to forget.”

While at the original Auschwitz camp we had a guide, and they really helped explain what we were seeing and provided a deeper meaning. In the museum, one of the exhibits was a big room full of stuff collected from the prisoners. It was intense to see how inhumanely they were treated, and, like livestock, everything these people had was used. We saw how their hair was cut and woven into blankets for SS soldiers. There was a wall full of baby dolls, and another space full of kids’ shoes. It was horrendous to see, and it made me think about how humanity has failed so many times in the past.

Being at Auschwitz that first day hit me hard, and there’s a point when you just can’t understand it, so you start to block it out. You feel like there was no way that a person could do this to another person. But being in the place where these atrocities did happen, made it so real and insane. It’s terrifying to see how easily we can become desensitized to that kind of thing.

There is a large record book of all the people that were there. It spans an entire room. I looked up my last name, and it was in there. Almost everyone in my class could find a familiar name. It showed just how deeply scarring this place was for our German history.

I think you can never understand what happened there unless you experience the place firsthand.

Later, we walked through the original front gate of Auschwitz under the words, “arbeit macht frei,” which means that, “if you work you will earn your freedom.” It was a reminder of one of the most disturbing thing Nazis did: give people hope. Being there put me in the shoes of people clinging to hope, people never giving up their indomitable human spirit.

A concentration camp is not a tourist destination. It is a memorial. Treat it like you would when visiting an American military cemetery; it is the resting place of over 1.1 million people. It’s a quiet, respectful place where it’s not appropriate to be taking selfies and posting them on social media.

On our second day, my class visited the Birkenau (Auschwitz II) camp. It was one of the three huge installations that made up the entire Auschwitz complex. Unlike the Auschwitz camp, it was very green with a melancholy feel. There are only a few reconstructed huts so you can see how the prisoners lived, and you can see the original gas chambers underground. We walked

“A concentration camp is not a tourist destination. It is a memorial.”



along the train tracks that brought in prisoners, and silently visited the ruins of other buildings. Our guide helped us understand what we were looking at.

Birkenau is also where the big memorial is, so the grounds feel hushed and respected. It is almost beautiful to see how these people, these victims, are being remembered after so many years. There were thousands of Jewish people, but also many other minority groups as well, anyone who was LGBTQ, 'gypsies,' Islamic people, and any people of color.

Auschwitz was used towards the end of the war. There were many other camps used previously, but it was the biggest. What makes it one of the scariest places is that you can tell the Nazi leaders were feeling the pressure of maybe losing the war and being discovered. In 1942, it became the largest extermination center where the "Endlösung der Judenfrage" (the final solution to the Jewish question) was enacted. Auschwitz was where they killed as many people as they could in as little time. It's also where Josef Mengele did his inhumane experiments of prisoners.

I was 14 when I went to Auschwitz, and I think that age was appropriate; a mature 13-year-old would also probably be ok. It's important to learn about the place ahead of time because there is an added layer of emotion when you are actually there. I don't recommend taking younger kids;



however, families could potentially go and not visit inside the buildings. Keep in mind that it is a quiet, somber place where children should not be running around. It is a memorial and a resting place. Kids, no matter what age, will be able to feel the extremely heavy environment and that alone may be a little bit too much for them.

To understand more about Auschwitz, visit lesson.auschwitz.org where organized and thorough e-learning lessons are available.

Entry to the site must be reserved ahead of time from the www.auschwitz.org/en website. Free entry is available, typically in the late afternoon, but I highly recommend purchasing a guided tour. ■

CASTLES OF MESSINIA

By Mic Fleming

LOOKING FOR A GREEK DESTINATION NOT OVERRUN BY TOURISTS YET? THE MESSINIAN PENINSULA IN THE SOUTHERN PELOPONNESE IS WAITING FOR YOU.

For history and castle lovers, it's a winner. Greek castles are nothing like the fairytale towers of the Rhine or French chateaux: they are stone fortresses with rugged, crenelated curtain walls and towers viciously contested, destroyed and rebuilt for centuries. From Homer's time through World War II, these castles have changed hands between Spartans, Byzantines, Ottomans, Franks, Venetians, French and Germans. Here are four of the best. Although you can visit them all in a day, two days would be easier.

Archers, grab your crossbows!

KALAMATA

Kalamata will be your base for discovering Messenia and experiencing ordinary Greek life. A site strategically prized from before the Trojan War, the medieval castle was built by French knights in 1205 returning from the Fourth Crusade and hungry for land. Born in the castle in 1211, William II de Villehardouin became the most successful overlord of the Frankish Principality of Achaea. From here, he set out to meet Louis IX on the Seventh Crusade. The sculpted frame, which once enclosed an image of the Lion of St. Mark over the main gate, signals the Venetian additions. The walk to the castle through the old town is pleasant, and the ramparts make an excellent platform for city-views.

➤ Plan to spend less than an hour. Entry fee is €2.

WHERE TO STAY IN KALAMATA

Example rates reflect double rooms at the end of high season.

BUDGET: The Rex Hotel has a central location. It is a historic building with spare but comfortable rooms. There is a public parking lot. €96 per night.

MID-RANGE: IRA-HPA City Hotel is perfect for exploring Old Town nightlife and shopping streets. It includes a spa, excellent buffet breakfast and private parking nearby. €140 per night.

"FOR HISTORY AND CASTLE LOVERS, IT'S A WINNER."



KALAMATA

SPLURGE: The Grand Hotel is located on the beach promenade with a classy bar, bright rooms and splendid sea views. Private parking. €280 per night for a sea view.

