

WHITTLESEY TRAVEL
Independent Travel Specialists

The Explorer

Magazine Issue 03 — Summer 2025

Islands of Adventures

Spotlight on Galapagos ± A Safari to Remember
Midlife Explorers ± A Cheese Lovers Guide to Europe

In partnership with

Explore!

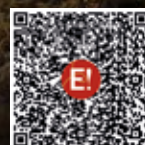
Explore!

Pedal to the Pastel

From the cobbled streets of Lisbon and Porto to the rolling hills of the Alentejo and the dramatic cliffs of Ponta de Piedade in the Algarve – Portugal is made for cycling. For the perfect balance of mild weather and fewer crowds, plan your ride in spring or autumn.



Plan your perfect ride –
explore our off-season
cycling tours.



Algarve, Portugal

Hello

They say the best journeys start with a story – and in this issue of *The Explorer*, we've got tales that stretch from the zebra-dotted plains of Botswana to the green volcanic ridges of the Azores. Whether you're dreaming of your next adventure or reminiscing on one just past, we hope these pages spark something special.

One of the stories that really stayed with me this time was Dom Tulett's piece about travelling through Southern Africa with his young daughter – a touching reminder that sometimes the most powerful moments come in the shape of wide-eyed wonder (and stripy animals). I also loved reading about island-hopping in the Azores, the joy of cycling (and snacking) your way through Europe's finest cheese trails, and how film and fiction are inspiring a new wave of travel, from Sicily to Corfu.

This issue we also introduce our new destination for 2026 – Algeria! – and as always, you'll find plenty of surprises tucked between the pages, including a new Explore Foundation project involving bees, elephants, and a brilliantly simple idea.

Until next time,



Michael Edwards
Managing Director,
Explore Worldwide

04
From Film Location to
Holiday Hotspot

10
Spotting Stripes

14
Natural Beauties

18
Love Islands

19
Having a Lovely Time

22
Our World

24
The Midlife Adventurer

28
How to Eat Your
Way Around Europe

32
Spotlight on Galapagos

35
Meet the Leader

36
Your Tour Leader of the Year

38
The Perfect Summer
Reading

FROM FILM LOCATION TO HOLIDAY HOTSPOT

Thanks to the growing trend of 'set-jetting', increasing numbers of travellers are choosing to holiday in real-world film locations around the globe. We asked film, TV and media experts to share their own on-screen travel inspiration.



Award-winning editor Jane Bruton has worked in publishing for 25 years, including *The Daily Telegraph*, *LivingEtc* and *Grazia* which she launched and edited for 10 years.

VIETNAM AND CAMBODIA

Jane Bruton
Editor-in-Chief of Good Housekeeping

A *pocalypse Now* is my favourite film so Vietnam and Cambodia were top of my travel bucket list on my gap year. That was a (very!) long time ago, when both countries had only just opened to tourists, and going down the Mekong in a tiny boat (with a machine gun strapped to the front) really did feel like being stuck on the Nung with Colonel Kurtz. I went back to Vietnam a couple of years ago and barely recognised the place – the hotel we stayed in was more *White Lotus* than *Apocalypse Now*. The learning? If you see somewhere, you really want to visit on screen, book your trip fast!



GREECE

Lily Wilson
ITV Commissioning Editor

In the height of lockdown in early June 2020, I gave birth to my first child. Feeling a little isolated and pretty tired and emotional (!), my husband and I were looking for a happy-go-lucky TV series to binge together. Nothing too scary or tense... we couldn't cope with any more drama in our lives! We came across *The Durrells* on ITV. A classic Sunday evening, 'warm hug' of a drama that is loosely based on Gerald Durrell's life/novels. Set in the 1930s, it was pure escapism as we watched Gerald's mother and her four kids relocate from Bournemouth, England to the (then very rustic) island of Corfu. We often talked about wanting to visit the island and relive the Durrells' adventures. Roll on three years and the perfect opportunity came up. I was working on a new reality TV series called *'Mamma Mia'* that was going to shoot for four weeks on Corfu. Rather than me flying back and forth, my husband and I decided this was too good an opportunity to miss

and we all went together. By this time, we were a family of four, and when I wasn't on set or shooting late night scenes, we explored the beautiful coastline and villages that we had fallen in love with on screen. We even went to The White House in the village of Kalami, where the Durrell family once lived and where a part of the series was filmed. It is now a gorgeous restaurant in which we enjoyed some delicious meals. This northeastern area of Corfu is full of charming coastal villages with secret pebble beaches and fabulous tavernas. Not only did it make for a gorgeous backdrop for the series I was making, but also an incredible family adventure.



In her role as commissioning editor, Lily Wilson looks after shows such as *Britain's Got Talent*, *The BRIT Awards* and *The Voice*. Before this, she spent over 15 years working in production for shows such as *I'm A Celebrity* and *Love Island*.



SOUTH AFRICA

James Brittain
Architectural photographer

Cry *Freedom*, the moving film biopic of South Africa's Black Consciousness leader Stephen Biko told through the eyes of journalist Donald Woods, is perhaps the single most influential film in relation to my life. I first saw it as a young student at Leeds University. It was significant in my decision to leave England to live and work in South Africa during the unravelling of apartheid in the early 1990s. The forceful beauty of the country and its inspirational people remain undiminished.



James Brittain is an award-winning photographer specialising in architecture, working from studios in Montreal, Canada, and London, UK. His work has been shown at the Contact Photography Festival in Toronto and at the Architectural Association in London.

ITALY

Kathryn Rayward
TV presenter

I have been obsessed with Sicily since picking up an Andrea Camilleri's *Inspector Montalbano* book twenty years ago (you know you can rent his beachside apartment in Punta Secca!) but it was the tiny yet elegant town of Taormina that really stole my heart, having seen it on the second series of *White Lotus*. Perched high on a cliff overlooking the beautiful Isola Bella, under the majestic shadow of Mount Etna, I'm not at all surprised that it's considered one of the most romantic places on earth.



Interiors expert Kathryn Rayward has presented *Cracking Antiques*, *60 Minute Makeover* and *Grand Designs*.



ROMANIA

Simon Toyne
Author

I've always been interested in anything dark and mysterious so it's not surprising that Bram Stoker's *Dracula* is a favourite. I was born not far from Whitby where the fictional vampire's coffin first washed up on windswept English shores, but for a true fan of anything vampiric, it has to be Romania. Fly into Bucharest and enjoy the city before travelling by train up to Transylvania and wander through the most extraordinarily beautiful forests and medieval towns. You can even visit Bran Castle which was supposedly the inspiration for Dracula's castle. Just make sure you're well stocked up on garlic!



Crime writer Simon Toyne is author of *Dark Objects*, the *Sanctus* trilogy, the *Solomon Creed* series, and presenter of *Written in Blood*. His new book *Dead Water* is out now.



When journalist **Dom Tulett** took his daughter Heidi on a once-in-a-lifetime trip to Botswana, he had no idea just how many close-up wildlife encounters and unforgettable moments awaited them. What followed was a father-daughter adventure filled with wonder.

had tried to manage my nine-year-old daughter's expectations ahead of our trip to Zimbabwe and Botswana. I told Heidi we would see a waterfall "a little bigger than the ones we saw in Fort William two summers back". I told her that a safari was a bit like going to the zoo, "But there aren't any fences, so the animals can walk around wherever they like."

"What animals will we see?"

"If we're lucky," I teased through a straight face, "We might see a zebra."

The idea caught Heidi's imagination; one she held onto all the way to Africa. A zebra. One actual, real-life zebra. This was to be our first major trip for just the two of us. We'd taken a couple of European city breaks together, but those are almost over before they've begun, rushing through flights, scrambling across heaving itineraries – nothing like this solid fortnight of father-and-daughter time.

"But I won't know anyone," Heidi had worried when I told her it was a group tour.

"You'll know me," I said.

Before long she also knew Anna, Sophie and Freya, girls of similar ages from other families on our tour. We had all met for the first time at dinner on the opening night in our guesthouse at Victoria Falls. The following day we walked the length of the falls (a little bigger than those we had seen in Fort William) on the Zimbabwean side, a mile and more of trails with viewpoints over the chasm. There were no zebras at the falls – nor did we expect there to be – but Heidi didn't care as she skipped along with her new-found friends, gasping as they peered over the hundred-metre drop, shrieking as they got soaked by spray from the cascading waters. ➤



Wild retreats

Love being under canvas but yearning for a more exciting setting than your usual campsite? Here are just a few of our favourites including nights in the wilderness, under the stars, deep in the forest and even next to a volcano.

