

TOP 10 LUXURY TRAVEL DESTINATIONS YOU DON'T WANT TO MISS IN 2021-2022



From the South Pacific to South America or from Europe to Asia, the number of beautiful and exotic places to explore for an exciting luxury vacation seem endless.

Here are 10 top luxury travel destinations that would be perfect to visit in 2021-2022, and we offer our suggestions on sights and activities that you would not want to miss.

1. AUSTRALIA



From the craggy peaks of the Blue Mountains to the lush tropics of Queensland and the coral treasure land of the Great Barrier Reef, Australia has something unusual and something special to offer all visitors.

The most frequently visited places in Australia's vast "red center" have been tamed, but the Outback hasn't lost its frontier allure. Watching the sunset at Uluru (formerly known as Ayers Rock) has become very popular, but seeing the scalloped monolith go from reddish-brown to a haunting burnt-orange against the desert sky is still a magical—some say spiritual—experience.

The same can be said for much of the rest of this country that's also a continent. Sydney may have joined the ranks of the world's top cities, but its architecture, stunning harbor, and electric, manic personality keep it singular: You won't mistake it for anywhere else.

What Not to Miss:

- A private surfing lesson on world famous **Bondi Beach** in Sydney
- A performance at Sydney's iconic **Opera House**
- Reserve an Insider Visit to Sydney's **Taronga Zoo**
- Take a **float plane** from Sydney to Cottage Point Inn for a gourmet seafood lunch
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- Spend a day on the **Great Barrier Outer Reef** snorkeling, diving and viewing the Reef in a semi-submersible
- Have your picture taken with a **friendly koala**
- Eat **Moreton Bay bugs** and ask for seconds
- Take a private **wine tour in the Barossa Valley** with a gourmet lunch of farm to table dining
- Take a **day trip to the Blue Mountains** outside of Sydney and enjoy lunch at a park on the way where you can usually see wild kangaroo lurking around you
- Take an **aboriginal culture tour** and learn about their long history in Australia
- And many more exciting adventures

2. **NEW ZEALAND**



New Zealanders sometimes refer to their country as "God Zone," a rather prideful twist on the phrase "God's Own." But if you like gorgeous scenery and gutsy people, you'll agree with them. New Zealand is blessed with some of the most varied and dramatic terrain in the world—from glaciers, fjords and beaches to mountains, meadows and rain forests, known to New Zealanders as "native bush."

If you're so inclined, you can admire the breathtaking scenery while skiing, surfing, horseback riding, mountain climbing, hiking (which the locals call "tramping") or kayaking.

And if those pursuits aren't exciting enough, you can try some of the adventures the Kiwis (as New Zealanders are called) have invented: You can bungee jump off cliffs or bridges; paddle through white-water rapids; rocket through narrow caverns on jet boats; or strap yourself inside a giant plastic ball and roll down a hillside.

If you prefer more leisurely activities, you can still enjoy New Zealand's natural wonders by strolling on its pristine beaches, sailing along its picturesque coastline or fishing in its crystal clear rivers and lakes.

What Not to Miss:

- A **jet boat ride** down the Dart River near Queenstown
- Playing a round of **golf on a championship golf course** built on a cliff with ocean views in all directions
- A visit to Weta, **Peter Jackson's production studio** in Wellington where the visual effects for The Lord of the Rings trilogy were created
- Take the helm sailing one of the **America's Club yachts** in Auckland's Waitemata Harbor and experience the sensation of racing.
- Visit **Hobbiton**, the outdoor movie set for The Lord of the Rings trilogy built by Peter Jackson, that is a joy to explore.
- Drive the 4 day Classic New Zealand **Wine Trail** from Hawke's Bay to Marlborough.
- Visit **Comvita**, the thriving manuka honey business, where the industry began and the products are officially graded to indicate the level of medicinal value. This is a very interesting story, and the company store offers some discounts on these unique and expensive products.
- Take a **helicopter ride** over Milford Sound and Doubtful Sound, to see the full beauty of the fjords of New Zealand
- Visit **Rotorua**, a town set on its namesake lake on New Zealand's North Island, which is renowned for its geothermal activity and Maori culture. In Te Puia's Whakarewarewa Valley, there are bubbling mud pools and the 30m-tall Pohutu Geyser, which erupts many times daily. It's also home to a living Maori village and the New Zealand Maori Arts and Crafts Institute, with traditional wood carving and

weaving schools. In the evening attend a Maori hangi, which is a traditional Māori meal or essentially a feast cooked in an earth oven for several hours. You will be entertained by traditional songs and dances while your dinner is cooking.

- Spend several relaxing days at a **luxury lodge** and enjoy the beautiful surroundings while fishing and hiking.

3. TAHITI – FRENCH POLYNESIA



It's surprising how close a visit to French Polynesia comes to fulfilling the ideal of paradise. The islands, which include Bora Bora, Tahiti and Moorea, are still largely quiet and move at a slow pace outside Papeete, Tahiti's busy capital city. The lagoons of French Polynesia are still amazing shades of blue or green; the mountains still rise dramatically above the sea.

