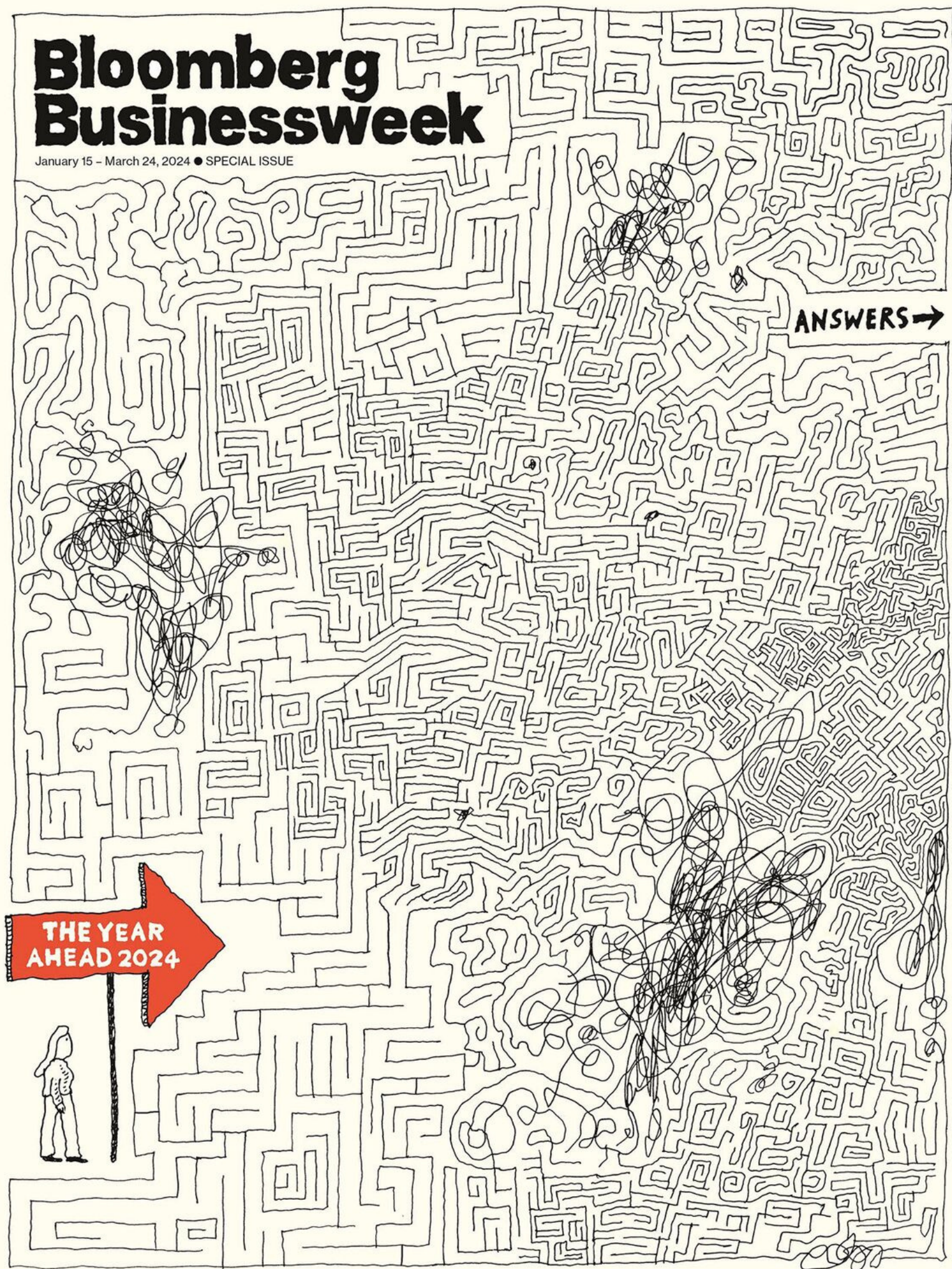


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WHERE
TO
GO IN

2024

One of
Comino's
caves in
Malta

The 23 thrilling destinations that
will awe and inspire this year

January 15, 2024

Edited by
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Businessweek.com

EUROPE

Climate change is steering travelers to some surprising places, while a thirst for slow travel reinvents others

BELFAST

A creative reawakening is underway in the capital of Northern Ireland, energizing everything—restaurants, distilleries, the already dynamic arts scene. In 2024, Belfast will kick off a £9 million (\$11.4 million) program of cultural events set to unfold everywhere from the city's alleyways to its rivers. Among the highlights will be "Waterworks," where people will be invited to build 10,000 boats in different shapes and sizes using recycled materials as a way to engage with the River Lagan,

on which the city was built. Another notable project, "Guerrilla Walls," will see the construction of a community garden along sections of the peace walls, which were built to minimize civil unrest in the 1960s and '70s and now serve as public art spaces.

All this befits Belfast's reputation as a culture hub. The success of the Titanic Belfast museum, which opened a decade ago, is now inspiring preservation projects all around it. Among them is the city's first distillery in 90 years, Titanic Distillers, inside a historic pump house. Belfast Distillery Co. is expected

to follow suit soon with a £22 million facility fit for visitors in the old Crumlin Road Gaol (the local spelling of "jail").

Elsewhere young chefs are amping up the food scene. At the Michelin-starred Muddlers Club, Gareth McCaughey serves tasting menus with Irish produce—beef with wild garlic and asparagus, or cod with prawn and tomato consommé—to a rock 'n' roll soundtrack. Self-taught chef Ryan Jenkins offers similarly artful yet unpretentious food at Roam in the city center.

