

World Traveller

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CROATIA
SAN FRANCISCO
SEVILLE
TRAVEL OFFERS

Under the Tuscan sun

Mapping the perfect
trip through Tuscany

Into the blue

Dive into the natural beauty of Mauritius



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OVER WATER OR UNDER WATER,
SURRENDER TO TURQUOISE HUES



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Comprising two iconic towers, the JW Marriott Marquis Dubai is centrally located beside the Dubai Water Canal and offers a spectrum of facilities and services for a memorable experience. The hotel features 1,608 luxurious guest rooms and suites, over 12 award-winning restaurants, the renowned Saray Spa with traditional hammams and 17 treatment rooms and 8,000 sqm of spectacular meeting spaces.

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We might be bidding adieu to our summer fiestas and heading back to the school run, but that doesn't mean we're putting our travel bug to bed until spring 2023. Vaccination rates are rising, more borders are opening, and we've still got a handful of UAE public holidays to take us to the end of the year.

If you're looking to stay closer to home with your next long weekend, and you'd quite like to bring your furry friend with you, flip to page 24 and check out the best pet-friendly staycation spots in the UAE - from grounding glamping to five-star hotels.

Or perhaps it's European escapes consuming your daydreams? Then maybe cruising the coast of Croatia (p34) is more to your taste. Speaking of taste, Tuscany is inviting food and vino lovers on a gastronomic tour on page 42. Or if it's Indian Ocean luxe you're after, then we've mapped out the places to visit and things to do in Mauritius on page 48.

Wherever your travel bug takes you this autumn, relax, stay safe, and most of all, have fun.



COVER IMAGE
Mauritius, Getty Images



34 Croatia



42 Tuscany



48 Mauritius

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Contents

September-October 2021



15
GLOBETROTTER

regulars

06

WHAT A WONDERFUL WORLD

Rethinking that bucket list? Here's a few places to keep in mind for a future trip.

15

GLOBETROTTER

The places topping our go-to list this month; three destinations to sink your teeth into; and Robert Irwin offers his travel tips.

20

MY CITY

In the first of a new series of insider guides, Idalia Salsamendi introduces us to the best of her home city, Seville.

24

SIX OF THE BEST

Can't go anywhere without your prized pooch in tow? Luckily, these six UAE staycation spots let you bring your furry friend.

64

SUITE DREAMS

The Seychelles has proved to be the perfect post-pandemic pick-me-up. Constance Ephelia offers one very good reason why...

features

28

HOW TO DO...SAN FRANCISCO

From its steep streets to its golden gateway, here's how to enjoy the The City by the Bay.

34

THE COAST IS CLEAR

Croatia expert Jane Foster's guide to the country's majestic coastline – more than 1,100 miles of it.

42

FRUITS OF DEVINE

Celestial hill towns, heavenly art, vino to die for... Dana Facaros draws the dream Tuscan-holiday map.

48

MARVELLOUS MAURITIUS

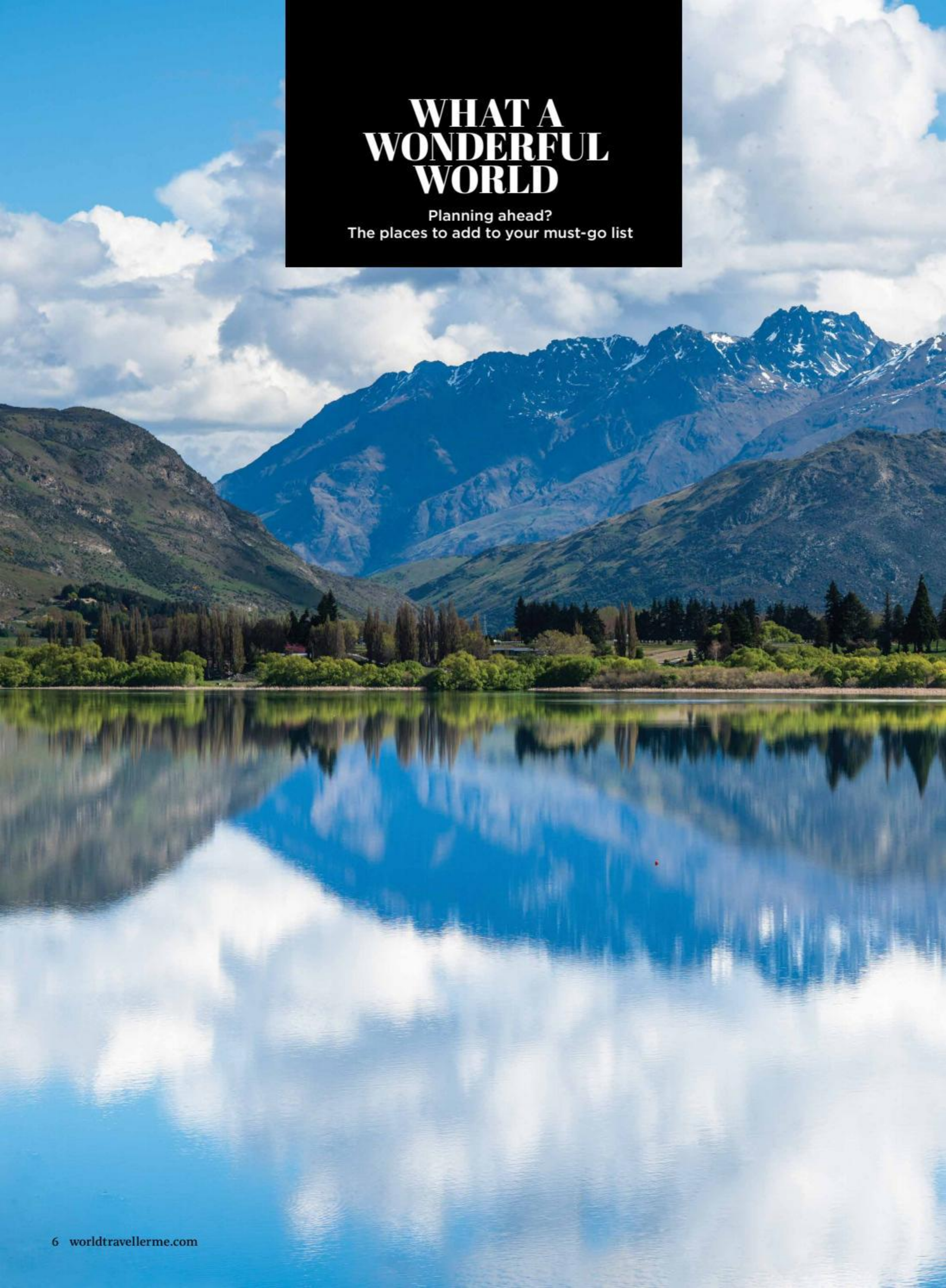
With the island opening fully to visitors in October, we show you its best bits.



48
MAURITIUS

WHAT A WONDERFUL WORLD

Planning ahead?
The places to add to your must-go list





New Zealand

With forests, mountains, beaches, rainforests, fish-filled rivers and fjords, New Zealand is the ultimate destination for adventure travellers who can't get enough of the outdoors. And whether it's surfing, heli-skiing, kayaking, hiking, rafting or mountain biking that you're after, there are a number of ways in which you can explore the beautiful North and South Islands. Lake Hayes is situated in Central Otago on the latter. Spend a blissful summer's day on its shores, before exploring the nearby Arrowtown – an historic gold mining village. Overall, the country is easy to travel around and self-drive holidays are popular. Accommodation options include quaint bed and breakfast inns, eco-lodges and high-end hotels.

Mexico

Mexico City has dusted off its gritty feel and is fast becoming known for its flourishing cultural and foodie scenes. Meander through its bustling downtown area and discover this capital's history, from pre-Hispanic and colonial-era grandeur to its contemporary edge. Then, head to the famous canals of Xochimilco, the remnants of a former system of lakes and waterways built by the Aztecs that crossed the Valley of Mexico. Hop aboard one of the colourful trajineras (gondolas) for a leisurely cruise while food vendors float past.







Cambodia

The Cambodia we know today was once ruled for hundreds of years by the Khmer empire, which, during the Angkorian period, reigned over what is now Laos, Thailand and Vietnam. Remains of this ancient kingdom can be seen at the temples of Angkor – arguably one of Southeast Asia’s most monumental sites. Built from 1186 and originally known as Rajavihara (Monastery of the King), Ta Prohm is one of the most atmospheric ruins in the complex. A thick jungle engulfs its crumbling walls, towers and dislodged piles of stone blocks that are covered in moss and foliage, allowing dappled sunlight to dance across the whole scene.

Eco adventures

If you're yet to discover Oman's must-visit resort, then here's why **Alila** Hinu Bay should be top of your list

Deciding upon a dream location and the perfect accommodation has long been a troubling task for passionate wanderlusts, with so many bucket list destinations to decide between. But in modern times – when sustainable travel and covid-related safety plays into it – it's more complex than ever. Enter Alila Hinu Bay, the destination that is more sustainable by conscious design, and safer by default due to its remote location in the mountainous southwest of Oman. But it's not just a tickbox of good travel practice; the luxury resort also offers everything you could need for a blissful break from modern life.

Private Pools

What's more relaxing than dipping into your own pool, surrounded by nothing but the sounds and sights of mother nature? Opt for one of the two villa options that come complete with a private pool – each with luxe contemporary design within – and you can soak away the stresses of daily life in peace.

Spa Relaxation

If switching off the mind to concentrate on pampering the body is what you seek from your next vacation, then Spa Alila is where you need to be. Sign up for one (or two, or three) of the signature treatments utilising natural products and ancient techniques, and make a day of it by taking advantage of the water therapy services.

Unique Experiences

Being well travelled isn't about travelling more, but travelling better; this is where the resort's unique experiences come in. Whether it is wild swimming in the neighbouring wadis or hiking the mountains to get a sight of one of the world's largest sinkholes, once in a lifetime experiences lie on Alila Hinu Bay's doorstep.

Fine Dining

What is a vacation without tucking into plentiful food – not least the local cuisine? Visit The Lobby to taste authentic Arabian flavours and Seasalt for fresh catches from the coastal restaurant. Wherever you go, you'll be greeted by traditional Omani hospitality. Prepare to be instantly charmed.

Sustainable Practices

What's perhaps most appealing about the hotel newcomer is that guests can partake in sustainable tourism, without putting it at the forefront of their minds throughout their trip. From conserving the surrounding landscape to sourcing local ingredients and materials, Alila Hinu Bay will take care of the best eco practices, so you can relax and recharge with a clear conscience.

Visit alilahinubay.com to find out more.



Private pool villa



Beach front



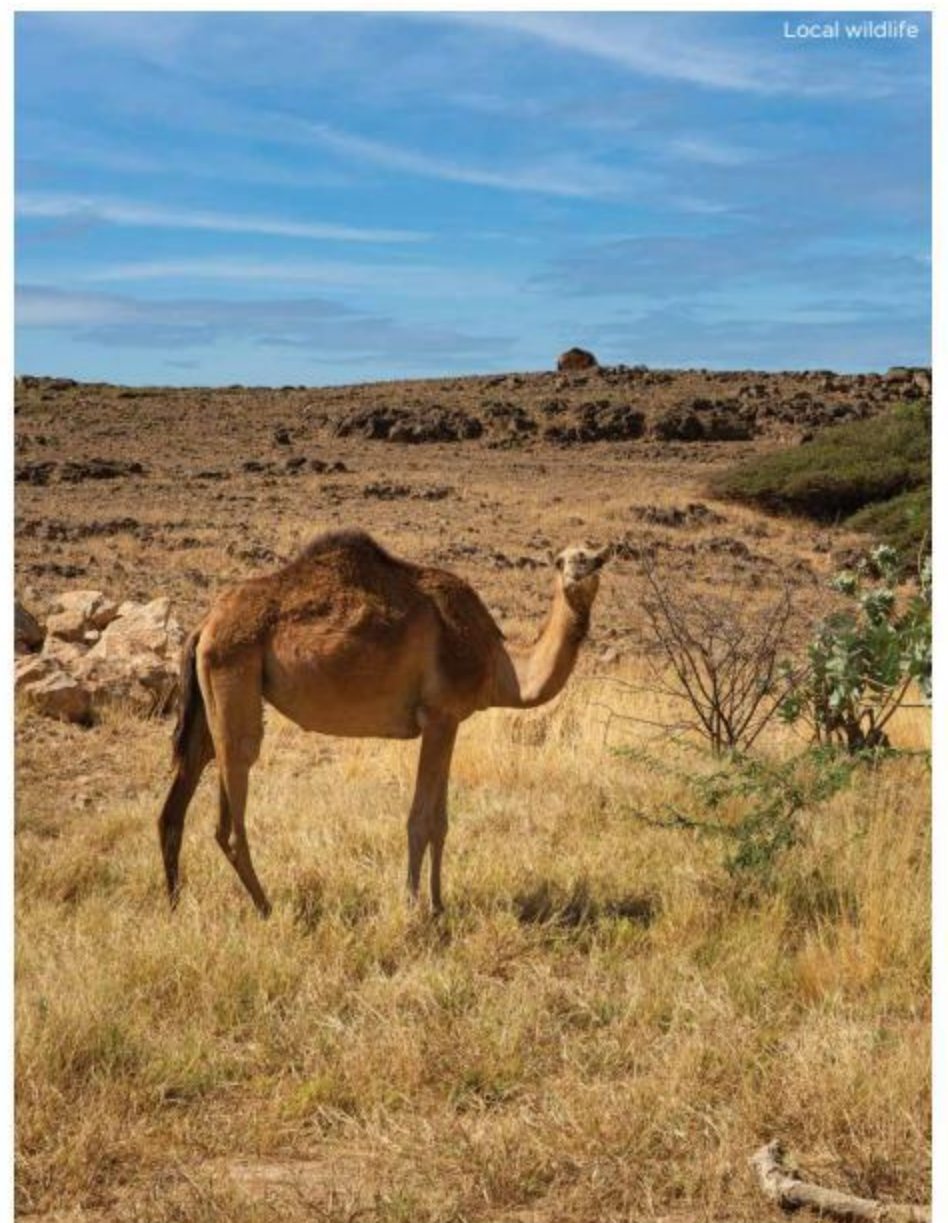
Dine under the stars



Pool



Local wildlife



Seasalt





Tailored luxe

If you're looking for understated luxury with your Maldivian escape, Sun Siyam Resorts is the hotel group for you - whatever your travel style

The word luxury often conjures images of over-the-top opulence, which is not to every traveller's taste. Enter the phenomenon of laid-back luxury, which is perfected by **Sun Siyam Resorts**. With four resorts across the Maldives, each is designed with a different holiday-goer in mind. There is the option to reconnect with nature through adventurous activities, switch off with a relaxation-centric itinerary, spend quality family time with an activity-packed getaway, or close the door to the rest of the world with a romantic escape.