And though the residents of French Polynesia may spend more time buzzing around in SUVs than paddling outrigger canoes, they still gather for a Hinano (a local beer) and a song, and many wear flowers in their hair.

But as with most things beautiful, French Polynesia isn't easily had as a travel destination. A (decidedly chic) thatch-roofed bungalow there can cost you \$700 a night or more, and there are few bargains to be found in dining, activities or transportation. However, those who can afford a vacation in the islands of French Polynesia aren't likely to be disappointed. And were it not for the travel price tag, you might be tempted to stay forever.

What Not to Miss:

- Visit **Papeete's bustling Municipal Market** with fresh produce downstairs and handicrafts upstairs. Stock up on fragrant local soaps to take home as gifts.
- **Ride the big breakers** on the reefs of Tahiti, Huahine and elsewhere for experienced surfers only, but beginners can learn on the beaches with this company. Surfing and body-boarding courses are available.
- Visit the Robert Wan Pearl Museum in Papeete to learn about the founding of **French Polynesia's black pearl industry**. This museum gives insight into the history and cultivation of pearls in French Polynesia, with many local pearls on display. It explains how the orbs are raised, harvested, graded and turned into jewelry, which the high-end store next door sells.
- Take a half or full day **tour around the island** of Tahiti
- Be sure to take at least one **ride on Le Truck** in Papeete. It is an open air bus experience and definitely lets you meet the locals.
- Arrange a **Dolphin Encounter** at the Moorea Dolphin Center
- Take a thrilling **ATV tour** on Moorea to get the adrenaline pumping
- **Fly to Marlon Brando's private island**, Tetiaroa, from Papeete (36 minutes) to experience this unique luxury resort. The Brando offers carefree luxury in the midst of pristine nature. With access to the island by private plane, the resort features 35 villas on white-sand

beaches frequented by sea turtles, manta rays and exotic birds. The resort was designed to reflect Polynesian lifestyles and culture.

4. JAPAN



It is fascinating to watch as Japan merges its thousands of years of tradition with its present and future. So far, it has been able to do so with some mystery intact. The language barrier has helped, although that's slowly dissolving with bilingual signs and Japanese students learning English. For a while at least, the language, like Japan itself, will remain an intriguing challenge for visitors.

At Tokyo station, waiting for the bullet train (shinkansen), many passengers buy boxed lunches (bento). They are inviting: The map on the cover suggests each of the foods inside has been harvested in a different part of Japan—white radishes from the far west, salmon roe from the far northeast, eel from the south coast.

These boxes are comparable to Japan itself: They have the same sense of order—each food in its own little compartment, carefully thought out and arranged.

They are also standardized, like the "salarymen" in their dark suits—yet, like their splashy ties, they had a container of sauce to spice things up. They are wrapped—everything in Japan gets wrapped. They even have a moist towelette—almost every restaurant gives you one.

The boxed lunch did not, of course, come with a state-of-the-art smartphone and a miniature camera. It did not open to a karaoke tune. It offered no hint of the passion for ice cream or mayonnaise, for the trendiest fashions, for manga, pachinko and cigarettes. And although its packaging reflected modern design, it said nothing about the bold, exciting architecture that is slowly changing the face of Japan.

Among Japan's chief attractions are Mount Fuji, gardens, shopping, cherry blossoms, cultural attractions (from palaces and historic sites to sumo wrestling and Kabuki theater), bullet trains, beaches, war (and peace) memorials, traditional crafts, and religious shrines and temples.

Japan is a wonderful, fascinating and, frequently, expensive destination.

What Not to Miss:

- The **2021 Olympics** – make your reservations as soon as possible to guarantee the best events package
- Reserve a **private guided day tour of Tokyo**, using the metro and ferries to see the city's highlights, and which also include lunch at a small (6 person) non-tourist restaurant gem where your guide will recommend a high quality tasting menu according to your preferences
- Eat like a local by joining a small group **evening tasting tour in Tokyo** that has 5 food stops plus dessert with 18-20 local dishes to try and 2 drinks included. The Japanese consider it very bad manners to eat in the streets, so all food is consumed inside.
- Visit the Zen Buddhist Kinkaku-ji Temple (**Temple of the Golden Pavilion**) in **Kyoto**, which is covered with gold leaf and was built by the shogun, Ashikaga. It is located in a beautiful garden and is very

striking when you see it in the distance. Unfortunately, it is not possible to go inside.

