

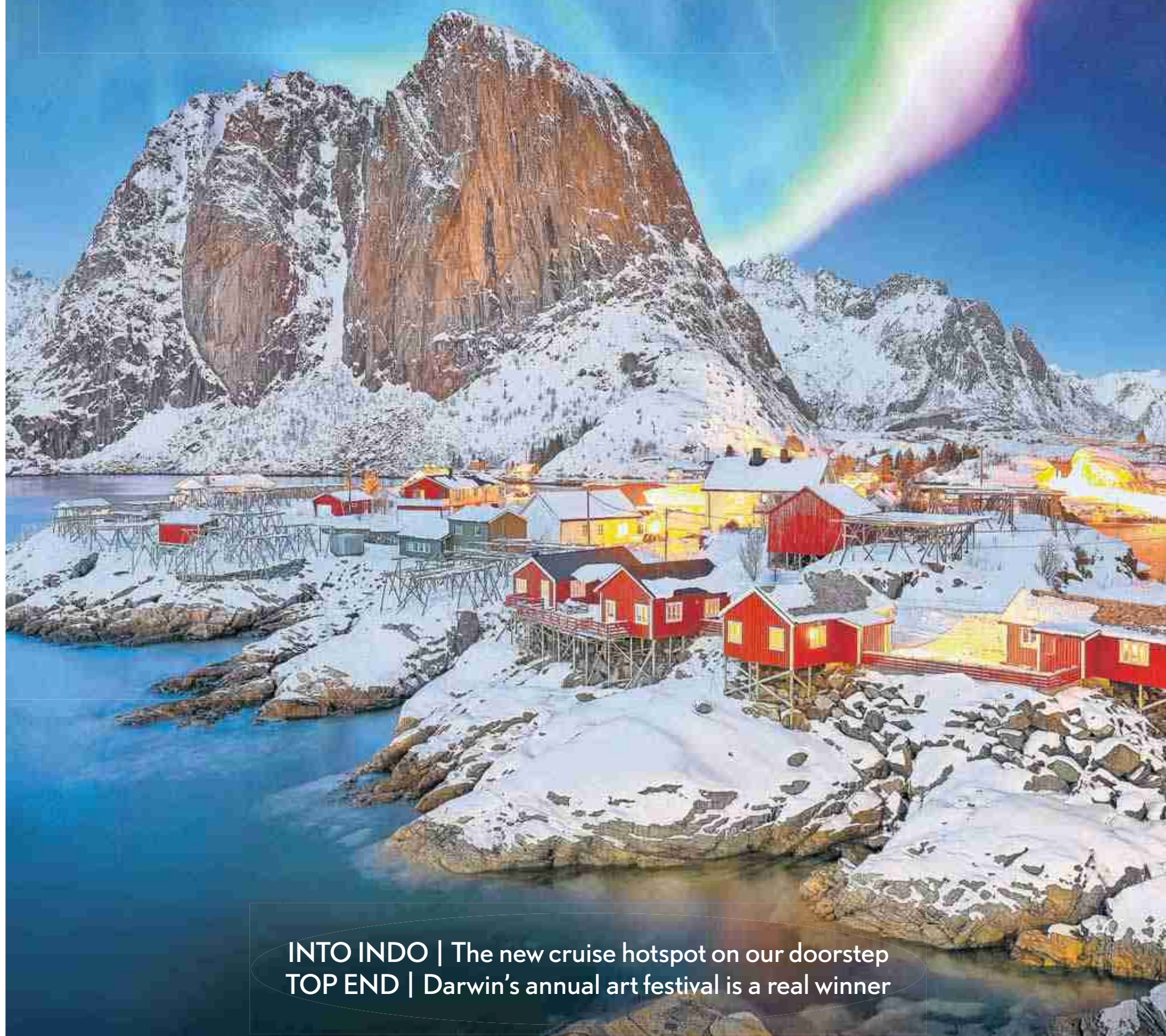
Traveller

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THESE ARE THE MOMENTS

Those unforgettable travel experiences
that money can't buy



INTO INDO | The new cruise hotspot on our doorstep
TOP END | Darwin's annual art festival is a real winner

Neighbourhood watch

By Brian Johnston



With its 17,000 islands, striking volcanic landscapes, outstanding reefs and many cultures, it's about time Indonesia had more cruise options. And happily, although development has been slow, our neighbour has an increasing number of small-ship and expedition offerings.

Komodo, the Maluku or Spice Islands and the rich marine environment of Raja Ampat are the focus, but other regions such as the Sunda Islands and Sulawesi are visited too.

Between December 2026 and February 2027 and again in December 2027, new boutique Australian company Pearl Expeditions sails itineraries in East Indonesia and Raja Ampat that begin or end in Bali, Dili or Darwin aboard the 30-guest Paspaley Pearl (pictured). They feature the staples of expedition cruises in the region, such as swimming with whale sharks in Saleh Bay, spotting dragons on Komodo, and orangutans in Borneo.

Coral Expeditions has two itineraries in December 2026 linking Darwin and Makassar. It visits destinations such as West Timor, Jailamu Island for snorkelling and diving, and Sulawesi for striking Torajan culture.

New Zealand company Heritage Expeditions is also now sailing this region. In September, it has a 14-day cruise from Darwin to Singapore, and in October an 18-day cruise linking Bali to Cairns.

Meanwhile, Aqua Expeditions' 30-guest ship Aqua Blu is based year-round in Indonesia. It visits Komodo National Park and Raja Ampat, where it will introduce new

itineraries in the southern islands in December this year.

