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EDITOR'S LETTER



Kat Nickola
Lead Writer-Editor
Stars and Stripes Europe

*“People don’t take trips,
trips take people.”*

— John Steinbeck

This year, experience Europe from an unfamiliar perspective. Do something different. Our motivation for this edition was to take you off the beaten tourist track, perhaps just enough to encounter a trip that takes you somewhere new.

In my memory bank, it’s the unique experiences that eclipse all those ‘check the box’ trips, so I’m a big fan of branching out. Have you been to a German sauna? Taken a whisky tour in Scotland? Ferried along the coast of Norway? Dyed wool in a Celtic home? Try something new.

Delving into unfamiliar cultures is often eye-opening and enriching. Maybe this year you’ll be fascinated by the architecture at the Alhambra or learn to haggle for souvenirs in Luxor. Unfamiliarity isn’t always far away, either. Perhaps it simply means trying public transit for the first time or tasting escargot.

One of the best ways to truly immerse yourself in a place is by heading out into the natural world. Maybe this summer you could go rock climbing in the Dolomites, hike along the Grand Balcon in Chamonix or camp along the coast in Türkiye. There is so much natural beauty that makes living here a joy.

Two exciting events are also taking place in our backyard this year. First, 2024 marks the 80th anniversary of the D-Day landings on the coast of Normandy during World War II. Second, the Olympics will be in Paris! Whether you visit the beaches or follow the torch, our Stars and Stripes team has you covered.

Let a trip take you somewhere new this season!



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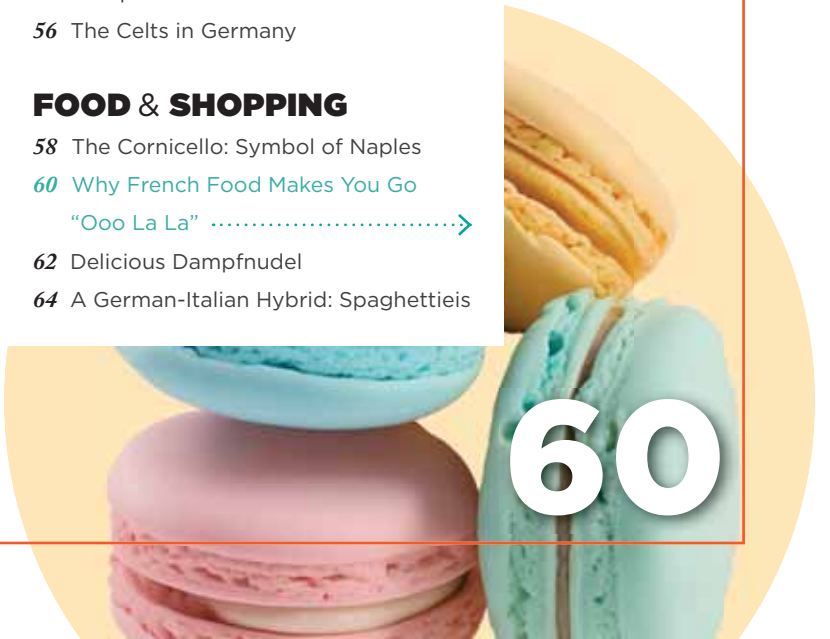
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**In comparison to the Manufacturer's Recommended Retail Price, where applicable.

THE DOLOMITES

Experience the Best of the Italian Alps

By Kat Nickola

Rising like jagged teeth above the bucolic high mountain fields of northern Italy are the iconic Dolomites. A favorite spot for mountaineers and rock climbers, the Dolomites are an outdoor sports paradise.

The Dolomites' limestone mountain range lies within the southern portion of the Alps and is largely protected by national and regional parks that dot the area. The beautiful and unique geological landscape was recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2009.

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HIKING

The choice for hikes in the Dolomites is endless. The Giau Pass near the town of Cortina d'Ampezzo is an especially serene area of mountain pastures surrounded by high peaks. At the trailhead, there is an easy family-friendly stroll into the pass or an intermediate hike up onto the rocky Mondeval plateau where a Mesolithic burial was found to be 7,500 years old. For an all-day adventure, the Cinque Torri loop passes a World War I open-air museum and continues around the five peaks with open views into the surrounding green valleys.

Another iconic Dolomite hike is the Three Peaks loop beginning at the Auronzo Refuge, then getting up close and personal with the scree slopes below three of the most distinctive jagged mountaintops in the area. For the committed backpacker, try the 12-day, 125 km Alta Via 1 which traverses the Dolomites from north to south. Starting at Lake Braies, this hike can be tackled by staying at mountain refuges along the route. Be sure to book lodging ahead of time and visit www.dolomiti.org for hike details.

CLIMBING

If you'd rather be climbing the rocks, basing yourself in the valleys near Cortina d'Ampezzo is ideal. There are a huge variety of sport climbing crags, especially in the Falzarego Pass, with short walk-in times that mean you can be in town for pizza and a beer every evening. Difficulty levels range from beginner routes to a high of 9a, with most climbs in the 8a-8c range. If you're more of a big wall climber, the iconic north face of the Cima Grande, at 450 meters and 16 pitches, is a prestigious route to attempt. Other options abound, visit mountainproject.com to find your crag.

During WWI, the Dolomites formed a portion of the incongruous front line between the Italian and Austro-Hungarian forces. Battles were fought in these high mountain





passes and scaling the peaks became a goal for both sides. It was a deadly war, but those fighting in the Dolomites faced the insurmountable challenge of bringing equipment and men into an area prone to rock slides, avalanches and steep cliffs. To tackle the landscape, via ferrata routes were built.

Trying a via ferrata is another experience born in the Dolomites, and a must-do when visiting. Meaning "iron path," these mountain routes involve iron cables, steps, ladders and other equipment permanently affixed to the mountain. These paths were created during WWI, but are now used, maintained and created for sport use. For those without their own climbing gear, numerous outfitters in the area offer tours. The German language website www.via-ferrata.de is a thorough resource for finding routes.

FARM STAYS

Both German and Italian are spoken throughout the Dolomites as the area is part of the historical Tyrol region. Now divided between Austria and Italy, Tyrol was a unified region while part of the Holy Roman Empire of the late Middle Ages when it was ruled by various counts.

Nowadays, the high Dolomite pastures and valleys are dotted with peaceful farms and small villages. Agrotourism is popular and booking a farm stay immerses you within the landscape in a way that a hotel can't offer. Many farm stays have small apartments inside a large house on a working farm where you can visit the cows, pet the barn cats and hike right out the front door. The Roter Hahn (www.roterhahn.it) organization has a locally run website that specializes in connecting tourists with farm stays throughout Tyrol. ■





The Legendary
Alhambra

By Kat Nickola

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“*From this palace, sultans led the Emirate of Granada through a time of peace and prosperity.*”

Perched atop a foothill of the Sierra Nevada mountains in southern Spain is the legendary Alhambra. From this palace, sultans led the Emirate of Granada through a time of peace and prosperity. It is a masterpiece of Islamic architecture.

The name Alhambra means “red fortress.” It is a massive complex of palaces, governmental buildings and gardens that were built and remodeled between the 13th to 15th centuries. The Nasrid Palaces are the highlight of a visit and feature room after room of breathtaking carved arches, delicately decorated domes and peaceful courtyard pools and fountains. Open spaces and gardens play a key role in the overall design of the Alhambra and those in the Generalife, the summer palace, are the most expansive. The oldest part of the Alhambra complex is the Alcazaba fortress. It is still primarily a ruin, but the towers are accessible and give a sweeping view over the city.

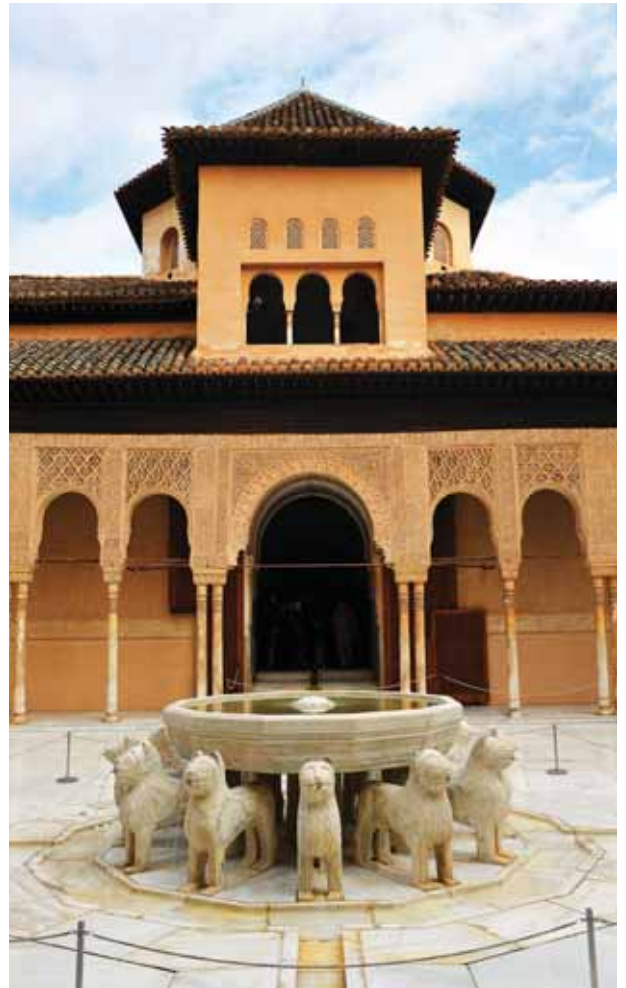
In the 8th century, the Umayyad Caliphate was the first Muslim state to spread far west into northern Africa and the Iberian Peninsula, which they named al-Andalus. Over time, the caliphate and its successors, sometimes referred to as the Islamic Empire, fractured. In the 11th century, al-Andalus came to be ruled by subsequent smaller caliphates based out of North Africa. This historical connection to Berber traditions would lead to the Alhambra’s intricate Moorish architectural style. As those caliphates crumbled, a power vacuum paved the way for Ibn al-Ahmar to become Muhammad I, the first Sultan of the Emirate of Granada.



This newly independent country needed a capital. In 1238, the Sultan climbed to the top of a hill called “al-Hamra,” or “the red one” and declared it the location for his palace. A city grew up around the palace and Granada became a place of culture and learning. While the rest of Europe was dragging itself through the Dark Ages, in Granada, poetry and science progressed. There were elite schools for medicine, writing and law.

In January 1492, however, the final sultan surrendered Granada to the Catholic Monarchs. It was not defensible against the power of the Reconquista led by King Ferdinand II of Aragon and Queen Isabella I of Castille. Granada was the final Islamic state to fall to the Spanish, leaving the King and Queen time to turn their efforts toward overseas exploration and conquest. They gave Christopher Columbus support for his voyages in April. From then, the Alhambra was owned by Spanish royals and nobles until Granada was occupied by Napoleon’s army. In 1870, it was declared a national monument and has been the subject of restoration and archaeological research.

When visiting the Alhambra, look out for marvels of engineering that would have been unheard of in most of Europe in the Middle Ages. In the Court of the Lions, there are four rivers and four gardens symbolizing paradise. The water converges on a fountain perched atop the backs of 12 lions. The scientific planning it took to bring water to the palace is still considered an engineering marvel. A dam on the Darro River diverted water into the Acequia Real, a six-kilometer canal taking



the water to the hillside. A series of waterwheels then raises it up, and a network of plumbing keeps the water flowing through the gardens, pools, and palace rooms. The brick-lined canal can still be seen in the Generalife gardens along with brick-arched roofs of ‘ajibes’, or fresh-water cisterns.

In the halls of the Nasrid Palaces, look up into the domed ceilings to see the intricate ‘muqarnas.’ These geometric elements resemble honeycomb fractals that protrude down like stalactites from the dome. There is mathematical art everywhere. The horseshoe arches, or ‘alfiz’, are supported by columns. The ‘mashrabiya’ lattice over windows allows hot air to rise and exit while keeping the room cool and shady. Tiled mosaics called ‘alicatados’ dominate the walls of the Mexuar Hall and show off the skill held by local craftsmen.

The Alhambra is located in the city of Granada, Spain. Leave an entire day to explore the palatial complex, and book tickets ahead of time. There are many third-party websites offering tickets and tours. To book at the official page and explore on your own visit: www.alhambra-patronato.es/en. The Alhambra General ticket can be used all day, but you will need to select a specific entry time for the Nasrid Palaces. Your ticket allows you to access each palace a single time, but you can come and go from the complex. There is a small café inside and plenty of restaurants near the two entrances. Be sure to dress for the weather and stay hydrated. ■

SAILING TO STOCKHOLM

WITH JASPER THE DOG

By Samantha Juhan, Creator of @helloitsjasper

Stockholm is a stunning waterfront city spread throughout 14 islands and there is no better way to experience this city than by taking a cruise. Since we travel everywhere with our furry friend, Jasper, we were delighted to discover that Viking Line hosts a dog-friendly cruise between Helsinki, Finland and Stockholm, Sweden. Guests can embark from either city, but we opted to begin our cruise in Helsinki and sail to Stockholm.



Walking onto the ship, we weaved our way through the bustling crowd to find assistance. "You're on the captain's level," a crewmember informed us. Dumbfounded, we entered the elevator and ascended to the top level. Pulling out our special access key and fully expecting to be rejected, we watched in awe as the locked hallway labeled captain's quarters popped open with a click.

