



2021

BUCKET

LIST

A YEAR OF HOLIDAY IDEAS

Let's face it – 2020 has been somewhat of a write off for travel. Many of us have had to cancel trips, lose out on flights and accommodation, and change plans at the very last minute to comply with the ever-changing government advisory. And those of us who have managed to take a trip as planned have muddled through social distancing practices, wide-spread business closures and the much-dreaded quarantine.

But as the year races to an end (as I'm sure many of us are hotly anticipating), travellers are left wondering how things will be different in 2021. Always the optimist, I'm keeping my hopes high and suitcase at the ready so I can squeeze two years worth of travel into one.

If you're eager to get back out there but you're not exactly sure where to go, I've rounded up my top destinations for every month of the year – timed perfectly for the best weather, festivals and natural phenomena. I hope you get to tick a few off your bucket list this year.

- *Gyonne Campbell*



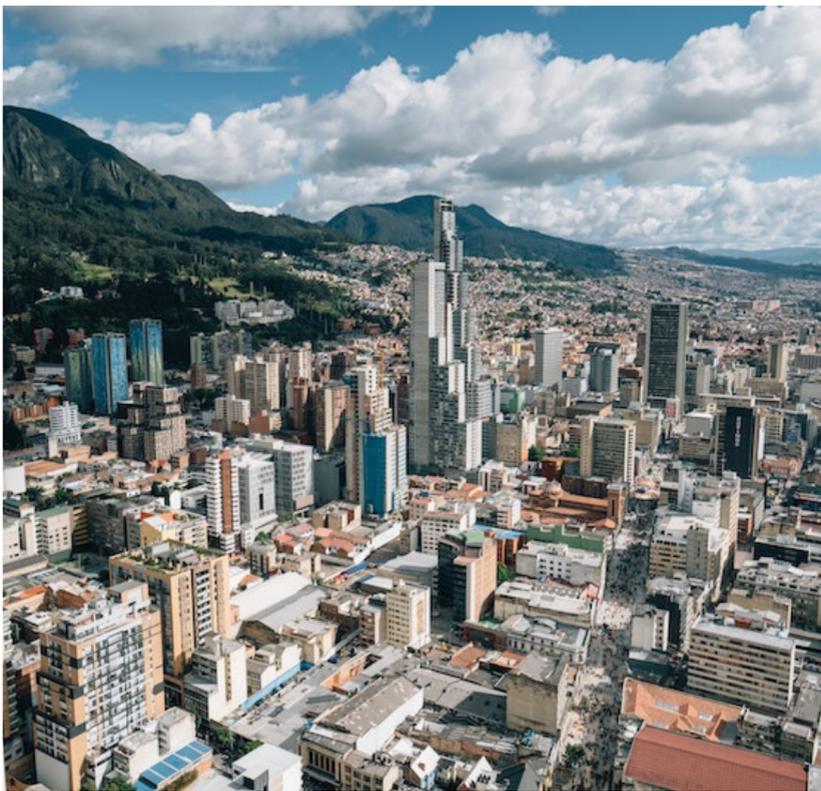
JANUARY

Colombia

When people think of Colombia, they usually associate it with the infamous drug cartel leader, Pablo Escobar. And it is true that his “legacy” in some ways shapes the country as it is today, but that shouldn’t overshadow the other rich, cultural aspects of the country. Colombia is home to spectacular mountain ranges, vast coffee and cocoa plantations, buzzing cities and the hotly-disputed home of salsa,

WHY IT'S A GOOD TIME TO VISIT

Being so close to the equator, Colombia maintains a consistent climate year round, however, in January, it is much drier around the Andes Mountains so you can explore the surrounding villages without worrying about the rain.



PLACES TO GO

In the capital, **Bogotá**, the mighty Andes Mountains cast a shadow over this buzzing city. It’s full of galleries and museums, and has a vibrant culinary scene with plenty of award-winning restaurants. After spending the day wandering through the Gold Museum and perusing the walls of the Museum of Modern Art, head to Andrés Carne de Res; a huge 2000-patron restaurant with a 40-page menu. Or for something a little quieter, try Gordo; a Brooklyn-style cocktail bar with a variety of American fusion favourites like pork belly and even s’mores for dessert.



Cali is also worth a visit for its fabulous nightlife, particularly the dancing scene. The locals say it is the true birthplace of salsa. It’s faster and more upbeat than the Cuban style but super fun to try nonetheless.

Cartagena is another gorgeous spot to visit, particularly if you love architecture and photography. This colourful port town is packed with open squares, cobblestone streets and colourful colonial buildings. With a tropical climate, the city is also a popular beach destination, located on the shores of the Caribbean Sea.



COLOMBIA

THINGS TO DO

In Medellin, the home of Pablo Escobar, there are private walking tours run by locals who take you to a place called Comuna 13. Years ago, it was said to be the most dangerous neighbourhood in Colombia. Today, however, it's covered in murals and street art, colourful houses and food markets. The 12,000-or-so residents used to have to walk the equivalent of 28 stories to get home from the city below. But recently, an enormous 384-metre escalator was installed that scales the mountain in just six minutes.

You can't visit Colombia without trying the country's biggest export (not cocaine, by the way). Of course, I'm talking about coffee! Join a local guide for a tour of the Coffee Triangle, made up of three towns: Caldas, Risaralda and Quindio. You travel through the stunning mountain ranges and steep sloped valleys, learning about how your morning cuppa is made. Pair it with a chocolate (cocoa) tasting tour and you're in for a real treat.



In the Caribbean Sea, there is a Colombian island called Providencia. Back in the day, it was a favourite of the infamous pirate, Captain Morgan, and is a popular holiday spot today. To get there, you need to fly to San Andres, then transfer to a 20-seater jet to get to the tiny island. Once you're there, be sure to take the opportunity to go for a dive or snorkel. There are spectacular reefs to explore with excellent visibility and sharks all around.



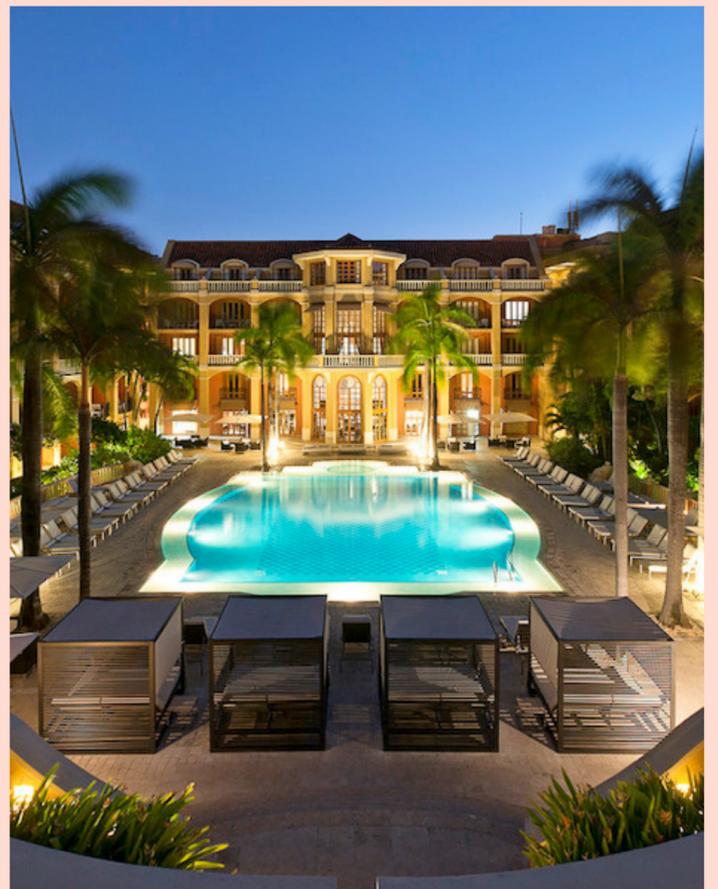
WHERE TO STAY

SOFITEL LEGEND SANTA CLARA CARTAGENA

With the French elegance typical of this 5-Star hotel brand, Sofitel Legend Santa Clara transports you to another time where decadence and excess reign supreme.

The hotel has quite a unique history dating back to 1621, when it was built as a convent and served as the home of the Nuns of the Order of St. Claire.

Today, it hosts travellers from all around the world. With 123 rooms, including 20 suites, this hotel offers a serene breath of fresh air amongst the excitement and chaos of Colombia.



FEBRUARY

Cambodia

This Southeast Asian gem is often overlooked with many travellers opting for its neighbour, Vietnam. But Cambodia is well worth a trip on its own. With astonishing landscapes from desert plains to tranquil, little-known beaches, and arguably the world's most impressive temple complex that dates back to the 12th century - Cambodia needs to be on your bucket list.

