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EDITOR'S LETTER



Kat Nickola
Writer-Editor
Stars and Stripes Europe

*“There is no bad weather,
just bad clothing.”*

There is a reason most northern European nations claim this saying as their own: It's true. Taking it to heart has expanded my own enjoyment of the wet, cold fall and winter, and the good all-season rain jacket I bought means that I still enjoy my drizzly, muddy bike ride to work.

I hope the weather doesn't hinder your motivation to travel to unique places during your time in Europe. And I hope you find this edition of *Stars and Stripes Europe* inspirational; it has been a fun one to put together.

Looking for spooky experiences? From **abandoned places** and **Halloween celebrations** to **camping in ruins** and visiting the darker side of **fairy tales**, we are diving deep into the moody, mystical feel of fall.

This is the off-season for travel, which means those of us lucky enough to live here can venture out sans the crowds. We have stories to help you find the sunshine in **Tuscany**, wine in **Bordeaux**, or scenic winter villages in the **Black Forest**. But be aware of seasonal closures in **Catch it While You Can**.

For all my fellow outdoor junkies, we have outlined the best places to learn a new **extreme sport**, plus our fall and winter **sports guide** has resources in your area. Head outside to embrace the dark with a snowy winter trip to **Poland** or **Finland**. Back inside you can warm up with a new take on **hot cocoa**.

Need ideas for a good fall or winter city break? Read our three-day itineraries for the best of **Berlin** or **Copenhagen**, check out the royal sites of **Budapest**, or head out to the potteries in **Stoke-on-Trent**.

Ready to go farther? Visit the fascinating blend of cultures on a loop around **Albania** or get off the continent for a big trip to **South Africa**. And even if you can't make it that far, you can get a taste with our **Chakalaka** recipe.

I'm optimistic that this edition will inspire you to explore a bit more and enjoy the change of seasons. Don't forget to pack a rain jacket.

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KAT HIGHLIGHTS
HER FAVORITE
EXPERIENCES
WITH THIS STAMP.

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INDULGE YOUR

SENSES IN

Tuscan

By Tamala Malerk

Whether you are familiar with the Tuscan aesthetic and history or have only gotten as far as the Zuppa Toscana soup from Olive Garden, there is no doubt the threads of Tuscan culture are woven throughout American culture thanks to generations of immigrants. However, you might be lucky enough to find yourself "Under the Tuscan Sun" (2003 rom-com). So, get ready for this central Italian region. Its cities and islands are rich with ways to utilize all five senses in Florence, Pisa, Lucca, Elba, Siena, Volterra, Pienza and more.

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Touch

Olive harvesting season runs from October through early December. Hand-pick some olives and take part in the harvest yourself. Villa Campestri prides itself on utilizing a completely organic process because their microclimate allows for a "superior" extra virgin olive oil.



While in Pisa, put your hands up and try your best to straighten the Leaning Tower of Pisa. You will not be alone in this attempt so make sure to purchase your tickets online in advance up to a day before your visit at opapisa.it.

EDITOR'S PICK



You will definitely want to warm up in the Thermal Springs of Saturnia. These waters are nice 37.5 degrees Celsius (99.5 degrees Fahrenheit) all year long. Keep in mind — parking is free but limited, there is no lifeguard, the gravel can be rough on bare feet and it will probably be very busy.



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Smell

There is no doubt that truffle oil French fries are delicious. However, those tasty treats don't just magically appear. One must hunt for the buried truffles, and you can go on your own truffle hunt in Tuscany. With the help of Massimo Cucchiara and his dog (the dog is doing most of the smelling), you can go on a hunt with Truffles in Tuscany in San Miniato.



Fall is the time of year to catch some final botanical beauties before winter arrives. Take in the floral scents of the Botanical Garden of Lucca through Nov. 2, 2023. You will find over 200 types of trees and shrubs, a botanical museum, greenhouses filled with tropical plants, rhododendrons, camellias and more.



Leather has a rich history in Florence, with the first leather workers' union dating back to the 13th century, and there is no denying that distinct scent. A handmade leather item is a great Tuscan souvenir and you can use your nose to help you find some great keepsakes in the San Lorenzo Market.

Taste

Castellina is a medieval village found in Chianti; it is also home to cultivators of olive oil and wine. Several places all over town allow you to book an olive oil and wine tasting tour. La Castellina winery also boasts an exquisite extra virgin olive oil grown from their highest altitude fields.



Italy is known for great food and each region boasts its specialty. In Tuscany, pappa al pomodoro or panzanella integrates Tuscan saltless bread. Within a single region, cities have their own distinct flavors and styles. If you are taking your obligatory photo at the Leaning Tower of Pisa, make sure to sample some Pisano-styled food. Pisan food is known for meat-based dishes with local vegetables and fruit, such as Pisan tripe and wild boar.



Pienza is the birthplace of Pecorino cheese. Whether you like a strong Pecorino di Pienza DOP cheese or a mild Pecorino di Grotta, there is a Pienzan cheese for you. This cheese is so popular that every September a fair held in its honor, the Fiera del Cacio, where you can watch cheese rolling competitions, traditional shows and, of course, eat cheese.

Hear



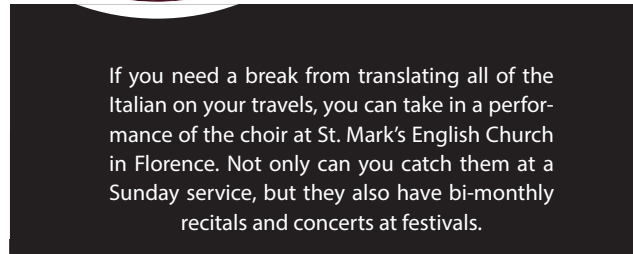
As you sip some wonderful Tuscan wine, listen to the live jazz music at unTUBO. They have a wine list 33 pages long and also feature art onsite. It's a great way to wind down after a day of exploring Siena.



After seeing all the sites in Florence, delight your ears with an auditory treat at the famous Teatro Verdi in Florence. The Orchestra della Toscana maintains a permanent residence here, but you can also listen to a variety of concerts, musicals and theater shows.

See

Nestled in the Tuscan Archipelago, one great site to see is the medieval village of Isola del Giglio. Travel back in time with a visit to Giglio Castello, whose medieval walls and atmosphere have been little touched by time. Every year, at the end of September, celebrate the grape harvest with the Grape and Open Cantine Festival.



If you need a break from translating all of the Italian on your travels, you can take in a performance of the choir at St. Mark's English Church in Florence. Not only can you catch them at a Sunday service, but they also have bi-monthly recitals and concerts at festivals.



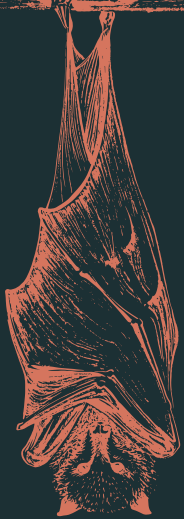
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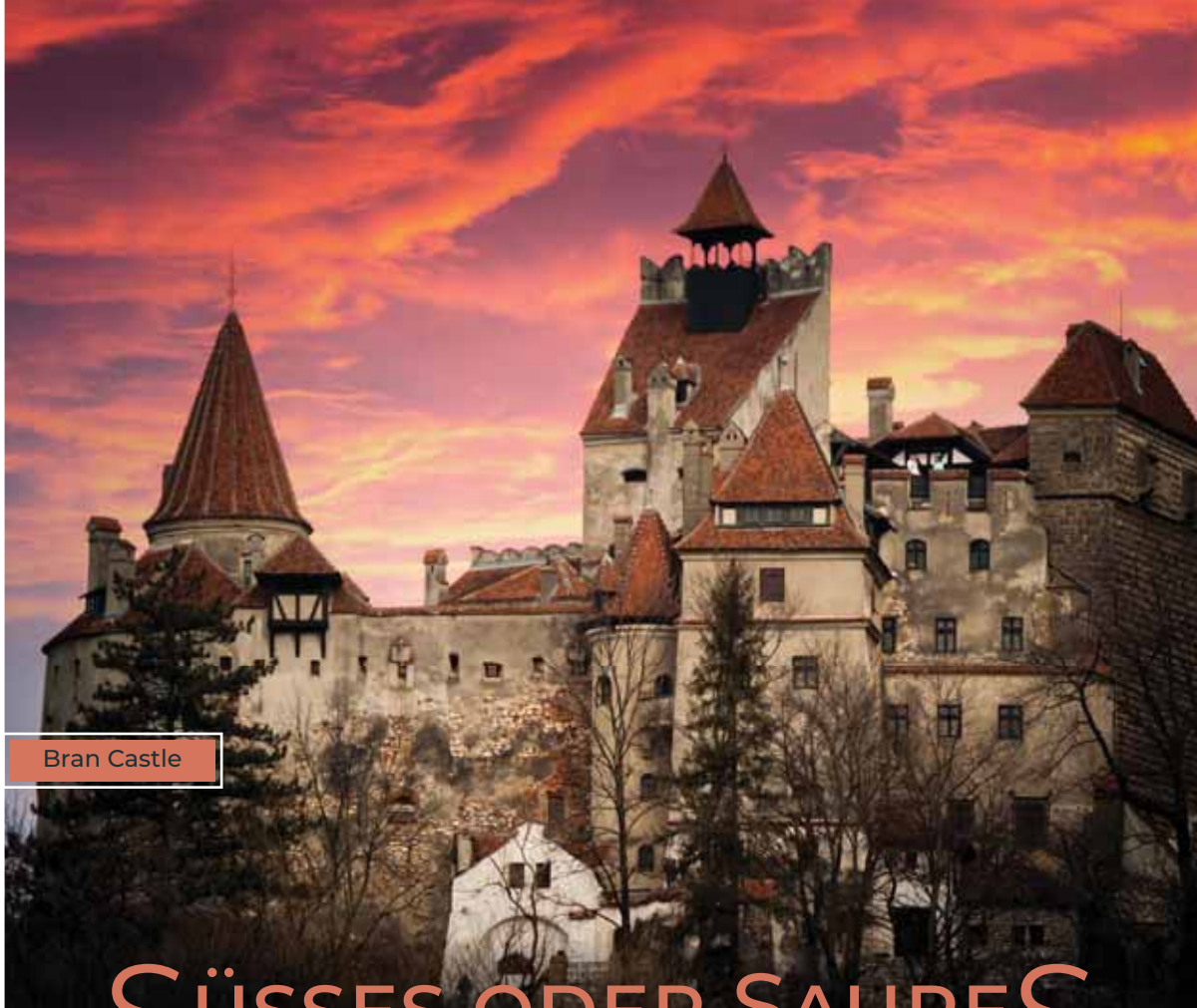
We cannot talk about things to see in Tuscany without mentioning the famous Statue of David by Michelangelo and the collection at the Uffizi in Florence featuring art by Botticelli, Leonardo, Raffaello and Caravaggio. ■

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If you want to see something atypical to the tourist experience, check out the "Filippo Civinini" Museum of Human Anatomy in Pisa. You can see an Egyptian mummy, the anatomical tables of Paolo Mascagni as well as anatomical and archaeological collections.



Halloween in the U.S. inspires creative costume ideas, massive candy consumption and ridiculous lawn decorations that put some Christmas light displays to shame. While Halloween in its modern iteration is considered mostly an American holiday, it can be celebrated here in Europe as well.



Bran Castle

SÜSSES ODER SAURES

Celebrate Halloween across Europe

By Tamala Malerk

Celebrate Samhain in Ireland and Scotland EDITOR'S PICK

Halloween's historical origins date back to the ancient celebrations of Samhain, or Samhuinn, (pronounced sow-in). In Celtic cultures, Samhain is believed to be the time of year when the veil between the living and the spirit realm is at its thinnest and is considered the "most significant" of the four annual fire festivals of the year, according to history.com. Villagers ate a "Dumb Supper" completely silent with a plate and cup set aside for an ancestor. Participants burned a bonfire to get rid of any dry vines or bushes. Today, it is typically celebrated on the night of Oct. 31.

Those in Ireland who want to celebrate this ancient holiday can do so at fires and festivals in Tlachtga, Derry, Meath and more. In Scotland, check out the Samhuinn Fire Festival in Edinburgh. If you are in Dublin for Samhain, make your way to the Bram Stoker Festival from Oct. 27–30. Stoker's "Dracula" is a literary classic and this festival celebrates him

with theater and choral performances, food tours, banquets and more.

Of course, we cannot talk about celebrating Dracula without mentioning a trip to Transylvania, home of the infamous bloodsucker. Here are some "must dos" in Transylvania:

- ◆ Visit Dracula's hometown, Sighisoara, a UNESCO heritage site, where Vlad Dracul was rumored to be born in 1431.
- ◆ Visit haunted forests such as Hoia-Baciu Forest, where vampires are believed to still roam.
- ◆ Explore Bran Castle in Braşov during their Halloween party. Careful, there's a zombie walk every October!
- ◆ Walk across the Bridge of Liars to see if your lies make the bridge crumble under you.
- ◆ Attend Braşov's Dracula Film Festival.

continued on page 12

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Celebrate with More Vampires

From Anne Rice to “Twilight,” “Underworld,” “Vampirina,” “Let the Right One In,” and “The Little Vampire,” the vampire is my favorite monster associated with this ghoulish holiday. If you want to explore various vampire lore and locations across Europe, here are some that may or may not have crossed your mind.

Film buffs will love this first location: Orava Castle in Slovakia. This castle was used as the backdrop for the 1922 film “Nosferatu.” Construction began in the 13th century, with its most modern form existing from the 17th century. They offer a variety of tours, including spooky lore to easier ones for those who choose not to conquer the hundreds of tower steps. Digital audio tours and guided tours are available in Slovakian and English.

It is believed that Istria, Croatia is home of the first European vampire, also known as “Strigoi.” Jure Grando did not lead a memorable life but is believed to have haunted his widow and Istria for 16 years after his death in 1656, leaving behind a trail of corpses of people he visited in the night. One night in 1672, some brave villagers, armed with stakes and crucifixes, decided to take action and slayed Grando, sending him to his final death. While in Istria:

- ◆ Go on a Halloween hunt in the forests for white truffles. These delectable finds are in season from April to October.
- ◆ Visit Bishop Leon Bembo, who just happened to die in the 12th century. His mummified corpse is one of three at St. Blaise’s Church.
- ◆ See what awaits you in the underworld of Baredine Cave.



