

Cuttings

BLACK TOMATO

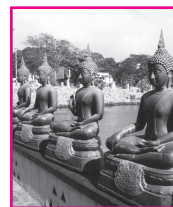
ISSUE
1
SEPTEMBER
2009

IT'S
SEPTEMBER.
GO HERE.



1 New Zealand

Why? Air New Zealand Fashion week in Auckland, 21st – 25th September. **Where?** Stay at the boutique-chic Hotel DeBrett **Splash out:** The Westin Auckland Lighter Quay, on the waterfront overlooking Viaduct Harbour. Finish with an awesome heli-skiing experience.



2 Sri Lanka

Why? for the festival of drums, 21st – 26th September. **Where?** stay at Kadju House with a group of friends **Splash out:** stay at Reef, a new hip tropical boutique hotel, on the beach at Wadduwa. Chill in the infinity pool facing the Indian Ocean.



3 Stromboli

Why? Magical at dusk in September. Climb the volcano in dramatic Stromboli which erupts every 15 minutes. **Where?** stay at La Locanda del Barbablù **Splash out:** stay at La Sirenetta, with one of the best views in Europe. Complete with pool, spa facilities and water sports for all.

WALKING ON SYRIA'S MILD SIDE

Think Damascus and you think mosques and desert, right? But behind the traditions lies the Middle East's most romantic city

BY OUR FOREIGN STAFF

Damascus is a one-off, a city of contrasts and confusion which somehow works, just as its many religions have somehow – for the most part – learnt to live side by side. It's a city where culture and commerce reign jointly, where ancient cars trundle over the ruins of even more ancient Roman columns, where shiny SUVs

overtake horse-drawn carts, and where a two minute walk takes you from the hushed tranquillity of the Umayyad Mosque into the happy chaos of the souks.

You may feel like you have been here before and that may be because the wonderful Mesquite in Cordoba is a copy of the mosque here. But that feeling of déjà-vu is just as likely to be because Damascus is etched into our souls, a biblical/koranic/

Talmud-like representation of the ancient Middle East.

It's a city with a small and intoxicating jewel of an old town at its centre, encased in the concrete clutter and dusty sprawl of the new town, both utterly interdependent. It's a city where young men head for Morning Prayer in clinging Dolce & Gabbana, where women wear shades, and where you are encouraged to glug glasses of the local spirit Arak while the sonorous call to prayer rolls over a skyline of minarets and satellite dishes. Next to the souk is a shop whose window displays are full of perfect, Hermès-orange leather goods; wander in though, and you'll discover that this is a Koran shop, not a Parisian leathersmith.

It's also a city which pampers visitors at a reasonable price. At Beit Al-Mamlouka, which you could call a boutique hotel if a sleepy courtyard with a tinkling fountain and overhanging lemon trees can qualify as a boutique, you have echoing silence just yards from the busy sidestreets, hammams and bars of the Christian quarter. Very Damascus.



DAMASCUS. NO. REALLY

FROM OUR MAN IN INDOCHINE

It's 28 degrees in Laos, and the elephants are rustling restlessly at *Ban Xieng Lom*. You take a short drive from Luang Prabang's new *Amantaka hotel*, to where you'll be escorted by mahouts on what is no ordinary ride. Once you're settled and confident, the pachyderms will take you across the *Nam Khan* river to explore the heart of the Laos jungle. Other animals think you're an elephant and they



SPEND SPEND SPEND

THE SPLURGES

Learn the art of **Ninja** with an original master in **Tokyo**. Go **heli-surfing** in New Zealand – that’s not a misprint, it’s surfing by chopper off South Island. Gnarly. Fly off to **see the big six in Uganda** – the usual 5 plus beautiful beautiful silverback gorillas.

THE SERIOUS BIT

DON'T BE A TRAVEL FASHION VICTIM

Travel is a pacey arena. With the constant quest for the undiscovered and ‘the’ new hot spot, it seems everyone is hell bent on getting to places ahead of everyone else. We know this better than most as it is part of Black Tomato’s DNA to unearth a new gem and ensure our customers experience a destination ahead of the masses.

