

# National Geographic Traveller (UK) reveals The Cool List: 20 must-see destinations for 2020

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LONDON (5 February 2020) — National Geographic Traveller (UK) has announced its Cool List 2020, highlighting the 20 must-see destinations for the year ahead. The hotly anticipated list of countries and cities is revealed in the March 2020 issue of the magazine — on sale on Thursday 6 February.

Pat Riddell, editor of National Geographic Traveller, said: “From Cumbria and Cairo to Panama and Pakistan, we’ve scoured the globe for 2020’s most interesting destinations. It’s a list that gives you plenty of inspiration close to home, as well as further afield, highlighting hiking trails, emerging culinary hubs, luxury lodges and landmark attractions.

“Considering how, where and why we choose to travel is an ethos now firmly in the public consciousness. Exploring the world this decade means doing so responsibly and with purpose: tour slowly, spend locally and show support. Australia, Puerto Rico, Egypt and Lebanon — all in need of our ongoing support — make our list for this reason. Travel can be a powerful force for good, offering an economic lifeline, and a voice, for beleaguered communities. It can change lives, including yours. We hope this year’s Cool List helps you enjoy the journey.”

## The Cool List 2020

1. Namibia
2. Baja California
3. Lebanon
4. Cumbria
5. Slovenia
6. Wales
7. Panama
8. Brisbane
9. Salt Lake City
10. Yerevan
11. Lyon
12. Ethiopia
13. Cairo
14. Los Angeles
15. Puerto Rico
16. Pakistan
17. Galway
18. Vietnam
19. Tel Aviv
20. Rio de Janeiro

1. Namibia

Few destinations can compete with Namibia’s raw, unspoiled beauty for off-grid adventuring. Add into

the mix a major anniversary and eye-catching new lodges in the country's untapped south, and Namibia is one to watch in 2020

While many of the country's off-radar retreats have so far been concentrated in the north, it's now the copper-hued dunes and game parks of the south that are seeing a wave of design-conscious openings, including Kwessi Dune Lodge, Sossusvlei Desert Lodge and the colonial era-inspired tented camp Sonop. It's all impeccably well-timed too: this year marks the 30th anniversary of the country's independence from South Africa and an extra £1.3m has been earmarked for nationwide celebrations on 21 March.

## 2. Baja California

Now with direct access from the UK and a raft of new hotels, the beaches, mountains and vineyards of Mexico's Baja peninsula are no longer just the preserve of holidaying Hollywood

A hop across the border from sunny southern California, most Americans see Baja as an extension of the Golden State itself. Following the launch of TUI's direct flights from Gatwick to Los Cabos, Baja California is within easy reach of British travellers, too. Los Cabos itself is a tale of two cities (or towns): laid-back, traditional San José del Cabo and buzzing international Cabo San Lucas, linked by 'the corridor' — a 20-mile, beach-fringed boulevard flanked by an increasing number of resorts and hotels. The Viceroy opened in 2018 and since then, a succession of luxury resorts has followed suit, including the Four Seasons, a Nobu Hotel and the Waldorf Astoria, with an Aman slated to open this year.

## 3. Lebanon

The FCO lifted restrictions on travel to swathes of the country last year and UK travel companies are returning in droves, opening up Lebanon's archaeological treasures to tour groups

Lebanon is back on the travel map, and its improved safety credentials are the catalyst. In 2019, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office deemed it once again safe to visit the northeast — including the picturesque Bekaa Valley, home to a booming viticulture scene. Companies launching into or returning to the region this year include YellowWood Adventures, Cox & Kings, Explore and Undiscovered Destinations, while Travel the Unknown has tripled itineraries to include specialist tours to lesser-known sights. Meanwhile, the capital's creative and culinary scene blossoms apace, with luxury digs available at Arthaus Gemmayze, scheduled to open in February.

## 4. Cumbria

It's been 250 years since the birth of William Wordsworth and the poet's home county is as magnetic as ever, with fresh attractions and the UK's most exciting trio of restaurants

Wordsworth has often been called the first mindful traveller, a man whose wide-eyed odes to the beauty of the great outdoors still help to shape how we see our landscapes. He was born in 1770 and spent the bulk of his life in and around Cumbria's Lake District, which was then, as it is now, England's most spectacular corner. This year anniversary year is being marked by a £6.2m facelift of Wordsworth's former Grasmere home, Dove Cottage, and the adjacent Wordsworth Museum. Cumbria also has three new Michelin stars, awarded to The Cottage In The Wood at Whinlatter, Allium at Askham Hall and The Old Stamp House Restaurant at Ambleside. It brings the county's total to seven, making it home to the most Michelin stars north of London.

