Barcelona

THE SIGHT
Don’t be put off by the recent independence-related political upheaval; for tourists it’s business as usual, only quieter — so there’s no better time to visit. The new must-see is Gaudí’s Casa Vicens (casavicens.org; £14). The first house built by the iconic architect, it was the landmark building owned, it was the landmark building, with its own contemporary art club, visiting DLs, dinedel chefs and craft cocktail bar (barcelona-hot.com; prices on offer yet, but you can expect doubles from about £250, B&B). As well as spectacular interiors, it displays Gaudí’s notebooks and offers a fascinating insight into the early 20th-century movement. As well as spectacular interiors, it displays Gaudí’s notebooks and offers a fascinating insight into the early 20th-century movement. As well as spectacular interiors, it displays Gaudí’s notebooks and offers a fascinating insight into the early 20th-century movement.

THE DISTRICT
East of the city centre, the former textile factory district, Poble Nou, is now a post-industrial enclave gaining popularity among artists and designers. Start with the fashion exhibits at the Casa Vicens, designed by Gaudí’s collaborator, Enric Sagnier, and then move on to Fabricades (fabricades.com); prices not available yet, but you can expect doubles from about £250, B&B).

THE HOTEL
The first large-scale hotel to open in the fashionable El Born district in years is the Edition, a statistics open mid-2018 next to foodie Santa Caterina Market. The 100-room establishment is pitched itself as a ‘microcosm’ of the city, with its own contemporary art club, visiting DLs, dinedel chefs and craft cocktail bar (barcelona-hot.com; prices on offer yet, but you can expect doubles from about £250, B&B).

THE RESTAURANT
Yes, it opened at the end of 2014, but it opened in the spotlight again, having just received its second Michelin star. It’s consistently voted the best in town by the local press, for its light-flooded, lacy-screen decor and as much for its molecular food from three El Bulli alumni. Dinner here is theatrical and fun, and worth the splurge (elbulliformabarcelona.com; 20-course tasting menu £1050).

THE TREND
Just about every neighbourhood has its own groovy weekend market these days, some groower than others. On the first weekend of the month, Palau Alto (palaualto.com) is skipping heave, with live music and DJs, superb street food, and locally crafted accessories and clothing. Or take a 45-minute train ride to Mercat de Santa Caterina, for pre-lunch vermouth, vintage homewares and books.

Hot for 2018

ARGENTINA
Because: Norwegian’s new flights to Buenos Aires, starting on February 14, are direct and heavily priced, challenging BA’s former monopoly on the route and saving you up to £400 per return. They go four times a week from Gatwick, from £219 one way (norwegian.com). Filmed in: Argentina’s spot for urban, flavour with its edgy, foodie capital, Buenos Aires — get on-train to the new Presidente, with its secret bar, within a bridge (bridgeotel.com). But the buzz for 2018 is about the unexplored northern landscapes, especially the Ibex Watttani. On KE Adventurer’s new 14-day expedition, you’ll sail past camans and armadillos, but very few tourists (keadventure.com; from £4,675pp, with flights and most meals). And you wouldn’t go all that way without seeing Igazu’s Falls (picturesquely — easier to reach from Iguazu with new budget airline Flybondi (flybondi.com); from Buenos Aires from £43, one way). Stay alone at Igazu’s new hotel (disfrutarbarcelona.com; doubles from £570, full-board), or the more family-friendly Malcs (iguazu.com), opening in December (meals; com; doubles from £245, B&B). Get there this year: Journey Latin America’s journeylatinamerica.co.uk has seven nights, staying in Buenos Aires (B&B) and all Aigues (iguazu.com; full-board), from £3,782pp, with Heathrow flights.

SOUTH KOREA
Because: The Korean Peninsula has good news stories, too. Preparations to learn about Korean Buddhism (eng.magnolia.com; flights extra), with chic Kelly Hoppen interiors, a rooftop garden and gorgeous split-level villas. From £2,645pp for a nine-night Caribbean cruise, with flights to (celebritycruises.co.uk). Stay at one of Igazu’s new hotels: Esplendor Iguazu (picturesquely)’s new 16-day tour of Argentina and Uruguay, £1,399pp (pocruises.com). For the best views, try the more family-friendly Melia Iguazu, opening in December (meliabahia.com; doubles from £245, B&B). Get there this year: Journey Latin America’s journeylatinamerica.co.uk has seven nights, staying in Buenos Aires (B&B) and all Aigues (iguazu.com; full-board), from £3,782pp, with Heathrow flights.

THE SHIP
Royal Caribbean, NCL and Celebrity Cruises all launch 2018 megayachts in 2018. Top spot goes to the 2,000-passenger Celebrity Edge, with chic Kelly Hoppen interiors, a rooftop garden and gorgeous split-level villas. From £2,645pp for a nine-night Caribbean cruise, with flights to (celebritycruises.co.uk).