Nosferatu

©WILLROW HOOD/STOCK.ADOBE.COM



Baredine Cave



Orava Castle

©HECKE/123RF.COM



Movie Park

©MOVIE PARK

Celebrate by Getting Scared

If tricks and scares are your favorite part of Halloween, there are plenty of opportunities across Europe to get your fright on. Those in Amsterdam can attend Amsterdam Halloween, a hybrid Halloween and music festival that combines the traditions of Halloween at three different areas for different music genres. Costumes are required for this event: You must wear one to not only attend but also survive the night.

If you are in Italy this Halloween, make your way to Corinaldo, whose inhabitants are believed to be descendants of witches. Every year they host the Witches Festival on the last four days of October. While in Italy, head to Monster's Park in Bomarzo, filled with interesting and "grotesque" sculptures that will delight any monster lover.

Readers in Germany have several options to get scared on Halloween.

- ◆ From Oct. 10 to Nov. 4, you can be horrified in a 1000-year-old castle ruin at Burg Frankenstein. There are over 3000 square meters of scary shows, monsters and more.
- ◆ Those familiar with Universal Studios Halloween Horror Nights will find similarities with Movie Park Germany's Halloween Horror Fest featuring scare zones, horror mazes and shows.
- ◆ You can also try to survive Film Park Babelsberg Horror Nights 2023, filled with terrifying mazes to navigate.

Celebrate with Family Fun

If you are like me, Halloween is more about fun than frights. Europe also has plenty of opportunities for family-friendly fun.

From Oct. 12 to Nov. 5, families can enjoy rides and enchanted gardens at Halloween in Tivoli Gardens in Copenhagen, Denmark. Those who love Germany's Legoland can enjoy the Monster Party all month in October featuring 4-D movie adventures, parades, monster dances and more. In Berlin, head over to the Monsterkabinett. This adventure may be better suited for older children as an abandoned amusement park comes alive with animatronic monsters.

Whether you prefer the tricks or treats, there is something for everyone celebrating Halloween in Europe this year. ■



Tivoli Gardens

ABANDONED AND INTRIGUING

By Kat Nickola



Paris, France

The Jardin D'agronomie Tropicale still houses the relics of a bizarre colonial exhibition from 1907. Built to showcase plants from French colonies, it soon housed people in a human zoo on display in fenced recreated "native villages." You can still see the remnants of this all-to-recent injustice in its collapsing state.



Esco Village, Spain

This village was (mostly) abandoned in the 1960s when a new dam flooded the occupants' former farmland. Set in a scenic arid valley, the crumbling walls still house a few people who graze sheep in the hills above. The road into town is blocked to vehicles, but you can still walk in and explore.



Duisburg, Germany

A former industrial site has become a public space pulled straight from the world of steampunk at the Landschaftspark in northern Duisburg. The steel walkways are surrounded by pipes and metal structures, the playground slides go through former ore bunkers and a viewing tower sits atop an old blast furnace.



Soča, Slovenia

The Soča River valley saw some of the bloodiest WWI battles along what was known as the Isonzo Front. There are empty tunnels built by Russian POWs along the hairpin turns of the Vršič Pass and an abandoned trench system and ruined battery near Kal-Koritnica.



Chiajna, Romania

Completed in 1790, this neglected monastery was bombed by the Turks before it could be consecrated. However, the solid structure remained. Believed to be cursed, it later housed dying plague victims and is said to be haunted.



Monterano, Italy

This clifftop village ruin survived the Bronze Age, the Etruscans and the Romans before falling to French forces in 1799. You can still explore the town, its ancient aqueduct and the old castle.



EDITOR'S PICK

Željava, Croatia

Originally built to house communist Yugoslavia's long-range radar, Željava Aerodrome became a massive underground air base able to withstand nuclear bombardment. Bring a high-powered flashlight to explore the old hangars and remnant twisted metal from its destruction, and if you are lucky, the local police will let you speed down the runway.

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Straight out of a fairy-tale: Hohenzollern Castle and the Swabian Alb

In SouthWest Germany, the legacy of the aristocratic Hohenzollern family includes some great attractions and sights. In the rugged, rolling upland of the Swabian Mountains, Hohenzollern Country is perfect for daytrips. Follow in the footsteps of one of the most important aristocratic families in Germany; explore the legacy of the once mighty Hohenzollerns.

The green, unspoiled Swabian Alb is so important that it has been recognized as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve and, in 2015, as the UNESCO Global Geopark Swabian Alb.

Hohenzollern Castle, one of the most impressive fortresses in Germany, is perched on a hilltop in the Swabian Mountains. It looks like a fairytale castle from centuries ago, but it is actually a fine example of 19th-century Gothic Revival architecture. The seat of the Prussian royal family and the Princes of Hohenzollern impresses with stunning views. As Kaiser Wilhelm I said after a visit in 1886: "The view from Hohenzollern Castle is really worth the journey." And that is still true today.

The castle Hohenzollern is only one hour away from Stuttgart. You can book your tickets here:

www.burg-hohenzollern.com



Leap, Ireland

Boasting a long list of eerie stories and claiming to be the world's most haunted castle, this well-preserved medieval castle has a bloody and violent history. If you are brave enough, contact Sean at leapcastle.net for a visit.



Oxford, U.K.

The ghost of Lord Lovell may still be wandering the roofless rooms of Minster Lovell Hall. It was originally built by one of the richest men in the 1430s and changed hands many times over the Middle Ages. You can still visit the ruins of the manor house, tower and dovecote.



Doel, Belgium

Nearly all the residents left Doel when eviction notices announced the town's demolition in the 1970s as part of the nearby Antwerp harbor expansion. Protests prevented its destruction, so you can now wander the empty streets and admire the graffiti art.



Munich, Germany

Affectionately dubbed a ghost train station, Geisterbahnhof Olympiapark, resides at the end of a defunct rail line that was built for the 1972 Olympic games. It was abandoned in 1988, but with rumors of a revitalization floating around, you should visit now to see the station in all its post-apocalyptic glory.



Buzludzha, Bulgaria

Perched atop a mountain pass like an alien spaceship, this disc-shaped monument to communism was abandoned in 1989. You can hike up to admire the lofty aspirations and walk around the exterior of this odd structure. ■



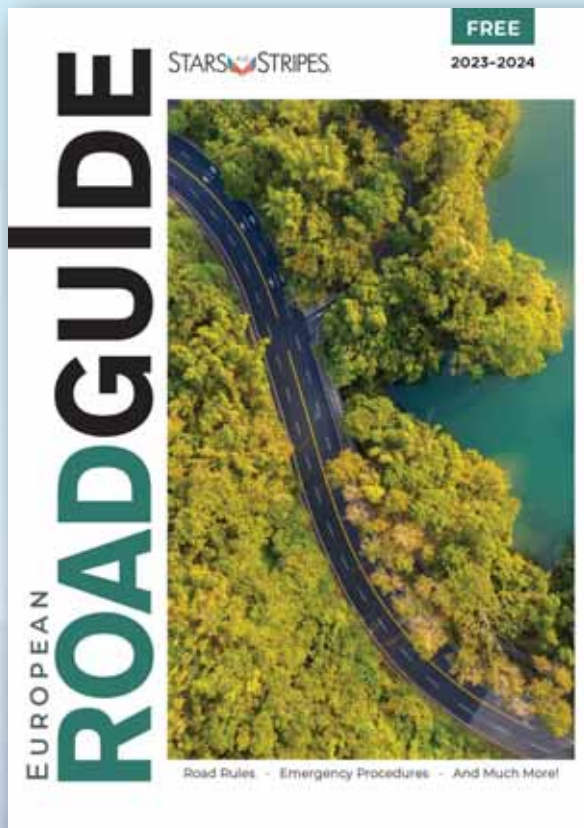
J-4 Battery, Spain

The J-4 coastal defense battery is perched above the Atlantic coast just north of the Portugal border. Built by Nationalist forces during the Spanish Civil War, it still houses rusting artillery guns amongst the windowless buildings and underground tunnels.



Malpasset Dam, France

Only five years after its construction, the Malpasset dam showed signs of leaking which were ignored by authorities. It broke on Dec. 2, 1959, and swept away two towns before flooding Fréjus. You can still see the wrecked dam and chunks in the river, which nature is slowly eroding away.



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CAMPING IN CASTLE RUINS

By Kat Nickola

Take ghost stories to the next level by telling them around the campfire at a crumbling castle ruin. These three places are fun to explore during the day but can seem genuinely eerie when staying overnight in a tent.

Go prepared! Bring appropriate camping gear, food and clothing to be equipped for any weather or medical emergency. These locations are far from facilities but may bring you nearer to the spirit of these derelict vestiges from the Middle Ages.

ARDVRECK CASTLE, SCOTLAND

Crumbling on a little promontory at Loch Assynt in the Highlands of Scotland, Ardvreck Castle's story began in 1490. It was built by members of clan MacLeod as a new seat of power. History takes a murky turn, however, when financial troubles prevented the castle's completion. Allegedly, the chief made a pact with the devil who would finish the castle in three days in exchange for marrying the chief's daughter Eimhir. After it was built, however, Eimhir jumped off the castle tower into the loch, turning into a mermaid to escape the devil. Supposedly, her tail splashing and weeping is still heard across the loch today. You can set up a tent for wild camping along the haunted shores of Loch Assynt near to the castle ruins. Read about the responsible use of the wild places in Scotland at outdooraccess-scotland.scot.



EDITOR'S
PICK



SCHMIDTBURG CASTLE, GERMANY

Uniquely situated on a clifftop surrounded by higher hills, the castle at Schmidtburg has a violent family history. It is said to have been built in 926 by the noble Wildgrave family and was caught in the middle of numerous feuds. The castle was attacked and rebuilt over the ages by fighting family members until its deterioration during the 16th century and final destruction by the French in 1688. Notorious German criminal Johannes Bückler used the ruins in 1802 as a hideout before being captured and taken to Mainz for a lengthy interrogation, trial and execution by guillotine. The castle is resonantly peaceful nowadays and is bookable as a trekking camp, roughly 2km from the trailhead, within the Soonwald-Nahe Nature Park at soonwaldsteig.de/en.

PIEL CASTLE, ENGLAND

At just 50 acres, tiny Piel Island has a history as deep as the harbor it guards. Home to a Cistercian abbey in the 12th century, the island became known for its lucrative smuggling operations. The castle was built in 1327 to help protect the monks from both pirates and the prying eyes of customs officials as they illegally shipped and sold tax-free wool to the continent. The abbey and castle were left to ruin after Henry VIII's 1537 dissolution of the monasteries. Nowadays, you can camp at this unique island castle; check-in at the small pub whose owner is considered the King of Piel. Perhaps you'll see the mysterious lamp-wielding figure said to help guide ships from the tower windows. Access the island via the small Piel Island Ferry (www.facebook.com/Pielislandferry) or by cautiously avoiding quicksand on the 2km walk across the tidal flats at low tide from Snab Point on Walney Island. ■



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MEANDERING IN BUDAPEST

By Stacy Roman

As the crowds of tourists fade into the horizon with the ever-shrinking daylight, fall is a great time to start planning trips to places that may have fallen by the wayside on your travel bucket list. Why not leave the crowded shores of last-minute beachgoers in the Mediterranean behind and head in the opposite direction? With impressive architecture, an often harrowing history, warm and friendly locals and delicious eats, Budapest is as magical as it is regal. Take a moment or two to meander through this fantastic Hungarian capital.

A LITTLE HISTORY

Budapest, as it's known today, was once three separate cities — Buda, Óbuda and Pest. Buda and Óbuda often outshone their quieter neighbor across the Danube with established trade ports and businesses in the early centuries. However, during the 18th century, when Pest became a highly desirable city, the population exploded, eclipsing Buda and Óbuda. In 1873, the three towns were unified under the Austro-Hungarian Empire as "Budapest" and became a co-capital with Vienna. It suffered significant damage during both World Wars and fell beneath the shadow of Communism during the Cold War. Budapest reclaimed its rightful place among spectacular European capitals as it emerged from the Iron Curtain.



PEST

Heading toward the Danube River, it's hard to miss the mammoth building along the riverbank. This immense structure is home to the Hungarian Parliament. Completed in 1902, the Hungarian Parliament Building is the second largest in Europe. Visitors can take a 45-minute guided tour in English and marvel at the impressive frescoes found throughout. Admission is 6,700 forints, or about 20 euros.

Walking along the river, you may see bronzed shoes on the concrete near the water. Commissioned in 2005, the "Cipők a Duna-Parton" honors the Jews who were ordered to remove their shoes before being shot and thrown into the river. These shoes serve as a haunting reminder of World War II.

On a lighter note, take in the changing leaves and crisp fall air a few blocks away at City Park. The entrance is marked by Heroes' Square, a large area flanked by columns and statues of Hungarian heroes, as well as fine art museums and galleries. Be on the lookout for the statue of an anonymous hooded figure. It's said to be the harbinger of good luck to aspiring writers.

For good (and inexpensive) eats on this side of the city, warm up with a delicious cup of Hungarian soup or stew at the local fast-food spot, LEVES. For a fancier sit-down option, head to New York Café. Opened in 1894, the jaw-dropping surroundings are worth the hassle of trying to get a reservation.

BUDA

Meandering in Buda (the western side of the Danube) has a slightly different vibe than Pest. Buda is older and quieter. You can't miss the spectacular Buda Castle and Castle Hill on the riverbank. The stately grounds were once home to Hungarian royalty and now house the Budapest History Museum and the National Gallery. The Fisherman's Bastion is one of the city's most iconic (and Instagrammed) spots. The daily tours of the castle are available in English from 2–4 p.m. for 12 euros per person.

For a little more adventure, head underground to the Buda Castle Labyrinth. Budapest has more than 200 caverns and tunnels beneath the city; the ones below the fortress are part of this network. Head to the Rock Hospital Atombunker Museum, a section used as a field hospital in WWII and a potential fallout shelter during the Cold War. The museum is open daily from 10 a.m. – 8 p.m., only closing on Nov. 1, Dec. 24, 25, 31 and Jan. 1.

