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10 Best Places You've Never Heard Of

There are precious few spots that are both off the grid and out of this world. We asked a dozen professional globe-trotters to take us to their most secret hideaways.

By Melinda Page

Saint-Sauvant, France

Recommended by Zane Lamprey, host of Spike TV's Three Sheets.

Lamprey's favorite destination is quiet Saint-Sauvant (population: 517), in the heart of cognac country: "It's my fantasy version of France." Saint-Sauvant is a quintessential 14th-century village, with a fortified tower, four winding streets, and only one place to stay, the Design Hôtel des Francs Garçons. Outside, the hotel looks like any medieval building: thick walls, wood shutters, and a tiled roof. But inside, a team of seven French, American, and British architects has transformed everything. The reception is a modernist forest with black-and-white wallpaper hand-printed with leafless trees. Out back, a swimming pool abuts the village's 12th-century Romanesque church, a French cultural monument. There's not much else to Saint-Sauvant, which is fine with Lamprey. "They have a pace of life I could get accustomed to," he says. "Lunch lasts for at least two hours, and it may just be two pieces of bread and some ham and cheese. But for some reason, it takes the French a long time to eat a sandwich." francsgarcons.com, doubles from \$127.



The 12th-century Romanesque Saint-Sylvain Church in Saint-Sauvant France. Photo: Courtesy Jack Ma/Wikimedia Commons

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Lord Howe Island, Australia

Recommended by Charles Veley, founder of most traveledpeople.com. Trekked more than 2 million miles (so far) on his quest to see each country, territory, dependency, and island in the world.

Veley likes Lord Howe Island so much that he's been there twice. That means something for a man on a mission to collect every passport stamp in the world. The crescent-shaped island, a two-hour flight northeast of Sydney, is just seven miles from tip to tip, with a long white stretch of lagoon beach at its center and emerald green mountains at either end. Don't miss the starfish in the tide pools near the lagoon and the hand-fed fish at the lovely and secluded Neds Beach. Wherever you go, you're not going to get lost; there's just one main street and only 18 small-scale hotels such as the 19-room bungalow-style Leanda Lei Apartments. "It's just you and fabulous white sand with the most beautiful palm trees all around."



An aerial view of Australia's Lord Howe Island, a two-hour flight from Sydney. Photo: R. Ian Lloyd

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Keahiakawelo, Lanai, Hawaii

Recommended by Valerie Yong Ock Kim, film-location scout and professional photographer. Has scouted exotic spots for scenes in *Pirates of the Caribbean*, *The Tempest*, and *Batman Forever*, among other films.

You need a four-wheel-drive vehicle to get to Keahiakawelo, which could easily stand in for the surface of Mars in a Hollywood blockbuster. On the northwest side of Lanai-the least populated of the [Hawaiian Islands](#)-the sweep of red rock gardens and giant boulders pops against a backdrop of blue skies and ocean. "I don't know of any place else like it," says Yong Ock Kim. "The wind actually rolls the rocks around." Being in Hawaii, you can certainly decamp to the beach, but it's far more interesting to visit with Kepa Maly, the executive director of the Lanai Culture & Heritage Center. "He makes the trip worth it," Kim says. "He knows all the stories."

Sucre, Bolivia

Recommended by Laura Aviva, owner of L'Aviva Home. Tracks down indigenous, handcrafted housewares for hotels and interior designers, and for her online boutique, [lavivahome.com](#).

Sucre has year-round high temperatures in the mid-70s and a collection of whitewashed buildings that have earned it the name La Ciudad Blanca. But it's the culture that Aviva found most alluring on a recent trip. "Even functional items like potato sacks were woven with lovely striped patterns," Aviva says. After checking into the Parador Santa Maria La Real, "a little hidden gem of a place" with vaulted brick ceilings and interior courtyards, Aviva headed to nearby Potosi and Tarabuco: "The women emerged from their houses and started asking if I wanted to see their *tejidos* (weavings). It's a great cultural exchange-and an opportunity to pick up some amazing textiles."