"This is our room?" We exclaimed in shock. Zooming past us, Jasper leaped onto the king-sized bed and began to make himself at home. Champagne, soft drinks, and snacks filled the complimentary

mini bar situated beside our flat-screen television. The room was a grand size and adorned with a private balcony. Feeling the ship move, we wandered outside to bask in the passing view. Raising his snout in the air, Jasper sniffed the welcoming sea breeze as our journey to Stockholm began.



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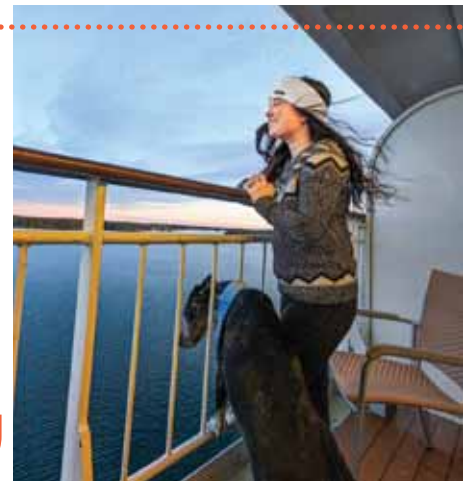
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Jasper sniffed the welcoming sea breeze as our journey to Stockholm began.



Glama Stan Old Town



Changing of the Guard



Jasper on the Train



Stockholm Kayak



Prinsesstårta Cake

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For one delightful evening, we enjoyed live entertainment, fine dining, and even an onboard club. At breakfast the following morning, we savored endless Swedish delights. While my husband indulged in the caviar bar, I found myself returning time and time again for another taste of the green icing and raspberry filling of the traditional Swedish Prinsesstårta cake. The fantastic food and staff were truly a highlight of this cruise.

As our ship weaved through Stockholm's many islands, we perched outside on our balcony to enjoy what felt like a sightseeing boat tour of the city. When it came time to disembark, we made our way into the heart of Stockholm where we stayed at the Radisson Blue Waterfront Hotel. Since this hotel was situated next to the main train station, it was the perfect home base for our weekend in the city.

If there's one thing we enjoyed most about Stockholm, it is how easy the city is to navigate with a dog. All public transportation allows dogs, bars welcomed our pup with open arms, and many restaurants offered Jasper a blanket or bed while we dined. While most museums in the city do not allow dogs, there were still plenty of tourist activities that we could enjoy with Jasper in tow. He loved meeting the Royal Guards and posing for pictures with them outside the Royal Palace of Stockholm.

While Stockholm is a waterfront city, it is also incredibly green and lush. Springtime brings fresh blooms and is perfect for visits to the famed Bergius Botanic Garden or an afternoon kayaking through the national park. A stroll through Gamla Stan, also known as Old Town, is a wonderful way to spend the day as well. If you're looking for an adventure this spring, Jasper certainly gives Stockholm two paws up. ■

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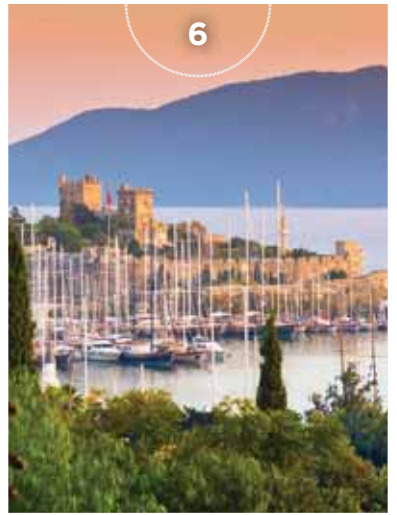




TOP
10
PLACES TO GO
IN TÜRKIYE

By Kat Nickola

Whether you are passionate about history, inspired by the outdoors or excited by urban life, Türkiye has it all. *Here are our top recommendations.*



1. Istanbul

Yes, it was Constantinople, and before that it was Byzantium. Founded in the seventh century by Greek colonists, this eclectic city straddles the Bosphorus Strait and has been a cultural meeting point for centuries. Highlights include the [Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque](#) and the Blue Mosque across scenic Sultanahmet Square. Don't miss shopping in the Grand Bazaar or wandering the Ottoman sultan's rooms at Topkapi Palace. Leave yourself time to enjoy some meze (small plate appetizers), try a borek (sweet and savory pastries) and sip some strong Turkish coffee.

2. Cappadocia

Experience this land of unique geology by staying in a Göreme cave hotel and enjoying the town's exotic nightlife. Tour decorated cave churches at the Göreme Open Air Museum or on a hike in Soğanlı Valley. Get a little lost among rock formations down Devrent and Love Valleys and explore the underground city tunnels in Derinkuyu or Kaymakli. Take a classic morning hot air balloon ride, then spend an afternoon tasting the local clay pot kebab and touring a vineyard before marveling at sunset over Rose Valley. In winter, try skiing on a stratovolcano at the Erciyes ski resort.

3. Ephesus

The UNESCO Heritage Site of Ephesus was built by ancient Greek colonists and later flourished as a Roman port city. Today, it is preserved as a massive open-air archaeological park where visitors can wander inside a neighborhood of terraced homes, see the [famous two-story façade of the Celsus Library](#) and visit the Temple of Artemis, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. There are intricate details like mosaic floors and grand structures like the amphitheater. For more archaeological sites, check out the Greek city of Pergamon, the Hittite capital of Hattusa or neolithic Çatalhöyük.

4. Turquoise Coast

Often called the Turkish Riviera, the coastline of Antalya and Mugla provinces boasts 1000km of cliffs, harbor towns, ancient sites and diverse beaches. Alanya is great for shopping in its lively downtown, plus there are plenty of water sports and big sandy beaches. For something eco-focused, stay in Dalyan with its Greek ruins, hot springs and wild beaches. Need more nightlife? [Marmaris](#) is known for its clubs, scenic harbor and boat trips, while Kaş offers live music, cobblestone streets and proximity to huge Patara beach. Can't choose? Try a multi-day Blue Cruise from Fethiye in a traditional "gulet" sailboat.



5. Bursa

If there is one Turkish city that has something for everyone, it's Bursa. The central bazaar was an essential silk road waymark and is still a shopping paradise. Non-shoppers will enjoy exploring the historical hans, or Silk Road inns and trading centers, that have been around for 700 years. Bursa was the first Ottoman capital. Unique architecture from the Seljuk empire is on display at the Grand Mosque, built in 1399, and at the impressive [sultan tombs](#). Nearby, wander around the cobbled alleys and original wood-beamed Ottoman homes in the quaint village of Cumalıkızık. Take the Bursa Teleferik, one of the longest cable cars in the world, higher into the Uludağ Mountains for summer hikes and winter skiing.

6. Bodrum Peninsula

The [Bodrum Peninsula](#) is a haven of small upscale waterfront towns, local markets and leisurely boat trips. Going to Bodrum is about finding the perfect beach town to match your vibe. Looking for epic dining, hopping nightlife, history and plenty of excursions? Try Bodrum City, known as Halicarnassus in ancient times, this city has it all. Looking for nature and a relaxing beach for swimming? Stay in one of the numerous cove resorts near Torba, or try windsurfing in Gumbet. For high-end stays, see if you can keep up with the yacht crowd in Yalikavak.

7. Izmir

Historically known as Smyrna, Izmir is an active port city. Known for its shopping superiority, the Kemeralti Market has been around for 500 years. Its combination of open-air stalls and small shops make this massive bazaar district a maze of commerce. Visit the Agora Open Air Museum to wander the ruins of the original 4th century marketplace. Later, enjoy fresh air and sunset views along Izmir's seafront promenade. For the best views in town, ride up the Asansör, a [free elevator](#) built in 1907 to allow easy transport between markets at sea level and neighborhoods high on the hillside.

8. Olympos

Nestled within the Olympos Beydaglari National Park, the canyons around the ancient town of Olympos are an outdoor enthusiast's dream. Camp, stay in a treehouse or rent a cabin. Go rock climbing, SCUBA diving or paragliding. Hike to the [eternal flames of Chimaera](#) where burning underground gases escape through rock fissures. Explore the ruins of Olympos and its famous Temple of Hephaestus, god of forges. Or just swim and relax at the natural pebbly beach. Take adventuring a step further and hike part of the Lycian way, a 509km long-distance trail that runs from Fethiye to Antalya. The wildest section of the trail runs through Olympos.

9. Pamukkale

The hot springs at Pamukkale deposit calcium bicarbonate from the surrounding limestone to form uniquely bright white terraces of travertine pools full of pale blue water. In antiquity, the Greek city of Hierapolis was built on part of the formation and is now an archaeological park. Today, the area is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and the water is diverted into cleverly mimicked swimming pools to control human impact on the natural terraces. A marked boardwalk trail allows viewing of the original travertine. Nearby are the less-touristed Karahayit Red Mud Springs where hot water bubbles up and deposits iron-rich minerals.

10. Black Sea

The northern Black Sea coast of Türkiye is unique with its forests, misty mountains, lofty villages and Byzantine sites. Find a chalet in the Uzungöl valley with its alpine hikes and beautiful mountain lake town. Take a day trip to the Sumela monastery, precariously carved into a cliff. Visit Zilkale castle and you'll think you landed in the alps. If you'd rather be wandering cobblestone streets, eating seafood and relaxing at the beach, stay in a small town like [Amasra](#) with its castle walls, quaint market and scenic waterfront ideal for slow travel. ■

The Best Alpine Refuges are in **Chamonix**

By Kat Nickola



“The sun!” my teens yell. We all stop hiking and face the warmth. Its rays dapple the scree slope we are standing on, but don’t quite make it down into the Chamonix valley far below. Warmed, we take off our hats, gloves and puffy coats before continuing along the trail. Even in late June, there is snow in places and a significant chill when the clouds, and rain, and then flurries return. Incredibly, we don’t care.

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MEANS YOUR PACK
CAN STAY LIGHT.

continued from page 20

A warm bed and four-course dinner would be waiting at the end of each of our four days hiking in the mountains above Chamonix. We stayed at the mountain refuges, which are like classy bunkhouses along the trail. These historic buildings offer a place to sleep for the night, plus breakfast and dinner are included in summer hiking rates. Experiences at them vary. Many have a bunk system that is similar to staying in a hostel. My family was usually assigned four beds in a room shared with other hikers. Some of the refuges had privacy options like curtains and wall dividers. Earplugs for snoring bunkmates would have been nice, but we slept well thanks to the high altitude and long days on the trail. The www.montourdumontblanc.com website is the definitive source for refuge information. Some are bookable online, while others require an email request.

Beyond the refuge system is the beautiful alpine scenery. Experiencing the rugged mountains, glacial waterfalls and dramatic vistas trounced any issues we had with the weather. The Chamonix valley runs east to west, with steep green slopes leading up to 'benches' of flatter, hikeable terrain. These are called the "Grand Balcones." Beyond the benches and tree line are steep, rocky snow-capped peaks that are barely visible from the valley below, including Mont Blanc, the highest mountain in the European Union.

I highly recommend using the Mont Blanc MultiPass to purchase unlimited use of gondolas, trains and public transit. We chose a pass for non-consecutive days, and got a family discount, to access the mountain trails on our first and last days of hiking. There is a free and convenient parking lot near the Flegere gondola.





THERE IS NOTHING
LIKE A FOUR-
COURSE FRENCH
MEAL AFTER A LONG
DAY OF HIKING.

My family agreed that our most favorite days were spent on the Gran Balcon Sud, the benches on the south side of the valley. We began by taking the gondola up to the peak of the Aiguille du Midi. At 12,602 feet, this peak is perpetually surrounded by glaciers. There is a visitor center and restaurant at the top. With the changeable weather we couldn't see the valley. Instead, our view was of an otherworldly cloud cover that made the peak feel suspended in space.

From there, we took the gondola halfway back down the mountain and hiked in a perpetual mist to the Refuge du Plan de L'aiguille. Seemingly perched at the edge of the world, this refuge was the highlight of our time in Chamonix. Even with weather that went from bad to worse, we had such a great time exploring, and even sledding, in the rocky terrain around the refuge. Inside, a delicious lamb-stew dinner was promptly served at 7 p.m., as it was at all the refuges we stayed at. We learned to expect a set four-course meal that started with soup, followed by a main dish and sides served family-style, a cheese course and then dessert. It was gourmet even as we ate in our base layers, that doubled for pajamas, like all the other hikers. In the morning there was a big hot breakfast buffet. The Refuge du Plan de L'aiguille is

small and special, only hosting an upstairs dormitory and five private rooms.

The next day we discovered the most amazing hike in Chamonix. Starting from the Refuge du Plan de L'aiguille, we traversed east past high meadows and into the stony scree. As we gained elevation, all signs of civilization down in the valley disappeared from view. I have rarely felt more immersed in stone and immensity. With a sense of finally reaching the top of the secret stairs on the border of Mordor, we reached the top of a pass and looked down upon a massive glacier. It is called the Mer de Glace, and its glacial tributaries make it the second longest glacier in the Alps.

The hike down into the glacial valley was like returning to the real world. The upscale Refuge du Montenvers sits on a cliff overlooking the glacier, and there are numerous day-tourists that come to gawp at the ice tunnel carved in it each summer. Our stay at Montenvers was a luxurious end to our hike. There is nothing like a four-course French meal on a mountaintop after a long day of hiking in every weather imaginable. The next day, as the sun finally came out to stay, we took the local cog train down into the Chamonix valley and headed home. It is one of our most memorable trips, foul weather included. ■

TIPS

- Trails around Chamonix are well-signed. It's easiest to stick to one side of the valley.
- Finding refuge availability can be competitive. Book refuge stays first and plan a route that links them together.
- Visit montourdumontblanc.com for refuge contact information.
- Gondolas, trains and buses are easy to use, so one-way hikes are the norm.
- Pack light. Bring a sleeping bag liner (required at refuges), towel, emergency kit, clothes for weather changes and snacks.
- Water is readily available at refuges and springs.
- Use the communal flip-flops at the refuge. Boots must stay out in the mud room.





