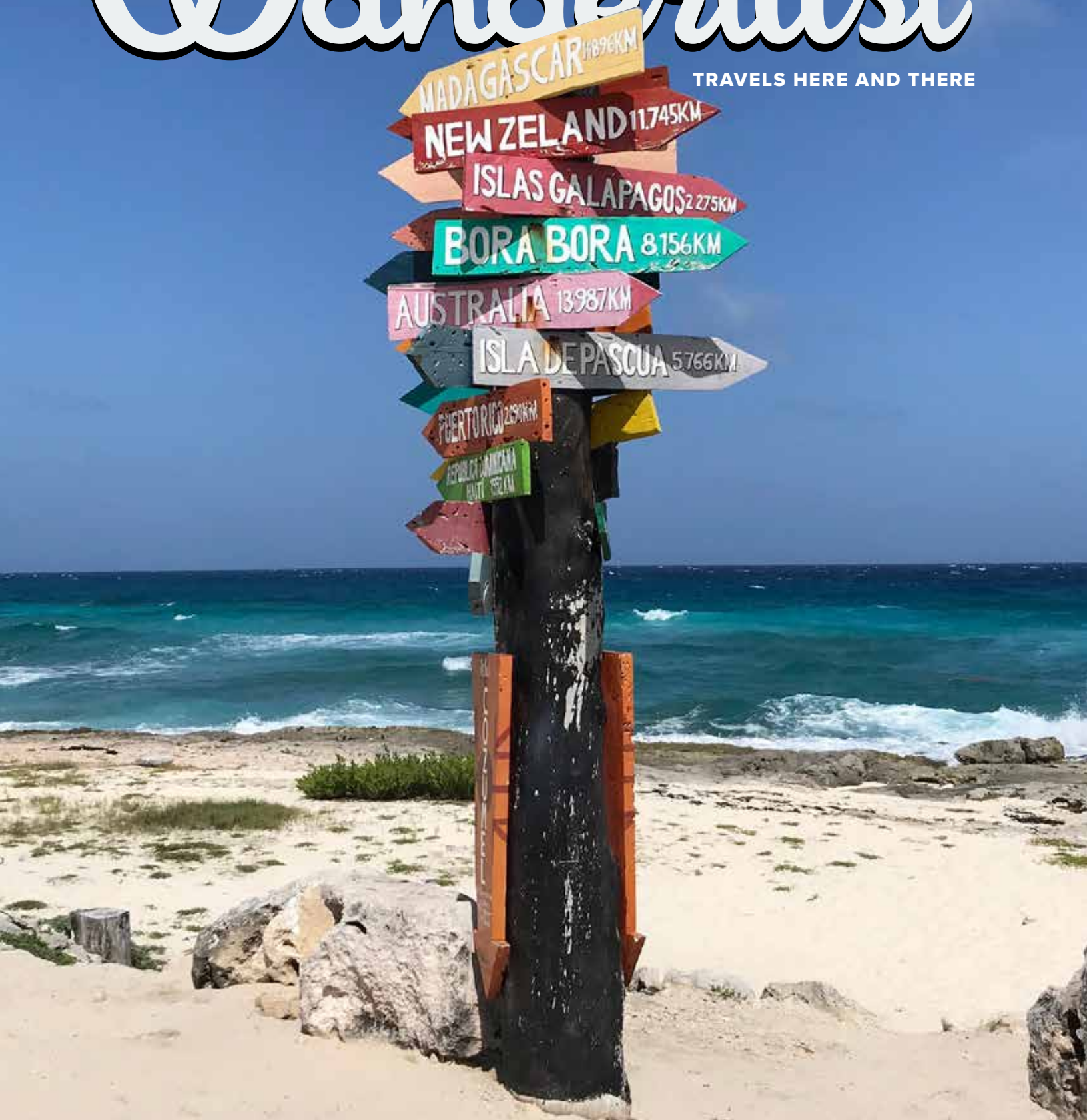


# Wanderlust

TRAVELS HERE AND THERE



WRITTEN AND PHOTOGRAPHED BY  
**RANDY DUNBAR**

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WRITTEN,  
DESIGNED  
AND  
PHOTOGRAPHED  
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TRAVELS HERE AND THERE

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***for my parents***  
*who took me places*

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## Introduction

My family rarely ventured outside the United States. Other than some road trips to Tijuana, the National Parks, and Crestline, we stayed close to home. My brother, bless him, did stray off to Alaska for a time, but that's about it.

At an early age, I frequently visited San Francisco and Palm Springs. After high school, trips to New York City became a regular occurrence. However, it wasn't until my first flight to Hawaii that I realized how transformative travel could be.

It's hard to articulate the feeling because, until you've experienced it, it's only speculation. Growing up and still living in Los Angeles—despite an eight-year stint in New York City—I know this town, perhaps too well.

A trip to Bali in the '90s opened my eyes to the “otherness” I had been seeking—something distinctly different from American culture. I'll never forget seeing a bare-chested woman walking down a dirt road in Ubud, balancing fruit on her head. I thought to myself: I'm not in America anymore. Later, witnessing a bloody cockfight further cemented that realization.

Neither heat nor humidity could dampen my love for travel. Over the years, I explored Bali, Australia, Europe, the Maldives, Mexico, Belize, and many other destinations. For a long time, I made it a tradition to spend my birthday somewhere new—Japan, Paris, Greece, Bangkok, Rome, Hong Kong. Perhaps it was the fatigue of the familiar that drove me to seek out new scenery, music, food, and languages. Travel, for me, has rarely felt like a burden; it's

***“Traveling generates stories. Every place has its narrative, as do the people you meet. Engaging with a culture other than your own—through its language, cuisine, and traditions—creates a story that is unique and often transformative.”***

more often a source of anticipation. Planning is half the fun!

I didn't always have a camera with me. I missed what I'm sure would have been award-winning photos—like at Paris's Hôtel Potocki during *Vogue's* 95th Anniversary Party in 2015—and countless other moments when the light shifted, people moved, or a car obscured the view.

Some of my photos were taken with a 35mm camera, but most were captured on an iPhone. In many ways, the iPhone is the superior tool—especially while traveling. Its convenience is unmatched.

Photographing iconic tourist destinations is a kind of game for me: finding unique perspectives on familiar sights. At the Sagrada Família in Barcelona, for instance, I aimed my camera at the vaulted ceiling and captured stunning kaleidoscopic images.

Traveling generates stories. Every place has its narrative, as do the people you meet. Engaging with a culture other than your own—through its language, cuisine, and traditions—creates a story that is unique and often transformative.

Travel isn't without its challenges: airports, delayed flights, and navigating foreign toll systems can be tedious. But once you start exploring the streets, tasting the food, and immersing yourself in the art and music, those initial logistics fade into the background.

