

1. opinion

1.1. I'm a feminist, and I converted to Islam

Editor's note: Theresa Corbin is a writer living in New Orleans. She is the founder of Islamwich and a contributor to On Islam and Aquila Style. A version of this piece first appeared on CNN iReport.(CNN) -- I am a Muslim, but I wasn't always. I converted to Islam in November 2001, two months after 9/11. I was 21 and living in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. It was a bad time to be a Muslim. But after four years of studying, poking and prodding at world religions and their adherents, I decided to take the plunge. Questions and answers I am the product of a Creole Catholic and an Irish atheist. I grew up Catholic, then was agnostic, now I'm Muslim. My journey to Islam began when I was about 15 years old in Mass and had questions about my faith. The answers from teachers and clergymen -- don't worry your pretty little head about it -- didn't satisfy me. So I did what any red-blooded American would do: the opposite. I worried about it. For many years. I questioned the nature of religion, man and the universe. After questioning everything I was taught to be true and digging through rhetoric, history and dogma, I found out about this strange thing called Islam. I learned that Islam is neither a culture nor a cult, nor could it be represented by one part of the world. I came to realize Islam is a world religion that teaches tolerance, justice and honor and promotes patience, modesty and balance. As I studied the faith, I was surprised many of the tenants resonated with me. I was pleased to find that Islam teaches its adherents to honor all prophets, from Moses to Jesus to Mohammed, all of whom taught mankind to worship one God and to conduct ourselves with higher purpose. I was drawn to Islam's appeal to intellect and heartened by the prophet Mohammed's quote, "The acquisition of knowledge is compulsory for every Muslim, whether male or female." I was astounded that science and rationality were embraced by Muslim thinkers such as Al-Khawarizmi, who invented algebra; Ibn Firnas, who developed the mechanics of flight before Leonardo DaVinci; and Abu al-Qasim al-Zahrawi, who is the father of modern surgery. Here was a religion telling me to seek out answers and use my intellect to question the world around me. Taking the plunge it was 2001, and I had been putting off converting for a while. I feared what people would think but was utterly miserable. When 9/11 happened, the actions of the hijackers horrified me. But in its aftermath, I spent most of my time defending Muslims and their religion to people who were all too eager to paint a group of 1.6 billion people with one brush because of the actions of a few. I was done being held hostage by the opinions of others. In defending Islam, I got over my fear and decided to join my brothers and sisters in the faith I believed in. My family did not understand, but it wasn't a surprise to them since I had been studying religion. Most were very concerned for my safety. Luckily, most of my friends were cool about it, and even curious to learn more. The scarf These days, I am a proud wearer of hijab. You can call it a scarf. My scarf does not tie my hands behind my back, and it is not a tool of oppression. It doesn't prevent thoughts from entering my head and leaving my mouth. But I didn't always know this. Studying Islam didn't immediately dispel all my cultural misconceptions. I had been raised on imagery of women in the East being treated like chattel by men who forced them to cover their bodies out of shame or a sense of ownership. But when I asked a Muslim woman "Why do you wear that?", her answer was obvious and appealing: "To please God. To be recognized as a woman who is to be respected and not harassed. So that I can protect myself from the male gaze." She explained how dressing modestly is a symbol to the world that a woman's body is not

meant for mass consumption or critique. I still wasn't convinced and replied, "Yeah, but women are like second class citizens in your faith?" The very patient Muslim lady explained that, during a time when the Western world treated women like property, Islam taught that men and women were equal in the eyes of God. Islam made the woman's consent to marriage mandatory and gave women the opportunity to inherit, own property, run businesses and participate in government. She listed right after right that women in Islam held nearly 1,250 years before women's lib was ever thought of in the West. Surprisingly, Islam turned out to be the religion that appealed to my feminist ideals. Getting married It might shock you to know that I had an arranged marriage. That doesn't mean I was forced to marry my father's first choice suitor, like Jasmine from "Aladdin." Dad didn't even have a say. When I converted, it wasn't a good time to be a Muslim. Feeling isolated, alienated and rejected by my own society pushed me to want to start a family of my own. Even before converting, I had always wanted a serious relationship but found few men looking for the same. As a new Muslim, I knew there was a better way to look for love and a lifelong partnership. I decided that if I wanted a serious relationship, it was time to get serious about finding one. I wanted an arranged marriage. I made a list of "30 Rock"-style deal breakers. I searched. I interviewed. I interrogated friends and families of prospects. I decided I wanted to marry another convert, someone who had been where I was and wanted to go where I wanted to go. Thanks to parents of friends, I found my now-husband, a convert to Islam, in Mobile, Alabama, two hours from my New Orleans home. Twelve years later, we are living happily ever after. Not every Muslim finds a mate in this manner, and I didn't always see this for my life. But I am glad Islam afforded me this option. Living in a post-9/11 world I never had to give up my personality, American identity or culture to be a Muslim. I have, at times, had to give up on being treated with dignity. I have been spat on, had eggs thrown at me and been cursed at from passing cars. And I have felt terror when the mosque I attended in Savannah, Georgia, was first shot at, then burned down. In August 2012, I moved back home to New Orleans, where being different is the norm. I finally felt safe -- for a while. But now, with the continuous news coverage of the un-Islamic group known as ISIS, I have been subjected to much of the same treatment I received in other cities. And I now feel less safe than I ever have. It enrages me to know there are some who call themselves Muslims and who distort and misappropriate Islam for political gains. It weighs on me knowing that millions of my countrymen see only these images as a representative of my religion. It is unbearable to know that I am passionately hated for my beliefs, when those hating me don't even know what my beliefs are. In my journey to Islam, I came to learn that Muslims come in all shapes, sizes, attitudes, ethnicities, cultures and nationalities. I came to know that Islam teaches disagreement and that shouldn't lead to disrespect, as most Muslims want peace. Most of all, I have faith that my fellow Americans can rise above fear and hatred and come to learn the same. Have a question for Corbin? We'll open comments at 1 p.m. ET, and she'll be here to answer your questions. The opinions expressed in this story are solely those of Theresa Corbin. Loading weather data ...

