+ Zanzibar is the spice of life
+ Ripe for the picking: Orange, NSW
+ One Perfect Day in Dallas

Medieval masterpiece
A luxury retreat high in the hills offers a taste of classic Tuscany.



Bernard Touillon

↑
Monteverdi hotel and villas in Castiglioncello del Trinoro, Tuscany

Travel Insider.


S T R A N G E

M A G I C

Colourful, chaotic and more than a little crazy, Zanzibar is an irresistible mélange of cultures and influences, writes **Lance Richardson**.

Photography by Zach Stovall





PERHAPS nothing captures the strange magic of Zanzibar so well as its full-moon parties. Imagine walking down to a beach and climbing aboard a *dhow* (sailboat). Almost immediately, the dhow hits a sandbar exposed by low tide. You can see everything in the moonlight: figures building a bonfire; somebody arranging a stereo. Meanwhile, more dhows are arriving. Suddenly, the sandbar is thronging with bodies. People start to dance and they continue for hours, until the tide turns and the water begins to rise again. They dance ankle-deep in water until the sandbar disappears and they seem to be dancing in the middle of the ocean.

Zanzibar is like that: beautiful, beguiling, a little deranged. "For a person who's creative, it's a great place to get inspiration," says Doreen Mashika, a local fashion designer who can be spotted walking around Zanzibar in a Panama hat and blue zebra-print outfit (which she calls her "Serengeti jumpsuit"). "Sometimes I get a little *too* inspired and have to tell myself, 'Stop! That's enough.'"

Located just off the coast of Africa's Tanzania, Zanzibar is an archipelago; its two largest islands are Pemba and Unguja. Pemba is known for its diving and untrammelled beaches, though most visitors go to Unguja, which is often simply called Zanzibar and sometimes the Spice Island.





Historically, Zanzibar was a major outpost of the African spice trade. At various times, it has been in thrall to the Persians, the Portuguese and the Omanis. Then it was the British who made it a protectorate. Cloves, cardamom, cinnamon and saffron have been grown in its fertile plantations and shipped all over the world. Tens of thousands of slaves once passed through its markets.

The presence of all these influences means Zanzibar is something of a hodgepodge today; as rich and complicated as a good masala. Muslims, Christians and Hindus coexist with a thriving expat community of Europeans. One of these expats is Lén Helén Hörlin, a Swede who came to Zanzibar by dhow in the late 1980s. Hörlin recalls seeing "this fairytale town rising from the seas, and the smell of cloves because the factory was still running then". She's talking about Stone Town, on the western shore of Unguja. Hörlin fell in love immediately – "totally, totally, totally", she says – as many do when they first visit this unusual place.

Stone Town is only a tiny part of Zanzibar City, though its reputation can make it seem like a vast labyrinth of stucco and tin. With its mix of rough houses and Islamic architecture influenced by Swahili culture from the mainland, this is the kind of place that's best explored by wandering, leaving discovery to chance. There's a series of ornate wooden doors opening onto private courtyards. There are boys playing football down echoing alleyways and men socialising on steps, rubbing their feet through gnarled sandals. From time to time, a muezzin calls the faithful to prayer, competing with a thousand hawkers selling mangoes, paintings and tourist paraphernalia.

The glut can be claustrophobic but it's not hard to understand why UNESCO declared this place a World Heritage Site in 2000. "Stone Town is like a shantytown," says Mashika. "But then you can have a millionaire right next door. It's mixed. From the street vendor to the politician, nobody is bothered here. There is no segregation."

One place to test this theory is the sprawling Park Hyatt Zanzibar (hotel.qantas.com.au/parkhyattzanzibar), which opened in 2015 in an old home once owned by a merchant – though "palace" seems like a more appropriate term. Because this part of the hotel is heritage-listed, almost all of the details are authentic, from the 90-year-old mango tree to several spiked doors designed to dissuade elephants. ("When the Indians came, they did not know we have no elephants here," explains the assistant manager.) But the most interesting thing is out back: a sliver of stunning beach being used by hotel guests and locals, everyone cavorting together in the sun.

Just down from the hotel, at the seafront, is Forodhani Gardens, which at night blooms

Sensory overload: House of Spices, a restored 200-year-old spice trader's home in Stone Town







(From top) The street-food market in Forodhani Gardens; Park Hyatt Zanzibar's oceanfront pool and ethereal lobby

into a raucous street-food market with traditional Zanzibari cuisine. It's impossible to walk through the fray without noticing the House of Wonders, just beyond, which looks like a cross between a plantation house and a mega-church. Built by a sultan in the 19th century, the house got its name because it was the first building in East Africa to have electricity and the first to have a working elevator. Rumour has it there's a good museum inside, though you have to use your imagination because the house is now closed due to safety concerns. "Nothing has been done for 50 years," a local whispers with embarrassment, gesturing at a sign outside that says "Revolutionary Government of Zanzibar".

In fact, there's a great deal on Zanzibar that is broken, decaying, falling apart or mouldering in the sun. But that's part of the charm. The Hamamni Persian Baths haven't worked for years but they're worth a look to see Shiraz-style architecture so elegant that it will have you redesigning your own bathroom. Thankfully, the old slave market is no longer in use either, except by visitors interested in the darker aspects of world history.

You'll see Stone Town at its best from the rooftops and there are several vantage points worth exploring. The Zanzibar Palace Hotel (hotel.qantas.com.au/zanzibarpalace) carries scars from 1896 when the British bombed the sultan – those cannonballs in the gardens are genuine – and its bar offers a view of the sea and Hindu temple next door. The nearby Palace Museum is still filled with furniture, as if the ruler might return at any moment.

Even better for views is Emerson Spice hotel (emersonspice.com), founded by a now-deceased American psychologist who once treated musician Kurt Cobain and liked to travel the world with a cargo of Louis Vuitton suitcases. "He was mercurial but *fantastic*," says manager Russell Bridgewood as he waves his hands to activate the sensor on a fountain.

Before going upstairs, it's worth pausing for a moment in the lobby of Emerson Spice to examine a shrine to Princess Sayyida Salme, daughter of the first Omani sultan to rule over Zanzibar. "She taught herself to write by copying calligraphy from the Koran onto a camel's shoulder blade – it was like a slate," says Said el-Gheithy, a local historian who arranged the exhibit and is Salme's No. 1 fan.

