

BTTM 707-18

TOURISM PRODUCT: EUROPE & AMERICA

Syllabus

Unit 1 International Tourism (inbound and outbound tourism) trends, A Comparison of latest statistics of Europe vs Americas. SWOT analysis of the tourism development strategies of USA and UK.

Unit 2 Destinations in North America - United States of America: New York, Washington DC, Florida, Los Angeles, Las Vegas, San Francisco. Canada: Ontario, Ottawa, Montreal, British Columbia. (Map Work)

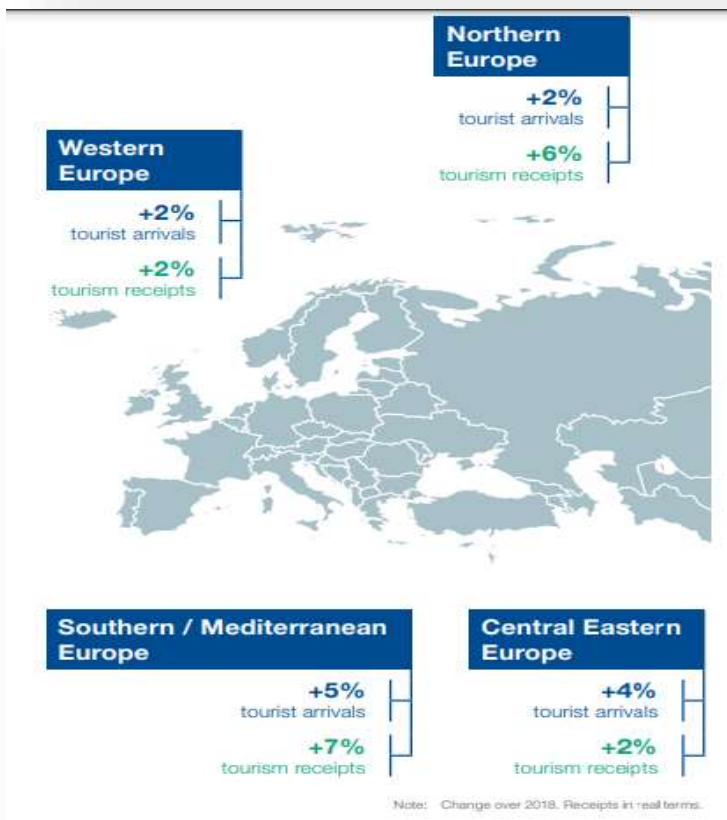
Unit 3 Central America - Costa Rica, Panama, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Honduras, Belize. South America: Peru, Ecuador, Venezuela, Chile, Bolivia, Chile, Brazil. (Map Work)

Unit 4 Europe - England, France, Italy, Spain, Ireland, Turkey, Spain, Netherlands, Czech Republic, Austria, Germany, Greece, Switzerland, Russia, Ukraine. (Map Work)

UNIT 1

A Comparison of latest statistics of Europe vs Americas.

Europe



Europe

Southern Mediterranean destinations continued to lead growth

- In 2019 intraregional demand fuelled much tourism in Europe, though performance among major European source markets was uneven, amid weakening economies. Demand from overseas source markets held up well.
- The collapse of British travel group Thomas Cook and several European low-cost airlines, as well as the slower outbound market from the United Kingdom in view of the Brexit impasse

affected key European destinations.

- Southern Mediterranean Europe led growth and continued to show remarkable performance, yet somewhat less bullish than in previous years. Virtually all destinations reporting data saw positive results in arrivals and most of them recorded strong growth in terms of earnings. Balkan destinations showed upbeat results and the more mature destinations in the Mediterranean reported positive results with particularly robust growth in Italy, Portugal, Greece and Malta.
- Results across destinations in Central and Eastern Europe were mixed as outbound travel from Russia slowed down to some destinations.
- In Western Europe, the Netherlands posted robust results, building on the tourist dispersal actions undertaken to promote tourism beyond Amsterdam.
- Northern Europe saw modest performance overall with mixed results across destinations. Bookings out of the United Kingdom were slower to euro area destinations in particular, while the lower value of the pound favored travel to more affordable destinations outside the euro area.

The Americas

International tourist arrivals 2019



219
million

+2%

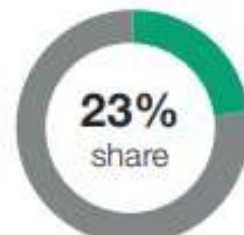


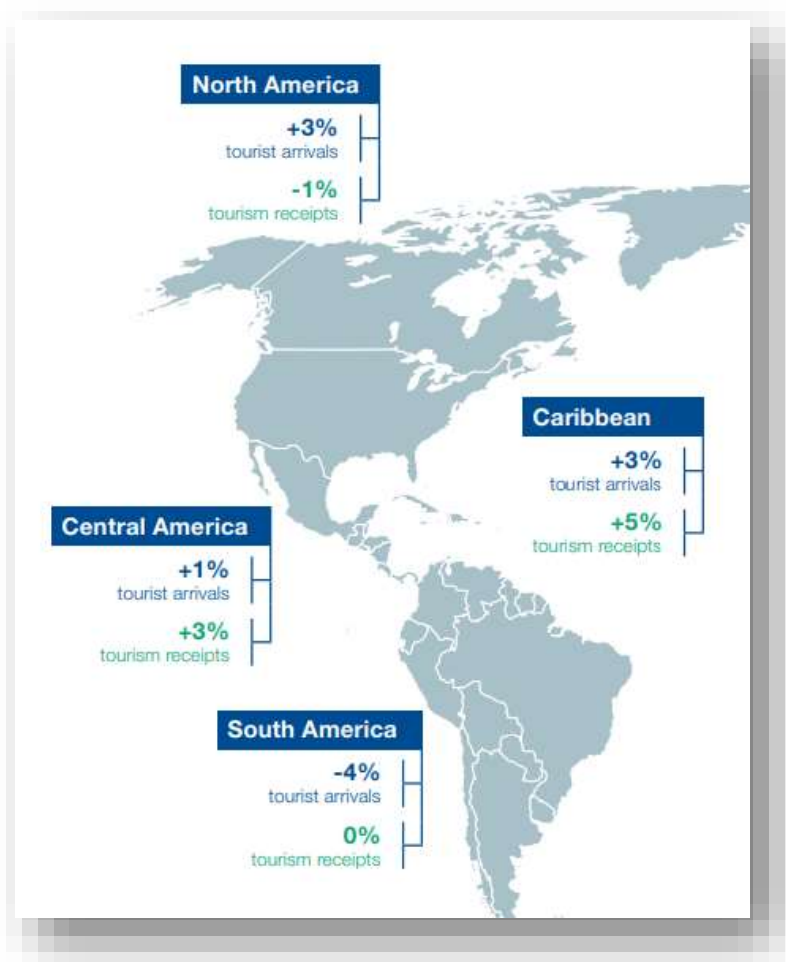
International tourism receipts 2019



USD 342
billion

+0%





Uneven performance across destinations

- In the Caribbean, many smaller island destinations saw double-digit growth in 2019. Among the larger destinations, Bahamas and Jamaica enjoyed continued solid growth while tourism to Cuba and the Dominican Republic was weaker.
- In North America, Mexico and Canada showed robust results, while the United States of America, the largest destination in the Americas, saw weaker results.
- Central America showed uneven results across destinations. Costa Rica, the sub region's most visited destination, posted solid results. El Salvador, Nicaragua and Belize show

above-average growth.

- International arrivals to South America went down with mixed performance throughout the year. Several destinations recorded a strong decline in tourist arrivals from Argentina. Outbound travel from Argentina slowed sharply impacting neighboring destinations such as Paraguay, Chile and Uruguay. By contrast, arrivals went up in Argentina benefiting from a favorable exchange rate.
- Political turmoil and social protests emerging in the subregion between September and October took a toll on inbound tourism in several countries.
- Spending from major source market Brazil saw also a decline, though much less pronounced. Brazil announced visa exemptions in June to tourists from some markets

An important contribution to world travel growth is expected to come from the Asia-Pacific region. Currently, the EU receives 26 million arrivals from this region. By 2030, this is expected to rise to 34 million arrivals. The Americas will remain the third-largest outbound region. The number of tourists from here is predicted to increase by 2.2% year-on-year, with 37 million visiting EU countries.

SWOT analysis of the USA's Tourism Industry

This detailed SWOT analysis of the USA's tourism industry aims to provide readers with a comprehensive insight into the strengths and the weaknesses of the USA's tourism industry. It also aims to examine the opportunities the industry should explore and the threats it needs to keep an eye on.

Strengths of the USA's Tourism Industry

The USA has an excellent and thriving tourism industry. According to Lock (2019) the contribution of both domestic and international tourists to the country's GDP in 2018 was \$1.1 trillion. Americans take around 2.29 billion domestic trips a year which clearly demonstrates the power of staycations. Likewise, inbound tourism is fantastic as well with approximately 80 million international visitors coming to the country each year.

Undoubtedly, the USA is one of the most beautiful countries in the world. Its tourism industry and what it offers pull tourists from around the world. Ancient lakes, stunning landscapes, soaring mountains, entertainment provisions, sporting events, sunny beaches, remote glaciers, coastlines, restaurants, parks such as Bryce Canyon National Park, Grand Teton National Park, Yellowstone National Park, Yosemite National Park, Crater Lake National Park, the Grand Canyon, and many other man made and natural wonders mesmerise millions of tourists every year. Lock (2019) reports that the most popular type of vacation for U.S tourists is beach vacation. According to Mejia (2018) the top fun states to visit are California, New York, Nevada, Florida, Illinois, Washington, Texas, Colorado, Pennsylvania, and Minnesota.

According to Hoistington (2019) the travel and tourism industry in USA catered for approximately 15.6 million jobs in 2018. Resendes (2020) states that 1.6 million new restaurants jobs are to be created by 2028. She also reports that employment satisfaction level among restaurant employees is very good as evidenced from employees rating their workplace happiness as an 8/10. Both American and international tourists spend huge amount of money on food, accommodation, traveling, and purchasing souvenirs making the U.S. tourism industry very lucrative.

Weaknesses of the USA's Tourism Industry

Mexico, Canada, the UK, Japan, and China are some of the top countries for U.S. inbound tourism. However, Hoistington (2019) reports a flatline in international visitors from China. Recent trade dispute between the USA and China has been a key factor. Foroohar (2019) reports that travel from Germany is down by around 7% and tourists from Canada and South Korea show less enthusiasm about vacations in the USA. Milward (2019) states that the number of international tourists to the US dropped by 5.4% in March 2019 compared to the same time in 2018. This prompted fears among many tourism experts and businesses.

Rigid visa systems, costs of holidays, and the attempts to ban tourists from some countries affect the U.S. tourism industry badly. Many analysts argue that a difficult visa system, and unnecessary barriers on international tourists drive millions of prospective visitors to other countries who would otherwise have visited the USA and contributed to economic growth. Likewise, findings from

some surveys are suggesting that a smaller number of Americans will take holidays in 2020 and this trend may continue next few years.

Opportunities for the USA's Tourism Industry

Lock (2019) reports that Canada, Mexico, the UK, Japan, China, Brazil, South Korea, Germany, France, India, Australia, Italy, Argentina, Colombia, and Spain are the top 15 source countries for the U.S. inbound tourism. Though a decline is expected from some sources, the USA has many pull factors to attract tourists from around the world. Chinese tourists often spend a huge amount of money, and therefore, inviting more Chinese tourists are likely to bring in more revenues.

Once the current economic turmoil is over, the domestic tourism is likely to increase. Therefore, developing more visitor attractions up and down the country may offer more opportunities. Many luxury hotels, restaurants, and other attractions are now being constructed away from tourist hubs. This is likely to attract the attention of both domestic and international tourists who many want to enjoy their holidays away from the hustle and bustle of mega city centres.

Threats to the USA's Tourism Industry

Threat is the last element to address in the SWOT analysis of the USA's tourism industry. The USA competes with a number of other countries for the market share of international inbound tourism. Some of the biggest competitors are France, Spain, China, Italy, Turkey, Mexico, Germany, Thailand, and the UK. All of these countries are constantly coming up with new strategies to draw the attention of international tourists. Apart from competition, some of the U.S. states which are also tourist hotspots, are often affected by natural disasters such as severe snow, ice storms, tornadoes, flooding, tsunami waves, earthquakes, and so on. These disasters often affect the country's tourism industry badly

SWOT analysis of the UK Tourism

Strengths

Being a member of the EU has made travel easier. EU nationals do not have to get visas to travel to other EU countries and flights have become much cheaper because of 'low cost' airlines. Under EU law consumers now enjoy protection if their flight is cancelled or delayed. They also enjoy financial protection for package holidays, for example, if the travel company fails or if the consumer wants to cancel the holiday. Not only do Brits travel more often to Europe than before, the British tourism industry has also benefited from this – the direct contribution of travel and tourism to the UK economy was about £60 billion (3.5% of total GDP) in 2014. Tourism has also supported nearly 2 million jobs (5.7%) in the UK. And according to the Office of National Statistics, tourism from EU states to the UK is more than double that from the rest of the world.

Using your mobile phone abroad has become cheaper and from June 2017 there will be no difference in cost using your phone at home or in other EU states. When in another EU member state, EU law allows EU travellers non-discriminatory access to services such as museums, galleries and theatres so EU travellers enjoy the same price of entry as locals. The Services Directive also requires shops, hotels, restaurants

and the like not to discriminate against service recipients (i.e. EU tourists). And if Brits injure themselves on holiday, they get emergency health care for free with the European Health Insurance Card (EHIC).

Weaknesses

The environment has been hit– nearly 70% of passengers come to the UK by plane. Tourism also places a burden on UK infrastructure, such as roads and the UK's heritage infrastructure such as National Trust properties. As the UK is outside the Schengen zone, but non-EU nationals only need a single visa to travel as tourists within the Schengen zone and need an additional visa to visit the UK, there is a risk that non-EU tourists do not visit the UK. This could be a potential loss to the UK tourism industry.

Some argue that freer travel means that it may be easier for those who want to harm the UK enter as tourists. Under EU law, all EU nationals have the right to come to the UK for up to three months without having to work or prove that they have enough money to live on – this can potentially cause several problems: some may overstay and could claim benefits or enter the black economy. Free movement also contributes to the burden on health services – it is estimated that it costs the NHS £260 million per year to care for visitors and non-permanent residents from the European Economic Area (EEA).

Opportunities

The tourist industry is expected to expand with opportunities for the UK economy to grow. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), tourism is forecast to rise by 3.7% in 2015, and to rise by 3.2% pa, from 2015-2025, to £88.2bn (3.7% of total GDP) in 2025. However, these figures assume continued EU membership. Travel and tourism is also a way of helping to ensure that visitors understand Britain and its culture. If Britain were to leave the EU and does not enter a special arrangement with the EU, the UK will be free to enter into negotiations with other states which may include free movement. As such, the danger of other EU nationals coming over here without jobs or sufficient private resources would be eliminated.

Threats

If the UK leaves the EU, the tourism industry may be affected. There is the possibility that fewer EU nationals will come to the UK depending on the nature of the post-Brexit deal. However, US and Asian tourist figures are not expected to drop. Similarly, Brits may find it harder to travel to other EU countries.

There may be longer delays at the Channel as the French government may not protect carriers from being boarded by irregular migrants. This may lead to lengthier checks either in the UK or by ferry operators. Security threats and increased migration from non-EU states may result in the UK further reinforcing its borders. If no deal is reached, UK nationals may need visas to travel to EU countries, and EU nationals may require visas to come to the UK. It may also become more expensive, as low cost airlines might not be granted the same access to landing rights at EU airports, the principle of nondiscrimination and reduced roaming costs may not apply to British citizens and Brits may have to pay for emergency healthcare in other EU countries.

INDIAN TOURISTS CHARACTERISTICS, BEHAVIOUR AND TASTES

In 2016, Indian tourists made 2.3 million trips to Europe, equivalent to 14% of outbound travel. India has been earmarked as an important market for future tourism in Europe, with its growth potential estimated at 5.7 % on average per year until 2020.

Characteristics of Indian tourists

The majority of Indian travellers organise their holidays as package deals through travel agencies and tour operators, while the rest book them independently.

Indians usually arrange their trips 3 to 6 weeks before travelling.

Indians often take recommendations from family and friends, but also seek the advice of travel agents and, most recently, the internet. They mostly go on leisure tourism, although meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions (MICE) travel has increased.

Indians tend to travel with family or to be experienced travellers. They seek a safe, friendly atmosphere and authentic experiences, and prefer to communicate in English.

Indians usually travel between May and July, and October and December, and stay between 10 and 21 days. They tend to visit different destinations within that time.

Indians travel for:

- good hotels and service
- well-known landmarks
- nature
- shopping

The most popular Indian travel destinations are:

- globally – Singapore, Thailand and the United Arab Emirates
- Europe – the UK, Switzerland and Germany
- Indians generally seek 3-to-4 star hotel accommodation, especially when travelling on tours.

UNIT 2

North America

North America

The third largest continent in the world in terms of landmass and the fourth largest in terms of population, North America, is what we know today as the New World, or simply the Americas. Home to over 500 million people, the continent, is divided into 24 countries, the largest by land mass being Canada and Mexico City by population. Mexico's Chichen Itza is also one of the seven wonders of the modern world, which belongs to this continent. A global power, United States of America is also one of the most influential countries in the world.

The continent is bounded by the Arctic Ocean to the north, North Atlantic Ocean to the east, the Caribbean Sea on the south, and North Pacific Ocean to the west. North America's highest point is Denali (Mount McKinley), 6,190 meters above the sea level and Death Valley in California is the lowest being 86 meters below the sea level.

America is named after Amerigo Vespucci, who was the first to explain that Columbus' journey was not to India, but to an entirely different landmass. The natives of this continent are believed to be North East Asian, who were also the first to settle on the Earth, even before the Europeans.

The United States of America, Canada, Mexico, Panama, Bahamas, and Costa Rica are the prominently visited countries of North America. Living on the edge, a fast-paced and relatively free-spirited life, the people belonging to this region lend a welcoming and warm vibe to this land. With compact diversity, three languages- English, Spanish, and French- prominently rule the continent.

Endowed with natural resources- ample fresh water resources, thick forests, great mineral wealth, and vast lands of fertile soil, North America is counted as one of the most economically developed regions in the world. It may interest you to know the average per capita income and food consumption of a single individual in North America is significantly higher than any other continent in the region.

Experience the most of the 'New World' and modernity with a visit to this contemporary and pulsating continent!

USA



The United States of America, which is commonly referred to as the United States or U.S., located in the continent of North America covers an area of 9.826 million sq km, which makes it the third largest country in the world in terms of area. Bordered by Canada on the north and Mexico on the south, the country is bound by the Atlantic Ocean on the east, Pacific Ocean on the west, while the Gulf of Mexico touches its southeast coast. U.S. comprises 48 contiguous states, with the state of Alaska and the island state of Hawaii in the mid-Pacific forming the 49th and 50th states respectively. The geography of the country ranges from Arctic in Alaska to subtropical features in Hawaii and Florida. This vast mass of land spans from arid desert to wet rain forests, from outstretched prairie to rugged peaks, and from a volcanic landscape in Hawaii to elongated coastlines. The U.S. is a melting pot where people from the different ethnic backgrounds and national origins exist. The most significant cultural aspect of this country is that it recognizes its people not by their ethnicity but by their citizenship and allegiance. The culture of this country embraces all the elements be it conservative or liberal, and gives the rights of free expression, individualism and egalitarianism. The variety in American culture is unique in the world. The places of interest in the U.S. are unlimited, from classy urban marvels and jazzy nightlife to quaint little countryside beauties; the country boasts something for everyone. Washington D.C., the capital city, houses three most important buildings, the Capitol, White House and Supreme Court. While, New York is the influential center for finance, fashion, culture and arts. Home to Time Square, Statue of Liberty, the Empire State Building and other iconic buildings, New York is a fast-paced city. San Francisco is known for its beautiful landscape, foggy locales, cable cars, and vibrant Victorian houses. San Jose, the technology hub of the U.S. is also known for its architectural landmarks. Las Vegas, a city in Nevada, is famed for its buzzing nightlife, hotels, casinos, iconic

dancing fountains and endless entertainment options. USA holds many more man-made splendours as The Golden Gate Bridge, Walt Disney World, Magic Kingdom, Disneyland, Islands of Adventure and Universal Studios Hollywood that draw millions of tourists from all over the world. And a description of the USA is incomplete without mentioning its natural splendours as Yellowstone Park, The Glacier National Park, and The Grand Canyon to name a few.

New York



New York is known as Big Apple. An ideal New York City vacation involves mild weather and fewer travelers, and the times that have both are spring and fall. Visit the city anytime between April to early June, or around September to early November. Hot dog vendors, steam bellowing from manholes, yellow cab traffic jams and towering skyscrapers that lend the ant-like procession on the street an almost hyper-real feel. If New York, located in the northeastern of the United

States, feels like the hub of commerce, it's because the city's history is steeped in it. It is not surprising that they call the New York Stock Exchange and Wall Street where it stands the Mecca of modern capitalism. Museums, parks, skyscrapers, music movements, political history and global fashion trends all take root and bloom in this city that the residents lovingly call the Big Apple. And its close-knit communities, restaurants and club culture make it a destination that will have you asking for seconds even before you've called time on your first visit.

One of the greatest cities in the world, New York is always a whirlwind of activity, with famous sites at every turn and never enough time to see them all. Some people come here to enjoy the Broadway shows; others come specifically to shop and dine; and many come simply to see the sites: the Statue of Liberty, Empire State Building, Brooklyn Bridge, Central Park, historic neighborhoods, and numerous world famous museums.

Many of the best places to visit in New York are within walking distance of each other, or just a short ride away, making this city a delight for sightseeing.

Some of the newer tourist attractions that have opened in New York in recent years, like the High Line and One World Observatory, offer unique perspectives of the city. Any time of year and any time of day or night there are an endless array of things to see and do in New York.

Although this year the city may not have its usual high-energy vibe, that doesn't mean you shouldn't visit. The smaller number of tourists has made the city a different place, one that's less costly to explore and easier to visit, with smaller lineups at famous attractions.

Statue of Liberty

America's most iconic sight, the Statue of Liberty is at the top of every first-time visitor's list of things to do in New York. It was France's gift to America. Built in 1886, it remains a world symbol of freedom and is one of the top attractions in America.

It is one of the world's largest statues, standing just under 152 feet tall from the base to the torch, and weighing approximately 450,000 pounds.

You can see the statue from land, with particularly good views from Battery Park, on the southern tip of Manhattan. However, to truly appreciate the Statue of Liberty, the best thing to do is to take a short boat trip to Liberty Island and see it up close. You can walk around the base, enter the pedestal, or, with advance reservations, go right up to the crown.

On a tour to the Statue of Liberty, you have the option to stop at Ellis Island and explore the Immigration Museum. This fantastic museum is located in the historic immigration station complex, where thousands of immigrants were processed before entering the United States.

Displays focus on the process, the experiences, and the stories of the people who came through here on their journey to the United States. You can even search the on-site computer database to see a record of immigrants who came through here.

Empire State Building

The Empire State Building is one of New York's most famous landmark buildings and key tourist attractions. The 381-meter-tall, 102-storey building was the tallest in the world until the 1 World Trade Center tower rose higher, 41 years later. Topped with a mooring mast for airships, the Empire State Building immediately became a landmark and a symbol for NYC when it opened in 1931.

There are actually two observatories atop the Empire State Building, but both offer astounding views. On clear days, you can see up to 80 miles, looking into the neighboring states of New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, and Massachusetts.

The 86th Floor Observatory (1,050 feet) is the city's highest open-air observation deck, and what most people are expecting to find when they go up the Empire State Building. If it feels familiar, it's because this area has been featured in countless movies and TV shows.

Reached by high-speed, automatic elevators, it has both a glass-enclosed area, which is heated in winter and cooled in summer, and spacious outdoor promenades on all four sides of the building. Views are incredible. The Top Deck on the 102nd Floor stands 1,250 feet above the bustling streets below. While you are 16 storeys higher, the viewing area here is enclosed.

The line to go up the Empire State Building is almost always long; moves slowly; and during peak times, it can be ridiculous, making the whole experience more frustrating than it needs to be. Be aware you can easily burn up half your touring day just at this one attraction.

9/11 Memorial and Museum

The World Trade Center's twin 110-story towers once dominated the Manhattan skyline but were destroyed by suicide-piloted jetliners on September 11, 2001, with a tragic loss of life. Where the two towers of the World Trade Center once stood, now stand two square reflecting pools, each one acre in size.

Known as the National September 11 Memorial, the area is a moving tribute to the almost 3,000 people killed as a result of attacks on September 11, 2001 and also the six people killed in the earlier World Trade Center bombing in February, 1993.

The 9/11 Memorial Museum is located in an architecturally stunning, curving glass building, between the two pools. It features displays that include artifacts, photos, and videos, presenting the story of 9/11, as well as the aftermath and impacts.

The building is constructed around the remnants of the World Trade Center and incorporates the old structures within the extraordinary new museum building. The memorial and the museum are located on the south side of One World Trade Centre, on Greenwich Street.

Also worth seeing in this area, on the opposite side of Greenwich Street, is the eye-catching Westfield World Trade Center, which contains Oculus Plaza. You can't miss this building with its white fins and spaceship-like appearance. This is a public building with shops and high-end stores, but it's worth popping in for a quick look at the architecture.

Tickets to the 9/11 Museum must be purchased online or at the window in advance. This is one of New York's most popular things to do, so booking ahead is essential to avoid disappointment. If you are traveling as a family, be sure to book the discounted family rate for up to five.

When purchasing your tickets, you will have the ability to select a time to visit, and you must make your time slot. On Mondays, the museum entry is free from 3:30 to 5pm, but tickets still need to be booked in advance and are limited to four per person.

Times Square

Lined with huge, brilliantly lit billboards and screens, Times Square is the place to go in New York in the evening, but still exciting at any time of day. This is the location of New York's New Year's Eve Celebrations and the famous "ball drop" at midnight, when the square and surrounding streets are filled with people.

Times Square is busy and perpetually crowded but has its own unique appeal. Bleachers set up at one end are a great place to take a break and appreciate the scene.

Formerly Longacre Square, Times Square was named in 1904 after the New York Times tower. The newspaper first posted current headlines along its moving sign, the first of its kind in the world, in 1928.

Brooklyn Bridge

The Brooklyn Bridge, with its Gothic-shaped arches and suspension cables, is one of the city's most recognizable landmarks and has inspired generations of poets, songwriters, and painters. This historic bridge, spanning the East River from Manhattan to Brooklyn, was completed in 1883 and was the world's first steel suspension bridge.

You can see it from many of the ferries, or the east side of Manhattan, but the best way to experience this icon is to take an hour and walk across the Brooklyn Bridge. A wood plank walkway, only open to pedestrians and cyclists, runs above the lanes of traffic. If you are not up for walking the whole distance, at least go as far as the first pillar, where there is a viewing platform, and you can see one of the granite towers up close.

From the bridge are beautiful views over Manhattan, the East River, and beyond to the Statue of Liberty. Biking over the bridge is another option, but pedestrian traffic is often very heavy, and cycling can be slow and challenging on busy days. Be aware that the access to the bridge begins well back from the water's edge.

Fifth Avenue

One of the most famous shopping streets in America, Fifth Avenue is New York's premier shopping area, where many top designers have their flagship stores. Cartier, Tiffany, Bergdorf-Goodman, the famous Apple Store Fifth Avenue, and of course Saks Fifth Avenue, as well as many others line this posh avenue.

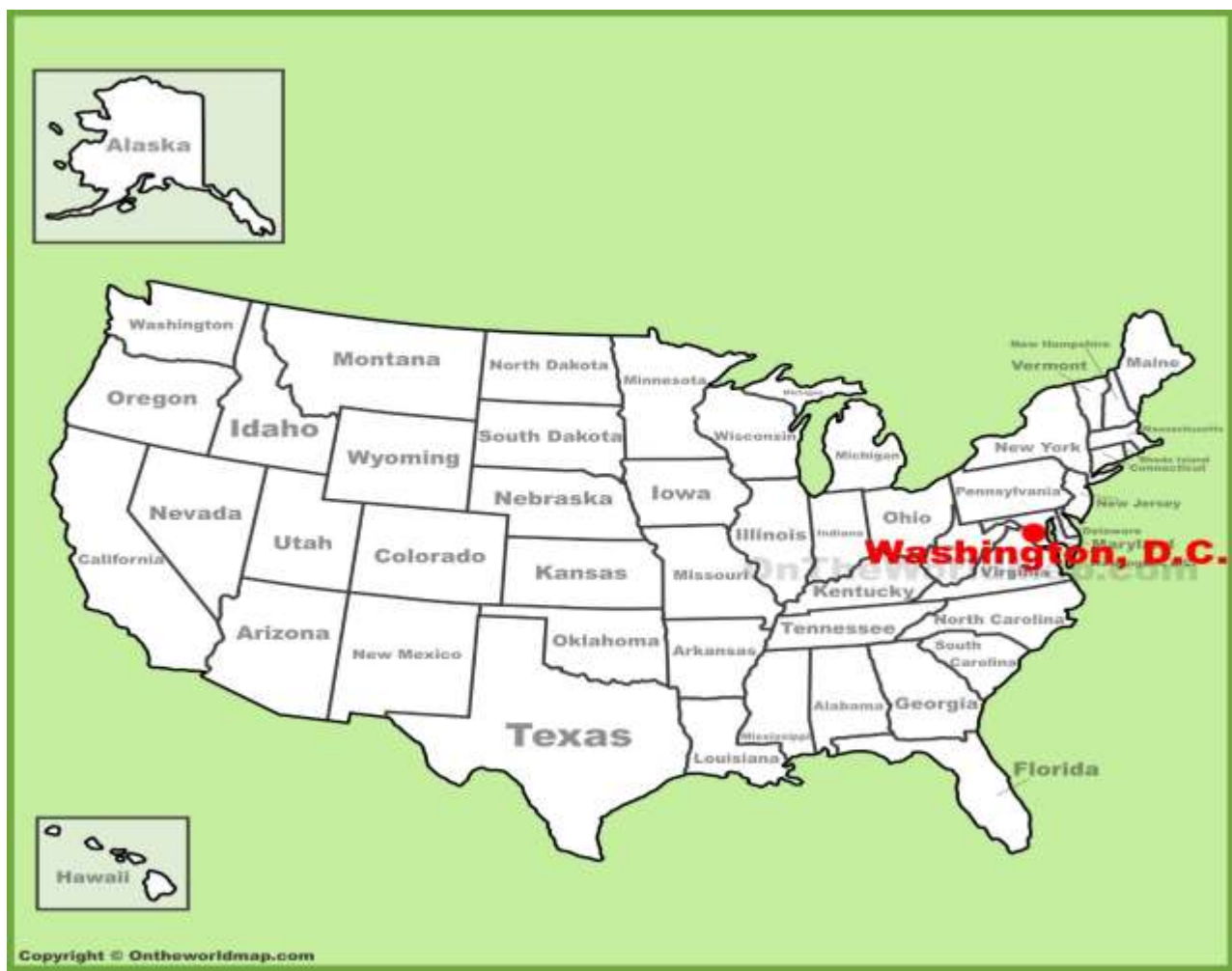
Even non-shoppers can enjoy a walk along Fifth Avenue. The best area runs from approximately the south end of Central Park to the New York Public Library, or more specifically, between 60th Street and 40th Street.