2. travel

2.1. Life inside the densest place on earth: Remembering Kowloon Walled City

(CNN) -- Picture a colossal empire of little houses stacked on top of each other. Visualize them connected by staircases snaking under dangling wires, through corridors so dark even police were rumored to be afraid of them. Now picture 33,000 people living there, within the space of one city block. That was Kowloon Walled City, once considered the densest settlement on earth. "A huge monstrosity of buildings" Before it was demolished twenty years ago, photographer Greg Girard spent years with collaborator Ian Lambot documenting this unique Hong Kong phenomenon, and remembers being amazed when he first saw it. "It was a huge monstrosity of buildings," recalls Girard. "It didn't look like anything else." After all, the Walled City was a kind of historical accident. A former Qing dynasty fortress, it never fully came under the regulation of the British colonial government in Hong Kong. As a result, its residents were free to build their dwellings as they wished, ignoring safety codes. "Quite often houses were built by building onto the next building, punching out walls to use their staircases," said Girard. "A lot of them didn't have access to air or open space, because they were enclosed in the center of the structure." Deep within the building's darkness, a variety of small businesses flourished. "The places that stuck out were the meat factories," says Girard. "There were pig carcasses laying splayed out on the floor; they'd burn the hair off with a blowtorch, it was all pretty open and of course there were no health laws governing the place." But despite the City's wild appearance, the photographer found that the people inside lived just like people anywhere else. "People were doing very ordinary things," he says. "It's just that all these ordinary things were happening in an extraordinary place." An ingenious community The complexity of the Walled City also fascinated local architect Aaron Tan, now the director of Hong Kong firm Research Architecture Design. A graduate student then, he wrote his thesis on the Walled City as it was being torn down. "I was fascinated -- it was like a piece of machinery that worked very well. The demolition was like taking the machine apart -- the first time you could see what was inside." It was a really humbling process for me as a designer -- when we met this Walled City, we started to see that people could be more intelligent than us, the designers -- that they could think of ways to solve problems that are outside the traditional academic world. "Tan was especially impressed by Kowloon Walled City's water system. To support its dense population, residents dug extra wells and built thousands of pipes that twisted through the building. But since pumping water to the City's roof tanks required plenty of power, the people would take turns conserving electricity so that water could be shared successfully. "It revealed the community inside -- that no matter the challenges, they would find some intelligent way to solve it," says Tan. Despite the ingenuity of the Walled City, by 1994 it was completely torn down by the city government, which was eager to replace the chaotic and unregulated community with a public park. "Seeing the Walled City fall into disuse was sort of melancholic," says Girard. "Every city realizes too late to start caring about their architectural heritage -- it's a mistake that gets repeated everywhere. By the time you start caring about it, it's too late to save it." Today, visitors to the site of the old Walled City will find a placid garden with swaying trees and cloudy ponds. In the park there is a small museum in honor of Kowloon Walled City. But when you look to the sky and imagine the colossus of Hong Kong life that once stood, it's easy to see that something significant has been lost. CNN Travel: Why we love the Kowloon City neighborhood The City is not dead Even

today, the City's legacy lives on. A walled neighborhood called the Narrows in the 2005 film "Batman Begins" was based on Kowloon Walled City. The City is even a level in the video game "Call of Duty: Black Ops." Because of the continued interest, Greg Girard is working with his fellow Kowloon Walled City photographer Ian Lambot to finish a new book of their stunning photographs, entitled "City of Darkness: Revisited." (Click [here](#) to visit the book's crowd-funding campaign). "You don't want to romanticize a slum, you know. Because it was that. But it was much more than that. The Walled City was a kind of architectural touchstone in terms of what a city can be -- unplanned, self-generated, unregulated. It was vital and vibrant and every part of it was being used." Tan believes the spirit of the Walled City continues to pulse through the heart of Hong Kong itself. "Go to The Peak and look down upon this amazing collection of buildings coming together -- it's almost like a blown up version of the Walled City, right? Each building is related to the next building. New programs evolve because of the connections." This organic chaos, he says, has been an inspiration for his own work. "Many architects and urban planners like control," he says. "But people like to get lost in the city. In my design process, I always consciously try to allow accidents, to allow others to participate, to surprise me." Loading weather data ...

2.2. Travel photos that defy perspective

(CNN) -- It all started when she kissed the Great Sphinx of Giza. Bored with taking the same, tired poses at monuments on their trip to Egypt in 2010, Alla Shubina and her husband began tinkering with perspective to create clever, funny photos. They left Egypt with some memorable pictures and the start of a new travel tradition. "The tour guides take you to certain areas to take pictures, like half an hour at the same place. You don't want to get bored with your pictures," said Shubina, a Ukrainian native living in New Jersey. "This brings a little bit of change and fun to picture taking." This style of photography, called forced perspective, uses optical illusion to make objects appear closer or farther than they really are. Google "Bolivia salt flats" and you'll see scores of photos showing exactly what we mean. To create images like these, you have to be willing to look funny sometimes. It's something Shubina and her husband have grown used to doing. While taking photos in Egypt, they noticed people watching them. The same happened at Half Dome at Yosemite National Park in 2012, when Shubina put up her arm to push the granite mountain. People looked at them in a questioning way, wondering what the couple was doing, she said. Her husband knows the feeling. "I'm the one who says move over a little bit, put your arm up," said photography enthusiast Christopher Stens. "People just kind of look at me like, 'What are you doing?'" Stens is the behind-the-scenes guy, the visual thinker. His biggest tip for other forced perspective photographers is to be "open and free" while posing and to follow whatever "quirky vision" you may have. "Alla's the inspiration. She's my muse," he said. "We have so many more [photos] where we missed the mark," Stens said. "Out of the 100 you take, you have a couple that are really cool -- other than you just standing in front of the monument." But the couple isn't in it for the perfect shot. "It's part of our trip. It's something which we can do together," Shubina said of the four-year tradition. Stens agreed. "The important part for me is having fun with Alla." Loading weather data ...