***Wanderlust is a strong desire to wander or travel and explore the world. The term has its roots in German Romanticism.***



# ASIA

*Japan*

*China*

*Hong Kong*

*Singapore*

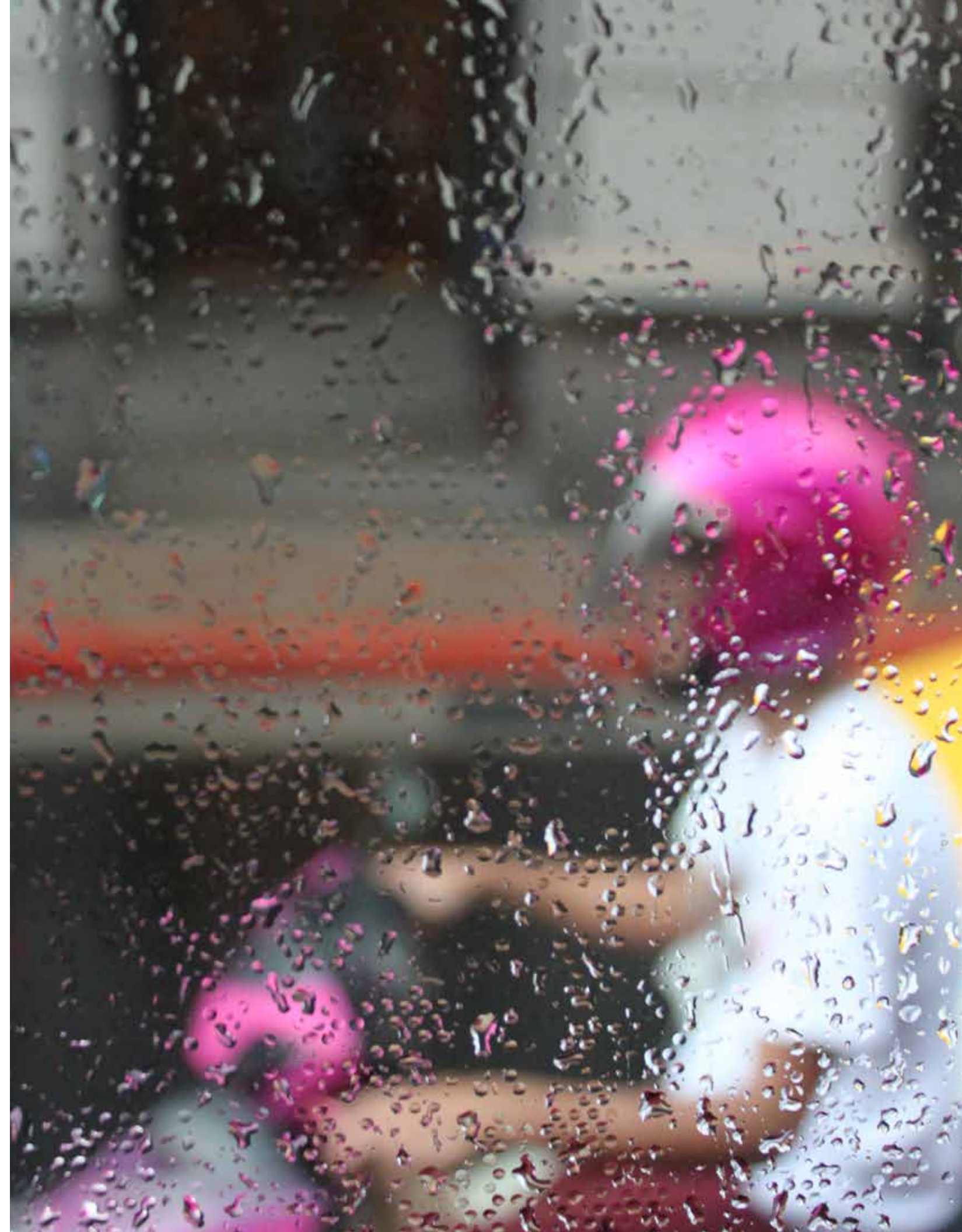
*Taiwan*

*Thailand*

*Maldives*



*ASIA. The largest continent the world, with 60% of the world's population, there is a lot to visit. And no two countries are alike—the cuisine is unique to each country, the dialects, vastly different, even within the country.*



*Taiwan, 2011  
Shot from a bus, scooters  
are a mainstream means of  
transportation. Very often one  
can see families of four all  
riding on a single scooter.*

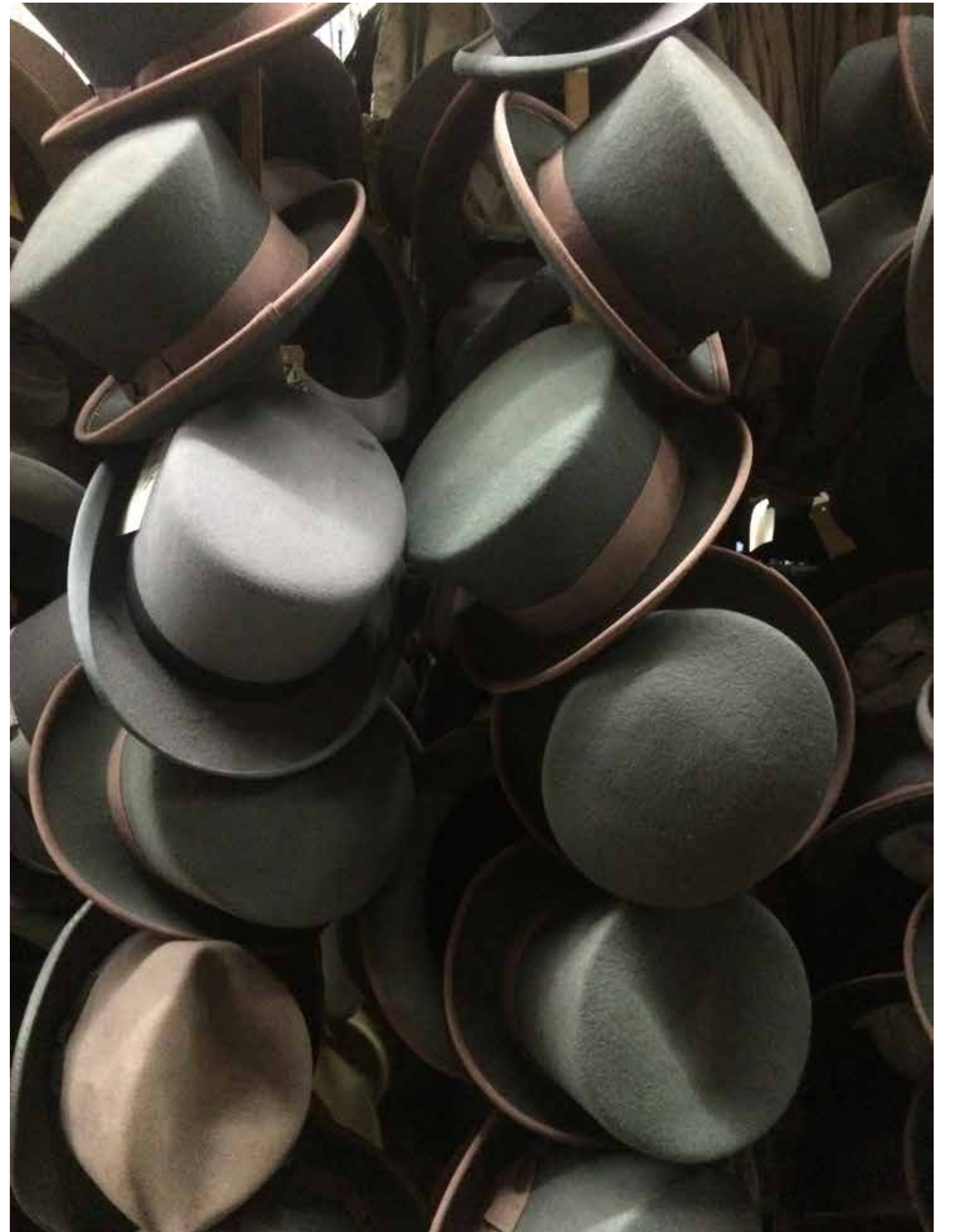




*Amphoe Mae Wang - Chiang Mai, July 2, 2017*









*Four Seasons Resort / Chiang Mai*

# MALDIVES



**M**aldives, a 26-atoll chain of islands with powdery beaches, turquoise waters, and dreamy overwater bungalow resorts. But we stayed on the water, in a Four Seasons yacht—complete with a chef, scuba instructors, and a National Geographic photographer.

