

THE TRAVEL CLUB

E-ZINE #19: NOVEMBER, 2021

Hidden Uzbekistan

Exploring the country away from the Silk Road

On the road in the Balkans

A summer adventure to remember

Slow days out in Cambridgeshire

Discovering one of England's oft-overlooked regions

Reopening the eighth continent

Why now is the time to visit Madagascar

Bradt GUIDES

TRAVEL TAKEN SERIOUSLY

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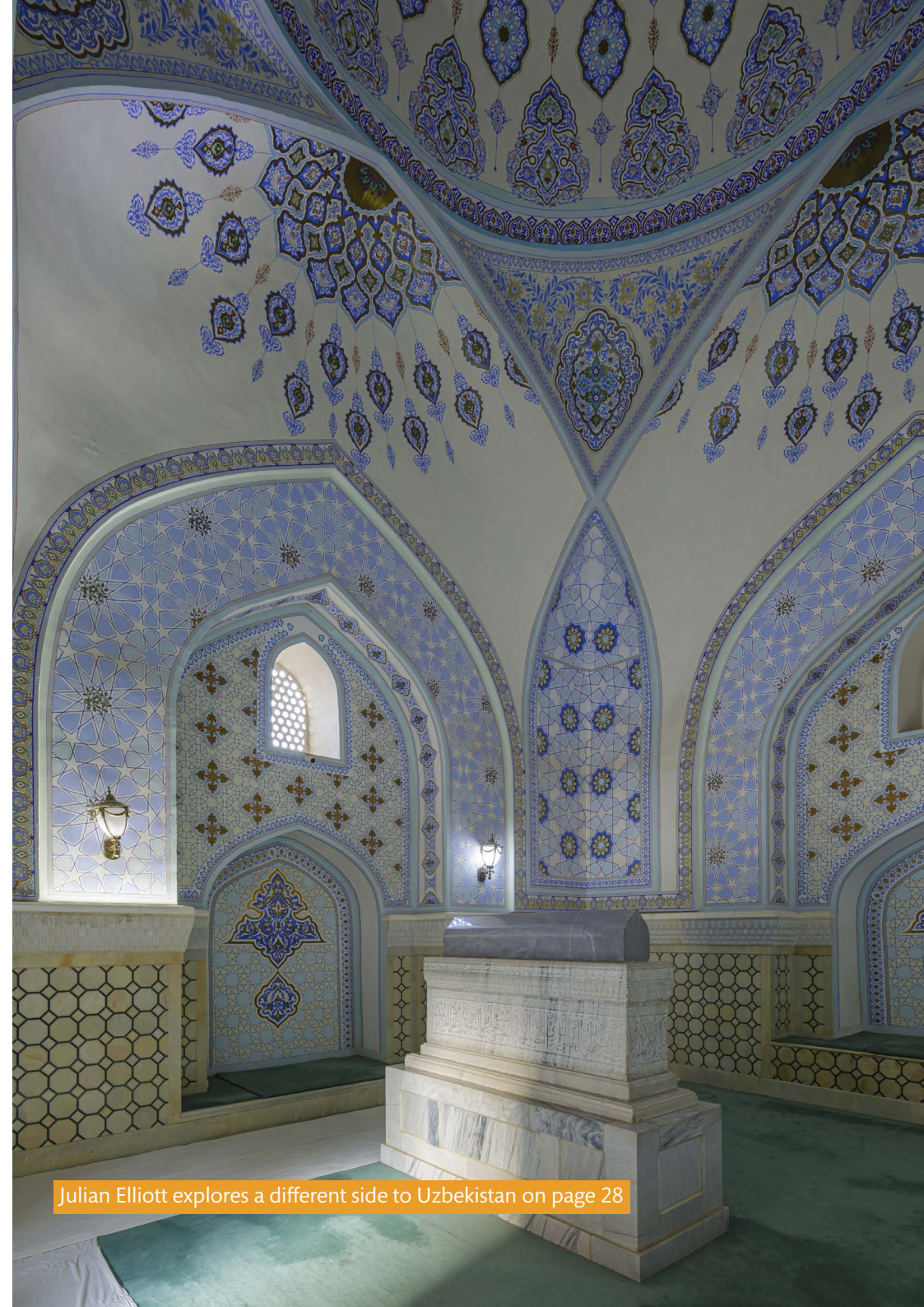
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MADAGASCAR'S REOPENING: WHY IT'S THE PERFECT TIME TO VISIT

*Closed to tourism since the beginning of the pandemic, the exotic Indian Ocean island of Madagascar is finally opening up to visitors again. Bradt author **Daniel Austin** explains why an uncannily prophetic video game from 2007 should have you rushing to pack your bags.*

A decade and a half ago, a Flash-based computer game called *Pandemic* was released by Dark Realm Studios. The objective was simple: evolve a virus and wipe out humanity. It's fair to assume it would not have been met with quite such universal critical acclaim had it been thrust upon the world post-Covid – but at the time this addictive strategy game garnered wide popularity.

Faced with a full-screen simulated world map displaying country-by-country data on the pathogen's spread, players had to tweak their virus's symptoms and traits, battling to infect the whole world before transport networks were shut down and vaccines developed. It wasn't easy to win. The millennials among you may well remember playing it – and you'll surely also recall that the greatest challenge of all was posed by Madagascar. The island was the source of interminable exasperation for players whose efforts to infect its inhabitants were continually thwarted by its disconnectedness from the rest of the world. An internet meme was soon spawned by frustrated users in which the president of Madagascar yells '*Shut down everything!*'

The video game becomes reality

As Mother Nature terrifyingly began to play *Pandemic* for real in Wuhan, one by one

many of the game's prophecies were proven eerily accurate. From Iceland to New Zealand, remote island nations turned out to have the upper hand in keeping Covid at bay. Madagascar did indeed promptly 'shut down everything', its president announcing the closure of the borders before even a single coronavirus case was confirmed there.

As of October 2021, almost two years on, Madagascar remains in the bottom three countries with the lowest rates of confirmed Covid cases in Africa, and the official R-value (basic virus reproduction rate) is a mere 0.05, while the worldwide average stands at 0.98. A contributing factor in these statistics is unquestionably the relatively low levels of testing across Africa, but nevertheless the island state has reported fewer than 1,000 Covid deaths in total (out of almost 5 million globally).

As a result, in contrast to much of the rest of the African continent, Madagascar has at no point been on the travel red lists of the UK, EU or US. And lacking land borders, it is rather less exposed to any infection peaks being experienced by neighbouring countries.

Happily, from 6 November 2021, Madagascar's borders will once again be open to travellers. This news comes as an *enormous* relief to the country's tourism sector, responsible for more than 13% of GDP prior to the pandemic. In one of the world's



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active routes into Antananarivo's Ivato Airport will be via Paris, Mauritius or Réunion. In the next phase of reopening, it is hoped that the flights of Turkish Airlines, Kenya Airways, Ethiopian Airlines and Airlink will resume, opening up additional routes into the country via Istanbul, Nairobi, Addis Ababa and Johannesburg.

The announcement of the border opening has caused a predictable spike in flight prices for the rest of this year, owing to pent-up demand from separated families eager to reunite by Christmas, but there are lots of fantastic deals to be had on flights from February onwards.

As the sector gets back on its feet throughout 2022, the inevitable low tourist numbers are also likely to mean there are plenty of great offers on hotels and organised tours, and as a bonus even the most popular national parks and other tourist spots won't be packed with other travellers. So visiting the country next year is a win-win!

I was first attracted to visit Madagascar by its wildlife, as so many are, but really it was the magnanimous welcome of the Malagasy people that has kept me going back time and time again. The warmest reception of all, I have noticed, typically comes after a period of adversity – such as the country's political crises of 2002 and 2009, both of which resulted in a brief tourism hiatus. (This is far from a uniquely Malagasy



phenomenon; I also remember with particular fondness the incredibly warm-hearted hospitality of the locals when I spent time in Serbia shortly after the cessation of NATO bombardments that ended the Kosovo War.) There's nothing better than visiting a country than when everyone is genuinely delighted to see you.

The eighth continent

Madagascar has its relative isolation to thank for *far* more than a bit of extra protection from

viruses. Cast adrift in the Indian Ocean, it has been separated from other landmasses for longer than any other island on earth. During tens of millions of years, evolution has played to a different tune here, heading off at a different tangent from the rest of the world. This huge island is sometimes known as the 'eighth continent', for it is truly a place apart.

The lengthy geographical separation is key to the otherworldliness of the wildlife you'll see in Madagascar today. It is arguably the most

important of all the world's biodiversity hotspots, with some 85% of the island's plants and terrestrial animals existing nowhere else. There are no giraffes or elephants, nor lions or tigers. Indeed, numerous globally widespread animal groups are conspicuously lacking – members of the cat, dog and bear families, for instance – and their very absence has been a significant factor in allowing so many new species to emerge and thrive.

Primates are a case in point: Madagascar is the exclusive home of around a quarter of all primate species on our planet, yet there are no monkeys or great apes. All belong to a group known as lemurs, and they exist in glorious variety: well over 100 different species – big and small, nocturnal and diurnal, social and solitary, adorably cute and downright freaky.

This unique flora and fauna is increasingly under threat. The country was already grappling with rising poverty, a rapidly growing population, illegal logging, slash-and-burn agriculture and potentially damaging mining operations, when Covid was added to this list. Ecotourism can make a big difference by providing local employment and generating much-needed revenue to help in tackling some of these issues. At the same time this reinforces the message that the country's natural heritage is a valuable asset worth protecting.



