



Introduction by HOLLY MORRIS  
AUTHOR OF *Adventure Diaries*



# 100 PLACES *Every Woman* SHOULD GO

STEPHANIE ELIZONDO GRIEST

adventure • inspiration • celebration • empowerment • renewal







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# 100 *Places Every Woman Should Go*

STEPHANIE ELIZONDO GRIEST



TRAVELERS' TALES  
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PALO ALTO

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*For my niece and nephew,  
Analina and Jordan,  
May your journeys take you far and wide!*

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# *Introduction*

*By Holly Morris*

TIME DISAPPEARED WHEN I SPUN THE GLOBE AND DROPPED MY young finger on a hunk of foreign land—a pink continent, a green island, a *republic* or a *highland* or a *range*. The *italics*, the **bold**, the ragged coastlines, the vast teal-blue oceans: to me, it all added up to potential. In some nascent way, even then I understood that seeing the world would be among life's sweetest nectars.

And now, with a good bit of road dust under my nails, and a keener than ever sense of years flying by, traveling with a *reason* (rather than the way of the peripatetic) seems more important than ever. But *Where?* And *Why?*

It's a wide, wide, wide, daunting and thrilling world out there, and we could all use a bit of direction. Sure, there are stacks of guidebooks that offer ample information about bus fares, hotels, and arcane history—the kind of stuff that flies out of your mind the minute you find yourself dancing on a sturdy Greek table, or watching an offering glide down the holy Ganges, or gazing across Cambodia's killing fields.

We ladies could use a book that limns the world in a way that makes sense for us; a book that encourages us to lead with our inspirations and chase down their manifestations around the globe. *100 Places Every Woman Should Go* does just that. This is the brain trust of an intrepid traveler who lashed on her *estro-lens*, filled a few passports, and is now handing over all the juicy liner notes so others can engage the world in a similarly spirited, pro-woman way.

There are lots of good reasons to travel far, near, and widely. Sometimes we simply need to escape the numbing demands of the work-a-day grind; sometimes we've lost our way and need the life-altering clarity one can achieve from leaping outside the comfort zone; sometimes we hope to connect with our contemporaries around the globe who face challenges similar and different from our own: poverty, land mines, spiritual angst, potty training. Sometimes we simply need to remember that there's a two-steppin' cowgirl within each of us—and that she could use a top-notch massage now and then.

This practical paean serves as a fresh reminder that every trip can be a votive journey of sorts. Reading it sparked memories of my own long-delayed pilgrimages: that intriguing Virgin festival in a tiny nook of South America that I've been meaning to get to—for a decade; the magical Hindu temple in Kerala that has long beckoned; the sites of my own matrilineal roots.

*100 Places Every Woman Should Go* touches on all the best reasons to travel, and delivers a hot list of destinations that is sure to enliven the *Where* and *Why* of your next adventure. Onward!

—HOLLY MORRIS, BROOKLYN, US

Holly Morris is executive producer/writer/host of the award-winning PBS series *Adventure Divas* and is the author of *Adventure Divas: Searching the Globe for Women Who Are Changing the World*.

which was named a *New York Times* “Editors’ Choice.”

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She has written for many publications including *Outside*, *The New York Times*, and numerous anthologies. She is also the former editorial director of the book publishing company Seal Press and developed the Adventura imprint, which features international travel and adventure writing by women.

Morris works as a television correspondent for the series *Globe Trekkers*, *Treks in a Wild World*, *Outdoor Investigations*, and has worked and traveled all over the world—from Lapland to Guyana, the Middle East to the Far East, the top of the Matterhorn to the depths of the South Pacific.

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## Preface

WANDERLUST PUMPS THROUGH MY VEINS: I'VE EXPLORED TWO dozen countries and a but four of the United States in the past decade, and ache for more. Every place is glorious in its own special way, but now and then, I stumble upon somewhere sacred. It usually takes a moment to recover, and when I do, I scan the room (or wilderness) for a pair of eyes to share it with. No matter where I am—downtown Manhattan or the Mongolian steppe—it is inevitably in the eyes of another woman that I find a similar spark or sense of wonderment. Afterward, I can only describe the place as one where “every woman should go.”

