PHOTOGRAPH: ANA LINARES

LOVE & TRAVEL

From *Roman Holiday to Eat Pray Love,* the best travel narratives are so often tales of romance. And what is true in art is also true in life. On these pages are stories of fervor and friendship, hope and heartbreak—all made indelible by the places where they happened—to make you fall even more madly in love with travel

LOVE & TRAVEL

Carved Into Memory

After a decade of journeys together, **Colm Tóibín** contemplates the pictures his partner took—and the ones he didn't

PHOTOGRAPH: STUART MILNE

Sometime in the future, when we are old, I dream that I will ask you to gather the photographs you took on the holidays we had and put them in order. I will also want to see the times your phone filmed a scene, such as the two of us on a vaporetto going down the Grand Canal in Venice together for the first time, or being driven to Valle de la Luna in the Atacama Desert, a line of volcanoes in the hazy distance.

I was the one who went through the websites and the guidebooks, searching for the best deals. You took the photographs. Now I am asking if you have managed to locate the photos you took in Sri Lanka; for example, the picture you took of the monkeys who came to the window when I was having a bath in the Heritance Kandalama hotel. I want to see them now, as I want to see the photos of the driver who took us to the holy mountain of Sigiriya that we climbed step-by-step.

You will ask me why I am smiling. I will tell you that it is because we never had to sit down each evening on those trips and discuss plans for the next day. Things seemed to happen by tacit agreement. It seemed obvious to both of us in Rome when we saw Caravaggio's *The Conversion of St. Paul* in the shadowy space to the left of the main altar of Santa Maria del Popolo that we would spend the next days seeking out the other Caravaggios on display in Rome. Instead of walking the streets of the old city aimlessly, we would walk with a purpose.

On holiday, I have often been greedy. Maybe that is my only fault. You shake your head in disapproval, even after all the years, at the memory of my wanting three scoops of ice cream in Venice and Rome. But now is the time to ask you if you've located the photos from Rio when I got attacked by pigeons.

On the beach at Ipanema, when I saw a woman cooking fresh prawns, I could not contain myself. I ordered a plate of them. They smelled delicious when they came. But I had not even savored one of them before every pigeon in the bay descended on me and my prawns, landing on my head, making predatory bird noises, fluttering all around me. The lucky ones got away with the succulent prawns; the rest remained to stick their wings into my eyes and scratch my bald head with their claws.

They caused the entire beach—men, women, children—to rush toward where we were so they could howl with laughter at the tourist who had ordered prawns. Close by stood the cook and her companion. They were not laughing. They wanted to be paid.

Why, later, did I buy a big box of french fries on Miami Beach? How did I not know that among pigeons worldwide I am the subject of jokes late at night and stories told to baby pigeons to get them to stop crying? Why was I surprised when the pigeons of Miami descended upon my fries?

How come you didn't order prawns or fries? What were you doing when I was being savagely, mercilessly attacked by these scavenging birds? Do you, by any chance, have any photographs of a prawn in the beak of a pigeon being carried into the upper air? Or the Miami pigeons with sheer malevolence in their thieving eyes?

For months one winter and spring, I studied the form of Greek Islands as others study racehorses. Eventually I worked out that we would go to Santorini for the glamour and the beauty and then Tinos because that is where ordinary Greek families go in the summer.

On Tinos, I simply asked you to park the car for us. But you, always so kind and so thoughtful, thought it was time I learned how to park a car. I agreed, but not now, not here. Some other time. No, you countered, you really should learn now.

By then, as though news had come from the pigeons, a crowd had gathered to hear this argument and study the forlorn unparked car. Maybe we are lucky that we were too involved in the argument for you to take any photographs.

In Tinos, I had noticed a thin carpet rolled out on a long boulevard leading up to a church. As we strolled around, we saw that people were using the carpet to make their way on all fours toward the church. I knew you would be tactful as an outsider and not take out your camera when a middle-aged woman began to crawl with a child on her back. God knows what penance she was doing or what favors she was seeking.

All the photographs from that trip are missing. They were taken on your phone, and someone seems to have hacked into the phone and deleted them. Our hotel was cut into the rock in Santorini. The sun went down into the sea in front of our balcony. I can tell you about it. For once, we don't need photos. If you stay, I will tell you about it.

And when we drove to see a monastery on a hill, we saw the shape of a bird etched into a rock. Just that: the bare stone in this high place, the vast plain below and the sea all around. And someone, in the time when the Greek plays were written and the myths were part of life, someone cut the shape of this bird into the stone and it has survived.

Put the photos away for a moment. Stay. I will tell you about the bird, its shape in the stone.

BOOKER PRIZE NOMINEE COLM TÓIBÍN HAS TRAVELED TO 12 COUNTRIES WITH HIS PARTNER, HEDI EL KHOLTI, AND HAS NEVER TAKEN ANY PHOTOGRAPHS WHILE THERE

LOVE & TRAVEL

TREND WATCH

Big Days Are Big Again

As destination weddings return, experts are seeing a swing toward larger scale—and longer lasting

After two years of postponements, cancellations, elopements, and "micro weddings," the special-event industry is back in force—and the guests are ready for it. "People feel much more confident now that they're vaccinated," says San Francisco–based luxury planner Laurie Arons of Laurie Arons Special Events, who produces destination weddings at venues like Ventana Big Sur and One&Only Palmilla.

