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MINI
GUIDE

Secret Europe

50

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Experiences

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Amazing *experiences* start here

Few places in the world lure travellers like Europe

With its momentous history, cutting-edge culture, and breathtaking landscapes, this continent comprises an extraordinary wealth of sights, sounds, peoples and parties. Many of our favourite experiences remain unknown to most travellers, so we've created a sampler of clandestine nightclubs, secret hotels, killer views, off-the-radar villages and more to inspire your next trip.

Sourced from our expert authors, locals, and other in-the-know denizens, it's these kinds of unexpected, magical places that make lifelong memories. Look for the 'Author Secret' label to find experiences so under-the-radar they haven't even been featured in one of our guidebooks before. Whether you've been to Europe once or 100 times, we're confident you'll find something here to make you want to start planning your next adventure.

Read on for 50 secret experiences (in no particular order) that will make your next trip to Europe that much more unforgettable. And remember: no matter where your ultimate European adventure leads, how many times you've been, or what you're looking for, there is always more to discover than you might expect.

LUXEMBOURG





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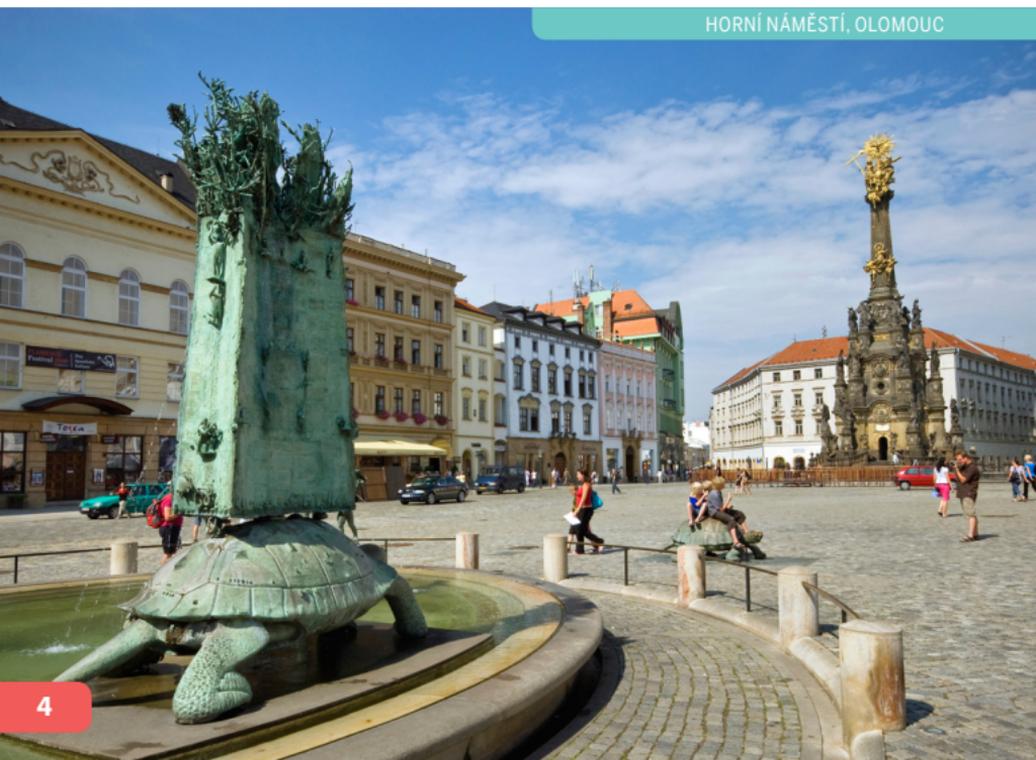
Discover a New Old Historical Capital

Location: Olomouc, Czech Republic

As countless tourists embrace the overt charms of Prague and Český Krumlov, the city of Olomouc (olla-moats) is practically unknown outside of the Czech Republic, emerging as the travellers' equivalent of a special restaurant that is your own little secret. The main square counts among the country's most charming, surrounded by historic buildings and blessed with a Unesco-protected trinity column. The evocative central streets are dotted with beautiful churches, many of which play host to a thrilling history. Explore the foundations of ancient Olomouc Castle at the must-see Archdiocesan Museum, then head for one of the city's many pubs or microbreweries.

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HORNÍ NÁMĚSTÍ, OLMOUC





MÓN SUL BEACH, CABO DE GATA

2

Remote Beaches & Low-Key Lounging

Location: Cabo de Gata, Spain

If you can find anyone old enough to remember the Costa del Sol before the bulldozers arrived they'd probably say it looked a bit like Cabo de Gata. Some of Spain's most beautiful and least crowded beaches are strung between the grand cliffs and capes east of Almería, where dark volcanic hills tumble into a sparkling turquoise sea. Though Cabo de Gata is not undiscovered, it still has a wild, elemental feel and its scattered fishing villages remain low-key. You can walk along, or not far from, the coast right round from Retamar in the northwest to Agua Amarga in the northeast.

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3

A Tucked-Away Bar Scene

Location: Kraków, Poland

Poles love to party. In the summer, town squares across the country are filled with tables and late-night revellers. The western half of the Kazimierz district in Kraków is home to a plethora of cool, small bars tucked away behind attractive old facades in narrow streets. Check out Alchemia for its shabby-is-the-new-cool look with rough-hewn wooden benches, candlelit tables and a companionable gloom. It hosts regular live-music gigs and theatrical events through the week. Just a few minutes away by foot, Singer Café is a laidback hang-out of the Kazimierz cognoscenti. This relaxed café-bar's moody candlelit interior is full of character. Alternatively, sit outside and converse over a sewing machine affixed to the table.

