



# What's a 'Retirementmoon'? Let These Post-Work Adventurers Tell You



When work responsibilities end, many retirees plan a great escape. A recent online poll by MassMutual reported that travel is the top objective of Americans approaching retirement: Seventy-six percent of respondents said that's what they most look forward to. The travel industry has even coined a term for that first big post-work trip: the "retirementmoon." For many, it's more than just a getaway; it's a long-awaited adventure, a reward and sometimes even a dream decades in the making. Looking for inspiration? Check out these travel tales from recent retirees.

# A fishing expedition

*Five days in the Kenai Peninsula, Alaska*



**Don Atkins, 61, Kirkland, Washington**

**Retired: 2021, medical sales**

I got hooked on fishing as a 12-year-old kid, even though I didn't catch anything during my first time out. After a 40-minute battle, I had nearly caught a 60-pound salmon, but the massive fish snapped the pole. I never forgot the thrill of hooking a fish.

I traveled to Alaska for work for years and always wanted to go fishing there. When I retired, I went fly-fishing with a bunch of guys. I caught 150 pounds of fish! I'm not exaggerating when I say that I caught a fish every 15 minutes. I felt like a kid again.

The Kenai is stunning. It's an hour's drive into the wilderness. You get to see grizzly bears and moose just walking around. One of the guides told us that a grizzly was above us on a bluff 30 yards away. We got out of there, and that guide was right on the money. I took a photo of the bear from the boat, and I didn't even use a telephoto lens.



# Where Dad fought

*A 65-day trip through Europe*



**Mary Terkelsen, 74, Clovis, California**

**Retired: 2008, teacher**

It had always been a dream to retrace my dad's World War II steps in Italy. We were also interested in visiting my husband Gary's relatives in Denmark and seeing friends in [Norway](#). We also decided to visit as many countries in between as we could.

The highlight was when we arrived in Monzuno, Italy. It's the village where a bomb hit just feet from my dad and where he earned his [Purple Heart](#). We walked around the village, and a man directed us to the mayor's office, where they could speak English. I told them my dad's story. The office workers were coming up to me and thanking me for my dad's service. It brought tears to my eyes. One young woman said, "Your dad's service helped rescue our parents and grandparents from the Nazis." The mayor's wife took us to her parents' home, where we had dinner. We found out that the house had been a Nazi headquarters, and then it became the American headquarters when they got the Nazis out. So we were literally walking in my father's footsteps.



# A bluegrass quest

*An eight-day road trip to Nashville*



**Stephen Kranz, 67, Westminster, Maryland**

**Retired: 2023, attorney**

I was introduced to bluegrass at a club while in college at Temple University in Philadelphia and have been hooked ever since. It's the first-person storytelling, the instrumentation, the harmonies. It's just good, well-written songs. I wanted to experience it in a city famous for live music.

So my wife, Michelle, and I climbed into our Dodge Durango and drove about 1,500 miles through five states to Nashville.

On our trip, one of the first stops was the Carter Family Fold in Virginia to see bluegrass act Russell Moore & Illrd Tyme Out. We had seen them before, but what was unusual here was that people streamed out of the stands and did flatfoot dancing.

In Nashville we caught Dailey & Vincent. We'd seen them at bluegrass festivals, but to watch them perform at the [Grand Ole Opry](#) was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. The acoustics in that place were just fabulous.

# A Jet Ski adventure

*Seven days from British Columbia to Juneau, Alaska*



**Don Swartz, 76, Bakersfield, California**

**Retired: 2016, district sales manager**

When I fell into the water at the start of a 650-mile Jet Ski trip to Juneau, I said to my adventure guide, "Take a picture!" I was 70, with bad knees, and was embarking on an excursion that not many people have experienced. I'm also [diabetic](#), but I love adventure and enjoy making memories.

We traveled the 650 miles in seven days. That part of Alaska is a special place. I was [so close to whales](#) that I could smell their breath as they sprayed us. It smells like krill! And then there was LeConte Glacier, which is stunning. I'll never forget navigating around the ice and just staring at the waterfalls.

