

LIFESTYLE TRAVEL

Culturally Adrift

Start the year by planning a trip to one of the top eight travel destinations in the world for 2015

BY LEN CRISTOBAL

GEOGRAPHY TELLS US that the world is a feast of colors and contrasts. And so are today's vacationers and nomads. Conversations have evolved from sought-after white beaches to sophisticated hideaways, from classic excursion spots to untouched historic suburbs. Here are eight places that can satiate your wanderlust in 2015:

BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA

Bosnia & Herzegovina, or Bosnia, is a heart-shaped country seated on southeastern Europe. With a history stained by a war in 1992, Bosnia has been slowly reintroducing itself to the world. Culture seekers will marvel at religious buildings, such as the Emperor's Mosque and Orthodox Church, and historic bridges like the Mehmed Paša Sokolović Bridge, which is part of the 2007 World Heritage List. The majestic wilderness in Sutjeska National Park is defined by the 75-meter plus Skakavac waterfall and the Maglic and Zelengora Mountains, which are for those into walking and climbing. Another treat for adventurous tourists is rafting or kayaking on the Una and Vrbas rivers. *To experience Bosnia's heritage and waters, fly in from Dubai. There are also flights and buses coming from major European cities. Travelers can take a train for gentler appreciation of the scenery, and rent a vehicle or call a taxi to get around Bosnian cities.*

NICARAGUA

Surrounded by the Caribbean Plate and standing between Honduras and Costa Rica, Nicaragua is dubbed by *The Los Angeles Times* as the A-grade Central American attraction. The country remains unapologetically loyal to its multicolored colonial influences, from architecture to literature. The quaint streets of Granada will allow tourists to relax with vibrant music, dining, and entertainment. San Juan del Sur is a town that radiates a spirited ambience because of flowers gracing every corner, brightly colored houses and buses, and the solid surfing waves. The adventurous ones will enjoy kayaking on Lake Nicaragua, which is home to fresh water sharks, bike tours, swimming in Apoyo Lagoon, considered the cleanest and deepest swimming hole, zip-lining and hiking to active volcanoes. *For those who want to explore this multiracial land, there are flights coming from Tokyo, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. There are also several border crossings through international buses, cruises, and river boats.*

MALTA

Malta is no longer just about structures, and Hollywood stars. Culture history add further depth to this island in Europe, making five of its sites recipients of the European Destination Excellence (EDEN), a program under the European Commission to encourage tourism development. These sites are Gharb, a tiny village of artisan blacksmiths and weavers; Mellieħa, blessed by farmlands and archaeological; Nadur, a locality known for its satirical Carnival; the old hamlet of Santa Luġa wears picturesque hills and events like Bir-Saħħa wine festival, and the majesty of Ħalq, which is loved for its regattas sites such as the cave of Miklin. *Malta, tourists who are into swimming can enjoy the unexploited waters of Kalanka, San Ġo, and Ħamrija-in-Rummen. To reach it in from Dubai, or see if Maltese islands of cruise itineraries.*

TURKEY

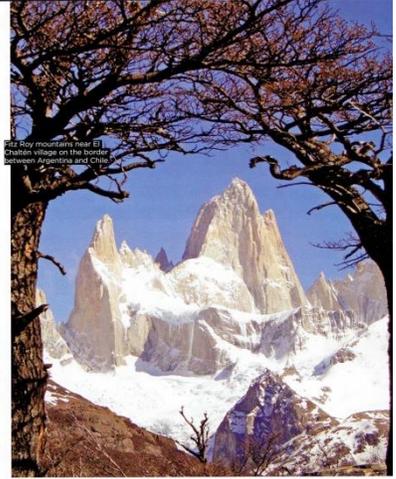
Turkey has always been a delightful spectacle because of its multiculturalism and tales of the world's oldest human settlement. But recent twist is the rise of the Bodrum Peninsula, which has become a vacation paradise for the Hollywood celebrities like Tom Hanks, Nicole Kidman, and couple Michael Douglas and Catherine Zeta-Jones. Perfecting the gentle winds and islands of the peninsula on the beaches, such as Orrakent, Yalikavak, and Bagla. Nature lovers will enjoy Bodrum's boat trips, the Museum of Underwater Archaeology, and the Uykü Vadisi (sleeping valley). Gözleme, Turkey's famous street food, and Turkey coffee in municipal cafes are other reasons to love Bodrum. Tourists looking for cultural journeys can watch events at the Bodrum Castle and the newly renovated amphitheater. *To experience the peninsula, there's a good news: Turkish Airlines and Philippine Airlines have recently signed an expanded services agreement that would serve direct flights between the two countries.*

