

NEW

THE TRAVELLER'S GUIDE TO

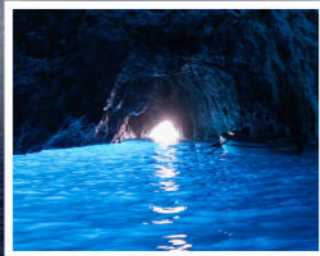
Mystical EUROPE

Journey to the
CONTINENT'S
MOST MYTHICAL
SITES

Witness
THE ORACLES
OF THE
ANCIENTS

Captivating castles
THE HOMES OF
WIZARDS, DRAGONS,
& FAIRYTALE
PRINCESSES

Digital
Edition



FANTASTICAL FORESTS * MOUNTAIN MARVELS * SEA SORCERY



FIRST
EDITION





WELCOME

So you think you know Europe? Organised, rational, birthplace of modern science? Europe's secrets might just surprise you. Beneath the continent's well-ordered streets and underpinning its modern, mundane societies teems a wealth of ancient mystical knowledge just waiting for you to rediscover it. Come with us on an epic journey to a Europe in which almost every river, mountain, woodland and lake has its own tutelary spirit, where haunted castles tower over landscapes engraved with the lines of ancient energies and where spirits gather in every hill and dale. And don't think the old magic is confined to the countryside either – even the most hi-tech cities have arcane secrets to reveal to those who can see them...

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The MYSTICAL CONTINENT

Whether you venture into its fairytale forests and wander through the cobbled streets of one of its medieval towns or hike the vast wilderness of its northernmost peaks, Europe's aura is one of enchantment, urging you to dig deeper into its mythic and magical past



WORDS ALICE PATILLO



Above: The ruins of an ancient Greek theatre in Sicily with a view to Mount Etna, the forge of fire god Hephaestus



Above: Europe is home to romantic medieval tales of knights in shining armour fending off dragons for damsels locked in fairytale castles

Europe's hills are alive with the sound of celestial spirits. Its dense thickets whisper of folklore and fairytales, and its craggy valleys are littered with the ghosts of days gone by. This enigmatic continent beckons the curious traveller to discover its mythical past. From the emerald hills of Ireland and snow-capped peaks of the Alps to the majestic fjords of Norway, the dreamy coastlines of Greece and the bewitching woodlands of Germany, every corner of these storied lands whispers the legends of ancient heroes, powerful deities, magical creatures and enchanted realms. Whether you're wandering through the cobblestone streets of a medieval town or hiking in the rugged wilderness, Europe's mystique is ever-present, enticing you to explore its many layers.

ENCHANTED EUROPE

Located entirely within the Northern Hemisphere – spanning from the Atlantic Ocean in the west to the Ural Mountains and Caspian Sea, bordering Asia in the east, and stretching up to the Arctic Ocean in the north and down to the Mediterranean in the south – Europe holds within its borders a rich tapestry of mysticism, myth, and magic. In terms of land mass, the continent of Europe is rather unassuming when compared to the vast expanse of Asia or the Americas, but its influence cannot be underestimated. This compact but diverse continent is particularly multicultural, encompassing 44 countries, with a large variety of landscapes, climates, cultures and religions at home here. Its huge variety of peoples and cultures, all of whom have intermingled for centuries, has led to the development of hundreds of thousands of stories, mythologies and superstitions that still resonate today.

LEGENDARY LANDSCAPES

Europe's esoteric nature is rooted in its landscape. Evidence of early magical practices have been discovered in the form of prehistoric paintings and artefacts – such as the mystical Grotte de Gabillou and Lascaux Caves in France and the curious Lion-man figurine of Hohlenstein-Stadel, the first known depiction of a mythical human-animal hybrid – suggesting a belief in the supernatural that dates back thousands of years to at least Neolithic times – when settlements and agriculture began to replace hunter-gatherer lifestyles.

Belief in folk magic, superstition and mystical forces grew out of our ancestors' need to make sense of the world they were living in. While we now know that many of Europe's unique land features are thanks to geological processes and the Earth's natural cycles, prior to scientific understanding, the causes of natural phenomena would be deemed supernatural and inspire a story. The ancestors of Europe believed that the Scottish moors were teeming with fairies shrouded in its ethereal mist, the White Cliffs of Dover are ancient guardians of the land, the volcanic Mount Etna is the forge of the ancient Greek god of fire and the underground rivers, caves and sinkholes of the limestone landscapes of Slovenia were entrances to the underworld – and it's easy to see why.

And it's not just these unseen forces of nature that solidified the case for a continent teeming with fantastical mythology; traces of our own past have also led to some of history's most enduring legends. Evidence of early man, Paleolithic beasts and Jurassic monsters have been unearthed across the continent. These fossils of extinct species, up until recently, could easily have been mistaken for creatures of folklore.

A MYRIAD OF MYTHS

With legends being woven into the very fabric of the European continent, out of each unique landscape emerged elaborate tales of a mythical ancient past, all of which have helped shape the cultural identities of each nation. Europe's very name is rooted in mythology. It is named for Europa, a Phoenician princess of ancient Greek myth who was mother to King Minos of Crete, after being seduced by Greek god Zeus in the form of a bull.

For our ancestors, myth and magic was often blended into everyday life; everything was linked to spirituality and the divine – it influenced everything from their politics and architecture to community celebrations and individual occupations. Ancient wonders and sacred sites dotted throughout the continent are a testament to this. Stonehenge in England has puzzled historians for centuries. The ancient site is shrouded in mystery and continues to attract folks seeking spiritual solace. The Acropolis of Athens still stands as a testament to the ancient Greeks' admiration of their gods. The Parthenon, a temple dedicated to the goddess of wisdom, Athena, is an awe-inspiring architectural marvel and symbol of civilisation and enlightenment. Meanwhile, head to Sweden and the ancient sites of Uppsala, and you'll discover where sacrifices were once made to the gods of Odin and Thor.

Below: Mythical beasts such as unicorns have captivated the imagination of Europeans for over two thousand years



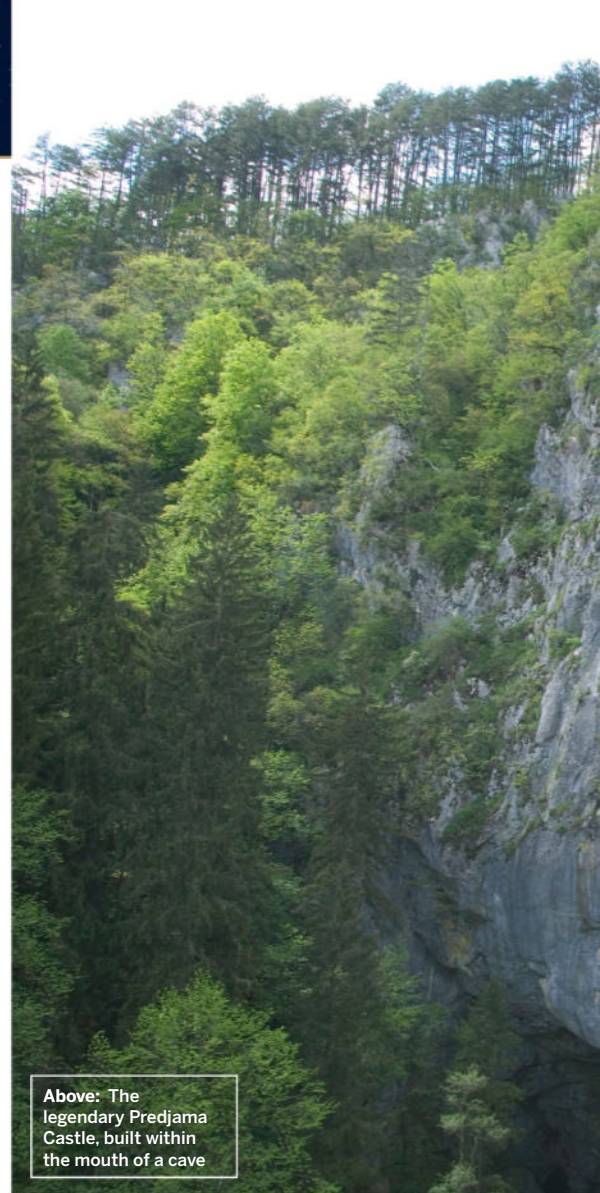
THE SUPERSTITIOUS DARK AGES

Despite Christianity spreading through the continent during the latter days of the Roman Empire and into the medieval era, the peoples of Europe wouldn't let go of their old ways, leading to a unique blend of folk belief and Christianity that can be seen in various architectural structures, if you know where to look. Early Christians would often adapt local pagan customs and beliefs to make Christian conversion more palatable.

New legends emerged that blended both Christian and pagan beliefs. Previously pagan myths were converted into Christian allegories by swapping out heathen deities for Christian saints. Pagan festivals, rituals, and symbols were also incorporated into Christian practices. This process of adoption, or syncretism, allowed traditional beliefs to persist under a Christian guise. Many practices and beliefs were simply too ingrained into people's identities and ways of life to be completely eradicated, and rural communities in particular maintained old customs. Local storytellers continued to tell their tales orally and healers continued to practice folk magic throughout the continent, adapting it to incorporate Christian elements by adding Christian symbols to their charms and Christian prayers into their spells. This helped maintain each region's unique identity, keep the old ways alive and allow regional folklore to evolve. Venture into many medieval churches and you will see the evidence of this tension between Christianity and paganism. Across the Celtic nations, you will notice Celtic crosses – like the one at Clonmacnoise monastery in Ireland that dates back to the 6th century or the later Muiredach's High Cross at the Monasterboice ruins. Many Norwegian churches feature pagan-influenced carvings, some with runic inscriptions added by parishioners. Similarly, many of Britain's churches feature so-called witch marks: sigils drawn on walls, doors or floors to ward off evil or, occasionally, hex people. Gargoyles also mark a throwback to older mythologies and are found on medieval churches as well as ancient architecture.

LITERARY LEGENDS

During the later half of the Middle Ages, as literacy increased, texts began to emerge that aimed to preserve various



Above: The legendary Predjama Castle, built within the mouth of a cave

regional myths previously only passed down by word of mouth, often documented by monks reinterpreting pagan myths in a way that explores the tensions between pagan and Christian belief. This can be seen with the 11th century Welsh manuscripts of the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi* and Irish *Lebor na hUidre* ('Book of the Dun Cow') detailing aspects of Celtic mythology, the Germanic epic poem *Beowulf*, Geoffrey of Monmouth's 12th century *Historia Regum Britanniae* ('History of the Kings of Britain') detailing the Arthurian legends, the German heroic epic *Nibelungenlied*, and the Icelandic texts the *Poetic Edda* and *Prose Edda* which detail Norse mythology. These texts form some the foundational mythologies of the European peoples, passed down through the generations, and have continued to influence modern European culture.

"Beneath any hill could lie a sleeping hero, any ancient oak could harbour a portal to another world, and hidden in every cobbled street are countless stories"

of Central and Eastern Europe as well as Portugal, Italy and Serbia. Local celebrations still incorporate ancient magical beliefs and many countries still hold festivities for pagan holidays, such as Kupala Night in the Balkans, the Swiss parade of Klausenfest in Appenzell, Swedish traditions of Midsummer and Easter witches, Green Week in Ukraine, the Italian Christmas witch Befana, and the Beltane Fire Festival in Edinburgh, Scotland.

HIDDEN TREASURES

As you traverse the European continent to uncover its rich, hidden tapestry of myth, magic and mysticism, consider the contents of these pages as merely a starting point. Europe beckons you to venture beyond the well-trodden paths and seek out local folklore. Branch out of the more well-known European holiday hotspots and into Slovenia, for instance, and you'll discover the captivating Postojna Cave, home to 'baby dragons' and the nearby legends of Predjama Castle. Head to Hamelin in Germany and you'll discover the medieval town home to the grim folktale of the Pied Piper, or trade in Prague for the Czech Republic city of Český Krumlov, full of medieval charm and alchemical history.

Beneath any hill could lie a sleeping hero, any ancient oak could harbour a portal to another world, and hidden in every cobbled street there are countless stories waiting to be discovered. Engage with the landscapes that have inspired countless stories, embrace the spirit of adventure, and explore this mystical continent where reality and imagination are beautifully blurred.

By the Renaissance, there was a revival of old beliefs and even more interpretations of these myths of ancient origin were added to Europe's legendary narrative. With this renewed interest in classical mythology and pagan practices, came the evolution of a new form of magic: Science.

ADVENTURES IN ALCHEMY

Alchemy was integral to later medieval Europe. Influenced by ancient Egyptian and Greek knowledge, Arabic texts and the rapid expansion of contemporary scientific thought, alchemists initially sought to transform metal into gold, which evolved, for medieval Europeans, into achieving a spiritual transformation as well. Alchemists searched for what was known as the philosopher's stone – a mythical substance that would not only turn base metal into precious metal but grant immortality as well. The predecessor to modern-day chemistry, alchemy was a blend of the material and the mystic and influenced everything from art and literature to later Western philosophy and esoteric traditions. Today, traces of Europe's alchemical past can be found in Prague's hidden underground chambers, where you'll discover an original

alchemist's lab that dates back to the 16th century (now a museum called Speculum Alchemiae) as well as at the Alchemist's Tower (Alchemistenturm) in Freiburg, Germany. Alchemy influenced the mysticism that swept across Europe during the 19th and early 20th centuries, too. London-based magical societies the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, the Society of the Inner Light, and the Parisian order of Martinism were both heavily influenced by alchemy and have left a lasting legacy, with their influence still felt in modern esoteric practices.

MODERN MAGIC

Traditions remain strong across Europe, with New Age movements developing out of Europe's rich magical heritage. The modern religions of Wicca, Druidry, Heathenry and Paganism all have their roots in Europe and European mythology and mysticism. The spiritual philosophy of Thelema, first established in Britain by occultist Aleister Crowley, continued to have a global following and many other forms of witchcraft still exist across the continent today. Belief in superstition and the supernatural remains strong in areas



Below: The Celtic Cross is a phenomenon most prevalent in Ireland and blends earlier art styles of the Celtic nations with Christian iconography



MYTH & MAGIC



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On the trail of KING ARTHUR

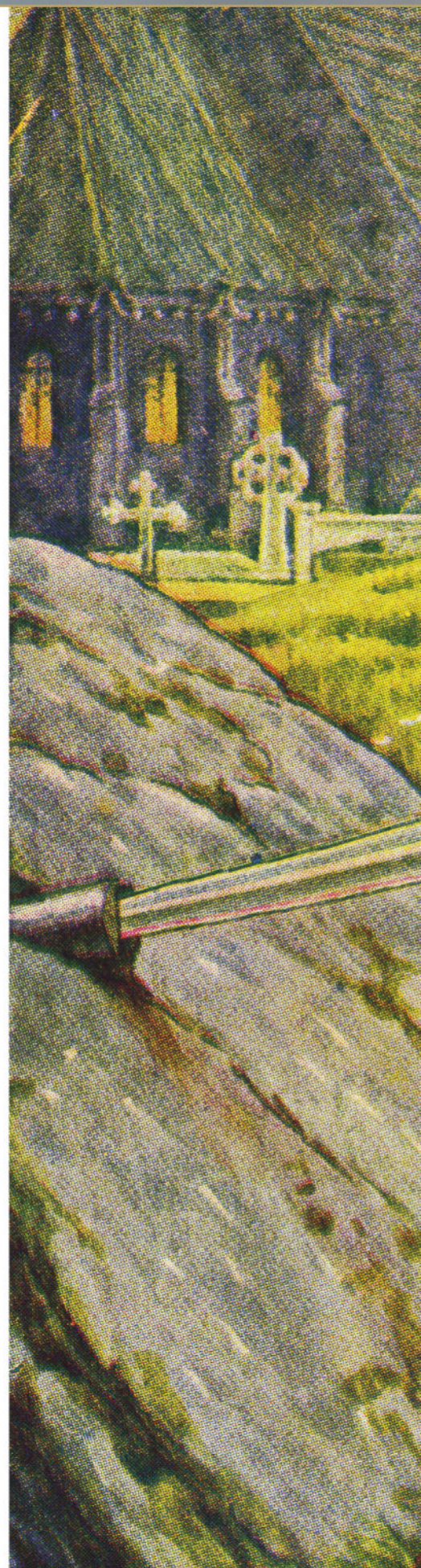
There are over a thousand years' worth of legends associated with the mythical king who pulled the magical sword, Excalibur, from the stone

WORDS ALICE PATTILLO

King Arthur is perhaps the most famous of all of the legends of Britain. King Arthur Pendragon, if he did indeed exist as a man, is believed by some to have been King of Britain between the 5th and 6th centuries, and fought off the invading Anglo Saxons. His first mention in texts, however, isn't until around 100 years or more later, first (possibly) in the 7th century Welsh poem *Y Gododdin*, and then in the 9th century text the *Historia Brittonum* ('The History of the Britons') and the 10th century *Annales Cambriae* ('Annals of Wales'). These are known as the pre-Galfridian Arthurian texts and they feature Arthur as a fierce warrior who fights off mythical beasts and has a connection to the Welsh otherworld of Annwn. It is likely that his character as a magical hero and mythical figure developed through the influence of Welsh mythology, and one school of thought argues that Arthur was never a real historical figure at all, but an old Celtic deity turned folklore hero. Whether or not Arthur was a real forgotten hero or a mythical forgotten god, his legendary status as a monarch was solidified with 12th century writer Geoffrey of Monmouth's hugely influential pseudohistoric account *Historia Regum Britanniae* ('The History of the Kings of Britain'). Geoffrey laid the foundation for the Arthurian myth that would captivate the world for the next thousand years by combining the lore found in the earlier texts and adding to it further. Elements such as

the legendary island of Avalon, thought to be influenced by the Welsh otherworld of Annwn, as the magical place where mythical sword Excalibur was forged, ruled over by Arthur's sorceress sister Morgan Le Fay and the supernatural magician Merlin, are all found in *Historia Regum Britanniae*. Geoffrey's Arthur, son of Uther Pendragon, led an empire that also comprised areas of Ireland, Iceland and Orkney, later expanding into Denmark, Norway and Gaul. During the reign of Edward I (1239-1307), Arthur lost some of his distinctly Welsh origins thanks to Edward's conquest of Wales and attempt to reinvent King Arthur as an English hero in his own image. By the 13th century, King Arthur had seen yet another shift in character with the rise of the Arthurian romance. These tales were particularly popular in France and featured Arthur as a powerful and wise yet bland and inactive monarch, focusing the stories more on the subcharacters such as the Knights of the Round Table, particularly Sir Lancelot, Galahad and Percival, and Arthur's adulterous wife Guinevere. These 12th century French texts also gave Arthur's castle and court a definitive name: Camelot.

Since the popularisation of the legendary king and his knights in shining armour, almost every nation within Britain has laid a claim to this mythical king – but it's not just a British phenomenon. Other European countries have professed associations with Arthurian legend, from the true site of Avalon to the location of the 'real' Round Table.





CAERLEON

Location: Newport, Gwent, Wales, UK

Time zone: UTC 0

Currency: Pound sterling (£)

The home of Geoffrey of Monmouth is a mere 20 miles from this Welsh town and former Roman outpost. According to *Historia Regum Britanniae*, it was at Caerleon – ‘City Of The Legion’ – that King Arthur held his court. This, according to Geoffrey, was an important place, and even had its own archbishop prior to King Arthur taking the crown. While Geoffrey makes no mention of Camelot – this name was first used by French poet Chretien de Troyes some 50 years later – the court of Caerleon no doubt inspired what became known as Camelot. The exact site of Arthur’s court in Caerleon remains debated – was it what became the castle mound, the Mynde? Many believe this to be his place of burial, and where he and his knights lie in wait until they are needed once again. In Elizabethan Britain, it was the ruins of the amphitheatre that was rumoured to have been Arthur’s elusive Round Table. But it seems the most logical spot for Arthur to build his castle would be the former Iron Age fort, now Lodge Hill. Archaeological excavations in 2000 found evidence of the hillfort being reused in the late Roman or immediately post-Roman period, between the 3rd and 4th centuries. Perhaps it was reoccupied by the Knights of the Round Table? We may never know. Caerleon was also the birthplace of mystic and horror author Arthur Machen. Machen was fascinated by Arthurian legend and made it his lifelong quest to discover the Holy Grail.





GLASTONBURY

Location: Somerset, England, UK **Time zone:** UTC 0 **Currency:** Pound sterling (£)

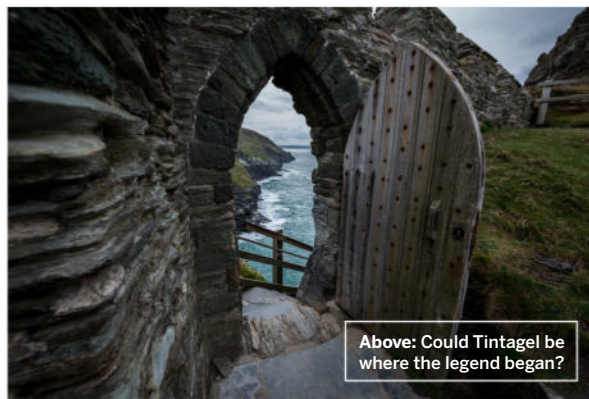
Glastonbury has many ties to the tale of King Arthur. The town is known as the “Isle of Avalon”, the entrance to which is situated upon Glastonbury Tor, and it is within the ruins of Glastonbury Abbey that the legendary king and his queen, Guinevere, are said to be buried. In 1191, monks at the Abbey claimed to have found two bodies, one of a tall man and the other of a woman, in a grave with a lead cross that was inscribed with “Here lies buried the renowned King Arthur, with Guinevere his second wife, in the isle of Avalon...” The bodies were placed in a

tomb in the abbey church and, opened some 100 years later for King Edward I, reburied into an intricate black marble chest that was placed centrally before the high altar. The tomb remained situated in the heart of the church, with Saxon kings Edmund the Elder and Edmund Ironside either side of it, until at least the 1530s. Unfortunately it was destroyed during the Reformation, leaving no evidence of the king and his wife. The stunt is now believed to have been a hoax to help generate interest and fund the rebuilding of the Abbey following a fire.

TINTAGEL

Location: Cornwall, England, UK **Time zone:** UTC 0 **Currency:** Pound sterling (£)

According to Geoffrey of Monmouth, it was at Tintagel Castle that King Arthur was conceived – although the castle that survives in ruins today wasn’t constructed until the 1230s, there is evidence that a high-status building was situated in the same location between the 5th and 7th centuries, possibly the palace of the kingdom of Dumnonia. Legend has it that Arthur’s father, Uther Pendragon, seduced Queen Igraine (Igraine/Ygraine), the wife of his enemy, Duke Gorlois of Cornwall, by magically changing his appearance to that of Gorlois and as a result, she conceived a son. Medieval antiquary William Worcester also claimed that Arthur was born at Tintagel – which would make sense, being the home of his mother. Later French and German Arthurian romances also have Tintagel as the court of the uncle of the legendary Tristan, King Mark of Cornwall. Today, for a fee, you can visit the 13th century castle dramatically



Above: Could Tintagel be where the legend began?

set upon Cornwall’s rugged north coastline, and if you can handle the long walk, discover the gigantic bronze sculpture known as the King Arthur Statue within the castle remains – an eight-foot modern, ghostly, sculpture of a crowned, cloaked man holding a sword. Beneath the castle at low tide you will spot Merlin’s Cave – accessible for free via a footpath – made famous by the Alfred Lord Tennyson poem, *Idylls of the King*.



Above: The active volcano and Etna’s otherworldly aura makes it easy to see why it is often cited as the true location of Avalon

MOUNT ETNA

Location: Sicily, Italy
Time zone: UTC+1
Currency: Euro (€)

Although it seems unlikely that a British king who was, not long before his death, said to be preparing a march on Rome, would find his final resting place in Italy, some say he did. Arthurian legend likely reached Sicily during its Norman occupation. Breton conteurs (storytellers) who accompanied the Normans to Sicily attributed its stunning scenery and the imposing force of Mount Etna to the fact that it is the mythical island of Avalon itself. According to ancient Greek mythology, Etna was the home of the god of fire and blacksmithing, Hephaestus, and Avalon was where the mythical sword Excalibur was forged by magic – coincidence? The Normans were convinced.

Legend has it that the king’s sister and queen of Avalon, Morgan Le Fay, is keeping Arthur alive even now by feeding him from the Holy Grail once a year in a castle whose entrance is within one of the caves along the slopes of the volcano. Etna is also known as Mongibello, meaning ‘beautiful mountain’, a phrase very similar to the name of Morgan’s otherworldly castle, Mongibel. Later 12th century texts also feature a subterranean realm beneath the volcano where Arthur once lost his horse. Locals dub the mirage seen on the nearby Straits of Messina ‘Fata Morgana’ in reference to the mythical queen. Experience the otherworldly magic of Etna with a guided hike if you are feeling brave, or jump on one of the 4x4 Jeep ride tours.



CADBURY CASTLE

Location: Somerset, England, UK **Time zone:** UTC o **Currency:** Pound sterling (£)

adbury Castle's association with Arthurian legend dates back to the 16th century and the works of English antiquarian John Leland, who placed Arthur's court, Camelot, at the site. Despite its name, there is no identifiable castle at Cadbury. Yet another Iron Age settlement, the original hillfort located on the summit of Cadbury Hill was refortified with timber and earth around the time King Arthur was said to have been ruling Britain. Not far from the Isle of Avalon, a causeway known as King Arthur's Hunting Track links Cadbury

Castle to Glastonbury Tor – on a moonlit night you may spot the ghosts of the Knights of the Round Table crossing this reputedly haunted trail. Archaeological excavations at the site have revealed a large 6th century timbered great hall, which could have housed Arthur's Round Table, as well as a partly constructed church, and evidence of houses and small temples. One legend has it that the hillfort turns clear at midsummer, revealing the legendary king and his knights in the ruins. For more information about the site, visit the nearby aptly named The Camelot pub where you can also grab a bite to eat.



Above: This elaborate Celtic hillfort may have been the setting for one of Arthur's most significant battles

BADBURY RINGS

Location: Dorset, England, UK

Time zone: UTC o

Currency: Pound sterling (£)

A former Iron Age hillfort, Badbury Rings is rumoured to have been the location of Mount Badon where King Arthur fought against the Saxons, slaying 470 of them

with his legendary Excalibur. According to legend, King Arthur's victory over the Saxons at Badon brought about 21 years of peace in Britain, with the Saxons integrating into British society. Badbury's claim to this is purely based upon its name's similarity to the mythical location, so take the tale with a pinch of salt, but the magical Celtic earthwork makes it worth a trip anyway.

ARTHUR'S SEAT

Location: Edinburgh, Scotland, UK

Time zone: UTC o

Currency: Pound sterling (£)

This volcanic hill in Edinburgh, Scotland, is associated with centuries of superstition. One of Scotland's most popular hiking trails, its peak, Arthur's Seat, towers above the Scottish capital and offers spectacular 360-degree views of the city and landscape. Often hypothesised to be the location of King Arthur's Round Table, or the site of one of his many legendary battles, this uniquely shaped hill is also believed to be a sleeping dragon. One thing is certain though; Arthur's Seat was once an Iron Age hillfort and a centre of power for the Votadini people, mentioned in the Welsh poem *Y Gododdin*.



Above: Could King Arthur's Camelot overlook Edinburgh?

CHÂTEAU DE JOYEUSE GARDE

Location: La Forest-Landerneau, Brittany, France **Time zone:** UTC+I **Currency:** Euro (€)



The site of a 6th century fortress that is rumoured to have been the legendary Joyous Gard, the castle was rebuilt in the 12th or 13th century but all that remains of this medieval stronghold are a few vestiges. The Joyous Gard was first mentioned in the 13th century French prose, *Lancelot*, as the knight's fortified residence after he is able to single-handedly rid it of the forces of evil. Lancelot later allows the legendary lovers Tristan and Isolde to live at the palace, and it is where Lancelot brings Guinevere when Arthur sentences her to death for adultery with Lancelot. It is eventually where Sir Lancelot himself is buried, beside the grave of his friend, the half-giant Galehaut.

ISLE OF AVAL

Location: Brittany, France **Time zone:** UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro (€)



This small island off the coast of Brittany is yet another possible location of Avalon, and its name, meaning apple in French (similar to the Welsh for apple, afal), couldn't be closer to the legendary place. According to Bretonic legend, Morgan Le Fay kidnapped Arthur from his springtime residence, a castle at Kerduel in Little Brittany. She tore him away to the Isle of Aval and offered him eternal life. In one version of the myth, Arthur asked Morgan if he could see his kingdoms again. The Queen of Avalon obliged under the condition that he would be transformed into a crow or raven. Just like many of the

other Arthurian tales, one day the King is said to return to his lands when he is needed again. The island was home to a 6th century monastery, where Arthur's tomb is said to be located at the foot of a standing stone in the middle of the old monastic cemetery. A mass grave was reportedly discovered in the late 19th century and the mysterious skeletal remains of around 30 people and numerous horses, assumed to date back to the early middle ages, were transferred to the cemetery of the Île-Grande. Whether these were indeed the bones of Arthur and his knights, we may never know.

AVALLON

Location: Burgundy, France
Time zone: UTC+1
Currency: Euro (€)

Considering this Burgundian commune's name, it is no surprise that Avallon is a prime suspect for the location of the elusive Avalon of Arthurian myth. According to British Arthurian historian Geoffrey Ashe, King Arthur is likely based upon the Romano-British supreme king Riothamus, whose life and campaigns are strikingly similar to the legendary Brittonic monarch. In 470, Riothamus vanished in the area of Avallon after defeat in a battle against the Visigoths. While this is a captivating theory, this Avallon is not an island, making this hypothesis rather ropery.



KING ARTHUR'S HALL

Location: Bodmin Moor, Cornwall, England, UK **Time zone:** UTC 0 **Currency:** Pound sterling (£)

This megalithic monument on the mysterious Bodmin Moor is thought to be a late Neolithic ceremonial site. A rectangular formation of 56 rocks surrounded by a bank of earth, originally thought to have contained around 140 stones, it is situated within a landscape rich with megalithic monuments such as stone circles and cairns. Its association with King Arthur, however, is relatively recent. A document dated 1954 suggests that the legendary Brittonic hero frequented the site. Situated in an area known as King Arthur's Down, King Arthur's Hall is only accessible on foot, if you can manage to scale the hillocks. This bizarre sunken patch of land, approximately 50 by 25 metres, is best seen in the spring to summer months and is known to fill with water during heavy rainfall, so be careful when hiking it.



Below: Sir Edward Burne-Jones's extraordinary tapestry showing the fulfilment of the quest as Sir Galahad beholds the Holy Grail



Quest *for the* HOLY GRAIL

The quest for the Holy Grail unites the two strongest currents of European spirituality: Christianity and the legends of Arthur and his knights



WORDS EDOARDO ALBERT





And He took a cup and when He had given thanks He gave it to them saying "Drink this, all of you."

According to St Matthew's account of the last meal Jesus had with his disciples, these were the words he spoke before being taken prisoner and hauled before Pilate. Mark and Luke and Paul repeat the account in their own ways. The meal, and both Jesus's actions and words during this final feast, became the basis for Christian celebrations, for their Eucharist, in the first century and for the centuries thereafter.

There was no more significant and holy event in the religion – and the cup into which Jesus poured the wine was seen as the receptacle into which he poured his blood for the salvation of all.

A little later, but still in the first millennium, a body of legends began to form around the person of King Arthur. In the way of popular tales, the stories developed a gravity of their own, sucking other stories into their orbit.

In the late 12th century, the French poet Chrétien de Troyes wrote *Perceval, the Story of the Grail*, which first set a grail – Christian or otherwise – within the body of Arthurian legends.

Then another French poet, Robert de Boron, wrote a verse romance of the life of Joseph of Arimathea in which Joseph used the Chalice from the Last Supper to catch some of Jesus's blood as he hung upon the cross. Joseph then brought the Chalice – or Grail – with him to the vau d'Avaron, the valleys of Avaron, in the west. Avaron became Avalon, which was equated with Glastonbury. Later legends suggested that Joseph had travelled with a young Jesus to England. William Blake took that story and used it to sanctify his vision of England to spine-tingling effect in the words of

Jerusalem: "And did those feet in ancient time; Walk upon England's mountains green?"

The Holy Chalice of the Last Supper and the Holy Grail of Arthurian legend had now met and fused. In their fusion, they produced the most sublime of the Arthurian tales, the great cycle of stories that tell of the quest of the Knights of the Round Table for the Holy Grail. All the knights take part in that quest but only three succeed: Sir Bors, Sir Percival and the purest knight of all, Sir Galahad.

The Holy Grail is embedded deeply within the European imagination. Its quest inspired and inspires people, poets and artists to this day. And pilgrims continue to go in quest of the cups that claim to be the true relic of the chalice that Jesus himself held and blessed on that fateful night in Jerusalem.

"The Holy Grail is embedded deeply within the European imagination. Its quest inspired and inspires people, poets and artists to this day"



CHÂTEAU OF MONTSÉGUR

Location: Montségur, l'Ariège, France **Time zone:** UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro (€)

The Château of Montségur, set atop a huge rock outcrop, was the last stronghold of the Cathars, a medieval heretical sect that believed the flesh, and its pleasures, were inherently sinful. In 1244, the last Cathar believers were besieged in the castle for 10 months. When the castle finally fell, over 200 hundred Cathars were burned for their faith.

However, according to some accounts, before the end a few Cathars managed to slip through the lines of the besiegers with various treasures and secret knowledge. In 1906, a French writer, Joséphin Péladan, first

proposed that among these treasures was the Holy Grail. Péladan derived this idea by equating Montségur with Munsalväsche, the castle of the Holy Grail in Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*, and later writers have taken the idea and run with it. The Cathar fortress was demolished.

The present ruin was a later royal stronghold. However, it presents a remarkable alignment on the morning of the summer solstice, when the light from the rising sun shines through the narrow window slits of the castle.

SACRO CATINO OF GENOA

Location: Museum of Genoa Cathedral, Genoa, Italy

Time zone: UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro (€)



This bright green hexagonal vessel certainly looks otherworldly, seeming to shine with some mysterious interior light. From the 12th century it was held in Genoa and revered as the Holy Chalice. It was reputed to have been recovered by knights of the First Crusade and to be carved from emerald. However, in the early 19th century, Napoleon conquered Genoa. The emperor ordered his soldiers to bring the Sacro Catino to Paris. But, on the way, they dropped it. The Sacro Catino broke and, in breaking, revealed itself as made of glass, not emerald. In Paris, the broken pieces were examined by scientists from the Academy of Science who determined that it was probably a Byzantine bowl. Stuck together, although with a piece missing, it was returned to Genoa in 1816. More recent research suggests it was made in the 9th or 10th century. So probably not the Grail.

MONASTERY OF SAN JUAN DE LA PEÑA

Location: Santa Cruz de la Serós, Huesca, Spain
Time zone: UTC+1
Currency: Euro (€)

While the Holy Chalice is now in the Cathedral of Valencia, the question remains of how it got there. After all, the Spanish city of Valencia is a long way from ancient Palestine.

According to tradition, the cup was brought to Rome by St Peter himself where it was used by his successors until increasing persecution meant that it had to be taken from the city and hidden. Pope Sixtus II gave the chalice into the care of his deacon, Lawrence, who fled Rome, eventually arriving in Huesca, the city in Spain where his parents lived.

Details get a little sketchy here, but somehow the chalice ended up under the care of the monks of the monastery of San Juan de la Peña, 30 miles north east of Huesca.

The chalice was documented in 1399 when it was given to Martin I of Aragón. It passed to Alfonso the Magnanimous who placed it in his palace in Valencia in 1424. In 1437, Alfonso gave the chalice to the church. It has been kept at Valencia Cathedral for most of the time since, although it had to be hidden during the Spanish Civil War by a brave local family.

CHALICE OF DOÑA URRACA

Location: St Isidore's Basilica, León, Spain

Time zone: UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro (€)

The Chalice of Doña Urraca has been held at St Isidore's Basilica in Spain for a very long time: since the 11th century. It was given to the cathedral by Urraca of Zamora, the daughter of Ferdinand I of León.

However, it is only recently, since 2014, that it has been recognised as a possible candidate for the Holy Grail. Two Spanish researchers investigating Muslim texts in the cathedral (for a thousand years much of Spain was under Muslim control), found documents telling how Muslims, who also controlled the Holy Land, acquired a sacred cup

from the Christian community in Jerusalem, taking it to Cairo. From there, it was sent as a diplomatic gift to Ferdinand of León in gratitude for his aid during a famine. The chalice itself they dated to between the 2nd century BCE and the 1st century CE. Such was the interest their claims produced that the cathedral authorities have had to move the chalice to a separate room for display.

Right: The Chalice of Doña Urraca bears interesting parallels to the chalice in Valencia; both are authentic kiddush cups of roughly the right time



THE HOLY CHALICE OF VALENCIA CATHEDRAL

Location: Valencia Cathedral, Valencia, Spain **Time zone:** UTC+1 **Currency:** € (Euro)

In a chapel of the magnificent Gothic cathedral in Valencia, Spain, there is a simple stone cup, carved from red agate. It sits upon a much more elaborate base that makes it look somewhat like a little pot sat atop a bejewelled spirit stove.

According to the belief of many pilgrims, and the testimony of hundreds of years, the cup was the very chalice with which Jesus celebrated the Last Supper. Although it seems unlikely that a vessel could have survived for so long, there is some evidence for its authenticity. Most important to this is the cup itself, ignoring its elaborate base. It is made from a type of red/brown agate that is only found in Palestine and Egypt. What's more, archaeologists have dated the carving of the cup to between the 2nd century BCE and the 1st century CE. So, the cup is old enough to have been used by Jesus.

Furthermore, the agate cup itself is the right size and volume for a kiddush cup, the traditional Jewish vessel used for blessing on the eve of Sabbath. The cup would be filled with wine and the Kiddush prayer is recited over the cup. The person reciting Kiddush then drinks from the cup before passing it to the next person at the table for him to drink.

So the chalice in Valencia fits the bill for authenticity in both its age and its possible use at least, and it remains on display in the Cathedral throughout the year, where it is visited and venerated by pilgrims. The cup is brought out twice a year, on Holy Thursday (the day before Good Friday when, according to tradition, Jesus was said to have celebrated the Last Supper) and on the last Thursday in October, when the chalice itself is used for the celebration of the annual mass in its honour.