WHY IT'S A GOOD TIME TO VISIT

With very little rain and warm seas, Cambodia is a great place to visit in February. For the country as a whole, the average temperature in February is a warm 27°C. Remember, you'll need to pack plenty of sunscreen and wear a hat while you wander about.



While it's not exactly the most picturesque capital cities, **Phnom Penh** still offers much in terms of food and culture. It's an important transport for those visiting Cambodia's other areas, but I wouldn't recommend spending too much time here.

Want pristine beaches and friendly locals? Head to **Koh Rong**. It has all the beauty of neighboring Thailand without the crowds. There's plenty of opportunities to go snorkeling, diving and trekking through the lush interior landscapes of the country.

PLACES TO GO

Since it's the city nearest to Angkor Wat, **Siem Reap** inevitably became Cambodia's main tourist destination.

Besides serving as a base for temple exploration, you'll find numerous other tours and services here to keep you entertained. Cooking classes, pottery classes, quad bike tours, vespa tours, ziplining, massages, fish pedicures, gondola sunset boat rides... you name it, Siem Reap's got it. When darkness falls, look no further than Pub Street for cheap booze and entertainment.



CAMBODIA

EXPLORING ANGKOR WAT

The temple complex of Angkor Wat is the undisputed highlight of Cambodia. It was once a huge ancient city that has since been destroyed in part. But plenty of temples remain today (more than a thousand, actually). The most famous is the much-photographed temple at the main entrance to the complex. It's where most people sit to watch the sunrise over the epic monument. It was originally constructed as a Hindu temple dedicated to the god Vishnu for the Khmer Empire, but was gradually transformed into a Buddhist temple towards the end of the 12th century. It served as the capital of the Khmer empire and eventually became the mausoleum of King Suryavarman.

Depending on your interest in history and architecture, you could spend an entire week exploring the enormous complex, but for most, a 3-day ticket will suffice. This will allow you to visit a handful of the other famous temples.



Bayon is one of the most iconic temples in Angkor, where a sea of colossal stone faces serenely smile down from 54 gothic towers that rise out from the upper terrace. With no outer wall or moat to enclose the complex, Bayon stands in dense jungle. Its location marks the centre of the city of Angkor Thom with roads leading directly to the temple from the city gates.

The Buddhist temple of Ta Prohm lies in a semi-ruined state engulfed by the jungle. The trees have grown to strangle the ruins, wrapping around and growing through the ramparts. It was here that the iconic Tomb Raider film was shot.

And finally, the monumental Angkor Thom was the last great capital of the Khmer empire. Measuring more than 10 square kilometres, the fortified city features eight metre high walls and a massive moat designed to keep invaders at bay from the residences of priests, and royal and military officials it encloses.



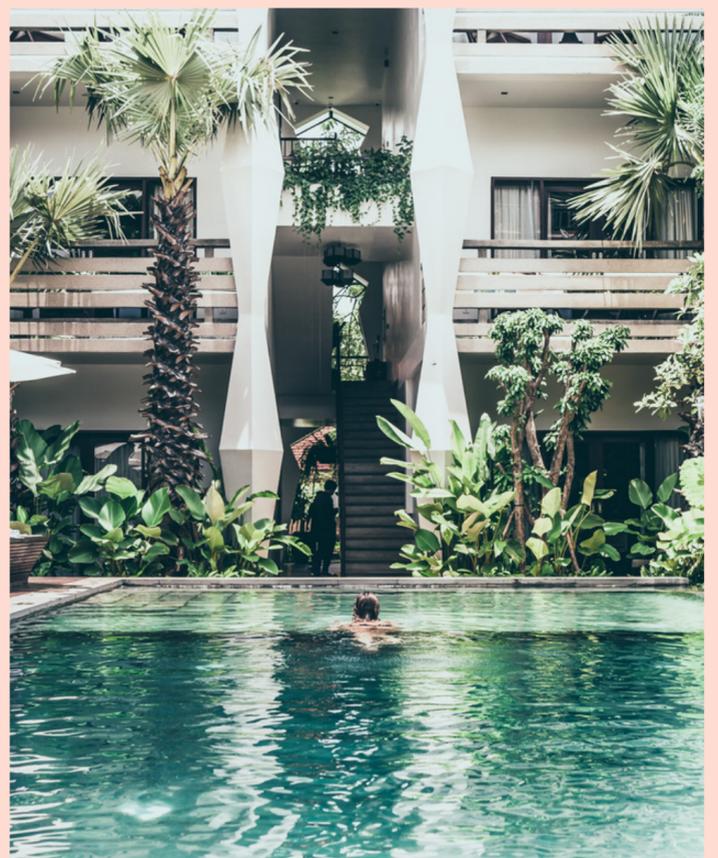
WHERE TO STAY

JAYA HOUSE RIVER PARK, SIEM REAP

Peacefully located alongside the Siem Reap River, surrounded by lush green trees, Jaya House River Park is truly a hidden paradise.

This boutique hotel has just 36 rooms with two swimming pools, a Spa and an all-day-dining restaurant.

The hotel is located about a 6-minute tuk-tuk journey from town in the direction of the magnificent temples of Angkor Wat.



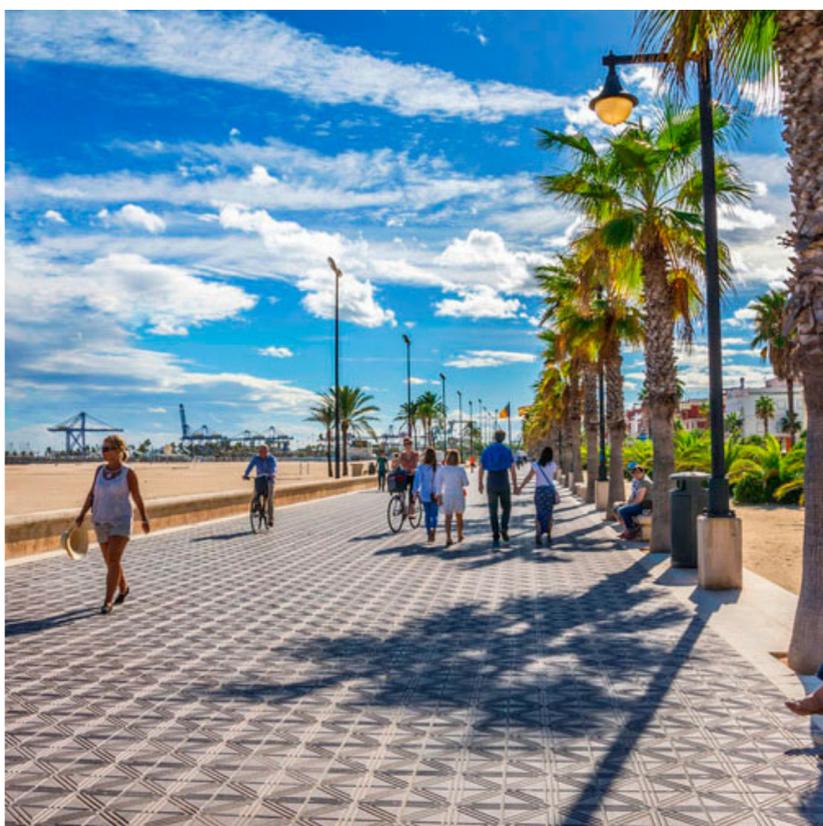
MARCH

Valencia

Valencia is a gorgeous Spanish city, known for its vineyards, sprawling beach, open air markets and, of course, football. The third largest city in Spain when it comes to population, Valencia is also known as the birthplace of paella, and as the home of the world-renowned Fallas Festival in March.

WHY IT'S A GOOD TIME TO VISIT

In March, the worst of winter is over in Europe, the days get longer and the city comes back to life with bars, restaurants and street parties erupting all over Valencia. Not to mention, March is when Fallas Festival kicks off – expect late night, lots of music and dancing, and plenty of fire works and bonfires.



