

Condé Nast Traveler

APRIL 2021

**CALIFORNIA'S
TRUE NORTH**

**THE CHARMS OF
COASTAL KENYA**

**SAIL AWAY TO
CROATIA**

find yourself

All About Taking a Heritage Trip

+ Why You Need a Travel Specialist



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at the Harbor
House Inn, on
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Mendocino coast

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The Editor's Letter

Northern California. Hungary. South Korea. Those destinations have been my go-to answer to the question I've been getting for months now, which is, *Where are you going when all this is over?* These places are obviously amazing in their own right, but for me they're all about family. In the Bay Area, the redwoods and restaurants call, but more than anything I want to hug my dad, whom I haven't seen outside of FaceTime in, literally, years, along with a bunch of old friends whose kids

are growing up fast, just like mine are. In Budapest, I want to be on the Danube again with my mom and my brother and his family, watching the moon rise over the Parliament building. When my wife and I last visited her family in Seoul six years ago with our baby daughter, they gave her a Korean name and we told them we'd be back in five years. Now we have a son too, who has been waiting patiently for *his* Korean name.

The destinations might be uniquely my own, but I know these desires are universal. It's spring now. We're in the midst of a mass vaccination program. We should all be making our travel plans for the rest of this year, and for next year. Those plans should include trips to see people we love and haven't seen in too long, trips *with* people we love and haven't seen in too long, and trips to the places where our roots lie. (For me, that includes Hungary, and for my wife, Korea.) That's why we've devoted a huge swath of this issue to the subject of heritage travel, beginning on page 31. And family isn't the only aspect of travel that the pandemic has brought into focus. We've also gained greater insight into how specialists solve our travel conundrums and pull off the vacations of our dreams, including heritage trips. Read more about their heroic feats on page 51, and peruse a complete list of the *Condé Nast Traveler* family of approved specialists at cntraveler.com/travel-specialists.

A few days ago I was watching the Korea episode of the Netflix series *Street Food: Asia* (as one does on a pandemic weeknight) when I saw the vendor who runs the stall in Gwangjang Market in Seoul where my daughter first tasted mandu. I long to go back with both kids and their great uncles and great aunts and second cousins for a celebratory feast. May we all realize these longings in the months ahead.

Jesse Ashlock

JESSE ASHLOCK
EDITOR, U.S.



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On the Cover

Lake Mir and the surrounding cliffs of Telašćica Bay, Croatia. Photographed by Mario Jurina



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VOLUME 56, NO. 3, *CONDÉ NAST TRAVELER* (ISSN 0893-9683) is published 8 times per year by Condé Nast, which is a division of Advance Magazine Publishers Inc. PRINCIPAL OFFICE: Condé Nast, One World Trade Center, New York, NY 10007. Roger Lynch, Chief Executive Officer; Pamela Drucker Mann, Global Chief Revenue Officer & President, U.S. Revenue; Jason Miles, Chief Financial Officer (INTERIM). Periodicals postage paid at New York, New York, and at additional mailing offices. Canadian Goods and Services Tax Registration No. 123242885-RT0001.

POSTMASTER: SEND ALL UAA TO CFS. (SEE DMM 507.1.5.2.); NON-POSTAL AND MILITARY FACILITIES: SEND ADDRESS CORRECTIONS TO *CONDÉ NAST TRAVELER*, Box 37629, Boone, Iowa 50037-0629.

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word of mouth

The people, places, and ideas we're talking about right now



Africa Is Calling

The continent where life began is so much more diverse than many Westerners understand. Naledi K. Khabo, one of its foremost advocates, explains how travelers are beginning to see these ancient lands anew

A view from the historic Cape Coast Castle in Ghana

word of mouth → in the air



Muhammad Ali by the River Congo before the storied Rumble in the Jungle, in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo (then Zaire), in 1974

I was born in South Africa and raised in the United States, after my father was forced to leave the country for resisting the apartheid regime. My connection to my birth country and the rest of the continent has shaped my life and career. I have a unique position within the diaspora: Unlike me, many Black Americans will never be able to trace their ancestry to a specific place the way I can. For them, heritage travel is about exploring the land that has shaped our people and culture. It's about finding connections and traces of the familiar.

Travel to Africa has historically been seen through a Western lens and has been dominated by the idea of going on safari. This is changing: I have been excited to see African culture draw greater international attention as it plays a larger role in fashion, music, art, and food around the world. Of course, Africa's cultural side is something that many Blacks within the diaspora have known about and honored for decades: Celebrities and thought leaders like Maya Angelou, Nina Simone, Muhammad Ali, and Louis Armstrong spent time in West Africa in the 1950s, '60s, and '70s. More recently, the painter Kehinde Wiley's Black Rock Senegal artist-in-residence program has brought a range of Black VIPs to Dakar. This year, work began on Senegalese-American pop

star Akon's futuristic smart city in Senegal. Music festivals, from Cape Town to Cairo, attract global acts to receptive crowds.

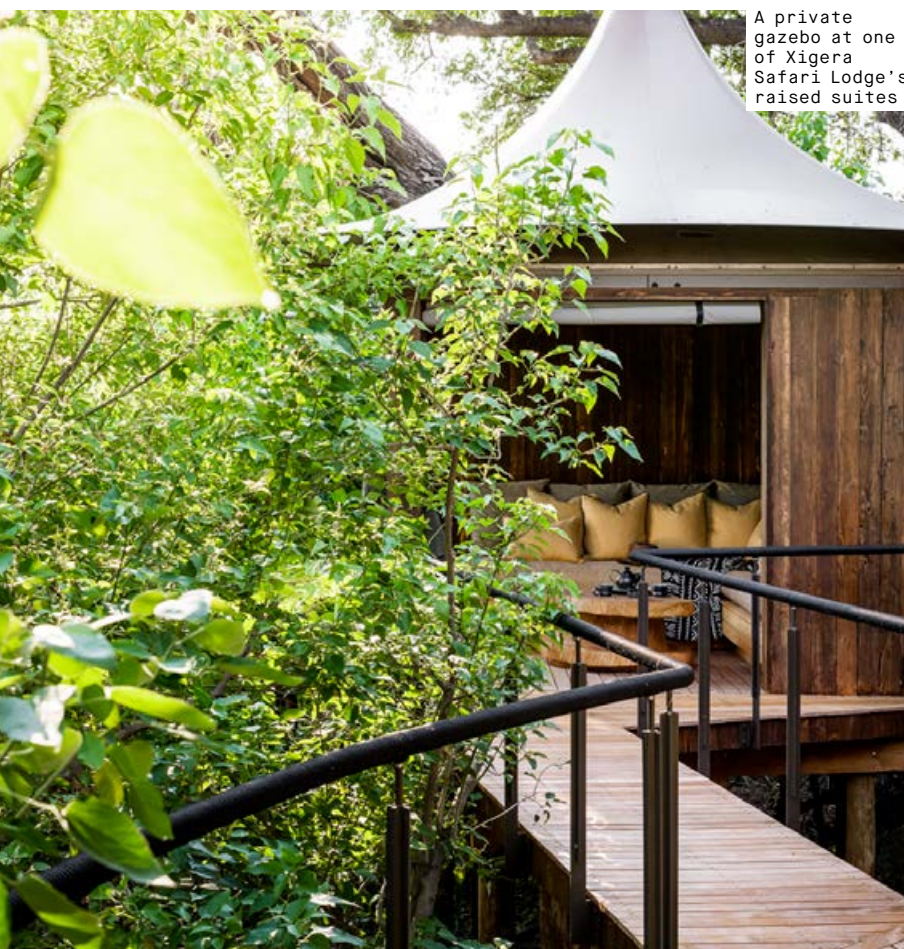
Despite all this energy, many corners of Africa—not to mention her vast diaspora—have been underserved by the travel industry. Still, as always, we have made our way, traveling with church groups, fraternal organizations, and affinity groups. In 2019, to mark the 400th anniversary of the first slave ship arriving in the New World, Ghana declared the Year of Return, inviting all people of African descent to return home. The country's annual tourism numbers increased by 45 percent. Last year, I joined with a group of Black travel writers and publicists in forming the Collective, a group dedicated to telling these stories in the mainstream media.

Cultural events such as Lagos Fashion Week, Durban July, or Dak'Art have been thriving for years, but now that these happenings are being more broadly celebrated, Africa is finally getting recognized for having more to offer than the Big Five. The African Union has declared 2021 as the Year of the Arts, Culture, and Heritage, and shining a spotlight on the continent's customs, crafts, religion, folklore, fashion, cuisine, music, and language will help expand the tourism experience across Africa.

As the travel industry works to become more inclusive, I hope we can start celebrating the diversity that exists all over Africa. This has been close to my heart throughout my life and my career, which is why, last year, I cofounded another initiative, called Travel Is Better in Color, meant to amplify diverse perspectives within travel. Heritage travel means something different when we are talking about Africa. Former Ghana President Kwame Nkrumah put it best: "I am not African because I was born in Africa, but because Africa was born in me."

NALEDI K. KHABO IS THE CEO OF THE AFRICA TOURISM ASSOCIATION

word of mouth → checking in



A private gazebo at one of Xigera Safari Lodge's raised suites



A post-game-drive cheese and fruit plate

Safari Shake-Up

In Botswana, a country renowned for its considered approach to wildlife protection, this reinvented camp is taking things to the next level, with a minimal carbon footprint and a spotlight on regional craft

The Okavango Delta smells of wild sage and damp earth. Cotton-wool clouds hang low in the sky, and thunder rumbles softly, like elephants trumpeting in the distance. From the air, the blue-green tapestry of water channels and islands spreads out like a giant hand. Three years in the making, Xigera Safari Lodge is located at the very center of this alluvial fan, on the western edge of the Moremi Game Reserve. Even during the last gasp of sultry Botswana summer, before the flood surge from Angola, 650 miles away, it is still possible to take a *mokoro* canoe trip through the lily-dotted shallows. Eventually, the waters disappear into the sands of the Kalahari Desert, producing hundreds of seasonal pans and lagoons

that are an inland paradise for birds. Predators and prey are concentrated on islands, providing some of the greatest wildlife encounters in all of Africa.

Xigera is arguably the most anticipated recent opening on the continent. It's the latest addition to Red Carnation, the boutique hotel collection that is part of the Tollman family's travel empire, which also includes Ashford Castle in Ireland, The Milestone in London, and a trio of properties in South Africa. Xigera's history dates back to the 1980s; it was the very first camp opened by legendary safari operator Wilderness Safaris. When the Tollmans, who were longtime Wilderness board members, parted ways with the company in 2018, they took Xigera with them. Their plan for the safari lodge was to reinvent it as a model for operating sustainably in the middle of nowhere.

Botswana's eco-travel roots run deep. Private concessions in the Okavango Delta are leased under strict environmental guidelines. Anything that may potentially contaminate the waterways is a no-go, including building with concrete, cement, and bricks. Although the area covers 2,000 square miles, there are only about 1,000 beds, resulting in a level of privacy that is almost impossible to find anywhere else in Africa. The country's low-impact approach to tourism has kept its wild expanses exclusive and pristine, justifying its high price tags.

The reborn Xigera represents the next chapter in Botswana's story. Its 12 new elevated suites, most facing the floodplains, still blend into the hardwood forest, but that's where any similarity to



A copper lily, Xigera Safari Lodge's emblem, tops the fireplace in the lounge

the original ends. Dinners feature spicy Durban curry prepared with local bream and wines from a cellar stocked by the family's Bouchard Finlayson estate in South Africa. There's a state-of-the-art gym, a pavilion for sunrise yoga, and a baobab tree house for sleeping under the stars. The spa menu makes liberal use of Tata Harper's farm-to-face products.

But for all its luxury, what most differentiates Xigera is its energy conservation, achieved with the latest Tesla solar-hybrid system, supplying the lodge with 95 percent of the required power. According to the project engineer involved, using renewable energy will save an estimated 19,300 gallons of diesel and prevent the release of about 421,000 tons of carbon emissions annually. The Tollmans' future plans include introducing solar-powered electric game-viewing vehicles.

A commitment to human sustainability runs in tandem with these efforts, with a focus on preserving cultural heritage and supporting community-owned artisan businesses. The family tasked 80 talented makers across Africa—including wood-carvers, sculptors, ceramists, and glassblowers—to create an ambitiously scaled gallery of functional and decorative African art for the lodge. Sculptor Adam Birch produced about 150 large-scale wood sculptures

from fallen timber found on location, with local carpenters working alongside him. Chuma Maweni, a master of hand-thrown ceramics, made more than 70 unique pieces from black clay—each pedestal, lamp, and coffee set unique in its shape, color, and patterning.

Many other items at Xigera were made from reused materials. For a patio, sculptor Conrad Hicks fashioned a giant firepit from repurposed steel. Furniture designer Jesse Ede used recycled aluminum for the outdoor dining tables, while Xandre Kriel's armchairs incorporate rubber from an old conveyor belt. Eye-catching circular works by Chris Soal, made from beer-bottle caps, appear in each suite. Almost everything you touch or see was crafted by hand; many objects are one-offs. Age-old traditions have been preserved and elaborate production elevated to its rightful place. The Tollmans' investment in limited-edition art, each piece grounded in Africa, has resulted in a timeless collection. In an industry sometimes guilty of over-refurbishing in an effort to enchant the next generation of travelers, Xigera puts an intelligent new spin on what it means to be truly sustainable. JANE BROUGHTON

Rates from \$2,320 a night per adult, meals and activities included; xigera.com

Community Spirit

In Seattle's Japantown, businesses continue to thrive in the face of historic challenges

1) Panama Hotel and Tea House

A clear panel in the teahouse floor reveals suitcases that Takashi Hori stashed for fellow Japanese Americans who were forcibly relocated to camps during World War II. Hori ran the hotel from 1938 until he retired in 1985, when current owner Jan Johnson purchased the property and set out to preserve its original details. The restoration efforts of Johnson, combined with the presence of the country's only intact traditional bathhouse, earned the hotel a spot on the list of National Historic Landmarks.

2) Maneki

Opened in 1904, Seattle's oldest Japanese restaurant has been a mainstay ever since for dishes like wild salmon nigiri and bluefin negitoro. Its 90-year-old hostess and bartender, known simply as Mom, has been mixing strong, straightforward cocktails since 1960. "Maneki has been through the Spanish flu, two world wars, internment camps, and recessions," says owner Jean Nakayama about the restaurant's chances of making it through the current pandemic. "We'll be here—we're too stubborn to go away."

The sun-bleached Douglas fir floors at the Panama Hotel and Tea House may be 111 years old, but they still support the customers who sit at tables sipping steaming mugs of nutty genmaicha. Below, in the property's basement, is a long-shuttered but marvelously preserved public bath. Its neat rows of wooden lockers and deep marble tubs made it indispensable during the early 20th century when few people had private baths. But it also served as an important gathering place where the day's news flowed freely among residents of Seattle's *Nihonmachi*, or Japantown, an area just east of Pioneer Square.

During the neighborhood's glory days, between the two world wars, it was the nation's second-most-populous Japanese district, and its streets buzzed with restaurants and shops. The year after Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed an executive order resulting in the mass incarceration of Japanese Americans living along the West Coast. Few of Japantown's once-booming businesses remained by the time their owners were released from internment camps; even fewer have lasted the 75 years since. Today, the survivors are tapping into the same spirit of perseverance in responding to COVID-19. These original restaurants and shops give visitors a glimpse of the past while offering a testament to the community's resiliency and evolution. NAOMI TOMKY



3) Kobo at Higo

Beginning in 1907, Japanese Americans came to the Higo Variety Store (originally the Higo 10 Cent Store) for everything from traditional sandals to kites. When its founders, the Murakami family, were interned, neighbors watched over the property and paid the bills. The store closed in 2003, but Paul Murakami, a relative of the original proprietors, still owns the building. The current tenants turned the space into a shop and gallery, Kobo at Higo, where, as a way to honor the building and neighborhood's history, they display original inventory from the store, like antique fans, alongside contemporary art.

4) Uwajimaya

When Seattleites need fresh uni or new chopsticks, kumquats or miso, they turn to Uwajimaya. Fujimatsu Moriguchi began the business in 1928 by selling homemade fish cakes from the back of his truck. After internment, he opened a little grocery store in Japantown. Though the store has moved a few times (and expanded throughout the Pacific Northwest), the present-day Seattle outpost is near the historic heart of the community. Today, Fujimatsu's granddaughter Denise Moriguchi runs the business.

word of mouth → where i work



The Gathering, Soneva Jani's main common area



A deckhand at work at Soneva Jani

Resorting to Change

The pandemic threatened the livelihoods of countless hospitality workers in the Maldives—and has created new challenges for those who are still employed there

Spanning some 1,200 islands across the Indian Ocean, the Maldives is among the world's most popular tropical destinations. Because it is also one of the nations most reliant on tourism—the sector comprises two thirds of the country's GDP, according to the World Bank—COVID-19 has been devastating to its economy, and its workforce has acutely felt the repercussions of the virus.

