

Travel

Get ready **TO EXPLORE** Australia and the world

Where to go in 2026

We've been there, loved them and want you to savour these wonderful places that align perfectly with the latest travel trends. Enjoy!



Samoa
Idyllic swimming spots like Lalomanu Beach, welcoming locals and a vibrant culture make Samoa an ideal place to switch off and relax.

For more holiday inspiration from *The Weekly*'s experts, head to our website at

WomensWeekly.com.au

You've got your nice, new, inspirational 2026 calendar, the dates are all in there, now all you have to do is fill them in, ideally with some holidays.

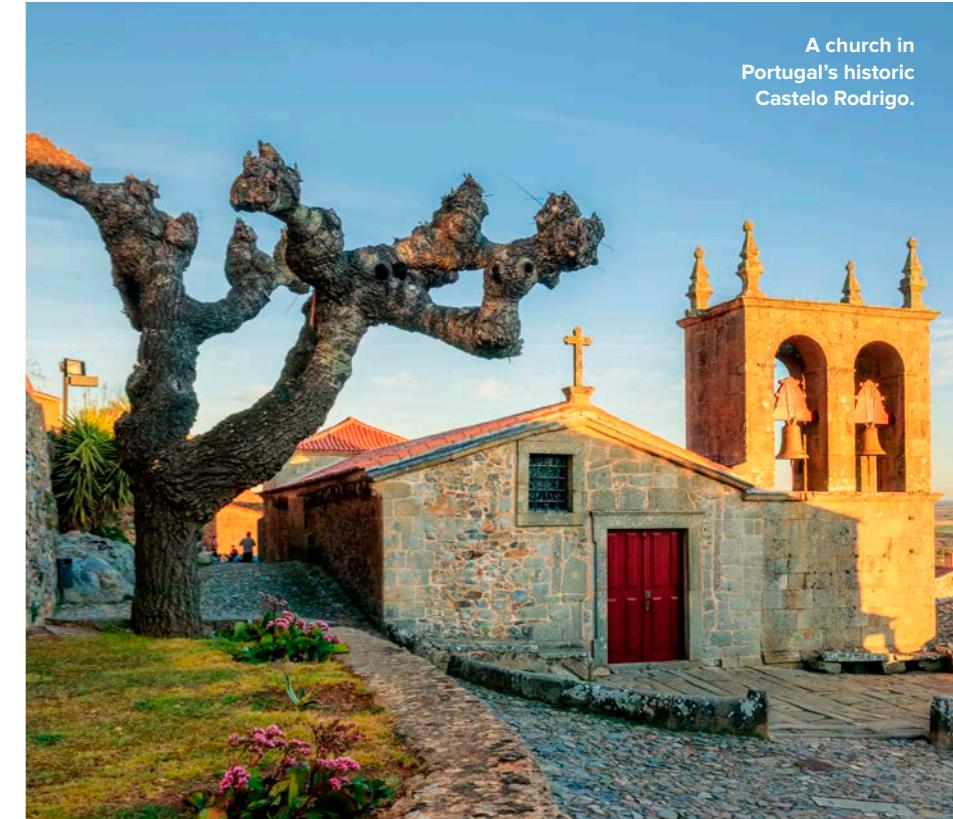
Where would you like to go in 2026? The fun starts with the planning, and to help fill in the blanks, we've tapped our network of top travel writers and enthusiasts for inspiration. Enjoyment is key, so we're not going to send you to places where resentful locals squirt tourists with water pistols, or have you sweltering in the summer heat on crowded islands.

We've opted for places where we've had some of our most pleasurable and memorable moments; where the air is fresh and the scenery is stunning, the hospitality is generous and the welcomes are warm and genuine. Places where we have come away with a wider appreciation and understanding of the world and its people.

Let the journeys begin ...



From top: Panoramic views from Serra da Marofa in Figueira de Castelo Rodrigo; fountains and statues aplenty in the Bishop's Palace Garden in Castelo Branco.



Portugal: Little-known fairytale wonders

Peering through my attic bedroom's two small windows, I feel like Rapunzel. Below me lies a gorgeous patchwork of terracotta-roofed houses, snaking cobble streets and, beyond imposing walls, forest-green rolling hills and mountains on the horizon.

I'm having a fairytale moment in one of Portugal's medieval villages, Castelo Rodrigo. Once at the centre of disputed territory, the far-flung hilltop fortress in Greater Côa Valley now lives a quiet, peaceful life as an open-air museum, home to roughly 50 residents.