After working up a serious appetite from the underground shenanigans, head to Ildikó Konyhája for traditional Hungarian fare. Complete with the red and white checkered tablecloths, fill up on roasted chicken, goulash and stew with dumplings. KEG Sörművház offers a delightful, modern twist on Hungarian dishes and a vast array of brews on tap to sample.

Budapest is the perfect mixture of history, elegance, opulence and mystery. You'll want to keep meandering through this incredible city for the spectacular sights, inexpensive and tasty places to try out, and its inarguable beauty. ■

Bordeaux

Opens for Business

Change is afoot in France's most historic wine region. Throughout most of the 20th century, Bordeaux wineries offered tourists little in the way of tasting rooms or vineyard hotels - not so much "Bienvenue" (welcome) as "Va-t'en!" (go away). An age-old tradition saw the vast majority of wines sold via the négociants (merchants) of Bordeaux, so receiving visitors was viewed as an unnecessary annoyance. Essentially, these traders (rather than the winemakers themselves) acted as the region's ambassadors. The châteaux gates were kept firmly shut.



By James Lawrence

continued on page 24

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SEE OUR AD ON PAGE #65

Enchanting Vineyards

On arrival, head north, south or east from Bordeaux city and you'll be immersed in grapes. The vineyards of Pessac-Leognan are less than 25-minute drive from the downtown area, located to the south of Bordeaux





◀ Top 5 cellar door experiences

- Chateau Cos d'Estournel
- Chateau Couvent des Jacobins
- Chateau Kirwan
- Chateau Pichon Longueville Baron
- Chateau Lagrange

Cellar Tours organizes bespoke trips to Bordeaux and other regions
Plaza de los Bandos, 5, 2A
Llanes, Asturias, 33500, Spain
Check out their website at www.cellartours.com or email them at info@cellartours.com.



Then, the digital revolution happened. Tech-savvy consumers wanted to connect with their favorite brands; even more importantly, they wanted to sample these delicious wines at the source. "We have to open our doors, share the stories of our wines, and show a different side to Lafite that is not all about men in suits and white-tablecloth dining," says Château Lafite owner Saskia de Rothschild. "This change has been a long time coming," agrees Hubert de Boüard of Chateau Angelus in Saint-Emilion. "It's not enough to accept tourists—we need to welcome them!"

True to his word, de Boüard's family now runs several hotels and high-class restaurants in Bordeaux, including the Michelin-starred Logis de la Cadène (restaurant with rooms) in Saint-Emilion and the more casual bistro at Château La Fleur de Boüard in neighboring Lalande de Pomerol. After a long wait, you can now dine—and sleep—amid

the vineyards in hoity-toity Bordeaux. Except it's not hoity-toity anymore.

The region is also wonderfully easy to explore: A high-speed rail link whisks you from Paris in just under two hours. On arrival, head north, south or east from Bordeaux city and you'll be immersed in grapes. The vineyards of Pessac-Leognan are less than 25-minute drive from the downtown area, located to the south of Bordeaux. To the north are the legendary châteaux of Kirwan, Latour, and Montrose, as well as a very snazzy boutique hotel, La Maison d'Estournel. Yet, Cordeillan Bages is many people's favorite address; it is very close to Pauillac's most hospitable property, Chateau Pichon-Longueville Baron. This fairytale castle was one of the first estates in the Medoc region of Bordeaux to dabble in cellar door sales.

The more progressive owners understand that visitors want to take a few bottles home with them. And the trend is growing. Who would have predicted such avant-garde behavior in a former bastion of tradition! The last time I set foot in Bordeaux was shortly after a visit to South Africa and the contrast was mind-blowing. The Western Cape has long set its stall on welcoming tourists, with an infrastructure that has few rivals in the world of wine. However, even in the early 2000s, France was not really on board with oenotourism (wine tourism).

In May 2023, I wined and dined like an 18th-century aristocrat (minus the family fortune), often

less than five meters away from the vines. Two days in Saint-Emilion was the highlight of the vacation, not least because the town itself is achingly beautiful: an UNESCO World Heritage Site packed with ancient churches, charming cafes, and friendly residents. Several iconic wineries welcome wine enthusiasts, equipped with state-of-the-art tasting rooms and visitor centers. Starchy formality was not on the menu.

Contemporary Bordeaux has mastered the art of delivering understated, relaxed luxury. This new breed of hotels and restaurants has redefined the very meaning of 'posh', combining world-class service, food and amenities and doing away with the stiffness that once plagued upmarket Gallic venues. Indeed, our winery guide was charming and approachable, with impeccable English that put my high-school French to shame.

Bordeaux's exceptional wine museum (La Cité du Vin) continues to draw crowds, not least due to its stunning design. Today, the city falls just short of being a French Napa or Stellenbosch; ironically New World regions have had longer to work on their act, despite Bordeaux's ancient pedigree. Progress is happening at a lightning pace and before too long, Californian vintners could have a major rival on their hands. ■

Berlin

BECKONS

By Kat Nickola





With its notorious nightlife, world-class museums and intense identity, Berlin is so much more than just a crumbling wall and a chariot-topped gate. Here are three themed days to help you explore the many facets of this German city.

BEFORE YOU VISIT

If possible, find a centrally located hotel near Hackescher Markt. Much of Berlin is walkable from here, but it is helpful to download one of the Berliner Verkehrsbetriebe apps (www.bvg.de) ahead of time for easy subway (U-Bahn) tickets, transit schedules and even bike and scooter rentals. If you drive to Berlin, I recommend that you use the park-and-ride service to keep your car outside the S-Bahn-Ring, a circular train line that defines the low-emissions zone. Only cars with green environmental badges are permitted inside the zone. Visit www.visitberlin.de/en/car-parks for parking details.

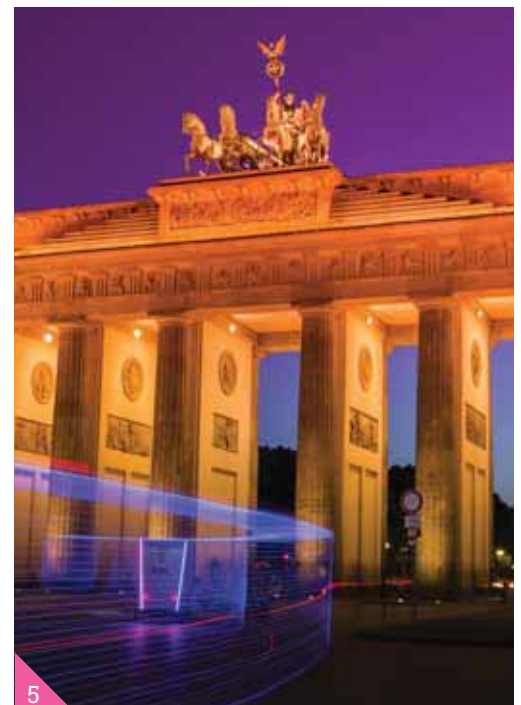
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Contemplate THE HISTORY

Take one day of your Berlin trip to acknowledge its dark WWII and Cold War legacy. Start with a visit to the interactive DDR Museum, where you can learn about daily life in East Germany. From there, walk along the famous Unter den Linden to the free Tränenpalast housed in an old border-crossing station. Further along the Spree River is the Reichstag, home to the German parliament (Bundestag). In 1933, a fire at the building gave the Nazis an excuse to claim more power. You must register at bundestag.de/en ahead of time. Nearby is the city's most famous site: the Brandenburg Gate. Previously inaccessible and located within the restricted area, the gate is now a symbol of German reunification.

Next, walk south to the Holocaust Memorial where 2711 concrete slabs and a subterranean space honor the lost Jewish individuals and families. A block away is an information panel at the former site of Hitler's Bunker. Continue south to the former Gestapo headquarters where a section of preserved wall surrounds the free and extensive Topography of Terrors exhibit of Nazi crimes. If you are interested, detour to the Berlin Story Bunker which has a re-creation of Hitler's bunker. Lastly, wander east to Checkpoint Charlie, for a picture at this former border crossing.

For more East German history, take the U-Bahn to the Stasi Museum, housed in the former headquarters of this secret intelligence agency, and visit the creepy Stasi Prison. Or tour the old air raid shelters at Berlin Underworld. Otherwise, spend the rest of the day decompressing in the green space of the Tiergarten where there are playgrounds, trails and the fabulous Café am Neuen See. Alternatively, have a meal at the diverse Mall of Berlin food court and roam around for some shopping therapy. During the holidays, try the Christmas markets in Potsdamer Platz and Gendarmenmarkt.



- 1 Reichstag Building and Paul Lobe Building
- 2 Reichstag Building Interior
- 3 Holocaust Memorial
- 4 Stasi Prison
- 5 Brandenburg Gate
- 6 Pergamonmuseum
- 7 Neues Museum
- 8 Berlin Dom (Cathedral)



See the MASSIVE MUSEUMS

Dedicate one day to the island of museums: Museumsinsel. Set within the Spree River, this UNESCO World Heritage Site hosts five huge museums. The most famous is the Pergamonmuseum which houses large architectural treasures from ancient Greece, Rome, and the Middle East such as the Ishtar Gate of Babylon, brought to Berlin during Germany's archaeology heyday of the 1920s. The Neues Museum displays prehistoric artifacts like a Neandertal skull and Egyptian finds like the famous bust of Nefertiti. Ancient Greek and Roman artifacts are housed in the Altes Museum, coins and sculptures reside in the Bode-Museum and fine art is on display in the Alte Nationalgalerie.

EDITOR'S
PICK



Though fascinating, museums can become exhausting. Break up the day at the museum cafes, visit the Berlin Dom or wander across the river to the Berliner Kunstmarkt for some fresh air at this local art bazaar. Museum tickets go on sale four weeks in advance at smb.museum/en. You can buy individual museum tickets, or entry to all museums with a 19 euros combined ticket (under 18 are free). Be sure to book free entry timeslots for children and combined tickets.

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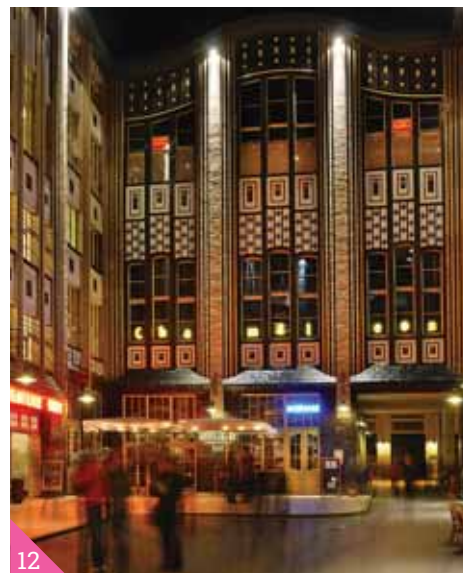
SCAN HERE

for a Google Map with additional Berlin wall locations, Christmas markets and more.

Explore the MODERN SIDE

Berlin is a bustling diverse place, so spend a day exploring its nooks and crannies. Begin with an exploration of the art nouveau courtyards and walkways that make up the shopping and dining experience that is Hackesche Höfe. Just up the block, another small painted alley leads past Haus Schwarzenberg and into an ever-changing outdoor street artist palette. From there it's a 10-minute walk to the Berliner Fernsehturm, the tallest building in Europe. Completed in 1969, this TV tower has a viewing platform and bar 203 meters in the air, plus a revolving restaurant. Book your timeslot well in advance.

For the afternoon, choose your adventure. There are nearly 200 museums in Berlin, and some of them are quite unusual like the Disgusting Food Museum, the Lipstick Museum and the Computer Games Museum. Search for your interests at www.visitberlin.de/en/museums-berlin. If the weather is nice, take the U-Bahn to Templehofer Feld and rent a bike to pedal around this former Berlin Airlift airport. Guided tours of the buildings are also offered at thf-berlin.de/en. For more street art, head to the East Side Gallery where international artists painted 1.3 kilometers of the former Berlin Wall. If you like shopping, you must visit continental Europe's biggest department store, the famous KaDeWe or try the boutique and pop-up brands at the Bikini Berlin mall before taking in some of Berlin's notorious nightlife. ■