Grand Central Terminal

Grand Central Terminal, often called Grand Central Station, is a fantastic Beaux Arts building, and it's definitely worth popping in to take a look at this famous landmark. The building first opened in 1913 as a terminal for the subway and train stations.

Outside, the 42nd Street colonnaded faces and the statuary on top are some of the key highlights. Inside, you can't miss the Grand Staircase, where you can stop to gaze out over the concourse. The beautifully restored ceiling here shows a celestial scene. You'll also find an extensive selection of retail shops and restaurants inside.

Washington D.C.



The District of Columbia, on the Potomac River between Maryland and Virginia, was set aside as the nation's capital so that the federal government would not be located in any single state. Pierre-Charles L'Enfant was commissioned by George Washington to plan the city, and you can clearly see L'Enfant's layout of a street grid intersected by broad avenues.

The most important of these is Pennsylvania Avenue, connecting two iconic buildings: the White House and the impressive domed Capitol Building. Alongside and maintaining L'Enfant's vision of an open and spacious city stretches the wide National Mall with its museums and monuments.

National symbols such as the Capitol and the White House are accessible to visitors, along with dozens of other tourist attractions, which include world-class museums and important monuments. Many of the most important things to see and do are in the northwestern quadrant along the National Mall and are best seen on foot. Summer can be unpleasantly hot and humid, so the best times to visit Washington are spring and autumn

A bustling hive of activity, Washington D.C. certainly exudes a powerful vibe. After all, it is the capital city of the most powerful country in the world. And D.C. certainly carries the title with pride with towering monuments, sprawling museums, mega-sized libraries and its own set of urban legends and conspiracies. It is interesting to note that the city is not actually a part of any state in the United States. Rather, it was created purely as a seat of the government and is exclusively under the federal jurisdiction. But the people seemed to have overlooked this fact, considering more than 6 million people call D.C. their home today. \r\n\r\nWashington D.C. is full of surprises for the curious traveler. The streets are made in the shape of alphabets and numbers, but 'J' street is suspiciously absent. It is considered quite normal to get lost in the Smithsonian, a museum the size of 18 football fields! Not to mention the Library of Congress, in which the reading room alone consists of 45,000 reference books! And if you feel a slight vibration while standing on the topmost floor of the Washington Monument, it is just the wind slightly shaking the structure.

United States Capitol and Capitol Hill

Recognized around the world as a symbol of the United States, the Capitol is the seat of the House of Representatives and the Senate. The huge dome, based on the dome of St. Peter's in Rome, stands out above all other Washington buildings.

Like Washington itself, the building has grown over the years since the central portion was built between 1793 and 1812. The last addition, in 1958-62, enlarged the main façade where presidents take the oath. On the other side, a marble terrace offers beautiful views over the mall and the city.

The interior is resplendent with frescoes, reliefs, and paintings, especially the rotunda under the great cast-iron dome with a ceiling painting by Constantino Brumidi and huge paintings of scenes from American history on the walls. Beside it is the former Chamber of the House of Representatives, with statues of leading historical figures. The small Senate Rotunda leads into the beautifully restored Old Senate Chamber, where the Senate met until 1859, and the Supreme Court until 1935.

When free tours resume, they can be reserved online and begin at the visitor center on the lower floor, where there is an interesting exhibition on the building's history. Free tours on weekday

afternoons explore the ornate paintings on the walls and ceilings of the corridors in the Senate wing, designed by Brumidi between 1857 and 1859. To visit the Senate or House in session, you need to contact your Senator or Representative for a pass; foreign visitors can arrange visits through the visitor center.

The Library of Congress

An underground passage with historical exhibits leads from the Capitol to one of Washington's little-known places to visit, the Library of Congress. It's the world's largest library, modeled on the Opera House in Paris. You can visit portions on your own, but free tours disclose even more of its beautiful interior.

Displayed here are one of the three surviving complete Gutenberg Bibles, an earlier hand-printed Bible, Thomas Jefferson's draft of the Declaration of Independence, Jefferson's personal library, and galleries filled with exhibits focusing on topics as varied as the musical careers of the Gershwin brothers and the work of editorial cartoonists and graphic artists.

The Lincoln Memorial

The best-loved of all Washington's memorials, the Lincoln Memorial stands at the far end of the mall, separated from the Washington Monument by the Reflecting Pool. At its center is a 19-foot marble statue of a seated and pensive President Abraham Lincoln surrounded by 36 columns, one for each of the states that existed at the time of Lincoln's death. This is the most famous work designed by noted sculptor Daniel Chester French. Jules Guerin painted the murals on the inside walls, showing important events in Lincoln's life.

Since its completion in 1922, the Lincoln Memorial has been the scene of a number of historic events. In 1939, when the all-white Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) refused to let celebrated African American singer Marian Anderson perform at a concert in nearby Constitution Hall, President Franklin Roosevelt and First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt arranged for her to give an open-air concert on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, attended by 75,000 people and broadcast to millions of radio listeners.

Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his famous "I have a dream..." speech from the memorial steps in 1963, again making history here.

Visiting this and other Mall monuments is one of the favorite things to do in Washington, D.C. at night. The monuments are all lighted, and many, like the Lincoln Memorial, are open 24 hours. The statue of Lincoln is especially powerful lighted at night inside the darkened interior of the temple and framed by the floodlit white columns.

National Mall and Veterans Memorials

The spacious swath of lawns and pools that forms a wide greenbelt from the Capitol Building to the Lincoln Memorial is also the site of many of Washington's landmark buildings and monuments. Most prominent at its center point is the Washington Monument, and war memorials include those to veterans of World War II, the Korean War, and Vietnam.

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial, a poignant wall inscribed with the names of all American servicemen and women who lost their lives or are missing, is one of Washington's most visited memorials. The nearby Vietnam Women's Memorial has a bronze sculpture of three servicewomen helping a wounded soldier. The Korean War Veterans Memorial contains 19 steel sculptures of soldiers. The newest, American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial was dedicated in 2014.

The White House

The White House is the official residence of the President of the United States. The home of every president except George Washington, it was originally built by James Hoban in 1792, and after being burned down by British forces in 1814 was rebuilt in 1818.

Although tours of the interior that include the East, Blue, Green, and Red Rooms; the Ballroom; and the State Dining Room must be reserved well in advance through your Congressional office or embassy, every tourist to Washington will want to see this iconic building, at least from the outside.

The free White House Visitor Center, a short distance away, has excellent interactive exhibits, which show details about the White House and the presidential families. It includes furniture of past presidents, a model of the residence, historical changes, and videos with insights from presidents about their time living there.

The Washington Monument

The 555-foot white shaft of the Washington Monument is a familiar icon of the National Mall, and a beautiful sight, especially when mirrored in the long Reflecting Pool at its foot. Construction of the obelisk to honor the nation's first president did not proceed smoothly. The plan was approved by Congress in 1783, but ground wasn't broken until 1848.

When the tower reached 156 feet in height in 1854, political wrangling and lack of funds stopped the project for several years, and the Civil War caused further interruption so that the tower was not capped until 1885, when it was finally completed by the Army Corps of Engineers.

Jefferson Memorial and Tidal Basin

The design for the domed white memorial to Thomas Jefferson, the third US president, is based on the Roman Pantheon, its low dome supported by 54 Ionic columns. Inside, appearing in a dramatic silhouette through the columns, is a 19-foot statue of a standing Jefferson, and around are engraved excerpts of the Declaration of Independence and other writings.

The monument stands alone at the far end of the Tidal Pool, which reflects the monument in its surface, and all around the edge of the water are cherry trees, a gift from Japan. These are one of Washington's greatest attractions when they bloom each spring, surrounding the basin with a cloud of pink flowers and celebrated with the Cherry Blossom Festival.

Along the Cherry Tree Walk around the Tidal Basin, the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial reflects twelve years of American History through four outdoor rooms. Each one is devoted to one

of FDR's terms of office as he guided the country through the Great Depression and World War II.

Florida



When most people think of Florida, they think of sunshine, theme parks, orange juice and alligators. But this former Spanish colony, which became the 27th state to enter the Union, is much more than that.

Bordered by the Atlantic Ocean on one side and the Gulf of Mexico on the other, it has mile upon mile of white sand beaches. This is the US state where you'll find Miami and its immediate neighbor Miami Beach – both famous for their Art Deco architecture, Cuban culture, and beaches, of course.

More sun, sea, and sand can be had in the south, where the Florida Keys fling themselves for around 120 miles along the Florida Straits. Come here for more beaches, scuba diving, snorkeling, and the potential for one of the most picturesque road trips ever, thanks to the feat of engineering that is the Overseas Highway.

There's also Cape Canaveral, home of NASA, but then again there's Orlando, too – famous for its sheer amount of amusement parks, including Disney World.

Orlando

Orlando is theme-park city, having more theme parks than any place else in the world. There's Walt Disney World (WDW) , Epcot Center, Universal Studios, SeaWorld and Gator Park, to name a few, all of which bring 51 million visitors a year to this central Florida city of 2 million people.

This Sunbelt city doesn't get hit by hurricanes as much as other parts of the state, which makes it a popular place to visit in Florida. One of American's most visited cities, Orlando is also home to the University of Central Florida, which has the second largest college enrollment in the United States.

The town of Orlando is a man-made heaven. Located in central Florida, USA, Orlando is known as the 'Theme Park Capital of the World'. The main attractions of Orlando are Walt Disney World, Universal Studios Florida, Gatorland, SeaWorld, and Wet N Wild. It is a popular family destination where children can have adventures and adults can feel like children again. Though the theme parks are a must-see when you visit Orlando, other attractions and places of interest include Charles Hosmer Morse Museum of American Art, the kayak eco-tour, Harry P. Leu Gardens, wine bars, world-class spas, upscale shopping malls, golfing on over 170 courses, Orlando Brewing Company and more Orlando has five of the top 10 theme parks in the world. While these parks keep you entertained during the day, when the sun goes down - you can visit night clubs, comedy clubs and dinner theaters around the city. The city is also great for adventure and outdoor activities like parasailing and hot-air balloon rides. Drawing in over 60 million visitors annually, it is one of the most visited cities in the nation.

Miami

One of the most vibrant cities in the USA, Miami is best known for its Latin culture and sizzling nightlife. Located in southeastern Florida off the coast of the Atlantic Ocean, Miami is also a major port city managing the world's largest number of passenger cruise ships.

Attracting tourists from all over the planet, Miami is a melting pot of ethnic cultures with a wide array of exciting attractions and activities. One of Miami's main draws is its sunny beaches that range from family friendly to party scenes. Across the bay from Miami on a barrier island is Miami Beach, known for its Art Deco architecture and glamorous South Beach. Miami, a city in Florida, USA, is renowned as the best party destination in the world. Famous for its hip and happening music and beach culture, this city takes partying to a whole new level. From clubbing to beach parties, the city is particularly known for its vibrant nightlife. There are numerous clubs such in Miami, including Cameo, Purdy Lounge, Blackbird Ordinary, The Stage, Grand Central, Liv and many more, where locals and tourists party till dawn. \r\n\r\nIn Miami, one can visit the exquisite South Beach with its Art Deco buildings, beautiful white sand, and the best night clubs. The Ocean Drive is home to Art Deco buildings such as the Beacon, the Colony Hotel, the Breakwater, the Cardozo and many more. The city's huge Hispanic population has influenced the culture of the city. You will see glimpses of Latin America in Little Havana. Here, you can enjoy Cuban food, music, and dance. Along Calle Ocho, you will find nice cafes and cigar shops. Apart from the beaches, nightlife, and parties, the city also has a lot more to offer- you can visit the Vizcaya

Museum and Gardens, Jungle Island, the Miami Seaquarium, Freedom Tower, Miami Science Museum and many more. No matter what you fancy, you are sure to find it in the city

TAMPA -Tampa Bay Area

The Tampa Bay area, on the Gulf of Mexico, includes Tampa Bay, a large natural harbor and several popular cities, including Tampa and St. Petersburg. Tampa is home to the NFL's Tampa Bay Buccaneers.

Family-oriented activities include Busch Gardens, a theme park said to have Florida's best roller coaster rides as well as a zoo dedicated to animals from Africa's Serengeti Plain.

Located on Tampa Bay, along the Gulf Coast of Florida, Tampa is a city of many colours. Warm weather, sandy Tampa beaches, lip-smacking food, and great outdoor activities are amongst the attractions Tampa has that keep crowds coming every year. Things to do in Tampa also include visiting one of many museums that cover a broad range of subjects. Popular Tampa tourist places include the Museum of Science and Industry, Tampa Museum of Art and the USF Contemporary Art Museum. \n\nPlaces to eat in Tampa range from hip cafes to fancy upmarket restaurants. The burgeoning food truck culture is a unique Tampa attraction. Nightlife in Tampa hits an all-time high during The Gasparilla pirate festival held sometime between late January and early February. Currently, Tampa and its surrounding metropolitan area are home to about 4 million residents. Other Tampa attraction, owing to its geography are Port Tampa Bay, one of the busiest ports in North America, and the US military in the form of MacDill Air Force Base.

Florida Keys

The Florida Keys are a 120 mile long chain of tropical islands curving around the base of the Florida peninsula, connected to the mainland by a series of bridges. The most spectacular bridge, the Seven Mile Bridge in the Lower Keys, has been frequently used as a location for films including True Lies and Fast 2 Furious.

US Highway 1, the "Overseas Highway" runs from Key Largo, Islamorada, Marathon, Lower Keys and finally to Key West, the most distant and most famous of the Florida Keys. The waters surrounding the archipelago are protected by a marine sanctuary and contain many aquatic species and coral reef.

The islands are categorized in groups of Upper, Middle and Lower Keys. Beginning at Key Largo, the Upper Keys are where tourists will find a wider variety of accommodation, shopping, dining and nightlife. The Middle Keys and Lower Keys feature a more quiet and remote atmosphere.

Key Largo is the first Key reached on the Overseas Highway and is home to the underwater Christ of the Abyss statue, which can be observed by divers and snorkelers. Another of the larger Keys, Big Pine is where tourists can see the knee-high whitetail deer.

Islamorada Key is touted as the "Sport Fishing Capital of the World" as well as a popular diving spot. Located on Vaca Key, Marathon is popular for its tourist amenities and facilities as well as

the Seven-Mile Bridge. At the southernmost point of the United States is Key West, which features the former home of author, Ernest Hemingway.

Sarasota

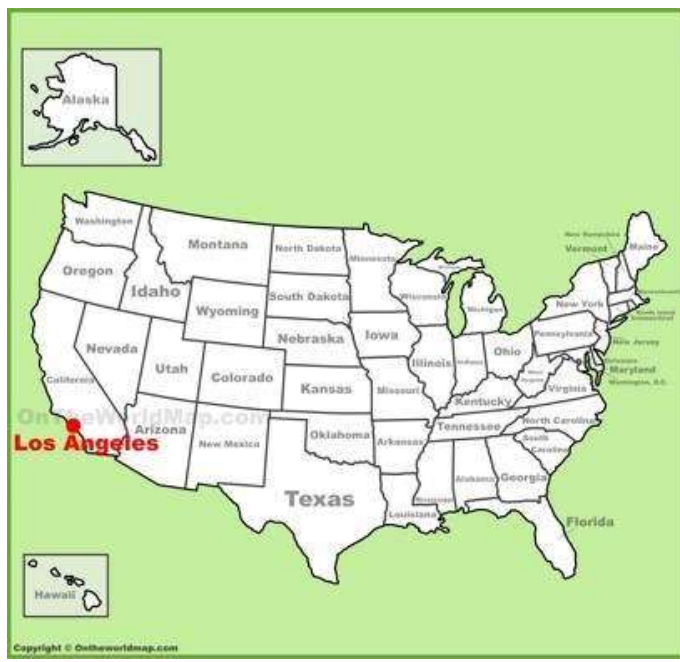
Featuring an impressive list of art-centric attractions and activities like The John & Mable Ringling Museum of Art, the Art Center Sarasota and various craft shows and festivals, Sarasota regularly woos enthusiasts and collectors. But art here isn't limited to traditional works like paintings and sculptures. Performing arts like ballet, opera and circus acts are also a mainstay of this waterfront city. In fact, the circus is deeply imbedded in Sarasota. John and Charles Ringling, two of the Ringling Bros. Circus' founders, moved to Sarasota shortly before it became a city in 1913. Sarasota's prime position by Sarasota Bay and the Gulf of Mexico also makes it a popular destination for nature lovers.

Clearwater Beach

Boasting miles of white sandy beaches, Clearwater Beach is separated by the city of Clearwater by the Intracoastal Waterway. USA Today readers in 2013 named it Florida's Best Beach Town. Besides laying in the white sand and swimming in the clear water there are also many activities offered such as fishing, sailing, kayaking, and dolphin tours. A lot of people get married on the beaches here.

A spot popular with visitors is Pier 60, a long fishing pier that hosts a playground, snack bar and day-long entertainers. At night, you can buy crafts from local artisans.

Los Angeles



The best times to visit Los Angeles are from March to May and between September and November, when the air is more breathable and the crowds are less oppressive.

Los Angeles is a city where dreams come true. This bustling metropolis in California, USA, is blessed with abundant natural beauty in the form of hills, beaches, and parks. Home to Hollywood, it is aptly named as the 'Entertainment Capital of the World.' Stroll around the teeming streets, and you might run into your favorite celebrity. A cultural mecca, the city has been a platform for some of the most talented people in the world. 'Live and let live' is the motto of its residents, enabling you to be yourself and chase your dreams.

The 'City of Angels' has no shortage of interesting places. The beautiful Pacific beaches blend beautifully with lush green hills. The landscape is bejeweled with the gleaming Hollywood Sign. The city has world-class museums like the Natural History Museum, housing billion-year-old artifacts, and specimens. The Universal Studios is a magical world where you can meet your favorite reel-life characters. The Dolby Theatre is the venue for several live performances and award shows, including the Oscars. The forever-sunny weather is the best aspect of Los Angeles, urging you to explore and enjoy the outdoors. Los Angeles is a sprawling Southern California city and the center of the nation's film and television industry. Near its iconic Hollywood sign, studios such as Paramount Pictures, Universal and Warner Brothers offer behind-the-scenes tours. On Hollywood Boulevard, TCL Chinese Theatre displays celebrities' hand- and footprints, the Walk of Fame honors thousands of luminaries and vendors sell maps to stars' homes.

1: Hollywood Walk of Fame

Being that Los Angeles is home to some of the biggest stars on the planet, it would be silly to spend time in L.A. without seeing the Walk of Fame before you go.

The Hollywood Walk of Fame is the most popular filming location in LA. You may recognize the palm tree-lined street of Hollywood Boulevard. It is one of the most popular places to go in Los Angeles.

The Hollywood Walk of Fame is located on both sides of the street at Hollywood Blvd and Vine Street. The first stars were laid in 1958. This period was a magical time in American entertainment history.

Fifteen blocks house over 2,500 embedded stars in their sidewalks. You can see stars representing the best of the best in costume design, production, direction, fictional characters, acting, and music.

2: Rodeo Drive

It's one thing to see the stars' names on the sidewalks on the Walk of Fame, and another thing to spot one in person on Rodeo Drive.

You don't have to be rich to come here, window shop, and admire the stunning buildings, all while enjoying the palm tree-lined streets and sunshine.

This street, famous for its high-end shops and luxury goods stores, is a major LA tourist attraction in itself, but there is also a large business district that surrounds Rodeo Drive, known as the "Golden Triangle."

This area is full of major tourist attractions and even more shopping areas, so take an afternoon to explore it!

3: Universal Studios Hollywood

Universal Studios is another not-to-be-missed destination in Los Angeles. You can come here to explore rides like Jurassic World and The Mummy.

The Citywalk is a hot spot for music, shopping, and restaurants. You can also go behind the scenes and explore the movie studio, which is the largest studio in the world. See the sets from movie classics like Jaws, Back to the Future, and War of the Worlds.

One excellent addition to Universal Studios: Hollywood is the fact that they have the Wizarding World of Harry Potter. Step inside the magic of Hogwarts and head to Hogsmeade for butterbeer, great dining, a wand shop, and more.

It will be exactly like stepping into the storybook. Take a spin on Flight of the Hippogriff for thrills in the sky. The Wizarding World is one of the best parts of visiting Universal.

4: Santa Monica Pier

If you are wondering what to do in Los Angeles that includes amusements, hit the pier. The Santa Monica Pier is a quintessential American boardwalk.

You can bring your friends and family to the pier for amusement rides. The merry-go-round is historic. The Ferris wheel is iconic. If you want to try something thrilling and new, you can take a class at the trapeze school. Fishing is also allowed on the pier.

Heal the Bay Aquarium is another cool spot situated underneath the pier. Learn in a hands-on environment about the wonders of the Pacific Ocean.

Up above on the pier, you may also see some impressive street performers. Be ready for non-stop fun at the Santa Monica Pier.

5: Olvera Street

Olvera Street is another L.A. attraction, which provides the perfect combination of history and divine entertainment. This street is part of El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historic Monument and has 27 buildings of different ages to be discovered along its zigzag brick-patterned sidewalks.

The street is now known for its Mexican marketplace, lined with street vendors, painted stalls, cafes, restaurants, and gift shops. Grab a taquito, watch some Aztec folkloric dancers, and take in the romantic "Old Los Angeles" feeling that the street exudes.

You can stroll through the streets to find the best Mexican food in the city and can possibly check out some Mariachi music.

On the weekends, there are performances by Aztec and Mexican folk dancers. They celebrate Dia De Los Muertos here every year, too.

You will see many faces painted as "sugar skulls" plus memorials for loved ones that have come to pass. It is the festival of the dead, after all. You should absolutely plan to attend if you will be in Los Angeles for Halloween. It will be unlike any other Halloween.

6: Getty Center

The Getty Center has something for everyone: gorgeous gardens, stunning architecture, and one of the best views overlooking Los Angeles.

At the Getty Center, you will find, as their website states, "Art and architecture at the top of Los Angeles". The grounds are spectacular with their gardens and outdoor sculptures.

The buildings are exquisite with their unique architecture. The art collection is impressive. See works from Medieval times and the Renaissance. Check out French, Italian, Dutch, and Spanish art. Plus much more.

There are many options for food here. The restaurant is upscale and usually requires a reservation. It features stunning views of the Santa Monica Mountains. Also, there are cafes and coffee carts to help keep you satiated.

7: Griffith Park and Observatory

If the Getty Center doesn't quench your thirst for the outdoors, then Griffith Park certainly will. The park is one of the largest urban parks in North America, covering 4,310 acres of land.

It is sometimes referred to as the "Central Park of Los Angeles," but it is definitely bigger, more rugged, and loaded with famous attractions throughout.

Because of its size and variety in foliage, many producers have filmed in almost any spot in the park, and you may just recognize parts from scenes in films such as Back to the Future, Terminator, Star Trek, and Van Helsing.

It is also home to the Hollywood sign, one of the most quintessential sights to see in Los Angeles.

Griffith Park also houses Griffith Observatory, which is a great idea for a break from hiking the trails. The planetarium is especially famous for being a training ground for astronauts who need to learn to navigate by the stars.

The architecture is quite beautiful and very impressive. This is unarguably one of the best Los Angeles attractions that must be high on your to do list.

Las Vegas



The best time to visit Las Vegas is from March to May and from September to November. While you'll find plenty of travel deals throughout the year, the spring and fall shoulder seasons offer the most moderate weather.

Nicknamed the 'Entertainment Capital of the World,' 'Sin City' and 'City of Lights,' Las Vegas is truly the place where dreams come true. The biggest city in the state of Nevada, Las Vegas is located in Clark County, within the Mojave Desert and is enclosed by barren hills on all sides. The city is known for its casinos, luxury hotels, fine dining restaurants, entertainment events, and nightlife. It is one of the top tourist destinations in the world.

This city in the desert is known around the world for fun and excitement. The Strip, Las Vegas' famous resort-lined street, sparkles with lights and recreated glamorous sites from cities around the world.

The location and inspiration for countless movie shoots, Las Vegas, has a fantasy-like environment with sparkling lights, towering buildings, themed hotels and dancing fountains. The Las Vegas Strip called the 'Strip' is a 6.8 km stretch of the Las Vegas Boulevard that is lined with casinos and resort hotels. Some of the hotels with the most number of rooms in the world are located on this strip. Las Vegas has something for everyone; music concerts, magic shows, theaters, casinos,

art displays, museums and so much more. There are also outdoor adventures like ziplining, race car driving, horse riding and a host of desert activities.

1. The Strip

The 2.5-mile-long central section of Las Vegas Boulevard, which runs through the city from northeast to southwest, known as the Strip, is where the action is. Lined with huge entertainment palaces, many built with a defining theme, and home to performance venues, luxury hotel rooms, and fine dining, this is what most people think of when they picture Las Vegas.

One of the must-do in Las Vegas is walking along the Strip and soaking up the sights. It's particularly impressive at night, when the city is illuminated by an endless succession of glittering neon signs. This area is a never-ending feast for the senses.

Generally speaking, the Las Vegas Strip runs from the Mandalay Bay Hotel to Treasure Island Hotel. To truly experience Las Vegas, stay on The Strip, preferably at one of the major resorts. For a look at some of the best accommodation options in a variety of price ranges, see our recommended hotels.

2. Fremont Street Experience

In old downtown Las Vegas, Fremont Street is a pedestrian-only area with all kinds of unique sites. A five-block section of Fremont Street is covered over with a canopy of LED lights that illuminate the sky in a spectacle of different colors and designs as you walk below.

Known as the Fremont Street Experience, each night a fantastic music and visual show takes place overhead. Street performers and special entertainment acts often perform outdoors in this area. Fremont Street is in downtown Las Vegas, a few kilometers from the Strip.

It is best to take a taxi to reach this area. Or, if you want to truly experience the city at night, take a Las Vegas Strip Helicopter Night Flight ride above the city. Note that hotel pickup is optional on this tour.

3. Helicopter Rides over Las Vegas and the Grand Canyon

For a great aerial view over Las Vegas, or even the Grand Canyon, visitors may want to take a helicopter ride. Las Vegas has a number of companies providing helicopter tours that take visitors over Las Vegas and the Strip, or as far away as the Grand Canyon.

This is a great opportunity for anyone with limited time to see not only Vegas, but the surrounding landscape and one of America's most impressive and famous natural attractions.

If you have a full day for exploring, try a Grand Canyon West Rim Luxury Helicopter Tour. The tour takes approximately three hours, and you'll see the Strip, Hoover Dam, Lake Mead, and the West Rim area of the Grand Canyon.

4. High Roller Ferris Wheel on the Linq

The High Roller Ferris wheel is the largest observation wheel in the world, topping out at an impressive 550 feet high. A single rotation takes 30 minutes. This will give you plenty of time to soak up the outstanding views over the Strip and surrounding area, especially at night.

Each cabin holds up to 40 people and is climate controlled. The High Roller is located at the bottom end of the Linq Lane – if you aren't sure where that is, just look up!

5. Caesar's Palace and The Colosseum

Perhaps one of the best known of all the Las Vegas hotel resorts, Caesar's Palace continues to evolve. Currently Caesar's Palace is a massive complex in the middle of the Strip, complete with every imaginable entertainment option. The hotel is closely associated with shows held in its huge concert venue known as "The Colosseum." Top performers (which have included Celine Dion and Elton John) perform here for extended periods, and shows are often booked out well in advance. Visitors planning a trip and hoping to see a performance here will want to check out dates and ticket availability as early as possible.

6. The Mob Museum

The Mob Museum, or the National Museum of Organized Crime and Law Enforcement as it is officially named, is a truly unique and standout museum in Nevada.

The museum is housed in a 1933 Neoclassical building, formerly the US Post Office and Courthouse, that has its own history. It was one of the locations for the famous Kefauver Committee hearings in 1950, which revealed some ugly truths about organized crime in Las Vegas and across the US.

The museum tells the unvarnished history of the Mob in America through engaging, interactive displays and video clips. Exhibits deal with everything from the individual characters and events to the culture and fashion associated with the times.

7. Mandalay Bay and the Shark Reef Aquarium

Mandalay Bay Resort is at the southwest end of the Strip, near the Luxor hotel. One of the key highlights at this complex is the Shark Reef Aquarium. The massive 1,300,000-gallon tank holds a wide variety of sharks, fish, rays, reptiles, marine invertebrates, green sea turtles, and even a Komodo dragon.

Just over 100 sharks from 15 different species and more than 2,000 animals in all are on display. The Shark Tunnel is the most impressive feature. Accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums, Shark Reef works with wildlife biologists to preserve endangered lake and marine populations as well as rehabilitate injured animals.

8. Neon Museum

The bright and colorful neon signs of Las Vegas have been one of the city's most memorable sights for countless visitors throughout the years. These multi-story advertising beacons became one of the city's claims to fame.

Today, the Neon Museum is working hard to preserve some of the city's history by purchasing, storing, and in some cases, refurbishing the historic neon signs that have gone by the wayside as businesses have faded or new signs have taken the place of older icons.

You can see many of these signs by taking a guided tour at the Neon Museum, where old neon signs are stored outside in a large compound. Guides provide the history of the signs and designs, which have evolved over the years.

Efforts at the museum are ongoing, and signs stand in varying conditions. In some cases, only a portion was saved or found, while others have been restored to their former glory. This contrast makes the museum that much more interesting and gives visitors insight into how much work and upkeep is required with these giant signs.

9. Luxor Hotel

Another distinctive theme hotel, at the far southwest end of the Strip, is the Luxor Hotel. Designed in an ancient Egyptian theme, the hotel is shaped like a pyramid, with a sphinx proudly gazing out over the street. The Luxor, like all the major resorts, offers a wide variety of restaurants and shopping opportunities.

One of the standout features of this hotel is the beam of light that projects from the highest point of the pyramid and shoots up into the night sky. It can be seen from almost anywhere in Las Vegas.

10. Stratosphere Tower

The Stratosphere Tower is an unmistakable sight on the Las Vegas skyline. The tower rises up 1,149 feet, and at the very top is the Skypod, the real attraction for visitors.

From the various levels of the Skypod, you'll find a whole host of things to do. These include a variety of heart-pounding thrill rides, including the SkyJump, Big Shot, X Scream, and Insanity.

For those looking for a little less drama, check out the indoor and outdoor observation decks with great views over the city. The Top of the World Restaurant is a great place to grab an excellent meal while soaking up the views of the Las Vegas Strip off in the distance.

The Stratosphere Tower claims the "tallest freestanding observation tower in the USA."

11. Vegas Indoor Skydiving

Vegas Indoor Skydiving offers a truly unique experience. Here, visitors will get to experience what actual skydiving is like, without an airplane or parachute. Qualified instructors escort participants to a vertical wind tunnel where they are suited up in special gear. Once the fan is turned on, anyone can float effortlessly in the air. No experience is necessary.