Even with the uncertainty about vaccine efficacy against Omicron (and whatever else may come), engaged couples are moving forward with large gatherings and pivoting with the science. "People want to get married and have kids—love really cannot wait," says Guerdy Abraira, a destination planner and event stylist based in Miami and New York. "And that's great to see, as long as it's done safely and preventively." To avoid "super-spreader" nuptials, Abraira and other pros have established strict protocols to ensure safe celebrations. "We are requiring that guests be fully vaccinated

and, likely soon, boosted, to attend." Precautionary measures—like rapid testing upon arrival—also help put guests at ease.

But nothing is certain during a global pandemic, which is why many couples are remaining Stateside for their big day. Planner Lynn Easton of Easton Events, who is based in Charleston, South Carolina, and Charlottesville, Virginia, recently relocated a multiday British Virgin Islands wedding to Utah's Amangiri because of quarantine-on-arrival protocols. ("Guests would have had to stay in their rooms for the first 24 hours while they waited for their PCR results.") "People really want international, but they need to be practical and have a domestic backup plan," explains specialist Julie Danziger, cofounder of Embark Beyond, which coordinates global destination celebrations in partnership with A-list planners. "Couples have to ensure their loved ones can get into the destination."

This uncertainty, plus a backlog of bookings at top domestic venues (weddings that were previously postponed or relocated from overseas), has contributed to a shift in planning timelines: What once was a yearlong to 18-month process can now be condensed into a three- to five-month window. "My couples still want their dream wedding at The Breakers, but because there's an elderly grandparent or they simply don't want to wait for an available date, we've had to pivot," says celebrity planner Marcy Blum, who splits her time between New York City and Palm Beach, Florida. "The goal is to do this while everyone is healthy and feeling positive."

For some couples, this may mean agreeing to say "I do" on a Thursday or Friday. "With destination weddings, the party is on Saturday, then everybody gets up the next day and leaves," says Easton. "If you get married on Friday, you have a captive audience for the wedding plus a final fun day together." Couples are leaning into this wedding-meets-vacation vibe, hosting three to five days of back-to-back events. "In all my years, I've never seen people more concerned about providing an experience for their guests," says Blum. "Couples just want to be around family and friends in a cocoon for a few of days as they start their life together." KATIE JAMES WATKINSON

Travel Tips for All

FOR THE COUPLE GETTING HITCHED
Plan to arrive at the venue at least two days prior to the wedding weekend. This allows time to nail down any last-minute details and rest up before the festivities.

FOR THE GUESTS
Don't approach the wedding with a "Get in, get out" mindset. For example, a ceremony in Cancún gives you a chance to explore Mérida, two hours away by car, for a different side of the Yucatán.

FOR THE HOST
Experts say it's smart to request to extend the room-block price after the wedding, even if there aren't any scheduled events, to allow everyone to hang out for a few more days.

PHOTOGRAPH: JENNY ZARINS. ILLUSTRATION BY KARLOTTA FREIER

TRUE STORY

HEAT OF THE MOMENT

Charlotte Mitchell, a captain for the yacht-charter company Sailing Collective, on witnessing a beginning

I've seen proposals on boats, mostly on the bow, in New York, as I sailed past the Statue of Liberty. Nothing memorable like what happened late this summer in Italy. I was chartering a fun group—three couples, all friends, from California—around the Aeolian Islands. One of the couples wanted to hike Stromboli; the guy was a geologist and especially keen. But our sail there took longer than expected because we came upon a pod of dolphins—a good omen at sea—and followed them. I noticed the guy getting angsty. "Boy," I thought, "he really wants to climb that volcano!" It was late in the day and hot when we got there, but the two of them took off. When they came back down, he was grinning, and she was giddy and had a new ring. He'd brought her to the top of the volcano, where the lava had hardened from a recent eruption, and gone down on bended knee. We all cheered. The chef and I poured out Champagne, and we sailed around Stromboli to share the view they both saw when she said yes. The couple called their families from the boat with the volcano in the background, which felt especially poetic. It was really emotional. I even cried.

LOVE & TRAVEL

TWO FOR THE ROAD

Jessica Fernando & Renato Soto

Fernando and Soto opened the hotel and artists' residence Mond on Sri Lanka's south coast in 2019. Next up is Studio Mond, a collection of objects crafted in collaboration with local artisans.

"As our relationship as a couple evolves, so does how we work together. We try to stay flexible and talk it out when 'things' arise.

Our favorite place to stay is Tonnara di Scopello, in Sicily. In 2015, we went on a road trip through Italy with a mattress in the back of our Volvo. Most of the time we parked along the coast or in the woods, but we spoiled ourselves by staying at an apartment in this former tuna factory.

Our top drinks spot is Bar Sacchi, a natural wine bar in Zurich owned by our friend Claudio. He just serves us his latest finds."

Bill Bensley & Jirachai Rengthong

Architect Bensley runs his namesake hotel-design studio with his horticulturalist husband, Rengthong. They are behind more than 200 properties, including recent arrival The Slate hotel in Phuket.

"We met in 1989. I saw Jirachai coming down the stairs at a party, and that was it. We moved in together; the house had a bare garden—within a year he'd turned it into paradise.

Our partnership works because we both have our own projects, so we don't step on each other's toes.