GARDENS & FLOWER SHOWS IN THE U.K.

By Tamala Malerk

Spring is here and what better way to celebrate in the U.K. than to marvel at the beautiful flowers, trees and succulents blooming this season? There are gardens galore, plenty of parks and the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) provides opportunities all spring and summer long for you to stop and smell the flowers.

continued on page 26

continued from page 25

CHESHIRE

Tatton Park: This summer you will want to make your way to RHS Flower Show from **July 17–21**. The flower show will feature floral installations, talks, children's activities, market shopping and plenty of great food. If you can't make it for the flower show, you can take a guided tour through the Japanese Garden on Wednesdays and Saturdays throughout the spring and summer. You can visit the historic glass houses, walled gardens and the Pleasure Grounds daily.

LIVERPOOL

Sefton Park: Springtime is the best time to visit this 200-acre park because you'll have the opportunity to see millions of daffodils around the lake. You can also go boating on the lake, visit the famous Victorian Palm House, grab a cup of coffee at the café and see the replica statues of Eros and Peter Pan.

Liverpool Festival Gardens: Like a phoenix rising from the ashes, these gardens have a harrowing story of their own. In the 1980s, a successful international garden festival was held on-site to promote tourism in Liverpool. Despite the success of the festival, much of the garden was turned into residential housing or left to decay. What remained was redeveloped in 2010. Visitors can enjoy woodland trails, bike riding or picnicking by the water.

St James Mount and Gardens: Located next to the Liverpool Anglican Cathedral, there is plenty for everyone in these gardens and cemeteries. Fans of history and macabre will want to see the centuries-old tombstones and sign up for a ghost walk or a "secret garden" story tour. Take a peaceful stroll through the gardens as a nice getaway from Liverpool's noise. From the garden, you can also see the Cathedral which has events throughout the year and boasts beautiful architecture with stained-glass windows.



©RHS/GEORGI MABEE

LONDON

Kensington Gardens: The brainchild of Queen Charlotte in the 18th century, these gardens are now open to the general public. You can see the famous Peter Pan statue and meander through the Italian Gardens, flower walks and historic tree avenues. Children can play on the playground, and everyone can enjoy the cafes and kiosks after they work up an appetite.

RHS Chelsea Flower Show: From **May 21–25**, London Gate will host this fantastic flower show. The 2024 show is slated to be "the most sustainable" yet. Walk through show gardens and sanctuary gardens and see the container gardens. There are tens of thousands of flowers here. At the 2023 show, Princess Kate joined children at the first-ever Children's Picnic, and King Charles III and Queen Camilla explored the gardens and awarded medals, so you may even spot a member of the Royal family.

MALVERN

RHS Malvern Spring Festival: Attend a talk or demonstration, shop plants, trees and shrubs, and sip tea in the Vintage Tea Room at this yearly garden festival. It runs from **May 9–12** at the Three Counties Showground. While there you can see a pollinator garden, waterfalls, a fruit market and bar, feature gardens and more.



1. Cheshire

Tatton Park

2. Liverpool

Sefton Park
Liverpool Festival Gardens
St James Mount & Gardens

3. London

Kensington Gardens
RHS Chelsea Flower Show

4. Malvern

RHS Malvern Spring Festival

5. Manchester

RHS Bridgewater Gardens
RHS Urban Show

6. Nottingham

Nottingham Arboretum
Wollaton Hall Deer Park
& Gardens

7. Pembrokeshire

Pembrokeshire Coast Path
Stackpole Walled Gardens
Picton Castle Gardens

8. Surrey

Hampton Court Gardens
Savill Garden

MANCHESTER

RHS Bridgewater Gardens: On **June 30**, celebrate the end of Pride month surrounded by beautiful nature at Pride in Nature. From Vogue workshops to drag queen story time, this LGBTQIA+ celebration brings together a diverse community. Outside of special events, Bridgewater Gardens is a great place to meander around the meadow and lake, educate yourself at the Peel Learning Garden, marvel at the Chinese Streamside Garden and see all the colorful flowers of the Paradise Garden.

RHS Urban Show: This flower show is dedicated to household and urban gardening, so you can see beautiful plants even in cities. Since the pandemic lockdowns, there has been a rise in household plant ownership and over 80 percent of the population of the U.K. lives in an urban area, creating a need for a flower show such as this. As a brand new show in Manchester, this event presents its first iteration from **April 18–21** at The Mayfield Depot.

NOTTINGHAM

Nottingham Arboretum: The 17-acre arboretum is Nottingham's oldest public park and is home to over 800 trees, some of which are from the original 19th-century collection. All spring and summer you can walk along various "tree trails" containing trees native to the U.K. as well as rare species from around the world. Grab a bite to eat at one of the cafés or ice cream concessions and see the aviaries, tea rooms and bell tower.

Wollaton Hall Deer Park and Gardens: Wollaton has 500 acres of grassland, wetland, woodland and other natural habitats. Deer have roamed here since the 14th century. In addition, the Formal Gardens feature a Doric temple, several statues and the Camilla House. While at the Formal Gardens, you might even catch an outdoor theater show. You can visit the Botanical Garden, where volunteers tend and sell plants, on Sundays all spring and summer long. Wollaton is also home to family trails where you can hunt for clues to receive prizes and two play areas.

PEMBROKESHIRE

The Pembrokeshire Coast Path: Spring is a great time to tackle this coastal path. Completing the coast path takes, on average, 10 to 15 days to complete. While on this trail, you can see plenty of coastal flowers like bluebells and pink campion that may overwhelm your senses with color and perfumed smells. In summer, catch the return of the puffins to Skomer Island.

Stackpole Walled Gardens: This walled estate garden is a great place to see seasonal flowers, fruits and vegetables growing all spring and summer. The garden shop is open daily where you can take home harvested fruits and vegetables along with handmade cards and crafts. The Cawdors Tea Rooms provides you with a great selection of coffee, teas, juices, soups, quiches and cakes with seasonal produce from the garden. What makes these gardens especially unique is their aim to "provide work experience and horticultural training to adults and young people with learning disabilities."

Picton Castle Gardens: These 40-acre gardens are home to rare tree and plant collections from around the world. Along with an exotic jungle garden, there is a walled garden with an extensive herb collection, woodland rhododendrons and family trails. Kids will enjoy the adventure playground and maze.

SURREY

Hampton Court Gardens: From **July 2–7**, make your way to the royal courts of King Henry VIII to attend the RHS Hampton Court Palace Garden Festival. At the festival, you can enjoy live music, attend a talk or demonstration, see the Festival of Roses and visit the floral exhibitions. If you cannot make it out for the festival, visit the gardens in the spring and summer to enjoy 750 acres of parkland and 60 acres of gardens within a loop of the River Thames. The gardens contain a record-breaking grapevine and the world's oldest puzzle maze.

Savill Garden: Savill Garden brings something new to visitors every season across its 35 acres. In spring, visitors will like the dwarf daffodils, Japanese cherry trees and azaleas. In summer, the roses come into full bloom, you can get out of the sun in the Shady Garden, the Dry Garden is at its peak and the colors are bright in the Jubilee Garden. ■



For more information and more events going on throughout the year check out the Royal Horticultural Society's website: www.rhs.org.uk





“

...the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) provides opportunities all spring and summer long for you to stop and smell the flowers.

”

© RHS / MARK WAUGH

THE OLYMPIC TORCH RELAY

By Kat Nickola

The Paris 2024 Olympics are fast approaching, but if you didn't get tickets there is still a fun way to participate. Go see the Olympic Torch on its relay run across France!

The first modern torch relay was held during the 1936 Berlin Summer Olympics when a special torch was designed to uniquely represent the host country. Since then, host countries have used the relaying of the Olympic fire into the opening ceremony as a way to highlight their national achievements, people and history. The flame is always lit in Olympia, Greece and transferred over the course of many days from bearer to bearer across the miles to the Olympic cauldron.

The relay leading up to the Paris 2024 Olympics will be lit in Olympia on April 16 and brought via ship to Marseille by May 8. It will travel around western France for two months before departing on June 7 for five French territories, Guadeloupe, Guyana, Martinique, French Polynesia and Reunion Island. After flying back, the torch will be run throughout eastern France before entering Paris on July 14 in preparation for the opening ceremony on July 26.

Each of the 11,000 torch bearers gets a specially designed torch that holds a liquid fuel, making it easy to pass the flame without it going out. The newest torch was designed by Mathieu Lehanneur and represents the three Paris 2024 symbols: Equality is embodied in its symmetrical shape, water is stylized by wavy relief, and peacefulness shows in its gentle curves.

The route through France is intended to showcase four themes: The history of France and the people behind it, France's natural heritage, French know-how and creativity, and the vitality of sport in all French territories.

WHERE TO SPOT THE TORCH

The actual route of the runner's between each place will be available at www.paris2024.org/en/olympic-torch-relay-route in the days prior to its arrival. Here are the major stopping points nearby:

JUNE 26

- Strasbourg

JUNE 27

- Site Verrier de Meisenthal
- Maison de Robert Schuman
- Scy-Chazelles
- Metz ■



To view the Olympic Torch's path through France, scan the QR code.



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Unforgettable Shopping at Outletcity Metzingen

Germany's first outlet destination is completely different from any other outlet center — Outletcity Metzingen with its prized architecture is in the heart of a lovely small town with a historic centre. Guests find over 170 brands like Polo Ralph Lauren, Tory Burch, lululemon and many more in fashion, sportswear, cosmetics, jewellery, but also Home & Living. Restaurants and cafés, as well as regular events invite guests to create vacation memories and digital services bring shopping to a new level. Metzingen is located just 30 kilometres south of Stuttgart and 2 hours from Frankfurt and Munich.

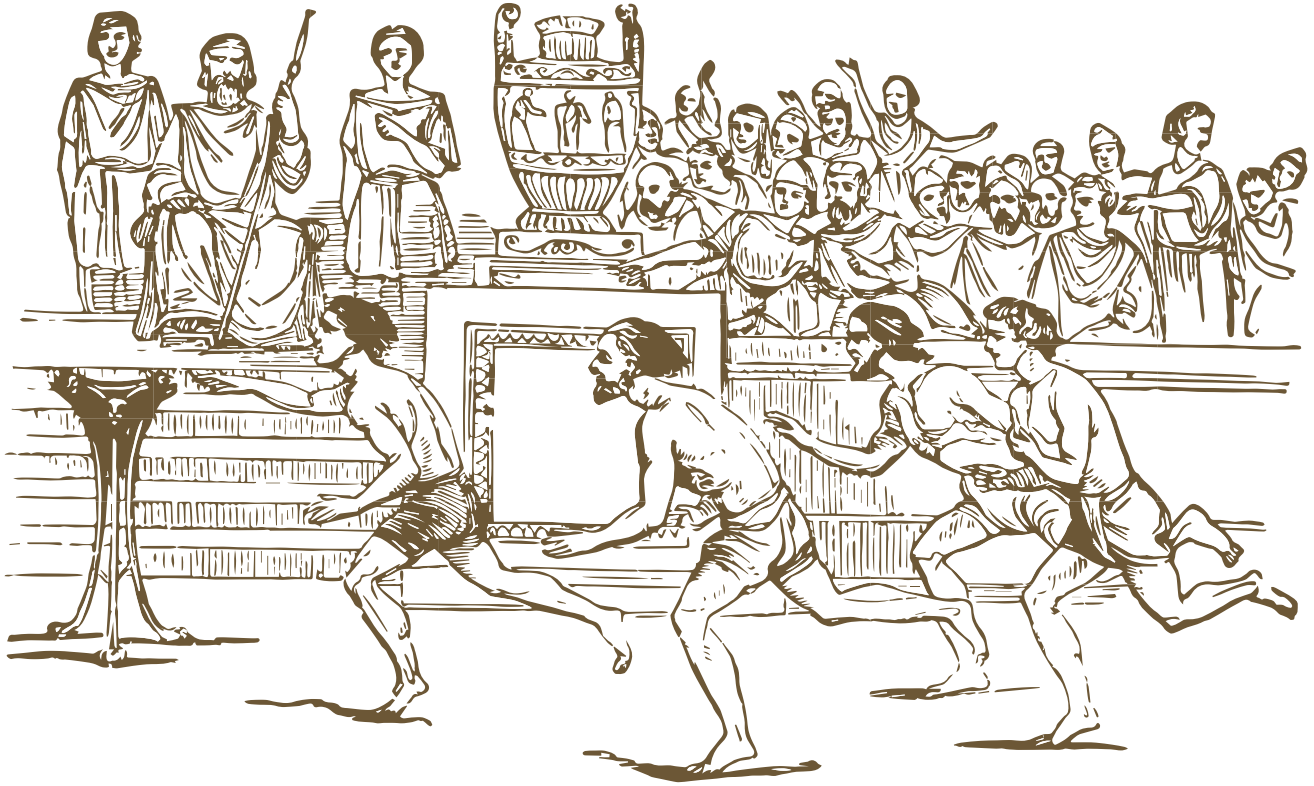
Fashion meets luxury at Moxy Outletcity Metzingen, your chic getaway for style-conscious travelers

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.

Where adventure, nature and architecture go hand in hand

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.