12. Las Vegas Motor Speedway

Fans of fast cars will want to head over to the Las Vegas Motor Speedway. Located in Clark County 15 miles northeast of the Strip, the Las Vegas Motor Speedway is a 1,200-acre complex of multiple automobile racing tracks just right for the speed-freak in you.

Ever imagined what it would be like to drive a Lamborghini or Ferrari? Dream no longer. These cars are available to be driven at high speeds around the race track if you've got the cash to spare.

The Las Vegas Motor Speedway is home to NASCAR races, as well as a number of other racing events. Several speed records have been set at the track. The Speedway features multiple restaurants, and for those wishing to stay overnight, RV camping is available. Check the website for the latest upcoming events and pricing.

San Francisco



The best time to visit San Francisco is from September to November. Believe it or not, fall offers some of the city's warmest temperatures year-round, not to mention fewer crowds than summer. Spring is another good time to visit thanks to its mild temperatures and lack of rain (compared to other parts of California).

Set along the ocean, with rolling hills and the iconic Golden Gate Bridge, San Francisco is one of the most beautiful cities in the United States and the jewel of Northern California. The city is full of history, great neighborhoods, parks, beaches, museums, and a whole host of entertainment options and things to do.

Some of the most famous attractions are Alcatraz Island and Fisherman's Wharf, but the sightseeing possibilities here are extensive. San Francisco's Chinatown is the largest of its kind in North America and definitely worth visiting. For an interesting experience, hop on one of the historic cable cars and tour the city.

San Francisco is the fourth most populated metropolitan in California, USA - the pride and joy of the Bay Area. Though it's a common setting or subject for many movies and TV series (especially *Mrs. Doubt fire* and *Full House*), the city is also known for its rolling hills, great weather, diverse culture, architecture and its world-class restaurants. The city has numerous nicknames like the 'Fog City,' 'The Paris of the West,' 'The City by the Bay,' 'San Fran,' 'Baghdad by the Bay' and more. Proving that good things do come in small packages, San Francisco offers a variety of experiences within its boundaries. While most visitors love it for the amazing view of the hills facing the calm bay, San Francisco also has numerous other attractions like the Golden Gate Bridge, Alcatraz, Pier 39, Presidio National Park, etc. When it comes to entertainment, the sky is the limit at San Francisco. Here, you can enjoy concerts, Broadway shows and sports games at some of the most historical venues in the country like the Golden Gate Theatre or The Castro Theatre. Of course, no trip to San Francisco is complete without a ride on the world's last manually-operated cable car.

1. Golden Gate Bridge

The Golden Gate Bridge is a California icon gracing San Francisco Bay. It is the most photographed site in the city, with the orange structure backed by blue water, or in many cases, peaking through low lying cloud. At night, the flood-lit structure is equally striking.

Connecting San Francisco with Marin County and other districts further north, the Golden Gate Bridge was, at one time, designated the greatest man-made sight in the United States by the U.S. Travel Service. Opened on May 28th, 1937, the bridge took four years to build and at the time of its completion, was the longest suspension bridge in the world, measuring approximately two miles in length.

If you want to drive over the Golden Gate Bridge, the road is US Hwy 101, or SR 1, and walkways on either side of the bridge are open to pedestrians and cyclists. The walk begins at the start of the bridge (accessible from the Presidio shuttle) and ends with a viewpoint in Marin County.

Many locals enjoy biking across the bridge to the nearby waterfront town of Sausalito. Pedestrian access is on the East Sidewalk; bicycle access is on the East and West Sidewalks. The bridge is only open to pedestrians and cyclists during daylight hours.

For a great view of the bridge, or for anyone interested in photographing the bridge, there are a number of ideal vantage points. From the San Francisco side, Nob Hill, an area known for its posh old mansions, offers some beautiful views over the bridge.

On the opposite side of the bridge, in Marin County, Golden Gate National Recreation Area is another good spot. Also, if you are planning on taking a tour to Alcatraz, there are completely open views from the boat and island.

2. Alcatraz Island

The historic and notorious Alcatraz penitentiary, located on Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay, is one of America's most infamous prisons. It operated for almost thirty years, closing in 1963 and re-opening as a tourist attraction in 1973. Some of America's most well-known criminals were inmates here, including Al Capone and the "Birdman," who would later form the basis for the fictional movie *The Birdman of Alcatraz*.

You can take a ferry over to the island and tour the site while listening to an exceptional audio recording that offers a glimpse into life in the prison, rather than just a historical list of the facts. The narration is even voiced by former inmates and guards of Alcatraz.

In the course of its 30-year existence, the penitentiary received a total of 1,576 convicts. There were never more than 250 at any one time, even though there were 450 cells measuring about 10ft by 4ft. At times the number of guards and staff was greater than the number of convicts.

While most people come for the history or the novelty of seeing a former prison, the island is now a prominent area for nesting seabirds.

An easy, convenient, and time-saving way to see Alcatraz and some of the other highlights of San Francisco, like Fisherman's Wharf, Chinatown, and the Golden Gate Bridge, is to take a combined Alcatraz and San Francisco City Tour. If you have only one day to explore the city, and Alcatraz is on your must-see list, this guided tour is the best option. Alcatraz regularly sells out, so booking in advance is strongly advised.

3. Fisherman's Wharf

Fisherman's Wharf is one of San Francisco's most popular tourist areas. If this is your first visit to the city and you only have a day or two to see the sights, Fisherman's Wharf is one of the best

places to visit. This old section, once the Little Italy of San Francisco, is known for its shops, restaurants, and beautiful setting along the waterfront. The views from Pier 39 back towards the city are exceptional.

It's a fun place to stroll around and get a taste for the city. From here, you can also take a sightseeing cruise for spectacular views of the city, or organize a fishing charter. The docks by pier 39 are some of the best areas in the city to see sea lions.

Some of the main attractions in the area are Madame Tussauds Wax Museum, Musée Mécanique, Ripley's Believe it or Not!, and Ghirardelli Square. Restored 19th- and 20th-century ships line the waterfront at the Hyde Street Pier, which is now the San Francisco Maritime National Historic Park.

The USS Pampanito, a national historic landmark, is a WWII submarine and part of the San Francisco Maritime National Historic Park. Pier 39, located in this general area, is home to more than 50 stores and unique places to eat.

4. Ride the Cable Cars

Cable Cars were introduced in 1873 to help locals contend with the many hills the city is built on. Today, the few remaining cable cars offer tourists a great way to explore the city in historic fashion. Since 1964, these tram-like vehicles have had the unique distinction of being the only public transport system to be declared a historic monument.

The Powell-Mason and Powell-Hyde are the most scenic routes. The cable cars will also get you to the major tourist attractions such as Fisherman's Wharf, Ghirardelli Square, the Ferry Building, Nob Hill, and Lombard Street. Tickets can be purchased onboard the cable car, or, if you are planning on more than a couple of rides or are going to be sightseeing for a few days, consider buying a pass.

5. Golden Gate Park

Golden Gate Park, home to gardens and museums, is a fabulous green space in the heart of San Francisco, often considered the "lungs" of the city. Before development began in 1871, this was an area of arid dunes.

Today, the park has a network of walking trails and cycling paths, more than 5,000 different kinds of plants and dozens of species of trees, several lakes, bridle paths, and a buffalo paddock. The main attractions include the de Young Museum, the California Academy of Sciences Museum with Steinhart Aquarium, the Japanese Tea Garden, and the San Francisco Botanical Garden.

Golden Gate Park is one of those places that can just as easily take up a couple of hours as a couple of days. Bike rentals are available, and this can be a good way to explore the park, rather than trying to do everything on foot. Alternatively, try an organized 2.5-hour Segway Tour with a local guide, and hit all the major highlights.

6. Chinatown

You may have been to Chinatown in other cities, but San Francisco's Chinatown is a whole other realm. It is both the largest Chinatown outside of Asia and the oldest of its kind in North America. Almost completely destroyed in the 1906 earthquake, Chinatown was rebuilt entirely in the Chinese style and was soon even more attractive than before the disaster.

Now with its temples, theaters, workshops, small businesses, stores, antique and souvenir shops, teahouses, and traditional pharmacies, visiting Chinatown has become one of the top things to do in San Francisco.

If you are traveling through San Francisco during an important Chinese holiday or event, you can expect to see an elaborate celebration. Chinese New Year celebrations are often considered the best in North America. The main street in Chinatown for tourists is Grant Avenue, with the Chinatown Gateway at Grant Avenue and Bush Street.

If you don't mind a little exercise, you can do your own walking tour beginning in Chinatown with the help of our San Francisco Walking Tour.

7. Palace of Fine Arts

The Palace of Fine Arts in San Francisco is the last remaining structure from the 1915 Panama Pacific Exposition. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, this classical looking building is beautifully situated on a lagoon that reflects the mirror image on the surface of the calm water, while ducks and geese drift by.

The palace has been restored, along with the grounds, and today hosts art exhibitions and performances. The Palace of Fine Arts Theatre seats approximately 1,000 patrons.

8. Twin Peaks

These two uninhabited hills, more than 900 feet high, have one of the finest views out over the city and bay. Access is easy – you can drive to the north peak parking area, park your car, and soak up the amazing vista.

For those looking for a bit of activity, take a hike along trails over the north and south peaks. This is some of the best hiking in San Francisco. While up here, you may be forgiven for thinking these are the highest of San Francisco's 43 hills; however, that lofty distinction belongs to Mount Davidson, which is 33 feet higher.

The Twin Peaks are the only hills in San Francisco not to have been built over and remain in their original state. The Spaniards called them "Los pechos de la Chola" or the Breasts of the Indian Maiden. Even on warm days, strong, cool breezes blow in from the Pacific, especially in the late afternoon.

9. Exploratorium

One of San Francisco's top family attractions, the Exploratorium is an incredibly popular science museum, with exhibits for both children and adults to enjoy. A huge number of diverse exhibits, and many with hand-on learning experiences, cover various areas of interest, all of which are designed to educate and entertain.

Children tend to rate this museum very highly, with all kinds of experiments and fun things to do, and whether they have kids or not, most adults also rave about the Exploratorium.

10. Oracle Park

Home of the San Francisco Giants, Oracle Park is a fun place to take in a baseball game while visiting the city. If you want to gaze out over the ball park to the sublime view of the ocean, buy tickets along the 1st base or 3rd base lines or behind home plate.

If you aren't able to see a game, consider taking a 90-minute ballpark tour for a behind-the-scenes look at places off limits to most people. You can learn about the historic moments that have taken place here and explore the architecture. Tours are scheduled around games and do not run every day so check the online calendar in advance.

11. Day Trip to Napa Valley

Less than 1.5 hours from San Francisco, Napa Valley and Sonoma Valley are the two best-known and largest grape-growing areas in California. Many people day trip to this area to enjoy the scenery and stop in at some of the sites along the way.

Situated at the southern end of the valley of the same name, some 52 miles from San Francisco, Napa is one of the largest Californian towns north of San Francisco. This is an incredibly scenic area with a drier climate than the coastal regions. It was founded in 1848 and bears the name of the long extinct Napa Indians. The western boundary is formed by the Napa Mountains. The Howell Mountains form the eastern boundary of Napa County and they also protect the valley from storms.

Canada



The best time to visit Canada is from September through November. The weather has cooled down but is still comfortable and changing fall foliage provides a beautiful backdrop for a vacation. Pleasant fall celebrations such as pumpkin, apple, and wine festivals are in full swing.

Canada is synonymous with the big red maple leaf, which is proudly flaunted on its flag. The maple leaf is a quintessential symbol of Canada that represents its culture, continuing life and beauty. Sprawled across the continent of North America, Canada is the second largest country in the world in terms of total area. It shares its land borders with the USA and the US state of Alaska. Flanked by three oceans on its three sides, the Atlantic Ocean on the east, the Pacific Ocean on the west and the Arctic Ocean to the north, it has the longest coastline in the world at 202,080 kilometers (125,570 miles).

One of its topographic wonders, Canada is home to the largest number of lakes in the world that add up to 2,000,000 in numbers, and hold much of the world's fresh water. Canada is enriched

with natural marvels that add to its raw beauty. The Northern Lights in Yukon and Northwest territories, fresh-water glaciers in the Canadian Rockies, the famous Niagara Falls, Prairie Skies in Canadian Prairies, Bay of Fundi in Atlantic Canada to name a few, are some of its incredibly beautiful phenomena that offer an immersive experience to visitors.

The cities of Canada are modern and classy and regularly feature on the list of “the best places to live”. Ottawa, the southeastern capital of Canada, is popular for boating in summer and ice skating in winter. Ethnically diverse city of Toronto is home to iconic CN Tower and 400-acres High Park. Montreal is a lively city that gets pepped up with annual Jazz Fest and is famed for its French colonial buildings. Banff is famous for the film festival, hot springs, and ski resorts. Quebec City is famed for Citadelle of Québec and Carnaval de Quebec.

Canada is a beautiful combination of pristine nature and suave infrastructure with advanced cosmopolitan cities, vibrant culture and wonderfully friendly people. Different ethnic groups, people from different religious backgrounds and national origins form the population of this vast country and make it a melting pot.

As a cultural mosaic, Canada is an amalgamation of European culture and traditions especially France and the UK, which blended with its indigenous culture. The country adopted their language, art and music. As a result, English and French form the official languages of Canada. Furthermore, the immigrant population also brought their cultures to the country which later became a part of the mainstream culture of Canada.

Ontario

Ontario is a province in east-central Canada that borders the U.S. and the Great Lakes. It's home to Ottawa, Canada's capital, known for Parliament Hill's Victorian architecture and the National Gallery, featuring Canadian and indigenous art. Toronto, Ontario's capital, is home to the 553m-high CN Tower, with expansive views from its revolving restaurant, as well as High Park, site of a rare oak savannah habitat.

Ontario is home to the nation's largest city, Toronto, and the capital city of Ottawa, but it also encompasses vast expanses of wilderness and pristine lakes, and contains one of Canada's most visited natural attractions, Niagara Falls. This huge province, about 15 times larger than the state of Texas, offers boundless opportunities for travel, adventure, and family fun.

During the hot summer months, people visit Ontario to see some of Canada's top museums and galleries; spend family time at the amusement parks; relax at lakeside resorts; paddle or fish in the lakes and rivers; camp in the parks; and see some of the country's most iconic landmarks, like the CN Tower.

In winter, while some venture outdoors to enjoy the ski hills, skating rinks, snowmobiling, and winter festivals, most turn their attention indoors to hockey games, shopping, dining, Broadway shows, and other cultural attractions.

From small towns to big cities, this province can deliver whatever you're looking for in a vacation. Plan your trip and discover the best places to visit with our list of top tourist attractions in Ontario.

1. Niagara Falls

Niagara Falls is Canada's most internationally recognized attraction, visited by millions of tourists each year. While there are actually three sets of falls, the largest section, known as Horseshoe Falls, drops approximately 57 meters, creating a great wall of water that stretches between Niagara Falls, Canada and Niagara Falls, USA. The falls are famous primarily for the large volume of water flowing over them, but combined with the huge drop, they are truly a magnificent sight.

The falls are located right at the city of Niagara Falls, making them easy to visit. It's possible to walk down the main tourist strip in Niagara Falls, an outrageous spectacle in itself, to the edge of the gorge, where you'll find great views all along the walkway overlooking the river and the falls. Day trip tours can be easily arranged from hotels or hostels in Toronto. By car, the trip from Toronto takes about 1.5 hours.

2. Toronto's CN Tower

The CN Tower is one of Canada's most iconic structures, standing tall along the Toronto skyline. The 553-meter tower is lit up at night and can be seen from all over the city and surroundings at any time of day or night, but visitors will likely want to take a trip up the tower to fully experience it.

An elevator allows access to the observation deck and restaurant, located about three quarters of the way to the top. The view is astounding, looking out over the city and Lake Ontario. On clear days, it's possible to see all the way to the plume of mist rising off Niagara Falls. In the evening, looking out over the sparkling city lights is also an impressive sight.

The tower is located in the heart of downtown Toronto, and at the base is the new Ripley's Aquarium and Rogers Centre, two of Toronto's top attractions.

3. Parliament Hill in Ottawa

Parliament Hill in the nation's capital is where most visitors begin their sightseeing in Ottawa. The buildings reside in a lovely setting on a rise above the Ottawa River. The Peace Tower is the most obvious and the most photographed structure, standing more than 90 meters high between the Senate and the House of Commons.

In front of the Parliament buildings is the Centennial Flame. During the summer, visitors can see the Changing of the Guard on the lawn in front of the Houses of Parliament, while those who are lucky enough to be visiting Ottawa on July 1 can enjoy some of the biggest Canada Day celebrations in the country.

Daily guided tours of the Parliament Buildings, including the Senate, House of Commons, and the East Block are available free of charge. Tickets are available same day, although it's strongly advised that you book well in advance online.

4. Ontario's Provincial and National Parks

Ontario has many outstanding provincial and national parks that offer access to some of the most beautiful areas of the province. In these parks, you'll find Ontario's best lakes, where you can fish, swim, and go pleasure boating. If hitting the beach and laying in the sand is more your thing, the parks are also hot spots for Ontario's best beaches.

In Southern Ontario, just two hours from Toronto, Algonquin Provincial Park is one of the most popular parks and outdoor destinations, with an extensive network of hiking trails, and beautiful lakefront campgrounds. Further afield but equally beautiful, Killarney Provincial Park is another great area for hiking, canoeing, and camping.

On the shores of Lake Huron and Georgian Bay, Bruce Peninsula National Park offers its own attractions, and nearby but offshore, boaters and divers can find adventure exploring Georgian Bay Islands National Park and the Fathom Five National Marine Park.

You can also find history in some of the parks. The petroglyphs of Petroglyphs Provincial Park, just a short drive northeast of Peterborough, offer an easy and close-up look at an outstanding collection of 500 to 1,000-year-old Aboriginal rock carvings. Somewhat more difficult to access, but also impressive, are the pictographs that line the cliff walls on the shoreline of Lake Superior in Lake Superior Provincial Park.

Those who are looking for a truly remote experience will find invitingly pristine lakes and forests in Quetico Provincial Park in Northwestern Ontario. This is a popular area for backcountry canoe trips and fishing trips.

5. Royal Ontario Museum (ROM)

The Royal Ontario Museum in downtown Toronto is one of the premier museums in the province, featuring a broad range of collections, from natural history and science to cultural exhibits from around the world.

Commonly referred to as the ROM, this museum underwent an expansion in 2007, which saw the addition of a modern and unique extension known as the Michael Lee-Chin Crystal. The building is now a mix of old and new architecture with a striking appearance.

The Royal Ontario Museum is within walking distance of the fascinating Gardiner Museum and the tony shops of Bloor Avenue.

6. Canada's Wonderland

About 30 kilometers northwest of Toronto's city center is Canada's Wonderland, a huge theme park, which operates during the summer months. For local residents with kids, an annual visit to Canada's wonderland is one of the top things to do in summer. But, as Canada's premier amusement park, this attraction draws families from across the country.

Roller coasters and thrill rides for children of all ages, as well as a water park, dinosaur park, and live shows, are just some of the attractions. Visiting Wonderland is an easy day trip from Toronto.

7. National Gallery of Canada

The National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa houses some of the country's most important collections. It contains a particularly strong selection of works by Canadian artists, from the Group of Seven to Emily Carr and many other famous names. The gallery also displays important pieces by well-known international artists.

The National Gallery building is housed in an ultra-modern architectural masterpiece designed by Moshe Safdie.

After you visit this fascinating museum, continue your museum tour by heading across the bridge to Canadian Museum of History, or stroll over to the wonderful ByWard Market for a bite.

8. Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF)

The Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) is the most famous event on Ontario's calendar, attracting some of the biggest movie stars across North America. This 10-day festival, held in early September in Toronto, is one of the best attended film festivals in the world, with almost a half million visitors annually.

Tourists and locals descend on the city to watch a film or catch a glimpse of some of their favorite actors, and the city is a buzz of activity. At this time of year, the weather is still hot, and evenings are pleasant. The streets are full of people, restaurants are booked well in advance, and outdoor patios in the city are crowded until late at night. If you are visiting Toronto at this time of year, make sure you book your hotel and restaurants well in advance.

9. Art Gallery of Ontario

In downtown Toronto, the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) is one of Canada's most prestigious art galleries. It hosts a particularly impressive collection of Canadian paintings with a focus on artists from Ontario and Toronto. It also holds Canada's largest collection of African and Oceanic Art displayed in a museum. Other highlights include paintings and sculpture by European masters and Modern and Contemporary collections from North America and Europe. Temporary exhibitions are held throughout the year, check the AGO's website for the most current list.

10. Thousand Islands

Spread over an 80-kilometer stretch of the St. Lawrence River is a scenic natural area known as the Thousand Islands. The islands are on a granite shelf extending from the Canadian Shield to the

Adirondack Mountains in the United States, with the US-Canada boundary actually running between the islands. It is one of the oldest and best-known holiday areas in Ontario, popular with cottagers, boaters, and those looking to get away from the cities of Southern Ontario during the hot summer months.

One of the most popular things to do in this area is a Thousand Islands Sunset Dinner Cruise through the maze of islands. Gananoque is the principle resort town in the area and the main gateway to the Thousand Islands.

11. Fishing in Northern Ontario

Northern Ontario is one of the best places in Canada for fishing. Walleye, pickerel, bass, northern pike, and muskies are some of the most sought-after catches, and people from all over North America come here to try their luck. And you don't have to be all that lucky if you know where to go.

Fishing lodges in Ontario range from luxury resorts to rustic cottages, but most offer everything you need to make your trip a success, including boats, guides, meals, and cabins. The best fishing is often found on remote northern lakes, and accessed by small float planes. Resorts either offer fly-in packages, or in some cases, boat pickup. You can also find a number of good drive-to resorts.

12. Stratford Festival

William Shakespeare would be proud of the fine folks who live in Stratford who, each summer, put on an incredible internationally renowned summer festival celebrating his works. Stratford is just 60 kilometers northeast of London, Ontario, and draws particularly large crowds from the Toronto area.

The 2,250-seat Festival Theatre has been staging plays between May and October since 1953, with pride of place going to Shakespeare. There are now four theater venues, and plays by other famous writers, along with up-and-coming playwrights, are also presented. Most seasons, at least 12 productions are shown.

OTTAWA

The best time to visit Ottawa is between March and May, when temperatures begin to rise and the city starts to bloom. This is also when some of the capital's favorite special events – including the beloved Tulip Festival – take place.

Ottawa is Canada's capital, in the east of southern Ontario, near the city of Montréal and the U.S. border. Sitting on the Ottawa River, it has at its centre Parliament Hill, with grand Victorian architecture and museums such as the National Gallery of Canada, with noted collections of indigenous and other Canadian art. The park-lined Rideau Canal is filled with boats in summer and ice-skaters in winter.

A visit to Canada must include a trip to its capital, Ottawa. A burgeoning lumber town of the 19th-century frontier that is now home to one of the largest multicultural societies in the world, this city has everything to offer, for families, group and solo travelers alike. Explore the town's pedestrian

friendly downtown by foot and find many surprises in its shopping and food districts. Ottawa is also bike friendly with many dedicated cycling lanes. The city's administrative center, Parliament Hill, would leave visitors awestruck by the sight of the parliament buildings, built in the mid-19th century. The festivals of Ottawa are world-famous, and there is always something to celebrate, no matter what the season is. Winter months transform the Rideau Canal into the world's largest skating area, an activity not considered complete without munching on a Beavertail, a Canadian sugary delicacy. Ottawa is also a history lesson, where travelers can learn about its frontier past and marvel at the unique French-Canadian culture of the place. Canada is known for being a friendly and welcoming nation, with some of the most beautiful natural sights in the world, and no other place embodies that message like its historic capital, Ottawa.

1. Parliament Hill

The Parliament Buildings, in all their splendor of Victorian Gothic sandstone, are quite an imposing sight on the 50-meter-high Parliament Hill (Colline du Parlement) looking out over the Ottawa River.

The Parliamentary Library, at the back of the building opposite the entrance, is a wonderfully furnished octagon that was untouched in the 1916 fire. You can explore the sprawling historic Centre Block on a guided tour, and the public can also attend a question period when the government is in session.

The attractive grassed area in front of the Parliament buildings is patrolled in summer by members of the Canadian Mounted Police, looking very dashing in their Mountie uniforms of scarlet jackets, Stetsons, riding breeches, and knee boots.

On summer mornings, the Changing of the Guard always attracts visitors with its regimental band and pipers. The ceremony begins at 9:50am, but you should be there at least 15 minutes before that for a good view. The Changing of the Guard and tours of Parliament are among the most popular free things to do in Ottawa.

2. Rideau Canal

The 200-kilometer-long (but only 1.6-meter-deep) Rideau Canal, connects Ottawa with Kingston on Lake Ontario. Sometimes also called the Rideau Waterway, it was originally intended as a strategic route between Montréal and Lake Ontario, the military need for which was demonstrated during the war with the United States in 1812.

In summer, the canal and locks are an active waterway. Fun things to do include taking a Rideau Canal cruise aboard one of the many tour boats that ply the water here (better still, splash out on an overnight cruise of the canal!).

As soon as it freezes over, though, the canal becomes a recreational area for festivals and skating, one of the favorite things to do in Ottawa in the winter.

Château Laurier is one of the grand buildings on the canal banks. Though it has the air of a medieval castle, it was actually built in 1912 and is a prime example of how big Canadian railroad companies added grand hotels (and striking landmarks) across Canada.

3. Canadian War Museum

Located beside the Ottawa River, the strikingly modern Canadian war Museum (Musée Canadien de la Guerre) explores Canada's military past.

Exhibits cover everything from the fighting between French and Iroquois people in the 16th century through the Canadian contribution to the First and Second World Wars. There are also displays relating to the role of modern peacekeepers.

US visitors will find it especially interesting to see the history of familiar historical events, such as the War of 1812, from the Canadian perspective. Some of the exhibits are interactive, and the collection of military vehicles displayed includes more than 50 tanks, jeeps, motorcycles, armored trucks, even Hitler's limousine. A café and gift shop are located on the premises.

4. National Gallery of Canada

Ultra-modern and designed by Moshe Safdie, the National Gallery of Canada (Musée des Beaux-Arts du Canada) is an architectural masterpiece with prism-like glass towers that echo the lines of the nearby Parliament Buildings. The glass contrasts with the mock medieval Château Laurier, yet the attraction still fits well into Ottawa's cityscape.

Inside what is one of the largest art museums in North America, galleries display aboriginal art, trace the development of Canadian art from religious works to the Group of Seven, explore European Impressionism, and show temporary exhibitions. The rooms of Inuit art are on the lower level under the glass-encased Great Hall. Admission to this fine gallery is free Thursdays from 5pm - 8pm.

For more sightseeing, the National Gallery is well placed near many other Lower Town tourist attractions, including Notre-Dame, the Canadian War Museum, and Major's Hill Park.

5. Peace Tower

The panoramic view from the observation deck at the top of the Peace Tower (Tour de la Paix), the highest point in Ottawa, encompasses Parliament Hill, the entire city, the river, Gatineau, and the hills to the north. On your way up in the elevator, you will get a look at the tower's bells, and there is a memorial room to Canadians who died in WWI.

While access to the tower - sometimes also called the "Tower of Victory and Peace" - is free, you must first get a ticket. (Check the official government site below for details.)

6. Canadian Museum of Nature

The Canadian Museum of Nature (Musée Canadien de la Nature) takes visitors through the world of the dinosaurs all the way up to today's animal population, and also features poignant temporary exhibits.

It is the national natural sciences and history museum, and the historic building (once the Victoria Memorial Museum) is the birthplace of Canada's national museums. Construction on this castle-like building was completed in 1910.

7. National War Memorial

The National War Memorial (Monument Commémoratif de Guerre) and Canada's Tomb of the Unknown Soldier is at the foot of a striking bronze sculpture of World War I soldiers emerging from a granite arch. Around the base of the statue, which is also known as "The Response," are the years of conflicts where Canadian forces have fought.

A brief, but solemn, Changing of the Guard ceremony here is led by a single bagpiper, and the monument is the center of activities on Remembrance Day, when it is traditional for people to leave poppies on the tomb.

8. Canada Aviation and Space Museum

Telling in detail the story of Canadian civil and military aviation, the Canada Aviation and Space Museum (Musée de l'Aviation et de l'Espace du Canada) is located at Rockcliffe Airport, on the northern edge of town.

Among the aircraft on display are a replica of the Silver Dart, which in 1909 made the first flight in Canada, fighter planes from the First and Second World Wars, and some of the seaplanes and other aircraft that helped open up Canada's uncharted northern wilderness.

9. Royal Canadian Mint

While the Royal Canadian Mint (Monnaie royale canadienne) no longer manufactures Canada's circulating coins, the Ottawa facility creates finely crafted medals, commemorative coins for collectors, and awards in precious metals. These include Olympic medals.

The tour is fascinating, especially on weekdays when you can see the craftspeople at work. You'll also see one of three giant gold loonies (Canadian dollar coins) minted here, and get to hold a real gold ingot. Tour groups are small, so you should reserve a spot in advance.

10. Canadian Tulip Festival

Ottawa's spring festival marks the end of winter as the tulips - given by Queen Juliana of the Netherlands in gratitude for the city's hospitality during the Second World War - come into bloom all over the city. Canal banks and Commissioner's Park in particular, are the scene of general festivities.

Major's Hill Park, southwest of the basilica, is aflame with thousands of tulips. In all, several million tulips bloom in the city, with tulip attraction sites spread out on a scenic "Tulip Route." Fireworks and performances are also regular attractions.

11. Byward Market

Located in Ottawa's busy Lower Town, north of the Rideau Canal, the Byward Market has enjoyed a colorful existence since 1846. In summer, fruit, flower, and vegetable stalls in the streets supplement the food stores in the main market hall.

The entire area surrounding the market has been lovingly restored and now is a neighborhood filled with restaurants and smart boutiques.

12. Dows Lake Pavilion

Dows Lake Pavilion has a beautiful location, jutting out into and overlooking the lake. This facility has a number of different restaurants, including an outdoor patio that is very popular in summer. The pavilion also looks out over the docks where it's possible to rent paddleboats, canoes, kayaks, or bikes.

The lake is also a popular fishing destination. In winter, you can rent skates and sleds, and the park hosts events during the Winterlude festival. In the spring, it's decorated with formal tulip displays during the Tulip Festival.

Montreal

The best times to visit Montreal are from March to May and from September to November, when the weather is milder and hotel vacancies run amok. But aside from fluctuating rates, you'll discover that there really isn't a bad time to vacation here.

Montréal is the largest city in Canada's Québec province. It's set on an island in the Saint Lawrence River and named after Mt. Royal, the triple-peaked hill at its heart.