THE NOVELTY
Expedition Line Ponant launches Le Ponant at cruising’s first multi-sensory underwater lounge, where you can watch turtles and listen to live whale songs from passing orcas in the Indian Ocean; from £4,100pp for seven nights, departing Reykjavik; flights extra (ponant.com).

THE BARGAIN
Cultural immersion is all the rage these days, and now Aegnaue minibreak, running all summer with special prices on certain port days, starts at £1,249pp for 10 nights (aegnaue.com). Meals, drinks, crew tips and Ephesus tours are thrown in, making this incredibly affordable, from £350pp, departing Athens; flights extra (aegneauecruises.com).
What's hot in...?

Prague

THE EVENT
Not only is 2018 the centenary of Czechoslovakia’s birth (expect a host of celebrations, from art exhibits to live concerts), it’s also 200 years since Prague’s iconic National Museum opened. Shuttered since mid-2011 for a £60m renovation, the Neo-Renaissance building that looms over Wenceslas Square will reopen in October with a major exhibition on the country’s often-turbulent history, from Kingdom of Bohemia highs to Nazi and Communist lows (nm.cz; £8.60).

THE DISTRICT
Prague’s newest up-and-coming neighbourhood is Holešovice, a few kilometres upriver from the Old Town. Visit the former meatpacking district for artisan coffee shops (including Bitcoin-only ParaleniPolis; parallel-политик.ru), fine-dining restaurants (try Asian-fusion favourite SaSaZu; sasazu.com/en) and modern art galleries (such as the airship-topped DOX Centre for Contemporary Art; dox.cz; £60-£65).

THE HOTEL
In a city of medieval bridges, Gothic churches and Baroque squares, the recent arrival of Modernist Hotel Sax was a real breath of fresh air. On a side street below the castle, this great-value stay is a shrine to 20th-century pop culture, complete with vintage furniture and offbeat wallpaper. Best bit? Its rooftop spa, with majestic city views (hotelsax.cz; doubles from £58, B&B).

THE RESTAURANT
Low-key-luxxe newcomer Field has redrawn the boundaries of Bohemian fare with its Scandi-twisted, high-end Czech cuisine. Decor is minimalism incarnate — beige walls, wooden floors and unadorned tables — but look up to see the street art projected onto the ceiling. Dishes such as heifer with kohlrabi and shallots, and suckling pig with beetroot and mead, are saucy, but delicate (fieldrestaurant.cz/en; mains about £20).

THE TREND
Prague’s dining scene has really raised its game in the last few years. The city has always guaranteed a hearty, low-cost goulash or sausage, but quality new options include high-end vegan diner Etnosvět (etnosvet.cz/en), best-of-the-hipster-coffee-shops Cafefin (cafefinvpraze.com), and farm-to-fork butchers, including Maso a Kobliha — ‘meat and doughnuts’ (masoakobliha.cz).

Moscow

THE TREND
In Moscow in 50 years. You’ll enjoy the scent of spruce on winding paths through 13 hectares that represent Russia’s tundra, steppe, forest and wetlands. Instant Instagramability comes from the boomerang-shaped ‘floating bridge’ levitating over the river. Facelifted in time for the footie, Moscow’s boulevards and monolithic buildings are looking mightier than ever, but it’s down side streets you’ll find the real confidence. These days, glitzy boutiques line up alongside impressive, diverse places to dine — such as the Siberian restaurant Expedition (expedica-restaurant.ru; mains about £17), where you can sit amid oversized polar bears and an antique helicopter to try pelmeni (Russian ravioli) filled with Kamchatka crab.

Get there this year: BA (ba.com) has a four-night break, staying at the four-star Novotel Moscow Centre, from £335pp, room only, including return flights from Heathrow.

Hot for 2018

Moscow

Because: Russia is sprucing itself up ready to host football’s World Cup in June and July — not least in the capital, where Red Square just turned a bit greener.

Fill me in: Russia hopes to outshine its own Sochi Winter Olympics spectacular of 2014, and has built 11 smart new stadiums — including biggies in Moscow, St Petersburg, Yekaterinburg, Sochi and Volgograd. (The red-carpet treatment for fans with tickets includes free train travel between World Cup host cities.) In Moscow, the hideous Soviet-era Rossiya Hotel that once sat next to Red Square has been flattened to make way for riverside Zaryadye Park, the first public park to be built in

Further

HOT SPOTLIGHT
LOCATION VACATIONS
New cinematic versions of kids’ classics this year will have you itching to explore the real thing. Get in the groove for the latest Jungle Book film (out in October) at India’s TigerTrails Jungle Lodge; its new private conservancy will cut red tape and make spotting Shere Khan easier (tigertrailstadoba.com; doubles from £140, full board). Closer to home, Peter Rabbit, out in March, will push more fans to Beatrix Potter’s Lake District house, Hill Top (nationaltrust.org.uk/hill-top; £10.40), while a new Robin Hood movie, starring Jamie Foxx and Dornan, is out in September. Follow them to Sherwood Forest for the October Robin Hood festival, or to Nottingham for the October Robin Hood Pageant (nottinghamshire.gov.uk; free).