If your interest was piqued at the mention of adventure, then **Sun Siyam Olhuveli** is for you. Adventure

and luxury become a match made in perfect harmony, as an abundance of watersports activities (kitesurfing, parasailing, diving) is met with beautiful accommodation options, and fine fare served in numerous restaurants.

Or perhaps it's 'relaxation' that catches your eye? Sign up for a retreat at premium all-inclusive resort **Sun Siyam Iru Veli** (because waiting for the cheque is never relaxing) known for its stress-free ethos. Island-dwellers can unwind in the villa of their dream, walk the pristine beaches barefoot and explore the island activities.

Couples should head to **Sun Siyam Vilu Reef** for an unforgettable vacation. The beautiful remote island in the South Nilandhe Atoll instantly charms with

its beauty. Expect dream-worthy villas, ambient restaurants and picture-perfect beaches. Not to mention the relaxing spas that specialise in couple's treatments.

Travelling with kids? Make **Sun Siyam Iru Fushi** your escape of choice. Little ones will enjoy the extensive range of activities, from crafty adventures to sporty endeavours, while parents will love that two children (under the age of 15) can sleep and eat for free, alongside two accompanying adults. While the kids play, parents can take on the many leisure activities the resort has to offer.

Whichever is right for you, Sun Siyam Resorts' laid-back luxe approach will be there to greet you.

To find out more, visit [sunsiyam.com](https://www.sunsiyam.com)



SEPT/OCT

Globetrotter

Be informed, be inspired,
be there

EXPO 2020

The year that this event has been on hold due to the pandemic has helped build further anticipation for Expo 2020, which finally opens on October 1. Under the theme of 'connecting minds, Creating the future', the event is being dubbed 'a feast for the senses' with 191 countries joining forces to put on events, cultural art programmes, culinary tours and global conversations. The site, or 'city of the future', is in Dubai South and is made up of thematic districts, pavilions, and the central Al Wasl Plaza. Running until March 31, it is expected to draw an audience of millions – be sure to be one of them.



FALL FOODS

Three global dining experiences to drool over

LONDON

Ebury by Fat Macy's in Pimlico is a Middle Eastern flavoured restaurant with a difference. Helping Londoners to move out of hostels and into permanent homes, it employs people living in temporary accommodation and gives them training alongside professionals. The menu is fresh and colourful; we've got our eye on the scallops with arak, labneh and chilli butter.



MONTE-CARLO

Revered as Europe's highest Michelin-starred restaurant, Monte-Carlo Société des Bains de Mer is inviting foodies from around the world to join them in a gastronomic celebration, Festival des Etoilés Monte-Carlo is a series of dinners running through September to November. Don't miss dinner at Louis XV-Alain Ducasse at Hotel de Paris with chef Michel Guérard from Les Prés d'Eugénie.



PARIS

Inside Cheval Blanc Paris, a new hotel on the banks of the Seine, is the highly anticipated Langosteria. A fine dining restaurant that puts a spin on standard seafood dishes. It combines traditional Italian cooking methods with contemporary flavours. Located on the seventh floor with a terrace overlooking the Parisian skyline, this is where to dine for romance this autumn.



TRENDING DESTINATIONS

As borders open, Emily Jenkins, dnata Travel's resident globetrotter, reveals the places you should visit

MAURITIUS

Renowned for its luxurious beach resorts set on white sands, this island paradise offers more on than its attractive coastline. Mountainous landscapes are great for hiking, while offshore coral reefs offer world-class diving.

HELSINKI, FINLAND

Spectacularly beautiful year-round, Finland has many wonders, from Finnish Lapland to Finnish Lakeland, the largest lake district in Europe, and its seaside capital, Helsinki. You'll find it full of historic sights and delicious Nordic cuisine.

NEGRIL, JAMAICA

From the bustle of Kingston, to the lively Montego Bay, head further along the coast to the sleepy town of Negril for a true taste of Jamaica's laid-back lifestyle. Its Seven Mile Beach, one of the Caribbean's most outstanding, offers shallow bays perfect for swimming.

ALULA, SAUDI ARABIA

AlUla is one of the oldest cities in the Arabian Peninsula; full of significant historic and geological sites such as Hegra – the first UNESCO World Heritage Site in the Kingdom. It's a landscape guaranteed to take your breath away.

HOW I TRAVEL

THE FIRST PLACE ON MY POST-PANDEMIC TRAVEL LIST...

I would love to go back to Oregon in the United States. My mum grew up there in a town called Eugene, and it's a really beautiful place, almost a second home.

THE BEST PLACE TO TRAVEL FOR WILDLIFE IS...

Australia - 100 per cent. We're very lucky here to have one of the most unique and diverse range of wildlife in the entire world.

THE THING I LOVE MOST ABOUT TRAVELLING IS...

I really like to experience the local wildlife and the local habitat - even when we visit somewhere that might be a big city or heavily populated place, I usually try and get out to the countryside.

IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR AN ADVENTURE-FILLED HOLIDAY YOU SHOULD GO TO...

Australia Zoo - not to toot my own horn but I think it's the most amazing place in the whole world.

WHEN I TRAVEL I PACK...

A camera. I always pack a camera!

MY TOP-THREE HOLIDAY DESTINATIONS ARE...

Tasmania, South Africa and Arizona.

THE TRIP THAT CHANGED MY LIFE WAS...

Going to Cape York Peninsula in North Queensland. We visit every year for our annual research trips carrying on the work my dad started a long time ago, but my first trip was when I was five years old.



Robert Irwin
The son of Steve and star of TV series Crikey!
It's the Irwins shares his travel tips



I KEEP MYSELF ENTERTAINED WHILE TRAVELLING BY...

I always bring a book. It was my sister Bindi who first got me interested in reading when I was young.

ON MY BUCKET LIST IS...

The Middle East. I've always wanted to go to Yemen to see veiled chameleons. They're one of my favourites.

IF YOU'RE INTERESTED IN CONSERVATION, I RECOMMEND YOU GO TO...

Lady Elliot Island on the Great Barrier Reef. It's this incredible UNESCO-listed place and they are doing great work to restore the bio habitat on the island and the reef around it.

THE COUNTRY WITH THE MOST DIVERSE ANIMAL INHABITANTS IS...

New Zealand - they have the craziest animals like the tuatara. It has been on the planet for over 200 million years they are a living relative to dinosaurs.

MY FAVOURITE ANIMALS ARE...

Crocodiles - 100 per cent, I've always loved crocs. I think they're really misunderstood creatures, and they are actually really intelligent with individual personalities.

I RESPECT WILDLIFE WHEN I TRAVEL BY...

Supporting sustainable tourism. The world is going through some tough issues at the moment, and it's so important to think about where you go and what you buy.





Return to Paradise

Four Seasons Resort Mauritius is set to reopen with new features and renovated design this October

One of the most sought-after vacation destinations globally, Mauritius isn't short of hotels and resorts. But if it's the *crème de la crème* you're seeking from your Indian Ocean getaway, it has to be Four Seasons Resort Mauritius at Anahita. Nestled between tropical landscape and connected to the blue waters of the Indian Ocean via the island's largest lagoon, it's a tropical paradise that brings tranquillity and content.

But its inherently peaceful setting isn't all the beautiful resort has to offer, as there are plenty of excitement-inducing activities to engage in. First up is The Lobby Bar, which will make its debut as the resort reopens, inviting visitors to sip on exotic drink mixes as they overlook the sparkling lagoon. Centred around an open bar counter, guests can watch on as the talented mixologists shake things up. Bambou is likewise mixing things up, as the revamped

restaurant and bar has been extended to include beautiful beachfront seating – making it the perfect place for a scenic breakfast, lunch or dinner.

With so many invitations to indulge, Four Seasons Resort Mauritius provides equally as many prospects to adventure-seek and get active. Think riding through the 64 acres of nature on a complimentary bike, heading to one of two championship golf courses for a round (green fees are complimentary for guests), and playing tennis at sunset on the floodlit courts. With three secluded beaches – including the exclusive Four Seasons Beach on the nearby island of Ile aux Cerfs – there's also ample opportunity to take part in watersports, and even embark on a marine education adventure, as the resort works in partnership with WiseOceans to restore the reef.

And if the water is your scene of choice, then head to The Spa at Four Seasons during your blissful vacation and enjoy a

relaxing treatment while overlooking the Indian Ocean. Enjoy a solo or couple's massage in a private treatment room, and you'll also be granted your own steam room to further unwind in.

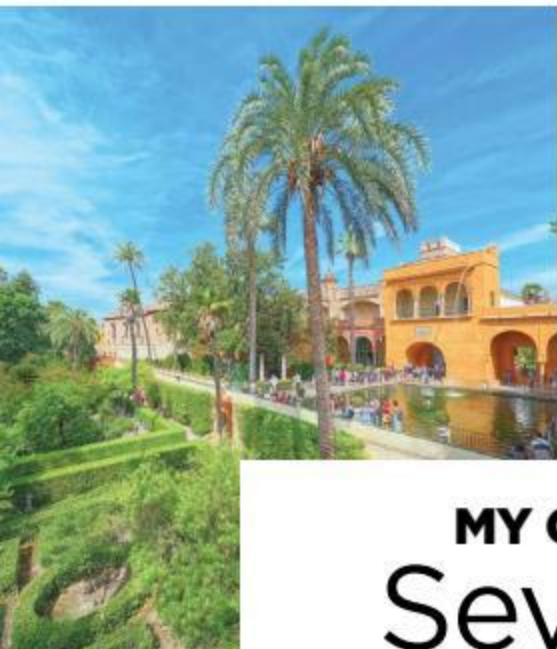
Lastly, it's the accommodation that puts the resort at the top of everyone's list. In particular, the expansive villas complete with a pool and tropical gardens are the perfect private sanctuary. Villas range from one to five bedrooms, so there's plenty of space if you're travelling with family. After action-packed days of exploring everything the resort has to offer, it's hard to beat a dining experience enjoyed on your very own outdoor terrace with the ones you love the most.

Whether visiting once again or exploring it for the first time, Four Seasons Resort Mauritius will transform your highly anticipated holiday into an unforgettable vacation of a lifetime.

To find out more, visit [fourseasons.com/mauritius](https://www.fourseasons.com/mauritius).



This page, clockwise from below: gardens of Royal Alcazar; cathedral bell tower seen from the garden courtyard; the flamenco performed on Plaza de Espana; Metropol Parasol, in the old quarter of the city



MY CITY Seville

Brand strategist **Idalia Salsamendi** is the founder of Idalia Salsamendi Inc

What makes Seville special?

In order to answer this question properly, I have to take you back to 2005 when I travelled to Seville for the very first time with my mother and brother. It was part of a two-week trip to Spain and there was something undeniably magical about stepping foot in Seville. Tucked into the south of Spain, and with such a poignant history, the city immediately took my breath away. Its seamless blend of Mudejar, Roman, and Spanish architecture envelops the curiosity and awe of anyone who wanders its streets. You can hear the sound of flamenco dancers on almost every corner, and smell the delectable notes of orange blossom (my favourite scent) no matter where you are. On that trip, I remember sitting by the Guadalquivir River with tears in my eyes telling my mother, "One day I will come back and live here." Fast forward almost ten years to that date, I just so happened to meet a guy in New York City who was from a town right outside Seville. I couldn't stop talking to him about the hold the city had on me, and that one day I would go



Idalia Salsamendi

back there. Little did I know I would end up marrying this man and eventually moving to Seville. Funny how life works.

My favourite place in Seville

If you really want to savour the picturesque beauty of Seville, walk on over to my favourite neighborhood, El Barrio Santa Cruz. This labyrinth of narrow and winding cobblestone streets dates back to the former Jewish quarter of the medieval city. It's also home to The Real Alcazar, the Cathedral of Seville, and La Giralda (the converted minaret of the old Moorish mosque). It's your one-stop-shop to explore the city's history and beauty.

My favourite places for culture

Seville is truly a treasure trove of a city. You can't walk a block without being mesmerized by its grandiosity. The one place I always find myself coming back to because of its rich history and culture is The Real Alcazar, the famous royal palace. The palace has been the backdrop of some of the greatest events in the history of Spain – it's actually Europe's oldest palace still in use. I spend equal amounts of time here being mesmerized by its rooms as I am by its magnificent gardens.





This page, from left to right:
traditional spinach and chickpea
stew; Seville, as seen from above

My favourite places to eat

Within the past five years the culinary scene has really escalated and the city is that much better for its blend of diversity and traditionalism. One of my favoured spots is Mano de Santo, a chic and upbeat Mexican institution in the city. Although they have expanded to several locations within Seville, my favourite location remains the original one in the neighborhood of Alameda de Hercules. If you're looking for something more traditional but with a modern twist, head to Eslava. It's a tourist-heavy restaurant, but trust me when I say it's worth the visit. One of their most popular dishes, el cigarro de becquer, is not one to be missed. Calamari wrapped up as if it were a cigar, once you take your first bite you'll be calling the waiter over to order you another one.

My favourite places to shop

Something that's very unique to Seville is its ceramics, specifically in the neighborhood of Triana. If you're looking for a truly authentic shopping experience, immerse yourself in the art of ceramics and pottery that date back to the Neolithic period. Ceramics gave way to the rise of Seville's architectural style. Most of these mosaics and tiles were painted by hand, and to this day you can see original ones.

