**Val Fiscalina, Italy**

What are Marta of Learning Escapes‘ thoughts? Nestled among the peaks of the Italian Dolomites, it’s a very special place for me: it’s where I spent most of my holidays as a child, and I love it so much that over the years I went there over 20 times! Yes, you read that right: I never tire of it and keep going back.

The first thing that strikes about Val Fiscalina is its beauty. The words that come to mind are ‘picture perfect,’ and with green lawns, pointy peaks, and light-colored mountains walls, the valley for me embodies the quintessential mountain scenery.

It is also a place with lots to do. If you are into sports, you can hike, climb, cycle, go kayaking, or paragliding in the summer, while in the winter, you can, of course, the sky. Hiking has always been my activity of choice, and as a child, it was particularly fun.

The local tourist board gives all children a small booklet to collect stamps: each mountain refuge you reach, you get a stamp, and if you collect enough, they reward you with a medal. One year I worked my up to get a gold one: so proud of myself!

For more contemplative moods, I always loved sitting at a local bakerei with a slice of cake and a book. This area of Italy was for many years part of Austria, and you can still very much feel the cultural influence in its architecture and food: at the end of the day outdoors, what can possibly beat sitting in a wooden chalet with a steaming hot Italian espresso and a slice of apfelstrudel? It’s my kind of heaven.

### ****Colmar, France****

What are Isabel of Bel Around the World‘s thoughts? If anyone fell in love with a commune-like Colmar, most of the credit would go to the colorful half-timbered houses. And that is exactly why Colmar won my heart.

I found myself being enamored by the half-timbered trimmings on buildings and little streets, which add to the town’s rustic charm. Once in a while, a canal will intersect your path, and the sight is beyond romantic. At that moment, I found myself lost in time as I pause by the riverbank and trail the flow of the waters.

I spotted creative adornments hanging from shop fronts that made me stop and imagine how much effort the shopkeepers must have put in to come up with such a beautiful mess, or maybe they didn’t at all.

***What are Ami of***[***Thrilling Travel***](https://www.thrillingtravel.in/)***‘s thoughts?*** History, History, and History all around. Hampi, [India](https://www.prettywildworld.com/places-to-visit-in-india/) – a UNESCO heritage site, a ghost town in South India, and the erstwhile thriving capital of the Vijayanagara Kingdom in the 16thCentury. If there is any city or place that I could compare it to, it would be Rome. Quite like Rome, whether you head right or left, all you will see are amazing buildings and treasures of the past. Each monument has some amazing facet to it.

Take the Vittala temple itself, where you do not just admire the amazing artistic sculptures but also stand awestruck when one taps on the musical pillars of the temple, and you hear melodious notes. It is not just the artistic splendor but the science that went into making these wonderful monuments that amaze you.

To cite an example – the musical pillars don’t just make random sounds but the sound of the instrument or animal that is sculpted on the pillars.

The chariot temple, the Hawa Mahal, and the Virupaksha temple are examples of exemplary artistry that prevailed during these times. I felt like an explorer as I discovered the underground temples and passages, along with their secret meeting rooms – all still open for the public to explore and re-discover. Walking through the Queen’s bath and her zenana gives you a sense of how lavish was the lifestyle of the royalty.

Hampi is great for foodies too. You get a variety of food options – from Israeli to Indian, Chinese, and more – all along the banks of the River Tungabhadra that flows through Hampi. And after you have added those calories on, you can opt for long trekking trails to explore the ruins of Hampi or cycle your way through them, trying to imagine what it would have been in its glory days.

VOLCANO MERAPI

Mt Merapi, located near [Yogyakarta](https://www.indonesia.travel/content/indtravelrevamp/gb/en/destinations/java/yogyakarta.html), is one of the most active volcanoes on earth. It is one of some 500 volcanoes in Indonesia, from which at least 129 are active in the volcanic arc spread along the Asia-Pacific islands called the Ring of Fire.

Living in the shadows of an active volcano is like sitting on a time bomb, especially when it is called the Fire Mountain or Mount Merapi, the volcano that dominates the center of the island of Java.

