

Jaunting

The Magazine of Recreational Travel

VERMEJO

Loch Ness

Itsukushima Shinto Shrine

New River Gorge National Park

How to Haggle

November 2023



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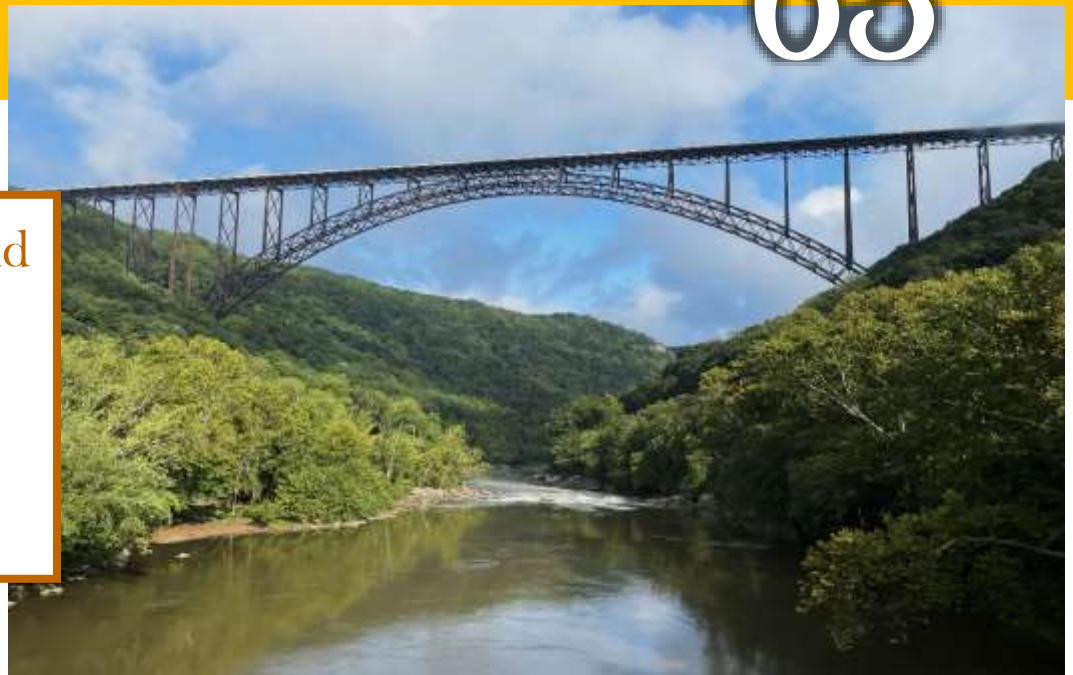
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Jaunting

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All travel involves risk.
Confirm directions and critical
information before traveling.
Be aware of health and other
concerns.

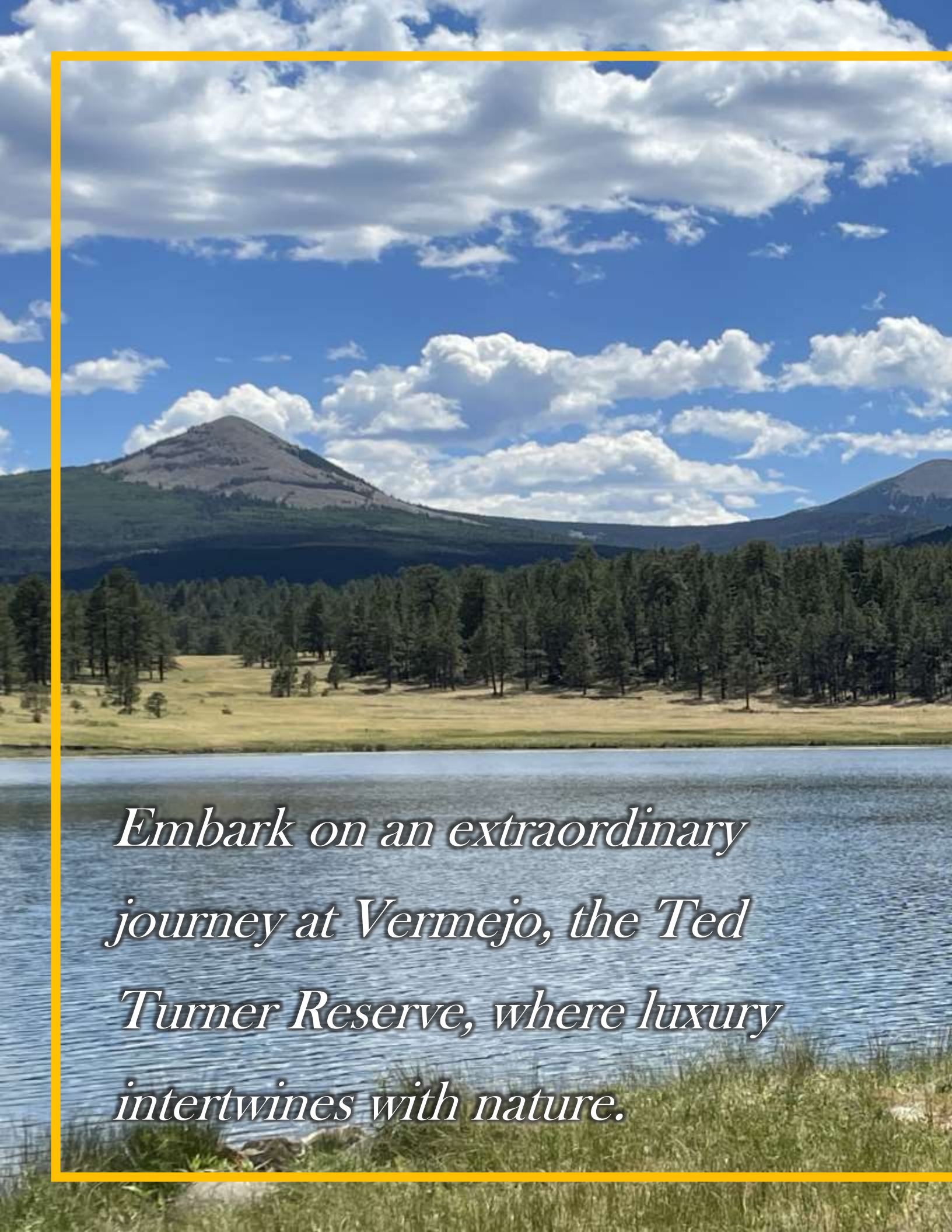
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Day of the Dead
Mexico

Photo by Darvin Santos



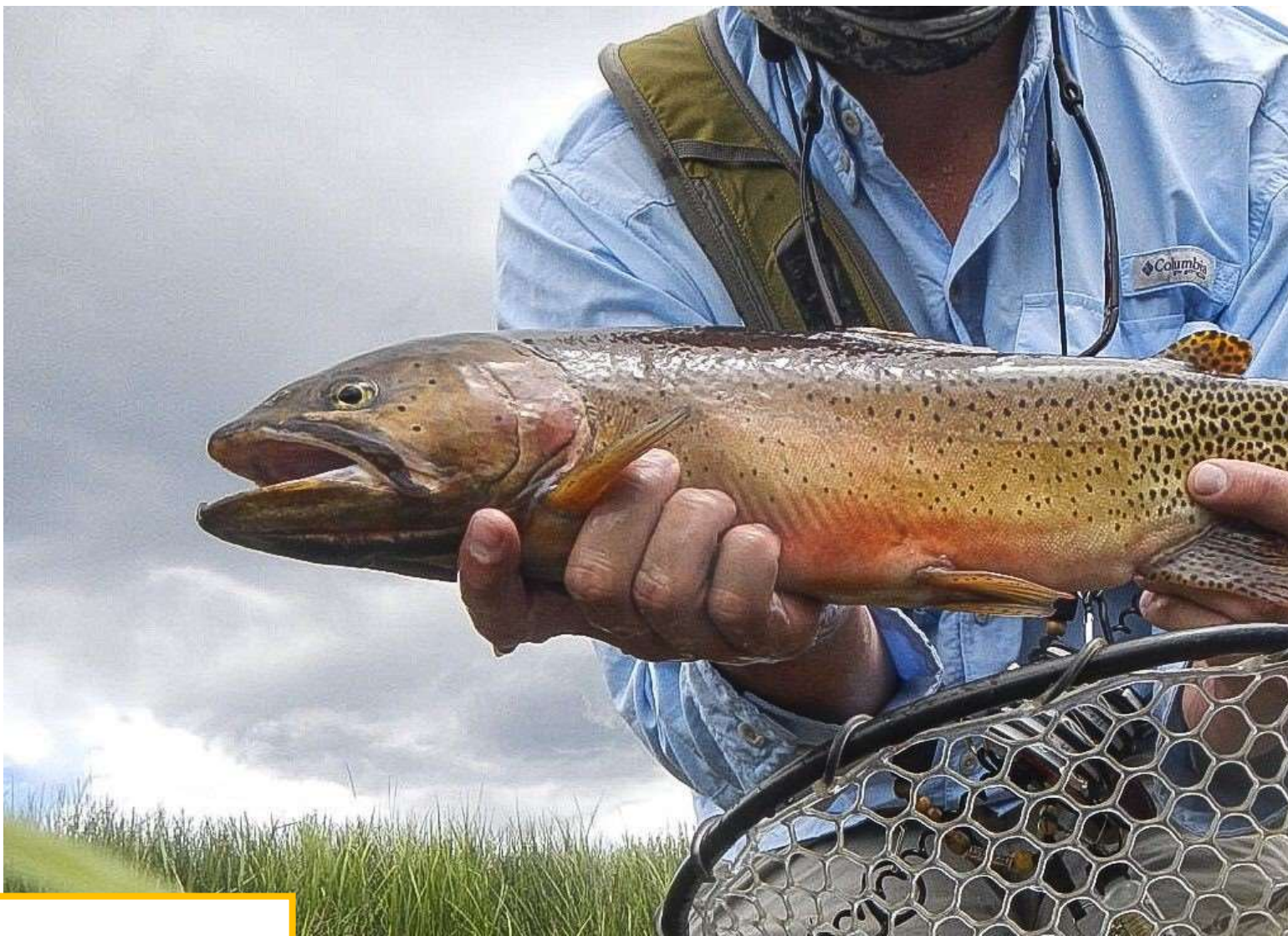
*Embark on an extraordinary
journey at Vermejo, the Ted
Turner Reserve, where luxury
intertwines with nature.*

If there's a heaven on earth, it's

VERMEJO

Feature by

Debbie Stone



I

finally hooked a big one! A six-foot, five-inch, 220 pounder! No, it wasn't a fish, unfortunately, but rather my fly fishing guide, Aiden. Embarrassing to say the least, as my fly landed right in his chin. Thankfully, after some very dexterous "surgery," he was able to remove it. And he graciously told me it wasn't the first time.



I had never tried fly fishing prior to this attempt but had always admired those I had seen participating in the sport. It looked like a beautifully choreographed dance that somehow in my deluded mind, appeared easy. Ha!

As I practiced casting, first while standing on terra firma, and then in a boat on a lake, I realized quickly that the motions involved were much more challenging than I imagined. My experience, albeit mortifying and

humbling, gave me a newfound appreciation and respect for fly fisherman and woman, who devote themselves to this art.

Fly fishing was one of several activities I participated in at Vermejo, a Ted Turner Reserve. Located in northern New Mexico and southern Colorado, Vermejo consists of over 550,000 picturesque acres with vast forests, mountains, prairies, nineteen

Rio Grande
cutthroat
Trout
(Photo by
Sam Hirt,
Courtesy of
Vermejo

Previous –
One of
Vermejo’s
many lakes.



lakes and 137 miles of rivers and streams. Larger than most national parks, it's one of the most dramatic, natural destinations in the country and a jewel in the Land of Enchantment, a home where the bison roam and the deer and the antelope play.