It would be great to do the trip again, but my wife says my life insurance has to be paid up first.



# A women-only trip

10 days by train to Prague, Vienna and Budapest, Hungary



**Carolyn Cryan, 66, Chatham, Massachusetts**

**Retired: 2024, health care executive**

When I had gone on trips before, often my boss would ask me, “Would you mind just dialing in to this conference call?” I always felt obligated to check my email, check my phone. It’s such a difference when you’re retired.

When I was in Prague, sitting at a sidewalk café with a latte and a pastry, I had this moment of *You’re in Prague. You’re going to Vienna tomorrow. You sold your house. You retired from your job. It doesn’t get any better than this.* It had always been hard for me to relax, and this was the first trip where I really felt, truly, that I could relax. It was this quiet moment with myself, the type of moment that had been so few and far between in my life.

The trip was a Girls’ Guide to the World tour. What’s wonderful about these women-only tours is that most people who travel are solo. It’s not easy to make friends at 66, but you’re there to meet other people. And you’re there to talk to the captain on the boat, or you’re there to talk to the chef. It makes me just appreciate life so much more.

# An ancestral journey



*10 days in Spain*

**Rose Mendoza, 66, Georgetown, Texas**

**Retired: 2023, corporate marketer**

My family is from Guadalajara, Mexico. I have always identified as Mexican American. However, I took a DNA test and was stunned to discover I am 70 percent Spanish. To be slapped with the knowledge that my DNA comes from a different continent was shocking. So, with retirement on the horizon, I decided that was the perfect time to [visit my motherland](#) with my sister.

Granada was the first town where I saw ladies who looked like my mother. We went to see a flamenco show. A lady came out playing castanets and dancing. She looked identical to our mother. My sister and I were blown away.

But when I got to Seville, I saw so many women with the same body type, hair, eye and skin color as mine. I felt a huge sense of pride seeing all these beautiful women who were my tribe.

The saying *la cultura cura* basically means: Being in touch with your heritage and culture heals the soul. That was my mindset when I went on this trip, to cure my soul with my culture. And the trip did that for me.



