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PROJECT FOUNDERS

Ready for a fresh start abroad?

Listen, we get it. The world is getting expensive, the crowds are thicker, and the global hum is reaching a fever pitch. But the solution isn't to retreat to the safety of your sofa. It's to move with more intent. Back in the day, we didn't have apps to tell us where the magic was; we had to find the spots that actually gave a damn about the history, the craft, and the community.

Don't let a few surcharges or logistical headaches keep you grounded. Whether you're white-knuckling a cliff jump in Negril or savoring a high-altitude brew in the Blue Mountains, you're there for the one thing your living room can't provide: perspective. The world is loud, messy, and staggeringly beautiful, but it only reveals itself to those who show up. The map is still wide open. Pack the bag, pay the fare, and just go. Your future self will thank you.

Warmly,

Jezzres & Natalia

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Contents

early summer 2026 • volume 1 issue 3

cover story

- 30 The Grand Tour**
From Paris to Venice, for the culture vultures

features

- 08 Sonic Equinox 2026**
Something from every continent!
- 14 Romance in Budapest**
One weekend to make the magic happen
- 20 The Art of the Absolute Pivot**
A chat with Kimberly Anne of Expat on a Budget
- 40 Fear of Flying!**
Mike Ward takes to the skies...
- 43 Photo Essay: Split, Croatia**
Captured through the lenses of 7 photographers
- 50 Big In Japan**
Are "Free" Japanese houses worth it?
- 54 Jamaica**
The antidote to the ordinary

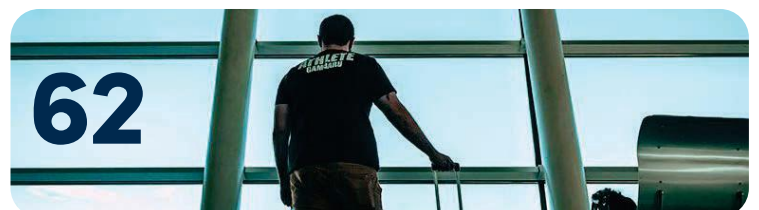
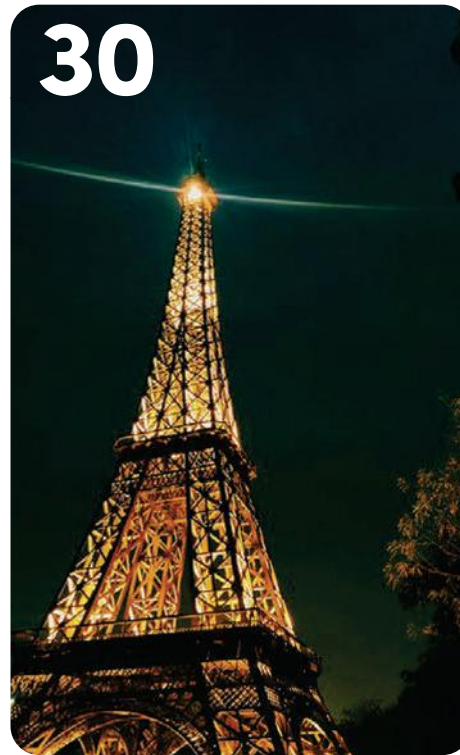
departments

- 09 Groove Check-In**
Inspiring tips for passionate travelers!
- 10 A Scanner Darkly**
Are you ready for EES and ETIAS?
- 11 Book Reviews**
Books about living the digital nomad lifestyle
- 60 Events & Tips**
Some groovy things are going on yo!
- 62 Last Word**
The prices of airfare is going up, go anyways!

DO YOU HAVE A STORY WORTH SHARING?

We'd love to hear it, wherever you landed...

[SHARE YOUR STORY NOW](#)



Rockin' the vibes in Spain.
By Tanhauser Vázquez R.

Sonic Equinox 2026

If your passport isn't already screaming for mercy, these are the sonic coordinates worth the jet lag.

PRIMAVERA SOUND, SPAIN (MAY 28 – JUNE 1) is the ultimate industrial-chic pilgrimage. Held at the brutalist Parc del Fòrum, Primavera Sound avoids the typical “mud and tents” clichés, delivering a lineup so consistently ahead of the curve it makes every other festival feel like a heritage act.

MTWARA JAZZ, TANZANIA (JUNE 12 – 14) is where the deep, rhythmic pulse of East Africa meets the Indian Ocean breeze. Mtwara Jazz isn't about polite clapping in theaters; it's a visceral, open-air collision of traditional Swahili sounds and modern improvisational grit that breathes life into the coastal heat.

FUJI ROCK, JAPAN (JUNE 26 – 28) is the cleanest descent into madness you'll ever experience. Tucked into the Naeba Ski Resort, Fuji Rock offers a mountain-

shaking mix of global indie heavyweights and experimental Japanese electronica, all served up in a lush, misty forest setting that's actually respected by the crowd.

DARK MOFO, AUSTRALIA (JUNE 10 – 22) is the Southern

Hemisphere's middle finger to the solstice. Hosted in Tasmania by the Museum of Old and New Art, Dark Mofo is a ritualistic, winter-dark celebration of the macabre, featuring extreme metal, industrial drones, and fire-lit feasts that feel like a pagan rave at the edge of the world.

INTI RAYMI, PERU (JUNE 24) is the ancient heartbeat of the Andes hitting a modern crescendo in Cusco. While rooted in Inca tradition, the energy of Inti Raymi is a massive, city-wide explosion of indigenous music, street theater, and hypnotic percussion that makes standard western festivals look like a school play.

GOVERNORS BALL, USA (JUNE 5 – 7) is New York City's relentless, high-energy answer to the West Coast's desert vibes. Set on Randall's Island, Governors Ball captures the city's frantic aesthetic, packing three days with the loudest names in hip-hop and garage rock against the backdrop of the Manhattan skyline.

Groove Check-in!

Inspiring tips for passionate travelers!



WATCH IT: *I Love Boosters*. Boots Riley returns with a heist comedy that actually has teeth. Premiering this June, *I Love Boosters* follows a crew of professional shoplifters in a sharp, satirical takedown of wealth redistribution. It's the perfect cinematic antidote to glossy blockbusters—gritty, hilarious, and unapologetically subversive. If you need a visual reset that challenges the status quo while keeping you hooked, this is the essential June watch. Trade the algorithm for some actual revolutionary spirit and catch it on the big screen. ► [Shop on Amazon](#)



WEAR IT: The Unstructured Linen Blazer. Forget the stiff, corporate tailoring of the past; the mid-2026 silhouette is all about effortless, breathable architecture. A single-breasted, unstructured linen blazer—like the heritage-cut options from **Uniqlo** or the rugged, garment-dyed versions from **Barena**—is the ultimate travel chameleon. It's light enough to survive a humid afternoon in a Roman piazza but sharp enough to grant you instant entry into a Parisian jazz club. The beauty lies in the wrinkles; linen is meant to look lived-in, making it the only formal wear that actually improves after being shoved into a rucksack for a six-hour rail haul. Pair it with a simple white tee and worn-in denim to master that restless, over-educated wanderer aesthetic without breaking a sweat.

Photo: Shutterstock



EAT IT: The "Swicy" Renaissance. The flavor profile for the 2026 solstice is a high-speed collision of extremes. We're talking about a sweet-and-spicy revolution hitting street corners from Malaga to Manhattan. Think charred pineapple spiced with habanero or crispy shawarma topped with tart pomegranate seeds. It's all about sensory friction and fermented umami.

We're also seeing a pivot toward high-function, gut-health proteins that deliver probiotic hits without sacrificing the gourmet edge. Don't just eat for fuel; eat for the thrill of the burn.

SHARE IT: Artivism and Open Streets. Community in 2026 isn't a passive scroll; it's a participatory riot. The "Artivism" movement is peaking this June, with events like New York's **Summer for the City** turning public spaces into immersive political theaters. We aren't just looking at art; we're being pulled into collective storytelling to dismantle social exclusion. Step into the fray—document the impromptu dance commissions or poetry slams in former railway stations. It's about the radical act of showing up in a digital-heavy age.



Photo by Shelby Alayne Photography (@shelbyalaynephotos) via Lincoln Center (@lincolncenter) and Jazz at Lincoln Center (@jazzdotorg)



HEAR IT: Iceage – For Love of Grace & the Hereafter.

Forget the jagged post-punk of their youth; the Danish heavyweights have returned with a sprawling, gothic-noir masterpiece.

Dropping just in time for the June heat, this record trades adolescent friction for a gravelly, orchestral soul that feels like a high-speed night drive through the Berlin outskirts. It's cinematic, beautifully frayed, and essential for those solitary, cross-border train rides. Spin it loud enough to drown out the transit noise and let the grit settle in. ► [Shop on Amazon](#)



A Scanner, Darkly...

Welcome to the end of the analog era—where your biometric data is now the only passport that truly matters.

By DALE M^CCREA

The European travel landscape is undergoing its most significant tectonic shift in decades, and if you're planning to cross borders in 2026, the era of "just showing up" with a passport is officially dead. The centerpiece of this transition is the full implementation of the Entry/Exit System (EES) and the subsequent ETIAS authorization, moving the Schengen Area away from manual ink stamps toward a centralized biometric dragnet. For the non-EU traveler, this means your first point of entry will now involve a mandatory digital enrollment where facial images and fingerprints are captured and stored for three years. This isn't just about security; it's a logistical bottleneck designed to automate the tracking of the 90-day short-stay rule, making overstaying a mathematical certainty for the system to catch.

Simultaneously, the ETIAS (European Travel

Information and Authorisation System) becomes the new mandatory digital handshake for visa-exempt nationals. You'll need to clear this online screening at least 96 hours before heading to the airport, providing personal data and travel history in exchange for a three-year permit tied to your passport. While the fee remains modest, the margin for error is razor-thin; even minor clerical discrepancies between your application and your travel documents can trigger an automatic boarding denial. Travelers should also be hyper-aware of the shifting regional nuances, such as the UK's parallel ETA rollout and the specific digital transition periods in transport hubs like France and Germany. Pre-empting these hurdles by digitizing your documentation and verifying your ETIAS status well in advance is no longer optional—it is the only way to maintain the fluid, borderless spirit of the original Grand Tour in a high-surveillance age.

BOOK REVIEWS

Chosen and reviewed by JOE BODIA



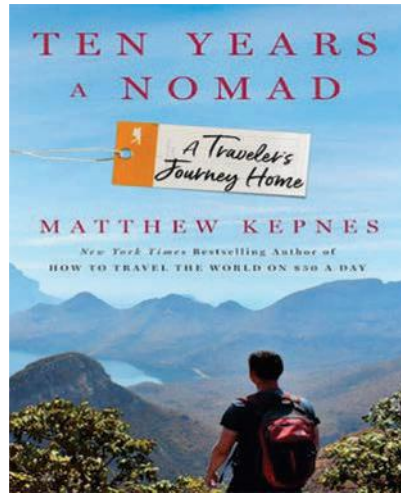
THE DIGITAL NOMAD HANDBOOK

Lonely Planet

Though *The Digital Nomad Handbook* hit shelves six years ago, it remains a surprisingly sturdy manual in an era where “remote work” has shifted from radical to routine. As someone who has spent significant chapters of my life on the road, I initially dismissed it as entry-level fodder for the uninitiated. I was wrong.

Beyond the basics, I unearthed a cache of digital tools and apps I’d either forgotten or never encountered—genuine gems for the long-term traveler. The real value, however, lies in the book’s second half. The 45-page destination guide is not just fluff; it’s a focused breakdown of global hubs that actually function as workplaces, not just tourist traps.

