

## EXPERT PICKS

## PICTURE YOURSELF HERE



Australia's Gold Coast, pictured left, is famous for being a surfer's paradise. Not only is the city of Lisbon, pictured right, a work of art, it's also home to many museums.

LEFT:  
DREAMSTIME  
RIGHT:  
LOUIS DROEGE/  
UNSPLASH

### FOR BABY-SNOWBIRD ADVENTURES

Go for the long haul with a snowbird vacation to Queensland. While admittedly a long way to fly, there are many reasons why the vast Australian state is a great landing spot for younger (and youthful-at-heart) snowbirds.

The plane ticket might be hefty (watch out for sales starting in Australia's spring to find a better deal), but once you touch down, the exchange rate is in your favour, with each Canadian dollar equalling about \$1.10 AUD. And you'll only see snow in your dreams because it will be prime summer in the Southern Hemisphere.

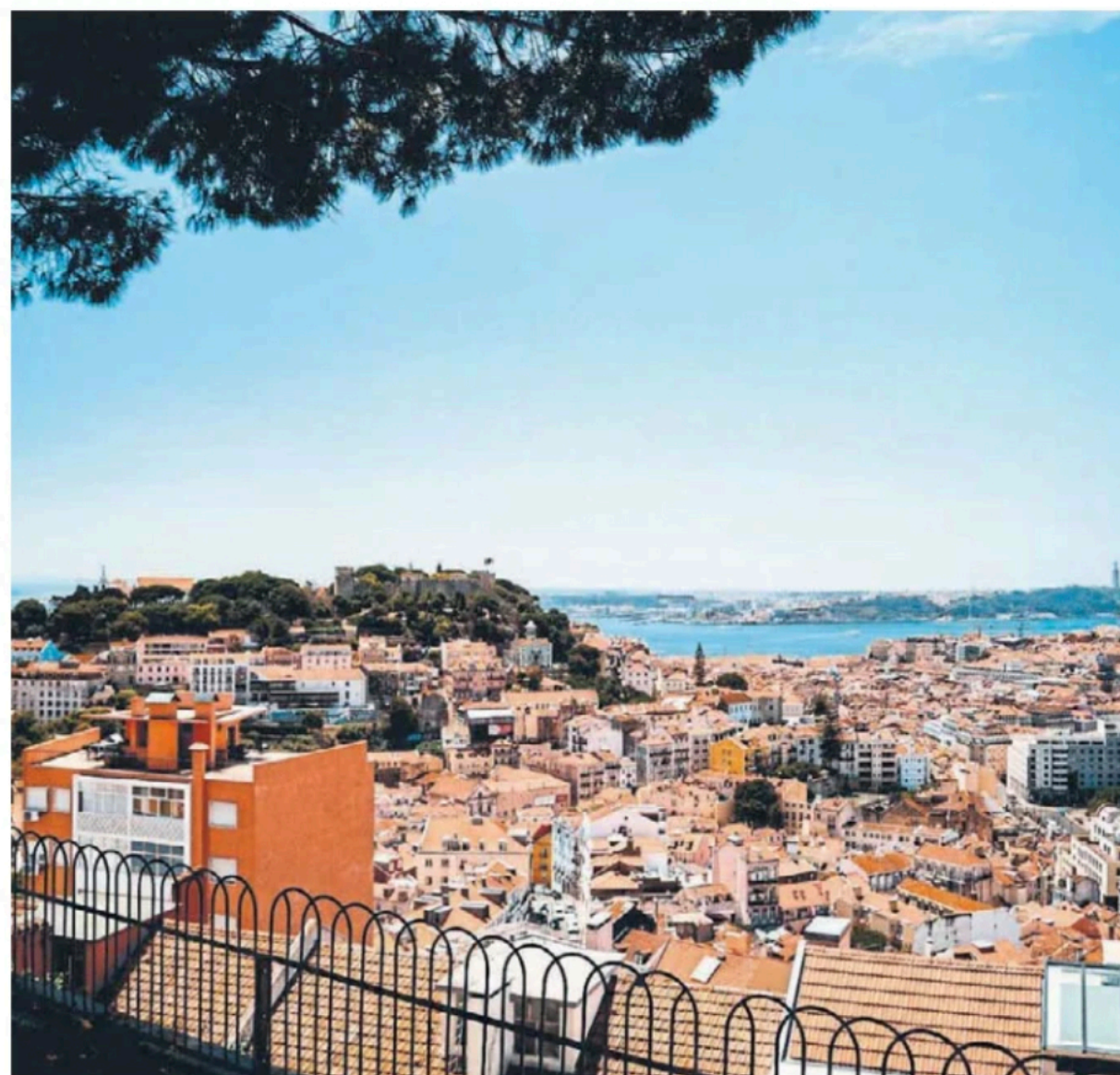
But the best part: There are adventurous snowbird opportunities aplenty.

Find beach time and a surfer's paradise in the famous Gold Coast, just about an hour's drive south of Brisbane. Or venture to the Great Barrier Reef (reachable after a short domestic flight from Brisbane), where you can experience the biodiverse coral cays of Lady Elliot Island and Lady Musgrave Island.

Road trip into the countryside of the Scenic Rim, Queensland's answer to Niagara-on-the-Lake or the Okanagan. Or simply hang back in cities like Brisbane, where you'll get some chill southern California vibes with its small and manageable size, but you won't be missing out on a buzzy food and cocktail scene or nightlife.

