

# RESORT TO LAURA MADRID

EXPERT TRAVEL PLANNING

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From top: Stepping back in time in Havana, Cuba; Re-visiting Chichen Itza in the Yucatan Peninsula; Cycling with Friends at Crater Lake, Oregon; Rib Riding the Thames with my family

Dear Clients and Fellow Experience Seekers –

Welcome to my annual newsletter! In this yearly edition, I like to recap all the rewarding travel research I have completed throughout the year in hopes that I might give you ideas for your own next adventure. Of course, it all looks very glamorous, but just as for any traveler, I too occasionally hit an unforeseen bump in the road during my journeys near and far. As we have seen this year, weather and natural events are quite literally out of our control and flight delays can wreak havoc on plans! Small things like lost luggage, not getting into THE restaurant you had hoped for, or dealing with a jet-lagged child can be annoying. Even as a professional traveler, I am not immune to these trip aggravations, and in fact doing dry-runs of the same trips my clients take is exactly how I stay current and can best advise you on how to make the most of your time and how to enjoy the most rewarding experiences at the best value!

My agency is not a call center at a credit card company nor an online search engine — instead my boutique and bespoke travel business works with clients whom we get to know well and with hotels and guides on whom we regularly depend. It is not uncommon for my clients to check into a hotel and have the General Manager tell them that “Laura sends her best wishes.” My guides often go off-script, issuing my clients an invite to their home for dinner or making a stop off the beaten path to share one of their favorite jaunts with you. My relationships mean that whether you are in Mallorca, New Zealand, Thailand, Tanzania or Palm Beach, you will be treated as an old friend! While I can’t stop the typhoon, I can ensure someone caring is waiting for you with an umbrella. My contacts around the globe are an extension of the Resort to Laura Madrid service, which means you always have someone on your time zone to reach out to at all times!

To be honest, when you travel for a living as I have done for the last 25 years, some days can be exhausting. One thing I’ve learned is to trust your travel advisor — that’s why you hired me, after all! Beyond that, don’t try to control the trip too much but rather LET THE TRIP HAPPEN TO YOU. That’s the magic of travel!

I appreciate your trust and loyalty! My team and I love our jobs and we feel especially pleased to have the opportunity to make your travel special each and every time. Wishing you a fantastic 2018 ahead!

Warmly,

*Laura*  
Laura Madrid



# HOW DOES LAURA DO IT?



Left to right:  
Holly, Julia, Laura and Celeste

“ Before starting my own travel advisory, I spent 18 years as a luxury hotelier. My personal passion for travel and discovery and an eye for detail certainly help, but I could not even begin to provide the high level of service we do to our loyal clients without the backing of a powerhouse team of ladies! Meet the magic behind the scenes. ”

## HOLLY ADAMS

*With Resort To Laura Madrid since March 2016*

Holly, a Georgia native, joined our team with over 20 years of hospitality experience including private club management, destination management and small business entrepreneurship in a boutique cupcake bakery.

**FAVORITE TRIPS:** Today, whether she and her husband are cruising through the Baltics, touring Spain to celebrate her sister's birthday or exploring the U.S. in their RV, Holly's desire for adventure shines on!

## CELESTE BAUER

*With Resort To Laura Madrid since August 2013*

Celeste has her family to thank for her love of travel, since some of her fondest memories are growing up in Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. Before relocating to Atlanta, she spent eight years in India working in hospitality with Taj Hotels & Palaces, where Sri Lanka was one of her favorite getaways.

**FAVORITE TRIPS:** Italy is at the top of her favorite travel destinations, along with South Africa. Turkey is highest on her current travel bucket list.

## JULIA WEEKS

*With Resort To Laura Madrid since June 2015*

Julia is a Houston, Texas native and an Emory grad with a double major in Theatre and Economics. Invoice, spreadsheet, and social media maven by day, and actor by night, Julia enjoys a very full weekly schedule and is a big fan of coffee.

**FAVORITE TRIPS:** Traveling to Finland to see her boyfriend perform, back-packing in Turkey, and road-tripping across Croatia.