Enjoy a slice of old-world design in a contemporary setting in Montreal, a city on the Island of Montreal in Canada. Its 18th-century buildings are simply delightful to observe. Visit the Heritage Canal de Lachine, shop in glittering shops and dine at restaurants and the terraced cafes of Plateau Mont-Royal. The architectural sweep of the city includes its ancient churches such as the Basilique Notre-Dame, St Patrick's Basilica, Saint Joseph's Oratory and 20th-century marvels like the Stade Olympique and Habitat 67. Montreal has beautifully manicured gardens and parks such as the Hochelaga-Maisonneuve for its Olympic Park, Botanical Gardens, Biodome and the Planetarium. Add to your itinerary the Jardin Botanique, one of the largest botanical gardens with its First Nations Garden, as well as Insectarium, Tree House, and 16 other themed gardens and greenhouses.

The Plateau has a distinctive, quaint architecture, with its parks, music venues, and theaters besides being the setting of many summer festivals. During the grand Winter Carnival, the city dazzles with colorful fireworks. Montreal is celebrated for its stunning street art along

Saint Laurent Boulevard, St. Denis Street, Park Extension, and the Mile End. Its Underground City is an extensive maze of passageways and is replete with shopping malls, restaurants and movie theaters. From centuries-old landmarks to festivals featuring the biggest bands in the world today, Montreal is both a modern and classic city that's everything except boring.

Notre-Dame Basilica

Walking around the Old Port neighborhood of Montreal, it would be hard to miss the two large towers of the Notre-Dame Basilica of Montreal peeking out above the skyline. If you're impressed by the outside, just wait until you walk in those doors. Completed in 1829, it's the first Gothic Revival-style church built in Canada, and the stained-glass windows and beautiful religious paintings leave many visitors in awe. Walking into the Basilica is like walking back through history. Pope John Paul II visited these walls, which also hosted the funerals of Prime Minister Pierre-Elliott Trudeau and hockey legend Maurice Richard. Admission to the Notre-Dame Basilica includes a 20-minute guided tour that introduces you to its history, architecture and art. You can also celebrate mass or take an extended tour for access to the sacristy, galleries, and baptistery.

Old Montreal

Old Montreal is appropriately named in one sense: it's the oldest neighborhood in the city, and contains the site where Montreal was first established in 1642. Its cobblestone streets scream of Europe and horse-drawn carriages take people through the maze of attractions, and yet, the crowds that gather in Old Montreal scream youth and excitement. People fill the many local fashion boutiques and cafes. People stream into the area to walk, bike, boat the beautiful waterfront (known as the Old Port) during the day, and to drink and dine at the many modern restaurants at night. And this doesn't only happen in the summer. In late January, thousands of people don snow suits and fill the harbor for Igloofest, an outdoor electronic music festival. Old Montreal is an incredible mixture of new and old that you won't want to miss.

Mount Royal

Mount Royal is a mountain located right in the heart of downtown Montreal, much of it within a large park of the same name. It was actually Frederick Law Olmstead, the designer of New York's Central Park, who designed Mount Royal Park, and the two landmarks serve a similar purpose: existing as an outdoor space in the city, where people meet, hang out, spend time outdoors, play sports, and much more. Climb to the lookout point at the top, visit the giant cross and look out over the entire city of Montreal. Or, visit on a Sunday for one of Mount Royal's biggest draws: tam-tams. Tam-tams are weekly gatherings (weather-permitting) of drummers, dancers, vendors and just about anyone else. It's a big outdoor party and you're invited.

St. Joseph's Oratory of Mount Royal

Driving around Montreal, you might notice a big, rounded, green roof standing tall on the horizon. That roof belongs to St. Joseph's Oratory of Mount Royal, the largest church in Canada and a popular destination for locals and visitors alike. At 97 meters, that huge roof — the dome of the Oratory basilica — is the second highest in the world, behind only Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome. Climb the long rows of steps and enjoy the amazing view of the city before heading inside. Take

a tour and visit the small original chapel, as well as the Basilica, the gardens and the museum, which features religious and artistic exhibits.

Montreal Museum of Fine Arts

Don your beret, wax your mustache, and pop over to the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts to see some of the 41,000 works in its collection. Founded in 1860, the museum is actually the most-visited museum in Canada, attracting over one million art-lovers every year. And it's an art museum in the broadest sense of the word, as traditional fine arts, music, film fashion and design all have a place inside its walls. In a few hours of browsing, you might encounter an ancient glass vase, a painting by Rembrandt, and unique modern furniture. New "travelling exhibits" join the collection every year, meaning you'll never have the same experience twice.

Sainte Catherine Street

Sainte Catherine Street (Rue Ste.-Catherine locally) is the shopping hub of Montreal. Whether you're after high-end designers, chain store brands, local boutiques or simple souvenirs, you'll find it on this street. At nine miles in length, Sainte Catherine Street crosses Montreal's downtown core from east to west. You could walk it for hours and encounter a different experience at every corner. Restaurants, bars and cafes line the street, which is easily accessible by bus or metro (subway). The Montreal Forum, former home of the legendary Montreal Canadiens, and major venue Place-des-Arts are both located on Sainte-Catherine's. Visit in the summer and watch the street come alive as sidewalks get eaten up by patios.

The Underground City

Montreal is home to what is widely called an "underground city." The RÉSO, as it is officially named, is a network of nearly 20 miles of underground paths and tunnels which connect shopping centers, subway stations and buildings. You can enter the network from the street, nine major hotels, or eight different subway stations, and have access to 2,000 stores, 17 museums, a hockey arena, a movie theatre, night clubs, and countless other restaurants and businesses. Whether you're trying to escape a cold day outside, you love to shop, or you just enjoy exploring, join the 500,000 people who make their way through the underground city every day.

Place des Festivals

In the heart of downtown Montreal is an entertainment district known as the Quartier des spectacles. The centerpiece of that district? The Place des Festivals. The Place is essentially an outdoor public square built to host big festivals and big crowds, and it definitely stays true to that purpose. Just for Laughs, the Montreal Jazz Festival, and a number of other events make use of the space to host free shows and concerts year round. The largest interactive fountain in Canada, with 235 water jets, sits inside the square, as do four huge light towers and two glass-encased restaurants. No matter when you're in Montreal, the Place des Festivals will have something worth checking out.

Space for Life

Montreal's Space for Life (Espace Pour La Vie) is a collection of four different experiences: The Biodôme, Botanical Garden, Insectarium and Rio Tinto Alcan Planetarium. The space is about reconnecting us with nature and our place in the universe, all in one convenient and exciting place. In just one day, you can stop and smell about 22,000 flowers and plants, have lunch alongside penguins or lynx, try and decide whether something is a stick or a bug, and then sit back and enjoy a 360-degree projection of the Northern Lights. You could do all of that in one day, but you might want to set aside a couple. There's a lot to see.

Pointe-à-Callière Museum

How fitting is it that a museum of archeology and history sits on the exact birthplace of Montreal? The Pointe-à-Callière Museum was founded on Montreal's 350th birthday in 1992, and now acts as a highlight reel of the city's history dating back to the 14th century.

British Columbia

While winter brings cold weather and plenty of snow to the interior, British Columbia's coast is warmed with Pacific Ocean currents, making it temperate year-round.

British Columbia, Canada's westernmost province, is defined by its Pacific coastline and mountain ranges. Nature areas like Glacier National Park offer hiking and biking trails, as well as campgrounds. Whistler Blackcomb is a major ski resort that hosted the 2010 Winter Olympics. The scenic Sea-to-Sky Highway links Whistler with Vancouver, a city known for its film industry, at the province's southern U.S. border.

British Columbia's mountains, lakes, islands, rainforests, beautiful stretches of coastline, picturesque cities, attractive towns, and world-class skiing make it one of the most popular destinations in Canada.

Most visitors to BC begin in Vancouver, which makes a great starting point for touring the province. A short flight or ferry trip from here will take you to Vancouver Island and the provincial capital, Victoria. Less than a two-hour drive from Vancouver is the resort town and ski destination of Whistler. In the interior of BC, the Okanagan Valley is another year-round hot spot, with the beaches on the shores of Okanagan Lake, golf courses, and numerous ski resorts.

1. Whistler

At the foot of the Whistler and Blackcomb Mountains, Whistler is the center of the biggest winter sports area in Canada. In 2010, this world-class ski resort attracted much international attention when it hosted the downhill ski events for the Winter Olympic Games.

While it is closely associated with skiing and snowboarding in Canada, Whistler is a year-round destination with hiking trails, mountain biking trails, golfing, and beautiful scenery to explore in

the summer. Visitors don't even need to ski or be active to enjoy this lovely town. One of the main attractions is the Peak 2 Peak Gondola, which joins Whistler and Blackcomb mountains. The distance covered is a record breaking 4.4 kilometers. The ride takes only 11 minutes and offers spectacular views of the area.

Whistler Village is a modern, upscale town with luxury hotels, high-end shopping, and fine dining. Although, you can still find casual restaurants and regular retail and grocery stores.

The town's close proximity to Vancouver, only a two-hour drive from the city, means it is also easily accessible. The drive to Whistler from Vancouver along the Sea-to-Sky Highway is beautiful. Popular stops on this route include the community of Squamish and Shannon Falls.

2. Yoho National Park

Yoho National Park is home to some of British Columbia's most rugged and scenic mountain terrain. Snowcapped peaks, waterfalls, rivers, and crystal-clear lakes, including spectacular Lake O'Hara, draw large numbers of visitors to this park during the summer months.

Incredible hiking trails allow easy access to the backcountry, but even a drive through the park offers enough exposure to appreciate the landscape. If you are touring Yoho National Park by car, one of the highlights is Takakkaw Falls, one of the highest falls in North America.

3. Vancouver Island

On Canada's far western coast, Vancouver Island is home to some spectacular coastal scenery, mountains, lakes, and other natural attractions, as well as lovely small towns and the provincial capital of Victoria. Coastal beaches provide year-round surfing, particularly near the popular tourist town of Tofino and nearby Pacific Rim National Park.

Vancouver Island is the largest island on the Pacific coast of North America. Much of it is very remote with limited access. If you take the time to explore the island, you'll find some incredible hiking trails, including the epic multi-day West Coast Trail. Campers can find a variety of excellent campgrounds spread around the island.

Vancouver Island is located west of the city of Vancouver and reached either by a short flight or a ferry ride. Ferries or flights will take you to the Victoria area or into Nanaimo, another popular town on the Island.

4. Okanagan Valley & Kelowna

Found in the interior of the BC, the Okanagan Valley, most often referred to simply as the Okanagan, is a lush, sunny valley with lakes, beaches, rolling mountains, and orchards. At the heart of the region is the 120-kilometer-long Okanagan Lake and the city of Kelowna on the eastern shore of the lake. Other popular towns in the area include Summerland, Peachland, Penticton, and Vernon.

The Okanagan has hot dry summers and mild winters making it a popular retirement destination and a prominent summertime retreat for people from across British Columbia and neighboring

Alberta. Some of the most common summertime activities are houseboating, golfing, and spending time at the beach.

In winter, many people come here to enjoy some of the best ski resorts in British Columbia, including Big White Ski Resort and SilverStar Mountain Resort.

5. Tofino and Pacific Rim National Park Reserve

This tiny tourist town on the edge of Pacific Rim National Park Reserve is the perfect place for nature lovers looking for a coastal retreat. Endless stretches of beach attract surfers year-round, but most people come here simply to stare out at the waves, storm watch in the off season, or walk for miles on the hard-packed sand.

Off the beach, visitors can hike through old-growth forests or camp along the oceanfront in some of the most stunning coastal scenery in British Columbia.

Couples often come here for a romantic getaway and to relax at one of the luxury seaside resorts and charming lodges. A variety of tours are also offered in the area, from kayaking on Clayoquot Sound to whale watching.

Tofino has an extremely remote feel to it, but it's relatively easy to access from places like Victoria or Nanaimo. Nearby, Ucluelet is another small town that makes a nice day trip from Tofino.

6. Vancouver and Stanley Park

Stanley Park is one of the great features of Vancouver that sets it apart from other major cities across Canada. This huge green space on the edge of the downtown core offers a beautiful nature retreat for visitors and locals.

The park is home to ancient cedars and huge Douglas fir trees. The seawall is one of the main attractions, offering miles of scenic paved path for walking, jogging, or biking. Trails also run through the forest. Within the park is the Vancouver Aquarium, as well as various other attractions, including totem poles, gardens, and beaches.

7. Victoria & the Inner Harbour

Located on Vancouver Island, Victoria is the capital of British Columbia and one of Canada's most scenic cities. Removed from the mainland, this city has the feel of a small town, but is home to a wealth of attractions and things to do.

At the heart of the city for both locals and tourists is the Inner Harbour, dominated by the grand Empress Hotel, built in 1908 for the Canadian Pacific Railway. This area is always alive with visitors and locals enjoying the waterfront, particularly in the summer when restaurants open their patios for outdoor dining and street performers take to the sidewalks.

If you are looking for things to do, take in the incredible mountain and ocean views from hiking trails in and around Victoria. For something a little less strenuous, consider High Tea at the Empress Hotel or wander by the Parliament Buildings.

8. Butchart Gardens

Set in an old quarry, Butchart Gardens offers a fabulous display of plants, trees, and flowers. Located just outside Victoria, the mild climate is perfect for changing seasonal displays. Spring through fall is outstanding, when the spring blooms come out and the fabulous display of summer color peaks. Fall brings the changing leaves of autumn. Themed gardens and water features extend over the 20-hectare property.

9. Haida Gwaii

Haida Gwaii is one of Canada's undiscovered treasures. These remote islands provide a wealth of culture and natural beauty, but are often overlooked by tourists. Formerly known as the Queen Charlotte Islands, Haida Gwaii is an isolated group of more than 150 islands in the Pacific Ocean at the western edge of the continental shelf. The two main islands, Graham and Moresby, are located about 50 kilometers and 150 kilometers respectively off the coast of British Columbia.

The native inhabitants, the Haida people, are thought to have lived on these islands for at least 8,000 years. They were known as proud warriors and daring navigators. With their awesome 20 meter-long war canoes, they traversed the length of the Inside Passage as far south as Puget Sound.

Unit 3

Central America



Central America is the thin section of land that links the North American continent with the South American continent. The region is made up of seven small, mostly tropical countries that would be easy to skip on a map. Yet they represent a complex mixture of cultures, ancient ruins, tropical wildlife, active volcanoes and great beaches.

Mexico is occasionally considered part of Central America due to the language and cultural heritage it shares with several of its southern neighbors.

Costa Rica is a wonderland of natural attractions, with volcanoes, beaches, cloud forests, and unique wildlife. This is a country that appeals as much to bird-watchers and luxury travelers as it does to surfers and backpackers.

The busy city of San Jose is home to the country's best museums and lovely squares, but the real treasures lie beyond the capital, in the forests and small coastal villages.

Endless stretches of beach line the Pacific Coast, with small towns that cater to surfers and sun seekers. Inland, the forest-covered mountains offer their own adventures, from volcanoes and waterfalls to ziplining and extraordinary wildlife viewing. For something completely different, check out the Caribbean coast with its calm waters, abundant wildlife, and different cultural vibe.

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1. Visit San José

Costa Rica's capital is in the center of the country. It's sort of gritty and there's not a whole lot to do; the city only requires a few days. While you're here, visit the Museum of Contemporary Art & Design to check out the future of Costa Rican art, as well as the magnificent Teatro Nacional to take in its décor. For a relaxing day trip, head to the La Paz waterfall for some hiking and swimming.

2. Zip through the rainforest canopy

The highest 10% of rainforest is where most activity takes place. To see it up close, take a zipline tour. They offer an adrenaline-pumping view of these vast, diverse ecosystems. There are dozens of companies throughout the country, though Monteverde is my favorite place to do it. Expect to pay around 50,000 CRC for a multi-line tour lasting a couple of hours.

3. Explore Baru Wildlife Refuge

With over 800 acres of land, seven kilometers of walking trails, and three kilometers of fantastic beaches, this refuge is another prime example of Costa Rica's natural beauty. Located on the coast south of San Jose, here you can go birdwatching, take canopy tours, and explore the park via guided tours to see the wildlife. Don't miss the orchid and butterfly gardens. For something more unique, take a nighttime guided tour to see the region's nocturnal animals. Self-guided tours cost 9,000 CRC while guided tours start at 21,000 CRC.

4. Go surfing in Jaco

Located on the Pacific Coast west of San Jose, Jaco was once a sleepy resort town whose main attraction was its excellent surfing. Growing tourism has transformed it into a haven of beach parties and nightclubs. Surf lessons and rentals are widely available on the beaches and sport-fishing is also popular here. For a more laid-back visit, head to the nearby Carara National Park to spot scarlet macaws, armadillos, and hundreds of species of bird (admission is 6,200 CRC).

5. Learn some Spanish

Costa Rica is one of the most popular countries for learning Spanish due to the country's easy-to-understand dialect. Programs vary in length and cost, but most offer the opportunity to do an

immersive homestay with a Costa Rican family. Expect to spend around 250,000 CRC for a basic week-long program.

6. See La Paz Waterfall Gardens

Located just one hour from San Jose, this makes for a popular day trip. Aside from the many stunning waterfalls throughout the lush cloud forest, here you'll also find several beautiful gardens, an aviary, a hummingbird garden, a butterfly garden, and a reptile area. Plan to stay at least two hours to see everything. Admission is 30,000 CRC.

7. Go fishing

Costa Rica is home to Marlin, Sailfish, Dorado, Snapper, Wahoo, and much more. If you love to fish (or just want to give it a try), consider doing a half-day or full-day fishing excursion. A basic excursion costs around 55,000 CRC and usually includes food, though prices can be ten times as high for multiday or exclusive charters. You can usually find places that can cook your catch as well.

8. Chill out in Santa Theresa

At the bottom of the Nicoya Peninsula is the hippy backpacker town of Santa Theresa. This "town" is really nothing more than a beach with a road lined with eateries, surf shops, and hostels. Not much goes on here as everyone is up early to hit the waves. I enjoyed my time here as it's a good place to just lay on the beach, hang out with people, and relax. It's an easy place to fall into and spend weeks. Or, like most people, months.

9. Learn to surf

Puerto Viejo, Cahuita, Manuel Antonio, Jaco, Santa Theresa, or Tamarindo all offer plenty a lot of waves and lots of places to learn to surf. In fact, most travelers come here to surf because the waves are world renowned. If you never learned but always wanted to try, this is your best place to in the region to learn. Lessons cost around 30,000 CRC while multiday courses cost around 80,000 CRC.

10. Walk through the treetops

The Rainmaker Aerial Walkway, located one hour from Jaco, was the first aerial walkway to be built in Central America. Spanning the canopy of a private rainforest, it's still considered to be one of the top aerial walkways in the region. At the highest point on the walkway, you'll find yourself 20 stories above the ground, giving you ample opportunities to spot all kinds of birds and monkeys. Tours start at 46,000 CRC.

11. Wander a coffee plantations

Costa Rican coffee is famous the world over. On a coffee plantation tour you can learn about the entire bean-to-cup process and see it all up close — all while learning about the lives of the local farmers who grow it. While I dislike the taste of coffee

Panama

Panama's capital and largest city, Panama City, is a concentration of modern high-rise towers rising up from a surrounding tropical rainforest. A vibrant, cosmopolitan city made prosperous by the development of the Panama Canal, Panama City is one of the best places to visit in Central America. While a visit to the city's most famous attraction, the Panama Canal, ranks at the top of most sightseeing itineraries, exploring the cobblestone streets and colonial buildings of the historic quarter, Casco Viejo, is also a must-do.

While visitors to Panama may come for the Panama Canal, they stay for everything else. Known as the "Crossroads of the Americas," Panama is not only the geographical point where North America meets South America but also where the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans meet in the country's famed canal. The original meaning of the word "panama" means "abundance of fish," and fishing is just one of the many water sports and activities that visitors to Panama can enjoy. More highly developed than neighboring Central American countries, Panama enjoys a modern infrastructure, making travel through the tropical paradise easy and convenient.

The Panama Canal stands as one of the world's greatest feats of engineering. Visitors can take either a partial or complete crossing of the canal. Crossings take four to eight hours. Many visitors choose to explore the canal by visiting the Miraflores Locks Museum. From the restaurant located at the top floor of the museum, visitors can watch transiting vessels in the canal below.

Bocas Town The capital of the Bocas del Toro Province, Bocas del Toro is a favorite spot for scuba divers, and as the dives are shallow, it's particularly suited for particularly for beginners. An extensive coral reef features colorful varieties of tropical fish. Discovered by Christopher Columbus in 1502, the area remains one of the most popular tourist attractions in Panama. In Bocas del Toro, visitors routinely hike through the lush rainforest to enjoy empty stretches of beautiful shoreline.

Coiba The waters of Panama are unmatched in their level of marine diversity, and nowhere is this more evident than in the Coiba National Marine Park. The island of Coiba is the largest island in the park, as well as the largest island in all of Central America. More than 800 species of marine life are present in the area. The park is known as one of the best places to enjoy snorkeling and scuba diving on the Pacific Coast.

Whale sharks can be seen in large numbers between February and May, while humpback whales frequent the area between June and October to give birth to their calves. What's more, the island's pristine beaches are ideal for relaxing and sunbathing. This nature lover's paradise can be reached by boat rides and tour operations from the mainland in coastal towns like Santa Catalina, and Mariato on the Azuero Peninsula.

San Blas Islands

Located in Eastern Panama, the San Blas Islands is the best place to explore the rich culture of Panama's indigenous people, the Kuna. The Kuna people view this area as their own but are warm and welcoming to visitors. One member of the tribe is stationed on many of the area's tiny tropical islands, and for a nominal fee, they allow visitors exclusive use of the island for the day.

Nicaragua

Biodiverse and naturally beautiful, Nicaragua is a still off-the-grid destination, filled with active volcanoes, cloud forests, jungles, lakes, and two coastlines, all boasting plenty of attractions and things to do.

Outdoor adventure enthusiasts can hike to natural attractions like crater lakes in dormant volcanos or sled down mountains of ash on wooden boards. While those in search of wildlife experiences can explore one of the many protected reserves around Nicaragua that are home to everything from jaguars to howler and white-faced monkeys and hundreds of species of birds.

With beaches on both its Caribbean and Pacific Ocean coastlines, there are plenty of options for getting wet as well. Towns like San Juan del Sur on the Pacific Ocean's Emerald Coast near Costa Rica are top places to visit, famous for their colorful architecture and surf scene. While the Corn Islands in the Caribbean Sea are known for their laid-back beach vibe.

Managua is Nicaragua's capital city, but people tend not to linger here unless visiting for business. Many things to do really lie in the smaller cities, like Leon and Granada, which are known for their colorful architecture and churches, and natural attractions such as Lake Nicaragua. It is the largest freshwater lake in Central America and home to hundreds upon hundreds of islands, including some with amazing ecolodges.

And then there are the multitude of volcanoes, some dormant; others, like the Masaya Volcano, still very much active. Here are our picks for the top things to see and do around Nicaragua.

San Juan del Sur -In southwest Nicaragua, on the Emerald Coast, near the border with Costa Rica, San Juan del Sur is a vibrant town with a large expat community and an excellent surf beach just 20 miles to the north. The town itself is filled with colorful buildings and murals. There is also a large Christ of the Mercy statue perched on a hill overlooking the city below that is worth a hike up for sunset, especially to experience the views.

And then there is the long gold-sand meets Pacific Ocean Playa Maderas beach, which is also lined with small hotels and eco-resorts. It picks up most of the swells that hit Nicaragua and is best approached at medium to high tide.

The beach is also known for its long, drawn-out sunsets with an amazing display of bright, shifting colors.

Lake Nicaragua When Spanish colonists first saw Lake Nicaragua, it was so vast, they thought it was a sea. In reality, it is Central America's largest lake at 177 kilometers long with an average width of 57 kilometers. It is home to more than 365 small islets and larger islands, like Ometepe, with two volcanos, in the lake's center.

Another interesting fact about Lake Nicaragua is that it is the only freshwater lake to have ocean animals, including sharks. It is believed the lake was once a sea bay, but then a volcano erupted, trapping marine life and turning it into an inland lake. Over the millennia, the marine life has adapted to living in freshwater.

Guatemala is one of those rare finds, with a good mix of travel options to satisfy adventurers, culture seekers, beach worshippers, and travelers looking for a little relaxation. The country is a cultural hot spot in Central America, from the colonial architecture and cobbled streets of Antigua Guatemala to the Mayan ruins of Tikal.

Small towns in the highlands and on the shores of beautiful Lake Atitlan offer a chance for unique cultural experiences. Tropical jungles, active volcanoes, mountain lakes, cloud forests, coral reefs, and beaches will entice nature lovers.

If you venture down to the coasts, you'll encounter beaches ideal for relaxing and finding solitude in a hammock. Throughout the country are markets with local goods for sale, particularly textiles; these only operate on certain days of the week.

Mayan Ruins of Tikal

In the humid jungle of northern Guatemala, near the border of Belize, stands one of the greatest archaeological sites in Central America. The well-preserved ruined city of Tikal is one of the best places to visit in Guatemala to learn about Mayan culture.

Tikal was occupied between approximately 600 BC and AD 900, and showcases more than 3,000 structures, ranging from pyramids and temples to plazas and an acropolis. It was one of the most important urban Mayan centers for more than a thousand years and is today one of the largest Mayan archaeological sites of its time period still in existence.

The experience of visiting Tikal is enhanced by the surroundings. Steep pyramids rise above the jungle's lush green canopy populated by birds, monkeys, and other wildlife. Tikal National Park, which encompasses the ruins, is a biosphere reserve, protecting rainforest and wildlife habitat.

Monkeys are prevalent at Tikal. You'll definitely see spider monkeys and, if you don't see the howler monkeys, you'll most certainly hear them.

El Mirador was a major Mayan city that flourished from about the 6th century BC and abandonment at the end of the 9th century. The ruins of El Mirador were rediscovered in 1926 but received little attention due to its remote location deep in the jungle of northern Guatemala. Today the site remains largely covered by tropical jungle. Visiting El Mirador is not for the faint of heart. The village of Carmelita is the nearest point to the ruins that you can go by car. From there it takes a grueling trek of at least five days and four nights through the jungle with ants, ticks and mosquitoes that never relent. That said, people who make this journey will never forget it.

Pacaya Located close to Antigua, Volcán Pacaya, is an active volcano, last erupting on May 27, 2010. While there are trails and hiking opportunities open to the public, this is not a site for the faint of heart and care should be given in the preparation of your visit. If you've got your heart set

on climbing Volcán Pacaya and seeing the magnificent view it affords, plan on setting aside at least one whole day for your journey – if not more.

Monterrico The small coastal village of Monterrico, with its laid-back feel and lovely stretch of oceanfront, will appeal to anyone looking for some time at the beach and a little nature. Unlike the high inland regions, the area around Monterrico is hot and tropical. The beach here is dominated by big surf and not always ideal for swimming, but beautiful nonetheless.

Lake Atitlán Often described as the most beautiful lake in the world, Lake Atitlán is another destination where travelers tend to linger. Make the journey here and you won't be disappointed. You can easily spend a week or more exploring the small towns and villages that ring the lake.

Lake Atitlán is located in the high country, less than a two-hour drive from Guatemala City and less than an hour and a half from Antigua. It sits in a volcanic crater 1,538 meters above sea level and is surrounded by hills and volcanoes, and many of the villages on the shores are only accessible by boat.

Boats line up here to take passengers to the villages of San Pedro, Santiago Atitlán, San Andrés Semetabaj, Santa Catarina Palopó, San Lucas Tolimán, and even smaller secondary villages or private hotels. Each village is known for something different, but most have markets and local crafts.

Over the years, Atitlán has attracted many expats with an interest in alternative lifestyles. Spiritual or new age centers offer everything from yoga to metaphysical pursuits. If you are considering learning Spanish, schools are available and very reasonably priced.

Honduras

Honduras is a Central American country with Caribbean Sea coastlines to the north and the Pacific Ocean to the south. In the tropical rainforest near Guatemala, the ancient Mayan ceremonial site Copán has stone-carved hieroglyphics and stelae, tall stone monuments. In the Caribbean Sea are the Bay Islands, a diving destination that's part of the 1,000km-long Mesoamerican Barrier Reef.

A diamond in the rough, Honduras, Central America's second-largest country, dazzles visitors with its natural beauty and diverse wildlife. Nature lovers can explore idyllic Caribbean beaches, bird-rich lakes and jungles, and the undeveloped tropical rainforest of La Mosquitia, the Mosquito Coast.

But the country's prized jewels are the beautiful Bay Islands. Ringed by thriving coral reefs - part of the world's second biggest barrier reef, which stretches north to Mexico - these laid-back islands lure many divers, snorkelers, and travelers seeking a relaxed tropical vibe.

Rich in culture, Honduras is also home to an impressive museum in the capital, Tegucigalpa, and the archeological treasures of Copán are one of the finest Mayan sites in the world. Other adventures include dolphin encounters, birding tours, rafting trips, and the chance to swim with gentle whale sharks.

Roatán, Bay Islands

Roatán is the largest and most developed of the Bay Islands. Once a well-kept secret, it is now a cruise ship port and a popular vacation destination - especially for avid divers and snorkelers.

A mountainous backbone undulates through the island's center, and flourishing coral reefs fringe its shores, offering superb opportunities for diving and deep-sea fishing.

Even with the influx of travelers, Roatán's beaches are beautiful. One of the best strands is West Bay Beach. Although packed on cruise ship days, it ticks all the boxes, with clear waters, snorkeling, swaying palms, and plenty of shops and restaurants nearby.

The small community of Sandy Bay is the cultural center of Roatán. Top tourist attractions here include the Roatán Institute of Marine Sciences with its popular dolphin encounters; Roatán Museum; the Carambola Gardens, a favorite with nature lovers; and the Roatán Marine Park, with excellent snorkeling.

Craving a cute animal encounter? Head to Manawakie Park, where you can cuddle sloths and get up close to capuchin monkeys, as well as soak up a dose of Honduran culture. Gumbalimba Park is another haven for wildlife lovers with sloths and monkeys. You can also pose for a photo with colorful macaws and soar through the jungle on an exhilarating zipline.

Other top things to do in Roatan include visiting the environmentally friendly Blue Harbor Tropical Arboretum and the Butterfly Gardens. Tucked in tropical fruit trees, the garden spotlights butterfly species native to Honduras and the Bay Islands.

French Harbour is Roatán's biggest fishing port and the economic engine of the island. A popular attraction here is Arch's Iguana and Marine Park.

Lake Yojoa (Lago de Yojoa)

Along the main road between Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula, Lago de Yojoa is the largest natural lake in Honduras and a haven for birders. More than 480 species have been spotted here, including whistling ducks, northern jacanas, and crakes.

You can explore this shallow lake from shore, or glide through the reeds in a canoe or kayak. Two mountainous national parks border the lake: Santa Bárbara National Park on the northern shore and Cerro Azul Meambar National Park to the south.

Other popular things to do in the area include hikes to waterfalls, exploring an underground cave system, and tours of coffee plantations and archeological sites.

Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve, Mosquito Coast

In 2011, UNESCO placed this massive swath of jungle along the remote Mosquito Coast on the World Heritage in Danger list. It is one of the few remaining tropical rainforests in Central America.

