JULY / SEPTEMBER, 2015

MAGAZINE

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SPECIAL REPORT: RIDING AN IRON HORSE ACROSS EUROPE



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Contents

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On a trip to Inner Mongolia, TraveLife's Spencer Wynn came upon this horse driver in traditional dress running his herd to keep them in top form for competition.

See Spencer's story and more photos on page 58

Saving Ecuador's rainforest Something is 'fishy' in Tokyo It's Father's Day in Vietnam Seeing Europe on cruise control Camera Corner: Photo advice A photo trip to Inner Mongolia Waltzing through Italy **Resort the Pinnacle of Success**

Cajun country feels like home

Waldorf a Dutch Masterpiece

Best airports to be stranded



South Carolina's Sweet' Surprise

Charleston's charming basket weavers continuing a proud tradition started by their enslaved ancestors

By Marc Atchison EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

HARLESTON, S.C.– Laurie Bonneau's lovely moon-shaped face beams with pride as she shows the stranger a sweetgrass basket her 13-year-old son has made.

"Our children start making the baskets when they are very young; my kids can make one of these sweetgrass roses (used as bookmarks) in a matter of seconds," boasts the engaging Laurie, whose stand at the corner of Broad and Meeting streets in Charleston's Historic District is laden with lots of the intricate handwoven baskets that have become prized souvenirs for the millions of tourists who visit this charming city each year.

"It takes me about 12 hours to make one of these," says Bonneau while holding up one of the larger coil items she identifies as a "rice fanning basket," which was used to "air and clean rice in the old days. Now people use them as fruit and bread baskets."

Bonneau and the other sweetgrass basket makers who lovingly ply their craft on Charleston's street corners are continuing a tradition that dates back to America's darkest period, when enslaved West Africans were brought here in the late 17th century



PHOTOS BY MARC ATCHISON

Sweetgrass basket maker Laurie Bonneau, left, showcases one of her lovely creations made from the durable material that grows in abundance in South Carolina. The sweetgrass weavers man stations all around Charleston, including the Market.

'I love meeting people from all over the world and they're always interested in hearing the history behind the baskets' — Laurie Bonneau



It takes time and patience to create the sweetgrass baskets and their price reflects the artistry needed to make what has become South Carolina's official "State Handicraft."

to work on the rice and cotton plantations of the Deep South.

"I've never looked up my family's history but we (the sweetgrass weavers) know the only other place in the world that uses the same basket weaving techniques we use here is Sierra Leone," says Bonneau, who, along with the other sweetgrass artists have become great ambassadors for their city.

"I love meeting people from all over the world and they're always interested in hearing the history behind the baskets," says the woman whose craft is considered an African art form and a South Carolina Lowcountry tradition that's celebrated annually during the Sweetgrass Cultural Festival — it's recognized as one of the Top 20 events in the Southeast.

Basket making requires a great deal of patience and Bonneau says there are no set patterns; every one is unique, each has its own fingerprint.

Originally, bulrush and palm were used to make the baskets but then sweetgrass — a softer, finer straw that's no less durable — took its place because of its abundance in South Carolina's coastal marshes. Long leaf pine needles — used for contrast — and palmetto are also employed in the construction of the baskets.

"These baskets will last forever," says Bonneau, who invites me to smell the long limp sweetgrass — it does smell very sweet — that's the primary material used in the sturdy baskets, whose price

Information

• Laurie Bonneau's sweetgrass basket stand is located in front of 83 Meeting Street near Broad across from St. Michael's Episcopal Church. She's there most days ("not when it rains") between 9 a.m. and 5:30 p.m.

 The Sweetgrass Cultural Arts Festival is held annually on the first Saturday in June. For information on the festival, go to http://sweetgrassfestival.org

 Porter offers direct flights to Charleston. For information, go to http://www.flyporter.com

 For tourist information on Charleston, go to http://www.explorecharleston.com

reflects the skill and patience needed to make them.

"This one sells for \$45 (U.S.)," says the exuberant artist while holding up one of the smaller baskets. "The large one with the elephant ear pattern (for luck) sells for \$800, but because you're such a friendly Canadian, I'll give it to you for just \$700." The rice fanning baskets sell for around \$400.

Bonneau has been manning her present station for the last five years and before that she had "a stand on (U.S.) Route 17," she says of the highway that cuts through nearby Mount Pleasant, the South Carolina city where most sweetgrass basket makers call home.

Sales of the baskets mushroomed when Easterners travelling through South Carolina en route to Florida were introduced to the artistry of the weavers.

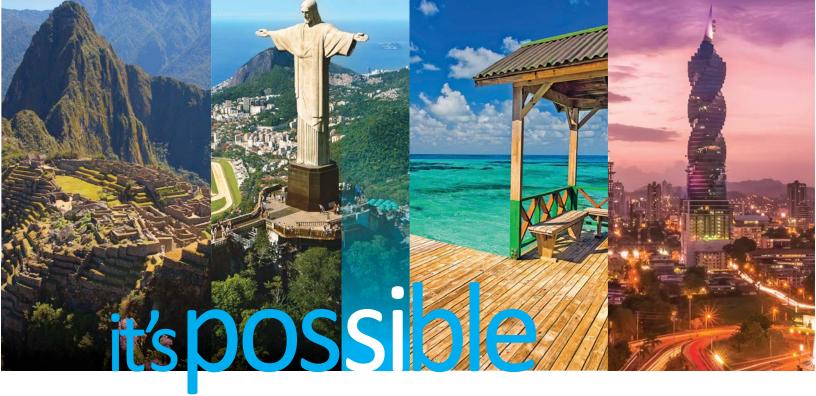
"Route 17 is where I first sold my baskets but I was a lot younger then," says the youthful looking Bonneau with an infectious laugh.

While some vendors still operate on Route 17, most have moved to Charleston — many, like Bonneau, operate in the shadows of some of the city's best-loved landmarks or in the iconic City Market. "We've become the biggest tourist attraction in Charleston," says Bonneau.

In 1997, a historical marker was erected at the intersection of Hamlin Road and Highway 17 in the Seven Mile section of Mount Pleasant to commemorate where the first basket stand appeared. Lottie "Winee" Moultrie Swinton is credited with being the first sweetgrass basket entrepreneur.

In 2006, South Carolina paid tribute to the remarkable artisans when the sweetgrass basket was named the official state handicraft. That same year, a stretch of Highway 17 North was renamed "The Sweetgrass Basket Makers Highway."

Bonneau, who started making the baskets when she was 12, says she'll continue until "my hands give out because it's something I love doing. It's something I have to do." •



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PHOTOS BY WAHEEDA HARRIS The bad lands of Argentina are a remarkable sight to behold. Las Tres Cruces, above, and Anfiteatrob, below, are two aswesome places.

Inside Argentina

Waheeda Harris goes beyond Buenos Aires to explore the vineyards and wild landscapes of Salta and Tucuman

ALTA, ARGENTINA — Flying from the stylish streets of Buenos Aires into Argentina's northwest leads me to the provinces not on most traveller's bucket list.

Discovering Salta's vineyards and peaceful Lake District, I realize this area is a quick antidote to the urban jungle thanks to a commitment to a slower way of life.

Salta is typically South American; a Catholic church dominates the downtown skyline, fruit vendors line the main square and its citizens are up early to ride the buses or walk the streets to get to school or work.

Rolling hills surround the city, while a scattering of vacation homes along the Reservoir Cabra Corral lure urbanites to the area for relaxing weekend recreation. Small farms disappear in the distance as the elevation increases,



and a dry riverbed adjacent to the road is surrounded by the soaring red, orange, yellow, blue and purple swatches of the Calchaquí Valley's rock formations.

My camera gets a workout as I traverse south through the colourful canyons of Quebrada de las Conchas, which boasts stunning rock formations like Garganta del Diablo (Devil's Throat) and El Anfiteatro (Amphitheatre). Visitors test their singing skills in a cacophony of languages within the rock walls at each location.

It's tempting to stop every 10 minutes to gaze at the mountains and the valley's ever-changing views; the vista from Mirador de Las Tres Cruces is worthy of a *National Geographic* cover. Although the drive is barely 200 kilometres, it takes over four hours with speed limited by narrow roads and regular switchbacks.

The small city of Cafayate greets visitors with a pretty plaza ringed with craft shops, cafés and wine bars, and the surrounding area is filled with vineyards featuring endless rows of Torrontés vines, the popular white varietal of the region.

This wine is the reason this region is becoming a popular topic among oenophiles; with over 4,000 hectares of vineyards, it's the most productive viticulture area of Salta and has been labelled the "cradle of high altitude wines" in Argentina.

As I sample glasses of the local vino blanco on the sunny terrace at Piattelli Vineyards (known for receiving the highest rated Torrontés vintage by *Wine Spectator* magazine), and later during dinner at cosy Viñas de Cafayate, a modern boutique hotel and vineyard, I know I've just started to scratch the surface of Argentina's offerings.

Taking a road trip south into Tucumán — the smallest province in the country — through the next part of the Calchaquí Valley, my journey is taking me deeper into the country's ever-changing landscape. Leaving behind grape vines, my view is now quintessential Sonoran-style desert: dusty rolling hills and saguaro cacti.

The first stop is the ruins of Quilmes, which was the largest







Artisans working on ancient machines, prized cows that produce remarkable cheese, and relaxing accommodation is what most visitors find fascinating about Argentina's fabulous Outback. This is a place where you can relax while enjoying some amazing wine, history and culture.

pre-Colombian settlement in the country, dating back to 850 AD, with 5,000 people living here during its height.

A guide explains how the Quilmes lived off the land and resisted invasions by the Incas and contact with the Spanish explorers until the Spanish defeated them in 1667. There are rows of low stone walls, the staggered remains of houses that once covered the hillside, a reminder of these once mighty ancient people.

There's not much to see beyond the wildflowers and cacti lining the road as the highway continues, but suddenly the centuries disappear quickly as I arrive in Amaicha del Valle. The quirky Museo Pachamama, inspired by the country's cultural past, is a bold 21st-century creation.

Artist Hector Cruz has interwoven architecture with art, his mosaics covering the pathways and outer walls of the museum, while his two- and three-storey sculptures are found between buildings, erected in homage to Pachamama, the Mother Earth deity of South America.

The museum features natural and cultural history dioramas of the area and a gallery of contemporary art by Cruz. It's creative excess at its best, and a worthy stop during a road trip. Silver jewellery, small sculptures, colourful textiles and traditional paintings lure visitors to the museum's wonderful gift shop.

Heading through the high elevations of the Calchaquí Mountains, the descent puts us into a new district; the farms and ranches of Tafi de Valle, a hill town and resort area of western Tucumán. Favoured by the citizens of Buenos Aires during the extremes of summer, Tafi de Valle's lake area and shady resort spots are an idyllic escape when the temperature heads beyond 30C.

I'm quickly ensconced at Las Carreras Estancia, originally built by the Jesuits, where the rustic tiles and carved wood furniture are paired with colourful hand-loomed textiles, all made locally. This region's Artisan Route features local craftspeople who are preserving cultural traditions, working with leather, clay, stone, sheep and llama wool.

Overlooking the stables, with a paddock full of horses, llamas and cattle, Las Carreras also includes another barn filled with the pride of the estancia: dairy cows producing milk for taif cheese. Based on a 300-year-old recipe brought by Spanish Jesuits to this region, this estancia manufactures six varieties, featuring flavours such as oregano and pepper.

Visitors can either roam the extensive estancia grounds by foot or on horseback, or relax in the welcoming common areas, the air scented by Andean gourmet creations, including the housemade cheeses used in handmade empanadas, ravioli and quesillo in fig leaf.

Another few hours on the road the next day leads us through the switchbacks of the lush mountain terrain into the city of San Miguel de Tucumán, the capital of the province and the home of Argentina's independence.

Founded by a Spanish conquistador in the 16th century, the city's Museo Casa Histórica de la Independencia was where Argentine leaders issued the Declaration of Independence in July 1816.

Touring the city in a Ford Model A Phaeton seems to be the appropriate way to explore San Miguel de Tucumán's Spanish colonial architecture. The drive leads me past several historic plazas, museums and to El Parque 9 de Julio to admire its gardens and floral clock.

As night comes over San Miguel de Tucumán, Plaza Independencia is the place to be. Bordered by architecture of the past three centuries, the main square is filled with locals meeting friends and family for an after-work drink or ice cream and spending the evening under the stars.

And for this traveller, it seems fitting to toast these regions, proudly protecting their natural beauty and sharing their creativity through art, cuisine and wine.







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Steaking out Philly City of Brotherly Love's food scene is so

food scene is so much more than a 'cheesy' sandwich

By Ilona Kauremszky Travelife contributor

HILADELPHIA — Like a well-oiled machine, the kitchen crew at this city's legendary cheesesteak sandwich restaurant called By George! prepares each order in sync — flip the ribeye beef strips, squirt the Cheese Whiz, splash on some sauce, pile on the sautéed onions, pack it all into a bun and pass it down the line.

On the other side of the counter there's a queue of hungry customers with no end in sight. I'm the one salivating at the end of the line.

Ahead of me stands Marie, a California transplant originally from Philly who is here to blast her taste buds back into a favourite treat from her youth.

"I used to eat them (Philly cheesesteak sandwiches) all the time," she divulges about her love affair with a dish that's as synonymous to Philadelphia as deepdish pizza is to Chicago and pastrami sandwiches are to New York City.

By George!, which has been serving up the Philly comfort food for 25 years from its Reading Terminal Market location, is as much a landmark in the City of Brotherly Love as the Liberty Bell.

I finally inch to the front of the line, place my order,



and bite into a sandwich and feel the heavenly juices run down my face.

Yum!

The Reading Terminal Market is "Ground Zero" for the food scene in the birthplace of America. The ultimate foodie hangout is home to some of the city's best ethnic restaurants and one of the cheapest places to eat.

The variety of food here is staggering and I can't resist the croissants at the Market Bakery — they are delicious!

I also find out that the cheesesteak sandwich has a rival — the roast pork sandwiches served at DiNic's is almost as famous as its beefy cousin. A regular customer at DiNic's tells me "the broccoli rabe roast pork has now become the city's new favourite sandwich."

Philadelphia has few equals when it comes to great restaurants and some of America's finest rooms have opened up here. Restaurateur Stephen Starr has the whole town talking with his collection of excellent dining options.

Starr's Butcher and Singer steakhouse is one of the most impressive I've ever visited and the only thing better than the juicy Delmonico steak I'm served is the ambience that prevails here; waiters shake martinis tableside while Billie Holiday tunes resonate through the room.

The food scene even extends outdoors in Philadelphia. Talula's Garden in Washington Square is a cosy culinary oasis featuring a wonderful haute cuisine menu where diners sit under vine-covered trellises.

Philadelphia really is an appetizing place to visit.







The iconic Philly Cheesesteak Sandwich may have put the city's culinary scene on the map but refined dining has taken over the City of Brotherly Love. There's lots of fine dining options in Philadelphia but if you are hooked on a cheesesteak sandwich, the place to go is the leagendary Reading Terminal Market where By George!, above, serves up some of the best in the city. The market is also home to shops that offer some great pork sandwiches, too.

Information

Where to stay: Loews Philadelphia Hotel http://www.loewshotels.com/
philadelphia-hotel/

 Where to eat: Talula's Garden http://www.talulasgarden.com/main/word. shtml; By George! in the Reading Terminal Market, 1200 Filbert St.; Butcher and Singer http://www.butcherandsinger.com/

What to do: Big Bus Double Decker sightseeing: https://www.phillytour.com/
products-tours.php; Philadelphia City Pass: adults \$62 includes admission to
five attractions: http://www.citypass.com/philadelphia



Our Top 10 Fashion Week Destintions

By Jessica Walden TRAVELIFE CONTRIBUTOR

ASHION WEEK. To the style enthusiast, these two words can stir as much excitement and emotion as an NHL playoff game does for hockey fans. And there are plenty held around the world each year to choose from. In fact, there's more Fashion Weeks than weeks in the year — 134 and counting. You could actually travel the world 2.5 years and still not make every show.

It all started as Press Week, a venture that began during World War II when American journalists couldn't travel to Nazi-occupied Paris to report on the latest fashions. So publicist Eleanor Lambert showcased U.S. designers to American fashion writers who had previously ignored the homegrown work and Fashion Week was born.

Many people plan their vacations around the Fashion Weeks and trying to get hotel rooms in London, New York City, Milan or Paris — considered the Big Four of Fashion Weeks — is almost impossible.

There are no "insider tips" on getting a ticket to the shows, although it helps to be Anna Wintour.

The "people watching" at these shows can be as much fun as sitting in the front row, and there's so much magic that attending one is almost a must if you care anything about style.

Here are the Top 10 Fashion Shows I suggest you put on your bucket list:

PARIS: The birthplace of couture, Paris is arguably the most glamorous of the Weeks, boasting a virtual Rolodex of Who's Who in the fashion world. Sadly, getting an invite (yes, you must be invited) to any of the shows is next to impossible. We suggest taking in one of the live runway shows at the Galeries Lafayette instead. The shows are free to the public, but make sure to reserve your seat at least one week in advance. Once you have taken in the trends of the season, stop off at Harry's New York Bar, a former haunt of Coco Chanel.

