



One of McLaren Vale's oldest family-run vineyards, the five-storeyed d'Arenberg's Rubik's Cube-like structure makes for a photo-worthy backdrop

1 A SENSORY WINE EXPERIENCE NEAR ADELAIDE BY PRACHI JOSHI

I'm in a dimly-lit room surrounded by artificial fruits and flowers, with a row of glass decanters and attached hand pumps lining its walls. I go around the room methodically pressing the pumps—hints of truffles, cherries, green apples, lemon, honey and rose form a heady aromatic cocktail, bringing to mind the notes you might find in wine.

The Inhalation Room is but one of the many surprises at the d'Arenberg Cube, a multi-sensory wine museum of sorts that also features a cellar door and restaurant. Located just 45 minutes outside Adelaide in South Australia, the family-owned boutique d'Arenberg Winery has been in McLaren Vale since 1912. In late 2017, a half-solved Rubik's cube rose amidst its vineyards, seemingly levitating above the vines as the light caught its white and wine-bottle-green glass facade.

Even before you step through its folding origami doors, the sound of the wind rustling the vines welcomes you (thanks to the ingenious use of an outdoor speaker system).

Inside, wine-themed murals cover the walls of a passage lined with oddities like a peep show installation of a group of people at a 1920s-themed party. Amongst them is Chester Osborn, d'Arenberg's flamboyant chief winemaker, often hailed as the Willy Wonka of Wine. The Cube was his fantasy project that took shape over three years (and several million dollars later). Each floor of the five-storey building has something different on offer—a trippy sound and light show encapsulates the history of winemaking, a quirky museum displays possessions of the four generations of d'Arenberg's winemakers, and the cellar door on the top floor is



Malta's old capital, Mdina has a history that goes back over 4000 years

TRAVEL

INCREDIBLE VOYAGES

Travel transforms you. From volunteering at a farm to scaling a mountain, these nine extraordinary experiences, for adventurers and anthropologists alike, will make you go the mile

where you can sample wines at a bar dressed up with actual vines.

I head to the third-floor restaurant, appropriately whimsical with bold-patterned upholstery, wine-related artworks, a wall of masks, and other objets d'art strewn about. The kitchen is helmed by Michelin-trained South African expat chef couple Brendan Wessels and Lindsay Durr. On offer is a 10- or 16-course seasonal degustation menu (paired with wine, of course). The food matches the overall feel of the Cube—high-quality, artistically plated, and springing several surprises as you progress through the meal, including a 3D printed dessert. Darenberg.com.au

SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

2 CHASING THE DOORS OF MDINA BY NATASHA HEMRAJANI

One of the world's smallest countries, Malta is a tiny archipelago nestled in the south of Europe. It's a land of ancient cobblestoned streets full of sunshine and golden stone architecture set against the saturated blues of the Mediterranean. The facades and doorways on the Maltese island—featuring quirky door knockers and vibrant doors that span the Pantone shade card—have inspired everything from photo books (*Malta's Doors* by Chris Wright) to Instagram accounts (@maltadoors).

My photo series was shot in the city of Mdina, a fortified region in the north of Malta. Founded by the Phoenicians in the 8th century, modern-day Mdina is now sparsely populated (its entire population is just under 300 people.) The city is one of Malta's main tourist attractions and is on the list of consideration for being declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site. If all this isn't impressive, *Game Of Thrones* fans should know that Mdina was also the shooting location for King's Landing.