## ... and a bit about LAURA MADRID *Founded Resort To Laura Madrid in January 2011 upon affiliating with Travel Experts, a Virtuoso Agency*

When Laura and her two brothers were kids, their mother piloted a five-seater single engine airplane to Costa Rica to start a new life for her young family, instilling an intense passion for travel, people, food, and experiences. Since then, Laura has lived in Italy, Mexico, and the United Kingdom and traveled to more than 75 countries. Given her adventurous childhood, more than 18 years as a sales professional in the luxury hotel industry (Four Seasons, St. Regis, The Ritz-Carlton), and experience escorting her own children around the globe, Laura knows how to plan just the trip!

# A YEAR IN REVIEW: LAURA'S 2017 TRAVELS

## WINTER

### CUBA LIBRE: A Magnificent Island on the Verge of Transformation

Cuba is an isolated island nation full of life, music, and people that give so much! I can legally arrange a **completely customized “People-to-People” trip** on a private basis for a family or small group of friends. We hand-select personal guides and ensure you are staying at the best possible hotels or private homes and dining in Cuba's most exciting restaurants. If you'd prefer to join an escorted small group tour on set dates, there are a few that I can absolutely suggest with confidence. A couple of terrific **small-ship cruise lines** are also circumventing the island, so there are many ways to do Cuba right!

### CABO: Sophisticated and Luxurious, If You Know Where to Go!

Most simply defined as the cities of **Cabo San Lucas** in the far South and **San Jose del Cabo** in the North, Cabo is a perfect beach holiday destination. Beyond its dramatic desert topography, the spectacular food, service, design, natural beauty, and a fantastic array of activities are a huge draw for this Mexican hotspot's well-heeled clientele.

The new **Chileno Bay**, an Auberge resort, will absolutely have everyone considering a return to Cabo! The vibe is sleek and sexy, chilled out but playful. I am obsessed with Chileno Bay's 3- and 4-bedroom sky suites! The swimmable beach (rare in Cabo, due to its geographic location between the Pacific Ocean and Sea of Cortez) has an array of water toys! I visited other favorite properties: **Resort at Pedregal, Rosewood Las Ventanas, One & Only Palmilla, Esperanza, and Grand Velas Cabo** — each wonderfully unique, one just the right fit for each of my clients!

### THE ITALIAN DOLOMITES: Hut-to-Hut Ski Safari

The **UNESCO World Heritage Dolomites** may be the most beautiful mountains in Europe! Located in northeastern Italy at the Austrian border, where “guten morgen” works as well as “buongiorno,” the gorgeous limestone peaks of the Dolomites wind through four ski resorts, seven centuries-old villages, and four mountain passes!

As is typical with European skiing, you will have a cappuccino in one village, a “bombarardino” (brandy-laced eggnog) in the next, and a Michelin-star lunch in another — just a typical day in **Alta Badia**! Oh and yes, there are also 4,000 vertical-foot runs and off-piste trails that rival the most sought-after ski resorts in the world.

This hut-to-hut trip was focused on skiing from village to village and through National Parks, with each night ending at an incredible *rifugio* (small “hut” or inn). The inns are family-run with love; each just has a handful of simple rooms which are comfortable and spotless with charming décor. Each *rifugio* has kitchens, wine cellars, and service to blow your mind and create a culinary experience worth the trip!

While the stunning Sella Ronda is a photo op “must” for experienced skiers, heading off-piste or from village to village is much more exciting. Alternatively, we can plan this trip during the summer, with a hut-to-hut hike through Italy's National Parks. *Bellissimo!*



*Skiing the Italian Dolomites*

### VENICE: Buon Appetito!

Winter and spring are always my favorite times to visit Venice, when the city is visible and not overrun with tourists. It's when the Venetians are there and it feels more authentic and beautiful!

Since we have been to Venice many times, we decided to do a food and wine tour through the city, stopping for wonderful Cicchetti and glasses of wine at the best local spots, all in the expert hands of our sommelier and guide. This has become one of my favorite tours to suggest to clients as a unique way to see the City of Bridges!