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BOZCAADA, TURKEY

4

Travel Back in Time

Location: Bozcaada, Turkey

It might come as a surprise that the little island of Bozcaada, roughly 15 miles square and home to a little under 3000 people, is so easily accessible from Istanbul, so relatively unknown even to many Turkish locals, and so entirely, deliciously divine. Floating serenely in the Aegean Sea, some 250 miles from the capital, Bozcaada is a quiet, bucolic place of hidden beaches, cobbled alleys, whitewashed townhouses and old-timers playing backgammon on street corners. Donkeys browse in lavender-studded fields; fishermen haul in their daily catch; old ladies sip coffee on sun-soaked doorsteps – the pace of island life is luxuriantly slow, all but unchanged for centuries.

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5

Detour to Solitude

Location: Cromane Peninsula, Ireland

Driving around the Ring of Kerry is an unforgettable experience in itself, but you don't need to limit yourself to the main route. Hidden off the N70, the Cromane Peninsula is a five-minute drive from both Killorglin and Glenbeigh. The peninsula's tiny namesake village sits at the base of a narrow shingle spit, with open fields giving way to spectacular water vistas and multihued sunsets. Cromane's exceptional Jack's Coastguard Restaurant (www.jacksromane.com) is a local secret and justifies the trip. Entering this 1866-built coastguard station feels like arriving at a low-key village pub. But a narrow doorway at the back of the bar leads to a striking, whitewashed contemporary space with lights glittering from midnight-blue ceiling panels, a pianist, and windows overlooking the water.

Start planning your trip with *Lonely Planet Ireland*, 11th edition

Paula Hardy is a travel writer and editor specialising in Italy for over 15 years.

AUTHOR
SECRET

6

Undiscovered Puglian Paradise

Location: Ostuni, Italy

Set amid 72 hectares of ancient olive groves and red-spotted poppy fields, Il Frantoio not only has its own antique olive press but also supplies the cult kitchen of Rosalba Ciannamea, who owns the 19th-century *masseria* (fortified farmhouse) with her partner Armando Balestrazzi. Far from the bustle of city life, the couple consider the restaurant and inn a 'clinic for the soul', and as the scent of orange blossom floats over the cobbled courtyard on warm summer nights it's easy to understand why. Here there is no TV, no air-conditioning and no pool, just dark night skies, simple but elegant rooms, and sensational, nine-course meals masterminded by Rosalba using the farm's fresh produce. There's added pleasure in not knowing what or how many dishes may arrive: perhaps smoked mozzarella with clover, fried *lampascioni* (hyacinth bulbs) with orange-blossom honey, white aubergine cake with sesame and slow-cooked lamb with aromatic herbs. Seated at tables with other multi-lingual guests, you sail into flavours as easily as good conversation. Each dish is an unexpected gift, assuredly rustic but subtly sophisticated. If you can't move afterwards, the rooms are really very nice.

For more about this area, see *Lonely Planet Southern Italy*, 2nd edition

OLIVE GROVE, ITALY



7

An Unknown Village

Location: Dihovo, Macedonia

Inimitable Dihovo remains a secret to most travellers, despite being just 6km west of Bitola, in the foothills of Pelister National Park. Dihovo makes a great base for hiking the 2600-metre-high Baba Mountain, crowned by two immaculate glacial lakes. It's a wild and whimsical place; Pelister's bears have actually been sued in court for stealing honey (you can buy big combs of *med* (honey) from Dihovo's beekeepers). Dihovo may be quiet (there's one restaurant, two guesthouses and one lovely church), but it offers visceral experiences like mountain biking and ice-cold swims in the odd outdoor pool, filled with spillover from the River Sapungica. Running down from the mountain, this woodland tributary is great for hopping boulders and hunting for frogs and crabs.

Villa Dihovo (www.villadihovo.com) is a grand old village mansion run by skiing/hiking leader Pece Cvetkovski and family, offering a handful of rustic rooms and a big lawn where kids can play. The exemplary Macedonian fare relies on home-grown veg and traditional seasonings. The beer's home-brewed, and there's a good house wine. Except for the alcohol, there are no fixed prices for accommodation or meals, making the villa accessible to people of all budgets.

For more about this area, see *Lonely Planet Eastern Europe*, 12th edition

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Roam Rural Rome

Location: Lazio, Italy

With a capital like Rome, it's unsurprising that the rest of the region of Lazio gets overlooked. But when Rome starts to feel like the Eternal City for all the wrong reasons, head into the country. Set amidst wooded hills in Lazio's remote eastern reaches, Subiaco is one of the region's hidden gems. Nero had a villa here, but it was Saint Benedict who put the town on the map when he spent three years meditating in a local cave. This grotto is now incorporated into the Monastero di San Benedetto, a spectacular hilltop monastery that boasts a series of rich 13th- to 15th-century frescoes.

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9

Sip, Stare & Shop in Secret

Location: Berlin, Germany

Some of Berlin's finest bars, restaurants, shops and venues are hidden from view behind unmarked doors, in nondescript buildings and in other clandestine spaces. For one, beyond an anonymous steel door lies Tausend, a cosmopolitan drinking den tucked into a railway bridge. At Sammlung Boros, a Nazi-era bunker has been turned into a shining beacon of art. Entry is by guided tour only; book online as early as possible. And you'd be forgiven for walking right past the empty white cube with only a staircase spiralling down to Apartment, one of Berlin's best-edited fashion emporiums.

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FRIEDRICHSHAIN DISTRICT, BERLIN



BURG SATZVEY CASTLE, MECHERNICH

10

Check Out Off-the-Radar Castles

Location: Mechernich, Germany

The fairy-tale Burg Satzvey castle is a short ride from touristed Bonn and Cologne, but remains off most travellers' radar. Its medieval castle walls, moat and quaint setting will delight even the most jaded visitor. Depending on when you go, you could find concerts, art classes, or even jousting. And Christmas-market refuseniks will feel stirrings of seasonal cheer come wintertime, when the castle grounds transform into a medieval-style market with pageantry, gothic trinket shops and the clanking sound of mulled wine served by the mug.