Indeed, Princess Salme is something of a celebrity on Zanzibar. Entire tours devoted to her old haunts turn out to be a terrific way to sample the island past Stone Town. Zanzibar Different Tours (zanzibardifferent.com) will pick you up and whisk you off to

Flight path

DAR

Qantas flies from Sydney to Johannesburg, where you can access connections to Tanzania. qantas.com







her beachfront palace, more Persian baths and a spice farm, where a guide points out everything from cinnamon roots to a fascinating tree growing "lipstick fruit". "Pretty boy!" he says, rubbing the red liquid into his lips and pouting, as if waiting for a kiss.

Emerson Spice is in an old house that belonged to a merchant and was intended for three wives, 14 children and 47 servants. Its vertical sprawl resembles an Escher drawing, with stairs and doors leading off in every direction, and the stunning garden was once a Swahili market. At the top of the hotel is a tea house inside a fluttery, coloured tent; it offers an extraordinary, almost hypnotic vista of the town. You can't stop peeking into all the windows.

It's here, high above the island, that Bridgewood and Hörlin discuss the comings and goings of the world around them.

"We're a small community and we like to try to keep each other insane," says Hörlin.

"Insane?"

"No!" She touches her temple, searching for the right word in English. "Keep each other *sane*." ●

Stone Town is a maze of narrow streets (above); elegant Baraza Resort & Spa at Bwejuu Beach (above right)

The writer was a guest of Bench Africa, which offers bespoke travel packages to Zanzibar. Visit benchafrica.com.

Where to stay

With sand the texture of icing sugar, the beaches on Zanzibar are beloved for good reason. In the north, the white stretches of Nungwi, Kendwa, Matemwe and Kiwengwa are popular and it's possible to arrange snorkelling expeditions in a local dhow. In the south-east is Bwejuu Beach, said to be one of the best in the world. Its reef is a renowned dive site.

Well positioned to take advantage of this natural splendour is Baraza Resort & Spa (hotel.qantas.com.au/baraza). Built right on the edge of Bwejuu Beach, this extensive compound of palm trees, tropical flowers and brass lamps caressed by flowing curtains is modelled after an Omani palace. The 30 private villas are superb and almost ludicrously indulgent. Styled like an Arabian hammam, the candlelit spa has a crystalline lap pool and offers frangipani-scented treatments.

Baraza is a destination in itself so include it on a longer trip that allows time to take in the rest of the island and Stone Town.

To dive on the reef, visit Rising Sun Dive Center (risingsun-zanzibar.com) at nearby Breezes Beach Club. The hotel can also arrange kitesurfing and daytrips.

Travel Insider

Zanzibar is just off the coast of Africa's Tanzania. Go to travelinsider.qantas.com.au to find the best safari experiences.

Can you smell the fresh air? How about the freshly ground coffee? This wine region in NSW's Central West blends rural charm with fine dining, writes **Penelope Green**.



Orange crush



Photography by Petrina Tinslay





Racine's pressed duck (far left) and its elegantly rustic wedding venue, the Apple Packing Shed



Tonic's owner-chef, Tony Worland (left); twice-baked Heidi Gruyere cheese soufflé by Lolli Redini (right)



PICK a resident of Orange and chances are they've left the bright lights to carve out a better life in the country – and found the grass really is greener here on the other side of the divide, just three and a half hours' drive across the Blue Mountains from Sydney or almost two hours from Dubbo.

When Willa and Shaun Arantz opened their paddock-to-plate restaurant, Racine, at La Colline Wines in 2009, Willa says there was only a handful of good cafés and restaurants in the regional city. "Now, there are about 70 and the food has gone from decent to amazing."

While well-established Racine and one-hatted Lolli Redini are popular stalwarts, newer restaurants (including Sweet Sour Salt, Mr Lim and Charred) and bars (Ferment and Washington & Co.) are joining the party.

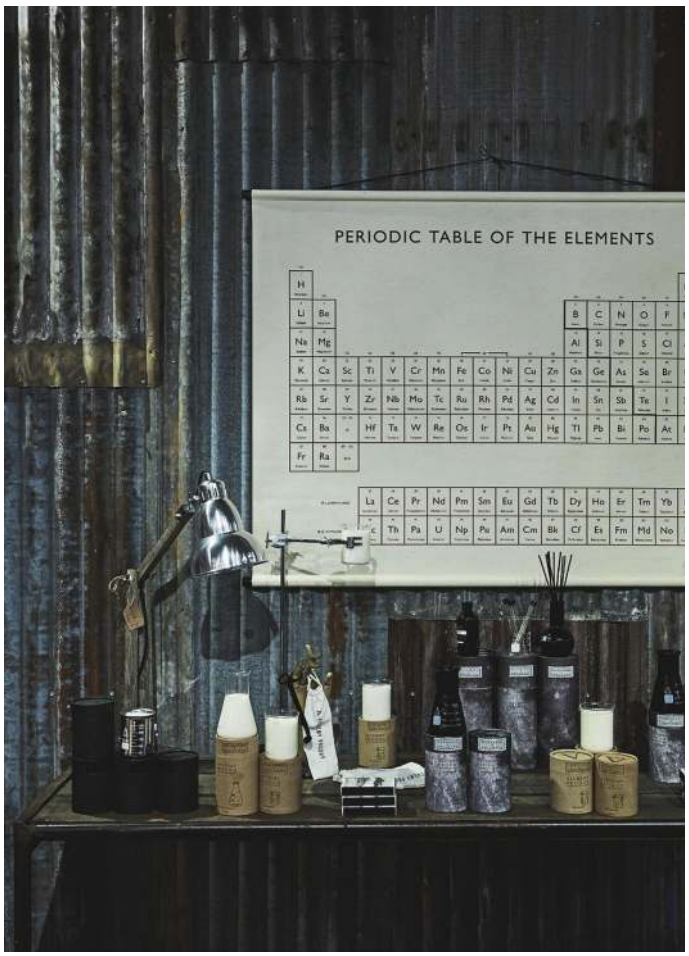
The seasons are keenly felt in this cool-climate winegrowing region where elevations range from 600 to 1100 metres – the highest in Australia. The wineries are a drawcard but add a swag of great restaurants, cafés and bars, eclectic shops and modest house prices and it's easy to understand why people want to live here.

