

ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

AD's Top 5 Design Destinations for December

Head to these locales around the world for the best in art, architecture, and design

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After a tumultuous election season, we wouldn't blame you for wanting to get away from it all with a long vacation. After all, the world is much larger than these 50 states, and 2016 has seen plenty of exciting developments in the international cultural landscape. This December take some time to explore one of the year's hottest destinations you haven't had a chance to visit yet, like Havana. Ever since Obama restored diplomatic relations with [Cuba](#), everyone's been talking about this evocative island with its fascinating history, vibrant culture, and alluring architecture. For a restorative seaside getaway with a splash of art, consider a weekend in St. Petersburg on Florida's Gulf Coast as an alternative to the craziness of Miami during Art Basel. [Buenos Aires](#) is heating up—literally and figuratively—with warm weather, a contemporary dance festival, and unforgettable New Year's Eve celebrations. For a more traditional holiday season, jet over to Berlin, which has 60 Christmas markets and wild end-of-year raves. Or seize the moment

to visit 2016's European Capital of Culture, San Sebastián, and indulge in some of the world's best cuisine.

Photo: Jason Wells/Getty Images

Havana, Cuba

There's been plenty of buzz about this long-inaccessible Caribbean island stuck in time. While it might take some years for the country's infrastructure and accommodations to catch up to the standards sophisticated travelers expect, adventurous types can and should go now to see Havana's [colorful buildings](#), rich culture, and historic landmarks. It's easier than ever, as [JetBlue now has regular routes](#) to Havana. For now Airbnb is the way to go—you can [rent gorgeous apartments](#) full of ornate tiles, antiques, and sumptuous textiles, though the arrival of luxury hotels is on the horizon.

Photo: Arpad Benedek/Getty Images



St. Petersburg, Florida

If you're over the whole Art Basel scene in Miami, consider a trip to St. Petersburg for sun and sand with a dash of culture. This small city has been making big strides in the arts, with a commission of 30 [street art murals](#) downtown, a recent expansion of the Chihuly Collection at the Morean Arts Center, and an exhibit of work by [Frida Kahlo at the Dalí Museum](#), which opens on December 17. The Mexican painter's work is [having a renaissance](#) lately, with two major exhibitions and a book. If you go, bed down at the 18-room [Birchwood Inn](#) inside a landmarked Spanish Mission-style building or the beach-chic [Postcard Inn](#), which just received a face-lift.

Photo: Ralf Hettler/Getty Images

Buenos Aires

South American summer means December is high season in Buenos Aires, so plan ahead if you want to get into the [best hotels](#). The [Festival de Danza Contemporánea](#) is one reason to go, though the whole city comes alive with revelers celebrating the holidays. Fans of Belle Époque opulence should stay at the [Alvear Palace Hotel](#), which has just debuted 15 new suites, a pool, and rooftop bar. For tasteful contemporary style, the [Park Hyatt Palacio Duhau](#)—part of which is housed in a historic mansion in Recoleta—can't be beat. Or stay at the Philippe Starck-designed [Faena Hotel](#), which will host an epic New Year's Eve Surrealist Ball with an open bar, buffet supper, and live entertainment.

Photo: bluejayphoto/Getty Images

Berlin

If you want to experience the holidays in Europe, there are plenty of options, but cosmopolitan [Berlin](#) has a winning combination of traditional Christmas markets and wild New Year's Eve bashes. Of the city's 60 Christmas markets, [Weihnachtszauber on the Gendarmenmarkt](#) is one of the best, with handmade crafts, gourmet specialties, acrobats, jugglers, and fire artists. When you tire of old-fashioned handicrafts, check out the city's forward-thinking boutiques, like Andreas Murkudis and SOTO. Savvy travelers should stay at the [Hotel de Rome, a Rocco Forte Hotel](#) in a former bank that serves a special Christmas menu and mulled wine on the rooftop terrace or the exclusive [Soho House Berlin](#) with its clubby bar and Cowshed spa.

Photo: Peeter Viisimaa/Getty Images

San Sebastián, Spain

If you haven't been yet, now is as good a time as any to visit San Sebastián, the 2016 European Capital of Culture. Celebrated for its [glittering beaches](#), rich history, and outstanding cuisine, the Basque Country's capital city has long drawn pilgrims as a stop on the northern route of the Camino de Santiago. Today's travelers will find a disproportionate number of the world's best restaurants, from the gastro-temple [Mugaritz](#) to the humble [Ganbara](#), which serves a fantastic array of pintxos with local txakoli wine. Be sure to check out the exhibit "A Singular Modernity" at the [San Telmo Museoa](#), and consider a day trip to Bilbao to see the [Francis Bacon exhibit](#) on view at the Guggenheim Bilbao until January 8.

