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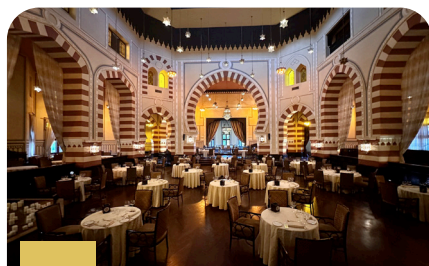
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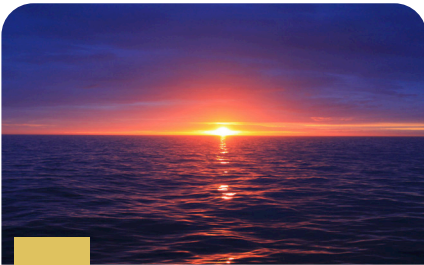
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Editor-in-Chief's Letter

FEBRUARY

The Month When New Journeys Begin

February is quiet, yet precise. It is a month that does not push, but invites—a time to choose a path consciously, without pressure and without noise.

This issue of Travelista® was created with the idea that travel does not need to be fast in order to be intense. Quite the opposite. Sometimes all it takes is slowing down and allowing a place to speak for itself. In this edition, we return to legends—from beneath Lomnický štít in the High Tatras to the shores of the Red Sea, from the papal walls of southern France to castles rising above tranquil waters. Each of these places carries its own story, and each proves that the most meaningful experiences are born not from perfection, but from authenticity.

February stands as a bridge between planning and departure. It is the moment when new journeys are born—not out of obligation, but out of desire. If these pages help you discover your next direction, then this issue has fulfilled its purpose.

Juraj Ilavsky - Editor-in-Chief



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A place where water heals.

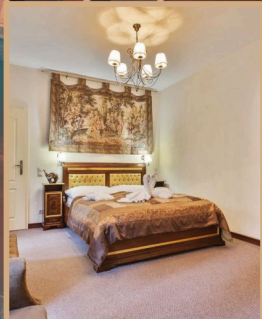
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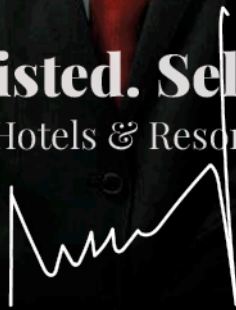
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The Hotel Where Death

Murder on paper, luxury in reality: the Egyptian hot

Some hotels have atmosphere. And then there are those with a story—so strong that you can feel it in the walls, in the quiet of the corridors, and in the way evening light reflects on the river’s surface. Sofitel Legend Old Cataract in Aswan is exactly that kind of place. It was here, during the winter of 1937, that Agatha Christie completed her famous Egyptian detective novel *Death on the Nile*. And it is almost surprising how easily you can believe that very little has changed since then. Not in terms of comfort—the hotel today offers impeccable modern luxury. Rather in mood: Old Cataract still feels like a jewel from the great age of travel, when visitors arrived in Egypt with linen-filled suitcases and eyes ready for wonder.

on the Nile Was Written

Hotel where Agatha Christie wrote *Death on the Nile*.





An iconic vintage Fiat 1100 in front of the entrance to Sofitel Legend Old Cataract Aswan evokes the atmosphere of the 1930s.

The first minutes at Old Cataract carry a strangely cinematic precision. Black-and-white photographs hang on the walls, a vintage Fiat 1100 in red and white—reminiscent of the 1930s—stands proudly at the entrance, and the hotel staff in traditional fezzes seem as if they have always belonged to this scene. The creaking Victorian elevator, velvet lawns, and the sight of wooden feluccas drifting

along the Nile at sunset all form a delicate mosaic of details that feel less like decoration and more like authentic continuity. The view of the Nile is exactly the one Christie herself might have had while searching for the right rhythm of her sentences—and perhaps even the motives of her characters.

Originally built for King Fuad, the hotel still carries a sense of grandeur that is never theatrical. Instead, it impresses quietly: vast spaces, elegant architecture, a façade in tobacco-hued tones, and dark green shutters that appear refined without ever being ostentatious. Old Cataract is the grande dame of historic hotels—one that never tries too hard to be modern, and for that very reason remains utterly convincing. If you are wary of the “standardized luxury” that some hotel chains apply to his-



Mia Farrow, David Niven, Peter Ustinov, Angela Lansbury, Bette Davis, Jack Warden, Olivia Hussey and George Kennedy, along with other cast members, pose in a photograph from the film *Death on the Nile*.



toric icons like a uniform glaze, you can relax here: Old Cataract has preserved its own identity.

Many guests arrive after a Nile cruise or on an early morning flight from Cairo, and the greatest pleasure then is simply walking through the long corridors with their cream-colored walls, Art Deco mirrors, and the blissful coolness of what may be the best air conditioning you will find in Egypt. The suites have been carefully renovated with contemporary comfort while preserving timeless proportions and decoration. Beds are impeccably crisp, and



The spa center So Spa at Sofitel Legend Old Cataract Aswan looks as if it were taken straight from an Egyptian fairytale.



Detective novelist Agatha Christie wrote the novel *Death on the Nile* during her stay in one of the spacious suites of Sofitel Legend Old Cataract Aswan.

the bathrooms resemble private hammams—with vast marble bathtubs and showers that feel less like routine and more like ritual.

And ritual is exactly the right word for the hotel's wellness experience. The spa offers treatments that are not merely “pleasant,” but memorable. One example is the Nubian Massage: steam, black soap, exfoliation, polishing, a revitalizing cascade of water, and finally hot stones that leave you in a state of complete relaxation. It is the kind of indulgence where, after an hour, you suddenly realize there is more space in your body than before.



The 1902 Restaurant at Sofitel Legend Old Cataract Aswan offers French cuisine in an enchanting setting.

If Old Cataract has one advantage that no modern resort can take away, it is its ability to create an atmosphere that feels almost like a film—yet remains entirely real. This is felt most strongly in the evening at the legendary Restaurant 1902, which is quite literally the crown of the hotel. At night it bathes in soft pink light and seems almost sacred: bottles of Cabernet are opened, grilled lamb is served beneath Byzantine domes and Moorish arches, and the entire room carries a nobility of the old world rarely encountered today.

And then there is the human touch: General Manager Ahmed el Shandawili, described by guests as charming and attentive, whether welcoming film stars or diplomats. Old Cataract is not merely a historic hotel—it is a place that still manages to do the hardest thing in travel: add a spark to the journey. Perhaps that is why people return—not simply because Agatha Christie once wrote here, but because even today you feel that the story is only just beginning. ■



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Petra tou Romiou

Cyprus's Elixir of Youth

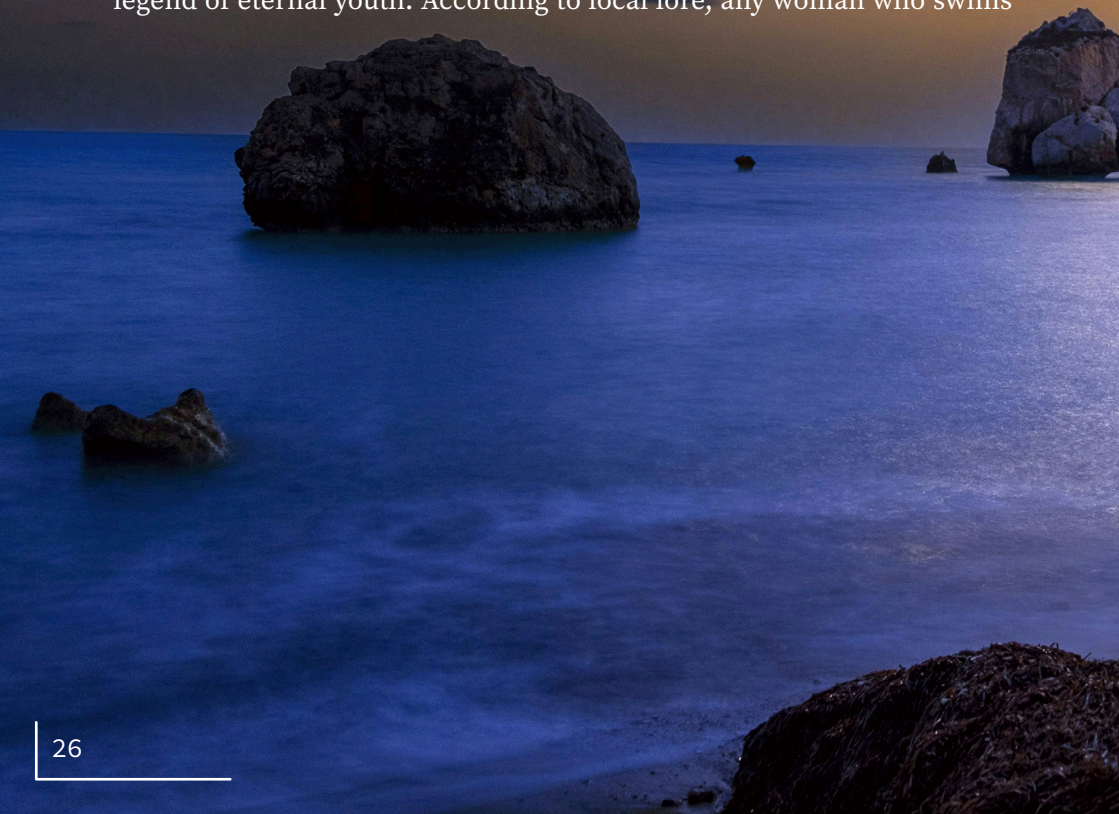
Would you like to swim in the very place where, according to Greek mythology, the goddess of love and beauty Aphrodite rose from the sea foam? Petra tou Romiou, one of Cyprus's most iconic locations, combines dramatic nature, legends thousands of years old, and a gentle dose of romantic magic. Some visitors arrive for the views and the clear Mediterranean water; others quietly hope for eternal love—or at least a symbolic touch of rejuvenation.

