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Uncommon Travel

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Across the Globe

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SHANGHAI

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ITALY

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One Dangerous Dance, AND MORE

“If I die here, call the
last number I dialed.”

DEEP IN THE PERUVIAN DESERT

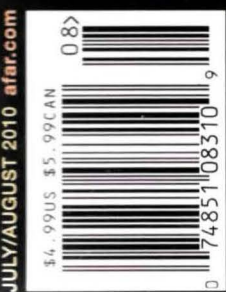
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China's Culture Hub

WHY GO: Most travelers overlook Xining, in north-central China, in their hurry to board a Lhasa-bound train. But the city is home to two of the country's most important religious sites for Hui Muslims and Tibetan Buddhists. In a one-day stop at this unusual cultural crossroads, you can wander among thousands of worshippers at a mosque whose history dates back more than 600 years and then view sacred art made by monks at a 16th-century monastery.

The aqua minarets and giant dome of Dongguan Great Mosque tower above Xining's eastern quarter, a bustling neighborhood of shopkeepers selling headscarves, skull caps, and mutton kebabs. Inside the mosque—one of the region's largest—elderly men sit peacefully in the main courtyard. On Fridays, an estimated 20,000 local Muslims fill the prayer halls. (Non-Muslims are welcome to enter the mosque complex but not the prayer halls.)

Seventeen miles southwest, the Kumbum Monastery is said to be the birthplace of the founder of the Gelugpa (Yellow Hat) sect of Tibetan Buddhism. (The Dalai Lama is the sect's most well-known member.) On most afternoons, the monastery's young resident monks passionately debate their teachers in the courtyards, punctuating their points by clapping their hands.

The monastery is also home to an extensive collection of silk tapestries, frescoes depicting scenes from the Buddha's life, and yak butter sculptures. "It used to be common to give flowers as a tribute to deities and lamas. But the problem was that flowers didn't grow for much of the year," explains local Tibetan scholar Jinpa Dorje, alluding to the region's harsh climate. "So the monks began experimenting with carving flowers out of butter."

Before you leave Kumbum, be sure to circumambulate (always clockwise) the main courtyard's eight stupas. You can also follow the lead of pilgrims genuflecting as they make their way around the complex—a seven-day process, according to Dorje. Don't be surprised if a curious pilgrim falls into step beside you. —Molly Loomis



Monks circle for ceremonial chanting at the Kumbum Monastery near Xining.

CALENDAR

FILM

Cinéma au Clair de Lune

Aug 4–22 /// Paris, France

Few cities have been so adored in cinema as Paris. At the 10th annual Cinéma au Clair de Lune, sit in the moonlight and watch classic movies on location. The festival opens at the base of Butte Montmartre, with Eric Rohmer's romantic drama *Full Moon in Paris* (1984). Other outdoor screenings include Jean-Luc Godard's new wave classic *Breathless* at Jardin des Champs-Élysées; the stylish thriller *Diva*, directed by Jean-Jacques Beineix, at Jardins du Trocadero; and Michel Gondry's fantastical film *The Science of Sleep*, starring Charlotte Gainsbourg, which will be shown at Place René Cassin.

franceguide.com

BOOKS

Byron Bay Writers Festival

Aug 6–8 /// Byron Bay, Australia

Writers and book lovers convene in this bohemian beach town for three days of talks and readings presented by a diverse roster of playwrights, poets, songwriters, comedians, and fiction and nonfiction authors. The emphasis here is on Australian writers, and this year's homegrown participants include Kate Veitch, author of the intimate family portrait *Listen*, and Brenda Walker, whose historical novel *The Wing of Night* explores the devastating aftermath of the Gallipoli campaign. In the evening, discuss the day's events over a round of locally brewed Stone and Wood lager at the Railway Friendly Bar.

byronbaywritersfestival.com.au

FOOD

Fête des Cuisinières

Aug 7 /// Pointe-à-Pitre, Guadeloupe

In the French West Indies, chow down on creole cuisine at the Fête des Cuisinières (Festival of the Women Cooks). For nearly a century, Guadeloupe's female chefs have prepared a feast for hundreds at this annual celebration of the isle's culinary history—a mix of native Carib, West African, East Indian, and French influences. Decked out in bright skirts and madras headaddresses, 200 master chefs host the five-hour banquet. The menu often includes *ti punch* (sugar cane rum, lemon, and sugar), *accras* (crispy cod fritters), shredded pumpkin salad, *colombo* (spicy chicken curry), and coconut layer cake.

lesilesdeguaeloupe.com