

WINTER 2023

# OFFSHORE

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## Connecting through travel

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Travel has the extraordinary ability to bridge gaps, foster understanding and connect people from different walks of life.

From sampling unfamiliar cuisines to exploring outside the resort strip, our lives are countlessly enriched everytime we buy that plane ticket, board that train, or simply pack up the car for a weekend away.

One of the most profound aspects of cultural travel is the opportunity to immerse ourselves in a world that is vastly different from our own. By embracing these differences, we open ourselves up to a world of experiences and knowledge that challenge our preconceived notions and expand our horizons.

Travel also serves as a bridge that connects people across the globe. When we pack our bags and venture to new places, we're opening ourselves to the opportunity of engaging with individuals from diverse backgrounds and cultures. We're saying yes to new experiences, new languages and new tastes. Trips where we begin as strangers so often end in friendships, and if nothing else, an increased appreciation for the commonalities that bind us all together. It's through connections like these that we can break down stereotypes and prejudices, creating a sense of unity and solidarity in an increasingly divided world.

In the latest issue of OFFSHORE, join our editors as they embark on a series of whimsical adventures through Asia, the Caribbean and Europe. In Vietnam, learn more about the power of sustainable travel and how to visit like a local. In the Bahamas, swim with wild pigs and stingrays—or do both—and learn more about cultural options on the island. Of course, with the holidays around the corner, don't miss our annual gift guide, where we've rounded up everything from luxury items to stocking stuffers for the traveller on your list.

Finally, as the nights get colder and the holiday parties draw nearer, try your hand at mixology with our holiday cocktail recipe handbook. Using spirits from around the world, from rum-drenched eggnogs to steamy mugs of Mexican mezcal hot cocoa, these drinks are sure to warm you up—inside, and to the idea of travelling the world. And we'll cheers to that!

Bon voyage,



**WENDY MCCLUNG**  
Creator & Publisher  
OFFSHORE



*Wendy McClung is the Creator and Publisher of OFFSHORE, published by Baxter Media. Her editorial team travels the world to find the finest in travel for its audiences.*



**OFFSHORE**  
TRAVEL AT ITS FINEST

# CONTENTS

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# OFFSHORE

TRAVEL AT ITS FINEST

CREATOR & PUBLISHER  
**Wendy McClung**

EDITOR  
**Christine Hogg**

DEPUTY EDITOR  
**Ann Ruppenstein**

CUSTOM CONTENT SPECIALISTS  
**Earl Lince**  
**Mitchell McClung**  
**Greg Ohman**  
**Vicki Zeppa**

MARKETING MANAGER  
**Zephan McMillan**

PRODUCTION MANAGER  
**Wayne Labourn**

GRAPHIC DESIGN & LAYOUT  
**Scott Aird**

WEB DEVELOPMENT  
**Sanja Sekaric**

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ADVERTISING  
[offshore@baxter.net](mailto:offshore@baxter.net)

SUBSCRIPTION & CIRCULATION  
[circ@baxter.net](mailto:circ@baxter.net)

EDITORIAL INQUIRIES  
[chogg@baxter.net](mailto:chogg@baxter.net)

GENERAL INQUIRIES  
[wmclung@baxter.net](mailto:wmclung@baxter.net)

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672 Dupont St., Suite 401  
Toronto, Ont. M6G 1Z6 Canada  
416.968.7252

[offshore@baxter.net](mailto:offshore@baxter.net) | [offshoretravelmagazine.com](http://offshoretravelmagazine.com)  
Twitter: @TravelOffshore  
Instagram: @offshoretravelmag

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# 12

**On the cover: Bahamas bound:**  
from stingray encounters to Junkanoo practice



**3** Welcome from the publisher



**6** The 12 cocktails of Christmas



**20** A tourist's guide to loving Vietnam



**24** Stop in South Caicos for  
luxurious authenticity



**32** Hiking Italy's most heavenly route



*Sandals*  
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# 1 2 DAYS OF



## WINE-TER WONDERLAND

Bottled in California, Twomey's grapes are sourced from the volcanic soils of their Soda Canyon Ranch. During the ageing process, the wine is raked from barrel to barrel in which rounds out the tannins in the wine, resulting in a soft and rich flavour.

\$100, LCBO.com

Enjoy it in: Mulled wine

Ingredients:

- 1 (750 ml) bottle of dry red wine
- 1/4 cup brandy (or orange liqueur)
- 1 orange, sliced into rounds
- 8 whole cloves
- 2 cinnamon sticks
- 2 star anise
- 2 to 4 tbsp. sugar, honey, or maple syrup to sweeten

Add wine, brandy, orange slices, cloves, cinnamon, star anise, and sugar to a large saucepan. Cook on medium heat until it simmers. Then cook on low for 15-20 minutes. Strain, garnish and serve hot.

## CRANBERRY SAUCED

Made with a pure rye base, Dillon's is a small-batch vodka made in Ontario. Distilled through oak barrels, expect a smooth, clean finish with notes of white pepper and spice.

\$34.95, LCBO.com

Enjoy it in: cranberry vodka

Ingredients:

- 1/2 oz. Dillon's Vodka
- 1 oz. fresh cranberry juice
- 2-3 dashes orange bitters
- 1 egg white
- 1/2 oz. fresh lemon juice
- Fresh cranberries or orange wheel, for garnish

Add all ingredients to a cocktail shaker and dry shake for 15-20 seconds. Add ice and shake again. Strain into a chilled coupe glass, garnish and enjoy.



## BERRY AND BRIGHT

Distilled and bottled in Islay, a tiny island off the coast of Northern Scotland, The Botanist Islay Dry Gin is produced from nine classic gin botanicals and enhanced with 22 herbs and flowers that are hand-forged locally by their own botanical scientists. Tasting notes are delicate, balanced and complex, with compelling notes of earthy juniper and sweet citrus.

\$59.95, LCBO.com

Enjoy it in: Gin and tonic

Ingredients:

- 1oz. The Botanist Islay Dry Gin
- Four to five blackberries
- Sprig of rosemary
- Premium tonic

Fill a highball glass two thirds of the way with ice. Add gin and top with a splash of premium tonic. Garnish with rosemary and blackberries.



# COCKTAILS

## ANGEL ON TOP

Angel's Envy is a premium bourbon and a true delight for whiskey enthusiasts or those new to the category. It's elevated through its unique signature secondary barrel finish in a port wine barrel, which offers a rich and smooth flavour profile with aromas and flavours of almond, honey, apple, cinnamon, and blueberry compote

\$79.95, [LCBO.com](http://LCBO.com)

*Enjoy it in: Bourbon and bubbles*

### Ingredients:

- 1 oz. Angel's Envy bourbon
- 2 oz. Martini & Rossi Riserva Speciale Rubino Vermouth
- A splash of Prosecco or Cava
- Lemon peel, optional
- Fresh rosemary sprig, optional

In a mixing glass, combine ice, bourbon and sweet vermouth. Lightly stir to dilute and chill. Strain into flute, finish with Prosecco. Garnish with lemon peel or rosemary sprig if desired.



## LOOSEY GOOSEY

Distilled and bottled in France, Grey Goose is known for its smooth and silky texture. You'll pick up on light aromas of sweet citrus and white flowers, making this vodka the perfect accompaniment to any citrus-focused cocktail.

\$54.95, [LCBO.com](http://LCBO.com)

*Enjoy it in: Greyhound cocktail*

### Ingredients:

- 40 ml. Grey Goose vodka
- 10 ml. real maple syrup
- 1 sprig of rosemary
- 1 pinch of salt
- 50 ml. pink grapefruit juice

In the bottom of a rocks glass, briefly crush the rosemary leaves into the maple and salt. Fill with ice and add vodka. Top with grapefruit juice and stir. Garnish with an extra sprig of rosemary, or candied grapefruit wedge.



