

World

# Luxury Travel

Magazine

Vol. 3 ■ Issue 4 ■ November, 2014

## Wandering Alone

The adventures of solo travel

## Tuning Glory

### MUSICAL CITIES

Five Enchanting  
European Castles

December Festivals around the Globe





**T**ravel is therapeutic for the soul. Whether you are trying to get away from sticky situations or seeking to mend your broken heart, travel can drive you away from your worries. More so when you are traveling alone. Many of us are too scared to actually embark on a vacation alone. Prepare yourself for a solo sojourn with our cover story on solo travel. It has all the required information to wander alone safe. Are you into music? Explore the must-visit musical cities of the world to find your song! Head towards our City Getaway section for more.

We believe that it is equally important to experience the property you stay in while traveling. Be it a luxury hotel, resort or a homestay, it is important to take it all in. Experience matters. For starters, try staying in one of these Five Enchanting European Castles we are talking about in our Luxe Stays section.

There is more. Flip through the pages to get enchanted!

Happy reading!



Manashree Prakash  
Editor-in-Chief

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**World**  
**Luxury Travel**  
**Magazine**

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■ Vol. 3 ■ Issue 4 ■ November, 2014

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December Festivals  
around the Globe

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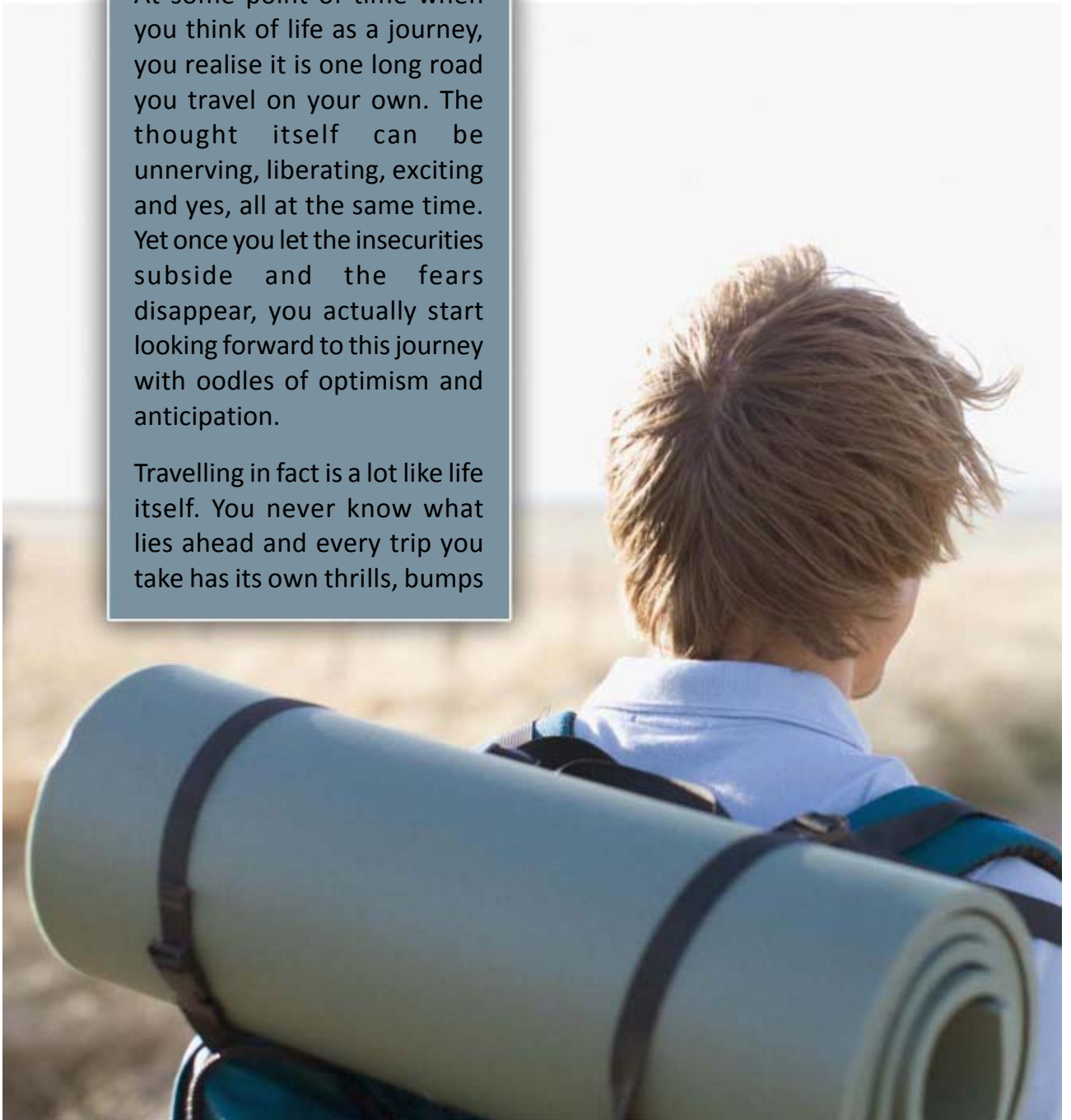
# Wandering Alone


The adventures of solo travel



At some point of time when you think of life as a journey, you realise it is one long road you travel on your own. The thought itself can be unnerving, liberating, exciting and yes, all at the same time. Yet once you let the insecurities subside and the fears disappear, you actually start looking forward to this journey with oodles of optimism and anticipation.

Travelling in fact is a lot like life itself. You never know what lies ahead and every trip you take has its own thrills, bumps



A woman with glasses, wearing a red beanie, a black cardigan over a black and white patterned top, blue jeans, and white sneakers, is walking on a paved path. She is looking towards the camera. The background is a lush green hillside with dense vegetation. A large, light-colored oval shape is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing text.

and road map. Amidst all the unpredictability and exhilaration, you meet new people, visit places and open up to new experiences that enrich you as a person. Travelling on your own can be one of the most unique adventures you can possibly have. Not only does it offer you unbridled freedom and a relaxation of a kind but also lets you get in touch with your inner self. Naturally, as more and more travellers are enjoying the benefits and euphoria of venturing out on their own, solo travel itself has become a rising trend that is here to stay.



## The Perks of Solo Travel

**Liberty** – Freedom usually features high on the priority list of those who love travelling solo or are toying with the idea. Imagine you can wake up at your own time, take up activities you like, chalk out your own itinerary and fulfil all your whims without worrying about the preference of another.

**Perspective** – Have you ever noticed how most of your great ideas spring to life

when you are travelling to and from office or sitting at a quiet café waiting for someone? What if you could have those blissful moments without being interrupted or hurried? The truth is when you are not pressed for time or distracted by the chores of life; you actually end up paying attention to your needs and gain a much perspective on things that matter.