SIMPLY STYLISH

Named in memory of a Tuscan nonna and family friend, elegant fine-diner Lolli Redini (lolliredini.com.au) has racked up more accolades than you can poke a silver butterknife at. For those who like to dine alfresco, Saturday lunch under the magnificent magnolia tree in spring and autumn is a must. Orange-raised Simonn Hawke trained in Sydney under renowned chef Anthony Musarra before heading home to raise the dining bar with the opening of Lolli Redini in 2001. Her forte is Italian- and French-influenced cuisine. "We're not into molecular gastronomy or short-lived trends," says Simonn, who believes the restaurant's success lies in its "generous, honest, consistent" cooking of regional produce. While customers have never let Simonn remove the twice-baked Heidi Gruyere cheese soufflé from the menu, the wine list is ever-changing. Curated by Simonn's life and business partner, Leah Morphett, it includes labels from some of the best vineyards in NSW's Central West, Australia and overseas.

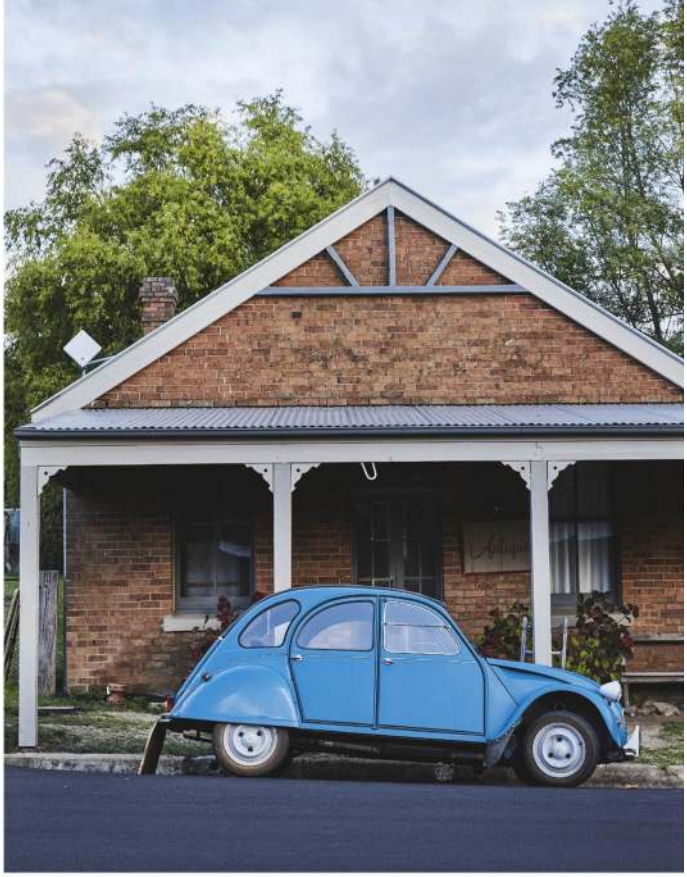
RUSTIC DINING

Nine kilometres west of Orange, charming Racine restaurant (racinerestaurant.com.au) at La Colline Wines has long been a favourite of locals and travellers. Don't be fooled by the shed-like exterior; inside, the atmosphere is swish, with grass-green walls designed to bring the outside in. After three years in London, owners Willa and Shaun Arantz came to Orange with the aim of creating a high-end restaurant "in the middle of nowhere, as you can find in Europe". They've also opened a bakery in town. The cuisine at Racine celebrates the region and the seasons. The restaurant, which is named after the French word for "root", has its own kitchen garden, and an apple symbol on the menu signifies that a dish has been 75 per cent locally sourced. "I'm sick of Sydney chefs saying, 'We grow it all here,' because even we can't do that, though we come close," says Willa. Gourmands note: the pressed duck has been on the menu since its inception for good reason. Nearby, the Apple Packing Shed – a nod to the apple orchard that was here before the vineyard – is a popular venue for weddings and functions.



An old storage shed in Millthorpe is the backdrop to homewares and gifts at Tomolly







Pip Brett and The Sonic in Orange (above and bottom); The Salon des Refusés antiques store in Pym Street, Millthorpe (top right)

HISTORIC CHARMER

Sure, there are linen tablecloths at one-hatted restaurant Tonic (tonicmillthorpe.com.au) in the historic town of Millthorpe but owner-chef Tony Worland doesn't do posh. His menu is brimming with seasonal produce, some of which Tony discovers growing in the wild, such as quinces. The restaurant "reflects what we're like: fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants types who love a beer and a good time", says the affable chef. Tonic (a combination of Tony and wife Nicole's names) is now in its 15th year and is one of the many reasons why people are drawn to Millthorpe (millthorpevillage.com.au), which is about a 20-minute drive from Orange.

While the small town's 1000 or so residents might get blasé about its quaint, heritage-listed buildings, that's not the case for the many visitors who love to explore its cosy heart, which has two pubs, as well as cellar doors at Angullong Vineyard (angullong.com.au) and Slow Wine Co. (slowwineco.com.au).

The Old Mill (theoldmillcafe.com.au), Millthorpe Providore (33 Victoria Street; 0417 412 577) and La Boucherie (25 Victoria Street; 02 6366 3656) serve good coffee and food, while you can get your fashion and homewares fix at Tomolly (tomolly.com.au) and Millthorpe Blue (millthorpeblue.com.au).

For all of Millthorpe's charm, people are what matter to father-of-five Tony. "There's a great little public school and community," he says.

