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Insider's Guide to Venice as a Gateway

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Travel Advisor

Gregory Rhoney[CONTACT GREGORY](#)

Venice is unlike anywhere else—a world-class destination and a perfect gateway to the rest of Italy and beyond. It's a city of canals, historic palaces, and quiet squares that feel both timeless and romantic. Days here are spent gliding along the Grand Canal, wandering narrow

alleyways, and lingering over fresh seafood by the water. After a stay here, connect to other Italian cities like Florence and Rome, the Adriatic coast by cruise, or other European capitals by train. It's a favorite for couples and culture lovers, but also works for families and groups who want a slower pace. Expect stunning views, rich history and plenty of moments that feel straight out of a painting. Read on to learn where to stay, what to do, and how to plan your time in Venice.

Need to know



Image courtesy of The Gritti Palace, a Luxury Collection Hotel, Venice

Venice drifts at its own unhurried pace. The city is safe, walkable, and best enjoyed with a relaxed mindset, even when bridges get crowded or *vaporettos* (waterbuses) fill up. Keep an eye on your belongings in busy tourist hubs. Refill your bottle at the city's *fontanelle* water fountains. Trains, water buses, and even gondolas keep you well-connected. Some of the best moments happen when you wander without a plan and stumble upon a quiet *campo* or hidden canal view.

Currency: Italy uses the Euro (EUR). Credit cards are widely accepted, but smaller cafés, markets, and water taxi ticket booths may prefer cash. Tipping is not mandatory but rounding up or leaving 5–10% is appreciated if service is exceptional.

Languages: Italian is the official language, but English is widely spoken in hotels, major attractions, and tourist areas. Learning a few Italian greetings is always appreciated, though.

- **Key phrases:** *ciao* (hello / goodbye), *arrivederci* (goodbye), *scusi* (excuse me / pardon), *grazie* (thank you), *per favore* (please), *sì / no* (yes / no).

Airports: Venice Marco Polo Airport (VCE) is the city's main gateway, with nonstop flights from major European hubs like London, Paris, and Amsterdam. Seasonal direct service from US cities include New York, Atlanta, Philadelphia, Dallas, and Washington DC. Nearby Treviso Airport is a hub for low-cost carrier Ryanair, with flights across Europe.

Transportation: From the airport, you can glide straight into the city by water taxi—it's a flat fee, so no need to try and negotiate, but bring cash. To explore the city, walking and *vaporetto* (waterbus) are the way to go. Rent cars or take trains for travel beyond the city. There are great train connections to cities like Vienna, Prague, Munich, and Amsterdam.

Best time to visit: The sweet spot for Venice is spring (April–June) or early fall (September–October). The weather is warm, canals shimmer under softer sun, and the crowds are less pressing. While the city never truly has a bad season, midsummer's heat can make those labyrinthine alleys feel like an oven, even with frequent gelato stops.

Ideal length of stay: Two to three days is ideal to explore the iconic sights, wander charming canals, and soak up the city's unique atmosphere without feeling rushed. It's a perfect stopover to pair with another Italian city or to take a Mediterranean cruise from.

Signature dishes and drinks:

- **Sarde in saor:** Sweet and sour marinated sardines.
- **Risotto al nero di seppia:** Creamy risotto made with cuttlefish ink for that dramatic black color and rich, briny flavor.
- **Bigoli in salsa:** Thick, rustic pasta tossed in a sauce of onions and salted anchovies.

- **Baccalà mantecato:** Whipped salted cod spread, silky and light, perfect on crostini.
- **Spritz:** The original spritz made with prosecco, Aperol or Select, and soda.
- **Prosecco:** Italy's sparkling wine from northeastern regions, often served chilled in elegant glasses alongside small bites.
- **Venetian wines:** Try local whites like Soave or reds like Valpolicella.
- **Cicchetti:** Venetian-style tapas found in *bacari*, Venetian wine bars, typically served on small pieces of bread or polenta.

What to wear: Venice calls for layers. Think breathable fabrics for warm days and a light jacket for evenings by the water. Comfortable, walkable shoes are essential for cobbled streets and bridges. A stylish scarf or hat adds both flair and sun protection while you explore.

