



## Great Winter Escapes

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By Charles Kulander

Cold? This year's *Old Farmer's Almanac* predicts a chillier-than-normal winter. In the Northeast, January will bring "persistent cold temperatures with only brief thaws." Anticipated average thermometer reading in the Upper Midwest? A pipe-bursting 25 degrees. We've seen the forecast too and have come up with a plan: 12 places where you'll be slipping on sandals instead of sliding on ice.

You'll travel south, where winter days are warmer and stretch longer (in January, for example, Tobago enjoys 2 1/2 hours more daylight than Seattle). But these aren't the usual mass-marketed suspects where you might escape the cold but not the crowds. We've chosen surprising destinations with inspired natural settings, authentic to the core, full of local flavor and strong tradition. Each is the genuine article, providing a warmth that transcends a mere rise in temperature. —THE EDITORS

### **The Real Thing: Todos Santos, Mexico**

This is the town Laguna Beach always wanted to be: a seaside artist retreat steeped in an historic Old California setting. (California's history is rooted in these small Baja California villages.) Everywhere you turn, there's a patch of antiquity waiting to be sketched: the mission church facing a centuries-old plaza, ruins of an old sugarcane mill, weather-beaten adobe walls painted in vibrant colors. "Todos Santos has a quality of light equal to Taos or the High Andes in Peru," says Jill Logan, an artist who owns one of the 15 art galleries here (more per capita than any town in Mexico). Inspired by their surroundings, this community of 4,000—including hundreds of expats—works hard to preserve them. Zoning regulations are in place to protect Todos Santos from the kind of development consuming Cabo San Lucas 43 miles to the south, while sustaining its historic appeal. A former sugar baron's mansion became the Todos Santos Inn, a chic bed-and-breakfast, while a gutted sugar warehouse was transformed into Los Adobes, serving haute Mexican food. Since this is Baja, you can always pick up traditional fish tacos at a street stand on your way out of town. The road south leads to the kind of sweeping,

development-free beaches that disappeared from California decades ago: Pelicans wheel overhead, whales spout on the horizon, a sprinkling of surfers bob in the swell. **The High:** Check out the historic Casa de Cultura near the main plaza for artist workshops and cultural events. **The Low:** Even when the surf looks calm, riptides plague most beaches here.

### **The Throwback: Samaná Peninsula, Dominican Republic**

An intriguing vestige of the Old Caribbean is alive and well on this slumbering 30-mile peninsula on the Spanish-speaking Dominican Republic's northern coast. Some of the locals are the progeny of 6,000 slaves traveling the Underground Railroad, who migrated here in 1824 from Philadelphia. "In church, you can still hear them singing hymns in English," says local Frank Minaya, a direct descendant. Other migrants come to sing a different tune—underwater. "During the winter mating season, we get almost the entire North Atlantic humpback population," says Kim Beddall, a marine mammal specialist who pioneered whale-watching in Samaná Bay. Across the bay, at Los Haitises National Park, you can kayak the creeks and crannies of a red mangrove jungle and enter bat caverns to contemplate rare pre-Columbian pictographs. Inland, small villages offer community-based activities, such as an hour-long jaunt on horseback to swim at El Limón waterfall. Stop in *colmados* (local stores) for passion fruit and *longanesa* (Dominican sausage) to take to the beach. And face it, that's why you're really here: miles of trackless sand embroidered with sea wrack, palms arching over slathering surf. Staying in either Las Terrenas or Las Galeras will put you smack on the beach in a owner-run villa or modestly priced hotel. Hire motorcycle rickshaws or painted skiffs to strike out for remote beaches such as El Valle or Playa Rincón. **The High:** You can still hear a pre-Civil War English as the old folks greet you: "Hullo-an'-how-are-you." **The Low:** A new superhighway and international airport mean change is coming.