GRAND DESIGNS

The stark white pillars of Orange's former Masonic Hall frame the grand entrance of The Sonic (thesonic.com.au), the stylish domain of petite dynamo Pip Brett. The 33-year-old completed a Bachelor of Design in Sydney before returning to Orange, where her mum, Kezz, ran a women's boutique. "Mum said, 'Just start small and build,'" says Pip. So she opened a clothes store, Iglou (which stocks labels such as Sass & Bide), then a successful homewares store, Jumbled. Pip was desperate for more retail space when, as luck would have it, her builder husband, Nick Luelf, noticed the Masonic Hall was up for sale; it was the perfect opportunity to put her two businesses under one roof. Melbourne architects Studio Esteta pared back Pip's vivid, multilayered style to create The Sonic, a space inspired by concept stores such as Merci and Anthropologie in Paris. Spread across two light, interconnecting rooms, the store has an eclectic range of homewares and cool, casual fashion labels, plus a café, Nimrod's. "I want The Sonic to inspire and excite," enthuses Pip.

A few blocks away, The White Place (thewhiteplace.com.au) and Mary & Tex (maryandtex.com.au) showcase contemporary furniture and quirky gifts. And if second-hand threads are your bag, Frockwork Orange (frockworkorange.com.au) is a must; don't miss the vintage room at the back.

MARKET FRESH

Twice a month, there's a wonderful opportunity to buy produce direct from the region's growers at Orange Farmers Market (orangefarmersmarket.org.au). The markets are held every second Saturday at the tree-lined Northcourt in summer and at Orange Showground's Agricultural Pavilion in winter. Grab a coffee and a freshly baked pastry and soak up the scene – 60 stalls operated by honest country folk, the sizzle of bacon, interesting local banter – and wonder why the heck you live elsewhere. Whether its duck's eggs, homemade fruit pies or the finest cut of beef, the markets have it all. You might even come across a guest chef cooking up a storm with seasonal ingredients. It's a welcoming place that unites the community; spot the locals with their branded farmers' market bags and a determined look to get to their preferred stalls.

An annual highlight is the Orange F.O.O.D (Food of Orange District) Week festival (orangefoodweek.com.au) that enlivens the town in April. The longest-running event of its kind in Australia, it's a veritable autumn feast. Program standouts include Forage, an amble through three vineyards that's akin to an eight-course dégustation. Another hit at the festival is F.O.O.D HQ, where you can hear growers talking about their produce. "It's often hard to get a seat," says James Sweetapple, the aptly named president of the F.O.O.D Week Association. Tip: book your accommodation now.

Flight path

DBO

Qantas flies to Dubbo from Sydney, with connections from other Australian capital cities. qantas.com

VINTAGE CROP

The Orange wine region now has 60 vineyards and 40 cellar doors. Bloodwood (bloodwood.biz) and Canobolas-Smith (canobolassmithwines.com.au) led the charge but many more wineries have since sprouted on the slopes of Mount Canobolas, including Ross Hill (rosshillwines.com.au), Philip Shaw (philipshaw.com.au), De Salis (desaliswines.com.au), Word of Mouth (wordofmouthwines.com.au) and Heifer Station (heiferstation.com). Naturally, several are run by tree changers.

Charlie and Loretta Svenson, of De Salis, abandoned Sydney for Orange (she was in hospitality; he was an academic) to master making topnotch wines with a "minimal-intervention policy" and without using enzymes or tannins. "The hipsters call it natural winemaking and market it as cloudy, unfinished wine but we're not comfortable with that," says Charlie of their ultra-premium drops.

At Word of Mouth, former Sydneysider Peter Gibson and his wife, Deborah Upjohn, also have a sustainable approach to winemaking. Their property includes two hectares of established gardens (look out for Snuggles the sheep and George



(From top) The Old Convent at Borenore and its Willow House accommodation







Charlie and Loretta Svenson, of De Salis, and their 2013 Lofty Pinot Noir produced from vines on the northern slope of Mount Canobolas

the alpaca), a market garden, a cellar door, Peter's pottery studio and a small exhibition space.

Renowned wine producer Philip Shaw's sons, Daniel and Damian, are leading the second generation of winemakers who love talking about wine at their cellar door or at the annual Orange Wine Festival (orangewinefestival.com.au), held this year from October 13 to 22. Chin-chin.

SLEEP WELL

With sweeping views to Mount Canobolas, the Old Convent (oldconvent.com.au) at Borenore, a 20-minute drive west of Orange, offers lovely quarters and wholesome food for the weary traveller. Owners Josie (a bespoke dressmaker) and Jeffrey Chapman (a financial controller) left Sydney for Orange in 1989. When the Catholic Church put the convent up for sale, they leapt at the chance to rescue it from its then parlous state. The 8000-square-metre property has a church that's used for small functions and three lodgings. The original convent building, which was run as a school until 1963, is now The Cottage, converted into a bright two-bedroom, one-bathroom space. Weatherboard charmer Willow House has two bedrooms, two bathrooms and a wraparound verandah. An extra bed is available in The Nun's Room, a self-contained one-bedroom apartment attached to the Chapmans' home. Guests can savour delicious country breakfasts; expect homemade muesli, a herb and goat's curd omelette with roasted tomatoes and robust coffee from the Faema espresso machine. "It's not fancy but it's the kind of place where *we* like to stay," says Josie.

Travel Insider

Experience another thriving wine region. The best of the Mornington Peninsula is at travelinsider.qantas.com.au.

Another rural charmer, also in Borenore, is the Black Sheep Inn (blacksheepinn.com.au), which offers contemporary accommodation in a former shearing shed. And if you're craving city digs, check out De Russie Boutique Hotel Orange (derussiehotels.com.au).

WAKE UP AND SMELL THE COFFEE

If you thought the hipster barista was exclusive to capital cities, think again. Orange's coffee scene shows no sign of slowing but, according to locals, you have to be on your game. "If you don't serve good coffee, you don't get away with it," says Katie Baddock, who moved from Sydney's Marrickville to Orange to found perennial gourmet favourite The Agrestic Grocer (426 Molong Road; 02 6360 4604) before opening new café Groundstone (151a Byng Street; 02 6394 6386). Located in the Orange Regional Museum precinct, Groundstone has a Scandinavian feel and features a kokedama succulent garden.

Need another caffeine hit? Wander a few blocks to Lords Place and look for the grey-and-white striped awning above hole-in-the-wall café Good Eddy (goodeddy.com.au). Pull up a seat, enjoy the sunlight streaming in through the shop window and soak up the country-town vibe.