SEE OUR AD ON PAGE #5



From Olympia to Paris

THE OLYMPIC GAMES

By Stacy Roman

Every four years, a global sports phenomenon brings a combination of tears of joy and frustration, incredible highs, extreme lows and, often, scandals that rival drama-filled soap operas. The Olympic Games allow athletes to compete against each other proving that their hard work, grit, and determination make them the best of the best. With the 2024 Paris Olympic Games just around the corner, here is a glimpse into what makes these Games so unique and how far they have come.

THE ANCIENT GAMES

Established in the Peloponnesian city of Olympia, the namesake sporting event was first held in 776 B.C.E. as a tribute to the Greek god Zeus. Over five days, amateur athletes would compete in chariot racing, running, jumping, wrestling, boxing and throwing. On the third day, an extravagant feast featuring the sacrifice of cows and oxen was held to honor Zeus. The event became wildly popular among the Greeks. At one point, it became challenging to amass an army among the city-states to defend the country against invaders if the Olympics were being held. However, in a push to promote Christianity, Emperor Theodosius I banned all pagan activities in 393 C.E., which included the Olympic Games.

There are quite a few differences between the ancient Games and those of the modern era. Athletes competed in the buff, with boxers and wrestlers competing not just in the nude but also covered in oil. If a competitor had a false start in a race, the punishment was often a public flogging. Women were not allowed to compete or attend events. If you won an event, forget the medals. Instead, you received bragging rights, a wreath, a poem read upon returning to your hometown and a feast.

THE MODERN ERA

After an absence spanning 1,500 years, a French nobleman named Baron Pierre de Coubertin formed the modern era's first International Olympic Committee (IOC) in 1894. Coubertin initially wanted the Olympics in Paris in 1900 to coincide with the International Expo. However, the committee was concerned about the six-year wait, so they proposed a sooner date and a different location. The reborn Games were held in Athens in 1896, paying homage to its Greek origins.

PARIS: THEN AND NOW

This year, Paris will become the second city to host the Summer Olympics three times — 1900, 1924 and 2024. Much has changed in the 100 years since the French capital last hosted the Games. In 1924, there were 17 sports with a little over 3,000 athletes competing. This year, 32 sports,



329 events and more than 10,500 athletes will compete over 16 days. Interestingly, the Games will actually span two continents, as the surfing events will take place in Teahupo'o, Tahiti (French Polynesia).

The 2024 Paris Games will break ground as one of the first events not to hold the opening ceremony in a stadium. Instead, Paris will bring the Games to the heart of the city along the Seine. Teams will not parade along a track but via barges on the famed river traveling through the city. The ceremony is anticipated to draw more than 600,000 spectators to the riverbank. While many of the events have been sold out since tickets went on sale in spring 2023, some may still be available. Visit tickets.paris2024.org for availability. ■



NEED SOME MORE OLYMPICS IN YOUR LIFE? SCAN THE QR CODE TO LEARN WHERE YOU CAN SEE PLACES IN OLYMPICS HISTORY.



HOW TO SAUNA

By Kat Nickola

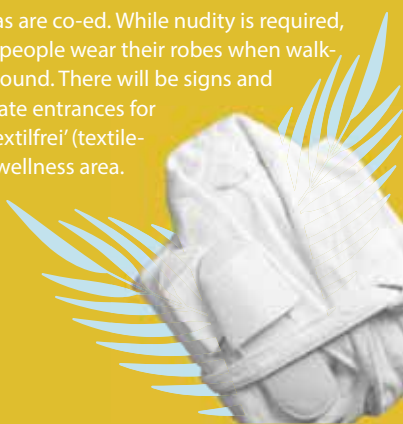


1. FIGURE OUT THE LINGO

A sauna is a dry or wet heated room used for specific health benefits. In Germany, the word sauna is casually used to mean an entire facility devoted to wellness. At such facilities, the space is officially called the wellness area, or spa if there are services like massage. If that facility uses natural mineral waters, it will be called a therme, whereas a hot tub is also called a spa.

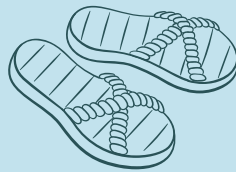
2. KNOW THE DRESS CODE

Saunas are co-ed. While nudity is required, most people wear their robes when walking around. There will be signs and separate entrances for the 'textilfrei' (textile-free) wellness area.



3. BRING THE BASICS

Bring a towel and flip-flops. I also highly recommend a robe. Phones and electronics must remain in lockers, but books and water bottles are welcome. It is polite to secure long hair in a braid or bun.



4. PAY YOUR FEE

For a large therme, book ahead online. Otherwise, pay your entry fee at the door. Be sure to specify that you are paying for the wellness area if it is co-located with a swimming pool. You will be given a wristband that allows purchases. Pay the tab on your way out.

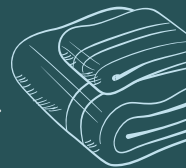
5. ENTER THE WELLNESS AREA

Locker rooms are co-ed but have changing cubicles. Undress completely, then put on your robe and flip-flops. Grab your towel, book and water bottle. Store all other items in your locker. Enter the wellness area. At some facilities, this may be through the public pool. Once inside, it's normal to wear your robe or towel when walking around or lounging. Stash your book and water bottle in cubbies near the entrance. Explore the whole space, even outside!



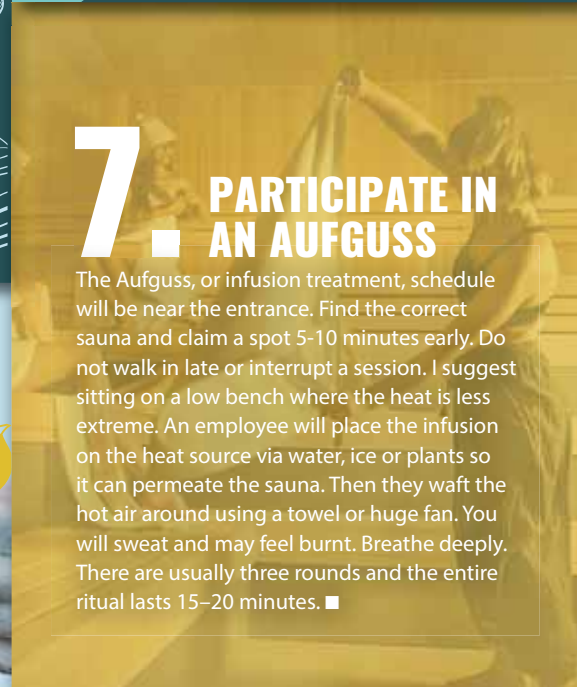
6. RELAX IN A SAUNA

Choose a sauna to enter and hang your robe near the door. Take off your flip-flops. If it is a dry sauna, bring your towel. Inside, place your towel on the wooden bench and sit or lie on it. Don't bring your towel in a wet sauna. Instead, find the small hose and rinse off the tiled seat before and after use.



7. PARTICIPATE IN AN AUFGUSS

The Aufguss, or infusion treatment, schedule will be near the entrance. Find the correct sauna and claim a spot 5-10 minutes early. Do not walk in late or interrupt a session. I suggest sitting on a low bench where the heat is less extreme. An employee will place the infusion on the heat source via water, ice or plants so it can permeate the sauna. Then they waft the hot air around using a towel or huge fan. You will sweat and may feel burnt. Breathe deeply. There are usually three rounds and the entire ritual lasts 15-20 minutes. ■



8. TRY SOME EXTRAS

All saunas will have a small café or restaurant. Wear your robe when eating and use your wristband to pay. Big saunas expect that you will want to stay all day, so you can often reserve private daybeds online or at the entrance. Treatments like massages are not the typical reason to visit a German sauna, but they may be available and must be booked in advance.





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PUBLIC TRANSIT IN EUROPE

By Mary Del Rosario and Tamala Malerk

YOUR GUIDE TO GERMAN PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

TRAINS

Germany's rail systems are efficient, comfortable and affordable. You can go to Paris for as little as 44 euros if you remember to book in advance. The Deutsche Bahn (DB) railway system is first-rate, and you can choose from four types of trains depending on your destination, schedule and budget.

- The S-Bahn (suburban train) stops at every station.
- The Regional Bahn connects smaller cities and towns.
- The Regional Express (RE) connects regional destinations with larger cities.
- The Inter City Express (ICE) connects to major European cities, such as Munich, Hamburg and Paris. It is usually the quickest way to get from point A to point B, but it can be expensive. I took the ICE from Mannheim to Berlin, and it cut the commute from a seven-hour drive to a five-hour train ride.

BUSES

Buses can be an efficient way to get around in the bigger cities. One-way trips can be as cheap as two euros within cities. I discovered it was quicker than driving to ride the bus while in Frankfurt.



HELPFUL TIPS

If you are skeptical about public transportation, check out these apps and websites to make your travels in Germany a piece of cake.


- DB Navigator is a free app where you can book tickets, get up-to-date information concerning delays/canceled trains, and, best of all, use the fare saver finder to look for the cheapest fares available.
- VRN Ticket is a free app for the Rhein-Neckar region which gives real-time schedules for regional buses, pedestrian routes, ticket prices and local traffic. You can find out which bus number to take, when it departs and where to get on/off.
- TaxiFareFinder.com is a website that helps those who want to calculate taxi fares between two destinations. For example, the estimated fare from Ramstein Air Base to Kaiserslautern is 30.69 euros.
- Purchase rail tickets for long-distance travel at your local station and use a value-added tax (VAT) form to save 19 percent on fares within Germany. If you have travel flexibility, check out the last-minute deal section of the Deutsche Bahn website (www.bahn.de).

TIPS FOR OTHER EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

- Google Maps has been indispensable for me when navigating public transportation across Europe. Whether I am on a bus, train or tram, this app informs which routes I can choose from and how many stops I ride. You can even search in advance to plan out the route for the day. If cell service could be an issue, download a local area map prior to travel.
- Sometimes only cash is accepted on board buses and at ticket stands. Often machines will only accept small euro or local bills.
- No need to worry about cash or card in Luxembourg because public transportation is free there (except for 1st class- you still have to pay for that luxury).
- SNCF.com is the official booking website for the National Society of French Railways (SNCF). This company works together with Deutsche Bahn to provide ICE services to France. The ICE train will get you from Kaiserslautern to Paris in 2.5 hours; driving takes almost twice as long.
- In France, the TGV train network connects major cities; the TER is the regional service running through towns and villages in 21 regions. Intercités trains run “medium” distances between towns such as Paris, Orleans, Caen, Lyon and Reims.
- In Italy, there are two major train companies. The Trenitalia website or app is the go-to method of finding the best fares, e-tickets and deals on regular trains across the country. The Italo company specializes in high-speed trains, and their Italo Treno app is the perfect way to book fast long-distance transportation.
- Despite some of the routes being above ground, the London metro system is referred to as “the Tube” or “the Underground.” It was easiest for me to navigate traveling around London by simply scanning my credit card or virtual wallet when I got on and off the tube. You will need to purchase tickets for longer trips outside of the city and across the U.K.
- In addition to having a great name, the Eurostar can be a great way to travel between countries. It runs between the U.K., France and Belgium. ■



ESSENTIAL EGYPT



By Kat Nickola

IT'S SO EASY

to assume you must go to Cairo, lots of people do it. I did it. I don't recommend it. With limited time, budget, or the stomach for crazy driving, Luxor is your best bet for a rewarding trip to this ancient land. Instead of a long tour or expensive Nile cruise, by focusing on Luxor you can book a single resort for the length of your stay, settle into a rhythm and enjoy getting to know Egypt and its people.

PYRAMIDS

"But I'll miss the pyramids," you say. I promise you can still see the pyramids. Most flights from Europe enter Egypt via Cairo. Schedule your flights so you have a long layover on one leg of your journey, then book a "layover pyramid tour" online ahead of time. Tours start in the morning, so plan to arrive in Cairo early, especially if you will go through immigration on your way into the country.

Pyramid tours last roughly six hours, while day tours can also include a whirlwind visit to the Egyptian Museum where King Tutankhamun's treasure is on display. Once you've climbed into the hot bowels of Khufu's pyramid, taken the requisite camel photos (you really must), and survived your drive in Cairo traffic back to the airport, you can check that off your bucket list and move on to the more enjoyable part of Egypt.

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OXIDIO is a state-of-the-art dental practice located in Gärtringen, not far from Panzer Barracks. We have welcomed American patients for many years and continue to take care of the American community, accepting new patients of all ages.

Trained in medical dentistry at the University of Pennsylvania, Dr. Lukas Winkelmann is not only an ace in dentistry but also in sports, and was elected to the hall of fame at Tusculum University.

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LUXOR

As the capital of Egypt during its Middle and New Kingdoms, Luxor was known as Thebes and became a center for religious and political power. The most impressive ancient sites in all of Egypt are on view in this historic city.

My favorite day in Egypt was our guided trip to the Valley of the Kings. In the desert on the Nile's west bank is a valley where Egyptian pharaohs were buried for 500 years. Our incredible guide Mike explained that the temples were planned, dug out, and intricately decorated over the pharaoh's lifetime to highlight their achievements and establish a legacy before being used as a home for the dead. Only 11 tombs are open at a time, and the park rotates the availability every few months.

