

Whether it's their more budget-friendly appeal, the lack of crowds, or the feeling of discovering a hidden gem, the trend for "destination dupes" is still going strong

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# Destination Dupes

Officially speaking, the word "dupe" has a negative connotation. It's defined as being a counterfeit – a copy that's made to trick or deceive others into thinking it's the real deal, when it is, in fact, a cheaper (and typically lower-quality) imitation of the original. Years ago, partaking in the purchase or seeking of dupes was seen as something shameful – dishonest, immoral, and unscrupulous.

Yet nowadays, with the ever-increasing cost of living, high interest rates, inflation, and general economic strain leading to tightened wallets – not to mention a changing societal perception of the value of a high-end brand, where people are often paying for a label as much as they are the make and quality – dupes haven't just become acceptable; they've become cool.

ABOVE: A seaside view of Sarande, a town on the Albanian Riviera

Typically associated with savvy consumers that wish to empower themselves by going against the grain of an increasingly image-conscious world, Gen Z – and millennials – have embraced the concept of dupes. And older generations have been only too happy to follow suit, finding joy in more affordable – yet high-quality – alternatives for everything from beauty products to fashion items.

While questions of ethics, such as copyright infringement, or the boundaries around ownership of intellectual property are still heavily under debate, the market for dupes continues to grow from strength to strength – and in the past couple of years, it has made its way to the travel industry with quite a splash.

Some believe that it was 2020's COVID-19 pandemic that first sparked a wider appreciation of destination

dupes. With so many people stuck at home and unable to travel to places further afield during their "lockdown seasons", travellers across the globe were forced to explore options either closer to home, or that they may not have previously considered prior to changing travel restrictions (from open borders to vaccine requirements), for their vacations and business trips. Yet when the world began to open up again, the trend showed no signs of dying down.

With many of the world's more popular tourism destinations now suffering from overtourism – leading to higher prices and bigger crowds – combined with the increasing thrill (and bragging rights) afforded from "discovering" a lesser-known gem – it's easy to see why destination dupes have become one of the hottest growing travel trends of the current age. Here are some of our top picks.

## Tokyo vs Taipei

While the capital of Taiwan is often described as a great destination dupe for Seoul, Korea, it also makes a great alternative to Tokyo. Taiwan was under the rule of the Land of the Rising Sun from 1895 to 1945, and Japan's colonial legacy on Taipei City – and Taiwan in general – has led to a certain level of influence on everything from its design and its cuisine to the lifestyle habits of its people, with the culture showcasing a mish-mash of both Japanese and Chinese elements, as well as those from its indigenous peoples. Much less crowded than Tokyo – which has suffered from so much overtourism lately that the government has had to put certain protective measures into place to stem the flow – there are multiple parts of Taipei City that can

offer the same feel and appeal. The Ximending district is comparable to Shibuya (including its trendy youth-centric Harajuku area), while those craving a taste for Tokyo's electronics-focused Akihabara shopping area can visit Taipei's Guanghua Market. There are plenty of old winding streets with traditional temples, reminiscent of Japan's Asakusa area, while the ZhongZheng district is also home to the historical Qidong Street Japanese Houses. If you have time for an excursion, the town of Jiufen – a two-hour drive from Taipei – has been likened to the setting of an animated Miyazaki film, most often the cult classic *Spirited Away*. The city also boasts a truly impressive amount of authentic Japanese food, and delectable Japanese-influenced Taiwanese cuisine.