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Madagascar is known for its unique fauna; from left to right: Coquerel's sifaka, *Boophis sandrae* frog, sportive lemur

The red tape

So what restrictions are in place? Unlike many other destinations, you do not need to be vaccinated to travel to Madagascar but, as you would expect, there are a few Covid-safety rules. These are liable to be adapted over time, so be sure to check the latest regulations before you travel. Under current rules, all passengers are required to take a PCR test

at the airport on arrival before being transferred by official shuttle bus to an accredited quarantine hotel for a stay of 24–48 hours until the result is received (extended to 14 days in the case of testing positive). Costs are €25 for the test and €3 for the hotel shuttle; quarantine hotels range from €12 to €138 per person sharing, or from €19 upwards for a single room.



With 4,828km of Indian Ocean coastline, Madagascar is not short of beautiful places for enjoying a sea view

You are not permitted to travel to Madagascar from red-list countries, defined as those with more than 300 new weekly Covid cases per 100,000 population. This means that around 90% of the world is on the green list at the time of writing, including the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and most EU countries. The UK's present rate falls above the red-list threshold, however, along with a few eastern European nations.

Those who feel that independent adventure travel is a bit too much of a headache right now, and who'd prefer to sit back and hand over the

Naturalist and travel writer Daniel Austin is co-author of Bradt's *Madagascar* and *Madagascar Wildlife* guides, both of which are available with a 50% discount using the code **TRAVELCLUB50**. He is also Secretary of the Anglo-Malagasy Society, accompanies Indian Ocean expedition cruises as a local expert, and leads regular wildlife tours of the island.

responsibility for all the arrangements to the experts, may like to know that I will be leading some tours of Madagascar from September to November 2022. These are small-group tours for six to ten people, managed and marketed by reputable UK-based tour operators who have excellent flexible refund policies in place to allow customers to book with confidence. For full details of these tours, see www.danielaustin.co.uk.

Or if group travel isn't your bag, there's a plethora of tour operators offering tailor-made itineraries across Madagascar. Dozens of the best ones are listed in Bradt's award-winning *Madagascar* guidebook, now in its 13th edition.

Oh, and if you're wondering what became of the *Pandemic* game from the 2000s, it ultimately inspired a more sophisticated version called *Plague Inc* that is still around today. Its creators, Ndemic, were quick to adapt when Covid hit, releasing a 'cure mode' in which you instead fight *against* the virus – so now Madagascar's seclusion works in the player's favour!



SLOW DAYS OUT IN CAMBRIDGESHIRE



*Around 8.2 million visitors flock to the city of Cambridge each year, but only a fraction stay overnight and very few venture beyond the city centre, let alone explore the rest of the county. But if you're fully committed to the Slow ethos, there's far more to discover: Anglo-Saxon earthworks, wildlife-filled wetlands and historic villages that tell stories of the people that make this county so fascinating. Author of our new Slow guide, **Lucy Grewcock**, lets us in on a few of the region's secrets.*

Ely

A matchbox-sized city with a big community vibe, Ely is a real unsung gem, with its showstopping cathedral, buzzing arts scene and laidback river life. It's only 15 minutes by train from

Cambridge, yet far too few people make the trip here. Ely Cathedral is an iconic Cambridgeshire landmark, with its 215ft tower visible for tens of miles across the Fens, and the recently revamped Ely Museum is undoubtedly one of the most

impressive local history museums I've seen anywhere. The city also has independent shops and cafés, and is best visited on market days, when local produce and artisan food stalls fill the square.



Grantchester

West of Cambridge is one of the county's most romantic villages – Grantchester, and its glorious tea garden, is easily reached from the city centre by walking, cycling or punting along the River Cam. Along with its leafy setting, Grantchester is known

for its legacy of famous residents – Edwardian poet Rupert Brooke called the village his home, as have the world's highest concentration of Nobel Prize winners, and current inhabitants include sculptor Helaine Blumenfeld OBE and novelist and former politician Jeffrey Archer. After meandering down

the charming High Street – which fans of the ITV detective series *Grantchester* will no doubt recognise – enjoy a pub lunch or afternoon tea in the Orchard Tea Garden before ambling back through the meadows to Cambridge for a drink in a riverside pub.



Houghton Mill

This working watermill is a strong contender for Cambridgeshire's most picturesque – and has unsurprisingly inspired countless artworks over the centuries, some of which you can see inside. The hands-on tour is both entertaining and

educational – visitors can watch, hear and smell three floors' worth of 18th-century cogs, wheels and millstones in action, and can also control the model locks, hoist sacks of grain on the Victorian pulley systems, and use a hand quern to mill your own flour. Elsewhere, a lovely 5-mile route

through open meadows connects Houghton Mill with the market town of St Ives and the riverside villages of Hemingford Abbots and Hemingford Grey, adorned with historic houses, thatched cottages and a storybook manor.



Wimpole Hall

Cambridgeshire's largest stately home, Wimpole Hall spans 3,000 acres and includes a magnificent mansion, formal gardens, rare-breeds farm and

sprawling parkland which you can explore on foot or by bike. There's a vast amount to experience – when I first visited, it took me a good hour to simply stroll around the hall's front garden and

take in its mighty façade. Just up the road is the excellent Willow Tree pub in Bourn village and ancient Bourn Windmill – one of the oldest surviving mills in the country.



Wisbech

The northernmost town in Cambridgeshire, unassuming Wisbech is dubbed the 'Capital of the Fens' and is a hub of fenland culture. It feels well off the beaten track, but Slow travellers who venture

to this outpost can look forward to some of the most impressive Georgian architecture in Britain, along with fascinating museums and memorials that honour the town's inspirational former residents – the likes of anti-slavery campaigner

Thomas Clarkson, philosopher William Godwin and Octavia Hill, one of the founders of the National Trust. One of the best ways to experience this area is by bike, with quiet backroads, tranquil villages and widescreen fenland views.





Holme Fen

Holme Fen is unlike anywhere else you'll find in the Fens, or in Cambridgeshire for that matter. It's the lowest point in Great Britain (around 9ft below sea level) and, according to

Natural England, the 'finest example of birch woodland in natural Britain'. I absolutely love this place – there's something utterly magical about the slender trunks and silvery bark of the

trees, and the dappled sunlight filtering through the canopy to the forest floor, which boasts 500 species of fungi. And all this in the least-wooded area in the UK.

The Lodes Way

My favourite fen-edge bike ride, the 8-mile Lodes Way is a linear route between Wicken Fen and Lode village, next to Anglesey Abbey, crossing four lodes – navigable waterways dug

by the Romans – along the way. You can hire bikes at Wicken Fen, and there are waymarkers to guide you along traffic-free cycle tracks and quiet country roads, which follow part of NCN11 through Adventurers' Fen, Tubney Fen and White

Fen. En route, you could lay out some lunch on a picnic bench or detour to one of the villages that sit at the end of each lode. For the return route, you could loop back through Swaffham Prior, with its striking twin churches.



Lucy Grewcock has been a travel writer for more than a decade. Her new guidebook, *Slow Travel Cambridgeshire & the Fens*, is out later this month – get your copy for half price with the code **TRAVELCLUB50**.



ON THE ROAD IN... THE BALKANS

*This multi-country road adventure exploring the cultural legacy of the Ottomans was well worth the Covid planning efforts, says author **Diana Darke**.*

Planning a road trip to the Balkans amid a pandemic must rate as one of life's more challenging undertakings. But there were reasons for my trip – it wasn't just some strange form of masochism. I'd taken on a new commission for a book on the Ottomans and their cultural legacy, timed to coincide with the 100th anniversary of the fall of the Ottoman Empire in 1922. Already very familiar with Turkey (having authored Bradt's guide to Eastern Turkey) and the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire like Syria, my experience of the Balkans was limited to the 1970s, when I'd driven through the former Yugoslavia en route to Lebanon. With air travel problematic, subject to frequent cancellations and alterations, instinct told me that a road trip would at least be more in my control, enabling the route to be more flexible.

Flexibility, as it happened, turned out to be key. I lost count of the number of times I had to change the itinerary, keeping up with the constant



© DIANA DARKE

Mostar, the pearl of Bosnia and Herzegovina

vagaries of the FCO travel advice for 15 countries, whose own Covid-19 rules were likewise subject to unpredictable rollercoasters. The original plan, arrived at in early June, had been to set off in mid-July and make the Turkish city of Bursa – birthplace of the Ottoman Empire – our final destination, with a rest on nearby Lake İznik our reward. It was an ambitious scheme, complicated by the fact that UK citizens were already on Austria and Serbia's red lists. It did not matter that Turkey was on the UK's red list, since more than ten days would have elapsed before our return, but when, two days before our departure, Bulgaria suddenly put UK passport holders on their red list – at the same time, ironically, as the UK put Bulgaria on its own green list – there was little choice but to pull the plug on the whole thing. Fortunately, I'd made all bookings subject to free cancellation at 24 hours' notice, so no funds were lost.

By mid-September, the rules eased slightly in our favour and persistence was rewarded. Leaving the UK in our own car via the Dover–Calais ferry, we embarked on a scaled-down version of the trip with Lake Ohrid in North Macedonia substituting for Turkey's Lake İznik as the rest spot. Armed with all the documentation I could think off – international driving licences, printed Covid-19 certificates to prove our fully vaccinated status, car registration and Green Card insurance

documents – I had prepared for all eventualities, and even stowed some food stocks and sleeping bags in the boot.

