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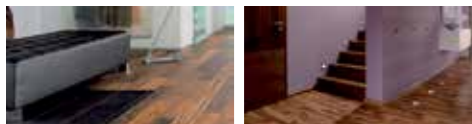


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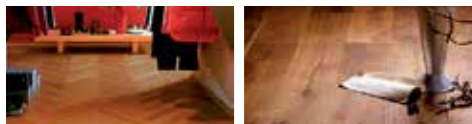


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Contents MAY



ABOUT THE MAY ISSUE

Early last month, *Baltic Outlook* author Una Meistere flew to Reykjavik, one of *airBaltic's* newest destinations, and travelled across Iceland (page 54). The trip ended up being deeply significant for her:

"I have always liked my first name. It's easy to pronounce in many languages and thus convenient to use when I want to reserve a table at a restaurant, for example. In Spanish- and Italian-speaking countries, 'Una' elicits a smile (and the unfailing *uno, dos, tres* or *uno, due, tre*). My name has also helped me at times. A well-known European art collector whom I once interviewed admitted that he agreed to meet with me because he associates 'Una' with the daughter of his good friend, the now deceased legendary curator Harald Szeemann. Her name is also Una. And now, on a marvellous volcanic island in the North Atlantic, I learned to my great surprise that 'Una' comes from an Icelandic word that can mean both 'friend' and 'the happy one'. With my trip across Iceland becoming a voyage in the land that spawned my name, the journey took on a completely new meaning. Tell me that there is no truth in the good old saying that 'God is in the details!'"

baltic^{outlook}

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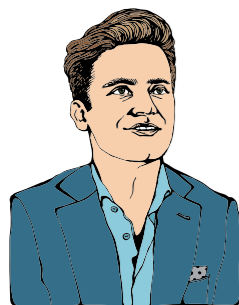
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City vs. country

I have always wondered why people tend to associate cities with an unhealthy pace of life, pollution and overpopulation, and much less with civilisation, education and growth. Perhaps the Puritan belief is still around that behind the glitter of city life lures a temptation to which no decent man should succumb. Even if we know that cities present people with far more opportunities for finding a job or learning something new, many of us still feel that rural Italy, Austria or Latvia are somewhat more genuine and authentic. An American presidential candidate recently referred to “New York values”, the look on his face suggesting that everybody should know what these stand for (nothing good, I suspect).

More than half (54%) of the global population now lives in cities, according to the United Nations. Yet many of us feel that the countryside’s “fresh air” helps to bring out our good and genuine

nature. Town and village dwellers seem closer to the rites of nature and to our primeval origins. Perhaps this all is true to a degree. But I have a problem with one tenet that stems from this view. It is the idea that national governments should primarily support regions and the countryside, rather than urban centres and especially capital cities. According to this train of thought, the cities are able to provide for themselves, while the regions need money to be invested into infrastructure and social support. It’s surprising how widespread this view is – from Belarus to Italy or from Finland to Spain – despite the fact that people in all of these countries are moving to cities and urbanisation is the order of the day.

Ask yourselves – when you travel, are you going to London or the United Kingdom? To Berlin or to Germany? To Moscow or to Russia? People will always take road trips to the countryside and look for tranquillity by the seaside. But we

are increasingly more inclined to experience first-hand the unique things that each particular city has to offer. People plan their weekend city breaks based on “what’s on” – be it a marathon or ice-hockey championship, a highly acclaimed opera production, great shopping, a new restaurant or an art exhibition. It is a 21st-century reality that cities are competing among themselves to a greater degree than countries in the quest to become popular tourist destinations. Cities are trying to attract people, talent, money and events. It is London vs. New York, Berlin vs. Barcelona or Stockholm vs. Riga, and less their host countries that lure people in a world that is highly connected by travel opportunities.

So, let us start thinking more about what is unique in our cities and how to help them be better than their urban counterparts in other places of the world. And let us urge our governments to take our capital cities more seriously. **BO**

Text by
MĀRTIŅŠ VANAGS
Illustration by
INGA BRIEDE

Mārtiņš Vanags is the managing director of the Skanste Development Agency in Riga. He has served as an advisor to Latvian ministers of the economy, foreign affairs and culture, and as a consultant to leading Latvian companies. He holds a Bachelor’s degree in philosophy from the University of Latvia and a Master’s degree in social and political thought from the University of Chicago.

SUITSUPPLY

Toy boys



SUITSUPPLY RIGA, GALLERIA RIGA SC, 2ND FLOOR, DZIRNAVU 67, RIGA.



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SPOTLIGHT ON THE SPRING

Five things that you should do in Latvia in May

- 1/ Admire the magical range of colours on blooming lilac bushes
- 2/ See a good movie during European Film Week at the ornate and historical *Splendid Palace* cinema house (May 20-25)
- 3/ Complement your home interior with premium-quality linen curtains
- 4/ Check out the works on display at the biannual *Riga Photomonth*

- 5/ Enjoy a tasty meal at any one of Riga's finest eating establishments during Riga Restaurant Week (May 16-22)



Text by **ZANE NIKODEMUSA** and **ROGER NORUM**
Publicity photos

READING LIST



Lyudmila Ulitskaya. *The Big Green Tent*

Set in 1950s Moscow and written by one of Russia's most acclaimed writers, this engaging novel of Soviet dissident life narrates the experience of three anti-establishment school friends – an orphaned poet, a precocious pianist and a would-be photographer. A reinvented version of the classic Russian novel, this survey of post-Stalinist life revolves around love, banned books and a secret police force with the finely-honed ability to inspire paranoia and betrayal.

Åsne Seierstad. *One of Us*

Written by a Norwegian investigative journalist (and author of *The Bookseller of Kabul*), this psychiatric case history details the Oslo massacre of July 2011 and the subsequent trial of Anders Breivik. Based on extensive testimonies, interviews and police records, Seierstad follows the lives of both the killer and a select group of his victims. The book takes a close look at the intricacies of Norwegian society, while showing the perpetrator to harbour the same deadly combination of violent fantasies and inferiority complex often found among gun-wielding teens in the USA.

INSTAFASHION



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① [instagram.com/zibstore](https://www.instagram.com/zibstore)

ON THIS MONTH'S MENU

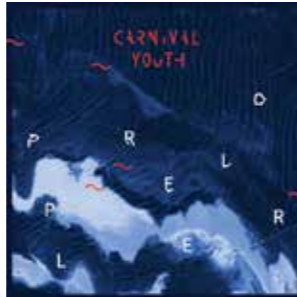
Celebrate life in all of its splendour with some tips from *Baltic Outlook*



Luxury The iconic *Happy Diamonds* collection by luxury jewellery house *Chopard* is turning 40 this year. To celebrate the anniversary, *Chopard* is releasing a new series of watches and jewellery. A wise investment to fit your taste and lifestyle.



Children Colorful clay chalks in the shape of vegetables, fruit and berries by Latvian designer Ieva Pastare allow for drawing on tiles, pavement, blackboards and paper. Drawing develops the hand muscles, which in turn stimulates brain function, language and creativity. Last year, the product won a Latvian Annual Design Award.
① drawies.com



Music Promising Latvian indie-rock band *Carnival Youth* recently released its second album, *Propeller*. The band is one of the most successful new-generation musical ensembles from the Baltic region. Earlier this year, it received a European Border Breakers Award at *Eurosonic 2016*.

TIME TO INSPIRE

In order to regain a sense of emotional balance and seek inspiration, it is not always necessary to go out on extensive trips abroad. Sometimes, a quiet afternoon by a lake or river is enough. Nowadays, modern technologies can also be used in the search for inspiration in one's professional field. Have you ever thought of watching and listening to a conference lecture in a pleasant setting of your choice, rather than in a crowded and air-conditioned auditorium? For extra inspiration, tune in on May 13 to a live stream of the inspirational *Reputation Time Riga* conference, which will bring together more than 400 business leaders, communications specialists, marketing professionals and public opinion shapers from the Baltic region and other parts of Europe (reputationtime.lv).



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Text by LIINA KARO,
DOVYDAS KIAULEIKIS and
ZANE NIKODEMUSA
Publicity photos

**METEOR
SHOWER**
(ZVAIGŽŅU
LIETUS)
solo exhibition
by contemporary
jewellery artist
Māris Šustiņš
Putti art gallery, Riga
May 20-June 13

Māris Šustiņš (b. 1970) is considered to be one of Latvia's most romantic jewellery artists. His distinctive and varied jewellery-making style often displays wistful and lyrical Art Nouveau elements. Šustiņš enjoys working with titanium that is inlaid with silver, gold and precious stones in various shapes and colours.

① putti.lv
Peitavas iela 5



Estonian superstar Jüri Pootsmann

**CONCERTS AT THE
TALLINN CREATIVE HUB**
Creative Hub (Kultuurikatel), Tallinn
May 19, 28 and 29

The Tallinn Creative Hub is a new and exciting venue that showcases different events, from theatre performances to fashion shows and technology displays. This month, the Hub is hosting three concerts that should not be missed! On May 19, the Estonian indie rock band *Frankie Animal* will present its debut album, *The Backbeat*, while on May 28, the wonderful *I Wear* Experiment* will play music from its new album, *Patience*. One day later, on May 29, concertgoers will get a chance to see this year's Eurovision entry from Estonia, charming local superstar Jüri Pootsmann, together with another talented Estonian singer, Mick Pedaja.

① kultuurikatel.ee
Tickets at piletilivi.ee
Põhja puistee 27a

**REOPENING of
the Latvian National
Museum of Art**

Riga
May 4

After a three-year, 31-million-euro expansion and renovation, the Latvian National Museum of Art will once again open its doors to the public on May 4, Latvia's second Independence Day (declared in 1990). Not only will you be able to marvel at the museum's stunning interior and new underground art space, you also be able to view impressive works by Latvian heavyweights. A solo show of paintings by one of Latvia's living art legends, Miervaldis Polis (b. 1948), will take place in the museum's Great Hall. The exhibition *Illusion as Reality* will be the first to represent all of Polis' periods of creative activity.

① lnmm.lv
Kr. Valdemāra iela 10

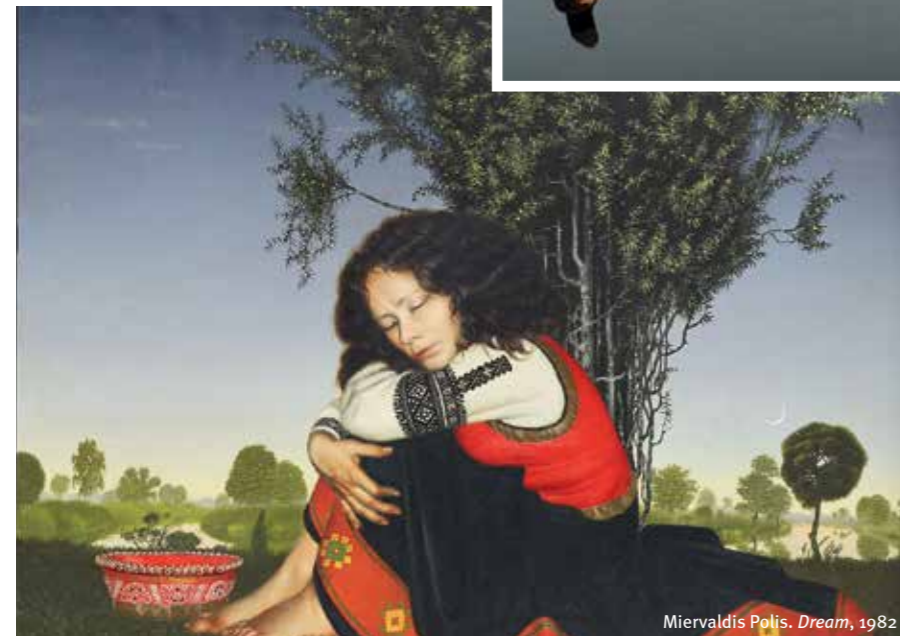
MAY 2016

**NEW BALTIC DANCE
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CONTEMPORARY DANCE
FESTIVAL**

Various locations, Vilnius
May 3-19

For the 20th year in a row, Vilnius will become a showcase of contemporary dance, with this year's festival concentrating on artists from Canada. The culmination will be a closing show by Marie Chouinard, a superstar of the dance world. Her provocative performance will feature a shocking and seemingly painful dance with crutches to the tune of Johann Sebastian Bach's *Goldberg Variations*.

① dance.lt
Tickets at tiketa.lt



Miervaldis Polis. *Dream*, 1982



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Independently minded

**BENJAMIN CLEMENTINE
CONCERT**



**Compensa Concert Hall, Vilnius
May 13**

British sensation Benjamin Clementine has come from nowhere and taken the music industry by storm. His heartfelt performances, hypnotising voice and authentic lyrics made him

one of the most popular artists on music streaming platforms last year, garnered him a prestigious *Mercury* award and landed him a large contract. This is his only stop in the Baltics during his world tour.

Tickets at bilietupasautis.lt
Kernavės gatvė 84



**LATTELECOM RIGA
MARATHON**

Riga, May 14-15

Riga's 26th annual marathon will bring together thousands of runners

from all over the world, giving participants the choice of running in one of four distances: the full marathon, the half-marathon, 10 km and 6 km. The marathon's scenic course will wind through the Old Town, pass architectural monuments and cross over bridges. Find your rhythm and enjoy your run!

📍 lattelecomrigasmaratons.lv
11. novembra krastmala



KALAMAJA DAYS

Kalamaja, Tallinn

May 21-22

Kalamaja is definitely one of the most dynamic, creative and quickly developing parts of Tallinn. The trendy and hip neighbourhood is celebrating spring and life with a two-day festival called Kalamaja Days, which is taking place for the eighth time. A weekend

full of happy people, garden cafés, a farmers' market and handicraft fair, music and theatre performances, sports and kids' activities, excursions, a photo competition and much more are in store for visitors. This is a fantastic opportunity to experience the hospitality of Tallinn's inhabitants.

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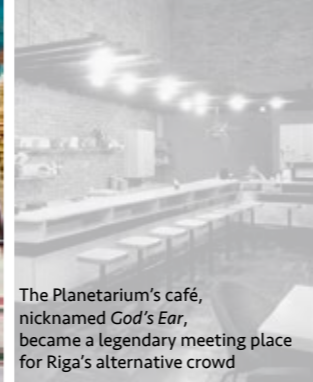
*S&P 2013





Details **RIGA CLOSEUP**

Text by **LIENE PĀLĒNA**
 Photos by **LAURIS AIZUPIETIS (F64)** and courtesy of the Latvian Museum of Architecture



The Planetarium's café, nicknamed *God's Ear*, became a legendary meeting place for Riga's alternative crowd

Timeless

The unbelievable story behind the one of the most beautiful cathedrals in Northern Europe

In the very centre of Riga, on Esplanāde Square, stands one of the most majestic buildings in the city – the Nativity of Christ Cathedral. It is the largest Orthodox house of worship in Latvia and welcomes anyone seeking spiritual peace. A few decades back, however, the Soviet Union's totalitarian regime found other uses for Riga's Orthodox cathedral.

Construction of the imposing Neo-Byzantine structure began in 1876, under the directorship of principal architect Robert Pflug. Only six years later, the church's imposing bells were hung, the largest weighing 13 tons. Upon its completion, the cathedral was the most ornate structure in the city, its interior one of heretofore unseen opulence and its collection of icons unique. Although the building withstood the devastation of both world wars, the Soviet authorities shuttered it in 1963 – there were even calls for demolishing it.

Fortunately, the Soviets decided to preserve the historical edifice as an architectural monument and turn it into a "House of Knowledge". Over the next three decades, the building underwent major changes and became an important centre of Riga's social life. The crosses surmounting its domes were sawed off, the bells bricked in or removed, and the wall that had been covered with icons became a movie screen.



Another floor was carved out to house exhibition halls and a café that people came to call *God's Ear (Dieva auss)*. The vast dome became a planetarium where the public could learn more about the stars and planets. This grand "House of Knowledge" received nearly half a million visitors per year.

The Nativity of Christ Cathedral is again a house of worship today, restored to its former grandeur. The restoration had to be started from scratch when the Soviet Union broke apart. It was impossible to renew the Byzantine-style frescoes with early Christian ornamentation, but Pflug's dream of gilding the great dome was fulfilled – its surface is now clad in 57,740 sheets of fine .980 gold leaf. **80**

After major modifications, Riga's Orthodox Cathedral was dressed in the trappings of Modernism. 1964. Architect: Juris Skalbergs



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Text by LIENE PĀLENA
Photo by Alamy

Slow down

Just east of Old Town Tbilisi is an area of ancient sulphur bathhouses. Why not come and try them for yourself?

The most unforgettable experience that you can have in Tbilisi could be the sulphur baths.

Public bathing has been an established tradition for the hot-blooded but hospitable Georgians since time immemorial. The bathhouses take up an entire neighbourhood of the Georgian capital – Abanotubani, or the so-called Bath District. You can't miss this area when you're exploring the Old Town. If you don't notice the ancient clay tiles of the domed bathhouses, built between the 17th and 19th centuries, then you will surely know of their existence by their sulphurous smell.

The secret to the baths' fame is that they are supplied by underground springs that have a high sulphur content. According to legend, Tbilisi was founded precisely because of these springs – the pleasures of bathing in the warm waters were so addictive.

Georgian poet Ioseb Grishashvili wrote that "if you visit Tbilisi without visiting the sulphur baths, it is the equivalent of travelling to Paris without visiting the Eiffel Tower." However, it would be quite wrong to think that only tourists head for

Abanotubani. For many locals, the baths are a necessary ritual. Honoured guests have been received there and important occasions have been commemorated. In an earlier era, visiting the baths was practically the only entertainment available to Georgian women.

The Georgians whom I met at the baths emphasised the continued importance of these establishments in the lives of Tbilisi's inhabitants. I met people who said that they go there at least once a week not only to cleanse their bodies, but also to uplift their spirits. A few said that going to the baths was a tradition passed down to them through the generations, while others praised the quality of the massages offered by the bath keepers.

Some locals insist that you should begin your visit to Tbilisi at the baths, which will help you to switch to the Georgian rhythm of life. Soaking in the warm sulphur-scented waters, coupled with artful massages, will practically put you in a trance. You will find many different baths in Tbilisi, including public baths (the most popular are No. 5 and Mirzoev), private baths and establishments catering to VIPs. The latter, however, are usually not visited by most locals due to their high prices. **BO**



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Bar Basquiat

Text by **UNA MEISTERE**,
anothertravelguide.com
Publicity photos

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Amsterdam

The capital of the Netherlands has been an important crossroads for ages. Throughout the centuries, trade routes and cultures have met in this port city, its restless, ever-changing spirit offering inspiration for countless creative ideas. The exhibition **Made in Amsterdam - 100 Years in 100 Works of Art** (Klaverstraat 92; amsterdammuseum.nl/en/exhibitions/made-in-amsterdam-100-years-100-works-art, through July 31) allows visitors to witness 100 of the most significant interactions between this city and various artists over a period of 100 years. The works by Marlene Dumas, George Hendrik Breitner, Karel Appel and other artists are arranged chronologically.

Those who are interested in getting an overview of the current design scene should head for **Xbank** (Spuistraat 172/174; xbank.amsterdam). A megaplatform for new Dutch design, Xbank is located in an early 20th-century bank building. This venue is indeed a vast one – its 700 square metres are devoted to works from the forefront of fashion, design and art in the Netherlands. There's something here for every taste and every wallet, with prices ranging from 5 to 100,000 euros. The industrial interior is dominated by modular wooden boxes that provide flexibility for changing the accents and atmosphere of the space.

An ode to Amsterdam's mutinous, free-thinking spirit awaits you at the new **Bar Basquiat** (Javastraat 88-90; barbasquiat.nl). Its inspiration is Jean-Michel Basquiat (1960-1988), an enfant terrible of the American art scene, who spent some time in Amsterdam a few months before his death of a heroin overdose at the age of 27. Basquiat is often cited as a late 20th-century version of Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890), for like his Dutch counterpart, Basquiat experienced dark periods and depression. In any case, the bar succeeds in incarnating the spirit of the wild American graffiti artist who later became a Neo-Expressionist painter, a friend of Andy Warhol's and cultural icon. The bar is located in a former supermarket, which also housed a butchers' section. The red colour recalls that history, whilst scribbles, wire collages and texts reincarnate the artist.



Xbank



Double Date: Love and Ecstasy
Micha Klein, 1996, Amsterdam
Museum collection



Photo by Dohudhah

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Details **CITIES OF THE MONTH**



Malcolm McLaren and Vivienne Westwood in 1977

London

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Pharmacy 2 restaurant

Forty years ago, an extravagant couple from London's King's Road – Vivienne Westwood (b. 1941) and Malcolm McLaren (1946-2010) – rechristened their boutique, *Too Fast To Live, Too Young To Die*, and gave it a new name, *Sex*, vastly stretching the boundaries of good taste and highlighting the new store name with a neon pink sign. *Sex* swiftly became a popular venue for non-conformists, who turned out to be a wild and rebellious bunch. However, that wasn't enough for the inventive couple; Westwood and McLaren wanted to give their anarchistic antics a conceptual framework. In the pursuit of still more publicity, McLaren dreamt up a rock group that would wear Westwood's clothing, thus drawing more attention to the shop, and so the *Sex Pistols* were born. The rest, as they say, is history. The couple behind this setup might not even have realised that they would become the godparents of a whole new subculture – punk.

McLaren is no longer among us and the rebels who are still alive have gone grey, but the party isn't over – London will celebrate punk's 40th birthday this year, offering a rich programme of exhibitions, concerts, films and other events. The British Library will open the exhibition **Punk 1976-78** on May 13, and the British Film Institute will show films on the theme in August. The entire programme can be found at punk.london.

Meanwhile, there's a fantastic place to contemplate the era that we live in and the manifestations of our consumer culture – the Newport Street Gallery is hosting a **Jeff Koons** exhibition (newportstreetgallery.com) from May 18 to October 16. The gallery belongs to Damien Hirst, the most controversial showman in the British arts scene. Koons, for his part, has become a superstar in the analogous American scene, rivalling Hirst in record-breaking prices and marketing ploys. The exhibition features three decades of Koons' work, including paintings, drawings and sculptures created between 1979 and 2014 – all of them from Hirst's private collection.

A few art market trophies are also to be found, including works from the *Popeye*, *Made in Heaven*, and *Luxury and Degradation* series. In addition, the gallery is offering a remake of the legendary restaurant that was once tied to Hirst's fame (or infamy) – **Pharmacy 2** (pharmacyrestaurant.com). The original establishment in Notting Hill lasted from 1988 to 2003 and earned wide publicity because its interior used Hirst's famous artwork of medicine bottles and tablets. That ran foul with the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain, which felt that such an interior might confuse those who were really seeking a pharmacy. Following the restaurant's closure, Hirst earned 11 million pounds from the sale of its interior items at a Sotheby's auction. A large medicinal arsenal can be found at *Pharmacy 2* as well, while the cooking has been entrusted to Mark Hix, a well-known British chef who is providing his versions of classic British and European cuisine.



Titi, Jeff Koons, 2004-2009

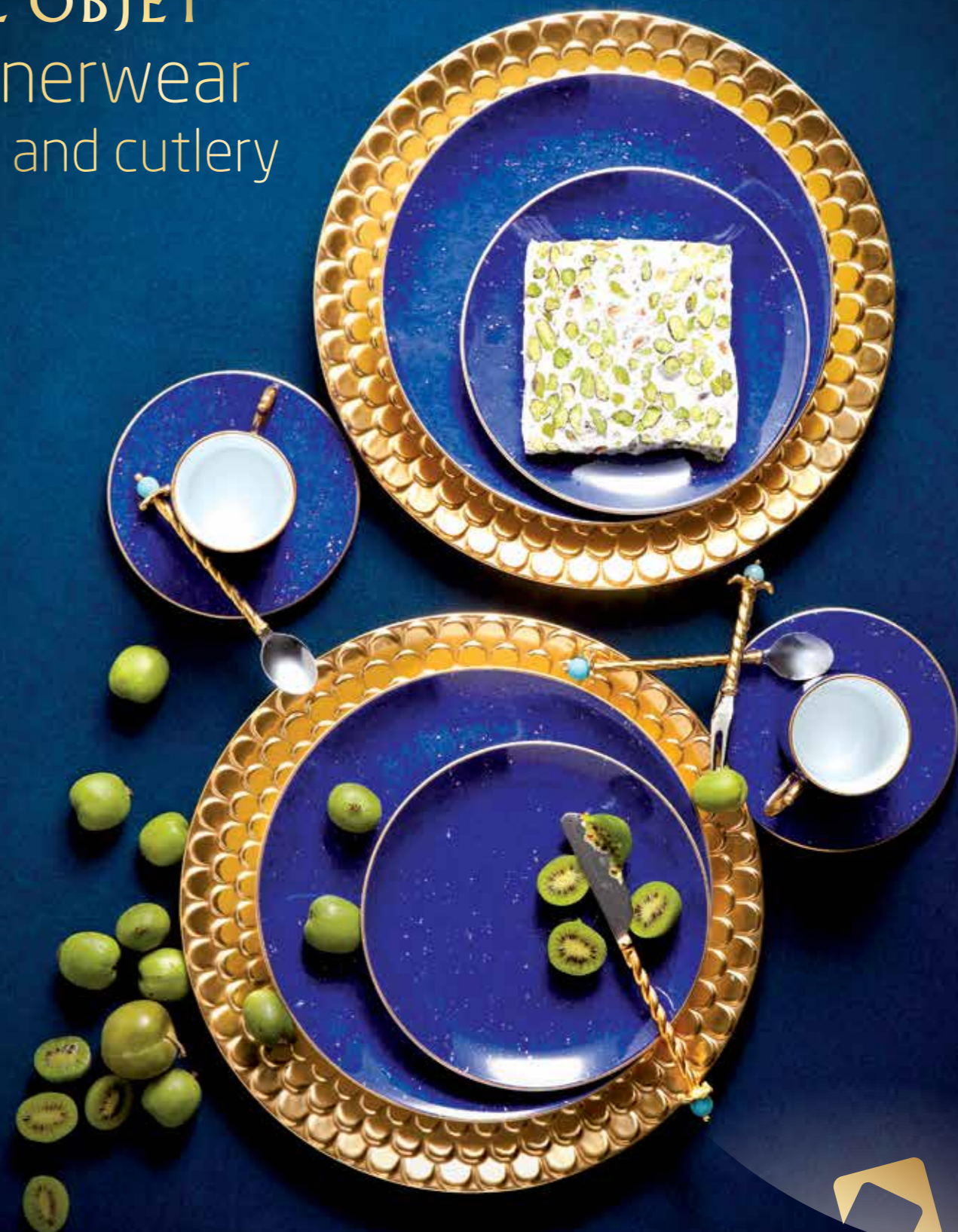
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MODULS
INTERJERA SALONS

www.modulsinterjers.lv. K. Ulmaņa gatve 140, Rīga

Photo by Prudence Cuming Associates
© ZH Restaurant Ltd



The Winery Hotel

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Magasin III, an exhibition hall in the former free harbour of Frihamnen, will be showing art by the scandalous British duo, the Chapman brothers, until the beginning of June. The showing is called **The Nature of Particles - Jake and Dinos Chapman / Francisco Goya** (Frihamnen, Frihamnsgatan 28; until 5 June - magasin3.com). For those who may have forgotten, the Chapmans were part of the iconic Young British Artists group in the 1990s. With the support of advertising guru and art collector Charles Saatchi, the group quickly became a sensation in the art world. The Chapmans' works address society, politics, war and religion, often joining absurd and humorous elements to scenes of brutal violence.