**Learning New Skills -**

Many believe that if you are in a new place you are more likely to try out new activities or learn new skills that you otherwise may not opt for. Take you pick between getting high on adrenaline rushing adventure sports, developing your artistic skills or nurturing the explorer in you – the choices are practically endless.

**Boosting Your Confidence –**

When you are out on your own with no one to fall back on but yourself, it can actually be a good thing for your self-esteem. The best part is you can be in



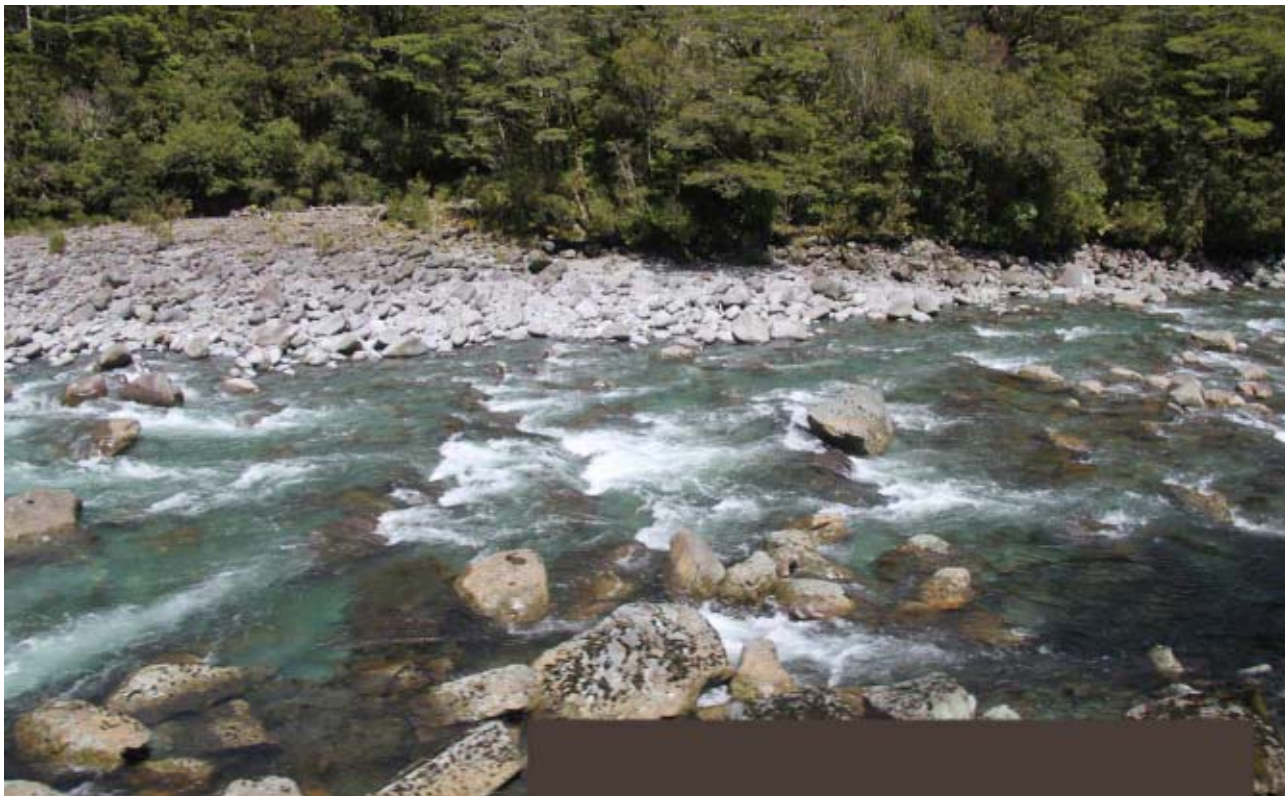
control yet have as much fun as you want. Ultimately you come back feeling empowered and refreshed more than you can dream of.

**Connection** – Is it not pretty obvious that if you are not occupied with a group or a

companion, you are more likely to concentrate on your surroundings and the people around you? Now that gives you a better chance of knowing the place and initiating interactions with the locales, helping you gain insights of the place and its ways in a much deeper level.







### Concerns of solo travel

**Safety** – Being safe and secure is important if you are not familiar with the destination, its customs and locals. From being on your guard to taking the necessary steps to protect yourself, all areas should be covered before starting your journey.

**Presence of mind** – You might be equipped with the right information and emergency numbers, but be prepared to face any situation that calls for presence of mind. Your





concerns can range from as frivolous as whether to sample an exotic dish to as grave as how to get help if the need arises.

**Independence versus sharing** – Once you decide on going solo and living like a free bird, consider the fact that you might not have someone to share simple things with after all. It can

range from not being able to share a phone when your battery runs out, ask for opinion when confused or swap stories at the end of the day.

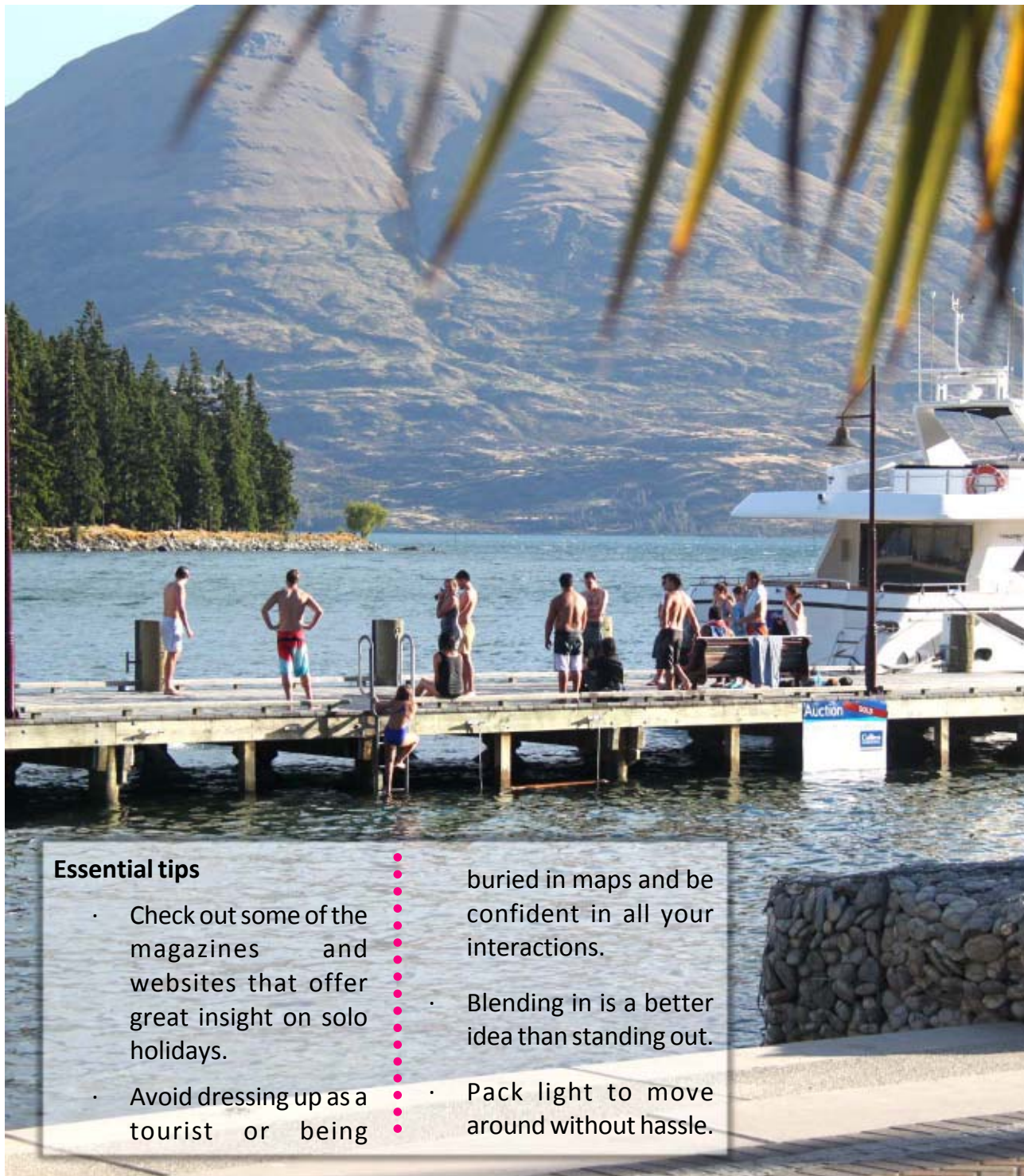
**Responsibility** – Depending on the kind of person you are or the state you are in, being responsible for yourself can make you shine or put you in a spot. Once you find the