Travel tips:

- **Dining:** Many eateries are casual, but ordering at the bar is common in *bacari* (wine bars). In sit-down restaurants, a polite “*buongiorno*” and a little patience go a long way.
- **Smoking:** Smoking is banned indoors and most public spaces, including *vaporetto* stops.
- **Shopping:** Venice is known for its artisan crafts, including Murano glass, hand-painted masks, and ceramics. Explore quieter neighborhoods like Dorsoduro and Cannaregio for unique boutiques and local designers. Don't miss Libreria Acqua Alta, a famously quirky bookstore. Non-EU visitors can usually claim a VAT refund, so save your receipts.
- **Alcohol:** The legal drinking age is 18. Drinking is allowed only in licensed venues like bars and restaurants; public drinking on streets or squares is prohibited and often fined.
- **Medications:** Bring prescriptions in original packaging with a doctor's note if needed as some medications available in the US may require a prescription here.
- **Crowds:** Venice can get very busy, especially midday in San Marco and Rialto. Early mornings and late evenings offer a quieter, more magical experience.
- **Transport:** *Vaporetti* tickets are valid for 75 minutes, so plan your water bus trips carefully to get the most out of your pass.

Venice

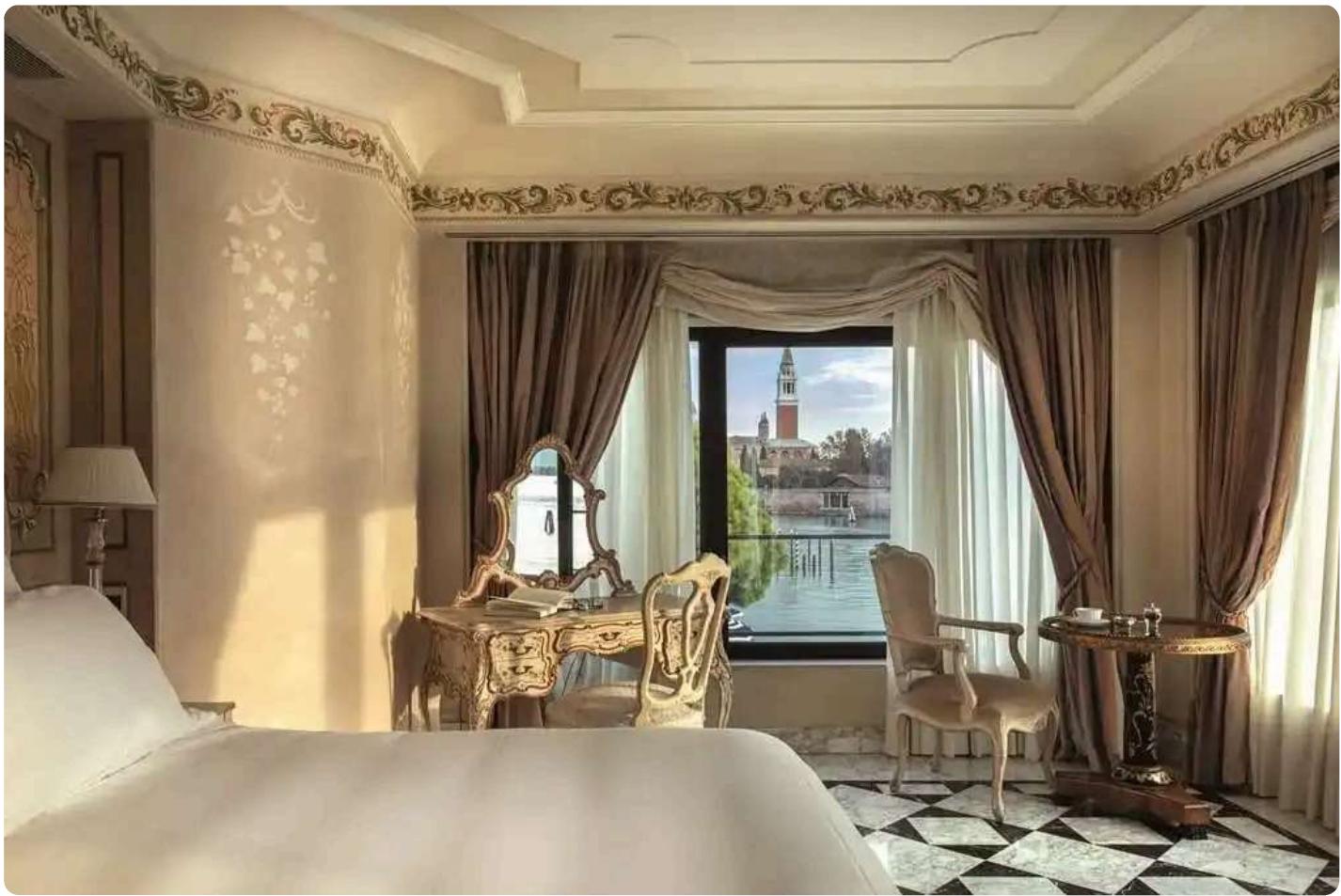


Image courtesy of Hotel Cipriani, A Belmond Hotel, Venice

Venice is a mosaic of distinct neighborhoods, each with its own personality and charm. San Marco dazzles with grand landmarks and waterfront views. Cannaregio feels lived-in and local, with canalside bakeries and tucked-away wine bars. Dorsoduro brims with art, from Renaissance to modern. Castello blends history and everyday life, where quiet gardens meet storied shipyards. Here's where to stay for postcard-worthy views, late-night *cicchetti*, or a front-row seat to Venice's creative soul.