2.3. 6 reasons to love Atlanta

Editor's note: This story, and several others on Atlanta, complement the CNNGo TV series. This month's show highlights Atlanta's local charm, outdoorsy atmosphere, culinary excellence and great music. See more of the show [here](http://www.cnn.com/gotravel): www.cnn.com/gotravel (CNN) -- OK, we know. If you've traveled to, or through, Atlanta, you probably have one of two impressions. 1. Wow, that's a big,

crazy airport.2. Wow, that traffic really sucked.Maybe you got to spend a little time downtown for a convention or ballgame.And, sure, there were the highlights like the Georgia Aquarium, the College Football Hall of Fame and the World of Coca-Cola.But after that, unless you knew exactly where to look, you probably saw a lot of concrete, a lot of places that closed at 6 p.m., and culinary and entertainment options just like the other roughly 430 Hooters or 175 Hard Rock Cafes.Here's the good news: You've been to Atlanta. But you haven't really been to Atlanta.Get away from that street named Peachtree (or one of the dozens of other streets we named Peachtree for your convenience), and there's a city with a lot more to offer.The capital of the New South has been called a small town trapped in a big city.In fact, it's a lot of small towns, coexisting, for the most part, inside and alongside the borders of that big city.And like the long list of Southern storytellers who have called Atlanta home, if you spend enough time with it, it will share its secrets with you.

Good eatsAs a food-lover friend recently said, in Atlanta, you can go to dinner and a show, or you can just go to dinner.Gourmands the land over have noticed that the ATL (please, never call it "Hotlanta") is quietly becoming a destination for high-quality dining, with everything from schmancy white-tablecloth affairs to traditional soul-food and meat-and-three spots drawing crowds.Gunshow, the latest by "Top Chef" alum and Atlanta native Kevin Gillespie, was recently named one of Esquire's best new restaurants and marries Brazilian churrascari and Chinese dim sum-style dining with Gillespie's love of all things meat.Celebrity chef Richard Blais has FLIP Burger and The Spence. Empire State South is one of Hugh Acheson's four restaurants in Georgia; it serves three meals a day that focus heavily on local ingredients.Perhaps tickling the most taste buds lately is chef Ford Fry, whose seven spots range from seafood (The Optimist) to Italian-inspired (No. 246) as well as stretching from Atlanta's re-emerging Westside to its commuter-heavy northern suburbs.And all of that's not even to mention Buford Highway's ridiculously rich array of traditional Asian cuisine; tradition-rich Mary Mac's Tea Room; no-frills Ann's Snack Bar, home of the massive Ghetto Burger; and Palookaville Fine Foods, the carny sideshow-themed bastion of guilty pleasures evolved from a corn dog cart by Jim Stacy, host of the Cooking Channel's "Offbeat Eats."

Songs of the SouthIt's been decades since the Allman Bros. made the short drive up from Macon to conquer Atlanta with tunes like "Melissa" and "Hot'lanta." (Again ... please don't call it that.)Now, it's all about the Dirty South.The New York Times has called Atlanta "hip-hop's center of gravity," and aside from New York and Los Angeles, it's hard to argue for another city being as influential in the form's evolution.A recent three-day stand by native sons Outkast in Atlanta's Centennial Olympic Park turned into a joyous homecoming weekend of sorts, bringing together everyone from hip young urbanites to suburban soccer moms to shake it like a Polaroid picture to a group that's helped define hip-hop since emerging from Atlanta's neighbor East Point in 1992.Cee Lo Green, Lil Jon, T.I., Ludacris and Usher are just a few of the other artists who call Atlanta home, where a new generation of MCs and DJs are bubbling up at venues like Apache Cafe, T.I.'s Club Crucial and MJQ Concourse.The presence of Usher, and his Vanity record label, has even been responsible for drawing Justin Bieber to the city.But don't hold that against us.If hip-hop isn't your thing, Atlanta has a thriving underground rock scene, spawning such current acts as sludge rockers Mastodon, power-pop stars-in-waiting The Biters and indie darlings Deerhunter.And Eddie's Attic is one of the most highly regarded acoustic music venues in the United States.Performers from across the country are on the months-long waiting list for the

club's highly regarded open-mic showcase, which has helped launch artists like John Mayer, Sugarland, the Indigo Girls and Shawn Mullins. A city of small towns Unlike a lot of cities, Atlanta doesn't have a central entertainment and shopping district. You know ... unless you love the Hard Rock and Hooters. If you're looking for a taste of Atlanta only downtown, you'll be disappointed. Instead, hit neighborhoods like Little Five Points, packed with record stores, live music and theater venues, restaurants, vintage clothing shops and the like (Not to mention a burger joint with a giant psychedelic skull for an entrance). Or similarly funky East Atlanta Village, where The Earl serves indie rock and brunch with equal skill and residents are so cool, they have their own Web radio station. For a slightly quieter good time, hit the square in downtown Decatur, which bumps up to Atlanta's eastern city limit and, in addition to being home to the aforementioned Eddie's Attic, features enough great restaurants that foodies have visited just to nosh at the spots packed within about a half-mile of each other. Cabbagetown. Virginia-Highland. Buckhead. Sweet Auburn. Castleberry Hill. West End. If you want to enjoy the real Atlanta, skip Hooters, catch a cab and enjoy some of what the city really has to offer. The story of civil rights The South teems with civil rights history, and different cities often focus on their slivers of the story. Atlanta has made a play to introduce the broad history to new generations by connecting the movement of the 1960s to the human rights issues of today. The National Center for Civil and Human Rights opened this year, offering comprehensive and sometimes intense views of the movement's darkest moments and greatest achievements. Another side of the museum presents an evolving look at modern human rights issues around the world. Just a few miles down the road, visitors can examine the lives of the movement's greatest leader, Martin Luther King Jr. Tours of King's birth home on Auburn Avenue are free, and tickets are often snapped up early in the day. Even visitors who don't score a trip through the stately yellow home can spend hours wandering the Martin Luther King Jr. Historic Site run by the National Park Service, peeking into historic Ebenezer Baptist Church or visiting the King Center -- the resting place of King and his wife, Coretta Scott King. Howard Finster's 'Paradise': The South's most inspired garden Beyond the big attractions When in Atlanta, you're basically obligated to cross the sugar-sticky floors of the World of Coca-Cola tasting room, to gawk at Margaret Mitchell's "Gone with the Wind"-era parlor and drop in on the latest big-name exhibition at the High Museum of Art. But you'll be missing out if you stop at the typical tourist draws. To get a deeper view of the city's history and personality, check out some of the smaller attractions not far from downtown. There's the Center for Puppetry Arts, where you can catch a puppet show geared toward kids or adults, or just get a close-up look at beloved puppets from Jim Henson Family Collection. Yes, your favorites are there, from the Swedish Chef to the Fraggles to Miss Piggy herself. Old and young can enjoy storytime at the Wren's Nest, the meticulously restored West End home of famed Atlanta writer Joel Chandler Harris, who wrote the beloved and controversial Uncle Remus tales. And just west of downtown, the Spelman College Museum of Fine Art offers fantastically curated exhibitions that focus on art by and about women of the African diaspora. For a glimpse of these and other out-of-the-way spots, as showcased by locals, take a look for the #WeLoveATL hashtag, started by a couple of photographers who didn't think the city was showing out on social media like it should, on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook. Ditch the car - - no, really What if you could visit Atlanta and somehow excuse yourself from all the tired jokes about terrible traffic? (Punchline: Your time is worthless! HA! Ha?) Believe it; it can be done. There