The reserve lies in the watershed of the Río Plátano and forms a mosaic of lowland tropical rainforest, coastal lagoons, undisturbed beaches, mangroves, grasslands, and patches of pine savannah.

Steeped in tropical humidity, this important wilderness area harbors a rich diversity of wildlife, including howler monkeys, scarlet macaws, giant leatherback turtles, toucans, and tapirs. Sadly, reports of logging and hunting continue to threaten the reserve's fragile habitats.

Sloping down to the Caribbean Sea, the mountainous landscape is also home to more than 2,000 indigenous people of the Miskito and Pech tribes, as well as the Garífuna, who continue to live their traditional lifestyle. Archaeological sites also lie within its borders.

The best way to explore the Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve is on an organized tour. Experienced guides can take you to the safe places to visit in this remote area of Honduras, away from drug smugglers and illegal loggers who often venture deep into the reserve. Ecotourism companies offer wilderness adventures and rafting trips down the Río Plátano.

Belize

Belize is a nation on the eastern coast of Central America, with Caribbean Sea shorelines to the east and dense jungle to the west. Offshore, the massive Belize Barrier Reef, dotted with hundreds of low-lying islands called cayes, hosts rich marine life. Belize's jungle areas are home to Mayan ruins like Caracol, renowned for its towering pyramid; lagoon-side Lamanai; and Altun Ha, just outside Belize City.

Belize brims with natural beauty. A top spot for eco-tourists, this fascinating country lies in Central America, between Mexico and Guatemala, and was known as British Honduras during its colonial days. Few countries offer such a rich diversity of ecosystems packed into a relatively small area.

In addition to the world's second largest barrier reef, Belize is home to dense jungles with howler monkeys and jaguars, mountain pine forests, palm-fringed beaches, bonefish flats, rivers, caves, and coral atolls rimmed by fish-rich reefs. Not surprisingly, diving and snorkeling are superb. The Great Blue Hole is a UNESCO World Heritage dive site, and anglers flock here from all corners of the globe for fantastic flats fishing and deep-sea adventures.

Apart from all the natural jewels, Belize's friendly people are one of its top assets, with origins as diverse as the landscapes. Mayans; Mennonites; English; Creoles; Mestizos; and the Garifuna people, of mixed Amerindian and African descent infuse an evocative mix of cultural influences. You can learn about the ancient Mayan culture at the many relatively untapped archaeological sites.

Belize City is the gateway to the country. Most travelers fly in here and explore the surrounding attractions before departing for adventures further afield. You can kayak lagoons, cave tube along

subterranean rivers, hike through jungles and pine forests, view stunning wildlife in its natural habitat, or simply collapse in a hammock and relax in this tropical paradise.

1. Ambergris Caye & Hol Chan Marine Reserve

Just off the tip of the Yucatán Peninsula, laid-back Ambergris Caye is the largest of Belize's 200 cays and a hot spot for tourists. If diving and snorkeling are on your things to do list, head off the coast here to the Hol Chan Marine Reserve. It's named after the Mayan for "little cut" and is one of seven reserves within the Belize Barrier Reef system, which is the second largest in the world after Australia's Great Barrier Reef.

Top attractions in the reserve include a cut in the reef with steep coral walls; Cat's Eye, a crescent-shaped sinkhole; and Shark Ray Alley, where divers can enjoy close encounters with nurse sharks and southern stingrays.

The island's main town is the fishing village of San Pedro, a colorful jumble of clapboard houses, stray dogs, and clucking chickens. Besides water sports and beach basking, top things to do here include dining at the cute cafés and touring the Belize Chocolate Company. Golf carts and bicycles are the most popular modes of transport, although these days an increasing number of cars and trucks zip along the sandy streets.

2. Lighthouse Reef Atoll and the Blue Hole

The farthest from shore of Belize's three atolls, Lighthouse Reef Atoll is nirvana for nature lovers and divers. Six cays surround a turquoise lagoon, with gleaming white-sand beaches, coconut palms, and fascinating coral formations.

The top place to visit here is the famous Great Blue Hole, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and Natural Monument. Plunging into the sapphire-toned sinkhole, you can see bizarre limestone stalactites protruding from the steep walls, and if you're lucky, the resident school of reef sharks.

Half Moon Caye is the most visited cay of the atoll. Also a World Heritage Site, the Half Moon Caye Natural Monument shelters a colony of about 4,000 red-footed boobies and many other species of birds. Nature trails lead to observation platforms with great views of nesting boobies and frigate birds.

3. Placencia Peninsula

Snuggled on the end of a 26-kilometer sandy peninsula, Placencia is a popular fishing village and beach resort. Travelers come here to bask on some of the best beaches in Belize, eat fresh seafood at the excellent restaurants, fish, kayak the lagoon, and dive and snorkel in the Silk Cayes Marine Reserve.

Near Placencia, Laughing Bird Caye National Park is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, with hiking trails and coral reefs. Swimming, snorkeling, sea kayaking, and diving are popular things to do her

4. Turneffe Islands Atoll

A paradise for divers and anglers, Turneffe Islands Atoll encompasses more than 200 coral islands surrounding a lagoon. It is one of three atoll reefs in Belize's waters.

Seascapes here range from crystalline flats to creeks and lagoons. Corals shimmer in the clear waters, and the atoll is a nursery for many different marine species, including grouper, snapper, and trunkfish. The atoll is also home to the famed bonefish, which lures saltwater fly fishing enthusiasts from around the world. In particular, the vast flats on the eastern side of the atoll are ideal for casting a fly line or snorkeling in the shallows.

5. Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary & Jaguar Preserve

Cockscomb Wildlife Sanctuary is a haven for nature buffs. The mountainous tropical forest here protects an impressive array of wildlife, including jaguars, ocelots, pumas, anteaters, tapirs, monkeys, and snakes, although sightings of the cats are rare.

Insider's tip: Save time to stop at the Che'il Chocolate Factory and farm near the entrance to the park before or after your visit. You can take a tour of this organic cacao farm, make your own chocolate, and stock up on some scrumptious treats.

South America



Located primarily in the Southern Hemisphere, South America is bordered by the Pacific Ocean to the west and Atlantic Ocean to the east. With a geographical area of 17,840,000 square kilometers, it is the fourth largest continent in terms of landmass, and fifth largest in terms of population.

Twelve sovereign states - Argentina, Chile, Bolivia, Colombia, Paraguay, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru, Venezuela, Uruguay, and Suriname- and two non-sovereign areas- the Falkland Islands and French Guiana, together make up all of South America. Colonized by Spanish and Portuguese people in the late 1500's, Spanish and Portuguese remain the most spoken languages of this continent.

South America has on its official list two of the seven wonders of the world - Machu Picchu, also a UNESCO world heritage site, and the statue of Christ the Redeemer in Rio, besides being home to some of the most wonderful natural gems. The Amazon River, Parana River, Lake Titicaca, Andes Mountains, Amazon Basin, Angel Falls and Brazilian Highlands among others are all a part of this same continent.

Belonging to various ethnic demographics, South America has descendants of Quechua, Aymara, and Amerindians. European population can also be found in significant numbers, especially in former Portuguese colonies. This continent is also home to large population of Africans.

Like the Oceania continent, tourism is also becoming an increasingly important source of income for South America. With landscapes that leave you speechless, seemingly straight out of postcards, diversity in culture and food options, and significant historical relics and architecture, South America has been consistently attracting tourists from around the world. This number is anticipated to inflate, owing to the Olympics 2016 that will be held in Brazil. This continent has a special affinity for sports, the most loved being football, followed by basketball, cycling, baseball, rugby, futsal, and motorsports.

Do visit Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paulo, and Santiago in Brazil, Lima in Peru, Buenos Aires in Argentina, and Medellin in Colombia.

Brazil

The largest country in South America, Brazil occupies almost half the continent. Nearly all of it is in the Southern Hemisphere, and much of it is tropical, with vast stretches of rainforest filled with exotic plants and wildlife.

Brazil's 7,400-kilometer Atlantic coast is lined with golden-sand beaches, and its interior is filled with mineral resources. Gold from Brazil's mines still lines the churches of Portugal, the colonial power that ruled Brazil until 1822. This strong Portuguese influence is evident in Brazil's colonial architecture, in decorative arts such as the glazed tiles in its churches and convents, and in the language.

For tourists, Brazil is both a tropical paradise and an exciting cultural destination with attractions for all tastes, from idyllic beach holidays and jungle explorations to world-class art museums and the pulsing rhythms of Rio's Carnival.

Brazil is officially known as the Federative Republic of Brazil. It is the largest country in both South America and Latin America and world's fifth-largest country by both area and population. Bounded by the Atlantic Ocean on the east side, Brazil has a coastline of 7,491 kilometers.

Including a vast tropical forest, a variety of ecological systems and home to diverse wildlife- Brazil is a unique environmental heritage.

Probably no other destination on earth is more exciting and animated than Rio de Janeiro. Located at one of the largest harbors and surrounded by the beautiful Sugarloaf and Corcovado mountains and famous beaches like Copacabana and Ipanema. The city's iconic landmark is the Christ the Redeemer statue sitting atop Corcovado mountain. Straddling the border between Brazil and Argentina, Iguazu Falls is a series of magnificent waterfalls located on the Iguazu River and one of the most stunning natural wonders. The falls in and of themselves are a breathtaking spectacle. Further in the list is Salvador, one of the oldest cities in the Americas, located on the coast of the Bay of All Saints. The city offers fantastic beaches including Porto de Barra, and Stella Maris, which are ideal for swimming, sunbathing and surfing.

Charismatic Brazil is famous for its Carnaval, outrageous costumes, street dancing, and parties that carry on until dawn. One of the biggest reasons to visit the country are the music festivals and incredible theatre shows held throughout the year. Also, the Brazilian Soccer Culture is not to be missed. Soccer fans around the world mark this as the number one reason to visit Brazil. It is an integral part of the country, and residents take the sport seriously and are incredibly supportive and proud.

The land of the Samba, Soccer, rainforest, magnificent sprawling cities and unspoiled beaches. Brazil is surely a sight to behold.

Rio De Janeiro, or Rio as it is commonly known and referred to, is the second largest city in Brazil. Rio is the city of sin and sun, of beaches and mountains, of man-made and natural wonders of the world. It is large, loud, and colourful. The natural rhythm of Brazil is Rio and Samba- the famous dance style, that goes as a body and spirit. Rio is a metropolis that reminds you that life is not all about working, but rather loving the exuberance of life.

Rio is locally called the Marvelous City; a moniker that is not misplaced. But Rio is not all about parties, music and beaches only. It houses Brazil's largest corporations like Petrobras and Vale and is a financial powerhouse. Rio is also associated with a high criminal activity rate, and while it attracts tourists from across the world, it also fosters the ill reputation of a city overrun by drug lords and muggers. But you will brave it all because Rio has one of a unique geographical location coupled with the vibrancy of an urban landscape. Whether it's the Sugar Loaf Mountain with its cable car, Copacabana Beach with its golden sand, or the giant statue of Christ the Redeemer that looms over, Rio promises to be an unforgettable experience.

Sao Paulo is arguably the world's third largest city and Southern Hemisphere's largest city. Centre of Brazilian finance, administration, arts and culture, Sao Paulo is a Medusa-esque cosmopolitan that is exhilarating and intimidating in equal parts. With a population that is constantly on the rise, Sao Paulo is home to a diverse community of people from across the world. Like other mega cities from developing countries, Sao Paulo is the glittering utopia that attracts migration from across the world.

A sprawling megacity of immense opportunity, Sao Paulo is a diptych of contradictions – it houses the richest and the poorest of the country in equal measure, it has the largest fleet of helicopters in the country and underground pubs and round the clock clubbing scene. The city of Sao Paulo, however, does not paint a rosy picture at the first glance, but its brimming rich culture and eclectic eateries make it a very happening place for tourists. The city is celebratory when it stages the world's largest Gay Pride and despondent when millions protest political crimes on the street. Sao Paulo is a fierce, colourful melting pot of a city that can only be experienced head on.

Amazon Rain Forests

About 20 kilometers southeast of Manaus, the dark Rio Negro waters meet the light muddy water of the Rio Solimões, flowing side by side for about six kilometers before mixing as the Amazon. Boat trips from Manaus take you to this point, called Encontro das Aguas, meeting of the waters.

Other boat trips take you into the heart of the rain forests and the network of rivers, channels, and lakes formed by the three rivers. In the Rio Negro, the Anavilhanas Islands form an archipelago with lakes, streams, and flooded forests that offer a full cross-section of the Amazonian ecosystem.

You can see monkeys, sloths, parrots, toucans, caimans, turtles, and other wildlife on a boat trip here. Also close to Manaus, the 688-hectare Janauari Ecological Park has a number of different ecosystems that you can explore by boat along its narrow waterways.

An entire lake here is covered with giant water-lilies found only in the Amazon region. While in Manaus, be sure to see its famous Teatro Amazonas, the Italian Renaissance-style opera house, designed to put Manaus on the map as South America's great center of culture.

Salvador Capital of the state of Bahia and the largest city in northeastern Brazil, Salvador was the first town in the colony of Brazil. Founded in 1549, the early town sat on a crag accessed only on steep tracks climbing from the harbor, almost directly below on the large bay called Baía de Todos os Santos.

Today, this old town is still filled with 17th- and 18th-century colonial buildings that have earned it a UNESCO World Heritage designation. This is where you'll find Salvador's most beautiful churches and monasteries, which are among its major tourist attractions.

Salvador was Brazil's capital until 1763, when it was succeeded by Rio de Janeiro, and for three centuries, it was the principal port for slaves arriving from Africa. People of African descent still make up the majority of the population, and African influence is evident in Salvador's music, festivals, and cuisine, as well as in religious groups such as Candomblé and Umbanda.

Brasília, which succeeded Rio de Janeiro as Brazil's capital in 1960, was built in less than three years. Its location in the center of Brazil was chosen to help open up the western part of the country.

The extraordinarily ambitious plan, mainly the work of Lúcio Costa and Oscar Niemeyer, caused a sensation with its avant-garde architecture and its innovative city planning ideals. Because Brasília was planned and constructed as a whole piece, it doesn't have the mix of commercial, residential, and government functions that happens when a city grows over time; instead, these uses are strictly divided.

This makes it easy to find the architectural highlights — its prime tourist attractions — most of which are in one large area, but these are widely separated from the commercial and residential neighborhoods where you can join in local life.

The central area is in the form of a large cross with a curving north-south axis, Eixo Rodoviário, and a straight east-west axis, Eixo Monumental. Esplanada dos Ministérios is the central axis with the principal official buildings. Be prepared for plenty of walking, or join a tour to cover the distances between sights.

Argentina

Argentina is a federal republic positioned in southeastern South America and officially noted as the Argentine Republic. Sharing the bulk of the Southern Cone with Chile to the west, Bolivia,

and Paraguay to the north, Brazil at Northeast, Uruguay and the South Atlantic Ocean to the east, and the Drake Passage to the south. Spread across an area of 2,780,400 square kilometers -it is the eighth largest country in the world and also the second-largest in Latin America, and the biggest Spanish-speaking nation.

Most prominent tourist attraction -The Iguazú Falls in the north lying on the border between Brazil and Argentina comprises of 275 cascades. Fenced with a subtropical rainforest and countless species of rare animals, in addition to the endangered Vinaceous-breasted Amazon, a wild green parrot. It is amongst the most majestic waterfalls in the world, taller than Niagara Falls and nearly twice as wide. Not to miss the Perito Moreno Glacier -an enormous glacier placed in the Los Glaciares National Park. While Talampaya National Park -a red desert in the northwestern part of the country, also the oldest dinosaur bones have been found here. Not surprisingly, it is marked as a UNESCO World Heritage site. The Capital city Buenos Aires also known as the Paris of the South, recognized for its historical facades, impressive boulevards, and outdoor cafes. Bracketed as the third best opera house in the world -The Teatro Colón is also worth visiting while you are in the city.

If you are a wine lover, it may interest you to know that Argentina has been building an enviable reputation as a producer of fine wines. The standout varieties produced include Malbec, Merlot, Syrah, Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay, Pinot Grigio and Sauvignon Blanc.

Argentina is home to one of the most famous dances in the world, so -Tango the night away! While you're there, try out your fancy footwork, or sit back and admire tango shows over dinner at any of the bars.

Buenos Aires

Buenos Aires is the capital city of Argentina and as such, lives up to all monikers of a metropolitan urban centre. It is the administrative, financial and cultural hub of the country. But this city is unique as it exhibits a perfect blend of European and Latin American elements. Often called the 'Paris of Latin America' Buenos Aires' urban landscape features cobbled streets and gothic architecture. But the pulse of this city is tango, the sensual Argentinian dance that is performed everywhere in the city - from dance schools to pubs and bars to the streets. It is one of the major tourist attractions in Buenos Aires, attracting tourists from across the world. It is the most visited city in Latin America. A truly multicultural city, Buenos Aires is very welcoming to migrants and celebrates ethnicity. The city also celebrates sexual diversity and is a very popular destination for gay tourism. Its nightlife is legendary with restaurants opening at 9 pm for their evening shifts, and clubs at 2 am! Buenos Aires is the city that you come to for an experience and then end up calling it your second home.

Peru

Peru is all about soaring peaks and serene waters, mesmerising treks and ancient traditions. Officially the Republic of Peru, it is a fascinating country in western South America. Extremely bio-diverse, it has arid plains in the west, Andes mountains extending from its north to the southeast, and Amazon Basin rainforest along with Amazon River in the east. The country covers an area of 496, 255 Sq Km and has a population of over 31.2 million.

Lima, the capital of Peru, is located in the central coast and is the only province in the country. The pre-Inca period pyramids, museums, cultural centers and shopping malls attract tourists here. It has many beaches for sunbathing, swimming and fishing too. On the other hand, Cusco is the city known for its archaeological remains and colonial architecture. Then there is the absolutely must-visit, Machu Picchu - one of the seven wonders of the world - and a fascinating place to visit, replete with ancient citadels and cathedrals. Adventure seekers can hike the Inca-trail in the country or can spend a night camping at Lake Titicaca by the Andes mountains. Wandering the riotous forests of Amazon, or indulging in hiking, paragliding and mountaineering are other thrilling excursions that are very popular.

Peru is a multi-ethnic nation that comprises native Americans, Europeans, and Sub-Saharan Africans. Spanish, Quechua and Aymara are the official languages of the country. Peruvian culture is rooted primarily in Spanish and Amerindian traditions. Some popular festivals celebrated in the country include Fiesta del Inti Raymi, Semana Santa, Q'oyoriti and La Fiesta de la Marinera.

In culinary traditions of Peru, an influence of Spanish cuisine is dominantly seen. Slow-simmered stews, Ceviche with corn and chilli, and the amazing Amazonian chocolate put together a dazzling plate of flavours. The geographical diversity also brings in influences from African and Asian cuisines to the mix. You can explore a bounty of food markets in the cities of Peru. There are street side corners selling beef skewers. However, Peruvian Nouvelle cuisine is famous with those who love to splurge on fine dining.

Machu Picchu

Enjoy a journey back in time to the great Inca civilization of the bygone era at Machu Picchu, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. This ancient city in Peru is the epitome of mysticism and will leave you in wonder. The intricately carved stone structures, the exquisitely planned layouts, surrounded by lush green hills and cliffs, will astonish you as you wonder about the skilled and talented people who achieved this feat of engineering and architecture, in the 15th century. \r\n\r\nThe site is located amidst a picturesque landscape, and the thrill to trek along the stone steps is an experience of a lifetime. The high altitude makes it even more challenging, but the scenic views make it worth the risk. This iconic citadel in the mountains is full of mysteries that need to be unfolded. If you happen to visit this place early in the morning, then the experience of observing the sun rising in the background will amaze you. Untouched by modern civilization, Machu Picchu represents a perfect blend of the beauty of nature and the imagination of man.

Colombia

Colombia is a transcontinental country located in the northwest of South America, with territories in Central America, and is officially known as the Republic of Colombia. It shares its border with

Panama to the northwest, Brazil and Venezuela to the east, Ecuador and Peru to the south. It is distinguished for being the only South American country sharing coastal boundaries with the Caribbean Sea and North Pacific Ocean.

Leading the list of tourist attractions in the country is the stunning Caño Cristales River. It is a unique natural wonder owing to its unusual combination of beautiful colors like blue, yellow, green, black and particularly the red color from the sub-aquatic plant called *Macarenia Clavigera*. Colonial Cartagena is one of South America's most picturesque cities and an essential visit on any tour to Colombia. Bogota - the capital has much to allure its visitors, including a planetarium, gold museum, botanical gardens, cultural events and a thriving nightlife. Deem your trip incomplete if you don't visit the Mt. Monserrate mountains and the famous Salt Cathedral- a salt mine converted into a church. For nature lovers, a visit to the Tayrona National Natural Park is a must.

La Guajira with its desert and alien landscapes, proud heritage, and traditions of its indigenous inhabitants is one of the most interesting tourist spots in the country. Mompox is a Colombian town distinguished for its architecture, culture and its great natural landscapes. Colombia's coffee region is also named the Coffee Triangle. This fertile region, located in the heart of the Andes, is where a majority of the famous Colombian coffee is produced.

Colombian food is very diverse, each region of the country having its characteristic dishes. This cuisine offers dishes that have been influenced by not only indigenous Colombian culture but Spanish, African and Arab cultures as well. Colombian food is versatile, full of flavors, colors, and comfort. Naming a few - Bandeja Paisa is the national dish, and the other prominent ones include Ajiaco, Asado Bogotano, Changua, and Sancocho.

Be it the unblemished beauty of its surroundings, rare species of wild animals, beautiful landscapes, the country has it all! Also known for its emeralds and high-quality coffee, Colombia should unquestionably be your next vacation destination.

Bogota

Bogota is a vibrant city surrounded by the majestic Andes Mountains. The capital city and urban hub of Colombia, it is the commercial, cultural and economic centre of the country. Like many other major cities, Bogota offers its visitors a taste of everything, from old colonial buildings to towering skyscrapers. The incredible cultural riches offered in Bogota are innumerable, varying from dozens of theatres, shopping areas, pubs, restaurants, cultural and sports venues, reflecting the true cosmopolitan nature of the city. \n\nThe Bolivar Square is arguably the most popular attraction in Colombia. Established in the 1500s, it is named after a former leader named Simon Bolivar, who played an important role in the independence of the country. Bogota has several museums such as the Gold Museum that displays an exquisite collection of pre-Colombian gold, Museo Botero that houses innumerable art collections and the Colombian National Museum that is the largest and oldest in Colombia. Tourists can also visit the nearby villages and hiking trails in the Andes, and get to experience the natural riches of Colombia.

Chile

Boasting one of the planet's most diverse landscapes, Chile has in recent years become an increasingly popular travel destination, particularly among nature lovers and adventure seekers. Here in this long, narrow nation on the west coast of South America, travelers will find an array of stunning sightseeing opportunities, from the tall peaks of the Andes and endless beaches to lush temperate forests, ancient volcanoes, and a dramatic coastline such as that found at Cape Horn.

Chile is also blessed with an abundance of superb national parks and conservation areas, many of them popular destinations for those into trekking and hiking, as well as those who enjoy adventurous things to do such as climbing, river rafting, mountain biking, and horseback riding.

But Chile is not without its cultural attractions, too, with cities such as the capital of Santiago offering many fine museums and art galleries, and stunning Easter Island with its famous stone figures.

Valle de la Luna and the Atacama Desert

Valle de la Luna, which literally translates as "Valley of the Moon," lies 13 kilometers west of San Pedro de Atacama at the north end of the country, near its border with Bolivia, and can be accessed via well-marked bike trails, tour buses, or self-drive car rentals.

This rugged, inhospitable looking landscape in the heart of the Atacama Desert attracts many visitors for its eerie resemblance to the surface of the moon, an effect caused by the erosion of its sand and stone features by wind and water over countless millennia. Despite its remoteness, though, this surprisingly beautiful landscape has sustained life for centuries, both human as well as that of numerous species of flora and fauna.

Among its most interesting features are its dry lake beds-this is, after all, one of the driest places on the planet-which are dazzlingly white due to deposited salt, and prone to producing fascinating natural saline outcrops.

Other notable features of the Atacama Desert are the region's many caverns, some containing evidence of pictographs created by early man and where some of the world's oldest mummies, preserved by the area's aridity, were found. The most famous of these, the Chinchorro mummies, are now on display at the archaeological museum in San Miguel de Azapa.

Also of interest is the Laguna Cejar sinkhole, famous for its turquoise water.

Easter Island & Rapa Nui National Park

First visited by Europeans in 1722, the magnificent yet remote Easter Island-so named by a Dutch Explorer who first set eyes on it on Easter Sunday- has been inhabited for thousands of years by Polynesians. Despite being more than 3,500 kilometers away from mainland Chile, this fascinating island with its remarkable stone sculptures remains the country's most recognizable attraction.

All told, 887 of these statues, known as Moai-created by the island's early Rapa Nui population-have been identified, most of them now protected by Rapa Nui National Park (the island itself has been declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site). The most impressive collection is at Ahu Tongariki where 15 of them have been re-erected on the island's largest Moai platform, or "ahu."

Rapa Nu is also where you'll find one of the country's best beaches, Anakena, a beautiful yet short stretch of white coral sand that's the perfect spot for a break from hiking.

Also of interest are the many "hare paenga" ruins near ahu sites consisting of stones that once formed the foundation of boat-shaped houses. Other highlights include the Father Sebastian Englert Anthropological Museum in Hanga Roa, the island's main community, notable for its exhibits relating to the history of the Polynesian islanders and their traditions.

Hot Tip: Visiting Easter Island is best done as part of a Chilean vacation, with regular flights available from Santiago or Tahiti (flight times are approximately five hours, so expect to stay at least a couple of days).

Santiago: Chile's Cultural Capital

Santiago is not only the financial and business capital of Chile, it also serves as the country's cultural and entertainment center and is home to endless fun things to do, including visiting its best museums and galleries, along with excellent shopping, dining, and hotel options.

Centrally located and the country's main transportation hub, Santiago is where most visitors begin their Chilean travels before heading to the Andes or other areas of outstanding natural beauty, such as Easter Island. The smartest travelers, though, will allow time in their Chile travel itinerary to get to know Santiago.

Founded in 1541 and relatively crowd-free, the city features points of interest such as the Centro Cultural Palacio La Moneda, a state-of-the-art cultural center occupying part of the impressive Palacio de la Moneda, and the Chilean National Museum of Fine Arts (Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes), established in the 1880s with a focus on Chilean artists and boasting a large permanent collection of paintings, sculptures, and photos.

Other must-sees are the excellent Museum of Pre-Columbian Art (Museo Chileno de Arte Precolombino), featuring collections relating to the country's native people, and the Museum of Memory and Human Rights (Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos) commemorating those who suffered under the Pinochet regime.

A highlight of any visit to Santiago is taking the aerial tramway to San Cristóbal Hill for its stunning views over this most hospitable of cities, along with interesting attractions, including an observatory, a 22-meter-tall statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and an amphitheater.

Be sure to also spend time enjoying Santiago Metropolitan Park (Parque Metropolitano de Santiago), a huge urban green space, with a botanical garden, the Chilean National Zoo, and a funicular railway.

Bolivia

Bolivia is a beautiful country resting peacefully in central South America. It's well situated amid a varied terrain spanning Andes Mountains, the Atacama Desert and the wide yet amazing Amazon Basin rainforest. It is known for having some fascinating yet breath-taking sites and one of the incredible sites is for sure the salt flats. It owns the Salar De Uyuni, the largest and highest salt flats in the world. There is a decent number of people flying to this beautiful country in pursuit of a well-deserving holiday hence there are several beautiful places where the visitors can try their luck to amuse and surprise themselves with the country's charm and beauty. Those who want an authentic and spectacular South American vacation should definitely consider Bolivia. This mountainous country is the only landlocked nation on the continent, and boasts sheer mountains with the world's highest navigable lake, cultural cities, and spectacular cloud and rain forests.

It is slightly off the beaten tourist path, which makes it possible to travel economically and get a real view of Bolivian life.

La Paz

It is known to be an excellent economic and political centre of Bolivia. It is a decently huge South American metropolis and is reputed to have some really beautiful and unique places worth having a visit. To start with, the witch market and a ride in the local cable cars is something like an untold ritual which is tried by almost every visitor if not all. The magnificent town is rightly set in a small yet beautiful valley somewhere at an altitude between 3,600 and 4,000 metres above the sea level offering some excellent views of the surroundings. It is very well known to be an excellent starting point for short as well as long trips to the surrounding areas. The famous Death Road or the Moon Valley is something which attracts and lures the adventure enthusiastic. It is a decent place to travel with friends or family like wisely solo travellers or couples can find their haven too.

Best time to travel: It is usually recommended to travel all year round however the best season is said to be between April and October when it is naturally cold and dry.

Salar De Uyuni

If we can survey the most visited places in Bolivia, the usual and expected answer will come out as Salar de Uyuni. Visitors can witness the largest salt plain in the world right at Salar de Uyuni which spreads over an area of 10000 km long. It is said that initially, it used to form the bottom of a lake known to be comparatively large. If there is a true beauty in nature then for sure it is in watching the amazing salt plain and its unique. It is nothing a true pleasure to eyes watching the islands covered with cactuses. The salt hotel in the area has earned quite a reputation and popularity of its own. Visitors can also have the opportunity to explore the other direction from the city where they can witness the train cemetery and discover hundreds of old, rusty

locomotives and trains and cars left right there considering that to be their end fate. Without a doubt, Salar de Uyuni has to be one of the best places to ever exist in the world.

Best time to travel: The best time to be here is supposedly between July and October owing to its perfect climate at that period of the year however to witness the reflective surfaces it is said to be perfect between March and April.

Sucre

It is one of the most beautiful cities in Bolivia also referred to as “The White City”, and is the official Capital of Bolivia. Owing to the beauty and the incredible charm of a colonial Spanish town, it is one of those fascinating tourist attractions placed on the UNESCO list since 1991. The mesmerising cathedral and the calm cemetery is known to be of utmost importance and is considered to be a must-visit for the visitors. The major attraction known as Cal Orck’o which is a mountain, lies just outside the city. What fascinating is, the mountain is entirely covered with fossilized dinosaur traces. There are free tours which are likely to take place every day between 12 pm to 1 pm and its recommended to all the visitors. As an add on, there is this very beautiful eccentric pink Castillo de La Glorieta castle just outside the city which at any cost shouldn’t be missed.

Santa Cruz De La Sierra

Santa Cruz De La Sierra

The mesmerising city of Santa Crus is well situated in the tropical Amazonian part of Bolivia. Being located in such an appropriate location certainly makes the climate much different from all the other parts in the region. Owing to where its placed (at the foot of the Andes) it has earned the blessing of pleasant weather. It is undoubtedly the largest city in Bolivia and for sure it is one of the best tourist attractions indeed. This famous tourist attraction is also known to be the centre of the Bolivian nightlife and the fascinating Monsenor Rivero Street is nothing but perfect to be in while you are exploring this heavenly place. To any nature enthusiast, Parque El Arenal or Jardin Botanico parks is a paradise where they can witness the local monkey and sloths in their best natural habitat.