Other great places in Orange for coffee include Hawkes General Store (hawkesgeneralstore.com.au) and Byng Street Local Store (byngstreet.com.au), which serves breakfast every day from 7am and has lovely verandah seating. ●

The Uros, who are believed to predate the Incas, still have a largely traditional way of life despite encroaching modernisation



PEOPLE OF THE LAKE



High in the Peruvian Andes on Lake Titicaca, novelist **Linda Jaivin** visits the Uros, an indigenous people who build boats, houses – even the floating islands they live on – out of reeds.

Photography by Enrique Castro-Mendivil



TWO YELLOW pumas rear up on Lake Titicaca, mouths agape, eyes rolling. "Mercedes-Benz," giggles our "taxi" driver, Eduardo. I wonder for a moment if I've chewed one too many coca leaves (a local remedy for altitude sickness). But while the thinness of the air at 3812 metres above sea level can do funny things to your head, there really is a double-decker extravaganza of a totora-reed boat, with twin pumas at the prow, sailing past.

By comparison, our single-oar water taxi is a jalopy: bundles of totora reeds tied in a sinuous shape that vaguely resembles a headless duck, topped with a brightly striped woven blanket to sit on. Eduardo is taking us on a jaunt around the world's highest commercially navigable lake, a body of water nearly the size of Puerto Rico and the birthplace of Incan civilisation. Pumas may no longer prowl its shores but they are still totemic as symbols of courage, power and energy.

Eduardo's people, the Uros, live here in the middle of the lake, in totora-reed houses on floating islands they build and rebuild themselves out of – what else? – totora reeds. They anchor the islands to the lake bed with rocks so as not to wake up in Bolivia (the lake is divided between Peru and its neighbour). The Uros, who claim descent from the first settlers of the Andean plateau, have lived like this for hundreds of years since working out it was one way to escape enslavement by the Spanish conquistadors, not to mention Incan and pre-Incan aggressors. Today, there are 94 islands, with up to 10 families per island.

The Uros fish with cormorants, keep cats to control rats and eat both the flesh and eggs of ibises, which they raise like hens. One woman on Eduardo's island sits weaving a fishing net from string. Another beckons me to follow her across the springy ground into her one-room reed hut. There, to her children's amusement, she dresses me in the Spanish-influenced Andean costume – in this case, a puffy, ruffled skirt of disco-green, a hot-pink bolero jacket and a wide-brimmed hat. (Later, my friends will do a double take on realising that one of the "locals" in my photos is me.) When it's time to hand back her clothes, she shows me a selection of exuberantly colourful handmade tapestries. The Uros still engage in barter but she seems content with soles (Peruvian currency).

For all the tradition on display, life here is changing. Solar panels perched precariously on reed roofs now provide a renewable source of energy that, unlike candles, allow people to light their homes without worrying about burning them down. Motorboats moor alongside reed craft. The islands have their own FM radio station broadcasting news in Aymara, one of the two main local languages (Quechua is the other, the original Uruquilla having faded away).

The lake's ecology is also evolving. It's home to giant water frogs that grow up to 60 centimetres long when outstretched and, in the hands of shamans, yield aphrodisiac "juices" – or so the locals claim. However, their



numbers are decreasing as climate change (which is shrinking the lake), pollution and introduced species take their toll. North American trout introduced in the 1930s have driven some native fish to extinction. On the upside, the trout have transmuted into a tasty species with golden scales that reflect the strong Andean sun.

That sun has been elusive today. We began our journey on the lake under fat grey clouds. Alan, our Quechua guide, told us he'd asked the spirits of the mountains to help us out with the weather then handed us three dried coca leaves each to dedicate to Pachamama, Mother Earth. After we'd flung them off the stern, into the wind with our prayers, the gods seemed to be with us for a while, thinning the clouds to reveal the blue Andean sky. We'll see the sky in all its saturated glory tomorrow when we visit the mystical pre-Incan burial towers of Sillustani but for now we're wondering if we should have spared Pachamama four leaves each instead of three. For, as we say our goodbyes to Eduardo and his friends and set course for Taquile Island, menacing violet and grey clouds fill the lowering sky.

The "Mercedes-Benz" of Lake Titicaca's totora-reed boats (above); locals re-enact an Incan legend (above left and previous page)

The 2000-plus residents of hilly Taquile have a reputation for producing the finest textiles in Peru. In fact, the island and its art are recognised by UNESCO as a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity. As we hike breathlessly towards the peak, 4050 metres above sea level, Alan stops to pick muña, a minty herb that, like coca, helps people acclimatise to the altitude – though probably not quite as helpfully as the oxygen tanks back at our hotel. The muña has a beautiful aroma and I rub the small oily leaves between my fingers then hold them to my nose as a pick-me-up.

Alan tells us how to determine, by the colour of their clothes and hats, which Taquileños are married: a gaudy pompom on a woman's hat says she is looking for a husband; on a man, a red hat with a white tip means he's available. Incidentally, the man would have knitted his hat himself. Women spin, dye and weave but knitting is a man's job. And if he wants to get married, he'll need to knit a spectacular cap for his prospective father-in-law or risk a knockback.

The Taquileños are proud and protective of their unique culture and have developed a community-controlled model of sustainable tourism. They run the island on a combination of collectivist principles, Catholicism and the Incan moral code: "Don't steal, don't lie and don't be lazy." We don't make it all the way to the top of the island – not because we're lazy but because forks of lightning are beginning to appear in the clouds and we face an hour's boat ride back to our lakeside lodge.

Titilaka (hotel.qantas.com.au/titilaka), a boutique hotel set on the tip of its own peninsula, is looking good to us as we flee the gathering storm. The all-inclusive price covers gourmet meals (including that famous trout and locally grown quinoa), room service, bar, outings on the lake or into nearby Puno – and the oxygen. Sitting in the lounge, Pisco Sour in hand, gazing through the picture windows at the dramatic, rain-lashed lake, I think, "Pachamama, do your worst. I'm on top of the world."