The Harrison Chambers of Distinction makes an excellent bolt-hole for the bohemian traveler; its Victorian-style rooms are themed after famous local characters such as *The Chronicles of Narnia* author C.S. Lewis and Belfast poet John Hewitt.

BERGEN

In 2023, Norway emerged as a major summer destination for European vacationers seeking a respite from the heat waves in Italy and Greece. That's made Bergen—a charming, supersize fishing village set between fjords and mountains on the west coast—increasingly popular.

It would be a mistake, however, to limit yourself to the warmest season. This February the Norwegian cruise line Havila Voyages is for the first time taking its energy-efficient expedition ships to Kirkenes for northern-lights-focused itineraries that begin and end in the city. Come fall, six-day trips on the Norient Express (aka Norway's Orient Express) head from Bergen to Oslo along one of the most scenic routes in Europe. No matter which adventure you choose, base

A villa at Tuscany's Castello di Casole



yourself at the alluring, three-month-old Charmante Hotel—where each room has a distinct design that evokes turn-of-the-century Paris—or the Børs, a handsome, 127-room property in the old stock exchange, where a crowd-pleasing, seafood-focused restaurant recently opened in its frescoed grand hall.

Another new hotel with excellent eating is a little beyond the city limits: At Beckerwyc House, you can immerse yourself in the quiet coastal lifestyle and sleep off dinner at Mirabelle by Ørjan Johannessen, whose namesake chef won the Bocuse d'Or in 2015.

In the heart of town, be sure to dine at Lysverket, the city's leading restaurant. Its sensational tasting menu highlights delicacies from the sea such as steamed crab tartlets with caviar. And if you're taking advantage of Bergen's most famous attraction, the Floibanen funicular, don't miss a meal at the 98-year-old Fløien Folkerestaurant at the top of Mount Floyen; it's getting ready to reopen in April after a long renovation.

MALTA

You may think of it as the backdrop for *Gladiator*, *Game of Thrones*, *Troy* and other historical productions, but Malta is embracing the present, opening Europe's most significant museum of the year. The 16,000-square-foot Malta International Contemporary Art Space will be housed inside a 17th-century fortress, overlooking the dramatic Marsamxett Harbour in the capital, Valletta. Come fall, it will dedicate its seaside galleries to immersive artist installations.

But the art world will likely descend sooner, from March through May, when Malta hosts its inaugural biennale. Its theme, White Sea Olive Groves, will revolve around building peace and fighting nationalism across Europe's south. Pavilions will be installed in historic palazzos and forts throughout Valletta and Gozo. With a new 250-berth superyacht marina soon to open north of the capital, more of these culture hounds will be arriving by sea, on itineraries that circumvent Malta's popular (and overcrowded) neighbor, Sicily.

Staying on dry land will be no less luxurious, particularly if you want to explore the charming villages beyond Malta's main cities. Casa Bonavita, with 17 rooms in a baroque mansion in the picturesque town of Attard, opens early in 2024; it's a passion project from the owners of the luxe Rug Co. Inside a new skyscraper by Zaha Hadid Architects in the seaside resort town of St. Julian's, the ME Malta Hotel will have Italian celebrity chef Gino D'Acampo running its bars and restaurants. And in the fortified city of Senglea, set on a car-free, cobblestone street across the grand harbor from Valletta, is the most exciting newcomer of all: Cité Privée Maison.

TRANSYLVANIA

Get Dracula out of your head. This area of central Romania—which, yes, was the setting of Bram Stoker's novel—is worth visiting for many reasons other than its castles and folklore. Prime among them is Matca, a brand-new rural retreat sitting in the shadows of the Carpathian Mountains. Its 26 rooms, suites and villas are spread across a rewilded stretch of forest and meadow. The featured experiences range from the intrepid to the spiritual: There are walking safaris through the woods to see brown bears; the purifying practice of hay bathing, which is meant to stimulate the metabolism and release toxins from the body; and praying with monks to the trance-inducing percussive sounds of toacă war drums.

SAN SEBASTIAN

This coastal city in Spain, which claims the most Michelin-starred restaurants per capita, is heating up as Europeans look for more summertime places to cool down. Take the 48-room, Belle Époque-style Hotel Luze: It will offer 97,000 square feet of stunning, cooling gardens when it opens later this year, plus an infinity pool facing the Cantabrian Sea and a restaurant by Ifigo Lavado, who trained under Ferran Adrià and Alain Ducasse. The Palacio de Bellas Artes, one of Spain's first cinemas, will be reborn as an 84-room Hilton Curio

hotel. These openings, along with a new Nobu property overlooking the beach, will boost the limited number of luxury accommodations in the city.

Sustainability has become San Sebastián's mantra. A massive, wave-shaped extension of the Basque Culinary Center will open in 2024, designed by Bjarke Ingels Group. Its huge rooftop includes a public square where locals and chefs can convene. To reach it, you'll climb a series of stairs built into its ridge-like exterior.

Of course there will be great new restaurants, too, extending beyond San Sebastián's traditional Basque fare. At Artean Barra Abierta, tortillas and Basque talo flatbreads are combined to make shrimp-stuffed tacos. Bantxu II has phenomenal (and trendy) Korean eats. And Ibai, a seafood-centric mainstay, is reopening after a three-year closure, under the direction of celebrated Argentine chef Paulo Airaud.

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Also raising the bar for luxury in Transylvania is Bethlen Estates, beautiful accommodations at the renovated 13th-century ancestral manor of Count Miklós Bethlen. The activities delve deep into Romania's natural beauty: Go e-biking, heli-skiing or hiking in the nearby mountains, and explore Transylvania's budding wine