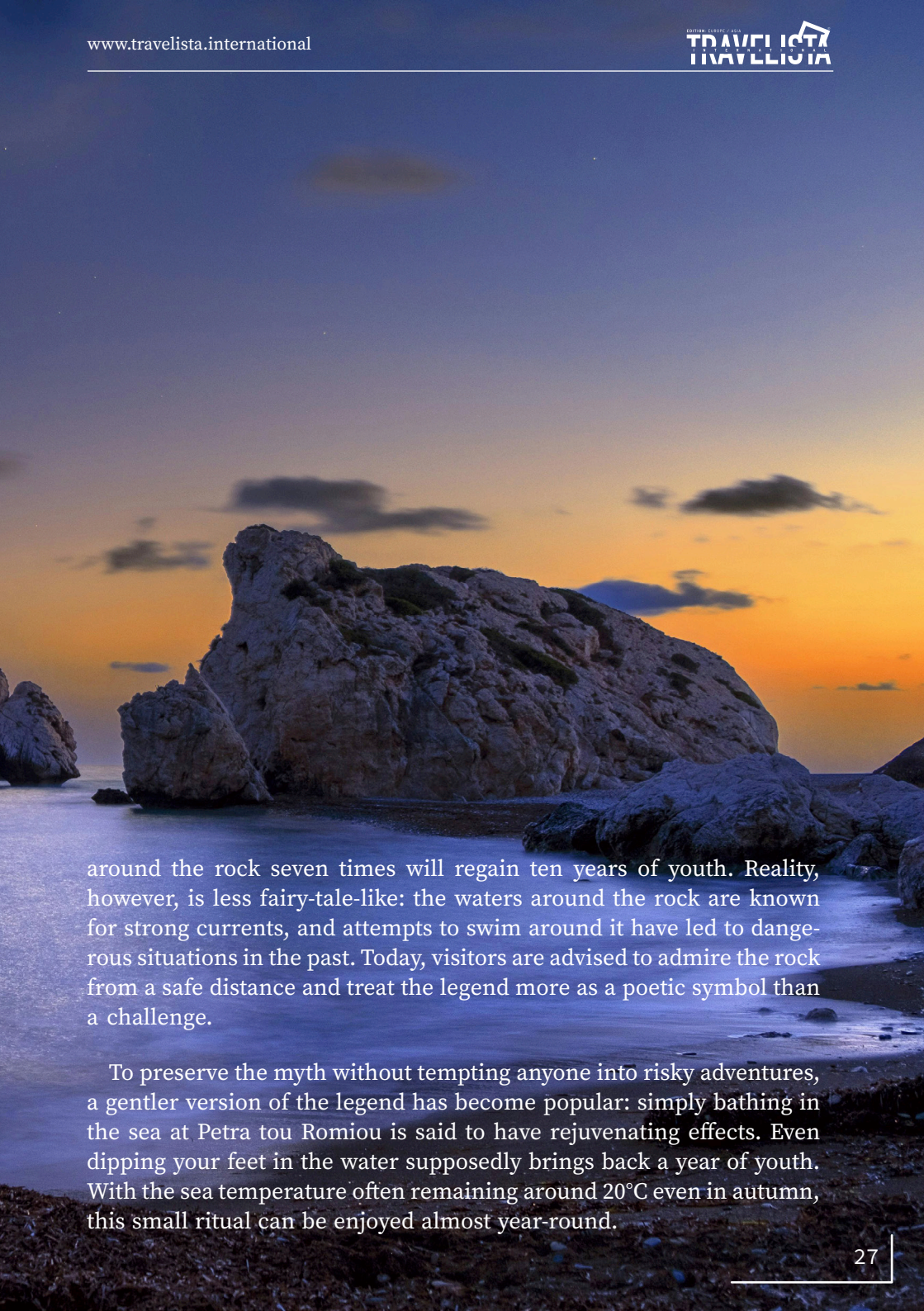


The bay of Petra tou Romiou lies on the southwestern coast of Cyprus, not far from the city of Paphos. Its name literally translates as “The Rock of the Roman,” though it is often mistakenly called the Greek’s Rock. According to ancient Greek legend, this is the very place where Aphrodite first stepped onto land after emerging from the sea. The story itself is less romantic than one might expect from the goddess of love, yet the symbolism of the place remains powerful.

The Greek poet Hesiod described Aphrodite’s birth as the result of a dramatic divine conflict that gave rise to sea foam—from which the goddess of beauty emerged. Whatever the mythological truth may be, nature seems to have chosen an extraordinary setting for her arrival. Steep cliffs, massive rocks rising from the sea, and wide-open views across the Mediterranean create a landscape that feels timeless and emotionally resonant even today.

One of the rocks emerging from the sea is known as Aphrodite’s Rock. It appears darker than the surrounding stones and is associated with a legend of eternal youth. According to local lore, any woman who swims





around the rock seven times will regain ten years of youth. Reality, however, is less fairy-tale-like: the waters around the rock are known for strong currents, and attempts to swim around it have led to dangerous situations in the past. Today, visitors are advised to admire the rock from a safe distance and treat the legend more as a poetic symbol than a challenge.

To preserve the myth without tempting anyone into risky adventures, a gentler version of the legend has become popular: simply bathing in the sea at Petra tou Romiou is said to have rejuvenating effects. Even dipping your feet in the water supposedly brings back a year of youth. With the sea temperature often remaining around 20°C even in autumn, this small ritual can be enjoyed almost year-round.



Petra tou Romiou is also known for another charming tradition. The beach is covered in smooth pebbles, and many visitors can be seen walking slowly along the shore with their eyes fixed on the ground. They are not searching for shells or souvenirs but for a pebble shaped like a heart. According to local belief, finding such a stone helps its owner discover true love. If you already have a partner, the stone should be placed beneath your pillow—only if you dream about your beloved during the night will its magical power truly reveal itself.

Whether you believe the legends or not, one thing is certain: few people leave this beach without at least one small pebble in their pocket. Petra tou Romiou is among the most visited sites in Cyprus, and during the peak season entire buses of tourists arrive each day. Yet the place still preserves its natural character and the quiet strength of the stories connected to it.



PETRA TOU ROMIOU IS MORE THAN JUST A BEACH. IT IS A MEETING POINT OF MYTHOLOGY, NATURE, AND ROMANTIC IMAGINATION. WHETHER YOU COME FOR THE VIEWS, THE SEA, THE LEGENDS, OR SIMPLE CURIOSITY, YOU WILL LIKELY LEAVE WITH THE FEELING THAT YOU HAVE VISITED ONE OF CYPRUS'S MOST SYMBOLIC PLACES. AND PERHAPS YOU WILL TAKE A SMALL STONE WITH YOU— JUST IN CASE. ■





SLOVAKIA

A 120-Year

Grandhotel Praha – A Legendary Address



Fairytale

Beneath Lomnický štít (Lomnický Peak)





Since 1905, Grandhotel Praha has been writing its own chapter in the story of the High Tatras. Built in exquisite Art Nouveau style, the hotel feels less like a place to stay and more like a portal to a more elegant era – a time when mountain air was considered medicine and travel was an event in itself.

Perched above Tatranská Lomnica at an altitude of 850 metres, the majestic four-star Grandhotel Praha commands one of the most iconic panoramas in Slovakia. Originally opened as Hotel Palace in 1905 and renamed Grandhotel Praha in 1919 following the birth of Czechoslovakia, it was conceived as a grand meeting point for European aristocracy. Tatranská Lomnica was emerging as a prestigious spa destination, and a hotel of this stature was essential to complete the vision.

Today, that legacy lives on across 108 rooms and 15 suites, blending historical elegance with contemporary comfort. It remains equally suited to romantic escapes and family holidays – a rare balance of grandeur and warmth.

THE FIRST LIGHT OF THE TATRAS

Each morning, the rising sun first illuminates Lomnický Peak, then reveals Skalnaté Pleso, and finally casts its earliest rays upon Grandhotel Praha — the very first building in Tatranská Lomnica to greet the day. This remarkable panorama has remained unchanged for 120 years.

Designed by architects Quido Hoepfner and Gejza Györgyi, the three-storey Art Nouveau masterpiece originally offered 150 rooms equipped with electric lighting and central heating — cutting-edge luxuries at the time. The hotel also featured a bar, reading room, billiard hall, tobacco shop, barber and hairdresser. Silver table settings and tuxedo-clad waiters completed the atmosphere of cultivated refinement.

It quickly became the preferred address of prominent figures in cultural and political life, including Czechoslovakia's first president, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk. Grandhotel Praha was not merely accommodation; it was a statement.





A CATALYST FOR MOUNTAIN TOURISM

The opening of the grand hotel marked a pivotal shift in High Tatras tourism. In the 19th century, the region had primarily been a summer retreat. With the arrival of a major luxury hotel, winter sports began to flourish.

Already in its first winter season, slopes below the hotel were adapted for skiing, and a natural toboggan track was created along a modified forest path. Wealthy guests embraced skjöring — skiing while being pulled by horses — turning winter recreation into spectacle.

The most transformative development came with the construction of the cable car to Skalnaté Pleso and Lomnický Peak. Designed by renowned architect Dušan Jurkovič, construction began in 1936 and was completed in 1940. This engineering milestone firmly established the Tatras as a year-round destination.

HERITAGE MEETS CONTEMPORARY COMFORT

Despite the passage of time, Grandhotel Praha has preserved its architectural soul. The Art Nouveau façade, decorative balconies





and intricate detailing continue to captivate guests and visitors alike. Even those stopping only for coffee and pastries in its elegant spaces feel the atmosphere of a bygone era.

Fifteen years ago, the hotel responded to modern expectations with the addition of the two-level Grand Mountain Spa. Its outdoor heated pool – the only one of its kind in the High Tatras – offers sweeping views of the Poprad Ba-

sin and Slavkovský Peak. Guests unwind in mountain-view saunas, indulge in aromatic treatments, and experience exclusive Tatry Essentials cosmetics crafted from local alpine herbs.

