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Our Staff

Publisher: *Annie Tsu*

Editor-in-Chief: *Marc Atchison*
marc.atchison@travelife.ca

Assistant Editor: *Claudia Tsang*

Design: *Joey Tang*

Chief Copy Editor: *Gale Beeby*

Contributors

Jules Torti, Tom Wuckovich, Bruce Sach, Garth Woolsey, Dina Maniatis, Athena Lucero, Hilary Duff, Nick Didlick, Melanie Chambers, Tamsyn Burgmann, Cristina Naan, Gary Trask, Karan Kwan, Katherine Brodsky, Karen Asp, Mark Wessel, Amy Laughinghouse, Chloe Tse

Our Address

TraveLife, 15 Kern Road, Toronto, Ont., M3B 1S9



Cover

On a visit to Ireland, our Editor-in-Chief Marc Atchison visited ancient Ashford Castle where he was treated like royalty

See Marc's story on page 40

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Lost in the Clouds

A lost hiker meets a lost civilization in the northern Andes of Peru

By Melanie Chambers
TRAVELIFE CONTRIBUTOR

CHACHAPOYAS, PERU — My cabbie excitedly yells into his phone "*Dónde estás se encuentra la entrada*?" It's the third call he's made since we arrived at the ruins of Yalape in the Northern Andes of Peru. I soon learn it's his first time here, too.

Having trudged through muddy cow fields, and then climbing a steep hill, I'm now on my hands and knees under a thorn bush and there are still no ruins, only my bruises and scratches.

The guidebook says you need a guide to help you find the overgrown ruins, but since the Incas wiped out the Chachapoyas (called the Warriors of the Clouds) around the 16th century, the forest has swallowed the ruins. But eventually I find a path



PHOTOS BY MELANIE CHAMBERS & BIGSTOCK







Travellers from around the world travel to Peru to see iconic Machu Picchu but what most miss is the treasure chest of ancient ruins in the northern section of the country, near Laguna 69 in the breathtaking Huascaran National Park, opposite page. Here are reminders of lost civilizations like the Chachapoyas People (a.k.a. the Warriors of the Clouds) who were wiped out by the Incas. The Chachapoyas may be gone but presence is still felt.

alongside a section of a stone wall entwined with tree branches. Aha! Civilization. The Cloud People were here.

Halfway into my six-month journey through Peru, I find myself changing my plans to hike more in this lesser-known northern region. But, I'm torn — I can't decide which hiking region I like more: the mysterious ruins of the Chacha, as the locals call it, or the phenomenal mountain scenery of Huaraz.

If Chacha is the lost civilization of ruins in the clouds, Huaraz — with its multitude of tour companies and fleece-wearing guides — is the Peruvian Whistler.

After my experience with the cabbie, I decide to find more knowledgeable guides in Chachapoyas — my home base and capital of the Amazonas Region. Kuelap, dubbed the Machu Picchu of the North, is the largest stone structure in South America. Three times older than Machu Picchu, and less known, myself



The northwern area of Peru, where the Andes rise to the clouds, is one of the most spectacukar in all of Latin America. While much has changed over the centuries, much has remained the same.

and two other travellers are the only ones here. I feel like we're the first to discover the 19-metre-high walled fortress full of circular homes, walkways and a tomb of human skeletons.

But this region is well known to archeologists. From Chacha, it's a one-hour bus ride, then taxi to the town of Cruzpata to see the bizarre burial site of Karajia. After walking almost an hour down into the valley, I turn the corner and look up, squinting to see six mud/clay figurines in the middle of the mountain guarding a sarcophagus. How did anyone build a tomb up there? But this isn't the only sign of burial ingenuity in the area. In 1997, archeologists found 217 impeccably preserved mummies in a mountainside tomb.

On my final day, I take a two-hour bus to the town of Leymebamba to see the eerie stark-faced mummies in a museum, and to hike to more ruins. This time I won't get lost because I'm led by a machete-wielding guide hacking through the overgrown ferns and trees. It's not long before we see stone walls from the Cattaneo ruins, some with intricate rhomboid and zigzag friezes. Further still, we arrive at a wooden door and the entrance to the village of Molinete. A lady comes out asking for five sols, (about $2 Cdn). Minutes later, she returns with a cup of warm milk, fresh from the cow. Sitting on a stool in her home, sipping milk, petting her cat and looking out onto the ephemeral clouds floating over the green valley, it all just seems like a fairy tale.

That night over a plate of Chonta — pasta-like slivered hearts of a palm tree (this is the Amazon after all) — I'm the only person in the restaurant. It's going to be quite different in my next trekking town.

The solitude of Chacha is hard to find in Huaraz, unless you hike alonem which is not advisable in these steep mountains. But luckily, there are many day hikes for the less-intense hiker.

However, at 3,000 metres above sea level, the altitude will leave most breathless. It's best to acclimatize with easy treks such as the Wari ruins of Wilcahuaín. Starting from a nearby subdivision, you don't need a guide for this four-hour stroll. Meadering through the various villages with lots of detours, I stop in a store for salted fava beans. Two little girls emerge from the back and before long, the 2-year-old raises her spoon of beans to my lips. Although the ancient burial buildings from 600-900 AD were amazing, it's these sweet girls, who asked if I was returning tomorrow, that stuck with me.

By the third day my lungs are ready for the 4,550-metre-high trek to Laguna 69 — a breathtaking turquoise lake — located in the Huascaran National Park. And at 35 sols (about $15) — a steal for a full day tour — I also don't have to worry about getting lost. It's a two-hour drive to the trailhead and thankfully the start of the hike alongside a snake-like river is flat. Then we look up to the eerie snow-peaked mountains.

"I hope we make it before the rain," says my new Israeli friend.

By the last hour — a series of quick switchbacks — every second step requires stopping for air. But you forget the lack of oxygen when you see the stunning blue lake.

"Forgive my language, but this is ^$%## beautiful!" says my friend.

I notice a young guy toweling his hair: "How is the water?" I ask. "Cold, but you have to do it."

With sweaty tendrils of hair stuck to my face, and sweaty salt stains on my eyelids, I don't need convincing.

Back in town, sustenance is top of mind — a meal of Huaracino is just the thing. It's a mountain version of ceviche but instead of raw fish cured in lime juice, here lupine beans (a local alpine bean) replace the fish.

The restaurant is packed with fellow hikers, as is often the case in Huaraz, but scoffing down this tangy meal, with a 9 per cent local craft beer so strong it's giving me vertigo, I happily sacrifice the solitude I had in Chachapoyas for a noisy, but sublime meal, in a popular mountain town. •

Just The Facts

- *Copa Airlines, Air Canada, Avianca, Delta, American or United Airlines offer flights to Peru from several different gateways in Canada.*
- *Tour East Holidays offers a number of tours to Peru and other parts of Latin America. For more information, go to http://www.toureast.com*
- *Canadians do not need a visa to visit Peru.*







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Going for the Green

A country shaped like a famous fairway embraces golf as a way of luring tourists to its shores

PHOTOS BY MARC ATCHISON



By Mark Atchison
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

PANAMA CITY — When a country is shaped like the 13th hole at Augusta National, and its most famous landmark is a "water hole," chances are it has some pretty good golf courses.

Panama actually has a dozen courses and they rival anything in North America — they range from good, to very good, to WOW!

Which shouldn't come as a surprise, considering Panama, where the Pacific and Atlantic oceans are connected by the Panama Canal, has had a long love affair with the sport. In fact, the game was first introduced to Panamanians 40 years ago by the U.S. military when they were sent to guard the canal while it was under American control. In recent years, thanks to the influx of retirees and tourists from the U.S. and Canada — Panama offers them generous tax breaks to resettle here — demand for golf has surged and clubs seem to be springing up everywhere.

And where else in the world can you play golf on the Pacific coast in the morning and the Atlantic in the afternoon without boarding a plane?

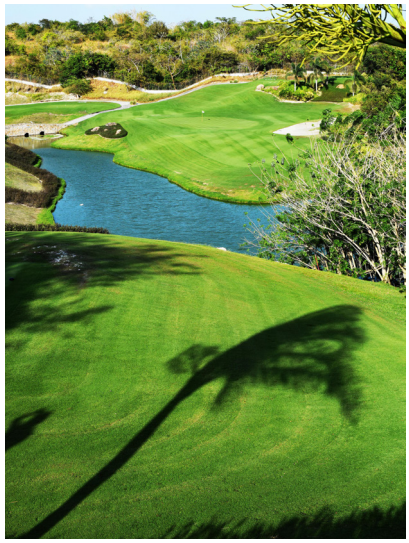
The rapid growth of golf also reflects Panama's status as one of the fastest growing economies in the world — GDP here last year reached 6.5 per cent, rivaling China's economic output — and it remains one of the safest countries in Latin America for foreigners to visit.

The fact that over 100 international banks are headquartered in Panama City means executives are always looking for quality courses on which to impress their clients, so no expense has been spared to bring in top course architects — among them Jack Nicklaus and Tom Fazio — to design new courses or revamp older layouts.

With Panama about to open its new expanded portion of the canal, which, starting in 2016, will be able to accommodate mega ships carrying over 15,000 containers — the present canal is limited to ships with 6,500 containers — the economy of this diverse country is expected to get even stronger, which will undoubtedly attract more investors, most of whom would love to play golf between deals.

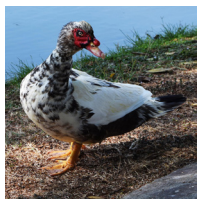
My introduction to Panamanian golf comes on a stunning sunny morning when I'm driven a short distance from my Panama City hotel to the Club de Golf de Panama, located near the city's international airport in Cerro Viento.

This is one of the country's original courses and it's steeped in history; Club de Golf de Panama









The fabulous Santa Maria Resort, opposite page, lies just outside Panama City and is one of the loveliest in the country. It offers some breathtaking views of the downtown area from almost every tee. Courses like the Sheraton Bijao, top photo, are equal to anything in North America. Caddies in Panama are well versed in the game and its rules but courses in this canal country offer some unique challenges and some odd-looking birdies.

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The Tucán Country Club and Resort is one of the older courses in Panama and appears to be getting better with age. The newest is Vista Mar, right, and when it matures will be the country's best.

has hosted a PGA Tour event (Web.com) the last 12 years, which gives you an indication the challenge this course's super slick greens and rolling tight fairways presents players.

The club actually opened in 1918 and costs $125 (all figures U.S.) to play, if you're lucky enough to be invited for a game by a current member.

The routing at Club de Golf de Panama is truly remarkable and offers lots of different looks from the tee boxes, but you'd better bring your A Game if you hope to score well on this beauty.

Next stop: Santa Maria Golf and Country Club, located halfway between Panama City and Tocumen International Airport. Stunning seems such an inadequate word to describe this breathtaking course, where you get remarkable views of Panama City from almost every tee.

Santa Maria is one of the country's newest courses and best reflects Panama's new-found prosperity. The perfectly manicured layout is the centrepiece of a high-end residential development, featuring deluxe homes and condos that will soon be joined by a luxury hotel.

Every hole on this Florida-style course qualifies as a "signature hole" and the conditioning sets it apart from most other courses in this sun-drenched country that sees little rain along its Pacific coast in the dry winter months.

One of the pleasures of playing golf in Panama is the welcome extended to foreign players. There's no better proof of that than the reception I'm given at the Tucán Country Club and Resort by Elizabeth Archer, a transplanted Canadian who manages the course and makes me feel right at home.

Tucán, located on the west bank of the Panama Canal, is another of the courses that owes its existence to the American era in Panama but has been totally upgraded to meet the challenges of modern golfers. An upscale housing development anchors this course — its fashionable apartments and villas are perfect hideouts for "golf buddies."

"We (Elizabeth and husband David Wittington) came to Panama four years ago and we love it here — we don't intend to leave," says the charming Elizabeth, who adds "golf in Panama is a unique experience because the people of Panama are very welcoming and very warm, which adds to the fun of playing here."

Elevated tees on many of the holes at Tucán afford golfers some memorable views during a round. This course exudes character, and while fairways and greens are challenging, they remain fair to all handicaps. The driving range and practice facility would not look out of place at some of North America's high-end courses.

Every inch of this 6,618-yard layout is fun to play and the back nine is a bit more challenging than the front. Because of the harsh weather conditions, scorched fairways become hard quickly in Panama, which results in golfers getting extra distance. No wonder so many gofers like it here.

The remarkable thing about Panama is that you can be standing in a forest of office towers in Panama City one minute and in a tropical forest the next. That's what I experience when I visit the Summit Golf Club and Resort, where I check into a stunning Radisson Hotel perched high on a cliff overlooking the course that affords guests stunning views of the city, canal and surrounding wilderness.

"Is that a wild boar?" I ask my cart mate as we approach the third hole at Summit after checking into the hotel.

"I think it's a large guinea pig," says my partner, who points to another nearby hole where an alligator is basking in the late-day sun. Summit, which borders Camino de Cruces National Park, is an ecological wonderland where beautiful butterflies, wild animals and rare birds share space with golfers.

American architect Jeff Myers let the area's rolling landscape dictate the design of Summit, and the 6,626-yard course and its picturesque surroundings is a delight to play. The remarkable

Just The Facts

- *Copa Airlines offers direct flights to Panama from Montreal and Toronto.*

- *For information on golf courses in Panama:*
  - *Club de Golf de Panama: http://www.clubdegolfdepanama.com*
  - *Summit Golf Club: http://www.summitholelgolf-panama.com*
  - *Tucán Country Club and Resort: http://tucancountryclub.com*
  - *Coronado Golf Club: http://www.bluebaycoronadobeach.com*
  - *Mantaraya at Decameron: http://decameron.com*
  - *Vista Mar: http://vistamarresort.com*
  - *Sheraton Bijao Beach Club: http://bijaobeachclub.com*
  - *Buenaventura Golf Club: http://www.buenaventura.com.pa*
  - *Santa Maria Golf and Country Club: http://www.santamariapanama.com*

- *In case you are wondering, it costs, on average, $410,000 for a ship to go through the Panama Canal — one way.*

- *Tiny Panama boasts a population of 3.9 million.*

- *The Pacific and Atlantic are separated by 88 kilometres at Panama's narrowest point.*

- *There are seven ethnic groups in Panama and 25 per cent of the country's delicate eco-system is protected by government decree.*

- *Panama City is the first country in Central America to have its own subway system.*

views one gets of Centenary Bridge — oceangoing ships must pass under it to get through the canal — from many of Summit's tees makes it hard to concentrate on your shots.

Lots of small lakes dot the Summit course, so accuracy is key to scoring well here. The course and hotel are equipped to handle big golf groups but make sure you leave enough time to visit the Radisson's small but excellent butterfly conservatory. Just beware that monkeys and wild cats lurk in the thick forest surrounding the property.

A two-hour drive from Panama City brings me to the Royal Decameron Hotel, an all-inclusive Pacific coast beach resort favoured by Canadians, whose Mantaraya golf club is one of the most pleasurable of all Panamanian courses to play.

The challenges at Mantaraya are many — starting right off the first tee when golfers have to navigate around a massive tree that sits right in the middle of the fairway. While visually intimidating, the tree really shouldn't come into play unless you are a long hitter. Thankfully, I'm not.

Oh, if you think the first hole is difficult, wait until you to get No. 10, where there are TWO huge trees waiting for you off the tee in the fairway.

Between the fairway trees, the always-present trade winds that blow off the Pacific, and a stretch of long holes — 13 to 16 — Mantaraya will test every part of your game. If you fail, however, you can always lick your wounds on the white sandy beach at Royal Decameron Resort with limitless rum cocktail in your hand.

After a few days of warming up on some of Panama's "golfer-friendly courses," it's time to put my game to the ultimate test on the Jack Nicklaus-designed Buenaventura Golf Club next to the chic JW Marriott Resort in Rio Hato.

The Troon Golf-managed course is first class in every way. Its state of the art clubhouse, restaurants and practice facility qualifies it as the best club in Panama. It's also the toughest thanks to a prevailing winds, which are so strong that over time it's shaped the tress that line the fairways.

Nicklaus has peppered the course with lots of his signature bunkers and weaved it around the magnificent corotú trees and water that dot this championship masterpiece.

At about $200 a round, it's the most expensive course in Panama to play, but worth every cent if you are a scratch handicap who can handle the wind.

On my weeklong tour of Panama, I also stop at a few other courses and come away impressed with each. The Tom Fazio-designed Bluebay Coronado course, for example, is another tough track where winds off the ocean will inflate your score. The course is routed around some very impressive condos, vacation apartments and a luxury hotel.



After rounds, there's always exciting Panama City to explore. The people are friendly and the Old Town sights are truly wonderful.

Don't be surprised if you're hitting driver, 3-wood, 3-wood on many of the par 4s on this 7,116-yard behemoth.

The Sheraton Bijao Beach Club and Resort in Santa Clara is a nine hole beauty where there's been a real emphasis placed on conditioning. Tight fairways and elevated tees make this gem challenging, but the Ron Garl design is a treat to play. This course proves that good things do come in small packages.

My Panama golf tour comes to an end with a visit to Vista Mar, one of the most visually stunning layouts in Latin America. This "American-style" links course, designed by Michael Poellot, is the crown jewel of the Vista Mar Resort complex, which features upscale homes overlooking a remarkable marina where million-dollar yachts are usually anchored.

Golfers get breathtaking panoramic views of the Pacific and the jagged mountains that dominate this area of Panama from most of the tees at Vista Mar, and the experience here will leave you speechless. A pump problem has left the course parched while I visit, but when the pumps are back up, this could easily rate as the best of all the courses in Panama.

To make your round at Vista Mar truly complete, make sure you enjoy a meal in the club's main dining room, where the kitchen staff, under the direction of Chef Pascal, makes the best seafood paella outside Spain.

Panama is becoming a rival to other long established affordable vacation destinations for Canadians and it's mainly because of the country's fine assortment of golf courses. •

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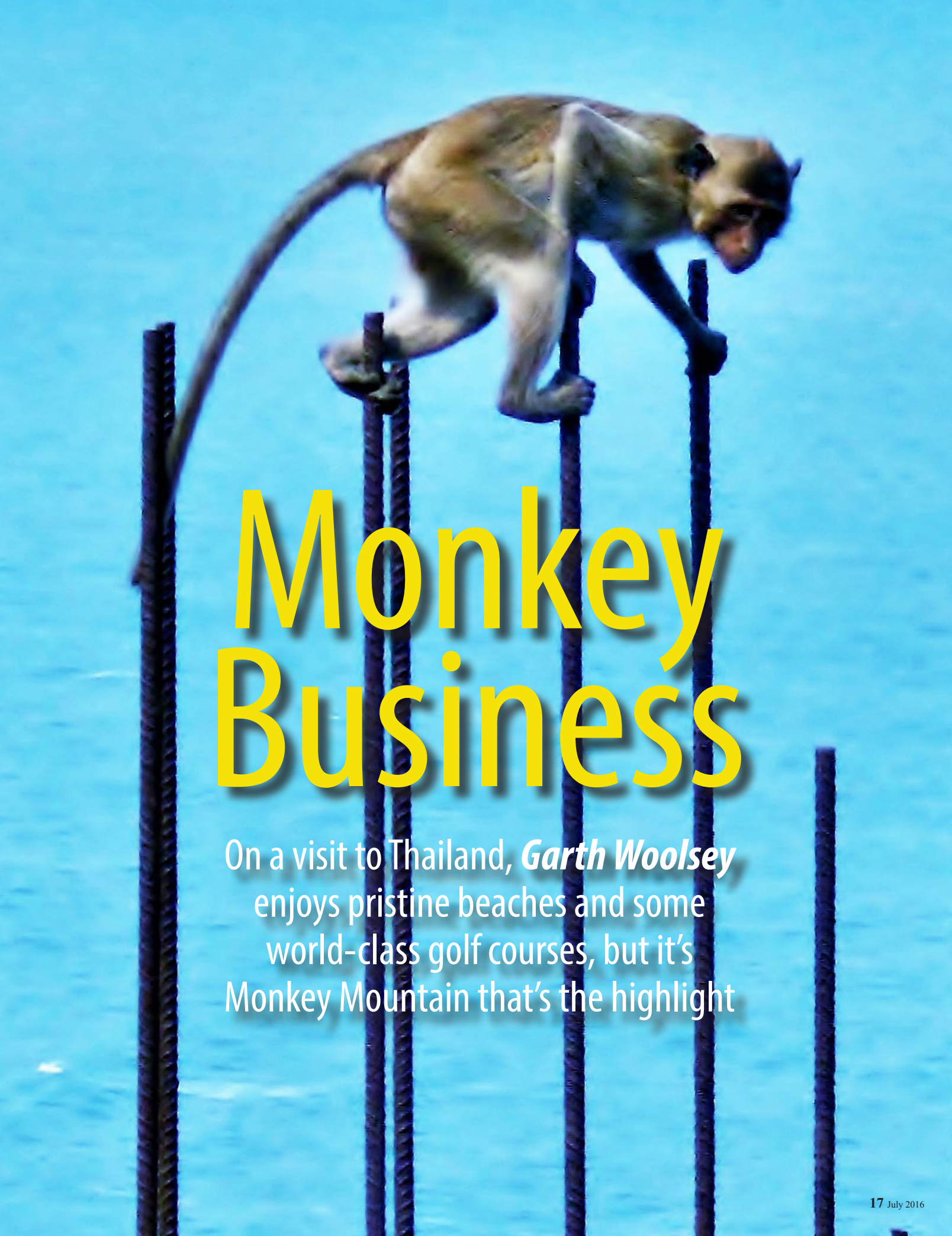

Monkey Business

On a visit to Thailand, ***Garth Woolsey*** enjoys pristine beaches and some world-class golf courses, but it's Monkey Mountain that's the highlight

By Garth Woolsey
TRAVELIFE CONTRIBUTOR

HUA HIN, THAILAND — They see me before I see them. The first one I notice, as I climb the scores of steep steps, is staring straight at me. Gradually, I become aware that I'm the target of many more eyes.

Sure, I'd come to see the monkeys. But it was strange to feel as if they'd been waiting for me, an entire welcoming committee of primates. Mid-afternoon, no crowds, quiet, a sea breeze relieving the sweltering heat, the resident macaques are chilling out, arrayed high in shade trees and, I begin to realize, stretched out low in the underbrush and even in the open on flat ground like so many sun-bathing tourists.

Among them, I gradually tune in, tiny and wide-eyed, are babies. I'm a sucker for all monkeys, big or small. But baby monkeys, living dolls? Come on. Name something cuter.

Plus, these toddlers are not behind bars. They're not somewhere up in a rain forest cover, either, only to be glimpsed if you're lucky. They're perched a few metres away. They're deftly climbing, their tiny fingers and toes already deft as pickpockets, an array of construction rebar, their very own monkey bars.

This tribe lives a privileged existence. Buddhist monks, funded by donations and fuelled by love, feed them and ensure their safety on Khao Takiab, a.k.a. Monkey Mountain, a rocky outcropping adorned with temples and a glittering, serene 20-metre statue of Buddha. The place affords stunning views northward up some five kilometres of broad, pristine beach stretching to the centre of Hua Hin. I walked all that way, stopping for beers and shrimp Pad Thai en route, but there are plenty of cheap alternatives from tuk-tuks to taxis to the locally preferred option of songthaews, covered pickup trucks with benches for seating.

Anyway, monkeys, what a bonus. (Even though, I am told, caution is advised especially at feeding time. Those teeth are real and those fangs are sharp and those monkeys are wild and, yes, they more often than not get what they want.)

I'd come to Hua Hin, a three-hour drive south of Bangkok on the Gulf of Thailand, not for the wildlife but for the consistently outstanding late-winter and early-spring weather (34C, blue skies every day). I'd also come, with the help of a specialized tour operator, for the golf as this resort town of only abut 80,000 — which was originally developed as a get-away for the Thai royal family — is surrounded by an array of first-rate courses.