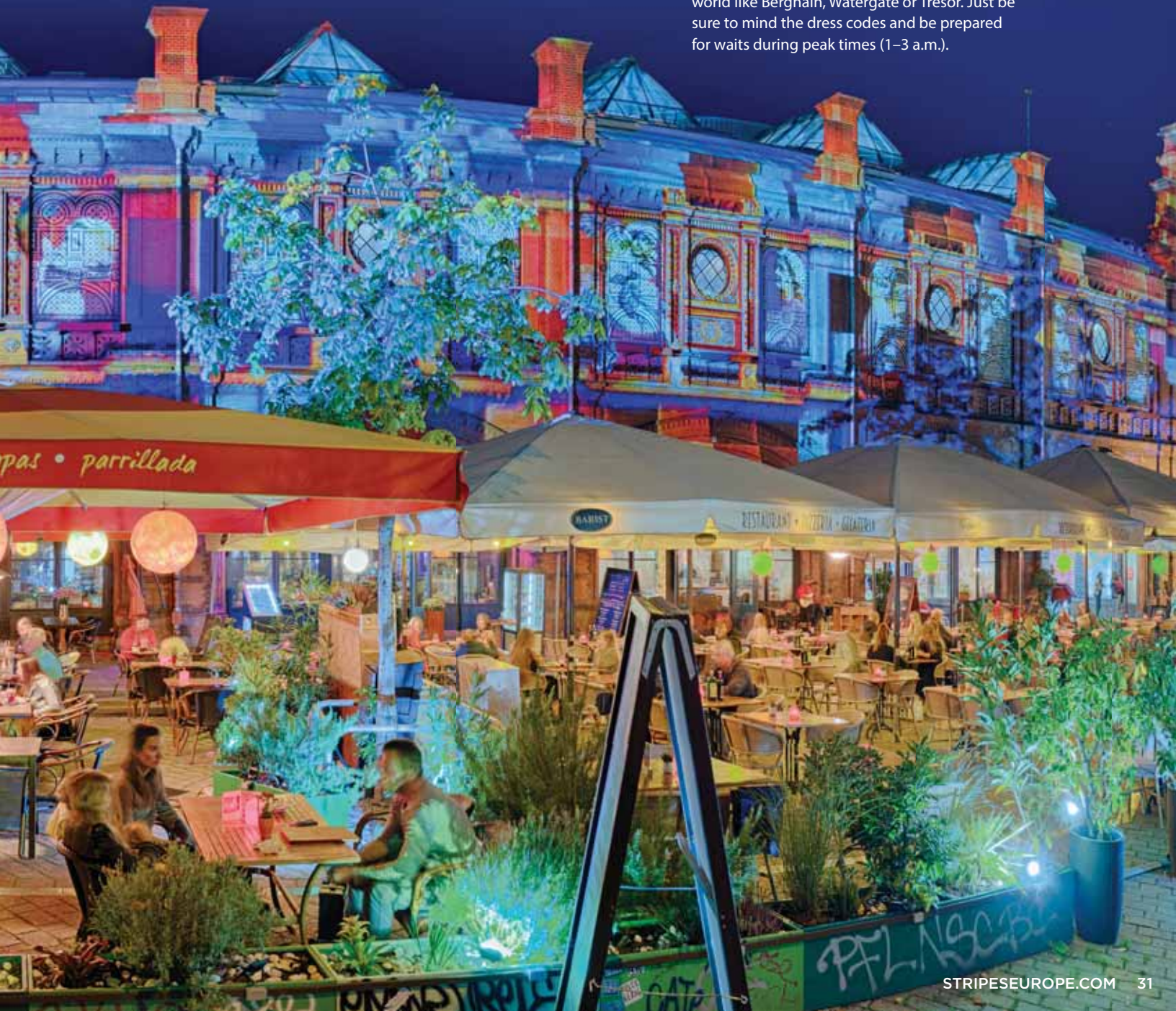


9 "KaDeWe"
10 Bikini Berlin
11 Berliner
Fernsehturm
12 Hakesche Höfe



FAMOUS NIGHTLIFE

For a walkable and relaxed atmosphere, stay near Hackescher Markt, where a variety of bars, clubs, theaters, and late-night restaurants line the streets. You could visit the Palast Berlin for the ARISE Grand Show, a spectacle of music, dance, acrobatics and wild costumes with a vague plot. For more options, the area around Simon-Dach-Strasse has something for everyone. There are bars ranging from casual to trendy, plus Berlin's best assortment of global food restaurants sure to please any taste. Near the uniquely repurposed industrial area by the train tracks are cutting-edge nightclubs and live music. Berlin is known for its techno scene and the city has no curfew, so you have plenty of time for some of the most famous clubs in the world like Berghain, Watergate or Tresor. Just be sure to mind the dress codes and be prepared for waits during peak times (1–3 a.m.).



As the seasons shift to the cooler months, a new flurry of activity begins to spin up. Festivals start appearing (Oktoberfest and Cannstatter Volksfest, anyone?), and it's easy to get lost in the myriad of things to do. However, while these new events pop up, others begin closing shop and putting away their signs for the winter months. The clock is ticking if you want to stroll through fragrant flower fields or take a few last-minute rides at the amusement park.

CATCH IT WHILE YOU CAN

By Stacy Roman

GARDENS

Spring and summer are the perfect times to walk through European gardens. From the tulips in Keukenhof to the summery blooms in Kew Gardens, fall is a great chance to squeeze the last drops of sunshine from these beautiful spots. While most gardens are open year-round, many transform into winter gardens, seasonal winter wonderlands or festive illumination displays for the holidays.



KEW GARDENS, U.K.

BEACH TOWNS

During the warmer months, almost everyone flees to beaches surrounding the Mediterranean and the frigid waters of the North Sea. As autumn approaches, the crowds disperse, and the charming beach towns can breathe and enjoy a few more weekends before closing up shop. The coastal town of Blankenberge, Belgium, is a great example. Bursting with visitors in the summer, it becomes a virtual ghost town during the winter. From mid-to-late November through mid-March it's more common to see closed signs and empty storefronts than to see open ones. If you're debating whether or not to go, go.



BLANKENBERGE, BELGIUM

.....AMUSEMENT PARKS.....

While Disneyland Paris Resort is one of the happiest places in Europe all year, riding on the Astro Orbiter in freezing temperatures with rain pelting can make your visit not so chipper. During September, many European amusement parks begin reducing their hours and have seasonal festivals. Europa-Park hosts "Traumatica - Festival of Fear" before transitioning to "Winter Magic" for November and December and closing in early January for two months during winter. Similarly, LEGOLAND Deutschland closes the summer season in early November before opening up for five weeks in winter. From late November through the first week of January, it transforms into Winter Wonder LEGOLAND.

In the mountains, alpine coasters and sommerodelbahns run through the end of fall or until it snows. Once it becomes too cold, many businesses trade in the rails for winter toboggans and sleds to use on the hills instead.



DISNEYLAND PARIS, FRANCE

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.....CASTLES AND PALACES.....

Castles, manors and palaces are a perennial summer draw. Thriving gardens, guided tours and even reenactments keep visitors busy and entertained. As the tourist numbers drop, so do the opportunities to visit some of these stately buildings. Although the changing of the guard occurs every day at Buckingham Palace, tours are not available in winter. The nearby Royal Mews (Royal carriages and stables) close from November through February. Others, such as Dover Castle, reduce their hours to weekends from November through February.

In Germany, the famed Neuschwanstein Castle remains open, but the bridge may close due to snow or ice. The fairy tale-esque Burg Eltz closes from November through March, although you can still hike the path for that perfect Insta shot. Just be sure to take care on the trails and check websites before you go.



BURG ELTZ, GERMANY

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.....CRUISES.....

Cruising along the sun-soaked shores of the Mediterranean when winter is blowing its full fury sounds fantastic. But, alas, reality kicks in as you fire up your computer to book that trip and realize you may have missed a good window. September through November is one of the best times to cruise in the Med. Fantastic weather and fewer tourists mean a perfect opportunity for you. After November, the seas become more unpredictable, and cruise lines begin redeploying their ships to other regions such as the South Pacific and Caribbean. Due to the rough water and weather, even Italian ferry services become much less reliable during the late fall and winter months.

Viking River Cruises recently announced they will continue Rhine and Danube River cruises year-round if you still want to jump on a cruise. During December, they offer Christmas Market cruises beginning in Amsterdam and sailing the Rhine to Basel, Switzerland. Even though it's not the warm, sunny spots of the Mediterranean, it's still a unique and relaxing opportunity for Christmas market exploring.

Whether you've been busy with various camping activities with the kiddos or trying to do some epic hikes during the summer, you still have time to catch some of Europe's favorite activities before they say "Auf Wiedersehen" for the season. ■



VALLETA, MALTA



Sports for Kids and Adults to STAY ACTIVE

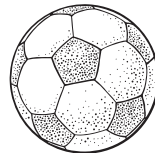
THIS FALL AND WINTER

By Tamala Malerk

As the weather cools and the sun sets earlier, it is tempting to spend more time bundled on the couch with a hot cocoa or mulled wine indoors. However, kids and adults alike can resist that temptation by signing up for a sport this fall and winter. For those out there that aren't "team players," fear not! We have included some great individual sports as well.

FALL AND WINTER SPORTS FOR KIDS

The Army Child and Youth Services (CYS) and School of Knowledge, Inspiration, Exploration and Skills (SKIES), as well as the Air Force's Force Support Squadrons (FSS) offer a variety of youth sports for the fall and winter. Depending on the age and area, your child can participate in soccer, flag football, basketball, ballet, cheerleading, Irish dance, gymnastics and more. Make sure your child has a physical form on file, which you can accomplish during their annual wellness exam.



FALL AND WINTER SPORTS FOR ADULTS

Team sports aren't just for kids. There are many on- and off-installation opportunities for service members and their families to enjoy playing as well. Many installations offer intramural sports such as flag football, volleyball and basketball in the fall and winter. Most installations have bowling centers that provide an opportunity for you to drink beer and eat pizza while you participate in a bowling league. Off-installation, depending on your location, you can find adult soccer leagues, hockey teams, running groups, roller derby teams and snow-sport clubs. (The table below is not meant to be all-encompassing, just to provide a few examples).



Germany	Incirlik	Italy/ Sicily	U.K.
KMC Eagles Ice Hockey	MWR: Flag Football, Basketball, Tennis and Bowling.	Catania Elephants American Football: Kids and Adults	Blackpool Roller Derby
Kaiserslautern Roller Derby League	Incirlik Rugby (MWR Facebook Group)	Vulcano Etna Rugby: Kids and Adults	Cambridgeshire Cats American Football: Kids and Adults
Stuttgart Scorpions Soccer: Kids and Adults			Badminton England: Kids, Adults and "Para Badminton"
Munich Ice Panthers Ice Hockey			Scan this QR Code for the BBC's Comprehensive List of Adults Sports finder for everything from archery, to fencing, judo, sailing, water polo and more.
Hamburg American Football and Cheerleading: Kids and Adults			

PREVENTING AN INJURY

No matter if you are a child or an adult (though especially if you're an adult), prevention is key when it comes to staying injury free.

- **Staying hydrated:** This improves blood circulation, prevents overheating and dehydration and improves movement and agility.
- **Wearing proper gear and using proper equipment:** Always wear supportive shoes, and wear helmets, pads, and mouth guards when required. Ensure your equipment is in good working condition.
- **Using correct posture and technique:** Know how to properly move your body and use the equipment.
- **Warm up AND cool down:** Warm-ups loosen the joints and cool-downs help reduce lactic acid build-up and regulate blood flow and body temperature.
- **Don't overdo it!** Rest when tired.
- **Strengthen your core and maintain flexibility:** The core is the center of your body, and a strong core allows for balance and stability.
- **Cross-train:** Remember to work other muscles and body parts so you are not repeatedly over stressing the same areas.

INDIVIDUAL SPORTS FOR EVERYONE

Not everyone wants to sign up to play with others and that is okay. There are plenty of individual sports that you can do in the fall and winter. Your installation's outdoor recreation center should be able to provide you with plenty of options. Depending on your location, you can try fishing, cycling, recreational shooting, archery, snorkeling, diving, rock climbing, skiing, snowboarding and more. In addition, installation fitness centers offer wellness programs, personal challenges and fun competitions. ■



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Neglecting snoring today will lead to poor health tomorrow: Conquer Snoring with Our Expert Sleep Clinic!

Are you tired of waking up groggy and exhausted, struggling to stay alert and focused throughout the day? Your readiness at work and zest for exploration might be hindered by a common yet often overlooked culprit: snoring.

Snoring disrupts your night's sleep, preventing you from reaching the crucial deep sleep stages. This deficiency doesn't just affect your nights – it creeps into your daytime activities, leaving you feeling fatigued, irritable, and unable to concentrate. But that's not all. Chronic snoring can be a sign of sleep apnea, which adds serious risks to your overall health. Sleep apnea is linked to weight gain, hypertension, heart disease, and cognitive decline. If you're aiming for healthy aging, addressing your snoring is crucial.

The American Sleep Clinic, located in Frankfurt, Germany is here to guide you towards good sleep, a good day and a good life. Dr. Schneider, Associate Professor of Medicine of the Johns Hopkins University, USA, will help you to solve this common yet underestimated problem. Don't let snoring stand in the way of your journey towards healthy ageing. Reclaim your nights, revitalize your days, and unlock your full potential. Explore new horizons, arrive with renewed vigor, and discover a life free from the chains of snoring-induced fatigue. We're not only dedicated to your well-being but also your convenience. We offer direct billing services to most US health insurances, ensuring a hassle-free experience. Contact us today at +49 69 808 807 777 or visit our website. Your future self will thank you.

SEE OUR AD ON THE BACK COVER

Europe's **EXTREME** Sport Hubs

By Kat Nickola

No matter what the season, you will find Europe teeming with outdoor enthusiasts. Here are six options that will take you beyond the hiking trail and into the world of extreme sports. When trying a new sport, going on a guided tour can help alleviate any safety concerns and give you a solid introduction to the gear and techniques.



Ski Touring the Haute Route

If your idea of perfection is fresh powder and miles of empty back-country, then ski touring might be your next adventure. Using specially designed skis and bindings to allow for both slogging uphill and bombing downhill, ski touring often avoids using (and paying for) ski resorts. The Haute Route between Mont Blanc in France and the Matterhorn in Switzerland has become the iconic alpine ski touring trek. It is 180 km of glacial terrain and incredible peaks which typically takes seven days, with overnight stays in mountain huts along the way.

Honorable mention: Take three days to loop around the less-visited high peaks of Gran Paradiso National Park in Italy.



Kitesurfing in Tarifa

The southernmost point of Spain has wind blowing across the Strait of Gibraltar from two directions making it windy 340 days of the year. These ideal kitesurfing conditions have made Tarifa one of the world's top kitesurfing destinations. In fact, most kitesurfing schools offer money-back wind guarantees. Kiteboarding involves strapping your feet to a kiteboard and wearing a harness attached by flying lines to a parachute-like power kite. With the aid of the ever-blowing wind, you can then freeride directly from the beaches around scenic Tarifa.

Honorable mention: Try smooth-water kitesurfing at the Lagoon of Marsala in Sicily, Italy before heading to the south side of the island for waves and big air.



Mountaineering up the Matterhorn

Combining ice climbing skills, rock climbing know-how and difficult hiking, mountaineering is a sport that requires specialized equipment and intimate knowledge of the mountains. For many mountaineers, ascending the Matterhorn is a transformative achievement. It is considered the most difficult of the classic alpine peaks with all four routes being extremely rocky and covered in snow or ice year-round. At 4,478 meters, this iconic pyramid-shaped summit is a beast and best done with a mountain guide.

Honorable mention: While scaling the tallest mountain in the U.K. is not a technical route, the extreme weather and optional Càrn Mòr Dearg Arête make Ben Nevis a great climb.



