

LONELY PLANET'S

**BEST IN TRAVEL**

**2011**

**THE BEST TRENDS, DESTINATIONS, JOURNEYS  
& EXPERIENCES FOR THE UPCOMING YEAR**



MELBOURNE ✪ OAKLAND ✪ LONDON

# FOREWORD

YOUR TRAVELLING YEAR STARTS HERE, WITH *BEST IN TRAVEL 2011*. THIS BOOK IS FULL OF FRESH IDEAS FOR WHERE TO GO AND WHAT TO SEE TO GIVE YOU THE INSPIRATION TO GET OUT AND EXPLORE THIS YEAR, NEAR OR FAR. DO THIS NOW: GET THAT DIARY OUT AND BLOCK OUT SOME TIME OFF BEFORE IT'S GONE – YOU'RE GOING TO NEED IT.

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This book started with hundreds of ideas from everyone at Lonely Planet, including our extended family of travellers, bloggers and tweeters. These ideas were whittled down by a panel of in-house travel experts, including Lonely Planet co-founder Tony Wheeler, based on scores for topicality, excitement, value for money and that special X-factor. As a result of this voting system, 2011 marks the first time our top 10 countries, regions and cities are ranked in order. We've put them out there – now we're looking forward to the debates that come next.

Where to first? Top scoring destinations to visit this year are Europe's last frontier, Albania (p10); Egypt's fast-changing Sinai Peninsula (p52) and endlessly exciting New York City (p94). The trend for rediscovering classics sees Italy (p34), Cappadocia in Turkey (p64) and the West Coast of the USA (p80) ranked highly by our experts. There are plenty of surprises too, from little-known countries like Cape Verde and Vanuatu to Iceland's wild Westfjords peninsula, Tangier in Morocco, and – yes really – Newcastle in Australia.

2011's top travel lists make for revealing reading. Most of us can only dream of the private tropical island and custom-built submarine favoured by the super-luxe brigade (p144), but everyone likes a good deal – start planning with this year's list of best-value destinations on p136. The world doesn't stand still, so while suggesting 10 places to head to for communist nostalgia (p152) we also highlight 10 countries that didn't even exist when the Berlin Wall fell (p156). Suggestions for eating and learning to cook, dancing and shopping reflect enduring passions. There are, as ever, some interesting new niches: vampire-spotting locales (p196), anyone?

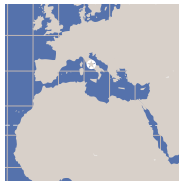
Whether 2011 takes you from the idyllic Marquesas to windswept Chilean Patagonia, diving Indonesia's Gili Islands or strolling the medieval lanes of Ghent in Belgium, this year promises to be a wonderful one for globe-trotters. This book offers a kick-start to your best adventures yet.

*Tom Hall, Lonely Planet Travel Editor*

# LONELY PLANET'S TOP 10 COUNTRIES



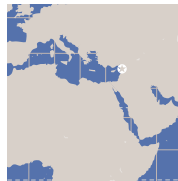
**030**  
**VANUATU**



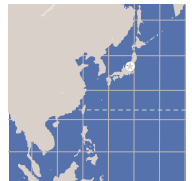
**034**  
**ITALY**



**038**  
**TANZANIA**



**042**  
**SYRIA**



**046**  
**JAPAN**



'The jig is almost up – Albania won't be off the beaten track for much longer.'

By Marika McAdam

01

# ALBANIA

- ✦ **POPULATION** 3.6 MILLION
- ✦ **FOREIGN VISITORS PER YEAR** AROUND 6 MILLION
- ✦ **CAPITAL** TIRANA
- ✦ **LANGUAGE** ALBANIAN
- ✦ **MAJOR INDUSTRIES** MAJOR EXPORTS ARE CHROMIUM AND CHROME PRODUCTS
- ✦ **UNIT OF CURRENCY** LEKË
- ✦ **COST INDEX** TIRANA BEER 150 LEKË (US\$1.50), MIDRANGE HOTEL DOUBLE 8000 LEKË (US\$80), SHORT TAXI RIDE 300 LEKË (US\$3), INTERNET ACCESS PER HOUR 100 LEKË (US\$1), BOTTLE OF ALBANIAN WINE 600 LEKË (US\$6), FERRY TO CORFU, GREECE 2000 LEKË (US\$20)



