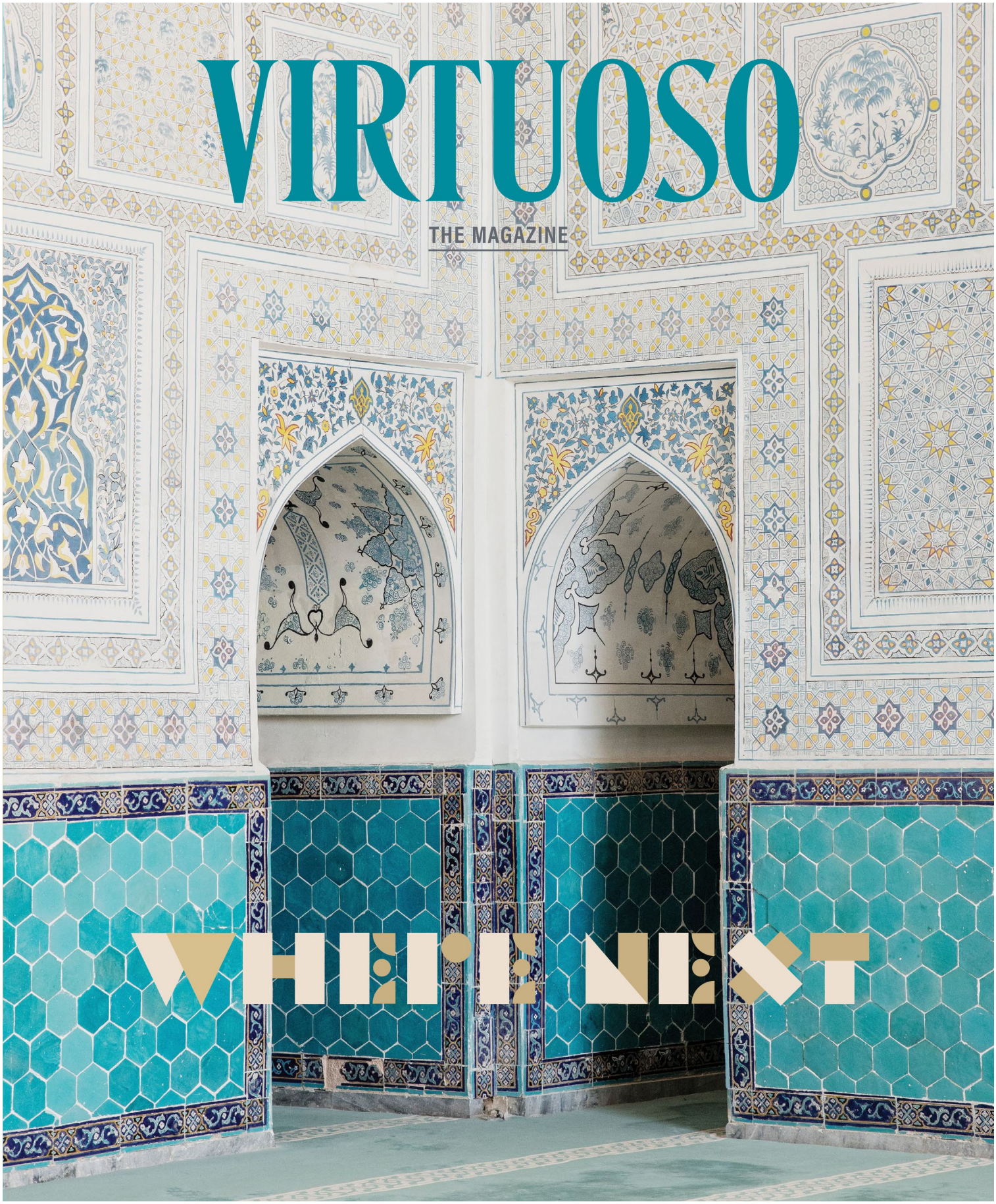
VIRTUOSO

THE MAGAZINE



WHERE NEXT



Faena New York's gilded Living Room bar.