Best time to visit: The best time to be here is supposedly between September and November. During this time, the beaches, walking paths or respectively other attractions aren’t much crowded as the summer tourists have supposedly returned to their sweet houses.

Best time to visit: Visitors can visit the place throughout the year however it is said to be the best time between January to March and October to December.

Venezuela

Venezuela is a country of beautiful landscapes and surprising sights, from the coast to the mountain tops. Magnificent waterfalls tumble off table top mountains, and coastal towns and offshore islands offer pleasant escapes and soft-sand beaches.

Inland, the Andes Mountains, soaring to over 16,000 feet, provide a stunning backdrop to colorful and lively cities, and the Orinoco Delta is teeming with wildlife. Caracas, the capital and largest city in the country, offers its own type of adventure, with a number of cultural sites and surrounding attractions.

Angel Falls

In the heart of the country, where table top mountains rise up like giant monoliths from the surrounding landscape, is Angel Falls. Dropping 979 meters, it is the highest waterfall in the world and one of the highlights of South America.

This stunning site in Canaima National Park is remote and difficult to access, but flights over the falls are easily arranged.

The best time to see the falls is during the rainy season, between May and November, when water is plentiful and the falls do not disappear into a mist before reaching the bottom as they do in the dry season. During the dry season, the falls may be little more than a trickle and you will want to check in advance to see if there is enough water to make the trip worthwhile.

The falls are usually visited by either a sightseeing flight or a three-day boat trip beginning in the town of Canaima. The boat trip, which also includes a hike through the jungle to the base of the falls, is not a luxury tour by any stretch, with basic accommodation along the route. The boat trip may not be possible during the dry season due to low water levels in the river.

Flights over the falls depart from many towns and cities and can be arranged from various places, including Caracas, Ciudad Bolívar, Santa Elena, or Isla Margarita, as well as other major cities, although usually with a connecting flight.

Caracas, Venezuela's capital, is a commercial and cultural center located in a northern mountain valley. Independence leader Simón Bolívar is buried at the National Pantheon of Venezuela, established in the 19th century in the city's old town. Caracas Cathedral, a landmark of Romanesque architecture, dates to the 17th century. Parque Central's 225m-high twin towers are the signature of the skyline

Venezuela has limited railway systems and airlines. High crime rates and the negative attitude of the Venezuelan population towards tourism also contributed to the poor evaluation.

In an attempt to attract more foreign visitors, the Venezuelan Ministry of Tourism invested in multiple hotel infrastructures. The largest hotel investment has been in the Hotel Alba Caracas. The cost for the general maintenance of the north and south towers of the hotel is approximately 231.5 million Venezuelan bolivars. Although the Venezuelan Ministry of Tourism has taken the initiative to recognize the importance of the tourism industry, the Venezuelan government has not placed the tourism industry as an economic priority. In 2013, the budget for the Ministry of Tourism was only 173.8 million bolivars, while the Ministry of the Youth received approximately 724.6 million bolivars. The tourism industry in Venezuela contributes approximately 3.8 percent of the country GDP.

Ecuador

More than making up for its small size with an array of Indigenous cultures, colonial architecture, scenic landscapes, and dense rainforests, Ecuador is one of the most fascinating nations in South America. Bordered by Colombia, Peru, and the Pacific Ocean on the continent's west coast-and no larger than most US states-this beautiful country of nearly 18 million people attracts tourists from across the globe for a myriad of reasons.

For outdoor sports enthusiasts, there are endless climbing and trekking adventures to partake in. For nature lovers, it's Ecuador's lush, ecologically important forests that are the big draw, while wildlife watchers will also gravitate to its famous Galápagos Islands. And for sun seekers? Ecuador's pristine tropical beaches are widely considered to be among the best and least spoiled in the world.

Once a part of both the Inca and, later, the Spanish Empires, Ecuador still displays many influences from both groups. These lasting influences are perhaps nowhere more notable than in the rich culture of its people, and the splendid colonial architecture of the capital city of Quito, much of which has been declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

1. The Galápagos Islands

Since their "discovery" in the 16th century, the Galápagos Islands have intrigued and inspired visitors from around the globe. Named for the giant tortoises on the islands, this UNESCO World Heritage Site is home to a unique ecosystem that largely evolved without outside influences (mainland Ecuador lies some 1,000 kilometers to the east). Consequently, a visit to this unspoiled region offers an exceptional opportunity for wildlife viewing. Here, you can see a variety of rare creatures both on land and in the surrounding seas.

The Galápagos Islands remain one of the most active volcanic regions in the world, and the formation of the islands is still in progress. Most of the 13 large islands, six smaller islands, and 42 islets that make up the Galápagos were declared part of the Galápagos National Park in the 1950s.

Not surprisingly, visiting this fragile ecosystem can only be undertaken as part of a guided tour to designated visitor sites. There are, however, one or two areas visitors can go without a guide, including some areas popular with scuba divers.

The main attraction here are the region's many rare bird species, of which 28 are unique to the islands. These include the Galápagos penguin, flightless cormorant, and waved albatross, along with the 13 species of Darwin's famous finches.

Hot Tip: If you're fortunate enough to make it to the Galápagos Islands, be sure to book a behind-the-scenes visit to the Charles Darwin Research Station, located in Puerto Ayora on Santa Cruz Island. Tours of this important research facility can be made in advance of your arrival and are certainly worth it.

2. Quito: Ecuador's Historic Andean Capital

Set high in the Andes, Quito, the capital of Ecuador, is filled with well-preserved examples of colonial architecture and is the largest historic center in South America. Preserved as a UNESCO World Heritage site for its many old churches, beautiful public squares, and world-class museums, this city of 1.6 million people has long been a favorite with artisans and is a great place to shop for local art and crafts, from ceramics and wood carvings to colorful clothing.

The most famous attraction in Quito's historic center is the San Francisco Church on the Plaza San Francisco. Dating back to the first half of the 1500s, the church's white-washed twin towers flank each side of the entrance to this massive complex. It's notable for its splendid Baroque interior and the Convent Museum of San Francisco with its religious paintings, sculptures, carvings, porcelain, textiles, and handcrafted furniture.

Other beautiful churches to visit include La Compania de Jesus Church. Constructed in the early 17th century, it's listed by UNESCO as one of the top 100 most important buildings in the world. Equally attractive is Quito's cathedral, Basílica del Voto Nacional, which was constructed in the 1560s.

One of the top things to do in Quito is to explore Plaza Grande. This beautiful square is surrounded by many important points of interest, including the cathedral, the Presidential Palace, and the Archbishop's Palace. It's also where you'll find the Municipal Palace, as well as Calle La Ronda, a buzzing street lined with restaurants, cafés, art galleries, and other entertainment.

UNIT 4

Europe



The second smallest continent in the world, Europe covers 2% of the Earth's surface and 6.7% of the Earth's land. With 47 countries and a population of 742.5 million (2013 census), it is the third most populated continent in the world. Bordered by the Atlantic Ocean on the west, Arctic Ocean on the north, Ural mountains in the east, and the Mediterranean Sea to the South, a visit to the European continent is visually magnificent and historically significant.

Having to its credit, the tag of being the largest economy in the world, Europe is also home to one of the Seven Wonders of the World, The Colosseum in Italy.

While its history dates back to the advent of life on Earth, it's influence first spread over the world with the reign of Alexander-The Great. Later of course a handful of the European countries as

Britain, Portugal, France and the Dutch went on to rule most other countries of the world at different periods. In more recent times, Europe has been the center of both World Wars, and it is this upheaval in the continent that makes it historically compelling.

Home to some of the most prominent and captivating monuments and structures that are also listed as UNESCO world heritage sites, every part of Europe stands tall as a trying testimony of its glorious and disconcerted past. Distinctly divided into three regions- Western Europe, Central Europe, and Eastern Europe- each one is more enchanting than the other for a tourist. What adds to the continent's charm is its diversified geographical bifurcation with the Scottish highlands in the northern parts, Hungarian plains down south, mountains in the Central Europe, and highlands in the southern area.

You can start your day at delightful Italy where you visit Rome to know why it wasn't built in a day. The afternoon can be spent at the rather chivalrous London where you have the London Eye, St. Paul's Cathedral, and its other lovely tourist spots waiting to greet you. Spend the evening by the River Seine in Paris and enjoy the starlit night right under the Eiffel Tower, celebrating love in the City of Love. Call this a teaser of the thrill the European continent has to offer.

Some of the most loved tourist places of the continent other than those mentioned above, include Moscow in Russia, Berlin in Germany, Budapest in Hungary, Madrid in Spain and the Swiss countryside. This continent is also known for its world-renowned cuisine, so if you're a food lover, this place is even more enticing.

France

Say Bonjour when in France! The first welcoming word that a visitor comes across as French love to speak their native language. Be stylish when walking down the streets of France, remember, the country is home to many stylish and chic people.

France has been a hub of art, architecture, fashion, music, literature and gastronomy that seduces millions of travellers all around the world. The Art de Vivre of French exudes cheerfulness and energy all around even in their simple daily rituals. There's lot more to do in France, from embracing its breathtaking countryside beauty to walking around the museums, hiking along alpine trails or hitting the road to its unusual locales, the experience sometimes overwhelms the visitors. The sheer variety of France is unquestionable. French are always touted for their ardor and Joie de Vivre.

Once a dominant political and military power in the world, France has been an important country in Europe till date. Being the largest country in the European Union, the French Republic is located in the western Europe and comprises several overseas regions and territories across the world. Flanked by the North Sea, the English Channel, the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea, and bordering countries like Germany, Switzerland, Italy and Monaco, the two-third of France comprises hills and mountains ranges. The famous mountain ranges the Pyrenees, the Alps and the Jura offer playgrounds for winter and summer sports including skiing, hiking, swimming, and fishing. The famous beach area on the Mediterranean coast called the French Riviera makes a popular spot for visitors in summers and mild winters.

Paris- the capital city is a global hub of art, fashion, gastronomy and culture. The city is well known for its major landmarks including Eiffel Tower being the one and cafe culture. A fashionista's dream, the city is home to many designer boutiques that lined the two upscale streets of Paris, Vuitton line Avenue Montaigne and Avenue des Champs-Élysées. Bordeaux is famed for the wine industry. Burgundy is home to world-class wineries, navigable canals, and grand chateau. Lourdes is known worldwide for Notre-Dame de Lourdes, a major Catholic pilgrimage site.

One of the major tourist spots in the country of France as well as in Europe, Nice is a place with a profound history and culture. Nice has seen an exchange of multiple kingdoms over time, and a mesh of combined influences are evident in the culture and the look of the city. From the early 17th century, Nice became a tourist epicentre as many affluent English tourists started spending the winters at the beach front here. The surrounding areas of Nice are also breathtakingly picturesque and was yet another attraction for tourists, prompting them to come here. This city is within the region of Côte d'Azur, which is also known as the French Riviera and is considered one of the most visually appealing places on the planet. Nice as a city was an inspiration for many artists of the past centuries due to its aesthetics. Many painters such as Niki de Saint Phalle, Arman, Marc Chagall, and Henri Matisse took an interest in Nice. Their artwork is currently on display in the museums here. Nice is also an important transport and business hub due to its proximity with Monaco.

From the boulevards of Paris to the fashionable seaside resorts of the Côte d'Azur, France offers some of the most beautiful scenery in the world. Fairy-tale castles, glorious cathedrals, and picture-perfect villages delight romantics. At the same time, the country's contemporary monuments and rapid train transit jolt visitors from the storybook surroundings into the ambience of the 21st century.

Begin with the Eiffel Tower, the modern emblem of France. Then discover famous masterpieces of art at the Louvre Museum. Spend a day pretending to be royalty at the elegant Palace of Versailles. Save time for leisurely gourmet meals – traditional French gastronomy has been inscribed on the UNESCO list of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Each region has its own distinctive cuisine and culture. The coastal region of Brittany offers the old-world charm of quaint fishing villages and ancient seaports, while the French Alps reveals the region's hearty cuisine of cheese fondue and charcuterie served in cozy chalets near ski slopes.

Indulge in it all and savor the country's irresistible charm with our list of the top attractions in France.

1. Eiffel Tower

The symbol of Paris, the Eiffel Tower is a feat of ingenuity as much as it is a famous landmark. This structure of 8,000 metallic parts was designed by Gustave Eiffel as a temporary exhibit for the World Fair of 1889. Originally loathed by critics, the 320-meter-high tower is now a beloved and irreplaceable fixture of the Paris skyline.

The Eiffel Tower's gracefulness has earned it the nickname of "Iron Lady." Visitors are impressed by the tower's delicate airiness despite its monumental size and the breathtaking panoramas at each of the three levels.

Tourists can dine with a view at the first level or indulge at the Michelin-starred Le Jules Verne restaurant on the second level. At the exhilarating height of 276 meters, the top level offers a sweeping outlook over the city of Paris and beyond. Vistas extend as far as 70 kilometers on a clear day.

2. Louvre Museum

In a stately palace that was once a royal residence, the Louvre ranks among the top European collections of fine arts. Many of Western Civilization's most famous works are found here, including the Mona Lisa by Leonardo DaVinci, the Wedding Feast at Cana by Veronese, and the 1st-century-BC Venus de Milo sculpture.

The collection owes its wealth to the contributions of various kings who lived in the Louvre. Other pieces were added as a result of France's treaties with the Vatican and the Republic of Venice, and from the spoils of Napoléon I.

The Louvre has an astounding collection of 35,000 artworks, including countless masterpieces. It's impossible to see it all in a day or even in a week. Take a private guided tour or focus on a shortlist of key artworks for the most rewarding experience.

3. Palace of Versailles

More than just a royal residence, Versailles was designed to show off the glory of the French monarchy. "Sun King" Louis XIV transformed his father's small hunting lodge into an opulent palace with a sumptuous Baroque interior. The palace became Louis XIV's symbol of absolute power and set the standard for princely courts in Europe.

4. Côte d'Azur

The most fashionable stretch of coastline in France, the Côte d'Azur extends from Saint-Tropez to Menton near the border with Italy. Côte d'Azur translates to "Coast of Blue," a fitting name to describe the Mediterranean's mesmerizing cerulean waters. To English speakers, this glamorous

seaside destination is known as the French Riviera, words that have a ring of sun-drenched decadence.

5. Provence

Provence is a gorgeous landscape of olive groves, sun-drenched rolling hills, and deep purple lavender fields, with little villages nestled in the valleys and perched on rocky outcrops. The vibrant scenery has enchanted many famous artists, including Cézanne, Matisse, Chagall, and Picasso.

The rustic natural beauty and country charm of Provence immerses visitors in a place where the art de vivre is a way of life. Sultry weather encourages leisurely strolls along cobblestone streets and afternoons spent on sunny terraces of outdoor cafés. Provence is also a region known for its delicious cuisine, which is based on olive oil, vegetables, and aromatic herbs.

6. Chamonix-Mont-Blanc

The awesome spectacle of Mont Blanc in the French Alps is an unforgettable sight. The highest mountain peak in Europe, Mont Blanc soars to 4,810 meters. Thanks to its elevation, Mont Blanc ("White Mountain") is always blanketed in snow.

Beneath its heavenly peak is the traditional alpine village of Chamonix, nestled in a high-mountain valley. This quaint little town is filled with historic churches, cozy chalet restaurants, and charming auberges.

Chamonix is a great base for skiing, hiking, rock climbing, and outdoor adventures, or just relaxing. This delightful village is one of the best places to visit in France for inspiring natural scenery and alpine accommodations. Upscale mountain lodges and cozy chalets welcome guests in style.

Catering to diners with good appetites, local restaurants serve hearty traditional French meals, as well as international cuisine. To sample the regional Savoyard specialties, try the charcuterie, fondue, and raclette (melted Gruyère, Comté or Emmentaler cheese served with boiled potatoes).

Italy

The best time to visit Italy is during spring (March-May) and autumn (September-November), when the temperatures are comfortable and there are fewer crowds.

Time zone in Italy (GMT+1)

Rome Fiumicino Airport FCO

Milan Malpensa Airport MXP

Officially known as the Italian Republic the country of Italy is a boot-shaped peninsula in the heart of the Mediterranean Sea. It shares its northern borders with France, Switzerland, Austria and Slovenia. Several small islands also form part of Italy, among them, Sicily and Sardinia are the largest. The charming Alps and Apennine mountains criss-cross the country's landscape.

Italy boasts one of the longest coastlines in the world and around 248 beaches of Italy have been awarded the Blue Flag status for their clear emerald waters and unspoiled sands. The country is home to Europe's largest active volcano Mt. Etna - a UNESCO World Heritage Site, providing a spectacular sighting of eruptions, lava flows, soot-filled skies and extensive caves. Interestingly Italy has the world's highest number of World Heritage sites - 51 in all.

Known worldwide for its pizza, pasta, Colosseum, Milan fashion, opera music and glitz, Italy offers various other exciting attractions.

The rich culture, heritage and chequered history of Italy is reflected in its cities. Rome- the capital city is famed for its 3000 years old architecture, art, and historical heritage. The Colosseum - one of the seven wonders of the world and the Roman Forum are some prime attractions here. Venice sprawled over 100 islands is intertwined with its famous canals all around. Milan is a hub of international fashion and design. The famous Gothic Duomo di Milano cathedral and the Santa Maria Delle Grazie convent flaunt Leonardo da Vinci's fresco. Florence is famed for its iconic architecture and masterpieces of art from Renaissance period. Florence Cathedral and The Galleria dell'Accademia and Uffizi Gallery are some of its remarkable sites to visit.

Italy loves its hot baths and is home to numerous spas offering mud and water therapies to its travellers. Most well-known are its island baths such as on volcanic Ischia, Tuscan hot springs, mountain baths in the town of Bormio and the thermal park of Lake Garda.

Italian cuisine, especially desserts are famous globally; its signature desserts being gelato, cannoli, tiramisu, biscotti spumoni, Neapolitan, Tartufo and zeppole. Italy is also a place for those who love to drive hot wheels. One can hire any super elite car in Italy including Ferrari, Pagani, Alfa Romeo, Maserati after all, the country has a history of starting Formula1.

The people of Italy are passionate about their culture and language. Italians love their food, wine, and siesta and believe in living their life to the fullest. Family values are embedded in their daily routine, as home cooked meal during lunch time is valued more than any other appointment at work. Sharing food with family, friends, and neighbors is a tradition which Italians follow staunchly.

Pisa, located in the province of Pisa, Italy is best known for its leaning tower. It is also famous for its museums, art and architecture. Though, ironically the most famous monument here is a result of flawed architecture. This city of love is also a famous destination for couples. Unwind in the pleasant weather and enjoy the delectable cuisine of Pisa. The tourist spots are what attract the crowds. The different neighbouring cities that you can visit while in Pisa are Tuscany, Florence etc.
Without the University of Pisa this city would not be the same. The students here organize parties and street festivals, which are a treat to the eyes. The peaceful walk from Campo dei Miracoli (The Fields of Miracles) is filled with interesting sights, restaurants, shops and

monuments. One leisurely walk through the city will leave you mesmerized by the beauty of this love-struck town. This city is not only famous as a heritage sight but also other entertainments such as music, dance, sports and fests. It also has a rich culture and tradition. The fests like festival of flowers and Crazy Street festival are also enthralling.

Venice -Meandering canals linking charming palaces built on a lagoon, define the captivating city of Venice. A synonym for romance, this city with its old-world charm, serves as a paradise for newly-weds. Venice provides an idyllic honeymoon retreat for couples to bask in its Italian glory and kindle the fire of new-found love. Take serene gondola rides and start to know your better half, while you get awed by the beauty of this awe-inspiring place.\r\n\r\nVenice thrives on its historical marvels that stand tall even today and have changed little over time. Transport yourself back to the city's glorious yesteryears, as you witness the wealth of Venetian architectural treasures along the Grand Canal, such as Ca' d'Oro, the Doge's Palace, Santa Maria Della Salute and many more. Delve into delicious Venetian seafood, which has a distinct taste that is hard to find elsewhere. Venice is brimming with stunning works of art, echoed in its numerous museums and art galleries, such as Ca' Rezzonico and Gallerie dell'Accademia. This enchanting city looks like a surreal painting, having inspired artists, authors, poets, authors and the like throughout history. The autumn months of September to November is when Venice turns into a magical paradise

Florence -A city that has been around since Roman times, Florence the capital of Italy's Tuscany region finds a prominent place in Medieval European history as the epicentre of the Renaissance. Pertaining to which, a lot of Renaissance influence is reflected in the sculptures, architectures, and the general look of the city. Many other cultural gems of the city are also very well represented at the various museums as well as art galleries. \n\nA place dotted with innumerable historical and cultural marvels, Florence is one of the art hubs of Europe and galleries like the Uffizi Gallery attract tourists from all over the world. Besides art, Florence is one of the European fashion capitals. Brands such as Gucci, Cavalli, Prada and Chanel and based out of this city as Florence had always had a strong presence of textile industries since the 14th century. Known for its street cuisine which many visitors find might also find outlandish, Florence is a foodie's delight. The city hosts many festivals and unique celebrations such as Scoppio del Carro and the Calcio Storico that showcase the culture.

Milan is the second most densely inhabited city in Italy and is the seat of Italy's stock exchange, besides being an industrial hub and a globally accepted arbiter of contemporary fashion and design. Beneath the veneer of its chrome, glass, and steel, the city exudes an aura of history and culture. Duomo, the grand Gothic cathedral oozes beauty and power. The art collections of bygone eras, the gigantic trade fair complexes, the sparkling nightlife, the prestige of the opera at La Scala, the treasures of Leonardo da Vinci's genius, religious fanaticism to football and mouth savoring cuisine make Milan a must-see destination. \r\n\r\nThe city is famous for hosting many international events and fairs such as Milan Fashion Week and the Milan Furniture Fair. Milan is a treasure trove with its theaters, museums, and landmarks like the Milan Cathedral and Sforza Castle. It boasts well-manicured parks like Sempione Park, the 18th-century Montanelli Gardens, and the Forlanini Park. The Parco Delle Cave features artificial lakes and woods. Wander around the protected regional parks, the farmlands, and woodlands of the north and south (Parco

Agricolo), winding up in the Arena Civica. Marvel at the art on display at the Palazzo dell'Arte including the incredible architecture of the Arco Della Pace and the Castello Sforzesco.

Rome -The seat of the mighty Ancient Roman Empire, Rome boasts astonishing history that very few cities can rival. A visit to this ancient city is literally a walk through time. Historic marvels such as the Colosseum, Roman Forum and the Pantheon will leave even the most die-hard history buffs in awe. The city is home to priceless works of art, including world-class museums, Renaissance frescoes, Byzantine mosaics and medieval piazzas, which are impossible to reproduce even today. The splendid churches will take you back to the early days of Christianity. Vatican City is still revered by millions of Roman Catholics.\n\nModern Rome is very different from its ancient predecessor, but has its own romantic allure. The 'dolce vita' lifestyle is the essence of this city. Wander around the meandering streets and you will find yourself hanging out at quaint cafes and restaurants, gorging on delicious food. If you believe in luck, throw a coin in the Trevi Fountain and wish for the best. The city's music scene is quite admirable, with innumerable concert halls and venues. Rome takes you away from the rat-race of life and compels you to enjoy life to the fullest.

Spain

The best time to visit Spain is in late spring (April to May) or early autumn (September to October), due to the pleasant temperatures and lighter crowds. However, the country's diverse offerings mean you can find something to enjoy at any time of year.

Cradled on the Iberian Peninsula in southwest Europe lies the captivating mainland of Spain. It is surrounded by Portugal in the west and shares a strip with France to the North. On the other sides it is flanked by the Mediterranean sea to the south and east, the Atlantic ocean to the northwest and the Bay of Biscay to the northeast. Some interesting Spanish archipelagos also lie in the Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean Sea.

Spain's pleasant Mediterranean climate, its dramatic coastlines, charming landscapes, rich historical legacy, eclectic culture, culinary expertise and vibrant nightlife have made it a much sought-after destination, and Spain's international tourist industry is among the largest in the world.

Madrid, the capital and a colourful cosmopolitan, is home to the Royal Palace of the monarchs, the singular Prado museum that showcases the works of European masters, Puerta del Sol - the hub of its cultural activities and the lively San Miguel Market.

Barcelona its top tourist attraction boasts of the architectural splendours of Casa Batllo and the Sagrada Familia church. Its must do's include a walk down the tree-lined La Rambla avenue, and sunbathing at its most popular beach - Barceloneta.

Barcelona and Madrid are both well-known for their buzzing culture and happening nightlife. Though many prefer to define the true party destination of Spain as Ibiza - known for its wild EDM parties. And the list is incomplete without a mention of Valencia that hosts some of the most famous discos of Spain.

Some other hot destinations of Spain include Seville with its ornate Alcazar castle and its famous flamenco dance; Granada renowned for the moorish Alhambra fortress; Valencia known for its ultra-uber City of Arts and Science. And Segovia with its fairy-tale medieval castle and Roman aqueduct.

Spain is Europe's main producer of wind energy and its windmills can be seen dotting the countryside everywhere and adding to its charm. And of course a description of Spain cannot end without a mention of Football its key sport, as Spain is home to two of the world's most renowned football clubs - Real Madrid C.F. and FC Barcelona.

Barcelona is the capital of Catalonia, in the Kingdom of Spain. It is a Mediterranean city with Roman remains, artistic treasures, and beautiful beaches. Barcelona has a rich cultural background and today, it is a significant cultural center and a popular tourist destination. It has numerous monuments that have featured in the UNESCO World Heritage Sites like the Park Guell, Casa Mila, La Sagrada Familia, Palau de La Musica Catalana, etc. This enchanting city has so much to offer from ancient architectural wonders to first-rate museums to the Catalan cuisine and the fun-loving people. Visitors can take a stroll along the Ramblas to get entertained by the street performers or take a tram trip to the top of Tibidabo or do some shopping along the Passeig de Gracia, then have a drink on the beach before ending the night at a local club. Those who love the sea can try kayaking, paddle boarding or even taking a sunset cruise. The Collserola Hills provide an excellent setting for hiking and mountain biking. Barcelona is where you will find the beauty of the past, blending perfectly with the excitement of the present.

Madrid is one city that caters to the interest of inquisitive travelers who come to Spain to spend time amidst some exquisite pieces of art and creativity. The city derives great influence from European culture-lifestyle, food, and people. The pre-historic monuments and their architectural excellence form a major part of the city's cultural heritage. Adore the magnificence of this brilliant city as you explore the amazing sculptures and art forms here.
Rejuvenate yourself in the mesmerizing landscape, hills and valleys, across the city and discover your adventurous side with some trekking. Feel at home while you interact with the locals, as they brief you about their gorgeous city. Admire their population diversity. The inhabitants of Madrid have an amazing sense of style which you can witness anytime on the streets and take inspiration from. El Prado is a must visit for anyone who steps into Madrid, as it introduces you to the major paintings and fine arts over centuries. Do not miss the traditional 'bullfighting' that stands as an identity of the city.

Seville, beautifully nestled away in Spain has a flamboyant, ever-evolving Andalusian metropolis, which was mythically founded 3,000 years ago by the Greek God Hercules. It is situated on the river Guadalquivir in southern Spain and is brimming with orange blossoms on every corner. One of Seville's distinguishing features is that one can sense the city's tone with the change in the seasons, each of which brings a different mood in the air, such as the solemnity during the Semana Santa and vivacity in the Spring Fiesta. The splendid architecture in this city attests to the works of many ancient dynasties that have walked across her paths. Torre del Oro, Torre de Plata, Casa de Pilatos, Giralda, Patio de Los Naranjos, the area of Triana, the Macarena Walls, the Alcazar and the Palacio Pedro are some of the architectural masterpieces of Seville. The beautiful sights of the city can be seen in the palatial Reales Alcazares and its church buildings like The

Cathedral.

The abundance of sunlight coupled with its rich culture, history, and folklore make Seville a lovely place to visit. Seville has its natural treasures in its Doñana Nature Reserve (which is a UNESCO World Heritage Site), the Biosphere Reserve and the Sierra Norte Nature Reserve. Seville has painted fresh brush strokes on its ancient canvas with the Archaeological Museum showcasing its famous Roman ruins and the modern Metropol Parasol, considered to be the largest timber-framed structure in the world.

Granada

With a medieval charm about it, the city of Granada in Spain offers a perfect destination for history buffs as well as nature lovers. Like a scene straight out of the movies, Granada is blessed with a panoramic, awe-inspiring landscape where the Sierra Nevada mountain ranges rule the skyline. The city stretches out to the plains of Vega and ends on the coastline of the Mediterranean Sea. With the rivers like Genil and Darro criss-crossing through the heart of the city, Granada is blessed with fertile plains. With stunning architecture that dates back to the Moorish rule and Christian domination, Granada has a rich heritage. This is a city where narrow streets and forts speak of bloody history and great conquests, and forts and cathedrals stand testimony to its stories.

If you are embarking on a trip to this beautiful city, be sure that you visit the Alhambra, the Museum of Alhambra, Granada Cathedral, Arc of Elvira, Royal Chapel of Granada and Monasterio de San Jeronimo. Seek out some adventures in the mountains of Sierra Nevada. Lately, the city has turned into a cosmopolitan hub where its medieval splendour has fused with modernity and students from outside have flocked into this city for higher education at the University of Granada.

Ireland

The best time to visit Ireland is between March and May, and September to November, when it's not as crowded as it is in summer, or as cold as it is in winter. That said, Ireland has a mild, temperate climate and although it's rainy at times, you can visit all year round.

The Republic of Ireland, more often referred to as just Ireland, lies off the coast of United Kingdoms. To its north is Northern Island (part of UK) and on the remaining sides it is surrounded by the Atlantic ocean; with the Irish sea to the east, the Celtic sea to the south and the St George's channel on the south-east.

The lush green landscape with rolling hills adorned by ancient castles and heritage sites has lent this beautiful country the nickname of 'Emerald Isle.' The birthplace of some renowned writers as Oscar Wilde and Samuel Beckett, Ireland is as renowned for its myths and legends, as it is for its literary and musical traditions. Ireland has a vibrant culture and is home to the happy and highly hospitable Irish folk and their favourite Guinness beer.

Ireland is a traveller's paradise with its historic sites and natural wonders. Some of its most renowned monuments in stone are the Blarney Castle near Cork City - one of the oldest castles, the spectacular Rock of Cashley fortress at County Tipperary and the very popular Bunratty Castle in County Clare, not to miss the pre-historic Newgrange monument in County Meath said to be dated from 3200BC, among others.

If road trips is your thing, then don't miss the chance of a drive through The Ring of Kerry. It comprises a circuitous route through the Iveragh Peninsula and covers some of the most scenic sites of Ireland including the Killarney National Park, The Skellig Michael and the Beehive cells, Ross Castle among numerous others.

See a different side of Ireland as you hit Dublin - the vibrant capital. The Temple Bar district where pubs, cafes, restaurants and craft shops overflow its cobbled streets. Grafton Street with its chic shopping options and the not-to-be-missed Guinness Storehouse. The cultural capital too - it has awe-inspiring museums, The Book of Kells and the Malahide Castle.