- Arrange to have **lunch in Kyoto at a shabuzen** which serves a type of food called shabu shabu. This is thinly sliced beef and vegetables that are cooked in a hot pan of what appears to be beef broth. The broth is heated over a burner similar to fondue, and when it is very hot the raw vegetables are added and the slices of beef are submerged in the broth and swished back and forth briefly to cook them. Then the quickly cooked beef and vegetables are dipped in 3 sauces before eating. It is a very tasty, light lunch that is fun to prepare and is followed by a small serving of fruit.
- Visit the fabulous **Itchiku Kubota Kimono Museum** which is located about an hour from Hakone. Although it is out of the way, it is well worth the effort to find it. Itchiku Kubota was obsessed with finding the lost 15th century art of silk dyeing used for kimonos. He spent his whole life and his family's inheritance working to achieve this goal. He is the only living person to have had an exhibit of his work at the Smithsonian Institute from 1995-1996. A display of some of his most beautiful kimonos are on display in the museum. This is a hidden gem.
- Have an interesting cultural experience and **spend a night at a ryokan**, a typical Japanese inn or guest house, where you can request either a Western style bedroom with a bed or try the Japanese traditional tatami-matted rooms. For the ultimate cultural immersion, stay at a guest house with an onsen, which is the Japanese name for a hot spring; the term also extends to cover the bathing facilities and traditional inns frequently situated around a hot spring. The onsens may be separate for men and women or combined. It is mandatory to shower and be very clean before entering the springs. No clothing is allowed and only a very small towel may be taken into the area with you. As the onsens are public, it may be a little unsettling to step into this environment the first time.
- Take the **bullet train** from Tokyo to Hakone where you may be lucky enough to see **Mt. Fuji**.

5. SPAIN



Spain offers visitors a richness and complexity that may surprise. All the tempting postcard fantasy pictures are there in reality, side-by-side with other, less-expected ones.

You may come across fiesta dancers in a village square, a young man practicing flamenco guitar, a medieval Arab fortress or windmills so enormous Don Quixote could be forgiven for thinking they were giants.

But there's also the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, its mind-bending shapes like those of no other museum in the world, just as the exuberant architecture of Gaudi's Sagrada Familia in Barcelona makes it like no other church in the world.

There are super-fast trains, and there are villages where life goes at a pace that has changed little for centuries.

Spain today is an engaged member of the European Union that has transformed itself from a remote backwater to a modern nation, all within living memory. The contrasts, the colors and the vibrant spirit of the place will stay with you for a long time.

Spain's main attractions are historical sites, lively cities, some of the finest art in the world, castles, cathedrals, the Alhambra, shopping, the White Villages, traditional fiestas, cultural events, beaches, museums, caves, hiking, watersports and great food and wine.

Anyone who likes to travel will enjoy Spain. From its art museums and its tapas bars to its beaches, Spain's appeal is so broad that it's truly a country with something for everyone. It is very difficult to pick only a few examples of all the extraordinary things to see and do in Spain, since each region has its own list. We can only choose a few of the main sights and experiences to highlight here, but there are many more.

What Not to Miss:

- In **Barcelona**, you will want to appreciate the offbeat artistic genius of architect **Antoni Gaudí** by visiting his major creations: **Sagrada Familia Cathedral**, **Casa Milá** (La Pedrera-UNESCO World Heritage), **Parc Güell** (UNESCO World Heritage), **Casa Batlló**, Casa Vicens, Palau Güell, Casa Calvet and La Cascada (Fountain) in Ciutadella Park . You may be able to take a special small group tour that focuses on several of his buildings or arrange for a private guided tour to visit on your schedule.
- Walk through the narrow streets of the **Barcelona Gothic Quarter** or old part of the city to discover historic sites, such as the Cathedral of Santa Eulalia, and many unexpected surprises. To make sure you don't miss anything, look for a small group or private guided tour of the main sights and then return later to wander on your own. There

are small tapas restaurants and good ice cream shops sprinkled around the area.

- Be sure to walk down **Las Ramblas**, a wide pedestrian avenue flanked by one way traffic lanes on each side, to experience the vibrancy of the area. Part way down from its starting point in Plaça Catalunya, you will find the large, bustling market of **La Boqueria**. Inside are large selections of produce, fresh fruit, and limited counter dining to enjoy typical foods. You can find delicious fresh figs there in June.
- In **Madrid**, get a combination ticket for an **English tour of the Royal Palace** followed by an audio tour of the nearby **Teatro Real (Opera House)**, before walking 10 minutes to the Mercado San Miguel near the Plaza Mayor for a glass of wine and a wide variety of delicious tapas. If you want someone in the know to tell you where to find the best of the best in tapas, you can go on a small group tour to learn the inside scoop.
- From Madrid, one of the best culture day tours outside of the city is to the wonderfully **historic walled city of Toledo** with important centuries old monuments such as the High Gothic Santa Iglesia Cathedral; the 16th century palace/fortress, the **Alcázar de Toledo**; the 15th century Ministerio de San Juan de los Reyes with grand cloisters and the **El Greco Museum** commemorating one of the most important and influential Spanish artists of all time. Combine your visit to Toledo with a wine tasting or a lunch featuring specialties from the region. Walking around the narrow historic streets is a very enjoyable way to see the city.
- Plan a visit to the scenic **Basque waterfront town of San Sebastian** where you can enjoy a small **evening tapas tour** with a local who takes you to five of the best tapas restaurants to taste the specialties that make them first choice in the local community. Plan a guided tour to a nearby **Basque cider house** where you will learn the age old technique of catching cider in your glass as it is poured from a large barrel. This method is used to aerate the cider and improve the taste. A typical cider house lunch follows, and you are guaranteed to not leave hungry!