While the landscape of remote work has evolved rapidly, the foundational advice remains sound. Whether you are contemplating your first exit from the nine-to-five or are a seasoned traveler looking to sharpen your logistics, this guide does offer a grounded, necessary framework.



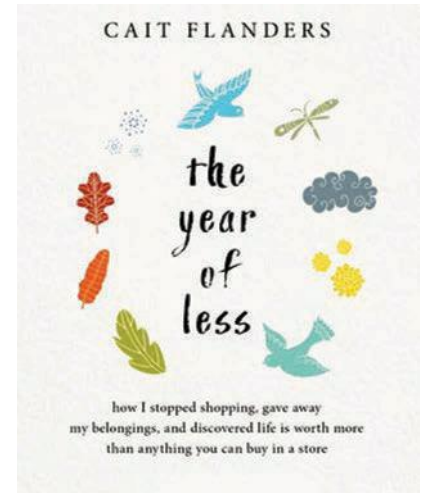
TEN YEARS A NOMAD

Matthew Kepnes

Matthew Kepnes is best known for teaching the masses how to travel on a shoestring, but *Ten Years a Nomad* is something else entirely: a deep autopsy of the travel bug. Moving beyond the “how-to” mechanics of budget tourism, Kepnes offers a memoir that is as introspective as it is adventurous.

He doesn’t shy away from the darker undercurrents of the lifestyle. He writes candidly about the persistent loneliness, the ephemeral nature of hostel-born friendships, and the heartache that comes with constantly saying goodbye. It is a refreshing antidote to the influencer-curated image of the “glamorous nomad.”

Kepnes charts his evolution from a shy, routine-bound college grad to a seasoned wanderer, ultimately arriving at a crucial realization: adventure isn’t merely a coordinate on a map. By the time he reconciles with the “ordinary,” the reader understands that real nomadism isn’t about running away from life, but learning how to finally inhabit it.



THE YEAR OF LESS

Cait Flanders

The Year of Less is an essential manual for anyone who has ever tried to purchase their way out of unhappiness. Framed around a year-long shopping ban, Cait Flanders chronicles a radical experiment in stripping away the excess that clutters our lives and, by extension, our identities. This is not a dry, clinical manifesto on minimalism; it is a raw, often uncomfortable exploration of the emotional crutches we use to navigate life’s pressures.

Flanders is vulnerable and refreshingly candid, detailing how she traded retail therapy for true self-awareness. Her journey serves as a potent reminder that we often consume to fill voids that no material good can ever touch. Whether you are struggling with burnout or simply the passive accumulation of a cluttered existence, Flanders offers a road map for building a deliberate, intentional life. It is an empowering, honest read that demands you interrogate exactly why you are holding on to what you have.



WHAT'S IN MY BAG

Photo By OTT MAIDRE

In our digital age, everyone is a photographer. Yet, capturing the essence of a destination requires more than a keen eye; it demands an ethical compass...

While local laws often permit photography in public spaces, being “legally allowed” to shoot does not grant a moral mandate to do so. There is a vital distinction between our rights and professional etiquette.

When photographing strangers, context is paramount. While public landmarks are generally fair game, private spaces—or situations involving vulnerable communities—require profound caution. We must resist the “human zoo” mentality, where

tourism risks commodifying the lives of others for a visual souvenir. If you find yourself in remote or impoverished regions, reflect on the impact of your lens. Are you exploiting a moment, or engaging in a human dialogue?

Simple gestures often travel further than a telephoto lens. A smile, a nod, or an introduction can transform a transactional shot into a meaningful connection. If a subject shows hesitation, respect it—walk away. The most evocative images are rarely those captured by force, but those granted by consent.

Ultimately, photography should not be an act of extraction. Whether you are using a discreet camera to capture a candid scene or a long lens to maintain distance, remember that these images represent real lives. Treat your subjects with the dignity you would expect in your own home. Before hitting the shutter, ask yourself: are you documenting a culture, or merely consuming it? Responsible photography is about honoring the human dignity within the frame. Shoot wisely...

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PHOTO BY BENCE SZEMEREY

TEXT BY CHRIS WALKER

ROMANCE IN BUDAPEST

Budapest has finally kicked the fascists to the curb, and the city's energy is electric again. It is the ultimate, vibrant playground for your next epic, spontaneous, and romantic escape...



The Founder's Quarters at Brody House. The Bohem Art Hotel's Superior Triple puts you in the art, and the Steak platter for 2 people at Stex Ház delivers!

You've got a weekend, you've got some cash, and your girl—or the girl you're trying to impress—doesn't have plans. Stop sitting on your couch. Seriously, there is only one move you need to make right now: Budapest.

Here's the deal: The old regime that had the city on lockdown is officially in the trashbin of history. The vibe in Hungary right now is electric. It's open, it's hungry for the world, and it's the most underrated spot in Europe. It's affordable, it's beautiful, and it's basically the cheat code for a legendary romantic trip. It's close to everywhere, and honestly, if you can't make a weekend in Budapest work, that's on you, mate.

Where to Set the Vibe

If you want to look like you know what you're doing (and trust me, you do), book in the **5th District**. Everything that matters—the architecture, the shopping, the romantic spots—is right there.

For the cool factor, you want **Brody House** (1088 Budapest, Bródy Sándor utca 10). It's boutique, it's creative, and the staff will tell you exactly where the best local spots are. If you want to impress her with something more modern and artsy, check out the **Bohem Art Hotel** (1056 Budapest, Molnár utca 35)—solid breakfast, great

Budapest's crown jewel. Seeing this in person is the perfect reminder of why you travel—to see the world at its most epic. by Jeffree Benet



service. If you're just there to drop your bags and get out into the city, **Bauhaus Astoria Apartman** has private rooms that'll save you cash for the fun stuff.

Friday: Dive Into the Chaos

Check in, drop your bags, and get out. You're hungry, right? If you want a solid steak and a chill vibe, hit **Stex Ház** (1085 Budapest, József körút 55–57). If you want to eat like a local without dropping a fortune, get to **Frici Papa Kifőzdéje** (1077 Budapest, Király utca 55). It's always packed for a reason (Ghoulash!).

Once you're fed, head to the **7th District**. This is where the nightlife lives. You have to start at **Szimpla Kert**. It's the original

ruin pub, and the aesthetic is wild—you'll be talking about this place for years. After that, wander over to **Instant** if you want to get weird, or if you're trying to actually talk and connect, hit **Csendes**. You can literally write your love notes on the wall there. Total pro move.

Sat.: The "I'm Cultured" Tour

Start the morning at **New York Café** in the Boscolo Budapest Hotel. Yeah, it's a bit touristy, but the place looks like a palace. It sets the tone immediately.

From there, jump on the tram to **Margitsziget** (Margaret Island) for a walk, or hop on the Millennium Line (Line 1)—the oldest metro line in Europe—

Hungary is entering an electric new era. With a fresh spirit of hope in the air, there has never been a more exciting time to experience the city's magic. Budapest is buzzing with youthful energy—wide open, authentic, and ready for your next legendary, spontaneous, and romantic escape.

to Hero's Square. You'll see the **Museum of Fine Art** and the castle in the city park. It's serious old-school cool.

Don't do a heavy lunch. Hit the **Great Market Hall** (1093 Budapest, Vármház körút 1-3) before 2 p.m. Walk the bazaar, grab some handmade souvenirs, and eat some street food on the second floor.

After that, cross the Liberty Bridge to **Gellert Hill**. There's a cave church there that is low-key beautiful. Climb to the top for the sunset—the view of the city lighting up is the moment she's going to remember. While the Gellert baths are closed for renovations until 2028, head to the **Rudas baths** to soak it all out.

For dinner, if you want to go all out, **Onyx** is a Michelin-star spot, but if that's too intense, **Drop Shop** has incredible wine and light bites.

Sunday: The Victory Lap

Sunday morning is not the most bustling time in Budapest, but coffee shops



abound. When you finish, wander across the **Chain Bridge** and walk to the **Fisherman's Bastion**. It's the perfect backdrop for photos. If you have a later flight, the perfect end is a

walking tour of the Buda Castle District. And for that final lunch? Hit **Baltazár Grill** (1014 Budapest, Országház utca 31). It's right in the heart of the Castle District with a vibe that's trendy, laid-back, and serves some of the best grilled meats in the city. It's the perfect, high-quality spot to cap off the weekend before you have to head out.

The flight home is going to suck, but you'll have pulled off a weekend that makes you look like a legend. Get out there while the city is peaking.

— Chris Walker is a 20-year-old travel addict who believes life is too short for a boring weekend. When he isn't scouting out Europe's hidden gems on a budget, he's documenting the chaotic beauty of travel for the next generation. He's all about finding the spot, skipping the tourist traps, and keeping it real.

Walking on the Szechenyi Chain Bridge in Budapest at night is a soulfully satisfying experience.
by Marina Chueshkova



THE ART OF THE ABSOLUTE PIVOT

What happens when an over-thinker trades a long California career for a life abroad? For KIMBERLY ANNE, the answer was found in the grit of starting over. This candid interview explores her "superpower" for navigating change and the liberation of letting go. Whether you're researching or ready to leap, Kimberly's journey offers a guide for reframing your future...



You've done everything (media, fiction writing, acupuncture). It's a weirdly specific resume. How does having that "healer" and "storyteller" background change the way you talk people off the ledge when they're spiraling about moving abroad?

It's funny that you said it's a weirdly specific resume, because I think it's so chaotic, eclectic, and bizarre! But I love that you're looking at it through a different lens. In terms of "talking people off the ledge," it really does help having the healer and storyteller background—and I've recently added spirituality to the mix.

But before all of those earned and learned skills (and this is personal), due to past trauma, I learned very early to be a mediator. I was the family mediator. I was the one who would calm people down when they were having histrionic meltdowns and alcoholic rages, which happened frequently. It's a chicken-and-egg thing: I don't know if I became a healer and a storyteller because of my traumatic childhood, or if becoming those things is what ultimately healed me.

I would say my main superpower is being a mediator and being able to step outside. It's two things:

EMPATHY: That's where the healer part

comes in. If somebody is freaking out about moving abroad, I can calm them down by using empathy, which I have in spades.

REFRAMING: I use my storytelling skills to frame the future for them. I've been in therapy for over 25 years, so I've learned how to reframe effectively.

All of my skills combine to facilitate what I'm moving into now, which is consulting to help people move abroad.

You're open about not being the "spontaneous type," but then you moved to Portugal at 56 without a safety net. I'm the same way. I'll overthink a lunch menu for twenty minutes. What's the secret to getting out of that "everything must be perfect" mindset so you actually get on the plane?

I love that you're the same way about being non-spontaneous but still doing what some would deem "crazy" things. It's an interesting dichotomy.

I learned to let go of perfection when I published my first book about 12 years ago. The way I did that was by adopting a pen name; I figured if I published in my own name, I would be held to this perfection standard by my peers. I didn't want that. Learning to let go of perfec-

**// Change happens
when the pain of
staying the same is
greater than the pain
of change. I realized
I could live anywhere,
and that changed
everything...**

tionism then changed everything for me.

Part of this is that I'm an adventurer. I've always said that if one thing doesn't work out—moving to Portugal, for example—I can pivot. It's important to note that moving to Portugal in 2022 was the first time I actually moved abroad. I lived in California until I moved to Europe. I did travel in a van throughout the United States for a year before I moved, and while that counts as adventure, it wasn't moving to a different country. However, moving abroad was my lifelong dream. The driving factor for me was the Tony Robbins quote I constantly use: *"Change happens when the pain of staying the same is greater than the pain of change."*

I love that you don't sugarcoat this stuff. If you had to skip the "it's a dream come true" travel brochure talk for a minute, what's the one gritty, honest truth about

moving abroad that people need to hear but never do?

