

20 Best Trips of 2011

Looking for an out-of-the-ordinary destination for your next vacation? Check out these 20 top trips, handpicked by *National Geographic Traveler* editors as the best of 2011. Where do you want to go this year?

Share your travel plans—real or ideal—below.



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Considered an oasis of peace and stability in a historically volatile region, the semi-autonomous Kurdistan region in northeastern Iraq is drawing a growing stream of curious Western visitors to its ancient cities, snowcapped mountains, and bustling bazaars. The 2010 expansion of Erbil International Airport—located in the provincial capital and main commercial center—has improved access to the region and helped fuel tourist infrastructure development. Recent advances include construction of several new luxury and business hotels and additional escorted small group tours focused on Kurdish ethnic heritage and historic sites.

Experienced guides such as Hinterland Travel and Kurdistan Adventures lead 8- to 16-day cultural tours.

Highlights include Erbil's historic citadel and Grand Mosque, the ruins of Salahaddin's Fortress in Shaqlawa, and the Jarmo Neolithic village archaeological site (7,000 B.C.) located in the foothills of the Zagros Mountains. Some itineraries include excursions into Kurdish ethnic regions in eastern Turkey and northwestern Iraq.

Pictured here: Dalal Bridge in Zakho, Iraq

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