When the Maldives closed its borders last March, many of its resorts paused operations, sending workers who lived part-time on property back home. Yasir Hussain, one of Soneva Jani's Barefoot Butlers (the brand's one-on-one service, available in every villa), returned to Malé, the nation's capital. Ibrahim Nazeer, the dive and recreation manager at the Four Seasons Resort Maldives at Kuda Huraa—who has been an employee there for more than 20 years—was luckier at least in this respect; he could retreat to his native island of Bodu Huraa, less than half a mile away.

In July, after the country relaxed its border restrictions, some properties including Soneva Jani and the Four Seasons Resort Maldives at Kuda Huraa reopened, and returning workers like Hussain and Nazeer had to quickly relearn how to do jobs that had evolved significantly since they departed. "The resort had a very

short period of time to set everything up for reopening, with lots of training and changes," says Nazeer. There's now a rigorous three-step disinfecting process for dive and snorkel equipment he must follow after each use, for instance.

Hussain says his experience has been similar. Barefoot Butlers, he says, have little contact with guests until their PCR test results arrive on day two. (Soneva Jani has been one of few Maldives resorts to require in-villa testing and quarantine of all arriving guests.) If the results are negative, then the masks can come off and the interaction can resemble pre-pandemic normalcy.

Both Nazeer and Hussain undergo frequent COVID-19 tests and have to quarantine whenever they return from another Maldivian island or destination—even Nazeer, who can actually walk to his home island when it's low tide.

Since the two men returned to work, their resorts have increased operating capacity; at Soneva Jani, according to Hussain, last December turned out to be busier than the same month in 2019. Between staffing shortages and the new safety and hygiene procedures, the workload can feel daunting. And, of course, as with any worker who interacts frequently with the public, COVID-19 remains a concern, especially for Nazeer, whose job often requires he forgo a mask.

But in spite of their worries, both of these front-line employees see themselves as the fortunate ones. "I feel lucky to be at work," says Nazeer, a husband and father of two. "That's something I don't take for granted." **TRAVIS LEVIUS**

The 1 in 10 Project Our newly launched editorial initiative celebrates the more than 10 percent of people around the globe whose jobs are tied to tourism in some way. With the pandemic still ongoing, we're spotlighting these individuals and telling stories that give a glimpse into their everyday lives.



Count János Bethlen's Manor House dates from the 1650s

Cut off from the rest of Romania by the arc of the Carpathian Mountains, Transylvania still embodies a certain rural self-sufficiency. There are few better examples than the picturesque village of Criș, from which Count Miklós Bethlen fled in 1948 during the rise of the Soviet Union. But even after settling in Austria, he never abandoned the place his ancestors founded some 800 years prior: “When he returned in 1967, he found his ancestral home in ruins and the community all but forgotten,” says his son Nikolaus Bethlen. “From then on it became his life’s ambition to raise funds to restore the family’s castle and support the local people.”

Since the count’s death in 2001, Nikolaus and his mother, Gladys, have continued this work, slowly acquiring village buildings and renovating them into appealing vacation houses under the banner of Bethlen Estates. The first, Caretaker’s House, was completed in 2019; this year, two more—Saxon-style cottage Depner House and the four-bedroom Corner Barn—will join it.

Bethlen is an enterprise deeply rooted not only in place but also in people and traditions. As part of the restorations, Gladys travels the countryside researching historic construction techniques and looking for period fixtures

and materials. “Whenever they knock down a house, I’m there collecting old hinges and beams,” she says. A team of local carpenters and blacksmiths integrates the pieces into the structures, along with locks, hand-forged nails, roof tiles, and old shutters.

As the scale of the project has grown, so has the family’s impact on the area. Since 2002, Gladys and Nikolaus have awarded five scholarships annually to local children to attend a boarding school in nearby Sighișoara, and they hire from the surrounding area whenever possible. That includes the chef, Robert Birtalan, who in turn sources from producers within a 10-mile radius of the property.

The pair now own 10 buildings around Criș, including a former school and a granary, all of which will become part of Bethlen Estates over the coming years, bringing further investment and job opportunities to the village. “Originally the Caretaker’s House was for our family to get back to our roots,” says Nikolaus. “But the project has evolved to preserve this part of Transylvania for generations more to come.” **FIONA KERR**

Doubles from \$300 per night; bethlenestates.com

It Takes a Village

A mother and son’s restoration project in the quiet hills of Transylvania promises to carry tradition into the future



The kitchen in the Caretaker’s House



Picnicking in a nearby meadow in Criș

word of mouth → walk this block



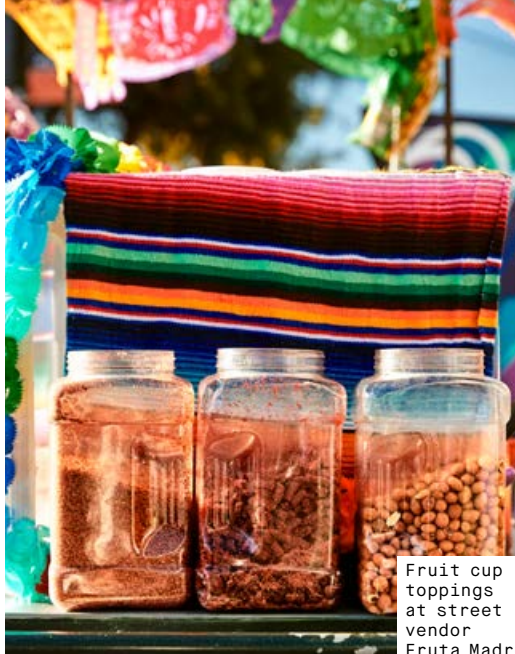
Colorful murals and mosaics in Chicano Park

Pride of Place

After more than a century, Barrio Logan remains the stronghold of San Diego's Chicano culture



A few of Barrio Dogg's loaded menu items



Fruit cup toppings at street vendor Fruta Madre

San Diego is often shrugged off as a one-note beach town, but that description hardly captures the complex character of this city just above the U.S.-Mexico border. Its history is inextricably tied to the nation to its south and to the civil rights struggles of its Chicano population; and nowhere is that heritage more apparent than in the neighborhood of Barrio Logan. Established by refugees of the Mexican Revolution in the early 1900s, it was the site of massive social justice protests in the '70s and continues to serve as the city's epicenter of Chicano civic and cultural engagement. Though it has gentrified in the last few years, many of the newer shops and restaurants that have sprouted along Logan Avenue, its main drag, are independent businesses with second- and even third-generation owners. From its vibrant street art to the revved-up lowriders and craft beers inspired by Mexican culinary traditions, Barrio Logan is a place where residents put their passions—and origins—on full, brilliant display. **DEBRA KAMIN**

Get Your Bearings

Chicano Park, which sits beneath the San Diego-Coronado Bridge, is the true heart of Barrio Logan. More than 80 murals painted by Chicano artists illustrate where this community came from: You'll see depictions of Aztec warriors and artists like Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera alongside scenes from the Mexican Revolution.

See Some Art

Since 2013, both established and up-and-coming artists have graced the walls of La Bodega Gallery, a light-filled exhi-

bition space that routinely hosts film screenings and performances. The team here also runs La Pulga Flea Market every Saturday along National Avenue; count on finding rare and one-of-a-kind jewelry, clothes, and antiques, much of it vintage or handmade by local artisans.

Where to Grab a Beer

San Diego has more than 150 craft beer pubs, but none are as barrier-busting as Border X Brewing, the city's first Mexican American-owned brewery. Try the Horchata Golden Stout,

laced with the vanilla and cinnamon notes for which the Mexican drink is famous; or the Blood Saison, inspired by agua de jamaica, a hibiscus tea that's popular across Latin America.

Order a Pick-Me-Up

The menu at Por Vida Cafe is a love letter to Mexico: Order a peanut-y mazapan latte for a buzz or the seasonal spicy sandía limonada for a burn. On the walls, you'll spot paintings of the Virgin of Guadalupe and the affirming statement #heretostay, plus a rotating selection of local artwork.

Treasure Hunting

Simón Limón (an expression similar to "okey dokey") is packed with wares made by independent artists from both sides of the border. Owner Alexandra Perez Demma, who grew up in Cabo San Lucas, selects every item, from hand-painted clay chimineas to pressed-flower earrings. You can also shop Perez Demma's own jewelry line, which she creates out of a private studio nearby.

Food Crawl

Hungry people have been lining up for mind-blowing eats in Barrio Logan since at least 1933, when Las Cuatro Milpas, a legendary taqueria that hand-rolls its masa each morning, first opened its doors. These days, the old guard is joined by new recruits: At Barrio Dogg, chef Pablo Rios serves his own twist on the Tijuana-style bacon-wrapped hot dogs beloved throughout Baja California.

why we travel

The experiences that change how we see the world



Find Yourself

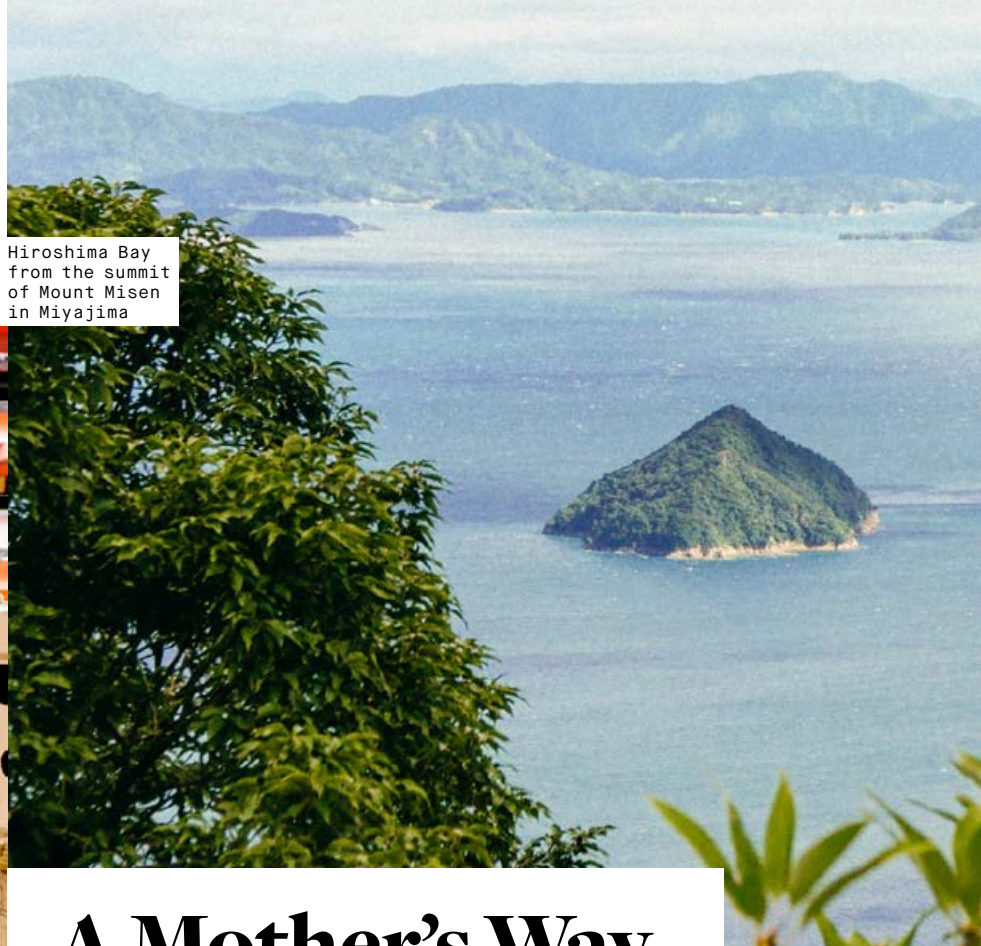
As we begin planning trips again, many of us will be seeking opportunities to explore who we are, how we got here, and what we can learn from those who came before us. That's the essence of heritage travel, whether you're tracing your genealogical history or just seeking a more meaningful connection with your family

Waiting at
Tokyo Station
to board a
bullet train
to Osaka

PHOTOGRAPH: JUSTIN CHUNG

Hiroshima Bay from the summit of Mount Misen in Miyajima

Sake barrels at Itsukushima Shrine on Miyajima Island



A Mother's Way

Traveling to Japan showed **Jennifer Flowers** a previously unseen, deeply illuminating side of the woman she'd known her whole life



A wooden arched bridge, part of the hiking trail at Mount Misen

The first time we visited Japan, back in 2008, my Hawaii-born mother and I spent hours wandering the food halls of department stores, gazing at prized muskmelons wrapped in cellophane. We visited galleries dedicated to woodblock prints, or *ukiyo-e*, and celebrated Thanksgiving on the Shinkansen bullet train, happily devouring bento boxes. I gaped in awe the first time I saw her converse in fluent Japanese, somehow persuading the gruff tuna auctioneers at Tsukiji Market to let me stand among the fishmongers instead of with the tourists. Watching her perform Japan's complex etiquette—nodding, saving face—was also astonishing.

I am a half-Japanese woman, yet I can barely manage a convincing *arigato*. My American passport lists my birthplace as Manila, but growing up I never lived anywhere longer than four years. My dad's career in hotel management ping-ponged us around the globe: New York City, Hong Kong, Seattle, Singapore. My family spent a lot of time assimilating into predominantly white expat communities. Ever the self-conscious new kid, I was more concerned with bringing the right kind of sandwiches to school than packing the rice lunches I craved. Embracing my whiteness (my dad descends from the British Isles and northwestern Europe) defined most of my peripatetic youth—that is, until this trip.

As my mom and I parted ways—me heading back to New York and her to Bangkok—I watched her grow ever smaller from my seat on the airport shuttle. In that moment I began to see Irene Oishi as not just my mother, but a whole person—with passions



An artful bento box by Karunan, a restaurant and guesthouse in Kambayashi

and stories and histories independent of me. I burst into tears.

My mom and I made two subsequent visits to our ancestral home, further exploring the esoteric wonders of Japanese culture. What I was really looking for, I understood, were glimpses of my mother's identity: details that had been there all along but only surfaced when we were immersed in new surroundings.

Over breakfast one morning in Tokyo, she told me that the miso soup reminded her of the dashi her mother made from scratch in Honolulu. Seeing a crane-covered kimono in an antiques shop sparked a story of how, during World War II, her family hid heirloom silk robes and buried the household *chawan* for fear of being viewed as anti-American.

Our last trip was in 2014. Two years ago, my mother suffered a stroke. She was fortunate not to lose her cognitive or motor functions, but the experience made me realize how quickly our time was slipping away. I called her and started plotting: We would go back to Japan and follow our bloodline to Hiroshima and Yamaguchi. A DNA test and research on Ancestry.com uncovered an old ship's registry of her maternal grandmother's arrival to the United States. Yoshi Otani was 24 years old in 1912. She stood four feet, nine and one-half inches, her only "mark of identification" a mole below her left eye. What was her journey across the ocean like? What was her hope for this new land, and what did she leave behind?

These are answers we'll never know, but when we do return to Japan the fourth time, we won't be seeking archival records. We'll be looking for a sense of connectedness—one we can only get sitting elbow to elbow, slurping bowls of ramen, or collecting *hanko* stamp impressions in Buddhist temples, or when she explains to everyone we meet, with a deferential smile, that I am her *musume*, her daughter, while I patiently wait for my mother to reveal her full self.

Here, There, and Everywhere

When you're a third-culture kid, wandering is often the only way to feel grounded

"So where's home?" It doesn't matter who I meet—as soon as someone detects my accent, they ask me this. I don't always know how to answer.

I am an ethnic Russian, born in Kazakhstan and raised in Estonia, never fully belonging to either. When my family moved away, I became "the Estonian girl" who visited Kazakhstan in the summers. In Estonia, there was an invisible wall between my Russian community and the Estonians. Tensions over decades of Soviet rule only intensified when the actual Berlin Wall fell. There's a Soviet film from 1974 called *At Home Among Strangers*, a *Stranger Among His Own*. Growing up, I knew the feeling.

At 16, I came to the melting pot of Miami, and my search for belonging gained a new dimension. We were all strangers trying to forge a new life. As I continued to move around the United States, I began to surround myself with people of similar backgrounds: a Pakistani from Dubai who lives in New York; a Hungarian from Romania based in Chicago. Our ethnicities were different, but we felt at ease because of our muddled upbringings and the unspoken camaraderie that comes from being "othered." This is perhaps America's greatest paradox: It's a place where diversity is celebrated yet xenophobia is so profound.

Twenty years into my relationship with the U.S., I still can't pinpoint a city I can call my home. But I've made peace with the ambiguity. For me, *home* does not exist in one place.

