



7 - The Magnificent

It's officially spring, so warm up in the mild climate of one of these overlooked treasures
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1 Brindisi ITALY

ON THE MAP

Looking east across the Adriatic Sea, Brindisi clings to the heel end of Italy's swinging boot. It also marks the end of the greatest Roman road in history. Once connecting the city all the way to Rome, the historic Via Appia is survived by one of two ancient stone columns that marked its terminus in Brindisi.

HOT DATE

In September 1943 the Italian king, his family and the ruling government arrived unexpectedly at the city's busy port. Brindisi remained de facto capital until February the following year. Locals still remain pretty annoyed they didn't have time to throw a proper party.

LOCAL WISDOM

Style-conscious travellers should remember la passeggiata. This slow evening stroll helps locals keep up with friends, family and whoever's bought flashy new clothes recently. It hits a peak on Sunday between 5pm and 7pm along Corso Garibaldi, so don't get caught in Bermuda shorts and flip-flops.

DON'T FORGET

The "white city" of Ostuni (left), 30km to the north-west. The southern region of Puglia, where Brindisi is both a province and a main city, is famed for its dazzling whitewashed houses.

2 Ajaccio CORSICA, FRANCE

ON THE MAP

Capital city of Corsica—the fourth-largest island in the Mediterranean—Ajaccio sits on a sheltered inlet on the west coast. Equidistant from Marseille (to the west) and Rome (to the east), the city has inherited both Gallic and Latin traits while remaining staunchly Corsican.

NAME DROP

Napoleon Bonaparte was born here in 1769. After being mercilessly teased in France for his distinctive Italian lilt, he got his own back by ruling the country with an iron fist and changing the course of history with ruthless military ambition. Feel free to visit his former home, but don't make fun of anyone's accent.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Local dishes have been influenced by culinary heavyweights France and Italy over the years, but the native ingredients punch well above their weight. Look out for sanglier (wild boar), brocciu (goat's cheese) and prisutu (cured ham), or head to Restaurant Le 20123 (www.20123.fr) on Rue de Roi de Rome for a proper gastronomic introduction.

DON'T FORGET

Your hiking boots. Corsica is home to Europe's toughest mountain-walking route, the GR20 (www.gr20.co.uk). Though amateurs should warm up first on the 1,500km of hiking trails that crisscross the island's Natural Country Park.

3 Bastia CORSICA, FRANCE

ON THE MAP

The principle port of Corsica, Bastia lies at the base of Cap Corse, looking east towards Italy. A fresh breeze is pretty constant on this northern peninsula, but so is sunshine. Some 340 days a year, to be exact.

HOT DATE

Bastia's Theatre Municipal has for years proved that little cities can be vibrant cultural hubs too. This month, expect the full artistic range from the fantastical Beijing Opera to dance spectacular Fame.

NAME DROP

The original bassist for The Police, Henry Padovani, was born here in 1952. He featured on their debut single, Fall Out, and the follow-up, Nothing Achieving, but failed to read between the lines and was dumped by the band at the fledgling age of 24. That's gotta sting.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

No-nonsense foods like figatellu (fried sausages) and migliaccilou (pancakes with goat's cheese) go down nicely with the local chestnut beer, Pietra and Corsica Cola. But more adventurous palates head north to the village of Erbalunga's best-kept secret, Restaurant Le Pirate (www.restaurantlepirate.com).

4 Dalaman TURKEY

ON THE MAP

Dalaman, on the Turkish Riviera, is famous for millionaire-magnet harbours and a picture-perfect coastline. But it's the interior of rugged mountains, lush valleys and crystal-clear rivers that really steals the show.

NAME DROP

The movements of Jack Nicholson, Madonna and Demi Moore around the nearby town of Göcek have never interested the locals much. But ask them about Cleopatra's mythical visit to one of their beautiful, pine-lined bays and they won't shut up.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Avoid the allure of seafood for a day and venture into the hills. Authentic rural flavours and breathtaking scenery combine at the Akkaya Garden Restaurant (www.akkayagarden.com), lovingly set within the remarkable landscape of the Dalaman Valley. Just 20 minutes from the airport if you're in a rush.