One of them is Sea Pines, which boasts a series of superb finishing holes verging on the oceanfront, coincidentally within easy walking distance of my buddies at Monkey Mountain. I'm not aware if the monkeys ever venture down to the course, but I do know they sometimes head to the beach beneath their





The beaches of Thailand is what lures countless numbers of tourists each winter, but it's the golf courses around Hua Hin that will truly surprise you. Of course, the cute little monkeys that you'll see at Monkey Mountain will amuse and delight, as well.



PHOTOS BY GARTH WOOLSEY





sanctuary and frolic in the surf like so many of the ubiquitous lotion-lathered visitors from northern Europe.

Hua Hin, quiet and safe, with a full range of accommodation from hostels to a Hilton, attracts an older crowd than other Thai beachfront resorts. Not that it is in any way stuffy. But neither is it tacky. Yes, there are some bar girls and raunchy pursuers, but even they seem to exercise a restraint you'd rarely see in, say, Pattaya, across the Gulf.

Sea Pines was developed by the Thai Army and, as such, officers get preferential treatment. I'm travelling on my own and start my round in the company only of the Thai-standard mandatory caddy (all are women and all are versed in the fine art of reading greens and stroking bruised visitors' egos).

We soon pair up with an Englishman and his non-playing girlfriend. He's swinging an old, beautiful set of Ping Eye 2 irons he found in Ireland. He's great company. Later, I would play with a couple that spend half their summers in Finland and winters here operating an online nurse recruitment business. I would play also with a German who tells me he only flies business class, a perk of a lifetime spent working for the Krupp steel empire (eat your heart out economy class). He's retired, but still a board member.

Over the course of a total of two weeks, I've played seven rounds of golf on five different courses. There are eight to choose from within about a 30-minute drive of central Hua Hin, another five farther out. Course quality is high, although I was shocked and disappointed by the burned-out condition (local drought) of the Jack Nicklaus-designed Springfield Royal layout.

The cream of the crop are Black Mountain, which played host to a PGA Asian Tour event in March, and Banyan, both opened within the last 10 years. Take it from a guy who usually plays public courses in the Greater Toronto Area, usually breaking 100, sometimes 90, rarely 80, both are challenging but fair, visually stunning and memorable. Greens fee, which include caddy at Banyan, cost about $145 Cdn.

The way to go for me, and I suspect most first-time visitors, is to book everything in advance in a package. It may be cheaper and it most definitely makes everything less stressful. I've used Golf Asian (http://www.golfasian.com) twice with no complaints. They take care of everything from meeting you at the airport in Bangkok, to fetching you at your hotel (a wide range of lodging is available, I opted for a small three-star place walking distance from the bars and night markets) for each round and getting you back there safe and sound. Then back to the airport. All for about $1,500 for one week.

Tour East Holidays — http://www.toureast.com — also offers many Thai tour packages that can be customized to include golf.

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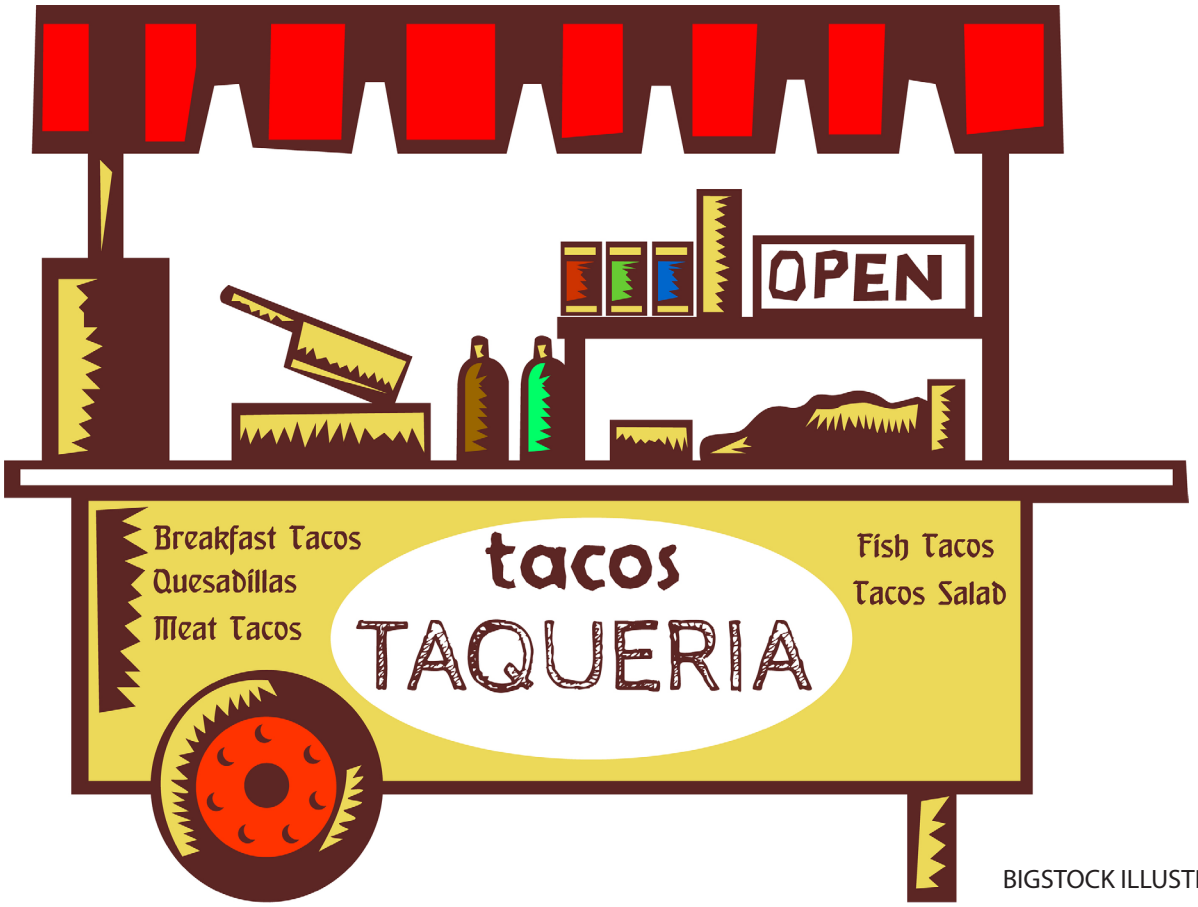

BIGSTOCK ILLUSTRATION

Cart Wheels

Portland pulls out all the stops to become known as the food cart capital of North America



"From the people and the foodies to the government, Portland has been so supportive (of food carts)," says Julia Barrett, co-owner of The Dump Truck, one of the city's most famous street diners.

PHOTOS BY KAREN ASP & PORTLAND TOURISM

By Karen Asp
TRAVELIFE CONTRIBUTOR

PORTLAND — This city might be best known as America's craft beer capital but anybody who's visited this hip Oregon city where man buns, flannel shirts and funky doughnuts reign, will know it for something different — its food carts.

Truth be told, one long weekend here isn't enough to hit a fraction of them. With over 600 on the roster, you'd have to eat at a food cart daily for almost two years to visit them all, and even then, you'd be behind as they're frequently changing.

I don't let that deter me, though. I'm on a mission to sample as much of Portland's food carts (and its beers, to be honest) in the short



The food carts in downtown Portland attract a lot of attention and are busy most of the day. Every type of food imaginable is on offer and carts like the Dump Truck deliver great high-quality grub.

time I have. Although I'm more successful on my beer mission, I do take a decent bite out of the carts. Just one bite tells me why Portlanders are so gaga about carts.

Dishing out the details

I'm staying at the Hotel Monaco in downtown Portland, giving me easy access to about 250 food carts (the rest are in other parts of the city). Food carts are grouped into "pods" that contain anywhere from a few to several dozen. Some have creative names — Cartopia, Tidbit and Cartlandia, for instance — while others are known by their location.

I do most of my sampling at SW 9th Avenue and Alder Street. Locals refer to it as the Alder Pod and it's a cart-lover's paradise with about 60 carts occupying a two-block radius. It's where I meet Brett Burmeister — owner of Food Carts Portland, which offers tours — who eats lunches daily at carts with one exception. "I take Sundays off," he says. Good timing, as most of the popular carts are closed that day.

While many cities have food trucks, Portland's scene is truly unique. For starters, carts, more appropriately called trailers, aren't allowed to park in streets, a law that's been around since they first appeared in the 1980s. Instead, they park



in lots, each space slightly wider than a car on average.

The support these food carts receive is also almost unprecedented. "From the people and the foodies to the government, Portland has been so supportive," says Julia Barrett, co-owner of The Dump Truck. "They're very welcoming to trying something new and funky."

Want to open a new food cart, though? Good luck. "To get a new space, the wait list is about 10 years," Burmeister says. But keep your ears open, as people do sell their carts — about 90 per cent are owner-operated — when they're ready to call it quits, some commanding as much as $10,000 (U.S.).

Besides meeting health codes, carts have one other main requirement to fulfill: The ability to move. Yet that's an irony because some wheels are no thicker than a piece of paper.



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In eco-friendly Portland, which is a leader in sustainability, many carts use biodegradable and compostable containers and utensils.

Around the globe in one city

One of the best things about Portland's food carts is no cuisine gets left behind. Whatever your taste buds desire, from whatever part of the world, healthy or not, you'll find it.

Seeking comfort food? Hit the Grilled Cheese Grill where the Cheesus — two grilled cheese sandwiches swaddled around a burger — steals the spotlight. Craving a burrito the size of your forearm? Honkin' Huge Burrito, which has been around since 1992, is your ticket. If, though, menus throw your head into a tailspin, visit Nona's Chua Man Gay. There you can get chicken and rice. Or rice and chicken. Doesn't matter how you order it, those are your only two options.

Yet it's not only the variety of cuisines these carts sell, but also the various styles of each cuisine. For instance, if you you're craving falafel, you have to specify whether you mean the Israeli or Lebanese version. Same goes for Mexican and every other cuisine.

"Foods have so many regional differences, and the food carts reflect that," says Burmeister, adding that Portland's palate is very discerning. "It's why there's not one fast food restaurant downtown."

My tour with Foodcarts Portland includes four samples, three of which appeal to my plant-based diet. We start at the Dump Truck, which specializes in Chinese dumplings, and I might as well have just ended here as the Potato Curry and Down2Earth are to die for. There are two other dumplings on the menu, the bacon cheeseburger being the most unique, and the menu rarely changes. "Whenever we try to swap something for our main flavours, people throw a fit," says Barrett, who learned how to make dumplings from a man who owned a dumpling restaurant in Beijing, where she once lived.

From there, we visit Ole' Latte Coffee Roaster for artisan coffee. I try the pumpkin-poached orange latte with the most beautiful design on the froth — I hate ruining it. Yet one sip is all I need to tell me I'm coming back, and when I do, I'll make a mark on their "suspended coffee" board.

The pay-it-forward program lets you to pay for a coffee for somebody (you get a 10 per cent discount on your total order) and mark it on the board; people who can't afford a cup can then redeem that mark, one per day. "Giving back to the community was important to me," says Todd Edwards, owner of Ole' Latte Coffee Roaster. "We try to keep everyone caffeinated, even those who don't have much."

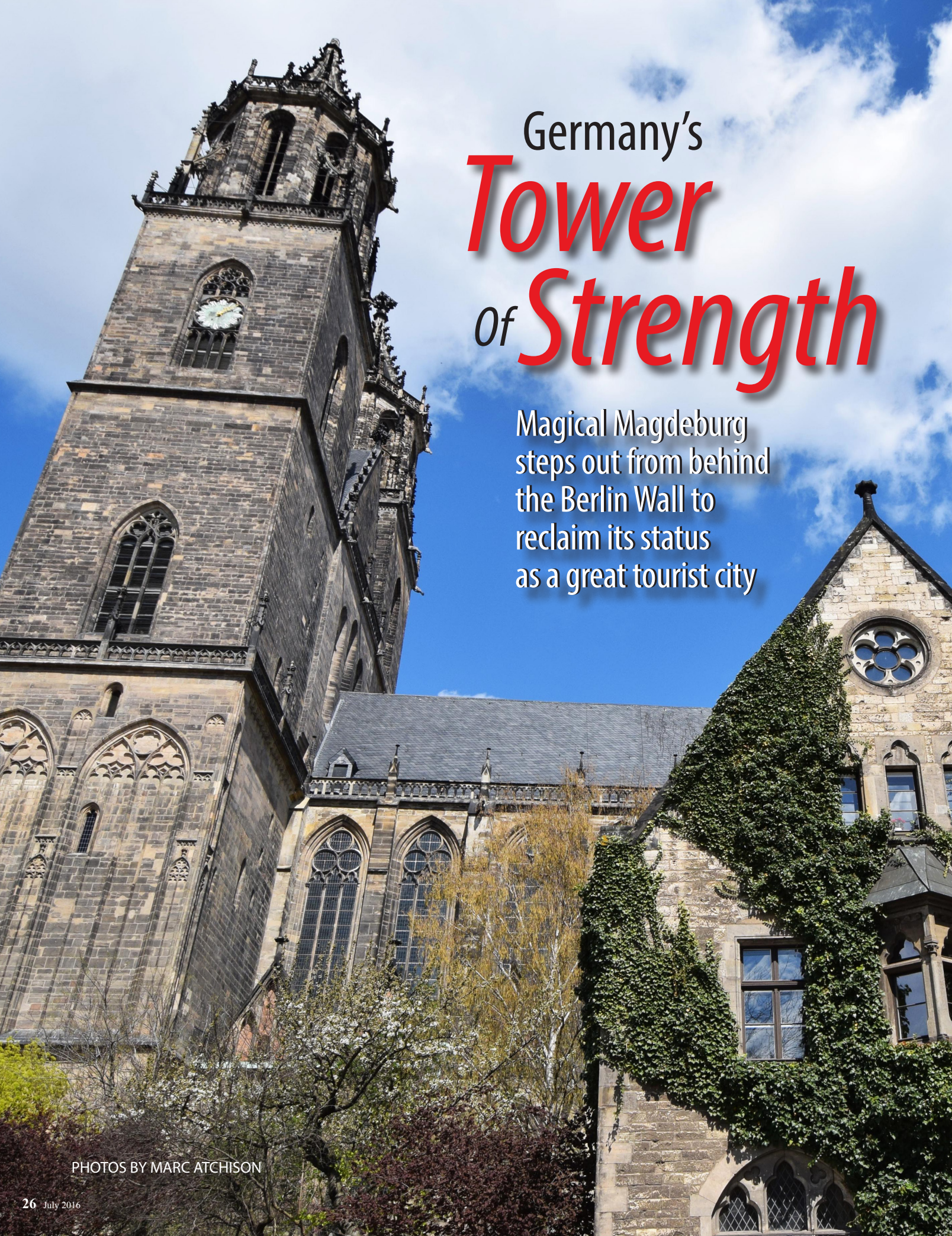
I travel next to a Persian food cart, Caspian Kabob, where I enjoy a veggie kabob over basmati rice. My group raves about the signature Kubideh Kabob with ground beef and lamb.

Our last stop is A Little Bit of Smoke Carolina BBQ, which specializes in Carolina-style BBQ. My non-vegan tour mates are served the Hogpile BBQ with black-eyed peas, pulled pork, slaw and red BBQ sauce.

By the way, if you're an eco-friendly eater like me, Portland, a leader in sustainability, has you covered. Many carts use biodegradable and compostable containers and utensils, but some have taken the next step by becoming a GO Box vendor. Food cart eaters pay a minimal yearly fee to get their fare in boxes that are picked up by bike courier and then reused after sanitizing.

Unfortunately, though, Portland's food cart scene is facing an unknown future. Many pod spaces are on the chopping block, possibly being turned into highrises and other buildings. Burmeister is hopeful, though, the city will change its laws to allow carts to park on streets.

One pod that doesn't have to worry about parking issues. The Portland International Airport pod. I'm so surprised to find it there, and I get one last fix as I leave by grabbing a tofu bowl, perhaps the best I've had, from Koi Fusion. Suffice it to say my food cart experience from start to finish was beyond delicious, or should I say, cart-licious. •



Germany's Tower of Strength

Magical Magdeburg steps out from behind the Berlin Wall to reclaim its status as a great tourist city

PHOTOS BY MARC ATCHISON



By Marc Atchison
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

MAGDEBURG, GERMANY — This lovely city that sits majestically perched on the banks of the Elbe River was a lost treasure, hidden behind a "wall" and almost forgotten for over 30 years. But when the "wall" came crumbling down, beautiful Magdeburg was rediscovered, polished and its luster restored. And now Magdeburg is magical again.

The former seat of the Holy Roman Empire is just one many cities that sat behind the Berlin Wall, out of sight and out of mind to world travellers while the communists ruled the former East Germany. But since German Reunification in 1990, Magdeburg, thanks to an injection of lots of federal cash, has been returned to its glory days and the 1,200-year-old beauty has again taken its rightful place among the "must-see" tourist cities of Germany.

And once you get here, you won't believe what you'll see.

Magdeburg certainly surprised this first-time visitor with its stunning good looks; its skyline is dominated by a grouping of ancient church towers that rivals anything I've seen in Rome or Paris.

Known as the "City of Otto" — Otto The Great, who ruled the Holy Roman Empire from here, and Otto von Guericke, a noted politician and scientist share favourite son status — Magdeburg is a place that now serves as capital of Saxony-Anhalt, one Germany's 16 states, which has the highest concentration of UNESCO World Heritage Sites in the country.

The compact city of 238,380 residents is divided into four distinct tourist districts; the Cathedral and Market districts are the ones that attract the most visitors, though.

As I stroll along the Elbe en route to the Cathedral District, I'm impressed by how environmentally-friendly Magdeburg appears. It's actually one of Germany's greenest cities and ranks second only to Hanover in total hectares devoted to green spaces.

The Elbe is one of the most important rivers in central Europe and cuts through Magdeburg just before emptying into the North Sea. The river has brought the city great prosperity over the centuries and remains one of the continent's major transportation routes. On its perfectly groomed banks, I see people stretched out on the grass soaking up the sun, playing cards and passionately discussing politics, something that was unheard of here during its communist era.

It's not hard finding the Cathedral District — the massive black towers of Magdeburg Cathedral, the centrepiece of the lovely area, can be seen from almost everywhere in the downtown core.

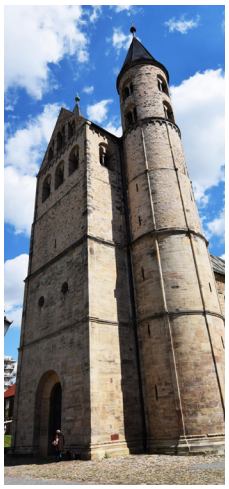
The original cathedral was commissioned by Otto The Great in 955 but he died shortly after ascending to the Holy Roman Empire throne and never saw it completed. He and his wife, however, are now entombed in the cathedral, which was destroyed in 1207 in a city fire. It took another 300 years to rebuild it and the end result is very impressive; it is one of the most beautiful Gothic structures in Europe and it's filled with lots of priceless artifacts from the Middle Ages.

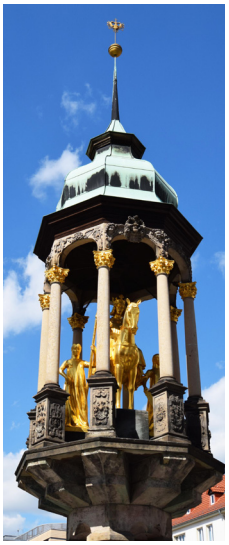
A short walk leads me to another handsome structure, the former Monastery of Our Lady, which is home to a very impressive art museum. The Monastery is the oldest surviving building from the Roman Road period in Magdeburg, dating back to the 11th century. The artwork is displayed in three vaults in the north wing of the building, which also houses the Georg Philipp Telemann Concert Hall.

Directly behind the monastery, I stumble upon the Old Möllenvogtel — circa 1600 — another ancient church, which is home to the city's Romanesque Art Centre. When I walk through the city's last surviving medieval gate next to Old Möllenvogtel, I discover a half-timbered house from the same period. History abounds in Magdeburg.

My next discovery is the Fürstenwall, the city's Middle Age ruins containing fortifications that look out on the Elbe. Two perfectly







The towers of Magdeburg Cathedral, opposite page, Walloon Church, top photo, and the Monestary of Our Lady dominate the city's skyline. The golden statue tower of Otto the Great sits in Market Square.

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preserved watch towers are the highlight of my visit here.

Before leaving the fascinating Cathedral District, I visit the Church of St. Sebastian, which opened in 1015. While admiring the lovely Gothic structure, my eye is drawn towards something that looks out of place amongst the historic landmarks — a pink building with lots of curves and big gold balls sticking out its roof. It looks like something Gaudi created.

The Green Citadel, as it's known, is actually the last creation of noted Austrian architect Friedensreich Hundertwasser, a devoted environmentalist who topped the building with a flowering meadow and incorporated 900 windows into the design to promote natural light. The Citadel prompted many opinions — both for and against — when it opened in 2005 but has since become one of the most photographed buildings in all of Europe; a novel creation that injects a bit of playful youthfulness in this staid old city.

When I get to the Alter Markt (Old Market Square), Otto von Guericke, or at least a bronze statue of the man, is there to greet me. Otto the Scientist is revered here because of his achievements in the world of physics; his discovery of an experimental method for clearly demonstrating electrostatic repulsion is his main claim to fame. Von Guericke also served in many municipal positions while living here for 50 years, including Magdeburg's Lord Mayor. So the handsome monument is indeed a fitting tribute to the 17th-century celebrity.

Around the corner from Otto the Scientist, I find Otto The Great perched atop a golden horse with two golden attendants at his side guarding Magdeburg's 12th-century Town Hall. The impressive statue, known as the Magdeburg Rider, is actually a copy of the 11th-century original, which rests safely in the city's Cultural History Museum.

Across the street stands the impressive Walloon Church of St. Augustine, where Martin Luther once preached (1524) during the earliest days of the Reformation. A statue of the great reformer stands outside the impressive church that has been standing on the hill overlooking the Elba River since 1285.

Because there's so many parks in Magdeburg, people are encouraged to get outdoors and the place they like to hang out most is Elbauenpark, home to the coned-shaped Millennium Tower, the highest wooden structure of its kind in the world — think giant teepee — where 6,000 years of human history are retraced through some fascinating exhibits and artifacts.







The Green Citidal, which is painted pink, stands out from the ancient buildings and statues that dominate the landscape in Magdeburg. Otto von Guericke, a former Lord Mayor of Magdeburg and a noted scientist, is honoured in Market Square, left, while the city's original fortress is on view on the banks of the Elbe River, above.

Just The Facts

- *The best way to get to Magdeburg from Canada is with Lufthansa via Frankfurt or Berlin. Air Canada also offers daily service to Frankfurt.*
- *Magdeburg is an hour's train ride from Berlin*
- *Magdeburg, like many other cities in Germany, are getting ready for the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017. Magdeburg is in close proximity to cities and towns that played key roles in Martin Luther's peaceful 14th century rebellion against the Catholic churcH. The Maritim Hotel Magdeburg (http://www.maritim.com) is offering special Reformation packages throughout 2017.*
- *For more information on Magdeburg, go to http://www.magdeburg-tourist.de*
- *For information on Germany, PLEASE go to http://www.germany.com*

Magdeburg's entertaining Butterfly House can also be found at Elbauenpark and it keeps kids and those young at heart entertained for hours. The park's summer toboggan run is another family favourite.

The cycle route along the Elbe is always crowded with locals and visitors alike, and offers the best views of Magdeburg's historic districts.

As you might expect in a city that drifts off into one of Europe's most famous rivers, there's plenty of boating activities available in Magdeburg and river cruises must be booked early in the summer months to avoid disappointment.