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11

A Cove of Your Own

Location: Lošinj, Croatia

On the south end of the island of Lošinj in the Kvarner Gulf, you can explore a barley inhabited thumb-shaped peninsula that's blessed with exquisite natural bays and is perfect for hiking. Pick up a copy of the tourist office's excellent *Promenades & Footpaths* map of this region. One lonely road snakes down the spine of this hilly, wooded landmass, eventually fizzling out at Mrtvaška, Lošinj's land's end. You can circumnavigate the entire peninsula in a full day by foot, stopping to swim at deserted coves.

Start planning your trip with *Lonely Planet Croatia*, 7th edition

12

A Hidden Mountain Retreat

Location: Milia, Crete

Concealed amidst wild mountains, Milia (www.milia.gr) is one of Crete's most sublime getaways, with lodgings in authentic traditional stone cottages, unforgettable, ultra-healthy organic cuisine, and miles of forested trails for walking.

At heart, Milia is all about respecting the environment and sustainability. For centuries a working village, Milia was abandoned after WWII. In the 1980s, however, the area was purchased for the sake of conservation by some forward-thinking Cretans. The traditional structures were painstakingly restored by local artisans, and terraced gardens were installed to prevent erosion. Wood-burning stoves and solar panels provide heating and electricity.

No wonder, then, that Milia's kind and laid-back management attracts like-minded guests. It's a convivial place for getting away from civilisation (despite being less than an hour's drive from the coastal town of Hania, famous for its Venetian architecture). By day, the thickly-forested hiking trails provide coolness, while at night the stars seem close enough to touch. In the morning, there's nothing better than to savour a strong Greek coffee from the restaurant and gaze out over the boundless mountains. Milia's nourishing organic food is always fresh, and the menu changes often, keeping in time with the Cretan cycle of nature. Milia's new chilled-out public space allows you to read, relax and sometimes attend Cretan cooking courses or intimate concerts.

For more on this area, see *Lonely Planet Eastern Crete*, 5th edition

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Secret Crustacean Capital

Location: Vila do Bispo, Portugal

Seafood lovers won't want to miss a journey to the sun-drenched town of Vila do Bispo in southern Portugal. This tiny settlement is one of the finest spots on the planet to sample those tender, unusual crustaceans known as *percebes*. Though unsightly in appearance (not unlike the misshapen hoof of some small, extra-terrestrial creature), a *percebe*, with its juicy snap, mouth-watering flavour and faintly salty finish is like a kiss from the sea. Its extraordinary taste affords no middle ground: you'll either love it or hate it.

Though *percebes* are known throughout Iberia, it's here in Vila do Bispo that fishermen still harvest by hand the small barnacles that attach themselves to the wave-beaten cliffs outside of town. This is one of the few places in Iberia where this is still done – a sustainable practice that goes back many generations. You can sample the fruits of their labours (which can often be quite dangerous) at one of two Vila do Bispo restaurants dedicated to *percebes*: Solar do Perceve (☎ 282-639-254; Rua Comandante Matoso 4) and O Palheiro (☎ 282-639-745; Rua Carlos Luís Correia Matos 3). Both are delightful, family-run affairs.

For more on this area, see *Lonely Planet Portugal*, 9th edition

VILA DO BISPO, PORTUGAL





GARDENS NEAR THE PALAIS ROYAL, PARIS

14

A Perfect Picnic

Location: Paris, France

Hidden beneath the arches on the western side of the courtyard gardens of Palais Royal, you'll find one of Paris' loveliest picnic spots, with benches overlooking box-hedged flowerbeds, crunch gravel paths and Daniel Bruen's distinctive zebra-striped columns at one end. The real secret, though, is the filled baguette sandwiches sold at Paris' oldest bakery, a two-minute walk away beneath the arches on the western side of the gardens. Boulangerie Patisserie du Grand Richelieu has been in the biz since 1810 and is something of a city legend.

Start planning your trip with *Lonely Planet Paris*, 9th edition

15

A New Space in an Old Place

Location: Kaliningrad, Russia

Kaliningrad is a vibrant, fun-loving city that feels larger than its population would suggest. On the ground floor of an apartment block, Kwartira is tricky to classify but unquestionably one of the coolest hang-outs in Kaliningrad. Lined with a fascinating range of pop-culture books, CDs, records and DVDs, all for sale or rent (as is everything else in the space, including the stylish furniture), Kwartira – which means 'apartment' – also serves drinks and snacks, but there's no menu. Movies are screened for free on several nights, while on others there may be a party or an art event: whatever's happening, you're sure to make friends with locals. It's best to visit in the early evening, but opening hours are erratic, so call before setting off.

Start planning your trip with *Lonely Planet Russia*, 6th edition



MACARONS

16

Savour Sacrilegious Sweetness

Location: Amiens, France

With a cathedral twice the size of Paris' Notre Dame, it's sacrilege that this town is seldom visited. Amiens' cathedral is a marvel of engineering, with intricate stonework that will leave you goggle-eyed, as well as some of the goriest carvings around (the severed head of John the Baptist is a recurring theme). And the local delicacy, the *macaron d'Amiens*, will please the sweetest of teeth: try one at Jean Trogneux, where five generations of artisan baking have left the simple recipe of honey, almonds, sugar and egg whites unchanged. These succulent cakes are best served with an impossibly thick *chocolat chaud*.

Start planning your trip with *Lonely Planet France*, 10th edition

17

Revel in Lesser-Known Luxuries

Location: Luxembourg City, Luxembourg

It's strange for a capital city to be an unsung wonder, even if it is in one of Europe's most petite nations. Rarely seen on bucket lists, Luxembourg City has intriguing contrasts, an intellectual and multilingual population, and some of the slickest modern art around. Luxembourg is awash with big spenders, but there's more to its big city than banks and suits. See cutting-edge art at MUDAM Luxembourg, cycle your way around the city streets and catch a view – the city is perched overlooking gorges, valleys and forests. Size certainly isn't everything with this European gem.