MILAN: Start your trip at the Grand Hotel et de Milan. In the heart of the Golden Triangle, you will be at the mecca of Milanese shopping and in the middle of the action. This is the place to people watch and, trust me, the street style during fashion week will make you think you are walking <image>

through the pages of *Vogue Italia*. What's more, this 5-star hotel is a mere 400 metres from La Scala, where couture and opera meet in the grandest of ways.

LONDON: You may not find yourself in the front row at the Burberry show, but London Fashion Week has a number of events that are open to the public with packages ranging from $\pounds 20$ to $\pounds 150$ (\$40 to \$300 CDN) that grants access to private shopping events, trendy cocktail parties, industry talks and even some of the shows. Of the public events, one of my favourites is the Fashion for Relief Show. Founded by Naomi Campbell, it features her entourage of beautiful friends and donated designs by the likes of Vivienne Westwood and John Galliano.

NEW YORK CITY: New York, New York! Oh, the sights, the sounds . . . the fashion. New York's Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week has become the place to see and be seen, with front row guests like Kanye West and Kim Kardashian, Rhianna, Blake Lively, David and Victoria Beckham ... the A List goes on. We suggest taking in some Grade A people watching while keeping in tune with the shows over live feed and then shopping the styles a mere hour later on ModaOperandi.com.

BERLIN: Premiering in 2007 and quickly becoming one of the most sought-after events in the European fashion scene, Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week Berlin has quickly become a worldwide event. This is the place to see up and coming designers and creative talent. The up-and-coming talent is on full display at the Designer for Tomorrow Awards hosted by Zac Posen. The show dictates that participants may not have already launched their

collections on the market — meaning talent is raw, new and top notch.

SYDNEY: Australia isn't just for surfer dudes. Sydney Fashion Week showcases sophisticated designers and brands such as Carla Zampatti and Swarovski and is chock full of luxe sponsors, meaning your trip to Sydney will be nothing short of top of the line. We recommend purchasing front row seats and sinking into the Mercedes-Benz Star Lounge following the show to rub shoulders with the likes of Dani Minogue over a custom Rococo cocktail, hand crafted with Bailey's

TOKYO: The fashion world has had a serious crush on Japanese style since Rei Kawakubo, designer of Comme des Garçons, invaded Paris in in the early 1980s. Her innovative, deconstructed designs have inspired the likes of Helmut Lang and Martin

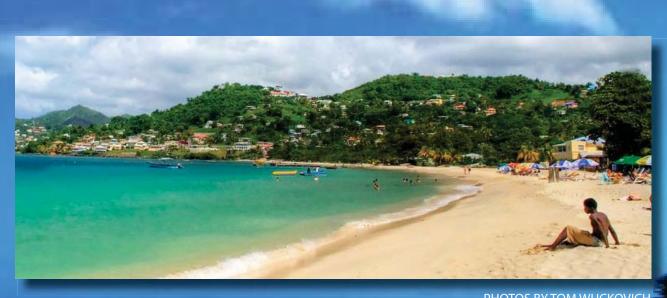
Margiela. It's no wonder that with the Japanese influence on fashion, the world pauses to watch what is happening during Tokyo Fashion Week. However, we recommend taking what you see with a grain of salt — these shows are by far the most creative — and while statements like "fox ears," "face masks" and doll-inspired makeup might work on the runway, they will not work once you have returned to the reality of the office.

BARCELONA: There is fierce competition between Madrid and Barcelona on which one of their fashion weeks reigns supreme, but our vote goes to Barcelona. With household names like Mango and Desigual, you will leave daydreaming of bold colours, prints and a certain Latin flair. We suggest swinging by the Desigual flagship following the show.

TORONTO: Anywhere the local fashionistas will brave subzero, freezing terrain deserves to be on this list. Being from Vancouver, I like to poke a little fun at Toronto, but, all jokes aside, this is a great event. Showcasing top Canadian talent and first class brands such as Pink Tartan, Mackage and Rudsak, this is a great way of seeing up and coming trends from the comfort of our own backyard. Take in the shows, grab a cocktail and have your makeup touched up in the Maybelline lounge and then hit the town — just don't forget your coat.

MIAMI: For those of you looking for something a little hotter, we suggest hitting the beaches of Miami for a tan and to watch Swim Week. What you can expect is the best in swimwear trends, the hottest DJs (and models for that matter) and countless parties, poolside at the Raleigh Hotel. •

Grenada's Everything Spice Spice Nice



PHOTOS BY TOM WUCKOVICH Grand Anse beach and its welcoming sand and surf, is a great place to kick off your shoes and enjoy all that colourful Grenada, known as the Isle of Spice, has to offer.

Colourful Caribbean island offers visitors a 'spicy' vacation thanks to its lifetsyle and lovely beaches

By Tom Wuckovich TRAVELIFE CONTRIBUTOR

RENADA — This island is a feast for the senses — all the senses — but one could easily argue that the sense of smell might be the most pleasurable here, even though the natural beauty of this southernmost Windward Island will take your breath away.

Drifting on gentle tropical breezes are the distinctive scents of nutmeg, cinnamon, cloves, ginger and vanilla, creating the island's appropriate designation as "The Isle of Spice." There are, in fact, more spices here per square kilometre than any other place on earth. Grenada supplies over 30 per cent of the world's nutmeg, while contributing significantly to the export of cloves, cinnamon, mace, cocoa, ginger and vanilla. The sweet aroma of these spices is especially pungent during market day in St. George's, Grenada's colourful capital. Throngs of locals and tourists flock to the marketplace on Saturdays to socialize, shop for produce and handicrafts and sample offerings of island foods laced with the various spices. It's also a sheer pleasure to wander the streets and alleyways to admire the colonial architecture with its British and French influence, as well as marvel at the famous Carenage, the horseshoe-shaped waterfront promenade winding around the inner harbour.

The buildings on the Carenage boast a pink cast, largely attributed to their construction using pink fish scale tiles. In the glow of the sunset, these structures dazzle when bathed in the warmth of the sun's evening rays.

Many yachts and cruise ships lay anchor here, drawn to the island because of its beauty and vast array of vacation amenities. Grenada has some of





Beautiful Concord Falls, left, is one of the most popular spots for tourists and locals alike on colourful Grenada, where even old tires are turned into artful planters.

the most beautiful beaches in the Caribbean, replete with bays and coves that shelter incredible marine life beneath its azurecoloured waters, and rainforests and parks that cover virtually one-sixth of the island's land mass.

Within these tranquil sanctuaries are a plethora of wildlife and plant life, gorgeous waterfalls and clear, limpid pools that present an ideal location for a brief respite from the everyday rigors of urban life. Perhaps the best-known falls are Annendale, which is easily accessible, and Concord, composed of three very picturesque waterfalls ideally suited for swimming or simply for admiring.

Travelling the length and breadth of the island is a simple matter since it only measures 33-kilometres long by 20-kilometres wide. The roads are very good, including one major highway that circles the whole of Grenada.

Points of interest are Caribs' Leap, north of the town of Sauteurs, where in 1651 Carib Indians jumped to their death rather than surrender to the French troops. There are three fortresses located on the island; Fort Frederick, Fort Matthew and Fort George, where Maurice Bishop and part of his cabinet were executed by a faction of his own People's Revolutionary Government. The revolution eventually prompted intervention by the United States, and an invasion in 1983 by U.S. forces displaced Bishop and restored the former democratic government.

The Grenada National Museum in St. George's details the coup and also offers a fine collection of objects and artifacts of the island's history and culture.

From there, a tour of the River Antoine Rum Distillery, which has changed little since the 1800s, affords a look at the oldest functioning water-propelled distillery in the Caribbean with a rum so strong it cannot be brought back to the U.S. or Canada. A milder version of around 75 proof is available, however.

Another historical remnant of Grenada's past is the Dougaldston Spice Estate, where most of the spices are grown and processed for distribution throughout the island. The largest nutmeg processing plants are at Gouyave and Grenville, and tours are welcomed here. Belmont Estate in St. Patrick Parish possesses a wealth of cultural and historic reminders as well. This 300-year-old plantation produces coffee, cotton, sugarcane, cocoa, nutmeg and bananas.

The main crops of nutmeg and cocoa are still processed the traditional way, resulting in world-class quality beans. The estate also gives visitors the opportunity to experience the excitement and appeal of traditional Grenadian country living through tours and plantation dining. You can tease your palate with "cocoa tea" and get a clearer understanding of why cocoa is called the "food of the Gods."

As you experience Grenada, you can't help but be impressed by the beaches. Of particular note is Grand Anse beach, which sweeps around the bay south of St. George's. This stretch of fine white sand draws sun worshippers as well as watersports enthusiasts. Grenadians are renowned for their boating skills, and each year in April, the local boat races on Grand Anse signal party time on the island. There are plenty of other water activities, such as snorkelling and scuba diving or fishing.

Accommodation choices in Grenada run the gamut — from small guesthouses to lavish resorts to luxurious villas. Your selections are only limited by your imagination — and taste!

One notable property is the Spice Island Beach Resort, which features a contemporary Caribbean theme. It was virtually destroyed by Hurricane Ivan in 2004, but a \$12 million (U.S.) renovation by Sir Oliver Royston Hopkin turned it into one of the most luxurious boutique hotels in all the Caribbean.

Accommodation consists of 64 exquisitely designed suites, including two new one-bedroom suites directly on Grand Anse beach.

All 34 beachfront units are new construction while extensive changes and upgrades were made to the private Pool Suites, Oleander Suites and Gardenview Suites. Amenities include Janissa's Spa and Fitness Center, the Nutmeg Pod activity centre for young guests, and two renowned restaurants that feature culinary creations made with local produce and spices. The resort is all-inclusive and the only AAA 4-Diamond resort in Grenada. It blends all the flavours of the island into one spicy vacation.









Trail Spreads Good Cheer In Nova Scotia

Annapolis Valley route introduces visitors to the province's thriving wine and craft brewery industry as well as its rich Acadian history







Vineyards lush with grapes and wineries where tastings lead to lasting frienships, is what Nova Scotia's Good Cheer Trail is all about. The seafood dishes offered up at some of the vineyard restaurants and microbreweries along the way are all part of the experience.

By Tiffany Thornton TRAVELIFE CONTRIBUTOR

NNAPOLIS VALLEY, N.S. — When you conjure up images of Nova Scotia, it's hard not to imagine rough Atlantic waters filled with seafaring stories, or scenes of small fishing villages, the kind that jut out along a shoreline enveloped by fog and boasting docks lined with wooden lobster traps. Now go past those magical Maritime ideals and

enter the Annapolis Valley, which lies nestled along Nova Scotia's Fundy shore — famous for the highest tides in the world — and find yourself in a place punctuated by quaint towns and bucolic topography.

The Valley, as it's known in these parts, proudly boasts award-winning vineyards and a growing craft brewery scene, which makes it an integral portion of the Good Cheer Trail.

The first of its kind in Canada, the Good Cheer Trail offers up samples from over 35 locally produced wines, beers and spirits and beverage enthusiasts can pair with fresh local cuisine along the way.



The name of the trail is derived from The Order of Good Cheer, established by French explorer Samuel de Champlain in 1606. Champlain was a true culinary pioneer, fostering the notion that settlers in Nova Scotia needed to celebrate food and drink, especially during the dreary winter months. It became the oldest social club in North America and the New World's first ever-gastronomic society, surviving to this day. Globetrotting TV personality and chef Anthony Bourdain was inducted into the Order of Good Cheer at last year's Devour!, the Food Film Fest which is held in the Valley each November.

Indulging in a glorious day of food and drink on the Good Cheer Trail is easy when you don't have to worry about driving; Nova Scotia Wine Tours offers a Trail Tour every Thursday, which consists of six fabulous stops. It starts at two craft breweries in Halifax, and then carries on to the Annapolis Valley, visiting three distinctive wineries and a whimsical garden that serves up homemade liqueurs. Travellers are issued a Good Cheer Passport at the start of the journey and they can get it stamped to commemorate stops along their trek.

Garrison microbrewery in Halifax's Seaport District makes some of the city's most popular ales, which are found at most local bars and pubs.

The Good Cheer Trial gives your palette a taste of where the "beer appeal" lies in their all-natural, preservative-free ale. Garrison's Tall Ship Amber and Irish Red are full of hops and rich flavour.

The Gahan House weaves its brewmagic right on the Halifax waterfront. Originating in Charlottetown, Gahan opened up its second restaurant and brewery in Halifax last year and brews their ale on site. While traversing the Trail this summer, the Beach Chair Lager and Blueberry Ale are perfect choices to sample, especially when paired with the scrumptious lobster croquettes.

Tangled Garden is an enchanting haven in the heart of the Annapolis Valley. The lush gardens are filled with fresh herbs utilized in the homemade jellies and liqueurs sold at the quaint shop. The liquor flavours are a tantalizing mix of sweet and spice, like the Rhubarb Blush Liqueur and Spicy Diablo. They can be added to many spirits and desserts for an extra kick.

Pulling up to Luckett Vineyards may have you wondering if you're seeing a illusion; vineyards stretch across the open fields and the Bay of Fundy sparkles in the distance. With views like this, partaking in a sample of the aptly named Tidal Bay Wine is a must. Tidal Bay is Nova Scotia's first Appellation wine, made with 100 per cent Nova Scotia-grown grapes. Luckett's Tidal Bay is infused with



Garrison microbrewery in Halifax's Seaport District makes some of the city's most popular ales, which are found at most local bars and pubs. Garrison's is one of the top meeting places in Halifax.

citrus and floral undertones and it's best sampled alongside a half chicken or beef panini with brie.

L'Acadie Vineyards is known for its traditional organic method of making wine, and derives its name from the flavourful grape that thrives here. You can learn all about the process of making organic wines while you sip their distinguished Bubbly Brut. L'Acadie's renowned style of brut took the silver medal in France at the 2011 Effervescents du Monde, which celebrates the best sparkling wines from around the world.

The Domaine de Grand Pré vineyards are surrounded by a major part of Canadian history. Meander along the vineyards that take you to the Grand-Pré National Historic Site — a UNESCO World Heritage Site — which commemorates the Acadian expulsion from Nova Scotia. The Acadians founded Grand Pré in the late 16th century and you can feel the history seeped into the soil while breathing in the ocean air.

The world-class local wines of Domaine de Grand Pré are a pleasure to sample at the onsite winery, especially when paired with local smoked trout and capers on a crusty baguette. The Baco Noir red performs a sophisticated palette dance, and the Pomme D'or dessert wine, made with Annapolis Valley apples and hints of caramel, will seduce you into taking a bottle home with you.

 For information on the Good Cheer Trail, go to www.goodcheertrail.com

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PHOTOS COURTESY MYSTICAL GOLF

Man-O-War, above, is just one of the spectecular courses that make up of the Mystical Golf experience. Its sister courses, the Witch and Wizard are equally impressive and all three are a joy to play.

Magical Moments On a trio of 'Mystical' South Carolina courses

By Marc Atchison EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

YRTLE BEACH, S.C. — The man with the devilish grin who welcomes me to America's golf mecca says he's taking me to see a Wizard and a Witch and later we'll tackle a Man-O-War. Now he's got me wondering: Is this the golf vacation I signed up for or the Harry Potter tour. My curiosity only heightens when Claude Pardue turns off the

main highway and a pink castle comes into view. Suddenly, I

feel like I've arrived in a Miagic Kingdom for golers.

"Welcome to Mystical Golf," says Pardue, owner of Myrtle Beach's most unique golf property, which is home to a trio of courses with the unusual names, which actually come from Pardue's playful imagination. The course designs were born in the creative mind of golf architect Dan Maples, who Pardue employed to transform a swampy old logging forest into a golf wonderland.

The Wizard, whose clubhouse was designed to look like an old Scottish castle, and Man-O-War — its stilted clubhouse is a replica of a fishing lodge — share a plot of treasured land not

far from the beaches of this vacation paradise, while the Witch is located about 10 kilometres away on a idyllic property that looks like it jumped out of a Monet painting.

"When I bought this property, there wasn't a bit of water on it," says Pardue as we survey the Wizard and Man-O-War both dotted with lots of water hazards — from the rooftop of the Wizard's castle-style clubhouse.

"We didn't have to dig very deep to find water and the courses are actually built around one very big lake," says Pardue, who opened the first of his Mystical troika in 1989.

The only thing better than the Mystical courses are the stay and play packages Pardue's company can offer golfers: accommodation, rounds on all three courses with a bonus round, daily breakfast and on-course lunches with two complimentary beverages (beer or soft drinks), plus a free steak dinner at one of Myrtle Beach's most popular restaurants, all for about \$250 (U.S.) per person. No wonder the Mystical complex is rated by *Golf Magazine* as one of the "Best Values" in the game.

Frankly, there is no better value in golf than this trio, which all qualify as championship worthy.

The Wizard is where I tee it up first and it's the perfect introduction to my Mystical stay. A course that's fair to all handicaps, the links-style Wizard changes with the seasons — the problematic fescue that dominates the mounded fairways in the summer and fall are less evident in the spring when I play and thus less of a problem for a duffer like me.