Tusheti, Georgia

Recommended by Jonny Bealby, founder of Wild Frontiers adventure travel company. Explores Niger, Laos, Pakistan, and beyond for trips to the world's most remote locations.

You won't want to go to Tusheti if you're afraid of heights. Hidden deep in the Caucasus Mountains, the region's villages cling to dizzyingly steep slopes that are as picturesque as they are precarious. That's all part of the allure to Bealby. Of Georgia's Tusheti region, the inveterate adventurer describes a land "with centuries-old defensive towers, mountaintop castles, and stone shrines," some of which, like Guest House Lamata, are being transformed into basic lodgings with simple wooden furniture. Newly open to visitors after the dissolution of the USSR and Georgia's Rose Revolution of 2003, Tusheti can now be explored on foot or from the saddle of a sure-footed horse.

There are sheep grazing in almost every nook and cranny, from the rolling grasslands up near the ridged peaks down to the glacial lakes below them and all around the gorges coursing with white-water streams. You'll also pass through hamlets like Shenako, with a rough-hewn stone church and houses adorned with lacy wood balconies. At night, you'll be well entertained by the locals, whom Bealby describes as "the most hospitable and fun people in the world."

Verduno, Italy

Recommended by Rob Kaufelt, owner of Murray's Cheese, a New York fixture for 70 years. Explores cheese-making regions - Ireland, France, England, Spain, Italy - for artisanal products.

One of the best dinners of Kaufelt's life-and as a guy who essentially eats for a living, there have been plenty of great ones-was in the Piedmontese village of Verduno. "I was staying at the Castello di Verduno, and the restaurant there was just incredible," Kaufelt says. He describes plates full of white-truffled pasta dishes. Dinner was served in a red-walled dining room with soaring ceilings in a crumbling 18th-century castle. In good weather, you can decamp to the



The lunar landscape of Keahiakawelo, Lanai, where thousands of years of wind erosion have created spires and towers.
Photo: Maryellen McGrath/ Landov



A vegetable stall at the central market in Sucre, Bolivia.
Photo: Jerome Lorieau



The ancient village of Dartio in Georgia's Tusheti region.
Photo: Courtesy Wild Frontiers



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palm-dotted garden to sip Barolo made from local grapes and cellared in barrels beneath the hotel. The Castello makes an ideal base for a foodie pilgrimage through Piedmont. "The whole region is teeming with good food-I almost smashed up my car when a family of wild boars went running across the road in front of me once," Kaufelt says.

Doe Bay, Washington

Recommended by Alex Calderwood, founder of Ace Hotels. Converts distressed properties (a bus station, a Salvation Army depot) into boutique hotels in [New York](#) and along the West Coast.

Before he opened his first Ace Hotel in [Seattle](#) in 1993, Calderwood threw a popular series of warehouse parties. His ability to define and create "cool" has organically grown into not just the Ace franchise, but also Rudy's, an old-school barbershop with 14 locations across the West Coast; and a marketing agency called Neverstop. To fuel all of his endeavors, Calderwood travels constantly. Over time, a theme has emerged: He's drawn to laid-back spots that blend high- and low-culture influences. Doe Bay, on Washington State's Orcas Island, is just his kind of place. "It's got a great blend of hippie kids mixed in with older hikers and naturalists," Calderwood says. The small inlet on the Pacific Ocean is home to an unassuming resort of the same name. "Doe Bay isn't a design spot. You're not going there to get pampered. There's nothing pretentious about it-and that's exactly what makes it great," Calderwood says. Doe Bay's reception building looks like an old general store-albeit one festooned with colorful flags-and beyond that there's a small clutch of yurts, campsites, and old-fashioned cabins sprinkled through the woods and along the shore. For Calderwood, it's the sauna and hot- and cold-water soaking pools that bring him back. "The pools sit on a platform that overlooks the most incredible view of the bay, with other islands off in the distance. When you're done with the pool, you can run down a little path and jump straight into the sound."

Wuppertal, South Africa

Recommended by Sarah Scarborough, buyer for the Republic of Tea company. Works with the Rainforest Alliance and the Ethical Tea Partnership to find new products worldwide.