Start planning your trip with *Lonely Planet Belgium & Luxembourg*, 5th edition

Brendan Sainsbury has authored over 30 Lonely Planet books including guides to Cuba and Spain.

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18

Scale Gibraltar via a Backstairs Route

Location: Gibraltar, Iberian Peninsula

It's not easy to keep a secret in somewhere as small as Gibraltar, but the so-called 'Mediterranean Steps', a rugged path that winds precipitously to the top of the iconic Rock, escapes the notice of all but the most intrepid travellers. While the bulk of Gibraltar's tourists ascend Europe's mythical 'Pillar of Hercules' in a taxi or cable car, the 'steps' ply a tougher, more challenging route. The climb starts at the entrance to the Upper Rock Nature Reserve and traverses the southern and eastern faces of the limestone escarpment along a former British military path restored in 2007. Views are dramatic and expansive with Spain, Africa, the Atlantic and the Mediterranean splayed like a Google map beneath you. Equally epic are the sights and cries of huge flocks of migratory birds that circle the crags above and below. Although only 1.5km long, the path is steep and mildly exposed as it zigzags torturously up the famous cliffs. It brings you out at O'Hara's Battery, a gun emplacement at Gibraltar's highest point, meaning you can descend via a network of narrow military roads and take in the Rock's swashbuckling historical sights on the way down (buy an entry ticket beforehand).

For more about this area, see *Lonely Planet Spain*, 9th edition

ROCK OF GIBRALTAR



Rock Out in an Unexpected Party City

Location: Belgrade, Serbia

Back in 1999, Belgraders held outdoor concerts while undergoing NATO bombardment, a feat that bewildered many outsiders. The long years of bad press that kept Serbia and its energetic capital off the map have now passed, and foreigners are now realising what locals always knew – that Belgrade really rocks. With an exuberant population and its legacy as an intellectual hangout, Belgrade offers intriguingly varied nightlife, ranging from eclectic watering holes for those in the know, to the busy restaurants and bars of the Skadarlija district and the summer clubs in heaving barges on the Sava and Danube Rivers. Major international musicians hit Belgrade's Sava Center, and the summertime EXIT Festival, held an hour north in Novi Sad, is one of Europe's best.

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LIVE MUSIC IN BELGRADE





GROTE KERK VAN ST BAVO

20

Worth the Road Less Travelled

Location: Haarlem, The Netherlands

Sure, it's hard to tear yourself away from the many pleasures of Amsterdam. But rewards are great for visitors to Haarlem: 17th-century Dutch master Frans Hals painted some of his finest work here, and you'll find his luminous oil paintings at the museum named after him. You can also crane your neck at the church organ in Grote Kerk van St Bavo, once played by a young Mozart. After a pancake overlooking the bustling and achingly pretty Grote Markt, you'll be glad you made the trip.

Start planning your trip with *Lonely Planet The Netherlands*, 5th edition

21

Linger in a Quiet Spot on the Amalfi Coast

Location: Nocelle, Italy

A tiny, still relatively isolated mountain village, above Positano and beyond Montepertuso, Nocelle (450m) commands some of the most spectacular views on the entire coast. A world apart from touristy Positano, it's a sleepy, silent place where not much ever happens and where the few residents are happy to keep it that way. If you want to stay the night, consider delightful Villa della Quercia, a former monastery with spectacular views. For food, Trattoria Santa Croce is a reliable low-key restaurant in the main part of the village.

From *Lonely Planet Italy*, 11th edition



BLUE LAGOON GEOTHERMAL POOL, REYKJAVÍK

22

Get Your Groove On

Location: Reykjavik, Iceland

You'll find all the cultural trappings of a large 21st-century European city in Reykjavík: cosy cafés, world-class restaurants, fine museums and galleries, and state-of-the-art geothermal pools. Reykjavík has also become infamous for its kicking music scene. A very cool place to hang out is 12 Tónar, responsible for launching some of Iceland's favourite new bands. In the three-floor shop you can listen to CDs, drink coffee and maybe catch a live performance on Friday afternoons.

Start planning your trip with *Lonely Planet Iceland*, 8th edition

23

Blend in with the Local Scholars

Location: Tartu, Estonia

Travellers who make it to this beautiful Baltic country usually hang out in fairy-tale Tallinn or test the island spas, but vibrant university town Tartu is not to be missed. Steep yourself in centuries-old student history as you visit the Student's Lock-up, where errant students were held in solitary confinement, and wander around the sculpted Toomemägi park. And in student central, dining out won't break the bank so make your way to a café near the university and blend in.

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Brendan Sainsbury has authored over 30 Lonely Planet books including guides to Cuba and Spain.

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24

Off the Beaten Track in Wild Andalucía

Location: Rural Andalucía, Spain

In a region well-known for its abundant beaches and spectacular architecture, Andalucía's *vía verdes* often get lost in the small print. These bucolic greenways are part of a project hatched in 1993 which has turned over 2000km of Spain's disused railway line into vehicle-free biking and hiking trails. Perhaps the most unsung of the stash is the *Vía Verde de la Subbética*, a thin ribbon of pre-car age serenity that skirts the Parque Natural Sierras Subbéticas, a cluster of craggy uplands south of Córdoba speckled with lakes, wild olive trees, and quintessential white villages. Well off standard Andalusian tourist itineraries that ogle Seville, Granada and the Costa del Sol, the Subbéticas greenway stretches for 58km and follows the route of the erstwhile *Tren del Aceite* which once transported lucrative cargos of olive oil. Although the steel tracks have long gone, the *vía verde* still utilises various railway-era landmarks including tunnels and viaducts, and has transformed former stations into cafés or bicycle-hire outlets. The white village of Zuheros is an excellent place to hop on the greenway. Without a doubt, it's the best way to see rural Andalucía.

