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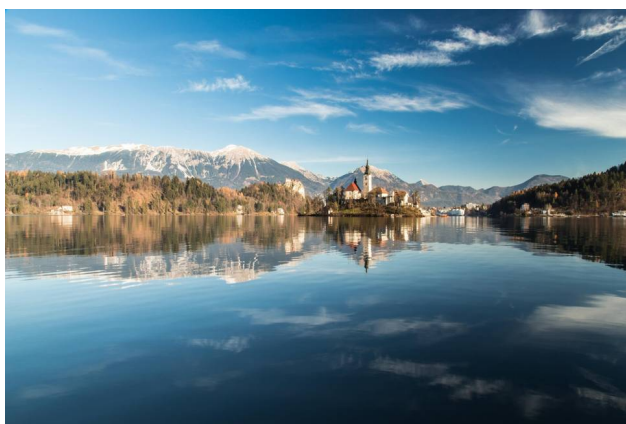
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Buzzy, Newly Accessible Destinations, From the Canadian Arctic to Chengdu, China

10 buzzy, unpredictable travel destinations, all on the brink of change, to visit next year—thereby startling your friends



Lake Bled in Slovenia PHOTO: ALAMY

By **CHRISTIAN L. WRIGHT**

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1. Slovenia

A good choice if you're looking for a chic, unlikely hideout since plenty of people don't know where it is. The little nation (pop. 2 million) that broke away from Yugoslavia in 1991 is squished between Austria and Croatia, and it's only an hour-and-a-half's drive from Venice. The "jet set's new Italy" has all the charms of the Boot—wine, food, landscape—and none of the mobs or sky-high price tags (yet). A two-bedroom suite in Castle Otočec, surrounded by 13th-century walls and nestled in woods on an island in the Krka River about 45 miles from the capital Ljubljana, goes for \$400 per night (grad-otocec.com).

2. Chengdu, China

If 23 baby pandas at Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding (panda.org.cn) aren't enough reason to visit the capital of Sichuan province, consider its ability to remain laid-back in the face of fast-paced development. Hipster culture is decidedly afoot: A guy from a family of yak-herders opened Charu, a Brooklynesque coffee place, and bamboo-bike makers are trying to turn the tide away from cars and back to the two-wheel mode. Possibly China's coolest city, Chengdu is also remarkably accessible—round-trip fares from LAX on

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Sichuan
Airlines are
currently
under \$600.

3. Rwanda

The good news: As a result of tourism, the population of indigenous mountain gorillas is increasing. The bad news: Only about 880 individuals exist, and they're still critically endangered. Enter Bisate Lodge, a stylish, six-suite camp from Wilderness Safaris—the Johannesburg-based ecotourism luminary—that mounted an ambitious reforestation project, at the edge of Volcanoes National Park, to bolster the gorilla's lost habitat. Bisate Lodge opens in June with rates starting at \$1,100 a night a person (*wilderness-safaris.com*).

4. Finland

Finnair will launch direct service between San Francisco and Helsinki in the spring, making it easier to reach the land of Nordic cuisine, Santa Claus, great design...and public saunas. Löyly, a new sauna and restaurant complex on the sea, is helping to reinvent an old industrial part of Helsinki. Bathers can cool off at St. George Helsinki, whose debut will give the city its first true luxury hotel (*stgeorgehelsinki.com*).

5. The Canadian Arctic

Much of the territory along Canada's long northern coast remains almost untouched by man—or Zika, or political unpleasantness (though not, sadly, by climate change). For nature lovers, it's a no-brainer. Aurora Borealis—aka the Northern Lights—paint the sky green and gold; snow geese and golden eagles share the land with wolverines and grizzly bears. Weber's Arctic Haven, a family-run lakeside lodge has brought a level of luxury to the hard-core adventure (*arctichaven.ca*).

6. Luang Prabang, Laos

Go to this beautifully preserved town—with its ancient temples, French colonial villas and fishing boats on the Mekong River—before the completion of the high-speed train that will change everything. Scheduled to launch in a few years, the train will connect Kunming, the capital of China's Yunnan province, to the Laotian capital Vientiane, with a stop in Luang Prabang.

7. Greenville, S.C.

The stars have aligned to make this Southern belle, in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, Dream Town, USA: Lots of investment—by Michelin, BMW, Mitsubishi—has ushered in international flair; the city's become a hub for the tech community; the thriving food scene includes some 120 restaurants along the tree-lined Main Street; a couple of historic districts are admirably preserved; and the NCAA chose Greenville as the new host for the 2017 men's basketball tournament.

8. Abu Dhabi, U.A.E.

The capital of the United Arab Emirates is an oil-exporting powerhouse with a skyline that combines modern towers with minarets of the country's largest mosque. But with the opening of Louvre Abu Dhabi—a collaboration between the emirate and the great museums of Paris—slated for next year, the city will become an art center too. Designed by Pritzker-Prize winning Jean Nouvel, the lattice-domed building alone might be enough to lure architecture snobs, already eager for the city's Frank Gehry-designed Guggenheim, under development.

9. St. Kitts

In spring, Park Hyatt will open its first hotel in the Caribbean, across the Narrows strait from its sister island, Nevis (parkhyatt.com). The deluxe resort faces Banana Bay in the rapidly transforming Christophe Harbour, where the Marina has been designed for super-yacht and private-jet arrivals, the latest proof that long-overlooked St. Kitts is finally gaining traction. Don't have a private jet? United will increase direct flights from Newark Airport in 2017.

10. Tangier, Morocco

King Mohammed VI would like this once-seedy port city—preferred by Henri Matisse and Mick Jagger, but largely neglected since the '70s—to be the St. Tropez of North Africa, and he's devoting major funds to that goal. While the city's art-nouveau and art-deco facades are covered in the nets and scaffolding of renovation, Ritz Carlton has broken ground on a resort a 90-minute drive from the newly vibrant cafe culture in the old city center.

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