It was the first introduction to a Muslim country.

The Republic of the Maldives lies in the Indian Ocean, on the southern side of Sri Lanka. The islands sheltered in this archipelago are categorized into natural atolls, most of which remain uninhabited.

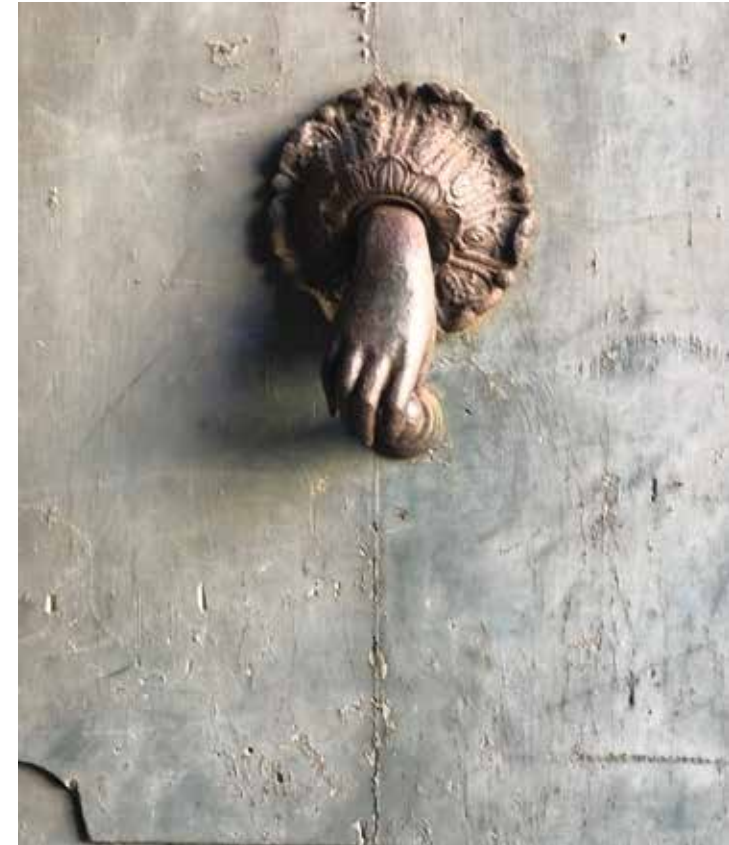
The Four Seasons Explorer, a 129-foot, three-deck catamaran, takes a maximum of 22 guests on a marine and cultural adventure into the undiscovered Maldives. The luxury live-aboard visits isolated reefs and virgin dive sites, uninhabited beaches, and secluded village communities.







*Duomo Di Orvieto*



# EUROPE

*ITALY*

*FRANCE*

*SPAIN*

*GREECE*



**Castro Pretorio**

# ROME

# Europe is first and foremost an idea.

a

n idea that was visited in the early 1970s as a small group of friends traveled to Europe. The first stop was the Netherlands.

The red light district, the Rijksmuseum, and an unforgettable meal called Rijsttafel.

With a Eurorail pass in hand, we went from Belgium to Nice, Nice to Rome, Rome to Munich, and finally to England. There would be short detours: Dachau, Hamburg, and Venice. We were young. Europe was so foreign to a small group of Americans—there was an audible sigh of relief as we strolled into London and finally understood what people were saying.

It was a foray into adventure beyond the American shore. In a distant land of multiple languages, customs, and cuisines, we participated in each as only the young could.

It was different. Police with machine guns stood guard on street corners. We stayed in affordable palazzos with large tiled bathrooms and luxurious, heavy cotton towels.

Decades later, Europe still maintains a travel experience unmatched. Other than the tourist attractions, it is the people and cuisine that one most remembers. In Rome, cobbled streets detoured off to reveal a little restaurant, Osteria Del Gallo, so quaint and charming, you had to come back.

Driving through the hillsides of Tuscany, one can come upon Saturnia. Strategically located between Rome and Florence, Saturnia is a free mineral hot spring in the middle of nowhere. It is as close to a Fellini experience as you can get.

Rome calls, and you answer. Many trips to this capital city of Italy provide unique experiences: the Vatican, the Colosseum, the Fountains of Piazza Navona, the Trevi Fountain, and the Forum.

For us, we went old school—rented a scooter, braved the Italian traffic, and went places not usually found on the tourist map.

*“Arrivederci, Roma  
Good bye, au revoir  
Ti rivedo a pranzo a  
Squarciarelli  
Fettuccine e vino dei  
Castelli*

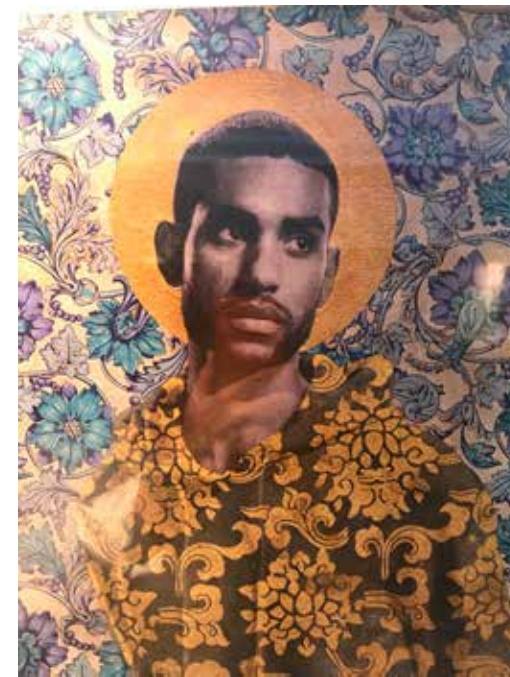
*Come ai tempi belli che  
Pinelli immortalò*

*Arrivederci, Roma  
Good bye, au revoir  
Ti rivedo a spasso in  
carozzella*

*E ripenso a quella  
ciumachella*

*Ch’era tanto bella e che  
t’ha detto sempre no.”*

—Claudio Villa



***“Italy has changed. But Rome is Rome.”***  
— Robert De Niro, American actor



# THE DOORS OF ITALY



# PARIS



*You come to Paris,  
You come to play.  
You have a wonderful time.  
You go away.  
And from then on,  
You talk of Paris knowingly.  
You may know Paris,  
You don't know Paree.*

—Cole Porter

No city has been as romanticized as Paris.

It is the perfect backdrop for a fashion shoot, or a movie about fashion—indeed, Paris is the fashion capital of the world and rightly so—this is the city of the best fashion shows, the best designers, “haute couture” (which means high dressmaking), the most glamorous people and it is where the bikini was invented by the French automobile engineer Louis Réard and fashion designer Jacques Heim in 1946.