right balance between being sombre and having fun, you will enjoy your solo getaways like never before.

### **Top five places for solo sojourns**

- Berlin
- Sydney
- London
- Prague
- Bali





### Essential tips

- Check out some of the magazines and websites that offer great insight on solo holidays.
- Avoid dressing up as a tourist or being buried in maps and be confident in all your interactions.
- Blending in is a better idea than standing out.
- Pack light to move around without hassle.



- Research thoroughly about the destination, code of conduct and ask for suggestions from locals and vacationers who have been there.
- Consider touring with a group or a guide if you like.
- Carry proper identification cards and keep all your important phone numbers handy.
- Make sure you have someone back home to check on you and who has all your accommodation and itinerary details.

### **Ideas for your vacation**

- Check the local newspapers for interesting gigs, festivals, theatre performances or musical shows going on nearby.
- Do some sightseeing or visit the markets on foot or on a bicycle to get acquainted with the place.
- Opt for a home stay to enjoy an authentic experience during your getaway.
- Ask around for quintessential restaurants to experiment with the regional cuisine.





- Try your hand at any activity the land is famous for, like wine tasting, snowboarding, making sushi, yoga practising or pottery making.

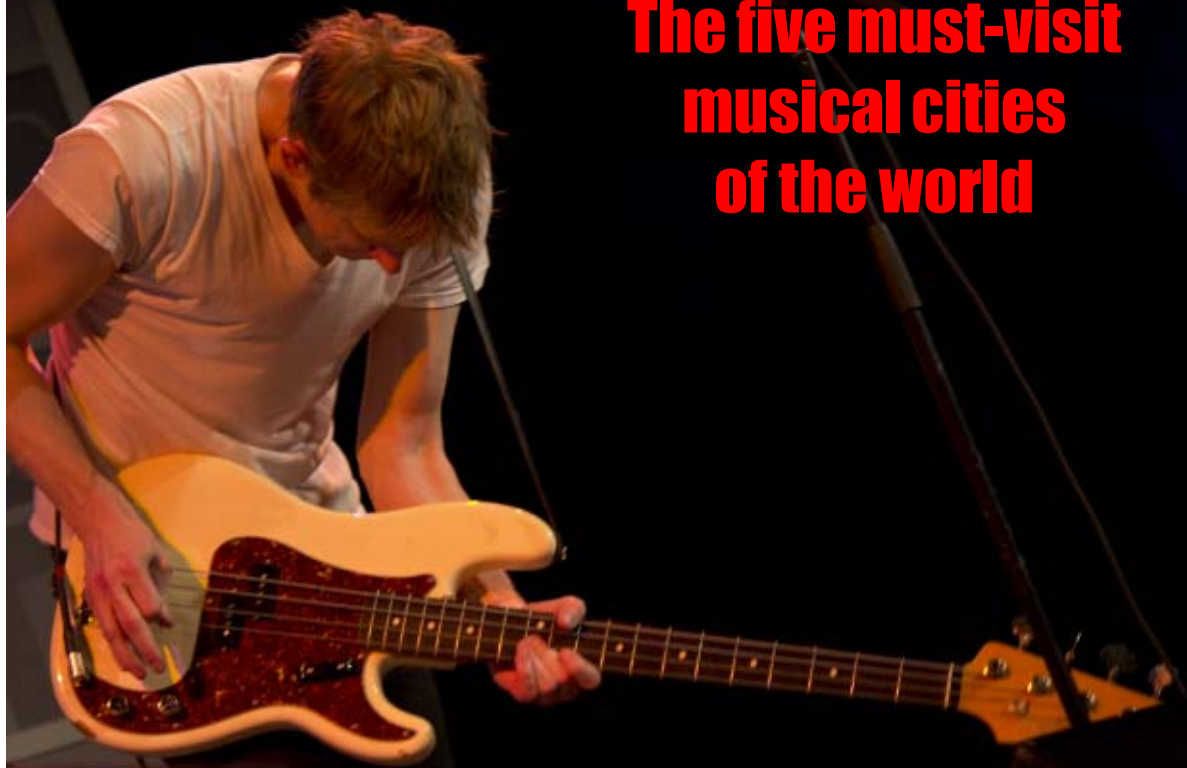
A number of solo tourists start out by travelling for work only to plan a holiday on their own when they get a taste of the good life. Being comfortable with yourself, having your own secret adventure or seeking solitude – whatever is your agenda, solo travelling can rejuvenate you better than any therapy you can think of. Give it a shot and chances are you might get hooked to this style of travel for the rest of your life!



# Tuning Glory

## MUSICAL CITIES

**The five must-visit  
musical cities  
of the world**



Music is known to transcend all barriers. It serves as an umbilical cord that connects people from all over the world. The best musical cities from different parts of the globe have a quintessential charm that is hard to miss. These cities instantly appeal to tourists looking for captivating sojourns; music lovers soliciting a muse as well as artists in search of nirvana.

Hans Christian Andersen once said, “Where words fail, music speaks” and it holds true till date. Dripping with enthusiasm and floating in inspiration, musical cities make for an enchanting getaway. We have shortlisted the top five musical cities that are ideal for a spiritual sabbatical where you can connect to your inner world as you absorb the beauty of your surroundings.





