

THE INSIDERS LYON, FRANCE

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RIVER CRUISES

TREAT: No visit to Lyon, in the Rhones-Alpes region, is complete without grazing at Les Halles de Lyon Paul Bocuse, which has more than 60 elaborate food stalls, bars and restaurants. Immerse yourself in a truly local experience and also take time to enjoy cheese and wine at the city's favourite cheesemonger, La Mere Richard; I recommend a wedge of Renee Richard's creamy Saint-Marcellin cheese teamed with a glass of the region's Cotes du Rhone; hallespaulbocuse.lyon.fr.



EAT: Rue Merciere, in the 2nd arrondissement of the city, has earned the title as "the" eating street in Lyon, with more than 40 restaurants. The historic Le Bistrot de Lyon, at No 64, is renowned for its oyster stall in winter and large outdoor dining terrace in summer; bistrotdecuisiniers.com.

DRINK: Founded in 1864, the elaborately appointed Le Grand Cafe des Negociants is an integral part of the history of Lyon and considered an institution. Located in the heart of the peninsula, on Place Francisque Regaud, in a high-end shopping area, the venue maintains the tradition of literary cafes where diners debate for hours over the city's best coffee; lesnegociants.com.

SHOP: Visit La Maison des Canuts (The House of the Weavers) and explore this living museum displaying silk-weaving equipment and information on techniques and the stories of the workers from the late 19th century. This is the place to purchase the finest of shawls, scarfs and woven trimmings and hangings; maisondescanuts.com.

EXPLORE: Along with Berlin, Lyon is considered the European capital of mural painting and one of the top five cities in the world to view such an abundance of this art form. About 100 frescoes decorate the walls of Lyon, through the entire city, from well-known neighbourhoods to backstreets, all telling the story of the city and its people. To understand the Lyonnais identity, visit the seven-storey Fresque des Lyonnais mural, which depicts all the city's most famous personalities, from Emperor Claudius to the modern era, with figures including chef Paul Bocuse; en.lyon-france.com.

STAY: Uniworld Boutique River Cruises' SS Catherine was launched by its "godmother", actor Catherine Deneuve, and named in her honour in May last year. It offers the ideal floating home while in this city between the Rhone and the Saone rivers. The luxury 159-passenger vessel boasts spacious staterooms and sumptuous suites; uniworldcruises.com.au.

Uniworld Boutique River Cruises operates eight-day all-inclusive Burgundy and Provence cruises between Lyon and Avignon aboard SS Catherine from March to November. More: uniworldcruises.com.au.



BEST DEALS
SCENIC Tours has new products in its 2015-16 program; book by September 30 for fly-free deals and savings on selected holidays; scenic tours.com.au.



GREEN PIECES
TARONGA Conservation Society will hold a free info evening in Sydney on February 26 for a 10-day Trek for the Wild Sumatra trip in September; inspiredadventures.com.au.



APT APP
CARNIVAL'S fun new Selfies at Sea app enables cruise passengers to collate pics into a mini-movie; free for iOS and Android devices; carnival.com.au.



WEB WISE
NITMILUK Tours has a new website with an enhanced booking process; the operator is used exclusively by Nitmiluk Gorge, 320km south of Darwin; nitmiluktours.com.au.



THE Eiffel Tower, the Statue of Liberty, the Egyptian Pyramids, the canals of Venice ... where could you see all these structures within a few kilometres of one another? Where else but Las Vegas, the spiritual home of gaudy imitation architecture and gambling, and a great place to relax during the week. If you're after a wild party a la *The Hangover*, stick to weekends, but if quietly enjoying the city is the goal, booking a hotel midweek will reap savings of at least 45 per cent. The ostentatious Venetian Resort and Casino is the perfect option — quintessentially Vegas in its extravagance, the foyer complex a gilded re-creation of a doge's palace and centred on an indoor-outdoor network of glittering canals. Gondolas are steered by employees in perfect historical garb; it looks like a cleaner version of Venice, minus the pigeons. Each of the 4049 guestrooms is an oversized suite, maintaining the palatial atmosphere in more contemporary styling. You don't even need to leave the property as world-class restaurants, sumptuous bars and several pools are all to hand. More: venetian.com.