It is also the “city of light”, so named because it was among the first cities of Europe to employ gas street lights and historically, Paris was the center of The Age of Enlightenment.



*Disneyland, Paris*



### *Père Lachaise Cemetery*

**C**emeteries reveal much about a city, and Père Lachaise, the largest cemetery in France, is the last home to many: Peter Abelard and Héloïse, Molière, Eugène Delacroix, Jacques-Louis David, Georges Bizet, Frédéric Chopin, Honoré de Balzac, Marcel Proust, Georges Seurat, Oscar Wilde, Sarah Bernhardt, Isadora Duncan, Gertrude Stein, Colette, Edith Piaf, Marcel Marceau, Richard Wright, and Yves Montand, among others.

Built in 1804, it's moody. But not without its unique attractions, such as the grave of Victor Noir, a man who lost his life in a duel and was immortalized in a full-length, oxidized bronze statue with an erection.

In the 1970s, a myth began that rubbing the crotch and kissing the statue on the lips would bring women enhanced fertility and a blissful sex life. The effects of this myth on the statue—Victor Noir's lips and groin are shiny, while the rest of his body has the usual verdigris.

The same can be said of the tomb of Oscar Wilde. Today, the monument is viewed by thousands. A tradition has developed whereby visitors would kiss the tomb after applying lipstick to their mouth, thereby leaving a "print" of their kiss. The stone has also been covered in graffiti, almost exclusively letters of love to the author, but this is not as damaging as the lipstick kisses. Lipstick contains animal fat, which sinks into the stone and causes permanent damage.

Fitting for a man who, as actor Stephen Fry said, "Here's this man who believed when he died that his name would be toxic for generations to come. For hundreds of years, his work wouldn't be read. He would stand for nothing but perversion. Utter disgust at a society that couldn't bear people like him... His tomb is in Père Lachaise Cemetery, in Paris. It had to be restored because the polished stone on its surface had corroded through kissing. Thousands and thousands. Wouldn't it be allowed once to just wake him up for five minutes just to tell him that, then he can go back to

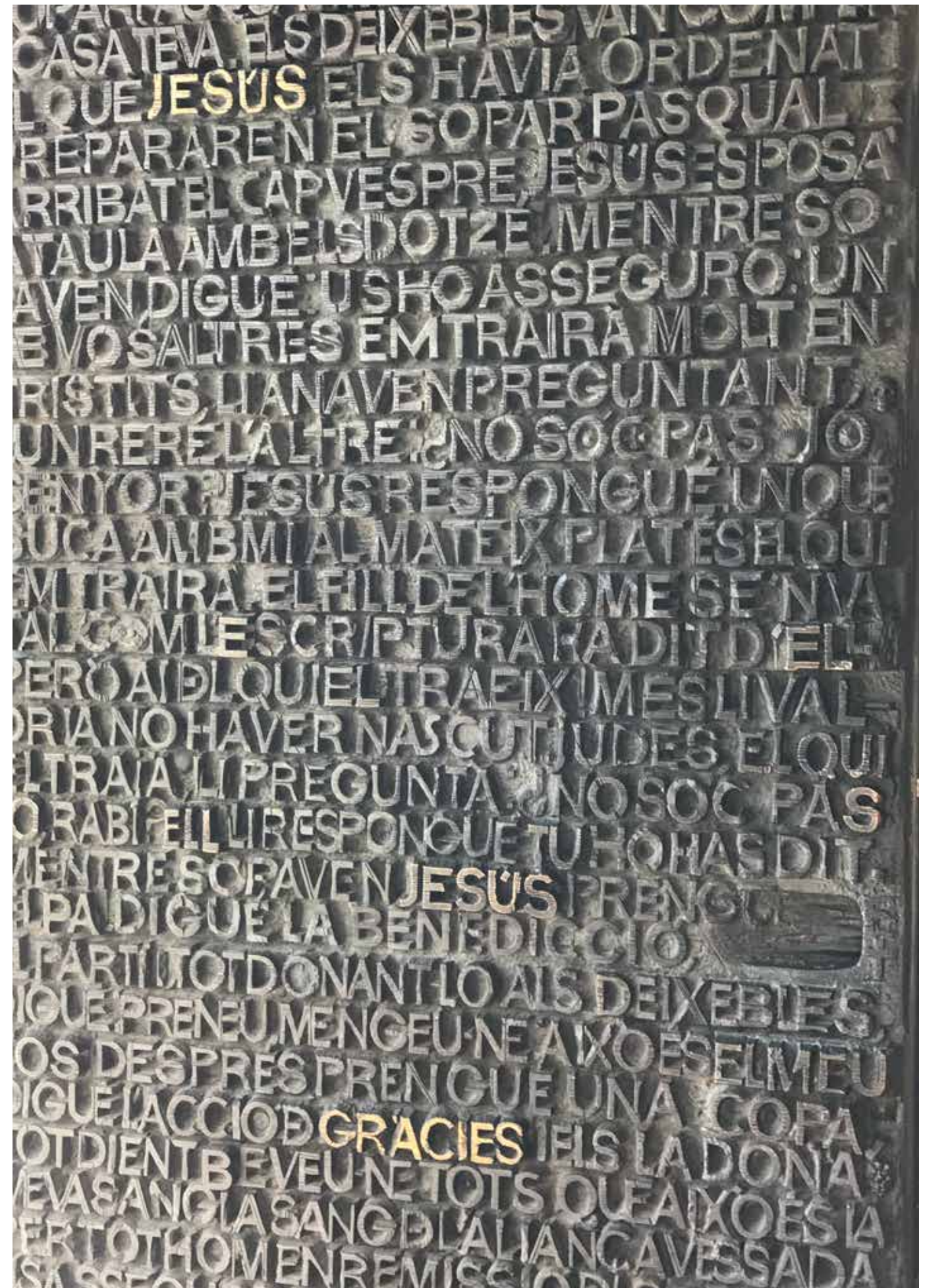


***Cathedral of Seville***

# SPAIN

*“Any reasonable, sentient person who looks at Spain, comes to Spain, eats in Spain, drinks in Spain, they’re going to fall in love. Otherwise, there’s something deeply wrong with you. This is the dream of all the world.”*  
– **Anthony Bourdain**

*Barcelona*  
*Figueres*  
*Seville*  
*Granada*  
*Bilbao*  
*Madrid*  
*Sitges*



For many, Barcelona is the first stop when visiting Spain. With a vibrant art scene, unique Catalan culture and food, and stunning architecture, Barcelona is the perfect starting point.

It is the tallest religious building in all of Europe, and indeed, it towers as an icon in the city: the Sagrada Família. Designed in 1882 by Antoni Gaudí, an architect who did not live to see the completion of the project, he was, in fact, struck by a tram, and because he looked so much like a beggar, he did not receive adequate care; he died in 1926. They buried his body on the underground level in a tomb, and visitors from any part of the world can see it whenever they visit. Gaudí's tomb is held in the chapel dedicated to the El

Carmen Virgin. The Sagrada Família is special, as are many churches in Europe, but here, the light, the vault, and the sheer quirkiness of the design create a unique experience.