## Berlin

Berlin strikes a chord and thrills music enthusiasts as soon as you bring up music. It is home to one of the world's most well-known music hub called Media Spree, located in no man's land between the former East and West Berlin. The city has a ripe music scene and abundant inspiration. It has welcomed musicians for decades and has given birth to some of the most well-known figures that the world loves. Europe's finest music capital Berlin boasts





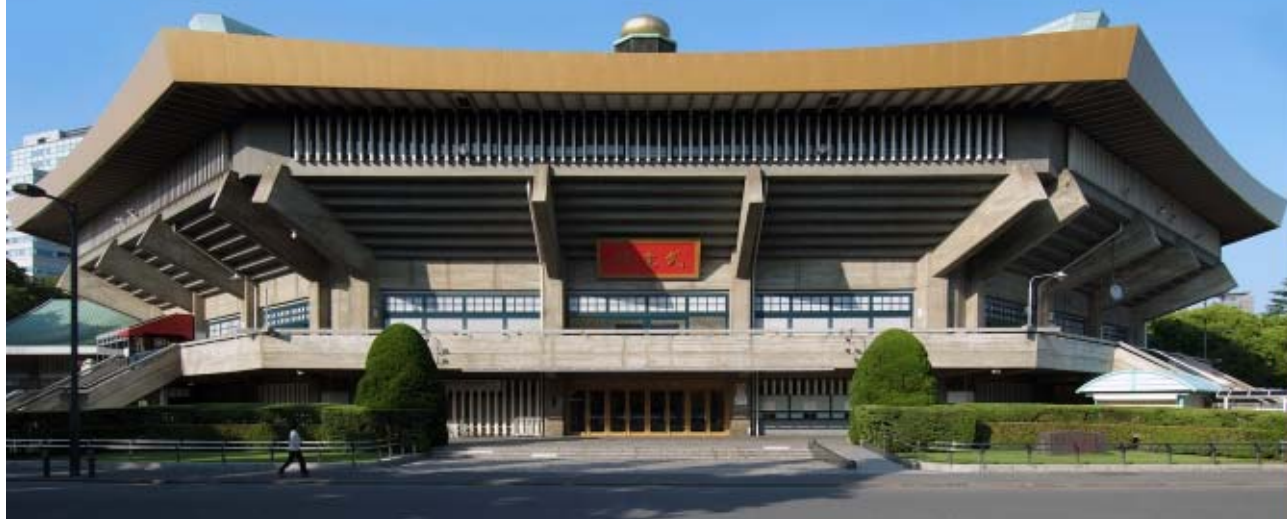
of 250 live venues, three top-tier opera houses and eight symphony orchestras. Music lovers from far and wide unite every year in September during the Berlin Music Week held by the City of Berlin. Indie rock, alternate punk and even Northern Soul can be heard everywhere. The districts of Kreuzberg, Friedrichshain, Lido and Mitte are the huge crowd pullers among others. Electro clubs, jazz cafes and street shows rule the roost. House and Techno steal the show in the live shows and concerts. Expat Nick Cave and his band, composers like Mendelssohn and music critics like E.T.A. Hoffmann along with musicians such as David Bowie and Iggy Pop have heavily influenced the music culture.



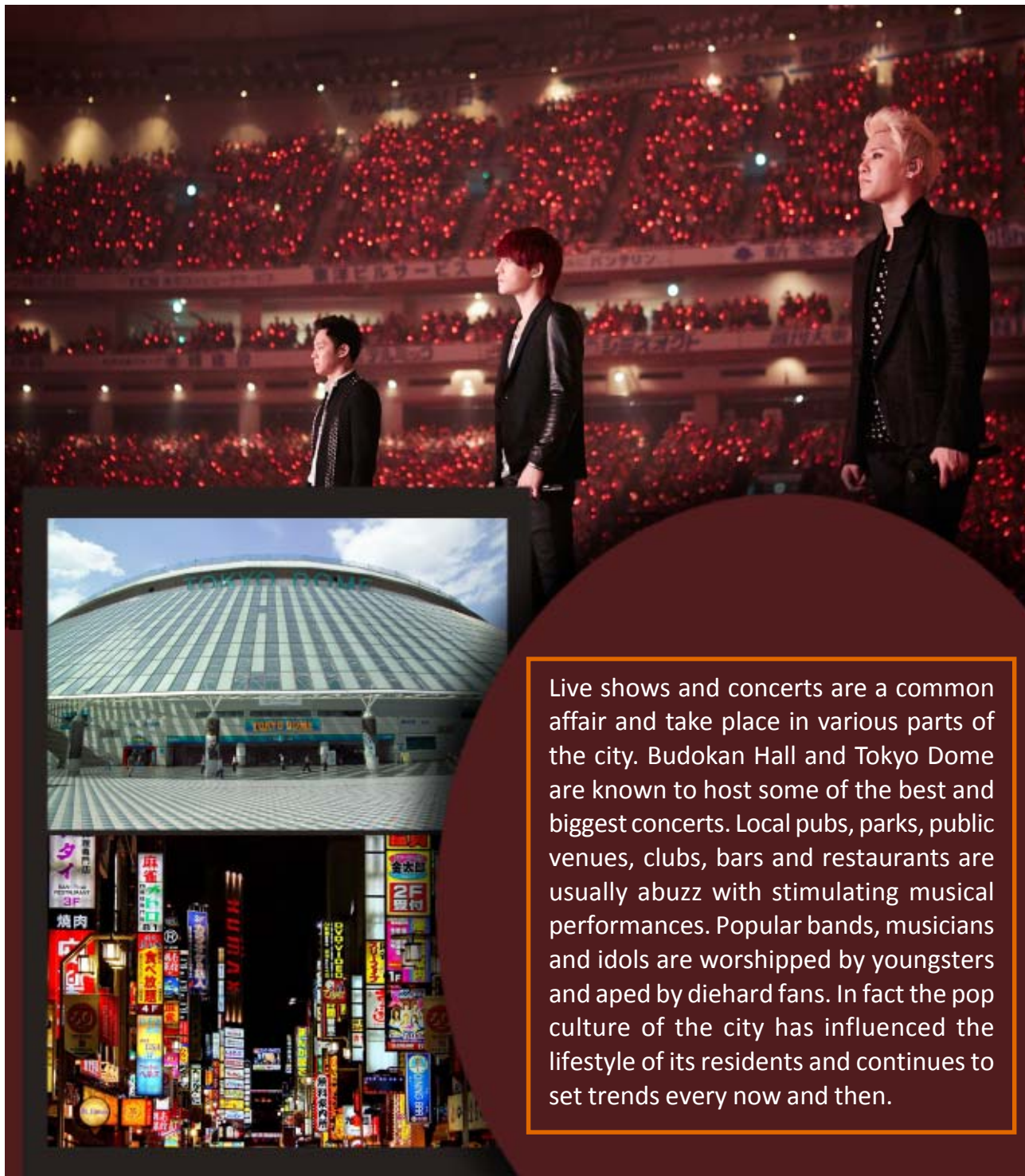


## Tokyo

From puppet theatres and operas to a pulsating music scene that will satisfy any ardent music lover's insatiable appetite, Tokyo has climbed the charts steadily over time. Koenji, Yoyogi and Shimokitazawa have emerged as hotspots in the music circuit and attract a regular crowd of hipsters and indie fans. Rock, punk, jazz, hip hop – name it and Tokyo has it all. Gigs are plenty and include an eclectic blend of regional and renowned groups and artists, solo performers and DJs belting out foot tapping numbers.







