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## My 10 best travel experiences of 2021

December 20, 2021 4

Monday [newsletters](#) always feature [top 10 travel lists](#) to inspire.

### Today: My 10 best travel experiences of 2021

As the year 2021 is coming to an end, it's a good time to reflect on the headlines and stories that shaped the past year. 2021 is a year most of us want to forget as quickly as possible. It's a year that we were hoping for an end to this pandemic, but more than 5 million deaths later, it seems there is no end in sight. Even worse, it feels like the emergence of the omicron variant is pulling us back into this dreadful misery. I assume most of us are exhausted from the relentless restrictions that are imposed on societies and from the constant not knowing what the next day will bring.

2021 is also the year that international travel tried to bounce back (and partly succeeded in doing so) after it collapsed in 2020. Concepts such as "lockdowns," "quarantines" and "vaccine mandates" are part of our everyday language as the coronavirus pandemic continues to impact all aspects of our lives, including our (disrupted) travel plans and wanderlust. However, since this is a travel blog that tries to give you some enlightening travel inspiration, I want to focus on hope, positivity, and my personal travel stories (trying to make the best of the complicated travel situation). I hereby share with you my own travel highlights of 2021, most of them taking place within Europe (except for one fabulous trip). Early 2022, I'll share what to expect from me in the next year.

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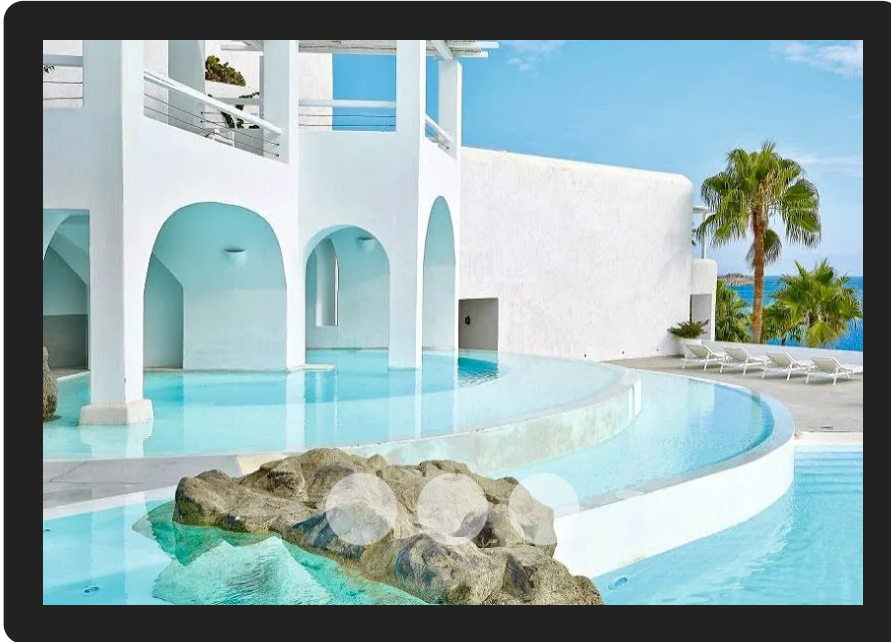


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There is more information (with trip reports & YouTube videos) below the slideshow. You can share your own thoughts on 2021 or your own 2021 travel highlights in the **comments section** below.

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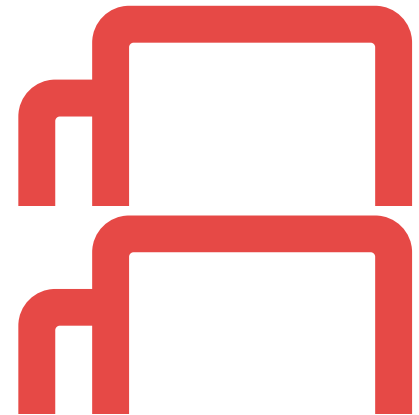
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## 10. STAYCATION IN BELGIUM

From January till May 2021, a travel ban was implemented by the government of Belgium – my home country – in an effort to curb the spread of covid (on a personal note, I think travel bans do more harm than good). Due to this travel ban and [my own covid infection](#), I didn't travel for almost 6 months. To keep my YouTube audience (and myself) entertained during these frustrating times, I created several videos featuring the highlights of Belgium, hereby re-discovering the charm of my home country. Located in the heart of Europe, Belgium is globally known for indulgent chocolates and tasty beer. But my country offers so much more than that of course. Highlights include gorgeous medieval towns displaying splendid gothic architecture and modern cities boasting designer shops and world-class museums. Watch my 4K videos of the cities of [Bruges](#), [Ghent](#) and [Brussels](#) by clicking the links.