Where to stay

The St. Regis Venice: Overlooking the Grand Canal with uninterrupted views of the Basilica, it pairs modern design with Venetian artistry. A private garden and lively arts programming make it a stylish base steps from St. Mark's Square.

- **Fora's Marriott STARS** partner perks include a \$100 hotel credit, welcome amenity, daily breakfast, an upgrade, and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

Hotel Cipriani, A Belmond Hotel, Venice: A five-minute boat ride from St. Mark's on a private island, this hideaway offers legendary service and the city's most famous pool. Manicured gardens, lagoon views, and an old-world glamour define the experience.

- **Fora's Belmond Bellini Club** partner perks include a hotel credit, welcome amenity, daily breakfast, and an upgrade whenever possible.

The Gritti Palace, a Luxury Collection Hotel, Venice: This once noble residence offers unapologetic Venetian opulence with Grand Canal views from nearly every angle. Interiors are a masterclass in heritage luxury, complete with Murano glass and silk damasks.

- **Fora's Marriott STARS** partner perks include a \$100 hotel credit, welcome amenity, daily breakfast, an upgrade, and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

Il Palazzo Experimental: This converted Renaissance palace is a playful yet refined boutique hotel, mixing modern design with bold color. Its canal-facing restaurant and chic cocktail bar draw both travelers and locals.

- **Fora Perks** include daily breakfast, welcome amenities, and an upgrade whenever possible.