My favourite attractions

When anyone thinks of Seville, their mind immediately turns to flamenco. It originated in this area of Spain, and



'One of my favourite restaurants is Mano de Santo, a chic and upbeat Mexican institution in the city'

since its recorded birth between the 9-14th century, this folkloric dance entrances all who watch it. Whether it's seeing it danced out on the street in front of a neighborhood bar, or a hall dedicated to the art, you really can't go wrong. Historically, because stories were not written down, the Andalusians would tell their stories through flamenco to express intense emotion.

If you do only one thing while in Seville, I recommend...

Walking. The city is big enough to explore, yet small enough to do it all by foot rather comfortably. Allow your eyes to wander, and the sights, sounds, and smells of the city to wrap you in their glory.



RIXOS
PREMIUM DUBAI

Blissful Beach Escapes

Surrounded by city buzz or secluded on a picture-perfect island, Rixos Premium has the perfect resort for you

Golden sands, salty sea air, and the soul-soothing sound of waves gently cascading onto the shores; there's nothing quite like a beach getaway. If you like yours teamed with luxury accommodation, five-star service and an inviting selection of dining and entertainment options, then Rixos Premium is calling you to come and explore its magnificent offerings. But which premium UAE destination to choose?

Rixos Premium Dubai

If you like to be in the beating heart of a city – without forfeiting proximity to open waters – then Rixos Premium Dubai is the idyllic getaway for you. Located on JBR's famous beachfront, guests can not only enjoy the private beach stretch and lively Azure Beach Club, but access to endless entertainment options right on their doorstep. Think a luxury cinema, high-end retailers

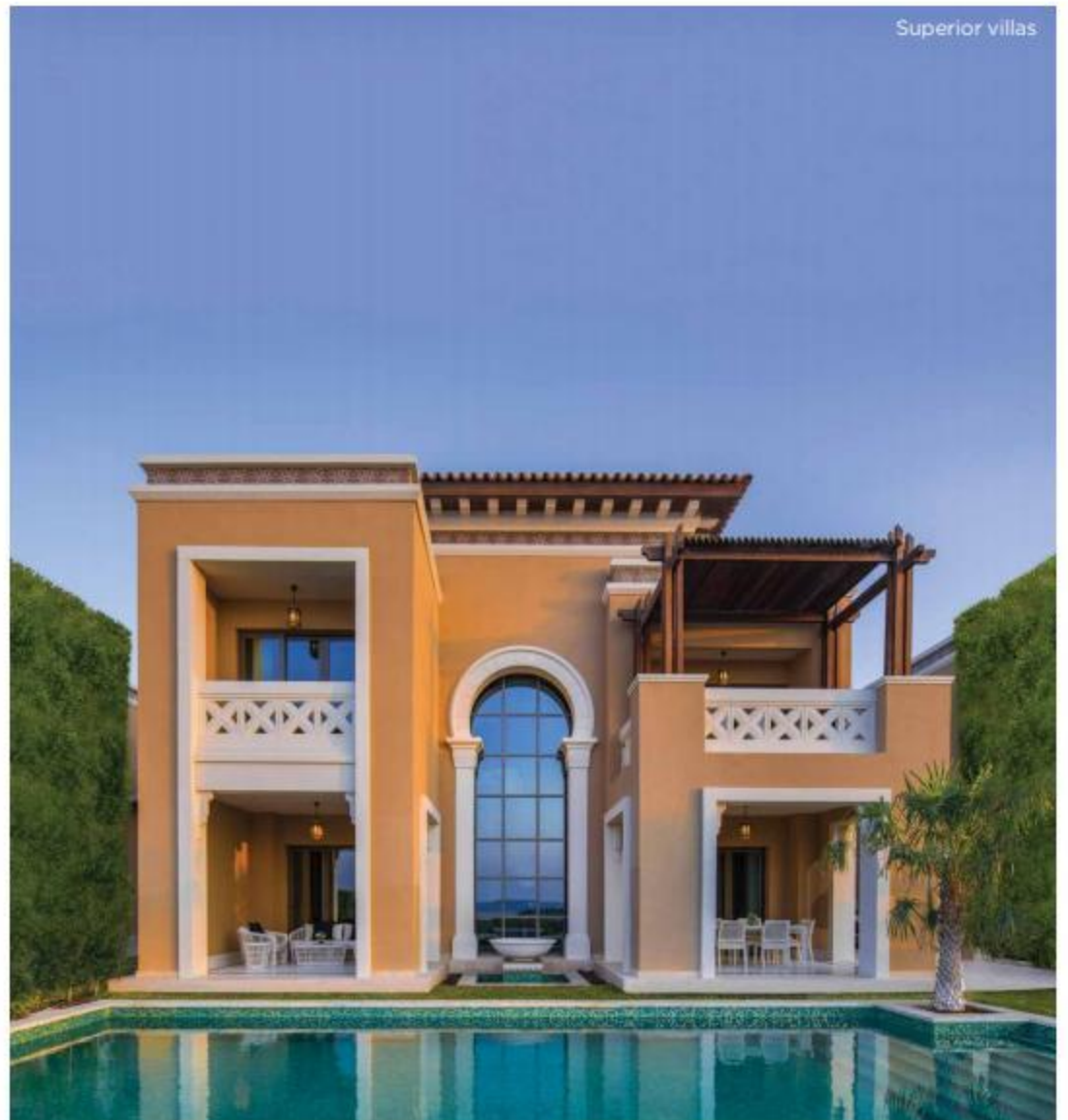
and numerous bars and dining outlets. As for Rixos Premium Dubai itself, the five-star resort boasts a plethora of award-winning restaurants; Ammos serves up tantalising Greek cuisine; STK is the steakhouse with a reputation as one of the best nights out in Dubai; Turquoise's open-buffet concept features an irresistible selection of international cuisine. Then there's the stylish accommodation championing contemporary-luxe design and panoramic views; watching the sunset over the Arabian Gulf as the world's largest Ferris wheel, Ain Dubai, lights up will be a view forever imprinted in guests' memories. For an uplifting beach escape, look no further than this coastal gem.

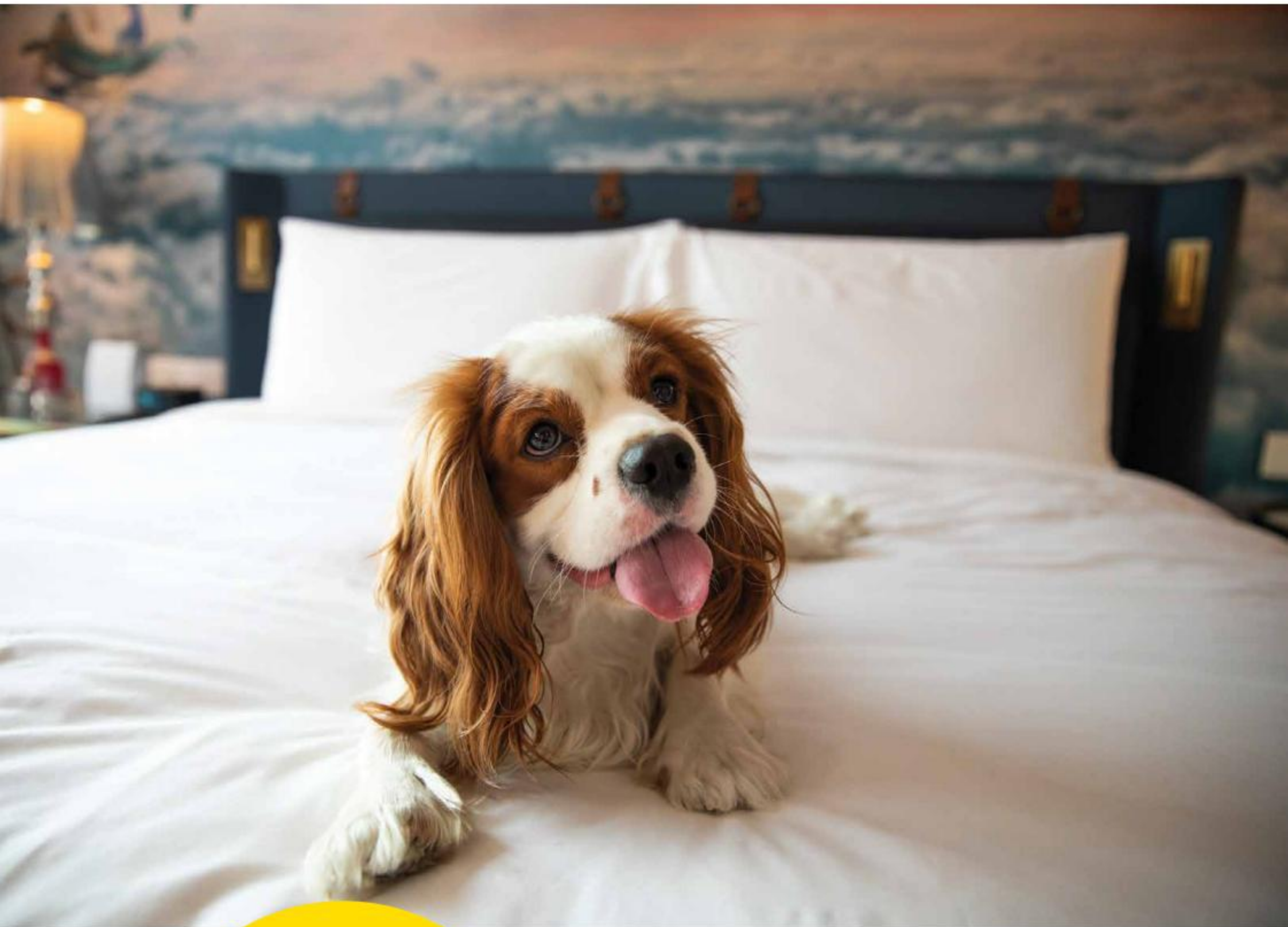
Club Privé by Rixos Premium Saadiyat Island

Forget what you know about luxury, as hotel newcomer Club Privé by Rixos Premium Saadiyat Island – set to open in late 2021 – takes it to the next level. Stay in one of Club Privé's

spacious villas, and you can expect enhanced privacy, ultimate relaxation and All-Inclusive, All-Exclusive amenities of Rixos Premium Saadiyat Island. Spend the days relaxing on the private beach stretch often named the most beautiful in the Gulf, or explore the UNESCO heritage site island famed for housing the world's largest single concentration of premier cultural assets. If relaxation is a priority, then leave the little ones to play at the Rixy Kids Club as you take advantage of the all-inclusive pampering services at Anjana Spa. Guests can also head to the exclusive lounge, Club House, to experience creative global dishes around the clock, or explore the various on-site dining destinations promising a sensory journey to delight the palate. Evoke all the senses with a luxury beach getaway like no other at Club Privé by Rixos Premium Saadiyat Island.

Find out more at rixos.com.





SIX OF THE BEST

UAE PET STAYCATION SPOTS

Because your pet pup deserves a weekend away, too

1

Hotel Indigo Dubai Downtown, Dubai

If your pet more into Picasso than chasing pigeons in the park, then take them for a weekend of high culture at the pet-friendly **Hotel Indigo Dubai Downtown**. The boutique hotel overlooking the Dubai Canal is packed with artistic expression, from the gallery located within the lobby showcasing local artists' work to the fanciful wall decor in every room. As for your pooch, they'll receive a welcome pet amenity kit

upon arrival, their own bowl for use upon stay, a pet bed for a great night's sleep and free snacks when dining in or ordering food from Open Sesame. As pup retires for the evening, humans can explore the nightlife options – speakeasy haunt, Off The Wall, and Orange Feels Bar and Shisha Lounge. Or if you're keen to venture further out, the hotel is located just 10 minutes away from The Dubai Mall and Burj Khalifa.

2

Radisson RED Hotel Dubai Silicon Oasis Dubai

Looking for a hotel that will leave you (and your pup) more inspired than switched off? Then why not check out the **Radisson RED** – the first of its kind in the Middle East – that opened up its doors in Dubai Digital Park last year. Contemporary design means there's always something to catch your eye around every corner, from the graphic art that coats the hotel walls to the red-painted bicycles that make

for picture-worthy decor. If not exploring the surrounding smart city (packed with retail shops and dining outlets), guests can cool off in the rooftop pool, work up a sweat in the on-site fitness centre or battle it out with a game of table tennis. Since four-legged friends are permitted to accompany their two-legged pals to OUIBar + Terrace, it's perfect for a bite and a beverage with your best buddy of an evening.



3

Vida Beach Resort Umm Al Quwain

Whilst many **Vida Hotels** are pet-friendly, we're opting for the newly opened beach resort in Umm Al Quwain as the temperature begins to cool. The name gives away its shore-side location, and Vida fans will be familiar with the sleek and soothing interior design that runs from signature café, Origins, to the 135 rooms up for grabs. Just mention your accompanying pup when booking to be assigned a pet-friendly room,

and keep an eye out for areas throughout the hotel where they're allowed to roam free. Ensuring you can still travel light, you can pick up a pet bed, feeding bowls, and toys are available to use during your stay. Visitors seeking a slice of relaxation need to make time for The Spa by Vida during the day, with signature massages, facials and scrubs on offer, before enjoying rooftop drinks at SoCal by night.



