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# EDITOR'S LETTER

## “ATTITUDE IS A LITTLE THING THAT MAKES A BIG DIFFERENCE”

Winston Churchill said it best. I think we can all agree this year has been trying and difficult. From our everyday lives to the little pleasures such as going to eat at your favorite restaurant, the current pandemic has presented challenging times for all of us. One of those challenges is the luxury of travel. With many countries shuttering its borders, flights being canceled and stop movement orders from Command, travel seems like a near impossible feat. However, nothing lasts forever, even the stormy days. When the time comes that we can roam freely throughout Europe again, let our magazine answer your burning question of “Where to travel now?”

In this edition, we feature American monuments sprinkled throughout Europe that will leave you humbled. We know you and your family have been patiently waiting to cross destinations off your list, so we've provided a few ideas for you with our family-friendly bucket list. If you're in the mood to explore underrated cities, head to Lithuania and see what the hype is all about and while you're at it, come explore why Toulouse, France should be the next family weekend trip.

From witnessing beautiful fall foliage in Garmisch, Germany to discovering Poland's winter magic, our Fall/Winter edition is here to feed your wanderlust and get you excited about traveling again. If sunshine is what your heart is after, fall in love with Croatia and seek some sun in these off peak winter destinations.

If you're into shopping and dining, read all about how wine makers cultivate their wine in the fall. In the winter, you'll want to want to make your own Glühwein—we have a recipe for that! Since you can't leave a country empty handed, grab some souvenirs your little ones will appreciate and buy yourself an intricate Belgium tapestry.

Despite the current climate around us, my hope to anyone who picks up this magazine is that you will be inspired and excited for future travels to come. Now, put that travel journal to good use and start writing your travel bucket list!

Mary Del Rosario  
Lead-Writer Editor  
Stars and Stripes Europe



LOOK OUT  
FOR **THIS STAMP**  
THROUGHOUT THIS  
EDITION TO SEE  
**MARY'S FAVORITES!**

EDITOR'S  
PICK



IN THIS EDITION

# WHERE TO GO



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## FALL travel

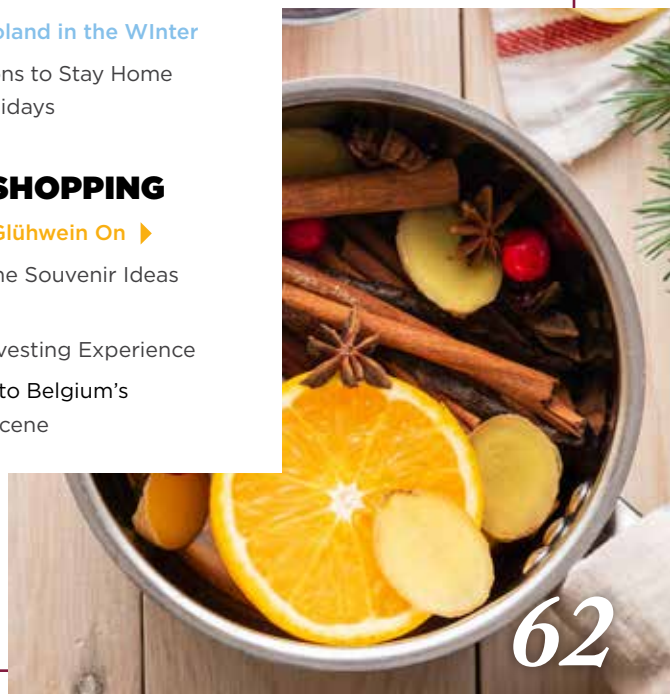
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By Stacy Roman

# GARMISCH-PARTENKIRCHEN

Fall is hands-down my favorite time of year. In Germany, autumn is marvelous—especially tucked away in the Bavarian alpine alcove of Garmisch-Partenkirchen. Mother Nature shows off spectacular foliage, the air has a crisp to it and there is a buzzy anticipation of the upcoming seasons. With plenty of outdoor activities and not as many tourists roaming the trails, fall into the beauty of this magnificent area.

*continued on page 8*



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## A Little History

Garmisch-Partenkirchen, more affectionately known as “GaPa” to locals or simply “Garmisch” to us Americans, was indeed once two separate villages. Separated by the icy blue waters of the Partnach and Loisach rivers, each had its own distinct flair. Located on the west side, Garmisch was known as the livelier of the two—hosting parties and nightlife, while Partenkirchen was quieter and more in touch with its historical past. In 1935, the mayors of the adjoining towns were mandated by Adolf Hitler to combine into one entity in preparation for the 1936 Winter Olympics which were held in the town. Spared from substantial destruction during World War II (WWII), much of the original architecture, including the handcrafted frescos adorning the sides of buildings, has been well preserved over the years.



## What To Do

If you’ve been in Germany for any length of time, fall is the time for celebrating and festivals. A mere 80 miles from Munich, Garmisch-Partenkirchen is often a popular home base for Oktoberfest. Unfortunately, due to the recent pandemic, many of the fun-loving rowdy festivals have been put on hold until next year. But there is still so much to experience! If you’re missing the Oktoberfest vibe, pop into one of the local “Gasthauses” for an authentic Bavarian meal. If you’re more of the outdoorsy type, autumn is almost picture-perfect weather for hiking. The perennial favorite trail is Partnachklamm. Be sure to look up at the trees as you walk along. The ombre shades of crimson, orange and yellow stand out against the dark rock walls. Feeling up for a challenge? Hit up Höllentalklamm before it closes for the winter. More challenging than Partnachklamm, this incredible gorge hike will leave you feeling quite humbled. Tumbling torrents of water cut between imposing alpine massifs. Narrow walkways guide your way up and around. Creaky rope bridges warning of one person at a time can definitely get your heart racing—especially if it’s a foggy day.

There are plenty of ways to see nature’s beauty without coming home with sore muscles as a souvenir. Take a leisurely gondola ride up to the AlpsiX viewing platform. The x-shaped platforms perch perilously (yet safely) over the edge of Alpspitze. It’s perfect for jaw-dropping vistas for thrill seekers. For those seeking a less adrenaline-pumping yet equally scenic view, hop on the Kreuzeckbahn. Or check out Germany’s highest peak, Zugspitze. Enjoy an old-fashioned cogwheel train ride up to the summit, or for a faster journey, jump on one of the cable cars. Just be mindful of the weather, as it can change very quickly.



Enjoy a meal and a drink while looking over Germany and Austria from 2,962 meters high, on the top of Zugspitze.





EDITOR'S  
— PICK



Take in the views at Lake Eibsee.

## Spend a day at the lake

While the craggy peaks surrounding Garmisch-Partenkirchen tend to draw a good chunk of attention, the many lakes in the area are stunning this time of year.

**Sitting at the base of Zugspitze is Eibsee, often regarded as one of Germany's most beautiful lakes.** With crystal clear water fading from shades of sapphire to emerald, enjoy a quiet day walking around the lake or rent a paddle boat and nature's splendor up close. Another fabulous spot, Riessersee boasts a proud Olympic history. As host to 10 events in 1936, visitors can still see small sections of the dismantled bobsled track above the shore. Relax inside Hotel Riessersee and enjoy the stunning colors of foliage reflected on the water.

## Take it down a notch at Edelweiss

Following WWII, the Army's 10th Armored Division took over the former German base which eventually became U.S. Army Garrison Garmisch-Partenkirchen. Part of the garrison houses one of five Armed Forces Resorts—Edelweiss Lodge and Resort. Surrounded by green pastures at the foot of the Alps, this cozy spot offers plenty of European charm with familiar American amenities. The friendly resort staff can help arrange special tours and day trips around the area. During fall holidays and long weekends, Edelweiss usually runs special packages and pricing.

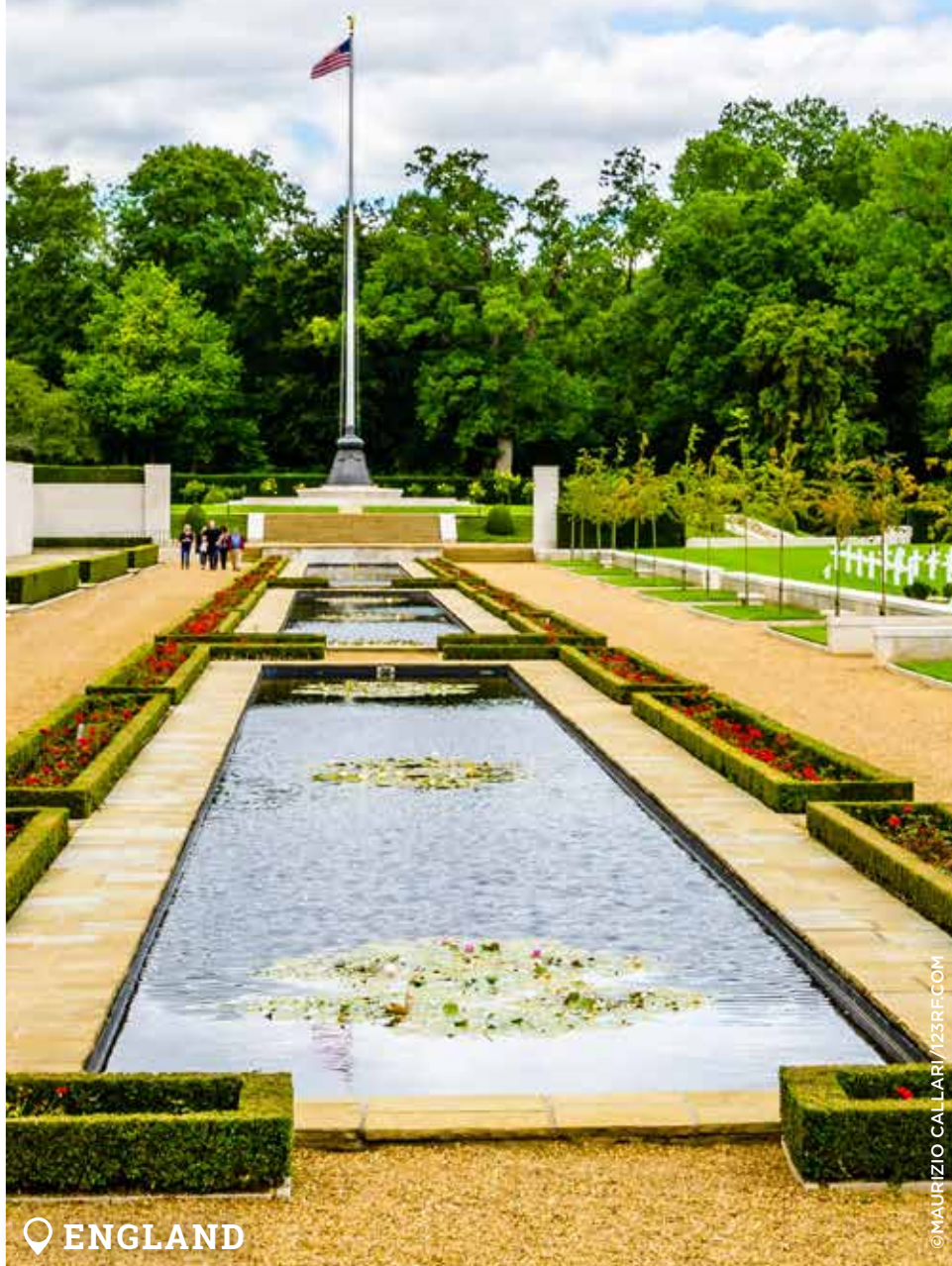
Discovering this beautiful piece of Germany is a must on any travel bucket list, especially for outdoor enthusiasts. With cool breezes and spectacular scenery—and fewer tourists—fall into the beauty of Garmisch-Partenkirchen. ■

Walk along (and over) a raging river inside the Höllentalklamm gorge.



# AMERICAN MONUMENTS

## in Europe



📍 ENGLAND

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By Jessica Zen

**R** There are noble American monuments on European soil that stand as a constant reminder of the hardships U.S. soldiers experienced during World War II. Though America emerged victoriously, it was not without thousands of casualties. American soldiers are buried all across Europe after giving the ultimate sacrifice for their country. The perfect way to pay tribute to the fallen Americans who have come before us is by visiting these monuments throughout Europe.

### Cambridge American Cemetery

Peacefully sitting on a slope and partially framed by woodland, The Cambridge American Cemetery and Memorial site cover 30.5 acres. On this land rests 3,812 fallen Americans. The Walls of the Missing honors the memory of 5,127 people whose remains were not recovered. Most of the names represent those who died in the Battle of the Atlantic or in the strategic air bombardment of northwest Europe.

A lone flag stands before a sea of cross-marked graves displayed before it. The south side of the monument holds the Walls of the Missing. The far end includes a chapel, large military maps, stained glass windows and a mosaic ceiling honoring the dead of the air forces. The visitor center has interpretive exhibits to express the criticalness of the campaign that contributed to the Allied victory. This monument is a sacred meeting place to recall what brought over 3 million Americans to the British Isles during the war.

*continued on page 12*

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📍 BELGIUM

continued from page 10

## Normandy American Cemetery and Memorial

The Normandy American Cemetery and Memorial is the first American cemetery to be established on European soil for WWII and is located in Colleville-sur-Mer. Expanding over a vast 172.5 acres, this cemetery hosts 9,385 graves of the military dead, mostly from D-Day landings and the operations that followed. The Walls of the Missing hold an additional 1,557 names.