There are many things. I talk about these in [my YouTube videos](#), but the big one that came up for me was loneliness. I never felt truly lonely until I moved into the van for a year and didn't have Wi-Fi for the first several months. That's when I learned true loneliness, and it actually helped.

It set me up for my move to Portugal. I moved here without knowing anybody, without a support group, and without even knowing how to find a supermarket. I was taking care of my sick and dying dog. It was a lot! I didn't even have a permanent place to live for the first several months. After the initial adrenaline rush, I hit a series of unfortunate incidents four months in. I had to learn how to be completely self-sufficient. I thought I already knew how—I'd lived alone for 20 years—but that period really tested me. It was rough.

I know I'd idealized it and had the fantasy version. I think we need that, because if I hadn't, I probably would have never done it. If somebody goes in knowing only the hardest parts, it's harder to take that leap. I always tell people to focus on the positive because that is what allows you to move forward. Life happens no matter where you are; there are going to be hard parts and despair whether you stay

home or move abroad. Wouldn't you rather have those dark, gritty moments living abroad in a new country? *I would!*

So, the honest truth is the logistics—like not being able to find laundry detergent—learning a new culture that is exciting but terrifying, and the isolation you feel before you finally form a community.

The vibe in Portugal is wild right now, isn't it? Seems like everyone (Americans, Russians, Ukrainians) we're all the new refugee class. What's it actually like on the ground? Is it getting crowded, or are people generally just getting along?

This is a really interesting topic. The biggest issue in Portugal is that it used to be extremely inexpensive—the most inexpensive country in Western Europe. It still is to some extent, but prices have risen exponentially, especially in housing. A bunch of wealthy Americans have definitely bought up a lot of the housing, driving up the prices. Mansions that were €50,000 or €100,000 a few years ago are now worth several million. There's a definite pushback.

It's not just Americans; plenty of people from other countries invest here without necessarily giving back. They turn houses into Airbnbs, which drives up rent. The Portuguese themselves are also trying to

The Research Loop: Escaping the Trap

Research is vital for the logistics of a move, but it easily becomes a fancy way of procrastinating because you are terrified.

I researched Costa Rica for ten years before moving to Portugal; eventually, you have to stop reading forums and jump. Here is how to break the cycle and get on the plane:

Establish a Deadline: Set a specific goal, such as moving in three years. If you are still procrastinating in year four, you have overstayed your goal and must force the transition.

Identify Vital Info: Focus only on the essential “must-haves,” such as visa qualifications, weather, healthcare accessibility, and language requirements.

The Daydreaming Phase: Use visualization to imagine yourself in the new location. If you can see yourself there, you can reverse-engineer the steps to make it happen.

Limit Forum Exposure: Avoid reading excessive negative feedback on forums if you know the information will paralyze your decision-making.

Accept the Unknown: No matter how much you research, you will not truly know a place until you have lived there for a full year and developed a community.



get ahead. My landlord, for example, owns four apartments. She doesn't overcharge, but she will only rent to Americans because she views them as a safer bet. That limits available housing for the Portuguese. Lisbon is now one of the most expensive cities in Europe, and that affects how things feel on the ground.

In the three and a half years I've been here, I have seen a change in how I'm perceived. As soon as somebody hears me speaking English now, they might scoff or give me a dirty look. They're not overtly aggressive, but there is more pushback than when I arrived. The crowds are mostly tourists. People are traveling much more since COVID ended.

I was at a convention recently where someone said they'd never move to Porto because it's too crowded. I was in Rome at the time thinking, "You think Porto is crowded?" But in the summers, it is quite busy. Regarding the other immigrants and refugees, everyone is generally kind. I have Ukrainian friends, and we gel because we have that "stranger in a strange land" phenomenon in common.

Back in my Prague days, being American was a totally different social card. Now? It's not always a warm welcome. How do you handle that? What's your advice for expats who find themselves on the receiving end of someone's anger over US politics?

I definitely feel the shift of not being as welcome as an American. I don't know the language well enough to be fluent, which contributes to the distance. I have a close friend who is American but has lived here for 20 years; everyone thinks she's Portuguese because her language skills are flawless, and she has a significantly different experience.

When I get pushback, I mostly disengage. I'll say, "I don't discuss politics," or "Why do you think I left?" I'm often self-deprecating. When people ask where I'm from, I usually say, "I'm an American, please don't hold that against me." That usually gets a warmer reception because I'm acknowl-

edging the bad reputation Americans can have. I'll even admit that a lot of us are jerks or "unconscious" when we travel.

Due to my mediator superpower, I can listen to someone else's opinion even if it differs from mine. I don't argue or try to change their mind; I just listen and walk away. Most people who pass judgment haven't lived in the U.S., so they don't really understand the nuance, and honestly, even we don't always know what's going on.

I've been out of the States so long that people usually start a conversation with me in the local language, which I take as a win. But for someone who just landed, do you have any real-world tips for actually "blending in"?

This is a hard one because I don't feel like I've blended in! I think the most important thing is curiosity. I engage with my Portuguese friends differently than I do with my American or Australian friends. I try to focus on the culture and geography of Portugal.

I ask locals where I should go hiking, what their favorite cities are, and why. I ask about the time of the dictatorship under Salazar; Portugal was under that regime until 1974. Asking how they feel about the current political climate shows genuine interest. Keeping conversations local—asking for restaurant or beach recommendations—

helps you feel less like a tourist. I make a conscious effort not to talk about America. I'm not interested in it, and that has helped me be accepted, even if I don't fully blend in.

I'm torn on the "home base" vs. "nomad" thing. In your experience, does planting roots right away actually make the transition easier, or is it better to try a few spots first?

I am also torn. What I tell people is: do not buy property right away. If you don't know for sure where you want to land, move around and try different things.

I have a friend in the Algarve who made one scouting trip and then bought a house that needed full renovation on a farm. She went all in her late 50s, and it worked out for her. People who know exactly what they want will have a better outcome with that "all-in" approach.

I am more of a "sticker." I have stayed in almost every apartment I've ever lived in for years, but I never went in planning to stay that long. I always thought it was temporary, but then it grew on me. When I talk to clients, I tell them to look at the big map and then drill down:

1. *The Country: (Spain, Thailand, etc.)*
2. *The Terrain: (City, beach, forest, or mountains.)* >> (Con't on page 28)



PHOTO BY CAIO SOARES
QUESTIONS BY JEFFREE BENET



Breathtaking view of Porto's
illuminated riverfront at twilight
from Vila Nova de Gaia.

3. *The Weather: In Portugal, if you want warmth year-round, you have to be in the south. There's no other option.*

When I moved, I had never been to Portugal. I knew I wanted a city because I didn't want to be isolated. I researched the four largest cities and decided that wherever I found the perfect apartment would be where I lived. I had a list of "must-haves," including a three-bedroom, two-bath, within a 25-minute walk to downtown.

I found a place in Porto through a friend of a friend while I was in Lisbon. I took the train up immediately. The apartment was mid-renovation and looked like a crime scene—torn down to the studs. The landlady told me I had to decide right then because there was a waiting list. I trusted my intuition and said yes.

I didn't have anywhere to live for three months while it was being finished, so I traveled to all the other places I'd con-

sidered. If I had gone to Braga first, I might be living there now. But I ended up in Porto, fell in love with the community, and now I can't leave—even though I absolutely hate the winters here! No matter how much research you do, you won't know if a place is right until you live through a full year there.

You've seen it all: the success stories and the ones that end in disaster. What does a bad expatriation experience look like?

I don't necessarily see "disasters." I see people finding out what they don't want. I have a friend who tried living in seven different countries in three years and didn't like any of them. She's back in Colorado now. I wouldn't deem that a disaster; I'd deem it a learning experience.

For whatever reason, I don't look at any place as my "forever place." Even though I stayed in California until I was 56, I never felt rooted. I've never owned a home, so I've always felt a bit transitory. That's very different from my mother, who still lives in the house I grew up in. When a move "fails," it's usually because an expectation or need is unmet. Some people leave Portugal because they can't get the healthcare they need. My experience has been the opposite—the healthcare here has been phenomenal. But the number one reason people move back is loneliness.



They didn't find their community. My friend who tried seven countries missed her comforts, speaking English, and feeling like she belonged.

I met Nora Dunn, the "professional hobo," years ago. She traveled full-time for twelve years before having an existential crisis where she realized she didn't belong anywhere. We are "other"; we are not fully integrated. She moved back to Toronto but eventually went back to traveling with a home base. In the end, we have to learn how to make peace with what we have.

Is there anything about the States that you actually find yourself missing?

I think I'm an enigma here. I don't miss the United States. I often say the only thing I miss is Trader Joe's (and no, Aldi is not the same!). I miss my best friend who lives in Oakland. I talk to him every day and I miss seeing him every weekend. But other than that, I don't miss the convenience, the "go-go-go" mentality, or the driving. If it weren't for my mother, I would never go back to the US again. My sister has already decided she will never return.

I hope people can glean some information from my "talker" nature! Remember, you've only got one life—don't look back at it with regrets... ► <https://linktr.ee/abroadonabudget>

Shedding Anchors: A Minimalist's Protocol

Minimizing and discarding was the most liberating part of my journey. I was an organized hoarder, and it took a year of purging to reach the point where everything I own fits into my apartment in Porto. If you are struggling to let go of physical anchors, here is the protocol for walking away:

The Scanner Method: Buy a scanner for your physical archives. Scan your ancestral photos and documents, then keep only a handful of the most significant originals.

The Cringe Test: Review your old journals. If reading them is a "huge cringe moment" and you don't want to see them again, dispose of them immediately.

The Staged Purge: Use a small storage unit as a transition phase. Go back annually with an empty suitcase, retrieve what matters, and downsize the unit until it is completely empty.

The Neutrality Rule: Don't feel obligated to keep furniture just because you've seen it for ten years. Changing your style in a new country can provide comfort through freshness rather than familiarity.

Memories Over Things: Adopt the philosophy that it is more important to form memories than to have "stuff". Minimizing allows you to focus on the adventure of the new culture rather than the maintenance of the old.

GROOVEESCAPE

The Grand Tour

BY JEFFREE BENET

They call it the City of Light, but it's really the city of ignition. When you're staring up at this iron icon, you realize one thing: it all starts here.
by Amrita Tiwari

In this installment of GrooveEscape, we're feeding the culture vultures a curated carcass of the European continent. We're retracing the skeletal remains of the Grand Tour—that original, eighteenth-century blueprint for the aristocratic gap year, back when the wealthy elite traded their drawing rooms for the dusty roads of the Levant and the wreckage of the Renaissance.

It was a ritual of the bloodline that began a century before Gustave Eiffel even considered scarring the Parisian skyline with his iron lattice in 1887.

The modern “finding yourself” expedition—that post-grad rite of passage involving stained rucksacks and questionable hostels—didn't spring fully formed from the forehead of a 1960s hippie convoy or the first Interrail passes of the 70s. It started in the 1700s, when the sons of the upper class—and it was almost exclusively the sons—embarked on a journey of calculated indulgence. The premise was deceptively simple, mirroring the same desperate curiosities that drive us toward the boarding gates today: a thirst for high culture, a need to brush shoulders with the “foreign,” and an urge to see exactly where the boundaries of home finally dissolve. Back then, it was horse-drawn carriages and powdered wigs. Today, the social spectrum has widened and the transit is measured in minutes rather than weeks, but the core hunger remains a constant.