- From San Sebastian, you can visit the **Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao**, which is about an hour away, or explore the colorful Basque fishing village of **Hondarribia** near the French border about 30 minutes away. Both are excellent choices.
- In **Andalucia**, the famous **Feria de Sevilla** takes place in April, and you will see people dressed in typical Spanish dresses for this giant party. Another major cultural event celebrated prominently in the villages of Southern Spain is **Semana Santa** or Holy Week before Easter. Religious icons are carried through the streets as part of a number of processions, and the atmosphere in the villages tends to be somber until Easter Sunday sparks a celebration and life returns to normal for another year.
- There are so many other extraordinary places to visit and enjoy in Spain including the amazing **Mezquita (Mosque/Cathedral) in Córdoba**, the remarkable hilltop Moorish fortress complex with stunning royal palaces that is the **Alhambra in Granada**, lovely beaches and the **White Villages near Ronda**, and too many more special places to mention. A visit to Spain is many unforgettable experiences.

6. **SICILY - ITALY**



Sicily is a mountainous island dotted with lemon, orange, almond and pistachio orchards—an extension of the Apennine Mountains separated from the mainland by the Strait of Messina. La Sicilia is the largest island in the central Mediterranean, with some 9,927 square miles of variegated terrain.

Many powers have occupied and governed this strategically important area 310 miles south of Rome: Greeks, Romans, Vandals, Goths, Byzantines, Muslims (Arabs), Phoenicians, Normans, Spanish, the royal houses of Hohenstaufen, Savoy, Habsburg, the Aragon and, for brief periods, the U.K. and the U.S. Historic sites related to these powers are part of the island's attraction.

For touring, the island can be roughly divided into the north-shore and south-shore areas. The north shore has reefs, olive groves, secluded coves and countless seaside resorts, including Cefalu, a gorgeous Arab-Norman city with good beaches. Also on the north coast is Palermo, the ancient (and current) capital, and the island's largest city. About 50 miles west of Palermo lies the ancient village of Erice, atop a mountain: It still has remains of a temple dedicated to Venus.

The southern coast has an even milder climate, so there's swimming most of the year (although it can get cold there November-March). Among the areas not to be missed are Agrigento, Acireale and Taormina, a distinctive, beautiful town perched on cliffs overlooking the Mediterranean.

Mount Etna is a 10,902-foot high active volcano on the east coast—its crater is difficult to reach, so join a guided tour and dress warmly. There are great ocean views from the mountain, and (depending on volcanic activity) it's possible to ski there in winter. You can also drive or take a train along the 120-mile route around its base to see a wide variety of scenery.

What Not to Miss:

- Hike up **Mt. Etna** to see its lunar landscape of black sand, volcanic rocks, and oozing lava flows that is as stark as it is beautiful. It has been declared a **UNESCO World Heritage** area due to its exceptional level of volcanic activity, as well as global scientific, culture and educational value. You can visit Etna without a guide only up to 2900 meters. To see the highest craters at 3300 meters a tour guide is required.
- **Taormina** is a distinctive beautiful town perched on cliffs overlooking the Mediterranean. The town is known for the **Teatro Antico di Taormina**, an ancient Greco-Roman theater still used today. Near the theater, cliffs drop to the sea forming coves with sandy beaches. A narrow stretch of sand connects to Isola Bella, a tiny island and nature reserve. This picturesque town is very popular with visitors and definitely worth a visit. The views from the Teatro Antico di Taormina are outstanding.
- **Palermo**, the island's capital, has a number of striking things to see. The 12th-century **Palermo Cathedral** houses royal tombs, while the huge neoclassical Teatro Massimo is known for opera performances. Also in the center are the **Palazzo dei Normanni**, a royal palace started in the 9th century, and the **Cappella Palatina**, with Byzantine mosaics. Busy markets include the central Ballarò street market and the Vucciria, near the port. Downtown Palermo is a very attractive place to visit with impressive buildings and excellent restaurants.

- **Agrigento** is well known for the ruins of the ancient city of Akragas in the **Valley of the Temples**, one of the most outstanding examples of Greater Greece art and architecture on a vast archaeological site with well-preserved Greek temples. On the modern city's outskirts is the Museo Archeologico Regionale 'Pietro Griffo', with artifacts and a telamon (giant male figure). West lies Scala dei Turchi, a stepped white cliff overlooking sandy beaches. To best understand the amazing history behind these amazing ruins, it is best to take a guided tour here.
- To relive *The Godfather* movies, visit **Savoca** and **Forza d'Agro**, the two most famous filming locations of the movies in Sicily. These small medieval villages were featured in some of the most iconic scenes in the movie, such as Michael Corleone's first meeting with Apollonia's father at the Bar Vitelli in the hilltop village of Savoca, and the wedding at the **Church of San Nicolò**, a short walking distance from the bar. This peaceful church is exceptionally beautiful with a fascinating interior and looks like a fortress set on top of the hill with breathtaking views.

The **Bar Vitelli** is housed in an 18th century Palazzo Trimarchi, located in the Piazza Fossia, the town's main square, near the Town Hall. It serves excellent pastries and is now famous as a movie location. The small town is not overrun with tourists, so you can enjoy eating or drinking something at the bar and then walking up the steep cobblestone street to the church and spending as much time as you want inside. This unique trip is sometimes offered as a shore excursion on cruises stopping in Taormina, about 7 miles away.

