

SECOND TO NONE

TOURISM IS BOOMING, AND
TOP-OF-THE-LIST PLACES ARE GETTING BUSIER.
IF YOU WANT A FIRST-RATE EXPERIENCE
WITHOUT THE CROWDS,
HEAD TO THESE 25 UNDER-THE-RADAR
DESTINATIONS INSTEAD.

There's never been a better time to explore the world. And more people are travelling every year, thanks to accessible airfares and growing flight networks. International tourist arrivals climbed to 1.4 billion in 2018—two years ahead of the World Tourism Organization's prediction—and are on track to reach 1.8 billion by 2030.

Luckily, the world is pretty big, and there are lots of places where you can have a little more elbow room. Here are 25 destinations that show how going just a little off the beaten path can pay off in a big way.

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MATERA

ITALY

Get away from the usual Italian destinations and do what Italian expats do: go south. Specifically, consider Matera, the “underground city” in the region of Basilicata that’s just coming off a stint as European Capital of Culture in 2019. This unbelievably well-preserved ancient settlement is known for its **sassi**, or cave dwellings dug out of the limestone, and a network of byzantine footpaths. Once evacuated due to squalor and disease, Matera underwent a gradual transformation, and its sassi are now filled with restaurants, shops and hotels. –Karan Smith



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Busan

SOUTH KOREA

Nearly half of South Koreans live in Seoul. Tell them you’re going to Busan, though, and their eyes light up. The country’s second city pairs skyscrapers with mountains and coastal cliffs with sandy beaches, making it a favourite with Koreans and a must-see for visitors.

It’s an easy two-and-a-half-hour trip on the high-speed KTX train from Seoul to Busan. Cyrillic script on a few buildings around the main train station acts as a reminder that Busan’s port has connected it to the rest of the world for centuries. The station neighbourhood makes it easy to get a taste of city life, with old-school *gukbap* restaurants ladling out the local specialty of rich pork soup (stir the rice in to thicken) and Brown Hands Design Café, a chic spot housed in a former hospital, serving lattes.

Fill your camera roll on an afternoon in Gamcheon Culture Village, a slum revitalized in 2009

with public art installations and plenty of bright paint. Its candy-coloured houses spill down the hillside, connected by steep streets and even steeper flights of stairs; some of the buildings are still inhabited by locals, and others by large-scale sculptures. Let the city bus ferry you up to the Haneul Maru info centre, pick up a map and follow it to stamp stations scattered at shops and lookout spots throughout the neighbourhood. Collect enough stamps and you’ll earn a postcard.

But it wouldn’t be a trip to Busan without some time by the water. For the energetic, the Igidae Coastal Walk is a gorgeous (but intense) hike past rocky coves scented by jasmine and through sweet-smelling pine forests. For everyone else, sandy Haeundae Beach, Korea’s largest, waits just off the subway, and Gwangalli Beach fills up at night with groups of friends waiting for the light show on the bridge just offshore. –Kristen Koch

Above: find murals, art installations and shops amid the colourful buildings of Gamcheon Culture Village

No. 3

BELFAST, NORTHERN IRELAND

Already been to Dublin? Next time, make the two-hour drive to Belfast, capital of Northern Ireland. Belfast’s maritime heritage is brought to life at **Titanic Belfast**, an interactive museum that tells the infamous tale of the RMS Titanic. Across the street, the swanky Titanic Hotel offers afternoon tea in a converted shipbuilding office with 500 artifacts from the golden age of ocean travel. In the city centre, enjoy innovative cocktails (and panoramic views) at the Grand Central Hotel’s Observatory—the tallest bar in Ireland. –Vawn Himmelsbach



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Lyon

FRANCE



Long boulevards and elegant Haussman-style buildings make it easy to see how Lyon's central Presqu'île district is often described as a smaller, friendlier Paris. But with its own unique topography and culinary traditions, France's third-largest city offers much more to warrant a visit than simply being a more manageable version of the sprawling French capital.

Situated at the nexus of two rivers, the Saone and the Rhone, and surrounded by verdant farmland and vineyards, Lyon is a prime example of geography as destiny. More than 2,000 years ago, the Romans made it the capital of their wine trade, bringing with them new flavours and setting the scene for the city's gastronomic pre-eminence. Today, it's the gateway to the Beaujolais region, and Lyon shines on the foodie front, with one of the highest concentrations of restaurants per capita in all of France and delicacies that are hard to find anywhere else: quenelles, coq au vin and above all else, offal.