It is no surprise that Grandhotel Praha has repeatedly won the Heritage Hotels of Europe Award in the “Heritage & Wellness” category. And after wellness comes gastronomy – another fairytale in its own right. Seasonal dishes crafted



from carefully selected local ingredients, herbs from the hotel garden, and desserts as visually enchanting as they are delicious create a dining experience worthy of the setting.

A LIVING LEGEND

Over 120 years, much has changed. The original cableways have been replaced with modern lifts. The mountain resort has expanded its summer and winter offerings. Stables once housing horses have given way to electric vehicle charging stations.

Yet as sunset bathes the Art Nouveau façade in golden light, time seems to pause. In the lobby bar, a pianist plays “Yesterday.” Guests gather for dinner, sharing stories of skiing, sledding, and alpine excursions. The day closes gently, and the legend continues into the evening.

FOR 120 YEARS, GRANDHOTEL PRAHA HAS STOOD BENEATH LOMNICKÝ PEAK — NOT MERELY AS A HOTEL, BUT AS A SYMBOL OF ENDURING ELEGANCE IN THE HEART OF THE HIGH TATRAS. ■



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Strasbourg

Europe Between Two

There are cities that are difficult to categorize as either French or German—quite indistinct—quite the opposite. Rather, Strasbourg is exactly such a place. In the morning, the scent of pastries and the history once shaped by language and culture sounds “German,” local accents are undeniably European, and the city’s history has made Strasbourg a unique destination—no wonder why.

Two Worlds

ategorize at first glance. Not because they are their dual identity catches you by surprise. French charm blended with German precision and wine alongside the deeper echoes of a language, armies, and ambitions. A city that looks distinctly Alsatian, yet functions unmissably as French. And it is precisely this combination that makes Strasbourg one of the continent's most fascinating cities, not only for a weekend visit, but also for anyone who loves Europe is the way it is.

This article was born from a simple observation: Strasbourg is often mentioned in the news, yet rarely described as a city with a soul. Most people immediately think of the European Parliament, perhaps the cathedral—and that is where their imagination stops. But Strasbourg is far more than a cluster of institutions and tourist highlights. It is a living organism along the Ill River, within sight of the Rhine, with streets capable of absorbing you so completely that time itself seems to slow. And once you have walked beneath the timbered gables of its historic houses, you will understand why it is best to stop comparing Strasbourg to anything else and simply let it speak in its own voice.

Strasbourg—Strasbourg in French, Straßburg in German, and Strossburi in Alsatian—is the capital of the Alsace region, and its name literally means “the city of roads.” It is not merely a poetic label; it is a diagnosis of a place that has always been a crossroads. Trade routes, river crossings, and a strategic position on a border where France and Germany have looked each other in the eye for centuries—sometimes with admiration, sometimes with fists clenched. The city has belonged to one side and then the other, which is precisely why it now feels so uniquely balanced. As if it decided to take from conflict not trauma, but the best of both worlds.





That “double face” becomes visible almost immediately—in street names, restaurant menus, architecture, and everyday details. On one side, there is French elegance: cafés, squares, and the unmistakable aroma of butter drifting from bakeries. On the other, German precision: cleanliness, order, and a sense of structure that persists even where you might expect chaos. Yet it never feels forced. Strasbourg does not attempt to be “something in between.” It is the in-between—the bridge, the space where cultures meet and learn to coexist.





In the distant past, Strasbourg was a free city of the Holy Roman Empire, flourishing thanks to trade and its river connections. And as often happens with border cities, powerful forces soon realized its strategic importance. Yet Strasbourg also attracted figures who shaped history not with swords but with ideas. In the 15th century, Johannes Gutenberg spent time here developing his early experiments in printing. Centuries later, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe studied in Strasbourg, and the city reportedly left a deep impression on him—not only through its academic atmosphere, but through the emotional intensity of his youth. Cities like this possess a particular quality: they enter your life quietly, but they stay with you for a long time.

A EUROPEAN CITY BEYOND POLITICS

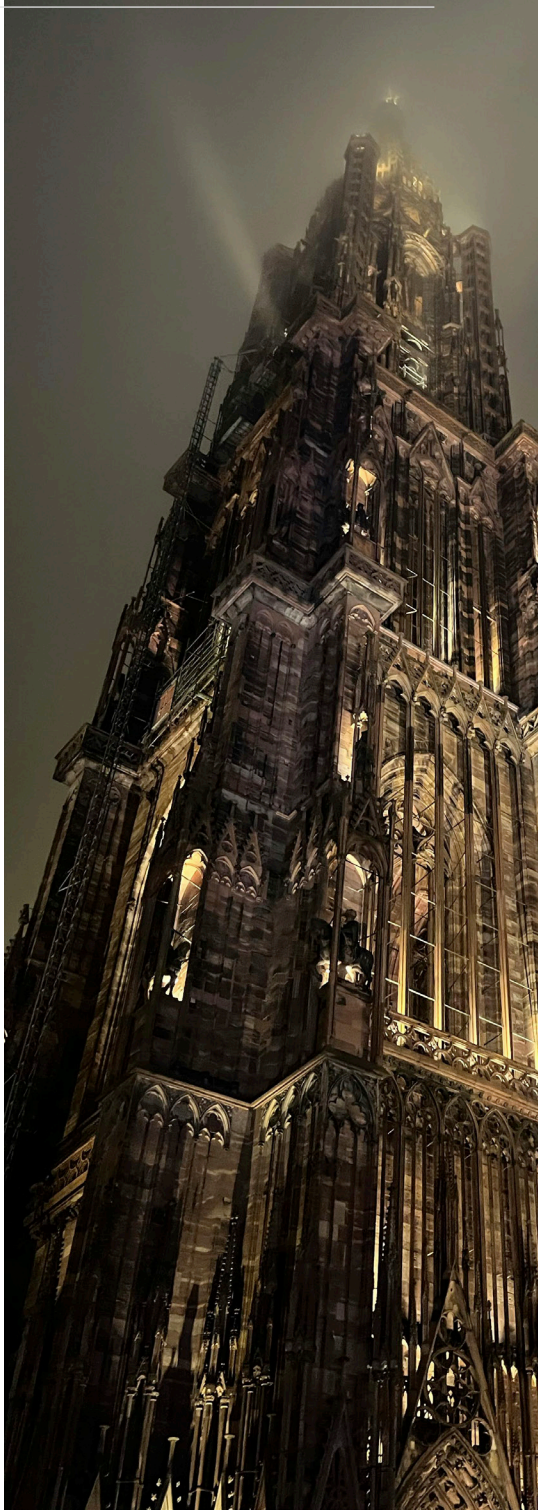
Today, Strasbourg enjoys a status that many capitals might envy. It is home to the Council of Europe, the European Court of Human Rights, and hosts regular sessions of the European Parliament. And yes—these modern buildings are worth seeing even if politics is not your interest. Their contemporary architecture along the water serves as a reminder that Europe is not only history, but also a project still being written.

Yet Strasbourg is perhaps at its most beautiful when you step away from institutions and return to the old town. The historic center—known as Grande Île—is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site and feels like an island suspended in time. Branches of the river weave through narrow streets, bridges connect quiet courtyards, and half-timbered houses lean gently over the water. It is not a museum piece. It is a living city where locals mingle with visitors, bicycles glide alongside trams, and the scent of fresh bread drifts through ancient stone streets.

THE CATHEDRAL THAT SILENCES THE CROWD

The dominant landmark of the city is the Notre-Dame Cathedral of Strasbourg, built from distinctive red sandstone. It is not a building created in haste—its construction unfolded over centuries, and it still feels as if it were carved from ambition itself. Its soaring façade and tower are among the most recognizable symbols of the region, but the true moment arrives inside, when the noise of the city fades into quiet reverence.

The interior is majestic and precise, filled with details that demand time. One of its greatest attractions is the famous astro-





nomical clock, which performs its elaborate display every day at a precise hour. It is more than a tourist curiosity—it is a reminder of a time when faith, science, mathematics, and craftsmanship met in a single mechanical masterpiece. And when you step outside again, you realize the cathedral is not an isolated monument. Surrounding it are historic buildings such as the Maison Kammerzell, creating a cityscape that feels sculpted from both stone and centuries.

PETITE FRANCE: A STORY-BOOK ON THE WATER

If there is one place visitors carry with them as the defining image of Strasbourg, it is the quarter known as Petite France. Timber-framed houses, canals, small bridges, reflections in the water, and the gentle illusion that you have stepped into the set of an old European film. It is beautiful and undeniably photogenic—but it is not sterile. Visit early in the morning or later in the evening when the crowds fade, and you will hear the city itself rather than its visitors.

The name sounds charming, yet its history is more complex. Many places across Europe share this paradox: what feels romantic today was often born from far harsh-

er circumstances. Strasbourg carries its past with honesty—without letting it weigh down the present.

