

RESORT TO LAURA MADRID

EXPERT TRAVEL PLANNING

WWW.RESORTTOLAURAMADRID.COM



Dear Trusted Friends and Fellow Travelers,

I am beyond grateful for yet another year of living vicariously through your travels. Many clients tell me that I seem more excited about planning their trips than I do my own, and the truth is I absolutely love my job and nothing gives me more pleasure than ensuring your travel objectives and wildest dreams are exceeded on each and every trip you count on me to arrange. Please remember that while I am definitely the best source for your complicated long-haul trips, I add a whole lot of joy and value to your “easy” transactions too. A weekend in New York or Chicago, a resort holiday in Cabo, or a much-needed wellness retreat — you may know where you would like to stay, but only when I make your reservation do you get the Resort to Laura Madrid special treatment. Our clients are always greeted like old friends, receive welcome amenities, upgrades, and other value-add perks. Resort to Laura Madrid works with the most desirable properties and hotels throughout the world and we are in touch with them regularly for all of our client needs. This means that these partners value the total equation we bring to their hotels and truly want to bend over backwards each time we send new clients to them. Trust me, no booking is too small for us to handle and you will notice the Resort to Laura Madrid difference each and every time.

As you know, I invest a great deal of my personal time and money to ensure my knowledge is current and first-hand on the destinations, guides, restaurants, hotels, cruises, trains and planes that make up my clients’ trips. I hope you enjoy this recap of my 2016 research — and for a more comprehensive review of each of the trips I take, please follow my blog at www.LauraMadridTravel.com.

Wishing you a marvelous 2017 and I look forward to collaborating on great adventures large and small.

Yours in travel,

Laura
Laura Madrid



Cartagena, Colombia: An unforgettable girls' trip last February



Bangalore, India: Daily yoga (that's me in the red shorts!)



Provence, South of France: The moms and daughters from our multi-family trip

LAURA ANSWERS

HER MOST FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

MY TOP SELLING DESTINATIONS IN 2016:

African Safari, Galapagos, New Zealand, Chile, Peru, Ocean and River Cruising, Iceland, United Kingdom, Italy, Spain, France, Ireland, Croatia, and Vietnam.

FUN TRIP I'M PLANNING FOR CLIENTS:

I am escorting small groups of friends to a few wonderful destinations in 2017: **Cuba** for a cultural insider's trip before it all changes; **Oregon wine country** and a cycling trip around Crater Lake; and a luxurious **Danube river cruise** aboard the new Crystal Mozart!

FAVORITE HOTEL THAT I VISITED THIS YEAR:

Masseria San Domenico — Italy's Adriatic coast region of Puglia has many former masseria (working cooperatives) that have been transformed into luxurious and authentic hotels. Masseria San Domenico drips romance, sophistication, and authenticity from a bygone era.



Each room is completely unique—just gazing around me brought joy. The lake-sized pool and the stunning cuisine and service made me feel that I had really arrived somewhere very special. The beach club, golf, and historic towns of the region make it a must-do for your 2017!

NEW OPENINGS THAT I'M EXCITED ABOUT:

Belmond Afloat in France luxury fleet is launching two new barges in 2017 available for private hire! Each luxury barge can accommodate up to eight guests in its four contemporary en-suite cabins, making it a perfect trip for a group of couples or to celebrate an epic birthday. Journey to the grand city of Strasbourg aboard **Belmond Lilas**, where you will soak up the scenery of Alsace. Or travel in total luxury as you cruise between Meaux and Chalons-en-Champagne aboard **Belmond Pivoine**, past beautiful vineyards and enchanting villages.

HOT DESTINATION FOR THOSE IN THE KNOW:

The Yucatan Peninsula —Merida is a fascinating medium-sized city in the isolated Yucatan Peninsula with a massive indigenous population. Founded in 1542 by the Spanish and rebuilt on the site of the former capital of the Mayan culture, the white-washed city of Merida is the second largest historic center in Mexico. With its unique geographic location, strong Spanish influence and isolation from other parts of Mexico, Merida developed a distinct cultural and political identity —overwhelmingly apparent in the local dress, language, cuisine and the observance of holidays and celebrations.

Resort to Laura Madrid has access to the most incredible historic haciendas to rent for a romantic weekend or for a big family celebration. Let us arrange your visit to Chichen Itza, lesser-known Mayan ruins in the jungle, the pink flamingos of Celestun and Rio Lagartos, swims in the Cenotes, not to mention local chefs, music and dance!