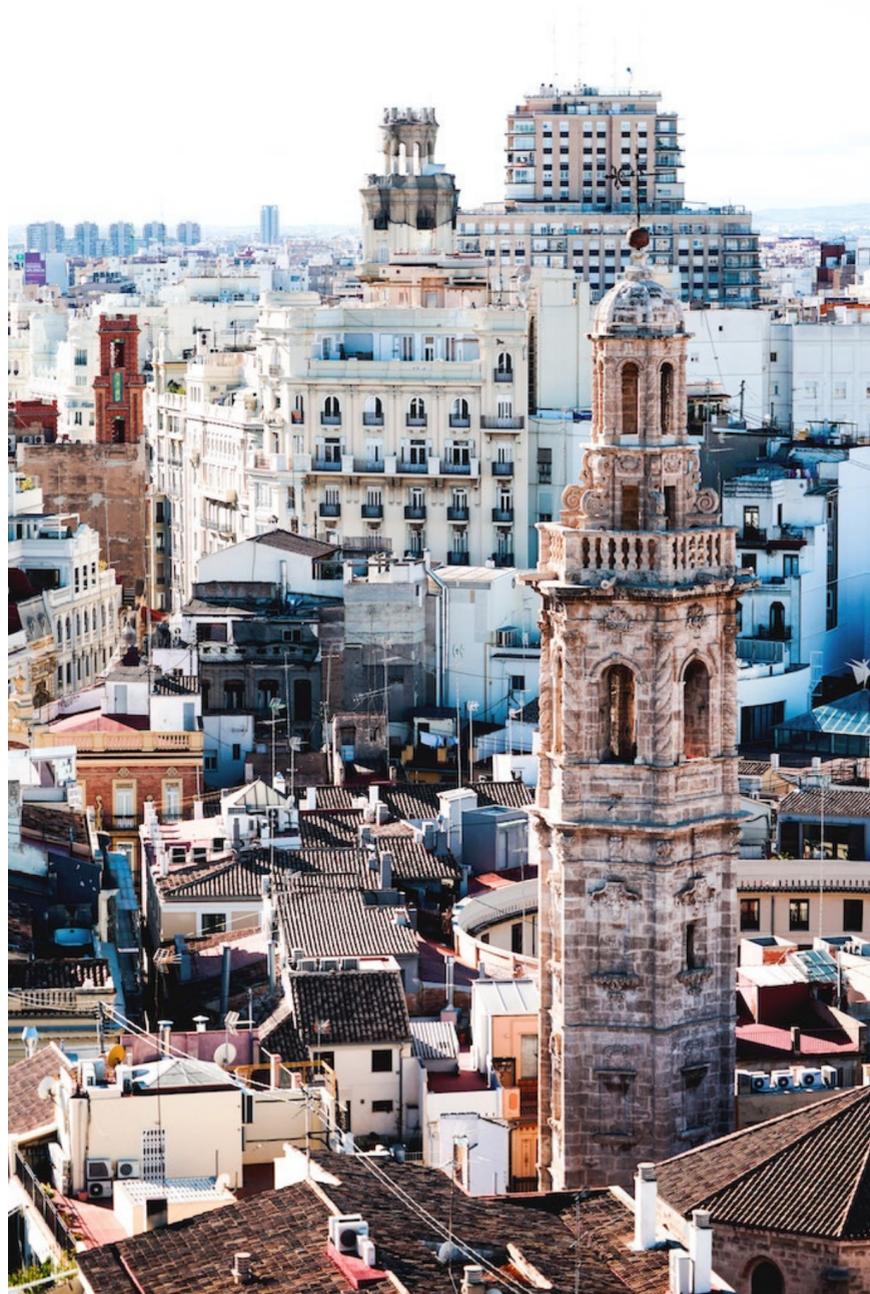
PLACES TO GO

The **historic centre** is the most popular area to stay because of its proximity to Valencia's main attractions. The city has over 2000 years of profound history and a rich artistic heritage; therefore, it is a must see.

A few must-sees in the historic centre are the Cathedral and the Holy Chalice, the Central Market, the frescoes in the Church of San Nicolás, the Torres de Serranos, Plaza Redonda or the Palace of Marqués de Dos Aguas, among others. You will need a full day to see them all.

The **Cabañal** neighbourhood on the coast is perfect for sampling Valencian cuisine with a sea breeze and spectacular views. The Valencia Marina is a famous area with plenty of space to walk, ride a bike, enjoy the local cuisine and do water sports. The Cabañal and Malvarrosa beaches, the promenade and the Cabañal seafaring neighbourhood area trendy areas due to their lifestyle.

Ensanche is great for artsy types, as it has plenty of modernist architectural treasures. It's also the best shopping area in the city. While **Ruzafa** is also a great area known as the Valencian "soho". Famous Valencian chefs have chosen this area to open restaurants, such as Habitual or Canalla Bistró by Ricard Camarena, Mercatbar by Quique Dacosta or RiFF by Bernd Knöllner.



VALENCIA

THINGS TO DO

In March every year the city of Valencia is taken over with **Las Fallas**, a huge 5-day festival. Parties kick off at the beginning of the week and continue right throughout, and more than 400 massive colourful “monuments” appear in the streets, only to be burnt to the ground a few days later in an emotional night of fireworks and flames.

The city streets are dressed with decorative lights, the smell of gunpowder fills the air, people dance to traditional Valencian music, and thousands of flowers fill the Plaza del la Virgen in the city centre.

The city is only transformed once a year and for just a few days, so if you're lucky enough to be in Valencia for Las Fallas make the most of this unique experience and enjoy the culture, tradition and parties!



A few other things to do while in Valencia include visiting the Silk Exchange; a set of Gothic-style buildings that were built between 1482 and 1533 and used for trading in silk, shopping at the Central Market, one of the oldest markets still in use in Europe that has been declared a Heritage of Cultural Interest site by the Spanish Ministry of Culture, and visiting Valencia cathedral and climbing the Micalet Tower for an epic view over the city. One reason why many people visit the cathedral is because there is a chapel here in which the Holy Chalice, a cup made of ancient gemstone, can be found. Some believe this is the Holy Grail.



WHERE TO STAY

CARO HOTEL, VALENCIA

The refurbished Caro Hotel is housed in a 19th century palace with features dating back to ancient times.

Renovated by prestigious designers, Caro Hotel makes the most of its architectural heritage and abounds with original features such as Gothic arches, medieval staircases and Arabic stonework. These charming details have been blended with contemporary design to produce elegant and comfortable surroundings. The hotel offers guests a restaurant and bar, courtyard and a tranquil lounge.



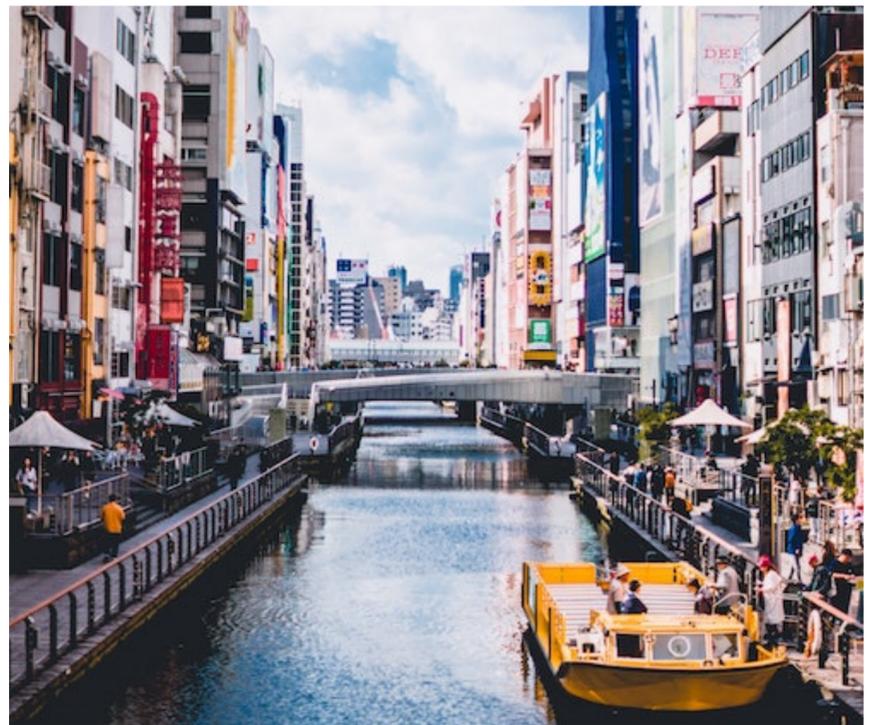
APRIL

Japan

Japan is one of those places that seems to have one foot in the past and one in the the future. The strong ties to their heritage can be seen in the beautifully preserved shrines, traditional cuisine and customs, but on the flip side, Japan is leaps and bounds ahead when it comes to technology with some of the quirkiest attractions such as robot restaurants, lightning-fast trains and rather infamous vending machines.

WHY IT'S A GOOD TIME TO VISIT

While there's never a bad time to visit Japan, it's during April that the gorgeous cherry blossoms come out and carpet the city of Kyoto in pretty pink petals and turn every street corner into a photo opportunity.



Osaka is another major hub to fly in and out of Japan. It's full of history and food, and is a good city to have a night out with friends.

Hakone, at the footsteps of Mt. Fuji, is a peaceful retreat from the big cities of Japan. It's here that most people come for a traditional Japanese experience; a chance to relax in an onsen and sleep in a ryokan.

PLACES TO GO

When visiting Japan, you can't miss **Tokyo**. This huge metropolis is likely where you're flying in and out of, and it is one of the most interesting cities we've visited anywhere in the world. From quirky experiences, to amazing foods, Tokyo is definitely worth some time on your itinerary.

Kyoto is packed with history, important temples, gorgeous architecture and a charming atmosphere. It's also the best place to see the cherry blossoms in full bloom with plenty of events and performances taking place during April.