## 9. MY FIRST POST-LOCKDOWN TRIP ABROAD TO MYKONOS, GREECE

I choose the Greek island of [Mykonos](#) as my first travel destination after Belgium finally lifted its travel ban. Offering dream beaches, azure seawaters, and picturesque whitewashed villages, the small island attracts more than a million visitors each summer. Known as an island that never sleeps, an endless adult playground, and one of the [world's most sought after gay tourist destinations](#), Mykonos has rightfully gained a place among the best party destinations of Europe, attracting renowned DJs and fashionistas. Since Brigitte Bardot, Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, and Grace Kelly visited in the 1960s, Mykonos also became a favored holiday spot for the rich and famous, with hip new hotels opening each year. During my visit, I stayed at [Grecohotel Mykonos](#)



[Blu](#), [Aeonic Suites & Spa](#), and [Myconian Imperial](#) (all fabulous hotels). And you can expect some more Mykonos trip reports in 2022 as I am going back!

## 8. A ROMANTIC BREAK IN PARIS

Monumental squares, centuries-old churches, famous boulevards, romantic bridges, magnificent palaces, and Montmartre's cobblestone streets make Paris one of the [most beautiful cities in the world](#). The City of Light has not only inspired painters, sculptors, writers, poets and composers but also practically every major world capital, with every city claiming its own Champs-Élysées. Cruise on the Seine or watch the world pass by from a café terrace or and it's easy to understand why so many people fall in love with Paris. The French capital is also home to a couple of [ultra-luxurious hotels](#), and last summer, I stayed at two of them: [Shangri-La Paris](#) – formerly the home of Prince Roland Bonaparte (grand nephew of Napoleon) – and [Hôtel de Crillon, a Rosewood Hotel](#) – a historic mansion, where Queen Marie Antoinette used to spend her afternoons relaxing and taking piano lessons.

## 7. A STAY AT THE FOUR SEASONS MADRID, SPAIN

Last September 2021, I was supposed to travel to French Polynesia for a holiday of a lifetime. Unfortunately, due to the ongoing pandemic, that trip was cancelled two weeks prior to departure, so I had to look for a last minute holiday elsewhere. In the end, I choose Spain as a travel destination, where I enjoyed a wonderful time in Ibiza, Barcelona and Madrid. I assumed the highlight of my trip was going to be the new Six Senses Ibiza, but that turned out to be a [big disappointment](#). To the contrary, I didn't expect much from the new [Four Seasons Madrid](#) (since it's a city hotel), but boy, was I wrong! Housed in a historic building, this property blew me off my feet (I'll publish my review & video early 2022). With rooftop dining by Spanish celebrity chef Dani García, a four-level world-class wellness center, and a terrific design, Four Seasons is bringing a new level of luxury and service to Madrid.



## 6. A VISIT TO THE SAGRADA FAMILIA IN BARCELONA, SPAIN



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The highlight of my trip to Spain was a visit to the Sagrada Familia, one of the world's most famous churches. The giant Roman Catholic basilica is the landmark building of Barcelona and, though incomplete, a UNESCO World Heritage Site attracting roughly 2.5 million tourists every year. Designed by genius architect Antoni Gaudí (1852-1926), the project that has been under construction since 1882. At Gaudí's death, less than a quarter of the project had been completed. The construction is progressing slowly – as it relies on private donations – and is now expected to be completed by 2028. When finished, the basilica will feature 18 towers and be the tallest church in the world. While the intricate exteriors of the Sagrada Familia draw plenty of attention, the interiors are just as spectacular. I'll publish a 4K video of the Sagrada Familia this Saturday on [my YouTube channel](#).



## 5. A HELICOPTER FLIGHT OVER SANTORINI

The Greek island of Santorini is arguably one of the world's most idyllic islands and ranks among my favorite destinations on earth. Perched high above the deep blue Aegean Sea, Santorini's whitewashed villages are clustered atop dramatic cliffs, with black sand beaches resting at the bottom. The island was shaped some 3,600 years ago by one of the largest volcanic eruptions in recorded history, which left a giant water-filled crater measuring about 12 by 7 km (7.5 by 4 mi) and surrounded by 300 m (980 ft) high cliffs on all sides. One of the best ways to appreciate the island's natural splendor is to fly over the world-renowned caldera by [helicopter](#), especially around sunset time. [Peak Helicopter Service](#) offers a choice between two helicopter tours, the standard 20 minute or the extended 30 minute tour. Below, you can watch a video documenting my experience (the helicopter tour starts at 41:39).