Vermejo is regarded as a leader in “regenerative”





Pir fishing
guide,
Aiden,
before
getting
hooked.

tourism, offering luxury digs and impeccable service, as well as bespoke experiences, allowing guests to connect with nature, while being inspired to conserve it. The place is so spectacular and unique it has been named the Travel + Leisure 2023 World's Best Resort Hotel in the West.



The property has a lengthy and colorful history, dating back to the 1841 Maxwell Land Grant, one of the largest contiguous private landholdings in the history of the U.S. Flash forward to 1902 when William H. Bartlett bought 205,000 acres of the grant and built three residences on the land, including Casa Grande and Turner House, both of which remain today. He expanded the property to 300,000 acres and reintroduced elk to the land.

After Bartlett's death in 1918, the property was bought by L.A. Times magnate Harry Chandler. Chandler started the Vermejo Park Club, with members that included some of Hollywood's silent picture stars





Vermejo
HQ. Photo
by Ben
Clark,
courtesy of
Vermejo

like Will Rogers, Douglas Fairbanks, Cecil B. DeMille and others. The club was a sporting getaway until the Great Depression.

In 1945, W.J. Gourley, a Texas tycoon, bought the place and expanded it to 480,000 acres and started cattle ranching. During this time, a fire destroyed the middle guest house. The stables were then renovated to become a social center for the property and what is presently the Main Lodge.

Pennzoil took ownership of the property in 1973 after Gourley's death and further increased the size of it to 588,000 acres, continuing cattle ranching, while adding more guest accommodations. The company's tenure ended in 1996 when Ted Turner bought Vermejo with the intention of focusing on conservation efforts and wildlife management. He transitioned the cattle



ranching operation to bison and directed efforts to return the land to a healthy, “rewilded” state.

You might wonder why Turner chose bison. Story has it that when Ted was ten years old, he read about





Take a bike and explore the property. Photo by Deann McBride, courtesy of Vermejo.

the plight of the imperiled bison in a National Geographic Magazine issue. He asked his father to buy one of the animals to help save the species. His father told him that he, Ted, should work hard and make money for this endeavor. And that is what Turner



proceeded to do, becoming a noted entrepreneur, television producer, media proprietor and philanthropist, all to save the bison from extinction.

Today, thanks to Turner, there are over 1,200 bison at Vermejo. He is a true savior of the species. It's not only the bison, but also the endangered Rio Grande cutthroat trout that have been successfully brought back to the streams and rivers at Vermejo. Additionally, due to a collaboration with the New Mexico Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit, Vermejo has performed habitat improvement projects on the property to help the mule deer population rebound. And efforts are continuously directed towards managing the elk herd by studying causes of calf mortality.



Improving the stream and riparian health of the Vermejo River watershed has been another major goal. Through a series of exclosures or fences to keep out the grazers, flora is flourishing, trout habitats have been enhanced and beavers are at work making their dams.

Other programs have been aimed at the ecological restoration of ponderosa pine and aspen, control of invasive species and inventory of plant species. To date, over 1,000 plant species have been documented on the property.



You can learn all about these efforts on a conservation tour, just one of the many activities available at Vermejo. The menu of curated experiences is extensive. All can be tailored to your interests, skills and ability levels and are led by guides well-versed in the history, land and wildlife of the property.

You can hike, go horseback riding, mountain biking and fish, take tours with an emphasis on conservation, history, wildlife and more. Or you can head up to the high country on a UTV and explore the lakes area, all while keeping an eye out for creatures. There are also archery and shooting sports, disc golf, a via ferrata, fitness classes, yoga, and the list goes on.

Of particular interest to me was the bison

expedition, where you can have an up close and personal view of a herd, though from the confines of a vehicle for obvious safety reasons. I could have observed



these animals for hours, as their behavior fascinates me. And I learned so much about them, courtesy of my guide. I had been using bison and buffalo interchangeably until he clarified the distinction between the two. Bison are a native North American species, while buffalo are native to Africa and Asia.

The bison cows can weigh around 700 pounds.

The Turner Enterprises Castle Rock herd, which we saw, gets its name from the unique geologic feature at Castle Rock Park on Vermejo. This area was “home” to these animals since the 1920s. The herd has Yellowstone origins and pure bison genetics.

Bison are impressive and intelligent mammals.

They are the original farmers, as with their high hooves, they turn over the soil for new seeds to grow. They know not to graze down to the last root and understand the need to circulate their grazing pastures. Though they drink from the rivers, they don't hang out on the banks, as they intrinsically comprehend they will ruin their water source with this behavior.

Females, or cows, set the lead in the herd and are super protective. When they start moving, the herd follows. Cows typically weigh around 700 pounds. The males, or bulls, basically eat, drink and pass their genetics on to as many females as they can. They can weigh up to 1,300 pounds. Bison have been clocked at over 35 miles per hour and can jump over a seven foot obstacle.

We witnessed numerous cows with their calves, or red dogs as they are often called. The calves stayed close to their mamas, who knew exactly where their babes were at all times.

Another tour I particularly liked was to the famous Catskill Kilns. These kilns date back to 1892 and are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Located near what was once the Catskill townsite, they were used to transform over 3,000 logs a day into

charcoal during the boom years. The red brick ovens are shaped like a beehive and massive in size. There are 25 of them in two groups, separated by a few miles. Each is about 28 feet tall, with arched openings and fifteen-inch-thick walls. You can walk inside them and they still emit a charcoal odor, similar to the remains of a



campfire. And in some, swallows have used the interior walls to build their nests.

Catskill was a bustling community of about 2,500 homesteaders who settled here over a hundred years ago. It was a lumber and sawmill town with a reputation as a fun loving place. Residents took pride in having a church, recreation hall, dance pavilion with 22-piece band, ballpark and even a racecourse. And unlike other towns in the 1890s, it wasn't a violent place.

Life was good until 1902 when timber around the

area became scarce and the sawmills began closing down. Then the tracks of the railway were removed, virtually cutting off the town's lifeline. A pair of floods devastated the town and all that remains today, other than the kilns, are a few foundations.

The UTV tour to the high country was also a treat. This part of the property is exceptionally beautiful, with small scenic lakes, mirroring the surrounding landscape. We hiked around one of them, discovering a set of old, bleached elk bones that we attempted to use our anatomy knowledge to identify. On our way back to the lodge, we detoured to see Castle Rock, a ginormous geological feature. Rising out of a



The Catskill charcoal kilns.

Pronghorn elk.
Castle Rock

Mysterious elk bones.



vast mountain prairie, it's a Vermejo landmark. While taking in this scene, we spied several pronghorn. Of course, once they noticed our presence, they quickly took off with speed and grace, living up to their reputation as the fastest land mammal in the Western Hemisphere.

With all this activity, sustenance is required. And as with everything else at Vermejo, the kitchen is a shining star, too. Guest receive three gourmet meals each day, included with their stay. Executive Chef Giovanni Lanzante and his staff prepare dishes using locally sourced, seasonal ingredients with a Southwestern flair. Many of the greens and veggies are grown in the onsite greenhouse and gardens, providing another opportunity to connect with nature.

You'll find ranch-raised bison, fresh





trout, salmon, quail, pastas and more tantalizing entrees, along with a range of appetizers from hot and cold soups and unique salads to potstickers and ceviche. Accompany your meal with craft cocktails, local beers and wines from the Vermejo's extensive wine cellar.

Dining
vermejo
ranges from
gourmet to
s'mores.

Definitely save room for dessert, like the berry crisp ala mode or mini chocolate cream pie. The “elevated” smores, however, took top billing for me. These are not your usual campfire treats. Think homemade marshmallows with an array of toppings such as hot caramel and chocolate sauces, berries, sprinkles, chocolates, candy bar pieces, etc. Trying to squish all your condiments in between two graham crackers with a gooey, toasted marshmallow is a challenge, but oh, what a tasty reward!





You'll find most folks out on the deck, relaxing with a cold one in hand before dinner. Those still feeling energetic can play a game of cornhole or practice casting on the lawn. You might even have the chance to make ice cream – without a churn. Using those arm muscles, you'll shake, then shake some more, until the ingredients in your bag solidify. Add assorted toppings for a homemade sundae.

Opportunities to dine al fresco abound, whether on the lodge's deck with to-die-for-views, amid the soothing landscape for a midday picnic or lakeside for an evening fish fry. Fuel up for the morning with a cowboy breakfast, cooked over a fire in cast-iron pots atop a hill overlooking the mesmerizing scenery. There are also cooking classes, wine tastings, high tea and more to choose from among the list of Culinary Adventures.

As for the accommodations, there are a number of options, depending on

Casa Grande
is beautiful
inside and
out.



your party size and preferences. I stayed at the ten-room Turner House, conveniently located next to the Main Lodge. With its elegant décor, you'll feel the old-world ambiance. Kick back in the cozy common areas and enjoy the coffee and beverage bars on each of the two levels. And for the ultimate relaxation, head to the onsite Vermejo Spa for a massage.

You can also stay in Casa Grande, a 25,000-square-foot stone mansion that was once Ted Turner's private quarters. The estate is the true grand dame of Vermejo and literally takes your breath away upon first glance as you drive through the main gates. Inside are seven guest rooms, a billiards room, chef's kitchen, conservatory and stunning main living area. Even if you don't stay here, you're welcome to stroll through the





Casa Grande
and the
Costilla
Fishing
Lodge.

marble column hallways and ooh and aah, as you're transported to turn-of-the-century opulence.

Tucked away on a mountain in high country, at 10,000 feet in elevation, you'll find Costilla Fishing Lodge, a wonderfully secluded retreat about 45 minutes from the Main Lodge. With eight guest rooms and a dedicated chef, it's the ideal haven for a group of friends or family. From here, you have direct access to the wilderness and lakes rife with fish.

Just know wherever you choose to stay, you're guaranteed to sleep well, bellies full and dreaming of your next fun adventure.

For more information

- www.tedturnerreserves.com/vermejo/





Fabled Loch Ness, where ancient mysteries and centuries-old tales come to life.



**Ripples of Legend and
History in
Loch Ness**

Feature by
Paul Pence



I

n the embrace of the Scottish Highlands, my wife and I found ourselves standing on the ancient shores of Loch Ness, a place that resonates deeply with her ancestral roots. The clouds hung low, adding an air of mystery to the already enchanting atmosphere. As we gazed out at the serene waters, we couldn't help but imagine the generations of Scots who had stood in this very



spot, their eyes scanning the depths for a glimpse of the legendary creature that is said to inhabit these waters.

On that particular day, as we stood hand in hand, a sense of anticipation filled the air. The Loch stretched to the left and right before us, its depths concealing secrets and stories as old as time. No monster. No boat. Nothing but the quiet mist on the water. But rippling across the plaid surface, a wake

wave spawned out of nowhere. Its source was undetectable. Maybe it was just a trick of the wind or a disturbance that had propagated miles away. But our imaginations said that it came from something massive cruising the length of the loch just beneath the surface.

In that moment, a shiver of excitement and wonder ran down our spines. Could it have been the elusive Nessie, the creature of legend, making a fleeting appearance just for us?

When the ripples traveled to the shore at our feet,

A mysterious wake without a boat in sight. Maybe something big cruising under the water?

Previous -
The ruins of
Urquhart
Castle
overlooking
Loch Ness

they were gone, leaving the Loch once again calm and undisturbed, we couldn't help but smile at the possibility. Whether it was a mere trick of the light or a genuine encounter with the unknown, Loch Ness had woven its magic around us, leaving us with a sense of awe and a story to share with everyone with a drop of Scottish blood in their veins.



Loch Ness is a razor slash through the emerald landscape of the Scottish Highlands, narrow, straight, deep, and long, following a fault line that separates the hills to the south and the mountains to the north. The Loch holds the distinction of being the largest freshwater lake in the British Isles, holding more fresh water than all of the lakes in England combined, stretching for approximately 23 miles in length and plunging to staggering depths of over 700 feet. It empties to the Northeast at the port city of Inverness, and thanks to the Caledonian Canal and a line of other

lochs farther up the valley, boats can stretch across the entire width of the Scotland.

Beyond the mystique of the elusive creature Nessie, the shores of Loch Ness have witnessed the ebb and flow of human history for millennia.