When Travelers' Tales approached me with this project, memories of these places surged forth. I scribbled down half the list in half an hour, then started calling my girlfriends (and a few select boyfriends). Nearly one hundred interviews later, this book was born. Within its covers, you'll discover places where women made history, where we battled for our rights to rule, to speak, to vote, to be free. You'll find places of inspiration and enlightenment, such as the 88 Sacred Temples of Japan, and places of purification and beautification, such as the mud bath volcanoes of Cartagena, Colombia. Looking for a little adventure? There's surfing in Costa Rica, mountain trekking in Pakistan, canyoneering in Utah, pearl diving in Bahrain. Or do you just want to indulge? Choose between white sand beaches in Zanzibar, champagne tours in France, and chicken tamales drowned in black mole sauce in Oaxaca. For every site of struggle on this planet (Rwanda, Beirut, Cambodia, New Orleans) there is a site of celebration (rumba clubs, full moon *haflas*, flamenco festivals, Carnivale).

In short, this book documents places where being a woman is affirmed and confirmed; where you will be energized and impassioned.

Perhaps you are wondering: does this mean there will be no men? Not a chance: in some locales—Rio de Janeiro, Havana, Bali—they are a main attraction! But we all know how catcalls from street corners and wandering hands in crowded subways can tarnish an otherwise fabulous trip. So pairings were taken to include places populated by men who are at least somewhat respectful to foreign women. Of course, not all women are similarly received on the open road. A Bulgarian friend of mine who has dark Mediterranean features, strolled across southern Italy without incident, while a busy blonde American friend got harassed at every turn. Our perceived race, class, religion, and sexual orientation can have just as much—or more—impact abroad as at home.

Another initial goal was to choose only places where local women, indigenous people, and the environment are treated with kindness, but it was nearly impossible to find 100 of them: inequities are too omnipresent. Instead, I tried to highlight the work of local community activists so that if you, like me, feel guilty downing a glass of Chardonnay in Napa Valley while undocumented farm workers are hunched over in the sun, you know where to volunteer or send a check afterward.

These destinations can be visited with your girlfriends, your mother, your daughter, or your partner. But hopefully you'll someday travel to at least one alone, to take on Mother Road on your own terms and experience what she has to offer. Be forewarned that she will push you to your physical, spiritual, and psychological limits—then nudge you a few steps further. But at the end of the journey, you'll be more self-reliant and self-assured, and ever more the woman.

May your travels take you far and wide! And if you discover yet another place every woman should go, please post it on our website at [www.placesforwomen.com](http://www.placesforwomen.com). It just might make it into our next edition.

—STEPHANIE ELIZONDO GRIESE  
CORPUS CHRISTI, TEXAS

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## *Ten Tips for Wandering Women*

1. *Networking.* A month before your trip, send an email to everyone you know with your travel itinerary. You'll probably be amazed at how many people have old friends/ex-lovers /third-cousins-twice-removed along your route. Ask for their contact information and arrange to meet them for coffee (or *chai*, or *nargileh* ) when you arrive to get the scoop on their home turf. Also check in with other travelers by posting a note on Lonely Planet's Thorn Tree Forum at [www.thorntree.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.thorntree.lonelyplanet.com). Any burning questions you have will likely be answered within 24 hours (if not minutes), and you can find travel partners as well.

2. *Packing.* Take only what you can carry half a mile at a dead run. This is the golden rule of foreign correspondents and should be adopted by travelers as well. Lay out everything you think you'll need, then pack half of it and double the money. A few things I never leave home without: earplugs, a versatile pocket knife, a strong piece of nylon rope, a flashlight (or better yet, a headlamp), a combination padlock, a rain poncho, blank paper, pens, a journal, condoms, and a mountain of tampons. Which leads us to Tip No. 3.

3. *Feminine Hygiene.* A friend once traveled the developing world for nearly two years with a single device—a menstrual cup—and swears it is the greatest contribution to womankind.

Simply insert it into your vagina and empty it a couple of times each day. No strings, no wings! Another friend eliminates her menses altogether by taking Depo-Provera, a shot of progesterone that can prevent ovulation for intervals of up to three months. Otherwise, pack o.b.s or other non-applicator tampons, which take half the space of regular tampons and are less likely to be tampered with by customs agents searching for drugs. Chances are you'll be able to buy tampons abroad, but if you're picky or have a heavy cycle (as in, only super absorbency-plus will suffice), bring your own.