Needless to say, all the planning and hassle was well worth the effort. The trip was mind-blowing and we learned so much. By a happy chance, Bradt had published Tharik Hussain's fascinating travelogue *Minarets in the Mountains* just weeks earlier, so we were able to benefit from some of his many insights – and even to join his 'Decolonising Travel Writing' Zoom talk from Split, where we happened to be overnighing on that occasion. In total we crossed 20 national borders, sometimes three in one day, such is the fragmentation of the region that has given us the very word 'balkanisation'. The former Yugoslavia is now divided into seven separate countries, two of which – Slovenia and Croatia – became members of the European Union in 2004 and 2013 respectively. Others hope to join in the coming years, with Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina probably next in the queue. Unlike in our home country, fuel shortages were nowhere to be seen, and petrol prices were considerably lower than in the UK.

There were more highlights and memorable encounters than I can fit into a single piece, so I've chosen just a select few here. But I'll be writing more about the trip in future, and recording one

or two BBC *From Our Own Correspondent* pieces about it in the coming months – watch this space!

Mostar

The heart and soul of this city in Bosnia and Herzegovina is unquestionably the famous Stari Most (literally 'Old Bridge'), with its startlingly high single arch. Deliberately destroyed in 1993 by paramilitary Croat forces during the Croat–Bosniak war, the Ottoman bridge had straddled the dramatic ravine and river below for 427 years,



A view of the now rebuilt bridge just before dusk

© DIANA DARKE

connecting the various religious and ethnic communities that lived on either side, mainly Catholic Croats with Bosniak Muslims. It was designed by a student of the great Ottoman court architect Sinan, and commissioned by Suleyman the Magnificent in 1557.

Today, sadly, despite its 2004 reconstruction thanks to the tireless efforts of a local Bosniak citizen, feelings of intercommunal antagonism still run high in Mostar, with local Croats forbidding their children to cross the bridge. Such divisive sentiment is also symbolised by the enormous cross, illuminated in neon by night, that

dominates the hilltop on the Croatian side, and by the unusually loud church bells that ring out regularly, in contrast to the gentler call to prayer.

Sarajevo

Like Mostar, the Bosnian capital enjoys a dramatic setting in a mountainous river ravine. Sometimes called the 'Jerusalem of the Balkans', it is one of only a few major European cities to have a mosque, Catholic church, Orthodox church and synagogue within the same neighbourhood, now the fully pedestrianised heart of the city.

The city wears its multicultural Ottoman heritage proudly – as demonstrated in this image (left), which shows the menu of a local restaurant specialising in Ottoman cuisine, with the curious late 19th-century City Hall in Neo-Moorish style, in the background. The bridge where Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria was assassinated by a 19-year-old Serb student, triggering the outbreak of World War I, is just yards away.

Višegrad

Close to the border with Serbia, Višegrad is the setting for the famous novel *The Bridge on the Drina*, which helped earn its Yugoslav Serb author, Ivo Andrić, the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1961. The 11-arched Ottoman bridge in

question – a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2007, commissioned by the Grand Vizir Sokullu Mehmet Pasha and built by Sinan – is the central character of the novel and still spans the river.

Today, the town's demographic is largely Christian Serb, following the terrible massacres perpetrated by Serb police and military forces against the previously majority Bosniak Muslim population in 1992, on the orders of the Serb leader Radovan Karadžić. The International Criminal Court for the former Yugoslavia described it as 'one of the most comprehensive and ruthless campaigns of ethnic cleansing' in

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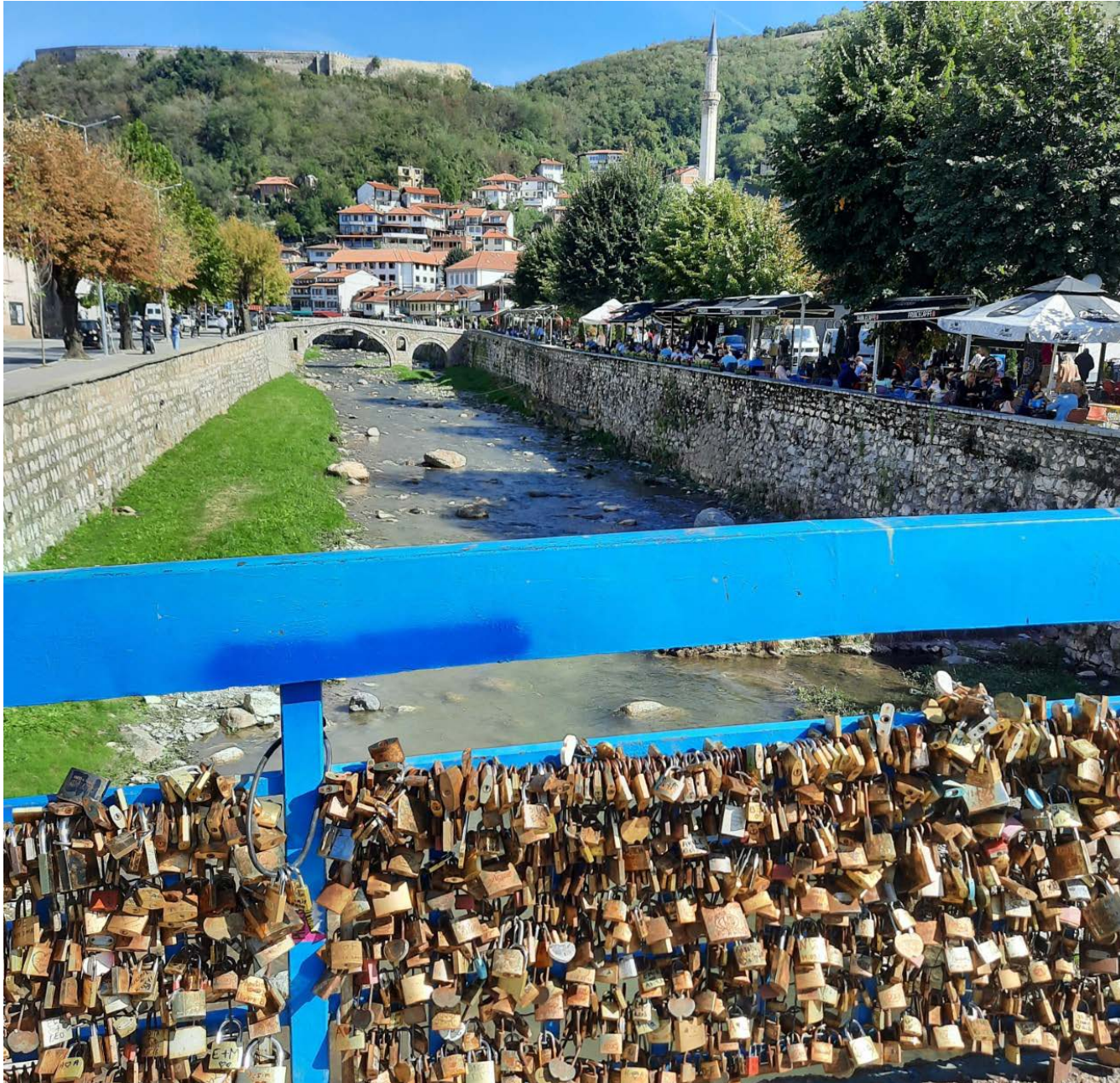


Sarajevo wears its Ottoman heritage proudly



Reading the Ottoman inscription on the Bridge on the Drina, Višegrad

© DIANA DARKE



Prizren's blue bridge with the Ottoman bridge, Sinan Pasha Mosque and citadel in the distance

the Balkan wars. It pre-dated the similar, but much more widely known, events in Srebrenica by three years and something of that history still hangs in the air in the strangely quiet town.

Prizren

Perhaps the most surprising city of the entire trip was Prizren, historical and cultural capital of Kosovo, set in a spectacular valley overlooked by an imposing fortress. Its mood is young, vibrant and multicultural, a city that appears at ease with itself these days, free from the tensions so apparent elsewhere in the Balkans. The Ottomans ruled the city from 1450 until 1912, and the proximity of the fully functioning mosques, churches and cathedrals in the old centre testify to the religious tolerance that was typical of that period.

Cafés and restaurants spill out onto the tree-lined riverbanks, offering excellent value and tasty local delicacies. The city also hosts a succession of festivals, the most popular of which is Dokufest, an international documentary and short film festival held every August, using atmospheric venues like the old Turkish hammam, the Sinan Pasha Mosque and the citadel. The surrounding mountains offer trekking routes with magnificent canyons, icy lakes and waterfalls.



Early morning light over Lake Ohrid

Lake Ohrid

This mountain-ringed lake, with trees descending right to its shoreline, has to rate as the most beautiful destination we visited on our trip – the perfect resting spot before continuing into Albania. One of Europe's oldest and deepest lakes, its beaches are composed of multicoloured pebbles in reds, whites, greys and greens, while its unique aquatic ecosystem boasts over 200

endemic species. Ohrid trout is the highlight on most local menus. The exceptionally clear water is perfect for swimming and development round the shore is still mercifully limited.

