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fabulous VACATIONS

## Jazz up your holiday by visiting places that host some of the world's most interesting festivals

BRYANT CHAN

FOR your next vacation, besides just taking in the sights, try to visit during a festival or check out those that are occurring while you are there. This can be a life-changing experience and can provide valuable insights into the culture of the destination.

Here are some notable festivals:

### Lisbon, Portugal

Portugal has emerged as one of the hottest destinations and is listed among Lonely Planet's top 10 countries to visit this year.

Lisbon's beautiful architecture draws numerous admirers with its Neoclassical planes of the D. Maria II National Theatre and the classic Portuguese Manueline style of the Belem Tower.

Besides being heritage-rich, the port city also holds amazing festivals, such as one that celebrates seafood. The Lisbon Fish and Flavours Festival offers innovative gastronomic delights from some of the most famous chefs worldwide.

Don't miss the "Best Pastel de Nata" contest, in which bakers vie to make the best Portuguese egg tarts.

The locals also know how to have a rocking good time.

The international music festival, Rock in Rio Lisboa, draws over 350,000 attendees yearly, and features some of the biggest names in rock and pop history. This year's line-up includes heavy hitters such as The Killers, Muse, Bruno Mars and Demi Lovato.

**Lisbon Fish and Flavours Festival**
**When** April 5 to 15
**Website** www.visitlisboa.com/node/7469

**Rock in Rio Lisboa**
**When** June 23, 24, 29 and 30
**Website** rockinriolisboa.sapo.pt/lisboa/en

Lisbon's multi-coloured architecture is a sight to behold. PHOTOS: ISTOCK, TURISMO BUENOS AIRES

From left: Tango is inextricably intertwined with the culture of Buenos Aires; Melbourne is famous for its coffee culture as well as its reputation as Australia's arts and culture capital; Hermanus is one of the world's best places for whale-watching.

### New Orleans, Louisiana, United States

It is simply impossible to think of jazz, Cajun culture or even the state of Louisiana without thinking of New Orleans.

As the Big Easy turns 300 this year, expect the year to be chock-full of celebratory events, such as the year-long Luna Fete art exhibition by the Arts Council of New Orleans.

So grab yourself a po' boy and a plate of jambalaya, and wander the grounds of Jackson Square as you admire the works of street artists plying their trade there.

Besides visiting the historic parts of the city like the famous French Quarter, make time to relax at Lake Pontchartrain or get in touch with nature at Bayou Sauvage National Wildlife Refuge, where you might catch a glimpse of its state bird, the elusive brown pelican.

The birthplace of jazz, New Orleans has produced music legends such as Louis Armstrong and Fats Domino. One of the largest music festivals in the country, the annual New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival showcases some of the world's greatest jazz musicians.

**New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival**
**When** April 27 to May 6
**Website** www.nojazzfest.com

**New Orleans Tricentennial**
**When** Throughout 2018
**Website** 2018nola.com

The streets of New Orleans are always filled with music.

### Bangkok, Thailand

Bangkok is not just a popular tourist destination for dining, shopping and watching authentic muay thai matches at the Rajadamnern Stadium.

It is also famous for Songkran, an important festival that is celebrated with friendly water fights and street parties, with the most raucous festivities taking place on Silom Road and Chao Yat Road.

For a religious and cultural take on Songkran, make a pilgrimage to some of Bangkok's most famous temples, such as Wat Pho and Wat Suthat Thepphawararam in the Rattanakosin area.

Outside Bangkok, Ayutthaya's Songkran festivities feature parades around the city, of which the stars are elephants, the iconic symbol of Thailand's ancient capital.

**Songkran Festival**
**When** April 13 to 15
**Website** www.bangkok.com/information-festivals/songkran

### Buenos Aires, Argentina

As the birthplace of tango, Buenos Aires plays host to one of the world's largest tango festivals each year as part of the International Tango Festival and World Cup.

Be swept up in the fervour of tango aficionados and join them in various classes, social dance sessions and concerts.

The highlight of the festival is the Mundial de Tango, an international tango championship. Hundreds of professional dancers compete for a spot in the finals at the historic Estadio Luna Park at the end of the festival.

While you are in Argentina, don't miss the Iguazu Falls on the border of the Misiones province, the largest waterfall system in the world.

The breathtaking views of the Garganta del Diablo falls from the Isla San Martin lookout points are also amazing.

**International Tango Festival and World Cup**
**When** Tentatively Aug 8 to 23
**Website** turismo.buenosaires.gob.ar/en

### Melbourne, Australia

Besides being the hotspot for cool hipster coffee culture, Melbourne is also one of the popular choices for travellers to take picturesque shots along the iconic Great Ocean Road, and of Flinders Street Railway Station, to post on Instagram.

This year, the city's calendar of events is packed with music, art, film and cultural festivals. The Melbourne International Comedy Festival, for instance, is the third-largest comedy festival in the world, featuring the likes of James Veitch, Jim Gaffigan and Singapore's Jinx Yeo.

There is also the annual Melbourne Festival, one of the country's leading international arts festivals that showcases the best of dance, theatre, music, visual arts and more.

**Melbourne International Comedy Festival**
**When** March 28 to April 22
**Website** www.comedyfestival.com.au/2018

**Melbourne Festival**
**When** Oct 4 to 22
**Website** www.melbournefestival.com.au

Songkran is a celebration of the traditional Thai New Year.

### Hermanus, South Africa

A sleepy seaside town in South Africa, Hermanus is famed for its Cliff Path and Fernkloof Nature Reserve that offer glorious vistas of rolling mountains and the jagged coastline of Grotto Beach.

But it is the whale season that draws the most attention.

Every year, pods of southern right whales return to the waters off Hermanus' shores from winter to spring. For a closer look at them, head out to sea on a whale-watching tour or take to the skies in a helicopter.

Celebrate this season at the annual Hermanus Whale Festival that has street stalls selling local handmade crafts and traditional South African cuisine. It is the only eco-marine festival dedicated to the preservation of marine life in the country.

This year also marks the 100th birth anniversary of former president Nelson Mandela, so watch out for exhibitions, concerts and activities to commemorate it.

**Hermanus Whale Festival**
**When** Sept 28 to 30
**Website** hermanuswhalefestival.co.za

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