Botswana

When the sun starts to set and it's time for the day-visitors to leave Chobe National Park, you get to stay! In a camp close to the Chobe River, you'll enjoy a delicious dinner sitting outside, hearing the occasional calls of animals, and you'll be the first on site to look for more wildlife early the next morning.

explore.co.uk/BW

Canada

Canada is a well-known camping heaven. But we think the camping along the Kananaskis Lookout Trail with its spectacular panoramic views across the park to a sea of trees, barren peaks, wide valleys, and large lakes, is out of this world.

explore.co.uk/WRK

Chile

When visiting the famous Torres del Paine National Park, taking the ferry across Grey Lake to the campsite, magnificently located between the lake and forest, is one of the highlights. A bonus: The camp is just a short hike away (2 kilometres/ 1.2 miles) from the Grey Glacier viewpoint.

explore.co.uk/TPF

El Salvador

Exploring El Salvador is pretty special in itself but camping in the Cerro Verde National Park, at 1800m, with its three volcanoes and surrounded by rainforest is an experience like no other.

explore.co.uk/HES

Jordan

For something completely unique, we've been given special permission by the Petra authorities to wild camp within walking distance of the archaeological site. You'll sleep like the local Bedouins in a goat hair tent, laid out with rugs and mattresses, surrounded by a sea of sand and stars.

explore.co.uk/TP

Mongolia

A huge proportion of Mongolians continue to live in traditional *gers* (Mongolian for a portable, round tent covered and insulated with skins or felt, also known as *yurt* in Turkic languages). We think it's a must-try experience when visiting Mongolia.

explore.co.uk/GK



Above
An elephant strolling past the tents after a dip in the water

“I was the only solo parent on the tour but had been quickly adopted by the other grown-ups.”

I was the only solo parent on the tour but had been quickly adopted by the other grown-ups. Travel stories and bottles of wine became our social currency, whilst the girls bonded over a shared love of hotel swimming pools and abysmal animal impressions. I looked on, happy that she

had made friends, that she'd forgotten any reservations she had about going away for so long with strangers.

Though I lost Heidi to the girls during the days, the evenings were my time. Most nights everyone retired early in preparation for pre-dawn game drives. Heidi would remain a fizzing ball of energy as we climbed into our beds, telling me everything the girls had seen and said and done. I knew all this already, of course – I was there – but I listened with enthusiastic ears.

“What was your best bit?” I asked her every night, and we would share personal highlights.

Heading southwest we reached the sprawling water world of the Okavango Delta. Our home for the next two days was a luxurious houseboat, on which Heidi helped plan an impromptu birthday party for one of her new friends. We spent days zipping along the channels in a small motorboat, swerving around pods of hippos, gliding past crocodiles sunbathing at the water's edge.

At Tsodilo Hills, one of Africa's most important and impressive rock art sites, I hung back with the other parents as the girls walked ahead together. Our guide showed us ancient paintings – including one of a zebra – daubed in red on the granite walls and told us stories of how his ancestors lived around the rock.

“What was your best bit?”

There was never just one answer; how could there be? Across the fortnight Heidi had ranked so many moments: finding the hyena's footprints in our campsite; toasting the marshmallows; the elephant's skull; buying bracelets for her new friends; the leopard climbing the tree; pancakes for breakfast; the giraffe peering into our lodge; the diving competition at the pool; lions blocking the trail; the abandoned tortoise shell; crossing the waterhole in the jeep; sleeping in a hotel; sleeping on a boat; sleeping in a tent. Each answer a victory.

Our final stop was the Moremi Game Reserve, a vast expanse of grassland, forest and waterways, where we bumped along dusty tracks in search of the 'Big Five'. And zebras. We saw more of what we had spotted in Chobe, plus rare African wild dogs, scampering honey badgers, armies of buffalo and endless species of antelope.



Above
Dom and Heidi on their trip

We drove and stopped, drove and stopped. False alarms and antelopes. Pausing at the forest's edge, we peered into the sheltered space. The canopy of leaves filtered the afternoon glare, creating pipes of sunlight and hollows of shade amongst the trees. We stared hard, trying to make out what our driver had seen hidden in the lines of darkness and light. A swish of a tail gave them away. Heidi's hand grabbed mine, squeezed it tighter than she ever has.

“A zebra! No, two. Five. Loads. Hundreds!”

With the elation of Heidi's first zebra sighting fresh in her mind we rumbled on to our campsite in a small copse of trees. No fences to keep the animals out, just a campfire as deterrent to prowling predators. One of the girls wanted to play hide-and-seek; I advised against it. Instead, we sat around the fire, enjoying a bush-cooked dinner as the setting sun bled golden light across the horizon.

With the Milky Way turning above us, we retreated to our tents, leaving the night to the wildlife.

“What was your best bit?”

Silence in the darkness. I desperately wanted Heidi to say that spending a fortnight away with me was the best bit, but true stories are rarely that neat. In any case, I knew she was having a brilliant time, as was I. No need to labour that. And she confirmed her happiness to me when she broke the silence and simply said, “The zebras.” ■



Dom Tulett is an award-winning travel writer for National Geographic Traveller, The Sunday Times, The Independent and many more.

[@DomTulett](https://twitter.com/DomTulett)

► Want to follow in Dom and Heidi's footsteps? They travelled on our 12-day Family Botswana and Zimbabwe Safari Adventure. explore.co.uk/FOA

NATURAL BEAUTIES

A JOURNEY THROUGH THE COLOURED ISLANDS OF THE AZORES

A colourful hiking adventure across four of the Azorean Islands took **Gina Lawrence**'s breath away. This remote Portuguese archipelago, a treat for walkers and nature lovers alike, was full of surprises.

“If each island has its own colour, then each walk has its own identity too.”

Left
Can you spot one of the traditional red windmills that are dotted around Pico island?

Below
The Mata do Canário hiking path on Sao Miguel island



The Azores are islands forged by volcanoes and shaped by water. Each one was born in a crucible of tectonic energy and lives on a tripwire, with smoking *fumaroles*, giant green-filled craters and black sand beaches all just part of the scenery. It's this that appeals to me; an ever-changing landscape, feeling the ground is alive beneath my feet.

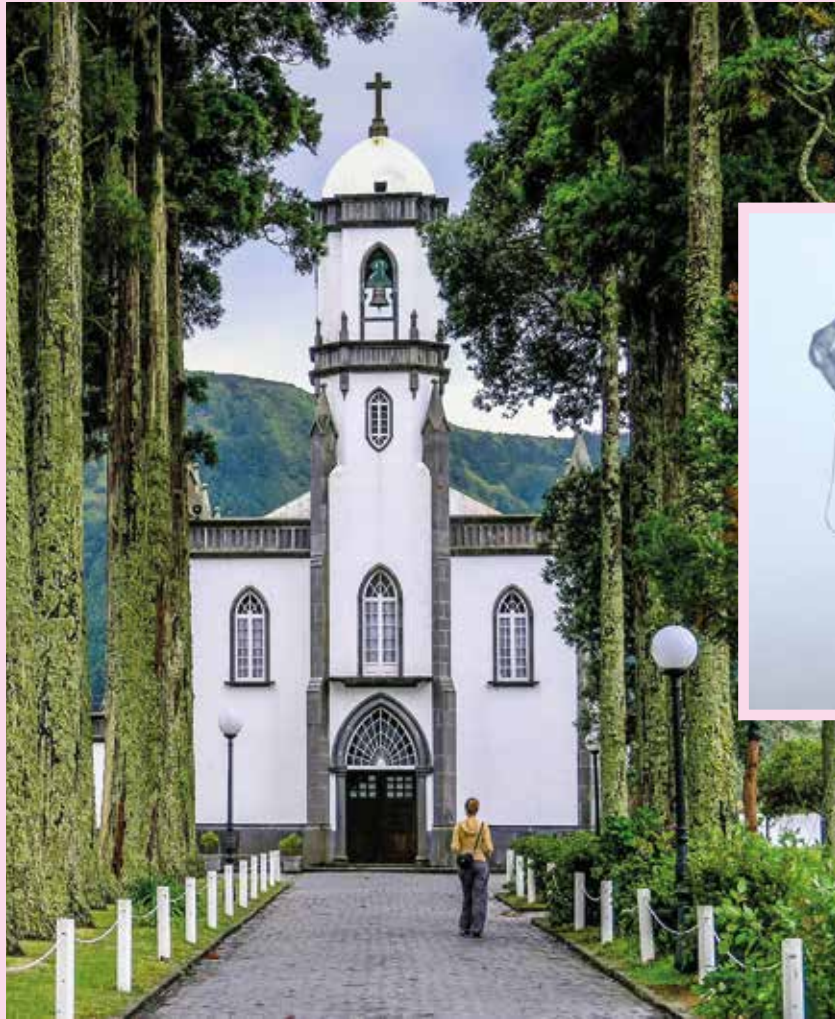
Despite this youthful exuberance, there's something prehistoric about Sao Miguel's lush greenery – something of the Jurassic in the curl of endless ferns, voluminous glossy leaves the size of my head, and the dappled light from the canopy above. Each one is rich, verdant shades of emerald and moss, vying for attention like indecisive colour swatches on a wall.