## WINTER WARMTH

Blended from 1,200 different cognacs aged up to 100 years, the Rémy Martin Louis XIII Cognac is housed in a stunning Baccarat crystal decanter. Sip it on its own, or warm up with an old classic and enjoy it in an extra fancy hot toddy.

\$4,929.05, [LCBO.com](http://LCBO.com)

*Enjoy it in: Hot toddy*

### Ingredients:

- 2 oz. Rémy Martin Louis XIII Cognac
- ½ oz. sugar syrup
- Hot water
- Cinnamon stick
- Lemon peel

Pour Rémy Martin 1738 Accord Royal and sugar syrup into a hot toddy glass. Top with hot water, a cinnamon stick and lemon peel, then stir.





# 1 2 DAYS OF



## MEZCAL MAGIC

Made from Espadín agave that's hand-harvested on the steep slopes of the Oaxacan Sierra, Sombra is an expert in artisanal mezcals. The Joven is aged between seven to nine years and is full of spicy and fruity notes of citrus, with just the right hint of smoke.

\$79.95, [LCBO.com](http://LCBO.com)

*Enjoy it in: Spiked coffee*

### Ingredients:

- 1 oz. Sombra Joven Mezcal
- 1 oz. hazelnut liqueur
- 1 oz. espresso
- Sugar spiced coffee rim
- cinnamon
- Black pepper
- Marshmallow

Combine all ingredients into a cocktail shaker. Shake, then strain into spiced coffee rimmed coupe glass. Garnish with roasted marshmallow stick.

## SUGAR COOKIE

Made with 100 per cent blue agave, Casamigos Tequila Blanco is twice distilled and aged to perfection in American white oak barrels. The end result is surprisingly smoky, with a mild sweet fruit profile; marked by notes of honey, apple, pepper and florals.

\$46.95, [LCBO.com](http://LCBO.com)

### Ingredients:

- 1.5 oz. Casamigos Blanco Tequila
- 1 oz. Amaretto
- 1.5 oz. vanilla oat creamer
- 1 pinch of sea salt
- Sprinkle of cinnamon

Combine all ingredients into a tin shaker. Add ice, shake vigorously and strain into a coupe glass, then garnish.



## SILENCIO NIGHT

An artisanal mezcal distilled deep in the mountainous, Mexican state of Oaxaca, El Silencio has earthy, red berry aromas leading to smoky bitter chocolate flavours, making it an exceptional accompaniment to a traditional hot chocolate.

\$80.95, [LCBO.com](http://LCBO.com)

*Enjoy it in: Mexican hot chocolate*

### Ingredients:

- 1.5 oz. Mezcal El Silencio Espadín
- 6 oz. hot cocoa
- 1 cinnamon stick
- A sprinkle of cinnamon
- Whipped cream

Combine hot cocoa and mezcal into a drinking glass. Top with whipped cream and a sprinkle of cinnamon. Garnish with a cinnamon stick and serve.





# COCKTAILS

## BUTTER TOGETHER

Inspired by the beloved and distinctly Canadian dessert, Forty Creek Butter Tart Cream Liqueur is a wonderful blend of craft Canadian whisky and fresh dairy cream. With a velvety smooth finish, this liqueur can be enjoyed neat, poured over ice, or added to your favourite coffee or cocktail after dinner.

\$32.75, [LCBO.com](http://LCBO.com)

Enjoy it in: *Espresso martini*

### Ingredients:

1 oz. Forty Creek Butter Tart Cream Liqueur

1/2 oz. Frangelico

1/2 oz. espresso

Add all ingredients to a shaker filled with ice and shake until chilled. Strain into chilled coupe glass. Top with coffee beans.

Add wine, brandy, orange slices, cloves, cinnamon, star anise, and sugar to a large saucepan. Cook on medium heat until it simmers. Then cook on low for 15-20 minutes. Strain, garnish and serve hot.



## GINGERBREAD MAN

Distilled in Salzburg, Austria for more than 60 years, Mozart Chocolate Liqueur is a creamy milk chocolate liqueur that is handcrafted using only natural ingredients. It can be enjoyed hot or over ice.

\$39.95, [LCBO.com](http://LCBO.com)

Enjoy it in: *Gingerbread hot chocolate*

### Ingredients:

1.5 oz. Mozart Cream Chocolate

Liqueur

3 oz. whole milk

3 oz. gingerbread syrup

Whipped cream

Ground cinnamon

Gingerbread cookie (optional)

Heat the milk and gingerbread syrup. Pour into a coupe glass. Add chocolate liqueur and stir well. Top with whipped cream and cinnamon. Garnish with gingerbread if desired.

— CHRISTINE HOGG

## THROW ANOTHER NOG ON THE FIRE

Expertly crafted from 10 unique bourbon recipes, Four Roses puts a sophisticated flair in any mixed drink. You'll pick up on warm notes of caramel, grain, vanilla and spice aromas, as well as toasted oak and spice.

\$57.95, [LCBO.com](http://LCBO.com)

Enjoy it in: *Spiked eggnog*

(served at *The Drake* in Toronto)

### Ingredients:

2 eggs

2 oz. brandy

2 drops cedar bitters

3 oz. milk

2 oz. cream

1/2 teaspoon grated nutmeg

1.5 oz. superfine sugar

4 dash cardamom bitters

Add all ingredients to a cocktail shaker and dry shake for 15-20 seconds. Double strain, then pour into coupe glass. Garnish with a sprinkle of nutmeg.







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*Yes*

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- **LYON FROM MONTRÉAL  
(RESUMING OCTOBER 2023)**

Many travellers have visited Europe, but have they truly experienced this magnificent continent? Visiting this amazing and diverse continent outside of the summer tourism season offers many perks. Gain a deeper appreciation for local culture, while truly discovering Europe from a whole new perspective.





## FANTASTIC FOOD FESTIVALS

For foodies, Europe is heaven on Earth. Italy is home to food and wine festivals that are held every month of the year, in every region of the country. Got a sweet tooth? Try the famous EuroChocolate festival, the biggest celebration of its kind in Europe, held each year in Perugia, in the Umbria region.

During the autumn months in Lisbon, Portugal, the city fills with the enticing aroma of roasted chestnuts (*castanhas assadas*), and you'll hear cries of "Quentes e boas" ("Get 'em hot!") ringing out through the streets. The Portuguese also hold festive celebrations for St. Martin's Day (Nov. 11) with roasted chestnuts and *jeropiga*, a traditional sweet liqueur wine. It's an experience not to be missed.

## WONDERFUL WINE WANDERINGS

Speaking of wine, there's no better place than France to do a deep dive into wine culture. Toulouse boasts many amazing winery tours and guided wine-tasting excursions. Lyon is also home to some of the most renowned wines in France—or anywhere. Located in the country's southeastern Rhône region, it's close to many of France's best wine regions including Saint-Joseph, Hermitage and Côtes du Rhône.

## EDINBURGH'S COOL CHRISTMAS MARKETS

Don't overlook the winter holiday season as a great time to explore Europe. If you thought historic European cities couldn't be more charming, you haven't visited at this time of year when many cities erupt in light and



colour and hold traditional Christmas markets. Edinburgh, Scotland boasts a fine variety of Christmas markets, the biggest being the East Princes Street Gardens market. Stay through the end of December and you can also experience the Hogmanay street party and the spectacular fireworks on Dec. 31.

## BARCELONA'S BALMY BEACHES

Barcelona gets more than 300 days of sunshine every year, so it's no surprise that the Spanish city on the Mediterranean—known for its architecture, cuisine and so much more—has some of the most amazing beaches in Europe. There are many beautiful beaches to choose from, and each presents sun-worshipping visitors with a different experience of Barcelona beach culture: some shimmering with

lively activities like basketball or ping pong, while others offer a perfect relaxing escape into warmth, peace and serenity.