KRUTENAU, ORANGERIE AND ROBERTSAU: STRASBOURG TODAY

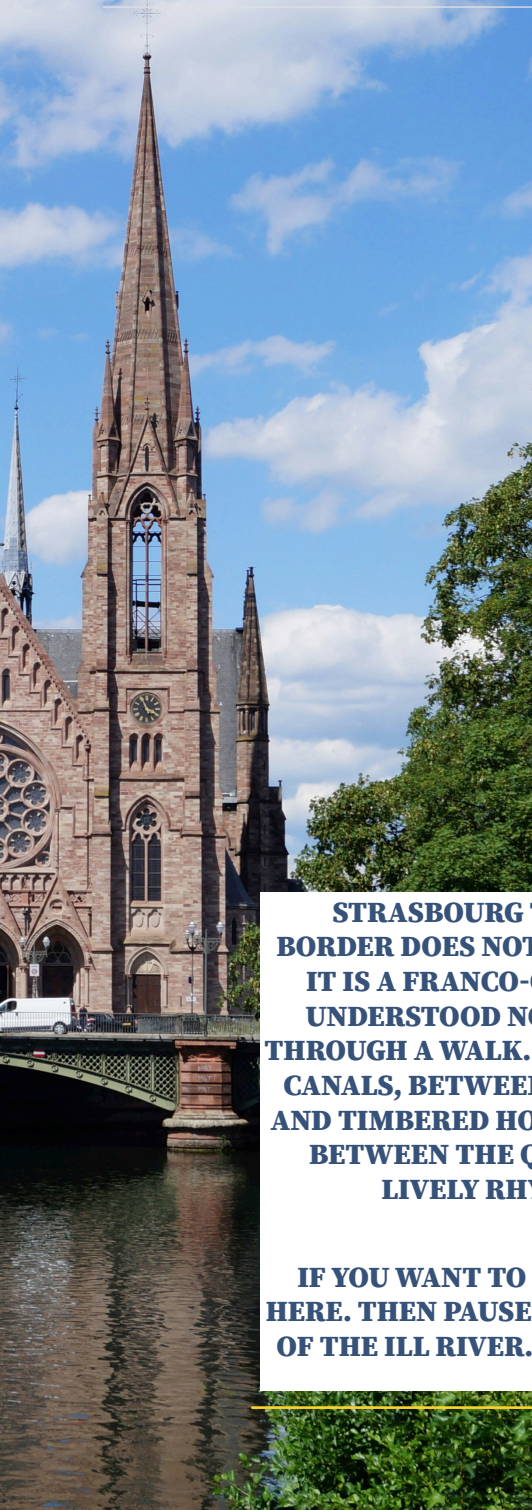
To feel the contemporary rhythm of the city, head to Krutenau. This lively district is filled with students, bars, and restaurants, and evenings here rarely pass quietly. It reveals a Strasbourg that is not merely a historical backdrop, but a vibrant urban culture with its own pulse.

For a calmer experience, explore neighborhoods such as Orangerie or Robertsau, where parks and elegant residential streets offer a quieter side of the city. And then there is another undeniable truth about Strasbourg: the bicycle. Cycling here is as natural as walking. It is not a trend but a habit deeply embedded in everyday life—making the city easy to explore, relaxed, and refreshingly free of the stress common in many European centers.

ALSACE ON THE PLATE

And finally—Strasbourg must be tasted. Alsatian cuisine perfectly reflects the city's cultural duality, where French refinement





meets German heartiness. Tarte flambée, sauerkraut with meats, sausages, rich sauces—and, of course, wine with its own distinct personality and pride. Strasbourg is home to several Michelin-recognized restaurants, yet the city's true flavor often lies in simpler establishments where authenticity matters more than trends.

And if Strasbourg itself is not enough, its most beautiful continuation begins just beyond the city: the Alsace Wine Route. Villages, vineyards, festivals, cellars, and houses that seem lifted from a painting create the sense that Europe can be experienced without grand speeches—sometimes all it takes is a glass of wine, a cobbled street, and an evening that refuses to hurry.

STRASBOURG TEACHES ONE SIMPLE LESSON: A BORDER DOES NOT HAVE TO DIVIDE—IT CAN CONNECT. IT IS A FRANCO-GERMAN SYMBIOSIS THAT IS BEST UNDERSTOOD NOT THROUGH EXPLANATIONS, BUT THROUGH A WALK. BETWEEN THE CATHEDRAL AND THE CANALS, BETWEEN EUROPE'S MODERN INSTITUTIONS AND TIMBERED HOUSES, BETWEEN WINE AND CUISINE, BETWEEN THE QUIET OF THE OLD TOWN AND THE LIVELY RHYTHM OF STUDENT STREETS.

IF YOU WANT TO SEE EUROPE IN MINIATURE—COME HERE. THEN PAUSE FOR A MOMENT BESIDE THE WATERS OF THE ILL RIVER. STRASBOURG WILL BEGIN TO MAKE PERFECT SENSE. ■

Antigua

365 Beaches of Calm





Antigua, the largest of the so-called Leeward Islands within the chain of the Lesser Antilles, is an island defined by its irregular coastline—an intricate mosaic of bays, coves, and natural harbors that once attracted the strategic attention of powerful empires. Inland, the terrain becomes drier and gently rolling, shaped by a past when much of the island was systematically transformed into land for sugarcane plantations. This contrast defines Antigua: along the coast, a Caribbean paradise; just a few kilometers inland, the tougher reality of an island that learned to survive even without abundant water.

The history of Antigua reaches far deeper than the modern image of resorts and luxury yachts might suggest. The island was inhabited since prehistoric times, later home to various Indigenous cultures before the arrival of Europeans. Christopher Columbus named the island after Santa María de la Antigua, and permanent settlement eventually began under the British in the 17th century. Today Antigua forms a single nation together with the island of Barbuda—Antigua and Barbuda—and remains part of the Commonwealth, with King Charles III as head of state. In everyday life, this heritage appears in subtle details: the English language, certain traditions, colonial architecture, and that curious sense of order that occasionally emerges in the Caribbean where you least expect it.

AN ISLAND BUILT BY HARBORS AND WIND

In the 18th century, the British turned Antigua into a crucial naval stronghold in the Caribbean. Bays such as English Harbour and Falmouth Harbour were not merely picturesque landscapes—they were the strategic heart of regional defense. This is why traces of the past remain scattered across the island: fortifications, artillery batteries, stone walls, warehouses, and lookout points once used to monitor ships on the horizon. Antigua carries a particular energy: even while sitting on a quiet beach, you sense the story of an island that had to defend itself, work hard, and endure.

The most iconic reminder of this era is Nelson’s Dockyard, a beautifully restored Georgian naval complex and one of the best-preserved examples of its kind in the Caribbean. It is far more than a historical monument. It is a place where an entire afternoon can pass effortlessly among old docks, colonial buildings, viewpoints, small museums, and a harbor filled with elegant sailing yachts. Above it all rise hills crowned with the ruins of old forts. From Shirley Heights, the perspective reveals why visitors gather here at sunset—not for a single photograph, but for the atmosphere as the harbor slowly turns into a mirror and the island seems to fall briefly into silence.

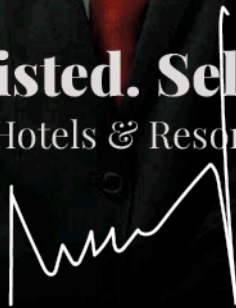






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Spa stays under the supervision of medical specialists, relaxing holidays, and sports training camps within Tatra National Park offer a wide range of accompanying services, activities, and opportunities to make every stay as meaningful and restorative as possible.

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SAINT JOHN'S: THE BEATING CARIBBEAN HEART

The capital Saint John's is the kind of Caribbean town that feels vibrant, colorful, and slightly chaotic during the day—yet softens into a relaxed rhythm by evening. Its skyline is dominated by the twin towers of St. John's Cathedral, while the surrounding streets combine older wooden houses with balconies, modern storefronts, lively markets, and a constant flow of people.



If you truly want to experience Antigua, do not begin with the beach. Start with the market—the scent of spices, the sound of conversations, the taste of local dishes. A fruit vendor might hand you a slice of mango together with a smile and a short story. Saint John's is also the island's center for small pleasures: art galleries, boutique-lined streets, relaxed restaurants, and bars where rum is enjoyed as naturally as mineral water elsewhere. And for those curious about the deeper past, the Museum of Antigua and Barbuda offers context: who lived here, what the island produced, and how its identity evolved over centuries.

BEACHES THAT ARE MORE THAN BEACHES

Antigua’s nickname as “the island of 365 beaches” is not entirely literal, yet it captures a simple truth: the variety of its coastline is remarkable. Some beaches stretch in long ribbons of soft sand with calm, shallow waters; others hide in smaller coves where the sea feels like a secret discovery. Dickenson Bay is among the best known, where comfort meets the relaxed elegance of Caribbean life. Yet quieter places—Deep Bay, Galley Bay, or Hawksbill Bay—offer a slower rhythm, where time behaves politely and allows you to simply sit, gaze at the sea, and forget the urge to “do something.”

On Antigua, beaches are not merely scenery. They are a way of life. A quiet swim in the morning, grilled fish with lime for lunch, a short drive along the coast in the afternoon, and sunset music drifting gently from a beach bar. It is an island where life follows the rhythm of the wind.

PLANTATIONS, WINDMILLS, AND THE SHADOW OF SUGAR

Those who wish to understand Antigua more deeply should venture beyond the shoreline. The





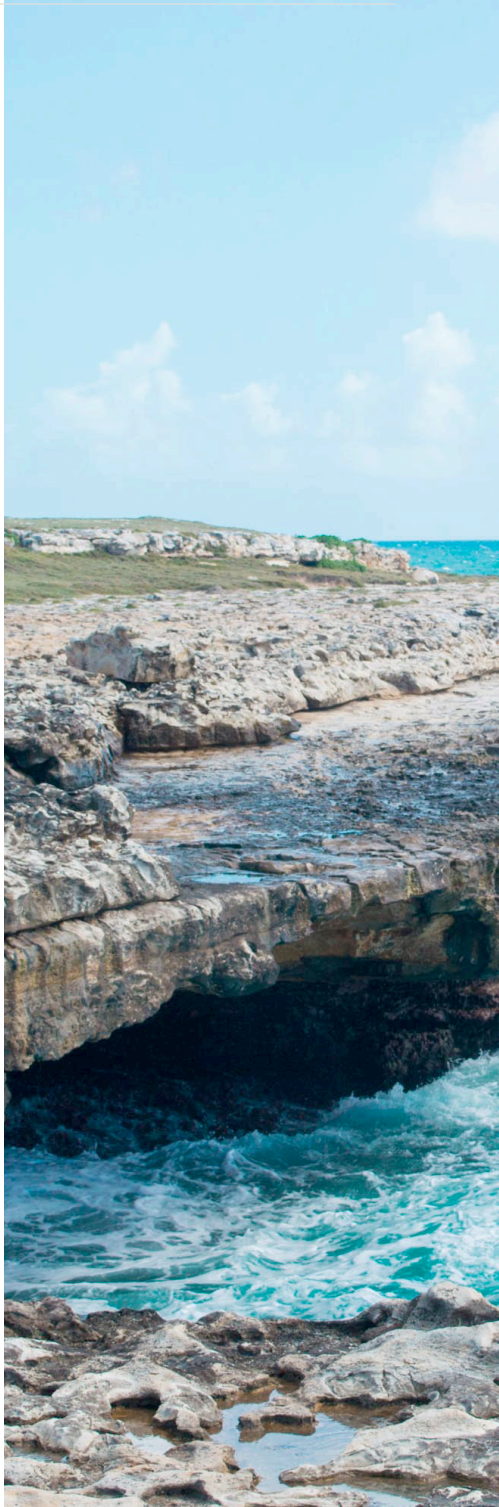
island's past is inseparable from sugar plantations and the difficult legacy of slavery. Places such as Betty's Hope stand as reminders of this era that shaped the island economically and socially. Old windmills remain, alongside a visitor center and historical exhibits—quietly reminding visitors that even tropical beauty can carry a complex history.

