

MONTHLY TICKET

# Where to travel in 2023: The best destinations to visit

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**Charleston, South Carolina:** Charleston has often glossed over the history of its Black residents. It's been taking steps to fix that. The International African American Museum is expected to open later in 2023.

Sean Pavone/Adobe Stock

**(CNN)** — New year equals new outlook. Apply this formula liberally to travel planning in 2023.

After nearly three years of travel disruptions and complications, many countries have dropped most of their pandemic restrictions. People are traveling internationally in large numbers, and there's plenty of pent-up demand to spread around the world.



The Points Guy managing editor Clint Henderson says that now is the best time to book your dream vacation because he expects prices for flights to international destinations to go up dramatically due to a spike in demand as more countries ease Covid restrictions.

International tourism was expected to reach 65% of pre-pandemic levels by the end of 2022, according to the United Nations World Tourism Organization, with some areas recently reaching levels closer to 80% or 90% of their 2019 arrivals. And experts are cautiously optimistic about a continued travel rebound.

Many travelers are charging full steam ahead into the new year -- with good reason.

Here are 23 destination ideas from CNN Travel to get you started:

## Poland



From the main square in Krakow, pictured, to forests, lakes and mountains, Poland invites exploration.

Sergii Figurnyi/Adobe Stock

We could list new openings in Poland -- such as Hotel Verte, the new Autograph Collection property in Warsaw, which threw open its gilded doors (it's in a humongous Baroque palace) in August. But the reason you should visit Poland in 2023 isn't for the chance to stay in a place fit for royalty. It's to show solidarity with a country which has, in turn, shown solidarity to the people of Ukraine.

Sharing a 300-plus-mile border with a country under attack has meant that Poland has taken in more Ukrainian refugees than anywhere else. Add to that plummeting tourist numbers (though they're on the rise again), and you have a tricky situation.

So whether you fancy that Warsaw palace, a city break to the likes of Krakow, Gdansk, Wroclaw or Poznań -- all hundreds of miles from the Ukrainian border -- or to get away from it all in the forests, lakes and mountains of the countryside -- now's your chance to do some good by taking a vacation. -- *Julia Buckley*

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## Western Australia



A full solar eclipse will be visible in April in Exmouth, Western Australia. The landscape is worth a long look, too.

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On April 20, 2023, a total solar eclipse will be visible over the northwestern edge of Australia.

For an event that will likely last about one minute, the town of Exmouth and the greater Ningaloo Peninsula on which it sits have been planning for more than a year. There will be outdoor viewing platforms where spectators can safely watch the solar miracle (with protective eyewear, of course) as well as musical performances, educational opportunities to learn about science and astronomy, and a three-day Dark Sky Festival.

But the state of Western Australia offers much more than some 60 seconds of wonder.

Spanning one-third of the entire continent of Australia, it stretches from the lively, growing state capital of Perth across deserts including the Great Victoria and Great Sandy to the wine country of Margaret River, the dramatic clifftops of the Kimberley and the quokka-covered Rottneest Island. -- *Lilit Marcus*

## Liverpool, England



Mersey paradise: Liverpool.

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England's port city of Liverpool, best known around the world as the birthplace of The Beatles, is adding another chapter to its musical legacy.

In May, it will be the host city of [Eurovision 2023](#), the spangly extravaganza of song that brings an influx of thousands of flag-waving fans from across the continent. It's an opportunity for the city to bounce back after the [ignominy of being stripped](#) of its UNESCO World Heritage status in 2021.

In June, the city will celebrate 25 years of the [Liverpool Biennial](#) contemporary visual arts festival, as more than 30 international artists and collectives take over spaces in the city until September.

England is also marking the [Year of the Coast](#) in 2023, with food festivals and beach cleans taking place along the country's shores. Just a half hour from Liverpool city center by train, Crosby Beach is the permanent home of sculptor Antony Gormley's "[Another Place](#)," where 100 cast-iron figures stand facing out to sea. -- *Maureen O'Hare*

## Charleston, South Carolina



Charleston, a city of undeniable refined, historic beauty, is also looking more closely at its troubled past.

Sean Pavone/Adobe Stock

Charleston parades its past like no other US city, but it often glossed over the history of its Black residents. It's been taking steps to fix that.