Despite its frequent eruptions, Mt. Merapi is very central to the lives of the Javanese people and kings. For through its eruptions Merapi spews lava, ash, and minerals to the surrounding areas. These provide nutrients to the soil, making this one of the most fertile areas in the world, and consequently the most densely populated.

This majestic, perfectly cone-shaped volcano, with its peak at 2,911 meters above sea level, has also determined the lives of kings and realms. In the early 11th Century, the once-mighty ancient empire of Mataram mysteriously disappeared, and power suddenly shifted to East Java. Scientists surmise that a violent eruption of Merapi in 1006 AD was the ruin of the empire.

This massive eruption also buried the nearby [**Borobudur temple**](https://www.indonesia.travel/content/indtravelrevamp/gb/en/destinations/java/magelang-regency/borobudur.html) in ash. Most recently at the end of October-beginning November, Merapi erupted catastrophically killing 353 people mostly by its *Pyroclastic* flows, the worst ever after the one in 1870.

Since then the mountain has been quieter, but the people here have befriended the mountain and accept its rumblings and coughs as part of normal natural phenomena.

The Merapi volcano also plays a central part in the accepted cosmos of the Javanese sultans. The **[Keraton of Yogyakarta](https://www.indonesia.travel/content/indtravelrevamp/gb/en/destinations/java/yogyakarta/the-kraton.html)** faces the mountain in one direct line. Merapi is also guarded by spiritual "guards" who give offerings to the mountain.

Local people respect the awesome power of this volcano. Annually, on the anniversary of the Sultan's coronation, offerings (*Labuhan*) are brought from the Keraton of Yogya to Mt. Merapi, together with similar offerings carried to the Indian Ocean to the south, to appease the spirits of the mountain and the sea, in order to bring welfare to the inhabitants of Java.

Today Merapi is continuously monitored by a number of earthquake posts, that warn inhabitants of imminent eruptions. Nonetheless, despite frequently giving out smoke, the mountain still attracts hikers and climbers and lately adventurers who love to retrace the hot lava flow of the last eruption, although now the lava has cooled down considerably.

Whether you are a professional or avid vulcanologist, or love the adventure of climbing or riding in off-road jeeps up dangerous slopes of Merapi, here are a number must-do activities:

### ****Bangkok, Thailand****

***What are Dave of***[***Silver Backpacker***](https://silverbackpacker.com/)***‘s thoughts?*** [Bangkok](https://www.prettywildworld.com/things-to-do-in-bangkok-thailand/) always has something new to offer whenever I visit. This is one of the most vibrant non-stop cities in the world and the center of Asia and one of my favorite places.

When in Bangkok, [Thailand](https://www.prettywildworld.com/places-to-visit-in-thailand/), I like to get off the tourist trail and get lost in the maze of the city’s streets. One of my favorite ways to see the city is to buy a Skytrain day ticket for 120 Baht and randomly ride, getting off at various stations, and exploring the area around it. You will be surprised at how friendly the locals can be.

Another enjoyment is to find your way to Saphan Taksin BTS station, walk down to the Chao Phraya and take a river taxi up to Nontaburi for B10. The trip takes two hours, and you get to see all the life along the river. Explore Nontaburi’s market and streets then make your way back downriver.

Bangkok has many markets too. Bangkok is itself one big market. Make sure you check out the Amulet Market, Train Night Market, and the Famous but touristy Weekend Market, just to name a few.

If the city gets too much for you, hop on a train and go visit Ayutthaya, the Ancient Capital and enjoy some peace and quiet wandering around this historical site.

If you are hungry, there is no shortage of options from the hundreds of street food sellers that are seen everywhere. Even restaurants take over the pavements with their tables and chairs after dark. Night markets are also an excellent place to sample all the different dishes.

Now with the opening of the Bangkok to Delhi, [India](https://www.prettywildworld.com/places-to-visit-in-india/) route through Myanmar, I can see Bangkok taking on more of its role as Gateway to Asia and becoming even more vibrant.”