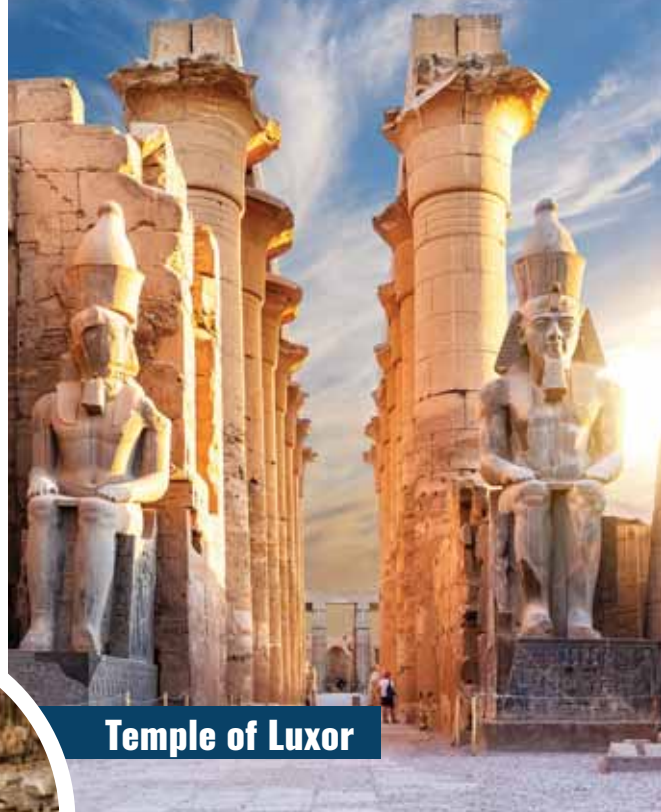
Stepping into our first tomb, that of Ramses IV, was surreal. While its occupant is not famous, the tomb is one of the most impressive. It is so well preserved, with original colors and carved details that give it a Disney-like quality. We walked past row upon row of bright hieroglyphics detailing his triumphs, took photos of the depictions of his journey through the afterlife, and marveled at the size of the stone sarcophagus that originally held his multi-layered coffin and mummy. My kids were so excited to pick out images of the Egyptian deities they knew: Ra with his hawk head and sun disk and Osiris with his bluish-green skin and mummy body. There were carvings of Anubis, the canine guide to the underworld, and a massive mural of Nut, goddess of the sky, spread across the ceiling.

We moved on to the heir of Ramses II, the Great: Merneptah. Because Ramses II lived so long, Merneptah was quite old by the time he ascended the throne, but his adventures alongside his famous father are carved in his tomb. From Mike, our guide, we learned to look for the battle-weary: dead figures surrounded by a cartouche, good people were carved laying down while evil folks were upside down. We spotted conquered peoples, too: bound arms, headless bodies, and piles of hands for counting the defeated.

The rest of our day continued to astound. Our final tomb visit, that of Rameses IX, was less ornate reflecting the spiraling economy of his time. We visited Hatshepsut's mortuary temple where my daughter found herself face-to-face with the primary source carvings she researched for an essay on the famous female pharaoh's voyage to Punt. Mike walked us through the funerary process at Ramses III's vast mortuary temple, called Medinet Habu, and we realized how important death was to the ancient Egyptians.

Hire a well-versed guide like Mike Atty (taiebabdelatty@gmail.com) while touring these ancient sites. Mike studied Egyptology in the U.K. for 15 years before returning to Egypt, and he retains dual citizenship. While in Egypt, we arranged all our tours via our hotels upon arrival. Mike stood out from them all, and I highly recommend arranging directly with him before getting to Luxor.

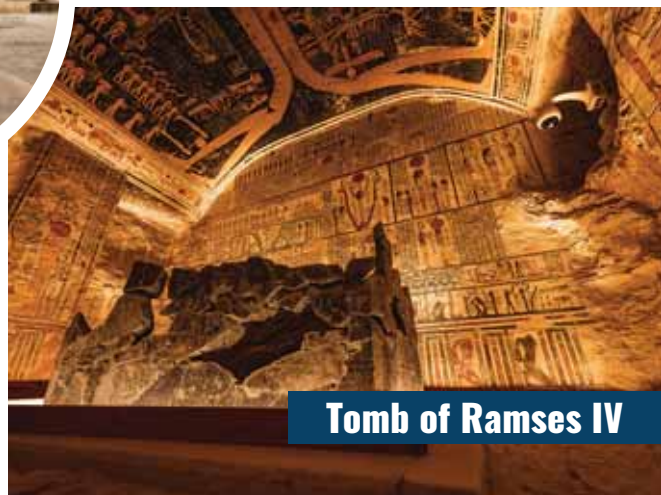
IF YOU CHOOSE ONLY ONE PLACE TO VISIT IN EGYPT, MAKE IT LUXOR



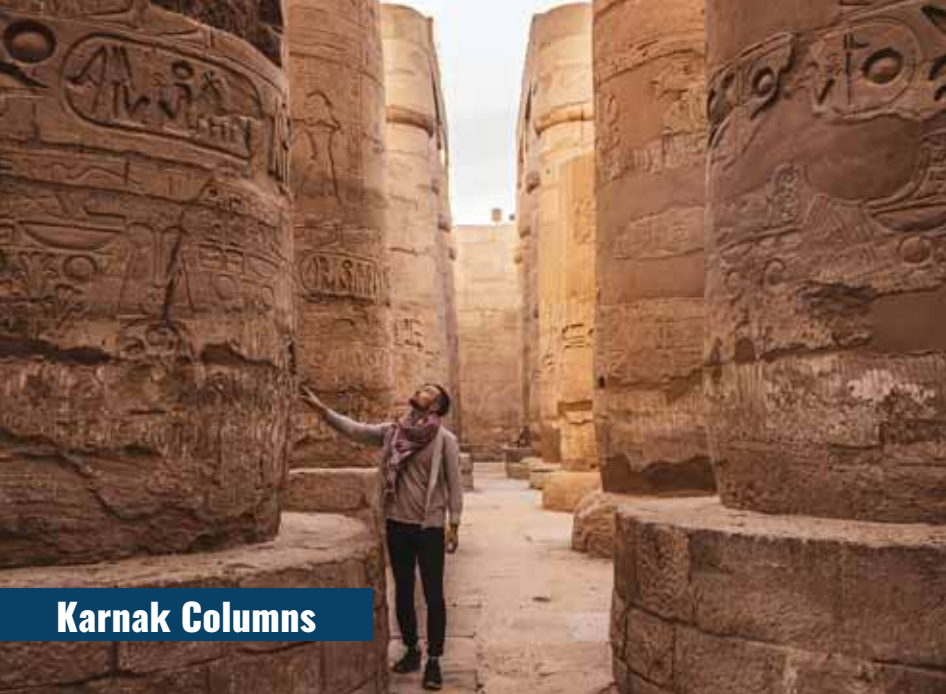
Temple of Luxor



Valley of the Kings



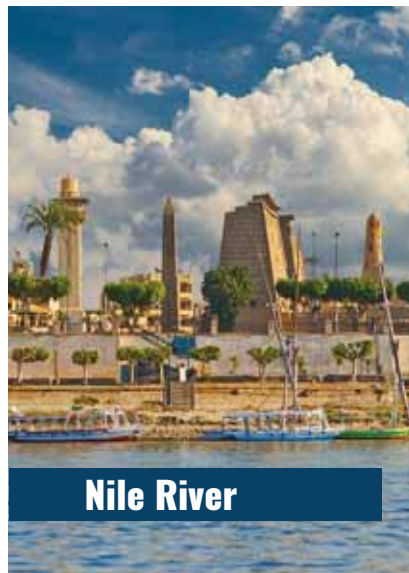
Tomb of Ramses IV



Karnak Columns



Karnak Temple



Nile River

There are two location options for accommodation in Luxor. On the east bank of the Nile is the city and numerous large waterfront hotels. There is a wonderful waterfront promenade to explore, plenty of restaurants and a traditional souk (market) where you can negotiate for anything from spices to souvenirs. Stay on the east bank if daily meandering is appealing or choose one of the small local resorts on the west bank if you'd rather relax at your hotel. In a quiet area on the Nile, the small al Baierat Hotel (www.albaeirat.com) was perfect for my family. Our rooms were traditionally designed dome-roofed bungalows in a shady kitchen garden. At the end of hot dusty days, we chose to lounge in the pool and eat our meals at the open-air restaurant.

One day we used the hotel's free shuttle boat to venture across the Nile into Luxor on our own. At the east bank, we were greeted by a horse carriage driver and happily negotiated a great rate for our

trip to and from Karnak temple. This huge temple complex was in use for almost 2000 years, with its biggest projects being erected during the golden age of the New Kingdom pharaohs like Hatshepsut, Seti I and Rameses II. Its vast pillared hall is dedicated to worshipping the sun god Amun-Re, while other spaces are dedicated to the mother goddess Mut and her son the moon god Khonsu. We wandered, took pictures and were genuinely happy to explore on our own skirting the tour groups and finding interesting vacant spaces. Our horse, Rambo, waited for us at Karnak and the small Mummification museum, a worthy stop to gawk at animal mummies, before dropping us back at the boat dock.

In all, we wished for more time to slow down and enjoy Luxor. Three days were not enough to see it all. The onward sites were not as magnificent or worth the transit time. Stick to Luxor for a one-stop immersive Egyptian vacation. ■

BE PREPARED

A quick no-nonsense guide on what to expect in Egypt

- **EGYPT IS NOT TIDY.** There is plenty of trash, unfinished buildings with rebar poking from the top and other obvious signs of poverty.
- **BRING ANTACIDS AND MEDICINE FOR INDIGESTION,** possibly even an antibiotic, and hand sanitizer. The food is amazing, eat it, but drink bottled water. Don't swim in the Nile. Wash your hands frequently as standards are low and you'll be touching things.
- **TOURIST POLICE ARE AT ALL THE SIGHTS** and are readily available, armed and monitoring the area for your safety. The law requires tourists to take certain routes and to be on monitored tours when outside of cities.
- **CARS DRIVE AT HIGH SPEEDS** in the middle of the street pulling right only to allow oncoming traffic. There is frequent honking to indicate passing, and limited usage of lane markers, signals or lights. Roads are shared with animal carts, pedestrians and stray animals.
- **THERE ARE ANIMALS EVERYWHERE,** from donkey carts to camels and stray cats and dogs. Few show signs of being well cared for.
- **BRING AMERICAN CASH** to pay for everything except your hotel bill. ATMs will only distribute Egyptian pounds, which are hesitantly accepted.
- **SALESPEOPLE WILL NEGOTIATE.** Attempt to do it ahead of choosing an item. Expect them to throw in a re-negotiation even after an agreement.
- **EVERYONE WANTS A TIP** and toilets cost money. Bring small American one-dollar bills for this.
- **GUIDES WILL TRY TO TAKE YOU SHOPPING** by promising a bonus stop at a "museum" or a nicer toilet at a business. Insist that you'd like to stick to the planned tour unless you'd like a concierge shopping experience.
- **IT IS HOT AND THE SUN IS STRONG,** as is the blowing sand. Check the weather and bring conservative lightweight pants and shirts that cover the shoulders for excursions. Swimsuits and revealing clothing are only fine at your hotel. Don't forget sunscreen.
- **MOST EGYPTIAN WOMEN HAVE A HEAD COVERING** of some kind and are rarely involved in business. You may never interact with any local women.

YOUR GUIDE TO

Finding a Campground in Europe

By Megan Zemke



One of the best things about being stationed in Europe is the opportunity to travel, but affordability is a different story. What if you could find a place to stay near your destination, in an accommodation big enough for the entire family with a kitchen for preparing meals to stretch your funds?

By staying at European campgrounds, you can visit the Europe of your dreams without blowing the budget.



Why Camping?

Camping to visit a famous city might sound like an oxymoron. Most Americans have camping memories that involve pitching tents with scouts or relaxing at a lake with family, but camping next to Paris or Amsterdam? Yes!

Europeans do not tend to use their caravan as a means to get away from it all, but rather as a budget-friendly way to tour Europe. Because of this mindset, there are small campgrounds surrounding almost every major city, usually within walking distance of a transit station and a short ride to the city center. To make it even more alluring, many European campgrounds are “resort-style” with cabins, restaurants, and activities to make your stay comfortable and easy.

Camping is both affordable and a great way to travel! Those touring with kids or a dog will find most sites allow pets and have playgrounds for little ones to burn off energy. Wi-Fi is standard. Morning bread service is often available to deliver fresh bread to your campsite. Plus, having a kitchen to make meals eliminates stressors for those with allergies or food intolerances, and makes it possible to sustain ravenous teens who seem to eat an entire fridge in one sitting! Couples and solo travelers will appreciate the friendly atmosphere of campgrounds where seasoned travelers are eager to tell you about their favorite local sites. The real treat of camping is that it takes you out of the isolation and tourist beat of hotels and into a fun, relaxing and unique atmosphere.

Finding a Campground

While you may not be in the habit of searching for campgrounds, they are easy to find once you have the right tools at your disposal. First, do a Google search. “Camping near Amsterdam” generates nearly 20 Google results for campground resorts with reviews and pictures. There are also options on popular reservation sites like Airbnb and [Booking.com](#). While convenient, you run the risk of finding outdated information, paying premium rates or discovering that the perfect campground is closed for the season. A dedicated camping website is preferred.

Happily, there are many websites dedicated to finding campgrounds in Europe. My favorite European camping websites are [Camping.info](#), [CamperGuru.com](#), and [Pitchup.com](#). They provide up-to-date information on openings, types of accommodation, and exact locations. Plus, you can view results on a map and compare all the options. Some campsites allow you to book directly from these camping marketplaces, while others will redirect you to the campground website. It is also worth joining their email lists for discounts or special availability at sold-out campsites during the high summer season.