I have felt like a traveler ever since I left Kazakhstan, spending weeks or months at a time in places like Afghanistan, Morocco, and Japan. Home is the feeling I get when I ride a motorbike for two days to drink rice wine with villagers in Vietnam. It's when I stay up late talking to a refugee-rights activist in Istanbul. It's sharing sage tea with my Bedouin friends in Jordan. Traveling connects me to others in a deep and universal way. By revealing the tapestry of our world, it helps me find my place within it. YULIA DENISYUK

THE TRAVEL JOURNALS OF PEGGY WOLFF LEWIS



Photos of Honey and Popo, the writer's grandparents, from their travels

Memory Bound

The vacation journals **Sallie Lewis's** grandparents kept are now family heirlooms and a continual source of inspiration

Few people these days know firsthand what a 70-year relationship looks like. My late grandparents Peggy and Jack, whom I called Honey and Popo, were two of the lucky ones. They met when they were 14 and remained a couple for the rest of their lives. Their bond was strengthened by their San Antonio roots and shared love of travel.

For decades, Honey and Popo circumnavigated the globe, ballooning over vineyards in Burgundy and exploring Chilean ice fields by catamaran. As the family grew, they invited their children and grandchildren on these adventures. We cruised the Yangtze River in China and went on safari in the Tanzanian Selous Game Reserve.

After Honey and Popo passed away, in 2017 and 2018, respectively, the family divided the treasures they'd collected abroad. Of all the things they left behind, my grandmother's travel journals have proved most precious to me. After each trip, my grandparents' secretary took Honey's yellow legal pads scrawled with her sloping script, typed out her entries, and turned every vacation into an individual

spiral-bound journal. One Christmas, I collected them into a single volume and made copies for each of Honey and Popo's children as a way to preserve their stories for the next generation. Today, these 400-page tomes are family treasures.

Whenever I miss my grandparents or find myself planning a trip, I revisit the pages filled with their collective memories. These journals have also given me a much-needed escape during the pandemic. When my own vacation to the U.K. was canceled last spring, I found myself drifting slowly across the pond while perusing their descriptions of the country. I smiled as I pictured them driving, windows down, through the manicured English countryside or weaving through the Scottish Highlands on the regal Belmond *Royal Scotsman* train. On a recent afternoon, I opened the book and found them strolling along the Seine, the pulse of Paris all around. With a turn of the page, I followed them down an alleyway in the ancient medina of Fez. One entry, from 2003, memorialized their visit to the Norwegian fjords, where the waters rippled "like the folds of the finest satin" as the northern lights winked over their heads.

Today, I cling to these pages as a reminder of two people who enjoyed life and loved each other. While traveling was the lens through which they learned about the world, their journeys were made meaningful through their companionship. "We've driven many miles and feel we have a real perspective of this land and its people," said my grandmother after a 1992 trip to South Africa. "As always, the greatest joy of the trip is the time alone that Jack and I share. What a fantastic trip it has been—and yet, how good home will be."

heritage travel

Perfect Strangers

The Jakarta of **Sebastian Modak's** youth is not the Jakarta of today—and he's okay with that



Kota Tua, formerly known as Oud Batavia, an old Dutch colonial quarter

Breaking for a meal near a hawker cart in Kota Tua



I was lost and a little nervous, but I wasn't ready to admit it. "Just a little farther," I said to my partner, Maggie, as we dodged a passing motorcycle and narrowly avoided an open gutter. I lit a cigarette, hoping that would make it look like I belonged here.

And I did, in a way. I had lived in Jakarta, Indonesia's teeming capital, as a teenager. It was one in a string of homes around the world, as my Indian father and Colombian mother hopped from country to country with three children in tow. It had been almost 15 years since I had been in Jakarta, and this time I brought Maggie. She had heard me tell stories of my upbringing: the plates of hot satay eaten street side; the reckless nights, barhopping with all the cluelessness of the most insufferable expat brat; the afternoons spent watching rain fall in sheets as the call to prayer ricocheted across the city. What we were doing now—huffing exhaust fumes as we made our way toward a dreary overpass—was not in the stories.

I was looking for Sunda Kelapa, the centuries-old fishing port where colorful schooners are loaded up with lumber and rice. It was a place I had been to exactly once, on an eighth grade field trip to Kota Tua, the Old Town, where the remnants of Dutch colonialism can be seen in canals and squares. Like an untrained pilot coming in for landing, I had overshot my destination and now found myself leading Maggie not toward the quaint port I remembered but to one of the city's main shipping hubs. Jenga towers of metal containers blocked our path as dockworkers stared at us in bemusement.

Ever gracious, Maggie did not question where I had taken her, but instead proposed we find a place to grab a drink. A drink? Here?

The whole trip had been like this. When I asked an old friend



A banana stand in a Jakarta market

about the bar we used to frequent, the one that inexplicably shared real estate with a paintball field, she laughed. Why go there when there were hipper, more grown-up rooftop bars on the other end of the city, far from the gated international school that had been the center of my universe? When I went searching for my favorite restaurants, the run-down spots where the food was delicious but the ice was not to be trusted, I found they had been bulldozed to make room for more fast-food chains. It took me three laps around my old neighborhood to identify my street—because the buildings had changed, my memories had faded, or both. Cities, especially ones that grow with the ferocity of Jakarta, don't wait for you.

Occasionally, the nostalgia hit. I noticed it riding in a taxi, serenaded by the endless chorus of motorcycle horns. Or when I walked the grounds of my school. Or when I saw familiar faces, the few friends who had stuck around all this time. But as the days went on and I “showed” Maggie “my” city, I noticed another feeling.

It appeared when I stopped looking for what I remembered, like during that dreadful walk through the shipyard. We eventually found our way out of the port and, miraculously, to a bar. It was a three-story building, thickly carpeted in luxurious reds and golds—the kind of venue designed with weddings in mind. An army of waiters held out laminated menus as we approached. We were the only ones there and we sat on aluminum chairs by the water, sipping Bintang beers and watching tankers float into the Java Sea. I hadn't been here before, but what I felt was recognizable. It had nothing to do with what I already knew of Jakarta. It was, I realized, the excitement of getting to know a place for the very first time.

All in the Family

The surprising discovery of relatives in Brazil turns a brief layover in São Paulo into a spontaneous conduit for connection

I whipped my head back and forth, trying to make sense of the animated conversation around me. I had just arrived in São Paulo and was the only person in the car who couldn't speak Portuguese. But I could tell from the hand gestures that some serious strategizing was underway. The women chattering to my left and right weren't tour guides, though—they were my newfound family, and we were headed to São Paulo Metropolitan Cathedral, one of the world's largest neo-Gothic sanctuaries. They wanted to find the very best vantage point, where swells of sightseers wouldn't distract from the structure's impressive twin towers and seafoam green dome.

As an American born to Taiwanese immigrants, I'd always thought my ancestral tree was rooted in the United States and Asia. So I was shocked to learn from my mom, weeks before my trip to South America, that my dad had a cousin with two daughters around my age living in Brazil. Before I knew it, we were on a group call with my long-lost relatives. When I told them I had an eight-hour layover in São Paulo coming up, they dropped everything to roll out a bespoke city tour. We shared no common tongue but bonded the moment my auntie handed me a photo album documenting my late grandparents' visit to Brazil several decades earlier.

As my new kinfolk shuttled me along the lushly canopied pathways of Trianon Park, down bustling Paulista Avenue, and over to the imposing Monumento às Bandeiras, pointing out little details only a Paulistano would notice, I snapped hundreds of photos, hoping that would adequately convey my appreciation for their every untranslated word. At the end of the whirlwind tour, I climbed out of my auntie's car at the airport and realized what we had done—spent the day together, writing the next chapter of our family album. **RACHEL CHANG**



Far and Near

Despite numerous visits to her mother's beloved Ponza, **Jessica Silvester** still hasn't cracked its code

and I took pictures there on our honeymoon, and we've returned for nearly every vacation since.

He never knew my mother, but he could get to know Ponza. I could too. And I've tried so hard—I even thought I might write a book about it, and for research I finagled interviews with everyone from Ponza's mayor to its most notable part-time resident, designer Anna Fendi. I marched on carnation-strewn cobblestones in the San Silverio festival, celebrating the island's patron saint. I hired a translator to help me talk to my cousins on the island: Ornella, who owns the *alimentari* down the hill from a spectacular array of sheer tuff cliffs, and Maria Rita, whose husband is the fourth generation to run one of two restaurants in the port.

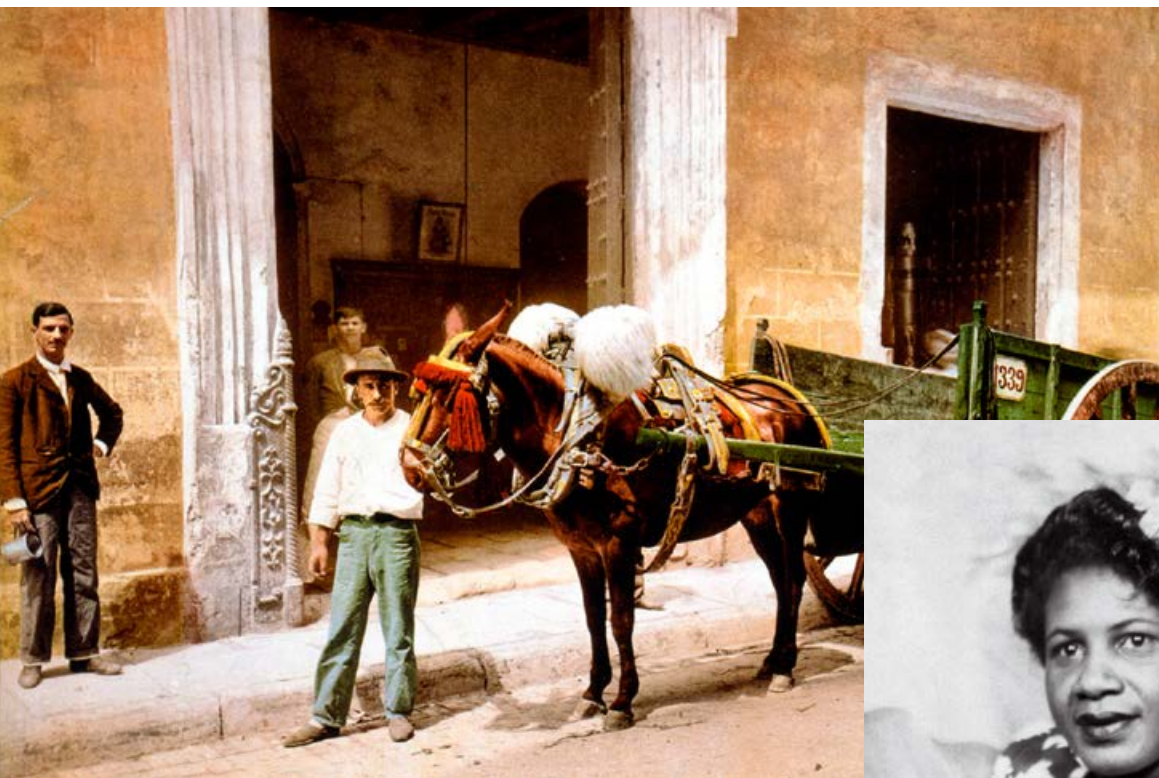
And yet, I don't feel I've filled any void by examining Ponza up close. Part of me wonders if that's because the actual Ponza could never measure up to my mother's rendering of it. It's a place she preferred to appreciate from afar—and made certain the reality would never infringe upon the mythology. Her sole visit, with me in 1996, was for just three nights, and the whole time she was desperate for air-conditioning. When she went to Ornella's grocery to introduce herself, Ornella didn't even offer her something cold to drink; she was too busy tending to her high-season customers. My mom went back to Italy twice before she died but never to Ponza.

Maybe some places are better kept to the imagination. My mother was raised among Ponzesi and Ponzesi-blooded children who spoke the dialect fluently and attended their own San Silverio. For her, there was plenty of Ponza right here in America. And me? I've come to know the real Ponza better than my mom ever did—although I'm still not sure I really know it at all.

Wherever we were, if there was a map of Italy lying around, my mother would look for Ponza, the birthplace of her father. I remember sitting in a booth at our local pizzeria, where the paper placemats were printed with the boot of Italy, drawing in the island myself with crayons. "It's there," my mother said hypnotically, tapping her French-manicured fingertip in the Tyrrhenian Sea. "That's your heritage, baby."

I have traveled to Ponza half a dozen times—once with my mom, when I was 14, but mostly in the years following her early death from colorectal cancer. The bumpy ferry ride from outside Rome takes about two hours. The five-and-a-half-mile-long island, formed by an ancient volcano, was abandoned for centuries after the fall of the Roman Empire. It has about 3,000 residents now—although, as my mother would point out, plenty of in-the-know Italians vacation there in summertime. Maybe it was the U.S. history teacher in her, but she liked to focus on Ponza's Cinderella story: Once a land of impoverished fishermen like her father, who left to find a better life in the Bronx, now an insider secret, celebrated for its eternal beauty and excellent scungilli.

It's just the sort of place where you'd think you could bend space and time—swimming through the same grottoes where Emperor Augustus's people farmed moray eels and drinking the local Biancolella on rocky beaches. I've trekked the steep path up to my grandfather's crumbling childhood home, which may not be the highest point of the island, as my mother used to brag, but still looks down on the crystalline sea from a thousand feet up. My husband



Beginning at the End

For BIPOC travelers, skewed DNA test results can make heritage trips harder to plan. But a few determined operators are changing the equation **By Sarah Enelow-Snyder**

“My **23andMe** test solidified my desire to visit Nigeria,” says Kent Johnson, cofounder of the tour company Black & Abroad. When he received his ancestry results in late 2019, his strongest place of origin in Africa was Nigeria (22 percent), followed by Ghana, Liberia, and Sierra Leone (a combined 17 percent). But one year later, after hearing that friends’ results had changed, Johnson logged in to his account to discover that his had shifted too: Ghana, Liberia, and Sierra Leone had risen to 22 percent while Nigeria had dropped to 17 percent. In the end, he visited Ghana first.

Such cases of hazy identity often share the same principal cause: the Eurocentric data collected by companies like Ancestry and 23andMe. Their reference data sets—DNA samples derived from customers (and in 23andMe’s case, publicly available data), meant to represent specific populations—have historically been robust for



people of European ancestry but lacking for those with roots elsewhere in the world. In recent years, these companies have moved to diversify their data sets. “We proactively seek people to test from underrepresented populations,” says Crista Cowan, a resident genealogist at Ancestry. The same goes for 23andMe; its data collection has grown enough that it was able to break down its Broadly South Asian category to include seven more specific groups, including Northern Indian & Pakistani and Southern Indian & Sri Lankan.

Even when armed with more specific DNA results, BIPOC travelers can find trip planning to be challenging. It took Michelle Jong, president of the Chinese Family History Group of Southern California, at least two years to construct her family tree; documents in China are tricky to track down, and can be tough to interpret if you do locate them. Jong eventually went on a trip in 2018 with Friends



of Roots, a nonprofit tour provider that has specialized in Chinese American heritage for 30 years. In her ancestral village in Guangdong province, she met a newfound cousin who showed her the house her grandfather was born in. “I never thought in my wildest dreams I would go there,” she says.

Like Jong, many BIPOC travelers will find their best heritage or genealogical trip options with small specialized tour companies. For the last six years, operator AfroLatino Travel has been leading trips primarily to Panama and Cuba, with an emphasis on history and spirituality. In Havana this includes an exploration of Santería and a visit to the home of a lifelong practitioner of the Yoruba-based tradition. Many of AfroLatino Travel’s clients are several generations removed from their countries of origin and want to learn more about them, says cofounder Javier Wallace. At the same time, these tours allow non-Black Latino clients to learn more about the diversity of these places. “We really like the idea of connecting the diaspora,” he says.

Dossé-Via Trenou founded the travel agency Magic & Melanin in 2018 to introduce members of the African diaspora to their ancestral homelands; the company leads trips to Togo, Benin, Côte d’Ivoire, and Ghana, with plans to add more African nations. About 20 percent of clients come to her after having taken a DNA test, says Trenou, who is based in Côte d’Ivoire, but those who haven’t are no less motivated to explore their West African roots. The company also offers a 14-week residency program for individuals to pursue their passion projects, providing access to classes in herbalism, dancing, and language—which has already inspired some attendees to make their bond even more permanent.

“Our residents embark on a decolonizing journey as they remember who they are and discover more of where they come from,” says Trenou. “Several of our inaugural residents have decided to stay in West Africa or are already making plans to move here.”