(From top) A Dusk room at luxury lodge Titilaka; *novoandina* cuisine by Astrid & Gastón, currently No.7 on Latin America's 50 Best Restaurants list

Flight path

LIM

Qantas flies to Santiago from Sydney then onwards to Lima via partner airlines. qantas.com

On your way

Make the most of your time in Lima en route to Lake Titicaca.

Lima sits under a pale wash of sky that locals call *la panza de burro* (the donkey's belly). But for its whispering blues and violet greys, it could almost be the colour of the city's pre-Incan ruins and crumbling 17th-century walls – or of the surrounding desert.

At first sight, the Peruvian capital appears to mute all its colours; even the native San Pedro cactus is a discreet powdery green. But step inside the food markets of Surquillo, with their technicolour produce displays; visit shops packed with flamboyant textiles, ponchos and pompoms; check out the galleries of vibrant contemporary art; or visit on a feast or festival day and you'll see that Lima, the gateway to Lake Titicaca and Machu Picchu, reveals the full spectrum of colours to the traveller who takes the time to get acquainted.

In the 16th century, Spaniard Francisco Pizarro conquered Peru and founded Lima as its capital. Today, it's a proudly independent Peru that is conquering the world with *novoandina* (new Andean) cuisine. Splurge on a meal by the culinary conquistadors at Central (centralrestaurante.com.pe), which has been No.1 on Latin America's 50 Best Restaurants list for the past three years, and Astrid & Gastón (astridygaston.com), located in a historic hacienda in the upscale San Isidro district.

Peru's food revolution has helped to spark a cultural renaissance, too. Lima boasts small but lively design, arts, theatre and music scenes. Survey its art history from pre-Columbian times to the present at the Museo de Arte de Lima (mali.pe) in the former Palacio de la Exposición. And try Peru's national cocktail, the Pisco Sour, at Bar Maury (Jirón Carabaya 399). It was at this Art Deco establishment that a barman in the 1920s first added egg white to the now-venerated recipe.

If time is short and you want art, history *and* great food and drink all in one place, stay at Hotel B (hotel.qantas.com.au/hotelb), where the rooms are full of contemporary Peruvian art. This boutique hotel in bohemian Barranco is also a prime spot for watching the sun tickle the donkey's belly with its rosy fingers before setting over the sea. ●





CASTLE IN THE SKY

Check in to an Italian retreat perched on a hill midway between Rome and Florence and discover the charms of a forgotten hamlet with sweeping valleys, terracotta roofs and winding roads. By **Lee Tulloch.**





(From left) The view to Mount Amiata in picture-perfect Castiglioncello del Trinoro; Hotel Monteverdi's Suite del Bosco, where wooden sculptures reinterpret structures that the region's farmers once used to dry grain; historic architecture frames lush views of the old town





Butterfly chairs dot a sunny terrace at Monteverdi (left); the dreamy Orfeo room

OUR RENTAL car's GPS tells us we're close to the tiny Tuscan village of Castiglioncello del Trinoro, except it fails to consider that there's a field and a mountain in the way. Castiglioncello means "little castle" and it sits high above the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Val d'Orcia, one of Italy's most serene valleys. We can see the terracotta roofs of houses from where we've come to a halt in the rutted field but they're frustratingly out of reach. When we eventually kill the GPS and follow our instincts, Tuscany's famous white roads lead us quickly to the town gates.

Castiglioncello del Trinoro is worth the convoluted journey. Its secluded location and sublime views are two features that drew Cincinnati-based corporate lawyer and law professor Michael Cioffi here more than a decade ago. He was holidaying at a nearby villa when he "fell in love at first sight" with the forgotten hamlet, halfway between Rome and Florence, which had been a rest stop on the pilgrim route from Rome to Canterbury in medieval times. "It had retained its medieval character with almost no interference from the outside," he says. "So there was this sense of being lost in time."

When several houses in the 900-year-old town became available for sale, Cioffi purchased them and enlisted the help of Rome-based architects Ilaria and Giorgio Miani to rebuild and reinvent the interiors, which had mostly fallen into ruin. He gave the collection of rental villas a name, Monteverdi (monteverdituscany.com), for his mother's family, for the composer whose work he admired and for the green hills that surround it.

The local residents, whose families had lived there for generations, were wary of the foreigner buying up their sleepy village, fearing their summers would be overrun by noisy interlopers. But Cioffi's intentions for Monteverdi were sensitive to those concerns, inspired by the idea of *albergo diffuso*, where failing villages are revitalised when a few houses are turned into tourist accommodation, embedding travellers in village life.

Cioffi hoped to take this model further, not only creating beautiful spaces to rent but also sponsoring events in art, literature, music and gastronomy, making Monteverdi a centre where the arts and humanities would flourish. "Michael wanted to create a cultural, emotional experience," says Ilaria Miani. "He really is like a Renaissance prince."

What he didn't want to create was a theme park but Monteverdi feels far from that. It's still a place where a small number of people live year-round, even through the snowy winters (Monteverdi is closed from mid-November to March). Wherever possible, Cioffi and his team have tried to maintain the authenticity of the setting and the medieval character of the buildings. The task was massive. Miani combed Italy for architectural details, such as ancient beams and handcrafted tiles, to replace poor contemporary materials used in previous renovations. The architect says it was all carried out "with no restraint on expenses".

One expense not anticipated was "the dig". Early on in the restoration, builders uncovered artefacts on the property from the original Etruscan settlement and the foundations of a castle dating back to 1127. Despite the massive cost of uncovering and preserving the ruins for posterity, Cioffi was determined to reconnect the village with its past. It's the only privately funded archaeological dig in Tuscany, overseen by a professor from the University of Siena.

Monteverdi has grown organically over several years, a glorious project involving the sort of care – and injections of cash – that might leave less passionate investors shaking their heads. The modest village, which lost many of its citizens to Italy's urban centres after World War II, has been re-energised. The Monteverdi project now includes

Flight path

FCO

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Bernard Touillon (previous page)

an art gallery and artist-in-residence program with a first-class curator, Sarah McCrory, in charge; a 14th-century church that's been retrofitted to become a music venue and an outdoor stage; as well as a lively enoteca and a restaurant serving seasonal, sustainable Tuscan food.