© MIC FLEMING



PYLOS

The last “cruise ships” arrived at Pylos on October 20, 1827. That’s when a combined Russian, French and English fleet sailed into Navarino Bay confronting the Ottoman/Egyptian navy in what would become the last great sea battle of the Age of Sail. The rain of cannon fire from the castle at the southern end of the bay failed to turn them back. In 1572, the Ottomans had captured the castle. Wrested away by the Venetians in the 17th century, it was now back in Turkish hands. Outnumbered by 26 to 82 ships, the allies, nevertheless, bottled up their enemy, blocking all escape. Failing winds, restricted maneuvers and gunnery crews seasoned in the Napoleonic wars won that day. It was a decisive victory in the battle for Greek independence. Today, the ramparts of Pylos contain one of the most attractive castles in Greece.

➤ *Plan for one hour. Entry fee is €6.*

METHONI

Methoni is one of the largest fortifications in the Mediterranean, this is the real deal. The castle’s battlements and barbicans jut into the sea, guarding the western tip of the Messinian Peninsula. The remnants make it easy to envision attackers scaling the walls, fighting through successive gateways and narrow streets, while defenders maximize fields of fire eventually retreating over a causeway to the

last stronghold for a final stand. The last redoubt is the impressive 16th-century Bourtzi Tower, approached through the restored Sea Gate. It is the site of those desperate last stands, gruesome executions, and locked-tight prisoners. If you are bringing kids, send them on a scavenger hunt to count the Venetian lions of St. Mark (there are 14). The small city that was protected within the walls is now only rocks and weeds.

- *Plan for two hours. Entry fee is €12.*
- *There are no concession stands and little shade.*
- *Bring water.*
- *Limited parking is nearby.*

KORONI

The impressive ruins of Koroni Castle announce its turbulent history commanding the eastern end of the Messinian peninsula. Take in the shoreline view around the base of the huge bastions and then walk up through the narrow streets of the village to enjoy the expansive views of the sea. And if you are a “House Hunters” fan, think what it would be like to live in one of the romantically set cottages on the grounds. Started as a Byzantine fortress in the seventh century, the castle was a significant stronghold. It’s easy to envision Frankish crusader knights riding up to the gates in 1205. In the 15th century, the Venetians converted the harbor into a major merchant port and turned the castle into its eastern “eye” guarding its empire. Imagine a full Ottoman sailing fleet attacking



PYLOS RAMPARTS

© MIC FLEMMING



KORONI SEA VIEW

© MIC FLEMMING

from the sea, a horrible massacre of retribution by the Venetians retaking the site, the Russian bombardment in 1770, and retreating Nazis blowing up one of the major bastions they had been using for ammo storage.

➤ *Plan one to two hours. Entry is free. ■*



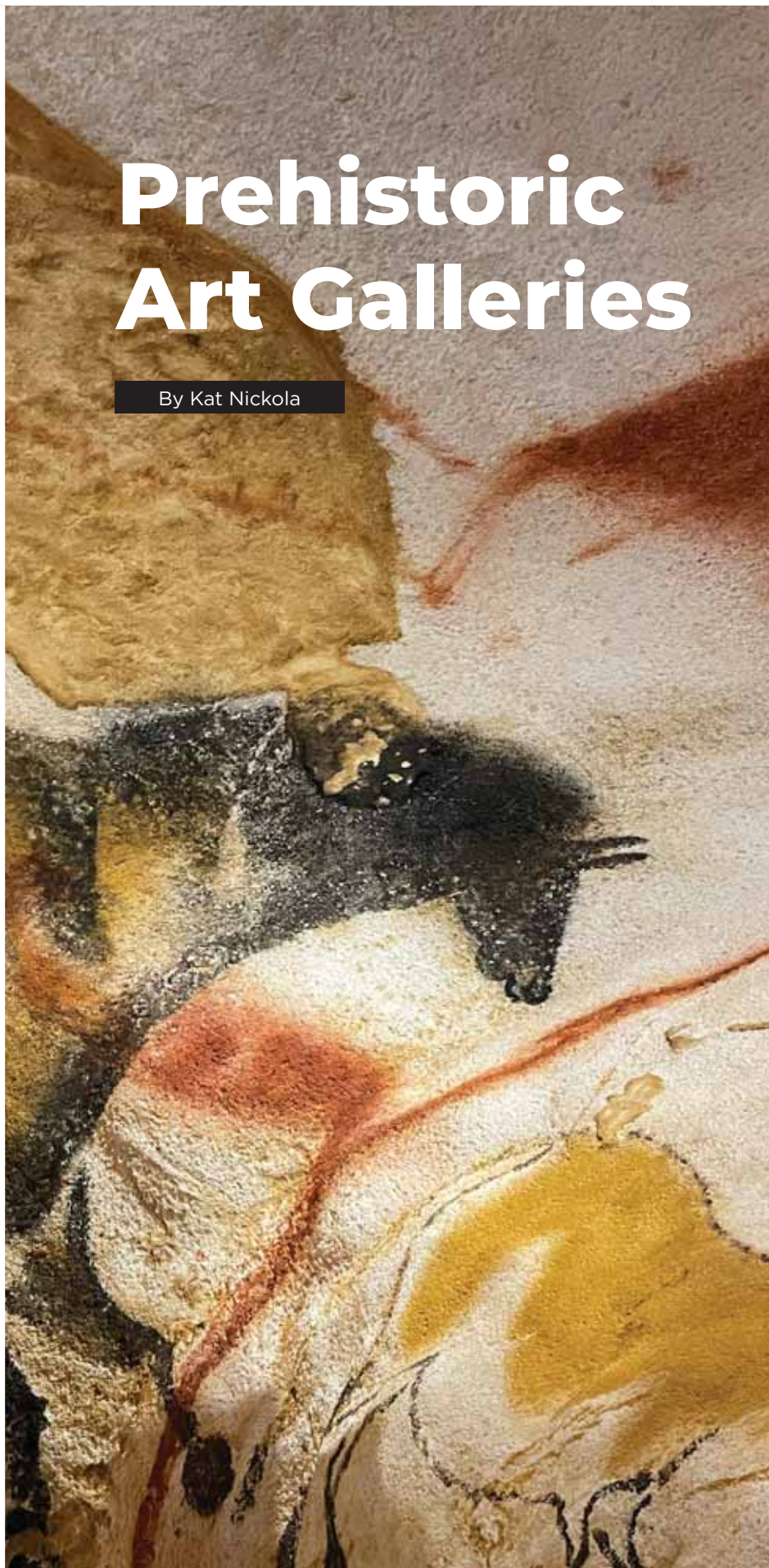
The spotted pony's head emerges from the painting as if the animal is trapped in the act of coming to life, its head forever shaped by the stone on which it is painted. At its rear, another horse faces the opposite direction looking beyond the stone slab canvas.