The Old Countries

These programs are bringing young adults back to their motherlands

Since the founding in 1999 of the Birthright Israel organization, more than 750,000 members of the Jewish diaspora between the ages of 18 and 32 have traveled to the Holy Land to connect with their heritage. In the last decade, similar initiatives have emerged elsewhere, sponsored by state governments, cultural affairs associations, and donors. Threaded with sightseeing excursions and language-immersion courses, the trips are designed to nurture visitors’ relationships with their ancestral lands while often enhancing these countries’ influence overseas. **BETSY BLUMENTHAL**

Birthright Africa

Embedded in the mission of this program is the Ghanaian principle of *sankofa*, says cofounder Walla Elsheikh, which holds that you need to build upon the past to get where you’re going. The itinerary consists of visits to U.S. cities with a strong Black culture, like Washington, D.C., followed by a 10-day trip abroad. Schedules are packed with stops at historical sites, like Ghana’s Cape Coast fort and dungeons, as well as more forward-looking ones, like Accra’s African Center for Economic Transformation. birthrightafrica.org

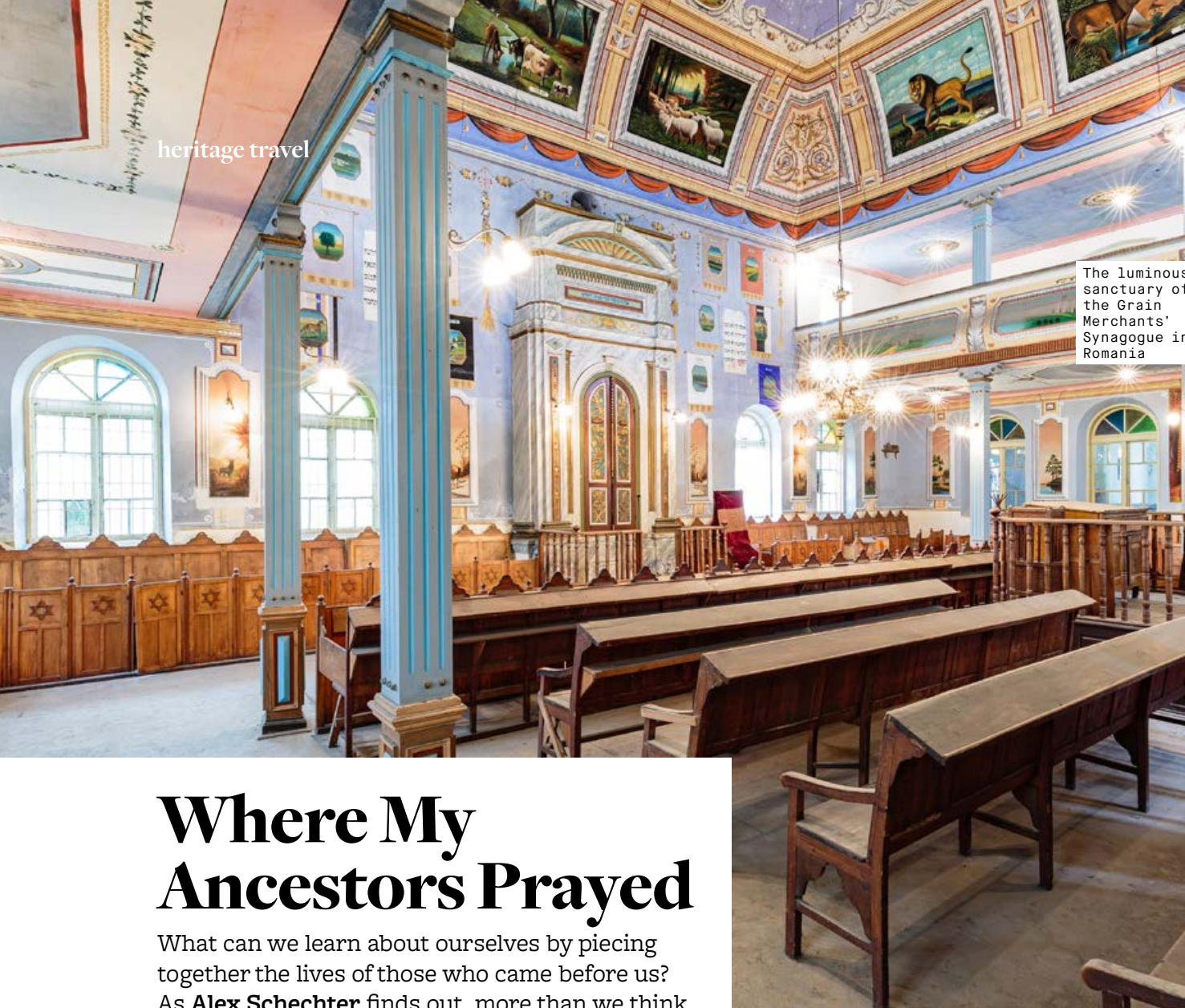
Tu Cuba

Meant for Cuban Americans in their 20s and 30s, these trips explore topics like technology and women’s leadership while supporting Cuba’s burgeoning private sector. Stays are usually based in Havana, with outings to secondary cities like Viñales, Cárdenas, and Matanzas. cubaone.org

Overseas Youth Taiwan Study Tour

Dubbed the Love Boat for its once-frequent dalliances between trip takers (as captured in the 2019 documentary *Love Boat: Taiwan*), this three-week summer program gives young adults, nearly all from the Taiwanese and Chinese diaspora, a fast-track education on the island. The country is distinguished from mainland China through tours of government buildings and cultural institutions, martial arts performances, and volunteering opportunities. roc-taiwan.org

The luminous sanctuary of the Grain Merchants' Synagogue in Romania



Where My Ancestors Prayed

What can we learn about ourselves by piecing together the lives of those who came before us? As **Alex Schechter** finds out, more than we think

It's a golden afternoon in mid-September and I'm wading through thick bramble in a cluttered cemetery on the outskirts of Bacău, Romania. There are more than 6,000 graves crammed into an area the size of a soccer field, and navigating them is tricky—the land is hopelessly overgrown. My guide, a toothless, sun-baked gravedigger named Ben, smiles as he pulls back some weeds to reveal yet another stone that bears my last name: Schechter.

Bacău is a small industrial city on the Bistrița River, four hours north of Bucharest. It's unremarkable in every way, except to me: This is the birthplace of my Jewish grandfather's parents, and I have come looking for evidence of their past. Earlier in the day, I had contacted Izu Butnaru, the nonagenarian president of Comunității Evreilor din Bacău, the local Jewish community center. After directing me to the city's old Jewish cemetery, he'd agreed to meet me at the Grain Merchants' Synagogue, one of two prewar temples still standing in Bacău.

No longer an active center of worship, the building now sits behind tall padlocked gates. Butnaru, hunched over and partially deaf, leads me through a yard littered with broken bottles. But as we enter the main prayer hall, a dream world unfolds before me. The walls and columns are painted with robin's-egg blue and touches of coral pink, like cake frosting. Looking up, I see murals inspired by scenes from the Bible and the zodiac, which depict tigers leaping and crocodiles waiting in marshes. The colors are vibrant, cartoonish, almost psychedelic. Despite this temple's crumbling exterior, its heart is stunningly alive.

But for how long? With the help of a translator, Butnaru explains that he has tried in vain to get the place listed on the national historic register. Bacău's Jewish population has sharply declined over the years. A 1930 census counted almost 10,000 Jews, roughly 30 percent of the town's population then. But after World War II, most moved to Israel. Today, just over 150 Jews remain. The community—much like the temple itself, which must be protected from vandals and squatters—is in danger of disappearing.

When my great-grandparents sailed to New York in 1918, they never looked back. As far as they were concerned, Romania was a distant memory. A century later, it's up to me to revisit the home they left behind, to stand in the waist-high grass and reassemble these identities, one weed-choked headstone at a time. Because if not me, then who?



Lay of the Land

As a typically sulky teenager, **Mary Holland** didn't always appreciate her family's vacations to the South African bush. But with time comes perspective—and now, an insatiable love of the untamed

Riding shotgun was never something my siblings and I fought over. The front seat of Elsa, my dad's rickety old Land Rover Defender, was considered the worst seat in the house—with a floor that got so hot, we joked you could keep a meat pie warm until dinner.

So when my dad announced that we were taking a family vacation in Elsa from Cape Town to Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, my sisters and I responded with eye rolls. "It's one of the most iconic parks in the country," he protested. It's also one of the hottest, dustiest places in South Africa. At 13, the last thing I wanted to do was drive through a giant desert in an old car with my family. Like any teenager, I preferred to go to the beach or hang out at the mall.

As kids, traveling to the bush was an annual affair. Kruger National Park was our Yosemite, a road trip destination for many South Africans. We'd chug past lions lazing on the road and surly crocodiles pinned to riverbanks—oblivious to the fact that foreigners spent thousands of dollars to see those very creatures. Sometimes we'd find ourselves in hairier situations, like when we accidentally wedged our car between a baby elephant and its mother, who furiously waved



PHOTOGRAPHS: CROOKES & JACKSON

her trunk at us. (To this day, my sister is terrified of elephants.)

Despite the Kgalagadi's endless empty spaces, going there is not a dull affair. The ancient landscape is part of the Kalahari Desert, which stretches from South Africa to Botswana and Namibia and encompasses approximately 360,000 square miles. It's where 80,000 nomadic Indigenous San people still live, alongside endemic animals like meerkats. It tops many travelers' lists, for good reason.

Here's what I remember from that trip: a lot of bickering over the back seat, eating toasted cheese sandwiches beside the campfire, and riding past gargantuan stretches of ochre-colored land that appeared to roll on forever. It was so different from the grasses and baobab trees in the parks I was used to, and a reminder of just how diverse South Africa's landscapes are. I never would have guessed it at the time, but I'd find myself pining for this place well into adulthood and long after I moved from South Africa.

I returned to the Kalahari for work two decades later, only this time I visited neighboring Botswana's Makgadikgadi salt pans. It wasn't my first experience traveling to the bush as an adult; I'd visited places like the Serengeti and Okavango Delta, which easily impress visitors with their abundance of animals. But there was something about returning to a terrain teenage me had once labeled "boring" that made this trip profoundly different—and not just because I was staying in a baroque bedouin tent with a four-poster bed at Jack's Camp, one of the most iconic and glamorous safari lodges in the region.

When I set foot onto the millennia-old salt pans—where the only sound was the crunching beneath my shoes, as if I were treading on potato chips—I was finally able to truly appreciate places like this. Solitary stretches that had once seemed lonely and lifeless felt peaceful and calming, especially after flying in from New York. More poignant still was the realization that all those trips I endlessly moaned about when I was growing up had created in me a profound adoration of the bush, a place inextricably linked to family and home.

Skin Deep

In Hawaii, tattoos become a way to honor the past, even while breaking from it

I was 10 years old the first time I met my dad and 12 when I heard one of his colleagues say, "I didn't know you have a daughter." As the product of my parents' office fling when my dad was between marriages, my existence was not a good look for a Native Hawaiian hero whose circle included CEOs and senators. My parents had spent years acting as if the other didn't exist, but learning my dad had omitted me from his backstory was crushing.

As I got older, I came to appreciate how ancient Hawaiians had etched ink into their skin to represent their origins. I found myself doing the same: collecting tattoos to document my travels and connect with my Hawaiian heritage. By the time I was 30, nearly a dozen decorated my arms. When my dad invited me to a formal gala in Oahu honoring his contributions to the Native Hawaiian community, I was thrilled to be included. But on the day of the event, he told me to cover up. "Not a tattoo crowd," he said. Furious though I was, I hid my art beneath my stepmother's shawl and heard myself introduced to 600 people with a surname that wasn't my own. I didn't even make a scene when I found myself Photoshopped into the family portrait.

I later confessed to one of my brothers that I'd never felt so rejected. He reminded me that our ancestors were not just *kāhuna*—priests—bound to tradition, but also pathfinders who chased horizons to make new lives for themselves. Adhering to formalities as our dad did kept the culture alive, but in breaking away I embraced our ancestors' spirit of exploration and independence. I was no *kāhuna*, but that didn't make me a "bad Hawaiian" or any less an embodiment of our roots.

A fitting way to commemorate this epiphany, I have decided, is to get a traditional Hawaiian tattoo, tapped into my skin with sharpened bone. Forming what image, I don't know yet: Ritual dictates that the artist decides in the moment. But it will serve as a reminder that my father and I are very different threads woven into the same tapestry. It will be my story, and he will not be omitted. NICOLE ANTONIO



Shri Kushal Bihari temple, near the town of Vrindavan



A bicycle in Vrindavan

If These Walls Could Talk

Growing up in Dallas as the child of immigrants, **Priya Krishna** struggled to connect with her Indian heritage. A day at her father's ancestral home in Uttar Pradesh changed that

In the mid-1800s, the oldest known ancestor on my dad's side, Ramkishan Das, set off on a long journey in a bullock cart from what is now West Bengal to Uttar Pradesh. Legend has it that an astrologer told him his family would not survive unless he moved—so he did. And it was there, in the town of Vrindavan, 834 miles from his birthplace, that he made a home. One hundred and fifty years later, just as I was entering high school, I got the chance to visit.

My parents immigrated to the United States in the 1980s, before my sister and I were born. While they tried to teach us about our heritage—cooking Indian food, taking us to see Bollywood movies—we were products of American culture. Trips to India were rare, but the house was my dad's most tangible connection to home. He spent many summers as a child there, shooting marbles in the courtyard and flying kites on the roof. When his father died, he and his brother were put in charge of the place.

After a three-hour car ride from Delhi, we pulled up to the formidable sandstone structure on a sweltering July day. It was decorated with paisley etchings and bright blue doors that stood out from the pinkish-yellow walls. The courtyard was surrounded by a maze of rooms and staircases, some only connected to a single chamber.

The odd arrangement was the result of gradual construction, as subsequent generations added on to accommodate more family. In my dad's old room, photos of red sports cars he'd cut out of magazines were still pasted to his closet doors. He told us stories as we wandered—of my grandfather's nanny, who lived in the house for decades, and of using his allowance to buy rings of syrupy-sweet jalebi, then retreating to his room to devour them in secret.

In the courtyard, we greeted the Hindu priest who had been caring for the house's temple since my father was nine years old. He recognized my dad immediately. The visit was short; it was too hot to linger. On the drive back, I asked my dad who would take care of the house after he couldn't. He said he wasn't sure.

I think about that visit often, and how much time has elapsed since. The priest has passed away. I worry that my connection to India is growing more distant with each passing year. But then I remember how Ramkishan Das rode an oxcart across the country to ensure the continuation of our lineage. One day, it'll be my responsibility to take care of that house, a living monument to my family. I'll take my future kids there and maybe we'll shoot marbles in the courtyard. I'll tell them stories of those who came before them, and then we'll create memories of our own.



You Got Your DNA Results. Now What?

A step-by-step guide to planning a great trip around them. **By Billie Cohen**

When data from a DNA test comes back, many people feel inspired to dig deeper into where they come from, sometimes deciding to plan a trip to a newly discovered homeland. Ancestral travel is an area where hiring a specialist can make a big difference—unlocking experiences and facilitating connections that would be difficult to do alone. Here's what to consider as you get started.

Establish your goals

Heritage and *genealogy* are sometimes used interchangeably, but they mean different things to the specialist planning your trip. The former is about connecting to the broader history and culture of your ancestral country; the latter focuses on family connections. If you want to learn about history and art in Ghana, a heritage trip may suffice. But if you want to find the barn where your Portuguese great-grandmother was born, that's a genealogical project which requires archival research and deep contacts within a region. A trip can be both, but you must articulate your wishes early on.

Find the right specialist

Some operators have genealogists on staff or in their network. Others, like Jan Sortland, a *Condé Nast Traveler* Top Travel Specialist for Norway, are genealogists themselves. There are also companies that focus on genealogy travel. Many, like My China Roots and Ancestral Attic Poland, cater to specific communities, while a few, like Ancestral Footsteps, founded by

a producer of the BBC's *Who Do You Think You Are?* television series, have a broader scope. Even DNA testing companies have gotten into the game. Ancestry has a research arm called AncestryProGenealogists, which, in conjunction with Kensington Tours, offers private trips with experts and local guides. It also runs genealogy-themed cruises with other partners, including AMA Waterways, Cunard, and Regent Seven Seas.

Review past itineraries

To decide if a specialist has the chops to transform DNA data into meaningful travel, ask about heritage trips they've created for past clients. Rami Girgis, a *Condé Nast Traveler* Top Travel Specialist for Egypt, has obtained permits to visit historic Jewish temples normally closed to the public and once arranged a meeting with Magda Haroun, a leader of the small Jewish community in Cairo.

Check for language and history skills

Language can be a big roadblock to genealogical research—especially if a tongue has evolved or died out. While these changes can make some documents impenetrable for non-natives, astute specialists will have experience untangling them. It's not only words that disappear, either—countries and borders do too, so the person you're working with should have extensive knowledge of the place's history. Gwen Kozlowski, a *Condé Nast Traveler* Top Travel Specialist for Eastern Europe, explains, "In Poland, a lot of



towns have the same name because they were partitioned and borders shifted often. So I might know that your 'Watertown' is not the one by Warsaw, and that it's the village, not the town."