NIKOLAS KOENIG

TOP OF THE PODIUM

THE YEAR'S BEST TRAVEL COMPANIES BROUGHT HOME GOLD AT VIRTUOSO TRAVEL WEEK IN LAS VEGAS.

BY JEN ROSE SMITH

Every year, the world's largest luxury-travel gathering culminates in a celebration of the companies taking travel to new heights. Virtuoso Award winners, as chosen by Virtuoso's global network of travel advisors, are announced – and summarily feted – during Virtuoso Travel Week's final-evening gala. The newcomers and returning champions in the 2026 winner's circle have one thing in common: They've risen to the top of an already elite pool, truly travel's best.


High-drama Dubrovnik

Allianz Partners has newly accelerated claims processing, as well as in-app support to schedule doctor visits across 100 countries.

Cruises

Expedition Cruise

National Geographic-Lindblad Expeditions, the pioneering cruise line in the Galápagos, continues to push boundaries. In 2027, a 16-night journey through the archipelago calls on remote Genovesa, and new 10- and 15-night voyages will reach French Polynesian atolls with wayfinding help from Pwo master navigator Tua Pittman.

Ocean Luxury Cruise

Following this year's launch of the 922-passenger *Explora III*, **Explora Journeys** inaugurates its first collection of Asian itineraries in 2027 – bringing its onboard wellness programming (including a fitness regime designed by tennis star Jannik Sinner) to ports from Busan to Tokyo.

Contemporary & Premium Ocean Cruise

Oceania Sonata's 13-night, Rome-to-Trieste voyage next August premieres both the 1,390-passenger ship and **Oceania Cruises'** spacious new Sonata Class. As travelers warm to the Med's year-round appeal, 2027 sees the line's first winter season there.

River Cruise and Specialty Travel – Cruise

This year's double award winner, **AmaWaterways**, will launch the 76-passenger Nile boat *AmaNubia* in November 2026 for 11-night sailings round-trip from Cairo, with interiors inspired by the artistry of ancient Egypt. Next April finds the new 196-passenger *AmaRudi* on its first Danube voyage, from Vilshofen, Germany, to Budapest, overnighting in Strasbourg along the way.

Small-Ship Cruise

With nimble vessels carrying 40 or fewer travelers into some of the world's most remote ecosystems, **Aqua Expeditions** shows how far thinking small can go. Pristine dive sites across south Raja Ampat will showcase the philosophy on a debut six-night sailing aboard the 30-passenger *Aqua Blu* in December, and one-to-one crew-to-guest ratios ensure cozy doesn't compromise comfort.

Global Stewardship

Protecting the Planet

More than 100 steel "reef stars" planted around Tanzania's Mnemba Island are footholds where coral fragments grow into thriving colonies, a project **andBeyond** developed in partnership with Oceans Without Borders. Travelers on a nine-day beach-and-safari getaway can plant their own reef-regenerating stars.

Celebrating Culture

Kazakh eagle hunters occasionally stop by to share tradecraft and stories with each other – and travelers – at Mongolia's Eagle Hunter Cultural Center, whose architecture nods to the steppe's traditional *ger* tents. Guests on **Nomadic Expeditions'** seven-day journeys to October's Golden Eagle Festival visit the cultural center, which debuted in 2024, before attending opening ceremonies.

Supporting Local Economies

Wilderness partnered with a Botswana nonprofit to develop the Wildlife Friendly certification for beef, buoying agrarian livelihoods on Okavango Delta floodplains and demonstrating the company's knack for sustainable innovation. While visiting its Vumbura Plains Camp on an eight-day Botswana wellness safari, travelers can add a helicopter flight to meet participating farmers in Eretsha village.