7. SOUTH AFRICA



South Africa is an exciting place to visit. Cape Town, with its vibrant nightlife, stylish young people and beautiful surroundings, has become one of the most desirable destinations in the world.

The country also has about 20 national parks and several hundred game and nature reserves, along with some of the finest safari lodges on the continent. Your surroundings can be as wild or as genteel as you want—or both.

Emblematic of South Africa's modern transformation from pariah nation to democratic statehood is Robben Island, where Nelson Mandela spent almost 20 years as a political prisoner, quarrying lime with pick and shovel, prior to his release and eventual emergence as the country's first democratically elected president. Now inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage site, Robben Island is one of South Africa's most popular tourist attractions, and its transformation from dreaded prison to post-apartheid icon typifies an astonishing process accompanied by painful setbacks as well as exhilarating victories.

Among the foremost attractions of South Africa are game reserves, indigenous cultures, heritage sites, uncrowded beaches, surfing, wilderness trails, beautiful mountain scenery, shopping, gold and diamond mines, and a sunny climate year-round. South Africa has a lot of appeal for everyone.

What Not to Miss:

- **From Cape Town** plan one or two day trips to do **wine tastings to Stellenbosch and Franschhoek**, two well known wine regions nearby. This will give you an opportunity to try some excellent South African wines that might be difficult to find outside the country and see some beautiful vineyards. There is also a local wine train that will transport you between some of the finest wine estates. To expand your wine tasting choices, you could spend a night at a chic Cape Dutch boutique hotel in the heart of the Winelands and increase your enjoyment of the region by arranging a special wine pairing dinner.
- Take the half day private **Cape Peninsula drive** from Cape Town down the Atlantic coast with amazing scenery and fascinating wildlife to the Cape of Good Hope. Stop at Chapman's Peak, pose with the **African Penguins on Boulders Beach**, visit the seaside villages of Scarborough, Kalk Bay, and Simon's Town, take the funicular up to the old lighthouse at Cape Point, and end up at the **Cape of Good Hope**, the southwesternmost point of the African continent.
- Ride the **Cable Car** from Cape Town to the top of **Table Mountain**. Its sleek capsules can carry up to 65 people each and take five minutes to travel between the Lower Cable Station and the Upper Cable Station. On the way, you can enjoy dizzying panoramas of the city and the Atlantic Ocean beyond. The capsules rotate to ensure that all passengers are given a 360° view. Formed by volcanic and glacial action approximately 520 million years ago, Table Mountain is thought to be one of the oldest mountains in the world. It's a top attraction for visitors and locals alike.
- Combine a tour to Table Mountain with a visit to **Robben Island**. In 1964, an anti-apartheid revolutionary named **Nelson Mandela** was arrested and brought to South Africa's Robben Island, just west of

Cape Town. He would spend the next 18 years imprisoned in an 8x7-foot cell, forced to do hard labor, and permitted only one visitor a year. Even so, Mandela went on to become his country's first black president, a **Nobel Peace Prize recipient**, and known globally for his significant contributions to human rights and social justice.

The Robben Island tour is awe inspiring when you hear the story of what **Nelson Mandela's life** was like as a long term prisoner of the South African government living under spirit breaking conditions. His ability to later rise to be President of his country and bring his countrymen together is truly inspirational. This is definitely a tour you do not want to miss.

- A trip to South Africa would not be complete without a significant **safari experience**. With a wealth of national parks and private reserves, you can take advantage of some of the best game viewing on Earth. From the **Big Five – lion, leopard, elephant, rhino and Cape buffalo** – to antelope, zebra, hyena, hippo, giraffe, and a plethora of bird and marine species, you'll be spoilt for choice with the abundance of wildlife.

Most game spotting activities are led by expert rangers, and undertaken in 4x4 vehicles, but there is also the chance to view wildlife on guided bush walks; from above – in **hot air balloon and light aircraft safaris**; and from the water, during boat excursions. A wealth of options exist for outstanding safari tours in South Africa's finest **private game reserves and Kruger National Park**.

- Take advantage of being able to easily fly from Kruger International Airport to see **Victoria Falls in Zambia**. The next morning leave your hotel and drive to the park entrance to take in the splendor and beauty of the cascades.

You will walk on paths near the falls where the roar of the falls drowns out conversation and often a misty rain can soak you through if you are not wearing a waterproof poncho. It is a spectacular experience. In the afternoon, take a **boat ride on the Zambezi River** to see hippos and other wildlife.

8. Switzerland



The popularized image of Switzerland is almost too perfect and timeless: spectacular Alpine scenery, cozy mountain chalets, dazzling ski runs, window boxes spilling over with red geraniums, tidy cities set on serene lakes, elegant grand hotels. Though you'll undoubtedly encounter these along the way, they don't present a complete picture of this modern country. Switzerland may guard its neutrality and assert its independence, but it is very much an active participant in the world.