For more about this area, see *Lonely Planet Spain*, 9th edition

CYCLISTS IN ANDALUCÍA



A fan of wild food and even wilder places, **Kerry Christiani** has authored/co-authored around a dozen Lonely Planet titles.

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25

Northern Norway's Ultimate Escape

Location: Kjerringøy, Norway

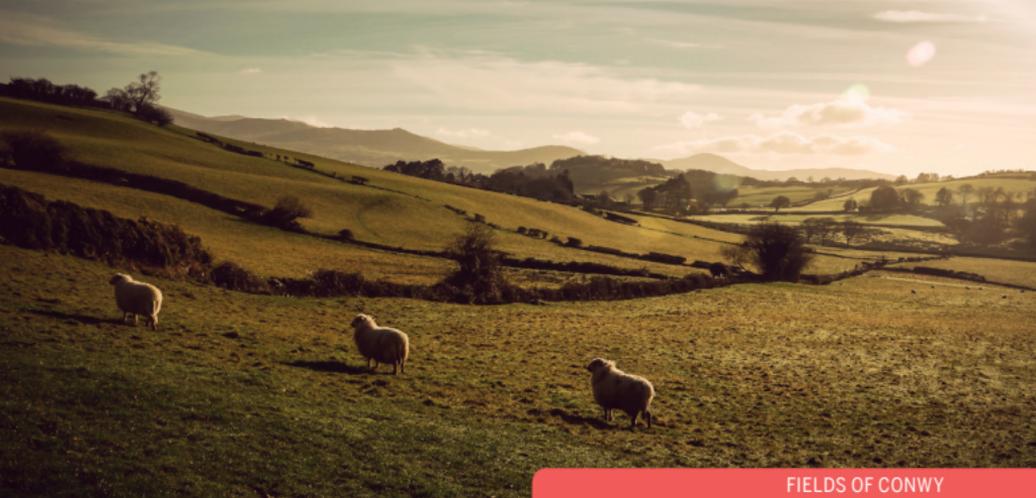
Nature is on an epic scale in Nordland, and nowhere more so than in Kjerringøy. The sense of remoteness on this peninsula north of the Arctic Circle and near Saltstraumen, the world's most powerful maelstrom, is enhanced by the fact you can only reach it by ferry. Dark granite peaks razor above a placid fjord and white-sand beaches; sea eagles wheel in the sky. All at once wild and serene, Kjerringøy has made a striking backdrop for films based on Nobel Prize-winning author Knut Hamsun's novels. Yet for the world beyond Norway, it remains something of a secret.

A community of wealthy fishermen and boat merchants thrived here in the 18th and 19th centuries, a proud heritage celebrated at Nordlandsmuseet, one of the country's best-preserved trading posts. The village itself is redolent of a bygone era when time was marked by the tides and changing light, and when neighbours mattered.

Neighbours, for instance, like Ulf Mikalsen, whose workshop doors open to reveal the boat-builder carving the bow of a smooth-contoured Nordland boat, like something a Viking would set sail in. At Markens Grøde farm opposite, organic cheeses, wood-fired bread and Elk sausage are lovingly made the traditional way. Kjerringøy feels remote but nobody here is a stranger, and the longer you linger, the harder it is to drag yourself back on that ferry.

For more about this area, see *Lonely Planet Norway*, 5th edition

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Boutique Beds Behind Closed Doors

Location: Conwy, Wales

The Kinmel Arms isn't your average country pub. This is a top-notch enclave of fine food, real ale and boutique accommodation. Four self-contained alpine-style units offer beautiful bathrooms and rustic touches. Rooms don't come with cooked breakfast, but instead offer a fully stocked fridge for breakfast in bed.

Start planning your trip with *Lonely Planet Wales*, 5th edition

27

Dine in Secret Style

Location: Morinj, Montenegro

A crystalline stream flows around and under Konoba Čatovića Mlini, a rustic former mill that masquerades as a humble *konoba* (a simple, family-run establishment) but in reality is one of Montenegro's best restaurants. Watch the geese idle by as you sample the magical bread and olive oil, which appears unbidden at the table. Fish is the focus but traditional specialities from the heartland village of Njeguši are also offered.

Start planning your trip with *Lonely Planet Montenegro*, 2nd edition



28

Visit Lesser-Visited Idyllic Isles

Location: Ithaca, Greece

Tucked between Kefalonia and mainland Greece, the mountainous, mythical home of Homer's Odysseus isn't the easiest place to get to – and therein lies the appeal of this sleepy, unspoiled paradise rimmed by brilliant ultramarine water. Splurge on a room at the lovely Perantzada Hotel in the main harbour town, Vathi, or opt for more privacy in a rented apartment in Vathi or the smaller seaside village of Kioni. For activities, it's worth renting a dinghy to explore some of the beaches that can be accessed only by sea. Apart from satisfying seafood cravings in local fish taverns, there are some great walks around the lush green islands – don't miss the spectacular views from an abandoned monastery above the crumbling village of Exogi.

Start planning your trip with *Lonely Planet Greece*, 11th edition

29

Get a Rare Peek into Old Albania

Location: Shkodra, Albania

Hidden behind a block of shops and flats, the Marubi Permanent Photo Exhibition has fantastic photography by the Marubi 'dynasty', Albania's first and foremost photographers. The first-ever photograph taken in Albania is here, taken by Pjetër Marubi in 1858. The exhibition shows fascinating portraits, places and events. Not only is this a rare insight into what things looked like in old Albania, it is also a small collection of mighty fine photographs. To get here, go northeast of the clock tower to Rr Çlirimi; Rr Muhamet Gjollësja darts off to the right. The exhibition is on the left in an unmarked building; locals will help you find it if you ask.