This is **Pech Merle Cave**, situated above the scenic canyon village of Cabrerets in south-central France. The artist who created the horses 25,000 years ago blew the black manganese pigment through a hollowed tube, possibly a bone, using their hand as a backstop for creating the beautiful defined lines of the horses with the talent of a minimalist illustrator.

In recent years, the prehistoric paintings inside the caves of France and northern Spain have been admired in a different light. Instead of solely focusing on the materials, dating, or subjects—the animals, the handprints, the stick figures—curators are presenting cave paintings to the public as works of art. And rightfully so.

Prehistoric Art Galleries

By Kat Nickola



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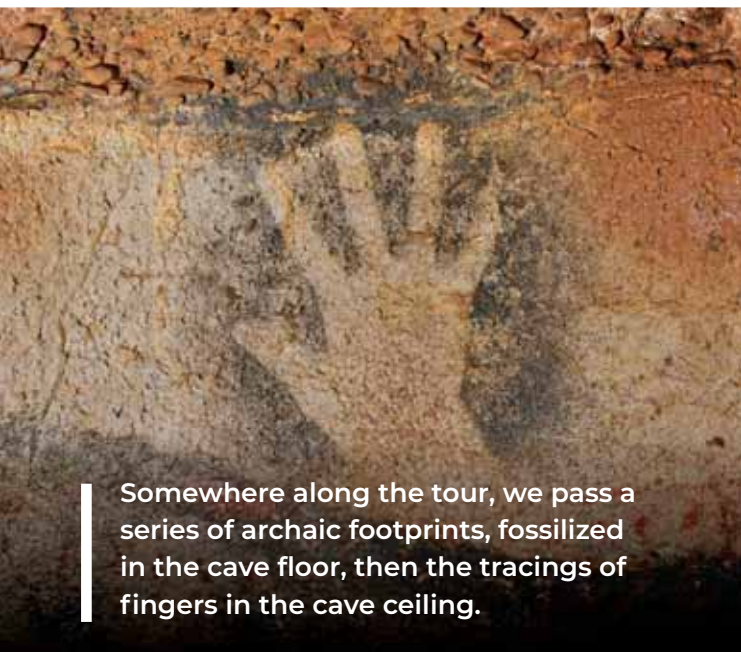
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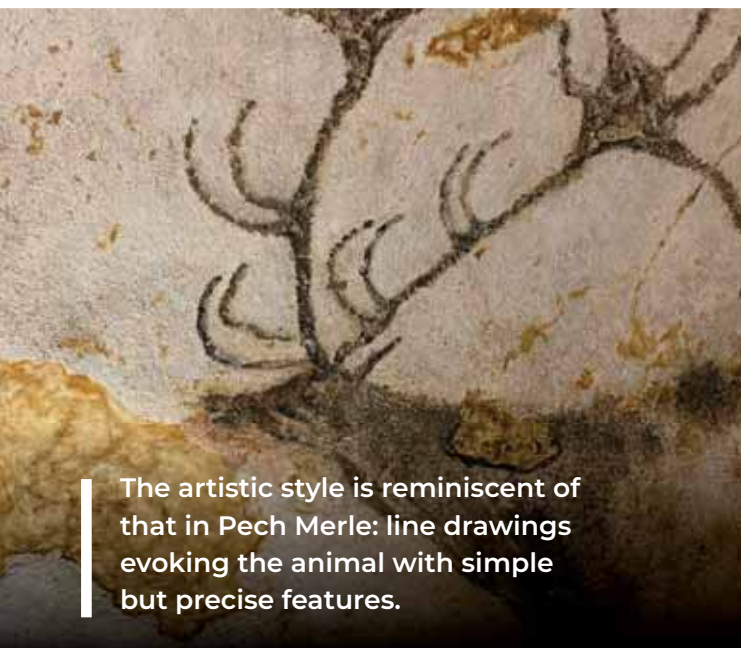
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©THE PECH MERLE PREHISTORY CENTRE

Somewhere along the tour, we pass a series of archaic footprints, fossilized in the cave floor, then the tracings of fingers in the cave ceiling.



The artistic style is reminiscent of that in Pech Merle: line drawings evoking the animal with simple but precise features.



The walls are a masterpiece of colorful animal figures that seem to run further into the cave.

continued from page 56

During my tour in Pech Merle Cave, the guide drew our attention to depth and shading, the choice of rock canvas and the connection between paintings within the cave. We encountered a large panel full of stylized line drawings of horses, bison, mammoths and aurochs. Beyond it, only a few black lines were used to bring the shape of a wall to life. By painting a rounded back and belly, a mammoth emerges from the stone.