It requires no Sherlock Holmes levels of discovery to see why it is known as Green Island. Each island has been assigned a colour, and over the next two weeks we hop

between four of the Azores' nine islands seeing how each earned its moniker. There's the aforementioned Sao Miguel, the green island; Sao Jorge, the brown island; Pico, the grey island; and Faial, the blue island – reminiscent of a 90's pop group. Perhaps their group name would be 'island power'.

If each island has its own colour, then each walk has its own identity too. Over the course of the two weeks, each walk reveals a new facet to the islands. From steep zigzags that showcase the coastline in increments on Sao Jorge, to the sudden scent of apple mint crushed beneath our boots on Sao Miguel, or the charming red windmills amidst the volcanic rock vineyards of Pico, each one was unique. My two favourites almost bookended the trip: a leisurely lakeside stroll on Sao Miguel that brought us out by a pocket of steaming *fumaroles* and *calderas*, and a dramatic volcanic crater rim on Faial, where the mist rippling over the ridge added an eerie, atmospheric drama to the day.

Like any island trip, there's a lot of time spent on boats. I board four vessels in my time here – two inter-island ferries, one catamaran and one Zodiac, the last one a ▶



Left
The Azores is not just landscapes but also interesting architecture and history

Below
Gina, ready to go on the next walk



excursion is descended from a long line of whale hunters. His grandfather hunted them, speared them and sold their body parts to survive. This man lives an altogether different life dependent on the whales – proud of his role of custodian and guide, able to earn a living from these creatures in an entirely different way to his grandfather and great grandfather before him.

The Azores has so many more surprises up its sleeves than I expected – enough to fill this entire magazine. I had no idea that it was famous for pineapples, but here they are, served up in many weird and wonderful combinations. Black pudding and pineapple crops up on the menus more than once, and at Europe's only tea plantation we're served slabs of pineapple cake the size of a small boat to accompany the tea tasting. As a tea lover, this was a real treat – and another first for me, visiting a tea plantation. I always assumed I'd have to go much further afield to wander along the striated rows and see the tea being processed, but no, here it was all along. As I write this, a steaming cup of green tea flavoured with pineapple and cinnamon sits on my desk, bringing back the memories of this lovely holiday – each one conjuring a smile. ■

► Take a look at Gina's Azores guide to learn even more: explore.co.uk/azores-experiences

Below
Sao Miguel boasts the only tea plantation in Europe

Right
The Azores grow their own unique type of pineapple – they're smaller and sweeter than commercially grown ones



first for me in the inflatable rib. The catamaran and Zodiac were part of optional excursions in search of the resident marine life that thrives in the plentiful waters around the archipelago.

The Azores are a shining example of how humans interacting with nature can do a full 180 in just a couple of generations. Historically, this was a whale hunting area.

Everyone relied on the whales as a resource, on a tiny island where income was scarce and life was hard, and Pico sailors were known as the bravest and most ferocious of the hunters. This is far

from ancient history; the last whale to be slain on Pico was in 1987. Given that a sperm whale can live up to 70 years, it's fair to deduce that there are whales in these waters who remember that time, and perhaps have had lucky escapes.

It's phenomenal to think that in just a few generations, almost no time at all, the island residents have gone from predators to protectors. Our skipper for our Zodiac

Azorian Food



Fish

It'll be no surprise that these islands boast incredible seafood, but what stood out to me was the variety – always a catch of the day, often a name I don't recognise. A particular favourite was *veja*, or parrot fish, a firm white fish I ate two ways: once filleted and coated in crispy almonds, and once grilled whole with a vinegary local dressing.

Beef

Cattle are a cornerstone of agrarian life on the Azores. Sao Miguel has several steakhouses showcasing Azorian beef, fatter than its foreign counterparts, and the owner of the restaurant we went to proudly showed us each cut he had available and encouraged us to pick our steak, which was served family style on huge platters.

Cheese

Rich and creamy, there's no shortage of cheeses in the Azores. It's impossible to pick a favourite, but strong contenders are a very mild soft cheese served with spicy red pepper relish, and the smooth *Sao Jorge* cheeses that are served with unctuous local honey.

“The Azores are a shining example of how humans interacting with nature can do a full 180 in just a couple of generations.”



Love Islands

There's something magical about island life – salty air, a sense of escape and the thrill of what's waiting just beyond the horizon. From sun-drenched shores to wild, windswept hideaways, our island adventures are all about falling for that off-the-map feeling.

MADEIRA

Madeira is one of those places that just feels magical. The views are stunning, the atmosphere is super relaxed, and the weather's great all year. Whether you're into nature or just want to unwind somewhere beautiful, it has got a way of making you slow down and enjoy the moment. It's the kind of place you'll want to come back to – peaceful, a little wild, and totally unforgettable.

explore.co.uk/MDR



MALDIVES

The ultimate in laid-back island escapes, the Maldives is where beach dreams come to life. Think sailing through crystal-clear waters, barefoot days on powdery white sands and discovering hidden lagoons. If pure relaxation is your thing, the Maldives never misses.

explore.co.uk/MC



GALAPAGOS

Where nature does its own thing and you're just lucky to witness it, the Galapagos is no ordinary island escape. Swim with sea lions, hike lava fields, and come face-to-face with giant tortoises. It's wild, otherworldly and effortlessly unforgettable – adventure with a side of evolution (for more see p. 32).

explore.co.uk/GA7B



THE FALKLANDS

For an adventure that's anything but typical, join a polar expedition to the Falkland Islands – an isolated outpost alive with wildlife. Visit vast colonies of penguins, sea lions basking on the shores and albatrosses soaring overhead. In Port Stanley, meet the hardy locals who share this remote world with the animals. Here, nature dominates daily life – and every encounter feels like a front-row seat to Antarctic wilderness.

explore.co.uk/MECF



GREEK ISLANDS

Take a deeper look at the Greek islands, where each stop brings something new – Syros with its neoclassical elegance, Paros and its golden beaches, Naxos with mountain trails, and Santorini's dramatic cliffs. Yet across them all, you'll find warm hospitality, slow island rhythms, and a love of good food, sea, and sun.

explore.co.uk/GW



HAVING A



LOVELY TIME

In an increasingly digital world, nothing beats receiving a postcard in the mail. Author **Lauren Bravo** pays homage to the love letters of holidays.



While social media is just blanket broadcasting to the world at large, a postcard says: “I thought of you.”

Page 19
Postcards can provide valuable insights into a place's past, offering a glimpse into popular culture and visual representations of different eras

Above
Secretive Victorians developed a "language of stamps," using the angle of the stamp to send coded messages on postcards

The other day I was packing a suitcase I hadn't used since last summer and found two things in the front compartment: my husband's sunglasses, long since replaced (he goes through about three pairs a year), and a postcard from the Dordogne in France, never sent.

The scene rushed back immediately. A café-bar in a tiny market town, the mingling scents of strong coffee and fresh bread wafting through the square – and the optimism with which I bought it, giddy on hot sun and cold *Orangina*, wanting to capture a little of that holiday magic for a loved one's fridge back home.

I had failed, of course, like so many hopeful holidaymakers before me. But the muscle memory was there. In the summers of my youth, writing postcards to our grandparents back home was a non-negotiable part of the holiday, as mandatory as the Christmas thank-you letter – only more fun, since you could do it with a melting *Mr Whippy* in hand. “Having a brilliant time,” I wrote in one missive from Belgium, circa 1999. “The chalet has 200 TV channels.”

These days it's probably fair to say that nobody expects a postcard. Not in our hyperconnected world, where tech has turned us all into travel photographers and we're able to follow each other's adventures minute-by-

minute on social media (whether we want to or not). And especially not in today's economy, where stamps might well cost more than the card itself. Research by InsureAndGo in 2023 found that only 18% of Brits still send postcards on holiday, though 41% would like to receive them more often.

I'm lucky to have a few friends and relatives who are keeping the tradition alive, and I'm always thrilled by a postcard's arrival on the doormat. To think that someone has gone to the effort of choosing a design, finding a pen and navigating a foreign postal system feels personal in a way that a flurry of photos in the group chat never will. While social media is just blanket broadcasting to the world at large, a postcard says: “I thought of you.”

First sold in Austria-Hungary in 1869, postcards launched in Britain a year later – and by 1871 around 75 million were already winging their way through the UK postal system. In 1902 they began to take the form we know today, with an image on one side and space for a message and address on the other. With the contents on display for all to see, senders took to writing their juiciest gossip in code, using cryptic stamp positioning to send hidden messages in plain sight (similar tactics were deployed a century later by teenage girls with nosy parents and news of holiday crushes).

In wartime, postcards were vital lifelines between soldiers, sweethearts and family. And as the mid-century boom in package holidays and affordable travel took more and more Brits abroad, they were an important way to incite envy in the folks back home – coupled with an ouzo-fuelled slideshow on your return, of course. Straw donkey optional.