Of all the American Battle Monuments Commission cemeteries, Normandy is the most visited, with around one million visitors each year. Located on a cliff overlooking Omaha Beach and the English Channel, this memorial features a semicircular colonnade with galleries at either end documenting military operations. In the center of the colonnade is the bronze statue, "Spirit of American Youth Rising from the Waves." There is also a visitor's center, reflecting pool, chapel and statues that represent the United States and France. The visitor's center offers three films and several exhibits. The white crosses face the United States and remind us of the thousands of American soldiers who lost their lives on European soil.

## Bastogne War Museum and Mardasson Memorial

The Bastogne War Museum is dedicated to remembering the events of WWII, specifically The Battle of the Bulge. This modern museum features multi-sensory, three-dimensional scenes to help visitors get a feel for the intensity of war. It also has depictions of how civilians lived during the occupation, the battle and afterward.

Not far from the museum sits the Mardasson Memorial, honoring the Americans killed during the Battle of the Bulge. It also celebrates the bond between Belgium and the United States forged in 1945. The monument is in the shape of a five-point star and has a circular open-air interior with the story of the battle engraved in gold on the walls. A spiral staircase leads to the top of the monument, giving visitors a panoramic view of the area and a feel for the layout during the siege.

For a more active tour, consider taking part in the annual Bastogne March in December. The march itself originated in 1977 when a former member of General Patton's 3rd Army began walking with friends. WWII Veterans joined the walking group and began an informal march around the perimeter



📍 ITALY



📍 FRANCE

of Bastogne to honor the memory of their comrades. Nowadays, the number of walkers nears 4,000 with funds that are raised to put towards transporting veterans to D.C. in order to visit various monuments.

## Sicily-Rome American Cemetery

The Sicily-Rome American Cemetery sits at the north end of Villa Costaguti Borghese. An expanse of headstones resting under Roman pines from 7,760 American military war dead graces this 77-acre cemetery. The chapel, with its white marble walls, hosts 3,095 names of further missing soldiers. The individuals memorialized here fought for the liberation of Sicily, during the landings and fighting in the Salerno area and in the landings at Anzio Beach.

Filled with art, a central mall leads to the memorial. The chapel is on the south end, with a map room on the north with a bronze relief map and four fresco maps. Beautiful

Italian gardens filled with flowers portray star shapes that add to the calming ambiance of the somber area. The visitor center focuses on education through stories, photographs, films and interactive displays. American flags are proudly displayed and wave in the ocean breeze. The white crosses stand as a constant reminder of the lives sacrificed.

Many of the soldiers who chose to defend the liberties of the American people did not live to tell the tale. These monuments allow their memories to live on forever through the beauty of their gardens, crosses and buildings. Touring these European monuments are a great way to explore the countries that combined forces with the United States during the difficult times of WWII. Pay tribute to these heroes and everything they sacrificed for the United States and our future. ■



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# Lovely Lithuania

By Jolanta Jackson



## Small but gorgeous,

Lithuania offers you dozens of UNESCO World Heritage sites, millennium-old history, medieval castles, affordable dining, drifting sand dunes and romantic walks on the beach. So, pack your bag and catch one of a budget airline's cheap flights to lovely Lithuania.

## Vilnius

Vilnius, the capital city of Lithuania, will give you an in-depth look at one of the UNESCO World Heritage sites and a best-value European city break destination. Vilnius offers one of the largest and most beautiful old towns in Central and Eastern Europe with cozy cafes, restaurants and narrow, curvy streets full of new discoveries around every corner. You will also see impressive examples of Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque and Classicism domes as well as towers and castles spread throughout the medieval city. The historic center of Vilnius includes the areas of the Upper, Lower

and Curved castles with the area that was encircled by a wall in the middle ages.

Start your Vilnius tour in the Cathedral Square where you will find the magnificent neoclassical Vilnius Cathedral, the newly rebuilt Palace of the Grand Dukes of Lithuania and the statue of Vilnius' founder, Grand Duke Gediminas. There is a magical tile between the Cathedral and the tower which says "Stebuklas" (meaning miracle) on it. If you step on it, close your eyes, turn around three times and make a wish. Legend says it will come true. Later, take a short climb to the Gediminas castle tower, which dates from the 13th century, and enjoy the breath-taking views of Vilnius from above.

Strolling down the narrow downtown streets, you will find St. Anne's Church, a prominent example of both Flamboyant Gothic and Brick Gothic styles. According to a well-known legend, Emperor Napoleon, after seeing the church during the Franco-Russian War in 1812, liked it so much that he expressed a wish to carry it home to Paris in the palm of his hand.

Later, enjoy your walk on Pilies Street visiting little souvenir, jewelry, crafts and linen shops.

Be sure to buy original pieces of jewelry made of amber or "Lithuanian gold." Amber has been



harvested from the shores of the Baltic Sea since prehistoric times and Lithuanian people still believe it possesses the power of healing.

After a long walk, you deserve a good Lithuanian meal. A popular European dish is "cepelinai," grated potato dumplings stuffed with minced meat or cottage cheese. The best place to eat is at Restaurant Forto Dvaras. Other traditional dishes include cold beet-root soup with hot potatoes, "saltibarsciai" roasted black bread, "kepta duona" and deep fried biscuits, "zagarelii." Don't forget to try one of 200 varieties of cold Lithuanian beer or make a toast with a glass of Lithuanian sparkling wine or the non-alcoholic "gira," made from black bread.



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## Trakai Island Castle

Just a half-hour train ride from Vilnius is Trakai, an island castle built in the 14th century and became a residential place for the dukes of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania until the capital was moved to Vilnius. Now, the castle is one of the most visited tourist attractions and is a popular place for weddings, picnics and picture-taking. Visit the castle's museum exhibiting many treasures found at the

site and explore its secret passageways and spiral staircases. Be sure to enjoy impressive stained glass and frescoes. You can also rent a rowboat or hop in a paddleboat and enjoy the serene lake with picturesque views from every angle. Since Trakai was a multicultural capital, for lunch try the most popular Karaites dish "kibina," pastries traditionally filled with mutton and onions.

**Still doubt if you are ready to visit Lithuania? You are, because you already know one very important word in Lithuanian, "Aciu" (AH-choo), which means "thanks."**



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## Kaunas

The second-largest Lithuanian city is just a one-hour train or bus ride away from Vilnius. Some cheap airlines fly directly there, and it is worth visiting. At the confluence of the two largest Lithuanian rivers Nemunas and Neris, Kaunas was the capital city during

the interwar period when Vilnius was annexed by Poland, and now it is called the city of museums. You can visit the War Museum of Vytautas the Great, Historical Presidential Palace or Devil's Museum (Zmuidzinavicius Museum), which has a collection of more than three thousand sculptures and carvings of devils from Lithuania and all over the world. The Akropolis mall was built around a few original 18th-century old town buildings and is a good place to shop with a variety of stores and restaurants. From there, head toward the pedestrian avenue, Laisvės Aleja, and visit the city's oldest church Vytautas' Church and a 14th century Kaunas Castle.



## Klaipeda & Curonian Spit

If you are in Lithuania for a long weekend, you still have time to go to the Baltic Sea and visit the port city of Klaipeda and the Curonian Spit. From the downtown of Klaipeda, which features German-style, 18th-century wood-framed buildings, you could hop on a ferry to the Curonian Spit, a long thin sand dune in between the Curonian Lagoon and the Baltic Sea. The Baltic legend says the spit was formed by a giantess named Neringa, who was playing with the sand on the seashore. Now, the Curonian Spit is a UNESCO World Heritage site with refreshing pine forests and huge drifting sand dunes. You could climb to the Panardis sand dune, which is 52 meters above sea level and enjoy the enchanting views of the Curonian Lagoon and the Baltic Sea. Since the Lithuanian-Russian border is less than a mile away, make sure you follow the trails while hiking in the dunes, so you don't cross the border illegally. Take a quiet romantic sunset stroll on the seashore and search for pieces of amber. As the legend says, the ruins of the sea goddess Jurate's amber castle was destroyed as punishment for loving a fisherman. ■





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## WHILE OVERSEAS

By Ruth Cuevas & Amanda Palumbo

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# EUROPEAN BUCKET LIST: FAMILY EDITION

By Mary del Rosario

Though Europe is the perfect location to knock off some bucket-list worthy adventures with friends near and dear, it's also a great place for the whole family to proudly check off some things on their wish list. From eating pizza in Naples to taking a group selfie at the Eiffel tower, below are just some ideas to get you started.



1  
Experience all things Harry Potter in London. Don't forget to stop by Platform 9¾.

2  
Tour LEGOLAND park in Denmark. There is also one in Germany.

3  
Learn how to make macarons in Paris.

4  
While we're on food, learn how to make pasta in Italy.

5  
**EDITOR'S PICK** Make sand castles on the beaches in the Canary Islands, Greece or the Balearic Islands.

6  
Say "cheese" as you all try to take a group photo with the Eiffel tower as the background.

7  
Explore inquisitive minds with museums such as The Natural History Museum in London and Eureka! The Museum for Children in Halifax.



8

During the winter months, see where Santa and his reindeer live in Lapland, Finland.

9

Become cultured as a family and tour cities such as Amsterdam, London, Paris, Lisbon, Berlin, Barcelona and Munich.

10

Become humbled at American monuments in France, Belgium, Italy, Luxembourg and the United Kingdom.

11

Teach your little ones how to ski on the German, Swiss, French or Italian Alps.

12

Hike up the Zugspitze, the highest mountain in Germany.

13

Feel like royalty and stay in a castle.

14

Experience thrills in Tivoli Gardens in Denmark.

15

Become a kid yourself in Disneyland Paris and/or book a Disney Cruise. ■







# Ghent

Belgium's Best-Kept Secret

By Kristi Adams

If you think a trip to Belgium means either Brussels or Bruges, then you've missed the country's best-kept secret of Ghent!

With its picturesque canal bridges, gently tilting architecture and gabled facades, Ghent reminded me of Amsterdam. As Belgium's third-largest city, Ghent is a bit bigger than Bruges. However, it is just as walkable and offers more things to do, with a wider selection of cafes and restaurants.

But when I discovered the city also had several dragons and a secret behind the flickering, nighttime city lights—Ghent now firmly ranks high among my favorite European cities.

## SIGHTSEEING

**Belfort Tower** – Towering above the Ghent skyline is the Old Belfry. The first gilded copper dragon was put on top of the tower in 1382. One has been perched on the tower protecting the city ever since. A huge plus for touring the Belfort is an elevator that makes several stops in the tower, giving you amazing views of the city—without having to climb quite so many steps.

**Gravensteen Castle** – The former castle of the counts is a 12th-century stone fortress complete with a moat, turrets and arrow slits. There's also a sizable weapons museum with torture devices and an actual guillotine with an original blade. *Tip: Arrive early to beat the tour buses.*

**Graslei and Korenlei markets** – Meander through these delightful city centers, hop on a boat for a canal tour or just enjoy a nice Belgian beer at a waterside cafe.

**St. Bavo's Cathedral** – Along with stunning architecture and a magnificent crypt, the cathedral houses the most-frequently stolen artwork of all time; the Adoration of the Mystic Lamb by Hubert and Jan van Eyck. Known as the Ghent Altarpiece, this monumental oil painting completed in 1432 contains 12 massive oak panels. In World War II, the Nazis' paranormal research group thought the masterpiece contained a hidden map to the Holy Grail, creating a race among the Nazi art theft unit to see who could capture it first. They succeeded, but the piece was eventually rescued and returned by the US's Monuments Men.

**Graffiti Street** – Just past the Korenlei market is a delightful little gem known as Graffiti Street. The actual street name is Werregarenstraat. Once you find it, you're treated to an explosion of colorful wall murals.

*continued on page 22*





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Petty Officer, US Navy  
BA Film & Digital Media, 2017

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If you drive to Ghent, don't forget to swing by the Carrefour market to stock up on those hard-to-find Belgian brews.

## EAT & DRINK

There's no shortage of great food and drinks to be had in Ghent. These were our favorites:

### Lunch

**Restaurant De Graslei** – For a gourmet lunch at a bargain price – you'd be hard-pressed to find a better option than De Graslei. Located in one of the most charming market squares in the city, the view is just as stunning as the food. Treat yourself to a three-course lunch, for just 17 – 19 euros per person! Reservations are smart for lunch and a must for dinner.

### Drinks

**'t Galgenhuisje** – As the smallest and coziest pub in Ghent, "The Gallows House" offers a wonderfully quaint, medieval ambience and one of the neatest places to grab a nice Belgian beer. It might take a few tries to snag a seat but a stop is worth it.

### Het Waterhuis aan de Bierkant

Located next to the river, the Waterhouse offers a large selection of beers, including several great house beers, in addition to some very nice salads and snacks.

**The Drifter and The Mix** – If you find yourself craving something different, take a rum-filled journey through these two Tiki bars. Tiki bars, you ask? You betcha, since these two bars whip up some of the best cocktails in the city using top spirits and the freshest ingredients.