Make a research plan

Will your specialist do the family-history digging for you, or do they expect you to do the legwork? The answer is typically some combination of the two, so it's important to sort that up front because it affects time and cost. Next, find out what documentation is needed. "I ask clients to send me everything they have," says Kozlowski. "Dates of birth, death, marriage: Those bits of data help us locate the family."

Start packing

Katherine Borges, director of the International Society of Genetic Genealogy, never travels without DNA tests. While it may be unreasonable for others to do the same, you should pack copies of photos and documents for any family you might encounter, plus a camera or recorder to capture their stories. Finally, think about what you'd want to say to a new family member. "You have to make them want to share things," says Terry Koch-Bostic, chair of the Education Committee for the National Genealogical Society. "So you might say, 'I would love to know more about my mother's family, and you're one of the few people who can tell me that.'" Most important, she says, is recognizing that these meetings are special and using the time wisely. "Ask about things no record can tell you. Ask them about their lives."

The Long Way Home

A recent ancestry test inspired Chavonna Frazier to visit Sierra Leone. She was so moved by her experience she is uprooting her life in California to start a new one abroad

My ancestors were victims of the transatlantic slave trade; many of their descendants died not knowing where they came from. I took a DNA test from African Ancestry, which specifically serves people of African descent, and matched with the Mende people of Sierra Leone. I wanted to pay respects to my ancestors, so I organized a 2019 trip for eight people—all Mende—whom I met through African Ancestry's online forums.

Planning a trip like this on your own is hard. I knew what I wanted to see, but I didn't know how to go about it. Eugenia Chinsman of Manstravel specializes in African travel and is from Sierra Leone. She went above and beyond, and her tour operator on the ground—Alieya Kargbo, the founder and director of Tourism Is Life, in Freetown—had great connections. He mentioned us to the minister of tourism, and it eventually got up to the president that we were coming. He and the country opened their arms to us. They said, "We are so happy to see you. Why haven't you come sooner?" They even offered us citizenship as a way to move beyond past tragedies.

When we met the Mende paramount chief, Prince Lappia Boima, of the Kakua chiefdom in the Bo district, there was a huge celebration, with dancers, traditional libations, and a Mende naming ceremony. It was very emotional, like closure.

After visiting again, I've decided to move to Sierra Leone this May. I'm starting my own travel company, Roots N Salone Tours, and partnering with Alieya on DNA trips. I know the trauma that a lot of people in the African community carry about being displaced, but we are blessed to live in an age with technology that tells us not just where we come from, but also our tribe or ethnic group. If you find that out, then you find out who you really are: your culture, your religion, your heritage. AS TOLD TO B.C.

manstravels.net; rootsnsalonetours.com

yes, they can

We've long looked to our network of trusted travel specialists to take us to the far corners of the earth. These are the pros who assemble many of the elaborate itineraries that appear in this magazine, and since the dawn of the pandemic, their up-to-the-minute insights on shifting safety protocols have made them even more essential. If you don't rely on them yet, now is the time to start. Which is why the 2021 edition of *Condé Nast Traveler's* Top Travel Specialists comprises more members than ever before (for the full list, visit cntraveler.com/travel-specialists). On the pages that follow, we give you all the reasons you need to book a trip with a travel specialist this year and share some of the best experiences our experts have ever put together—not just to show the scope and prowess of their work, but also to remind you of all the adventures ahead after a long year of staying close to home.



A free diver gets a closer look at a manta ray in the Maldives

"We sent a drone up in Raa Atoll in the Maldives to look for manta rays. When we found one, we summoned our client from his villa onto an awaiting boat so he could snorkel alongside them."

—LINDSEY WALLACE, LINARA TRAVEL

Camel trekking
in Oman



Blissfully in the Middle of Nowhere

“The Arabian wilderness, which is largely pristine and remote, requires a level of particular expertise. It’s really a privilege to gain such access to an unspoiled landscape and the people who live there. That being said, we always try to enthrall and surprise. The largest sand dune in the world was discovered in southern **Oman**, and we were asked to track it down for a client. Our travelers tend to be adventurers who are conscious of the importance of low-impact travel. In this case, we ran a private expedition on a

mind-blowing trail through the Empty Quarter desert and set up a comfortable camp with a private chef for his group at the bottom of the dune. It was a magical journey. It just so happened that, on this same trip, members of our team were reunited with camel-herding Bedouin family members they hadn’t seen in years.”

SEAN NELSON,
OMAN EXPEDITIONS

All the reasons you should use a travel specialist—now more than ever

1.

They make things work, no matter what.

“We keep our clients happy by helping them move or defer bookings without incurring cancellation fees while ensuring that our service providers—the camps, lodges, and hotels—don’t lose bookings so that they can keep their heads above water.”

ANJA NAUDE, GO2AFRICA

2.

You trust someone to safeguard your financial future—why not your travel future?

“Our role is becoming similar to a financial planner in that we are part of the client’s team of advisers for their long-term plans.

I have personally been referred by many financial planners and wealth advisers who understand the importance of a future travel portfolio or plan in retirement.”

ESTEE GUBBAY,
LUXURIST TRAVEL

A Different Perspective

“Our mission is to connect travelers with people and places that change how they see the world. Clients of ours who were spending time in Louisiana had a completely immersive adventure: After breakfast at a great hotel in **New Orleans**, we took them to the skies in a De Havilland Beaver floatplane to fly south over the deep delta and outlying communities of Plaquemines Parish. This habitat is disappearing at an alarming rate, and from the air you can really see the challenges, as well as the efforts being made to conserve one of the largest alluvial floodplains in the





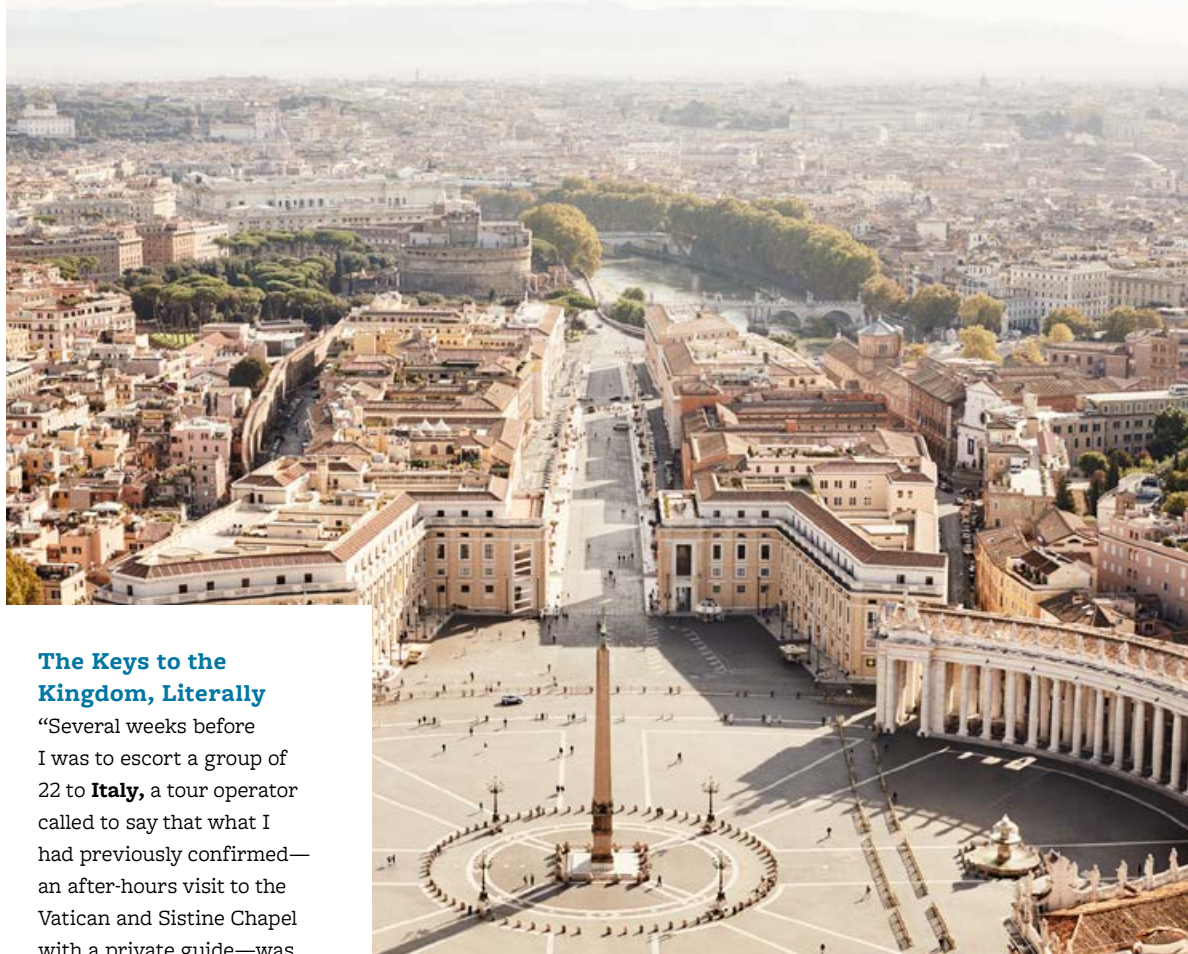
Wetlands in Louisiana

world. They landed on the banks of the Mississippi and had lunch in a restored 1880s church. On the return flight, they dropped down in the maze-like bayou to the west of New Orleans and transferred to an airboat for a ride through the swampy marshland filled with wildlife.” SAM HIGHLEY, *ALL ROADS NORTH*

A SMALL VICTORY IN 2020

“I pulled off a 50-person retreat in the Dominican Republic—with two weeks’ notice. People came from around the world, and everyone made it. It was an amazing way to end the year.”

—DAWN OLIVER, *WELL XPLORED*



St. Peter's Square in Vatican City

The Keys to the Kingdom, Literally

“Several weeks before I was to escort a group of 22 to **Italy**, a tour operator called to say that what I had previously confirmed—an after-hours visit to the Vatican and Sistine Chapel with a private guide—was now unavailable. Refusing to accept the news, I picked up the phone and tried some of my contacts on the ground in Italy until I found one who was able to pull off the impossible. And so we arrived at the Vatican one evening and began our private tour. When we reached the Sistine Chapel, a small and humbly dressed

man met us at the locked door. A large ring of dangling keys hung from his belt. He knew exactly which one would unlock the door to the sacred chapel...and in we went.” LYNN TYGER, *FROSCH TRAVEL*

How to Win at Instagram

“One of my clients joined zebra researchers as they did a game count flying over the Makgadikgadi Pans in **Botswana**. The photos he took from that Cessna 206 with the doors off were pretty spectacular.” DAN ACHBER, *TRUFFLEPIG TRAVEL*

travel specialists

Seeking Snow Leopards and Solitude

"We pulled off a helicopter safari deep into the main **Himalayan** range in search of the elusive snow leopard. We capped it off with a night's stay alongside monks in a remote monastery."

PHIL BOWEN,
GUIDES OF BHUTAN

Disney World, Minus Mickey and Goofy

"I was working with first-time clients on a family trip to **Disney World**, and from the outset we established that this was absolutely not about ticking off boxes or cramming in all the rides. I knew that they had pursued their Professional Association of Diving Instructors certification just before this trip, so I set the father and son up with private access to scuba diving in Epcot's 5.7-million-gallon saltwater aquarium in the Living Seas Pavilion. It's filled with more than 6,000 sea creatures and has perfect visibility. Early the next morning, they set off with a photographer on a private Wild Africa Trek safari at Animal Kingdom. They fed hippos and crossed an elevated rope bridge that hovered over alligators and crocodiles and drove through the savannah where lions lounged on warm rocks and elephants gathered in herds. This trip went well beyond the typical Disney World playbook."

PHYLLIS POLANER,
SMARTFLYER



Going Below the Surface

"For a 50th birthday trip I arranged diving under the ice in **Antarctica**, alongside leopard seals, and a private sail through the Drake Passage. I also scored permits to Palmer Station, one of the U.S. research centers in Antarctica. I knew I needed a vessel that could navigate the ice, which moves. No one would give me a ship. Finally, I found one, in Russia, so I scheduled conference calls in the middle of the night. I'll never forget the chuckle I got from the Russian owner of the ship when I said we won't take no for an answer. And we did it. We got it."

MEG AUSTIN, MEG2BOOK



Near Whichaway
Camp, Antarctica

A SMALL VICTORY IN 2020

"In a year where very few were able to travel, my guests were among the first Americans to travel to Kenya after the lockdown in August. They had an amazing time and really helped others feel more confident about traveling."

—ELIZABETH LOFTUS, ALLURING AFRICA

PHOTOGRAPHS:
TOM PARKER/WHITE DESERT
SAFARI, ROBERT PRESTON/
ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Otherworldly, in the Best Possible Way

"When my client said she wanted a truly authentic experience that didn't feel produced or refined for the sake of tourism, I suggested **Ethiopia**. She visited the secluded Omo Valley, an ancient land where tribes are untouched by modern life. This is a raw, genuine, and deeply transformational encounter. From there she

took a helicopter up to the highly remote Danakil Depression. It's the hottest, least hospitable place on earth, where lava lakes and neon-hued hydrothermal fields create a tapestry against the shimmering salt pans. It's like landing on Mars. To say few people on the planet will ever set foot there is an understatement."

TERESA SULLIVAN,
MANGO AFRICAN SAFARIS

3.

Because you don't know everything.

"It's almost impossible to ask all the right questions. My job is to make sure the client understands how things will be different and to help them break through their assumptions about what they'll encounter so they have a smooth trip. A travel specialist can get things done that you don't even know need to be done."

ELAINE BARAN, *ESPRIT TRAVEL AND TOURS*

4.

Travel specialists don't take no for an answer.

"Through sheer tenacity, I was able to get a client refunded over \$18,000 from a tour operator who was not giving refunds."

ALYSE CORI, *TRAVELWIZE*

5.

They make you a better traveler.

"COVID-19 will pass, but now we're much more mindful of how we travel and can use this as an opportunity to use travel for good, rather than be reckless consumers."

JAMES JAYASUNDERA,
AMPERSAND TRAVEL

Returning to Vietnam, Five Decades Later

"A gentleman contacted me to say that he'd been thinking about finally returning to **Vietnam**. As an American soldier he was based somewhere near the demilitarized zone in central Vietnam, and he had made friends with the local families in the village near where he was stationed. He wanted to find one family in particular, to see them and make peace in his heart with all that had happened. He said that he didn't expect I'd be able to find them. Still, I asked him to tell me what he could remember. He described a station, past the main road and down a hill. There was a small river by the village and a family with two boys and a girl. It wasn't much to go on, but I shared this with my Vietnam partner. 'Is there any possibility we can find them?' I asked. My Vietnam partner said it was worth trying. So he rented a motorbike, then a boat, and went out to the general region to ask around and see what he could find. It took two days of scouting, but sure enough, we found the family. When my client returned from his trip, he said he found a peace he never thought he'd be able to achieve before he passed."

APRIL COLE, *KAANECT*

For the full list of Condé Nast Traveler's Top Travel Specialists, please visit cntraveler.com/travel-specialists.

Still Waters Run Deep

"This is something that could never be duplicated, but I once arranged a yoga class for 20 in the underground Basilica Cistern of **Istanbul**."

ERICA GRAGG,
ESCAPE ARTISTS TRAVEL

Inside Istanbul's Basilica Cistern

6.

Travel specialists have the best tools at their disposal.

"We know about health and safety protocols for each destination. Our tourism boards and partners have been in constant contact with updates, changes in safety regulations, and reassurance of care for our clients. Because we have ongoing personal relationships with our tourism partners, we can inspire our clients to explore the world again with confidence."

ADRIENNE SASSON,
RUBINSOHN TRAVEL

7.

Because travel looks entirely different now.

"I expect there will be a growing interest in philanthropy and that vacations are likely to get longer as people want to enjoy slower travel—more time in less places. We're able to tap our contacts to help parents navigate working and schooling remotely."

MELISSA MATTHEWS,
RED SAVANNAH

Beachside
in Santa
Teresa,
Costa Rica



Seizing the Moment

"I planned a trip to **Costa Rica** for a father and his teenage son who had some physical disabilities and was mostly blind. They wanted to do this trip, and all the adventure activities they possibly could, before his condition worsened. Because the son could feel and hear better than he could see, I arranged white water rafting on a low rapid class, tandem zip lining, tandem waterfall rappelling, and ATV riding. They got to go into the animal sanctuary with a guide to feed a sloth and handle and feed the toucan. I put them at hotels where they would get the star

treatment, and because I set them up with a private guide and driver for the duration of the trip, the father got to feel like he was on an actual vacation. I think about this trip a lot, because our job is so much more than just planning travel. We create these magical moments and memories that will last a lifetime." LESLEY EGBERT,
LIVE LONGITUDE TRAVEL

A Party to Remember

"For our client's 40th birthday, we helicoptered six couples from Reykjavik directly to a glacier in **Iceland's** wild interior. We set up a bespoke camp with six heated tents, a private chef, an astronomer, and a DJ. They were lucky enough to party the night away under the northern lights. To clear the cobwebs the next

A SMALL VICTORY IN 2020

“Our client decided to go to the Serengeti for the wildebeest migration. Because he was arriving in just two weeks, we knew exactly where the animals would be, and he experienced it all with no one else around.”

