



Clockwise from top left: Get a yellow cab around New York like a local; Central Park is an inner-city oasis; Enter Sir Richard Branson's private London Rooftop Gardens by invitation only; Cruise New York's Hudson River. Centre: Big Apple skyline.

my worth as a man. I step into an old-fashioned diner to escape his tirade but find the mammoth portion sizes more dangerous than the musical madman.

DAY FOUR :: PARK IT

Having spent much of my time in LA lurking in the corners of darkened drinking dens, I resolve to find some sunshine in New York. Central Park is the antidote to chaotic city life, and a cycling tour with Bike and Roll is the best way to see this 341-hectare urban playground. It's a mild autumn morning and the park is filled with cyclists, joggers and sunbathers. I head to John Lennon's memorial, dubbed Strawberry Fields, on the south-west side of the park to pay my respects to the late Beatle, tipping a busker on the way who sounds like she's had a hard day's night.

I pedal to the Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis Reservoir in the centre of the park – otherwise known as

“ Central Park is the antidote to chaotic city life, and a cycling tour is the best way to see this urban playground. ”

Charlotte's favourite running track in *Sex and the City* – for peaceful views of 5th Avenue. You must also see the lay of the land from the 102nd floor of the Empire State Building. The queue can be long, but a Skyride ticket will allow you to jump most of it.

DAY FIVE :: PRESIDENTIAL PARDON

One of the best ways to see New York City is from the Hudson River. I start the day with a joy-ride on a New York Water Taxi; a hop-on, hop-off day pass for US\$20 (A\$23) is the best way to explore the river's many ports. Wanting to make the most of my new-found sea legs, I then opt for an afternoon cruise on the tall ship *Clipper City*. It departs the South Street Seaport four times a day and offers a full-service bar, so I sip cocktails in the sun as I watch the Manhattan skyline drift by on my way to check out the Statue of Liberty.

My second day of sun in the city is given a serious vibe when a surprise visit from President Obama shuts down the airspace and waterways of the city. We are prevented from docking by a machine-gun-wielding coastguard boat that bellows at our beret-wearing captain to turn the ship around. We spend the next hour set adrift on the Hudson River watching several decoy helicopter (and one that carries the President) circle overhead. I leave New York sunburnt to a crisp, ready to take on old London town.

DAY SIX :: LUXE LONDON

I arrive in London – my third time zone in less than a week – bitten and bruised by the dog from hell they call jet lag. As I check into the classic Sofitel St James I seek a remedy in the hotel's brand-new So Spa. I spend an indeterminate amount of time in the steam room before meeting my diminutive masseuse, who asks me to choose a colour that suits my mood ('yurple' isn't an option). She then proceeds to bring me back to life with her black-magic mix of aromatherapy and pressure point massage. My senses are fresh for an excellent French dinner at the on-site Bistro Roux, where I investigate whether the road of

excess really does lead to the palace of wisdom by attempting to drown myself in copious amounts of foie gras, oozing cheese and rich red wine. Unfortunately it leads only to indigestion.

DAY SEVEN :: TRAINING WHEELS

I wake to my first morning in London, only to leave it. I'm heading to Paris on the Eurostar train – by far the easiest way to make the trip – for an overnight jaunt in the city of love. I arrive to a warm afternoon and, after negotiating the sweaty metro system, find respite at a cafe facing Notre Dame.

I sit down, order a beer and then notice the beautiful Parisian woman sitting across from me. I fall instantly in love, cursing my current unfashionable incarnation of red-faced, dishevelled tourist. My hopes are further dashed when the waiter approaches with my beer: a garish two-litre behemoth served with a sparkler. A sparkler! Why don't they just slip an American flag into it and call it quits? The woman smirks and I direct my



From top: Revisit the charm of 1920s train travel, complete with period characters, on the British Pullman Orient-Express; The Sofitel St James and its new So Spa provide classic therapy.

ashamed gaze back into the murky depths of my bucket of beer, heartbroken and alone.

The beer does, however, give me suitable motivation for my 10-minute cab trip across town to check into the flagship Pullman Paris Bercy. Unlike me, it's tres chic – a designer hotel in the heart of the Bercy Village pedestrian precinct, which comes alive with bustling French bistros as soon as the sun goes down.

DAY EIGHT :: MOVABLE FEAST

Having licked my wounds in the charming bars of the cobblestoned Rue Princesse district the night before, this morning I head directly for the steep streets of Montmartre with renewed vigour.

“Actors roam the train playing hilarious 1920s stereotypical characters, such as the drunken English toff.”

Here you'll find the Sacré Coeur and incredible views over the city. I treat myself to a long, wine-soaked lunch of charcuterie (a plate of preserved meat) and a selection of cheeses at local bistro Du Gadget de Caslogne.

Back in London this evening, I continue my day of indulgence at Sir Richard Branson's private members' club, Rooftop Gardens.

This fantasy venue features more than half a hectare of rooftop garden space in the heart of London's Kensington area. The bar is rarely open to the public, but you can get a taste of the venue at its fine-dining restaurant, Babylon. After having a glass or two of Champagne, I spot three pink flamingos roaming the garden. The sighting throws me into an internal panic: has this cocktail of jet lag, exhaustion and alcohol finally shattered my mind into a million little pieces? I'm later assured that they are, in fact, real residents of the venue and are not precursors of my deteriorating mental health.

DAY NINE :: UPPER CRUST

From flamingos to flappers, today I indulge in perhaps the most quintessential English experience possible: lunch aboard the historic British Pullman Orient-Express. The train originally ferried the well-heeled English upper class to and from their glamorous engagements back in the 1920s. Almost 90 years later I'm stepping aboard the impeccably restored carriages for a sumptuous five-course lunch. The meal is part of the four-hour return trip to Kent, in the country's south-east, on which we've embarked.