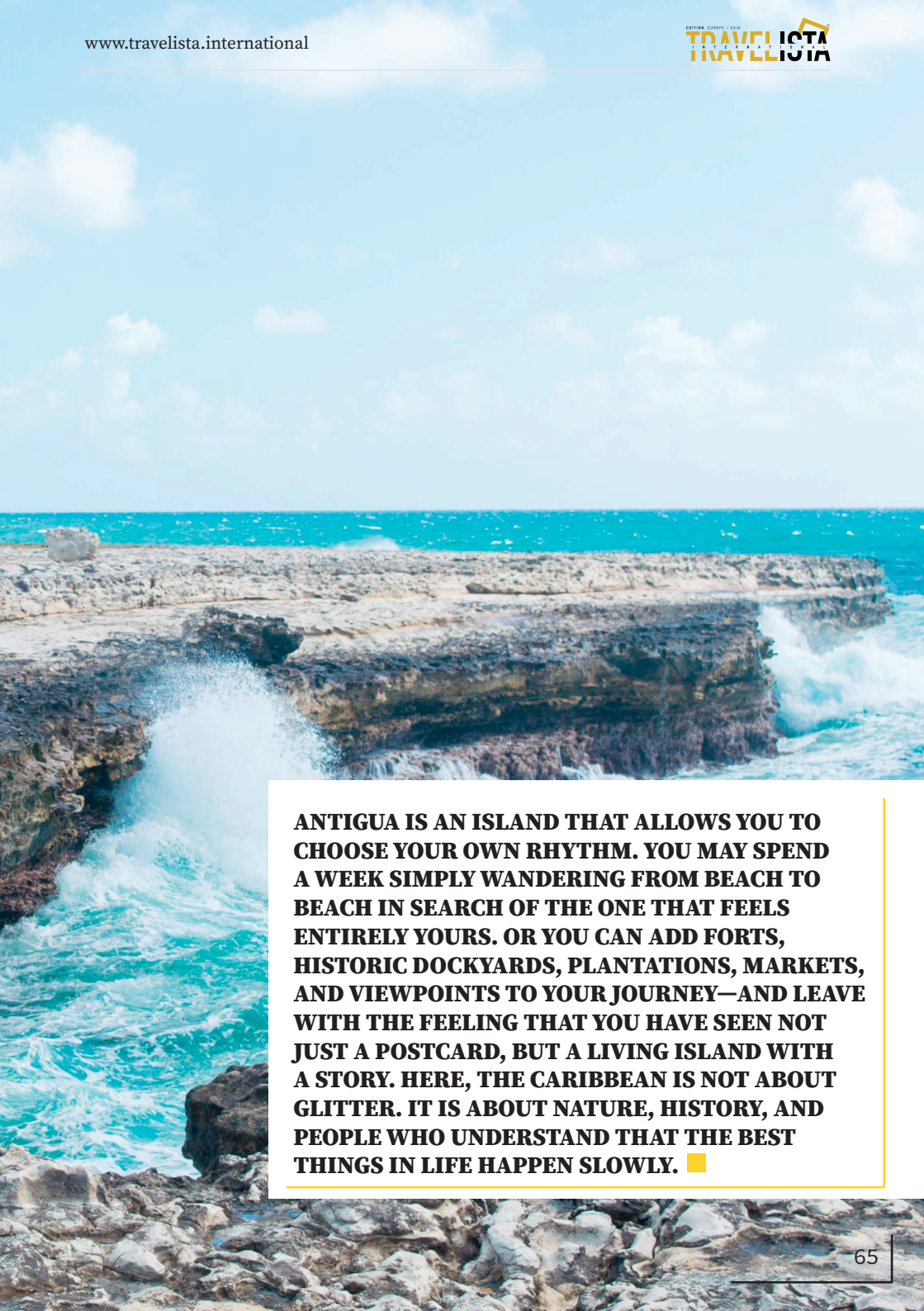
This contrast gives Antigua a deeper dimension. It is not merely an all-inclusive postcard; it is a place with memory.

NATURE AND VIEWPOINTS: THE ISLAND FROM ABOVE

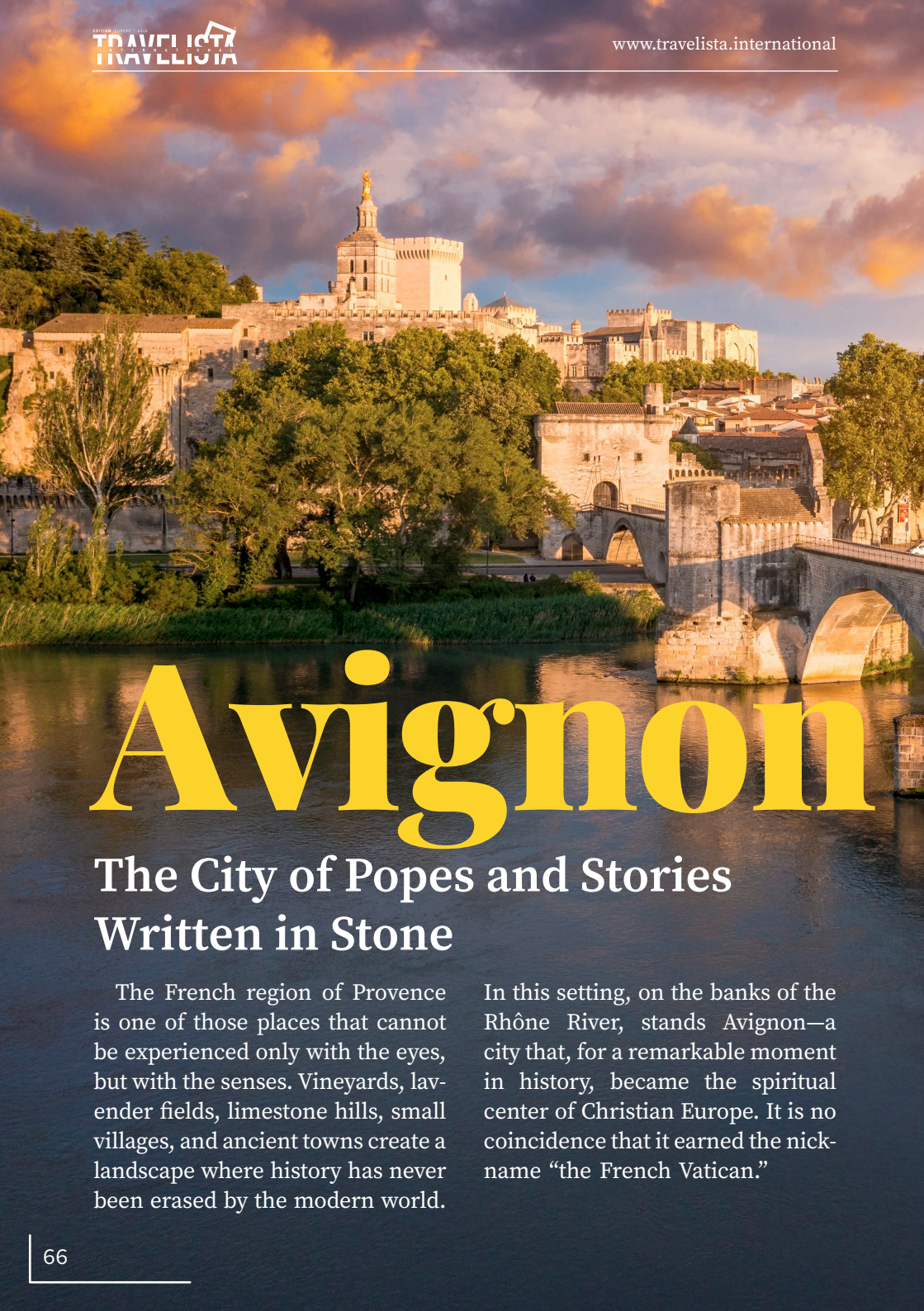
Antigua may not be mountainous, but it offers rewarding viewpoints and gentle hikes. The highest point, Boggy Peak—often also referred to as Mount Obama—reveals the island from a different perspective. From the hills, you see the drier interior landscapes, green patches of vegetation, and bays that appear almost painted in shades of turquoise and blue.

On the eastern coast lies one of the island's most dramatic natural formations: Devil's Bridge, where the Atlantic Ocean crashes against limestone cliffs, forcing water through natural rock arches. It is a raw, powerful side of Antigua—one that reminds visitors that the Caribbean is not always tranquil.