4. *Money Storage.* Some travelers sew little pockets on the insides of their clothes; others stash emergency bills and contact information in their bras or shoes. I advocate spreading the wealth. I usually keep a copy of my passport, a couple of travelers' checks, and some money in a hidden waist belt, then store the critical documents (passport, airline tickets, credit cards, bulk of money and travelers' checks) in a hidden thigh pouch. If theft is a serious problem in your destination, carry a decoy purse—that is, something to hand over in case of a robbery.

Before you leave, give a trusted friend a folder containing your itinerary, contact information, and copies of your passport, visas, driver's license, travelers' checks, and credit cards. Save your passport number, 1-800 credit card replacement numbers, and pertinent contact information in a folder in your email account.

5. *Male Repellent.* Some women wear fake wedding bands and carry photos of hulky men they call husbands to ward off advances. I try to learn key phrases in the local language. ("I'm meeting my boyfriend here. He is a lieutenant in the U.S. Marine Corps," is a useful one.) Public guilt and humiliation are the best way to deal with men who molest you on crowded buses or subways. Loudly and firmly, say: "How would you like it if someone treated your wife/daughter /sister like that?" or simply: "Shame on you!" Chances are, your fellow

passengers will come to your rescue. (If you turn around and slug him, they likely will not.)

6. *Safety*. As a general rule, pensions, homestays, bed and breakfasts, and hostels are more “women friendly” than hotels or motels. Use only a first initial when checking in and request a room that is not on the main floor. Take the elevator instead of the stairs, and never leave your key where someone can see your room number.
7. *What to Wear*. Conforming to local gender roles/social customs can be a challenge sometimes. While foreign women might be forgiven or excused for pushing the limits of local dress code, it is simply disrespectful to wear tank tops and shorts in conservative or religious societies. Also beware that many cultures take fashion seriously: my mud-brown corduroys and hiking boots made me look and feel like an androgynous pauper in Eastern Europe, and my ripped jeans were crudely inappropriate. Flip through magazines and rent contemporary movies from your destination to help you pack accordingly.
8. *Staying Healthy*. Parasites just love to hitchhike. Keep them away by avoiding the following, especially in the developing world: salads and other raw vegetables, unpasteurized products like milk and yogurt, iced drinks, cold meat and cheese platters in Soviet-era hotels (where it probably been sitting out for hours, if not days), and shellfish. When choosing a restaurant, check out the bathroom first. If the Board of Health would condemn it, the same probably goes for the kitchen. Give your body time to adjust to local spices before hitting the street stalls, and only patron the busiest ones when you do. If you wind up somewhere even remotely sketchy, go vegetarian—or at the very least, avoid chicken and fish, as it goes bad fast. If you do get sick, drink Sprite, ginger ale, or carbonated beverages (or electrolytes if you have severe dehydration) and monitor your stool. If it turns yellow, bloody, or has pus in it, get to a doctor fast.
9. *Tears Work*. While I hate to recommend that women rely on their perceived fragility or weakness to get by, there really is something about a lonesome foreign woman crying that magically opens the doors, wallets, and hearts of the people of this planet. It is how I got all of my stolen documents replaced one miserable day in Turkey in record time, without penalty or rush fees. It is how my friend Daphne evaded costly traffic violations across Africa and literally stopped a departing airplane in Angola. Use only as a last resort, but if you’re going to do it, go all the way. If seeking to avoid an exorbitant fine, jail, or getting thrown off the Trans-Siberian train in the middle of the night for not having your papers in order, think: Oscar. Drop to your knees. Convulse. Make such a scene, passersby get involved. If the situation is truly critical, consider fainting (but *only* if you’ve gotten enough sympathetic people involved that your oppressor can’t just toss your body off the train!).

Another strategy is pretending to get sick. I once read of an elderly expat in China who never left home without his doctor’s business card. Whenever his cabbies hit 80 miles per hour, he would hand it over with an ominous “If I have a heart attack, drop me off here.” The cabbie promptly screeched to a halt. Younger travelers may have a harder time pulling that off, but if your taxi really needs to slow down, shout: “I’m getting carsick!” and heave.

