

Top Travel Destinations: Finland, Tasmania and The Azores

By **Judy Koutsky**

The Azores islands, Tasmania and Finland all offer amazing landscapes and plenty of unique activities. Here's why you should explore them in 2018.

Azores

These nine volcanic islands located off the coast of Portugal are a mere four-hour flight from Boston (a new JFK route with Delta is slated for May). The [Azores Getaways](#) can book outdoor pursuits including rappelling down waterfalls and hiking through lava tubes of extinct volcanoes, to more wellness-minded excursions like soaking in geothermal hot springs next to the ocean. Plus, this is a great place for whale watching—it's not uncommon to see blue, humpback, and sperm whales breaching the ocean's surface



There are many species of whales found throughout the Azores.

The best place for whale watching is the channel between Pico and Faial islands. There's an impressive 90% success rate of seeing these huge creatures while on tour here.





Hiking to waterfalls is one of the top attractions in the Azores.

Hiking to waterfalls is one of the top attractions in the Azores. Stay at the Furnas Boutique Hotel; it has a spacious spa complete with natural geothermal hot springs and two pools. For amazing views (and great food), go to Quinta dos Sabores. They use produce from their own farm and the tasting menu (which includes fresh, local fish, seasonal vegetables and local farm-raised meat) is a must-try. Two of the most popular activities include climbing Pico Mountain, Portugal's highest mountain, and hiking the scenic Faial's Capelinhos volcano.

Tasmania

This under-the-radar destination has seen a 25% increase in American travelers in the last year alone. People come not only to enjoy the wildlife (be sure to see the Tasmanian devil at Bonorong Wildlife

Sanctuary), but also to experience the sophisticated art, food, wine and hotel scene. The recently-opened Museum of Old and New Art (MONA)—the largest privately funded museum in the country—is a must for visitors and locals alike.



Museum of New and Old Art (MONA) in Tasmania

Plus, several new restaurants are making Tasmania a foodie destination, like Dier Makr, which features dishes like eucalyptus and lamb, alongside cocktails with ingredients like burnt pineapple and Douglas f. The newly opened MACq 01 hotel is being lauded as the place to stay. Located on Hobart's waterfront, it has a master storyteller who gives tours on the history, tales and fables that make up the remarkable history of Tasmania (like how convicts were the first inhabitants).



Coral Expeditions stops at Wineglass Bay.

Coral Expeditions (coralexpeditions.com), an Australian expedition cruising company, brings people to some of the most sought-after corners of this island, including hiking in Bathurst Harbor and exploring the Wineglass Bay region. The small ship size (it only takes 72 passengers) means it can navigate into hard-to-get to places like Port Davey. Now that Qantas has launched the Dreamliner flight from the U.S. Australia, Tasmania has become easier to visit.

Finland

This Nordic country just celebrated the 100th anniversary of its independence from Russia, and is known for its beautiful cities and countryside. It's also one of the most eco-friendly nations in the world, with two-thirds of its electricity coming from renewable or nuclear power sources. That's good news for travelers because public transportation is clean and easy.



Glass igloos at Kakslauttanen Arctic Resort

Visitors flock to the Aurora Borealis (aka Northern Lights) in Finnish Lapland, which appear on 200 night a year between winter and early spring (September to March). But the white summer nights are just as gorgeous. The nighttime sun is at its strongest during the months of June and July, and in the very northernmost parts you can experience a full midnight sun from May to August (which means you have plenty of natural light—24 hours in fact—to do all your activities).



Sunset in Lieksa

Looking for rugged adventure? Finland has more forest per square mile than any country in Europe and boasts the nickname “land of a thousand lakes” (it actually has 187,888 lakes, if you’re counting). Rent a lakeside cottage (like the locals) and partake in swimming, fishing, canoeing and going to the sauna. LÖy in Helsinki, which opened last year, has three different saunas, plus a spa, and a hole in the ice for “wint swimming” a popular activity post-sauna in Finland. Finnair flies directly from New York to Helsinki year-round.

Photos by (MACq 01 hotel) Adam Gibson; (LÖyly Sauna) Harri Tarvainen; (Finland Igloos) Jouni Porsange (Sunset in Lieksa) Asko Kuittinen