SIME/PAVAN ALDO » 4CORNERS

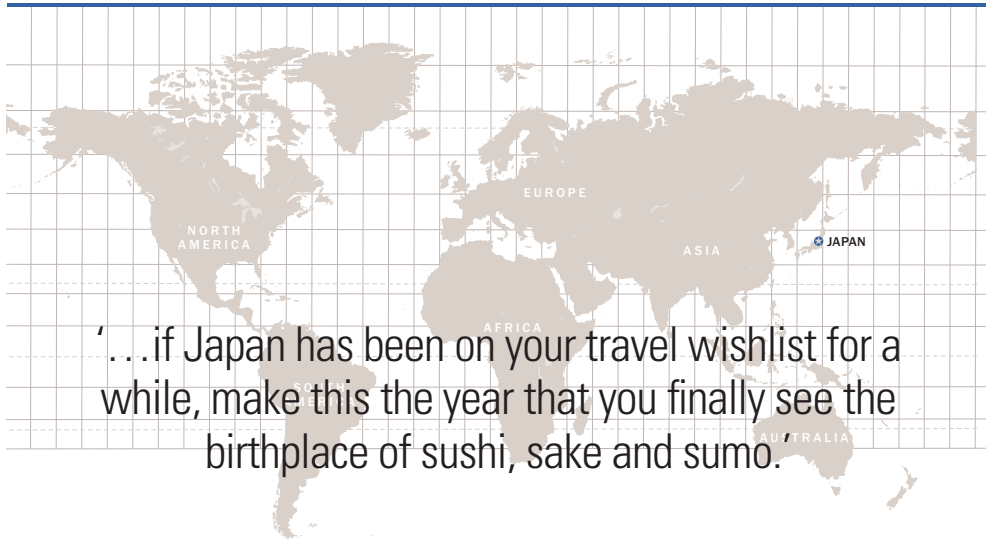
## YOU COULDN'T MAKE THIS STUFF UP

Picture, if you will, a place where rulers have names like King Zog, Enver Hoxha and Bamir Topi. Now make it the headquarters of the mystical Bektashi Order. Set the scene with coastal cliffs, snow-capped mountains and jungle-wrapped ruins. Cast some female 'sworn virgins' to fill the roles of men who have been lost in ancient blood feuds. Let the spoken dialects be known as Tosk and Gheg. Make it that daily life is governed by a code of conduct with 1262 instructions including 38 on hospitality towards guests.

It may seem like you've just conjured a medieval fantasy novel rather than an up-and-coming travel destination, but this is Albania in all its epic, eclectic glory.

## THE LAST OF THE LAST FRONTIERS

Not so long ago, when the Balkans were considered an 'only for the brave' travel destination, only the bravest of the brave trickled into Albania. Since backpackers started coming to elusive Albania in the 1990s, tales have been told in 'keep it to yourself' whispers of azure beaches, confrontingly good cuisine, heritage sites, nightlife, affordable adventures and the possibility of old-style unplanned journeys complete with open-armed locals for whom travellers are still a novelty. Sick to death of being dismissed with blinged-up crime-boss clichés, Albania has announced 'A New Mediterranean Love' via its tourist board. The jig is almost up – Albania won't be off the beaten track for much longer.



'...if Japan has been on your travel wishlist for a while, make this the year that you finally see the birthplace of sushi, sake and sumo.'

By Matthew D Firestone

10

# JAPAN

- ✦ **POPULATION** 127 MILLION
- ✦ **FOREIGN VISITORS PER YEAR** 6.8 MILLION
- ✦ **CAPITAL** TOKYO
- ✦ **LANGUAGE** JAPANESE
- ✦ **MAJOR INDUSTRIES** MOTOR VEHICLES, ELECTRONIC EQUIPMENT, MACHINE TOOLS, STEEL AND NONFERROUS METALS, SHIPS, CHEMICALS, TEXTILES, PROCESSED FOODS
- ✦ **UNIT OF CURRENCY** YEN (¥)
- ✦ **COST INDEX** BOWL OF RAMEN NOODLES ¥800 (US\$8.50), PINT OF SAPPORO BEER ¥400 (US\$4.25), BED IN A CAPSULE HOTEL ¥4000 (US\$42.50), CROSS-TOWN TAXI ¥2500 (US\$26.50)

## DOWN, BUT NOT OUT...

It's been a rough year for the Land of the Rising Sun. Although the Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO) had hoped to attract 10 million foreign visitors a year by 2010, this lofty target was dropped quicker than a *maegashira* (lowest sumo rank) squaring off against a *yokozuna* (sumo grand champion). The Great Recession, the rapid deflation of the yen against Western currencies and the spread of H1N1 influenza in Asia resulted in the first annual decrease in tourism in more than two decades. Japan may be down, but it's not out. Case in point: the JNTO recently issued a new target of 20 million foreign visitors annually by 2020, which means that now more than ever, travellers touching down in Japan are treated as most honoured guests.