10. *Return the Good Sister Karma*. Spread the love. Be nice to female travelers you encounter at home, and help out your local sisters abroad. Support female artisans, vendors, tour guides, and taxi drivers wherever you wander. Your money will almost certainly go where it is needed most.



*Powerful Women and Their Places in History*

## *Madonna Sightings Around the World*

MARY JUST MIGHT BE THE MOST VENERATED WOMAN TO HAVE graced the planet. Nearly all cultures worship her in some form or fashion: she has been named Mother of God, Earth Mother, and the Bodhisattva of Compassion. Great feasts are thrown in her honor in the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches. Although she died some two thousand years ago, her spirit still makes public appearances now and then, and shrines commemorating these “miracles” abound. The following spots are considered especially sacred:

- In December of 1531, campesino Juan Diego Cuauhtlatatzin was resting on a hilltop near Mexico City when he heard some fantastic singing, “like the songs of various precious birds.” A woman dressed in clothes “like the sun” suddenly stood before him and asked his help in convincing the local bishop to build her a shrine. Juan Diego hurried off to the church, carrying the Castilian roses she gave him as proof of her presence. When the bishop expressed skepticism, he opened his cloak to show him the roses, and lo and behold—her olive-skinned image was emblazoned on its fabric. La Virgen de Guadalupe has since become the symbol not only of Mexico’s faith, but of the very nation itself, and many indigenous and activist groups have adopted her image in their call for social justice. The famous cloak can be viewed via a moving walkway at the Basilica de Santa Maria Guadalupe in Mexico City, near the La Villa-Basilica metro station. During the weeks of the Feast of the Virgen de Guadalupe (December 12) and Easter, millions of Mexicans make pilgrimages to the Basilica, some hobbling on their knees as an act of penance.
- In May of 1917, a woman “more brilliant than the sun” appeared before three children tending their family’s sheep outside Fatima, Portugal. After revealing three secrets (including a description of hell and instructions on how to save souls from it), she asked them to pray the rosary every day, and visited on the thirteenth of the next five months to ensure they did. Word quickly spread of this vision, and thousands flocked into the fields to catch a glimpse. By August, authorities deemed the children disruptive and threw them in jail, but they refused to divulge the secrets that the Virgin passed on—even under threat of being dunked into a cauldron of boiling oil. That October, the Virgin rewarded some seventy thousand spectators with a spectacular light show in the fields that culminated with the sun doing a swan dive over the horizon amidst a torrential rainstorm. She hasn’t returned since, but hundreds of thousands still gather in Fatima every May 13 to parade her statue through town and hold a candlelight vigil at the Basilica.



- The Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C. contains some seventy chapels, oratories, and images honoring the Madonna, many donated by religious orders from around the world. “When I sit here, I feel connected to women who lived centuries ago, and who will come centuries later,” says motivational speaker Aliana Apodaca of El Paso, Texas. “It is a mystical place that honors the feminine. Whenever I am in D.C., I take a car here to just sit and meditate for a while.” Located at 400 Michigan Avenue in the northeast part of the city, the Basilica—the Western hemisphere’s largest—can be reached via the Brookland-CUA metro station.

## RECOMMENDED READING

*Mary: A Flesh-and-Blood Biography of the Virgin Mary* by Lesley Hazelton  
*A Woman’s Path* edited by Lucy McCauley, Jennifer L. Leo, and Amy

G. Carlson

## *Egypt Hatshepsut and St. Catherine*

ANCIENT EGYPTIAN WOMEN WERE A FAIRLY LIBERATED BUNCH, possessing the right to both inherit and own property. But all were astonished when one of their own rose to the exalted rank of pharaoh and held it for twenty-two years. Born with a knack for self-promotion, Hatshepsut started spreading rumors at an early age that her father (the king) had chosen her—and not one of her half brothers—as his successor. After seizing the regency, she acquired the symbols of her male predecessors (down to the fake beard) and was often portrayed as having no breasts. (Historians say this was her way of asserting her title as king and not some lowly wife or consort.) One of the most successful of all pharaohs, Hatshepsut is widely regarded as history’s “first great woman,” and immortalized today in everything from a computer game (*Civilization IV*) to novels to a play by Beth Shamieh. Pay your respects at Deir el-Bahri, the sprawling complex of temples and tombs on the west bank of the Nile opposite Luxor, where her royal steward (and supposed lover) built the colonnade temple of Djoser-Djoseru (the Sublime of Sublimes) as a place of posthumous Hatshepsut-worship. Then walk down to the Valley of the Queens, the burial ground of the wives of the pharaohs. Only a few of its estimated seventy tombs can be visited, and that of Queen Nefertari—which has the most lavish reliefs—for just ten minutes, but the feminine energy is palpable.