Besides hiring one of the best designers in golf, Pardue spared no expense when it came to employing the best groundskeepers in the area and the results are easy to see at each of his courses, which are kept in impeccable condition all year long. Pardue has enhanced the Wizard experience by planting thousands of rose bushes throughout the course and when they bloom it transforms the Wizard into a Garden of Eden.

The Wizard's wide fairways and large greens are a joy to play, but Pardue warns me that the Witch, which I play on the second day of my three-day visit to Myrtle Beach, will be a tougher test.

Even the Einsteins of golf would find the Witch a challenge, I discover.

The Witch is aptly named because its design and surroundings quickly cast a spell over you. It's love at first sight for me on this course where black bear, deer, alligators and waterfowl abound. The indigenous South Carolina Lowland plants and flowers that flourish here are a treat for the eyes and the garden setting will certainly test your concentration throughout a round.

Pardue is most proud that he and Maples created the 500-acre Witch "without disturbing one bit of nature."

There's water on five of the Witch's first nine holes and the stretch from 4 to 7 may be the strongest collection of holes in South Carolina.

Cedar knees — stumps that grow in abundance in the swamps bordering the course — are used as tee block markers on the Witch and they have become prized souvenirs for players.

"We don't mind if golfers take them home because we just go out to the swamp and cut some more," says Pardue of the markers which have been recognized by industry publications as the most unique in America.

The Witch's No. 5 hole is a remarkable test — the Par 5, 570yard beauty zig zags through a corridor of pines and requires some accurate and thoughtful shots before arriving at a small green that drops off into a pond where I find a family of alliga-

Continued on Page 88





The Wizard's castle-style clubhouse, above, is a playful feature that impresses golfers upon their arrival. The Witch's slick greens, top photo, are well guarded by sand traps and alligators.

There's a 'Grand' place to stay in Myrtle Beach

YRTLE BEACH, S.C. - There's many accommodation options in this South Carolina playground but few can match the oceanside Patricia Grand for its spacious rooms and location.

Situated along North Ocean Blvd., in the heart of Myrtle Beach, the completely renovated Patricia Grand is one of the city's most sought after properties, offering guests prime views of the Atlantic and one of the best stretches of beach in the United States.

The rooms at the Patricia Grand have been designed with families and golfers in mind — each comes with a fully-equipped kitchen and offers plenty of space to stretch out.

The Patricia Grand, a member of Wyndham's Oceana Resorts family, works closely with area golf companies like Mystical Golf and offers some attractive stay and play packages of its own.

Guests are offered free Wi-Fi, a fitness centre, indoor and outdoor pools and on-site children's programs are available.

Oceana Resorts consists of seven oceanfront properties in Myrtle Beach as well as condo rentals.

• For information on the Patricia Grand, go to http://www.patriciagrandonline.com or for more on Oceana Resorts' golf packages, go to http://www.oceanagolf.com

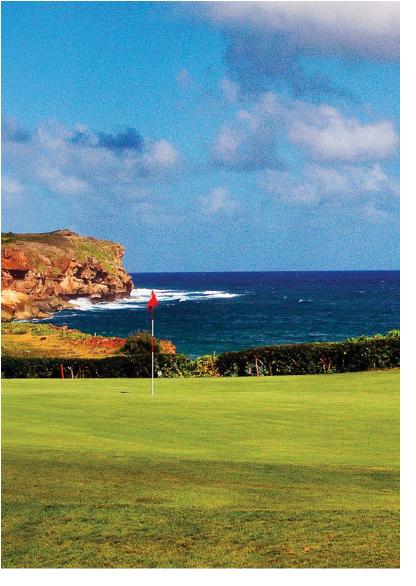
Green Hawaii

Steve Donahue discovers golf on lovely Kaua'i is an experience that few other places can match



Kaua''s Poipu Bay Golf Course, top photo, juts out into the azure Pacific and offers golfers one of the most beautiful settings in the world. Equally impressive is the island's Princeville Makai Golf Club, which like many of Kaua'i's courses offers breathtaking ocean vistas. Great golf courses, combined with luxury accommodation, makes Kaua'i a paradise for golfers.

COLFANAYS CETANANAI



AUA'I, HAWAII — I finally lost my tolerance for cold and snow this past winter, during which I seemingly spent more hours shovelling than sleeping. Once spring sprung, I broke out my golf clubs from their long winter's nap and booked a golf vacation to Hawaii — specifically Kaua'i, the northernmost of the state's six main islands.

My main getaway-destination requirement is simple — great golf courses must be offered, and Kaua'i delivers brilliantly on that front. But wait, there's more. Kaua'i's low-key vibe is irresistible. Only 5 per cent of the island is developed for commercial and residential use, while two-thirds of Kaua'i is uninhabitable. Meanwhile, the island's 80 kilometres of white-sand beaches offer more beach per kilometre than any other Hawaiian island.

Kaua'i's lush, tropical terrain makes it one of Hollywood's favourite movie/television show locations — the countless major productions shot on Kaua'i include *South Pacific*, the four-film *Jurassic Park* series, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *Indiana Jones* and the *Temple of Doom*, *The Descendents*, *Avatar*, *Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides*, *Tropic Thunder*, *Blue Hawaii* and *King Kong*.



The Kaua'i Lagoons Golf Club, above, is stunningly beautiful but challenges a golfer's power of concentration from start to finish.

Indeed, the stunning scenery, not to mention warm, mostly sunny weather, bolsters Kaua'i's reputation as a golfer's paradise and a golf destination (www.golfkauaihawaii.com) featuring a cooperative of five world-class courses (Princeville Makai Golf Club, Kaua'i Lagoons Golf Club, Poipu Bay Golf Course, Puakea Golf Course, Wailua Golf Course) and three awardwinning resorts (The St. Regis Princeville Resort, Grand Hyatt Kaua'i Resort & Spa, Kaua'i Marriott Resort on Kalapaki Beach).

My five-night, six-day Kaua'i trip commenced with two nights at The St. Regis Princeville Resort, whose guest rooms overlook Hanalei Bay, the Pacific Ocean and mountains. The hotel is also home to the fabulous Halele'a Spa and The Kaua'i Grill by Jean-Georges Vongerichten.

The Princeville Makai Golf Club, which I played in 2001, re-opened in 2010 after an extensive, superb renovation by original designer Robert Trent Jones Jr. that improved the layout so much I didn't even recognize it. It has climbed 15 places to No. 65 on *Golf Digest's* "America's 100 Greatest Public Courses 2015-2016" ranking. The course's serene lakes and spectacular ocean coastline are utilized brilliantly for aesthetic and strategic effect. Makai's nine-hole sister, the Woods Course, winds through native woodlands.

The next morning I drove an hour southeast from the north shore to Puakea Golf Course, owned by AOL co-founder Steve Case. During my previous Kaua'i visit Puakea only featured 10 holes designed by course architect Robin Nelson, but within the next several years Nelson's remaining eight holes were completed, and the result is amazing, if not stunning. Puakea is now a polished gem that, like Makai, was unrecognizable, except for the signature, downhill sixth hole — a 176-yarder with a 15-metre drop to a green fronted by a pond. Golfers are treated to gorgeous views of Mt. Ha'upu and, on several holes, deep, lush ravines used as the backdrop to the original *Jurassic Park* movie.

The Grand Hyatt Kaua'i Resort & Spa — it completed a renovation in 2012 — served as my base for the next two nights. The sprawling hotel feels as though it's set in its own jungle paradise, thanks to a water playground with a river pool, waterfalls, a saltwater lagoon and the celebrated Anara Spa, where I enjoyed a lomi lomi massage that loosened up my ailing lower back tremendously.

The next morning I walked five minutes to the Poipu Bay Golf Course, which, along with the adjacent Grand Hyatt, has been honoured by *Conde Nast Traveler* as one of the top U.S. golf resorts. Poipu Bay, designed by Robert Trent Jones Jr., was named to *Golf Digest's* "America's 100 Greatest Public Golf Courses 2013-2014. The course — it also hosted the PGA Grand Slam of Golf from 1994 through 2006 — underwent a renovation and has featured eco-friendly Seashore Paspalum turf on all its greens since 2011. The layout's final four holes play atop a jaw-dropping 50-metre sea cliff.

Not every great Kaua'i golf course is affiliated with a five-star resort. Like Puakea, Wailua Golf Course is a value priced public course (non-residents \$48 U.S. weekdays, \$60 weekends) but, unlike the privately owned Puakea, Wailua is one of the nation's most beautiful, not to mention challenging, municipal layouts.

The original holes date to the 1920s. Wailua expanded to 18 holes in 1962 under the direction of Hawaii golf Hall of Famer Toyo Shirai. The layout — a favourite of both locals and tourists — is just a 10-minute drive from Lihue Airport (LIH).

My last evening on Kaua'i was spent at the massive Kaua'i Marriott Resort on Kalapaki Beach, a short shuttle ride to the Kaua'i Lagoons Golf Club, which has an 18-hole course instead of the three nines it had during my previous trip.

The Kiele Course — which consists of the Kiele Mauka and Kiele Moana nines — is a blast to play. *Golfweek* named the layout No. 10 in Hawaii in its 2015 "Best Courses You Can Play" by state ranking, and MSN Travel tabbed Kiele one of the "World's Most Beautiful Golf Courses."

Indeed, the course — Jack Nickluas' lone Signature Golf experience on Kaua'i — features the state's longest continuous stretch of ocean holes, with more than two kilometres of oceanfront golf. The front nine is highlighted by the 219-yard par-3 fifth hole's green, encircled by a tropical mango and guava tree forest. I also enjoyed the 506-yard, par-5 fourth hole, which I eagled in front of a cheering maintenance crew by the green. One of them said my approach bounced just in front of the putting surface and rolled over half of the hole and somehow didn't drop for a double-eagle.

Oh well, I guess Kaua'i isn't perfect after all — but it's pretty darned close.



The Puakea Golf Course, owned by AOL co-founder Steve Case, is a remarkable test of golf that tests every aspect of a player's game. The stunning scenery that surrounds the course only adds to a golfer's experience and memories.

Information

WHERE TO PLAY:

Kaua'i Lagoons Golf Club: http://www.kauailagoonsgolf.com

Poipu Bay Golf Course: http://www.poipubaygolf.com

Princeville Makai Golf Club: http://www.makaigolf.com

Puakea Golf Course: http://www.puakeagolf.com

Wailua Golf Course: http://www.golfkauaihawaii.com/wailua-golf-club

WHERE TO STAY:

Grand Hyatt Kaua'i Resort & Spa, Poipu Bay: http://kauai.hyatt.com/en/hotel/home.html (pictured above)

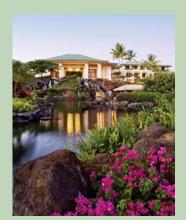
Kaua'i Marriott Resort on Kalapaki Beach: http://www.marriott.com/hotels/travel/lihhi-kauai-marriott-resort/

The St. Regis Princeville Resort: http://www.stregisprinceville.com

GETTING TO KAUA'I:

Flights to Lihue Airport (LIH) commence from all major Canadian cities on United, West Jet, American, USAir, Alaska and Delta airlines, with connections from numerous Canadian and U.S. airports.

GENERAL INFORMATION: http://www.golfkauaihawaii.com





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Jungle Fever



PHOTOS BY MARK DIMITROFF

Thanks to the efforts of Jiovanny Rivadeneira, pictured below, the insects and rare species like this Poison Dart frog, above, have been given a chance to thrive in their natural Ecuadorian habitat.

In the second of a two part series, *Mark Dimitroff* looks how a man's sacrifices helped save a rainforest

ASUNÌ NATIONAL PARK,

ECUADOR — The Ecuadorian leafcutter ants are bustling along the highway at our feet, like Friday evening rush-hour traffic on a one-

lane highway home. Bumper-tobumper, head-to-toe, and every one has a parcel — a blade of grass, a section of leaf, a piece of something — which they are taking to their destination. They all have a purpose, and are steadfast in their approach to get their task accomplished.

With the bright sun overhead, and the Añangucocha Lake stretched out in front of us, Jiovanny Rivadeneira and I sit on the grassy knoll between villas at the Napo Wildlife Centre

(NWC) and talk about the local community and how it spawned the successful NWC. Throughout our chat, I keep looking at those industrious and relentless ants and think how much Rivadeneira's story is so similar, in tenacity, work ethic and personal sacrifice.

For a long time, the community here was

stagnating. Birth rates were down, and the young, once old enough, were leaving for bigger centres. There was nothing to hold them back, no future to look forward to. The population was dwindling and the future of the community was in peril.

Rivadeneira, a community elder and leader and the general manager of the NWC, is one of 13 children. He was always a dreamer growing up, the thoughtful one. He was a visionary of sorts, and as he grew older and became wiser, he recognized that there had to be change or the consequences for his beloved community would be catastrophic.

When the time was right, Rivadeneira became the leader of the community council and

started his quest of revitalization. But this was not a dictatorship, so his vision had to be sold to the council and voted upon. At the time, the council was leaning heavily towards getting involved with the oil companies that wanted to buy lands to get to the vast oil reserves locked beneath. This was easy money and a quick fix, a get-rich-quick





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type of deal. Big money.

However, Rivadeneira saw the consequences of that option, how the encroachment of the oil companies, once started, would eventually change the landscape of the rainforest forever. He opted instead to campaign with his peers on the council to build an Eco Reserve to earn money to keep the community alive, provide employment for the young and build and renovate the community infrastructure.

He had the foresight to think that foreigners would pay money to see the rainforest from within, to stay in the warm belly of the Ecuadorian Amazon, to marvel at nature at its best, to see and experience the traditions of the local peoples — to live, for just a while, inside the Yasunì National Park, an important UNESCO Biosphere Reserve and the largest tract of tropical rainforest in Ecuador. Years later, history has proven him right.

But this was not without personal sacrifice.

"Many nights I cried," recalls Rivadeneira. "I had to make so many personal sacrifices, family sacrifices, for the greater good of the community, while non-supporters had great lives with their families."

Today, however, he smiles. Broadly. Things are coming together. The NWC is working on a scientific study with a local university. The Interpretation Centre — situated in an authentic Añangu village building with a woven grass roof and dirt floor — is where the community women's association sells handmade traditional handicrafts, where you can see demonstrations of traditional ways of hunting and fishing, and enjoy performances of traditional dances. And you can try your hand at shooting blow darts through a two-metre-long blowgun; not nearly as easy as it looks!

As honoured guests, we are treated to an exclusive tour of the community itself, a social outing usually off limits to visitors.

In the village we see the new Vicente Mamallacta School, boasting around 92 students. The school offers specialized courses in ecotourism, language and agronomy, subjects that best fit the practicality of the community. The top graduating students have the option of getting a job or a scholarship, paid for by the community.

But we have come to see wildlife and to experience the rainforest from within. And we are not disappointed. During our three-day stay, we see plentiful displays of wildlife: caimans, sloths, turtles, lizards, squirrel monkeys and scores of birds, in-



The native people of Equador and the wonderful rainforest creatures like the cute Golden Mantled Tamarin monkey above, have been given a chance to remain in the lands of their ancestors.

cluding kingfishers, hawks and the screaming piha, probably the loudest bird ever, and, of course, the hoatzin, also known as the stinky turkey or stinkbird. A rather noisy but always entertaining species with a variety of hoarse calls, including groans, croaks, hisses and grunts.

And insects? This is insect central. Iridescent blue morpho butterflies the size of dinner plates live here. Caterpillars six inches long with long fuzzy sweaters lounge on giant leaves, eating their furniture one bite at a time. Moths, giant grasshoppers, huge beetles ... just too many to list.

We are gently woken by a polite knock on the door — there are no alarms here — at 4:30 every morning, get a bite of breakfast and then we go hiking, sometimes for hours. One day we hike to the best parrot clay licks in Ecuador to see the beautiful birds get their daily mineral fix. From the blind we see no fewer than five species, including the mealy amazon, blue-headed and orange-cheeked. Then we're off to another clay lick that parakeets frequent. Hundreds of them buzzing around, watching for predators, always alert and skittish. Land to get their mineral fix. Take off. Hide. Come out again. Repeat.

Amazing.

Another day, we hike for an hour to get to the canopy observation tower — so aptly named — and once we make the 36-metre climb we were mesmerized by the antics of a family of howler monkeys grooming each other atop a tree. Moments later, a group of macaws fly by in the distance, effortless, barely above the morning mist and glowing warmly in the rising sun. We spot a lettered araçari, a cousin of the toucan, and we're delighted to have a visit by a kite, a bird from the hawk family. Tarantulas larger than my hand make the tower their home, as well.

In the evening, paddling along a tributary by canoe after dusk, I feel closer to the rainforest than in the daylight. It envelops me in a calming black curtain – not silent, but still. Nighttime sounds come from everywhere. A shriek here, a howl there ... clicks, whirs and cackles. In the light of the moon I can make out the twisted mesh of vegetation spilling over from the canopy above reaching into the water next to our canoe.

Later, we catch the red reflections from inside a caiman's eyes by powerful torchlight, both up close and across the kilometrewide lake.