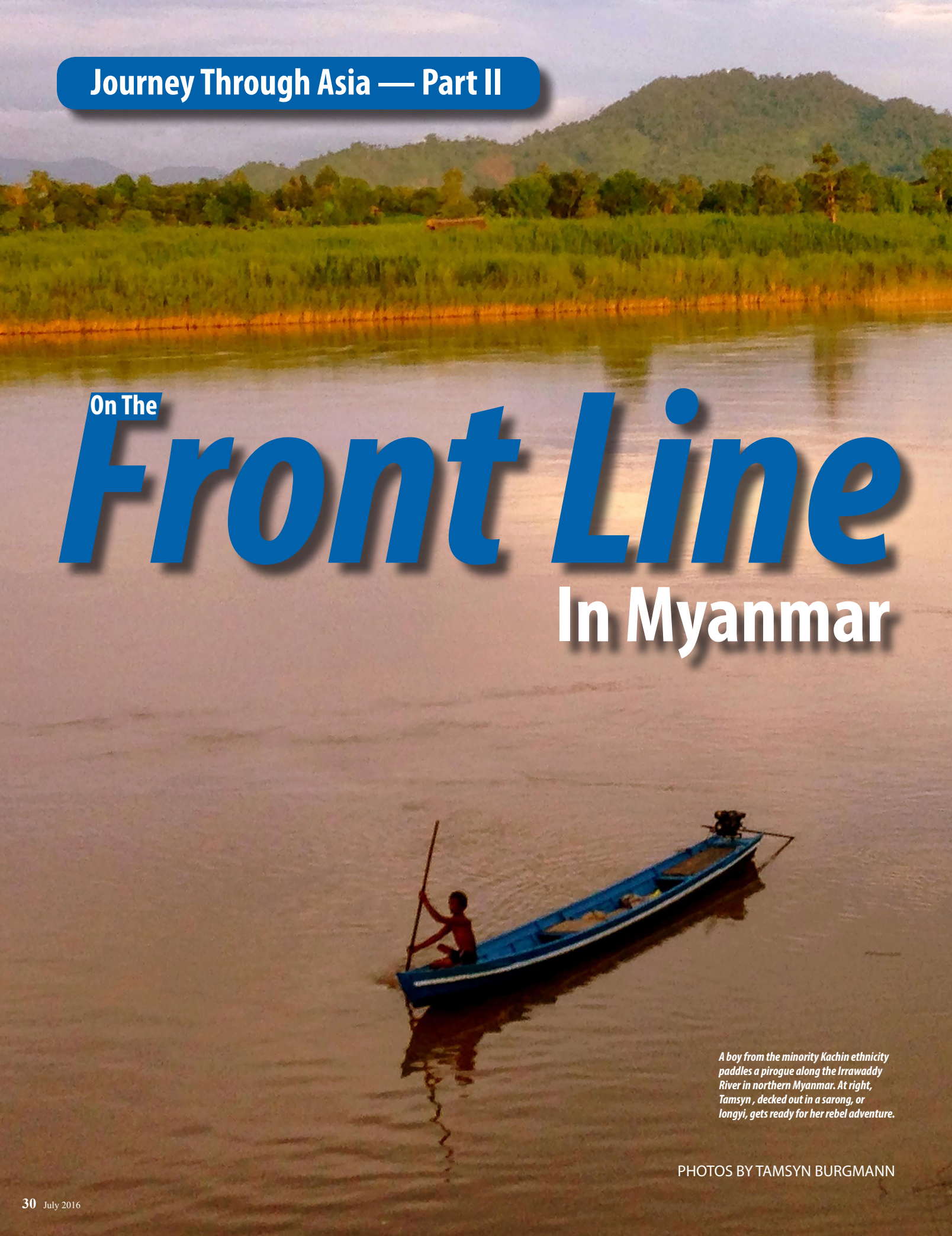
This is a city of surprises and there's no better proof of that than Magdeburg Zoo, where 1,200 exotic animals, representing 190 different species, roam freely over 16 acres of idyllic terrain in Vogelgesang Park. The zoo is one of the best in the world and its savannah landscape will make you think you've arrived in Africa.

The zoo's chimpanzee enclosure and its elephant and penguin presentations are truly remarkable. Kids love the zoo's "Up Close" program, where they can hold and touch some treasured animals.

The zoo certainly brings a smile to everyone's face, just like the rest of magical Magdeburg. •

Journey Through Asia — Part II

On The Front Line In Myanmar



A boy from the minority Kachin ethnicity paddles a pirogue along the Irrawaddy River in northern Myanmar. At right, Tamsyn , decked out in a sarong, or longyi, gets ready for her rebel adventure.

PHOTOS BY TAMSYN BURGMANN



It's a brave new world for our solo traveller ***Tamsyn Burgmann*** as she ventures into 'rebel' territory to get the inside story on this country

MYITKYINA, MYANMAR — As the twin-engine turboprop bumps onto the narrow tarmac of the Myitkyina airport, I am acutely aware I have entrusted my safety to a man I hardly know. Acting on raw instinct, I have accepted an exclusive invitation to meet a rebel army in Myanmar's far north.

The city is in Kachin State, at the foothills of the Himalayas in the country better known as Burma. At the time it is the farthest a foreigner can visit without the military-backed government's permission. It is also the most remote place I have ever travelled.

I have lied to the Myanmar embassy to get my entry visa, so I keep up the ruse when I'm greeted by three military officers with betel-stained grins.

"I hear it is very beautiful here," I croon to the gatekeepers. "I'm an English teacher visiting from Japan!"

They smile at my blonde hair and traditional sarong, called a longyi, so I feign confidence and blow past onto the muddy road outside. But unlike most Southeast Asian tourist destinations, I discover nary a tuk-tuk in sight. I plead with the universe, "Please let him meet me … "

* * *

One week earlier, I'm the only woman in the Yangon steakhouse when my new buddy lobs a cool welcome: "I heard you were kidnapped last month?"

The newcomer sits. We down a bottle of red wine before he reveals himself an international news videographer, a daredevil regularly scaling 900-foot mountains to embed with a rebel army. His name is John Sanlin and his weapon of choice is the camera. The soldiers he records fire Kalashnikovs out of necessity, defending their ethnic minority from the ruling junta.

Sanlin plays coy that first night. He deflects inquisition



corrupt minister into gifting him a chunky gold ring studded with rubies and sapphires. By our third round of whiskey and shisha, my persistence triggers his offer. "Come with me to war-torn territory. I'll show you how it's done."

I spend the next two days atop the Sakura Tower, the capital's tallest building, mooning over wispy pink-and-orange sunsets and grilling Sanlin on his journalism chops, integrity and life story. He uses spotty Wi-Fi to stream cloak-and-dagger footage of his exploits. That's him, sneaking a CNN correspondent through restricted areas during Cyclone Nargis in 2008. Him again, nabbing surreptitious shots for the World Wildlife Fund of poachers in the jungle. He confesses a reputation for dangerous stunts. "I'm not afraid to die," he says. So the last thing I do, before agreeing to meet up with him in Kachin state, is to ask him point-blank: "Why are you inviting me?"

* * *

I've only sent a sketchy Facebook message to confirm I'm making the 1,500-kilometre flight when I touch down in rebel territory. But Sanlin is right where he promised, whisking me into a jeep with a cracked windshield. He breezily introduces me to a woman belted in the front seat who speaks no English, named Kabul – "like Afghanistan." I eventually figure out she's his wife.

He tosses me a juicy rambutan fruit and we roll out, driving past ramshackle shops, a fleet of trucks overflowing with schoolchildren, and camouflage military vehicles. He settles the three of us in at a freshly painted guesthouse and then refuses to let me pay for any meals, zipping us to a roadside stall serving ethnic Shan food. For the equivalent of 80 cents I dine on



Video journalist John Sanlin, above, shows his footage of Kachin soldiers at battle in the mountains. Left, two cows moon our writer outside the gated rebel compound.

stewed okra, chickpeas and fresh fish from the Irrawaddy River, a spectacular blue-green ribbon that gushes under fishermen on their pirogues. I'm impressed by a golden pagoda encasing an opulent reclining Buddha, until I learn it's a symbol of oppression. The majority Buddhist government has burned down and replaced churches built by the minority Kachin populace, who are almost all Christians.

The cock crows outside my window the next morning and we begin a whirlwind of meetings. Sanlin chauffeurs me throughout the city, switching between tour guide and personal monologist. I meet the local police chief, who regales me with details of an opium sting; another tale about a 25-year-old farmer and father of three, beaten by the military into falsely confessing a bomb plot; and the story of a young activist who was imprisoned

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Four Kachin women, top photo, tearfully explained their husbands were jailed by the military based on racial profiling. Above, Kachin people gather outside golden pagodas in Myitkyina, not far from the ramshackle city's modest airport, right.

for sneaking human rights documentaries through a military checkpoint.

I wonder if Sanlin is putting himself in danger. The government's military — and their guns — are omnipresent. Sanlin wordlessly swaps his personal jeep one day for another with tinted windows.

At last I am delivered to the gated rebel compound, where strategists for the Kachin Independence Army meet. Their office stands secure but in plain view, constructed to fulfill the terms of a tenuous cessation of hostilities. The army exists solely to fight the regime, which the United Nations says has committed widespread human rights abuses. The rebels want freedom for their people in the form of self-governance.

I heed Sanlin's instructions, but sometimes still make blunders. I'm urgently called back after sauntering outside the security fences to snap a photograph with cows grazing in the foreground. "We don't want people to see you!" (I click the shutter once and secretly applaud myself, until I see I've caught the animals' tails up and mooning me – too lewd for a news publication.)

Sanlin says nothing. He has his own agenda, requesting I consider rounding up foreign volunteers for "an adventure," an all-expenses paid expedition back to educate local Kachin adults. For one of the most impoverished countries in Asia, it's do-it-yourself empowerment.

My interviews with the army's advisors stretch late into the night at a picnic table beside the riverbank, and we reconvene over breakfasts of roti and chickpeas. When I bid them farewell, Lt. Col. Gawlu La Awng responds, "See you in another life."

* * *

It's the final day of my visit, and for the first time Sanlin and I exchange no words as he drives me back to the airport. I quietly position my video camera toward the jeep's back window, capturing final impressions. I mostly want rare footage of the forbidding military base, documenting the apparatus of state oppression to share with the outside world.

Sanlin breaks the silence: "Don't video the military!" I guiltily slam the device into my lap, missing the coveted shot. I'm struck that he knew I was secretly filming the whole ride. It dawns on me that had I been seen, the military would have taken it up with him and not me. Right until our final parting, Sanlin did whatever he could to create opportunity for me at his own risk.

My mind flicks back to the 20th floor of the Sakura Tower in Yangon. Sanlin's tough exterior. The sunsets he helped me photograph. "Why are you inviting me?" I ask him. Sanlin looks me straight in the eyes: "I always champion the underdog," he replies. "Hear their words." •

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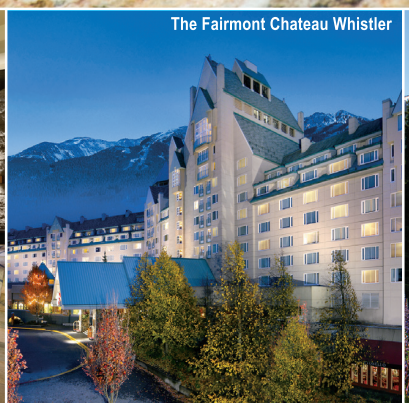
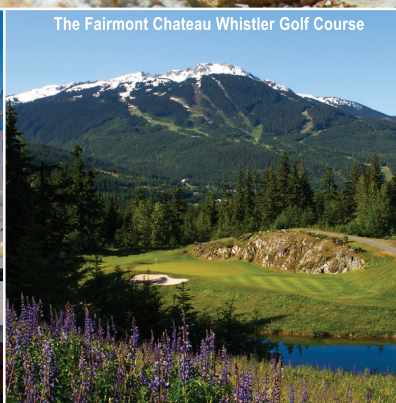






A drive through Vintage France



PHOTOS BY AMY LAUGHINGHOUSE

Writer Amy Laughinghouse gets a front seat view of the lovely places that make up the French Riviera. From behind the wheel of a vintage Porsche, Amy watches the sun dip into the waters lapping lovely Antibes, below, and visits postcard pretty coastal towns like Villefranche, above, where the rich and powerful come to play.

Writer's cinematic tour of the Cote d'Azur in a classic Porsche an affair to remember

By Amy Laughinghouse
TRAVELIFE CONTRIBUTOR

EZE, FRANCE — I'm grinding the gears of a 1956 Porsche 356 Speedster, transforming what should sound like the purr of a big randy cat into the anguished groans of a wounded grizzly as I haltingly navigate a stretch of French Riviera coastline. The sea breeze has reduced my Grace Kelly-style bun to a wind-whipped travesty, and my terrified companion in the passenger seat wears the frozen expression of a skydiver who can't remember if they packed their parachute.

Yet when a man lounging at an al fresco café whips his head around as I pass, shouting "Belle! Belle!" into my fuel-injected wake, the whole scene is suddenly rendered in romantic, super-saturated Technicolor … in my mind, at least.



Whether his hoot of approval is for me or, more likely, for my rented wheels hardly matters. I'm determined to enjoy my movie star moment, ensconced in a red bucket leather seat as I head for the hills. My convertible is the same model favoured by James Dean, and, voila!, I've finally found second gear. All that's missing now is a jazzy score by Henry Mancini to drown out the carnage I'm inflicting on the engine.

Cruising in a vintage car is the perfect complement to a film-themed tour of the French Riviera, where dozens of seminal flicks have been shot since the 1950s. I begin, appropriately enough, in Cannes.

Every May, celebrities descend upon this coastal city for the Cannes International Film Festival. They preen and pose like a flock of Prada-clad peacocks for the



At the 13th century Chateau d'Eza one gets an awe-inspiring view of the French coastline and the small exclusive communities that make up the South of France.

paparazzi before disappearing into the Palais des Festivals et des Congrès to scrutinize the most hotly anticipated movies of the year.

As Cannes' Stage Management Department Director for more than 30 years, Philippe Octo was charged with ensuring that the screenings run smoothly. To his everlasting disappointment, the glory days of potential glitches have gone the way of the silent film, thanks to digital technology.

"It's just a beam and a bit of sound, like a Game Boy. Push and play," sighs Octo, who fondly recalls a time when reels came straight from the lab and subtitles were burned on the spot using acid. Nervous directors, who had only an hour to adjust colour and sound at a pre-screening, would beg the technicians for more time.

"They were so tense," Octo says. "A lot of them were drunk. It was fun."

The festival was founded in 1946, but the Riviera has been luring the artistically inclined for nearly a century. In 1925, F. Scott Fitzgerald penned Tender is the Night in a seaside villa at my next stop, Juan les Pins in Antibes.

Now reincarnated as the Hotel Belles Rives, Fitzgerald's erstwhile home still draws the rich and famous. Woody Allen fans may recognize its dramatic Art Deco decor from the period film Magic in the Moonlight, starring Colin Firth and Emma Stone.





The multi-million dollar yachts at anchor in the harbour at Cannes could belong to one of the Hollywood stars who come to this chic town each year for the world famous film festival.



Nice's flower market is a tradition spanning many generations and is one of the world's best.

Just The Facts

Getting around:

Rent a Classic Car, http://www.rentaclassiccar.com/en/. FYI: classic cars don't come with air-bags — or sometimes even seatbelts. If you prefer to be chauffeured in a modern vehicle, consider Executive Transport Service, www.executive-transport-service.com.

Where to stay:

- *Cannes: Splendid Hotel, http://www.splendid-hotel-cannes.com*
- *Antibes: Hotel Belles Rives, http://www.bellesrives.com*
- *Nice: The Negresco, http://www.hotel-negresco-nice.com/en/*
- *Villefranche: Hotel Welcome, http://www.welcomehotel.com*
- *Eze: Chateau d'Eza, http://www.chateaueza.com/the-hotel.html*
- *Chevre d'Or, http://www.chevredor.com*

Tourism Info:

- *http://us.rendezvousenfrance.com*
- *www.visitcotedazur.travel*
- *www.frenchriviera-tourism.com*

Getting There:

- *Air Canada and Air France offer daily service to the South of France via Paris.*

Nearby, the 16th century Fort Carr has also enjoyed its 15 minutes of fame. It featured in the 1983 Bond movie Never Say Never Again, with Sean Connery and Kim Basinger improbably jumping off the ramparts into the sea (on horseback, no less).

Further along the coast, Nice has "guest starred" in films ranging from To Catch a Thief (Cary Grant and Grace Kelly) to Ronin (Robert De Niro). Strolling through the aromatic flower market or negotiating the crowded seafront Promenade des Anglais, it's easy to understand why cinematographers have found Nice's energy irresistible.

In my opinion, however, the best supporting village award goes to Villefranche-sur-Mer, with an imposing fort and brightly painted houses that cascade downhill to the coast. If it seems rather familiar, that's because Villefranche-sur-Mer has served as a backdrop for so many films, including An Affair to Remember (Cary Grant and Deborah Kerr), The Jewel of the Nile (Kirk Douglas and Katherine Turner), and Never Say Never Again (yes, again).

The Hotel Welcome, nestled alongside the harbour, has hosted dozens of legendary visitors, including Jean Cocteau (who painted the interior of the local chapel), Gerard Depardieu, Catherine Deneuve and U.S. president Harry Truman. It's located next to Mere Germaine, an intimate seafood restaurant that's a favourite among celebrities like Madonna and De Niro.

The climax of my tour is a stay at Chateau d'Eza in Eze, a 13th-century stone village high above the coast. My chateau, formerly the Prince of Sweden's residence, was voted the most romantic hotel in the world by Conde Nast Traveler a few years ago, and it was here that Bono, who owns a home in the town below, proposed to his wife. (She said yes, of course.)

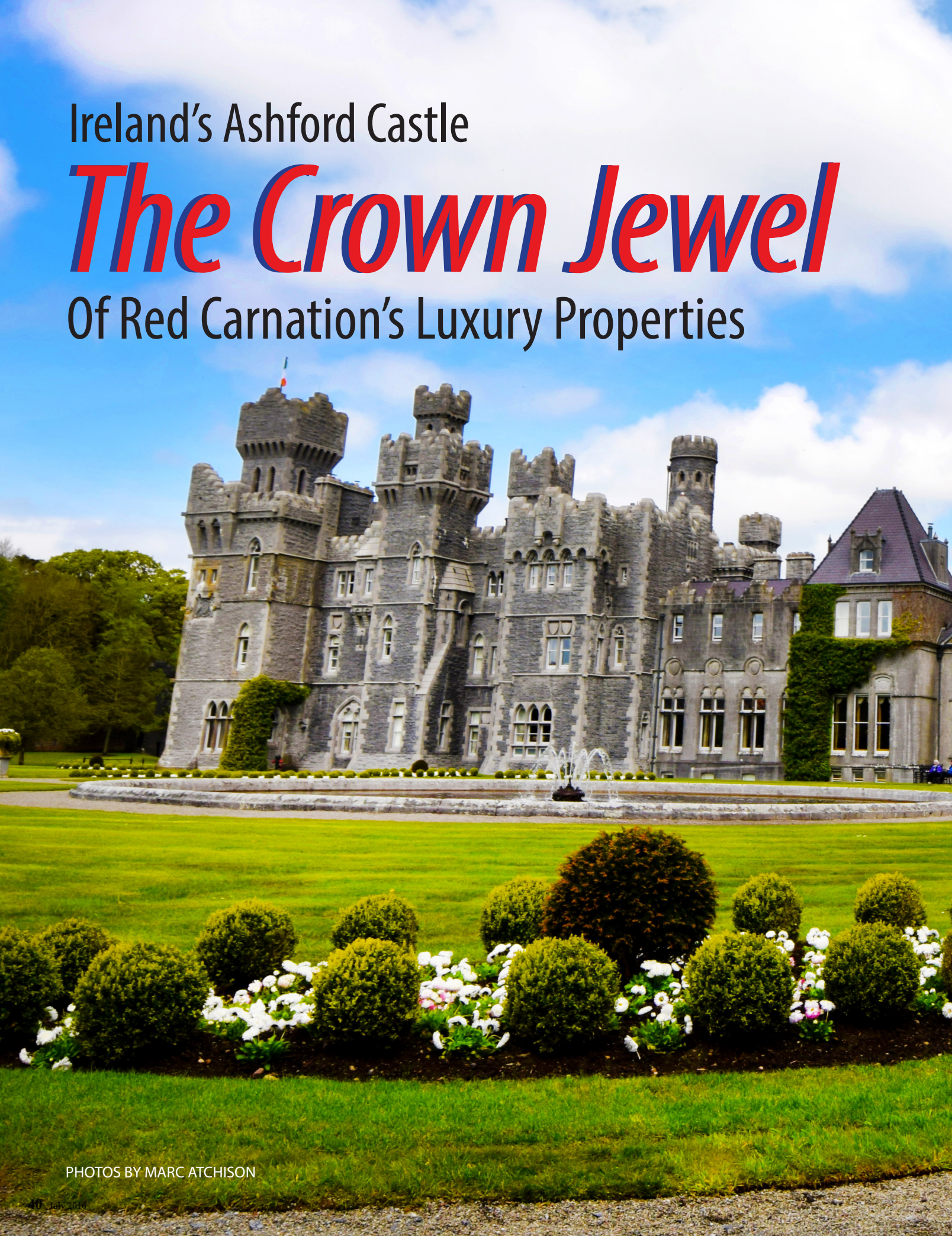
On my final night, I dine at the neighbouring Chevre d'Or, which has welcomed a who's who of elite actors, from Leonardo di Caprio to Jack Nicholson and Morgan Freeman, who filmed a scene from The Bucket List here. Dinner at the Michelin two-starred restaurant was — not surprisingly — on the men's list of "things to do before we die."

Having already faced what I feared was my own imminent death in a bucket seat, I'm happy to have simply survived this cinematic thrill ride. I'm not so sure I can say the same for the Porsche. •

Ireland's Ashford Castle

The Crown Jewel

Of Red Carnation's Luxury Properties



PHOTOS BY MARC ATCHISON

By Marc Atchison
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

CONG, IRELAND — When the car in which we are passengers reaches a point on the winding country road where fairytale Ashford Castle and its Lough Corrib backdrop come into view, the breathtaking panorama prompts us to simultaneously blurt out: "Oh my God!"

"And that's why they call this Oh My God Corner," smiles Ryan, the charming young Irishman who picked us up at Galway's rail station after our journey from Dublin.

A few minutes later we are welcomed to the fabled castle — now part of the renowned Red Carnation Hotel Collection and a Leading Hotels of the World member — by a smartly dressed doorman donned in a top hat and emerald green long coat. We bound up the stairs of the 13th-century landmark, past the two stone Irish wolfhounds guarding the entrance, and enter a lobby wrapped in rich oak panelling and an even richer history. We are instantly impressed.



Ashford Castle, built in the 13th century, is now a state-of-the-art hotel thanks to a $100 million facelift. However, the castle's history and original regal design were not compromised in the massive refurbishment . Now guests can soak up the property's regal past while enjoying modern luxuries fit for 21st century royalty.



PHOTOS BY MARC ATCHISON

Taking a stroll along the River Corrib, where fly fishermen cast for trout in the shadow of Ashford Castle, is an idyllic experience.





Ashford's resident Irish Wolfhounds, Cronan and Garvin, like to mingle with guests. Family pets are always welcome here.



Priceless paintings and antiques adorn the castle's Oak Hall where the grand staircase in located. The castle is a museum hotel.

While always regarded as the crown jewel of Irish hotels, Ashford Castle, thanks to a massive $100 million (Cdn) restoration initiated by Red Carnation's owners Stanley and Beatrice Tollman after they bought the property in 2013, has been lovingly transformed into one of the great hotels of the world — some might argue it's the greatest and few would disagree. (The influential Virtuoso travel group, in fact, recently awarded Ashford Castle its Best Hotel in the World Award).

Staff snaps to attention when we enter the lobby, offer us an adult beverage and quickly whisk us through the arrivals process — their attentiveness quickly eases the stresses of a long day of travel.

