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PLACES
TO
GO
IN
2019

The Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilizations in Marseille, France.

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52 PLACES TO GO | 2019

46 Finn Hall is one of four food halls that opened in Houston last year.

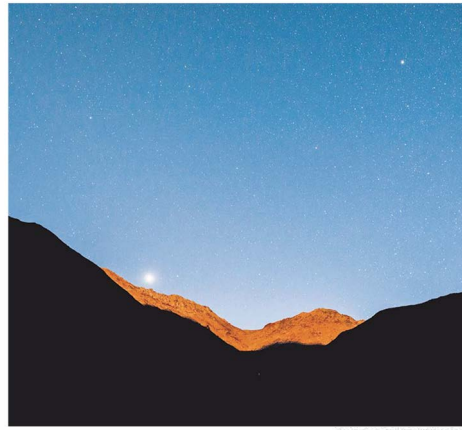


KIMBERLY DAVIS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

45 The ancient city of Yazd, Iran.



SHUTTERSTOCK



TERESA ALONSO FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

51 Venus rising over the mountains before sunrise in the Elqui Valley in Chile.



52 Overwater bungalows in Bora Bora, French Polynesia, northwest of Tahiti.

44 HONG KONG

Dazzling infrastructure eases travel but could threaten independence

After Britain returned its former colony to China in 1997, Hong Kong prided itself on resisting mainland interference. Last year saw the opening of a high-speed train that takes passengers all the way to Beijing, and a 34-mile sea bridge linking Hong Kong to the mainland for the first time, opening the question of whether that independent streak can survive. For travelers, though, boarding a train at the new West Kowloon station bound for Beijing — and more than 30 other destinations in China — is a game changer. The 1,200-mile trip to Beijing is just nine hours, and the business-class seats are roomy. Whether they are headed to China or not, travelers can indulge in British nostalgia at the Mandarin Oriental Hotel. The 25th-floor M bar offers fabulous views of the harbor, exotic cocktails like Saravak Tea Punch and memories of the 1960s when the hotel opened as a symbol of luxury and style in this ever-glamorous city. JANE PERLEZ

45 IRAN

Tourism cautiously returns to this Middle East jewel

Though tensions between Iran and the United States have escalated since President Trump took office, the appeal of Iran for adventurous travelers is obvious: the monumental ruins of ancient Persia; the spectacular, centuries-old mosques of Shiraz and Isfahan; the Grand Bazaar and Golestan Palace in bustling Tehran. One additional reason to visit in 2019 is a major exhibition scheduled to open at the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, a popular hangout for young Iranians. "Portrait, Still-life, Landscape" (Feb. 21 to April 20) will take over the entire museum, with a selection of about 500 works, including pieces by Andy Warhol, Mark Rothko and Marcel Duchamp, as well as about 40 Picassos recently discovered in the museum's storage facilities (much of the collection has been kept under wraps since the 1979 revolution). The United States State Department discourages, but does not prohibit, travel to Iran by American citizens, and Americans can travel to Iran only as part of an organized tour. Options for 2019 include three expeditions from Intrepid Travel, including the company's first-ever all-female tour. STUART EMRICH

46 HOUSTON

Rebounding bigger and better after a hurricane

After Hurricane Harvey, the city is back on its feet and showing off the everything-is-bigger-in-Texas attitude. Four food halls opened in 2018, including Finn Hall, which features up-and-coming chefs like the James Beard-nominated Jianyun Ye and a downtown outpost of his Chinese hot spot Mala Sichuan and a taqueria from the local favorite Goode Company. The five-diamond Post Oak Hotel opened in March 2018 with a two-story Rolls-Royce showroom, art by Frank Stella and a 30,000-bottle wine cellar; The Menil Collection, known for its eclectic art ranging from Byzantine antiques to 20th-century Pop Art, underwent a renovation of its main building and opened the 30,000-square-foot Menil Drawing Institute. The city's museum boom continues with an expansion of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, to be completed in 2020, a newly built location for the Holocaust Museum, which will move in this spring, and a restoration of the Apollo Mission Center that will open in time for the 50th anniversary of the moon landing in July. KELLY D'NARDO

47 COLUMBUS, OHIO

Is this the American city of the future?

With a revitalized riverfront and booming downtown, Columbus is already one of the nation's fastest-growing cities. Now, it's poised to become the model for the future of innovative urban transportation, with self-driving shuttles carrying travelers along the Scioto Mile, which recently completed a massive revitalization, adding 33 acres of riverfront green space for festivals, water sports and outdoor art. (The newly opened National Veterans Memorial and Museum also sits on the Scioto Peninsula.) Among the newest dining options are Veritas, which specializes in small-plate offerings; Service Bar, run by the young chef Avishar Barua, a veteran of New York's Mission Chinese and WD-50; and in the North Market neighborhood, veggie-forward Little Eater. The ultracool Short North Arts District offers access to the city's notable local businesses like the new fashion store Thread and the original Jeni's ice cream store. But don't skip Italian Village and German Village neighborhoods, where innovators and dreamers have opened destination shops like Stump Plants and Vernacular and bars like Cosecha. DANIEL SCHEFFLER

48 PLOVDIV, BULGARIA

A city ready for the spotlight

With its colorful, cobblestoned historic center, well-preserved Roman ruins and lively art scene, Bulgaria's second-largest city is surprisingly overlooked by tourists who favor the quirky, post-Soviet charm of the country's capital, Sofia. But as a European cultural capital of 2019, this European gem is ready to shine. Organizers have planned more than 500 events throughout the city and its region, including concerts, opera theater performances and street-food fairs. Tucked into the heart of central Bulgaria and built on seven hills, Plovdiv features an artistic quarter called Kapana, whose winding streets are lined with galleries and stylish cafes, as well as a beautifully restored Roman amphitheater that hosts summer opera performances under the stars. The city's location at the foot of the Rhodope Mountains — with their stunning views of peaks and deep gorges — makes it an excellent launch point for hiking day trips. ANN MAH