At *Groove Travelers*, we've stitched together a modern autopsy of this Grand Tour, embracing the ghosts of those early “backpackers.” We are hitting the same coordinates, even if the twenty-first-century highlights didn't exist when the original tourists were dodging highway-men. We start where they did: London, the perennial springboard, before jumping the channel to Paris, where the real descent begins.

Paris

THE TRANSIT: THEN & NOW

1780: London to Paris via carriage & boat, **41.5 hours** of bone-rattling fatigue.

Today: The Eurostar, **2.5 hours** of climate-controlled detachment.

For the devotees of art and structural ego, Paris remains a necessary haunt. You start at the **Louvre**, obviously. It's a massive, marble-lined warehouse for the world's finest stolen and donated aesthetics—the Mona Lisa staring you down alongside the heavy hitters: Botticelli, Rembrandt, Rodin. If your sensibilities lean toward the



fractured and the frenetic, the **Pompidou Centre** serves as both an inside-out architectural middle finger and the home of the **National Museum of Modern Art**. For the purists, the **Musée Picasso** holds enough of the master's ego to satisfy any enthusiast. The **Île de la Cité** is non-negotiable, if only to stand in the shadow of Notre Dame, while the Hôtel des Invalides and the Sacré-Cœur provide the necessary architectural weight to balance out the iron skeleton of the Eiffel Tower.

MORE ATTRACTIONS

Find a corner in a Latin Quarter café. Burn an hour on espresso and cigarettes before diving into the city's culinary layers—bypass the tourist traps for the authentic, or better yet, tap into the diaspora: the city is thick with top-tier African, Chinese, Greek, and Vietnamese joints if you know where to look.

Then, there's the night. Paris doesn't just host parties; it consumes them. Whether you're chasing the ghost of jazz, the decadence of cabaret, or the relentless pulse of the world music scene, the city is built for the nocturnal. In the inevitable morning, when your head is a percussion instrument and the bass is still a ghost in your inner ear, go seek some silence. Clear the sensory debris with a walk through the Jardin du Luxembourg. It's the only way to reset before the next border.

The Old and the New at the Louvre (Ivan Drazić) / Parisian Nights (Kei Scampor) / Would you like a Croissant with that? (Can Falabella)

Geneva

THE TRANSIT: THEN & NOW

1780: Paris to Geneva, **54.5 hours** of carriage-cabin fever.

Today: Train, **3.5 hours** of alpine blur.

The eighteenth-century crowd used Geneva as a high-altitude basecamp for romanticizing the Swiss wilderness, but the city itself has a cold, clinical pulse that's worth a deep dive. For the modern art set, **MAMCO** is the holy grail—housed in a repurposed factory, it's a sprawling, industrial temple to the Avant-Garde. It's art that's designed to be as disturbing as it is fascinating. If you need to cleanse the palate with something more traditional, the **Museum of Art and History** stacks the heavyweights—Rodin, Renoir, Cézanne—while the **Collections Baur** offers a sharp, curated look at East Asian artifacts that feels strangely out of place in this watch-making capital.

MORE ATTRACTIONS

Don't skip the **International Red Cross and Red Crescent Museum**; it's a heavy, multi-media autopsy of humanitarianism that hits harder than you'd expect. For the seekers, the twice-weekly flea market at **Plainpalais** (Wednesdays and Saturdays) is a graveyard of hidden treasure. If Geneva feels too buttoned-up, hop a train to **Lausanne**. The *Rough Guides* crew calls it Switzerland's sexiest

Cultural Surplus: The B-Sides

Beyond the classic circuit, Europe's map is littered with high-art wreckage and architectural ego. If you're still hunting for meaning, hit these...

Vienna: Kunsthaus Wien. A museum as erratic as its creator, Hundertwasser. Forget right angles; this building is a hallucinatory showcase of uneven floors and trees sprouting through walls. It's an architectural middle finger to the grid.

Brussels: Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts. The Belgian heavyweight. It's a collision of 15th-century Old Masters and 20th-century surrealists, where the grotesque beauty of Rubens meets the cerebral stillness of Magritte.

Prague: Mucha Museum. Alfons Mucha went from designing Paris theater posters to crafting the very identity of a newborn Czechoslovakia. This is a claustrophobic, fascinating look at Art Nouveau thriving amidst the gears of shifting borders.

Bilbao: Guggenheim. Frank Gehry's titanium-clad masterpiece. The building didn't just put the Basque country on the map; it redefined modern architecture as a spectacle. The art inside is almost secondary to the sheer industrial flex of the exterior.

Budapest: Museum of Contemporary Art.

Perched in the former Royal Palace on Buda Hill, the location alone is a power move. Inside, you'll find the sharpest Hungarian and international talent currently defining the East-West dialogue.

Athens: The Ancient Sites. The original blueprint. While Rome has the grit, Athens has the bones: the Acropolis and the Parthenon stand as the ultimate, sun-bleached remnants of the classical world's peak. Stand in the shadow of the Tower of the Winds and try to feel small.



city, and they aren't wrong. Sit at a waterfront café, watch the world drift by, and then get weird at the **Collection de l'Art Brut**, a museum dedicated entirely to "outsider art"—the brilliant, frantic work of the institutionalized and the isolated souls amongst us.

Florence

THE TRANSIT: THEN & NOW

1780: Geneva to Florence, **81.5 hours** of grueling mountain passes.

Today: Train (via Milan), **7.5 hours**.

Florence is the epicenter of the Renaissance, a city so visually saturated it feels like a fever dream of marble and oil paint. The **Uffizi** is the undisputed heavyweight champion here. You can't do it in

one go; you need at least two hits to process the sheer volume of genius, most notably Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus*. Then there's the **Accademia**, where Michelangelo's *David* stands as the ultimate benchmark for human anatomy. Architecture junkies should head straight for the **Duomo**—it's the fourth largest church on the planet and a majestic, red-tiled behemoth. Climb the dome or the bell tower; the view of the city's terracotta skyline is the kind of thing that ruins all other views.

MORE ATTRACTIONS

In a city this beautiful, the best move is often the simplest: buy an espresso, sit outside, and let the atmosphere do the work. Walk the **Ponte Vecchio**, a

medieval bridge cluttered with jewelry shops that looks like it might succumb to gravity and slide into the river at any moment. For the money shot, hike up to **Piazza Michelangelo** south of the Arno. It's where every postcard you've ever seen was born. If you're still craving architectural oddities, a quick train to **Pisa** lets you check the box on that world-famous leaning tower.

Rome

THE TRANSIT: THEN & NOW

1780: Florence to Rome, **28 hours.**

Today: Train, **1.5 hours.**

The *Lonely Planet* blue list once claimed Rome has the “most history per square mile,” and honestly, the math checks out. People have been gravitating toward this eternal chaos for centuries. The classical ruins—the **Colosseum**, the **Roman Forum**, and **Palatine Hill**—are spectacular skeletons of a time when Rome owned the known world. Then there's the **Vatican City**, a sovereign state of incense and ego. **St. Peter's Basilica** is a mandatory pilgrimage, and if you can stomach the admission price, the **Vatican Museums** are a hoard of treasures culminating in the Sistine Chapel.

MORE ATTRACTIONS

If you want a break from the ruins, go find the ghost of the World Cup at the



Centuries of Side-Eye at the Colosseum / Steps, Statues, and the Eternal Hustle / Nocturnal Rites at the Pantheon (By Natalia Benet)



Olympic Stadium. Catching an AS Roma or Lazio match is a visceral, loud, and necessary Roman experience. Otherwise, grab some gelato—this is the global capital of frozen excess—and wander into **Trastevere**. By night, the neighborhood transforms into a pulsating sprawl of bars and clubs where the live blues and jazz are consistently top-shelf.

Venice

THE TRANSIT: THEN & NOW

1780: Rome to Venice, **51 hours**.

Today: Train, **5 hours**.

Venice is a cliché that actually lives up to the hype. It's a sinking, beautiful anomaly. The **Grand Canal**, **St. Mark's**

Square, and the **Bridge of Sighs** are the magnets that pull 20 million tourists a year into its damp embrace. For the art-damaged, the **Galleria d'Accademia** tracks the Venetian masters since the 1300s, while the **Guggenheim Collection** (Peggy's old haunt) pivots toward the modernists. If you only see one church, make it the **Basilica di San Marco**—it's essentially a giant treasure chest filled with loot from back when Venice ruled the seas.

MORE ATTRACTIONS

Skip the \$100 gondola ride and take a water taxi to the outer islands of the lagoon. This is where you find the actual Venetians, living life in the shadow of the tourist industrial complex. If you need a palate cleanser on your way out, stop in **Verona**. It's got a Roman arena that's better preserved than the one in Rome and an old town that feels like a film set.

Heidelberg

THE TRANSIT: THEN & NOW

1780: Venice to Heidelberg, **79 hours**.

Today: Train (via Basel), **10 hours**.

Heidelberg is Germany's academic heart, a magnet for intellectuals and the terminally curious since 1385. The **University district** in the Altstadt is the soul of the place. Visit the University Museum to hear about the "Student Prison"—a bizarre

relic of academic discipline—and then hit the **Museum of Ancient Art**. If the sun is out, the **Sculpture Parc** is free, green, and perfect for a slow afternoon.

MORE ATTRACTIONS

The student body here is massive and international, which translates to a nightlife that's more "intellectual dive bar" than "glitzy club."

Check out **Karlstorbahnhof**, a former train station turned cultural bunker for theatre, live music, and political debates. For the linguists, the **German-American Institute** runs poetry slams in English that are surprisingly raw and worth the detour to check out.

Dresden

THE TRANSIT: THEN & NOW

1780: Heidelberg to Dresden, **59 hours**.

Today: Train (via Frankfurt), **6.5 hours**.

Before WWII leveled it, Dresden was Germany's cultural crown jewel. The restored **Altstadt** is a triumph of persistence, with the **Frauenkirche** standing as its centerpiece. To see the peak of Baroque excess, visit the **Zwinger**, which houses an insane collection of Meissen porcelain. Art fans need the **Gemäldegalerie**—it's a heavy-hitting lineup of Old Masters: Raphael, Titian, Dürer.



Venice Canal and iconic Dome. (Kristina Bekher IG: @ninjagexly)



The romantic Old Town in Heidelberg. (Tobias Waibl @tobiwaibl)



Feldschlößchen, Dresden's best beer! (By Vale)



MORE ATTRACTIONS

The Altstadt is for the day; the **Neustadt** is for the night. This is the student side of the river, packed with about fifty bars per square kilometer. It's the place to lose a night. If you need to reconnect with nature, the **Swiss Saxony** region is just outside the city—all rolling hills, dense forests, and sandstone formations that look like something out of a Romantic painting.

Amsterdam

THE TRANSIT: THEN & NOW

1780: Dresden to Amsterdam, a soul crushing **81.5 hours**.

Today: Train (via Berlin), **10 hours**.

Forget the “loose morals” stereotype for a second. Amsterdam is a cultural powerhouse that has been attracting “Grand

Tourists” since the 1700s. The **Van Gogh Museum** is essential, as is the **Rijks-museum**, which holds an unrivaled collection of Dutch Masters. For something more immediate, the **Stedelijk Museum** (currently in the old post office on Oosterdokskade) is where the contemporary scene lives.