# Around the world



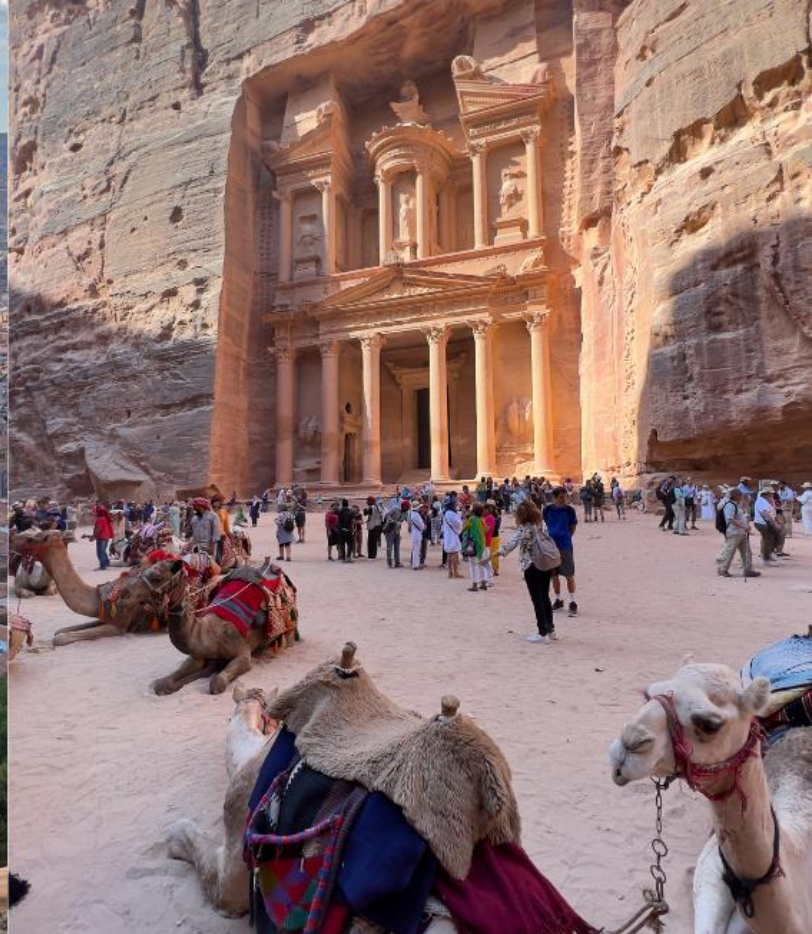
## Retired: 2020, Hollywood TV director

I retired when the pandemic started. My wife, Becky, and I had our hearts set on a post-retirement trip around the world. But you couldn't travel then. In 2022, Becky got sick and passed away. The whole thing was very sudden and shocking.

Shortly after, I got a brochure about an around-the-world trip: 24 days, to 12 countries, on a private jet. It seemed to be the perfect thing to fill my heart at that moment. They had one spot available, so I took it.

We flew from Washington, D.C., to [Machu Picchu](#), to Easter Island and then to [Fiji](#) and the Great Barrier Reef. From there we went to India and saw the Taj Mahal. Next was [Angkor Wat](#), Kathmandu in Nepal, Bhutan and the Serengeti for two days of safaris. From there we flew to Jordan for Petra, then to Marrakech, Morocco.

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Being in the film and TV business, I spent a lot of time on location scouts during my career. In a way, this was like that. As I was traveling, I was on a location scout to know where I wanted to revisit.

Becky and I had always traveled a lot together, and I felt like I had her with me the whole time. The first meal on the plane included a caviar appetizer, something Becky had loved. I took a photo of the plate and texted it to my daughters. And those gentle reminders continued throughout the trip with different foods and also museums I know she would have loved. Though I was alone, it was a way to keep her with me.