Start planning your trip with *Lonely Planet Southeastern Europe*, 1st edition

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East London's Secret Stage

Location: London, England

Tucked down an alley in an unprepossessing corner of London, Wilton's is a glorious and truly atmospheric surprise: a Victorian music hall, little-changed from its heyday in the late 19th century. At the height of their popularity, there were roughly 300 music halls in London, often just makeshift backrooms of pubs, where the drinking masses were entertained with song, dance and variety acts. Wilton's, however, was a 'grand music hall' and provided a more glamorous and comfortable night out than most; an East End establishment rivalling its West End counterparts. It survived the threat of demolition in the 1960s and reopened as a theatre in 1997. Ongoing restoration work has faithfully re-created the hall in all its faded Victorian glory and it now hosts a cornucopia of events from classic theatre, comedy and cabaret, to pop acts and ping-pong competitions. If you can't make a performance, take a fascinating hour-long tour, soak up the crumbling ambience in the Mahogany Bar, or sneak upstairs for a cocktail in the Green Room.

For more about this area, see *Lonely Planet London*, 9th edition

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Breathe Some of Europe's Freshest Air

Location: Pripyatsky National Park, Belarus

One of the best-kept secrets in Belarus is the excellent Pripyatsky National Park, a relatively untouched swathe of marshes, swampland and floodplains known locally as 'the lungs of Europe'. Flora and fauna particular to wetlands are found here, including more than 800 plant species, some 50 mammal species and more than 200 species of birds. Excursions can take from one day to a week and can include extended fishing, hunting and boating expeditions deep into the marshlands. Cruises on the river are highly recommended.

From *Lonely Planet Eastern Europe*, 12th edition

32

Sip in Secret Cafés

Location: Prague, Czech Republic

Prague is well known for its grand cafés, but raise your sights: the city's most refined and atmospheric downtown cafés are all on the first floor, wondrously ignored by the visiting masses. The period interiors are stunning, the coffee unfailingly perfect. Try the Grand Café Orient above the Cubist Museum, decorated in such detailed sympathy even the cakes come garnished with an oddly angled wafer. Or the *fin de siècle* Café Louvre, perched over an entirely forgettable modern rival, was a favourite with Kafka and Einstein, and serves a fabled hot chocolate you can stand a spoon up in.

Start planning your trip with *Lonely Planet Prague & the Czech Republic*, 10th edition

David Else has written many Lonely Planet titles, including guides to England and Great Britain.

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33

Britain's Cinderella Countryside

Location: South Cotswolds, England

The Cotswolds is one of Britain's best-known countryside regions. With rolling hills, manicured farmland and cottages of honey-coloured stone, the North Cotswolds draw the limelight and the crowds. Meanwhile, the South Cotswolds are often overlooked. But this area is a hidden gem, with scenic villages and tranquil landscapes – and rarely a coach-tour in sight.

The South Cotswolds' authentic edge is reflected in the local stone – work-a-day grey not postcard-perfect yellow – while the roads see more muddy tractors and fewer pristine SUVs. And there's a slower pace of life, meaning ideal days for visitors revolve around long lunches in cosy pubs, followed perhaps by gentle strolls along little-trod paths through meadows or down into wooded valleys.

For a place to stay, historic inns offer comfortable rooms and classic English food. Favourites include the Old Bell Hotel and Smoking Dog pub in the ancient abbey town of Malmesbury, while pubs in nearby villages include the Vine Tree at Norton, and the Rattlebone at Sherston.

For more about this area, see *Lonely Planet England*, 7th edition

COTSWOLDS



34

Follow the Locals' Lead

Location: Bergen, Norway

Potetkjelleren ('Potato Cellar') is one of Bergen's finest restaurants, the sort of place that food critics rave about but attracts more locals than tourists. The dining area has a classy wine-cellar ambience, the service is faultless, and the menu (which changes monthly) is based around the freshest ingredients, Norwegian traditions and often subtly surprising flavour combinations. The wine list is also impeccable. Save this one for a special occasion and prepare to leave with a whole new respect for Norwegian cuisine.

Start planning your trip with *Lonely Planet Scandinavia*, 11th edition

35

Europe's Quietly Coveted Wine Region

Location: Lavaux, Switzerland

With pristine waters, cute local beaches and an impressive network of walking trails, the picturesque wine-growing region of Lavaux is one of Europe's best-kept secrets. Situated in French-speaking western Switzerland on the northern shores of Lake Geneva, Lavaux has all the beauty of the Italian lakes but a low-key sense of chic. Its microclimate gives it an almost Mediterranean feel in the summer months, when locals don swimmers, shades and sandals to revel in the best backyard in central Europe. To sample the region's best wines, don't miss the villages' many *caveaux* (wine cellars). The Caveau des vigneronns de Lutry, in the lakefront town of Lutry, is popular, and Rivaz's Lavaux Vinorama offers the region's largest selection of local wines for tasting and sale.

Start planning your trip with *Lonely Planet Switzerland*, 7th edition

VINEYARDS NEAR LAKE GENEVA

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36

Hidden Hot Springs

Location: Norðurfjörður, Iceland

Iceland's unofficial pastime is splashing around its surplus of geothermal water. There are 'hot-pots' everywhere – from downtown Reykjavik to the isolated peninsular tips of the east – and not only are they incredibly relaxing, it's a great way to meet the locals (and cure a mean hangover!). Everyone knows that Blue Lagoon is the big cheese – its steaming lagoon full of silica deposits sits conveniently close to the international airport – but there are hundreds of secreted spots hidden betwixt fjords and lava fields.

In the Westfjords, the far-flung region in Iceland's northwest, there's a preponderance of hot water that creeps up to the earth's surface from deep below. The region's best geothermal pool is also the area's farthest – Krossneslaug sits at the end of a dirt track just north of cargo station at Norðurfjörður. Follow the path down to the sea and you'll find the salty Arctic waves crashing against the soothing swimming tub. There's no better place to watch the mid-night sun in summer.