ANTIGUA IS AN ISLAND THAT ALLOWS YOU TO CHOOSE YOUR OWN RHYTHM. YOU MAY SPEND A WEEK SIMPLY WANDERING FROM BEACH TO BEACH IN SEARCH OF THE ONE THAT FEELS ENTIRELY YOURS. OR YOU CAN ADD FORTS, HISTORIC DOCKYARDS, PLANTATIONS, MARKETS, AND VIEWPOINTS TO YOUR JOURNEY—AND LEAVE WITH THE FEELING THAT YOU HAVE SEEN NOT JUST A POSTCARD, BUT A LIVING ISLAND WITH A STORY. HERE, THE CARIBBEAN IS NOT ABOUT GLITTER. IT IS ABOUT NATURE, HISTORY, AND PEOPLE WHO UNDERSTAND THAT THE BEST THINGS IN LIFE HAPPEN SLOWLY. ■



Avignon

The City of Popes and Stories Written in Stone

The French region of Provence is one of those places that cannot be experienced only with the eyes, but with the senses. Vineyards, lavender fields, limestone hills, small villages, and ancient towns create a landscape where history has never been erased by the modern world.

In this setting, on the banks of the Rhône River, stands Avignon—a city that, for a remarkable moment in history, became the spiritual center of Christian Europe. It is no coincidence that it earned the nickname “the French Vatican.”





Avignon is not a city for hurried sightseeing. It is a place where one walks slowly, where echoes of medieval history blend naturally with the vibrant life of a university and cultural center. Every stone carries traces of power, faith, division, and reconciliation—and this is precisely what makes the city so extraordinary.



Today Avignon has nearly 100,000 inhabitants and is the largest city in the Vaucluse department, yet its importance extends far beyond regional borders. The area was already inhabited in ancient times, as archaeological discoveries have shown. The city itself was founded by the Romans, who turned it into an important center of the province Gallia Narbonensis. After the fall of the Roman Empire, Avignon passed through the hands of several rulers before eventually becoming part of the Duchy of Burgundy.

The decisive chapter of Avignon's history began in the 14th century, when the city entered the pages of European history in a truly extraordinary way. Between 1309 and 1376, Avignon became the residence of the popes, who were forced for political reasons to leave Rome. Seven popes ruled from here, later joined by five anti-popes, creating one of the greatest crises in the history of Christianity—the Western Schism. During this period, Avignon effectively became the Vatican of the North, a place where the fate of Europe was debated and decided.

At the papal court, art, culture, and diplomacy flourished. Envoys, clerics, and pilgrims arrived from across Europe. The famous poet Francesco Petrarca spent part of his youth here, and his work remains one of the pillars of European literature. The Siense painter Simone Martini also left a profound mark on the city, while the frescoes of Matteo Giovanetti helped shape a new artistic movement known as International Gothic.





When Pope Gregory XI returned to Rome in 1376, Avignon soon elected its own pope, deepening the schism that lasted until 1417. Later centuries were no less dramatic. In 1721, the city was struck by a devastating plague epidemic that claimed the lives of roughly a quarter of its inhabitants. Avignon remained under papal authority until 1791, when it was annexed by the French Republic.

Today, Avignon is an elegant city of winding medieval streets, university life, and a strong cultural spirit. The atmosphere becomes particularly vibrant during the Avignon Theatre Festival each July, when the streets fill with actors, mimes, circus performers, and artists from around the world. In 1995, the historic center of Avignon was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

WALLS, SQUARES AND THE PULSE OF THE CITY

In the 14th century, Avignon was surrounded by massive city walls, which together with the Rhône formed a natural defensive system. Today, most visitors enter the city through Porte de la République, from which the main avenue leads to Place de l'Horloge, the lively heart of the city. The square is adorned with a historic belle époque carousel and the elegant Opéra-Théâtre, where opera and theatre performances are still held today.

PALAIS DES PAPES – A STONE SYMBOL OF POWER

The most impressive landmark of Avignon is undoubtedly the Palais des Papes, the monumental Palace of the Popes, which served both as a fortress and a residence. It consists of the Old Palace (Palais Vieux) of Pope Benedict XII and the New Palace (Palais Nouveau) built by Pope Clement VI, connected by the grand Cour d'Honneur courtyard. Even today, this courtyard hosts the main performances of the Avignon Festival.







Inside the palace, visitors discover the fascinating world of papal power: the Great Treasury, ceremonial halls, private chambers, chapels adorned with Giovanetti's frescoes, magnificent banquet halls, and terraces offering sweeping views over the city. The palace itself is a living textbook of medieval politics, faith, and art.

CATHEDRALS, MUSEUMS AND GARDENS

Next to the palace stands the Cathédrale Notre-Dame des Doms, a Romanesque cathedral from the 12th century, known for the tombs of antipopes and the gilded statue of the Virgin Mary crowning its tower. Nearby lies the Musée du Petit Palais, home to rare works of the Avignon school and Italian paintings from the 13th to 16th centuries, including works attributed to Botticelli.

For a moment of calm, visitors often walk to the Jardin du Rocher des Doms, a peaceful park where fountains, greenery, and panoramic views over the Rhône create a tranquil escape from the city streets.

THE BRIDGE MADE FAMOUS BY A SONG

One of Avignon's most recognizable symbols is the legendary Pont Saint-Bénézet, of which only four arches remain today. Built in the 12th century and later destroyed by floods and time, the bridge became immortal thanks to the famous French song "Sur le pont d'Avignon." It proves that even a fragment can carry a stronger story than a perfectly preserved monument.

AVIGNON IS A CITY WHERE HISTORY DOES NOT REMAIN LOCKED INSIDE MUSEUMS BUT CONTINUES TO LIVE IN EVERYDAY LIFE. IT IS A PLACE OF POWER AND FAITH, ART AND DIVISION, THE SILENCE OF MONASTERIES AND THE LIVELY NIGHTS OF FESTIVALS. ANYONE WHO WALKS THROUGH ITS ANCIENT WALLS WILL UNDERSTAND WHY IT IS CALLED THE FRENCH VATICAN—NOT BECAUSE OF ITS SIZE, BUT BECAUSE OF THE WEIGHT OF THE STORIES THAT STILL BREATHE FROM EVERY STONE. ■

The Red S

Beneath the Surface

The desire to explore the world beneath the surface is strangely addictive. It is a silence with its own rhythm, and colors that simply do not exist on land. That is why each year more people discover diving and snorkeling—not only as an adrenaline activity, but as a form of pure, healthy movement and a rare moment when one truly breathes... even while breathing through a regulator.

In many European waters, however, the underwater world can be modest and the season short. Naturally, travelers begin to look for places where the sea can be entered almost any time of the year—and where there is something extraordinary to see in every direction.

Sea

This is where the Red Sea enters the story. For many Europeans, it is the closest true coral paradise. Relatively near, logistically accessible, yet remarkably rich: coral reefs, walls descending into deep blue water, vast schools of fish that seem as if they have never learned to fear humans, and sometimes silent witnesses of history in the form of shipwrecks. For most travelers, the gateway to these experiences is Egypt, a country that has developed its coastline into a network of resorts designed precisely for lovers of sea, sun, and underwater exploration.



From a diver's perspective, the Red Sea offers one remarkable advantage: it is the northernmost coral sea on the planet, yet it delivers conditions you might otherwise expect much farther south. Its coastline is divided into two major diving "stages" — the Sinai Peninsula and the mainland coast of Egypt. Each has its own character, its own atmosphere, and its own way of convincing visitors that the sea is far more than a surface—it is an entire universe beneath it.

SHARM EL SHEIKH AND NABQ BAY – THE GATEWAY TO THE REEFS

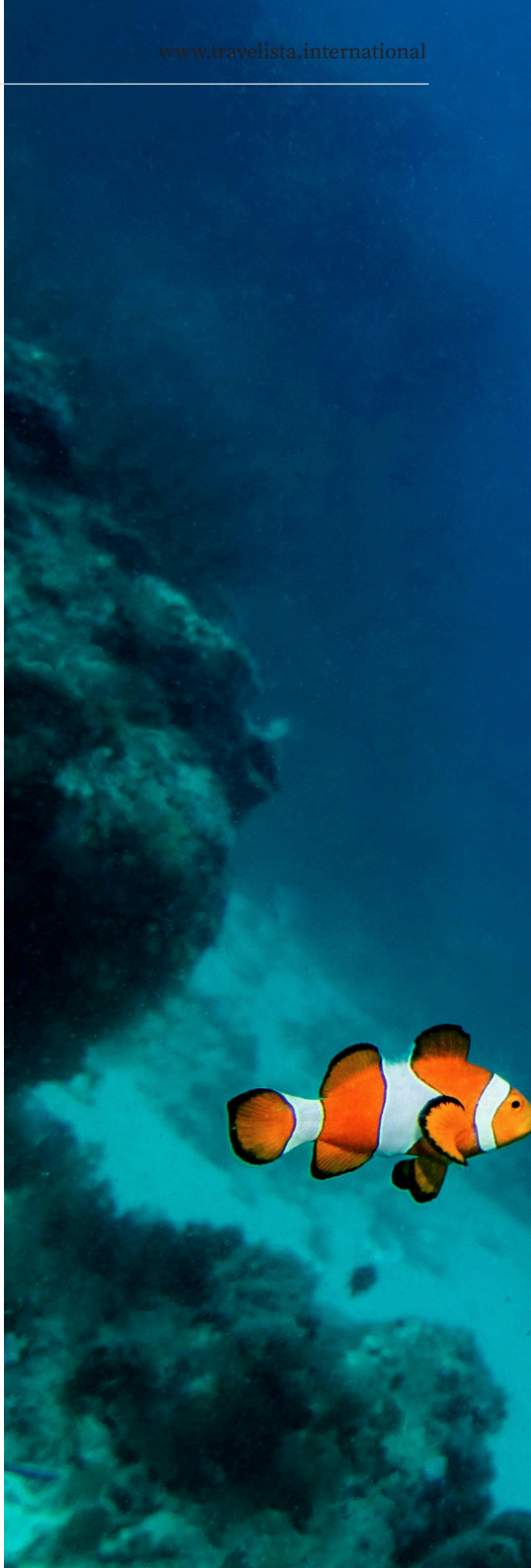
The best-known resort of the Sinai Peninsula is Sharm El Sheikh, a destination that for years has served as a reliable starting point for diving expeditions. About 11 kilometers north of the airport lies Nabq Bay, a newer resort area that still carries traces of ongoing development. This contrast gives the place a curious character: modern hotel complexes standing beside a sea that remains unchanged by trends.