Below: When Albertus Magnus invited a monarch and his court to Cologne, they had no idea what amazing sights awaited them in an enchanted garden



Location:
Cologne, Germany

Time zone:
UTC+1

Currency:
Euro (€)

Tip: A plaque marks the site at the intersection of the streets An den Dominikanern and Stolkasse

The magical garden of Albertus MAGNUS

When philosopher Albertus Magnus threw an outdoor party in the depths of winter, cold weather proved to be no problem

WORDS CATHERINE CURZON

In the 13th century, philosopher Albertus Magnus was celebrated for his writings and philosophical work, even as rumours spread that he practised alchemy and magic and had achieved results that some regarded as dangerous. With at least one scholar claiming that Albertus, known as Doctor Universalis, possessed the secret of the philosopher's stone, it was little wonder that he was regarded as a man who knew more about Earth and the heavens than he was willing to tell.

The most celebrated tale of the magical powers of Albertus Magnus isn't one of alchemy or devils, however, but a dinner party. According to an account found in the University of Paris, Albertus invited William II, King of the Romans, to visit him at his home in the Dominican Monastery at Cologne. Despite it being the middle of winter, Albertus had dining tables set out in the snow-covered garden, and it was here that he received the king and his courtiers. Known for his unorthodox ways, nobody suspected exactly what the philosopher had planned for his illustrious guests.

Understandably, the monarch and his attendants were unimpressed at having to dine in the freezing garden, fearing that William II might fall ill as a result. However, as

they took their seats at the table, the snow completely vanished, and the air grew as warm as spring. As the sun shone down on them, flowers bloomed and birds settled in the now blossoming trees, singing joyfully. For the duration of the supper, the garden was bathed in sunshine, but once the meal was finished and the attendees rose to leave, the season changed in the blink of an eye and winter returned once more.

Needless to say, this incredible feat only enhanced the reputation of Albertus Magnus, who had been born mere Albert de Groot.

He continued as head of his Dominican order and for a time, served as Bishop of Regensburg. His theological career was impressive and though he was made a saint in 1931, some still prefer to remember him as an alchemist and philosopher. Fittingly, Albertus Magnus was named the patron saint of natural scientists in 1941.

On the site where the Dominican monastery once stood in Cologne, Albertus Magnus is commemorated by a plaque; sadly, the magical garden where he once controlled the seasons is long since lost.

"The garden was bathed in sunshine, but once the meal was finished and the attendees rose to leave, the season changed in the blink of an eye and winter returned"

Below: William II, Count of Holland and King of the Romans, was treated to a miraculous change of season in the blink of an eye



Below: Theologian, bishop, rumoured alchemist and eventual saint, Albertus Magnus turned a frigid midwinter night into spring to host a very special supper party



MYTH & MAGIC



Cities of SORCERY

*Wherever you journey in Europe, there is no escaping magical
meaning – even in some of the continent's most cosmopolitan cities*



WORDS ALICE PATILLO



Witchcraft is more often than not associated with rural locations, small villages, forests and fields, but while the countryside is no doubt teeming with folk magic and mystical wisdom, not all sorcery is confined to the natural landscape – urban areas are rich with magic too, particularly alchemy and ‘high’ or ceremonial magic. Many of Europe’s cities have been inhabited for millennia. They have seen it all. And just because we have moved so far from superstition and into scientific advancement, losing some of the beauty and history by flattening historic buildings filled with passionate workmanship and artistic magic and replacing them with modern skyscrapers, housing and offices, it doesn’t mean there aren’t magical secrets still hidden within them. Look beyond the hustle and bustle of modern-day city life and the same old copy-and-paste coffeehouse conglomerates and multinational chainstores and you’ll see that towns and cities aren’t just alive with the rat race of consumerism, they are alive with the ghosts of their pasts.

In late medieval to early modern Europe, alchemy – particularly the idea of turning metal into gold and finding

a mythical elixir of immortality – was a respected science and all the rage with the kings, queens and nobles of the continent, despite it being deemed heresy and prohibited by the Church. Queen Elizabeth I of England employed alchemist John Dee as her trusted advisor and court astronomer, and he would provide guidance to her through divination techniques. Sweden’s Queen Christina even dabbled in alchemy herself, as did Holy Roman Emperor Rudolf II, who was a patron of the occult sciences and consulted Nostrodamus. His lifelong quest to find the philosopher’s stone even led him to transport England’s leading alchemists, John Dee and Edward Kelley, all the way to Prague. Prague itself was a hub of alchemy during this time, and the art was allowed to be practised within the city’s Jewish quarter. In 2002, an original alchemist’s workshop, known as Speculum Alchemiae, was discovered during the renovation of one of the Czech city’s oldest buildings of the old Jewish Quarter following a flood and is an essential visit for anyone interested in the mystical arts.

With so much surviving medieval and Renaissance architecture scattered throughout European cities, it shouldn’t

be a surprise that they are still teeming with folklore, mythological associations, alchemical and esoteric symbology and occult energies. And you can discover them all – if you only know where to look! The signs are often hidden in plain sight and can transform the way you look at city life.

Take a look at the French capital, Paris, for example. Just beside the iconic Stravinsky fountain lies the Church of Saint-Merri. Look up above the entrance and you will see the figure of Baphomet carved into the stone, a symbol used by the Knights Templar and associated with Satanism and the occult. And this is just one of numerous mystical monuments hidden behind the facade of the “city of love”. But it’s not just Paris and Prague that are teeming with lore. Pick any town or city in Europe and you are almost guaranteed to discover some long-lost secrets of sorcery and the supernatural. From fun curiosities to tragic tales of persecution and misfortune, these municipalities are curated exhibitions of our cultural past, teeming with hearsay and legend and changing superstitions and beliefs. And there are some towns and cities so rich with mythical and magical history there is a tale to tell on every street...

Left: From folk magic to ceremonial secret societies, Europe is rife with the relics of our mystical past

Britain's witch villages

You needn't be a witchfinder to stumble across a witch in England

PENDLE

Location: Lancashire, England, UK

Time zone: UTC 0

Currency: Pound sterling (£)

12 people were found accused of murder by witchcraft in the villages surrounding the mysterious Pendle Hill in 1612, all of whom were sentenced to death by hanging save one, who died before the trial. Today you can learn about the Pendle Witch Trials by visiting the Pendle Heritage Centre in Barrowford. Retrace the accused's journey all the way to their execution in Lancaster by following the Pendle Witches Trail walk, spot the witch sculptures dotted throughout the countryside, or jump in the car and follow the road trail.



Left: The tragedy of the Pendle Witch trials will never be forgotten

BURLEY

Location: Hampshire, England, UK **Time zone:** UTC 0 **Currency:** Pound sterling (£)

Burley's link to magic is mostly thanks to infamous white witch of the 1950s Sybil Leek. Due in part to the locals finding issue with her peculiar nature, habit of wearing a long black cloak and her pet jackdaw perched upon her shoulder, Sybil was cast out of Burley and moved to

America – but not before she had made her mark on the historic New Forest village. You can find a large portrait of Sybil, along with a ghostly cat and a large variety of witchy goodies for sale, in A Coven of Witches – the local shop she was responsible for naming.



Right: This picturesque Hampshire town has a magical past



Left: Boscastle's Museum of Witchcraft and Magic is a must-visit for lovers of all things magic

BOSCASTLE

Location: Cornwall, England, UK

Time zone: UTC 0

Currency: Pound sterling (£)

This small, picturesque coastal village is home to possibly the largest collection of occult items in the world. Founded by Cecil Williamson, a friend of Gerald Gardner and Aleister Crowley, the Museum of Witchcraft and Magic features thousands of unique artefacts related to many esoteric traditions, but focuses heavily on historical folk magic. Step inside a traditional 18th century cottage and inspect herbal remedies and divination tools, pay your respects to those who lost their lives in England's early-modern witch trials, and discover the origins of Wicca.

TOLEDO

Location: Castilla-La Mancha, central Spain **Time zone:** UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro (€)

Just an hour from Madrid you'll reach the former capital of the Visigoth kingdom, world heritage site Toledo. This ancient and beautiful city is said to have been home to the oldest and most famous school of magic during the Middle Ages. Thanks to its multicultural influences – the city has been occupied by Jews, Christians and Muslims – a variety of theological beliefs, philosophies and esoteric secrets were shared between cultures at this time, and knowledge that was lost to Christian Europe could be translated into Latin and spread throughout the West. Amongst this lost knowledge were the arts of astrology, alchemy and occult sorcery such as geomancy (earth divination) and necromancy (communicating with the dead).

In fact, during the Middle Ages, Spain itself was seen as the mystical hub of Europe, as it were, and the top place to be if you were into the occult was Toledo. Legends regarding this mystical hub were spawned, including that daemons taught at its school of occult sciences. But by the late medieval to early modern period, you didn't want to be flying the flag for the occult. The Church was clamping down on so-called heresy and aiming to wipe out non-Christian beliefs

by rebranding them as satanic. So it is no surprise that it is in Europe's mystical hub, Spain, that the satanic witch was spawned. While the cultured people of Toledo believed that magic users could control demons and were not controlled by them, further north rumours spread that in the Aneu Valley, high up in the Pyrenees mountain range in Catalonia, locals were being terrorised by high-ranking officials who were in cahoots with bruxas (the medieval Catalan term for Roman striges – child-killing nocturnal demons – which would later become bruja, the Spanish term for witch) to pay homage to the devil. Campaigns from Catholic priests quickly led to the idea that these satanic cults were prevalent across Europe, particularly in remote, mountainous regions, and that unsanctioned magic and witchcraft were the work of a devilish pact. This harmful stereotype led to the widespread witch panic and the execution of hundreds of thousands of innocent people throughout Europe and beyond. Today, you can delve into the story of how the wise healing woman became the evil, cackling witch at the Brujeria Museum.

Essential info: Take the train for a day trip from Madrid and tour the historic city of Toledo by foot

Below: Toledo was an occult epicentre during the Middle Ages



TURIN

Location: Piedmont, Italy **Time zone:** UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro (€)

Dubbed “World Capital of Magic” back in 2018, Turin earned its nickname as “the magical city” long before, thanks to its location. According to legend, this Italian city was founded by an Egyptian prince and demigod, brother to Osiris, Eridanus, who chose the location due to its rivers, the Po (representative of the sun) and the Dora (the moon), which form a ring around the city. It is also believed to be situated at the intersection of two metaphorical magical triangles: the white magic triangle formed with the cities of Prague in the Czech Republic and Lyon in France, and the black magic triangle between the cities of London, England, and San Francisco in the United States. This duality of light and dark is echoed throughout the city, with various landmarks linked to either dark or light energies with the two sides believed to meet at the Piazza del Palazzo. Beneath the city streets are a series of underground tunnels that are believed to lead to alchemical caves. The Royal Palace is at the heart of Turin’s white magic, beneath which the first gallery of the tunnel system is reportedly located, and leads to Statuto Square, the black magic epicentre – a western

facing former site of execution and burial said to be built on top of a gateway to hell which now features a large monument of the angel Lucifer. Contrastingly, at the white magic-charged Piazza Solferino, you can find the gateway to infinity and another fountain bursting with esoteric symbolism. Another tunnel reportedly leads from below the Piazza Castello city square – there is an important alchemical cave beneath the Palazzo Madama – possibly leading to the Gran Madre di Dio Church, which is also associated with white magic. A third tunnel system is said to exist but its location is unknown. It is within this cave that, according to legend, the magician Apollonius di Tyana hid the philosopher’s stone in a cave beneath the city. Along with its position within two magical triangles, Turin is located at the foot of the Italian Alps – an awe-inspiring mountain range that is rampant with superstition and folklore regarding witchcraft and magic.

Essential info: Turin has two airports: Caselle Airport and Cuneo Levaldigi Airport both offer easy access for international tourists and all of the city’s sights can be all seen on foot

Below: Turin harbours a hidden secret



ROME

Location: Italy **Time zone:** UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro (€)

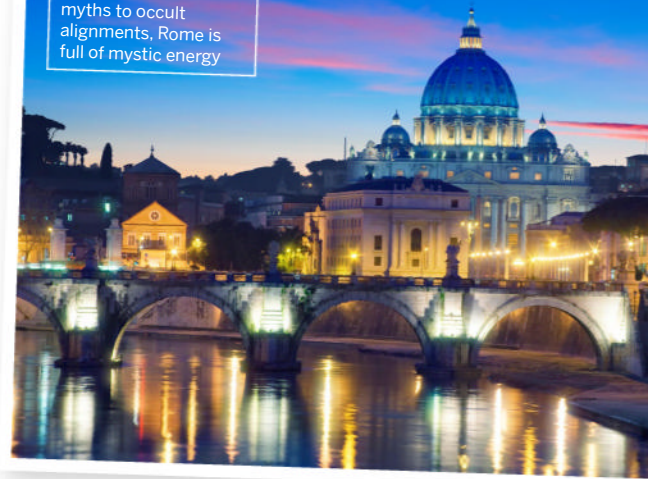
Known as the Eternal City, Rome's esoteric past can be traced back to its foundation. It is said to have been established by Romulus and Remus – two mythical twin brothers and sons of the god Mars, infamously saved by a mother wolf – their image, suckling from the she-wolf, has become the city's emblem. Magic was practised by most Romans, in one form or another, from divination and astrology to herbal potions and symbols of protection. Almost everything was imbued with some form of mystical and mythical meaning. The city was originally designed in a polygonal shape, its perimeter creating an eight-pointed star-shape representing the sun. All of the city's most significant monuments are placed upon these lines.

But the city's links to sorcery didn't end with the Empire. Enter one of Rome's most famous Christian monuments, the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore, and you will discover a mysterious Sator Square inside its basement. The origins of these palindrome puzzles are unknown, but they date back to pagan Rome. During the Middle Ages they

were used in spellwork and folk magic as a charm and symbol of protection. Rome was also where alchemy-obsessed Swedish Queen Christina established a second court and held huge cultural influence at the time. Head to the nearby Piazza Vittorio and you will find a now boarded up Alchemical Door. Probably the scribbles of one of Christina's courtiers, the alchemist Francesco Borri, the door is inscribed with enigmatic alchemical symbols, Latin and Hebrew writings and is said to hold the secret to the philosopher's stone – if only it could be decoded.

Buried at the Basilica of San Giovanni in Laterano, is the controversial 'Wizard Pope', Gerberto D'Aurillac (Pope Sylvester II). Legend has it that he was in league with the devil and when his tomb was opened some 645 years after his death, his corpse was revealed to be intact before immediately turning to dust. The lawn of Basilica of San Giovanni in Laterano is also said to have been the spot where witches congregated on the eve of the Feast of St. John the Baptist. And within the Villa Torlonia is the Casina delle

Right: From Roman myths to occult alignments, Rome is full of mystic energy



Civette (House of Owls), the fantastical, fairytale-like residence designed at the wish of Prince Giovanni Torlonia, a mysterious man with a love of all things magical.

Essential info: The easiest way to get around Rome is by public transport. Roma Passes include 48 or 72 hours of public transport access and the entry to one or two museums or experiences of your choice plus discounts on additional exhibitions too



Founded by the Romans on land occupied by warring Gallic and Celtic tribes, magic has imbued the UK capital for thousands of years, from ancient Roman protection amulets to medieval spellcraft, Elizabethan sorcery, Renaissance alchemy and Victorian high magic. During the Elizabethan era London became the largest and most congested city in Europe, home to alchemists, cunning folk and other professionals of the occult sciences, most notably John Dee. Dee's polished obsidian scrying mirror, his crystal ball and other magical relics can be found in the British Museum's Enlightenment Gallery. Dee is believed

LONDON

Location: England, UK **Time zone:** UTC 0 **Currency:** Pound sterling (£)

to have conjured up a demon to create the British Empire from a stone circle situated on a ley line located in Mudchute Park on the Isle of Dogs. Rumour has it his ritual led to the death of writer Christopher Marlowe.

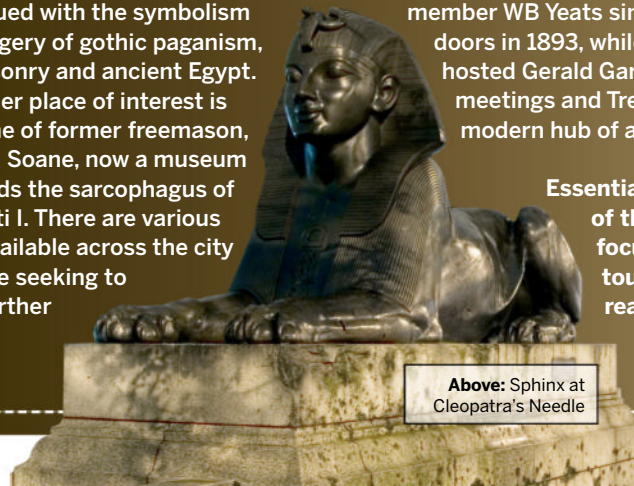
Nicholas Hawksmoor, known as the Devil's Architect, built a number of notable churches across the city, whose locations are said to form a pentagram. Whether they do or not, his buildings are imbued with the symbolism and imagery of gothic paganism, freemasonry and ancient Egypt.

Another place of interest is the home of former freemason, Sir John Soane, now a museum that holds the sarcophagus of King Seti I. There are various tours available across the city for those seeking to delve further into the occult,

promising to take you to the former headquarters of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, Wicca founder Gerald Gardner's London home, and even the spot where infamous occultist Eliphas Levi supposedly attempted to summon up the dead.

Before you leave the city, be sure to head to some of the oldest and best occult bookshops: Watkins served Aleister Crowley and Golden Dawn member WB Yeats since opening its doors in 1893, while Atlantis once hosted Gerald Garner's coven meetings and Treadwell's is a modern hub of all things esoteric.

Essential info: Book one of the many occult-focused guided tours of London to really delve into the secrets of the city and its magic



Above: Sphinx at Cleopatra's Needle

Legends *of the* BASQUE COUNTRY

Quashed by the arrival of Christianity and all but lost, the beliefs of the ancient Basque people were rich in legend

WORDS CATHERINE CURZON

When Christianity came to the ancient Basque people of northern Spain between the 4th and 12th centuries CE, it left no room for their traditional belief system. Based on the four elements, with earth at its centre, Basque mythology was almost silenced. What trace of it remains today can be found in legend and scattered, fragmentary references to these ancient rituals. As they developed over centuries, their beliefs incorporated elements of other groups including the Romans and early

Christians, bringing in a wealth of figures and legends to join those that had been passed down for centuries.

Although the elements of earth, fire, air and water were important to Basque tradition, earth was at the centre of their beliefs. Unlike the Christian God, Basque deities didn't live in the heavens, but on or below the earth itself, with the sky simply a channel used for travel by these divine beings. Central to the mythology was the shapeshifting goddess of earth, Mari, and her consort, Sugaar, the serpentine god of thunder. Mari

was at the heart of Basque belief long before Christianity came to the region and can be found in one of her many sanctuaries across the land. Goddesses play a huge role in the culture, with Eguzki Amandrea and Ilargi Amandrea, the deities of the sun and moon respectively, also female.

One of the most popular characters from Basque myth was the charcoal burner Olentzero, who visits Basque homes on 24 December each year to hand out gifts. This Basque Father Christmas may not wear a red suit but is just as generous and beloved as his more famous counterpart.

Less welcome as a visitor is Akerbeltz o Aker, a goat-like character with two faces to match his two personalities. On the one hand, the kindly side cares for and protects animals. On the other, however, he is at the head of supernatural covens and a lover of excess and hedonism. Often associated with fertility, the early Christians interpreted Akerbeltz o Aker as the devil himself, who was intent on debauching and perverting the Christian faithful.

Filled with figures who were linked closely with the natural world, including lamia, or sirens, subservient gnomes, and legendary ancient Basque heroes who possessed superhuman strength, Basque mythology is rich and fascinating. Though much has been lost, what remains offers a fascinating glimpse into a culture that could not be entirely silenced.

Below: The earth goddess Mari is central to ancient Basque belief; she dwelt on earth, at the heart of the land she loved



Above: The bearded, portly and reclusive Olentzero is a welcome guest when he visits Basque children on 24 December to hand out presents!



Location:
Basque
Autonomous
Community
(Euskadi), Spain

Time zone:
UTC+1

Currency:
Euro (€)



Above: When Christianity arrived
ancient Basque beliefs were
threatened. Thankfully, those
traditions weren't lost

Donjons & DRAGONS

What terrors lurk in the walls of the world's most fearsome fortresses? Castles weren't just opulent homes, they were citadels; strongholds designed to endure invasion, built not only to fight off their enemies but to capture, imprison and torture them. If you are seeking spine-chilling spectres, these palace phantoms won't disappoint...



WORDS ALICE PATTILLO & APRIL MADDEN

MALAHIDE CASTLE

Location: Dublin, Ireland **Time zone:** UTC **Currency:** Euro (€)

The imposing Malahide Castle to the north of Dublin was the ancestral seat of the Talbot family for 791 years, from 1185, when the land was first granted to Richard Talbot by Henry II of England, until 1976 when the estate was sold to the Irish state.

Thanks to this long history and its position close to the Irish capital, Malahide has witnessed more than its fair share of drama and turmoil over the centuries. This included the Battle of the Boyne in 1690, during which the Talbots came out on the side of the deposed Catholic king, James II – only to lose all but one of the 14 male members of the family who fought that day.

40 years earlier, in 1649, the castle was seized by Oliver Cromwell and given to his supporter, the MP for Yarmouth, Miles Corbett, who signed the death warrant of

Charles I and was subsequently hanged, drawn and quartered for regicide two years after the restoration of Charles II. It's said that Corbett's spirit not only appears in the castle's great hall on the anniversary of his execution, but that he also occasionally manifests in full armour that then falls apart around him in four pieces, apparently reflecting the gruesome manner of his death.

Another one of the castle's ghosts allegedly dates from the 16th century and is said to be the spirit of a dwarf jester called Puck who fell in love with the beautiful Lady Eleanor Fitzgerald. He either took his own life after being rejected or was murdered by her family to prevent the lovers from eloping, but nonetheless he is said to be a mischievous ghost who loves to prank visitors and appear in photographs.

But the best-known phantoms at Malahide are said to be the ghosts of Walter Hussey, Lord Galtrim, and his love, Lady Matilda Plunkett. According to legend, Hussey was killed by a love rival on his way to his wedding and now haunts the halls of Malahide, clutching a fearful spear wound in his side and groaning in agony. Lady Matilda also haunts the castle along with her second husband, with whom she had an extremely stormy relationship – to the extent that she has reportedly been seen furiously chasing his ghost through the castle corridors.

The other female ghost said to haunt Malahide is much more sedate. A beautiful young lady in white, her portrait hangs in the great hall and she has allegedly been seen walking around the castle at night.

“Corbett’s spirit appears in the castle’s great hall on the anniversary of his execution”



Above: Malahide Castle is said to be haunted by five ghosts including a white lady, a lovesick jester called Puck and the protagonists of a stormy love triangle

Right: English parliamentarian Miles Corbett was given the castle by Oliver Cromwell but joined the host of castle ghosts after he was executed for regicide



LEAP CASTLE

Location: County Offaly, Ireland **Time zone:** UTC **Currency:** Euro (€)

Claimed to be the most haunted site in all of Ireland, Leap Castle hides a dark and treacherous past behind its walls. Allegedly built on the site of a druid initiation site, which was chosen for being the crossing of two ley lines, it is claimed that the barrier between the physical and spiritual realms are particularly thin here, resulting in paranormal activity that exaggerated the site's aura – both good and bad.

Even before it was built, the castle was bathed in blood, condemning the site to negative paranormal activity. Built by the O'Bannon clan in the 13th century, the family was in the midst of a dilemma – two brothers contested each other's claim as chieftain. To solve the issue, both brothers jumped into a rocky gorge, the survivor taking the title.

200 years later, the Earl of Kildare attempted to seize the castle several times, the last attempt succeeding in destroying part of it. The castle soon landed in the lap of the O'Carroll clan. The O'Carrolls, too, were engaged in a serious sibling rivalry. Following the death of the chieftain in 1532, two sons feuded over the right to lead. One a warrior, the other a priest, both claimed that it was their right. One day, as the priest held mass for some family, his brother stormed in. Outraged that the priest had started the mass before all of the family had arrived, he leapt towards the priest and plunged his

sword straight through his heart. The priest collapsed over his altar, soaking it in his blood. To this day, the ghost of the priest has been seen around the chapel.

It's not just the murdered priest whose spirit remains at Leap Castle. The ghosts of two young girls have also been spotted at the site. Usually seen playing together, others have reported witnessing one of the girls falling from the battlements, while the other has been seen dragging a deformed leg behind her. These sisters, Emily and Charlotte, were thought to have lived there in the 1600s.

More inexplicable, perhaps, is the hybrid phantom that roams the grounds. Apparently as big as a sheep, but with the face of a human, this demon emits the foul stench of rotting flesh. If that's not bad enough, in place of eyes, the demon has empty, black pools. Nobody can explain its terrifying presence, but it has since been named the Elemental, and some theories claim that the spirit calls back to the days of the druids. Thankfully it's said that the Elemental doesn't appear unless you provoke it.

Even today, the castle's current owner, Sean Ryan, reports curious goings-on. While the castle was undergoing renovations, Sean reported that ladders have been pushed away from walls, as well as other unexplained accidents that have resulted in workers' broken limbs.

Below: Leap Castle in County Offaly has seen nearly eight centuries of turmoil... and ghostly reminders abound



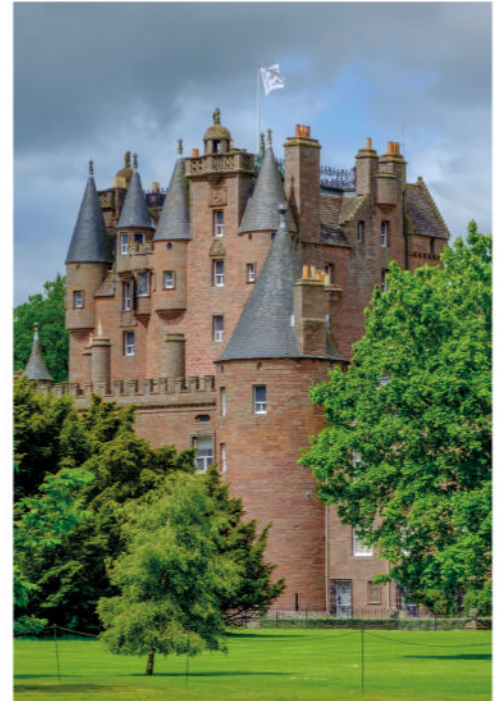
GLAMIS CASTLE

Location: Angus, Scotland **Time zone:** UTC **Currency:** Pound sterling (£)

Although beautiful, romantic Glamis Castle is now perhaps best known as the childhood home of Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, and birthplace of Princess Margaret, it is also synonymous with several ghost stories as a result of its connections to Scotland's dark and bloody past and mention in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.

In the 11th century, Glamis was a royal hunting lodge where, in 1034, the Scottish king Malcolm II was either murdered or died after escaping a nearby battle. The castle remained in royal hands until 1372, when it was granted to Robert II's son-in-law Sir John Lyon, Thane of Glamis, who replaced the lodge with a castle. The Lyon family remained close to the royal Stewarts until the 16th century, when James V, father of Mary Queen of Scots, had Janet Douglas, wife of the Sixth Lord Glamis, arrested for treason and witchcraft and burnt at the stake in Edinburgh Castle in July 1537. After such a violent end, it's no wonder that many people believe that the mysterious 'Grey Lady' who haunts the chapel and clock tower at Glamis is the wraith of the unfortunate Lady Janet. Meanwhile, the West Tower

of the castle is said to be haunted by the spectre of Earl Beardie, said to be Alexander Lindsay, Fourth Earl of Crawford, a man of such evil character that on at least one occasion he hunted one of his own servants before setting his dogs on the unfortunate man, who is also said to haunt the castle. According to legend, when the wicked earl and his cronies committed sacrilege by playing cards on the Sabbath, it attracted the attention of the devil, who disguised himself as a fellow gambler and won the Earl's soul, forcing him to play cards for all eternity. Perhaps the most troubling legend associated with the castle is that of the Monster of Glamis, who is said to have been the true heir to the earldom but was so deformed that his parents had him raised in secret in one of the castle's many hidden rooms. According to legend, an unfortunate maidservant accidentally saw the boy and had her tongue cut out to ensure that she could never tell anyone else – eventually becoming yet another one of the castle's many ghosts herself, with more than one visitor claiming to have seen a spectral woman with a bleeding mouth. It's said that



the identity of the 'monster' is passed on to every heir to the earldom when he comes of age, with the Queen Mother's own father once reportedly saying: "If you could even guess the nature of this castle's secret, you would get down on your knees and thank God it was not yours."

GWRYCH CASTLE

Location: Abergele, Wales **Time zone:** UTC **Currency:** Pound sterling (£)

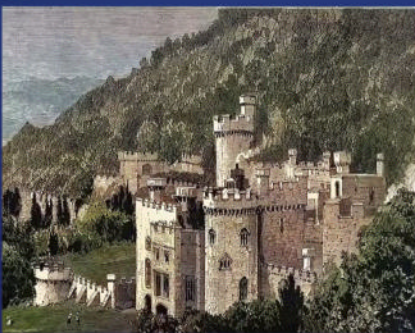
Wales is known as "the land of castles" thanks to the fact that it has more castles per square mile than any other country in Europe, 427 of them in fact! Many date back to the Middle Ages and are riddled with phantoms, including the capital city's fortress Cardiff Castle, Pembrokeshire's creepy Carew Castle, Caerphilly Castle and the cursed Craig Y Nos. But the most eerie of all is Gwrych Castle thanks to its extensive size and its forlorn appearance. Although one of Wales' younger fortresses (it only dates back 200 years), it has been used as a site for reenactments and filming locations thanks to its imposing size. The

castle has fallen into disrepair, however, with its once regal marble staircase, cold, empty rooms with peeling plaster, and exposed entrances to once hidden passageways. Money earned from filming is going towards its preservation – but no amount of cash can rid the estate of its ghosts. The site is rumoured to be haunted by Countess Winifred, who died in 1924, the ghost of a former servant girl who supposedly died falling off a horse, a lady in red or white, and numerous other phantoms.

Many visitors have reported a strange feeling of being watched, bad vibes, and hearing the sound of footsteps.

TIPS

Book onto one of the castle's regular ghost hunt nights where you will be provided with paranormal investigation equipment and can take part in table tapping and divination





MOOSHAM CASTLE

Location: Austria **Time zone:** UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro (€)

Popularly known as the Witches' Castle, Moosham was home to some of the darkest moments in Austrian history. Between 1675 and 1690, its spooky walls were at the heart of the Salzburg Witch Trials, where those accused of witchcraft were tried, tortured and condemned. Over the 15 years of trials, more than 130 people were condemned to death, while countless more victims suffered horrific torture, brutality and abuse.

Curiously, most of the people accused of witchcraft were men, and the accusers weren't particular about who their accusations fell upon; those who were executed varied from ten years old all the way up to 80. Arguably those who weren't executed faced a worse fate than those who were. Thousands were tortured, and until their dying day, they were marked as a witch.

Most of those accused of witchcraft were beggars, paupers and the homeless. One particularly unfortunate beggar, a 12-year-old boy, became known as Wizard Jackl. The government fiercely hunted him after he disappeared following the execution of his mother in 1675. Despite hearing rumours of the boy's death two years later, the government rounded up his friends on the streets under the accusation that they'd been taught black magic by their long-gone friend. Under torture, the children told tales of Jackl's power and barbarity, claiming that he could make himself invisible, eventually convincing the government that they'd rather not find the boy.

Moosham's mystical credentials don't end there. In the 19th century, hundreds of deer and cattle were found dead all around the castle. Naturally many residents leapt to the conclusion that werewolves were responsible, and several castle residents were tried and executed under the accusation that they were leading secret double lives as werewolves.

To this day, the castle is apparently host to several paranormal presences. Those who have visited the castle claim to have felt someone breathing on them, while others say they've been touched by some invisible being. More frequently, bangs, footsteps and apparitions have been reported. Perhaps that's no surprise given such history!

CACHTICE CASTLE

Location: Cachtice, Slovakia **Time zone:** UTC+1
Currency: Euro (€)

The notorious Hungarian countess, Elizabeth Bathory, was a wealthy and powerful 16th century noblewoman. But being a powerful, wealthy woman without a husband was a terrifying notion to 16th century Europe and rumours quickly circulated that she was a serial killer, torturing and killing women. If the conjecture is correct, Bathory could be responsible for the deaths of more than 600 young women – one of the most prolific female serial killers of all time.

Whether it was a witch hunt spurred on by her enemies or Bathory really was a bloodthirsty psychopath, the Countess was tried and sentenced to spend the rest of her days trapped inside the home where her victims had allegedly met their doom – the Castle of Csejte – where she died at age 43. Unsurprisingly, her servant accomplices didn't get quite such a lenient conviction, with three sentenced to death and only one getting off as lightly as their mistress. Bathory has become a figure of folklore, and more and more myths have spread about the Countess, including her penchant for selecting virgins, bathing in her victims' blood in an attempt to stay young forever and even drinking their vital fluids, earning her the epithets the Blood Countess and Countess Dracula.

The castle later fell into disrepair, but appeared as Count Orlok's home in the iconic 1922 silent horror film, *Nosferatu*, further cementing its link to vampires. The castle is said to be haunted by the tormented souls of the girls that the Countess murdered as well as Bathory herself, and today you can explore the disintegrated remains of the once extensive fortress. In the nearby town of Čachtice there is a small museum devoted to the Blood Countess at the nearby town museum as well as the church where her body was initially interred at her death.

Below: Čachtice castle
can be seen in *Nosferatu*

Right: 'Bloodthirsty'
noble Elizabeth Bathory



ELTZ CASTLE

Location: Wierschem, Germany **Time zone:** UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro (€)

This castle was once home to a young lady named Agnes Eltz. A daughter among many sons, Agnes grew up around the 16th century, pretending to be a warrior with her brothers rather than a princess. But like many girls of her age and status, Agnes was destined for an arranged marriage from a young age. Her parents' spouse of choice was the knight of Braunsberg. The pair met several times, but the young girl dismissed him as boring and chose to ignore him. One day, infuriated by her lack of interest, the knight grabbed Agnes and forced himself upon her. Outraged, Agnes pushed him away and slapped him round the face – a great embarrassment for her family. The knight's patience had worn thin, and her slap pushed him over the edge. He stormed out of Eltz Castle, vowing revenge for what he considered to be disrespectful behaviour.

For months, the Eltz family lived in fear of an attack – but it didn't come. Lulled into a sense of security, the

family resumed their usual lives. But the knight hadn't forgotten. For months he stewed in his resentment, plotting how to take revenge for the slight by Agnes. One day, when the Eltz men went out hunting, Braunsberg and his soldiers stormed the castle, killing the guardsmen and attacking anyone else in sight. Agnes, more the brave soldier than a fragile maiden, leapt into action, donning her brother's suit of armour and storming out to attack the knight. Braunsberg fought back, dealing her a fatal blow to the chest. It was only after the battle that the knight realised that the ferocious warrior he'd killed was his own betrothed. He fled the scene.

Agnes' ghost now defends her castle; and in turn, a phantom horseman – the apparition of the knight of Braunsberg – has been seen riding near the gates seeking forgiveness.

TIPS

If you visit the castle at Eltz, you'll pass through the gates at its entrance. A guard, only visible to some, has paced Eltz since Agnes' brutal death many centuries ago



Far left: Philipp Karl von Eltz-Kempenich, one of the early proprietors of this spooky pile

Left: The majestic Eltz Burg towers above the river Moselle like a fairytale... and a dark one at that



HOUSKA CASTLE

Location: Blatce, Czechia **Time zone:** UTC+1 **Currency:** Czech koruna

About 50km away from Prague stands a castle that seemingly serves absolutely no purpose. Houska Castle was built in the 14th century by the Bohemian ruler Ottokar II.

The castle changed hands several times, enjoying a Renaissance redesign in the late-16th century, before falling into disrepair in the 18th century. By the 20th century, the curious legend of Houska Castle had attracted the attention of one particular group of people: the Nazis.

Unlike other fortresses of the period, it wasn't meant to house the king. The castle wasn't near any trading route and there was no access to water. Defences were built inside the castle rather than outside – instead of keeping people out, it seemed like the castle was meant to trap something else in.

According to lore, this apparently pointless construction was, in fact, built over the gates of hell. A bottomless hole had existed at Houska for centuries, a gateway for demons and evil beings to enter Earth and terrorise people. The area has long been avoided by locals, and even to this day the castle is given a wide berth, with only the inquisitive daring to set enter.

Above this fateful hole stands the chapel, dedicated to none other than the leader of God's army, Archangel Michael. Frescoes decorate the

walls – but their gory tales give an insight into what lurks below, with left-handed demons clawing their way out of the scenes.

However, before the chapel's construction, the hole was involved in some sinister experiments. Attempts were made to fill the hole with rocks, but no matter how many rocks were thrown in, it never seemed to fill. It's alleged that one duke summoned prisoners who had been condemned to death and offered them a pardon if they agreed to be lowered into the hole. Many agreed, expecting to escape with their lives. They were mistaken. There was silence as one man was lowered down. Moments later, his uncontrollable screams echoed up from the depths. As he was hauled back out, they discovered his hair had turned white and he'd aged several decades. They never found out what was in there – it drove the prisoner to madness, and he died days later.

Houska Castle's secrets don't end there. Many visitors claim to have experienced supernatural encounters, from the ghost of a woman that stalks the corridors, to curious animal-like presences. It's these stories and supernatural sightings that struck a chord with the Nazis. From 1939 to 1945, Houska Castle was home to occult experiments, but records were destroyed and it's not known what happened here. However, several skeletons of Nazi officers were discovered during renovations.