The inspiration for this exhibit is Goya's *Los Desastres de la Guerra* (The Disasters of War, 1810-1823), a series of 80 etchings depicting the violence and destruction that Napoleon's army wreaked upon Spain. The Chapman brothers, using Goya's motifs and blending them with contemporary symbols of war, created 83 works for their own series titled *Disasters of War, 1999*. Twenty of Goya's originals are also being shown to emphasise the dialogue between the present and the past.

Although Sweden isn't known for its wine, the Nordic country does offer some opportunities for serious hedonistic wine-tasting. **The Winery Hotel** (Rosenborgsgatan 20; thewineryhotel.se) is a new establishment on the outskirts of Stockholm. Its 184 rooms are located in a red brick building by *Archus Arkitektur*, and the structure does indeed look like a winery that could have been plucked from the cypresses of a Tuscan hillside. The hotel really does have its own winery, too - a wine expert from Le Macchiole ferments the house wine from grapes grown in Tuscany's Terreno region. You can watch part of the process from the hotel lobby - barrels behind a glass wall are a design element, and the hotel has a wine bar as well as a restaurant.

Have you ever heard of a restaurant for adults? **Hillenberg** (Humlegårdsgatan 14; hillenberg.se), a newcomer to Stockholm's dining scene, has been billed as "a place for grown-ups" by its chef, Karl Ljung. In other words, this place is meant for people with a certain maturity and a good number of years behind their belts. The décor is classic and probably won't go out of style even in 50 years, while time-tested European cuisine with a light Scandinavian accent rules in the kitchen. **BO**



Restaurant Hillenberg

Stockholm



Not to Dot, Jake and Dinos Chapman, 2013

Photo by Jack Hems, courtesy of White Cube



Photo by Benoit Derrier

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Text by **AGRA LIEGE**
Photo courtesy of
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(argentous-yacht.com)

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WAY

There is no limit to the adventures and quality leisure time that Greece can offer. With over 6,000 islands and islets scattered in the Aegean and Ionian Seas, this Mediterranean country boasts a fascinating history, fantastic food, beautiful beaches and lots of sunshine. While Greece has long been popular with vacationers, it has recently been attracting an increasing number of rich and famous travellers who hop from one island to the other on luxurious yachts.

Dreamy blue waters, clean shores, an incredible cultural heritage and a laid-back atmosphere ensure plenty of visits by the well-to-do. The yachting season in the Greek Islands lasts from May through October, with July and August being the busiest and hottest months. It has become especially popular to sail around the Greek Archipelago, making stops and enjoying various attractions both on land and at sea, while revelling in the privacy and seclusion of a fully equipped yacht – perfect for Hollywood actors, pop stars and multi-millionaires.

Many actors got their first taste of Greece when filming on location. With its spectacular scenery and

historical architecture, Greece has been a desirable setting for many a big-budget production. Among the best known are *For Your Eyes Only* (1981), in which James Bond soars over the famous Meteora monasteries, *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* (2001) on Kefalonia Island, and *Tomb Raider* (2001) with Angelina Jolie in Santorini.

Many actors got their first taste of Greece when filming on location

Celebrity fans of Greece include the likes of Tom Hanks, the Beckhams, Russell Crowe and Sarah Jessica Parker. Those who wish to be seen aim for Hydra Island, where fashion designer Valentino and well-known fashion blogger Olivia Palermo hang out. Catherine Zeta Jones and Michael Douglas, on the other hand, prefer more private and luxurious sailing between the Greek islands on their yacht. Whichever way suits you best, why not spend your next holiday in Greece celebrity-style? **BO**

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The peaceful Coq D'Argent rooftop garden terrace in London

Text by **AGRA LIEGE**
Photo courtesy of Coq D'Argent

An evening on top of the city

Rooftop bars and terraces all over Europe have spearheaded a long-awaited trend of dining and drinking beneath the stars.

Just close your eyes, feel the light evening breeze on your face, hear the laughter and muted chatter around you and the distant traffic sounds down below... and wonder is there anything better than a rooftop terrace on which to spend a summer night (or day) in the city? High above the noise and daily stresses, cocktails have never tasted better than when sipped under open skies, be they starry or sunlit - and stylish places to enjoy them are springing up all around Europe, often on the roofs of equally stylish hotels.

When the sun comes out in London, finding slightly sheltered outdoor spots for drinks is the thing to do. Everyone is out and about, but you can catch a glimpse of the action from above. One of the best-located rooftop bars in the UK's capital is of the *Rockwell Bar at The Trafalgar*. Grab one of the seats that look out across Trafalgar Square and you're pretty much eye-to-eye with Lord Nelson. This small, chic but laid-back locale is often booked for private parties, so check and see if you can visit it beforehand!

At a wildly different location - this time in the buzzing commercial heart of

the City of London - is the peaceful *Coq D'Argent* rooftop garden terrace. Its indoor restaurant is quite pricey, but snacking outside will not rob you of much, and it will offer you a view of both the breathtaking garden and the panorama below.

Rome, for its part, has another rooftop space to be proud of. The bar on the roof of the *Hotel Raphael*, near the vibrant Piazza Nova, is one of the ultimate places for

Cocktails have never tasted better than when sipped under open skies

enjoying the city's lively atmosphere, while avoiding the hordes of tourist traffic.

Croatia stands out with *The Top* at the top of the *Adriana Hotel* in Hvar, one of the hippest island spots in the country. *The Top* provides a full view of the picturesque town, with cool multi-level terraces and a ready-to-party clientele. So, whichever place you visit in Europe this summer, go up and you won't regret it! **BO**

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Details **STYLE**

Text by **DACE VAIVARA**
Publicity photos and
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Peterhof Palace
Photo by Denise Esposito,
deniseesposito.com

Dress by Alena Akhmadullina,
EUR 733.20 (RUB 57,000),
alenaakhmadullina.ru

iPhone 6
cover by
Alena
Akhma-
dullina,
EUR 32.16
(RUB 2,500),
alenaakhmadullina.ru

Scarf by Alena
Akhmadullina,
EUR 186.52
(RUB 14,500),
alenaakhmadullina.ru

Sweater by
Tatyana Parfionova,
EUR 167.22
(RUB 13,000),
parfionova-home.ru

Shoes by
Tatyana
Parfionova,
EUR 450.21
(RUB 35,000),
*parfionova-
home.ru*

Skirt by Alena
Akhmadullina,
EUR 159.50
(RUB 12,400),
alenaakhmadullina.ru

Chair by Tatyana
Parfionova,
EUR 1,119.10
(RUB 87,000),
parfionova-home.ru

St. Petersburg

Russian harmony and traditions

Often called Russia's cultural capital, St. Petersburg has a unique sense of style when it comes to fashion, blending Slavic and eastern motifs with European traditions. The clothing created by the city's fashion designers interweaves creativity and harmony, while reflecting a sense of aristocracy born from St. Petersburg's culture, history and architecture.

Tatyana Parfionova is one of Russia's most renowned fashion designers. She founded her own fashion house in St. Petersburg in 1995 and her clothing collections have been featured in Paris, Milan, New York and Beijing. Some of her creations are also housed in the State Russian Museum. Parfionova's fancy embroidery makes use of motifs from the folklore of diverse nations.

Alena Akhmadullina's fashion house, founded in 2001, is one of the most successful in the history of Russian fashion. Inspired by fairy tales and Russian folklore, the designer turns stories into reality and makes dreams come true with extraordinary prints and silhouettes. Akhmadullina's clothes have been worn by top model Naomi Campbell, actress Eva Green, singer Patricia Kaas and Russian stars Ksenia Sobchak and Zemfira.

Oleg Biryukov is another master of design who stands behind St. Petersburg's style, his intellectual chic tempered with ascetic minimalism. Biryukov consciously avoids superfluous ornamentations, striving for an individualistic and harmonious image with the perfect cut and a subtle elegance. **BO**



Oleg Biryukov
Photo by Biryukov Studio

SHOPPING IN ST. PETERSBURG

ModaNew
Opened in 1992, *ModaNew* carries only clothing from local and other Russian designers (about 20 in all), including Alena Akhmadullina, Ilya Chelyshev, Yuri Malashenko, Faina Tveritina, Karnache'va, Natalia Meckler and Spicery. The store features limited edition clothing in diverse styles, with items for both everyday wear and special occasions. Bolshoi prospekt P.S. 28/ 1
① *modanew.spb.ru*

Tatyana Parfionova Fashion House
Tatyana Parfionova Fashion House in the city centre has become a symbol of St. Petersburg's fashion and culture. Every season sees a fresh prêt-à-porter line from the *White by Parfionova* collection as well as unique works from Parfionova's haute couture collection of evening gowns. The store also takes custom orders and offers interior items from her *Home Design* line. Nevsky Prospekt 51
① *parfionova.ru*

Studio Stas Lopatkin
The St. Petersburg-born designer created his own brand and *Studio of Beautiful Clothes* in 2001. His studio offers romantic and elegant haute couture collections of cocktail, wedding, made-to-measure and other dresses. There is also men's wear in casual, classic, business, evening and uniform styles. Petrogradskaya storona, ulitsa Lenina 10
① *lopatkin.ru*

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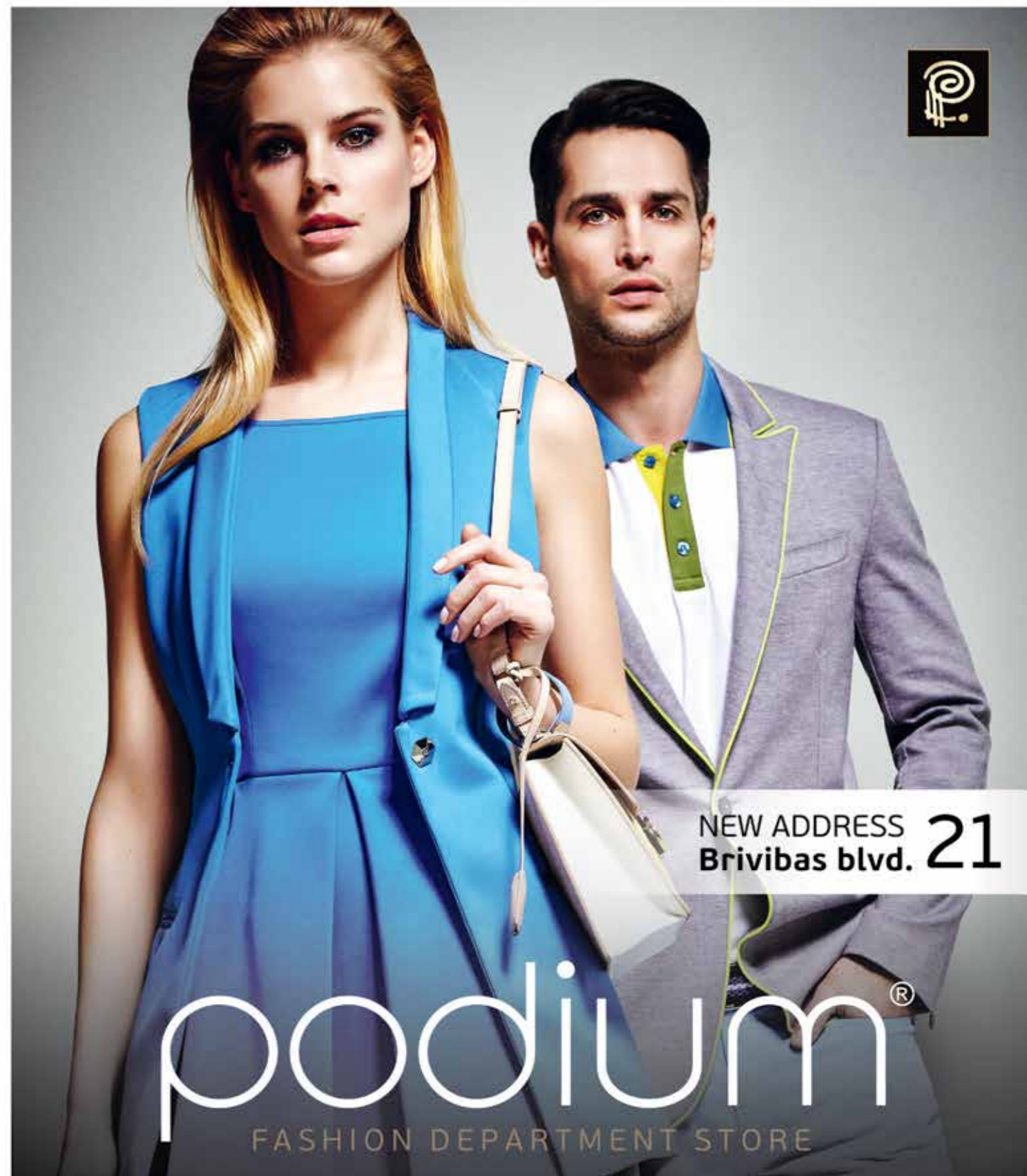
S

ummer breeze

If summer had an official stone, then we'd bet that it would be turquoise, so why not brighten your style with a turquoise accessory? You can't go wrong with this beautiful gemstone!

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- Earrings with turquoise droplets**, EUR 13, *Riviera*
- Long earrings with beaded fringes**, EUR 19, *Kazene*
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Text by **KRISTĪNE BUDŽE**,
Pastaiga
Photo courtesy of *Nendo*

Chairs

that **SEEM** to be missing
something

The latest collaboration between the Italian furniture maker *Alias* and the Japanese design studio *Nendo* has materialised in the *Twig* collection – a set of chairs with peculiar-looking backrests.

WHAT IS IT?

The common feature of the chairs is their aluminium legs, but the backs are not at all alike; they're made of ash tree wood and vary by design. Interestingly, the Italian designers were able to blend the two materials so perfectly that the aluminium and wood form a single flowing line. The most alluring models feature chairbacks from which parts have been removed, the sleek lines of the design being nonetheless continuous. In 2016, *Alias* introduced *Twig* chairs with a dark colour.

WHY IS IT SPECIAL?

Twig was designed by the Japanese design studio *Nendo*. Its founder, architect and designer Oki Sato, is considered to be a wunderkind of design. He set up his studio immediately after completing his studies in architecture at Tokyo's prestigious Waseda University at the age of 24. It didn't

take long for him to draw worldwide attention. Participating in Milan's international furniture expo *i Saloni*, the most significant design event of its kind, Sato was astounded by the event's vast scope and decided that he definitely wanted to be part of the Italian design scene. Nowadays, it's nearly impossible to avoid *Nendo* in Milan. One of the most talked about events at the Milan expo last year was an exhibit of everything that *Nendo* had created in the course of a single year – over 100 objects with various functions were displayed at an Italian palazzo. In fact, *Nendo* simultaneously works on 400 different design elements on a daily basis. Asked how he can be so prolific, Sato answered:

"I'm like a spinning top. As long as it's spinning fast, it's stable, but as soon as it starts to slow down, it wobbles. It's the same with me."

HOW DOES IT FIT INTO INTERIORS?

One of the latest trends in interior design is placing dissimilar chairs around the dining room table. People who'd like to follow this trend but don't wish to succumb to total chaos in their dining room will love the latest models from the *Twig* collection – the chairs match in style and colour, but their backs bear striking variations. The chairs stand out the most when displayed as a collection, permitting one to take in the interplay of the different designs. Although Sato claims not to be a fan of the excessive minimalism that is associated with Japanese design, the *Twig* collection would go well with a completely white, minimalistic interior. However, the subtlety of the light-toned chairs' design would be lost in a cosily colourful space, where the new, darker versions would probably fit in the best. **BO**
① nendo.jp

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Text by **ILZE POLE**
Photos courtesy of
ĒRIKS BLEKTE

This is your **captain** speaking

Baltic Outlook introduces you to some of the most important people at *airBaltic* – its flight crew members.

ĒRIKS BLEKTE (49),

from Latvia, captain of
Boeing 737 aircraft
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FAVOURITE **BOOK**

I'll rephrase this to "books that have left the greatest influence upon me".

These are the New Testament, plays by the famous Latvian writer Rainis and *Faust* by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe.

HOW IT ALL **BEGAN**

I really liked trains and planes during my childhood, and I first considered becoming a commercial airline pilot while conducting my military service in the Soviet army. However, at the time it was possible to train for that profession only outside of Latvia and I didn't want to leave home again so soon after returning from the army, so I studied forest management at the Latvian University of Agriculture. Later I had a chance to study at the Riga Aviation University and eventually acquired some flight skills in the Latvian air force. I have been with *airBaltic* for the past 18 years.

SNAPSHOT TO SHARE

This snapshot was taken from the cockpit on March 31, 2012, during a flight from Milan to Riga. We were catching up with another *airBaltic* plane from Zurich on the same route. Altitude difference: 600 metres.



FAVOURITE **RUNWAY**

The most interesting airport that I have landed at is in Paro, Bhutan. It is located in a Himalayan valley between two steep mountain ridges. You have to make some challenging manoeuvres at low altitude in order to land, which would not be permitted at any of the airports that we usually fly to on a daily basis.

THINGS THAT MIGHT **SURPRISE** SOMEONE WHO STEPS INTO THE COCKPIT

People are usually surprised at the large number of buttons, levers and instruments. We explain that generally most modern smart devices have hundreds of more functions and options. While it is vital for a pilot to know the function of every item in the cockpit, the most important thing is to follow the dynamics of the flight and predict various situations in advance.

BEST THING ABOUT **BEING A PILOT**

Although being a pilot demands discipline and punctuality, it provides a pleasant sense of freedom, both on the job and outside of work.

HOBBIES

I enjoy an active lifestyle, as well as music and books. My favourite sports are skating, cycling and cross-country skiing. I also like football and ice hockey.

LAST **DESTINATION** FLOWN TO AS A PASSENGER

I flew back from Zurich to Riga during my vacation last August.

THREE THINGS THAT I **NEVER LEAVE** HOME WITHOUT

I had a list of things that I always brought with me when I was ten years old: a pocket flashlight, a pocket knife, a bus ticket and a 20-kopek coin. Now I no longer have such a list.

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Cycle of life

Ratchet up your urban bicycle game with the latest hip road tech



Text by **ROGER NORUM**
Publicity photos



RECON JET

The eyes have it

This sunglass-mounted display provides cyclists and other athletes with real-time information about their activities. Bluetooth Smart, ANT+ and Wi-Fi connectivity allow you to pair the Jet to smartphones (for SMS notifications and social media access) and sensors (for keeping track of your cadence and heart rate). An altimeter, accelerometer, thermometer, GPS and built-in gyroscope offer further functionality and huge app potential. The interchangeable lenses give full UVA and UVB protection. Weighs a fairly light 60 grams. EUR 740 | reconinstruments.com

SCOSCHE BOOMBOTTLE



All bottled in

This wireless, IPX4 splash-proof Bluetooth speaker fits cleanly into your water bottle cage to let you pump out the tunes as you ride. It also has a built-in microphone so it can work as a speakerphone. The battery lasts 10 hours per charge. Comes in pink, grey, blue, yellow and green. EUR 72 | scosche.com



HÖVDING

Airbag as helmet

Leave it to the Swedes to think out of the box, or out of the helmet. The Hövding inflatable helmet is worn around your neck, making use of sensors and algorithms to detect when a crash occurs, immediately inflating all around to protect your head. The external shell can even be switched to match what you're wearing. The downside? It can only be crashed with once, after which you'll need to replace it. Then again, you only have one head. EUR 484 | hovding.com



COBI

Brains for your bike

Just released this month, this ambitious Kickstarter project fully integrates your bike with your smartphone, using a modular system to integrate half a dozen accessories into one sleekly designed gadget. In one kit, you get a smartphone holder with charging dynamo, bike computer, front and rear light, bike-navigation, a motion-sensitive alarm system and a bell. The system is very customisable, so you can make pretty much any bike "smart" – even ones that otherwise look kind of dumb. EUR 228 | cobi.bike



WIRELESS BICYCLE TURN SIGNAL

Turn this thing around

This compact little gizmo affixes to your seatpost to let you keep both eyes on the road and both hands on the handlebar. Just press the right or left button and 24 very bright blinking LEDs will light up in the shape of an arrow to warn those behind you of your intended turn direction. Also functions as a strobe or hazard signal. Audible beeps accompany the signals, and a quick release enables easy removal to guard against theft. Charges via USB. EUR 43 | sharperimage.com

The new Estetic range from Gustavsberg makes it simple to furnish attractive, hygienic and functional bathrooms.

The organic design opens up generous flat surfaces, even though the actual dimensions are modest.

Soft lines and concealed fixtures simplify cleaning and promote hygiene.

Estetic bathroom porcelain is available in white, matt white and black.

GUSTAVSBERG/ ESTETIC

DESIGN JON ELIASON

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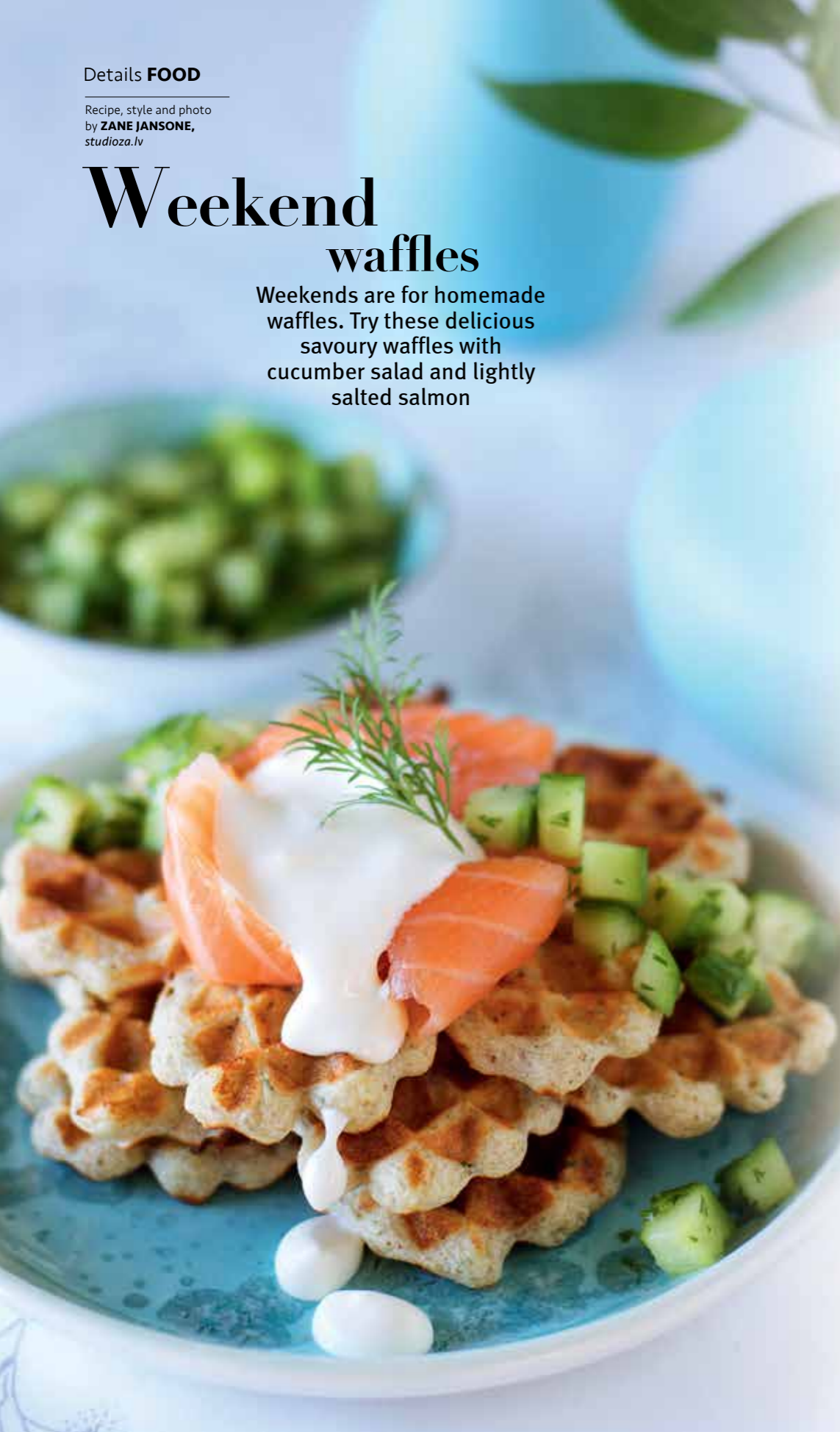
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Weekend waffles

Weekends are for homemade waffles. Try these delicious savoury waffles with cucumber salad and lightly salted salmon



Ingredients (makes approximately 4 servings)

For the salad:

1 long or 2 short cucumbers
1 small bunch of dill, finely
chopped
1 pinch sea salt
1 tbsp. lemon juice
1 tbsp. white wine vinegar
1 tbsp. honey

For the waffles:

2 eggs
1/2 tsp. sea salt
100 g melted butter
1 1/2 cup (300 ml) buttermilk
1 garlic clove, pressed or finely
chopped
1 grated lemon peel
1 cup pea flour
1 cup wheat flour
2 tsp. baking powder
1 tsp. soda
100 g grated cheddar cheese
1 small bunch of dill and
chives, finely chopped

For the garnish:

4-8 slices of lightly salted
salmon
Sour cream

Preparation

First make the salad. Peel the pickles and slice into thin cubes. Add the finely chopped dill, salt, lemon juice, vinegar and honey. Mix the ingredients together.

For the waffle batter, beat the eggs and salt together in a bowl. Add the garlic, lemon peel and buttermilk. Slowly pour in the melted butter. In another bowl, mix the flour together with the baking powder and soda. Add the flour mixture to the egg and buttermilk mixture. Mix in the grated cheddar cheese, dill and chives.

Heat up a waffle iron. Pour the batter onto the iron by the tablespoon and fry until the waffles are golden brown.

