GREAT TRAVEL DESTINATIONS FOR WRITERS

BY ZACHARY PETIT & JESSICA STRAUSSER
Author Henry Miller once said, “One’s destination is never a place, but rather a new way of looking at things.” That’s why in inspired and uninspired moments alike, a change of scenery might be just what you need to lend perspective to your writing. And why not further entice inspiration to follow by choosing a destination with a literary history all its own?

Here are 10 of our favorite destinations for writers, and some tips for maximizing your time at each one. But this is by no means a comprehensive list—join in the fun and share your own favorites at community.writersdigest.com/forum.

#1 BOSTON, MASS.

WHAT TO READ BEFORE YOU GO:
Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* (for a reminder of the town’s puritanical past); Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden* (for your moment of nearby Zen).

WHAT TO SEE WHILE YOU’RE THERE:
Get your footing with a walking tour around historic Beacon Hill (bostonbyfoot.org)—which features the homes of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Hawthorne and others. Then immerse yourself in the charming Boston Athenaeum library (bostonathenaeum.org), long frequented by famous scribes. Afterward, head to nearby Concord to take in the setting of Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women* and get your transcendentalism on at Walden Pond (mass.gov/dcr/parks/walden).

WHERE WRITERS WINE & DINE:
The Saturday Club was the ultimate writers group—imagine having Longfellow and Charles Dickens as critique partners—and it met at what is now the Omni Parker House (omnihotels.com/FindAHotel/BostonParkerHouse.aspx). Drop by for Boston crème pie (the hotel claims it was invented here), and the long-faded echoes of the *Christmas Carol* reading Dickens reportedly gave the club before taking it public.

EDITOR’S CHOICE:
At King’s Chapel Burying Ground, legend has it Hawthorne took a particular interest in the grave of a woman named Elizabeth Pain. Look closely: Is that engraving on the top-left of the headstone an *A* for Adulterer?

#2 KEY WEST, FLA.

WHAT TO READ BEFORE YOU GO:
Your pick of Ernest Hemingway classics (for obvious reasons); Tennessee Williams’ *Night of the Iguana* (written at his Key West home); *A Salty Piece of Land* by Jimmy Buffett (because you’ve always wanted an excuse).

WHAT TO SEE WHILE YOU’RE THERE:
The no-brainer is Hemingway’s house (tours $12.50, hemingwayhome.com). For maximum exposure, consider booking a room at Lighthouse Court (historickeywestinns.com) across the street. Legend has it Hemingway used the lighthouse to guide himself home from his favorite watering hole, Sloppy Joe’s. Papa aside, poets can delight in tracing the steps of Pulitzer Prize winners Elizabeth Bishop, James Merrill and Richard Wilbur, among other masters (plan your walk with help from fla-keys.com/hemingwaymedia/literary-landmarks.cfm).

WHERE WRITERS WINE & DINE:
Capt. Tony’s Saloon (capttonyssaloon.com) was the site of Sloppy Joe’s in Papa’s day (his bar stool and other memorabilia remain) and also counted Williams, Truman Capote and Robert Frost among its patrons. You’ll also want to visit the new Sloppy Joe’s (sloppyjoes.com) for live music, food and libations—it’s touristy, but it’s fun.

EDITOR’S CHOICE:
Beat the winter blues by planning a January visit to coincide with the annual Key West Literary Seminar (kwls.org), which draws an impressive roster of writers to discuss and celebrate the craft.

#3 LONDON, ENGLAND

WHAT TO READ BEFORE YOU GO:
Anything by Dickens (for due diligence); *The Complete Sherlock Holmes* by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (which still defines the city today); Neil Gaiman’s *Neverwhere* (for the fantastical modern London underground).