JAPAN

CHERRY BLOSSOM SEASON IN KYOTO

There's a 2-week window from first to full bloom. It's tough to get the timing right but the experts predictions are pretty spot on. Accommodation during this time does book out so be sure to lock something in well in advance.

Cherry blossom season brings a whole range of events to Kyoto. There are live performances in the streets, ceremonies at temples and shrines, activities all around the city centre, beautiful buildings illuminated with lights and projections and more cherry blossom paraphernalia than you could possibly fit in your suitcase.

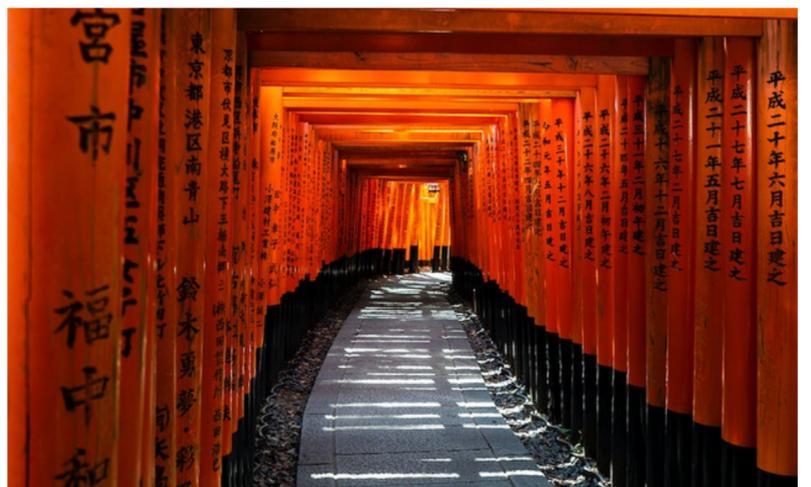
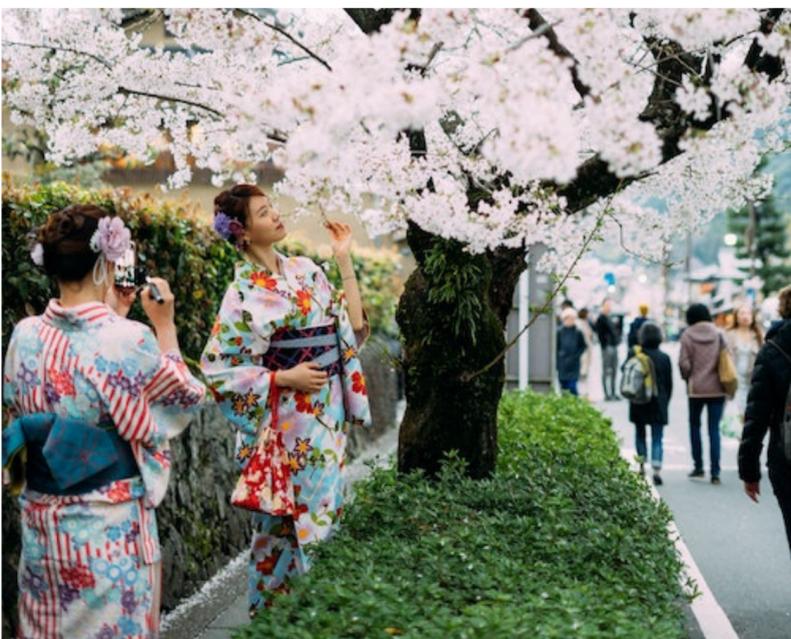
One of the highlights is seeing the fabulous Geisha's in their traditional dress wandering through the streets of Kyoto, and sometimes putting on performances of their traditional dances.



While you're in Kyoto, be sure to visit the iconic Fushimi Inari-taisha Shrine, located at the end of a bright red-coloured walkway made up of thousands of traditional torii gates.

Another great photo stop is the golden Kinkakuji Temple, a Zen temple wrapped in gold leaf, with the top floor gilded both inside and out.

For the best view over the city, head to the top of Kyoto Tower and enjoy panoramic views of the city extending all the way to Osaka.



WHERE TO STAY

HIIRAGIYA RYOKAN, KYOTO

This traditional Ryokan has been welcoming guests since 1818 and is known as one of the finest ryokans in Kyoto. It has been operated by the same family for 6 generations.

The 2-storey wooden ryokan has Japanese-style guest rooms with tranquil views of Hiiiragiya Ryokan's Japanese garden.

This highlight is the opportunity to soak in a private onsen spa and relax in comfortable robes and slippers provided by the hotel and customary for wearing around the property.



MAY

Cappadocia

The mystical Cappadocia region located in the heart of central Anatolia in Turkey. It is perhaps most famous for its landscapes – or should I say "moonscapes"? The terrain surrounding the main towns of Ürgüp, Göreme, and Uçhisar is truly otherworldly, where erosion has formed caves, clefts, pinnacles, and "fairy chimneys" in the soft volcanic rock. Lucky for wine lovers, Cappadocia is also one of Anatolia's prime grape-growing areas, and still boasts many productive vineyards and wineries.

WHY IT'S A GOOD TIME TO VISIT

May is the perfect time to visit Turkey in general as the temperatures are beginning to warm up but the crowds haven't yet flocked here. Cappadocia in particular can get very hot during the peak of summer so travelling during shoulder seasons is a good idea.



Uçhisar is situated at the highest point in Cappadocia, on the Nevşehir-Göreme road, just 5 km from Göreme and is recognisable and famous for its rock citadel which provides stunning views of the whole of Cappadocia, over to Mount Erciyes. The village itself is very hilly and full of small, cobbled streets lined on both sides by cave houses and hotels.

Ürgüp is a cheerful market town, which lives with tourism but not from it. What it lacks in stunning scenery, it makes up with its luxury hotels, gourmet restaurants, a lively market and historical Turkish baths, still in use today.



PLACES TO GO

The village of **Göreme** is set right in the heart of the valleys and is surrounded by the pinnacles and stunning rock formations which have made Cappadocia world-famous. Travellers from all around the world flock to Göreme; with hundreds of hotels and pansiyons, cafés and bars, travel agencies and hot air balloon companies, Göreme has become the main tourist centre in Cappadocia. Traditionally a favourite with backpackers, the village now boasts luxury hotels and is aiming to attract a more upmarket clientèle.



CAPPADOCIA

THINGS TO DO

Cappadocia is one of the most popular destinations in the world for hot air balloon rides. Floating high above the valleys with hundreds of other balloons in the air as the sun creeps out from the horizon is truly unforgettable experience. Most flights last around 90-minutes and usually end with a glass of champagne once you're safely back on the ground.

It's an expensive exercise – expect to pay upwards of 180 Euros – but it's worth it! Just make sure your camera (or phone) is fully charged.

It's a good idea to book your balloon flight for the first morning you spend in Cappadocia as the weather dictates whether the balloons fly or not. Last-minute cancellations are common, but you can usually re-book for the following morning.



Beyond balloons, the Goreme Open Air Museum is a UNESCO World Heritage Site that contains rock-cut churches with beautiful frescoes dating back to the 10th, 11th and 12th centuries. It is one of the best places to visit in Cappadocia – plan to spend an hour to 90 minutes wandering between hollowed-out cave churches, and don't skip the "Dark Church" to see the preserved colourful frescoes.

The unique topography in Cappadocia is a result of volcanic eruptions and millions of years of erosion. The result? An otherworldly landscape of "fairy chimneys", pinnacles and even phallic rocks. The "penis rocks" in Cappadocia are a hoot, even if you're a prude, and can be seen in the appropriately named "Love Valley" or Pasabag ("Monks Valley").



WHERE TO STAY

ARGOS IN CAPPADOCIA,

Argos is one of the most magical hotels in the region, offering an unforgettable experience staying in one-of-a-kind rooms carved into the stone, excellent food and wine from the on-site restaurant and an eco-consciousness approach.

Each of the rooms is uniquely decorated, embracing the natural shape and colours of the cliff-face which they have been carved out from. The gorgeous suites are equipped with fireplaces, terraces and some even have their own private indoor swimming pool.