FEBRUARY 2018 SUNDAY TIMES TRAVEL 123
Hot for 2018

ICELAND

Because: With a surge of new routes to Reykjavík, the bucket-list destination is now as accessible — and cheap to reach — as the continent, for long weekends or (free) stopovers en route to the US. What’s more, new domestic flights to Akureyri are opening up the country’s icy un trodden north for whale-watchers and Aurora-seekers.

Fill me in: The contrast between Iceland’s Star Wars landscapes and sophisticated culture is thrillingly stark — and best experienced amid the lava fields of the Blue Lagoon (bluelagoon.com; from £50). This year the famous spa’s milky-blue geothermal pools double in size to 7,000sq m, adding secluded nooks to sink into — plus a modern, new on-site hotel called Silica (doubles from £459, B&B; pictured). With its own private hot springs, it’s pricey even for Iceland, but worth it for the therapeutic luxury. From here, it’s 40 minutes to the dinky Lego-look capital, Reykjavík, then just 45 minutes on one of those new flights to arty Akureyri. Here, on the misty, mountain-ringed fjord of Eyjafjörður, whale-watching expeditions guarantee humpback sightings (whalewatching.is; £80). Afterwards, soak in a wood tub filled with hot, yeasty ale — the new ‘beer spa’ at Bjórböðin (bjorbodin.com; £15).

Get there this year: Icelandicair (icelandair.co.uk) flies to Reykjavík from Aberdeen, Belfast, Birmingham, Gatwick, Glasgow and Manchester, from £137 return. Air Iceland Connect (airicelandconnect.com) flies from Reykjavík to Akureyri from £118 return. Hotel Akureyri (icelandairhotels.com) has doubles from £83, B&B.

HOT HOTEL

Nyungwe House, Rwanda

Branching out from its ultra-luxury beach hotels into the primate-filled jungles of Rwanda, One&Only Resorts recently opened the 22-room Nyungwe House, and Gorilla’s Nest is also set to open later this year (oneandonlyresorts.com; doubles from about £860, full board). Top-end hotels are booming here, helped by Rwandair’s speedy new non-stop flights between Gatwick and Kigali (rwandair.com; from £368 return).

What’s hot in…?

The Caribbean

GRENA DA

Things don’t change too quickly on the Spice Island (pictured), so there’s huge excitement about the March debut of minimal-luxe Silversands, the first major hotel to open on gorgeous Grand Anse beach in 25 years (silversands grenada.com; doubles from £595, B&B). Beyond the loungers, you’ll spot monkeys from the new forest-canopy high wire (grenadahighwire.com; £36), and fresh statues are set to expand the Underwater Sculpture Park.

BARBADOS

New direct Heathrow flights from Virgin and Thomas Cook will make the A-list island more accessible in 2018, while in May, Virgin Holidays opens a ‘Departure Beach’. Its customers will be able to check in for their flight home, drop bags and kick back until a transfer whisk them to the airport. There’s a tingly new resort, too: Sandals Royal Barbados (sandals.com; seven nights from £2,025pp, all-inclusive, with Gatwick flights).

CUBA

After a rough 2017, Cuba is back on its feet and looking perkier than ever. The Irma-bashed beaches in the north have been cleared up, while Raúl Castro’s vow to step down in February has put a spring in the island’s step. In Havana, hot new bars, shops and the soon-to-open retro-chic boutique hotel Malecón 663 (malecon663.com; doubles from £130, B&B) all herald a bright future.

ANTIGUA

It’s all new looks and newbies: island favourites Blue Waters (bluewaters.net; doubles from £265, B&B) and Curtain Bluff (curtainbluff.com; doubles from £642, all-inclusive) have just emerged from multi-million-dollar facelifts. And mid-2018, villa complex Tamarind Hills unveils 46 one-bed suites (tamarindhills.com; from £448, room only) — about the same time the new Hodges Bay resort (eleganthotels.com; rates not yet available) opens on the north coast.

JAMAICA

Here’s one for the grown-ups: Jamaica’s first adults-only, five-star all-inclusive, Excellence Oyster Bay, opens in the first half of this year. Set on its own private peninsula, surrounded by the mint-green waters of Montego Bay, this all-suite resort comes with 3km of private white-sand beaches (excellence resorts.com; prices not yet available).