AKERSHUS FESTNING

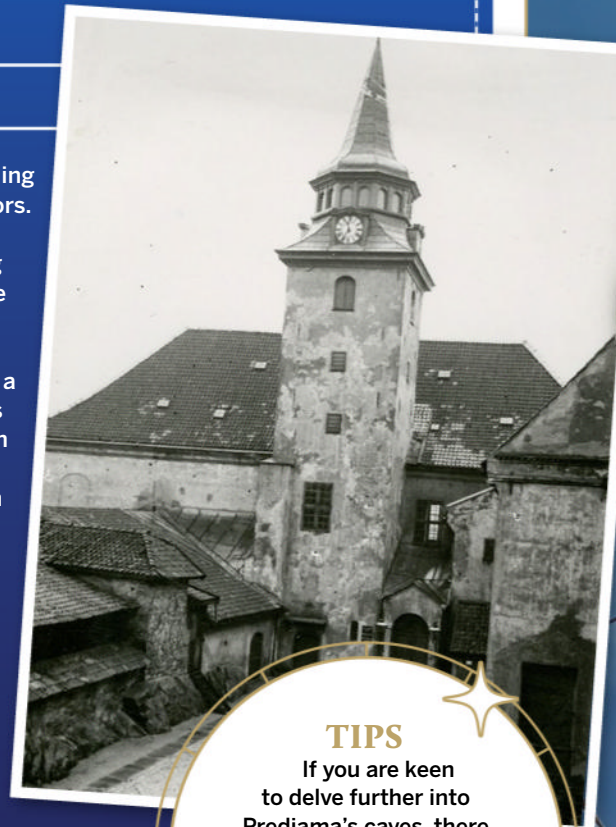
Location: Oslo, Norway **Time zone:** UTC+1 **Currency:** Norwegian kroner

Built under King Haakon V in 1299 as a castle, Akershus Festning was home to generations of Norwegian rulers and is an important landmark of the Norwegian capital. The fortress has withstood a number of sieges and has even functioned as a notorious prison where Norway's answer to Robin Hood, Ole Høiland, committed suicide in 1848. When a prison, part of the castle was dubbed the Slaveriet ('Slavery'), where prisoners were subjected to extreme hard labour, causing many a death. This is perhaps the reason why the fortress has earned the title of Norway's most haunted building. Staff have claimed to hear



whisperings and feel strange forces pushing them when walking along its dark corridors. Others have reported disembodied voices, battle screams, sounds of rattling chains, footsteps, sensations of someone breathing down their neck and strange smells. Legend has it that the former gatekeeper of the castle, Garshol, buried a guard dog alive at the Maiden Tower. This poor pup is now known as the Malcanisen ('vicious dog'), returned from death in the form of a vengeful spirit, and if bitten by him you'll die within three months. Other ghosts include the Mantelgeisten – a faceless, cloaked woman seen at the Margaretasalen – and the horse of a drunken Swedish man, who was gunned down when he attempted to storm the castle. But it's the Virgin Tower, the castle's highest tower, that's said to be the most rife with paranormal activity.

Left: This gate is said to be prowled by a vengeful dog spirit



TIPS

If you are keen to delve further into Predjama's caves, there are extended tours – but not during the winter months, as the bats are not to be disturbed in their slumber!

PREDJAMA CASTLE

Location: Inner Carniola, Slovenia **Time zone:** UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro (€)

This medieval stronghold is built inside a bat-filled cave which has been inhabited by humans since Paleolithic times; and it's also said to be riddled with ghosts. The original 13th century castle was damaged from sieges and rebuilt in the 1500s only to be nearly destroyed by a massive earthquake in 1511. The current structure is a Renaissance castle, built in 1570. As the castle was built as an impregnable safe haven, designed to protect its residents from unwanted attacks, it has some rather interesting booby traps, such as holes in the ceiling of the entrance tower where boiling oil would be poured onto enemies, and a dungeon where bones have been discovered, a small court room and a torture chamber. According to psychics, the original owner of the castle, Erasmus of Lueg, a Robin-Hood-type knight in shining armour who was eventually murdered in his own home, still haunts Predjama seeking revenge towards the servant who betrayed him. Aside

from Erasmus, many have reported footsteps and voices, perhaps from the many souls who met their untimely demise at the castle, whether through violent ends or simply the natural disaster of 1511.



DRAGSHOLM CASTLE

Location: Zealand, Denmark **Time zone:** UTC+1 **Currency:** Danish kroner

Built in about 1215 by the Bishop of Roskilde, Dragsholm Castle's history is as rich and interesting as it is morbid. During the Middle Ages, the castle was overhauled and thoroughly fortified, making it the strongest castle at the time. As a testament to its strength, it stood resolute against the fiercely destructive armies of Christoffer, Count of Oldenburg, during the Count's feud of 1534 to 1536.

After the Reformation that followed, Dragsholm Castle fell into the hands of the state, where it was transformed into a prison for noble and high-ranking prisoners. Here, each prisoner received a cell built especially for them, while cells in the north east tower of the castle were equipped with toilets and windows. Perhaps the most infamous prisoner of

Dragsholm Castle was James Hepburn, 4th earl of Boswell, the third husband of Mary, Queen of Scots. Caught in Norway in 1573, the earl found himself transported to Dragsholm on the order of King Frederik II of Denmark. Here, he was tied to a pillar and was provided with only enough food and water to keep him alive. It's alleged that he went insane, dying almost five years after capture. Witnesses claim to have seen the ghost of the disgraced Earl of Boswell riding into the courtyard on his horse and carriage, the sound of the horse's hooves audible across the castle.

As well as James Hepburn, there are apparently more than 99 other ghosts that frequent the castle's hallways. The Mad Squire, a noble-born Dane who died at the castle, has been heard moaning

from the dungeons of the castle, while there are two ladies who haunt the corridors, one a disgraced daughter of a noble, the other a grateful worker. The Grey Lady, who had worked in the castle for years, and went to work one day complaining of toothache. Her master had given her some relief for the pain, but tragically the woman died. Yet thankful for the help her master had offered her, she stuck around.

The White Lady, however, met her maker after disgracing her father. Calina Bovles, the daughter of a noble, had fallen in love with a mere commoner and had become pregnant with his child. As evidence of her liaison grew, her father realised the atrocity that she had committed and locked her in a room until she died. Incidentally, during renovations, the skeleton of a woman wearing a white dress was uncovered in the 20th century.

TIPS

As well as a museum, Dragsholm Castle is also a hotel, so you can rent a room for a night



CHÂTEAU DE BRISSAC

Location: Loire Valley, France **Time zone:** UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro (€)

The gloriously ornate Château de Brissac has dominated the Loire Valley for centuries. Built initially as a castle in the 11th century, it was rebuilt in the 1400s, and then again in 1611. However, behind this impressive Baroque façade, the hidden secrets of the château's tragic past are kept.

A double murder that took place in the 15th century has haunted residents, with the

vision of the Green Lady terrifying visitors. After the château was rebuilt in the 1400s, Jacques de Brezé, the son of the man that commissioned the redesign, inherited the building. Jacques married a woman named Charlotte, the favoured illegitimate daughter of Charles VII of France. Yet their marriage had not been a happy one. Despite having five children, Charlotte's eye wandered, landing upon her husband's huntsman, Pierre de Lavergne, and their frenzied love affair began.

According to legend, Jacques walked in on his wife and her lover intertwined, after a servant came to him one evening after he returned from a hunting trip and told him the tale of his wife and her commoner lover. It was the final straw. Here, records become murky. Some claim that the lovers were murdered on the



TIPS

The château offers bed and breakfast (with a tour included) – if you are brave enough to stay the night

spot, with over one hundred blows from Jacques's sword delivering them to their messy deaths. However, others claim that Jacques

waited, murdering the pair separately. In this story, Charlotte was allegedly killed in the château's chapel, brutally strangled by the cuckold.

To this day, the ghost of Charlotte has been spotted roaming the halls. Known as the Green Lady, it's claimed that half of her face has already rotted away, leaving a blackened corpse with empty eye sockets and no nose. Visitors to the suites that are available to overnight guests have remarked that they've heard the dying screams and moans of the murdered couple along the corridors in the early hours of the morning. It's said Jacques left the château after the deadly deed, unable to bear these sounds.

CHÂTEAU DE TIFFAUGES

Location: Tiffauges, France **Time zone:** UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro (€)

Known as the Château de Barbe-bleue (Bluebeard's Castle) Château de Tiffauges was where the infamous serial killer Gilles de Rais committed his atrocious crimes. A lord and knight, born Gilles de Montmorency-Laval, Rais was a companion-in-arms of Joan of Arc during the Hundred Year's War (1337–1453) and was awarded the title Marshal of France. After he retired from the military he quickly spent all of his wealth on frivolity and was accused of dabbling in the occult – he attempted to summon a demon in the lower hall of the château, but it appears he wasn't particularly good at sorcery. Rumours began circulating that Rais was responsible for the disappearance of a large number of children around the Tiffauges area during the 1430s.

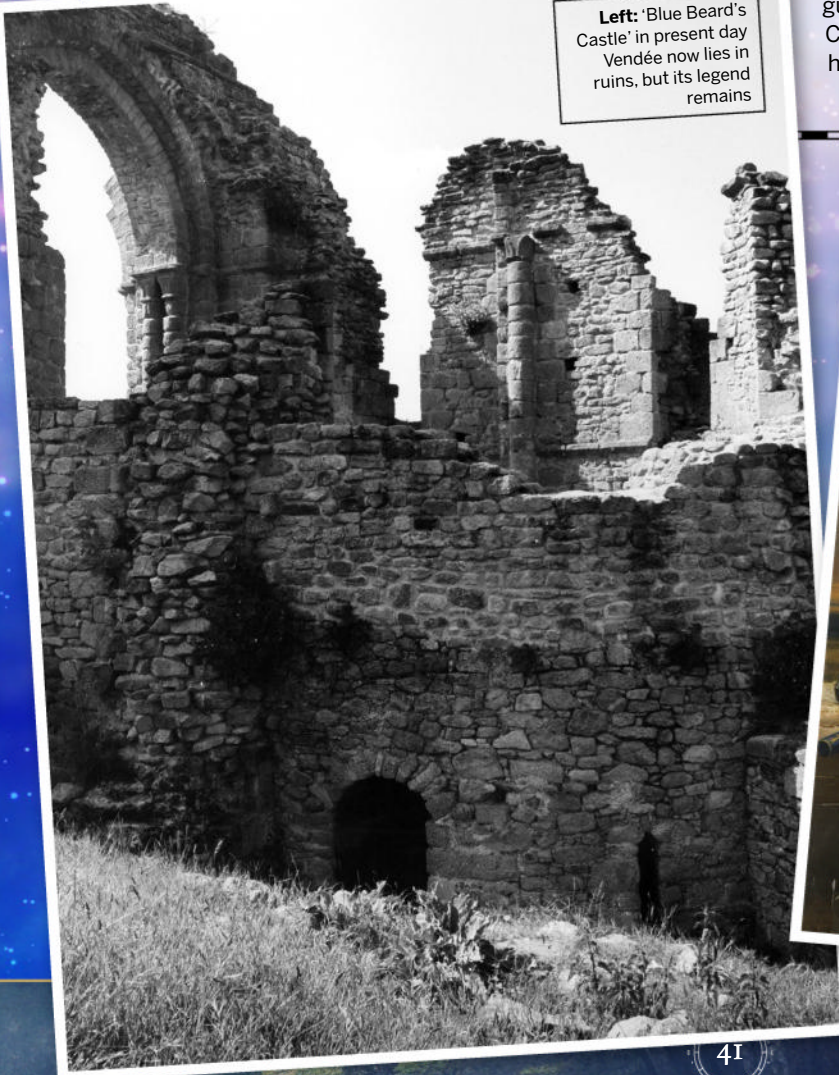
Finally, in 1440, a violent dispute with a clergyman verified the rumours and his true nature as a paedophile and serial killer, who had kidnapped and raped a number of young children (mostly boys) only to then have them killed or kill them himself. An ecclesiastical investigation led to the exposure of his crimes, of which Rais confessed, had begun in 1432, following the death of his grandfather. His cousins Gilles de Sillé and Roger de Briquerville assisted Rais in

at least one kidnapping, with Gilles de Sillé also being enlisted to murder children after they were assaulted. But it was Rais' bodyguard, Poitou, who was most often his accomplice, later testifying against him in court and giving a graphic description of his master's atrocities, inciting terror upon his juvenile victims and torture.

The parents of the missing children, witnesses who had seen Rais' servants dumping the children's bodies, and his own cohort also testified at the trial, and following threat of torture, Rais himself came clean and was sentenced to death. In his own confession, Rais reportedly admitted that "when the said children were dead, he kissed them and those who had the most handsome limbs and heads he held up to admire them, and had their bodies cruelly cut open and took delight at the sight of their inner organs; and very often when the children were dying he sat on their stomachs and took pleasure in seeing them die and laughed".

He was found guilty of sodomy, necrophilia, paedophilia and slaughtering over 100 children and sentenced to death in 1440 by hanging and burning. Like most medieval criminals, we can't say for sure whether or not he was guilty or just set up by the church in order for them to gain his wealth and usurp his power, however, most historians believe he was indeed guilty due to his own confession. Today the Château de Tiffauges is believed to be haunted by his vengeful spirit.

Left: 'Blue Beard's Castle' in present day Vendée now lies in ruins, but its legend remains



Below: The crimes that Gilles de Rais was tried for are horrific even by medieval standards



QUINTA DE REGALEIRA

Location: Sintra, Portugal **Time zone:** UTC **Currency:** Euro (€)

Part of Portugal's Cultural Landscape of Sintra – a UNESCO World Heritage Site – Quinta da Regaleira is a unique palace that has to be seen to be believed. It was built at the behest of eccentric Brazilian millionaire António Augusto Carvalho Monteiro (known as 'Moneybags Monteiro') in the late 19th century, with the design combining his passions for nature, mythology and philosophy. The result is an estate unlike anything that you'll find anywhere else.

The site has been open to the public since 1998, after it was acquired and restored by the local government. Visitors can explore the bewitching buildings, mysterious monuments and fairy-tale garden surroundings while scouting out examples of hidden symbolism along the way. Carvalho Monteiro's fascination with mysticism is reflected in the motifs and iconography related to alchemy, the Knights Templar, Freemasons and more that

can be found throughout the house and grounds.

The Regaleira house itself was a summer retreat for Carvalho Monteiro, and is a fantastical fusion of Manueline, Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque design. Its imposing facade features many intricate carvings, inscriptions and sculptures. Close to the main house sits the Roman Catholic chapel, decorated with frescoes, stuccoes and stained glass windows. However, the most intriguing features of the estate lie in – and under – the grounds, in the shape of the bizarre and complex routes around the beautiful gardens and grounds.

A maze of footpaths connect the site's many monuments. But there are also underground walkways in tunnels that link some areas with caves and grottoes. Quinta da Regaleira's design is intended to provide a connection between the physical and spiritual, and to reflect a journey towards enlightenment. The best place to

appreciate this sentiment is by looking up from the bottom of the Initiation Well, a 27-metre-deep (89-feet-deep) underground tower. Travelling through the dark subterranean tunnels to reach the well, and ascending its ten levels via the grand spiral staircase towards the sky above, is an almost otherworldly experience. And that's the idea. The well is intended to portray the link between Earth and the heavens above. Visitors are welcome to explore on their own, but audio and guided tours will offer much greater insight and reveal some of Regaleira's secrets that otherwise remain hidden in plain sight. Guided tours will teach you a great deal about the estate, its history and construction, and will help put the symbolic design details into context. It's a good idea to book in advance to make sure you secure a spot.

There's also the incongruously modern option of an augmented reality tour. Simply download the Quinta da Regaleira app to your device to follow it.

Below: The Initiation Well (which inspired the sets of *The Witcher*) is perhaps Regaleira's most beguiling feature

ALCÁZAR OF SEGOVIA

Location: Segovia, Spain **Time zone:** UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro (€)

This impressive medieval fortified palace overlooks the Castilian city of Segovia from its perch high above. Castilian princess Isabella (later queen of a unified Spain) was famed for her piety, but one of her predecessors in the Castilian royal family is thought to have provoked the wrath of God.

Alfonso X of Castile – nicknamed both ‘the Astrologer’ and ‘the Wise’ – once summoned his advisors to council in 1258. During their meeting, the king fell to boasting of his own wisdom, claiming that if God had asked his advice during the Creation, he would have made a much better world than the one the men found themselves in. A monk named Antonio immediately called on the king to take back his boast, but he refused. Suddenly, a huge storm blew up out of nowhere and destroyed the hall that the king’s council was meeting in.

It’s said that in penance the king had the destroyed parts of the castle rebuilt, including motifs that represented the Franciscan order of the wise monk who had tried to save him from his hubris.

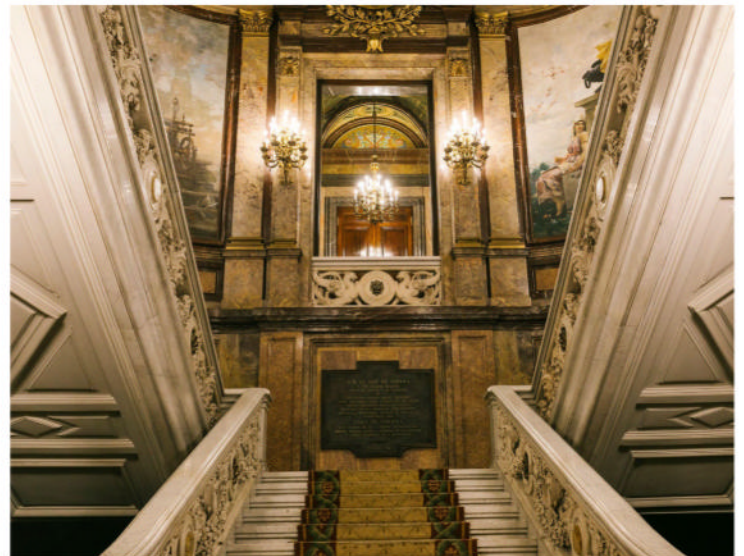


PALACIO DE LINARES

Location: Madrid, Spain **Time zone:** UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro (€)

This 19th century palace is known for its sweeping marble staircase, French-inspired architecture and ghostly apparitions. The first Marquises of Linares built the palace as his residence, and it is said he and his wife still haunt their former home. According to legend, the couple were half-siblings, unbeknownst to them before their marriage. Upon discovering this, they vowed to live in chastity but their passion for one another was too strong and they bore a daughter. To avoid scandal, they had her murdered and bricked up behind the palace walls, with the couple dying of grief by committing suicide merely months later. This, of course, is merely

conjecture, and there is no evidence the couple were related nor that they had any children. Nevertheless, the myth persists and the palace is said to be haunted by not only the couple but their child too, who is heard singing nursery rhymes and calling for her parents.



Dare you visit A DRAGON?

These castles and estates are said to be the haunts and homes of monstrous beasts from myth and legend



LAMBTON

Location: Lambton, England, UK
Time zone: UTC
Currency: Pound sterling (£)

The earldom of Durham only goes back to 1833, but the Lambton family who carry the title have been linked to the estate and village that bear their name for centuries. Legend has it that one of their ancestors, John Lambton, once chose to go fishing on a Sunday instead of to church. His only catch was a small and horrid-looking creature that a passerby told him was in fact the devil.

John grew up and joined the Crusades, but on his return he found the village, estate and castle being terrorised by the Lambton Worm (dragon) – the creature he caught so long ago. A good witch told him how to kill the beast, but it required a sacrifice. John arranged with his father that this would be their favourite hunting dog, but when the time came to release it the old man forgot in his excitement. To destroy the Worm, John was forced to kill his father instead, and for that a deadly curse was laid on nine generations of Lambton heirs.

SCHLOSS DRACHENBURG

Location: Königswinter, Germany **Time zone:** UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro (€)

This picture-perfect palace dates to the golden age of German Baroque castles – which means that it's still shy of 200 years old. In the 19th century there was a vogue for fairytale castles among the ruling princes and kings of imperial Germany. This one, however, has a legend to back it up. Schloss Drachenburg is built on the Drachenfels, the hills on which the legendary hero Siegfried was believed to have killed the dragon Fáfnir.

Having slaughtered the beast, the hero bathed in its blood in the hope of gaining immortality. Like Achilles however, he missed a spot. A part of his back was left vulnerable, and after a quarrel between the queens Kriemhild and Brünhild, the Burgundian warrior Hagen murdered Siegfried.



LENZBURG CASTLE

Location: Aargau, Switzerland **Time zone:** UTC+1 **Currency:** Swiss franc

This beautiful castle is one of Switzerland's most important, dating from the 11th century. The almost-circular hill that it's built upon was said to be the location of a cave that was

home to a dragon that terrorised the villagers living below. One day two knights arrived, the brothers Guntram and Wolfram. Baiting the beast from its lair they defeated it, and in

gratitude the villagers named the two Counts of Lenzburg, and encouraged them to build their castle atop the hill.

Today that castle is a tourist attraction, boasting magnificent grounds, a history museum, and interactive children's play areas, including an exhibit featuring the peaceful dragon Fauchi, said to have hatched from an egg laid by the original dragon. He even has a children's festival named after him. Unlike many other castle dragons of legend, Fauchi seems to be a friendly creature intent on fun!



CHÂTEAU DE MÉLUSINE

Location: Saint-Jean d'Angle, France **Time zone:** UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro (€)

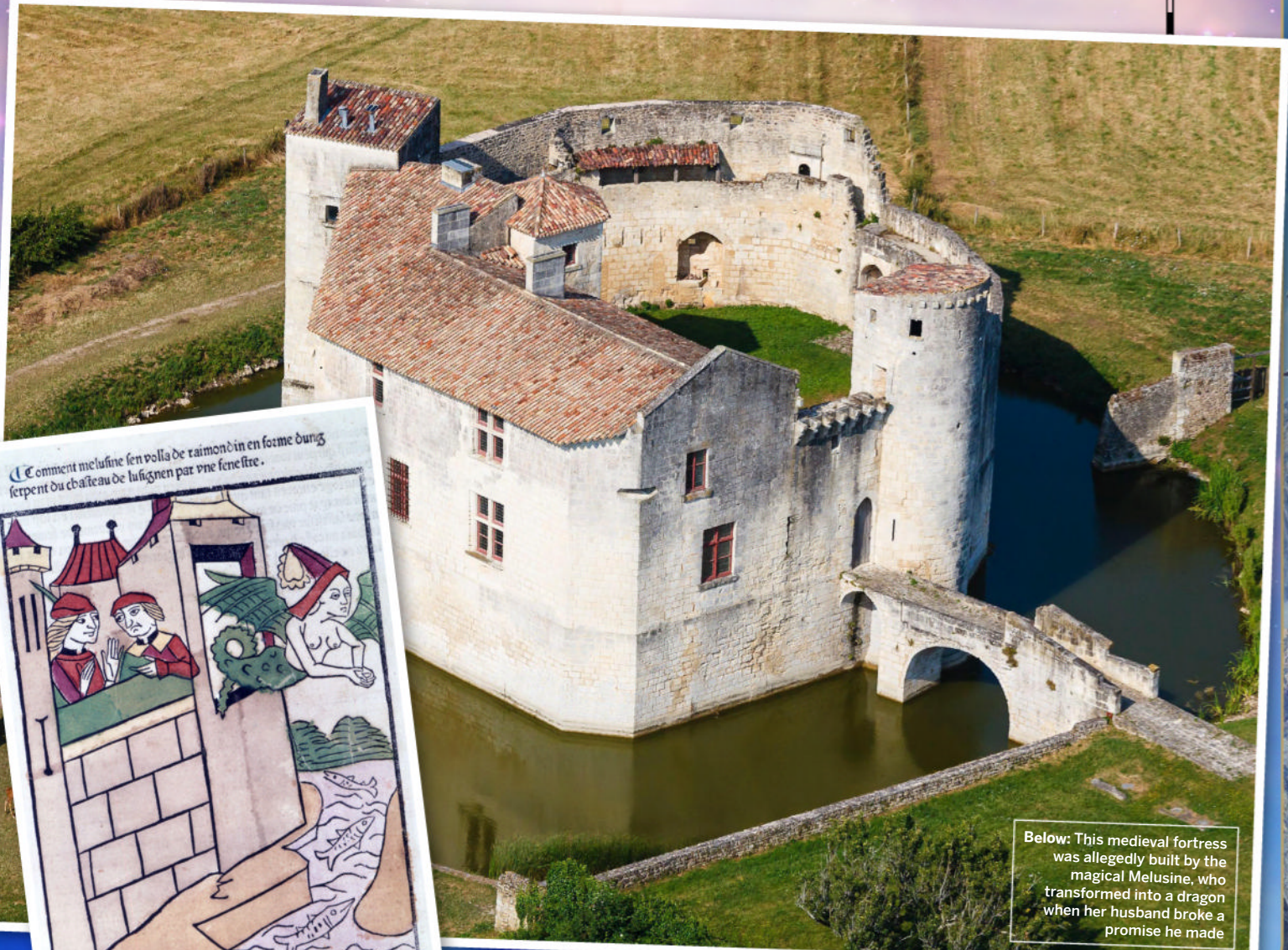
The half-fairy woman Melusine is a figure from Arthurian myth. The daughter of a Scottish king and a fairy queen, Melusine's family was broken apart when her father contravened a sacred promise he'd made to his wife. Raised in the mystical realm of Avalon, Melusine and her sisters plotted to murder their father.

When Melusine's mother discovered the plot she exiled her daughter from Britain and cursed her: every Saturday, the lower half of Melusine's body would turn into that of a two-tailed dragon. If she ever marries, her husband must never see this.

Melusine turns up again in Poitiers, France, where she meets Count Raymondin of Poitiers. The two fall in love, and when he proposes marriage, Melusine explains that he can never see her on a Saturday or he will invoke a mysterious curse, of which she can tell him no more. Wildly in love, the Count agrees.

Raymondin was lucky in love: Melusine's fairy magic gave her the ability to build incredible castles, one of which is the castle of Saint-Jean d'Angle, near La Rochelle, which today offers a truly immersive 12th century experience. Visitors are clad in the clothes of princesses and knights as they explore interactive exhibits of medieval life, including catapult shooting, games, a farmyard, archery and much more. The activities are all suitable for children.

Melusine's children had less fun, however. Raymondin grew suspicious of his wife hiding away on Saturdays and spied on her in her bath. Then, during an argument about their children, he revealed what he had seen in front of the whole court. The distraught Melusine transformed into a dragon and flew off, only returning in the depths of night to nurse her two youngest children. The Plantagenet kings of England claimed her as an ancestress through their links with the royal line of Anjou.



Below: This medieval fortress was allegedly built by the magical Melusine, who transformed into a dragon when her husband broke a promise he made

BRAN CASTLE

Location: Bran

Bran Castle is perched upon a cliff at the very edge of where Transylvania borders with Wallachia. Vlad “the Impaler” Tepes (nicknamed Dracula, meaning son of the devil), 15th century Voivode of Wallachia, never actually lived in Bran Castle, but that hasn’t stopped it from being dubbed Dracula’s Castle. The fortress dates back to the 13th century, with the stone castle being erected during the 14th century. But it’s the surrounding landscape that’s really terrifying. Romanian myths tell of werewolves, the Strigoi, the Iele, the Sântoaderi, the Solomonari and more all lurking across Transylvania – and the castle’s permanent exhibit “A history of dreads in Transylvania” will introduce you to these frightening folktales.

The land *beyond* the FORESTS

Transylvania, the homeland of Count Dracula, is a historic region in the heart of Romania– a country riddled with not only vampires but ghosts, witches and more



Location:
Romania

Time zone:
UTC+2

Currency:
Romanian leu

Tips: Fly in to Budapest and book a day trip to explore Transylvania and Dracula’s haunts all in one go

CORVIN CASTLE

Hunedoara

Some say that the Voivode of Transylvania John Hunyadi’s enormous castle was where Vlad was once imprisoned for several years. Legend has it that Dracula kept himself alive by eating rats and began to entirely lose his mind, causing his blood-thirst to intensify. Along with Vlad, many others were held captive in this massive fortress, including three Turkish men enslaved to build a well. Promised to be set free once they found water, they were betrayed and left to die in the castle’s dungeons, inscribing “you now have water, but you don’t have a heart” on the wall. The Capistrano Tower is haunted by a monk who was bricked up alive after spying on a nobleman and many have claimed to experience numerous paranormal activities throughout Corvin, including footsteps, screams, orbs, apparitions, shadows and feelings of dread.



CHIAJNA MONASTERY

Săbăreni Road, Bucharest

This cursed church was supposedly mistaken for a fortress by the Turks before it had even been consecrated. They burned its contents and threw its bell into the Dâmbovița River, which can still be heard ringing at night when the moon is full. Originally, the church would have been an important place of worship but it was abandoned during the Black Plague – sufferers of which are said to have sought refuge and died at the monastery. Within its crumbling plaster is an angelic figure, reportedly the Lady Chiajna's daughter, who was murdered by her command after the child refused to marry her chosen suiter.

There have also been more recent tragedies; in 1967 the body of a teenager was found murdered and in 2006 the church was the backdrop to a horrific triple homicide.



THE WITCHES POND

Boldu-Creteasca Forest, Bucharest

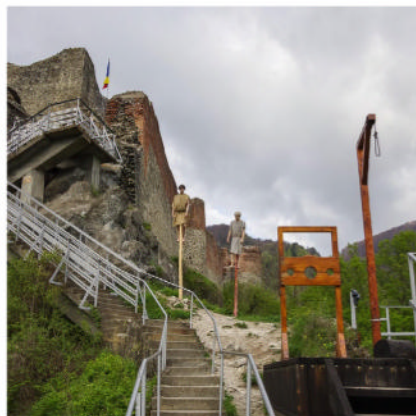
Călugăreasca Forest (located in Mehedinți county) is said to be cursed, its mulberry trees spirits enriched by the blood of murdered monks whose souls are forever stuck in the thickets. On the outskirts of Bucharest there lies a curious water hole deep inside Boldu-Creteasca Forest – the very place where Dracula's namesake, Vlad the Impaler, was decapitated. Known as Witches Pond, this tiny, mysterious pool never changes size, shape nor depth and its surrounding area appears to have a climate all of its own. It is said to be kept alive by rituals performed in June at the Saznienele summer solstice celebrations by witches. Apparently animals refuse to drink from its cursed water and women who wished for abortions would bathe in the cursed waters to rid themselves of their pregnancy.

"This tiny, mysterious pool is said to be kept alive by rituals performed in June at the Saznienele summer solstice celebrations by witches"

POENARI FORTRESS

Location: Foothill of Făgăraș Mountains, Arefu

Poenari was Vlad's true home. Now lying in ruins, the abandoned castle is situated high atop a mountain and accessed by climbing 1,480 concrete stairs. The notorious ruler gained his nickname as Vlad the Impaler from his brutal tendency to impale enemies on spikes, imitations of which can be seen as you climb the steps to his old haunt. The castle itself is said to be haunted and during the Communist era, many tourists would stay overnight within its ruins in an attempt to witness something paranormal. Vincent Lee Hillyer, husband of Iranian royal Fatemeh Pahlavi, famously reported significant drops in temperature, the smell of rotten flowers, bizarre nightmares, inexplicable keratosis, an overpowering feeling of being watched and having been bitten by seemingly nothing.



THE DEVIL'S PRECIPICE

Poiana Trestiei, Cosminele

Lurking in the landscape about 100km south of Brasov, lies cursed treasure guarded by ghosts. Legend has it that outlaws buried the stolen fortune and cast a protection spell so that nobody else would ever find it. It appears they never even came back for it themselves, though, and so the area is forever damned. Those attempting to find the buried treasure have reported being met with terrifying entities with the bodies of men but the heads of bulls and demonic eyes. Some have found themselves far away from the spot, with no recollection of how they got there and their clothing in shreds. Others have supposedly been driven mad or met with nightmares until the end of their days.

Follow in Faust's FOOTSTEPS

The legend of Faust has haunted the European imagination for five centuries and it continues to resonate today, taking people on a path from temptation to transcendence



WORDS EDOARDO ALBERT

Below: What would you give up to get your heart's desire? That is the question at the heart of the legend of Faust



I want to know everything." The young scholar stared up at the blank ceiling of his lonely room. "I want to have everything." He looked around at the penury his years of study had brought him to. "But I know nothing and have less." The noose dangled from the ceiling. He could end it now. Leave this sorry world and his futile life.

But there was someone who knew that which he wanted to know. There was someone who could give him everything he wanted. All he had to do was find something to trade with him.

"With what can I buy everything?" He looked into the dirty mirror. He saw there, through the cracks and grime, Dr Johann Faustus: scholar, astrologer – necromancer. And Dr Faustus smiled. "With my soul."

This is the essence of the legend of Faust: a scholar who dabbles in magic makes a pact with the devil, in the form of his prince, Mephistopheles. Faust is gifted whatever he wants: money, fame, women, success, knowledge and power. In return, Satan requires that little, immaterial thing: his soul.

For years, Faust rides the waves of his deal: the world is his banquet and he feasts on it.

"Faust is gifted whatever he wants: money, fame, women, success, knowledge and power. In return, Satan requires that little, immaterial thing: his soul"

But the day of reckoning approaches and, despite his wriggling and searching, there is no way to break the deal. At the agreed time, Mephistopheles returns and takes what was his: he drags Faust's soul to hell.

In 1587 a chapbook was published in Germany. Its author was, and remains, unknown. Chapbooks were cheap booklets, crudely illustrated with woodcuts, that were highly popular in the first centuries after the invention of the printing press. They brought stories within the budget of ordinary people and were, in effect, the comics of their day.

This particular chapbook was called *Historia von D. Johann Fausten* and it was supposedly based upon the life of a real man, the alchemist Johann Faust who lived from c.1480 to 1540 and became notorious in his lifetime for calling the devil his schwager

('crony'). The book was hugely popular. It was reprinted and expanded, and an English translation appeared in 1592 which attracted the attention of the Elizabethan playwright, Christopher Marlowe. His play, *The Tragical History of D. Faustus* (1604) turned Faust into a figure of hubristic tragedy (the play is still performed today).

In the 19th century, the great German polymath, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, took the Faust legend as the story frame for his masterpiece, bringing the story to a new century. The legend has continued to inspire writers, filmmakers and artists to this day: the story of the man who sold his soul to the devil for knowledge and power, its continuing relevance anchored in the deep realisation that Faust's story in some way mirrors the story of Western civilisation itself.

THE BROCKEN

Location: Saxony-Anhalt, Germany **Time zone:** UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro (€)

Even without its associations with Faust and witches, the Brocken is an eerie place – at the right times. It's the highest mountain in northern Germany and while no Everest, its microclimate is harsh, with an average annual temperature of only 2.9 centigrade and snow cover at the summit for months on end. Visit when it is quiet, with the mist cloaking the landscape and the Brocken Spectre visible, and the mountain can seem truly uncanny, the place where witches might well gather.

And that, according to legend, is exactly what happens on Walpurgis Night (the night of 30 April). On that date witches gather for a bacchanalian celebration with the devil. In Goethe's *Faust*, Mephistopheles takes Faust to the revels to distract him from the loss of his beloved Gretchen, tempting him with a naked young witch.

There is now an official eight-kilometre footpath, the Goethe Way, from Torfhaus to the summit of the Brocken that follows

the believed path that Goethe himself took when he climbed the Brocken on 10 December 1777, walking through deep snow and reaching the summit at quarter past one. While the climb is not

particularly strenuous, conditions on the Brocken can change rapidly. However, the well-maintained footpath allows walkers to ascend the mountain even in winter and snow.



FAUSTSCHLOSS

Location: Oberlandshaag, Feldkirchen an der Donau, Austria

Time zone: UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro (€)

In the face of it, this lovely hotel set on a wooded hillside overlooking the Danube looks better suited to a romantic weekend break than being a stop on a mysterious Faustian tour. But looks can deceive. While it is no doubt a romantic hotel, its romance has its basis in some of the myths that assembled around the legendary Johann Faust after his death. According to these tales, Faust, while travelling in the area, liked what he saw so much that he ordered the devil to build him a house there, which was first recorded as Fauststöckl in 1500.

The folk tales go on to say that Faust tried to trick the devil from their pact by giving him increasingly difficult tasks to carry out: a bowling alley on the River Danube, a new bridge every time he wanted to cross the river, a new road to Neuhaus. Unfortunately for Faust, the devil accomplished all these tasks with ease. Then the appointed time came and the devil returned to claim Johann Faust. He grabbed the alchemist and flew with him up the mountain, where he tore Faust apart. The spot where that happened, the Devil's Hole, is still there; ask at the hotel and they will show you where to find it.

Above: The majestic River Danube flows past the hotel, providing a scenic backdrop for guests

FAUSTŮV DŮM (FAUST HOUSE)

Location: Charles Square, Prague, Czech Republic **Time zone:** UTC+1 **Currency:** Czech koruna

The Faust House in Prague's historic Charles Square is a magnificent Baroque palace. Today it houses a hospital for the medical faculty of Charles University and, unfortunately, it's not open to the public. Although the original Faust travelled widely there's no record of him visiting Prague. However, many of its owners over the centuries were interested in alchemy and secretly practised various forms of magic, inviting famous practitioners to stay with them. The most famous of these was Edward Kelley (1555 – 1597/8). In December 1581, Kelley had begun an extraordinary spiritual partnership with John Dee, the Elizabethan mathematician and magus. Kelley was the medium through whom Dee communicated with angels. Seeking financial support for

their work, Dee, Kelley and their wives went to Europe, ending up at the court of the Holy Roman Emperor, Rudolf II, in Prague, who was interested in their claims that they could transmute elements through the philosopher's stone. However, Dee and Kelley also attracted the attention of the papal nuncio, and they eventually had to flee lest they be tried for necromancy. The partnership between Kelley and Dee eventually dissolved when Dee was told by Kelley that the two men had to share everything – including their wives.



AUERBACH'S KELLAR, LEIPZIG, GERMANY

Location: Leipzig, Saxony, Germany
Time zone: UTC+1
Currency: Euro (€)

The young Goethe, a student at Leipzig University from 1765 to 1768, was fond of wine. His favourite wine bar was Auerbachs Keller, set near the market. Auerbachs was old even when Goethe frequented it, having been founded in 1438. It took its name from Heinrich Strome, rector of Leipzig University, who was familiarly called Doctor Auerbach from his birthplace. Doctor Auerbach was a firm believer in the health benefits of wine, a belief shared by his students, including Goethe. The Cellar was decorated with two paintings of the legend of Faust: Faust drinking with students and Faust, astride a wine barrel, riding from the wine bar. When Goethe wrote his own version of Faust, he set a scene in the Cellar.