If you're going for the scenery or for the skiing, there are few places that can equal it (in quality or high prices). And there are few places as clean, safe and orderly as Switzerland. Likewise, few countries have such diversity in terms of culture and language: German is prevalent in Zurich and the northern, central and eastern regions; French in Geneva and the western region; Italian in Lugano and the southern region; and Romansch, the fourth national language, is the language of the southeastern part of the country, which includes the ski resort area of St. Moritz.

Despite its varied cultures and linguistic traditions, Switzerland is one of the most politically and economically stable countries in the world.

Switzerland's foremost attractions are spectacular Alpine scenery, impeccably managed hotels, world-class museums, medieval architecture, hiking, fishing, watersports, skiing, climbing, quality shopping, tennis, health spas, cycling and chocolate.

Despite the fact that Switzerland is politically neutral and hasn't been involved in an armed conflict in hundreds of years, military service is obligatory for its male citizens. They are required to complete a minimum of 300 days of training and service between the ages of 20 and 42. Women are accepted on a voluntary basis. The annual defense budget is almost 10% of all government expenditures (approximately 4.5 billion CHF).

What Not To Miss:

- **Check your luggage straight through** from your U.S. departure airport to your hotel in Switzerland if you are on a non-stop flight.
- Get the **best value Swiss train pass** for the locations you will be visiting.
- Take as many of the special designated **Swiss Premium Panoramic Scenic Rail Trips** as you can fit into your schedule and make sure you have your seat reservations: Bernina Express, Glacier Express Excellence Class, Golden Pass MOB Panoramic, Gotthard Panorama Express, Jungfrau Railway to Jungfrau Mountain, Cogwheel Railway to Mt. Pilatus from Lucerne and Gornergrat Cog Railway in Zermatt.

- Visit the very interesting **Olympic Museum in Lausanne** near the waterfront.
- Explore the impressive **Château de Chillon** located on a rocky island in Montreux
- Eat the typical Swiss dishes of **cheese fondue and raclette** at local restaurants

- Between May and October take the **chocolate train from Montreux** for a full day of enjoying cheese and chocolate. The train offers scenic views of vineyards and bucolic countryside on its way to the medieval **cheesemaking town of Gruyères**, where the train pauses for an excursion by bus to a cheese factory and the local castle.

Then you board the train again for the trip to Broc, home of the Cailler-Nestlé chocolate factory, where you can watch a multilingual video, observe chocolate production, **sample the finished product**, and buy Cailler or Nestlé **candy bars at factory prices**. The train then returns to Montreux, a pleasant resort town on Lac Léman.

- Take a **bicycle ride around the vineyards**

Switzerland is full of **beautiful hiking trails** for you to choose the ones that suit you best.

- Take a **walking tour around Lucerne** to see why it is considered the most beautiful Swiss city.

9. **Portugal**

Pastéis de Belém, delicious pastry specialty from Lisbon



Portugal is composed of the continental part of Portugal on the Iberian Peninsula, which it shares with Spain, and the small archipelagos of Madeira and the Azores in the Atlantic Ocean.

The most western European state has a shoreline at the Atlantic Ocean, it is bordered to the north and in the east by only one other country, Spain. Portugal shares a maritime border with Morocco.

Portugal is famous for Fado and Saudade, the cultural heart of the country. In the 15th century, the seafaring nation invented ocean-going sailing ships like the carracks and galleons and a range of navigational instruments. It was home to several Portuguese explorers, like Vasco da Gama and Ferdinand Magellan.

The Portuguese also invented marmalade, the Pastel de nata, and tempura. Of Portuguese origin are Port wine, Madeira wine, Vinho Verde (green wine), and other local wines, two Portuguese wine-producing regions are even protected by the UNESCO as World Heritage.

Portugal is also known for Azulejo, the art of painted tin-glazed ceramic tilework and Calçada Portuguesa, the characteristic Portuguese paving, used for many pedestrian areas.

An independent kingdom since 1143, Portugal established its continental frontiers in 1297 and is one of the oldest nations in Europe. The former world power during the 15th and 16th centuries lost much of its wealth and status with the destruction of Lisbon in a 1755 earthquake, the occupation during the Napoleonic Wars, and the independence in 1822 of Brazil as a colony. A 1910 revolution deposed the monarchy; for most of the next six decades, repressive governments ran the country.

In 1974, a left-wing military coup installed broad democratic reforms. The following year Portugal granted independence to all of its African colonies.

Since 1986 Portugal has been a member-country of the European Union.

What Not To Miss:

- The best way to visit northern Portugal is on an **8 day Douro River cruise** from Porto, which allows you easy access to the many small towns along the route and also includes regional port and wine tastings. However, it is also possible to do a driving tour and visit some of the main highlights.

If driving, plan to spend time in **Porto** with its stunning Old Town on the Douro River that is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and makes an excellent base to explore the surrounding area. Another special town to explore is **Guimarães** with a beautiful palace and a medieval castle.

- **Fatima, one of the most important Catholic shrines in the world** dedicated to the Virgin Mary, is located midway between Porto and Lisbon (about 90 minutes from each). The story of a famous miracle in Fátima, Portugal, began in May 1917, when three children (ages 7, 9, and 10) claimed to have encountered the Virgin Mary on their way home from tending a flock of sheep.