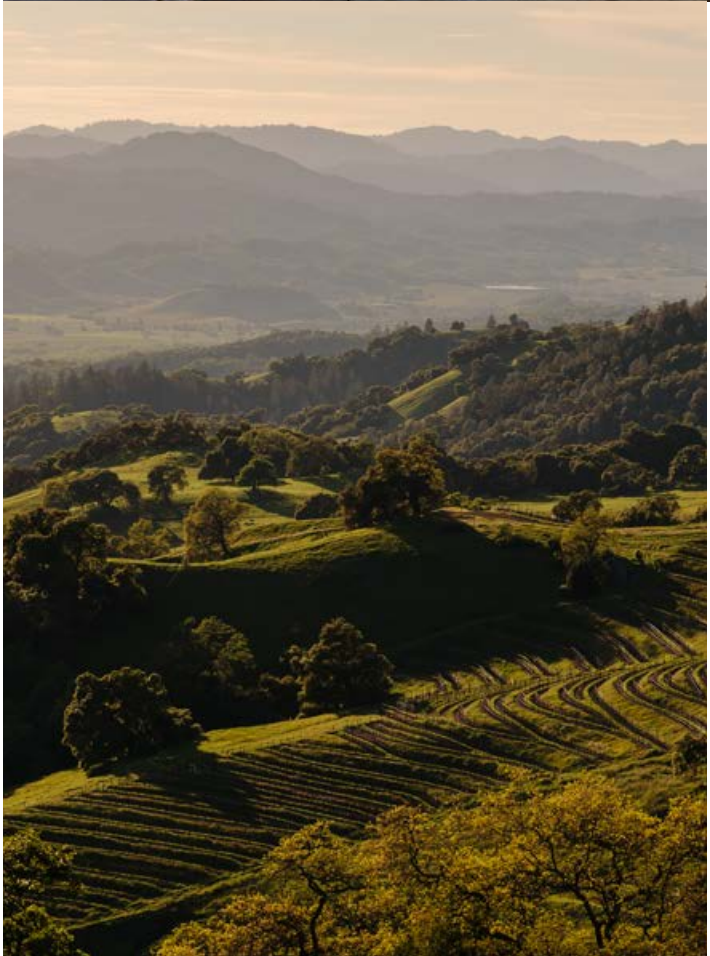
Our favorite escape is the wilderness of Mongolia; it's a place that the world hasn't messed up yet. You can go for weeks without seeing anyone."

PHOTOGRAPHS: RYAN WIJAYARATNE, K. WASAN PUENGPRASERT

LOVE & TRAVEL

Raising a Glass

After a prolonged separation, **Ada Limon** and her two best friends get together in California wine country.



It'd been nearly two years since the three of us were together, but life, work, and the pandemic had kept us apart. More than 20 years ago, back in Brooklyn, we jokingly referred to ourselves as the Power of Three—three inseparable friends. Two years was far too long not to see one another, so as soon as we were vaccinated, we finally reunited in Sonoma, California.

I was born and raised in Sonoma. My parents still live there, and many friends do too. I'm even lucky enough to have a small apartment on my friend's property on Moon Mountain, in the Mayacamas mountain range, where I can write. Even as a child, I was aware that this beloved tourist destination, known for its picturesque rolling hills populated by stately wineries, was built around the idea of pleasure, the idea of savoring.

And savoring is what the three of us set out to do. After months of lockdown and social distancing, we reunited on Moon Mountain and tried to remember what real pleasure felt like. T and H arrived just before sunset, and we gathered poolside with family

and friends for elaborate charcuterie boards and grilled salmon. Every time we clinked glasses of some ridiculously delicious local wine, it felt like losing another layer of awkward anxiety.

I kept staring at T and H, touching them, grabbing their hands excitedly. We were finally together after a time when togetherness felt like something you weren't even allowed to wish for. We'd lived in the same city for years, even lived together in the same apartment in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, but our lives were now achingly separate. T was still living in New York and had been on extreme lockdown during the worst of the pandemic. H had just moved across the country in the middle of the pandemic to relocate to California. And I remained landlocked down in Kentucky with my husband, who works in the horse industry.

Somehow we all managed to make it to Moon Mountain at the same time. We were surrounded by a working organic vineyard and had views of the whole valley, San Pablo Bay, and San Francisco. Honestly, it was hard not to continually burst into tears of gratitude. Instead, we did what we do best: We picked up right where we left off. We cracked up; we let loose. The three of us were soon finishing one another's sentences, rolling eyes at one another, making snarky comments like "I already knew that" when someone repeated themself. T kept calling the vineyards "wine fields," which made us laugh and laugh and pour more wine.

That's the thing about true friendships: Time passes, but it also doesn't. The next day, we drove out to the Hog Island Oyster Company in Marshall and ate barbecued oysters at a sunny picnic table on Tomales Bay. That night, we ate fried chicken at Valley Bar + Bottle. There was chocolate tasting and a wine tasting and sitting under the towering eucalyptus trees at Bartholomew Estate Vineyards and Winery—and yet at any given moment we could have easily been in our early 20s, drinking cheap beer at a dive bar in Brooklyn. We were different but also the same.

Each evening, we made it back to the mountain by sunset. We'd pour a glass and climb the stairs to the best lookout spot and watch as the sun sank over the Sonoma Mountain Range. If my home valley has always been about savoring, this trip was also about saving, saving one another again, reminding one another of pleasure, of ease, of delight, of how lucky we were to have made it this far together.