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# BAHAMAS

## A LOOK AT ISLAND LIFE OUTSIDE THE RESORT STRIP

ANN RUPPENSTEIN

It's my first day in Grand Bahama — the northernmost island of the Bahamas archipelago — and I'm already ignoring the age-old advice not to be lured into a complete stranger's house.

Tempted by the promise of a home-cooked meal, I'm here to meet Colette Williams, a host with the Bahamas' Ministry of Tourism's People-to-People program, which is all about pairing travellers with a local ambassador for an authentic Bahamian experience.

"I think that's what I was made to do — just to welcome people to our sun, sand and sea," said Williams, who has been a host with the program for 19 years. "I love people. I feel that if I can make one person have a memorable experience of the Bahamas, I would not have lived in vain, so my goal is to make sure everyone has a memorable experience of my home and to share the authentic experience of Grand Bahamian hospitality."

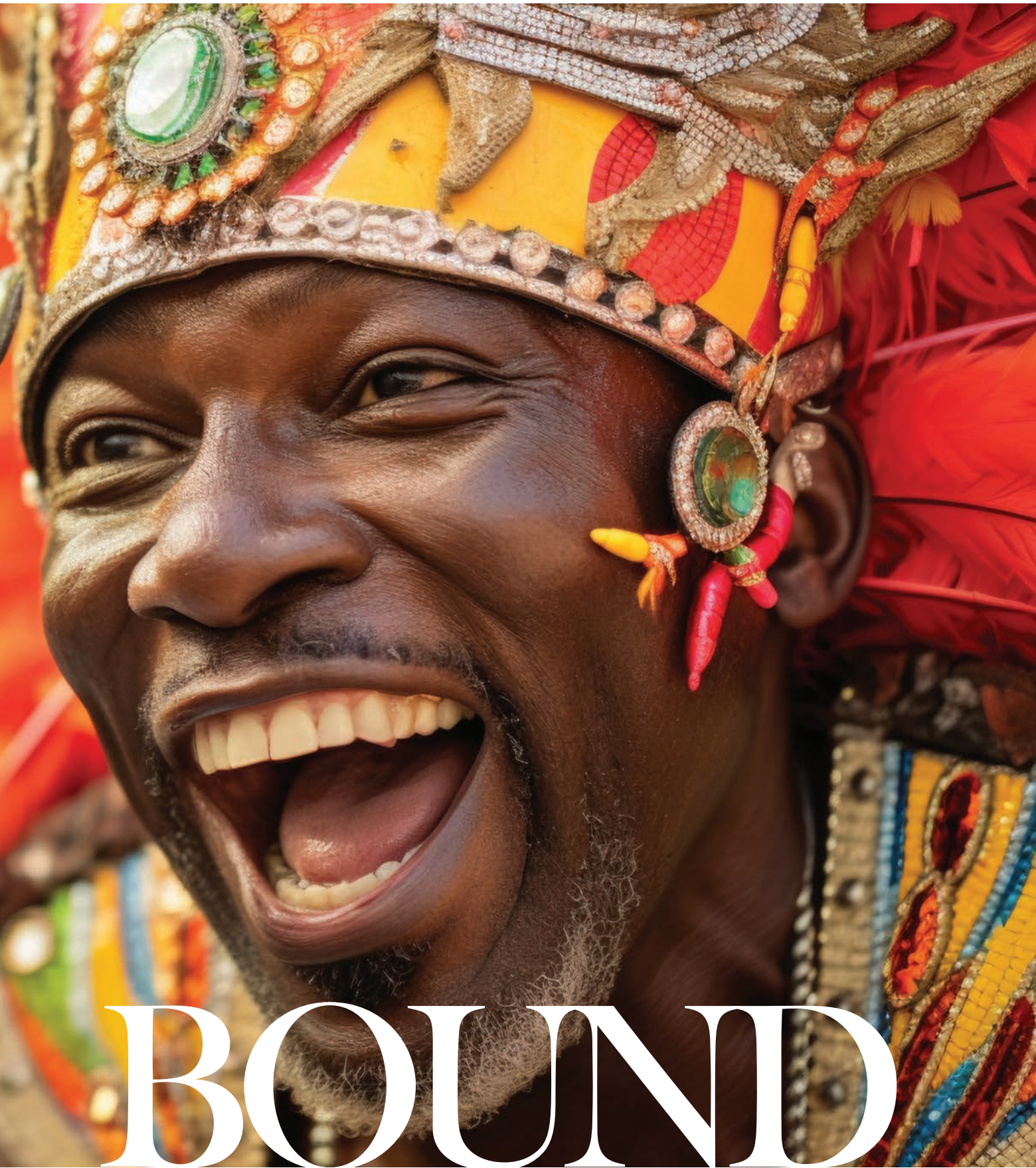
In her backyard, Williams proceeds to set up an elaborate spread of stewed chicken, steamed fish, peas and rice, warm potato salad, baked macaroni and cheese and homemade iced tea. Today's batch is infused with hibiscus. A yellow tablecloth spread across the dining table echoing the words Bahamas matches her blue dress, which also has the words Bahamas printed all over it.

Williams, who formerly worked in the hotel industry, said tourists rarely get a chance to see how Bahamians live.

"You can drive around the tourist route and never even see a house," she said, noting that she enjoys sharing authentic Bahamian dishes with visitors. "When you get food in a hotel, it isn't as authentic as home cooking. There's no cooking like home cooking. You put a face to the food, there's a story behind it."

The immersive program pairs interested travellers with locally-vetted ambassadors who are matched based on various interests.





# BOUND





"It's a program that's been in place for more than 40 years," Latia Duncombe, Director General of The Bahamas Ministry of Tourism, Investments & Aviation, told Offshore. "It's a day in the life of a Bahamian. You're moving away from the commercial, touristic components and you're getting immersed into culture — whatever the local does is what the visitor does. It is true culture; it's who we are as a people. It's being prepared to share that authentic element of being a Bahamian, something you can't find anywhere else in the world."

## MEETING THE PIED PIPER OF STINGRAYS

Thirteen kilometres off the shore of Grand Bahama, I've connected with another Bahamian resident who is just as passionate about the destination and sharing his knowledge. Although the Bahamas is known around the world as the place where tourists can come to swim with pigs, I'm here for a different kind of wild encounter — to meet the man known as the pied piper of stingrays. From the moment Keith Cooper

of West End Ecology Tours steps off the boat at Sandy Cay, a dozen stingrays with names like Stubby, Hard Wire, Lunatic, Scratch, Big Momma and Little Momma, instinctively swarm him.

"They're touching my leg with their sensors because they know who I am, they remember who I am and because of the special bond I have with them. They trust me as much as I trust them," he said, adding that stingrays often get a bad rep for being dangerous. "More than 9,000 visitors have participated in the Stingray Experience Tour and no one has ever been stung by a stingray... when the protocols are followed, guests will have one of the most unique encounters with marine life they have ever experienced."

Before launching West End Ecology Tours, Cooper stumbled upon the stingrays by accident during a fishing expedition in 2006. "During the stopover, I discarded unused fishing bait over the side of the boat and within minutes the boat was surrounded by 15 stingrays feeding off the bottom of the shallow water where the boat was

anchored at the beach," he explained. Since then, he's returned to the spot to study the stingrays. In 2009, Cooper turned it into a business that now offers multiple tours, including snorkelling trips to underwater boat wrecks and reef fishing experiences. The Stingray Experience Tour remains his best-selling excursion.

According to Cooper, stingrays can display sentient behaviour and will show off their unique personalities. "There are two alpha female stingrays that dominate the fever — Big Momma is the most dominant member of the group and often displays her displeasure when too many rays come near me during the introduction and demonstration phase of the tour," he said, noting she'll use a decoy tactic to draw the other stingrays away so that she can consume the fish provided during the demonstration phase. Another stingray, Hugger, got its name from the "hugs" she gives Cooper upon approach. "Guests watching from the boat are awestruck when they observe Hugger sitting in my lap, waiting patiently to receive a fish," he said.