UP A DORMANT VOLCANO IN **TANZANIA** BY PETALS DEAS

"Pole, pole [Swahili for 'slowly, slowly'], one step after another." I am standing at Stella Point, 18,652ft above the grassy African plains, looking towards my goal, Uhuru Peak. It's the peak of the highest free-standing mountain in the world and my goal of the last two years, Mount Kilimanjaro. All that stands between me and victory is a mere 500 metres. But it's 500 metres through a slippery icy path, with towering glaciers on either side and an altitude where oxygen plays hide and seek. Last year, I decided to climb Kilimanjaro for my 35th birthday. After little convincing, my husband was on board. Armed with all the wisdom gleaned off a friend who'd been to Kili, we booked a 11-day trek. We were both relatively fit; he did weights and I did Pilates. The only extra training we incorporated was a walk three to four times a week with an altitude simulating machine, a mask that you wear on the treadmill. On the plane, I had butterflies in my tummy as I took in the views of the snow-capped peak. But all fear quickly dispelled when we met our four fearless guides, who turned out to be the lifelines of our group of eight hikers (age 22-60). Climbing Kilimanjaro via the Lemosho route allows you to traverse through five diverse terrains—starting in the lush green rainforest, through dry and dusty heather and moorland, and then an alpine desert, and finally astounding arctic conditions near the summit. As we reach Stella Point (the last checkpoint) and make our way towards Uhuru Peak (a 40-minute walk along the rim), it's at this very moment, when the body has endured enough cold, exhaustion and altitude sickness that an adrenaline kicks in to push you forward. And then the realisation hits as clear as the icicles around us: We hadn't just conquered the mountain!



Deas celebrated her 35th birthday summiting Mount Kilimanjaro with her partner



Opt for the Lemosho route for a picturesque trek



Oxygen is in short supply at this altitude

PAELLA MAKING IN **VALENCIA** BY PRAACHI RANIWALA

"Don't put chorizo in your paella and call it Valencian paella!" exclaims chef Boro, as we gather around his cooking station in the backyard of his family-owned *alqueria* (a traditional Valencian farmhouse) for a typical Spanish Sunday afternoon of paella making. The Valencians, it becomes quickly apparent, are very sensitive about the authenticity of their homegrown signature dish. The now internationally popular rice dish originated in the mid-19th century around the Albufera lagoon, on the east coast of Spain, adjacent to Valencia. In its truest form, the Valencian paella is made of short grain rice, chicken, rabbit, onions, tomatoes, artichokes, garrofón, tabella, saffron, paprika, salt, water and olive oil; cooked unhurriedly over an open fire in a sizeable pan. "Every region in Spain has a paella unique to it. There is no standardised way of making it. But we are snobbish about our recipes." An agro-engineer by profession, Boro imbibed his love for paella during his childhood, when weekends were reserved for family cookouts, with the men donning the apron. He strives to keep this heritage alive by opening his home to select friends for a taste of the real deal. After two hours of playing happy helpers to Boro (who only uses ingredients from his farmland), we sit down to share the fruits of our labour over copious amounts of *tinto de verano* (no sangrias, please). Turns out you can have your paella and eat it, too.



Sign up for a paella making workshop in its native Valencian region

IN A MONASTIC HOTEL NEAR **NAPLES** BY HIMALI SINGH SOIN

In Napoli, everything happens at once. Vespas veer, sirloins sear, plants and laundry flutter from verandahs, bread is always baking and homemade shrines are constantly garnished with artificial flowers. It's a mystical city in which all life occurs outside. Jean-Paul Sartre once said of the Neapolitan people: "I imagine that nowadays under this austere Fascist regime they conceal themselves when they make love. But 20 years ago they probably did it on the front door step, or maybe in their large beds with the doors wide open." Napoli wears its heart on its sleeve, but it has one well-kept secret. An hour's ferry ride away is the Castello Aragonese d'Ischia, a castle built in 5th century BC within which lies Albergo Il Monastero, a monastic hotel. Located on an islet, the castle is an intriguing palimpsest of histories. After a series of invasions, raids, battles and sieges, through which the castle saw itself transform from an entire village to a literary salon with Vittoria Colonna, to a nunnery, a political prison and a healing chapel, it became a national monument in 1860. In 1912, it was sold to a private family who care for it as both cultural heritage and artistic slate. Today the hotel retains a reverence for its layered past. It stands noble in its minimalist modern interior and magnificent ancient exterior, and is surrounded by the sea that blends seamlessly into the sky. Inside, you can wander through its ruins, a museum of medieval weapons, an old cemetery and an art gallery. An organic vegetable garden hangs over the ocean. The food at Il Cafeteria features freshly-caught fish, garden-plucked vegetables and other 'zero-kilomitrì' produce and poultry. In contrast to Napoli, almost nothing happens here. The past is a drop in the ocean, and the ocean is ever more. En.albergoilmonastero.it