These classic dishes, plus a warm, unpretentious atmosphere, make a meal at a traditional Lyonnais restaurant, or *bouchon*, a must-do, whether you choose a standby like Daniel et Denise in Vieux Lyon or



a neighbourhood favourite like Les Filles. And don't miss Les Halles Paul Bocuse. Named for the late chef, perhaps Lyon's most famous, the indoor market is chockablock with fish- and cheesemongers, butchers and bakers: the best of the city under one roof.

For an altogether different vibe—and a sense of how Lyon is evolving—check out the burgeoning Confluence district. Once derelict, the Presqu'île-adjacent neighbourhood has been reborn as a hub of sleek shops, restaurants and futuristic architecture, including the steel-and-glass Confluence Museum of anthropology, frequently likened to the Guggenheim in Bilbao. —Alyssa Schwartz

► From top: the dining room at Daniel et Denise Saint-Jean in Vieux Lyon; the eco-friendly Green Cube office building stands where the Saone and Rhone rivers meet in the Confluence neighbourhood

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SAN ANTONIO

TEXAS, U.S.A.

Logging a visit to buzzy Austin has become a status symbol of sorts. But the nearby larger city of San Antonio, a.k.a. the Alamo City, is more the Texas of travellers' imaginations.

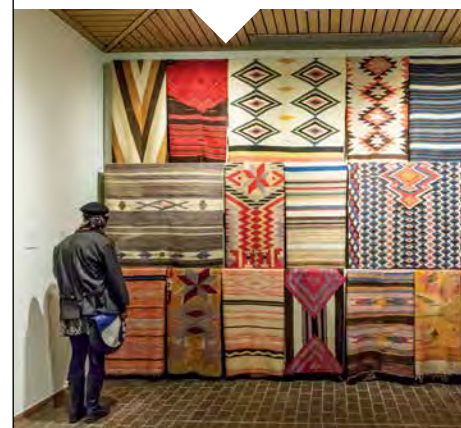
Once part of Mexico, later home to wealthy cattlemen, German settlers and oil barons, this quietly sophisticated city in the heart of Texas has a fusion of cultures that defines Tex-Mex.

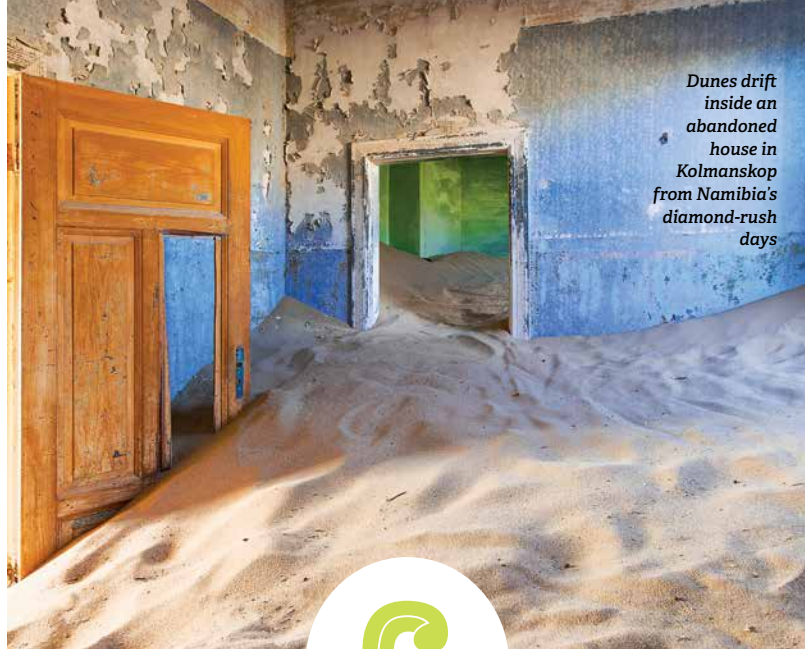
Even the architecture is a mix of UNESCO-listed, circa 1700 Spanish missions and iconic Greek Revival and Victorian buildings.

Downtown is best known for its River Walk, a network of bars, restaurants and shops enlivening the banks of the San Antonio River. Don't miss the **McNay Art Institute**, scores of hiking and bike trails, the huevos rancheros breakfast at Mi Tierra and the Pearl District, an entertainment area born from the remains of a century-old brewery whose former brewhouse is now the high-design Hotel Emma.

On the city's outskirts, Hill Country brims with wineries.

—Becca Hensley





Dunes drift inside an abandoned house in Kolmanskop from Namibia's diamond-rush days

6

Namibia

Tucked between South Africa, Botswana and the Atlantic, Namibia boasts wildlife and landscapes rivalling those of its neighbours. It's also one of the least densely populated (and sparsely touristed) countries in the world, so if you want lions and dunes to yourself, Namibia is for you.