For more about this area, see *Lonely Planet Iceland*, 8th edition

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Eat & Drive in Italy's Secret Countryside

Location: Sybillini Mountains, Italy

This drive, which is also manageable by bike or horse, epitomises the best of Italy's secret countryside, combining great, local food and jaw-dropping scenery. Straddling Umbria and the lesser-known Le Marche region, the 28km trip between the village of Norcia on the Strada Provinciale 477 (or 'SP477') winds its way through the tranquil Sibillini Mountains, to the tiny town of Castelluccio.

In the spring and summer, the spectacular approach to the valley takes the breath away. The bright blue sky frames fields bursting with colour from thousands of bright red poppies and even brighter yellow rapeseed flowers, dotted with grazing sheep and horses – the quintessence of romantic country life. In the distance is the hilltop town of Castelluccio, famous for its world-class lentils grown in the valley and worth exploring for the traditional, rural feel of its cobbled walkways and rustic trattorias. Save your appetite for the drive back to Norcia, the original home of the *norcinerie*, or pork butchers, whose streets are littered with shops peddling and restaurants serving the town's pork and truffle products and local specialty of wild-boar sausage.

For more about this area, see *Lonely Planet Italy*, 11th edition

SHOPFRONT IN THE VILLAGE OF NORCIA





TAXI ON THE CHAMPS-ÉLYSÉES

38

Paris' Hidden Hotel

Location: Paris, France

'The Hidden' is one of the Champs-Élysées' best secrets: an ecofriendly boutique hotel, it's serene, stylish and reasonably spacious, and it even sports green credentials. The earth-coloured tones are the result of natural pigments (there's no paint), and all rooms feature handmade wooden furniture, stone basins for sinks, and linen curtains surrounding Coco-Mat beds. The Emotion rooms are among the most popular.

Start planning your trip with *Lonely Planet Paris*, 9th edition

39

Day-Trip to Discovery

Location: Beuron, Germany

Theatrically set against cave-riddled limestone cliffs, dappled with pine- and beechwoods that are burnished gold in autumn, and hugging the Danube's banks, the Upper Danube Valley Nature Reserve bombards you with rugged splendour. Stick to the autobahn however, and you'll be none the wiser. To explore the nature reserve, slip into a bicycle saddle or walking boots and hit the trail.

Start planning your trip with *Lonely Planet Germany*, 7th edition



WINERY IN KAKHETI PROVINCE

40

Tap into a Secret World of Wine

Location: Kakheti province, Georgia

In Georgia, where wine has been made for 8000 years, the grape has sacred significance, and the heart of wine-making here lies in the eastern province of Kakheti. Here, the Alazani River waters a fertile valley between two dramatic ranges of the Caucasus. At the northern end, a distinctive turret-shaped 50m spire belongs to 11th-century Alaverdi Cathedral, part of a monastery complex where wine has been made for 1500 years. After a hiatus during Communist rule, wine is once more being produced at Alaverdi. Come sip.

Start planning your trip with *Lonely Planet Georgia, Armenia & Azerbaijan*, 4th edition

41

Hidden in Plain Sight

Location: Zagreb, Croatia

Founded in spring 2010, Zagreb's Street Art Museum (www.muu.com.hr) doesn't have a fixed physical home, opening hours, curators or pompous openings – rather it was conceived as a series of projects. The first project was successfully completed when over 80 artists were given 450m of the wall that lines Branimirova Street and separates it from train tracks. The latest project beautified the otherwise drab Dugave and Siget neighbourhoods in Novi Zagreb with colourful street art.

Start planning your trip with *Lonely Planet Croatia*, 7th edition

A fan of wild food and even wilder places, **Kerry Christiani** has authored around a dozen Lonely Planet titles.

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42

Behind the Helmets

Location: Romagne-sous-Montfaucon, France

Hidden down a lane in Romagne-sous-Montfaucon is a draughty barn; pushing open its door reveals Northern France's most heart-rending WWI museum. Called Romagne '14-'18, the space is piled to the rafters with the private collection of Jean-Paul and Brigitte de Vries. For the past 38 years Jean-Paul has made combing Romagne's battlefields his life work.

Wire traps spider up the wall, an exploded typewriter rusts away in a reconstructed dugout, display cases brim with black-and-white snapshots, faded letters, dog tags. Brigitte stoops to a chest filled with the little shoes German soldiers, some amputees, made for poor French kids from their old army boots. "My favourite finds show human resourcefulness," says Jean-Paul, pointing out gasmask coffee filters and a mess tin that a certain G.W. Flint has inscribed with 'no good for shit'. "Who knows if he was talking about the food or the war in general," says Jean-Paul.

Outside, rain lashes a muddy field Jean-Paul names 'Russian Roulette' because of the live ammunition that is still churned up here on a daily basis, 100 years after the guns fell silent. Guided walks with Jean-Paul and Brigitte to the surrounding trenches, bunkers and battlefields unearth the tiny details of lives lost in the dirt and the devastation; the objects found tell the story of the humans behind the helmets.

For more about this area, see *Lonely Planet France*, 10th edition

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Ply Venice's Hidden Passages

Location: Venice, Italy

In Sala del Consiglio dei Dieci (Chamber of the Council of 10), festooned with happy cherubim and Veronese's optimistic *Triumph of Virtue over Vice*, head through the Palazzo Ducale's hidden passageway, which is disguised as a filing cabinet. Suddenly you're in the cramped, unadorned Council of 10 Secret Headquarters, adjoining a trial chamber lined with top-secret file drawers. Follow the path of the accused into the windowless interrogation room with a single rope, used until the 17th century to extract information. Next are the studded cells of the Piombi, Venice's notorious attic prison. In 1756 Casanova was condemned to five years' confinement here for corrupting nuns and spreading Freemasonry, but he escaped through the roof of his cell and walked confidently out through the front door, even pausing for a coffee on Piazza San Marco.