FAUST MUSEUM

Location: Knittlingen, Baden-Württemberg, Germany

Time zone: UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro (€)

The man upon whom the legend of Faust was based, the alchemist Johann Faust, was (probably) born in Knittlingen in Germany in either 1466 or 1480/81. In keeping with the mysteries wound round the legend, there may have been two Fausts, both of whom were alchemists and magicians, living at the end of the 15th and the start of the 16th centuries. So it's appropriate that the world's only museum dedicated to the legend of

Faust should be in Knittlingen. The museum is in a 19th-century half-timbered building, the old town hall. It contains comprehensive exhibits and archives about the historical Faust and the burgeoning legends that attached themselves to him after his death, probably from a failed alchemical experiment that left his body mangled, as well as the later stories and writers who have been attracted to the tale.





Mountain MYSTERIES

*Inaccessible mountain ranges and hidden valleys are
home to many mysteries and dark folk tales*

WORDS BEN CAZUR

Above: With few people living in the mountains, many of their secrets have remained hidden for centuries

THE ALPS

Location: France, Switzerland, Italy, Germany, Austria, Slovenia
Time zone: Various **Currency:** Euro (€), Swiss Franc

The Alps have presented an almost impenetrable barrier to travellers for millennia. Those who roamed them often returned with uncanny tales. Dragons were seen soaring through the clouds that cling to the mountaintops. In the 15th century a dragon became lost in a storm and slammed into the ground near Mount Pilatus and its blood turned into a miraculous stone. Today it is thought this was actually a meteorite.

Wild Men were thought to prey on unwary travellers. The deep gorges of the Alps made travelling to remote villages dangerous. A bridge across the Schöllenen Gorge was supposedly built by the devil when he was promised the life of the first to cross it. The villagers tricked him by sending a goat across first.



Above: The first bridge across this perilous gorge was allegedly built by the devil himself

THE BROCKEN

Location: Saxony-Anhalt, Germany **Time zone:** UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro (€)

The Brocken, or Blocksberg, is the highest peak in northern Germany and is associated with a number of mysterious folkloric traditions. The writer Goethe described witches riding on goats to visit Brocken on Walpurgis Night to hold an unholy festival with the devil presiding over the feast.

For centuries hikers who climb to the peak of the Brocken have reported sightings of a vast and terrifying figure who looms up at them from the frequent fogs and mists

which shroud the summit. Known as the Brocken Spectre, similar terrifying visions have been reported from mountains around the world. Sometimes the head of this phantom is surrounded by a halo of light or rainbows, known in German as heiligenschein. Science tells us that these figures are nothing more than a chance coming together of conditions when the sun is low in the sky. When the sun casts a climber's shadow into the water droplets of a mist it creates the illusion of a giant stalking their footsteps. The shining light around the spectre's head is caused by the water droplets acting as lenses which refract and reflect the sun's light back at the observer.

The mountain is also marked by several rocky features that have created folk tales. The Teufelskanzel ('Devil's Pulpit') is a granite outcrop that Satan is said to have stood on when preaching to the witches who gathered to hear him. An altar dedicated to the devil was supposedly once set up on the rocks there. A nearby rock is named the Hexenaltar ('Witches' Altar') and was said to be the site of diabolical ritual sacrifices by evil sorceresses.



THE PYRENEES

Location: Border of France and Spain
Time zone: UTC+1
Currency: Euro (€)

Classical writers said that the Pyrenees mountains took their name from a princess called Pyrene. According to one legend she was beloved by the hero Herakles but died – so Herakles built a huge funeral mound for her: the mountains. Other tales say Herakles assaulted Pyrene so she fled to the mountains, gave birth to a monstrous snake and died. Intriguingly there are tales of a giant snake which once dwelled in a cave near Hautacam that terrorised local shepherds by eating their flocks.

Later legends say that the mountains are sleeping giants and that when storms rage you can hear their cries. The French hero Roland supposedly fought a giant named Ferragut in the passes of the mountains. It was at the Battle of Roncevaux Pass in the Pyrenees that Roland himself was killed.

Basajaun, the Lord of the Woods, is a gigantic man covered in hair. Despite his fearsome appearance he is said to protect Basque shepherds who leave crusts of bread for him to eat. A bearded man called Tantugou roams the French Pyrenees valleys and guards flocks and fields from predators and thieves.

The Simiots were a group of beasts with lion bodies and ape heads who streamed out of the mountains one day and attacked towns and villages. They climbed down chimneys and carried off infants. Other caves in the mountains are supposedly guarded by fairy-like creatures who do not take kindly to visitors.



SLIABH AN IARAINN

Location: County Leitrim, Ireland
Time zone: UTC
Currency: Euro (€)

Sliabh an Iarainn, meaning “iron mountain”, is known for its iron ore that has been mined for centuries, including by divine metalworkers.

A collection of Irish texts made in the Middle Ages, known as the *Book of the Taking of Ireland*, describes how a race of supernatural beings called the Tuatha Dé Danann first came to Ireland. They came in ships that sailed on the air and descended through heavy clouds to land on the summit of Sliabh an Iarainn. This arrival blessed the mountain. When the people already living in Ireland heard of this arrival a battle was fought below the mountain and the Tuatha Dé Danann won. The iron mines of Sliabh an Iarainn were first dug by Gobán Saor for the newcomers, and he is said to have used the iron to build many landmarks around the country.



MOUNT IDA

Location: Crete, Greece **Time zone:** UTC+2 **Currency:** Euro (€)

Mount Ida is the highest peak on Crete, the island where the god Zeus was born and raised. Because Zeus’ father was known to devour his children, Zeus was whisked away and concealed within a cave on the slopes of Mount Ida. The young god was placed in the protection of two nymphs called Ida (from whom the mountain takes its name) and Adrasteia. They fed Zeus on wild honey and milk from the she-goat Amalthea.

It was said that within the mountain there lived a group of spirits known as the Dactyls who were famed for working with metal they dug from the Earth. To hide the crying sound of the infant Zeus these spirits

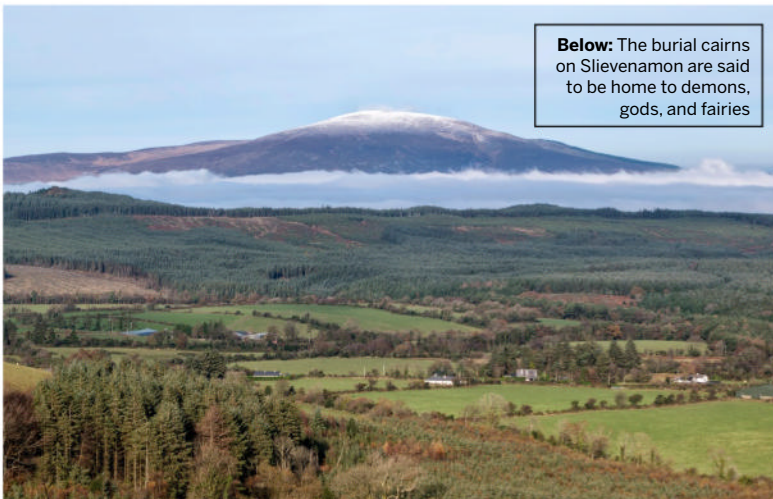
performed a loud war dance outside the cave, which drowned out the noise and protected Zeus from his father. When Zeus reached adulthood he slew his father and became the king of the Greek gods.

Archaeological evidence shows that Mount Ida has been a centre of worship for thousands of years with pilgrims climbing the breathtaking trails that wind up the mountain to the summit.

Above: Mount Ida looms over the island of Crete and has inspired religious awe since antiquity

SLIEVENAMON

Location: County Tipperary, Ireland **Time zone:** UTC **Currency:** Euro (€)



Below: The burial cairns on Slievenamon are said to be home to demons, gods, and fairies

Slievenamon, known as Sliabh na mBan – “the mountain of women” – in Irish Gaelic, is closely associated with the mythical hero Fionn mac Cumhaill (Finn MacCool). The name of the mountain is said to come from a race run by women seeking to marry Finn. Whoever reached the top first would win Finn’s hand. As Finn was in love with one woman he revealed a shortcut up the mountain and so she won.

The mountain is the site of several ancient burial mounds which have traditionally

been seen as the homes of fairies or entry points to the underworld. In one legend of Fionn mac Cumhaill he was camping on the mountain with his men when a demon of the underworld crept from one of the mounds and stole a pig. Finn chased him and had his thumb on the doorway when the door was slammed on it. In pain, he sucked the thumb. Since the thumb had been in the underworld Finn sucked on the hidden wisdom of the dead and was granted superhuman knowledge.

Below: The slopes of Cadair Idris supposedly inspire either madness or poetic skill to those who sleep on them

CADAIR IDRIS

Location: Meirionnydd, Gwynedd, Wales, UK **Time zone:** UTC **Currency:** Pound sterling (£)

The rugged landscape of Cadair Idris is steeped in legend. Anyone who sleeps on the summit of this mountain is said to awake as either a poet or a madman.

Folklore says that King Arthur, who once lived on the mountain, threw a dragon into a bottomless lake nearby, where it is still trapped.

Cadair Idris means "Chair of Idris" in Welsh and may refer to a prince called Idris who won a battle against the Irish on the mountain. Alternatively it may be named for the giant Idris who studied the stars from the peak. It is said that the boulders at the base of the mountain, carried there by ancient glaciers, were actually shaken from Idris' boots when he cleaned them.



JURA MOUNTAINS

Location: Border of France and Switzerland

Time zone: UTC+1

Currency: Euro (€), Swiss Franc

Those venturing into the Jura mountains would be well advised to avoid any horses which they see galloping towards them. There are more ghostly horses reported from the Jura mountains than anywhere else on Earth.

Several villages in the region claim that a winged, white horse lived nearby. Sometimes this horse was said to swoop down on any woman who ventured too far on her own. Other villages linked their white horses to springs which had been thought sacred since antiquity. These horses would sometimes be glimpsed at twilight by shepherds and farmers who attested they had seen the horses fly away towards the mountain peaks. Some of the winged horses are described as having riders – either hunters or elven kings. To make the horses even more unsettling there are reports of headless horses roaming the valleys.

The horse of Gauvin is a particularly dangerous one to encounter. It is often said to wander beside rivers and tempt the unwary to ride it and, once astride, the horse races off and carries the rider either deep into dangerous water or towards a precipitous drop.

Below: Old tales from the Jura mountains speak of magical white horses – sometimes helpful, sometimes perilous



KYFFHÄUSER

Location: Thuringia and Saxony-Anhalt, Germany

UK Time zone: UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro (€)



Beneath the Kyffhäuser hills the rock is studded with caves, and in one of those is said to be the resting place of King Frederick Barbarossa. When Barbarossa set out on crusade in the 12th century he drowned while crossing a river but legend says he is sleeping somewhere underground in Kyffhäuser.

Barbarossa is sleeping while sitting at a large and round stone table. His beard continues to grow and has by now already circled the table twice. When his beard has made it three times around the table the king will wake up and lead a unified Germany in a battle at the end of the world. Above the hill stands a monument to the German monarchy with a statue of Barbarossa on it.

MOUNT OLYMPUS

Location: Pieria and Larissa, Greece **Time zone:** UTC+2 **Currency:** Euro (€)

Below: The summit of Mount Olympus was home to the Greek gods, and a site of pilgrimage for many believers.



There is no more famous mountain in European mythology than Mount Olympus in Greece. Regarded as the home of the powerful Olympian gods it features in many Greek myths and epic poems. The early Greek poems of Homer describe it as a paradise containing the palaces of the gods and as a place where wind never shakes the trees, rain does not fall, and snow does not settle. The gates of the city are gold and shine with endless sunlight. The summit of Olympus stands around 3000m tall and

is often hidden by clouds so it was easy to imagine that something was hiding up there.

The summit of Olympus was shrouded with religious awe. According to legend the hero Bellerophon attempted to ascend to the top of the mountain on the winged horse Pegasus to live with the gods. For his hubris Bellerophon was cast down to his death. But the ancient Greeks did occasionally climb mount Olympus to leave offerings for the gods and today around 10,000 climbers per year reach the pinnacle of the mountain.

UNTERSBERG

Location: Border of Germany and Switzerland

Time zone: UTC+1

Currency: Euro (€)

Legend says that under the Untersberg there is a sleeping king. Some versions say that it is Frederick Barbarossa who sits slumbering at a table, as at Kyffhäuser. In other accounts it is Charlemagne. His needs are tended by a group of dwarves who keep him safe. Once a century Charlemagne wakes up and emerges and when he sees ravens are still flying over the mountain he retreats back inside to sleep for another hundred years. Folk tales speak of groups of travellers going missing on the mountain, only to descend a century later with no knowledge of how long they were gone.



SOUTHERN CARPATHIAN MOUNTAINS

Location: Southern Romania

Time zone: UTC+2

Currency: Romanian leu

When Bram Stoker wrote *Dracula* he gave the vampire a sinister home in the Carpathians. Dracula was said to have studied at the Scholomance – an academy of magic that legend says was located deep in these mountains. The Carpathians are said to be some of the last truly wild mountains in Europe and their pristine forests have nurtured tales of werewolves, witches, and ogres. Not all supernatural beings in the mountains are actively trying to hurt those who visit, but they can still be dangerous. The iele are a group of female spirits who gather to dance, but only attack those who see them dancing.

PUY DE DÔME

Location: Auvergne, France

Time zone: UTC+1

Currency: Euro (€)

The mountain of Puy de Dôme was formed by a volcanic explosion 11,000 years ago and has been a centre for religious pilgrims for thousands of years. A Roman temple to the god Mercury has been excavated at the summit. Other peaks in the Massif Central were thought to be inhabited by fairies.

In the 16th century a local woman accused of witchcraft confessed that the summit was a gathering point for witches. Every Wednesday and Friday, 60 witches met on the peak. Others suspected of sorcery revealed they had met with the devil in goat shape there, with a candle between his horns.



SNOWDON

Location: Gwynedd, Wales, United Kingdom **Time zone:** UTC **Currency:** Pound sterling (£)

Snowdon, known as Yr Wyddfa in Welsh, is the tallest mountain in Wales and the most visited peak in the country. The Welsh name from the mountain may be derived from the words for a burial mound, and legend explains why it might be such a large mound.

The king of the giants Rhitta Gawr was a fearsome leader who conquered the lands of groups living around him. Once Rhitta had slain his rivals he would shave off their beards and weave them into a cloak. At this time King Arthur was battling to unite his kingdom and Rhitta decided to challenge him, telling Arthur that he needed his beard to patch a hole in his cloak. Arthur did not take this challenge lying down and stormed Rhitta's home and slew the giant. Once Rhitta was dead Arthur ordered his men to pile a burial cairn on top of the giant's grave and this formed the mountain's summit.

The peak of Snowdon can be reached via Bwlch y Saethau ('The Pass of Arrows') where it is said that King Arthur himself fell in battle with his enemies under a hail of arrows. A large cairn of stones was erected there, which has since disappeared.

Near to Snowdon is the rocky hill called Dinas Emrys where an ancient hill fort once stood. According to legend at first a fort could not be built there without being destroyed

because two dragons were fighting in beneath it. One dragon was white but the winning dragon was red – and it has since become a national symbol for Wales.

Below: Mount Snowdon is closely linked to the legendary life, and death, of King Arthur





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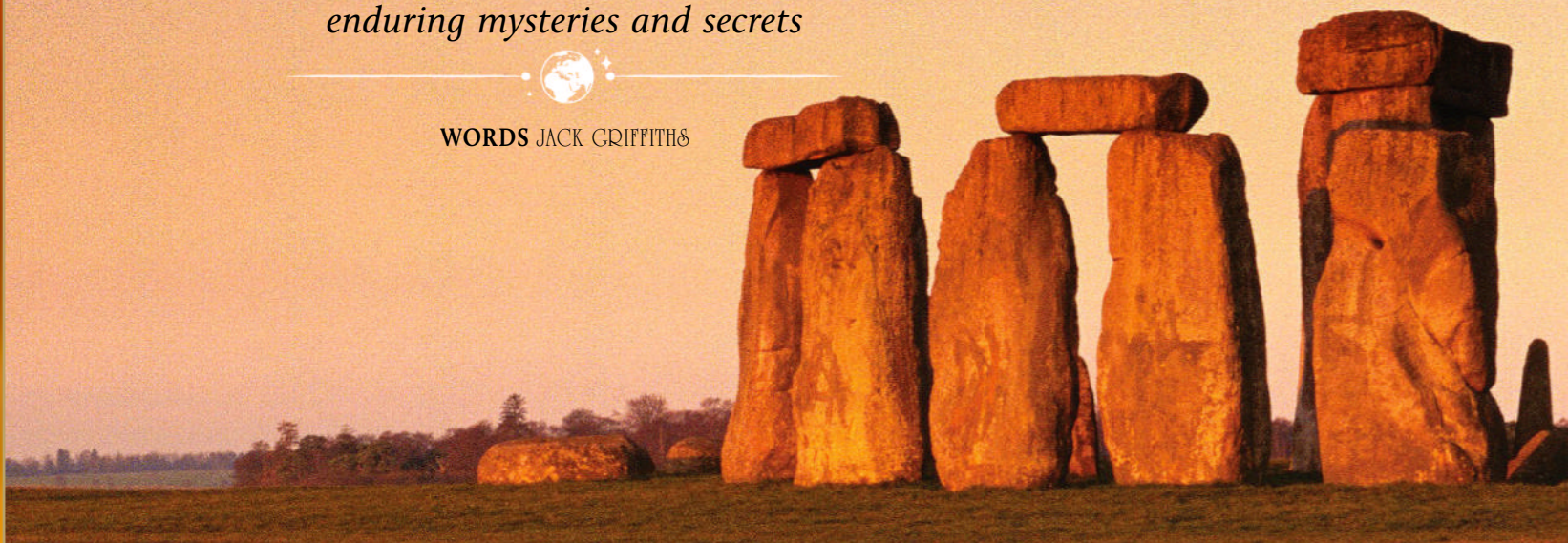




Ley lines *and* EARTH MYSTERIES

From Stonehenge to ley lines, humanmade and natural structures the world over continue to puzzle us with their enduring mysteries and secrets

WORDS JACK GRIFFITHS



Living all over the globe, almost from pole to pole, humans occupy nearly every corner of the world. Seemingly, nearly everything has already been discovered and understood as humankind has learnt almost all there is to know about the planet and what's on it. However, the Earth still holds a number of mysteries – both natural and ancient human-made structures – which still aren't fully understood.

Seeing is believing, or so we're told, but gravity hills beg to differ. Also known as magic roads, these are an optical illusion that makes it look you're travelling uphill when you're actually going down. Perhaps best experienced in a car, the phenomenon is caused by the surrounding landscape making

it falsely look as if you are rolling uphill, even though gravity is working as normal, taking the car down a slope. Often, the horizon and other points of reference like buildings, aren't viewable from the angle the hill is on, skewing your perception of the slope further, as your brain focuses on the road rather than the surroundings, which would usually prove its true and real gradient. The unusual occurrence means that, across the world, magic roads have spawned myths and legends. One such tale is that a ghost pushes the cars up the hill and, if you brake to stop the ghost, it'll steal all your petrol.

Perhaps the most famous structure with mystical associations created by humankind is Stonehenge. The prehistoric monument is famous for the large stones that make up

its circular formation but, millennia after its construction, it still isn't completely clear what it is or why and how it was built. The purpose of Stonehenge is believed to be spiritual and it's thought that the stones align with the movement of the sun from sunrise to sunset – a phenomena that is especially prevalent at the midsummer and midwinter solstices – as well as the monthly phases of the moon. Therefore, it is reasoned that it acted as a sort of Neolithic calendar for the changing of the seasons as well as a burial site. Mystery surrounds just how the stones – that weigh more than 22 tons – were moved into place, especially as the type of rock is not found all that locally to Stonehenge. Some believe that the stones were left in the area after the melting of a



Above: The oldest stones at Stonehenge date to circa 2,500BCE but the function and meaning of the structure still isn't completely understood



glacier during an ice age, while others are of the opinion that they were moved into place by humans using wooden rollers or sledges. Despite being one of the most well-known ancient structures in the world, and a UNESCO World Heritage Site, we can't say for sure what its true purpose really was and its mystery lives on.

Only 20 miles away from Stonehenge is Avebury, another Neolithic formation that, with more than 100 stones, is the largest stone circle in Europe. It is a ceremonial burial site but, unlike its nearby counterpart, wooden structures are likely to have also been on the site. Avebury has a network of banks, ditches and circles but, unlike many similar structures, a square monument has been discovered beneath the site. Surveys

also suggest that there was a small wooden building and both are believed to date back to around 3,500 BCE. The purpose of Avebury isn't known but theories include that it was a ceremonial or religious gathering place, in a similar way to Stonehenge, that was used to measure astronomical events and celebrate the beginning and the end of seasons. The mystery surrounding Avebury grows further as it's supposed that many of the stones were moved, buried or destroyed by order of the early Christian church as it was believed that they were relics of pagan worshipping. Some were also used for construction during stone shortages in the 18th century so the site may even have been larger and much more complete than it is today. This is also being found with the Stonehenge site.

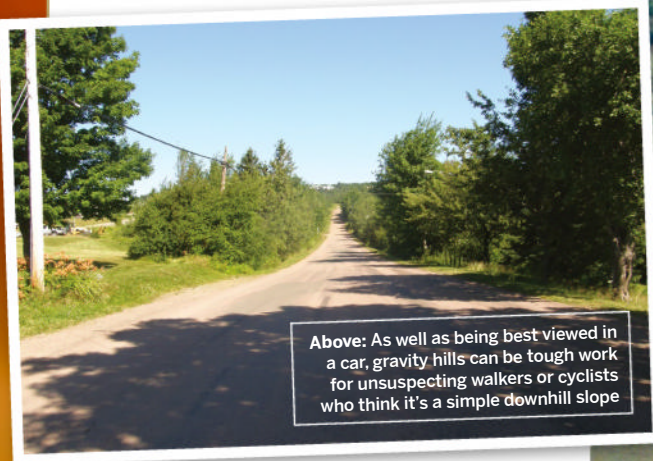
In parts of England, some of the rolling hills have large chalk figures emblazoned upon them. A prominent example is the 50-metre Cerne Abbas Giant, which depicts a man carrying a club. It is unknown who created it with some believing it was the Celts while others suggest it was created in the Anglo-Saxon era or even during the English Civil War. It is thought that couples would venture up to the Giant by night in the hope its distinctly phallic symbolism would bless families with children. Another glyph at Uffington, Wiltshire, illustrates a giant horse, and a similar design was used on Celtic coins, although its unusual design means that some believe it to represent a dragon. These vast images were thought to symbolise or honour gods and bring good luck. One story behind

HOW ARE THESE MYSTERIOUS SPIRITUAL LOCATIONS FOUND?

Dowsing is the use of wooden or metal rods to detect hidden archaeological features. When held out, the Y-shaped instrument is seemingly moved by hidden energy and can locate underground water and oil, or potentially lead to undiscovered ancient objects. Research has shown that dowsing only works if the user already has some prior information of roughly where the target can be found and the tool is unable to locate anything by itself. The only success from dowsing has been through inaccurate or misplaced anecdotes and not scientific fact. Indeed, the rods may look like they move towards an area that

contains subterranean water but it's only because of the movements of the user's arms that this happens. This is what's called the ideomotor effect, where someone moves unconsciously but believes that the movements aren't caused by them but by something else – supernatural or otherwise. A similar phenomenon occurs when a Ouija board is used. In addition, dowsers usually operate where it's known that water is underground anyway. Therefore, the idea of dowsing is built on random chance. This doesn't stop dowsers being called in to locate water to this day, however. Well, if it works, who needs a reason why?

Below: The theory is that the tool will twitch when the dowser moves over underground water, which will then lead to new discoveries



Above: As well as being best viewed in a car, gravity hills can be tough work for unsuspecting walkers or cyclists who think it's a simple downhill slope

the Uffington White Horse is that it will awake and dance upon the hill if King Arthur were to rise again. Recently, it's theorised that it may have been created for the Celtic and Roman goddess of horses, Epona. These markings have inspired more recent versions including the Osmington White Horse made for King George III in 1808.

One theory combines natural and human-made structures at specific locations across the globe. Ley lines involve the theory that historical monuments were purposely constructed by our ancestors in a connected network and are an example of ancient lost knowledge. It's proposed that this formation was used purposely to create spiritual ties between ancient sites.

This belief can be as small-scale as connections between Stonehenge and Avebury or a much larger scope spanning countries and continents. This thought can also be expanded into crop circles and



Below: A study in the 1980s unearthed proof that the Cerne Abbas Giant wore a cloak and stood upon a dismembered head

natural landscapes with unusual features. The concept of ley lines revolves around the idea of the Earth's spiritual energy rather than a physical or navigational link between locations. Ley line concepts vary between cultures with the idea of fairy paths originating from Ireland.

Over the Irish Sea, jutting out from the Northern Irish coast, is a famous landscape known as the Giant's Causeway. A formation of hexagonal columns, it was formed 50-60 million years ago by the cooling of superheated rock into distinctive shapes. Nearby ancient volcanoes spewed out lava

that cooled into the rocky columns you can see today. The ancient tale states that the striking causeway was created by the mythical Irish hero Fionn mac Cumhaill (Finn MacCool) who was a giant trying to get closer to a rival giant in Scotland. Modern technology has since dispelled the folklore but the name has stuck. Scientific experiments on samples of basaltic rock in Iceland demonstrated that the cooling process that formed the causeway and also created another remarkable natural formation which reaches into the sky rather than stepping out into the ocean.



Left: The Barber Stone at Avebury; named after killing a tradesman who was on the site

Below: Ley is an Anglo-Saxon word meaning 'clearing in the woods'. The Malvern Hills area in Worcestershire, England is believed to carry ley lines



ST MICHAEL'S SWORD

Location: Ireland, England, France, Italy, Greece (and on to Israel)

Time zone: UTC/+1

Currency: Euro (€), Pound sterling (£)

From the lonely island of Skellig Michael off Ireland's Atlantic Coast, all the way across the southern tip of the UK mainland, across France and the entire length of Italy, across Greece and eventually culminating on Israel's west coast, runs a ley line known as the Sword of St Michael.

The Archangel Saint Michael, chief of the angels and archangels and a warrior-prince tasked with the protection of the faithful, is often represented sword in hand. In Europe, his ley line sword stretches all the way from its westernmost tip to the Holy Land, passing through a straight line of Christian holy places along the way including Ireland's Skellig Michael Monastery; the Chapel of St Michael on St Michael's Mount in Cornwall, UK; the Abbey of Mont-Saint-Michel in Normandy, France; an abbey and two churches dedicated to St Michael in Italy; and a monastery in Greece, before arriving in Israel.

SACRED SITES

An ancient Greek ODYSSEY

From soaring temples to subterranean tombs, the legends of this fascinating land live on in the stunning monuments raised to honour the gods and ghosts that will forever wander the classical world



WORDS BEE GINGER

Above: While it is known to the world as Greece, the Greeks refer to their country as Hellen, which is derived from the Ellanes, a people who lived near the coastal city of Volos



THE ACROPOLIS

Location: Athens, Greece **Time zone:** UTC+2 **Currency:** Euro (€)

Dominating the Athens skyline from atop a series of hills, the ancient citadel of the Acropolis is home to some of the most historically important buildings in the world, chief among them the breathtaking Parthenon. Constructed in the mid-5th century BCE the Acropolis (which means 'high city') was originally known as Cecropia in honour of Crecops, a half-man, half-serpent who was said to have been the first king of Athens.

Many of the greatest tales of ancient Greece can be seen etched into the stone of the temples and statues built for Athena, for whom the city is named, and Zeus, king of the gods. It is said that the scars from a battle waged between

Athena and Poseidon over who would become the city's patron are found here.

Determined to win the contest, Poseidon struck the ground with his trident to carve open a spring, while Athena offered the people of the city an olive tree, a symbol of peace that also provided food and oil. When her gift was chosen, the enraged god of the sea is said to have flooded the surrounding plains.

Legend has it that when the invading Persians later torched the Acropolis, the next day the olive tree sprouted a new shoot half a metre long, a divine reminder to the beleaguered citizens that while fortune may have abandoned them, their goddess never would.

EPIDAURUS

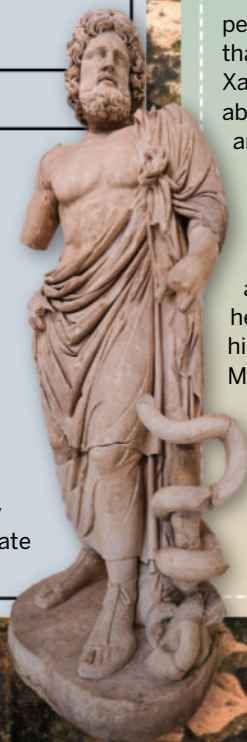
Location: Argolid Peninsula, Greece **Time zone:** UTC+2 **Currency:** Euro (€)

Epidaurus was once a centre of healing that drew the unwell from across the classical world. It is here that the Sanctuary of Asklepios was erected, which boasted a vast hall (enkoimeteria) that ill visitors would sleep in. Asklepios would enter their dreams and advise them on how to heal themselves.

Asklepios, whose father was Apollo, is thought to have shown kindness to a serpent, which in turn revealed to him the ways of both healing and resurrecting the dead. Snakes were seen as sacred creatures possessed of healing powers, and Asklepios was said to have

carried a staff around which a snake wrapped its body. This came to be known as the Rod of Asklepios, and in many parts of the world it remains a symbol of medicine.

Epidaurus is home to a theatre that is still used today and a tholos, a circular building that was designed by Polyclitus the Younger. Its foundations comprise concentric walls punctuated by doors and partitions, which create an enormous labyrinth.



AN ANCIENT GREEK ODYSSEY

THESSALY

Location: Central Greece

Time zone: UTC+2

Currency: Euro (€)

Renowned as a hive of witchcraft and magic, in ancient times Thessaly was a wild, untamed land thought to be prowled by barbaric centaurs and cunning spell-weavers such as the hideous Erictho of Roman literature. Due to its geographic isolation, Thessaly stagnated as the rest of Greece began to prosper, further bolstering claims from outsiders that it was a dark and primitive place. Yet despite its supposedly backward ways, it was home to some sophisticated mythical figures.



Chiron, a semi-divine centaur who dwelt on the mountain of Pelion in the south of the region, mentored the fearless warrior Achilles, the intrepid adventurer Jason (whose name, which means 'healer', was given to him by Chiron), and the god of medicine, Asklepios. The latter was delivered from the womb of his dead mother, Coronis, as she lay upon a funeral pyre and given to Chiron to raise. This he duly did, teaching the young Asklepios the ways of healing.

Thessaly was also famed for the pedigree of its horses, and it was here that Achilles first mounted his steed, Xanthus, a horse gifted with the ability to communicate with humans and prophesy the future.

Another seer to hail from Thessaly was Melampus, who received the power of understanding the language of animals when some snakes that he saved and then reared cleaned his ears with their forked tongues. Medea, the famed sorceress who helped Jason to steal the Golden Fleece, also practised her magic here. In fact, she is said to have been the first to do so in all of Thessaly, which to this day is known as the land of the witches.

DELPHI

Location: Phocis, Greece **Time zone:** UTC+2 **Currency:** Euro (€)

Considered to be the centre of the world by ancient Greeks, Delphi is most famous for being the home of the Oracle, whose insight was sought from people across the classical world. Selected from among the local peasantry, a woman who had lived a 'blameless' life would become a pythia (priestess) of the Oracle and move into the Temple of Apollo on Mount Parnassus. Here she would prepare for prophetic rituals by bathing in a sacred spring before burning laurel leaves and then assuming her position upon a tripod above a gaping chasm (it was into this pit that Apollo cast the body of the she-serpent Delphye, from which Delphi is said to take its name). However, she could not be visited during the winter, a time when Apollo descended from the heavens and went to live among the Hyperboreans at the top of the world (scientists now believe that the natural volcanic gasses that likely caused the Oracles' trances weren't as pungent during

the colder months, which may explain the limit on visiting hours). Perhaps the most well-known prophecy foretold by an Oracle of Delphi was the warning given to King Croesus of Lydia. Having conquered the Greeks of Ionia, Croesus, who possessed both enormous wealth and self-confidence, turned his attention towards the burgeoning Persian Empire. Determined to crush this emerging threat to his realm, Croesus prepared for war, but before he sent his troops into battle he turned to the Oracle, who told him that should he proceed a great empire would fall. Arrogantly believing that this meant he would defeat Persia, Croesus began his campaign. But he was gravely mistaken. After suffering a number of defeats to Cyrus the Great, Croesus watched in horror as the armies of Persia besieged the Lydian capital of Sardis. It was his empire that was doomed to fall. Such was his despair that he attempted to immolate himself on a funeral pyre, only to be spared by Apollo.

Below: One legend claims that a goatherd discovered the sanctuary of Delphi and went into a trance upon inhaling fumes escaping from a natural vent

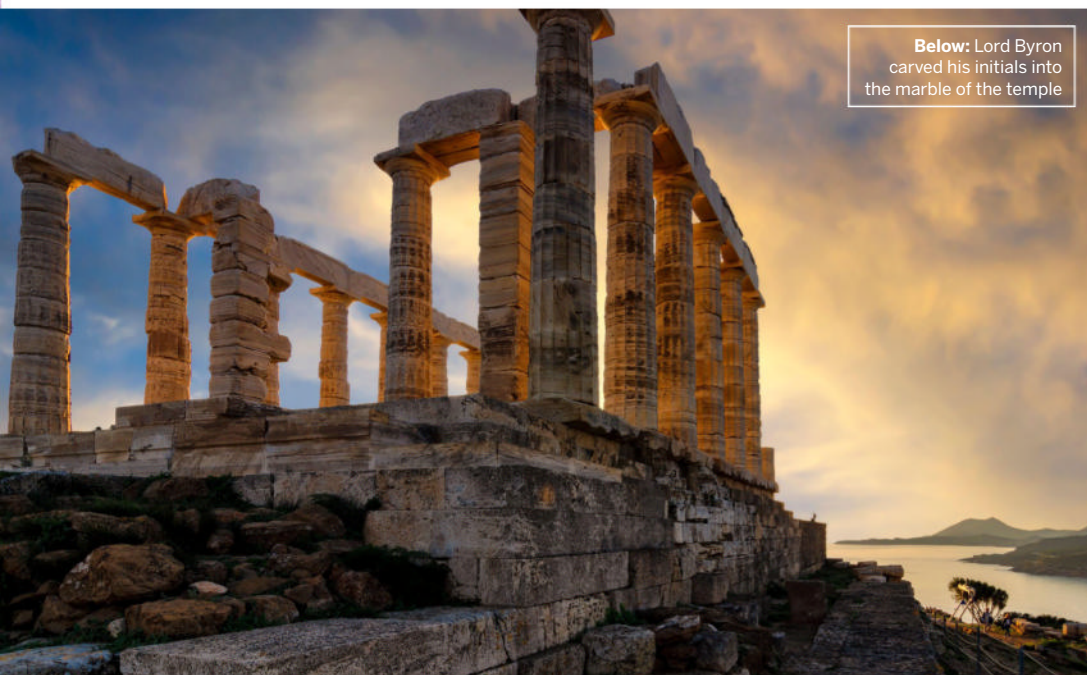


TEMPLE OF POSEIDON

Location: Cape Sounion, Greece **Time zone:** UTC+2 **Currency:** Euro (€)

Never ones to waste an ideal location, the Greeks built the Temple of Poseidon on the ruins of another. Situated 60 metres (200 feet) above sea level, the site was chosen as it was the first point travellers saw on their return to Attica, meaning it was a fitting place to both worship the god of the sea and also appeal to him for safe passage upon the waves. One part of the Sacred Triangle that also includes the Parthenon and the

Temple of Aphaia on the island of Aegina, the temple would have been a sight to behold, its entrance dominated by a six-metre (20-foot) statue of Poseidon set beneath its marbled ceilings. Here cults dedicated to Poseidon and Athena would have engaged in various rituals, and after their stunning victory at the Battle of Salamis in 480 BCE, the Greeks brought an entire Persian warship to Sounion as an offering to the master of the seas.



Below: Lord Byron carved his initials into the marble of the temple



ITHACA

Location: Ionian Sea, Greece
Time zone: UTC+2
Currency: Euro (€)

Thought to be named after Poseidon's son Ithacus, this small island off the west coast of mainland Greece was the home of Homer's hero Odysseus, who endured a gruelling ten-year journey back to his wife, Penelope, after fighting in the Trojan War that is the central part of the epic poem the *Odyssey*, which stretches to 24 books. For centuries it was assumed that the poem was a colourful story, but the discovery in 2010 of what archaeologists believe to have been Odysseus' palace lends credence to the claim that Homer was in fact recording some historical events.

Another mysterious find was the Cave of Nymphs in the bay of Dexa. Also known as the Marble Cave, it was here that Odysseus privately convened with the gods, the only mortal able to enter the cave.

PALACE OF KNOSSOS

Location: Heraklion, Crete, Greece **Time zone:** UTC+2 **Currency:** Euro (€)



This remarkable monument to the Minoan civilisation blends beauty and barbarity. Step between the crimson pillars that support the partly reconstructed walls of the Palace of Minos and you will be treated to wonderful frescoes – a series of painted blue dolphins immediately catching the eye – and intricate mosaics, but beneath the cracked tiles underfoot lurks the twisted shadow of the Minotaur.

Confined in a labyrinth built on the orders of his father, King Minos, in a bid to contain the creature, this half-man, half-bull preyed on the flesh of unfortunate Athenian offerings until a

hero named Theseus confronted the beast in its labyrinthine lair and killed it with his sword.

Work began on the palace complex around 1900 BCE, and it was routinely extended and enhanced throughout its life. Appropriately enough, it was an amateur archaeologist by the name of Minos Kalokairinos who first began excavations on the site in the late 1800s. It's thought that the central court would have been the scene of various festivals, including bull jumping – although some researchers have since stated that it wouldn't have been the ideal location for such a chaotic event.

