

# Gem Junket

Trips come and go, but a sparkly souvenir can make your travels last forever

By Deborah Abrams Kaplan

**DIAMONDS MAY BE** a girl's best friend — if you agree with Marilyn Monroe, that is — but there's plenty of room in the jewelry box for some other pals too. Gemstones and jewelry are great friends that are collected over a lifetime, often as souvenirs from places we've visited. When you see a new destination through a jeweler's loupe, your sparkly chums may help unearth the story of a city's natural resources, commerce, and culture.

**1 Puerto Plata:** The idea of wearing resin-covered bugs as jewelry doesn't sound glamorous, until you realize that this resin is amber, and that the bugs are 25 million years old. Though the beaches are a major draw in this Dominican town, it's worth taking a few hours to stroll through the town center. Visit the Amber Museum at Calle Duarte 61 and see how real amber floats on salt water and becomes fluorescent under UV light. Amber is formed when resin drips from trees like the now extinct *Hymenaea protera*, encasing objects like insects, small lizards, seeds, and plants in its stickiness. As both a gemstone and fossil, this time capsule for paleontologists also makes a lovely accessory for any black-tie affair. The museum's three gift shops should satisfy any amber urges. [ambermuseum.com](http://ambermuseum.com)

**2 Amsterdam:** There's truth to the phrase "diamond in the rough." Rough diamonds, looking like simple pebbles,

bear little resemblance to the finely cut, reflective jewels that sparkle on ring fingers. Diamond miners process about 250 tons of rock for each one-carat polished diamond, crystallized from pure carbon under intense heat and pressure beneath the earth's crust.



Although diamonds aren't a natural resource of the Netherlands, starting in the late 17th century, Amsterdam became the center of the diamond-cutting industry. Thanks to the country's religious tolerance, Sephardic Jews flocked to the Netherlands, bringing their diamond-cutting skills. The industry declined in 1930s as the Great Depression

affected Europe, but visitors can still view history in the grand redbrick Boas Diamond Factory. Built in 1879, the building is now home to Gassan Diamonds, whose free tours allow visitors to see the diamond-cutting process. The tour ends, of course, in the factory's store. Coster Diamonds and Amsterdam Diamond Center also offer free tours. [gassandiamonds.com](http://gassandiamonds.com); [costerdiamonds.com](http://costerdiamonds.com); [amsterdamdiamondcenter.nl](http://amsterdamdiamondcenter.nl)

**3 Delhi and Mumbai:** Up until the 18th century, diamonds were exclusively mined in India. And Mumbai is now the world's largest diamond-cutting center, cutting and polishing 90 percent of all diamonds. But even in a country that's home to a million diamond workers and 3,000 diamond polishing companies, diamonds are by no means the only jewels of interest. From birth, many women in India collect jewelry, including gold, silver, filigree, precious stones, enamel, shell, and sandalwood bead baubles, for dowries. While the dowry system is slowly disappearing, the jewelry collecting is not — it's still pursued for security, status, and investment. Most of India's jewelry stores are small family stores. Look for shops in Mumbai's Zaveri Bazaar, which has hundreds of stores in close proximity, including the upscale Tribhovandas Bhimji Zaveri. In Delhi, shop for traditional or

## GO TO TOWN

modern jewelry at the block-long flagship store of Hazoorilal Jewelers, in South Delhi's Greater Kailash neighborhood [hazoorilal.com](http://hazoorilal.com).

**4 Tokyo:** Visiting a new destination is a good excuse to get some culture, especially if that includes cultured pearls. While the oldest naturally produced pearls go back thousands of years, cultivated pearls came to the masses in the early 1900s, when Kokichi Mikimoto started growing pearls commercially from Akoya oysters in Japan. During the cultivation process, growers implant a shell bead into a live oyster. The pearly nacre forms in layers for 10–18 months before harvesting. While some pearl cultivation still takes place in Japan, the country is now more involved in processing and marketing pearls grown elsewhere, and the bulk of Akoya pearls are now grown in China. To sample the best pearls, visit Tokyo's Mikimoto Ginza 2 store at 2-4-12 Ginza. Designed by Toyo Ito, the 10-story pink building, with its irregularly shaped windows, is worth a stop for the architecture alone.

**5 Tucson:** If you need one more reason to visit Tucson in winter, the largest annual gem and mineral showcase in the United States takes place there February 2–17, 2008. About 55,000 gem seekers descend on Tucson each year, attending nearly 50 gem shows during

the two weeks. While some shows are exclusive to wholesalers (business licenses in hand), the public is welcome at others to shop for diamonds, colored gemstones, African art, Swarovski crystals, and more. With 250 vendors under one roof, the main event is the Tucson Gem & Mineral Show, February 14–17. Visitors can view gem and fossil displays from museums like the Smithsonian Institution and check out free lectures on topics ranging from Mars mineralogy to Australian opal mining.

**6 Copenhagen:** Travelers searching for elegant silver designs make a beeline for Copenhagen. The Danish


in addition to Jensen, at Danish Silver. [georgjensen.com](http://georgjensen.com); [danishsilver.com](http://danishsilver.com)

**7 Bogotá:** With apologies to L. Frank Baum, the Emerald City is not Oz, it's Bogotá, Columbia, the urban trade hub located not far from the mines that produce 60 percent of the world's emeralds. Columbian emeralds, especially those from the Muzo mine near Bogotá, are known for their deep color. Though beautiful, emeralds are usually flawed. Enhancements using oil or synthetic polymers to fill and seal cracks are not only accepted, but expected. When buying an emerald, be sure to ask how the emerald was treated. Along Avenida Jimenez, in Bogotá's emerald district,

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silver industry began to boom in the late 19th century, thanks in large part to silversmith Georg Jensen. Jensen's first love was sculpting, but failing to make a living at that, he dedicated his skills to designing silver objects — first jewelry, then hollowware and flatware. Although Jensen died in 1935, the namesake company still sells new and restored silver pieces in 12 countries. Check out pieces from one of Georg Jensen's Copenhagen stores, and see work from other silversmiths,

avoid the street-based hawkers pulling emeralds out of small envelopes. Head instead to the jewelry stores providing certificates of authenticity. 

*After writing this story, Deborah Abrams Kaplan decided that her kids' 529 plan could wait. She's now the proud owner of several new pieces of jewelry.*

**Getting There:** All the destinations covered in "Go to Town" can be reached by flying Continental Airlines. To book your vacation, visit [Continental Airlines Vacations at covacations.com](http://ContinentalAirlinesVacations.com).

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