Loch Ness's
rock-strewn
shore and a
pair of
proud
Highlanders.



In the 6th century, it became a spiritual sanctuary, dotted with monastic settlements that added a touch of serenity to its rugged surroundings. The nearby Urquhart Castle, perched dramatically on the edge of the Loch, stands as a testament to the area's historical significance, having played a pivotal role in the conflicts and alliances that shaped Scotland's turbulent past.

Loch Ness is not just a reservoir of legends; it's a thriving ecosystem teeming with life. Its waters harbor a diverse array of fish, including salmon, trout, and

perch, sustaining a delicate balance that supports the local wildlife. The surrounding woodlands are home to red deer, pine martens, and a myriad of bird species, making Loch Ness a paradise for nature enthusiasts



and photographers seeking glimpses of Scotland's untamed beauty

Even if you have little interest in history and geology and the customs of those who live on the Loch, certainly you've heard the myth and mystery that surrounds the infamous Loch Ness Monster. Sightings date back to 564 AD by St. Columba. The first modern sighting of this enigmatic creature dates back to 1933,

sparking a frenzy of speculation and intrigue. Over the years, 1153 documented eyewitness accounts and blurry photographs have only deepened the legend. Some believe Nessie to be a long-surviving plesiosaur, a

Is it Nessie?
And why
does she
never come
out on a
bright sunny
day?

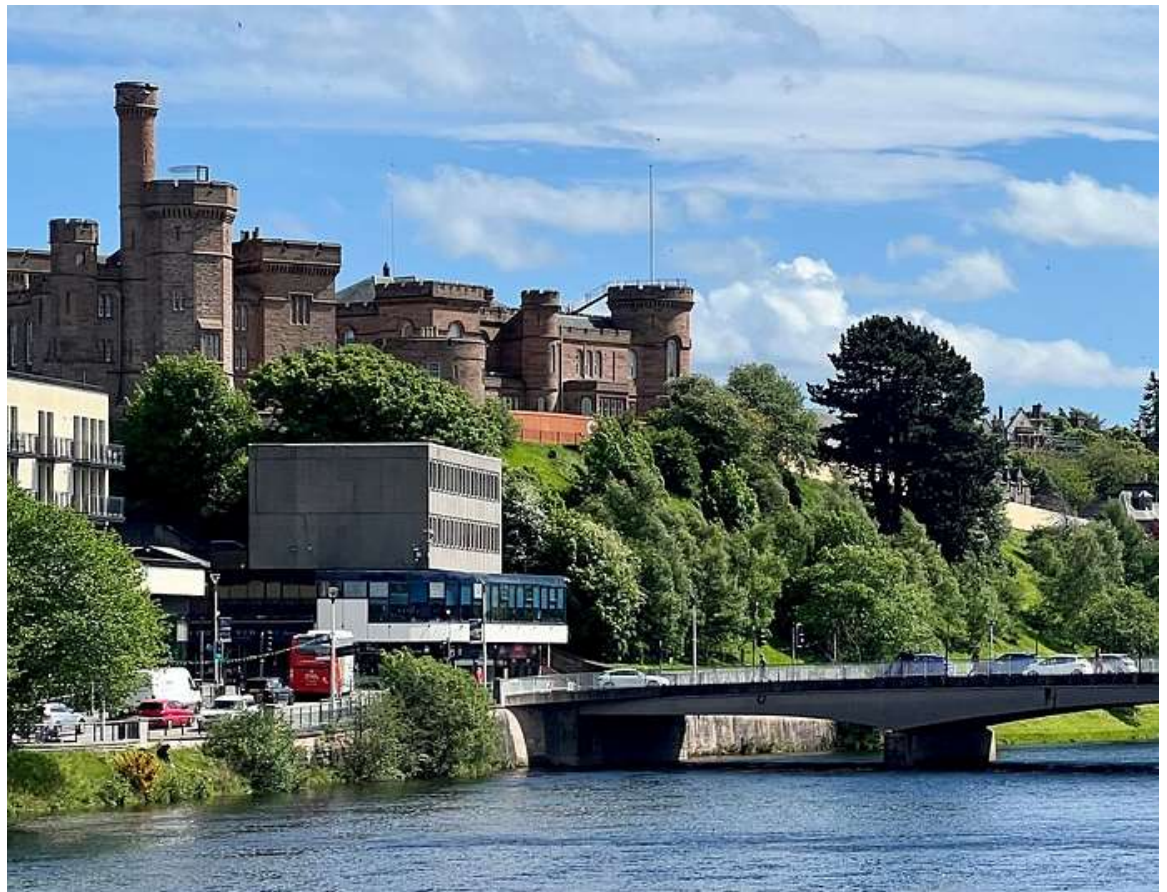


prehistoric marine reptile, while others see it as a product of overactive imaginations. Regardless of the truth, Nessie has become an indelible part of Loch Ness's allure, drawing in enthusiasts and skeptics alike from every corner of the globe.

For us, our trip to Loch Ness was a chance to experience a place of legend, to add a sense of place to add to the stories in history books and to wrap ourselves

in the embrace of timeless landscapes. And perhaps to add our own experiences to the legend too.

Our adventure began in the heart of the Scottish Highlands, the enchanting city of Inverness. As the 'Capital of the Highlands,' Inverness is a captivating blend of medieval charm and contemporary allure,



inviting travelers to delve into its rich tapestry of history and culture.

Dominating the skyline over the river Ness with its majestic presence, Inverness Castle stands as the city's crowning jewel. No longer the fortification it was when

it was built in the 11th century and remained through the Jacobite uprising in 1746, the castle was rebuilt in 1836 as a seat of government, which it remains as today. While the castle itself is not open to the public, its exterior is a testament to Scotland's architectural heritage.

Inverness Castle is only a tiny part of the architectural marvels we found in the city. A leisurely walk from the castle brought us to Old High St. Stephen's Church. Dating back to the 18th century, this building is blocky and stunted compared to its slender towering brethren in the city, but it is adorned with intricate stained glass windows and exudes a serene ambiance amidst the city's lively atmosphere. The Free North Church stands out



Inverness Castle and other iconic structures in Inverness.

not just because of its architectural beauty, but because it exists as a reminder of the turmoil in the Church of Scotland in the mid-1800's and the effective end of state religion in the nation.

Of course there's more than architecture in Inverness. The Victorian Market, a covered market lets



you feel like you've entered a bygone era, where narrow alleys are lined with stalls selling everything from traditional Scottish kilts and tartans to handmade crafts and local delicacies. The market is a treasure trove of unique finds, making it an ideal spot for souvenir hunting and immersing oneself in the city's artistic heritage. Or you can visit the Ness Islands, sitting in the River Ness and connected by

charming footbridges. The Ness Islands offer a serene escape from the city's hustle and bustle. These verdant islands, adorned with lush greenery and floral displays, are a haven for nature lovers.

On our visit, we could have haunted shops and pubs, or spent the morning in the Ness Museum and Art Gallery taking in its treasure trove of Highland

history and culture, but we had Nessie spotting on our agenda, so off we went, along the A82 toward the Loch.

We passed through tiny hamlets, caught glimpses of the Loch, and debated on where to find the best place to access the waters of the Loch itself.

The most accessible, in fact downright unmissable



place along the Loch was the picturesque village of Drumnadrochit and Urquhart Castle.

Drumnadrochit is more than just a village; it's a gateway to the mysteries of Loch Ness. Here, traditional Scottish cottages coexist harmoniously with modern amenities, creating a welcoming atmosphere for travelers. The village is not only a hub for Loch Ness

The footbridge to the Ness Islands.

The village square near Urquhart Castle.



enthusiasts but also a treasure trove of local culture.

The village seems to exist for the benefit of visitors, with pubs and inns and restaurants and gift shops. A traffic island in the middle of town is a recreation of nearby Urquhart Castle in flowers.

Urquhart Castle is a historic marvel that proudly stands on the Loch's shores. From the roadway it looks





The castle is recreated in flowers in the town square, but the castle itself is much bigger!

like a complete ruin, but stepping into the castle grounds, we were immediately immersed in the echoes of centuries past, as the weathered ruins whispered tales of medieval Scotland.

With a significant role in the war for Scottish Independence, the castle has history dating into ancient times, slowly building into a major fortification by the



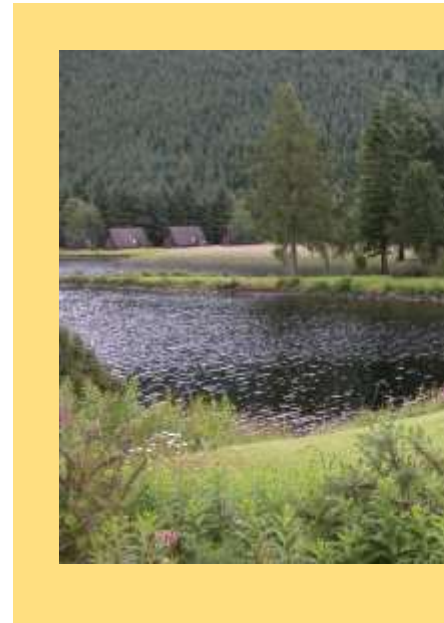


13th century before being partially destroyed following the Jacobite Rebellion.

Today its classic castle structure of towers and keeps and baileys and halls, despite largely in ruin, make it a popular stop for tour busses and visitors like us.

Visitors to Urquhart Castle can not only immerse themselves in Scottish history but also indulge in the thrill of the unknown. Guided tours led by knowledgeable historians provide deeper insights into the castle's past, bringing its stories to life with vivid detail. The nearby visitor center offers interactive exhibits, artifacts, and multimedia presentations, further enhancing the understanding of Urquhart Castle's historical and cultural significance.

That's when we found our way down to the waters



of the Loch itself.

A stony shore, a silent lake, an eerie mist, and a mysterious unexplained wake gave us a story to share about our, perhaps, close encounter with the Loch Ness Monster.

Our Loch Ness adventure concluded at the village of Fort Augustus at the southern tip of the Loch, 28 miles from Inverness. Here, the Caledonian Canal locks

mesmerized us. Watching boats navigating these intricate locks, linking the canal which continues through to the west side of the country. We marveled at the engineering feat of the Caledonian Canal, which spans a remarkable 60 miles, but the picturesque village was just as intriguing, making a finishing touch to our trip.

Throughout the trip, as we



After
Urquhart
Castle,
discover
Fort
Augustus
and the
Caledonian
Canal.

toured the highland edge of the Loch, we couldn't help but be enchanted by the ever-changing landscapes and the historical sites that dotted our path. Each twist and turn revealed a new chapter in Scotland's story, and every stop allowed us to immerse ourselves in Highland culture.

If you're eager to embark on your own Loch Ness adventure, consider visiting during the spring or summer months (May to August) when the weather is relatively mild, and the days are longer, allowing you ample time to explore the surroundings and perhaps catch a glimpse of Nessie in the daylight. Plan a visit to Urquhart Castle early in the day to avoid crowds and enjoy the serene atmosphere.



Don't forget your camera; the panoramic views of Loch Ness are breathtaking and provide excellent photo opportunities, even if you aren't lucky enough to snap pictures of Nessie herself.

Also, consider staying in Drumnadrochit to fully immerse yourself in the Loch Ness experience. The village offers a range of accommodations, from cozy bed-

and-breakfasts to charming guesthouses, ensuring a comfortable and authentic Highland stay. Participate in guided tours led by knowledgeable locals. These tours often provide fascinating insights into the history, folklore, and natural wonders of Loch Ness, enhancing your overall understanding of the region.



Our own journey along the legendary shores of Loch Ness was not merely an exploration; it was an immersion into a realm where history, folklore, and natural beauty converge. Standing on the shore, just as we did, you too can feel the magic that permeates this mystical place. It's a sensation that lingers, an invitation to delve into the unknown and

embrace the mysteries that have captivated humanity for generations.

For more information


- www.visitinvernesslochness.com

Still no Loch
Ness
Monster,
but some
strange tree
roots look
serpant-y.