Live shows and concerts are a common affair and take place in various parts of the city. Budokan Hall and Tokyo Dome are known to host some of the best and biggest concerts. Local pubs, parks, public venues, clubs, bars and restaurants are usually abuzz with stimulating musical performances. Popular bands, musicians and idols are worshipped by youngsters and aped by diehard fans. In fact the pop culture of the city has influenced the lifestyle of its residents and continues to set trends every now and then.



## Austin

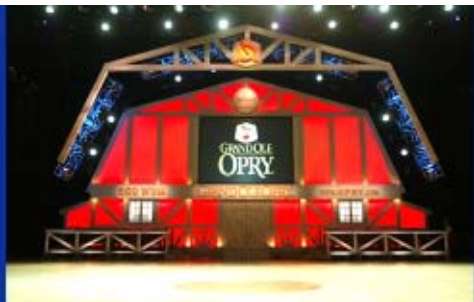
Often referred to as the 'World's Live Music Capital', Austin is jammed with clubs, bars, concert houses, public venues, theatres and festivals to keep the music connoisseurs on their toes. It is hard not to enjoy music if you live in Austin. Country music, indie and alternative rock are the most preferred forms. The region contributes greatly to the cultural economy of the nation. It is said to have more than 230 live music venues and there is usually a stage show in progress in every second nook and corner. The unbeatable SXSW festival that began in 1987 and grew immensely popular from the late 1990s is one of the most attended musical events in the world with a visitor count of over one million. Austin is not just the breeding ground for new age music and creative ventures but is also one of the most acclaimed haunts frequented by novices and pros alike.





## Nashville

According to reports, Nashville has around 180 recording studios, 130 music publishers, 100 live music clubs and 80 record labels. If the statistics are anything to go by, the city has a throbbing music circuit waiting to be explored. Traditional venues like the Grand Ole Opry and the Bluebird Café are home to some of the most adored country music stars. Nicknamed as the 'music city', Nashville has a laid back, relaxed ambience and is regularly thronged by artists from different parts of the globe. The Country Music Hall of Fame & Museum trace the emergence and growth of the metropolis as a well-known hub of music. It has created a benchmark when it comes to world class music and is in a league of its own.





## London

London brings to mind the Rolling Stones, the Beatles, the Clash and the Kinks. It is the epicentre of different genres and eras of music - be it jazz, pop, Latin, punk or rock. The capital has moved on from the age of boy bands to a brimming scene of post punk and grime. Often touted as the Mecca of music, London plays host to plenty of clubs, pubs, restaurants, concert venues, operas and the like. It claims to have around 350 concert spots and ten





illustrious concert halls under its cap. Every mushrooming band dreams of making it big in London. The industry is meandering with opportunities and business is in good shape. Moreover the city is tolerant towards experimental music and readily welcomes new talent.

Sometimes the journey you set out for opens doors to untrodden horizons that

you never knew existed. In the words of Ludwig van Beethoven, “Music is a higher revelation than all wisdom and philosophy” and that explains its appeal to the masses. Musical cities croon a tune that the soul relates to, travellers find solace in and all of a sudden the world seems a better and brighter place to live in.



# Five Enchanting European Castles





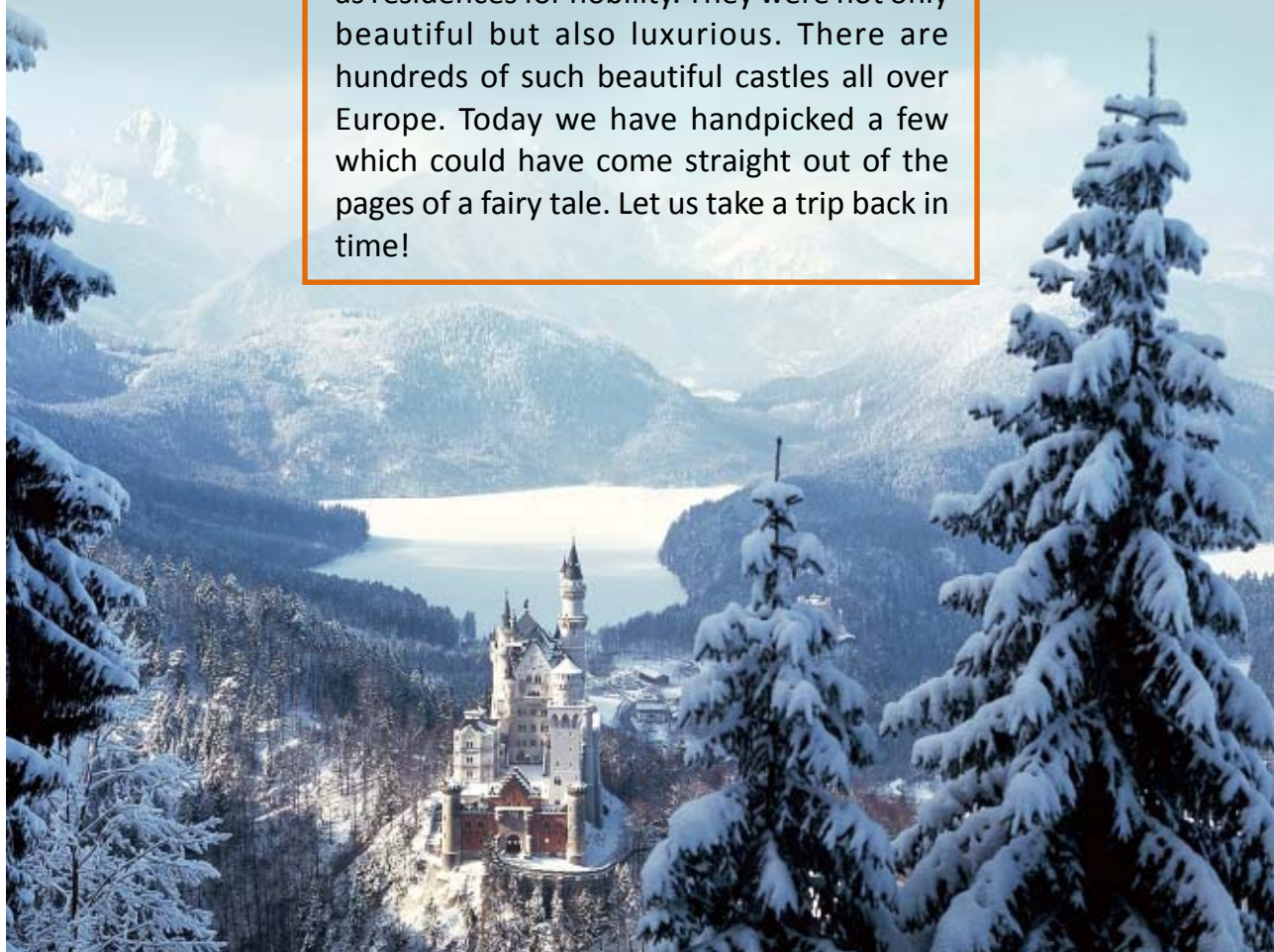
Once upon a time, long ago, William the Conqueror invaded England. The Norman invaders started building huge stone castles for defence purposes as they advanced on their journey of conquests. Later castles