TRAVEL TREND:

Make a **family travel schedule** for trips you want to take before your kids are out the door or hunkered down with their own school, work, or family commitments! Many of my clients realize that getting their children to break away from school priorities and sports, summer internships, and even their careers and day-to-day urgencies gets increasingly difficult. I encourage clients to have me sit down with them to review their travel wish list and actually schedule significant travel experiences for the next 2-5 years. This is a critical step in carving out time, expectations, and budget for taking these monumental trips before everyone gets too busy with their lives! My number one tip — send out the date to everyone you want there and tell them to lock it in on the calendar and steer around it, even if the trip details have yet to be completely ironed out.



At Machu Picchu, hiking the Incan Trail in Peru with my husband and children

A YEAR IN REVIEW: LAURA'S 2016 TRAVELS

WINTER

SOUTHERN INDIA: A Wellness Retreat

India is an incredible destination, and it makes for the most special ladies' trip! The culinary experiences, the shopping, the yoga, the cooking schools, the spa treatments — pure heaven! My mother and I indulged in Ayurveda whole-body healing systems, yoga, breath work, healthful and delicious and nourishing dining at Shreya's Retreat. We relished the history and shopping in Ft. Cochin in the trendy and relaxed Kerala region, and enjoyed beach time, cooking classes, and even a visit to a 5:00 am fish auction with our chef at the very southern tip of India.



5:00am, Southern India: Local fisherman auction off their catch to the highest bidders

CARTAGENA, COLOMBIA: A Magical Girls' Trip

I traveled to Colombia last year for the first time and was blown away by the whole country — the people, topography, food, nature, and climate. And when I got to Cartagena, I knew I would return many times again for its year-round 80-degree weather, Spanish colonial vibe, spectacular shopping, restaurants, and nightlife. With just a 3.5-hour non-stop flight from Atlanta, it was easy to pull together an all-star cast of adventurous, fun-loving women for a long weekend jaunt in February. Colombia is on the cusp of becoming a hot tourist destination, so get here soon!

LAS CATALINAS: Costa Rica's Great New Little Town

Who doesn't love an easy escape on a non-stop flight to a little piece of beach paradise without giving up any of the comforts of home? Las Catalinas is just the answer with wonderfully built and tastefully designed homes of all sizes, complete with its very own Main Street,

a beach club, a toes-in-the-sand restaurant, a surf and activity shop, and miles of mountain cycling and hiking in the most pristine and relaxed environment. The town is pretty perfect, but unique in that you don't just see the snowbirds hunkering down for the weekend. Instead, the guests are a mix of school kids, year-round residents, and visitors alike. Las Catalinas encourages area "Ticos" to be a part of the Pura Vida lifestyle by enjoying the mountain biking and the local bar.



A selfie on the Inca Rail between Machu Picchu and Cuzco, Peru

PERU: An Epic Family Adventure

My husband and I hiked the Inca trail over a decade ago, and throughout that experience I dreamed of not IF, but WHEN we would return with our children! Highlights included mountain cycling in the Sacred Valley, chartering a private car on the Inca Rail from Machu Picchu to Cuzco, hiking up Huayna Picchu at Machu Picchu, and visiting the inhabited floating reed islands at Lake Titicaca — at 12,000 feet, the highest navigable lake in the world. Lima is the gastronomic capital of Latin America and especially unique was the 12-course tasting menu at Central (rated #4 in the world)! Epic, for sure!

SPRING

SOUTH CAROLINA: Town & Country in the Low Country

This perfect Low Country holiday includes a resort stay at Montage Palmetto Bluff, located on 20,000 acres on the May River. Palmetto Bluff is equally ideal both for couples seeking a romantic long weekend and adventurous multi-generational families on the hunt for a week of water sports and river-based safaris, tennis, golf, and swimming.

After a resort stay, I highly suggest a visit to town — at over 300 years old, Beaufort is a genuine landmark in American history with its authentically preserved antebellum homes and quaint downtown district. The Union Army occupied the city and ultimately helped save the beautiful old homes in the charming neighborhood known as "The Point," where Anchorage 1770 is located. This 250 year-old waterfront mansion was meticulously restored and transformed into a 15-room luxury inn

run by the charming and fun owners, Amy and Frank Lesesne. The couple earned the loving nickname “The Insane Lesesnes” by taking on the ambitious project, and while no one doubted they would succeed, landing a spot on the *New York Times*’ “52 Places to See in 2016” is a massive testament to their success.

CROATIA & MONTENEGRO: All Along the Adriatic

If you love Italy, then you are in for a treat in Croatia. Not yet on the Euro, Croatia is still a relative bargain with picturesque and preserved walled cities, islands, history, and absolutely incredible food and wine. Our family traveled by private car and driver, which I highly suggest to really maximize your stay, but the region can also be visited along the Adriatic in a fantastic ship, private yacht, or even by bike! Highlights included a private boat trip to Hvar, an exclusive oyster and mussel experience with a family in Ston, staying in a 7-room hotel in Diocletian’s palace from 200 A.D. in Split, and swimming and dining at the chic Villa Dubrovnik. The people could not have been more welcoming and the history and diversity of cultures throughout the region are incredible. I can’t wait to return!



