

Literary cities

Where soul speaks through
literature



Literary tourism is the answer to an incorrigible obsession with libraries, a fascination with book-themed venues or homes of classic authors. And for those deeply devoted to the pursuit of books, a perfect bucket list includes these UNESCO's Cities of Literature:

words // Punita Malhotra



1 | MONTEVIDEO, Uruguay

Uruguay's capital Montevideo is the epitome of timelessness with its classic architecture, riverside promenades and a thriving cultural scene. Its small historic district of Ciudad Vieja makes for a delightful stroll with its newly restored colonial mansions, quirky cafes, majestic museums, antique stores and bookshops. 'The Athens of the Rio de la Plata' rose to literary prominence with the creative genius of many renowned authors in the league of Mario Benedetti, Delmira Agustini, José Enrique Rodó, Julio Herrera y Reissig, Juan Carlos

Onetti, Antonio Larreta, Eduardo Galeano, Carlos Vaz Ferreira, Marosa di Giorgio, Cristina Peri Rossi and Felisberto Hernández. During the 1950s, these Uruguayan authors shaped the contemporary Uruguayan intellectual identity forever. This cradle of Gaucho literature has the distinction of being the only UNESCO City of Literature in Latin America.

Diomedes Libros, Las Karamazov and Escaramuza are some of the bookstores worth peeking into. But the piece de resistance

is Más Puro Verso, a striking Art Nouveau building from 1917, with a flamboyant glass frontage opening. A sweeping marble staircase, ornate stained-glass window and soaring ceilings showcase a fabulous collection of books over two floors. Upscale piazza gives way to flea-market exuberance at the Sunday Feria de Tristán Narvaja in the Cordón neighbourhood. Hours flit by under the hypnotic spell of book bargaining along the long tables overflowing with old books and magazines.



2 | LJUBLJANA, Slovenia

Under the shadow of a 900-year old hilltop medieval castle that overlooks a mythical green dragon perched on an iconic bridge, Ljubljana is a welcoming city. Lively riverside bars line the banks of the gently meandering Ljubljanica River, which separates the baroque eye-candy of its historic, car-free cobbled cultural centre from a more modern and green west bank.

Designated World Book Capital by UNESCO in 2010 and City of Literature in 2015, thanks to its rich literary culture, Ljubljana commands pride of position as the literary centre of Slovenia. Its national heroes are the scholars, poets and writers, who made history by influencing social, political and cultural issues, and it is they, who stand immortalised in bronze and stone in all major central squares.

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Bibliophiles can embark on the 'Ljubljana for Poetry Lovers' tour for an introduction to eleven of the greatest Slovene poets or be inspired by visits to various famed authors' homes along the Slovenian Writers Trail. A book reading at the iconic Trubar House of Literature and some pottering around the massive selection of 70,000 book titles in the two-level Konzorcij bookstore, add to a brush with culture. Ljubljana's grassy parks are venues for casually laid-out cartons of books and comfy cushioned deck-chairs washed by the warm sun.



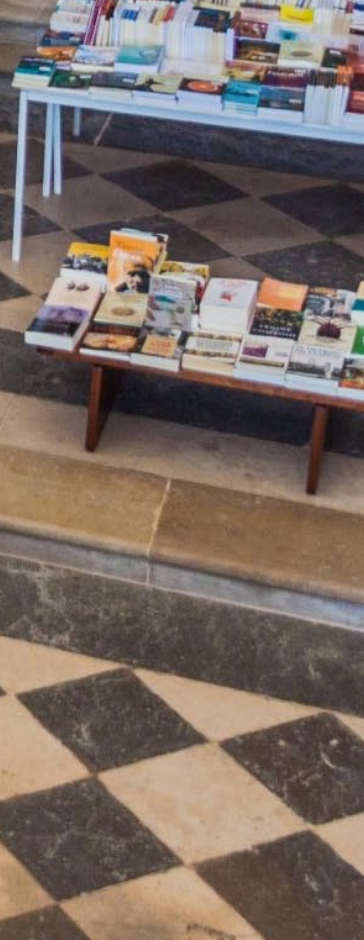


3 | OBIDOS, Portugal

A centuries-old medieval town protecting an ancient castle, a maze of cobblestone alleys and whitewashed homes with bright blue-yellow painted trim, has been reborn as the youngest book town in the world. Half a million books to 3,000 residents, a dozen new bookstores and an international lit-fest called FOLIO, featuring debates, reading marathons, screenings and concerts for artists, Obidos has successfully reinvented itself as the literary hub of Portugal.