DION

Location: Pieria, Central Macedonia, Greece **Time zone:** UTC+2 **Currency:** Euro (€)

Located at the base of Mount Olympus, home of the gods, Dion's name is derived from Dios, meaning 'of Zeus', and it certainly lives up to its divine title. This religious centre is a shrine to the almighty thunder god – as well as his daughters, the Muses – and is said to be the resting place of Orpheus, a poet who travelled with Jason and the Argonauts. Orpheus' bones were placed inside an urn that sat upon a pillar beside the road from Dion to the mountain.

Kings of Macedonia made offerings at Dion (the name Macedonia comes from Makednos, one of Zeus' many sons, who dwelt nearby with his brother Magnes), including Alexander the Great, who made sacrifices on the site before conquering Persia. Upon his return he commissioned



the great sculptor Lysippos to design 25 bronze statues in memory of the Hetaroi (Companions) slain at the Battle of the Granicus in 334 BCE.

Excavations here have also revealed a remarkable mosaic inside a temple dedicated to the god of wine and pleasure, Dionysus.

AKROTIRI OF THERA

Location: Santorini, Greece **Time zone:** UTC+2 **Currency:** Euro (€)



Estimated to have been built around 4,500 BCE, the city of Akrotiri became a prosperous one thanks to its key role in the copper trade. In time it boasted paved streets and an advanced sewage system, its people producing fine pottery, furniture and stunning frescoes. But unbeknown to these creative crafters, their home was in fact living on borrowed time. In the 17th century BCE, a mammoth earthquake shook the region, and around ten days later an immensely powerful volcanic eruption smothered the city in choking ash and molten lava. One of the largest in human history, the Minoan Eruption caused widespread damage to the

surrounding area, and its aftermath was recorded as far away as China in the form of bizarre yellow skies and summer frost.

Given that subsequent excavations failed to unearth any bodies or much in the way of personal belongings, it is safe to assume that the people of this once bustling Bronze Age settlement managed to return to their homes after the quake to remove all they could carry, perhaps aware of the looming threat of a lethal eruption.

As with most places in Greece, Akrotiri is enveloped in myths. According to some tales, Triton, a sea god, gave Euphemus, a son of Poseidon, a lump of earth, which in a dream Euphemus saw change into a woman who he then coupled with. This mysterious lover then revealed her divine origins and told Euphemus she would one day return to nurse his future children. After discussing this vision with Jason, Euphemus cast the dirt into the sea, birthing the island of Santorini.

Other accounts go further still and claim that the island was in fact the location of the fabled lost city of Atlantis.

DELOS

Location: Cyclades, Aegean Islands, Greece

Time zone: UTC+2

Currency: Euro (€)

When it comes to seeking the favour of the heavens, few can have tried harder than the rulers of this island to the west of Mykonos. Birthplace of Apollo and his twin sister, Artemis, whose mother, Leto, went into labour beside the island's sacred lake, there is evidence of human occupation on Delos dating back to the 3rd millennium BCE. Both Leto and Dionysus were worshipped at a cult site here, and in 476 BCE, construction began on the Temple of the Delians in honour of Apollo. This project was funded by the Delian League, a collection of Greek city-states who joined forces to fend off the menace of Persia. However, it was left unfinished and later devastated by war. Other prominent features include the Minoan Fountain, built above a sacred spring, and the Terrace of the Lions, a rank of fierce lionine statues that lined the island's sacred way.

Prior to the island being used as the meeting place for Greece's anti-Persian conglomerate, in the 6th century BCE, Athenian authorities had sought to purify Delos by removing the bodies of those buried in its soil. When this extreme measure apparently failed to please the gods, Athens ordered that nobody was permitted to be born on the island either. Later it instructed all inhabitants to leave the island. However, it was not doomed to be deserted forever; after the Romans conquered Greece they turned it into a bustling port.



Below: The Terrace of the Lions originally comprised nine to 12 marble statues

VERGINA

Location: Central Macedonia, Greece **Time zone:** UTC+2 **Currency:** Euro (€)

Located on a plateau overlooking the Thermaic Gulf, Aigai, to give the city its original name (which means 'land of many goats'), was the first capital of the Kingdom of Macedonia. Populated by 12 large temple-shaped tombs, it is the resting place of no less a figure than King Philip II, father of Alexander the Great, whose remains are said to reside inside the ornate Golden Larnax, a coffin that bears elaborate carvings of 313 oak leaves and 68 acorns. Its lid is embossed with the

Vergina Sun, whose 16 rays represent the 12 Olympian gods and the four elements: earth, fire, wind, and water. The ancient king sleeps in a royal tomb built beneath the Great Tumulus, one of hundreds of grave mounds that litter the site.

Once looming over the surrounding landscape, the Palace of Aigai was the largest building in classical Greece, and it was here that Alexander was proclaimed as king of Macedonia in 336 BCE. He would go on to greatness.

Below: Discovered in the late 1970s, the Golden Larnax is thought to house the remains of Philip of Macedon, who was assassinated in 336 BCE



THE AGORA

Location: Athens, Greece
Time zone: UTC+2
Currency: Euro (€)

Once the beating heart of Athens, the Agora ('gathering place') of Greece's capital is regarded as a very sacred location, one that contains its own share of mysteries. Founded in the 6th century BCE to the north of the Acropolis, at its peak the Agora boasted the Altar of the 12 Gods, a tribute to the Olympians and the point from which all distances from the city were measured. Centred around the Panathenaic Way, a sacred road along which the Panathenaic Festival travelled every four years to honour Athena, the Agora has provided archaeologists with some priceless historical finds. In 1938, a well was discovered between the Agora and the nearby Temple of Hephaestus that contained the bones of over 460 infants, some adults, and around 150 dogs, plus artefacts including shards of pottery and an ivory chape (the protective fitting on a scabbard). Almost 40 years later, a tablet was unearthed that had been inscribed by a slave named Lesis, who lamented his poor treatment at the hands of a "man thoroughly wicked".



OLYMPIA

Location: Elis, Peloponnese Peninsula, Greece
Time zone: UTC+2
Currency: Euro (€)

As the prevalence of their remarkable structures attests, the ancient Greeks built things to last, and this extended to less tangible elements of their culture. Olympia was the birthplace of the Olympic Games, a contest held every four years to honour Zeus that drew crowds and competitors from across the city-states, and one that the world still enjoys thousands of years later. As is only fitting for the highest of the deities, his likeness was shaped into a towering statue made from gold and ivory that was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, but this was sadly destroyed in the 5th century BCE. Nearby stood the altar of Olympia Zeus, fashioned using the ashes of animals sacrificed in his name. Another notable feature among these sprawling ruins is the Pelopion, tomb of the semi-legendary king Pelops, from whom both the kings Agamemnon and Menelaus descended, and the source of the name of the Peloponnese.

MYCENAE

Location: Argolis, Greece
Time zone: UTC+2
Currency: Euro (€)

The most intriguing part of many of the Greek myths is whether or not there is in fact a grain or two of truth in the story, and when it comes to Mycenae, the truth may in fact be staring right at us. That is because the crumbling walls of this former hilltop city – which according to legend were built by cyclops commanded by Perseus and are therefore called Cyclopean walls – may once have been walked by none other than King Agamemnon, the monarch who gathered the troops of Greece and laid siege to the (possibly mythical) city of Troy. This theory is supported by the discovery of what has become known as the Mask of Agamemnon, a glittering golden funeral mask thought to have been buried with the king. Hailed as the 'Mona Lisa of pre-history', today it is displayed in the National Archaeological Museum of Athens.





Above: The temple at Tarxien shows the complex construction of those gigantic and impressive monuments. Today, they are a protected site



Location:
Malta and Gozo

Time zone:
UTC+1

Currency:
Euro (€)

Tip: Ġgantija Archaeological Park in Xaghra, Gozo, has a visitor's centre and a showcase of artefacts

The megalithic temples *of* MALTA

Across the islands of Malta stand seven megalithic temples; these impressive constructions are a fascinating record of temple-building in Malta



WORDS CATHERINE CURZON



The seven megalithic temples of Malta are a unique and important record of prehistoric temple building during 3,600-2,000 BCE. Two temples from the so-called Ggantija phase can be found on Gozo, whilst the temples of Ħaġar Qim, Mnajdra, Skorba, Ta' Ħaġrat and Tarxien are on Malta itself. They are some of the earliest free-standing stone buildings in the world and each is its own architectural masterpiece, with a unique form and decoration. Today the temples have been named UNESCO World Heritage Sites, and they stand as monuments to a time long since passed, but not forgotten.

Archaeologists have found evidence of prehistoric human activity in the islands since 5,000 BCE and believe that construction of the temples began in the third millennium BCE. As subsequent generations inhabited the islands, they continued to build and change the temples, leading to some difficulties in confirming



"In ancient Maltese folklore, the megalithic temples weren't built by humans at all, but by giants; indeed, Ggantija means Giant's Tower"

exactly what part of the building process belongs to which particular era. In Maltese folklore though, the temples weren't built by humans at all, but by giants; indeed, Ggantija means "Giant's Tower".

Each of the temples has its own layout and construction style, consisting of upright stone slabs topped by horizontal blocks. It is an extraordinarily sophisticated technique for the period and stones and earth fill the cavity between the internal slabs and the larger blocks that form the outer walls. Inside are impressive corridors, paved courts and a series of semi-circular rooms, or apses, which are arranged symmetrically around the centre court. Their construction is a testament to the understanding the builders had of the local stone, which they employed in the construction.

The seven temples are each impressively decorated with panels featuring bas-reliefs of patterns and local flora and fauna. Whilst the external walls were usually built with coralline limestone, the internal spaces employed the less hard-wearing globigerina limestone, which was also used to create the decorative reliefs inside. Though today the temples have no roof, scholars have theorised that there may have been roofs on the buildings at some point in their history.

The seven megalithic temples of Malta are remarkable for their complexity and today are protected by law. With careful management, it is hoped that the ruins of these once magnificent structures can survive to share their important story for many, many years to come.



SACRED SITES

HOLY LANDS

Like underground rivers, spirit veins run through Europe, coming to the surface in certain places where the veils of the world are thin



WORDS EDOARDO ALBERT



Above: Europe is ancient. In places, the walls between worlds have worn thin. These are some of those places



AACHEN CATHEDRAL

Location: Cologne, Germany **Time zone:** UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro (€)

Step into Aachen Cathedral and you will be transported back to the end of the 8th century. In 796, Charlemagne ordered Odo of Metz, an Armenian architect, to build a chapel for him near his favourite residence in Aachen. The Palatine Chapel, which forms the core of the cathedral, was built extraordinarily quickly; a 798 letter from the scholar Alcuin states that it was nearly finished and in 805 the final chapel was consecrated. Charlemagne himself, the greatest of all the early medieval kings and the founder of the Holy Roman Empire, was buried in his church and his tomb became a place of pilgrimage for centuries.

The church was extended during the Middle Ages but it suffered

considerable damage during the Second World War. However, its treasures had been safeguarded and the Palatine Chapel survived largely unscathed although the Gothic choir required extensive restoration.

Among the treasures within are the throne of Charlemagne, where subsequent German kings were crowned, and the Marienschrein (Shrine of Mary) which holds the relics for which the cathedral is famous: Mary's cloak, the swaddling clothes of Jesus, the cloth that wrapped John the Baptist's head and Jesus's loincloth. Just as impressive, and far more visible, are the extraordinary mosaics. Few places pierce time in such a

visceral way.

THE GARGOYLE OF ROUEN

Location: Rouen, France

Time zone: UTC+1

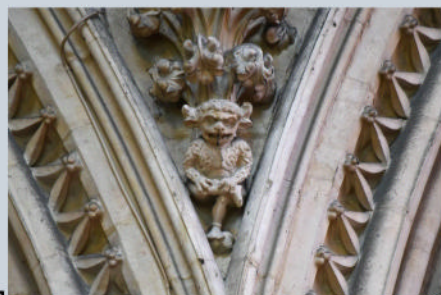
Currency: Euro (€)

Ever wonder why medieval masons carved gargoyles on the outside of churches? It's all thanks to St Romain. A dragon, La Gargouille, was terrorising Rouen, demanding regular meals of virgins. Determined to save the young women of the city, St Romain asked for volunteers to accompany him in confronting La Gargouille – but only a condemned murderer agreed. The duo set off to find La Gargouille and, dragons being conspicuous, soon succeeded. However, the fearsome dragon was rendered immediately docile when St Romain inscribed the cross on him. Now harnessed, St Romain returned La Gargouille to Rouen and its citizens and to commemorate their deliverance from the dragon, the clergy of Rouen Cathedral were given the right to pardon one condemned man every year. As for La Gargouille, the vengeful citizens burned the poor dragon. But when the fire went out, its head and neck were still intact, so they stuck them on the cathedral tower – where a passing mason saw how falling rain drained from the dragon's snout. A quick carving later, and gargoyles were created!

THE IMP OF LINCOLN CATHEDRAL

Location: Lincoln, England, UK **Time zone:** UTC **Currency:** Pound sterling (£)

High up in the choir of Lincoln Cathedral there is a carving of a little devil that dates all the way back to when the choir was made, between 1250 and 1280. It



didn't attract much attention when first carved but since the 19th century various tales of its origin, which might be much older, have been collected. The earliest had the demon attacking the bishop, whereupon the Blessed Virgin sent a wind so strong that the evil sought refuge inside the cathedral, where he has stayed ever since. Another legend has the devil dispatching twoimps to cause mayhem in the cathedral. However, an angel arrived to defend the holy place and, when theimps wouldn't stop, the angel turned one of them to stone as a warning of the consequences of such actions.



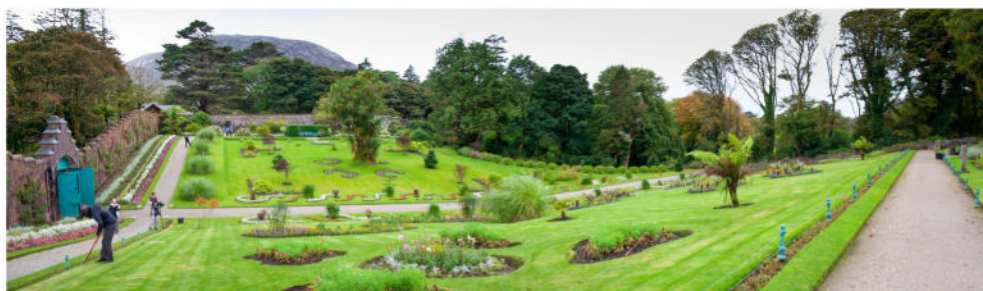


SANCTUARY OF OUR LADY OF NAZARE

Location: Nazaré, Portugal **Time zone:** UTC **Currency:** Euro (€)

One misty day in September 1182, the sheriff of Nazaré, Dom Fuas Roupinho, took his favourite horse out hunting. Flushing a deer from cover, they gave chase, galloping uphill. The deer, in its panic, leapt from the cliff face and, as the mist cleared, Dom Fuas Roupinho realised that he was about to follow, for it was too late to make his horse pull up. In extremis, Dom Fuas prayed to Mary and his

prayer was answered: the horse managed to pull aside before they tumbled from the cliff. In gratitude, Dom Fuas built a sanctuary to Our Lady nearby, over the place where a statue of her stood that had reputedly come originally from Nazareth. The imprint of the horse's hoof, as it turned back from the cliff edge, can still be seen in the rock while the sanctuary became a place of pilgrimage.



KYLEMORE ABBEY

Location: County Galway, Ireland **Time zone:** UTC **Currency:** Euro (€)

Kylemore Abbey, a fabulous Victorian Gothic construction, is tinged by tragedy. It was built by Mitchell Henry for his beloved wife, Margaret, as the place where they would raise their children. But Margaret died while still young and her grief-stricken husband built the nearby neo-Gothic church in her memory. In 1920 the castle passed into the keeping of an order of Benedictine nuns, becoming an abbey in the process and the sisters maintain it still.

The country around the abbey is steeped in legends from Ireland's past. According to those tales, the mountain under which the abbey stands, Dúchruach, was the home of Cú Chulainn, the great warrior hero of Irish myth whose battle frenzy was such that both foes and friends fled before him. On the other side of the valley another mountain rises which was the home of another warrior hero

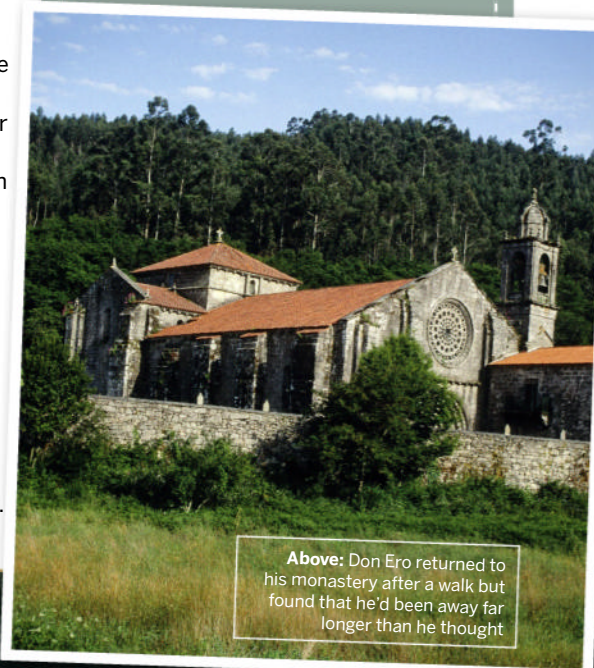
of Irish legend, Fionn mac Cumhaill. The two were hot-tempered and often argued. During one such row, Cú Chulainn picked up a stone and flung it at Fionn mac Cumhaill. It just missed, embedding itself in the ground where it can be seen to this day. Today, if you stand with your back against the 'Ironing Stone' (for it looks like an iron) and throw three pebbles over it while making a wish, it's said your wish shall be granted.

The lake in front of the abbey is both the last resting place of Fionn mac Cumhaill's hound, Bran, and the home of a white horse that rises every seven years to gallop across the lake. The nearby Giant's Bed, a large flat stone, marks the grave of a giant that was terrorising local people until a brave young lad tricked the ogre and slew him. The locals buried him under the giant slab of rock to ensure that he could trouble them no further.

ARMENTEIRA MONASTERY

Location: Pontevedra, Spain
Time zone: UTC+1
Currency: Euro (€)

In the 12th century, a Spanish nobleman, Don Ero, founded a Cistercian monastery. As founder, Don Ero became its first abbot. He was renowned for the simplicity of his life and his fervent faith. Most of all, he wished to have a vision of heaven in this life. One day, while walking on nearby Mount Castrove, Don Ero renewed his prayer. As he was doing so, Don Ero noticed the beauty of the place where he was praying: a little dell where a stream flowed under trees. Don Ero sat down to appreciate the beauty of his surroundings and, as he was sitting and looking, he heard a bird begin to sing. Its song was more beautiful than any music Don Ero had ever heard and he was transported and completely transfixed. When finally the bird stopped singing Don Ero gathered himself and returned to his monastery. But, on getting back, he found it... different. The monks themselves looked at him strangely. They asked who he was and when Don Ero told them, they gasped. Don Ero founded our monastery three hundred years ago, they told him, but one day he went walking on Mount Castrove and never returned. Don Ero looked around at what he had founded and then, suddenly, the lost centuries caught up with him and he crumbled to dust.



Above: Don Ero returned to his monastery after a walk but found that he'd been away far longer than he thought

CAMINO DE SANTIAGO

Location: Spain, Portugal, France **Time zone:** UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro (€)

According to tradition, the Apostle James was martyred in Jerusalem by order of Herod Agrippa but his followers took his body back to Spain, where he had originally preached, interring his remains in Compostela where they were rediscovered in the 9th century.

That was the trigger for the genesis of the most remarkable pilgrim tradition in western Europe. There were already two great

pilgrimage routes: to Jerusalem and to Rome. The pilgrimage to the Cathedral of St James became the third.

There were and are many different pilgrimage routes. The Camino Francés, starting from St-Jean-Pied-de-Port near the Spanish border, is the most popular but starting points for pilgrims include Paris, Le Puy and Vézelay in France, Madrid in Spain and Lisbon in Portugal. None of these are for the faint of heart. The Camino Francés, which is at least fairly level once it crosses the Pyrenees, is still 500 miles (800km) long. To earn the Compostela, a certificate confirming completion of the pilgrimage, the pilgrim must have walked at least 100km or cycled 200km.

Pilgrims can stay at pilgrims' hostels along

the way. These usually provide dormitory-style beds and are run by a range of organisations, from local parishes to pilgrims' associations. The friendships, meetings and serendipitous encounters along the way provide treasured memories to pilgrims as they meet, leave, and meet again the other wanderers on the path.

Every day, at noon and 7:30pm, pilgrim masses are celebrated at the Cathedral of St James during which pilgrims who received the Compostela the day before have their home country and starting point announced. The Botafumeiro, a huge swinging censer, is used for every Friday evening mass (apart from Good Friday).

The last 40 years have seen an extraordinary growth in the number of pilgrims. In 1985, 690 completed the pilgrimage. In 2023 there were 446,035 recipients of the Compostela. The 2010 film, *The Way*, starring Martin Sheen, is a touching depiction of one man's pilgrimage in the footsteps of his dead son.

Below: One of the things that has made the Camino de Santiago so popular is that, in today's labour-saving world, it is something that is genuinely difficult to do so the accomplishment is earned



DUOMO DE MILANO (MILAN CATHEDRAL)

Location: Milan, Italy **Time zone:** UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro (€)

Turning into the central piazza in Milan, the cathedral that looms ahead of you is, literally, jaw dropping. Milan Cathedral is the fifth largest cathedral in the world but its size is the least of its attributes. Seeing the façade, the visitor is struck by the sheer intricacy of the carvings that cover it. Look to the right of the main door to see a carving of Tarantasio, the dragon that terrorised the people of Lombardy until he was killed by either Frederick Barbarossa or an ancestor of the Viscontis, the family that would go on to rule Milan.

It was a later Visconti, Gian Galeazzo, who began the building of the cathedral (an enterprise that would take six hundred years). One legend suggests an unlikely catalyst: the devil appeared to Gian Galeazzo in a dream and threatened to steal his soul if he didn't build a cathedral covered with statues of the devil and his minions. Hence the 134 gargoyles on the church.

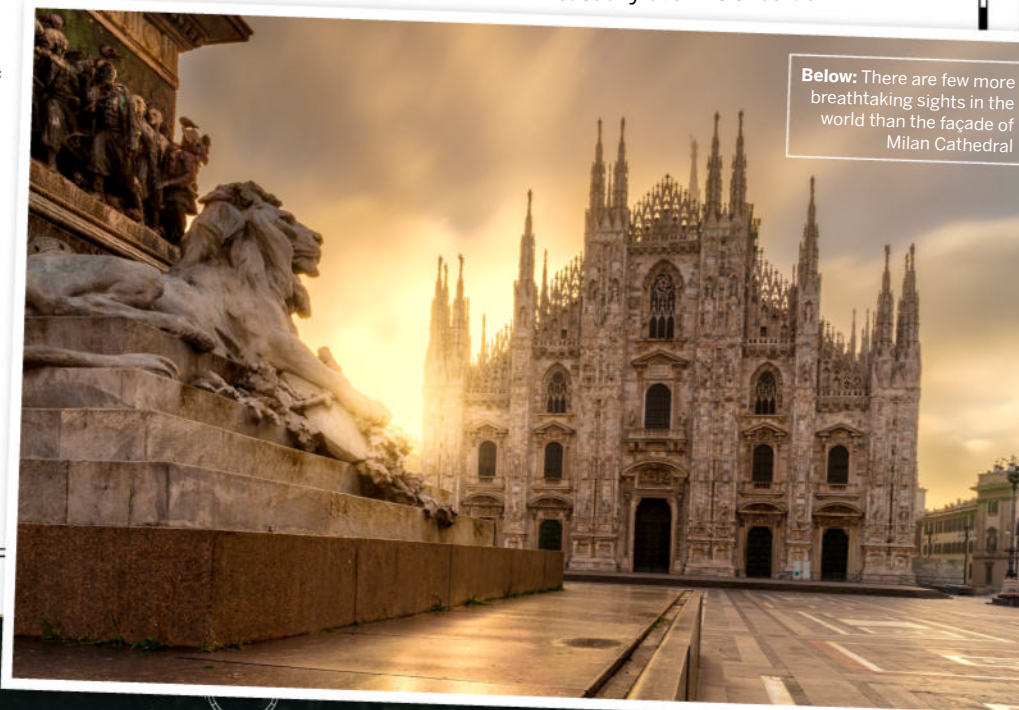
Set atop the highest spire of the Duomo is the Madonnina, a golden statue of Mary. A ticket up to the terrazza will reveal her in all her splendour as well as unveiling wonderful

views over Milan and, on a clear day, all the way to the Alps.

Within the cathedral, don't miss the extraordinary stained-glass windows. In particular, look out for the window depicting battle between St Michael and the demons on the north wall. Also at the back of the

Duomo is a statue that was originally part of the façade but had to be moved inside because churchgoers found it too disturbing. It depicts St Bartholomew, who was martyred by being flayed alive. The statue shows the flayed Bartholomew with his skin flung casually over his shoulder.

Below: There are few more breathtaking sights in the world than the façade of Milan Cathedral



The sanctuary at LOURDES

There are few experiences to rival a visit to the sanctuary at Lourdes, where history, legend and belief draw millions of pilgrims each year

WORDS CATHERINE CURZON

Each year, millions of pilgrims make the journey to France, to visit the sanctuary of Our Lady of Lourdes. It was in this unassuming corner of France where, in 1858, 14-year-old Bernadette Soubirous claimed to have witnessed a vision of the Virgin Mary in the Massabielle Grotto, a visitation which occurred 18 times and resulted in Bernadette's eventual canonisation. Today, Lourdes is one of the most important Catholic shrines in the world, visited by approximately six million pilgrims annually. The waters of the grotto's natural spring are believed to have miraculous healing powers.

Whether travelling alone or in a group, anyone who makes the pilgrimage to Lourdes is welcomed as a friend. The

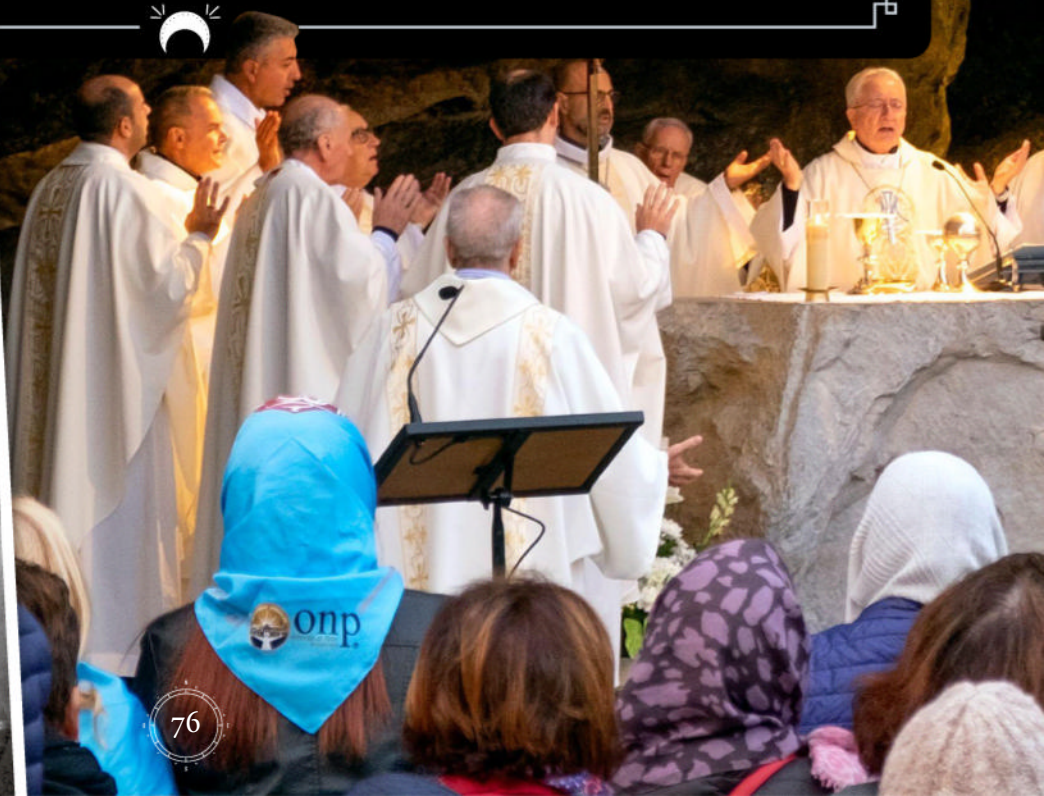
sanctuary offers visitors a peaceful place in which to light a candle, join the candle procession or make the water gesture: washing their hands, forearms and face in the spring water that flows from the grotto. Pilgrims can also drink the water or even bathe in it with the assistance of the hospitaliers, volunteers who are on hand to help the sick should they require it.

Though the pilgrimage season runs from Easter to late October, the sanctuary is open to visitors all year round. There is no charge to enter and, while certain activities are only available at scheduled times or on specific dates, the sanctuary itself is open 24 hours a day and entry to the site is free. While it is an important Catholic site, people of all faiths or those with none are welcome to visit the sanctuary and participate.

Visitors to Lourdes will find a town that is nestled in the Pyrenees mountains, surrounded by stunning scenery and offering a warm welcome to pilgrims and tourists alike, with plenty of accommodation on offer. For those pilgrims whose health or accessibility issues mean that they need to be close to the site itself, there is the Accueil Notre Dame, a purpose-built accommodation block specifically open to pilgrims with mobility and other health concerns.

Whether visitors to the sanctuary of Lourdes are tourists, who simply want to see the famed and mystical site, or Catholic pilgrims for whom the grotto has a particular importance due to their faith, the sanctuary at Lourdes is a fascinating place, rich in history and legend and welcoming to all.

Right: Bernadette Soubirous reported that she had seen the Virgin Mary in Lourdes' Massabielle Grotto



THE SANCTUARY AT LOURDES

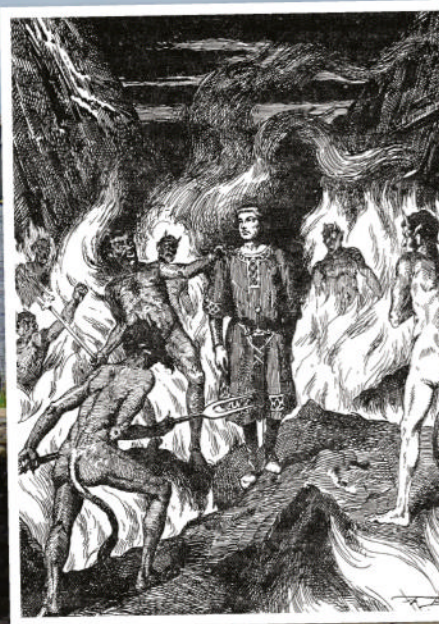
Left: Thousands flock to the grotto each day, to taste the water, light a candle or perhaps participate in a mass.



On unhallowed GROUND

You might think consecrated earth would prevent restless spirits from congregating, but think again. These houses of the holy are also regular stomping grounds of the dead, and sometimes even something demonic...

WORDS ALICE PATTILLO



ST. PATRICK'S PURGATORY

Location: County Donegal, Ulster, Ireland

Time zone: UTC

Currency: Euro (€)

Catholics on pilgrimage have been visiting this site on Station Island since the Middle Ages. According to legend, this holy spot was where Christ showed St Patrick a cave leading to purgatory. The site was so important in medieval times that it's the only Irish place mentioned on Martin Behaim's world map of 1492, and it can be seen on maps dating back to the 5th century. The body of water in which it is situated – Lough Derg (Red Lake) – is also the legendary home of a giant serpent, said to have been killed by St Patrick and whose blood stained the lake red. Previously, the loch was named Lough Fin, in honour of a mythical Celtic warrior (and the supposed creator of the monstrous serpent). Many locals believe that this was the site of the druids in Ireland, hence its significance and prevailing relevance in legend. Whatever the reality, there is something lurking in Lough Derg that defies all logic.

ROSSLYN CHAPEL

Location: Midlothian, Scotland, UK **Time zone:** UTC **Currency:** Pound sterling (£)

This stone chapel dates back to the 15th century, and was featured prominently in the 2003 novel and subsequent 2006 film *The Da Vinci Code*. Initially built as a private chapel in 1446 by the last Earl of Orkney, Sir William St Clair, he commissioned numerous stonemasons to construct it with various imported materials from far and wide. Unfortunately, Sir William died before his vision was finished and he was laid to rest within its walls. The chapel is full of strange carvings, often described as a 'tapestry in stone'. One pillar in particular, the Apprentice Pillar, is said to have been carved by an apprentice stonemason whose talent superseded that of his master, causing his master to murder him in a fit of jealousy. The meanings behind many of the carvings appear to be Masonic, which

is unsurprising as it is likely that Sir William was indeed involved in or at least inspired by the Order of the Knights Templar, despite the fact that they were officially disbanded in 1312. Today, the chapel is said to be home to numerous ghosts, including that of the alleged murdered apprentice, a ghostly dog, numerous monks and even knights.



MELROSE ABBEY

Location: Melrose, Scotland, UK **Time zone:** UTC **Currency:** Pound sterling (£)

Once a wealthy and prosperous monastery, St Mary's Abbey, Melrose, is home to one of the creepiest vampire legends in Scotland. In 1139, there was a chaplain to one of the ladies who lived nearby. This chaplain was known to revel in a wide array of sins and vices, even earning himself the nickname 'Hunderprest', meaning 'dog priest'. He was given this title apparently due to his fondness for hunting with a pack of wild hounds.

It is believed that when the priest died, he paid for his sinful life by being cursed to

return as a revenant, or vampire. There were sightings of the priest stalking the streets, searching for blood and terrifying the locals. It was said he would return to the abbey in the dead of night in the form of a bat. The monks at the abbey were reportedly able to drive the vampire away with prayers and rituals; however, this simply drove the priest into the house of his old mistress, whom he tried to ravish. Terrified, she called upon the help of the monks, hoping an exorcism would halt his advances.

In order to finally rid themselves of this sinful demon once and for all, an elder monk travelled to the priest's grave where he reportedly witnessed the man rise out of the ground and approach him. The monk fought him off with a staff, and drove the phantom back into the ground. Now confident he was dealing with a vampire, the monk and some companions opened up the grave the following morning. Inside they found the priest's body, a smile upon his lips, dripping with blood. The monks removed the body, burned it to ashes, and scattered the ashes into the wind. The monks were satisfied that the demon was dealt with and things began to calm down. However, today it is said that on some nights ghostly howls can still be heard throughout the ruins of the abbey.



BUCKFASTLEIGH CHURCHYARD

Location: Devon, England, UK
Time zone: UTC
Currency: Pound sterling (£)

The skeletal remains of Buckfastleigh church perch on a rock opposite Buckfast Abbey (itself haunted by a procession of phantom monks) and have attracted a congregation of corvids and a midnight mass of owls since a fire, supposedly started by Satanists, decimated the interior and ancient Norman font back in 1992. The church's history is chequered with disasters from fires to lightning strikes, bombs and body snatchers. If that's not ominous enough, its long-forgotten churchyard is home to one of England's oldest mausoleums: Richard Cabell's sepulchre, a tomb harbouring the remains of an evil 17th century squire whose infamy inspired the Sherlock Holmes tale *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. Cabell was said to have murdered his wife and sold his soul to the devil. His death in 1677 was predicted by a pack of hellhounds, who arose from the depths of Dartmoor to escort his soul to hell. Convinced that they would never be safe from him, the Buckfast locals constructed a solid tomb and secured his coffin beneath a block of heavy stone to trap him for eternity. Despite this, his unquiet spirit is said to haunt the graveyard along with the hellish hounds. Today, you'd be forgiven for mistaking the sepulchre's pyramid-shaped porch for a closed-down café kiosk – but most kiosks don't harbour a devil that bites your fingers if you circle them seven times and stick your hands through their iron bars...



SACRED SITES



NEWSTEAD ABBEY

Location: Nottinghamshire, England, UK
Time zone: UTC
Currency: Pound sterling (£)

Lord Byron's old haunt is home to a few phantoms, one of which he reportedly witnessed for himself. Known as the Black Friar, but dubbed by Byron the Goblin Friar, this black, shapeless mass was said to roll off a bed, onto the floor, and vanish. Byron claimed it would appear to his family members as an indication of an unfortunate event.

When Byron tired of life at the Abbey, he sold it to his childhood friend, Thomas Wildman. Wildman heard that a local deaf and mute girl named Sophie Hyatt was a huge fan of the poet, and invited her to visit Newstead as often as she wished. Sophie found a haven at the Abbey, caring for a dog Byron had left behind and becoming a familiar sight dressed in a white gown. Sophie had relied on a rich relative for her income and, after he died, set off for Nottingham, leaving a note to tell the Wildmans of her plans. When they read it, the family decided to ask Sophie to live with them at Newstead and sent a servant to bring her home. Tragically, he arrived to find that Sophie had been hit by a drayman's cart and killed instantly. But Sophie's spirit lives on at Newstead, strolling through her beloved garden where she now has her own pathway – White Lady's Walk.

The final ghostly figure at the Abbey is an ancestor of Byron's, witnessed by *Sleepy Hollow* author Washington Irving. He claimed the terrifying bearded figure emerged from a painting above the drawing room fireplace at night.



ST GEORGE'S CHURCH

Location: Lukova, Czechia **Time zone:** UTC+1 **Currency:** Czech koruna

In 1968, after serving the small community of Lukova – around 600km east of Prague – for over 600 years, the roof of St George's Church collapsed during a funeral service. For the superstitious locals, this was the last straw. The church had been plagued by misfortune for years, being rebuilt time after time. For the local parishioners, enough was enough and they began to hold mass outside, convinced the place was haunted, or even cursed. The church was soon boarded up, later raided by thieves struggling to survive under Soviet rule. Left in ruins, in

2014 it piqued the interest of art student Jakub Hadrava, who had been tasked by his university to find an abandoned, dilapidated church for an art project. Hadrava, who was studying sculpture, chose to give the haunted former house of the holy an afterlife, installing 30 plaster ghosts within the chapel's pews and aisles. Although the installation was initially only supposed to last for half a year, news spread and the ghosts now live here permanently, with donations making it possible for local authorities to begin the repair of the building.

