

Insiders' golden hits

Well-travelled newsmakers reveal their favourite spots to eat, shop and sightsee

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Thronged by Sikh devotees, the Golden Temple (above) in Amritsar, India, is a must-visit for culture lovers. -- PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

There are destinations to satisfy every appetite and curiosity. Five authorities in various fields give their take on the best places to...

Understand the world

'If you want to understand the world, you need to understand Asia. That, in turn, means setting foot in China and India,' says Nicholas D. Kristof, a columnist at the New York Times.

Background story

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RCA Records chief executive Peter Edge

'Those two countries account for one- third of humanity and much of the world's recent economic growth. They reflect two of our richest civilisations, two broad religious traditions and a vast share of the world's artistic heritage - and its future.

'So fly to Beijing and Shanghai, Xian and Guangzhou. But don't just visit the giant metropolises. Go also to the countryside that is China's soul.

'Visit a town such as Datong, west of Beijing, home to stunning carved Buddhas several storeys high and one of the most amazing sights in China.'

He also recommends the nearby and stunning Hanging Monastery, perched precariously on the side of a cliff. Datong could also be used as a base to see parts of the Great Wall that have not been restored.

He says: 'Alternatively, especially in winter, go south to the warmer landscape of the Guangxi region.'

'From Guilin, take a boat trip down the Li River, with views of those jutting spires that are featured in Chinese art, and spend a couple of days in the lovely town of Yangshuo. From there, you can easily rent bikes and explore the nearby countryside.'

In India, you should go beyond Delhi and Mumbai, Kolkata and Bangalore. From Delhi, hire a car and visit the poor state of Rajasthan next door.

Also, explore the religious side of India, perhaps with a flight to Varanasi, on the holy Ganges River, where corpses are cremated on bonfires beside the waters. Or take a train to Amritsar and visit the Sikh Golden Temple.

He adds: 'Wherever you go, interact not only with monuments but also with the people. Too often, tourists see Tiananmen Square and the Taj Mahal but don't make friends. Asia is important above all for its people, so get to know them.'

Eat

David Chang, chef and owner of Momofuku Restaurant Group, says: 'I've eaten sushi around the world and the best in Tokyo is at Sushi Sawada (Ginza 5-9-19, Chuo-ku, Tokyo, tel: +81-3-3571-4711). In the kitchen, it's just chef Koji Sawada and his wife. And there's nothing there except charcoal and a box of rice. As old-school as you can get.'

'In Paris, Le Chateaubriand (129 Avenue Parmentier, 11e, Paris, tel: +33-1-4357-4595) looks like a typical bistro but you're getting extraordinarily intelligent food. The chef is Inaki Aizpitarte - there's nobody like him. He's doing food in new ways.'

'Everyone goes to San Sebastian in Spain for food. But if you want to have the best seafood experience of your life, drive about 10 to 15 minutes outside the city to Elkano Restaurant (Herrerietta 2, 20808 Guetaria, tel: +34-943-140-024, www.restaurantelkano.com).

'It's got a state-of-the-art storage space for seafood. It gets a shipment of sea water every week to keep things fresh. Everything's cooked over charcoal - it's like Basque barbecue. A dish might consist of turbot, a local sherry, a few other ingredients. Very simple but everything is delicious.'

For those who cannot get a reservation at Noma, the acclaimed Copenhagen restaurant in Denmark, he recommends heading to Restaurant Relae (Jaegersborggade 41, 2200Kbh N, tel: +45-36-966-609, restaurant-relae.dk/?page_id=182).

'Chef Christian Puglisi and his team are all Noma veterans, serving exquisite and light vegetable-centric food, and amazing bread. His food is simple, but not simple.'

In New York, try Kajitsu (414 E 9th Street, NY 10009, www.kajitsunyc.com/) in the East Village.