But despite their bragging power, there is something beautifully egalitarian about the postcard. After all, everywhere has them, or did. Breathtaking UNESCO World Heritage Sites are reduced to the same cardboard real estate as Milton Keynes shopping centre. Duck ponds and floral displays are given their time to shine. Having grown up in a C-list seaside resort and complained about it endlessly, I now love tracking down old postcards of my hometown and finding fresh charm in its more photogenic corners.

Then there are the, er, artistic designs, which have a collectible legacy of their own. Kitsch, big-eyed flamenco dancers with 3D net skirts. Comically sunburned pensioners with knotted hankies on their heads. Most saucy seaside cartoons wouldn't fly today, although it's hard to say whether their casual misogyny would look shocking or quaint by modern standards. Yorkshire printing firm Bamforth & Co, whose postcards came to define the style, ceased production in 2001.

But it's the personalisation that gives a postcard its real value. Writing a good one is an art form, made harder by the fact you often need to send them within a couple of days to make sure they reach home before you do. I've always found that the shorter the trip,



“Having a brilliant time,” I wrote in one missive from Belgium, circa 1999. “The chalet has 200 TV channels.”

Above left
A wide range of postcards next to keychains. No matter where you go in the world, postcards are a souvenir that's easy to find

Above right
The period from 1893 to 1920 is often considered the “Golden Age” of postcards, with the development of full-color printing and the creation of themed cards

the more likely the postcard will go into detail of rough ferry crossings, inadequate balcony views and the alien bounty of the local supermarket shelves. It's hard to sum up a holiday before you've had it.

That bittersweet duality – expectation on one side, reality on the other – was the inspiration behind *Postcard From The Past* by Tom Jackson; first a hugely popular Twitter account, then a book published in 2017. Each vintage image was accompanied by a choice extract from the postcard's message, often in hilariously bathetic contrast. “As yet we have not found the nudist beach.” “I got stuck in my deckchair.” “The food's OK, but I've mainly been eating Mars bars.” Wherever you go, there you are.

Curiously, it's younger rather than older travellers who are more likely to send a postcard these days, with 53% of millennials and 47% of Gen Zs still putting pen to card, while those aged 78+ send the least. Perhaps, like vinyl records and film cameras, postcards will see a revival as nostalgic analogue objet d'art, appreciated for their style if not their function. After all, they're still hot property in museum gift shops. As recently as 2019, the

Tate group were selling more than a million postcards across their galleries per year.

In the meantime, I'm determined to do my bit. As soon as my daughter learns to write, I intend to make postcards a family tradition. Sure, we can send our own snaps to Granny and Grandpa via a printing app, but I think they'd prefer smudgy biro and a little authentic chip grease. Who wouldn't?

As with so many fading traditions from the analogue age, it might be only once postcards are gone that we wish they were here. ■



Lauren Bravo is a lifestyle journalist and author of four books, including novels *Preloved* and *Probably Nothing*.

Let us tell you more about what we've been up to in recent months.

Algeria Unveiled

Fresh adventures await in North Africa



Africa's largest country may have been out of the tourist spotlight for many years, but the travel tides are beginning to change – so we've decided to bring it back with three brand-new tours for 2026.

WONDERS OF ANCIENT ALGERIA AND THE M'ZAB VALLEY | 10 DAYS

On this ten-day tour, we'll discover influences from throughout the ages including the Berbers, Romans, Byzantines and Arabs. Explore the coastal capital of Algiers, uncover the ancient cities of Tipaza, Timgad and Djemila and travel to the edge of the desert to explore the M'Zab Valley and its fascinating communities.

explore.co.uk/AY



ALGERIA'S SAHARA DESERT ADVENTURE | 9 DAYS

The Algerian Sahara in the far south offers travellers one of the ultimate desert experiences. With vast expanses of sand, towering dunes, dramatic rock formations, canyons and an extraordinary concentration of ancient rock art, akin to an open-air museum, this is a trip for those wanting to take time away from the stresses of modern-day life.

explore.co.uk/AD

ANCIENT ALGERIA AND THE SAHARA DESERT | 16 DAYS

Our comprehensive two-week Algeria tour takes you on a journey from the Mediterranean coastline and stunning architecture of Algiers and Constantine, to the breath-taking landscapes of the Algerian Sahara. Discover ancient rock paintings, witness mesmerising sunsets over rolling sand dunes, and spend nights camping under a spectacular star-filled sky.

explore.co.uk/AYD



NEW Explore Foundation Project Alert!



The Explore Foundation has a new partner. Meet 'How Many Elephants'!

Along with their direct-action partner, Wild Survivors, they're using nature to tackle the increasing conflict between humans and elephants in Tanzania.

It's a little-known fact that elephants have a natural fear of bees. So, the ingenious, nature-based solution has been to install an 8.5km 'beehive fence' in the Upper Kitete Corridor in the Karatu District of Tanzania. There are 371 beehives connected by a wire which create a boundary around the community farms. It serves to deter elephants from destroying vital farmland and guides them safely away from villages and along their migratory route.

The Explore Foundation are fundraising £5,000 to install another kilometre of beehive fencing which will house an additional 1.6 million bees!

That's not all – the honey produced by the bees is then processed and sold by the NARI Women's Beekeeping Group to help protect wildlife, conserve landscapes and provide stable incomes. It's a win – win-win!

Help us reach our target to install more beehive fencing. Visit theexplore.foundation

TRIPS TO ECLIPSE ALL OTHERS

One of the most highly anticipated solar events in decades is set to take place in 2026 – a total solar eclipse, and the first to be visible from mainland Europe in nearly 30 years! See the phenomena for yourselves on one of our special departures to Spain or Iceland. PLUS more to come for 2027 – stay tuned!

explore.co.uk/eclipse



Recipe

Encocado de camarón

Our Tour Leader Diego (see page 35) recommends *Encocado de camarón* (shrimp in coconut sauce). In his opinion, this Ecuadorian coastal dish is best enjoyed in front of the beach at Isabela island, while discovering the Galapagos Islands.

Ingredients:

For the shrimp:

500 g prawns, peeled and deveined

Juice of ½ orange

Salt and pepper

For the sauce:

2 tbs regular cooking oil or achiote oil

½ red onion, finely diced

2 garlic cloves finely diced

1 red or green pepper, finely diced

½ tsp achiote powder or 1 tsp of sweet non-smoked paprika as a replacement

1 large bunch of coriander, finely chopped (1 large bunch = ~50 g) separate stems and leaves

1 large tomato, peeled and finely diced ~300 g

1 can of unsweetened coconut milk ~400ml

1 tsp of tapioca starch or corn flour

2-4 tbs of freshly grated coconut (optional but recommended)

Juice from ½ to 1 lime – to add at the end

Salt and pepper to taste

Instructions:

1. Chop and dice all the vegetables and herbs. Have all ingredients prepped and ready.

2. Place the raw prawns in a bowl, sprinkle with salt, pepper, and juice from ½ orange. Let it marinate for max. 15 mins.

3. Heat oil over medium heat in large pan. Add diced garlic, diced onion, diced pepper and achiote powder or paprika powder. Cook until onions are soft, about 3-5 mins.

4. Add diced tomatoes, chopped coriander stems, half of the chopped coriander leaves, and salt. Cook for about 5 mins on medium heat.

5. Add coconut milk, mix it well, and cook for about 5 mins. Add corn flour to thicken the sauce.

6. Add prawns and mix well. Turn heat down to lowest setting. Cover and let it cook for about 5-10 mins, stirring occasionally.

7. Add fresh grated coconut and lime juice once the prawns are cooked. Taste and add additional salt/pepper if needed. Stir in the remaining chopped coriander leaves.

Serve immediately with rice, lime slices, avocado and fried plantains.



Welcome to the age of the new (slightly more mature) adventure traveller. Research shows that increasing numbers of people in midlife are getting bitten by the travel bug.

THE MIDLIFE ADVENTURER



‘Our plan is to do as much as we possibly can, in as many far away countries as we can, for as long as we can.’

In a quest for a better work-life balance, we’re taking more time out to explore the world while we have the energy. We’re active, curious, up for some thrills, but we also want quality guides, comfortable means of getting around, and a better standard of accommodation. In a nutshell, backpacking has got an upgrade.

Travel journalist **Xenia Taliotis** reflects on her own evolving needs and speaks with five midlife travellers who have embraced a world of adventure travel, with added benefits.

Like all of us, I have times when I feel 20, but even then, I know that age has altered the way I look, softened or hardened some of my views, and changed my capabilities and needs. What it hasn’t done, though, is dampened my passion for travelling, my intrinsic hunger for adventure, and the accompanying desire to fill my life to the brim with people, to understand their cultures, and to find peace in nature.