Keith Cooper



Colette Williams



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## IT'S JUNKANOO TIME

On Nassau, New Providence, where major resorts like Atlantis, Goldwynn Resort & Residences, Sandals Royal Bahamian and Baha Mar are located, Arlene Nash Ferguson has made it her life's mission to showcase the longstanding Bahamian celebration known as Junkanoo.

Based in her childhood home, the Educulture Junkanoo Museum is lined with colourful displays and costumes displaying the evolution of the cultural affair. A former British colony from 1629 to 1973, in the Bahamas, Junkanoo began roughly 200 years ago, when members of the African diaspora, including enslaved Bahamians, were granted three days to observe Christmas.

"They said, 'let's use these precious three days to recreate our festivals from home. It's time to renew the spirit and just in

case anybody tries to stop us, we will wait until the night and off we go,'" said Nash Ferguson, who has been taking part in Junkanoo since she was four years old.

Although the residents of the time were mixed by culture, she said the festivals wound up sharing several things in common, including instruments like goatskin drums, bells and elaborate costumes. "When you covered your face, it symbolized the presence of our ancestors," Nash Ferguson said. "In these isolated islands, leaves, feathers, shells, seaweed, anything Indigenous becomes your decoration."

Nash Ferguson shared that costumes continue to be made from paper as an original sign of defiance because in the time of slavery on the islands "by law people were not permitted to learn to read and write." More than just a tradition, she said Bahamians are passionate about Junkanoo and work on their costumes all year long in their spare time once the theme for the following year's festival is announced. Typically, the costumes are made using a cardboard base that's covered in layers of tissue paper and often include elaborate headpieces. "Two hundred years ago in

the dark of the night at Christmas time, Bahamians said 'Man, we survived, let's celebrate life' and they told their children never to forget," she explained. "And ladies and gentlemen, right up to Christmas gone, we who are their children, we continue to do it. Today, we call it the Junkanoo festival — at 10 o'clock Christmas night we shut down Bay Street, hit the road dancing, still to the music of drums and bells."

After outfitting my small group of travel companions with cowbells, whistles and drums, Nash Ferguson led us into a practice run of a Junkanoo simulation.

"The costumes are magnificent; we have worked months on them and we can't wait to get out there to show them off. We're going to out music and out dance every other group because we are going to win," she said, before blowing her whistle loudly. "Line up, everybody ready? Who we is? Junkanoo! Bark like a dog. Woof, woof!"

The end result is a far cry from the organized rhythm of an actual parade, but we give it our all, joining in with off-beat drumming and what could only be described as tone deaf whistling. What we lack in musical ability, we make up in spirit and effort.



# THREE DESTINATIONS, THREE UNIQUE EXPERIENCES

Made up of more than 700 islands and cays, the hardest part of visiting the Bahamas may be deciding where you want to go. Here are a few hand-picked recommendations for your next visit.

## ESCAPE THE CROWDS IN EXUMA

**Swimming in the pig leagues:** Whether you head to the Exumas island chain for an overnight stay or travel in via plane for a quick day trip, you don't want to miss out on visiting Big Major Cay to swim with pigs in the surrounding sapphire-blue waters. The pigs swim out to meet the boat on arrival and get up close and personal to guests on shore. Full day excursions of the region include stops for a photo opportunity with nurse sharks, to enjoy a cocktail at an idyllic sandbar and a visit to the underwater plane wreck at Staniel Cay — the wreck of a drug smuggler's plane from the Pablo Escobar drug running empire in the '70s. Another must see is the Thunderball Grotto, which got its name from the 1965 Bond film *Thunderball* and was used again in the filming of *Never Say Never Again*. It doesn't look like much from the outside, but after swimming through a dark hidden passage during low tide, you enter an intriguing underwater cave system that is teeming with colourful fish, the occasional bat and unique caverns and openings that let in dramatic lighting.

**A bucket list experience:** For the ultimate in luxury, embark on a private yacht charter with companies like The Moorings or Dream Yacht Charters. The fully-crewed yachts come equipped with a chef, captain and bartender so all you have to do is chart the adventure.

## NOTEWORTHY STOPS IN NASSAU

**Take part in Junkanoo:** As the clock strikes 2 a.m., the party is just getting started along Bay Street in downtown Nassau as dancers and musicians get ready for the parade and thousands line up to take part in the festive celebration. But be prepared—the party goes on for hours, often surpassing breakfast time.

**Get a taste of Nassau:** To get a tasty overview of the local food scene, embark on a walking tour through the charming and historic streets of downtown Nassau with Tru Bahamian Food Tours. Hosts like the knowledgeable Captain Ron (Ronnell Pierre) will embark on a quest to tantalize the taste buds with local favourites like conch fritters and baked macaroni, while also sharing insights into the history of the Bahamas. All tours frequent Bahamian Cookin', a family-owned local venture that's been serving up Bahamian comfort food since 1986.

**Raise a glass:** Cocktail fans can head to Bon Vivants, the first true craft cocktail bar in the Bahamas. Dedicated to the art and history of the craft cocktail (as well as mocktails), visitors can sip cocktails with a twist served in funky glassware like a pig-shaped bowl. All travellers should try Sky Juice (also known as Gully Wash), a popular local drink made with gin, coconut water and condensed milk. Bon Vivants is now part of Sandals Royal Bahamian's Island Inclusive dining program, meaning that guests in high-end room categories can experience the bar as part of their seven-night package.

## GRAND ADVENTURES IN GRAND BAHAMA

**Hit the streets:** Every Wednesday night, the community comes together for a weekly fish fry at Smith's Point on Grand Bahama. It's an evening filled with music, food and good company. During the summer months, the adjacent Taino Beach is also where the Bahamas Goombay Summer Festival is held, featuring live music and vendors selling culinary delights. Pack your swimsuit to enjoy the concert while cooling off in the ocean. For a great Instagram shot, walk down the beach to The Stoned Crab, and hop on the beachfront swing set.

**Go nutz cruising around Grand Bahama:** To get the lay of the land, head out on an informative and scenic e-bike adventure with CocoNutz Cruisers. Local guide Alfredo leads the group through different local communities and stunning beaches, while also engaging with characters like Tony Macaroni for a conch demonstration. Tours include a lunch stop at the beach-side Banana Bay.

**Hitch a ride:** For those with the need for speed, another scenic way to explore the island is to head out on an ATV adventure with Grand Bahama Nature Tours. The off-the-beaten path journey goes through a forested trail as well as along the Grand Lucayan Waterway, offering beautiful views of the island's south shore. ■