Fatima now attracts thousands of **pilgrims from all over the world**, particularly on the pilgrimage days in May and October. The **pilgrims gather in Cova de Iria**, an enormous plaza where a little chapel was built and where the Virgin Mary is believed to have appeared.

On the far side of the plaza rises the **great basilica**, built in a neo-classical style with a central tower 65 meters high. The construction of the basilica began on May 13, 1928. In the basilica are the **tombs of two of the three visionaries**, siblings Francisco and Jacinta Marto. They died in 1919 and 1920 respectively and were beatified in 1970. The third seer, Lucia dos Santos, died in 2005. This is a very interesting place to visit even if you are not a member of the Catholic faith, especially if it is on your way when you are traveling from Porto to Lisbon or vice versa.

- A visit to the picturesque **town of Sintra** and the **Sintra National Palace** is a major tourist experience in Portugal and only takes about 30 minutes to drive or take the train from Lisbon. This is an excellent day trip to plan from Lisbon.
- Another really pretty town to explore by taking a **30 minute train ride** from Lisbon is **Cascais**, a traditional and charming Portuguese fishing town, which has responsibly developed into a **popular resort town**. Historically, Cascais was the summer retreat of the Portuguese nobility, and today the town is an elegant fusion of its illustrious heritage, with the expectations of the modern tourist.

Found within the cobbled streets of the historic center are **lavish villas, an imposing fort, fascinating museums**, along with a buzzing holiday atmosphere. Cascais boasts so many historic sights and attractions, that it is regarded as one of the best day trips from Lisbon. Cascais is a lovely town with charming cobblestone streets, attractive shops and a wonderful walk along the beach. It is a restful escape from the large city bustle of Lisbon.

- **The Algarve**, Portugal's southernmost region, is known for its Atlantic **beaches and golf resorts**. Whitewashed fishing villages on low cliffs overlooking sandy coves were transformed in the 1960s, and now its central coast between Lagos and Faro is lined with villas,

hotels, bars and restaurants. The region's western Atlantic coast and rugged interior are less developed. The Algarve has long been a **popular international vacation destination** with a few upscale resorts, but it has recently been evolving with more **luxury properties** and additional golf courses. There are many **beautiful white sand beaches** along with warm water and sunny skies that make it a beachgoer's paradise.

- An insider tip to find the original pastéis de Belém that were first made in 1837 from a secret recipe; the pastries are still made daily from the same recipe at a café near the Mosteiro dos Jerónimos. These delicious custard cream tarts are considered to be the best in Lisbon (and probably the country). The pastries can be ordered to eat inside the café and are also available for carry-out. Thousands are made and consumed daily. The address: Pastéis de Belém café, Rue de Belém #84 to 92, Lisbon.

10. **United Arab Emirates (UAE)**

The contrasts between old and new in the United Arab Emirates (U.A.E.) are not only dramatic—they're often deliberate. The leaders of this oil-rich nation, made up of seven emirates along the Persian Gulf, have succeeded in drawing tourists with new hotels and diversions that have made cities such as Dubai and Abu Dhabi global hotspots. But they have also maintained policies to conserve the country's traditional culture.

As a result, you can easily maneuver between past and present in the U.A.E.: You can venture into the desert on a camel trek and then indulge in a new sport—sand skiing. Or you can bargain for carpets in a souk and then enjoy a round of golf on greens surrounded by sand.



The U.A.E. is a fascinating mix of bedouin life and international commerce. For those looking for a complete escape into desert exoticism, the country's major cities of Abu Dhabi and Dubai may be disappointing. At first glance, both cities look more like Houston than Tangier. Traces of the old bedouin and trading cultures remain in the U.A.E., but you may have to search for them.

In Dubai, historic old houses cooled by wind towers are surrounded by squeaky-clean office buildings overlooking Khor Dubai, the broad creek that bisects the city and fades out in the desert to the east. Lining the docks of the creek are dhows (traditional sailboats), whose distinctive curved prows haven't changed in centuries, although they're now more often driven by motors rather than by sails.

The U.A.E. has the reputation of being one of the most comfortable and pleasant places to travel in the Arab world, particularly for women, who may have a difficult time on their own in other Arab countries. It's a favorite resort for vacationers from more restrictive countries in the Middle East. However, take note that homosexual practices are prohibited in the U.A.E., and even public displays of affection between men and women are frowned upon and fined in some jurisdictions.

The U.A.E.'s beaches, oases, dunes and a smattering of interesting rock formations aren't as dramatic as the scenery elsewhere in the region, but the friendliness of the people is a big plus. There's always a lot going on, particularly in the way of sports or shopping.

The main attractions in the U.A.E. include beaches, Arab culture, desert scenery, watersports, sand sports, horse and camel racing, shopping, mosques and historical sites.

The U.A.E. is a major hub for commerce in the Persian Gulf region and elsewhere. In the past, most travelers visited the area on business, but its new beach resorts and other tourist facilities are world-class. The country is a good introduction to the Persian Gulf region and a pleasant place for a relaxing getaway. Don't go if you are looking primarily for spectacular scenery and exotic desert cultures.