Start planning your trip with *Lonely Planet Venice & the Veneto*, 8th edition

44

Unspoiled Views of Nessie

Location: Cluanie, Scotland

Deep, dark and narrow, Loch Ness stretches for 23 miles between Inverness and Fort Augustus. While tour coaches pour down the west side of Loch Ness, the eastern shore is relatively peaceful. Here you will find Dores Inn, a beautifully restored country pub with a garden that even has its own Loch-Ness-Monster-spotting point. The menu specialises in quality Scottish produce.

Start planning your trip with *Lonely Planet Scotland's Highlands & Islands*, 2nd edition

URQUHART CASTLE ON THE SHORES OF LOCH NESS





The Hidden Hideout for 'Losties'

Location: Barcelona, Spain

If mention of 'the others', the 'Dharma Initiative' or 'the hatch' make you break out in a cold sweat, perhaps you need to make a pilgrimage to Bharma (www.bharma.com) and lay those *Lost* demons to rest. Located in Barcelona's Poblenou district, Bharma is a wildly configured bar that pays homage to the famously addictive American TV series. Its stone-lined interior is reminiscent of the bunker-like 'hatch', save for the fragment of plane wreck imbedded in one wall (and emblazoned with the Oceanic Air logo). You'll find a slew of other relics scattered about, including a re-created Virgin Mary statue that Eko used to smuggle heroin out of Nigeria (season 2, episode 10, in case you're curious). Step into the bathroom and you'll hear those disconcerting jungle sounds, erupting when something bad was about to happen, including the eerie racket of 'the smoke monster' that gobbled up many a helpless victim on the show. For refreshment, there is of course Bharma Initiative beer, complete with the Dharma logo – though with some slight linguistic rearranging.

For more about this area, see *Lonely Planet Spain*, 9th edition

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For In-the-Know Drinkers

Location: Dublin, Ireland

Want to get off the beaten path in Dublin? Head to Glasnevin, not far from Dublin city centre, and treat yourself to a sublime pint of Guinness at Kavanagh's. This cracking little establishment is set next to the old gates of Glasnevin Cemetery. The Gravediggers' sobriquet came about due to 19th-century funeral workers stopping off here for a pint after a hard day burying people. Walking into the pub via the left-hand door is literally stepping back in time; local lore has it that the original owner decreed that all subsequent owners not change the décor. It is an other-worldly experience.

Start planning your trip with *Lonely Planet Ireland's Best Trips*, 1st edition

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Escape to Solitude

Location: The Lakeland, Finland

Enticing Linnansaari and Kolovesi, two primarily water-based national parks in the Savonlinna area, offer fabulous lakescapes dotted with islands, all best explored by hiring a canoe or rowing boat. Several outfitters offer these services, and free camping spots dot the lakes' shores. This is perhaps the best part of the Lakeland to really get up close and personal with the region's natural beauty. It's also home to the endangered freshwater Saimaa ringed seal, of which only around 300 remain.

Start planning your trip with *Lonely Planet Finland*, 7th edition

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48

The Secret Wellness Tradition

Location: Sigulda, Latvia

Cast modesty aside and indulge in Latvia's most Latvian tradition – the pirts, a hot birch sauna. A traditional pirts is run by a sauna master who cares for her attendees while performing choreographed branch beatings that feel almost shamanistic in nature. Yes, you read that correctly – while lying down in your birthday suit, the sauna master swishes branches in the air to raise the humidity then lightly beats a variety of wildflowers and branches over your back and chest while you rest. Branch-beating sessions last around 15 minutes before one exits the sauna to jump in a nearby body of water (lake, pond or sea). The aroma of the sauna is also very important – sauna masters take great care to create a melange of herbs and spices to accent the air.

All traditional saunas are in the countryside where the tradition began. While most authentic pirts are situated on private property, it is possible to organise a three-hour session through Hotel Sigulda smack in the centre of the leisure town. The owners will take you to the outskirts of the village to their purpose-built lodge.

For more about this area, see *Lonely Planet Estonia, Latvia & Lithuania*, 6th edition

GUAJA NATIONAL PARK, SIGULDA



Karla Zimmerman is the co-author of Lonely Planet's new Amsterdam guide and a *jenever* devotee.

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49

The Secret Sailors' Café

Location: Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Wandering the cobbled streets in Amsterdam's medieval centre you're bound to come across the round, brick Schreierstoren (Weeping Tower) hulking over the waterfront. The pillar's tale is well known: built around 1480, it's where the Dutch East India Company's sailors departed on voyages as their wives cried uncontrollably. But what's often overlooked is the centuries-old pub inside. It's called the VOC Café (VOC being the Dutch acronym for the East India Company), and it still wafts an ancient mariner vibe. Step over creaky wood floors to the bar and order a *jenever* (Dutch gin) made from the same earthy recipe as the one VOC sailors drank. Sip it inside, where candle-filled sconces send a flickering light over the timbered tables. Or swill it outside on the terrace, where boats drift by on the canal below. Either way, you'll be following in the footsteps of generations of seafarers who stoked their Dutch courage here – including one Henry Hudson, who presumably hoisted a gin or two before setting sail to explore the New World in 1609 (a plaque near the entrance marks the spot).

For more about this area, see *Lonely Planet Amsterdam, 9th edition*

BOAT RIDE ALONG PRINSENGRACHT, AMSTERDAM





BATTLE ABBEY

50

Scour Seldom-Visited Battle Sites

Location: Battle, England

The Battle of Hastings may be well known as the bloody standoff in 1066 that inspired the Bayeux tapestry, but few make the journey to see where it happened. Take a spin around the evocative fields where the arrows flew and complete your visit with shopping in the village's deliciously quaint streets. Don't miss out on rambling around the glorious Sussex countryside; the dramatic white cliffs of Beachy Head are one of England's most iconic sights and are less than an hour's drive from Battle.

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