Majella McGovern offers to show us to our stateroom — 430. "It's located in the oldest part of the castle, dating from 1228," she tells us.

Many people have owned Ashford Castle over the centuries, including one of Ireland's most famous families. The head of the Guinness clan of black beer fame, Sir Benjamin Lee Guinness, bought the estate in 1852 and bequeathed it to his son Lord Ardilaun in 1868. It remained in a family trust until 1915 when new owners turned it into a hotel.

As we make our way to Room 430, we pass the castle's grand staircase where royalty (England's King George V and Monaco's Prince Rainier), a former U.S. president (Ronald Reagan) and the kings and queens of stage and screen (John Wayne, Maureen O'Hara, Pierce Brosnan and Robin Williams, among them) all left their footprints.

Museum-worthy paintings and ancient artifacts like knight's armour, regal red velvet furnishings, an overhead library filled with volumes of priceless books and an impressive array of crystal chandeliers adorn the Oak Hall where the staircase is located. We poke our heads into the Inglenook Room opposite Oak Hall and are surprised by the display cases filled with elegant silverware.

"There's over 1,000 pieces here that once belonged to Washington Augustus Roebling, the man who built New York's Brooklyn Bridge," Majella tells us.

The Inglenook, where the castle's most impressive fireplace is located — you can actually sit in it — drifts off into the lavish Connaught Tea Room where traditional high tea has been served each afternoon since 1868.

When Majella finally pushes open the large wooden door guarding Room 430, we're left speechless by what's inside. While each of Ashford's 83 guest rooms are unique, our stateroom is simply stunning. The walls are covered in rich fabrics

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— a feature of all Red Carnation properties, apparently — and a large canopied bed sits in the middle of the oversized room with the cathedral ceiling. We're especially awed with the red wine-coloured marble fireplace, which Majella says is an original from 1228. A set of narrow stairs beside the bed leads to a cozy reading loft where a day bed invites us to curl up with a glass of wine and a good book.

While it appears we've stepped back into the 13th century thanks to the room's lovely antique furnishings, we're quickly brought back to modern times when we enter the bathroom, which has been totally remodelled and updated with the addition of state-of-the-art amenities like a large soaker tub, oversized shower, plush towels, heated floor and lots of high-end toiletries. Flat screen televisions, Wi-Fi and other modern gadgets complete the decor.

When Majella pulls back the room's curtains, however, the true beauty of Ashford Castle is revealed. Below our window we see lovely flower beds and manicured lawns that sweep down to idyllic Lough Corrib, which is dotted with white swans, small forested islands and colourful fishing boats. Gorgeous!

Two of the most famous rooms at Ashford are the Reagan Presidential Suite, where the late U.S. leader and his wife Nancy stayed during their historic 1984 visit to Ireland, and The Kennedy Suite, where U.S. senator Ted Kennedy spent time in the 1980s. Many American guests ask to stay in those historic rooms, which, like our stateroom, are located in the oldest part of the castle.

For the next few days we immerse ourselves in the regal splendours of Ashford Castle, like:

- Taking long walks in the gardens where lords and ladies once had their secret trysts away from prying eyes;
- Playing a game of golf on the estate's nine-hole championship course designed by legendary Irish golf architect Eddie Hackett;
- Enjoying treatments in the castle's world-class spa staffed by well trained therapists using some unique local ingredients like seaweed in their massages and scrubs;
- Paying a visit to the stables where guests can saddle up well-groomed horses and meander along lovely wooded trails;
- Taking a lesson in falconry (where I get the thrill of holding and feeding a Peruvian Harris hawk named Lima);
- Strolling along the shores of the River Corrib — it's the dividing line between County Mayo and County Galway — where we see fly fishermen expertly casting for trout;
- And cap our stay off with a 10-course feast in the castle's Michelin-star worthy dining room The George V (named after the British King who visited here in 1905), and which is now ruled by acclaimed Chef Philippe Farineau.

All these activities are proof positive why Ashford Castle is regarded as much a destination as a hotel.

We also catch up on the castle's colourful history with members of staff in the Prince of Wales Bar (it was George V's private bar when he was here) and the grand parlour, where guests gather each evening to enjoy traditional Irish entertainment.

Servers Paul (Coyne), Michael (Conolleey) and Simon (Piercy), the guardians of the Guinness at Ashford, tell me many famous actors and golfers have sat at their tables and walked the well-groomed fairways of the castle's excellent course over the years. Duty manager Michael Hill also reveals that PGA legend Tom Watson once played the course before going on to win one of his five British Open championships.

Ashford Castle is indeed an inspiring place.

The third hole at Ashford golf course is called "Watson's Way" because the Hall of Famer cut the corner on the 391yard, par 4 and chipped in for an eagle — a remarkable feat when you consider the forest obstacle that Watson had to contend with off the tee.



The George V dining room is one of the most opulant restaurants in Europe where guests dine on gourmet meals



The pretty cottage where the classic movie The Quiet Man, starring John Wayne and Maureen O'Hara, was filmed sits next to Ashford Castle's fascinating falconry centre.

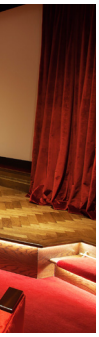


In the evening, guests gather in the Castle's plush theatre to view some movies form Hollywood's golden era.



from the kitchen of renowned French Chef Philippe Farineau. The 10-course tasting menu is a classic.









Remparts of the castle's original wall look out on tranquil Lough Corrib, one of Ireland's biggest lakes which is usually dotted with small fishing boats and white swans.

PHOTO BY MARC ATCHISON & ASHFORD CASTLE



Our Editor-in-Chief Marc Atchison and Lima get acquanted at Ashford Castle's Falconry School.

It's love at 'first flight' for guests at Ashford's falconry school

CONG, IRELAND — A Peruvian beauty named Lima and I lock eyes. I offer her my arm and together we walk through the tranquil gardens and magical woodlands that surround legendary Ashford Castle. The sleek beauty nestles into my shoulder and delivers a few pecks. But just when I think we're about to strike up an affair to remember, Lima flies off.

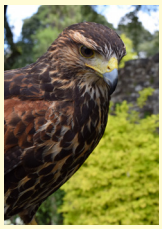
A relationship with a Peruvian Harris hawk, I discover, can be fleeting.

One of the favoured activities for guests at Red Carnation's amazing Ashford Castle is falconry, the "sport" that dates back to ancient Egypt (circa 1,300BC) and became popular with the royal elite, both in Great Britain and the Middle East, in modern times.

Ashford's Falconry School offers guests the chance to interact with the 20 hawks housed on the grounds and meet other birds of prey that call Ashford home, like Peregrine falcons and an huge Eurasian owl named Dingle.

Six instructors educate guests on the bird's feeding habits and their ability to take down large animals with their dive-bombing techniques.

Anna Aseeva, a charming falconry instructor from Russia, fits me out with a large leather glove before introducing me to Lima, one of the youngest Harris hawks on site.



"Harris hawks are great hunters," says Anna as she shows me how to hold my arm and hand so Lima feels more comfortable during our walk. "I'll get you to launch Lima and then we'll lure her back with some pieces of chicken," says Anna, who tucks small portions of chicken into the glove and Lima, with her massive wings spread, flies back, lands on my arm and devours her treat in seconds.

"Harris hawks will eats a couple of ounces of food every day and they sleep a lot," says the instructor, who points to a small sack on Lima's chest. "They can't digest all the food at once so the chicken will sit in the sack and Lima will digest it slowly."

The instructor says weight is very important. "It's the only way we can tell if the birds are ailing. So we'll weigh them every day and if there's even a slight change, we react quickly."

The experience is not just educational, but also lots of fun.

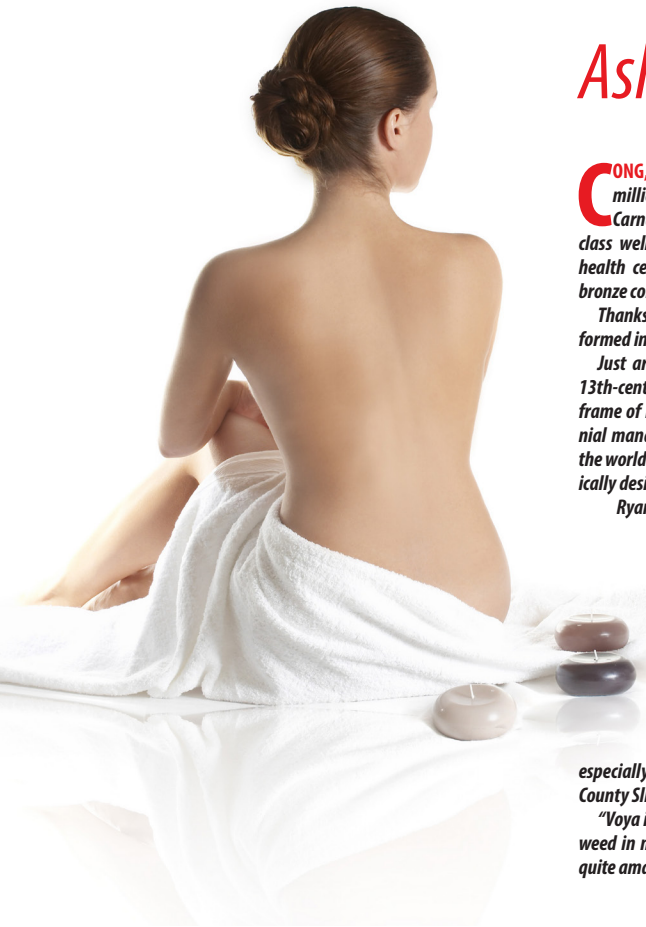
Back at the falconry school, Anna introduces me to Dingle, the massive owl with the saucer-sized eyes and the wing span of a 747, and tells me "this species has been known to take down small deer."

Ashford's falconry experience is one of the most delightful ways to spend your time at the fairytale hotel — it was love at first flight for me.

— M.A .



Well-informed instructors like Anna Aseeva, seen here with Ashford's wise old owl named Dingle, makes the falconry experience both fun and educational for guests.



Ashford Castle's spa a 'pleasure palace'

CONG, IRELAND — *The crowning achievement of the $100 million (Cdn) refurbishment of Ashford Castle by The Red Carnation Hotel Collection was the addition of a world-class wellness facility, complete with a state-of-the-art spa, health centre and swimming pool that sits under a glassed bronze conservatory overlooking stunning Lough Coirrib.*

Thanks to the luxury upgrades, Ashford Castle has been transformed into a "pleasure palace."

Just arriving in the fairytale woodland setting, where the 13th-century castle is located, instantly puts guests in a relaxed frame of mind. But the spa staff, under the direction of congenial manager Michelle Ryan, completes the transformation to the world of ultimate bliss with treatments and products specifically designed to ease tension.

Ryan, a passionate advocate of wellness, has assembled a superb team of therapists who conduct lengthy interviews with guests before treatments begin.

The spa features five treatment rooms — including a couple's room — a Hammam and a relaxation suite where guests look out on the gorgeous County Mayo countryside and Ireland's second largest lake.

Ryan is most proud of the products used in the spa, especially the organic Irish brand Voya, which hails from nearby County Sligo.

"Voya is a family-run company (the Waltons) which uses seaweed in most of their products and the effects on the skin are quite amazing," says Ryan.



Ashford Castle's French-designed wellness centre offers exceptional treatments in palatial rooms manned by expert therapists using the latest techniques. Afterwards, the lovely swimming pool area awaits.









The spa also features other highly recognized international brands like Elemis — "it was created by an Irish woman," Ryan proudly points out — and B Africa, a brand that until now was exclusive to Red Carnation's African properties.

One of the spa's most popular treatments is the Voya seaweed hot stone massage, where warmed Atlantic leaves of seaweed are layered onto the body and warmed stones placed on top to enhance the penetration of their goodness. The results are amazing, as is the whole wellness experience at Ashford Castle.

— M.A .

"We've also had many famous people take their vows at Ashford — like actor Pierce Brosnan," says Hill. The former James Bond married Keely Shaye Smith at Ashford Castle in 2001.

The Ashford estate also served as the backdrop for director John Ford's legendary 1952 film, *The Quiet Man*, starring John Wayne, Maureen O'Hara and Barry Fitzgerald.

"Ford, O'Hara and Wayne all stayed in the castle during filming and the house next to our falconry was used as the main prop in the film," says Hill, who adds, "many guests are still attracted to Ashford because of that old movie."

Speaking of movies, Ashord's 32-seat theatre, where guests get to see Hollywood classics from the comfort of plush velvet seats while eating popcorn and sweets each evening, is one of the castle's most popular spots, especially with families. So, too, is the lavish billiards room opposite the theatre — both were added during the castle's latest refurbishment.

Two of the most popular members of Ashford's staff are Cronan and Garvin, the castle's resident Irish wolfhounds, both of who like to mingle with guests in the Oak Hall.



Rooms at Ashford Castle are historic and lavish, fit for royalty

Just The Facts

- *Rates at Ashford Castle (Nov-Mar) start at €245.00 ($360 Cdn.) and in the peak summer months (May-Oct) start at €550.00 per room based on double occupancy, per night, B&B. Ashford also offers specials throughout the year — some include accommodation paired with spa packages. For more information, go to http://www. ashfordcastle.com*

- *The best way to get to Ashford Castle from Canada is with Air Canada Rouge or WestJet via Dublin. Then take the train from Dublin's Hueston Station to Galway (2.5 hours away). Ashford will arrange transportation to the hotel from Galway rail station.*

- *During your stay at Ashford Castle, make sure you visit the lovely 7th century island village of Cong — a short walk from the castle. It's a home to the ruins of Cong Abbey and four pubs that service the 100 or so inhabitants.*

The gentle giants, whose breed is recognized as "the king of dogs and the dog of kings," feel right at home in this palatial setting.

Hill offers to show me the wine cellar, which is located in the 17th century part of the castle. Open for tastings, the cellar has a fabulous collection of old and new world vintages and has been the place of many marriage proposals.

The Tollman family are very active in the running of Ashford Castle — some of Beatrice Tollman's own family recipes, like her amazing chicken noodle soup, show up on the menus of George V and the Dungeon, the hotel's casual dining spot.

What really makes a stay at Ashford Castle special, though, is the way guests are treated by staff, many of whom have had long, distinguished careers at the property. Within a few hours of arriving, we're on a first name basis with most of the servers and front desk staff, whose incredible Irish hospitality and charm soon make us feel like one of the family.

Thanks to the Tollmans — and the fabulous staff they have assembled — Ashford Castle's past, present and future are secure and in good hands. •

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PHOTOS BY DINA MANIATIS

Mykonos inspires people to relax. Whether it be looking out on the turquoise harbour or enjoying a meal at one of the island's iconic restaurants, people wind down here.





Sun Never Sets On Greece's *Party Island*

Dina Maniatis returns to seductive Mykonos and its alluring lifetsyle, where anything goes

MYKONOS, GREECE — It all started in the 1960s when Jackie O and Grace Kelly made this place, known as the "island of the winds," a highly coveted escape for the rich and famous. That's because Mykonos is remarkably cool — where you go to impress and to be impressed.

I'm always amazed at the reaction of tourists who set foot on the Greek Islands and witness the magnitude of this country's beauty for the first time. It's a sight that never gets old. And Mykonos has more wow factor than most.

How did they get these whitewashed villas, bars, restaurants and churches so perfectly chiseled into the cobblestone streets along the side of a mountain?

No matter how many times I visit, I never get tired of Mykonos.

On Mykonos, you don't just exist, you live.

And while the Greek financial crisis still looms over the people and their country, Mykonos is the anomaly, remaining pretty much unscathed by Greece's economic misfortunes.

One visit here and you quickly discover why its lifestyle is so alluring, so desirable. Mykonians avoids the norm and do not allow routine to manipulate their decisions. Instead, those who live on the island, and even those who just visit, ignite reactions and moods that are seductive, strange and completely justifiable.

Anything goes on Mykonos.

I quickly realize five days on the Aegean island of Mykonos may not be enough.

Each day during my visit I wake up to the tranquil view of mountains and ocean bathed in sunlight. Then I mingle with the people who make up this treasured island — the local fishermen whose skin has been baked by the sun, the lady who's up at 5 a.m. to get the first loaf of freshly baked bread from the fourno (bakery), and the merchants sitting on the steps of their shops engaging in a nutritional breakfast of cigarettes, black coffee and kotsobolio (gossip) from the night before.



I watch the tycoons and VIPs perusing the chora (town). Foreign investment is at its peak on Mykonos. The British, French and Thais have invested heavily here. They remain faithful to the heritage of Mykonos while taking pre-eminent luxury to new heights.

Then you have the regular tourists, the mature, refined couples and families who stroll the streets in search of a breakfast of fresh yogurt and some early shopping before the sweltering heat kicks in.

And, of course, there's the party animals, mostly single (or at least it looks that way), who come to have fun without being belligerent. They party at famed island venues such as Queen, Remmezzo and Rock n' Roll and party until the wee hours of the morning.

What connects all these people is the beach. They come together there under a canopy of blue sky; some soak up the rays while others sleep off their hangovers from the night before.

That's life on Mykonos. No one is in a hurry. No one is stressed.

The famed full moon (panselino) during the month of August falls nothing short of incredible as dark skies light up at night.

Greeks will congregate just about anywhere to soak up the island vibe, drink, dance and wish upon a star. This year was no exception and I joined the droves of people under the serene glare of the August moon each night during my stay.

What once was a vacation spot dominated by Greece's Italian and Spanish neighbours is now a favourite for the likes of Arab Sheiks and Asian millionaires. The residents of Mykonos tell me they can't recall seeing the island as crowded as it has been these past two summers.

With over 100 new or completely renovated venues — ranging from upscale hotels, clubs, spas, restaurants, patisseries, high-end fashion retailers and jewellery boutiques — Mykonos' global appeal is reaching new levels. Hotels are at capacity. Champagne flows by the caseloads. And an armada of luxury yachts line the harbour.



The pristine beaches of Mykonos lure beautiful people who let their hair down when the sun sets and the clubs light up.

During the day, I feel the vibe at illustrious beaches such as Kalo Livadi, Pasrrou and Plati Gialos. Inevitably, the beach scene sets our mood and leads us into the night. It's time to go back to the hotel to shower, change and then head out for a bite to eat at Souvlaki Story.

The streets are bustling and men, women and kids are dressed up and poking their heads into every store. When the clock strikes 10 p.m., it's time for another outfit change. I throw on a pair of strappy heels, a bright lipstick and grab a front row stool at Astra, where I watch people cruise up and down the winding streets, drink and bop my head to the amazing music.

Midnight rolls around and we head to Monarch Beach — quite early by Greek standards — to find it almost empty. We wonder whether many of the locals and tourists were heading elsewhere. If you've never been to Greece, or Mykonos for that matter, one thing you quickly learn is that there is a party that's about to go off somewhere. Within an hour, Monarch Beach is absolutely crammed with young and old grooving to the beats and sipping cocktails. Let the party begin!

There are plenty of expats hanging around, including a 20-something woman from Boston who had only arrived in Mykonos that afternoon and was already wondering how she would adjust to life back home. Join the club, my dear.

Then at 2 a.m., fireworks light up the sky and the full moon spotlights the revellers on the beach.

It's just Day 1 of my visit to Mykonos but already I'm relaxed.

My trip to Greece has been reasonably priced up until now, but that's because I just arrived in Mykonos. It's not cheap to mingle with the rich and famous, but for some reason I know my euros are being well spent. For the next several days, I lose perception of money — it costs me 20 euro for two beach chairs on my second day.

The VIPs in the beach cabana next to our chairs are ordering magnum champagne bottles and beads of sweat start dripping from my head — not because of the heat but rather the thought of what each bottle is costing them.

I've become quite the snob when it comes to Mykonos. Why go somewhere else when this island keeps calling me back?

Like the tourists who lose themselves on this island, so too, do I. Sometimes in life we need to get a little lost in order to find ourselves again. And I find myself every time I come to Mykonos. •

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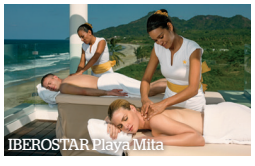
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Despite the digital age, libraries are still attracting lots of people and some of them are tourists

By Jules Torti
TRAVELIFE CONTRIBUTOR

WHEN I WRITE about libraries, it's with great sheepishness. In Grade 4, I buried three library books from Mount Pleasant Elementary School because I was immobilized by fear. The books were long overdue and the consequences (the wrath of the head librarian) were better resolved with the deft work of a spade by the pond. I claimed that the books had been returned long ago and were obviously shelved by a student helper unfamiliar with the Dewey Decimal system. Crisis averted.

It should come as no surprise (or maybe it does), that I am an unswerving ambassador for public libraries now. I champion them, bragging about all the indie docs and off-the-cuff titles our local branch orders in by request. They host live painting competitions and a "Cineseries" that brings Toronto International Film Fest heavyweights to our tiny West Galt outpost.

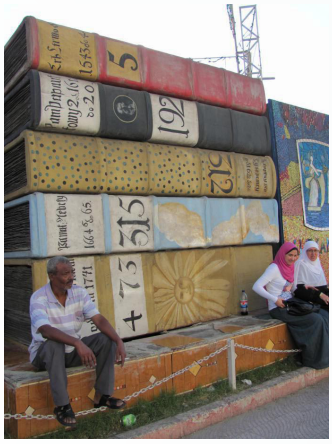
A few years ago, Carole Pope of post-punk Rough Trade notoriety, told a Toronto Life interviewer that next to her Fender Mustang guitar and Vivienne Westwood raincoat, her Toronto Public Library card was one of the Top 10 things she couldn't live without. See? Even rock stars love libraries.

The debate over the future of libraries has been an ongoing arm-wrestling match. How will the old brick and mortar institutions survive the swift convenience of a book download from Amazon? Who still travels with weighty books when every critical travel item from a headlamp to a sleeping bag has been redesigned into micro lightness?

Despite the growing population that has signed up for Team Kindle and the like, the library renaissance is here. Colourful Little Free Libraries are popping up in neighbourhoods like dandelions, relying on the age-old honour system of take a book, leave a book. Traditional libraries are upping the ante, too, and integrating social media, coffee shops and sometimes even serving beer. You can check out paperbacks and guitars at some locations. At The Kitchen Library in Toronto, you can borrow a waffle iron or ice cream maker for up to seven days. For a one-time loan, members pay $15 or can opt for a $9/month fee for an annual membership. In Ottawa, The Human Library Project allows patrons to sign out one of 30 human books at its events. You can borrow a human for a 20-minute interaction and hear personal accounts about Asperger's, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or drug addiction. Launched in Denmark in 2000, the idea was to create dialogue between different community groups and combat violence. Ottawa's Human Library has since become the biggest of its kind in the world.

As our concept of libraries transforms into









PHOTOS BY JULES TORTI

Libraries come in all shapes and sizes. For instance, the top photo showcases Canada's smallest library in Cardigan, P.E.I., while the photo above is of one of Canada's most modern libraries, the Halifax Central Library. Our writer has visited many libraries around the world, including one in Alexandria, Egypt, middle left photo. The Free Little Library in Long Point, ON, middle right, is among those increasing in popularity.

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The Idea Exchange, a future digital library in West Galt, ON, is one of the most attractive buildings in the town and in an idyllic location.

human books, juicers and ukeleles, those that represent a different time and tradition will still exist in storied glory. Next to downing a pint at the Guinness Storehouse's Gravity Bar, the Book of Kells at the Library of Trinity College in Dublin is a mainstay on visitors' itineraries. The 9th-century gospel manuscript (illustrated with the blood of insects by monks) can be marvelled at under glass, or from your laptop thanks to their digital collections online repository.

While some choose to see the tallest waterfalls in the world, or eat hot dogs at all of America's ballparks, I will continue to look for the most peculiar, ancient or contemporary libraries of the world.