Istria, Croatia: My family enjoyed a private tour with a truffle hunter and his dogs

SOUTHERN ITALY: Authentic Puglia and Basilicata

What a glorious region of Italy to discover! For those who have been to Italy multiple times and would like to get off the beaten path, the “heel” of Italy awaits. Our first stop was to Puglia, on the Southern Adriatic coast. This is a magical and authentic destination full of Italians and Europeans enjoying the beaches — far less crowded and at a more attractive price point than the Amalfi Coast. Nearby historic towns and cities to visit make this a relaxing hub from which to sightsee and enjoy downtime at the seaside.

The highlight of my trip was visiting Matera in the Basilicata region. Settled since the Paleolithic period, Matera is famous for its Sassi, or cave dwellings, thought to be among the first ever human settlements

in what is now Italy. These habitations, dug into the calcareous rock characteristic of Basilicata, are called Sassi and housed some of Italy’s poorest people until the 1950’s, when the government related them to the modern part of the city. Matera has become a very hip place to visit with excellent restaurants, hotels and shops. Go quickly — by 2019, Matera will be the European Capital of culture and you may have a hard time finding availability once the word gets out!

SUMMER

PROVENCE Villa Life in the South of France

This past summer, we joined two of our favorite families for a week of fun in a lovely villa in Saint-Rémy-de-Provence. Words cannot describe the joy and relaxation a home can bring to a group of friends, families, or a multi-generational gathering. It is also a great way to break up an extended holiday where you might be moving hotels and touring quite a bit and just need some time to properly unpack and recharge! Days involved walks into town for lunch and visiting the local market, wine tasting in Châteauneuf-du-Pape, cycling in the Luberon, sightseeing in Les Baux, or simply cooking at home and enjoying the pool!

Resort to Laura Madrid has the pleasure of finding the most wonderful villas, chalets, châteaux, and even flats and apartments in the world’s most desirable holiday locations.



Imanta: Peace, relaxation, natural beauty, exceptional dining and personalized service.

IMANTA: Peaceful Bliss Outside of Puerto Vallarta

Imanta is an idyllic seaside retreat near Puerto Vallarta, Mexico — reached by driving about an hour from the airport, the last 20 minutes of which are through a thick jungle, finally reaching an untouched sliver of the Pacific coast. There are no imposing buildings, just a charming restaurant with rooftop views, a wonderful beach shack and toes-in-the-sand restaurant, an open-air spa, and 12 stunning individual

“casas” where guests have the utmost in privacy and luxury. For a family or a group of friends, Imanta has spectacular two- and three-bedroom “Casonas.” Best of all, this is a hotel where you can arrive, breathe deeply, and just see what comes your way.

Imanta is the kind of place where the chef asks what *you* would like to eat and then prepares it for you. You are on a first-name basis with the beach bartender and he knows every type of margarita you have tried and that your favorite is the jalapeño hibiscus concoction. Your spa therapist meets you at the beach and walks you a few steps through the jungle to the *al fresco* treatment zone for a dreamy massage. You won't come home from this holiday in need of a vacation!



Bermuda: A perfect romantic getaway with so much to explore and experience

BERMUDA is Back

I will admit, Bermuda was not the first place that came to mind when a client would ask me for a quick getaway! Well, that won't happen again because Bermuda is definitely back in vogue and it looks nothing like your grandmother's Bermuda! The island is proud and pristine, with pink sand, turquoise water, perfect gardens, landscaping, and pastel-colored homes throughout. With just a few narrow roads traversing the 21 mile-long island, visitors are not allowed to rent cars, so leaving the driving to the professionals make it all that much more enjoyable. The city of Hamilton has some great shops and a plethora of wonderful restaurants. In fact, dining throughout the island is truly a treat!

Activities include phenomenal snorkeling and scuba diving, deep sea fishing, cliff jumping, caving, and horseback riding. This pristine British colony is merely a 2.5-hour flight from most U.S. East Coast cities and boasts six exceptional golf courses, tennis and terrific spas. While peak season runs May through October, Bermuda makes for a great off-season retreat as well, with spectacular rates available throughout the fall and mild winter (average temperature 65°F!). Can you say tennis team retreat, golf outing, or good old-fashioned birthday celebration with friends? Bermuda could not be more affordable or easier to get to for that quick fix during the U.S. winter months.