—ELIZABETH GORDON, EXTRAORDINARY JOURNEYS

Karnak Temple
in Luxor, Egypt

A River Runs Through It

“We created an epic itinerary for a family cruising the Nile in a private dahabeah to **Egypt**, Jordan, and Oman. We pulled everyone out of bed at 4:30 a.m. and transferred them to the Giza Plateau to experience the Pyramids before they opened to the public. We even tapped a photographer to capture the family as the sun rose in front of the Pyramids and the Sphinx. They went on a private tour of the Grand Egyptian Museum with archaeologists and an Egyptologist, and had an after-hours tour of the Valley of the Kings where they accessed King Tutankhamen’s tomb. It’s hard to overstate the sheer magnificence of sailing in a glorious dahabeah. It’s really the trip of a lifetime.” TOM MARCHANT,

BLACK TOMATO

day we arranged for the more hardy members of the group to swim between two tectonic plates in the crystal clear waters of the Silfra fissure. We then deconstructed the entire camp and left the glacier without a trace of anyone having been there.”

MARK ALLVEY, UNTOLD
STORY TRAVEL

The Story Behind Our Stories

Our authority in the travel world is only as airtight as the sources we rely on. Before anybody boards a plane to report a story, we’ve already had numerous conversations with a travel specialist. Most begin with us sniffing around an idea: Is anyone going to Samoa? What’s new in Rome? Are we nuts to think about driving from San Diego to Cabo? At the nascent stages of story development, specialists are our sounding boards. They gut-check what is doable and what should stay a fantasy. They put places and people on our radar that we then put on yours.

Equally crucial is the real-time, on-the-ground support they provide when we’re stitching together complex itineraries. From our office in New York City, it would have been impossible to pull off what became our September/October 2018 cover story on Guizhou, an autonomous, hard to reach—and even harder to navigate—region in southern China by ourselves. Gerald Hatherly of Abercrombie & Kent booked in-country travel arrangements for our writer and photographer and provided top-tier guides who were able to get them the access they needed to tell the story they were chasing. Catherine Heald of Remote Lands led us through Japan’s Ōu Mountains for a ski piece in our November 2018 issue that ended up being as much about hidden hot springs and ancient Shinto shrines as it was a quest for epic powder. We’re still not sure how Marc Télió from Entrée Destinations got our writer to Arctic Watch Wilderness Lodge on extremely short notice for an April 2019 feature. Located 500 miles north of the Arctic Circle, and only open six weeks out of the year, weather permitting, it’s one of the most isolated and toughest-to-book retreats on the planet. And in February 2020, right before the pandemic hit, Behzad Larry from Voygr Expeditions led our writer on a trek through the foothills of the Himalayas in hopes of spotting one of the elusive snow leopards in India’s Hemis National Park. Though the experience felt like a search for “40-ish needles in a very big, high, cold haystack,” she ended up seeing several, including a mother and her cubs.

As we begin exploring a fundamentally shifted world, following our travel specialists’ advice and lead will be even more essential. This new reality has inspired us to relaunch Iconic Itineraries, a recurring feature that ran in our magazine from 2007 to 2013. Beginning later this year, we’ll work closely with a specialist to craft a custom itinerary that will be available to readers to book or customize further. It’s a win for everyone: We get to tell a great story, you get to turn it into your own trip, and we all discover new ways to get back out there.



Former Lamu resident
Josephine Muraya at the
storied Peponi Hotel.
Opposite:
Birds gathering at
sunset at Manda Bay



a place in the sun

A magnet for European nomads, writers, and royals, Kenya's Lamu archipelago belongs on the radar of any American traveler seeking warm climes and bohemian vibes

By Peter Browne Photographs by Jack Johns and Owen Tozer

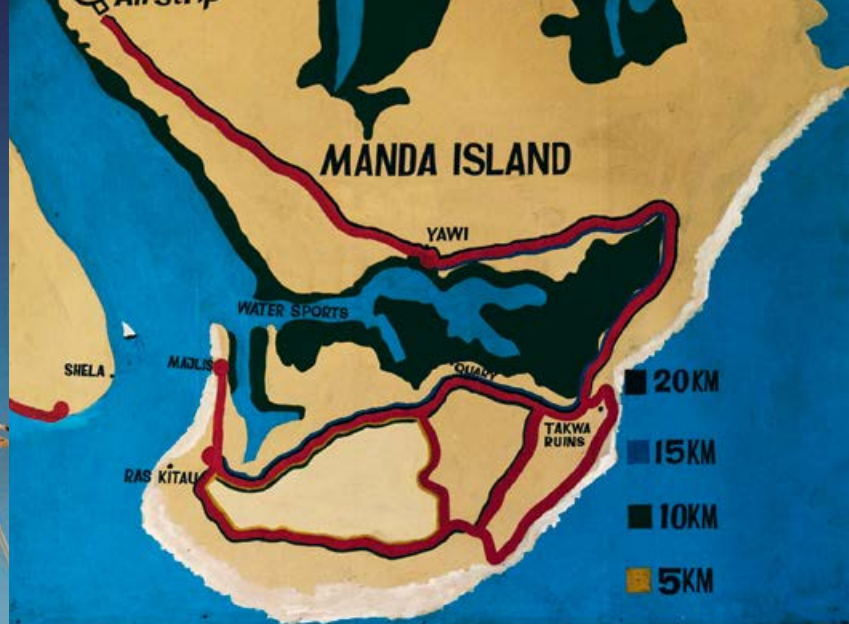


From left:
Brass detailing on
the *Tusitiri* dhow;
locals in Lamu Town;
the sails of the
Tusitiri; a wall
map at The Majlis
resort on Lamu

met a blind man in Matondoni who, 50 years ago, worked on the most majestic dhow on the Swahili coast of East Africa. Long before *Tusitiri* was refitted as an elegant home, it was a workhorse plying trade routes between Arabia and Mombasa, carrying coffee, spices, and mangrove poles. Sitting beneath a tamarind tree in his home village on the Kenyan island of Lamu, weaving rope for donkey harnesses from memory, Bwana Mzee could still recall his three-month-long journeys on the stately dhow, sailing north to Oman and Yemen on the Kaskazi trade wind and returning home on the Kusi.

In the late 1980s, a Norwegian family, the Astrups, found *Tusitiri*'s abandoned skeleton on a beach and decided to rebuild it, calling on Bwana Mzee to help put the vessel back together. Afterward, the accomplished craftsman sailed on the dhow for 22 more years, voyaging as far south as the Quirimbas islands in Mozambique, where he lost his heart and fathered a daughter, Asha, but was never to return.

Today visitors can charter the boat from the Astrups to sail up to Kiwayu, a secluded but mesmerizingly beautiful islet near the Somali border. But it is more commonly found plying the waters of the Lamu archipelago, a timeless world of reflected sea and sky. The islands' mix of Arab architecture, Chinese and Indian cultures, and superb artistry (silversmiths and woodworkers abound) has proved irresistible to travelers since hippies hailed Lamu as Africa's



Kathmandu in the 1960s. The archipelago still attracts curious nomads, its inaccessibility being a draw rather than a hindrance. The three largest islands are the sandy isthmus of Lamu itself, the coral-line Manda, and the mysterious Pate, which is only accessible at high tide. Resolutely traditional and almost entirely Muslim, there is nowhere more authentically Swahili along this stretch of shoreline.

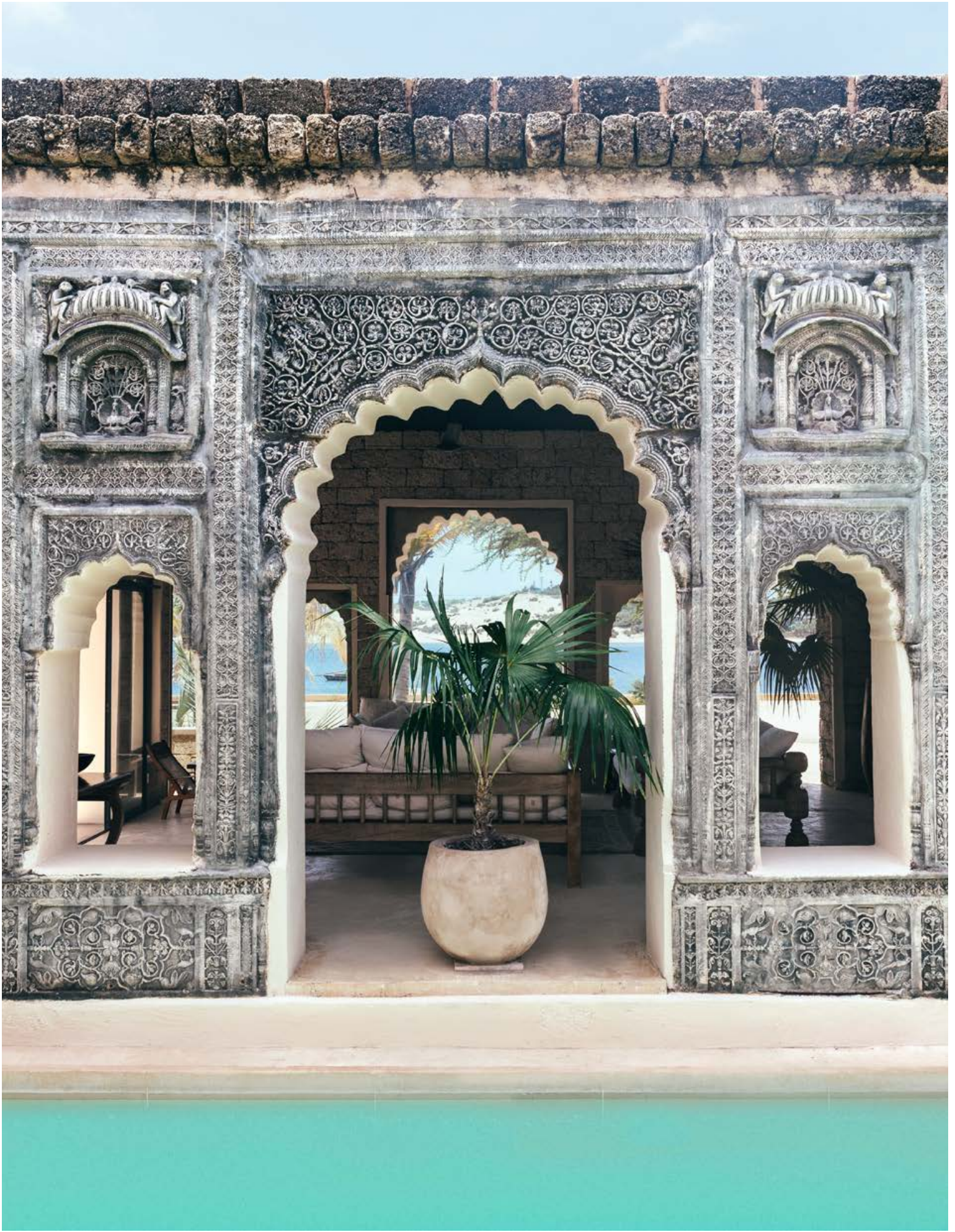
The *Tusitiri* is a languorous base for exploring Lamu's bustling hamlets and emptier margins. Measuring 65 feet from almond-shaped bow to stern, with a deck polished to a rich patina, it moves with surprising grace and speed; seven sailors are needed to raise anchor and hoist its imposing sails. I joined the dhow in the village of Shela, one of just four settlements on Lamu and a haven for European royalty, artists, and rock stars. We sailed past Lamu Old Town, the oldest and best-preserved Swahili settlement in East Africa, and on to Matondoni, where *Tusitiri* was built and Bwana Mzee lived in a simple brick house until he passed away in 2019, not long after my visit. We continued our circumnavigation of the island to anchor at remote Kipungani, a cluster of thatched houses fronted by a deserted beach, where we slept soundly on deck beneath the sparkling equatorial skies.

One afternoon, I took a tender from the dhow to explore the ruins of Takwa, a once-thriving trading town on Manda that was

abandoned in the 17th century. We motored slowly up a narrow creek lined with mangrove forests rich in spiny lobster and shrimp, and when the clear water became too shallow to navigate, we walked, coming eventually to a clearing. The remains of a grand mosque dominate the site, its outer walls etched with images of sailing dhows and Arabian daggers. Baobab trees stand sentry over a sacred tomb distinguished by a single soaring column. It is said that Takwa was forsaken when its wells ran dry and its occupants made their way to Lamu to settle in what is now Shela.

Pole, pole ("slowly, slowly") is one of my favorite Swahili sayings, and time certainly has a more languid dimension here. Twice a year, villagers visit the pillared tomb at Takwa to pray for rain. Some still see Shela, four centuries after it was founded, as an uppity upstart and rival to Lamu Old Town, a UNESCO World Heritage Center site since 2001, which lies just two miles away.

They are linked by a coastal path, along which donkeys serve as taxis and pickup trucks carry salmon-colored bricks and lime mortar. Until recently the only vehicles on Lamu were a Land Rover belonging to the district commissioner, a tractor, and an ambulance. Today a fleet of *boda boda*—whiny motorcycle taxis—whiz along its rudimentary backroads and busy promenade, puncturing the *Arabian Nights* atmosphere of Lamu Old Town.





From left: Poolside seating at The Majlis on Lamu; a crab claw at Manda Bay lodge; a carved wooden sofa facing the sea at Manda Bay

For more than 50 years, the Peponi Hotel has been part of the fabric of Shela. The handsome seafront house was built in the 1930s for the Kenya Colonial Service district commissioner, a Major Henry Sharp (known as “Sharpie”), and sold in the 1950s to Henri Bernier, a Swiss heir of the Nestlé family. Bernier, in turn, sold the house in 1967 to Aage Korschen, a Dane, and his German wife, Wera. The couple had lost their farm in the Kenyan Highlands after the country won independence and they decided to leave Africa. But after setting sail for Europe from Mombasa, they stopped in Lamu. Taken by its remoteness and great beauty, they bought a house and opened the small hotel, then with just four bedrooms.

Peponi, which is still in the same family, has expanded organically over the years to 28 rooms set in whitewashed buildings, arranged protectively around the old house on grounds full of palms. Early on, the Korschens added the deep, colonnaded veranda overlooking the Lamu Channel, where guests gather to gossip over sundowners.

But the hotel really took off after Aage and Wera’s son, Lars, picked up the reins when his father died in 1976. Some of Lars’s earliest guests were Mick Jagger and Jerry Hall, whom Lars took fishing.

Small and quirky, with none of the usual hotel trappings (there are still no televisions or telephones in the rooms), Peponi attracted worldly novelists and foreign correspondents, big game hunters, and robust conservationists. Its celebrity status was sealed in the late 1990s when Prince Ernst August of Hanover built a mansion next door and renovated three other Shela houses to rent out through a discreet agent at Hollywood prices. Soon, stars including Sting, Kate Moss, and Jude Law were hanging out at Peponi, enjoying the anonymity afforded by a low-lit bar on a far-flung African island.

Virtually all visitors to Lamu end up on Peponi’s bougainvillea-shaded terrace at some point. In the early mornings, expats stop for coffee before walking their dogs along the empty eight-mile beach just south of the hotel; around lunchtime, sunbathers clamber up the stairs; and come dusk, young men from Nairobi in pressed linen shirts and *kikoi* gather for Tusker Lagers at dusk. It also has the best restaurant in town, hosted each evening by Lars’s widow, Carol Korschen, or her daughter Elie. Lamu’s tourism is still recovering from a travel ban imposed by the U.K. government following Somali terrorist attacks. Without Brits, who made up the bulk of Lamu’s



tourists, its hotels, guesthouses, restaurants, and shops suffered. Many have reopened since the ban was lifted in 2017, and in more recent years there has been a real sense of purpose and optimism about the place, which I hope will return once travel resumes.

In the labyrinthine lanes rising steeply behind the waterfront in Shela village, amid the mosques and private houses owned by wealthy Europeans, there are art galleries and tiny boutiques selling beads and boho jewelery, kikois, and fabrics. The finest of these is Aman, owned by the South African designer Sandy Bornman. Her delicately embroidered clothes, which are run up by local tailors in handloomed fabrics from India, are bought by the screenwriters, poets, architects, stylists, and musicians who blow through Shela.