It always will be, but I do find myself pausing and looking back on trips gone by and thinking about destinations that, in the eyes of some people, have had their moment ‘in the sun’ (excuse the pun). The places that no longer emit that sense of urgency to visit and have long disappeared from the ‘guess where I’m going this year’ conversations littering dinner parties and offices. And whilst for the ‘new year, new place’ people out there, the prospect of visiting an old destination brings them out in shivers, my advice is: don’t always discard the past. Places change and new experiences appear. Just because you have been once or twice before doesn’t mean it is ticked. You need to know people who can give you the inside track on what’s new and where’s fresh (that’s where we step in) but it is simply naïve

to think that a place will remain as it always has done ‘so why bother going back?’

So where am I talking about? It works particularly well with cities – Moscow, New York and Berlin. In terms of bigger destinations, Brazil continues to throw up some of the best beach and jungle experiences on earth (you can never go too many times, trust me) and India evolves in such a fascinating way that the country you see now is completely different from 10 years ago. It will leave you amazed at the speed of change and passion of the people for embracing this bright new global world. But it’s not all White Tiger. Experiences set up where you can spend time living with locals in the stunning foothills of Almora show that not all change is technology driven. The ability to feel like a local has increased in wonderful ways also.

So the next time you spin that globe for inspiration and your finger lands on a place you have been before, don’t re-spin right away. Ask yourself, ‘do I really know all there is to do there?’ or ‘I wonder what that place is like now?’ Most likely, as magical and more so than it was the first time you went. *Tom Marchant.*

Rant

‘STAYCATIONS’

Judging by some headlines the **travel industry is doomed**, and even if people do want to head for foreign climes, they shouldn’t.

We have to disagree. Yes, the recession has impacted us all, but how people choose to spend their money is a personal choice. Moreover, isn’t travelling abroad the perfect antidote to the economic gloom? Having something to look forward to lifts the spirits, and a trip away from this land to sunnier and often more optimistic climes is the perfect pick-me-up from office and home worries. We love GB – catch us surfing on Fistral a dozen times a year – but we love the world too. ‘Staycations’, a PR invention, should stay in their boxes.

COMPETITION

Black Tomato loves twitter, almost as much as we love competitions. So we have just launched our new twitter-based competition: Destination 140

To enter all you have to do is send us a description of your favourite travel destination via twitter, in 140 characters. And the prize? 140 hours (6 days) in the destination you have described. 140 characters for 140 hours. Simple. Follow us, our twitter name is destination140.

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4 things to do in MIAMI right now

OGLE

People watch over a Grey Goose martini at the rooftop bar of the Gansevoort South hotel or Skybar at the Shore Club

CHILL

Sleep at the Metropole, a charming small art-deco hotel just steps from the hunk-clad sands at South Beach

ZOOM

Take a guided jet ski safari around the islands of Miami Bay and spot the pads of the rich and famous

GET CULTURE

Explore the art world – head through the up-and-coming Design and Wynwood districts with a private guide for some incredible emerging art

HATE THE SUN?

Try these instead

Scuba dive between tectonic plates in the Silfra gully in Iceland’s Thingvellir National Park. A whole new experience where you’ll see the clearest water known to man. **Trek the mountains**, sweeping plains, lakes and glaciers of Patagonia. Stay at the Hotel Remota near the Torres del Paine national park, one of Earth’s most beautiful and extraordinary parks. **Go wine tasting and black water rafting and do all kinds of stuff in New Zealand**. Ditch any notions of exploring with a backpack and travel in style by luxury motorboat or helicopter.

BULLETIN

The best coffee in the world

is not at Costa or in your Nespresso machine. It’s on the island of **São Tomé**, off Africa’s west coast. Heading inland from the beaches, which by the way are white sand and rather nifty, you’ll come across the small town of **Monte Café** (really) and it’s bursting with old buildings and historical home to the biggest coffee plantation of the island. A ristretto at the Jasmin café tastes intense and almost meaty, and you can smell the aroma from the forest nearby as well as inside your cup.

STOP PRESS READY TO WEAR, THE COLLECTION OF EXPERIENCES

BOOKABLE ONLINE, HAS LAUNCHED AT BLACKTOMATO.CO.UK