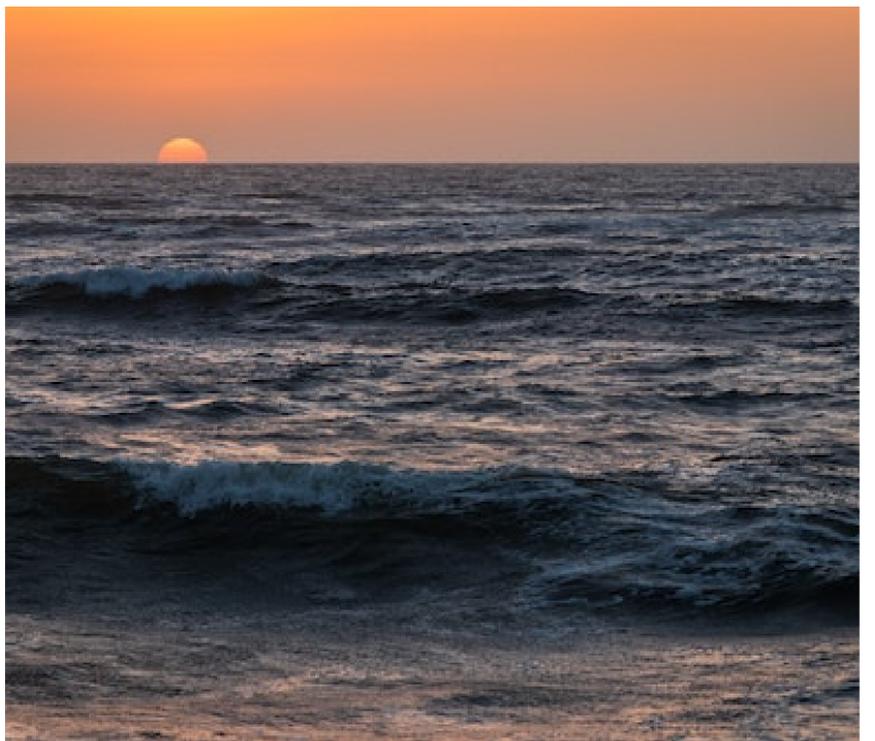
JUNE

Namibia

If you're dreaming of travelling in Africa but have no idea where to go first, head to Namibia. It's one of the safest and least intimidating countries on the continent. On top of that, the official language of Namibia is English, which makes independent travel even easier. Namibia has every type of landscape you could imagine - deserts, beaches, built-up cities, lush forests, rivers and more!

WHY IT'S A GOOD TIME TO VISIT

During June, the rains cease and dry season sets in. This is the perfect time to visit the National Parks, particularly Etosha, because the animals congregate around the watering holes so your chances of spotting rare wildlife is much higher.



Swakopmund is known as the adventure capital of Namibia with quad biking, sky diving and sand boarding on offer. It's located on the coast and has plenty of hotels, restaurants and bars to check out. It's definitely the most lively and touristy town in Namibia, but in a good way.

The city of Windhoek, Namibia's capital, lies in a wide valley surrounded by the Khomas Highland, Auas mountains and Eros mountains at the epicentre of this desert country. While it is a cultural, economic, political and travel hub, it does have a reputation for crime.



PLACES TO GO

The most iconic destination in Namibia (and one you've no doubt seen many photos of) is a place called **Deadvlei**. It's a huge barren expanse, covered in bright orange sand with ancient acacia trees creeping out of the ground. These trees are so dry and sunburnt that their dark brown, blackening trunks and branches contrast dramatically with the red dunes and bright blue sky.

Nearby, **Soussusvlei** is home to dozens of sand dunes that move as the years go by. The wind from the coast blows the sand further and further inland. If you're feeling energetic, try climbing to the top of Dune 45 or Big Daddy - but don't forget your water bottle!



NAMIBIA

THINGS TO DO

Most people who travel to Africa do so in the hope of spending a few days on safari, spotting rare and exotic wildlife that they might never see in their home country. Of all the national parks and game reserves in Africa, Etosha is up there with the best.

This 8,600 square mile park is distinct from many other African game parks because it is so remote and spread. You could drive for miles and not come across anyone else.

During dry season, the animals flock to the park's watering holes to feed and socialise. Expect to see lions, giraffes, elephants, springboks, gemsboks, zebras, hyenas, rhinos, and many more.

Etosha is also a spectacular spot for stargazing because there is almost zero light pollution. Namibia is also home to a Dark Sky Reserve so it's no surprise the night skies are astonishing.



Another great place to visit is Fish River Canyon. This huge expanse is large enough to give the Grand Canyon a run for its money. You can choose from various hikes ranging from a few hours to multiple days (but you'll want to organise a guide for this option).

If you have time, Cape Cross Seal Reserve is another breathtaking spot on the coast where thousands of seals congregate and bask in the sun.



WHERE TO STAY

SHIPWRECK LODGE

Perched amongst the dramatic dunes of Namibia's Skeleton Coast, Shipwreck Lodge is a unique and exciting concept combining distinctive design, an unrivalled ocean views.

The 10 guest cabins are spoiling havens of understated luxury. Each features a velvet day bed for soaking up the gorgeous vista, comfy king-sized bed, bar area that doubles as a cosy writing space and stylish bathroom with a funky porthole window.

Due to its isolated location, guests are treated to full board. The daily-changing menu, likely to include game and fish, is limited but the standard is excellent.



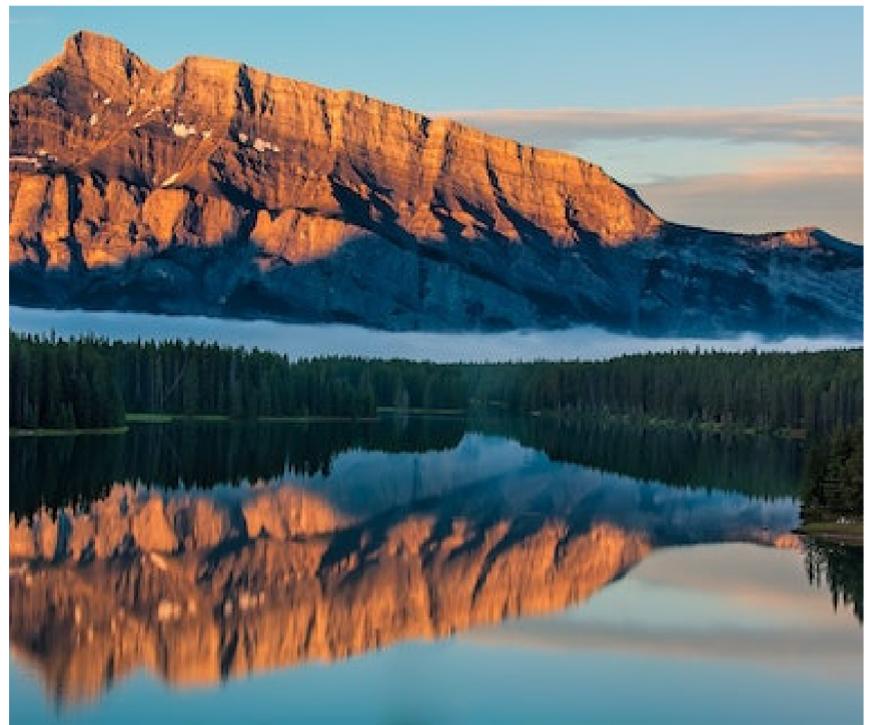
JULY

Rocky Mountains

The Canadian Rockies mountain range spans the provinces of British Columbia and Alberta. With jagged, ice-capped peaks, including towering Mt. Robson, it's a region of alpine lakes, diverse wildlife and outdoor recreation sites. You could hike, camp or roadtrip through the region but the best way to soak it all up is without a doubt by taking a ride on the Rocky Mountaineer.

WHY IT'S A GOOD TIME TO VISIT

It's the busiest time of year to visit for a reason – the weather is perfect with comfortable temperatures during the day and some spots at a high altitude even copping a small coating of snow. This does mean you'll want to book in early to avoid missing out.



Although traditionally viewed as the “other” big Rockies park after Banff, **Jasper National Park** covers an area greater than Banff, Yoho and Kootenay combined, and looks and feels far wilder and less touristy than the rest. Its backcountry is more extensive and less travelled, and Jasper, its only settlement, is more relaxed than Banff, with just half its population.

Yoho National Park's name derives from a Cree word meaning “wonder” – a fitting testament to the awesome grandeur of its mountains, lakes and waterfalls. Yet it's a small park, whose intimate scale makes it the one favoured by Rockies' connoisseurs.

PLACES TO GO

Banff National Park is the most famous Canadian Rockies park and Canada's leading tourist attraction – so be prepared for the crowds in its key centres, Banff and Lake Louise, as well as the most accessible of its 1500km of trails.

The actual town of Banff, a busy and commercial town where you can pause for a couple of days to soak up the action and handful of sights. The nightlife in Banff is rather wild thanks to the huge population of backpackers and working-holiday-visa-holders who work at the ski resorts over winter and party all Summer.



ROCKY MOUNTAINS

THE ROCKY MOUNTAINEER EXPERIENCE

For those who like to travel in style (and don't mind paying for it), travelling through the Canadian Rockies on the famous Rocky Mountaineer is a must! This luxurious train was purpose-built for unparalleled sightseeing with enormous glass windows that continue all the way across the roof.

The train slowly meanders through the Rockies on a railway route that was used during the Gold Rush days. You'll pass through varied landscapes from desert expanses to alpine lakes, with a range of wildlife along the way including bears, deer and countless birds.

The Rocky Mountaineer is five star luxury all the way. Expect delicious, high-end meals for breakfast, lunch and dinner with an impressive wine, beer and cocktail menu.



