

STORY DANIEL SCHEFFLER

# EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED

There is a rise of alternative cities which offer something  
luxurious but also utterly amazing



**Rome – check.** Paris – check. Tokyo – check. New York – check. Cape Town and Buenos Aires – check. Even going to the moon with Richard Branson – check.

Luxury travel has centred on famous cities and of course the various well-represented – and known – experiences people squeeze into their bucket lists. They, of course, have been getting better and better, but the more sophisticated traveller is hunting for something somewhat unexpected that these “tourist icons” couldn’t offer – even if they tried very hard. And so there is a rise of alternative cities now offering

something different, yes luxurious, but also utterly surprising.

But where did it all begin? Perhaps this new gesture has started with people moving out of these “famous cities”. All this movement to “secondary cities” means these newly found cities are gaining attention and, naturally and organically, finding love in new ways.

We can, thus far, credit America for starting the trend. More people are moving out of New York and Illinois than are moving in, according to the annual list compiled by United Van Lines, a moving company

**ABOVE LEFT**

*Visitors can catch a ride on a traditional tuk-tuk scooter in an old village in Sicily.*

**ABOVE RIGHT**

*Fishing boats in a port in San Vito Lo Capo in Sicily, Italy. Visitors can enjoy the serene environment.*



that has put together an annual survey of where Americans have been moving for the past 38 years.

Oregon, with Portland's appeal of walkable neighbourhoods, public transport and cuisine, is at the top of the moving-in list. Next on the list is South and then North Carolina with cities such as Charleston, Greenville and Asheville receiving the love. And with this movement has come tourism too.

It is Richard Florida, urban studies theorist, who makes the most compelling case for "quality of place" and the three T's of economic development – technology, talent and tolerance – in his book *The*

*Rise of the Creative Class*. He says: "Independently minded, innovative, creative people, who value lifestyle, are looking at a handful of alternative cities. They're after a new way of living that embodies true quality."

And so these people move to secondary cities and open coffee shops, great dining, craft stores, and it follows that exclusive experiences start to appear because these cities have never had it – opportunities for travellers seeking something "unfound" seem endless now.

This is the urban shake-up of our era – seekers call and alternative cities respond. Thomas Woltz, owner of Nelson Byrd Woltz Landscape Architects, sees alternative cities globally as the future of innovative development, and that this trend will just continue to expand to more ➔

PHOTOS: DISCOVER YOUR ITALY

places and bring people who will both live there and come to visit. "I respond intuitively to the authentic grit that places like Birmingham, Nashville, Louisville and New Orleans share and like their bold experimentation in food, hospitality and art, allowing these cities to flourish," he says.

And boldly the jaded traveller will go to a series of new cities that will emerge on six continents. Some of these cities are years in the making and offer the most sophisticated, yet undiscovered, beauty you can imagine. Others are just rising to the surface and inviting the savvy, and chic, traveller to dip their toe in.

It's not just the city of Montevideo in Uruguay that is really gaining traction – it's in fact the whole country. But, because Uruguay is so small, it's easy to get access to almost the entire country on one trip – all from the capital. And that's the luxury – just 20 minutes and you're at some of the finest wineries, like Bouza right outside the city.

"Uruguay is a small country, but you can find beaches, pampas, unique wines and great food and lovely people," says Veronica Curtis, Abercrombie and Kent, country manager for Argentina. "Punta del Este is the exclusive spot in Uruguay, and small villages such as Garzon and Carmelo are becoming popular with those looking for off-the-beaten-track destinations – but all of it still close to the city of Montevideo."

Although visitors have been to Angkor Wat, Cambodia, for decades, the town of Siem Reap was largely overlooked. The laid-back small town vibe with French colonial feel and, of course, endless nature is what gives it its exclusivity. At the Amansara, travellers are given the most unique visit to the city far beyond the temples.

"You can see the sunrise at Angkor Wat, but then breakfast on delicious Nom Ben Chok [traditional noodle dish] at Amansara's Khmer Village House, take an open jeep ride through the deep countryside to observe the harvesting of sugar palm, a boat ride on Tonle Sap from silted to floating fishing villages with picnic lunch and wine served aboard Amanbala, a life-changing session at the Spa with resident spiritual guru Stephen Jeanes and finally a not-to-be-missed performance at Phare Circus – all in one trip," says Sally Baughen, general manager at the Amansara.

