

To Be *THE BEST*

CREATING TAILOR-MADE HOLIDAYS WHICH COMBINE SPECTACULAR EUROPEAN DESTINATIONS WITH INSIGHTS INTO THE HEART AND SOUL OF THE LOCAL CULTURE HAS PROVEN A FORTÉ FOR ARTIST SUSAN HARRISON-TUSTAIN AND WINE CONNOISSEUR/ PHOTOGRAPHER RICHARD TUSTAIN.

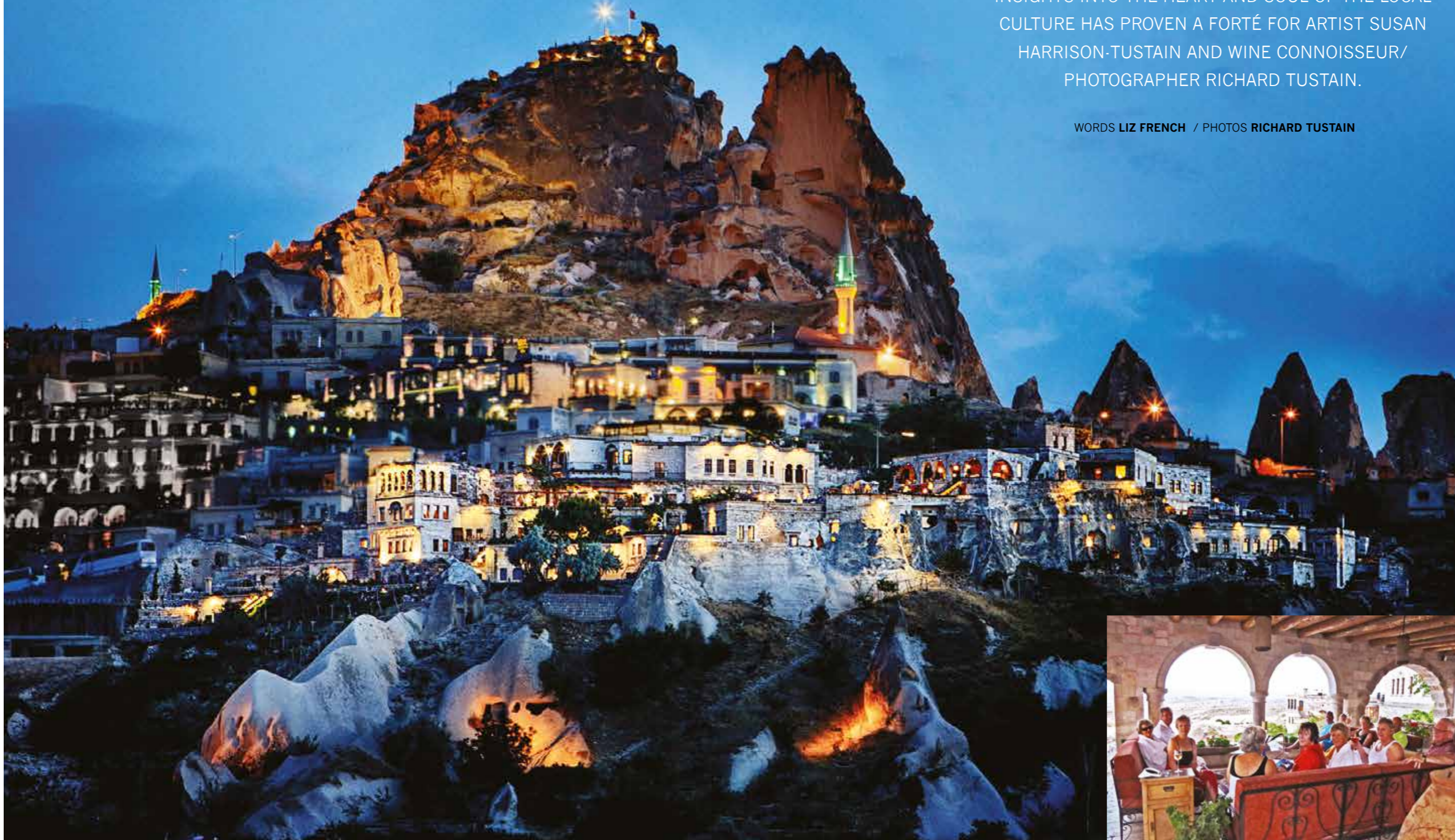
WORDS **LIZ FRENCH** / PHOTOS **RICHARD TUSTAIN**