ADA LIMÓN IS A POET AND A NATIONAL BOOK CRITIC CIRCLE AWARD WINNER FOR HER POETRY COLLECTION *THE CARRYING.*

PHOTOGRAPHS: ERIN SCOTT, BRAD TORCHIA/AUGUST

LOVE & TRAVEL

TREND WATCH

Making It Count

These days, newlyweds are looking to get more out of a honeymoon

The days of the weeklong "fly and flop" honeymoon are over. For many well-traveled couples (especially those who have waited two ulcer-inducing years to celebrate), the vacation has become the new trip of a lifetime. Sorry, white sand beaches. "The pandemic has really opened people's eyes that time is limited and it's valuable," says *Condé Nast Traveler* specialist Grace Cular Yee, of Pineapple7. "Couples now view splurging on the honeymoon as an investment in themselves."

This mindset may translate into extending the length of the trip (anywhere from two to four weeks); cashing in on savings and honeymoon funds (for room upgrades and private drivers); and choosing more unexpected, far-flung locales. "That's particularly the case with our LGBTQ clients, who have been together longer before getting married," says David Rubin of DavidTravel. "They've already done the romantic, veg-out trips. Now it's a Galapagos cruise or an African safari."

When to Honeymoon

NORWAY
Book an April expedition voyage aboard the just-launched *Seabourn Venture* to traverse narrow inlets and sheltered bays as you can only on a small-ship cruise. *From $30,599 per person; seabourn.com*

FRENCH POLYNESIA
Shoulder season (April through May) means a better chance of booking a Mount Otemanu–facing suite at a resort like the InterContinental Bora Bora Resort & Thalasso Spa. *Doubles from $910; ihg.com*

SOUTH AFRICA
You'll get the best game-viewing from April to October at Singita Ebony Lodge, on the southeastern edge of Kruger National Park. *From $2,090 per person; singita.com*

JAPAN
For a temperate climate and fewer crowds, go in mid-May. Start at Four Seasons Hotel Kyoto before checking into Sasayuri-Ann, a ryokan in the mountain village Fukano, then wrap up at Aman Tokyo.

GREECE
Mykonos and Santorini is a classic summer combo. And the staff at Canaves Oia Santorini treats honeymooners like royalty. *Doubles from $680; canaves.com*

For now, ever-evolving entry requirements are motivating many couples to limit their itineraries to a single country. But streamlined doesn't have to mean boring: Yee's clients have requested island-hopping in the British Virgin Islands, Hawaii, and French Polynesia. "They're spending more time in the destination instead of wasting it in transit." As a result, honeymooners are able to dive deeper into local cultures. Neufville Travel founder Tisha Neufville is arranging immersive experiences, like Muay Thai boxing at a professionally equipped facility in Bangkok, a food tour of Tokyo's *depachika* (department-store-basement food halls) with chef-author Yukari Sakamoto, and an evening cruise through Norwegian fjords aboard a traditional wooden sailing vessel.

Eager as engaged couples are to pack their bags, the pandemic has taught them the merits of patience. Many experts say couples have been going somewhere close to home after the ceremony while planning a bigger trip down the line. Of course, waiting too long can lead to surprises: Destination wedding–travel specialist April Schmitt, of Travel by Divine, has had couples get pregnant in between the wedding and the honeymoon—which doesn't mean they're canceling their plans. "People still want to take two or three weeks and do something huge before the baby comes," she says. Call it the honeybabymoon. KJW

ITALY
Both high season (July/August) and shoulder season (June/September) are prime time on the Amalfi Coast. Il San Pietro di Positano is always a winner. *Doubles from $2,280; ilsanpietro.com*

MALDIVES
November to April, the dry season, is ideal for this island nation, with fewer rainstorms to drive you into your overwater villa at Velaa Private Island. *Villas from $3,400; velaaprivateisland.com*

HAWAII
December is both whale and surf season on Oahu. Post up on the North Shore's Turtle Bay Resort for a short drive to Ehukai Beach Park, with Banzai Pipeline action. *Doubles from $680; turtlebayresort.com*

PHOTOGRAPH: JENNY ZARINS. ILLUSTRATION BY KARLOTTA FREIER

TRUE STORY

VIVA LAS WEDDINGS

Brendan Paul, an Elvis impersonator and co-owner of Graceland Wedding Chapel, on officiating a most memorable ceremony

Las Vegas is the wedding capital of the world, and getting married here is a bucket-list trip for many couples. I bought the Graceland Wedding Chapel 19 years ago but got ordained when same-sex marriage became legal. So many of the chapels here closed up when that happened; the ministers refused to do it. Corrupt souls. I grew up in the punk scene in L.A. in the 1980s. I play Dead Kennedys in my chapel. So many of my friends are gay. A ton of my same-sex couples travel here from Texas; it isn't so easy to be gay and get married there. But truth is people travel here from all over the world. I've married folks from Brazil, Dubai, Germany. Before COVID-19, I was marrying 4,500 couples a year, every one of them from somewhere else. One couple a few years ago came in from the Netherlands. He was dying of cancer. This would be their last trip together. They drove what's left of Route 66 and ended up here, to get married, in Vegas. When we said "in sickness and in health," I choked up. It was heartbreaking. But it was what he wanted. And we made it happen.