You can begin your journey in Vancouver or Jasper, choosing from Silver Leaf or Gold Leaf service – the main difference between the two being the size of the cabin and the addition of a private outdoor viewing platform to get closer to the action.

Most travellers spend between 3-5 days touring the Rockies on the Rocky Mountaineer, staying in gorgeous hotels dotted along the iconic, scenic railway line along the way.

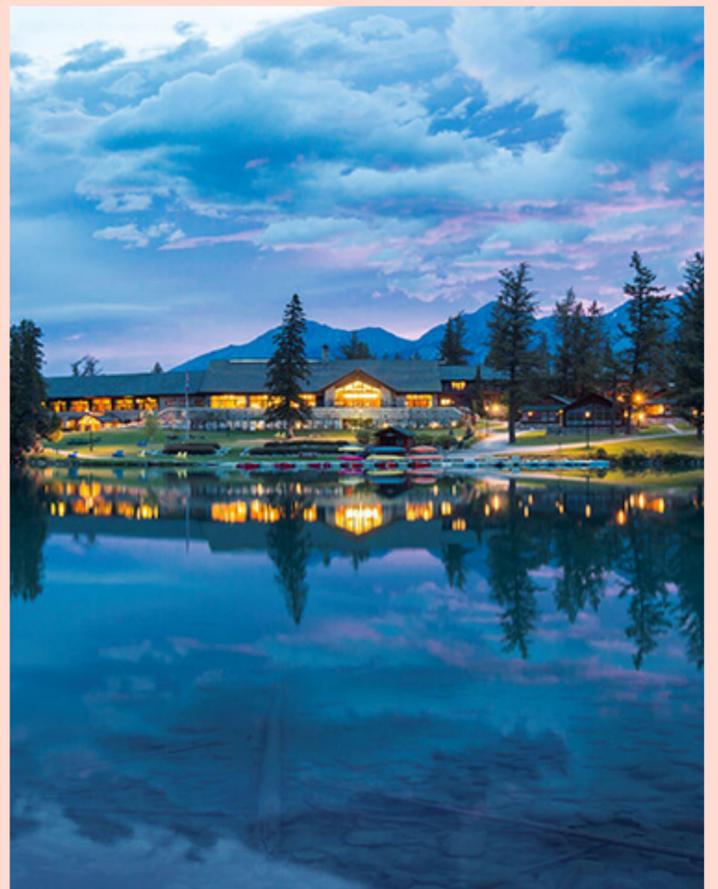


WHERE TO STAY

FAIRMONT JASPER PARK LODGE

This beautiful national park retreat is a little different from its fellow Fairmont Hotels. Rather than being a grand railway hotel or set in a building that resembles a fairy-tale castle, it's has the vibe of a hidden-away log cabin.

While most hotels are just a base to return to at the end of the day, the Fairmont is a destination in itself. Many of the activities that are available throughout the park, such as kayaking, biking and horse riding, can be enjoyed straight from the lodge. You can rent canoes from The Boathouse and get those Instagram-worthy shots out on the lake or hire a mountain bike and explore some of the 700 acres on two wheels.



AUGUST

Santorini

Santorini is the world-famous volcanic island located in the most southern part of the Cyclades group of islands in the Aegean Sea, in Greece. Great poets have sung its praises, a 4,000 year old history. The eternal rock continues to stand, strong and majestic rising proudly from the sea and guarding well the secrets of Atlantis.

WHY IT'S A GOOD TIME TO VISIT

Who wouldn't want to visit a beautiful Greek island during the balmy European summer? August can be rather busy but with so many islands to choose from, tourists tend to spread out. Travelling during peak season means there are plenty of flights and ferries going, and loads of hotels, airbnbs and homestays to choose from.



Santorini is a fairly laid-back island surrounded by black rocky beaches, dotted with beach bars and restaurants. There are also plenty of cliff jumping opportunities if you're a bit of an adrenaline junkie.

Santorini has excellent seafood as well with many restaurants serving up dishes that were plucked from the sea that very morning. And let's not forget about the wine. Santorini is known for its fabulous wineries with many offering tours and wine tasting. But if you want to visit multiple wineries, book a wine tour (most wineries are small and hard to find if you don't know the island well).

ABOUT SANTORINI

Santorini has had a challenging past between volcanos and earth quakes which make it a real mix of old and new. Although, the new builds have masterfully captured the essence of traditional, old school Santorini.

This small island is known for its steep cliffs, or more specifically, the home and hotels build into the sides of it. These gorgeous white-washed buildings cling to the rock face and offer breathtaking views over the ocean. One downside, however, is that the steps up and down are a bit of a punish. Great exercise though and great for walking off your second scoop of ice cream or third glass of wine.



SANTORINI

THINGS TO DO

Starting with one of the most iconic of settings, head over to Oia for a lazy afternoon stroll around this cliff-top town. If you're looking to watch the sunset, you can either find a spot in the town itself or book a table in one of the restaurants that overlook the town.

If you're keen to stretch your legs, grab your walking shoes, hop on board a local boat and sail over to Nea Kameni island. This is where you can hike through the barren landscape leading up to Santorini's impressive volcano.

No trip to the Greek Islands is complete without a little jaunt on a boat. It's one of the best things to do in Santorini for a tour of the island. Many of the routes will head around the dramatic parts of the bay, visit the Volcanic Island and even have a little time for diving into the deep blue sea!



Much to many visitors' surprise, Santorini's beaches aren't fringed with tropical palms or laden with powdered, gold sand. This volcanic island gave birth to a spectacle of uniquely-hued landscapes and the Red Beach is one of them. It's named after the rusty reddish tones of its sand, and the dramatic amber cliffs that dip into it.

For one of the most unique trekking experiences on the Greek islands, follow the island path carved out between towns Fira and Oia. Known as the Fira-Oia Hike, it runs across the cliffs and through the villages of Fira, Firostefani and Imerovigli.



WHERE TO STAY

KATIKIES, OIA, SANTORINI

Made up of bridges, cubist cottages and infinity pools, Katikies is considered one of the best boutique hotels in Santorini (arguably, the world). Hugging the dramatic volcanic rim of Santorini, the hotel is the ultimate honeymoon destination.

The white washed suites have majestic views of the Aegean Sea, which can be enjoyed from the large terrace with an open-air dining area, sun deck and two-person Jacuzzi.

Awe inspiring views, sublime Santorini sunsets and perfectly manicured pink bougainvilleas provide the magnificent backdrop for this stunning luxury hotel.



SEPTEMBER

Gili Islands

Just off the coast of Lombok in Indonesia lay a gorgeous string of islands named the Gili's. The three islands that make up this tropical paradise are distinctly different from one another and offer something for every kind of traveller. You'll find all night full-moon parties, vivid marine life, turquoise ocean, boutique hotels and breathtaking sunsets. No cars or motorbikes are allowed so you can slow right down and soak it all up.

WHY IT'S A GOOD TIME TO VISIT

September is the perfect time to head to the Gili's as it's right before the main tourist peak but well outside the rainy season. The weather is balmy and the ocean blissfully warm and welcoming. The sea is also fairly calm which makes getting to the islands by boat a much more relaxing journey. (The stretch from Bali to the Gili's is notoriously rough).



The quietest of the three islands, **Gili Meno** is known for its idyllic beaches – squeaky clean white sand and gentle lapping waves, fringed by palm trees. It only takes an hour and a half to walk around the entire island, but there are plenty of hidden pockets to enjoy a moment of romance. For this reason, Gili is known as the honeymoon island.

And finally, **Gili Air** is the perfect blend of the other two. It is becoming more built up with more accommodation and restaurants opening in recent years, but it still retains its peaceful charm. Air is also the only Gili where you can gaze across the sea for uninterrupted views of Lombok's mountainous northern coast.



PLACES TO GO

Of the three islands, **Gili T** is known as the "party island." It has a very friendly vibe, and is full of people keen to get to know one another. The social atmosphere is a massive draw – each night of the week, a different club or dive centre bar hosts a party, so everyone ends up in the same place (and business is spread evenly across the venues).

You can, however, still enjoy spending time on Gili T if you're not into partying – the scuba trips, free-diving classes and sunbathing spots are more than enough to keep most people here.