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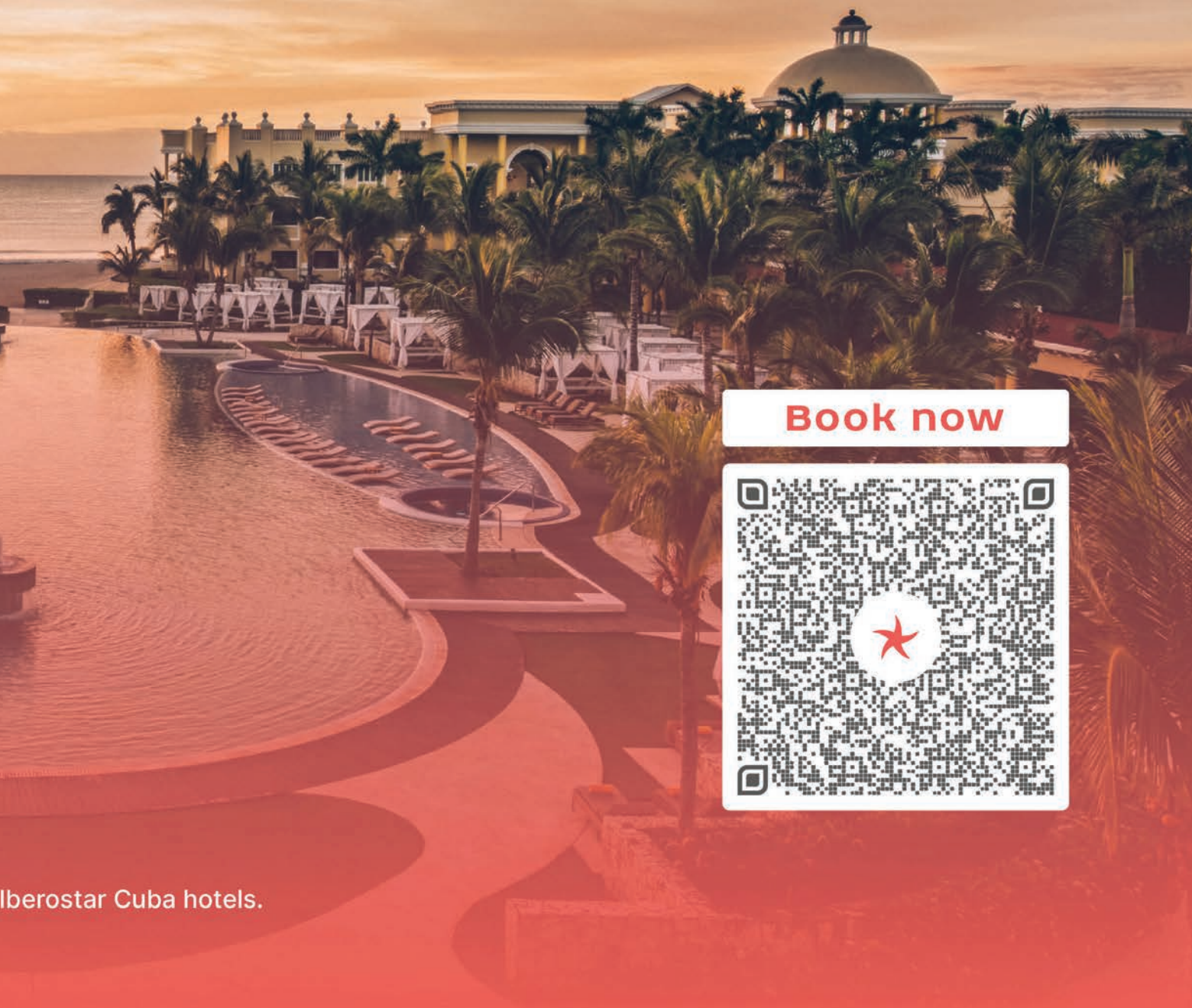
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# A TOURIST'S GUIDE TO LOVING VIETNAM

Breathtaking caves, hands-on cooking demonstrations and the power of giving back

ANN RUPPENSTEIN

I had some initial apprehension upon learning that I'd be checking into a 'junk boat' for the next two nights. But upon seeing my home on the water, I quickly discovered that unlike the sound of the name, it's actually not a shabby way to spend the night.

In fact, these sleeper ships, which range from basic bare bones boats to luxurious yachts, are the perfect gateway to experiencing Vietnam's postcard-worthy Halong Bay, where 1,969 unusually shaped tree-covered limestone islands and islets jet out from the water.

After we stashed our luggage in our onboard rooms, tour guide John Tran began leading our small group of travellers on the Classic Vietnam itinerary

with Canada-based tour operator, G Adventures. He describes it as a more "off-the-grid kayak excursion" to explore several remarkable caves along the UNESCO World Heritage site. With the job title of CEO — that's Chief Experience Officer — he says he's "in charge of facilitating life-changing experiences."

Topping the list on today's adventure are a visit to Trong Cave, where the ceiling is covered in stalactites and gives way to impressive views of the area's famous towering limestone islands, and Trinh Nu Cave, which can best be described as an outer-worldly natural attraction. Although there were many other junk boats around our boat, we have these fascinating spots to ourselves.

The next morning, we set out bright and early after a hearty breakfast on a

mission to climb the nearby Ti Top island. Although all the islands in Halong Bay are uninhabited, Ti Top features a pagoda at the top offering visitors a bird's eye view of the surrounding area.

It's a balmy 43°C out as we slowly conquer the 400 steps to reach the top, but the view surpassed my expectations. While I'd seen countless pictures taken from this exact spot, it didn't prepare me for how vast the area is. Dripping in sweat and high on adrenaline for making it to the top, we take advantage of our own photo opportunities, before climbing down the steps for a refreshing reward: taking a swim at the sandy beach at the bottom of the island's shore.

"How is this my life right now?" muses fellow traveller Kaylee Mitchell of Kelowna, British Columbia while floating in the water.





## COFFEE AND CULTURE COLLIDE IN HANOI

Earlier in the week, we headed to Hanoi Food Culture for a lesson in making a local specialty known as egg coffee. The restaurant is a G Values Fund project, an initiative where former G Adventures tour leaders can open their own businesses with low interest loans through the tour operator.

“These are funds that we set up for former CEOs. When they’re tired of guiding our tours but they still want to be involved with the company, they can apply for a low interest loan and start up a business of their own as local suppliers,” explains Jenna English, global purpose specialist for British Columbia & Northern Territories at G Adventures. After interacting with travellers day in and day out, she says CEOs often see the need for what kind of businesses are lacking in an

area through their tour experiences.

While setting up the egg coffee demonstration, co-owner Lap Nguyen explains how he shifted gears to launch the restaurant. “I used to be a CEO, running tours on the road,” Nguyen says. “One day, my wife called me when I was in Siem Reap and said that she had cancer so I decided to quit the job and come back here.”

Through access to funding from the G Values Fund, Hanoi Food Culture was born. While we’re here for a coffee demonstration, the restaurant is open for lunch and dinner and hires students as its main staff. “The story of the egg coffee — it’s a Hanoi specialty. Hoi An and Saigon also have egg coffee, but they’re not the original, Hanoi is the place where the egg coffee came from. Egg in coffee, it seems very weird right?” he says, noting that the dish is indeed made

with egg yolks. “It started over 100 years ago. If you go to any coffee shop and ask, ‘hey, what’s the recipe?’ They never want to share with you, but here we want to share it with you. It’s a million dollar business idea when you go home.”

## THE POWER OF TRAVEL

All G Adventures itineraries involve giving back to the local community, and in Vietnam trips support Oodles of Noodles in Hoi An, where we arrive for a lesson in making noodles. Before getting started, we watch an introductory video featuring interview footage of some of the previously homeless and at-risk youth who have benefited from the culinary and hospitality school. There’s a particularly powerful tale by a young man who is sharing a story about a hungry boy who was waiting near a local restaurant in hopes of being fed any scraps of food.



Finally, after guests left the restaurant after complaining that the meals they were served were too cold, the little boy was permitted to eat the discarded noodle bowl.

“That boy was me,” he announces in the film, calling it the best meal of his life. Today, he’s gone on to graduate from the on site training program that was developed to help disadvantaged, orphaned and trafficked kids develop the skills for careers in tourism and hospitality.