Excellent roads and jaw-dropping boutique hotels are perfect for a self-drive tour of the sights. Wild Atlantic currents have littered the Skeleton Coast with shipwrecks. The red dunes of Sossusvlei, some of the tallest in the world, drift into surrealist landscapes. Abandoned diamond-rush towns

are an explorer's dream; petrified by the desert air, they sit just as they were 100 years ago. And Etosha National Park has one of the world's largest concentrations of wildlife. Even on a short visit, you'll see rhinos, elephants, lions, oryx and giraffes—without the crowds. —Mark Dunsmuir and Naomi Horrox

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Hanoi

VIETNAM

Despite being the country's capital, this charming northern city has, so far, been spared the unchecked development that has transformed many other Southeast Asian metropolises. You can spend a day strolling through Hanoi's colonial-era French Quarter, pedal boating on central Ho Tay Lake and reflecting at ancient shrines—like the nearly 1,000-year-old **Temple of Literature**. That's the type of easy-going experience you'd be hard pressed to have in bustling Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam's biggest urban centre. —Andrew Raven



EXPERT IDEAS: ROMANCE

Under-the-radar picks from CAA Travel Planners



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RIGA, LATVIA

"The art nouveau architecture is very romantic in this city. It has a wonderful city centre with so many amazing restaurants. Latvia is also very social, with lots of music and bars to enjoy some great craft beers. There are castles and amazing art history as well." —Katherina Khoury, CAA North & East Ontario



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MALTA

This island country south of Italy lacks the spotlight and nightlife of other Mediterranean hot spots, but makes up for it with historic architecture, temples, marinas and coves. "You can wander along the beautiful marble promenade on the Valletta waterfront and watch the sun go down." —Ramsay Anderson, CAA Atlantic



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BRITISH ISLES

"It's not just London." Forgo the city in favour of sweeping views that will steal your heart in the wide moorlands and river valleys of England's Dartmoor National Park, the mountains and lochs of the Scottish Highlands, or the rugged Aran Islands off the west coast of Ireland. —Ramsay Anderson

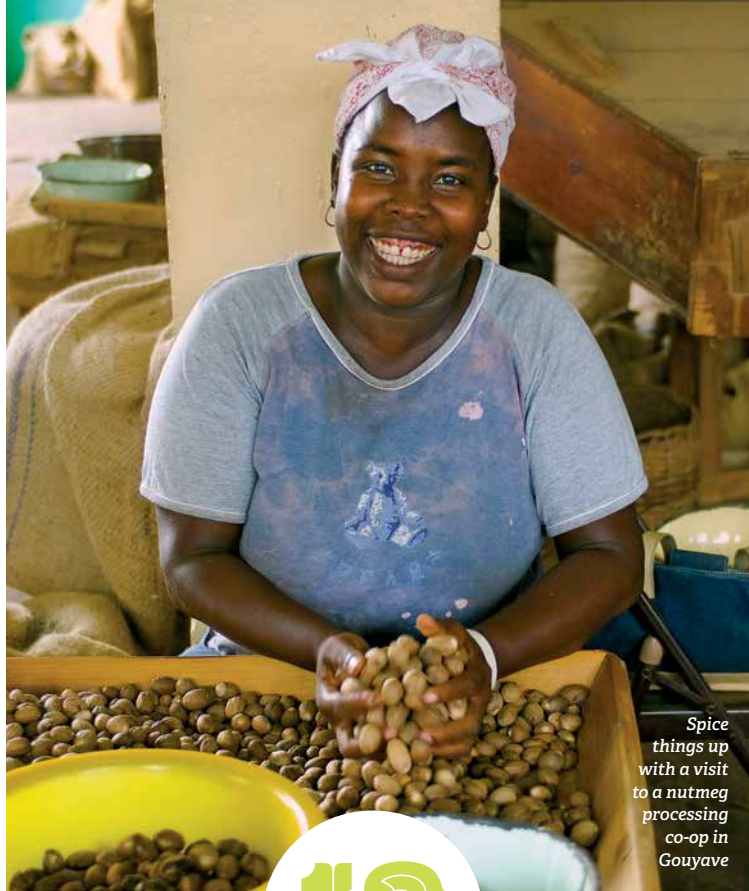
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ROTTERDAM

THE NETHERLANDS

Amsterdam gets all the buzz, but Rotterdam has all the cool. Known as the City of Architecture, Rotterdam was largely destroyed in the Second World War, then rebuilt with modernist Dutch architecture, such as its famous cube houses. It's now one of Europe's liveliest festival cities, and art takes centre stage on Witte de Withstraat, the so-called Axis of Art, featuring boutiques, galleries and cafés.