GILI ISLANDS

THINGS TO DO

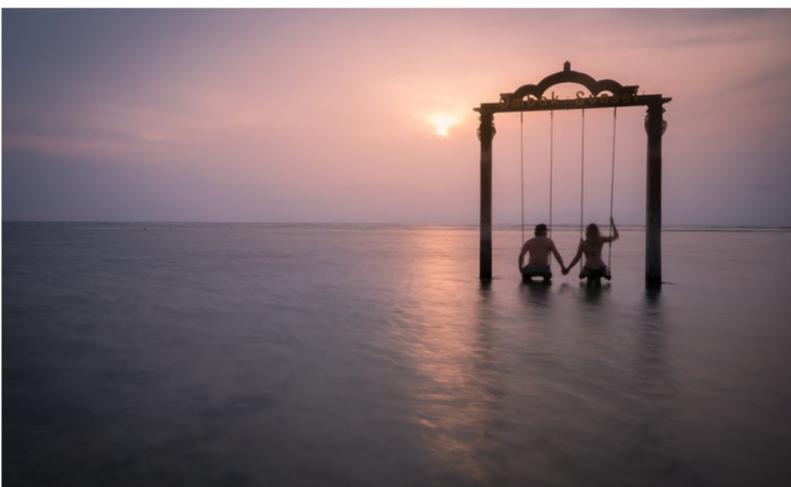
When you're surrounded by so much sparkling turquoise water, you'd be crazy not to dive in and explore below the surface. Snorkelling and diving are the two main reasons people come to the Gili's (besides partying, perhaps). And there are plenty of places to do so. You can take a private boat if you are with a large enough group, rent snorkelling gear, or book in for an organized boat trip. Otherwise, there are plenty of spots to snorkel right off the beach.

Another must is spending an evening at the Gili T night markets, sampling seafood that was caught that very morning and char grilled to perfection over a street barbecue. You'll also find skewers, tofu satay, noodles, veggies and grilled corn, all for a few quid.

Be sure to bar hop along the beach one night, relaxing on one of the bean bags strewn along the sand, enjoying a cocktail as the sun goes down. Many of the beachfront bars have live music which really sets the mood for a perfect night in paradise



If you have a few days to spare, it's worth taking a boat trip over to Flores and beyond to visit Komodo National Park where the world's largest reptiles reside. The famous Komodo dragons, while a little scary looking, are fascinating creatures who have lived on since the time of the dinosaurs, thriving on this remote island in the East Nusa Tenggara province of Indonesia. The terrain is made up of rusty-red volcanic hills, savannah and forests. Its surrounding waters of seagrass beds, mangrove shrublands and coral reefs are famous for diving.

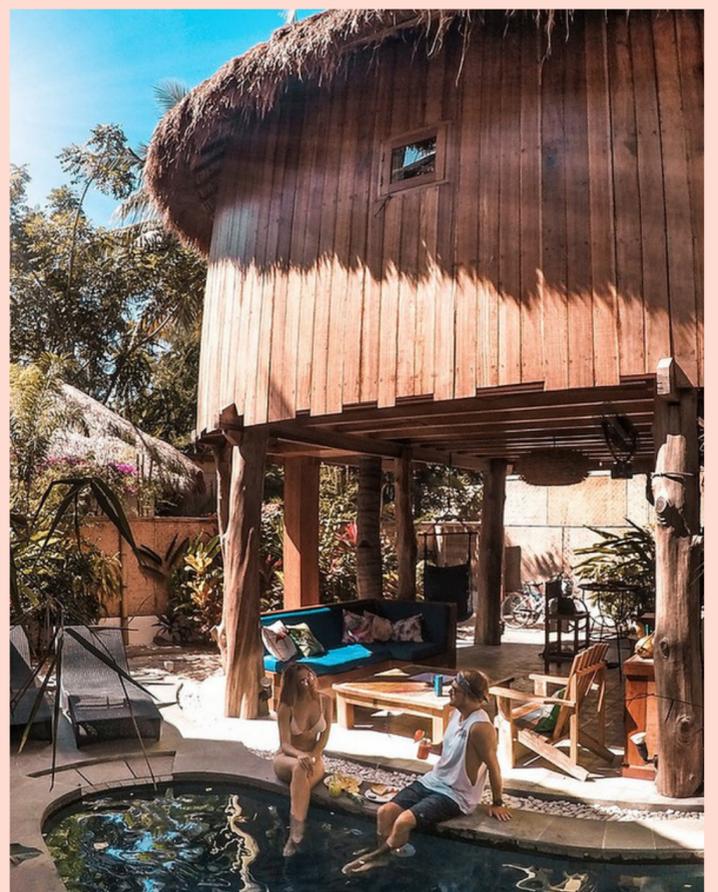


WHERE TO STAY

GILI TREE HOUSES, GILI T

Built among the palm trees of Gili Trawangan, these masterfully-designed treehouses offer adventurous travellers a truly unique experience. With private plunge pools, huge outdoor living spaces and all the amenities of a hotel, you'll never want to leave.

Located on the sunset side of the island, you're close to all the action – bars, restaurants, markets and dive shops. The hotel also offers free bike rental so you can cruise around the island at your own pace.



OCTOBER

Dubai

When people think of Dubai, their mind tends to go straight to luxury, excess and eccentricity. And while this isn't everyone's cup of tea, it is the perfect place to splash out and live like a sheikh for a few days. Think outstanding five (even six) star hotels, long Friday brunches, pool parties, glamorous nightclubs and exclusive restaurants. But under all the glamour, you'll find an intriguing culture with subtle but strong ties to their heritage.

WHY IT'S A GOOD TIME TO VISIT

Dubai was due to host the World EXPO in 2020 but this was postponed until 2021. Every 5 years, a 6-month festival is held in a selected country, showcasing new innovations and ideas from around the world. Knowing Dubai and its tendency towards excess, 2021 is going to be huge.



PLACES TO GO

The relatively new neighbourhood of **Dubai Marina and Jumeirah Beach** is the most popular place to stay around Dubai, with a high concentration of luxury resorts along the promenade. Behind it is the jaw-dropping Dubai Marina where you'll see super yachts and other gorgeous boats worth squillions. This is also where you'll find Dubai's tallest skyscrapers and the canal. The area also has plenty of bars and restaurants, and no strict restrictions, like the way women dress at the beach, for example. It's close to the metro which is handy if you're keen on doing some shopping in Downtown Dubai as it's a fair distance from the main hotel drag.



Downtown Dubai is what most people picture when they think of the city. It's seen on all the advertisements, packed with towering skyscrapers and expensive cars driving on 6-lane highways. With some of the tallest skyscrapers, including the Burj Khalifa, the most luxurious shops, fancy boulevards, and the most glamorous clubs and fine-dining restaurants, Downtown is the reason why Dubai is famous.

Bur Dubai is the heart of the Old City of Dubai. Composed of narrow alleys, real bazaars, and traditional architecture, this is where you'll get to experience some real Emirati culture.

The Palm is one of Dubai's most remarkable landmarks and the most expensive (and exclusive) area to stay. It's basically a palm-shaped island which is attached to Dubai's mainland. It is actually huge, with a length of several kilometers from the beginning till the edge of the island, where you find the Atlantis Hotel, one of the most luxurious hotels in the city and a replica of the same hotel in The Bahamas.

DUBAI

THINGS TO DO

Dubai's massive **Global Village** is essentially a theme park for all ages, though it's popular with families as the rides and attractions are kid-friendly. Throughout the year, it features concerts, rides, dining, and attractions from around the world.

A popular heritage destination, Al Marmoom draws camel racing enthusiasts of all stripes, local and otherwise. A day at the camel races is an experience that is nicely representative of Middle Eastern culture, one that dates back to the 7th century.

Dubai's sprawling spice market is arguably the most entertaining of all the city's souks. It's bustling and crowding, with intoxicating sights and smells. Many of the vendors sell the same ingredients—Persian dried limes, saffron, barberries, rose hips, and traditional Middle Eastern spice mixes. Saffron, while still pricey, is more affordable here than elsewhere in Dubai.



The world's tallest building is, unsurprisingly, visible from almost everywhere in Dubai. Taking in the site is thrilling enough from the street, but you can also visit the top of the 160-story behemoth—brace yourself for the thrill of the high-speed elevators, followed by complete awe the moment you step onto the observation deck.

As the largest mall in the world, the Dubai Mall draws in almost 100 million visitors a year (in 2015, it counted 92 million). It's easy to get lost—there are more than 1,200 shops, after all—but a great place to beat the Dubai heat and ogle at the luxury stores.



WHERE TO STAY

W DUBAI - THE PALM

W Dubai - The Palm is a dreamy 5-star hotel set right on a private beach on the iconic island of Palm Jumeirah. You'll enjoy the uninterrupted views while taking a dip in the luxurious swimming pool, dine like royalty at the high-class restaurants and spacious suites with large balconies, a Jacuzzi, and a private cocktail bar.

All bars at the resort are sleek and chic, offering a wealth of exotic cocktails, snacks and hot drinks throughout the day. The rooftop bar, SoBe, has 360° views across the city, while the WET Deck is an adults only pool area with fantastic cocktails.



NOVEMBER

Nepal

Nepal is one of the best countries in the world to go trekking. The Himalayas offer numerous challenging trekking destinations among a spectacular backdrop of sweeping green valleys to snow-capped mountains. Many travellers come here with the aim of conquering Everest Base Camp or the Annapurna Circuit but there are plenty of other places that are just as beautiful without the crowds.