### **The Gourmet: Colchagua Valley, Chile**

Don't call it the New Napa. Despite sharing similarities with California's Napa Valley—comparable latitude, Pacific breezes moderated by coastal hills—this area 110 miles south of Santiago has developed its own personality as South America's go-to wine district. Its loamy soil and heady sun are a perfect mix for Carmenère, a grape thought to have disappeared from the world but rediscovered here in 1994. (Sometimes blended into Cabs and Merlots, it adds a compelling hint of velvety chocolate that's been winning awards around the globe.) What is Napa-like about this valley is its promotion of tourism as a way to champion its wines. Lapostolle, producer of *Wine Spectator's* Wine of the Year 2008, has added four rustic-chic casitas and an infinity pool, while Viña Casa Silva, the oldest winery in the valley, has rehabbed its original farmhouse into a posh nine-room hotel. Or stay at Los Lingues, a hacienda restored to its original mid-17th-century style, a reminder that wine has been cultivated in this valley 200 years before Napa saw its first grape seed. **The High:** Eighteen wineries sponsor a do-it-yourself wine route, allowing access to innovative properties such as Viu Manent or Viñas Montes, which is designed to feng shui

principles; in its barrel cellar, there's even Gregorian chant music—not for you, but for the wine. **The Low:** Though arbitrarily enforced, you can only bring home one liter of wine duty-free.

### **The Fantasy: Bimini, Bahamas**

The island's heyday was in the early 20th century, when rumrunners ruled and Papa Hemingway lived here, writing terse novels and tossing back mojitos. Fifty miles off Florida, separated by the boisterous Gulf Stream, this wispy seven-mile-long stretch of sand still offers refuge, but of a different sort as travelers discover an island poised for ecotourism: white coral beaches, natural pools, locally run, modestly priced cottages and hotels such as the 14-room Sea Crest, and 1,700 Biminities to hang out with. Hike the Bimini Nature Trail (eyes peeled for the endangered Bimini boa, a harmless snake). Or head five miles out to the Bahama Banks and swim eye-to-eye with a friendly pod of spotted dolphins through Wild Dolphin Adventures. Or kayak into the same mangrove forests that inspired Martin Luther King, Jr., to sketch out his 1964 Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech on the spot. King's boatman, Ansil Saunders, remembers: "He saw the fishes under the mangrove roots, birds overhead, stingrays shuffling, and he said, 'So much life all around us, how can people not believe the existence of God?'" The Bahamian government recently found religion of another kind, putting the skids on a proposed 18-hole golf course and creating a Marine Protected Area to preserve the mangroves, a nursery for wildlife. **The High:** Savor a bite of Bimini bread, swirled with pineapple compote. **The Low:** Don't rely on the island's single ATM; bring greenbacks.

### **The Barefoot Idyll: Isla Holbox, Mexico**

More than a few travelers come to this skinny, 26-mile-long island—a short flight from Cancún or three hours by car or ferry—and never leave. Instead, they stay to open savory restaurants (Italian ones mostly, like Pellicanos, or La Cueva del Pirata) or build handcrafted hotels, the kind where rooms are named instead of numbered. "What attracted me was the islanders' relationship to nature," says Sandra Pérez, a Cuban artist and screenwriter who originally built her hotel, CasaSandra, as a place to write. "I found a small village of fishermen who slept in hammocks, and drank their beer watching the sunset on the beach." How relaxed is it? Residents of this asphalt-free island drive golf carts, not cars. Come winter, paradoxically the low season, you probably won't see any whale sharks or pink flamingos—the island's most famous summer attractions—but you will find a quintessential Mexican fishing village quietly going about its business at a languorous pace that will lull you into a reverie of hammock-swaying, reading, swimming, and endless walking on shell-speckled beaches. **The High:** Three hundred hotel rooms, 26 miles of virgin beach—you do the math. **The Low:** There are mosquitoes year round, lots of them.