Enter the [International African American Museum](#), which promises to make an opening announcement "soon" for 2023 after pushing back its January date. The museum will be set on the shoreline of the Cooper River in the spot where many Africans first set foot in North America. It will explore the lives of slaves and their descendants.

Visitors in late May and early June can enjoy the world-renowned [Spoleto Festival](#) featuring opera, theater, dance, musical acts and artist talks. And foodies should mark March 1-5 on the calendar for the [Charleston Wine and Food Festival](#) and sample Lowcountry favorites.

Can't make the festival? You'll still be well-fed. For fancier Southern fare, try [Magnolias](#). Opened in 1990, it helped spur the city's culinary renaissance. For something informal, try [Bertha's Kitchen](#) in North Charleston, where red rice with sausage, fried chicken and lima beans rule. The eatery even caught attention of "[Roadfood](#)" author Michael Stern. -- *Forrest Brown*

## Vilnius, Lithuania

Self-effacing Vilnius admitted in an [ad campaign this year](#) that nobody really knows where it is. If their brilliant video didn't make you want to book a trip there immediately, perhaps this will: the capital of Lithuania celebrates its 700th anniversary on January 25, 2023.

To mark the milestone, there's a yearlong program, including music festivals and exhibitions. But use the anniversary as a push to visit rather than following a program religiously.

The [entire city center](#) is a UNESCO World Heritage Site -- putting it up there with its fellow V-cities, Venice and Vienna. Vilnius makes it on the list thanks to its Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque buildings, all sitting on a medieval street plan, but it's best known for its

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Don't miss the frothy bell tower of St. John's church (you can climb it for sweeping city views) or the church of St. Casimir, topped by a giant crown. Got an eye for social media? This is Europe's only capital city that allows hot air balloons to cruise over the city skyline. - *JB*

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## Fiji



Scenes like this await visitors to Fiji.

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Brilliant blue waters, expansive coral reefs and hundreds of peaceful islands: Fiji is not a hard sell. But why go there in 2023? For one, the country only reopened post-Covid at the end of 2021, meaning that visitor numbers to the South Pacific paradise have yet to fully rebound.

While the country is spoiled for underwater beauty, take an opportunity to explore its above-ground treasures, too. The country's lone UNESCO World Heritage site is the town of Levuka, a former capital and an important port, which is studded with British colonial-era buildings amid coconut and mango trees.

To learn about the local Indigenous communities, travelers can take part in a kava welcoming ceremony -- named for the traditional drink at its center -- or enjoy a *lovo*, a meal cooked by hot coals in an underground pit covered with banana leaves.

Fiji Airways now has direct flights from Los Angeles and San Francisco, making it relatively easy to get to the islands. As the Fijians say, *bula!* -- *LM*

## Manaus, Brazil

As the fate of the Amazon rainforest hangs in the balance, two eco-lodges around Manaus -- the capital of Brazil's Amazonas state, and gateway to the river -- have used their pandemic pause to get even more environmentally friendly.

Juma Amazon Lodge, about 50 miles south of the city, is now fully powered by a new \$400,000 solar plant, whose 268 double panels swagger nearly 40 feet into the air above the canopy (meaning no trees had to be cut). They've also built a biogas system to increase the efficiency of organic waste treatment, reducing annual carbon emissions by eight tons.

Meanwhile, Anavilhanas Jungle Lodge, northwest of Manaus on the Rio Negro river, opened an off-grid "advanced base" during the pandemic that's 30 miles from the main lodge and accessible only via river.

Guests can take long jungle hikes through territory home to jaguars, pumas and giant armadillos in what's one of the Amazon region's most remote hotel facilities, then spend the afternoon in a hammock or by the pool. For 2023, the lodge is planning overnight stays in a creekside tent for small groups.

Don't miss Manaus itself -- eating behemoth Amazonian fish outside the pink 1896 opera house is a bucket list experience. -- *JB*

## Thessaloniki, Greece



Enticing flavors, history and proximity to beaches and mountains are just a few factors working in this Greek city's favor.

Panos Karapanagiotis/iStockphoto/Getty Images

There's been no shortage of reasons to visit Greece's second city in recent times, with a UNESCO-endorsed local food scene that recently celebrated the refurb and reopening of its century-old [Modiano food market](#).