Serve the waffles together with the cucumber salad, lightly salted salmon and sour cream. Enjoy with a glass of light white wine if desired. **BO**

THE TREASURES OF ITALIAN HISTORY

BOSCA



Since 1831 **Bosca** secrets are being guarded in the *Cattedrali Sotteranee* wine cellars, that stretch under the Canelli town in Italy and are inscribed on UNESCO cultural heritage list.

ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION MAY HAVE ADVERSE EFFECTS

Text by **LIENE PĀLĒNA**
 Photo by **CSEH IOAN**
 (Alamy)



The power of matcha

Matcha madness is taking over tea shops, health food stores and restaurants

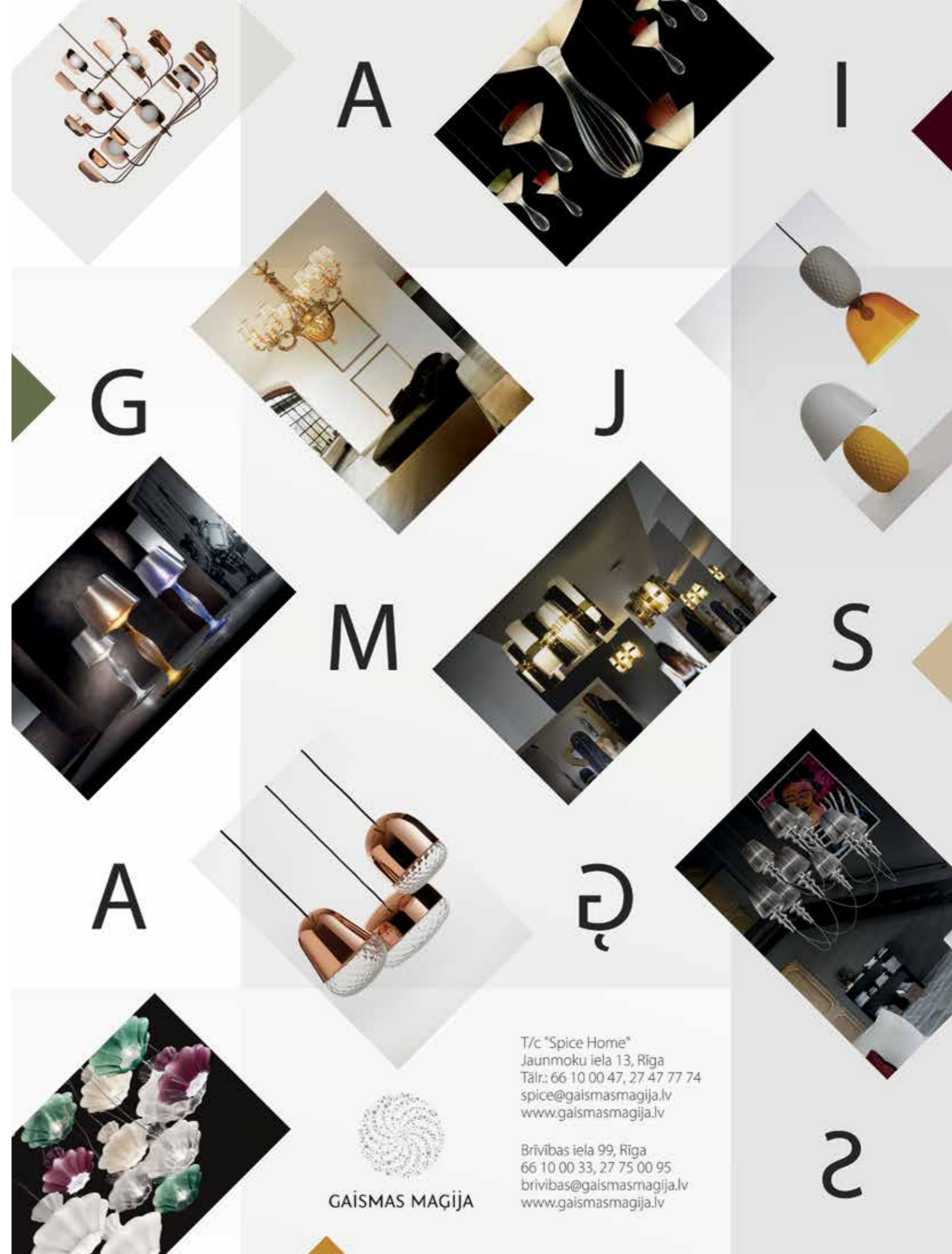
According to *Google Trends*, the popularity of the search term "matcha" began to spike in January 2014 and is expected to remain high in 2016. It seems that everybody is talking about this umami-tasting green tea powder, whose anti-oxidant properties are said to boost the metabolism, detoxify the body, slow the aging process, improve one's sense of well-being and increase energy levels. The amount of anti-oxidants is one of the main factors that determines the quality of a tea, and matcha is a veritable powerhouse of these beneficial chemicals. That is one of the reasons why the price for premium quality matcha tea powder can exceed 700 euros per kilogram, says Matīss Eglītis, the head of the *Raw Garden* healthy eating restaurant in Riga.

Although the tea was first used in China, it was popularised in Japan in the late 12th century by Zen Buddhist monks, who claimed that it had the power to increase people's lifespans and used it to enhance their meditation sessions, because this Japanese super-tea can increase alertness and improve concentration. Although matcha tea has two times less caffeine than coffee, the caffeine is distributed more incrementally, providing a perky feeling for a longer period.

Matcha is one of the more expensive teas on the market, both due to the high quality of the tea and because its production is complicated and time-consuming. Matcha comes from the same plant that all green teas come from – *camellia sinensis* – but its growth, harvest and production processes

differ from those of other green teas. The very best matcha gets harvested by hand just once per year. Roughly four weeks before harvest, the tops of the tea plants are covered to prevent them from being exposed to direct sunlight. After harvesting, the stems and veins are removed from the leaves, which are then stone-ground into a fine, bright green powder known as matcha.

Lately, this unique green tea powder has become an exciting ingredient for countless chefs, baristas and gourmets the world over. People are no longer surprised to see matcha ice cream, latte and even guacamole on the menu, as increasingly bold culinary dishes with this Japanese super-tea continue to be created. **BO**




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2

Text by **AGRA LIEGE**
 Photos courtesy of *Yakusha Design* (yakusha.com.ua)

Closer to nature

Baltic Outlook takes a tour inside a modern house in a pine forest near Kyiv (Kiev), where the owners wished to preserve the natural landscape as much as possible.

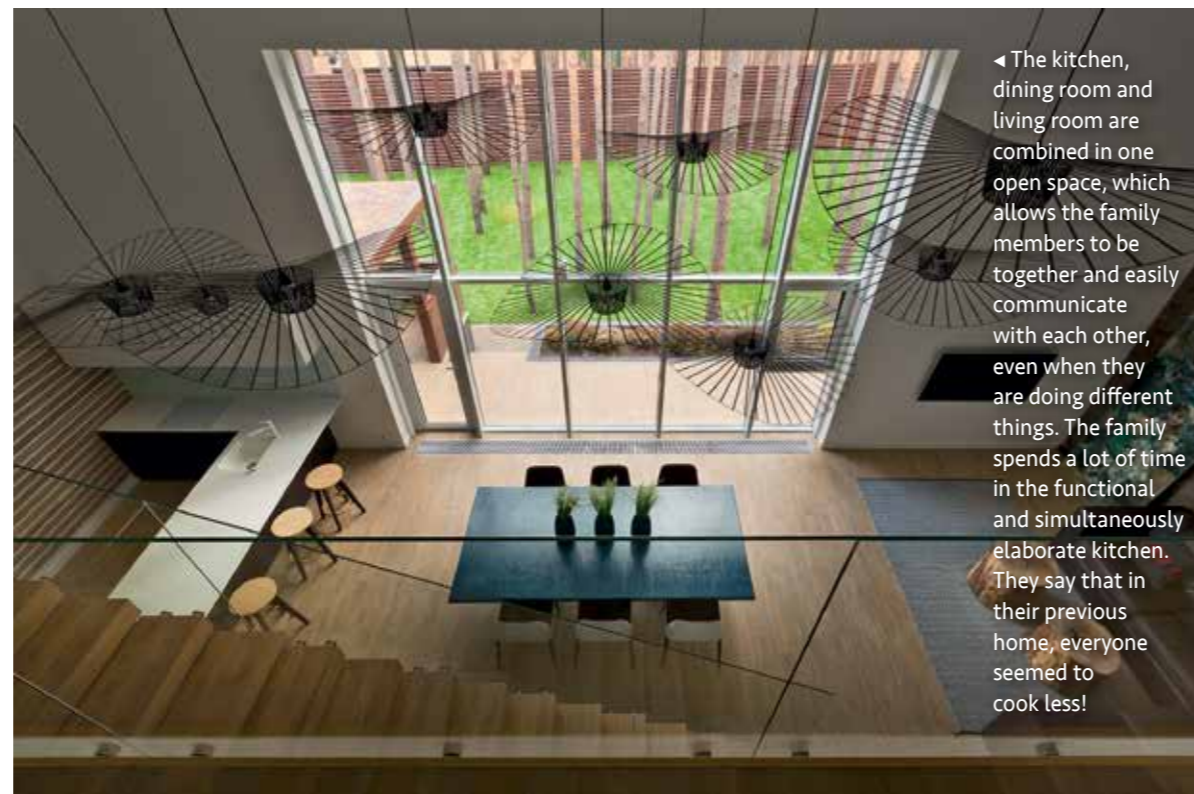
This white cube house was created by the Ukraine-based architecture and design company *Yakusha Design*. The company's head and owner Victoria Yakusha says that while she prefers laconic forms, she is not a strict minimalist and supports the addition of picturesque elements to interiors. She works with natural materials such as wood, wool and greenery, and notes that while trends change every three to four years, eco-style has remained pretty much the same.

Many people who live in big cities wish to establish a closer link with nature and also enjoy comfort and cosiness in their home. Thus, laconism, natural features and functionality are the cornerstones of Yakusha's design philosophy.

The cube house is inhabited by a young couple that leads an active lifestyle and had two children when it approached Yakusha. While thinking about the design of the future house, the couple learned that another baby was on the way. Yakusha was assigned to create a contemporary, stylish and cosy home for a family of five.

Through a masterful use of visual effects, the 200-square-metre house appears bigger from the inside than from the outside. While the plot of land occupies only 700 square metres, it has been landscaped playfully and lightly, with trees and greenery planted around the house.

The clients required an attached two-car garage, but they also wanted to preserve the beauty of the natural surroundings. These wishes gave rise to the cube concept. Most of the details and objects in the house are made of natural materials such as wood, wool and linen. Each item is meant to be useful, pragmatic and uplifting.



◀ The kitchen, dining room and living room are combined in one open space, which allows the family members to be together and easily communicate with each other, even when they are doing different things. The family spends a lot of time in the functional and simultaneously elaborate kitchen. They say that in their previous home, everyone seemed to cook less!



▲ To enhance the feeling of being close to nature, one of the walls in the double-height living room was made out of glass, allowing natural daylight to fill the room and the pine trees outside the window to be seen without obstruction.

◀ A terrace with a barbecue zone is outside the house by the glass wall. The whole family loves to spend time there when the weather is warm enough, cooking and having fun together.



The master bedroom was made in calm, natural colours. A grey-graphite decorative wall surface sits in harmony with the wooden oak floor. A wardrobe is hidden behind the door, invisible at first glance.

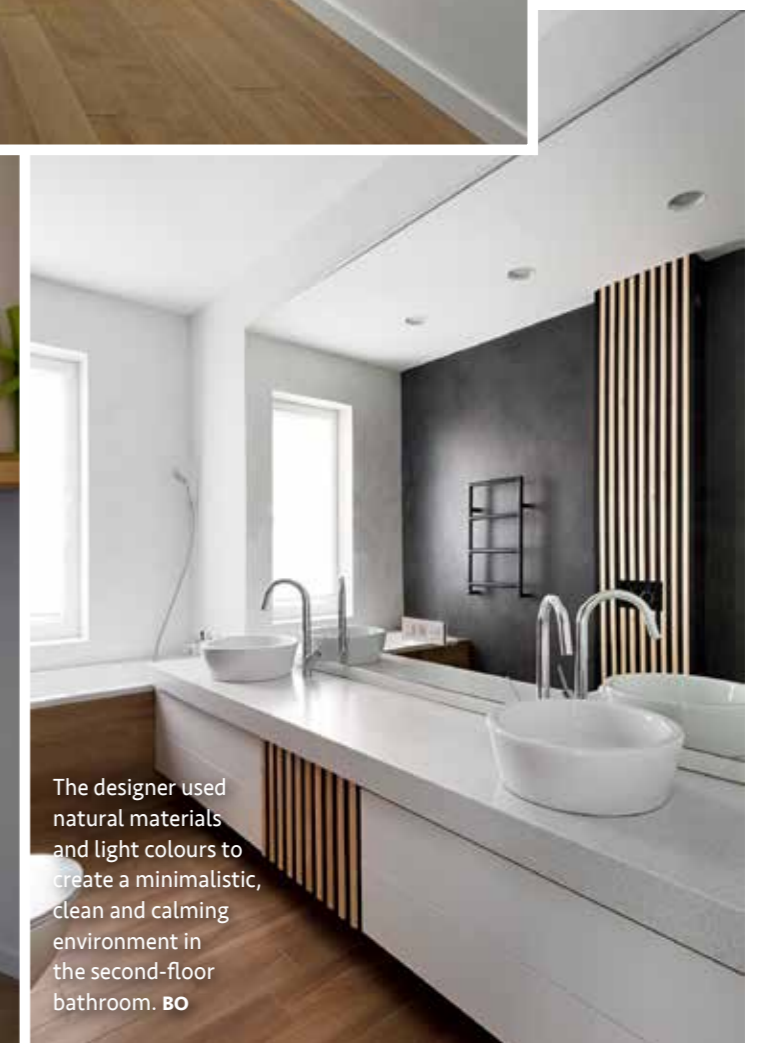


◀ The boy's room was intended to accommodate two children, and thus two beds are hidden under a wooden platform, while a desk sits on top of it near the window, providing more space for studies and fun. The room's white walls are ornamented with blue and red drawings – a convenient way to decorate a child's room simply and stylishly.

While working on the design of a teenage girl's room, Yakusha wanted it to be multifunctional enough to allow the occupant to get her homework done, sleep and spend time with friends. The stylish and versatile room has two beds and a work desk inside a wooden oak palette.



▲ The second floor has a private living area, a master bedroom and two children's bedrooms.



The designer used natural materials and light colours to create a minimalistic, clean and calming environment in the second-floor bathroom. **BO**

Text by **UNA MEISTERE**,
anothertravelguide.com
Photos by **AINĀRS ĒRGLIS** and
courtesy of *Inspired by Iceland*

ICELAND

LAND OF ICE,
FIRE AND
GLOWING
SENSATIONS



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WAY

As we near Reykjavik, the pilot apologises for the bad weather. It's raining in Iceland, and it feels like the airplane is landing on one of the gravel roads in Iceland's interior, which, I've heard, can surprise drivers with huge potholes. But while we're still in the air, I hurry to watch the last scenes of the film *101 Reykjavik* (2000).

"Reykjavik is like some backwater in Siberia. Swirling snow in the dark, not a bird to be seen. Endless wind that makes you wither...biting your cheeks, spraying frost in your eyes. Even the ghosts are bored here," says Hlynur, the main character in the film. He's 30 years old and still lives with his mother in a wooden house in town. In the mornings, he takes a bath in hot water from the thermal springs, and then spends the day either watching porn or having casual sex, occasionally visiting the employment agency and going to the local bar. Every once in a while, he lies down on the edge of a volcano and enjoys a fatalistic but beautiful dance of snowflakes while contemplating suicide. Due to its black humour and harsh aesthetics, this film by Icelandic director Baltasar Kormákur is often compared to Spanish director Pedro Almodóvar's movies, albeit filmed in Arctic latitudes. And there is something of Almodóvar in it, especially when Lola enters the lonely mother-son relationship. Lola is the mother's friend, and later turns out to be her lover.

On the ground in Reykjavik, it's not raining, but pouring buckets of white water. And the road to the town of Selfoss in southern Iceland, which we've chosen as the starting point for our five-day trip to the island, is like a greyish-white infinity with snowy peaks in the distance. Only in Ushuaia – the capital of Tierra del Fuego and the world's southernmost city – have I experienced such a "low sky" of clouds seemingly within my reach. My passport still has the stamp proving that I've been to the end of the world.

Photo by Ragnar Th. Sigurdsson



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A view of Reykjavik from the top of Hallgrímskirkja Church



Basalt rocks at Reynisfjara Beach



Secret Lagoon



On the way around Lake Þingvellir



Reynisfjara black pebble beach

Your **NEXT DESTINATION**



Gullfoss waterfall

Now it feels like I've come to the opposite end of the world. Iceland is an island in the North Atlantic Ocean, the second largest island in Europe (103,000 square kilometres) after Great Britain. Located between Greenland and Norway, it is considered to be one of the newest land masses in the world. The Eurasian and North American tectonic plates meet there, at the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, and Iceland continues to rise from the sea by an average of five centimetres per year. This is also where some of the world's most active volcanoes can be found.

The deadliest volcanic eruption in the island's history happened in 1783-1784, when clouds of toxic gasses from the Laki volcanic fissure blocked sunlight across Europe and caused flooding and other natural disasters. Laki spewed out a total of 30 billion tonnes of lava and hundreds of millions of tonnes of ash. About 25 percent of the island's human population died due to an ensuing famine and more than half of the livestock perished. It took the island two decades to recover. The eruption of Eyjafjallajökull in 2010 paralysed European air travel for several weeks, and the Holuhraun eruption (August 2014 to February 2015) created an 85-square kilometre (1.4 km³) lava field. As a result of volcanic activity, lava covers 11,000 square kilometres of Iceland's area. Glaciers cover another 12,000 km², sand covers 4,000 km², and water covers 3,000 km².

Europe's largest glacier, Vatnajökull, is in Iceland, which is not only one of Europe's youngest states (it became independent in 1944) but also one of the world's least densely inhabited countries. About 80% of Iceland is uninhabited, and the country takes pride in its wonderful natural diversity. This is truly a fairy kingdom of natural landscapes, with geysers, glaciers, fjords, waterfalls, black sand beaches and much more. It's no wonder, then, that Iceland has featured in a number of legendary films and television series, from James Bond's *Die Another Day* and *A View to a Kill* to *The Secret Life of Walter*

Mitty, *Game of Thrones*, *Journey to the Centre of the Earth*, *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* and others.

Even though Jules Verne never made it to Iceland himself, this is where his heroes – Professor Lidenbrock and his nephew, Axel – began their journey to the centre of the Earth. The symbolic "door" that they find is on the western side of Snæfellsjökull, a 1,446-metre dormant volcano now covered in snow.

"How can we know for certain that Snæfells isn't about to erupt? The fact that this monster has slumbered since 1229 does not mean that it will not wake," wrote Verne. Snæfellsjökull still brims with legend and mystery today, and esoterics believe that the area around the mountain is one of the most powerful centres of spiritual energy in the world. The volcano supposedly sits on the same ley line as Mount Shasta in California and Cheops' pyramid in Egypt.

All of Iceland is filled with legends and myths, which still rise to the surface in modern times. For example, a relatively recent road construction project in northern Reykjavik was suffering from constant problems – sudden landslides, broken machinery and so on. Instead of turning to scientific or technological explanations, people blamed spiritual issues and accused the project of interfering in the world of the elves, or *huldufólk*, because the road led through their territory. According to a 2007 study by the University of Iceland, more than 80% of respondents refused to deny the existence of elves. However, only 8% stated that they were completely convinced of their existence.

In fact, I received similar answers recently, when I posed the same question to a variety of people we met during our trip. Fewer people from the younger generation may believe in elves, but no one is ready to actually deny their existence. Like the British newspaper *The Guardian* aptly wrote last year: "When your house can be destroyed by an earthquake, when you can be blown over by the wind, when boiling water from your taps tells you there's lava not far beneath your feet – then you don't mess with nature."

Iceland's Eiffel Tower

And this, perhaps, is the island's greatest magic – Iceland manages to keep all who arrive on their toes and provide them with non-stop wonders, sensations and impressions. I am woken by daylight at six in the morning at the hotel in Selfoss, which is almost as small as the town itself, albeit with an intriguing name – *Bella Apartments*. Outside the window, it's absolutely blue, as if someone had taken a large paintbrush, dunked it in a can of blue paint and painted the landscape in this pure colour, without adding a speck of any other tone. It's no longer raining, and the clouds are gone. Now I understand the Icelandic saying "If you don't like the weather, then wait 15 minutes." Rain can replace the sun in 15 minutes several times a

day. But, luckily, this is not one of those days, and it looks like the sun is here to stay.

Our first stop of the day is the crater of the Kerið volcano. About 270 metres long, 170 metres wide and 55 metres deep, it was formed 6,500 years ago. A small lake at the centre of the crater now takes the place of boiling lava, and the crater can be explored on two levels: down right along the edge of the lake, or up along the top edge of the crater. Up there, however, the wind is so strong that I need to hold on to my hat, and soon I realise I'll need to hold on to myself as well. The Kerið volcano is a part of the so-called Golden Circle, which also includes the Gullfoss waterfall, Þingvellir (Thingvellir) National Park and the Geysir geyser district. This is no doubt the most touristy route in Iceland, but it is also one of the

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most impressive and beautiful. A number of small detours along the way let visitors explore some less-trodden paths, too.

Geysir is an absolute must-see. A geologically active zone in the Haukadalur Valley, it is named for its most famous geyser, which has actually been inactive for many years. A gravestone-like monument has even been placed at its feet, reminding all who visit about its former status. In the past, Geysir was the greatest geyser in the world, discharging boiling water at a height of 60 to 80 metres in the air. But this happened for the last time in 1935, and since then Geysir has been pronounced dormant. It is believed that the geyser first became active in the 13th century, when the area experienced several powerful earthquakes as well as the eruption of the Hekla volcano. But no one knows whether Geysir has fallen silent forever or is simply taking a long nap. Needless to say, the English word *geyser* comes from the Icelandic *geysir*, which means "gusher" or "impressive jet/spout".

Despite its location right along the side of the main road and the always-full parking lot, the Geysir area is quite extraordinary. Over a space about the size of a football field, many large and small hot springs steam at temperatures of 80 to 100 degrees Celsius. And, while the great Geysir sleeps, Strokkur has now taken over the lead. Although slightly smaller, it is almost as impressive, shooting a stream of water 30 metres into the air every six to eight minutes. It can be spotted from quite a distance by the crowd of people standing around the crater at a safe, marked-off distance and armed with all manner of modern gadgets, waiting for the moment to arrive.

I must admit that the first time I approached Strokkur, I startled in surprise. The geyser's crater breathes deeply and heavily and seems quite alive. Then suddenly and with huge force it shoots a mountain of white water up into the air. The steam slowly dispels, the crater grows quiet, and then it starts slowly boiling and breathing again. There's something hypnotic about this show (especially if you let yourself observe it for a while without trying to capture it on film), and it never repeats in exactly the same way. Sometimes the water slashes the air like a sharp icicle, other times it meanders irregularly like a lazy mountain, and still other times the gush of water is followed a split second later by the next, even more powerful gush of water. I don't think I exaggerate when I say that Strokkur is Iceland's Eiffel Tower, only made by Nature.

Nearby, however, it's possible to observe geysers in a much more intimate atmosphere. The small village of Flúdir is located about half-an-hour's drive from Geysir along much smaller roads. With a

Just a short ferry ride from Reykjavik is Viðey Island, home of the **Imagine Peace Tower**. The monument, which is Yoko Ono's dedication to John Lennon and the global struggle for world peace, consists of a gigantic white wishing well, upon which "Imagine Peace" has been inscribed in 24 languages. Yoko travels to the island every year on October 9, Lennon's birthday, when the installation is turned on and 15 searchlights are directed upward to form a single "tower of light" beaming up into the heavens. Geothermal energy provides the power for the lights, and on a clear night they shine four kilometres into the sky. The lights shine every evening from October 9 until December 8, the day Lennon died. The lights are also turned on at the winter solstice, New Year's Eve, the first week of spring and Ono's birthday on February 18.

The Imagine Peace Tower was unveiled in 2007 on what would have been Lennon's 67th birthday. Ono chose Iceland partly because it has been deemed the most peaceful country in the world by the Global Peace Index for the seventh year in a row.

American artist Richard Serra's basalt environmental sculpture *Áfangar* is also located on Viðey Island. The ferry to Viðey operates every day from May 15 to September 30, but from October 1 to May 14 it runs only on weekends.