Bernauer Strasse, Berlin

Berlin Wall





Communist East Germany built the wall to prevent escaping to the West.

In 28 years, 140 people died trying to escape to freedom.

In 1948-49, Soviets blockaded food to West Berlin. A massive airlift saved the Berliners.


The wall fell on November 9, 1989, in part due to a clerical error.

Of the original 96 miles of wall, about 2 miles remain to remind us of the era.

Bernhauer Strasse is the location of the Berlin Wall Memorial.

East and West Germany were reunited on October 3, 1990, a day celebrated in Berlin.

Your visit should also include "Checkpoint Charlie" and the Topography of Terror.



*A transcendent journey
through the ethereal beauty
of the Floating Torii Gate,
Japan's ancient spiritual
heritage, sacred rituals, and
timeless traditions*

The background of the cover is a photograph of a Shinto shrine. In the foreground, several large, weathered wooden torii gates stand in a body of water. The gates are made of dark wood and have a traditional design with two vertical posts and two horizontal bars. The water is calm, reflecting the sky and the gates. In the background, there are mountains and a town with buildings. The sky is blue with some white clouds. The entire image is framed by a thick yellow border.

Reverence and Beauty
Itsukushima
Shinto Shrine

Feature by
Max Reynolds



A

pproaching Itsukushima Shinto Shrine is a transcendent experience marked by a tranquil boat journey through the iconic Floating Torii Gate. In the soft light of dawn, the gate emerges from the mist, its ancient form reflected in the gentle waters. Travelers, enveloped in reverence, glide beneath the majestic arch, stepping into a realm where the ordinary meets the divine.

The boat's rhythmic paddling carries them into the heart of Miyajima Island, revealing the shrine's



architectural marvels amidst ancient forests. This ethereal passage through the floating gate sets the stage for a profound exploration of Japan's cultural heritage, immersing visitors in the sanctity of Itsukushima Shinto Shrine.

The Shrine, with its roots dating back over a millennium, stands as a testament to Japan's cultural and spiritual heritage. Originally established in the late 6th century, the shrine's present form took shape during the 12th century

Heian period. Central to its significance is the deep reverence for the Shinto faith, Japan's indigenous belief system.

The shrine is dedicated to the three daughters of Susano-o, the Shinto deity of seas and storms, embodying the profound connection between the spiritual realm and the natural elements. Itsukushima's unique location, seemingly floating on water during high tide, symbolizes the harmonizing blend of the physical and spiritual worlds, a core belief in Shintoism.

In recognition of its cultural and historical

The Floating Torii Gate provides access to the shrine by boat during high tide.

importance, Itsukushima Shinto Shrine, along with the floating Torii Gate, was designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1996.



Itsukushima Shinto Shrine is a masterpiece of Japanese architecture, harmoniously blending with the natural beauty of Miyajima Island. The shrine, with its vermilion-colored structures, stands as an elegant testament to ancient craftsmanship and reverence for the divine. The most prominent feature, visible from afar, is the iconic Torii Gate. Crafted from camphor

wood, it rises majestically from the sea, appearing to float during high tide—a visual spectacle that epitomizes the shrine's spiritual aura.

The Shrine's buildings are painted vermilion red.



Beyond the Torii Gate, Itsukushima Shinto Shrine unfolds in a captivating panorama, its vermilion structures blending with the ancient forests of Miyajima Island, creating a scene of ethereal beauty and profound spiritual significance..

Approaching the shrine, visitors are greeted by the Main Hall (Honden). Intricate carvings adorn its facade,

depicting mythical creatures and divine symbols, inviting contemplation on the spiritual significance of the shrine. Adjacent to the Main Hall, the Noh Theater Stage captivates with its minimalist yet profound design, where traditional performances echo the shrine's cultural legacy.



Walking along the shrine's exterior, the Shinden, or prayer hall, reveals itself. Adorned with detailed ornamentation and vermilion pillars, it embodies the essence of Shinto aesthetics. The Soriroof, characterized by its graceful curvature, adds an air of elegance to the structure. The shrine's pillars, made from natural cedarwood, evoke a sense of organic

connection, grounding the sacred space within the island's natural surroundings.

Stepping over the threshold of Itsukushima Shinto Shrine, visitors are enveloped in a world of the spiritual and the artistic. The hushed whispers and the soft echoes of prayers create a tranquil atmosphere, setting the stage for a profound spiritual encounter.

At the heart of the shrine lies the Main Hall breathes with the essence of centuries-old rituals. Intricately designed wooden beams stretch overhead, creating an atmosphere of sacred intimacy. The scent of cedarwood hangs in the air, a testament to the shrine's organic connection with nature. Soft rays of light filter through delicate shoji screens, casting a gentle glow upon the carefully arranged ritual implements. Here, worshippers and visitors alike offer prayers, their whispered invocations mingling with the faint scent of incense, creating an atmosphere of divine communion.

Adjacent to the Main Hall, the Haiden (Prayer Hall) beckons with its pristine simplicity. Polished wooden floors echo with the soft padding of footsteps, enhancing the sense of reverence that permeates the space. Worshippers approach the sacred altar, bowing in humility as they offer their prayers to the kami, the spirits revered in Shintoism. Ema, wooden plaques bearing the wishes and hopes of the faithful, adorn the walls, their vibrant



Traditional designs are used in the buildings and in ornamentation like the lanterns.

colors adding to the tapestry of spiritual aspirations that fill the room.

As visitors explore deeper, they discover the Ema Hall, a gallery of wishes and dreams.

Countless wooden plaques, inscribed with prayers and adorned with vivid illustrations, line the walls. Each plaque tells a story—a wish for health, a hope for prosperity, a dream for love. It's a testament to the deeply personal connection people forge with the shrine, their aspirations becoming an integral part of its spiritual legacy.



Visiting Itsukushima Shinto Shrine is not just a sightseeing endeavor;

it's an immersion into a world where ancient rituals and modern reverence harmonize. As visitors approach the shrine, they enter a realm alive with spiritual activities. Worshippers, their attire reflecting tradition, offer prayers with respectful gestures, enveloping the shrine in a meditative ambiance. Ceremonial rituals, performed by Shinto priests, unfold with graceful

dances and chants, revealing the shrine's deep spiritual heritage.

If timing aligns, visitors might witness the island's festivities—a Matsuri, where processions and music echo through the air, illuminating the shrine's cultural significance.

Amidst these rituals, nature weaves its presence. Resident deer, considered messengers of the gods, roam peacefully, adding a touch of natural grace. For visitors, photography becomes a contemplative act, capturing the shrine's architectural marvels and the play of light, while moments of quiet contemplation by the waters allow them to absorb the shrine's timeless aura. Itsukushima Shinto Shrine becomes more than a destination; it becomes a tapestry of experiences, inviting all who visit to partake in its spiritual legacy and find serenity amidst its ancient beauty.



Ceremonies and prayers are a regular occurrence in the Shrine.

Visitors to Itsukushima Shinto Shrine are welcomed not only as observers but also as participants in the shrine's living traditions, rooted deeply in the Shinto faith. As travelers approach the shrine, they're encouraged to partake in the spiritual rituals that unfold within its hallowed halls. One of the fundamental customs involves purifying oneself at the *temizuya*, a water pavilion, symbolizing the cleansing of impurities before approaching the divine—a practice echoing Shinto's emphasis on purification and harmony with nature.

Inside the shrine, visitors can witness or even join worshippers in offering prayers. Observing the act of clapping hands twice, bowing deeply, and then clapping once more—a gesture symbolizing the presence of the *kami* (spirits) and expressing gratitude—is a profound way to engage with the essence of Shinto spirituality. Many visitors choose to contribute to the shrine by making offerings at the *saisenbako*, the traditional offering box, ensuring the continuity of the shrine's



rituals and preservation.

For those seeking a deeper connection, participating in the Ema tradition provides a personal experience. Ema, wooden plaques, serve as a conduit for wishes and prayers. Visitors inscribe their hopes or

dreams on these plaques, which are then hung within the shrine. This act not only allows visitors to express their desires but also integrates them into the spiritual fabric of the shrine, following the Shinto belief in the interconnection of all things.

Throughout these interactions, the underlying philosophy of Shinto becomes evident—a belief in the sacredness of all

natural elements and a deep respect for the spirits dwelling within them. By participating in these traditions, visitors are invited to embrace Shinto's core principles: a reverence for life, gratitude for nature, and a harmonious existence with the world. Itsukushima Shinto Shrine, in essence, becomes a sanctuary where visitors can not only observe but actively engage in the spiritual tapestry of Shinto, offering a transformative

Like the rest of the Shrine, the courtyard is a place of reflection.



encounter with Japan's ancient faith.

As the profound journey within the heart of Itsukushima Shinto Shrine concludes, visitors are invited to participate in a final act of reverence deeply ingrained in Shinto tradition. Before departing the sacred sanctuary, travelers are encouraged to leave an offering at the shrine's saisenbako, the symbolic vessel connecting the spiritual and material worlds. This act, a gesture of gratitude and respect, not only supports the shrine's preservation but also becomes a tangible representation of one's connection to the spiritual legacy of Itsukushima.

Equally significant is the way out—an exit mirroring the entrance. It is customary to pass through the same Torii Gate that welcomed them upon arrival. This cyclical journey holds profound symbolism,





Sika deer are revered in Japan.

Be sure to depart through the same gate you arrived through.

marking not just a physical transition but a spiritual one as well. By exiting through the gate they entered, visitors honor the shrine's sacred boundary, respecting the rituals and customs that have guided pilgrims for centuries.

In bidding farewell to Itsukushima Shinto Shrine, travelers carry with them not just memories of exquisite architecture and scenic beauty, but a deeper understanding of Shinto's timeless principles: an appreciation for the divine in the everyday, a reverence for nature, and the importance of harmony in existence.