were built all over Europe for residential, administrative or defence purposes. Nobility or royalty occupied the castle with their servants and the castles were lively with the presence of knights and ladies, jousting



tournaments, archery and feasting. With the invention of gunpowder the era of medieval castles came to an end. These were no longer useful for defence and were vulnerable to cannon attacks. The decline of castles started in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

The early castles, purely built for defence purposes, were far from comfortable. However, as time passed, castles were built as residences for nobility. They were not only beautiful but also luxurious. There are hundreds of such beautiful castles all over Europe. Today we have handpicked a few which could have come straight out of the pages of a fairy tale. Let us take a trip back in time!



## Neuschwanstein Castle, Germany

If ever there was a castle straight out of a fairy tale, it is the Neuschwanstein Castle. Complete with towers and spires, the magic of this castle is enhanced by the stunning backdrop of the Bavarian Alps. One look and you can understand why it was the inspiration for Disney's Sleeping Beauty Castle. The Neuschwanstein Castle

was one of the three royal palaces commissioned by King Ludwig II of Bavaria in 1869. Schloss Neuschwanstein ("new swan on the rock castle") was built atop a steep cliff, as a private retreat for the king and a tribute to the king's idol, Richard Wagner (Wagner's operas form the theme of several murals all over the castle).





Notable features of the castle include the Singer's Hall, the massive throne room and the grotto. Though built along medieval lines, it had modern amenities like automatic flushing toilets, air heating system for the entire castle and running hot water. The palace, sadly, was never completed. The king for whom it was built, hardly lived in it and Wagner, to whom it was dedicated, died without setting foot in it. Today this beautiful castle is one of the most photographed castles in Germany (though photography is not permitted within) and attracts more than a million visitors annually!

**Trivia:** King Ludwig II ran into huge debts as a result of his fantastic architectural projects; he was declared insane by his cabinet and deposed; he died later of drowning, under mysterious circumstances!



### Prague Castle, Czech Republic

The largest ancient castle in the world, the Prague castle measures around 70,000 sq. m in area. The oldest castle in the world, it served as the seat of power for the ruling monarchs and emperors. Construction of the castle began in the 9<sup>th</sup> century with renovations made over the years. This has resulted in a huge castle complex with a mixture of architectural styles including the Romanesque and Gothic.

Today it is the office and official residence of the President of the Czech Republic. The castle houses



the renowned St Vitus Cathedral, Basilica of St George, the Powder Tower and several palaces and gardens. The St Vitus Cathedral is the most important landmark of the castle. It is notable for its lovely stained glass paintings, the twenty one chapels and the Golden Portal. Other must see features include the Golden Lane walk; a picturesque street lined with tiny colourful houses, some dating back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Noted writer Kafka lived here too! The castle houses numerous museums including the National Gallery, Toy Museum and the castle's Picture Gallery.

***Trivia:** The original Czech Crown jewels are kept hidden in the Prague castle; there are seven different keys to open the seven locks of the door behind which they are hidden. The keys are held by seven different important heads (the Czech President has one)!*





### Mont Saint Michel Castle, France

Set like a tiara at the mouth of the Couesnon River, this castle is perched on the tiny Mont Saint Michel Island in Normandy. Built in the 1800s, it was originally a monastery and was known as La Merveille (The Marvel). It was an important medieval pilgrimage centre attracting thousands of people who walked along the 'Paradise Road' to reach it. Around the 16<sup>th</sup> century its popularity waned and it was converted into a prison



which was finally closed in 1863. It was declared a historic monument in 1874. Today Mont Saint Michel and the beautiful bay surrounding it is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. More than three million visitors come to see this beautiful castle annually.

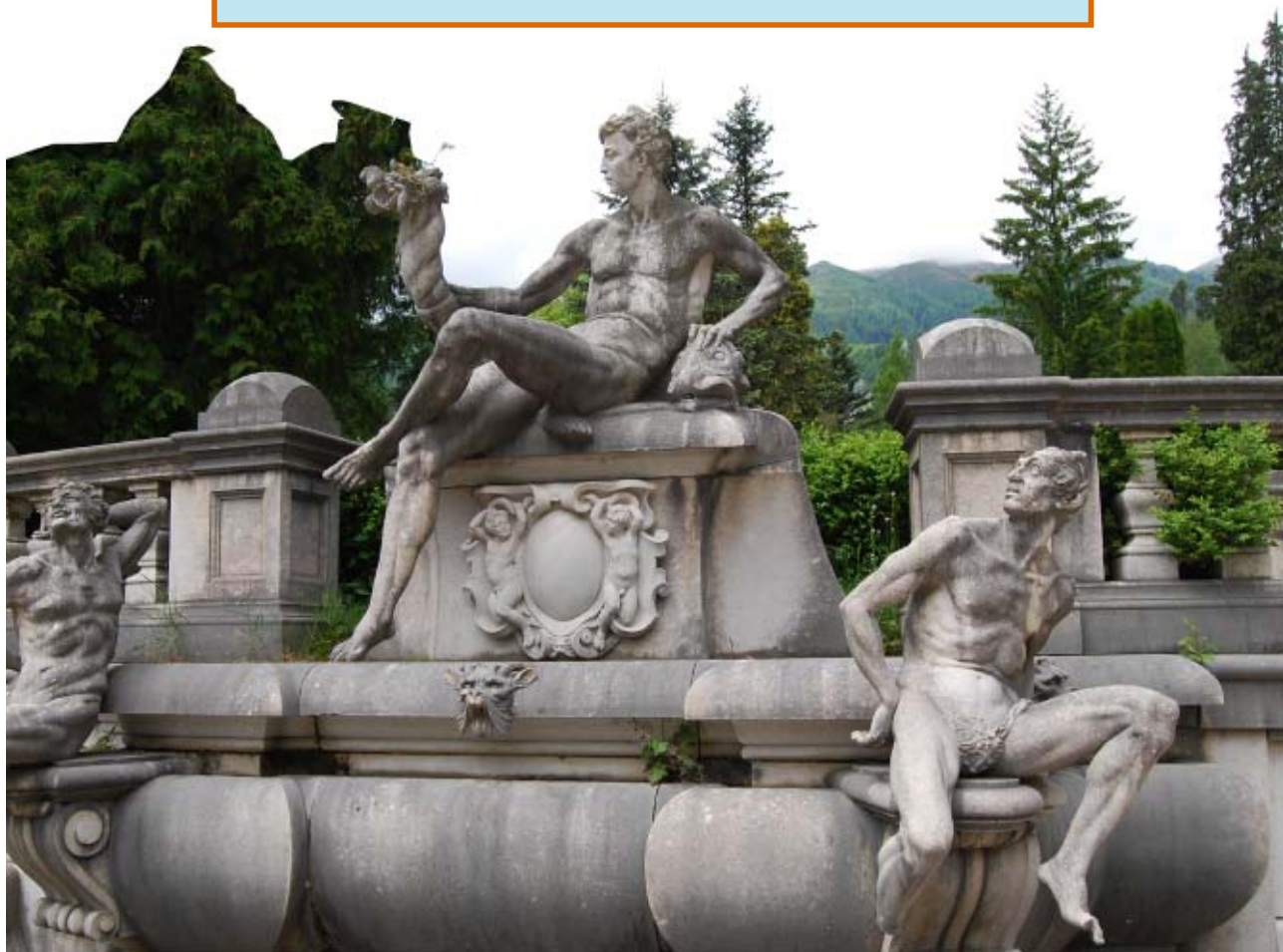
The abbey complex consists of a church, cloister, refectory and gardens. The best time to catch the abbey in all its beauty is during the light and sound show after sunset. The Mont Saint Michel Island can be accessed by a causeway. The area is notorious for its sudden tides, so tourists beware. Do not miss a walk around the abbey!