Whitewater Rafting the Sjoa River

Tackle the wilds of Norway from a raft! The Sjoa River is the outlet for meltwater from Jotunheim National Park. Named for the mythical land of the giants, this harsh and mountainous area in central Norway has narrow canyons and miles of glacially-fed whitewater. Rapids range from mild class II to difficult class IV. Attack the rapids past jagged cliffs, murky forests and ethereal waterfalls on a guided trip. Numerous outfitters in the Sjoa area provide all the equipment necessary, including helmets and wetsuits.

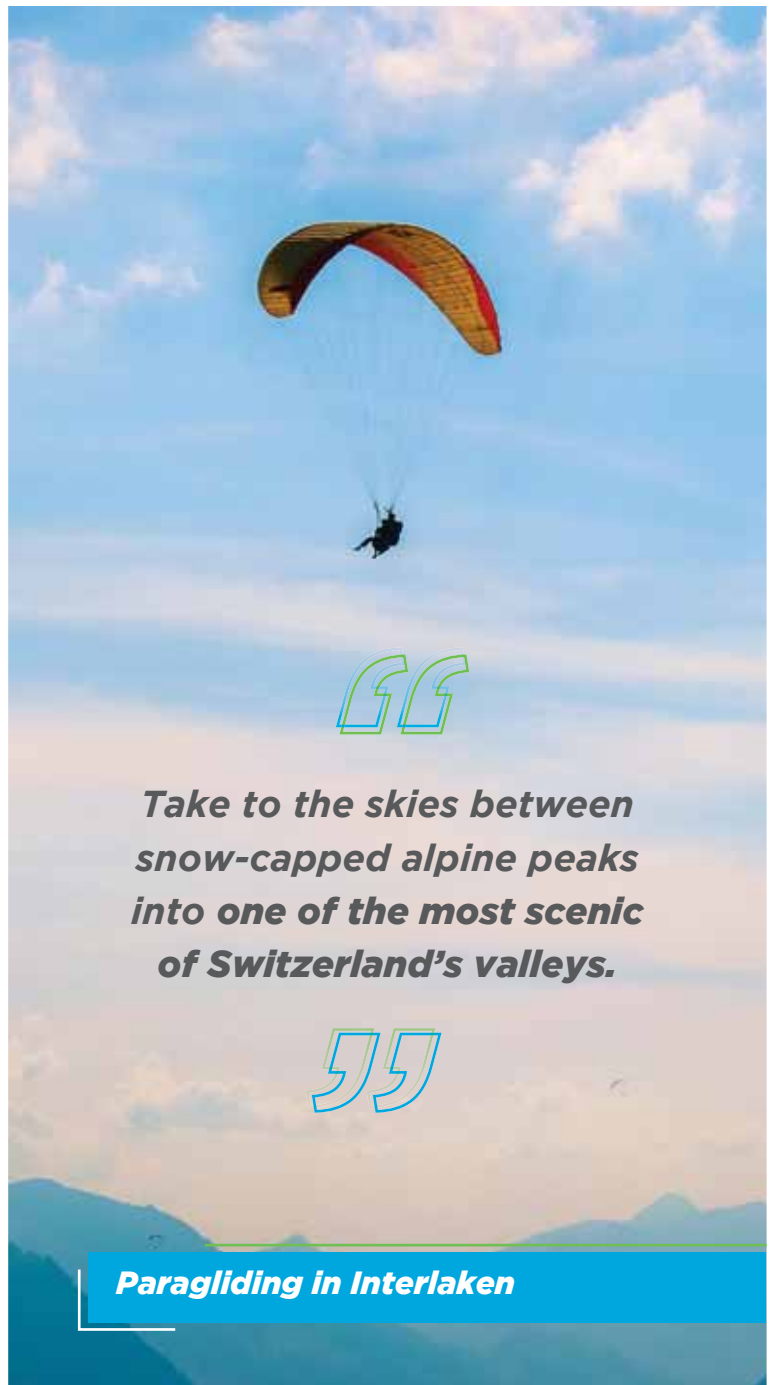
Honorable mention: For a much warmer adventure, take a rafting trip down the blue-green waters of the Soča River in Bovec, Slovenia.



Rock Climbing in the Dolomites

Strap on your harness, clip on the cams and get ready to belay your partner up some of the best rock climbing in the world. The limestone Dolomites are a classic rock-climbing destination, with hundreds of "trad" routes, a speckling of bolted sport lines and lots of multi-pitch options. Plus, you can't beat the views of alpine meadows and craggy peaks. While there are some big wall options, most of the climbing is ideal for day trips from the bucolic Italian villages east of Bolzano.

Honorable mention: Try the thousands of bolted sport routes in the limestone cliffs of the Frankenjura upland of Germany.



“
Take to the skies between snow-capped alpine peaks into one of the most scenic of Switzerland's valleys.
”

Paragliding in Interlaken

Take to the skies between snow-capped alpine peaks into one of the most scenic of Switzerland's valleys. Paragliding is initially done in tandem with an instructor, whose harness is attached behind yours. The wing above is similar to a parachute but more maneuverable, allowing you to catch thermals to loftier heights. Launching is often done by running down a sloping hill until the canopy opens. A flight from the popular launch in Beatenburg offers stunning views of Jungfrau, Eiger, and Mönch peaks.

Honorable mention: Head to the birthplace of paragliding in Annecy, France where thermals over the lake and surrounding mountains make for ideal conditions. ■

Beyond Europe: **South Africa**

South Africa has all the ingredients for a dreamy vacation destination—warm weather, sandy beaches, modern accommodations, luscious landscapes and awesome food. With an exotic array of once in a lifetime adventures, from off-roading safaris to fine dining and shark diving, it's hard to name another place that offers so much variety. It's a vast country and to explore it fully would take a lifetime. Squeezing the most of what my family wanted to see into a two-week vacation took some effort.

Most international flights arrive in Johannesburg or Cape Town. Both cities are great launching points for experiencing South Africa. Cape Town is known for its wine, beaches, wildlife and great wine (did I say that already?). For us, Cape Town was a great home base for an all-encompassing family getaway.



Midwest Family Dentistry American Dentists in Stuttgart

Dr. Bridget Hennessy and Dr. Jennifer Weydert welcome you to their modern, state-of-the-art dental practice, conveniently located in Schönaich. Gentle, comprehensive care for the whole family, with an emphasis on patient education and prevention, is provided in a comfortable and inviting setting.

Both doctors are native Midwesterners, trained and licensed in the USA. Dr. Weydert, a University of Iowa graduate, performs routine procedures with her focus being pediatrics, root canals, crowns, and esthetic procedures. A graduate of the University of Alabama, Dr. Hennessy also practices general dentistry and she focuses on oral surgery, implants, crowns, and esthetic procedures. Annual continuing education in the U.S. ensures the latest technology and optimized treatments are available to patients. Call 07031-7655920 or visit www.midwest-family-dentistry.com.

SEE OUR AD ON PAGE #19

OXIDIO

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.

OXIDIO is the right choice for every patient who values pro-fessional, individual treatment, well-founded knowledge of the American healthcare system, and the excellent customer service of an international, English-speaking team.

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SEE OUR AD ON PAGE #15

How You Can Shop More Safely and Securely Around the World

As a military member or military family member, life can be unpredictable. Luckily, the security of your finances doesn't have to be.

If you're looking for the safest way to make purchases in Europe, it is always a good idea to use a credit card. If your card gets lost or stolen, a member services representative will be able to help you right away so that you can avoid fraudulent charges. Many financial institutions also make it easy to keep tabs on your card usage so you'll know right away whether someone else is using your card; whether it's via an SMS alert making you aware of potential suspicious activity, or through app options that allow you to set spending, category and location limits.

Plus, you'll usually get better rates for foreign exchange fees with credit cards than by exchanging currency. In fact, some credit cards offer no foreign transaction fees at all.

If you are just starting out, a credit card such as Service CU's Visa® Everyday Card can help you begin establishing your credit history, which you'll need if you ever apply for an auto loan, mortgage or even a home rental. If you're eligible for a card with higher limits, such as their Visa® Signature Everyday Elite card, you'll earn points on every purchase, which you can use to redeem for merchandise or cash back.

Last but not least, many new credit cards are contactless, which means they are virtually impossible to tamper with or clone. All you have to do is tap and pay!

To learn more about Service CU's Everyday credit cards, visit servicecu.org/myeverydaycard.

SEE OUR AD ON PAGE #11



CAPE TOWN

Located on the southwestern coast, Cape Town is the most popular tourist destination in Africa. Laying between Table Mountain and Table Bay, the city is spread out—it's not a pedestrian-friendly city. We chose to stay at a centrally-located hotel for easier access to restaurants and shopping. If you are brave enough to drive on the left-hand side of the road, a rental car will offer more freedom to roam. If not, it's definitely possible to do everything with Uber or guided tours.

Long Street, a vibrant road flanked by local eateries and bars, runs through the center of Cape Town and truly comes alive at night. Three stops that helped us to soak up the culture were Mama Africa, the Old Biscuit Mill and the Cape Town waterfront.

A popular stop for dinner, Mama Africa serves local cuisine. We were adventurous and tried the mixed grill which included crocodile, spring bock, ostrich and kudu. The kids were relieved and content with nuggets and fries.

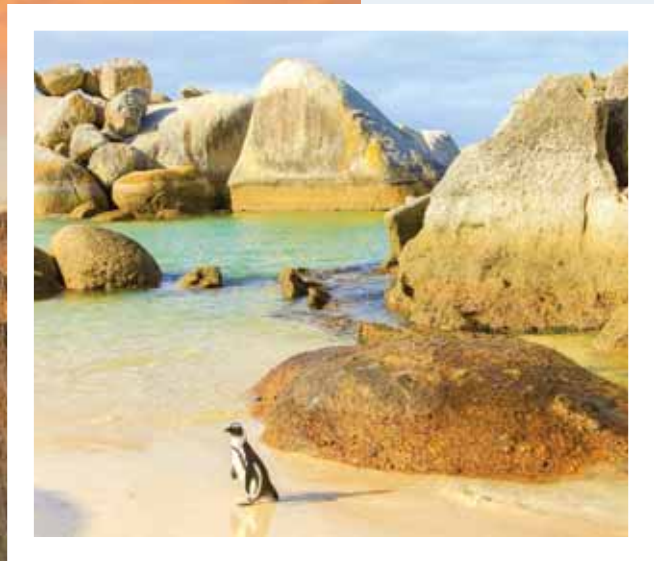
The Old Biscuit Mill is a former biscuit factory that houses local arts and many food stalls. Each Saturday, the popular Neighbourgoods Market introduces even more vibrant shopping stalls and foodies.

Mildly reminiscent of San Francisco Bay, the harbor area, known as the Victoria and Alfred Waterfront, is the perfect setting for a romantic evening. From here you can stroll the Sea Point promenade to find vendors who have mastered meals on a stick. Our kids enjoyed the playgrounds along the way.

Cape Town is surrounded by beautiful beaches. If you want to get some surfing lessons while on vacation, then Muizenberg is the place. There are various companies that offer lessons as well as surfboard and wetsuit rentals. Muizenberg is also known for the little colorful houses – which are used for beach bathrooms or changing rooms.

For those seeking an adrenaline rush, shark diving tours are a classic Cape Town experience. Spend the day near Dyer Island swimming with sharks, including the iconic great white.





While in Cape Town, you will notice that African sunsets are a big deal. South Africans call it a “sundowner event.” Popular spots include Lions Head and Signal Hill, offering some of the best views.

Table Mountain National Park and Cape Peninsula

Absolutely, go on a scenic drive through Table Mountain National Park. The road hugs the cliff all the way up to the scenic Cape Point and the Cape of Good Hope, which is the southern-most tip of South Africa. The perfect day trip, this route offers many iconic photo stops and experiences along the way. Boulders Beach and the Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden were two of our favorites.

Boulders Beach

Boulders Beach is a unique experience not to miss! Here you can see wild African penguins in their natural habitat. You can get close by walking over the raised boardwalks or head down to the beach itself.

Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden

Set against the backdrop of Table Mountain, the Kirstenbosch Botanical Garden is world renowned for the beauty and unique flora on display. Odd-shaped plants and trees look like something out of Jurassic Park. Walk along the overhead canopy for the best experience.

Cape Winelands

The Cape Winelands valley is surrounded by small villages and luscious landscapes. The area benefits from a Mediterranean climate which makes it perfect for wine making. South Africa even has its own grape known as Pinotage. Many of these wineries have been around for centuries. Most offer tastings with guided tours. Groot Constantia, for example, is the oldest vineyard in the Cape Town area.

WILDLIFE AND BIG FIVE PARKS

A trip to South Africa wouldn't be complete without a safari. It's possible to include a game drive during your Cape Town visit. Several game reserves are just a short drive from the city. Some include the chance to see the big five: lions, elephants, rhinos, buffalo and leopards.

If you have time to spare, prepare for the highlight of your South Africa trip! Kruger National Park is undoubtedly the largest and most popular national park in South Africa. To get there from Cape Town is an easy 2.5-hour flight.

Kruger is vast and it's recommended to stay at least three nights within the park for the best experience. While self-drive safaris are possible, you get more out of guided game drives. Wildlife guides are much better at spotting the animals and can share interesting facts about the animals. We had our closest wildlife experiences in Kruger: watching hyenas enjoy a fresh kill, seeing lions cuddle and dodging the giraffes that strolled across the road.

Make sure to research thoroughly before you go. Selecting a lodge is key. You will spend most of your time there. Most stays include two drives per day. Some lodges aren't fenced – you might find a zebra outside your door in the morning. If you are going on safari with kids, check if they accept children before you book. Many lodges have a minimum age requirement – typically ages six to eight.

We fell hard for this colorful, kind and energetic country! Although we packed a lot in, we were left with so much we wanted to see. South Africa is a dream! It's a country that should be added to everyone's bucket list. ■



Escape to the **BLACK FOREST**

By Stacy Roman

The Black Forest (Schwarzwald) stretches across a large swath of southwestern Germany. The region spans the borders of France and Switzerland, whose influences are seen in the enchanting villages dotting the rolling hills and breathtaking landscape. While the larger spa town of Baden-Baden and the spectacular waterfalls near Triberg draw crowds, the lush, dense canopy surrounding the smaller villages creates the perfect setting for legends, fairy tales and the perfect winter escape.