WHAT TO SEE WHILE YOU’RE THERE:
There’s simply too much for the 200 words we have here (don’t even get us started on nearby Stratford-Upon-Avon). But here are three possibilities: See the ornate graves of Chaucer, Dickens, et al. at Westminster Abbey (about $26, westminster-abbey.org); get a photo outside Holmes’ 221B Baker Street (but skip the accompanying museum unless you’re really a superfan); catch a play at the reconstructed Shakespeare’s Globe theater (shakespeares...
globe.com). **WHERE WRITERS WINE & DINE:** For a serving of writing-world history (and a pint!), take the excellent Literary London Pub Walk (about $13, walks.com). Then grab a bite on Fleet Street at Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese (does it get more British?), which has been here since 1667. The charming wood-paneled interior has long been a magnet to writers, drawing the likes of Dickens and Joseph Conrad. **EDITOR’S CHOICE:** If you go nowhere else in London, go to the British Library (bl.uk). With its collection of everything from the Magna Carta to Leonardo da Vinci’s notebooks to original Beatles lyrics, it's safe to say it will be your cup of tea.

**#4 NEW ORLEANS, LA.**
**WHAT TO READ BEFORE YOU GO:** Tennessee Williams’ *A Streetcar Named Desire* (set in the city); *Soldiers’ Pay* by William Faulkner (who wrote this first novel here); The Vampire Chronicles by Anne Rice (for the city’s immortal heartbeat). **WHAT TO SEE WHILE YOU’RE THERE:** When you close your eyes and envision New Orleans, you see the French Quarter. So start there by browsing the stacks at Faulkner House Books (faulknerhouse.net), located where the author once lived. Then, check into a writer-branded suite at Hotel Monteleone (hotelmonteleone.com), which played host to such legendary scribes as Williams, Hemingway and Capote—some of whom became so enamored with the hotel they set stories there. The property also offers literary tours ($27/$10 for hotel guests). **WHERE WRITERS WINE & DINE:** After sipping New Orleans’ signature Hurricane cocktail (it’s probably safe to say Capote had a few), relax at Galatoire’s Restaurant (galatoires.com)—where Williams liked the crawfish bisque so much he sent Stella there in *Streetcar.* **EDITOR’S CHOICE:** Eat red beans and rice while reading Anne Rice. Drink Stella while screaming “Stellaaaaaa!” You’re in New Orleans: Go wild. Afterward, pick up your pen with a coffee and beignet at the iconic 24-hour Café Du Monde (cafedumonde.com).

**#5 NEW YORK, NEW YORK**
**WHAT TO READ BEFORE YOU GO:** Anything: All your favorite books were published here. **WHAT TO SEE WHILE YOU’RE THERE:** The city’s mark on literature is so vast it can barely be touched in a visit. But whether you’re looking to pound the same pavement as the mysterious Edgar Allan Poe, the irreverent Dorothy Parker or the great Mark Twain, Greenwich Village is a must. Take it in on foot—countless guides exist to help you target your stroll (one to try: nyslip.org)—and don’t miss longtime literary gathering place Washington Square Park (nyc.gov/parks/parks/washingtionsquarepark). Save time to venture into Midtown’s New York Public Library (nypl.org) and its backyard, Bryant Park. **WHERE WRITERS WINE & DINE:** Village watering holes: Edna St. Vincent Millay, John Steinbeck and Eugene O’Neill favored Chumley’s (86 Bedford St.); Dylan Thomas famously drank his last whiskey at White Horse Tavern (567 Hudson St.). **EDITOR’S CHOICE:** After you’ve had your fill of Bohemian life, splurge on a meal at The Plaza (fairmont.com), overlooking Central Park and Fifth Avenue. Capote fans know it as the site of his famed Black and White Ball, and F. Scott Fitzgerald devotees will recall the hotel (which he frequented) from a memorable scene in *The Great Gatsby.*