are more attractions and restaurants popping up along the city's MARTA train lines. A single ride costs \$2.50, far less than a cab or rental car. A new streetcar will soon be running in a 2.7-mile east-west loop from the hotel-heavy downtown. It'll take visitors past a gaggle of quirky pop-up shops to the burgeoning bar scene along Edgewood Avenue and near the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Site. Visitors can also hit the Atlanta BeltLine Eastside Trail, a car-free stretch where residents run, ride, scoot and stroll, sometimes stopping for a drink at a restaurant along the way or dropping by Piedmont Park, the city's busy central greenspace. More Beltline trails are in the works, which will only make it easier to navigate between neighborhoods with just a pair of comfortable shoes. 'Walking Dead' in Georgia: Film tourism comes to life Loading weather data ...

2.4. Secrets from a Japanese master: How to make sushi

CNN's On the Road series brings you a greater insight into the customs and culture of countries across the world. Until mid-December CNN International explores the places, people and passions unique to Japan. Read CNN's special reports policy. (CNN) -- Nigiri zushi, the most famous representation of sushi, appears to be just a bundle of rice topped with a piece of raw fish. You don't even have to cook it. Sounds like the easiest dish ever to make? Not exactly. "We spent the first 25 minutes just talking about which fish we should buy and can be made into sushi from the market," says Evelyn Teploff-Mugii, one of three American women who founded the Kanazawa-based company, The Art of Travel. Teploff-Mugii is recalling a conversation she had with Kanazawa sushi chef Masaki Teranishi. Teploff-Mugii's company focuses on offering private tours around Japan that include shopping at a fish market and learning how to make sushi in a private kitchen. "Every part of sushi-making is very deep in context and an art for sushi chefs," she says. Making sushi is no easy chore. Donning a full Shinto sushi outfit when at work, chef Teranishi has been a sushi chef for 30 years. He's the head chef of a family-run, 70-year-old sushi business. He's also the region's only certified chef of houchoushi, an ancient fish-cutting style and ceremony that highlights the knife skills of a chef. MORE: CNN Go in Japan: Wagyu, ramen, sake How to pick the right fish "Determining which fish to buy is totally seasonal and regional," says Teranishi. He isn't just talking about the four seasons, but the many mini-seasons in between. To complicate things further, names of the same fish change depending on seasons, since fish flavors can change accordingly. "For example, snapper is called 'tai' in winter but 'sakura dai' in spring and summer," says Teranishi. "Tai is more fatty and oily than sakura dai as fish tend to store more fats in winter." Yellowtail is usually called "buri," but it's "buri-okoshi" during rough weather in December. "We believe that during a storm, buri is awakened and swims to the surface," he explains. "Buri-okoshi is more alive." As a region, Kanazawa is known for squid, flounder and yellowtail. To pick a good fish, lift the gill using a finger. Pink and red indicate fresh catches. "You want to make sure the fish has firm flesh," says Teranishi. "Mushy texture suggests the meat is already breaking down." If you aren't allowed to touch a fish, look for a fish with a swollen belly and clear eyes, and avoid fish with liquid oozing out. Gutting and cutting Fish should be gutted and washed as soon as it's brought back to the kitchen and is best consumed the same day. The most common ways to cut a fish are san-mai-oroshi (three-piece cut) and go-mai-oroshi (five-piece cut). Both methods include slicing the middle section with the bone out, and separating it from the two side flaps. Go-mai-oroshi cuts the two fillets further into four thinner slices. Twisser tools are used to remove small bones on fillets before they're cut into small pieces for sushi. "Fish meat is very delicate," says Teranishi. "Every time you touch a fish, you're damaging it." Less adventurous cooks may consider already-cut fillets

at the market.**MORE: Ultimate Japan Wagyu beef guide**Making the riceSushi rice's glamor is often stolen by the fish above it, yet the rice is "so, so important," says Teranishi. Generally, the harder and older the rice, the better for sushi making. "Mountain fields produce the best sushi rice," says Teranishi. "But to produce the best texture, we often mix the harder mountain rice with softer rice. "Sasanishiki rice from Sendai is a famous one we use in the mix." Once the rice is cooked, quickly cool it off using a fan while slowly mixing the seasoning -- vinegar, salt, sugar and Japanese rice wine -- into the rice. The rice should be gently slapped into shape using two fingers and a cupped palm. "Don't squeeze," says Teranishi. "The gathering of the rice should be done by slapping using strength from one's wrist, so the rice sticks together without pushing out the air between the rice." Making maki-rollsHomemade nigiri zushi isn't impossible to make, but mastering the skills takes time. Teranishi suggests making maki-rolls for more predictable results. "I'm a firm believer that everyone can make good maki-rolls at home," says Teranishi. "They're an important part of sushi and are fun to make with endless combinations." For maki-roll, instead of cupping rice into a bundle and slicing fish into small pieces, the rice is gently spread on a piece of dried sea kelp. Ingredients are cut into sticks and placed in the center. Then, everything is rolled into a tube-shape using a rolling mat. As for ingredients, it's usually a combination of fish and vegetables, but there are no strict rules for what can go in the roll. "Teranishi once prepared a roll with mayonnaise for a Swedish family with small kids so they'd enjoy it more," says Teploff-Mugii. "As he said, just go ahead and stuff it."**MORE: Adventures in ramen: Japan's ever-changing soup scene**Kanazawa Sushi Supreme Tour is conducted by The Art of Travel. Kanazawa Tamazushi Souhonten (Flagship), 2-21-19, Katamachi, Kanazawa, Ishikawa; +81 76-221-2644 Kanazawa Tamazushi, Kanazawa New Grand Hotel B1F, 4-1, Minami-cho, Kanazawa, Ishikawa; +81 76-233-0911 Kanazawa Tamazushi, Korinbo Daiwa, 1-1-1, Korinbo, Kanazawa, Ishikawa; +81 76-220-1346 Kanazawa Tamazushi Keibajyonaiten, A 549-1, Hattamachi, Kanazawa, Ishikawa; +81 76-258-5568 CNN's On the Road series often carries sponsorship originating from the countries we profile. However CNN retains full editorial control over all of its reports. Read the policy Loading weather data ...