To the north of Barcelona is Figueres, a town an hour away by train. It is home to the

Dalí Theatre Museum, the largest surrealist object in the world. It is located in the former Municipal Theatre, a 19th-century construction destroyed at the end of the Spanish Civil War. On its ruins, Dalí decided to create his museum.

An hour from Figueres will get you to Portlligat, Dalí's summer home, which, as expected, is surreal.

On another trip to Spain, we drove or took a train from the southern point of Cadiz to the northern point of San Sebastián.

Arriving in Madrid, one can sense the bustle of a large, populated city. The capital of Spain, it is home to nearly seven million people.

*Basilica of La Sagrada Família. Passion facade. Flagellation of Christ (1937).  
Josep M Subirachs, sculptor.*



Staying at the H10 Villa de la Reina, which is in the center of Madrid, is the perfect starting point for adventures north and south.

Starting out, we head to the roof of the shopping center El Corte Inglés Callao, where, if and when you can find a table, you order a drink and watch the Spanish sunset.

The drive from Madrid delivers an easy ride through “Man of La Mancha” territory, Toledo. Rusted metal sculptures along the hills reveal Don Quixote and Rocinante, his horse, as indicators that you too are on a journey.

Then, there is Granada, home to the Alhambra. The Alhambra is a breathtaking palace and fortress complex located in Granada, Andalusia, Spain. It is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of the most famous examples of Islamic architecture in the world. The name “Alhambra” is derived from the Arabic words “al-qal’a al-hamra,” which mean “the red fortress.”

The Alhambra’s origins can be traced back to the 9th century, when a small fortress was built on the site. However, it was during the reign of the Nasrid dynasty in the 13th and 14th centuries that the complex was expanded and transformed into the magnificent structure we see today.

The Alhambra is composed of several distinct areas, including the Alcazaba (the fortress), the Nasrid Palaces, the Generalife, and the Medina (the residential quarter). The complex is surrounded by imposing walls and towers, providing a defensive structure that overlooks the city of Granada and offers stunning views of the surrounding landscape.

The Nasrid Palaces are the highlight of the Alhambra, showcasing the pinnacle of Islamic architectural and artistic achievements. These palaces feature intricate stucco work, beautiful tile patterns, ornate arches, and serene courtyards. The most



*“This is the dream of all the world. The dream is to live in Granada. You know, work in the morning, have a one-hour nap in the afternoon, and at night go out and have that life. Go out and see your friends and eat tapas and drink red wine and be in a beautiful place.”*

— Anthony Bourdain

famous of the palaces is the Palacio de los Leones (Palace of the Lions), with its iconic courtyard centered around a stunning fountain supported by twelve marble lions.

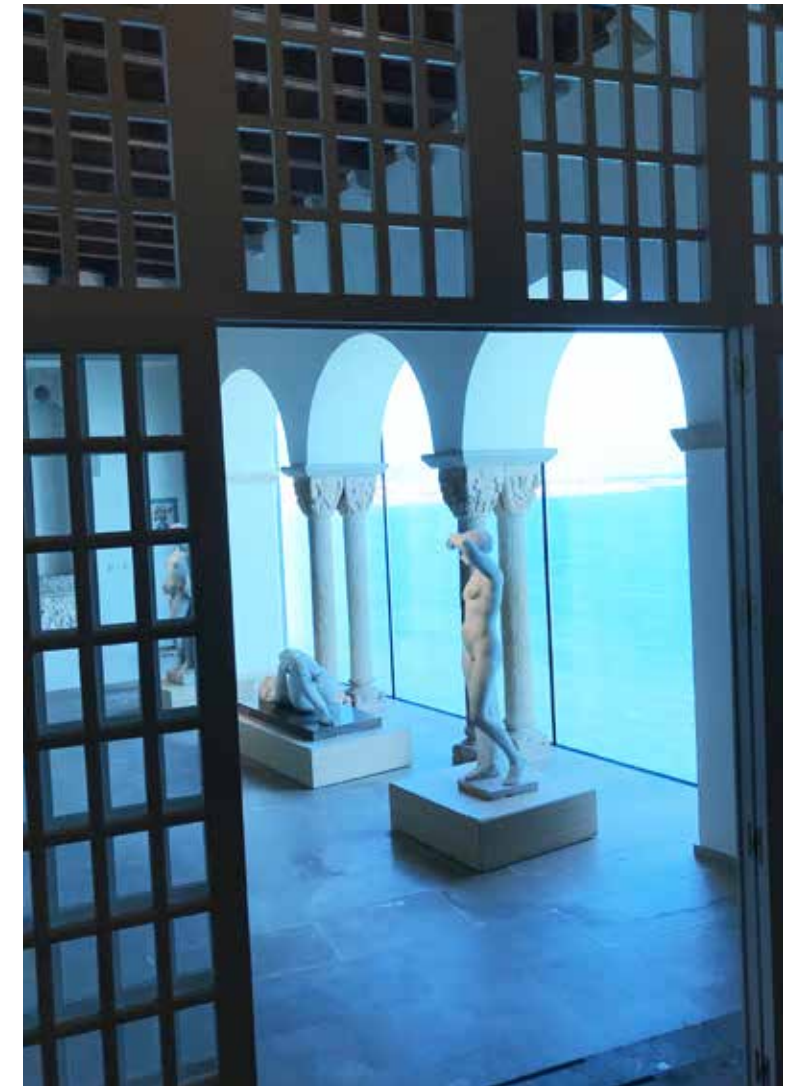
Another notable feature of the Alhambra is the Generalife, a lush and peaceful garden retreat located adjacent to the palaces. It consists of beautifully landscaped gardens, picturesque courtyards, and pavilions, providing a tranquil escape from the opulence of the palaces.

Throughout the complex, visitors can also admire the detailed calligraphy, geometrical patterns, and inscriptions that adorn the walls, reflecting the rich artistic and cultural heritage of the Islamic civilization.

The Alhambra’s architecture combines Islamic and Andalusian influences with elements of Spanish Renaissance and Gothic styles that were added after the Christian Reconquista. The blending of these diverse

influences creates a unique and captivating aesthetic.

The Alhambra attracts millions of visitors every year, and its timeless beauty continues to inspire and captivate people from all over the world. It stands as a testament to the rich history and cultural exchange between civilizations, as well as a symbol of the artistic and architectural achievements of the Islamic world. If there is magic in this world, this is where it is.