LOCAL WISDOM

The secret of looking young in these parts involves a relaxing boat trip through the protected Dalyan tributaries and a dip in the mud baths of Sultaniye. Overlooked by Lake Köyceğiz, these sulphur-rich, 40°C mud baths are accredited with making locals look 10 years younger.

5 Catania SICILY, ITALY

ON THE MAP

Threatened by Europe's largest active volcano to the north (Mount Etna), and outnumbered by a capital city to the west (Palermo), historic Catania refuses to be intimidated and its citizens enjoy life to the fullest throughout the year. This is, after all, a Sicilian city.

NAME DROP

"Math rock" legends Uzeda were formed in Catania. Favourites of late British DJ John Peel, the band is one of the most famous groups to emerge from this peculiar form of hard rock. Just ask the DJ at the Krossower club (www.krossower.com) for something with intricate jazz-derived rhythms, cerebral lyrics and intense hard rock riffs.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Look out for pasta alla norma on the menu. Named in honour of Vincenzo Bellini's opera Norma, which opened the city's Teatro Massimo Bellini (www.teatromassimobellini.it) in 1890, it's a delicious pasta dish, served with tomato sauce, fried aubergine, basil and lashings of ricotta cheese. Head to Ambasciata del Mare Viale (www.ambasciatadelmare.com) to sing its praises.

LOCAL WISDOM

Rumour has it the lava elephant on Catania's Fontana dell'Elefante statue was neuter when installed. But to appease the men of Catania, who saw the monument's lack of appendage as a slight to their virility, its sculptor secretly added a pair of testicles a few months later.

6 Hurghada, RED SEA, EGYPT

ON THE MAP

Once an unknown fishing village, Hurghada is now the hottest destination on Egypt's Red Sea Coast. Understandable if you consider a year-round temperature that rarely drops below 20°C and some of the best beaches on the planet.

NAME DROP

You're spoilt for choice with all the white sandy beaches feeding into crystal clear waters along the coast, but Mangroovy Beach stands out from the crowd. Pride of the nearby El Gouna resort, Mangroovy has made a name for itself as the kite-surfing centre of the region.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The authentic taste of Egypt comes in these three dishes: ful medames (slow-cooked fava beans, garlic and lemon juice), eish masri (traditional bread) and taameya (vegetable or spiced

meat patties). Hurghada's cliff-side restaurant, Felfela (Tel: +20 65 442 411), is recommended for all three. And the amazing sea views.

LOCAL WISDOM

The Giftun Island National Park. Take the 45-minute boat ride to the pristine Mahmya Beach (www.mahmya.com) on the south-east side and spend a day snorkelling amid the vibrant coral reefs.

7 Lamezia Terme, ITALY

ON THE MAP

Lamezia Terme looks west towards the Tyrrhennian Sea from the foot of Italy. A short distance from a stunning stretch of Calabrian coast, the city owes its existence to the sea and an inland area awash with remnants of ancient history.

HOT DATE

This part of Calabria is famed for its spectacular coast, which gives way to incredibly white sandy beaches. In 1968 the commune of Lamezia Terme was formed when historic communes Nicastro, Sambiase and Sant'Eufemia Lamezia decided they were too pretty not to have a private members' club.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Outside Lamezia Terme you'll find a selection of restaurants that typify the regional taste. Head to the coast and family-run fish restaurant L'Aragosta (www.ristorantelaragosta.com), where you'll find the secret to understated, Michelin-star quality seafood.

LOCAL WISDOM

The only time locals slow down is when they drive along the Costa degli Dei (God's Coast). A journey starting from Pizzo Calabro in the north, passing through historic Tropea and finishing at Capo Vaticano in the south, is a semi-religious experience thanks to the awe-inspiring landscape.

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