"I am very happy here," says Bornman, who visited on vacation more than 20 years ago and never left. "When I arrived as a single mother with two little girls, we were made to feel welcome and safe. The whole village took care of us from the start. The people here are kind, generous, and warm. We stick together but respect our differences. I wouldn't want to live anywhere else."

If Shela displays a curated, contemporary edge, Lamu Old Town has the unvarnished appeal of centuries-old traditions. Even today sailing dhows are built by hand without drawings or plans; the carved Swahili doors, the *kiti cha jhuri* chairs introduced in colonial

times, and the spindle beds copied from Indian designs are all part and parcel of the cultural swirl of these islands.

Wandering around town one morning with Nassir Omar, a man of Yemeni and Omani origins, I stopped at carpenters' workshops where timeworn chisels and techniques are passed down through generations. I met Mbarak O. Slim, who makes silver pendants and rings from luminous shards of antique Chinese pottery. Later, I was introduced to Isaiah Chepyator, an artist who creates colorful fish sculptures from old dhow wood decorated with beach detritus. Together we sat in the town square and talked about the 21st-century problem of plastic waste, watching feral felines said to be direct descendants of the sacred cats of Egyptian pharaohs.

One day I took a speedboat to Manda Bay. Rustic and romantic, the boutique lodge was built in the 1960s by Italian musician Bruno Brighetti. Then called the Blue Safari Club, it became known as the ultimate barefoot hideaway, equally popular with glossy Italian actors and intrepid aristocrats, and recorded for posterity by celebrity photographer Slim Aarons.

Brighetti sold the club to Fuzz Dyer and Andy Roberts, sons of prominent white Kenyan families, 18 years ago. The friends had overspent on a fancy deep-sea fishing boat and thought they'd better justify the cost by starting a business. They started viewing



From left: Peponi Hotel's most inviting balcony; palms swaying with the breeze on Lamu; children in the streets of Shela; a collection of clay vessels at Peponi Hotel

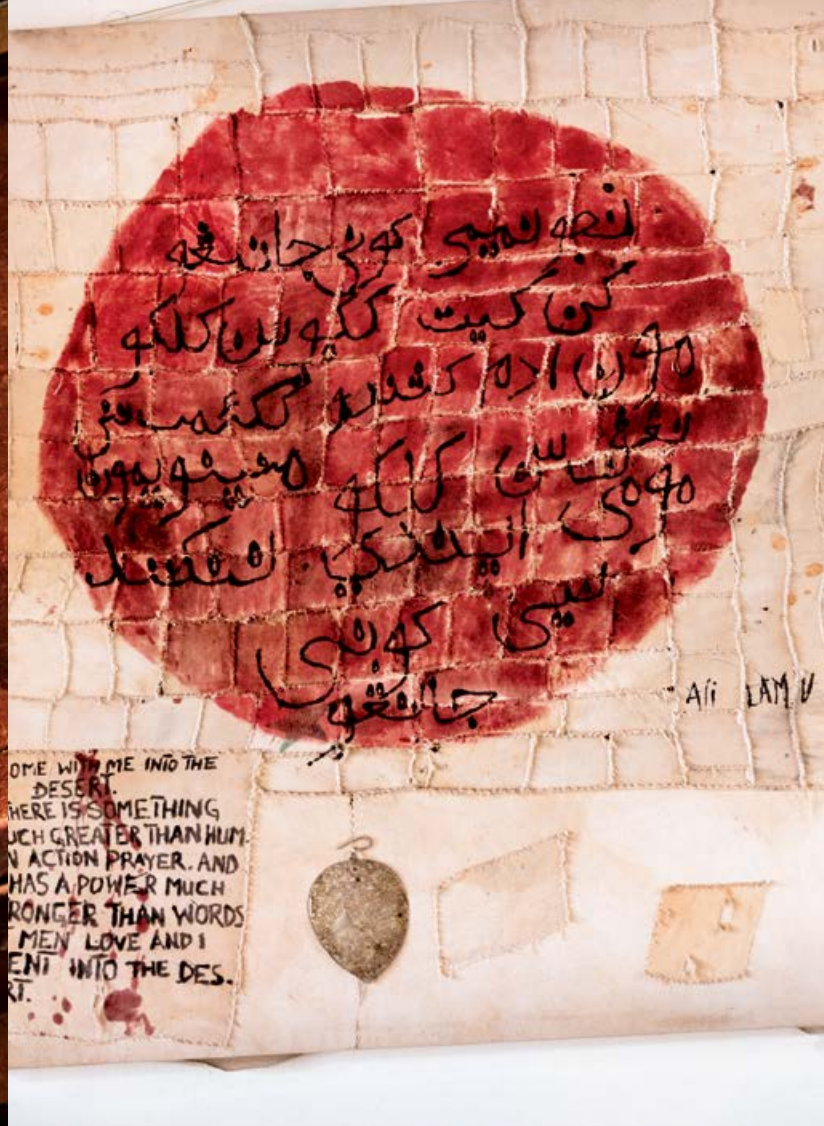
properties in the area, until it dawned on them that Brighetti already had the best location: Ras Kilindini, an iridescent peninsula with a calm swimming beach and no irritating sand flies or recorded cases of malaria. An offer was made, and Manda Bay was born.

Manda has always been a family place. The Dyers' and Roberts' four children were ages 8 and 10 when they all moved in. Caragh Roberts, now 26, remembers her childhood fondly. "We were never bored. We'd go digging for clams or harvesting oysters and eat them on the beach; we played football and volleyball, with the staff against guests." There were some inevitable cutbacks during the tourism ban, but the place is back to looking a lot like its past self: an unapologetically old-school retreat with fishing, sailing, and good times at its heart. Even today, there's still no glass in the windows of the bandas, which were built with mangrove poles and mats woven from palm leaves. The pure sea-salty breeze is the only air-conditioning needed, and geckos come and go as they please.

The fast boat from Manda Bay to enigmatic Pate Island skims across the glassy blue water at high tide, past fishermen free-diving for lobsters and along the island's mangrove-forested southern coast. I had heard stories about Pate from Mia Miji, who, with his English wife, Kirsty Tatham Miji, hosts guests on the *Tusitiri*. Mia was born and raised on Lamu, but his mother's family hailed from this outpost that outsiders seemed to know little about.

The village of Pate, where I landed, was once an important port. Even in its ruined state it resembles Lamu and Shela with its maze of narrow streets. Pate islanders are mostly subsistence fishermen, and I found them repairing nets and cultivating modest crops of tobacco amid the remnants of once-grand houses and mosques. The presence of *wazungu* (white people) is still a novelty, but the locals made me feel welcome and asked a teenager to serve as my guide. Mohammed appeared to know more about Arsenal and Chelsea than the historic features of his village, but we passed a pleasant hour among the ruins before catching a boda boda to Siyu, riding three-up along a dirt road through coconut plantations, radio blaring.

I was taken to Siyu because the few *wazungu* who do come to Pate always ask to see its impressive fort, a national monument. Soon I had a second guide, Salim, to escort me around the crumbling tombs. As it happened, Salim had once worked at an archaeological



dig on the island at Shanga. According to local lore, a bedraggled contingent of shipwrecked Chinese sailors stumbled onto Pate in the 15th century and, having proved their worth by dispatching a python, were permitted to settle and marry. The name Shanga, it is said, derives from Shanghai. For centuries, speculation swirled that descendants of the Chinese sailors still lived on Pate, a notion encouraged by the high cheekbones and other Asiatic features of some of the islanders. In 2002, a DNA test conducted on a family in Siyu provided proof of Chinese ancestry—and the myth became fact.

I thanked Salim for his time and left Siyu, hurtling through the coconut groves, and the centuries, to a waiting speedboat. At Manda Bay, I walked along the beach to the tip of Ras Kilindini. In the distance, I could make out the cranes of dredgers working on a vast new port that will one day rival Mombasa's. As in so many other places, change is on its way to these isolated islands. But that night, life continued at Manda Bay as it has for 50 years, with a barefoot supper served on a starlit beach and the sound of ice cubes and laughter at the bar. This will always be a place for dreaming, where herds of wild buffalo swim across from the Kenya mainland to feed near the ruins of a ninth-century Arabic town and best friends take risks to raise their children on a tiny island in the great swell of the Indian Ocean.

From left: Backgammon at Manda Bay lodge; regional art at the Dhow House, a five-bedroom vacation rental in Shela; a view of a sandspit at idyllic Manda Bay

In October 2020, the U.S. State Department issued a Do Not Travel advisory for the Kenya-Somalia border and select coastal areas, including Lamu County, due to the risk of terrorism. However, all six of the East Africa travel specialists we spoke with about this said they would still send clients to Lamu, including *Condé Nast Traveler* Top Travel Specialist Will Jones of Journeys by Design (journeysbydesign.com), who assembled this itinerary for writer Peter Browne. Kili McGowan, co-owner and CEO of Next Adventure, concurs. "The problems have mostly been on the mainland," she says. "Since all our clients fly to Lamu Island, we are not too concerned." Though it may be harder to secure travel insurance, *Condé Nast Traveler* Top Travel Specialist Elizabeth Gordon Halliday, cofounder and CEO of Extraordinary Journeys, says it's worth it: "My team traveled there recently, and it's still one of my favorite beach experiences in Africa."



A full-page photograph of a coastal landscape. In the foreground, a rocky shoreline meets the ocean with gentle waves. The middle ground features a steep, rocky cliff covered in patches of yellowish-brown vegetation and dark green shrubs. Above the cliff, a dense forest of tall evergreen trees covers a hillside. The background is shrouded in a thick, white mist or fog, creating a sense of depth and mystery.

natural high

In a wild, misty corner of the Golden State, *Marisa Meltzer* discovers an alternate version of the California dream, where fierce independence is as prized as ancient redwoods and empty Pacific beaches

Photographs by Jake Michaels

Near the town of
Shelter Cove on
California's rugged
Lost Coast, where
the King Range meets
the Pacific Ocean



T

here's a history of booms and busts here," said Otis Brown, the resident storyteller at the Inn at Newport Ranch. "Fish, lumber, cannabis—and we'll see about ecotourism." He was shouting bits of local lore as he navigated a Kawasaki UTV around the inn's 2,000 acres of private trails, passing stumps of redwood trees that were cut down 150 years ago, many with their inner layers eaten out by enterprising black bears. We whizzed by the house of the hotel's closest neighbor, who Otis said was John Gray, author of the *Men Are From Mars, Women*

Are From Venus self-help books.

In the mid-19th century, Newport, just outside present-day Fort Bragg, was a tiny logging community. When the loggers left town after a few decades, dairy and fruit farmers took over. Once the farmers cleared out too, about a century ago, the area became a haven for a certain kind of dissident thinker drawn to its remoteness. In 1941, a group of these new residents, scattered across several counties in northernmost California and southern Oregon, launched a failed bid to create a new state called Jefferson. That secessionist energy has remained at a low simmer ever since, drawing utopianists, pot growers, and other practitioners of alternative lifestyles. Every few decades—most recently around the time of the 2016 election—it rises to a gentle boil.

In the 1980s, Will Jackson, a Manhattan-based banker, saw a listing in the *Wall Street Journal* for a 100-acre coastal Northern California property that was priced the same as a single acre in the Hamptons. He bought it. A few years on, he purchased the adjacent lots, hoping to build a lodge with a back-to-the-land ethos. In 2015, he opened the Inn at Newport Ranch. I had come to Jackson's hotel with my best friend, Windy Chien, on a road trip that took us from her home in San Francisco to the Oregon border. We were chasing the spirit of the Lost Coast, a 25-mile stretch of prime California coastal land that starts just north of the Inn at Newport Ranch. No major roads access it, making this corner of the most populous state surprisingly unexplored.

That has long been central to its appeal with certain kinds of committed adventurers, like rogue surfers looking for undiscovered waves or hard-core hikers who don't mind timing their treks with low tide. But in this moment, when the more physical space you have the better, that's a selling point for us all. These empty landscapes aren't just a bonus during our era of COVID-19, but also an antidote to the kind of Instagram-driven travel where every stellar view or destination restaurant seems overcrowded and overhyped. This is not Big Sur, which can feel like a Hollywood playground, or the coast of Marin or Sonoma County, where techies flock to keep it real, but a more gothic version of sunny, coastal California.





Clockwise from top left:
The Captain's Quarters at
the Inn at Newport Ranch
has panoramic views of
the Pacific; a vintage
Cadillac in Ferndale,
known for its Victorian
storefronts and homes;
driving along the Avenue
of the Giants; room keys
at The Madrones in Philo;
The Brambles, the sister
property next door, sits
in a grove of redwoods;
a quiet afternoon in
Mendocino's town center

*The trees grow so close
and so high that it's
like driving through
a wood-paneled tunnel*





A bull elk crosses Usal Road, a former logging route and now the only way to access the Lost Coast by car

We eased our way toward the Pacific via the Anderson Valley, about two and a half hours north of San Francisco, along a winding 35-mile stretch of Highway 128. The isolationist element is alive and well in the local newspaper, the *Anderson Valley Advertiser*, which has revolving mottoes: “America’s Last Newspaper” and “Fanning the Flames of Discontent.” But now the valley is home to an up-and-coming wine scene. It feels like Napa must have in the 1970s, or Sonoma in the 1990s: funky, unpolished, mom-and-pop. “Tasting rooms have doubled in the last 12 years,” said Paula Viehmann after bringing us a flight of pinot noirs to sip at Goldeneye, a winery and tasting room in the tiny town of Philo.

We only had to go next door to spend the night. Jim Roberts and Brian Adkinson, owners of The Madrones, have built a kind of Mediterranean-inspired compound with guest rooms (mine was their former living room); four tasting rooms; and a restaurant whose chefs, Alexa Newman and Rodney Workman, are Chez Panisse alumni. The Bohemian Chemist, the on-site spa and cannabis apothecary, is unlike other dispensaries that I’ve visited, which usually look like old-school head shops or Apple stores. The owners purchased the fittings from an Art Deco pharmacy in Hungary. I bought a THC bath bomb that was so effective at chilling me out that I spent five minutes after my soak looking for my glasses until I realized they were still on my face.

On our way out of town the next day, we stopped by the Bewildered Pig. The restaurant, run by Janelle Weaver, who cooks, and her partner in work and life, Daniel Townsend, occupies a converted Craftsman-style home surrounded by rows of cacti, with a Tesla charger in the parking lot. We crashed an alfresco gathering of Weaver and Townsend’s friends and neighbors and restaurant suppliers, and were invited to stay for what turned into a long and lazy six-course lunch with wine pairings. Everyone we met that day had chosen the Anderson Valley not for its convenience—you might have to drive 45 minutes to buy groceries—but because they wanted to be there. I began to understand why as I ate one of the best meals of my life: shaved matsutake and yuzu persimmon salad, baby artichoke soup with fermented mushrooms, pork belly with lemongrass and turnips, pecan shortbread that was almost savory.

At golden hour we left the valley and drove through groves of redwoods toward the coast. As we approached, frothy sprays of waves crashed against a cluster of sea stacks. “Those rocks,” Windy says, “look like a Yeats poem. Slouching towards Mendocino.”

We stopped by the Sotheby’s real estate office in the town of Mendocino, a quaint and cliffside community with a white chapel and clapboard cottages that feel more Cape Cod than California, on our way up to the Inn at Newport Ranch. Most of the properties for sale were well into the seven figures, and inventory in the age of the pandemic was low. When we got to the inn, I pretended that it was my own compound. It’s built in the coastal-ranch style using

reclaimed redwood and is home to a restaurant run by Adam Stacy, a former executive sous chef with Thomas Keller Restaurant Group. Our dinner of sturgeon caviar on sourdough rounds and abalone and locally foraged mushrooms was briny and earthy and captured this place where the sea meets the forest.

There were windows everywhere to make the most of the views. To the east I saw golden hills, dotted with cows and strategically placed picnic tables—Jackson, the owner, is passionate about picnicking—which gave way to deep and dense forest. On my UTV tour of those woods with Otis, we passed not only redwoods but also rare California nutmeg trees, nettles, and sorrel. To the west, right in front of the inn, was the Pacific. Otis said migrating whales come up right to the cliffs—so close that his wife, Sally, who also works for the inn, claims she has smelled whale breath. When a storm is coming, they send notices out to all the guests and employees, and everyone gathers in the lodge with a glass of whiskey to watch the waves crash all the way up and over the cliff's edge.

Windy woke up at dawn to soak in the view. I was outside watching a cook walk down to the kitchen garden to gather some salad greens when Windy returned, reporting that it was so beautiful and overwhelming she'd cried. She immediately booked a whole week so that she could bring her boyfriend. I thought I could see the ocean just fine from where I was, but I followed her advice and walked over to one of several benches; each seemed placed in the exact right spot for viewing a specific rock or seeing a wave break in a particularly dramatic fashion. I watched a slice of sun cut through the overcast sky, its rays shooting into the dark sea. I sat there, smelling the tang of the ocean and listening to the rhythmic sound of the waves against the rocks. Soon enough I, too, was in an altered, exalted state.