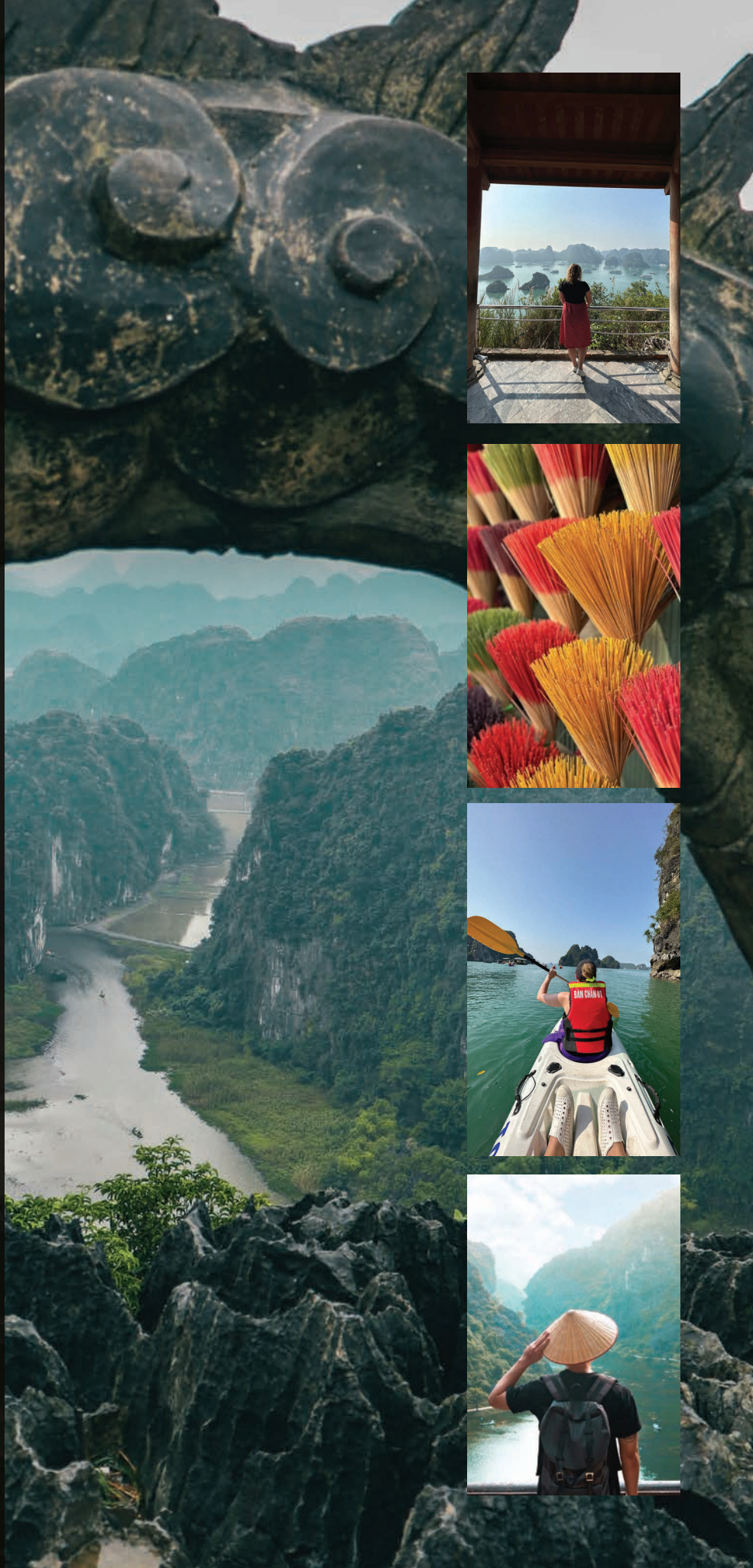
“Sadly, approximately 20,000 Vietnamese youth are homeless and lack access to education, healthcare and social protection,” explains English. “G Adventures and our non-profit, Planeterra, partnered with Streets International, a vocational program that helps street youth, and created Oodles of Noodles, a restaurant that helps Vietnamese youth develop employable skills that will prepare them for careers in Vietnam’s growing hospitality and tourism industry.”

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Along with access to a teaching kitchen, classrooms for learning hospitality and tourism-related courses and an English lab, trainees also get firsthand experience working in the restaurant and interacting with G Adventures groups, who visit the location for noodle making and tasting classes in a full-service apprenticing restaurant setting.

Trainees begin their stint in the restaurant with no working knowledge of the English language or hospitality skills, but graduates obtain an international culinary or hospitality certificate and go on to begin their careers, some at high-end resorts across the country. To date, more than 250 youths have been trained.

“It was great to see how and where the Planeterra donations were being used and the people we were impacting,” says Mitchell. “The Oodles for Noodles cooking lesson was so absolutely amazing that I cried because of the impact that it has on the young children and young adults in Vietnam. The impact of teaching these kids great life skills to better their life was unmatched.” ■





# WARNING: Active travel may cause feelings of intense connection



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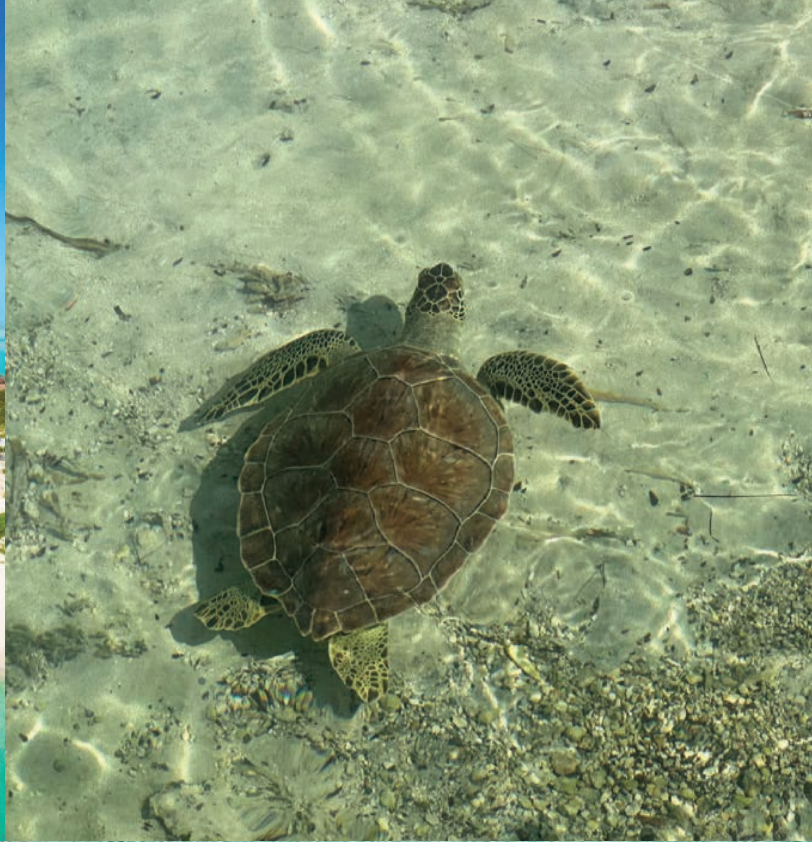
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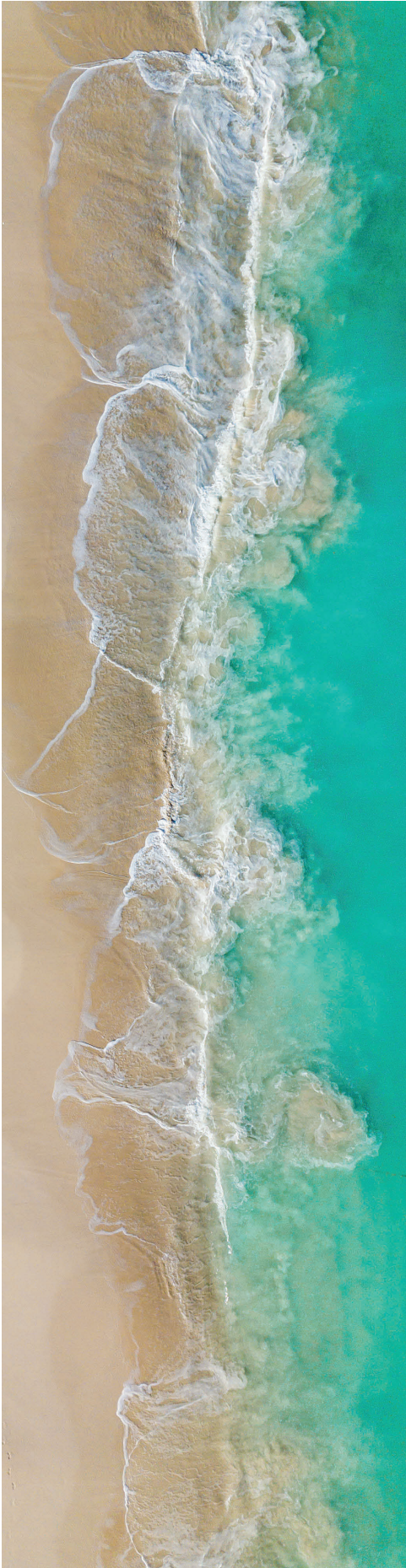


