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DESTINATIONS

5 MUST-SEE OFF-TRACK LOCATIONS

Step out of your comfort zone to visit places where few have ventured before you



Setting up camp in the middle of the Mongolian steppe along the Chuluut River offers a once-in-a-lifetime experience that few travellers think about doing. The fishing is fantastic too.

NICK WHARTON
 SPECIAL TO THE SUN

Close your eyes and picture your favourite holiday destination. What do you see? As a Canadian, you're probably visualizing white sand beaches, crystal clear water, palm trees and tropical jungles. But your next vacation could be so much more than sangrias, sunbathing and snorkelling. What if you could dive into a culture head first and experience things you never thought possible? What if you trade in your Caribbean beach paradise for an alpine hot-spring or a bustling market that makes you feel as if you've travelled back in time? This is the joy of stepping out of the comfort zone and heading to an off-track destination where few have ventured before you. It's time to strap on your backpack, dust off your passport and ready yourself for the adventure of a lifetime. Here are five off-track countries that should definitely make it on your travel bucket-list.

1. GRENADA

Let's start off slow and easy. We know you still want to live out your holiday beach fantasy and to tell you the truth, you really can't find a more post-card perfect destination than Grenada. This tiny island bobs in the Lesser-Antilles in the southern Caribbean and is located just 140 kilometres north of Venezuela.

If you're looking for beaches, this place has them in spades. Pure, powdery white sand, glass-calm aquamarine waters and hardly a tourist in sight! Most people who visit the Caribbean typically stick to the northern countries of Cuba, Dominican Republic and Jamaica ... but they're missing out on a real untouched jewel.

Not only does Grenada have some of the best beaches in the Caribbean (and in the world), but it also boasts a mountainous, jungle-clad interior that is perfect for trekking. Hire 74-year-old Telfor



Morne Rouge Beach in Grenada with hardly a tourist in sight.

to guide you on a hike deep into the lush rainforest where you can discover sparkling waterfalls hidden within the thick foliage. Telfor is a legend on the island and has clocked over 16,000 kilometres in his

lifetime of guiding; walking up, down and all around these incredible jungle paths.

From beaches and jungle, to friendly people and tasty food ... Grenada truly has it all.

2. IRAN:

Did you gasp? That's OK. Many people believe that this Islamic Republic is a dangerous place to visit, with government travel advisories listing "avoid all travel" warnings. However, if you do some independent research and actually go to Iran, you'll see the country for what it truly is. You'll wonder how these warning messages have made their way to the television and around the web. With a low crime rate and a high regard for community and personal well-being, Iran is a very safe place to travel.

The diversity here is amazing. One day you can be visiting the Persian Gulf, gazing out at the beach and watching fishermen haul in their daily catch, while the next day you could be experiencing the barren desert with rolling sand dunes and sauntering camels. Head north and you'll find towering snow-capped mountains with captivating Troglodyte Villages, while in the west you'll discover a labyrinth of mud brick towns and bustling street markets.

This is a country with incredible Islamic architecture. The mosques, mausoleums and minarets are adorned with intricate mosaics and designs. The covered bazaars are exciting, with wafts of exotic spices filling the air and smiling carpet salesmen loudly boasting the quality of their elegant Persian rugs.

The transportation in Iran is also amazing. Get those visions of chicken buses and over-packed trains out of your head. The buses in Iran put the Greyhound to shame, with enormous reclining seats, A/C and an attendant that serves up



The arched entrance of the Jameh Mosque in Kerman, Iran is just one example of the country's incredible Islamic architecture.

fresh snacks and hot drinks. You could only compare the land transport services in Iran to business class flights, and you can take a 7-hour bus ride for just a few dollars!

By far, the most amazing thing about Iran is the people. The locals are profoundly hospitable with travellers often being invited for weeklong stays in complete stranger's homes. People will speak with you on buses, call you over for tea and help

with directions whenever you look lost. Iranians are, without a doubt, some of the friendliest people on Earth.

On top of all of this, Iran is extremely safe, outrageously affordable and easy to get around. Forget what you thought about Iran, go there and see how remarkable it truly is.

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