Surrounded by the sea, the Albergo Il Monastero is a monastery turned resort

IN THE COMPANY OF OTHER MEN AT AN **ONSEN** IN **KANAZAWA** BY PRASAD RAMAMURTHY

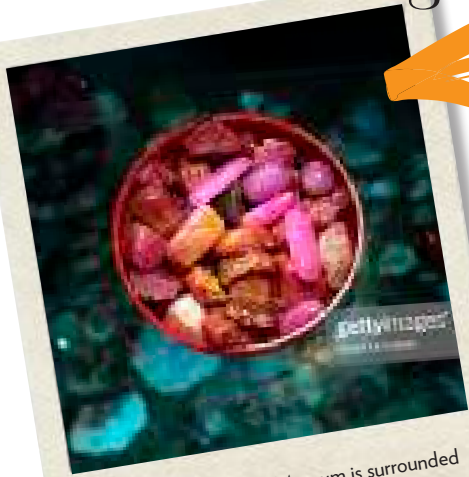
Buck naked. At least 50 men in the room and each one of us buck naked. Chatting. Snoozing. Lying in a pool of steaming water. And doing it all buck naked. I repeat those words to try and convey the cultural shock I experience as I struggle to use a tiny piece of wash cloth, like a proverbial fig leaf, to cover my genitals. But clearly no one around me was doing the same. Of course, as a flag-waving gay man, being in a room with other naked men isn't new to me. What is, is the vibe. Nothing sexual or threatening about it. In fact, in the room are fathers and sons, uncles and nephews, neighbours and travel companions. All butt naked. Wrinkly arms, saggy manboobs, and for the predominant part, hairless torsos, all exposed. As though everyone had come to accept the imperfectness of their bodies, and let go of their inhibitions, I've always felt being naked in front of others is one of the greatest acts of courage and trust required of a man. Especially when #gymrat or any variation of that isn't a part of your daily Instagram vocabulary. Frankly, here is my nation of such heroes! The Japanese have a term for this: *hadaka no tsukiai*, or naked communion. You bathe naked with your friends and family (always the same gender). You hide nothing. You strengthen your bond with them. A beautiful concept, and I can see it working in the faces around me. Relaxed. Smiling. Deep in conversation. But getting to this point is itself a journey. There's a certain protocol to be followed, before entering a bath, be it an onsen (water is drawn from geothermal springs) or a sento (water is artificially heated). On entering the bathhouse, you disrobe, lock your belongings away, collect aforementioned tiny washcloth and walk into the bathing area. Before stepping into the hot water, you must cleanse every inch of you with soap. Crouching low ensures you don't splash water on your bathing neighbour, an act that is definitely frowned upon. Once clean, you're free to step into the bath. Remember: that washcloth does not touch the water. It's an absolute no-no. By now I've managed to fumble through the pre-wash rituals, and step in. I find a nice hot rock to perch my bottom and the heat rises in wispy mists and seeps into my body. My tense muscles relax. Blood surges. In the distance Mount Hakusan is clearly visible. As are various male body parts in proximity. Such a sight isn't new to me, but the vibe certainly is. And I'm loving it.



Matsusaki near Kanazawa is a luxury heritage ryokan with a modern update. Here, the onsen comes with jet sprays and Jacuzzis open to the views of Mount Hakusan

IN YANGON'S FAMOUS GEM MARKETS

BY APARNA PEDNEKAR



The Myanmar Gems Museum is surrounded by over 80 stores at the nearby Gem Mart

"These are tourmalines," Celine Desile Dejean cocks her head, shaking the gleaming pink and blue candy hanging from her ears. The French-born gemologist is big on spinel and tourmaline, excellent alternatives to Myanmar's notoriously pricey rubies. We're at Yangon's Myanmar Gems Museum, casually discussing rocks. "Is it completely untreated?" I ask a dealer as he shows me a deep-red 1.02-carat pigeon blood, the holy grail of rubies. Any heat treatment or lead glass injection can knock off a couple of zeros off its six-figure price tag. We brandish our weapons—loupe, polariscope, UV torch—and huddle in to admire it. That evening, I buy three pairs of untreated red spinel at Bogyoke Market. They match the ruby in colour and clarity, and are not as exorbitant. I don't get to visit the famous Ruby Land, the city of Mogok, but a cruise on the Irrawaddy river takes me to Mandalay, where the other Burmese heavyweight—jadeite—holds fort at Mahar Aung Myay Market (aka Jade Market). From giant rocks to brass platters brimming with gems, wares are laid out like vegetables and hawked with gusto. And then, I strike green gold. A skinny, soft-spoken dealer with a betel nut-stained grin shows me a packet of intense neon green oval peridots in unusually large sizes (as big as 19 carats!). I reduce the asking price to half and ply the Indian connect; turns out he's an Aamir Khan fan and pines to travel to Bodh Gaya. With 40,000 kyats added to my price, the Indophile relents. *Fait accompli!*