Throw in a popular waterfront and proximity to beautiful beaches and inland mountains, Thessaloniki is surely a contender for one of Europe's best city-break destinations.

What could make it even better? How about a gleaming new metro system? All being well, November 2023 should see the opening of the main line of an infrastructure megaproject that will eventually connect the city's downtown to its international airport. Driverless trains will whisk passengers through tunnels whose excavation has added to Thessaloniki's already rich catalog of archeological discoveries, many of which will be on display in specially created museum stations. -- *Barry Neild*

## Rwanda

January 2023 sees the official opening of Rwanda's most exciting hotel yet: [Sextantio Rwanda](#), a collection of traditionally crafted huts on an island on Lake Kivu, one of Africa's largest lakes.

It's the first project outside Italy for Daniele Kihlgren, whose part-hotel, part-living history projects keep local tradition alive. A nonprofit delivering money straight to local communities, Sextantio will see guests fishing on the 1,000-square-mile lake, paddling in dug-out canoes, trying local banana beer and wildlife-spotting -- and not just the chickens, cows, pigs and goats that roam around the property.

Of course, you'll want to see gorillas. Adjoining Volcanoes National Park, the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund opened the 4,500-square meter Ellen DeGeneres Campus in 2022. Its visitor center includes exhibits, virtual reality gorilla "encounters" and nature trails.

Over in Akagera National Park, white rhinos -- transferred from South Africa in 2021 to aid conservation -- are already calving. It's easier to get there, too. A new route from London joins Brussels, Dubai, Guangzhou and Mumbai as the only direct flights to Kigali from outside the African continent. -- *JB*

## Gothenburg, Sweden

Voted the world's most sustainable destination in the world for [six years running](#), Sweden's second-biggest city is finally emerging from the shadow of Stockholm.

Once a major trading and shipping town, Gothenburg is now considered to be one of the greenest destinations in Europe, with 274 square meters (2,950 square feet) of green space per citizen, while 95% of its hotels are certified as eco-friendly.

Although Gothenburg officially turned 400 in 2021, the celebrations were put on ice because of the global pandemic. But they're [finally taking place in 2023](#), so it's a great time to visit.

Sweden's King Carl XVI Gustav, who celebrates 50 years on the throne this year, will be in town on June 4, Gothenburg's official birthday, and the city's major anniversary festival is being held in the Frihamnen port district from June 2 to 5, with concerts and art events among the activities on offer.

The festivities will continue throughout the summer until the September 3 kick off of Göteborgsvarvet Marathon, a new 26-mile race following on from the city's popular half marathon, which takes place on May 13. -- *Tamara Hardingham-Gill*

## Ras al-Khaimah, United Arab Emirates



The Dhayah Fort in Ras al-Khaimah is one of the few remaining hill forts in the United Arab Emirates.

creativefamily/Adobe Stock

When travelers think of the United Arab Emirates, the dazzling skyline of Dubai is usually what springs to mind.

But the UAE has a lot to offer nature lovers too -- particularly the northernmost emirate [Ras al-Khaimah](#), which is aiming to become the Middle East's most sustainable destination by 2025 thanks to a new "Balanced Tourism" strategy.

Just 45 minutes from Dubai, it's often called the "adventure Emirate," and for good reason. Offering beaches, deserts and mountains, outdoor attractions abound, such as sand boarding, trekking, wakeboarding, skydiving, scuba diving and even the world's longest zipline.

But it's not all about the adrenaline rush. Ras Al Khaimah is where you'll find the highest restaurant in the United Arab Emirates, [1484 by Puro](#), which sits in the emirate's Jebel Jais Mountains. Culture seekers can head for the historic Dhayah Fort, which dates back to the Late Bronze Age (1600-1300 BC).

Where to stay? Luxury hospitality brand Anantara is [opening a fabulous new resort](#) there in 2023 that will offer 174 guestrooms, suites and overwater villas along with specialty restaurants and a spa. -- *Karla Cripps*

## Laos



Three-tiered Kuang Si Falls is just south of UNESCO-listed Luang Prabang.