2.5. 12 of the best places to spend Christmas

(CNN) -- Any old city can string up a few lights downtown and call it a holiday celebration. From Mexico to Malta, northern lights to sunny skies, these places are doing Christmas better than the rest this year. Bath, England There are few cities in the world where you can celebrate the birth of Jesus and the birth of Jane Austen with the same amount of fanfare, but Bath happens to be one of them. The Theatre Royal, which Austen mentions in "Northanger Abbey" and "Persuasion," is home to a musical celebration accompanied by mince pies and mulled wine in honor of the literary doyenne. There's also a varied program of holiday drama, musicals, opera and concerts, including Cinderella and Rumpelstiltskin. A seasonal favorite, the 18-day Bath Christmas Market has over 170 wooden chalets selling distinctively British handmade crafts in a quaint Georgian setting. Straddled between the imposing Bath Abbey and the venerable Roman Baths, the market offers a festive way to discover the character of Bath, which is the only entire city in the UK to have been designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Bath on Ice is a great excuse to bundle up and lace up your skates, while the Thermae Bath Spa is the perfect reason to strip down and savor the steam emanating from the thermal mineral-rich waters of an open-air rooftop pool with spectacular views over the city. New York Rockefeller Center lies at the core of the New York Christmas. Its

famed ice rink has been around for 78 years; the decorated tree is an 81-year-old tradition. Across the street, Radio City hosts the annual Christmas Spectacular, starring the Rockettes. On the southwest corner of Central Park, Columbus Circle hosts more than 100 vendors selling clothes, gifts, snacks and drinks at the Holiday Market. Central Park has two ponds for skating and horse-drawn carriage rides. Fashion's biggest names join in the festivities, setting up impressive Christmas window displays. The most glamorous cases, at the Fifth Avenue flagships and department stores like Saks and Bergdorf, are impressive enough to melt the heart of Anna Wintour.

MORE: World's most glamorous Christmas store windows

Malta Visiting presepeju, or nativity scenes, is an integral part of Christmas in Malta. Every year, residents proudly open their shutters, and sometimes even their garage doors, to display their holy crib confections to the public. On a grander scale, the Bethlehem f'Ghajnsielem is a life-size nativity experience spread over 20,000 square meters of formerly abandoned fields. Inhabited and animated by over 150 actors comprised of entire families, the village takes visitors back in time to Judea of 2,000 years ago, complete with oil lamps, turn mills, grazing animals, crafts areas teaching traditional skills and folklore, a tavern, and of course a grotto housing baby Jesus. Downtown Valletta is also home to a lively Christmas spirit, with carolers singing outside the Baroque St. John's Co-Cathedral during advent, and a dizzying display of Christmas lights on Republic Street. The Manoel Theater is well known for its annual Christmas pantomime -- this year Pinocchio themed. A visit to the privately owned Museum of Toys featuring dolls, soldiers, train sets, and clockwork tin trinkets dating as far back as the 1790's, is a heartwarming homage to childhood.

Barcelona, Spain If you can manage to extend your Christmas holiday until Three King's Day (January 5), there's no better place to catch up with Melchior, Gaspar and Balthazar than Barcelona. On the evening of January 4, they arrive at the city's port on the Santa Eulalia -- their very own ship -- in bearded and velvet-robed splendor. Canons are fired, fireworks are set off, and as the mayor hands them the keys to the city, the magic of the Magi officially commences. They parade through the streets in a magnificent cavalcade of floats that includes camels, elephants, giraffes and dazzling costumes.

Rovaniemi, Lapland, Finland While legends dating as far back as the 1820s cite the North Pole as the official home of Santa Claus and his jolly missus, the Finns would have us believe otherwise. For them, Rovaniemi, Lapland, located just north of the Arctic Circle, is Christmas HQ. Here, children make gingerbread cookies with Mrs. Claus, enroll in Elf School or take a calligraphy class and compose their Christmas wish lists with a traditional quill. Other area attractions include the Ranua Zoo, home to baby polar bears, wolverines and moose; Sirmakko reindeer farm, where visitors can take a sled-led reindeer safari; and the Arktikum, a science center where the mystery of the northern lights is revealed. Those in search of a truly frosty experience can stay in the Arctic Snow Hotel, made entirely of snow and ice, but equipped with saunas and hot tubs in which to thaw.

Nuremberg, Germany The Nuremberg Christmas market (Nurnberger Christkindlesmarkt) is a German institution, pulling in more than 2 million visitors each year. Highlights include a giant carved wooden Ferris wheel, old-fashioned carousel and steam train. Unlike all those "fake" Christmas markets that have been popping up in the region, Nuremberg's Christmas Market Council is serious about making sure only traditional handmade toys and holiday goods are sold. No mass-produced plastic garlands here. The market's 200 select vendors also put up fantastic displays as they compete for the Most Beautiful Stall Design award. The top three walk away with a