4

RAK Glamping Ras Al-Khaimah

Your dog a little more down to Earth? **RAK Glamping** ground it is, then. Reconnect with nature in this delightful glamp site that boasts nine acres of (fenced!) desert ground that includes Hajar Mountain views. Stay in a cosy wooden cabin or a traditional Bedouin tent and spend the evening barbecuing and stargazing with your furry friend by your side. A haven for outdoorsy types, a weekend in RAK can

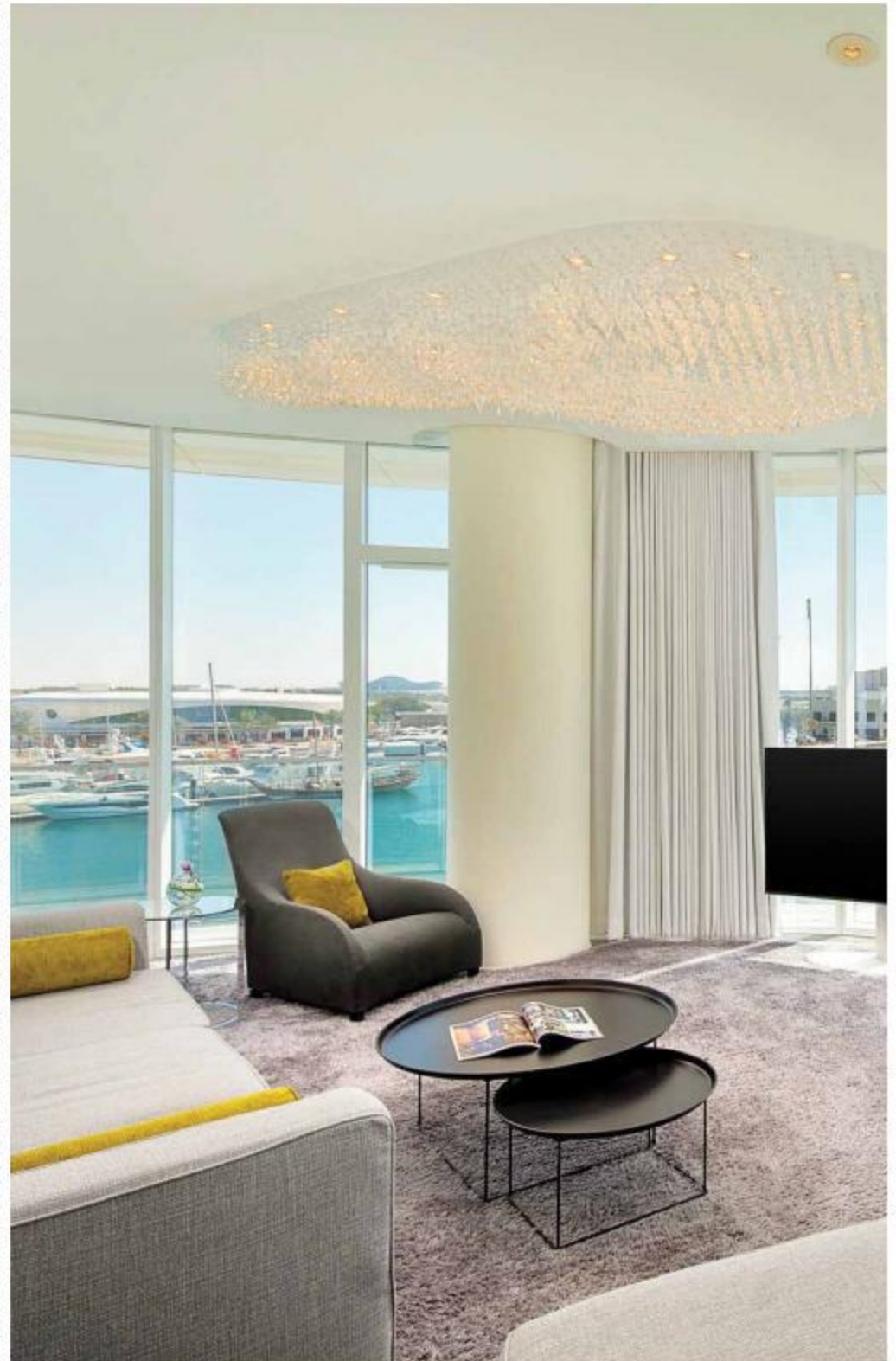
be spent kayaking beside the mangroves, cycling through Jebel Jais, darting along the world's longest zipline, or hiking around Wadi Shawka. Leave your dog at the onsite daycare as you explore and rest assured they're in good hands; the site owners have a background in animal care (as a previous Veterinary Practice Manager and Master Dog Trainer) and two canines of their own. They even make dog-friendly ice cream...

5

W Abu Dhabi Abu Dhabi

Cats and dogs – or even goldfish – eager to visit the capital should book a night at **W Abu Dhabi**. One of few animal-friendly resorts in the emirate (and the only five-star one), a staycation at the Yas Island hotel is a special treat for pet parents, too. Extremely accommodating, the hotel allows for animals weighing up to 18 kilograms to stay with their owners, and provide all the essentials (treats, toys, bed, litter) free

of charge. But being able to bring your supersized or teeny-tiny companion isn't the only draw here; it's the only hotel in the world to be located atop a Grand Prix racetrack, and its surrounded by action-packed activities. Yas Island is home to multiple theme and adventure parks including Ferrari World, features the largest shopping mall in Abu Dhabi and boasts a state of the art marina front and a gorgeous beach.



6

JA Hatta Fort Hotel Dubai

Another vote for the 'back to nature' approach, but this time not without the modern luxuries that a four-star hotel has to offer. This mountain resort is a popular option for people looking to hike and kayak the weekend away but retire to a kitted-out hotel room as night falls. With so much adventure on your doorstep at **JA Hatta Fort Hotel** – from ziplines to mountain biking trails – and plenty to keep you occupied

within – numerous eateries, a sunset terrace bar and a sun-soaking pool – the resort is an all-rounder. On site, dogs of any size are welcome, and they can roam free in a designated outdoor marquee, but will have to remain on a lead when exploring further afield. With childrens' clubs and childcare facilities also available, this Hatta escape is the perfect spot for the entire family to retreat for the weekend.





HOW TO DO SAN FRANCISCO

Kick back in the original hippie city for outdoor loveliness and fab food. The sun may have set on the Summer of Love, but the City by the Bay is still one of the loveliest spots for urban outdoor fun. A rarefied place, where the city melts into the water, redwoods stretch into the sky and skyscrapers get swaddled in fog rolling in off the Pacific. Layer up (beach doesn't mean bikini) and get back to nature.

Words: Julia Buckley



These pages, clockwise from right: classic view of San Francisco's steep streets; cable cars on California Street; Golden Gate Bridge



the newly founded United Nations congregated here in 1945. A wheelchair-accessible boardwalk winds through the trees.

• **There are redwoods in the city,** too — a whole grove in the San Francisco Botanical Garden within the whopping Golden Gate Park. The 22-hectare garden is crammed with 8,000 plants from all over the world, but you're here for the local bits: the rambling California Native Garden, with poppies and tree daisies running wild, and the groves of Monterey cypress, pine and eucalyptus.

• **These days, the Mission district** is rated for nightlife and shopping, but this city's historic Latin American hub is also known for its political murals. A weekend walking tour with Precita Eyes (precitaeyes.org) will take you through Balmy Alley, where artists are constantly reworking and painting over walls to give their take on world events and human rights issues.

• **The farm-to-table movement** began here, and you can see why at the Ferry Plaza Farmers' Market. Wander around stands brimming with produce, then break for a grilled artisan cheese-of-the-day sandwich from Sidekick Cafe and Milk Bar. That should set you up for an afternoon at Alcatraz — boats leave for the infamous prison island from the nearby Pier 33, but advance booking is a must. It's very popular.

• **Bid farewell to the city from Twin Peaks** — two conical hills topping a ridge above the Castro Theatre. Depending on the fog, the 360-degree views take in the entire Bay area, from Oakland to San Francisco's 8km Pacific-pounded beach. Follow the mist down to Fort Funston Beach for one last wind-blown stroll below 60-metre sand-dune bluffs.

SEE & DO

• **Your first San Francisco moment:** standing on the rust-coloured Golden Gate Bridge, boats chugging by underneath. Cycle there in style — rent an electric bike from Blazing Saddles (blazingsaddles.com), then mooch along Crissy Field, a misty beach with wild views of the bridge, and up through Presidio Park — its steep incline will convince you that you made the right choice going electric.

• **On the other side of the Golden Gate** are the rumped, emerald Marin Headlands. Wind your way to the

far western tip, where a footbridge cantilevered over the void takes you to Point Bonita Lighthouse, saviour of many a ship. Weave north to the Marine Mammal Center, which rescues seals and sea lions along the coast, to meet its honking in-patients.

• **California's gentle giants** — the famous redwood trees — are just 20 minutes' drive north of the Golden Gate Bridge at Muir Woods. The ethereal Cathedral Grove, its trees lined up like Olympian-sized columns, feels so peaceful that delegates from

EAT

Japantown stalwart

MUMS

It's been going strong for 36 years with its homely, tasty Japanese-American menu. The signature shabu-shabu — tendrils of rib-eye and veg stewed DIY at the table — is included in an all-you-can-eat dinner each evening. mumssf.com

Cult Chinese

MISSION CHINESE FOOD

Behind the facade of the nondescript Lung Shan restaurant, Mission Chinese Food is known for its superb Sichuan dishes as well as inventive crossovers such as Chongqing chicken wings. Book ahead — once a queue fest, it now takes reservations. missionchinesefood.com

Chi-chi beatniks

TOSCA

The once infamous dive bar is today an Italian restaurant owned by star chef April Bloomfield, with top dishes including San Fran anchovies and polenta with mascarpone and parmesan. This is Beat territory — across the street you'll find both Vesuvio, Jack Kerouac's one-time pub, and Ferlinghetti's bookshop, toscacafesf.com

Stellar vegetarian

GREENS

This vegetarian restaurant helped kick off the farm-to-table scene 40 years ago, mostly using produce grown on its sister farm near Muir Beach. Ask for a window table overlooking the Golden Gate Bridge. greensrestaurant.com

Pasta master

COTOGNA

Hailing from the same restaurant group as Michelin-starred Quince — though more casual — at communal wooden tables sit diners who have come here solely for the fantastic fresh pasta. Probably. It's best enjoyed as the single oversized ravioli.





STAY

Zen style

KIMPTON BUCHANAN

In Japantown, this beautifully simple hotel is peaceful, excellent value and thoroughly un-American with its kimonos and in-room easels. Its untouristy location — 15 minutes from Fisherman's Wharf — keeps prices down. You're a few seconds' walk from the best mochi in San Francisco at Benkyodo.

Family-friendly spot

HOTEL ZEPHYR

Just off jaunty Fisherman's Wharf, and almost within earshot of its loud resident sea lions, this fun hotel, all portholes and decorative rope, works the family-friendly nautical vibe. There's even a backyard with a firepit. Go for a Partial Bay View room if you want to gaze on Alcatraz from beneath your 'SOS' blanket.

Golden Gate digs

CAVALLO POINT

At the foot of the Golden Gate

Bridge, this former military base has been transformed into a high-class, understated resort. Nights are quiet but for the sound of the foghorns of passing ships (use the in-room earplugs). Book a room in a new-build block for floor-to-ceiling windows, often skewed towards the bridge.

Rooms with a view

INN ABOVE TIDE

All rooms at this gorgeous B&B, cantilevered over the water in Sausalito, overlook the Bay, Alcatraz and the city beyond. The in-room breakfasts and nightly cheese and wine are worth staying in for. Take one of its bikes to the Golden Gate Bridge to work off breakfast.

City slicker

FOUR SEASONS HOTEL AT EMBARCADERO

It occupies the top 11 floors of one of the city's highest buildings, offering silky-chic rooms and with

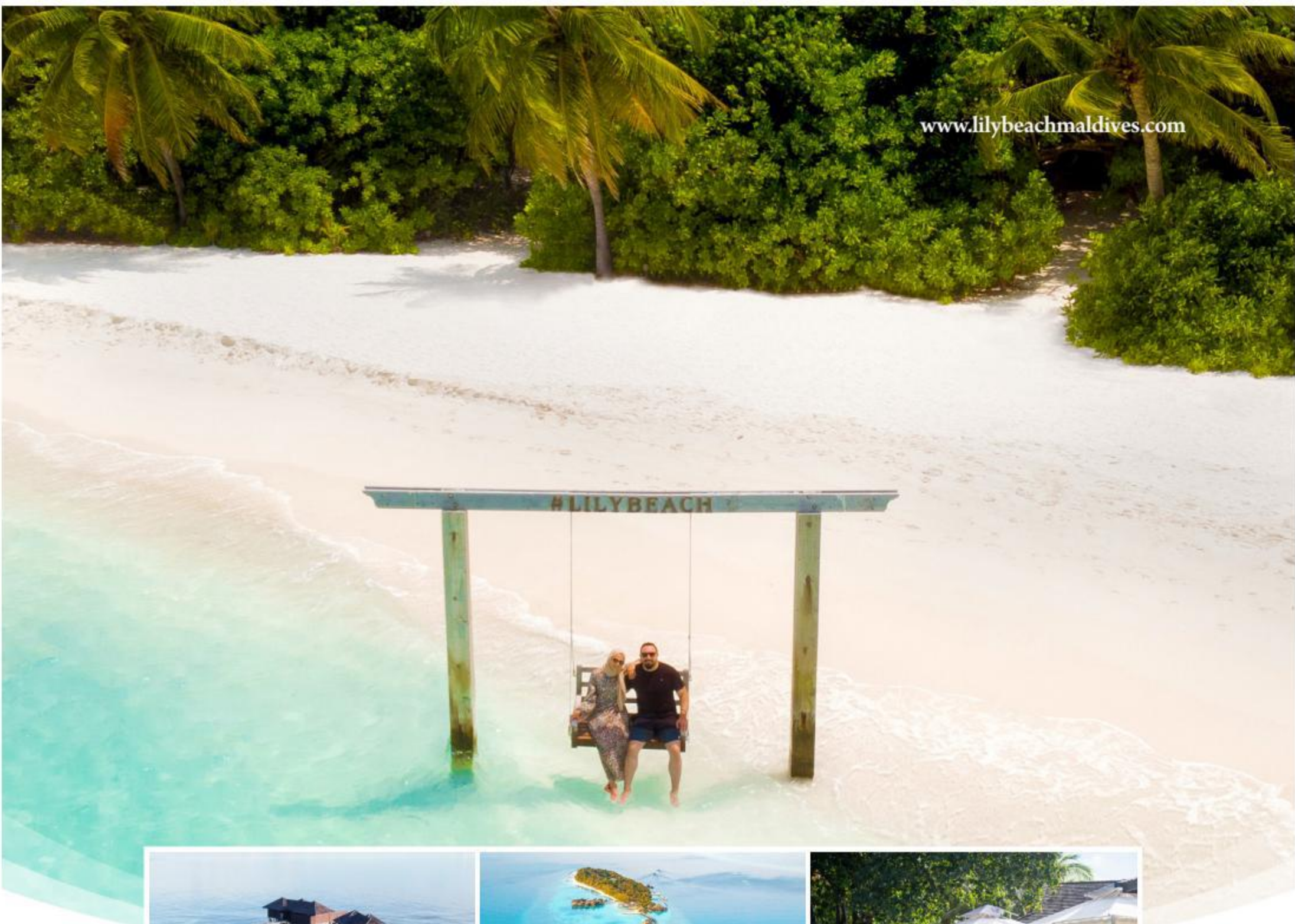
Left: Ravioli at Cotogna

Above: Four Seasons Hotel At Embarcadero

'bridge-to-bridge' views from the Bay Bridge to the Golden Gate — yours to enjoy from the Sky Deck, which opens in 2022. Don't pay for an official bay view — the City View rooms have fascinating glimpses of the Bay through skyscraper-spiked hills.