MORE ATTRACTIONS

The **Anne Frank House** is a sobering, necessary reality check on the city's history. For the hedonists, the **Heineken Experience** is a polished lesson in brewing (and drinking), while the **Sex Museum** offers exactly the kind of titillation the city is famous for. And then, there are the coffee shops—the final destination for many a traveler looking to finally blur the boundaries of home.



GETTING AROUND. In the 1700s, the Grand Tour was a bone-shaking carriage ordeal. Today, Europe's jagged edges are best smoothed over by rail—efficient, sustainable, and undeniably romantic. Whether you're snagging regional passes or point-to-point tickets, seat61.com is the definitive, no-nonsense resource for navigating the tracks. It's the ultimate guide for those trading the airport terminal for the open rails.

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For those nine and a half excruciating hours, we're all one big miserable family.

(AI visualisation of the author's text)

Fear of Flying

Mike Ward takes to the skies...

I'm currently suspended thirty-five thousand feet above the Atlantic in a pressurized aluminum canister that smells faintly of recycled upholstery and the collective anxiety of four hundred strangers. I'm on a flight from L.A. to London—a trajectory through time zones that essentially functions as a slow-motion eraser of the soul. I'm trying to achieve that specific state of mid-air suspended animation we call "sleep," but the universe has other plans.

Specifically, the universe has provided a masculine Hungarian woman with a fanny

pack. She is standing in the aisle, a monument to localized indifference, shouting a narrative over my head to the man on my left. Every few seconds, she anchors herself by gripping the top of my headrest. My seatback bobs against my skull like a rhythmic reminder of my own insignificance in the global economy. I've tried the "prolonged dirty look"—that classic weapon of the disenfranchised middle class—but she is linguistically and emotionally bulletproof.

Finally, I deploy a seething "Excuse me." It's the verbal equivalent of a tactical strike. She removes her hand, but the cheerful jibber-jabber continues unabated for twenty minutes, a verbal wallpaper of non-sequiturs. Just as the cabin lights dim for the mid-flight movie—that digital

pacifier meant to keep the herd from stampeding—she returns. The conversation resumes. She is the human version of a pop-up ad that refuses to be closed.

On a previous crossing, I was seated next to a tragically obese woman who inhabited her coach seat with the precariousness of a liter of water in a half-liter jar. To my absolute horror, she reached down to lift the armrest—the only physical border remaining between my private existence and her gelatinous, uncontained physique. She wanted to colonize my territory. She wanted to turn our seating arrangement into a biological merger. The armrest, a hero of industrial design, refused to budge. Thank God. She was eventually moved to a vacant row, leaving me with a residue of guilt and a massive dose of spatial PTSD.

When did the sky become a slum? At what point did we decide that packing 416 people into a roaring metal tube meant forfeiting the right to a personal perimeter?

Maybe the collapse began when they started making us remove our shoes. Now, every poorly ventilated security checkpoint on the planet smells like the interior of a blue cheese factory. Once you've shared the intimate scent of a stranger's foot fungi, the social contract is effectively

shredded. If I've smelled your toes, the logic goes, why shouldn't I subject you to my life story? Why shouldn't I cuddle up against your shoulder or blast you with gust after gust of "old man breath" while I snore? For nine and a half excruciating hours, we aren't passengers; we are one big, miserable, dysfunctional family trapped in a high-altitude basement.

The surfeit of unwanted intimacy is compounded by the fact that we are flying more than ever, yet the infrastructure is wheezing toward a cardiac arrest. Heathrow doesn't have flight schedules; it has "suggestions." I have never seen a plane leave London on time. Usually, the delay is announced only after you've been strapped into your seat, a captive audience for "Halitosis Harry" in 14B. It's a simulation of purgatory, only with worse snacks.

My primary ambition is now purely aspirational: to fly luxuriously. I don't need a private jet—though I wouldn't say no—but I'd settle for anything that offers a "breathing room" upgrade. Until then, I have a modest request for the traveling public: Shower before you arrive. Spray some deodorant into your sneakers. If you're truly large, consider the logistics of the space you've purchased. The sugar-free breath mints are on me. Please. I'm just trying to survive the decade.

available at
amazon



Beyond the Palace Walls... The Riva, the Ruins & the Secrets in Between.

Experience ancient Roman palaces, sun-drenched coastal walks, hidden Adriatic coves, and the vibrant energy of the Riva through a guide that combines deep historical context with modern travel essentials. Detailed, local, and focused on authentic discovery, this book allows you to navigate the city's labyrinthine streets and nearby islands with total confidence.

Start uncovering the side of Split that most visitors never see.

Wander the limestone passage where the Dragon Queen once walked. This iconic Diocletian's Palace alley remains a timeless favorite for fans. Photo by Natalia Benet @nataly_smart

SPLIT

Seven distinct photographers explore the sun-bleached stone and azure horizons of Split, capturing the hidden rhythms of Croatia's coastal gem through their diverse, personal lenses.

The iconic white and blue of a Jadrolinija ferry cuts across the deep Adriatic, serving as the modern lifeline between Croatia's ancient mainland and its scattered emerald islands. By Ruza Leko



SPLIT, THE MEDITERRANEAN FLOWER, began as the Greek colony Aspalathos. Over centuries, this strategic Adriatic prize morphed under various regional powers. Its prime location and natural wealth ensured constant evolution, remaining an irresistible target for neighboring nations and legendary conquerors throughout history. Today, it is a popular destination for another kind of conqueror: the tourist cruise lines.

The sun-drenched Riva promenade stretches along the harbor, where historic architecture meets the lush, rising slopes of Marjan Hill. By Jan Tang IG: [@tang.jan](#)



A sovereign medieval city-state, Split evolved under Croatian, Venetian, and French rule. Its stunning landscape blends Roman architecture—anchored by Diocletian’s Palace—with Tuscan and local traditions. Following centuries of imperial shifts under the Habsburgs and Napoleon, this diverse cultural haven finally emerged as a cornerstone of the democratic Republic of Croatia.



Centuries of history settle into the limestone of this living city, where medieval stonework and modern life intertwine seamlessly. By Marko Garic.

The vibrant ochre facade of the Croatian National Theatre stands framed by palms, a testament to Split's rich architectural and artistic soul. By Ryan Klaus IG: @ryank_photo



PHOTOESSAY

Embrace the effortless vitality of the Mediterranean lifestyle through a spread of fresh, seasonal flavors that make healthy eating feel like a daily celebration. By Tom Lovric



As a vital Adriatic hub, Split attracts millions with its blend of sacred monuments and bustling markets. Beyond the history, visitors enjoy world-class Mediterranean cuisine and sun-drenched, crystal-clear city beaches.



Crystal-clear Adriatic waters meet breathtaking pebble shores. While the views are incredible, remember to pack swimming shoes—the underwater rocks are sharp and plentiful. By Urška Medvešek.

The iconic gassho-zukuri architecture of the Japanese countryside: a picture-perfect ideal that masks the relentless, hands-on stewardship required to keep such heritage alive.



The Countryside Dream...

Why That “Free” Japanese House Is a Gamble—And Why It Might Be Worth It.

By JONATHAN LIM *Photo* TRANG NÈ

We have all seen the Instagram Reels and the YouTube thumbnails. They are seductive, aren't they? A sprawling, traditional Japanese farmhouse nestled against a misty forest, with a price tag of ¥0. It's the ultimate “life hack”—abandon the crushing rent of Singapore's CBD,

move to the idyllic Japanese countryside, and live a life of tranquil, minimalist bliss.

As a writer who has spent plenty of time covering the real estate market, I have learned one immutable law: if a deal looks too good to be true, it's because you are about to inherit someone else's nightmare.

Yes, *akiya*—the Japanese term for abandoned houses—are very real. There are, by conservative estimates, nearly nine million of them across the country. And yes, the *akiya banks* (municipal databases of these properties) do occasionally list homes for free. But before you start looking up flights to Tokyo and packing your bags, we need to have a serious talk about what “free” actually means in the Japanese context.

The Cost of “Zero”

First, let’s dismantle the biggest myth of all: the purchase price. In Japan, the price of the house is the least significant variable. When you accept an *akiya* for zero yen, you aren’t just getting a property; you are acquiring a legal and financial liability.

Even on a ¥0 property, you are looking at substantial transaction costs. You’ll need a *shiho shoshi* (a judicial scrivener) to handle the registration. Between the registration and license taxes (*touroku menkyozei*), real estate acquisition taxes (*fudoushan shutokuzei*), and the necessary surveys, you should set aside at least ¥200,000 to ¥400,000 right out of the gate.

Then, there is the matter of renovation. These houses are usually listed at zero yen because they have been vacant for

decades. They are not waiting for a fresh coat of paint; they are waiting for a structural intervention. Traditional Japanese *kenchiku* (architecture) is a marvel of joinery and wood, but when abandoned, it succumbs quickly to rot, termites, and humidity. Replacing a roof can easily cost you ¥2,000,000. Rewiring and replumbing an ancient house? Add another ¥3,000,000.

A “free” house that you spend ¥15,000,000 to fix is not a bargain. In many cases, it is a ruin waiting to collapse. If you are not careful, you could end up with a *tokutei akiya*—a “specified vacant house” that the municipality deems a safety hazard. If you fail to maintain it, they may force you to demolish it at your own expense, and you will lose the tax exemptions that keep rural land ownership affordable.

The Hidden Social Contract

If the financial reality doesn’t deter you, the social reality might. In Singapore, we are accustomed to paying our monthly maintenance fees to a management council and calling it a day. In rural Japan, the “management fee” is not paid in cash; it is paid in participation.

Almost every rural community operates under a *jichikai*, or neighbourhood

association. This is not a voluntary social club. It is the lifeblood of the village. As a new resident—especially as a foreigner—your membership is expected. This means attending early morning meetings, participating in mandatory community clean-ups, preparing for local festivals, and paying dues.

If you move to the countryside looking for hermetic, undisturbed solitude, you are in for a rude awakening. If you refuse to engage, you become the “invisible” outsider. If you participate, you become a neighbour. This is the social contract of rural Japan: you are not just buying a house; you are being inducted into a multi-generational ecosystem. For many, this is the most rewarding part of the experience. For the antisocial, it is a deal-breaker.

Why Give Them Away?

Understanding why the house is “free” is vital. It’s rarely out of generosity. Japan’s population is aging, and the youth have long since migrated to the neon pulse of Tokyo and Osaka. When the parents pass away, the children inherit a property in a town they no longer visit, which costs money to hold.

For the heir, an *akiya* is a burden. They don’t want the house; they want the problem to disappear. By offloading it to you, they are simply cutting their losses.

This is why you must treat every “free” house with the skepticism of a seasoned negotiator. Ask yourself: what problem am I inheriting? Is it structural decay, a termite infestation, or a location so remote that the nearest hospital is two hours away?

Finding the Sweet Spot

Does this mean the dream is dead? Absolutely not. It just means you have to be smarter about how you pursue it.

The secret to success in Japanese real estate isn’t the “free” house; it is the “affordable” house. I always advise my friends looking to make this move to search in the ¥1,000,000 to ¥5,000,000 range.

At this price point, you are often buying a home that has been maintained just enough to remain habitable. The roof is sound, the utilities are connected, and the neighbours aren’t looking at your property as a safety hazard. You are buying a baseline that allows you to improve the property over time, rather than spending your first year fighting to keep the structure standing.

The Reward: A Life of Intent

So, why would anyone go through the trouble? Why deal with the taxes, the *jichikai* meetings, and the DIY renovations?

// True value lies not in the price, but the work...