gold, silver or bronze "Plum People" awards. Adults can enjoy Nuremberg spicy gingerbread and mugs of mulled wine. For kids, there's the Toy Museum, while the German Railway Museum is a hit with everyone. MORE: Are there too many 'German' Christmas markets? Quebec City, Canada If you're the type who likes to celebrate Christmas around a tree made from recycled sheet metal, with lights powered by the pedaling of nearby cyclists, Quebec is your destination. A haven for environmentally friendly, outdoor enthusiasts, the city bustles with activity, offering holiday programs for all tastes. Modern-day Victorians can enjoy a candlelit evening of stories from Charles Dickens, recounting the Christmas traditions of yore. Sausage and roast chestnut lovers can browse the wares at the German Christmas market. The more religiously inclined can wander an exposition of nativity scenes from around the world. The nearby Sentier des Caps de Charlevoix offers family-friendly hiking, snowshoeing and skiing, while speed devils can zoom around in a snowmobile from Nord Expe. Reykjavik, Iceland When it comes to Christmas celebrations, Iceland has a few peculiarities. Among these, 13 "Yuletide Lads" (scruffy Santas) are said to bring gifts to nice children for the 13 nights leading to Christmas. Rows of small, beautiful huts make up the Yule Town Christmas market on Ingolfstorg. Here, visitors can pick up colorful Christmas gifts, decorations and treats. The shopping differs day to day as some craftsmen and designers set up stalls for only one day. Beaming down onto a city covered in snow and Christmas lights, northern lights displays add to Reykjavik's festival feel. MORE: How to be a Reykjaviker: 8 ways to be cool in Iceland San Miguel de Allende, Mexico Piñatas, posadas and ponche sum up the festivities in this colorful Mexican city, where Christmas is both a solemn and celebratory affair. Leading up to December 24, you're likely to stumble upon Mary and Joseph strolling the streets, as locals make pilgrimages from home to home, singing to "ask for posada" or "beg for shelter" as they reenact the journey to Bethlehem. Pinatas and ponche (a mulled fruit drink) cap a long evening of peregrinations around this cobblestoned city, designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site for its wealth of grand churches, well-preserved architecture and grand zocalos. Santa Claus, Indiana Christmas is a year-round occasion in this town of fewer than 3,000 residents. Santa Claus, Indiana, receives thousands of letters a year from children trying to reach St. Nick himself. A group of volunteers called Santa's Elves was set up in the mid-1930s to reply to each letter. The Land of Lights display is a 1.2-mile drive around the Lake Rudolph Campground & RV Resort. Among various Christmas-themed events, Santa hosts a buffet dinner at the Christmas Lodge every Friday leading up to Christmas. Strasbourg, France Strasbourg's series of themed Christmas villages morph the city into a visual and gastronomic wonderland. Visitors can head to the Village of Alsace Farmhouse to taste prune, apricot and other holiday-inspired variations of farm-fresh foie gras. The nearby Village of Bredle is supplied with its namesake traditional Christmas biscuits and copious amounts of mulled Alsatian wine. From the Strasbourg Philharmonic to gospel to Django Reinhardt-inspired gypsy jazz, Strasbourg's Christmas program is packed with concerts and cultural events from Croatia, the guest country of Strasbourg's Christmas celebrations this year. MORE: 8 top Christmas markets in Europe Valkenburg, The Netherlands This small town is the Dutch center for Christmas festivities. Valkenburg's Velvet Cave is transformed into a Christmas Market and the residence of Santa, where visitors can see his room of presents and reindeer sleigh. The cavern houses sculptures and an 18th-century chapel, as well as preserved mural drawings that date to Roman times. Marlstone products and traditional Polish handicrafts are a few

of the unique items exclusive to Valkenburg's Christmas markets. Best way to reach the Christmas town? A Christmas Express train that runs regularly between Simpelveld and Valkenburg. MORE: 10 best cities for a winter vacation Originally published December 2013, updated December 2014. Loading weather data ...

3. world

3.1. Glamour and grieving: How the Victorians dressed for death

(CNN) -- Today, mourning a death in the family often means donning the most formal black outfit in one's closet for one solemn afternoon. But 150 years ago, it was a reason to stash away one's current best and purchase a whole new grief-appropriate wardrobe. During the Victoria era, mourning rivaled weddings in terms of pomp, etiquette and fashion -- a theme explored at the latest exhibition at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art's Costume Institute. *Death Becomes Her: A Century of Mourning Attire* focuses on the boom years of the mourning industry, from 1815 to 1915, when the rich and middle class alike paid through the nose to look properly anguished and fashion magazines devoted pages to the most coveted fashions for the grieving style plate. "It's an intersection of fashion with what can be a very personal projection of grief," explains Jessica Regan, assistant curator of the exhibition. Grieving, Victorian style Throughout the West's upper classes, mourning was not to be taken lightly. Whereas men were largely allowed to get on with their lives, for women, mourning was a job in itself. A widow could be expected to visually grieve for more than two years (although the loss of a child or parents only required one.) The most prominent part of this display was mourning dress, which was meant to be a visible manifestation of grief. A 1863 diary entry from a Tennessee teenager named Nannie Haskins, which will be projected at the exhibition, makes the correlation plain: "What do I care whether it becomes me or not? I don't wear black because it becomes me. ... I wear mourning because it corresponds with my feelings." How some whisky lovers are now making millions But this didn't stop mourners from dressing fashionably. While the lower classes would often dye their existing garments black in response to the death of a loved one, the upper classes -- and later middle classes -- bought new wardrobes of black gowns, parasols, bonnets and brooches. Expensive mourning crepe, a stiff crinkled silk gauze with a matte finish, became the "iconic fabric of bereavement," according to Regan. The discerning sought out unfading black textiles, since true black -- black that wouldn't fade to brown or blue -- was as much a display of personal wealth as it was of grief. The most famous example of this dedication to mourning dress was the so-called Black Ascot of 1910. When Edward VII died a few days before the horse races, the British aristocracy attended in elegant black regalia (impressive hats included) that reflected the top trends of the time. "(Mourning dress) was a way of sharing one's grief with the community, (but) it certainly was also a display of economic and social status." Mourning goes mainstream Like most industries, the mourning business was invigorated by the industrial revolution, which made textile production faster and cheaper. This made it possible and profitable to bring specialized mourning fabrics, once restricted to the very wealthy, to the middle class. Striking photos reveal hidden history of black Britons in the Victorian era "The industrialization of textiles became affordable to a much broader segment of society," says Regan. "Retailers of mourning goods developed on a much grander scale and target middle-class consumers taking advantage of these readily available textiles." The industry was also further propelled by the birth of the fashion magazine, which brought both high fashion and upper class sensibilities to the attention of the working class consumers. "This gave a broad segment a clear view of what standards of mourning attire were through fashion illustrations and detailed descriptions," Regan says. The death of funereal fashion But mourning traditions started to decline soon after their peak. By the early 20th century, dress