### **The Sultry Beauty: Cartagena, Colombia**

As a trickling stream of international travelers rediscovers a more peaceful Colombia, Cartagena has become South America's worst-kept secret. "Word of mouth has been a powerful tool in promoting Cartagena as a hot emotional brand," says Latin fashion designer Silvia Tcherassi, who recast a 250-year-old mansion into the city's newest luxury digs, the seven-room Tcherassi Hotel + Spa. "But it's not a flavor-of-the-month destination. The spirit is unparalleled. Each corner, each street, each plaza has a magic and unique story to tell." Preserved by a seven-mile ring of 500-year-old fortress walls, this colonial city of domed churches, courtyards, and bougainvillea-covered balconies glows in the original colors that once lay hidden under centuries of whitewash: ochre, fuchsia, canary yellow. You'll find its crooked streets confounding—they were reputedly designed to befuddle marauding buccaneers—as you weave past the *vallenato* musicians, *cumbia* dancers, and hip-swaying ladies selling papayas from baskets balanced atop their heads. It's a modern-day version of *Pirates of the Caribbean*, except the dungeons have been converted into craft stores and the 17th-century convents are now chic hotels, such as the Sofitel Santa Clara, which offers what all hotels should consider: a confessional. Evenings start at the many alfresco cafés offering bold fusions of Old and New World cuisines, and end in Getsemani, the former slave quarter, where nightclubs roll till morning. If it's all too much, make like a pirate and escape to Islas del Rosario, a national park of 43 islands one-hour offshore by boat, where smart eco-hotels like Hotel San Pedro de Majagua offer the kind of tranquility you can slice with a cutlass. **The High:** Tour the city after sunset on the open-air Chiva bus, a real fiesta-on-wheels. **The Low:** You may find some assertiveness training helpful in keeping street touts at bay.

### **The Natural: Tobago**

Limin', or hanging out, is an acquired skill best learned on the island that has elevated it to a true art form: Tobago. The fine beach at Pigeon Point Heritage Park is the perfect place to begin some introductory limin'. (Start with rum punch, add sunset and dominoes.) Once you get the hang of it, head for Tobago's fabled northwest coast, passing hillside hamlets with fairytale names—Harmony Hall, Providence, Whim—to reach the quiet beaches of Castara, Charlotteville, and Parlatuvier, traditional places where you can still lend a hand by helping villagers tug their seine nets onto the sand in return for a share of the catch. Relaxation comes later, kicking it back at the tiny rum shops or beachfront dining shacks such as Boat House in Castara, where the local steel pan band plays Wednesday nights. Village guesthouses and small hotels are integrated into community life, like the eco-sensitive Castara Retreats, a six-cabin aerie overlooking village and sea, and backed by the island's most precious resource: the Tobago Rain Forest Reserve. "It's the oldest legally protected rain forest in the Western Hemisphere, established in 1776 to protect the sugar plantation watershed," says guide and local ornithologist David Rooks. The island's primordial bounty allows for prolific birdwatching, diving with manta rays, plunging into refreshing waterfalls, and snorkeling over the largest brain coral colony in the world. Come Sunday, attend "Sunday school" at Buccoo Beach, the island's largest nondenominational beach party: steel pan band, crab-and-dumpling stalls, and dancing into the wee hours. By now, you'll be limin' like a true Tobagonian. **The High:** J'ouvert, the muddy (old

clothes, please), rum-fueled, music-blasting start to the two-day Carnival celebrations (Feb. 15-16) kicks off at 4 a.m. **The Low:** Expecting to find peace and relaxation during same Carnival.