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T&L LOVES



THE prestigious Relais & Chateaux group has released its Taste of the World directory, featuring a wish-list of 530 member accommodation and restaurants across 86 destinations, from riad in Morocco to ryokan in Japan, and culinary meccas such as Tetsuya's in Sydney and Hentley Farm Restaurant, housed in converted stables at a wine estate in South Australia's Barossa Valley. "Hospitality in unique places" is the key and it's encouraging to see Asia-Pacific is the fastest growing region, with the rollcall including Huka Lodge (pictured) on New Zealand's North Island and Qualia on Hamilton Island, Queensland. According to director general Jean-Francois Ferret, accommodation members have an average of 28 guestrooms and "there are 330 Michelin stars across the portfolio". R&C, which celebrates its 61st anniversary this year, has also devised "20 commitments for cuisine and hospitality" incorporating UNESCO goals of environmental awareness and sustainability. There's been a subtle shift from a Euro-centric image to a more global feel; newcomer destinations include Hong Kong, the Maldives, Hawaii and Costa Rica. More: 1300 121 341; relaischateaux.com.

SUSAN KUROSAWA

ACCESSORY

KOBO AURO H20, \$229

THIS nifty device is a world first — a premium e-reader that's waterproof (to 1m, for up to 30 minutes), making it a top option for pool, beach or bath. It has a 6.8-inch touchscreen, anti-glare display and 1GHz processor for fast page turns. Available at JB Hi-Fi, Bookworld, Angus & Robertson and Myer. More: kobo.com.

SHARON FOWLER



IN THE HOME

THE ORIENT EXPRESS VINTAGE PAPIER-MACHE SPARKLER BOXES, \$25

MADE in India, these small, vintage boxes that once housed China Electric Sparklers are the perfect size to add colour to bookshelves or bedside tables. Brother-and-sister duo Paul Tozer and Penny Dunn run The Orient Express, a Melbourne store specialising in Asian homewares. More: (03) 9421 3288; theorientexpress.com.au.



SHARON FOWLER

ON THE ROAD

AVEENO INTENSE RELIEF HAND CREAM, 100G, \$9.99

YOU have to wonder how they do it for the money but the Aveeno brand is part of the Johnson & Johnson behemoth and bulk volume is the key. A family member who's addicted to Aveeno Daily Moisturising Body Wash has put me on to the hand cream. Aside from price and availability (stock up at Priceline or Chemist Warehouse), it is not greasy and lasts through several hand washes. More: 1800 029 979; aveeno.com.au.



SUSAN KUROSAWA

A guiding light in the Grand Bazaar



SNAP DECISIONS

SUSAN KUROSAWA

HOW much fun is the Grand Bazaar in Istanbul? After several days of dipping in and out of its labyrinthine passages, circling and getting comprehensively lost, I decide I would like to just wheel in a bed and take up residence.

It's not just the shopping but the sheer scale and scope, the industriousness of its shopkeepers and the inventiveness of their wily ways. Never have I been so flattered and cajoled by carpet-selling chaps, so admired for my lustrous hair and child-bearing hips, so compared to goddesses and movie stars and (more realistically) their much-worshipped mothers. In India, long ago, a shopkeeper in Rajasthan set eyes upon me and asked in a voice choked with mock emotion, "Which country is grieving in your absence?"

In Istanbul, an opening gambit by a purveyor of gold and precious stones is just as charmingly ridiculous. "And so, princess lady, where are your servants and your smitten admirers?"

My "servant", in this case, is my long-suffering guide Eser Sedef who, at this moment, has all but disappeared

behind a bouncy stash of the loveliest and softest Turkish hamam towels we have recently procured, after the usual ritual of floral tea and bargaining, in a little nook of a store she recommends called Egin Tekstil.

The lovely Eser negotiates the arcades of the Grand Bazaar with the sure step of a local and soon works out which shops will appeal to me most and those I will dismiss with a princess pout and wave of the hand.

Eser shows me how to buy an Istanbulkart transport ticket and sends me off on ferries across the Golden Horn, waving like an approving mother at me as I sail away to who knows where; later we convene for coloured drinks at a rooftop bar overlooking the Galata Bridge and recap our days. We have been naked together in a traditional hamam (although somewhat veiled in suds), we have walked and walked and shopped and shopped. If you decide to book the best guide in Istanbul, give Eser my love: esersedef@gmail.com

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