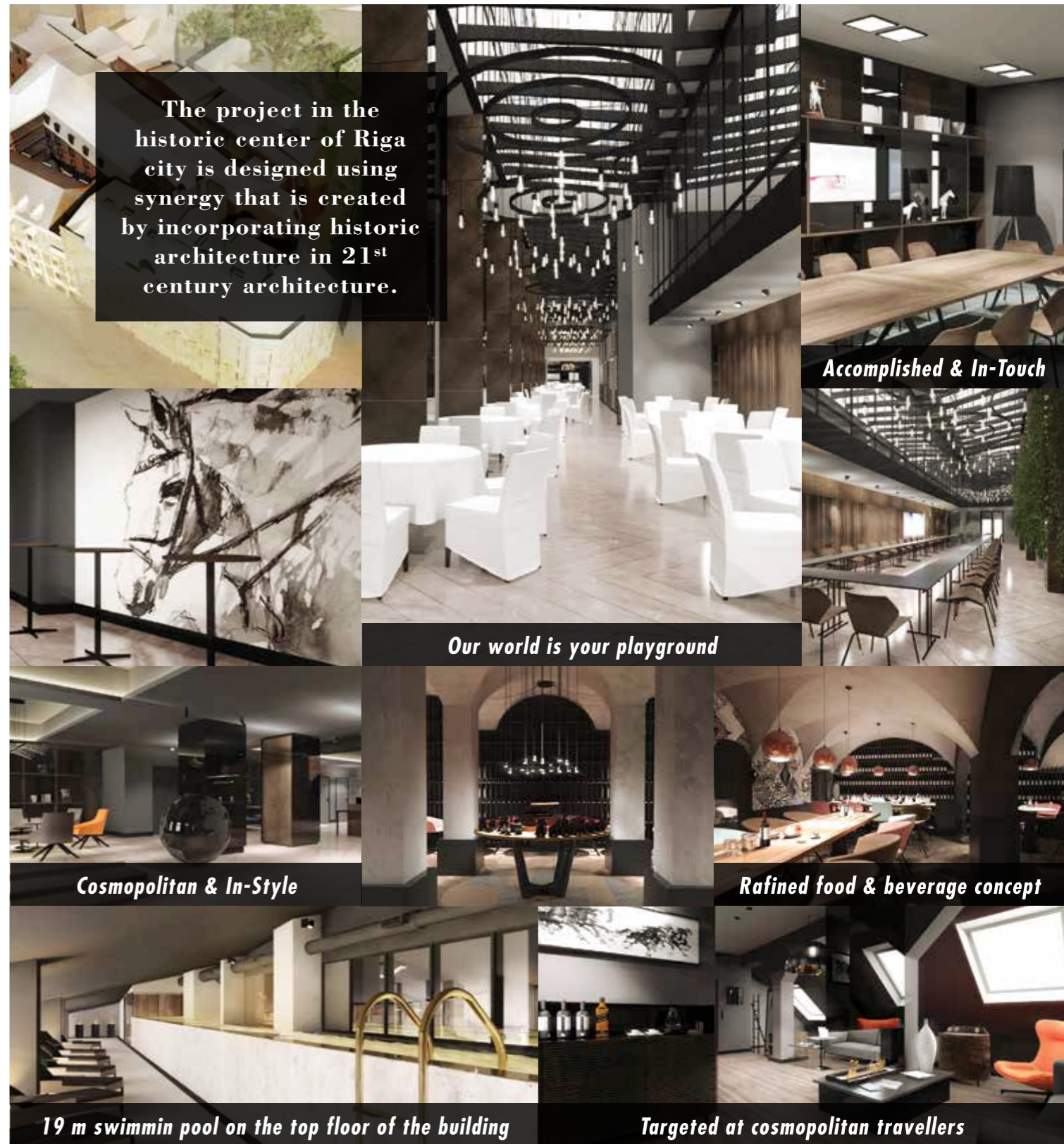
One of the more extravagant traditional Icelandic foods is **hákarl**, or fermented shark meat. Due to its distinct ammonia smell, this "delicacy" is usually either passionately loved or likewise hated. During the fermentation process, the meat is first aged in the ground and then hung outdoors to dry for

population of only 400, it is near the Secret Lagoon – a geothermal area that is also home to one of the oldest outdoor swimming pools in Iceland. One feels as if one has arrived in the middle of nowhere. Here, on the banks of a small stream, a whole meadow gurgles, steams and boils, and at the very centre of it is a small pool with just a few swimmers in it. A wooden boardwalk leads around the meadow, letting visitors get a closer look at the geysers and mystical environment.

There are no showers or other extras here, but for 2,800 Icelandic krónur (plus 500 to rent a towel) you can take a swim in the most authentic natural pool in all of Iceland. Water enters the pool from the surrounding hot springs, and special cooling equipment ensures that the water temperature never exceeds 40°C. The bottom of the pool is covered in natural gravel, so some visitors prefer to take their hot bath while floating on colourful foam "noodles". The pool was built in 1891, but it was abandoned in 1947 and stood unused for 67 years. The present owners renovated the pool and opened it to the public only in 2014. Unlike the popular and widely advertised Blue Lagoon, the Secret Lagoon still has a fair amount of Icelandic wildness to it.

Like many places in Iceland, greenhouses flooded in yellow light can also be spotted outside Flúdir. In them, vegetables are grown year round, with the help of geothermal energy. Did you know that the best soup in Iceland can be enjoyed...inside a greenhouse? The Friðheimar greenhouse complex, located on the way from Selfoss to Geysir (via a small detour), is a comfortable lunchtime stop along the Golden Circle. The tables are set up right in the greenhouse, across from a huge tomato "plantation", and the air certainly smells of fresh tomato plants. In fact, close to one-fifth (18%) of Iceland's tomatoes are grown at Friðheimar. The restaurant is only open for lunch, every day from 12:00 to 16:00. In addition to tomato soup, it also serves pasta, but the soup is definitely the restaurant's specialty and particularly delectable in combination with homemade whole-grain or cinnamon bread.

Naturally, the Gullfoss waterfall has its own legend, too. At the beginning of the 20th century, two men who owned land there rented it out to a foreign company that wished to set up a power plant on the falls. According to one version of the story, the company's plans never came to fruition due to a lack of funds. But in another version of the story, the waterfall was saved from destruction only thanks to Sigríður Tómasdóttir, the daughter of one of the landowners. When it seemed that the battle for the falls was already lost, she announced that she would jump into the roiling waters and kill herself if it was given to the English. Luckily, she did not have



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to fulfil her promise, and she instantly became a hero to the local people, who built a monument to her at the edge of the waterfall. Gullfoss is unique in that the water falls into a canyon and the step-like layers of rock divide it into two separate waterfalls. The higher of the two measures eleven metres tall, and 109 cubic metres of water per second rush over it. The rapid seasonal flow of cold water comes from melting glaciers. Such water contains a high level of silicon, which colours it a distinct shade of blue. Surrounded by black cliffs, the contrast makes Gullfoss doubly impressive.

A hotel amidst mountains of lava

Iceland's roads are nearly as fascinating as its natural wonders. When you think that you've finally grown accustomed to the natural environment, it suddenly changes radically, as if someone had put a magic wand to it. One moment you're driving across a snowy plain that the springtime sun has striped black and white, like a zebra, by uncovering the lava looming under the snow. The next moment those lava fields are already covered in green moss, with the intervening rock piles resembling surreal puffballs in the setting sun. Icelanders enjoy picnicking in the moss because it's so soft. A moment later, you're driving along the edge of lake that's still frozen on one side but bright blue on the other side. Or maybe you discover a whole cascade of waterfalls along the side of the highway, each more impressive than the next. And here and there a small, brightly coloured wooden house or church sits comfortably in the landscape.

One of the most beautiful roads along the southern side of the island leads around Lake Þingvellir, which lies in a very significant spot – the place where the European and North American tectonic plates meet. Here, a two- to thirty-metre-tall cliff wall rises on each side of the rift. The higher side is North America, while the lower side is Europe. The two continents are spreading away from each other a rate of a few centimetres per year, and the space between them fills with new land. It is thought that this area was covered with a layer of ice 1000 metres thick during the last ice age, but that regular volcanic activity continued below the ice. Some of these eruptions even reached through the ice to the surface above, and the lava created the hilly environment that we see today.

As air temperatures rose 18,000 years ago, the glaciers began to melt, thus forming a lake about 12,000 years ago. Despite the relatively cool climate, lush vegetation grows around the lake and several species of fish (including the brown trout, Arctic char and the three-spine stickleback) make their home in the waters. Today, the Þingvellir area is a national park, and in 2004 it was added to the UNESCO World Heritage List. Þingvellir is also the place where, in the year 930, Iceland's first parliament, called the Alþingi, convened. It is one of the oldest parliamentary institutions in the world.

One of Iceland's most special accommodations is also located near the lake, namely, the *ION Luxury Adventure Hotel*. Iceland's first and only boutique hotel, it exists far

four to five months in order to remove acidic substances from the flesh. Icelanders usually eat hákarl with a shot of vodka or Brennivín, the national drink. If you're up to trying some hákarl, a good place to go is the 3 Frakkar restaurant (Baldursgata 14, 3frakkar.com), which specialises in traditional cuisine.

Not far from Vík, Iceland's southernmost village, you'll find *Reynisfjara*, one of the island's most beautiful beaches. It is completely black – covered in black sand and pebbles – and stretches in front of one of Nature's grand works of art, a huge pyramid of greyish-black basalt columns. But do be careful and respect the environment when visiting the beach, because the Atlantic Ocean on this side of the island is particularly wild and unpredictable.

To find out what's happening on Iceland's design scene, stop by the *Kiosk* fashion shop in Reykjavik (Laugavegur 65, kioskreikjavik.com), where eight Icelandic fashion designers have joined together under one roof. Also check out *P3* (Miðstræti 12), a studio and store for several local brands, and *Kronkron* (Laugavegur 63, kronkron.com), an eclectic shop featuring both local and international fashion names, such as Henrik Vibskov, Vivienne Westwood and others.

But the place to be for lovers of contemporary jewellery is *Orri Finn Design* (Skólavörðustíg 17a). Created by the designer duet of Orri Finnbogason and Helga Gvuðrún Friðriksdóttir and revolving around seemingly everyday objects (scissors, chisels, hammers, keys and so on), the jewellery has become quite popular among Reykjavik's fashionistas.

from civilisation, in the middle of a moss-covered lava field at the foot of the Hengill volcano. This dramatic environment is also reflected in the hotel's architecture. The building rests on many slanting piles, inspired by the wooden logs that the Vikings are said to have laid in order to mark their territory, and resembles the futuristic eye of a Cyclops or a Martian probe sent down to explore Planet Earth.

As Sigurlaug Sverrisdóttir, *ION's* owner says with a laugh: "On the popular *booking.com* website, people usually search for a hotel by location, be it a city or village. But there's nothing where we are, no settlement of any kind nearby. So, in effect, you already have to know beforehand where you're headed, and you have to specifically search for this hotel." Sverrisdóttir worked in the aviation industry for many years and lived in Switzerland before returning home to Iceland.

"We had a house in Reykjavik that we had rented out. It was obvious we would never be able to return it to its original condition, so we decided to sell the house and buy a summer home somewhere in rural Iceland. But here, summer homes are rarely sold; instead, they're passed down from one generation to the next. Nevertheless, some homes had come onto the market following the financial crisis. So, completely by accident, we came upon this little corner of land – an abandoned building in the middle of a lava field that had once been an office building for the employees of a geothermal energy station. As technologies had advanced, the number of employees had been downsized and the building was abandoned. We bought it at a public auction. Lots of people thought we were crazy, building something in a completely empty area."

Sverrisdóttir's former classmates at *Minarc Architects* designed the building, and *ION* opened its doors to the public in 2013. The hotel has only 45 rooms and the design scheme is ascetic, featuring grey concrete that alternates with warm wooden accents. But the main thing here is the panoramic view – a practically unending landscape of mountains and lava fields no matter which window you look out of. *ION* also has a spa with an outdoor geothermal swimming pool heated naturally by the earth

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and open year round, as well as a restaurant and the *Northern Lights* bar. The bar is worth a visit even if you don't plan on staying at the hotel; its large windows let you feel like you have front-row seats to the majestic show of nature spread out before you.

At eleven o'clock in the evening, as I'm floating off to sleep, a phone call from the reception desk wakes me: "The Northern Lights are starting to form in the north." I remember that I had asked the hotel employees to wake me in such an event, although, after checking the weather forecast, they had said the chances were minimal. Iceland's northern lights season runs from September to mid-April, and the astronomical phenomenon lessens as springtime approaches. But that night we saw bright green lights on the horizon, which added a certain mysticism to our stay at *ION*.



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Since her hotel is near the meeting point of the North American and European tectonic plates, Sverrisdóttir says that its construction had to be several times stronger than required, say, in Reykjavik. The region is also geothermally active, with boiling water located a mere eight metres below the ground. In fact, the hot water is a practically unlimited resource. As at most of Iceland's hotels, when you turn on the hot-water faucet in the bathroom, the water smells faintly of rotten eggs. ION strictly adheres to the ecological concept in everything it does:

"Lake Þingvellir is near our hotel. The fishermen were not taking nature into account and had begun to overfish the lake, taking way too many trout. We decided to rent a part of their land, which allowed them to earn money by not fishing. Now, we sell fly-fishing licenses, thereby protecting the lake from overfishing."

Sverrisdóttir admits that people in Iceland have only begun to pay attention to nature conservation in the last few years: "We have taken our environment a little bit for granted. But I think we are now becoming more conscious about maintaining it. With 300,000 inhabitants and 3 million visitors per year, it's a big deal for us. We have to be awake. Because in the most popular places, you can already see that some damage has been done."

Northernmost capital

ION plans on expanding its business in the near future. When I ask Sverrisdóttir whether they've coordinated their new construction project with the elves, she laughs and says that she hasn't spoken with them yet. But, seeing as the elves had no objections to their previous construction project, everything should be alright this time around as well. The following day, when we check into our next hotel, the Radisson Blu 1919 in Reykjavik, I cannot believe my eyes when I see that we have again been given the same room number - 208. That's already the fourth time on this trip, and all the more surprising because none of our hotels have had 200 rooms. Now, tell me there isn't such a thing as elves!

Founded in 1786, Iceland's largest city, Reykjavik, is the world's northernmost capital. It has a population of approximately 200,852 - in other words, 60% of the island's population.

The Radisson Blu 1919 is located in one of the few historical buildings in the centre of the city to have preserved its original form. With its low, brightly coloured wood and masonry houses, Reykjavik feels a little bit like a village that has burst at the seams. There are hardly any multi-storey buildings - the locals say it might be due to frugality, because Icelandic legislation requires any building over four storeys tall to have an elevator. However, life in Reykjavik - as befits any capital city - takes place with a concentrated intensity, and current "in" addresses change at the same pace as they do in London and Berlin.

As soon as you arrive, stop by one of the fashion shops (for example, Kiosk, which sells apparel by Icelandic fashion designers) or bars along Laugavegur, the city's most stylish street, and ask what's new in the city. Icelanders open up towards visitors, and in a few minutes' time you'll have a list of "must-visit" places both along Laugavegur and around the old harbour, which is quickly gaining new life in the form of various unusual gastronomic spots and concept stores.

A symbol of contemporary Reykjavik can also be found in the harbour area, namely, the Harpa concert and conference hall, which opened to the public in 2011. With a name that translates to "harp", the majestic glass building was designed by Henning Larsen Architects of Denmark and Batterið Architects of Iceland and simply cannot be missed. In the evenings, its southern façade is adorned with a light installation by Icelandic-Danish artist Ólafur Elíasson that reminds one of the Northern Lights.

Like Björk, Icelanders take pride in Elíasson, a poetic eccentric and mystic who uses colour, light, mirrors and a variety of natural elements (including water and rocks) in his installations. These conjure an environment that leads visitors into a world that balances - like a tight-rope walker - on a fragile border between mystification and reality. The Harpa is open to visitors until midnight, but you'll find few people there after about 11 PM. From the inside, the building feels like the crater of a surreal glass mountain, into which the surrounding urban environment - as well as Iceland's waters and majestic mountain peaks - enter by means of lights and reflections...once again proving that Iceland is not only the Land of Ice and Fire, but also a wonderland of glowing sensations.



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Sigurlaug Sverrisdóttir

Take in the sights slowly

Sigurlaug Sverrisdóttir is the owner of the first and as yet only design hotel in Iceland, the *ION Luxury Adventure Hotel*. Located on a lava field seemingly in the middle of nowhere, where parts of *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* and *Game of Thrones* were filmed, the hotel provides adventures in both nature and architecture. It has won a number of industry awards since opening in 2013, including the World Boutique Hotel Awards for Europe's Best Sustainable Boutique Hotel. A "sister" to Sverrisdóttir's hotel, the *ION City Hotel*, will open in central Reykjavik at the end of this summer.

What sights do you usually recommend seeing in Iceland in addition to the so-called Golden Circle?

I suggest hiring your own car, or maybe your own car and driver. I would send them to the Secret Lagoon, which is still authentic, and you can find natural hot springs there. I would suggest a hike on the Langjökull glacier. I don't like anything that is not natural. Inside the glacier is an 800-metre-long artificial ice cave that has become a popular tourist attraction. For me it seems a completely crazy idea – why would one go to an artificial snowhouse? Especially considering that there are so many natural caves in Iceland that one can see. It's definitely worth going to see the Reynisfjara black beach near the town of Vik. And, the main thing: when you're moving from point A to point B, don't forget

the road itself. Don't hurry, stop somewhere in the middle of a lava field and just sit on the moss for a while. Moss is so soft, and if the weather is nice and it's dry, lie down on the moss. Have something with you, like a bottle of red wine and some nice food, and just enjoy the day.

Which part of the island is the most special for you?

I like Myvatn. It's in the northeast. The most beautiful route to get there is the highland road, but that's only possible in the middle of summer. There's nothing at all there, nothing green and no one living there. And then you reach Myvatn. It's like reaching paradise – everything is green again. So energising!

How much time does one need to see Reykjavik?

One day is completely enough.

Which are your favourite restaurants in Reykjavik?

There are a couple of old-fashioned ones, like the *Gallery Restaurant* in the *Hotel Holt*. It's one of the oldest hotels in Reykjavik, and the restaurant is very traditional but great. I also love *Jómfrúin*, which is a traditional Danish restaurant with shrimp and the like. If I go out on a weekend, I definitely go there. Then there's *Matur og Drykkur*. The chef there is from the Westman Islands, and they're doing very fun things with traditional food. I think it's the most creative and coolest restaurant in Reykjavik today. *Snaps* is also trendy now, as well as the *Kol Kitchen and Bar*.

Traditional Icelandic cuisine includes some pretty specific foods, such as puffin and whale meat and fermented shark meat. Can all of that still be found on a contemporary Icelander's menu?

We still use those foods, but in a different way. For instance, I find puffin is a very touristy thing. Puffins are almost extinct, and it's banned by law to hunt them. Yes, you can still find them on the menu at urban restaurants, and you'll usually be told that the puffins on your plate are ones that have accidentally gotten tangled in fishermen's nets. My grandparents are from the Westman Islands, and that's where the puffins come from. So, when I was growing up, we ate puffin on every New Year's Eve. I loved their meat, but not anymore. Since they have almost become extinct, I will never eat puffin again in my life.

Whales are a different story. Hunting them is restricted, but whales are not threatened with extinction along Iceland's coasts. That's the thing people always misunderstand – whales are almost extinct along the United States coast, because there they've been very much overhunted. But Iceland is too small, we cannot eat all of the whales. Plus, you should not forget that whales, for their part, eat fish. In my opinion, we should preserve a balance in all things, and we should remember what is important in which part of the world.

How would you describe Icelanders?

The climate is very harsh here. The winters are long and cold. Maybe not temperature-wise, but it's very windy. And also the darkness. December and January are really dark. If we have snow, it's good, because snow brightens everything up. We put Christmas lights up already in October and November and keep them on until March. Even with young kids – my daughter is

five – you feel it's hard to wake her up in the morning in December or January. Daylight time goes down to only two and three hours a day. And if you have bad weather, you don't even see the daylight. People get very depressed. And you feel something of that in the people here, too.

But when spring starts, we get really happy and energetic. I think we are happy that people want to visit us, because we are so far away, on an island. I once saw a sign on the street that was very funny. It said "Welcome to Niceland! Where we are nice to you, but not to each other." And there is some truth in it, because we are sometimes very happy about foreigners, but we forget to work together.

Has the unpredictability and power of Iceland's nature – the earthquakes, the volcanoes – somehow influenced the people who live there? In Sri Lanka, for example, many people admit that they live with the fear that a tsunami might come upon them again some day.

I don't think so, because – at least, as far as I know – nobody has died here from a volcano eruption in a long time. Or from earthquakes. We have very strong houses. But what does cause fatalities is the weather brought on by Mother Nature. She herself has killed a lot of people. For example, sometimes people go out on a hike and get lost in a storm and die. Or in an avalanche. I think that's our biggest difficulty in Westfjords. When I'm driving there, I sometimes feel sad to see the evidence of so many avalanches. They've destroyed whole villages and towns in that region. But people always return. They've lost their parents, their grandparents. You'll see a huge cross by the roadside, and a house right next to it.

One of the biggest volcano eruptions in Iceland in recent history took place in February 1973 in the Westman Islands. It began in the middle of the night, the lava covered everything, but the people escaped and survived, thanks to Mother Nature. There had been a terrible storm the night before and, because it's mostly fishermen living in the Westman Islands, all of the boats were on shore. If the weather had been good, they would definitely have been out on the sea. When the volcano erupted, people woke up and ran to the harbour, climbed into the boats and survived. Some of them later returned to the island, others not. My grandparents were among them. Today, there's only a cross on the spot where their house once stood. **BO**

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FINISHING FIRST

Jeļena Prokupčuka (b. 1976) is Latvia's most accomplished female long-distance runner. In this interview with *Baltic Outlook*, she outlines her ambitions for the Olympic season and reveals what she has to go through in order to run the 42.195 kilometres of a gruelling marathon race in less than two and a half hours.

Prokopčuka's name is well known on the international athletics scene, and she is one of Latvia's most popular athletes. A look into her CV will reveal the scale of her accomplishments. Since running the Boston Marathon in 2004 (when she finished fourth), Prokopčuka has been a two-time winner of both the New York City Marathon and the Osaka International Ladies' Marathon and has finished second twice at the Boston Marathon. She holds several Latvian long-distance running distance records for women, including a winning marathon time of 2:22:56, which she set in Osaka in 2005. Currently, Prokopčuka is preparing for her 16th marathon season together with her husband and coach, Aleksandrs Prokopčuks, himself a former long-distance runner and holder of the Latvian men's marathon record (2:15:56).

Right now, while this interview is being conducted, you are at a training camp in Portugal. How do you spend your days there?

If I'm not mistaken, then this is our 13th training season in Portugal, because the weather conditions in Latvia during the winter aren't suitable for marathon training. Neither are indoor running tracks. We usually arrive in Portugal in December, but this time we arrived very late – only on January 6, because we wanted to treat our son to a special New Year's celebration with snow and a Christmas tree. In training for major competitions, like I am now, I run in the morning and in the afternoon and abide by a strict diet and rest regime. I usually run about 200 km per week.

This running season will be a milestone in a sense, because you turn 40 this year. Although it's not polite to speak with women about their age, what will this mean for your running career?

I don't think much about my age, because I don't feel as old as I am. Of course, I realise that I am no longer a young girl. My body recovers differently than before and I have altered my training program, because physically I can no longer do the same things that I once did. My attitude has also changed: now I simply try to enjoy the fact that I am running in a race and doing my best. I don't harbour any false hopes. I take everything easier now and run with a greater sense of enjoyment.

You have quite a lot of achievements and competition experience under your belt. Does that hinder you in setting new goals for yourself or effect your desire to finish first?

Last year, when I finished second at the marathon in Osaka but was later declared the winner due to the disqualification of [Ukrainian runner] Tetiana Gamera-Shmyrko, that was a very good feeling. [Prokopčuka's winning time of 2:24:07 was clocked as the fastest ever marathon by a 38-year-old woman. Ed.] It's very hard to win again on the same course after ten years, because your body has aged during that time and two younger generations of athletes may have arrived onto the scene. To be honest, I'm not setting any overly ambitious goals for myself right now. I'm motivated by the simple fact that I can do something that I like and that I have a talent for. I could stop running at any time, but if I did that, then I wouldn't be able to resume long-distance running at the highest level of competition.

I take everything easier now, and run with a greater sense of enjoyment

This will be your 16th marathon season. Your first victory was in Tallinn in 2001. Which competition stands out most in your memory?

Probably the New York City Marathon in 2005, which I won. Nobody was expecting me to win, neither the organisers, nor the spectators, nor myself. When the race started, I couldn't imagine that I would be standing on the top step of the winners' podium a few hours later. That was such a sweet and very hard-won victory.

Is it true that your career as a marathon runner was launched many years ago on December 31, when your future husband, Aleksandrs, passed you during a 35-kilometre handicap race but couldn't shake you off after that?

Yes, coach Leonid Strekalovsky had a tradition of making his athletes run a long-distance race on December 31 so that everybody would go to bed early that evening. Sasha [Aleksandrs, her future husband – Ed.] passed me during the race, but he couldn't pull further ahead of me because I was keeping up right



Last year, Jelena Prokopčuka finished eighth in the prestigious New York Marathon

behind him. That's when Sasha thought: "Yes, this girl could run a marathon." I hadn't even imagined that I could do something like that until then.

What are the main races that you will be running in this season?

First, the Boston Marathon [which took place on April 18 and in which Prokopčuka finished 4th – Ed.] and then the Summer Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Who are your main competitors?

Runners from Kenya and Ethiopia. Their faces change a lot in the sense that new athletes from these countries keep arriving all of the time. Runners from North America and Europe are mostly from the "old guard", so to speak.

What is your relationship with other competing athletes?

It's hard to maintain a friendship with someone from a different continent, but generally the relations between professional marathon runners are friendly because running long distances is very hard work. You have to invest a great deal of effort just to be at the starting line of a marathon race, and for that reason alone you respect your opponents. A marathon is first and foremost a personal struggle with your own limitations.

Will we see you racing in Latvia soon?

Yes, I will probably run the half-marathon in Riga in May. [The Lattelecom Riga Marathon will take place on May 15 – Ed.]

Have you detected any trends in long-distance running?

In previous years, many female athletes ran the marathon in close to two hours and 20 minutes, which is almost at the limits of a woman's physical capabilities. [The current world record time of 2:15:25 was set by Paula Radcliffe of the UK in London in 2003 – Ed.] The running times of the winners got shorter, but a lot of athletes also got caught using banned substances. Now people are starting to run more naturally again, without the use of drugs. But of course, the use of illegal performance-enhancing substances still remains a problem.

One gets the impression that advancements continue to be made in sports sciences. Have these advances affected you, personally?

Running with better sports equipment, such as shoes that are 20 grams lighter, doesn't play a defining role in your results. New training methods are being developed, but you can't find a single method to suit everybody. Some people have to run every day, while others need to run only three times a week. The main advancements have come in methods for helping the body to recover, because recovery is a key to our success. Thanks to advancements in modern medicine, you can recover from injuries faster than before. If earlier it would have taken a month and a half for an injury to heal, then now it might take only two weeks, for example.

Does your husband set up your training plan?

Yes.

I recently saw an interview with Lizzie Armitstead of the UK. She's the reigning world champion in road race cycling. I was surprised to learn that she is a vegetarian and that she sets up her own training program.

Nobody knows you as well as yourself. In setting up your training program, your coach might not know that you didn't sleep well the night before or that you haven't fully recovered from a previous run. And athletes don't always reveal everything to their coaches. Theoretically,

a coach should adjust your training program on a daily basis, but that is difficult to do in practice. Incidentally, the coach's functions shouldn't be restricted to just setting up a training plan. He should be an important provider of psychological support. In fact, he should be like a life partner. That might be unpleasant for some people to realise. I have been extremely fortunate, because my coach really is my husband in real life. Sasha is a man who senses what I feel. I can cry on his shoulder and reveal all of my emotions to him. I would probably be shy to do so with a stranger.

If we talk about diets, then that's an individual choice. I'm not a vegetarian. In long-distance running, you need to have a sufficient amount of haemoglobin in your body, and you can't create haemoglobin without protein. That protein should be of animal origin. You have to think about this if you want to get the highest results, otherwise you might harm yourself.

How would you describe the popularity of running in different countries?