CONVENT OF ST AGNES

Location: Prague, Czechia **Time zone:** UTC+1 **Currency:** Czech koruna



This haunted nunnery is home to the ghost of – you guessed it – a nun. According to lore, in life, the daughter of a wealthy nobleman fell in love with a poor knight who was of a much lower social status than her. Her father refused the match, and instead sent her away to St Agnes to devote her life to God as punishment for her sinful love affair. The night before she left for the convent she conspired to leave with her love, but instead was met by her enraged father who murdered her for her disobedience and the shame she supposedly brought upon her family. Of course, this technically means she isn't a nun at all... In any case, the poor woman haunts St Agnes' – a terrifying sight, dripping with blood and often in an understandably miserable state. However, she is also known to smile creepily before vanishing and even saved the life of a suicidal girl once – grabbing the poison from her grasp and replacing it with gold coins.

BORGVATTNET VICARAGE

Location: Borgvattnet, Sweden **Time zone:** UTC+1 **Currency:** Swedish krona

Borgvattnet Vicarage may not be very old, but it is infamously one of Sweden's most haunted places. Built in 1876 it was a mere 50 years into its existence that the first paranormal sightings were reported. In 1927 the resident vicar logged numerous supernatural events, including his washing being inexplicably taken off the line. Since then almost every new vicar or their family and friends have reported ghostly

goings on, from poltergeist activity to screaming and shadow-people sightings. In the early 1980s, Borgvattnet attracted the attention of Tore Forslund, a different kind of ghost priest. Forslund performed exorcisms on the house but to no avail, quitting within a year.

Today, you can stay the night at this infamous vicarage – if you manage to stay a whole night, you will be awarded with a diploma.

TIP

Borgvattnet is about two hours from Östersund via public transport – available on weekdays only. Jump on the number 132 bus from Östersund Busstorget, changing at Stugun for the 321 direct to Borgvattnet. Check out sj.se to plan your journey ahead of time

Above: Dare you stay the night in Sweden's most haunted residence? It's available to rent on AirBnB!



Left: A mysterious monk haunts Norway's impressive cathedral, but where did he come from? God only knows

Below: Nidaros Cathedral dates all the way back to the 11th century

NIDAROS CATHEDRAL

Location: Trondheim, Norway
Time zone: UTC+1
Currency: Norwegian krone

Built in 1070, Nidaros Cathedral is built upon the burial site of King Olav II, who was responsible for Norway's Christianisation and has since become the patron saint of the nation. It is also home to Norway's most famous ghost – but it's not Saint Olav who haunts these consecrated walls, it's a monk. First witnessed by bishop Marie Gleditsch in 1924, who reported the sight of a ghostly friar with a slashed throat, inexplicable chanting and eerie organ music have since been heard in the cathedral late at night. While the macabre monk might be one of Norway's most infamous phantoms, it is rather controversial as the cathedral has never had any link to any monastery. Perhaps it is Saint Olav after all?

London's TEMPLE of MITHRAS

In 1954, an ancient Roman Mithraeum emerged into the London daylight, centuries after it was lost. Today, it is open to all

WORDS CATHERINE CURZON

In 1954, archaeologist Audrey Williams and WF Grimes, director of the Museum of London, excavated what they believed was an early Christian church on a construction site on Walbrook, a street in the City of London. What they had discovered, however, was a Roman temple dedicated to the god Mithras. Among the artefacts unearthed were marble statues of Minerva and Mithras and locally made clay figures of the goddess Venus.

The temple had been constructed on the site of the Walbrook, a lost river of London. When the Romans founded the city, the Walbrook marked the boundary of the very first settlement and 200 years later, one of residents of Roman London built the temple. It was subsequently rededicated to Bacchus in the 4th century.

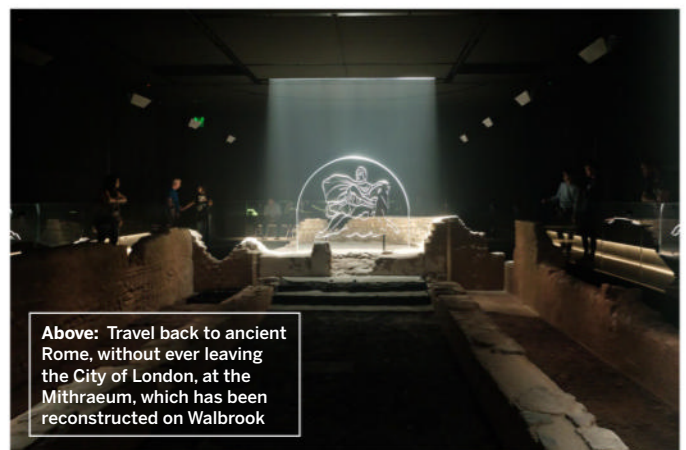
With building work ongoing at the site of the temple, the uncovered ruins were moved to a new site to allow the construction work to continue, but in 2007 the site was relocated back to 12 Walbrook, where it had been built in the 3rd century. In the years since the initial discovery, over 14,000 items have been recovered, many

of them in excellent condition thanks to the preservation qualities of the waterlogged soil in which they had lain. A new excavation between 2012 and 2014 was one of the most extensive the city had ever seen and uncovered ancient Londinium's rich Roman history still further.

Today, the Walbrook sight of the Mithraeum is open to visitors and the ruins have been reconstructed exactly as they were when they were discovered in 1954. This recreation of the initial building of approximately 240CE contains original stones and bricks, while perishable elements such as wood and lime mortar are new but have been made to match those that the Romans would have been used. Visitors to the temple can also view a number of artefacts that have been found at the site during various excavations.

In order for visitors to be able to picture the site

as it was when a place of worship, careful attention has been paid to lighting and sound, creating a mystical haze and filling the air with mysterious chanting and distant footsteps. It is a multisensory experience, evoking a time that has long since passed and transporting visitors out of the modern era and back through the centuries into the temple of Mithras. Entry is free (and entertainingly through a sleek modern office building), but you need to book in advance.



Above: Travel back to ancient Rome, without ever leaving the City of London, at the Mithraeum, which has been reconstructed on Walbrook



Above: Archaeologists first uncovered the site in 1954, before building work forced the removal of the ruins. Today, they are back where they belong

LONDON'S TEMPLE OF MITHRAS

Below: In addition to the original walls and many ancient artifacts, the Temple of Mithras also hosts contemporary art installations and events



Location:
London, UK
Time zone:
UTC
Currency:
Pound sterling (£)

Image source: Adobe Stock, Alamy, Getty



Ancient stones imbued with magical and mythical significance are hidden throughout the landscapes of Europe

WORDS ALICE PATTILLO

Humans have been building with stones since, well, at least the Stone Age, over three million years ago. Rocks have long provided us with shelter from the elements and protection from our environment. We've also used them to make tools and jewels and carved them into symbols of remembrance, honour, love, power, or purely for decoration.

We also have a long tradition of ascribing magic to them – associating certain stones with specific spiritual properties or in the belief that they can be used to channel and

amplify mystical energies, communicate with otherworlds, and to heal the sick. And it's easy to see why – stones contain pigments, precious metals, minerals and can even generate electric currents, as well as being the toughest naturally-occurring materials on the planet.

During the Neolithic period, ancient Europeans began to develop a distinctive megalithic tradition that would continue for many centuries, building large open air structures out of specially selected giant stones to create sacred spaces. Across Europe there are estimated to be over

“During the Neolithic period ancient Europeans began to develop a distinctive megalithic tradition that would continue for many centuries”

35000 megalithic sites dating back as far as 5000 years. Megalith literally means large stone, and these ancient monuments come in all shapes and sizes, ranging from singular standing stones known as menhirs or monoliths to impressive structures such as trilithons (two vertical stones with a horizontal stone across the top) and dolmens (two or more vertical standing stones and a horizontal, flat stone 'roof').

Free-standing single chamber dolmens, also known as portal tombs, are the most common type of megalithic structure found across Europe, with more than 100 Neolithic dolmens in Sardinia, Italy alone. Many believe they were originally covered by earthen mounds, similar to a larger passage grave. And while some do indeed function as a tomb, many do not – causing much speculation over whether or not that is their primary function.

Megalithic monuments may also appear as simple stone circles, rows of stones, spiral formations or elaborate

constructions that use all of these formations, and they may not always be Neolithic either. There are more than 1,300 stone circles in the British Isles and Brittany, France, but the majority are Celtic grave sites dating back to the Bronze Age and feature cairns (stacks of flat stones). In Scandinavia, such constructions often date back to the Viking era.

Neolithic and Bronze Age megalithic monuments are often combined with earthwork. Some may be situated in a henge – an earthen enclosure consisting of a ring-shaped mound with a ditch along its inside that marks out a circular or oval platform in the centre. Despite being the namesake for the term 'henge', England's Stonehenge is not an actual henge – it is a proto-henge, an early example of the earthwork construction.

Similarity between site structures, stones selected, their placements and alignments, suggest that each rock was placed with a great deal of consideration and these

magnificent monuments also have spiritual significance. Evidence of ritual significance, such as sacrificial animals, human remains, offerings and pre-historic art, have been found in many of these sites indicating that they were sites of major cultural significance and perhaps had multiple functions. Many of the larger sites are also aligned to the lunar and/or solar cycles, functioning as time-keeping devices with incredible accuracy, and many were no doubt used as astronomical observation points. Carvings have pointed towards them being, possibly, ancestral churches to the gods of nature and associated with both fertility and death, and their many shared characteristics point towards a common culture or at least shared knowledge that spanned across Europe. To stand within one will bewitch you. These ancient stones are rich with powerful spiritual energies and serve as mysterious ghosts of the past – they stand as all we have left of once thriving prehistoric civilisations.

Below: Callanish stone circle, found in the Outer Hebrides, Scotland



CASTLERIGG

Location: Lake District, England, UK
Time zone: UTC
Currency: Pound sterling (£)

One of Britain's oldest open stone circles, Castlerigg was constructed in around 3000 BCE and its location alone makes it a mysterious and magical site. Surrounded by the stunning scenery of the Lake District, cradled by mountains and overlooking the Thirlmere Valley, its entrance is marked by two large upright menhirs on its northern side that seem to line up with the midwinter solstice. With its 30 meter diameter circle of 38 (originally 42) stones, curiously, is a rectangular formation of standing stones. This anomaly has only ever been found at one other site – the Bronze Age open stone circle at the Cockpit in nearby Ullswater. In 1901, three Neolithic stone axes were discovered within the circle, now on display in Keswick museum. But there has never been extensive excavation at Castlerigg, so its purpose remains a mystery. Many believe it was a ceremonial site or a trading spot while others theorise it was an astronomical observatory. If you want to discover its secret yourself, there's a picturesque circular walking route from Keswick town centre that will take you around two hours to hike.



STONEHENGE

Location: Wiltshire, England, UK

Time zone: UTC **Currency:** Pound sterling (£)

Situated right in the centre of the mystical Salisbury Plain, Stonehenge is an incredible example of a megalithic stone circle featuring gigantic trilithons that date back over 4000 years and have, unbelievably, survived until this day.

Originally a larger arrangement of stones, Stonehenge has bewitched and bewildered humanity for centuries, inspiring tales of sorcery and ritual – including a theory that it was conjured by the wizard Merlin. 18th century antiquarian John Aubrey theorised it was built by the druids in 400 BCE as a temple where they would perform their alleged human sacrifices, casting a sinister shadow over the site that has remained to this day. However, while it was no doubt used by the Celts, the structure dates back thousands of years before their existence.

The stones are made up of a central horseshoe of 15 gigantic sarsen (silicified sandstone) stones that weigh around 20 tons each surrounding a six-ton altar stone made of Old Red sandstone, all within an outer arrangement of smaller rocks made

from bluestone. These bluestones, which average two to three tons in weight, were transported to the site from the Preseli Hills in south-west Wales, more than 150 miles (as the crow flies) and the large altar stone may have come from as far as Scotland. Clearly, whoever built it was remarkably sophisticated, and utilised joints normally found in woodworking and not found in any other prehistoric monument.

While nobody knows Stonehenge's original purpose, like many ancient monuments, it is aligned with the sun. On the summer solstice, the sun rises over the large sarsen stone known as the Heel Stone and sets behind it on the winter solstice. Twice every year, people still gather at the stones to witness the solstices and the stunning feat of engineering our ancestors put in so much effort to create, and if you can manage to attend on either the longest or shortest day of the year, it is by far the most magical way to experience the site. If you want to visit at any other time, make sure you book a tour so you can see the stones up close.



AVEBURY

Location: Wiltshire, England, UK **Time zone:** UTC **Currency:** Pound sterling (£)

Avebury is the UK's largest diameter stone circle and a superhenge, built between 2850 and 2200 BCE. Its surviving henge encircles part of Avebury village and its outlining stone circle is the largest in Britain. Within its larger stone circle, which originally contained 100 stones, are two smaller

stone circles. The henge and stone circles are part of the Avebury World Heritage Site, which also includes West Kennet Avenue, the nearby causewayed enclosure of Windmill Hill (another Neolithic site believed to have been used for rituals, feasts and perhaps even trading), the impressive West Kennet Long Barrow burial chambers (dating back over 5,000 years) and Silbury Hill.

Shrouded in mystery, Silbury Hill is a huge artificial hill built in around 2400 BCE that stands at approximately the same height as the Egyptian pyramids, also constructed around this time. The majority of Avebury World Heritage Site can be reached on foot from Avebury village, where you can also learn more about all the local megaliths at the Alexander Keiller Museum.



THE DROMBEG STONE CIRCLE

Location: Glandore, County Cork, Ireland **Time zone:** UTC **Currency:** Euro (€)

Locally known as the Druid's Altar, this Bronze Age stone circle is a prime example of the Cork-Kerry type of stone circle. These recumbent or axial stone circles feature one large horizontal stone on one side of the circle and two tall stones facing each other opposite it. These tall stones, known as portal stones, create an entrance. Drombeg's recumbent stone and the two portal stones are arranged in alignment with the sunrise at midsummer and the sunset at the midwinter solstice. Upon the altar stone are carvings of two shallow cups and

an oval motif often believed to be an axe, which represent the powers of divinity, but it could also represent a vulva – a hypothesis suggested by Terence Meaden, who claims one of the northern stones features a phallic engraving. In 1957, archeologists discovered a gravel surface and central fire pit, within which were 3,000 year old cremated adolescent human remains and a broken pot. Was this a site for fertility rituals or human sacrifice? With its picturesque view of the Atlantic Ocean and the lush green fields of the Emerald Isle, it's certainly the perfect setting for revering the power of nature.

Below: The cyclic nature of life and death is profoundly felt at Drombeg



SACRED SITES



ALIGNEMENTS DE CARNAC

Location: Brittany, France

Time zone: UTC+1

Currency: Euro (€)

The Alignements de Carnac are 3000 mysterious and perfectly aligned dense rows of menhirs extending for almost four miles. These some 7,000 year old symmetrical stone columns are split into three main sites, but were likely originally all linked, and they end with a stone circle. The alignments at Ménéac descend in height

from west to east, varying from four metres high to as short as 60 centimetres and then growing in height again as they head east. The Kermario alignments consist of over 1,000 stones in a fanned-out formation, decreasing in height towards the east, and the Kerlescan alignment consists of over 550 stones with the tallest in its western extreme reaching four metres high and featuring a stone circle of 39 stones. There are further, smaller alignments such as the Petit-Ménéac alignment, hidden in a woodland, and several tumuli (earthen burial mounds) and dolmans that also dot this dramatic and puzzling ancient landscape (Kercado is especially worth seeing as it is still covered with its cairn).

Numerous myths surround the stones, including medieval tales of them being the result of the wizard Merlin turning a Roman legion to stone. But they are much older than any Arthurian legend and it's most likely they had a more ritualistic and spiritual function. Start your journey at the Maison des Megaliths in Ménéac to discover more.



NEWGRANGE

Location: County Meath, Ireland

Time zone: UTC

Currency: Euro (€)

This enormous prehistoric passage tomb was built over 5,000 years ago by Stone Age farmers, yet it could easily be mistaken for an entirely modern building. The 13 metre high, 85 metre diameter kidney-shaped, grass-topped mound is much more than just a tomb – it is an ancient temple, older than the Great Pyramids of Giza. Surrounded by 97 large kerbstones, many of which are engraved with symbols, its doorway leads to a 19 metre long passage which opens into a cruciform chamber with a corbelled roof and three alcoves, which all lights up at sunrise on the winter solstice. This is undoubtedly the most magical time to visit but is so popular that a lottery is held every year to gain access to the passage and chamber when it is illuminated (and with the notoriously erratic Irish weather, the event may not even occur!)

LONG MEG & HER DAUGHTERS

Location: Cumbria, England, UK **Time zone:** UTC **Currency:** Pound sterling (£)

Besides Stonehenge, this incredible stone circle is, according to Cumbrian 19th century Romantic poet William Wordsworth, "beyond dispute the most notable relic that this or probably any other country contains". Being a local, he might have been biased, but Long Meg and Her Daughters certainly is a unique spectacle to behold. The stones got their name from a local legend that claims that the stones are not rocks at all, but a petrified coven of witches led by Meg of Meldon, who were turned to stone after violating the Sabbath and dancing wild on the moor.

With a diameter of 350 feet, Long Meg and Her Daughters is the third widest stone circle in the country. Consisting of over 60 stones, its tallest monolith, affectionately known as Long Meg, stands just outside the circle at 12 feet high and is made of local red sandstone, while her 'daughters' – the shorter stones that form the circle – are made



from rhyolite. Long Meg is carved with symbols, including a cup, rings and spirals similar to megalithic carvings found at Newgrange, and she is thought to be a solstice stone like the altar stone at Stonehenge, while her daughters may be linked to not only solar but lunar cycles too.

Whatever the origin or purpose of Long Meg and Her Daughters, they have held us under their spell for centuries, and will likely continue to do so for many more years to come.



THE ROLLRIGHT STONES

Location: Warwickshire, England, UK

Time zone: UTC

Currency: Pound sterling (£)

The Rollright Stones are a complex of three limestone monuments in the Cotswolds. The oldest of the monuments are the Whispering Knights. 400 metres west are the King's Men. The stones are placed very closely, and may have originally formed a continuous barrier without any gaps, and there has been evidence of a fire pit in their centre. The King's Stone stands 76 metres north of the King's Men. According to one local legend they were once a king and his knights who were turned to stone by a witch while crossing the country. Today, the site is run by a trust who charge a small entry fee, and Pagan groups are able to book slots to perform ritual ceremonies too.



THE RING OF BRODGAR

Location: Orkney, Scotland **Time zone:** UTC **Currency:** Pound sterling (£)

The Ring of Brodgar comprises the remains of a large 104 metre diameter stone circle, thirteen or more burial mounds and a pseudo henge built over 5,000 years ago. Its spectacular setting surrounded by the hills and lochs of Mainland, Orkney, on a small isthmus between the Lochs of Stenness and Harray, creates the feeling of a natural amphitheatre and it's easy to see why a ceremonial space would be constructed here.

The Ring of Brodgar is the youngest monument of and a part of the Heart of Neolithic Orkney World Heritage Site, which includes a large portion of the islands' Neolithic ritual landscape with sites such as Maeshowe, a chambered cairn and passage grave aligned to be illuminated by the midwinter solstice sunrise, the Standing Stones of Stenness, four megaliths that stand as high as six metres, and Skara Brae, Northern Europe's best-preserved Neolithic stone-built village, which features a primitive functioning sewer system.

During the Middle Ages, when the Vikings reached Orkney, they allegedly dubbed the Ring of Brodgar the Temple of the Sun and the Standing Stones of Stenness, the Temple of the Moon, and a stone that once lay between the two until it was destroyed in the 19th century, Odin's Stone, adopting the sites to worship their own Norse gods. You can see some of their additional runic carvings on several of the stones of the Ring of Brodgar. Brodgar's earthwork is almost exactly the same size as the henge at Avebury and the inner banks of Newgrange, suggesting that these Neolithic builders had some form of common unit of measurement and perhaps shared belief systems.

Due to its remote location, Orkney has retained the incredibly strong mystical aura that drew the ancients to it. Visit between September and March on a clear night and you can witness the Aurora Borealis from the Ring of Brodgar, a spectacular sight that adds to its magical, ethereal allure.

BRYNGWYN

Location: Anglesey, Wales, UK **Time zone:** UTC **Currency:** Pound sterling (£)

Anglesey was once home to the druids, so it's no surprise this Welsh island features prehistoric ritual structures. Literally translated as "white hill", the village of Bryngwyn is home to the two largest menhirs in Wales, believed to have once been part of a Neolithic cromlech (stone circle). Excavations have unearthed evidence of seven of the reportedly eight stones that formed the original 16 metre diameter circle and the cremation deposits of four people of varied ages at the south-east quadrant, where a blade-style stone would have been placed and is in line with the midsummer sunrise and midwinter sunset. Stand at the Bryngwyn stones on the summer

solstice and the sun will rise over the centre of another prehistoric site, Castell Bryngwyn (white hill castle) – a circular former Iron Age/Roman fortress likely built upon an earlier henge that helped form a Neolithic ceremonial landscape around the River Baint along with another supposed former cromlech at Tre'r Dryw Bach. Nearby is the mysterious Neolithic Bodowyr Chambered Tomb, and just a few miles along the Menai Strait, which separates Anglesey from mainland Wales, is Wales' finest passage grave, Bryn Celli Ddu, whose passageway and chamber is, in a similar fashion to Ireland's Newgrange, illuminated by the sun at dawn on the the summer solstice.



BELTANY STONE CIRCLE

Location: Donegal, Ireland
Time zone: UTC
Currency: Euro (€)

One of Ireland's largest stone circles may not even be a stone circle at all. Thanks to 19th century accounts, we may deduce that Beltany Stone Circle is perhaps the desecrated remains of a Neolithic passage tomb. Inside its 45 metre diameter central plain, older reports describe raised earth and stones covering human skeletal remains and a large central cairn. Its name, Beltany, no doubt has a link to Beltane (a pagan festival that marks halfway between spring equinox and summer solstice) and its location supports the idea – upon Top Hill overlooking similar megalithic sites at Kilmonaster and under the watchful eye of Croaghan Hill. The tallest pillar is opposite the circle's most significant stone, a triangular slab with over 40 Neolithic carvings, which are both in alignment with the Beltane sunrise – the perfect time to visit.





DARE YOU

visit the

WITCHES' CAVES?

Fairytale witches live in dingy hovels or fearsome towers, but in folklore, they dwell in caves, making their lairs much easier to find!



WORDS ICY SEDGWICK



WOOKEY HOLE

Location: Somerset, England, UK

Time zone: UTC

Currency: Pound sterling (£)

According to legend, the Wookey Hole Witch lived here 1000 years ago. Unlucky in love, she had grown bitter about romance, cursing happy couples from her lair. The locals asked the Abbot of Glastonbury for help, and he sent a monk to the cave. Furious at the intrusion, the witch threw spells at the monk, but they bounced off. In retaliation, the monk hurled holy water at her and she turned to stone. You can find her, now a rock formation, in the first chamber. People believe the small, lumpy stalagmite at her feet is her dog. In 1912, a dig revealed human remains in the cave, but the bones belonged to a man. To see the witch, book a tour of the cave.

Image source: Alamy, Getty, Wikimedia

ZUGARRAMURDI CAVES

Location: Zugarramurdi, Navarre, Spain **Time zone:** UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro (€)



The Zugarramurdi cave is a natural tunnel, eroded over time by the Olabidea River. According to legend, this river begins in Hell, giving the cave a diabolical link even before you get into the stories of pagan rituals that have unfolded. In 1609, the Spanish Inquisition descended upon Basque Spain and more than 7000 local people were tried as witches. 53 were found guilty. The cave has been linked with witchcraft ever since, though the association is no longer negative. The townsfolk hold a feast in the cave on Midsummer's Eve, roasting lamb and lighting bonfires, much to the delight of visitors. Witch fans can also visit the nearby Witch Museum to learn more about the witch trials.

BLACK ANNIS' BOWER CLOSE

A small cave in the Dane Hills, Leicestershire, is believed to be the home of Black Annis. This folklore favourite is an old crone with a blue face and iron claws, who enjoys feasting on humans. She makes a great cautionary tale since she prowls the area at night, seeking to snatch up misbehaving children. According to legend, she dug the cave out of the cliff using only her claws.



MOTHER GRUNDY'S PARLOUR

Creswell Crags is a limestone gorge in Nottinghamshire, UK, dating back to the Ice Age. One of its caves is known as Mother Grundy's Parlour, named for its 18th century resident. She left the local village of Creswell after being accused of witchcraft and moved into the cave. The villagers invited her back after she cured the child of a local landowner, but Mother Grundy chose to stay in her cave. Another cave also has a huge collection of what have been called "protective witch marks" carved into its walls.



MOTHER SHIPTON'S CAVE

Location: Knaresborough, England, UK **Time zone:** UTC **Currency:** Pound sterling (£)

In local legend, Ursula Sontheil was born in the cave in 1488 during a thunderstorm. Her mother refused to name her father, leading to rumours he was the devil himself. Separated from her mother at a young age, Ursula stayed close to the cave as she grew up and learned to make potions with the plants she found in the nearby woods. After her husband died, she kept his surname and became known as Mother Shipton. People mocked her for her apparent witch-like appearance, but happily made use of her talent for healing and fortune-telling. She became known as a prophetess, and apparently foretold the Great Fire of London and the invention of ships made of iron. People visit her cave now for the Petrifying Well, whose waters turn items left there slowly into stone. The cave is also England's oldest tourist attraction, having seen visitors since way back in 1630!





Petrifying woods, ★ fairy forests ★ and SACRED ★ GROVES

Europe's forests once stretched across the continent and its islands, and were home to many myths and magical sites, some of which can still be visited today



WORDS ALICE PATILLO
& APRIL MADDEN



TAKE CARE

Nature can be a cruel mistress, so make sure you take the proper precautions when exploring it: Enlist an expert, stick to trails, wear sensible clothing and never walk alone!



POKAINI FOREST

Location: Naudites Pagasts, Latvia **Time zone:** UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro (€)

The mysterious clusters of rocks deep in this Latvian forest have lured people deep into the woodlands for centuries. Numerous theories have been proposed, such as they were collected in order to build a castle that never materialised or simply discarded while clearing nearby fields for farming. Neither explanation entirely makes sense, and that's why many believe the forest is a powerful, spiritual place thanks to these piles of pebbles, while others deem the woods haunted or a portal to another realm.

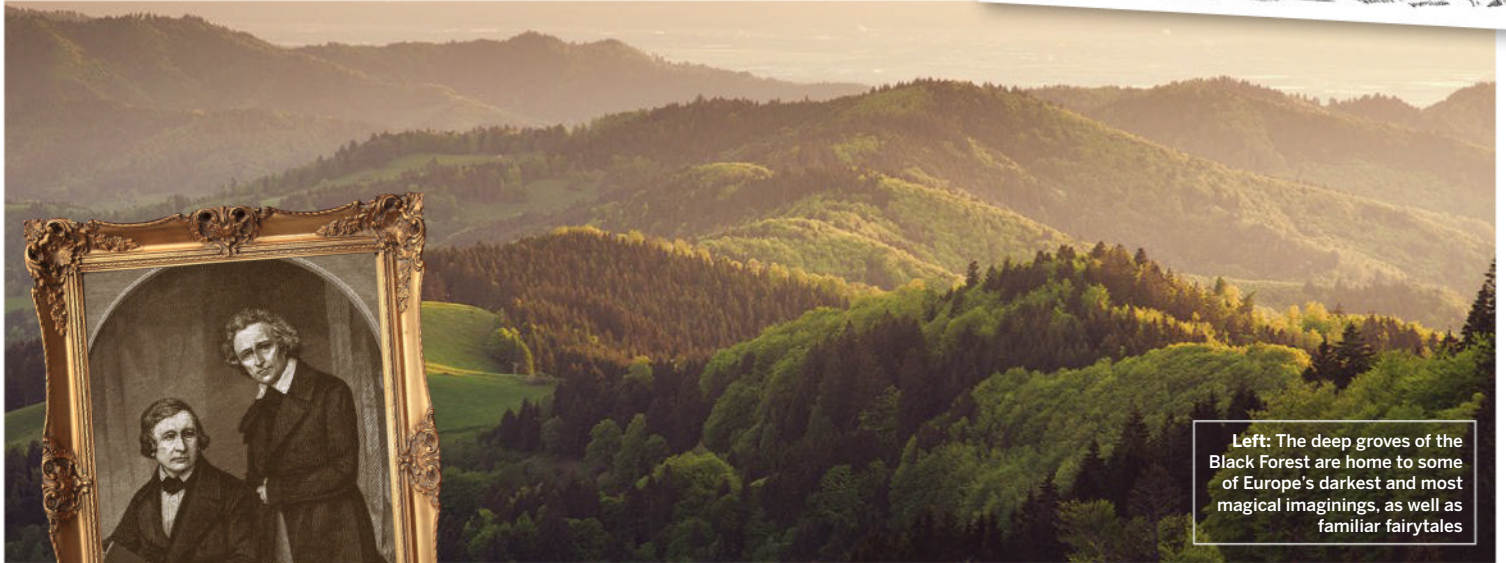


BLACK FOREST

Location: Baden-Württemberg, Germany **Time zone:** UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro (€)

The Black Forest is a gigantic, ancient forest that stretches across the mountains of southwest Germany, 100 miles long and up to 30 miles wide, and is as shrouded in mystery as its forest floor is shrouded in darkness by the thick, dense canopy of conifers. The Brothers Grimm collected

folklore stories such as *Red Riding Hood*, *Hansel and Gretel*, *Rapunzel* and *Snow White*, all said to have been inspired by the thickets of the Black Forest and its untamed nature – the original fairytales didn't all have happy endings, unlike the sanitised Disney versions we are familiar with today.



Left: The deep groves of the Black Forest are home to some of Europe's darkest and most magical imaginings, as well as familiar fairytales

HOIA-BACIU FOREST

Location: Transylvania, Romania **Time zone:** UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro (€)



Romania is full of haunted places, but nowhere in the Transylvania region is quite so supernaturally charged than Hoia-Baciu Forest – in fact, it might be the creepiest forest in the world.

Located just outside of Cluj-Napoca, this 250-hectare stretch of woodland has everything from UFOs to vanishings and ghosts. Supposedly, alarm bells started ringing when a shepherd went missing here with 200 sheep, and a girl once disappeared in the woods, only to be found five years later as if she'd only been gone a day. In 1968, a military technician photographed what looked like an extraterrestrial spaceship hovering over the Clearing – the forest's most frightening spot. Many of the trees in Hoia-Baciu grow in peculiar ways: twisted, contorted, gnarly trunks that often spiral clockwise and cannot be explained by any scientist. Bizarre noises, footsteps, sensations you are being watched, shadow figures... Hoia-Baciu has it all.



EPPING FOREST

Location: Essex, England, UK
Time zone: UTC
Currency: Pound sterling (£)

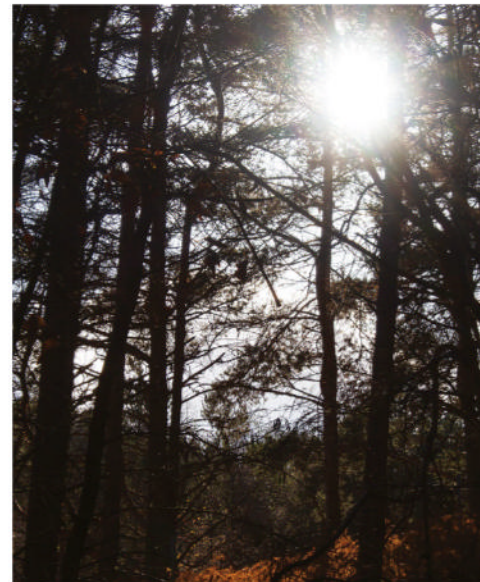
This large woodland north of London holds the title of England's most haunted forest. Thanks to its close proximity to the Big Smoke, many murdered bodies have been buried here, allegedly including many of the notorious Kray twins' victims. Highwayman Dick Turpin used a cave in the forest as a hideout for many years, the ghost of whom TV show *Most Haunted* made contact with in 2003. But many more phantoms can be found between the unkempt trees of this ancient woodland, including the spirit of Celtic queen Boudicca, apparitions of a headless horseman, a horseman with his head (and a tricorne hat and black cape) atop a black stallion, the ghost of a drowned girl, a headless biker and a horse-drawn carriage. Other poltergeist activity is also common, with many reports of being touched or pushed by seemingly nothing. Epping Forest also has its very own execution site – Hangman's Hill – where the figure of a man can be seen. If you leave your car in neutral, it will supposedly roll upwards towards the tree that once bore a noose.



CANNOCK CHASE

Location: Staffordshire, England, UK **Time zone:** UTC **Currency:** Pound sterling (£)

This Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is also a paranormal hotspot. In 2007, werewolves were reportedly sighted here; from 1988 until the early 90s, there were numerous UFO sightings and the area also has its own grey lady – dubbed The Lady of the Chase – a pale figure of a nude woman with hypnotic eyes who instils dread in those she comes across. There have also been accounts of black-eyed children – an urban legend commonly sighted across the US, black-eyed children are a paranormal entity that appears as a pale, black-eyed child between the ages of six and 16. Others say these so-called black-eyed children are the ghosts of the three young girls who were tragically murdered and discovered within the woodlands in the 1960s. More recently, baby dolls were found nailed to some of the trees, adding to the eerie mystery of the area.



WISTMAN'S WOOD

Location: Devon, England, UK **Time zone:** UTC **Currency:** Pound sterling (£)

This wood in Devon's Dartmoor national park is one of the UK's last few ancient temperate rainforests, sometimes called Atlantic rainforests or Celtic rainforests. A remnant of the ancient woodlands that once covered much of the UK and Ireland, this Site of Special Scientific Interest is also a darkly magical place. Its name comes from the old West Country dialect word 'whisht', which means uncanny, eerie, and even fey. Believed to be the most haunted woodland in the UK, Whist Hounds are thought to run through

the ancient glades: these hellhounds with shadow-coloured coats and red eyes are said to be driven by the devil, who uses them to hunt down innocent victims. One local man returning from Widdecombe Fair is believed to have once called out to the passing cavalcade "How goes the hunt?" to which the huntsman replied "Take that!" and threw him a satchel. Thinking it might be full of meat or even money, the man picked up the bag and hurried home with it – only to find the bloody body of his baby son inside.



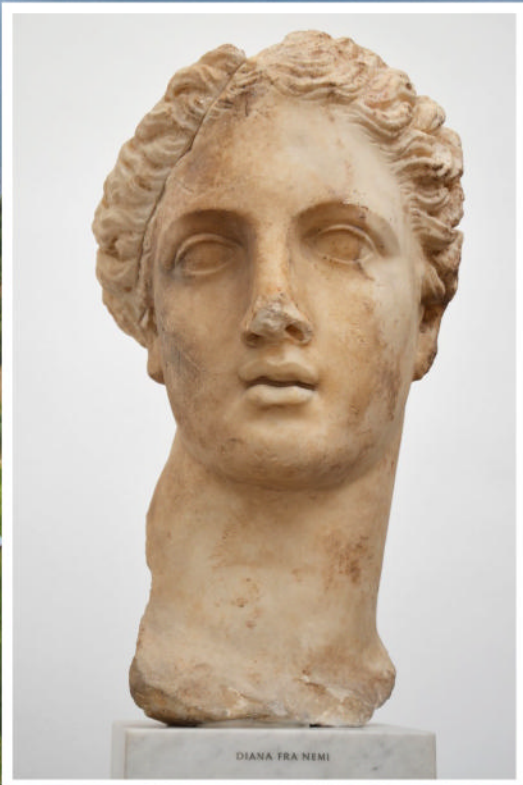
Above: Dartmoor's magical Wistman's Wood is a nexample of an ancient Celtic rainforest

NEMI'S SACRED GROVE

Location: Lazio, Italy **Time zone:** UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro (€)

The Roman goddess Diana is most often associated with the moon, but in her aspect of Diana Nemorensis – 'Diana of the Wood at Nemi' she was worshipped in a temple and sacred grove at this site on the shores of Lake Nemi. Here she was served in her aspect of huntress and healing goddess by a priest-king called the Rex Nemorensis. If a runaway slave broke off a branch from a sacred tree in Diana's sacred grove, he could challenge the Rex Nemorensis to a fight to the death for the title.

Below: The Roman goddess Diana Nemorensis ruled over the wooded shores of Lake Nemi, where her temple was built



Sylvan secrets of ANCIENT EUROPE

THE HOLY THORN

Location: Glastonbury, England, UK **Time zone:** UTC **Currency:** Pound sterling (£)

Glastonbury is home to many legends, but its Holy Thorn is so real that branches of it are presented to the British monarch at Christmas.

Legend has it that the biblical figure Joseph of Arimathea had once visited the Somerset town with the young Jesus, and after Christ's death he returned there with the Holy Grail. Tired, he pushed his walking stick into the ground on Wearyall Hill,

where it blossomed into a hawthorn, the ancestor of Glastonbury's Holy Thorn. Uniquely, this variety of hawthorn blooms twice a year, once in spring and again in winter, near Christmas.

Together with a walnut tree that flowered at midsummer, it was said to be a sign of the town's divine favour.

Sadly, due to repeated vandalism, the most famous Holy Thorn was removed in 2019.

HOLY SECRETS

Cuttings of the Holy Thorn are now grown in the grounds of Glastonbury Abbey, St John the Baptist church, and near the local school. Cuttings also grow in the USA, Canada and Australia.



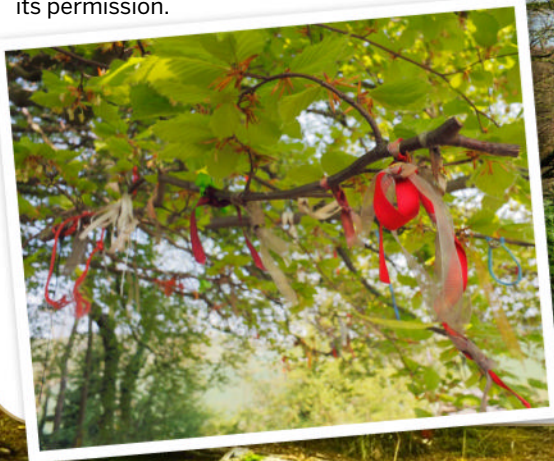
CELTIC TREE WISDOM

Location: Western Europe **Time zone:** UTC/+1 **Currency:** Czech koruna, Hungarian forint, Euro (€), Pound sterling (£)

Across the former Celtic nations (those in the British Isles, Ireland, northwest France, northwest Spain, and northern Portugal, as well as the original Celtic tribal homelands around the Danube) there existed a deep and prevalent belief in the sacred nature of trees. Oak, ash and thorn are the three most magical. Hazel is said to contain wisdom, apples represent immortality, and elder is a fairy tree that must not be touched without its permission.