While these websites are great, finding a place while on the go, changing travel plans or the need to unexpectedly bed down for the night on a long car trip is made easier with an on-the-go app. My favorite is the Park4Night app. Using their platform, you can search near your



location or even along the route of your trip. The app also gives you the ability to filter by amenities and accommodation type. You may want something pet-friendly with a pool for families, a resort cabin, a car camping slot, or even just a safe spot to pull over for a nap. Some app information is crowdsourced; so, reviews are updated, and campers can submit new locations for approval by the admin team. The paid version of the app will connect you directly to a campground’s booking method, whether a website, phone number or email, to make reserving your spot seamless. ■



WHISKY TOURS in Scotland

By Tamala Malerk

The term “whisky” comes from the Gaelic words, “uisge beatha,” meaning literally, “water of life.” It is believed that the phrase has even older roots from medieval Latin from the phrase, “aqua vitae.” No matter the word’s origin, it has laid its roots and found its home across the world; perhaps, most famously in Scotland.

The oldest reference to whisky in Scotland dates back to the 13th century. Today, there are almost 150 whisky distilleries in Scotland spread across five “whisky-producing” communities: Campbeltown, Highland, Islay, Lowland and Speyside. If you want to take a tour of a distillery, here are a few of our favorites.



The Glenturret

Location: Perthshire, Highland Region

History: The Glenturret whisky dates back to 1793 and is Scotland’s oldest working distillery. It has changed names and owners several times since its inception and The Glenturret name began to appear sometime in the 1800s. In 1991, the distillery welcomed its one-millionth visitor.

Tour Information: The distillery offers three different tours. Book your spot at theglenturret.com/pages/book-a-tour.

- The Glenturret Tour | 60 minutes | £18 per person
- Lique Whisky Flight | 90 minutes | From £53 per person
- Whisky Maker’s Tour | 120 minutes | £100 per person | 18+

Glenfiddich

Location: Banffshire, Speyside Region

History: The first stones for the distillery were laid in 1886. Today, Glenfiddich remains one of the oldest family-owned Scotch whisky distilleries.

Tour Information: Glenfiddich offers two tours that you can book in advance at glenfiddich.com/en-gb/book-tour. The tour route contains multiple sets of steep stairs. If you have mobility requirements contact Glenfiddich.bookings@wgrant.com for accommodations.

- Distillery Tour | 90 minutes | Wednesday–Sunday 9:30 a.m.–3:30 p.m. | £25 per person
- Glenfiddich Solera: Deconstructed Tour | 150 minutes | Thursday and Saturday | 2 p.m. | £75 per person | 18+



Bladnoch

Location: Dumfries & Galloway, Lowland Region

History: Bladnoch Distillery dates back to 1817 when Thomas and John McClelland were granted a license to distill whisky. It is known as the “Queen of the Lowlands.” Today it boasts a state-of-the-art visitor center, gift shop and café.

Tour Information: The distillery offers two tours which you can book in advance at bladnoch.com/pages/visit-bladnoch-distillery.

- Classic Tour and Taste | 60 minutes | Tuesday–Saturday | 11 a.m.–3 p.m. | £20 per person | 14+
- 1817 Tour | 120 minutes | Tuesday and Friday | 11:30 a.m. | £50 per person | 18+

Kilchoman

Location: Bruichladdich, Islay Region

History: This distillery is one of the newest ones to be built in Islay. In 2005, it was the first distillery built in Islay in over 120 years. It is a family-owned business and today is “Islay’s only Single Farm Single Malt Scotch Whisky.”

Tour Information: Kilchoman offers three tours that you can book in advance at kilchomandistillery.com/book-distillery-tour.

- Classic Tour | 60 minutes | Monday–Friday | 1:30 p.m. | £10 per person
- Roving Tasting | 90 minutes | Monday–Friday | 2:30 p.m. | £25 per person | 18+
- Limited Edition Tasting and Tour | 120 minutes | Monday–Friday | 11 a.m. | £40 per person | 18+

Glenmorangie

Location: Tain, Highland Region

History: Beginning in 1843, the Matheson family began selling their whisky for a few shillings per gallon. They named their whisky “Glenmorangie” which is a Gaelic word meaning “Valley of Tranquility.” Today, they are one of the most famous Scotch distilleries and have the tallest copper stills in all of Scotland which help create their renowned whisky.

Tour Information: Tours last one hour, cost 20 pounds per person and you receive two drams for tasting at the end of the tour. You can book the tour in advance online at glenmorangie.com/visit-us/distillery-tours.

- April–May: Monday–Friday | hourly | 10 a.m.–3 p.m.
- June–August: Monday–Sunday | every 30 minutes | 10 a.m.–4 p.m.
- September–October: Monday–Friday | hourly | 10 a.m.–3 p.m.
- November–March: Monday–Friday | 10 a.m. and 2 p.m.



To find more distilleries in any region, scan the QR code for an interactive map by Visit Scotland.
<https://www.visitscotland.com/things-to-do/food-drink/whisky/distilleries> ■



Know Before You Go: UTAH AND OMAHA BEACHES

By Jessica Zen

When the Allied forces launched an attack to liberate Europe from German military occupation, the impact it would have on history was nothing but a dream. June 6, 1944, will forever be remembered as D-Day, when a 60-mile stretch of beaches in Normandy were used for an invasion that would change the world. Utah and Omaha were two of the five beaches on the westernmost front where American forces landed. Though the Allied forces were triumphant, they were met with fierce German resistance and suffered serious losses. Today, visiting the beaches is a great way to honor the memory and pay homage to the thousands of soldiers who gave up their lives for our freedom. This year marks the 80th anniversary of D-Day.



TOP: Remains of a German bunker at Omaha Beach.
BOTTOM: Omaha Beach World War Two Overlord landing Memorial.





LEFT: Utah Beach invasion landing memorial.
BOTTOM: B-26 Marauder bomber at the Utah Beach Landing Museum.



Furthest to the west is **Utah Beach**, where over 23,000 men landed and moved approximately four miles inland after intense fighting on D-Day. When visiting this beach, parking is easy, as you can head straight to **Musée du Débarquement** (Utah Beach Landing Museum) for free parking in a large lot. After walking the beach, stop by the museum, which chronicles how D-Day was planned and executed. Be sure to check out the B-26 Marauder bomber, an American WWII twin-engine bomber aircraft.

Across from the museum is a shop, bar and restaurant called **Le Roosevelt Cafe**. The restaurant is covered in museum-like decorations, including mannequins in traditional uniforms and historical artifacts. It is located in a fishing house that was used during WWII, making it an incredibly authentic piece of history in which you can now dine.

If you want to tour more of the town of Utah Beach, which is **Saint-Marie-du-Mont**, visit the church, where the walls are still peppered with bullet holes, a solemn reminder of the battles fought. The church

tower has since been restored, but the people will never forget the damage.

Just 45 minutes away (via N13) is **Omaha Beach**, which was the most heavily defended area on D-Day. Fighting here was intense and casualties were higher — around 1,000 soldiers. Despite the odds they faced, at the end of the day, Americans were able to gain a small foothold on the beach. A must-see at Omaha Beach is the **Normandy American Cemetery, Memorial and Visitor Center**. This beautiful area pays homage to the soldiers who lost their lives on D-Day. The names of men missing in action are inscribed on the Walls of the Missing. The museum also relays the story of the D-Day landings and the battle of Normandy.

Pointe du Hoc, a cliff on the English Channel, is another great stopping place and is where the German fortifications were strong during the war. To this day, the ground is still littered with German concrete defenses. Here you'll find a memorial dedicated to the battle and the **Army Rangers** who scaled the cliffs to seize German artillery pieces.


The **Omaha Memorial Museum** houses a collection of uniforms, weapons, personal objects and vehicles in order to keep the memory alive of the soldiers who paid the ultimate price for our freedom. This museum is kid-friendly and offers a free tour. Parking in this area is easy and can be found at the museum, Pointe du Hoc, the cemetery, as well as free parking lots.

Conveniently located between the cemetery and Pointe du Hoc is **L'Omaha**, the perfect place to stop for lunch. They feature a covered terrace with a sea view and a garden. Served daily is local wine and beer, as well as full lunches ranging from burgers and fries to mussels in cream sauce. They also have a small shop and free parking. Should you wish to enjoy the beach in a closer proximity, pack a picnic lunch!

Between the natural beauty of the beaches and the historical significance, it's no wonder people flock to Normandy. With the 80th anniversary of D-Day upon us, there is no better time to plan a trip to this area. Take some time while you are there to learn about the battles and reflect on the significance of this area and the invasion of the beaches. Though it was many years ago, we will never forget what D-Day meant for the world. ■







I watched as the ship's captain ladled ice water out of a bucket and dumped it down the back of my kneeling daughter's neck. She squealed and Njörðr, the Norse god of seafarers, laughed. Well, I admit that I laughed too. It was her Polar Baptism and the jovial atmosphere aboard the MS Nordnorge was contagious. Also, it was just really funny, until it was my turn.

continued on page 50

Cruising Norway's Fjords on the
Hurtigruten

By Kat Nickola

“HER•TUH•GROO•TIN”



© TYRM IVAR BERGSMO/HURTIGRUTEN GROUP

Half cruise, half ferry, the Hurtigruten shipping line began in 1893 as the primary way northern coastal Norwegian communities connected with each other and the world. Now called the Coastal Express, the ten ships that make up the fleet still ply the Arctic waters of western Norway providing ferry and shipping service to the towns along the fjords.

The route extends from Oslo in the south to Kirkenes in the far north, stopping at 34 port towns along the way. We booked our passage from Bergen to Tromsø. It's possible to take a trip heading either north or south between any combination of ports, but the larger towns like Oslo, Bergen, Ålesund, Trondheim, Svolvær and Tromsø, are the best options. In these towns, ships stay in port longer and dock during the day. Yes, since it is also a shipping vessel, some ports are visited at night! Many of those stops are fast 15-minute visits for loading and unloading.

“

Down in Bergen, we spent a day wandering along the Bryggen, the old wharf area...”

The town of Bergen was a great starting point.

My children loved riding the funicular up Mt. Fløyen. It was inexpensive, and the misty forest at the top was dotted with mossy trails past carved gnomes and rocky outcroppings, plus there were fun woodsy play spaces. I've heard the view of Bergen from the top is also beautiful on the rare occasion it isn't buried in a cloud.

Down in Bergen, we spent a day wandering along the Bryggen, the old wharf area, taking pictures of the brightly colored clapboard buildings. An integral part of the Hanseatic trade routes of the 14th–16th centuries, this historic part of town is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The lower levels of these 62 original buildings have shops and cafes, plus the Bryggen Museum with interactive displays and artifacts of daily medieval life. At the end of the Bryggen wharf is the Bergenhus Fortress. There is an entry fee to see Håkon's Hall and the Roskrantz Tower, both relics of Norway's 13th-century golden age. The adjacent Bergenhus Festningsmuseum is free and offers a fascinating glimpse at the WWII Nazi occupation of Norway.

It was a pleasant walk from the Bryggen area through a hilly neighborhood to the Hurtigruten ferry terminal. We arrived at the earliest check-in time, one hour prior to boarding, and quickly went through an emergency briefing before walking up the gangway of MS Nordnorge.

Our basic, but comfortable, overnight berths accommodated two people and were designed for local ferry users and tourists alike. They had two single beds with one being able to fold down into a couch. There was also a small built-in desk with a mirror and chair, plus a tiny ensuite toilet and shower room. Hurtigruten berths are similar to those on a cruise, however much simpler in décor and amenities. Don't expect extravagance. They are clean, tidy and comfortable. That first night was difficult. Rough seas meant we were all feeling queasy and glad we brought Dramamine. However, the waves calmed and we found our sea legs.





ÅLESUND

On our second day, the ship pulled into Ålesund for three hours. We ventured into town and walked up the 418 steps to the Aksla viewpoint high above the town. Trondheim was the next day's major stopping point, and we had plenty of time to walk to the 850-year-old Nidaros Cathedral. This Gothic masterpiece was built over the grave of Saint Olav, who is credited with bringing Christianity to Norway. It is covered with carvings of the gory lives of saints and dragonsque gargoyles. On the way back to the ship, we made a point of getting some pictures as we crossed the Gamle Bybro with its scenic red gates that frame the colorful waterfront warehouses.

Back aboard, we took advantage of the various lounges to sit and read while watching the scenery slip by. Our family chose to make this a digital-free vacation, except for pictures, and we prepared the kids by choosing books and special sketch pads ahead of time. It was slow travel at its best. Our favorite space was the seventh-floor Explorer Lounge with its panoramic views out the front of the ship and its giant brass steering wheel. Nearby was a small children's play space and a library with chess boards.

Food aboard the ship was included. We purchased the half-board dinner and breakfast rate and bought lunch during shore excursions. The breakfast on offer at the Torget restaurant's buffet was a wide range of tasty European options from British beans and sausage to local preserved fish favorites and a variety of breads. The buffet was a good chance to try unique Norwegian foods without committing to an entire meal. Dinners were served in three courses with a delicious selection of hearty soups and gourmet main dishes to choose from.

Some stops, like Bodø at the entrance to the Lofoten Islands, were a bit short for touring, so we would disembark and find a local grocery store to get lunch and snacks. When we pulled into Svolvær, it was dark, but we had time to pop into the ice bar for a drink and did get a peek at the aurora over the port. Other stops were merely a chance to get off the ship, stretch our legs, pet the local cats and get back aboard. The frequent stops helped to break up the days. Like a cruise, shore excursions are available for purchase as well. We found exploring on our own very enjoyable, but activities like dog sledding and island farm visits sounded interesting.