## 5. Slovenia

A mountain hiking route and multistage cycle trail give good reason to visit the country in the run-up to its stint as next year's European Region for Gastronomy

Unveiled in late 2019, the Julian Alps Hiking Trail is a 170-mile walking route through the limestone peaks that cover northwest Slovenia. Beginning on the Italian border, it traces a fiercely beautiful route that incorporates many of the destination's established highlights — including, yes, the lovely Lake Bled — as well as lesser-known parts of the country. No less enticing is the Bike Slovenia Green project, a diverse, 150-mile, multistage cycle route which launched in November. And you won't have to look far for a good meal. Slovenia will spend 2021 as the official European Region for Gastronomy, in recognition of its quality local produce.

## 6. Wales

Three new touring routes, a long-distance walking trail and a family-friendly app for navigating the Wales Coast Path are bringing the country's many charms to the fore

For a small country, Wales packs in a thunderous amount of good stuff: the soaring peaks of Snowdonia, the Atlantic cliffs of Pembrokeshire, ancient castles, beaches, headlands and green hills. All told, it makes for a spectacular road-trip destination, which is precisely the thinking behind the Wales Way, the collective name for a trio of new long-distance touring routes. Last year also saw the official opening of the Heart of Wales Line Trail, a 141-mile hiking route that traces the path of the famously scenic Heart of Wales rail line. The superb Wales Coast Path, meanwhile, has seen the launch of a dedicated family-friendly app.

## 7. Panama

Synonymous with its canal, Panama has traditionally been travelled through rather than travelled in, but new forward-thinking eco-retreats are putting it on the map

This Central American country is packed with reasons to linger — especially for nature-lovers.

Trailblazing an eco-retreat boom with its 2018 launch, Isla Palenque set the standard for conservation-minded hideaways. The Panama debut for Latin America's Cayuga Collection of high-end sustainable lodges, the hotel's eight design-forward beach villas are set in 400 acres of beach-fringed jungle. Meanwhile in December, eco-retreat Islas Secas opened up 14 rugged islands in the Gulf of Chiriqui. Welcoming just 18 guests at a time, this is proper castaway terrain, albeit of the barefoot luxe variety, where 100% of the energy used is solar-generated, water use is sustainable, and the spa offering is a plush tent hidden in the jungle.

## 8. Brisbane

Mega developments, a boom in stylish hotels and a hip laneways scene are giving the overlooked Queensland capital an injection of cool

Long known as the River City, Brisbane is spreading the good stuff further along the water's edge. A £2bn plan to transform Queen's Wharf into a glitzy commerce district is underway, hot on the heels of the new Howard Smith Wharves, now open as an 8.5-acre, landscaped public space with restaurants and a craft brewery. The five-star, art-focused Fantauzzo hotel has also opened here, one of a string of additions to the hotel scene. While elsewhere, the Fortitude Valley neighbourhood has spruced up its once-grim laneways with indie shops and small bars. There are new adventures to embark upon, too: Yalingbila Tours has launched the first Aboriginal-owned whale-watching cruises, and Australia's newest luxury train journey, the three-day Great Southern epic from Brisbane to Adelaide, opened in December.

## 9. Salt Lake City

The gateway to the American West is now open year-round — Delta's summer service from Heathrow to Salt Lake City has extended to the winter season too

Curiosity has long been the main lure to Salt Lake City. Temple Square — the Mormon equivalent of the Vatican — offers somewhat ethereal grandeur and the world-famous Tabernacle choir. But it's the liveliness beyond Temple Square that comes as a surprise. The restaurant scene is booming, and diversifying in the process. The drinking scene is changing too, despite Utah's heavy proportion of teetotalers. And beyond the state capital, Utah's spectacular national parks are a big draw — and the red rock ruggedness of Zion, Bryce Canyon and the Arches are much less crowded in winter. That's partly because everyone has decamped to the ski resorts, such as Park City, which is less than an hour's drive from the airport.

## 10. Yerevan

New routes are opening up to the Armenian capital, one of the world's oldest continually inhabited cities

In recent years, radical adventure tour company The Travel Scientists has offered one of the most impractical ways to get to the Silk Road-era city — driving a second-hand banger all the way there from Istanbul on its Caucasian Challenge. Thankfully, 2020 will welcome another option: simply flying from Italy. Launched in January, Ryanair's new routes mean that the Armenian capital can be reached from London for under £100 with that one simple connection — and there's chatter that fellow budget carrier Wizz Air will soon follow suit with a rival route. Black Tomato and G Adventures have launched tours in the last year, both focusing not only on Yerevan's rich past, but also its distinctive cuisine and millennia-old wine traditions, capitalising on a growing interest in the Silk Road.

