

# Eight Spots for When You Need to Get Away for a Weekend

For either a business trip add-on or your own brief vacation.

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Generally speaking, you need a minimum of three days when visiting a new city. It's just enough time to scout out a favorite restaurant, find the best must-see attractions, pin down a couple of great boutiques, and check out a lesser-visited, local-feeling neighborhood. In my mind, it's the only way to truly get a sense of the destination—to know a place rather than see it.

But there are exceptions. On a recent trip to Africa, I spent only one night in Zambia: I wanted to see Victoria Falls, and there's little else to do in the vicinity if you're not keen on bungee jumping at one of the world's largest crevices. Earlier this year, I had only two days to spend in Zurich before a ski trip, which proved to be plenty of time for this beautiful, immensely walkable, yet diminutive capital. Within a few blocks of a new boutique hotel in the center of town called the Marktgasse is an incredible bakery with a local crowd, a stunningly arranged shop filled with gourmet gift-ables, and a stuck-in-time tavern for traditional fondue.

It didn't take much longer to see the clock tower of St. Peter's, wander down the sweetly cobbled Augustinergasse, and window shop along the watch-lover's Mecca of Bahnhofstrasse, which leads to the city's most famous chocolatier. By the third morning, hopping the train to St. Moritz signaled no lost opportunity.

With that in mind, here are eight easily accessible cities that can be explored meaningfully in as little as a night's stay—all vetted by some of the world's leading travel specialists. Tack them onto a work trip or use them as inspiration for the next free weekend on your calendar.

# Ljubljana



A bird's eye view of Slovenia's capital city.

Photographer: Tuul & Bruno Morandi/Photolibrary RM

Central Europe travel specialist Nathalie Nagy, of ProTravel, ranks Slovenia's capital as a top destination for quick trips, partly because the city is so compact and walkable. "It's an easy, 1.5-hour drive or train ride from Zagreb—close to Austria, the Istrian Peninsula, and Italy," she says, which makes it a sort of "cultural crossroads." Even better, it's characterized by "charming red-tiled roofs, curving narrow streets, lovely Baroque architecture, and whimsical bridges that connect the two sides of the city over the Ljubljanica River," says Nagy.

It's not a city for five-star hotels—not yet, anyway—so stay in Hotel Cubo, the best boutique option. Or book an Airbnb, then organize your itinerary around these exemplary restaurants. Food, after all, is the best way to explore the cultural fusions that makes Slovenia so special.

# Stockholm



The sun falls on Stockholm, a city set across many hilly islands.

Photographer: Bob Krist/Corbis Documentary

Jack Ezon of Ovation Vacations says “Stockholm’s sophisticated music, shopping, art, and museums are overshadowed only by its eclectic nightlife.” It’s true: The city that birthed Spotify has all sorts of quirky bars such as Gondolen, set in a cantilevered space that hovers over the archipelago, and Grill, whose eight rooms are reimaged by interior designers every season.

Be sure to survey the city’s more traditional side during the day: The old city of Gamla Stan is where Nobel prizes are awarded each year, bakeries everywhere peddle a cardamom-infused pastry called kardemummabullar that is like a cinnamon bun on steroids, and the shellfish at Lisa Elmqvist’s stall in the Ostermalms Saluhall market is mind-bogglingly fresh and flavorful.

Make your base the new At Six hotel, which has floor-to-ceiling views of the city and a super-central location; from there, you can stroll down the waterfront to the

Vasamuseet, a museum dedicated to a restored 17th-century ship that's cooler than it sounds.

## Manchester



The Northern Quarter of Manchester is brimming with youthful boutiques. Photographer: Alberto Manuel Urosa Toledano/Moment RM

It's known more for football, but there's so much more to this emerging business hub, says Yaron Yarimi, a bon vivant with experience in Frosch Travel's corporate and leisure divisions. "In two days, you can see the Fletcher Moss botanical garden, the Manchester Cathedral, and lots of museums," he tells Bloomberg, citing dozens of small and manageable cultural institutions within the 45-square-mile city. (Yes, one is dedicated to the U.K.'s football memorabilia, but we'd recommend the newly expanded Whitworth, with its excellent Turner collection and sprawling sculpture gardens.)

Luckily for you, a spate of new and lovely hotels have recently opened in town, including the King Street Townhouse (whose killer rooftop pool overlooks the

spires of Manchester Town Hall) and the residential-feeling Oddfellows on the Park, which occupies a grand Georgian building in leafy Bruntwood Park.

## Panama City



Outdoor dining in Casco Viejo, Panama City.