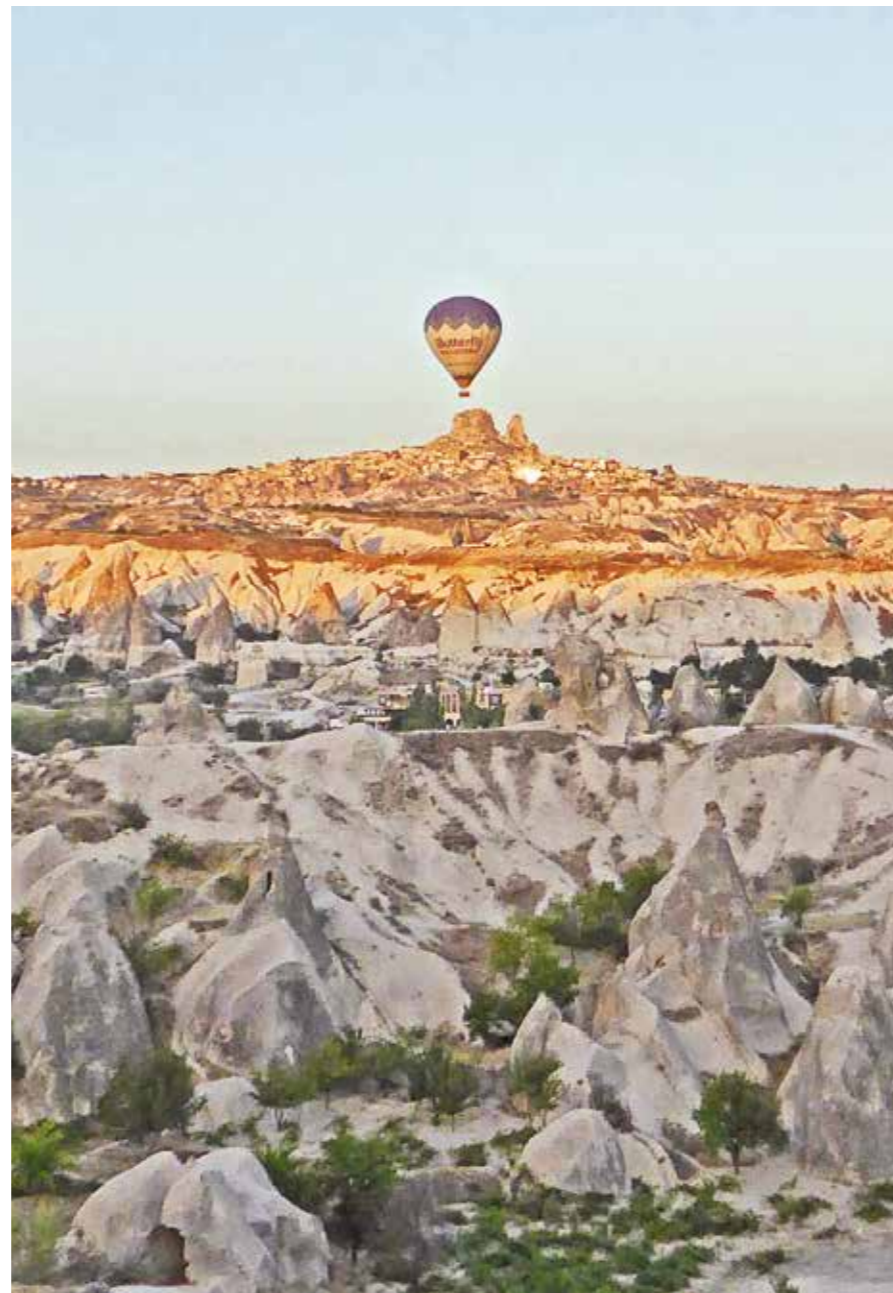
Select the highlights from previous travels and name your 2016 European excursion *The Best of the Best* and you set yourself up for very high expectations. This is exactly what Richard and Susan have done. Their track record suggests they will deliver all they promise and more to those lucky enough to accompany them next year.

Luck may just come into it. Susan and Richard's third adventure in 2014 sold out rapidly with a waiting list long enough for another tour had they been able to create one! "The number of repeat guests we attract is testament to the success of our vision for a unique approach to travel," says Susan, mixing her delight with quiet confidence that they have the formula right.

