

BEST PLACES FOR DANCE FEVER

LEAVE THE WALLFLOWERS BEHIND AND LEARN FROM THE PROFESSIONALS IN THESE HOMETOWNS OF HIGH-ENERGY DANCES.

01 FLAMENCO, ANDALUCÍA, SPAIN

Few parts of Europe are as romantic as Andalucía, with its mountains and whitewashed villages, and the Spanish region is also home to one of the most beguiling dances. Flamenco conjures up images of olive-skinned beauties swirling to a percussively played guitar, clicking castanets and clapping. In cities such as Seville, Cádiz and Granada, you can learn how to flick your ruffled dress like a proud *senorita* or stomp your feet like a Córdoba hat-wearing hunk. The schools cater to all levels of interest – from flamenco fanatics to travellers who are equally interested in sampling the local *jamón* (ham).

Don't miss Granada's famous Moorish fortress, the Alhambra. Seville's Feria de Abril (spring fair) begins two weeks after Semana Santa (Easter holy week).

02 TANGO, BUENOS AIRES, ARGENTINA

Argentina is justifiably beloved for its mix of old-world melancholy and Latin passion, and the national dance form is certainly no exception. Tango originated in the working-class neighbourhoods of the Argentinean capital, which is a great place to learn some dance steps. With Buenos Aires' *porteños* (residents) cruising along the city's avenues during the day, most classes take place in the evening. Follow the accordion music to a *milonga* (tango venue or event) to learn moves including the *giro* (turn) and *ocho* (figure eight traced with the feet). There are usually dozens on offer, catering to the throngs of dance-loving *milongueros*. *Buenos Aires' Tango Festival and World Cup (www.tangobuenosaires.gov.ar) takes place in August; the City Dance Championship is in May.*

03 BREAKDANCE, NEW YORK, USA

In the 30-plus years since the Big Apple's b-boys broke out the first hip hop moves, breakdance has entered the mainstream and courses have started. Many classes are geared towards locals rather than tourists, although the NYC Hip Hop Dance Company (www.nyhiphop101.com) welcomes walk-ins at its weekly lessons near Times Sq. It takes a lot of practice and press-ups to master the key manoeuvres – toprock, downrock, power moves, freezes and suicides – but what a city to study the art of breaking. Nightly inspiration is found in the clubs, where you might see legs and arms flying in a breakdance battle.

OLÉ! GIVE FLAMENCO A FLING IN SPAIN



BRUCE BI ▶ LPI

Explore NYC's hip hop history with a *Hush tour* (www.hushhiphoptours.com) or *lunch at Queens' Hollis Famous Burgers and Hip Hop Museum*.

✦ CAPOEIRA, BAHIA, BRAZIL

Capoeira has spread around the world from northeast Brazil, where African slaves developed the fusion of dance and martial arts, but Bahia remains its heartland. Workshops, run by capoeira *mestres* (masters) in state capital Salvador da Bahia, are just one way the city is keeping its Afro-Brazilian heritage alive. Capoeira circles form on the plazas at night, and the action intensifies during festivals, when the colonial buildings are a backdrop for frenzied drum circles. If the martial arts aspect sounds off-putting, don't worry as the sparring is generally playful and little physical contact is involved.

Salvador da Bahia (often shortened to *plain old Bahia*) is connected to Rio de Janeiro, some 1300km southwest, by bus and plane.

✦ HULA, HAWAII, USA

As if anyone needed another reason to go to Hawaii, the home of atolls, coral reefs, beaches and sunworshippers, it's also the birthplace of hula. Popular culture is full of saccharine images of island princesses swaying beneath the palms, but hula began as an accompaniment to chants containing oral history. At a *halau hula* (school), a *kumu hula* (teacher) will instruct you in the Polynesian dance form's various moves, which symbolise aspects of Hawaiian life such as ocean voyages and volcanic eruptions. Though many

male visitors may be reluctant to wear a loincloth, hula is also performed by men. *Hawaiian hula events include the Merrie Monarch Festival (www.merriemonarchfestival.org) in April and the World Invitational Hula Festival (<http://worldhula.com>) in November.*