### Dinner

**Amatsu** – Take advantage of Ghent's nautical access and head to one of the best sushi restaurants we've found since stationed in Europe. Amatsu offers a wide range of a la carte items as well as full-tasting menus, in a lovely dining setting. Reservations are a must. *TIP: For a romantic and quiet candle-lit dinner, ask to sit in the courtyard.*

**Ankara** – For a Mediterranean treat, head to one of the top-rated restaurants in the city. Ankara offers excellent value, with large sharing platters meant for two people but loaded down with enough delicious meats, cheeses and sides that it could easily be shared by four.

## NIGHTTIME MAGIC

Ghent is beautiful during the day but becomes absolutely stunning at night when the city comes alive with light. The nighttime splendor of the city is a carefully crafted network of thousands of lights developed by the famous lighting designer Roland Jéol. The city has won several international awards for its lighting plan, including the highest rating of three stars by the prestigious Michelin travel guide.

Standing on St. Michael's Bridge, one of the best nighttime views of the city, we saw the city lights flicker. At first, I thought it was my imagination—until they flickered again.

The flickering is, in fact, part of an art installation titled "Ai Nati Oggi" meaning, "For Those Born Today." Artist Alberto Garutti partnered with the Ghent City Council to connect the square's streetlights to the local maternity hospitals! When a newborn arrives, the parents can press a button in the hospital, which subtly announces to the world via flickering light that they've welcomed a bright new addition to their family, and to the city. ■

After one visit to Ghent — you might just find yourself counting down the days until the next trip.



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# An Adriatic Pearl: CROATIA

By Mary Del Rosario

Bordering Slovenia, Hungary, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro is the stunning country of Croatia. A gem on the Balkan Peninsula many visitors flock to, Croatia provides it all—history, unspoiled nature, perfect weather and beautiful beaches.

*continued on page 26*











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## CITIES TO EXPLORE

No matter the time of year you decide to visit Croatia, be sure to put these cities at the top of your list!

### 1 Zagreb

The capital of Croatia is definitely a city not to be missed. The largest of the cities, Zagreb is a mesh of old-town vibes mixed with modern taste. One way to appreciate Croatia's history is by visiting the medieval Kaptol located in the Upper Town. This section of Zagreb is home to the Roman Catholic Archbishop and the Zagreb Cathedral. A little history factoid: the original use of the cathedral was an observation tower during the Ottoman Wars. For a glance at another Medieval location, be sure to walk through Gradec, an area where cobblestone streets are peppered with tradesman and craftsmanship. In St. Mark's Square, you'll find St. Mark's Church, where the Croatian Parliament and Constitutional Court were founded.

Foodies and those who like to enjoy vacation with some drinks should head to Tkalciceva Street. This street is where all the locals go, so you know the food here is genuine—you'll be spoiled for choice when it comes to deciding where to eat and drink. If you're more into the market scene, check out Dolac Market where you can get your hands on the freshest meat, dairy and vegetables. If your accommodation has a kitchen, buy ingredients to create a traditional Croatian dish to really live like a local!

If you're like me and can spend hours in museums uncovering a city's history, get lost in the Image of War Photography Museum, the Zagreb City Museum, the Museum of Contemporary Art, the Nikola Tesla Technical Museum and the Museum of Broken Relationships. For the jaded ones, you can even post the place where you and your former love broke up and the story behind it!

### 2 Split

Situated on the Dalmatian coast is the timeless city of Split. Walking around the streets and gawking at masterpieces such as Diocletian's Palace, St. Dujice's Cathedral, the bell tower and

Klis Fortress further cements the fact that Split is a seemingly untouched city. If Klis Fortress rings a bell, it's because it was a filming location for "Game of Thrones." (Meereen for those who were wondering).

To get a taste of Split's history, visit the Old City from Pjaca Square where you can take in the Renaissance buildings. A two-minute walk will take you to Marmontova Street, a beautiful street lined with restaurants and shops. If it's breathtaking views you're after, you'll want to hike up Marjan Hill. Dotted with pine trees and Cyprus, you can see a panoramic view of the city.

### 3 Dubrovnik

Game of Thrones may have put Dubrovnik on the map as a hotspot, but the "Pearl of the Adriatic" showcases more than King's Landing—just one look at The Old Town and you'll see why this city in Croatia wears the title as being one of the world's finest and well-kept medieval cities. Bask in the charm through this old part of the city that includes a perfectly-preserved city wall that you can walk along to see the quintessential orange roofs that are special to Croatia. While here, be sure to eat, drink and shop at the Stradun, or the Placa. Palace Knezev Dvor, Palace Sponza, Luža Square, Bell Tower, Onofrijeva Cesma and the Dubrovnik Cathedral are also sights to check off our to-do list. To let you in on a secret, take the cable car from Mount Srđ for the best view of Dubrovnik. For those who can appreciate a green thumb, a visit to the Trsteno Arboretum is a must.

In the summer, Dubrovnik not only shines as a charming city, but it also transforms into Croatia's largest cultural celebration at the Dubrovnik Summer Festival. Held at the Old Town, 47 days and nights are filled with classical music, theater, opera and more. Note that the old town is a traffic-free zone, so you'll have to use your feet to explore this part of town.

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EDITOR'S  
PICK



EDITOR'S  
PICK



## OUTDOOR ADVENTURES IN THE MAKING

It's no secret that Croatia boasts some of the most beautiful nature parks and beaches. From rugged terrain to serene lakes producing gorgeous hues of blue, these parks and beaches are ones to add to your Croatia itinerary.

- 1 Sjeverni Velebit National Park:** Here you can find ruins of old houses. The Velebit mountain is the largest mountain range in Croatia.
- 2 Biokovo Nature Park:** If you're into rocky and rough terrain.
- 3 Mljet National Park:** There are many white, sandy beaches here!
- 4 Krka National Park:** This park needs no introduction but if you don't know it, many waterfalls await you.
- 5 Kornati National Park:** Recommended if you love to dive, sail and camp. It's comprised of more than 80 islands!
- 6 Risnjak National Park:** Known as the park with the most forests in all of Croatia.
- 7 Plitvice Lake National Park:** The first park that might come to your mind when you think "Croatia." The waterfalls and turquoise blue water is unreal.
- EDITOR'S PICK =**
- 8 Zlatni Rat Beach:** Known as the Golden Horn, the "most beautiful beach in the world" is located near the town of Bol. Note this beach consists of small pebbles, not sand.
- 9 Baška Beach:** Sunbathers will have a field day on this beach! There are lots of sunchairs to lounge in.
- 10 Lubenice Beach:** Translating to "watermelon," this welcoming beach may require you to fly to Rijeka and rent a car to Cres Harbor.
- 11 Nugal Beach:** Located south of Makarska city, this remote beach is perfect for those who don't like crowds.
- 12 Podrače Beach:** This pebble beach in Brela are what dreams are made of.

## THE GASTRONOMY SCENE

One would be remiss if one flew to this beautiful country and didn't chow down on some delicious Croatian cuisine. From the freshest seafood to the heavenly pastries, below are just a few favorites to try.

**Fritule:** Fried dough that resembles a donut. Some are mixed with raisins or citrus fruits such as lemons and oranges.

**EDITOR'S PICK =**

**Black risotto:** The squid ink is what gives this divine dish its rich, black color. Careful, your teeth may turn black after eating this.

**Buzara:** Translating to "stew," this dish is a stew of mussels in wine broth.

**Peka:** Meat (often lamb, chicken or veal) and vegetables that's cooked in a bell-like dish over fire until the meat is so tender, you won't even need a knife to cut it.

**Strukli:** A pastry filled with cottage cheese and sour cream that is then baked in an oven.

**Pasticada with gnocchi:** Marinated braised beef that's been reduced in red wine and served with gnocchi.

**Brudet:** Fish stew cooked with onions, tomato sauce and spices.

Note that depending on which region of Croatia you're in, the food may vary. The Dalmatian Coast diet consists of fish, vegetables and olive oil, which is native to the Mediterranean scene. The food you'll find in Zagreb belongs to central Europe and consists of potatoes and meat. ■



## GOOD TO KNOW

Croatia's currency is the kuna. Small businesses prefer cash over card, and some may not even accept card.

Tipping is always appreciated, but not expected.

It's recommended to take a car as public transport is not as efficient as you may be used to.

Be sure to bring back wine or olive oil as a souvenir. Both of these products have been produced and perfected here.

Don't be disappointed if you can't walk along the beaches without sandals on. Many of Croatia's beaches are mostly rocky.

The best months to visit are September and June.



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# & Me, My Crew Toulouse, France

By Carrie Farrell

**I**t seems like only yesterday my husband and I were conquering Europe city by city—taking trips on a whim and utilizing last-minute fares to go explore. Once we had kids, plenty of people commented that our travelling days were over. We decided to prove them wrong.

I'm not going to sugar-coat it—travelling with young children doesn't offer the same free-style rush of a last-minute getaway. But with the right planning and attitude, it can be even more rewarding.

So, why Toulouse? The answer "why not?" is the more important question. Nestled in the south of France, this amazing city is an hour from the Mediterranean sea and the Atlantic ocean. The city is a mix of rosy brick buildings, stunning Gothic architecture and a myriad of lovely cafe-lined cobbled streets. Known to the locals as La Ville Rose (the Pink City), Toulouse sounded interesting enough to explore. Here's our trip in a nutshell.

## STAY SOMEWHERE CENTRAL

Our goal on all of our family trips is to choose a home base that offers plenty of sites and conveniences within walking distance. We knew we'd have the most success staying in the middle of it. Undoubtedly, The Capitole (city hall) is the heart of Toulouse. Our hotel was four city blocks from the central square making for a great starting point. The bus station was across from the hotel and the metro station was just one block. My family is notoriously slow in the mornings. Rather than rushing from attraction to attraction, we spent the first morning scouting our vicinity for a cozy cafe for breakfast and then meandering down the main boulevard toward the Capitole. Our kids quickly spotted a carousel at Place du President Thomas Wilson. A little further down, behind the grounds of the Capitole is the Tourist Information Center. There, we loaded up on fliers showing us the multitude of things to see and do.

At the main square of the Capitole, numerous food stalls, cafes restaurants and shops can be found. By then, the kids were ready for a rest and a snack. To keep our sanity as well as being able to hold our kids' interest, we seduced them with a sugary waffle and a ride on the tourist train.

**TOP: ST. PIERRE BRIDGE**  
This green steel girder bridge with pedestrian walkways connects the place Saint-Pierre on one side to the Dome de la Grave on the other.

**BOTTOM: THE CAPITOLE**  
It is the place where St. Saturnin was martyred back in 257A.D. The Romans used it in the thirteenth-century and during the French Revolution it acted as army barracks. Nowadays, it's used as a city hall.





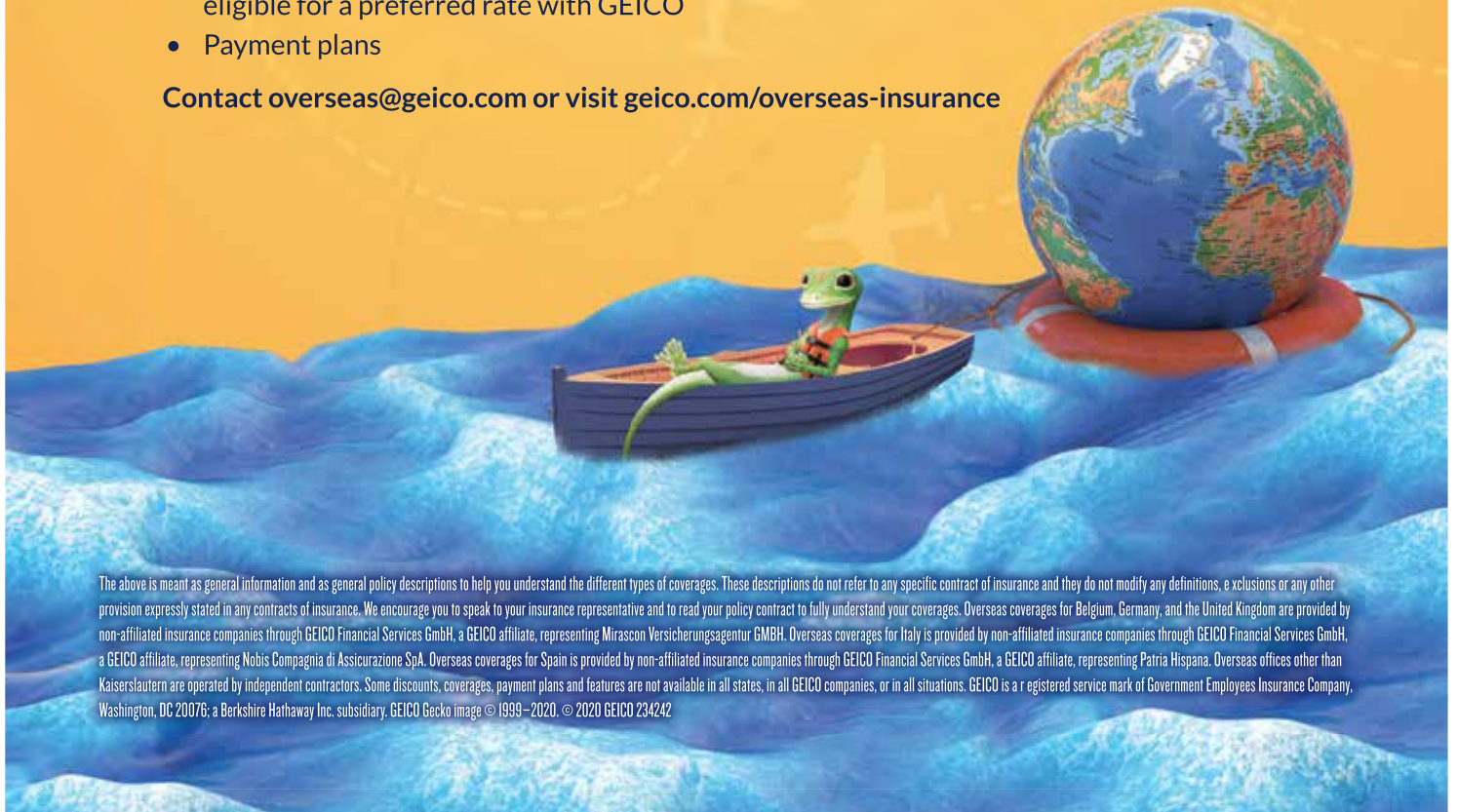
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**TOP: ST. SERNIN BASILICA**  
A UNESCO World Heritage Site. Inside, there is a crypt with Saint Saturnin's remains

**LEFT: CANAL DU MIDI**  
A UNESCO World Heritage Site and is nearly 300km long and links the Atlantic to the Mediterranean Sea.