Two-thirds of the shore lies in North Macedonia and was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site

Diana Darke is a writer specialising in Syria and the Middle East. She is also the author of *My House in Damascus*, *Stealing from the Saracens* and Bradt's guidebooks to *Eastern Turkey*, *Syria* and *Oman*.

in 1979, while the other third belongs to Albania and was only added in 2019. Both countries have created national parks and nature reserves along the lakeside and the surrounding mountains and forests offer excellent hiking.

Berat

For a near picture-perfect Ottoman town, Albania's Berat, designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2008, takes the prize in the Balkans. Several of the old Ottoman houses on the hillside have been converted into boutique hotels, so you can even experience a taste of the former lifestyle, with all the benefits of modern plumbing.

Behind its high walls, the castle on the hilltop conceals an entire fortified town of churches and mosques, now largely in ruins, but with some houses still lived in, either converted to restaurants and cafés for tourists, or shops brimming with handicrafts of lace, colourful clothing and wood carvings. Lower down the slope, the town also has one of the finest ethnographic museums in the country, housed in a large Ottoman mansion. Very popular with local school outings, it even allows dressing up in Ottoman costumes.

NEW TRAVEL WRITER OF THE YEAR 2022

For over 20 years, our New Travel Writer of the Year competition has been seeking out and championing new writing talent. And entries are still open for our 2022 competition!

The theme this year is *'It was strangely quiet'* – all entries must be an original piece of writing of between 600 and 800 words that focuses on this topic. The entry fee is £15 (for which you also receive a copy of [Travel Write](#), our new travel-writing anthology), and the deadline is 7 November 2021. For more details on how to enter, [click here](#).

And, if you're in need of some inspiration, here is one of our past winners: *The Tiger's Tail* by Dom Tulett. Following his win in 2016, Dom also won the National Geographic Traveller annual travel-writing competition, had pieces featured in Bradt's travel-writing anthologies, and has written for *The Guardian* and *The Telegraph*. Just think – that could be you!

A swollen sun, blunted and smudged by morning mists, watched with me as elephants emerged from the forest. They moved slowly, gracefully, and when their trunks swung wide enough to the side I was sure I could see them smile. I was reminded of the previous evening; a boy from

the village approached me as I sat with a beer watching the day fade into the river. He handed me a slip of paper. On it was written: *NEPAL. Never Ending Peace And Love*. 'I hope you like my country,' he said, and he smiled and walked on along the riverbank.



© BIZ188/SHUTTERSTOCK

The morning was cold and wet. A dew glossed every surface and the air clasped my throat and chilled my breath. I fought to puff out clouds of white. The elephants were our transport; our ride into the Chitwan National Park. Gopal, alert and lean, forever blowing on his fingers to keep them warm, was our guide. He had been doing this for twenty-two years. He briefed us on what to expect, and what not to expect: tigers landed in the latter category; squirrels in the former; rhinos somewhere in the middle.

I was sat next to a fidgeting Norwegian girl. It was her first time trying to see a tiger in the wild, but I had been here many times before, and always failed: India – nothing; Malaysia – nothing; Bangladesh – a paw print in the mud. She asked me if I thought we would see a tiger.

‘I hope so.’

‘I think we will,’ she said, repositioning herself on the creaking sedan chair. ‘I’m a bit lucky like that.’

The mist had begun to burn off as our elephant took its first steps towards the forest. We moved clumsily, with a heavy lateral swagger – roll and pop – that jolted right through me on every other step. The sun gained colour and strength as we followed a muddy trail rutted with long puddles, and it reflected up beneath us and rippled out with the elephant’s strides. A range of greens approached: a patchy, pale tint of the tufted

parkland; a lush wave in the dense tall grasses; and a darker block where the trees met the sky.

Indonesia – nothing.

We broke through the treeline and almost immediately Gopal stopped us. His eyes narrowed and his head tilted. He blinked rapidly three or four times. I tried to follow his stare into the undergrowth. I looked but saw nothing, only clumps of vegetation and patterns of leaves.

Gopal blew on his fingers.

Deep greens and thick browns.

I tried to breathe silently, but the harder I fought, the louder I could hear myself. My blood thumped through my veins, pulsing in my ears like a bass drum.

Pipes of sunlight and hollows of shade.

Then Gopal sat straight upright, stretched his back and unzipped his jacket. He blew on his fingers and, with a look of complete indifference, we pressed forward again.

Thailand – the remains of a kill.

Our elephant walked on and on – roll and pop, roll and pop – for three hours more as we roamed wide through the forest. There were many false alarms; each time we paused, strained our eyes, resigned, and moved on. Throughout, the forest hummed with noise – chirping and chattering. Gopal pointed out other wildlife: a sulking boar, an angry woodpecker, neurotic deer. The Norwegian

girl had stopped fidgeting. She whispered in frustration, ‘We have better deer than that at home.’

India again – nothing.

The forest fell silent. The elephant paused. Gopal held out an arm, dipped his neck and bore his eyes into the layers of tangled foliage. I watched him closely. He did not blink, did not blow on his fingers. Nothing about him moved, except for his mouth, which breathed a longed-for whisper, ‘There.’

My heart locked. ‘Where?’

‘There. Past the silver tree with the split trunk.’

Again I looked but saw nothing. I leaned forward for an inch of improved view. The sedan creaked and scared a bird from a nearby branch, stealing my attention and gaze for a moment. When I looked back down, I saw it; hovering in the smallest gap in the leaves, almost out of sight, yet I’ve never seen anything more clearly. It was there. Rings of white-orange and black, looped upward at the end in a curve, like a smile. The entirety of the forest reduced to a gap in the leaves. A lifetime’s dream filtered into one moment. The tiger’s tail. It was there.

Then the tail twitched and flicked, and slid out of sight again. And that was it; that was all I saw. Nepal – something; for just a moment, a pulse of the universe – no longer than a breath. Elusive and beautiful. There and gone.

HUNG, THE BOAT WOMAN OF HUE

*A chance encounter on the Perfume River leads **Maxine Rose Schur** to reflect upon her life.*

For years I had loved the words 'Perfume River'. I imagined sailing down this Vietnam waterway of which I knew nothing. I imagined it smelled gorgeous and the experience would be one of romance and poetry. That's why on my single day in Hue, the ancient, imperial capital of Vietnam, the first thing I did was to enquire how to take a boat ride on the Perfume River.

Since I had only a day, I needed a short boat ride as I was keen on seeing the famous Imperial City, the 14th-century walled palace complex, in the afternoon. 'No problem,' said the girl at the hotel desk. She told me she would arrange a taxi pickup for me in the morning to one of the dragon boats that provide voyages on the river. The boats, shaped and painted like dragons are designed for tourists. They stop at the main sites along the riverbank so you can hop on and off, and they wait for you. Since I didn't have much time, she suggested I go directly to the Thien Mu

Pagoda and get a taste, or rather a whiff, of the Perfume River, then return to Hue.

When I got to the dock, I found a boat waiting for me and soon realised I was to be the only passenger.

'Hallo Lady!'

A thin, aged woman working on the boat called to me. She reached out to hold my arm and steady me as I jumped aboard the wobbly craft. She then bade me sit in a white plastic chair on the deck.

Most of the dragon boats looked grand with two great dragon heads at the prow. This boat had only one dragon head. Like the woman, it was small and weathered, but I had complete confidence in its safety because the pilot, a silent, middle-aged man, looked steady. With a long wooden pole, the woman, agile as a child, pushed the boat away from the shore. The engine rumbled to a start and off I sailed down the Perfume River.



Hung standing beside a photo of herself as a young bride

© MAXINE ROSE SCHUR

The river gets its name from the fragrant scent of the blossoms from nearby orchards, that in autumn, float along the water. In those months the river must seem poetic, but now, in winter, the wide slow water was as grey as dust and the only fragrance I could smell was engine fuel.

I sat back and relaxed, watching other dragon boats chug past under the cloudy sky.

As soon as our journey was underway, the boat woman got busy. She unrolled a bamboo mat on the damp floorboards, went back into the small dim room – the only room on the boat – and emerged with a Styrofoam cooler of soft drinks for sale. I bought a can of Coke and the selling continued. The woman, toothless as a toddler, must have made at least eight trips back and forth into the room to present each time a different array of wares: silk pyjamas, embroidered cloth bags, freshwater pearl earrings, horn bracelets, agate necklaces, key rings and sets of chopsticks, each charmingly tucked into a silk case. She spoke little English, but enough to be tireless in her effort to sell. Each time she brought out something new I shook my head regretfully to show I was not at all interested, but after a short while, seeing her look so very disheartened, I relented and bought a package of chopsticks. At this sale she perked up and gave me a bottle of water in gratitude.



Thien Mu Pagoda is the oldest religious structure in Vietnam

I couldn't see much life from the boat as the riverbank was hidden in thick foliage, so I became curious about the woman. I stole glances at her as she moved about. Her own stolen glances at me revealed she was equally curious. Now and then we smiled at each other but made no attempt to converse.

After an hour or so we came to the Thien Mu (Celestial Lady) Pagoda. I jumped off the boat onto the sandbank and walked up the hill path, through the small pine forest to the pagoda. Built in 1601, it is the oldest religious structure in Vietnam and the crown of the Buddhist monastery surrounding it. The pale pink tower of the pagoda rises gracefully seven storeys high, each storey representing another stage of enlightenment. The garden of the monastery surrounds the pagoda and you can enter a temple where a bored-looking boy, about ten years old, beats a large gong.