AKSLA VIEWPOINT



NIDAROS CATHEDRAL



GAMLE BYBRO

continued on page 52

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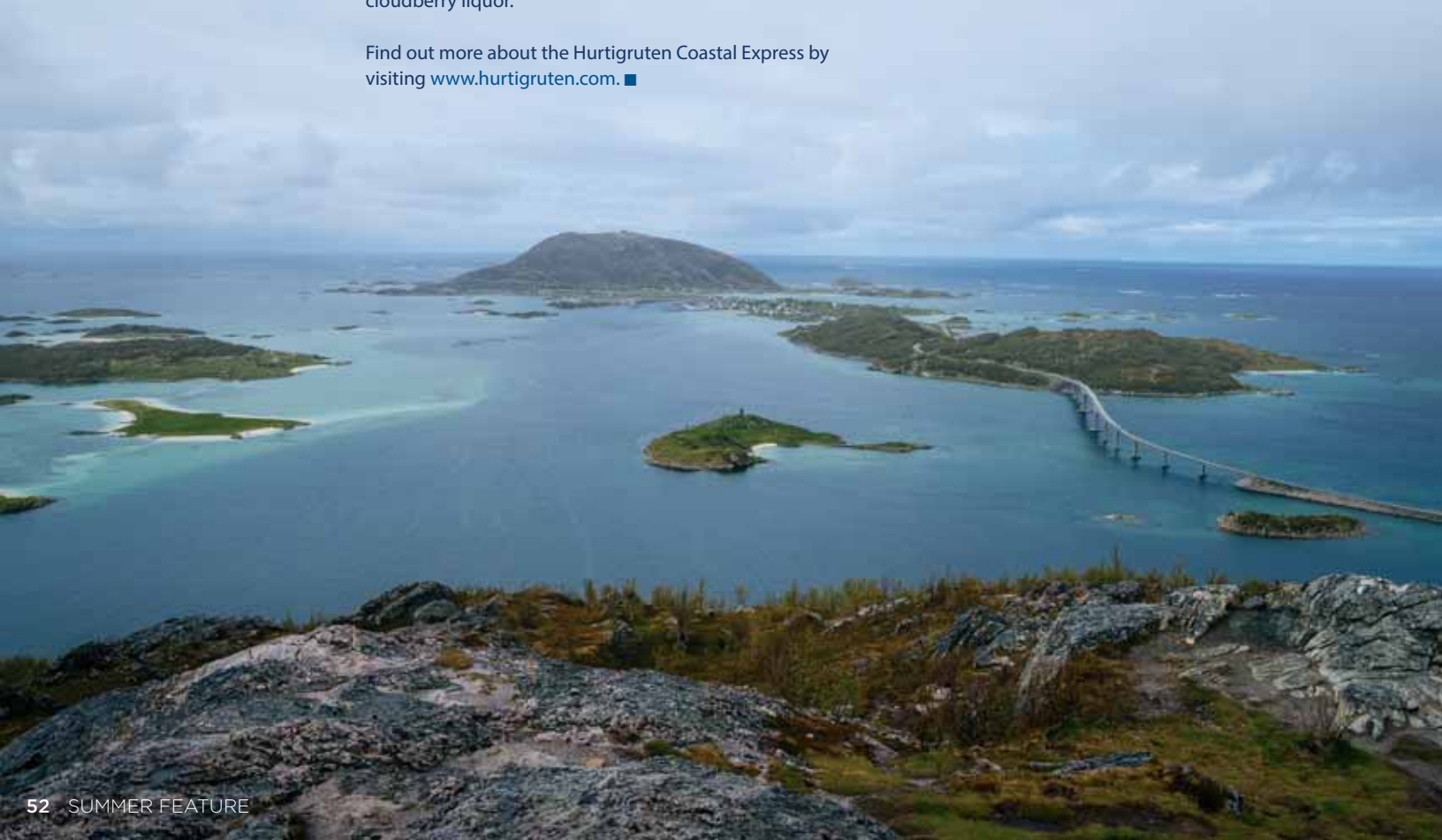
Tromsø, at the end of our trip, was covered in snow when we arrived. We visited the Polaria arctic aquarium which is right on the waterfront near the Hurtigruten dock. There were touch pools of anemones and sea stars and a seal show. Tromsø also has other interesting sites like the Polar Museum dedicated to arctic exploration. A lot of arctic excursions like dog sledding and reindeer tours also start from Tromsø. They were outside our budget. Instead, we rented sleds and took the city bus uphill to the Charlottenlund park where we sledded until it was dark and even dug a hole in the snow for a fire to warm our toes like the local kids.

The Hurtigruten ship offered other interesting free entertainment options. For example, we attended a fascinating lecture (in English) on Viking history, learned the science behind the aurora and went to some of the daily information sessions to learn about recommended sightseeing. In the evenings there were retellings of Viking lore, which leads us to the Polar Baptism.

It took us five days to go from Bergen to Tromsø and along the way we crossed over the Arctic Circle. There was a competition to guess the exact time of crossing which involved a big ceremony on the rear deck. The Norse god of seafarers, Njörðr, appeared blasting his horn and announcing our arrival in the polar region. Guests were invited to kneel in front of him as the ship's captain ladled a drizzle of freezing water, fresh from the Norwegian sea, down the back of our necks. After snickering when my daughter braved the ritual, it was my turn to be laughed at. The water was so cold, but the reward was a delicious warming shot of cloudberry liquor.

Find out more about the Hurtigruten Coastal Express by visiting www.hurtigruten.com. ■

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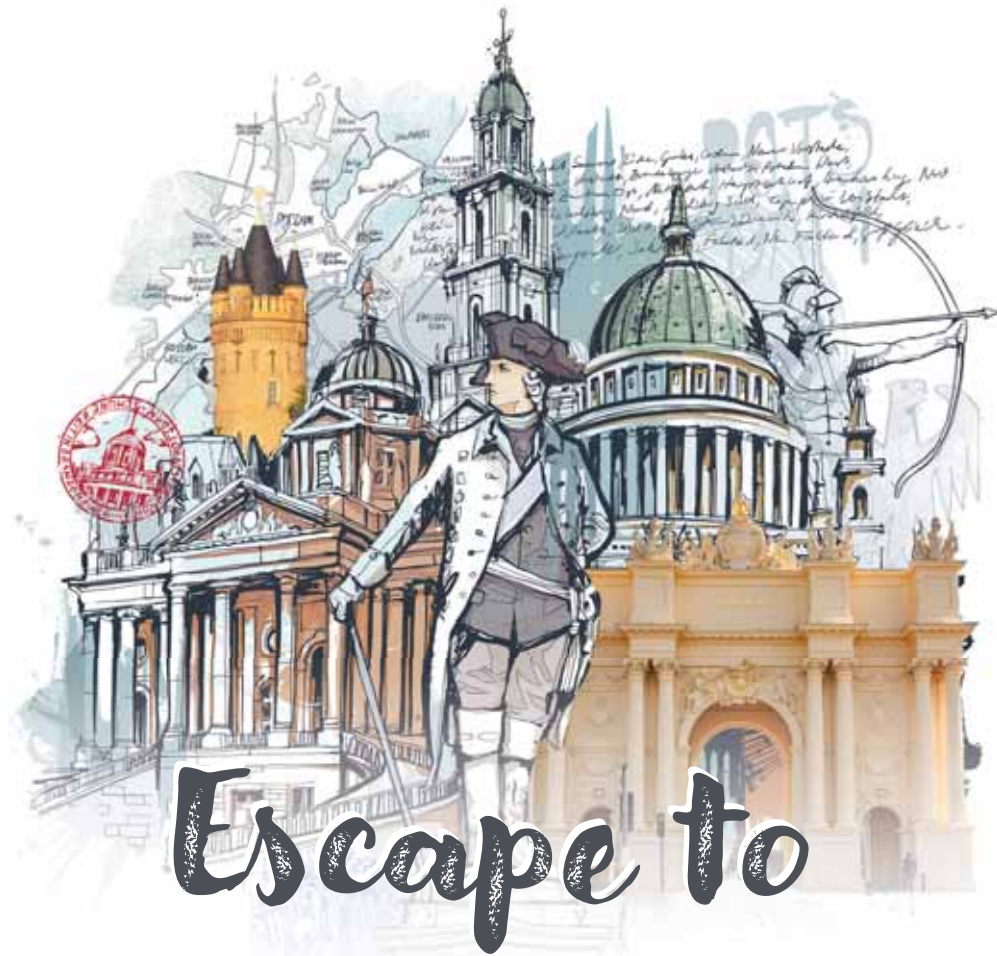
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Escape to POTSDAM

Tamala Malerk

Filled with elaborate palaces, unique food and provincial history, Potsdam makes a leisurely destination outside the bustle of Berlin.

Walk through History AT CECILIENHOF

History buffs and architecture lovers alike will want to put this on their list. Take advantage of the warm weather and take a leisurely stroll from the town center to this palace and enjoy the lake views along the way. Flowers and plants adorn the outside area. Once inside, you can tour historical rooms where royalty once lived, and perhaps, more famously, the location of the 1945 Potsdam Conference. At this Conference, Winston Churchill, Josef Stalin and Harry Truman met to negotiate terms for the end of World War II.



Eat Croatian & Russian Food IN GERMANY

I haven't had the chance to go to Croatia yet, but my tastebuds traveled there at Restaurant Adriatic. We stumbled upon this place while meandering up and down the streets right after we dropped our bags off at the hotel. The Croatian red wine that I paired with our tzatziki and grilled cheese appetizers is now one of my top three favorites. I recommend the lamb entrees with grilled vegetables.

On our second day in Potsdam, we had the opportunity to explore the 19th-century Russian colony, Alexandrowka. The colony was formed for former Russian POW singers who settled in Potsdam after the Napoleonic wars, and the wooden architecture still exists today. Alexandrowka has been a UNESCO Heritage Site since 1999. While visiting the colony, you can



see houses, a museum and a church, as well as enjoy a delicious meal at the restaurant. I started with a Bojaren Coffee, which is essentially a mocha with cinnamon, coriander and

whipped cream. For my entrée, I had Pelmeni, a hearty meat and potato dumpling dish. I finished with small "Moscow-style" pastries filled with caramel milk cream.

Strolling the SANSOUCI PARK

What is a German holiday without a couple of palaces? In addition to the aforementioned Cecilienhof, you will find several other palaces in Potsdam, and they are conveniently located in the same area: Sansouci Park. The park itself is several square kilometers, but fret not, there are museums, cafes and palaces scattered throughout to provide you with free maps of the area. There are three palaces for your

viewing pleasure in Sansouci Park: Orangery, Neues, and the one that started it all: Sansouci. I highly recommend reserving your tickets for Sansouci Palace online prior to your trip, lest you be stuck waiting for three hours like a writer who shall remain nameless.

Sansouci Palace provides visitors a guided audio tour that takes you room-to-room. Fun fact, former U.S. President Clinton was subject to a rare treat in 1998 when, to the chagrin of the historical preservationists, officials insisted on hosting him in the palace for dinner.

Inside the Neues Palace, visitors can see walls adorned with over 20,000 gemstones, minerals, seashells and fossils. At the time of writing (and the time of my visit), Orangery Palace was closed to visitors, but you can still view the gorgeous exterior.

If the above suggestions were not enough, scattered throughout the city are plenty of cafes, ice cream shops, clothing stores, bookshops, game and toy stores, museums and more. There is something for everyone in the quieter town of Potsdam. ■



THE CELTS IN GERMANY

By Kat Nickola



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Celtic sites seem to be everywhere in pre-Roman Europe. From Ireland to Austria, their archaeology is dotted across multiple landscapes. Archaeologists debate their origins, however. Pottery and art styles seem to suggest a spreading of culture westward from eastern Germanic areas like Hallstatt, Austria. However, recent DNA and language studies point to an origin from Atlantic coastal communities in Ireland, Britain, France and Spain. Either way, the Celts are not considered a single people group. Instead, they represent a variety of Iron Age cultures that shared a base language: Celtic, or Gallic, or Gaelic depending on its iteration. By the time of the Romans, from whom most of our information comes, Celtic-speaking people had a wide network of towns and trade across Germanic Europe and the British Isles. After the Roman Empire crumbled, Celtic languages were only left along its former fringes in places like Scotland and Ireland.

Parts of Germany were at the heart of Celtic-language lands, and it was one of the areas that saw a lot of Roman interaction. Today, numerous small sites dot the country. Many are part of non-profit archaeological clubs or local history museums. The www.verein-keltenwelten.de website is a national association of Celtic sites and maintains a great directory of locations. You can also find Celtic heritage sites near you by typing “Keltisches” into Google Maps.



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Eberdingen-Hochdorf (near Stuttgart)
www.keltenmuseum.de

The highlight of this Keltenmuseum is the contents and reconstruction of a local Celtic prince's richly furnished burial mound. There is also a living history farmstead with weekend experiences like yarn-dyeing, metalwork and weaving.



Otzenhausen (near Baumholder)
www.keltenpark-otzenhausen.de

A recreated, walled Celtic village sits at the base of the Dollberg mountain where a massive Celtic fortress stood 2,000 years ago. You can hike the old fortress wall and visit the living-history village to see demonstrations of life and skills during its Celtic heyday.



Altmühltal (near Ansbach)
www.naturpark-almuehltal.de

There are 18 stations along the 39km Altmühltal cycle path with reconstructions of Celtic city gates, houses and burial mounds. QR codes at the stops provide an immersive experience. There are also Neandertal relics and caves to explore.

Rodenbach (near Kaiserslautern)
www.kaiserslautern-kreis.de

At the edge of town is a Celtic burial mound from around 400 B.C. You can enter a reconstruction of the central chamber where a replica burial and expensive grave goods are on display. The gold jewelry, iron weapons and bronze vessels led people to call this the "Prince's grave of Rodenbach."