## SPRING

### EXPLORING THE YUCATAN PENINSULA: Glorious Haciendas and Mayan Culture

The Yucatan Peninsula might as well be a million miles away with its rich Mayan culture, art, and traditions, unspoiled nature, mysterious pyramids, freshwater swimming *cenotes*, and delicious and varied cuisine. At one time, the area was the world's largest producer of rope due to its native sisal plant. Once nylon was invented, the Spanish fled the area, abandoning the native population they had dominated for decades and leaving hundreds of beautiful haciendas to fall into ruin. The towns of **Merida** and **Uxmal** now attract bohemians, artists, and chefs who enjoy the region's laid-back outpost feel. Many of the haciendas have been restored into gracious private homes and small hotels that host visitors wanting to immerse themselves in the beauty of the Yucatan!

I inspected several of these special haciendas and small city homes and can help you pick the one that will be a perfect fit for your family or next house party. In fact, I fell in love with one dramatic property — its gardens, pools, and very own Mayan pyramid — and booked it for my own 50th birthday next year! So many surprises are in store for my clients intrepid enough to trust me on this one!

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## NEW ZEALAND: Luxury Lodges, Food, Wine & Adventure

Each year, I send many clients to the **North and South Islands of New Zealand** to explore beaches and mountains, quirky towns, the ancient Maori culture, breathtaking golf courses, and to boost their adrenaline: dart-boating, bungee jumping, hiking, fishing, kayaking, glacier climbing, heli-riding, and skiing. There are countless incredible, cozy lodges in which to unwind, each with bespoke service, staff, and setting to make you feel at home! NOTE: When I plan your New Zealand holiday, I need as much lead time as possible to get you into the most sought-after lodges in a nice flow from North to South or vice versa without much zig-zagging. With less time, we may need to be more flexible on the routings. Either way, you will feel completely cared for. The gastronomic and wine options in New Zealand are very much worth the trip. Some consider New Zealand one big farm with spectacular beef and lamb dotting every hill, but the bountiful seafood and award-winning vineyards producing Sauvignon Blancs, Chardonnays, Pinot Gris, Pinot Noir and Shiraz (just to name a few) will keep you well-satiated throughout your journey!



*Helicoptering off from the uber-luxurious Helena Bay*

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## JAMAICA: Cherry Oh Baby!

I hadn't been to Jamaica in 20 years and it was high time I checked back in. This island has an easy, friendly vibe that encourages you to smile and let your hair down right away! Due to great air connectivity, we have families who rent fully-staffed homes at **Tryall Club** and **Round Hill** year after year. It was wonderful for me to see some of the terrific homes and meet the lovely teams who take care of our clients! I also had the chance to stay at the marvelous **Golden Eye**, where Ian Fleming penned all of his James Bond novels, and in the **Blue Mountains**, where Jamaican coffee is grown and food is truly farm-to-table at the charming **Strawberry Hill**. **Jamaica Inn** was also a real treat, a genuine throw-back to the glamorous 1950s and 60s when the glitterati vacationed here and likely sat at **Teddy's Bar** with Teddy, who still holds court!

# SUMMER

## OREGON: Cycling, National Parks, Wine and Beer!

I was not prepared for the WOW factor I experienced at every level in darling Oregon. "Oregrown" says it all, as just about everything is grown and sourced locally — from delicious Pinot Noirs to local beers with brewery tours and tastings galore, to spectacular coffee and coffee shops (no, NOT Starbucks!) on every corner. Foodies will be delighted by all the state has to offer! I loved the beautiful fresh produce, the pasture-raised lamb and wagyu beef, and the local river and ocean fish — all served up at various creative eateries on little plates of happiness!

I pulled together a group of dear friends for a week of cycling in the stunning Cascade mountains. We made our way from **Bend** to **Crater Lake** to **Sisters**, all the while taking in the majestic mountains, lakes, and deserts in between. The trip started with some wine-tasting fun in the Willamette Valley and ended with a night at the chic **The Nines Hotel** in Portland. It's just the ticket for those wanting something fresh that's close to home!

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*The Parliament in Budapest, shot from the deck of the Crystal Mozart along the Danube*

## CRYSTAL MOZART: Cruising the Danube River

Crystal has been impressing ocean cruisers for years, but now with the launch of the **Crystal Mozart** on the Danube River, they are setting a new standard for service on the river ways! If you were not one of the 18 who joined our fun group of friends (lovingly called "the Boat People") on our most recent voyage, please check out my blog for highlights!