ABOVE: Sailing boats in the marina of Tivat, Montenegro

LEFT: A street in Jiufen, a mountain town east of Taipei, that has often been likened to one from the Japanese film *Spirited Away*

## Amalfi Coast, Italy vs Tivat, Montenegro

If what you're after is a sun-drenched coastal European destination with good food, wine, and access to winding seaside roads leading to beautiful intimate beaches, Italy's Amalfi Coast is usually a top pick. With its charming villages, breathtaking coastal vistas, and sense of "joie de vivre" that encourages you to kick back and enjoy a long lazy meal, it's one of the most picturesque places for a sunny European summer getaway. It's also one of the most jam-packed destinations for this type of film set-worthy break, equally appealing to the hordes of tourists as it is to the rich and famous. Tivat, in Montenegro's Bay of Kotor, offers all of these things with far less people – and despite the fact that it also boasts a beautiful marina filled with luxury yachts (that also give it a bit of a Monaco-worthy feel), it does so for a typically less demanding price tag. →



~~Singapore City, Singapore~~ vs Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Described by some as the more laid-back, less glitzy cousin of Singapore City, Malaysia's capital isn't just very close to the Garden City in terms of location – it's also an excellent substitute. Singapore is known for its incredible selection of street food, and Malaysia is no different. Here, you'll also find impressive modern skyscrapers in a similarly tropical (and humid) environment, and both feature remnants of colonial rule, influence from the surrounding countries, and the diversity that has remained from their past. Both are proud to showcase a commitment to maintaining green spaces within city environments, and both offer a good selection of nightlife, shopping, and easy excursions to nearby island escapes. The most noticeable difference between the two, perhaps, is that Kuala Lumpur isn't quite as clean-cut as Singapore, and with the former not having built up its tourism offering quite as much as the latter, it boasts a quieter, less-expansive offering of things to do during longer trips.



~~Amsterdam, Netherlands~~ vs Ghent, Belgium

As well as its many cultural attractions (and excellent dining scene), Amsterdam is famous for its iconic waterways. The port city of Ghent, Belgium, may have a touch more medieval and Art Nouveau architecture than what you'd expect of the "bike capital of Europe", with its rustic gabled facades – but you can still do canal boat tours in Ghent, and both cities boast remarkably well-preserved Old Towns. While those looking for a more direct "mini Amsterdam" would be better off sticking to the most famous alternative within the Netherlands – Utrecht – if you're

after something with a similar feel but that isn't a cookie-cutter copy, Ghent will charm you as another vibrant canal city. Where the Netherlands is celebrated for its pancakes and appeltart, Belgium is known for its waffles and appelflap – and although there are only 13 types of cheese originating from the "Battlefield of Europe", Belgium was recently named the third cheesiest place in the world – falling just behind the Netherlands and France. It's a fantastic place to soak yourself in culture, walk some pedestrian-only streets, enjoy some live entertainment, relax in the lovely public squares, and enjoy the pleasures of excellent food and drink.



~~Greek Islands~~ vs Albanian Riviera

Thoughts of a Mediterranean holiday often bring to mind images of white sandy beaches surrounded by rocks, with a backdrop of the crystal-blue waters of the Ionian sea, and plenty of fresh seafood grills accompanied by fresh, warm breads and tasty dips to enjoy while you wile away the hours. Although the Greek Islands have long been one of the most popular haunts for this type of break, the Albanian Riviera has much of the same to offer – and with far fewer crowds, as well as a notably cheaper price tag. From Saranda to Vlorë, you'll find many small towns with mountainous coastal appeal, rife with sleepy, pebble-filled coves and turquoise waters. It's the perfect place to slow down and enjoy a beach break with a more quiet Mediterranean pace of life.

~~Petra, Jordan~~ vs AIUla, Saudi Arabia

With its otherworldly rose-coloured ancient buildings, the archeological site of Petra is one of Jordan's most iconic tourist attractions. But it's not the only place in the world with these types of jaw-dropping rock formations: like Petra, Saudi Arabia's Hegra, in AIUla, is also a UNESCO World Heritage Site (it was actually the country's first), and it also boasts remnants of settlements from ancient Nabatean civilisations. While in this case the dupe typically isn't a cheaper alternative, AIUla's uncrowded nature and mostly undiscovered appeal add a sense of luxury that goes beyond its exceptional hotels – and the two destinations make perfect complements of each other, since if you've enjoyed one, you will likely enjoy the other. Another stellar



similarity is in its astrotourism offering: Petra has long been known as a fantastic spot for stargazing, and AIUla was recently celebrated for having the GCC's first-ever official Dark Sky Parks, for its Manara and Gharameel locations. Both are outstanding spots for astrotourism, and a visit here will transport you to another world.