### **The Southern Soul: Apalachicola, Florida**

If you want a taste of Old Florida, eat an oyster from Apalachicola. The working folk of this slumbering town along the panhandle's Forgotten Coast are some of the only ones left in the U.S. who commercially harvest wild oysters the old-fashioned way: raking them up with wood-handled tongs. "It's a great half-shell oyster for eating raw," says Tommy Ward, a third-generation oysterman who, like most people here, still makes his living off the water. There's still a real working waterfront here, a briny mix of seafood packing houses, docks, and oyster joints. Stroll a few blocks inland and you'll pass through one of Florida's largest concentrations of 19th-century homes and businesses: clapboard-and-gingerbread houses, antebellum churches, and weathered brick warehouses turned into galleries and shopping emporiums. "Everything's authentic," says Dan Tonsmeire of Apalachicola Riverkeeper, a grassroots environmental organization. That includes sailing the bay on the *Heritage of Apalachicola*, a 58-foot ketch, and staying in the town's laid-back hotels. The Consulate's four loft-style suites occupy a former French consulate facing jaunty shrimp boats moored to pilings. At the 1907 Gibson Inn, sip a mint julep on a front porch rocker and soak up scenes of small town life as sweet as the tupelo honey harvested deep in the bayou. This is the shrimp-netting, mullet-smoking, worm-grunting soul of the South, where beekeepers still ferry their hives far into the Tupelo swamps for the three-week flower bloom. (Pick up some honey at the Piggly Wiggly.) Explore it yourself by canoe or kayak on the 12-mile-long Apalachicola Paddling Trail. **The High:** Hit the oyster bars—the ones offshore, that is. Book a guide, tongs, and oyster boat through [Bookmeacharter.com](http://Bookmeacharter.com). **The Low:** This isn't South Florida; on some winter days, you may need a sweater.

### **The Road Trip: Seven Lakes District, Argentina**

If any road demands a leisurely pace, it's Argentina's legendary Seven Lakes Route, a 113-mile summertime romp through a Patagonian playground of glaciated lakes and snow-clad Andean peaks. Sure, you can do it in a day, but even a restless Che Guevara, who chronicled this epic route in his *Motorcycle Diaries*, realized that's hardly enough time "to immerse yourself in the spirit of the place; for that you must stop at least several days." So start in Bariloche, with its Bavarian chalets, fondue restaurants, and artisan chocolate shops and head for quieter Villa de la Angostura on Lake Nahuel Huapi. Stay in one of the friendly *hosterías* and give yourself time for hiking, spa treatments, mountain biking, or kayaking nearby Río Correntoso—at 328 yards, the world's shortest river. (Watch out for hooks whizzing through the air; it's fabled among fly fishers.) As you wind north on Route 234, the sparkling lakes (and a few waterfalls) come at you fast: Lago Espejo, vast Lago Correntoso, Lago Villarino, Lago Falkner, Lago Escondido, Lago Hermoso, Lago Machónico. (There's

more than seven, but who's counting?) Canoeing, condor-watching, horseback riding, fly-fishing, and a spider web of hiking trails are reasons to tarry at each. With places to stay ranging from free lakeside camping to the intimate riverfront Río Hermoso Hotel, there's no excuse for barreling on to route's end at San Martín de los Andes, though this charming town on the shores of Lago Lácar has grown up since 1952 when Guevara spent the night here in a barn. That barn is now a museum dedicated to Argentina's revolutionary bad boy, and the lodging, ironically, comfortably bourgeois. **The High:** Don't miss an authentic Argentine asado, a hours-long Sunday ritual involving a succession of steak—ribs, strip, flank, skirt—slow-cooked over coals and firewood. **The Low:** There's a 25-mile stretch of road that's still unpaved, resulting in clouds of dust—or rivers of mud when it rains.