The coastline around Nabq Bay is unique. Instead of immediate depth, there is often a broad stretch of shallow water—some-

times nearly a kilometer wide—where marine life can already be observed while snorkeling. Beyond that lies a sudden drop, a slope leading to deeper waters that attract more experienced divers. This underwater geography is ideal: one day may be spent calmly observing colorful reef fish and coral gardens, while the next leads into deeper blue water where light shifts and everything seems to move with greater gravity.

For those seeking an iconic diving experience, the Ras Mohamed National Park is almost inevitable. Among divers, the name is spoken with respect. The park is known for its dramatic reefs and vibrant underwater landscapes. Offshore, an 80-kilometer coral reef system stretches toward the Gulf of Aqaba. Divers often describe the Red Sea as a gallery without walls—coral gardens, swirling schools of fish, distant silhouettes of larger creatures, and sometimes the quiet emergence of a wreck from sand or rock.

Nabq Bay also offers a typical resort atmosphere: souvenir shops, jewelry, leather goods, ceramics, restaurants, cafés, and bars. At the same time, it feels calmer than the lively center of Naama Bay, where visitors often go for a more ener-



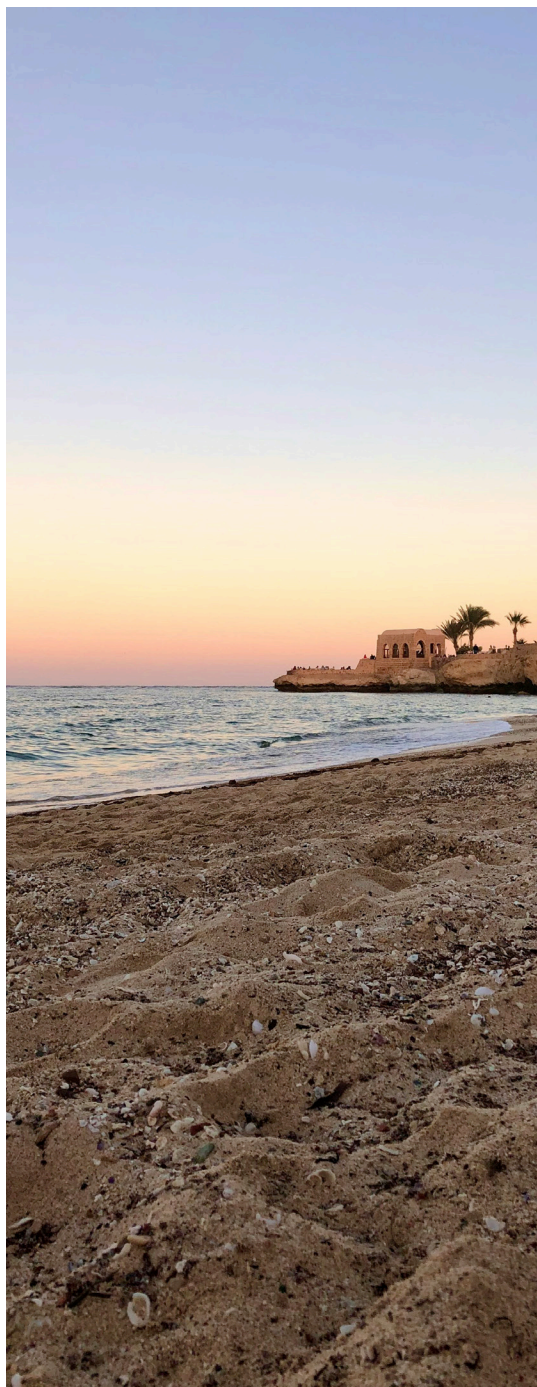


getic nightlife. For many travelers, Sinai also offers something beyond diving—excursions into landscapes connected to the deeper cultural and spiritual stories of the peninsula.

**MAINLAND EGYPT: EL QUSEIR
– QUIET WATERS AND RICH
REEFS**

Looking at the Red Sea from the mainland coast of Egypt reveals a slightly different rhythm. One of the most appealing destinations here is El Quseir, located about 120 kilometers south of Hurghada. The atmosphere is quieter and less extravagant, focusing more on what truly brings people here: the sea, the sun, and the extraordinary life beneath the surface.

The beaches here often descend gently into the water, making them ideal for relaxed swimming and for first snorkeling attempts. Yet only a short distance farther out, the underwater terrain becomes more complex, revealing coral formations, schools of fish, and delicate reef ecosystems. El Quseir offers an appealing balance—comfort and accessibility, combined with the peaceful environment that divers often seek.



THE BROTHER ISLANDS – PEAKS OF AN UNDERWATER MOUNTAIN

Among the greatest highlights of this part of the Red Sea are the Brother Islands, two small islets known as Big Brother and Little Brother. Despite their romantic names, they are actually the exposed peaks of an underwater mountain range rising above the sea. Their submerged slopes create dramatic dive sites: steep walls covered with coral, sudden descents



into deep blue water, and marine life moving like inhabitants of a bustling underwater city.

For diving boats, the islands provide suitable anchorages, and a trip here often becomes one of those experiences divers remember for years. On Big Brother Island, marked by a small lighthouse, lie two well-known wrecks: Namibia and Aida II. Shipwrecks have a unique ability to suspend time. What was once noise, movement, and machinery now rests silently beneath the sea, transformed into an unexpected refuge for marine life.

QUESEIR EL QADIM AND OTHER SITES – AMPHORAE, RAYS, AND TURTLES

For those who prefer to stay closer to shore, the mainland coastline still offers numerous fascinating dive sites. In the area known as Quseir El Qadim, divers can even discover ancient amphorae scattered across the seabed—small reminders that the sea often preserves history longer than we expect.

Encounters with marine wildlife are another highlight. Divers frequently report sightings of rays, sea turtles, and a remarkable variety of fish species moving through



THE RED SEA IS MORE AN INVITATION INTO A DIFFERENT WORLD WHERE HUMAN HISTORY MEETS THE FIRST DESCENT AND THE FIRST SOLD IN SOUVENIRS, BUT THE ENCOUNTERS BENEATH THE SURFACE YOU CHOOSE SINAI, WADI NABQ BAY, OR THE QUADRIANGLE OF EL QUSEIR, THE ESSENTIAL LIVING CORAL REEFS, AND THE RARE FEELING OF DISCOVERY AUTHENTIC.

AND ONCE YOU HAVE EXPERIENCED THE SILENCE OF THE RED SEA, YOU WILL KNOW THAT IT WILL BECOME A PART OF YOU THAT WILL BECOME A PART OF YOUR RETURN. ■



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vibrant coral formations. Locations such as Erg Esel and several nearby reefs are often shared among divers as treasured recommendations.

Of course, not every underwater site is equally pristine. Some areas—such as parts of the Quei Reefs—may appear less abundant or more affected by environmental pressures. Yet even there, a memorable moment often emerges: a flash of color in the coral, an unexpected species appearing from the blue, or a fish you previously knew only from photographs.

Ultimately, the Red Sea offers something rare: a destination where different travelers can shape their own experiences. Some may simply snorkel in shallow lagoons. Others will pursue steep reef walls and deep dives. And some will seek the stories hidden within shipwrecks. This versatility is precisely why so many visitors return—not because they have already seen everything, but because the underwater world is never the same twice.

Positano

Where Music Meets the Sea

There are places that do not capture you loudly, but quietly—through light, color, the scent of the sea, and the feeling that everything is exactly where it should be. Positano is one of those rare destinations people carry not only in their memories but also in their hearts. Dramatically perched on the steep slopes of the Amalfi Coast, this small town proves that harmony between nature and human life can exist without grand gestures. All it takes is the sea, the rock, houses clinging to one another, and a horizon that changes color with every hour of the day.





Positano lies in the southern Italian region of Campania, in the province of Salerno, about sixty kilometers south of Naples, and for decades it has been regarded as one of the most beautiful jewels of the Amalfi Coast. White and ochre houses with orange-tiled roofs cascade down the mountainside toward the sea, creating the impression that they have been delicately glued to the cliff itself. The dramatic elevation differences give the town its iconic character while also offering extraordinary panoramic views of the Tyrrhenian Sea and the surrounding mountains, which rise to heights of more than 1,400 meters.

The semicircular windows of many houses recall distant Arab influences, and the entire Amalfi Coast has been recognized for its exceptional natural beauty as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The history of Positano stretches far into the past. Favorable climate conditions attracted early civilizations such as the Oscans, Samnites, and Etruscans, but the town experienced its greatest prosperity during the Roman era, when it became a luxurious retreat for the Roman elite. Archaeological discoveries of a Roman villa uncovered in 2004 confirm that Positano has long been associated with leisure and elegance.

Despite the thousands of visitors who pass through during the summer



season, the town has preserved much of this aristocratic calm. One reason is its unique urban character—many of Positano's streets are designed primarily for pedestrians, allowing visitors to wander through quiet lanes without the constant noise of traffic.

Although relatively small, Positano is home to eight churches, the most famous of which is Santa Maria Assunta, easily recognizable by its colorful majolica-tiled dome. Located in the heart of the town, it has become one of Positano's most recognizable landmarks. Inside, a 13th-century Byzantine icon of the Virgin Mary is still venerated today. Every year on August 15, the town celebrates the Feast of the Assumption with vibrant festivities that recall centuries of local tradition. Above the town stands a former Capuchin monastery, now transformed into a hotel offering one of the most breathtaking views along the entire Amalfi Coast.