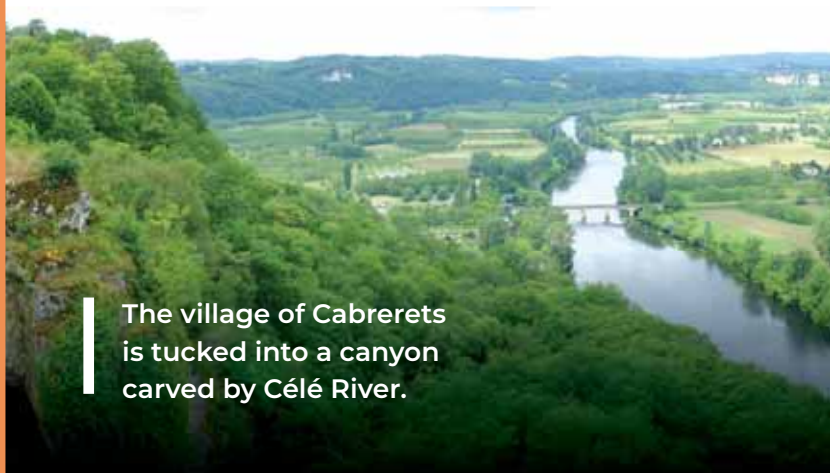
After being analyzed by artists and art historians, it is now accepted that the black line drawings in the cave were likely all made by the same artist. "The Artist" had a keen eye for bringing stone to life, and their reason is heavily debated. Were they participating in rituals, painting art for the sake of art, or are those actually the same thing? Perhaps we are looking at the work of the world's first professional artist.

Somewhere along the tour, we pass a series of archaic footprints, fossilized in the cave floor, then the tracings of fingers in the cave ceiling. It is a visceral reminder of the continuity of humanity; these Ice Age people were just like us.

Roughly 350 caves with paleolithic art have been found in both France and Spain, and many of those prehistoric sites are in this region north of the Pyrenees. Within two hours of Pech Merle are Cougnac Cave, Rouffignac Cave and the famous Lascaux Caves.

Tucked into the Vézère Valley, the **Lascaux Caves** are part of a UNESCO Heritage region preserved for the quantity of prehistoric sites, and certainly worth a visit. The cave itself is no longer accessible to the public, but I take a tour in an exact replica called Lascaux IV which feels like visiting an archaic art gallery. Inside, the walls are a masterpiece of colorful animal figures that seem to run further into the cave. The entire space is covered with red aurochs, yellow and brown horses, black bulls and stags. When a flashlight is used to mimic a flickering oil candle, a row of deer appears to swim with their heads just above the water. The artistic style is reminiscent of that in Pech Merle: line drawings evoking the animal with simple but precise features. But here there are other exquisite artistic leaps like new perspectives and techniques that the tour guide details. It is a popular place for a reason and thousands of people from all over the world visit Lascaux every year.

At Lascaux, about 8,000 years have passed since The Artist painted the horses at Pech Merle, and while it is mind-bogglingly impressive, I appreciate the simplicity and authentic cave experience at the older site.



The village of Cabrerets is tucked into a canyon carved by Célé River.

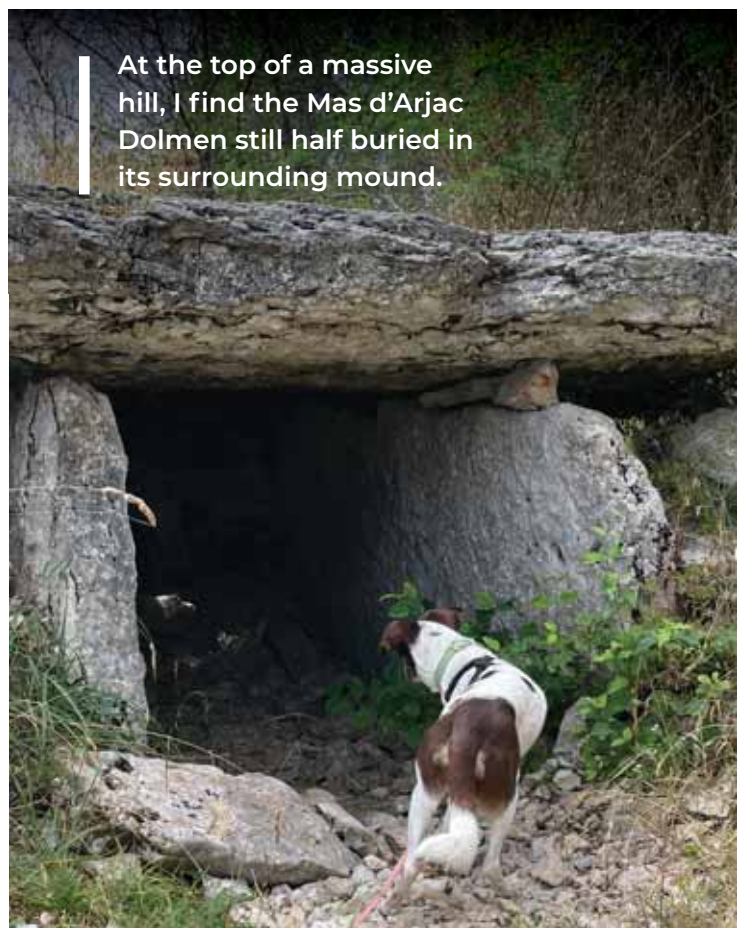
It's cold inside Pech Merle Cave, but outside it's a balmy summer day. Hiking back down to the village of Cabrerets, I look over a landscape of scrubby trees and canyons carved in the local limestone by the same processes that created the caves. During the Ice Age, this area would have been subject to permafrost with stunted vegetation and the ground frozen year-round. As the world thawed roughly 10,000 years ago, melting and floods further shaped the land and one landslide sealed Pech Merle, preserving its artworks.