The pagoda and the grounds of the monastery exude peace. Yet this most tranquil place was a centre for anti-government fervour during the early '60s. The tourists who jostle to take a photo of the 1950s Austin motorcar attest to the monastery's eerie history of protest. It was here

“In that moment, our lighthearted reaching towards each other turned poignant.”

in 1963 that one of the monastery's monks, Thich Quang Duc, drove the Austin to Saigon, where he set himself afire in protest at the Catholic President Diem's persecution of Buddhists.

Sobered by my visit to the monastery, I returned to the boat and we headed upstream, back to Hue. I was gratified that on the journey back the boat woman didn't try to sell me anything. Like all Vietnamese, she was curious about a woman travelling alone and she began to ask me questions.

We started to communicate with hand gestures and three-word sentences. I told her I was from America, that I had flown here from Hanoi and the next day I would be going over the Marble Mountains to Hoi An. I told her my name

and she told me her name was Hung, which I later learned means pink rose. With a hint of pride, she told me how old she was: 65.

She asked my age and I told her.

We were the same age.

The knowledge stunned us both into silence... and melancholy. For, in that moment, our lighthearted reaching towards each other turned poignant. Though we were the same age, my life was privileged. I was on vacation, overfed, with a full set of teeth, smiling, carefree, enjoying

the freedom that comes with having leisure time and credit cards. She was still doing hard physical labour and struggling to sell trinkets to one passenger, and, I sensed, struggling with something else.

The speed at which her smile vanished on realising we were both 65 told me she too had felt the cruel disparity. For the rest of the ride she no longer smiled.

When we did speak again, I learned she had been married when she was 17. She had loved her husband since she was a little girl and after they married, she bore seven children. One was her son, the dragon boat pilot, with whom she now lived in the dark boat room. She had never left Hue. Ever.

As she spoke, I did the grim maths.

She and I were 19 years old in January 1968. While I was in college, acting in plays and preparing for a fun-filled summer in Israel and Greece, she was a young mother in Hell. In January 1968 during the 'Tet Offensive', to take back control of the south, the Viet Cong captured Hue, set up a provisional Communist government and murdered thousands of civilians they thought were South Vietnam sympathisers. Nearly 3,000 men, women and children were tortured, executed, then thrown into mass graves. Another 2,000 went missing. One hundred



Hung waving goodbye

thousand residents lost their homes and no-one in the city could have escaped the tragedy. After three weeks, the city lay in ruins and corpses were strewn everywhere. This was the infamous ‘Massacre at Hue’.

‘Come,’ the woman beckoned, and I followed her into the cramped, shadowy room. The room was painted mint green and was sparsely furnished: two more white plastic chairs, a television, a cooler for drinks and some benches on which bedding was piled. In the corner rose stacks of cardboard boxes filled with her tourist wares. She walked over to a large framed black-and-white photograph on the wall, pointed to it then pointed to herself.

‘Me,’ she said. ‘Marry.’

I looked up at the photo to see the face of pretty teenage girl, an innocent bride.

‘Beautiful,’ I said.

She understood this word and nodded.

‘And your children?’ I asked.

“She didn’t have the words to tell me more; I didn’t have the words to ask her more.”

‘No more,’ she said quietly. ‘No more here. No more now.’ She pointed to her son, whose back was facing us as he piloted the boat. ‘One boy. No more now.’

She didn’t have the words to tell me more; I didn’t have the words to ask her more. And, even if we had shared the same language, we would have had no words that could matter.

No more now.

We docked in Hue, she helped me climb out of the boat and I waved goodbye to her. She stood at the prow waving back to me and she stayed waving to me much too long.

As the boat sailed away up the Perfume River, the figure of the woman shrunk smaller and it is that miniature waving image of her that haunts me. Not because my last view of her was at such a great distance, but because my full understanding of her – what she lived through and how – was at such a great distance, forever impossible for me to justly breach.

Maxine Rose Schur is an award-winning children’s author, travel essayist and writing instructor. Her travel memoir, *Places in Time*, about her around-the-world journey was named Best Travel Book of the Year by the North American Travel Journalists Association and was awarded the Gold (First Place) for Travel Literature by the Society of American Travel Writers. Visit her [website](#) for more.

BEYOND THE SILK ROAD: EXPLORING UZBEKISTAN

*Uzbekistan has become one of the world's most popular tourist destinations over recent years, but step away from the tourist trail and you'll discover that there is more to the country than its towering minarets and gilded madrasas. Join photographer **Julian Elliott** as he uncovers a different side to Uzbekistan.*

Inside the tomb of Sheikh Shamsiddin Kulyol, Shakhrisabz



Ayaz Kala

Approximately 100km northeast of Khiva, within the Republic of Karakalpakstan, stands the stunning desert fortress of Ayaz Kala. While there are a half a dozen or so similar structures in the area, this one is by far the most impressive with its two enormous structures offering commanding views over the surrounding Kyzylkum Desert.

There are actually two fortresses here. The bigger Ayaz Kala 1 was built somewhere between the end of the 4th century BC and beginning of the 3rd century BC, while the lower Ayaz Kala 2 was constructed almost a 1,000 years later from sometime around the 6th to 8th century AD. They would have been a very wealthy place, and you can clearly see the scale of the site: the footprint was a remarkable 182m by 152m, and even today sections of wall survive that are 10m tall.

I visited on a burning hot day in mid-August, and there was not a single other tourist in sight. Standing on that desert road, looking across at these magnificent structures, really did take my breath away.





Shakhrisabz

A 90-minute drive south of Samarkand lies the oft-overlooked city of Shakhrisabz. Not many tourists make it to this UNESCO World Heritage Site, choosing instead to spend more time exploring the more famous Silk Road cities. But for those interested in the exploits of Timur – the feared leader of the Timurid Empire – it is not to be missed.

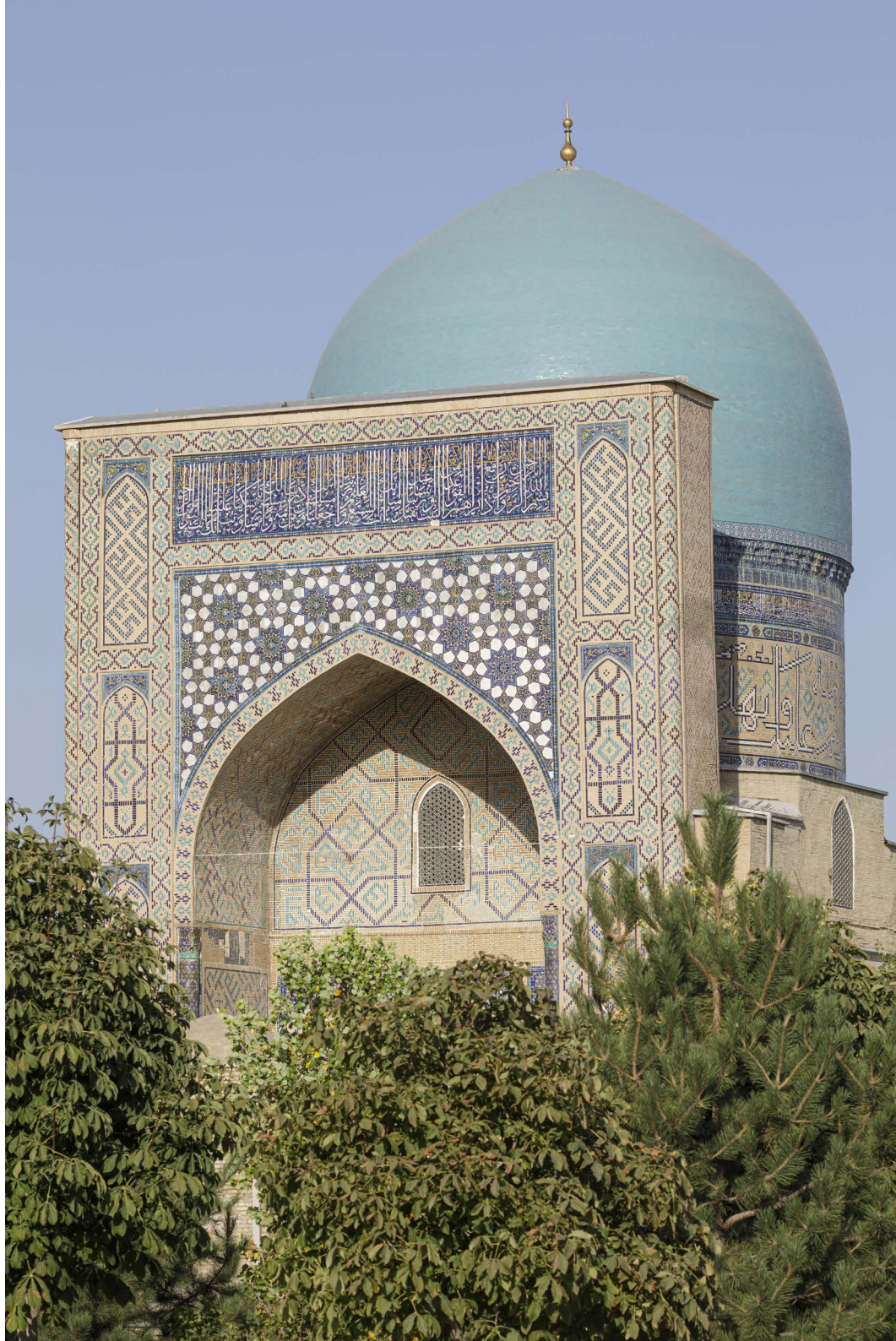
Its most famous sight is the imposing ruins of Ak Saray Palace, quite possibly the largest and most impressive building commissioned by Timur. Although only a small portion of the palace is standing today, the tourist board provides enough information on the information boards at the foot of the remains that you can fill in the rest with your imagination.