**BOTTOM: GARONNE RIVER BANK**



## THREE WAYS TO SEE THE CITY

### By Train

Toulouse offers a whole variety of ways to see the city. You can catch a guided tour on Les Trains Touristiques de Toulouse (The Little Tourist Trains) right in front of the Capitole courtyard. There were two routes, the Canal du Midi and the Toulouse Garrone. Both are about 40 minutes and depart and return to the Place du Capitole. We took the Garrone circuit to take in views of the river. This particular circuit took us past the outer edge of Canal de Brienne, the Saint-Sernin Basilica and more. The train is a fantastic way to tour with kids and get a basic view of the city before setting out to explore. Once we returned to the Capitole, it was time for lunch. Note: lunch is available in France between noon and 2 p.m. After that, many restaurants close until evening, usually around 6:30 p.m. However, we found plenty of food options that were open throughout the day.

### By Bus

On day two, we opted for the hop-on hop-off bus. The starting point was at Place d'Arménie right in front of our hotel. We decided to explore the Jardin des Plantes and surrounding parks which border the Museum of Natural History.

## *Les Bateaux Toulousains is a perfect way to see Toulouse from a different vantage point.*

The Museum of Natural History is one of the sites we reluctantly decided to tour with our kids. At ages three and six, we weren't sure it would hold their interest. It was a surprising hit. The museum had a very impressive collection of life-sized skeletons and animal displays that fascinated my children. There were plenty of interactive, activity screens for kids to touch and play. Note, the exhibits are not labeled in English, however the museum's web app was easy to access and helped to decipher some displays. The onsite cafeteria served great food and they offered kids meals too. There is also a McDonald's nearby and the museum ticket allows re-entry throughout the day if you choose to eat offsite.

Next, we explored the garden (Jardin des Plantes). Created in 1794, it's the oldest garden in Toulouse and popular for walking, jogging and picnicking. It's also a perfect spot for kids to burn off some energy. There is a modern playground, a merry-go-round and a little model train that circles the area. This garden serves as a center point and is connected by foot bridges to reach Square Boulingrin, the Royal Garden and the Grand Rond. And if you have any energy left, the Canal du Midi is only a 10-minute walk away.

### By Boat

By day three we were ready for a cruise on the river. Les Bateaux Toulousains offered another wonderful tour to take with kids and is a perfect way to see Toulouse from a different vantage point. The Garonne River runs through Toulouse and accesses the Atlantic Ocean. The river branches through the city through two waterways, the Canal du Midi and the Canal de Brienne. The highlights of this tour were the Pont Neuf Bridge and the Canal de Brienne. To access the canal, we passed through the St. Pierre lock—a very cool experience for the kids.

## OTHER ADVENTURES TO CHECK OUT


Although we saw a lot, here are some things we will have to cross off our list next time:

**Kid approved** - Cité de l'Espace, Musee Saint Raymond, Aeroscopia, Animaparc

**Adult-approved** - Canal du Midi, Saint Sernin Basilica, Jacobins Museum, Musee Des Augustins

If you have the luxury to stay longer, Toulouse is also within striking distance of the Pyrenées mountain range for those who like world-class hiking and skiing. The locals take full advantage of the proximity to other options such as Biarritz, Languedoc, the Dordogne, Carcassonne and not to mention places like San Sebastian in Spain just across the border.


Toulouse is one of the most attractive cities we've ever been to and has so much to offer families. It's easy to navigate and is a great, go-with-the-flow, family destination. And to our delight, we always found a waffle stand when we needed one. ■



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VFW 9334 at Vilseck - for the past 6+ years has sponsored Thanksgiving Dinner with all the trimmings for the children and staff of the Immenreuth SOS Children Village and in partnership with the Vilseck Kriegerverein (German VFW) has sponsored the Sorghof Kinderfest providing food, rides - everything that one would find at a fest. Visit us at Vilseck VFW Post 9334 on Facebook.

VFW 10692 Grafenwoehr - established 1983 and has sponsored Memorial day commemorations at 2 locations - Grafenwoehr cemetery where 17 American Veterans and Flossenbuerg concentration camp has 2 American Veterans lying in their final resting place. Sponsors a Summerfest and Christmas event for the past 12 years at St. Elizabeth orphanage in Windischeschenbach. Visit us at VFW Tower Post 10692 on Facebook for events.

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# Lapland, Finland

## HOME OF REINDEER AND SANTA CLAUS



By Jeana Coleman

Santa Claus is a real man of mystery. A mere mention of his name can either strike fear or incite sheer delight in the hearts of the world's youth. Of course, that all depends on whether they have been naughty or nice; no one wants to appear on the wrong side of his list. He's known to bring good things to those who deserve it.

### Legendary Origins

Some say he originated from Turkey, or Germany, or from stories of Norse god, Odin. Some call him Sankt Nicholas, Sinterklaas and Papá Noel. In Poland, he's Święty Mikołaj. In France, he's Père Noël. He's Kerstman to the Dutch.

He may walk on foot, ride a horse, on skis or a sleigh. An old Scandinavian tale said he rode on, and even appeared as a goat, called tomte.

But no matter where he came from or what people call him, one small town in Finland claims to be his true place of residency, and they've gone to great lengths to bring that magical wonderland to you. One visit to Lapland, Finland, and you'll be a believer, too.

### How it All Started

Around 50 years ago, Finnish officials decide that Santa's international security was stable, so they supplied the answer every child needed to hear: he lives in the small town of Rovaniemi, Finland, positioned right along the Arctic Circle.

Not long after this announcement, people started venturing to this beautifully rugged wonderland to see for themselves. It was true! Today, visitors are delighted to find that Santa not only lives there year-round, but they can see his home, workshop, and visit him in person at his office nearly all year long.

### Where to find the Finnish Santa Experience

For the ultimate Santa experience, plan a vacation around one of these Santa-themed amusement parks in Finnish Lapland. Each location offers numerous Santa- and elf-related attractions, shopping opportunities and fun-filled activities.



that would even cause Scrooge to smile. Meet old Saint Nick himself anytime of the year; he puts in daily appearances at both of his offices at Santa Claus Village and SantaPark. Just check for his specific office hours when you arrive.

## SantaPark & Santa Village, Rovaniemi

Find out everything you ever wanted to know about elves and Santa's workshop at SantaPark and Santa Claus Village in Rovaniemi. Children and those with youthful hearts can learn about ancient elf secrets, and sharpen their elf skills at Elf School, learn about reindeer, and even take reindeer sleigh rides.

One of the best features of SantaPark and Santa Village is their post offices. Guests get a behind-the-scenes look at how all the mail is sorted that enters the Arctic Circle, and then they have the opportunity to send mail back home specially stamped from Santa through either SantaPark or Santa Claus Village.

Then, head over to his office where you can have a personal conversation with Santa himself, nearly every day of the year. Check their website when booking your trip. [www.santaclausvillage.info](http://www.santaclausvillage.info) and [www.santapark.com](http://www.santapark.com).

## Lapland Safaris

For another special Santa excursion, consider an English-speaking tour called a Santa Claus Family Safari, which incorporates a visit to a reindeer farm, sleigh ride, Santa visit and more. Guests will also take a reindeer-teamed sleigh ride, then (optionally) hop on snowmobiles and skidoos for an adrenaline rush along the snow banks.

Tours also provide a commemorative, Arctic Circle-crossing ceremony and stops at Santa Claus Village where they can send letters at the Post Office and head over to Santa's office to see the jolly fella himself.

Tours must be booked in advance, and are available from December to April. [www.laplandsafaris.com](http://www.laplandsafaris.com).

## Joulukka, a secret location

This Santa experience may very well be the most exciting you and your children will ever encounter. Twenty miles from Rovaniemi, hidden deep in the Arctic forest, is Joulukka, Santa's secret hideaway. Guests have the opportunity to arrive by car, snowmobile or reindeer-drawn sleigh. To the children's delight, awaiting elves already know them by their first name. Guests are once again entered into Elf School, bake



with Mrs. Claus, then tromp through the forest in the dark of night for another adventure. Watch for trolls, giant forest animals, Northern Lights and then roast marshmallows in the wide open space.

When guests can't eat another fluffy b e, they're whisked away to the gem of the night: Santa's Control Center. Here the secrets of Santa are revealed; they'll learn how he and the elves make magic happen across the globe every Christmas Eve. Elves encourage the children to help Santa in his mission, helping create a really enchanting evening for all in attendance. But don't think they let all of their secrets out of the bag ... his control center is hidden deep within a secret location of the forest along the shores of Lake Sierijärvi.

Reservations must be made in advance. Joulukka also provides opportunities for fairy-tale weddings, themed dinners, graduation parties and other special occasions. [www.joulukka.com](http://www.joulukka.com).

## Santa's Resort, Kakslauttanen

Need a little R&R for the adults but still want to get some personal time with Santa? Head to Santa's Resort, a feature at Hotel Kakslauttanen and Igloo Village. Feed the reindeer, share hot cider and cookies with Santa and his elves, then partake in numerous outdoor activities offered at the resort. In the summer months, guests can also mountain bike, hike, take part in motocross and forest scooter excursions, and head back to Santa's Resort to pan for gold with Santa's elves at Gold Creek. Yes, you're sure to find a gold nugget or two, they guarantee. [www.santasresort.fi](http://www.santasresort.fi) and [www.kakslauttanen.fi](http://www.kakslauttanen.fi). ■

WHEREVER YOU  
DECIDE TO GO,  
REMEMBER TO SEE  
YOUR EXPERIENCES  
THROUGH THE EYES  
OF A CHILD, AND  
YOU'LL SURELY FEEL  
THE MAGIC.



**TOP:** Tour stops at Santa Claus Village where guest can send letters at the Santa Post Office.

**BOTTOM:** Santa Claus Village in Rovaniemi in Lapland in Finland.

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# Best Off-Peak Winter Destinations

By Karen Bradbury

Even in Europe's northern reaches, autumn tends to linger a good long time, with warm days late into the month of October not unheard of. But inevitably, the hours of daylight grow ever shorter, and there's a chill to the morning air.

Before resigning yourself to nearly a half-year's wait for the return of that honey-warm feeling of sun on skin, a late-season holiday might be just what the doctor ordered. In many of southern Europe's prettiest corners, the hordes of tourists have packed up for the season and the prices on premium hotel rooms have gone down substantially. Here are some places to go, and an idea for an extra-special experience that's sure to create a memory you can savor over the long cold nights of winter.

## Siracuse, Sicily

Siracuse is rife with ancient ruins. Take them in with a visit to Archaeological Park Neapolis, site of a large limestone cave known as the Ear of Dionysius, or at the Regional Archaeological Museum Paolo Orsi, where scenes from the Old Testament are carved into white marble. The city's historical heart is found on Ortygia, a small island to the east connected to the city proper by bridge.

**MUST DO:** Visit Riserva Naturale Orientata Cava-grande del Cassibile, a nature reserve about one hour's drive from the city. A hike through the park reveals steep canyons, gorges and views of Mt. Etna off in the distance. On hot days, crystal-clear pools entice swimmers. Pack a lunch and plenty of water, as the cafe might not be open in the off-season

*continued on page 38*



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## Chania, Crete

Be enchanted by a charming 14th-century Venetian-style harbor, Egyptian lighthouse, narrow streets and a restaurant-lined waterfront. In terms of shopping, be on the lookout for handcrafted works of leather. Don't miss the agora, a covered market where tourists and locals can shop for herbs, olives, cheese and freshly-caught fish

**MUST DO:** Unlike most of those little motorized trains that guide tourists only through city centers, the Little Fun Train of Chania takes its riders to some fantastic places. Its Seven Villages route passes through traditional towns, orange orchards and olive groves, as well as along the stunning coastline.