'I think it might be the best restaurant in the city. And it's totally a value; there's an eight-course tasting menu for US\$70 (S\$91),' says chef Chang. 'Executive chef Masato Nishihara serves Shojin temple food, an ancient cuisine developed in Buddhist monasteries. It's all vegetables but you're not going to miss the meat. And his pickles are so delicious. '

See art

Director and chief curator of the Studio Museum in Harlem Thelma Golden loves Los Angeles. "I've been thrilled by the international attention given to Pacific Standard Time (www.pacificstandardtime.org/exhibitions), a huge, multi-institution exhibition showing art of California in the most inspiring and groundbreaking way. It is a whole new way to experience a vast range of significant art and artists and a great moment for the city."

New York is also always at the top of her list because at any given moment, the city is filled with exhibitions that allow people to be reacquainted with art and artists they love, and to discover new art - sometimes in the same institution.

This year, there is the Whitney Biennial 2012 (whitney.org/Exhibitions/2012Biennial) and the New Museum Triennial: "The Ungovernables" (www.newmuseum.org/exhibitions/448).

"One of the most inspiring places to see art is the Tate Modern (www.tate.org.uk/modern/)," says Ms Golden. "It's among my favourite physical spaces, as the architecture really facilitates engaging with the work on view. I'm looking forward to the Yayoi Kusama retrospective that opens next month.

"Placing museums and art at the centre of any itinerary gives you a point of entry for so many wonderful places. I love Dakar, Senegal, and the biennial Dak'Art (www.biennaledakar.org/) is a reason to explore the city's visual art, music, design and more - this year's iteration opens in May.

"There are so many biennials and triennials, you could combine them for a fascinating itinerary."

Hunt for treasure

Designer L'Wren Scott's favourite place to shop for vintage is Los Angeles. "There's a great store called Golyester (136 S. La Brea Avenue, www.golyester.com). The owner, Esther, has a great eye for textiles and fun vintage, so I always find a new treasure or learn something from her.

"Another great place is The Way We Wore (334 S. La Brea Avenue, www.thewaywewore.com), where I found some great Victorian cotton dresses for either vacationing in the country or the beach."

She recommends London too, as she finds the city also wonderful for all things old. "I love Gallery 25 in Pimlico Road (26 Pimlico Road, London SW1W 8LJ, gallery25.co.uk) for 20th-century antiques - mostly Italian objects. Also, Gordon Watson (28 Pimlico Road, London SW1W 8IJ, www.gordonwatson.co.uk) is a top-end dealer in wonderful 20th-century antiques."

Those who are headed for Paris can find great housewares with a fantastic range of quality and price points. Try Merci (www.merci-merci.com), which has everything from amazing napkins to plates to things for a country picnic.

Scott also likes Vietnam for custom-made clothing. "It can make anything you desire and have it ready the next day. The last trip I took was to Hoi An to a place called Madame Yale. I went crazy making long pants and shirts."

Finally, if you are in Peru, do not leave without a hand-knit sweater. There is a huge market in Cuzco where you can find anything.

Hear music

'In terms of where to hear cutting-edge popular music today, your first stop might be New York City which, in my opinion, is definitely one of the hot spots right now,' says Mr Peter Edge, chief executive of RCA Records.

'The Music Hall of Williamsburg (www.musichallofwilliamsburg.com/) is probably the epicentre of the scene, along with Glasslands (glasslands.blogspot.com/) and the Knitting Factory (bk.knittingfactory.com/).

'Bell House (www.thebellhouseny.com/) is worth a visit, too.'

As well as being historical and beautiful, Paris is still one of the most vibrant, cutting-edge cities and has some of the best music.

He says the hot club right now is the Social Club (parissocialclub.com/). You can hear a sound there - kind of an amalgam of funk and disco, though not specifically retro - that is purely a creation of Paris.

Another club worth noting is Silencio (www.silencio-club.com), designed in part by David Lynch. It is more of a social club and a dance club - another place to hear the newest Paris sound.

In London, the dance party everybody is talking about is Horse Meat Disco (www.eaglelondon.com/lineup/horsemeatdisco.php) at Eagle London in Vauxhall on Sunday nights.

'It's DJ'd disco music that is a late night thing. I would also recommend XOYO (xoyo.co.uk/) in Shoreditch - it's becoming one of the hippest, in-the-know clubs in the city.'

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