Because there is a soul in these old houses that a modern condominium simply cannot replicate. To restore a traditional home—to sand down the old-growth wood, to frame the view of the mountains through shoji screens—is an act of profound satisfaction. It is a slow, meditative engagement with the physical world.

Living in an *akiya* offers a chance to experience *satoyama*—the Japanese concept of living in harmony with the mountains and fields. It is a life of rhythm, of seasons, and of stewardship. You are preserving a piece of craftsmanship that is rapidly vanishing.

If you approach this as a “get-rich-quick” investment or a holiday rental scheme, you will fail. The Japanese countryside is not a commodity to be flipped; it is a community to be joined. But if you are looking for a place to put down roots, to work with your hands, and to participate in a way of life that has persisted for centuries, it might just be the best purchase you ever make.

Just don’t expect it to be free. Nothing of real value ever is.

Residency Reality: Paper Chase

Japan doesn’t hand out residency to property buyers. You need an “anchor”—a legitimate legal reason to be there. Forget the “move abroad” influencer hacks; there is no buying your way in.

THE THREE PATHS:

The Employment Route: The standard. You need a Japanese company to sponsor your visa. This requires a verified job offer and a specific skill set.

The Student Route: Enrollment in a language school or university. You’ll need significant savings to cover tuition and living costs; your work rights will be strictly limited.

The Spousal Route: Marrying a Japanese national. It is the most straightforward, but be prepared for intense scrutiny regarding the legitimacy of your relationship.

THE TAX REALITY:

Once you establish residency, Japan’s reach is long. You are liable for taxes on your worldwide income. Do not try to obscure assets; the National Tax Agency is efficient, meticulous, and entirely unimpressed by offshore loopholes.

TACTICAL ADVICE:

Stop searching for “visa hacks.” They do not exist. Your best move is to retain a *gyoseishoshi* (administrative scrivener). These professionals specialize in navigating the Immigration Services Agency’s labyrinth. Trying to self-file is a recipe for a rejection notice. Build your “anchor” first—residency is the hard-earned reward for qualifying, not a product to be bought.

Jamaica

By SOFIA RIVERA
Photo SEAN WITTER

The Antidote to the Ordinary

Jamaica is the Caribbean amplified. It's louder, larger, and lusher than its neighbors, a place rendered in colors so saturated they make your high-definition phone screen look like a charcoal sketch. If you're the type of traveler who thinks a vacation begins and ends at the airport transfer to an all-inclusive fortress, you're missing the point. Noel Coward and Ian Fleming didn't fall in love with the island because they were handed a plastic wristband and ushered into a lukewarm buffet with three thousand strangers. They went for the soul, the heat, the danger, and the history.

Let's be real for a second. We spend our lives in LA – or wherever you're grinding – trading time for money, fighting traffic, and navigating the noise of the digital age. When we escape, the last thing we need is more of the same, just with a view of a pool. *You want the real thing?* You have to earn it. That means skipping the cruise ship hubs and the strip malls of Ocho Rios. It means finding a proper bar where the rum tastes like wood and the local music isn't a curated playlist.

And look, if you're traveling with children who need a kids' club to survive, go to the resort. Leave them there. This isn't a destination for progeny; it's an island for grown-ups who still know how to have a good time without a scheduled activity hour.

Jakes, Treasure Beach

The Bohemian Heart

If you want to know what "laid-back" actually feels like, go to **Jakes**. It's on the South Coast, and the vibe here is less "tourist trap" and more "eccentric uncle's estate." It has grown organically over the decades from a few quirky, hand-decorated cottages into a proper local institution, but it still feels like it was put together by someone with an artist's eye, not a corporate committee.

It's not the slickest hotel in the Caribbean, and thank God for that. It's deeply embedded in the Treasure Beach community – the fishermen, the farmers, the artists – and you feel that pulse the second you check in. The cottages are playful, sculptural, and perfectly imperfect. Life here has a specific rhythm: morning swims,

Portland Parish is the side of Jamaica that
whispers, not shouts. Finding the stillness on
the water, far from the noise of the main drag.
by Sean Witter IG: @long_skiez



bike rides along back roads, and long, lazy afternoons that inevitably spill into music-filled evenings at Jack Sprat Bar.

GROOVETRAVELER'S TIP: The beach right on the property is iconic for the photos, but it isn't the place for a long, meditative swim. Head to the beach outside Jack Sprat's shack next door. It's local, it's lively, and the water is perfect. Order the lobster pizza and don't look at your watch.

Rockhouse, Negril

Cliffside Cool

Negril gets a bad rap for being a party town, but if you plant yourself in the right spot, you can watch the chaos from a safe, very stylish distance. Rockhouse is perched on the cliffs, which acts as a natural, unspoken filter—it's not a place for toddlers, which makes it an immediate winner in my book. You aren't here for the endless sand; you're here to jump off the rock jetties, snorkel in the clear, deep blue, and soak in the sun from an elevated vantage point.

The architecture is a masterclass in blending in—wood, stone, and thatch that feel like they grew out of the limestone. They make a big show of the healthy dining and yoga retreats, but it never feels precious. You can be a "wellness person" or you can be someone who needs three painkillers and a strong

coffee to recover from the night before, and you'll fit in just fine. Expect to drop anywhere from \$250 to \$450+ a night depending on the season, and you'll find it's money well spent for the sunset alone.

GROOVETRAVELER'S TIP: Don't bother overspending on the "best" villa. Go for a standard room. The sunset hits the same, the water is the same, and you'll want that extra dosh to spend at the bar.

Jamaica Inn, Ocho Rios

Old School Glamour

This place is a time capsule, and I mean that in the best, most elegant way possible. We are talking about a level of "old money" charm that feels like it belongs to a black-and-white movie. There are no televisions, no radios, and no clocks to remind you of the emails you aren't answering. Just the sound of the ocean, the clink of ice in a glass, and the smell of jasmine.

It's sedate, it's quiet, and it's undeniably romantic in a way that feels permanent. In the high season, it attracts a more mature crowd who appreciate the silence. At its heart, it will always be circa 1950 at Jamaica Inn.

GROOVETRAVELER'S TIP: The dress code used to be strictly black tie, which is a bit much for 2026. These days, they've relaxed it to collared shirts and long

trousers in the evening. Leave the cargo shorts and flip-flops for the beach; dress like you actually have somewhere to go.

Geejam, Port Antonio

The Industry Hideaway

Geejam is basically a high-end, world-class recording studio that happens to have luxury rooms attached. It's tiny, hyper-modern, and feels like you've stumbled onto a secret that wasn't meant for you. This is where the actual A-list stars go when they want to avoid the paparazzi—the kind of place where you feel like you're getting a backstage pass to history.

The vibe is effortlessly luxurious. You aren't just staying in a room; you're staying in a sanctuary designed for people who make things. The staff is incredible—discreet, present, and professional. They know how to handle the whims of rock stars, so they'll handle yours without breaking a sweat.

GROOVETRAVELER'S TIP: There's a small beach on property, but it's a rookie mistake to stay there. Head over to Frenchman's Cove. It is one of the most idyllic spots in the world, and as a Geejam guest, your entry is usually sorted.

Blue Mountain: The Morning Buzz

The drive up to the Blue Mountains is an exercise in surrender. You have to trust your driver as he negotiates the turns with a cool, casual hand while you stare out the window. The scenery is a blur of emerald green, and if you're lucky, you'll get caught in a bit of that legendary "liquid sunshine"—the kind of tropical rain that makes the jungle glow.

Strawberry Hill is still one of the most blissed-out hotels on the planet. It's a sanctuary in the clouds, worlds away from the heat of the coast. I spent my mornings here with a cup of coffee that effectively ruined all other coffee for me. Blue Mountain coffee is the Champagne of the

bean world—protected, regulated, and grown on only a sliver of land. If you want to see the process, book a private tour. You're looking at around \$90 to \$280 USD for a deep-dive, full-day experience, but seeing the berries plucked, the husks peeled, and the roasting happen in real-time is the kind of slow-living masterclass you can't get from a website. When you finally sit on a terrace, high above the clouds, with a cup of black coffee in your hand, you won't care about the sea. You won't care about the hammock. You'll just be happy to be there, right at that moment, awake and alive in the mountains. Buy the five bags of beans. Drink it all. It's worth every penny.



AUSTRIA

Nickelsdorf

NOVA ROCK | 10 – 13 JUNE

A massive four-day pilgrimage for rock, metal, and punk fans held in the Pannonia Fields, renowned for its explosive energy, high-profile headliners, and vibrant festival community. The 2026 bill features massive acts including Iron Maiden, The Cure, Bring Me The Horizon, Volbeat, and Architects.

► [novarock.at](#)

Vienna

DONAUISELFEST

| 3 – 5 JULY

Europe's largest free open-air music festival, transforming 4.5 km of the Danube Island into a massive hub of diverse musical performances, culture, and summer celebration. The festival hosts a sprawling, multi-genre lineup ranging from local Austrian talent to major international pop and electronic artists.

► [donauinselfest.at](#)



BELGIUM

Brussels

BRUSSELS PRIDE | 16 MAY

Get your spandex hotpots out and join the fun, and one of northern Europe's largest gay and lesbian Pride events in the Belgian capital. 20,000 people will be marching, before heading to bars and clubs for an evening of outrageous entertainment.

► [brusselspride.eu](#)

CROATIA

Korcula

EXPLORE A QUIET ISLAND | ONGOING
Like much of the Croatian

coast, the Island of Korcula has traded hands between the Byzantines, Romans, Dalmatians, Venetians and Austrians (to name a few) because of its strategic location and natural beauty. Today it is home to one of the most beautiful and lesser-known old towns in the Balkans.

► [visitkorcula.eu](#)



Varaždin

ISFMF | 21 – 24 MAY

A must for anyone obsessed with film scores. This festival pulls back the curtain on how sound shapes cinema, bringing in composers and sound designers for masterclasses. It's not just about watching movies; it's about dissecting the emotional architecture behind the scenes.

► [isfmf.com](#)

Zagreb

INMUSIC FESTIVAL

| 22 – 24 JUNE

Croatia's largest open-air music festival takes over the wooded islands of Lake Jarun. It's a distinctively relaxed, communal affair that balances indie, rock, and alternative sounds against the backdrop of the lake. This year's massive lineup features Jack White, Gorillaz, Kings of Leon, The Flaming Lips, IDLES, and the Manic Street Preachers.

► [inmusicfestival.com](#)

CZECHIA

Hradec Králové

ROCK FOR PEOPLE

| 11 – 14 JUNE

A premier Central European festival celebrating the best of rock, punk, and alternative music, known for its high-energy atmosphere and dedicated fan base. This year's massive lineup features heavy hitters like Gorillaz, Limp Bizkit, Bring Me The Horizon, Halsey, Iron Maiden, Papa Roach, and

Megadeth.

► [rockforpeople.cz](#)



Prague

KHAMORO FESTIVAL

| 25 – 31 MAY

The world's largest professional Romani festival, turning Prague into a vibrant hub of Romani culture. "Khamoro" (meaning "sunshine" in Romani) features a high-energy mix of traditional music concerts, gypsy jazz, and classical performances, alongside an iconic, colorful parade through the city's historic center that bridges Romani and non-Roma communities.

► [khamoro.cz](#)

THE DANCING BUILDING

Amongst all the Olde-Europa charm of Prague the "Fred and Ginger" Dancing Building, built in 1996, stands out. It was designed by Frank Gehry and Vlado Milunic, and is a great example of how modern buildings need not be an eyesore. The Dancing Building also has a restaurant at the top with great views...if your wallet can handle it.