America is going through a running craze, which shows no sign of tapering off. It's pretty hard for amateur runners to take part in the big marathons, particularly in Boston and New York. Running is also popular in Europe, judging by the marathons in London, Paris and Berlin. Many Europeans also travel to take part in American marathons. In 2012, I flew later than usual from London to New York for the marathon there, and the plane was full of runners. We had to wait in the passport control line for three hours, and when news came in that the marathon had been cancelled [in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy – Ed.], loud moans of disappointment rang out throughout the hall.

I really admire the amateurs. Here in Portugal, you see a lot more amateurs than professional runners. Many of them have families and jobs, so it's not easy for them to train, but I understand why people choose to run – it's the most accessible sport. You just have to buy a good pair of running shoes and a track suit, and off you go! Running provides a release and lets you challenge yourself.

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Outlook **INTERVIEW**

How popular is running in Latvia? I mean for amateurs.

Compared to the situation 15 years ago, running has become a lot more popular. Living in Jūrmala, I see lots of people running along the beach, in the forest and on the streets. Lots of amateur runners are seeking coaching advice to give their pastime a more professional bent. I'm glad to see that people not only want to keep in shape, but that they want to do it right.

Your son, Viktor, is now five years old. Has he shown an interest in running?

Not yet, but he does have a certain spark within him. For example, whenever he goes out for walks with his dad, he is always running. Time will tell whether he decides to become a professional runner. We'll know the answer to that question maybe ten years from now. In any case, I can see that he enjoys physical activities.

You hold several Latvian records in a number of running distances. When do you think that they might be broken?

I have seen young women with the capability to beat my records, but somehow they haven't yet grown to that level. In any case, I would be happy if Latvia's best running times improved still further. I can say sort of jokingly that if God blesses me with a daughter, then she can try to improve my records. Only if she wishes, of course.

On the other hand, if ten years ago I was the only professional-level female long-distance runner in Latvia, then now several athletes are competing for the chance to take part in this year's Olympics. Along with two guaranteed spots, there is a third spot that two or three runners are competing to fill. This shows that marathon running has reached a new level in our country.

What do you think about when you run the marathon?

You always have to listen to what your body is saying and you have to keep track of what's going on around you. You have to watch where you place your feet to avoid stepping on pebbles

or uneven surfaces. You have to plan how to navigate a turn in the proper manner. If you're running in a group, then you have to avoid stepping on other runners' heels or stumbling and falling. You can't run in a marathon without thinking. You have to pace yourself to maintain your strength. You have to evaluate your opponents: are they on the verge of exhaustion or are they still running "fresh"?

During the last 5-7 km, though, usually only one thought is in your head – crossing that finish line as soon as possible so that your ordeal can end and you can go back home. At that stage in the race, your body has used up all of its reserves. You don't know where you are getting the strength to keep on running and your legs feel really heavy. But sooner or later, it all comes to an end. Then you have a feeling of a job well done and you can finally rest.

Many long-distance runners divide the race up into stages. What do you do?

Yes, there are different ways for running the marathon. Some run "from post to post" until they reach the finish line. My system is like this: during the first half of the race, I am "sleeping", or mechanically placing one foot in front of the other. If I am in a group, then I might follow the pace of another athlete. After the 21st kilometre, I "wake up" and really get to work. I put all of my remaining strength into the rest of the race. This means that I run the first half of the marathon more slowly and deliberately than the second half. Other people do the opposite, but that's really difficult. I try to run so that I can enjoy the race, too. It's great if you can pass somebody during the last 5-7 km, because that provides a big moral boost and gives you additional strength.

Do you carry out any rituals – perhaps even something small and insignificant – before a race?

I'm not superstitious, so no, I don't. Otherwise, if something suddenly went wrong, I might condition myself into thinking that I had no chance of winning. However, when I look at myself in the mirror before a race, I always make sure to wish myself good luck.



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Prokopčuka says that her husband Aleksandrs Prokopčuks (left) deserves a great deal of credit for her sports achievements, being a trusted life partner, coach and manager in one person

In order to reach the cities where the marathons take place, you have to travel and spend a lot of time in airplanes and hotels. What helps your body to deal with the stresses of travel?

I've travelled so much that I no longer feel any stress from these trips. Travelling is simply a part of my daily routine. I barely even think about it.

I feel a bit uncomfortable asking this question, but it seems that you have at least one running season left ahead of you. Have you thought about what you would like to do after you retire from professional sports?

Of course, I have thought about my future. At first I will probably just want to live for myself and do what I like. After a while, that will probably not be enough, but right now I would be quite happy just to water my plants and grow strawberries in my garden. I suppose that my next profession will probably be connected with sports. Perhaps I'll coach children or help amateur runners with advice. However, I'd have to try it out first and see how things go, because not all athletes make good coaches. But generally, I try to simply do what has to be done today and think about tomorrow when it comes.

Many men and women of your (and my) age are amateurs who have been running for some time. I invite you to present them with a friendly challenge. What running times should they strive to reach at the upcoming Riga marathon in May?

One athlete might run the marathon in five hours, and that will be a major achievement. Somebody else might run it in two hours and 45 minutes, and that will be outstanding. But OK, here goes! I challenge the marathon's male participants to run the race in three hours and ten minutes and the women to run it in three hours and 30 minutes. That would be super!

Thanks very much! I hope that you do extremely well when you run the next half-marathon in Riga! **BO**

How do you rest after a race? Do you spoil yourself in any way?

Oh, yes! After a race, I'm allowed to do anything that I want. There are so many restrictions before a marathon. I have to take special care to watch my weight. I also don't go to social events like birthday parties, because if I get sick, then three months of training will go straight down the tube. During the last month before a race, I don't even let myself go shopping. After a competition, however, I can eat whatever I want and socialise with other people as much as I want. During the first month after a marathon, I can run any distance that I want, and not the distances that Sasha sets for me. Psychologically that is very relaxing, because then, at least for a while, you don't have to keep yourself in check all of the time.



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SECRET ESCAPES FROM ROME

Text by **DACE VAIVARA**
 Photos by **DACE VAIVARA**,
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What's the best thing to do in Rome during the summer season? Escape the sweltering heat! That's what the Romans do, fleeing the sun-baked walls of the Eternal City to cool off in the countryside.

In July and August, when daytime temperatures in Rome can reach 40°C, wandering the streets is only possible if you walk in the shade – and then only if you are armed with a supply of drinking water that you can replenish from the many lovely fountains in the Italian capital's ancient centre. It would be tantalising to step fully dressed into a fountain like the Trevi, as bewitching Swedish actress Anita Ekberg did with heartbreaker Marcello Mastroianni in Federico Fellini's *La Dolce Vita*, but such sensuous pleasures would likely get you a hefty fine in the real world. The answer is to head for one of

the nearby lakes that the residents of Rome love so much, or to take a dip in the sea.

I visit Rome every summer to catch the high fashion shows and spend my vacation time pursuing *la dolce far niente* – the delectable art of doing nothing in particular, a concept that the Romans have long mastered. One day, before absconding from the city with a friend of mine to visit one of the fantastic places near Rome that I'll be describing for you (we've visited all of them by now, more than once), I summoned my last strength to climb the Spanish Steps in an intolerable swelter and headed for the Villa Borghese gardens to lie back in the shade of the trees, shoeless, and peruse a book. Lazily reading about people's longings for happiness, gazing now and then at the sky through the canopy of leaves, I started to understand how delicious the fine art of doing nothing can be. *La dolce far niente!*





Courtesy of Villa d'Este

VILLA D'ESTE TIVOLI

There's no lack of beautiful villas and parks in Italy, but the ancient Villa d'Este in Tivoli, a small hilltop town 30 km from Rome, is simply spectacular. The villa and surrounding gardens are masterworks of Italian Renaissance art. Innovative design, hundreds of smaller and larger fountains (including the famous "singing fountains"), fantastic Bernini sculptures and multi-level terraces combine with unique 16th-century architecture to create an unparalleled atmosphere that has inspired many other gardens across Europe. Last year, the Villa d'Este was awarded the title of the most beautiful park in Italy.

The villa was originally built as a Benedictine convent, but in 1550, Cardinal Ippolito II d'Este converted it into his country home. The Villa d'Este became a major cultural centre when Cardinal Gustav von Hohenlohe restored it the mid-19th century and frequently invited composer Franz Liszt to perform there. This was where the great Hungarian composer created the *Giochi d'acqua*, or Water Games for piano, dedicating it to the Villa

d'Este and performing it at one of his last concerts, in 1879.

I first visited the villa several years ago, while living and studying in Rome. Following the local tradition, I threw a few coins into one of the fountains and made a wish – I wanted to come back again. When I did return, I saw a completely different Villa d'Este. On a warm summer night, illuminated in mysterious colours, the gardens were even more impressive after sunset than they were by day. The bouquet of fragrances from the foliage and flowers in the humid air around the fountains was indescribable – it was like being in the Garden of Eden.

The *Viale delle Cento Fontane*, or Alley of One Hundred Fountains, is especially alluring by night, the sounds of its splashing waters exceptionally soothing. The Villa d'Este is a perfect location for a romantic getaway and slow strolls far from the sweltering city – and from July to the middle of September, the villa and its splendid gardens are open to visitors until midnight.

Piazza Trento 5, Tivoli
 ① villadestetivoli.info

How to get there

The easiest way is to rent a car and drive by the fastest route, A24. It will take you only half an hour to get there. By bus from Ponte Mammolo at the end of the Metro's B Line, your trip will take a bit longer – 40 to 70 minutes, depending on traffic. By train from Termini, you ride towards Pescara and reach Tivoli in about an hour.



Where to dine

If you want an unforgettable evening, *Sibilla* is the restaurant of choice. It boasts 300 years of history, an open-air terrace under the stars, ancient Roman columns beside it and a panoramic view of the fountains. Try the *Antipasto il mare*, a mixture of fish and oysters that will delight your taste buds. It goes perfectly with a cool prosecco or white wine.

Via della Sibilla 50, Tivoli
 ① ristorantesibilla.com



Photo by Marie-Lan Nguyen

What else to see

Hadrian's Villa or the Villa Adriana Tivoli is also worth a visit. Commissioned by Roman Emperor Hadrian in the 2nd century, the villa ensemble reflects his many travels eastward and his fascination with Greek and Egyptian culture. In turning his idealistic dreams into reality, Hadrian himself was the principal architect of this monumental complex of buildings – it was the largest villa ever constructed in Ancient Rome.

Largo Marguerite Yourcenar 1, Tivoli
 ① villaadriana.beniculturali.it

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PONZA – A HOT HOLIDAY ON A STAR-STUDED ISLAND

The tiny but picturesque island of Ponza off the Mediterranean coast between Rome and Naples is a popular place to relax for Rome's wealthy and well-known citizens. It's a wonderful isle for enjoying the sun and the beach, shopping and some serious nightlife. The high season lasts from May to mid-September, with speedboats ferrying passengers from the seaside town of Anzio to the island. You arrive in a crescent-shaped cove, white yachts bobbing in the blue waters below densely built little buildings clustered on the hillside. Italian families with children usually rent apartments and cook their meals themselves, but the stars glide in on their yachts, select luxury villas to stay in and savour the scintillating poolside nightlife. Fashion designers Giorgio Armani and Valentino have sojourned here, as have supermodels

Naomi Campbell and Heidi Klum, Monaco's Princess Caroline and actor Pierce Brosnan.

One of the most elegant places to stay on the island is the enchanting Villa Laetitia, owned by the House of Fendi. Each of the villa's six rooms bears the name of a spice and has a unique style – *Zafferano*, which means saffron, has a saffron interior, for instance. *Cannella* (cinammon) is perhaps the room that best reflects the island's charms.

A true jewel in the north of the isle is *Chiaia di Luna*, a beach shaped like the crescent moon that gives it its name, with white sand, pale tufa cliffs and a clear sea. Those less interested in scenery and more interested in beach fun and partying, however, should head for the island's biggest beach, *Frontone*. You can get there only by boat, so depart from the harbour. If you arrive early in the morning, you can get some sun and swim in the turquoise-blue water before having lunch along the beach. Once the sun sets, the seaside bars are happening places.

How to get there

The easiest and fastest way is travelling by car to Anzio, 40 km from Rome. There are buses from Metro Line B (Eur Station) and trains from Termini to Anzio-Netto. Speedboat ferries from Anzio to Ponza take 70 minutes... or you can sail your yacht.



Where to dine

You can have an unforgettable dining experience at *Da Enzo al Frontone*, located among the cliffs near Frontone Beach. Getting there is an adventure in itself, as the place can only be reached by boat. You need to call Enzo himself, the proprietor (tel. +39 339 2060408), and reserve a table. If you don't have your own yacht, then a rubber motorboat will pick you up, take you to the cliffs and later return you to town – this service is included in the dinner price. You'll have a vast array of seafood to choose from and be served by affable waiters who skilfully navigate the narrow steps between the illuminated cliffs. The tables are set out beneath the stars, offering a splendid view of the sea and the waves lapping below.



What else to see

Ponza is the largest island in the Pontine Archipelago. The others – Gavi, Palmarola, Zannone, Ventotene and Santo Stefano – can be visited by boat. The most popular excursions are to nearby and nearly uninhabited Palmarola, 12 km from Ponza, with a summer-only beachside restaurant. You can also rent a motorboat and visit Palmarola on your own, which will give you a chance to boat around Ponza and see the entire island – it's only seven square kilometres in size. If you go with the day-long guided boat tour, then you will be able to visit a few beaches and explore some fantastic grottos. The islands are at their most beautiful when seen from the sea.



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SPERLONGA — THE WHITE CITY BY THE SEA

Sperlonga is a prime destination for Romans who long to spend time on wonderful white sand beaches washed by sparkling blue waters. The historic silhouette of the hilltop town begins to gleam at a great distance when you approach, its characteristic whitewashed houses shining in the sun. It's known as one of the region's loveliest cities and boasts 10 km of impeccably clean beaches.

At the foot of the hill are private beaches with folding cots and parasols, and restaurants and bars abound. *Canzatora* is a smaller beach favoured by families with children, and *Fontana* is among the most popular and closest to town. Grotta di Tiberio Beach harbours an impressive grotto and the Villa Tiberio, the imposing residence of the second Roman emperor, Tiberius. Flanked by four medieval towers

built to repel a Saracen invasion from the sea, Sperlonga's historic centre with its 12th-century church, ancient and medieval architecture, and narrow, hilly streets and steps remind one of Amalfi, the Mediterranean jewel on Capri.

Sperlonga's central promenade is transformed on warm summer evenings into something of a fashion show; Italians love to dress for dinner in a manner that exceeds what you'd expect in a small resort town. Well-tanned Italian gentlemen in white shirts stroll the streets hand in hand with smartly dressed ladies, while casually clad tourists, families with baby carriages and elegant elderly women with small dogs complete the idyllic picture. Old men playing cards by the square and raucous children with melting ice cream from the *gelateria* in their hands add to the scene – it's a show everyone participates in and watches at sundown.

How to get there

Sperlonga is 150 km from Rome. The most convenient way to get there is by car along the A1 Rome-Naples highway, turning off at Cassino. You can also take the Naples train and get off at Fondi, whence you go on to Sperlonga by city bus. The town has a small harbour where you can berth your yacht, too.



Where to eat

Da Martini sul Ponte is a fabulous inn in the historic centre with a fine terrace that offers a panoramic view, superb seafood and a family atmosphere that drew me in almost every evening when I vacationed in Sperlonga. The proprietor, Marco Martini, personally serves his guests and recommends the best of the daily offerings whilst his mother performs alchemy in the kitchen. My favourites were lobster linguini with grilled tiger shrimp and squid, and I could never resist having the divine lemon sorbet served in a frozen lemon for dessert. When everyone has finished eating, which can be at well after midnight, Marco offers *limoncello*, a lemon liqueur, to the lingering guests.

Corso San Leone 5, Sperlonga

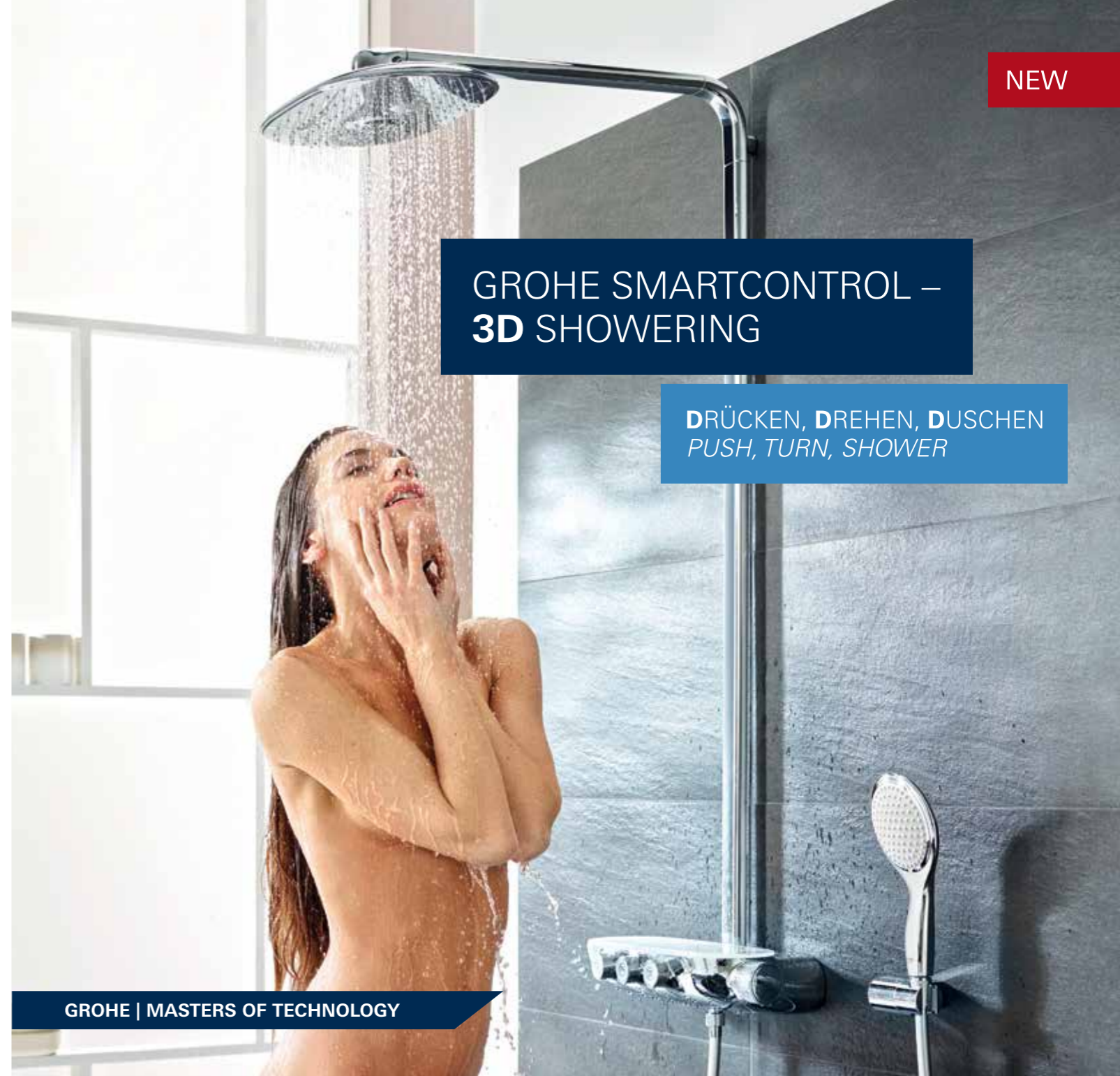


Photo by Sagnon 21

What else to see

It's worth visiting neighbouring Gaeta, 10 km from Sperlonga. The attraction is a natural wonder within a mountain, the Grotta del Turco in the Montagna Spaccata. Descending the 267 steps of the "Turk's Grotto" gives you stunning views of the turquoise sea and eroded stone in the mystical light of the cavern. According to legend, Saracen pirates docked and hid there before attacking ships in the medieval period. After an earthquake in the 15th century, a small chapel was erected – the view of the sea is fantastic from there.

Via Santissima Trinità, Gaeta



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NEMI — AN IDYLL IN A STRAWBERRY OASIS

Another fantastic escape from Rome is at Nemi, a hilltop village that is only seven square kilometres in size. The volcanic Lake Nemi at the foot of the hill has been considered sacred since the times of the Etruscans and ancient Romans. Art, history and nature are blended here in perfect harmony. Nemi's narrow streets have been painted and described by many great painters and writers, among them Hans Christian Andersen, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Stendhal and Gabriele d'Annunzio.

French Romantic composer Charles Gounod, inspired by the nocturnal panorama of the lovely lake, composed his renowned *Ave Maria* there and carved the place and date into a guitar that he never parted with: Nemi, 24 April 1862. Lord Byron brought Nemi into eternity with his *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, and a panoramic terrace is now named after the famed poet in the Piazza Roma

in the city centre. The Palazzo Ruspoli, a medieval castle from the 10th century that's the oldest in this region, stands nearby. The Temple of Diana Nemorensis, dedicated to the goddess of the hunt by the ancient Romans, is also close at hand. Nemi is an ideal town for unhurried exploration, visiting small shops and tasting local specialties in the cafés.

Nemi has a pleasant climate and summers aren't as hot as in the cities. Refreshing winds cool the town, while the surrounding forests teem with mushrooms and the strawberries that this region prides itself on. The strawberry season starts in May and during the first week of June, Nemi holds its strawberry festival, the *Sagra delle Fragole*. It's a tradition that dates to the beginning of the 20th century. The girls of Nemi, dressed in folk costumes, treat everyone at the festival to wild strawberries. Meanwhile, the bars and restaurants offer all kinds of culinary miracles made of strawberries, including marmalades, liqueurs, syrups, ice creams, tarts and cakes. **BO**

How to get there

If you rent a car, you can get to Nemi on the A1 from San Cesario, heading in the direction of Valmontane – it's less than an hour's drive. By train from Termini, head towards Velletri and get off at Albano Laziale or Lanuvio. A local bus will take you to Nemi from there.



Where to dine

There are only a few restaurants in Nemi, for the most part family-run places. It's worth trying *Il Ramo d'Oro*, the Golden Branch, which provides a panoramic view of the lake and fantastic cuisine by Raniero, a chef much praised by the locals. This is a region of fine cheeses and good wine. Among the prized dishes are *Fettuccine ai funghi porcini*, or pasta with penny buns, and nobody should leave Nemi without trying *fragolino*, the aromatic local strawberry liqueur, or one of the rich strawberry desserts.

Via Nemorense 4, Nemi
 ① iramo-doro.com



Photo by Ra Boe / Wikipedia

What else to see

Relaxing on the beach by the legendary lake is an experience that you shouldn't miss – the ancient Romans also adored this place. Two ships belonging to Caligula, one of Ancient Rome's most tyrannical emperors, are said to have sunk into the lake's depths under mysterious circumstances, filled with treasure. The Museo delle Navi Romane, dating to the 1930s, displays models of these ships and other historical exhibits.

Via del Tempi di Diana 13, Nemi
 ① museonavromane.it



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LONDON

GOES WILD

London is changing, with new skyscrapers continually popping up like mushrooms after a rain. However, at ground level a no less exciting culture is growing. Londoner James Luxford explores the British capital's vibrant outdoor spaces, presenting a rarely viewed side of the thriving city.

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Text by **JAMES LUXFORD**
 Photos by *Alamy*, **EWAN MUNRO**
 and **CRISTIAN BORTES**

Nearly every major world city has seen change over the last decade, but perhaps none more so than London. We've seen the complete rejuvenation of the famous East End thanks to the 2012 Summer Olympics, areas such as Shoreditch attracting a new generation of young creatives, The Shard integrating itself into the city's skyline, and the business world flocking to be part of the action.

It's an exciting time to be a Londoner, as I have been all my life. But with all of this manmade progress, it can be easy to overlook a different but equally powerful revolution happening in the city's numerous green areas. All kinds of new and interesting wildlife have begun to appear in a metropolis that is traditionally famed for its concrete streets and architectural wonders. These new arrivals have been able to thrive thanks to both human intervention and the existence of parks and woodlands. Some formerly foreign species have become as common to Londoners as red buses and Big Ben.

From falcons to scorpions

For a bustling metropolis of over 8.5 million people, it's surprising that nearly half (47%, according to a 2014 survey) of London is made up of "green space" – gardens, parks, zoos, nature reserves and other communal areas. As a result, many species not traditionally associated with the city have made it their home. One



There are more peregrine falcons in London than in the more picturesque areas further north

new resident is the fastest animal on the planet, the peregrine falcon, whose numbers have multiplied dramatically over the last couple of decades. Ironically, the imposing skyscrapers and hidden areas of the inner city have provided the perfect hunting ground for these renowned predators, who patrol the skies above the city's West End in the search for prey.

You might see the presence of these expert killers as discouraging, but it is in fact a sign of the natural order in progress, largely due to another more familiar bird. To many visitors the feral pigeon is a charming part of Trafalgar Square and other tourist areas, made famous by the film *Mary Poppins*. However, the pigeon population began to get out of hand towards



Holland Park is one of the most romantic green spaces in London

Photo by Ewan Munro



Rabbits, peacocks, parrots and other wildlife abound in Holland Park

The park encompasses a semi-wild woodland, public gardens, cafés and war ruins

the turn of this century, and the tens of thousands of pigeons that laid siege to the area began to become a menace to pedestrians, prompting the city government to impose a ban on feeding them. Among other things, the peregrine falcon preys on pigeons, and the resurgence of the raptor in London is seen as plus for anyone who has been greeted by a sea of feathers while trying to make their way through town!

Like so many of their human counterparts, peregrine falcons are

outsiders who have made London home, but they aren't the only ones. Yellow-tailed scorpions have become unlikely inhabitants towards the south of the city, despite originally being native to parts of Africa. The only species of scorpion to be live outside of terrariums in the UK, they have taken to hiding within older buildings and in the Underground, where surprised commuters have occasionally reported sightings. However, those fearing being stung on a rail journey will

be relieved to hear that these sighting are quite rare. Similarly, a variety of bats can be found around the Hampstead Heath area of North London, with over 16 species recorded to be patrolling the skies. These migrating species may not be everyone's idea of nature at its most beautiful, but they are a surprising addition to the local ecology and a prime example of adaptation to the most varied of environments.

Green metropolis

For those who don't want to leave their wildlife encounters to chance, the first port of call would be a visit to one of London's eight incredible royal parks, four of which can be found in the central region of the city. In the affluent surroundings of Kensington lies Holland Park, a gorgeous 54-acre space bordered by the charming London icons of Notting Hill and High Street Kensington. The park encompasses a semi-wild woodland, public gardens, cafés and war ruins. Its most ornate residents are beautiful peacocks, which have been a feature of the park for years and add to the sense that you have wandered far from the noise and traffic of the city.