LOVE & TRAVEL

TWO FOR THE ROAD

Cyrielle Astaing & Julien Phomveha

Art director Astaing and photographer Phomveha, who opened the riad Le Jardin Secret in Marrakech in 2015, now concentrate on interior-design projects.

"We are a true partnership. Our passion for art, vintage furniture, and Moroccan techniques led us to create authentic interiors with a contemporary twist at Le Jardin Secret. While Cyrielle has the creative drive to craft new pieces, I look for the right materials and artisans to turn her ideas into reality.

Nothing is ever wrong when we have a drink at La Mamounia, a Marrakech institution since 1923."

PHOTOGRAPH: RIGOTANG

LOVE & TRAVEL

Eternal Flame

Writer **Elif Shafak** on her love affair with Istanbul

Her. For Istanbul is, and always has been, a she-city. This might be difficult to discern at first glance. The serpentine streets, the sidewalks, the public squares, the coffeehouses, the entire urban space visibly belongs to men, after all. Especially after dark, once the sun descends. And yet it is worth remembering that throughout the centuries, from the Byzantines to the Ottomans, countless poets and artists have imagined and addressed the ancient metropolis as a woman. A strong, resilient, impressive, stubborn, and beautiful woman. But reviving a long-forgotten literary and artistic tradition is not the only reason I call Istanbul a she-city. I want women to reclaim the public spaces and connect with the core of the city, feel its female power, and hear the heart beating with a quiet determination underneath all those construction sites, traffic jams, and endless noise.

I was born far away from Istanbul—in Strasbourg, France. After my parents separated, my father stayed in France and my mother brought me to Ankara, Turkey, where I was raised by my grandmother. Grandma's house was full of superstitions, folklore, and food. By the time I was 18, I knew with a certainty two things about myself: that I wanted to become a writer and that I urgently had to move to Istanbul to fulfill this dream.

Istanbul, for me, was a liquid city, a wild mountain river, not yet settled, ever-changing, flowing, searching, rowdy. Even so, I thought she was calling me. It was an irrational urge I could neither explain to myself nor ignore. Without knowing a single soul, I moved from Ankara to Istanbul on my own. The name of the street I moved into when I first arrived in Istanbul meant "the Steep Street of Cauldron Makers." It was right next to the famous Taksim Square, which is considered by both locals and tourists the heart of the modern city. My street was old and narrow, vibrant and chaotic, full of loud banter. At the entrance there was a saint's shrine ensconced between apartment buildings, where women of all ages would come and light candles or tie bright-colored strips of cloth. Every time I passed by I would stop and observe the place, wondering what kind of prayers and secret wishes were entrusted to a nameless saint. I placed my yellow typewriter by a small window in my flat and wrote a novel here, then another, the clickety-clack of the keys mixing with the sounds of backgammon from the teahouse opposite. At the top of the road there was an infamous nightclub, and I would hear the women who worked there walking up and down the street, their heels navigating the broken cobblestones. When it rained, I would listen to the pitter-patter on the roofs, and when the rain subsided, I would listen to the fury of the wind and the hunger of the seagulls. These are the sounds that I carry with me still—the roll of the dice, the cry of a seagull, the echo of the footsteps of a dancer in the night.

I fell in love with Istanbul. I fell in love in Istanbul.

Years went by. I moved to other neighborhoods, lived in other houses. I got married, and both my children were born in Istanbul. This is where I found love, sisterhood, creativity—but also heartbreak, loneliness, restrictions on my speech. I carry Istanbul around my neck like a necklace of turquoise.

Istanbul has a long and complex history. That doesn't mean, however, that Istanbulites have a strong memory of the past. Just the opposite—we are a society of amnesiacs. Hence the city remains full of stories but also of silences. It was those silences that I wanted to give voice to. I wanted to look at the periphery—the marginalized, the disempowered, the forgotten. There was no such thing as Istanbul, I understood over time. Instead there were multiple Istanbuls—competing, clashing, coexisting. The Istanbul that I wrote about was different from the one found in the glitzy brochures printed by the Ministry of Tourism.

I haven't returned to Istanbul in many years, but I haven't abandoned her. We do not leave the places we love just because we happen to be continents away from them. It is the small things that hit you the hardest when you are an immigrant, an exile. The smell of roasted chestnuts, the taste of a sesame bagel, the smell of salty seawater in the breeze bring back memories of a lost motherland.

When I started writing my latest novel, I asked myself, Had I known that I would not be returning, what would I have taken with me from Istanbul? I realized that I would have liked to take a tree with me. A sapling that I could plant and grow in London. Its branches longing for freedom and the bluest skies and multiple belongings, its roots firmly in Istanbul.

BOOKER PRIZE–NOMINEE ELIF SHAFAK'S NINETEENTH BOOK, *THE ISLAND OF MISSING TREES,* IS OUT NOW.