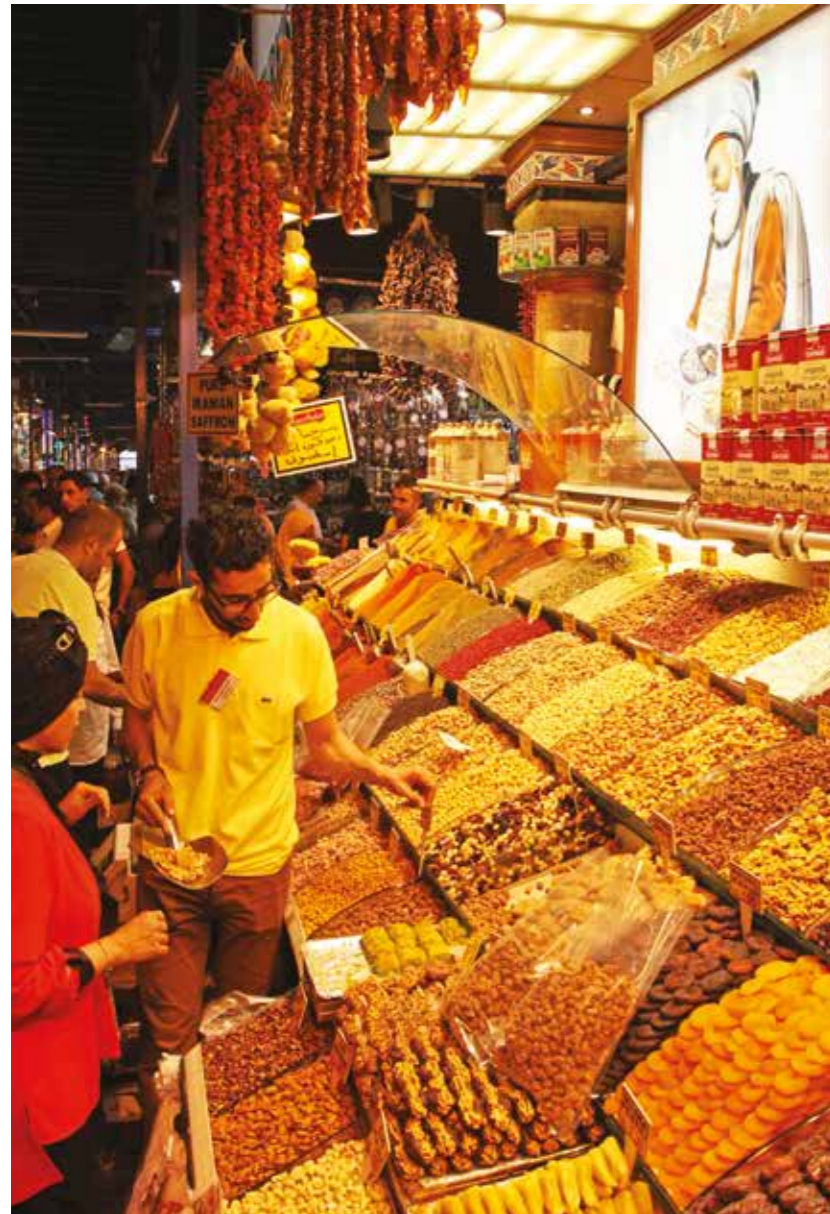
Part of their success stems from the fact that they are anything but formulaic. This couple put a huge amount of time and effort, research and personal experience into creating memorable holidays. They seek out authentic experiences; eliminate the expected, find the 'road less travelled'. Each takes about five months to fine tune. "We pride ourselves on attention to every detail," says Susan, an internationally recognised artist who readily shares her skills while hosting the tours. Richard's many years as a European tour host have stood him in excellent stead. He has since worked in the wine industry and is an accomplished photographer. While the group is in France he will be offering tastings of personally selected wines and will always be available to assist his fellow travellers in honing their photography skills.



“An essential ingredient is the leisurely pace.”



Pullout quotes:
 “The number of repeat guests we attract is testament to the success of our vision.”



LEISURELY, PLEASURABLY

While many of the people who join Richard and Susan may have ‘done’ Europe on their OEs, dashed from place to place on a tour bus, this is the last way they want to experience it now. “An essential ingredient of our month long August/September 2016 itinerary is the leisurely pace,” Susan points out. “We have three to four nights in most land based destinations.”