A short ride on London's central train line will lead you to another natural wonder, St James' Park. Created by King Henry VIII, the 57-acre space is reminiscent



Squirrel at St. James's Park



European robin at St. James's Park



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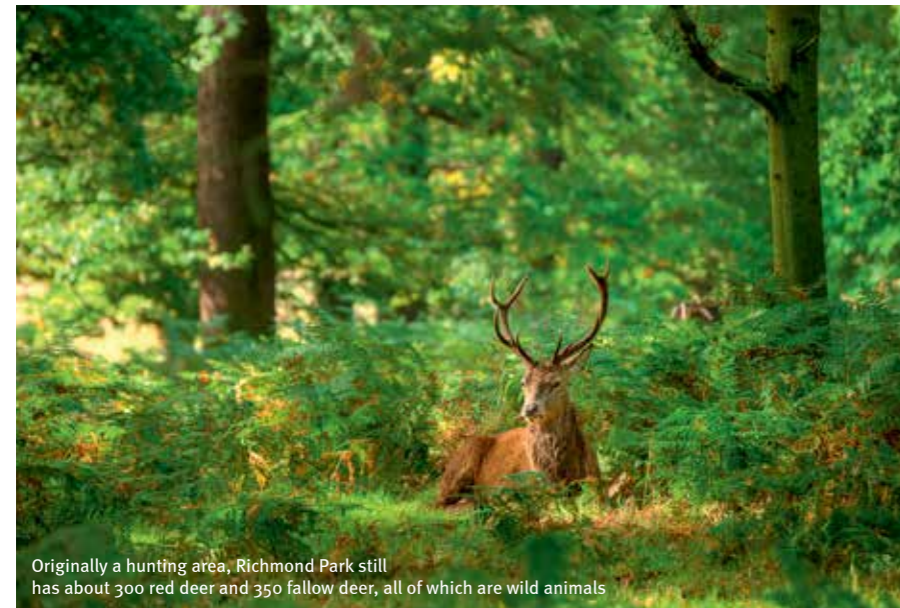
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Despite being surrounded by London's urban sprawl, Richmond Park is one of the best places in the UK for wildlife photography



Originally a hunting area, Richmond Park still has about 300 red deer and 350 fallow deer, all of which are wild animals

Several hundred deer still roam wild around the grounds, in a diverse and beautiful ecosystem

of New York's Central Park – an oasis of calm planted within a busy city. The park has hosted a colony of pelicans for over four hundred years, following a gift from a Russian ambassador. The birds (more commonly found in the Americas) are always the main draw for both tourists and locals alike – quite a feat considering the

stunning views of The Shard, Buckingham Palace and the London Eye that the park also offers.

For sheer space, it's hard to beat Richmond Park, a nature reserve with over 2,000 acres of lush woodland that have provided the setting for many films, documentaries, the 2012 Olympics and,

of course, family days out. The park was initially used to breed deer and became a protected area several decades ago. Several hundred deer still roam wild around the grounds, in a diverse and beautiful ecosystem that includes many types of rabbit, foxes and voles. Even to Londoners, who are quite familiar with green spaces, the sight of wild animals and mystical woodland is breathtaking. No wonder that this park was recently a location for the big-screen fairy tale *Into The Woods*, where superstar Meryl Streep and her fellow actors took advantage of the grounds' other-worldly feel.

Zoos will always be a divisive subject to lovers of nature, as even the largest reserves and areas of captivity cannot truly match the wild. Nestled within Regent's Park is the London Zoo, which houses one of the largest collections of animals in the UK and is just a stone's throw from the rebellious music hub of Camden Town. Home to lions, gorillas, penguins and many other animals, the zoo once had a resident who provided the inspiration for A. A. Milne's *Winnie the Pooh* books. In the modern era, resident animal experts work in tandem with conservation efforts all over the world to make sure that many rare species are protected.

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Historic Triton Fountain in Regent's Park



Heron in the canopy

Dolphins and porpoises have been spotted hundreds of times towards the south of London

Secrets of the River Thames

The scrupulous members of the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) recorded another curious phenomenon happening right in the city's beating heart, the River Thames. For far too long, the river had been a literal dirty secret of the city, where hundreds of years of pollution and neglect had made sea life a thing of the past. A more environmentally conscious age has turned the tide, however, and a ZSL survey covering the past decade has revealed sightings of some very surprising

visitors. In the financial core of Canary Wharf, workers and wildlife-lovers have regularly seen seals of many varieties, with the playful mammals delighting onlookers more used to seeing them in coastal regions.

While they haven't been spotted quite as often, even more fantastic creatures have been known to pass through the river. The same ZSL survey reports that dolphins and porpoises have been spotted hundreds of times towards the south of London and near the famous Kew Gardens. While parts

of Ireland and Scotland have regularly seen the notoriously friendly animals, it's only in recent years that such sightings have occurred in London as well.

To top it all, whales have been seen several times near the mouth of the river, although arguably the most famous of these sightings ended tragically. This past January marked the ten-year anniversary



Large stone urn of flowers in Regent's Park

of the River Thames Whale, sometimes named Diana in the media. She became lost and surfaced in central London, attracting thousands of onlookers and gaining worldwide fame as rescuers tried to steer her to more suitable waters. Sadly, the whale did not survive, but the story remains a part of the river's history. The skeleton of the animal is now on display in the nearby Natural History Museum and many have campaigned for a commemorative plaque to be placed by the river. London-based musician Damon Albarn, of the bands *Blur* and *Gorillaz*, even wrote a song dedicated to the unintentional celebrity.

During the mid-20th century, a large part of the Thames was considered dead due to years of pollution, with much of it uninhabitable for any form of aquatic life. The reappearance of animals not seen for years is the surest confirmation that efforts to create a more environmentally friendly city have come to fruition. Londoners and people

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The Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew in West London house the world's largest collection of living plants

Photo by Cristian Bortez



Treetop Walkway at the Royal Botanic Gardens in Kew

Adventurous urban explorers can discover a completely different side to a place that so many dismiss as a cold metropolis

in many other parts of the world have become increasingly aware of the need to care for our natural resources, and for industrial progress to occur harmoniously with the growth of nature.

Future perspective

Indeed, maintaining natural habitats is important in a constantly evolving city like London. The legacy of the industrial past laid many areas of the city to waste, but just as construction has turned the East London village of Stratford into a revived cosmopolitan area, so too green conservation has revived formerly derelict parts of the city. This is where the work of charities such as the London Wildlife Trust (LWT) comes in. Over the years, the

Trust has developed 40 nature reserves, encouraging the public to respect and protect the environment. The Trust also works to repurpose disused areas of the city so that they benefit both local wildlife and people living in the vicinity. Wandering into Crane Park Island, a former gunpowder works situated on a river near Richmond, is like walking into an enchanted forest. Twenty-five years ago, the island was transformed from a factory setting into a nature reserve where plants, birds and fish now thrive.

There are other areas where the city's industrial past has helped natural growth, such as the Birdbrook Grove Nature Reserve in historic Greenwich, where rare amphibious species have been

reintroduced and bred amongst the rubble of a former building factory. To the very west of London in Hounslow is the Gunnersbury Triangle. The woodland is surrounded by a now disused railway line, and this lack of human intervention helped the area to develop naturally over many years. The site has been protected from any kind of development since the 1980s – the first case in the UK of urban development being halted on environmental grounds – and has become one of the most beautiful pieces of unspoiled woodland to be found in the outer reaches of the city.

“Our vision for London is a city where all people treasure wildlife and natural spaces,” reads the LWT’s official site. “We believe that Londoners have a right to access free, quality natural spaces in their local area (and) will fight to maintain London as a critical home for wildlife”.

There are thousands of sights, sounds and experiences that can make you fall in love with London, a place that so many call home and that even more want to visit. This guide to London’s surprisingly vast natural wealth shows that there is much more to the British capital than shopping or landmarks, with the best that nature has to offer just a short walk away. Adventurous urban explorers can discover a completely different side to a place that so many dismiss as a cold metropolis or concrete jungle. Hopefully, London’s environmental richness will live on and indeed increase, making this modern city a habitat and sanctuary for all creatures great and small. **BO**

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German artist and theorist Joseph Beuys once said that “everyone is an artist”, and he was right. One just has to discover the artist in oneself and let one’s imagination run free. Sometimes, all that one needs to carry out a seemingly crazy idea is the right impulse. Hence, for an added dose of artistic inspiration during your travels, *Baltic Outlook* offers a list of some of Europe’s most colourful and unusual hotels. Even if you don’t become an artist after your stay, an invigorating springlike feeling and a powerful creative stimulus are guaranteed.

Text by **UNA MEISTERE**,
anothertravelguide.com
Publicity photos and courtesy of
Design Hotels



HAM YARD HOTEL, London

London is a city that debunks all of those stories about British people incessantly complaining about the bad weather. In any case, it is hard to imagine a more effective form of positive shock therapy than a night’s stay at the *Ham Yard Hotel*. The bohemian lotusland of colours and textures will immediately draw you into a hallucinogenic dream that is impossible to describe in words, but that can be enjoyed to the max with the hope that at least some of your stay’s most colourful vignettes will remain in memory.

Imagine this – the walls of your room are covered with greenish grey striped fabric, the pillows on your bed are bluish white, while the sofa is grey on one side and blue on the other. The table top consists of three robust boards of different lengths, while the floor lamp’s decoratively carved column casts a surreal pattern onto the window curtain in the evening light, providing an added dimension to the room. Even after her experiences in *Wonderland* and her adventures behind the *Looking Glass*, Alice’s head would be left spinning from a stay at the *Ham Yard Hotel*.

The *Ham Yard Hotel* belongs to the well-known British *Firmdale Hotels* chain, providing an urban village feel and housing a fashion microcosm complete with designer stores, a cinema, a bowling alley, a restaurant and a spa. Tim and Kit Kemp, the owners of *Firmdale Hotels*, are often referred to as the British counterparts of Ian Schrager, the American father of boutique hotels.

The small courtyard that houses the *Ham Yard Hotel* is only a couple of hundred yards from Piccadilly Circus and is said to have gotten

its name from a lively pub that operated there during the 18th century. The pub was followed by night clubs during the 1920s and 1930s and jazz bars during the 1940s. The courtyard suffered heavy damage from German bombings during the London Blitz, and its most significant postwar resident was *The Scene Club*, a popular 1960s music venue that hosted the *Rolling Stones*, the *Who* and other British bands.

Hotel co-owner Kit Kemp is to design what Christian Lacroix is to fashion. Both share the unique ability to paint with colours and patterns in the boldest combinations. Kemp says that she doesn’t rely on any set things for inspiration, and that she might suddenly obtain creative impulses from reading a book, seeing a trinket in an antique shop, watching a movie or travelling somewhere. For example, the pages of an old book on botany now serve as decorative elements on the walls of the hallways of the *Ham Yard Hotel*. Other “exhibit pieces” grow in the rooftop terrace garden and are used for the needs of the hotel restaurant.

Each of the hotel’s 91 bedrooms and suites has been individually designed, and it seems that objects from every part of the world have been brought there. Apparently, Kemp has a whole warehouse full of fabrics, interior items, artworks and design objects that she has brought back to London from her travels. The cinema on the basement floor is decked in bright orange chairs, fuchsia pink curtains and electric-blue fabric covered walls, while the bowling alley displays 1950s-style elements, including vintage bowling shoes that Kemp purchased through *eBay*.

1 Ham Yard, London, W1D 7DT
① firmdalehotels.com

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HOTEL WINDSOR, Nice

The love affair between great artists and the French Riviera is well-known and continues at the *Hotel Windsor* to this day. Designed by a student of Gustave Eiffel in the late 19th century, the building became a hotel soon after and was popular with British citizens, who wintered there to escape the UK's cold and rainy climate.

The current owners of the hotel are passionate about art, and this is reflected in the interior of the *Hotel Windsor*. In 1987, the owners began a *chambres d'artistes* project, under which one guest room per year was redecorated by an artist, and Nice-based artist Ben Vautier was one of the project's first participants. Known for creating artworks with witty and provocative texts, "Ben" created a bright reddish-orange interior, with written texts decorating even the lamps and wooden door frames. A spark of humour can be found in practically every artist's work at the hotel, making a night's stay at this establishment something to remember. You will find artworks everywhere in the hotel, including the lift, restaurant, lobby and courtyard garden. The latter is a wonderful oasis in the centre of the city, with a swimming pool available for those who feel too lazy to walk down to the beach.

1 rue Dalpozzo, 06000 Nice
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who travel frequently are doubtless familiar with the feeling of waking up in a semi-conscious state and wondering "Where am I?"

The *Pantone Hotel* is the equivalent of a box of coloured pencils in the literal sense of the word, too. That should not be surprising, as the US company that set up the hotel is also the creator of a colour matching system that has been used in fashion and design circles for decades – part of the so-called Pantone Universe. Each of the hotel's seven guest floors displays a distinct set of colour hues, ranging from vivid to subdued. Furthermore, with white walls and a white bed, each of the 59 guest rooms is like a canvas that serves as an ideal backdrop for further experiments with colour. The central interior elements in each room are colour installations by Belgian photographer Victor Levy, who used the *Pantone* colour spectrum. The rooftop terrace, for its part, provides a splendid panoramic view of Brussels from a unique vantage point (and colour perspective).

1 Place Loix
 ① pantonehotel.com



PANTONE HOTEL, Brussels

Sigmund Freud would have had plenty of material to write about after visiting this hotel in the Belgian capital. Imagine suddenly waking up in the middle of the night and sitting up in your bed, because a fairy has transformed you into Thumbelina and placed you in a

box of coloured pencils. At least that's how things might appear, because the bed is surrounded by spaces that have been meticulously coloured in the same tones that one would find in a pencil set. The dream recedes and you fully regain your senses. It turns out that you have not shrunk after all and that the box of pencils is actually your hotel room. Those

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SEMIRAMIS, Athens

The opening of the *Semiramis* hotel in Athens in 2004 signalled a veritable revolution. In any case, nobody had dared to come forth until then with such bold experiments in the boutique hotel business. Famous contemporary industrial design specialist Karim Rashid designed the hotel from A to Z – starting with the architecture and ending with the interior décor, including the tables, wavelength sofas, swing chairs and guest slippers. The *Semiramis* has since become a classic of its genre and a monument to creative freedom, as Rashid was given free rein to realise his artistic ideas.

The establishment is operated under the Greek boutique hotel chain *YES! Hotels*, which is owned by Athens-based businessman and patron of the arts Dakis Joannou. One of the reasons that he entrusted the design of the hotel to Rashid was the latter's absence of previous architectural experience. "He was asked to design the hotel as a self-sufficient object," says Joannou. In essence, the hotel can be seen as a work of art.

The *Semiramis* is located in Kifisia. Athens' greenest residential

district, about 15 kilometres or a 40-minute taxi ride from the city centre. The hotel's colour palette reflects Rashid's trademark tones, mainly bright pink, orange, green and yellow. One gets the impression that the designer played around with colours, technologies, materials and textures as if they were toy blocks. Here one might find a blue glass sink in one's guest room, along with bathroom walls of matted glass and a bright green rubbish bin, coloured concrete and rubber floors, and ceramic tiles with metal. A modern art installation sits in the wall behind every bed, and each guest room is identified with a custom-designed symbol rather than a room number.

Guests can type in such traditional requests as "Do not disturb" and "Please clean the room", which are displayed on electronic message boards installed in the hallway floor by the entrance of each room. The hotel boasts 51 guest rooms, four penthouse suites and five pool bungalows that lead out to the equally colourful pool deck and private garden.

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Three cabrios to try this summer

The Baltic summer is short and sometimes quite wet, but there is still fun to be had, particularly on sunny days in an open-top car. We tried out some of the best cabriolets in different price ranges in cooperation with the *What Car?* car buyers' guide.

In association with car buyer's guide **WHATCAR.LV**
Publicity photos



PORSCHE 718 BOXSTER

The *718 Boxster* is the cheapest *Porsche* that money can buy, and also one of the best. A two-seater sports car with a mid-engined layout, it's brilliant to drive, with lots of horsepower, sharp handling and beautifully accurate manual and automatic gearboxes. The interior is well built and nicely designed, with plenty of space and two separate boots – one in the front and one in the back – which makes it surprisingly practical.

The simple, retracting soft-top ensures that you can enjoy sunny days just as much as any winding roads, and this car is a better all-rounder than anything else in its class, including rivals as varied as the *Jaguar F-type*, *Mercedes SLK* and *BMW Z4*.

Choosing an engine for your *718 Boxster* is a simple process: there are just two options available. The entry-level car comes with a 2.0-litre 300-hp motor, while the more expensive *718 Boxster S* has a 350-hp 2.5-litre engine. Whichever you choose, the performance is scintillating, especially with the optional Sports Chrono package.

As standard, both versions of the *718 Boxster* come with a six-speed manual gearbox, but a seven-speed 'PDK'



dual-clutch automatic is available as an option, and when fitted it makes the car feel even quicker.

Any sports car worth its salt needs to offer handling excitement in spades, and the *718 Boxster* will not disappoint. The steering is wonderfully accurate and very precise, with just enough feedback to give the driver plenty of confidence. Turn into a bend and there's virtually no body roll and a massive amount of grip at both axles, so you can power out of corners without any hint of instability.

VERDICT

You will like: Brilliant handling, clever roof mechanism, practical to use, reasonable running costs

You will not like: Expensive to buy, doesn't come with much equipment as standard, options are pretty pricey

Price: from 44,900 euros



MAZDA MX-5

The *Mazda MX-5* is the only two-seat sports roadster that you can buy for less than silly money, so it's really in a class of its own. The *Toyota GT86* is its closest competitor, but unavailable as a convertible.

Any rivals would need to be remarkable to surpass the fun, lightweight *Mazda*. It is available with a 1.5- or 2.0-litre petrol engine, both of which offer easily accessible, free-revving performance. The *MX-5* is also balanced and light-footed through corners, and comfortable even over broken surfaces. We favour the 2.0-litre model – the small premium is worth it, given the sharper handling and punchier performance.

This is one of the best-handling sport cars short of those that cost twice as much, coming at a great price and with generous standard equipment levels. Some might wish for a folding hard-top variant, but the manually operated fabric hood is a doddle to use.

Noise levels with the roof up are perfectly acceptable for a sports roadster. There's a fair bit of wind and tyre noise at motorway speeds, but all within reason. The car is not too blustery with the roof down, even at higher speeds, so you won't be afraid to go roof-down in mediocre weather.

Both engines deliver a pleasing rasp at medium revs and stay smooth at high ones, so it's a pleasure to rev them out (as you're



likely to want to do regularly), while the manual gearbox's precise, short shift makes changing gears enjoyable, too.

The *MX-5* is a small car, and one does feel this in the cabin. You can touch the opposite door without stretching, so you're in close proximity to any passenger, and long-bodied drivers might feel that the roof is a bit close. However, this is acceptable by the standards of small roadsters.

VERDICT

You will like: Outstanding ride and handling balance, performance perfectly suited to Baltic roads, classy-feeling interior, low running costs

You will not like: No hard-top version, limited storage space, driving position lacks adjustment options

Price: from 27,100 euros



AUDI TT ROADSTER

The *TT Roadster* is the soft-top version of *Audi's* smallest coupe. Unlike its hard-top equivalent, the *Roadster* has only two seats, but otherwise it has most of the same virtues. Its main rivals are the *BMW Z4* and *Mercedes SLK*, although unlike those cars, the *TT Roadster* has a fabric hood rather than a folding metal hood. That might sound less secure, but it makes the *Audi* lighter, which in turns means that it's faster and more agile. The *TT* is also classier inside than its rivals and more practical. In addition, the hood is seriously quick to do its business; we timed it at just nine seconds from up to fully down.

Most buyers are best off sticking with the 2.0 TFSI petrol in Sport trim, but we wouldn't try to talk you out of the *quattro* (four-wheel-drive) version if you want better traction in slippery conditions. The S tronic automatic gearbox changes gear rapidly, but it can be a bit jerky when parking. Unless you really need an automatic, we'd stick with the six-speed manual.

The standard suspension gives a firm but generally comfortable ride, and even the S line's optional sports set-up doesn't make things too bumpy. It's worth avoiding the temptation of large wheels (up to 20-inch tires are available) if you



value comfort over sporty looks, because they make the ride harsher.

In damp conditions, front-wheel-drive *TTs* can struggle to transfer all of their power to the road – particularly when moving briskly away from a standstill or on the way out of corners – but the four-wheel-drive (*quattro*) versions are almost unflappable.

While a two-seater roadster is never going to be as quiet as a luxury car, the *TT Roadster* does a good job of keeping the outside world outside. There's some wind noise from around the frameless windows and you can also hear road noise, but the *TT* is a pretty quiet cruiser with the hood up.

VERDICT

You will like: Brilliant to drive, fast-acting hood, sumptuous cabin

You will not like: Poor over-the-shoulder visibility with the roof up, you'll almost certainly want to add a few options, smaller boot than the coupe and no rear seats

Price: from 38,193 euros

**BIGGEST AND BEST
CAR BUYERS GUIDE
IN THE BALTICS**





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Robert Böhme,
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Next step: the Moon

The *Audi Lunar Quattro* wouldn't be the first man-made vehicle on the Moon, but if this ingenious means of transport manages to make some new imprints in the dusty surface of Earth's nearest neighbour, then it will definitely be a spectacular manifestation of *Vorsprung durch Technik* (advancement through technology).

There was a time when people were in a hurry to get to the Moon. During the era when the Iron Curtain was still firmly in place, the Moon even became an object of the Cold War between the capitalist and communist systems. The space race that broke out between East and West experienced a fantastic climax on July 21, 1969, when the American Apollo 11 mission landed on the Moon. That seminal event will always be associated with astronauts Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin and their historic “giant leap for mankind”. In the decades that have since passed, the furor surrounding our nearest neighbour has died down. Or has it? Things may soon change.

“The concept of a privately financed mission to the Moon is fascinating. And innovative ideas need supporters that promote them.” With these words, Luca de Meo, a senior manager at *Audi AG*, announced the company's support for one of the world's most innovative teams of engineers – the Part-Time Scientists, whose headquarters are in eastern Germany. In April of 2015, the group managed to obtain some rental space in an industrial part of Berlin's Hellersdorf district. Two-hundred metres behind their office is the border with the neighbouring German state, Brandenburg.

Publicity photos
and illustrations

“For the rent that we pay for our 177-square-metre office, we couldn't have found even 40 square metres in the city centre,” says Robert Böhme, the leader and founder of the group. “We need a place where we can hammer, be noisy and make a mess even at three in the morning.” This is the perfect location, he feels, because the Part-Time Scientists' ultimate goal is to reach the Moon. And they intend to get there by the sweat of their own brows.

Böhme's adventure began in 2008 – with a car accident. The then-22-year-old received 16,000 euros from an insurance company for his totalled vehicle. Others would have used the cash to travel around the world or – perhaps a more obvious solution – to buy a new car. Böhme, however, saw this windfall of sorts as seed money to fund a vision of his and paid the equivalent of 10,000 US dollars to enter the *Google Lunar XPRIZE* competition, an international effort to spark a new race to the Moon.

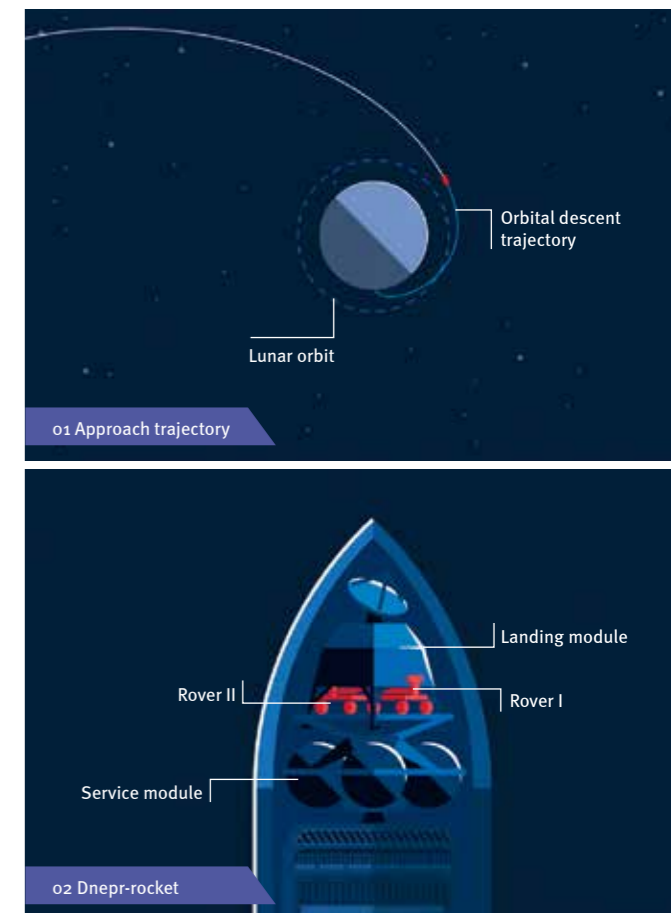
While the terms and conditions of this competition might sound lucrative at first, they are in fact quite brutal: 20 million dollars will go to the first privately funded team to land a rover on the Moon. This vehicle must travel at least 500 metres on the surface of the Moon and transmit data back to Earth. Completing additional tasks can bring the total reward up to around 30 million dollars. How, when and with what means the competing teams accomplish this is entirely up to them. Logistics, technical details and financing are left in their own hands. Neither ESA nor NASA are involved.

Thirty-four teams initially registered for the mission, of which 18 are no longer in the running. In addition to the space enthusiasts from Berlin, the best odds are on two teams from the USA, one from Japan and one from India.

“*Audi* is a very strong partner that will bring us a big step forward with its technological and other capabilities,” Böhme says.

Böhme is a techie. Long before founding the Part-Time Scientists, he built an Internet radio based on Open Source technology and ran a large community for *Linux* beginners. And – yes, there has to be a cliché somewhere – as a fan of the early *Star Trek* movies, he has long had an eye on space.

“There aren't enough visionaries today. People are stuck far too much in an optimisation rut. Today's commercialisation is supposed to make things better. But that way, you don't make anything new. Life can't just be about optimising things for capitalism.” That's more than just an opinion. It's an attitude. “It's good to have a goal that is much bigger than you are. That helps you grow,” he says.



01 Traveling at five times the speed of sound, the landing module will follow a precisely calculated trajectory on its approach to the Moon.
02 The Part-Time Scientists are planning a flight to the Moon with a Russian *Dnepr* space launch vehicle. Its nose will contain the service module, which will carry two *Audi Lunar Quattro* vehicles in a smaller landing module.