## Ibiza Town (Eivissa), Ibiza

The island famous for its hedonistic nightclubs has a gentler and more historic side that's best experienced by meandering through the alleys of Dalt Vila, the highest and oldest part of town. It's topped by a cathedral offering stunning views out to sea.

**MUST DO:** Hop a ferry and spend the day in Formentera, a much smaller island to the south that's known for its white, sugar-sand beaches and turquoise waters. Rent a bicycle and cycle past dazzling coastal vistas, lighthouses and a salt lake that's home to many unique species.

## Kotor, Montenegro

This medieval gem of crooked streets and attractive squares is best known for its postcard-perfect, U-shaped bay encircled by mountains on the Adriatic Sea. When peeking into churches and museums grows old, feast on typical cuisine such as black risotto, which gets its color from squid ink, or "brodetto," a seafood-packed stew.

**MUST DO:** Hike the Ladder of Kotor, a steep and strenuous trail with more than 70 switchbacks. The reward for conquering this steep and challenging path is a stunning view over the Boka Bay.



RIGHT: Enjoy the sunset along the water at Chania, Crete.



EDITOR'S PICK



ABOVE: Catch a boat ride in the bay or opt for exploring Kotor's ancient architecture.

LEFT: Take a break from dancing and adventuring to grab a bite in Dalt Vila, Ibiza Town.





LEFT: Lagos, Portugal has dozens of hidden coves and beaches, perfect for a little rest and relaxation.



ABOVE: Travel to the past in Matera, known as one of the "oldest, continuously inhabited cities in the world."



LEFT: Walk along the many docked sail boats at Calanque de Port-Miou, a picturesque way to finish your hike.

## Lagos, Portugal

This thoroughly modern town on the Algarve is known for its nightlife, with no end of cafes, bars and restaurants. Marvel at the impressive baroque Igreja de Santo António church and stroll through the harbor from which boat trips and deep sea fishing expeditions are easily arranged. History lovers will enjoy searching the age-old streets for traces of its former masters the Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Romans and Moors.

**MUST DO:** Visit the Ponta da Piedade, a headland where golden limestone formations take on the shape of arches, grottos and sea pillars. Explore from land, where winding staircases lead down to hidden coves with sands lapped by turquoise waters. Or approach by sea, and paddle your own kayak beneath the rocky outcroppings.

## Marseille, France

This gritty city is known for chic shopping, tasty seafood and its bustling port filled with sleek watercrafts surrounded by restaurants and watering holes. Don't miss the city's oldest district, Le Panier, with its charming village atmosphere, creative craftspeople and brightly painted facades. Marseille is no tourist's idyll. Some places may be raggedy, but refreshingly real.

**MUST DO:** Hike atop the Calanques, the craggy white limestone cliffs running alongside the blue waters of the sea. The GR 98 hiking trail running from Marseille to Cassis would take more than ten hours to walk in its entirety, but even a shorter jaunt will provide vistas of hidden coves and sparkling bays.

## Matera, Italy

People come to see the cave dwellings known as "sassi," that was first occupied by monks, hewn into the rock in the form of cells, chapels and churches. This form of housing sheltered the poorest families right up until the 1960s. To really get to know the story of the caves and its residents, be sure to book a guided tour.

**MUST DO:** If you have a car at your disposal, head 40 miles south to Craco, an uninhabited village perched high on a hill. Plagued by landslides, flooding and earthquakes since 1980, it's been completely abandoned. Nowadays, the ghost town is used as a filming location and is popular with day-trippers seeking an eerie, otherworldly atmosphere. ■



# Gorgeous Winter Train Rides

By Jessica Zen

**T**owering mountains covered in blankets of snow, pine trees stretching toward the sky with icy branches and quaint villages are just a few of the reasons you should book a ticket on a European train during the winter. Stay warm and cozy while you experience breathtaking landscapes and nature at its finest. Check “take an epic train ride” off our bucket list with any one of these options!



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## Glacier Express

Chug across beautiful stone arch bridges while you stare in awe out panoramic windows starting in either St. Moritz, an elegant holiday resort, or in Zermatt, an alpine village. Enjoy stunning views of the Matterhorn and experience the Landwasser viaduct and the Rhine Gorge. Go through Oberalp Pass on a route that offers eight hours of sheer pleasure. Pass rivers, lakes, valleys and tunnels on the slowest express train in the world! Visit one of Switzerland's oldest settlements of Chur, home to twisting alleys and historic buildings.

## Bergen Railway

Bergen Railway is northern Europe's highest railway, with 180 tunnels and 22 stops. This route takes seven hours and stops at Myrdal, where you can get on the Flåm Railway. The ride to Flåm takes you along the innermost part of the Aurlandsfjord, whose wild scenery was developed by melting glaciers. This unparalleled experience allows you to view frozen waterfalls, rivers and farms located on mountain slopes. The Flåm Railway is one of the steepest railways in the world with a 2,841 foot height difference in just 12 miles.

## West Highland Line EDITOR'S PICK

Head to platform 9  $\frac{3}{4}$  to catch the Hogwarts Express and be transported to a magical land where nature is so remarkable, you'll think you've entered another world. In reality, you're just on the West Highland Line crossing the Glenfinnan Viaduct. With a staggering 21 arches, it is the longest railway bridge in Scotland at 1,246 feet long. Other highlights include the Erskine Bridge, Dumbarton Castle and Arrochar Alps. Travel through Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park. Experience remote wilderness, mountains, deep forests and steep locks during this visual delight!

## Munich to Innsbruck

via Garmisch-Partenkirchen

This three hour train ride takes you into the Bavarian Alps and through picture-perfect Garmisch-Partenkirchen. See Germany's tallest mountain, the Zugspitze, which dominates the landscape at 9,717 feet. You're also likely to see masses of skiers and countless wooden huts, idly resting in the valleys below mountains. This lovely town is dripping with traditional Bavarian ambiance with its cobblestoned streets and half-timbered buildings. Start or end your journey with a fantastic ascent or descent along the Inn Valley in Innsbruck.

## Golden Eagle Danube Express

This train is a luxury hotel on wheels. Watch the world go by as you get to know fellow passengers. For 11 days, experience a blend of culture in the following places: Venice, Italy; Trieste, Italy; Ljubljana, Slovenia; Zagreb, Croatia; Sarajevo, Bosnia; Mostar Herzegovina; Dubrovnik, Croatia; Belgrade, Serbia; Skopje, Macedonia; Thessaloniki, Greece; and Sofia and Plovdiv, Bulgaria. From canals to mosques to the glittering sea, there is so much to experience on this voyage of a lifetime! ■

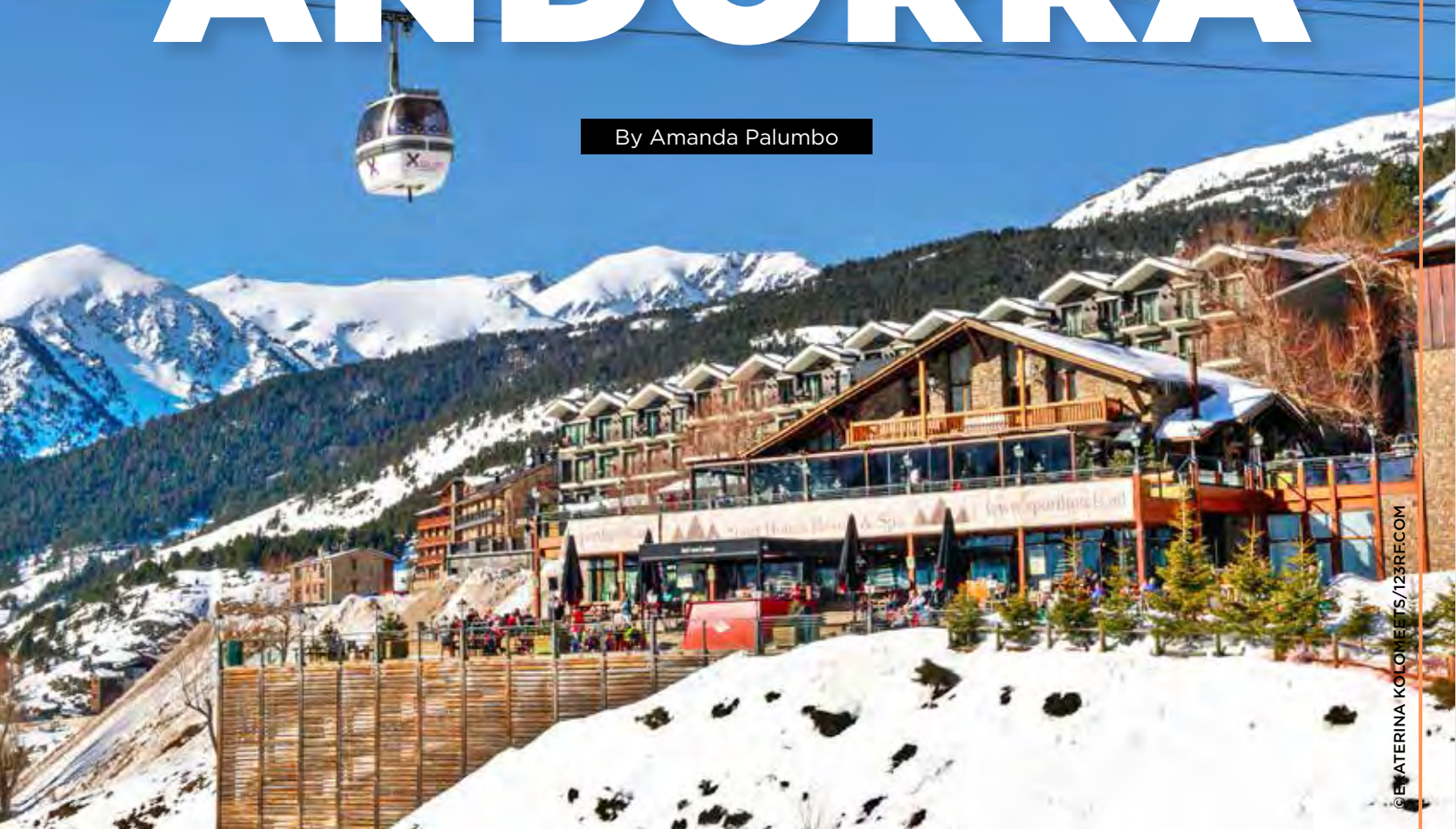
Explore Europe's picturesque winter scenery on this convenient way of transportation.





# Amazing ANDORRA

By Amanda Palumbo



© ELLA TERINA KOLOMEETS/123RF.COM

I'm going to let you in on a little European secret. There is a tiny country that flies under the radar of many tourists. The French and Spaniards do not want me to share this information with you and you're about to learn why. But trust me, it is one for the travel bucket list: Andorra.

Andorra is the 17th smallest country in the world, only 181 square miles right along the Spanish-French border. It is a favorite among Europeans for two big reasons: duty-free shopping and the great outdoors.

## SHOP TILL YOU DROP

If you're stationed in Germany, duty-free shopping is nothing new to you, given the German-American VAT agreement. But in Andorra, there are fewer restrictions and a lot less paperwork. If you've had your eye on a big-ticket item, like electronics, sporting equipment or designer clothes, Andorra is the place to go.

You don't need to have high-end taste to enjoy Andorra's shopping districts. There are stores for every budget, from luxury boutiques to more mainstream brands like Guess and Levi's and even outlet stores. There's a good chance you'll find a good deal.

Visit Andorra's prestigious Shopping Mile, a partially-pedestrian zone filled with stores bursting with deals on fashion, perfumes, cosmetics and more. Winter sports enthusiasts flock here to stock up on ski and snowboarding gear before hitting the country's slopes. Don't worry, there are dozens of cafes and restaurants for you to caffeinate and recharge while deal-hunting. For the true shopaholic, save your trip for late April or early November. The country hosts a shopping festival offering deep discounts, along with live entertainment.



## GOOD TO KNOW

No sales tax is added at the register, however, there is a 4.5% tax added before products hit the shelves. Items like food, books and art carry a 1-2% tax. It's a far cry from the 19% added in EU countries. However, good news! You can still get that money back. Save your receipts and visit the VAT office at the airport for reimbursement. There are limits with what you can take over the border with food, coffee, tea, alcohol, tobacco and perfume. While Andorra is on the Euro, it's not an EU country, so you will have to go through customs.

**It is a favorite among Europeans for two big reasons: duty-free shopping and the great outdoors.**

## GETTING GRUB

Andorra's cuisine is unlike any other in Europe. It's Catalan but with strong French and Spanish influences, giving your dining experience its own unique flair. Here are just a few things you'll spot on menus:

### APPETIZER

Step out of your comfort zone and order something truly Andorran: "cargols a la llauna." Drawing from its French neighbor but with a Mediterranean twist, these are roasted snails often served in a paprika vinaigrette or with olive oil and aioli.

### SOUP

"Escudella" is perhaps the most popular dish in Andorra. This 14th-century dish is a hearty stew that is great in the winter. Each chef puts their own spin on this classic dish, adding beans, sausage, pork bones and occasionally pasta. However, its main character is the "pilota," a large meatball with garlic and parsley. This could easily be your dinner's main event.

### MAIN COURSE

While Andorra is technically landlocked, there is amazing seafood to be had, thanks to the Gran Valira, the country's largest river. It's chock-full of freshwater fish like trout. Keep an eye out for "trucha a la piedra," grilled trout, wrapped in bacon and seasoned with olive oil, lemon juice and parsley.