Cruising to and around Venice

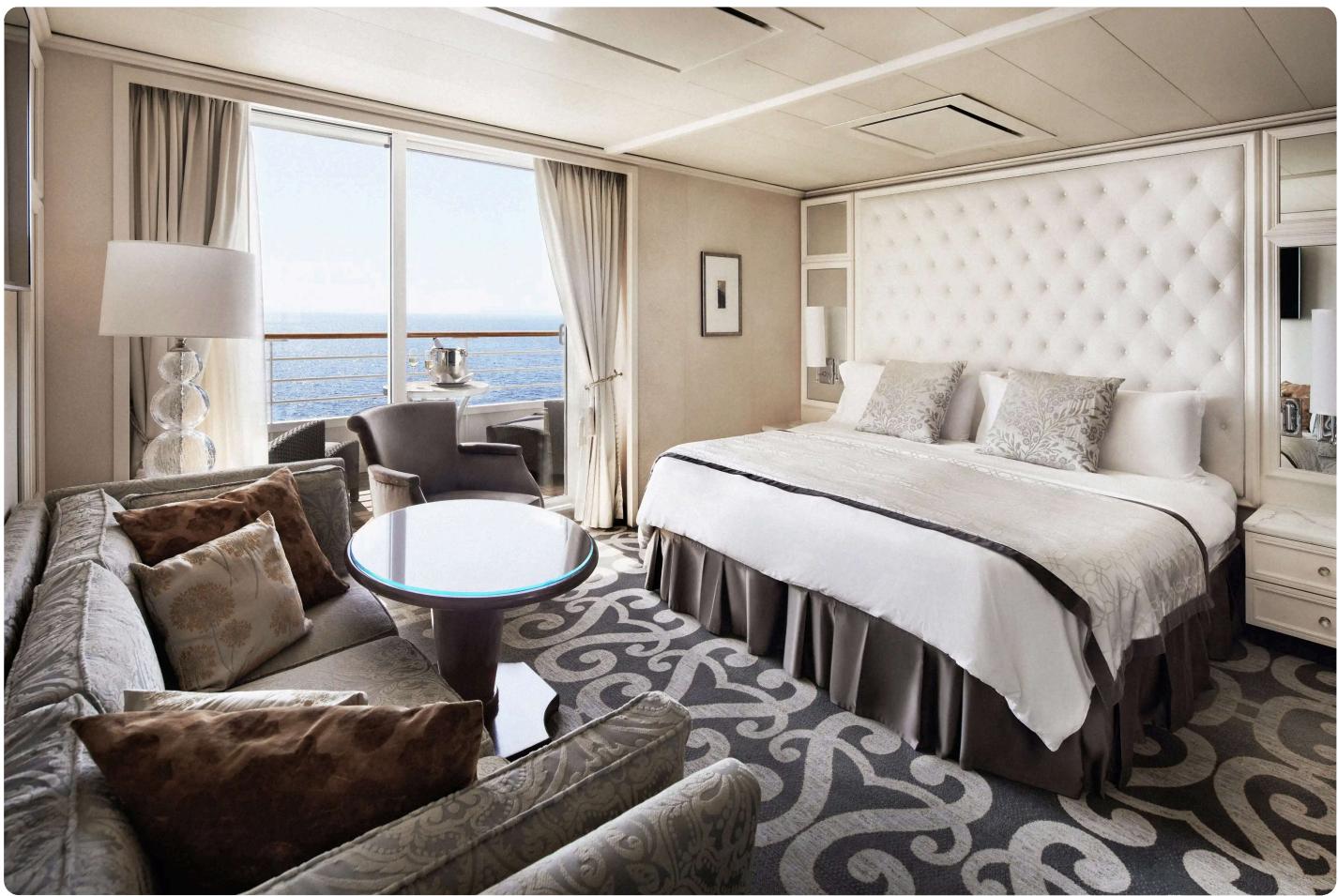


Image courtesy of Crystal Cruises

Cruising to Venice is a little different these days, with passenger numbers capped as part of the city's tourism limits. While smaller ships may still dock in Venice, most ships stop in Ravenna or Trieste, each about two hours away. Many itineraries build in extra time, arriving in Venice early and staying late into the evening so guests have more time to explore.

While Venice isn't the embarkation hub it once was, smaller luxury lines and river-style ships still sail from here, often on Adriatic, Western Mediterranean, and Greek Isles routes. Some longer voyages use it as a highlight stop between Western Europe and the Aegean, pairing its romantic canals with sun-soaked islands and historic coastal cities.

Notable cruise lines

Viking Ocean Cruises: Sleek, Scandinavian ships with no casinos, no kids, and all-veranda staterooms. Itineraries put an emphasis on cultural immersion through port-intensive itineraries, plenty of overnight stays, and destination-focused excursions.

- **Fora Perks** include up to \$200 onboard credit per stateroom on select departures.

Crystal Cruises: Reimagined under new ownership to blend classic elegance with modern comforts like spacious suites, refined dining, and high staff-to-guest ratios. Their itineraries lean toward longer, immersive voyages on smaller ships with a yacht-like feel.

- **Fora Perks** include up to \$250 shipboard credit per stateroom.

Royal Caribbean: Known for its big-ship energy, Royal Caribbean packs in Broadway-caliber shows, adventure activities, and a wide range of dining for all tastes. It's a match for travelers who love bustling onboard life paired with popular cruise destinations.