Audi AG's Luca de Meo shares this view, which prompted him to call for support across disciplines and industries for the pioneering spirit that he sees in Böhme's team. Award money is not the top priority in this venture. All of the members of Böhme's team have been volunteering their time for years. The core team consists of 20 to 35 members, with up to 70 people involved altogether. Among the space freaks, physicists and mathematicians is Jack Crenshaw, a dyed-in-the-wool NASA veteran. The 80-year-old programmer once calculated trajectories for the Apollo space missions.

All of the team members are united by the dream of shooting two 90x70-centimetre vehicles into space, landing them together on the Moon and driving them around. The *Audi* working group that is supporting

On the moon's surface, the *Audi Lunar Quattro* will have to withstand temperatures from -180°C to $+120^{\circ}\text{C}$



The *Audi Lunar Quattro* rover. An adjustable solar panel will capture sunlight and direct it to a lithium-ion battery, which will power four electric wheel hub motors. The vehicle's top speed is 3.6 kilometres per hour. Given the unevenness of the Moon's surface, the rover's off-road capabilities and ability to stay on course are vital. Three cameras will be mounted on the front: two stereoscopic and one scientific. The latter is for examining materials.

the Part-Time Scientists consists of employees from widely varying disciplines.

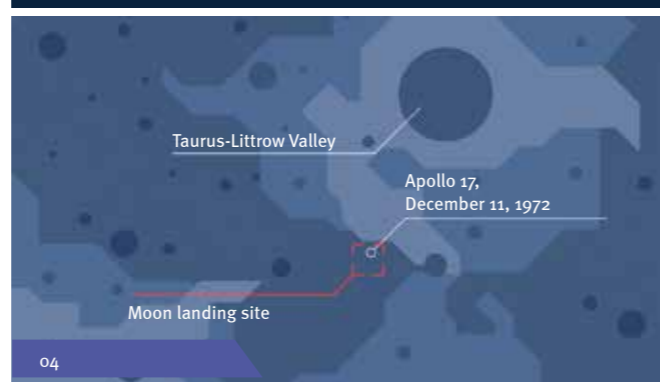
"A conventional *Audi* is extremely efficient. The Moon rover will have to be even more efficient. *Audis* are propelled by *Quattro* drives, and our Moon rover will be as well. Among our assignments is coming up with a customised solution to deal with the fine, powdery dust on the surface of the Moon," Michael Schöffmann, head of transmission development at *Audi*, explains. Not only that: temperatures on the Moon range from -180°C to $+120^{\circ}\text{C}$. Coupled with the extreme radiation of the Sun, this means that alloys of such metals as aluminium and magnesium will have to be used.

A symbiosis of design and technology will protect the *Audi Lunar Quattro* rover during its hazardous voyage in space.

"Ultimately, you need the same specs as for a regular *Audi* in conditions that are much more extreme than on Earth. I'm talking about efficiency, lightweight construction, permanent all-wheel drive, e-tron drive and an optimal engine for all types of terrain," says Jorge Diez, head of *Audi's* concept automotive design section, summing up the requirements.

Weight is another crucial factor in the mission to the Moon; A difference of a few grams can lead to considerable cost savings in the project. Thus, *Audi* and the Part-Time Scientists are working with particular gusto on getting the most that they can out of the company's expertise in lightweight construction.

In any case, "there are no problems, only challenges," says Böhme, whose colleagues describe him as an "untiring optimist who drives the team forward". He is the captain who keeps this off-beat and diverse team of specialists on course. Böhme stresses that he is not at the helm of a lunatics' association, but heads a team of experts that stands a good chance of sending a rocket with a rover



03 A rocket will blast off with the thrust of some 4,520 kilonewtons and travel at 7.8 kilometres per second to exit the Earth's gravitational field.

04 The aim is to land in a precisely calculated quadrant of the Taurus-Littrow Valley, not far from where Apollo 17 touched down on the Moon in December 1972.

to the Moon. One of these experts is Karsten Becker. Like the rest of the team, he has spent his spare time in recent years working to drive the mission forward.

"In aerospace, every mission is an adventure," says Becker, the team's electronics engineer, who is responsible for setting up a communications system between the Earth-based mission control centre and the rover. That includes steering the vehicle while it is on the Moon's surface. A signal takes three seconds to get from Earth to the Moon and back. But this is a mere technical detail. In April of 2015, the Part-Time Scientists successfully passed two milestones that earned them 750,000 US dollars from the *Google Lunar XPRIZE Foundation*.

"For us, the fun lies in the advanced engineering that is required for this project, not the prize money. I think I speak for everyone on the team when I say that," Becker asserts. Just the cost of launching a rocket to take their rover to the moon, including various types of insurance, will run to 24 million euros. This means that it will take quite a bit of accounting savvy to make the project come out even, and that's in the best-case scenario.

In short, the job calls for a pioneering spirit, plus the will and enthusiasm to take on the challenges. Recently, the deadline for the teams to reach the Moon was extended to December 31, 2017. By that date, the *Audi Lunar Quattro* must have travelled the 384,400 kilometres to the Earth's only natural satellite and fulfilled its mission. A rocket takes about four days to cover this distance in an environment of intense radiation and extreme temperature changes. The race is on and going full steam ahead. **BO**

More information:

It's a long way to the Moon – in more ways than one. Germany's Part-Time Scientists and *Audi* are going the distance together. Learn more about how the project is progressing, the milestones that it has achieved and read plenty of exciting stories about the mission at www.mission-to-the-moon.com.



Jorge Diez, head of *Audi Concept Automotive Design* (left), meets with his team members to discuss various draft designs for the *Audi Lunar Quattro*. Karsten Becker (right) is the member of the Part-Time Scientists responsible for communications with the rover during its journey.



To enable the Part-Time Scientists to accomplish some of their tasks, the rover is equipped with a multi-spectral telephoto lens and two 2K cameras for capturing 3D images of the moon.

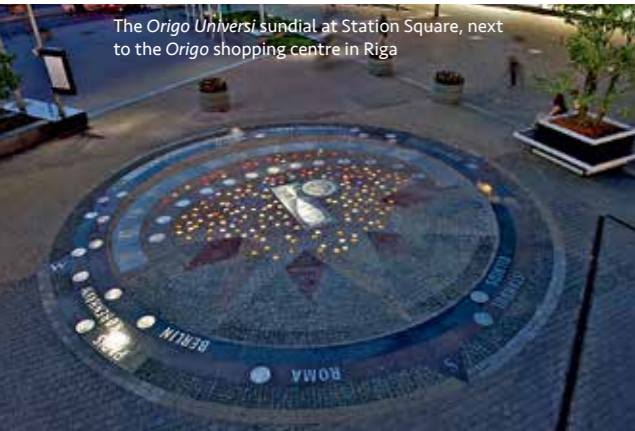


The *XPRIZE Foundation* has one goal: to make the world a better place. Since its founding by Peter Diamandis in 1995, the non-profit organisation has been promoting technological and scientific research. A fundamental element in the *XPRIZE* philosophy is faith in the power of competition. Competition spurs people on, again and again, to live their potential to the fullest, to never stop getting better and to keep discovering new solutions, no matter what hurdles they may face. Initially funded mainly by private donations, the organisation is now receiving more and more support from major corporations such as *Google*. In progress since 2007, the *Google Lunar XPRIZE* has two objectives: to pave the way for low-cost space flight, and to inspire the next generation of scientists, engineers and space pioneers. To win the prize, a privately funded team must get a rover to the Moon, make it travel for at least 500 metres along the Moon's surface and transmit HD images and videos back to Earth.

Places for shopping and cultural experiences



Linstow Center Management (LCM) runs the Alfa, Origo, Galerija Centrs, Mols and Dole shopping malls in Riga, as well as the Ülemiste shopping centre in Tallinn. This year, LCM is celebrating the 20th anniversary of its operations in Latvia. The total floor space of the shopping centres operated by LCM is 230,000 m² in Latvia and over 329,000 m² in the entire Baltics. LCM has implemented several projects to preserve the cultural and historic heritage of Latvia's capital city and to significantly upgrade its urban environment.



The Origo Universi sundial at Station Square, next to the Origo shopping centre in Riga

Origo Universi sundial

Trade is an integral function of traffic hubs. Railway, metro and bus stations in cities around the world are ideally supplemented by a quality environment and cultural life, prompting passers-by to stop for a minute and explore a particular place. The outdoor Origo Summer Stage in the square by Riga's Central Railway Station and next to the Origo shopping centre has become such a venue, providing a taste of Latvia's most important summer events in the centre of the Latvian capital.

Another interesting site in the square is the Origo Universi sundial – a nine-metre-wide interactive and educational design object that has been amusing passers-by since 2012. Viewers can interact with the object by raising a hand (provided that the sun is shining) and following instructions in the figure eight (analemma) at the centre, which shows how the sun appears to move over the earth. The coordinates of 11 palaces and castles in Latvia and ten key cultural objects in Europe help the viewer to learn more about particular attractions.

The Origo shopping centre is implementing an educational project through which schoolchildren can learn interesting facts about the interactive and educational Origo Universi sundial. After learning how the sundial works from a professional astronomer, the children put what they have learned to practice in natural history classes. The project is being implemented in cooperation with the Latvian Astronomical Society.



Galerija Centrs – a fashion shopping centre since 1938

The Galerija Centrs is located at the very heart of the Latvian capital in Riga's Old Town. The charming shopping mall is steeped in tradition, offering decades of retail experience combined with the latest trends and stylish shopping as a natural part of life in the 21st century. The Galerija Centrs can be found in a key historic building that has been serving as a successful retail venue (under various names) since 1938. The centre's historic stairways showcase a unique exhibition of 63 photographs that cover the history of the edifice. The unique project was implemented by LCM in cooperation with various Latvian museums, foundations and archives.

The Galerija Centrs has been singled out as a facility of outstanding design on a European and global scale in building renovation and expansion competitions organised by the International Council of Shopping Centres (ICSC). It is therefore particularly important to maintain the historic heritage of the

The Galerija Centrs shopping centre in Old Riga is a building of historic importance. It has been singled out as a facility of outstanding design on a European and global scale in building renovation and expansion competitions organised by the International Council of Shopping Centres (ICSC).

building, many elements of which have been fully preserved to this day, as the development of the edifice continues. The noteworthy photography exhibition – which informs the public about the building's role in Riga's social life from its first incarnation as the Army Surplus Store to the present day – was LCM's contribution to Riga's European Capital of Culture programme in 2014. **BO**



Exhibition of historic photographs at the Galerija Centrs shopping centre in Riga



Rīdzenes iela in the Galerija Centrs shopping centre

Red-eye recovery: how to look and feel great after a flight

Are you familiar with the unpleasant feeling that arises when your eyes are irritated? They might tear up a bit (albeit inefficiently) and sometimes even hurt. This usually means that your body is not producing sufficient moisture (i.e. tears) to lubricate the surface of your eyes. The problem can become acute if you spend a lot of time in air-conditioned indoor spaces, often use a computer, and especially when you fly.

Dry eye syndrome

If your professional life involves airplane flights, conferences, seminars and stays in hotel rooms, then it's quite possible that you've experienced the discomfort of eye irritation. Even if you maintain a healthy lifestyle and take care of your body by getting enough sleep, eating regular meals and trying not to overwork your eyes, your daily work regimen may cause your eyes to tire, redden and hurt. The symptoms might get worse when you're in an airplane, hotel or conference room. That's because these are air-conditioned spaces with dry air – the principal cause of your eye irritation.

Dry air interferes with the proper functioning of tear ducts. The human eyes is normally lubricated by about 400 teardrops a day. Aside from moisture and lubricants,

teardrops contain a variety of nutrients, vitamins, oxygen, trace elements, enzymes and antibodies. Blinking coats the eye with a uniform, 0.01-mm thick tear film. Tears moisten the eyes, protecting and nourishing the cornea and aiding refraction. If this film of tears is damaged or if your tear ducts aren't producing sufficient moisture, then your eyes will get dry and irritated. This is dry eye syndrome.

Moisturising helps

Although dry eye syndrome is a problem for both genders, women tend to experience this discomfort far more often than men, due to the hormonal differences between males and females. Still, no matter what our gender, we tend to spend too much time in front of computer monitors and behind steering wheels. These activities demand a lot of concentration and are hard on the eyes. As a result, we tend to blink less and our eyes don't get the moisture that they need. Normally people blink up to 22 times a minute. When they work at a computer, however, they might blink three times less often. Add air-conditioning to the mixture and the dry air overburdens the eyes.

What to do? The eyes need help, obviously, and the solution is actually quite simple. There are many aids available these days, including hypotonic artificial tears, lubricants and osmoprotectants (neutral particles). These moisturisers increase the amount of tears and help keep the eyes' surface moist. It's important to

know, however, that some eye solutions combine these functions and act as osmoprotectants, protecting the eye cells from further damage and stimulating natural tear production.

This is what *Optive* does. It's the only moisturiser that tackles dry eye syndrome and simultaneously provides neutral particles that protect the cells from stress and damage, including from hypertonic tears. *Optive* diminishes the irritation experienced in dry eye syndrome and stimulates the secretion of natural tears. Best of all, it's effective for more than 24 hours, lessening discomfort and healing your overburdened eyes.

Optive is the only remedy containing osmoprotectants – the same kind that your tears contain naturally: L-carnitine, taurine and erythritol. These substances will make your eyes feel good again during your next flight, office meeting or business conference. **BO**

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Ribs that really rock

Preparing excellent ribs is hard work, and that's one good reason to leave it to the experts. At *Ribs & Rock*, located right in the heart of Riga, the staff prepares ribs at a state-of-the-art level.



Chef Juris Latišenoks

Although *Ribs & Rock* belongs to the same people who founded three other popular Riga restaurant chains – *Steiku Haoss*, *KID** and *MUUSU* – it carries a different message than its kin. The restaurant's special place on Riga's gourmet map is the work of its chef, Juris Latišenoks. Highly talented and already gaining renown, Latišenoks was famed chef Kaspars Jansons' right hand man and has worked at some of Riga's finest restaurants. Latišenoks was on the team when *MUUSU* was created. He's only 23 years old and still full of the unbridled enthusiasm and creativity of youth. That's reflected in the menu as well. The young chef is not afraid to experiment, and

the reaction so far suggests that his boldness is being appreciated.

Rock and roll is what they play in the restaurant, and ribs are what you'll get. *Ribs & Rock* is a tempting blend of an American-style restaurant with a Latvian heart and staff. Already before *Ribs & Rock* opened, its chefs had transformed the kitchen into a laboratory, seeking new methods of achieving tender and juicy meat dishes – and the outcome is remarkable. That is partly because carefully chosen butchers provide top quality cuts to both *Ribs & Rock* and *Steiku Haoss*.

The typical diner at *Ribs & Rock* is someone who values not only great food, but also classic rock. At *Ribs & Rock* you will hear old-school favourites like Jimi Hendrix and Led Zeppelin as well as new classics such as REM and U2. On weekend nights, the restaurant provides live music played by local bands.

As the only restaurant in Latvia to specialise in lamb, beef and pork ribs, *Ribs & Rock* knows how to make its customers' mouths water right from the start. Sometimes the aroma emanating from the dining hall is so irresistible that it's easy to overrate one's hunger when choosing from an order of either 400 or 800 grams of ribs. And if you're not in the mood for fancy ribs, then the menu also offers an array of appetisers, soups, salads, pastas or fish to choose from as well as wide range of steaks.

Those who are looking for a great lunch will love the lunch specials at *Ribs & Rock* – 7.90 euros will get you two delicious dishes. The restaurant takes care to offer a diversity of classic meat and fish plates as well as vegetarian soups and salads. It's well worth sampling items from the special menu that Latišenoks is preparing for Riga Restaurant Week, which is taking place from May 16 to 20. During that time, visitors will be able to order a high-quality three-course meal for the very low price of 15 euros. This year's menu will feature some characteristic Latvian ingredients like birch sap, rhubarb and sorrel. Make sure to contact the restaurant if you want to try out these special Restaurant Week dishes, which will be available only to those who have made advance reservations.

The fast-approaching summer and upcoming Restaurant Week also provide perfect opportunities for trying the outdoor terrace at *Ribs & Rock*, which is one of the most pleasant outdoor spots in the Old Town. While enjoying the nice weather and relaxed atmosphere, be sure to match a special wine with your main course, such as the perfectly prepared pork ribs. Believe us, *Ribs & Rock* is the one place in Riga that knows how to couple wine and pork with aplomb. Appetising dishes, relaxed patrons sipping refreshing drinks and listening to live music by Latvian rock groups while enjoying each other's company – all this makes *Ribs & Rock* a fantastic place to be! **BO**



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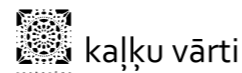
The jive bunny. Saddle of rabbit, rabbit leg pie, variations of carrot



Rock of lamb. Roasted rock of lamb with lentils, cherry tomatoes, smoked garlic puree and lingonberry mint sauce



Photos by **MĀRIS ZEMGALĒTIS**
and courtesy of F64



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Photo by Māris Zemgaleitis

A contemporary taste of Latvia

The *Kaļķu Vārti* restaurant in Old Riga is one of the best places for an unforgettable dining experience with exquisite modern Latvian cuisine.

Anyone who goes for a leisurely stroll through the streets of Old Riga is likely to come across the legendary restaurant.

Kaļķu Vārti has become such a fixture of life in the vibrant Old Town that some local inhabitants and tourists even see it as a symbol of the city. Over the years, the restaurant has stood out with superb cuisine and outstanding service, along with the ability to change with the times and introduce bold innovations. This is thanks to the staff at *Kaļķu Vārti*, which is known for its professionalism and eagerness to try new things. The restaurant team includes some of the most accomplished chefs and confectioners from the Baltic region, all of whom have proven their skills at countless local and international competitions.

Kaļķu Vārti's trademark feature is modern Latvian cuisine, to which the restaurant's chefs are passionately devoted. They have been actively promoting what they call "a contemporary taste of Latvia", which continues to surprise and delight

even the most spoiled and discriminating gourmets with each new menu that *Kaļķu Vārti* puts forward. The food on offer, which is based primarily on the highest-quality local ingredients – including those that are organically farmed and come from the forest – will suit the tastes of both refined food connoisseurs and those who are accustomed to classical fare.

Among this month's top dishes is the dessert – maple sap and white chocolate soup with rhubarb sorbet and a liquorice cookie. In Latvia, the flowing of maple sap is one of the first harbingers of spring. The sap is popularly known as "living water", being an inter-cellular liquid that is extremely rich in minerals and enzymes. The sap has a cleansing effect, boosting the metabolism and nourishing body cells with organic acids. It also helps to reduce emotional stress and instil feelings of peace and self-assurance. In addition, maple sap is hypo-allergenic, which means that it can be consumed by people of all ages, from infants to pensioners. Palatable maple sap

flows for only a short period in the late winter or early spring and one can easily miss that brief window of opportunity. Luckily, the chefs at *Kaļķu vārtu* have managed to extend the maple sap season a bit by collecting and freezing the precious liquid for use in this month's maple sap dessert. Try it out and get a genuine taste of Latvia!

Although the interior of *Kaļķu Vārti* is dominated by light beige Nordic tones, it does not convey the coolness and austerity that characterises many Scandinavian rooms. Indeed, the feeling inside is particularly warm, due to the Latvian ethnographic motifs that fill the inner space. Of course, during the summer months, visitors are less liable to pay attention to the tastefully decorated premises, as they will likely be enjoying their meals on the beautiful outdoor terrace. This is a place where, sipping on a glass of wine and watching the flow of passers-by, one is overcome by a pleasant sense of peace and by the feeling that time has stood still. **BO**



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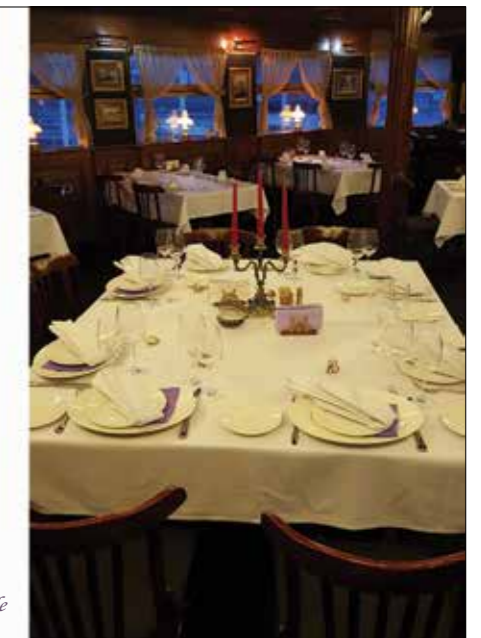
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► **Info: OPERATING Organic Beef Cattle FARM | Total area: 395 ha | ID: 4404**
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► **Info: AGRICULTURAL LAND | Total area: 647 ha | ID: 5674**
Description: Agricultural land for sale in eastern part of Latvia (2000 EUR/ha). Object includes an area with the necessary infrastructure for the development of a new farm base.

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Restaurants, bars and cafés

Text by **LIINA KARO**
Publicity photos

Culinary hotspots in Tallinn

A guide to the best restaurants, cafés and eateries



V VEGAN RESTAURANT

Turning meat lovers into vegetarians

Actually, that is not true – V is not seeking to turn anyone into anything. In fact, I think that V is the least aggressive restaurant I have ever visited. Not that I usually go to aggressive places, but the way that the super-friendly staff treats you at V is absolutely comforting and you can't help but feel great.

Once I had the pleasure of visiting V with three Australian friends who happen to be vegetarians, one of them vegan as well. You would think that in Australia it's much easier to be a vegan than in Estonia, since the climate there is warmer and you have lots of veggies and fruits all year round. However, all three of

my friends admitted that V in Tallinn is the best vegan place they have ever been to!

"The best place in the universe" were their exact words, and I completely agree. The selection of spreads (muhammara, pumpkin hummus, tofu spread) with garlic ciabatta (EUR 4.50) is a great choice for a starter. However, beware of ordering more than you can eat. It's tempting, but try to leave enough space for the mains!

My absolute favourite main course is pumpkin, spinach, peanut and coconut curry with Basmati rice (EUR 8). It is truly delicious, and any hint of Asian food works really well for me. Chickpea beetroot burger with baked vegetables (EUR 6.50) is also very tasty, and I had a bite of grilled seitan with parsnip carrot puree and red wine beetroot sauce (EUR 8.70), which I had

never tried before. Although it was a bit unfamiliar, I liked the taste and texture. For dessert, the chocolate orange mousse with strawberry chilli sauce (EUR 4) was really nice, but I think I was already too full to enjoy it to its maximum potential.

All in all, V is the perfect place to prove to any meat lover that food without meat can be super tasty and fulfilling. I also believe that every vegan and vegetarian will find a lot of inspiration from V's menu. To enjoy the experience that V has to offer, make sure to book a table in advance, since this lovely place is always very busy.

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The legendary Latvian film 'The Devil's Servants', which was produced by the Riga Film studio in the 1970s, served as the inspiration for the restaurant. The Key to Riga was an essential part of this cinema classic and an exact replica now holds a place of honour in the restaurant.

It is said that he who holds the key to Riga will unlock a world of wealth and happiness and we encourage you to pick it up and see what it feels like to hold the key to this ancient city. Take a photograph with the key and capture a timeless moment with one of Riga's most revered symbols!

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FRANK

A true world citizen
 The *Frank* bistro feels completely different from any other place in Tallinn. Once you step in there from the streets of the Old Town, you can imagine yourself being pretty much anywhere in the world. The interior is cool and cosy, so it could easily be a nice bistro in the middle of Paris or a lively diner in New York. Judging by the name *Frank*, one would be correct in guessing that the menu contains burgers, sandwiches and all-day breakfasts. It also has *escargots à la Bourguignonne* (snails in garlic-herb butter) and a lot more dishes from different corners of the world, not to mention a terrific cocktail menu.
 Together with a friend, I started my Friday evening dinner with a delicious guacamole served with crispy

papadam (EUR 4) and added a little spice to the night with piri piri prawns (EUR 8). We were super happy with our starter's choice! For the main course I had a traditional classic New York burger with bacon (EUR 8), which was good but just a little too dry for my taste. However, when I added the cheddar fries (EUR 3) and some mayo, it was a great American dinner.
 I also got a bite of grilled chicken with crispy wrapped prosciutto and grilled portobello mushrooms served with yoghurt mint sauce (EUR 9) from my friend, and all I can say is that I will definitely go back for more. We washed it all down with *Frank's* house lemonade called Arnold Palmer (EUR 4). We tried the mint version (so refreshing!), the apple one with cinnamon and the mock maté, and loved them all.