### DESSERT

"Crema a la andorrana" is everything you love about the French creme brulee with one key difference. Instead of the crunchy charred sugar on top, Andorrans prefer light fluffy cream or meringue. This provides a lightness to the otherwise heavy custard-based dessert.

*continued on page 44*



**ABOVE:** Get your Christmas shopping done while exploring the duty-free shops.

**LEFT:** Andorran food is a mix between French and Spanish, like the pictured "cargols a la llauna," a traditional snail dish.

© MARTIN SILVA COSENTINO / 123RF.COM





## THE GREAT OUTDOORS

France and Spain's natural border is the Pyrenees Mountains. Since Andorra is nestled between the two countries, this famous mountain range runs right through it, making this tiny country a hot spot for winter sports enthusiasts and hikers.

There are roughly 186 miles of ski slopes running through Andorra and you don't have to look far to find a good deal or a day soaring through the snow. Day passes can run as little as 14 euros.

If you're not a fan of barreling down a mountain on two skis, there is, of course, snowboarding. If you're looking for something a little tamer there is also sledding, snowshoeing, snowmobile rides and mushing.

You can find even more thrills at Naturlandia EcoPark (also home to that 14 euros ski pass). The park has both summer and winter, indoor and outdoor activities. It's also known for the longest nature slide in the world. Two-seater trolleys barrel down along three miles of track through the forest giving you breathtaking views of the mountains. You can even have your photo snapped while onboard! As long as the kiddos are taller than four feet, they can hop on. ■

Grandvalira Ski Resort in Andorra ▼



▲  
Climb up a ropes course with the little ones for an even better view of the Pyrennes.

## FAST FACTS

**IT'S TINY:** It's total land area is 181mi<sup>2</sup>, making it only three times the size of DC.

**THEY SPEAK CATALAN:** But you'll also hear Spanish and French.

**ANDORRA LA VELLA:** The capital city is the most populated city in all of Andorra, at 22,000 people.

**SHOPPING & SKIING:** The duty-free shopping + winter sports is why we love it here. (Don't worry, their currency is Euro.)

**10.2 MIL TOURISTS VISIT YEARLY:** That's a lot of shopping for tiny Andorra.

**PEOPLE LIVE LONGER HERE:** In 2019, Andorra had one of the longest life expectancies: 81 years for men and 87 years for women.

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# Winter Wonders of Switzerland

By Jessica Zen

Switzerland is one of the greatest places to visit during the winter months with its breathtaking landscapes, picturesque villages, and an incomparable, magical atmosphere. Whether you want to ski, hike, unwind at fancy spas or indulge in tasty Swiss delicacies, Switzerland has something for everyone. Plan your winter getaway to some of the best resort towns the country has to offer.



©SUTISA KANGVANSAP/ISTOCK.COM

EDITOR'S  
PICK



## GRINDELWALD EDITOR'S PICK

The charming Swiss village of Grindelwald is located at the base of the north face of the Eiger Mountain. Grindelwald's quaint shops, numerous restaurants and abundance of winter activities make it a perfect location to explore the wonders of Switzerland. Enjoy the surrounding mountainous views while you ski, hike or simply relax in the village.

A part of the Jungfrau region, one of Europe's most popular skiing destinations, Grindelwald is directly linked to the Wengen ski area and offers 132 miles of ski terrain with over 50 ski runs and 20 chairlifts. Skiing enthusiasts of all ages and skill levels will appreciate the vast array of ski runs in the Bernese Alps. Families often find Grindelwald a prime location for children to learn to ski. The Bodmi slopes are gentler for beginners and the ski school can be easily accessed from the base village. While the beginners enjoy the tamer slopes, intermediate skiers can be assured that there is something for them as well. The majority of runs are red and blue. Though experts may find that there aren't many black runs, they will find plenty of fun and glacier skiing.

Skiing isn't the only draw to Grindelwald in the winter. For those who prefer not to be strapped into ski boots but still want some fresh air, dazzle your senses with a hike on the First-Waldspitz-Bort trails. This series of mountain trails feature simultaneous views of snow-covered huts, forests and valleys, all while the cliffs of the Wetterhorn and Eiger dominate the backdrop. The hike takes approximately two and a half hours, but don't worry about getting hungry. The mountain restaurant Waldspitz is just waiting for you to refuel on the patio while delighting in the lake scenery. Don't miss the First Cliff Walk, a lookout platform for thrill seekers that hovers 147 feet above the valley, offering a marvelous view of the Eiger.

If you are seeking a winter getaway that doesn't include traipsing through the snow looking for an adrenaline rush, consider relaxing at Belvedere. This four-star hotel is home to a spa and wellness center that will melt away all your problems. The spa area has a swimming pool, whirlpool, salt water jacuzzi, Finnish sauna, glacier steam bath, heat mine gallery and much more. In addition to the pools and saunas, the spa offers massages for a total relaxation experience. Finish up with a facial and feel fresh as a spring daisy, despite the cold weather.

## ZERMATT

Surrounded by the peaks of the Pennine Alps, including the famous Monte Rosa and Matter-

horn, Zermatt also offers a plethora of activities. Though the small town only boasts three main streets, Zermatt has numerous cross-streets filled with restaurants and hotels just waiting for tourists to come knocking on their doors. It takes a mere 30 minutes to walk across this remarkable town, which is convenient, as only a very few battery powered cars are allowed. However, electric shuttles are available.

To begin your Zermatt adventure, hop on the world's first fully electrified cog railway, the Gornergrat Bahn. It is Europe's highest open-air cog railway and transports passengers from Zermatt station to the summit of Gornergrat. After a scenic 30 minute ride to the top, be prepared for a photo opportunity of a lifetime. The panoramic view showcases Monte Rosa, Switzerland's highest peak, Gorn Glacier and the Matterhorn. If you don't want the experience to end, consider staying at the 3100 Kulmhotel Gornergrat, where you will find a restaurant, astronomical observatory, chapel and shops.

From the top of the Gornergrat, there is access to multiple hiking trails. Strap some snowshoes on your feet and explore Challenge Trail. This leisurely trail is close to the railway and descends about 985 feet, for a pleasant hour-long hike. Exceptional views of the railway and the snow-covered landscape are guaranteed.

After all that fresh air and exercise, pamper yourself with some serious down time at one of the many local spas. Hotel Eden Wellness has an indoor pool and spa to ease the most tense of muscles. Book an appointment in the evening for a massage, holistic therapy, gemstone therapy and much more to wrap up a successful winter day.

## ST. MORITZ

Nestled in the Engadin valley, the glamorous village of St. Moritz has earned international fame for hosting the Winter Olympics not once, but twice. Lake St. Moritz adds even more village appeal with its White Turf horse races, snow polo and ice cricket tournaments. Throw in some devilish ski runs, après ski clubs, and a bobsled run for the perfect combination of winter activities. This swanky village resort area has something for everyone.

For a skiing experience you won't soon forget, check out Diavolezza. Legend has it that once upon a time, a lovely, red-haired she-devil lived on this mountain. If the legend is true, she certainly left some particularly hellish runs for the more experienced skiers. The runs on Diavolezza include over 13 miles of red and six miles of black. This snow-covered behemoth is not for the faint of heart!

## ENJOY THE SURROUNDING MOUNTAINOUS VIEWS WHILE YOU SKI, HIKE OR SIMPLY RELAX IN THE VILLAGE.

For some après-ski activities, consider going to the Alpina hut on Corviglia Mountain. This rustic hut sits on a large rock overlooking the town and the lovely Engadin valley. Relax with a drink from the snow bar outside while you soak up some rays on the sun terrace. If you are craving more than just a drink, the hut restaurant serves local specialties and traditional home-style Swiss dishes.

A trip to Switzerland just isn't complete without trying traditional cheese fondue and an Engadine walnut tart. Reserve a table at Restaurant Engiadina for a truly spectacular taste of local cuisine. Their menu offers a variety of cheese fondues, along with other traditional favorites. After enjoying the fondue, finish off the night with dessert at Confectionary Hanselmann. Here you can find the famous Engadine walnut tart, a local favorite that confectioners have been perfecting for years. Filled with crème, caramel and walnuts, this sweet treat is sure to leave you feeling satisfied.

Switzerland has so much to offer during the winter months, from skiing to relaxing at the spa, there are enough activities to keep everyone entertained for days. Spend some time exploring where Swiss watches, army knives, chocolate, banks and yodeling originated. You'll return from your trip invigorated from all the fun you had flying down the slopes and over-indulging in delicious food. Why wait? Start planning your getaway to experience the winter wonders of Switzerland today! ■



# A TOUR OF \_\_\_\_\_ TALLINN, ESTONIA

*"Located on the Baltic Sea, the capital of Estonia boasts winding cobblestone streets, imposing church towers and a fascinating mix of modernity and history that create the perfect vacation destination."*

By Jessica Zen

The streets of Tallinn are the place to go for a taste of a new and different culture, architecture and history. From the medieval Old Town to the stunning beach front, there is a rich cultural scene in this northern European country. Located on the Baltic Sea, the capital of Estonia boasts winding cobblestone streets, imposing church towers and a fascinating mix of modernity and history that create the perfect vacation destination.

*continued on page 50*



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## Old Town Charm

Start your adventure in the Old Town. The 13th-century city plan is still intact, as are various churches, merchant houses, barns and warehouses from the Middle Ages. Start at the Kiek in de Kõk Fortifications Museum, which was once a 15th-century defensive tower. The museum includes the namesake tower, Maiden's Tower (Neitsitorn), Stable Tower (Tallitorn), Gate Tower (Väravatorn), the bastion passages and the Carved Stone Museum. The Kiek in de Kõk tower was built in the 15th century, but today there are six floors of history that chronicle the city's defense system. Don't miss touring the bastion passages, which once concealed soldiers and their equipment. These passages were built in the 17th and 18th centuries and helped to monitor enemy mine activity.

Next up in the Old Town is St. Olaf's Church, the city's biggest medieval structure. It was named after a sainted Norwegian king, Olav II Haraldsson. It dates back to 1267 and is where the reformation started in Tallinn in the early 1500s. Its beautiful Gothic spire towers over the city at 406 feet. Fun fact: the spire was used as a radio tower for the Soviet KGB from 1944 - 1991! This is a great place to look out over the city, but first you have to climb up the 232 steps to the viewing platform.

Another beautiful religious structure in the area is the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral. This stunning piece of architecture is a Russian Orthodox cathedral that was built in 1900 in the Russian Revival style on Toompea Hill. It is amazingly well kept and features four minor golden, onion-shaped domes and a grand cupola, as well as 11 bells, all of which were cast in St. Petersburg. The largest bell in the city is here and weighs 15 tons. Wander inside to experience a calming peace and quiet while you look at various mosaics and icons.



## Outdoor Entertainment

After enjoying the museum, it's time to head outside. Kadriorg Park is a lovely palace and park with 173 acres that makes you feel like the bustling city is miles away. This beautiful palace was built in 1718 on orders of Tsar Peter I for his summer home. It features a lovely swan pond, lower and upper gardens, fountains and various museums on site, including the Estonian Art Museum. Interestingly enough, the architectural and design styles for the palace and grounds pull from various countries. Here you'll see Italian terraces, Dutch canals, French-style road networks and Russian-inspired fountains, all in one location.

From royals to farmers, get the full scope of what Tallinn used to look like. Go from the palace to the Estonian Open Air Museum, located just outside of the city, for a stark comparison of what the commoners lived like. This outdoor museum has 14 farms showing the 18th - 20th century rural way of life. Take a horse and cart ride and go inside the school building from 1887. Once you've worked up an appetite, stop at the Kolu Inn. It was originally built in the 1840s and now serves up local dishes.

## Futuristic Fun

Tallinn stretches much further than just the Old Town. Head to PROTO Invention Factory for a unique experience. This was a former submarine factory that is now a place to see amazing inventions come to life. This fantasy world will allow you to discover your inner scientist while experimenting with physical phenomena. Launch a space shuttle or use air cannons to keep a ball afloat. Both children and adults will love this interactive factory.

After enjoying the invention factory, head to Fotograafia, the museum of photography. Here you'll find the perfect blend of art, music, food and design. Linger over some of the world's best photography, then grab a bite to eat at the restaurant on the sixth floor, which offers great views of the city. Discuss your favorite pieces while savoring food made by one of Estonia's top chefs, Peeter Pihel. He utilizes his experience from Estonia, Sweden and France to create delicious, "honest" food.

This charming city is the perfect place to learn about northern Europe's culture, both past and present. Get lost in the winding streets of the Old Town, or rocket into the future at the invention factory. Whatever you decide to do with your time in Tallinn, make sure you're learning and loving life. That's what a good adventure is all about! ■

*"This stunning piece of architecture is a Russian Orthodox cathedral that was built in 1900 in the Russian Revival style on Toompea Hill."*



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Explore

# Poland

in the Winter

By Amanda Palumbo

When planning a snowy getaway, the first place many look to is The Alps. And, rightfully so as the Alps are beautiful with lots of things to do but let's face it, The Alps are expensive.