—Vawn Himmelsbach



Spice things up with a visit to a nutmeg processing co-op in Gouyave

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Grenada

Anchoring the end of the Grenadine island chain in the southern Caribbean, Grenada is a tiny taste of island bliss, all white sand, blue waters and smiling faces. This engaging retreat manages to maintain a rustic charm flavoured with traces of its British roots, all while delivering a luxury vibe—often without the hefty price tag. It's outside the

hurricane belt and an easy alternative to more popular Caribbean islands, with far fewer high-rises (and people), exceptional value and a tropical climate tempered by cooling trade winds.

Besides trekking up rainforest hills or lounging poolside at one of the three new resorts that have sprung up in the past two years, visitors

can take advantage of excellent diving and snorkelling along with sublime sunset cruises. The island's cuisine is elevated by its spice heritage; Grenada is a global source of nutmeg, mace, turmeric, cinnamon, cloves and ginger. The calibre of the tree-to-bar chocolate here makes it easy to decide what to bring home. —Doug Wallace

No. 13 PORTO, PORTUGAL

Sure, Lisbon has *pasteis de Belem*, but Porto lends its name to Portugal's other sweet export: port wine. Get lost in narrow lanes sloping toward the Rio Douro before crossing over to wine heaven in Vila Nova de Gaia. Raise a glass in one of the many wine "caves" offering tours and tastings here, then capture a postcard-perfect vista from the 360° Terrace Lounge at Espaço Porto Cruz with a port and tonic in hand. —Beverley Ann D'Cruz



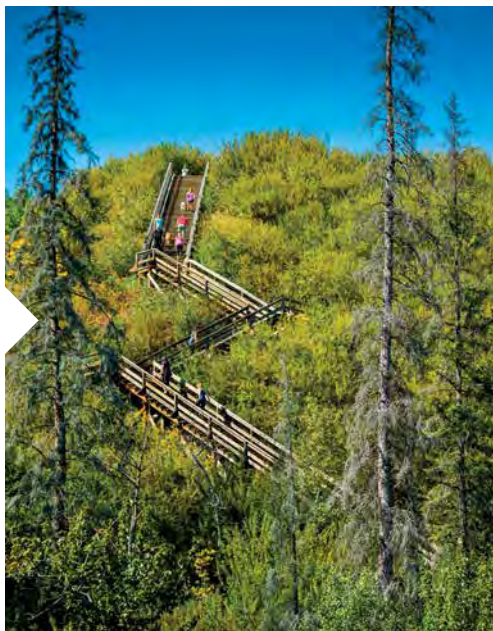
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Edmonton

ALBERTA

Name the city that's home to Canada's largest urban park, along with a sophisticated homegrown restaurant scene and top-notch museums. Edmonton, not Toronto or Vancouver, offers all these things. From the steel architecture of the Art Gallery of Alberta—meant to evoke the city's urban grid and northern landscapes—to eateries such as Bündok and Café Linnea to 160 kilometres of outdoor fun in the **River Valley**, Alberta's capital city surprises, inside and out.

—Alyssa Schwartz



Sunset over traditional banca boats on the white-sand beach of Panglao Island

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Panglao Island

PHILIPPINES

When it comes to the Philippines, most visitors make a beeline for Boracay, but Panglao Island in Bohol has the same white-sand beaches without the crowds. Swim and snorkel in the clear waters of Alona Beach, then go scuba diving at Balicasag Island or spot dolphins and whales at Pamilacan Island. For some sightseeing on land, head to the main island of Bohol to view the stretch of dome-shaped mounds known as the Chocolate Hills, or cruise the Loboc River aboard a floating restaurant. —Rina Diane Caballar

EXPERT IDEAS: CULTURE



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TALLINN, ESTONIA

There are more than 30 museums around the city, ranging from medieval exhibits to marzipan collections on display at the oldest café in Tallinn. "This city also has authentic restaurants where you eat by candlelight. And it has a lively nightlife!"

—Katherina Khoury



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RHINE RIVER

A river cruise not only lets you slow down, it also docks at a country's less-trodden destinations. An Avalon Waterways journey along the Rhine from Amsterdam to Basel makes stops in the beautifully preserved city of Colmar, France, and Mainz, Germany, home to the Gutenberg Museum.