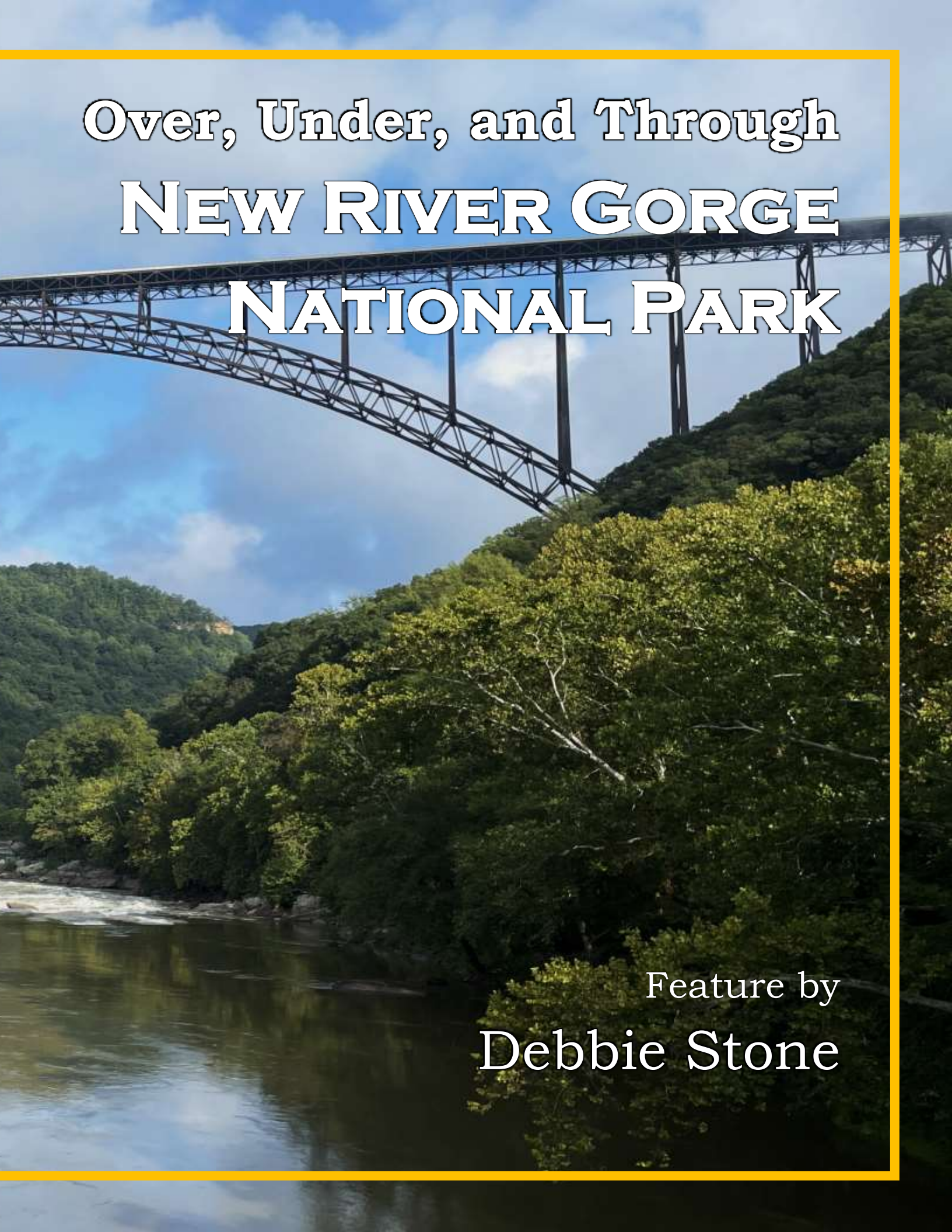
For more information

- www.pref.hiroshima.lg.jp/site/bunkazai/bunkazai-data-102010030.html





*Where heights are conquered
and nature's wonders
explored.*



**Over, Under, and Through
NEW RIVER GORGE
NATIONAL PARK**

Feature by
Debbie Stone



I

'm actually not fond of heights, but oddly I'm attracted to height-related experiences. They're freaky as all get-out for me, yet the prospect of views and thrills pulls me in like a magnet. And when I do conquer my fears, whether hiking on an exposed trail with steep drop-offs, hot air ballooning, rappelling down a cliff or ziplining, it's a rush and a major boost in self-confidence, not to mention the props I get for my accomplishment.



My latest acrophobic adventure was doing the Bridge Walk across the New River Gorge Bridge in West Virginia's New River Gorge National Park. At 876 feet, this is the third highest bridge in the country and it's a beaut! A national landmark in engineering, it was constructed in 1977 at a cost of nearly 37 million dollars. Its single 1700-foot arch span design makes it the longest of this style bridge in the world. This marvel is featured on the

WVA State quarter, as well as on a U.S. postal stamp and it's also listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Though I've walked across many bridges in my life, I've never done it via a catwalk 25 feet beneath the structure. After checking in to the Bridge Walk office, you'll get suited up in safety cable attire, then shuttled to the Canyon Rim Visitor Center on the north side of the bridge. A short path leads to the bridge where you enter the catwalk under this massive behemoth.

The catwalk is 24 inches wide and has a substantial railing, plus you are securely fastened onto a safety cable making it impossible to fall from the

Grand View
overlook.

Previous –
The bridge
is supported
by a single
1700-foot
arch.



bridge during a tour. You'll walk single file the entire 3,030-foot length of the bridge at a leisurely pace. Your guide stops at various junctures to discuss features of the structure and the National Park. There's plenty of time to take pics and your guide also snaps shots of each participant to have



The catwalk under the span is not for the faint of heart.



as an included souvenir.

I was initially nervous approaching the bridge, as I didn't know how I was going to react to the height. But I had seen videos of the experience so I knew what to expect. Once on the catwalk, my anxiety disappeared fairly





quickly, as I was too distracted by the glorious landscape and dramatic views. Not only was it amazing to be amid this enormous structure, hearing and feeling the cars go across it (and yes, the bridge does shake), but the bird's-eye perspective of the scenery was so special. I also felt very safe as I traversed the span and was comforted to hear that the company hadn't lost anyone yet!

To commemorate the importance of the bridge to the state, Bridge Day is held the third Saturday of every October. Traffic is closed for pedestrians to explore the mighty structure and BASE jumping is allowed for a few hours on that day only. Perhaps I'll return for the event next year to try this

Hiking takes
you over,
under, and
through.



activity – and add another notch to my belt!

The Bridge Walk is a definite highlight of the park, but there's so much more to do here. A bit of background: New River Gorge National Park conserves over 70,000 acres of land along the New River between the towns of Hinton and Fayetteville within the central part of southern WVA. For reference, it's sixty miles from the State Capitol of Charleston and two hours from Roanoke, VA.



This is the newest National Park in the U.S., having been granted this status in 2020, bringing the total National Parks to 63. The river itself, however, is not new. It's actually one of the oldest rivers in the world. For centuries, the area was inaccessible to most people. In 1873, the railroad arrived, making it possible to ship coal, which was in abundance in this region, to the outside world. Communities sprang up and thrived until the 1960s when mining ceased and the people left, abandoning the towns behind them.

Tourism opened up when people discovered the New River had one of the nation's premier whitewater

stretches and rafting took centerstage. In 1978, New River Gorge National River was established to preserve this waterway. And now with National Park status, the place has gained increasing recognition for its rich cultural and natural history, and bounty of recreational activities, from hiking and mountain biking to rafting, climbing, fishing and more.

The main sights of the park are located in clusters along the New River. There are four distinct sections – Canyon Rim, Grandview, Thurmond Historical District and Sandstone - which are spaced at a fair distance from one another, so you'll need a car to get around.



Most people head to Canyon Rim to get oriented at the Visitor Center and most importantly, to see the New River Gorge Bridge from either or both upper and lower viewpoints. From here, you can drive Fayette Station Rd. and travel back in time before the modern bridge was built. This one-way, 100-year-old road has hairpin turns and snakes down to the bottom of the gorge, across a narrow bridge and up the other side. Along the way, you'll get great vistas of the river and

New River Gorge Bridge, along with a few remnants of the communities that were once beehives of activity.

The most popular hikes in this area are the Endless Wall and Long Point Trails. Both offer nice views and are rated easy/moderate, covering about three miles



roundtrip. The former leads you out to overlooks along a long line of formidable sandstone ridges high above the gorge. The latter takes you to an overlook with a killer view of the bridge.

In Grandview, the top hikes are the Castle Rock

Trail and Grandview Rim Trail Loop. Check out the Grandview overlook first before heading down the Castle Rock Trail. Follow it until it connects with the Grandview Rim to make a loop. You'll pass through tunnels of verdant rhodies and sandstone walls and get occasional views of the gorge. You can also hike to the

The Castle Rim visitor's center is a great place to learn about the history, geology, and wildlife of the National Park.



Turkey Spur Overlook from the Grandview Rim Trail, where you'll have an impressive vista of the gorge and winding river amid lush green foliage as far as the eye can see.

If you like abandoned mining town history, drive

out to Thurmond Historic District. This was a classic boomtown during the first two decades of the 1900s as coal was king. Thurmond's banks were the richest in the state, serving as the repositories of the coal barons' largesse. And the railroad prospered, serving as many as 75,000 passengers a year. Likewise, the town's



stores and saloons were hopping.

This all changed with the switch to diesel locomotives and the shutdown of local mines. Thurmond went into a steady decline, as businesses closed and residents moved on seeking other economic opportunities.

Today, you can stop in at the visitor center, which is in the

historic depot, and then take a self-guided walking tour around the area. Careful crossing the railroad tracks as the line is still active, with over a dozen trains passing through the town daily. There are some buildings remaining, particularly along what was called Commercial Row, plus a coal tower and water tanks. You can imagine what the



The
Thurmond
Historical
District was
a
boomtown
in the
1900s.



town might have been like in its heyday, but now it's quiet with the spirit of the past lingering in its ghostly air.

Sandstone Falls are the largest waterfalls in the park and can be found in the Sandstone sector. To see the upper and lower falls, you'll use a series of boardwalks and bridges. Though pretty, I found the falls

to be a tad underwhelming, probably because I am jaded after seeing magnificent, thundering cascades elsewhere.

If you're a rabid Instagrammer, put Babcock State Park on your list. Located about twenty miles southeast of New River Gorge Bridge, this lovely place is best known for the Glade Creek Grist Mill, one of the most photographed mills in the world. It's a replica, though functional, of the original Cooper's Mill that once stood on the grounds. Though I'm not in the above category of Instagrammers, I was curious when I read about the site and saw the images. I can now attest after seeing it, that it deserves the hype. Oozing with charm, the mill and its surrounds present a very photogenic scene.

As for accommodations, there are no lodging facilities in the park. In the surrounding communities



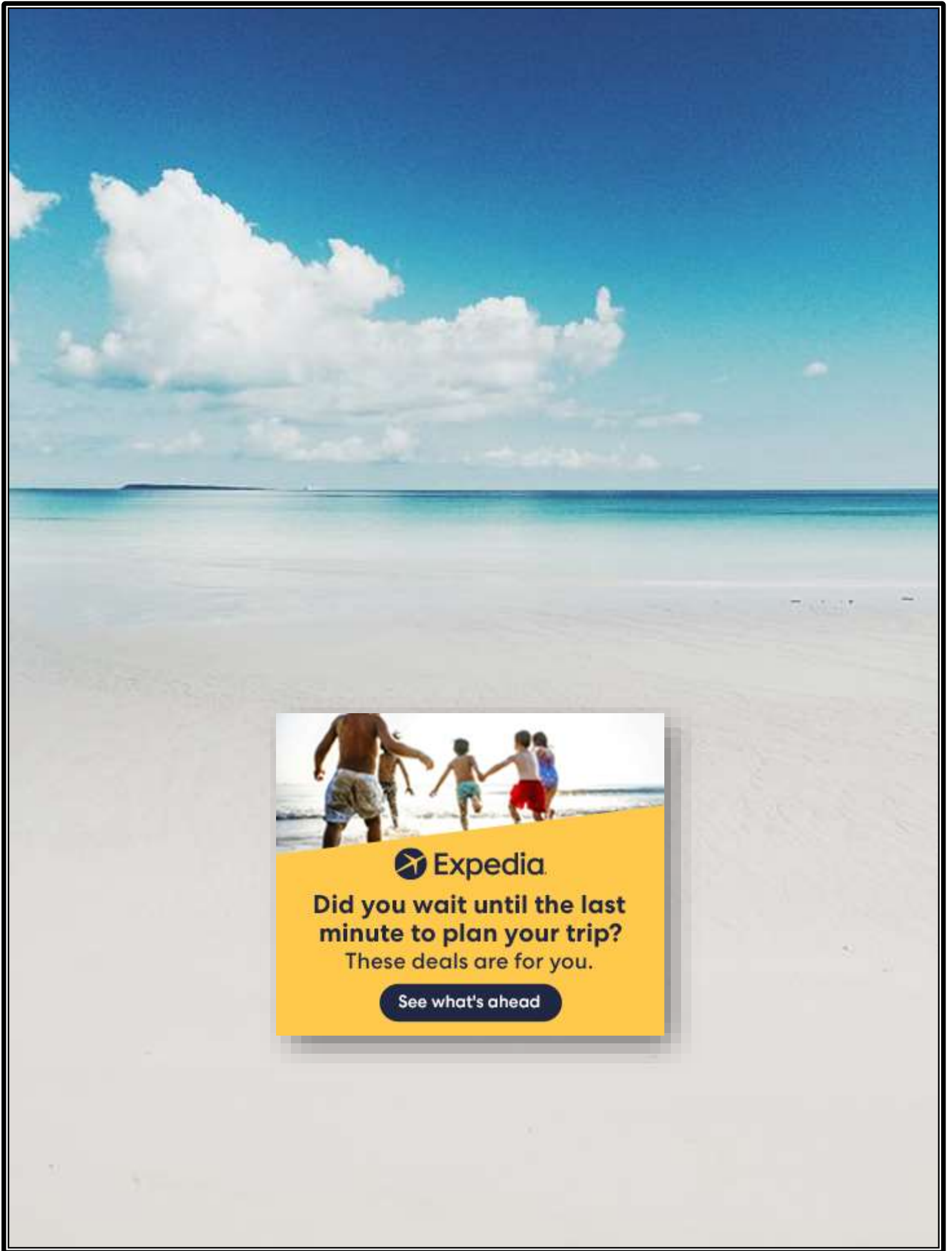


Some prefer rock climbing and rappelling, but just sitting back and enjoying the view is great too!

of Beckley, Fayetteville, Oak Hill, Glen Jean, Hinton, Beaver, Sandstone and Mount Hope, you'll find plenty of options, from chain hotels and motels to inns, cabins and vacation homes. These towns are also sources for food and groceries. Camping is permitted in the park at areas located along the river but know that the sites are primitive and managed on a first-come, first-serve basis.