PHOTOGRAPHS: TOM PARKER

TREND WATCH

Collective Soul

They say friends can be your family. During the pandemic, this meant a reimagining of group excursions

The year 2020 is one I'd rather forget, but I will always cherish the five days I spent in Maine. We booked the trip out of sheer desperation: After sticking it out in New York City through its run as the pandemic's global epicenter, my husband and I decided, with two of our closest friends, that we had to get out of town. We needed to turn off our phones, breathe in fresh air, and dive into a lake or two. But we also needed one another. The solidarity of close friendship felt like a salve after so much anxiety and isolation. So we packed up a rental car and headed north to go hiking in Acadia National Park, eat fresh lobster on our cabin's covered porch, and generally distract ourselves from a world turned upside down. Sharing something joyful with friends again felt both novel and therapeutic, and we returned home vowing to make our Maine trip a tradition that outlasted the pandemic.

"The past year and a half has really been a time of meaningful closeness for our friendships," says Miriam Kirmayer, Ph.D, a clinical psychologist and friendship expert based in Ottawa.

PHOTOGRAPH: CHRIS BURKHARD. ILLUSTRATION BY KARLOTTA FREIER

"We're asking, Who do we feel safe around? Who are we really wanting to connect with?" For those able to form a pandemic pod with friends, finding ways to socialize safely has been an anchor amid so much uncertainty. And as we begin to move around the world more freely, trips with friends can be a meaningful way of maintaining that closeness long-term. "Travel provides an opportunity for connection. It means working together toward a common goal or project, which can really inspire a sense of togetherness," Kirmayer adds. "But to say to a friend, 'I want to travel with you' is also communicating that the relationship is a priority."

Since the arrival of the vaccines, *Condé Nast Traveler* top travel specialist John Clifford, who curates celebration-style trips for the LGBTQ+ community, has noticed a sharp uptick in friend groups looking for safe, remote getaways that afford them memorable shared experiences. "Pod travel is not new, but it's been reimagined and redefined since the advent of COVID-19 to be a more deeply meaningful vehicle for us to reconnect," says Clifford. "Travel matters because it brings us back together. We're not just going to places for the sake of going anymore." Earlier this year, he orchestrated a trip for two best friends and their families, who'd long been separated by border closures, to reunite for a week of surfing at Del Coronado resort in San Diego. Airstreams have also been a surprise hit, he says, with clients looking to hunker down in wide-open spaces like Joshua Tree for "cookouts over the fire, storytelling over marshmallows, and private group dinners in the desert." These are the kinds of experiences one can imagine wanting to re-create time and time again. As Kirmayer puts it, "The bigger takeaway is the rituals. For some, that might be taking a trip and making it a yearly priority. But there are plenty of ways that we can replicate the feelings and experiences we get by traveling together." My pod's Maine trip helped me see the value of the friendships that are still helping me get through this strange and challenging time. "I've had people tell me, 'This trip allowed me to touch my best friend for the first time in two years,'" says Clifford. "Just being together with friends in a safe environment, that is a magical therapy." LALE ARIKOGLU

Where to Pod

Bishop's Lodge, Auberge Resorts Collection
The Bunkhouse at Bishop's Lodge in New Mexico is a 12-room private home within a resort. It can sleep up to 36 and comes with a soaring two-story stone fireplace. Be ready to fight your friends for the master suite, with its own covered porch. *Three nights from $9,000; aubergeresorts.com*

AutoCamp
Think of these nature-inspired retreats as RV parks with bells, whistles, and an uncommon sense of style. The Joshua Tree spot is spectacular, with community firepits, a heated plunge pool, and a cocktail bar. *Airstreams from $351 per night; autocamp.com*

Collective Retreats
This luxury glamping brand is found from Montana to Manhattan, but Clifford's favorite location is at the Vail ranch, where outdoor activities span whitewater rafting, horseback riding, and wine tasting. *From $319 per night; collectiveretreats.com*

TRUE STORY

THE VACATION ROMANCE

Ashley Tate-Gilmore, former director of the White House travel office for President Obama and CEO of the travel-concierge company Fortis Global, on falling in love

My mom passed away in May 2018. We were super close, and I thought, She wouldn't want me to be here wallowing. Shortly after she passed, I was talking to one of my best friends, Joshua, who's always going to Jamaica, and he said, "Ash, I'm going to send you a ticket. It's happening." So we get to Jamaica, and Joshua and I were on the beach one day trying to find a boat to do water sports. All of a sudden, this man came up to us and said, "Do you guys want to go on this boat?" We were like, "Yes!" And he called me beautiful and said I could go on board anytime. His name was Kevin. He gave us his number, and a few days later, we all ended up going out on the boat with him—it turns out that he was the owner of the boat-charter company. I wasn't really looking for anything at the time, but the two of us hit it off that day. We spent the rest of the trip together, and two weeks after I got home, I was back on a plane to Jamaica to see him. Within three months, we were engaged, and we got married in Montego Bay, Jamaica, just nine months after that.

LOVE & TRAVEL

The Way Forward

When he lost his fiancée suddenly in Kashmir, adventure-travel expert **Jonny Bealby** turned his grief into a life on the road

It was October 1989, on a houseboat on Dal Lake in Srinagar. We'd gotten engaged in Bangkok and followed this wonderful journey around Chiang Mai and the Thai islands, in the days when there were just a few huts on Koh Tao. There'd been this one sunset on Koh Phi Phi that seemed to turn the entire sky orange. People were wandering around in this reverent silence. Melanie was this old soul with such an adventurous spirit, who had just understood me intuitively nearly from the moment we'd met, almost five years earlier. We were 25, and I remember the deep untroubled happiness of two people free and in love.