Top Tip

Many road-trip along Highway One between San Fran and L.A. The journey time is eight hours, but it's best enjoyed as a week-long trip.



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A once-in-a-lifetime experience awaits you at Lily Beach Resort & Spa, where luxury and bliss entwine together under the vibrant colours of the setting sun. The natural beauty of the Maldives surrounds this award-winning, 5-star resort, just a short 25-minute seaplane flight from the international airport. An encompassing All-Inclusive Platinum plan, delectable food options, and a variety of leisure and sporting activities create the perfect holiday for couples and families alike.


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Postcards

Stories from far
and wide

CROATIA p34

TUSCANY p42

MAURITIUS p48

THE COAST IS CLEAR

Your guide to **Croatia's** majestic coastline





Croatia offers more than 1,100 miles of meandering mainland coast backed by rugged limestone mountains, along with hundreds of scattered islands and islets, of

which 47 are inhabited. It is also dotted with historic and beautifully preserved harbour towns, relics of the four centuries between 1420 and 1797 when it was occupied by the Venetians. This combination makes it the perfect option for those who like to combine cultural sightseeing with lazing on the beach.

But where to go? Within each of Croatia's coastal regions – South Dalmatia, Central Dalmatia, North Dalmatia, Kvarner and Istria – we've highlighted one beach and two standout towns, along with a nearby not-to-be-missed inland attraction, food and hotel recommendations. Remember that there's very little sand in Croatia – almost all the beaches are of pebble and rock, or in some cases you swim from man-made concrete bathing platforms with steps into the sea.

SOUTH DALMATIA

Dubrovnik, formerly known as Ragusa, was for centuries a wealthy independent city-republic, which slowly expanded to include a stretch of coast and the tiny Elafiti islets.

From Dubrovnik's Gruž port, you can make day trips by boat to the Elafiti, as well as the island of Mljet, where Mljet National Park encompasses two stunning turquoise lakes, rimmed by dense woodland – rent a bike and cycle around the lakes, or hire a kayak and paddle across.

Northwest up the coast, tiny Ston (famed for excellent fresh oysters and mussels) is the gateway to the rugged Pelješac peninsular, which produces some of Croatia's top red wines, notably Dingač. Opposite Pelješac, verdant Korčula is South Dalmatia's biggest island.

Go visit

Dubrovnik

Dubbed the 'Pearl of the Adriatic' by Lord Byron, Dubrovnik is Croatia's most visited (and expensive) destination. In the past, its extraordinary wealth was

'SPLIT'S OLD TOWN IS A LABYRINTH OF STONE ALLEYS AND VENETIAN-ERA HOUSES'

based on seafaring and trading – today it thrives on tourism. The UNESCO-listed old town is protected by sturdy medieval fortifications. Walk a full circuit of the ramparts, then explore the stone alleys, packed with noble Baroque palazzi, elegant churches, museums, restaurants, cafes and souvenir shops. Even first-time visitors may well recognise the city – it stars as the fictional King's Landing in *Game of Thrones*.

Korčula Town

Perched on a tiny fortified peninsula on the island of Korčula, this medieval settlement is based on a herringbone plan, with a series of stone stepped alleys leading up to a main pedestrianised thoroughfare. On the main square, see the 16th-century cathedral with a finely carved portal, and nearby, the dubious 'birthplace' of the explorer Marco Polo (a small stone cottage, open to the public).

Hit the beach

Escape Dubrovnik's summer crowds with a ferry ride to the nearby islet of Lopud, home to Šunj, one of Croatia's rare sandy beaches. The sea is warm and shallow, ideal for children, and there are several beach bars hiring sun-beds.

Head inland

Green and rugged Konavle offers a glimpse of old-fashioned Dalmatian rural villages, which for centuries provided Dubrovnik with wine, olive oil, cheeses, meat and vegetables. Have lunch by the waterfalls at Konavoski Dvori, then drive down to the 15th-century Sokol Tower at Dunave for superb views over the valley, with its elegant cypress trees and carefully tended vineyards.

Eat up

A rustic agrotourism eatery, the lovely Konoba Maha serves local specialities such as Korčulanski makaruni (homemade pasta with a rich meat and tomato sauce) and barbecued lamb. It lies in the hills behind Korčula Town.

Stay in style

On the coast, immediately outside Dubrovnik's medieval walls, Hotel Excelsior offers understated luxury and a spa.

CENTRAL DALMATIA

Split, Croatia's second biggest city (after the capital, Zagreb) is backed by rugged mountains, and fronted by a busy little port, with regular ferries and catamarans to the nearby islands of Brač, Hvar, Vis, as well as Korčula and Lastovo (officially in South Dalmatia).

Down the coast from Split, Mt Biokovo rises 1,762m, casting its shadow over the 40-mile Makarska Rivijera, where you'll find some of Croatia's best mainland beaches and shimmering turquoise waters. Up the coast, Šibenik is an up-and-coming destination with a UNESCO-listed cathedral and two renovated fortresses.

Go visit

Split

Within the walls of Diocletian's Palace, a magnificent Roman monument built by the eponymous emperor in the 3rd-century, Split's old town is UNESCO-listed. A labyrinth of stone alleys, Venetian-era houses and churches, it centres on the Roman peristyle (arcaded square), overlooked by the cathedral. Immediately outside the walls, the pazar is a colourful open-air fruit-and-vegetable market.

West of town, in a 1930s villa set in gardens by the sea, the Meštrović Gallery displays the works of Croatia's greatest 20th-century sculptor, Ivan Meštrović.

Hvar Town

Croatia's trendiest island destination, Hvar Town on the island of Hvar is built around a deep sheltered harbour, overlooked by a hilltop castle. Hvar's pricey seafood restaurants and cocktail bars are much loved by yachters, who moor up along the quayside on

summer evenings.

The best beach

An absolute stunner, Zlatni Rat is a 450-metre long fine pebble spit, jutting out from the coast in Bol on the island of Brač. It's a fantastic spot for water sports – try wind surfing, kite surfing and scuba diving, or just hire a pedalo.

Head inland

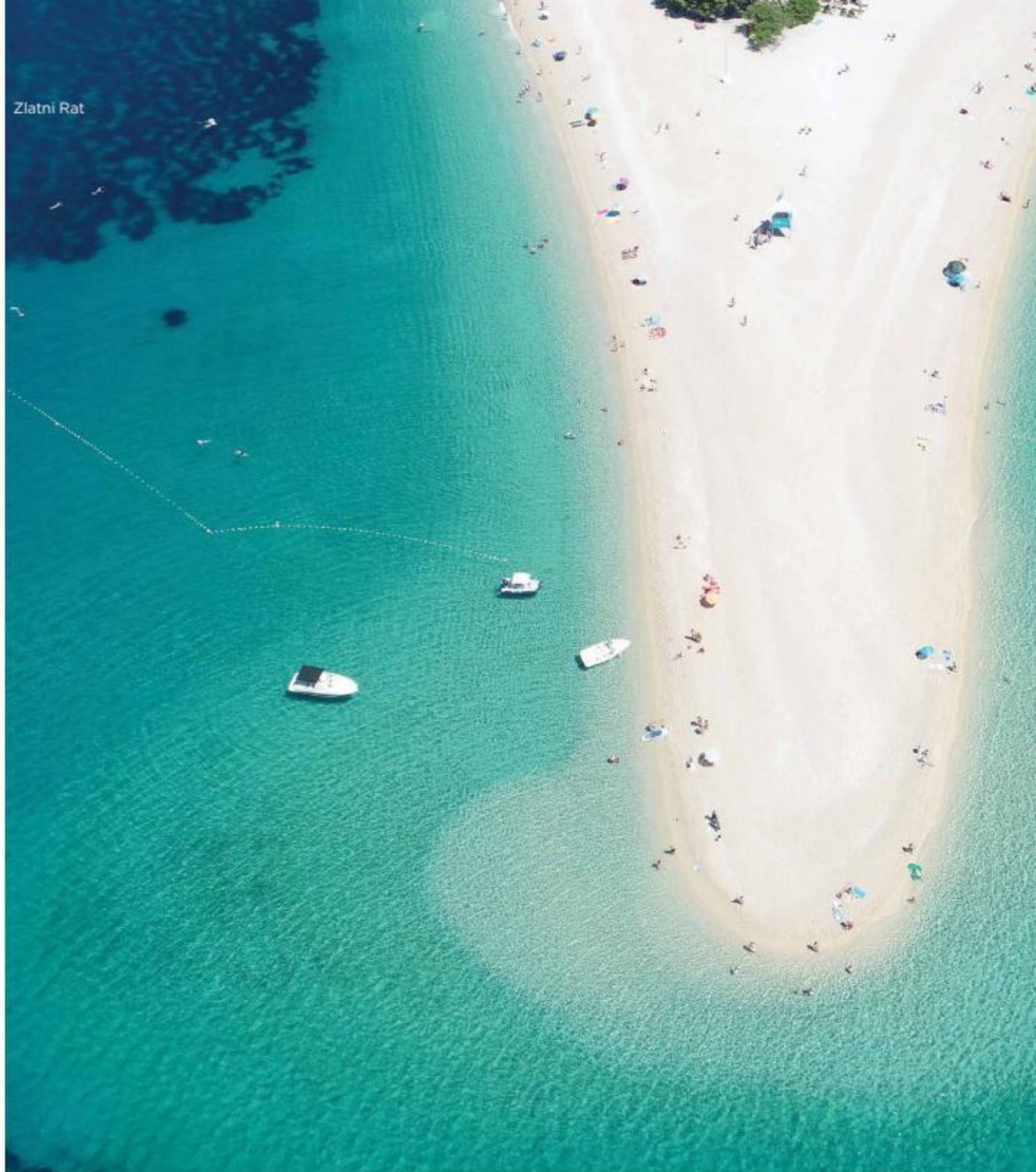
From the seaside town of Šibenik, excursion boats sail up the River Krka to Krka National Park near Skradin. Immersed in dense woodland, the river thunders through a rocky gorge, in a series of rapids and seven waterfalls – at Skradinski buk you can swim below a waterfall that creates a natural Jacuzzi.

Eat up

For sophisticated contemporary dining, book a table at Pelegrini, opposite Šibenik's cathedral. Chef Rudolf Štefan uses seasonal Dalmatian ingredients to create dishes such as hake with Jerusalem artichokes and prosciutto, or lamb with beans. It gained a Michelin star in 2019.

Stay in style

Overlooking the harbour in Hvar Town,



AN ABSOLUTE STUNNER, ZLATNI RAT IS A 450-METRE LONG SPIT, JUTTING OUT FROM THE COAST

Go visit

Zadar

Built on a small peninsula, fortified by the Venetians, Zadar's car-free old town centres on what was once a Roman forum. It is home to the 9th century Church of St Donat and the 12th century Cathedral of St Anastasia, with a bell-tower you can climb for fantastic views of the town, sea and mountains.

For something more contemporary, on the seafront promenade you'll find two quirky installations, the Sea Organ (2005) and the Greeting to the Sun (2008), both by local architect Nikola Bašić.

Starigrad Paklenica

This seaside town is the starting point for exploring Paklenica National Park on the southern slopes of Velebit. Hike up the Velika Paklenica Canyon to Manita Peć, a limestone cave adorned with stalactites and stalagmites, which you can visit with a guide.

The best beach

A wide arc of smooth white stones fringes the translucent turquoise bay, backed by pinewoods, at Saharun beach, near Božava on the island of Dugi Otok. It's quite remote but you can arrive by excursion boat from Zadar.

Head inland

Drive through rural Lika to visit the Nikola Tesla Memorial Centre in Smiljan, near Gospić. Inventor Nikola Tesla was born here in 1856 – see the cottage where he grew up, watch a film about his life, and take part in a demonstration, presenting his discoveries about electricity.

Eat up

In Novalja on the island of Pag, Boškinac uses locally reared lamb and fresh Adriatic seafood to create sublime modern dishes. It was given a Michelin star in 2019.

Stay in style

On the coast, a 15-minute drive north of Zadar, Hotel & Spa Iadera offers contemporary design and a vast luxurious spa.

KVARNER

Overlooking the Kvarner Gulf, and backed by the pine-clad mountains of Gorski Kotar, the industrial port city of Rijeka, with its Austro-Hungarian architecture, was named European Capital of Culture for 2020 (though its programme of events was predictably curtailed).

From Rijeka, ferries and catamarans run to the nearby islands of Lošinj, Cres and Rab, while the nearest and biggest island, Krk, is joined to the mainland by a road bridge. Lošinj, 'the island of vitality', offers several upmarket hotels with spas; wild and rugged Cres is known for sheep farming; Rab has some of Croatia's rare sandy beaches and a medieval capital.

Go visit

Opatija

West of Rijeka, Opatija was the birthplace of Croatian tourism, when wealthy Central Europeans began convalescing here, enjoying the mild climate and therapeutic seawater, in the late 19th century. Today its grand Vienna Secession hotels exude a fading glory, and the seven-mile seaside promenade, running from Volosko to Lovran, passing through Opatija, remains a joy to stroll.