Like the caiman that night, we too were red-eyed when we finally had to depart. •



Something's **Fishy**In Tokyo

The famed Tsukiji market remains a big tourist draw

By Annie Tsu TRAVELIFE PUBLISHER

OKYO — Total strangers, speaking every language imaginable, huddle beneath tarps slung between the small sushi restaurants opposite the Tsukiji Fish Market trying to avoid the relentless spring shower.

The tourists are packed like sardines in the narrow passages that separate the restaurants, but no one appears willing to leave.

"They line up around 6 a.m. every day and they wait as long as two hours







Tourists pack into narrow restaurants to enjoy some of the fish delicacies cut by skilled hands at Tokyo's world famous Tsukiji Fish Market.

PHOTOS BY ANNIE TSU

to get into the restaurants," a seaweed salesman tells me.

The queue waiting to enter the narrow restaurants is orderly. No one pushes or shoves. The lucky ones smile back at the crowd as they enter the premises.

Always rated among the Top 5 tourist attractions in Japan's capital, the Tsukiji Fish Market is one of the most fascinating places to visit — it's a beehive of activity from the time it opens until it closes at midday.

"The market opens around 4 a.m. and that's when the big tuna get auctioned off," the seaweed vendor tells me as he hands me a salted sample of his product to taste. Yum!

"After the auction, local fishmongers and chefs come and get their catch of the day. The tourists who arrive early (registration starts at 5 a.m.) always come over here (to the restaurants) afterwards."

There's no fresher fish on the planet then what's served in these tiny restaurants. Once inside, the patrons are treated to the freshest uni (sea urchin), toro (the fattest part of the tuna, and the best part!), hamachi (yellow tail tuna) and an assortment of other seafood goodies plucked from the oceans just a few hours earlier. The charge: about \$40 U.S. and worth every penny as far as I, and every other uni lover out there is concerned.

Access to the auction is restricted to early risers — an incident a few years ago, when a tourist was struck by a forklift truck, prompted market officials to create a viewer's gallery (behind glass) so the fishermen can go about their business without being interrupted. You must line up around 5 a.m. to get a ticket and only about 40 people are admitted each day.

The restaurants - Diwa is my favourite - hold between 10 and 15 people and they're always crowded.

"This is my 15th visit to Tokyo and my 16th visit to this market; I came here twice on one of my visits," a charming Australian tells me.

One visit to the Tsukiji Fish Market gets you hooked for life.

INFORMATION

 For more information on the fish market or how to obtain tickets, ao to these websites: http://www.shijou.metro.tokvo. jp/english/market/tsukiji.html; http://www.tsukiji-market. or.jp/youkoso/24hour_e/24hours.htm; http://www.shijou. metro.tokyo.jp/pdf/english/tsukijiguide.pdf

• Air Canada offers direct service to Tokyo from Toronto, Vancouver and Calgary and Delta and United also offer service.

• For information on other fascinating places to visit in Japan, go to http://www.ilovejapan.ca

It takes a keen eye to pick the best fish to be served at the sushi restaurants located opposite Tokyo's legendary Tsukiji Fish Market. Even if it's raining, hungry tourists don't mind waiting to sample these taste sensations that were plucked from the world's oceans just a few hours earlier.





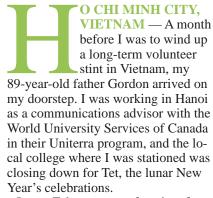
Fal Da In Asia

A father-daughter journey through Indochina turns into an intergenerational adventure

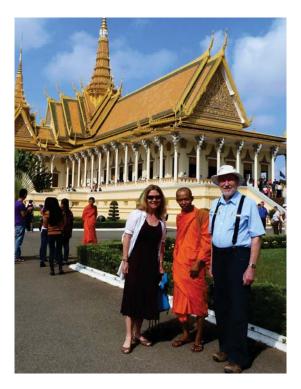


Maureen Littlejohn and her father Gordon set out on a journey through Vietnam and Cambodia that resulted in some fascinating revelations about the places and people they came upon and especially about themselves.

By Maureen Littlejohn TRAVELIFE CONTRIBUTOR



It was February, a perfect time for dad to escape Toronto's deep freeze





Maureen and her dad were especially impressed with the ruins of Angkor in Cambodia, the colonial buildings of Vietnam and especially the street food they tasted.

and join me for a holiday. Our plan was to scout the country for a couple of weeks and also see Angkor Wat in neighbouring Cambodia.

Dad is an old-school foodie, meaning he is an adventuresome eater. When my mother was alive they loved discovering hole-in-the wall ethnic restaurants, so I knew he'd be up for a Hanoi Street Food Tour. Joining a group of 10 travellers, we entered Hanoi's frenetic Old Quarter, dodging motorbikes and eating as the locals do.

The bun chao, a noodle broth topped with barbequed pork patties and fresh herbs, was my favourite. Dad loved the rice flour pancakes filled with minced pork and cloud ear mushrooms, called *bánh cuốn*. The vendor even let him try cooking the translucent wraps.

At the end of our gastronomic adventure, there was just enough room in our bellies for a frothy egg coffee at Giang Café. The café's founder, Nguyen Giang, first used eggs when milk was scarce after World War II. Sweet and creamy, it tasted like tiramisu in a cup.

Hồ Chí Minh's mausoleum was next and we joined the throng snaking its way towards the imposing, box-like structure. The line-up moved surprisingly fast and 20 minutes later we shuffled past the Godfather of communist Vietnam.

Hồ Chí Minh died in 1968 and wanted to be cremated, but the powers that be had him preserved as an inspirational figurehead. So, Uncle Hồ remains in his acrylic glass box for all to see, except for the two





months of annual "refreshing" he gets in Moscow.

Exploring the city, dad and I came upon a religious ceremony at Vietnam's first national university, the Temple of Literature, where fierce older ladies dressed in shiny satin marched and prayed. We also walked about the crumbling citadel and sipped countless cups of sweet Vietnamese coffee.

When the temperature dipped we headed south to Hội An, an ancient port city boasting a mishmash of Chinese, Japanese, French and Vietnamese culture. Strolling along the streets of this UNES-CO World Heritage site, we popped into traditional houses that are open to the public. Often occupied by descendants of the original inhabitants, some families go back seven generations. We were shown ancestral altars and stared at yellowing photos of unsmiling matriarchs and patriarchs in silk robes. It's difficult to get a grasp on family roots so deep. I know my aunts, uncles and grandparents, but after that it gets fuzzy.

My dad is not a man of many words. He was a lawyer and plays his cards close to his chest, but the displays got to him and he gave me a little familial background.

"My grandmother and grandfather came over to Canada from England when I was very young," he told me. "My grandmother moved in with us because my grandfather didn't like it in Canada and



went back to England."

There had always been a mystery surrounding my great grandfather. I remember being told he had been in the tea business but ended up a stevedore.

"Oh, he was kicked out of his family's tea business. My cousin and I went through some old documents and figured out why." Dad paused and lifted his eyebrows. "He and my grandmother had their first child a little too soon after they got married. My grandfather's family didn't want '*that woman*' benefitting from their tea business, so my grandfather was cut out."

Funny what you learn about your family while so far from home.

We then flew to Siem Reap, Cambodia, and dad was pleased to see a bottle of Glenmorangie — a fine single-malt Scotch in the duty free shop. Later, sitting by the pool at our hotel, we toasted our adventures with the smooth amber liquid.

"To a wonderful trip!" said dad, a big smile on his face.

Touring Angkor Wat and the other temples in the complex, we learned of gods and demons, a mythic serpent, and the Ocean of Milk containing the elixir of life. We gazed at gigantic stone faces with the features of 12th-century ruler Jayavaran VII and quietly crept past kneeling worshipers in front of Buddhist statues.

In Phnom Penh, we paid tribute to the two million Cambodians butchered during the violent regime of Pol Pot and toured a former high school which had been turned into a prison. Chum Mey, a man with deep soulful eyes and one of the prison's few survivors, sold my father his book. It was sad yet enlightening. Dad and I shook our heads, thinking about those atrocities taking place while we were oblivious in Canada.

A speedboat on the Mekong River took us from Phnom Penh



across the border to the Vietnamese city of Châu Đốc. The food in the Mekong Delta, to my mind, is the best in Vietnam seafood, river fish, fresh fruits and vegetables. We even tried elephant ear fish. Battered lightly and served upright on a wooden stand, it looked imposing. Dad flaked a piece onto his fork and took a taste. "Tender!"

Ho Chi Minh City was our last stop. We shopped the night market, marvelled at the Opera House, and did a day trip to the Ců Chi Tunnels, where the Viet Cong hid so effectively during the American War. Dad, who served in the Navy in World War II, passed on trying out a high-powered rifle at the complex's shooting range. So did I. Too noisy.

What a journey: Food, culture, history and family revelations. Even at 89, dad says he learned a lot. I know I did. •

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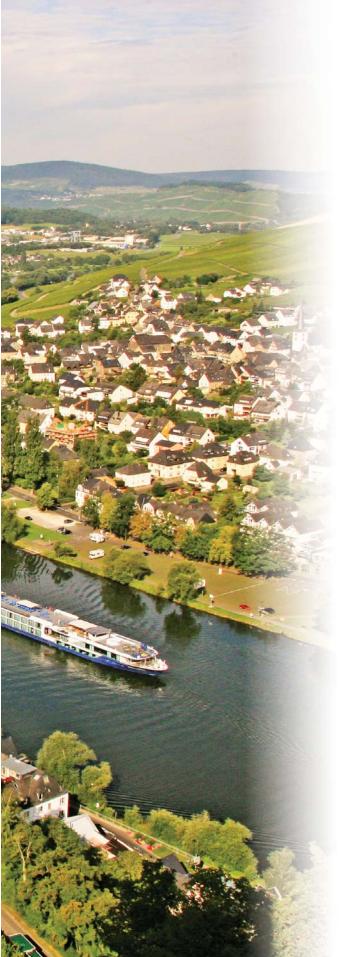
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Cruisers Discover A Handback Handback

PHOTO COURTESY AVALON CRUISE LINE



Slowing down on a slow moving ship is the only way to appreciate Europe

By Josephine Matyas TRAVELIFE CONTRIBUTOR

BOARD THE AVALON TRANQUILITY II — With each trip, I try to pack less; just the essentials in an ever-shrinking suitcase. I have a fantasy: perhaps if I can learn to schlep less from place to place, I can learn to pare my to-do list as well.

"Do less" does not come naturally. There's a skill to shifting gears — with a yawning cavern between "gotta do it all" and "I'm watching the world go by." Is stepping off the merry-go-round just crazy talk, or can I learn to embrace a laid-back chill?

That's how I find myself on the deck of the Avalon Tranquility

II, waving as we pull away from the cityscape of Strasbourg, France, for a cruise along the Upper Rhine River. Navigating one of Europe's great rivers aboard a luxury small ship could be my ticket to that illusive chill. Travel on the ribbon of water is slow and steady with absolutely no chance I'll get my hands on the wheel.

The Rhine begins as a trickle in the Swiss Alps, gathering steam and flowing northward until spilling into the North Sea. From the end of the Thirty Years' War in the mid-17th century to the end of World War II, the line formed by the Upper Rhine was a contentious borderland between France and Germany. The land flipped back and forth under the two flags and, decades later, the mingling of cultures is stamped into the architecture and on the menus of small winstubs (wine lounges) consider a foie gras appetizer and a hearty entrée of sausage and sauerkraut.

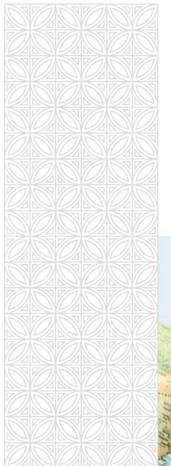
Downstream from Strasbourg, the Romantic Rhine is a procession of medieval castles, a system of tollbooths where rulers extracted taxes for passing through their fiefdoms. Upriver — to the south between Strasbourg and Basel, Switzerland — the river widens and the shoreline slackens (gone are the deep gorges and steep vineyards of the Middle Rhine) and villages are set back from the edge. Out of sight, perhaps, but not out of mind.

"We haven't moved so much forward in time," says Nancy Parades, our onboard cruise director. "This is what makes the Rhine so romantic."



PHOTO BY JOSEPHINE MATYAS

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In the Middle Ages, prudent town planners built small trading villages along the Upper Rhine on higher ground, away from the banks of the flood-prone river. On the French side, medieval, walled villages like Riquewihr, Eguisheim and Kaysersberg are a string of irresistible stops along the 170-kilometre-long Alsace Route du Vin, just a short hop from the boat docks and a popular half-day trip on the Tranquility II itinerary.

On the German side of the Rhine, an amazing side trip meanders through a landscape of farms quilted in lush squares of green, past villages of half-timbered Hansel and Gretel-style houses, into the dark conifers of the Black Forest. This countryside grandstands with cherrytopped gateau soaked with kirsch liqueur, cuckoo clocks and its namesake ham.

The Tranqulity II slips into the dock at Breisach, Germany, just long enough for us to parade down the gangplank and climb onto buses for the half-day excursions. To the west is France's Alsace, a blissful region of sleepy vineyards, tucked beside the foothills of the Vosges Mountains. These slopes have the high cheekbones and lanky silhouette of vineyard pedigree, with perfect conditions for wine production: warm, dry weather and a fertile soil that produces some 12 million cases of wine each year.

The bus stops in tiny Riquewihr, a virtual showcase of renaissance and medieval homes, hemmed in by arrow-straight rows of vines blanketing the rolling hills right up to village's stone ramparts. Riquewihr's layout has not changed since the Middle Ages — fortified gateways control traffic to the town square and three sides of the 700-year old ramparts still mark its outer boundaries.

A pride of preservation is on full show and it's no wonder that the entire town has been declared a historic monument. The cobbled main street is lined with family-run hotels, shops and small restaurants serving traditional Alsatian meals, including cheese-smothered tarte flambée.

Shingles announcing wine hang everywhere and there is no shortage of caves, the cellars where the winemakers pour glasses of the crisp white wines that make Alsace famous – Riesling, Gewurztraminer, Pinot Gris and Muscat.

On the other side of the river, our bus winds along country roads toward the hills of the Black Forest. We pass fields of springtime asparagus and tidy orchards of cherry, apple and walnut trees (ingredients that show up on every local menu).



PHOTOS BY JOSEPHINE MATYAS

Vineyards, lush with ancient vines that sweep down to the mighty rivers of Europe are a feast for the eyes, and the street treats that await in small towns along the rivers are especially appealing.



"The Romans came here 2,000 years ago and they saw this mountain range but didn't enter because it was covered with trees," explains Gerald Nill, our genial guide. "They stayed on the plain of the Rhine River and it was another 1,000 years before people ventured into the forested area and established villages." Now they come to the forest in droves, mostly hikers looking to escape the cities.

The roadway narrows and twists and turns as it enters the forest of beech, spruce and silver fir, so thick that they make the woods look black from a distance. According to Nill, motorcyclists who want off the wide autobahn love the challenging curves of the Black Forest roads. In every village, small restaurants and shops have sprung up to service the tourist.



Europe is a wonderland of fairytale towns and ancient buildings that are best seen from the deck of a slow-moving river cruise ship.

The cuckoo clock was invented in the Black Forest and at the Hornberger Uhrenspiele — The House of Black Forest Clocks — seventh-generation craftspeople still design, carve, glue and paint up to 5,000 clocks each year. The shop's shelves are lined with every cliché of the Black Forest — beer steins, music boxes, felt alpine hats, folded pairs of lederhosen and hundreds of handmade cuckoo clocks.

The owner signals me over to his workbench and I watch as he deliberately, patiently chips away at a piece of wood that will become a timepiece. Behind him, a hundred of his creations keep up a rhythmic tick-tock but he seems immune to any suggestion of marching time. He has found his own version of the laidback chill I have been chasing.

And, with just a little bit of time, the magic along this waterway will show me as well. \bullet





Information

• The 128-passenger Avalon Tranquility II is the newest of Avalon Waterways' suite ships. Some of the spacious staterooms feature floor to ceiling windows and a bed positioned to face the view, pictured left. Gourmet meals focus on regional dishes typical of the area. The Rhine River cruise season operates from mid-March until the end of October with special cruises through the Christmas market season. For info, go to http://www.AvalonWaterways.ca

- For information on the wine route, go to http://www.alsace-wine-route.com
- For informaiton on travel in Germany, go to http://www.germany.travel

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GIRONA, SPAIN

Reflections *Of A European Train Holiday*

Marc Atchison discovers that Europe's charms are best seen through the window of a Eurail train

ARCELONA — Outside my window, Europe is whizzing past. First Holland, then Belgium ... France ... Switzerland ... Italy ... Spain. Small towns, their church spires sticking up like pins on a map, pass by in the blink of the eye.

Farmers' fields, some dotted with animals and lush with spring crops, are there one moment and gone the next.

As we approach great European capitals and their iconic landmarks come into view, my heart pounds with excitement.

The sight of lovers locked in a romantic embrace as we pull into stations frozen in time brings back memories of tearful Hollywood goodbyes in those old black and white movies I love watching.