## Music and merriment



### *Three weeks in London*

**Jennifer Rumage, 56, Louisville, Kentucky**

**Retired: 2024, teacher**

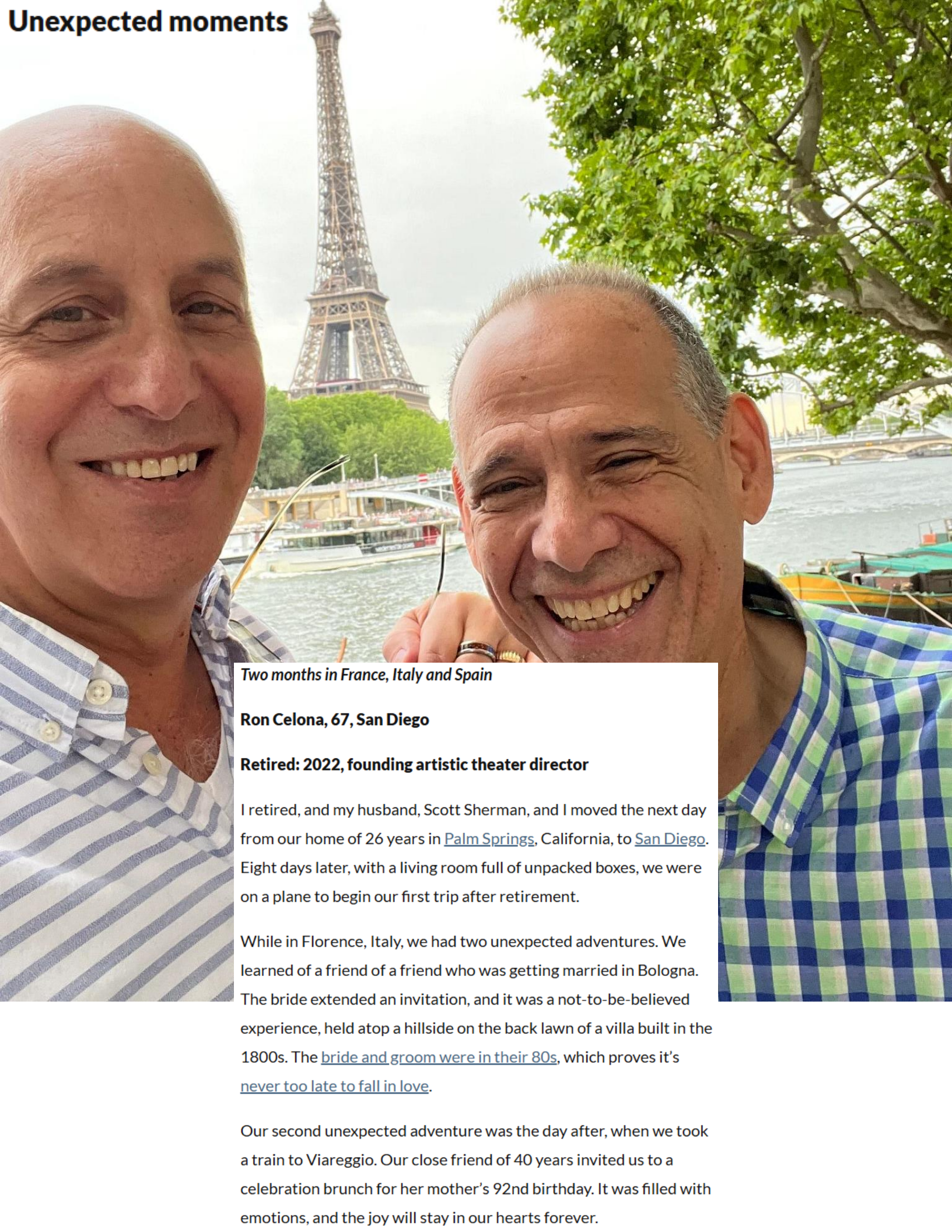
I was ready to celebrate my retirement by going to England. My original plan was to book a one-week vacation to London to see Pearl Jam last summer, but then I ended up planning a longer trip because a friend of a friend offered me a free room in Slough, 24 miles outside London.

Once there, imagine my disappointment when the Pearl Jam show was canceled because of singer Eddie Vedder falling ill. However, I still got to see another musical act: AC/DC.

It was at Wembley Stadium. Iconic. There are posters on the wall of Freddie Mercury from Live Aid. Wembley Stadium has been rebuilt since, but it's still a huge place. It's probably the biggest stadium I've ever been in. A man and a young girl from northern England were sitting next to me. She was 20 years old, and he was, like, my age. It was her dad. She had never seen AC/DC. They were loving it.



# Unexpected moments



**Two months in France, Italy and Spain**

**Ron Celona, 67, San Diego**

**Retired: 2022, founding artistic theater director**

I retired, and my husband, Scott Sherman, and I moved the next day from our home of 26 years in [Palm Springs](#), California, to [San Diego](#). Eight days later, with a living room full of unpacked boxes, we were on a plane to begin our first trip after retirement.

While in Florence, Italy, we had two unexpected adventures. We learned of a friend of a friend who was getting married in Bologna. The bride extended an invitation, and it was a not-to-be-believed experience, held atop a hillside on the back lawn of a villa built in the 1800s. The [bride and groom were in their 80s](#), which proves it's [never too late to fall in love](#).

Our second unexpected adventure was the day after, when we took a train to Viareggio. Our close friend of 40 years invited us to a celebration brunch for her mother's 92nd birthday. It was filled with emotions, and the joy will stay in our hearts forever.



# A motorcycle road trip



**Gary Windham, 72, Eldersburg, Maryland**

**Retired: 2016, U.S. Department of Defense employee**

I flew to Dallas to pick up a motorcycle I'd bought earlier that year. I planned to ride it back home, some 1,800 miles. I figured I might as well take advantage and do a reunion tour of sorts. I had family in Houston and friends in Auburn, Alabama, and more friends up in Tennessee.