Scarborough has lived from [Alaska](#) to [New Zealand](#), and she's touched down on all continents. But the one place that thrills her every time is the South African town of Wuppertal, four hours northeast of [Cape Town](#). "It's a pure, wild scene," says Scarborough, who is often greeted by farmers lugging their produce to market on donkey carts. "The air has a very mineral quality, and you can see forever." Despite the arid landscape, there's water everywhere. "My favorite swimming hole on the entire planet is outside of town. It's a bit of a treacherous climb down the side of a cliff to reach the water, but once you descend you can sunbathe on a water-worn rock in the shallows, play under the waterfall, then rest in the shade of cedar trees with the big blue sky above you," Scarborough says. For the evening, she recommends staying in one of the town's several cottages or pitching a tent at the Algeria Campground on the Rondegat River. "I've never been to a more perfect place to gaze at the stars."

Namje, Nepal

Recommended by Stephanie Odegard, founder and president of Odegard Inc. Works with craftsmen to create a line of hand-knotted carpets that preserve native handicraft traditions.

There are no roads to Namje. The only way to get to the Nepalese village is along a series of footpaths with views of Mount Makalu, the world's fifth-tallest peak. Not that getting to those footpaths is easy; you'll have to wrangle a flight from [Kathmandu](#) to the town of Biratnagar, which is itself an hour's drive from the trailhead. Buddha Air offers daily flights from Kathmandu to Biratnagar, the closest access point to Namje. It's no surprise that the place only sees a handful of outsiders a year. Odegard came upon it while she was searching for local women to harvest fiber for her rug company. "After my trip to Namje," she says, "I felt like I'd never been farther away from home." Namje's isolation

The dining room in Castello di Verduno, in Italy's Piedmont Region, where guests can sample Barolo from the castle's cellars.
Photo: Andrea Wyner



Doe Bay, on Washington State's Orcas Island, which has an unassuming resort of the same name.

Photo: Cameron Zegers Photography



South Africa's wild Cederberg Mountains, which surround the picturesque town of Wuppertal, four hours north of Cape Town.

Photo: Awie Badenhorst/ Alamy



The remote Himalayan village of Namje in Nepal, accessible only by footpath.

Photo: Courtesy Stephanie Odegard

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has been its saving grace. "The native Magar people live very close to nature, and there's an incredible amount of spiritual activity," Odegard says. You can climb to the top of Thumki Hill and visit the sacred burial ground where the villagers, who still practice animism, worship their ancestors. Odegard suggests staying at the Hotel Himalaya and trekking the footpaths between villages to catch the stunning sunrises and sunsets.

Buffalo, Wyoming

Recommended by Andy Holak, cofounder of the Adventure Running Company. Searches for backcountry tour routes that feature grazing bison, mountain lakes, and stunning peaks.

An accomplished ultramarathoner, Holak thinks nothing of running 50 miles in a day. On a recent long-haul race to [Dayton, Wyo.](#), he discovered Buffalo and immediately decided it was one of his favorite outdoorsy gems: "Buffalo has that nice mix of cowboys and kayakers." The town's undiscovered status means you'll have the trails to yourself, and its superb location at the foot of the Bighorns offers immediate access to some of the best recreation areas in the country. "It's one of the closest jumping-off points for climbing Cloud Peak," Holak says; at 13,167 feet, Cloud Peak is the highest point in the Bighorn range. But even mellow day hikes are rewarded with dramatic endings here, such as the one found at Bucking Mule Falls, which plunges 600 feet down a steep rock face into Devil Canyon. Drives, too, are almost distractingly scenic. It's hard to top a cruise in the car out to Crazy Woman Canyon, where a narrow dirt road hugs a creek and steep rock walls cast a golden glow. Then there's the excellent rock climbing at Ten Sleep Canyon and the plentiful cross-country skiing trails in winter. It doesn't hurt that Main Street is movie-set picturesque, with rows of well-preserved mercantile shops and saloons from the late 1800s now transformed into art galleries and outdoor outfitters.



Devils Leap in Wyoming's Bighorn Basin, sitting in the backyard of outdoor-friendly town of Buffalo.
Photo: Iconotec/ Alamy

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