I still want to see, do, go, learn. I still yearn for meaningful holidays that broaden my mind. Travel has enabled me to realise long-held dreams – be that seeing penguins on the White Continent or tracking leopards in Botswana – and I’ve returned home enriched by my experiences.

In this, I’m like many of my middle-aged peers. Travel surveys consistently show that mid-lifers are the most adventurous age group, based in no small part on us having the time, a little more income, and the growing awareness that undoubtedly comes with dodgy knees that our vitality and vigour are likely to diminish. Knowing this has spurred us on to grab opportunities because we’re increasingly aware that the time is now. But with our evolving needs comes a desire to travel a little differently from our younger years.

For me, age 59, it’s my own room. Someone who can tell me things I can’t get from a guidebook. And a schedule that allows me to have down time as well as sociable or out-of-my-comfort-zone time. It turns out I’m not alone. ➤

Left
Midlife adventures love new experiences, including visiting a place by foot or on bike

Above
Audrey and Linda on one of their latest escapes, visiting Durbar Square in Kathmandu, Nepal



Explore Upgraded

Discover the newest Explore collection, which includes everything you know and love about an adventure travel tour with us, with upgraded stays in premium accommodation to offer some extra comfort after a long day's worth of exploring.

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Peru is famous as the heartland of the ancient Incas, and you'll discover it all on this journey from coastal Lima to the Sacred Valley, through elegant Arequipa and on board the Titicaca train. Machu Picchu is a spectacular climax, but along the way you'll find a treasure trove of architecture, an exciting foodie scene, and big landscapes that defy belief. explore.co.uk/DPR

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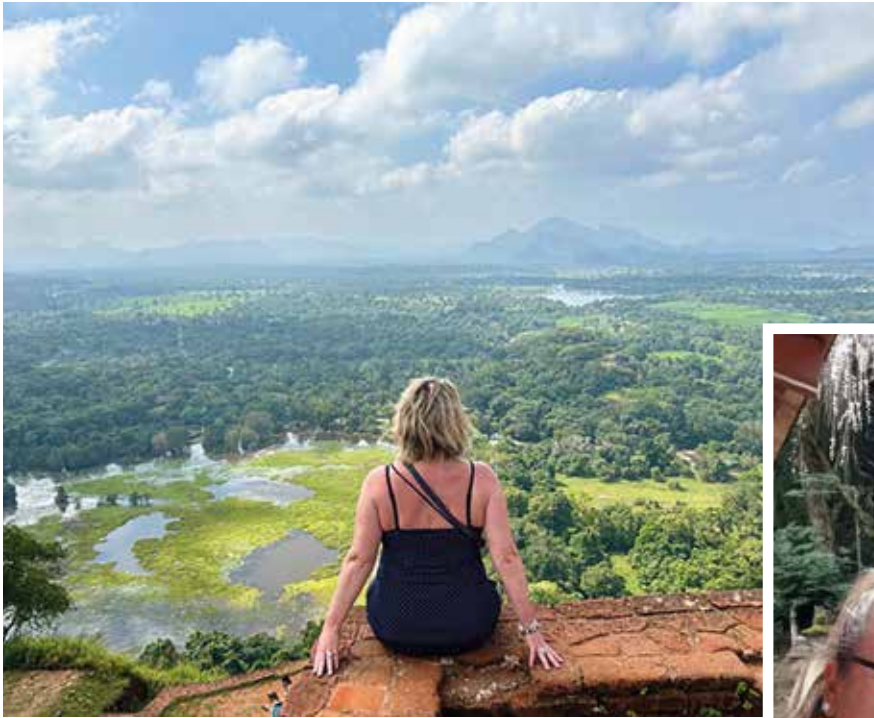
The other good thing about an escorted tour is the guidance and direction you get culturally, not only in terms of where to go, but also in how to behave. Japanese culture is hugely different from ours – for instance, it is considered impolite to walk down the street eating and drinking. It was so useful to have this information from David so that we could behave politely and wouldn't offend anyone."

Andreas Bisang, 58

"Sometimes when I think back to the things I did when I was young, I laugh at the memories of the young man who would throw a few clothes and essentials into paniers and take off on his own on a motorcycle road trip, sleeping under bridges and on random picnic tables at autoroute stations. I'm not sad about growing old, I see it as a massive privilege, but with middle-age my body started creaking and groaning a lot more than it did in the past! I still go on motorcycle trips and love to travel but now happily enjoy having a proper bed and my own shower at the end of the day.

I think my first guided holiday in Botswana last year marked a bit of a turning point; it showed me that I could go on adventures, while enjoying an enhanced level of comfort. It was the most incredible experience, one that included camping for several nights in the middle of a national park. I was a little anxious in advance. Would my back be able to make it? Would I be ok with someone else deciding the itinerary for me? I didn't need to worry. I had a spacious tent with a camping bed and Bibi was a brilliant Tour Leader. I loved it so much that I'm already planning my next trip, I'm thinking Namibia might be up next." ■

'I think my stay in Botswana last year was the turning point it showed me that I could go on adventures, while enjoying an enhanced level of comfort.'



Left
Linda enjoying the incredible view from Sigiriya in Sri Lanka

Below
Travel buddies Deborah and Caroline in front of a cherry blossom tree in Japan



Audrey Connolly and Linda Welsh, both 55

"We've been together since we were 15, and as you can imagine, how we travel has changed enormously in that time. Our first holiday, when we were in our late teens, was a last-minute deal to Luxor, in Egypt. There hasn't been a year since – except for during the pandemic – when we haven't travelled, and we've done everything from flop-on-the-beach packages to city breaks and US road trips.

Latterly, we've focused more and more on escorted group trips. We took our first one when we were in our forties and loved everything about it. For us it is a great way to see countries without worrying about... anything! The guides are all locals and so knowledgeable, providing insights and experiences we would either take ages to discover on our own, or miss completely.

By the end of this year, we'll have seen all seven wonders of the natural and ancient worlds and been to 69 countries, including China, Peru, North Macedonia, Albania, Chile, Brazil, Argentina, Patagonia, Jordan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Vietnam and Cambodia, and several places in Africa. We've managed to visit places that are now no-go's for ethical or safety reasons, such as Russia and Israel, and my goodness, the adventures we've had, and the friendships we've made!

Our plan is to do as much as we possibly can, in as many far away countries as we can, for as long as we can. We are both looking after elderly relatives so understand mobility matters. We'll save those closer destinations for when long-distance travel becomes more of a challenge for us."

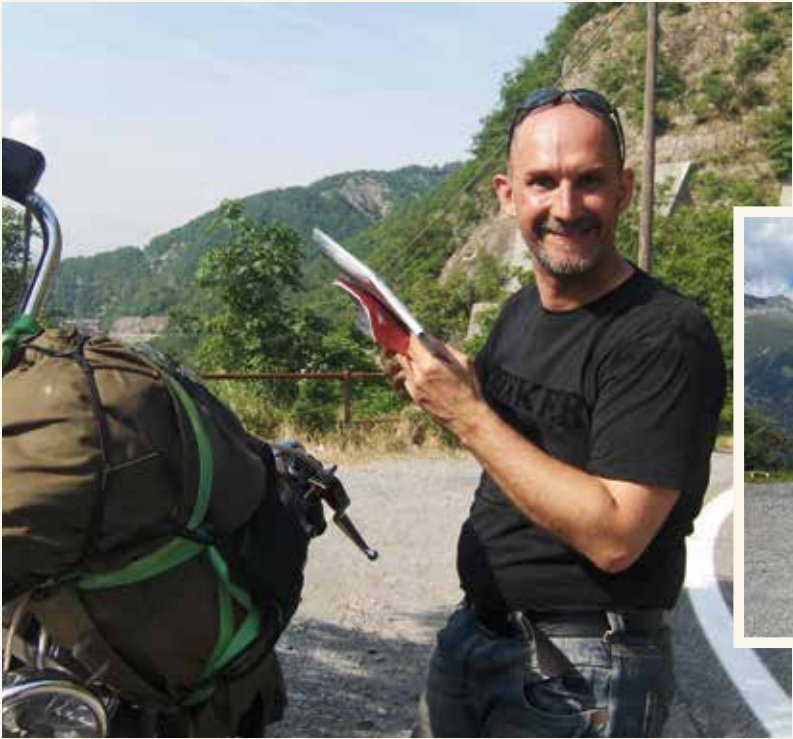
'Japan for us was about indulging and treating ourselves and therefore we wanted to make sure we travelled with a little more comfort than we might have in the recent past.'

Deborah Elliott and Caroline Hook, 48 and 51

"We met at work about a year ago, and there was such a strong connection and instant friendship that it wasn't long before we started planning a trip. Japan had been a dream for a while for both of us, and with April being the perfect time for cherry blossom season, we decided it was now or never.

Although we're both no strangers to backpacking adventures: Deborah has fond memories of a trip to the Everest Base Camp with shared teahouse dorms and very limited (shall we say) toilet facilities, and Caroline walked the Camino de Santiago last Spring. Japan for us was about indulging and treating ourselves and therefore we wanted to make sure we travelled with a little more comfort than we might have in the recent past.