Visiting my wife's sister and her husband in Houston was a precious stop for me. As it turns out, my brother-in-law was becoming ill. That was my last chance to spend some time with him.

I'd been riding large motorcycles for a good 10 years, but I'd only ever been on one- or two-day trips. I wasn't sure I could handle long days of riding by myself. I did find ways to keep myself entertained. One was to "dance," so to speak: shifting my weight around on the bike, or standing up on my foot pegs in time to the music on my iPod. I probably got some odd looks.

I'd say the best thing about my trip was having to depend on myself, being alone for days at a time.



# Tips for taking a retirement moon

**Forget what other people think.** “Seriously, this trip is for you, not your kids, your neighbor or whoever said, ‘Oh, but wouldn’t you rather go somewhere warm and easy?’ ” says Georgia Fowkes, an adviser with Altezza Travel. “If you’ve always dreamed of visiting the post-Soviet republics or chasing snow leopards, go do that.”

**Extend your stay.** “Retirement means there’s no rush. [Spend more time in one place](#) so you can really immerse yourself in the local culture and savor each day,” says Leigh Barnes, president of the Americas at Intrepid Travel.

**Travel during “shoulder” season.** “Take advantage of the flexibility that comes with retirement,” Barnes says. “The time just before or after peak season means fewer crowds, lower prices and still great weather.”

**Don’t limit your adventure.** “We recently had a 77-year-old experience Everest Base Camp with us. Another one of our customers is 66 and started traveling later in life, and now has more than 70 countries under her belt. There’s always room to push boundaries,” says Barnes.



**Choose tour companies wisely.** “Look for people who have actual [experience supporting older travelers](#),” Fowkes says. “That’s what makes the difference between a hard trip and a deeply joyful one.” —  
*Amy Alipio*

## Top retirement destinations

*Where travel agents say older people are heading*

### The Riviera Maya, Mexico

Balmy weather and a relaxed vibe put the Yucatán Peninsula’s eastern coast at the top of many retirees’ wish lists. Nadia Sparkle, owner of Travel With Sparkle, says older visitors are drawn to the Mayan ruins at Tulum. Another attraction: swimming in one of the peninsula’s many cenotes (freshwater- and saltwater-filled sinkholes and caves).

### Japan

Interest in travel here is “insane,” says Catherine Heald, CEO of tour company **Remote Lands**. “A lot of it is word of mouth. It has snowballed into this frenzy.” Retired travelers can enjoy exploring gems beyond Tokyo and Kyoto, such as Kanazawa for samurai-era history, Beppu for [geothermal springs](#), and the Iya Valley for hiking trails.



## European canal cruising

[River and ocean cruising](#) continue to be popular, but retired travelers are increasingly discovering barge-cruising along Europe's canals and smaller rivers. This type of vacation embraces [slow travel](#) (vessels meander at 3 to 4 mph) but doesn't skimp on plush accommodations and active on-land experiences like biking and hiking. One of the most sought-after itineraries covers the Burgundy wine region.

## The Canadian Rockies

The stunning sights of [Banff](#), Lake Louise and Jasper in the province of Alberta attract an increasing number of nature-loving retirees. In summer, paddle the turquoise waters of Lake Louise in a canoe. In winter, hike Grotto Canyon near Canmore, "an ice walk that winds past rock formations and frozen waterfalls," says Stacey Ludlow, a product manager at tour company Kensington. "It's a peaceful, invigorating way to experience beauty while reflecting on life's next adventure."



## **The Amalfi Coast**

This seaside in southern Italy consistently tops wish lists. “Can you blame anyone? It’s the kind of place that takes your breath away,” says Doni Belau, CEO of Girls’ Guide to the World. Take to the water in a boat or [kayak](#) for the most spectacular views of the storied villages that line the coast.

## **South Africa**

“The safari experience is a big draw” for retirees, says Katie Lee, an adviser with Audley Travel. Other attractions include the vibrant urban centers Cape Town and Johannesburg, and the vineyards of Franschhoek and Stellenbosch. —*Amy Alipio*