The Crystal Mozart was stripped to the steel and completely rebuilt before debuting as Crystal's first river vessel. It is the widest ship on the Danube and boasts some of the most sumptuous public space. So while the ship cannot get into every city center port of call, it is always within a stone's throw, and you can be sure you're coming and going in style!

Following the Mozart's success, Crystal has three new state-of-the-art luxury ships coming on line in 2018 and 2019 that will sail the Rhine, Main, and Danube Rivers. I look forward to checking them out in due time!

# AUTUMN

## NASHVILLE: A Rip-Roaring Good Time

Playfully referred to as “Nash-vegas” or “Smashville,” it’s an astonishingly fun city to visit! The energy, music, drinking, and good times are evident the moment you pull into town. Nashville has an overload of talented musicians who play for free in hopes of getting discovered. There’s no shortage of bars to pop into and listen to act after act! The District is just one place to Honky Tonk (it’s a real thing!), but there are many other neighborhoods to uncover country, jazz, and rock n’ roll. The Nashville dining scene is progressive and impressive to boot!

## LONDON: Always Calling!

London has at least two dozen FABULOUS hotels and they are all completely unique. I always try to stay some place different than my last visit so I can determine which hotels best suit each client. On this visit, we stayed at the classic **Dorchester** reigning over Hyde Park as well as at the playful and artsy **Hamyard**, off Regent Street in Soho.

Having lived in London until 2010, this trip was both a homecoming for our kids as well as a chance to check out some of the special tours I set up for families. Highlights included a private tour of the **Household Cavalry Museum** — a living and working museum of the Queen’s Royal Mounted Bodyguards — with the museum’s engaging director Alice before the doors opened to the general public. Without question, our favorite day was spent checking out the urban street art and food scene in the hipster East London neighborhood of **Shoreditch** with our fabulous guide Pepe, who engaged the teens and adults alike!

A standard cruise on the Thames River can lull you to sleep. For families, I much prefer sightseeing on a fast-moving **Rib Ride**, which provides a beautiful, fun-filled hour of the prettiest sights on the Thames.



*A bit of bubbly at Coworth Park in Ascot, England*

Our last stop was in Ascot, 45 minutes outside of London at the lovely **Coworth Park**, a Dorchester property. This gorgeous country retreat is ideal for a few days of spa, horse riding, tennis and fresh air. It’s a superb location to explore the English countryside or simply enjoy a long layover, as the property is just 25 minutes from Heathrow Airport.

## NEW YORK: With Four Seasons Preferred Partners

It was a great honor to have been invited to attend Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts’ Preferred Partner Leadership Forum, a fantastic event for the hotel company’s top-producing travel advisors. It was fantastic to spend time with many of my favorite Four Seasons General Managers who welcome my clients throughout the world! The two-day event took place at the gorgeous and sleek new **Four Seasons Hotel New York (Downtown)**. It is THE place to stay in Manhattan if you want to be where New Yorkers-in-the-know dine and shop!

I also got insider updates about the direction of the Four Seasons brand and some openings. **Attention Ski Buffs:** Opening soon in Megève is a new-build, charming, slope-side chalet in the French Alps!

## NAPA & SONOMA: Better Than Ever!

Visiting Napa and Sonoma after the devastating fires of this past fall was a very important mission for me: not only did I want to support this great community, but I wanted to see for myself that absolutely everything is ready for business as usual. All of the luxury hotels we work with are open, the wineries are pouring, and you just might get a table at that top restaurant. I don’t want to downplay the tragedy that many in the Valley have gone through, but I do want to up-play that the scenery is as beautiful as ever, the people in wine country are genuinely incredible, and our business in the area is important for tourism and the wine industry! Most of my favorite properties — including where I stayed at **Meadowood** in St. Helena and **Farmhouse Inn** in Sonoma (a perfect combination to experience both areas) — have fantastic offers through the end of March. It is always a great time to snuggle by the fire, hike in the redwoods, and drink wine paired with locally grown and prepared farm-to-table cuisine!