After basking in Hatshepsut’s glory, head on to Mount Sinai, the sacred mountain where God handed Moses the Ten Commandments. Follow the backpackers up the trail before dawn to watch the sun rise. Services are sometimes held on Sundays in the chapel up top, and a lamb is sacrificed once a year in the neighboring mosque. Then climb down to see the Monastery of St. Catherine, where Moses is said to have seen the burning bush. Now a museum, the monastery houses fifth- and sixth-century icons, chalices, mosaics, and other sacerdotal ornaments, as well as the world’s second largest collection of early codices and manuscripts. It also contains a rather sad-looking bush everyone claims to be the original.



St. Catherine's is named for a remarkable fourth-century woman who at age eighteen begged the emperor to stop persecuting Christians. Although she managed to convert his wife, as well as many pagans, authorities were sent after her. They attempted to torture her with the "breaking wheel," a device that slowly shattered every bone in the body, but it broke when Catherine touched it. Authorities beheaded her instead, and angels are said to have swooped down from heaven and carried her body off to Mount Sinai.

After contemplating the courage of St. Catherine, journey into the desert. Bedouin guides offer jeep rides to nomadic camps, where you can hike to the local watering source. The scenery here is dynamic, changing color with the sun, and shape with the wind. Arrange to visit Wadi Al-Zalag (between the monastery and the Oasis of Ain Umm-Ahmed near Nuweiba) in mid-January, when tribes from southern Sinai converge to race dozens of camels in a chaotic 12.6-mile course. Celebrate the victories afterward with tea and *lebba* bread cooked right over the fire.

## RECOMMENDED READING

*Hatshepsut: From Queen to Pharaoh* edited by Catherine Roehrig, Renee Dreyfuss, and Cathleen Keller

## *Lesbos, Greece Sappho*

PLATO CALLED HER THE TENTH MUSE. OVID INCORPORATED HER lyrics into his poetry, and Solon wanted to learn her work—and die. Fast forward many centuries and even TV’s *Wonder Woman* cried out her name in times of trouble (“Suffering Sappho!”). While only a couple hundred samples of her work remain—totaling just four complete poems—she is a mandatory component of any classical education. She is, of course, Sappho: the Greek poetess and lyricist, and a modern-day icon for feminists the world over.

Born sometime between 630 B.C. and 600 B.C. to an aristocratic family, Sappho lived in great privilege until a violent coup sent her into exile. She later married a wealthy merchant and, according to some scholars, became the headmistress of a girls’ finishing school. She dedicated so much of her sensual work to women, people assumed she had lesbian inclinations. (Indeed her birth island, Lesbos is where the term “lesbian” comes from.) Sappho was the first Greek poet to write in the first person, daring to reveal her own interior rather than pontificate about the gods, as most of her colleagues did.

“Even when other poets do use the first person, there is still none of the ‘freshness’ and presence that Sappho conveys—her interior seems almost flammable in comparison to other stagey first-person speech,” says Princeton instructor Sarah M. Anderson. “As so many have observed, here surely is a woman speaking for and about herself for the first time.”

Her poetry is also so melodic, it is nearly impossible to translate, and so erotic that the early Roman Catholic and Byzantine churches are said to have destroyed much of it. Remarkably, a poem she wrote 2,600 years ago was recently discovered on the wrapping of an Egyptian mummy. Scholars have interpreted it as a speech to young women that mourns the aging process:

*...but my once tender body old age now has seized  
my hair’s turned white instead of dark  
my heart’s grown heavy,  
my knees will not support me,  
that once on a time were fleet for the dance as fawns...*

Sappho’s modern-day admirers flock to Lesbos—Greece’s third largest island—to soak in her muses. Mountainous and lush, Lesbos is covered with olive groves that produce some of the finest oil in the nation. Other offerings include Roman ruins, hot springs, museums, historical sites, and miles and miles of dusty brown beaches. Hiking here is a joy, with trails linking villages via dells lined with pink hollyhocks and wild pears. The half-mile path from Paleohori to Rahidi includes a fun pit stop at a *kafeneio*, or coffee house, open in the summer.