### **The Mystic: The Islands of Lake Titicaca, Peru & Bolivia**

Lake Titicaca's floating reed islands appear in every schoolkid's geography textbook, but the lesser known islands in the world's highest navigable lake provide the real lessons. Take Isla del Sol—the birthplace of Inca cosmology—reached via a ferry from Copacabana, Bolivia. You can hike an ancient pilgrims' trail that runs the length of the six-mile island, ending at Roca Sagrada, the sacred rock where the Inca sun leaped into darkness. Come nightfall, snuggle down under heavy wool blankets in one of the many small hotels run by Aymara descendants of the ancient Inca. On Isla Amantaní, you'll stay with a host family, arranged at the island's cooperative office at the pier in Puno, Peru. Ringed with Inca terraces and surrounded by searingly blue water, the island invites hiking with its groomed trails and fanciful stone arches. At sunset, climb to Pachamama, a hilltop temple dedicated to Mother Earth, to witness a fiery sunset, then return to your host family preparing dinner over a smoky fire (and hope it's not going to be one of the guinea pigs skittering across the floor). A morning boat putters to Isla Taquile, whose residents sport boldly embroidered clothes. (UNESCO has declared their textile art a "Heritage of Humanity.") Men knit as they walk and women herd sheep while spinning wool on drop spindles, adhering to the three principles of this pre-Hispanic culture: *ama sua, ama llulla, ama qhella*: do not lie, do not steal, do not be idle. If idleness is more what you had in mind, head to Isla Suasi, a private island with a solar-powered eco-lodge, yet offering luxury perks, such as an Andean sauna and regional gourmet dining. **The High:** Take a two-day hike around Isla Taquile with a native guide: pre-Inca ruins, ancient terraces, a village home-stay. **The Low:** The 12,500-foot altitude means a one-day headache for most.

### **The Keeper of the Flame: Port Antonio, Jamaica**

Until the '50s, this rickety banana port was Jamaica's epicenter for tourism. Big modern resorts have since been built elsewhere, leaving Porty's provincial character unscathed. "Here on a personal level you can still experience the heart and soul of Jamaica," says Shireen Aga, co-owner of the ten-room Hotel Mocking Bird Hill, a pioneer in sustainable tourism. "Whether walking around our twin harbors or eating lobster at Cynthia's hut on Winnifred Beach, visitors can interact with locals a million different ways." There's nothing generic about Porty, from "da' jelly" (chilled coconut water) sold at Musgrave

market to its quirky hotels, ranging from the delightfully decrepit DeMontevin Lodge to celebrity-fave Geejam with its veranda whirlpools and in-house recording studio. Five splendid beaches etch the coastline, Monkey Island entices offshore, and spring-fed Blue Lagoon—a 180-foot-deep indigo hole—opens to the sea. The misty mountain backdrop is Maroon country, the communally owned, self-governing homeland of former runaway slaves granted their freedom after a peace treaty was signed with the British in 1740. Navigate eight miles through its heart on the Rio Grande River, gliding on a bamboo raft, your guide poling through the riffles. "Up here with the Maroons, you can hike to the ruins of an 18th-century plantation, or learn how to make bammy, unleavened bread made from cassava flour," says Aga. In Charles Town, Maroon leader Colonel Frank Lumsden will show you around the museum, meant to keep Maroon culture intact. If Maroons are the safe-keepers of Jamaica's origins, the Blue Mountains are its spiritual home. Explore them on trails dappled with exotic birds, more than 200 species. And if you need an attitude adjustment, sample Jamaica's most famous (and legal) backcountry crop. Yep, Blue Mountain coffee, arguably the world's most delicious bean. **The High:** Ask around in Porty or Charles Town to see if the Charles Town Drummers, a Maroon heritage drumming group, are performing. **The Low:** Deep potholes, steep hills, steering wheel on the right: Driving here is not for the fainthearted.

### **The Modernist: Palm Springs, California**

Around the mid-century mark, the young guns of modernist architecture—Richard Neutra, Albert Frey, William Cody, and Don Wexler—took Palm Springs by storm, finding the desert a perfect match for their minimalist Bauhaus-inspired creations, low-slung, rectilinear, glassy structures expressing the bold confidence of what the Atomic Age would bring. Today, Palm Springs is to modernism what Miami is to art deco, both preserved by decades of neglect, only to be rediscovered by the next generation. "People are coming from all over the world," says architectural guide Robert Imber, who runs Palm Springs Modern Tours. "It's the most important collection of mid-century architecture in the country." While a younger generation appreciates the effervescent design that appeals to the optimist in all of us (who else would live in a glass house?), Boomers may have a more complicated relationship to the oddly shaped furniture they grew up with. "Most loved it, some hated it," says Imber. "Either way, they have a bond with it." These small modernist hotels—revamped 1950s motor courts for the most part—will put the swizzle stick back in your life, whether it's sipping sake-flavored Orbitinis at Orbit In's Boomerang Bar, soaking up the pool scene at the Movie Colony, or hopping on Del Marcos Hotel's cruiser bikes, stopping at vintage stores for Bakelite jewelry, Sputnik lamps, and Noguchi- and Bertoia-style furnishings. Bookings of renovated mid-century homes ranging from Frey-designed villas to Frank Sinatra's four-bedroom lair are soaring. Granted, the exuberance of the Atomic Age may have flatlined, but in Palm Springs, the beat goes on. **The High:** Robert Imber's Segway Tour of Modern Palm Springs is truly a Jetsonian experience. **The Low:** Obligatory daily resort fees from \$14 to \$30 are common in the larger hotels. Find out if yours charges one.