## CHICAGO: It’s Christmas Time in the City!

I have the world’s best team and Chicago is a favorite city for many of my clients, so with this in mind, the Resort to Laura Madrid team treated ourselves to a fabulous three days staying at the top-notch **Peninsula** hotel, seeing the coveted musical, “Hamilton,” taking a private architectural walking tour, and dining at **Girl and the Goat**! Of course, we managed a few sight inspections too and can give you the full update on the luxurious **Peninsula**, **Ritz-Carlton**, **Four Seasons**, and the **Langham** hotels along Chicago’s Magnificent Mile! ■

*Hamilton certainly surpassed expectations for the Resort to Laura Madrid team!*



# THE BACK PAGE

Throughout the year, I am asked about current travel trends and to what destinations my clients are frequenting. I am happy to share Resort To Laura Madrid's top-selling destinations in 2017.

**TOP DOG:** My top and most frequently requested destinations in 2017 were **Thailand and Southeast Asia**, tied with **New Zealand and Australia**. Following closely behind were **African safaris**. These are epic bucket-list adventures that are the absolute most fun to plan!

**SOUTH AMERICA:** **Peru** and **Chile** remain top-selling countries for those seeking adventure, nature, culture, and gastronomy.

**EUROPE:** **Ireland** and **Portugal** have become must-dos for so many of my regular clients this year, but **Italy** and **Spain** remain unwaveringly strong and never disappoint, even after multiple visits.

**EXHILARATING SKI TRIPS:** **Deer Valley, Zermatt, Steamboat, Val D'Isere, Telluride** and **Whistler** have been winners in 2017!

**FUN TRIP I'M CURRENTLY PLANNING FOR CLIENTS:** I'm taking a small group of wine lovers to **Argentina** and **Chile** in the fall to visit the most stunning properties in Chile's Central Valley, Argentina's Mendoza region, and the Atacama, the world's driest desert! Please let me know if YOU are interested in joining my next wine trip!

**MOST UNIQUE TRIP I PLANNED THIS YEAR:** A two-week trip throughout the island of the **Hebrides**, a remote Gaelic-speaking archipelago comprised of hundreds of rugged islands and fishing villages off the coast of Scotland.

**CLOSER TO HOME:** Our **U.S. National Parks** continue to surprise and delight the families we work with — it is difficult not to be in awe of America the Great. **Canada** and **Nova Scotia** have absolutely increased in popularity. And **Hawaii** continues to be a huge hit for Resort to Laura Madrid clients!

**FURTHER AFIELD:** **The Maldives** is my personal favorite long-haul beach destination and I have had the wonderful pleasure to arrange trips for several clients there this year.

**MOST ADVENTUROUS FAMILY:** One of my wonderful clients with their adventurous teens, despite world events, were set on a Nile cruise through **Egypt**, beaching in Sharm El Sheikh, camel-riding at the pyramids at Giza, skiing in **Dubai**, and sky diving in **Oman**. They had a ball and were treated like royalty!

**SUPERB VILLAS OUR CLIENTS KEEP RAVING ABOUT:** While some of the villas we work with in the Caribbean are picking up the pieces following 2017's hurricanes, the private homes we work with in **Costa Rica, Panama, Nicaragua** and **Mexico** are doing exceptionally well! We have some wonderful options in **Jamaica, Turks & Caicos**, and the **Dominican Republic**. Further afield, **Bali** and **New Zealand** have mind-blowing exclusive-use homes! This is a great way for a multi-generational trip or a big celebration with friends!

**WHAT'S IN STORE FOR LAURA IN 2018:** Inspecting jungle and beach properties throughout **Belize**, staying in castles, lodges and inns around **Southern Ireland**, exploring Lazio, Umbria, Emilia Romagna and Piedmont in **Italy** (my top-selling destination!), traveling with wine-loving friends to **Argentina and Chile**, cherishing my grandparents' 75th wedding anniversary celebration with my enormous family in **St. Louis**, and celebrating my own 50th birthday with family and dear friends in a surreal hacienda in the **Yucatan**! It's going to be a great year and I look forward to helping make yours exceptional, too!

## YOUR NEXT ADVENTURE

If any of the destinations mentioned in this newsletter are on your list, I invite you to read my complete recap and check out the photos on my blog at [www.lauramadridtravel.com](http://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!

**BLOG** [www.ResortToLauraMadrid.com](http://www.ResortToLauraMadrid.com)

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