



Travel | Culture | Adventure

# Escape

TRAVEL SECTION OF THE YEAR



## PAWSPORT

Should we be allowing pets on aeroplanes?

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### MYSTERY HOLIDAYS

#### The UK One



Fancy seeing a bit more of your own country? Shearings offers mystery breaks by coach – back in vogue, apparently – where you can spend four or five days getting to know Britain better. You might end up in Shakespeare-land, the Cotswolds, or in the Lake District – who knows? From £119. [shearings.com](http://shearings.com)

#### The Global One



Wix Squared specialises in travel to 22 countries, mostly in Asia and the Middle East, as well as Australia and Iceland. Its Mystery Travel service is aimed at those 'with a love of the unknown, who simply don't have time to plan' their trips. You could end up ballooning over the Moroccan desert, or visiting a tea plantation in Sri Lanka. From £1,000. [wixsquared.com](http://wixsquared.com)

#### The Millionaire's One



Got a spare £250k? That could get you six months on one of the Extraordinary Adventure Club's 'transformational journeys'. Depending on the result of an assessment by founder Calum Morrison, a former Royal Marine, you could find yourself in the Arctic, the Chad desert, or the Amazon rainforest. [extraordinaryadventureclub.com](http://extraordinaryadventureclub.com)



**A**T the airport and with no small amount of anxiety I'm counting down the minutes. Not because I'm waiting for my flight but because I don't know where my flight is going – and I won't until the Mission Impossible-style clock on a website has reached zero. Only then will I be able to enter a code to reveal my destination. Given my boyfriend calls me the Itinerary-bot because I like to plan holidays, the term 'nail-biting' doesn't begin to cover it. I've signed up for a growing travel trend: the mystery, or surprise, trip. Over the past couple of years, several

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*Wish you were...* **WHERE?**

Surprise travel is a growing trend, so a brave **Laura Millar** signs up for a mysterious package. But where is she going?



## I'd not heard of it three hours ago



Pastry chef: Laura finds out about the Poznan croissants



Cobbles and bustles: Pastel-coloured baroque buildings line the streets of the old town

PATRICIA CLARKSON BRUNO GANZ CHERRY JONES EMILY MORTIMER CILLIAN MURPHY KRISTIN SCOTT THOMAS TIMOTHY SPALL

★★★★★ THE TIMES  
★★★★★ THE GUARDIAN  
★★★★★ MARIE CLAIRE  
★★★★★ THE INDEPENDENT

# THE PARTY

A FILM BY SALLY POTTER

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★★★★★ EMPIRE

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Crowd magnet:  
The town hall and  
Old Market Square

ALAMY

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companies have sprung up that allow you to leave your holiday entirely in their hands. Deferring the decision to someone else takes away the 'tyranny of choice'.

I booked with a company aptly called srprs.me. It chooses somewhere in Europe, or you can opt for its new Pick a Side option, which allows customers to choose a region of Europe. So far, 'south', which includes Croatia, Italy and Spain, has been the most popular. I chose 'east'.

I shared my interests (history and eating, among others) and told them I'd been to Prague already. It then emailed me a link to my 'countdown' page, which also told me the weather at my mystery destination so I knew what to pack, and posted me an envelope with a code on a scratchcard, and boarding passes. I wasn't tempted to rip it open though – I hoped to be amazed at the airport.

And I was. At the allotted hour, my boyfriend, Dan, typed in the code and a window popped up, with streamers and confetti, announcing it's... Poznan! Cue frantic googling. I was intrigued to discover it was a small, historic city in western Poland. And I was beyond delighted to find it boasts an eccentric old town, a town hall clock featuring mechanical goats,

a croissant museum, plus hipster neighbourhoods.

We arrive and check in to Puro (from £47 per night, purohotel.pl/en/Poznan), a stylish boutique hotel, close to the historic Old Market Square. 'Welcome to Poznan!' says the receptionist, and I refrain from saying I'd barely heard of it until three hours ago.

Since srprs.me leaves you to it, we collar a couple of locals in an eclectic bar called Pijalnia (pwip.com.pl). Poznan is a university town and they recommend the boho Śródka and Ulica Taczaka, a Berlin-esque student area lined with cellar pubs. We celebrate with a couple of beers, which cost us just £4. Poland's economy may be on the up – Vogue Poland has just been launched – but the exchange rate makes you feel wealthy.

We spend the next two days happily wandering. The Old Market Square is filled with pastel-painted baroque buildings, and at noon crowds outside the town hall see the mechanical goats pop out and butt each other's heads 12 times, commemorating two real goats that escaped a feast back in the 16th century. It's magnificent.

The croissant museum (£3.40,

rogalowemuzeum.pl) is a delightful interactive experience where two hilarious bakers recount the history of the town's pastry, made with poppy seed paste, almonds and walnuts. It was created by a 19th-century chef who, after hearing of St Martin (who gave his only cloak to a beggar) sought to feed the poor.

On Sunday morning we head to Śródka and have a coffee with the bearded crowd at Cafe La Ruina (coffee £1.50). We try to see who can spot the most examples of Mr Periscope on crumbling building walls by local street artist, Noriaki, and we wolf down hearty meals. My favourite spot was Wiejskie Jadlo (wiejskie-jadlo.pl), where a huge leg of roast duck costs just £9.

I now realise that the best bit about my surprise trip is that it didn't have to live up to my expectations because I didn't have any. Everything has been a glorious surprise. Perhaps it's time to deactivate The Itinerary-bot!

'Pick a Side' breaks are priced from £100 per person including flights, srprs.me/uk  
Laura's trip was £170

Mystery: Laura's  
srprs.me countdown

Wander-ful: Mr Periscope by street artist Noriaki; Wiejskie Jadlo restaurant; the city's headbutting mechanised goats