

Condé Nast Traveler

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The
Experts
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Our editors' pick of the best travel specialists in the world

Clockwise from right:
Del Mar; the
Temple House;
Officina; shellfish
at Del Mar



THE CAPITAL'S FRESH SCENE

D.C. IS REVVING UP AS AN ARTS AND FOOD HUB

In a city once awash in conservative navy pinstriped suits and white-linen-tablecloth restaurants, a wave of international tastemakers has woken up everything from restaurants to nightlife, and even its hotels. In April, the blossoming cherry trees gifted by Japan paint the National Mall creamy pink and the spring sunshine means you can walk everywhere, from the monuments over to The Wharf, the city's refurbished southwest waterfront. That's where to find the fine-dining Spanish restaurant Del Mar, by James Beard Award-winning chef Fabio Trabocchi, and the casual Italian Officina, by Nicholas Stefanelli (stick around for a nightcap at its hidden Salotto). It's also home to Anthem, a David Rockwell-designed music venue from the same people behind D.C.'s legendary 9:30 club—if here for the Kenny Chesney show later this month, stop into edgy cocktail-maker Todd Thrasher's raucous Tiki TNT around the corner for last call. In the funky U Street/Cardozo area is Maydan, a North African-meets-Middle Eastern restaurant that is always packed with a cool crowd (word is the Obamas like to pop in for date night). And in more traditional pockets of Northwest D.C., new hotels lend a hipster edge to a space once dominated by chintz and brocade. Eaton Workshop opened in October, giving young travelers more than just stylish hotel rooms—it has a wellness center, recording studio, and social programming right on the lobbying hub of K Street. Herzog & de Meuron brought their signature spare-but-art-driven aesthetic to the newly opened Conrad, in CityCenterDC, while Martin Brudnizki just redesigned the bar and restaurant at the Dupont Circle. Next month also brings back one of the city's hottest attractions: The International Spy Museum reopens in a new location, at L'Enfant Plaza, with 140,000 square feet showcasing the world's foremost collection of international espionage artifacts. It's a few blocks from the Mall, and it reminds us that even alongside the traditional monuments there are more unexpected, on-the-pulse reasons to have D.C. on your radar. CORINA QUINN

THE CHINESE TRENDSETTER

AN ALTERNATIVE CITY LEADS THE WAY

Chengdu's tourist lure has traditionally centered on two clichés: hot pot and giant pandas (the largest captive population in the world is in the Sichuan capital). Yet this is exactly where to also glimpse New China. Its residents have a reputation for being both laid back and cosmopolitan—it was on the Silk Road, after all, and became China's western commerce hub. An added asset: the location, more than 1,000 miles from the prying eyes of Beijing, has afforded it an unlikely autonomy. For example, in a country where the LGBTQ population is often invisible, Chengdu is a rare, rainbow-colored exception. Come here to experience the cutting edge of contemporary Chinese culture and the city's indie boutiques, like the months-old Kerry RC, which are more adventurous than their coastal counterparts. Several of them smartly use their Chengdunese outposts as a divining rod for homegrown trends: What locals buy today will impact what the Shanghaiese pick up next season. Rents can be a third cheaper than in Shanghai or Beijing, which means independent creatives flourish (the oddly named Eastern Suburb Memory complex has an impressive roster of fashion and art). Stay at the Temple House, whose wooden pavilions and stone towers embody Chengdu's ancient/modern dichotomy, and do cocktails at The Bridge, a Neri&Hu-designed bar and restaurant inside a converted walkway that marries old and new in a way this city excels at. MARK ELLWOOD



PHOTOGRAPH: NICOLE FRANZEN

THE SHOPPING HACK "CLIGNANCOURT FLEA MARKET, IN PARIS, WHERE I PICKED UP A LAMP BY ARTIST JACQUES DUVALBRASSEUR." INTERIOR DESIGNER KELLY WEARSTLER