- **Fora Perks** include a specialty dining experience for balcony cabins and above, plus a spa treatment for Junior Suites and above on 7+ night sailings.

History and culture



Image courtesy of The St. Regis Venice

Venice's story begins in the 5th century, when refugees fled invasions on the mainland. They built their homes on marshy islands, anchoring them with wooden piles that still hold the city up today. Over the centuries, it transformed into a powerful maritime republic, controlling trade routes between Europe and the East. It amassed enough wealth to commission architectural wonders like St. Mark's Basilica and the Doge's Palace. The city's devotion to art, music, and spectacle lives on through traditions like *Carnevale*, when masked balls and parades fill the city. Religious and civic pride converge in the annual Festa del Redentore, a midsummer celebration giving thanks for deliverance from the plague. Even today, Venice's rhythm is tied to its waterways, from the clanging of church bells across the lagoon to the gondoliers' calls under arched bridges. Each element is a reminder that this floating city is as much a living community as it is a masterpiece of history.

Cultural celebrations & events

- **Carnival of Venice (February/March)**: The city's most famous festival, known for elaborate masks, grand balls, and vibrant street performances.
- **Venice Biennale (May–November)**: One of the leading contemporary art exhibitions, featuring installations, performances, and pavilions from dozens of countries.
- **Festa del Redentore (Third Sunday of July, Giudecca Island)**: A stunning celebration marking the end of a plague in the 16th century.
- **Regata Storica (First Sunday of September)**: A historic boat race on the Grand Canal with colorful gondola parades and traditional costumes.
- **Christmas Markets (December)**: Festive stalls with handcrafted gifts, seasonal treats, and warm vin brûlé. Venice's cozy way to celebrate the holidays.
- **Festa della Sensa (Ascension Day)**: Celebrates Venice's relationship with the sea through a symbolic "marriage" ceremony, boat processions, and communal feasting.

What to do in Venice



Venice is a city best explored slowly, where every turn reveals another canal, bridge or centuries-old piazza. Here are a few unforgettable things to do while you're there.

- **Venetian Ghetto:** Wander the hushed lanes of the world's oldest ghetto, with tucked-away synagogues and timeworn workshops with centuries of history.
- **Peggy Guggenheim Collection:** Linger in the leafy sculpture garden before stepping inside her former Grand Canal palazzo, now filled with galleries of modernist gems.
- **Basilica Santa Maria della Salute:** Climb the Cupola for sweeping lagoon views that feel miles from St. Mark's crush. For the best views, go at sunset.
- **St. Mark's Basilica:** Dawn is when the mosaics shimmer and the aisles are blissfully empty of day-trippers.
- **Fondazione Querini Stampalia:** Arrange a private, after-hours wander through serene courtyards and contemporary art spaces, all tucked beside a quiet canal.
- **Boat charter:** Glide across the lagoon in a polished Riva Aquarama, a classic Italian yacht, to explore the canals and islands.
- **Venetian mask-making:** Learn the centuries-old craft in a private workshop with a master artisan, creating your own keepsake in the city that made them famous.

Sample itinerary

- **Day 1 (Venice):** Arrive in Venice with a private airport transfer. Settle into your hotel before an evening at Sautter Atelier for an unforgettable Carnival costume experience.
- **Day 2 (Venice):** Explore hidden corners on a secret garden and private palace tour. Savor a *bacari* food and wine adventure, sampling *cicchetti* and regional vintages. Enjoy an evening stroll through the softly lit majesty of Piazza San Marco.
- **Day 3 (Bologna & Florence):** Travel by train to Florence with a stop in Bologna. Explore the city's medieval heart with a guided tour, take a pasta-making class with a local chef, and linger over a traditional lunch before arriving in Florence that evening.
- **Day 4 (Chianti & Florence):** Venture into the rolling hills of Chianti for a day of wine tasting. Return to Florence for an evening guided walk through its storied historic center. End with a sunset *barchetto* boat ride on the Arno, aperitivo in hand.
- **Day 5 (Bomarzo & Rome):** Depart for Rome with a detour to the whimsical Parco dei Mostri sculpture garden in Bomarzo. Wander its fantastical stone creations before continuing to the Eternal City for an evening arrival.
- **Day 6 (Rome):** Discover Rome on a private golf cart tour, pausing for espresso and gelato. Enjoy an exclusive private visit to the opulent Palazzo Colonna.
- **Day 7 (Rome):** Bid farewell with a private transfer to the airport.