Sasipa Muennuch/Moment RF/Getty Images

Sharing borders with Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, China and Myanmar, landlocked Laos has long been a must-hit spot for time-rich travelers making their way through the Southeast Asia circuit.

But now, thanks to the 2021 opening of a [semi-high-speed railway](#), it's easier than ever to get around the country at a quicker pace, shaving hours off journeys that previously took full days to travel.

You're still going to have to make some hard choices -- there's a lot to see in Laos.

Towering karst peaks await visitors to adventure-haven Vang Vieng, while UNESCO-listed Luang Prabang is filled with French-colonial heritage, Buddhist ritual and natural beauty. (Luxury seekers will want to check into the [Rosewood Luang Prabang](#), with its stylish hilltop tents)

The mysterious Plain of Jars, a megalithic archaeological site, can be found in the Xiangkhoang Plateau. For a once-in-a-lifetime experience that makes a difference, head for Bokeo Province and join one of the [Gibbon Experience's](#) overnight treks. Guests of this tourism-based conservation project spend the night in the world's tallest treehouses -- only accessible by zipline -- among wild, black-crested gibbons. -- *KC*

## Gruyères, Switzerland

Rolling hills, medieval buildings -- and the officially crowned [world's best cheese](#). Welcome to Gruyères, Switzerland.

Everywhere you look in this tiny, hilltop town, there's a different picture-perfect view -- from the medieval market square to the turreted 13th-century castle. A doable day trip from Geneva, summer promises hiking opportunities aplenty, while winter allows for venturing to the nearby [Moléson-sur-Gruyères](#) ski resort.

To taste Gruyères' namesake fromage, stop off at the wood-lined [Chalet de Gruyères](#). And to learn how cheesemakers perfect this creamy goodness, head to [La Maison du Gruyère](#) factory. For further foodie delights, there's the [Maison Cailler](#) chocolate factory -- from the outside it looks like something from a Wes Anderson movie, inside it offers a glimpse into the secrets of Swiss chocolate making.

Gruyères is also home to the surreal [HR Giger Museum](#), celebrating the work of the acclaimed Swiss artist behind the eponymous alien in the 1979 movie "Alien." A drink at the museum's bar, designed by Giger in an eerie skeletal aesthetic, offers an antidote to Gruyères' fairytale vibe. -- *Francesca Street*

## Minneapolis, Minnesota

A modern Indigenous restaurant in Minneapolis has earned one of the culinary world's highest honors, and it's not alone in shining light on Native communities in the area.

At Owamni, a James Beard Award winner for best new restaurant, Indigenous ingredients - trout, bison, sweet potatoes and more -- make up "decolonized" menus where ingredients such as wheat flour and beef are absent. The restaurant is a partnership between chef Sean Sherman, Oglala Lakota and Dana Thompson, who is a lineal descendant of the Wahpeton-Sisseton and Mdewakanton Dakota tribes.

One of the pair's community-owned initiatives, Indigenous Food Lab, is planning to open a market in February in Minneapolis' Midtown Global Market, a former Sears building housing businesses that represent more than 22 cultures.

The open-air Four Sisters Farmers Market (Thursdays June through October) also focuses on Indigenous products. And at the Minnesota History Center in neighboring St. Paul, the exhibit "Our Home: Native Minnesota" looks at thousands of years of Native history in the state. -- *Marnie Hunter*

## Bogotá, Colombia



While Colombia's busy capital can be congested, it's also home to the historic neighborhood of La Candelaria.

Toniflap/Adobe Stock

Caribbean coast destinations such as the Rosario archipelago or the UNESCO heritage list city of Cartagena are rightly top of most Colombia travel wish lists, but also deserving a look-in is the country's somewhat unsung capital of Bogotá.

Yes, it's a messy, traffic-snarled urban sprawl, but it's also a high-altitude crucible of culture and cuisine. There are tours that chart the city's transformation from graffiti wild west to incredible street art gallery.

Equally colorful are the restaurants that make the most of Colombia's diverse natural larder of flora on menus that range from delicious peasant dishes to mind-blowing Michelin-level gastronomy. And then there's the coffee!