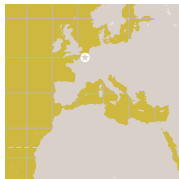
JOHN BANAGAN » LPI

CHERRY BLOSSOM SEASON AT OSAKA CASTLE - BE SURE TO SPRING INTO JAPAN AT THIS MAGICAL TIME OF YEAR

# LONELY PLANET'S TOP 10 CITIES



**114**  
**IQUITOS**



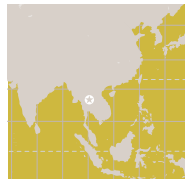
**118**  
**GHENT**



**122**  
**DELHI**



**126**  
**NEWCASTLE**



**130**  
**CHIANG MAI**





By Robert Reid

01

# NEW YORK CITY

- ✦ **POPULATION** 8.4 MILLION (METROPOLITAN AREA 19 MILLION)
- ✦ **FOREIGN VISITORS PER YEAR** 7.5 MILLION
- ✦ **LANGUAGE** ENGLISH
- ✦ **UNIT OF CURRENCY** US DOLLAR (US\$)
- ✦ **COST INDEX** CUP OF COFFEE US\$2, HOTEL DOUBLE/DORM FROM US\$175/40, SHORT TAXI RIDE US\$6, INTERNET ACCESS PER HOUR US\$1



COREY WISE / LPI

## A BIG YEAR

Since 9/11, the site of the World Trade Center's twin towers has stood out as a closed-off, out-of-view, painful gaping void. This year that changes, as the former WTC site finally reopens to the public with the National September 11 Memorial, a 6-acre, tree-filled plaza with 30ft-deep waterfalls at the footprint of the former towers, rimmed by the name of each victim and illuminated at night (its museum will follow in 2012). For the city, this will be more momentous than if the Yankees, Knicks, Rangers and Giants won simultaneous championships while the ball dropped in Times Square on New Year's Eve. For all of New York, 11 September 2011 will be a defining moment.

'Today's 'new' Newcastle is a unique blend of imagination, sophistication and laid-back surf culture.'



By Catherine Le Nevez

09

# NEWCASTLE, AUSTRALIA

- ✦ **POPULATION** 532,500
- ✦ **FOREIGN VISITORS PER YEAR** 112,300
- ✦ **LANGUAGE** ENGLISH
- ✦ **UNIT OF CURRENCY** AUSTRALIAN DOLLAR (A\$)
- ✦ **COST INDEX** DORM BED A\$28–32 (US\$26–29.80), SCHOONER (425ML) OF BEER A\$4.90 (US\$4.55), 80-MINUTE GROUP SURF LESSON A\$30 (US\$28)

## AUSTRALIA'S MOST UNDERRATED CITY!

Anyone surprised to see Newcastle on the list of 2011's hottest cities (and there's a few of you, right?) probably hasn't pulled in off the Pacific Highway, or at least not for a while.

Newcastle flies under the radar of Aussies and international travellers in part because it's overshadowed by its bigger, bolder and better-known sibling, Sydney, 150km south. But, at around one-tenth the size, Australia's second-oldest city has Sydney-like assets: surf beaches, a sun-drenched subtropical climate, and diverse dining, nightlife and arts.

Not only is Newcastle ideally located just two hours by road or rail or 30 minutes by plane or seaplane from Sydney, it's less than an hour's drive west to the Hunter Valley wineries, south to sailboat-filled Lake Macquarie, north to whale-watching and shark-feeding at Port Stephens and to sandboarding at Stockton Beach (the southern end of the 32km-long beach is a five-minute ferry ride across Newcastle's harbour).

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## FROM 'STEEL CITY' TO CREATIVE HUB

In part, too, Newcastle is often bypassed due its long-time reputation as an industrial city. But while it's the world's largest coal-export port, it's won numerous awards for environmental conservation and clean beaches.

For the best part of a century, Newcastle was dominated by its billowing steelworks until their closure in 1999 dealt a massive economic blow. But Novocastrians (Newcastle residents) are a resilient bunch, and the dozen intervening years have seen an explosion of artists taking advantage of the cheap living costs. Newcastle now has the most artists per capita nationwide, and the most galleries – from acclaimed regional centres to independent, artist-run spaces and dozens of disused city-centre buildings occupied by photographers, fashion designers, digital artists and more as part of the inner-city regeneration scheme, Renew Newcastle.

Today's 'new' Newcastle is a unique blend of imagination, sophistication and laid-back surf culture.



EMMA HARRIS © CORBIS

YOU DON'T NEED A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW TO APPRECIATE SEASIDE LIFE IN NEWCASTLE