## SITGES

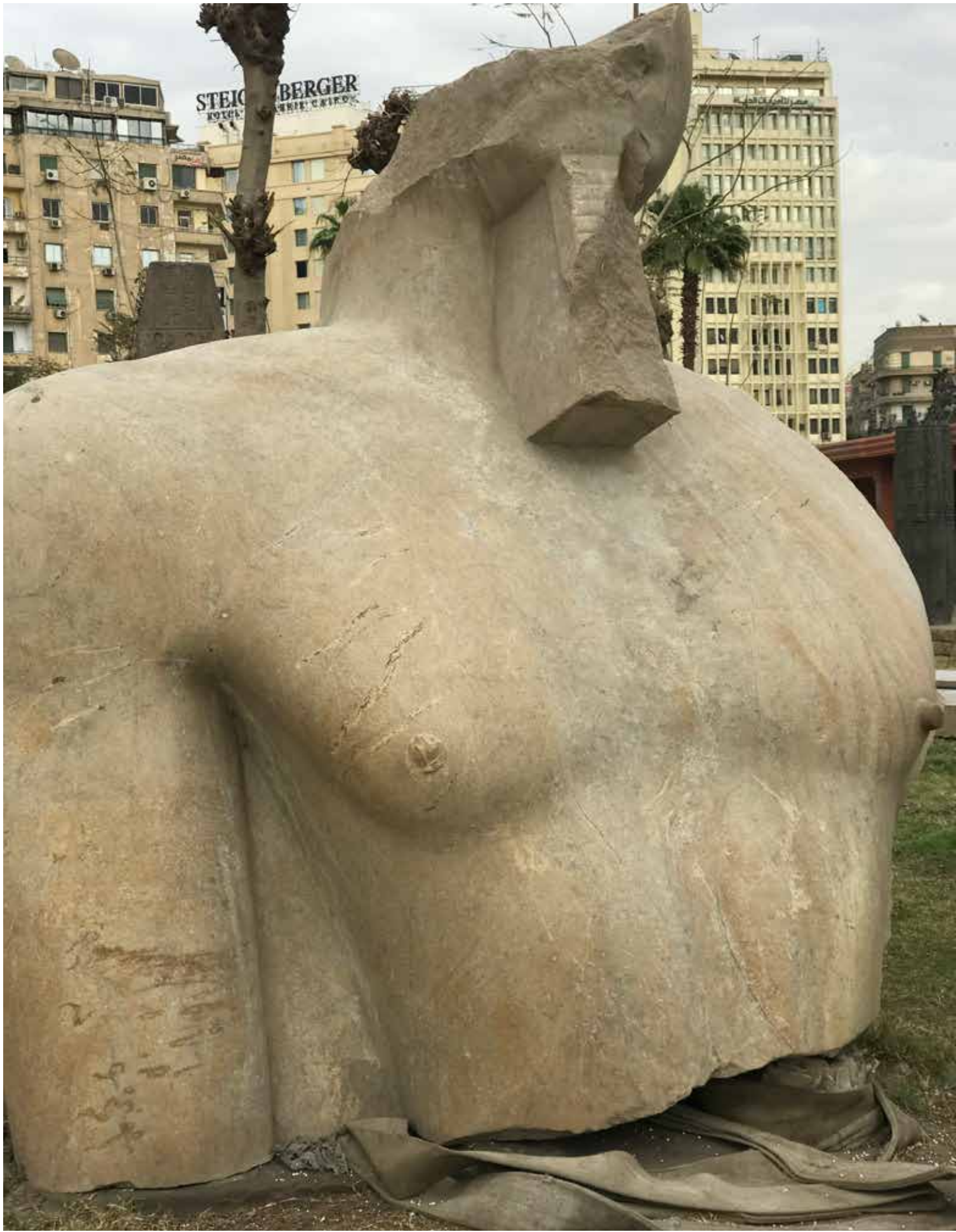
*A quick train ride from Barcelona, Sitges, a town about 35 kilometers southwest of Barcelona in Catalonia, Spain, it is renowned worldwide for its film festival, carnival, and LGBT+ culture.*

*And it is beautiful.*

*While most people are shopping and dining at Calle Ier de Maig (Street of Sin), a visit to the Cau Ferrat and Maricel Museum may be one of the most physically beautiful museums in the world. Its windows look out to the Baleric Sea, providing a bank of natural light.*



*The Cau Ferrat and Maricel Museum was the home and study of artist and writer Santiago Rusiñol, one of the most important figures of the Modernisme movement in Catalonia. It is one of the three museums in Sitges located on the shores of Sant Sebastià beach.*



# CAIRO

**T**hen there is Cairo. The first impressions came quick: the buildings were all the same color, a muted beige, as if painted with the dust of the surrounding desert. The streets pulsed with a bustle unlike many cities—perhaps it was the 10 million people navigating the labyrinth of streets, each trying to cross a chaotic river of honking cars. Not a liquor store in sight, a reminder of the city’s cultural and religious fabric. Instead, corner shops sold tea, fresh bread, and dates, their owners chatting amiably with passersby.

Thousands of taxis jockeyed for position in a smog-filled haze, their horns creating a cacophony that blended with the staccato rhythm of cigarette smoke darting from half-open car windows. The sun struggled to pierce through the haze, casting a diffused golden light that softened the city’s rough edges. Sidewalk vendors displayed vibrant arrays of goods: pyramids carved from alabaster, silver jewelry, and colorful scarves swayed gently in the breeze.

The Museum of Egyptian Antiquities loomed across the street from the hotel, a commanding presence that seemed

to anchor the city in its ancient roots. Its imposing facade, adorned with neoclassical elements, stood as a testament to history. The architect of the building was selected through an international competition in 1895, which was the first of its kind. The competition was won by the French architect Marcel Dourgnon, whose vision came to life in this monumental structure. The museum was inaugurated in 1902 by Khedive Abbas Helmy II and has since become a historic landmark in downtown Cairo, home to some of the world’s most magnificent ancient masterpieces.

Stepping inside the museum felt like entering a portal to another time. The cool, dimly lit halls were filled with artifacts that bore the weight of thousands of years. Intricate hieroglyphics whispered stories of gods and pharaohs, while colossal statues loomed with an air of timeless authority. The golden mask of Tutankhamun, resplendent and impossibly detailed, seemed to gaze through the veil of millennia, a reminder of the fleeting nature of life and the enduring power of legacy.





At some point in being a tourist in Egypt one gets round to asking the question: Why are all the statues so similar and so perfect? The artwork on the walls, "sunken relief" drawings, all have idealistically drawn hands and feet. The male figures are lean, athletic, and smooth. Created between the 6th millennium BC and the 4th century AD, they served a few purposes, but generally to honor royalty.

When asked about the athletic nature of the statues, we were told that most Egyptian statues are idealized versions of the person portrayed. Art was not intended for visual appreciation, but rather served functional and propagandistic purposes. A system of guidelines and grids was used to put everything into proportion. Copying the art or texts of predecessors was how artists often composed new works. The Egyptians had a great reverence for the past, and repeating it was more common than creativity. In fact, we were told that the royals were likely out of shape as they had servants to tend to their needs.





# The Great Pyramid of Giza

One night in Cairo, from the comfort of the Hilton Hotel, we caught a glimpse of something extraordinary in the distance—a pyramid. It was unmistakable, even cloaked in the haze of night.

The following day, after yet another chaotic drive through the bustling city streets, we ventured 11 miles south to our destination: the Great Pyramid of Giza. Like an aging movie star, it stood aloof yet iconic, exuding a timeless presence that was both majestic and weathered.

The bustling tourist trade was impossible to ignore—camels and horses lined the pathways, alongside carriages and persistent guides vying for attention. Negotiations over prices were a ritual unto themselves, a lively prelude to the journey ahead.

Finally, with agreements made, we set off. Perched atop a horse or camel, the view transformed. There's something surreal about seeing the Pyramids up close after countless glimpses in Hollywood films or history books. Every angle felt oddly familiar, yet strikingly new.

Shifting your gaze, another marvel emerged—the Great Sphinx, a sentinel of stone watching over the desert. Carved during the reign of Khafre (c. 2558–2532 BC), this ancient guardian holds the title of the oldest known monumental sculpture in Egypt and remains one of the most iconic images in the world.