Rab Town

Rising from the sea upon a small narrow peninsula, car-free Rab Town takes you back to medieval times. Three parallel cobbled main alleys are linked by stone steps, with attractions including monasteries, churches and four elegant bell towers.

Hotel Adriana has funky contemporary interiors and a spa with an indoor rooftop pool.

NORTH DALMATIA

Founded by the Romans, Zadar has a tumultuous history, having been raided during the Crusades, heavily bombed during the Second World War, and blockaded during the Croatian War of Independence. Nonetheless, today it's a cheerful university town and popular holiday destination.

Northeast of Zadar, the imposing Velebit mountains run parallel to the coast. From Zadar, ferries run to nearby islands, and excursion boats take day-trippers to the uninhabited rocky islets and turquoise waters of Kornati National Park.

The long skinny rocky island of Pag, known for its flavoursome Paški sir cheese made from sheep's milk, is connected to the mainland by a



The best beach

On Rab's northeast coast, near Lopar, Paradise beach (Rajska plaža) is a sandy one-mile strip with a shallow sea, water sports facilities and beach volleyball.

Head inland

High above the Kvarner Gulf, in the mountains of Gorski Kotar, you'll find Risnjak National Park. From the ticket office at Crni Lug, hike the three-mile Leska educational path, an easy circular route taking you through meadows and woodland and ideal for families with kids.

Eat up

Feast on tuna tartare, homemade ravioli and succulent Kvarner shrimp at Rivica, overlooking the fishing harbour in Njivica on Krk. It's highly esteemed by foodies and sailing crews, and dates from 1934.

Stay In style

On Lošinj, the posh Boutique Hotel Alhambra occupies two early 20th-century villas and offers retro design, sophisticated dining and a spa.

ISTRIA

Sitting on the southern tip of the Istrian peninsula, Pula was founded by the Romans – it's somewhat brash, but is a good starting point for a boat trip to Veliki Brijun, a tiny islet with pristine lawns and woodland within Brijuni National Park.

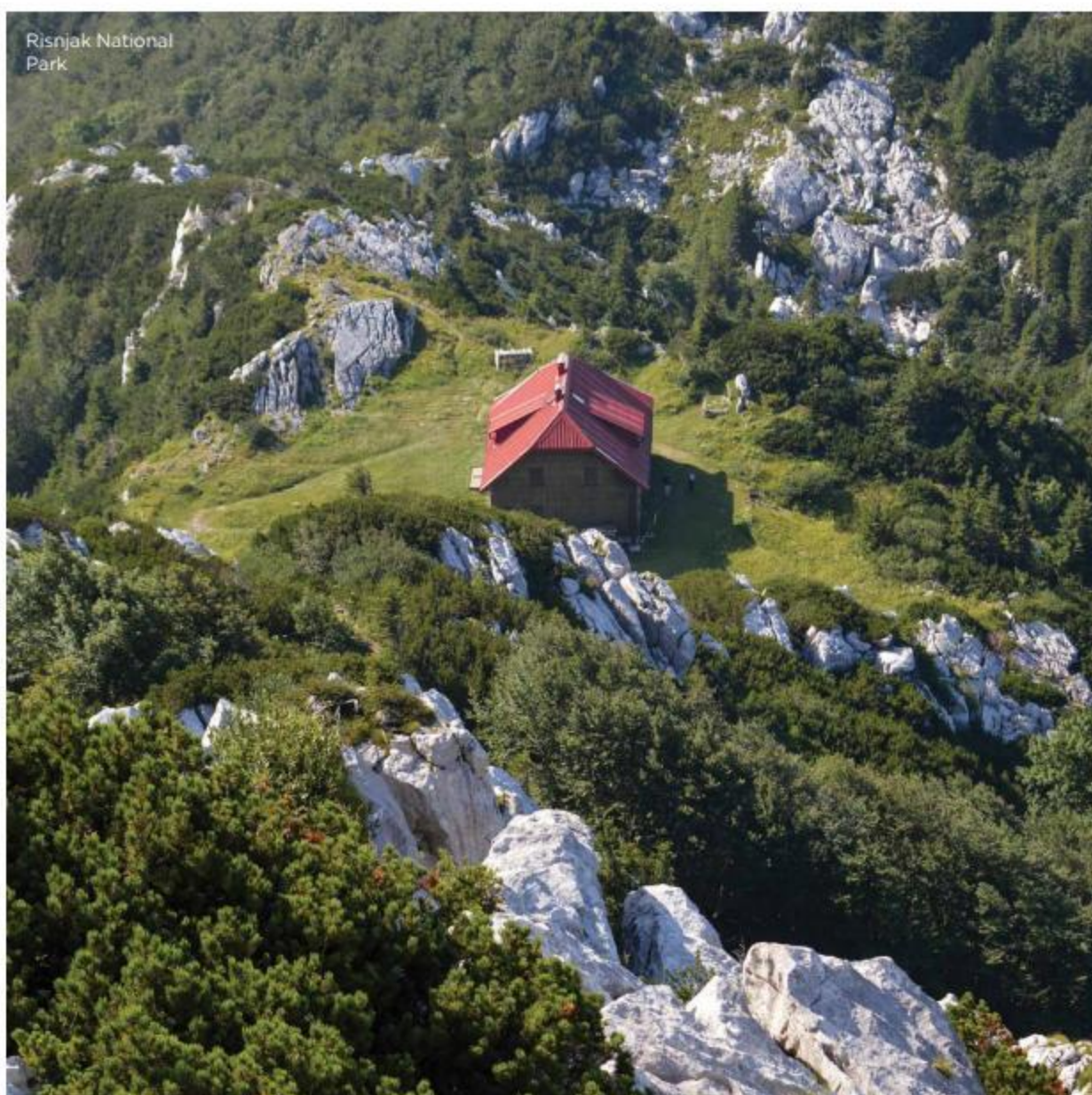
Istria's most popular seaside resorts, Rovinj and Poreč, lie on the west coast, with centuries-old pedestrian-only historic centres, and big modern hotels hidden by landscaping.

Go visit**Pula**

An industrial port with cranes and a shipyard, Pula's ancient Roman monuments include the Forum Square, rimmed with cafes and overlooked by the 1st century Temple of Augustus, a monumental Triumphal Arch, and the Arena, a well-preserved amphitheatre.

Rovinj

On Istria's west coast, Rovinj is one of Croatia's prettiest and most upmarket destinations. Pastel-coloured Venetian-



‘HIKE THROUGH MEADOWS AND WOODLAND IDEAL FOR FAMILIES WITH KIDS’

era facades rim a sheltered harbour, filled with fishing boats and overlooked by an 18th-century hilltop church. South of town, past the sailing marina, Zlatni Rt park is planted with pines, cypresses and cedars, and rimmed by tiny coves with pebble beaches.

The best beach

On the southernmost point of the Istrian peninsula, within the pine-scented Kamenjak Nature Park, Mala Kolombarica is an expanse of flat rocks jutting out into the deep blue Adriatic. Come here to sunbathe, or test your courage diving or somersaulting into the sea. There's a beach bar and it lies just outside Pula.

Head inland

Often compared to Tuscany, inland Istria has undulating hills planted with vineyards and olive groves, and

walled medieval hilltop towns such as Motovun. Foodies will love its agrotourism eateries and rustic konobe (taverns), which make the most of the region's olive oil and cheeses, and the tartufi (truffles) unearthed in the Mirna Valley.

Eat up

With waterside tables rimming the fishing harbour in Rovinj, informal Konoba Kanton specialises in reasonably-priced local fare. Try the monkfish carpaccio, followed by homemade pasta with pungent truffles.

Stay In style

The Grand Park in Rovinj offers elegant contemporary architecture in a blissful coastal location.

Inspired to travel? To book a trip, call +971 4 316 6666 or visit dnatatravel.com



Fruits of devine

Celestial hill towns, heavenly art, vino to die for... Pootling about with her friend Chiara (in Chiara's red Cinquecento), Dana Facaros draws the dream holiday map to **Tuscany**

Chiara and Mario were doing it on purpose. It was late September, but still warm enough for aperitivi outside their old farmhouse overlooking the undulating Val d'Orcia — the ultimate Tuscan photo op. Over the long hot summer, the earth had sucked in enough sun to add an inner glow to the black-dagger cypresses and the chalky hills, blurry in the twilight mist. A decade-old bottle of Brunello filled our glasses as we munched on crusty bread dipped in newly pressed olive oil — Tuscany's green elixir. Then, for the full Tuscan whack, they put on Callas singing Puccini's heart-aching *Un bel dì vedremo* from *Madam Butterfly*. I had to ask: "Come on, do you realise how lucky you are?"

"After 30 years here, we sometimes take it for granted," Mario said. "We need someone to look at it for us, to see it through fresh eyes." And then he screeched. "Dio mio! Garibaldi just pooped in your shoe!" It was just as well that their ginger tom cat broke the spell or I might have collapsed from the surfeit of beauty.

There is Italy, and then there is Tuscany, the gold standard by which all other Italian regions, trying to be the next tourist honeypot, measure themselves. But Tuscany is a tough act to follow. First came the arty Etruscans, who taught the Romans everything they knew. Then, already one of the wealthiest regions in medieval Europe, it invented the Renaissance almost single-handedly. But in the 16th century the money and talent moved to Rome. Tuscany slid into a twilit retirement, leaving much of its incomparable art and architecture, as the Italians say, *com'era, dov'era* ('as it was, where it was'). It's no wonder that I return to the region, not annually, but seasonally, for my fix of beauty.

Of all the many parts in Tuscany where you will be dazzled by its good looks, the hill towns below Siena are the most obvious. Even just a few days here are candy for the soul. Take Pienza, near Chiara and Mario. Nicknamed the 'ideal city', it was built in the 1460s for humanist pope and local lad Pius II.

OF ALL THE MANY PARTS IN TUSCANY WHERE YOU WILL BE DIZZIED BY ITS GOOD LOOKS, THE HILL TOWNS BELOW SIENA ARE THE MOST OBVIOUS

Pienza never became the lightning rod for culture that Pius had hoped — today, it's known best for its sheep's cheese. It never became a city, either. But the centrepiece, Piazza Pio II, with its dreamy air of unfulfilled expectations, is the perfect stage for the daily lives of Pienza's 2,000 residents. Waiting for Mario one day, I watched them meeting up for chats in a slow waltz amid the perfectly proportioned Renaissance palazzi and cathedral. Chiara has a theory that Italians subconsciously dress in colours to match the stone of their town. She may be right.

As we walked through an alleyway, a round wooden cheese mould came hurtling towards us. "Eh, signora! Fai attenzione!" yelled a couple of boys, who were bowling it at a juice packet. I thought it was a game of youthful invention, but it's called *ruzzola*, Mario explained. "They've been playing it here for ever. You can even see Etruscans playing it on a fresco in Tarquinia — only without a juice packet!"

The next day, Chiara and I set off under the blazing sun in her shiny old red Cinquecento. We wound around the cypress-lined lanes that appear on half of Tuscany's postcards: to San Quirico d'Orcia, 10 minutes southwest, alongside Lycra-clad cyclists and Dutch, French and German pilgrims taking

the Via Francigena to Rome. The town's church of Santi Quirico e Giulitta, with mermaids having a tête-à-tête and scaly fish dragons French kissing over the door, was founded in the 8th century, about the same time as the road itself.

Pilgrims on the way to Rome looked forward to soaking in the waters at bijou Bagno Vignoni. Today, the steaming ancient pool, where St Catherine of Siena and Lorenzo de' Medici once dipped, takes the place of a piazza, embraced by Renaissance buildings. Although it's been closed for a few years, others are open; Chiara and I happily wallowed in the Albergo Posta Marcucci's, with priceless views over the hills.

Prune-fingered, we carried on to Montalcino, another hill town on the Via Francigena. It was the time of the vendemmia, or wine harvest, and at a hillside vineyard we watched the workers bring in crates of glistening blue-black bunches, destined to become the divino Brunello.

Heading back to Pienza, we stopped for an espresso in a roadside cafe. "Look at him," Chiara whispered mysteriously, when the barista was out of earshot. Bright eyes, thin face and lips, receding hairline — I drew a blank until she thrust her phone at me. "Machiavelli! A dead ringer!" she laughed. 'It's funny



These pages, clockwise from top left: roses grow aside a winery; Piazza Grande in Arezzo; sunrise over Val d'Orcia; scooter in Cortona; a narrow street in Montalcino, pasta with porcini mushrooms



**These pages, clockwise
from bottom left:** the village
of Monticchiello; Tuscan
hills lit by the sun; lounging
Chianina cattle



‘WATCHING THE SUN SINK BEHIND ITALY’S MOST FAMOUS BACKDROP, CLOUDS SENT DARK SHADOWS ROLLERCOASTING OVER THE HILLS; THE OLIVES TREMBLED SILVER IN THE BREEZE’

how many Tuscan throwbacks you find. Once, in the toll booth on the autostrada near Lucca, there was a Botticelli angel! The most beautiful man I'd ever seen."

Early the next morning, mist still lingered in the hills as we headed east to Cortona. Piled high on a natural balcony, with mesmerising views over the Valdichiana's rolling landscape, Cortona is a bold sight. According to Virgil, it's as old as the hills it perches on, too — one of its pioneer citizens is said to have founded Troy. The Museo dell'Accademia Etrusca is home to treasures including a round Madonna and Saints by Cortona native Luca Signorelli, in which a gentle St Michael shows the baby Jesus his soul-weighing scales as if it were a toy. Chiara preferred the bronze statuettes of the Etruscan gods Selvans and Culsans: naked except for their boots, androgynous, ringletted hair and a provocative hand on hip — exactly like Donatello's scandalous David, which takes pride of place in Florence. "Do you think Donatello ever saw these?" I asked.

"I doubt it! I think the David may have been the most mysterious Renaissance throwback of them all." Tuscany is full of surprises.