The village of **Cabrerets** is tucked into a canyon carved by Célé River. It is a bucolic place with sand-colored stone buildings and mossy terra cotta roofs abutting the canyon walls, many of which are dug further underground. It has a lively little town square and great waterside restaurants; a far cry from the massive tourist crowds and overdone infrastructure that made Lascaux a tad overwhelming. My family takes a canoe trip down the river, enjoying the slow pace and the chance to float below the canyon walls.

Later, my dog and I go for a long walk across the river, then up and out of the canyon east of town. We are on a mission to find a dolmen: a megalithic tomb. After the Ice Age, the people of this area, and far beyond, began using stone in a different artistic manner. They propped giant capstones on upright boulders to create a burial structure that was usually covered in a mound. These dolmens are some of the only art or architecture left from people's lives 5,000 years ago.

At the top of a massive hill, I find the **Mas d'Arjac Dolmen** still half buried in its surrounding mound. I swat away spider webs and the pup and I crawl inside. It's large enough for us and maybe another couple of folks to cram in. There are hundreds of prehistoric dolmens like this in France, and it's interesting to think that the art in the caves belowground was already 15,000 years old when it was created.

We stayed for three days in the village of Cabrerets and wish we had planned for longer. While there is much to do – from traversing a cool via ferrata to seeing fossil footprints of pterosaurs and visiting clifftop villages—it's also a place that demands slow travel. I could have spent a week meandering the trails and bike paths, exploring more caves or just sitting at the local café trying regional wines and tasting the area's famous goat cheese and black truffles while pondering the art galleries underground. ■



At the top of a massive hill, I find the **Mas d'Arjac Dolmen** still half buried in its surrounding mound.



My family takes a canoe trip down the river, enjoying the slow pace and the chance to float below the canyon walls.

Planning

Pech Merle Cave
en.pechmerle.com



Lascaux Cave
lascaux.fr/en

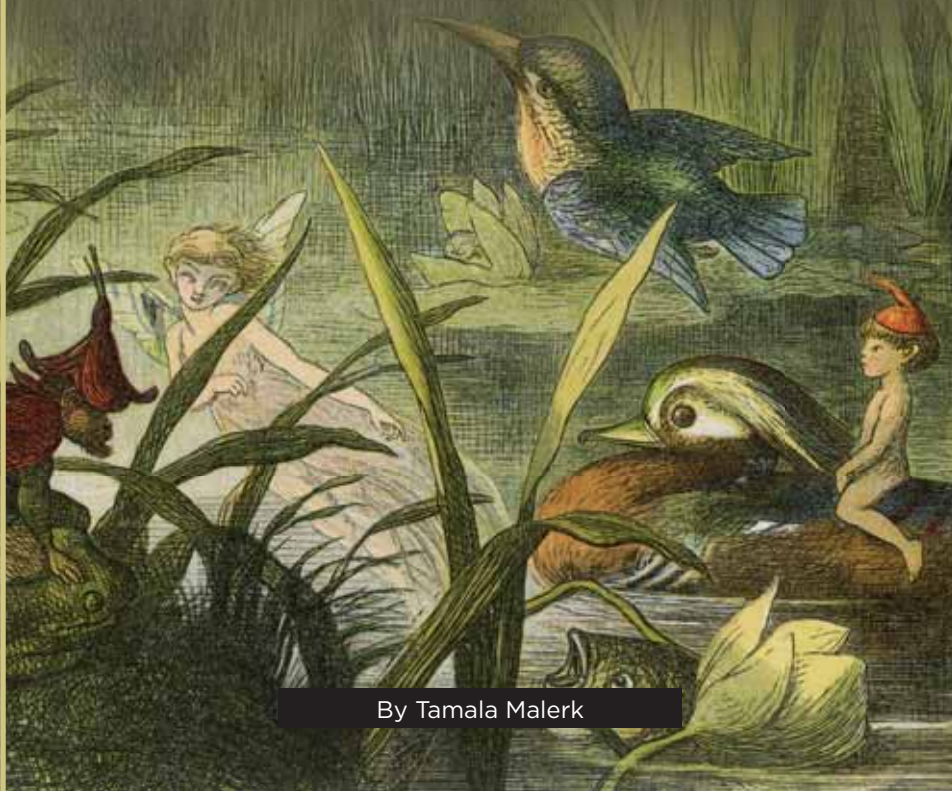


Cabrerets Area
cahorsvalleedulot.com/en



Finding Fairies

IN IRELAND AND THE U.K.



By Tamala Malerk

In 1895 in Ireland, Bridget Cleary was starved, man-handled, had chicken droppings and urine thrown on her and herbs shoved down her throat while being interrogated about being a “changeling,” a person taken and then replaced by a fairy. Despite passing the interrogation, she was still burned alive by her husband as a form of “fairy exorcism.”

Despite happening less than 150 years ago, fairy lore is alive and well in Ireland and the U.K. Today, there are still “fairy forts,” trails, portals and sanctuaries where you might even spot a fairy. Just be wary of getting switched.

WHAT IS A Fairy Fort?

A Fairy Fort is an ancient circular mound, typically made of wood, earth and/or stone as a shelter for its inhabitants. It is believed that fairies protect these mounds, and you can suffer consequences and bad luck for interfering with these forts.

CAN'T MAKE IT TO IRELAND OR SCOTLAND? YOU CAN ESCAPE TO THE WORLD OF FAIRIES THROUGH BOOKS. HERE ARE THREE THAT I RECOMMEND:

1. **“The Burning of Bridget Cleary: A True Story”** by Angela Bourke. Learn more about the story of Cleary in a world where people truly believed she had been fairy-possessed.
2. **“A Court of Thorns and Roses”** series by Sarah J. Maas. Feyre kills a wolf to attempt to provide for her poor and starving family. It turns out the wolf is really a fairy and Feyre winds up entangled in a world of curses, wars, betrayal and romance.
3. **“Wicked Lovely”** series by Melissa Marr. While this is a “young adult” series, adult readers will still adore the story of Aislinn, a mortal girl who must hide her ability to see fairies from the world around her. This becomes even more difficult when she is chosen by the Summer King to potentially be his fairy Summer Queen.



