

# WORLD'S GREATEST BOOKSHOPS

THE BEST SPOTS TO BROWSE, BUY, HANG OUT, FIND SANCTUARY AMONG THE SHELVES, RAVE ABOUT YOUR FAVOURITE WRITERS AND MEET BOOK-LOVING CHARACTERS.

## 01 CITY LIGHTS BOOKS, SAN FRANCISCO, USA

Lawrence Ferlinghetti's City Lights Books is still one of the world's coolest bookshops, almost 60 years after it opened for bohemian business. Having been a meeting point for American literary icons, from beat writers like Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg onwards, it's still central to the city's vibrant cultural scene. As well as two floors of tomes, including those published by City Lights, the shop offers weekly readings and events. More than the nearby Beat Museum, this is the place to feel the boho buzz that once inspired Kerouac *et al* to drive across America to the Bay Area.

*Check [www.citylights.com](http://www.citylights.com) for details of upcoming events; and you can do that pretty much anywhere in wi-fi-blanketed San Francisco.*

## 02 LIBRERÍA EL ATENEO GRAND SPLENDID, BUENOS AIRES, ARGENTINA

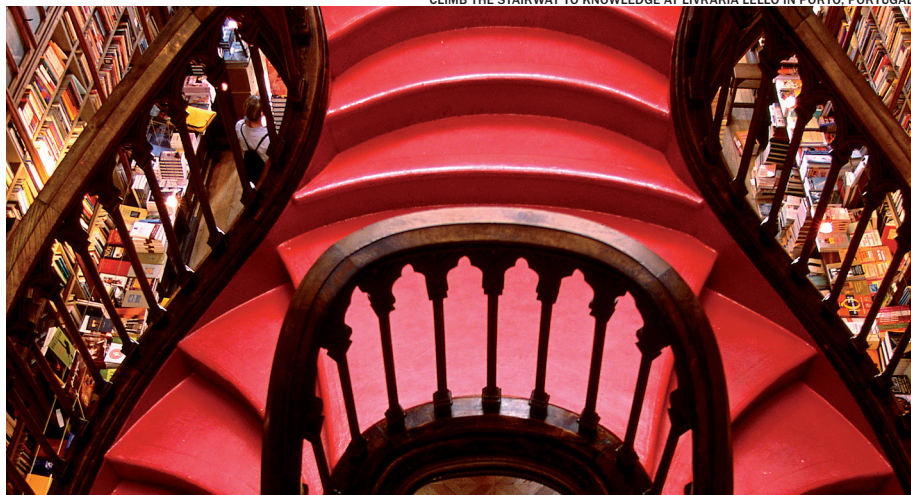
It's grand, it's splendid and it's a strong contender to be the world's most beautiful bookshop. Occupying a 1920s theatre in downtown BA, El Ateneo has kept the sumptuous auditorium's original

furnishings – and added books. Beneath the painted ceiling, shelves have been built into the spectator balconies. When you've finished gawping at the ornate carvings and it's time to put finger to page, the former theatre boxes are now intimate reading rooms. There's a cafe on the stage, between red velvet curtains, and the final firework in the literary spectacle is the round-the-clock opening hours.

*Librería El Ateneo Grand Splendid is located on the south side of Ave Santa Fe, 50m west of Ave Callao.*

## 03 LIVRARIA LELLO, PORTO, PORTUGAL

A little over 100 years old, this art nouveau gem in Portugal's second city remains one of the world's most stunning shops – perhaps of any kind. Competing for attention with the books are wrap-around, neo-Gothic shelves, featuring panels carved with Portuguese literary figures. A track, used by the staff for transporting stock in a cart, leads from the entrance to the lolling red staircase, which winds up to the first floor like an exotic flower. Books are available in English as well as Portuguese, and there's



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a small cafe upstairs beneath the stained-glass skylight.

*You can continue the art nouveau tour of Porto at Café Majestic and streets such as Rua Galeria de Paris.*

### ★ SHAKESPEARE & COMPANY, PARIS, FRANCE

Where did the American beat poets go to share cigarettes and profundities when they were in Europe? Shakespeare & Company of course – located in Paris' Latin Quarter, a tome's throw from Notre Dame Cathedral. George Whitman, the eccentric American bibliophile who opened the cosy store in 1951, has handed the reins to his daughter as he approaches 100. Nonetheless, much of Shakespeare & Co's creative, chaotic spirit remains. It's still a prime spot to fill your rucksack with paperbacks, hang with the Left Bank literati, and admire the packed shelves, wooden beams and poetic posters.