**#6 PARIS, FRANCE**
**WHAT TO READ BEFORE YOU GO:** Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises* (which defined “the Lost Generation”); Victor Hugo’s *Les Misérables* (for dramatized love and redemption steeped in Parisian history). **WHAT TO SEE WHILE YOU’RE THERE:** Start with one of the American expat Lost Generation’s favorite places—the Shakespeare and Company bookstore (shakespeareandcompany.com), frequented by Hemingway, Fitzgerald and others before it closed during WWII. When it was reopened in Paris’ creative-centric Latin Quarter, the Beat writers settled in. After you go, haul your bag of books to the top of Notre Dame (notredamedeparis.fr/-English) for a glimpse of the gargoyles from *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame.* Then take in the Louvre Museum (about $8, louvre.fr), where Dan Brown fans can get a glimpse of the Mona Lisa and other treasures. **WHERE WRITERS WINE & DINE:** For one of Fitzgerald’s favorite bars, visit the Hôtel Ritz—the cushy digs featured in *Tender Is the Night,* *The Da Vinci Code,* and Ian Fleming’s *From Russia,* *With Love.* Dedicated to Fitzgerald’s famous pal, The Bar Hemingway at the Ritz (deemed “the greatest bar in the world” by Forbes) features Papa-related photography and a selection of his favorite Scotches. **EDITOR’S CHOICE:** Hop the metro to Père Lachaise cemetery (perelachaisecemetery.com)—where you can find the graves of Richard Wright, Gertrude Stein, Oscar Wilde, Marcel Proust and even Jim Morrison. The grounds offer tranquility in an otherwise bustling metropolis.
10 THINGS FOR EVERY WRITER’S BUCKET LIST

Check these off your list someday, and you’ll be able to look anybody in the eye and say with assurance, “I am a writer.”

1. **Publish a Short Story**
**WHY:** To have the satisfaction of bringing a fiction project to completion. **HOW:** 1) Pack it with action; make a lot happen in a short space. Or 2) Create a quiet little world with an ulterior feel—and then deliver your knockout blow. → Submit to literary journals: It’s a thrill to hold a nicely bound journal with your story in its pages, and it can build your bio.

2. **Go to a Writing Conference**
**WHY:** To find out more about this milieu you’re a part of. **HOW:** Pick an event and go for the experience of it. → Learn from positive examples, like the speaker who turns you on to a new way to set scenes, and from the negative, like the self-obsessed wannabe monopolizing the Q&A.

3. **Freelance for Money**
**WHY:** It’s one of the most empowering things you can do. **HOW:** Visit a newsstand with your notebook. Which magazines would be fun to write for? Play with ideas you’ve already got; brainstorm more. → Write a batch of queries without overworking them. Submit. Persist.

4. **Visit City Lights**
**WHY:** Because it’s (still) there. **HOW:** The 41 Union bus. → This San Francisco bookstore, birthplace of the Beats, is so steeped in counterculture and literature that you’ll want to pitch a tent right on the floor. (Hey, they’d probably just shelve you around.)

5. **Write + Publish an Essay**
**WHY:** It feeds your brain (and is terrific training for writing a memoir). **HOW:** Take a personal subject and give it meaning beyond you and it. → Basic blueprint: Start with an anecdote, add context and finish with what universal truth can be learned.

6. **Take a Writing Retreat**
**WHY:** To see how much you can accomplish without distractions. **HOW:** Find the proverbial isolated cabin. A cheap motel room will do. → Go alone to get a running start on a new project, or to regain momentum on a work-in-progress and get the thing done—or a lot closer to it.

7. **Write a Novel**
**WHY:** Because it’s the biggie. **HOW:** Take the first step. → In talking with authors, I’ve come to realize that the most important step in writing a novel is the first one: commitment. Once you make that decision to do it—to see it through, come what may—you’re free of doubt and indecision. You’re free to write!

8. **Go to BEA + Score a Tote**
**WHY:** It’s a trip. **HOW:** Sign up and pay the fee. → The biggest publishing trade event in the U.S., Book Expo America is crawling with authors, publishers, agents, booksellers, librarians and celebrities whose ghostwritten autobiographies are coming out. Soak up their vibes on the convention floor, where you can snag giveaways like books, pens, T-shirts, candy and highly prized tote bags in which to schlep around your stuff.

