



Urban thrills... and chills



This summer, these European hotspots offer something for everyone – from foodie breaks to outdoor adventures. **Angelina Villa-Clarke** finds the most exciting cities to put on your radar.

Dubrovnik, Croatia

Where theatre & arts come alive

The Croatian city of Dubrovnik is quite possibly one of the prettiest destinations in Europe – oozing heritage and charm at every corner. As a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and nicknamed the 'Pearl of the Adriatic', its status as a 'must-see' city is official.

With its terracotta roofs and winding streets, the Old Town's charm lies in its rich character: inside the Medieval fortifications you'll pass by Baroque churches, stone palaces and crumbling monasteries. Make sure to walk the two-kilometre-long Old City Walls to find an elevated perspective across the rooftops and to soak up the epic views over the glittering Adriatic Sea.

A passion for the arts is ingrained in the city's culture and a highlight is the annual Dubrovnik Summer Festival (10 July – 25 August 2026). This year, you can expect to find works from some 2,000 artists, as well as 70 music, dance and theatre performances across the city. Another annual event is the Midsummer Scene Festival, in Fort Lovrjenac (22 June – 5 July

2026), which is rooted in Dubrovnik's centuries' old tradition of open-air theatre. The only one of its kind in south-eastern Europe, the event brings English language productions, such as this year's *The School for Scandal* and *I, Peaseblossom*, to an international crowd.

When it comes to where to stay, you can't beat the location of **Sun Gardens Dubrovnik**, found on the seafront in Orašac. The family-friendly resort has residences for larger groups, some 12 restaurants and bars, a spa with a Turkish hammam and lagoon pool. Meanwhile, an impressive Sports Academy offers a wealth of fitness and health programmes.

Placing you in the thick of things – just a five-minute walk from the Old City – is **Villa Orsula Dubrovnik**. Carved out of a 1920s stone villa, the intimate boutique hotel has just 13 rooms, immaculate gardens and a Peruvian fine-dining restaurant. It's the perfect spot from which to enjoy a day trip to Lokrum Island (there's a 15-minute ferry from the Old Town). This idyllic nature reserve is home to botanical gardens with roaming peacocks, an 11th-century monastery and a dramatic fortress.

Helsinki, Finland

Where music & nature bring the fun-factor

The design capital of Finland comes alive in the summer months and it's not only due to the glorious long days and surreal midnight sun. The seaside city hosts a strong line-up of festivals, including the Flow Festival (14 - 16 August 2026), which sees Florence + The Machine headlining, and the Helsinki Festival (18 August - 5 September 2026), which will feature Rufus Wainwright's Dream Requiem and the Czech Philharmonic.

A must in the city is to delve into the sauna culture, with a visit to one of the public saunas, such as Löyly, a spacious shell-shaped building, which combines a vast sauna and restaurant by the sea.

From Helsinki you can branch out and explore some of the country's stunning Arctic wilderness destinations, such as Saariselka and Rovaniemi. In the summer, it's all about embracing the outdoors with life-affirming activities, including hiking, mountain biking and fishing along crystal clear rivers in pristine countryside.



The vast northern terrain of Finland – known as Lapland North – is dotted with wilderness lodges, which are magical in winter but also unforgettable in the summer months when you can be at one with the wild nature found all around. With its suites on stilts, the **Arctic Treehouse Hotel**, for instance, is hidden in a pine forest with cosy Nordic interiors and wellbeing experiences, such as mindful nature walks and Arctic floating on Lake Sierijärvi, that make the most of the long 'white nights'.

The ultra-luxury **Octola Private Wilderness**, meanwhile, ups the stakes when it comes to one-off adventures. The private wilderness retreat, found in a 300-hectare off-grid estate, comes with a private chef, butler and nature guides as well as some 70 curated activities. Guests can go foraging, husky walking and white-water rafting late into the night.

Valletta, Malta

Where history meets modernity

As a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Valletta is a captivating destination for lovers of history, architecture and art. Malta's elegant capital is firmly on the tourist radar for 2026 with a new tranche of luxury hotel openings putting it in the spotlight. With its views over the Grand Harbour and a two Michelin-starred restaurant – **Iniala Harbour House** set the tone when it opened in 2020. The main building dates back to the 17th century, yet inside its contemporary interiors and art collection give it a modern twist.



Roselli AX Privilege is another property that marries history with modern luxury. The 17th-century palazzo has been reimagined with individually designed rooms, a rooftop terrace and a Michelin-starred restaurant, Under the Grain.

Opening later this summer 2026, the new **Romègas** is an independent boutique hotel in a 500-year-old restored palazzo. Celebrating the best of Maltese culture, craftsmanship and community, it has just 23 rooms and suites with traditional terrazzo flooring and original Maltese balconies giving views onto the streets of Valletta.

Art-lovers should head to MICAS – the Malta International Contemporary Art Space. Malta's first national museum dedicated to contemporary art opened its doors in 2024 and is found in a restored 17th-century fort. Also a must is a visit to St John's Co-Cathedral where two of Caravaggio's greatest works are on display.

This year, the Malta International Arts Festival (12 – 21 June 2026) brings art, theatre and dance performances to historic spaces across the city; while the Malta Jazz Festival (7 – 12 July 2026), a three-day celebration of international jazz, promises an eclectic mix of performances framed against the dramatic sweep of Valletta's historic fortifications.



Lisbon, Portugal

Where food & fado stir the soul

The vibrant city of Lisbon has a spring in its step in the summer months with major music festivals like Rock in Rio (20 – 21 and 27 – 28 June 2026), NOS Alive 2026 (9 – 11 July 2026), and Kalorama 2026 (28 – 30 August 2026) bringing a backbeat to the streets.

From enjoying a sundowner from a rooftop bar to spending a day at one of the nearby beaches, the city offers an eclectic choice of things to do and see. Of course, sampling a locally-made pastel de nata is essential and one of the best bakeries in town is Mantelgaria, on Rua do Loreto, found in a pretty Art Nouveau building. Another foodie hub is the Time Out Market which hosts a huge variety of stalls selling delicious food and produce.

Don't forget to take in the city's major tourist spots, which are plentiful and includes the UNESCO World Heritage site Belém Tower and the hilltop São George Castle. Also worth a visit is Casa de Fados in Mouraria, once the home of the 19th-century singer Maria Severa, where you can catch a performance of fado, the Portuguese soulful music genre.

When it comes to where to rest your head, Lisbon has no shortage of beautiful hotels. A highlight is a stay at the **Corinthia Lisbon** which has just celebrated 20 years as one of the city's finest properties. It has newly renovated rooms by interior designers, Goodard Littlefair, a spacious spa and destination restaurant Evra, which celebrates the best of Portuguese cuisine. With its views over the 18th-century Aqueduct of Aguas Livres, the hotel stands as one of Lisbon's iconic properties.