Below: In Celtic belief, trees were sacred and symbolic, especially oak, ash, and hawthorn



BROCELIANDE

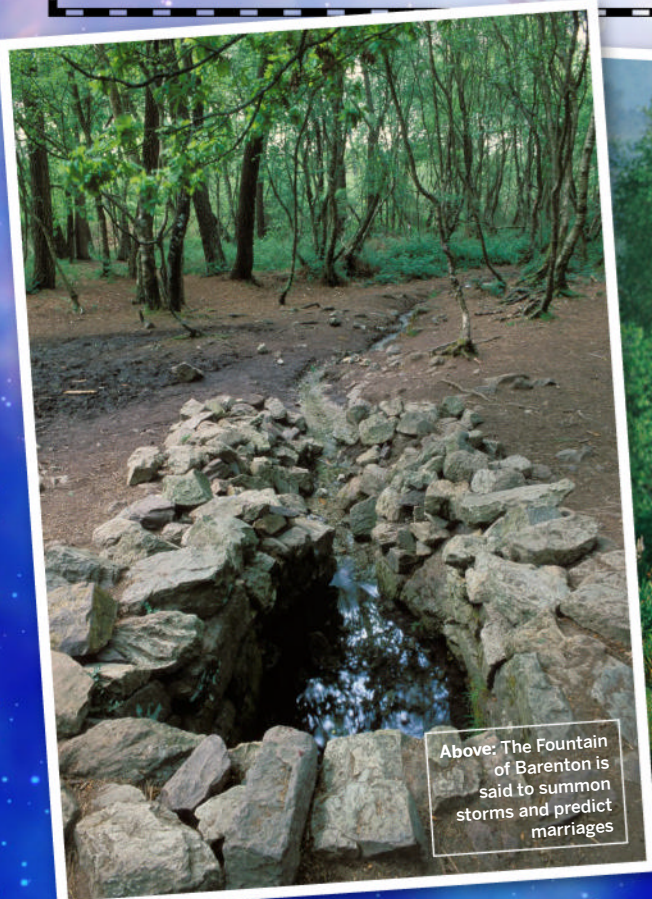
Location: Paimpont, Brittany, France **Time zone:** UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro (€)

The legendary magical forest of Broceliande is believed to be the modern-day Paimpont Forest in Ille-et-Vilaine, Brittany. Today it's home to two beautiful châteaux, the former castles of the Château de Trecésson, thought to be home to mischievous fairy maidens known as the Dames Blanches ('White Ladies') and now privately owned, and the Château de Comper, once said to be the home of Viviane, the Lady of the Lake, who legend has it lives in a crystal castle beneath the château's pond. Today, the castle itself hosts the Centre de l'Imaginaire Arthurien, a cultural centre that focuses on the *Matter of Britain*, which despite its name deals with French legend as much as that of the UK. It's a body of ancient and medieval works that relate to the gods, heroes, kings and legends of Britain and Brittany, and it's replete with Arthurian myth.

So too is the forest in which the Centre de l'Imaginaire Arthurien makes its home. The wizard Merlin is said to be entombed here. The half-demonic sorcerer was enamoured with a fairy enchantress (in various versions she is Nimue, Viviane, the Lady of the Lake, any one of a number of unnamed witch queens, or even Morgan Le Fey herself). Tired of his romantic advances and having learned all the magic she could from him, Merlin's inamorata seals the magician into a cave, or rock, or tree. While there are other locations given for Merlin's tomb, such as the Île de Sein off Finistère in the Atlantic Ocean, most of the legends agree that the wizard's last home is Broceliande.

Merlin is not the only man imprisoned in the magical forest. Betrayed by her lover Guimar, who abandons her thanks to the meddling of her rival Queen Guinevere, Morgan Le Fey leaves King Arthur's court at Camelot and sets out for Broceliande, where she uses her formidable magic to craft the Val Sans Retour ('Valley of No Return'). The valley is packed with trials designed to appeal to chivalrous knights: a cliff-fanged pool that must be crossed, a wall of fire that must be passed through, and a pair of dragons to fight. Morgan baits her trap with a sign at the head of the valley claiming that only a knight who is faithful to his lady can pass the tests within. Those who do not are trapped inside forever (although given that Morgan provides these failures with feasts, games, dances and each other's company, it seems more like a medieval boy's club than a magical prison!). Even Morgan's own son Yvain is trapped within, until Sir Lancelot, with his blind loyalty to the adulterous Queen Guinevere, passes the trials and breaks the spell. You can visit the site of the Val Sans Retour; it's near Tréhorenteu and features an artwork called the Golden Tree.

Morgan's son Yvain soon found other ways to get into trouble in the magical forest. Near the village of Folle Pensée is the Fountain of Barenton. Drinking from its golden bowl without permission, Yvaine found himself locked in combat with a fearsome Black Knight. The fountain is believed to summon storms, but give it a pretty hairpin and if the water bubbles, folklore says you'll be married before the next Easter.



Above: The Fountain of Barenton is said to summon storms and predict marriages



Below: This ancient forest is reputed to be full of fairy magic and Arthurian legends like the grave of Merlin

Amazing LABYRINTHS

Life is a journey, and our fascination with labyrinths is our attempt to lay out the journey on the ground in front of us



WORDS EDOARDO ALBERT

Labyrinths are old. They were first recorded around 2000 BCE in North Africa and southern Europe. Labyrinths are worldwide. They have been constructed on every continent and by most cultures. Labyrinths recur. The same basic design has appeared, independently and by diffusion, all over the world. Labyrinths occur in waves. There is a great burst of labyrinth building and then everything goes quiet before a new wave of labyrinths appears.

And labyrinths are back. We are in a new age of labyrinth building with literally thousands of labyrinths having been constructed in the last few decades. Which of course begs the question: why? Why

have people been fascinated by labyrinths in so many different places and at so many different times?

We've all been lost at some point in our lives. We've all searched for the right path. This applies both to wayfinding and to life itself. The labyrinth is the physical representation of this. There is a destination to reach, the centre of the labyrinth, but the path there is difficult and, should the centre be reached, there is still the difficulty of getting back out again.

Symbolically, the labyrinth is the journey to the lost centre. It combines within its symbolism both the circle and the spiral, combining them to create a path. A labyrinth is not the same as a maze, although the two

terms are often used interchangeably in English. Strictly speaking, a labyrinth has a single path to the centre, with no dead ends or alternative paths, while a maze has many blind alleys and routes that lead nowhere. The classical labyrinth forms a single looping path that consists of seven circuits with eight walls; it comes in circular and square designs. All early labyrinths are of this type.

Roman labyrinths, which were usually laid on mosaic floors but which were rarely large enough to walk, developed the classical design and medieval builders took this further, creating the eleven circuit labyrinth seen on the floor of Chartres Cathedral and elsewhere. Medieval designers also experimented with creating new designs,



Below: The classical labyrinth pattern that recurs throughout the world: note that if you simply keep going, you will reach the centre of the labyrinth



using more or fewer circuits and new connections between the paths to create unique labyrinths.

The current revival of interest in labyrinths has produced many unique designs. The essential labyrinth, a single turning path leading to a centre, has been twisted and turned, on occasions shifting into mazes. Puzzle mazes first appeared in the Middle

Ages and they became very popular in the 17th and 18th centuries as additions to the gardens of stately houses. A great trick to get out of most of these mazes is to simply trail one hand on the wall, never taking it off. However, more complicated mazes were developed in the 19th century that defeated this ploy. To escape from these requires more complicated strategies.

“The classical labyrinth forms a single looping path that consists of seven circuits with eight walls; it comes in circular and square designs”

HAMPTON COURT MAZE

Location: Molesey, Richmond, UK

Time zone: UTC

Currency: Pound sterling (£)

The maze at Hampton Court really is a maze, not a labyrinth. There are dead ends and false paths and visitors often get lost. The maze is younger than the palace, having been commissioned by William III who reigned from 1689 to 1702. The maze was planted during the great explosion of puzzle mazes in the 17th and 18th centuries, when the nobility saw them as entertaining diversions and statements of wealth to be included in the grounds of their houses. It was first planted with hornbeam but the palace gardeners later replaced the hornbeam with yew. It is Britain's oldest surviving hedge maze, with an unusual trapezoid shape. The maze was designed by George London and Henry Wise. In Jerome K Jerome's classic comedy novel *Three Men in a Boat*, the three men decide to take a few minutes strolling round the maze – Harris assures his fellow boaters that all they have to do is keep turning right – only for them to be lost for hours. Most visitors take 20 minutes to get to the centre of the maze.

LABYRINTH OF CRETE

Location: Near Kastelli, Crete

Time zone: UTC+2 **Currency:** Euro (€)

Hidden deep within the labyrinth of King Minos the monster prowled, waiting for the victims delivered to him. But this time Theseus intended to give the Minotaur a surprise.

The story of Theseus and the Minotaur is the most famous of all the labyrinth legends. Like the other legends of antiquity it was generally regarded as nothing more than a story – until Sir Arthur Evans discovered the lost Minoan civilisation of Crete in the early 20th century. The palace complex at Knossos is the best known of these finds but the excavations there did not uncover anything like a maze.

But now archaeologists have discovered a labyrinthine structure on top of a hill in Crete near the town of Kastelli. The structure consists of eight concentric stone rings with bisecting walls that form small rooms. This new find has a diameter of 157 feet (48 metres), with a central circular zone that has walls radiating out from it.

Using the fragments of pottery found on the site, archaeologists have dated the structure to between 2000 BCE and 1700 BCE – the heyday of the Minoan civilisation. Archaeologists have also found lots of animal bones on the site, suggesting that it was the site for feasting and ritual sacrifice.

The tantalising prospect arises that this might have been the labyrinth through which Theseus crept, trailing out the thread he had been given by the King's daughter, Ariadne, so that he could find his way out again afterwards. It's far too early to say this is the case but then, no one believed Troy was real until Heinrich Schliemann found it.



Below: A Roman floor mosaic showing Theseus confronting the Minotaur at the centre of the labyrinth



Below: The labyrinth in Chartres Cathedral. Note the chairs pushed back out of the way: normally they cover most of the labyrinth

CHARTRES CATHEDRAL

Location: Chartres, France **Time zone:** UTC+1
Currency: Euro (€)

Set into the nave of Chartres Cathedral, perhaps the most sublime of all Gothic churches, is a 42-foot (13-metre) labyrinth. It's a true labyrinth, which means that it has a single path that winds to the centre, symbolising the one path that leads to salvation. The labyrinth was laid down in the early 13th century as the cathedral was being built and it proved popular, with many other churches and cathedrals laying down labyrinths too – only to take them up again in most cases when they proved too popular and people were distracted during mass.

Visitors to Chartres Cathedral today sometimes complain of not being able to find the labyrinth. It is right there, in the nave, but if the cathedral's chairs are out they cover most of the labyrinth. For labyrinth walkers the best day to go is on the Fridays during Lent, when the chairs are moved out of the way between 10.30am and 5pm and the cathedral is happy to host labyrinth walkers. The centre of the labyrinth corresponds to the centre of the rose window of the façade, where Christ appears in majesty, uniting the pilgrim path to its true destination.

TROY TOWN

Location: St Agnes, Scilly Isles, UK

Time zone: UTC **Currency:** Pound sterling (£)

If a labyrinth is a journey, then getting to this one adds further layers to the journey: a trip, by boat or plane, to St Mary on the Scilly Isles and then a ferry ride to St Agnes. Troy Town labyrinth lies on the west of the island, next to the farm that takes its name from the labyrinth ('Troy Town' was a common name for labyrinths in the 17th and 18th centuries as the pattern was supposed to resemble the winding streets of ancient Troy). The labyrinth is beautifully situated by the sea (although this is true for just about everywhere on the Scilly Isles). Troy Town is securely dated to the early 18th century when the local lighthouse keeper, Amor Clarke, laid out the stones. The group that renovated the labyrinth in 1988 claim to have found evidence of a much earlier labyrinth but unfortunately they did not record or photograph their discoveries, so this remains uncertain. There are few more scenic labyrinths in the world.



Below: There aren't many more spectacularly sited labyrinths than Troy Town on St Agnes



Above: Julian's Bower. Over the fields in the distance the Trent and the Ouse merge to mark the start of the Humber

JULIAN'S BOWER

Location: Lincolnshire, England, UK

Time zone: UTC

Currency: Pound sterling (£)

Julian's Bower is a turf-cut labyrinth set into the hillside above the confluence of the rivers Trent and Ouse. It's next to Countess Close, a large medieval earthwork. Julian's Bower is 36 feet (12 metres) in diameter. Walking the path provides excellent views of the rivers below. The labyrinth was first recorded in 1697 but probably predates that. The local parish church, St John the Baptist in Alkborough, has a copy of the labyrinth plan embedded in its floor and in the stained-glass window above the altar, both gifts of J Goulton-Constable, a local historian, who installed them so that the labyrinth pattern could be preserved and used as a template whenever the turf had to be recut.

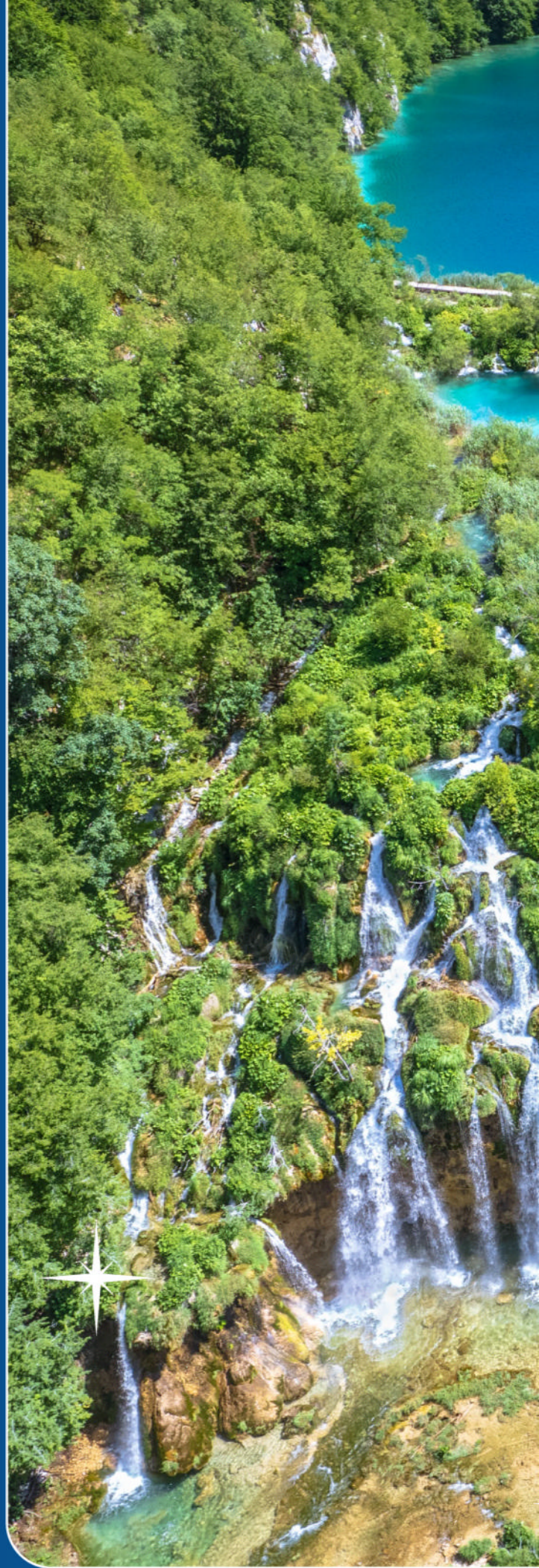


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Below: Vital to all life, water, and in particular rivers, have been worshipped across the world for millennia by countless cultures

Streams of CONSCIOUSNESS

The depths of Europe's greatest rivers hide all manner of myths and legends, from water nymphs to prowling monsters



WORDS BEE GINGER

THE SEVERN

Location: Wales and England, UK **Time zone:** UTC **Currency:** Pound sterling (£)

At 354 kilometres (220 miles), the River Severn is the longest river in the UK and boasts 13 tributaries. Beginning its journey at Plynlimon in the Cambrian Mountains of Wales and ending at the Severn Estuary before flowing out into the Bristol Channel and the Atlantic Ocean, it is by far the most voluminous flow of water in the country. These tides can create a natural phenomenon called a tidal bore, causing the waters to flow against the current and forcing the river to flow the other way around.

Steeped in legend, the River Severn, or Afon Hafren in Welsh, takes its

name from a princess called Sabrina, who was sent to a watery grave by her wicked stepmother Gwendolen. She then became a water-nymph and river goddess. Celtic scholars believe the precise name to have been Samarosina, which means 'land of summertime fallow', and that Sabrina is a Latinised version of this name that was recorded as early as the 2nd century CE.

There are many other myths associated with the river, including terrifying river monsters and a beast known as the Deerhurst Dragon, who was killed by a local villager, earning him unlimited free beer in his local pub.

THE THAMES

Location: London and Thames Valley, England, UK

Time zone: UTC

Currency: Pound sterling (£)

Old Father Thames is a symbol of renewal and plenty, the site of sacred rites since time immemorial. The name is derived from the Brittonic name for the river, Tamesis, and the Proto-Celtic tamëssa, meaning 'dark water', a title first recorded in 51 BCE in the writings of Julius Caesar.

Old Father Thames himself bears similarities to Achelous, the god of the largest river in Greece. Celtic gods Belinus and Lud were also associated with the river, as was Isis, the Egyptian goddess of motherhood, fertility, rivers and nature. Isis' name was used in around 1540 for the river. It's possibly an abbreviation of Tamesis, or it may have been influenced by religious studies conducted at the now prestigious Oxford University; the part of the river flowing through the city of Oxford still uses the name today.

In many faiths sacrifices were a necessity when it came to appeasing the divine and would be made as offerings to rivers. Many people believe London Bridge – with the ghosts of traitors' heads watching down from it – to have been a site of such sacrifice. The children's song *London Bridge is Falling Down* is said to support this idea, as it was thought that unless a human sacrifice was buried in the bridge's foundations the bridge would collapse.

In modern times the Thames serves the UK's Hindu community as a sacred river akin to the Ganges, and was blessed as such in 1970. Diwali lamps, offerings, paper prayers, statues of the gods and even people's ashes all find their way downriver.



Above: The source of the Danube is enclosed in an elegant stone basin that can be found in the grounds of the Prince of Fürstenberg's palace

THE DANUBE

Location: Central Europe **Time zone:** Various **Currency:** Hungarian forint, Euro (€)

Flowing across southeastern and central Europe, the continent's second-largest river passes through ten countries before culminating in the Black Sea. It was once a key imperial border for the Romans, whose river god was named Danuvius.

Originating in Germany's Black Forest mountain range, it is one of the most vital sources of fresh drinking water in central Europe. Diverse geography and the rich mix of cultures along the Danube's shores whisper countless legends, myths, tales and songs from source to mouth. Serbian, Romanian and Bulgarian folk songs and fairytales tell stories of Mother Danube herself, a mythical figure who gave life to wildlife, fish and plants,

seduced sailors, and as a wise old woman split like the river into three parts and joined the Black Sea.

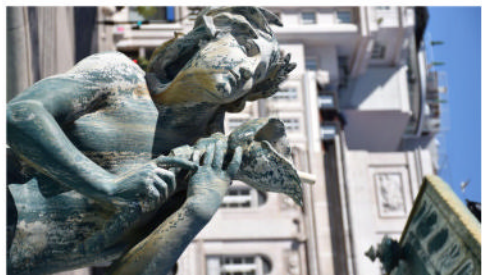
A similar legend has it that at the bottom of the river on the Jochenstein rock lives Isa, the mermaid of the Danube, her home a wondrous crystal fairytale castle. In treacherous weather she shows sailors the way to safety, but if they listen to her melodic song for too long she may well take them to her castle at the bottom of the river to stay with her forever. If you listen carefully you may catch a few notes of Johann Strauss' famous waltz *The Blue Danube*, which is often used as a lullaby... but be sure you don't mistake it for the songs of the mermaid...

THE TAGUS

Location: Spain, Portugal
Time zone: UTC+1
Currency: Euro (€)

Originating in the Montes Universales mountains, the Tagus culminates near Lisbon, Portugal, where it empties into the Atlantic Ocean. It takes its name from the ancient Greek tagus, a Thessalian title for general or leader. However, an alternative possibility is that the river was originally named Tago, which was the name of an Iberian king murdered by the Carthaginian general Hasdrubal.

According to some historical accounts it was traditionally a source of gold for the famously wealthy Portuguese royalty. There are even said to have been mythological nymphs inhabiting the river. First mentioned in a poem by André de Resende, they were later immortalised by Camões in his poem *Os Lusíadas* ('The Lusiads').



THE ELBE

Location: Czech Republic, Germany
Time zone: UTC+1
Currency: Czech Koruna, Euro (€)

Rising in the northern Czech Republic's Karkonosze Mountains (Giant Mountains) and flowing 1,094 kilometres (680 miles) through large parts of Bohemia and Germany before joining the North Sea northwest of Hamburg at Cuxhaven, the River Elbe is one of Central Europe's major rivers. It's also home to a series of tragic monuments known as hunger stones.

These stones were first erected in the 15th century to warn future generations of impending famine, drought and hardships. When the river's water level drops to a certain depth an inscription carved into stone can be seen. One stone, engraved in 1616, reads "Wenn du mich siehst, dann weine", which translates as "If you can see me, weep". These unique stones remain popular curiosities and are an important hydrological sign; the most recent stones were uncovered in the summer of 2022 during a time of drought.

THE BOYNE

Location: Leinster, Ireland
Time zone: UTC
Currency: Euro (€)

The River Boyne rises from the Carbury Bog in County Kildare and wends its way through lush woodland and rolling fields for 112 kilometres (70 miles) before joining the Irish Sea. Deriving its name from Bóann (or Bóand), a legendary Celtic goddess, the river is believed to be the place where the Salmon of Knowledge was captured. Irish mythology also tells us of the Tobar Segais (Well of Wisdom), which belonged to Bóann's husband, Nechtain, the king of Leinster. The king was very protective of it, allowing only three others to frequent it, even excluding his queen. One day the goddess visited wanting to see its magic for herself, but on peering into the waters tragedy struck – the waters rose up and drowned Bóann.



THE RHONE

Location: Switzerland, France
Time zone: UTC+1
Currency: Swiss franc, Euro (€)

The Rhône has been a major trade route since ancient times and an integral waterway during the medieval period that linked France and Switzerland to the Mediterranean. Near the river's mouth at Arles the flow divides in two, creating the Little and the Great Rhône. Arles became an integral centre of Roman power, and where trade travelled so did new religions, traditions and legends, including that of the Tarasque dragon, which lived along the banks around the town Tarascon. Any who dared to fight it faced certain death. That was until Saint Martha sprinkled holy water on her cross and held it up to the beast. The creature immediately became obedient, enabling Martha to lead it into a nearby village.



THE RHINE

Location: Western Europe **Time zone:** UTC+1 **Currency:** Swiss franc, Euro (€)

The majestic River Rhine is one of the most historic waterways in Europe. Beginning its journey in the southeastern Swiss Alps, it weaves through Switzerland, Austria, Germany, the Principality of Liechtenstein and France before finally merging with the North Sea near the city of Rotterdam in the Netherlands.

Due to the large number of historic towns, fortresses and picturesque castles erected along a large stretch of the Middle Rhine, it is listed under UNESCO. Sankt Goarshausen in Germany is one such location to be explored in the Rhine Valley. Here stands the Lorelei Rock, infamous for numerous maritime disasters dating back to the 10th century, calamities caused by its position where the currents are

particularly strong and treacherous. The raging waters create and amplify an eerie echo, prompting numerous legends, including that of a beautiful maiden who flung herself from this spot into the Rhine after discovering her lover had been faithless. Transformed by the waters, she returned as a siren who sat atop the rock luring sailors to their doom with her beauty and song.



THE SEINE

Location: Northern France **Time zone:** UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro (€)

Emerging at Source-Seine 30 kilometres (18 miles) northwest of Dijon, the Seine navigates her way through Paris, passing under the city's 37 bridges on a journey of 777 kilometres (482 miles) through Normandy's picturesque countryside to join the English Channel at Le Havre. The river is over 14,000 years old and has not altered much since 12,000 BCE. These banks, however, hold a rich history, having witnessed thousands of years of tradition and culture along the waterway. The river even boasts her own goddess, Sequana, nymph of the Seines' springs, which are located at Source-Seine in Burgundy Franche-Comte, an ancient Gallo-Roman sanctuary where the

water is at its purest. In Gallic mythology Sequana is thought of as the healing goddess of the river, and on 15 April 2019 her powers were put to the test when the water of the Seine saved the Cathedral of Notre Dame as it stood ablaze. With firefighters tapping the river water to assuage the flames, many believe the spirit of the Seine helped to save one of the most beautiful cathedrals in the world.

Believed to have received the ashes of Joan of Arc when they were scattered at Rouen, the Seine came under the governance of Paris in 1864 during the reign of Napoleon III, whose famous uncle of the same name had asked to be buried on its shores. Today its riverbanks remain a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Below: The Seine has been a source of endless inspiration for countless European artists, including Renoir, Seurat, Lebourg and Monet

THE LOST RIVERS OF LONDON

Location: London, UK **Time zone:** UTC **Currency:** Pound sterling (£)

Stretching across the heart of the City of London lies Old Father Thames, a landmark known to visitor and Londoner alike and the subject of etchings, paintings, songs and photos for centuries. But less is known of the 21 tributaries that flow from around Greater London into the Thames; some

passing above ground and remaining largely unnoticed, others hidden underground buried beneath streets and buildings as the capital has continued to grow. The city's landscape was once shaped by the valleys and hills created by these rivers, and while much of it is now hidden from view they

continue to flow – although thankfully they are no longer used as open sewers as in pre-Victorian times. You could be standing over a piece of aquatic history and not even know it, as in order to locate traces of these rivers you would have to look in some unlikely places.

Under Buckingham Palace, for example, flows the River Tyburn, once famed for its salmon... and its gallows. Over 50,000 people died on its banks.

As the city's population grew dozens of canals and rivers were converted into sewers, which at the time was a necessity; now they would have served to enhance the city's landscape. Once required for sluicing waste, drinking water and industry, it soon became apparent that a newer and more effective system needed to be conceived, leaving many rivers forgotten or repurposed in the background of a rapidly expanding city.

These rivers helped shape the city in numerous ways, from creating paths for the railways to follow to providing boundaries between the different boroughs. Canals were converted into underground sewers to assist industrial growth and make way for new residential areas.



Above: London's rivers and streams used to be freely accessible, but industry and development drove them underground

THE FLEET

Location: London, UK **Time zone:** UTC **Currency:** Pound sterling (£)

As the city's largest hidden river, the Fleet is perhaps the most well-known as it was vital to medieval life and formed a key part of Roman industry. Wide enough to accommodate ships, the lower section was essential for trade and was used daily by Londoners for bathing, drinking and fishing. Due to the large number of wells built along the banks it became known as the River of Wells in the 11th century, with many thought to possess healing qualities. However, as industry expanded and the

population grew, the Fleet became used as a dumping ground for all things unpleasant, including sewage, industrial waste and the remains of dead animals from Smithfield Market. In time it resembled more of an open-air sewer than a healthy waterway. Even the famed architect Christopher Wren's attempt to resolve the pungent issue with a Venetian-style canal proved fruitless. Eventually it was incorporated into new sewage tunnels, but not before the Great Stink of 1858.

Below: Much of the river remains underground as part of the sewer network, although you can still swim in its waters in the ponds on Hampstead Heath, which are fed by the river's source



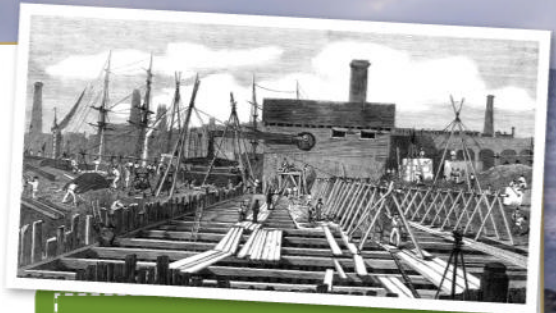
THE MOSELLE BROOK

Location: London, UK **Time zone:** UTC **Currency:** Pound sterling (£)

Today much of the Moselle Brook in the north of London is covered over, but through the culverts that channel it flows a river steeped in legend. Once referred to as the “sparkling Moselle”, this tributary of the River Thames used to teem with fish, and its waters were thought to possess healing properties.

The ‘Mossy Well’, which is now capped beneath a house on Muswell Road, was dedicated to Mary and attracted many pilgrims. There are even accounts of a

Scottish king being healed of a disease by imbibing the well’s water. This may have been Robert the Bruce, who visited the site and, according to some accounts, was cured of leprosy. While the veracity of this story is difficult to establish, what is beyond doubt is that local upper-class ladies used to send staff down to the river to collect water for their tea – but that was long before industrialisation sadly polluted it. A sip from the brook today is not advised!



THE EFFRA

Location: London, UK
Time zone: UTC
Currency: Pound sterling (£)

Once part of Lamberth’s rolling countryside, the River Effra too was forced underground and incorporated into London’s sewer system to allow for new neighbourhoods and housing. The river’s name is a little up to interpretation, with some believing it comes from Hethra, the river valley it ran along, the Celtic word for ‘torrent’, or a derivative of the early medieval word for ‘bank’. Legend has it that King Cnut, the Viking prince who conquered a North Sea Empire that included England, sailed down the river, and that centuries later a Victorian coffin from West Norwood Cemetery once made its way along the Effra and into the Thames.

Even after being covered, the Effra refused to be contained and continued to flood until the sewer was widened in the 1930s. Remnants of the Effra still remain in Brixton in the form of ‘stink pipes’, towering tubes designed to allow the smells and gases to escape the sewer system.

THE WALBROOK

Location: London, UK **Time zone:** UTC **Currency:** Pound sterling (£)

The origins of the Walbrook’s name divides opinion. Some accounts state that it comes from the fact that the river ran through (or alongside) the defensive wall the Romans erected around London, hence ‘Wall brook’ becoming Walbrook. However, there is also the suggestion that it comes from ‘weala broc’, or ‘brook of the foreigners’. Whichever is true, in the mid-3rd century CE the Romans built a temple devoted to the Persian god of light, Mithras, on the Walbrook’s east bank. Here the Roman military would bathe in the hot blood of slaughtered bulls to prove their virility and valour. During construction work in 1954 the temple was uncovered by chance and relocated nearby. Artefacts from the temple and debris from the river, including tools, human skulls and the heads of forgotten gods, can be viewed at the Museum of London.



Below: Situated in the heart of the City of London, the ‘Forgotten Streams’ monument incorporates the flow of the Walbrook

Holy wells *and* SACRED SPRINGS

*Sometimes water really
is the liquid of life*



WORDS EDOARDO ALBERT

Today, when turning on the tap produces unlimited potable water, it's difficult to appreciate just how vital and awe-inspiring springs and wells were to our ancestors. To understand their importance we must first realise that, for most of history, water was not so much the drink of life but a quick route to the grave. Waterborne diseases killed huge numbers of people, particularly children. It's not that people in the past did not understand this. There was a reason the main drink in the Middle Ages was small beer and during the Roman Empire wine: fermentation made the water safe to drink. People were perfectly well aware that many water sources were unsafe.

So at a time when a drink of water, while immediately life saving, might lead to you spewing your guts up a few days later, sources of clean, pure, untainted water were, literally, a blessing. This was water you could drink and be confident that it wouldn't kill you. Water you could bathe in and be sure it would not make you ill. This was the water of life and springs, with their water bubbling up mysteriously from the earth, were its source.

As such, it's not surprising that springs and wells attracted stories and legends about their origins and health giving properties. In ancient times, wells and springs were often

regarded as sacred to water spirits such as nymphs. Although the two terms are sometimes used interchangeably, strictly speaking a well is dug down to a water source below ground while a spring has water flowing freely from the ground. Warm and mineral water springs were often visited for their healing properties, such as the waters flowing at Bath in the UK, which were already a spa in Roman times and possibly before.

The advent of Christianity further sanctified these water sources. Water was central to Christian symbolism and practice, from the water used in baptism, to the wells mentioned in scripture, to the spirit of God moving over the waters at the moment of creation. Wells and springs quickly became associated with saints, many of them acquiring legends of their origin from the life of their saint. Britain and Ireland were particularly rich in such legends but, unfortunately, the Reformation saw many of these stories suppressed and the wells abandoned since the Reformers saw such tales as pagan and idolatrous.

Recent times have seen a revival of interest in sacred wells and springs, linked both to a resurgence of interest in Christian pilgrimage routes and new neo-pagan veneration of natural springs. It seems that holy wells are springing back.



Above: Water from springs and wells was often the only safe source of drinking water, which made it a true blessing for those who lived near by

BAGNO VIGNONI

Location: Val D'Orcia, Tuscany, Italy
Time zone: UTC+1
Currency: Euro (€)

On the via Francigena, the ancient pilgrim path to Rome, as it passes through Tuscany, there's an old Italian village, Bagno Vignoni. In most respects it's an ordinary village but in one way it's unique: where you'd find the central piazza in most villages, there's a large pool, fed by upwelling hot springs. While the central pool is no longer open to bathers, nearby in the Parco dei Mulini there's a hot spring that allows bathers to take the waters for free. The pilgrims on the via Francigena were not the first to use the springs; the Etruscans and Romans did so before them. As the Bagno Vignoni became better known, people such as Lorenzo the Magnificent and St Catherine of Siena stopped there on their way to Rome.





ST BRIGID'S WELL

Location: Liscannor, County Clare, Ireland
Time zone: UTC
Currency: Euro (€)

Just a mile or so from the Cliffs of Moher, there's a little white building in a walled garden. In the centre of the garden there's a statue of St Brigid, for whom the well is named. The entrance to the building is an arched doorway – but there is no door in the doorway, for the well never closes. Duck down (it's low) and enter the open door, and you will see before you a corridor festooned with offerings: religious statues, rosaries, photos of loved ones, leading to the well itself, a flint-tiled wall through which the healing water trickles. There's an alcove covered with votive candles and the space is accompanied by an almost overwhelming sense of peace. St Brigid's Well is one of the most visited holy wells in Ireland. Its position, close to the Cliffs of Moher, helps in this regard but even more so is the palpable sense the well conveys of prayers made and, sometimes, granted. Even a cursory inspection of the offerings left near the well reveal the effect it has had on many lives.



ST WINEFRIDE'S WELL

Location: Flintshire, Wales, UK **Time zone:** UTC **Currency:** Pound sterling (£)

The Reformation, with its suspicion of popish practices, killed off the tradition of pilgrimage almost everywhere in England. One place where pilgrimage survived through centuries of Catholic persecution was St Winefride's Well in Wales. According to legend, the well itself sprung up where Winefride's head struck the ground when her would-be rapist, frustrated by Winefride's attempts to escape him, struck off her head with his sword. The rapist himself fell dead while the prayers of St Beuno brought Winefride back to life, unscathed apart from the thin white scar line around her neck.

The well became a place of pilgrimage, with many medieval English kings, including Richard II and Henry IV, visiting the holy well, attracted both by its aura of sanctity and the miraculous healing properties associated with its water. Despite various attempts to suppress pilgrimages after

the Reformation, Catholics, local and from further afield, continued to visit the shrine. Indeed, such was its reputation for healing that many Protestants also visited the well to take the waters.

By the 17th century, medicinal spas had become popular around the country, so many people visited St Winefride's Well seeking healing there because of the restorative effects of the water's mineral content rather than because of its spiritual associations.

However, miracles continued to occur at the well, the most famous being the 1805 healing of Winefrid White from a left-side paralysis that had resulted in an inability to walk. People continue to bathe in the well, traditionally immersing themselves three times. If you want to try the waters, check in advance to discover the times when bathing is permitted; well water is always available from a tap.

Right: The well cover was designed by Frederick Bligh Bond, the two interlocking circles forming a vesica piscis, where centre of each circle lies on the circumference of the other circle

CHALICE WELL

Location: Glastonbury, Somerset, UK **Time zone:** UTC **Currency:** £ (Pound sterling)

Glastonbury is one of the most numinous sites in Britain so it's appropriate that it should also have a holy well. The Chalice Well rises from Chalice Hill, near Glastonbury Tor and, because its water contains iron oxide, it's also sometimes called the Red Spring because of the colour of its water.

The well produces 25,000 gallons (110,000 litres) of water each day and has reputedly never run dry, even during the drought years of 1921-22. Archaeologists have found evidence of human use of the well dating back two thousand years.

Chalice Well is intimately connected with the legends that surround Glastonbury Tor.

According to these, Joseph of Arimathea visited Britain with Jesus during Jesus's boyhood and there were indeed trade routes connecting the tin mines of Cornwall with the Mediterranean. After Jesus's crucifixion and resurrection, legend tells that Joseph returned to Britain, bearing the Holy Grail, which he deposited at Glastonbury, under the well. Blood that Joseph had collected from Jesus as he hung upon the cross flowed into the water, thus giving the water its red colour.

The garden surrounding Chalice Well is open to visitors but check opening times. When closed, well water is available from the Lion's Head fountain on Wellhouse Lane.



CHURCH OF SANTA MARIA IN VIA

Location: Rome, Italy Time zone: UTC+1 Currency: Euro (€)

The servants of Cardinal Pietro Capocci woke the sleeping cardinal in the early hours of 27 September 1256, calling him to come to the stable where the well was overflowing. It wasn't the water that was the problem: there was something floating on the water. Rushing there, the cardinal found a picture of Mary, painted on a stone slab – and the stone was floating. Cardinal Capocci grabbed the

picture and the waters subsided back into the well. Hearing of this miracle, Pope Alexander IV ordered a church built over the well.