It must have been a jaw-dropping feat of engineering in its heyday – the portal alone would have reached 50m in height and been flanked by a pair of tapered minarets, each 65m tall. Certainly, if the footprint is anything to go by, Timur would have had plenty of space in which to wander while commanding his armies into the next battle.





Another site worth seeking out in Shakhrisabz is the Dorut Tilovat complex, a holy site dating from the 1374 construction of the tomb of Sheikh Shamsiddin Kulyol, a revered Sufi teacher credited with converting the Chagtai tribes to Islam. A wonderfully decorated mausoleum stands on the left-hand side of the courtyard, which is an important pilgrimage destination.



On the right-hand side of the courtyard, the aptly named Kok-Gumbaz (Blue Dome) was built by Timur's grandson Ulug Beg in 1434–35, not long after his father had moved the centre of Timurid power from Samarkand to Herat, and is the town's main mosque. On the site of an older, Karakhanid-era mosque, it once had a dome larger than that of the Bibi Khanym Mosque in Samarkand, as well as 40 domed galleries to house additional worshippers. The original dome collapsed in the late 18th century, but was rebuilt 200 years later. Inside the mosque is a beautifully decorated ceiling (see following page).





Master crafters

For centuries Uzbekistan has been known for its artistic output: from glazed tiles to the finest silks and finely worked jewellery set with precious and semi-precious stones to handwoven and knotted carpets. The mosques that surround Samarkand's Registan Square are home to a number of traditional workshops, so it's well worth devoting half a day to perusing their wares and admiring the ancient traditions that they continue today.

One such craft is embroidery, most commonly in the form of a *suzani* (derived from the Persian for 'needle'). Traditionally they are made by young women for inclusion in their wedding dowries, and are used as bedspreads, wall hangings and throws. The most popular motifs are flowers, leaves and fruits, though the designs often also take on symbolic properties: suns represent life, pomegranates indicate fertility and peppers give protection from the evil eye.



Another famous Uzbek craft is carpet-making. Though most carpets are now produced by machine, and Turkmen and Afghan carpets often labelled as Uzbek, some small workshops do still produce carpets by hand. I met the owner of one such shop, who recounted that it can take many months for the workers to create a carpet from start to finish as no machines are used. They are instead produced on a simple loom made from narrow, wooden beams (see following page). The carpet pictured here is particularly special because it is double-sided, rather than the usual one-sided carpet that we are used to seeing.





A master potter at work in Samarkand. The potter worked entirely with his body as he worked the wheel with his feet. The potter was also teaching his craft to eager students when I photographed him in the late afternoon sunlight.

Following page

And it's not just Samarkand where you can witness crafts in action. Metal chasing in Uzbekistan dates to at least the 4th century BC, and the tools that are currently in use by today's masters have changed little since the Middle Ages. When I asked this metal chaser in Bukhara how long it takes him to finish a piece, he explained that it takes many hours of patient work. At the time the photograph was taken, he was working in 45°C heat.





Tucked away on a side street in Khiva is a wood carver's shop, where two brothers work tirelessly each day to create beautiful works of art entirely by hand. Their skills have been passed down through a number of generations, creating everything from pencil cases to doors to beds.



Uzbekistan was one of the earliest producers of silk after the secrets of its production escaped from China, and the country's farmers and artisans continue to raise silkworms and weave high-quality silks. The centre of Uzbekistan's silk industry lies in the city of Margilan, deep in the Fergana Valley, and there is no better place to see it in action than the Yodgorlik Silk Factory.

Established in 1983 in a bid to preserve traditional silk-weaving techniques in the face of industrialisation, the focus on high-quality, handmade goods has clearly paid off as the buoyant factory has now expanded to employ more than 200 workers. All parts of the production process are undertaken here, from the feeding of the big, fat silkworms with mulberry leaves, through dyeing with natural vegetable and mineral dyes, to the weaving of the final cloth, and it is fascinating to follow it through step by step: you'll never look at a silk scarf or tie in quite the same way again.

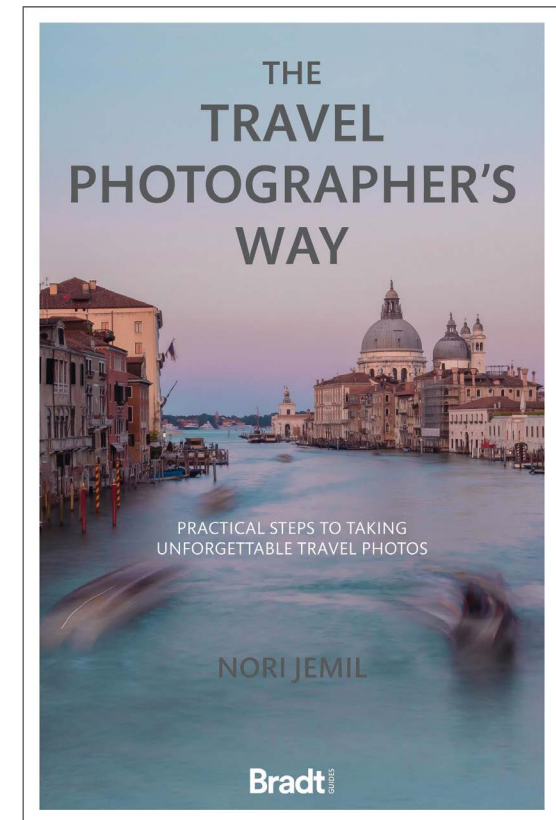


Julian Elliott is a professional travel photographer whose work has featured in numerous magazines. You can see more of his photos on his [website](#) or follow him on [Instagram](#). For more on Uzbekistan, check out Sophie Ibbotson's [comprehensive guide](#), available for half price with the code **TRAVELCLUB50**.

THE TRAVEL CLUB TALKS

Join us on 24 November for the next in our Travel Club Talks series: **Around the World in Seven Photographs**, with award-winning photographer and author *The Travel Photographer's Way*, Nori Jemil. A must for anyone with an interest in travel photography, Nori will share the stories behind seven of her favourite photographs – one from each continent – and explain how she achieved such powerful images.

The Travel Club members can register for their **free** ticket (usually £5) using the code **TTCEVENTS**.



A SPOTLIGHT ON THE INDEPENDENT: ROCKY ROAD TRAVEL



*Berlin-based Rocky Road Travel provides a gateway to some of the world's least-visited and misunderstood countries. Specialising in trips that are often described as 'dangerous' and 'inaccessible', they aim to open the curtain and shed light by working with local guides and businesses on the ground. We caught up with founder, **Shane Horan**, to chat about what inspired him to go it alone and his experiences as a tour leader.*



Tell us about Rocky Road Travel.

I founded Rocky Road Travel in January 2019. Previously I had worked as a tour leader in Australia, China and southeast Asia before moving back to Europe, eventually settling in Berlin. I've always had a fascination with the world and, having studied International Relations at university with a focus on so-called 'rogue states' (Iran and North Korea, in particular), I became eager to travel to these stigmatised destinations and experience them with my own eyes. Rocky Road Travel was created with the purpose of encouraging travellers to go beyond the usual rhetoric and to show others the true identity of often misunderstood destinations that I came to know and love.

What has been your most memorable trip with Rocky Road so far?

My most memorable trip came in 2019 on our Somaliland Independence Day tour. Our group was invited to join the military parade through Hargeisa, the capital of this self-declared independent state. So here we were, eight foreigners holding flags and marching with the Somaliland military through the streets waving at our adoring crowds – which included the president himself! We even got a cheeky wave back. It was a wonderful way to kick off any tour, never mind one in an unrecognised country.



Joining the parade on Somaliland Independence Day

Speaking of unrecognised countries – I must give an honourable mention to our trip to Iraqi Kurdistan during the last independence referendum. A period of political upheaval is a fascinating time to visit a country, but perhaps not the best time to organise a tour...

Towards the end of the trip, we were driving from Sulaymaniyah to Erbil when our local guide whispered to me: 'The Iraqi army has just taken the border town of Pirde, 30 miles south of here,

and may advance northwards tonight. What do you want to do?' Luckily, his wife was actually the daughter of the Erbil police chief, so we had first-hand information on the security situation in the region.

'Tell me everything you know right now,' I discreetly uttered back, so as not to alarm the group. He had been informed that the city was close to an evacuation order and that we should hit the road fast. The Iraqi army was re-grouping

at the southern checkpoint and preparing to advance towards Erbil in the middle of the night.

Upon hearing that, there was really only one option in my mind. We had to drive 2 hours northwest to Duhok to be closer to the Turkish border.

As the hours progressed, the likelihood of an advance on Erbil began to diminish, but however small the risk was, it was not one worth taking. We arrived safely in Duhok that night where we spent the next day visiting the sacred Yazidi temple at Lalish and stopped by the largest Yazidi IDA (Internally Displaced People) camp in Iraq – the Shariah camp – where we met some of the temporary residents. The following day we continued across the border safely and into Turkey.

This was my fourth visit to the Kurdish region, and it never disappoints.

Which destination would you suggest for someone's first trip off the beaten track?