I sleep alongside Portugal's rich history, staying at heritage guesthouse Casa da Cisterna, within the citadel's walls and in the shadows of castle ruins. After feasting on a traditional home-cooked dinner, I go back in time further, joining guesthouse owner Ana on a four-wheel-drive adventure to encounter Portugal's real rock stars.

The UNESCO World Heritage-listed Côa Valley Archaeological Park is home to Palaeolithic art dating back thousands of years. Spread across multiple sites, the engraved rock art depicts animal figures, best viewed under starry skies, torchlight in hand.

The enchantment on my Portugal Real Food Adventure tour with Intrepid continues the next day at Jardim do Paço Episcopal (Bishop's Palace Garden) in Castelo Branco. The aesthetically pleasing, baroque-style, 18th-century gardens are woven with grand staircases, multiple statues depicting Portugal's past kings, as well as saints, months, continents and virtues, manicured hedges, and opulent water features. Consider me charmed.

—Julia D'Orazio

More at visitportugal.com and intrepidtravel.com

Samoa: Where time slows and the sea sings

Set in the heart of the South Pacific, Samoa moves to the rhythm of the tide. Here, days begin with the scent of frangipani and end with fiery sunsets over serene lagoons.

Many travellers make their way to the famed To-Sua Ocean Trench, with its dramatic ladder descent into turquoise depths, but just as magical is the lesser-known Piula Cave Pool on Upolu. Fed by a crystal-clear spring beneath a historic Methodist church, it offers a peaceful, cooling swim in nature's quiet embrace.

Continue south to Lalomanu Beach, where powder-soft sand meets the gentle lap of aquamarine water. It's the kind of place where hours drift by without effort.

In Apia, the markets brim with colour and chatter. Hand-woven mats, fresh tropical fruit and hand-crafted treasures offer a window into Samoa's warmth and artistry.

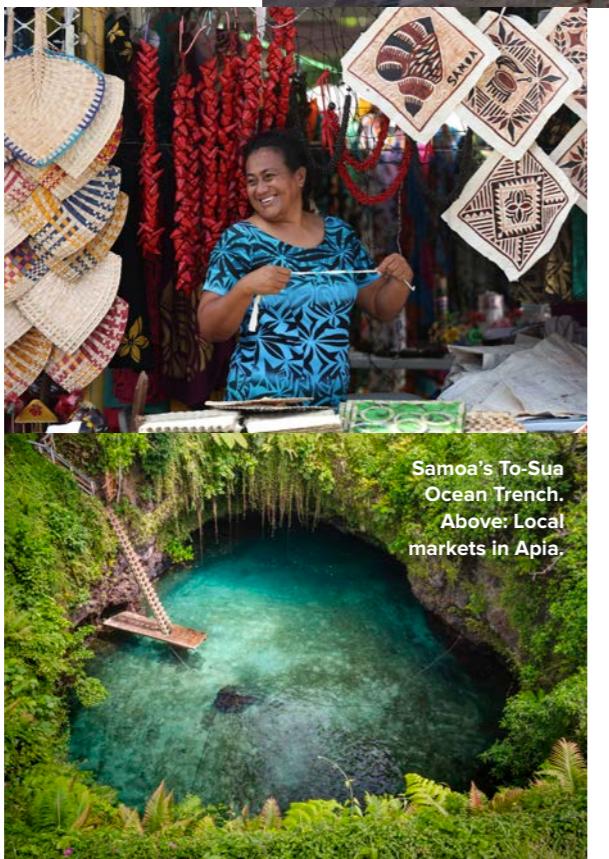
Samoan culture is lived openly and proudly: Families gather in open-air *fales*, meals are cooked in an *umu* (oven) and hymns fill church halls on Sunday.

For even slower days, take the ferry to the island of Savai'i which beckons with dramatic blowholes, rugged walks and peaceful coastal villages.

Warm hospitality, unspoilt landscapes and an unhurried pace make Samoa a place to simply be.

Jayde Malifa

Getting there: Fly direct from Sydney or Brisbane to Apia, or connect via Auckland or Nadi, Fiji. *See samoatravel*



Samoan To-Sua Ocean Trench. Above: Local markets in Apia.

Bhutan: Hit the heights

Boasting lofty snowy mountains, fluttering prayer flags, maroon-clad monks and an unwavering ethos to kindness, Bhutan reads like a fairytale. Hemmed by the Himalayas, laying quietly between India and China, the tiny Buddhist kingdom is one of the world's smallest countries, and with a staggeringly small citizenship of around 770,000, also one of the least populated.

