



BEST IN TRAVEL 2019

Top Countries

Ten countries primed to capture travellers' imaginations



1. Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka is decidedly having its moment in the equatorial sun and change is coming swiftly. Already notable to intrepid travellers for its mix of religions and cultures, its timeless temples, its rich and accessible wildlife, its growing surf scene and its people who defy all odds by their welcome and friendliness after decades of civil conflict, this is a country revived. There's now more than ever for families, adrenaline junkies, eco-tourists, wellness seekers and foodies of all budgets. Even the north and east, including areas previously off limits, difficult to reach or lacking in services, deliver new discoveries.

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[Discover the many flavours of Sri Lanka](#)



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[Top things to do in Sri Lanka](#)



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2. Germany

Germany has long been a powerhouse of innovation and has bestowed upon the world the printing press, the automobile, the aspirin and other milestones of invention. And 100 years ago, a little school in the Thuringian countryside kick-started an aesthetic movement so globally influential that its reverberations are still felt today: the Bauhaus. Join the year-long birthday party of this midwife of modernism that was founded in Weimar in 1919, flourished in Dessau and was quashed by the Nazis in Berlin in 1933. Sparkling new museums are set to open in these three cities along with scores of related events and exhibitions held throughout Germany.

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The awe-inspiring cascade of Victoria Falls © e2dan/ Shutterstock



3. Zimbabwe

While it may be known for making the headlines for all the wrong reasons, Zimbabwe has always been a country that travellers on the ground have raved about. Not only is it one of Africa's safest destinations, it's one blessed with ultra-friendly locals, Big Five-filled national parks, World Heritage-listed archaeological ruins, forested mountains and, of course, the mighty Victoria Falls. Although the controversial 2018 election may have dampened the unbridled optimism following the end of Robert Mugabe's time in power, the sense of hope for what the country can become remains strong in Zimbabweans. And as always, a visit here is viewed by locals as a sign of support of them on their journey to a new dawn.

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[Matobo National Park](#)





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Colourful coral reefs off Bocas del Toro on Panama's Caribbean coast © Vilaincrevette / Shutterstock



4. Panama

Welcome to the crossroads of the Americas. In Panama, north meets south in a fiesta of tropical biodiversity, celebrated at the world-class BioMuseo. East meets West through expanding world trade, with the world's biggest cargo ships travelling the recently revamped Panama Canal. Darling Panama packs so many treasures into one small country – from white-sand beaches to tropical rainforests, misty highlands and indigenous culture – it is shocking that it's somehow still under the radar. In 2019, Panama City pledges to party like never before, marking its 500-year history with one raucous jubilee that you won't want to miss. ¡Viva Panama!

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Finding the flora and fauna of Panama