I think Iraqi Kurdistan is a wonderful beginner's destination for your first visit to the Middle East. It has all the allure of an off-the-beaten-path destination – you're in Iraq, after all – but the region has its own borders and army, creating a bubble of added security. It's a well-developed, welcoming, fascinating and naturally stunning

part of the world. A world away from what we perceive Iraq to be.

Must-visit sites include the already mentioned Yazidi temple at Lalish, the memorial to the Kurds murdered by Saddam's chemical attacks in Halabja, and Saddam's abandoned mountain palace. But wherever you go, the overall welcoming atmosphere of the Kurds will ensure you have a fantastic trip – plus, the food is fantastic!

Which destination do you think most thoroughly confounds the stereotypes about it?

There are a few contenders for this prize! Given my background studying rogue states, I'll have to go with Iran. It's very easy to lump a government and its people into the same bracket – especially given the imagery and headlines generated by the media when it comes to this country.

But the reality of Iran is so far from what is covered by the press. Iranians are among the



© KNOVAKOV SHUTTERSTOCK

Lalish is one of my favourite sites in Iraqi Kurdistan



Victory Day, North Korea

friendliest and most welcoming people in the world. They want nothing more than to open their country to the world, build friendly relationships and show off the beauty of their land to as many visitors as possible.

How have things changed for you in the wake of the pandemic?

The pandemic has led us to restructure our product and think more sustainably. Our focus has shifted to offer sustainable, smaller-group trips to five core destinations. We now have a goal of making all our tours climate-neutral by mid 2022, and are working with [Ecologi](#) and [Eden Reforestation Projects](#)

to achieve this. A portion of every booking goes towards these foundations, who in turn are funding carbon-reduction projects around the world. On top of this, for every booking we also plant 25 trees to offset part of the footprint of the tour.

We are now also much busier than ever before. Since January this year, we have been flooded with requests from people all over the world asking us 'Where can I go?' or 'What's open?'. Luckily some of our core destinations – the likes of Iraq, Pakistan, Somalia, Socotra and South Sudan –

have remained open and accessible throughout the pandemic. The surge in bookings definitely illustrates the pent-up demand for travel that the global lockdowns have caused.

What are the advantages of booking through an indie operator like Rocky Road rather than one of the bigger names? And – be honest! – are there any disadvantages?

Hmmm, let me see! With smaller indie operators like ourselves, you get instant and personal responses to enquires – you'll even get my mobile number so you can WhatsApp me any questions! There's also a more intimate element, as tours focus more on local experiences than a ticklist of sites. On the ground, we work with only local and small businesses in an effort to give directly back to the community – tour groups stay in family-run hotels, eat in local restaurants and overland/use public transport as much as possible to reduce the carbon footprint.

And on a more practical note, customers also get the standard deposit and insolvency insurance with us – meaning that your money is always safe and you can book with confidence. So yeah, I'd say there are no disadvantages!

The Travel Club members can enjoy an exclusive 10% discount off any tour with [Rocky Road Travel](#): just email info@rockyroadtravel.com and quote the code **TRAVELCLUB10**.

THE BRADT TRAVEL TEASER: ALL SHOOK UP

Taken from *The Travel Quiz Book*, this month's quiz is all about anagrams. Rearrange the letters of the CAPITALISED word or phrase in each of the clues below to find the answer. See page 50 for answers.

1. If you don't pay careful attention to the spelling, there is A DANGER of getting this Caribbean nation confused with a Spanish city.
2. NOT A MAN should visit this state without seeing Glacier National Park.
3. Animals you might see in this country include brown bear, wild boar, red deer, marmot, LIZARD, NEWTS, golden eagle and bearded vulture.
4. If you feel exhausted after a day walking around this Balkan capital city, you will be pleased to get back to the LARGE BED in your hotel room.
5. It would be SAD, OVERALL, if you missed out on seeing this small nation in the Americas.
6. It's a disputed territory but there are no PENALTIES for visiting this place.
7. No doubt many have found ROMANCE on this Mediterranean island.
8. If you are looking for a restful CHANGE, OPEN your eyes to this destination, a picturesque capital city with a notably calm ambience.

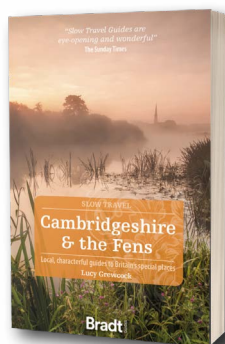
OUT THIS MONTH!

The Travel Club members can claim their exclusive **50% discount** on ALL our books by using the code **TRAVELCLUB50** at checkout.

Slow Travel Cambridgeshire & the Fens

Lucy Grewcock

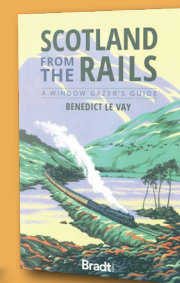
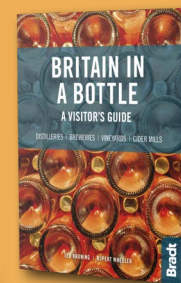
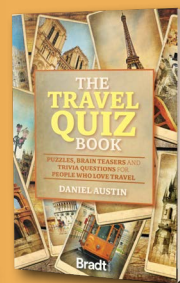
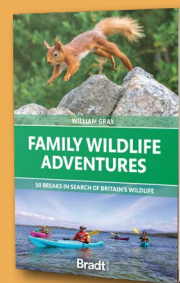
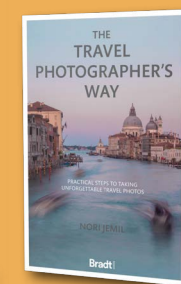
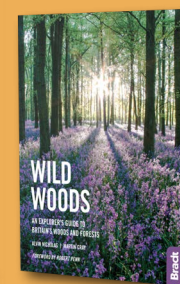
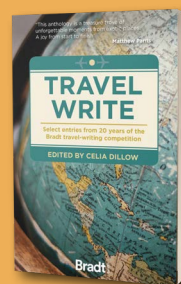
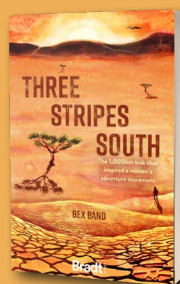
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The latest addition to our award-winning Slow Travel series – the biggest series of UK regional travel guides – this engaging, informative and unexpected [guide](#) captures both the stand-out highlights and lesser-known attractions of this unique part of East Anglia. Active and slow exploration is included, with a range of walks, cycle routes and watersports – and not just punting! Historic towns, striking estates and monastic sites are featured, as are quintessential English villages, ancient earthworks and the intriguing, pancake-flat Fens. Join Lucy Grewcock as she lifts the lid on one of England's most distinctive and attractive areas.

Already thinking about Christmas gifts?

Then we've got the guides for you! From books to help you discover what's on your doorstep to tales from faraway lands, from wildlife guides and adventure inspiration to quiz and colouring books, our library covers more than just standard guidebooks. [Click here](#) to browse our full collection.



Answers to the Bradt Travel Teaser

1. Grenada 2. Montana 3. Switzerland 4. Belgrade 5. El Salvador 6. Palestine 7. Menorca 8. Copenhagen

THE TRAVEL CLUB MEMBER BENEFITS

Our aim for The Travel Club is not only to entertain and inspire, and to bring together like-minded travellers, but to save our members money!

7% off with Amarok Adventures

Run by qualified hiking guides Alberto Ojembarrena and Mónica Fuentes, Amarok Adventures is an independent operator specialising in hiking and adventure holidays in Iceland, the Faroe Islands and Nepal.

Amarok is offering Travel Club members a 7% discount on two of its most popular tours: [Hidden Trails](#) (12 days backpacking in Iceland) and [Hiking and Sailing in the Faroe Islands](#) (8 days aboard an expedition sailboat in the Faroe Islands). Just use the code **TCLUB7** at checkout.

Aardvark Safaris: 5% off all tours

Aardvark Safaris specialises in tailor-made, high-quality African safaris away from the crowds. Just email mail@aardvarksafaris.com and mention that you are a Travel Club member when booking.

The Adventure Creators: 10% off all Pyrenees tours

This [adventure outfit](#) based in the Pyrenees specialises in tailor-made, outdoor holidays in the region. To claim, quote **Bradt10** when enquiring.

