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MAGAZINE OF THE YEAR

# THE WEEK

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## This week's dream: Java's thriving capital of culture

Protected during "colonisation, wartime, occupation, revolution and years of authoritarian rule", the Indonesian city of Yogyakarta is "the heartland of traditional Javanese culture", says Donald Frazier in *The New York Times*. All of Java's courtly arts – shadow puppetry, classical dance, gamelan music – originated from and still flourish here, and lately the city has also emerged as "one of the world's most vibrant centres of artistic innovation and risk-taking". Contemporary visual art from Indonesia caused a "sensation" at the last Art Basel fair in Hong Kong, and modern dance, theatre and puppet troupes from Yogyakarta are now staples of the global arts festival circuit.

At nearby Prambanan, a spectacular ninth century Hindu temple complex, there are nightly dance performances of the Ramayana, with firelight, extravagant costumes and a full gamelan orchestra. In the city itself, traditional dance troupes and gamelan ensembles perform daily at the Sultan's Palace,



A Javanese dancer at the Sultan's Palace

often in a grand covered pavilion "lavishly decorated with symbols of the three traditions that inform life here" – Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam (the majority religion). Gamelan – "a complex, ethereal form of auditory theatre" – can also be heard in private houses. Strangers are usually welcome to attend, though you'll need to know the right people to hear about these events.

To tap into Yogyakarta's contemporary arts scene, visit the city's major rehearsal spaces. Among the most exciting are the suburban headquarters of the Miroto Dance Company (who sometimes give torchlit performances in the jungle nearby); and the "gracious

company" occupied by the Papermoon Puppet Theatre – if you're lucky, you might get to meet their "enigmatic modernist" puppets and the people who make and use them. *Ampersand Travel* (020-7819 9770, [www.ampersandtravel.com](http://www.ampersandtravel.com)) has a 12-night Java trip from £3,240pp, including flights and guides.

### Holiday let of the week



#### Finca Marella, Istán, Spain

Set amid olive groves in the hills above Marbella – with views of Morocco from the pool terrace – this hacienda-style house is an "imposing" but "cosy" base for a family holiday, says Steve King in *Condé Nast Traveller*. A relative of Prince Alfonso Hohenlohe (whose Marbella Club was "ground zero of the international jet set" in the 1960s), owner Sandro Gamazo is a good guide to the locale, where there's excellent hiking and fishing to enjoy, and culture too, in nearby Málaga. Interiors are "eclectic, fun and opulent", and the house comes with two maids, a cook, a butler and a driver.

Sleeps 14, from €23,000 per week. 020-7788 7815, [www.uniquepropertiesandevents.com](http://www.uniquepropertiesandevents.com)

### Getting the flavour of...

#### A wolf's kiss in Arctic Norway

Only one wild wolf pack survives in Norway today – but at a sanctuary in the country's north, you can now meet a "socialised" group face-to-face in their natural habitat, says Mike Unwin in *The Daily Telegraph*. Located near the "picturesque" town of Narvik (also known for skiing, Northern Lights-viewing and cruises to the spectacular Lofoten Islands), Polar Park has recently opened a guest lodge inside a huge wolf enclosure. The predators' "heads down, single-file advance" through the snow towards you is "unnerving" – but they are "delightfully curious", even putting their paws on your shoulders and licking your face "in the celebrated 'wolf kiss'". At such close quarters, they are strikingly beautiful. *Off the Map Travel* (0800-566 8901; [www.offthemaptravel.co.uk](http://www.offthemaptravel.co.uk)) has a four-day trip from £2,299, excluding flights.

#### Cycling for gourmands

Want to cycle on holiday, but without having to "keep up with a group, camp, or live out of panniers"? Then try one of Cycling for Softies' private tours of Provence, says Catherine Cooper in *The Times*. This family-run business arranges luggage transfers between hotels, and offers itineraries taking in some of the region's best restaurants. The cycling is largely on "quiet, sheltered back lanes", and includes pretty destinations such

as Saint-Rémy-de-Provence (where van Gogh admitted himself to the local asylum in 1889) and the villages of Collias and Eygalières. The going can be tough – but the prospect of dining at such "incredible" restaurants as St Rémy's Michelin-starred La Maison Jaune at the end of each day provides excellent motivation. *Cycling for Softies* (020-7471 7760, [www.cycling-forsofties.co.uk](http://www.cycling-forsofties.co.uk)) has a five-night Provence trip from £1,485pp, excluding flights and trains.

#### Triathlons the fun way in Wales

For an active family weekend in a beautiful and "under-visited" part of the country, look up Discover Carmarthenshire's new "travellers' triathlon" routes, says Kevin Rushby in *The Guardian*. Each involves a swim, a run and a cycle ride in a particularly scenic area, at roughly Olympic-triathlon distances, but without the competitive element. Stay one night at Brown's Hotel in Laugharne, Dylan Thomas's favourite drinking spot, for easy access to the spectacular Pendine Sands, the starting point for one of the most beautiful running routes. Then move to Llandysul (where the "beautifully restored" Blaenforest Cottages make a good base) for a spot of thrilling white-water river swimming (carefully supervised by local kayaking club Llandysul Paddlers). See [www.discovercarmarthenshire.com](http://www.discovercarmarthenshire.com) for routes and accommodation.

### Last-minute offers from top travel companies

#### Italian seaside and city

Spend 4 days soaking up the coastal beauty of Punta Ala, then another 4 days roaming Florence, from £1,145pp b&cb incl. flights and car hire. 020-7838 5892, [www.wexas.com](http://www.wexas.com). Select dates until October.

#### Dublin short break

Explore the Irish capital during a 2-night stay at the city's 4-star Louis Fitzgerald Hotel, with prices from £99pp b&cb incl. flights. 020-8588 9923, [www.qwertytravel.com](http://www.qwertytravel.com). Dates until October.

#### Magical Isle of Mull

Enjoy a relaxing week at Smiddy Cottage (sleeps 4) in the village of Salen. Book before 31 March and get 15% off the standard £250 weekly rental. 01738-451610, [www.cottages-and-castles.co.uk](http://www.cottages-and-castles.co.uk).

#### Coastal California

Have a 9-day adventure taking in San Francisco and then L.A. From £1,539pp incl. flights and car hire. 0800-188 4503, [www.roundtheworldexperts.co.uk](http://www.roundtheworldexperts.co.uk). Book by 8 March for October-December travel.