**Trivia:** The original abbey was built in the 8<sup>th</sup> century by St Aubert, bishop of Avranches, at the bidding of Archangel Michael whom he saw in a vision!



## Peles Castle, Romania

This lovely castle in Sinaia in the Prahova Valley is set atop a hill amidst picturesque forests and mountains. Built as a summer residence by King Carol I, this is a unique castle. What sets it apart is that each room is uniquely furnished in a different style. Here you can see Turkish, Moorish, French, Florentine, Venetian decorative themes in different rooms. The castle is beautiful with its 160 grandly decorated rooms, lovely stained glass windows, crystal chandeliers, Sevres porcelain and splendid art work. The beautiful woodwork throughout the castle is one of its notable features. The rooms





worth mentioning include the Florentine Room, Reception Room, the Royal Library, the Big and Small Armory Rooms. It is also a treasure house of Europe's finest paintings, with a collection of around 2000 paintings.

Though Bran Castle is the most visited castle in Romania (thanks to its Dracula connection), Peles Castle is



considered one of the most beautiful castles in Europe! Remember the castle is closed in November.

**Trivia:** Peles, the world's first castle to be lit entirely by electricity, involved 300-400 workers and cost 16,000,000 Romanian lei in gold (present day \$120 million USD approx.) to build.

## Hohenwerfen Castle, Austria

This is another delightful castle set against the dazzling background of the snow-capped Alps and pine forest landscape. This medieval stronghold (defending Salzburg) was built in 1077 on a 155 m rock face. It lies between the Tennen and Hagen mountain ranges and overlooks the Salzach Valley. The castle was badly damaged by rioters in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and by a fire in 1931, but it was rebuilt as before. The castle gained notoriety during its use as a state prison. Prisoners (including high-ranking noblemen) lived and often died in





miserable conditions here. It also served as a Nazi training camp during WWII. It was finally opened to the public in 1987.

The castle today has come out of its shadowy past and is an important historic monument attracting tourists from all over the world. Visitors can take a tour of the castle, see the chapel, the pitch kitchen, armoury, the Austrian Falconry Museum and the Falconry Centre with fascinating falconry demonstrations. The interactive exhibition, 'To arms! Power, Honour, Submission', will transport you right back to the Middle Ages. Throughout the year there are special programmes and tours for visitors to enjoy.

**Trivia:** *The Hohenwerfen Castle was featured in popular movies like 'The Sound of Music', 'Where Eagles Dare' (as Schloss Adler) and Just Married.*





## A Castle Old and Grey

A visit to an old castle provides a fascinating glimpse into the past. A castle is a silent testimony to times long vanished. Alexander Anderson once said, "I never see a castle... but my thoughts at once go backward, to the past so misty and dim.... I fill the hall with visions of

ladies rich in their bloom; and stately knights in armour....but maiden and youth have vanished, away from the scene and the light...only the grey old castle, of crumbling stone and lime, still stands to speak of the ages, and the iron footsteps of time."