Sankt Georgen im Schwarzwald

A short, 15-minute drive east of Triberg will find you in the quaint village of Sankt Georgen im Schwarzwald. If cold or snowy weather keeps you from enjoying the many nearby hiking trails, there is plenty to do inside. The Deutsches Phonomuseum is a great place to start. Home to more than 250 exhibits, this museum documents the history of phonographs, record players and the music industry. The museum is closed in November but reopens from December to April, Wednesday to Sunday, from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Admission is five euros for adults.

Titisee - Neustadt

Just a few kilometers northeast of the quiet shores of Lake Titisee is Titisee-Neustadt. It is home to plenty of relaxing thermal spas and is full of traditional German charm and architecture. Badeparadies Schwarzwald, one of the country's top-rated indoor water parks, is located on the outskirts of town. During the winter sports season, Titisee-Neustadt hosts competitions on Hochfirstschanze, Germany's largest natural ski jump.

Bad Wildbad

With pastel-hued half-timbered buildings lining the Große Enz River that cuts through the middle of the village, Bad Wildbad has something for everyone. The adjacent towns of Sommerberg, Kaltenbronn and Aichelberg offer plenty of skiing, snowboarding and snowshoeing action. Those looking for a little more relaxation can visit the Palais Thermal or Vital Therme spa resorts for a day of pampering. Or take in a performance at the beautifully renovated Königliches Kurtheater.

Schonach im Schwarzwald

Deep in the heart of the Black Forest, only a five-minute drive west of Triberg, is Schonach im Schwarzwald. Skiers are in luck, as a double lift to Skilift Winterberg will pick you up directly in town. There are several cross-country ski areas and toboggan and sledging areas as well. If you're not feeling the sporty vibe, Schonach is also home to the world's largest cuckoo clock. Take a peek at this behemoth timepiece and shop for a slightly smaller one to take home.

Schwarzwaldtbahn

If you're torn about which villages to visit, why not take the scenic route? The Black Forest Railway (Badische Schwarzwaldtbahn) is a 150-kilometer-long twin track that begins in Karlsruhe at the northern end of the forest and ends at the southeastern point in Konstanz. Constructed between 1863 and 1873, the railway travels through 39 tunnels and over two viaducts. Trains pass through picture-perfect scenery of snow-capped mountains, cozy villages and winter landscapes.

Christmas Markets

The Black Forest is home to some amazing Christmas markets during the holiday season. The Ravenna Gorge Christmas Market (Ravennaschlucht Weihnachtsmarkt) is one of the best ones in the region. More than 40 wooden huts, lights and festive spirit transform the gorge and beautiful arched viaduct above it into a magnificent sight to behold and experience. The market runs Nov. 24 through Dec. 17 and is open Friday from 3 to 9 p.m., Saturday from 2 to 9 p.m. and Sunday from 2 to 8 p.m.

Triberg Christmas Magic (Triberger Weihnachtszauber) is another must-visit market. It is truly magical with the backdrop of the Triberg Waterfall, one million twinkling lights, music, and mulled wine. If you can't make it before the holiday, that's okay! Triberg Christmas Magic doesn't open until Christmas Day and runs through Dec. 31. Dazzling fireworks are scheduled for Dec. 27–31, and a daring fire show occurs five times nightly.

From snow sports to rejuvenating at the spa to enjoying the serene winterscapes, the Black Forest is the perfect place to escape from the ordinary to the extraordinary. ■



A man in a light blue shirt and tan pants is falling upside down through a hole in a roof. The roof is made of stacks of books. The sky is blue with many pages falling around him. In the background, a town with a church spire is visible through the hole.

JUMP INTO A BOOK: Fairy Tale Fun for all

By Tamala Malerk

Fairy tales date back to over 6,000 years ago in the Bronze Age. The first known fairy tale is “The Smith and the Devil” about a blacksmith selling his soul to the devil to gain super abilities. More known fairy tales such as “Rumpelstiltskin” and “Beauty and the Beast” also date back 4,000 and 5,000 years and many pre-date the languages that they were written in the during the 16th through 18th centuries. If you want to go on your own fairy tale adventure, there are plenty of places for you to visit the origins of your favorite tales across Europe.



Italy

- » Palermo is home to the funny tale of “Firrazzanu’s Wife and the Queen,” during which the protagonist tricks the queen and his wife into yelling at each other because he told one that the other was deaf. While playing your own pranks in Palermo, you can also visit the grand cathedral and climb to its rooftop, taste some of Palermo’s famous street food at one of its food markets and catch a show (maybe even a fairy tale) at the Massimo Theater.
- » In Naples, particularly High-Hill, you can walk the same setting as the tale of “Cannatella” the princess. The tragic princess was trapped in a loveless and cruel marriage, but ends happily ever after when she escapes her evil husband. While in Naples, live out a fairy tale at the Royal Palace, learn more about its rich art and history in the various museums and go for a stroll along the Lugomare for great views of Mount Vesuvius.
- » Along the Amalfi Coast is Salerno, the place of the fairy tale, “The Castle of Life.” The tale tells the story of 12-year-old Graceful and his adventure to the aforementioned castle in an attempt to save the life of the grandmother who raised him. While there, stroll along the various promenades and beaches, pet a water buffalo and taste the cheese made from its milk at Vannulo or visit the ruins of Paestum.



Germany

- » In Schwalm-Eder-Kreis, you can see what big ears Grandma has from “Little Red Riding Hood.” While on your way to grandmother’s house, you can visit the Schwalm Museum or go hiking or mountain biking. You can also continue your adventure down the German Fairy Tale Road (Deutsche Märchen Straße).

» Sandwiched between Hamburg and Bremen, Buxtehude is home to one of the lesser-known Grimm tales, “The Hare and the Hedgehog.” The story tells of multiple races between the two animals. I won’t spoil the ending, but it does not end well for one of them. While in Buxtehude, you can visit the fountain featuring the famed hare and hedgehog, go to the Museum for Regional History and Art and walk inside the historic old town.

» Allow your partner to climb your long, lovely braid at Trendelburg Castle. The tower there is known as “Rapunzel’s Tower,” and is where the famed Grimm Brothers’ tale, Rapunzel, comes from. While at the castle, you can stay overnight in one of the 22 rooms, get a massage, take a steam in the sauna or grab a bite to eat at the castle restaurant offering lunch, coffee and cake and dinner menus.



England

» In the Norfolk town of Swaffham, you can follow in the footsteps of “The Peddler of Swaffham,” which tells the tale of a man whose dreams led him to London and then riches beneath a tree. While searching for your own gold in Swaffham, fuel up with coffee from one of their many independent coffee shops, visit the 12th-century Swaffham Church and grab a bite to eat from one of Swaffham’s markets.

» The “Princess of Canterbury” is wooed by a prince with a fish in this fairy tale. While looking for a fish of your own to woo a potential partner with, there is plenty to do in Canterbury. You can enjoy the art in The Beaney House of Art & Knowledge, marvel at the wonders of the Canterbury Cathedral and grab a drink at the oldest pub in Canterbury, the Parrot, established in 1370.

» Yorkshire is the haunt of a boggart who terrorized a farmer and his family, especially his children. Avoid the boggart as you bet on your favorite horse at Wetherby Racecourse, experience an outrageous and hilarious (grown-up only) time at Farm Adventure and learn something new at the National Railway Museum. ■

GO NORTH: COPENHAGEN

By Kat Nickola

“SHE TURNS INTO SEA MIST?”

My daughter is taken aback. “No wonder she looks so sad.” The statue of the Little Mermaid may be a bit melancholy, but the rest of Copenhagen looms large. The capital of Denmark is home to the longest continual line of monarchs in Europe, and the home to Queen Margrethe II. Founded in 1167 as a fortified fishing town, it flourished in trade and became the royal seat of power in the 14th century. Take a few days to get to know this walkable, fun city.

DAY 1: GET TO KNOW THE DANES

Start at the Nationalmuseet where lots of hands-on and interactive exhibits walk visitors through Danish prehistory, Viking expansion, Middle Ages and modern times. Wander toward Amalienborg castle to watch the changing of the guard at noon, and then take a tour inside Amalienborg for a peek at how the monarchy lives.

Time to get a view from the water. Book ahead for a popular Stromma canal tour, rent your own Go Boat for self-exploration or take a budget ‘tour’ on the eco-friendly Harbor Bus by walking to Nordre Tolbod and taking the boat back to Nyhavn.

Spend the evening soaking up the atmosphere in one, or more, of the bars and restaurants that line the scenic Nyhavn canal. Try Nyhavnskroen or Cap Horn for traditional Danish cuisine or grab an outdoor table and drinks for some people watching.



LOGISTICS & LODGING

Getting into Copenhagen is easy. From the airport, trains depart for Copenhagen Central Station every ten minutes. If you’ve driven a car, parking downtown can be expensive. Book a spot in a parking deck ahead of time or park and ride from a suburban station like Åmarken. For an interesting approach to the city, make the journey part of the destination by taking the Snälltåget overnight train from Berlin or Hamburg (both easily reached via ICE) to Copenhagen.

For lodging, you can’t go wrong with anything in the downtown zone between the waterways. There are numerous hostels throughout the city, and the area around the train station has some great local budget stays but avoid the red light district on Istedgade in Vesterbro Central. Copenhagen is a very walkable city, but it’s handy to take the M3 metro line as it loops around downtown.



DAY 2: LIVE LIKE A LOCAL

Begin with a trek up the unique spiral-ramped Rundetaarn (tower) for a view over the city. At the base of the tower, snag a quintessential Copenhagen treat: a dressed-up hot dog from an outdoor stand. If you can tour only one of the four castles within Copenhagen, this is the one to choose with its turrets, Renaissance charm, and a glimpse at the dazzling crown jewels. Surrounding the castle is a sprawling city park. The giant botanical garden on the west side is free and ideal for a cold day, while the east side has formal gardens and playgrounds. Head south to the Torvehallerne indoor food market for some lunch at the local produce and gourmet food stalls.

Bundle up and spend the afternoon on the most typical of Danish transports: a bicycle! Grab a Bycyklen rental easily with a credit card at the nearby city bike rental dock or download the app for a Donkey Bike rental. For those with kids in tow, numerous bike shops like beCopenhagen have kid bikes and family cargo bikes to rent. Pedal out to the Kastellet—a star-shaped 17th-century fortress that is now a city park and worth exploration. Along the eastern waterfront, you can check out the small somber Little Mermaid statue. For a longer ride, enjoy the bike trails and bridges over the harbor.

DAY 3: TIME FOR ATTRACTIONS

For your last day, focus on what interests you. The Statens Museums for Kunst is a world-class art museum with works by Rubens, Rembrandt and Picasso. For royal history, visit the reception rooms, royal stables and 800-year-old ruins of the castle below Christainsborg Palace. Den Blå Planet, the National Aquarium of Denmark and the largest in northern Europe is easily reachable by the M12 metro. At Halloween and Christmas, Tivoli Gardens is a favorite and is known for its fun rides and stage shows.

For an afternoon of shopping, hit the upscale Strøget shopping street for all the big names, or head to Larsbjørnsstræde for an earthy, vintage and thrifty experience. Then there is Freetown Christiania, a unique collective established in 1971 within a former military barracks where graffiti, art and social activism are the rule. The area is known for its illegal cannabis subculture, so follow the posted rules: have fun, don't run, and don't take pictures of people. Opt for one of the daily local-led tours that begin near the entrance at 3 p.m. and run 60 Dkr cash per person. ■



EDITOR'S PICK =





When planning a snowy getaway,
many people first look to the Alps. And,
rightfully so as they are beautiful, but let's
face it, the Alps are expensive.

There is another place in Europe that
provides breathtaking mountain views,
killer slopes and relaxing spas for half the
price and with half the number of tourists
crowding the lifts. That place is Poland.
Here is a tour of everything this eastern
European gem has to offer in the winter.



WINTER ADVENTURES IN

POLAND

By Amanda Palumbo

continued on page 50

FIRST STOP

Zakopane



Krupówki street, Poland's most famous pedestrian stretch



"Grzaniec," a Polish hot mulled wine

"Oscypek," a delicious smoked cheese carved with intricate designs

Zakopane is the perfect picture of a quintessential European village sitting below snow-capped mountains, with wooden and stone cottages lining cobblestoned streets. It is the epicenter of Goral culture, with traditions passed down for centuries from its first Slavic inhabitants.

Zakopane is a hub for diehard skiers and snowboarders. It is one of just a handful of European cities that host Ski Jumping World Cup competitions. Poland has a long history with this high-flying sport, with its first competition in 1908. Ski jumpers from all around the world launch themselves off the Great Krokiew jump. On non-competition days, a lift takes tourists to the jump's observation deck, giving them the same view world-champion jumpers see before they begin their descent.

For those who aren't professional athletes, the Zakopane resort has slopes for beginner and intermediate skiers. Then, there is the Kasprowy Wierch ski area, dubbed the "holy mountain" for Polish skiers. It has two very difficult and winding, but fun ski runs: Gasienicowa and Goryczkowa.



Zakopane is a hub for diehard skiers and snowboarders.



What makes Zakopane so attractive among winter sports enthusiasts are the prices. An adult day pass is almost half the price of a Zugspitze day pass.

When you're not soaring down the Tatra Mountains, there is plenty to see and do in the foothills. If you're staying in the city of Zakopane, which I highly recommend, take time to stroll down Krupówki street, Poland's most famous pedestrian stretch that runs through the heart of the city. Bricked walkways take you along dozens of shops, restaurants and cafes. The Tatra Museum is on this street and is dedicated to the history and culture of Zakopane.

Vendors will be selling "grzaniec," a Polish hot mulled wine you can sip while you wander the streets. Keep an eye out for "oscypek," a delicious smoked cheese that you could mistake for a toy with intricate designs carved into its rind. If your feet are too tired to walk, take a horse-drawn carriage on Zakopane's oldest street.

Seeing the city under a blanket of snow during the Christmas market is one of those moments that feels like you've hit the pinnacle of travel goals.