WORKING AT AN ORGANIC FARM NEAR ZURICH

BY JHARNA THAKKAR

When I say Switzerland, feeding a clutch of nine chickens, three sheep (Stefina, Zwöckel and Blondie) and a rabbit is probably the last image to come to mind.

Yet that's exactly how my husband and I spent our summer. Part of the small cohort endorsing the back-to-land movement, we are a couple set on migrating from the city to the countryside. So when we signed up for WWOOF, short for World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms, we knew too well that we had to speak farm—soil, dirt, mulch. Known to attract aspirational farmers and hobbyists, WWOOFers comprise those who are keen to know where their food comes from. The movement was established in 1971 by Englishwoman Sue Coppard, who in her "desperate need" to often escape to the countryside, conceived WWOOF. Now, 48 years on, it continues to run with the same ideology. Volunteers work on 'host' farms in a country of their choice in exchange of food, stay and learning organic agriculture. We picked a small, self-sustained farm in Krinau, where days can be punctuated with hikes that lead to an alpine lunch with Toggenburg specialties—try Restaurant Älpli (Aelpli-krinau.ch), where some of the draws include a pear-cream dessert called schlorzifladen and churfiristen-kafi, an in-house coffee creation.

We lived with a family comprising Felix Wyss, a full-time farmer and part-time school teacher; Lisbeth Vogl, the farm's matriarch, head chef and English-German tutor; their daughters Leila and Iljana and three cats. Our welcome was with a big, garden-fresh BBQ complete with salad, lettuce, tomatoes and herbs, plump sausages and a fruity local brew called quöllfrisch. Our routine was simple yet strenuous. Breakfast, farm work till noon, lunch prep and an afternoon break spent exploring the village. Evenings were reserved for clean-ups and cook-outs culminating in languid cultural-exchange. Nights were for strolls, board games or sharing playlists. Felix taught us to deweed and sift stones with gusto and over three weeks, we picked apples, pears, grapes and berries, as well as harvested potatoes, onions and Swiss Chard to last the family all winter. I learnt to make jam and pesto while my husband perfected the peach pie. In exchange, I taught Festi to make salsa verde using their tart green tomatillos and finally cooked a five-course Indian dinner where the seekh kebab and kaali dal were the stars.

8



Herbs prepped for the garden barbeque



Peach pie



Krinau is a two-hour train ride from Zurich

Dog Temple was set up in 2016 by two German expats



VOLUNTEERING AT A DOG RESCUE HOME IN GOA

BY TUNALI MUKHERJEE

I believe happy dogs are a sign of friendly locals. So when on a walk on Mandrem beach, I stumbled on a pack of dogs lounging around a sign that read 'The Dog Temple', I had to step in and pay my respects. I was informed that this was a volunteer-run dog shelter, and though so far, volunteer tourism had failed to enthrall me, I decided to give this a try. Mornings here begin with a round of feeding. Adult dogs impatiently await their turn as the pups are served, and soon enough you learn the names and quirks of each dog. "Thomas is always hungry, Suki needs to be fed before Buddy, keep Tigerly away from the pups and Scranton gets extra servings as he's just recovering from an illness," explained Michael, one of the volunteers. The space offers lodging to two volunteers at a time, for a minimum period of two weeks. The experience is so immersive, you'll leave like a local. Afternoons at the shelter are the quietest. A week into my stay, I joined my furry companions in siesta. I felt soft paws over me and opened my eyes to see Suki settling on my stomach. The warmth from her spread to my heart and I joined their susegad club at last. ■

COURTESY @THEDOGTEMPLE/FACEBOOK; GETTY IMAGES; SHUTTERSTOCK.COM