

SEA-MORE!

Last week, **Rhea Dhanbhora & Pearl Mathias** told you about three charming little beach towns they're longing to visit. This week, they're adding four more to your travel list!

We're sure you've already started planning your next holiday after looking through our recommendations from last week. But wait, we've got more! The travel and tourism industry also suggested these fantastic little towns and we've already started clearing our travel dates to visit them.

MENDOCINO (North Coast, California)

Recommended by Visit California

The closest thing to a New England village in California, Mendocino lets you stroll past tidy saltbox cottages wrapped in roses and lined with picket fences, with wind chimes tinkling in the breeze. This coastal hamlet is an obvious magnet for artists, romantics and those who love anything wild and untamed. In the mid to late 1800s, Mendocino was not as peaceful as it is today. The small town bustled with people and commerce, and thrived with lively hotels and saloons. Now, luxurious B&Bs welcome you to curl up by the fire, restaurants serve freshly-caught seafood and local organic wines, and galleries beckon with artwork and quality handicrafts. When artists began migrating to the town in the 1950s, it was established as a flourishing community. Explore the local art scene at Mendocino Art Center, with galleries that offer regular shows, displaying works by local and national artists. It's also a vibrant teaching centre, with over 200 classes a year in everything from fibre arts to sculpture.



Credit: Visit California

Why we want to visit Every year, from November through April, California gray whales do a swim-by off the coast on their way to their mating grounds in the warm coastal lagoons of Baja in Mexico. Catch the unforgettable sight of the leviathans spouting, breaching and diving as they make their epic journey south.

OKINAWA (By the Pacific Ocean, Japan)

Recommended by Japan National Tourism Organization

Famous for its white sand beaches and turquoise waters, Okinawa enjoys warm temperatures that barely fall below 15°C during winter, and boasts of beaches that are open all year round. Also known as the Ryukyu Islands, the Okinawa archipelago is made of over 20 islands of varying sizes. The best beaches are located on the smaller ones, such as the Yaeyama, Miyako and the Kerama Islands. Here, you will notice that the allure of Okinawa's beaches is magnified and many have a pristine, untouched feel, with jungles and mangrove forests spilling down to the beach. The beaches towards the south also offer a world-class diving experience with dolphins. You will also spot sea turtles, manta ray and whale sharks. If you're visiting between July and September, don't miss out on the Eisa drum dances — a vibrant, colourful affair involving singers, dancers, clowns and drummers, which is believed to be a way to send one's ancestors off to the afterlife. A must-visit beach here is the enchanting Manza Beach, which is laden with soft sand. The beach is part of the ANA InterContinental Manza Beach Resort, whose large hotel building overlooks the entire 300-metre stretch of sand and sea.

Why we want to visit The cherry blossom season (end of January) will make you forget the bustle of Japan and want

to merely wander along the streets, which are lined with flowering trees. One of the best spots to view this phenomenon is the floodlit 700-year-old Nakijin Castle, which opens at night during this season.

HUA HIN (Prachuap Khiri Khan Province, Thailand)

Recommended by Tourism Thailand

A delightful mix of city and sea, with a cosmopolitan ambiance, lively markets, tasty street eats, long beaches and fully functional infrastructure, Hua Hin is one of Thailand's most beautiful beach towns. Small streets, quaint cafés and a 5-kilometre long beach that calls for long walks and meditation rather than water-sports and beach shacks, are what set this quaint little beach town apart from other Thai beach resorts. You could engage in a host of activities here; rent a scooter and lose yourself in the myriad streets, lined with low, beautiful houses. Enjoy golf at some of the finest golf courses in the world such as Black Mountain, Banyan and Springfield. Seafood lovers must savour some delicious local food at restaurants that overlook the sea. Visit the beautiful little railway station, which is said to be one of Thailand's prettiest, and take some selfies on the railway track. Yes, you heard that right; it's safe to do that here. When you feel a little livelier, head towards the night-market, where there's plenty to shop for and eat. You can chance upon the most trendy bathing suits, clothes and accessories in Hua Hin's little boutiques. Don't be stumped by the countless little boutiques bedecked with big, white wedding dresses; Hua Hin is a favourite for destination weddings among couples the world over. If you're in the mood for something spirited, you'll find an array of upbeat pubs and bars for an exciting night out on the town. You can also tour the vineyards and enjoy a truly relaxing time as you sip on some Thai wine over Mediterranean or Thai cuisine — they're happy to help you pair the two perfectly.

Why we want to visit A tuk-tuk ride that will take you through the town's fishing hub and help you land at Monkey Mountain, full of resident monkeys who don't shy away from grabbing your food. A 100-step climb will take you up to the marvellous Buddha temple, where you will be rewarded with the most wonderful views of the coastline of Hua Hin.

➤ The Venezia is the latest theme shopping and attraction village in Hua Hin



Credit: Tourism Thailand

LA DIGUE ISLAND (Seychelles Archipelago)

Recommended by Seychelles Tourism

With jade-green waters, enthralling bays studded with gorgeous beaches and green hills veiled by tall trees, La Digue paints a perfect picture of paradise. Despite its abundant beauty, the town has managed to escape rampant tourist development. With a more laid-back feel than most main islands, La Digue has only a few surfaced roads and no motorised cars (minus a few cabs). With its leafy, meandering avenues and sleepy island ways, not typical of the Seychelles' special brand of tranquility, harmony and raw natural beauty, La Digue is in a league of its own. The best way to explore the island is like the locals do: on the ox carts, taxi service or bicycles. The island is also famous for its many examples of fine French-style colonial architecture and world-class beaches. If you're up for some adventure, the glassy waters at Île Cocos offer superb snorkelling opportunities. The delightfully dramatic crescent of Petite Anse is accessible only by foot. Although the strong tides make it dangerous for swimming, it's a lovely place to lay back and sunbathe.

Why we want to visit If the glorious sun, warm sand, captivating waters and lush greenery are not reason enough to visit La Digue, you must witness the work of nature at Félicité, Grande Soeur and the fairytale Île Cocos.



➤ La Digue draws tourists to its gorgeous beaches and green hills

Credit: Gustasp and Jérôme Irani