The more distant temples of Banteay Chhmar, Preah Vihear & Koh Ker are all easily connected in one day by helicopter for seekers of the most exclusive parts of Cambodia.

Meanwhile, Palermo, the capital of the Italian island of Sicily, manages to maintain its original soul of typical/traditional Mediterranean city with its



PHOTOS: DISCOVER YOUR ITALY, ITAMAR GREENBERG / ISRAEL TOURISM MINISTRY



## HAIFA IS ATTRACTING ALL KINDS OF VISITORS AND HAS AN UNEXPLORED STREET CULTURE

layers of different cultures (Greek, Roman, Arab, Spanish, etc) deriving from centuries of different dominations. It is exactly there where the exclusivity comes in – a proper meditative slowing down combined with the fineries of life.

"A day cooking with the Duchess is not simply a cooking lesson in an extraordinary location – an 18th century palazzo by the sea – it's also a fascinating journey through Sicilian culture and food," says Matteo Della Grazia, owner of FuoriTinerario Discover Your Italy, who organises the most intimate and unrepeated tours of Italy.

For the most unique experience, Della Grazia organises a trip to the island of Pantelleria – south of Sicily very close to the African coast – to stay in the typical local houses (dammusi) plus day trips to hike to the top of Mount Stromboli volcano.

If the thought of all that hiking makes you thirsty, Brno in the Czech

### TOP

*The Bahai Gardens and the Shrine of the Bab in Haifa, Israel. Haifa is the best mix between city and beach and a mountainous landscape.*

### ABOVE

*A traditional Sicilian cart in Palermo, Sicily. Palermo is a city full of wonderful scenic spots and cultural elements.*



**LEFT**

*Travellers who visit the Bouza Winery in Uruguay can also admire the stunning vintage car collection on display there*

**BELOW**

*Brno in the Czech Republic is an energetic city that honours history, prides itself on modern architecture and really loves art.*



Republic is the city of cafes. These cafes are attracting visitors that have already done Prague. "Brno, an energetic city that honours history, prides itself on modern architecture [like Villa Tugendhat was recorded on the Unesco List of World Cultural Heritage] and really loves the arts with a highly concentrated new art scene [including Gallery of the Young: Galerie mladých]," says Jiří Dužár, public relations manager at CzechTourism in New York. With a relaxed atmosphere and fewer tourists, the city has attracted a host of young people to start businesses and set up Czech handicrafts not available anywhere else in the world.

Last but not least, Tel Aviv and Jerusalem have been the darlings of Israel for travellers. But there is another city that is gaining traction as an alternative. Haifa is attracting chefs, investors, younger generations of artists, creators and designers and has an unexplored street culture away from tourists. "Haifa is the best mix between city and beach and a mountainous landscape. [There are] green forests and great hikes and views that are much more extensible than in other cities in Israel, or just about anywhere," says Nir Margalith, founder of Puzzle Israel, an expert travel operator. **T**

**GETTING AWAY FROM IT ALL**

Want to go beyond alternative cities? What about alternative experiences?

**ABANDONED ISLAND**

Soneva Resorts is opening its latest in the Maldives. Soneva Jani will open on the island of Medhu Faru, part of an uninhabited five-island cluster in the Noonu Atoll. Just you, and anything you need on call.

**DESERT GLAMPIN**

Abercrombie and Kent, in collaboration with Alto Atacama, has revealed its starry night camping in the Atacama Desert exclusive offering. Just you in a spot never explored before.

**SURFING IN THE ARCTIC**

Hit the waves in the Arctic Ocean with Eleven Experience at the newly opened Deplar Farm, a native sheep farm turned luxe-lodge in the northern part of the country.

**THE NEXT SCUBA-DIVING DESTINATION**

Having never really promoted itself, the island of Saba, or "unspoiled Queen", is gaining traction as the next scuba-diving destination in the world. Low-key Caribbean beauty - just don't tell anyone about it.