

## 10 Travel Hotspots for 2010 By Steenie Harvey in Ireland

Are you a hermit crab or a social butterfly? With some destinations, you want to get there before the world catches on. With others, it's all about joining the party.

For a travel writer, flexibility is the key. Although I adore unsung places, I'll never refuse revelry. Pick the right destinations and you'll return with ample stories and photos to suit all kinds of publications.

One of my choices last year was Iceland. Taking my own advice, I went--- and wow! Reykjavik and the Blue Lagoon, sure, but I joined in Hafnarfjordur's Viking festival... watched icebergs calve... danced under the midnight sun... went troll-hunting... tried deep-sea fishing... saw and (sorry) ate puffins... explored the heartbreakingly beautiful West Fjords... delved into a witchcraft museum.

With its ongoing currency crisis, the "Land of Fire and Ice" remains a good value -- and I see Iceland now features on other 2010 hotspot lists. (It's always gratifying to beat the competition!) But plenty more places also whet my wanderlust...

### Cartagena, Colombia

Sultry nights. Partying until dawn. Emerald traders. An enthralling pirate past. Colombia's crown jewel is sleeping beauty Cartagena. Originally named Cartagena de Indias, this colonial port city was founded in 1533 by Spanish conquistadores. Heavily walled and fortified, it was infamous for having the Caribbean's most profitable slave market. All patios and flowery courtyards, Ciudad Amarullada is the city's historic heart. The streets and plazas you walk today once echoed to the footfalls of inquisitors, treasure seekers, slavers -- and buccaneers who once sailed the Spanish Main.

### Boracay, the Philippines

Turquoise waters. Dazzling white sands. Seafood feasts under tropical stars. In winter/early spring, I'd thrill at returning to the exceptionally affordable Philippines and Boracay. Being a vacation island (though mostly attracting Australian and Asian visitors), Boracay has a great choice of accommodation and restaurants -- including the Hobbit House, entirely staffed by "little people." It's not just about sun soaking: the island offers golf, parasailing, snorkeling, diving, surfing and island hopping. You undoubtedly won't manage them all, but the Philippines has over 7,000 islands to explore.

### The Western Cape, South Africa

For soccer fans, South Africa is June's prize destination. The FIFA World Cup takes place in various locations including Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town. Some fans will aim to explore -- and it's down to us writers to help them out. My choice would be the Western Cape. Along with Cape Town and

Table Mountain, this region also has white sandy beaches, deep-sea fishing, the Garden Route and some luscious wine estates. From May to November, you can usually spot whales from the cliff path at Hermanus, a neat seaside town. For an insight into South Africa's political history, take the ferry from Cape Town to Robben Island where Nelson Mandela was imprisoned.

#### Easter Island

July 11th, 2010 will see a total solar eclipse. The prime spot to watch the celestial drama is isolated Easter Island, claimed by Chile and renowned for its 600 or so enigmatic Moai -- those mysterious stone heads. But don't you wonder what else the island offers? I'd love to read some stories on the Rapanui people's culture and the folklore associated with the landscape's jigsaw of volcanic craters and lava formations.

#### Chile's Pacific Coast

If you can't make the eclipse on Easter Island -- a 5-hour flight from Chile's capital, Santiago -- Chile's Pacific coast will also experience a shorter "black sunset." Vina del Mar is a top beach resort, but if you've poetry in your soul, head to neighboring Valparaiso. Immortalized by poet Pablo Neruda, it's one of South America's most historic ports with labyrinthine cobbled streets, rickety ascensores (funiculars) and artist's palette of houses scrambling up the hillsides.

#### Istanbul, Turkey

Ever visited a harem? Tried a hammam bath? Haggled for a carpet? Istanbul is where Europe turns into Asia Minor. Showpiece sights include the Grand Bazaar with its 5,000 or so vendors, the Topkapi Palace, the Blue Mosque and Hagia Sofia, but little things lodge in my memory too. Watching the moon rise over the Bosphorus... lounging on a courtyard divan sipping rose sherbet... discovering exactly how a hookah pipe works. Now there's an extra reason to visit this most dazzling of Turkish cities. This year it holds the title of European Capital of Culture. Check events at [www.istanbul2010.org](http://www.istanbul2010.org)

#### The Alentejo, Portugal

Portugal's Alentejo region remains relatively unknown. Yet its golden beaches are as stunning as the Algarve's. It has atmospheric Evora, a city with everything from Roman temple ruins to a macabre ossuary (bone chapel) crammed with skeletal parts. The marble town of Estremoz hosts a massive Saturday market, lots of vineyards are open to visitors, and there's a slew of medieval hilltop villages. (Complete with castle, old Jewish quarter and mysterious megaliths on the doorstep, Castelo de Vide is a cracker.) The Alentejo is Portugal as it used to be, with prices to match. Go before the secret is out -- a new regional airport starts operating later this year.

#### Penang, Malaysia

Combining history, night bazaars and beachlife, Penang is among my favorite Asian destinations. With Georgetown as its capital, this lush Malaysian island is one of the former British Empire's oldest outposts. Anchored on the Spice

Route, "the Pearl of the Orient's" tropical treasures include a Snake Temple where doped-up vipers hang from the fixtures. Inside Georgetown's tightly packed streets are Chinatown and Little India as well as oodles of colonial heritage. Georgetown is heaven for foodies -- you can mix and match from many SE Asian cuisines. Breakfasting on Chinese frog porridge isn't compulsory, but it would make a great travel story...

#### Hanoi, Vietnam

Get to the charmed Indochine world of Hanoi before Vietnam goes mainstream. In Hanoi, the remnants of French colonialism meet lake pagodas, sidewalk kitchens, and cycle rickshaws. There's endless fascination in the "36 Streets," a labyrinth of noodle-skinny lanes containing tube houses, street barbers, \$1 eateries and bargain-priced treasures such as lacquerware. The best day trip from Hanoi? Sailing in a junk across Ha Long Bay. Like a theater curtain, sea mists part to reveal a stage-set of bizarre limestone crags and islands.

#### Black Rock Desert, USA

It isn't international for US readers, but one festival I long to experience is Burning Man. As one friend puts it: "We meet people, we party, we see some beautiful, bizarre, touching, wild and crazy things. The art out there is incredible." What's it all about? Essentially, radical self-reliance and self-expression in Nevada's Black Rock Desert where almost 50,000 people converge on Black Rock City -- a temporary community of tents and other shelters that disappears once the party is over. This year's Burning Man is August 30th to September 6th; the art theme is "Metropolis." However, you'll need to bring all that's necessary for a week of desert survival.