Walking through Positano's narrow streets, visitors quickly notice the distinctive architecture of the houses—tall, narrow structures built closely side by side. This design once served as protection against pirate raids, but today it creates a charming maze filled with art galleries, boutique shops,

and small cafés. Among the most popular souvenirs are citrus products, especially the famous limoncello, along with handcrafted blue glass objects and locally produced perfumes.

For lovers of the sea, Positano offers beautiful beaches such as La Spiaggia Grande and Spiaggia Fornillo, both reached by narrow stairways descending from the town. The main beach, Spiaggia Grande, provides space for relaxation as well as beach sports, while the quieter Fornillo beach invites long walks along the coast. The rocky sections of the shoreline hide small cave systems, attracting divers and marine enthusiasts eager to discover a vibrant underwater world—home to moray eels, octopuses, and colorful sea anemones.

Positano's charm has inspired not only travelers but also artists and musicians. Between 1967 and 1970, musician Shawn Phillips lived here, and in 1969, in a local café, Mick Jagger and Keith Richards of The Rolling Stones reportedly wrote the song "Midnight Rambler." The town has appeared in numerous films and has become a symbol of the Mediterranean lifestyle that continues to attract writers, musicians, and filmmakers from around the world.

POSITANO IS NOT A PLACE YOU SIMPLY VISIT—IT IS A PLACE THAT QUIETLY FINDS ITS WAY UNDER YOUR SKIN. WHETHER YOU FOLLOW THE FAMOUS PATH OF THE GODS, TAKE A BOAT TOWARD CAPRI, OR SIMPLY SIT ON THE STEPS OVERLOOKING THE SEA, YOU WILL UNDERSTAND WHY PEOPLE RETURN HERE AGAIN AND AGAIN.

POSITANO IS PROOF THAT BEAUTY CAN BE NATURAL, QUIET, AND TIMELESS. ■



Château de

A Stone Legend Above the Waters of



e Chillon

Lake Geneva

At the meeting point of water, rock, and history stands a place that has etched itself into Europe's memory as powerfully as the continent's greatest royal residences. Château de Chillon, the majestic fortress rising on the shores of Lake Geneva, is among the most iconic landmarks of Switzerland. It is not merely a castle—it is a chronicle of power, commerce, suffering, and literary immortality. Every step along its stone corridors reveals a story that has endured for centuries.



A STRATEGIC FORTRESS ABOVE EUROPE'S TRADE ROUTE

Chillon Castle stands on a small limestone island just a few meters from the lakeshore, near the elegant town of Montreux. Its location was anything but accidental. Whoever controlled Chillon controlled one of the most important trade routes linking northern Europe with Italy. As early as the 11th century, the Counts of Savoy established a fortress here to oversee the movement of ships and caravans while collecting tolls from merchants passing through.

Over time, the simple fortification evolved into a powerful medieval residence with an oval layout, surrounded by defensive walls, semicircular towers, and the imposing central bergfried tower dating from the 12th century. The castle gradually assumed the form that today is considered one of the best-preserved medieval fortresses in all of Europe.

INTERIORS THAT BREATHE THE MIDDLE AGES

Entering the castle feels like stepping into the world of knights, princes, and political intrigue. One of the most striking spaces is the Heraldic Hall, supported by

original oak columns and crowned with a richly carved wooden ceiling from the 13th century. The walls are decorated with the coats of arms of Savoyard nobles, while the massive fireplace evokes the long banquets and strategic discussions that once filled the room.

The ceremonial areas continue with the Aula Nova, a former banquet hall where visitors are surrounded by intricately carved chests, historic chairs, pewter tableware, as well as weapons and suits of armor. Each chamber stands as an authentic witness to a time when the castle was not a museum but a vibrant center of political power.

THE CHAPEL AND THE DARK DUNGEONS

The spiritual heart of the castle is the Chapel of St. George, a Romanesque-Gothic sanctuary dating from the 13th century, carefully restored during the 20th century. Its frescoes and tranquil atmosphere create a striking contrast with the darker side of the castle—the dungeons.

It was here that one of Chillon’s most famous stories unfolded. François de Bonivard, prior of a Geneva monastery, was imprisoned in the castle during the 16th century, chained for six years to a stone pillar. His tragic fate later inspired Lord Byron, who after visiting the castle wrote the famous poem “The Prisoner of Chillon.” Through Byron’s work, the fortress became permanently woven into the fabric of European literature.



A close-up photograph of a stone wall. On the left side, there is a rectangular framed relief carving. The wall itself is covered in various carvings, including what appears to be a signature or a set of initials. The background is a blurred view of a stone building, likely the Château de Chillon.

The alleged signature of poet Lord Byron inside Château de Chillon.

A CASTLE THAT INSPIRED GREAT MINDS

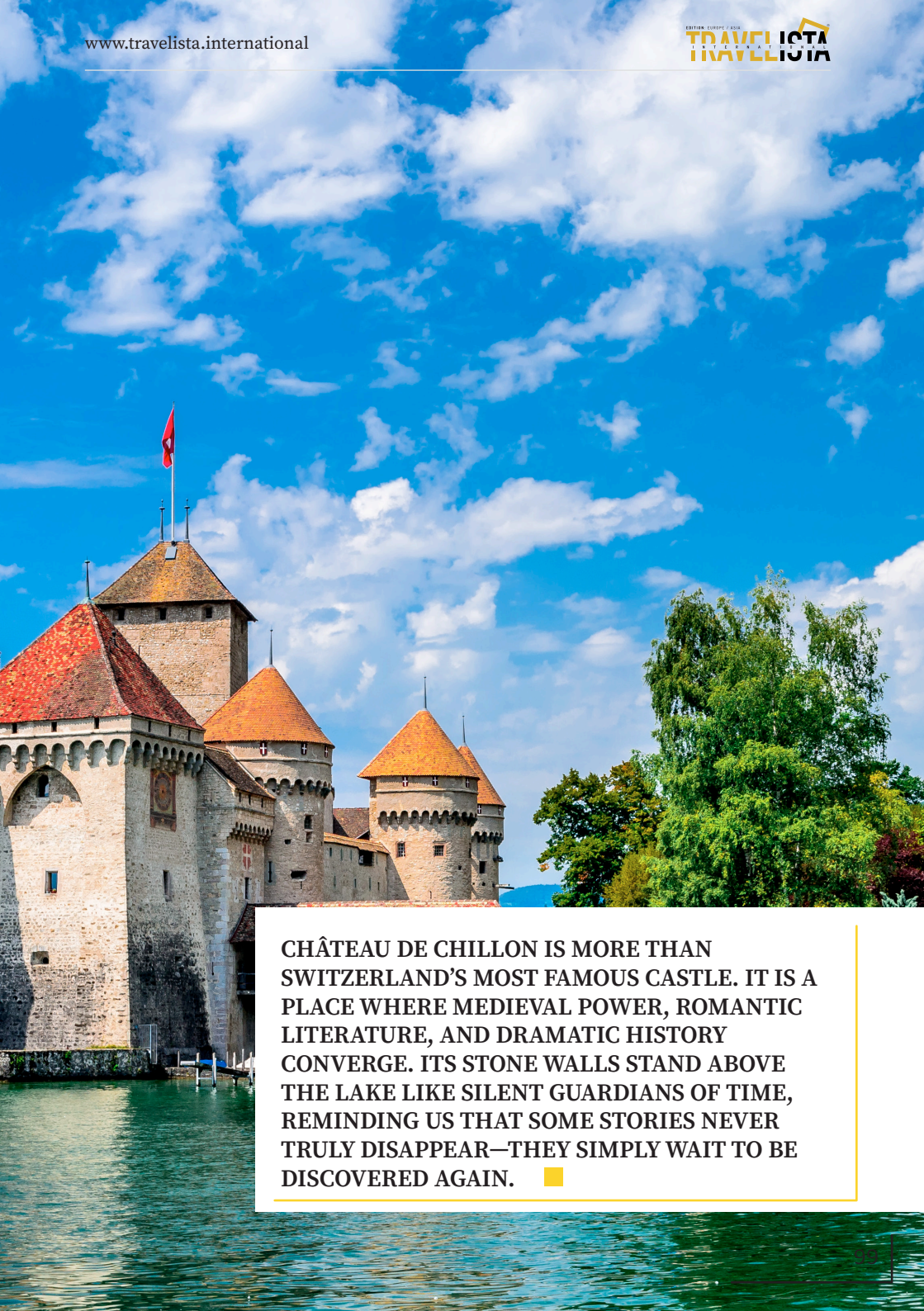
Chillon was not only a fortress but also a powerful source of artistic inspiration. The castle appears in the writings of Victor Hugo, Alexandre Dumas, and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, and most prominently in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's celebrated novel *Julie, or the New Heloise*. These literary references gave the castle a romantic aura that still surrounds it today.

CHILLON TODAY: A LIVING MUSEUM OF HISTORY

Today, Château de Chillon is open to the public as a vast historical complex. Visitors can wander through courtyards, towers, dungeons, and richly furnished rooms filled with period furniture. The exhibition also includes four detailed models of the castle, illustrating its architectural development across the centuries.

Exploring the castle is intentionally unhurried. A recommended route guides visitors through the site at a comfortable pace, allowing time not only to admire the architecture but also to pause for the breathtaking views across Lake Geneva and the distant Alpine peaks.





CHÂTEAU DE CHILLON IS MORE THAN SWITZERLAND'S MOST FAMOUS CASTLE. IT IS A PLACE WHERE MEDIEVAL POWER, ROMANTIC LITERATURE, AND DRAMATIC HISTORY CONVERGE. ITS STONE WALLS STAND ABOVE THE LAKE LIKE SILENT GUARDIANS OF TIME, REMINDING US THAT SOME STORIES NEVER TRULY DISAPPEAR—THEY SIMPLY WAIT TO BE DISCOVERED AGAIN. ■

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