# STOP FOR SOUTH CAICOS

The Turks and Caicos archipelago offers luxurious authenticity like no other







ANN RUPPENSTEIN

**E**ven from 10,000 feet up in the air, it's easy to see why South Caicos has lured in celebrities like Justin and Hailey Bieber and Neil Patrick Harris.

There are no filters required to boost the serene turquoise hue of the waters surrounding the laid-back island in the Turks and Caicos. It's really that blue. It's really that pretty.

"We're known as being the authentic side of the Turks and Caicos experience. It's sort of like going to the Maldives except we're very close to the U.S. and Canadian markets," Kashmie Ali, the managing director of Sailrock Resort tells Offshore from the property's beach bar, where the fixings to make s'mores have been laid out next to the fire pit. "We're quite different from Provo [how locals refer to Providenciales]. We're known for peace and tranquility. Sailrock, in particular, is best known for lots of space. We have 40 suites and villas but it's over 750 acres."

In order to cater to the desires of their high-end guests, Ali says the resort has staff ready on standby in different time zones to pick up and fly in food and meal requests that can't be sourced in destination. Sworn to secrecy, he can't divulge many details on the most outlandish requests, but let's just say there certainly have been some.

One of the services that Sailrock offers

is in-villa dining — meaning the chef will come over to cook breakfast, lunch or dinner for those who want to enjoy a meal in private — or in the comfort of their villa. But should guests choose to leave the property, this is another spot where South Caicos shines. Sailrock offers excursions to spectacular dive sites, pristine sandbars and opportunities to see wildlife like flamingos, donkeys and incredible sea life.

Unlike the main resort hub of Providenciales, which is booming with major hotel brands, South Caicos has a different vibe without a lot of development. The boutique tourism destination even fielded a visit from Queen Elizabeth II back in 1966. "It's a great complement to what Provo has to offer and we're only 30 minutes away," adds Ali. "Twenty years ago, people came to Turks and Caicos because of this natural environment and over time Provo has really grown. It's literally the opposite here — for us, that's a huge advantage."

As a Caribbean destination where 85 per cent of the GDP comes from tourism, Josephine Connolly, Minister of Tourism for the Turks and Caicos Islands, said the archipelago has launched a new strategy to build awareness about each island's distinct natural beauty and charm in hopes of spreading tourism to its other 40 islands and cays.

Courtney Missick is an entrepreneur who runs Isaac Farms in North Caicos.





Here, travellers can stop to enjoy freshly made jams, cake and cane juice. Cynthia Johnstone, another self-starter, creates salt-based bath products on Salt Cay, a small cay off the coast of Grand Turks where donkeys outnumber its 69 residents. Whatever the endeavour, it's all about developing tourism experiences that benefit those who call Turks and Caicos home.

For example, a short ferry ride over from Provo, travellers can reach Middle Caicos, known for its secluded beaches like Wild Cow Run and Bambarra, which Connolly says most visitors have never heard of. Another lesser-known highlight there is the coast of Mudjin Harbour, a 4.8 kilometre stretch of limestone cliffs where a hidden stairwell leads to a private picnic spot, complete with its own beach.

Back at Sailrock, Ali says it's quite common for guests to combine a stay at the resort with a pre- or post-trip in Providenciales. As the home to the international airport that links both Toronto and Montreal, and Grace Bay Beach, a five-kilometre long beach that frequently gets recognized on lists of the World's Best Beaches, Provo remains a popular choice for Canadians. On

the luxury side, there are some remarkable resorts like Amanyara, Grace Bay Club, The Palms, The Ritz-Carlton, The Shore Club, Wymara Resort and Villas, and COMO Parrot Cay, set on its own private island.

Over the decades as tourism has blossomed on the island, so has the local food scene. Along with a weekly island fish fry where vendors sell home-cooked favourites and a dance floor keeps the party going into the wee hours, there are many restaurants to try, like Crackpot Kitchen and the chef's table at Kokomo Botanical Resort.

But for those looking for a different kind of experience, look no further than the home of Chef Lorraine Kenlock, who invites visitors and locals alike into her abode for private dinner bookings at The Ital Life. Focusing on an Ital fusion cuisine that's organic and natural, Kenlock first started the culinary endeavour at the request of a client who wanted to surprise his wife on Valentine's Day in 2014.

"I have always loved hosting and preparing food; my home was always a gathering place," she says. "But it was my passion for mindful eating that got me started."

First starting a salad delivery service, she continued working in the industry as a private chef before launching a home-based approach.

The dinner service is a way of getting an inside look at a local's real everyday life in Provo. She says her recipes are inspired by her curiosity for flavours and the thought of bringing people together. "I truly believe that food is a common denominator and all issues, good or bad, can be made better over the table at a great meal," she says. ■





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# GIFT GUIDE



## LIFE OF THE PARTY

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## MESSENGER MUSE

For travellers on the go, Espe's River messenger bag is a stylish solution. Female-owned and designed in Canada, all of Espe's vegan leather pieces retail for under \$100. The River messenger bag is available in black or tan and is outfitted with antique bronze hardware. Decked out with plenty of pockets and zipper closures, plus an adjustable shoulder strap, this unisex bag provides plenty of storage for securing your valuables while adding a smart and practical look to any outfit. — \$98, [espe.ca](http://espe.ca)



## WINTER WEDGE

Cougar's Villa boot is a super lightweight, easy-to-wear wedge. The boot is available in four beautiful shades in sizes six through 11: cream, almond, cognac and black. Always waterproof, the boots will keep your feet snug up to -24 C, making them an ideal choice for both fall and winter. The polar plush lining ensures your feet stay dry and warm, while an anti-slip rubber outsole provides protection against wet or icy conditions. — \$200, [cougarshoes.ca](http://cougarshoes.ca)



# GIFT GUIDE

## BELIEVE IN MIRACLE

Sick of compromising on your skincare routine while on vacation because of size restrictions? This customized collection contains a four-week supply of five essential skincare products (cleanser, serum, toner, day cream and night cream) in 15 and 30mL containers. All of Miracle 10's products are fragrance-free, paraben-free, not tested on animals and are made in Canada. Perfect for frequent jetsetters or for those simply looking to try out a new line, these collections conform to airline carry-on regulations and fit neatly into your purse or luggage. — \$145, [miracle10.com](http://miracle10.com)



## SUIT UP

Look smart season to season. Perfect to pair with pants or layered on top of a dress, the Veronica Beard Dickey Jacket is a versatile wardrobe staple for any occasion. Available in sizes 00 to 24, the jacket comes in black or navy with gold or silver statement buttons. Made of a cotton and polyester blend, the relaxed fit allows for comfort and flexibility, while the shoulder pads add a touch of drama. — \$780, [veronicabeard.com](http://veronicabeard.com)