The congestion (except on regular cycle-only days) thins quickly on its outskirts, allowing day trips to see historic and modern treasures. Itineraries include Lake Guatavita, where conquistadors once plundered sunken gold offerings left by indigenous Muisca people, or the majestic subterranean Zipaquirá salt cathedral. -- *BN*

## Mustang Valley, Nepal

Famed for its mountain treks through ancient trails that once facilitated trade between the Himalayas and India, Nepal's stunning Mustang Valley sits on the doorstep of Tibet.

Expect to hear a lot more about this remote destination in the coming months thanks to the arrival of the soon-to-open Shinta Mani Mustang. Part of the Bensley Collection, this all-inclusive resort perched above the small town of Jomsom in the Lower Mustang will offer luxury seekers 29 suites inspired by traditional Tibetan homes.

In addition to trekking, Mustang visitors can explore ancient villages and Buddhist monasteries. Also not to be missed, the man-made Mustang Caves sit above the Gandaki River and are filled with 2,000-year-old Buddhist sculptures and paintings.

Getting to the Mustang Valley is part of the adventure. Travelers will need to take a 25-minute flight from capital Kathmandu to Pokhara then hop on another plane for the 20-

minute journey to Jomsom. The views alone might make this option more pleasing to some than the alternative -- a 12-hour drive from Kathmandu. -- *KC*

## Tanzania

From the spectacular wildlife to the beautiful national parks and beaches, Tanzania is absolutely bursting with visual splendor.

The East African country holds a seemingly endless list of incredible sights, with Mount Kilimanjaro, Africa's highest mountain, UNESCO world heritage site Serengeti National Park, and the Zanzibar Archipelago, among its many highlights.

This year, flag carrier Air Tanzania will launch new routes to West and Central Africa, along with the UK, in a bid to transform the country's largest airport in Dar es Salaam into a transport and logistics hub, while construction on the country's first toll expressway is also scheduled to begin.

Meanwhile, the Delta Hotels by Marriott brand is making its Africa debut with the opening of its Dar es Salaam Oyster Bay property later this year. -- *THG*

## Cairo, Egypt



Cairo is pulsing with life and a rich blend of cultures.

Izzet Keribar/Stone RF/Getty Images

Could this finally be the year tourists can see the [Grand Egyptian Museum](#)? After delay upon delay, the museum is [expecting a 2023 opening](#).

GEM will be the largest museum dedicated to a single civilization, costing around \$1 billion and holding the entire King Tut collection. [See video here](#) of a CNN insider visit.

If you arrive in Cairo before it opens, the [Egyptian Museum](#) in Tahrir Square can still scratch your antiquity itch.

While the Pyramids of Giza are the city's tour-de-force, there's still more to see. Start with Islamic Cairo. This area has one of the largest collections of historic Islamic architecture in the world. While there, visit the Al-Azhar mosque, which dates back to 970.

The city also has a rich Christian tradition. Coptic Cairo, part of Old Cairo, has a concentration of Christian sites that pre-date the arrival of Islam.

If you need a respite from Cairo's cacophony, [Al Azhar Park](#) has a nice expanse of greenery and a design inspired by historic Islamic gardens. And the affluent neighborhood of Zamalek, which sits on an island in the Nile River, serves up restaurants, antique stores and swanky hotels. -- *FB*

## Naoshima, Japan

Yayoi Kusama has the distinction of being the best-selling living female artist on the planet. In particular, she has become a global icon for her sculptures of giant polka-dotted pumpkins, one of which was [reinstalled at the pier](#) of Naoshima, one of Japan's "art islands," in 2022 after being swept into the sea the year before.

However, Naoshima is so much more than its famous yellow gourd or its works by Kusama.

There are five small, walkable "art islands" in the Seto Inland Sea, which is located between the main islands of Honshu, Kyushu and Shikoku in southeastern Japan. The largest collection of things to see -- not to mention the only hotel -- is on Naoshima. Together, the five champion modern and contemporary art, with emphasis on Japanese artists.

Don't come here expecting calligraphy and other classical forms. Instead, be awed by Tadao Ando's massive stone monoliths, a tiny gallery where patrons can listen to nothing but the beats of human hearts, a makeshift thunderstorm created inside a wooden house and an exhibit where jumping in and taking a bath is intended to be part of the artistic experience. -- *LM*

## Belize

With direct flights to Belize City from about a dozen North American airports, this Central American country is a low-hassle hop for many travelers during the November to April high season.