Destination Stewardship

Responsible-growth initiatives supported by the **Dubrovnik Tourist Board** include capping cruise ship arrivals and easing congestion in a destination that's seen the effects of overtourism firsthand, pointing the way for cities elevating rich experiences – and locals' well-being – over volume.

Specialty Travel

Adventure

Family-owned **Backroads'** hike- and bike-loving fans have access to dozens of fresh offerings for 2027. Walks along



lodge-lined ancient paths take travelers into Mallorca's Serra de Tramuntana; multigenerational groups will appreciate Michigan beach- and island-hopping.

Culinary

The seventeenth-century Tuscan villa housing **Il Falconiere Relais & Spa** invites travelers to linger over Michelin-starred menus honoring local ingredients such as heritage Chianina beef or hand-shaped *pici* pasta. Pairings come courtesy of the 31-room property's on-site Baracchi Winery.

Family & Celebration

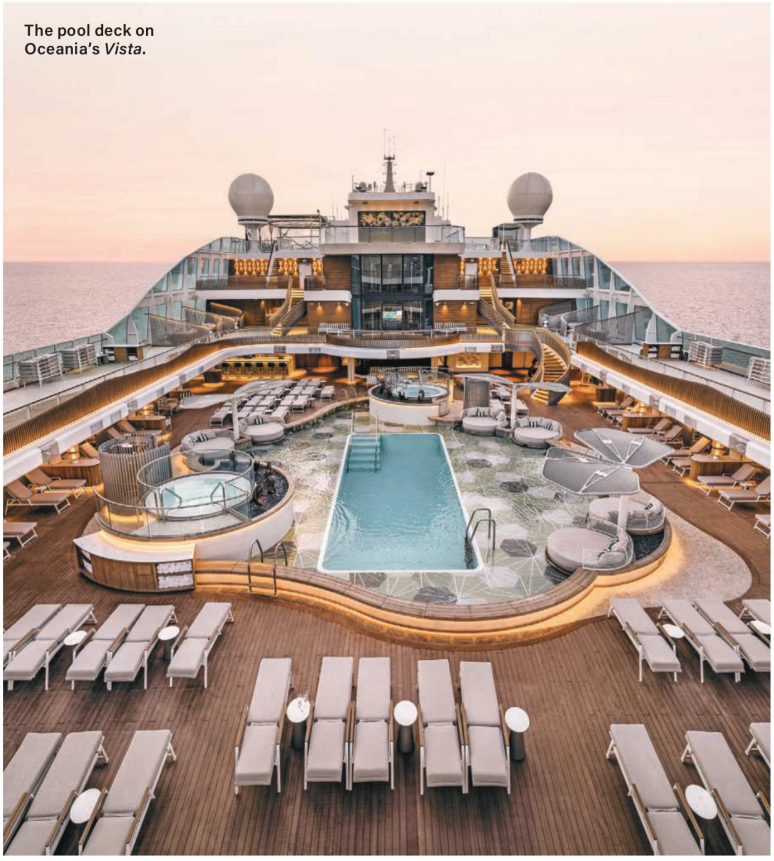
Built to find common ground for 8- and 80-year-olds, private journeys from **Family Twist** cinch loved ones closer. Next year's new Italian trips prove the point: Travelers might craft their own marionettes in Sicily or follow a truffle-hunting dog through Puglia's forests.

Sustainability & Ultraluxe

Last year's record-breaking turtle nesting season benchmarks the impact of long-standing biodiversity commitments at **The Brando**, the 36-room resort that's equal parts research hub and private French Polynesia paradise. Naturalist guides bring travelers inside conservation projects or alongside migrating humpbacks.

Wellness

Doubling down on rejuvenating stays, the 95-room **Chenot Palace Weggis** debuted a physician-supported, four-day body insights and optimization program – healing science surely helped by the resort's Lake Lucerne and Mount Rigi views.



The pool deck on Oceania's *Vista*.

NICK TORTAJADA