Heuneburg (south Baden-Württemberg)
www.heuneburg-pyrene.de

A recreated Celtic town and nearby museum show off this thriving 4th century B.C. economic power center. Walk through the houses, check out the crafting demonstrations and admire the extensive burial mounds on the archaeological trail. ■



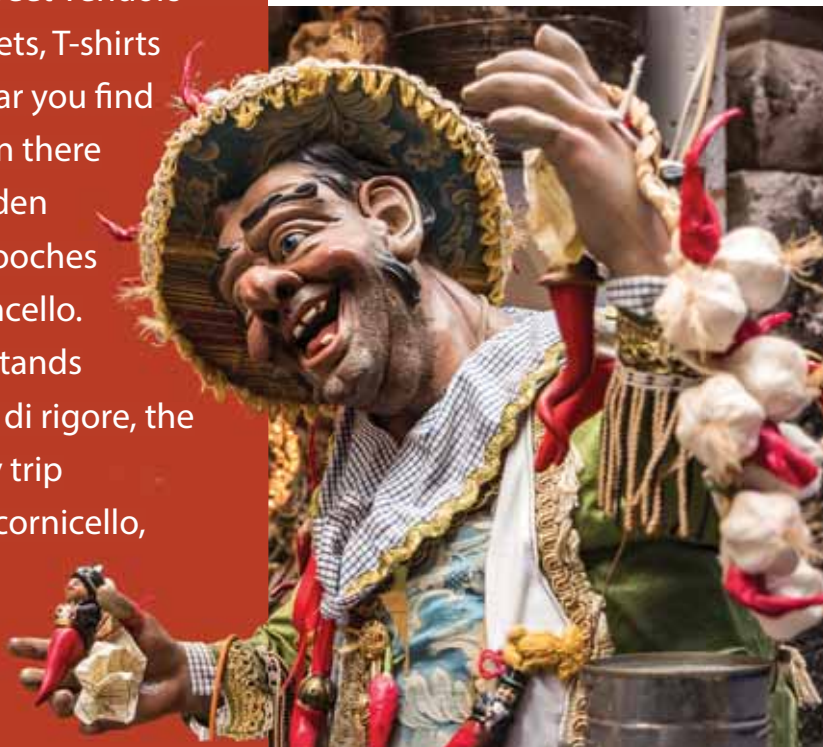
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The Cornicello:

Symbol of Naples

By Karen Bradbury

Italy's third-largest city is undeniably a bit tatty around its edges. Naples is one of Europe's most ancient cities, and a walk through the cavern-like historical core reveals shopkeepers and street vendors selling all the magnets, T-shirts and soccer team gear you find all over Europe. Then there are the carved wooden figurines, cameo brooches and bottles of limoncello. But soon one item stands out as the purchase di rigore, the must-have from any trip to Bella Napoli: the cornicello, or Naples horn.





Where to buy the Naples Horn

There's no need to search far and wide for the most simplistic examples of the Naples horn. Casual souvenir shoppers will likely make their purchases in and around Via San Gregorio Armeno, a bustling shopping street known for the sale of hand-carved nativity sets. Cosmos-Artigianato Napoletano, located at number 5 on this famous street, has garnered rave reviews on both Google and TripAdvisor. Many other handicraft and jewelry stores throughout the city sell hand-crafted versions of the cornicello, many of which come with certificates of authenticity and instruction manuals.



AN ANCIENT TALISMAN WITH ENDURING POWER

Bright red, elongated, twisted and conical, the hornlike object known as a cornicello in Italian or cornicello in the local dialect is ubiquitous. This immediately recognizable talisman is used to channel good fortune and repel the curse of the evil eye. Even people who aren't particularly superstitious have a healthy respect toward its purported efficacy. And it's been working its magic for a long, long time.

Numerous sources trace the origins of Naples' trademark amulet as far back as 3500 B.C.E., when hunters would hang the horns of their prey upon their doors to scare and repel enemies and evil forces. Its red color, symbolic of blood, represents life, strength and good fortune. Its similarity to a hot chili pepper is not coincidental. Believed to work as an aphrodisiac, red peppers symbolize fertility, an idea closely intertwined with survival of the species and perpetuation of the family line.

To be effective, the cornicello's essential attributes are dictated by age-old rules. The horn is optimally hollow inside, which allows it to be filled with salt, said to increase its powers. It should be crafted by hand, allowing its maker to pass on strength and positive influences to its new owner. A particularly auspicious material from which it can be made is coral, a revered substance believed to endow energy and confidence, as well as offer protection to pregnant women.

The amulet may be worn as a pendant around one's neck, carried in the form of a keychain, hung from a vehicle's rear-view mirror or placed above the entrance to a home or business. No harm is associated with harnessing the power of several horns within a number of different settings.

The most important rule in connection with the cornicello is that it can only be purchased for another, as buying a horn for oneself negates all of its mystical, protective powers. When presenting the gift to its intended, a certain ritual should be followed. The recipient is asked to open the palm of his left hand, which should be pricked with the tip of the horn.

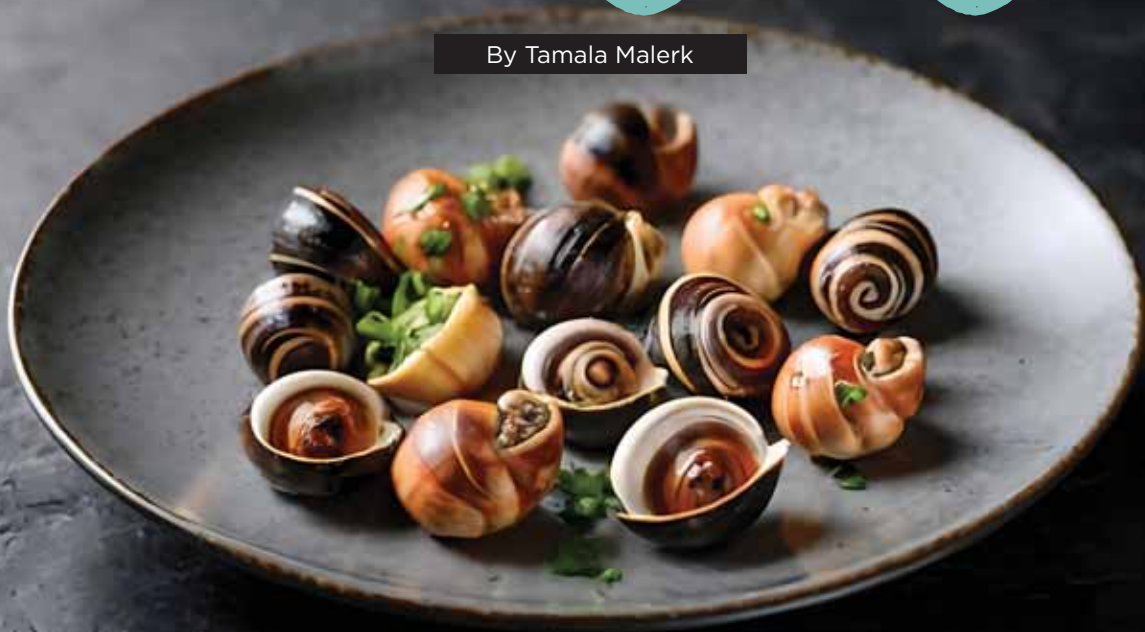
If ever the tip of the horn should break off, one should not panic. The breakage indicates the horn has performed its intended task, accumulating negative energy within its tip until it could hold no more.

Reason enough, perhaps, to inspire the recipient of this sacred gift to embark upon a trip to Naples to buy more horns for all those he or she holds dear. ■



Why French Food Makes You Go “Ooo La La”

By Tamala Malerk



French food is renowned for its “formal techniques, emphasis on fresh ingredients and simple flavors [and] pride in presentation,” according to Escoffier Culinary School of Arts. Whether it’s a flaky croissant, a tasty macaron, duck confit or, for the adventurous, escargot, French food is synonymous with rich history, technique and culture.

Food and Culture in France

According to JRE-Jeunes Restaurateurs, “In 2010, UNESCO recognized that French gastronomy is a ‘social custom aimed at celebrating the most important moments in the lives of individuals and groups.’” That is how intertwined food is with culture in France. It is not just eating a meal; it’s an experience. Meals can often last between two and six hours; dinner can contain six different courses from pre-appetizer to an ending espresso.

French Cooking Techniques

There is a lot that goes into French cuisine, and we cannot cover it all, but we can provide you with a few techniques to take with you on your next trip.

- There is a concept called **“Mise en place”** meaning everything in its place which is the French way to ensure everything is in reach before you begin your meal.
- **Flambéing** is a technique utilizing alcohol and high heat to infuse the flavor of the liquor into the sauce.
- **Mirepoix** is a French staple consisting of diced vegetables and fat or butter that is used for sauces, stews and soups.
- To **julienne** is to thinly slice food into long, thin pieces.
- There are five **“mother sauces”** key to French cooking: hollandaise, tomato, velouté, espagnole and béchamel.

Velouté sauce



Poached egg with hollandaise



5 My Top Five French Foods

Here are some of my favorite rich, saucy and yummy French foods.

1. **Duck Confit:** This time-consuming dish is worth the wait. The duck is typically cured in a medley of salt and herbs and refrigerated for upwards of 36 hours, then roasted somewhere between four and 10 hours. It is often served with potatoes.
2. **Macaron:** This French sandwich cookie consists of a two-cookie base made of sugar, egg whites and almond flour containing a cream, fruit spread or chocolate filling. My favorites are pistachio and white chocolate.
3. **Onion Soup:** Caramelized onions in a dark broth topped with gooey Gruyere cheese and is often paired with delicious bread is such a comfort food.
4. **Croissant:** This flaky pastry needs no description. However, you may find it curious that the croissant was originally an Austrian pastry. The croissant “became” French in the 20th century when the brioche dough was changed out for a laminated yeast dough.
5. **Quiche Lorraine:** This savory tart has a custard base of egg and crème with cheese and bacon for a tasty brunch meal.





Delicious DAMPFNUDEL

By Kat Nickola

These mildly sweet dumplings are a mainstay at German festivals and markets. The softball-sized hot steamed bun is served in a bowl with your choice of topping. At fests, the most common topping is a tasty vanilla sauce, while other sweet fruits like cherries or even chocolate are also popular. Savory varieties are also sometimes seen swimming in a vegetable or potato soup.

.....
MAKE THEM YOURSELF



ORIGIN DEBATE

The Dampfnudel is claimed by both Bavaria and the Pfalz regions of Germany. It is a continuing point of contention. In 2008, the Minister of Agriculture for Rheinland-Pfalz sent a stern letter of complaint to the Minister of Agriculture in Bavaria. Dampfnudel had appeared on a food database celebrating Bavarian dishes being considered for EU cultural protection. This was a problem because the dumplings are made differently between the two regions. Not to fret, however, a return letter guaranteed the public that dampfnudel was not selected and would not be locked into a protected status favoring the Bavarian style.

FILLED OR NOT?

Bavarian-style dampfnudel is often filled with a fruit compote and is steamed with milk and butter. This iteration tends to be softer and is almost always served with a sweet topping. In the Pfalz, where traditional un-filled dampfnudel is eaten as both a savory main dish with soup and as a sweet side dish with wine sauce, it is steamed in salt water and fat. The Pfalz version has a slightly crispier crust. ■

Legend has it that a baker in the Pfalz town of Freckenfeld made the first huge batch of dampfnudel in the 1600s. It was during the Thirty Years' War and a Swedish cavalry unit was demanding tribute in exchange for not destroying the village. Apparently, the Swedes were pleased with their dampfnudel payment and its plentiful wine sauce, so the town survived.

American Dentist in Heidelberg & Stuttgart

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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Spaghettieis

By Karen Bradbury

One of the best experiences on a warm summer's day in Germany is to meander through a city's Altstadt and drop by one of its many "Eiscafé," ice cream places. One can either hope to snag a table outdoors and feast on a fancy gelato dessert served in a bowl the size of a baby's head, or just grab a cone with a scoop or two and eat it on the run.

When opting for the former, there's a very special dessert with a unique appearance that may suggest Italy, but is, in fact, a German innovation: "Spaghettieis." What resembles a heaping plate of pasta is entirely concocted of sweet treats. What gives?

This optical illusion is created in a few simple steps. First, a heap of deeply chilled whipped cream is placed upon a plate to serve as the base. Next, vanilla ice cream is pressed through a special kind of sieve to create the appearance of spaghetti and heaped around the cream. A strawberry sauce poured over the top stands in for tomatoes. The finishing touch is white chocolate shavings, a look-alike for the parmesan cheese.

Of course, variations exist and nowadays you can order a carbonara version featuring nuts or one with ice cream noodles that are made of chocolate.

The backstory of Spaghettieis reflects recent German history. The creamy dessert was the brainchild of one Dario Fontanella, whose dad had migrated to Germany to open up an ice café. He founded his new business in Mannheim. Dario, inspired by a labor-intensive dessert he'd once eaten back in Italy, created his Spaghettieis prototype out of pistachio, lemon and strawberry ice cream—colors that reminded him of the Italian flag. His dad was not impressed, remarking he'd never before encountered colorful spaghetti. So, with a few quick tweaks and substitutions, Germany's classic summertime treat was conjured into being. This creation, dating back to 1969, remains as beloved as ever. Lucky for us!

You can enjoy a Spaghettieis virtually anywhere in Germany. To sample one made by the ice cream shop that pioneered it, a pilgrimage to Die Eis Fontanella Café in Mannheim, is in order.

Guten Appetit! Buon appetito! ■



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All information current as of March 2024.

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