We'd reached Kashmir from Delhi via a bone-crunching 36-hour bus journey, but we'd settled into life on a houseboat made from carved rosewood, with a local family called the Nadroos. Every day, we'd wake to the sight of the lake and the snowcapped Himalayas. Little shikara paddleboats would appear selling flowers and pashminas, and we'd haggle for warm macaroons and topaz rings. We'd spend our days hiking and exploring—the Friday Mosque with its towering wood pillars, and the old town where horses and carts would trundle through the narrow streets, like London before the Great Fire. On cool evenings, the Nadroos would light a hearth on the boat before dinners of fresh paneer, aloo gobi, and rice dyed yellow from the saffron grown in the nearby fields.

We'd been there a few weeks. It was a normal evening when I told her I loved her. We fell asleep to the sound of the lake lapping against the houseboat's hull and the muezzin calling the faithful to prayer for the last time of the day. But when I woke up, at 6 or 7 a.m., something was wrong. Melanie—who had mild asthma but was otherwise healthy—could barely breathe. She was unconscious and burning up. I panicked and threw water in her face because that's what they do in the movies. Nothing seemed to make any difference. There was a German policeman on the boat, and I remember grabbing him and us both frantically doing CPR. It was a blur, but I remember holding her and realizing that I knew. She was gone.

PHOTOGRAPH: JONNY BEALBY

Bealby motorbiking in Algeria's Sahara Desert in 1991

I couldn't get her body embalmed in time, so I found the old Catholic church and, with the help of the local priest, I cremated her. I remember the next day, standing over the pyre, gathering up the cold ashes of the woman I'd planned to spend my life with. But, in a strange way, I now cherish those six days in Srinagar after she died. It was still just me and her, and I kicked into some sort of gear I didn't know I had. It was when I returned to England that the emptiness hit me. The world was carrying on as normal, but I felt completely alone in this vast hinterland of grief.

Two years later, my journey across Africa by motorbike began when someone mentioned a Kenyan farm looking for a manager. I needed something to focus on and started to plot a possible journey, which I got so absorbed with that it didn't matter when the job failed to materialize. It didn't feel like running away, but running toward something new. I remember turning south at Clapham Junction and knowing there was at least some meaning now.

On the long journey south, my life seemed to turn around. My motorcycle was a Yamaha Ténéré bike, and I wanted to drive to the desert it was named after. So I joined a convoy of French aid workers in Niger, and we drove 250 miles east from Agadez into this deep desert, through great waves of shadow-draped sand. It was just one of many treacherous journeys on the trip, but there was one night, when we'd roasted a goat on the campfire and drunk red wine, when the sky turned this incredible, blazing red. I'd been so numb, but for the first time since Melanie had died I felt truly lucky to be alive. I think that was the point when I shed my grief in some ways, and Melanie's death became a positive force for me.

From there, I basically circumnavigated Africa, first heading south until I hit Cape Town, and then driving back up the other side of the mighty continent. There was always a sense on that journey that Melanie was with me. I wanted her to be proud of me. I felt a responsibility to live for her, in a way, but also a freedom. Life had been so devoid of meaning that taking risks only seemed like a chance to feel.

And that stayed with me. My next big trip, into the mythical Kafiristan, in the remote mountains of Afghanistan, was based on Rudyard Kipling's *The Man Who Would Be King,* the first book Melanie ever gave me. It was a Kalash tribesperson there who encouraged me to bring more visitors to this wildly beautiful corner, which is how my travel company Wild Frontiers was born.

I still don't know exactly how or why Melanie died, though I've since read about sudden-death syndrome, which most commonly affects people in their 20s and middle age. I'll never know how life might have turned out had we woken to just another blissful autumn morning in Kashmir. But I know that she has been with me ever since that day. And I know that, without her death, I would never have made the choices I made—which ultimately taught me that people are almost always good, and that the most seemingly dangerous places are often the most welcoming. In many ways, her death taught me how to live.

AS TOLD TO ASHLEA HALPERN

CONDÉ NAST TRAVELER SPECIALIST JONNY BEALBY IS THE FOUNDER OF THE ADVENTURE-TOUR COMPANY WILD FRONTIERS AND THE AUTHOR OF BOOKS ON AFRICA, INDIA, PAKISTAN, AFGHANISTAN, AND CENTRAL ASIA.

LOVE & TRAVEL

TWO FOR THE ROAD

Olga & Alex Polizzi

Olga, an interior designer, hotelier, and director of design for Rocco Forte Hotels, and her daughter Alex opened their first hotel together, The Star in East Sussex, in 2021.

"The relationship works because we have different skill sets: Mum is the designer, and I'm more operational, but we both respect each other enormously. There is no one I would rather be in business with.