For more information

- www.nps.gov/neri
- www.bridgewalk.com



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A vibrant and bustling outdoor market scene, likely in a developing country. The street is filled with a dense crowd of people, many of whom are wearing colorful clothing. In the center, a white truck is parked, its bed loaded with numerous cardboard boxes. The market is surrounded by makeshift stalls and structures, with various goods and items visible. The overall atmosphere is one of active commerce and community interaction.

The Lively Art of Haggling

*Mastering the
delicate dance of
haggling – turning
transactions into
celebrations.*



I

Imagine wandering through the bustling alleys of a vibrant bazaar in Jordan, surrounded by colorful textiles, intricate jewelry, and captivating tapestries. As you try to avoid the enthusiastic gazes of sellers eager to showcase their treasures, you find yourself inevitably drawn into a haggling experience, negotiating the price of a beautifully crafted rug that caught your eye.

In this lively marketplace and in many others throughout

the world, haggling is more than just a transaction; it's a cultural dance, a delicate balance between buyer and seller.

Understand Cultural Cues for Haggling

The first question is - “Are you haggling?” If the shop has prices on everything, if the shopkeeper clearly hasn't the authority to set prices, or you're in a restaurant, haggling is out of the question. If the shopkeeper says “look at the fine craftsmanship of the weaving on this rug”, you're not haggling yet. But if he says “A hundred dollars, but for you, I can make it ninety dollars,” he is saying that he can make adjustments to the price and is open to haggling. If he comes back after telling you more about the rug, and says “I see you really want this, perhaps you can see it's worth eighty five dollars,” then you are haggling for certain.



Haggling is about the interaction, not getting the lowest possible price.

Wherever you go, consider diverse cultures' haggling norms: observe customs, research market specifics, gauge seller responses, and understand non-verbal cues. Respectful haggling blends cultural understanding and open communication. Ask your local experts whether or no

haggling is expected or frowned upon in the setting.

Express interest with Grace

It's essential that you understand that haggling isn't really about the price of the item. Negotiating the price of the item is an excuse for the buyer and seller to interact. Of course



there's a reason to negotiate the price of a house or car, but whether or not you get a rug will not change your life and will have little impact on your travel experience. Sure, the shopkeeper would love to make a sale at a ridiculously high profit, but if he participates in the haggling, he's looking forward to learning about you.

Ask about the item, its history and how it's made, and give the shopkeeper a chance to show that he knows his wares.

Show genuine interest through observation, thoughtful questions, sincere compliments, polite language, and respectful body language. These set the stage for positive negotiations, fostering respect between buyer and seller.

Expect haggling to take a while and enjoy the process.

Negotiate a Fair Price

Of course you want a fair price. But unless you are an expert on hand-woven rugs, you're not likely to have a good idea of what it's really worth, and you won't have time to research market prices, so just resolve yourself to knowing that you'll reach a price that seems good... or not... based on your impression at the time. If you approach the process as a way to interact with the shopkeeper, you'll realize that the price is secondary to the experience. A great price on a rug is transitory, but the story of spending an hour haggling with an old man who seemed to have a story about every thread in the rug will last you a lifetime.



What Not to Do

Avoid aggression, insulting offers, disrespectful remarks, unwarranted comparisons, excessive praise, and rushing the process. Respectful haggling builds connections and understanding, ensuring a positive outcome. Don't degrade the object being haggled over or the shopkeeper. "That's too much for me, perhaps you can show me something I can afford," goes a lot farther than "I don't like the way the knots are tied."

Parting Company Amicably



If you can't reach an agreement on the price, express gratitude, maintain respectful body language, leave the door open for future interactions, acknowledge the value of the interaction and avoid abrupt departures.

Often, in parting the vendor may further reduce the price. If you respond about the item or the price, you'll find that you're still negotiating. If you really must go, thank him for his hospitality and helpfulness.



When you are done, you'll have a story to tell, even if you don't buy the item.

If you do reach an agreement on the price, still express gratitude.

Conclusion:

Haggling isn't just a transaction; it's a celebration of cultures and human connections. Armed with these insights and your bazaar experience in Jordan, venture into global markets, engaging respectfully. Every hagggle becomes an opportunity for understanding, leaving both parties with respect, understanding, and genuine human connection.

Embrace the art of haggling with an open heart and a respectful spirit, and discover the joy of meaningful connections and unforgettable experiences in every market you explore.

You'll find that you'll get a lot more than just a rug, you'll have an experience!



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Skip the lines at the Empire State Building!





Guardians of the **GIANTS**

*Witness harmony between
humans and nature and
become part of a vital
narrative in the survival of
Africa's Elephants.*



I

In the heart of Kenya's Tsavo National Park, a remarkable conservation effort is underway, dedicated to preserving one of the planet's most majestic creatures: the elephant. Tsavo National Park, sprawling over 20,000 square miles, stands as a testament to the dedication of wildlife enthusiasts and conservationists alike.

At the forefront of this endeavor is a multifaceted approach aimed at ensuring the survival of these gentle giants. Tsavo's conservationists employ rigorous anti-

poaching measures, harnessing cutting-edge technology to track and protect the park's elephant population. GPS collars, equipped with real-time tracking capabilities, allow experts to monitor their movements, thwarting potential threats from poachers.

Moreover, local communities actively participate in this noble cause. Collaborative initiatives educate residents about the importance of coexisting harmoniously with these magnificent animals. By fostering understanding and appreciation, the

Male
African
elephants
can weigh
up to 7 tons.



conservationists create a sustainable environment where both humans and elephants can thrive.

One of the pivotal aspects of Tsavo's conservation efforts is the nurturing of orphaned elephants. Orphaned due to various reasons, including poaching and natural disasters, these vulnerable youngsters find refuge in dedicated elephant orphanages. Here, they

receive round-the-clock care, learning essential skills from experienced caretakers. As they grow, they are gradually reintegrated into the wild, ensuring their seamless transition into their natural habitat.

In addition to these grassroots efforts, global alliances and partnerships provide crucial support. International organizations collaborate with local authorities to fund research, implement conservation policies, and raise awareness on a global scale. This collaborative spirit underscores the urgency of the situation, emphasizing the interconnectedness of all living beings.

Tsavo National Park's elephant conservation

endeavors are not merely a local initiative; they represent a global call to action. By safeguarding the future of these awe-inspiring creatures, we are not only preserving a species but also safeguarding the delicate balance of our planet's ecosystems.

As visitors stand amidst the vast savannah,



witnessing these gentle giants in their natural habitat, they become part of this essential narrative, embodying the shared responsibility we bear for the world's magnificent wildlife. Tsavo stands not just as a park but as a testament to humanity's capacity for compassion,

Both male and female elephants have tusks.



education, and preservation, reminding us that the legacy of these elephants is in our hands, and together, we can ensure it endures for generations to come.

Exodus Travels' 'Free to Roam' elephant conservation project, in collaboration with Tsavo Trust and the Tofauti Foundation, stands as a model of cooperative efforts in Tsavo National Park. Through the innovative 10% Fence Plan, the

project minimizes human-wildlife conflicts and fosters coexistence. Elephants are provided vast roaming spaces while empowering local communities to dedicate 90% of their land to nature, promoting harmony. Exodus Travels' upcoming Kenya expedition, coinciding with World Elephant Day 2024, exemplifies their



commitment to responsible travel, engaging travelers as active participants in vital wildlife preservation efforts. This initiative signifies a trans-formative step towards ensuring elephants' freedom and inspiring global conservation awareness.

To learn more about Exodus Travels' Kenya expedition and how you can actively contribute to elephant conservation while embarking on a transformative travel experience, visit their official website for detailed itineraries, booking information, and inspiring stories about responsible wildlife preservation.

For more information

- www.exodustravels.com/us/

A romantic scene at sunset by a lake. A man and a woman are silhouetted as they sit on a wooden bench, looking out over the water. Two bicycles are parked on either side of the bench. The sky is filled with warm, golden light from the setting sun, reflecting on the calm water. The foreground is dark, with some foliage visible on the left side.

Lake Constance
*Four Countries,
One Destination*

***A gastronomic
adventure across four
countries and one
lake.***



S

andwiched between Southwest Germany, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, and Austria, Lake Constance is a paradise for fall travel. Food harvest festivals, fish weeks, soft autumn air, wines, biking and walking, and extraordinary scenery in the heartland of Europe are a tonic for travelers around the world.

It is unusual to get four countries in one destination. Your vacation quadruples in value as you experience the distinct culture of each country in one

unhurried trip. Stopping in each country for two or three days allows one to absorb the local culture through festivals, the traditional dishes and wines. Even though you could, in one day, enjoy breakfast in Switzerland, lunch in Austria, coffee and cake in Liechtenstein, and still get back in time for dinner in Southwest Germany, you will get a real sense of the destination if you take it at a more leisurely pace.

"Farm-to-Table" truly defines the culinary traditions of Lake Constance. Specialties from local farms, orchards and the lake find their way onto plates around the four-country region.

Some of the famous specialties from each country include, the Swiss potato Rösti; the German "Kässpätzle," or pasta with cheese; the pork shoulder, "Schäufele;" and the filled raviolis, or "Maultaschen." Sweet hearty dumplings from the Austrian Arlberg along with apricot and ham dumplings are not to be missed. "Dünnele," small pizzas, in every form: traditional with cream and ham, refined with smoked salmon, sweet and flambéed with plums are perfectly paired with a fruity white wine crafted from the Müller-Thurgau grapes, or a red from the Schaffhausen pinot noir region, or even a Schnapps or Obstler.

Seek out the
local cuisine
of four
different
countries.



Produce and products including cheeses from the local village dairies and farms; cucumbers from the UNESCO monastery and garden island of Reichenau, one of Germany's oldest agriculture sites; mild and flavorful heirloom onions „Höri-Bülle;“ wines from six wine districts each with its own character; hops brewed after centuries-old traditions; Swiss Chocolate and the



family-friendly Chocolarium in Switzerland; fine fruit spirits; whiskeys; and gins from local grains are abundant and delicious. Apples, pears and cherries fill the stalls at the weekly and evening markets.

During the autumn Apple Weeks, restaurants and farms organize special events around the apple along the German and Swiss shores. At the same time, during

the Fish Weeks, the chefs of various restaurants at western Lake Constance serve 3-course menus at a single price. Whitefish, perch and other fish fresh from the lake are served to create delicious fish menus.

From mid-October until the end of November, Triesenberg in Liechtenstein invites guests to sample the very best of regional cooking at the Triesenberger

Autumn is
apple
season
around Lake
Constance.



Weeks. At this festival, a variety of restaurants serve a selection of dishes from the Walser people who are native to Liechtenstein and the surrounding area. The dishes include pasta-like 'Chäaschnöpfli' and the sweet 'Öpfelchüachli' (apple-flavoured doughnuts) that are traditional today and were even typical of the region many centuries ago.

The towns of Lindau, Nonnenhorn, Bodolz, Wasserburg in Germany and Bregenz in Austria have special open days when owners open their doors for



special tours.

Throughout the region, towns host fall wine tastings and pairings with the local cheeses that you cannot find elsewhere; restaurants open their kitchens; fish hatcheries welcome visitors; and orchard owners host hikes through their fields. It is a special time to peek behind the curtain and get a real taste and feel for the local production and traditions.

