



TRAVEL

# The world is your oyster

Pristine beaches are among  
Mallorca's attractions







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A few months ago, corporate professional Manas Dewan and his wife, Dr Anuradha, completed an epic road trip, biking through 18 countries and 20,000 km. So what were their most memorable destinations? **Manas Dewan** shares his list — from Mallorca in Spain to Cappadocia in Turkey.

Using their own resources, Manas and Dr. Anuradha Dewan travelled on a motorbike (Ducati Scrambler) across 18 countries and 20,000 km over four months, a project they call “Dosti On Wheels”. Their ride started from the port city of Valencia, in Spain. They travelled to Portugal, France and thereafter covered Switzerland, Germany, Czechia, Austria, and Liechtenstein, before riding into Italy and Vatican. From there it was the Eastern European countries of Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia Herzegovina, Montenegro, Albania and Macedonia, before venturing into Greece. They then entered Asia — they spent a month exploring the beautiful land of Turkey. They shipped their motorbike back from the port city of Istanbul to Mumbai to conclude their odyssey. Here, Manas Dewan describes his favourite destinations and why they should be on every avid traveller’s bucket list.

### Mallorca, Spain

Pristine beaches, rugged mountains, secret coves and lush countryside — Mallorca offers exciting options for the intrepid traveller. The capital city of Palma has a thriving cultural scene, with the Gothic Cathedral serving as its centerpiece. The historic city centre still retains its old-world charm, with its picturesque lanes and cobbled streets. If you like driving and have an eye for wild beauty, then venture into the west coast, where the ocean road clings to the jagged mountains with the sea stretched below. On the other side of the island lie the popular ports of Pollençà, Alcudia, Magaluf and Cala Millor. Whether you like leisure or active sports, culture or nightlife, sailing or motoring, the island paradise of Mallorca is bound to impress you with its variety, authenticity and hospitality.

Stay at a country house or finca, mingle with the locals at the pubs, haggle at a farmers’ market and spend lazy afternoons at the seaside eateries. Take your time with Mallorca, feel its energy... it is happy and slightly lazy.







## Porto, Portugal

When Anu and I learnt that the famous Port wine is actually named after the city of Porto in Portugal, we agreed that the fact called for a closer investigation. As we motorbiked into the north of Portugal, we crossed unending miles of vineyards. The emerald blue river Duoro cut through the green landscape, while the scenes of a typical European summer unfolded all around us.

In the surrounding vineyards, however, we were welcomed to sample their collection, and that is how we learnt the distinction between rose port, ruby port, tawny port and white port, to name just a few. These sampling exercises not only give you a fine appreciation of the wine, it also earns you the friendship of the pub regulars.

If you are planning Porto in summer, you should not miss the Festa de São João do Porto. The Festival of St John is one of Europe's liveliest street festivals, though little is spoken about it. On the night of June 23 every year in the city thousands of revellers walk the streets greeting each other "Hola" while tapping your head with a soft plastic hammer or with garlic flowers. There are street concerts, dance parties throughout the night, and fireworks light up the skies upon the banks of river Duoro. It is really easy to feel at home in this warm, heady city of Porto.

## Perigord, France

Pristine nature, the romance of the medieval ages, breathtaking panorama and cuisine to delight the finest senses are just some of the highlights of the province of Perigord. As you leave the bustling, touristy Bordeaux and head east into the Aquitaine region, you will realise that this is not your regular tourist route, but a trail that leads you into another era altogether. All along the countryside are numerous castles from the Middle Ages, while villages such as Sarlat

and Perigueux are perfectly preserved. The pre-historic caves in the Vezere valley go back to over 450,000 years.

The gastronomy of Perigord is world-renowned. The exclusive foie gras comes from this region, so do the black truffle mushrooms. Its chestnuts, strawberries and walnuts are legendary, too. For the good life connoisseur, there could be no better vacation than a week or two in the Perigord region.

## Albania

"Is your colour for real?" the little boy asked us unabashedly. His parents came up and chastised the boy, but I could figure that the same thought lingered in their minds, too. "Yes because we are from India" I said, and the very next moment we were surrounded by a crowd of admirers. "Do you watch the serial Balika Badhu?" asked the boy, now emboldened by his earlier icebreaker. "No, I like Saraswati Chandra better," said his sister. And the dad nodded. We were shocked: out in the middle of nowhere, thousands of kilometres away from home, a silent cultural exchange had taken place. Bollywood, and the Indian media had indeed been embraced into homes far and wide. From Berat to Tirana and from Shkodra to Gjirokastra, our skin tone turned out to be a conversation starter throughout our stay in this tiny country of kind and hospitable people.

If you are a backpacker looking for an adventure 'off the tourist grid', Albania is a place for you. It is surprisingly economical. While the larger towns and cities offer the creature comforts of modern life, the most authentic experiences lie in the tiny villages and the countryside. My recommendation: opt for a homestay in a remote village — like we did with the village Udenisht, lying along the banks of Lake Ohrid.







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Houses in the Perigord region, France



MANAS DEWAN

Manas Dewan (extreme right) and his wife, Dr Anuradha (extreme left), in Albania



Hot air ballooning in Cappadocia, Turkey

## Tuscany

The Italian sun worked its magic upon the grapes, as we zipped past the green-gold countryside of the Toscana region. Around us, the gentle slopes of the Oltrepò Pavese mountains were carved out by grape plantations and after about 30 minutes we pulled in at the Scuropasso Vineyards. That is where we met Fabio and Manuela Marazzi and their daughter Flavia. The Marazzi family owns the vineyards and for several generations have been producing wines of the Scuropasso label. Flavia, all of 18 years, took over as our self-appointed tour guide and translator. Truth be told, she demystified much of the wine-making process during the tour.

Theory over, it was time to sample their produce — and we did it in typical Italian style: a multi course meal at their vineyard. Now meals are serious affairs in the Italian culture- serious enough for us to invest nearly three and a half hours on this particular activity. We sampled a wide variety of wines from their collection, paired with farm produce, home-made ham, salamis, various cheeses, and, of course, the local classic- pasta with pesto. The Marazzis believe in cooking and serving personally — and we bonded over great wines and home cooked food. Where words fell short, body language took over. The sun moved westwards, the shadows grew longer, and as I watched the expressive hands and faces all around, I could not help but marvel at the simplicity, openness and warmth with which we were welcomed into the Italian countryside.

"Time spent with friends is time well invested"— so goes an Italian proverb. This adage may date back several centuries, but the Italian way of life in the countryside, still embraces this with gusto.

## Cappadocia, Turkey

Turkey has it all, and few places have inspired such awe in us as the region of Cappadocia. This geological wonderland is famous for its tall spiry 'fairy chimneys'. Not far away is the Ozkonak, a vast underground city that goes down till six levels. During the Arab invasion, it housed the Christians, who gave one town the name of Goreme, which means "You cannot see here". The region has many World Heritage Sites including the Göreme National Park and the Rock Sites.

An unforgettable experience in Cappadocia is hot air ballooning. As you catch the first rays of the sun aboard your balloon, the land, stretching below you, reveals its volcanic craters, the tall mushrooming rocks, the deep valleys and mysterious rock formations. Among all the places we have travelled, Cappadocia occupies a very special place in our hearts. ●

*Manas Dewan writes about his experiences and reflections on DostiOnWheels.com*