Europe is picture perfect — when it's framed in a train window.

Maybe that's why, even in these days of budget airlines, romantics like me still elect to use trains to get around Europe.

Train travel on the Continent, after all, is a gift wrapped in a ribbon of steel.

The company that does European train travel best is Eurail (http://www.eurailgroup.org), a consortium of rail and shipping firms that have banded

together to provide foreign visitors with a seamless mode of travel — one pass gets you almost everywhere.

The Eurail Global Pass is what some friends and I elect to use on our 11-day journey through France, Italy and Spain, which actually starts in The Netherlands when I get off my KLM (http://www.klm.com) flight at Amsterdam's remarkable Schiphol Airport; walk a few steps from the arrival hall to the Thalys Train (a Eurail partner — http://www.thalys.com) ticket booth, pick up my ticket and 10-day Eurail pass (they have to be

shown together on trains to be validated), then take an escalator down to the convenient train station below the airport where I board my Thalys coach bound for Paris — the first stop on our tour.

The high-speed Thalys train is packed with foreign travellers and European execs — they love the convenience of the free onboard Wi-Fi service — and as the train pulls out of the station I'm awed by the flat

Dutch countryside that's awash in colour — it's tulip time in Holland.

The 2.5-hour journey, which takes me past enchanting Brussels, ends at Paris' Gare du Nord (station), where I meet up with my friends for a two-night stay in the City of Light.

Our Paris visit has many highlights:

• We discover two affordabe hotels — the chic Fred (http://www.fred-hotel.com/en/) and its sister property Hotel Max (http://www.hotel-max.fr) in the 14th Arrondissement, close to all the major sites.

• We are led around the historic Marais District, comprised of Paris' Gay and Jewish quarters, Notre-Dame Cathedral, the flower market, "love-locked bridges," incredible St. Gervais, tony Rue des Francs-Bourgeois and Place des Visges by the husband-and-wife

guide team of David Downie and Alison Harris (http://www.parisparistours.com).

• I learn all about Paris' café culture from an entertaining ex-pat American and Paris expert named Terrance Gelenter (http://www.paris-expat.com).

• We enjoy wonderful dinners at the Restaurant Le Zeyer and Moulin Vert and great lunches at some local cafés that the guides introduce us to.

Our time in Paris, however, goes by like a speeding train.

Next stop: Venice.

We take a cab to Paris' Gare de Lyon where we

PHOTOS BY MARC ATCHISON

Eurail trains rocket across Europe or chug up mountain sides

to get travellers up close to the Continent's wonders in magical places like Italy, France and Montserret, above and left, in the the Catalan region of Spain.

Eurail Global Pass

How to use your Eurail Global Pass

1. Before making your first journey, activate your pass at your travel agent you purchased the Pass from or in Europe at a train station ticket window. You must activate the Pass within six months after buying it.

2. Read the Eurail Global Pass Guide prior to your departure. Bring it along on your journey, as well as the Eurail Map.

3. Before boarding a new train, bus or boat, you must fill in the Travel Report details. If you have a Flexi Pass, enter the date in blue or black ink (no pencil) in the Travel Calendar on your Eurail Pass Ticket.

4. Keep your Eurail Pass, possible train reservation tickets and your passport available as these need to be shown together to the various train conductors.

5. Guard your Eurail Pass as you would cash. There are no refunds for lost or stolen Eurail Passes.

6. Note that the Eurail Pass is valid for all trains and boats/companies printed on your Eurail Pass ticket, or in the case of a Global Pass, valid in the countries and companies printed on the Pass Cover. The Rail Planner App specifies the different participating railway companies and shipping companies.

7. Note that for free passage on international ferry routes, your Eurail Pass must be valid for the country of departure AND the country of arrival. For discounted passages, the Pass must be valid for the country of departure OR the country of arrival.

8. The Eurail Pass entitles you to extra benefits. Check the Rail Planner App for the list of extra benefits such as free or discounted transportation on busses, ferries, internet providers and hotels.

9. In several major train stations, you will find Eurail Aid Offices where you can get information and assistance with reservations.

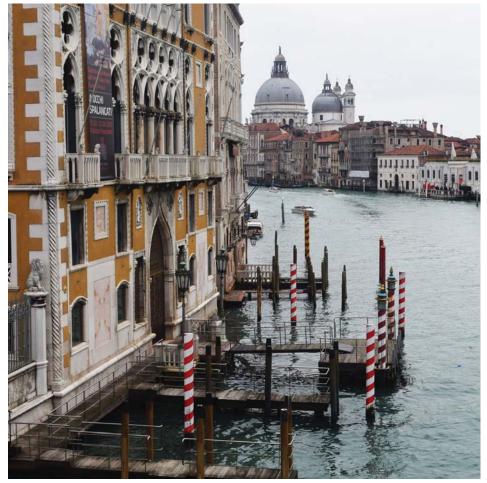
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Venice is a Eurail stop that excites even on a cloudy day. Its maze of streets is always fun to explore.

board a Thello Train (http://www.thello.com) a new Eurail partner — for an overnight journey through France and Switzerland before reaching Rome's capital of romance, Venice.

While our train is being readied, we have time to explore the historic station that was built in 1900 for the World Exposition. Most trains that leave from here, including the high speed TGV, are destined for southern France and Italy.

One of the station's many highlights is its famed restaurant Le Train Bleu, whose lavish decor, frescoed ceilings and massive chandeliers make it more suited as the main dining room of the Elysee Palace than a railway station "café." The restaurant was originally called "Buffet de la Gare de Lyon" but was renamed Le Train Bleu in 1963 in honour of a famous train of the same name.

We book "First Class" cabins on the Thello train but the accommodation does not meet our expectations. While clean and comfortable, Thello's idea of "First Class" and ours differ significantly — no in-room washroom and I've seen better dining cars in VIA's Economy Class trains. That said, I'm quickly lulled to sleep by the hum of steel wheels gliding along the tracks and awake in the middle of the night to find we've stopped in Lausanne, where the Swiss Alps are silhouetted against the night sky — beautiful!

We cross the Italian border just as the sun starts to appear on the horizon and soon we begin to see the domes of Venice spotlighted under the morning rays. When we reach the city's Santa Lucia Station, we bound from the train, hurry across the Ponte della Costituzione and through Piazzale Roma to reach the Hotel Papadopoli Venezia (http://www.hotel-papadopoli-venezia.com) a very impressive property — where we quickly drop our bags and rush off to see this great city's highlights. Too many, by the way, to absorb in the 24 hours we've budgeted for this stop.

I get lost in the maze of streets leading off St. Mark's Square, which is crowded with enthusiastic Chinese tourists. Sadly, the centuries-old glass and mask shops that once thrived near St. Mark's have been replaced by high-end fashion stores — Gucci, Dior, etc. — which cater to the Chinese. That means the city's traditional craftspeople have been pushed deep inside Venice. An unexpected benefit as I search through the labyrinth of streets to find them is that I discover quiet little neighbourhoods and enjoy glasses of wine at quaint cafés while listening to Vivaldi's romantic music seep out the doors of one of the area's grand churches.

We're up early the next morning to catch another Eurail partner train — Trenitalia (http://www.trenitalia.com) to Rome and its state-of-the-art First Class cabins restore our faith in luxury train travel. The service in the Frecciargento car — which means Silver Arrow — is pure gold and this train dispels all those old tales you may have heard about how bad the Italian train sys-

tem is. Not only do we leave Venice on time, but the futuristic Trenitalia train gets us to Rome a few minutes early.

That's good, because we have another action-packed schedule in the Eternal City.

The two smartest things we do in Rome is to first check into the back alley but very chic Hotel Relais Orso (http:// www.relaisorso.com/en), a divine little property tucked away in a small cobbled street that's within walking distance of the Vatican, Piazza Navona and the Spanish Steps. The historic hotel once served as the Vatican prison and is one of the most affordable and unique — square toilet seats — properties in Rome.

Secondly, we secure the

services of an extraordinary



Visitors to Catalan's colourful Girona will do some crazy things to secure their return.

tour guide by the name of Stuart Harvey (http://www.romepersonaltours.com), an ex-pat Brit who has become an expert on all things Rome.

On Day One of our tour with Harvey, we explore the city's squares and fountains — Trevi Fountain, even though most of it is wrapped in scaffolding while being refurbished, still looks very impressive. Harvey shares with us his vast "inside" knowledge of the Spanish Steps, Pantheon, Temple of Hadrian and Piazza Navona before introducing us to the cats that guard the Largo Agrentina, site of Caesar's assassination. What a purrfect way to end Day One of our Roman holiday.

Harvey arrives early on Day Two because he has lots planned for us — "the Forum, Colosseum and Arch of Constantine quickly fill up with tourists so it's better to get an early start," he tells us.

Harvey's incredible knowledge of each site and their importance during Roman times amazes us but he keeps the best for last — a visit to the 11th-century San Clemente Basillica, which sits atop two 1st-century Roman buildings is the highlight of the entire trip for me, so far.

We'd need two years, not just two days, to truly explore and appreciate all that Rome has to offer, but Barcelona waits.



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Vatican City looks imposing as it reflects in Rome's Tiber River. Rome remains one of the main stops on a Eurail trip and passengers are never disappointed.

Knowing this was going to be a hectic trip across three remarkable countries, we opt to take a ferry to get to Catalonia. The Grimaldi Company (http://www.grimaldi-lines.com/en), another Eurail partner, offers crossings from Italy's Civitavecchia (Rome's port city) to Barcelona and we take the opportunity to catch our breath during the 36-hour voyage.

To get to the ship from Rome, we hop aboard the Frecciabianca train and an hour later we're sitting in the ferry terminal with hundreds of energetic teenagers, part of a large school group returning to Catalonia's historic capital.

Grimaldi's M/V Roma is massive, capable of accommodating over 3,000 transports and 215 cars on its lower decks while its upper decks look more like a luxury cruise ship with 411 spacious cabins, 50 junior suites and 19 owners' suites. We each reserve one of these beauties that come with an oversized living room, bedroom and bathroom. The ship also boasts a variety of dining options, including a fine dining room with some excellent menu choices.

Thanks to the presence of the teenagers, a party mood prevails during the crossing from Italy to Catalonia with a middle-ofthe-night stop in Sardinia, which my friends and I sleep through thanks to some very comfortable beds.

After the M/V Roma docks, we check into the Hotel Arts Barcelona (http://www.hotelartsbarcelona.com/en), a 5-star masterpiece nestled along the harbourfront that affords guests incredible views of the city and supplies the best service in a city renowned for its hotel hospitality.

As the name suggests, the hotel puts an emphasis on "art" and because there's so many pieces scattered about the rooms and public spaces, sometimes we think we've booked into an art gallery instead of a hotel.

The artful flower arrangements in the lobby are especially eye catching.

Next day we hop aboard an FGC (Ferrocarrilis de la Generalitat de Catalunya) train and take a breathtaking journey through some gorgeous mountain scenery to reach Catalonia's most important religious retreat, Montserrat (http://www.montserratvista.com/en), which dates back 1,000 years.

After leaving the main FGC line, we transfer to a funicular

known as Santa Cova that chugs up the steep slopes along a narrow track that clings precariously to the side of the dramatic rock formations.

We spend half the day exploring the impressive monastery, its informative museum and listen to the angelic voices of its worldrenowned choir in the 16th-century basilica — it's where the revered statue of Our Lady of Montserrat stands — before returning to Barcelona for a tour through the impressive Picasso Museum (http://www.museupicasson.bcn.cat/en/) in the city's Old Quarter.

The day ends with a Catalonia cooking lesson at the Cook & Taste culinary school before returning to the hotel and a nightcap in the happening Frank's Bar.

The final day of our Eurail trip starts with another short train journey to magical Figueres (http://www.catalunya.com), the hometown of Salvador Dali, where the incredible museum (http://www.salvador-dali.org/ museus/teatre-museu-dali) he planned before his death now stands as a testament to his artistic genius — or madness, if like me, you are not a big fan of his surreal style.

However, the museum is informative and a delight to tour but I find the town even more fascinating. We're treated to a lunch at Restaurant Duran, where Dali would eat with his friends whenever he was in Figueres.

Before returning to Barcelona, we take a short taxi ride to neighbouring Girona, a lovely town where colourful homes are mirrored in the still waters of the four rivers — Ter, Onyar, Galligants and Güell — that run through it. The old Roman city has spectacular churches to visit, narrow streets to wander and the ancient Jewish Quarter is one of the best-preserved in Europe.

On the train ride back to Barcelona — we spend our last night at the Hotel Barceló Sants (http://www.barcelo.com/BarceloHotels/en), maybe the best railway station property in all of Europe — my friends and I compare notes on what we've seen and experienced on this trip of a lifetime with Eurail and its partners, which has allowed us to see Europe at ground level.

We dread going to the airport the next morning to catch our flights home and one of the group muses: "I live for the day when they run a train tunnel under the Atlantic so I never have to be strip searched at an airport again."

We all agree that would be great — but only if Eurail ran it. •



PHOTO BY SAM SCIARRINO

Great Photography starts with a Passionate Eye

Some of the world's top photographers, including some of the Nikon Canada Ambassadors who appear regularly in TraveLife, were front and centre at the recently held Scotiabank CONTACT Photography Festival in Toronto. The annual event features more than 1,500 Canadian and international artists and photographers exhibiting at more than 175 venues throughout the city. As in previous years, the festival also featured the Nikon Lecture Series session where the Nikon Canada Ambassadors discussed their inspirations and the technical accomplishments behind their travel photography images. World-class photographers Kristian Bogner, Michelle Valberg, Sam Sciarrino and Tony Beck provided a wealth of information and advice to those attending the month-long festival. Here's some of the advice the Nikon Canada Ambassadors shared with the CONTACT crowds:

Nikon Canada Ambassadors offer some travel photography tips



SAM SCIARRINO

SAM SCIARRINO

AM, a noted portrait photographer, says following leading lines and light composition can be the difference between an average image and a stunning one. "Create a story. Create interest and drama," says Sam, who uses the Nikon D810, Nikon D610, SB-910 and a teleconverter when travelling and capturing portrait images. "Trying to find the right look is key, he says when ensuring proper lighting indoors and out in the field, adding that "create an illusion with flash and light direction" and "in shade,

look for ways to redirect light."

Most of all, Sciarrino says using available light with a focus on the "highlights and shadows" can create breathtaking pictures.



PHOTO BY MICHELLE VALBERG

Michelle Valberg

HE award-winning wildlife and nature photographer — she uses the Nikon D4S and D800 as her camera tools of choice — has captured stunning images of humpback whales, polar bears and penguins. She notes that when travelling to remote locations such



as the Canadian Arctic, preparation and a willingness to be creative are key to getting great travel photographs.

"You have to take every opportunity that you can in the time that you are there," says Valberg. "You are looking for behaviours ...

MICEHLLE VALBERG

anticipate what the animals will do next," she says, adding that "you have to be well prepared when shooting in extreme

conditions" and "you can get so overwhelmed in the field but you have to be in the moment for great photos."

Most of all, she says improving your travel photography is about practice and persistence: "With wildlife photography, it is critical to be still. Patience is a virtue."



PHOTO BY TONY BECK

TONY BECK

ONY is a nature and wildlife photography specialist and his message to the CONTACT crowd was this: "Try to focus on the eyes when capturing your wildlife image." Beck uses a range of tools, including the Nikon D4S, to capture the many animals and plants he encounters on his world travels.

"Usually the ISO is one of the last things I will adjust," Beck says, adding he advises that photographers look to use a fast shutter at all times. "If things are happening rapidly, I put the focus in the centre ... I may have to crop to get a better composition."



TONY BECK

Using a wide angle lens is often best to help capture the rich wildlife, Beck says.

He also offered that he tends not to look at his histogram in the field, advises that shooters learn to master manual shooting for greater control and offers that great travel images is about focus: "I am more focused on what the animal & the light is doing — and where I am positioned with my subject."



PHOTO BY KRISTIAN BOGNER



Kristian Bogner

APTURING amazing sports photography was the focus of award-winning photographer Kristian Bogner's lecture session. His advice: "What makes a great sports photographer? Focus — images that have impeccable sharpness draw you in. "Energy in motion. Sometimes it's about raising your purpose," says the professional action sports and adventure photographer who regularly travels to shoot sporting events and world championships. Bogner, who typically uses the Nikon D4S or Nikon D750, offered

action images. "To get the shot, do whatever it takes. It's good to be out of your comfort zone," he says, adding that taking a different perspective and getting a sense of the space, size and amplitude when shooting is key as well. Most importantly of all, Bogner stressed the following: "It's about ingenuity in getting the shot. Find your centre. Take deep breaths. Tell a story."

that travel photographers should be passionate and fearless, too, when looking to create



NIKON AMBASSADOR

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This camera's Wi-Fi® capability using the WU-1a Wireless Mobile Adapter can only be used with a compatible iPhone®, iPad®, and/or iPod touch® or smart devices running on the Android[™] operating system. The Wireless Mobile Utility application must be installed on the device before it can be used with this camera. Learn more at Nikon.ca



As the sun sets over the vast grassland of Inner Mongolia, a horseman keeps watch over his herd in the distance. He carries a long pole with a loop of rope to practice catch and release of the horses as an agility maneuver.



