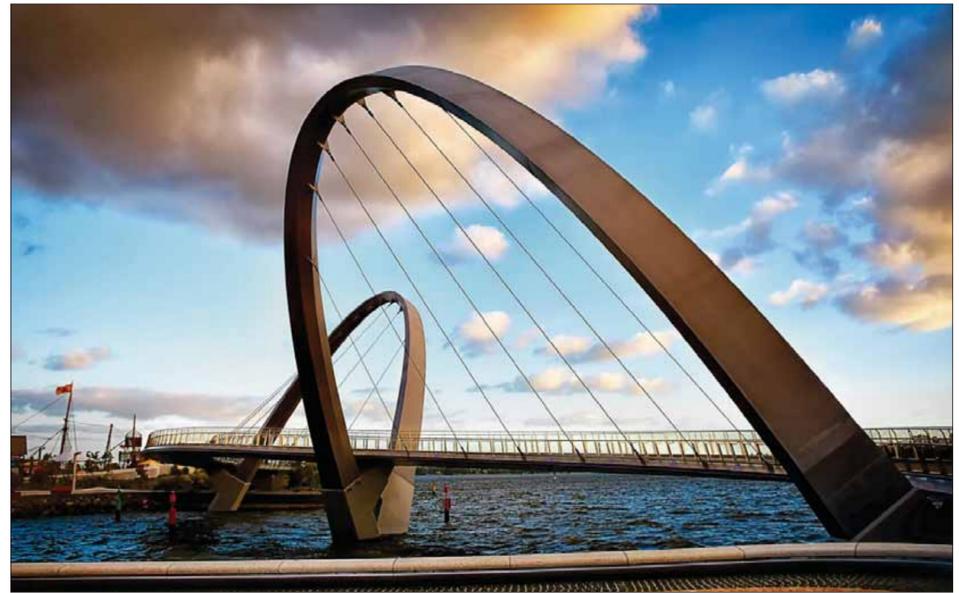


MIR-I ARAB MADRASA, an Islamic educational center, was built in the 16th century in Bukhara, Uzbekistan, a Silk Road city now reachable by high-speed rail.

LUIS DAFOS Getty Images



IMAGEIXEN Getty Images/RooM RM

PERTH in Western Australia features the architecturally notable Elizabeth Quay Bridge, which is open to pedestrians and cyclists.



JOHN GREIM LightRocket via Getty Images

OUR LADY OF REMEDY Church overlooks the bay in Kotor, Montenegro.



The Irish Image Collection / Getty Images/Design Pics RF

SEE ANCIENT abbeys such as Killoceol in Ireland.

18 PLACES FOR 2018

By **CHRISTOPHER REYNOLDS** >>> You know that saying about eating dessert first because life is short? It goes for travel too. ¶ These destinations, which include cities, rivers and an ancient trading route, demand attention in the year ahead. ¶ Some have new attractions, some are planning big parties to celebrate major anniversaries and others have prospered by staying out of trouble. Here are your 18 for '18, in alphabetical order.

1 Albuquerque
This old town in New Mexico is starting to look livelier, partly because of the boutique Hotel Chaco, which opened last year. The hotel is the anchor for the emerging Sawmill District, complete with the Sawmill Market food hall, which the developer aims to open this year.

about 15 minutes outside central Bologna, fills about 20 acres with fields, workshops, markets, kitchens, shops, classrooms and, of course, restaurants.

Some worry it will compete with the city's traditional markets and eateries, but the buzz is upbeat. Florence and Venice are within 100 miles.

Info: www.bolognawelcome.com/en

The people behind downtown's One Central Entertainment District (shopping, dining, bowling) also are planning to open their project this year. In 2017 the Albuquerque airport kicked off a 15-month renovation project. Delta Air Lines added a nonstop flight between ABQ and LAX, and Alaska Airlines added nonstop service to San Diego and John Wayne Airport in Orange County.

4 Douro River, Portugal

The Douro twists and turns for more than 500 miles through Spain and Portugal. The Portuguese part flows through gorgeous wine country and quaint medieval towns and cities, culminating in lively, historic Porto, where the river meets the Atlantic.

You can tour it by rail — Rough Guides calls the Linha do Douro "Portugal's best train ride" — with more than 20 tunnels and 30 bridges between Porto and Pócinho.

River trips are even bigger. At least six lines now offer trips on the Douro: Uniworld has a couple of options on the Douro, and Viking has three ships plying the Douro's waters, and a fourth under construction.