And now for the best part – dessert! I have never been a dessert lover, but the Sweet Mumbai (fresh whipped cream, crushed meringue and berries and rose syrup, EUR 5) simply stole my heart. *Frank's* chocolate fondant with ice cream (EUR 5) also melted in my mouth, and I could not have been happier after such a dinner. *Frank* is a great place for a meal and also a good choice to spend a night out with friends (as mentioned earlier – the cocktail menu is impressive). Join the party on a weekend night and you will likely find me there sipping on a cocktail as well, so come in and say hi!
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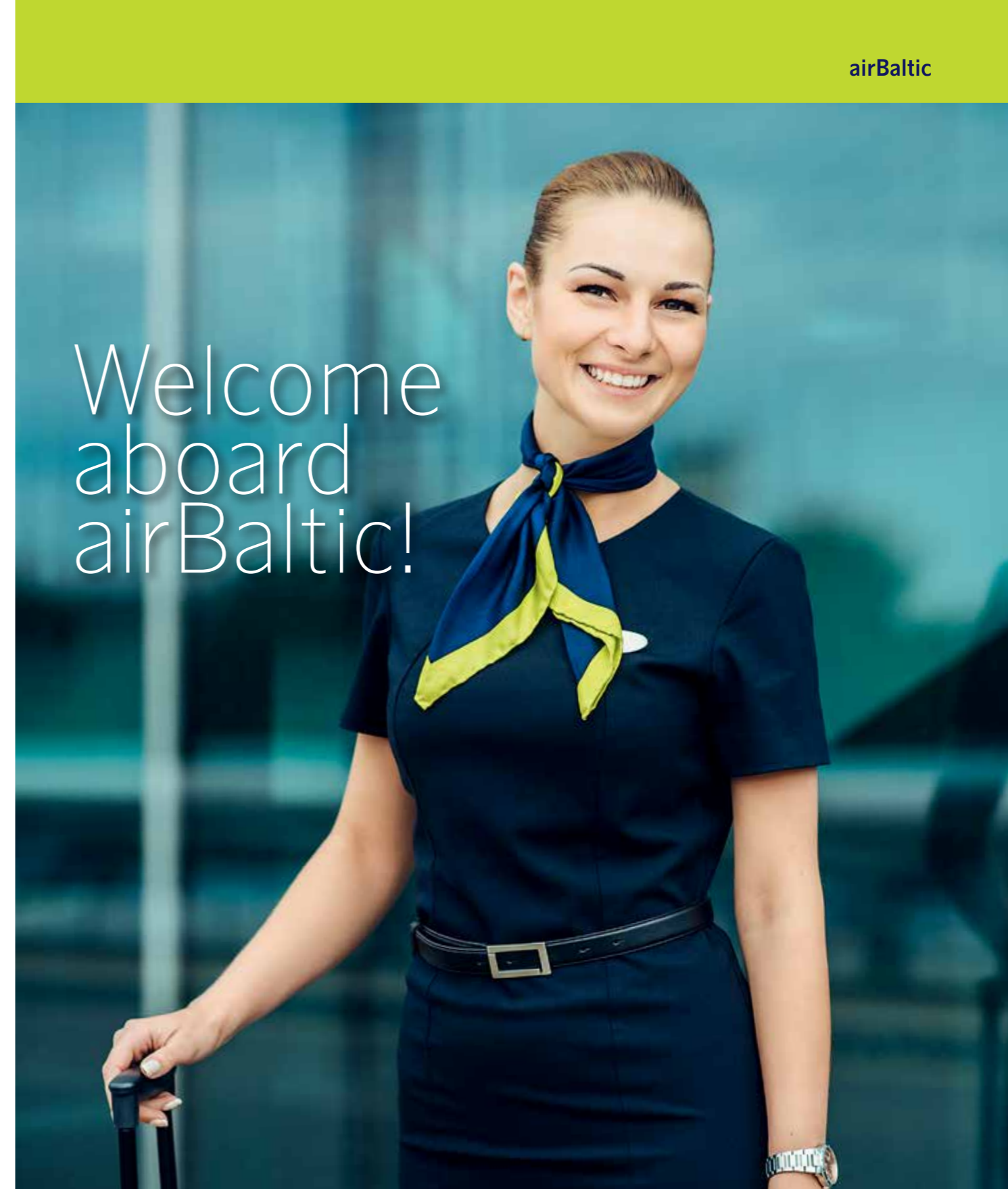
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Stockholm

1/ Best service between the Baltics and Stockholm

airBaltic is proud to offer the best schedule for travel between Stockholm and two of the Baltic capitals, Riga and Vilnius.

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One-way ticket prices to Stockholm start at EUR 35.

1/ Best service between the Baltics and Stockholm

2/ New flights to Reykjavik

3/ We'll take care of your unaccompanied children

4/ Summer flights to Europe's best beaches are back

2/ New flights to Reykjavik

On May 28, airBaltic will launch a new direct flight from Riga to Reykjavik. Flights to the Icelandic capital will operate twice a week.

Iceland is second largest island in Europe after Great Britain and an absolute must for nature-lovers and adventure-seekers. The Blue Lagoon, the Great Geysir, tumbling waterfalls and vast icebergs are just some of the impressive sights in this volcanic landscape.

Iceland is second largest island in Europe after Great Britain and an absolute must for nature-lovers and adventure-seekers. The Blue Lagoon, the Great Geysir, tumbling waterfalls and vast icebergs are just some of the impressive sights in this volcanic landscape.

One-way ticket prices from Riga to Reykjavik start at EUR 139.

3/ We'll take care of your unaccompanied children

During the summer holidays, many parents would like to send their children abroad to visit relatives or to take part in a summer camp, for example, but can't fly together with them.

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4/ Summer flights to Europe's best beaches are back

Summer is almost here and airBaltic is relaunching flights to many holiday destinations. These will continue until the end of October.

For the cheapest rates, book your trip now at airbaltic.com.



NICE

The French Riviera is known for its picturesque scenery with snow-capped mountaintops, a turquoise sea, sheltered bays, sunny beaches and legendary parties. No wonder that famous artists such as Henri Matisse and Pablo Picasso made the region their home and drew inspiration there.

airBaltic flies to Nice three times per week and one-way ticket prices from Riga start at EUR 95.



ITALY - Venice and Olbia

While ordinary pasta and pizza can be eaten throughout Italy, Sardinia stands out with particularly good seafood. Visit the turquoise beaches on the north coast, which are especially popular among jet-setters. If you prefer the Italian classics, then Lido Beach in Venice is always a good choice.

airBaltic will fly to Venice twice a week and to Olbia once per week from end of May. One-way ticket prices start at EUR 95.

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MALTA

Plenty of wellness and spa facilities provide a whole array of affordable beauty and body treatments, while Valletta's impressive Rococo architecture reflects just a small part of the island nation's intriguing 7,000-year human history.

airBaltic flies to Malta once a week. One-way ticket prices start at EUR 99.



PALMA DE MALLORCA

Great restaurants, regal buildings, wild parties and a beautiful seacoast are typical features of this Spanish Balearic city. A wide range of relaxation options will suit all tastes, from more active sports like kitesurfing and yachting to just sitting in cosy beach restaurants with a glass of sangria.

Flights to Palma will start from end of May and operate once a week, with one-way ticket prices starting at EUR 115.



BURGAS

Bulgaria has its own Riviera, which encompasses the Sunny Beach Resort on the Black Sea and is comparable to the famous party heaven of Ibiza with lots of nightlife possibilities and value-for-money hotels. Get ready for fine golden sand, natural dunes and a clean and gently deepening sea. A large variety of restaurants right on the Black Sea coast offer fantastic sunset views.

airBaltic will fly to Burgas twice per week from the end of May, with one-way ticket prices starting at EUR 109.



CROATIA - Dubrovnik and Rijeka

Game of Thrones' fans will enjoy seeing actual filming locations in the historic city of Dubrovnik, which is known for its marble streets, shimmering waters and entertaining street performers. The port city of Rijeka further north is a great place for starting an exploratory road trip.

Flights to Dubrovnik and Rijeka will take place twice per week from the end of May, with one-way ticket prices starting at EUR 95.



GREECE - Athens, Thessaloniki and Rhodes

Yes, places like those seen in Mamma Mia really do exist in Greece! The country is full of romantic and quiet beaches, some of them surrounded by steep cliffs and wild scenery, both on the islands and the mainland. Relax while snorkelling in crystal-clear blue waters or exploring some of Greece's many ancient sites.

Flights from Riga to Athens operate twice a week. The routes to Thessaloniki (twice per week) and Rhodes (once a week) will reopen in June. One-way ticket prices to Greece start at EUR 59.

Hello, this is your captain running!

Captains Jānis Krištopš, Pāvels Timofejevs and Jānis Kolontajs after running the Las Vegas marathon

When pilots Jānis Krištopš and Pāvels Timofejevs joined *airBaltic* seven years ago, they decided that it might be a good idea to train for marathon races. Since then, they have run nine marathons and 20 half-marathons between the two of them. This March, Krištopš and his colleague Captain Jānis Kolontajs ran a marathon together in Portugal. And later this month, Timofejevs will try to complete the *Lattелеcom* Riga marathon together with several other *airBaltic* employees.

"We are running not for the sake of sport, but to keep in shape," says Krištopš with a laugh, adding that a three-kilometre-long runway would be perfect for a collective run by *airBaltic's* staff members.

How did you decide to start running?

Jānis Krištopš: I had started to run to keep myself in shape already before I met Jānis [Kolontajs] and Pāvels here at *airBaltic*. Then I began to run together with Pāvels when we both came to work for the airline. **Pāvels Timofejevs:** I was still only thinking about running when I joined *airBaltic*, but Jānis [Krištopš] was already deeply into

the sport. He insisted that I buy myself a decent pair of running shoes, a pulsometer and all kinds of other gear.

And after spending so much money on equipment, you had no other choice but to start running, right?

Pāvels: Exactly!

You both met as pilots at *airBaltic*. How did you enter the field of aviation?

Pāvels: I had dreamed of becoming a pilot since my childhood. Literally the day after I graduated from high school and received my diploma, I started training to become a flight attendant at *airBaltic*. Then in parallel to my job at the airline, I studied at the aviation institute in Riga. Two years later, I got a great opportunity to learn how to become a pilot and I took advantage of it without hesitating.

Jānis: Flying was a childhood dream for me as well. I am convinced that real dreams never die. If you really put your mind to something, then you can find a way to reach your goal. After finishing high school, I joined the local police academy. Then I took on all kinds of jobs, but the thought of flying was with me at every

moment. As soon as I got the chance, I began a lengthy study and training process that went together with long work hours to make my dream come true. It was very difficult, but through a great deal of effort, I have reached the point where I am working the job of my dreams, and that is a tremendous privilege.

What was the first marathon that you ran?

Pāvels: My first was the *Nordea* marathon in Riga, while the first marathon that Jānis and I ran together was the historical circuit in Athens.

Jānis: By that time, we had drawn in a whole bunch of other pilots with us. We regularly take part in the annual *Lattелеcom* Riga marathon, where we run together with other *airBaltic* staff members like a big international family.

Which marathon stands out in your minds?

Jānis: Definitely the Athens Classic Marathon! The run begins in the town of Marathon and ends at Panathinaiko Stadium in Athens, the finishing point for both the 1896 and 2004 Olympic

marathons. This is one of the most difficult marathon courses, and the atmosphere is fantastic! When we trained for that race, we drove to Sigulda, Latvia's most hilly city, to get used to the uneven terrain in Greece. **Pāvels:** The Athens marathon doesn't take place on a circular course, which is usually the case in other cities, but goes in one direction along the approximate route that Ancient Greek messenger Pheidippides is said to have taken to inform the Athenians about a Greek battle victory over the Persians. The runners are taken by bus to the starting line, and all that I could think about was the fact that I would have to run that whole distance back to Athens again!

Jānis: And on top of that, about half of the race is uphill!

How do you choose which marathons to run in?

Pāvels: We aren't Super G athletes, so we often choose interesting places that are also worth visiting in their own right. It's a great feeling to run along the main street in Athens. In Las Vegas as well, we ran along the main street twice: first in one direction and then back in the other. When else do you get a chance to do something like that? The atmosphere is also positively charged, with spectators lining the streets and performances of all kinds along the way to boost the runners' morale. There is also a fantastic feeling of togetherness that you would never get by running alone or with only a few friends. When you're running together with a huge crowd, the feeling is amazing!

Jānis: The Las Vegas Strip is closed to traffic only twice a year: on New Year's Eve and during the marathon. It's cool when one of the most active streets in the world is closed to let a group of runners race through it!

How do you manage to train for the marathons? I imagine that your schedules as commercial airline pilots impose some restrictions.

Jānis: If we establish a joint goal, such as running in the marathons in Athens and Las Vegas, then we set up a training program and try to follow it.

Pāvels: I didn't run in this year's marathon

in Lisbon because I missed two weeks of training due to illness. I realised that there is no point in struggling through a race because you feel bad. You have to run marathons when you are physically fit and when you can actually enjoy running them. In any case, if you like a particular activity and set your mind on doing it, then you will find a way to do so.

Jānis: We don't get the chance to train together that often because we have different flight schedules, but when we do, it's a bit easier and more interesting. You have someone to talk to and it's easier to keep on running if you start to feel tired.

Does running long distances help or hinder you in your work as commercial airline pilots?

We run to feel good physically and to stay healthy

Pāvels: It definitely helps. After a long work day in the pilot's seat, all I can think about is getting a good physical workout. **Jānis:** Running is like a form of meditation. You hear the rhythm of your breathing and the songs of the birds in the forest. You clear out your head.

How often do you run in marathon races?

Jānis: If you are not a professional runner and racing is not a source of income for you, then you can run the full 42-km distance once a year. You have to keep yourself in good physical condition all year round to do so. On top of that, you have to start preparing your body for the rigours of the marathon about three months before the race date. You go through an even more intense training program than usual to prevent yourself from being a total wreck after the race. Following the marathon in Las Vegas, we spent a few days travelling across the United States. After the marathon in Athens, we went out for dinner and just strolled through the city streets. The marathon is extremely gruelling, not only physically but also emotionally.

I remember when we were running a marathon together with our colleague,

Captain Normunds Dreimanis. We were standing behind the start line and suddenly this extremely dynamic music started coming out of the loudspeakers: Boom! Boom! Boom! Normunds took his pulse and said: "Listen, guys! I haven't even done anything yet and my pulse is already at 145! What's going to happen when we start running?" The body reacts to this positive form of stress by pumping out adrenaline. Another memory stands out from the marathon in Athens. We had already run more than 30 kilometres and had entered a tunnel where a group of percussionists was performing. After running that distance, you are usually quite tired. Your body is aching and you start feeling sorry for yourself. But when they started to play that catchy rhythm, I felt a new surge of energy go through my body. It was like pouring gasoline over a fire!

How do you motivate yourself to keep on running?

Pāvels: I run to prevent myself from getting a beer belly! [*Laughs.*] If I haven't done any physical activity for a while, I start to feel stiff and tired. Then I go out for a run and torture myself a bit. Things get easier already during the second run, when I feel that I have got back into the groove again.

Jānis: We run to feel good physically and to stay healthy. After a tough day at work, you can come home tired, sit down on the sofa and take the remote control in your hands. You'll probably wake up the next morning even more tired than before. I choose a different method: I go out for a short run at a slow pace, boost my body's metabolism and take in a healthy dose of oxygen.

Are you going to take part in this month's *Lattелеcom* Riga marathon?

Pāvels: Definitely! The Riga marathon is continuing to develop and is becoming an increasingly big event. And when else would I get the chance to freely run across one of Riga's main bridges?

Jānis: I just took part in the Lisbon marathon in Portugal, so I think that I will probably run my next marathon only in the fall. **BO**



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New Business Class menu

This spring, we are introducing a new Business Class menu for the summer season. Inspired by the cuisines of different cultures and by the latest culinary trends, chef Andris Vasiļonoks of *LSG Chefs* has used fresh and carefully selected ingredients to create new culinary delights.

On morning flights, our Business Class passengers will be treated with wholesome breakfast meals such as omelette with herbs and bresaola baskets with mozzarella; chicken roll-up with pesto and grilled vegetable salad; and frittata with asparagus, cherry tomatoes and fried mushrooms.

The Business Class lunch and dinner selection includes sublime meat and seafood dishes such as fried turkey fillet with lemon-caper sauce and gnocchi, grilled Argentinian red shrimps with mango salsa and grilled vegetables, and Brazilian steak in green pepper sauce with fried vegetables.

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About the programme

PINS is the **airBaltic frequent flyer loyalty programme**, which uses the loyalty currency "PINS".

You can collect PINS while flying with *airBaltic*, shopping at airports, staying in hotels, renting cars, dining out and even by using the **airBaltic Payment Card** or the **PINS MasterCard**. It is also possible to collect PINS by doing your everyday shopping, with more than 700 local, global and online partners represented.

The PINS programme has various card designs from which you can choose, but if you are a frequent flyer, then the most suitable one for you will be the green **airBaltic PINS card**. The more you fly with *airBaltic*, the higher your membership level and the greater the privileges. **Executive** and **VIP levels** are reserved for

the most loyal *airBaltic* customers and ensure various benefits, which include a **free baggage allowance**, **priority check-in**, **reserved seats** and much more to make traveling more pleasant. The youngest members, starting from age two, are issued with a special **airBaltic PINS Young Pilot card**, which also allows children to collect PINS.

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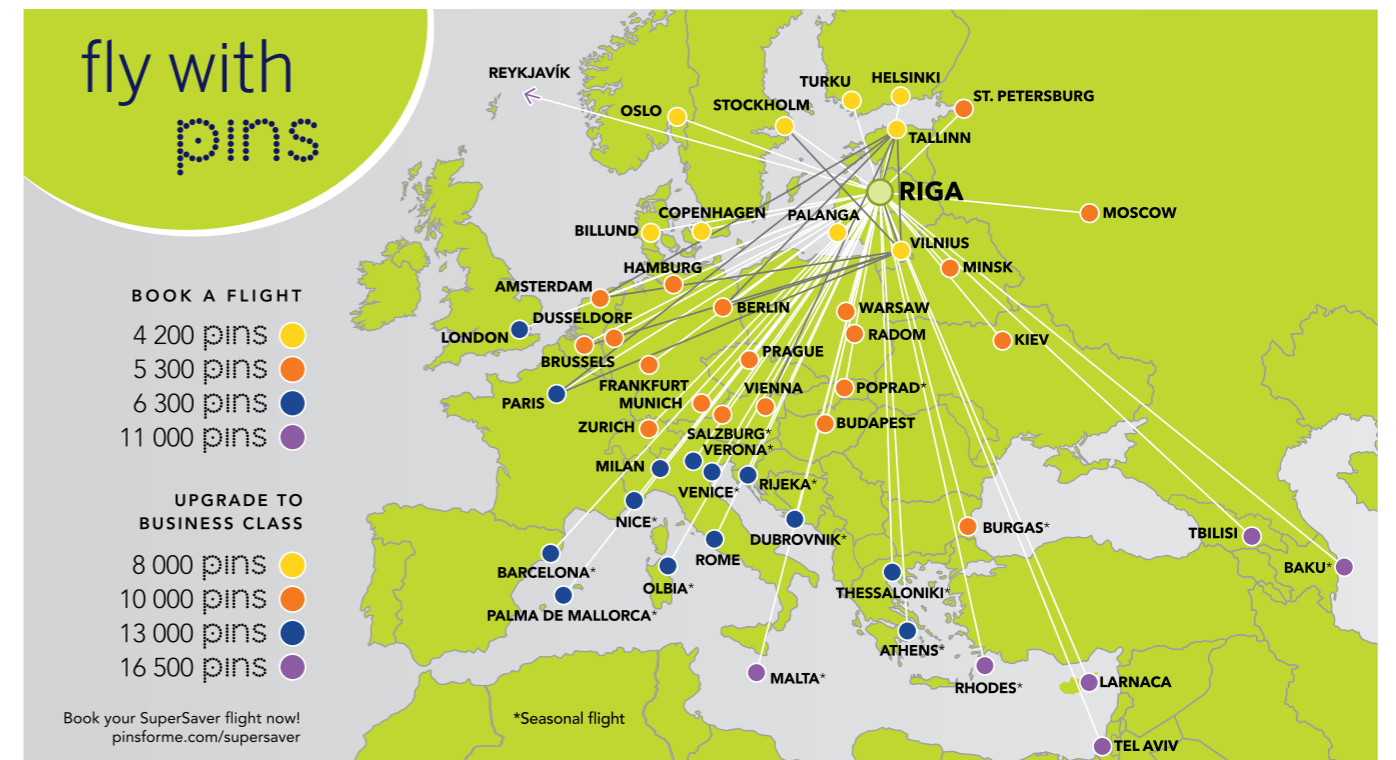
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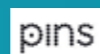


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Why book connecting flights together?

Booking connecting flights together in one ticket is the safest and most reliable way of air travel. Both airlines assume the

responsibility for your connection and for taking you to your final destination, which means that you don't have to worry about delays, missing flight connections that are an airline's fault or getting your luggage from one flight to the other.

Two tickets types for your convenience

When booking connecting flights with airBaltic's partner airlines, you can choose between two ticket types: Premium Economy with one piece of checked baggage, airport check-in and fast-track security control at the Riga airport; and Business Class with a full range of service and flexibility.

Transit via Paris-Charles de Gaulle airport

airBaltic flights arrive and depart from Terminal 2D at Paris-Charles de Gaulle airport. Air France flights leave from either Terminal 2E (to non-Schengen countries)

or Terminal 2F (to Schengen countries). It is easy to transfer between airBaltic and Air France flights. Just follow the signs for Connecting flights and those for Terminal 2F or Terminal 2E. You will use the N1 shuttle bus to reach Terminal 2F, and the blue shuttle bus (Navette bleue) to reach Terminal 2E.

The standard connecting time between flights is one hour. If you are travelling to or from both Schengen and non-Schengen countries, then you should expect to go through additional security checks and customs inspections. These can extend the time that it takes to complete your transfer procedure.

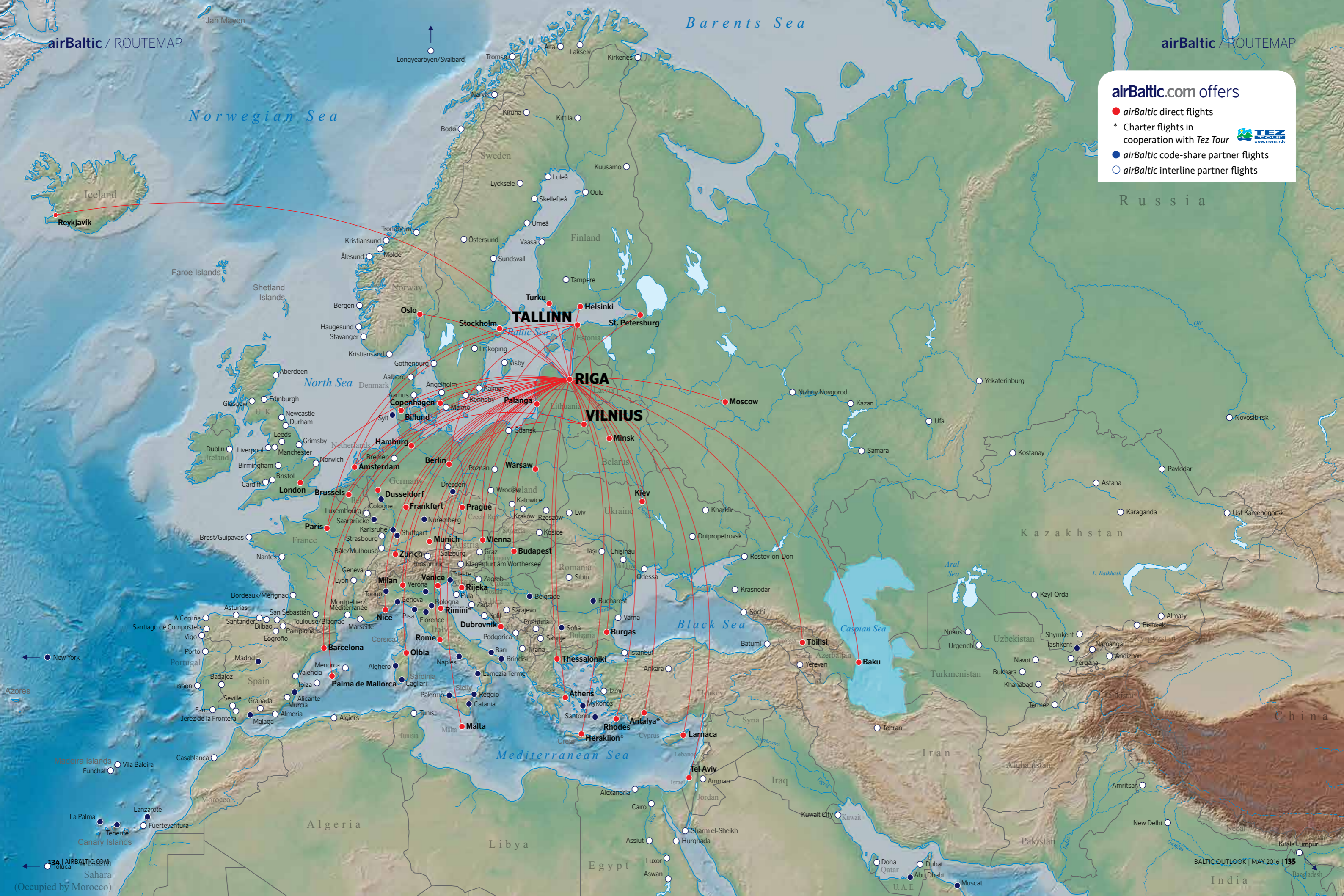
AIRFRANCE / BASIC FACTS	
Founded	1933
Alliance	SKYTEAM
Slogan	France is in the air
Hub	Paris-Charles de Gaulle airport
Fleet	235
Destinations	204

airBaltic codeshare partners



airBaltic.com offers

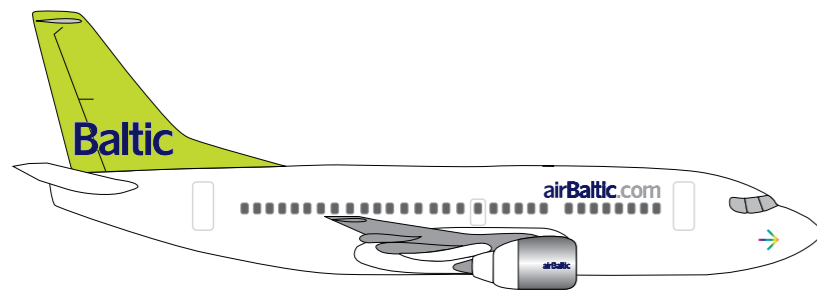
- airBaltic direct flights
- * Charter flights in cooperation with Tez Tour 
- airBaltic code-share partner flights
- airBaltic interline partner flights





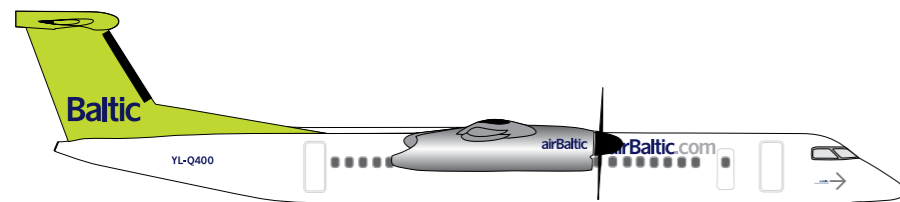
Boeing 737-300

Number of seats	142/144/146
Max take-off weight	63 metric tons
Max payload	14.2 metric tons
Length	32.18 m
Wing span	31.22 m
Cruising speed	800 km/h
Commercial range	3500 km
Fuel consumption	3000 l/h
Engine	CFM56-3C-1



Boeing 737-500

Number of seats	120
Max take-off weight	58 metric tons
Max payload	13.5 metric tons
Length	29.79 m
Wing span	28.9 m
Cruising speed	800 km/h
Commercial range	3500 km
Fuel consumption	3000 l/h
Engine	CFM56-3



Q400 NextGen Bombardier

Number of seats	76
Max take-off weight	29.6 metric tons
Max payload	8.6 metric tons
Length	32.83 m
Wing span	28.42
Cruising speed	667 km/h
Commercial range	2084 km
Fuel consumption	1074 l/h
Engine	P&W 150A

HARMONY INCLUDED



J5 is a high-end residential complex that consists of three buildings in the quiet center of Riga, at the intersection of Jeruzalemes and Dzirnavu streets.



ADVANTAGES FOR RESIDENTS

- Restaurant
- Yacht and Motorboat
- Villa Amata Country House
- Concierge service
- Apartment cleaning service

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