Then there are the three luxury villas and a 12-room hotel occupying a row of townhouses. Gardens have been landscaped, a swimming pool has been added and a spa opened last year, using products sourced from a centuries-old Tuscan *farmacia* and offering Etruscan-inspired bathing rituals with views of the valley.

The quiet road leads us to Monteverdi when the town is in full bloom: rambling roses and honeysuckle tangle over the stone walls; lavender and rosemary hedge the paths; and the houses, with brightly painted doors that open directly onto the street, are decorated with dazzling pots of hydrangeas. The village's main street is so narrow that our car almost touches the walls of the houses on either side. There are startling views of the valley with avenues of cypress trees at almost every turn. As tranquil as the setting is, the village is nevertheless bustling with tradesmen working on a villa conversion, cyclists and motorists passing through, locals chatting in doorways and hotel guests sipping coffee on the many terraces.

The villas, which are rented by the week, are scattered throughout the village. The largest, three-storey Villa Muri Antichi, has six bedrooms. At one time, at least 20 people and their animals lived in each of these peasants' houses.

Hotel Monteverdi, created for shorter stays, occupies a former pensione. We're sleeping in room No. 5, or "the green room", named for its pastel-washed timber. It's charmingly rustic, with heavy ceiling beams. Linen bedding and furnishings have been sourced from local carpenters and tradesmen. All rooms are individually decorated – No. 6 next door has an extravagant freestanding copper bathtub.

Monteverdi creates a problem for us: we're keen to enjoy the village and all that it offers but we're also eager to drive down into the valley and cut a swathe through the vintages of Montepulciano, Chianti and Brunello. There's no shortage of advice on where to go, as bon vivant Cioffi is keen to promote local winemakers and provedores. Then again, the enoteca dispenses 32 wines by the glass and the views from Monteverdi's terraces are magnificent. It's very tempting just to *be* in this transcendent space.

There are a number of annual events at Monteverdi, apart from the ongoing arts programs, that provide further reasons to spend time in the village. Cioffi is the sponsor of the eight-day music festival Incontri in Terra di Siena, held each July in the famous gardens of neighbouring La Foce estate. Monteverdi sponsors and hosts selected events at the annual Sarteano Jazz & Blues festival and British maestro Sir John Eliot Gardiner holds a one-week boot camp for aspiring singers each April. Every Wednesday in summer, musical events take place in the piazza.

Ilaria Miani says it's important for guests to understand that Monteverdi "is not a resort". It's part of a community, she says, with "an incredible exchange of energy". Cioffi also hosts scholars, exchange students and summer interns from Cornell University's hospitality program in the United States. On any sunny morning, Monteverdi may look sleepy but it's buzzing with creativity.

As for its benevolent creator, he hopes guests will appreciate "the life of the mind" and visit the village to "think and talk and have great food and drink great wine". Just taking in the view is fine, too. ●



Classic Tuscany

Monteverdi is the perfect base from which to tour the heritage-listed Val d'Orcia region. Here's what to do...

Visit a historic villa
The 15th-century La Foce (lafoce.com) was inherited by Benedetta Origo Isidori, daughter of Anglo-Irish writer Iris Origo and nobleman Antonio Origo, who were responsible for great agricultural and social improvements in the impoverished valley from the 1920s. The formal gardens, which are open to the public on certain days, are considered the finest example of the work of British architect Cecil Pinsent. Dopolavoro (dopolavorolafoce.it), a nearby café, was once the after-work social club for the estate's workers.

Eat with la famiglia
Podere Il Casale (podereilcasale.it) is a picturesque lunch spot between Pienza and Montepulciano, which includes a biodynamic farm, a cheese factory and a rustic restaurant with spectacular views of the surrounding countryside. Tuscan cheesemaker Ulisse will take you on a tour of the factory if you reserve ahead. His wife, Sandra, cooks hearty organic meals in the very family-friendly restaurant. Children will be happily distracted petting the animals.

Explore vineyards
The Val d'Orcia is famous for its fine wines, especially the Brunello di Montalcino, made exclusively from sangiovese grapes. The towns of Montalcino, Montepulciano and Pienza are surrounded by vineyards. A number of wineries open their cellar doors, such as the impressive winery at Rosewood Castiglion del Bosco (pictured above; rosewoodhotels.com), an estate established by the Ferragamo family. It hosts tasting seminars year-round and a harvest event in September.

Seek wellness
Fans of Federico Fellini will enjoy a visit to the thermal springs in the municipality of Siena, where the Italian director shot his masterpiece, *8½*. The Etruscans built a temple here in the fifth century and some Renaissance architecture survives. The modern Terme di Chianciano (terme chianciano.it) is one of the finest health resorts in Italy, with hotels, springs, thermal baths and lush parklands.

Travel Insider

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Dallas

There are rustlings in the Texan city... and they have more to do with entertainment and the arts than oil rigs and cattle ranches, writes **Catherine Marshall**.

One Perfect Day



Downtown's flashy skyline flanks Klyde Warren Park, a green space "created out of thin air" over an eight-lane freeway


DMA
FREE TO BE YOU
DALLAS MUSEUM OF ART



DALLAS has shaken off the shoulder pads, big hair and wheeling and dealing – hallmarks of the eponymous 1980s TV show that made the city famous. Yes, there's something familiar about the glass-and-steel skyline that rises from the flat Texan landscape but the cranes pivoting around it indicate a city on the move. Founded on cotton, oil, ranches and railroads, Dallas is a diverse economic hub and one of the fastest-growing cities in the United States. Scores of American companies, including Fortune 500s, are headquartered here. And while the city has retained some of that old charm – cowboy boots, Southern hospitality, Tex-Mex – it's now also home to sophisticated food, wine and arts scenes.

08:00

Join a meditation or tai chi class or go for a walk around Klyde Warren Park (klydewarrenpark.org), an urban garden built, improbably, over the freeway that connects Uptown, Downtown and the Arts District. Grab a coffee from one of the food trucks lined up around the park.

