

# GREAT

ENJOY THE WORLD AT YOUR LEISURE

# ESCAPES













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# THE PERFECT GETAWAY



**The shadows dance in the candlelight.** Musical strains from a mariachi band float across the cemetery as the painted midnight revellers laugh and chat and dance and sing. Some people choose to perch on the graves in silent vigil. Most, however, are a little livelier in their celebration of the dead.

It's dark and eerie at the graveyard in Oaxaca, but the night is just beginning; this will party stretch on until dawn. It's the Day of the Dead, Mexico's annual festival to honour family and friends who have passed away. It's an evening spent in the company of those loved ones down at the cemetery, celebrating their lives and the things they held dear. It's ghoulish costumes and dark shapes in the night. It's tequila and mescal and the joy of friends.

It's also about as far from the world most people know as you could possibly get, a sometimes bizarre escape from the daily norm. Want to get away from the routine of home? Want to have your world so shaken, your soul so inspired that you return feeling like a different person? Then a night in a cemetery in Oaxaca during Day of the Dead is not a bad place to start.

It's not, however, everyone's idea of a great escape. And it doesn't have to be. There's a whole world of options available.

Cut to a beach in French Polynesia, one of those arcs of white sand that kiss the sapphire water of the Pacific Ocean. There's not a soul around, no one to disturb the peace of a tropical island and time to spend in the sun. This is Tikehau, an atoll that barely pokes its head above the wide expanse of the ocean, and it is home to a private resort offering seemingly unending solitude.

There are activities available on Tikehau if you want them. You can surf the breaks that crash into the coral fangs that ring the island. You can scuba dive among swirling schools of tropical fish. Or you can just wander the beaches soaking up the sun. As a brief break from the norm it's as spectacular as the revelry in the Mexican cemetery, but a completely different experience – one of solitude and relaxation rather than cultural fascination. It's an escape from reality nonetheless.

And that's what this book is all about: escape. Over the course of these pages you'll find holiday escapes of all shapes and sizes, from romantic weekends to gastronomic adventures to big-city





getaways. Whether you're holidaying as a family, a couple, a group of friends or going solo – you'll find ideas to inspire your next short break, or an interlude during a longer trip. These exciting experiences share the common thread of enjoyment and difference, a way to break up life's routine with something special, something out of the ordinary.

Some people prefer to experience that enjoyment through adventure, by kayaking across an archipelago, touring Thailand on a motorbike, or rounding up cattle at a ranch in Montana. Others want to let loose and party, bar-hopping through pulsating Tokyo, dancing on the sand in Hvar, or soaking up the music in New Orleans. And then there are times when you just want to get away from it all, from civilisation entirely, working on body and mind in a yoga retreat in Bali, or sleeping under the stars on a houseboat in Kerala, India.

These escapes can be discombobulating riots of colour if you want it, or they can be the complete absence of the things that stimulate the mind. A break to make you think, or a break to make you stop. Whatever your pleasure, whatever form it takes, an escape is a chance to reassess your life, to recharge your batteries, to so completely divorce yourself from normality that by the time you return to the nine-to-five grind you've forgotten all of your passwords. This is the chance to have an experience that will alter the way you look at the world, and perhaps even the way you look at yourself.

These journeys are not lengthy. We're talking mere days. A long weekend. Travel at its best doesn't have to be an epic adventure. It can be a perfectly planned mini-break, a couple of days to discover something different from the daily routine.

That can be enough time to soak up another culture. Spend a couple of nights in the tapas bars of Andalucia and you're starting to get an understanding of the place, of the locals' passion for flamenco dance and the heart and soul that goes into the little plates of food. Live a weekend in Berlin and you'll find enough time to be inspired by its thriving creativity, to experience a city that caters to every quirk and whim imaginable.

It's also enough time to disconnect. Whether that's achieved in a monastery in Mallorca or at Ian Fleming's Jamaican villa is up to you. It's enough time, too, to taste the flavours of the world, from the hawker food in Penang to Chile's world-class wines.

And, of course, it's enough time to take in something so completely alien that you'll be pondering the experience for months afterwards. Something like the Day of the Dead. Something like drinking tequila in a graveyard in the middle of the night while those around you pay their respects to the dead by celebrating the joy of life.

That's something different. A great escape.

BEN GROUNDWATER  
Peru, May 2013