Only opening to visitors in 1974, the nation is still catching up to the world-at-large. There are no traffic lights, and it wasn't until 1999 that TV was launched. More unusual, the happiness of Bhutan's residents is measured with a survey every five years. Though you'll wonder why as you visit villages where locals spin prayer wheels with Zen-like calm.



Must-do experiences in the "happy kingdom" include a pilgrimage hike to the Tiger's Nest – a monastery clinging to a sheer cliff face – and exploring the cool corridors of Punakha Dzong, Bhutan's second largest and most impressive monastery. For cultural immersion, include a homestay, visit a nunnery, and join prayer time at a monastery; chanting recharges your soul. Attend a festival to see theatrical costumes, masked dances, comedians and clowns. The Bhutanese people will welcome you like family.

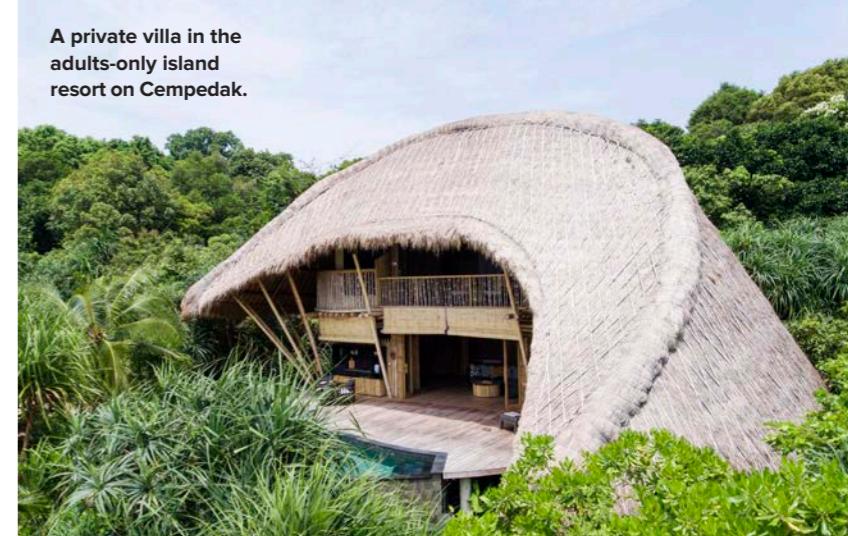
– Lynn Gail

Need to know
Over 70 per cent of Bhutan is covered by forest, earning it the impressive title of a carbon-negative country. To protect it, there are strict entry rules and a set daily fee which supports local development projects. Book your itinerary with an authorised guide at bhutanbelieve.bt

More at nikoi.com, cempedak.com, batubatu.com.my



Choose between pool or beach on Cempedak island, Indonesia.



A private villa in the adults-only island resort on Cempedak.

Southeast Asia: Easy island-hopping

Singapore makes an excellent stopover, but it's also the gateway to more than long-haul flights. Linger and recharge your batteries on eco-friendly islands in Indonesia and Malaysia, with no additional flights required.

The sister private islands of Nikoi and Cempedak in Indonesia could not be further from the concrete jungle. They're accessed from Bintan Island, itself just a one-hour ferry ride from Singapore. Families adore Nikoi resort, where two-storey driftwood villas give treehouse vibes. While the kids are whisked away for pirate treasure-hunting, zip-lining or rock climbing, parents snorkel the reef, stroll the jungle or sip cocktails at the breezy beach bar.

Nearby Cempedak is an adults-only retreat. Elegantly curved bamboo villas nestle amid giant native trees and butterflies slurp the nectar of fallen flowers. Each villa has a plunge pool, perfect for lingering while overlooking the sea or jungle. Hornbill birds wing into treetops, monitor lizards help aerate the compost and sea otters cruise by to visit.

Malaysia beckons too. With a private driver, cross the bridge from Singapore and head north to Mersing for a boat transfer to Batu Batu Resort. Actively regenerating the island, family-friendly Batu Batu immerses guests in Johor's protected Sultan Iskandar Marine Park, where they snorkel, stand-up paddleboard or even join a beach clean-up. It's a sea turtle hotspot, and guests may visit the resort's not-for-profit Tengah Island Conservation facility to see best practice turtle conservation in action. Adopt a turtle nest or if you're lucky, witness turtles hatching.

– Carolyn Beasley

Zimbabwe: Take a safari by land and lake

Lake Kariba is so immense it could pass for an ocean in the landlocked southern African nation of Zimbabwe. One of the world's largest man-made lakes, it's the starting point for my extraordinary wildlife adventure with The Classic Safari Company.