Yet another new ship, the Amadouro of AmaWaterways, will debut on the river in 2019.

Info: www.visitporto.travel

2 Antarctica

Some scientists believe sea-ice levels in the region reached a record low in 2017. In September, an iceberg four times the size of Manhattan calved off of the continent's Pine Island Glacier.

Who knows what comes next? It might be wise to see this end of the Earth now. National Geographic Expeditions and Lindblad Expeditions, working as a team, have two ships that will make as many as 14 trips each in January, February, November and December. Or you could take a Silversea luxury cruise to the same area. It has butlers.

Info: lat.ms/natgeoantarctica; lat.ms/silverseantarctica

3 Bologna, Italy

It's less crowded than Italy's top-tier tourist cities, but renowned within the country for its cuisine and architecture. And it has a faulty tower that leans even more severely than Pisa's — prime Instagram material.

On the food scene, Bologna is home to the new FICO Eatery World, which opened in November. (FICO stands for Fabbrica Italiana Contadina, or Italian farming factory.) And yes, these are the same people who run the just-opened Eatly in Los Angeles.) This complex,



LAURIE NOBLE Getty Images

NEON SIGNS dazzle in Shinjuku in Tokyo, an area known for its busy train station and entertainment.



CNBC/Getty Images/Stockphoto

MASAYA VOLCANO, a.k.a. "mouth of hell," is a steamy must-see outside Managua, Nicaragua.



RODRIGO ARANGUA APF/Getty Images

A PENGUIN strolls in Antarctica. Cruise lines make many voyages to the continent in the winter months.



DEA/V. GIANNELLA De Agostini/Getty Images

VICTORIA FALLS and the Zambezi River are shared by Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Info: www.hamburg-travel.com/attractions

6 Ireland's Ancient East

The rest of the world is chasing after "Star Wars" locations along Ireland's Wild Atlantic Way, but you might want to head to the other side of the island, home to green scenery, ancient stonework and the cities of Cork, Kilkenny, Waterford and Wicklow, not to mention Dublin.

Just outside Cork, the town of Kinsale is becoming renowned for its restaurants. In Kilkenny a Medieval Mile Museum opened last year. On June 1 in Drogheda, they're reprising an annual festival celebrating music and camper vans (Vantastival, they call it).

In Dublin a long-awaited north-south light rail line opened in December, connecting two lines and reducing construction scaffolding in the city core.

Farther south, local leaders in March unveiled a 28-mile greenway cycling and walking trail on an old rail line between Waterford and the seaside town of Dungarvan. The route goes over a viaduct and passes a Norman castle, Viking settlements and staggering coastal scenery.

Info: www.irelandsancienteast.com

7 Montenegro coast

Kotor, a port town in Montenegro full of medieval buildings and red-tile roofs, might have only 13,000 residents, but it's beginning to attract cruise ships, which approach on the scenic, narrow Bay of Kotor. And action is increasing elsewhere on this bit of Balkan coast.

In Budva, about 20 miles south of Kotor, a Nobu restaurant opened in 2016, neighboring the ultra-luxurious Aman Sveti Stefan hotel. The similarly snazzy One&Only hotel chain is putting its first European property, Portonovi, on Boka Bay, about 25 miles west of Kotor; opening is set for midyear. Cchedi, another luxury hotel chain, also is working toward a mid-year opening on Lustica Bay.

Info: lat.ms/vistikotor

8 New Orleans

As part of New Orleans' 300th birthday party (the French founded the city in 1718), the Prospect 4 contemporary art exhibition and festival runs through Feb. 25. McIlenny, the hot-sauce outfit, is sponsoring a staging Jan. 25-28 of "Tabasco: A Burlesque Opera," which was last heard in 1894.

The Mardi Gras season is supposed to feature shorter parades this year but plenty of them. More than 60

krewe are to march from Jan. 6 through Feb. 13. Though most performers at 2018 New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival (April 27-29 and May 3-6) are yet to be announced, April 28 will feature local favorite Trombone Shorty and his band.

Info: www.discoverhongkong.com

12 Perth, Australia

Perth, on the continent's west coast, has long been known for idyllic beaches, nightlife and bustle along the Hay Street and Murray Street malls and fancy shopping on King Street.