## 11. Lyon

If your travels are driven by your taste buds, France's gourmet capital has upped the stakes with a major cultural centre devoted to all things gastronomic

Taking up more than 43,000sq ft inside the Grand Hôtel-Dieu, a former hospital, the International City of Gastronomy is a cultural space and food museum. Touchscreens delve into the history of the Michelin Guide and the philosophies of some of the great French restaurateurs, while video games teach youngsters about nutrition and tasting sessions are hosted by top chefs. Much of the centre is devoted to the region's produce — there are 340 farms within the metropolitan area, and 80 separate geographically protected AOC labels for wines in the surrounding area. Dining out is Lyon's strong suit, however, and the scene refuses to stand still. La Sommelière is the newest addition to the Michelin star list, with traditional French dishes interpreted by Japanese chef Takafumi Kikuchi.

## 12. Ethiopia

Things continue to develop in Ethiopia — there are new tours, improved safety and a tourism trade that's growing faster than anywhere else in Africa

The ghosts of the Ethiopian famines of the 1980s haven't been forgotten, but they're no longer a fundamental part of the country's make-up. The shadow of war with neighbouring Eritrea has been lifted, too, and suddenly green, mountainous Ethiopia is one of the most exciting places to visit in Africa, if not the entire world. The government introduced electronic visas in June 2018 and encouraged the construction of new hotels in Addis Ababa, while new direct flights from Manchester have begun with Ethiopian Airlines. Travellers traditionally come to seek out the ancient rock churches of Gheralta and

Lalibela, but several tour companies, including Wild Frontiers, are branching out to offer tours of the Omo Valley with visits to tribes including the Mursi, famous for their lip plates.

### 13. Cairo

A murder mystery and a mega-museum anchored by Tutankhamun's treasures could propel Egypt back onto travel bucket lists in the new decade

Tutankhamun's treasures are getting a new home, a 'hero' attraction that could reboot the tourist image of this magnificent North African city. Construction of The Grand Egyptian Museum has been delayed but should be worth the wait. Set in Giza, where suburban Cairo slips towards the sand, the collection includes 5,400 artefacts from Tutankhamun's tomb, many not seen since Carter's discovery of 1922. Terror attacks and political unrest have taken a toll, but visitor numbers to this affordable destination are ticking upwards thanks to new airports, highways and an upcoming blockbuster — Kenneth Branagh will reprise his role as Hercule Poirot in *Death on the Nile* in October.

### 14. Los Angeles

LA's faded Hollywood sheen is set for a serious polishing in 2020 with the opening of the sensational new Academy Museum of Motion Pictures, plus a glut of glamorous hotels

This year will be a banner one for film fans in Los Angeles thanks to the long-awaited opening of the Academy Museum of Motion Pictures on Wilshire Boulevard. It's set to be a very Hollywood affair, with the Academy's vast resources — not to mention its colossal collection of memorabilia — driving a lot of what's on display. As well as Dorothy's original ruby slippers from *The Wizard of Oz* and the typewriter Alfred Hitchcock used to write *Psycho*, the curators are also keen to celebrate international cinema, and one of the inaugural exhibitions will be by the master Japanese animator and founder of Studio Ghibli, Hayao Miyazaki. Significantly, too, the year ahead will also see a string of glamorous new hotels jazzing up the downbeat Hollywood neighbourhood, including The Godfrey Hotel.

### 15. Puerto Rico

Tourism on this intriguing Caribbean island is rebounding from recent natural disasters, thanks to hotel openings, improved routes and a whole new entertainment district

Puerto Rico has become a surprising poster child for tourism comebacks. In 2017, Hurricanes Maria and Irma blasted the island, leaving the US territory of 3.2 million people devastated. Then, in December and January, earthquakes rocked the island's southwest. Despite this, Puerto Rico is very much open for business. This year will see the launch of El Distrito, a five-acre entertainment district in San Juan, while further fillips include Marriott Aloft openings in the capital and the city of Ponce, and a Four Seasons and golf course in Cayo Largo. Last year marked the 500th anniversary of Old San Juan, a UNESCO World Heritage Site where the island's Taino, African and Spanish traditions mesh. December 2020, meanwhile, will see the premiere of Steven Spielberg's remake of *West Side Story*.

### 16. Pakistan

A new top-down, pro-tourism policy has resulted in direct flights from the UK, easier-to-obtain visas and a royal tour — and visitor numbers are on the up

In the 1970s and 1980s, Pakistan was a highlight of the backpacking circuit: hippies flocked to Lahore to soak up the dazzling Mughal history then headed north, through Peshawar, for meadows, mountain trails and tribal homestays among the gemstone mines of the Hindu Kush. Terrorism meted out by the Taliban then stymied tourism to a mere trickle — but that's all changing. In 2018, former cricketer Imran Khan

became prime minister and introduced pro-tourism policies. As a result, last year an \$8 (£6) e-visa was introduced for the UK and a confusing permit system was scrapped. Then, in June, a decade after the route was halted, British Airways resumed direct flights from Heathrow to the capital, Islamabad. A high-profile visit by the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge followed in the autumn.