Going on an organised group trip was such a treat! It meant that we didn't have to organise our day-to-day so we really got to soak up the atmosphere and culture of the country and its highlights. Our Tour Leader, David, had all the answers and knew all the best hidden-gems that he tailored to our group's interests. At the same time we could do our own thing on days when there were no activities planned – like visiting the bowing deer of Nara.



If there's one thing that connects like-minded people, it's cheese. We asked food writer **Clare Finney** to take us on a European road trip for fromage fanatics, with slices of history (and the odd glass of vino) along the way.

HOW TO EAT YOUR WAY AROUND EUROPE

the cheese edition



Opposite top
Dutch Gouda cheese is not only tasty, but also makes for great shop window decoration

Opposite bottom
French cheese counters always offer a wide array of local cheese options

There are, to my mind, only two ways to see mainland Europe: cycling its roads and eating its cheese. Happily, the two come hand-in-hand; picnic-in-panier. There is no better way to experience a country's changing landscape and architecture than by moving at a speed which allows you to cover more ground than you would walking and see more than you would driving. And there is no better way to experience a country's changing cuisine, as lush pastures become scrubland and rivers widen into oceans, than by feasting on cheese and wine, which together are so perfect a distillation of terroir, they are like a postcard for the palate.

The magic of cheese

Of course, there is no need to cycle. Cheese and wine are not confined to those clad in lycra and cleats. But regardless of your preferred mode of transport, if you are looking to make the most of a country's cheese offering it is worth moving around. The magic of cheese is that it varies wildly according to changes in climate, soil, microbial cultures, local culture and people – not just country to country, but region to region. Just look at Parmigiano Reggiano and Mozzarella di Bufala Campana: both cow's milk cheese from Italy and yet entirely different.

You can taste and see these differences and have them explained to you: the swampy lowlands of Campania were well suited to the rearing of water buffalos, whose richly nutritious milk lent itself to the kneading and stretching that gives Mozzarella di Bufala its unique, pliable texture. It is a fresh cheese, believed to have been developed by monks to feed pilgrims who visited their monastery, and for centuries remained confined to that region. Parmigiano, meanwhile, was developed in Emilia Romagna by monks determined to find a cheese that could last a long time. The salt came from local mines, the milk from the indigenous Vacche Rosse cows, which have a higher casein content than your average cow breed, and the substantial shelf life of the cheese meant it spread far and wide, very quickly. As such, it was one of the first cheeses to have its methodology protected: Parmigiano Reggiano is distinct from parmesan, which can be made in any way, in any country. Yet to fully grasp how connected these cheeses are to the land, people and history that produced them – well, like all good stories, you have to be there.

Sadly, I have never quite made it to the lush lowlands of Lazio, one of the regions in which Mozzarella di Bufala can be made, where the number of water buffalo can often exceed the number of people. I have never been to Caserta, a town as famed for its cheese as it is its medieval ghosts and Roman architecture, where a chef known as

“The real wonder of cheese and wine is not their natural differences, but their humanity.”



'The Queen of Mozzarella' serves a Mozzarella cheesecake with raspberry sauce. I have been to Naples and enjoyed what the locals call 'white gold' on top of pizza made by one of the city's few female pizza-makers, Isabella de Cham, but I have never tasted it fresh from a buffalo farm and dairy. All are on my list, though, and are a beautiful cycle – or easy drive – from the iconic Amalfi coast.

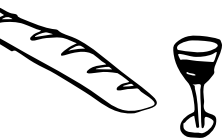
Mountains of flavour

Where I have been is Emilia Romagna, one of the five regions in Italy which produce Parmigiano Reggiano. I have eaten a hunk of Parmigiano Reggiano, straight up, whilst the sun set over the Apennines, sipping a crisp, local sparkling wine. From the right producer and at the right age, Parmigiano Reggiano needs nothing else, says Luca Dusi, founder of *Passione Vino* in Shoreditch and curator of one of London's finest cheeseboards. "If there is one cheese I can have every single day, it is Parmigiano. Of course, you have those mass producers [those are the cheeses you'll find in supermarkets] but those small ones up in the hills outside Parma, where you can see red cows grazing freely on the mountain pasture?" For a moment, words fail him. "It is beautiful. 90% of the flavour of cheese comes from what cow's graze on, and that quality of pasture makes all the difference."

So too, of course, does the process by which it's made: unchanged for millennia, and something you can witness yourself, at any number of dairies. It is an extraordinary site: cheese wheels larger than truck wheels, ageing in silent formation with nothing more than the climate and the occasional flipping to help them along. For the ultimate Parmigiano Reggiano experience, Dusi says, head to 📍



‘What grows together goes together’



Osteria Francescana by chef Massimo Bottura. Easier said than done, given its three Michelin star status, but the Five Ages of Parmesan dish is “insane, absolutely insane. The creaminess, saltiness, the variations in age – this dish will stay with me for the rest of my life.”

But what about the lesser-known cheeses? The ones you can only find on your travels, in *osterias* on Tuscan hilltops or Provencal wine bars? A few years ago, I cycled the length of France and came across

La Jonchee: a fresh cow’s cheese hyperlocal to Rochefort, which comes wrapped in rushes picked from the local marshes and sewn and pressed by Eric Jaman – the last man to know how to do.

Local heroes

Tas Gaitanos, co-founder of Brother Marcus, tells a similar story about a Cretan cheese made by Michalis Parasyris in the Hills of Elounda where he grew up. “His family have a small herd of sheep and goats that have foraged the hills for as long as I can remember, but his dairy is a new addition.” Graviera is a traditional Greek cheese that is made across many parts of the Aegean, but Parasyris’ Graviera is so beloved by locals not one gram of it leaves

Looking for a slice of heaven?



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“The real wonder of cheese and wine is not their natural differences, but their humanity.”

Opposite left

Goat’s cheese is made around the world with a variety of recipes, giving many different styles of cheeses

Opposite right

One of the joys of eating cheese is the wide range of fruit you can combine it with

Below

The rind is where the cheese’s aged flavours are most concentrated, offering a more intense taste than the cheese itself

the area. “It captures the soul of Crete. It’s raw, honest, and deeply connected to the land,” says Gaitanos. “For me there is nothing better than drinking a glass of red (Alexandra, 2019) from Manousakis’ vineyard with a freshly baked sourdough with olive oil and a thick slice of Michalis’ Graviera, still cool from the cellar.”

Gaitanos’ story encapsulates the connection cheese forges not just between land, livestock and place but between people. Cycling through France, some of the most memorable interactions I had were with cheesemongers, using my best ‘Fraglais’ to try and understand the different cheeses on display and where they’d come from. We don’t have this so much in the UK, for all that our cheese scene has drastically improved over

the last decade, but in much of mainland Europe people feel a fierce loyalty toward their local cheeses. There are many cheeses which Jose Pizarro, Britain’s most beloved Spanish chef, loves and serves at his restaurants; but the one that most tugs on his heartstrings is from his homeland, Extremadura: the pungent and mercurial Torta de Casar.

Natural affinities

Extremaduran shepherds have been making Torta de Casar for centuries, grazing their sheep in harshly beautiful pastures accessible only via ancient Roman roads. Yet it is only in the last 20 years that the cheese has ventured beyond the region: “It is popular now – but I remember the time when no one knew it,” says Pizarro. “When we first started selling it here [when Pizarro worked for the Spanish shop Brindisa] it didn’t really sell.” Torta de Casar is an

extraordinary cheese; firm and waxy from the outside, and yet with an interior so gooey, the tradition is to serve it with the top sliced off, with a spoon to scoop out the interior. Unusually, for such a historic cheese, Torta de Casar is vegetarian; instead of animal rennet, the milk is curdled with an endemic wild thistle, lending a bitter edge to the buttery insides. In Cáceres, a walled medieval town complete with cobbled streets and ancient towers occupied by storks, there is a dairy called Pastovelia, where you can see it being made.

“I serve it with crunchy bread and a Palo Cortado sherry,” says Pizarro – which actually hails from Jerez de la Frontera, down in the south of Spain. I have enjoyed this combination in Pizarro’s restaurant in London; and I have also enjoyed it at Bodegas Cayetano del Pino, home of Palo Cortado, after touring the bodega’s dusty barrels and emerging, blinking, into the baking Andalusian sunshine. This dry, nutty, complex sherry compliments the cheese’s creamy acidity, despite the two being born of different soils and climates. ‘What grows together goes together’ is an adage beloved by sommeliers and loyal locals – but marriages like this prove it’s not gospel.