WHY IT'S A GOOD TIME TO VISIT

The reason November is such a good time to visit Nepal is that in the beginning of the month (specifically, the 4th) is when the Diwali celebrations take place. Thousands of candles are lit all around – you can even see them from the plane as you fly into Kathmandu.



PLACES TO GO

Kathmandu is the bustling capital and usually the first stop to find some of the best places to visit in Nepal. One of the best things about Kathmandu has to be the eclectic mix of temples, historic sites, shrines, restaurants and bustling streets.

You can also plan a hiking or trekking trip, shop your heart out at the Thamel area and eat delicious local grub at restaurants like Forest and Plate, Places, and Yangling. Don't forget to buy some gorgeous handicrafts while you're here, too. Some good spots for gifts are; SK Handicrafts and Local Women's Handicrafts.



The beautiful city of **Pokhara** is on the shores of Lake Phewa and is best known for its unparalleled views of the snow-capped Annapurna Himalayan range. With green forests, underground caves, beautiful waterfalls, the Valley of Orchids, and the Massif Glaciers, Pokhara is a fantastic base for shorter hiking trips.

A popular UNESCO World Heritage Site in Nepal, the **Chitwan National Park** is home to grasslands, marshes, forests, and wildlife including one-horned rhinos, over 500 species of birds, wild elephants, leopards, sloth bears, and the majestic Bengal tiger. It's a great place to visit after you've completed your hike and need a few days to relax and soak up some nature.



NEPAL

THINGS TO DO

For many travellers, climbing up to Everest Base Camp is the main reason for their trip to Nepal. And it is a fantastic hike having done it myself a few years back. You'll come across the highest Irish bar in the world, Namchee Bizarre, standing at 3.440m! You'll also need to conquer the scary Hillary suspension bridge, 125m off the ground - not for the faint of heart.

Once you've made it to Base Camp, if you can, continue on to Gokyo Lakes. You'll wander through snowy glaciers, past striking blue lakes and encounter virtually no other tourists.

Another popular route is the Annapurna Circuit in central Nepal. The total length of the route varies between 160-230 km, depending on where you decide to start and finish. You'll cross two spectacular river valleys and circumnavigate the breathtaking Annapurna Massif. You can join a tour or hire your own private guide, but experienced hikers often go it alone as the trails are well sign-posted.



If trekking isn't your thing but you still want to admire the most majestic peaks on the planet, opt for a scenic flight instead. You'll soar over the impressive mountain ranges and get an excellent view of the mighty Mt Everest.

You should also take the opportunity to get a massage - but not just any kind of massage. The rate of blindness in Nepal is remarkably high so local charities train people who have lost their sight the art of massage. They call them "Seeing Hands" massages.

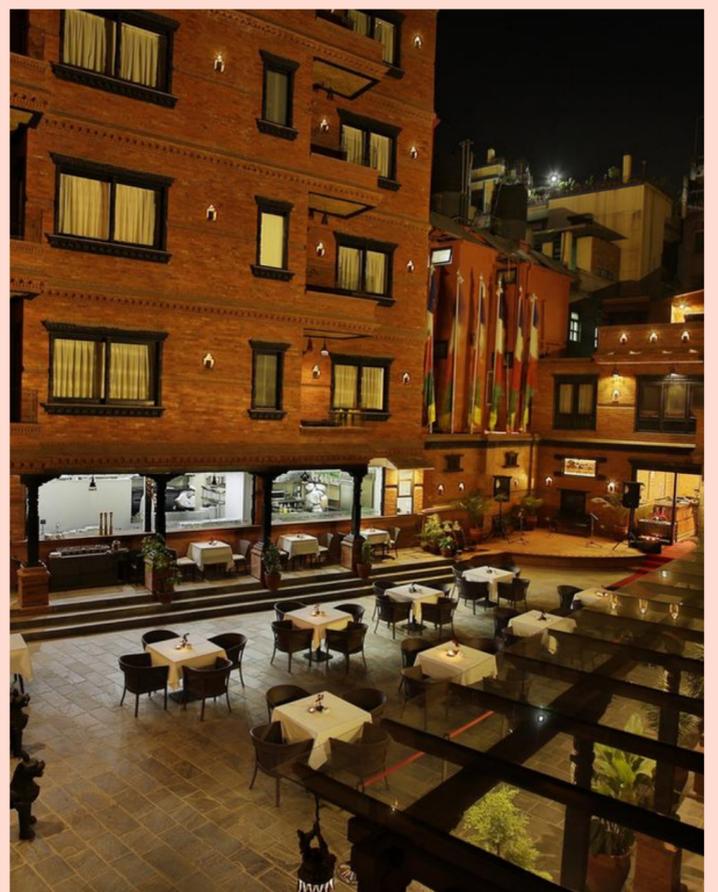


WHERE TO STAY

DALAI-LA BOUTIQUE HOTEL, KATHMANDU

This boutique hotel is located in the heart of Thamel, Kathmandu's up-and-coming tourist centre. It's within walking distance of great shopping areas, landmarks and restaurants. It's also just 20 minutes from the airport.

The rooms are basic but comfortable. There's also a spacious terrace and a bar to kick back and enjoy a drink in the evenings. The concierge desk is extremely useful when it comes to planning a trek if you haven't already booked something in. The staff are very knowledgeable and will take care of everything, including transfers, accommodation and food during your trek.



DECEMBER

Lapland

Lapland is the largest and Northern most region of Finland and home to just 3.4% of Finland's entire population. The capital of Finnish Lapland is Rovaniemi, which is known as Santa Clause's hometown attracting visitors all around the world to witness the magic of Christmas. But it's definitely not just for kids - there's plenty to draw adults to the region as well. It's also one of the best places in the world to see Aurora Borealis - the Northern Lights.

WHY IT'S A GOOD TIME TO VISIT

It's the closest you'll get to spending Christmas in the North Pole! For the most magical white Christmas you'll ever have, visit during December and get the full experience - reindeer, Santa Claus, carols, themed events and fluffy, powdery snow.



Located in Finnish Lapland in the middle of the Bothnian Arc is **Kemi**, the site of the famous SnowCastle with its amazing SnowRestaurant, SnowChapel and Children's Land. Other popular attractions in this area include cruises aboard the Sampo icebreaker ship, where you can go for an "Arctic swim" in thermal flotation suits.

Kiruna, the northernmost city in Sweden, is surrounded by amazing landscapes, ranging from rivers and crystal-clear lakes to ancient boreal forests and snow-capped mountains. The most famous attractions here are the ICEHOTEL, located in the neighbouring village of Jukkasjärvi, and the Aurora Sky Station in nearby Abisko National Park.



PLACES TO GO

"Lapland" is situated in Scandinavia and often referred to as the northern area of Finland. But, in fact, it occupies the northern part of Sweden, Norway (which is $\frac{1}{4}$ of all Scandinavia), Finland, and even Russia.

Situated next to the Arctic Circle, **Rovaniemi** is considered the capital of Finnish Lapland. This town is best known as the hometown of Santa Claus, whom visitors can meet any day of the year at the Santa Claus Village.



LAPLAND

THINGS TO DO

The one and only absolute must when visiting Lapland is going to see Santa Claus in his hometown of Rovaniemi. Once you've sat on his lap and told him whether you've been naughty or nice, spend some time exploring the Santa Claus Village – there's dog sledding, snow mobiles for hire, reindeer rides, a zoo and plenty of Christmas-themed restaurants and bars.

For a real thrill, opt for a husky sleigh ride in the wilderness, powered by a team of gorgeous Siberian huskies! A Husky Musher will guide you through an Arctic pine forest while you admire the changing wilderness from the comfort of your sleigh.

At a slightly slower pace, snowshoeing in the untouched Arctic wilderness is a truly magical experience. Don't underestimate how much of a workout it can be, though!



You can also try the locals' favourite pastime – ice fishing. As most of the lakes and rivers remain frozen for up to 7 months each year in the Arctic north, ice fishing is deeply rooted in Finnish traditions. Try your luck catching the native fish, bass, and cook up your catch over an open fire.

Lapland is one of the best places in the world to see the famous Northern Lights. They can be viewed for more than 200 nights out of 365 most commonly from late August to April. Aurora Borealis can be viewed from most of Lapland region but the most northern parts such as Saariselkä provide clearer skies and better chances for vivid observation of the phenomenon.



WHERE TO STAY

STAR ARCTIC HOTEL

Star Arctic Hotel is located on the top of the Kaunispää “Beautiful Peak” near Ivalo, 270 km north of the Arctic Circle. Here, the Nordic modern civilization is perfectly integrated with Lapland’s own unique culture.

The hotel is certified environmentally-friendly with its exterior designed specifically to blend harmoniously with the natural surroundings.

Of the three room types, the Aurora Glass Cabin takes the cake with a stunning three-panel glass design that offer a direct view up to the dreamy night sky.



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