Here are a few libraries that you need to visit for a shelfie of your own:

The Royal Library of Alexandria, Egypt

The Bibliotheca Alexandria once housed the largest collection of books and papyrus scrolls in the world but 2,000 ago, a tragic fire vanquished the mighty works of Socrates, Homer and Plato. There are several myths and suspicion surrounding the existence of this famed ancient library by scholars. Reopened in October 2002, this Mediterranean seaport library is the book lover's parallel to a climber's affection for Everest.

The Taha Hussien Library offers special software services for the blind and visually impaired. The Rare Books Collection has over 15,000 titles, the earliest dating back to 1496. Courtesy of the French National Library, there are over 500,000 French books, which makes it the biggest collection of French books outside of France. With an arts and multimedia cinema club and International Training Program for young Arabs, the library has continued its commitment to academia, dialogue and cultural literacy.

Canada's Smallest Library, Cardigan, P.E.I.

Tucked in the pocket of a drowsy fishing community, Cardigan's library is on par with the square footage of a backyard garden shed. Plunked on prime waterfront real estate on the eastern part of Prince Edward Island, it's worth the winding road trip. When plotting your visit, include Panmure Island lighthouse and Rossignol Winery in Kings County (grab a bottle of their strawberry rhubarb wine).

Measuring 3.5-by-3.5 metres, a lifetime membership to this library will only set you back $5. A self-checkout system (a binder with lined paper) relies on the honour system but the rules are lax. The suggested lending period is three weeks, but if you're not from P.E.I. and the return might take a little longer, that's okay. Just return the book if you're ever back that way again, and maybe bring a few to donate. I picked up a copy of Virginia Woolf's To the Lighthouse last year and will responsibly return it with a few others to keep this tiny landmark on the map. Take a meandering walk on the nearby Confederation Trail with a picnic and your bottle of Rossignol and crack the spine on your smallest library find, as we did.

Halifax Central Library, Nova Scotia

The $55 million Central Library is a jaw dropper. It snagged the Lieutenant Governor's Design Award in Architecture for its contemporary design (a collaboration between architectural firms in Nova Scotia and Denmark) when it opened in 2014. The rooftop terrace and fifth-floor glass cantilever roof over the entrance serves as a haven for bleary-eyed PhD students who set up base camp here with stiff Americanos and Callebaut brownies from Pavia Gallery Espresso Bar and Café. The atrium and its matrix of stairways is a whitewashed, sunshine-infused beacon. Patrons of all ages gather — with shoes kicked off even — and research passion projects in sleek study pods. With a green roof and cistern collecting rainwater, the library uses an estimated 64 per cent less water than other buildings. The juxtaposition is seen in the Jetsons-like terminals and book returns conveyor belts and chutes to upper floors. In addition to a First Nations Circle, local history room and teen lounge with video games, the book catalog includes Tagalog and Korean titles.

Amateur comedians and musicians are invited to perform on open mic nights or learn the basics of recording on Garage Band nights. There's also Giant Jenga, Popsicle stick bridge-building competitions, yoga classes and workshops on creating your own seed bombs for the garden.

Idea Exchange, Galt, ON

In 2017, Galt's old post office will get a $13 million restoration that will see the grand dame re-open its doors to a different clientele.

Touted as the nation's first totally digital library, the sister space of the Cambridge library group's Idea Exchange at Queen's Square will lure a curious and tech-savvy crowd. With 3D printers (make your own iPod amplifier), a podcast recording studio and space to practice breakdancing choreography, the stately 1885 former Customs House and Post Office plans to be the hotspot in town, and not just for Wi-Fi.

Located on the banks of one of Canada's Heritage Rivers, the Grand, Galt's digital library is enticing the public with talk of a teaching kitchen, coding lessons for teens, robot-making software, a common garden and a 40-seat restaurant. Bibliophiles need not panic — the shelves of biographies and magazine racks (boasting over 250 titles) will remain at nearby Queen's Square.

As Rosemary Bonanno, president-elect of the Canadian Library Association told the Canadian Press, "We have to be relevant to the people in our community. We have to embrace the change, and those who don't will be left behind." •

Fulfilling An *Appetite* To Travel



By Marc Atchison
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

THE FACT THAT "culinary tourism" has become one of the staples of the travel industry may be hard for some people to swallow. However, famous restaurants are now as big a tourist draw as historic castles, great cathedrals and revered temples.

Case in point: Noma, rated the world's No. 1 restaurant numerous times, now ranks alongside the Little Mermaid and Tivoli Gardens as a "must see" attraction in Copenhagen.

If you find that hard to digest, how about this: Anthony Bourdain's *Parts Unknown* TV series, which deals mostly with culinary tourism, is now the top rated show on CNN.

Here's some more "culinary tourism" facts for you to chew on:

• According to the *American Culinary Traveler,* "the percentage of U.S. tourists who went abroad for unique dining experiences grew from 40 per cent in 2006 to 53 per cent in 2015."

• A recent industry report noted that "39 million leisure travellers in the U.S. choose a destination based on the availability of culinary activities, while another 35 million seek out culinary activities after a destination is decided upon."

• Last year, it's estimated that tourists spent almost $300 billion (U.S.) on food in the U.S. alone — that's nearly a quarter of all travel income in the U.S.

It's not just tourists who participate in culinary tourism. Many globetrotting chefs travel the world looking for culinary inspiration. Among them are two of Canada's most gifted chefs, Mark McEwen and Susur Lee, both of whom have been lured to foreign cities or countries to check out famous or trendy new restaurants.

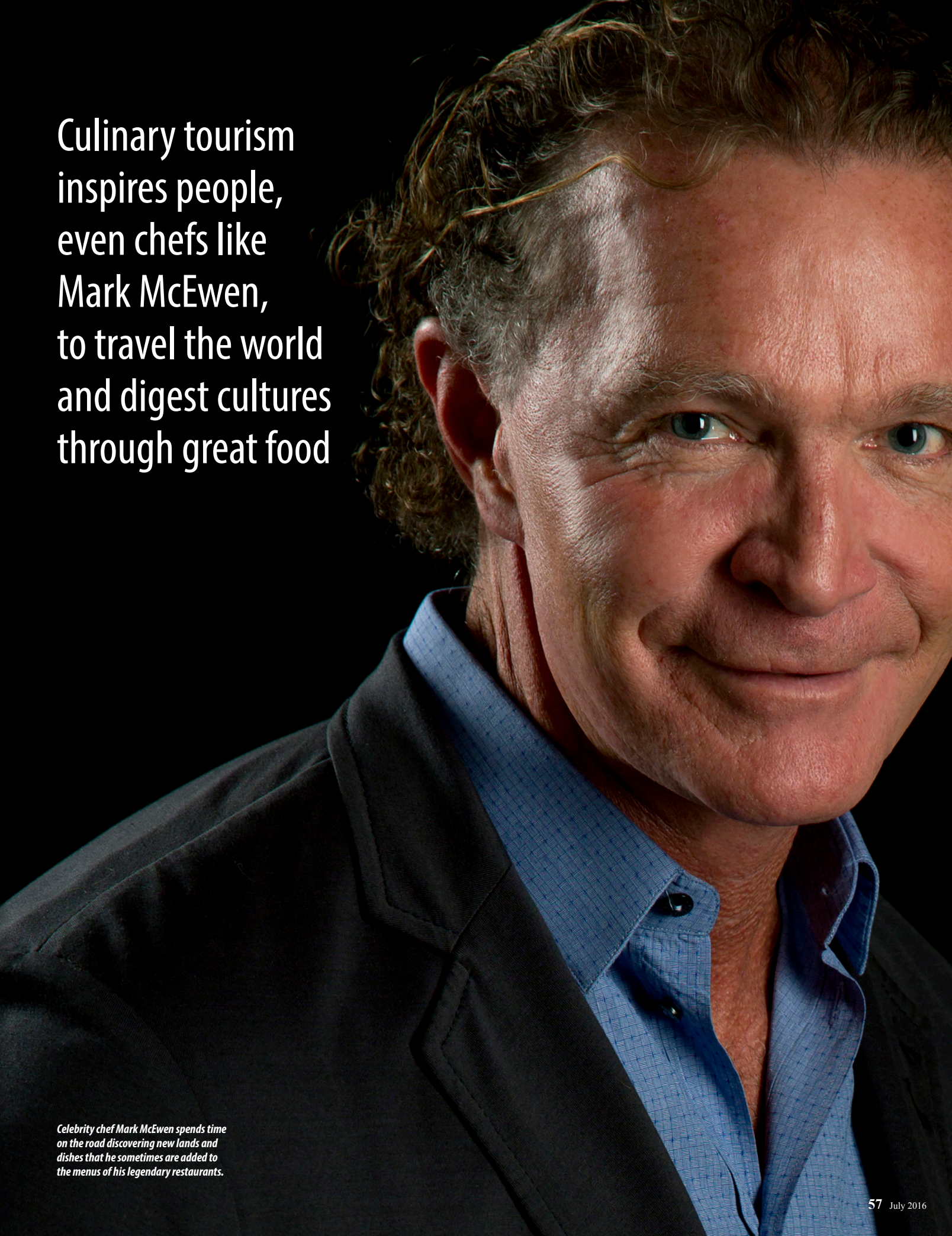
While McEwen and Lee — they have achieved rock star status in Canada because of their appearances on various foodie TV shows — have a real hunger for travel, their growing restaurant empires make it more difficult for them to get away these days. Still, Lee, who owns restaurants in Canada and Singapore, finds time to go on the road four times a year, while McEwen travels at least once a month.

While on the road, the two celebrity chefs like to visit "out of the way" places to get an insight on regional dishes, some of which they incorporate in their award-winning menus.

In McEwen's case, he likes "rustic and rural food" and dines in smaller establishments that are "more relaxed."

"I did not have time to travel when I was younger," says McEwen, who started his career in Buffalo and

Culinary tourism inspires people, even chefs like Mark McEwen, to travel the world and digest cultures through great food



Celebrity chef Mark McEwen spends time on the road discovering new lands and dishes that he sometimes are added to the menus of his legendary restaurants.



World renowned Noma has become one of Copenhagen's most popular tourist draws but it will cost you a pretty penny to eat in this Michelin star restaurant where the wait is up to 12 months.

now owns some of Canada's most iconic restaurants — Bymark, One, North 44 and Fabbrica among them.

McEwen was inspired to open his Italian-themed Fabbrica restaurant after visiting Italy and learning some dishes from the "nonas" (grandmothers) he saw in the kitchens of Milan and Rome.

"I love restaurants that are comfortable and authentic where people socialize," says McEwen, whose career has been influenced by legendary chefs like the late Julia Child — maybe the first culinary tourist — and Graham Kerr.

"I actually cooked with Julia in 1992 at the Four Seasons Hotel in Toronto and that was a real thrill," says the soft-spoken McEwen.

Lee's career started in his native Hong Kong but he honed his skills in Singapore, where he perfected his now signature dish, "Singapore Slaw."

"The neighbourhood restaurants in Singapore are where you can enjoy some amazing food," says Lee, whose Luckee dim sum restaurant in Toronto is the talk of the town these days.



Interestingly, Singapore was one of the first destinations to embrace culinary tourism when it introduced its popular "night food tours" that takes visitors through the Chinese, Malay and Indian districts of the city where tourists get to enjoy regional treats.

Lee says when he travels he likes to eat "street food" because "I grew up eating street food after school in Hong Kong and you can learn a lot from the street food vendors."

One of Lee's favourite destinations is Vietnam, especially the northern Sapa area where the fertile land inspires some amazing cuisine.

Culinary tourism is defined as being "any tourism experience in which one learns about, appreciates, and/or consumes food and drink that reflects the local, regional or national cuisine, heritage and culture." Both Lee and McEwen agree that food really defines the culture and traditions of countries and that tourists can learn a lot about a destination through its cuisine.

Michelin star restaurants have become a real magnet for culinary tourists but does the Michelin endorsement guarantee the restaurant will supply travellers with a once-in-a-lifetime dining experience? Not necessarily, according to McEwen and Lee.

"I've been to good Michelin star restaurants and some that have not been so good," says McEwen.

"The Michelin rating is a standard that reflects the quality of service, not just the food," cautions Lee.

According to celebrated Chef Noriyuki Hamada, the first Japanese to take home a medal (bronze) at the prestigious

Bocuse d'Or competition (2013), the only "star at a restaurant should be the food."

Hamada, who has travelled the world searching out new restaurants and learning new techniques, told me last year when I visited his award-winning Yukawatan restaurant in the fabled Japanese town of Karuizawa, that culinary tourism should "inspire people to try different foods so they can understand and appreciate cultures."

Hamada says his visits to France over the years revealed how "complex and delicate French cuisine is — and you only appreciate that when you go to France," he says.

Over the last decade, national tourism organizations have leveraged the mainstream interest in food and restaurants to direct visitors to particular areas of their lands. Countries like Ireland and Thailand, for example, have created major promotional campaigns and events around food, and the biggest draw to Prince Edward Island each year are the province's annual oyster festivals.

While Germany is recognized as the "land of beer and bratwurst," the country's National Tourist Office (GNTO) in Toronto points out that Germany is also home to 290 Michelin star restaurants.

"Germany ranks second behind France in Michelin star restaurants," says Juliane Ehrich, public relations manager at GNTO, who also points out that hundreds of thousands of culinary tourists are drawn to Munich during that city's annual Oktoberfest celebrations.

The fastest growing segment of culinary tourism is the China market. However, many destinations have been slow to respond to the particular needs of Chinese tourists and according to a recent report published by China's National Tourism Organization, "the food factor is likely to hold most Chinese tourists in their own country or at least have them remain in Asia rather than draw them to Europe or North America for some time."

But some destinations and hotels are catering to the Chinese. New York's Hotel Plaza Athénée, for instance, has introduced services geared to inbound Chinese travellers, like in-room teakettles, Chinese breakfast items like congee and Chinese-language newspapers. The Sheraton Gateway Hotel in Los Angeles is now offering its Chinese guests steamed rice, tea and soymilk.

Who exactly are culinary tourists?

Well, according to the World Food Travel Association (WFTA), the youngest culinary traveller hails from Asia while the oldest is from North America. And, Europe — Paris especially — and North America — mostly New York City — are the favoured destinations for culinary tourists, according to the WFTA.

In a recent WFTA survey, over half (51 per cent) of all respondents said they travel to learn about or enjoy unique and memorable eating and drinking experiences, and nearly two-thirds (61 per cent) said they are interested in taking a trip to a destination to engage in culinary activities within the next year.

There's a smörgåsbord of outlets — the Food Channel, food blogs and print and online food publications — feeding culinary travellers with lots of information on the hottest restaurants at home and abroad, but the biggest source of information for foodie travellers is social media, especially Twitter and Instagram. Users of those two sites post millions of food photos every day and many people say they are influenced by the pictures to visit that particular restaurant when visiting cities abroad.

One of the most popular Instagram sites is "New_Fork_City," which only highlights the best places in the Big Apple to eat. It has accumulated over 317,000 followers in its first two years of operation.

Thanks to culinary tourism, the old phrase "going out to get something to eat" has now taken on a much broader meaning. •

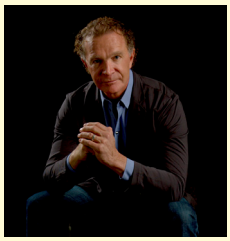


Susur Lee's favourite culinary destinations

1-Vietnam
2- China
3- Singapore
4- Hong Kong
5- France or Italy



Mark McEwen's favourite culinary destinations



1- New York City
2- Miami
3- Los Angeles
4- Milan
5- Rome




14
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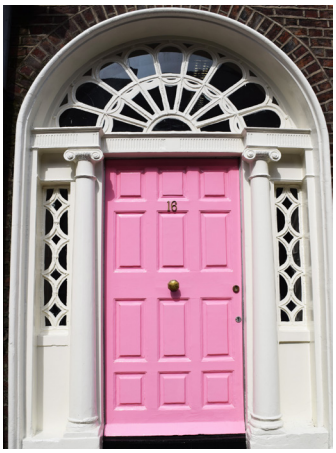









Georgian townhomes a reminder of this lovely city's colourful history

By Annie Tsu
TRVAELIFE PUBLISHER

DUBLIN — There are many colourful stories and tales about when and why the doors of this city's lovely Georgian townhomes began to be painted a myriad of vibrant caolours, but the one I like most involves two of Dublin's eccentric writers, George Moore and Oliver St John Gogarty.

According to legend, the two writers were neighbours in Ely Place, where all the doors at the time (18th century) were painted the same colour — black. However, because Gogarty routinely got drunk and knocked on Moore's door late at night, the latter painted his a bright red so Gogarty could distinguish the correct door to know at. Incensed, Gogarty retaliated by painting his a different colour and the whole street, and then the city, soon followed

PHOTOS BY MARC ATCHISON















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Dublin's colourful doors are a thing of beauty and the most photographed doors in the world. Many townhomes featuring the doors have been turned into law offices.

suit, leaving tourists with lots of colourful doors to photograph.

Historians dispute the Moore/Gogarty legend because, apparently, Moore was abstemious, drinking only a little wine with dinner, and was repelled by displays of public drunkenness. But hey, I'm not going to let facts get in the way of a good story.

No matter, Dublin's landmark doors remain the most photographed in the world. But on closer inspection, one is equally fascinated by their elaborate frames and ornate knockers.



One of the greatest concentrations of Georgian townhomes and their painted doors is in the fashionable Merrion Square district, close to Ireland's Houses of Parliament.

Fitzwilliam Square, located in the south of Central Dublin, Baggot Street and Lesson Street are other locations where there are plenty of painted doors to be photographed.

While no one seems to know exactly how many painted doors there are in Dublin, there are more painted red than any other colour.

In recent years, many of the old Georgian homes have been bought and turned into law offices or hotels — the fabulous 5-star Merrion Hotel on Upper Merrion Street is a combination of four townhomes from the 1700s. The first Duke of Wellington, Arthur Wellesley, was born in Mornington House, where the hotel's famed Cellar Bar in now located.

So, when you go to Dublin, make sure you take your camera because it will open some doors.



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Airlines make skies *Friendlier* for LGBTQ fliers



Gay travel takes flight thanks to a change in attitude by North America's biggest airlines

By Chloe Tse
TRAVELIFE CONTRIBUTOR

GAY-FRIENDLY AIRLINES are in the sky and they're making life better for the LGBTQ community. With gay culture becoming more mainstream, brands are forced to take their positions and stand as allies or risk being left behind in the dark ages. And those who take a prejudice stand are facing backlash.

North Carolina, for instance, has been receiving a lot of negative attention for its recent anti-LGBTQ bathroom law that violates the rights of transgender folks. So, back in April, Bruce Springsteen made a political stand against this decision by cancelling a concert he was scheduled to play in the state. Canadian rocker Bryan Adams followed suit by protesting with his own tour date cancellation in Mississippi, a state that has adopted a similar anti-LGBTQ bathroom law.

Discrimination has become so passé.

It was back in 2011 when L Word actress and musician Leisha Hailey was removed from a Southwest Airlines flight after allegedly kissing her girlfriend. The lesbian couple issued a statement on their band Uh Huh Her's website, took to Twitter to vent and gained the support of gay rights activists. Of course, the airline initially issued statements insisting that the problem was abusive and inappropriate language, and not the kiss before back-peddling and reaching out "to extend goodwill" and offering the couple a full refund.

"The Gay Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) pointed out that Southwest is a corporate sponsor and urged everyone to do the right thing," reported the Guardian newspaper, noting that airlines are running scared from negative publicity.

Social media has played a significant role in amplifying outrage against brands that fail



Dealta Air Lines is committed to annual pride events in multiple cities (New York, Los Angeles, Detroit, Seattle, Atlanta, Toronto and more) and is claiming a proud commitment to LGBT employees as well.



Bruce Springsteen made a political stand against North Carolina's anti-LGBTQ bathroom law that violates the rights of transgender folks and cancelled a concert he was scheduled to play in the state.

to support marginalized people, from the LGBTQ community to racial advocacy groups. Southwest has since proven to be a huge supporter of the gay community as the official GLAAD airline with outreach programs, fostering LGBTQ partnerships with almost a dozen organizations, and goes as far as identifying as part of the LGBTQ community.

Other airlines are also promoting their pride and proving they're the preferred picks when it comes to travel. From Delta Air Lines to Air Canada, carriers are doing their best to identify as the LGBTQ-friendliest carrier of the skies.

Air Canada

Airlines like Air Canada consider inclusion in the workplace to be vital if they're going to succeed in global business. Peter Fitzpatrick, a spokesman for Air Canada, thinks being inclusive is important for employee retention — workers in the industry have rare skills and airlines want to keep them.

"You want to be diverse, you want customers recognized and represented," says Fitzpatrick. "Good for recruitment."

Inclusion includes LGBTQ groups, which is why Air Canada has partnered with Pride at Work and supported events like World Pride. Air Canada Vacations, affiliated and a part of Air Canada, belongs to the International Gay Lesbian Travel Association (GLTA) and has worked to create packaged geared for the LGBTQ market.

Selected by Canada's Top 100 Employers, Air Canada is listed as one of the country's Best Diversity Employers for 2016. Of course, Fitzpatrick is personally more pleased about The Glass Door Award won in 2016 for top employer.

"Employees voted it as a great place to work," says Fitzpatrick, "This to me sends the message that people are happy and feel content — a safe place you like to be."

Important websites

https://www.southwest.com/html/southwest-difference/community-involvement/glbt/partners.html

https://www.alaskaair.com/content/gay-travel.aspx

http://www.delta.com/content/www/en_US/traveling-with-us/where-we-fly/destinations/lesbian-and-gay-travel.html

http://attitude.co.uk/attitude-announces-inaugural-attitude-pride-awards/

Delta Air Lines

Committing to annual pride events in multiple cities (New York, Los Angeles, Detroit, Seattle, Atlanta, Toronto and more), and claiming proud commitment to LGBTQ employees as well, Delta takes human rights seriously. Delta also proudly supported the Attitude Awards in London last year.

American Airlines

With longstanding loyalty to the LGBTQ community, the folks at American Airlines pride themselves in being the first airline to offer a loyalty program "that invites you to highlight LGBT interests" in traveller profiles. They make an effort to engage with LGBTQ travellers and also aim to provide a rainbow friendly workspace.

Alaska Airlines

In efforts to prove their support of the LGBTQ community when it comes to travel, Alaska Airlines offers resources when it comes to sniffing out destinations that support marriage equality, Pride celebrations and other gay interests. They even offer discounts to these places if you opt for their airline to get there. •



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Posh California hideaway where rich and famous play has much to offer visitors

Carmel's Pacific coast setting makes it one of the most beautiful locations on Earth. The posh village where the likes of Clint Eastwood has been mayor, is one of the most sought-after addresses in the United States and while it's the playground of the rich and famous, it's also where dogs rule the beaches.



PHOTOS BY KATHERINE BRODSKY

By Katherine Brodsky
TRAVELIFE CONTRIBUTOR

CARMEL-BY-THE-SEA, CALIF. — This quaint coastal enclave, which is celebrating its centennial this year, is a town of many mysteries and quirks. From the countless courtyards and stone-paved passageways to the fairy-tale, curlicue-roofed houses and shops with asymmetrical stone chimneys and rounded doors designed by architect Hugh Comstock, there's nowhere else on earth like it.

Then consider for a moment a few of Carmel's mayors, which have included the likes of Clint Eastwood and former CIA agent Sue McCloud. (Incidentally, the latter is co-chair of the Centennial "Century of Memories" celebration, complete with a parade and luncheon to take place on October 29).

Reminiscent of a European village, Carmel is surrounded by lush green hills and features wooded trails, white sands and a soft sea breeze that engulfs the land.

"The greatest meeting of land and water in the world," wrote Jack London of Carmel in his 1913 novel The Valley of the Moon.