Galway City prides itself as the bohemian city of Ireland - the city that is always alive with celebrations and boasts a rich and vibrant culture. Situated in what is known as the Hidden Ireland, it is well-known as a gathering spot for writers, artists, musicians and has a rich theatre culture.

Ireland, today is among the wealthiest countries in the world as per GDP per capita, and was at the seventh position among most developed nations according to the UN's Human Development Index of 2012.

The capital of Ireland, Dublin is a small city with a huge personality. The city has one foot firmly rooted in its glorious past and the other foot in the tantalizing 21st century. The stone streets and the old buildings of central Dublin are still drenched with the town's history, while the Docklands area sparkles with modern restaurants, trendy bars, and fancy glass buildings. All the stories of Ireland's vibrant nightlife, old pubs and high-spirited locals (pun intended) are true. It is the perfect city to soak up some charming Irish culture.

Dublin is also the business gateway to Europe because of its low corporation tax, the people's fluency in English and a well-educated workforce. Though the city's gardens and rolling landscapes will keep you captivated, some other places you shouldn't miss while visiting Dublin are Trinity College, St. Stephen's Green Park, Newgrange, Dublin Castle, James Joyce Cultural Centre and National Museum of Ireland. If you travel a little bit from the city center, you can spend a day kite surfing and relishing some fresh ice cream along the sandy beaches of Dublin's coastline.

Capital city of Northern Ireland, Belfast is a city of optimism where the pint glass is always half full. In the 21st century, Belfast is one of the world's top tourist destinations. Home of the Titanic, Belfast's history is riddled with tragedy, but the city has overcome many hurdles and is now on the path to becoming one of the safest and most welcoming cities in Northern Ireland.

Belfast is a young cosmopolitan city and unlike other mega cities in the world, where tourism has laid bare all its secrets, it still has unexplored and unknown niches. With an impressive Victorian and Edwardian architectural landscape, Belfast is a treat for the eyes. Its cultural scene is vibrant and raw, undiluted by touristy expectations. Its industrial heritage looms over the city reminding the traveller of Belfast's history of a time when it was the catalyst of the industrial revolution. Home

to the world's biggest shipyard in the 20th century, Belfast has an enviable collection of ships that are being opened for public perusal. Belfast, the economic, cultural and financial centre of Northern Ireland, is an intriguing city to visit – a city that presents the best of the Irish and British cultures.

Netherlands

The best time to visit the Netherlands is in June, or between September and November, when the leaves change and the foods and beers of the festive season emerge. The Netherlands - in particular Amsterdam - can get pretty busy during the peak summer months, especially in July when the schools break up. The spring shoulder months of April and May

The Netherlands is neatly nestled away in the lap of Western Europe. It is bounded by Germany to the east and Belgium to the south; the country shares maritime borders with Belgium, United Kingdom, and Germany. Netherlands is also surrounded by three island territories in the Caribbean and covers a total area of 41,543 sq. Km.

Officially known as the Kingdom of Netherlands, it is known for its charming villages and towns set in a beautiful flat landscape. The best way to capture and explore the alluring beauty of this country is by cycling at no costs. The capital city Amsterdam has an urbane quintessence and boasts of an active and a truly entertaining nightlife.

Netherlands is home to some of the most exotic tourist spots. The Amsterdam's Canal with its 400-year-old streets, beautiful architectures of cafes, shops and hotels will blow your mind. The Keukenhof: The Garden of Europe boasts of an exquisite floral bounty that just cannot be missed. The Hoge Veluwe National Park is the largest nature reserve in Netherlands which is famous for hiking, bird-watching and also biking. The splendid Van Gogh Museum is a delight for art lovers, ranked as the 35th top art museum in the world; it houses the magnificent paintings of the famous painter Van Gogh.

With still much to allure the tourists, The Anne Frank Museum in the capital is also a famous spot that narrates a beautiful tale of the young Anne Frank's courage through her writings during World War 2. The Windmills of Kinderdijk is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, which houses the largest surviving combination of Windmills in the country and simply cannot be missed. The Zeeland's Spectacular Dikes is a star attraction, declared as one of the Seven Wonders of the world it is an engineering marvel that is built to prevent floods using modern techniques, enjoy walking along the dikes while inhaling crisp, cool air.

Dutch is the official language of Netherlands and is spoken by the majority of the population. English is also an official language along with Frisian and Papiamentu. Other languages that are used for communication are German, Spanish and French, along with several other dialects.

The estimated population of Netherlands is 16.8 million people. Over 88% of the population is Dutch. The country is also home to Indonesians, Turks, Moroccans and Antilleans.

Amsterdam - Historic buildings, arched bridges, and over-striking canals adorn the beautiful city of Amsterdam. The capital city of Netherlands and the 'Venice of the North' is the essence of the

culturally rich continent of Europe. Every corner of Amsterdam is bustling with architectural masterpieces, from ancient museums and art galleries to spectacular theaters. The cycling culture of the city is admirable, which is not only a mode of transport but a way of life here. Whether they are going to work or visiting a coffee shop round the corner, the locals love to wander around the city with their two-wheelers. Hop on a boat and experience bliss, as you roam through the canals that criss-cross the city. You can rent a bike and experience the city like a local. Get a glimpse inside the culture of this vibrant city, by visiting treasures at the Van Gogh Museum or the Rijksmuseum. Revisit history and admire the bravery of the courageous Anne Frank at the Anne Frank House. Appreciate the beauty of mother nature at Vondelpark, which also houses an open-air theater. Whether you are here to experience history, culture or the free-spirit of Amsterdam, you will be enthralled for sure.

The Netherlands is known everywhere as a land of windmills, canals, and tulips, and today's visitors certainly will find these among its many tourist attractions. But along with the country's many breathtaking gardens and picturesque villages, those sightseeing here will also find the vibrant capital city of Amsterdam filled with museums showcasing a rich heritage of artists (think Rembrandt and Van Gogh). Other places to visit include numerous medieval castles and cityscapes, along with a 13,800-acre national park, and a tide control system that's been named one of the Seven Wonders of the Modern World.

Given the relatively small size of The Netherlands, all these attractions and fun things to do are within a relatively compact area, and the landscape is quite flat (the highest elevation is barely a thousand feet above sea level). Consequently, it's extremely easy to do at least a little of your sightseeing the Dutch way: by bicycle. Many communities actively encourage the use of pedal-power and provide free bikes to explore the sights.

However you choose to see the Netherlands, you're guaranteed a great time in one of the friendliest and most liberal cultures in Europe. Be sure to plan your travel itinerary with our list of the top-rated tourist attractions in The Netherlands.

1. Jordaan and Amsterdam's Canals

Canals are as important a part of Amsterdam's cityscape as they are to the city of Venice, and some of the most enduring memories for any visitor are the time spent exploring the city's wonderful waterways. While many of Amsterdam's best tourist attractions can easily be accessed by boat tour or water taxi - including most of the major museums and art galleries - nothing beats strolling along the smaller, quieter streets that line the waterways.

Particularly charming is the Jordaan, a neighborhood built in the early 1600s to house workers and immigrants drawn here for the city's religious tolerance. Along with its small canal-side houses, look for the neighborhood's many "hofjes," the quaint inner courtyards hidden behind the buildings.

Another photo-worthy neighborhood is the Grachtengordel, with its many small bridges and quaint 17th-century homes. You'll be rewarded as you explore these 400-year-old streets with examples

of beautiful architecture, small boutique shops, cafés, and gardens. Be sure to look out for the many houseboats moored along the canals.

Just a 10-minute stroll away is Dam Square, a must-visit when in Amsterdam. In addition to its numerous restaurants, cafés, and shops this vast public square is home to some of the city's most-visited tourist attractions, including the spectacular Royal Palace (Koninklijk Palace); the attractive New Church (Nieuwe Kerk); and the country's most important war memorial, the National Memorial Statue.

2. Keukenhof

Think of the Netherlands, and you'll inevitably think of tulips, the country's most popular flower. And one of the most beautiful places to visit in the Netherlands showcases these and other spring bulbs in spectacular abundance.

Keukenhof, otherwise known as the "Garden of Europe," is located on the outskirts of the town of Lisse in what's widely considered the "bulb belt" of the Netherlands. The largest public garden in the world, encompassing more than 70 acres of what was once the former kitchen (or "keuken") garden of a large country estate, Keukenhof displays more than 700 varieties of tulips, which are at their height in April and May.

But thanks to its massive commercial hot houses, the display continues almost year-round. In these, you'll see endless rows of flowering tulips, along with thousands of hyacinths, crocuses, and daffodils.

4. Anne Frank House, Amsterdam

The Anne Frank House is a must-see when in Amsterdam. On Prinsengracht, in the home where Anne's family hid for much of WWII (they were Jewish refugees from Frankfurt), is where this remarkable girl wrote her famous diary. Although she died just two months before the war ended, her legacy lives on through her words, which have since been translated into 51 languages.

The back of the fully-restored house where the Frank family had their hiding place has been kept in its original state as much as possible and is a poignant monument to a tragic slice of world history and a brave young woman who continues to inspire people around the globe. A word of caution: tickets for this must-see attraction do sell out, so be sure to reserve yours online well ahead of time.

6. The Windmills of Kinderdijk

On the River Noord between Rotterdam and Dordrecht is the famous village of Kinderdijk ("Children's Dike"), which takes its name from an incident during the St. Elizabeth's Day flood of 1421 after a child's cradle had been stranded on the dike.

The big draw these days are the fantastically preserved 18th-century windmills. Now UNESCO World Heritage Sites, the 19 Kinderdijk windmills, built between 1722 and 1761, are the largest surviving concentration of windmills in the Netherlands. Originally used to drain the fenlands,

these majestic buildings with their impressive 92-foot sails are open to the public from April to October, including special Mill Days when the sails are set in motion.

Czech Republic

The best times to visit the Czech Republic are in late spring (May) and early fall (September and October). Not only do these months have the best weather, but also fewer crowds and cheaper accommodation prices.

Czech Republic is a dazzling country in Central Europe. This landlocked country shares borders with Slovakia in the East, Austria in South, Poland in Northeast and Germany in North and West. The land of ostentatious castles, iconic architectures and vibrant renaissance history has much to offer. The capital city Prague boasts of excellent attractions, while the charismatic countryside of Czech has breathtaking national parks and conservation areas.

Czech Republic, the hub of medieval paradise is home to the glitzy Prague Castle that is known for being the largest building in the world in terms of area. Other attractions include the Charles Bridge, which offers panoramic views of Prague. The splendid national monument of Brno's Cathedral of St. Peter and Paul, the elegant and charming old town dominated by ?eský Krumlov Castle - a UNESCO world heritage site, and the National Library are also of great significance.

Czech Republic has more to allure the tourists. The soothing spas of Karlovy Vary, the fine artistry and decorative works in the Glass Museum, beautiful structures made from the wealth of Kutna Hora - a UNESCO world heritage site and the breathtaking beauty of the Bohemian Paradise is sure to swathe your senses. The lovely palace of Konopišt? Chateau and the Archduke's Trophies which displays stunning architecture symbolizes the grandeur of this country. The Hluboka Castle which is loosely based upon the famous Windsor Castle in England is another major attraction here.

Apart from its magnificent sights, the verdant atmosphere of Czech Republic invites tourists all year around. The cold weather marks the beginning of the year, which is followed by beautiful spring showers. Later, the warm and cozy summer opens up numerous excursion possibilities.

Czech Republic has a population of 10,548,124, amounting to 0.14% of the world's total population. 95% of the population is Czech, who are known to be descendents of Slavic people hailing from Black Sea Carpathian region, which is present day Austria. Other ethnic groups are Poles, Romani, Germans and Hungarians. The capital, Prague is also home to Turks, Greeks, Yugoslavs and Italians.

Prague -Popularly known as one of Europe's most well-preserved cities, Prague boasts of a millennium-old history, splendid castles, countless churches and cobbled streets. The magic of this Czech city has an allure akin to a fairy tale, something that sets it apart from other European cities. The enchanting Prague Castle dominates the skyline of the city. Graceful bridges adorn the beauty of the majestic Vltava River, on the banks of which the historical center is located. The meandering lanes of Prague are full of surprises, making it an amazing place to wander around. Art is plentiful in Prague and finds its way in every corner. The city has a wonderfully laid-back culture, and the

people love to hang out at the local bars, cafes, and restaurants. A good meal in Prague is incomplete without a glass of local beer, which is considered as one of the best in the world. Attending one of the city's famed jazz festivals is a great way to enjoy a taste of their culture. As the city has so much to offer, it won't take you long to fall in love with this city.

Austria

The best time to visit Austria is during the shoulder months, in spring, between April – May, and in fall, between September – October. The weather is excellent for outdoor activities, and the crowd is sparser. The high tourist season between June – August sees excellent weather and sunny days.

Famous as a bridge builder and a venue for cultural exchange in Europe, Austria boasts spectacular landscapes and urban sleeves. Officially the Republic of Austria, it is a landlocked country that covers an area of about 83, 879 Sq Km. A federal republic in East Central Europe, Austria shares its borders with Germany and Czech Republic in the north, Slovakia and Hungary in the east, Italy and Slovenia in the South, and Liechtenstein and Switzerland in the west. The country is blessed with deep carved valleys, rocky flank of mountains and many picturesque lakes.

Austria is dominated by the Alps mountain range in the west and the south. Grossglockner mountain is its highest point with a height of 3,798 meters. The major rivers in the country include the Inn, the Salzach, the Enns, Gali and Drau rivers, and the Murz and Mur rivers.

Vienna, the capital of Austria, is the largest city of the country. Regarded as the 'City of Music', it houses a Museums Quartier that hosts some magnificent museums, and is one of the largest cultural quarters of the world. Many famous music icons like Beethoven, spent a major part of their life in Vienna. Also, the world famous instrumentalist - Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, was born in the country, in the city of Salzburg. Graz and Linz are other prominent cities in Austria that are known for their architectural splendours. Tirol city is famous with tourists for its enchanting mountain landscapes while Innsbruck has cultural pleasures along with adventurous expeditions.

As Austria is an alpine region, sports like snowboarding, ski-jumping and mountain skiing are prominent here. Though football gets most attention followed by hockey, ice-hockey, basketball and Formula One racing. The country is also famous for its culinary circuits. People eat a well-balanced diet with variations of pork, beef and countless vegetables here. Krapfen, which are essentially doughnuts filled with custard or apricot jam are a very popular bakery item.

With a population of over 8 million, Austria has German as its official language. Others languages including Turkish, Bosnian, Serbian, English, Hungarian, Croatian, Polish, Albanian, Slovenian, Czech, Arabic and Romanian are also spoken here. Austrian nationals share a mixed view on religion. Over 44% of population believe in God, out of which many follow Roman Catholic Church. However, more than 38% people believe in existence of some sort of life force, and 12% do not believe in God at all.

Innsbruck

The capital of Tyrol located in West Austria is a wonder to behold. The rocky spires belonging to the Nordkette range lies so close to the city that within a few minutes you can travel from the city to the 2000-meter-high alpine pastures. The city of Innsbruck is famous for its contribution in the fields of games and sports and has been a favourite spot for winter sports. The city of Innsbruck also boasts imperial architecture that speaks about its great past. The Imperial Palace, Ambras Palace, Ottoburg and the Wilten Basilica are some of the architectural marvels in Innsbruck. \n\nAt the heart of the city is situated the famous Golden Roof, which is considered by many as the main symbol of the city. Emperor Maximilian I got this structure built on the occasion of his wedding. Reliefs depicting the emperor and his wives namely Bianca, Maria, Sforza, and Mary of Burgundy can still be seen here. The region around Hofburg hosts several tourist spots such as the Silver Chapel, which owes its names to the silver impression of the Virgin and the Imperial Court Palace. The diverse attractions of this place from Innsbruck Festival Week to modern and ancient sightseeing attractions make this city an exciting place to visit.

Salzburg is one of the most picturesque cities in the world. The capital of Austria, Salzburg is famous for being the home of the legendary composer Mozart, and the location of the super hit classic film The Sound of Music. The Old Town of Salzburg has been declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO for its magnificent baroque architecture. \n\nThe city is slow and magical with music wafting through its streets that are lined with small home run cafes. Salzburg provides an elevated experience with the Salzach River rushing past it, and the city inching up till the Hohensalzburg fortress and the Alps in the backdrop to the entire scene. Salzburg is the center from where tourists go toward the Alps. The city offers beauty and serenity, in sync with its natural surroundings. Tourism is one of its biggest industries and Sound of Music location tours and searching for Mozart's house are some of the highlights that every tourist checks off their list when they visit Salzburg.

Vienna, a city strewn with magnificent architecture and beautiful, picturesque landscapes. The capital city of Austria, Vienna is a tourist's paradise. Whether you are on a short trip or an extended stay, the city will charm you equally with its vibrant music and culture. Stop at Alte Donau to enjoy the natural beauty of the Oxbow Lake or stroll in the magnificent gardens of Kurpark Oberlaa which houses various lakes and beautiful botanical features. Vienna is also known as the City of Music for its music legacy and being the home of Mozart, Beethoven, and Sigmund Freud. Cycling culture is quite prevalent among the locals, and you will find cyclists all over the city. It is the preferred mode of transport as well.\r\n\r\nGet a glimpse of the artwork and architectural magnificence in the different Palaces such as Hofburg, Schonbrunn and Belvedere Palace. You will be amazed by the unique architecture of St Stephen's Cathedral. Get mesmerized by the amazing collection of drawings and old master prints at Albertina, along with photographs and various modern graphic arts. Explore the various attractions at the Museumsquartier which is the eighth largest cultural area in the world. This place has a lively mix of cafes, bar, shops, museums, art galleries and street markets giving you plenty of reasons to love it even more.

Germany

Germany is Europe's largest economy. It is also the second most populous nation after Russia on the continent, with a population of over 81.5 million. Its territory stretches from the North Sea and Baltic in the north to the Alps in the south. The country is traversed by rivers like the Danube, Elbe, and Rhine. Officially the Federal Republic of Germany, it covers an area of 137.847 Sq Km and offers soul-stirring landscapes, romantic palaces, half-timbered towns and a vibrant culture.

Berlin, the capital of Germany, is a cultural centre of the country and is known for its art scene, modern architecture, and happening nightlife. Berlin Wall, Museum Island, Brandenburg Gate and Holocaust Memorial are the key attractions of Berlin. On the other hand, Frankfurt is the major financial hub of the country. The largest city in the state of Hesse, it glints with skyscrapers and is home to one of the largest stock exchanges in the world. The new headquarters of European Central Bank also lies in Frankfurt. But despite all the modernistic developments, the city is extremely traditional and charming at heart.

Munich is home to Mediterranean-style cafes and beer halls. It is Germany's unofficial southern capital where the world comes together to celebrate the famous Oktoberfest. It has many magnificent art galleries and museums that give a character to its royal Bavarian heritage.

In Germany, two-third of the population is Protestant, one-third is Roman Catholic and Jews are a minority. A large number of Muslims also reside in the country. German is the official and predominantly spoken language. However, Danish, Low German, Romany, Sorbian, Frisian are recognized minority languages. The most used immigrant languages in the country include Turkish, Polish, Kurdish, the Balkan languages, and Russian.

In terms of cuisine, Germany is famous for its pretzels and sausages. Bread is a significant part of the meal along with meats like pork, chicken or beef. The country produces over 1200 different types of pastries and rolls. German cheeses account for about a third of all the cheese produced in Europe. Although wine is popular in many cities of Germany, it is known for its beer purity and consumption.

Berlin- The capital of Germany, Berlin is famous for its fascinating history, excellent variety of attractions and its thriving cultural scene. It is regarded as one of the best and exciting European capitals. Some of the most significant events of Germany's history took place in Berlin and now it's this beautiful blend of the past and present that make Berlin such a special place to visit. It is the city of music, art, and museums. It houses over 160 museums, including the many that are on Museum Island.
Other places to visit here include the Grunewald Forest, Berlin Wall, Brandenburg Gate, The Holocaust Memorial, Reichstag Building and so much more. In Berlin, you can shop till you drop for a variety of things ranging from vintage clothing and souvenirs to furniture and the latest fashion wear. The shopping spaces range from flea markets to malls, boutiques and the KaDeWe - Europe's largest department store. With no closing time, you can enjoy a late night show or dance till the sun rises. The laidback lifestyle of the city is infectious and keeps you relaxed, yet eager to see and do more.

Munich -Regarded as the most prosperous city in Germany, Munich happens to be the hotchpotch of modern technology and ancient history. It is situated on the banks of the river Isar and lies to the north of the Bavarian Alps. The third largest city in the country, Munich is home to some of the world's best universities and colleges. Backed by a riveting history, the city will take you on a glorious journey back in time with its magnificent arsenal of royal avenues and squares. \r\n\r\nThe numerous palaces and churches scattered far and wide across the city hold witness to the rich heritage of Bavarian legacy, notable among which are Nymphenburg, Residenz, and Frauenkirche. The annual beer celebration, Oktoberfest, is what entices millions of tourists from across the world to Munich. Not to forget, Munich takes the privilege of owning FC Bayern, Germany's most successful football club and a multiple winner of UEFA Champions League. Munich's remarkable capacity to keep up with the pace of time through its astonishing developments in technology while simultaneously sustaining its cultural heritage has helped it acquire the sobriquet "the city of laptops and lederhosen."

Dusseldorf

Although well known for its fashion and arts scene, the attractions of Dusseldorf are not just limited to its world-renowned trade fairs or extremely rich culture. The city is located in western Germany and is famous for its nightlife, especially around the Altstadt, an Old Town along the river Rhine that is often referred to as the world's longest bar. Other things to do in Dusseldorf include visiting the Medienhafen, a newly developed harbour area known for its inspiring avant-grade architecture or the Königsallee, their main shopping street. The tourist places in Dusseldorf such as its many museums, theatres and restaurants get a steady flow of visitors all the year round with the busiest months being July, August and November when Carnival takes place.\n\nThere are many interesting places to eat in Dusseldorf. Beyond the obvious, Dusseldorf attractions also include many opportunities in the corporate sector with the city functioning as a major hub for the fashion, advertising, telecommunications and banking sectors. There are Turkish, Greek, Polish, and Japanese communities and 17% of the Dusseldorf population consist of foreign nationals. The general cosmopolitan and active nature of the city makes it a good place to visit. However, do keep an umbrella since the weather is often wet.

Frankfurt (or Frankfurt am Main) is the fifth-largest city in Germany and also the largest city in the state of Hesse. Situated on the Main River, Frankfurt is Continental Europe's financial capital and a global hub for tourism, commerce, education, and culture. It has the busiest airport in Germany and one of the world's largest stock exchanges. Though it seems like the city is all work and no play, at its heart it remains to be charming and old-fashioned. Frankfurt has beautiful parks, riverside paths, gardens, delightful neighborhoods and quaint taverns serving apple wine with yummy regional food. After Berlin, Frankfurt has the most museums. It also has a vibrant nightlife with lots of entertainment spots.\r\n\r\nThe city has the most diverse culture with the country's largest foreign population. Whether you're here on business or a vacation, here are some things you have to do at Frankfurt- visit the gothic Saint Bartholomeus Cathedral. Take a stroll through the halls of one of the city's numerous galleries, watch a flick at the German Film Museum, or make your way to the top of the Main Tower for a breathtaking views of the city.

Hamburg has had a strong maritime tradition throughout its history including it becoming an Imperial Free City in 1189 AD and a cornerstone of the Hanseatic League in the years to follow. What to see in Hamburg includes one of the 40 theaters, 60 museums, and over 100 musical venues that the city is home to. Some of the better know Hamburg tourist places are the Deutsches Schauspielhaus, the Museum of Art and Industry (Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe) and the English Theatre of Hamburg. Historic Hamburg tourist sites include the Neustadt (New Town) or the Speicherstadt (Warehouse District) both of which were established during the 17th century. Beyond Hamburg tourism, the city is also known for its port that is one of the largest in the Europe. It's functioning as a major hub for the banking, aviation, and arts related sectors have resulted in many employment opportunities in Hamburg. There is a vibrant expat community in Hamburg with about 30% of the cities residents coming from over 180 countries across the world! The general cosmopolitan and friendly nature of the city makes visiting Hamburg attractions an enjoyable and memorable experience.

Kaiserslautern

From adventure tourism to a tour of the relics of the biggest catastrophe of humanity - the Second World War, Kaiserslautern, a city in southwest Germany, offers something for every type of tourist. Kaiserslautern has been the precursor of and incubator for both the world wars, the battleground of France and Germany for a thousand years, but today it is best known for its eponymous international university. Nevertheless, buried bombs of WW2 are found to this day in Kaiserslautern, The town has developed around the old city 'Altstadt' which was demolished and reconstructed many times during its tumultuous past. An ornamental fountain at Altstadt commemorates this. At the city center, you will find the high rise Town Hall, which houses a café on its top floor from where you can see the entire town and the countryside. Another famous tourist attraction in Kaiserslautern is the Roman Catholic Church- Saint Mary's. Being located at the border of a forest, the city houses a botanical garden featuring exotic plants, and it also has Europe's largest public swimming pool.

Stuttgart

The sixth-largest city in Germany, Stuttgart is part of the fourth-largest metropolitan area in the country. A historically rich city along with being an important economic center, Stuttgart lies in the middle of a string of small towns surrounding it on all sides. The Stuttgart metropolitan area is one of the most densely populated areas of Germany. Stuttgart is a blend of medieval architecture as well as contemporary buildings. Not just a city for work, it also has many avenues for recreation such as nightclubs, opera houses, museums, libraries, parks, riversides and many others. Stuttgart also has an active nightlife which people from all over the world come to enjoy. Stuttgart has the reputation of being the cradle of the automobile industry as many of the initial breakthroughs were made here during the latter part of the nineteenth century. There are many automobile-related museums here too, such as the Mercedes-Benz Museum and the Porsche Museum, which are worth a visit. Stuttgart is home to many prestigious educational institutions for all streams, whether it is research sciences, music, arts, or humanities. Stuttgart also has one of the most famous symphony orchestras based out of here, the Stuttgart Radio Symphony Orchestra.

The beautiful Black Forest with its dark, densely-wooded hills is one of the most visited upland regions in all of Europe. Situated in the southwestern corner of Germany and extending 160 kilometers from Pforzheim in the north to Waldshut on the High Rhine in the south, it's a hiker's heaven.

The quaint old town of Füssen, situated between the Ammergau and Allgäu Alps and a popular alpine resort and winter sports center, is a good base from which to explore nearby Neuschwanstein Castle, one of Europe's most famous (and picturesque) royal castles.

Greece

Greece is officially known as the Hellenic Republic and is located at the crossroads of Asia, Africa, and Europe. Situated on the south tip of the Balkan peninsula, sharing land borders with the Republic of Macedonia and Bulgaria to the north, Turkey to the northeast and Albania to the northwest. Greece has the longest coastline on the Mediterranean Basin, also the 11th longest coastline in the world. Eighty percent of Greece is mountainous, and Mount Olympus is its highest peak at 2,918 meters (9,573 ft).

Greece is known for its fascinating history and natural beauty. The countless islands, sandy beaches, ancient archaeological sites, and a balmy Mediterranean climate make it one of Europe's prime tourist destinations.

It might interest you that Greece is the world's third largest producer of olive oil and edible olives, with a 16% share of the international olive oil market. It stands for purity, excellent taste, and high nutritional value. The country also produces the finest cheeses in the world and all Greek cheeses are exported making the nation a huge exporter through the international markets.

Mediterranean cuisine is at its best in this country, and every part of Greece has its own specialty. The sea, the sand, and the creative hands of the inhabitants all together produce flavors which are unforgettable.

Considered the symbol of Athens and Greece, the Acropolis is a rocky mound rising in the heart of modern Athens and crowned by three magnificent temples, the best known and most distinctive is the Parthenon. Rhodes is the largest of the Dodecanese islands with an impressive fortification system, including monumental towers and gates.

Making it to the list of the top destinations Delphi is a UNESCO World Heritage site. You must visit Santorini for its stunning sunsets and dramatic views, fine dining and wineries, while Mykonos is famous for its extreme nightlife and wonderful beaches. Each of these places holds its own unique charm and ambience that attracts visitors to visit the exotic country of Greece.

Athens

The capital and the largest city of Greece, Athens is the financial, administrative, maritime, trade, cultural and industrial centre. It is one of the oldest cities in the world with its history dating back to the Neolithic Age. The city of Athens since time immemorial, has been the centre of arts and philosophy and a busy port city. Athens is home to Aristotle and Plato, the Parthenon and the Acropolis. It is the cradle of the western civilisation and is the site where the tenets of democracy took birth. The political and cultural influence of Athens on Europe especially Rome is undisputable. \n\nThe first Olympic Games was held here in 1896. Walking through Athens is akin to absorbing a history lesson with time periods spanning from ancient to modern. Athens retains and carefully preserves the architectural and cultural relics from its rich past. Contemporary Athens is a bustling city with a strong tourism and trade industry, with beautiful architectural and oceanic vistas for the eyes to feast on.

Mykonos

Known as Greece's glamour island, Mykonos is the perfect spot for tourists who want to enjoy the beauty of nature as well have fun and party hard. The city has earned a reputation for being liberal towards the LGBT community and is dotted with special gay bars and clubs. Elia and Super Paradise beaches are mostly frequented by people of this community. \n\nThe city is famous for its thriving nightlife. If you want to have a romantic rendezvous with your partner, then you should head to the beaches in the north as they are quiet and serene, while the ones in the south are filled with party mongers. For the adventure enthusiasts too, there is a lot on offer. You can engage in adventure sports and choose from a wide range of options such as skiing, jet-skiing, windsurfing, horse riding and parasailing.

Santorini, now officially known as Thira after its classical Greek name of Thera, is a beautiful island in the Aegean Sea. Santorini is a part of Greece and an island within an archipelago which also constitutes of another inhabited island named Therasia. The main attraction on the island of Santorini are the spectacular views of the houses here. What differentiates the houses from any common house is that all of them are painted sparkling white and are constructed on the side of a caldera that falls into the sea. This results in a spectacularly contrasting view of the area and is breathtakingly picturesque. You must have seen this part of Santorini in many Bollywood movies. \n\nOther attractions also include volcano sites, scenic hills, beaches, cliffs, historical and religious monuments and others. Santorini was once a centre of the Minoan civilisation, and thus, the heritage and the culture of this place goes back to ancient times. Santorini is a blend of the Greek, Medieval, and Renaissance culture, which is also evidently prevalent throughout the island and in its inhabitants.

Switzerland

Located in the heart of Europe, Switzerland is a landlocked and mountainous country, the beauty of which bewitch your senses. Officially the Swiss Confederation, it is bordered by Germany to the north, Italy to the south, France to the west, and Austrian and Liechtenstein to the east.

Covering an area of 41,285 Sq Km, Switzerland is a federal directorial republic with 26 cantons, with the medieval city of Bern being the seat of the federal authorities.