### **Arts and Crafts: Otavalo, Ecuador**

Every Saturday, Poncho Plaza and surrounding streets of this quiet town sheltered in a pocket of the Ecuadorian Andes transform into a vivid pageantry of textile art: rugs, serapes, museum-quality weavings. The enterprising Otavaleños—men in traditional blue ponchos and snappy fedoras, women garlanded in jewelry—oversee what has become the largest indigenous market in South America. Their prowess on the loom dates back to pre-Inca times, but was honed in the notorious 19th-century *obrajes* (workshops). In a twist of history, the Otavaleños now engage the modern world on their own terms, while the haciendas, cleaving to the past, survive by opening their doors to tourism, offering you an opportunity to experience these Andalucian-styled mansions once favored by presidents and generals. "Suite One was Simón Bolívar's favorite room," says Hector Alarcon of Hacienda Pinsaqui, a 220-year-old hacienda on the outskirts of town. "Or you can stay in Room 3, which was his bathroom." (Not as bad as it sounds; it's been converted into a tri-level suite with a blazing hearth.) Just beyond the hacienda are the neighboring craft villages: Cotacachi for leatherwork, San Antonio for wood carvings. Nonshoppers will find plenty to do in these mountains, whether mountain biking along San Pablo lake, climbing Imbabura volcano, photographing Peguche Waterfall, or hiking around a crater lake or to a condor reserve. **The High:** Get a \$30 *limpio*, or "spiritual cleansing" in Ilumán 10 minutes from Otavalo, a village famous throughout the Andes for their *yakchats* or shamans. (Look for the sign "Asociación de Yacchacs de San Juan de Iluman" painted on the wall.) **The Low:** Roaming Otavaleño flute bands play the Andean tourist anthem, "El Condor Pasa," over and over and over.

### **Up from the Ashes: Montserrat**

The Soufrière Hills Volcano responsible for turning Plymouth into a modern-day Pompeii a few years back (between 1995 and 2003) is now the island's star attraction, bringing back the tourists it once chased away. The best place to see it is the Montserrat Volcano Observatory (MVO), Central Command for volcanologists. There's a self-guided tour with interactive kiosks and an outdoor deck for viewing both the restive volcano as well as the capital city's lunar landscaping. Currently at Hazard Level 3, more than half of the island remains off-limits. "Large parts of the island are as safe as anywhere else in the world," assures Richie Robertson, MVO's former director. (Still, check hazard levels at [www.mvo.ms](http://www.mvo.ms) before booking that ticket.) Visiting Plymouth is still a no-go, except by boat. "We can get you really close to the buried city," says Troy Deppermann, co-owner of Green Monkey Dive Shop, which runs boat tours off Plymouth. "You can see how the town is slowly disappearing; last January, a pyroclastic flow buried the church steeple." While there's only one hotel, many posh private villas have been converted into spectacular (and economical) guesthouses, like the new six-bedroom Olveston House ([www.olvestonhouse.com](http://www.olvestonhouse.com)), owned by former Beatles producer George Martin. (Yes, Paul McCartney slept here.) More than half of the islanders have emigrated, but those who remain are even more determined to preserve their unique Irish-African roots, seen in spirited St. Patrick's Week celebrations and