As Windy and I pushed north into Humboldt County, there were suddenly a lot more Trump signs, even though the election had come and gone, alongside billboards advertising seasonal work harvesting cannabis. It's a place of strange mixes. We drove through Ferndale, a small town known for its perfect specimens of Victorian architecture. The Victoriana continued at the Inn at 2nd & C in downtown Eureka, where my room was painted a deep purple. I thought it looked psychedelic, but Windy thought it looked like the bedroom of Jo March from *Little Women*.

The redwoods, which are everywhere in Humboldt, long ago spawned a cottage industry. There are tourist shops every few miles selling wood carvings, and signs for drive-through trees for photo ops. We drove the Avenue of the Giants, a 31-mile stretch of the old Highway 101. The trees grow so close to the sides of this narrow, two-lane road and extend so high into the sky that it's like driving through a wood-paneled tunnel. I have to admit, at the outset I was a bit blasé about the prospect of seeing the giant redwoods. I grew up with a redwood tree in my father's front yard. The *Sequoia sempervirens* are majestic, and, as old-growth trees, they have been around since before the time of Christ. But they weren't, for me, novel.





Clockwise from top left:
A bowl of bouillabaisse
at Wild Fish restaurant
in Little River, just
south of Mendocino;
Wickson restaurant at
The Madrones; the hotel's
lobby doubles as a gift shop

Thankfully, I had Windy with me, who geeks out over all things nature. She had been telling me all week long about Richard Preston's book *The Wild Trees*, and the botanists who study the flora and fauna that only grow in the forest canopy. Another book she loved was *The Overstory*, Richard Powers's 2019 Pulitzer Prize-winning novel about five different trees, including a centuries-old redwood. On our way out of Eureka to the alluvial flats of Redwood National Park and adjacent state parks, which hold the highest concentration of these massive trees left on earth, we listened to an audio version of a recent *New York Times Magazine* profile of the Canadian forest researcher Suzanne Simard, who was the basis for a character in *The Overstory*. I was ready to experience the trees anew.

In Orick, about an hour south of the Oregon border, we turned into a parking lot in front of a group of cabins where an ominous hand-painted sign read, "Elk Are Wild Animals. By Entering You Acknowledge All Liability." We didn't see any elk, but we did find Justin Legge, a lanky, fleece-clad naturalist who would be our guide on a trek through the park. He led us on a hike that included rapid-fire asides about the 19th-century naturalist John Muir and his enthusiasm for the German naturalist Alexander von Humboldt, who never visited California but for whom the county, bay, and nearby university were named. Justin told nonstop jokes with a loud, infectious laugh, pausing to pick and smell laurel leaves. He and Windy immediately liked each other, talking as I trailed behind about whether people from *The Wild Trees* still lived in the area.

Redwood National Park and its environs aren't like, say, Yosemite. There are no hotels or restaurants to attract tourists, and barely any signs to hint at all the park contains. "The trees here are 200 percent larger in biomass than the ones along the Avenue of the Giants," Justin said. He pointed out where scenes were filmed for the second *Jurassic Park* movie, which I never knew had a redwood moment, and discussed research on the interconnectedness of trees in a forest. "I love how altruistic and community-minded they are," he said.

We were really there to see Ilúvatar, which was named after J.R.R. Tolkien's Elvish word for "creator of the universe." It was, famously, once on the cover of *National Geographic*, and is the largest tree in the park. It's 320 feet tall, weighs almost a million pounds, and has a forest canopy that fills 30,000 cubic yards of space. What looks like one huge fused trunk from afar is actually, Justin said, made up of about 220 vertical trunks. Those are all impressive figures, but it's only when experiencing it in person with no one but the three of us around that the tree's real power comes through. It was like standing in front of a living skyscraper, so grand it's scary.

I was torn on how closely guarded the location of the tree was. "It's a secret on purpose," Justin said. In this era of everything being accessible all the time, I liked that if you wanted to see the giant redwoods in this area, you had to know where to look, or at least how to look for them. I couldn't remember a time I'd been to a national park that felt so rugged. I guess Ilúvatar and the redwoods were like so many of the delights in this part of the state: hiding in plain sight. They're there for anyone who is willing to put in a little effort. ■





The Harbor House Inn,
a hotel off Highway 1
near the hamlet of Elk,
has a Michelin-starred
restaurant with great
views to boot



PHOTOGRAPH: CAMERON HAMMOND

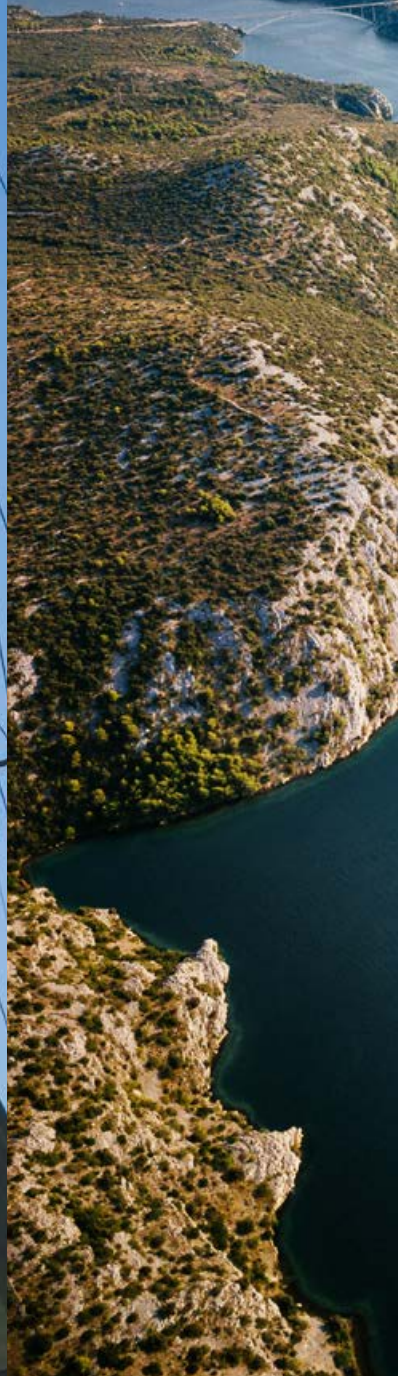


time and tide

The siren call of Croatia's North Dalmatian coast pulls *Timothy O'Grady* to a land of stark beauty and resilience, where sun-bleached islands smell of sage and salt and limestone-paved towns wear their history proudly

Diving into the
Adriatic near
the seaside
city of Zadar

Clockwise:
The schooner
Satori in
the Kornati
archipelago;
the Šibenik
Channel;
navigational
tools





PHOTOGRAPHS: STUART PEARCE,
PETAR SANTINI, LAURA EDWARDS



n the summer day that Elena Rusnjak introduced her parents to the family of her betrothed, on the island of Rab, they set off early from their hilltop town in Istria, in the northwest part of Croatia near the Slovenian border. A place, she told me, as green as Ireland. It was her 21st birthday. She was nervous about the meeting. At the ferry port she watched her father look apprehensively across the strait at the lunar landscape of Rab, where the land was stripped naked by the ferocious wind known as the bora. On the island they drove over karst on which no vegetation could endure and stopped in eastern Barbat, whose name means “densely green” but is a place as bald as a stone on a beach. Finally, her father could contain himself no longer. He began to sob. Elena begged him to tell her what was wrong. “My child,” he said, “what is this place you have chosen? A single goat could eat all that is here in a day.”

What she knew and her father didn’t was that just over the ridge were the island’s beaches, inlets, farmland, vineyards, one of the last oak forests in the Mediterranean, and the millennia-old city of Rab, where her future husband was waiting for her. Soon everyone was happy. Elena went on to raise two daughters on the island before moving to the mainland’s seaside city of Zadar. She grew to love life on the North Dalmatian coast, with its archipelagoes, special light, and complicated history that has seen nearly every European imperial force, from the Greeks and Romans on, pass through and leave its mark. Its austere beauty cured her homesickness for the soft greenness of Istria.

I met Elena when I walked into the lobby of the Almayer Art & Heritage Hotel in the old part of Zadar; she was behind the desk. The teasing started before I even reached her. Something about my parking skills and inability to find the main entrance to the hotel. I was reminded of being in Glasgow or Brooklyn, where roasting is a recreational pastime. In her case it had an appealing combination I’ve encountered elsewhere in parts of Europe, an alternating current of the acerbic and the passionately enthusiastic. As a teenager she was, she says, an introverted punk. In order to overcome her shyness, her mother suggested she study hotel management. This gave her the chance not only to spend time in the places she loved but also to convey their virtues to others. She blogs about the region and, still the punk, conducts her own alternative tour of Zadar in a dress and Doc Martens, uncovering secret gardens and ruins and monuments officialdom might not promote. We sat in the hotel’s courtyard and she talked about this part of the country, so that when I walked the streets of Zadar and nearby Šibenik, I saw them in part through her eyes.

This is northern Dalmatia, which feels quite different from the Dalmatia around Dubrovnik, with its Venetian harbor. The north stretches from the Kvarner Riviera down to the ancient city of Split, and for the most part is harsher, less populated, and less visited. The bora defines the vegetation and at times the angle at which people walk. It is more Croat, less Italian, particularly in Šibenik.

Those who pass the region by miss not only these small cities with their layered histories, but also the nearby lake lands of Prokljansko and Vrana and the glorious Krka National Park, emerald green and blue, with cascades of waterfalls that catch the light.

I'd come to northern Dalmatia to see these things, but above all to sail around the islands of the Kornati archipelago. I was to set off the following morning and asked Elena what I might expect. "Tomorrow you will get relief from the ordinary world because the Kornati is so starkly empty," she said. "Everyone who goes there speaks of this. Out there, you can hardly even get a phone signal." A substantial fee to enter the national park deters many outsiders, and with the party-boat scene kept further south around Hvar and Brac, the Kornatis are eternally calm; even in the height of August, it's possible to sail around for a week and encounter only a handful of other yachts. This strange, bleached world of scattered islets and reef is considered one of Europe's last wildernesses. If viewed from above, the Kornati appear like little hillocks in the sea, stretching out as far as the eye can take in. I set out to sail around them on the *Satori*, a 136-foot schooner that can be chartered for a few days or longer.

There are certain journeys that feel more like allegories than routes to a destination. Sailing the seas is one. This has to do with the vastness and pitilessness of what you're moving through. You feel infinitely small but also liberated. The senses work in a primal way. Sometimes they are pushed beyond the range normally asked of them. Robert M. Pirsig, the author of *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, wrote, "Sailing is not an escape but a return to and a confrontation of a reality from which modern civilization is itself an escape."

Sailing among islands is entirely different than sailing the open sea. Croatia has hundreds of them, all set in unusually clear water not far from the mainland. Among them the Kornatis are distinct. These 147 islands form the densest archipelago in the Mediterranean. They are pale beige or gray desiccated limestone karst covered sparingly with low-lying shrubs, wild herbs, and pines. You glimpse orange clay tiles on the roofs of summer houses, an isolated chapel, a donkey, a few olive trees, the occasional tavern where you can get seafood or lamb baked in a pot during the warm months. The palette, all the different colors of the sea, is restrained. The islands' names are less so—Large Breaking of Wind, Prostitution, Grandma's Hind Quarters, to offer genteel translations of a few of them. It seems the locals entertained themselves with naive 19th-century Austrian cartographers and the names got onto maps and stuck.

You slalom among them through calm lagoons, narrow channels, and open sea. Notable are Levrnaka, with its sandy beach and excellent fish and seafood restaurant; Žut, for its complex coastline; and Mana, for its dramatic cliff topped by "ruins" created for a 1959 film. We stopped at an island at random and walked the paths, through the pines, out to a cliff. The sea shimmered, the islands were dark discs in the glare. We dived into the still waters of a cove.



**The bora, a fierce
wind, defines the
vegetation and
at times the angle at
which people walk**



PHOTOGRAPHS: MARIO JURINA, ANNIE SOPHIE ROSEVINGE

A bird's-eye view of Šibenik's Old Town

Opposite: Taverna Goro on the island of Dugi Otok in the Kornatis





PHOTOGRAPH: JULIEN DUVAL/AMAZING AERIAL AGENCY



Seen from Telašćica
Nature Park on Dugi
Otok, the Kornati
appear endless

You can almost persuade yourself that no one has ever set foot here before. You enter something different than elsewhere in the Mediterranean. It is spare, timeless, silent. Of these islands George Bernard Shaw, in an uncharacteristic outbreak of lyricism, wrote, “The gods wanted to crown their work and on the last day they created the Kornati Islands out of tears, stars, and breath.”

The archipelago’s complex history makes it both enticing and inhospitable. There are signs of habitation that go back to Neolithic times, but now, Elena explained, no one lives here full-time. On the one hand, the water is beautiful, there’s ample fish, some good pastureland, and sheltered bays. On the other hand, the wind has always blown fierce, and good soil has always been scarce. And, of course, pirate attacks and the kidnapping of shepherds to turn them into galley slaves were real issues. Remains of stone walls, little harbors, olive orchards, forts, churches, and sea-salt refineries are vestiges of man’s on-again, off-again relationship with the Kornati.

My journey through the them ended in the small fortified city of Šibenik, with its magnificent UNESCO-listed Cathedral of St. James. I walked its labyrinthine alleyways but was soon hit by a downpour and took a taxi back to Zadar. In the morning I met Elena for her walking tour, which was funny and touching, particularly when we arrived at the ninth-century Church of St. Donatus. The church was built in imitation of Charlemagne’s court chapel, on a foundation of pillars left over from the city’s Roman forum. After all the devastation visited on this city, the simple church is still intact and hosts concerts. We ended the tour in its bell tower.

Looking down on the city built on interconnecting islands and out to the sea beyond, Elena recalled her first glimpse of Zadar. “It was December. The light alone mesmerized me,” she said. This high bourgeois city was totally flattened by Allied bombers late in World War II. Before that, everyone else seems to have been through it and taken a piece while leaving behind a little of their glory—the Huns, Venetians, Hungarians, French, Austrians, Germans, Italians. In the early ’90s, Serbs attacked from air, sea, and land. The fact that the people are hardworking and resourceful, not to mention stubborn, said Elena, is what spurred them to rebuild the home that they love so much. “And now I love it too,” Elena adds. “The shades of orange tiles on the roofs, the a cappella singers who keep on singing, and the people’s capacity to survive.” 

Sailing the Kornati Archipelago

The writer sailed the Croatian islands aboard the *Satori*, a 136-foot schooner that belongs to Claus Thottrup, owner of the Borgo Santo Pietro hotel in Tuscany. Onboard, there are lounges, indoor and outdoor dining areas, five en suite double cabins, a foldaway cinema, and a sunbathing deck. *Rates from \$126,260 a week for up to 10 guests (excluding fuel, food, and drink); satoriyacht.com*



Author **ISABEL ALLENDE** on

Brazil



In 1996, my friend the photographer Amanda Jones was working on a piece for the *L.A. Times* about candomblé, an Afro-Brazilian religion in Bahia, Brazil, and she wanted me to write the story. At the time, I was looking for a new wife for my son, Nico. I know how that sounds! But my son married young and after five years and three children, his wife left the marriage. Being a Latina mother, I felt it was my duty to help him find a partner. Amanda said she had a friend, Lori, who could be a match. Since Amanda and I were going on this trip together, we invited Lori to come with us as a sort of test, an interview. In Salvador, we were received at a modest concrete *terreiro*, where ceremonies take place, by one of the *mães de santo*, or priestesses. She had offered to throw the *búzios*—a divination, like a tarot card reading but with shells—for the three of us, to tell us about our patron goddesses and answer questions about our futures. We sat on the floor; the only furniture was a low table. She said that my deity was Yemanjá, the goddess of the sea and of love. Then she threw for Lori and told her that there was a man waiting for her, that she would meet him very soon, and that she would have three kids. I thought, Great, but three more kids—that's six kids! From there, we went to Rio, and I figured we should give this *búzios* thing one more shot. So we went to a favela, and another priestess threw for us. She told me, again, your goddess is Yemanjá. And then she threw the *búzios* for Lori. She said, 'There is a man waiting for you and you will have three kids.' At this point, Amanda and Lori were convinced the *búzios* worked—and I was sure that Lori was the woman for my son. *Búzios* aside, she was always helping. She was funny. She was incredibly kind. The only problems were that she had a boyfriend and that she was a vegetarian. I thought, Okay, I will learn to cook vegetarian. And the boyfriend? Well, maybe we can get rid of him. And we did. When we got back to California, I introduced Lori to Nico. They fell madly in love and have been married for 20-something years. And they never had kids—but she's been a mother to his." AS TOLD TO MEREDITH CAREY

ISABEL ALLENDE'S LATEST MEMOIR, *THE SOUL OF A WOMAN*, WAS RELEASED MARCH 2.