It also has the best cows. En route to Arezzo, we came upon a dozen white Chianina — bovine royalty — placidly chewing the cud in a field. We unwrapped porchetta sandwiches that we'd bought earlier from a roadside van — slow-roasted and herby between slabs of Tuscany's dry, salt-free bread — and chewed back at them. They were magnificent beasts, towering over us — the oldest, biggest and heaviest breed in the world, prized in ancient times for pulling ploughs and as sacrifices to the gods. Now most end up as bistecca alla Fiorentina.

Arezzo is one of Tuscany's less-visited

art cities, having gifted the world the poet Petrarch and Guido d'Arezzo inventor of musical notation. Most visitors come for Piero della Francesca's sublime 15th-century fresco cycle *The Legend of the True Cross* in the church of San Francesco. As a former resident, I would go there often to gaze at his great battle scenes and the transcendent *Dream of Constantine*, in which the pagan Roman emperor is visited by an angel who will spark his conversion to Christianity. Restoration of the frescoes was completed 20 years ago and they look as if they were painted yesterday: clear, vibrant and filled with the timeless stillness that's the trademark of Piero, who was obsessed with clinical lines and perspective. They have, I thought, while gazing at them, that Tuscan je ne sais quoi.

On my last evening, Mario, Chiara and I sat outside again, watching the sun sink behind Italy's most famous backdrop. Clouds sent dark shadows rollercoasting over the hills; the olives trembled silver in the breeze. "If Tuscany had been as flat as Kansas, would it have produced such great artists?" I wondered.

"But not all Tuscan landscapes are natural," Mario said thoughtfully. "Back in the days of the Black Death, when the elite escaped into the country and started turning castles into villas, they wanted to make the countryside as beautiful as their frescoes. So the countryside is like a painting, I guess — a 14th-century moment frozen in time."

We fell silent as the evening deepened and Venus hovered into view next to the slimmest of crescent moons. "Oh, go on then," I said. "Put on some Puccini."

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Credit: The Sunday Times Travel Magazine/News Licensing



Travelvellers



The island nation is set to reopen completely to fully vaccinated visitors this October, meaning it's time to step outside the hotel lobby and explore...

Mauritius

Port Louis waterfront



“Mauritius was made first... and heaven was copied,” novelist Mark Twain famously said of the island. Situated along the southeast coast of Africa, Mauritius is a favourite of those seeking a tropical escape with a difference. There’s natural beauty, historic towns, cities full of culture, and picture-perfect beaches promising marine adventures. And when the second phase of the country’s reopening commences on October 1, tourists will be able explore everything it has to offer; previous regulations saw them confined to their resorts for 14 days. So, considering it takes all but 90 minutes to drive across the island, there’s no reason why you can’t go beyond the four walls of your resort, and explore every corner. But where to start?

Port Louis

BEST FOR: Museum visits and history tours

Where better to start than the capital city? Like most capitals, Port Louis is Mauritius’s economic, cultural and political hub, not to mention the most populated area. Meaning a day trip or weekend visit offers up a glimpse into how the locals live, work and play. As its name might giveaway, Port Louis is rich with influence from its colonial powers of the past – its namesake was the French king, Louis XV, while colonial British and Dutch influences are

pervading, too. If you really want to get to grips with the history of this tropical island, Port Louis is the place to start.

While in town...

TAKE A TRIP TO THE PAST

If you’re going to sign up for a tour anywhere while travelling the country, do it in the capital. Options are plentiful, and by general consensus, each includes iconic landmarks that play a part in the Mauritian story. There’s the Citadel Fort Adelaide, known as an architectural feat with striking city views. There’s The Saint Louis Cathedral built in 1814, making it one of the oldest in

the country. And then there’s the SSR Memorial Centre For Culture, the hub of all things national history.

THE BLUE PENNY MUSEUM

Unless you’re a philatelist, you might not be drawn to The Blue Penny Museum based on its name alone. But don’t strike it from your list too soon, as it displays intriguing artefacts that showcase the nation’s cultural diversity; think historical maps, old-time photographs, and works of local art. As its moniker promises, it’s home to the Blue Penny and Red Penny stamps, two of the rarest in the world. Issued in 1847 by the British Colony Mauritius, they have become (very valuable) collectors’ items due to their historical significance. Keen to catch a glimpse? Be warned, the vivid stamps are only on display for 10 minutes per hour every day to preserve their hues.

DAY TRIP TO CHAMP DE MARS RACECOURSE

The largest in the Southern Hemisphere and second largest in the world, Champ de Mars has been hosting competitions for almost 200 years. Race enthusiasts and history geeks alike will be satisfied with a day trip – think gorgeous surroundings, enticing restaurants and towering monuments ready to enjoy alongside the action.

Blue Penny Museum





Public beach in Grand Baie

Grand Baie

BEST FOR: Beach days and bustling nights

A village in northern Mauritius, this is the place to be if you're dreaming of idyllic beaches for your next vacation. With plenty of gorgeous beach in this beautiful seaside location, it's no wonder this is the most popular tourist spot on the island. Aquatic adventurers will enjoy exploring the sparkling blue waters, while the sun-seekers can unwind on the golden sands. But Grand Baie is also known for its nightlife, with bars, beach clubs and restaurants noted among the best of the island.

While in town...

PARTAKE IN WATERSPORT ADVENTURES

Being an island, coastline adventures aren't hard to come by. But the place to really get your watersports on is this beachside location – think diving, snorkelling, windsurfing, parasailing, cave diving and even embarking on a submarine safari. Visitors can expect calm and clear waters filled with awe-inducing sea life such as lionfish, stingrays, eels, turtles and more. Head to Pereybere Beach for everything you need throughout the day, from a spectacular shore-side setup to places to grab a bite.

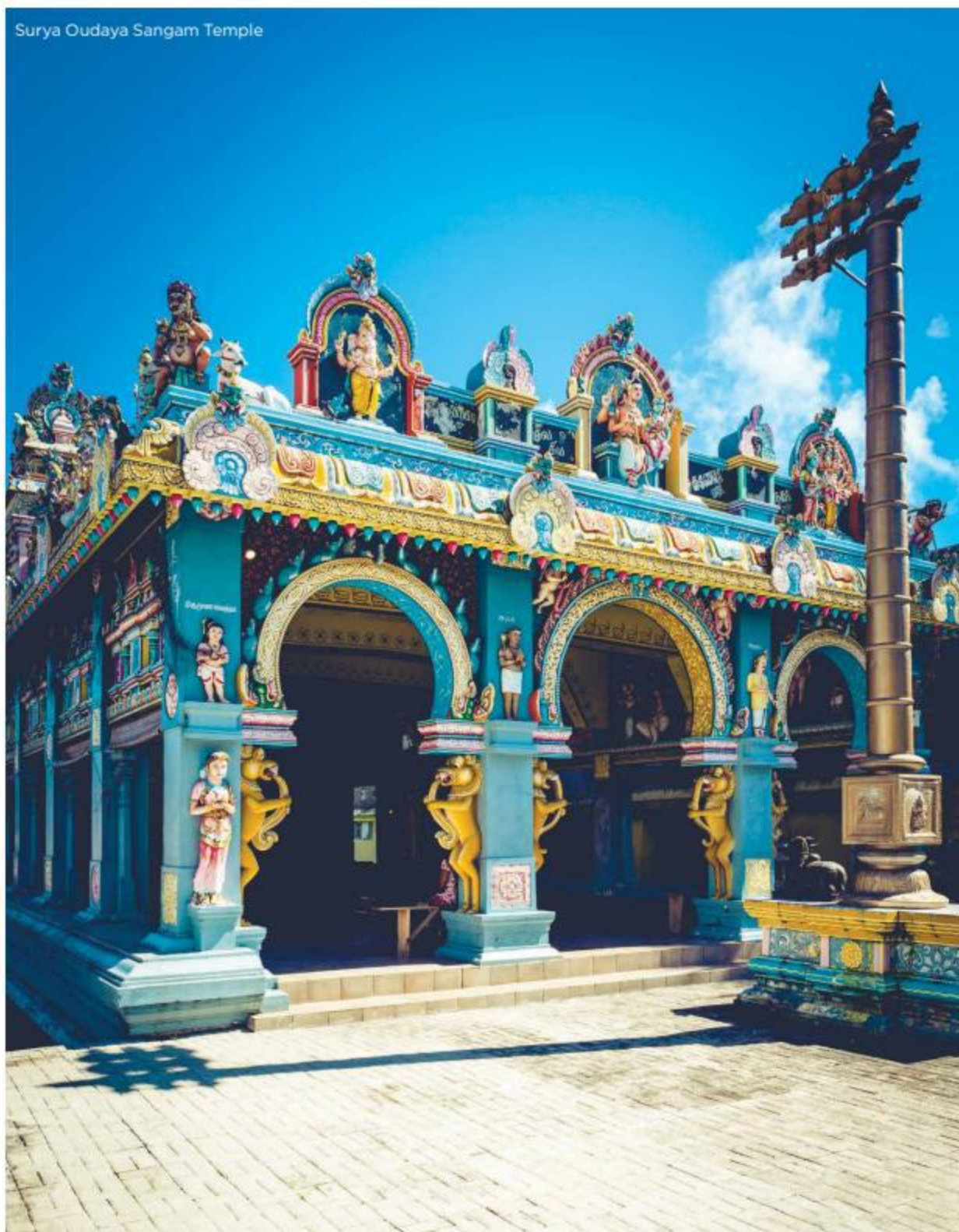
SPEND A NIGHT ON THE TOWN

When it comes to nightlife, this is the place to be. Grand Baie is known for its vibrancy, with many beach clubs, bars and restaurants to host you of an evening. Tick off the long-established Banana Beach Club first, loved by locals and tourists, before enjoying the varied musical offerings of BARaBAR. And if you want to see what the local mixologists can put together, a night at the Avant Garde bar it is.

STOP AT SURYA OUDAYA SANGAM TEMPLE

It might be the destination for bars and beaches, but you can still embark on a cultural exploration when in town. Spend a morning exploring Tamil Surya Oudaya Sangam Temple, the Hindu temple standing tall in the southern part of Grand Baie. After you've removed your shoes and paid your fee, you'll be privy to the colourful painting and sculptures enriched with spiritual significance

Surya Oudaya Sangam Temple



‘SO REMARKABLE IS THE MOUNTAINSCAPE, IT HAS BEEN NAMED ONE OF ONLY TWO UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITES IN THE COUNTRY’



that resides within. It's small in size, but you can make your way to the top to see the beach views from above.

Le Morne

BEST FOR: Hiking and outdoor adventures

Hikers, here's your rugged paradise.

Just travel to the southwestern tip of the island and discover Le Morne Brabant. So remarkable is the mountainscape it has been named one of only two UNESCO world heritage

sites in the country. But the name of the Indian Ocean facing peak shares its name with the small village below. Le Morne is one of the best places to learn the stories of slavery and resistance so ingrained in the country's history, as nothing is shied away from, making it a must-visit when it comes to understanding Mauritius's foundation.

While in town...

TREK THE LE MORNE BRABANT PENINSULA

Pack your hiking boots for this trip because it would be audacious to visit Le Morne and not elevate your status, quite literally. The eponymous peak, formed of basaltic rock, stands 1,824 ft above sea level and covers 30 acres of ground space. Guided tours are widely available across different paths and time frames, or you can go it alone across the 7 km stretch. Be warned, with its own micro-climate, temperatures can change at any time.

VISIT BLACK RIVER GORGES NATIONAL PARK

If you're willing to jump in the car for 30 minutes, then plan a day trip to Black River Gorges National Park while down this end of the island. Covering a landmass of 16,690 acres, the dense rainforest is home to the likes of macaque monkeys and wild boars, a

unique selection of flora and fauna, and a river lined with black stones – hence its moniker. Immerse yourself in nature by walking on the many paved paths, and bring a picnic to make a day of it.

GO WHALE AND DOLPHIN WATCHING

The best place to spot these beautiful marine mammals is along the southwest coast, so pick your time in Le Morne to grab your binoculars and board a boat. On a day of calm waters, head out into the Indian Ocean to spot the likes of pilot whales, bottlenose dolphins, spinner dolphins and more.

Curepipe

BEST FOR: Shopping trips and natural wonders
Although there's no escaping outdoor adventure, sometimes you



MAURITIUS

want to feel in the thick of the city – flashing lights, enticing restaurants, and shiny shops. Be sure to stop by Curepipe, the shopping district of Mauritius. Located in the middle of the island (hence, no coastal appeal) shopping comes out top trumps here, with malls, artisan stalls, factory outlets, and souvenir shops luring in global tourists. Just make sure you leave some extra room in your suitcase before arriving if you're planning to spend the day here.

While in town...

ANTIQUÉ HUNT IN BEAUTÉ DE CHINE

Antique lovers, take note; if you're making your way around the shops of Curepipe, don't skip this gem tucked away in Les Currimjee Arcade. Beauté

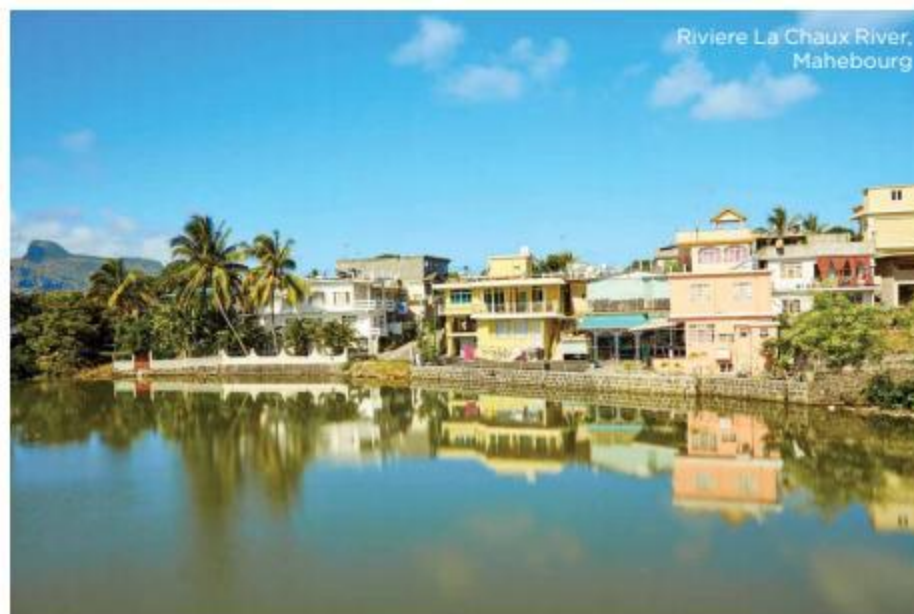
De Chine is the oldest running store in the city, and one of the oldest in the entire country. Take your time to walk around this family-run shop to discover the weird and wonderful, and make a day of it by checking out what the adjoining mall has to offer.