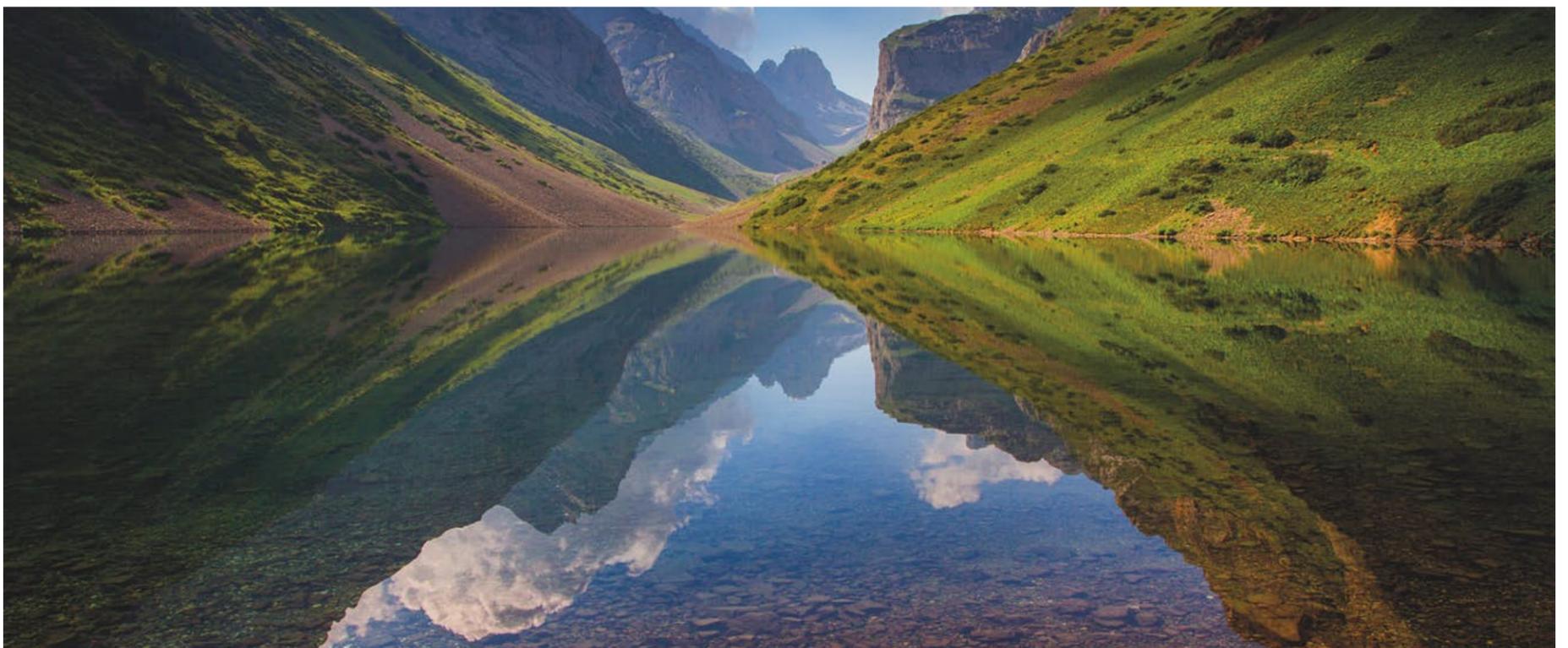
PLACE

Panama City



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Top things to do in Panama



Köl-Tör lake is set amid supreme mountain terrain © Anton Agarkov / 500px



5. Kyrgyzstan

Kyrgyzstan's moment on the world tourism stage seems to have come following huge buzz from the 2018 World Nomad Games, Central Asia's competition dedicated to its traditional (and quirky) regional sports. The time to visit has never been better – more than 2700km of newly marked trekking routes; a countrywide push of community-run tour products; a revamped national highway system cutting transit times immensely; and a simplified e-visa programme for those not on the list of 60+ visa-free countries – but do it now: Kyrgyzstan is quickly becoming an in-the-know favourite for independent travellers seeking unspoilt natural beauty.

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The Treasury (Al Khazneh), carved out of the rock in magical ancient Petra © Truba7113 / Shutterstock



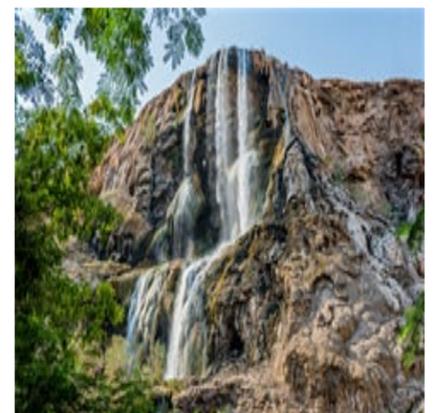
6. Jordan

Have a taste for adventure? Here's a new recipe: find a path 650km long and set aside 36 days (42 with rest stops) to hike it; throw in a mindblowing Rift Valley landscape crumpled with canyons and made green after flash floods; add vistas of the lowest point on Earth (the Dead Sea) and of biblical catastrophe (Sodom); season with wildflowers strewn over crusader castles; combine with a healthy pinch of irrepressible Jordanian optimism and there you have it – the Jordan Trail, the country's latest signature dish. Be ahead of the pack to sample the highs and lows of this epic route.

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[Introducing Jordan](#)



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[Dead Sea](#)





Pulau Padar, Komodo National Park © Danaan / Shutterstock



7. Indonesia

Indonesia is as diverse as its span is long, from new eco-resorts offering orang-utan encounters in Sumatra to the tribal traditions of Papua. More than 17,000 islands make up the medley of cultures, cuisines and religions across the archipelago, offering a kaleidoscope of experience. Earthquakes recently struck some parts of Indonesia, which is located on the volcano-lined Pacific Ring of Fire. The response to these natural disasters is ongoing, but much of this sprawling country remains safe for visitors. Thanks to substantial investment in new air, land and sea connections, plus recent visa-free access for nationals of 169 countries, it has never been easier to explore this tropical country. Go now, before all its secrets are uncovered.

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[By land and sea: outdoor adventures in Indonesia](#)



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Top things to do in Indonesia



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Borobodur Temple



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Cathedral of the Holy Spirit is a landmark of the Belarusian capital, Minsk © bruev / Getty Images



8. Belarus

Long a beacon for those seeking the obscure, [Belarus](#) has quietly become cool on the back of relaxed visa requirements, a sneaky-good art and cafe scene, and locals who party like it's 1999. Minsk is the hub and where you must arrive and depart to take advantage of a new 30-day visa-free regime. In its impeccably restored Old Town, centred around the graceful *ratusha* (town hall), evening revellers erupt out of *bierstubes* and fashionable cocktail bars to join raucous summer street parties. Minsk has also become a hub for global events and summits. Next up: the 2019 European Games.

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[Minsk](#)



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The 668m-high Pico Cão Grande rock tower on São Tomé Island © Justin Foulkes / Lonely Planet



9. São Tomé & Príncipe

Intrepid explorers have always searched out places to boldly go where no one has gone before. This is a rare chance for you to visit a place few other travellers have even heard of. The two-island nation of [São Tomé & Príncipe](#) – found floating in the Gulf of Guinea – is now calling. Don't make the mistake of ignoring it. Surreal landscapes climb dramatically to the heavens, tropical waters kiss its empty beaches and jungles consume everything from colonial sugar, cocoa, and coffee plantations to sobering relics of the island's past role in the slave trade. And whether trekking through the forests, climbing the mountains or snorkelling in the waters offshore, you'll discover many untold treasures here.

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[Beyond compare? The delights of São Tomé and Príncipe](#)



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[Top things to do in São Tomé & Príncipe](#)



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[Roça Agua Izé](#)





An extraordinary sinkhole and diving hotspot, Blue Hole plunges 124m © Matteo Colombo / Getty Images



10. Belize

Its Caribbean coast is fringed by the world's second-largest barrier reef; its interior is riddled with some of the most extensive and accessible cave systems in Central America; and its people are an exotic mix of Maya, Mestizo, Garifuna, Creole, Mennonite and expats. Yet many travellers struggle to place Belize on the map. However, the tide is turning. The government is moving to fully protect its unique marine environment, new eco-resorts are taking advantage of the country's stunning cayes and jungle hideaways, and travellers are discovering a slice of Central America that's relatively untouristed, safe and tantalisingly easy to reach. Get here before the inevitable crowds do.

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