✦ **WALTZ, VIENNA, AUSTRIA**

Developed by Austrian and Bavarian peasants and picked up by the Habsburg royals before spreading to France and beyond, waltz remains important in Vienna during its ball season. If you feel like donning a ballgown or tailcoat and dancing this sensual style of ballroom dance, the season's fixtures include the lavish Opera Ball in the 19th-century Opera House. Fear not, novices don't have to humiliate themselves in front of Austrian society. Schools offer tuition to individuals and couples who want to learn to dance in three-quarter time. The fabulous classrooms include the Pallavicini Palace, where Mozart and Beethoven performed, and a baroque hall. *There's a list of dance classes in Vienna at <http://tinyurl.com/yjezwep>. The ball season starts on New Year's Eve and runs for three months.*

✦ **CEILIDH, EDINBURGH, SCOTLAND**

Most people have a brush with *ceilidh* dancing at some point in their life; whether the wedding's taking place among the heather in Scotland, or far away in the Celtic culture-loving New World. The partner-swinging dance began at social gatherings in Scotland and

Ireland, so what better place for some coaching than the picturesque Scottish capital. Not only does Edinburgh boast a castle on a volcanic mound, but there are dance classes and *ceilidhs* for all levels of experience. In fact, *ceilidhs* are by definition welcoming, sociable affairs, and even the clumsiest of novices are normally encouraged to try their first reel. *Dance Base (www.dancebase.co.uk) offers drop-in beginners' classes at the Grassmarket; Visit Scotland has a list of upcoming *ceilidhs* at www.edinburgh.org/events.*

✦ **SALSA, CUBA**

Forget cigars and Che Guevara. Salsa, a sizzling mix of Latin and Afro-Caribbean rhythms, perfectly encapsulates sultry, multicultural Cuba. It's a sexy, hip-shaking dance, and teachers on the island happily show beginners how to move to the Cuban beat. The internet is awash with two-week, all-inclusive salsa packages, but, if you want some time to cruise in a clapped-out Buick, shorter courses are also available. When it's time to show off your skills, or to pick up some free tips, hit Havana's nightspots with a friend. There are usually half a dozen salsa nights happening; ask your hotel concierge or another local. *Cuba's alluring spots include Santa Clara, dedicated to all things Che, Havana's waterfront and Baracoa, a windswept town on the Atlantic coast.*

✦ **BELLY DANCE, ISTANBUL, TURKEY**

Exuding all the exoticism of the Middle East, belly dance has fascinated the West ever since Turkey was the centre of the

Ottoman Empire. A fun place to learn the shimmying dance is the city where the Middle East meets Europe, and the Ottomans built palaces: İstanbul. Although many performances are touristy, *göbek dans* (belly dance) goes back centuries in Turkey, where it is more energetic and playful than in countries such as Egypt. Serious instruction is available.

There's a list of teachers at www.bellydanceclasses.net/turkey; a recommended company is Les Arts Turcs (www.lesartsturcs.com), which offers private lessons.

★ MANDINKA DANCE, WEST AFRICA

Wielding instruments such as the *kora* (21-stringed harp) and *djembe* drum,

West Africa's *griots*, the descendents of court musicians, rightfully sit at the forefront of world music. While visiting the region to see, say, Toumani Diabaté play in Bamako, Mali would be remarkable enough, you can also learn to groove like the folk at the clubs and festivals. A cultural or community centre is a good place to find a teacher who can show you some traditional Mandinka dances, which involve a lot of drama and rituals. Outfits such as Senegal's Jamo Jamo Arts (<http://jamojamoarts.com>) also run dance-focused trips.

Arguably the best West African dancing destinations are Senegal, with Dakar and its Atlantic coastline, and Mali, for the Sahara, River Niger and Bamako.



BREAK IT DOWN WITH A BREAKDANCING CLASS IN NEW YORK CITY

LOUIS GALLI • ALAMY