For a moment, time seemed to pause. Sitting still atop your mount, you could almost hear the whispers of an era long past. The weight of history was palpable, the realization that you were standing before something crafted in 2570 BC—a structure that had weathered millennia, yet remained resolute.



# NILE RIVER

To get to the Nile River cruise boats, one must get to the city of Aswan. It is a 600-mile journey that requires four hours by plane or nearly 13 hours by train. Of course, we chose the train.

The journey begins in Cairo, where one begins at the Ramses Train Station. As the train arrived, people packed onto it in an alarming manner. With local stops at each stop, the train grew lighter.

We wanted to see what a first-class lounge would be like on an Egyptian train. The first-class coach should really be called the smoking car because, as there was no alcohol, smoking cigarettes seemed to be the point of this lounge.

The sleeper car was decidedly comfortable.

We met some interesting passengers, had a perfectly good night's meal, and when we woke around 7 AM, it was a completely different world outside the windows.

The train heads south along the Nile. The Nile is the longest river in the world, measuring 4,132 miles. It starts at Lake Victoria and empties into the Mediterranean Sea. This is a river with a vast history, and one senses that as the



window to the right reveals men walking carts filled with sugar cane and dead animal carcasses laying on the sandy shores of the Nile. It is as if time has stopped. In some ways, it has...

Welcome to Aswan.

Aswan is a smaller version of Cairo. To be sure, there is a McDonald's, a Kentucky Fried Chicken, and likely any day, a Starbucks, but for now, it is a popular city that sits on the Nile, with a substantial amount of river boats. Aswan is the

"jewel of the Nile." Pink and gray granite thrusts upward through the Nubian sandstone, forming mountains, cliffs, and jagged outcrops. There are countless mosques; there is also Archangel Michael's Coptic Orthodox Cathedral, a towering cathedral in Coptic architecture—the architecture of the Copts, who form the majority of Christians in Egypt.

Security is a way of life in Egypt. In Cairo and in places like the Coptic Church, security runs high. Armed guards and blockades can be found at many hotels, including this Coptic church. But retail and restaurants flourish in the

city of Aswan—it is only until late one afternoon on a Friday that the azan, the call to prayer, can be heard by countless speakers throughout the city. These callers, called muezzinine, are a cacophony of sounds. It becomes a surreal moment in a backstreet hotel as the soundtrack shifts, the sun sets, and we are surely not in the West anymore.

The Sanctuary Sun Boat IV is a contemporary, chic, sleek boat with heavy art deco influences. There are 36 standard cabins, two presidential suites, and two royal suites. We are greeted as we enter the plank by the entire staff, who offer refreshments and introductions. We are divided into groups and assigned an English-speaking tour guide, who will accompany us to the various temples along the way. Afternoon tea will be served. Every night an activity is planned—tonight, after a gourmet dinner is served, we watch as traditional folkloric music and a “whirling dervish” perform.

As one looks around, it becomes clear that this journey invites all kinds of people—local Egyptians, a London-based Sufi businessman with his family, an elderly couple from Scotland, a couple from Cape Cod, a Brazilian opera singer and her daughter, and an Egyptian family with their California-based son-in-law. The staff is attentive, occasionally too attentive, but the dinner, which is buffet-style, is a nice start to this ride up the Nile.

Back in Cairo and ready to set sail for America. We are booked on a flight to Moscow. Leaving Cairo was quite unlike anything—security measures, repeated luggage checks, patdowns, and another luggage check as one boarded the plane. It’s five and a half hours to Moscow. We will not have a layover with no time to visit the city. Instead, we opt for a two-hour “nap room” and a five-minute shower at Moscow Sheremetyevo Airport.



**Right:**  
**Aswan Sheyakha Olah,**  
**common retail outlet**  
**on the streets.**  
**In Edfu, a class visit to the**  
**Temple.**







# MEXICO

*Short flights, great  
food, wonderful  
people, Mexico  
is an easy  
destination from  
Los Angeles*

*Mexico City  
San Miguel Allende  
Isla Mujeres  
Cancun  
Holbox  
Tulum  
Puerto Villarta  
Playa del Carmen  
Cozumel  
Guadalajara  
Tijuana*





# Mexico

*“The lazy lights are pretty, we may end up in Mexico City”*

—Paul McCartney

Frequently, we’re asked, “Is Mexico safe?” It’s an ironic question, considering how often safety concerns cloud perceptions of travel worldwide. But let’s set politics aside and focus on what truly matters: Mexico’s unparalleled beauty, vibrant culture, and warm hospitality.

From bustling cities to serene beaches, Mexico is a feast of places to explore. For those in Los Angeles, Mexico City is just a three-and-a-half-hour flight away, often costing under \$300. The capital city offers an abundance of hotels, restaurants, museums, and historical landmarks—all reasonably priced. The people are remarkably friendly, and with its rich history and cultural heritage, Mexico ranks first in the Americas and seventh globally for UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

## Mexico City

Mexico City, the heart of Mexico, is a bustling blend of history, art, and modern vibrancy. Just a three-and-a-half-hour flight from Los Angeles, this sprawling metropolis offers an experience as diverse as its population.

Start your journey at the Zócalo, the city’s main square, surrounded by architectural marvels like the Metropolitan Cathedral and the National Palace, home to Diego Rivera’s breathtaking murals. Nearby, the ancient ruins of Templo Mayor reveal the city’s Aztec roots.

Art enthusiasts will love the Frida Kahlo Museum in the colorful Coyoacán district, while foodies can savor everything from street tacos to gourmet dining in Polanco. For a peaceful escape, explore Chapultepec Park, one of the largest city parks in the world, housing museums, a zoo, and a serene boating lake.

Mexico City is not just a destination—it’s an experience. Its rich culture, warm hospitality, and dynamic energy make it a must-visit for travelers seeking the soul of Mexico.

## San Miguel de Allende:

### A Colonial Gem

One such heritage site is San Miguel de Allende, located 170 miles from Mexico City and about a 10-hour drive from the U.S. border. While the surrounding areas have evolved over time, the historic center remains remarkably preserved, much as it was 250 years ago. Its streets form a mostly grid-like layout, a hallmark of Spanish colonial planning, though the uneven terrain adds charming irregularities.

Here, you’ll find no parking meters, traffic signals, or fast-food chains—just a timeless ambiance. Weddings are frequent and joyous affairs, often starting with a callejoneada, a lively wedding parade featuring a

mariachi band and a tequila-toting donkey. The vibrant celebrations encapsulate the spirit of Mexico.

## Puerto Vallarta: Pacific Paradise

On Mexico’s west coast lies Puerto Vallarta, a resort town in Jalisco State celebrated for its beaches, water sports, and nightlife. The cobblestone streets of the town center are lined with boutique shops, restaurants, and bars, with the iconic Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe church at its heart.

The Malecón, a scenic beachside promenade, showcases contemporary sculptures, lively bars, and nightclubs. Puerto Vallarta gained international fame thanks to director John Huston, who chose nearby Mismaloya as the filming location for *The Night of the Iguana*. The film drew Hollywood stars like Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton, cementing the town’s status as a glamorous destination on the so-called “Mexican Riviera.”