The motto has its merits. The dense, floral goats’ cheeses of Provence beg for lavender honey and regional rosé wines blushing with fresh fruit. The fresh ricotta-style cheese of western Crete, Anthotyro, “goes perfectly with a crisp glass of the local Domaine Karanika, Cuvee Speciale Extra Brut,” says Gaitanos. Both are reflective of that unique terroir of that part of the island: an area sheltered by Mont Vermio, with a temperate climate touched by the influence of several unspoiled lakes. Yet whilst I love these natural affinities, my favourite wines and cheeses are the unexpected; the ones which unite disparate regions or even countries, like Pizarro’s Palo Cortado or – perhaps most blasphemous of all – Dusi’s Parmigiano Reggiano with champagne.

“Yes, champagne,” he says emphatically, when I gasp in surprise. “With the French we argue about everything – food, cheese, wine, heritage, skiing you name it we fight over it. But parmesan and champagne is where we meet, sit down and make love to each other.” It’s where the king of cheese meets the queen of sparkling wine.

Spreading the joy

The world contains a near infinite variety of cheese, and the joy of travelling is seeing that as a reflection of different lands and cultures. But the affinities and similarities that emerge between distant, even divided countries, can be equally heartening to behold. That’s what food, drink and indeed travelling are for, after all; to bring people together and nurture connection, not division. The more I experience of them, the more I feel that the real wonder of cheese and wine is not their natural differences, but their humanity; the fact we made them, loved them, and spread their inimitable joys to every corner of the globe. ■



Clare Finney
Food journalist, writer, author of
The Times Food Book of the Year 2023
‘Hungry Heart: A Story of Food
and Love’, and contributor to
[@scribehound_food](https://twitter.com/scribehound_food) [@finneyclare](https://twitter.com/finneyclare)



Top Tips

Pack light

Cabin space is at a premium on a boat and there's nothing worse than filling it with a suitcase. Take only the minimum – you just want comfortable, casual clothes for both on and off the boat.

Get prepped for seasickness

If you're prone to it yet still want to cruise, think about travelling between January and May, when the seas are calmer. Book a catamaran and request a cabin on the lowest possible deck, preferably in the middle of the ship.

Don't miss the seafood

Ceviche, arroz marinero, encebollado... seafood is fresh, varied and utterly delicious on the Galapagos Islands!



Hundreds of bird species, endemic land animals, and underwater habitats that are home to serene sea turtles and playful sea lions... the world of the Galapagos Islands is like no other place on Earth.

When Charles Darwin landed on San Cristobal Island in 1835, he couldn't have known the lasting impact that he would have on this tiny corner of the Earth. The Galapagos Islands pop out of the ocean some 600 kilometres west of Ecuador, formed by angry volcanoes that have lent the landscape a craggy, blackened appearance. The islands are deceptively barren; peer just a fraction beneath the surface of this bleak environment and you'll find life in its most natural, abundant form.

Island life

The Galapagos archipelago is made up of 13 main islands, along with several smaller islands and rocky outcrops. For the average holiday-goer, navigating the complex waters of a Galapagos trip can seem like a complicated endeavour. Which combination of islands should you visit? When is the best time to go? It may seem like a cop-out, but for a tourist who simply wants to experience the wonder of these islands, and who isn't hung up on sighting a particular species, the real answer is this: any combination of islands, at any time of year, will show you something new and wonderful. For something a little more specific, the seasons broadly fall into two distinct periods:

December to May: Warm and wet. Tropical showers are more frequent (though short), and the seas are calmer and warmer. Giant tortoise eggs start hatching, and birds begin their courtship rituals.

June to November: Cool and dry. Temperatures are fresher (yet still warm) and the seas are colder and choppier due to the arrival of the Humboldt Current. An abundance of fish and larger marine creatures appear, to the delight of keen snorkellers.

The Galapagos 'Big 15'

Africa may have the 'Big Five', but in the Galapagos you can get three times the excitement with their 'Big 15'! Catch sight of the giant Galapagos tortoise in the wild at Los Chatos Reserve, or at one of the archipelago's breeding centres. While blue-footed boobies and magnificent frigatebirds will easily be seen in flight throughout the islands, bird lovers who want to see these iconic species at close range should consider an itinerary that includes the prime nesting spots of either North Seymour, Genovesa or Española islands. Española is also the best place to see the waved albatross. For those hoping to see something specific, a little research will help you make decisions. For example, Galapagos penguins are most likely to be spotted off Fernandina or Isabela Islands, while snorkelling at Kicker Rock is one of the best places in the archipelago to see spotted eagle rays and white-tip reef sharks. Our advice? Go with an open mind and you won't be disappointed.

Landlubber or cruise junkie?

The Galapagos Islands are synonymous with cruising. But unlike in other cruise destinations, many of these small vessels have a capacity of just 16 passengers, giving you

Above
The surreal coastline of Bartolomé Island

Left
The archipelago's iconic blue-footed boobies

GALAPAGOS

Before you go



Watch:

The three-part documentary *David Attenborough in the Galapagos* will whet your wildlife appetite.

Read:

Floreana: *A Woman's Pilgrimage to the Galapagos*, is an astonishing and adventurous first-hand tale, written by the five-months pregnant Margret Wittner as she travels from Germany to settle in the harsh landscape of Floreana Island.

Listen:

Get in the Latino vibe with the *Viva Latino playlist* on Spotify: [Viva Latino | Spotify Playlist](#)

an intimate and personal experience like no other. Each day includes two shore excursions and at least one snorkelling trip – it's a packed-out itinerary that will have you rocked to sleep by about 9pm! But if the thought of living in a confined space on the water doesn't do it for you, land-based Galapagos holidays are a fantastic (and lower cost) alternative. A combination of islands and day tours will offer a winning diversity of geology and wildlife. It's also only on land-based tours that you'll get to try activities like hiking up the Sierra Negra volcano for ultimate island views, or experiencing life in the towns and putting money directly back into the economy by visiting local cafes, shops and restaurants.

Tourism and Conservation: hand in hand

The perpetual dilemma that the Galapagos faces is how to benefit from tourism without altering the integrity of the islands. The Galapagos Islands have been a protected area since 1998 and, since this date, the Galapagos authorities have put increasing conservation measures in place on both land and sea. Local people are empowered to work either in tourism or in conservation – the two main employment avenues on the island. Any tourism business, from hotels and restaurants to cruising vessels, must abide by strict laws around waste management. Naturalist guides are obligatory at all sites, whether you are

island hopping on land or cruising. They are very experienced and highly trained in responsible wildlife management; sticking to marked trails, not disturbing the animal species by touching or getting too close to them and ensuring that tourists take all waste away. And, importantly, the \$100 fee that every tourist pays on entry to the islands is used for key conservation projects, from eradicating pests like rats and goats, to re-establishing native animal populations across different islands and restoring their natural biodiversity.

Did you know?

► To be a naturalist guide on the Galapagos you have to be a permanent resident. This is no mean feat: the only way to do this is to be born on the Galapagos Islands, or marry a Galapageño.

► Blue-footed booby females typically choose a mate with the brightest, bluest feet. This ensures that the blue-footed gene stays strong!

► Darwin only stayed for five weeks on the islands. Just 35 short days that have given us a lasting insight into the natural world.

► The shops in the Galapagos sell Factor 100 sun cream! Unbelievable but necessary – the sun on the equator is deceptively strong, even on a cloudy day. ■

“The Galapagos Islands have been a protected area since 1998.”

Left
Seals are one of the many animals you'll see plenty of when visiting the Galapagos

With their brilliant knowledge, our expert Tour Leaders are what make the country you visit truly come to life.

Diego Torres Garzón is a highlight of Ecuador



It's easy to eat well.

Tasting shrimp in coconut sauce (find the recipe on page 23) in front of the beach at Isabela Island, Galapagos is a must to me. Enjoy a local craft beer at Santa Cruz Brewery in Puerto Ayora, feeling the sea breeze and celebrating the unique wildlife encounters of the day. At Casa Manuela restaurant in Old Town Quito, try a *locro de queso* (potato soup with cheese and avocado, a must-taste dish). Just be aware that credit/debit cards are not accepted everywhere; especially in local restaurants where only cash will be used.

“Every day you'll enter a different world.”

I never stop learning.

Every day I discover more about my past and my present in my country. I never stop being fascinated by the birdlife which reflects the biodiversity that we have here or being inspired by the opportunity of meeting new inquisitive visitors. Ecuador will always exceed your expectations.

It's an emotional journey.

In Ecuadorian culture, people display their emotions – hugs, kisses, and handshakes are common ways to greet and show affection to loved ones. Ecuador is a whole cosmos; you will be missing us for a long time when you return home. ■

Climate insight, local culture, what to eat and where to find the magic – no-one knows Ecuador and the Galapagos better than our tour leader.

We're a little unpredictable.

There is no such thing as a weather forecast in Ecuador and the Galapagos – our microclimates drive meteorologists crazy. And the Pacific Ocean in the Galapagos is not always pacific! Expect choppy waters when crossing between islands.