**Happenings**

# December Festivals around the Globe

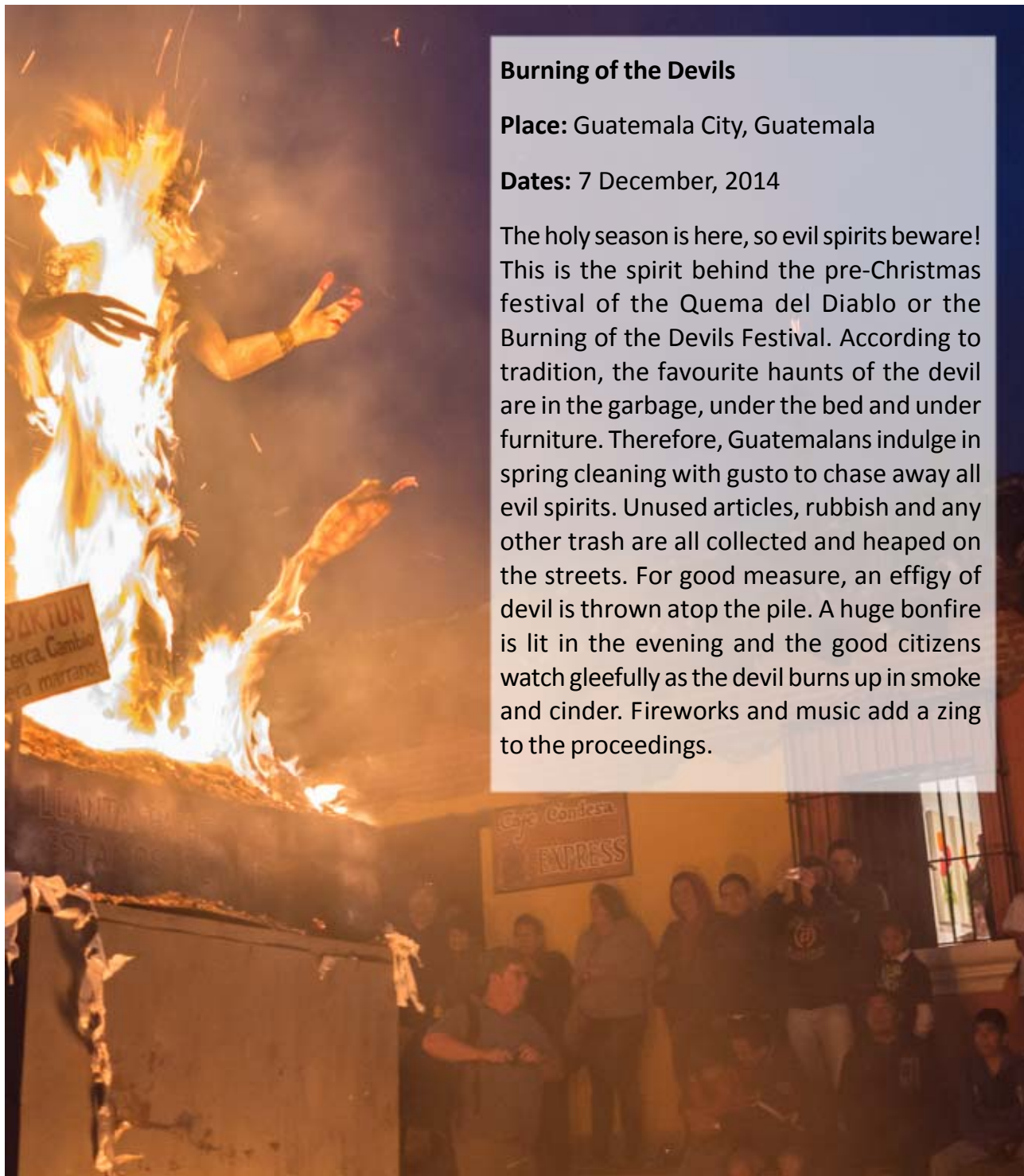


## Burning of the Devils

**Place:** Guatemala City, Guatemala

**Dates:** 7 December, 2014

The holy season is here, so evil spirits beware! This is the spirit behind the pre-Christmas festival of the Quema del Diablo or the Burning of the Devils Festival. According to tradition, the favourite haunts of the devil are in the garbage, under the bed and under furniture. Therefore, Guatemalans indulge in spring cleaning with gusto to chase away all evil spirits. Unused articles, rubbish and any other trash are all collected and heaped on the streets. For good measure, an effigy of devil is thrown atop the pile. A huge bonfire is lit in the evening and the good citizens watch gleefully as the devil burns up in smoke and cinder. Fireworks and music add a zing to the proceedings.





## Hanukkah

**Place:** Israel

**Dates:** December 16-24, 2014

This beautiful Jewish festival is also known as the Festival of Lights. It is a celebration of the re-dedication of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem at the time of the Maccabee revolt by the Jews. The temple was taken over by the Jews from the Syrian Greeks who had turned it into a pagan place of worship. During the purification ritual that followed, a lamp was lit. Though



there was just a little oil left, it is said that the lamp burned for eight nights! In memory of this miracle, the festival is celebrated for eight days. During this time, traditional armed menorahs (candelabrum) are lit, beginning with one candle a day to all on the last night. This is a time for feasting, family get-togethers, games and eating traditional dishes like latkes (potato pancakes) and sufganiyot (deep fried, jam-filled doughnuts).

**Trivia:** Hanukkah is traditionally celebrated on the 25<sup>th</sup> of the Kivlev month in the Jewish calendar!





## Christmas

Place: Worldwide

Dates: December 25, 2014

This is perhaps one of the most popular festivals in the whole world. It celebrates the birthday of Jesus Christ, the founder of Christianity. People remember the saviour of mankind with gratitude on this day. Something of this spirit is reflected in the festivities. There is goodwill and cheer in the very air and the joy of the season begins much before the festival day. People buy gifts, Christmas decorations, put up







Christmas trees, tie up holly and set their homes and neighbourhood sparkling with coloured bells, streamers and tinsel. Children put up stockings for Santa Claus to stock with gifts. On Christmas Eve, churches are full of people attending Midnight Mass. On Christmas day, presents are exchanged between friends and relatives. This is a joyous time with family reunions, feasting on rich plum puddings, cakes and carol singing. It is a season of festive cheer, peace and goodwill on earth.

**Trivia:** *There is no specific known date for the birth of Christ; December 25 was chosen by the Catholic Church to officially represent his birthday!*



## Sunburn Festival

**Place:** Goa, India

**Dates:** December

This is the largest electronic music festival of India and is held at the Candolim Beach in Goa. Held annually around Christmas time, this is a huge show with renowned stage productions and DJs. The event attracts international artists showcasing a variety of genres - Trance, House,



Drum & Bass and Techno. Names like Afrojack, Above & Beyond and Swedish House Mafia have all performed at the festival. Though music is the main agenda here, it is by no means the only attraction. Entertainment, food, shopping, and beach parties ensure that the fun never stops here. Remember that entry is allowed only if you are over 18 years of age. More important to remember, drugs are a strict no-no and a stringent watch is kept to prevent its usage.

***Trivia:** The festival has won several awards including the 9<sup>th</sup> Best Festival in the World by CNN.*







## Junkanoo Parade

**Place:** Nassau, Bahamas

**Dates:** December 26, 2014, January 1, 2015

This incredible festival goes back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century practice of slaves getting leave from plantations to celebrate Christmas with their families. The slaves would dress up in feathers, scrap materials and paint their faces and celebrate. Thus began the Junkanoo parades. Held over two weekends, beginning early morning, they are awesome spectacles





of colours, dance and music. The costumes are a marvel of colour and creativity. The hypnotic drumbeats, the gorgeous floats and swaying dances create an indelible impression on the mind. Months of preparation goes into the final displays. Awards are given for three main categories- best music, costume and overall presentation. The Junkanoo Parades are exotic visual displays of the Bahamian culture and heritage.

***Trivia:** The intricate costumes are theme-based and made of hundreds of layers of fringed crepe paper painstakingly stuck on cardboard.*





## Hogmanay

**Place:** Edinburgh, Scotland

**Dates:** December 31, 2014

Hogmanay, the Scottish New Year, is traditionally rung in with the New Year song 'Auld Lang Syne'. This is one of the most popular street parties in Scotland. The celebrations start with the spectacular Torchlight Procession, where





thousands of torch-bearers move in a 'river of fire' from Royal Mile to Calton Hill. The streets overflow with people joyously waiting to welcome the New Year. There are parades, live concerts, music, dancing and of course, drinking of whisky.

***Trivia:** 'First footing', a popular custom of Hogmanay involves visiting neighbours at midnight with small gifts. Tall, dark men are popular as first-footers as they are believed to bring good luck!*





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