## Holbox: Mexico’s Hidden Island Paradise

Tucked away off the northern coast of the Yucatán Peninsula, Isla Holbox is a tranquil haven that feels worlds apart from Mexico’s bustling tourist hubs. Accessible by ferry from the mainland town of Chiquilá, this car-free island enchants visitors with its laid-back charm and natural beauty.

The island’s sandy streets are best navigated by golf cart or bike, leading to pristine beaches lined with hammocks and colorful murals that reflect Holbox’s artistic soul. Nature lovers can marvel at the bioluminescent waters that light up at night, or join tours to swim with whale sharks during the summer season.

Holbox is also part of the Yum Balam Nature Reserve, making it a prime spot for birdwatching—flamingos and pelicans are frequent visitors. Pair your adventures with fresh seafood, especially the local lobster pizza, a must-try delicacy.

## The Riviera Maya: Caribbean Bliss

On the opposite coast, the Riviera Maya stretches along the Yucatán Peninsula’s Caribbean shoreline. It’s known for its luxurious all-inclusive resorts, pristine beaches, and captivating Mayan ruins.

Playa del Carmen offers a mix of vibrant nightlife and easy access to Cozumel, a picturesque island perfect for diving and snorkeling. Further south, Tulum combines tranquil yoga retreats with the allure of ancient history. The Tulum ruins, perched on limestone cliffs overlooking the Caribbean, include El Castillo, a striking castle with steep steps best tackled sideways. Nearby, cenotes—natural sinkholes filled with clear water—offer unforgettable swimming experiences.



# SALTON SEA

*It is a place best seen in black and white*

Desolate, abandoned, and humid, the Salton Sea is the land that time forgot.

There is a sulfuric odor that typically shows up when the mercury and humidity are high and levels of hydrogen sulfide spike in the Salton Sea.

It is a 60-mile trek south on Highway 86.

Past Date Palms and towns with names like Mecca are a drive into the neo-noir film world of arid, barren landscapes dotted with motor homes, abandoned junk, and ghostly relics of a time now gone.

Billed as “Palm Springs-by-the-Sea,” restaurants, shops, and nightclubs also sprang up along the shores. The lake enjoyed immense popularity, especially among the rich and famous, as movie stars and recording artists flocked to the area. From Dean Martin to Jerry Lewis, Frank Sinatra, and the Beach Boys, the lake became a speedboat playground.

However, the Salton Sea’s bright lights would quickly fade in the 1970s, when the sea’s water level began rising after several years of heavy rains and increasing agricultural drainage. Shorefront homes, businesses, resorts, and marinas flooded several times until the water stabilized in 1980 after a series of conservation measures to reduce field run-off. However, for the many resort areas, it was too late. The salt and fertilizers in the run-off had accumulated to such a degree that they had reached toxic levels, which began a cycle of decay. As the algae fed on the toxins, it created massive amounts of rotten-smelling matter floating on the surface of the lake and suffocated many of the fish.







# MONO LAKE

*is a saline soda lake in Mono County, California, formed at least 760,000 years ago as a terminal lake in an endorheic basin. The lack of an outlet causes high levels of salts to accumulate in the lake which make its water alkaline.*

*Mono Lake's hypersalinity supports a fascinating ecosystem. While no fish can survive in its salty depths, it teems with life, hosting trillions of tiny brine shrimp and alkali flies. These creatures, in turn, attract an astonishing array of migratory birds, making the lake a critical stopover for avian travelers.*

**38.0128° N, 118.9762° W**





# Angels Flight

LOS ANGELES

Created in 1901 to provide vertical transportation for the Bunker Hill area of Downtown Los Angeles, this historic landmark has been moved, rebuilt, and featured in at least forty films. Its two trains, named Olivet and Sinai, that run in opposite directions on a shared cable. They traverse a 33 percent grade over a 315-foot journey that lasts about two minutes.

Rain in Los Angeles was once a rarity, but not anymore—and it changes everything. While LA cannot be called a romantic city in the same vein as Paris or Venice, rain does transform it. The streets shimmer, the sky turns moody, and the air becomes intoxicating, carrying a singular blend of oil, dirt, grass, salt, oranges, and earth. It's the kind of atmosphere immortalized

***The streets shimmer, the sky turns moody, and the air becomes intoxicating, carrying a singular blend of oil, dirt, grass, salt, oranges, and earth.***

by writers like Joan Didion and Nathanael West.

That was the night this was captured. The pavement gleamed, and the buildings, their architectural details normally cloaked in dust and grime, were suddenly revealed in all their revealing glory.

The iconic palm trees, symbols of a bygone era, sway dramatically in the wind. These exotic plants, specifically Mexican fan palms, were brought to the city in 1932 for the Olympic Games as part of a \$100,000 beautification project. Stretching along 150 miles of boulevards, this initiative employed over 400 workers as part of an unemployment relief program.

And on the rare nights when the Santa Ana winds arrive—those warm, electrifying gusts charged with positive ions—the city falls under a spell: The air shifts, the mood changes, paradise sings.



# Hollywood

## CALIFORNIA

*“No dream ever entirely disappears. Somewhere it troubles some unfortunate person and some day, when that person has been sufficiently troubled, it will be reproduced on the lot.”*

—Nathanael West, *Miss Lonelyhearts*

a city on the edge—from early childhood, the threat of the “big one” (a catastrophic, 9+ earthquake) has hung over the city like an enduring fog. It has always felt like the price to be paid for living in something like paradise—for that is what LA is like most of the time. Now, add to the mix unending bad traffic, parking restrictions that require a substantial IQ to understand, increasing homelessness, rampant graffiti obscuring freeway exit signs, humidity, and finally rents that resemble our neighbor to the north, and it is fair to suggest that this is a city in decline.

Then there’s Hollywood. Actually, only one studio is in Hollywood (the iconic Paramount Pictures), and the rest are located on the outskirts of Hollywood. What poses as Hollywood is the tourist attraction, Hollywood & Highland, once home to some fiberglass elephants. A detail of the main courtyard of the center, Babylon Court, was modeled after the famous Babylon set from D.W. Griffith’s silent, racist epic “Intolerance.”

The Babylon-themed decor, including the elephants, were removed from Hollywood & Highland as part of a major renovation project that began in 2020. The renovated complex was renamed Ovation Hollywood in 2022. Oh Hollywood. Just to the south of this attraction is the actual Hollywood Boulevard, where, unlike what the Kinks song said, you are not very likely to see any movie stars, but you will see an array of characters in costume, ranging from Spiderman to Willy Wonka, who work in costume for tips. Without a rumble, unbeknownst to the pedestrians on the street, a subway beneath the street stops

***“You are not very likely to see any movie stars, but you will see an array of characters in costume...”***

at Hollywood and Highland on its way to the next tourist attraction, Universal Studios. To the east of Hollywood and Highland, the landscape is littered with tourist attractions: wax museums, the Guinness Book of Records, and Scientology.

It’s not glamorous—it has the sheen of a carnival attraction without much attraction—but souvenirs abound with a flurry of cheap signage, all indicating that you have been here, and you too can own a piece of Hollywood.

↔ ***filming Gangster Squad, Park Plaza Hotel***

*“All these places had their moments  
With lovers and friends, I still can recall  
Some are dead and some are living  
In my life, I've loved them all.”*  
—John Lennon



***The view from Mt. Wilson***

Wanderlust 

TRAVELS HERE AND THERE