9. **Read Shakespeare**
**WHY:** If you’ve ever wished good riddance (Troilus and Cressida) to a pair of star-cross’d lovers (Romeo and Juliet) who were eating you out of house and home (Henry IV), you may have taken cold comfort (The Taming of the Shrew) from your brave new world (The Tempest). **HOW:** Buy anywhere or download for free. → Writers should comprehend both the dramatic standards Shakespeare set and the references to his work permeating our culture. Haven’t read him since school? Take a second look.

10. **Fill in This Blank With Your Heart’s Desire**
**WHY:** Because you know you really want to. **HOW:** Go for it!

—Elizabeth Sims

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### #7 Rome, Italy

**WHAT TO READ BEFORE YOU GO:**
*John Keats: The Complete Poems* (to anchor Rome’s Keats lore); Brown’s *Angels & Demons* (for thrills). **WHAT TO SEE WHILE YOU’RE THERE:** You can get your literary fix in two tracks—one a bit more classic than the other. Poets won’t want to miss sacred ground of the romantic movement: the Keats-Shelley House (about $6, keats-shelley-house.org) at the Spanish Steps. ● The house, where Keats died of tuberculosis, is now a museum dedicated to the poet and his friend, Percy Bysshe Shelley. For more modern fare, Rome has all the Brown tours you can handle—notably, “The Official Angels & Demons Rome Tour” (about $79, angelsanddemons.it), which takes you along historic cobblestones to several stunning sites. **WHERE WRITERS WINE & DINE:** It’s not cheap, but if you want to sip coffee at stately marble tables favored by Lord Byron, Dickens and even Casanova (!), stop by the Antico Caffè Greco in Via Condotti. But
be warned: Italian coffee is serious stuff. **EDITOR’S CHOICE:** Head to the ruins of the Roman Forum and see where Mark Antony gave his famous funeral oration (later dramatized by Shakespeare). Bellow out, “Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears…” And if you’ve still got the rest memorized from high-school English and have had enough Italian coffee, well, now’s the time.

**#8 SAN FRANCISCO, CALIF.**

**WHAT TO SEE WHILE YOU’RE THERE:** North Beach is home to the must-see legendary City Lights Bookstore (see Page 34); explore the eclectic neighborhood on foot, and you’ll find the Beat Generation spirit lives on. Nature buffs should venture outside the city to Muir Woods National Monument (nps.gov/muwo) and the John Muir National Historic Site (nps.gov/jomu), where the scribe depicted the love for nature that influenced the creation of the National Park Service. And for mystery fans, the Hammett walking tour ($10, donherron.com) claims to be the nation’s longest-running literary tour, but times are limited. **WHERE WRITERS WINE & DINE:** A surer bet for hard-boiled buffs is John’s Grill (johnsgrill.com), a favorite haunt of both Hammett and his gumshoe Sam Spade. And from City Lights, hop next door to Vesuvio Café (vesuvio.com), once frequented by Jack Kerouac and company; **EDITOR’S CHOICE:** Visit for the San Francisco Writers Conference (sfwriters.org), held every February (for fun). THE City of Falling Angels by Thomas Mann (for due diligence); Berendt’s The City of Falling Angels (for an outsider’s account). **WHAT TO SEE WHILE YOU’RE THERE:** You need not seek out inspiration in Venice—the city itself is a masterpiece. Rick Steves’ Venice is a wonderful guide to customizing your experience; you can use it to self-narrate your way along the Grand Canal (for a sense of noir). MAKE YOUR WAY TO: Visit the ruins of the Roman Forum and see where Mark Antony gave his famous funeral oration (later dramatized by Shakespeare). Bellow out, “Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears…” And if you’ve still got the rest memorized from high-school English and have had enough Italian coffee, well, now’s the time.

**#9 SAVANNAH, GA.**

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