What if there was a place that provided breathtaking mountain views, killer slopes and relaxing spas for half the price and half the amount of tourists crowding the lifts? That place does exist. That place is Poland. So, hop on board this figurative train as we take you on a tour of everything this eastern European gem has to offer in the winter.

*continued on page 54*

Beautiful snow covered Tatra Mountains in winter time, Poland.





## Zakopane

### First Stop

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

Zakopane is a sort of Mecca 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 hurl themselves off Great Krokiew. 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, there are slopes for beginner and intermediate skiers. Then, there is Kasprowy Wierch, dubbed the "holy mountain" for Polish skiers with two very difficult and windy, but very fun ski runs: Gasienicowa and Goryczkowa.

What makes Zakopane so attractive among winter sports enthusiasts are the prices. An adult day pass is 110 Polish złoty,

“  
Zakopane is a sort  
of Mecca for die-  
hard skiers and  
snowboarders.  
”

EDITOR'S  
PICK



Tourists walk in snow-covered Kasprowy Wierch.

or PLN, which is just under 25 euros. Compare that to a Zugspitze day pass at 47.50 euros.

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, which I highly recommend, take time to stroll down Krupówki, 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, dedicated to the history and culture of Zakopane.

Vendors will be selling "grzaniec," the Polish hot mulled wine you can sip while you wander the streets. Keep an eye out for "oscypek," a delicious smoked cheese that you would probably mistake as a toy or an ornament 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.

If you get to see the city under a blanket of snow during the Christmas market, well you can stop traveling now because you just hit your peak.

## Bukowina Tatrzańska

### Next Stop

Our journey takes us just a half-hour east of Zakopane to Bukowina Tatrzańska, a small village near the Slovakian border. This is where Tour de Pologne ends. Why would this grueling cycle-ride end in a town of just under 3,000 people? After you've ridden 1,200 kilometers across Poland, you need to soak in the healing powers of a natural hot spring with water just under 100°F. The end-of-race rally is at Hotel Bukovina, a luxury spa sitting in the mountains at an altitude of 1,000 meters. If you think you can't afford a night in a luxury spa hotel, think again. Rooms can start as low as 580 PLN (130 euros) 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 the mal waters, so you can go for a swim even if there's 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 beware nudity is allowed in some of the sauna areas.

*continued on page 56*



Take in the beauty of the Tatra mountains at sunrise.



**TOP:**  
Famous Wang Church (Kosciol Wang) - 12th-century church, constructed similarly to Viking longships and moved to this site in 1842.



**BOTTOM:**  
A disc-shaped observatory with a weather station and restaurant was built in 1974, located on the peak of Sniezka mountain, Karkonosze National Park, Poland.

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While tourists typically flock here for its thermal waters, there are slopes to slide down. Day passes here are just as inexpensive as Zakopane at just 110 PLN (25 euros) for the day. 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.

## Karpacz

### Final Destination

It's time to double back west to Karpacz, along the Polish-Czech border. Not everyone enjoys skiing or snowboarding and those people, like myself, are often forgotten about in winter travel articles. Luckily, Karpacz specializes in winter fun off the slope. Don't worry. There is still topnotch skiing in Karpacz with professionally-prepared slopes for both downhill and cross-country skiing.

If you're longing for the hiking days in spring and summer, you can still hit the trails and try snowshoeing. 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. A two-and-a-half-hour snowshoe walk with training is just 40 złoty or 10 euros. They offer romantic moonlight walks for just 50 PLN (13 euros). There are even full-day snowshoe trips available.

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 can go on and on without losing all that energy slugging uphill. 10 rides start at just 18 PLN (5 euros). This is a great activity for kiddos, 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. Quite a bit smaller than the one down in Bavaria but still a whole lot of fun. Open year-round, you can ride through the mountains at a fraction of the cost of Germany's coaster. A 10-pass pack is just under 55 PLN (14 euros).

If you're a fan of fantasy and sci-fi, take a break from the snow and head to Karłowice 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 suggested for kids five-and-older as some of the displays are of mythical creatures that could be frightening. One of the interactive displays is creating your own 'spirit animal'. Self-guided tours are available through a multi-lingual iPad.

I hope you enjoyed our journey through Poland. It's a country that does not get near enough love from tourists but I have a feeling that will change in the next 10 years, given it is incredibly family-friendly, there are far fewer crowds and you get a lot more bang for your buck. A winter getaway in Poland is just what the family will need to decompress from what has been a very long 2020. ■

“  
Imagine walking  
along snowy mountain  
trails in a winter  
paradise lined with  
evergreen trees.  
”



### Decent Detours

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

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

**Spala** - Enjoy Olympic Sport skiing, indoor swimming pools, sleigh rides and winter paintball.



## Good to know

While Poland is a member of the EU, it is not on the Euro. Its currency is the Polish złoty, or PLN and subdivided into 100 grosz, or gr. 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 złoty, look for a bank or a KANTOR (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.

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# FIVE REASONS TO STAY HOME

By Stacy Roman

## FOR THE HOLIDAYS

**AFTER SEEMINGLY ENDLESS WEEKS SPENT INSIDE YOUR HOUSE DURING THE SPRING AND EARLY SUMMER MONTHS, THE OVERWHELMING URGE TO GET OUT AND TAKE ADVANTAGE OF NEWLY FOUND FREEDOM IS STRONG.**

You can probably count the number of floor tile between your living room and kitchen, and even with holiday decorations sprucing up the all-too-familiar walls, this year is the year to travel for the holidays. However, when you factor in crowded Christmas markets, overpriced airline tickets and the hassle of traveling, staying home for the winter vacation may not be such a bad idea.

### 1 NO JET LAG.

Since we hadn't spent Christmas with family in five years, we decided to head back to California last year for two weeks. Luckily, we combined it with a college fact-finding mission for my now-high school senior but let me tell you ... the jet lag is real. By the time we finally adjusted to a somewhat normal schedule, it was time to fly back to Europe. And then the vicious hour adjustment cycle began all over again just in time for both of the kids to start school again. By staying put, you completely avoid the jet lag hassle.



### 2 NO CROWDS TO CONTEND WITH.

With the virus pandemic still fresh in our minds, one of the last places you want to be is in the middle of a crowd. And traveling during the holidays pretty much guarantees plenty of crowds, both indoor (think shopping malls) and outdoor (think Christmas Markets). Also, if you're thinking of jet-setting to warmer climes, airport crowds can take the jolly out of the holiday.

*continued on page 60*



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## 3 YOU'RE NOT LIVING OUT OF A SUITCASE.

Unless you've just arrived or are getting ready to move, odds are pretty high you're not living out of a suitcase. However, traveling during the holidays means packing ... lots and lots of packing. Especially if you're gifting (or bringing back) souvenirs or visiting places with contrasting weather patterns and need multiple layers. The 50-pound limit sneaks up on you quickly and shipping boxes back can add up rather quickly. Remaining at home means the only weight limit you need to worry about is how much home-made fudge you can safely consume in one sitting.



---

## 4 MAKE NEW TRADITIONS.

Once we began celebrating Thanksgiving and Christmas with just the four of us, we began incorporating new traditions into some of the ones we carried with us from childhood. My kids know they get to open two presents on Christmas Eve—a set of goofy pajamas and something completely random. One year it was a bag of pretzels, the next it was a wrench. Another fun tradition we started was coming up with a nontraditional Christmas dinner. Who needs goose when you can make super cheesy nachos rivaling Taco Bell or Chili's? Staying close to home helps us create more memories and traditions.

---

## 5 YOU CAN RELAX AND ENJOY THE SEASON.

Not traveling means you have more time to explore the area around you and discover awesome local customs and holiday traditions. You can check out the nearby Christmas markets when it's less crowded, decorate your house without rushing and stay in your pajamas all day if you want. Since we've now spent more holidays staying home, I love the unhurried pace it takes. The stress level is a lot less and it feels much more enjoyable.



**With all of the craziness happening, it's completely understandable to want to escape your house and get away from it all. I absolutely love traveling and admit Thanksgiving is one of my favorite times to go. This year, however, I plan on sticking closer to home for both of the major holidays this year. No crowds to fight with, decking the halls with the season's splendor, eating pie for breakfast and staying in my sweats? Sign me up. ■**

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# Get Your Glühwein On

By Karen Bradbury

A sure sign that Christmas time is near is the popping up of the beloved Advent markets. As the end of November approaches, these festive-season markets spring up from Switzerland to Sweden, and Europeans postpone their winter slumber to take part in the ritual of shopping, eating and drinking with friends and family. And when it comes to pre-holiday drinking, there's one beverage that stands out as the clear favorite: the mulled wine referred to in German speaking lands as Glühwein, also known, depending on where you are and how the recipe's been tweaked, as "vin chaud," "glögg," "vino caliente" or dozens of other terms.

Glühwein at its most basic form is a red, or less commonly, white wine that's been jazzed up with the addition of cinnamon, cloves, lemon peels, star anise and other spicy substances. It's more than likely been sweetened with sugar, or

perhaps with honey or even a touch of spirits ("mit Schuss"). The wine is served at a temperature somewhere around 163°F—any hotter and the alcohol content vanishes into thin air, and who wants that to happen? A typical Glühwein will generally come in anywhere between 9% and 13% in terms of alcohol content, making it even more intoxicating than your average beer.

The tradition of taking less-than-stellar wine and making it palatable by adding spices dates back at least to the time of the Greeks, and even the Romans knew that drinking warmed-up wine would make them feel toasty on the inside as well. In the Middle Ages, drinking spiced wine was considered to have health benefit, and was a habit mostly confined to the upper classes.

The first attempt to sell the beloved beverage in bottled form in modern times spelled trouble for its maker. In the winter of 1956, a wine dealer from Augsburg by the name of Rudolf Kunzmann added sugar and spices to a wine and sold it labeled as Glühwein. As the laws pertaining to the sale of wine forbade the addition of sugar to wine, Kunzmann's creativity resulted in him having to pay a fine.

Once the laws were changed to allow other ingredients to wine—with the proper labelling, of course—endless versions of this cheap and cheery drink were to follow. But tastes do change, and just as craft beer arose in response to mass-produced, uninteresting brews, quality in Glühwein is currently trending. Nowadays, even serious winemakers practice the art of crafting delicious variations of it, particularly from Spätburgunder, Dornfelder or Regent grapes.

Should you happen to visit a Christmas market taking place in one of Germany's 13 wine-producing regions, make way to a stand selling not just Glühwein but "Winzerglühwein." The mulled wine sold there will have been made by one specific winemaker, and likely be offered in a variety of enticing flavors, from blackcurrant to raspberry. For a change of pace, go for the Glühwein made from one of the white varieties of grape, flavored with apple, vanilla or cinnamon notes.

*continued on page 64*



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# Make Your Own Glühwein

## Planning to host a party at home during the festive season?

Impress your friends and family with this simple recipe which comes courtesy of the German Wine Institute:

### Ingredients

- 1 liter locally produced red wine (there's no need to go for the top shelf stuff)
- Sugar, preferably in candied form (Kandis)
- 1 orange
- 1 lemon
- 4 cloves
- 1 stick cinnamon

- 1** Sweeten the wine to your own taste with sugar; honey could also be used. The sweeter the base wine, the less sweetener you'll wish to use.
- 2** Add slices of the lemon and orange, using fruits with peels that haven't been coated with pesticides or preservatives, along with the rest of the spices. Adding slices of apples will further refine the taste. To make a white mulled wine, replace the cloves with star anise.
- 3** Heat the liquid over medium heat, being sure not to bring it to a boil. Cooking with excess heat makes the delicate fruit aromas disappear and creates a bitter taste.
- 4** Leave the wine to steep at a low temperature for a few hours.
- 5** Remove the spices with a sieve and re-warm before serving, but don't serve it overly hot.

For more Glühwein tips, see [www.germanwines.de/knowledge/wine-more/mulled-wine/](http://www.germanwines.de/knowledge/wine-more/mulled-wine/). ■

*guten appetit*



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## OXIDIO

Great news from the dental practice OXIDIO in Gärtringen! Starting this summer, Dr. Reinhard Winkelmann will manage the practice side by side with his son. Lukas Winkelmann DMD recently completed his studies in medical dentistry at University of Pennsylvania (UPenn) and will come home after seven years in the U.S. Not only is he an ace in dentistry but also in sports and was elected a member to the hall of fame at Tusculum University.

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SEE OUR AD ON PAGE #59

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SEE OUR AD ON PAGE #45





# 12 Awesome Souvenir Ideas for Kids

By Stacy Roman

One of the fun parts about traveling throughout Europe is the opportunity to collect different souvenirs from the amazing places you visit. When exploring with kids, you'll often get pulled in the direction of the nearest gift shop or souvenir stand. After informally polling friends and colleagues, we came up with a list of 12 items worth bringing home. The main rule of thumb? Whatever item your child picks shouldn't end up in the trash or in a garage sale.

## Food

Okay, food doesn't quite fit the category listed above, but is a tasty take-away to bring home. In France, hit up a local patisserie for fresh baked macarons, cream puffs or eclairs. When in Italy, find fun shaped dried pasta to bring home and recreate their favorite dishes as a reminder of your trip.