It is dotted with rustic cottages, log cabins, shingled beach

houses and glass homes, all of which cost on average more than $1 million U.S., even if you can't always tell. And that's part of Carmel's vast charm; it is entirely unassuming and relaxed.

Here you'll find no street addresses. As result, the village's post office serves as a sort of a social gathering spot, as well as the sole place to pickup mail. There are also no parking meters, no streetlights and no sidewalks outside of Carmel's downtown commercial area. Carrying a powerful flashlight isn't such a bad idea after sundown.

And if you want to wear high heels, you'll need to get a license from City Hall. The town's dwellers love their uneven sidewalks too much to let pesky lawsuits get in the way. There was once even a law prohibiting the sale and consumption of ice cream on public streets (to avoid messiness, presumably). Luckily, one of Eastwood's first acts as mayor in 1986 was to repeal that cruel ice cream law.

Speaking of eating, you'll also not find a single chain restaurant in Carmel. Instead you can enjoy the likes of Vesuvio, which made in into the headlines recently when actor Bill Murray allegedly tossed fans' cellphones off of the rooftop patio. Aside from sharing that dubious honour, Vesuvio offers a casual, warm environment to enjoy some old school Italian dishes, including, of course, pizza. Plus, that patio is gorgeous at night when the firepits are going and the twinkly lights are dazzling.

Terry's Restaurant at Cypress Inn, which incidentally is co-owned by Hollywood legend Doris Day, is a great place to enjoy lunch. Take a seat in the flower-filled courtyard and enjoy the Charlie Chaplin mural alongside an assortment of canine guests in this particularly dog-friendly property (Day is an animal advocate).

Tapas more your thing? Mundaka has your paella fix. It's a dark intimate space with vintage black-and-white movies projected on the wall.

For fine dining, head over to Casanova Restaurant. It's an Italian-French room with a romantic flair and French Provençale decor — it feels like it has been lifted from a different decade. Van Gogh once frequented this restaurant and nowadays you can book Van Gogh's Table — the actual table at which the legendary Dutch painter enjoyed his meals at the Auberge Ravoux.

For a shot of java, you can head over to Carmel Coffee House and Roasting Company, or pick up a delicious treat at Carmel Bakery. Built in 1904, it's exactly the sort of old-fashioned bakery you imagine when you close your eyes. The aroma of freshly baked goods draws you in from the streets.

Cottage of Sweets, a British-style sweet shop, will easily bring out the child in you with its extensive collection of candy. So, if you have a sweet tooth, you know where to go. And if you're craving chocolate the chocolate-covered sea salt caramels at Lula's Chocolates will sort you out.

For a more sophisticated experience, stop by Trio Carmel to sample their extraordinary selection of vinegars and olive oils. Try blood orange infused olive oil or espresso dark balsamic in your ice-cream. Honey Ginger White Balsamic, with its slight heat, mixes particularly well in a cocktail or just with soda water. You are limited only by your creativity.

For your sipping enjoyment, Carmel also has 14 tasting rooms and a Carmel Wine Walk-by-the-Sea Tasting Passport — $65 gets you a flight of wine at any nine of them.

Better yet, take in a Carmel Food Tour (http://www.carmelfoodtour.com). It's three hours of tastings for $79, including wines and chocolates.

At night, much of the town shuts down. If you're not ready to climb into bed, head over to one of Carmel's "dive" bars (by Carmel standards only), like Sade's.

There, you can only pay in cash and order any drink of your choice as long as it doesn't involving mixing more than two ingredients. The real characters here are the bartenders, like Parker, whom locals refer to as "Legend." For a delicious Aviation cocktail, head over to Barmel (next door to Mundaka). One of their bartenders has an uncanny resemblance to John Goodman.





Carmel is a village where surfers and sculptors like XXXXX XXXXXXX feel right at home. The art shops, quaint inns and hotels and its renowned restaurants make Carmel the perfect place to escape.

Once you're ready for bed, you can stay in any number of quaint inns like Horizon Inn & Ocean View Lodge, which offers a spacious and comfortable resting place, great views and a fireplace. They even deliver a breakfast basket to your room each morning. There are also more luxurious digs like La Playa Carmel and L'Auberge.

Rested for a new day, you're ready to take in Carmel's art haven, with approximately 100 galleries featuring paintings, sculptures, glass and photography (Winston Boyer's Ocean Series at Gallery Sur is particularly worth seeing). the Carmel Art Tour (http.//carmelarttours.com) will take you inside with their 90-minute walking tour that covers the historical to the contemporary.

Or take in a show at the multimillion-dollar Sunset Cultural Centre (recent guests include David Sedaris and Michael Feinstein).

The jewel of the Monterey Peninsula, Carmel-by-the-Sea has attracted an assortment of colourful characters of some renown over the years. Those include names like Pickford, Fairbanks, Gable, Taylor, and Dali. Today, it still attracts its share of movie stars, famous scribes, politicians and business leaders who come in pursuit of a quiet reprieve and creative energy in this unassuming town that lives by an unspoken code of privacy.

But there's no one quite as revered in Carmel as our four-legged companions. This is truly a city gone to the dogs. In a town where there is no cemetery, the only grave within city limits belongs to a dog, Pal. There's even an annual Poodle Festival.

Everywhere you go, there are dogs. They are running free on the beach, drinking out of bowls filled with fresh water at shops, and some restaurants offer a "yappy hour" or dog menus. Several establishments even offer massages and doggy turndowns — whatever those are.

In a town where the population is under 4,000, canines quite possibly rival their human counterparts.

And that's one of Carmel's biggest charms. •

Let The *Fireworks* Begin!







Nikon Ambassador ***Nick Didlick*** puts us in the right frame for big celebrations

By Nick Didlick
NIKON AMBASSADOR FOR CANADA
& TRAVELIFE CONTRIBUTOR

WITH CANADA DAY just around the corner and outdoor plans for the summer kicking into high gear, many of us will likely be watching and photographing fireworks celebrations across the country at some point this season. Fireworks photography can be one of the more challenging photography assignments because it requires some technical ability combined with a little luck.

Photography is both a creative and technical craft that is made up of three creative aspects: subject, lighting and background.



When it comes to fireworks photography, while you often have little control over the creative factors of the fireworks themselves, you can still be creative and take interesting shots. You can do this by including a person or object in the foreground of the shot. When choosing a photo location, be careful to position yourself upwind of the fireworks so you can get a clear and unobstructed view and shot of the fireworks even after they explode and the smoke swirls around.

The trick to photographing fireworks is to first set your camera to Manual Mode. Shooting in this mode will allow you to have complete control over your camera's functions.

Some initial camera settings to consider:

- A Low ISO (200 ISO)
- Auto or Sunny White Balance
- Manual Exposure Mode (M) of 4 to 10 seconds
- Aperture f/5.6 to f/11
- Image Stabilization Off (when using a tripod)
- Manual Autofocus

Note: The settings will vary widely depending on

the length and brightness of the fireworks show.

Equipment you'll need:

• A camera and wide-angle lens (a kit lens will work just fine)
• A sturdy tripod
• A cable release (this could also be an Infrared shutter release)
• A flashlight - you will need this to see the camera and so you can easily make adjustments between exposures

On the night:

Arrive early at the location and choose a place that has some structure in the foreground. This will help to give your photographs some added interest. For instance, you could use the audience watching the show, a bridge or even city skyline. When setting up your tripod, try and anticipate the arriving crowd interfering with your shots or your chosen composition.

Remember that fireworks frequently change in colour, intensity and motion, and they explode quickly in the air, so you always have to be ready with your camera. Another consideration when photographing fireworks is to use a long shutter speed (4 to 10 seconds) to capture the fireworks trail exploding into a colourful light show. Too long of a shutter speed (30 to 60 seconds) and you'll gather too much light; too fast of a shutter speed (1/125th of a second) and you will only see little specks of light.

If your camera has a shutter speed setting of B (Bulb), use that with your cable release. Bulb mode will allow you to control how long the shutter stays open. By holding down the shutter release button, the shutter will stay open. When it's released, the shutter will close.

Your set-up onsite:

• Mount your camera on your tripod
• Turn off Vibration Reduction
• Arrange your composition in your viewfinder (remember fireworks can go very high in the air so be prepared for that)



Nick says: "Before the fireworks show begins, take a test shot or two to make sure you are ready for the action and make any adjustments as necessary. During the show, you will probably need to adjust your shutter speed depending on the fireworks and what you see on the back LCD of your camera."

• Set your ISO to 200
• Set your White Balance to Auto (the default)
• In M (Manual Exposure Mode), set your Aperture to f/5.6 and a starting shutter speed of six seconds
• Set your focus to Infinity (the ∞ on the lens)

Before the fireworks show begins, take a test shot or two to make sure you are ready for the action and make any adjustments as necessary. During the show, you will probably need to adjust your shutter speed depending on the fireworks and what you see on the back LCD of your camera.

When you are first photographing fireworks, try starting at a shutter speed of six seconds – f/5.6 – 200 ISO – and review the image. If the fireworks look dark in your photos, open your aperture up one or two stops. If they appear too bright, close your aperture down one or two stops. If you want to capture longer light trails or bursts of light, lengthen your shutter speed to 10 seconds.

One last tip, watch as the fireworks are launched into the air (you can see the little light trails as the fireworks ascends) and trip your shutter before they reach their maximum height and explode. Now sit back with your cable release in hand, vary your shutter speed and enjoy the show.

Additional equipment:

• Nikon Cable Release — MC-DC2 Remote Release Cord (1 meter)
• Nikon IR Release — ML-L3 Wireless Remote Control (Infrared)
• Nikon Cable Release for 10 PIN — MC-36A Multi-Function Remote Cord
• Good Round Tripod — Manfrotto 055 Kit
• Tripod and Ball Head
• Lightweight Tripod — Manfrotto Be-Free Series •

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NIKON AMBASSADOR
CANADA

Nikon Ambassador Nick Didlick is a photographer, videographer and social media consultant, and is a 40-year Nikon visual media veteran. A pioneer in digital photography and D-SLR video, Nick has covered 9 Olympics, 7 Stanley Cup Finals, 5 Super Bowls and too many world events to count. He has travelled to more than 50 countries on assignments with presidents, prime ministers and royalty. Nick counts photography as both his profession and his greatest hobby.

To see more of Nick's work, go to: http:// www.nickdidlick.com
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Horse Power

On The Outer Banks

Shipwrecked many decades ago, rare Spanish horses now patrol the shores of North Carolina's pristine Outer Banks. The horses eat vegetation that grows in the sand dunes near million-dollar homes and sunbathe on the shore. They have become a major tourist attraction and have survived despite hurricanes and a bounty on their heads.

Gary Trask discovers shipwrecked Spanish breed thrives despite having a bounty on their head

OUTER BANKS, N.C. — It's difficult to decide what's more thrilling: The anticipation or the discovery. Either way, four-wheeling your way down Carova Beach on the northern strip of the Outer Banks in North Carolina searching for — and finding — a majestic herd of native colonial Spanish mustangs is a positively unforgettable and dramatic experience.

"It's surreal," explains Boston native Paul Brean, who has made the Outer Banks a regular vacation destination for him and his family. "You're driving on this unbelievable beach, taking in the scenery. You're not sure when, or if, you'll actually see the horses, and I remember a couple times we were ready to give up.

"But then all of sudden you see something way off in the distance. At first, it's hard to tell if it's for real, but as you get closer and closer you start to realize it's happening. And then, there they are; running wild, playing in the waves. They are just stunning, beautiful animals. It's really amazing to see in person."

Angie Brady-Daniels agrees. The vice president of events and communication for the Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce never tires at the sight of the horses and says that of all the itinerary items available on this 320-kilometre string of peninsulas and barrier islands off the coast of North Carolina, an encounter with wild horses remains one of the most sought-after and intriguing attractions for the five to seven million visitors who pass through the area each year.

"It's just one of those very rare chances to see a herd of wild animals on the beach, walking the dunes, in their natural habitat," says Brady-Daniels. "The organized tours are very popular and many times you'll see as many as 15 or even 30 of them on a single tour. People just really love it."

A meeting with the horses is even more compelling when you consider the primitive history of the species, and if you're mindful of their near demise as recently as 20 years ago.

According to local legend, the mustangs descended upon the region as far back as the 1500s when during treacherous conditions Spanish sea captains were forced to unload all heavy cargo overboard to avoid being shipwrecked. A National Geographic article in 1926 reported that the wild horse population in the region was around 5,000, but that began to plummet in the late 1930s when the federal government, which to this day defines the horses as "invasive" and "feral," put a bounty on them in order to quell the population, which continued to trend toward an ultimate demise as the decades went by.

Fast forward to 1985. With the area turning into



PHOTOS COURTESY COROLLA WILD HORSE FUND, OUTERBANKS.ORG AND BY BIGSTOCK



Wild horse tours have become very popular on beaches of the Outer Banks. However, tourists are warned to stay at least 50 feet away and to never feed the horses.

a busy beach town with new homes and the tourism business booming, NC Highway 12 was paved from where the Sanderling Resort currently sits in the city of Duck, all the way to Corolla's northern borders, near the state line of Virginia. With a heavy of volume of vehicle and foot traffic on this once non-navigated piece of land, the mustangs were in grave danger. Between 1985 and 1995, 20 horses were hit and killed on the highway. With the population now down to less than 20 horses, local residents joined forces in 1989 to form the Corolla Wild Horse Fund with the hopes of saving the herd.

The fund organized an effort to round up the remaining horses over several days and guide them to the north gate, away from the now busy highway.

Today, there are an estimated 80 horses in the Corolla region, and close to 130 in the entire Outer Banks.

"There's no doubt in my mind that they would all be long gone if the fund didn't get them out of there," says Karen McAlpine, the executive director of the Corolla Wild Horse Fund for nearly 10 years. "It's a credit to those people that we have a strong, healthy population of horses in Corolla today.

"And we're talking about DNA-test, registered colonial Spanish mustangs. It's a rare and ancient breed and to think they have survived nearly 500 years with a bounty put on their head, and all of the hurricanes and nor'easters we've seen in these parts, it's truly amazing."

McAlpine says the horses can live into their 30s, and have specialized diets, surviving on oats and coarse grasses found behind the dunes. They also eat acorns and milfoil, which makes residents happy since this aggressive aquatic vegetation often clogs boat motors.

The horses are seasonal grazers and in the cooler months are found behind the dunes. In the summer, they tend to move toward to ocean to cool off and escape the flies, and that's when they are seen frolicking in the ocean, much to the delight of vacationers who are allowed to drive on the beaches with 4-wheel-drive vehicles.

McAlpine and her staff spend much of their time trying to educate tourists about how to handle the situation when they come across the horses. Above all, she said the most important thing is that you never want to get closer than 15 metres to them.

"The biggest misnomer out there is that these are tame animals, but they are not," she said. "They are tolerant, because they see so many people, but they are not tame. So, even though there is an urge is to move close to them to try and pat them and get your selfie with your iPhone, you're actually putting yourself and your family in great danger."

Another problem is that tourists want to feed to horses, but because they have diet far different than domestic horses, giving them apples and carrots out of your picnic basket is not only harmful, but illegal.

During the busy summer months, the fund pays four off-duty police officers to do eight-hour shifts, patrolling the beach and informing people about the various ordinances and explaining why getting too close or providing unwanted snacks to the horses is a bad idea.

"They really a spectacular sight," McAlpine said. "When people visit the area and see them, it's an experience they never forget and when they go home it's most likely the first thing they'll tell their family and friends about.

"Our goal is to keep them healthy and keep both them and the tourists' safe so these life-long memorable experience can continue to take place for decades to come." •


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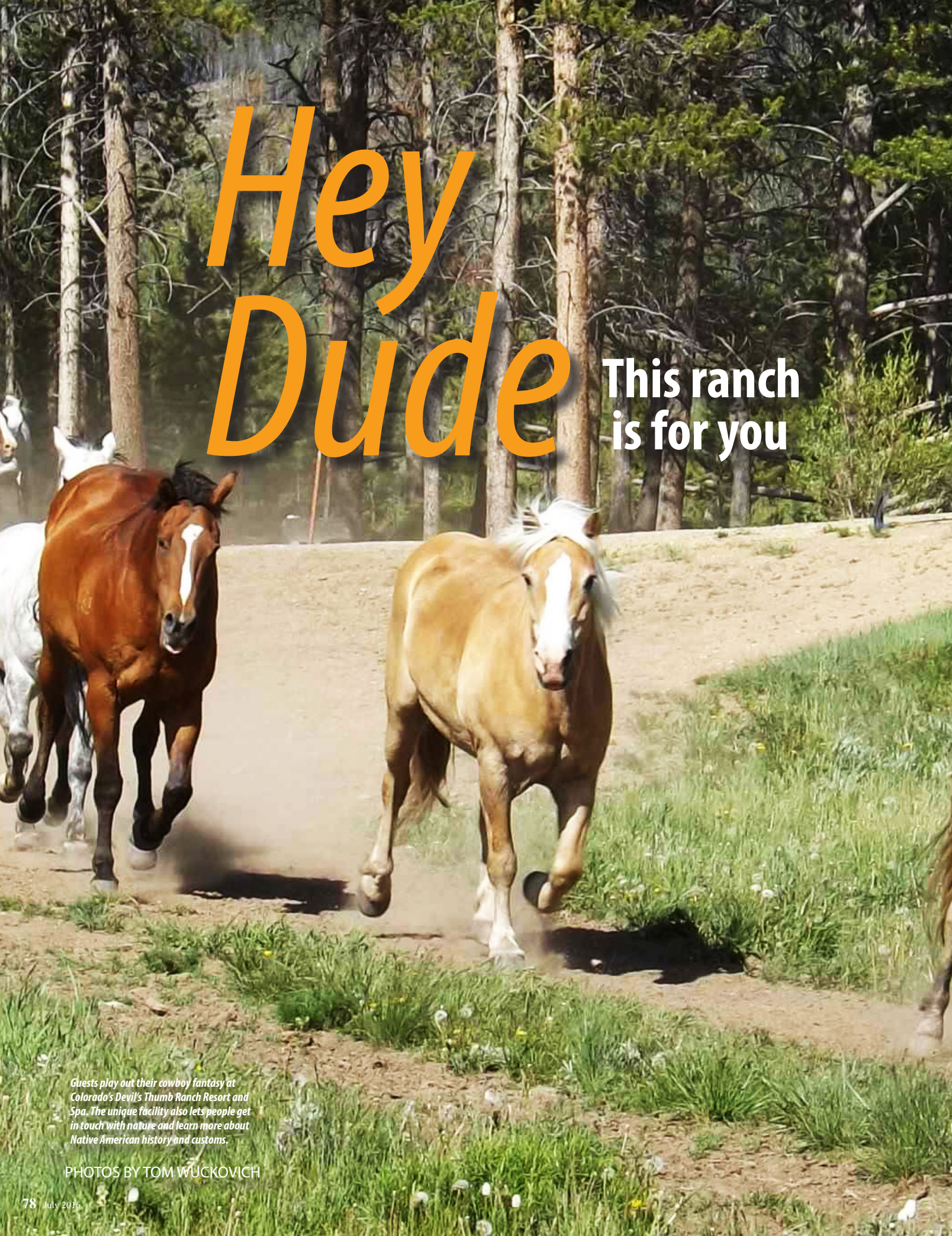

Guests play out their cowboy fantasy at Colorado's Devil's Thumb Ranch Resort and Spa. The unique facility also lets people get in touch with nature and learn more about Native American history and customs.

PHOTOS BY TOM WUCKOVICH



City slickers discover Devil's Thumb Ranch a heavenly hideout

By Tom Wuckovich
TRAVELIFE CONTRIBUTOR

TABERNASH, COLO. — There seemed no end to it. A forest dense and vast, as old as time itself, stretching to the feet of the imposing Rocky Mountains before these daunting volcanic creations declared this domain to be theirs and forged an impassable border.

Inside this lush woodland in Colorado's Fraser Valley, just outside of Denver, are rambling rivers teeming with fish, green glades where deer share the sweet grasses with elk and moose, and valleys hidden from the view of civilization, known only to the sun, moon and stars that look down upon them through a roof of wooden sticks.

The forest did not always enjoy the harmony and tranquility evident today. In the 1800s, Utes and Arapaho built their lodges here but fought over the verdant land for years until elders from both tribes saw the futility of war and sought to settle their differences peacefully. Legend says the tribes "buried the war devil" in a nearby mountain above Ranch Creek Valley. As a symbolic reminder of the evils of war, they left his "thumb" exposed and this rocky outcropping remains today, visible from great distances and lending its name to the sprawling ranch that occupies a significant portion of the valley.

The beauty of Devil's Thumb Ranch Resort & Spa in Tabernash is that its footprint in this wilderness oasis pays homage to the environment, treading as lightly as possible on the land while still affording visitors the rustic western experience they long for.

The original ranch homestead was built in 1937 by Margaret Radcliff and served as a dairy until the brothers Yager — Dan, Louis and George — took over and began operating as Devil's Thumb Ranch vacation property. It remained both a working ranch and dude ranch until 1972, when it became known as more of a cross-country skiing destination, but without many guest amenities.

The ranch's fate changed again in 2001, when current owners Bob and Suzanne Fanch thwarted developers who were intent on building residences and a golf course. Instead, the Fanches moved ahead with their vision of creating a special reserve where visitors to the valley could still have an authentic Colorado experience celebrating the soul of the West.

To house expected guests, they built 15 ridge-top cabins with plenty of space for privacy. In 2007, a 52-room main lodge was added and one year later the ranch's smaller spa got its own homestead in a nearby meadow. More recently, in 2013, the 35-room High Lonesome Lodge, barn and wine grotto completed the accommodations. For an intimate gathering space, the Broad Axe Barn, a conference centre and events venue built from a reconstructed Civil War-era barn, rounded out the additions.

The activities visitors can choose from include horseback riding through the meadows, creeks and hilltops; zip-lining above stands of sturdy green giants; mountain biking and hiking that could comprise a foray into the many trails of the Arapaho National Forest; or a visit to Rocky Mountain National Park, only 45-minutes from the ranch. For young guests, there is the option of a two-hour, half-day, or full-day excursion to the Cowpoke Camp while mom and dad can relax, fish, hike, mountain bike or attend the spa.

Fly fishing, a Colorado staple, is a cherished pursuit on the ranch, where anglers can fish on Ranch Creek and part of the Fraser River — both meander through the ranch property.

In the spring and early days of summer, the creek and river rush through the ranch in a spectacular display of the power of water. Trout reaching the size of a tennis racket frequent these mountain runoffs.

In the winter, recreation options still abound. There are frozen lakes to skate across and thrilling hills to sled down, cross-country and snowshoe trails, horseback and sleigh rides. And only minutes away is Winter Park, one of America's premier downhill ski resorts. A bit further up the road is Grand County, where five quaint towns beg to be explored. The area also is the western gateway for Rocky Mountain National Park. The drive over the park's Trail Ridge Road reveals elk and moose grazing, some with young calves trailing closely behind their mothers, breathtaking vistas of lakes and hillsides and even an abandoned ghost town called Lulu City.

The former mining settlement boomed for only a brief five years, beginning in 1879, before miners and settlers deserted it for more promising digs.

Colorado's two largest lakes are here — Grand Lake and Lake Granby — one and two respectively in size. Lake Granby offers more than 75 kilometres of scenic shoreline, ideal for fishing, camping and hiking. Locals insist that at certain times the spirits of Native American women and children can be heard moaning, lamenting their deaths due to those early tribal wars. Fact or fiction, it makes for an interesting campfire conversation.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch, guests who fill their days with a variety of adventures can find relaxation in Rachel's Pool, a geothermal heated pool and hot tub that is anything but ordinary. The pool is shaped like a natural pond to blend in with the landscape, emphasizing the Fanch's efforts to merge with their surroundings rather than intrude upon them.