Actors roam the train playing hilarious 1920s stereotypical characters, such as the name-dropping snob and the drunken English toff, and no expense is spared, with old-time silver service and crystal glassware completing the picture. On arriving in Kent we alight for oysters and Champagne, enjoyed to the up-beat tunes of a jazz band. With transport of this ilk I understand why Fogg took his sweet time. This, indeed, is the art of travel.

DAY TEN :: CROWNING GLORY

The Novotel St Pancras is well located only a few minutes' walk from Kings Cross tube station. It provides a good central base for sightseers to start from. I have a full day in London and I'm intent on stuffing it like a Cornish pastie. I begin at the Tate Modern gallery, which houses works by masters such as Picasso, Dali and Pollock, and then pop into Shakespeare's Globe Theatre next door to tip my hat to the bard. Then it's off to the medieval museum that is The Tower of London to see the Queen's family jewels.

Afterwards, I head post-haste for Notting Hill, via the gluttony of designer shopping at Oxford Circus, to the famous Portobello Road Market, which sells a mishmash of antique wares and quirky accessories. Sitting quietly at the end of the market strip is the Earl of Lonsdale, an authentic old English pub, where I steel myself for my fast-approaching flight with a pint of Samuel Smith's Alpine Lager. Having seen London in the lap of luxury, I'm now ready to shift gears and dive headfirst into the hedonism of Hong Kong.

DAY ELEVEN :: KING KONG

The pace of Hong Kong hits me as soon as I step out of the Novotel Nathan Road, a recently refurbished ▶

Clockwise from top: Notre Dame, Paris, is one fine French Gothic; when in Montmartre, scale a plateful of charcuterie and cheese with wine, or scale the streets to Sacré Coeur basilica – your choice.

property that brings luxury accommodation to the centre of the Kowloon shopping action. The Temple Street Night Market is a melting pot of Hong Kong culture and tourist bargains. Hang around to catch a glimpse of what the locals refer to as 'old man karaoke' (a gaggle of tone-deaf codgers screeching their way through Chinese opera classics) or get your fortune read by a bird. I'm not sure that I'm ready to know the answers to life's big questions, so

I chicken out – no pun intended. I'm of the opinion that Hong Kong is home to some of the best food that can be found anywhere in the world, and my theory is reinforced with an incredible dinner at Hutong. Arrive before 8pm to witness the nightly lightshow over

Hong Kong Island from one of the best vantage points in Kowloon. When it comes to food, you can't go wrong here – every dish is a brand-new culinary experience.

DAY TWELVE :: FINISH LINE

I gather the small amount of energy that I have left and get an early start in Aberdeen for a sampan ride among the fishing boats in the harbour. I then have a quick lunch at the historic Crown Cellars, which was originally built as underground ammunition bunkers during World War II, and take a little time to reflect on my trip. Admittedly, I'm exhausted. But the world seems considerably smaller and our differences less pronounced. From the hawkers in New York to the stallholders in Hong Kong, I have an overwhelming sense that we're all in this together; that we're all just a small part of the pulse that gives life to a city, to the planet. When Fogg returned home from his journey he was rewarded with a large fortune and the love of a beautiful woman. Me? I'd be more than happy

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TICKET TO FLY

Thanks to the launch of V Australia, it's now possible to circumnavigate the globe on the Virgin network. Here's how to get the job done.

SYDNEY TO LOS ANGELES :: V AUSTRALIA

Upon boarding my International Business Class flight to Los Angeles I retire to the bar to sip glasses of vintage Champagne with my fellow travellers. I feel every inch the sophisticate as I tuck into the contents of an impressive à la carte meal, slip into my flight pyjamas and freshen up with the complimentary Bvlgari toiletries. After a surprisingly peaceful night's sleep in my comfortable lie-flat bed – which comes complete with wraparound privacy curtain – I hit the ground running. Visit www.vaustralia.com.au.

LOS ANGELES TO NEW YORK :: VIRGIN AMERICA

I feel even more famous than an ageing R&B star as I board a Virgin America flight from Los Angeles to New York. The neon cabin lighting and swish Business Class partitions in

the brand-new cabin remind me of the interior of a plush stretched limo. Visit www.virginamerica.com.

NEW YORK TO LONDON :: VIRGIN ATLANTIC

As a Virgin Atlantic Upper Class passenger I'm welcomed into the Revivals Lounge at Heathrow airport, where I enjoy a long, hot shower, have my clothes pressed for me and feast on an à la carte breakfast before facing the queues at one of the world's busiest airports.

LONDON TO HONG KONG :: VIRGIN ATLANTIC

After I'd had a big day in London the Virgin Atlantic Clubhouse at Heathrow airport was a godsend. Upper Class passengers are given access to a private check-in facility that means no long queues, and The Clubhouse itself resembles a high-end hotel. Complimentary spa treatments (I opted for an old-school wet shave), a dine-in restaurant and a cinema-sized screen transform the airport experience from an exhausting nuisance into a re-energising holiday highlight.

HONG KONG TO SYDNEY :: VIRGIN ATLANTIC

You'd have to be a professional basketball player to even have a chance at outstretching the impressive 200-centimetre-plus lie-flat beds that fill the Upper Class cabin. They are more valuable than gold on this overnight flight and I don't know how I've survived without them. Visit www.virginatlantic.com.



From top: Hutong restaurant in Kowloon, Hong Kong, is foodie heaven with a sublime lightshow to match; sampans and fishing boats make for a vibrant Hong Kong Harbour scene.