Keep an eye out for “Genussherbst,” a special gourmet hike with different tasting stations along the way. It is a healthy eight miles long through orchards and vineyards, past special vantage points, and regional

delicacies with corresponding beverages at the various stations.

A picnic with local produce can be a relaxing way to independently enjoy the region and shoreline. Visitors can order complete meals to go in knapsacks, including family meals, vegan, vegetarian, and classic, and a bottle of wine is included. It is a particularly relaxing way to feel like a local and be part of the landscape.

Two historic steam boats, the Hohentwiel and the Oesterreich, offer themed tours and gourmet five course meals at lunch and dinner giving



visitors special and relaxing experiences with excellent menus and outstanding views as they tour the lakes.

The views from every angle around the lake deliver a five-star experience no matter what type of lodging you

Nearby
towns
welcome
visitors.

are seeking. From cozy pensions to contemporary spas and grande dame hotels, there is a hotel and amenity for all budgets. Some newcomers include, Seehotel am Kaiserstrand directly on the shore of Lake Constance in Lochau between Bregenz and Vorarlberg in Austria. Switzerland's Tailormade Hotel LEO St. Gallen designed by star architect Roger Boltshauser is located right at the train station.

Next year, a new hotel focusing on sustainable and organic products, das Zeppelin Hotel, will open in SouthWest Germany's Friedrichshafen in a green park setting and right on the shore where the famous Zeppelin museum is located.

Many of the charming towns around the lake are worth at least one overnight. St. Gallen in eastern Switzerland is a UNESCO World Heritage site known for its baroque cathedral and the famous abbey library. The medieval lakeside town of Meersburg is a step back into past with its cobblestone, winding streets and enormous baroque palace. Equally charming is the old city of Stein am Rhein with its half-timbered buildings clustered in the old town. Konstanz is a bustling center full of restaurants and shops with a delightful walk along the harbor.



The Bodensee Card PLUS, the holiday pass of Lake Constance, makes these experiences easier, by offering 160 attractions, including museums, castles, theme parks, free boat trips, and swimming pools.

To get to Lake Constance from the US or Canada, fly to Bodensee-Airport Friedrichshafen (via Frankfurt) or to Stuttgart Airport or Zurich Airport in Switzerland.

Also, trains from all over Europe go straight into Constance and from there you can drive, bicycle, or go by ferry to various points around the lake.

Lake Constance is an ideal destination especially in fall when students are back in school and the summer rush is over, and calm days, bright fall colors, and harvest

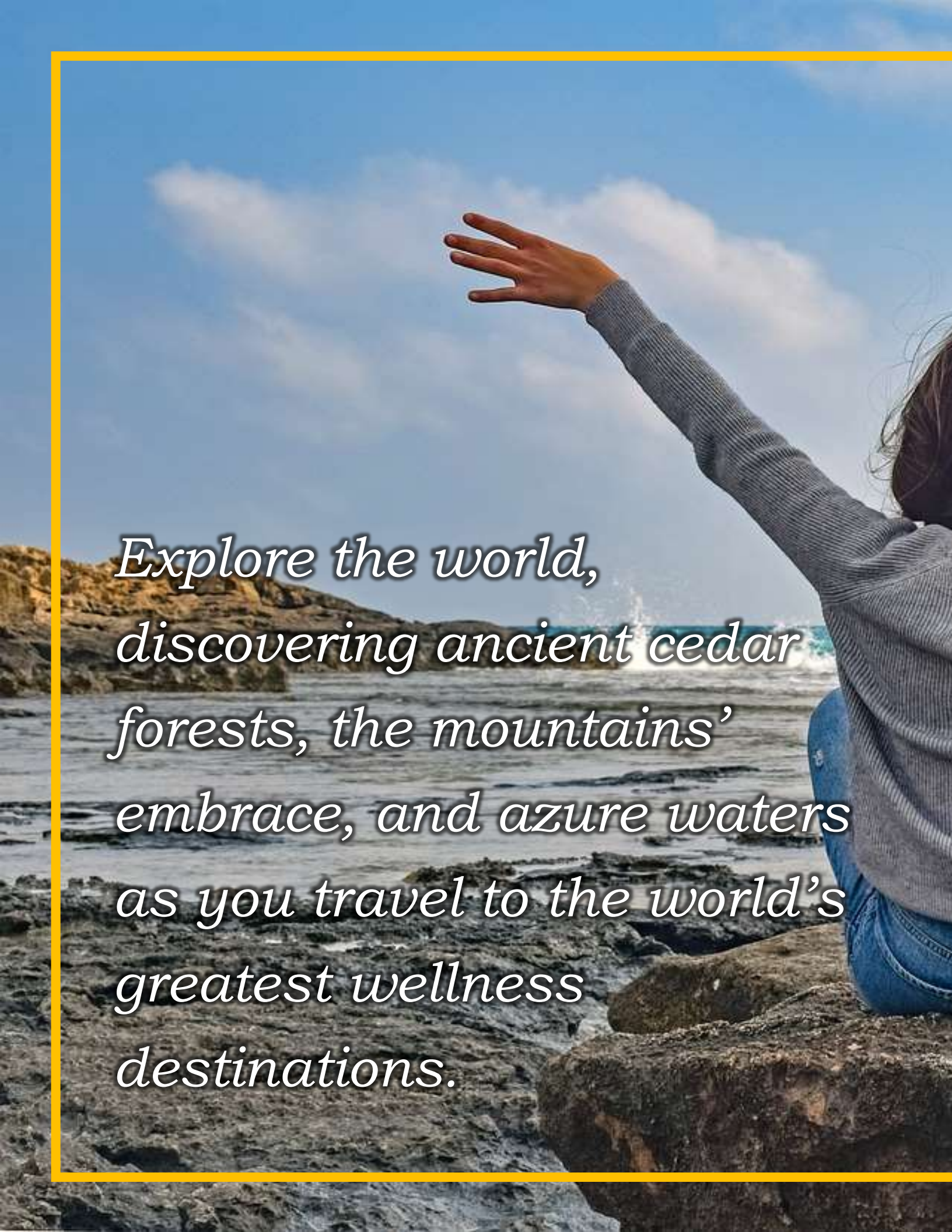
time festivals prevail. You can enjoy the atmosphere and soak up the local culture of four distinct cultures and countries at a relaxing pace within one destination.

For more information:

- www.tourism-bw.com
- www.bodensee.eu

Autumn is quieter and slower paced, but still warm enough to get out into nature.



A person is sitting on a rocky shore, their back to the camera. They are wearing a grey sweater and blue jeans. Their right arm is raised, with the hand open and fingers spread, reaching towards a bright blue sky with scattered white clouds. The foreground consists of dark, jagged rocks. In the background, the ocean waves are breaking against a rocky coastline under a clear sky.

*Explore the world,
discovering ancient cedar
forests, the mountains'
embrace, and azure waters
as you travel to the world's
greatest wellness
destinations.*

Journeys of

Wellness





I

Imagine a place where the soothing whispers of rustling leaves blend harmoniously with the gentle hum of flowing water, where every breath carries the scent of fragrant blooms, and time slows down to the rhythm of your heartbeat.

Traveling, away from daily concerns, seeking wellness often gives tranquility and rejuvenation. There



are quiet destinations where the quest for inner peace meets the embrace of nature's serenity. In these sanctuaries, wellness isn't just a concept; it's a way of life. Here, amidst the embrace of nature's wonders and guided by the wisdom of ancient practices, visitors embark on transformative journeys, reconnecting with their essence and rediscovering the lost art of self-care.

In our exploration, we delve into some of the most esteemed wellness destinations on the planet. From the lush jungles of Bali to the enchanting red

rocks of Sedona, Arizona, each destination offers a unique tapestry of experiences designed to nurture the body, mind, and spirit. Join us on this immersive journey as we uncover the secrets of holistic healing, spiritual awakening, and mindful living in the world's most renowned wellness havens. Let these destinations inspire you, inviting you to embark on your own odyssey toward well-being and balance.

Wellness is where you find it, but it's easier to find where you feel a connection to nature.



Las Catalinas, Costa Rica

Hidden on the sun-drenched Nicoya Peninsula in Costa Rica, Las Catalinas epitomizes purposeful living amidst stunning coastal landscapes. Founded by Charles Brewer, this car-free seaside town is a living embodiment of the Blue Zone concept,

emphasizing longevity and well-being.

Las Catalinas distinguishes itself with a car-free environment, fostering a sense of community as residents and visitors explore on foot or bicycle. Inspired by the Blue Zones, the town encourages outdoor activities, plant-based diets, and

strong social connections. La Rambla, a forthcoming commercial center, epitomizes Las Catalinas' commitment to well-living, offering a blend of services and residences designed for balanced living.

Nature is not just a backdrop but an active participant in life here. Surrounded by tropical forests and bordered by the Pacific Ocean, the town invites outdoor enthusiasts with hiking, snorkeling, and paddleboarding.

Culinary experiences echo the region's natural abundance,



where locally sourced ingredients are crafted into exquisite dishes.

In Las Catalinas, well-living isn't a distant dream; it's woven into everyday life. This destination isn't merely a place; it's an invitation to embrace health, happiness, and harmony amidst nature's splendor.

Ananda in the Himalayas, India:

Perched amidst the Himalayan foothills, Ananda in the Himalayas stands as a sanctuary of tranquility, where ancient traditions harmonize with contemporary luxury. Housed within a former Maharaja's palace estate, this retreat exudes regal serenity across its sprawling 100-acre

Costa Rica is known for its Pura Vida "Pure Life" lifestyle.



forest setting. Ananda's palatial architecture, adorned with intricate details, offers a glimpse into a bygone era of royal grandeur.

What sets Ananda apart is its focus on holistic wellness, integrating Ayurveda, Yoga, and Meditation into personalized programs designed to enhance physical, mental, and emotional

well-being. Unique Emotional Healing sessions, blending Eastern spirituality with Western behavioral sciences, provide guests with transformative experiences, aiding in the release of past traumas and self-discovery.

Ananda's culinary offerings are a celebration of mindful eating, featuring

gourmet dishes crafted from locally sourced organic ingredients. The resort combines ancient wisdom with modern luxury, offering traditional practices like Yoga and Meditation alongside state-of-the-art spa facilities, where skilled therapists perform Ayurvedic massages and other ancient



healing treatments.

Amidst this haven, guests are treated to awe-inspiring views of the Himalayas, providing a majestic backdrop for yoga sessions and

meditation practices. Ananda in the Himalayas isn't just a retreat; it's a transformative journey where guests embark on a profound exploration of self, guided by the wisdom of ancient sages and the nurturing embrace of modern luxury. It's more than a wellness destination; it's a sanctuary for the soul, inviting travelers to embark on a voyage of self-discovery and holistic rejuvenation.

Calabash Cove, Saint Lucia:

Nestled on the picturesque shores of Saint Lucia, Calabash Cove Resort and Spa stands as a beacon of tranquility and luxury in the heart of the Caribbean. More than

India and Nepal are renowned for their yoga retreats.



just a destination, it's a haven of eco-conscious elegance and serene seclusion, where the natural beauty of Saint Lucia intertwines with the art of mindful living.

This intimate resort is a pioneer in eco-conscious hospitality, enveloping guests in a sustainable paradise. From solar energy for hot water to plastic-free initiatives

and on-site water treatment plants, Calabash Cove is a testament to eco-conscious luxury. Culinary excellence takes center stage with a diverse menu inspired by Asian cuisine, featuring tantalizing vegan and vegetarian dishes crafted from locally sourced ingredients.

The resort offers intimate luxury

through luxurious villas and suites, each designed as a private sanctuary with breathtaking ocean views, private plunge pools, and outdoor rain showers. The Ti Spa, located cliffside overlooking the Caribbean Sea, offers rejuvenating spa treatments amidst the calming sounds of tropical waves and scents of blooming flowers.

Beyond relaxation, Calabash Cove offers a myriad of activities, from snorkeling adventures to romantic sunset cruises and yoga sessions on the beach. Guests can immerse themselves in the local culture, attending traditional music performances and exploring nearby fishing villages. Excursions to iconic

Piton Mountains and Sulphur Springs allow visitors to marvel at the Caribbean's natural wonders.