## Books

Books are a great way to capture memories of your vacation. Pick up a city guidebook or a special souvenir book with fun facts or information about the region you're exploring. Or do as one mom did and pick up a blank adventure book similar to the one in the animated film "Up," and fill it with your favorite pictures. Another idea is to find a book which is special to that region. Pick up a copy of "Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone" or "Le Petit Prince" written in French.

## Teddy Bears (or stuffed animals)

For the younger ones, teddy bears and stuffed animals can definitely be a hit. Find ones with local flair and have fun. Take photos of your new family member enjoying the sights with you. We have a stuffed Domo monster who gets into all sorts of shenanigans while on vacation with us.

## Keychains

One friend picks up special keychains for her daughter with teddy bears on them. Her daughter then hangs them up on a cork board to display. One of my favorite keychains to collect are LEGO minifigures. Many stores in the larger cities have limited edition ones for that particular city.

## Stamped Currency

These are actually really fun souvenirs for kids. Put the penny or cents in the machine and watch it stretch and stamp a picture on the currency. A friend collects them for her son and places them in a globe-shaped piggy bank.

## Wearable Souvenirs EDITOR'S PICK

Growing up, I loved seeing where my friends had been just by looking at their Hard Rock Cafe t-shirt. Hoodies, hats, visors and even printed socks are fun reminders. Once t-shirts get a bit worn, be sure to save them to make into a quilt in the future.

## Scarves

While scarves can definitely go into the wearables section, there are so many different types, it deserves its own mention. Even if your kids aren't fans of wearing them, you can use them as decoration. My son is a huge European football fan and picks out a soccer scarf every place we visit. We hang the scarves on dowels around his room as decorations.

## Magnets

Brightly colored mementos clinging to the front and/or sides of the refrigerator? Yes, please! Most magnets are very inexpensive and are decorated with plenty of reminders of your favorite spots. Grab ones with clips or bottle openers incorporated for dual functionality.

## Small Trinkets (or mini snow globes)

Did your child fall in love with the Colosseum in Rome or the Acropolis in Athens? Let them relive their favorite spot with a miniature replica. Soon their desk will be lined up with a tiny Sagrada Familia or Eiffel Tower. If you visited a castle, keep the fairy tale alive with a mini snow globe.

## Patches or Flags

One of my friends has a son who loves collecting patches. Not only are they flat, inexpensive and easy to pack, but they can add a little spice to your child's backpack. If you don't want to sew or glue them on, tack them up on a corkboard. Likewise with small flags. Cities, provinces and individual states often sell their own individual flag.

## Stickers

A timeless souvenir which has never really disappeared is the humble sticker. Kids can plaster them on their water bottles and laptops (or hang on to them for use as bumper stickers when they get older). It's a great way to tell whose computer or phone is whose.

## Christmas Ornaments

Christmas ornaments were the hands-down favorite souvenir. If you have little ones, you can purchase sturdier plastic ones. They're great for reminiscing while decorating the tree and also make wonderful gifts to pass down when they get older. ■





Macarons come in a rainbow of colors and flavors, ensuring your little one will enjoy picking (and eating) these French delicacies.



All you need for this interactive collectible is a one euro coin, and a shiny five cent euro coin!



There's always room for a new, fluffy friend. Make this one more memorable by getting a stuffed toy that has the city name on it!



Souvenir stores everywhere always carry a variety of fun, collectible keychains, like these pink Eiffel Tower ones.



Much like keychains, you're guaranteed to find an endless supply of souvenir magnets. The hardest part is going to be picking out your favorite one (or five) before you head home.



Snow globes aren't just for the holidays. A collection of these will make any shelf look like a mini wonderland.



# the GRAPE HARVESTING EXPERIENCE

By Karen Bradbury

Wine has made up part of European culture since time immemorial, and vineyards are a defining feature of some of the continent's most breathtaking landscapes. As autumn falls and the grapes reach optimal ripeness, the time for the "Weinlese," "vendange," or "vendemmia"—terms which apply strictly to the harvest of grapes—draws near. And many wineries offer the public to get hands-on with the process.

## SCHLOSS VOLLRADS Oestrich-Winkel, Germany

EDITOR'S PICK =

The morning begins with a glass of chilled Riesling at the wine estate. Helpers are then transported into the vineyards and shown how to cut grapes from the vine. When harvesting is done, it's back to the winery, where a rustic "Vesper" plate of bread and cold cuts await. The vintner then conducts a tour through the cellar and explains steps in the winemaking process. In several months' time, when the wine of the grapes from this harvest is ready, helpers receive a bottle.

## "VINTNER FOR A DAY"

Alsace Region, France 📍

For several years now, the Synvira association of independent winemakers has partnered with local tourism authorities to allow visitors to take part in the annual grape harvest. The day starts





Vineyards and view of Kayzersberg castle, Alsace Wine Route, France



with the winemaker greeting his helpers and acquainting them with harvesting techniques. Then it's off to the vineyards for a couple hours of labor. In the wine cellar, the host shows how grapes are transformed into wine, and a degustation follows. Participants are then awarded their "Vintner for a Day" diplomas. Three-hour morning or afternoon sessions cost 30 euros; a five-hour package including a meal goes for 45 euros.

## AGRITURISMO DA SAGRARO

Mossano, Italy

The Da Sagraro estate, idyllically situated in the Berici Hills south of Vicenza, cultivates two main crops: grapes and olives. From September through November of each year, proprietors Sonia and Fabio invite guests to see first-hand how grapes are made into wine and olives are turned to oil.

As part of the wine discovery experience, participants learn about the grape's growth cycle, the pruning of the vines, grape varieties and the influence of terroir. The day typically begins with a coffee and homemade cookies, followed by a trip to the vineyards to harvest grapes and load them into a waiting trailer. In the wine cellar, pressing and winemaking techniques are demonstrated, followed by sampling of the tangy, freshly pressed juice known as must. Kids can stomp on grapes while their parents taste the wines. The experience ends with participants joining one another at the table for a well-earned lunch. Prices start at about 35 euros for adults; there are discounted rates for children and the very youngest accompany their parents for free.

Although the harvest dates are preliminarily fixed based on normal weather patterns in a given region, would-be helpers should note that these dates can—and often do—vary according to the whims of nature. Even if you're not lending a hand to the harvest, September and October are great months to plan a hike through the vineyards or visit a wine estate. Chances are some kind of festival celebrating the bounty of the grape won't be too far off. ■

**GET  
HANDS-ON  
WITH THE  
PROCESS.  
HEAD TO  
THE VINE-  
YARDS TO  
HARVEST  
GRAPES.**





## TAPPING INTO BELGIUM'S

# Tapestry Scene

By Jessica Zen

The tapestry scene in Belgium is entwined with a lengthy history that stretches far past European borders. Tapestries have been used worldwide for centuries. Egyptians used them as shrouds to bury their dead. Greeks and Romans used them as wall hangings in sacred temples; and the Chinese would use tapestries to decorate garments and wrap gifts. When Belgian weavers came into the picture, they used the tapestries to cover castle walls or in religious buildings. Today, the visual art form of tapestry weaving is still in existence. Learn about the fascinating history and then pick out one of these masterpieces for yourself!

### TAPESTRY HISTORY

Tapestries are incredibly intricate works of art with ornate details that were once used as status symbols. The exceptional quality and design of the tapestries made them quite expensive. A tapestry was an investment and a display of wealth for noblemen and rulers. They were often used in castles as insulation from the cold, damp air, or in religious buildings on special occasions. This form of insulation was particularly nice because of its portability. Anyone who owned a tapestry could simply roll it up and move it to another location.

These magnificent creations are a form of textile art, traditionally woven on a loom. Weavers generally used wool, linen or cotton, but also included silk, gold and silver into more elaborate pieces. Brussels has been a center for tapestry art since the 14th century. During this time, famous reproductions of religious paintings were created. These reproductions were generally smaller than other tapestries because they mirrored the size of the painting they portrayed. By the 17th century, Belgium was the center of European tapestry productions. The main tapestry hubs were Flanders, Brussels and Bruges.

Depictions in the tapestries vary, oftentimes influenced by the time period. Each century has a different style or focus. For example, the 15th century featured the mille fleurs theme, as well as biblical and mythological scenes. These Gothic tapestries were made by Flemish weavers. A famous example from this time period is "The Hunt of the Unicorn," which is now housed in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Over time the scenes on the

*continued on page 72*



"The Unicorn Purifies Water" (from the Unicorn Tapestries), on display at the Met Cloisters in NYC. (Photo Credit METMuseum.org)




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tapestries became more complex. By the 16th century, hunting and games were featured, as well as battle scenes. Weavers also incorporated more colors and borders at this time. Other themes seen in these rich, colorful works of art are enchanted castles, forests, angels, flowers and even family crests.

By the end of the 18th century, wallpaper replaced tapestries and plain fabrics could be mass produced. The plain fabrics were easier to make, so the price of tapestries dropped, but intricate scenes remained very expensive. In the early 1800s, Joseph Marie Jacquard developed a new type of loom using “punched cards” to position the threads used while weaving. As the years passed, Jacquard looms became more and more sophisticated, allowing more flexibility for creating new tapestries.

## WHERE TO FIND BELGIAN TAPESTRIES

The fine art of tapestry weaving is still going strong today. Belgium is a great place to procure a masterpiece of your own. These four locations are great places to shop for a treasure.

► **Flanders Tapestries, Wielsbeke** - This company has been producing Flemish wall hangings for the last 24 years but is located in a region that has been producing tapestries since the Middle Ages. Here you can have custom tapestries made, or purchase some of the local favorites. The entire manufacturing process is completed within Belgium at Flanders Tapestries.

**Mille Fleurs, Bruges** - The name of this company means “thousand flowers.” After 21 years of service, Mille Fleurs is still going strong. They use weaving mills in Belgium and throughout Europe. Here you’ll find items like wall tapestries, tapestry cushions, runners, brocade doilies, throws and plaids, bags and more.

**Belgian Treasures, Ghent** - This treasure chest is full of tapestries that vary in size and price. Here you’ll also find Belgian cushions, lace, handbags, souvenirs and reproductions of glass and decorative weaponry. Walk out the door with a new tapestry or have it sent straight to your house.

**Lace Jewel, Bruges** - This shop has been a family-owned business for four generations. Shop for anything from lace, tablecloth runners, and curtains to antique lace. Of course, they also have a large range of tapestries, cushions and bags, all made in Belgium.



“Julius Caesar and Attendants” (from the Nine Heroes Tapestry), on display at the Met Cloisters in NYC. (Photo Credit METMuseum.org)

Many famous tapestries can be found in museums or private collections today. The craftsmanship and artistic style is something to be preserved and treasured. Some famous tapestries include “The Lady and the Unicorn,” “The Devonshire Hunting Tapestries” and “Apocalypse Tapestry.” Whether you want a tapestry for yourself or just want to admire the designs, Belgium is the perfect place to brush up on your history and take in the beauty presented in this magnificent visual art form! ■



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FOR PUBLICATION REQUESTS

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# USO Staff Picks

## STRIPESEUROPE.COM

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

In this edition, we asked our friends at the USO

**"What is your favorite souvenir from your European travels and why?"**

**Check out what they picked and why!**



JJ de Jongh  
CENTER MANAGER,  
USO RAMSTEIN, GERMANY

"My favorite souvenirs from European destinations have an expiration date on them: food and drinks.

**Cheese from France, whiskey from Scotland, port wine from Portugal, beer from Belgium, and the original Bossche bollen from the Netherlands!**

The only lasting souvenirs I have are "old school" paper guidebooks. They're all from the same series and so far I have collected 59 during my travelling life. They're not as pragmatic to carry around but they have an indefinite shelf life!"



Samantha Storch

CENTER MANAGER  
USO VICENZA, ITALY

"My favorite souvenir from my European travels is by far my hand-crafted Venetian mask. **Not only does it remind me of the beautiful city of Venice, but it is like owning an amazing piece of art.** Each mask is different from the other since they are designed by individual artists that put amazing detail into each mask. They have been in creation for many centuries as a way to establish anonymity amongst the citizens of Venice, which brings an air of mystery as to who is behind each mask. With all of the history, detail, colors, and creativity, how could you not love the Venetian masks?"



Melissa Whitaker

CENTER OPERATIONS MANAGER  
USO CAMP AACHEN, GERMANY

"My favorite souvenir from my European travels is a simple magnet. My husband and I pick up a magnet every time we travel to a new country or city. **We spend the majority of our time exploring, eating and drinking that the quickest thing to grab is a magnet.** Whenever we get home from a trip, we both add the magnet to our fridge collection and reflect on the trip and on how lucky we are to travel all over Europe. This souvenir is so small but it creates some of the best conversations because they represent so many wonderful adventures and goals."

"Throughout our time in Europe, I've been blessed to have traveled to 21 different countries so far, and while I don't pick up many physical souvenirs from these places, I've captured many memories from the experiences. My husband and I acquired our dog Sophie when we moved here to Spain, and she is, by far, the best souvenir we obtained in Europe! But I spent a week traveling around and camping throughout Iceland. That first night, it poured rain, and I got soaked in my tent, **so I bought a pair of nice warm wool socks, and I slept like a baby every night thereafter.** Those socks are some of the best souvenirs I've ever purchased, and I still use them every winter here in Spain."



Kayla Clark

CENTER OPERATIONS SPECIALIST  
USO ROTA, SPAIN

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