09:00

Dallas is well serviced by trains and buses but Uber offers ease of movement between its divergent attractions – and the chance to chat with the resolutely friendly locals. Hop in your ride and head to Ellen's Southern Kitchen & Bar (1790 North Record Street; +1 469 206 3339), located five minutes away in the West End. This historic warehouse-filled area is undergoing technological refurbishments such as the installation of free public wi-fi and interactive digital kiosks offering mobile-charging stations, touchscreen maps and public-transit schedules. Ellen's menu features plenty of Southern comfort food such as biscuits, gravy and grits. For a true fusion of old and new, try the grits Benedict: poached eggs on a bed of spinach, crumbled hickory bacon and cheesy grits.



(From top) AT&T Performing Arts Center in the Arts District; former American president John F. Kennedy and first lady Jacqueline are immortalised at The Sixth Floor Museum

D. Guest Smith



Willem de Kooning's *Seated Woman* at Nasher Sculpture Center (left); the George W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum houses a full-size replica of the Oval Office

10:00

Walk five minutes to The Sixth Floor Museum at Dealey Plaza (jfk.org) for a solemn, thoughtful look at the life and death of one of the most beloved American presidents, John F. Kennedy. It was from the sixth floor of this former book depository that Lee Harvey Oswald fatally shot Kennedy as the president's motorcade passed by in November 1963. Peer down from the window through which Oswald aimed his rifle and understand how this pleasant Texan streetscape was transformed into a site of deep national grief.

11:30

Lighten the mood by exploring the Arts District (dallasartsdistrict.org), a five-minute drive or 20-minute walk away. Spanning 28 hectares and 19 blocks, it's the largest contiguous urban arts district in the US. Don't miss Dale Chihuly's bright glass flowers adorning the windows in the Hamon Atrium at the Dallas Museum of Art (dma.org; free admission) or the vast, thrilling collection by masters such as Miró, Picasso, de Kooning and Giacometti at the Renzo Piano-designed Nasher Sculpture Center (nashersculpturecenter.org).



13:00

It's a 10-minute drive to Trinity Groves (trinitygroves.com), a six-hectare restaurant, retail, arts and entertainment development in gentrified West Dallas. The space is crammed with concept restaurants launched by up-and-coming chefs as part of a unique incubator program. Challenge and delight your tastebuds at Chino Chinatown (chinochinatown.com), where chef Uno Immanivong blends Chinese and Latin American flavours in dishes such as chicken tinga wontons (chipotle chicken, yuzu guacamole, Oaxaca cheese) and elote (grilled corn, Cotija cheese, togarashi and Sriracha aïoli). Afterwards, pop into Cake Bar (cakebardallas.com) for a slice of Southern-style sweetness.

Flight path

DFW

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14:30

Love him or not, former American president George W. Bush is presented in vivid, fascinating detail at the country's newest presidential library (georgewbushlibrary.smu.edu). A 10-minute drive will deliver you to the nine-hectare Bush Center, set on the campus of Southern Methodist University. Spend some quiet time browsing the exhibitions that trace Bush's presidency. Most stirring is the September 11 remembrance display, which features a soaring, battered steel beam from the World Trade Center.

15:30

It's 20 minutes by road to Bishop Arts District (bishopartsdistrict.com) – Dallas's best-kept secret, according to those in the know. The sagging weatherboard bungalows typical of this South Dallas neighbourhood are being revamped and the main streets reflect this creative spirit with a burgeoning collection of restaurants, bars, coffee shops, galleries and boutiques. Fuel up with a slice of French silk chocolate pie with pretzel crust or buttermilk chess pie from specialty shop Emporium Pies

Tim Hursley



Travel Insider

For Dallas's best Tex-Mex and fine-dining restaurants, go to travelinsider.qantas.com.au.

(emporiumpies.com) then get down to the job of shopping. Pop into We Are 1976 (weare1976.com) for its retro letterpress prints and DFW M'Antiques (dfwmantiques.com) for "manly" collectables such as industrial antiques, vintage cameras and old tools.

17:30

It's been a long day so take your pick from Bishop Arts District's quirky collection of bars. Read a book while sipping a cocktail at bookstore-café-bar The Wild Detectives (thewilddetectives.com), pair gulf oysters with a glass of wine at Boulevardier (dallasboulevardier.com) or quench your thirst with locally made hard cider at Bishop Cider Co. (bishopcider.com).

19:00

It's just 10 minutes by car to Stampede 66 (stampede66.com) at the junction of Uptown and Downtown. Decorated in an idiosyncratic mix of modern artworks and country-and-western comfort, it's where acclaimed chef Stephan Pyles oversees a kitchen that dishes up down-home Southern fare and modern Tex-Mex (chicken fried steak, tortilla soup, oyster tacos), accompanied by a small but impressive selection of Texan wines. Whatever you do, don't leave without sampling Hell's Eggs, served with Louisiana-style andouille crumble and bell pepper marmalade, and the chef's favourite, salted-caramel butterscotch pudding. If you prefer dinner with a view, head to the fashionable, neon-slicked Soda Bar perched on the rooftop of NYLO Dallas South Side (hotel.qantas.com.au/nylo), 10 minutes' drive from Bishop Arts District, in the South Lamar/Cedars neighbourhood.

Dining, drinking and reading are "serious pleasures" at The Wild Detectives (above); neon nights at the Soda Bar



Order share plates or mains from the suitably hip menu – kale bucatini with Texan mozzarella and gulf shrimp, quinoa bowls, fried pickles in ale batter – and watch the city's skyline twinkle to life.

21:00

The night's still young so head to Deep Ellum (deepellumtexas.com), just east of Downtown. This former warehouse district was a blues and African-American cultural epicentre in the early 1900s; today, it thumps and jives with everything from jazz and country to alternative beats. Though many of Deep Ellum's warehouses have been converted into shops and homes, its graffiti, neon signs and water towers lend grungy authenticity. Immerse yourself in the pleasantly unkempt surroundings of Adair's Saloon (adairssaloon.com), a honky-tonk covered from floor to ceiling in the scribblings – art, not graffiti, say the proprietors – of patrons. Elvis Presley came through in 1955 and the Dixie Chicks launched themselves on this stage. Order a drink at the refreshingly inexpensive bar, sit back and see if you can pick music's next big thing. ●

Joseph Haubert