BULGARIA

Gracefully wearing the highs and lows of its history, Bulgaria emerged with a high Human Development Status from the United Nations in 2001. The resiliency of this country in southeastern Europe has been largely attributed to its tourism sector. Bulgaria's famous asset is its long Black Sea coastline, which offers camp sites and summer resorts for the guests. The European country is also known for its skiing spots in Vitosha, Pirin, and Rhodope Mountains and health spas. For art aficionados, the city of Sofia is home to churches with exquisitely intricate architecture, art galleries, and nightclubs. Another cultural haven is Plovdiv, a land of stunning ancient theaters and cultural institutions and host of the International Fair Plovdiv, the country's oldest trade show. *Those who want to experience Bulgaria's golden sands and charm can fly in from Dubai or Doha, travel by train from London, or by buses from all European cities.*

INDIA

Grabbing the ninth spot in Lonely Planet's top 10 cities for 2015 list is Chennai, the capital of Tamil Nadu. Chennai is now ready more than ever to emphasize its other side—the one far from the hurried, congested façade—because of India's plan to build a bullet train that will make traveling from Delhi to Chennai faster. The story of Chennai's breathtaking currents is narrated by Marina Beach and Covelong Beach, which invites fishing and windsurfing scenes. Other treasures of Chennai include Coorg, hailed as the Scotland of India due to its lush green scenery, Puliact, a small town with Dutch



Fitz Roy mountains near El Chalten, Patagonia, Argentina and Chile

influence, and the Zha Café, a shop known for its themed rooms. *To see what else Chennai has to offer, fly in from Hongkong, Bangkok, or Singapore. Take the flights in Chennai from all major cities in India or train rides via Chennai Central Station and Egmore Station.*

ARGENTINA

Argentina is a grand mix of all wild and festive things a traveler is looking for. Its capital, Buenos Aires, is considered one of the most visited cities in the world. But another tourist favorite, which ranked second as *Lonely Planet's Best in Travel 2015*, is El Chalten. Known as the Trekking Capital of Argentina where Cerro Torre and Cerro Fitz Roy are resting, El Chalten is a cradle of landscapes, glaciers, forests, and waterfalls. Also drawing travelers is the city of Salta nestled in the northwest part of Argentina because of its colonial underpinnings and cosmopolitan offerings, like parks, museums, and restaurants. As proof of its potential, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) supported the Sustainable Tourism Development Program of Salta. *There are flights to El Calafate from El Calafate International Airport, where there are*

buses going to El Chalten, and from Buenos Aires via Aerolíneas Argentinas.

MYKONOS

Mykonos has made a star-strudded comeback. Thanks to Hollywood celebrities like this Greek island, including the Kardashis Liam Neeson, Shakira, Lady Gaga, and I Jackman. Mykonos, surrounded by the hill of Tinos, Syros, Paros and Naxos, has been called the Ibiza of Greece today because of its nightlife scenes. But reminding local tourists of the island's heritage are its list windmills, churches, especially the Panag Parasortan, museums such as Fildoreo Museum and The Boni Mill, native stores, to monasteries, cobble streets, and white-tiled edifices in harmony with the azure water the Aegean sea. Beaches attracting travelers are Elia Beach, known for having the lon stretch of white sands; Paranga, Paradise, Super Paradise. There's also room for even body: Foodies can sample *kebabitis*, soft seasoned with pepper, while athletic ones enjoy water sports like scuba diving, snow surfing, or taking boat tours. *Flying to Mykonos starts from Hongkong, Abu Dhabi, or Dubai*

METRO 74 JANUARY 2015

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DESTINATION: BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA

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DESTINATION: NICARAGUA

Surrounded by the Caribbean Plate and standing between Honduras and Costa Rica, Nicaragua is dubbed by The Los Angeles Times as the A-grade Central American attraction. The country remains uncomplicatedly laced to its multicolored colonial influences, from architecture to literature. The quaint streets of Granada will allow tourists to relax with vibrant music, dining, and entertainment. San Juan del Sur is a town that radiates spirited ambiance because of flowers gracing every corner, brightly colored houses and buses, and the solid surfing waves. The adventurous ones will enjoy kayaking on Lake Nicaragua, which is home to fresh water sharks, bike tours, swimming in Apoyo Lagoon, considered the clearest and deepest swimming hole, zip-lining, and hiking to active volcanoes. For those who want to explore this multiethnic land, there are flights coming from Tokyo, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. There are also several border crossings through international buses, cruises, and river boats.

DESTINATION: MALTA

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DESTINATION: TURKEY

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