No two days are the same.

Here, nature and culture find the perfect blend. On the islands, people are so friendly and mass tourism does not exist. Every day, we enter a different world, due to the cultural variety and the natural contrasts. Altitudes, temperatures, and vegetation change drastically. Green Andean valleys, unique flavours, cloud forests, local food markets, Andean volcanoes, Amazon jungle, Galapagos wildlife – all here in a destination to be fully immersed!

Your senses will work overtime.

Wake up in the cloud forest of Mindo, and enjoy a cup of freshly made coffee, as you contemplate hummingbirds having their dose of nectar. Feel charmed and intrigued by the Historic Centre in Quito, where your five senses will be awoken. Walking through this UNESCO city, you go back to the past as you discover daily life at every sight. Gilded altars, blackberry and soursop sorbet, street vendors, the smell of incense burning – you will be captivated!

Our flavours are as diverse as our climate.

Try *canelazo*, an Andean spiced and hot cocktail that warms you up in the cool evenings (8-10°C) of our mountain towns. It's a cinnamon tea mixed with fresh *naranja* (a sharp tomato family fruit) juice and sweetened with brown sugar. If you want to feel the whole experience, add some *aguardiente* (sugarcane liquor). Salud!!

► We honour our top leaders each year in the Explore Leader Awards. Have you had an outstanding Tour Leader on an Explore tour? Nominate them here explore.co.uk/leader-awards

Find the winners of this year's awards on the next page.

Our annual Tour Leader Awards honour our top-rated leaders, as nominated by our travellers and selected by an expert panel. Meet this year's standout stars!



YOUR TOUR LEADER OF THE YEAR

Anyone that's been on a small group adventure knows the worth of the Tour Leader – they bring the destination to life, bring the group together and make the whole tour run smoothly. And Explore leaders... well, they really are the cream of the crop.

Our annual Tour Leader Awards, as voted for by you, and selected by a panel of experts, recognise the leaders that have really gone the extra mile in the last year to make your adventures the very best they can be.

WINNER Zeynep Bazlar, Turkey

I graduated in Philosophy from Kocaeli University, and I was always interested in music so I started to play in a band which became quite famous for a time, but I realised I couldn't put up with big-city life so moved down to a tourist resort. I've worked in different sectors of tourism. In restaurants, hotels, beach clubs... Then I was introduced to Explore, after a year working in our local agent's office, and in 2013 after some great training I started as an Explore Tour Leader – the best job ever!

Which Explore tours do you lead?

Mostly I lead hiking trips on the Lycian Way and also family multi-active trips. I love nature and working with children who appreciate my child-like sense of fun.

What is your favourite local food?

My favourite local food is *mujver*, (a zucchini fritter), clay casserole dishes with rice and cheese and herb stuffed filo pastry rolls (*Sigara Börek*).

What do you most love sharing with Explore groups?

I love to share everything about my country with my travellers, and it is a big plus if they're interested in my routine life details. How we live, how we eat and drink, how we look after animals, how lifestyles differ between different areas of Turkey... I love to take them to places that only the locals know and to introduce them to local people. I love to share Turkish recipes too, as I am a big fan of eating and drinking!

I also love to listen to our guests' life stories. Working with Explore gives me the chance to meet so many people from different places, share our life experiences, hopes, dreams and even disappointments sometimes. In some ways Explore brings the world to me and I hope to share my story with the world, in little steps!

Customer comment: 'I cannot praise [Zeynep] highly enough, she was superb. Good local knowledge, friendly & approachable. Very compassionate. Zep got me through the tough parts of the walk and gave me the courage to take on all of the challenge – she led by example with her gentle humour, integrity and compassion.'



Left
Zeynep leading a walking tour along the Turkish coast

Above
From the left: Our runners up, Sudarshan and Ester followed by our newcomer of the year, Sajid



RUNNER UP Ester Galindo, Spain

I spent 20 years working as a translator from English and German into Spanish and Catalan, whilst I was also climbing big mountains, mountain biking and competing in trail running and orienteering races. In a way, I was leading a "two-headed" life. My hobbies and my natural skills merged perfectly as soon as I started both coaching and guiding about 10 years ago: firstly, in trekking and mountaineering and, later, with Explore!

Customer comment:

"Ester was one of the best leaders I've encountered in 16 Explore trips. She was constantly friendly, happy and helped out people with their many questions at all times of day or night. Ester also put across her passion for her country, the culture and history and added so much to whole experience of walking the Camino de Santiago."

RUNNER UP Sudarshan KC, Nepal

Growing up with a simple lifestyle, I have always embraced each day as a fresh opportunity filled with excitement and new experiences. For me, every day is a day to learn, and I approach life and work with positivity. My journey has been shaped by countless interactions with people from all walks of life, especially my customers, whom I consider my greatest teachers and mentors. Every conversation, every shared experience, and every challenge has taught me valuable lessons that continue to shape my perspective.

Traveller comment:

"Sudarshan was excellent – nothing was too much trouble. He was kind, considerate and generous with his time. He made sure that the whole trip ran like clockwork. His passion for the region was infectious and he made sure that we had the best experiences possible."

BEST NEWCOMER Sajid Ali, Pakistan

I am an adventure lover, born and raised in a mountainous community of Karakoram. When I was just 15, I joined a trekking tour as a helper reaching the base camp of K2 (the second-highest mountain in the world). Later, while still a student, I occasionally worked with cultural tours as an assistant.

I started working with Explore in June 2022 and was promoted as local leader in 2024. I have also worked with local companies across a variety of tours, mainly cultural exposure, blossom seasons and autumn tours.

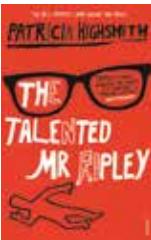
Customer comment:

"Sajid was a brilliant guide. He stopped at nothing to give us an amazing, safe and authentic experience. He was always on hand, always patient, always reliable. He was well briefed on all aspects of the trip, prepared to be flexible, and planned ahead. He put the needs of the group as a whole and as individuals above his own."

THE PERFECT SUMMER READING



Passport, tick. Sunscreen, tick. Walking shoes, tick. Paperback... Enhance your summer holiday with a novel set in your location. Here, the Explore team pick some top recommendations from the Four Corners Book Club.



ITALY
The Talented Mr Ripley by Patricia Highsmith
"The book explores famous Italian cities such as Rome, Naples, Venice, San Remo and the Amalfi Coast. It names places and restaurants and sights that many people enjoy exploring in Italy. The plot weaves its sinister threads of avarice, jealousy and murder into the Italian locales, making the protagonist and his victims play their games of cat and mouse in unforgettable venues."

Recommended by Sandra



SCOTLAND
You, Me & the Sea by Elizabeth Haynes
"This phenomenally written book makes the remote, windswept Scottish island setting feel like a main character. The human protagonists are both lost, set adrift by life but become grounded through their connection with nature and each other. A provocative read."

Recommended by Gina



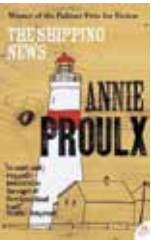
THAILAND
The Beach by Alex Garland
"This book is the perfect travel partner if you're off to Thailand. It tells the story of Richard who sets off on the ultimate back packing adventure to find a secret paradise. But not all is what it seems. This book captures the hustle and bustle of the big city but also the quiet serene paradise. A must read for anyone going to Thailand but be warned you may just be tempted to go off into the unknown to find your own beach."

Recommended by Caroline



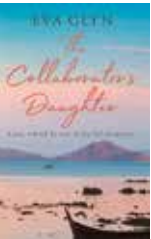
NORWAY
The Bird Tribunal by Agnes Ravatn
"A dark and quirky tale that evokes the spirit of the Norwegian Fjords in haunting beauty. You can really picture yourself in a remote Fjord, even if you have never been there yourself."

Recommended by Hannah



CANADA
The Shipping News by Annie Proulx
"Although the author of Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Shipping News* is American, the book, its characters and setting are about as Canadian as any written. The book's hero, Quoyale, returns to his ancestral home along with his two small daughters to pick up the pieces of his life following a series of disasters. *The Shipping News* is not an easy read, it pulls you in gradually. It is, however, a good book to introduce Newfoundland to the discerning traveller."

Recommended by Veronica



CROATIA
The Collaborator's Daughter by Eva Glyn
"I found this book really good at sharing some of the history of Dubrovnik and also giving a good sense of what this city is like to visit."

Recommended by Sally

Are you looking for some more reading inspiration or have a recommendation of your own? Check out the Four Corners Book Club. Now also with non-fiction suggestions! explore.co.uk/bookclub

Explore!

Algeri-yeah!

Algeria is bold, beautiful, and officially back in our programme. Bursting with places waiting to be discovered, we've created three brand-new trips that are sure to take you on the adventure of a lifetime.

Discover our new tours in Algeria! →





**We love nothing more than
talking about holidays!**

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