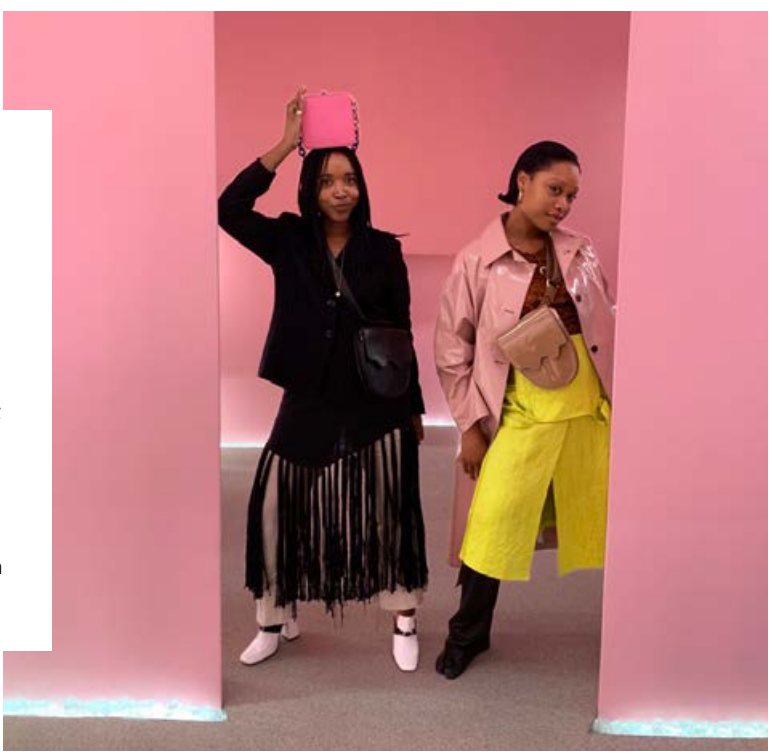
Mum has just got back from Verdura Resort, a Rocco Forte Hotel, near Palermo, and said it was absolute bliss. My favorite staycation escape is one of the modern lodges at the Gilpin Hotel in the Lake District."

Ashley Cimone & Moya Annece

The best-friend duo are behind the brand Ashya, which makes beautiful leather travel accessories, from passport holders to crossbody bags. This year, the line will be stocked at Saks Fifth Avenue and Nordstrom in New York City.

"The key to our partnership is that we have so much genuine love and respect for each other. Being great friends has helped us to overcome all the obstacles of running a business together.

We love traveling to Santa Monica Proper hotel. Designer Kelly Wearstler managed to make these really creative, textured spaces. Or to Jamaica, which has become a place of rediscovery, solace, and joy."



PHOTOGRAPHS: MAGGIE MCCALL, ASHLEY CIMONE AND MOYA ANNECE

LOVE & TRAVEL

A Double Date With Paris

Returning to the City of Light, **Rick Steves** takes a long stroll with the woman he loves

There's a spot in Paris where I like to share my macarons, on the Île Saint-Louis. Pulling the ribbon on the tiny box, gilded with tradition and a flair for good living, and sharing them here is the perfect start for a romantic afternoon with my favorite travel partner—my girlfriend—and my favorite city.

Nibbling our pastel confections, we dangle our legs over the tip of the island that splits the River Seine and the city. Behind us towers Notre Dame, its rebuilding after a tragic fire a testimony to the city's commitment to its heritage. Ahead of us are bridges celebrating kings and emperors with medallions glinting in the morning sun.

Paris is a city for walking, hand in hand, with just the right person. In a tiny park on the Île Saint-Louis, we listen as pétanque balls crack against each other and old-timers cackle. We share a Monet moment by a pond with water lilies where children push tiny boats with sticks.

We celebrate the chance to become temporary Parisians, vowing to blend in, to join in. We relish the novelties (like poodles actually sitting on chairs in cafés). We find comfort in the universalities (like children working on their social skills in the sandbox at the Place des Vosges). Strolling along a market street,

PHOTOGRAPHS: SIVAN ASKAYO, JOANN PAI

we're reminded how the city is really a collection of neighborhoods. We shop for strawberries in the market like locals. We covet the countless goat cheeses spilling from the fromagerie onto sidewalk racks. We mark a chance meeting of friends with air kisses just beyond each cheek.

We're not really hungry, but two rattan chairs and a rickety table at the corner bistro are too inviting to ignore. Settling in, we are thankful that we really do like snails, if they come with enough garlic. The rapid-fire, curiously appetizing sound of the knife slicing the baguette signals that another woven basket piled with crunchy bread is on the way, the better for soaking up every bit of that buttery sauce. We cock our ears for the mouthwatering sound of the little spoon cracking through the crème brûlée. And then we devour it slowly. We pause, we reflect, settling ever deeper into our wicker chairs. We sip pastis, that anise-flavored liqueur that demands you just sit and experience it. It's so Parisian.

After climbing the steps of Montmartre, we grab a perch at the top. From here, we survey the city as it sprawls before us. France, like every culture, has a soul, the accretion of art, history, the people, and their struggles. We ponder how, for generations, it's been the fringe of Parisian society who've enjoyed this view—the bohemians of each age. There's a kind of communion here, on the steps of Montmartre. As we cuddle, so do strangers around us. They may be of a different generation and a different nationality, they may speak a different language, but there's a oneness, an intimacy of being surrounded by strangers carrying on their own love affairs with Paris.

As we look out over Europe's grandest skyline, the sun sets, and the City of Light starts to turn itself on. District by district, neighborhoods are illuminated. As if all connected to a sliding switch, the monuments glow brighter. And then, at the top of the hour, as church bells ring, the Eiffel Tower twinkles on like a constellation in the Paris sky.

We put our phones away, thankful we have nothing scheduled but time together.

TRAVEL WRITER RICK STEVES IS THE FOUNDER OF RICK STEVES EUROPE. HE BELIEVES THAT PARIS IS THE MOST ROMANTIC CITY IN THE WORLD.