It's there still – it is the Church of Santa Maria in Via, in the Trevi district of the Italian capital city of Rome. The Chapel of the Madonna of the Well, with the holy picture, is on the right of the main altar of the church and there's a niche in the chapel that dispenses water from the holy well.

WONDERFUL WATERS

Reflecting POOLS

*The still waters of the lakes across Europe have
always been sites of worship and mystery*



WORDS BEN CAZUR

Above: Generations have long wondered at the mysteries lurking under the waters of lakes



PLITVICE LAKES

Location: Karlovac County, Croatia **Time zone:** UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro (€)

The Plitvice Lakes of Croatia form a series of bodies of waters that descend from the hills and are joined together by picturesque waterfalls. The lakes were formed by the Black and White rivers eroding the natural soft rocks of the area and legend has it these rivers were created by a mystical figure called the Black Queen.

When the people of the area were suffering from a terrible drought a voice was heard from the heavens telling them to visit a spring known as the Spring of Life. Since the voice of the Black Queen had always given them good advice

before, they did so. At the spring the people were told to confess their secrets and the Black Queen would reward them, if they told the truth. All did so except one selfish man. To help the honest people the Black Queen returned the rains, but because of the selfish man the Black Queen wept. The tears from one eye formed the White River and the tears from the other created the Black River, and together they carved out the Plitvice Lakes. In the depths of Gavanovac lake there is said to be a treasure associated with fairies – but also that it will never be recovered by human hands.

LAKE PAVIN

Location: Puy-de-Dôme, France **Time zone:** UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro (€)

Lake Pavin is a perfectly round body of water nestled in the crater of a volcano. For generations locals held that the lake was bottomless and that unnamed horrors dwelled far below the blue waters. Mysterious bubbles that disturb the water hinted at dark creatures below. There are said to be undines, water



spirits, who live in the depths, and goblins who lurk in the forests surrounding it.

Some said that Lake Pavin was created by the devil himself, and filled with his tears at not being allowed to return to heaven. Others said that God had made the lake when he drowned a town full of sinners who once lived there.

Swimming across the lake was not advised because it was able to suck people down so that their bodies would never be recovered. Anyone who cast a stone into the water was said to conjure terrible evil. Some researchers think this legend may have some truth – when deep lakes are disturbed they can occasionally release dangerous gasses.

REFLECTING POOLS

LAKE BLEĐ

Location: Upper Carniolia, Slovenia
Time zone: UTC+1
Currency: Euro (€)

At the centre of Lake Bled stands an island which legend says was once a hill in the middle of a beautiful glade inhabited by fairies. When human farmers allowed their sheep to graze on the hill the fairies warned the farmers to keep them back or they would build a barrier to stop them. The farmers allowed their flocks to wander where they wished. Soon the whole of the valley had been stripped of its grass, leaving nothing but brown mud and rocks. This so infuriated the fairies that they retaliated by flooding the valley and it was this that formed Lake Bled.

Today a church stands on the island and it is associated with a tragic tale. A local couple were



deeply in love but one day the husband was waylaid by robbers and killed. They tossed his body into Lake Bled. The wife honoured her dead husband by offering a bell to the church in the middle of the lake. It took all of her money to afford the bell but as it was being rowed across the lake a sudden storm sprang up and tipped the bell into the water, where it sank forever. Some say it can still be heard to this day.

The widow was bereft and sold her home to finance the construction of a new church on the island, but she could no longer stand to look at Lake Bled. She moved into a nunnery and died there years later. When her tale became known, people gathered money to finance a new bell. Those who visited believed that striking the bell three times would grant their wishes.

LAKE ANNECY

Location: Haute-Savoie, France **Time zone:** UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro (€)

The crystalline waters of Lake Annecy may seem tempting to swimmers but there is a legend which may make visitors think twice before entering.

In the Middle Ages a young lady called Bernoline lived in a castle beside the lake but was deeply lonely. When a wandering knight on his way home from the Crusades visited, the two fell in love and married. When Bernoline saw a spectacular star in the sky her knight promised to fetch it for her and left on an adventure. After a hundred

days, a mermaid informed the knight that she could fetch the star for him, but he must return with it to Bernoline that very night, or his love will die. Near to his goal, the knight is then tricked by the devil in the shape of a fisherman, who offered to row him across the lake in exchange for his soul. He agreed, and the lovers lived happily for ten years, before the devil came to collect. In her grief Bernoline was transformed into a mermaid with a fondness for pulling men into the water and devouring them. When someone dies in the lake Bernoline's cries can be heard.

Above: Beneath the waters of Lake Annecy a dangerous mermaid is said to have made her home



MINNEWATER

Location: Bruges, West Flanders, Belgium **Time zone:** UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro (€)

Visitors to Bruges often travel to Minnewater to declare their undying love for each other on a bridge over the water. Lovers who cross the bridge are said to remain in love forever.

The association of Minnewater with love can be traced to the legendary doomed romance of Minna and Stromberg. Minna was a young lady that lived in the area who fell in love with Stromberg, a poor member of another tribe. Minna's father did not approve of their relationship and instead betrothed her to a wealthy man that could promise

her an easy future. Minna and Stromberg pledged eternal love to each other.

While Stromberg was away Minna's father attempted to force her to marry, but she ran into the woods. When Stromberg returned from his journey he went in search for Minna but took days to find her. By the time he did Minna was dead and Stromberg promised her eternal rest. He dammed the river running into the Minnewater and buried her there before releasing the water so no one could ever disturb her tomb.



LAKE CERKNICA

Location: Inner Carniola, Slovenia
Time zone: UTC+1
Currency: Euro (€)

For part of the year Lake Cerknica is the largest lake in Slovenia but in the summer, when the rains cease, it disappears as the waters completely drain away. Sometimes the lake will remain for years at a time but at others it does not refill which has made it appear mysterious to locals for generations.

Above the location of the lake is a cave where witches were said to live. As locals saw fogs descending from the cave it was believed that the witches there created bad weather and released it into the region.

The sinkholes in the area which help to drain the lake are said to have caused tragedy. Ruins near to the lake are the remains of a castle which was abandoned by a baron when his wife was swallowed, along with her horses and carriage, by a sinkhole that opened beneath her.

LAKE AVERNUS

Location: Cuma, Campania, Italy **Time zone:** UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro (€)



Lake Avernus was one of the most important lakes in Roman mythology. It sits on the volcanic Phlegraean Fields near to Mount Vesuvius in the Gulf of Naples. The name Avernus derives from a Greek term meaning "without birds" and came about because of the toxic fumes which occasionally belched from the lake and killed creatures who got too close. Such places were thought to be inhabited by Mephitis, the Roman goddess of noxious airs. The lake was supposedly created by the shocks of the battle between Zeus and the Titans which left the whole area disturbed. Due to the bacteria living in the lake it sometimes turns a vivid red, which might have made people think it was turning to blood.

The deadly nature of the area led to the idea that Lake Avernus was the entrance to underworld where the souls of the dead go. In the *Aeneid* by Virgil the Roman hero makes his journey into the realm of the dead by travelling through a cave on the shore of Lake Avernus. Other authors also said that Odysseus visited the underworld via Lake Avernus.

Near to the lake there was a temple built to the god Apollo, the god of prophecy. On the shores of the lake was also the home to the Cumaean Sibyl, the most famed prophetess in the Roman world. It was she who told Aeneas how to reach the underworld, and gave books of predictions which were consulted and revered by the Romans for generations.

LAKE CONSTANCE

Location: Border of Germany, Switzerland and Austria

Time zone: UTC+1

Currency: Swiss franc, Euro (€)

Visitors to the town of Konstanz on the shores of Lake Constance, may notice something strange about the fountain called the Kaiserbrunnen. Several little bronze creatures, half-rabbit and half-fish, spout water into the fountain. Known as seehase, these mythical animals are said to live in Lake Constance. Each year in July, children wait at the port in Friedrichshafen for a highly decorated boat. Onboard is a person wearing a spotted rabbit costume carrying a large sack full of toys and sweets. This festival is called the Seehasenfest.



LOUGH LEANE

Location: County Kerry, Ireland

Time zone: UTC

Currency: Euro (€)

Lough Leane in Ireland has been a site of human habitation for thousands of years. One of the islands in the lake is rich in copper ore and pre-historic people mined it, which may have led to one of the myths of the lake. Pearls are sometimes found in the lake and these were formed when a legendary smith who lived in the water struck his anvil. As the sparks settled they transformed into the pearls.

It was by the lake that the Irish hero Oisín met Niamh, the beautiful daughter of the sea god. The pair married and Oisín became king of the land of eternal youth, known as Tir na nÓg, and ruled there for 300 years.

ULLSWATER

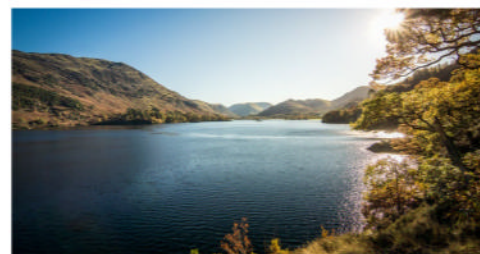
Location: Cumbria, England, UK

Time zone: UTC

Currency: Pound sterling (£)

Ullswater is the second largest lake in the English Lake District and has several links to the story of King Arthur. Near to the lake is a large circular earthwork that has been called King Arthur's Round Table for generations – in reality it is the remains of a Neolithic henge. Legend has it that King Arthur's famous sword Excalibur may lurk in the depths of Ullswater. As the king was dying he ordered that his sword be returned to the Lady in the Lake who had first given it to him and she lived in Ullswater.

The lake is also known as the Dark Lake for its gloomy waters, and medieval sources hinted at spirits and monsters residing in its shadowy depths.



LAKE GARDA

Location: Lombardy and Veneto, Italy **Time zone:** UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro (€)

The largest lake in Italy, Lake Garda, is one of the most romantic locations in Europe, so it is fitting that one of its most famous legends is linked with love. The lake was supposedly created by the Roman sea god Neptune's son Benaco. The poet Virgil said the waves of the lake were like those of the ocean. Benaco had travelled away from the sea to seek a new home and fell in love with a nymph living in a small mountain lake. She refused to follow him away from her beloved home and so Benaco promised to make them a grand new place to live instead – and struck the ground to create Lake Garda.

The lake was said to be home to mermaids known as anguane who took the form of beautiful women with either cloven hooves or fish-tails. They emerged from the water to wash their clothes on the shore and dry them, and to seduce men. The anguane are also said to help infertile couples have children and care for babies.

Like many European bodies of water, Lake Garda is supposedly home to a large and mysterious monster, known as Bennie. In 1965 a group of tourist near to the lake's

Bay of Mermaids spotted a long serpentine creature rise from the waters before disappearing into the depths. Others who have seen Bennie claim it is a cross between a whale and snake. No one has ever been

harmd by Bennie and many locals believe it to be a protector of the lake.

Below: The capricious winds of Lake Garda have given rise to legends of gods and monsters living under the water



LAC DU GRAND-LIEU

Location: Loire-Atlantique, France **UK** **Time zone:** UTC-1 **Currency:** Euro (€)



Lac de Grand-Lieu is one of the largest lakes in all of France, but according to legend the lake had not always been there. Locals believed that where the lake now stands was once a rich town called Herbauges.

The people of Herbauges thought of nothing except their own pleasures and knew nothing of Christianity. In the 6th century a concerned bishop sent a holy man named Martin of Vertou to convert the citizens but only two out of all the population listened to him. God warned Martin that the town would be destroyed and to leave at once, so he took the converts with him. A deluge of rain fell and drowned Herbauges in a single night. Today it is said that on Christmas Eve the bells of Herbauges can still be heard ringing under the lake.

LAKE MUMMELSEE

Location: Black Forest, Germany **Time zone:** UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro (€)



Below: The mountain Lake Mummelsee may be small but it is large enough to contain many wonderful legends

The small lake Mummelsee is rich with folklore and legend. The most famous story of the lake is that it is inhabited by a nix, or mermaid. Depending on the version told this nix is either a beautiful woman who revels in dance and song and freely gives wise advice, or she is a temptress who lures men into the water to drown them.

One tale says that the mermaids of the lake were permitted to walk on land and mix with the local humans – so long as

they returned to the lake by a certain time. One of the men fell in love with one of the mermaids and so set the town clock back by an hour to have more time with her. When the mermaid failed to return at the allotted hour she fell dead, and the other mermaids were forbidden to ever leave the water again.

Legend also speaks of a king living in the lake who rewards guests with straw that magically transforms into gold on land.

BLACK LAKE

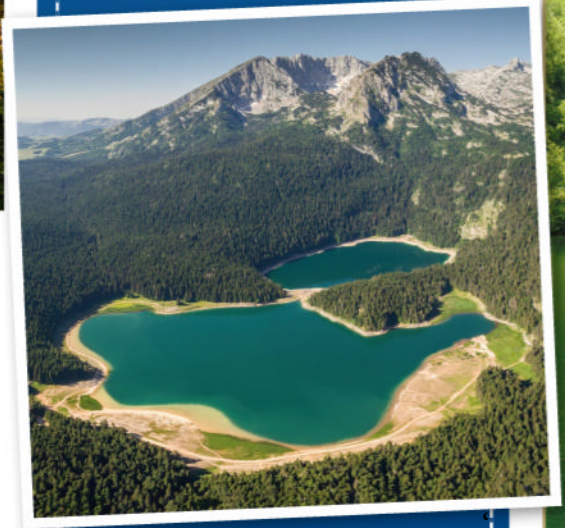
Location: Žabljak, Montenegro
Time zone: UTC+1
Currency: Euro (€)

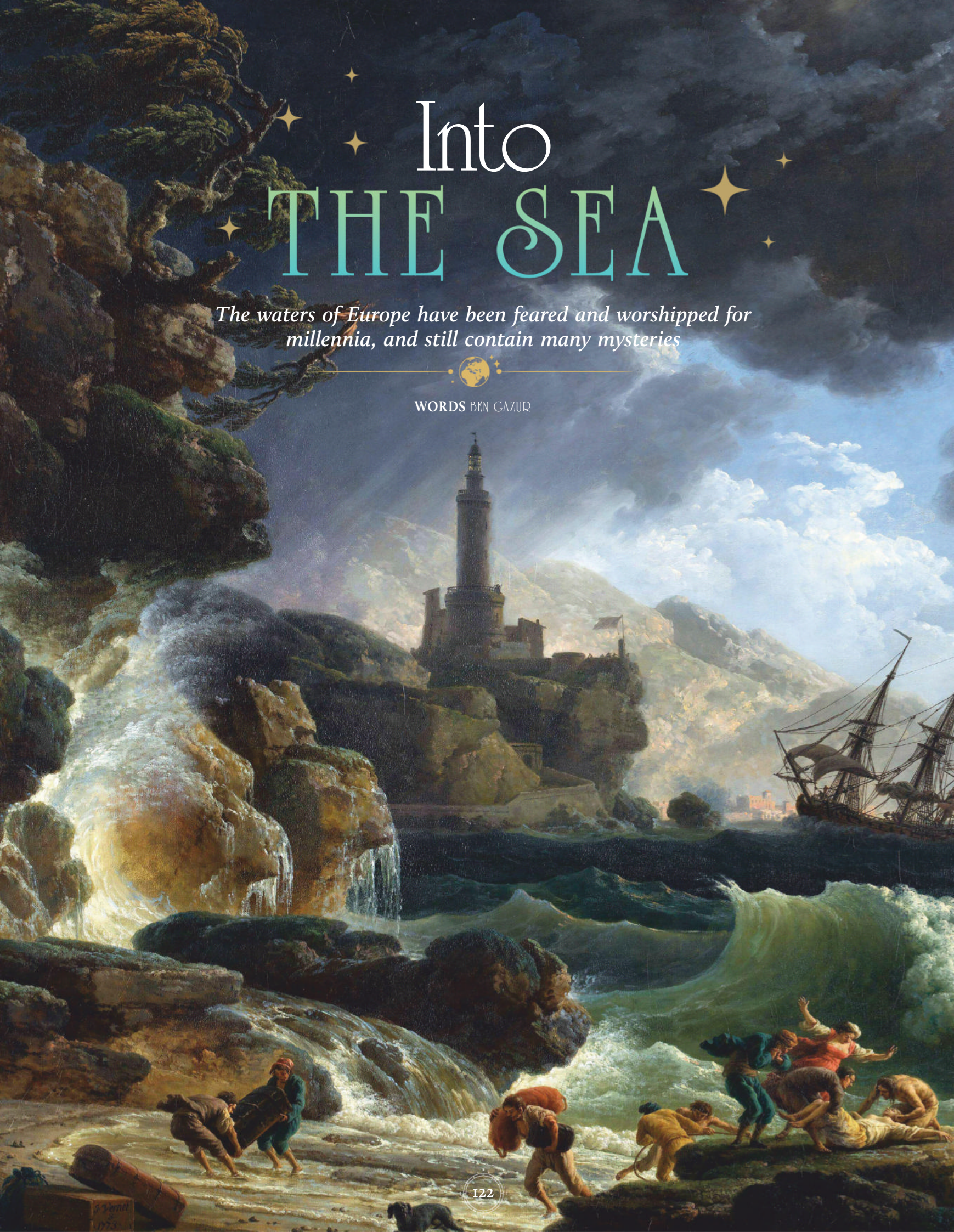
Black Lake, known as Crno jezero in Montenegrin, is a lake with a legend about its formation involving a famous saint and miracles.

Where the lake is now was once the site of a monastery which was visited by Saint Sava, a Serbian prince and holy man. The monks welcomed Sava but were unconvinced that he had the sanctity which was attributed to him, so they tested him. The monks killed one of their roosters and slipped it into Sava's bag, and when he tried to leave they accused him of theft. When Sava saw this he cursed the monastery, and the village around it, and the whole area sank into the ground where the lake is today.

Another version of the legend has the monks join the saint and his pupils on their journey away from the monastery into the mountains. When they stopped to eat, the monks had a feast for themselves but had only dry crusts of bread for the saint. It was then he cursed the town. A horse drowned with the monastery is said to emerge from the lake sometimes.

Below: The peculiar shape of Black Lake is thought to spring from its miraculous creation in an act of divine vengeance by a saint



The background of the page is a detailed painting. On the left, a large, dark, gnarled tree stands on a rocky outcrop. A powerful waterfall cascades down the rocks into the sea. In the center, a tall, cylindrical lighthouse sits atop a steep, rocky cliff. To the right, a large, multi-masted sailing ship is visible on the horizon. In the foreground, several people are gathered on the rocky shore, some appearing to be struggling or helping others. The sky is filled with dark, dramatic clouds, with a few stars visible.

Into THE SEA

The waters of Europe have been feared and worshipped for millennia, and still contain many mysteries



WORDS BEN CAZUR

The sea is a fickle thing. It has offered humanity a swift way to travel to distant lands for thousands of years and provided a bounty of food for those who fish the waters. Yet it can also be a terrifying power that sinks ships, breeds ferocious storms, and inundates the land to wash away people's homes. The murky depths of the ocean are a breeding ground for myths and legends.

Given the terrors of the ocean it is understandable that sailors are a uniquely superstitious group. To placate the sea there were any number of rituals and

pieces of folklore meant to assuage its wrath. Often, however, these often failed and many lost their lives at sea. Seeking an explanation for the loss of colleagues and loved ones, survivors claimed they were pulled under by krakens, drowned by mermaids, or cursed by encounters with ghost ships. All of these supernatural beings have been reported in the seas of Europe across the millennia.

For a long time people had no idea what lay on the ocean bed, much of which still remains unmapped today, and this left them open to speculate about what was being concealed by the waves. One of the most common myths was that the sea had swallowed up towns, cities, and whole kingdoms in the past to punish the transgressions of humans. The implicit threat was that this might happen again. Indeed as the sea levels of Europe have fluctuated over the ages many places once

inhabited by humans have been consigned to the deep. Doggerland, a large area between England and northern Europe, was once home to many people until 10,000 years ago it began to sink under the sea. Tales of Atlantis, the city of Ys, and many other lost lands swallowed by the waves can be found across the continent.

Those who lived safely on land could not even feel fully safe from the dangers of the sea even when it was not threatening to submerge their homes. Tales of creatures emerging from the sea were found in many places. Kelpies and other beasts would come onto the land and drag the unwary away to their deaths in the water. Mermaids and sirens would tempt people into danger with their beauty and songs.

Whether the waters of the sea are the dark grey of the far north or the glittering blue of the south, European seas are filled with mysteries.



Above: The dangers of the sea have often been linked to spirits, monsters, and gods

Image source: Alamy

THE AEGEAN

Location: Between Greece and Turkey **Time zone:** UTC+2/3 **Currency:** Euro (€)

The Aegean Sea occupies the area between Greece and Turkey and was well known to the ancient Greeks. They even gave a name to the god of storms who was thought to menace their ships in the area – Aegaeon – but it was not he who gave the sea its name.

According to legend, King Minos of Crete demanded that the Athenians send him seven girls and seven boys each year as tribute. These young people were sent into the labyrinth beneath Minos' palace where they were eaten by the monstrous Minotaur. This continued until Theseus, son of king Aegeus of Athens, volunteered to be one of the tributes sent to Crete to kill the Minotaur. He promised his father that if he was successful he would hoist a white sail on his ship. Theseus did indeed slay the Minotaur and end the yearly tribute but forgot his promise and his returning ship still had its black sails. Aegeus saw the ship's sails and, thinking his son was dead, threw himself into the sea and drowned. It is from Aegeus that the sea took its name.

The gorgones are mermaids who dwell in the waters of the Aegean and one of them is linked to Alexander the Great. After much

searching and great effort Alexander the Great was able to obtain a small jar filled with the water of immortality. Any who drank it would live forever. His sister Thessalonike did not know this and either spilled it or wasted it, dooming Alexander to die. When he died she was so grief stricken that she drowned herself in the sea but instead of dying became a mermaid. Now it is said she confronts sailors and asks them "Is King Alexander alive?" If they answer anything but "He lives and reigns and conquers the world!" she attacks their boat and kills all aboard.

Below: Visitors to the Aegean may not know that the glorious blue waters conceal tales of dark folklore



THE HELLESPONT

Location: Çanakkale, Turkey

Time zone: UTC+3

Currency: Turkish lira

In the ancient world the Hellespont, the narrow channel between Turkey and Greece, was the symbolic border between Europe and Asia. When the Persian king Xerxes invaded Greece he constructed a bridge across the waters, though when it was washed away he whipped the sea. When Alexander the Great crossed the other way he threw a spear onto the Asian shore and claimed the whole of it as already won by the spear.

The name of the Hellespont derives from a girl named Helle. Helle was going to be sacrificed by her stepmother but a golden ram sent by the gods whisked her away. While fleeing Helle fell from the ram's back and drowned in the waters named after her.

Other mythic figures met their ends in the waters of the Hellespont. Hero and Leander were two lovers who lived on opposite sides of the strait but each night Leander swam across towards a lamp held by Hero to spend their nights together. Their affair lasted all summer but when the season turned the rough weather extinguished Hero's lamp and Leander became lost. He drowned, and when his body washed up on the shore Hero drowned herself too.

SEAS OF BRITTANY

Location: Brittany, France **Time zone:** UTC+1/2 **Currency:** Euro (€)

The people who live beside the English Channel in Brittany have long told tales about the strange creatures who dwell off their shores. Many sailors were lost in storms and their bodies were often not recovered. Locals said that their souls became spirits known as Iannic-ann-ôd who eternally wandered the beaches crying out at night. If any human calls out to them they race towards the caller and snap their neck.

The groac'h is a water fairy linked to several of the islands in the region and



she lives under the sea and lures sailors into her kingdom. There she transforms them into fish and feeds them to her guests. The mari-morgans are mermaids who live in the ocean and kidnap men unwary enough to approach them.

The most famous sea legend from Brittany is that of the lost city of Ys. There are many versions, but all say that Ys was one of the wonders of the world, made rich by its trade. Dahut, the daughter of the king, was the most wicked woman in the kingdom and one night she and her lover stole the keys to the dikes which kept the ocean out and opened the gates – immediately submerging the whole of Ys. For her sins, Dahut was turned into a mari-morgan. It is said that the bells of Ys can still be heard ringing under the waves.

THE AZORES

Location: Atlantic Ocean, Portugal

Time zone: UTC-1

Currency: Euro (€)

The Azores are a spectacular cluster of volcanic islands around 1400km west of Portugal in the Atlantic Ocean. They have been settled by different groups over several centuries and a complex system of folklore has formed there.

Given their position some have suggested the islands are the remains of the mythical island of Atlantis. Other tales say that the Azores were once part of a rich and powerful island kingdom ruled by a proud king. To get an heir he made a deal with a supernatural being on the condition that he not set eyes on his child for 30 years. After 28 years he attempted to glimpse his promised heir – and an earthquake struck which destroyed his land. Geysers, tremors, and eruptions caused by volcanoes often alter



the appearance of the Azores making their landscapes seem ever-changing.

Given the dangers of the waters around the Azores the people sought a protector. It is said that every 23 June St John appears to bless the seas and cast out evil spirits. For generations inhabitants would refuse to enter the waves before this date.



ZENNOR

Location: Cornwall, UK

Time zone: UTC

Currency: Pound sterling (£)

The town of Zennor was supposedly founded by a French saint, Senara, when she was falsely accused of adultery and thrown into the sea in a barrel. The waves floated her to this spot on the coast.

The most famous sea legend of the area is that of the Mermaid of Zennor. A local man became intrigued by a beautiful woman he saw every Sunday at church but whom no one knew. After the service he followed her to discover who she was – and no one ever saw either of them again.

Years later a group of local fishermen were met at sea by a mermaid who asked them to raise their anchor as it was blocking entrance to her home. The fishermen realised the missing man must now be living under the sea with the mermaid. In the local church a pew is carved with an image of the mermaid to commemorate the events.



GULF OF CORRYVRECKAN

Location: Between Jura and Scarba, Scotland

Time zone: UTC

Currency: Pound sterling (£)

The swift tides and peculiar conditions in this gulf unite to form the third largest whirlpool in the world, known as the Corryvreckan. The roar of the swirling water can be heard miles away and it creates waves over 9m high.

The whirlpool is known as Coire Bhreacain in Gaelic, meaning Cauldron of the Plaid. According to legend it is the spot where the goddess of winter washes her plaid cloak when the seasons turn colder. Once the cloak has been churned in the Corryvreckan it emerges pure and white, and it is this she spreads over the land as a layer of snow. Others say it is named for a Norse prince named Breacan who drowned attempting to swim the gulf.



THE ISLES OF SCILLY

Location: Scilly Isles, UK **Time zone:** UTC **Currency:** Pound sterling (£)

The Isles of Scilly are today separated from the British mainland by 45km of sea – but legend has it that they were once connected by a rich and beautiful Arthurian kingdom. When there is an unusually low tide you can spot rocks and the ruins of walls stretching away from the shore for miles.

This lost land was named Lyonesse and features in a number of myths and legends. The hero Tristan, whose love for the princess Isolde (Iseult) inspired poets and storytellers, was the son of a king

of Lyonesse. It was while Tristan was at the court of king Mark of Cornwall that his father died but tragedy struck before he could return to Lyonesse to claim his crown. A storm swept in and in a single night the whole kingdom was submerged forever beneath the sea. Only one of the locals survived the calamity as he was out hunting and saw the incoming wave that swamped the land and managed to race ahead of it on his white horse. The white horse was later taken as a symbol by several Cornish families.

VENICE

Location: Veneto, Italy **Time zone:** UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro (€)

Venice is a city built on a number of low islands in a lagoon – it is also a city built on myths and legends. It is said that the first inhabitants of Venice were refugees who fled from mainland Italy to the islands for safety at the end of the Roman period when barbarians invaded the empire.

Building a city on muddy islands was not easy and legend says the locals received diabolical aid. The Rialto Bridge is a landmark of Venice and was the first bridge to cross the Grand Canal. Attempts to build it were struck several times by calamity, driving the architect to fear it was impossible, until a mysterious stranger offered to do it in a single night. He only wanted

the soul of the first person to cross it as his fee. The devil built the Rialto as he promised.

The waters of Venice are its most notable feature and in the darkness of the canals it is said a monster lives near to the Punta della Dogana. It only emerges on moonless nights and is rarely spotted but is said to be able to drag the unwary to their deaths.

Other supernatural beings are said to live in the lagoon. A fisherman named Orio encountered a mermaid called Melusina and fell in love. The pair soon married and lived together happily until Melusina sickened and died, asking that Orio bury her at sea. The house they shared together has a brick heart set in its wall and those who touch it are said to be granted eternal love.

Below: The streets of Venice are made of water – and the canals are said to hide many mystical secrets



THE STRAITS OF GIBRALTAR

Location: Gibraltar **Time zone:** UTC+1

Currency: Gibraltar pound (£)

The Straits of Gibraltar separate Europe and Africa by just 14km of water. Around 5 million years ago the Atlantic Ocean broke through the land which once joined the continents and the inundation created the Mediterranean Sea. For the civilisations which lived around the Mediterranean the straits marked the edge of the known world.

The Romans knew the strait as the Pillars of Hercules. According to legend the hero Hercules reached an impossibly tall mountain that separated the Atlantic and Mediterranean while attempting to carry out one of his epic Twelve Labours. Instead of climbing over the mountain he simply smashed through it and created the strait. The remains of the mountain formed the Pillars of Hercules, one of them being the Rock of Gibraltar. Which peak on the African



coast forms the other pillar was disputed throughout antiquity.

What lay beyond the Straits of Gibraltar was little known in the ancient world and so it was there that Plato said the island of Atlantis lay, before it was swallowed by the sea. Some still look for the fictional island in the area today.



PAVLOPETRI

Location: Vatika Bay, Pelopennese, Greece

Time zone: UTC+2

Currency: Euro (€)

Many places are claimed to be the basis for Plato's legend of Atlantis but few are as intriguing as the ruins of Pavlopetri. Beneath the waves of a shallow bay lies the remains of a city dating back to around 1000 BCE, which were submerged by a series of devastating earthquakes – the same fate Atlantis is said to have suffered. Because Pavlopetri never rose above the sea again it was never built over by later generations and is frozen in time. According to some researchers Pavlopetri may have inspired Plato to create the myth of Atlantis based on folk memories of a prosperous land being sucked beneath the ocean.

Locals had told stories of something extraordinary being under the bay but Pavlopetri was only rediscovered in 1967.

CAPE FINISTERRE

Location: Finisterra, Galicia, Spain **Time zone:** UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro (€)

The Romans named this peninsula protruding into the Atlantic Ocean Finis Terrae – 'the end of the Earth'. Beyond this point seemed to be nothing but endless sea. There is evidence that in the most ancient times worshippers gathered there to offer up prayers to the sun as it set over the seas. Finisterra was considered to be the Coast of Death, where the lands of the living and the dead came closest.

Pilgrims walking to Santiago de Compostela to pray at the shrine of St James would often continue their pilgrimage to Finisterra. Once they had reached the ocean the pilgrims would strip off their clothes, burn them, and then wash themselves in the sea as a sign of their new life.



Below: The tip of Cape Finisterra has been a site of pilgrimage for thousands of years for those seeking the tip of Europe.



THE BLUE GROTTO

Location: Capri, Bay of Naples, Italy
Time zone: UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro (€)

To enter the Blue Grotto on the island of Capri, visitors must wait until the tide is out and the sea is calm as the entrance is so small. Once inside, an ethereal blue glow suffuses the whole cave from sunlight reflected underwater.

The Roman Emperor Tiberius was known to swim in the Blue Grotto, and dedicated it as a temple to sea-nymphs. For centuries the grotto was avoided by locals because it was thought to be haunted by witches and other evil spirits. Legend has it that priests entered the cave to drive out the demons – but were instead driven to madness by what they encountered inside. They described it as a ‘gate to hell’, but tourists still flock to the Blue Grotto.

Below: The eerie light of the Blue Grotto has inspired worship and fear for millennia

BLÅ JUNGFRUN

Location: Kalmar Strait, Sweden

Time zone: UTC+1

Currency: Swedish krona

Blå Jungfrun, meaning Blue Maiden in Swedish, is not the real name of this island in the Baltic sea. Sailors who came too close were afraid of using its true name, Blåkulla, because those who did disturbed the spirits of the island and were struck by storms. In the 16th century people thought that witches gathered on Blå Jungfrun each Maundy Thursday to meet with the devil. The island’s magical reputation drew those looking to perform various rituals.

The most mysterious feature of Blå Jungfrun is a large labyrinth set out in stones on a bare stone plateau. It is unclear how old this ancient maze is, or what its function was, but anyone who disturbs the stones is said to be cursed for the rest of their life.

“In the 16th century people thought that witches gathered on the Swedish island of Blå Jungfrun each Maundy Thursday to meet with the devil”





STRAIT OF MESSINA

Location: Sicily and Calabria, Italy
Time zone: UTC+1
Currency: Euro (€)

The Strait of Messina separating the island of Sicily from the Italian mainland narrows to only 3km in width. The uniquely powerful currents of these waters create dangerous sailing conditions and a powerful whirlpool at its northern end. It has also given birth to many legends.

According to Greek and Roman mythology the Strait of Messina was home to two terrifying monsters named Scylla and Charybdis. Scylla was a monstrous figure with ravenous dogs growing from her waist while Charybdis was a sea creature able to suck down vast quantities of water, and any ships in it. Sailors had to decide which threat to venture closer to if they wished to pass the strait. Some say Scylla was based on a perilous outcrop of rocks on the Italian shore while Charybdis represented the whirlpools.



THE GIANT'S CAUSEWAY

Location: County Antrim, Northern Ireland, UK

Time zone: UTC **Currency:** Pound sterling (£)

The Giant's Causeway is a mass of basalt columns running out into ocean. It was formed around 60 million years ago by a huge outflow of lava which solidified into the hexagonal pillars of black stone, which fit together so closely they appear to have been designed. According to legend the causeway was indeed designed and built.

The giant of the Giant's Causeway was the Irish hero Fionn mac Cumhaill (Finn MacCool) who lived in the area. He was

challenged to a battle of strength by a giant who lived across the sea in Scotland and so to reach his foe he constructed the Giant's Causeway. In some versions Fionn won this fight, but in others his enemy was tricked into believing Fionn was too mighty to face and so destroyed the causeway. This explains why the Giant's Causeway disappears under the sea – but similar rocks can be found near Fingal's Cave on Staffa in the Inner Hebrides, showing where it once stretched to Scotland.

ES VEDRA

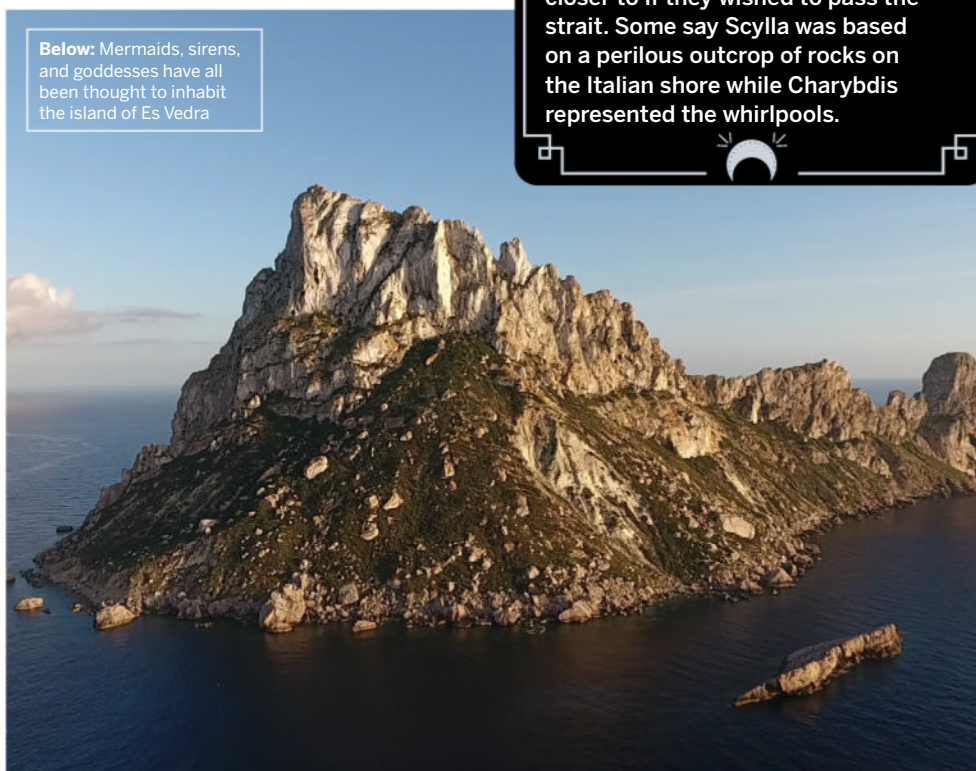
Location: Ibiza, Balearic Islands, Spain

Time zone: UTC+1 **Currency:** Euro (€)

The towering and jagged rocks of the island of Es Vedra have long drawn curious visitors. For centuries sailors who ventured close to the island told tales of huge, dark shapes moving in the water beneath them and mermaids frolicking among the waves. Some said that the island was the home of the sirens who had tried to lure Odysseus and his crew to their destruction with their alluring song. The Phoenicians who colonised Ibiza thought that Es Vedra was the birthplace of the moon goddess Tanit, who rules the tides with her motion.

Today supernatural researchers claim that the island is full of mystical energy and is unusually magnetic. The island is now protected as a nature reserve.

Below: Mermaids, sirens, and goddesses have all been thought to inhabit the island of Es Vedra



THE TRAVELLER'S GUIDE TO

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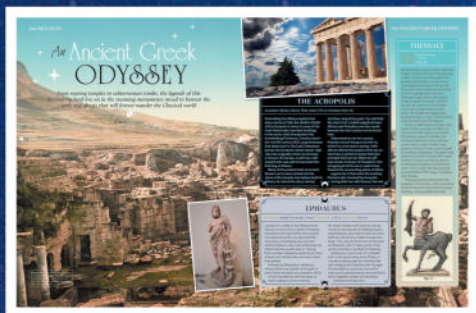
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