—Johanne Ottens, CAA Niagara



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MOROCCO

Even its place names conjure up a cultural adventure: Marrakesh, Casablanca, the High Atlas Mountains. We can help you find the right places to ride camels, shop in crowded souks and savour slow-cooked tajines. —Johanne Ottens

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Split

CROATIA

If you've already explored Dubrovnik, why not head to Split? As Croatia's second-largest city, it has a bit of everything: a medieval Old Town, a buzzing seaside promenade and a wooded peninsula with secluded beaches, backed by coastal mountains along the Adriatic Sea.

The palm-lined Riva promenade runs the length of the Old Town, where the well-heeled stroll past yachts and sip Aperol spritzes at the outdoor cafés. It's all just outside the fortifications of Diocletian's Palace, built in the heyday of the Roman Empire. The palace is more like a city within a city, its labyrinth of alleyways bustling with shops, restaurants and bars. It's a UNESCO-designated site, but people still live and work here, just as they did hundreds of years ago. Sharp-eyed visitors might also recognize several filming locations from *Game of Thrones*, including the dungeons where Daenerys kept her dragons.

For those who want more film-worthy scenery, Klis Fortress—the ruins of an ancient fortification atop a mountain overlooking Split and the Adriatic—is a must-visit

for *Thrones* fans and history buffs alike. Over the course of an eventful past that could fill a TV season, the Knights Templar, the Mongols and the Ottomans all fought real-life battles here. And its hilltop perch has the best views of Split, bar none.

Fresh seafood abounds in the medieval maze of Old Town, whose cafés and restaurants spill out onto cobblestoned streets. You'll also find traditional restaurants, called *konobas*, that serve Dalmatian specialties, such as grilled fish and *brudet* (seafood stew). Croatia produces its own wine, but its grape varieties, like the vowel-free *grk*, are unfamiliar to most visitors. Get to know them on the breezy rooftop terrace at Paradox Wine & Cheese Bar, where sommeliers pair local Pag cheese with more than 100 Croatian wines. —Vawn Himmelsbach



► From top: the bell tower of the Cathedral of St. Domnius stands over the Riva promenade; see armour on display along with breathtaking city views at Klis Fortress

EXPERT IDEAS:

ADVENTURE



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JORDAN

Explore the pink sandstone city of Petra, dine under the desert stars in Wadi Rum and float effortlessly in the Dead Sea. "We felt very safe. People were happy that we'd come to visit and proud to show us their history, their culture, their food. And I was overwhelmed by how beautiful the country was." —Ramsay Anderson



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ADIRONDACK MOUNTAINS, NEW YORK

"I recently went to the Wild Center, a great option for families wanting interactive trails and different programs, including canoeing. It was a five-minute drive to the town of Tupper Lake, which had antique shops and a few neat restaurants. Saranac Lake was only a 20-minute drive, with lots of hiking trails." —Katherina Khoury



22

BHUTAN

A guided road trip through this carbon-negative country opens up Himalayan views and hiking trails ranging from a climb to the Tiger's Nest, a cliff's-edge monastery, to a trek to Bumdra High Camp. "Hardest hike I've done yet. The views were stunning, though!" —Katherina Khoury

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Kuelap

PERU

Many visitors head to the Peruvian Andes to see one thing and one thing only: the ancient Inca citadel of Machu Picchu. That's a shame, because the mountain range is home to a trove of stunning archaeological sites, including **Kuelap**, a towering fortress that predates its famous southern neighbour by almost a millennium. Kuelap's calling card is its monumental walls, which reach up to six storeys high. Archaeologists say they hold more stone than the pyramids of Egypt. But perhaps the biggest attraction is the solitude. Nestled in the cloud-covered forests of the remote Amazonas region, Kuelap saw 90 per cent fewer visitors than Machu Picchu in 2018.

—Andrew Raven



READY TO GO?

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MUMBAI

INDIA

Although New Delhi gets capital-city cred, Mumbai remains India's heartbeat. **Marine Drive**, a three-kilometre promenade hugging the Arabian Sea, is the spot to get swept up with locals relishing the salty breeze. As dusk falls, the stretch sparkles as it lights up, showing how it got its nickname: the Queen's Necklace. —Beverly Ann D'Cruz

No. 25

BERGEN, NORWAY

With about half the population of Oslo and central attractions that are completely doable on foot, Bergen has a small size that belies its big charm. As Norway's historic capital, Bergen boasts a heritage that's incredibly well preserved, from the **wooden Bryggen district**, built in the 12th century (and rebuilt after fires), to waterfront stalls where fishermen have been hawking herring and tiny, sweet prawns for hundreds of years. For the best view in town, catch the funicular up to Mount Floyen, one of seven iconic hills in the city centre. —Alyssa Schwartz CAA