Poetry pilgrims especially enjoy Skala Eressos, a relaxed resort. An international community of lesbians has opened shops and cafes here, and women-only hotels abound. The Antiopi Hotel boasts an open-air Jacuzzi and massage studio, while the Mascot Hotel’s rooms have private balconies.

overlooking citrus groves. Every September, the town throws a two-week Women's Festival with open-mike nights, concerts, cruises, day trips, Silly Olympics, and workshops on everything from osteopathy to building space rockets (in Natalie's "Fly Me to the Moon Seminar").



*Come back to me, Gongyla, here tonight,  
You, my rose, with your Lydian lyre.  
There hovers forever around you delight:  
A beauty desired.*

*Even your garment plunders my eyes.  
I am enchanted: I who once  
Complained to the Cyprus-born goddess,  
Whom I now beseech*

*Never to let this lose me grace  
But rather bring you back to me:  
Amongst all mortal women the one  
I most wish to see.*

—"Please," Sappho

## RECOMMENDED READING

*Sappho: A New Translation* by Sappho, translated by Mary Barnard

## TOURS

Sappho Travel offers women-only holidays, including a tour to the island of Lesbos ([www.lesvos.co.uk](http://www.lesvos.co.uk)).

## *Llanddwyn Island, Wales Saint Dwynwen*

SAINT DWYNWEN’S STORY DATES BACK TO THE FIFTH CENTURY. HER father, Wales Prince of Brycheiniog, had twenty-four daughters, but she was fairest of them all. Along came a dashing lad named Maelon, who sought her hand in marriage. The Prince, however, had already hand-picked a husband for young Dwynwen. What happened next depends on which legend you believe. Some say Maelon raped his love in a fit of rage and left her crying to God for help; others say she sought God’s assistance to remain chaste. Either way, He sent down an angel with a potion that turned Maelon into a block of ice. This was too much for poor Dwynwen, and she beseeched Him for three more wishes: to thaw her man, to enable her to forget him, and to give other lovers a collective break. All were granted, and she retired to Llanddwyn Island off the coast of Anglesey to pass the rest of her days in solitude. (Which isn’t to suggest she wasn’t happy here; indeed, Dwynwen is known for chipper proverbs like, “Nothing wins hearts like cheerfulness.”)

In time, Dwynwen became revered as the patron saint of lovers. Pilgrims traveled to Llanddwyn to pay tribute to her and to test their own love at her holy well. Word has it, if you scatter breadcrumbs and lay out a handkerchief, an eel will peek out of its crevice if your lover is destined to be faithful. So many people left offerings at her shrine, a new chapel was built in her honor in the sixteenth century alongside the ruins of her old one. Four centuries later, she was bestowed with a day of remembrance on January 25. The Welsh celebrate this day as Americans do Valentine’s, with cards and chocolates.

Despite its name, Llanddwyn Island is attached to the mainland in all but the highest tides, so technically not an island. It is, however, a romantic place with endless coastlines, rolling dunes, sea cliffs, salt marshes, and mud flats. Here and there are funny little geological formations known as “pillow lavas” formed during undersea volcanic eruptions. Wild ponies roam about the land and cormorants, shags, and oystercatchers soar through the sky. Soay sheep can occasionally be spotted munching flower beds near Saint Dwynwen’s chapel.

“There is something otherworldly about Llanddwyn that I can’t really say,” contends Nicole Frase, an American paleontologist living in Wales. “It is just astounding.”

Because it is so remote (the nearest train stations being Bangor and Holyhead), a car is essential here. Dickens fans will love the Ye Olde Bull’s Head Inn on the opposite side of the island, near Beaumaris Castle. Enjoy a glass of ale over the views of the Menai Strait and Snowdonia, just as the author once did in 1859. (Every room at the inn has since been named for one of his characters.) The drop in the upstairs restaurant for one of the best meals in North Wales: a Welsh beef fillet with red wine, shallot, seared belly pork, served au jus—seasoned with Anglesey sea salt—followed by warm Valrhona chocolate parkin with ice cream and a dark chocolate sauce.



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