Photographer: E\_Rojas/iStock Editorial

The conveniently located midpoint of North and South America has emerged as an ideal business trip add-on, says **Ashish Sanghrajka**, president of **Big Five Tours and Expeditions**. But flight access is far from the only draw: This international crossroads “is worth exploring for its cathedral tower, Old Panama Museum, and the old city compound called Casco Viejo, which dates from the late 1600s,” says Sanghrajka.

The tiny Casco Viejo area is indeed where you should spend the bulk of your two-day trip. Stay at the 50-room American Trade Hotel, developed by Ace Hotels, with its can't-miss jazz club run by Panamanian Grammy winner Danilo Perez. Have the concierge book you into a walking tour so you can learn about the meticulous architectural restoration that's brought this neighborhood back from

the brink, then go shopping for Panama hats and kick back over al fresco rounds of mojitos and ceviche at Ego y Narcisco.

## Montreal



Montreal's bustling Vieux Port, with its characteristic streetside cafes.

Photographer: Chris Cheadle/All Canada Photos

It's only an hour from New York by plane, but Montreal feels worlds away with its Franco-American vibes, festival culture, and beautifully preserved Vieux Port. For such a tiny city, Montreal has an outsize food scene. Download the app DINR for last-minute reservations at such tough-to-book spots as Joe Beef, then hightail it to boutique-lined Boulevard St. Laurent, where you'll find everything from all-day wine bars with outdoor seating to the highly photogenic La Diperie, which peddles frozen yogurt cones dipped and rolled in a variety of sweet and savory toppings. (Think dark chocolate and peanut butter magic shells, speckled with pistachios or pretzels.)

Pro tip: Don't scramble for Montreal-style smoked meat sandwiches and bagels until after dinner and drinks. Some of the city's best institutions, such as Jarry

Smoked Meat (which is less touristy than Schwartz's) and St-Viateur Bagel, are open 24/7.

## Bordeaux



The Stone Bridge and the bell tower of the Basilica of St. Michael, in Bordeaux.  
Photographer: DEA / D. STAQUET/De Agostini Editorial

Ezon says this wine capital is one of the most overlooked gems in France, “a miniature Paris, with fabulous markets, museums, and one of the densest concentrations of Michelin-stars in the world.” Add the vineyards, easy train access, and the city’s sheer walkability, and you’ll wonder why it took you so long to weekend here.

Check into La Grande Maison, a six-room manse in the middle of town that’s run by one of the area’s top winemakers, Bernard Magrez. There, you can hit on every one of Bordeaux’s draws without stepping out the front door: wine tasting and blending workshops, a two-Michelin-starred restaurant by Pierre Gagnaire, and access to a leading art collection. But leave you should: The hotel can send you out in a gleaming wooden boat to harvest and taste oysters in the Arcachon Basin, you

can helicopter out to the area's best wine estates, or you might simply stroll the magnificent Place de la Bourse, with its mirror-like reflecting pool.

## Dresden



An outdoor market in Dresden, where locals gather seasonally for live music and local foods.

Photographer: NurPhoto/NurPhoto

Did you know Dresden is known as the Florence of the North? According to Nagy, that's one way to sum up its beauty; she loves this 800-year-old city on the Elbe River for its meticulously rehabbed Saxon architecture (reconstructed after World War II) and vibrant cultural offerings.

Many of Dresden's historic monuments have been given new life as part of a museum complex that resembles the Smithsonian. The Zwinger is hailed for its beautiful Vermeers and a curious collection of historical scientific instruments while the Schloss is a literal gold mine for 18th century jewelry and design; lovers of history should make a bee line to the architecturally stunning military museum, which is a little farther afield. As long as you pick and choose exhibits, it's realistic



to see two of them—and to walk the city’s picturesque old center—in a single day. Plus, says Nagy, the city makes a perfect stopover between Berlin and Prague.

## San Miguel de Allende



The Parroquia De San Miguel Archangel Church tower, seen behind strings of Day of the Dead banners.

Photographer: Rob Tilley/Corbis Documentary

This tiny expat haven, smack in the middle of Mexico, has been rapidly gaining buzz as a must-visit getaway: It hosted the finale of *Top Chef* in 2015 and was recently named the best city in the world by *Travel + Leisure*. Ezon says that partly reflects how easy it is to get there from the Midwest and the West Coast and partly due to its overwhelmingly Mexican charm. “Just strolling the streets throws you back to a Colonial-era yesteryear,” he says, describing such iconic sights as the Parroquia de San Miguel Arcangel church, the locals with wide-brimmed hats and guitars slung over their shoulders, and the riotously colorful streetscapes.

Here, vacation mode sets in quickly—and you don’t need much time to reap the benefits. Stick to a loose agenda of gallery hopping and taco crawling around the Centro Historico (make this excellent list your guide), leaving ample time to lounge

around your hotel. The landscaped pool deck at the Rosewood and the spa at the Hotel Matilda are reasons enough to travel.