From its hilltop roost, Bumi Hills Safari Lodge has a sweeping vista of the southern lakeshore and nearby Matusadona National Park. Dawn breaks with the cry of the African fish eagle and a view from my balcony of elephants, zebras and waterbuck emerging from the thickets and ambling down to the lakeside to drink. I keep watch for lions and leopards on game drives along the shore and in the hinterland; during sunset cruises I'm alert for the hippos and crocodiles hidden beneath the lake's glazed surface.

The sea-blue reservoir sprawls beneath me on the flight to Somalisa, a tented camp in Zimbabwe's largest national park, Hwange. Water is more sporadic here: rivers threading through the savannah, pans dousing the Kalahari sandveld, and a waterhole beside the camp's outdoor dining room thronged during lunch by a thirsty herd of elephants. Sundowner excursions lead us past a baboon resting on a tree bough like something from *The Lion King*, and a pride of lions barely distinguishable from the golden twilight and flaxen savannah.

– Catherine Marshall

Getting there: The quickest flights for Australians go from Perth to Harare via Johannesburg. More at zimbabwetourism.net and classicsafaricompany.com.au



Clockwise: Elephants by Lake Kariba, one of the world's largest man-made lakes; Bumi Hills Safari Lodge; sunset on Lake Kariba; Zebras roam in Zimbabwe's largest national park, Hwange.



ALAMY; GETTY IMAGES; INSTAGRAM COURTESY OF EXPEDIA GROUP; ROB BLACKBURN; SHUTTERSTOCK. OTHER IMAGES SUPPLIED AND USED WITH PERMISSION.

Going UP

Travel trends of 2026

Explore Worldwide's got its fingers on the pulse in all parts of the world, and its 2026 travel trends resonate strongly with us. Here are the highlights.

The micro-retirement

With traditional retirement moving later and later, more travellers are taking their big trip mid-career. From Patagonia treks to slow journeys through Vietnam, the travel bucket list can't wait.

Off-peak time-tripping

2026 is the year of hidden seasons and quieter horizons. Travelling in shoulder months means fewer crowds, lower costs and richer local connections; think autumn in Japan, spring in Morocco, or summer safaris in Zimbabwe. The new rule: Go when others stay home.

Wellness through community

Wellness travel is shifting from spa retreats to connection and culture. Travellers are cooking with families in Peru, joining rewilding projects in Romania, and engaging in meaningful cultural exchanges that nourish both body and soul.

The rise of non-viral destinations

Travellers are turning from crowded Instagram-favoured spots toward authentic, undiscovered places like northern Laos and inland Croatia. It's about meaningful moments over viral moments.

More at exploreworldwide.com.au

Australia: Great things in tiny packages

It was a waterfall that led me to the 2025 Top Tiny Tourism Town in Australia. I'd been holidaying in Central Victoria, enjoying the culinary scene and lakeside walks at Daylesford and an indulgent Mineral Milk Bath at Hepburn Bathhouse and Spa. Where to next? My phone's map highlighted a photogenic picnic spot nearby: Trentham Falls. The 20-minute drive proved well worth it – this is where you can admire the highest single drop of any waterfall in Central Victoria, 32 metres. The lookout point is ideally positioned for maximum appreciation.

By now the rumble from my stomach almost matched the roar of the falls, and that's where tiny Trentham town beckoned. In an alleyway off its picturesque, gold-rush-era High Street, we struck gourmet gold at Sisko Chocolate Studio, the new creative headquarters of chocolate sculptor Christina Tantsis.

Trentham has a picturesque lake, a 6km scenic rail trail walk that cuts through the Wombat State Forest, boutique stores, alluring pubs and the acclaimed French farmhouse-style restaurant du Fermier. But Sisko put the icing on my cake: A chocolate tart topped with hazelnuts washed down by a coffee that this fussy caffeine addict scored 5 out of 5. **AWW** – Bernard O'Shea



Above: Be awed by Trentham Falls. Below: Delight your tastebuds at Sisko Chocolate Studio.



Other charming towns to explore

The runners-up in the Top Tiny Tourism Town awards: Huskisson, NSW (silver) and Town of 1770, Qld (bronze). The Top Small Tourism Towns: Bungendore, Canberra region (gold); Deloraine, Tas (silver); and Airlie Beach, Qld (bronze). More at toptourismtowns.com.au



HUSKISSON



TOWN OF 1770



DELORAIN