Most visitors head directly to Belize's Caribbean coastline. The country's largest island, Ambergris Caye, sits next to Belize Barrier Reef -- the world's second largest coral reef system. [Margaritaville Beach Resort](#) is set to open on the island in early 2023, and "eco-luxury" resort [Alaia Belize](#) opened in 2021.

Farther south, the Great Blue Hole -- a massive underwater sinkhole -- is an aquatic magnet for both scuba divers and aerial photographers.

But Belize offers way more than its enticing islands.

Lush rainforests, cave networks, winding rivers and rich Mayan archaeological sites invite exploration in a country that's had an evolving sustainable tourism master plan since 2012. Ruins of the Mayan city of Altun Ha are just about an hour north of Belize City. Or farther west, Lamanai is one of Belize's largest and most fascinating Mayan sites. -- *MH*

## Oaxaca, Mexico

Mexico is arguably as rich in culinary heritage as it is in Mesoamerican archaeological treasures, and Eva Longoria explores many distinctive flavors in her series "Searching for Mexico," airing on CNN in 2023.

The state of Oaxaca, which Longoria visits, has an especially deep well of culinary traditions. Plus, Oaxaca produces most of the world's mezcal.

Tlayudas, known as Oaxacan pizzas, are a street food staple. A large corn tortilla is typically layered with lard, beans, traditional Oaxacan cheese, pork and other toppings such as avocado and tomato. The state is also renowned for its seven mole sauces, with recipes that may call for dozens of ingredients from chiles and sesame seeds to chocolate and dried fruit.

In the city of Oaxaca, Mercado Benito Juárez is one of many markets across the state selling items such as dried chiles, fresh produce, handicrafts and crunchy grasshoppers. To sample the state's increasingly popular beverage, the town of Santiago Matatlán is the place for mezcal distillery tours and tastings. -- *MH*

## Ottawa, Canada



In the winter, the frozen Rideau Canal in Ottawa becomes the world's largest skating rink.

[vlad\\_g/Adobe Stock](#)

It doesn't have Montreal's French flair or Toronto's international oomph, so the Canadian capital can get overlooked. That would be a mistake. Graceful and understated, Ottawa has its own draws.

Music lovers should take note of two [Ottawa Jazz Festivals](#). There's a winter edition February 2-3. If you can't handle the cold, there's a summer edition June 23-30.

If you love hockey, watch the [Ottawa Senators](#) do their NHL thing at the Canadian Tire Centre in the western suburbs. If that ticket is too pricey, check out the [Ottawa 67's](#), a more affordable option of junior men's hockey games at downtown's TD Place Arena.

The [Rideau Canal](#) turns into the world's largest skating rink from sometime in January to late February or early March, depending on ice thickness. It's free and accessible 24/7. When it's warmer, it's a great spot for people and boat watching.

A don't-miss is [Parliament Hill](#), home to Canada's federal government and the visually striking Parliament buildings on a promontory overlooking the Ottawa River. -- *FB*

## Uganda



Treks through the Bwindi Impenetrable Forest are among Uganda's highlights.

[Shakked Schwartz/Moment RF/Getty Images](#)

There's considerable change brewing in Uganda's travel offerings at the moment with the East African country looking beyond the traditional staples of safari and wildlife spotting to appeal to both regional and international visitors.

Keen to revitalize post-Covid tourism in all corners of the country, not just the big-ticket businesses offering wealthy visitors a glimpse of the Big Five beasts or mountain gorillas, it's turned to [marketing its other attributes](#).

And why not? From the expansive shores of Lake Victoria to the snowy Rwenzori Mountains, Uganda is a beautiful wilderness playground, with opportunities for adventure including treks through the Bwindi Impenetrable Forest or up to the craters of the Virunga volcano chain or whitewater rafting along the Victoria Nile.

There's also an emphasis on connecting visitors with Ugandan communities -- promising tastes of Ugandan food, music and culture. Last year saw the launch of the [Uganda Cycling Trail](#), a 1,600-kilometer mainly unpaved 22-stage route designed to appeal to all levels of cyclist from hardcore solo bikepackers to fully-guided easy riders. -- *BN*