codes and rigid social standards were losing their grip on society, and as the world was shaken by World War I, excessive displays of grief began to be seen as both insensitive and gauche. Meet the surrealist behind fashion's most memorable images "The elaborate traditions of mourning were really reconsidered in the face of great loss of life," Regan explains. "Elaborate mourning dress came to be seen as putting more attention on the mourner and a showy display, rather than focusing on the loss of the deceased." The changing role of women also led to mourning's demise. As women became involved with the war effort and joined the work force outside of the home, the periods of seclusion expected in Victorian society were no longer compatible with their lives. This tradition continued for a few more decades before finally giving way to the looser practices of today. Black is still worn (as it has been since the Middle Ages), but grief has become a much more personal experience, rather than a social obligation. "The standards have become much looser in favor of individual judgment," Regan says. *Death Becomes Her: A Century of Mourning Attire* runs from October 21 to February 1 at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. One hundred years since the 'Golden Age' of posters began What we can learn from the tattoos of our ancestors The enduring allure of steam trains Divine photos of America's most epic churches Loading weather data ...

3.2. Gold mine of cheeky medieval doodles show ancestors just as silly as us

(CNN) -- My personal favorite is this. At the top of a page of angular medieval text -- full of theological extrapolations and religious devotion -- is a cartoon of a deadpan dog. "It's amazing to think that people doodled in medieval times in a similar way to how they doodle today," says Dr Erik Kwakkel, a book historian at Leiden University, Holland. "When you see the monks expressing their personalities, their sense of humor, it makes you feel like you're traveling back through time. It's like you're going through the keyhole and sitting right next to them." Indeed, that dog would not be out of place in *The Simpsons*. READ: The spacesuit inspired by medieval armor 'Medieval eye candy' Dr Kwakkel is making an unlikely name for himself on the internet by posting "medieval eye candy" that he comes across during the course of his research. And the doodles are by far the most popular. "Normally, scribes would doodle or write snatches of lettering after cutting their nibs, to make sure they were the correct width," he says. "These pen-tests ranged from the sort of scribbled lines that people still do today to words, names, full sentences, or simple drawings. Sometimes we even find pretty good drawings." These include funny faces with long beards, big hats or noses, as well as animals, unidentifiable creatures, and even caricatures of teachers and colleagues. In the majority of cases, the doodles were never intended to be seen. They were drawn on the outside of the first and last pages of a book, which were later glued to wooden covers. But although the glue has obliterated a great many doodles and pen-tests, a variety has survived the test of time. "They offer a rare glimpse into the informal or private world of medieval monks," says Dr Kwakkel. "Personally, I love the thumbprint, which was left by a careless scribe who spilled ink on his work. It seems so fresh and human, yet it happened 700 years ago." Read: World's coolest bookstores Hidden meanings For modern scholars, doodles and nib-tests can be more than mere curiosities. When the scribes were trying out their quills, they often wrote in their own handwriting, rather than the heavily prescriptive styles demanded by their work. This allows academics like Dr Kwakkel to identify individual scribes -- who were rarely credited for their work -- and track their careers, including when they migrated across Europe. Sometimes, they can also tell us about the classroom environment. "I found one that is obviously a drawing of the face of a schoolmaster. You

can recognize him from the teacher's hat on his head," says Dr Kwakkel. "It was obviously drawn by a student in class, seven centuries ago." Some may have had a deeper meaning at the time, too, particularly the ones in the margins of the text (known technically as "marginalia"). One common trope was a drawing of a person's profile with a long, pointed nose. Dr Kwakkel believes that this was intended to highlight a particularly important sentence, as indicated by the end of the nose. Another example shows a snatch of musical notes together with the lyrics of a hymn. The monk was probably trying to remind himself of a song; this, Dr Kwakkel says, is "one of the earliest example of musical notation that we have".

Read: Ancient book bound with human skin
Treasure troves of secret manuscripts
But the aspect of his work that most excites Dr Kwakkel is the uncovering of fragments of ancient texts, which he describes as "treasure troves" or "stowaways". "After Gutenberg invented the printing press in 1436, the old handwritten manuscripts fell out of fashion. Some were thrown away, but others were chopped up and used in bindings and covers," he explains. "I often take 15 students to a library for three days, and we carefully open up the bindings of medieval books to reveal what is inside." "We have found many fascinating, rare manuscripts this way. It is magical, like uncovering a time capsule." "I know there is a lot of stuff hidden out there in bindings waiting to be discovered, but I can't fathom what it might be." His discoveries include the rough workings of medieval scholars who were translating texts from Arabic to Latin. Ordinarily, only the finished copies survive, so these manuscripts open up a new area of research into the translators' methodology. But his favorite is a stash of 132 notes, letters and receipts that came from the house of a German nobleman. One, dated 31 May 1486, was a note to a servant. "Could you please get me some wild roses, but make sure to include some that are still in bud," it says. "That was breathtaking," says Dr Kwakkel. "It was so casual and romantic. It as if it had been written just yesterday." The future Underground: London's new spaceship-style tube trains
Did artists eerily predict the Ukraine crisis?
Would you eat Fukushima soup?
The lost art of the American pin-up
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3.3. Revealed: Unseen photos of Churchill, Astaire, Garbo and others

(CNN) -- It all started with some boxes that had not been opened for 80 years. "There was a rumor that there were archives in the Condé Nast offices in New York that nobody had known about," says Todd Brandow, a photography curator. "It was difficult to get access, but when I finally got in, they told me that it had all been sold and nothing was left." But then the archivist rolled out these boxes of 2,000 prints. It was one of those great 'oh my God' moments. "Among the prints were photographic portraits of Winston Churchill, Katharine Hepburn, HG Wells, George Gershwin, Marlene Dietrich, Greta Garbo, WB Yeats, Fred Astaire, and countless other luminaries of the 1920s and 1930s. None of the pictures had seen the light of day for eight decades, and all had been taken by the pre-eminent photographer Edward Steichen (1879-1973) for *Vanity Fair* and *Vogue*. Also included in the stash were Art Deco-style portraits of women modeling designs by Chanel, Lanvin, Lelong, Schiaparelli and many others. The photographs are now being exhibited at London's Photographer's Gallery, where they will show until 18 January.