*Nearby transport links include St-Michel (metro line 4) and St-Michel Notre Dame (RER lines B and C). Visit <http://shakespeareandcompany.com> for more information.*

### ★ DAUNT BOOKS, LONDON, UK

London is an armchair explorer's dream, offering high-quality, travel-focused book dens such as Stanford's and The Travel Bookshop. Our favourite is Daunt Books. The mini-chain stocks a lot more than guides and maps, and everything – from biographies to fiction – is handily arranged by country. The green Daunt Books sign is found in five well-heeled enclaves of London, but the Marylebone branch is the original and best. Occupying an Edwardian bookshop, its long oak galleries with polished floors and shelves, graceful skylights and William Morris prints create a peaceful atmosphere. The perfect place for some serious browsing.

*The branches at 83 Marylebone High St, Chelsea, Holland Park, Hampstead and Belsize Park open seven days a week; visit [www.dauntbooks.co.uk](http://www.dauntbooks.co.uk).*

### ★ **ANOTHER COUNTRY, BERLIN, GERMANY**

The commendably eccentric Another Country is a hub for everyone from Berlin's expat community to indie bands. The Kreuzberg institution is more of a library than a conventional bookshop; you can pay for the book, return it when you've read it, and get your money back – minus €1.50. In addition to some 20,000 books, the sprawling shop-cum-club offers much-loved events, including the Tuesday night film club, Thursday TV night and Friday dinner. In the finest tradition of leftfield bookstores, Another

Country inspires as well as sells creative efforts, and its website features a comic and a story about the shop.

*Located at Riemannstrasse 7, Another Country ([www.anothercountry.de](http://www.anothercountry.de)) is open Tuesday to Friday 11am to 8pm and weekends from noon to 4pm. The film and TV nights start at 8pm; the dinner at 9pm.*

### ★ **THE BOOKWORM, BEIJING, CHINA**

The Bookworm does everything a good bookshop should do – which is a lot more than sell books. The Beijing mothership, which has spawned branches in Suzhuo and Chengdu, has played a huge role in promoting both local and foreign literature. Not only is it one of the few places in China where you can pick up books which are banned in the country,



BOOKS ARE THE STAR ATTRACTION AT LIBRERIA EL ATENEO GRAND SPLENDID, BUENOS AIRES, ARGENTINA

it has a lending library with 16,000-plus titles. The library is also the setting for a healthy program of events, from gigs to an annual literary festival. There's even a whisky bar and monthly wine club.

*The Bookworm International Literary Festival takes place in Beijing, Suzhuo and Chengdu over two weeks in mid-March; see [www.chinabookworm.com](http://www.chinabookworm.com).*

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### ★ SELEXYZ DOMINICANEN, MAASTRICHT, THE NETHERLANDS

Occupying a 13th-century Dominican church – which the Dutch city's cyclists had appropriated for bike storage – Selexyz Dominicanen consists of a steel bookstack rising towards the heavens. Cunningly, this both leaves the nave's grandeur intact and creates 1,200 sq metres of selling space – despite the 750-sq-metre floor area. Staircases and a lift lead to the top of the three-storey stack, where you can eyeball 14th-century ceiling paintings. The altar has been superseded by a cafe, with a halo of lights hanging above a cruciform table. It's an award-winning architectural triumph and a peaceful haven for page thumbing.

*Close to both Liège in Belgium and Aachen in Germany, Maastricht is connected to Amsterdam, some 220km north-west, by train.*

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### ★ BOOKÀBAR, ROME, ITALY

Just the thought of big, sexy art books makes us consider diverting our travel dollars to collecting coffee table beauties. Alright, it's rash talk; but even hardened travellers might agree when they ogle

the arty tomes in Bookàbar – the perfect setting. With a curvy ceiling and long, smooth shelves, the shop's coolly contemporary, snow-white interior hordes books, catalogues, CDs, DVDs and merchandise. It looks like a space station staffed by extremely well-read astronauts. The neighbours certainly don't lower the tone, as it's part of the Palazzo delle Esposizioni exhibition centre. Bookàbar's adjoining cafe serves dishes inspired by the centre's exhibitions.

*Palazzo delle Esposizioni, which normally has a few exhibitions covering various art forms, is near the junction of Via Nazionale and Via Milano.*

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### ★ ATLANTIS BOOKS, SANTORINI, GREECE

In an age when independent bookshops are being replaced by chains and websites, a gang of American and European university graduates realised the dream of opening one – on a Greek island. 'We found an empty building facing the sunset, drank some whiskey and signed a lease,' explains [www.atlantisbooks.org](http://www.atlantisbooks.org), though we suspect it was more of a mission than that. The shop occupies the basement of a whitewashed, cliff-top villa, which the communally minded staff also call home. The terrace overlooking the Aegean hosts cultural happenings, and inside are more cult novels and quality books than you can shake a quill at.

*Santorini is linked to Athens by Blue Star Ferries, Hellas Flying Dolphins ferries, Olympic Air and Aegean Airlines.*