A herd of horses run to where I'm standing but always veer away, giving me spectacular photographic opportunities.

Horse Power

Award-winning photojournalist **Spencer Wynn** travels to Inner Mongolia and captures the raw beauty of the land, its people and their famed horses

ORTH OF ONE of the world's largest and busiest cities is a vast open land of deep calm, grass and horses. Inner Mongolia is a place to escape my hectic life — and I keep returning to enjoy the vast flat grasslands that give rise to small rolling hills and skies of pristine blue that drift off into the horizon. I have come here not just to get away, not just to live with the locals in their yurts, but also to learn about their rich equestrian tradition. No other place offers such photo-

province of Inner Mongolia.

graphic opportunities as China's northern

Photo tourism here offers amateurs and professionals the chance to tick an item

off their bucket list while also testing their skills behind the lens. Each day presents a new location and lots of new challenges. I must admit. it does take nerves of steel



SPENCER WYNN

to concentrate on shooting with 200 horses running towards you at full gallop. The test is to stand your ground and keep shooting — trusting that the horses will veer away – giving you the opportunity to create outstanding still images and video.

The ground shakes, the air fills with dust and the soundtrack of raw power is something you will never forget. That's why I keep coming back for more. •



Afternoon sun lights this horse driver and his mount.



After a hard run, a driver takes a cigarette break, left, while at right, another hops onto his trusty mount before joining the herd again.

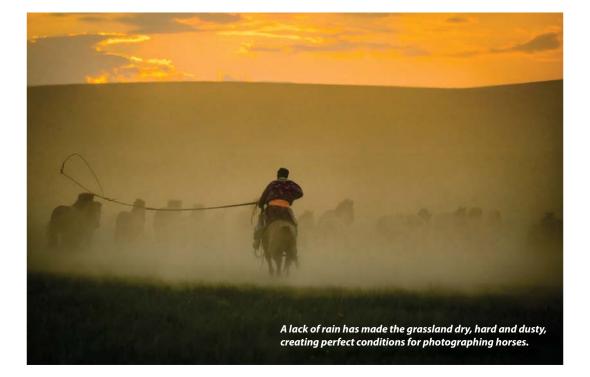




While travelling in Inner Mongolia, one lives with farm families in their comfortable yurts.



Dripping with water and sweat, these horses go for one last run before retiring for the evening.





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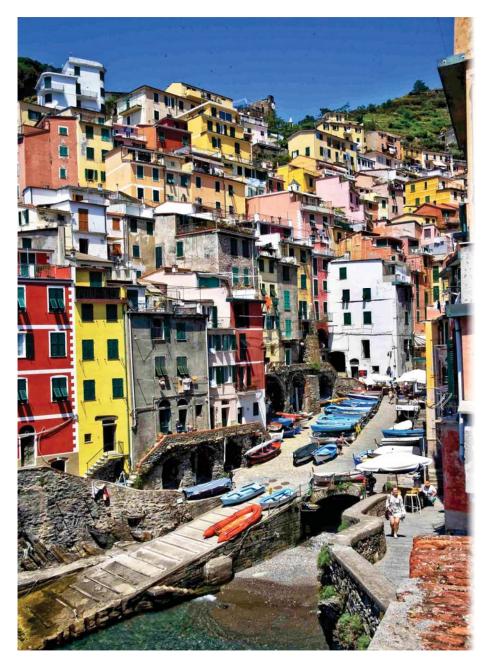


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AIR CANADA

Anniversary Waltz Through Italy's Romantic Cinque Terre



Kay and Dick Loek

fall in love with the towns and culture in the colourful region while celebrating a wedding milestone

By Kay Loek TRAVELIFE CONTRIBUTOR

ERNAZZA, ITALY — The view one gets of the ocean from this magical town that clings to Italy's jagged Ligurian coast is spectacular. Being nicely exhausted after climbing most of the day along trails that connect what's known as Cinque Terre (Five Lands), the bench in Vernazza, from where we look out on the glorious ocean vista, comes just in time.

Then comes the mountain of crumbs — a local housewife has just emptied her tablecloth from the window above and the remnants of her last meal comes raining down on us like confetti at a wedding.

But even that cannot ruin our view or this romantic moment at the start of our 50th wedding anniversary trip through Italy's legendary Cinque Terre, which is located on the scenic Italian Riviera.

Considered a relaxed cousin of wealthy Portofino, Cinque Terre consists of five villages, Vernazza, Riomaggiore, Corniglia, Manarola and Monterosso al Mare. Cars are not allowed in any of the towns and visitors have three choices by which to reach each — by foot, train or ferry.





It's love at first sight for those visiting Italy's Cinque Terre for the first time. Colourful villages, like lovely Riomaggiore, opposite page, that cling to jagged seaside cliffs, are among the most treasured in the world. And the locals, like the elders of Monterosso, top photo, and the sunbathers of Vernassa, above left, are warm and welcoming. When the sun sets, the candles are lit and there's not a more romantic place in the world to spend a very special wedding anniversary.

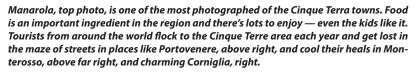
PHOTOS BY DICK LOEK













We actually start our tour by visiting La Spezia and Porto Venere, which, while not actually part of the Cinque Terre, are lovely little towns that border this treasured area of Italy dominated by colourful villages that sweep down from high cliffs to the sea.

We drive to La Spezia, stay a night, and leave our car in the hotel parking lot for five days.

Then we hop on the local bus to Porto Venere and, after a wild serpentine ride upwards, arrive at our first lovely village to explore. The narrow streets take us up to the ancient church of San Lorenzo and Doria Castle and, finally, to the Church of San Pietro, built in 1198, which sits perched atop a hill with another jaw-dropping panoramic view.

Next day we take the train to Vernazza, where we stay at the Franca Maria Apartments. Best to heed the advice we got from a seasoned traveller: "Do not book accommodation in every village. Choose only one village and do day trips." Lugging suitcases or backpacks up and down the steep Cinque Terre paths can be tiring, to say the least. We are impressed to see the number of people — of all ages and shapes — hiking here.

Train travel in this part of Italy posed a challenge for us. The ticket sellers speak very little English and with such large crowds, they just do not have time to try and explain things.

A very important tip: Do not forget to validate your ticket in one of the many machines placed outside the ticket office. If neglected, it could result in receiving a hefty fine and tourists are not exempt. It is difficult to find out how much the fine is, but we overheard one ticket taker saying it was 50 euros (about \$75, Cdn.). We buy tickets only for the villages we are going to and they are good for 75 minutes after validation.

Vernazza is a one-street town dotted with charming shops all the way to the oceanfront and the village has recovered nicely from a flood that crippled it in 2011. The walk along the shore is nothing short of spectacular and if you are fortunate, you may see some young men diving from the high rocks that dot the shoreline.

It's a climb up to see the ruins of Doria Castle; the family that built the castle of the same name in Porto Venere apparently built this one, too.





While the tourists play on the rocky but pristine beaches of Vernassa, below, there's work to be done by the locals, like hauling in the fishing boats at sunset and delievering barrels on wine and beer to the local bars and restaurants.





Food is special in the Cinque Terre. You can pick fresh fruit off the vines in Vernassa, above, or enjoy a drink in a local bar in Riomaggiore or have a local favourite in Corniglia.

The main tower is called Belforte and it was built in the 15th century to fend off the pirates who patrolled the coastline. A restaurant that bears the name of the tower is considered Vernassa's best.

The lovely Santa Margherita d'Antiochia Church, built in 1318, sits on a rock right at the ocean. After a visit to light a candle or two, be sure to stop by the Ananasso Bar right outside and enjoy a cappuccino under their inviting yellow umbrellas. Perhaps the town's character, Mauricio Carro, will thrill you

with a few songs while he is bringing in his boat.

Riomaggiore is straight uphill from the train station, where the tunnel to the town is decorated with attractive mosaic tiles and stone. Fruit and vegetable shops dominate the main street.

Primo Platto, where Roberta Ricci makes handmade pasta and will cook it for you in five minutes, is not to be missed. Just choose your topping and Roberta puts it in a container and — *ecco!* — a delicious lunch to eat on the go for just five euros!

On the other side of the now paved-over river that separated the town, is a wonderful view of the sea and there are sailboats and rowboats aplenty for rent. If you have the energy, climb higher to San Giovanni Battista. Further up is the ancient castle of Riomaggiore and once again, remember, good walking or hiking footwear is a must!

Manarola is the second smallest of the Cinque Terre towns and it, like Riomaggiore, is a delightful place to swim and sunbath on the lava rocks. The town's beautiful pastel-coloured homes look like they are built one atop another. Hike up to Nessun Dorma for a drink and a platter of salami and cheese while enjoying the splendid view. Corniglia is the smallest of the villages and perhaps the oldest. There are 365 steps — but who's counting — up to the landlocked town centre. However, the bus is also an option and it only takes a few minutes to arrive at the top. Although Corniglia is not on the ocean, there is a terrific panoramic view to enjoy from the town centre.

We really felt we had to try the fresh anchovies that are a classic dish in this region, so we make ourselves comfortable at the Bar Terza Terre overlooking the ocean and sample an

aperitivo — two glasses of local white wine (quite good), anchovy toasts, pesto toasts, a cheese platter and honey, all for 13 euros. We find the anchovies to be surprisingly delicious and are glad we tried them. Sitting at this nice café while viewing the surrounding terraced vineyards is an amazing experience.

Monterosso al Mare is more of a resort town with a long beach studded with colourful umbrellas. We regret not having packed our swimsuits because everyone seemed to be enjoying the turquoise water.

Most of the outdoor cafés here sport red and white checked tablecloths that beckon scores of hikers. It seems there are more hotels and eateries here and this is quite a large town in comparison to the other villages of Cinque Terre. A tunnel takes us to an older section of town with more shops.

One must be in reasonably good shape to venture into this region as most of the time here is spent climbing or hiking. If it isn't stairs that are very old, it's long and winding paths or cobblestone streets that you must navigate — wear good shoes!

All throughout the villages, the atmosphere is relaxed and laid back — quite wonderful.

It's said Cinque Terre has *mille delizie* — a thousand delights — and we enjoy them all. •



One last look at charming Monterosso.



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Primland Reaches Pinnacle Of Success

Addition of luxury 'cottages' makes Virginia resort one of America's most desired By Marc Atchison EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

EADOWS OF DAN, VA — I step out onto a pine balcony perched high above the timber-filled Dan River Gorge and admire the wisps of early morning fog swirling through the lush valley like ghostly ballerinas. I stand there admiring the conical peaks known as the Pinnacles of Dan rising out of the gorge like giant church steeples — in the distance, a choir of songbirds serenades me.

The rising sun casts a spotlight on the brilliance of the surrounding Blue Ridge Mountains and a sense of majesty prevails.

I've arrived back in a special place — Primland.

This magical retreat sits like a crown atop the mountain, the crowning achievement of a man named Didier Primat, a French businessman and visionary who carved this world-class resort out of an old logging forest.

It has few equals. Rated among America's Top 10 resorts, Primland is a natural beauty accented with man-made wonders like a Donald Steel-



Information

• The best way to get to Primland from Toronto is via Charlotte, N.C. Air Canada and a number of U.S. carriers offer direct service to Charlotte daily.

• The Primland Driving Experience is one of the most popular activities at the result. This year's "drive" will take pace between Aug 23-25. Participants can take the wheel of a 430 horsepower Audi R8 and speed around nearby Virginia International Raceway for the ultimate adrenaline rush. Primland offers packages for the 3-day Driving Experince which also includes a round of golf on the Highlands Course, accommodation,helicopter transport to the race track and much more.

• For more information on Primland and all its offers, go to http://www.primland.com







PHOTOS COURTESY PRIMLAND RESORT

The Pinnacles Cottages at Primland are state of the art masterpieces that offer guests every comfort imaginable. The one thing that sets these accommodation apart from other luxury resorts in America is the drop-dead gorgeous views of the surrounding Blue Ridge Mountain brilliance that comes with each of the cottages. The new additions at Primland fit in beautifully with the resort's stately main lodge, which beckons global travellers.



An aerial view captures the brilliance of the design Donald Steel used to create The Highland Course at Primland. The mountain-top layout is the best in the United States and has few equals anywhere.

designed golf course — The Highland Course is among the best mountain layouts in the world — a recently opened spa that takes you to new heights of relaxation, a main lodge that houses one of Virginia's best restaurants, Elements, and a unique observatory that offers guests a glimpse of far-off galaxies.

This is my fourth visit to Primland and over the years — the resort celebrates a decade of excellence in 2016 — I've seen it grow from a humble hunting lodge into a four-season's resort that offers guests a multitude of activities, including fishing, hunting, cycling, archery and championship golf, just to name a few. There's never a dull moment at Primland.

"There's over 50 things to do here and we keep guests very busy," says Steve Helms, the property's charming vice president, who was born and still lives in this town with the lyrical name.

What makes Primland so special is that it never rests on its laurels. It's always adding or upgrading, which makes each visit more special than the last.

On this visit, I discover Primland has added some new "cottages" that come with the jaw-dropping views of the Dan River Gorge and the Pinnacles of Dan.

The two-storey, aptly named Pinnacles Cottages, built in a cluster adjacent to the first tee of Steel's brilliant The Highland Course, are cottages in name only. The four chalet-like structures would make most 5-star hotel rooms blush with envy and were designed with families and (golf) groups in mind.

The 16 spacious rooms that make up the four cottages can be brought together into one giant accommodation that's perfect for wedding parties, corporate gatherings and large family reunions.

The cottages are named and painted to honour of the songbirds that inhabit this wilderness paradise — mine was Hummingbird and there's also Robin, Oriole and Bluebird. Each can accommodate between four and eight guests and they enjoy luxury trappings like oversized bathrooms, dining and living room areas that come complete with large stone fireplaces, and wilderness views that can't be matched by any other resort in the world.

The Pinnacles Cottages are the perfect compliment to Primland's already impressive list of accommodation; the resort's Fairway Cottages, which are favoured by golfers, the 26 sumptuous rooms and suites in the castle-like main Lodge and the three playful tree houses that stick out over the Dan River Gorge, are all unique in their own ways.

The 12,000-acre eco-conscious resort is the perfect escape

from modern life — a place where you can find yourself while navigating the network of trails that snake through the property, which consists of a restored 14-kilometre section of the Old Appalachian Trail.

But what draws me back to Primland time after time is the chance to play The Highland Course, a remarkable piece of golf real estate created by a man, who, while he may not be a household name in North America, is a legend in England and Scotland. Based on what he's done at Primland, Steel deserves to be counted among the best course architects of all time.

And to think, Primland's owner, the recently deceased Didier, was advised by some of golf's elite — Nick Faldo among them — not to build a course on top of the mountain.

Steel — he was entrusted with updating sacred St. Andrews in the 1980s and was the first architect allowed to touch the home of golf since Harry Colt in 1913 — proved them all wrong and now the Highland Course stands as a testament to his genus and ingenuity.

The only thing better than playing Primland's The Highland Course is meeting the man who created it. Steel, who visits the property from time to time, is at the first tee the day I play the course and joins me and the congenial club pro Brian Alley for a round. What a thrill!

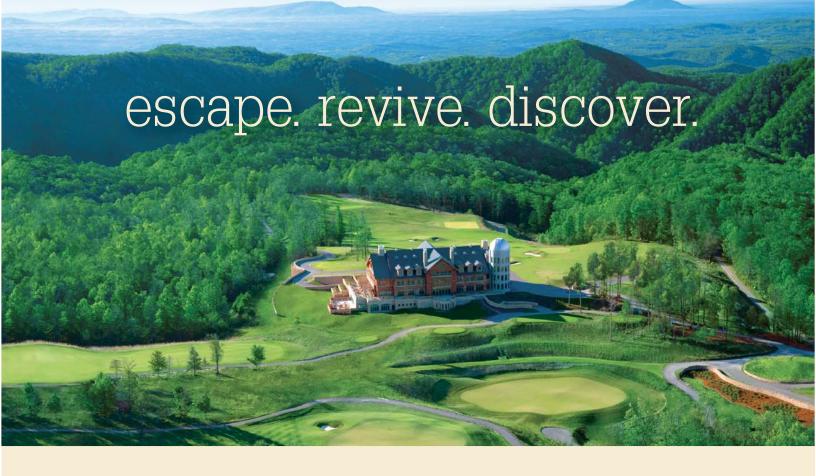
"What people didn't understand is that there was a farm on top of the mountain at one time, so there was lots of top soil on which to build the course," says Steel, as we tee up on a course that is visually stunning from start to finish.

There's not a bad hole on this course and Steel says this design is one of "the highlights of my career" — a career which has included updating St. Andrews and the creation of such legendary courses as The Abaco Club in the Bahamas and exclusive Redtail in London, ON, just to name the few.

"When I first came here, it reminded me of the highlands of Scotland (hence the name) and I knew the terrain was properly suited for a challenging course."