READ: Apple thinks iPad photography is here to stay
The Picasso of photography
"It was a kid-in-a-candy-store feeling," Brandow recalls. "They were taken almost 100 years ago but the pictures felt so contemporary, that's what really excited me. All the poses were so natural, and the vision was so fresh." Many of them were fashion pictures, but the women looked like they'd been born wearing those clothes, that they wore them every day. That was Steichen's skill: he could make people look natural in

every sense of the word."During his lifetime, Steichen was recognized as the most important photographer of his age. Even today, says Natalie Herschdorfer, an art historian who co-curated the exhibition with Brandow, he is "one of the top five photographers of all time". "He was the Picasso of photography," she says. "He had a 70-year career covering the whole 20th Century. All the genres of modern photography are represented in his work, from the pictorial style of the 1900s to the modernist period. It's very rare."At the height of his fame, Steichen -- who borrowed from a range of aesthetic movements such as Impressionism, Art Nouveau and Symbolism to create a distinctive Art Deco style -- was being paid the equivalent of \$1 million a year by Vanity Fair and Vogue, plus another \$1 million by commercial clients. But after his death he fell from prominence because his widow, Joanna, was extremely protective of the rights to his work, making exhibitions very difficult. Now, says William A Ewing, the third of the exhibition's co-curators, the time has come to reintroduce Steichen's work to the world. "The skill of any great portrait photographer is to gain an immediacy, an intimacy," he says. "You feel as if Steichen lives with his subjects. He doesn't turn them into gods. He brings out their humanity."He turned fashion photography into portraiture. He looked first and foremost at a woman wearing a dress, not the dress for its own sake. That's what connected so powerfully with the viewers."READ: Drone maker wants to take 'selfies' to the skiesFrom steerage to First ClassThe story of how Steichen came to take these iconic photographs -- and become a household name -- reads like a Hollywood rags-to-riches story. In the early 1920s he had gone through an acrimonious divorce, and had large alimony bills that placed him in financial jeopardy. He was determined to dedicate his life to his art, and had changed his style to a modernist approach, with clean lines, strong diagonals, and high contrast. But he didn't know how to make it pay. In a letter to his sister, he wrote that the outlook was bleak and that he was considering abandoning photography for film, which he thought may have a more secure future. He traveled from Paris, where he had been during the First World War, to the United States in steerage, alongside impoverished immigrants. After he arrived, he stumbled upon an article in Vanity Fair in which, to his surprise, he was named as "America's greatest portrait photographer". He contacted the magazine and was offered a job. Within a few weeks he was returning to France to photograph Paris Fashion Week. But this time he was on a big salary, and traveling First Class. "He went from rock bottom to being on top of the world almost overnight," says Ewing. "You can see this reflected in his pictures, which had a sense of exuberance and confidence."READ: The photo of a lifetimeHow Steichen worked his magicIt was Condé Montrose Nast himself who had the vision to attract Steichen's talents to his magazines. In their discussions, Steichen was quite open about the fact that he had no interest in haute-couture. But Nast persuaded him that "it's not about fashion, it's about photography". "Those were the days before professional models," says Ewing. "People used to photograph society women. But Condé Nast went to Broadway and hired actors and dancers, who knew how to get into character for the camera."This enabled Steichen to work his magic. "It was this unique approach towards fashion photography, which was firmly rooted in the tradition of portraiture, that was one of the keys to Steichen's success. Steichen lived the high life for several years, photographing the world's most famous faces. But in 1935 he burned out, and resigned to spend his time on horticultural photography, which was his great passion."He really was one of the greats," says Brandow. "He was the founding figure of modernism in photography and the modern woman in fashion

photography, as well as modern portraiture."Revealing these secret photographs will finally bring him back to the prominence he deserves."The future Underground: London's new spaceship-style tube trainsDid artists eerily predict the Ukraine crisis?Would you eat Fukushima soup?The lost art of the American pin-upLoading weather data ...

3.4. Kenyans rally for woman stripped naked in Nairobi

(CNN) -- Kenyans took to the streets of Nairobi on Monday to send a message to men: Stop attacking women because of the way they dress.The protests followed the latest incident of a woman stripped naked in the capital by a group of men who accused her of "indecent" dressing. The attack captured on video last week prompted outrage on social media under the hashtag #mydressmychoice.Protesters marched through downtown carrying placards that read "My dress, my choice" while others donned mini-skirts, the same attire the unidentified woman wore when she was attacked. Some men wore dresses to show their support.#MyDressMyChoice protestors outside the Supreme Court. Behind them, the anti-choice group hurls insults pic.twitter.com/yZ2Cf9RiorOthers joined the march to rally against the protests, chanting "don't be naked" and "wear clothes."More photos: #MyDressMyChoiceThis is not the first time a woman has been undressed for purported indecent dressing in the East African nation, which is a majority Christian. Such incidents sporadically happen in other major cities, including Nakuru and Mombasa.In the footage posted on YouTube and shown on local television, the woman is confronted by her attackers at a bus stop. She looks terrified as she is pushed and shoved by a group of men, who eventually strip her naked. In the background, attackers yell "Toa" -- Swahili for "take it off!" as they tug at her clothes."It's so sad that these men who strip women are the same same men who ... will go out in the night looking at women who are dressed to kill and they drool over them," said Brenda Otieno, who supported the protests in Nairobi.While some applauded the protests, others said they are a distraction from the main issues.#MyDressMyChoice protest in Nairobi after a woman was stripped 'for wearing a mini-skirt' pic.twitter.com/w4h0E9SNRy "Kenyans are actually not concerned about clothes ... this is just a media created frenzy trying to redirect the nation's attention away from hard questions like poverty and poor education system," Edu Gezuka posted on social media.After the videotaped incident, other instances of women getting undressed have been reported including in Mombasa, Kenya's second-largest city.The issue is not limited to Kenya. Over the years, such incidents have occurred in other African nations, including Malawi and Zimbabwe.Kenyan authorities have said they are investigating the latest incident.CNN's Daisy Carrington and Rachel Rodriguez contributed to this report.Loading weather data ...