**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:** The Petronas Twin Towers and KLCC park in Kuala Lumpur; Graslei harbour on the Leie River in Ghent, Belgium; Ksamil Island on the Albanian Riviera; Elephant Rock in AIUla, Saudi Arabia

IMAGES: MASTERLIU/ASCENTX/MEDIA, XN/VEERARNAU/GETTY IMAGES, A/CABEZA/ADOBE STOCK, ADITYA ARYA, THE KHYBER HIMALAYAN RESORT



~~Swiss Alps~~ vs Kashmir Valley, India

Like Switzerland, Kashmir is also landlocked – and like the former, the latter is also rich with unbelievable natural beauty, mountainscapes that are lush and green in the summer, and snow-covered in the winter. In fact, Jammu and Kashmir's Baisaran Valley is often called "Mini Switzerland". Surrounded by the Pir Panial Range and the Greater Himalayan Range, this intermontane valley is filled with rolling green meadows, dense forests that scent the air with fresh pine, and fresh blue lakes that reflect the awe-inspiring surrounds like a mirror. It's a great place for hiking and trekking, or taking horse or pony rides, where you'll see fat white sheep grazing as you breathe in the fresh mountain air. For a truly luxurious stay, The Khyber Himalayan Resort and Spa (pictured above) is an exceptional choice. Located at 8,825 ft, it's India's only luxury ski resort, with 85 gorgeous cottages and rooms with mind-blowing views. It also has an all-season pool that's temperature-controlled and offers floor-to-ceiling mountain views. **BT**

IMAGES: ADITYA ARYA, THE KHYBER HIMALAYAN RESORT; COZY HOUSE - DILIJAN

MINI DUPES

Sometimes, it's not an entire city or country, but an individual hotel that is enough to transport you to another place – without stepping too far. Here are some fun options:

Anantara Santorini Abu Dhabi Resort

This stunning resort doesn't just look like Santorini, Greece – it was also built using methods that honour Cycladic architecture. From its all-white buildings to the soft Greek music that plays around its infinity pool – which has an olive tree in the middle – this ultra-exclusive property in Abu Dhabi's Ghantoot area only has 22 keys, ensuring that unlike Santorini itself (which is currently strained by overtourism), this place will always be peaceful enough to encourage genuine Mediterranean-style ease.



Anantara Mina Al Arab Ras Al Khaimah Resort

Overwater villas have become synonymous with the Maldives, and you'd be forgiven for thinking that this resort must be in the Indian Ocean archipelago – but it's actually in the UAE's northern emirates. This gorgeous waterfront retreat boasts the first-ever overwater villas in Ras Al Khaimah, but unlike the Maldives, this location offers an extra edge in terms of local wildlife: it's adjacent to some protected mangroves, packed with everything from crabs to herons and pink flamingos.



Cozy House - Dilijan

Sometimes, a dupe can transport us to not just another city, but to another world. While *The Lord of The Rings* fans can find hobbit-style accommodation in New Zealand (such as Underhill Valley and the Woodland Park Motel), there's a delightful alternative in Armenia. Surrounded by the lush forests of Dilijan National Park, this family-run set of fenced-off hobbit homes look straight out of *The Shire*. A visit to the nearby Old Town will also make you feel like you've gone to the fictional village of Bree.



Georgian House Hotel

If the world of *Harry Potter* is more your style, this hotel in London's Pimlico has you covered. Much like how Diagon Alley is hidden to the unseeing eye, this hotel may seem like a regular English country hotel at first – but in its secret basement level, behind a concealed bookcase door, you'll find "Wizard Chambers" designed to resemble Hogwarts dorm rooms, complete with gothic doorways, stained glass windows, vintage-style trunks, cauldrons, and floating candles. They also offer potion-making experiences.