While tough enough for the pros, Primland's The Highland Course is forgiving for all handicaps if you play from the right tees. Accuracy off the tees is a must here but it's hard to concentrate when you're surrounded by such natural beauty.

The 18th at Primland is one that you wish would never finish. The view you get off the tee is breathtaking and as you near the green, the new Pinnacles Cottages come into view, a reminder that Primland is a great golf course and so much more.



A 12,000-acre Blue Ridge Mountain resort, Primland is the ultimate retreat for world-class golf, nature-inspired spa treatments, refined dining and outdoor activities in an environment of rare natural beauty.

From the European-chic Lodge and the private Tree Houses, to the Pinnacle Cottages perched at an elevation of 2,800 feet, each of our accommodations was designed to honor and reflect the natural beauty of our surroundings, while providing an utterly unique lodging experience.

Ask about seasonal specials, including our Summer Savor, which includes all meals.



Meadows of Dan, VA = 866.960.7746 = primland.com





Our Frequent Flyer Lily Chiu is celebrating her fifth year as a flight attendant and shares some memorable moments she's encountered in the skies during that time

FREQUENT

The Sky's The Limit When you are a flight attendant

HEY SAY TIME FLIES and I couldn't agree more as I flip through the stamp collection on my passport from the past five years. This month marks my five-year journey as a flight attendant and it sure brings back many memories. From flying to cities that I didn't know existed, becoming a regular at many restaurants and bars across North America, facing challenges with medical emergencies at 35,000 feet, and mastering how to walk in heels after working 13 to 16 hour days. Those are just some of the things that come

along with my flight attendant job.

Above all, though, the opportunity to work with a new crew of colleagues on every flight, along with interacting with hundreds of different passengers everyday is an experience I look forward to.

Sometimes I meet individuals who are so inspirational — it feels like I learn more from them during our short conversation than the knowledge I garnered in all my years spent in school.

Of course, there are the occasional days when I have to count down the minutes until that unbelievably ridiculous, miserable and ignorant



passenger leaves the aircraft. But after those particular flights, my reasoning for indulging in a chocolate bar or glass of wine is always 100 per cent justifiable.

One of my most memorable flights happened four years ago. I received a call from Crew Scheduling requesting that I operate a flight to Tokyo. It was exactly one week after the 9.0 magnitude earthquake hit the Pacific coast of Tōhoku, just 350 kilometres northeast of Tokyo. The earthquake caused a devastating tsunami that damaged nuclear reactors and the country was still understandably in chaos a week later.

My biggest concern, at the time, was the uncertainty of how the damaged nuclear plants would affect cities like Tokyo. By the way, the reason I was asked to jump onboard was because more than half the crew originally scheduled for the flight asked to be removed — they shared my fear of what might occur during the layover.

In the end, I agreed to operate the outbound flight to Tokyo, which was nearly empty — few, with the exception of business travellers returning home or volunteers going to help in the rescue, were travelling to Japan during those tragic days.

Because there were so few people onboard the flight, I had a chance to talk — comfort, really — some of the Japanese passengers.

I noticed a sad-eyed Japanese lady starring out the window and within seconds tears began running down her face when I asked if everything was okay?

"I'm going home and I'm so scared," said the woman, who had been vacationing in Cuba.

The distraught woman told me she had received an email from her sister and that, while all her family members had been accounted for, the state of her own home was unsure. And, most importantly to the woman, her sister was unable to tell her if her precious dog, whom a neighbour had been looking after while the woman was in Cuba had survived the quake.

"This is the second time in my life that I'm experiencing a major earthquake in Japan," said the woman quivering. "The first time it happened, my home was destroyed and I was only able to salvage a few things."

While grateful her family members were safe, the woman was afraid her precious possessions — photos and momentoes from her global travels — might be lost forever.

I assured her that there will be more trips to come in the future and she'll have plenty of new photos and momentoes to collect.

Like that woman, I have a cabinet at home filled with my travel memories — magnets, postcards, and unique Coca-Cola bottles from every place I visit.

A question of tact

Sometimes I get some unusual questions thrown my way during a flight but answer each politely and as best I can. However, here, in parenthesis, is what I'd really like to say to questions like:

"Do you know when it'll stop snowing?

("Let me give my friend Mother Nature a quick call and I'll get back to you.")

"Is there turbulence in the lavatory?" ("Why wouldn't there be?")

"Can you tell that passenger to stop snoring?" ("It looks like his wife has been unsuccessful all these years, so I don't think I'll be able to stop him either.")

"Where are we?"

("I can't see the street signs from up here, sir.")

"Is it okay if I smoke?"

("Smoking on airplanes has been banned since I was in diapers, where have you been all these years?")

I often think of that passenger when I look at my travel treasures and hope she's visiting an exotic destination while making new travel memories.

The return flight from Tokyo was completely full.

We were bringing home Canadians who were left stranded in Tokyo for days due to so many flight cancellations. Many of the passengers told us how relieved they were to be going back to their homes, while sympathizing with the Japanese, so many of whom had been left homeless by the disaster.

When the plane touched down in Toronto, the passengers clapped and I could see many let out a sigh of relief.

Our company thanked us for showing the bravery to take the Tokyo-bound flight and we all felt that, in our own way, we had lent a hand during the horrific event.

Every passenger left the airplane that day with the most sincere "thank you" to me and the rest of the crew.

It was the least we could do.

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there are plenty of opportunities to perfect your game.

A course on Prince Edward Island, where nothing else is in play but the numbers 1 to 18, awaits an experience that will test your skill and tease your senses. But beyond the rolling fairways and manicured greens, PEI is home to breathtaking red cliffs, 683 miles of pristine sandy beaches, world-famous artists and second-to-none seafood like the Malpeque oyster. With all that going for it, it's fair to say, no matter what Island experience sticks with you, lasting memories happen here.



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Good times and great music are what makes a trip to Cajun Country so special. But Canadians, who share an Acadian history with the folks living in and around the charming Louisianna city of Lafayette, get a special welcome because they are considered a 'cousine.'

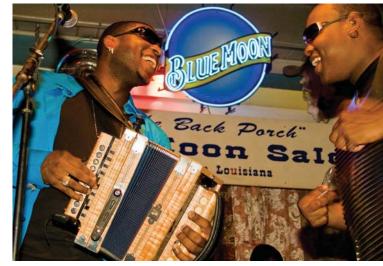


PHOTO BY ERIC LINDBERG



Down'Home' In Cajun Country

Canadians dance to a different tune when visiting a Louisianna '*cousine*'

By Nancy Wigston TRAVELIFE CONTRIBUTOR

AFAYETTE, LA — There's music and then there's Zydeco. Deep in Cajun Country, when the clock strikes 9, the Café des Amis is jumping. When J.J. Caillier and the Zydeco Knockouts launch into another number, chairs scrape the floor, people rise and start dancing, spellbound by this blend of accordion, electric guitars, drums, and the singular percussion instrument called a vest frottoir (metal apron).

Zydeco — no one agrees on what the name means exactly, except that it's French Cajun and compelling — speaks directly to the body, bypassing the brain entirely. And that's why this place is always packed by 9 on a Saturday — and that's 9 in the morning, y'all.

Rumour has it that celebrated Blues Brother and Ottawa native Dan Ackroyd likes to drop by this popular spot when he's in the neighbourhood (we're a 90-minute drive northwest of New Orleans) during Mardi Gras season. If so, it's hard to fathom where he'd find a place to sit. Lineups begin at 7:30 a.m., music starts at 8, and the café, a former casket factory, fills up fast.

We experienced many delightful shocks in Cajun Country. Breakfasting to zydeco tunes in Breaux Bridge among a jeans and cowboybooted crowd — a third of them from Europe — sipping *café au lait* and devouring warm beignets. Well, that was just one beignet.



PHOTO BY ROBIN MAY



PHOTO BY PHILIP GOULD

The towns in the Heart of Acadiana may be small — Breaux Bridge, the Crawfish Capital of the World, has a population of just over 8,000; metropolitan centres like Lafayette number less than half a million — but people's hearts are large. When I told someone in Lafayette I was from Canada, the stranger hugged me like a long-lost relative: "Ma cousine!"

The music travels north to cities like Montreal, Moncton and Winnipeg; Zydeco and Cajun music lights up festivals wherever French speakers planted their roots.

The 700,000 Acadians living in Southern Louisiana today remain the largest French-speaking minority in the U.S., many, if not most, descended from l'Acadie, the colony founded in Nova Scotia in 1604. When those settlers were brutally expelled by the British in 1755, few made the return trip to France. Most sailed south, searching for new homes.

Les acadiennes, quickly Americanized into Cajuns, packed little but their language, music, religion and *joie de vivre* when they settled in the remote reaches of bayou country. As it happened, that was more than enough.

The definition of Cajun today is somewhat elastic (experts have counted as many as 17 varieties) but most know some French and all proudly celebrate their heritage and centuries-old refusal to assimilate.

Visitors step into local history at The Vermilionville Living History Museum & Folklife Park, a Cajun/Creole heritage site created in 1990. Old houses — some date from the early 1800s, others are replicas — line winding paths through what appears to be a living Acadian village on Lafayette's Bayou Vermilion.

Craftspeople in period costume happily show off their skills and their gardens, passing the time of day chatting with curious visitors. One volunteer blacksmith regaled us with tales of his ancestors, bayou folk who kept to themselves, fishing, trapping and maintaining their traditions. Eco tours and swamp adventures open windows into the moody, haunted waters that evoke the bayou experience.

Cajun cuisine continues to evolve, although the old dishes are revered, and gator (alligator) makes frequent appearances on the menu. (After one lavish buffet in Lafayette, I explained I'd only tried the chicken, only to be told no chicken had been served. "That was gator.")

Besides traditional menu offerings at standout eateries like Randol's Seafood in Lafayette, there are boudin (sausage) tastings and local craft beers (Bayou Teche Brewing's Acadie). We ate lunch at a café called French Press in downtown Lafayette, as chic as anything north of the Mason-Dixon Line. And our dinner at Julie's Louisiana Bistro was a thoroughly elegant experience.

Hot sauce belongs on every Louisiana table, none being more famous than Tabasco, created by the McIlhenny family on Avery Island, 20 minutes south of Lafayette. An Avery Island visit reveals the painstaking methods behind making red Tabasco (the shop sells green and yellow Tabasco as well as kitchen-themed items).

In the 1890s, "Mr. Ned" McIlhenny, concerned with the decimation of the great white egret population (hunted for their decorative feathers), established a bird sanctuary on Avery Island's Bayou Petite Anse. Now a jungle sanctuary and botanical paradise, Avery Island is home to deer, alligators and, naturally, the great white egret.

In Southern Louisiana, America's multicultural face is everywhere; its population shares French, African, Creole, Caribbean



PHOTO BY ERIC LINDBERG Eco-tourism has become one of the great draws in the Layfayette area.

and Native American roots. Dance floor conversations run along these lines:

"Are you Cajun?"

"I'm from Canada."

"That's Cajun!"

What really draws people together — Europeans, Canadians and British alike — is the music, both the guitar, fiddle and accordion Cajun tunes and the electric, washboard, accordion Zydeco sound. Country and classical music are also hugely popular.

Artisans like Anya Burgess handcrafts fiddles at Sola Violins in downtown Lafayette when she's not performing with the Grammy-nominated duo Bonsoir, Catin. Three out of five nominees in the American Regional Roots category at this year's Grammys were Cajun or Zydeco bands. The winner was country/cajun accordionist Jo-El Sonnier, a native of the town of Rayne, Acadia Parish.

Within a few days of our Lafayette visit, folks started looking familiar. The same faces we saw at the Blue Moon Saloon, doing a practiced two-step to the sounds of Dikki Du and the Zydeco Krewe (just back from a European tour), appeared the next night on the large dance floor at Randol's Seafood, alongside flamboyantly dressed members of local "krewes," or Mardi Gras clubs, trying out their new costumes for the upcoming blow-out: feathered, sparkling, outrageous, weird — yet homey.

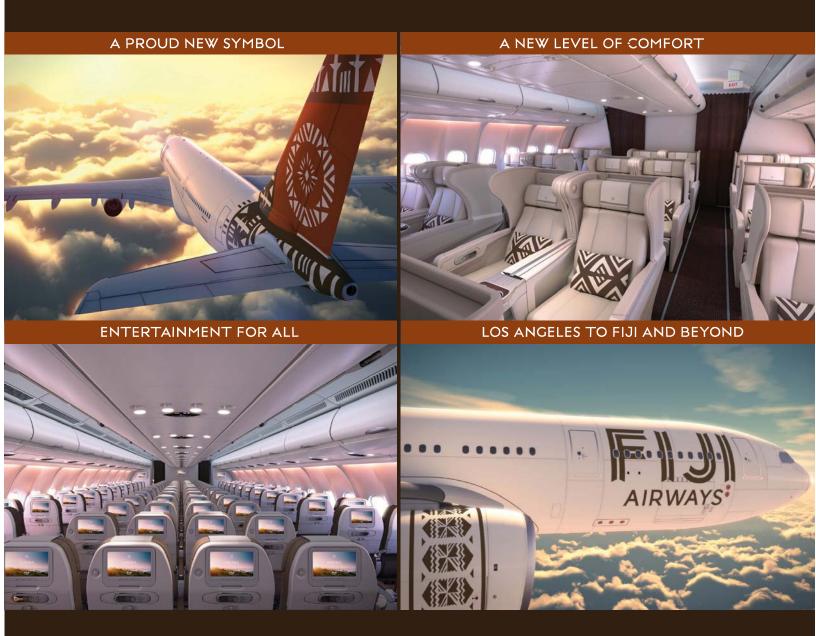
Music brought us here and music will bring us back. It's easy enough to understand. In the words of the lady we met Saturday morning on the dance floor in Breaux Bridge: "Music makes your heart smile."

Information

• The Southwestern Louisiana Zydeco Festival happens this summer on Aug. 20

- For all things Lafayette-related go to www.lafayettetravel.com
- We stayed at the splendid new Carriage House Hotel: www.cityclubatriverranch.com

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Six classic Canal Homes come together to make one of the greatest new hotels in all of Europe

By Marc Atchison EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

MSTERDAM — As I turn a corner off Rembrandt Square, I see six Grand Canal homes reflected in the Herengracht (Gentleman's or Lord's) Canal like giant dollhouses. Their distinctive facades instantly identify them as homes built for nobles — mayors and leading Dutch merchants — during Holland's Golden Age, when Amsterdam was the capital of world commerce.

Each of the massive, doublewide homes has a name — De Wildt, Kemp, Hooft, Marot, Sautijn and Brentano — and a rich history; they were all built during the 17th and 18th centuries.

Few would disagree that this is the best collection of canal homes in all of Amsterdam and, thanks to an engineering miracle, they've been brought together to form the city's best hotel the Waldorf Astoria Amsterdam, a property the



The historic Canal Homes that now make up Amsterdam's magnificent Waldorf Astoria Hotel date back to the city's Golden Age and reflect the importance of the people who once lived in them. Now the homes, above, have come together to make the city's best hotel, featuring luxury rooms and quaint gardens. The transformation was completed without sacrificing the brilliance of the original architecture, some of which still awes guests when they enter the stately property.







PHOTOS BY MARC ATCHISON & COURTESY WALDORF ASTORIA

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Journeys of Inspiration



The chic lobby area at the Waldorf Astoria Amsterdam reflects the elegance and uniqueness of what qualifies as one of Europe's Top 10 hotel properties.

likes of which Amsterdam has never seen.

It took years of careful and painstaking planning to transform the UNESCO World Heritage protected homes into a luxury hotel and maintaining the dignity of these treasured properties was a daunting task, but one the architects employed by the worldrenowned Waldorf Astoria chain have exceeded in every respect.

My arrival at the Waldorf Astoria Amsterdam — the Marot house serves as the main entrance — is a special experience because I'm instantly awed by the home's elaborate vestibule and dramatic relief-filled staircase, two of the best-preserved examples of 17th-century Amsterdam architecture.

Cornelis Becker, for whom the Marot House was built in 1665, would certainly be impressed with the "renovations" the Waldorf Astoria family has made, like:

• Creating 93 luxury state-of-the-art rooms and suites that qualify as the best in a city renowned for its upscale accommodation.

Adding a 2-star Michelin restaurant called Librije's Zusje Amsterdam.

• Introducing a fabulous Guerlain Spa to the city.

• And turning the homes' tranquil inner gardens into a peaceful retreat for guests.

While staying true to its canal home roots on the outside, inside the hotel reflects a modern ambience that few other historic hotels in Europe can match. The carefully sourced furnishings, textured wall coverings and museum-worthy Dutch paintings blend in beautifully with the state-of-the-art bathrooms, the finest linens and every electronic and Wi-Fi convenience demanded by today's plugged-in traveller.

The blending of the six homes into one great hotel has created some interesting passageways, where movie stars or highpowered guests can easily be hidden from public view if they so wish.

The Waldorf's trademark service level is exceeded in its Amsterdam hotel because no one makes you feel more welcome than the people of Holland.

The entrance quickly drifts off to the Bel Etage, where the elegantly decorated Peacock Alley lounge serves as the gathering place for guests and the important people of Amsterdam.