JOG AROUND TROU AUX CERFS

Trou Aux Cerfs is the biggest attraction of the cool-temperated city, as the dormant volcano crater is quite a sight. Only 1km from the hustle and bustle of the town, it only takes a brief walk to be greeted by the lush greenery. Immerse yourself within it, and you'll soon spot the 100-metre deep crater. If you're keen to stay fit during your vacation, you can enjoy a jog around the dedicated track, waving at the mountain ranges in view as you go.

VISIT TARAMAND FALLS

Yes, it's another neighbouring spot of natural beauty, but there's just too many demanding not to be missed from your list. This time, it's Taramand Falls (also known as the 7 Cascades) calling all tourists. Head here for a hike that's suitable for all levels, and see almost a dozen waterfalls, multiple



STOP BY CUREPIPE, THE SHOPPING DISTRICT OF MAURITIUS

jumps, deep ponds and, of course, colourful vegetation. Don't want to go at it alone? There are plenty of groups operating all day hikes across the area.

Mahebourg

BEST FOR: Culture vultures ready to explore

Here's another town prime for people who want to get stuck into the local culture – there's a history museum, an old-timey church, and authentic street food markets to name a few. Even just walking through the traditional town alone is a feast for the eyes. Plus, Mahebourg is also along the coast, meaning visitors can break up knowledge-intensive days with carefree trips to the beach. Head to the waterfront (which is perfect for

a long morning stroll), and you'll also find a naval museum that tells the tales of the battles fought at sea.

While in town...

EAT THE STREET FOOD

Who doesn't love to learn about the local cuisine when on vacation? And there are more ways to do so than simply tucking into second helpings at dinner. Enter the street food of Mahebourg, where Mauritius offers up flavours of the world – from Indian to French. Real foodies can sign up for the Mahebourg Village Food Tour and eat their way around the town's most famous landmarks with a knowledgeable tour guide on hand.

DISCOVER THE RAULT BISCUIT FACTORY

Unless you have a special place in your heart for custard creams, this niche spot might not be the top of your vacation agenda. Yet there's a reason why The Rault Biscuit Factory has been touted as one of the must-see tourist spots this end of the island. A family business first opened in 1870, the sweet treat factor hasn't changed much since; everything is made almost entirely by hand with a century-old secret recipe. Visitors can watch the magic happen, taste different mixes, and of course buy some to take home.

ZIPLINE IN VALLÉE DES COULEURS

After you're done with the museums and walking tour, why not amp up the adrenaline with a day trip to Vallée des Couleurs, a 45-minute drive. With a distance of 1.5km, it's the third-longest zipline in the world, so definitely one to tick off your list. After you've flown over the nature reserve, you can explore it at ground level – with sights such as the naturally occurring 23-coloured earth area, the animal farm, rock garden, and waterfalls.



WHERE TO STAY?

Three of our favourite hotels in Mauritius

FOUR SEASONS RESORT MAURITIUS AT ANAHITA

Just in time for the travel updates, the five-star resort will reopen its newly renovated doors on October 1. Expect a completely new bar, revamped restaurants, luxury accommodation options complete with a private pool, and even three secluded beaches that stretch along the southeastern coast. Guests can explore the local treasures in Beau Champ and the closer-to-home sports and leisure options, such as golf and a luxe spa with treatment rooms overlooking the Indian Ocean.

CONSTANCE PRINCE MAURICE, MAURITIUS

Setting up camp on the northeastern coast? Constance Prince Maurice it is, then. This romantic hideaway, a grand dame of hotels on the island, is known for its stunning architectural design, which can be enjoyed from one of the 89 suites and villas. Travelling in numbers? The lavish Princely Villa sleeps six and boasts three individual terraces with different ocean views, a private heated pool, and a personal villa host. Be sure to enjoy dazzling sunsets from the Floating Bar,

ANANTARA IKO MAURITIUS RESORT & VILLAS

On the southeastern coast, just a short drive from Mahebourg Waterfront, Anantara Iko Mauritius Resort & Villas is tucked away between tropical gardens and the golden sands of Le Chaland Beach. After exploring the nearby city and hiking spots, guests can return to enjoy rejuvenating hammam spa rituals and suitably indulgent dining experiences (the steaks cooked over Himalayan salt rocks at Sea Fire Salt are sublime).



STAYCATION

Meliá Desert Palm Dubai

For a luxurious escape from the city, where polo meets Spanish hospitality

THE ROOMS & SUITES

You're spoiled for choice when it comes to choosing a room to stay here. From secluded villas with private pools and Polo pitch-side suites, to spacious deluxe rooms and a jaw-dropping three-bedroom Presidential Villa. Each of those options is surrounded by the natural beauty – think full trees and tropical birds – the hotel is afforded by being on the outskirts of town.

THE FOOD

If there's one thing the Spanish do right, it's hospitality. That's why dining at this Spanish-themed hotel is quite the experience. Overlooking the polo field and sparkling skyline, Rare Oak Wood Fire Grill is where you'll find authentically-smoked meat paired with luxuries like truffle potato foam. For casual French classics there's the poolside brasserie Epicure.

THE ACTIVITIES

Standing within a 160-acre polo estate, horse-related activities are naturally the drawcard here. But along with horse-yoga (yes, it's a thing), stable tours, horse riding and polo matches, you'll find art-classes, tennis and cycling will also capture your attention. But if it's total relaxation you're after, the infinity pool and Samāna Spa offer a serene experience.

To find out more, call +971 4 323 8888 or visit marriott.com



STAYCATION

JW Marriott Marquis Dubai

The sky's the limit inside the world's tallest five-star hotel

THE ROOMS & SUITES

Wake up in the clouds and revel in stunning floor-to-ceiling views of the city's futuristic skyline or the turquoise waters of the Arabian Gulf. Sleek suites boast marshmallow soft beddings and soundproof windows for a serene slumber, while Executive Rooms come with perks including complimentary drinks, a continental breakfast and afternoon tea in the Executive Lounge.

THE FOOD

Foodies are spoilt for choice with over 10 multi-award winning restaurants. Splurge on a unique sky-high dinner at Prime68 steakhouse before heading for a nightcap at Vault. Serving up delicious Asian spices, is dinner-only restaurant Tong Thai. Meanwhile, authentic coastal Italian cuisine is on the menu at Positano, which serves up unlimited pizza from Dhs95 on Tuesdays and Saturdays.

THE ACTIVITIES

Discover the shiniest gems the city has to offer with top attractions including The Dubai Mall, Dubai Canal and Dubai Opera right around the corner. After a day out and about, pamper yourself back at the hotel with a mini refresh at Saray Spa. Signature hammam treatments, bespoke facials and holistic rituals draw upon the spa's Arabian heritage for a top-to-toe rejuvenating experience.

To find out more, call +971 4 414 0000 or visit jwmarriottmarquisdubailife.com



STAYCATION

Le Méridien Al Aqah Beach Resort

Perfect for a family getaway this summer, take a trip to Fujairah's most iconic resort

THE ROOMS & SUITES

The Emirate known for its mighty mountains and pristine beaches, Fujairah is all about natural beauty, which is why every room at the resort offers panoramic views of the Indian Ocean. With 66 interconnecting rooms, the largest standard room on the East coast, and higher floors equipped with balconies, the resort has all the makings of a luxurious staycation spot.

THE FOOD

With six distinct dining outlets under one roof, resort dwellers can embark on a culinary journey. Those seeking endless views should visit Gonu Bar & Grill, while cravings for Thai and Indian cuisine can be satisfied at Taste. After a day soaking up the sun and enjoying poolside bites at Baywatch, head to Sapore, located in the picturesque garden, for classic Italian fare.

THE ACTIVITIES

As far as pools go, this resort's is unrivalled. The largest along the East coast, days spent dipping in the luxurious pool is an activity in itself. And, with a Kids' Club equipped with a splash pool and indoor activities, everyone is happy. For the more adventurous, watersports are bountiful, while those who prefer to stay grounded can try their hand at crazy golf.

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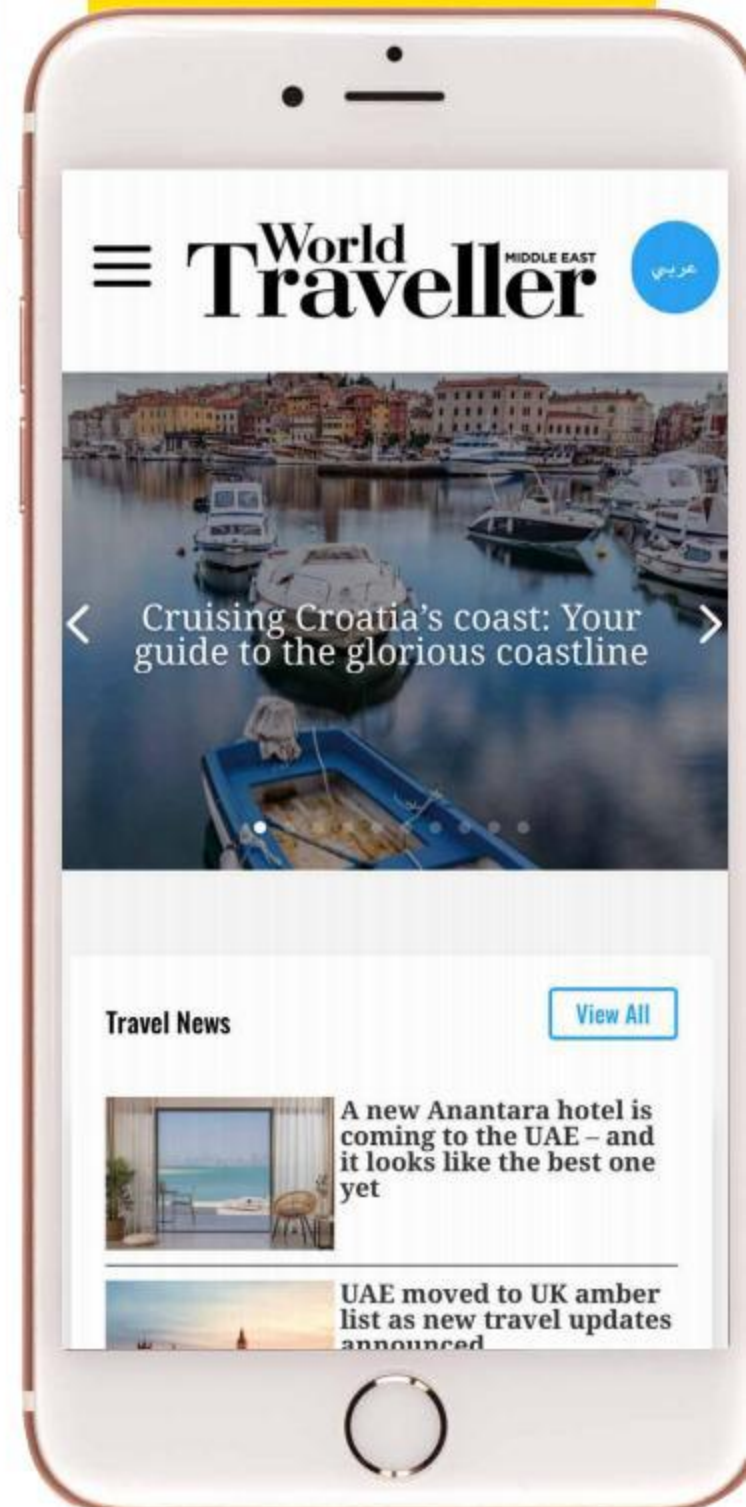
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Suite dreams

Our monthly finish with a flourish, delving into a suite that has a character and style all of its own



TWO-BEDROOM BEACH VILLA

Constance Ephelia, Seychelles

If there really is a way to make a holiday in the Seychelles any more relaxing, Constance Ephelia has discovered it. Anyone who travels with their kids in tow knows that privacy either comes at a premium or is as rare as rain in a UAE summer – usually both. Not so at Constance Ephelia, whose twin-level Two Bedroom Beach Villa is as luxurious as it is practical. In addition to one large bedroom and bathroom upstairs is another on the villa's ground floor, where you'll also find a private pool and garden, al fresco dining space, and a marvellous living area – one side of which is open to allow a warm breeze to blow through. One tip: be sure to book your airport transfer with the hotel's driver Julio, who's as full of local knowledge as he is charm.

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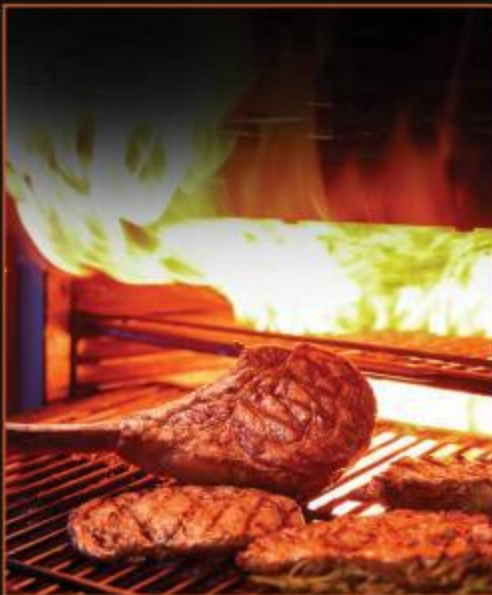
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*Opening Soon