Book-worming temptations in Obidos are not limited to the annual literature festival. A 13th

century architectural Gothic icon, the Church of Santiago, has been rebranded as the most unusual bookshop in this part of the continent. Inspiration enough for many other unique places to buy a book, including an old fire station, a vegetable market, and even a wine cellar. And that's not where the quest for redesigned historic spaces ends. The innovation hits crescendo at the Literary Man, a literary-themed hotel. Fans of print can spend hours lusting after the collection of 65,000 books displayed in the luxe property, and give into indulgence by buying anything that catches fancy.





4 | **BUCHEON,** **South Korea**

Seoul's biggest satellite city Bucheon has an unusual claim to fame. It has a well-organised network of 128 libraries, including miniature versions in markets, offices and even subways. For the residents of Bucheon, a book, a lecture or an educational program is always within five minutes of reach. Book exchange facilities between public and university libraries and special library services for the elderly, differently-abled and visually impaired, ensure that no one is left craving the written word.

This burgeoning thirst for knowledge is credited to the time of Korea's rapid industrialisation, when workers turned to night school to protect their civil rights. Cut to today and Bucheon boasts of being the leading cultural city of Korea, with festivals of international-scale in music, film and animation. Native writers like Mok Il-sin, Yang Gui-ja, Jeong Ji-yong, and American author Pearl S. Buck, who wrote two novels set in Korea, flagged off the creative journey. Decades later, the literary legacy gained new momentum with the new-age Korean poets, Byun Yeongro (Suju) and Chong Chi-yong.

Lovers of books can follow one of the literary trails named after Buck and Ji-yong that cover the prominent city sights. The romantic at heart can check out The Street of Poetry and Flowers. A visit to the Korea Manhwa Museum can give insight into the power of illustrations in storytelling and highlight the role of cartoons and comics in the region's literary tradition.



5 | MELBOURNE, Australia

The second city of Australia has an enduring appeal that extends beyond the boundaries of its sports stadiums. Multicultural and diverse, sophisticated and free-spirited, intellectual and artsy, its lively, modern vibe proudly showcases a quaint Victorian lineage like no other. Melbourne's thriving music scene, world-class museums, legendary street art, lineup of festive events and vibrant nightlife make it as the undisputed cultural capital of Australia.

The highest consumption of

books and the most number of community book clubs than any other city in the country bear testimony to the eternal Melbournian bibliophilia. Homegrown celeb writers like Marcus Clarke, Peter Carey and Helen Garner and treasured events like Melbourne Writers Festival, Digital Writers Festival, and Feminist Writers Festival, add to its flourishing literary character.

Lit fans can pay homage to the celebrated State Library of Victoria, attend a book launch at the

Wheeler Centre and zone out under the octagonal dome of the La Trobe Reading Room decorated with quotes by famous writers. Other recommended must-dos include book browsing at the Saturday market in Fed Square, witnessing poetry readings at the Drunken Poet under a portrait of Oscar Wilde and making a trip to the 'vertical laneway' of the Nicholas Building, where Gregory Roberts penned the famous novel, *Shantaram*. Fantasy peaks at the iconic Cole's Book Arcade, a.k.a Palace of Intellect, while tracking invisible fingerprints of Rudyard Kipling and Mark Twain on the shelves that hold two million books. An inscription on the locally loved cultural institution, Athenaeum Library, defines the moment succinctly—'Pleasure of Words'. 🌟

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