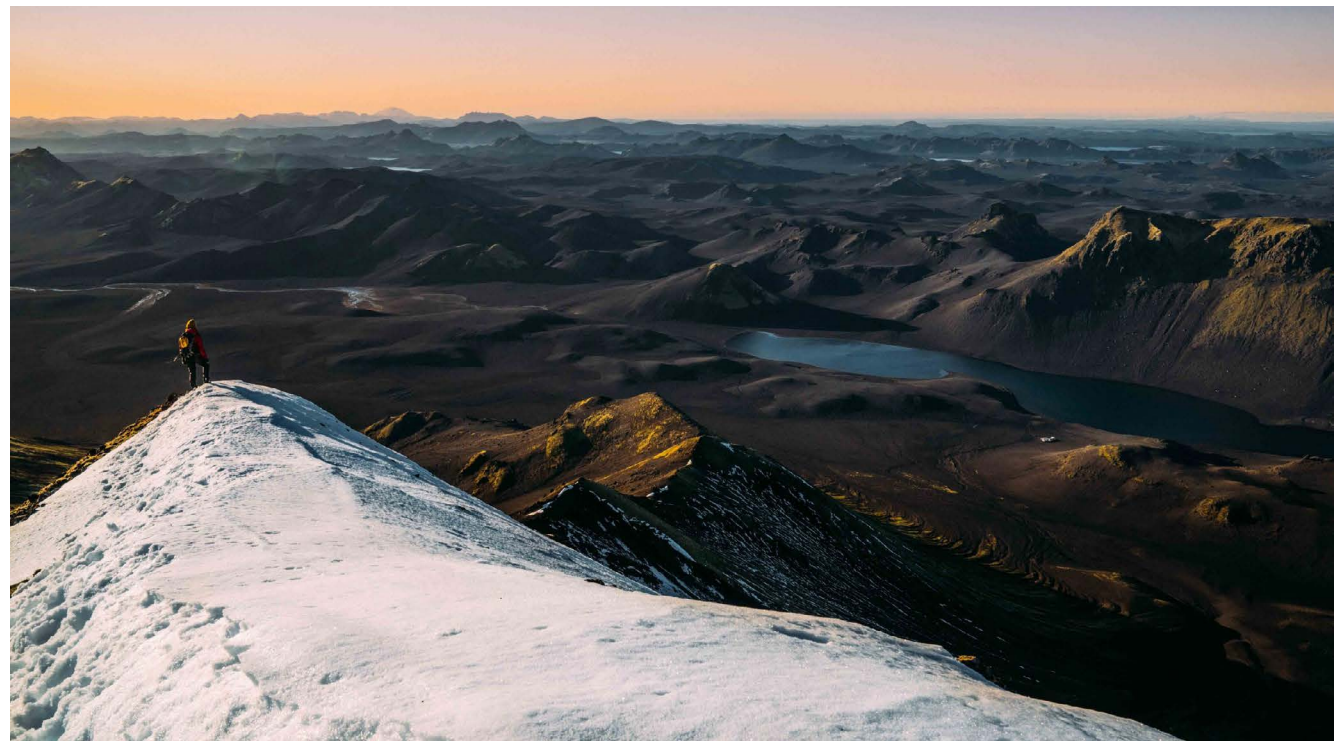
Adventurous Ink: get your first month free

[Adventurous Ink](#) is a unique subscription service. Each month you'll receive a new book or journal featuring writers, photographers and illustrators who really 'get' the great outdoors. Get your first month free with the code

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Bidroom: free Plus membership

Founded with the mission to make the hotel industry fair for both travellers and hotels, [Bidroom](#) is the first membership-based marketplace



Amarok's 12-day 'Hidden Trails' tour combines the famous Laugavegur Trail along with lesser-known sights in Iceland

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for travel lovers. Hotels get bookings with no commission, and instead they offer discounts and added perks to members such as free room upgrades, complimentary welcome drinks, free parking and discounts on spa treatments and dining experiences. The Travel Club members can get a one-year Plus membership for free (normally £49) to unlock bigger discounts and a wider selection of hotels and partner extras. [Click here](#) to sign up.

The Cook's Place: 10% off cooking courses

Based in North Yorkshire, [The Cook's Place](#) is an independent cookery school offering a range of courses. Enter the code **BTG21** at checkout (valid on all half- and full-day courses until 30 November 2021).

Dog-Friendly Weekends: free subscription

There's a new title coming to the Bradt list in 2022: *Dog-Friendly Weekends: 50 breaks in Britain for you and your dog*, written by award-winning travel writer and canine lover Lottie Gross. Lottie is in the process of carrying out her research, and has launched a regular newsletter with trip ideas, hotel recommendations and shout-outs to lovely pubs and restaurants worth travelling for – all suitable for dogs, of course. The Travel Club members can

get their subscription for free (normally £40); just click this [link](#) to sign up.

Feast Box: 30% off plus a free bottle of wine

Taste the world in your kitchen with [Feast Box](#), the UK's top-rated recipe box specialising in over 50 of the world's tastiest cuisines. Enjoy 30% off your first two boxes plus a free bottle of wine; just use the code **BRADTFEAST** at checkout.

HÔRD: 10% off everything

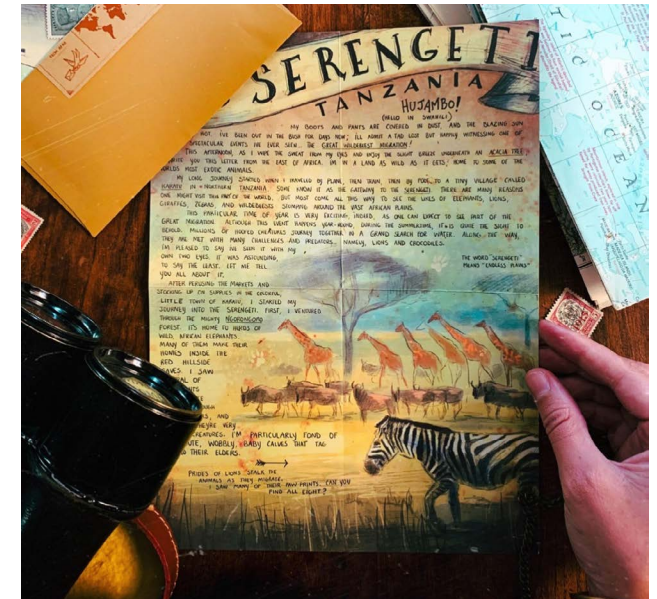
Yorkshire-based [HÔRD](#) creates meaningful and high-quality gifts and apparel for the adventurous and wild among us. Just use the code **HORDXTRAVELCLUB10** at checkout.

Inertia Network: 5% off any booking

[Inertia Network](#) runs immersive expeditions that support local communities in remote and threatened regions. Enter the code **Bradt2021** in the 'How Did You Hear About Us' box when making your enquiry.

Letters from Afar: 10% off

[Letters from Afar](#) is a unique subscription service that shares handcrafted letters from around the



Letters from Afar is a unique subscription service

world each month. The Travel Club members can get 10% off their first subscription using the code **TRAVELCLUB** at checkout.

Lupine Travel: 5% off tours

[Lupine Travel](#) is a UK tour company specialising in unique destinations and travel ideas at affordable prices. For your 5% discount, just email info@lupinetravel.co.uk and mention that you are a member of The Travel Club when booking.

Muddy Boots: 10% off Discovery Walks

Launched in 2020, [Muddy Boots Walking Holidays](#)

runs self-guided walking holidays and guided 'Discovery Walks' in the Yorkshire Dales. Walks range from 2½ to 8 hours, with routes suitable for all ages and abilities. To claim your 10% discount, use the code **THETRAVELCLUB** at checkout.

National Geographic Traveller (UK): three issues for £3

With a reputation for compelling storytelling and a focus on off-the-beaten-track travel, *National Geographic Traveller (UK)* is a favourite with intrepid travellers. [Click here](#) to get your first three issues for just £3.

Native Eye: 5% off tours

[Native Eye](#) specialises in small-group tours to some of the world's most adventurous destinations from Chad and Congo to Saudi Arabia and Iraq. For 5% off any bookings made until 31 December 2021 (for tours in 2021 or 2022), contact them on 01473 328546 or info@nativeeyetravel.com and state you're a member.

Natural Britain: 10% off

[Natural Britain](#) is a new UK-focused tour operator with a focus on slow and sustainable travel, and the first operator in the country to introduce carbon labelling for every trip. Enjoy 10% off two brand-new tours, [Hidden Hampshire](#) and

[Champing in Natural Northants](#); just use the code **BRADTNB** at checkout.

Safari Drive: 10% off vehicle and equipment hire

[Safari Drive](#) is a UK tour operator specialising in creating bespoke self-drive safari holidays in Africa since 1993. Just mention that you're a Travel Club member when booking.

Sunvil: 5% off Alentejo bookings

Award-winning holiday specialist [Sunvil](#) is offering The Travel Club members a 5% saving on any new booking to Portugal's Alentejo for travel before 31 December 2021. This is in addition to the two free PCR tests per person for stays of five nights or more (saving £120pp). To book, visit their website or call 020 8758 4722.

Tonic: 10% off subscriptions

[Tonic](#) is a brand-new biannual drink and travel magazine. Simply use the code **BRADTTC10** at checkout to redeem your discount, which currently also includes free UK and EU shipping.

Travel Africa: 20% off subscriptions

Founded in 1997, *Travel Africa* remains the only international magazine dedicated to

exploring Africa's attractions, wildlife and cultures. [Click here](#) and enter the code **BRADT2020** at checkout.

Untamed Borders: 10% off group tours

Adventure travel company [Untamed Borders](#) runs bespoke trips and small-group adventures to some of the world's most interesting and inaccessible places. Use code **BRADT10** to receive 10% off any 2021/2022 group departure.

Wanderlust: £10 off subscriptions

This legendary travel magazine is still going strong after nearly 30 years, offering issues packed full of articles on wildlife and cultural travel. [Click here](#) and enter the code **WLMAG20** at checkout.

Wild With Consent: 5% off new bookings

[Wild With Consent](#) is a new UK-based platform that allows campervanners to browse and book privately owned sites with full landowner permission. The Travel Club members can enjoy 5% off bookings with the code **BRADT2021** (valid for first-time customers only).

COMING NEXT MONTH...

In DECEMBER's issue of The Travel Club...

A tour of Riga's Art Nouveau masterpieces,
exploring the best of St Lucia and how to prepare
for the trip of a lifetime to Antarctica.



Gentoo penguins in Antarctica © MARK DUNSMUIR