traditional foods such as goat water (a variant of Irish stew) and mountain chicken (actually bullfrogs—and don't; they're endangered). With the golf course and tennis courts entombed in ash, Montserrat is rediscovering its more natural side: unspoiled reefs, dark-sand beaches, and an expanding network of nature trails, including the Oriole Walkway (eye out for the endangered Montserrat oriole) and the 40-minute trail to Rendezvous Bay, the island's most secluded beach. Once a pop-star hideaway, now a dynamic eco-paradise—sometimes it takes a catastrophe to discover one's true nature. **The High:** Nothing beats arriving in Montserrat aboard a 65-ft. racing sloop after a four-hour reach from Antigua ([www.ondeckoceanracing.com](http://www.ondeckoceanracing.com)). **The Low:** Your first sobering view of Plymouth, a scary testimony to the power of nature.

### **New Colonial: Granada, Nicaragua**

In Nicaragua, "poetry is as popular as sport," says Gioconda Belli, the country's most renowned poet. Nowhere is this more apparent than in Granada, a tranquil colonial town of 110,000, where each winter more than 100 international poets such as Yevgeny Yevtushenko and Anne Waldman attend its Poetry Festival (Feb. 16-24, 2010)—the world's largest celebration of verse. A looming volcano and the vast Lake Cocibolca provide a lyrical backdrop to the town's colorful adobe buildings and contemplative courtyards. Dating to 1524, its authentic colonial character rivals Oaxaca in Mexico, but without the glut of Internet cafes, nightclubs, and coffee hangouts. And it's a less expensive eco-adventure than neighboring Costa Rica. Step outside of town and you can careen down zip lines, peer into fuming volcanoes, and kayak among Las Isletas, a micro-archipelago of 365 lush islands sprinkled across the lake. As travelers discover Granada's allure, the city is evolving to accommodate them: venerable hotels such as La Gran Francia ([www.lagranfrancia.com/eng/bienvenidos.htm](http://www.lagranfrancia.com/eng/bienvenidos.htm)) offer updated digs in landmark buildings, while ancient courtyards shelter new restaurants showcasing little-known Granadino specialties (Try *vigorón*: fried pork rind, boiled yucca, and shredded cabbage served on banana leaf). And as you stroll Granada's narrow cobblestone streets from restaurant to church to fort to museum, inspired by its timeless historic aura, you may find yourself agreeing with Nicaragua's current president Daniel Ortega, who once explained to author Salman Rushdie, "In Nicaragua, everyone is considered a poet until proved otherwise." Tourists included. **The High:** During the poetry festival, says Belli, "Poets accompany a funeral hearse, which stops at every corner so poets can climb on a float—the poet-mobile—and recite their poems to the multitude." **The Low:** No airport means a bumpy hour-long car ride from Nicaragua's capital city, Managua.

### **Sleeping Arrangements: Back to Nature, In Style**

**Hix Island House: Vieques, Puerto Rico** Crowning a hilltop, these indoor/outdoor concrete lofts open to the elements. Strict ecological principles (rainwater collection, solar panels, an ionized pool) don't get in the way of indulgence: luxury Frette linens, cool minimalist architecture, and outdoor showers (from \$185). [www.hixislandhouse.com](http://www.hixislandhouse.com)

**Centro Ecológico Sian Ka'an: Tulúm, Mexico** Safari-style tents with hammock terraces catch the breeze atop dunes separating lagoon from Caribbean waves at this wind- and sun-powered nonprofit. Superb beachcombing, unexcavated Maya ruins, and heaps of guacamole in restaurant (from \$65).