Calabash Cove Resort and Spa is not just a luxury escape; it's a celebration of conscious living and mindful indulgence. Here, amidst Saint Lucia's tropical splendor, guests experience the perfect harmony of eco-consciousness,



culinary delights, and wellness. This resort isn't merely a destination; it's an

Santa Lucia's natural springs and mud baths attract wellness-minded visitors.

embodiment of sustainable luxury, offering a sanctuary where the rhythms of the sea and the whispers of the wind create an unforgettable retreat.



Ubud, Bali, Indonesia:

Ubud, deep within Bali's lush landscape, offers a transformative experience blending

tradition and modernity. As Bali's artistic heart, the town boasts art galleries featuring traditional and contemporary Balinese art forms. Ancient temples, including the iconic Ubud Monkey Forest, and spiritual retreats dot the area, fostering spiritual connection through yoga and meditation practices.

The surrounding landscapes of rice terraces, waterfalls, and forests provide a serene backdrop for contemplation, with scenic hikes offering panoramic views. Ubud is a paradise for food enthusiasts, serving aromatic Balinese dishes in traditional restaurants overlooking rice paddies. The town's spiritual energy attracts wellness enthusiasts to holistic



Balinese healers are known as “Balian” with practices including herbal remedies, energy healing, and sacred rituals.

healing centers, spas, and natural hot springs like Tirta Empul, promoting relaxation and well-being. Vibrant cultural festivals and traditional dance performances depicting ancient myths add to Ubud's allure, offering travelers a holistic journey that nourishes the body, mind, and

soul, inviting profound self-exploration.

Sedona, Arizona:

In Arizona's high desert, Sedona is a geological marvel and spiritual oasis. Its red rock formations, sculpted over millions of years, create a surreal landscape of towering sandstone buttes, vibrant mesas, and winding canyons, bathed in hues of

crimson and orange during sunrise and sunset. Scenic drives, like the Red Rock Scenic Byway, offer panoramic vistas, inviting travelers to marvel at ancient geological wonders.

Renowned as a global hub for spiritual seekers, Sedona boasts energy vortexes believed to enhance meditation, self-reflection, and healing.

Sites like Bell Rock and Cathedral Rock draw visitors and locals alike. Sedona's artistic community finds inspiration in the natural beauty, with galleries showcasing Southwestern art, contemporary sculptures, and vibrant paintings. Tlaquepaque Arts & Shopping Village offers handcrafted treasures, from jewelry to pottery.





For outdoor enthusiasts, Sedona provides a playground of hiking trails, catering to novices and experienced climbers. Trails like the West Fork of Oak Creek lead hikers through lush canyons, offering shade amidst towering cliffs. The town's serene ambiance makes it ideal for wellness retreats, with luxurious spa treatments inspired by Native American traditions and opportunities for yoga, meditation, and energy healing sessions.

Sedona's clear desert skies make it

perfect for stargazing. Guided tours unravel the universe against a backdrop of constellations. Spiritual guides offer astrology readings and cosmic energy interpretations, providing insights into life's path. Sedona invites travelers on a profound journey of self-discovery and natural marvels, where ancient earth energies and the boundless cosmos converge, creating a sanctuary for the soul and a canvas for exploration.

Kerala, India:

On India's southwestern coast, Kerala, often called "God's Own Country," is a haven of serene backwaters, lush tea plantations, pristine beaches, and ancient traditions. Its

Sedona is known for spiritual retreats and healthy dining.



interconnected rivers and lagoons form a mesmerizing network, perfect for tranquil houseboat cruises amidst swaying palm trees and rice paddies. Ayurvedic resorts offer personalized healing therapies and yoga sessions, rooted in ancient Indian wisdom, promoting physical and mental well-being.

In the picturesque town of Munnar,

sprawling tea estates emit the fragrance of freshly plucked leaves. Guided tours reveal the art of tea cultivation, from plantations to factories, amidst mist-covered hills. Kerala's rich cultural heritage comes alive through traditional art forms like Kathakali and Mohiniyattam. Vibrant festivals, such as Onam and Thrissur Pooram, showcase

colorful processions and traditional music, offering a glimpse into Kerala's vibrant cultural tapestry.

Kerala's cuisine, a fusion of spices, coconut, and seafood, tantalizes taste buds with dishes like Appam, Fish Curry, and traditional sweets like Payasam. Its coastline, adorned with golden sands and coconut palms, invites relaxation. Beach towns like Varkala and Kovalam provide



beachside massages and a tranquil retreat by the Arabian Sea.

Kerala harmonizes nature's beauty with ancient wisdom, inviting visitors to embrace well-being and immerse themselves in the timeless traditions of India's southern gem.

Atacama Desert, Chile:

The Atacama Desert, Chile, situated between the Pacific Ocean and the Andes Mountains, offers a mesmerizing landscape of salt flats, lunar-like valleys, geothermal geysers, and starlit skies. Renowned as a premier stargazing destination, the desert's clear, high-altitude skies provide an ideal backdrop for observing celestial wonders.

Kerala is the birthplace of the ancient Indian system of healing called Ayurveda.



Guided stargazing tours and observatories like the European Southern Observatory at Paranal offer unparalleled insights into the universe, attracting astrophotographers capturing the Milky Way and nebulae against the ink-black night canvas.

The desert's Valle de la Luna (Valley of the Moon) and Valle de la Muerte (Valley of Death) showcase surreal formations akin to lunar and Martian landscapes, sculpted by erosion into mesmerizing sand dunes and jagged rock formations. Travelers can explore these valleys, witnessing the

play of light and shadow during captivating sunset excursions.

Additionally, the region boasts El Tatio Geysers, erupting against the Andean backdrop, and natural hot springs, providing tranquil and rejuvenating experiences amidst the desert's silence.

Atacama is not only a celestial marvel but also a hub of indigenous culture. Visitors can engage with Atacameño people in villages like San Pedro de Atacama, learning about their traditions, adobe

architecture, textiles, and ancient petroglyphs. Despite its arid climate, the desert supports unique flora and fauna, including resilient cacti species and diverse birdlife such as Andean flamingos. The Atacama Desert invites travelers to contemplate the mysteries of the universe while embracing the ancient wisdom and rich biodiversity of this extraordinary land.

Yakushima Island, Japan:

Tucked away in the southern reaches of Japan, Yakushima Island is a mystical oasis, designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Its ancient cedar trees, known as yakusugi, some dating back more

Serinity comes naturally in the Atacama Desert.





than 7,000 years, create an enchanted primeval forest veiled in mist. Among them stands Jomonsugi, a revered cedar estimated to be between 2,170 to 7,200 years old, attracting pilgrims and hikers on a challenging yet rewarding trek.

The island is adorned with

cascading waterfalls like Oko no Taki and Senpiro no Taki, plunging into emerald pools amidst lush greenery. Yakushima's diverse wildlife includes Japanese macaques, sika deer, and endemic bird species, offering delightful encounters. The island's spiritual significance is

palpable, making it an ideal retreat for meditation and forest bathing, fostering peace and mindfulness.

Yakushima's unique natural heritage has spurred conservation efforts, ensuring the preservation of its delicate ecosystem. Visitors are encouraged to engage in eco-friendly practices, safeguarding this sanctuary of wonder and awe. Yakushima Island invites travelers to embark on a profound journey through ancient

forests, serene landscapes, and untouched beauty, where the whispers of ancient trees echo through the ages, creating a sanctuary of natural marvels and spiritual solace.

Maldives:

In the heart of the Maldives archipelago entices travelers with its paradisiacal allure. Comprising 26 atolls and over 1,000 coral islands, the Maldives is a tropical haven celebrated for its white sandy beaches, vibrant coral reefs, and luxurious overwater bungalows. Guests can indulge in the luxury of private villas and overwater bungalows perched above turquoise lagoons, offering direct access to the ocean and breathtaking views of

Yakushima Island is a place rich with nature, history, and healing.





the horizon. This island nation is a haven for sun-seekers, divers, and romantic souls, promising an unforgettable retreat amidst the serenity of the ocean.

The Maldives is a marine enthusiast's paradise, boasting colorful coral reefs teeming with a variety of marine life. Snorkelers and divers can explore intricate

coral formations and encounter majestic manta rays and gentle whale sharks. Many resorts are situated on private islands, ensuring utmost privacy and personalized services. Guests can enjoy intimate moments, from private beach dinners to spa treatments amidst lush gardens, creating an atmosphere of pure



relaxation and romance.

Unique culinary and wellness experiences await in the Maldives, including dining in underwater restaurants surrounded by marine life and indulging in spa treatments with views of colorful fish swimming amidst coral gardens.

While primarily known for its natural splendor, the Maldives also offers cultural experiences, such as traditional dance performances

and craft exhibitions on local islands. The Maldives is committed to sustainable tourism, with resorts actively participating in reef restoration programs and marine conservation activities.

The Maldives, with its luxurious accommodations, vibrant marine life, cultural richness, and dedication to sustainability, provides travelers with a celestial escape into a world of unparalleled beauty and tranquility. Whether seeking a romantic getaway, an underwater adventure, or a serene retreat, the Maldives stands as an idyllic sanctuary of tropical allure and timeless elegance.

The Maldives offers not just privacy, serenity, and natural beauty, it does it with luxury.

Embarking on a journey to exotic destinations like the Maldives, Yakushima Island, or the Atacama Desert demands meticulous planning and insider knowledge.

This is where specialized travel agencies like Naya Traveler shine, curating bespoke experiences that transform ordinary vacations into extraordinary adventures.

Naya Traveler excels in curating bespoke travel experiences that elevate ordinary vacations into extraordinary adventures. Their personalized itineraries cater to diverse passions, whether it's immersive food experiences in Spain and Japan, spiritual retreats in Yakushima or the Atacama Desert, or deep cultural engagements in destinations worldwide.

Emphasizing cultural immersion, their approach facilitates authentic connections with local communities, traditions, and rituals, offering enriching travel encounters.

With experienced guides providing historical insights and hidden gems, Naya Traveler transforms sightseeing into profound explorations of history and heritage. They also indulge culinary enthusiasts with



gastronomic journeys, from Michelin-starred dining to street food adventures, illuminating the cultural significance behind each dish. Managing all travel logistics seamlessly, they ensure stress-free

experiences, especially in remote destinations.

Moreover, their commitment to responsible tourism aligns with eco-

conscious

accommodations and local community

support, making their journeys not only enriching for travelers

but also environmentally and socially impactful.

Naya Traveler's tailored adventures

redefine travel, fostering meaningful

connections with the world's diverse

cultures and

promising unparalleled wonder and discovery.

Discovering wellness in the sun-kissed Maldives and the ancient cedar forests of Yakushima Island, may uncover a tale of beauty, adventure, and spiritual resonance. It invites us to wander, embrace the unknown, savor every moment, and let the spirit of adventure be our guide.

Travel doesn't have to be rush rush rush to get to the next iconic landmark. It can be your ticket to relaxation, health, and reconnection with nature.



ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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He loves exploring, traveling the back roads, experiencing the world, and finding what is unique and memorable about the places he visits.

And he loves writing - poetry, short stories, essays, non-fiction, news, and, of course, travel writing.

For over 20 years, he has shared his explorations with

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She's an avid explorer who welcomes new opportunities to increase awareness and enthusiasm for places, culture, food, history, nature, outdoor adventure, wellness and more.

Her travels have taken her to all fifty states and nearly 100 countries, spanning all seven continents.

Her stories reach over three million readers and listeners, and appear in numerous print and digital publications, including Luxe Beat Magazine, Big Blend Radio & TV Magazine, Parks & Travel Magazine, Northwest Prime Time, Woodinville Weekly, Santa Fe Fine Lifestyles Magazine, Edmonds Beacon, Outdoors Northwest, Southwest Stories Magazine, Go World Travel and Travelworld International Magazine, among others. She can also be heard sharing her travel adventures on Big Blend Radio.



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