#### 17. Galway

Galway's trick is to effortlessly squeeze big-city sensibility and college craic into small-town streets

On Ireland's Wild Atlantic Way, Galway feels at once like a global cultural crossroads and an intimate after-party. It's a perfect fit for European Capital of Culture 2020, with a year-long programme designed to sync with old Celtic calendar dates like Bealtaine (May Day) and Samhain (Halloween). Events range across city and county, from a modern version of one of the world's oldest stories, Gilgamesh, to a rock and dance festival at Galway Airport and a Lumiere Galway finale lighting up the city. Annual art, film, theatre and street feast events will feed into the Galway 2020 spirit, too. This is the year to get a bit of Galway running through your veins.

#### 18. Vietnam

Vietnam is bolstering its credentials as a world-class destination with a crop of stylish, high-end hotels that bring luxury from the major cities to coastal idylls

It seems redundant to speak of Vietnam as a burgeoning destination in light of the enduring popularity of its iconic cities, postcard-perfect beaches and emerald jungles. But recent and upcoming developments are setting the stage for a new phase in its appeal. Visitors can check into a glittering array of new hotels: for some truly decadent luxury, Anantara Quy Nhon Villas is a villa-only resort in the coastal city of Quy Nhon while Bai San Ho will be opening in the second half of the year in Phu Yen. The ethereal limestone spires and glittering waters of Ha long Bay have become more accessible, too, with the opening of a new international airport on the nearby island of Van Don, saving travellers a four-hour drive from Hanoi.

#### 19. Tel Aviv

Bolstered by Virgin's direct flights from Heathrow, the beachfront Israeli city is seeing an exciting bedroom boom

The 'non-stop city' has been living up to its moniker with an ever-growing list of openings and extensions that means more rooms than ever. Design-led Hôtel BoBo will open its doors on the leafy Rothschild Boulevard, channelling a decadent mantra of 'bohemian bourgeois', while two further big-name openings are Soho House (marking the brand's first opening in the Middle East) and Nobu, which will feature 38 rooms, gardens, a pool and a private rooftop. Perhaps the most interesting opening, however, is Selina. Founded by two Israelis, the innovative hostel-meets-hotel already has a healthy presence across Latin America and is known for catering to the digital nomad community. When it opens its doors in March it will be the first outpost in the entrepreneurs' home country.

#### 20. Rio de Janeiro

There's never been any doubt that Rio is South America's most stylish city, but its billing as the world's first Capital of Architecture ups that accolade to international status

From flashy surf-front high-rises to sprawling favelas, Rio's architectural landscape is a representation of its stark socio-economic contrasts. A recognition of this drama of imbalance,

UNESCO's new designation aims to demonstrate the crucial role of architecture in sustainable urban development; Capital of Architecture will be a triannual forum of innovation, discussion and inspiration for sparking urban planning solutions. And with such landmarks as Santiago Calatrava's recently completed Museum of Tomorrow and Christian de Portzamparc's curvaceous concrete Cidade das Artes cultural complex, there's plenty to be inspired by already. This includes a cooler-than-cool new hotel, JANEIRO, designed by one of Brazil's most celebrated fashion designers, Oskar Metsavaht, and Jo&Joe Open House, due to open later this year in a renovated £3.6m property in Rio's Cosme Velho neighbourhood.

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CONTACT:

For editorial enquiries:

[editorial@natgeotraveller.co.uk](mailto:editorial@natgeotraveller.co.uk)

Tel: +44 (0) 20 7253 9906

Pat Riddell, editor

Tel: +44 (0) 20 7253 9906

[pat.riddell@natgeotraveller.co.uk](mailto:pat.riddell@natgeotraveller.co.uk)

Maria Pieri, editorial director

Tel: +44 (0) 20 7253 9906

[maria.pieri@natgeotraveller.co.uk](mailto:maria.pieri@natgeotraveller.co.uk)

Matthew Jackson, managing director

Tel: +44 (0) 20 7253 9909

[matthew.jackson@natgeotraveller.co.uk](mailto:matthew.jackson@natgeotraveller.co.uk)

Anthony Leyens, CEO

Tel: +44 (0) 20 7253 9909

[anthony.leyens@natgeotraveller.co.uk](mailto:anthony.leyens@natgeotraveller.co.uk)