## SWEET DREAMS

After a long day of travel, there's nothing like a good night's sleep. Henrie is a new, Vancouver-based, female-founded luxury pillow brand. Their signature adjustable pillow is filled with a blend of chopped memory foam and premium kapok, a natural fluffy fibre. Suitable for all bodies and sleeping positions, the Henrie pillow also features a removable, organic 450 thread count cotton outer cover that's machine washable and each pillow comes with a storage bag to keep any excess pillow filling. — \$199, [henrie.com](http://henrie.com)



## SET THE TABLE

Meticulously crafted in Portugal, the charcoal grey dinnerware set by Canadian cookware company, Kilne, is a beautiful, 16-piece addition to your kitchen. Handmade of recycled clay, each piece is slightly imperfect, giving off a rustic chic feel. Dishwasher safe, each plate and bowl is also oven-safe up to 250°C and freezer safe down to -20°C. — \$326, [kilne.com](http://kilne.com)

## JETSETTER JAVA

Pilot Coffee Roasters' holiday gift set is the perfect stocking stuffer for coffee-loving travellers—and let's face it, most of us are! The set includes a 300 gram bag of their signature holiday blend roast (cranberry, cinnamon and chocolate notes) as well as a one-of-a-kind ceramic cup in collaboration with Paule Vezina, who runs a local artisanal ceramics studio, Poterie Vez, in Quebec. — \$60, [pilotcoffee.roasters.com](http://pilotcoffee.roasters.com)



—C.H.



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# HIKING ITALY'S MOST HEAVENLY ROUTE

*The Path of the Gods promises spectacular views—and some unexpected twists*

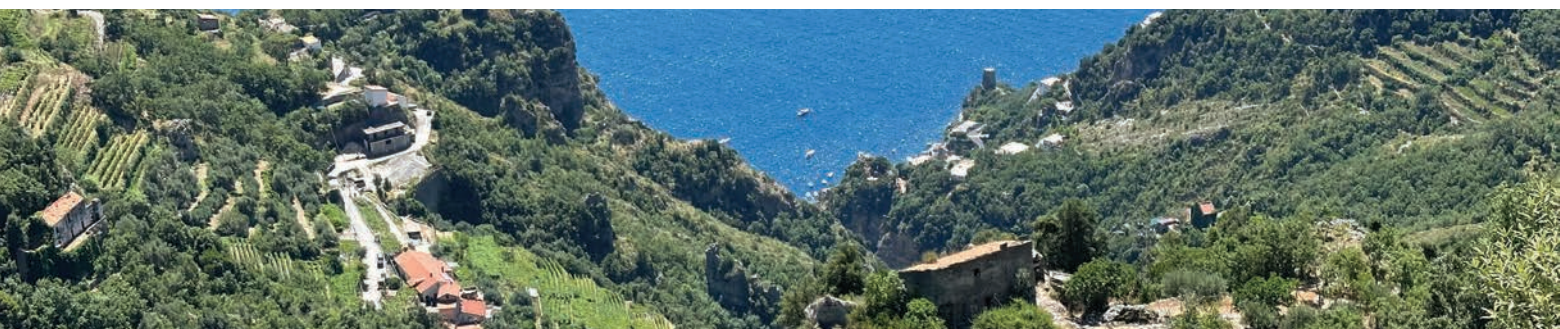
ANN RUPPENSTEIN

I'm sitting along a wooden table overlooking the dramatic cliffs of the Amalfi Coast, feasting on freshly-made goat cheese, deep-fried fritters, roasted tomatoes and eggplants, while sipping on homemade red wine with a group of fellow travellers from around the world, when an impromptu concert breaks out.

Nino Aversa, one of the guides leading my small hiking trip, has joined goatherd Antonio Milo, the owner of the charming stone-built farmhouse who prepared our meal, and the pair start singing and playing instruments, tapping their feet along to the rhythm. Although Milo, who takes care of some 100 goats on site, only purchased the farmhouse several years ago, he comes from a long line of goatherds. Travelling daily to milk the goats and oversee the property, he was inspired to expand the venture to provide a true farm-to-table experience for guests. There's no fixed price menu for hikers who stumble upon him, and

he works with local hiking outfitters to feed their group tour bookings as a side business.

Although I don't understand the words as they're serenading us to the tune of O Sarracino, an old Neapolitan folk song, I can't help but think: I'm so







and immediately locked it in. After a last minute pit-stop to a nearby mall to procure some appropriate hiking attire, I was on my way.

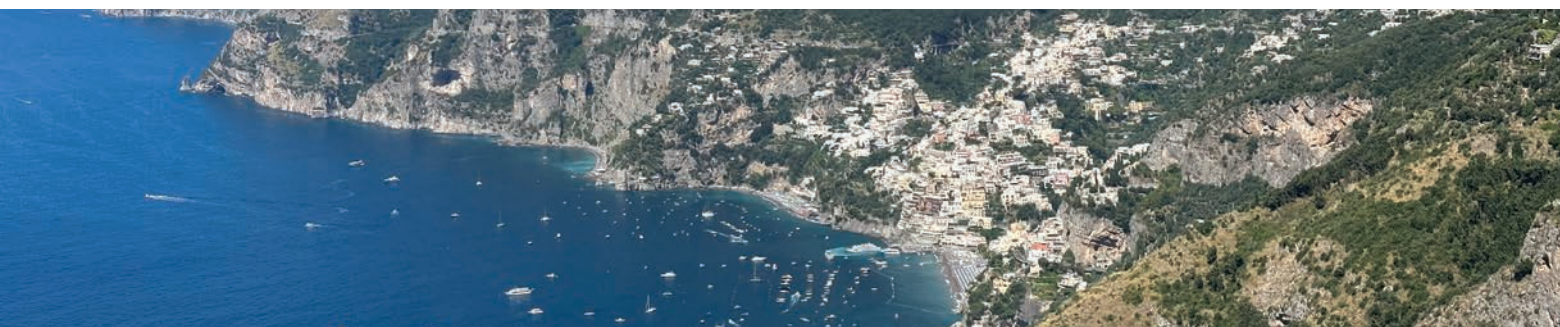
The Sentiero degli Dei, or Path of the Gods as it's known in English, is a stunning trekking route along the Amalfi Coast that provides an amazing vantage point over the picturesque towns of Praiano and Positano. Long before it became a popular hiking route, the trail was developed centuries ago as a mule-track to link the dairy farms with the towns along the coast. While there are several different options to hike along the Path of the Gods, their recommended route goes from Bomerano to Nocelle, which Aversa describes as "walking between heaven and earth." There are no guardrails along the route, just steep drops that almost induce vertigo if you stand too close to the edge.

In the car transfer over to the beginning of the trail from Sorrento that morning, my other passionate guide, Giovanni Gargiulo, inquired about what I'd heard about the difficulty of the path. Much to my dismay, when I shared that I've read it's an easy-to-moderate hike, the German tourists in the back-

glad I wound up here. A mere few days earlier I was destined to be doing a day trip to the island of Capri instead, but due to rough waters, the journey was cancelled. With a gap to fill in my agenda, I serendipitously found a guided tour with Sorrento Hiking to the famed Path of the Gods hiking route online

seat chimed in that everything they've read contradicted that.

"It's definitely more of a challenging route," Gargiulo confirmed, but then quickly reassured me that we could take it at our own pace.





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Continued from PG 33

For seven kilometres, the hike seemingly did a never-ending loop, complete with steep hills and descents. Gruelling at times, the frequent stops to admire the views from the top reminded me why I set out on this path in the first place.

By the time we reached the farmhouse, I was eager to enjoy a home-cooked spread and taste some well-deserved vino.

Driving back in the car Gargiulo asks how I enjoyed the hike. It wasn't the path I'd originally set out on, but it's one I'm glad I took. ■





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