Despite its awkward name, COMO The Treasury, a 2015 redevelopment project, in October was named Australia's best hotel in Condé Nast Traveler's annual Readers' Choice voting.

Joining it: The Westin Perth and Park Regis Subiaco, opening early this year. The Intercontinental Perth City Centre opened in late 2017.

On a more intimate level, there's a proliferation of bars such as the antique-filled Wolf Lane.

Info: lat.ms/perth

13 San Antonio

While the French were busy founding New Orleans, the Spanish were founding San Antonio. From Feb. 17 to May 13, the San Antonio Museum of Art will explore the city's first 100 years through paintings, sculptures and artifacts. A Commemorative Week will start May 1 with a 6 p.m. pilgrimage from Espada Park to the city's Main Plaza.

Meanwhile, the Bottling Department food hall opened in July in the Pearl, a redeveloped riverside brewery complex. Range restaurant opened in September, focusing on steaks from Texas Hill Country, and Burgerteca opened in December, offering diners new ways to marry Mexican food to burger culture.

Info: www.sanantonio300.org

14 San Miguel de Allende, Mexico

San Miguel, home to legions of Spanish colonial buildings and U.S. expats, didn't suffer from the 2017 earthquake that rocked Mexico City. Although most of its architectural charms are historic, new attractions keep popping up.

Early this year Grupo Posadas is scheduled to open a high-end 135-room Live Aqua Urban Resort San Miguel de Allende, which will contend with other recently opened boutique lodgings L'Otél and Casa 1810.

Meanwhile, great eating, easy living and colonial attractions such as nearby Sanctuary of Atotonilco keep San Miguel atop many favorite-destination polls, including Travel + Leisure's 2017 "best city in the world" reader survey.

Info: lat.ms/sanmigueldeallende

15 Shinjuku, Tokyo

This area is best known for its train station — the busiest in the world with about 3.6 million daily passengers — and its entertainment and red-light district, not to mention a dizzying number of well-litged retailers and government buildings.

In September a new museum opened celebrating Yayoi Kusama, the 88-year-old artist whose polka-dot patterns and infinity rooms have charmed art lovers worldwide.

Shinjuku is also home to the 144-acre Shinjuku Gyoen National Garden, once a preserve of a local lord and now a public green space that blends Japanese, English and French styles.

Info: lat.ms/shinjuku; lat.ms/kusamamuseum

16 Silk Road cities

Tashkent is the capital, but it's Samarkand and Bukhara that send imaginations soaring. Those cities and others along the ancient path are full of treasures from centuries past.

Once they were crucial connections on the trading route between China and Europe. Later, they spent decades in the shadows of the Soviet empire. Uzbek leaders now are easing red tape in hopes of attracting more travelers, and there's plenty to admire in the epic mosques and other Islamic architecture.

A high-speed rail line between Tashkent and Samarkand was extended to Bukhara in late 2016, greatly easing trips within Uzbekistan.

Overseas Adventure Travel, a longtime U.S. tour operator, last year started offering trips to Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.

Info: www.visit-uzbekistan.com

17 Uruguay

It's one of the smallest countries in South America, tucked between Argentina and Brazil on the Atlantic coast. But word is getting out about Uruguay and its capital, Montevideo; international tourist arrivals totaled about 3 million visitors in 2016.

Montevideo offers highlights such as the Ciudad Vieja (colonial buildings), the Teatro Solís (Uruguay's oldest theater, dating to 1856), the lively Mercado del Puerto and the eccentric Palacio Salvo, a part Gothic, part Art Deco skyscraper from the 1920s.

As in Argentina, steak, tango and gaucho style are popular. But there are also Italian and African influences, which show in the city's vigorous annual Carnival, which begins Jan. 25.

Info: lat.ms/montevideo

18 Zambia

This small African nation shares the Zambezi River, Lake Kariba and Victoria Falls with Zimbabwe and is a prime spot for viewing wildlife. In early 2017 the luxurious King Lewanika Lodge opened with six villas in Liuwa Plain National Park in western Zambia.

Also last year, African Bush Camps completed a major renovation of the

Thorntree River Lodge, near Victoria Falls.

CroisiEurope Cruises' eight-suite river cruise ship African Dream debuted last year on the Zambezi and Chobe rivers; the company hopes to unveil an African Dream II in December to navigate the same rivers.

Info: lat.ms/zambiatravel; christopher.reynolds@latimes.com; Twitter: @mrcsreynolds

New Groups of America																													
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