## 4. TRYING OUT THE NEW ONE&ONLY PORTONОВI IN MONTENEGRO

In June 2021, I traveled to the Adriatic Sea's newest nautical playground: the ultraluxurious [One&Only Portonovi Resort](#) in Montenegro, one of the most beautiful but still largely undiscovered travel destinations in Europe. The property sits at the entrance of Boka Bay, a UNESCO World Heritage Site often dubbed "the southern-most fjord in Europe." With its spacious rooms, suites, and villas, and Riviera-style dining helmed by Michelin-starred Chef Giorgio Locatelli, One&Only Portonovi retreat is a must-stay for discerning travelers. The resort's world-class facilities

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include a private manmade beach, eleven swimming pools, and a fabulous Chenot Espace wellness center. One of the highlights during my stay was a private boat excursion to Boka Bay, which is home to countless hidden lagoons and coves, as well as century-old moated walled towns like Kotor.

### 3. A LONG WEEKEND AT THE FOUR SEASONS CAP FERRAT ON THE FRENCH RIVIERA

Last summer, I enjoyed a fabulous long weekend on the French Riviera, where I stayed at two famous hotels: [Le Negresco](#) and [Four Seasons Cap Ferrat](#), with especially the latter one making a tremendous impression. Located between Nice and Monaco, on a peninsula facing the Mediterranean, Grand-Hôtel du Cap-Ferrat, a Four Seasons Hotel is a French Riviera icon on the bucket list of many discerning travelers. This award-winning legend has hosted many heads of state, celebrities, and artists since 1908. Guests can settle into one of 49 guest rooms, 24 suites, or a villa with views of the sea or lush pine forest. World-class facilities include a luxurious spa, an infinity-edge swimming pool at Club Dauphin, and Michelin-starred cuisine at Le Cap. Without any doubt, Grand-Hôtel du Cap-Ferrat, a Four Seasons Hotel is one of my favorite Four Seasons hotel in the world.

### 2. A HOLIDAY AT CALILO ON IOS ISLAND, GREECE

The honor of my favorite beach resort of 2021 – and one of my most phenomenal hotel stays ever – goes to [Calilo](#). In a remote corner of unspoilt Ios, in the heart of the Cyclades, and just a pebble's throw from party islands Mykonos and Santorini, this 30-suite sanctuary offers an escape from the crowds. Rising out of, and carved from, the native rock, Calilo is cradled by 1,000 acres of protected land and fringed by a beautiful golden sand beach, lapped by a cerulean sea. Think sun-drenched seclusion surrounded by an ancient olive-pricked landscape – nature and art at its heart. From its architecture and interior design to the striking artworks and installations, Calilo – an acronym for “create a life you can fall in love with” – is the creation the Michalopoulos family whose aim is to preserve, protect and nurture this tantalizing land and to share the island's mesmerizing magic.

### 1. A ROAD TRIP IN NAMIBIA

Last month, I enjoyed an amazing road trip in the southern African country of Namibia, one of my best holidays ever. Few countries in the world can match Namibia's sheer natural beauty. Not only is the country famous for its exceptional wildlife, game reserves and safari lodges, but the landscapes of its coastline and deserts are some of the most photographed and gasped over in the world. Highlights of my trip included spotting wildlife in Etosha National Park and watching the sun rise over the world's highest dunes in Sossusvlei in the Namib Desert. En route, I stayed in some of Africa's most spectacular wildlife lodges, including the ultraluxe [Zannier lodges](#), the recently revamped [Beyond Sossusvlei Desert lodge](#), and the fabulous [Hoanib Skeleton Coast Lodge](#) (managed by Wilderness Safaris) in Namibia's remote area of the Kaokoveld. I'll publish my reviews and videos of that incredible trip early 2022.

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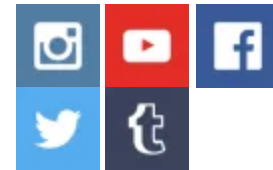
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wanderwithfaith says:  
 DECEMBER 21, 2021 AT 6:47 AM

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Franziska M. says:  
 DECEMBER 22, 2021 AT 4:07 PM

Hi to Belgium, quite a long time I thought you were from London ... I have not been to Belgium yet, but I want to go in the near time. Asia or other far away places seem to be no option soon ... The FS in Madrid has already been on my bucket list. A question to los, my son has been there twice and told me that it is a party destination. What do you think? The hotel you mentioned on this island sounds interesting. And as you asked for our vacation highlights in 2021, here my tips for a 11-day trip to northern Italy & southern France in style: <https://swisstraveler.net/italy/northern-italy-southern-france-in-11->