The U.A.E. is big on breaking records. It's home to the tallest man-made structure in the world (the Burj Khalifa), the world's only seven-star hotel (the Burj Al Arab), the only Louvre to be built outside of Paris and the world's largest playground (Dubailand).

Most native residents of the U.A.E. practice the Muslim religion. They pray five times daily in mosques, located in nearly every neighborhood. Each mosque is equipped with loudspeakers that notify residents and passersby of the calls to prayer at dawn, midday, midafternoon, sunset and nightfall.

The U.A.E. has a president, His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan (also the ruler of Abu Dhabi), and a prime minister, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum (also the ruler of Dubai). Each emirate has its own sheik or ruler. There are no elected bodies in the country.

Foreign nationals comprise the overwhelming majority of the population of the U.A.E. Most are guest workers from India and Pakistan who must return home when their contracts expire.

Although women from other countries enter the country without a problem, they are expected to dress moderately and behave respectfully. The native women dress in varying degrees of modesty from a black hijab with a hair covering but no face covering to being completely covered up including the full face and eyes, so they have to be guided by someone else to walk around. The contrasts are enormous and very interesting to observe.

What Not To Miss:

- Try **snow skiing in the mall** attached to the Kempinski Hotel in Dubai for an unusual experience. There is a full scale ski slope constructed behind large glass panes which allow spectators to watch part of the ski trail. The contrast is even more jarring when the temperature outside the mall is over 100 degrees Fahrenheit and inside the ski slope there is actual snow and ice.
- Make a reservation well in advance to have **tea at the Burj Al Arab hotel, the world's only 7 star hotel**, which is a luxurious 1053 feet skyscraper and the world's third largest hotel. Only hotel guests or people with dining reservations are allowed on the property. In 2005

Roger Federer played a tennis match against Andre Agassi on the hotel's roof helipad which was covered with grass for the occasion.

- Hire a car and driver to take you to the most **unusual and luxurious malls** built around Dubai. They are like no other malls you have ever seen before. It is not necessary to want to buy anything, but the surroundings and people watching are very entertaining.
- Have a car and driver/guide take you to **Abu Dhabi for a day** if you are staying in Dubai, but make sure you are not going on a holy day when everything is closed. There are a number of things to see and do there, including the **Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque**. Ask your driver to also show you the neighborhood on the outskirts of town where the foreign embassies and consulates are located. It is a beautiful area.
- Visit the **main souk market in downtown Dubai**, located in the **Deira** district, with its world-famous gold souk and rather more down-to-earth fish souk, but all of the Emirati cities have their own souk districts to explore. The souks are where you come to get a good deal on local handicrafts and much better prices (with some haggling) on products than you'd get at one of the malls.
- Reserve the **Dubai evening safari in the desert** with hotel pickup and drop off, **BBQ dinner, camel ride and a belly dancing show**.
- Reserve premium tickets for the **At The Top Burj Khalifa SKY journey** including the 125th and 148th floors. Dubai's Burj Khalifa is a tower of superlatives as the **world's tallest building at 2,717 feet**, the tallest freestanding structure in the world, the highest observation deck in the world with panoramic views across Dubai, and the elevator with the longest travel distance in the world.

While Level 124 is home to At the Top, Burj Khalifa, the observation deck that opened in 2010, Level 125 is part of the At the Top Burj Khalifa SKY journey that takes visitors to the **World's Highest Observation Deck on Level 148**. Premium ticket holders to At the Top, Burj Khalifa SKY now have the opportunity to visit all three levels 124, 125 and 148, which is the crowning glory at 555 meters

high. Each of the levels offers a distinguished experience. This is a must-see attraction.

- Plan a visit to the incredibly beautiful mammoth **Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque in Abu Dhabi**. Harnessing contemporary design and ancient craftsmanship, the mosque harmoniously blends modern and ancient styles and techniques to create a new interpretation of Islamic architecture. With its interiors **using lavish amounts of gold, mosaic tiles, and glass work and immense amounts of marble**, and its exterior of blindingly white stone contrasting dramatically under the Emirati blue sky, it never fails to dazzle. This is something you definitely want to see, but it must be scheduled for a time that is open to the non-Muslim public.
- Visit the **Abu Dhabi Louvre**, the newest and most spectacular museum in the United Arab Emirates, If there is enough time, this might be scheduled on the same day as a visit to the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque.

We hope you have found the perfect destination for your next luxury vacation outside the country. There are definitely many amazing places to choose from, so maybe you will want to plan trips to several different locations. You can choose your preferred way to travel by ship, river boat or customized land arrangements to give you the most memorable vacation of a lifetime.

WE WOULD LOVE TO HELP YOU PLAN YOUR IDEAL LUXURY VACATION AND LOOK FORWARD TO HEARING FROM YOU WHEN YOU ARE READY TO TRAVEL. [CLICK HERE](#) TO ARRANGE A COMPLIMENTARY 20 MINUTE CONSULTATION TO DISCUSS YOUR TRAVEL PLANS.

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