History of the houses

What sets most of these homes apart from other canal homes in Amsterdam is they have a double staircase entrance so the occupants didn't have to go through the basement — a common occurrence in canal homes — to reach the living quarters.

Brentano: It was bought as a family home in 1753 by Josephus Brentano, a Dutch merchant of Italian origin.

Sautijn: This house was built for Mayor Willem Sautijn in 1672.

Marot: This house — it serves as the entrance to the Waldorf Astoria — was built in 1665 for the Backer family but many other prominent Amsterdam families also lived here.

Hooft: The house was built in 1665 for Hendrick Hooft, a scion of a very important patrician family. His father, Henrick Hooft was also Mayor of Amsterdam.

Kemp: In 1665 Joost Kemp, Lord of Kerkwijk, had this house built from sandstone, a luxury material that was imported from Germany.

De Wildt: Hendrick Hooft also had this home built in 1665.

The lounge is wrapped in flowing drapery, hand-blown glass and classic furniture, with a Waldorf Armillary Sphere, which pays tribute to the properties' links to "sail, trade and time," taking centre stage. From the lounge guests get an elevated view of the lovely gardens where in spring over 5,800 tulips come to life.

Just off the Bel Etage is the impressive Maurer Room, a leftover from the Marot House's earliest days, which is a great example of Italian design. The elegant room is in great demand for meetings and private dinners.

My room, which overlooks the Herengracht Canal, is breathtaking and comes wrapped in textured wall coverings that are highlighted by the natural light pouring through the floor to ceiling windows. The furnishings are covered in exquisite fabrics and soft textures prevail throughout. The Waldorf is most proud that each room displays its own individual character but I can't imagine any of the other rooms matching mine for charm and elegance.

No hotel in Amsterdam, or the rest of Europe for that matter, can match the Waldorf Astoria Amsterdam for its dining options, especially the gastronomic experience offered at the decorated Librije's Zusje.

In just seven short months after it's opening, Librije's Zusje Amsterdam was awarded 2 Michelin stars, and after eating there people wonder why it's not been given a third.

The Waldorf Astoria Amsterdam entered into an exclusive partnership with noted restaurateurs Jonnie and Thérése Boer, owners of the acclaimed 3 Michelin star restaurant De Librije in Zwolle, Netherlands, to create Librije's Zusje Amsterdam. They then convinced super star Chef Sidney Schutte, former chef at De Librije, to return from Asia to head up the kitchen at Librije's Zusje.

The result of that collaboration has been nothing less than astonishing — never before has a Dutch restaurant earned such high acclaim in such a short time.

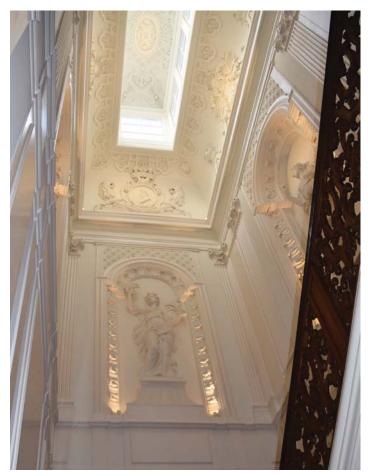
Needless to say, getting a table at Librije's Zusje Amsterdam is like getting an audience with the Dutch king and so not to disappoint guests, Waldrof Astoria Amsterdam created a dining option that is almost the equal of Librije's Zusje Amsterdam. Welcome to the Goldfinch Brasserie.

Located adjacent to the lovely garden and Librije's Zusje Amsterdam, Goldfinch offers diners a Michelin star experience without the Michelin star price. Schutte oversees the menu at Goldfinch, as well, and dishes for the Brasserie are prepared in the same kitchen that services Librije's Zusje Amsterdam. The name Goldfinch, by the way, was inspired by a painting by Dutch master Carel Fabritius (circa 17th century) of the bird of the same name.

The Crispy Suckling Pork — lacquered with clove honey and accompanied by sauerkraut and potato puree — I order is an orgasmic experience of which my taste buds have rarely experienced.

If you think the restaurants at Waldorf Astoria Amsterdam are fabulous, wait until you see the Guerlain Spa facility the property features. There's only one problem with this spa there's just three treatment rooms and the demand is high, so book treatments well in advance of your stay so you won't be disappointed.

This is a spa sanctuary like none other and its position on the garden level makes the experience even more tranquil and magical. Guests are taken on a trip through time to reach the Guerlain facility, passing through the hotel's historic rooms filled with



The lavish staircase off the entrance of the Waldorf Astoria Amsterdam dates back to the Canal Home's original owners and its detailed decorations keeps guests mesmerized.

Information

 The Waldorf Astoria has opened many new properties around the world and I must say I'm most impressed with their Amsterdam hotel as well as the one they've built in Beijing. Waldorf boasts 15 hotels and resorts in the Americas, five in Europe, three in the Middle East and three in the Asia Pacific region. To learn more about Waldorf Astoria properties worldwide, go to http://www.waldorfastoria.com

• KLM is the best way to get to Amsterdam from Canada. The Dutch carrier offers flights from Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, Calgary and now Edmonton. Go to http://www.klm.com/canada for fares and flight details.

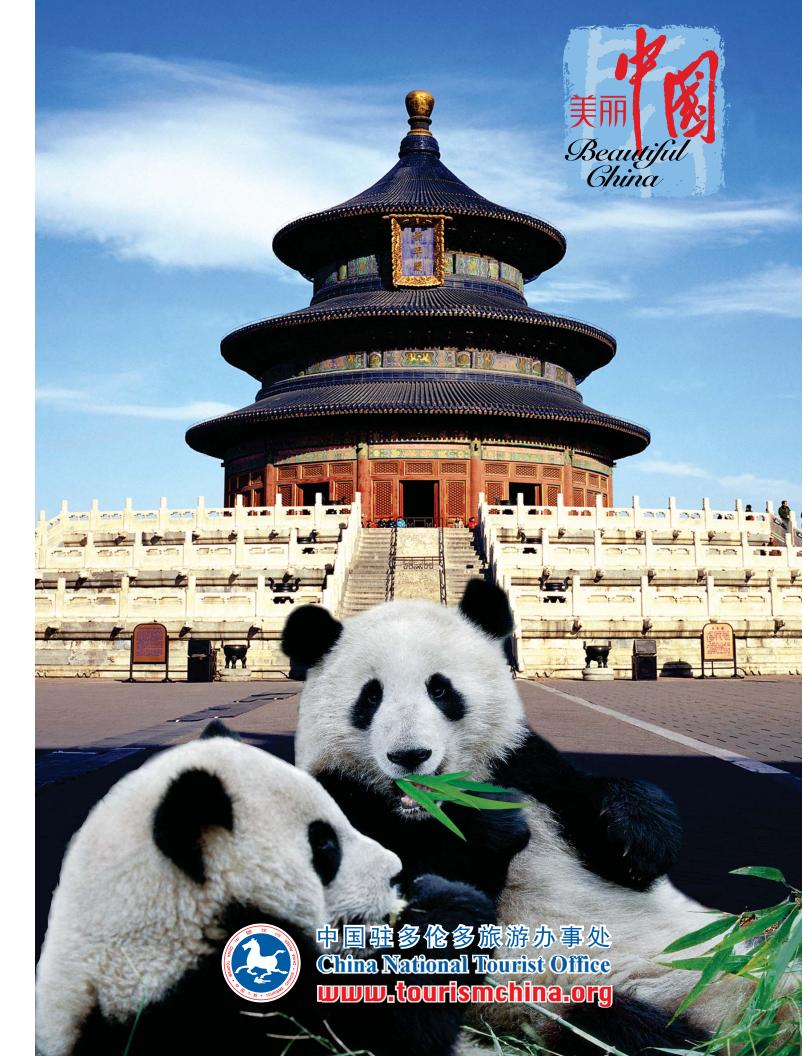
For tourist information on Amsterdam, go to http://www.iamsterdam.com

• For Holland, including Amsterdam, go to http://www.holland.com

lovely sculptures and fascinating paintings. The tranquil walk gets them into a relaxed mood even before they meet their master therapist.

The Guerlian Spa offers some leading-edge treatments and afterwards guests can retire to the relaxation area overlooking the garden, or take a swim in the hotel's incredible indoor pool.

Overall, the Waldorf Astoria Amsterdam is an indulgence that every traveller should splurge on because this, for our money, is the best overall hotel experience — restaurants, spa, rooms, service — anywhere in Europe. •



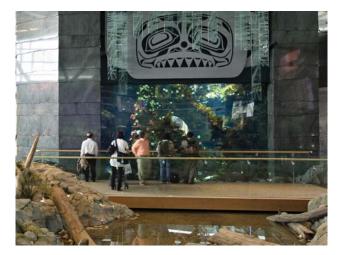


Airports where you won't mind being stranded on a long layover

Airports are not our favourite places — even the ones that look like shopping malls. Having said that, there are some we don't mind being stranded while waiting for a connecting or delayed flight. And our friends at Vision Travel Solutions reminded us that some airports can be downright interesting thanks to the unique features they offer. Here's a few we like and the reasons why:

1- VANCOUVER INTERNATIONAL IS A 'SEA WORLD'

British Columbia's vibrant underwater ecosystem takes centre stage at Canada's second busiest airport. The International Terminal houses two satellite Vancouver Aquarium Marine exhibits giving business travellers an opportunity to experience underwater life without ever having to leave the airport. The 114,000-litre aquarium, on Level 3, features over 5,000 creatures including wolf eels, rockfish and anemones and on Level 4 you can discover a variety of Pacific jellyfish in the 1,800-litre aquarium.





2- TOKYO'S NARITA IS REFRESHING

After a long flight there's nothing better than stepping outside for fresh air. At Tokyo's Narita Airport there's something even better — the Juko Oxygen Lounge. Travellers can hook themselves up to oxygen tanks that pump flavoured oxygen from eucalyptus menthol to cinnamon. The increased oxygen is said to reduce headaches and limit the effects of jet lag, ideal especially when travelling for business where time is money.



3- HONG KONG IS ENTERTAINING

Experience cinema like never before at Hong Kong's International Airport. The 350-seat UA IMAX theatre in Terminal 2 brings films to life with special effects including artificial fog, wind, water spray and even snowfall. After the movie enjoy a round of golf at the Sky City Nine Eagles nine-hole golf course located next to the terminal.



4- LOTS OF BEER IN MUNICH

Accommodating approximately 600 guests, Europe's largest roofed-in-beer garden is at the Munich International Airport. Complete with a variety of trees, plants and even a pond, the glass ceiling covered venue is ideal for long layovers. While you're soaking in the Bavarian spirit and sipping on a glass of Airbrau, enjoy some live musical performances at this traditional tavern.



5- LIVE MUSIC IN NASHVILLE

Famous for its country music, the Nashville International Airport displays some of the best local talent in the city. With four stages and up to 100 concerts per year, travellers can hear anything from Celtic and pop to bluegrass and Latin jazz.

6- SLIDE INTO SINGAPORE



There's lots to keep you occupied at arguably the best airport in the world, including a tropical garden with 47 species of butterflies and a 27-foot waterfall, two movie theatres, a Balinese-themed rooftop pool and the world's tallest airport slide in Terminal 2. There's also free Wi-Fi throughout this gem.



The island greens at Man-O-War make it one of the toughest of the Mystical courses. Overall, the course is one of the best in South Carolina and its unique features make it a joy to play.

Continued on Page 27

tors sunbathing.

The par-3 7th, which is protected by a well-placed front bunker and a green that slopes back to a menacing pond, and the tricky par-4, 373-yard 9th, recognized as one of the Top 18 holes in South Carolina, are special holes on a very special front nine.

Inspired by what I've experienced so far at Mystical, I arrive early for my round at Man-O-War on the third day of my visit and enjoy the folksy atmosphere at the fishing lodge clubhouse and bask in the attention lavished on me by the courteous staff.

One of the strongest elements of a Mystical visit is the southern hospitality served up to golfers by Pardue's longserving employees — length of service averages almost 20 years.

Looking out from the first tee at the waterlogged Man-O-War — there's water on all 18 holes — I'm not sure if this is a golf course or an extension of Myrtle Beach's famed ocean-side Grand Strand.

The intimidation factor — water, water everywhere — is mind boggling at first but after a few holes you realize that Maples has compensated golfers with

Information

 Mystical Golf offers some very affordable stay and play packages throughout the year — the company's off-season rates are among the most attractive and affordable in Myrtle Beach. There's many golf packages available so go to http://www.mysticalgolf.com to see all the options.

 Porter Airlines offers direct seasonal flights to Myrtle Beach and most U.S. carriers, like Delta and United, offer connecting flights to Myrtle Beach from Toronto.

 For tourism information on Myrtle Beach, go to http://www.myrtlebeach.com

wide fairways and large greens and water rarely comes into play.

Man-O-War's par-4 9th is actually an island hole from start to finish and there's some knee-knocking moments here. Accurate shots are rewarded so you might want to keep your driver in the bag. No wonder this beauty is recognized as one of the best holes in Myrtle Beach.

The island hole experience doesn't end on No. 9 — Nos. 14 and 15 are also island holes and each will have you gripping your club a little tighter. The par-4 354-yard 14th really isn't that difficult if you have faith in your approach shot and many low handicappers are rewarded with birdies here. The par-3,173-yard 15th is a different story — there's little room for error off the tee and Pardue probably paid for his kid's college educations with the balls he's retrieved over the years from the hole's pond.

Pardue, known as the "creator" by the people who admire what he's fashioned here, is devoted to providing golfers with an experience they'll remember for a long time.

"I see golf as a business opportunity and a hobby, but golf course owners have a responsibility to the players — we have to grow the game and it all starts here," says the proud Mystical owner who can be seen regularly patrolling the courses or the clubhouses because "I like to keep an eye on things."

"I love creating jobs for people, creating good experiences for golfers, so I'll keep doing it," says the man with the beaming moon face whose charitable work for Myrtle Beach's troubled youth has made him a legend in the community.

Pardue is no doubt a magician who is creating some magical moments for golfers in a place that leaves you bewitched. •





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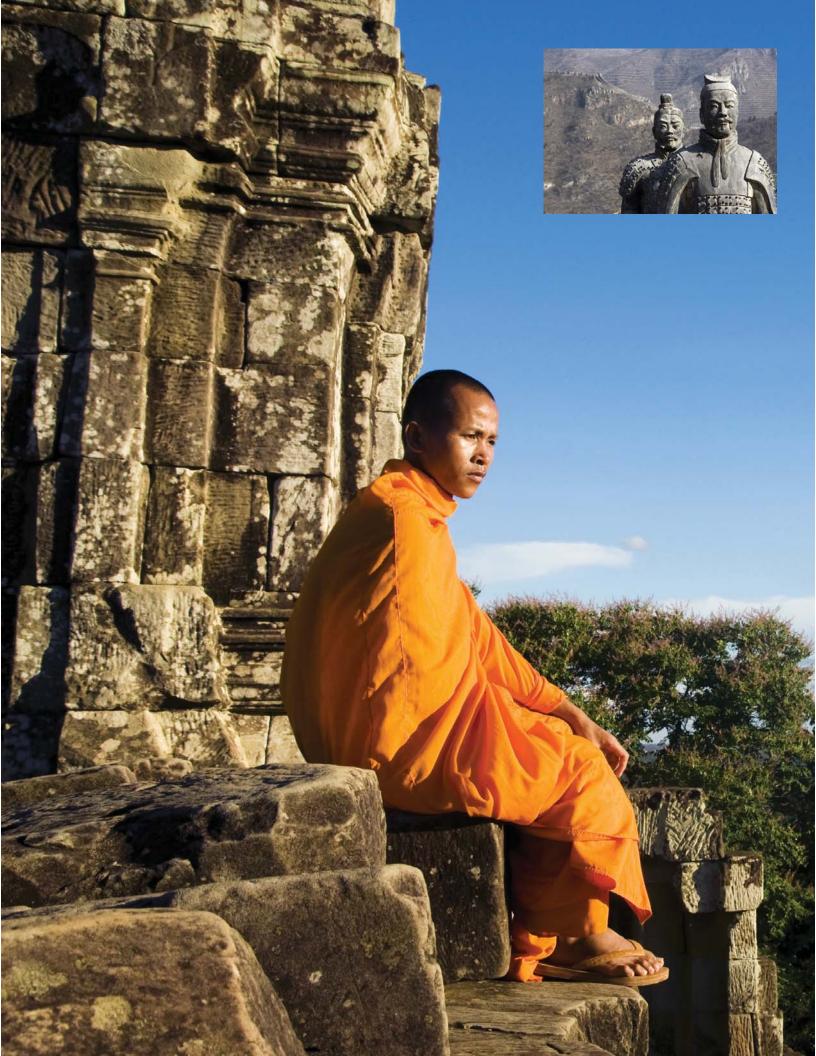
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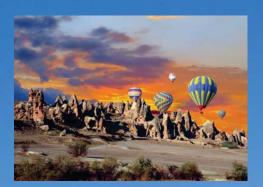


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