DUNVEGAN CASTLE, SCOTLAND

THE RING OF KERRY, IRELAND

This place is home to sheep, cows and, most importantly, several fairy forts where the fairies reside. The ring is also one of Ireland's most famous cycling routes. Keep your eyes peeled while on your bikes.

CAHERCONNELL STONE FORT, IRELAND

Located in Galway County, this fairy fort has stone walls that give visitors insight into 1,000-year-old architecture. Even if you don't see any fairies, you will see plenty of sheepdogs on-site and you can even pet them.

SOUTH UIST, SCOTLAND

In the Hebrides, South Uist is home to a tall mountain, Beinn Mhòr. This mountain is home to the Loireag, a water fairy known for her spinning abilities. She gets angry if women who work nearby sing the same song twice or sing poorly. So, perhaps avoid humming while exploring the area.

DUNVEGAN CASTLE, SCOTLAND

Located on the Isle of Skye, this castle has the fairy flag, which is a mysterious shawl that the son of an immortal fairy was found wrapped in. The fairy fell in love with a human, birthed a son and had to return to the fairy realm. It is believed she returned to wrap the crying baby in the shawl. Perhaps she will return to soothe a sad infant.



CAHERCONNELL STONE FORT, IRELAND

NORTHWOOD TRAIL, ENGLAND

Known as "England's Fairy Sanctuary," this is 100 acres of woodland where visitors can find fairies, elves and relics. It is about 20 minutes from York. Along the trail, you will find treehouses, a fairy museum, a playground and an eatery that serves food made from regional fare using electricity that is self-sourced.

THE GREEN FAIRY TRAIL, ENGLAND

In Lichfield, this trail is home to the Green Fairies of the trees. They make their homes and doors from recycled and re-purposed materials. The trail takes about 20–30 minutes to walk, so it's perfect for a kids' first fairy-finding mission.

LLYN BARFOG, WALES

This lake, known as the "bearded lake" is one of several lakes in Wales that is believed to be a portal to Annwn, the fairy underworld/other-world. Annwn is a place believed to have food in abundance and no disease. Stars and Stripes cannot be held liable if you attempt to swim through this portal.

LLANGOLLEN, WALES

This is where the U.K.'s largest fairy festival takes place every summer. Kids will love the rides and games. Adults will love the grown-ups-only Fairy Ball; and everyone will love trying to find the real fairies amongst the costumed patrons. In 2025, the festival will take place from Aug 9–10. ■

Europe's Fabulous FOOD HALLS

By Kat Nickola

It's 10 p.m. and my family wanders inside a large steel and glass structure, perusing the options amidst noisy bustling and delicious smells. My son meanders while he munches on a few croquettes. I help my daughter choose an adorable pizzetta with fresh mozzarella and basil while my husband is a few feet away eyeing the pintxos.

We are at the **Mercado de San Miguel** in Madrid, Spain. It's a great place to taste new fare without committing to an entire meal, and the food choices make it a place everyone can agree on. Visiting indoor markets, and especially European food halls, is a staple for our vacations. Not only is it fun to explore the variety, but they are great for both foodies, ordinary eaters and families with varied diets.

Covered markets are often located in historic places where their structures replaced older outdoor farmer's markets. Many were built in the 1800s when industrialization brought higher numbers of people into cities and controlling the hygiene of food sold on the streets was a concern. During this heyday of market hall culture, many were built in steel and glass, a new popular architecture of the time. However, popularity waned following World War II and the advent of grocery stores, supermarkets and fast food. Nonetheless, some market halls remained and saw revitalization beginning in the 1970s with a renewed interest in locally sourced ingredients and cuisine.



MARKTHALLE NEUN



THE COVERED MARKET OXFORD



A STALL SELLING OLIVES IN EL MERCADO DE SAN MIGUEL



"Covered markets are often located in historic places where their structures replaced older outdoor farmer's markets."



©CELIA PHOTO/STOCK.ADOBE.COM



HALA TARGOWA

Today, when traveling, a visit to these markets can make for a really fun dining experience. An independent vendor runs each stall, so you may get a fresh fruit stand beside a minced pie vendor across from a stall selling garden plants. Every market hall is different, too. Many combine a food hall with a shopping market, some only sell food and have stools and tables for seating while others have different morning and evening vendors.

Here are some historic food hall markets worth a visit:

EL MERCADO DE SAN MIGUEL | *Madrid, Spain*

This 100-year-old steel and glass structure is open late into the evening with vendors offering high-quality tapas, local meats and cheeses, and a few places to grab a drink.

THE COVERED MARKET OXFORD | *Oxford, England*

Built in 1770 and one of the oldest markets in England, this place has it all: products from independent local and international traders and food from all over the world.

MARCHÉ DES ENFANTS ROUGES | *Paris, France*

Built in 1615 and the oldest market on this list, this place has a relaxed vibe and is full of fresh produce and a handful of eclectic prepared food stalls.

SANT'AMBROGIO MARKET | *Florence, Italy*

With both an indoor and outdoor section, this market has fresh produce, meats, cheeses and flowers in addition to bakeries and a small restaurant.

DE HALLEN | *Amsterdam, The Netherlands*

While the market here is new, it occupies a historic tram depot from 1902. Inside, head to "De Foodhallen" for lots of international food stalls and cafeteria-style seating.

ENGLISH MARKET | *Cork City, Ireland*

Popular with locals and tourists, this historic multi-level market is known for its artisanal food and soaring wooden arches.