An idyllic barn shot during my Backroads cycling trip through Napa and Sonoma

AUTUMN

BACKROADS: Cycling in the California Wine Country

Backroads is certainly not all about cycling, though they do that admirably. The number one point I would like to make is that their trips are truly for all fitness levels. When planning, I look at the trip route ratings with my clients to ensure they are selecting the right one. But even on a trip with couples, friends or families who have different fitness levels or desires, each day offers a mix of cycling or sporting options with varying lengths, elevations and sights. If you let them know your interests, your trip leaders will help you set up something lighter or more arduous. It is not uncommon for one person to be a road warrior while the other wants to ride until lunch and then hit the spa.

Backroads has introduced two fantastic features this year: E-Bikes (electric bikes) for those who want a little extra help on the hills, and Garmin GPS systems so that no matter where you are in the pack, you will always find your way to the next meeting point.

Beyond cycling, Backroads offers terrific walking and hiking trips, as well as multi-sport trips that combine cycling with hiking and even rafting or canoeing. The experience is not about the activity itself, but rather about enjoying the destination at a different pace. Instead of whizzing by in a car, you can take in the scenery at your own speed, under the power of your own two legs.

NEW YORK CITY: Boutique is Better!

New York is always a good idea and offers something fresh and exciting! Just before the holidays is a particularly festive time, as the window shops and lights come alive and the weather is still reasonably comfortable for long strolls. This particular trip was two-fold for me! We celebrated my fabulous mother-in-law's 70th birthday and I also took a couple of days to visit many of the boutique hotels that my clients so love. In New York, every neighborhood tells a different story, has its own vibe, and its boutique hotels all have a personality of their own.

CONTINUED ON BACK ▶

AUTUMN, CONTINUED

While we work closely with all of the larger and very glamorous properties including Four Seasons, Mandarin Oriental, Ritz-Carlton, Peninsula, St. Regis and so on, it is the tiny boutique gems that really take the most time to get to know. On this visit, I stayed at The Chatwal near Times Square and the Greenwich Hotel in Tribeca, but I did site inspections at The Surrey and the Lowell on the Upper East Side as well as the Crosby in SoHo. Let me know what you are seeking and I will help you select your perfect home away from home in Manhattan.



With my in-laws, riding around New York City on rickshaws

BERLIN – Germany's Capital City

Berlin is a fascinating city and one of Europe's most exciting capitals! My last visit was the year the Wall came down, so returning after so many years was a thrill. Berlin is an exhilarating city for history, but it is also a creative hub for artists and musicians. The art scene, museums, and nightlife here are worth the visit alone! I stayed at the incomparable Das Stue, Berlin's first luxury boutique hotel located in the peaceful diplomatic district but a short drive to the art, entertainment and shopping of the East and West sides of Germany's capital city. Even if you are not staying here, plan on a dinner with famed Spanish chef Paco Pérez one evening — you won't be disappointed!

WHAT'S IN STORE FOR 2017?

A cultural and foodie trip to Cuba, visiting the luxury lodges of New Zealand, seeing the many new hotel openings in Cabo, skiing in Deer Valley, cycling and wine-tasting in Oregon, river cruising on the Danube aboard the Crystal Mozart, hut-to-hut skiing in Italy's Dolomites... So now that you can anticipate some of the destinations you'll read about in *next year's* newsletter, I hope you'll follow me throughout 2017 on all of my reconnaissance missions!

BLOG www.resorttolauramadrid.com (where you'll find the full article about every destination featured here)

FACEBOOK www.facebook.com/resorttolauramadridtravel • **TWITTER** @ResortToLaura



The magnificent Ksar Char-Bagh by Relais & Châteaux in Marrakesh

MOROCCO with Relais & Châteaux

I fell in love with Morocco when we took our kids to Marrakesh and the High Atlas mountains for Spring Break back in 2009 and knew I would eventually return to further explore the labyrinth of adventure, luxury, culture, shopping and unforgettable cuisine. Morocco is a destination of endless discovery, where the hotels or riads where you stay are very much part of the experience! Check my blog to get a peek into some of the delightful Relais & Châteaux owner-operated properties in ancient cities, coastal villages, and remote towns that I visited in this romantic and exotic Northern African country: Ksar Char-Bagh and Villas des Orangers in Marrakesh, Riad Fès in Fez, Villa Difaya in Rabat, and L'Heure Bleue in Essaouira.

► If any of these destinations are on your list, please read my complete recap and check out the photos on my blog at www.lauramadridtravel.com. Or simply contact me to organize your perfect trip! I always appreciate your calls as well as your referrals — they are the biggest compliment you can give me and my team!

RESORT TO LAURA MADRID
EXPERT TRAVEL PLANNING



Laura D. Madrid • (+1) 404.502.9191

EMAIL laura@resorttolauramadrid.com

VISIT www.resorttolauramadrid.com

An Affiliate of Travel Experts, Inc., A Virtuoso Agency