JENNIFER WEATHERHEAD  
HARRINGTON

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### FOR ARTS APPRECIATION IN A SUNSHINE CAPITAL

Lisbon's mild winter climate qualifies it as a snowbird getaway — the city has seen snow just once in 70 years — and a highlight of any visit is exploring those decorative cobblestone streets on a warm winter day in search of the next engrossing museum.

With murals practically around every corner and buildings cloaked in colourful ceramic tiles, Lisbon is itself a work of art.

But it also has 69 museums dedicated to everything from Portuguese fado music to the history of the city's famous *azulejo*.

Many Lisbon museums started as private art collections. The Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, named after its creator, includes works from Egypt, China and Japan, along with paintings by Renoir, Rembrandt and Rubens. The

Museum of Portuguese Decorative Arts, assembled from works bequeathed by Ricardo do Espírito Santo Silva, is dedicated to Portuguese arts and crafts.

In October, pieces from the private collection amassed by José Bernardo — including works by Picasso, Miró and Francis Bacon — became the opening exhibit at the new Museum of Contemporary Art in the Centro Cultural de Belém.

And next spring will see the opening of the Armando Martins Museum of Contemporary Art (MACAM). Martins, a wealthy businessman, assembled his collection of 20th-century works over 50 years. And in a first for Europe, a hotel, called the Curator Art Palace Hotel, will open inside the museum. The MACAM makes it an even 70 museums for Lisbon, a city of just over half a million people.

DARCY RHYNO





ULI VALDEZ UNSPLASH

### FOR BEACHES AND NATURE WITHOUT THE CROWDS

If you've never visited Bahias de Huatulco ("wa-TUL-co") in the Mexican state of Oaxaca, picture Cancun, without the party atmosphere. The region was developed as a master-planned tourism community but was never finished.

While wide, bougainvillea-lined boulevards were built, most of the area's nine bays and 36 beaches remain wonderfully undeveloped. There's also Huatulco National Park, with possibly the best preserved tropical dry rainforest in Mexico and lots of bird life.

You can get around the region on foot or by bike, but renting a car makes it easier to explore and dabble in the diverse activities. You can

golf at Tangolunda Bay, snorkel among tropical fish at Cacaluta Bay, 10 kilometres away, or drive two hours to La Ventanilla, an Indigenous community where guides will take you into the lagoon by canoe to explore the mangroves and see crocodiles swimming in the fresh water and lounging on an island.

Protecting wildlife and the environment is a big deal here. Huatulco has achieved "Master" status with EarthCheck, an organization that certifies destinations and businesses for sustainable practices.

But despite Huatulco's relative quiet, it's not difficult to reach: Its international airport means snowbirds can fly in from Toronto in about five and a half hours.

SUZANNE MORPHET



RED FROG BEACH RESORT

### FOR MORE AFFORDABLE ISLAND-HOPPING

Bocas del Toro is a Panamanian province, but for travellers the name mostly refers to five closely clustered inhabited islands covered in rainforest and fringed with beaches. Until recently, this was primarily a backpacker destination, but the presence of hotels like Red Frog Beach Island Resort in Bocas Town has added upscale options, too.

Island-hopping here is a pleasure,

and each one has its own personality. Meet up with ebullient howler monkeys and strange sloths, plus dolphins, which are still in abundance in these clear waters. Take a day trip to Bird Island, where the cliffs swarm with swooping, tropical winged wonders. Then sink your toes into Starfish Beach, where cheap beer and fresh grilled fish are served up at little stalls, all day long.

TIM JOHNSON



MARTINIQUE TOURISM AUTHORITY

### FOR CROSS-CULTURAL CARIBBEAN EXPERIENCES

Rugged Martinique is famous for its volcanic peaks and tropical greenery, with a land mass of 40 per cent forests. But apart from its breathtaking beauty, it offers authentic cross-cultural experiences. And with Air Canada launching direct flights from Toronto to its capital, Fort-de-France, this month, getting here has never been easier.

The French arrived in 1632, and Martinique remains a French territory, though the local Creole culture blends Indigenous, Arawak, African and French influences. For a taste, stop into Fort-de-France's sprawling Grand Marché, which dates back to 1885. The bustling market stalls are full of Creole spices, bountiful fruits and vegetables,

locally produced rum, madras clothing and live pan drums.

Beyond the capital, wander the enchanted forest of L'Habitation Céron, an agri-tourism destination on the site of a former sugar factory built in 1685, in the village of Le Prêcheur. In the commune of Sainte-Luce, learn about Martinique's distinctive rum agricole, a French-Caribbean spirit distilled from sugar cane juice, at the Trois Rivières estate, where you can tour the plantation on an ATV.

Set sail on a Calypso Croisières catamaran to Les Anses-d'Arlet, a fishing village with one of the island's most photographed sights, Église Saint-Henri. And if you're lucky, en route to the village, you might just spot dolphins diving up.

CHARMAINE NORONHA

Far left: A quiet beach in Mexico's Bahias de Huatulco region. Near left: Martinique's often-photographed Église Saint-Henri in Les Anses-d'Arlet. Bottom left: An aerial view of Bocas del Toro, Panama, and the Red Frog Beach Island Resort.

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