► [tancici-dum.cz](#)

DENMARK

Copenhagen

WHITSUN CARNIVAL

| 5 – 14 JUNE

A taste of Latin America comes to Denmark in May, as 100,000 people take to the streets to celebrate the annual Whitsun carnival. Alongside the processions there are various stages offering live samba, reggae, blues and more, with DJ sets taking the party long into the night. Sounds like a party...

► [karneval-kbh.dk](#)

FINLAND

Nummijärventie

NUMMIROCK

| 17 – 20 JUNE

Headbangers of the world

unite...you have nothing to lose but your braincells. In June on the banks of Lake Nummijärvi, heavy metal fans from around the globe celebrate the longest day of the year worshipping power chords and the mighty axe. This year's 40th-anniversary lineup is fierce, featuring Satyricon, Battle Beast, Rise of the Northstar, Swallow the Sun, Moonsorrow, and Omnium Gatherum.

► [nummirock.fi](#)

FRANCE

Biarritz

XTREME FRANCE

| 10 – 14 JUNE

In a world saturated with uniformity, Wheels and Waves stands as a stronghold for those who live their passion with intention, sincerity, and creativity. Head west and step into Wheels and Waves, a world where time slows down, every encounter surprises, and each moment invites you to dare. Wheels and Waves invites you to Biarritz, where motorcycles, surf, skate, bmx, art, and music come together at Wheels and Waves, each discipline inspiring and enriching the others at the heart of the event.

► [wheels-and-waves.com](#)

Cannes

CANNES FILM FESTIVAL

| 12 – 23 MAY

Hello luvvies...time to break out the Prada and Gucci, slip on the high heels (ladies as well) and attempt to gatecrash the exclusive parties of the rich and famous who gather in Cannes to worship at the altar of the silver screen, and send a message to American politicians when they hand out the prizes.

► [festival-cannes.com](#)

Paris

FÊTE DE LA MUSIQUE

| 21 JUNE

The Parisian suburbs of France often get a bad press, but at the Banlieues Bleues festival there is a more positive message being offered. Some of the biggest names in French jazz, blues and hip

hop will be heading to Seine St Denis for the festival, that is a month-long celebration of music and local culture.

► [fetedelamusique.culture.gouv.fr](#)



GERMANY

Berlin

CARNIVAL OF CULTURES

| 22 – 25 MAY

Performers from over 80 countries take to the streets of Kreuzberg for a riot of music, color, dance, and international cuisine. The main parade is the centerpiece, but the city pulses with events, workshops, and street parties for the entire weekend.

► [karneval.berlin](#)

Cologne

CHOCOLATE MUSEUM

An immersive dive into the history and industrial art of chocolate-making, featuring a massive chocolate fountain and interactive exhibits. It is a must-visit for anyone with a sweet tooth looking for a break from traditional sightseeing.

► [schokoladenmuseum.de](#)

Leipzig

HONKY TONK PUB

FESTIVAL | 27 MAY

This festival transforms the city's nightlife, taking over pubs, bars, and clubs across Leipzig. You get a wristband and drift between venues to catch everything from blues and soul to funk in intimate, historic spaces.

► [honky-tonk.de](#)

WAVE-GOTIK-TREFFEN

| 22 – 25 MAY

The world's largest annual gathering of the "dark" subculture. Over 20,000 goths, raverheads, and industrial fans descend on Leipzig for

euro-events&tips

a program that includes concerts, historical markets, and themed parties. Notable acts often include Diary of Dreams, Front 242, and Combichrist.

► wave-gotik-treffen.de

Nuremberg ROCK IM PARK | 5 – 7 JUNE

One of Germany's premier rock festivals, taking over the Zeppelinfeld grounds. It brings together massive crowds for a high-octane weekend. Expected acts include Limp Bizkit, Sleep Token, and Bring Me The Horizon.

► rock-im-park.com

Scheeßel HURRICANE FESTIVAL | 19 – 21 JUNE

Hosted at the Eichenring racetrack, this is a rite of passage for German alternative fans. It offers a diverse lineup of rock, alternative, and pop. Headliners often include major international acts like The Cure, Arctic Monkeys, and Muse.

► hurricane.de



Würzburg HURRICANE FESTIVAL | 19 – 21 JUNE

Celebrating its 37th year, this is the largest festival of its kind in Europe. It creates a vibrant, temporary village along the banks of the River Main dedicated to the music, art, and cuisine of Africa.

► hurricane.de

HUNGARY

Budapest
BUDAPEST ART SEASON | 01 MAR – 15 MAY
Budapest's spring cultural landscape has evolved into a multi-venue "Art Season" that bridges traditional mastery and

contemporary innovation. A central pillar is the Essentia Artis showcase at the Pesti Vigadó, featuring curated works from the Hungarian Academy of Arts across design, architecture, and fine arts. This coincides with the Bartók Spring International Arts Weeks, a city-wide series that dissolves the boundaries between classical music and visual media. From immersive multimedia experiences at Vincent Hall to the vibrant mural tours of the Jewish Quarter, the season offers an exhaustive look at Central Europe's creative heart.



DANUBE CARNIVAL | 12 – 19 JUNE

Ever since 1996, the banks of the Danube in Budapest have been the setting for an annual celebration of folk arts, concerts, fairs, and exhibitions, combining Hungarian traditions with contemporary developments. The festival showcases the pinnacle of folk culture, featuring spectacular performances by the Duna Art Ensemble and the Hungarian State Folk Ensemble, alongside various int'l dance troupes that bring global traditions to the heart of the city.

► dunakarneval.hu

COMMUNIST STATUE PARK | ONGOING

When communism collapsed across eastern Europe at the end of the 1980s, statues of the great icons of the ideology were removed from squares, buildings and street-corners across the former Eastern Bloc and in most cases were destroyed. In Hungary however, they were collected together in one place – check out Marx, Engels, Lenin and more at this monumental graveyard.

► mementopark.hu

ICELAND Reykjavik BLUE LAGOON

No, it's not a dubious bar of ill-repute. The Blue Lagoon is actually a unique geo-thermal spa where you can bathe in comfort, outdoors, even in the midst of Iceland's arctic November. Not only is it a cool thing to do, but apparently it is good for you as well, with the blue green algae being especially good for the skin.

► bluelagoon.com

IRELAND

Dublin
BLOOMSDAY | 16 JUNE
Dublin celebrates one of its favourite sons, writer James Joyce, every year on Bloomsday, the day his hero Leopold Bloom wandered the city streets in what once arguably the writer's greatest masterpiece, Ulysses.

► bloomsdayfestival.ie

LITERARY PUB CRAWL | ONGOING
If Bloomsbury got you in mood for all things literary, how about a bookish pub crawl? Tours take you to some of the haunts and favourite drinking dens of the likes of Joyce, Beckett, Shaw amongst others, and features commentary and performances.

► dublinpubcrawl.com



ITALY
Perugia
UMBRIA JAZZ FESTIVAL | 10 – 19 JULY

One of the world's most prestigious jazz festivals, bringing top-tier international performers to the historic streets and piazzas of Perugia for a world-class celebration of sound. The 2026 edition is set to be a standout, featuring heavy-hitting headliners including Sting, Jon Batiste, Elvis Costello & The Imposters, Snarky Puppy, Gilberto Gil, Zucchero, Charles Lloyd, and Laurie Anderson.

► umbriajazz.it

Rome
TEATRO DELL'OPERA DI ROMA AT CIRCO MASSIMO | LATE JUNE – JULY

This is the ultimate Roman summer experience. The Opera House moves its summer season to the ancient ruins of the Circo Massimo, transforming the massive, atmospheric

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MAY							JUNE							JULY						
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space into an open-air theater under the stars. The productions are grand and world-class, featuring star-studded performances from international conductors and dancers like the legendary Roberto Bolle. It is an unforgettable way to experience works like Verdi's *Aida*, Carmina Burana, and high-profile ballet galas amidst the backdrop of Roman history.

► operaroma.it



Sicily MAFIA TOUR | ONGOING

Down in Sicily you can learn something of the Mafia's past, as well as see some of the places where they shot the *Godfather Part II*, with an all-day tour of the Italian islands most infamous export. Includes a drink in the very same bar Francis Ford Coppola drank in during the filming.

► veronikasadventure.com

Siena THE PALIO | 2 JULY

The Palio is a right of passage for participants as well as visitors, which you might have seen in *Solo Mio*, the American romantic comedy drama film by Kevin James. Mental young Italians ride their horses bareback in a battle for the big prize, while the city explodes in ecstatic Italian emotion.

► ilpalio.org

MALTA Valletta

MALTA INTERNATIONAL ARTS FESTIVAL | 12 – 21 JUNE

This festival transforms the island's unique heritage sites—from 16th-century subterranean cisterns to panoramic harbor settings—into vibrant stages for contemporary music, dance, and theatre. It is a highly

curated, multidisciplinary celebration of artistic excellence that bridges local heritage with international innovation.

► festivals.mt/miaf

NETHERLANDS Amsterdam HOLLAND FESTIVAL | 3 – 28 JUNE

The Netherlands' most prestigious international performing arts festival, turning the city into a sprawling stage for avant-garde theatre, opera, dance, and digital art. Each year, it pushes the boundaries of contemporary performance, bringing world-class creators to venues like the Royal Theatre Carré and the Muziekgebouw. The 2026 edition features a thematic focus on "Deep Listening" and empathy, with highlight performances from associate artist Hildur Guðnadóttir (the Oscar-winning composer of *Joker* and *Chernobyl*) and world-renowned actor Wagner Moura.

► hollandfestival.nl



HEINEKEN EXPERIENCE

Learn something about the art of brewing, and then immediately forget it as you sample the creations at the Heineken Experience. A free beer is included in the price of the tour.

► heinekenexperience.com

DANCE VALLEY | 14 – 15 JULY

One of the world's longest-running electronic music festivals. It transforms the Velsen-Zuid recreation area into a massive open-air dance floor, blending diverse electronic sub-genres with elaborate stage design and a distinct "festival in the park" atmosphere.

► dancevalley.com

Breda WORLD-CLASS JAZZ | 25 – 28 MAY

The oldest and largest four-day jazz festival in the Netherlands. It takes over the city center, turning Breda's historic Grote Markt and surrounding streets into a sprawling venue for traditional, swing, and modern jazz performances.

► bredajazzfestival.nl



Landgraaf PINKPOP | 19 – 21 JUNE

Europe's premier pop and rock festival returns to Megaland. The 2026 edition features a massive lineup including The Cure, Foo Fighters, Twenty One Pilots, Halsey, YUNGBLUD, Zara Larsson, and Editors.

► pinkpop.nl

Rotterdam ROTTERDAM UNLIMITED | 24 – 25 JULY

A vibrant, multi-day celebration of the city's multi-cultural spirit. The festival is anchored by the Summer Carnival Street Parade, a high-energy display of Caribbean-inspired dance, elaborate costumes, and steel-pan music moving through the heart of the city.

► rotterdamunlimited.com

Weert BOSPOP | 10-12 JULY

A staple of the Dutch festival scene, Bospop returns with a stellar mix of rock, blues, and pop. The 2026 lineup features headliners Volbeat, Moby, and Lenny Kravitz, joined by Within Temptation, Floor Jansen, Steel Panther, and Airbourne.