Dining experiences at the ranch are varied, filling and delicious. There are no less than four restaurant options, beginning with Heck's Tavern, located in the main lodge. Its signature dish is the ranch-raised Wagyu beef. The Ranch House Restaurant and Saloon sits unpretentiously on the edge of a sweeping meadow with the Continental Divide 1,500 metres above and worn pine floors below. It's located in the original homestead that was built on the ranch in the 1930s. Here is served what the ranch calls New American Mountain Cuisine: fresh ingredients from nearby farms, ranch-raised Wagyu beef, Rocky Mountain trout, elk and Colorado striped bass.

John Ls' Wine Cellar and Grotto Suraboza are upscale eateries aimed to provide an intimate and elegant private dining experience. The Hallowed Ground Coffee Shop serves freshly baked breakfast pastries and breads from the onsite bakery, as well as a full selection of coffee, latte, chai, juice, beer and wine along with soups and sandwiches.

The ranch also has two restaurants in Winter Park — Caffe Giocondo, a casual Italian street café, and Volario's, which mixes Spanish influences with Northern Italian mountain cuisine.

City slicker or dyed-in-the-wool cowboy, Devil's Thumb Ranch will meet every vacation expectation. •





The outdoor splendours at Devil's Thumb include fly fishing in the crystal clear rivers running through the expansive property. Fishermen like George Kuzmiak of Pennsylvania enjoy their sport in the shadow of snowcapped mountains. Pioneer history abounds at this resort, which adds to the very special experience visitors get.

Just The Facts

- *For more information about Devil's Thumb Ranch Resort & Spa visit http://www.devilsthumbranch.com.*
- *Note: Special packages are not available through Internet reservations. Call 970-726-5632 for assistance in booking a package.*

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Tunnel Vision

PHOTOS COURTESY SWISS TRAVEL SYSTEM

Interior of completed Gotthard Base Tunnel at southernmost section (Bodio-Faido) is a multi-function station replacing the 15-kilometre railway tunnel first built at the end of the 19th century.

Swiss get set to unveil massive Gotthard project, an engineering marvel that will make travelling through Europe so much faster

By Athena Lucero
TRAVELIFE CONTRIBUTOR

TICINO, ITALY — Famous for innovation, precision and punctuality, the Swiss have again broken ground, in more ways than one.

In the heart of Europe, 17 years in the making, and one year ahead of schedule, the Gotthard Base Tunnel — the longest rail tunnel in the world — carves its way through the Gotthard Massif in the Alps, the continent's highest mountain range. At 57 kilometres, it surpasses Japan's 54-kilometere Seikan Tunnel and links Switzerland's different cultural regions.

All eyes will be on this quantum leap that will bring Germany in the north and Italy in the south a lot closer when — by way of Switzerland — high-speed train service officially begins on December 11, 2016. The train will whisk passengers and goods through the tunnel at speeds up to 250 km/h

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Gotthard Base Tunnel's northern portal in Altdorf, the cantonal capital of Uri. Total length of the tunnel and gallery system is 152 kilometers. Over 17 years the project employed 2,600.

between the German-speaking canton of Uri to the Italian-speaking canton of Ticino in 20 minutes, faster than it takes to sip a latte.

An aficionado of train travel and an ardent fan of Switzerland's fantastically efficient rail system, regarded as the best in the world, it was hard not to be a bit giddy when I heard the news.

The Alps covers three-quarters of this landlocked country, but that has never stopped the Swiss from designing and constantly improving its renowned transportation network, which helps locals and travellers commute easily from one village to the next and between metropolitan cities, taking the guesswork and stress out of getting from here to there. That's huge for visitors because land transportation plays a major role when planning a holiday.

Whether going to work or heading for the ski slopes, the Swiss hop-on and hop-off clean and safe trains get people wherever they need to go. Frequent departures (every 10 to 15 minutes is typical), helpful state-of-the-art signs at train stations and bus stops, English spoken on public announcement systems and a timetable that coincides connections with trains, buses and boats, runs like, well, clockwork. With the integration of the Gotthard Base Tunnel, commuting will be even faster. And fewer cars on the road means less pollution, an environmental priority and another Swiss cornerstone.

Switzerland, the home of timeless watchmaking and divine chocolate and cheese, also created the Swiss Travel Pass, a passport for visitors to board trains, buses and boats without ever having to stand in line to purchase a ticket (as well as free entry into almost 500 museums). With non-stop views – from mesmerizing mountain peaks, forests and lakes to romantic wine country and storybook villages – even my shortest commutes were relaxing journeys.

"Swiss people travel by public transport a lot, are proud of their system and want tourists to experience this unique network of perfected connections," said Tabea Mandour, Project Manager Gotthard at Swiss Travel System. "We are convinced that travelling by train, bus and boat is the best way to experience our country."

That explains why a strong majority of the Swiss electorate voted in 1992 in favour of the New Railway Link Through the Alps project to build (at the tune of 12.2 billion francs, $15.9 billion Cdn) the Gotthard Base Tunnel on the all-important north-south axis that also links freight transport to other parts of the continent, the flagship point of the government's ambitious long-term transportation program.

Joining the Gotthard Rail Tunnel built in 1882 and the Gotthard Road Tunnel built in 1980, the trio of major tunnels through the Alps — at the strategic crossroads of Europe — is the pride of Switzerland.

Since antiquity, humans have persevered conquering the treacherous Gotthard Pass when merchants, ambassadors and scientists first trekked the route on foot, then by stagecoach, trailblazing what would become the economic and political backbone for the

region.

The first Gotthard rail tunnel, at 15 kilometres, was the longest in the world at the time. The Gotthard, as it was called in a travel guidebook written in 1897, was the biggest tourist attraction in Switzerland when adventurous travellers from afar came to witness, not just the profound beauty of the Alps, but this engineering wonder.

According to Kilian T. Elsasser, historian and former curator of rail transport at the Swiss Museum of Transport in Lucerne, no other traffic route in the world has shaped a country the way the Gotthard route has shaped Switzerland.

Now, 134 years later, the Gotthard Pass is in the 21st century spotlight. Sophisticated high-tech trains will move stealth-like on level ground along two single-track tubes 2,300 metres below ground. The extraordinary engineering feat will accommodate 65 passenger trains and 260 freight trains per day.

Passenger safety is in place, too, with emergency stop stations facilitated by six "connection tunnels" between the parallel tubes for smooth evacuation as well as a ventilation system that will circulate clean air.

Protecting the environment was as important as the transportation project itself, which became the most ambitious environmental protection effort in the history of Europe.

Streams were rerouted, transitional habitats for reptiles and small animals were created, a chestnut forest was fortified and wildlife and people were protected from noise, dust and sludge. It's no wonder construction took so long – it takes time to do things right.

With half a year left before high-speed train service begins, there's a once-in-a-lifetime chance for the curious to view the belly of the "once-in-a-century construction" before its maiden voyage in December. Between Aug. 2 and Nov. 27, the special Gottardino train will transport visitors 800 metres underground to the multi-function Sedrun station midway through the Gotthard Base Tunnel to see the magnitude of this technical masterpiece. Such a stop will not be possible after high-speed service commences. Now that's a bucket list item.

And for the romantics who like watching the world go by a bit more slowly, the Gotthard's original panoramic train route over the Gotthard Pass will continue operating along the mountainside. Whether venturing through the Alps or over the Alps, experiencing the Gotthard will soon be at its best.

And you can sip your latte, too. •



The Wilhelm Tell Express weaves along tracks through the romantic landscape of Wassen, Uri (pop 436) in central Switzerland.



The Gotthard Base Tunnel's two directionally-separated single track tubes will also facilitate emergencies with connection tunnels placed every 325 metres for efficient passenger evacuation.



High speed trains like this will connect Italy and Germany through Swtizerland's Gotthard Base Tunnel.

Just The Facts

- *For information about the Gotthard Base Tunnel, the Swiss Travel Pass (must be purchased before departing your country), and travel throughout Switzerland, visit http://www.swisstravelsystem.com or go to http://www.myswitzerland.com*

- *Air Canada offers flights to Geneva and Zurich from Canada.*

Lost in Lisbon



Cristina Naan discovers the city's hidden charms on one of its famous trams



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PHOTOS BY CRISTINA NAAN

From its nautical past, to its history of port and its sizzling public spaces, Portugal and its capital Lisbon offer tourists some amazing alternatives. Travelling around Lisbon on one of its iconic trams lets you see it at streer level.

Lisbon's landmarks and neighbourhoods are very entertaining

By Cristina Naan
TRAVELIFE CONTRIBUTOR

LISBON — There is something enthralling about spending a few days losing yourself in this city's narrow cobblestone streets lined with pretty pastel-coloured buildings while mastering its steep hills fuelled by good coffee and pastel de nata.

After my body succumbs to the great distance covered in only half a day, I feel no shame in falling back into my seat on the famous Tram 28 so I can experience Lisbon's Moorish influence in a more comfortable way.

Slightly hypoglycaemic and sweaty, it is with a sigh of relief that I squeeze between a group of young tourists chatting gleefully, an older woman carrying her groceries and a man wearing a turban. As I hear the vintage tram — which has been fighting these hills since before World War II — squeaking and creaking, I'm glad it's the tram, rather than me, struggling to reach the top of the hill. My Lisboa Card came in very handy this day. With it, all of Lisbon's metro, buses and elevadores (trams) can be ridden for one price.

Refreshed after my tram ride, I enjoy walking downtown in Chiado, the city's famous downtown square. It is a lively and very popular area for those interested in historical sights, shopping and dining. It is also the perfect place to start your day if you are among those who absolutely could not go to Lisbon without stopping by Café A Brasileira, one of Lisbon's oldest and most famous stops.

Another lively, yet more free-spirited area, is Bairro Alto. It's a youthful neighbourhood with independent shops and undoubtedly the best place to experience the city's nightlife. There are many relatively small bars and clubs right next to each other, each of them amazingly unique.

I reserve the rest of my day for a trip to Belém in order to satiate my hunger for history, culture and architecture, starting with the famous and ornate tower Torre de Belém, which was commissioned by King Joao II to defend the mouth of the Tagus River. It is an important symbol of Portugal's rich maritime history and an impressive reminder of its once expansive empire.

After I conquer the monument's 91 spiral steps and enjoy the spectacular views, I stop by the famous blue-and-white tile café, Antiga Confeitaria de Belém, to treat myself to Lisbon's renowned Pastéis de Belém — the flaky pastry and creamy custard confections are sprinkled with cinnamon to enchant your palate as much as your soul.

After grabbing another two tarts for the road, I continue my journey across the street to Mosteiro dos Jeronimos. This transcending beauty, a 15th-century monastery demarcated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site for its over-the-top Manueline,





Portugal's pristine coastline is filled with lovely coves and harbours where coloruful boats drop anchor. The beaches of Portugal are among the best in the world and the quaint neighbourhoods of Lisbon are wonderful places in whcih to get lost.

or Portuguese late Gothic architecture, is an absolute must-see attraction. The breathtaking architecture and the beautiful court garden in the centre are a real feast for the eyes.

I then make my way through the green lawns along the river (an approximately 30-minute walk) to Abril Bridge, a Golden Gate Bridge look-alike. Taking its name from the revolution on April 25, 1972, this suspension bridge over the Tagus has an overall length of 2,228 metres.

The dock area below is one of the most charming places in the city, with former warehouses morphed into cosmopolitan bars, restaurants and clubs that accommodate any taste. It's a pleasant place for a drink in the late afternoon or evening. I pass by 5 Oceanos, which is said to serve exquisite seafood. Only glancing at the menu made me hungry.

But I skip dining there since I am still digesting the pastéis, and I opt instead for going to a quieter area: the garden Miradouro de São Pedro de Alcantara. It has marvellous panoramic views, all the way from the city to St. George's Castle and central Lisbon. After walking among the alleys of trees and taking in the breathtaking surroundings, I close my eyes and relish the summer.



Across the street is the Solar do Vinho do Porto, an 18th-century building where one can sample more than 300 different Port wines. They have some of the rarest vintages, dating as far as 1937. I sit back in a comfortable armchair in the sitting room and order a glass.

My plans for the evening are quite simple: dining in Alfama, the district famous for fado music.

Fado is Lisbon's mournful yet beguiling sound; a combination of emotional voice and string instruments like guitars and mandolins.

The intensely melancholic songs are usually about love, woe and pain and they convey sadness and longing. Clube do Fado is said to offer the best live performances of Fado in Portugal, but being more entranced by a cozy atmosphere, I instead book a table at the popular Sr. Fado de Alfama. Owned by Fado singer Ana Marina and Fado violinist Duarte Santos, the small 25-seat club gives off a friendlier, more intimate feel than a restaurant.

On Saturday, I head for Feira da Lada, which literally translates to "the thief's market," which is also situated in the Alfama. There you'll find a myriad of small stalls that sell all sorts of new and second-hand products. The merchants sometimes simply display their inventories on a blanket.

The market abounds with antiques, furniture, second-hand clothes and old books. As advised, I negotiate the price of every item and left with a handmade plate and a traditional blouse to forever remind me of this captivating summer.

After almost two days of roaming the city, my body yearns for the contrast of the sandy beaches and the ocean. So I hop on a train to Cascais to dip my toes in the Atlantic Ocean. The water is surprisingly clean and clear and sparkles with a variety of fish.

I make my way towards Boca do Inferno where, with fascination, I watch the powerful waves crash on the cliffs and the fishermen engage in their craft.

Portugal's coast is the ideal setting for water sports, including sailing, windsurfing, kite surfing and water skiing. Guincho beach, with its excellent wind conditions, is perfect for anybody who wants to try boarding, while Praia do Guincho is best suited for windsurfing and kite surfing. On the other hand, Praia de Carcavelos and Praia de Sao Pedro lend themselves best to surfing and body surfing. Last but not least is Baia de Cascais, the most popular spot for sailing.

I did so much in two days that it is hard to believe that there is so much more to see. Whether you are looking for culture or relaxation, city or nature, you'll find it all in Lisbon. •



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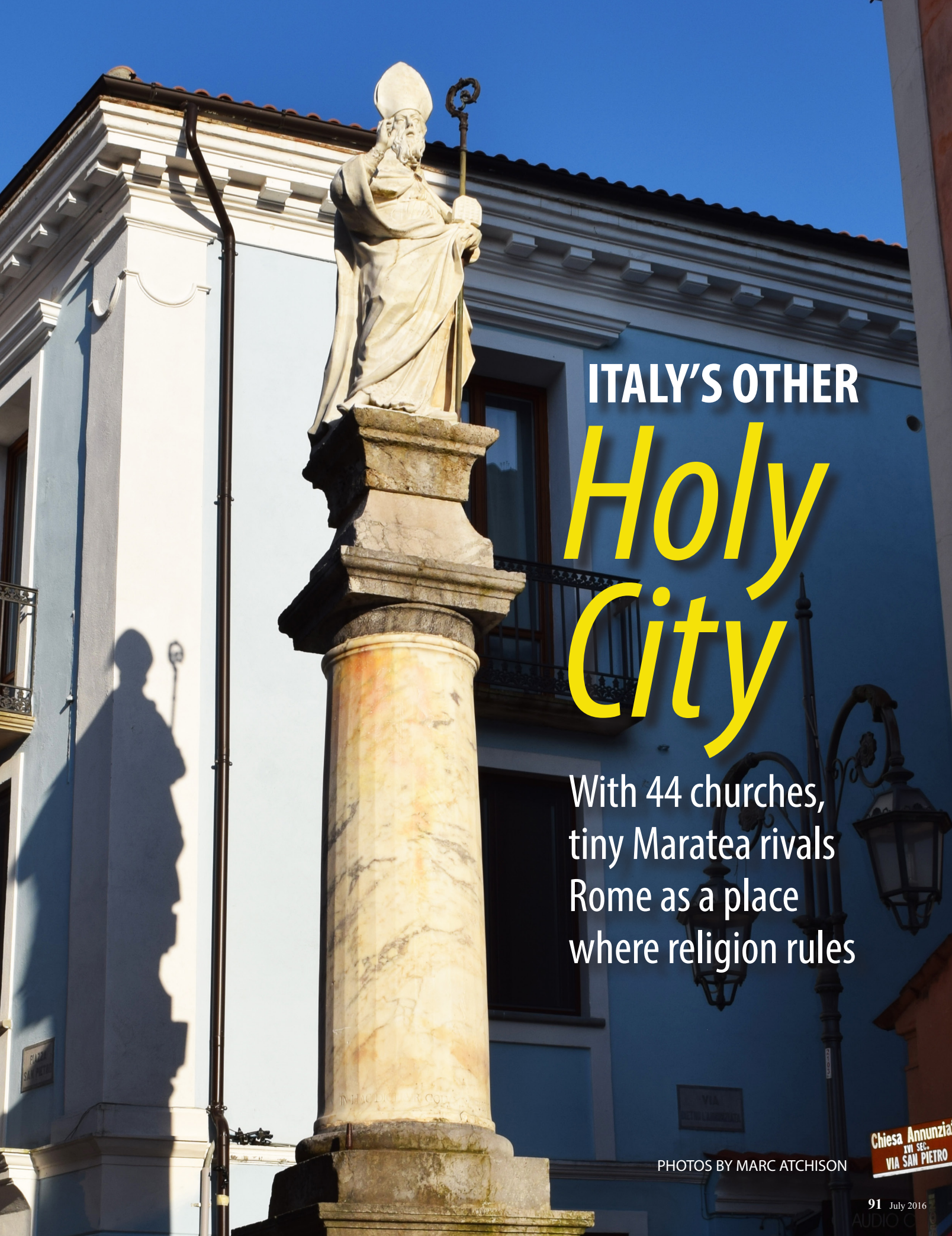


ITALY'S OTHER *Holy City*

With 44 churches, tiny Maratea rivals Rome as a place where religion rules

PHOTOS BY MARC ATCHISON



PHOTOS BY MARC ATCHISON

Italian beauty nestled in boosom of volcanic mountains

By Marc Atchison
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

MARATEA, ITALY — At the end of another glorious day, with the setting sun spotlighting this tranquil town's many church spires, I take a seat at a café in Maratea Borgo (Old Town) and order a glass of local vino.

My charming young server jokingly tells me Maratea is "the Holy City" of southern Italy because "we have so many churches in this small town."

There are actually 44 churches crammed into the tiny space Maratea occupies in this spectacular coastal region of Italy, a two-hour train ride south of Naples.

Nestled in the bosom of lush volcanic mountains that dominate this sun kissed coastline, Maratea — aka The Pearl of the Tyrrhenian — is one of the most beautiful villages in all of Italy and one of the country's best-kept secrets. While a favourite vacation spot for domestic tourists — they come here in their boats and yachts and explore the caves along the region's honeycomb coastline — few foreigners ever come. Pity!

Maratea is an ancient place with archeological findings that date all the way back to the 15th century BC,



The Taverna Rovita is one of the most famous restaurants in Maratea. Tucked away in a back alley, the restaurant is housed in a 700-year-old building and is lovingly managed by Mariasteua Gambardella and her husband Ciccio. The regional dishes served here are accented with the freshest of ingredients.


美丽中国
Beautiful China

Maratea's town square is where locals and tourists gather each evening after a day of touring the town's ancient streets lined with colourful houses. The square is always alive with people.

when a small trading post was established here. Greeks, Romans, French and a few other conquering armies have all camped on the hillsides surrounding this charming town with the many cotton candy-coloured homes. The Greeks stayed long enough to build a temple dedicated to the goddess Minerva, which Maratea's Basilica of Saint Blaise was built over.

"Before you leave, you must visit our basilica and our beautiful Christ statue up there," says my server while pointing to the mountain where Maratea's Basilica and the Cristo Redentore di Maratea — a modern version of Rio de Janeiro's Christ the Redeemer statue — reside.

The sacred remains of the town's patron saint, Saint Blaise, lie in the Basilica's alter — they were put there in 732 AD — and many Italians make the pilgrimage to Maratea to pay their respect.

By the time I've finished my second glass of wine, the sun has dipped into the sea and the evening air in the square is accented with spicy aromas coming from the narrow streets leading off it.

"If you are hungry, I suggest you try Taverna Rovita, where they serve some very delicious local cuisine," says the young woman as she directs me to a small alley where I find the family restaurant owned





China's Fujian Is Everyone's

Cup of Tea

Karen Kwan explores the tea, mountains and rivers of one of China's most beautiful provinces

XIA MEI CUN, CHINA — One should stop to smell the roses, but in China it's tea that they take the time to smell, and it's a lesson in mindfulness that would do us all well.

The size of the cups of tea — petite and delicate — is not merely for aesthetics but also to encourage one to sit back, take in the ritual and gingerly sip and have one's cup refilled repeatedly with the fragrant hot beverage. And even with their small size, the cups are only filled halfway — the rest of the cup is said to be filled with friendship.

The love for tea is a way of life here, and they start young. While most people in their early 20s are busy posting selfies to Instagram and Snapchatting, our young guide in Wuyishan is instead proudly demonstrating his ritual for drinking tea — taking in the scent of the tea, and once having taken a sip, fully immersing himself into the experience, physically tracing with his hand the tea's journey from his sip as it moves down his throat into his belly.

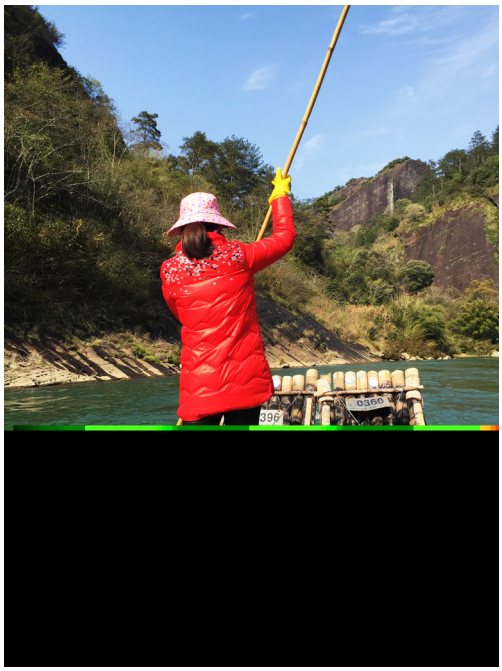
We are in Wuyishan, the second stop of our visit to Fujian, a province on the southeast coast of mainland China, after having landed in Hong Kong and kicking off our tour a few hours away at the start of the Maritime Silk Road in Quanzhou.

Well rested thanks to the elegantly modern digs at the Best Western Jooch Resort Hotel, where we woke up daily to the sound of roosters crowing and a view of the sun rising over the tea garden outside the hotel, we set off to hike to Tianyou Peak of Mount Wuyi. This UNESCO World Heritage Site sits at an altitude of 409.6 metres and the views of the Nine Bend River seem dreamlike. The water is a brilliant green hue and, as we hike, I can't get enough of the tall lean trunks and delicate leaves of the bamboo trees. I feel as though I've been dropped into the vistas I grew up seeing on decorative plates and vases at home.

As serene as our views are, the hike to Tianyou Peak, should not be underestimated (as many visitors have done, as evidenced by their choice of flip flops and high heels). The climb is steep and if you step off the path to take pictures, you may find yourself on uneven ground where you can easily lose your footing.

If you're less inclined to work up a sweat and get your heart pumping taking in the breathtaking view from above, a much more relaxing — albeit potentially more wet — way to enjoy Mount Wuyi is rafting close to 10 kilometres along the Nine Bend River.