About two-third of Switzerland is covered with forests, lakes, and mountains. Zurich is the largest town in the country, and also the global center for banking and finance. It attracts tourists with its bounty of museums, art galleries, boating and hiking opportunities. Lucerne is one of the prettiest cities that boasts 14th-century Chapel Bridge and Water Tower whereas Geneva is known for its fine-trimmed parks. Adventure seekers often visit the towns of Zermatt and Lausanne in the country for they are famous for challenging hikes and steep ski slopes. At 10,000 feet, Mount Titlis is the loftiest mountain in the country, the peaks of which can be closely seen through a cable-car ride.

In Switzerland, there is no official state religion. Most of the cantons recognize official churches that are either Catholic or Swiss Reformed. But, there are some with Old Catholic Church and Jewish congregations. Three of Europe's major languages are official in Switzerland namely German, French, and Italian. It also recognizes Romanch - a Romance language as official.

Switzerland takes pride in its culture that has contributed to literature, music, art, architecture and sciences. Some of the notable festivals celebrated in the country are Paléo Festival, Lucerne Festival, the Locarno International Film Festival, the Montreux Jazz Festival and the Art Basel.

The cuisine in Switzerland includes heavy use of dairy products and a variety of cheeses. Dishes like fondue, raclette and rösti are found almost everywhere. The country is known for its chocolates that are made here since the 18th-century. Muesli is a widely accepted cereal here whereas wine is the most popular alcoholic drink.

Zurich

Set amidst the abundance of nature with enthralling lake views bordered by the magnificent Alps, Zurich appears to be the ideal haven for a travel fanatic. Be it culture, fashion, economy or architecture; this Swiss city promises to provide you with the best of all. The city is deemed to be the most efficient and culturally vibrant metropolis of Europe. It accommodates infinite avenues to explore, ranging from ancient buildings to modern technological hubs. \r\n\r\nZurich is the abode of multitudes of international fashion brands and designs, which legitimately turn it into a shopper's paradise. It is also the financial center of the country and proudly holds the privilege of being the most competitive economy in Europe. A visible evidence of this is the presence of the Swiss Stock Exchange. Needless to say, the quality of life in this city is at its searing heights. It is noteworthy that Zurich is the headquarter of FIFA and also houses some of the world-class universities. The city of Zurich offers a peculiar melange of attractions – from opera houses and art galleries to an extravagant nightlife in the shimmering clubs and bars that are scattered across the city. For those who are fond of trekking, there is the scenic Uetliberg Mountain which is the perfect hiking destination. Other recreational activities include swimming and boat rides in Lake Zurich and the nearby riverside areas.

Geneva

The second-most-populous city in Switzerland, Geneva is also the financial and administrative hub of the world. A concoction of both tradition and modernity, it is home to both cultural and diplomatic organizations. Geneva is the European headquarters of the United Nation's Organization. This global city is not only home to traditional European art, architecture, international organizations, heritage sites, museums, music festivals but also chocolates.

Geneva is also one of the most technologically developed cities and apart from the heritage marvels, there are modern things to see and experience as well. The Geneva Motor Show attracts many people from all over the world. CERN, one of the largest laboratories in the world and home to the famous hadron collider is located very close to the city. Apart from these, Geneva is also a city incredibly rich in art and culture, both old and modern. In fact, there are many pieces of art and sculpture displayed within various areas of the city which are rich in symbolism. Performing arts are also part of this city's culture. The opera house in Geneva is home to the Orchestra de la Suisse Romande. There are many museums in the city as well displaying its heritage, such as the Voltaire Institute and Museum, Mallet house museum among many other famous ones.

Lucerne is a small, but popular town located in central Switzerland. The city lies at the north end of Lake Lucerne, the fourth largest lake in the country. This sapphire lake is strangely shaped, with bends and arms and is surrounded by mountains that tell tales. Lucerne was even popular in the 19th century, and it still has a well-preserved medieval town. The views of Europe's oldest enclosed bridges, rainbow-coloured houses, sunlit plazas and waterfront paths will make you wish you lived there.

Though the city has a historical feel to it, its concert halls (especially the Kultur und Kongresszentrum), museums and carnivals give Lucerne a fresh vibe. Some of the major sightseeing spots are Kapellbrücke (Chapel Bridge), Old Town, Spreuerbrücke, Museum Sammlung Rosengart, Hofkirche, Verkehrshaus der Schweiz, Jesuit Church, Löwendenkmal and the Gletschergarten (Glacier Garden). The city is known for its love for music and literature. Thus, there are numerous festivals and events to entertain the locals and tourists. Lucerne is the perfect starting point to explore the best of Central Switzerland and sites like the Rütli Meadow, Mt. Pilatus and Mount Rigi. Mount Pilatus in the Lake Lucerne region is full of legends. The name of the mountain comes from a rumor that the famous biblical Roman governor Pontius Pilate may have been buried there. Medieval Europeans believed that the mountain formed as a dragon rock falling from the sky. The 2,100 meter (7000 foot) peak offers views of the Swiss and French Alps, as well as Lake Lucerne below.

Lugano

A city located in Ticino region of Southern Switzerland right on the border of Italy, Lugano presents a perfect example of how the two cultures merge with one another. While it is within the Italian-speaking area of Switzerland, the landscape of this city with the mountains and the Lugano lake in the backdrop flaunts typical Swiss beauty. Besides being aesthetically pleasing, Lugano is also an important centre for commerce within the region.

Lugano is one of the major Swiss banking trade centres which is famous all over the world. It is one of the largest banking cities in Switzerland after key cities like Zurich, Lucerne, Basel, and others. Settled-in from the time of the Romans, Lugano is rich in both history and natural marvels and is one of the major tourist attractions in the country. It has cold but pleasant winters compared to other parts of Switzerland.

It also has many Renaissance Era influenced churches. \n\nThere were other cultural contributions during the baroque, classical and modern era as well. A cultural city, tourists will love the Lugano Festival that is held regularly every year during April and May. There are also many art museums which hold priceless pieces of art and are a popular attraction in Lugaon.

Zermatt

Nestled in the heart of a deep valley outlined by steeply carved mountains, reclines the silent village of Zermatt on the southern tip of Switzerland. This quaint little town is blessed by the grace of the gigantic pyramid of Matterhorn. What is most striking about this place is its no-car policy, particularly adopted to preserve its natural environment. The enchanting culture here will immediately draw you in and make you a part of this abode. Get immersed in the salubrious breeze and let lose your senses to the tranquil aura that this place exudes.\r\n\r\nIf you are a skiing enthusiast, Zermatt deserves to be the next stop on your bucket list. Sauntering through the cobbled streets or rambling amidst the primordial barns, you can catch a fascinating glimpse of the Matterhorn. Take a ride to the medieval past by stepping into this alluring town, mounting onto a majestic sleigh. Complementing this old-world charm is the welcoming approach of the locals here which will leave you in a curious delight. The mellifluous tunes of various songbirds around you, act as an additional bliss.

Rhine falls, near Schaffhausen, is Europe's largest waterfall. This amazing sight can be reached via a boat tour, which will also show visitors to Switzerland the lovely basin, riverside castles, and spectacular boulder perched in the middle of the river at the top of the falls

The famous Matterhorn is an iconic emblem of the Swiss Alps. The mountain derives its name from the German words Matte, meaning meadow, and Horn, which means peak. With its 4,478 meters (14,692 ft) high summit, lying on the border between Switzerland and Italy, it is one of the highest peaks in the Alps. It is also one of the deadliest peaks in the Alps. From the first time it was climbed in 1865 to 1995, 500 alpinists have died on it. The Matterhorn's faces are steep, and only small patches of snow and ice cling to them while regular avalanches send the snow down to accumulate on the glaciers at the base of each face.

Jungfrauoch One of the most popular things to do in the beautiful Bernese Oberland is the train journey to Jungfrauoch, the "Top of Europe," with an observation terrace and scientific observatory perched at 3,454 meters. The longest glacier in Europe, the Great Aletsch Glacier begins at Jungfrauoch, and is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The famous Eiger Trail from the Eiger glacier station to Alpiglen clings to the rocks at the foot of the north face.

Other popular walks include Panorama Way to the sunny, south-facing First slope; the Gletscherschlucht (Glacier Gorge); and Öpfelchüechliwäg, the high-altitude trail from Holenstein to Brandegg through fields of flowers, alpine pastures, and woodlands. The less active can ride gondolas and cable cars to scenic viewpoints over the Lauterbrunnen Valley.

Interlaken -Nestled between Lake Thun to the west and Lake Brienz to the east, Interlaken is one of Switzerland's most popular summer holiday resorts. In the center of town, Höhematte is a marvel

of urban planning with 35 acres of open space. Flower gardens, hotels, and cafés surround the Höheweg, the main boulevard through here with breathtaking vistas of the mountains.

Russia

Welcome to Russia! The land of diverse nature and extremities. Spanning more than one-eighth of the Earth's inhabited area, Russia makes the largest country in the world. Comprising a wide range of terrains and divided into eleven time zones, the country extends across Eastern Europe and northern Asia. The country shares its borders with 14 nations including Norway, Finland, Poland, China and North Korea and maritime borders with Japan and the US state of Alaska.

Rich in natural landscapes and enormous tracts of land, the country is home to the largest freshwater lake in the world. Rivers and forests encompassing amazing flora and fauna, awe-inspiring volcanoes, the icy tundra region and the sun-kissed beaches, colorful cultural heritage, remarkable historical monuments, and inimitable cities are what adorn this country and make Russia a beckoning land to explore. Adding to its charm, the old Russian cities of Vladimir, Sergiev Posad, Suzdal, Rostov, Kostroma and others make the jewels of Russia's Golden Ring.

Russia is the land of magical beauty and endless attractions. High on any tourist's priority list, the attractions that make this country unique are a trip by boat from Moscow to St.Petersburg and the Valaam Island, an important religious pilgrimage center, a visit to Kizhi Island, famed for old Russian wooden architecture, the Black Sea coast, which is a seaside playground. Not only these, but there are also other enormous places of interest that make this country a land of marvels.

Russian is the official language. The people of Russia are well mannered but reserved by nature and do not open up to strangers. The cultural diversity can be seen here that spans ethnic Russians and their orthodox traditions blend with Tatars and their Muslim culture, Buddhist Buryats, and people from Siberia, Northern Caucasus, and Volga region.

Russians love to eat fish, poultry, mushrooms, berries, black bread and honey. The Byzantine architecture, music and Russian Ballet, and visual arts make the core of Russian culture.

Moscow- the capital city is rich in historical and religious heritage sites. State Historical Museum and St. Basil's Cathedral are famous for its colourful onion-shaped domes, the major landmarks Moscow is known for. Saint Petersburg, the cultural capital of Russia, is famed for world's best museum and open air theater. Irkutsk, a Siberian city known for the beauty of Lake Baikal. Kazan, the capital city of Tatar known for its impressive Kremlin. The largest country in the world really has it all—mountains, valleys, frozen lands and warm sands, and an incredible number of amazing natural destinations to impress any visitor. Some of the oldest cities in Russia, including Moscow

and St. Petersburg, still retain their imperial splendor—obvious not only in their architecture but also in their majestic parks, shopping centers, and even metro stations.

Other cities and regions—including far-away destinations in Siberia and the Far East—offer a chance to explore things like the stunning beauty of the tundra and the Northern Lights, volcanoes, and more skiing than you could ever dream of.

From striking gilded palaces to vast natural spaces, take a look at our list of the best places to visit in Russia.

Moscow

Since most international flights arrive or at least stop in Moscow, it's worth planning your trip so you at least have a few hours to explore the city. Russia's capital is a magnificent mix of greenery, stunning architecture, and lots of historical reminders of times gone by.

Visitors to Moscow usually start exploring in the center, where the Kremlin, Red Square, and the colorful St. Basil's Cathedral are located. The shopping mall GUM, with its glass and steel roof, is also a popular destination—even by tourists who can't afford the luxury brands sold here—and a great place to try authentic Russian food.

Even if museums are not your thing, Moscow has some amazing options, including The State Tretyakov Gallery (which houses only Russian art); the Pushkin Museum (for more international collections); and the Kremlin Armory Museum for a look into some unique items, such as the ivory throne of Ivan the Terrible and gold-covered imperial carriages. The Bolshoi Theater, one of the largest ballet and opera theaters in the world, is also worth a visit if you can get tickets.

Some of the best things in Moscow require some walking to be properly explored, such as the pedestrian-only shopping street Stary Arbat and the boardwalk along the River Moskva.

Moscow's Metro stations are a work of art in themselves, decorated with porcelain relief, crystal chandeliers, and unique mosaic artworks that make these places basically look like subterranean palaces.

St. Petersburg

Although smaller than Moscow, St. Petersburg actually has so much to offer, it's often impossible to see it all in one day. Compared to Moscow, St. Petersburg feels more European—fine art and exquisite design details mixing in with history around every corner. You can explore it on foot to admire the architecture up close and personal, or hop on a cruise to explore part of the 300 kilometers of canals that cut through the imperial city.

For a stunning overdose of white and gold colors, visit Moika Palace (most famous for being the place where Rasputin was killed) and the Neoclassical, 19th-century St. Isaac's Cathedral, which is actually a Russian Orthodox museum.

The Hermitage Museum, perhaps St. Petersburg's most famous tourist attraction and the second largest art and culture museum in the world, has a collection of over three million items that cover

everything from prehistoric art (including articles from the nomadic tribes in Altai) to Catherine the Great's art collection.

About 25 kilometers outside of St. Petersburg, and more than worth the day trip, is Peterhof Palace. Built in the early 1700s as a summer residence for Peter the Great, it greatly resembles the Palace of Versailles in France.

Novosibirsk

Located on the banks of the Ob River, Novosibirsk is the third-largest city in Russia and the unofficial capital of Siberia—a place where summers are hot enough to swim and sunbathe, and the winters have temperatures that reach -40 degrees Celsius.

Home to the Novosibirsk Opera and Ballet Theater, a number of universities, and several museums, the city has much to offer visitors. The outdoor Museum for Railway Technology is particularly interesting, as it features many diesel and steam locomotives, electric trains, snowplows, and a number of unusual carriages, such as tank cars, hospital and prison cars, and even fire engines.

The Novosibirsk Trans-Siberian railway station is one of the largest ones in the country and it was once at the epicenter of the transport of prisoners to gulags (Soviet forced labor camps). Today, it is the main departing point for train adventures to nearby cities, including the town of Berdsk, on the shores of the Ob Sea—which is actually a man-made reservoir, not an actual sea.

Part of the longest railway system in the world, the classic **Trans-Siberian railway** runs from Moscow to Vladivostok, a city near Russia's borders with China and North Korea. Begun in 1891 by Tsar Alexander III and completed by his son, Tsar Nicholas II, in 1916, the line is known as the route of the tsars. Most travelers use the train as overnight accommodation from one destination to the next. The train features first-, second- and third-class sleepers, some with private bathrooms and showers

Vladivostok

Located near the borders with China and North Korea and just across the ocean from Japan, Vladivostok is Russia's largest port city. A major stop on the Trans-Siberian Railway route, the city was actually off-limits to foreigners during Soviet Union times and now receives lots of foreign visitors eager to discover it. The city is home to many parks and public spaces, including Sportivnaya Harbor with its beautiful beach and promenade, and the Eagle's Nest viewpoint at the top of a hill.

Vladivostok's Russky Bridge is a stunning architectural marvel and the longest cable-stayed bridge in the world at 1,885 meters. The bridge connects Vladivostok to Russky Island, where visitors will find Philippovsky Bay and its beautiful sandy beaches, as well as Voroshilov Battery, a military museum. History buffs will appreciate a chance to explore the WWII C-56 Submarine or visit the Museum Vladivostok Fortress, originally built to protect the city against potential attacks from Japan.

Ukraine

As the largest country in Europe, Ukraine offers many attractions for tourists, including festivals celebrating its rich culture and a handsome selection of centuries-old architecture. From the rolling countryside to the cobblestone streets of old city centers, Ukraine's people are just as diverse as its landscape, and they are some of the most hospitable folks in Europe.

The word "Ukraina" literally means borderland, and the country has been prime invasion territory since its earliest beginnings. At different periods, the land has been shared by Russia, Poland, Austria, the Czech Republic, and Romania.

Today, you'll find an undiscovered Eastern European gem in search of its own identity and making a unique mark in the world of tourism. When you visit, make sure to chat with a local at one of the many delectable eateries or markets. Old recipes are being reinterpreted with modern flair. Everyone wants to practice their English, so when conversations happen, use the opportunity to gain a local's perspective on the best Ukraine has to offer.

For sightseeing ideas, see our list of the top attractions and things to do in Ukraine.

1. Chernobyl

Are you familiar with the term Dark Tourism? It refers to travel to places associated with death and tragic occurrences. The 9/11 Memorial at Ground Zero in New York City, Alcatraz in San Francisco, Pearl Harbor, Pompeii, and The Killing Fields of Cambodia are all popular examples. Visitors to Ukraine can add the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant, ground zero for the disaster, to the list.

The explosion, which took place in 1989, is located in the town of Pripyat in the Northern Ukraine. The sight has recently been open to the public—but you must visit with an authorized tour company. If you are worried about radiation, tests conducted disclose that travelers receive more exposure on a transatlantic flight than they receive during a visit to Chernobyl.

Close to 65 miles from Kiev, it's an easy, full-day trip from the capital with a Chernobyl Tour. Tour operators can pick up visitors at their hotel and drop them off after the tour. During the transport, you will see an informative video about the disaster. Narration and actual footage bring the incident into reality and prepare visitors for what lies ahead.

The tour takes visitors through many buildings, some looking like a stage set. It is an incredibly moving experience, one that will stay with you long after you leave.

2. St. Sophia's Cathedral

As a UNESCO World Heritage Site since the 1980s, St. Sophia's Cathedral (also called Saint Sophia Cathedral) is a favorite of visitors. With an elaborate Baroque exterior consisting of 13 golden domes, this cathedral stands out among the other historic buildings. Its beauty draws you into a jaw-dropping interior.

Inside, you'll find the space filled with beautiful murals, ancient mosaics, and frescoes that are centuries old. Take a tour or sit through a service to get the full experience.

Named for Hagia Sophia, St. Sophia's is one of Kiev's most noted landmarks since its construction in 1037. One of the best views in Kiev is from the bell tower—it's well worth the hike to the top!

3. Visit L'viv's Historic Center, a UNESCO World Heritage Site

One of the most charming and well-preserved Ukrainian destinations for visitors is the city of L'viv. The entire historic center has been awarded UNESCO World Heritage status, and tourists will love walking the cobbled streets taking in the sights.

Often called "the Paris of Ukraine," the old city has a very traditional European feel, with the addition of modern conveniences and excellent restaurants. Coffee lovers will find the café scene hard to beat. This is an area that takes its caffeine in all forms very seriously.

For a bird's-eye view of the town, climb the 1,000-plus stairs of the bell tower. The landscape in all directions is breathtaking.

4. Sunflower Field

Sunflower oil is one of Ukraine's largest exports; as a matter of fact, the country is the 2nd largest producer of the oil in the world. Tourists will find enormous fields of the flowers all over the country. With shades ranging from buttercup to golden orange, these platter-size beauties thrive in the area's soil and climate.

While setting up the perfect location for that Instagram selfie, just make sure to stay close to the edge of the field. The flowers are enormous, and those that get carried away wandering off might find themselves soon lost in a sea of yellow and green.

Turkey

The beautiful Turkey is a parliamentary republic in Eurasia. Officially known as the Republic of Turkey, it is bordered by Iran and Armenia in the East, Syria and Iraq in the south, Bulgaria in the northwest and Greece in the west. Located at the crossroads of Asia and Europe, Turkey is a country of geostrategic importance. The dazzling nation is spread in an area of 783, 562 sq km.

Turkey is home to some of the most alluring destinations. A Mecca for art and history lovers, the stunning Turkish land is shrouded in an elegant archaic aura. The breathtaking architecture of Hagia Sophia will leave you awestruck, operating as a museum; it is one of the best preserved

ancient structures in the world. Ephesus is an ancient city that houses the well preserved Roman and Greek ruins along with a temple, theatre and a library. A tour of the age old town will make you marvel at its timeless beauty. Aspendos is a Roman Theatre that is considered as a fine example of classical history and is a star attraction. The sultry Silk Road city of Ani will give you a sneak peek into the primordial days of trade and commerce in Turkey. Later, choose to descend into the splendid world of the Topkapi Palace that gives you a glimpse of the lavish Ottoman Empire.

Apart from its classical wonders, Turkey also offers some of the most exotic spots for adventure junkies and nature lovers. The Cappadocia is a rock valley that has been formed in a millennia by the natural agents of wind and water. Its craggy ridges are perfect for hiking while its scenic beauty can be captured brilliantly from a hot air balloon. Pamukkale is Turkey's most famous natural wonder that is a must visit. Its pristine white terraces amid the green landscape will leave you wondering at nature's bounty. The magnificent Mediterranean coastline of Turkey warms your soul while you cruise on the yacht and take in the pretty sights. The Ölüdeniz is a phenomenal beach that not just offers panoramic views of the scenery but also let you soar into the skies, when you take a paragliding dive off the breathtaking Babadag Mountain.

The estimated population of Turkey is 74.93 million people. The country is predominantly inhabited by people of Turkish descent and is also home to other ethnic groups like Kurdish, Greeks, Armenians and Zazaki among others. When it comes to languages, the official language of Turkey is Turkish which is spoken by the majority of the population in Southeast Europe and Western Asia.

Cappadocia

A major tourist destination in central Turkey, Cappadocia attracts a significant number of visitors for its uniquely beautiful setting and historical importance. Together with its huge boulders and honeycombed hills, Cappadocia appears very much like a place from a Utopian world altogether. Beneath the rocky terrain of Cappadocia, there are several underground cities nestled together. And several means not just eight or ten but thirty-six cities! (Yes, you read that right.) The cities were built by the ancient dwellers to escape from the harsh climatic conditions and ferocious wild animals. \n\nTermed as a world heritage site by UNESCO, the Goreme Open Air Museum hosts thirty or even more rock-carved chapels and churches. History buffs will have a field at these chapels as the walls of these churches are adorned with beautiful mural paintings dating back to 900-1200 AD. Not to miss, behold Cappadocia from the above with a hot balloon tour which is the major attraction for the visitors coming to Turkey. The beautiful landscape below and favourable flying conditions of Cappadocia make it a world known place for hot balloon rides.

Antalya

The city of Antalya is a prime tourist destination in Turkey which is known for its Turquoise Coast. The largest city of Turkey, Antalya depicts an interesting blend of traditional and contemporary. Old Antalya or 'Kaleici' is a beautifully preserved old area situated at the heart of the city. Here, you can even stay in old Ottoman houses that have been restored and which now come with all modern amenities. \n\nApart from delving into its historical heritage, you can also enjoy the

modern and stylish life of Antalya. Reside in lavish hotels which house world-class restaurants, bars and clubs. To revel in its natural beauty, the golden beaches of Konyaalti and Lara and the milky white waterfalls of Düden, Kursuntu and Manavgatare, are the main spots to visit in Antalya. The Atatürk's House Museum is situated in a two-storeyed house, and is a replica of the original house where the famous Turkish Military personnel, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk resided during his visits to Antalya. Photos, newspapers, and documents related to Atatürk's visits and artefacts used by him are also carefully preserved here.

Istanbul

A city where the East meets the West, the magic of Istanbul will enchant you with its tall minarets, beautiful mosques, buzzing markets and vibrant culture. This Turkish city has attracted the likes of some of the greatest empires in history, such as the Greeks, the Romans, and the Ottomans. Witness layers of history unfold before you, as you walk through the busy streets. Treat yourself with the city's delectable cuisine, which is as diverse as its history. Be mesmerized as you see the sun setting in the background of Istanbul's beautiful skyline.

Istanbul caters to tourists from across the world, from history lovers to foodies and artists. Monuments such as the Hagia Sophia are believed to have changed the face of architecture. Historical sites such as the Blue Mosque, Topkapı Palace, Basilica Cistern, Galata Tower and Süleymaniye Mosque boast of splendid architecture that will astound you. No experience can match that of walking around the colorful Grand Bazaar, one of the world's first shopping malls. The locals will prove to be wonderful hosts, enhancing your experience with their friendly demeanor and generous attitude.

England

One of the most popular travel destinations in the world, England offers almost endless possibilities for vacationers seeking fun things to do and top attractions to visit. Part of the beautiful British Isles, this small but influential country bursts with fascinating history, exciting cities, and rich cultural traditions. Historic sites are at every turn, from prehistoric megaliths and ancient Roman sites to centuries-old castles and town centers dating back to the Middle Ages.

England is also extremely easy to get around, with its most popular tourist destinations well connected by trains and buses. Alternatively, you can drive between points of interest on a well-planned system of motorways. Whether you choose to tour the country by car or public transport, you're guaranteed an unforgettable experience. To help you get the most out of your travel itinerary, be sure to use our list of the best places to visit in England.

The vibrant and energetic metropolis of London has something for everyone, from innumerable theaters, ancient monuments, spectacular gardens to restaurants serving cuisines you have never even heard of. Truly a global city, the multicultural nature of London is admirable. The top-notch infrastructure and transportation facilities, complement the essence of the city. Located along the Thames River, London is the capital of the United Kingdom, the tiny country which once ruled the world. With a rich history and a culture that encourages new ideas and innovations, London presents the best of the old and the new.

London has so much to offer that it is nearly

impossible to explore the entire city even in a lifetime. Most of the tourist attractions in London represent its glorious history and culture. There are several museums in the city, including the British Museum, Natural History Museum and many more. The iconic Tower Bridge on the Thames and the Buckingham Palace, have become icons of London. Other attractions include London Eye, Big Ben, Westminster Abbey, Madame Tussauds, Leicester Square, Piccadilly Circus, St. Paul's Cathedral, Trafalgar Square, etc.

Oxford

Known for its eponymous education institute in England, the city of Oxford also showcases excellent specimen of English architectural style. The magnificent buildings and houses in Oxford are what prompted the great poet Matthew Arnold to label it the 'city of dreaming spires'. The Carfax Tower, situated at the junction of several streets, namely Cornmarket Street (north), High Street (east), Queen Street (west) and St Aldate's (south) is considered by many to be the exact centre of this city. The tower derives its name from the French word 'carrefour' which means 'crossroads'. This 74-foot-tall structure has a ring containing six bells that are recast from the original set of five that was built in 1676 by Richard Keene hailing from Woodstock. Tourists can get a spectacular view of the magnificent skyline of Oxford by climbing to the top. The Bodleian Library in Broad Street, another tourist attraction in Oxford, was established by Thomas Bodle, and initially housed a collection of 2000 books. Currently, there are about nine million items on shelves spanning 176 km. The library boasts of being able to accommodate about 2500 readers at a time. The non-literati can opt for a guided tour around the city.

1. Stonehenge

Stonehenge, 10 miles north of the historic city of Salisbury on Salisbury Plain, is Europe's best-known prehistoric monument. It's so popular that visitors need to purchase a timed ticket in advance to guarantee entry. Exhibitions at the excellent Stonehenge visitor center set the stage for a visit, explaining through audio-visual experiences and more than 250 ancient objects how the megaliths were erected between 3000 and 1500 BC, and sharing information about life during this time.

After walking around the various viewing points adjacent to these enormous stones, visit the authentic replicas of Neolithic Houses to see the tools and implements of everyday Neolithic life as volunteers demonstrate skills from 4,500 years ago. Although you can't go inside the circle to wander among the stones during normal opening hours, you can reserve special early morning or late evening access into the circle through English Heritage, which manages the site.

2. Tower of London

Prison, palace, treasure vault, observatory, and menagerie: the Tower of London has done it all and it's one of the top attractions in London. Widely considered the most important building in England, there's enough to see and do at this World Heritage Site to keep visitors busy for hours.

The centerpiece of this Thames-side fortress is the White Tower. Built in 1078 by William the Conqueror, it's home to amazing exhibits, such as Line of Kings, the world's oldest visitor attraction, established in 1652 with a remarkable display of royal armor.

Other highlights include the impressive Crown Jewels exhibition, classic Yeoman Warder Tours, the Royal Mint, and exhibits and displays regarding prisoners and executions. All told, the Tower of London covers some 18 acres, so there's a great deal of exploring to do.

If you're traveling with children, be sure to check for special events for kids, including "Knights School" and other immersive programs that provide a fun insight into the castle's history.

3. The Roman Baths and Georgian City of Bath

If you only have time to visit one smaller city in England, you couldn't do much better than Bath. This remarkably beautiful city in Somerset boasts more fantastic tourist attractions than you could hope to visit in a day.

While most famous for the magnificent 2,000-year-old Roman Baths built around the city's rejuvenating hot springs, it's equally well known for its honey-colored Georgian Townhouses, such as those located on Royal Crescent.

Some 500 of the city's buildings are considered of historical or architectural importance, a fact that has resulted in the entire city being granted World Heritage status. Bath makes an ideal location from which to explore some of England's most stunning countryside, including the Avon Valley, the Mendip Hills, and countless other fantastic Somerset landmarks.

4. The British Museum

With collections of antiquities that are among the world's finest, the British Museum holds more than 13 million artifacts from Assyria, Babylonia, Egypt, Greece, the Roman Empire, China, and Europe. The most famous ancient artifacts are the Elgin Marbles from the Parthenon in Athens, as well as the famous Rosetta Stone.

But there are many other outstanding pieces on show here that help make this one of the best places to visit in London. The Ancient Egyptian collection is the largest outside of Cairo, and the hoard of Roman silver dating from the fourth century known as the Mildenhall Treasure, unearthed in Suffolk in 1942, is nothing short of spectacular.

If you've got time, be sure to look into joining a guided tour (private after-hour tours are fun), or participate in a workshop or lecture. Dining and shopping is also available on-site.

5. York Minster and Historic Yorkshire

The magnificent York Minster is second in importance in the Church of England only to the cathedral at Canterbury. It stands in the center of historic York, surrounded by half-timbered homes and shops, medieval guildhalls, and churches.

In turn, York's romantic streets are surrounded by three miles of magnificent town walls that you can walk atop for spectacular views over the city and its surroundings. While here, visit the National Railway Museum, one of England's most visited tourist attractions.

York is also a good base from which to explore northeast England, in particular the rugged beauty of the Yorkshire Dales and the North York Moors. Elsewhere in this corner of the country, you'll find some of England's most beautiful historic towns and cities, including Durham – famous for its castle and cathedral – and Beverley, which also boasts an attractive minster.

6. Warwick Castle

If you're looking for a truly memorable English excursion for the whole family – and one that offers a fascinating insight into life in medieval times – you couldn't do much better than visit Warwick Castle. Located in the beautiful city of Warwick on the River Avon, this impressive fortress has dominated the landscape and history of the region for more than 900 years. Today, it serves as a backdrop to medieval-themed events and reenactments, from jousting festivals to fairs and concerts.

Warwick is also great base from which to explore the Cotswolds, as well as nearby towns such as Stratford-upon-Avon, famous as the birthplace of William Shakespeare. Bigger city destinations, including Liverpool, hometown of The Beatles, as well as Birmingham and Coventry, are an easy drive away.