Guests fly into Istanbul where Susan and Richard will have been for a couple of days, resting and recharging ready to give of their best. The group joins them in their spectacular hotel in the heart of the Sultanahmet. After exploring this amazing city of friendly people which straddles Asian and European culture, they all fly to Cappadocia, included in this Best of the Best for the best of reasons. Previous groups have declared the surreal moonscape, the dawn balloon ride, the option to explore on horseback as civilizations have done for centuries, the underground city lived in centuries ago, are only matched by staying in the boutique Museum Hotel, awarded best small hotel Europe, best luxury historic hotel in Turkey in international awards; and very best hotel ever by several privileged groups of Kiwis!

A cruise ship is a destination in itself when you travel on the 5 Star Azamara Journey for eleven glorious days in luxurious balcony staterooms. There are numerous shore excursions but many will opt to join Richard and Susan in exploring their favourite ports of call. The Azamara Journey is boarded in Istanbul and cruises the Turkish coastline (including the option to visit Gallipoli, and a complimentary sunset classical concert in the 2nd Century AD Roman Odeon theatre in Ephesus) before heading to the Greek Islands, Paros and Santorini, then along the Croatian coast via Montenegro, Dubrovnik and Hvar. Susan remembers the last visit to Santorini and it wasn't only the absorbing history and the blue domed white washed architecture that everyone loved, but floating in the crystal water off Kamari Beach was also a ‘this is heaven’ moment.

If you have to disembark; what better place than Venice? “One of our favourite cities,” says Susan who promises experiences far beyond postcard Venice. “Think masked finery, private water taxis from our hotel’s ‘wet door’, dinner in a family owned trattoria, sun setting over the old city...”



PHOTOS ABOVE: The pool at Museum Hotel, Cappadocia, Azamara Journey onboard show PHOTOS OPPOSITE CLOCKWISE: Sophia at night Istanbul, Ballooning over fairy tale landscape Cappadocia, Masked beauties, Venice, Venice by night, Hagia Spice Bazaar Istanbul.



PHOTOS CLOCKWISE Lauterbrunnen Switzerland, al fresco dinner Istanbul, view from dining terrace Cuq en Terrasses Hotel France, sumptuous delights from Cookschool with Masterchef Andonis at Cuq en Terrasses Hotel, cheeses at Revel Market, France.

Testimonial:
We had so much fun and laughter along the journey and the places we stayed were exquisite and memorable. I find it hard to pick the best bit because it was all 'over the top' so good! - Jan.

TOP OF EUROPE

The group head to Switzerland via Lake Como where they will be beguiled by 'bella' Bellagio. Next destination, Switzerland, to a beautiful village surrounded by the majestic Alps. Here their group experiences yet another 'best', the Jungfrauoch which is approached via a vertiginous train journey through the Eiger to the highest train station in Europe. This is lauded as possibly the best excursion in Europe for awe inspiring views over Europe's largest glacier, its valley below and as far as the Black Forest in Germany on a clear day. There's time for the adventurous to go summer skiing, tobogganing or swoop the flying fox.

Another day, take an aerial gondola ride ending in a quintessential alpine Swiss field surrounded by wild flowers and the sound of cowbells. Bring out the inner artist, with a little help from Susan to guide those who would savour capturing majestic Swiss Alps in watercolour.

France follows – flying from Geneva to Toulouse and staying in the tiny hamlet of Cuq Toulza, where, in a converted monastery, the exceptional hotel Cuq en Terrasses (awarded 'The second best small hotel in France' by Trip Advisor 2015) awaits. Join a cook school by Master chef, Andonis (co-owner with Philippe, both now old friends to

Susan and Richard) with time also to visit the local Saturday market in Revel, meander country roads, swim in the pool, laze in the garden...

Next stop, Bordeaux and the delightful town of Saint Émilion with its much photographed village square, your base for becoming acquainted with the home of some of the finest wines in the world. Richard comes into-his-own again here, sourcing wines which may be revelations and giving some insight into styles and how they match our younger versions 'down under'.

The TGV to Paris marks the end of *The Best of the Best*, but maybe the start or rekindling of a love affair with the French capital where most opt to spend a few days before heading home or on further travels.

Richard and Susan promise many delights awaiting the 2016 group who will happily put themselves in the safe hands of highly experienced tour leaders to be whisked away for 32 days and nights of fun and fascination with flexibility to savour every planned and unexpected moment... making memories, making friends. So if you measure the success of a holiday by how much you laugh then contact Kay Rogers at United Travel Bethlehem, to secure your booking now! ■



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