► bospop.nl

NORWAY Bergen BERGEN INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL | 27 MAY – 10 JUNE

The largest curated art event in the Nordic countries, transforming this gateway to the fjords into a vibrant stage

for world-class music, opera, and theatre. Established in 1953, the festival masterfully balances high-brow classical tradition with cutting-edge contemporary performance, often centering on its deep connection to Edvard Grieg at his former home, Troldhaugen. The 2026 edition features Artist in Residence Esa-Pekka Salonen, the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra as festival musicians, and highly anticipated performances from soprano Lise Davidsen, alongside grand presentations of *Turangalita*, *Dido & Aeneas*, and Mahler's 2nd Symphony.

► fib.no



POLAND Gdansk BALTIC SAIL GDAŃSK | 21 – 24 AUGUST

This annual festival remembers the day when King Casimir honored Gdansk for its role in Polish history. The festival typically features a massive parade of tall ships on the Gulf of Gdansk, traditional vessel cruises, and the "Shanties under the Crane" music festival. Witness the ceremonies & celebrations in this merchant shipping town of yore. 2026 will be a special year, Baltic Sail will celebrate its 30th anniversary! Visit the website and you can be part of a ship's crew!

► balticsail.pl

EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY CENTRE (ECS) | ONGOING
The "Roads to Freedom" exhibit, once modest, now anchors the massive European Solidarity Centre (ECS). Located beside the

historic Gdańsk Shipyard Gate No. 2, the building's rust-colored exterior resembles a ship's hull and houses an immersive chronicle of the 1980 shipyard strikes led by Lech Wałęsa. Visitors can explore reconstructed communist-era spaces—including a grocery store with bare shelves and a secret police interrogation room—while viewing iconic artifacts like the UNESCO-registered "21 Demands" and the Fiat Campagnola Popemobile. It is a profound, essential stop for understanding the birth of the Solidarity movement.

► ecs.gda.pl

Gdynia OPEN'ER FESTIVAL | 1 – 4 JULY

A major world-class music festival held on an airfield near the Baltic Sea, renowned for its massive, diverse lineup and spacious, seaside environment. The 2026 edition is set to be one of the festival's most ambitious, featuring headliners and heavy hitters such as The Cure, The xx, Calvin Harris, Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds, Florence + The Machine, David Byrne, Halsey, IDLES, Zara Larsson, and Teddy Swims.

► opener.pl

Krakow JEWISH REVIVAL | 1 – 9 JULY

Share the spirit of resurgence as the local Jewish community continue their recovery from the Holocaust. Music, dance, workshops, films and more bring the Kazimierz District to life all week long.

► jewishfestival.pl

ROMANIA Cluj Napoca TRANSILVANIA FILM FESTIVAL (TIFF) | 12 – 21 JUNE

The 25th edition of Romania's premier international film event showcases the best of regional cinema and filmmaking, acting as a major hub for international directors and film lovers.

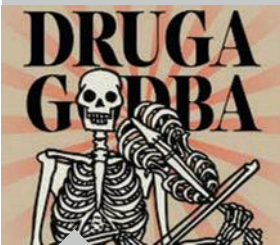
► tiff.ro

euro-events&tips

SLOVAKIA**Trenčín**
POHODA FESTIVAL
| 9 – 11 JULY

A widely celebrated, multi-genre festival held at a former military airport, known for its eclectic mix of music, art, and intellectual discourse, all set in a friendly, wide-open space. Celebrating its 30th edition with an added fourth day, the 2026 lineup is spectacular, featuring legendary headliners like The Cure (performing on an exclusive extra day, July 8th), Gorillaz, and The Prodigy, alongside Lykke Li, Denzel Curry, IDLES, Action Bronson, Emiliana Torrini, and Apashe & Brass Orchestra.

► pohodafestival.sk

**SLOVENIA****Ljubljana**
DRUGA GODBA FESTIVAL
| 27 – 30 MAY

Ljubljana plays host to the Druga Godba festival which, if you speak Slovenian, means "Different Music." Celebrating everything the mainstream ignores, the festival is a distinctive musical gathering that spans global sounds, avant-garde experiments, and traditional music transformed into contemporary expressions. The 2026 lineup features an eclectic mix of international acts, including Gisela João, Ammar 808, Nusantara Beat, La Niña, Bobo & Behaja, and Cerys Hafana. Venues range from the iconic Cankarjev dom to the urban energy of Kino Šiška and the alternative vibes of Metelkova Mesto.

► drugagodba.si

SPAIN**Barcelona**
PRIMAVERA SOUND FESTIVAL
| 3 – 7 JUNE

One of the world's most

influential music festivals, Primavera Sound takes over the Parc del Fòrum and venues across the city for a sprawling celebration of indie, rock, pop, and electronic music. While the main festival days at the Parc del Fòrum are June 4–6, the "Primavera a la Ciutat" program extends the festivities throughout the city from June 3 to 7, offering intimate showcases and club shows. It is a critical event for music discovery, consistently featuring a forward-thinking lineup that mixes legendary headliners with the most exciting new talent.

► primaverasound.com

SONAR FESTIVAL
| 18 – 20 JUNE

Sónar is much more than a festival; it is a global benchmark for electronic music, creativity, and technology. Divided into Sónar by Day (at Fira Montjuïc) and Sónar by Night (at Fira Gran Via), it bridges the gap between hedonistic club culture and intellectual exploration through its Sónar+D digital arts and technology conference. It is the pulse of the international electronic scene, attracting thousands for an immersive experience of cutting-edge sound, visual art, and digital innovation.

► sonar.es

**SWEDEN****Stockholm**
TASTE OF STOCKHOLM
| 3 – 6 JUNE

Ever wondered what a genuine smorgasbord tasted like? The Taste of Stockholm festival at the beginning of June is the perfect chance to sample some of the culinary delights of the city.

SWITZERLAND
Bern**GURTENFESTIVAL**
| 15 – 18 JULY

A beloved music festival located on Bern's local mountain, offering a unique setting with multiple stages,

including a forest stage, all providing panoramic views of the Swiss capital. The 2026 lineup features headliners including Lily Allen, Krafklub, Lorde, Teddy Swims, and Sean Paul.

► gurtentfestival.ch

Interlaken
GREENFIELD FESTIVAL
| 11 – 13 JUNE

Switzerland's premier rock, punk, and metal festival, where intense live performances meet the breathtaking, jagged backdrop of the Swiss Alps. This year's heavy-hitting roster includes Bad Omens, Sabaton, Volbeat, The Offspring, Architects, Papa Roach, and A Day To Remember.

► greenfieldfestival.ch

Locarno
MOON & STARS
| 9 – 19 JULY

An exclusive open-air concert series set in the historic Piazza Grande, blending intimate performances from international superstars with the unique Mediterranean atmosphere of Lake Maggiore. The 2026 series highlights include Lewis Capaldi, OneRepublic, Jamiroquai, Jessie J, Duran Duran, and Roxette.

► moonandstars.ch

Montreux
MONTREUX JAZZ FESTIVAL
| 3 – 18 JULY

One of the world's most iconic music gatherings, bringing legendary jazz, blues, and contemporary artists to the shores of Lake Geneva for two weeks of world-class performances. Celebrating its 60th edition, the lineup features Sting, Deep Purple, John Legend, Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds, Moby, Conan Gray, and Angus & Julia Stone.

► montreuxjazzfestival.com

Nyon
PALEO FESTIVAL
| 21 – 26 JULY

One of Switzerland's largest and most famous music festivals, offering a massive, diverse program of international and local artists across an expansive, well-curated site. The 2026 edition promises massive

performances from The Cure, Katy Perry, Gorillaz, Twenty One Pilots, Orelsan, and Lorde.

► paleo.ch

**St. Gallen**
OPEN AIR ST. GALLEN
| 25 – 28 JUNE

One of Switzerland's oldest and most respected music festivals, known for its stunning valley location and a stellar, diverse lineup ranging from indie and rock to electronic and pop. The 2026 roster includes Twenty One Pilots, Paul Kalkbrenner, Scooter, Zara Larsson, Nothing But Thieves, Wet Leg, and Nina Chuba.

► openairsg.ch

**UKRAINE****Kyiv**
FANCON | 6 – 7 JUNE

The largest Ukrainian pop culture festival returns to the International Exhibition Center, offering a massive space for fans of video games, movies, manga, fantasy, comics, and cosplay. Ukrainian pop culture is alive, strong & inspiring even in times of war.

► fancon.com.ua

KYIVPRIDE EQUALITY MARCH | 21 JUNE

As the central human rights event of Pride Month, the Equality March takes place in

Kyiv to advocate for equal rights and visibility for the LGBTQ+ community.

► kyivpride.org

UNITED KINGDOM
Leeds/Hatfield**SLAM DUNK FESTIVAL**
| 23 – 24 MAY

The definitive pilgrimage for pop-punk, emo, and alternative rock fans. Held across two sites, it's a high-energy, concentrated explosion of nostalgia and new music. Because of its multi-stage, tight-knit layout, you can easily catch a massive variety of bands, from the heavy-hitting headliners to the rising stars of the scene.

► slamdunkfestival.com

Newport**ISLE OF WIGHT FESTIVAL**
| 18 – 21 JUNE

Steeped in rock history, this iconic festival balances legendary, legacy acts with current chart-toppers. The experience is uniquely "island life"—taking a ferry over creates a distinct sense of escape, and the weekend culminates in a massive, celebratory atmosphere that feels both historic and vital. Expected acts for 2026 include heavy hitters like The Cure, Lewis Capaldi, and Calvin Harris.

► isleofwightfestival.com

Warrington
NEIGHBOURHOOD WEEKENDER
| 23 – 24 MAY

A focused, community-driven festival that has quickly become a staple for indie, rock, and alternative fans in the North of England. It's less of an overwhelming "mega-fest" and more of a curated party, featuring a strong roster of British talent and reliable stadium-fillers. Notable acts this year include Richard Ashcroft, Kaiser Chiefs, Blossoms, and DMA's.

► nbhdweekender.com

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TO SHARE?**

email us at:

editor@groovetravelers.com



HIGH AIRFARE? JUST GO...

By JEFFREE BENET Photo [VICTOR FREITAS](#)

...Don't give them that satisfaction.

Look, the numbers don't lie. Jet fuel is volatile, ticket prices are soaring, and the airlines are busy nickel-and-diming us into the ground because of geopolitical instability they didn't cause but are more than happy to profit from. It is infuriating. We watch as corporate suits trim schedules and slap on extra fees for the privilege of existing in a middle seat, all while the world stage is dominated by the predictable, tiresome chest-thumping of leaders who wouldn't know the value of a real experience if it hit them in the face.

They want you to stay home. They want you to look at the spreadsheets, see the spike in the cost per mile, and decide that a weekend in Budapest, a stroll through the Louvre, or a coffee in Bangkok is just "too much." They want the global community to shrink into a collection of isolated, cautious enclaves.

Yes, it is getting more expensive. Yes, the logistics are a headache. But here is the reality: if you wait for the geopolitical climate to stabilize, for the price of oil to bottom out, or for the airlines to suddenly start caring about your comfort, you will be dead before you renew your passport. Travel isn't just an expense; it is the only way to keep your head clear in a world gone mad. So, pack the bag. Pay the fee. Go. Because the alternative—staying put and letting them win—is the most expensive mistake you will ever make.

At the end of the day, you won't remember the extra surcharge or the hassle of the boarding group. You'll remember the way the light hits the Tower Bridge at dusk, the taste of a street hawker meal you didn't have to cook, and the clarity that comes from being somewhere entirely new. That perspective is the only currency that actually matters. Stop obsessing over the fuel charts, stop watching the news, and start checking your calendar. The world is out there, and it is a hell of a lot more interesting than the view from your living room. ■



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