MARKTHALLE NEUN | *Berlin, Germany*

Of Berlin's original 14 market halls built in the 1890s, only three remain and IX (nine, or neun in German) is the best for a grazing lunch and weekly events.

HALA TARGOWA | *Wroclaw, Poland*

This huge open hall, with its red brick Gothic exterior and brutalist concrete interior arches, is mostly grocery vendors and a few worth-the-stop café bars. ■



THE GREAT BRITISH BAKE OFF

By Katie Wells

Get ready bakers and spectators! The beloved white marquee is back up in the garden and 'tis always the season for a plume of sweet castor sugar to fill the air, the sound of a timer ticking down to the last second and very corny jokes. Bake alongside new competitors and create delightful desserts under the gaze of Paul Hollywood's piercing blue eyes and the expertise of Prue Leith. Or simply watch and cheer on your favorites while enjoying the witty commentary of Noel Fielding and Allison Hammond. As one of the most feel-good shows on television, something about U.K. charm makes viewers feel like they are in the tent holding their breath for favorite bakers through all the wins and mishaps.



THE 'BAKE' DOWN

For those who haven't watched the GBBQ, it is filmed from April to June over a 10-week period at the Welford Park Estate in Berkshire, England. It airs in September, just in time to kick-off the holiday season. Around 12 amateur bakers, depending on the year, compete for the title of the U.K.'s "Best Amateur Baker." In each episode, contestants participate in three challenges that become more difficult as the competition progresses with the hope of being deemed that week's "Star Baker." While you cannot visit the tent, you can visit the Estate.

THE THREE CHALLENGES

Signature

This challenge allows bakers to show off their tested, tried and true recipes that they might make for their friends or family. Unique flavor pairings and creative design are a bonus here.

Technical

This challenge displays the baker's technical ability and experience as a baker. Can they assess and execute a recipe with little to no instructions to replicate a version as tasty as Paul or Prue's? Texture, size and uniformity matter as much as taste when being judged. Each of the finished bakes are placed behind the contestant's photo so that the audience knows which one belongs to each baker; however, they remain anonymous to the judges.

Show-Stopper

Arguably the most important challenge, bakers are judged on the "wow" factor of their creations not only in flavor, but also in appearance. These challenges can get elaborate from cake sculpting to mirror-glazing and blowing sugar as if it were glass. Each season there are fantastic fan favorites that often win the coveted handshake of Paul Hollywood. Who could forget Paul Jagger's realistic lion bread or Yan Tsao's banana ramen bowl illusion cake? I personally loved Giuseppe Dell'Annos' Madhatter tea party display from season 12. ■

To try your hand at these marvelous creations, the GBBO has a recipe section on their website, thegreatbritishbakeoff.co.uk and includes a difficulty rating as well as the picture of the contestant or Judge of whose recipe it is. Try this easy spring biscotti recipe adapted from Prue Leith's.

PISTACHIO AND LEMON BISCOTTI

INGREDIENTS

For the dough

- 1/3 cup caster sugar
- Finely grated zest of 1 large lemon
- 1 cup plain flour
- 1/2 teaspoon baking powder
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 large egg, lightly beaten
- 7–10 drops pistachio extract, to taste
- 3/4 cup pistachios, roughly chopped

To decorate

- 3.5 ounces white chocolate, broken into pieces
- Green chocolate coloring
- Yellow chocolate coloring



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METHOD

Preheat the oven to 350° F and line a baking tray with parchment paper.

Step 1

In a mixing bowl add the caster sugar and lemon zest. Massage the zest into the sugar until it is pale yellow and slightly moist. Add in the flour and baking powder. Mix with a spoon until combined.

Step 2

In a separate bowl, mix together the oil, lightly beaten egg and pistachio extract. Add in the crushed pistachios and mix gently for about 5–10 seconds.

Step 3

Combine all of the ingredients together and shape the dough into a cylinder measuring about 33 cm long. Place it on the lined baking tray and partially bake the dough for 20 minutes. Remove it from the oven to cool slightly, then cut into slices about 1.5 cm thick. Separate and lay the slices on their sides. Reduce the oven temperature to 325° F and pop the tray back into the oven for five minutes. Turn them over and bake for another five minutes until they appear light gold. Remove and let cool.

Step 5

Melt the white chocolate in a heatproof bowl over a pan of gently simmering water. Stir until smooth. Remove the bowl from the heat and divide the chocolate into two separate bowls. Color one green and one yellow (you only need a couple of drops). Use a spoon or butter knife to drizzle the chocolate over the biscotti (you can also use heat-resistant piping bags).

Step 6

Let the chocolate set before serving and enjoy!



Taste the Culture

AT THE PIEROGI FESTIVAL IN KRAKÓW

By Tamala Malerk

Every year, local pierogi makers gather in the Small Square (Mały Rynek) to compete for the title of best pierogi in Kraków. This year, for the 23rd time, you have the opportunity to taste the competition for yourself from Aug. 10th through Aug. 16th, 2025.

For those who are unfamiliar, a pierogi is a Central or Eastern European version of a dumpling, and they are particularly popular in Poland. They are typically savory and served as an appetizer or in a soup. They can also be sweet, too. However, at the annual Pierogi Festival, staying conventional isn't the goal.

At the festival, you'll find savory pierogies, sweet pierogies, steamed

Asian-style pierogies and even themed pierogies. At the 2023 festival, Barbie pink pierogies were in fashion. Non-conventional pierogi ingredients that have been featured in the past include salmon, strawberry, venison, carbonara, lamb, duck with mango, Mexican chicken curry and smoked cheese.