Aqua Blu is also chartered by Lindblad-National Geographic, which in November 2026 has a 15-day voyage from Komodo to Palau Nusa Laut with return flights from Bali, and a 14-day voyage through Maluku and Raja Ampat with return flights from Jakarta. Uniworld, known chiefly for river cruises, is chartering Aqua Blu on itineraries in June and September 2027.

These small companies appear to be testing the waters. If successful, Indonesian itineraries are sure to be offered again.

One operator banking on interest, especially from the Australian market, is British company Swan Hellenic. Its Asian debut this year with the 152-guest Minerva included an itinerary through West Papua and Raja Ampat with a diving program. Another linked the Solomon Islands to Bali.

The company has seen strong demand and has more Indonesian journeys in 2027 and 2028. A 10-night journey in Raja Ampat in April 2027 is followed by one linking Raja Ampat and the Philippines.

And British company Noble Caledonia does things differently on three cruises in 2027 on the 118-guest Island Sky: Kuala Lumpur to Penang taking in Malaysian Borneo and Brunei, Bali-Singapore, and Bali-Kuala Lumpur.

Apart from the international players, a host of smaller companies offer cruises in Indonesia, such as Aliikai Voyage, Ayana Cruises, SeaTrek Sailing Adventures, and Rascal Voyages.



PORT OF CALL Bodrum, Turkey

Who goes there

Large ships from the likes of Royal Caribbean and Virgin Voyages do occasionally call in here, but Bodrum is mostly visited by the smaller ships of premium and luxury lines such as Azamara, Emerald, Explora Journeys, Oceania, Seabourn, Scenic, Silversea and Windstar. Most are sailing itineraries in the eastern Mediterranean or Greek islands.

Sail on in

This is one of the Mediterranean's most glorious bays, so don't miss it. You sail into a ring of blue hills with Bodrum's spill of white cubist houses and crusader castle straight ahead. By the time you approach the dock, ferries to the Greek islands and boats full of day-trippers are heading out of the harbour, creating a friendly buzz.

Berth rites

Bodrum's cruise terminal is tiny and needn't detain you long, though it fits a modest cafe, shops and a tourist information desk. It's a two-kilometre walk into town but it's one well worth the effort, since you follow the promenade that skirts the bay, with fine views of the castle and town, and plenty of cafes and bars if you tire. Some cruise lines offer a shuttle, however, given Bodrum's traffic and one-way maze, this can sometimes take as long as walking.

Going ashore

Apart from Bodrum Castle (pictured), the town has no particular sights – you can certainly skip the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus, once one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, but now sadly just a pile of stones. Walk the town instead, from its labyrinthine shop-filled back streets to its busy waterfront. If you care to explore the peninsula, you'll need a taxi or you can take public transport; at fashionable Yalikavak marina you can stickybeak at the superyachts.

Don't miss

The World Heritage-listed castle, built by the crusading Knights of St John, sits in flowery gardens with attendant peacocks and views over the bay. Its Museum of Underwater Archaeology is crammed with treasures and artefacts recovered from shipwrecks that span several millennia – one of the biggest such collections in the world.

Get active

You can sail, windsurf, kayak and jet ski and, on the peninsula, horse ride and mountain bike. A three-hour round-trip walk into the hills will take you to some modest ancient ruins, but the views are splendid. The long waterfront promenades that lead all the way from the cruise terminal through town and out the other side might, however, occupy you for half the day – or more if you stop for a swim.

Best bites

Bodrum is known for its mandarins, so plunder the market or buy some mandarin-flavoured Turkish delight. The town specialises in smaller versions of ravioli-like Turkish dumplings served with yoghurt, and a kebab variant served with fried potatoes, tomato sauce and yoghurt. Seafood is served everywhere along the waterfront. Bodrum has three Michelin-star restaurants that showcase contemporary Turkish cuisine but, alas, all are inconveniently out of town for day visitors unless you're touring the peninsula.

Further afield

Shore excursions in the surroundings are relatively modest, so you might save you money and simply enjoy the town. However, choices include a visit to a winery on the Bodrum Peninsula, four-wheel drives into the rugged hills, or a visit to Lake Bafa and the ruins of ancient Heraklia. You can also sail in the bay on a traditional wooden gulet. Some cruise lines offer shore excursions to the ruins of Greco-Roman town Ephesus but, while Ephesus is certainly outstanding, it will be a 2.5-hour drive each way. Kusadasi further up the coast is the more usual port for Ephesus excursions.

THE NUMBER 13

The unlucky deck number you're least likely to see on a cruise ship, with many jumping from 12 to 14.

EVERYBODY ASKS ...

Should I do a Nile River cruise?

Yes. If you're only going to make one river cruise in your life, make it this one. Travel in Egypt can be hot, dusty and bothersome, and a river cruise – which usually includes a land-tour component in Cairo – takes you to all the major sights in air-conditioned comfort and ease.

The Nile valley landscape is wonderful although little talked

about, since monuments grab all the attention. It mixes desert and agricultural scenery and is lined by villages on both sides, linked by ferries or bridges. Sunrises and sunsets over the river and glowing dunes are superb.

Aswan has a magnificent setting between desert cliffs and sand-dunes, and the narrowing river is scattered with islands and giant granite boulders. On top of this, ancient Egypt's temples and tombs are one of the world's great sights.

Karnak, Luxor and the Valley of the Kings are the most famous, but lesser-known places such as Kom Ombo and Edfu are brilliant too.

In Cairo, you'll see the pyramids and Sphinx, plus astounding treasures, including everything from King Tut's tomb, at the newly opened Grand Egyptian Museum. Cruises typically run between Luxor and Aswan and last between three and seven days. Cruising on the Nile is undergoing a resurgence, so plan ahead.