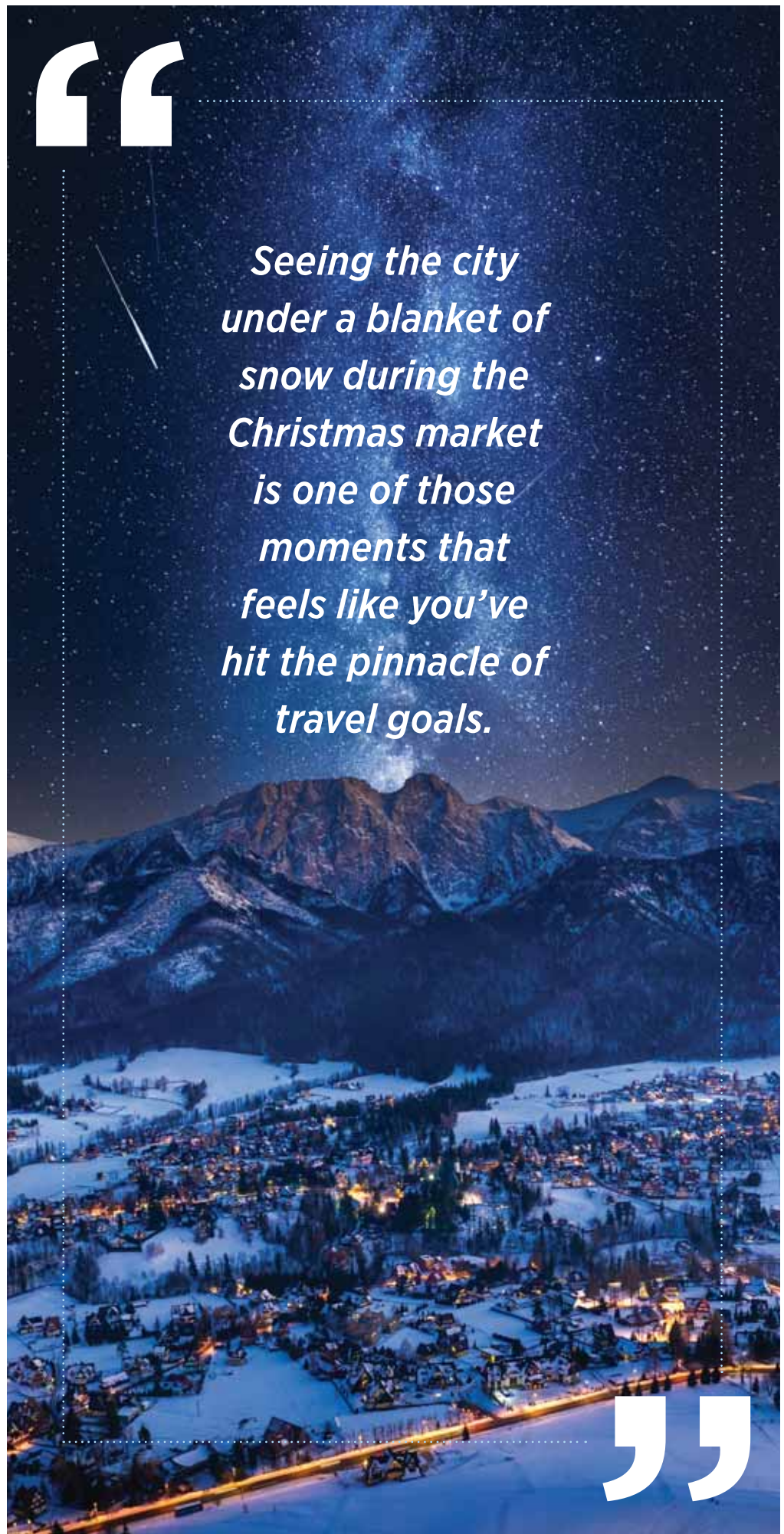
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“

Seeing the city under a blanket of snow during the Christmas market is one of those moments that feels like you've hit the pinnacle of travel goals.

”





DECENT DETOURS

Spala

Enjoy Olympic skiing, indoor swimming pools, sleigh rides and winter paintball.

Gizicko

Spend winter on the water with iceboating. This is one of the coldest areas in Poland, so bundle up!

Biatowieża

Home to the last primeval forest in Europe, hikers can spot around 500 different species of Bison. Wildlife tours are given year-round.

continued from page 51

NEXT STOP

Bukowina Tatrzańska

A half-hour east of Zakopane is Bukowina Tatrzańska, a small village near the Slovakian border. This is where the cycling world's Tour de Pologne ends. Why would this grueling ride end in a town of just under 3,000 people? Hot springs! After cycling 1,200 kilometers across Poland, every cyclist welcomes the healing powers of the natural, nearly 100 degrees Fahrenheit, spring water. The end-of-race rally is at Hotel Bukovina, a luxury spa, and if you think you can't afford a night in a luxury spa hotel, think again. Rooms can start as low as 73 euros or 325 zloty (Polish currency also known as PLN) a night.

Another fantastic stop for R&R is Termy Bukovina, a family-friendly water park and spa. You may glaze over the words 'water park' when looking for winter activities, however, indoor and outdoor pools are filled with thermal waters, so you can go for a swim even if there are six inches of snow on the ground. One unique feature is the live entertainment you can enjoy while in the thermal baths. Dance and splash in the warm water while listening to DJs spin the latest and greatest tunes. Much of the park is family-friendly but be aware that nudity is allowed in some of the sauna areas.

While tourists typically flock to Bukowina Tatrzańska for its thermal waters, there are ski slopes there as well. Day passes here are inexpensive. If you're lucky enough to visit in February, check out the Highlander Carnival, a festival and dance competition tapping into the village's rich history.



GOOD TO KNOW

While Poland is a member of the EU, it is not on the Euro. Its currency is the Polish zloty, or PLN. The airport, larger stores and some tourist attractions may accept euros, but you may not be getting the best exchange rate. To exchange euro for zloty, look for a bank or a KAN-TOR (money exchange) sign. These will usually give you better exchange rates than airports, train stations and ATMs. Like in any country, there are dodgy money exchange shops. Google the exchange rate to make sure you're getting a good deal.



Bukowina Tatrzańska, a small village near the Slovakian border

FINAL DESTINATION

Karpacz



Tadeusz Hołdys High-Mountain Meteorological Observatory on Śnieżka

It's time to double back west to Karpacz, along the Polish-Czech border. Not everyone enjoys skiing or snowboarding, and luckily, Karpacz specializes in winter fun off the slopes. But don't worry, there is still top-notch skiing with both downhill and cross-country slopes.

If you're longing for the hiking days of spring and summer, try hitting the trails with snowshoes. Imagine walking along snowy mountain trails in a winter paradise lined with evergreen trees. Like so many things in Poland, you don't have to break the bank to have fun. Try a romantic moonlight walk or a full-day guided snowshoe trip.

If you still want to barrel through the cold mountain air without all the grueling work associated with skiing, snow tubing is your answer. Not only do you slide down the slopes in an awesome inflatable tube, but there is also a lift that will take you up to the top. The fun goes on and on. This is a great activity for kids, especially since there's a winter playground nearby.

If none of those activities grab your attention there are sleigh rides by torchlight, snow scooters and an ice rink. Before you wrap up your stay, take a ride on the alpine coaster. It is quite a bit smaller than those in Bavaria, but still a whole lot of fun. Open year-round, you can ride through the mountains at a fraction of the cost in the Alps.

If you're a fan of fantasy and sci-fi, take a break from the snow and head to Karkonoskie Tajemnice, an interactive underground museum dedicated to the local legends and myths of the mountains. It's a hot spot for families, though it's recommended for kids five and older as some of the displays of mythical creatures may be frightening. One of the interactive displays is creating your own 'spirit animal.' Self-guided tours are available through a multi-lingual iPad.

Poland in winter is just what the family needs to decompress. Enjoy a winter getaway to this incredibly family-friendly country where there are far fewer crowds and you get more bang for your buck. ■



Karkonoskie Tajemnice, an interactive underground museum dedicated to the local legends and myths

© KARKONOSKIE TAJEMNICE



Five Fantastic Places TO FIND YOURSELF IN FINLAND



By Jessica Zen and Tamala Malerk

According to Nordicvisitor.com, winter temperatures in Finland range from a high of 44 degrees Fahrenheit (1 degree Celsius) and a low of 3 degrees Fahrenheit (-16 degrees Celsius), and winter typically lasts from November to March. These chilly temperatures are perfect for a winter wonderland getaway whether you want to stay warm indoors or have some outdoor frozen fun. We've found five places to help you make the most of winter in Finland.



Northern Lights 4

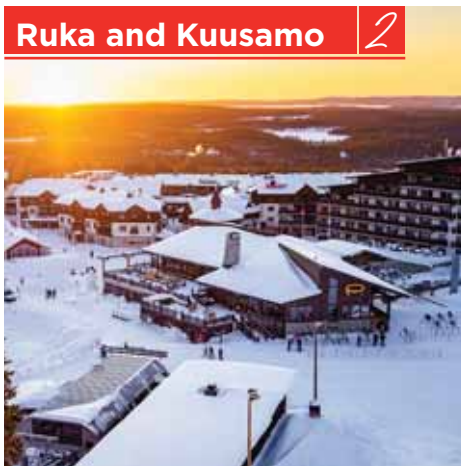
Finland is the perfect place to see the stunning aurora borealis. The lights are visible around 200 nights each year from approximately August to April and are truly magical as they dance across the sky. Consider a snowshoeing excursion, snowmobiling trip or a dog sled tour at night to enhance your experience. You could also stay in an Arctic treehouse, glass villa, snow hotel or a glass igloo to get the perfect views of the lights. Ilmatieteenlaitos.fi offers information about the current weather so you can improve your odds of seeing the lights.



EDITOR'S PICK

Santa Claus Village 1

The "official" home of Santa Claus is said to be located in Rovaniemi. After being almost completely destroyed during World War II, this delightful city has been meticulously rebuilt. Rovaniemi is now a modern city and the capital of Lapland. Since 1985, Santa has had an office here. While at SantaPark, you can meet the magic man himself, earn a diploma from Elf School, send a holiday greeting from the Post Office, ride the magic train ride and more. Santa is available from Nov. 11, 2023 – Jan. 13, 2024. If you find yourself in Rovaniemi before November or after January, you can visit Santa all year long at Santa Claus Village which provides more of a "pay as you go" experience rather than an "all attractions at one price" experience.



Ruka and Kuusamo 2

Skiers will love Ruka-Kuusamo for its ski resort filled with a variety of slopes and events for everyone to enjoy. Families will enjoy the Monday meetings with the reindeer at Rudolph's Adventure Route and the Rosa and Rudolph Family Park featuring a playground, a tubing hill and a nearby restaurant. More experienced skiers will enjoy the Superpipe. Ruka.fi informs potential guests about open slopes, lifts, temperature, wind speed and more.



The Icebreaker Sampo Ship 3

The Sampo is a Finnish icebreaker built in 1960 and was used to clear ice from the shipping lanes around Finland until 1987. Not only do you get to see the ship on the guided tour, but you can also witness the frozen sea, floating ice and Lapland while on a 3.5-hour cruise. While on the frozen Gulf of Bothnia, you can enjoy hot drinks, see the sunrise or sunset in the Arctic and put on a floating suit to go on an ice floating adventure.



Åland Islands 5

This archipelago featuring 6,500 islands (only 60 are occupied), is located between Finland and Sweden so you can experience cultural influences from both countries. While here, you can enjoy island hopping and go to a variety of restaurants, museums, shops and more. See the wooden houses in Mariehamn, the world's smallest metropolis according to vistifinland.com. You can also visit the pirate ship on Lilla Holmen Island and the ruins of Bomarsund, a Russian Czar's granite fortress.

There are more incredible sights in Finland beyond these five. However, you should certainly give some thought to checking out these attractions when you are planning your next trip. Finland is an incredible destination just waiting to entertain your wildest dreams! ■



UNTOUCHED ALBANIA

By Kat Nickola

Albania is one of the least visited European countries, making it an alluring new destination. This country has beautiful beaches, rocky mountains and unique east-meets-west villages perched on hillsides. Its history is complex, making Albanian culture diverse and its cuisine absolutely delicious.

One major airport serves international flights to the capital city of Tirana, but the Corfu airport in Greece off the south coast is another great option and perfect for flying out. There is no rail system in Albania, just vans and buses, so a rental car is ideal. Consider a one-way rental from Tirana Airport to Sarandë Port for a flight out of Corfu for the most efficient tour of Albania's best experiences.

MODERN TIRANA

Start your day in Tirana at Skanderbeg Square. Named for a medieval Albanian hero, the square is in the heart of the city, and the location of their yearly Christmas market. Visit the National History Museum which offers some depth and context for the rest of your trip. Across the square is Et'hem Bej Mosque with its unique nature depictions; this symbol of religious freedom hosted the country's first public Muslim gathering after the fall of communism in 1991. Nearby, the modern Orthodox Cathedral is a beautiful blend of architectural traditions and worth a glance inside at the intricate mosaics. Behind the cathedral is the House of Leaves museum detailing the secret activities of the former communist regime. For a different take on this part of Albanian history, walk to the Bunk'Art2 video exhibition inside an atomic bunker. A short walk away in Avni Rustemi Square, is the new bazaar and a great selection of traditional restaurants like the Oda.





OTTOMAN BERAT

Known as the City of a Thousand Windows, this UNESCO World Heritage site is roughly two hours from Tirana. Berat has an old town full of rare Ottoman-era architecture. Give yourself a couple of days in Berat to wander the streets of the old Mangalem area, which was traditionally the Muslim quarter. Take in the scenery with a hike up to the medieval hilltop castle and wander around its old fortress wall. Part of the village still thrives within this wall, even as some places like the former Red Mosque fall to ruin. Traditional Albanian restaurants abound. Be sure to try some delicious fried Kaçkavall cheese and local favorite tavë kosi, a tasty lamb and rice casserole.

ALBANIAN RIVIERA EDITOR'S PICK

From Berat, it's time to head to the Albanian Riviera. This area is hot in the summer, warm in spring and fall and too chilly to swim in winter, but beautifully sunny and devoid of tourist crowds.