Where to eat in Venice



Venice is a city best explored through its flavors, from canalside *cicchetti* bars to elegant, historic dining rooms. Here are some standout spots to savor the city's food.

- **Osteria Alla Frasca:** Tucked away in Cannaregio, this family-run osteria serves authentic Venetian classics far from the tourist crush.
- **Cip's Club at Belmond Hotel Cipriani:** Enjoy elegant Italian fare with front-row views of St. Mark's across the water.
- **Al Covo:** A refined, family-run restaurant blending Venetian tradition with creative twists, championing local, seasonal ingredients.
- **Antiche Carampane:** No signs, no tourist menus, just incredible seafood in a cozy, wood-paneled San Polo dining room.
- **Venice M'Art:** Part café, part concept store, admire the canal-side views while sampling their beautifully plated food.
- **Nevodi:** In Castello, this unpretentious favorite balances generous plates of fresh pasta and seafood with a warm, neighborly atmosphere.
- **Arva at Aman Venice:** Elevated Italian cooking in a palatial setting, where the seasonal menu changes daily and every bite feels like it belongs in an art gallery.

- **Vino Vero:** A buzzy natural wine bar in Cannaregio where glasses are poured with passion and the *cicchetti* are made for grazing over long conversations.
- **Caffè Rosso:** A quintessential Venetian spritz spot in Campo Santa Margherita.
- **Gelato Nico:** A Zattere institution where locals line up for scoops of *gianduia* or pistachio before strolling along the waterfront.
- **Il Mercante:** A dimly lit cocktail hideaway near San Polo, where each drink channels a leg of Marco Polo's fabled journey.

Trips to add on



Venice is the perfect springboard for exploring some of Italy's most celebrated cities and landscapes, all within a few hours' reach.

Rome (1.5-hour flight): Where ancient ruins mingle with lively piazzas, world-class art, and unforgettable meals. A feast for history lovers, art aficionados, and food lovers.

Florence (2-hour train): Renaissance grandeur at every turn, with soaring domes, art galleries, and cobblestone streets lined with artisan workshops and candlelit trattorias.

Tuscany (2-3 hour train): See Siena's Gothic splendor, wander Montepulciano's winding lanes, visit Montalcino's Brunello estates, and explore the quiet beauty of nearby Umbria.

Bologna (2-hour train): Italy's culinary heart beats here, in arcaded streets filled with markets and medieval towers. A must for travelers chasing Italy's best bites.

Italian Lakes (2–3 hours by car or train): Trade gondolas for gliding over Como, Garda, or Maggiore, where mirrored waters meet Belle Époque villas and mountain views.

Dolomites (2.5–3-hour drive): A cinematic alpine escape, whether it's for sunlit summer hikes or winter slopes, with storybook villages and air so crisp it feels like a reset button.

If not Venice...



These destinations are similar to Venice but channel fresh ways to indulge a love of history, beauty, and a life lived by the water.

Amsterdam, Netherlands: Canal cruises instead of gondolas, golden-age art alongside cutting-edge galleries, and cozy cafés tucked along leafy waterways.

Bruges, Belgium: A living fairy tale, where cobbled lanes, gabled facades, and hushed canals feel untouched by time. Perfect for slow, scenic wandering with a side of Belgian chocolate.

Stockholm Archipelago, Sweden: A labyrinth of 30,000 islands with pine-clad shores, and clean-lined Nordic design. Best explored by boat, sauna breaks included.

Dubrovnik, Croatia: Medieval walls meet sapphire Adriatic waters in a city steeped in maritime lore. Ideal for travelers seeking Venice's history, but with a sunnier, salt-kissed edge.

The Loire Valley, France: Turreted châteaux and ornamental gardens, with vineyard-speckled hills rolling to the horizon. A regal, wine-filled escape steeped in French elegance.

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