[www.cesiak.org](http://www.cesiak.org)

**Cotton Tree Lodge: Punta Gorda, Belize** Boardwalk connects stilted cabanas along Moho River (kayaking and swimming). Howler monkeys provide nightly entertainment. Daytime pursuits: horseback riding, spelunking, volunteering in Maya communities. Lodge owner—the Willy Wonka of Belize—organizes chocolate-making workshops using organically grown cacao (from \$109). [www.cottontreelodge.com](http://www.cottontreelodge.com)

**La Cusinga Eco-Lodge: Uvita, Costa Rica** In rainforest bordering a primeval beach, this solar- and hydro-powered resort provides a gold standard of eco-activities—yoga, ziplining, surfing—but it's the prolific wildlife that astonishes: toucans, monkeys, sea turtles, humpback whales, iridescent butterflies (from \$149). [www.lacusingalodge.com](http://www.lacusingalodge.com)

**Jungle Bay Resort & Spa: Dominica** The 35 cottages are stilted above undisturbed greenery, withstream-fed outdoor showers. Lots of hiking opportunities (including just getting to some of the cottages.) Excellent community relations, too: locals built it, staff it, supply it (from \$179).

[www.junglebaydominica.com](http://www.junglebaydominica.com)

**Eco Camp Patagonia: Torres del Paine, Chile** Individual geodesic domes with fleece sheets, low-emission wood stoves, and skylight windows (watch for condors) face a trekking paradise of spired granite mountains, calving glaciers, azure lakes. With 17 hours of daylight (it's summer here), there's no excuse not to do it all (from \$990 per person for three-day all-inclusive tour). [www.ecocamp.travel](http://www.ecocamp.travel)

## Drink Like a Local

**Coffee, The Way They Like It** Puhleeze, don't say frappuccino. In Buenos Aires at Café Tortoni ([www.cafetortoni.com.ar](http://www.cafetortoni.com.ar)), request a **cortado**, an espresso with a spoonful of steamed milk, which you'll finish off with a shot glass of mineral water. The **cortadito** as served at La Bombonera in Puerto Rico's Old San Juan is similar, but the steamed milk is sweetened. Even sweeter are the **cafezinhos** you'll find at street corners in Rio: high-octane, overly sugared black coffee served in tiny cups (order it "pingado" and you'll get a few drops of milk). At Gran Café Parroquia ([www.laparroquia.com](http://www.laparroquia.com)) in Veracruz, Mexico, the **café lechero** is legendary; tap your glass with a spoon for refills. Fidel and Che reportedly talked revolution over **café con leche** at Table 58

at La Habana, Mexico City's most nostalgic coffee house. But the signature drink here is the **Habana**, a creamy froth laced with a few potent drops of coffee extract.

**Speaking of Spirits** Take a sip of **tequila** and savor the agave flavor—it's the floral essence of the Mexican state of Jalisco—then brace for the kind of bold and brassy finish you'd expect in a mariachi band, guaranteed to stir your inner ranchero. On the other hand, the **mojito**, made of plantation rum from Martinique is a languorous taste of the Caribbean so complex connoisseurs can tell if the sugarcane is leeward- or windward-grown. Brazil's booze of choice, the classic **caipirinha** is a cocktail of muddled lime, sugar, ice, and cachaça (like rum, made from sugarcane). It's different from **pisco sour**, the national drink of Peru and Chile, a fiery brandy tamed with lime and an egg-white foam dotted with Amargo bitters. It's an odd, intriguing marriage of opposites, full of connotations, much like Andean culture.

If you're looking for the perfect drink in its most authentic setting, the trail ends here.

**Best Tequila Bar in Mexico:** Las Casas de Sirenas in Mexico City's historic center offers 200 artisanal brands of tequila and terrace views of Templo Mayor.

**Best Rum in the Caribbean:** Visit any of the 12 distilleries on Martinique's Rum Route.

**Best Caipirinha in Brazil:** With 500 varieties to choose from, you'll want to ask the barkeep for advice at the Academia da Cachaça in Rio de Janeiro.  
[www.academiadecachaca.com.br](http://www.academiadecachaca.com.br)

**Best Pisco Sour in Peru:** The Maury Hotel's bar makes the best mix in Lima, whether or not it was invented here, as the hotel claims.

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