The first beach town is Vlorë, and it's a good place to fuel up before heading south for the next 130 kilometers of clifftop coastal highway. The road is well paved with amazing views over the Ionian Sea, especially the windy, steep section over the Llogara Pass. On the other side of the pass is your first beach. Dhërmi has a large, bustling sandy beach with clear blue water and a cute old town perched high above. For a remote beach option, continue south to Gjipe. You need to hike about 2.5 kilometers into this beach, past old communist bunkers, but there are sea caves, a canyon and even camping to explore. If you prefer a chill beach vibe, then Himarë is a great choice. This budget-friendly town has a relaxed feel, beautiful beaches, great restaurants and a cool castle ruin to see. A few kilometers south is a fort at Porto Palermo. Built in the 1800s and used as a Soviet submarine base, it is full of abandoned tunnels and barracks. The next major town along the route is Sarandë, with its massive beach, lots of hotels and restaurants, and plenty of nightlife. It

also has its own castle, monastery and synagogue ruins. For soft sand, you can't beat the beaches a little further south around Ksamil. This cute village also has plenty of small coves worth finding and is close to Butrint Archaeological. Butrint is a UNESCO World Heritage site, with a former Greek colony, Roman city, Venetian castle and Byzantine ruins. It is a large site carved out of the encroaching forest and marshland which could easily occupy an afternoon.

When your time in Albania is over, it's possible to return your rental car at the Sarandë port and ride the one-hour ferry to Corfu where it's a quick taxi ride to the international airport. Between the Finikas and Ionian ferry lines, there is at least one sailing daily in the winter and more options during the warmer months. ■





SHOPPING *for the Perfect* Tea Set *in Stoke-on-Trent*

By Kat Nickola

If you've been in England for a bit, then you know how important afternoon tea is. The next time you pop into a friend's house for a cuppa, or attend a lavish afternoon tea service in London, sip your beverage and then admire the porcelain cup it's been poured into. Likely, it was manufactured by a company based in Stoke-on-Trent.

The Story of Teatime

Some of the world's finest tea sets are produced in Staffordshire, England. In 1910, the villages of Burslem, Tunstall, Fenton, Hanley, Longton and Stoke were officially unified into a single city. Located along the winding River Trent, this amalgamated city is now known as Stoke-on-Trent, and it is the best place in England to get high-quality ceramics.

With an overabundance of clay and coal, these villages became known as "The Potteries." In 1759, Josiah Wedgwood opened his world-renowned factory. A few decades later, Josiah Spode added a bone ash and kaolin to the porcelain, inventing bone china — the finest and strongest in the world. By the early 1800s, English potters adopted Spode's methods and Stoke-on-Trent became a production center for fine china. The Victorian era saw a boom in ceramics as afternoon teatime became a demonstration of wealth.

Supposedly, it was the seventh Duchess of Bedford, Anna Maria Russel, who started the afternoon tea sensation. With dinnertime being served fashionably late around 8 p.m., this lady-in-waiting for Queen Victoria began requesting mid-afternoon tea and snack services in her room. Soon, others took notice and joined her for what quickly grew into a nationwide custom.



Build Your Own Tea Set

Are you ready to adopt this tradition into your own family? You'll need to start with a tea set. Gone are the days of matching cups and saucers. Instead, build your own colorful mixed collection by visiting the ceramics factories in Stoke-on-Trent.

A basic tea set includes a teapot, cups with saucers, a small milk pitcher and a sugar bowl. You will also need a tea strainer and spoons. Add-ons to consider for your collection are a second teapot for hot water, a small plate for lemon slices, table plates or a tiered serving tray.

Start with a visit to The Potteries Museum and Art Gallery for an in-depth and interactive history of English pottery. This free museum also houses galleries displaying other historical aspects of the local area. After that, delve into the pottery shops and factories.

Some Places To Get You Started

Dudson Pottery Factory.....

The longest surviving ceramics factory in the area is open to the public as a free museum at the original red-brick factory. Enter through a conical bottle oven to learn about the company and its workers and see their historical pattern displays. A mile down the road is The Potters Shed outlet for your shopping needs.

Middleport Pottery

Visit this factory to compare the old and new faces of ceramics. The visitors center features old Victorian offices, original bottle kilns and a steam engine, while a factory tour is offered to see the current production of the Burleigh line. There is also a café and factory shop.

Emma Bridgewater Factory

This modern factory is still an active producer of British ceramics, and you can take a tour to see the artists in action. There is a studio for visitors to paint their own pottery and a tearoom for an afternoon break. The shop offers great deals on 'seconds' – slightly blemished pieces.

Spode Museum

When this Spode factory closed its doors in 2007, it became a museum where you can watch demonstrations of hand-painting pottery, see the original machinery, step inside the famous Blue Room gallery and learn about factory workers. There is a tearoom for snacks and drinks, and shop stocked with Spode designs.

Portmeirion Outlet

Located at this active factory, the Portmeirion outlet store is the place to find great deals on their classic Botanic Garden floral designs.

World of Wedgwood

This place has it all. The factory tour lasts about 45 minutes and takes visitors from design to creation of this world-renowned white-on-blue ceramic. There is also the Wedgwood Collection – a museum showcasing historical designs. Pottery classes are available for kids and adults, plus there are shops, three cafes and a tearoom offering a formal afternoon tea.

There are many other ceramics shops and factories in the area. It is also enjoyable to poke around the many charity shops where you can sometimes find rare treasures. Whether you add to your collection or simply learn about pottery heritage, a visit to Stoke-on-Trent is sure to leave you appreciating teatime. ■

A map of the shops & factories in Stoke-on-Trent!





OH, THE MANY FACES OF HOT COCOA

Re-vamp your Hot Chocolate

By Tamala Malerk

On a cold day in Luxembourg City, we were marveling at the Grand Ducal Palace when a sudden onset of heavy rain had my mom, spouse and I running into the first open door we saw. To my surprise, we stumbled into the Chocolate House of Luxembourg. While they offered a medley of chocolate treats, what interested me the most was warming up my soul (and my slightly wet self) with one of their hot chocolate spoons from the giant wall of choices.

As a consumer, you make your choice and hand it to the barista or chef on site. They prepare it and bring you a giant cup of molten chocolate topped with whipped cream and a giant marshmallow. I went with a white hot chocolate, my spouse chose a Bailey's hot chocolate and my mom selected a dark chocolate blend.

That rainy day in Luxembourg inspired me to bring the experience home.

Why not re-vamp your hot chocolate all winter long at home?

THE FOUNDATION

Create a European-style hot chocolate

- 1 3/4 cup milk of choice (whole milk for full flavor, but feel free to use soy, almond, cashew, oat, nonfat, etc.)
- 1/4 cup cream of choice (heavy cream, half-and-half, evaporated milk, non-dairy substitute)
- 1 1/2 tablespoons cocoa or carob powder (carob powder provides a more caramel flavor)
- Powdered sugar, to taste
- 1 tablespoon cornstarch
- 3 ounces chopped chocolate (70% dark chocolate is recommended to keep it authentic, but feel free to use milk chocolate, unsweetened chocolate or white chocolate)
- 1 ounce chocolate shavings (to top)
- Whipped cream or whipped coconut oil for a vegan option (topping)

Mix all but the toppings together and melt together on a low heat on the stove.

Adapted from kitchenconfidante.com

KEEP IT SIMPLE

While it may seem tempting (especially for the kids) to pile in all the ingredients possible, two or three add-ins will make for the tastiest treat.

Potential add-ins

Peppermint, coffee, orange zest, marshmallow, Irish cream, Baileys, white chocolate, berry syrup, caramel, nutmeg, hazelnut syrup, ground cinnamon, vanilla, coconut, cayenne pepper, crushed cookies, mint, chai, ice cream, Nutella®, espresso, flavored liquor, dark chocolate, gingerbread spice, pumpkin spice, chili peppers, etc. The possibilities are endless.

GO FANCY

- Use a blow torch or microwave to soften the marshmallow
- Use a candy cane as a stir stick
- Use high-quality chocolate
- Try heavy cream or milk (or non-dairy alternative) instead of water for instant hot chocolate

MAKE A DAY OUT OF IT

Grab ceramic paints and a plain, white cup for everyone to decorate their own hot chocolate mug. You'll be warmed by company and cocoa in no time. ■



Berlin's

TOP 3 FOOD SPOTS

Kat Nickola

1 Bergmannkiez

This neighborhood is a foodie hotspot with its epicenter in the Marheineke Markthalle. This indoor market hall is full of fresh and daily prepared foods, while the streets around it are lined with global restaurants. Visit the **Tibet House** for delicious traditional steamed momo dumplings, or try the **Madang Restaurant** for amazing Korean BBQ. You can find unique brunch offerings like the honey and tahini porridge at **Two Trick Pony**. Or join the throngs of tourists in line at **Mustafa's Döner Kebap**. Berlin claims title of home of the döner. Whatever country you are craving, its food is probably in Bergmannkiez.



2 Torstrasse

This main road lies between the business district to the north and the artsy Hackescher market, and the small streets nearby are full of upscale and trendy restaurants. For a splurge, try the eight-course menu at Berlin's only Michelin 3-starred restaurant, **Rutz**, where modern flavors blend with sustainability. For a trendy all-day brunch, there is the **House of Small Wonder**, whose Japanese-American fusion food and studio-loft atmosphere win it rave reviews. If you have a group, then the "chuzpeles" at **MANI Restaurant** make for great shareable reinterpreted Israeli dishes.



3 Humboldt Forum

This cultural center, housed in a former palace on Museum Island, is home to some of Berlin's most progressive restaurants. The **Lebenwelten Bistro** is an ecologically sustainable eatery specializing in vegan and vegetarian cuisine, while the **Deli Alexander** offers quick meals inspired by international street food. **Restaurant Baret** on the rooftop terrace has views over the city and a contemporary fine dining menu with seasonally unique and regionally sourced dishes themed around ecosystems. For a special evening, try the monthly four-course dinner menu worthy of its palace setting at the French-inspired **Restaurant Wilhelm**.





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TRAVEL TO SOUTH AFRICA

with Chakalaka

By Carrie Farrell

Have you ever heard of Chakalaka? I came across this interesting vegetable jumble while researching a trip to South Africa. I had no idea what this spunky-sounding dish could be. All I knew is it was fun to say and reminded me of the 1993, Tag Team song “Whoomp [There it is].” I decided to make it and I’m so excited to share it here.

Chakalaka is a vegetable and bean relish originating in South Africa. The word chakalaka means “all together” in the Zulu language, which is exactly how this sauté and dump recipe goes. It emerged from the townships surrounding Johannesburg. The base ingredients are onions, bell peppers, carrots and baked beans and recipes vary by region and individual preferences. Here is my version.

enjoy

Recipe Notes:

You can substitute baked beans with cannellini beans. Add in Worcestershire sauce, ketchup and brown sugar to mimic the baked-bean flavor.

Be creative with the spices. Any BBQ-flavored spice will work, even bottled barbecue sauce. I used McCormick Brown Sugar Bourbon seasoning.



SERVES 8 – 10



START TO FINISH: 30 MIN

Ingredients

- 3 tablespoons oil
 - 1 medium onion, chopped
 - 3 cloves garlic, minced
 - 1 tablespoon fresh ginger, grated
 - 2 large tomatoes, chopped
 - 2 large carrots, grated
 - 2 cups cabbage, shredded
 - 1 cup colored bell peppers, chopped
 - 1 tablespoon curry powder
 - 1 teaspoon of BBQ seasoning
 - 1 14 ounce can baked beans
 - 3 tablespoons cilantro, chopped
 - Salt, to taste
 - Red chili flakes, to taste
- Optional:
- 1 tablespoon brown sugar
 - 1 tablespoon ketchup
 - 2 teaspoons Worcestershire sauce
 - 1 cup vegetable broth

Steps:

1. Prepare the veggies and set aside.
2. In a large pot, heat cooking oil. Add onions, bell peppers, garlic and ginger. Sauté till tender, about 10 minutes.
3. Add in dry spices. Stir, about two minutes.
4. Add carrots, tomatoes and cabbage. Gently mix.
5. Add in the baked beans. Gently mix.
6. Lower heat to medium. Cover and cook for about 10 minutes.
7. Now add in the cilantro. Gently mix. Reduce heat and simmer for five minutes until thickened.
8. Optional: Add in vegetable broth to give the relish a sauce-like consistency.

Traditionally, chakalaka is more of a relish served with bread. I made it saucy to serve over rice. It’s a key component you’ll find at most South African barbecues, served as a side dish to meat. Try it. And I dare you not to sing the previously mentioned 90’s song while you make it! ■

Adapted from Immaculate Bites

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Staff Picks

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From community news to travel and PCS tips, StripesEurope.com has got you covered to conquer your tour in Europe!

In this edition, we asked some of our staff **“Do you and your family travel for the holidays or do you prefer to celebrate in the comfort of your own home?”**

Check out what they have to say!



“Being in Germany for 20 years has made Christmas all about family for me. It is often the only time I get to see my family for the year. In the past they would always visit us. The only place I would rather be than my house on Christmas with my family is at Mom and Dad’s house with everyone together. At the end of the day, it is all being with my family but I do miss being at my parents house for Christmas.”

– Leah Geier
MARKETING COORDINATOR



“My husband and I usually spend time home with family but since moving to Europe we have spent the holidays travelling, usually to somewhere in the Alps so he can snowboard as I struggle to ski behind him, lol!”

– Capri Roe
SALES ASSOCIATE



“We prefer to travel to get away from the home office environment, and relax in the comfort of our rented homes in southern Europe. This year it was in the lovely region of Bari, Puglia, Italy. A must see and do!”

– Sean Adams
SALES ASSOCIATE



“The Roback family’s holiday plans usually include spending time together cozy at home with some board games or puzzles and Christmas movies- either with our extended families, or just our little family unit, or traveling to visit our family back home if they aren’t able to come to us!”

– Ayla Roback
MARKETING COORDINATOR

“We take turns with the extended family every year cooking an extravagant Christmas Eve dinner and then opening presents. However, on Christmas morning my husband, son and myself exchange gifts, have breakfast and spend the day watching movies and playing games.”

– Elizabeth Drumm
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