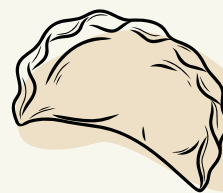
Not only will you be able to try a large, delectable variety of pierogies you can also enjoy live music, beer, other local delicacies, artisan demonstrations, culinary workshops, shopping opportunities and folk dance performances.

"Best pierogi" is judged in two different competitions: one by a panel of qualified judges and one that is essentially an audience favorite. The judges' winner receives a small statue of St. Jacek, who brought the pierogi to Poland to

help feed the poor. The winner of the crowd favorite receives a small statue of King Casimir the Great.

Admission to the festival is free. Here are some tips to get the most out of your experience:

- **Bring cash.** Each pierogi costs about 4 Polish złoty (about 1 euro).
- **Go during quieter times to avoid the crowds.** This includes mid-mornings or late afternoons.
- **Don't fill up at one spot.** It might be tempting to get a lot of pierogies once you find a super delicious one, but you may not have room for other amazing flavors.
- **Cast your vote** for your favorite pierogi so it can claim the title.



CAN'T MAKE IT TO KRAKÓW?

Check out this pierogi recipe to make these delicious treats from the comfort of your own home.

This is for a basic potato and cheese pierogi, but feel free to stuff your pierogi with whatever your heart desires. Be inspired by the examples from the festival. This recipe makes roughly 40 small pierogies.

INGREDIENTS

For the dough

- 2 cups flour
- One large egg
- ¼ cup butter (room temperature, not melted)
- ½ cup sour cream (optional)
- ½ teaspoon salt (optional)

For the filling

- 1 cup potatoes (mashed)
- 1 cup cheese (for ease) or quark (for authenticity)
- ½ cup chopped onion (optional)
- Salt and pepper (to taste)
- Other seasonings: onion powder, garlic powder, etc. (optional)

INSTRUCTIONS

Make the dough

1. Combine the dough ingredients. If you choose not to use sour cream, you may need less flour.

2. Roll the dough until it becomes a sticky ball and then knead until it is less sticky but still moist.
3. Wrap in plastic wrap and refrigerate for 30 to 60 minutes (up to 48 hours).

Make the filling

1. Boil the potatoes until fork tender. (Do this before preparing the dough for best timing).
2. Mash the cooked potatoes. (You can also use instant mashed potatoes).
3. Combine potatoes, cheese/quark, seasoning and onions (or whatever you choose to fill with).

Assemble

1. Roll the dough out to ⅛ inch thickness.
2. Cut out 2-inch circles from the dough. Use a small jar lid for ease if you don't have a cutter.
3. Fill each circle with 1 ½ teaspoon filling. Fold over the dough and pinch the edges to seal.

You can now boil or pan-fry your pierogies. If boiling, only boil about 10 at a time to give room to expand. Once they float in the water, they are done. If you choose to pan-fry them, use medium heat with butter until pierogi are golden brown. ■



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Unraveling Scottish Tartans

While the kilt may be an iconic part of Scottish identity, the tartan patterns are what sets this fabric apart.

By Kat Nickola



Historic Tartan

Prior to the 1700s, in Scotland, the word “tartan” described the warm, wool homespun fabric worn primarily as work clothes in the Highlands. Wool has been used in Scotland since Neolithic settlers brought domesticated sheep roughly 6,000 years ago.

The Romans called people from this area Caledonians. A few rare pieces of evidence may point to their garments having distinct patterns. A written account by historian Diodorus says they wore cloaks “in which are set checks, close together and of varied hues” (V:30). In Morocco, a statue of Emperor Caracalla’s triumphs depicts a Caledonian with patterned trousers.



Over time people in Scotland used their wool tartan fabric, patterned or plain, for various clothing like trews (an older version of men’s trouser), cloaks, tunics and eventually for kilts. Made with a belted plaid (pronounced played), the first kilts evolved sometime in the 1500s.

The versatile plaid, which means blanket, was used for many different garments like women’s arasoids and shepherds’ wraps.

They used tartan fabric, and many were patterned.

Political Tartan

In the 1700s, wearing the patterned tartan cloth signified allegiance to the Catholic Stuart monarchs who originated in Scotland. Rebels known as Jacobites (for James VII) actively fought against the Protestant Hanoverian monarchy who had taken over. After a decisive defeat at the Battle of Culloden in 1746, Highlanders were banned from wearing specific regional clothes like kilts, trews and great coats, all of which were made with patterned tartan fabric.

Instead of staying a generic term for wool fabric, the word tartan changed usage to mean the unique patterns on the fabric. It became politicized, with the English throne using tartan patterns and kilts as a symbol of the Scottish clan system they claimed to have subdued. As Scottish immigrants moved, or were forcibly relocated, to the U.S. and Canada, they brought their wool traditions with them and the word plaid (instead of tartan) became synonymous with the checkered patterns.

Modern Tartan

While the ban on tartan clothes only lasted 26 years, its cultural impact continued. Scottish national identity became entwined with the cloth patterns. In the late 1700s, people began to create and wear their own family patterns. Since then, many unique tartan designs have been affiliated with specific clan heritage, and in 2008 The Scottish Register of Tartans was established to preserve pattern information.

While the specific clan patterns may be an invention of the modern era there is no reason to assume clans didn’t have their own patterns passed down from generation to generation, and the current use is continuing that heritage.

Today, you will find tartan clothing sold to tourists and locals alike all over Scotland. It comes as kitsch on keychains and phone covers, but also as upscale attire in scarves, dresses, jackets and kilts. American visitors on genealogy trips often find themselves seeking out their own clan tartan. But don’t worry if you can’t trace your heritage to Scotland, there are plenty of non-affiliated tartan patterns to choose from. ■



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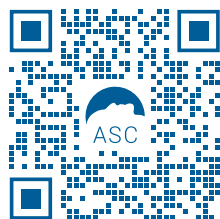
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