With traditional hats and often facemasks to shield themselves from the sun, guides will expertly navigate the raft down the shallow river, all the while gossiping with one another in Mandarin. And although I admittedly find myself wishing they'd be quiet so that I can enjoy floating down the river with just the sound of the

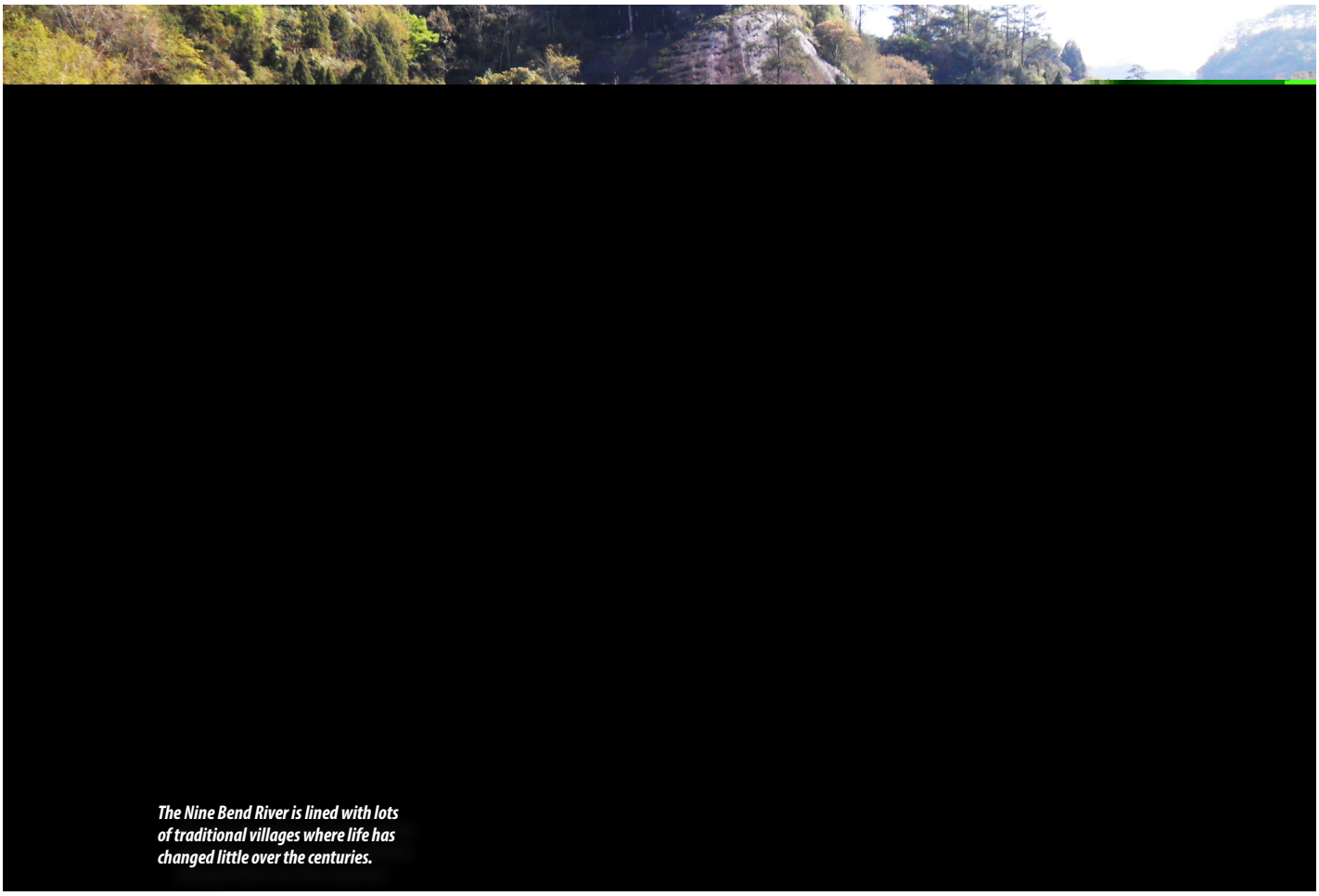






PHOTOS BY KAREN KWAN

Fujian is a province full of Chinese history and culture where tea plantations, some dating back thousands of years, still produce some famous blends. The Nine Bend River is always crowded with bamboo rafts taking tourists on criuses where the awe-inspiring Mount Wuyi is seen. Small water towns are where some of the best tea is served.



The Nine Bend River is lined with lots of traditional villages where life has changed little over the centuries.

currents, their chatter soon becomes a sing-song-like melody and I start imagining what they are talking about. What they're having for dinner, perhaps, or how this Chinese girl doesn't speak Mandarin (that being me; I've caught plenty of the Chinese tourists and locals by surprise with my lack of comprehension.)

Just a 10-minute drive away, we stop for an afternoon at Xia Mei Cun, also known as Plum Village, an ancient town where you'll get to explore the style of homes and businesses of the Qing Dynasty.

Once the Wuyi region's largest tea centre, with the tea distributed via the Meixi River, which runs through the village, it is quiet during our visit, given it is not tea season. The locals sit outside on the benches that line the walkways along the river, vegetable greens hanging out to dry.

These benches were traditionally built for women waiting for their husbands to return home from work but today they are occupied predominantly by young women and their toddlers, who are running and playing.

As you stroll through the village, you may notice plenty of skylights but few windows. This is because in ancient times the wealthy wished to protect themselves, and thus went without windows so as to limit access. At one tea company, we stumble upon a group of men drinking tea at a beautiful burl wood table and shooting the breeze — it seems to be their version of hanging out at the barbershop.

We chat (through our guide) to the oldest gentlemen of the group.

He's 84, he tells us, and the fourth generation of his family is in the tea business.

His skin is lined with wrinkles and he's missing a few teeth, but this doesn't take away from his smile. Proudly showing us some framed photos of him and boasting that he can sing, we are treated to a song — after a little prodding. It's a toss up as to whether he's our favourite Plum Villager or maybe it's the elderly lady hand sewing bright baby shoes in a quiet courtyard.

While here, make sure to stop to see the "mother-in-law door," which features the silhouette of a woman carved as the shape of the door's opening. Place your body alongside the silhouette to see how you measure up — filling the curves is said to demonstrate how fruitful you will be at bearing children.

For a sight that's less novel and quirky, step into the Ancestors' Hall, which was established 200 years ago. And with that, we find ourselves ready for more tea, so we set out to find a spot for our new favourite ritual. •

Just The Facts

- *When you're in Fujian, make sure you try some of the local cuisine — one of Karen Kwan's favourites is Buddha-jumps-over-the-wall soup. A local dish, this soup has mushrooms, bamboo shoots, abalone, fish, shark fin and quail egg, and legend has it that it earned its name by smelling so good a Buddhist monk (who are prohibited from eating meat) leaped over a wall to enjoy some of the delicious smelling dish.*

- *Air Canada and a number of Chinese carriers offer flights to China from Toronto, Montreal, Calgary and Vancouver.*

- *Tour East Holidays offers a number of tour packages to China and can customize a tour that includes a stop in Fujian. Go to http://www.toureast.com for information.*

- *For information on China, go to http://www.tourismchina.org*

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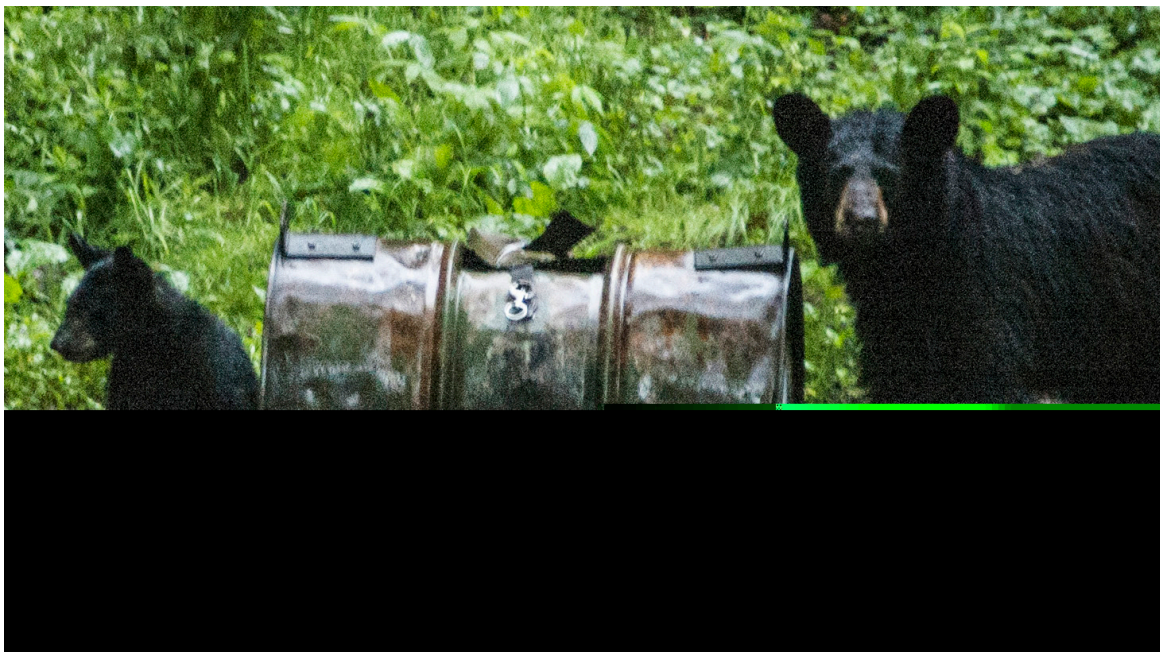

PHOTOS BY CAROLE JOBIN

Sandwiched between Montréal and Québec City, the Mauricie Region is often overlooked by visitors to the province. However, the region is a natural beauty where wildlife abounds and world-class accommodation like Hotel Sacacomie, left, have become a favourite hideaway for Americans and Europeans.

By Bruce Sach
TRAVELIFE CONTRIBUTOR

TROIS-RIVIÉRES, QUE. — "Our prison was so out of the way that in the old days prisoners had to go to Montréal or Québec City to be judged. Then they'd be returned to us here in Trois-Rivières, to serve their sentence, or be executed."

These chilling words, stated matter-of-factly by our prison guide, seemed like a perfect metaphor, not only for Trois-Rivières, but for the entire Mauricie region of Québec.

Although millions of motorists pass by here yearly as they whiz between Montréal and Québec City, few seem to stop in the area. As a result, it is unspoiled and, to my mind, a perfect spot to get to know the authentic Québec.

Don't get me wrong. I love Québec City and Montréal – but leave the main Highway 40 and head up north a few kilometres, and time really seems to stand still.

For starters, save a few cyclists in the old Chemin du Roy, (King's Road), there's no one around. After passing innumerable farms, the first store you'll see is Le Brun Grocery Store at Maskinongé.

The store is huge by the standard of any day, and during its long history sold livestock, fancy plates, expensive furs, and (this was big at the time) manufactured skates. Even local moonshine, if our guide is to be believed.

Today, the store specializes in items from the old days: Elephant Popcorn, Thrills Chewing Gum and those liquid-filled wax canes, popular in the 1960s. There are also handicrafts typical to Québec – Phentex bedroom slippers and linen towels.

But current owners, Isabella Thibeault and Richard Vienneau, have gone one step further. The second floor now houses L'Grange, an intimate cabaret complete with a functioning 1904 Aeolian piano player, where some of the best live performers from the province perform for crowds of 75 to 100 people. In a sense, it echoes the days when locals came to the general store Saturday nights as a kind of com-

munity centre to watch Hockey Night in Canada on the town's only television set.

As if Mauricie wasn't quiet and remote enough, at the end of a longish dead-end road several kilometres from Saint Alexis des Monts, Sacacomie Lake and its secretive Hotel Sacacomie lay hidden in the forest.

It offers the ultimate unplugged resort, well concealed, and perhaps deliberately, hard to access quickly. European visitors fly onto the lake by hydroplane, or get off the train at Charette (a mere whistle stop, there is no train station), or end up renting a car for the length of the trip.

Inside the massive white pine log lodge, rooms and balconies are almost too big to believe. Sure, it looks like the 1980s, but wouldn't you expect that from an unplugged paradise?

No TVs, no AC, no room safes — this place is so utterly peaceful that one guest actually asked room service for a fan just for the comfort of noise.

The food is outstanding, but the relaxed atmosphere is what makes this place worth visiting. There is a sizeable Nordic Spa and there are guided tours of the lake, as well as tours to see bears and beavers in the wild. We saw both bears and beavers but getting to know our guide, Gaspar, was worth the tour alone. He knows it all and has seen it all — the fruit of having been a guide all his life.

Carlotte, a local dog, teamed up with us in the boat tour. In 90 minutes we became acquainted with just a part of the lake. Later, in a six-wheel drive Puch Pinzgauer, we were taken on a seriously wild trip up and down impossible elevations as we headed to the shelters built for wildlife viewing.

Remember I underlined the relaxing nature of this place? Well, I fell into a meditative state as the minutes streamed by, waiting for a bear to show up while stationed at the viewing shelter. The guide had to pull me out of my visual meditation (inspired by the rain) to get my attention when, as if on cue, the mother bear showed up. Baby bear showed up soon afterwards.

Some character named Johnny Depp stayed at the hotel during the filming of Secret Whistle, as did Paul Walker.

The night at the hotel was memorable. Our room overlooked the lake, where not one light was visible save two fireflies that dared dart by. There was an international crowd there, as European and American tourists seem to outnumber Canadian visitors.

Nearby is another village, Saint Elie de Caxton. Almost anyone interested in contemporary Québécois culture has heard of this town and its most famous son, Fred Pellerin. Fred, while still in his 20s, hit the provincial scene big in Québec when his talents as a raconteur in the purest of traditional styles became known. Now popular even in France, virtually everyone in French Québec has heard of his hometown and the famous peppermint trees from one of his legends. A thirty-something making a living by telling stories? Welcome to Québec!

Today, this otherwise sleepy, typically slow-paced Mauricie town offers self-guided tours (on foot or on bike) and wagon tours to the many visitors who come. Talented chefs and craftsmen have set up shop here, too. One spot that you should not miss is Potier de St-Elie, owned by Sébastien Houle, the town's top pottery shop.

Not too far away, is the little town that is possibly the best-known spot in the whole area, historically, at least.

Shawinigan Falls is possibly best known for its past glory due to its aluminum factory and for local celebrity the "Little Guy from Shawinigan," former prime minister Jean Chrétien. His family grew up in the shadow of the mill and today the Jean Chrétien Museum and the Espace Shawinigan are intimate attractions worth visiting.

Across the river, via a tiny free boat, is the Cité de l'Energie, which includes a huge tower from whose observation deck you have a view of the entire region that was once the largest aluminum producer in the world. •

The Le Brun Grocery Store in Maskinongé, above, is a town landmark which, over the decades, has sold everything from furs to moonshine. Sébastien Houle, left, is the owner of the Potier de St-Elie, a top pottery shop in the small town of Saint Elie de Caxton.

Just The Facts

- *For information on the Hotel Sacacomie, go to http://www.sacacomie.com*
- *If you'd like to know more about the Mauricie, go to http://www.tourismemauricie.com*

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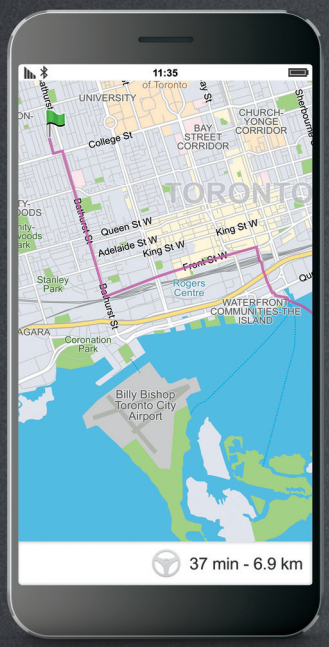

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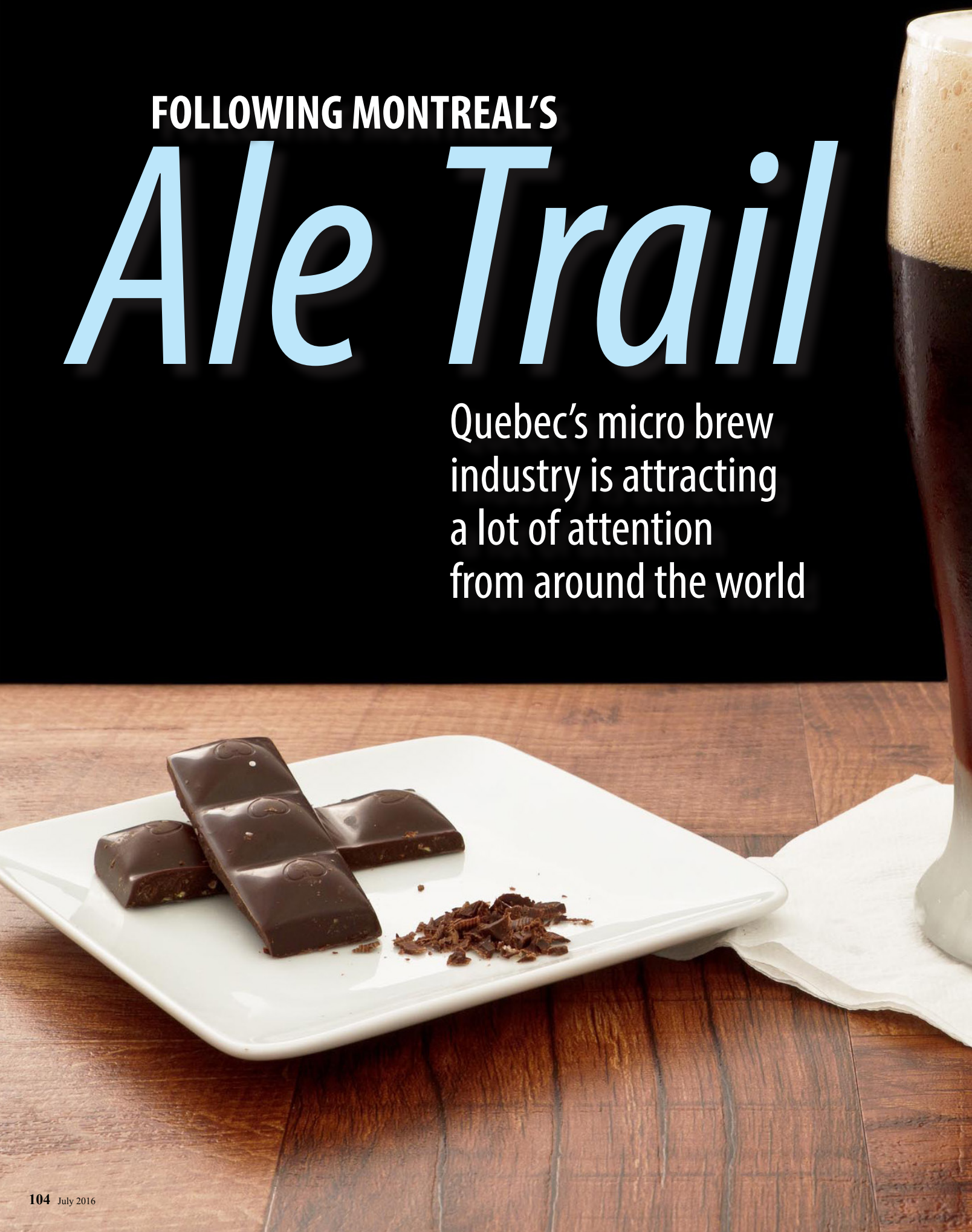
FOLLOWING MONTREAL'S

Ale Trail

Quebec's micro brew industry is attracting a lot of attention from around the world



By Mark Wessel
TRAVELIFE CONTRIBUTOR

MONTRÉAL — After sampling a saison flavoured beer with the most unlikely of ingredients – mustard — we try a smoked rye porter paired with not just any poutine, but one with a rich sauce à la bière. And already, just 20 minutes into our Montréal brewpub walking tour, our taste buds are captivated.

Since the 1980s, Québec's micro industry has taken off faster than a cork from a triple fermented Belgian ale — after starting out with just three, there are now 150 breweries in the province, which makes up a third of the micro beer industry across Canada.

"The quality of our beers is attracting visitors from all over … not just Canada and the U.S. but Europe, Asia and South America," says Stephane Lussier, the man who conducts tours of Montréal's microbreweries for tourists. As a result of this demand, Local Montréal Tours, which Stephane works for, runs as many as eight tours every Saturday through different neighbourhoods.

"You could say we've become the victim of our own success," Stepahne observes.

Le Saint Bock artisanal brewery in downtown is the perfect place to start this tour, in part because of its central location immediately north of Old Montréal and south of the Plateau Montréal neighbourhood. But also because of its tremendous beer selection, with 44 beers on tap (21 brewed on site plus 23 guest taps), and over 850 bottled beers. They even have their own Beer Bible, a heavy book listing all of their beers, which really does look like one of those massive bibles you'd find in a medieval church.

Raphaël Richard of Soeurs Grise has helped revolutionize the micro brew industry in Québec and Canada.

As we move on to our next microbrewery, Stephane, himself an amateur brewer, tells us he's made 40 different beer recipes of his own.

As if to underscore the diversity of beers and flavours that beckon residents and tourists alike, at L'amère à boire we sample a German Hefeweisen, or wheat beer, with hints of banana, paired with beer gravlax (a cured meat). A highlight of our third stop at the Bennelux brewery is an Imperial stout paired with a selection of Belgian chocolate.

All three microbreweries on this tour are in close walking distance of one another and each brews an impressive selection of beers only available on site. And they're all close to Métro (subway) stations, as are the vast majority of the micros in this city. In fact, there are so many breweries at the doorstep of Métro stations, there's even a beer/subway map on a website called Thrillist. And as I discover

first hand during my stay in Montréal, it really is a thrill to discover the microbrewery scene here by subway (not to mention a safer, faster way to go).

From Bennelux, the Reservoir Pub is a short subway ride away; we get off at the Saint-Laurent station.

Reservoir is deservedly known as a nanobrewery, not only because they have eight beers on tap, but because they brew in small batches — as little as 250 litres at a time, with the mindset of constantly trying new recipes. They also do 100-bottle runs of limited edition beers which are cellared and continue to mature on site.

"We make a broad selection of beers, from our IPA Citra to our Black Currant Saison. We're also big on cherry beers," observes Corin Dejonge, the pub's assistant brewer. "So we're giving people more reasons to visit more often."

On my second day discovering Montréal's micros, I come to the realization that my favourite ale trail is the Orange Line on the city's Métro — the breweries here are all top quality. There's no better proof of that than the Dieu du Ciel on Rue Laurier — loosely translated its means "God of the Sky." The God reference is arguably appropriate, as Dieu du Ciel's bottled beer is so good that it has made its way onto the shelves of stores across Canada, the U.S. and a growing number of European countries. Although they've since added a larger facility in Saint-Jérôme, north of Montréal, Rue Laurier is where it all began.

The first beer we sample at Dieu du Ciel doesn't disappoint: a tart framboise (raspberry beer) that explodes in the mouth with flavour and freshness. It's probably the best framboise I've ever tried and as I glance across the bar, I realize all three of the servers are drinking the framboise as well.

Assistant manager Kevan says a big reason for the beer's appeal is "they put a crazy amount of raspberries into this recipe. Unfortunately, we only make it in the spring, and while it's available in bottle, it's really hard to find."

As much as I desperately want to have another, I'm scheduled to visit a relatively new micro, Bistro-Brasserie Les Soeurs Grises in Old Montréal near Square Victoria Station. You have to pace yourself on these tours.

While Dieu du Ciel is a place you'll be comfortable in shorts and sandals, Les Soeurs Grise is a trendy, relatively new restaurant and bistro, which offers an upscale dining experience that draws people not just for the beer, but for its sophisticated ambiance and a food menu that includes tapas and several smoked dishes.

Partner Raphaël Richard has clearly helped up the game of this gastro brewery, drawing on years spent working in the L.A. restaurant business. "We're one of the first brewpubs with a full kitchen and almost every dish we serve features one of our beers," Raphaël proudly says.

One of the beers served here is the 7.8 per cent Ninja IPA, with notes of honey and blueberry. Thank goodness I'm taking the subway.

Raphaël sums up his passion for beer, which is clearly shared by the other microbreweries of this city, by saying: "We want people to come here and say 'my God, this beer is so good and I can't find it anywhere else, so I need to come back.' " I'm already planning my next visit. •

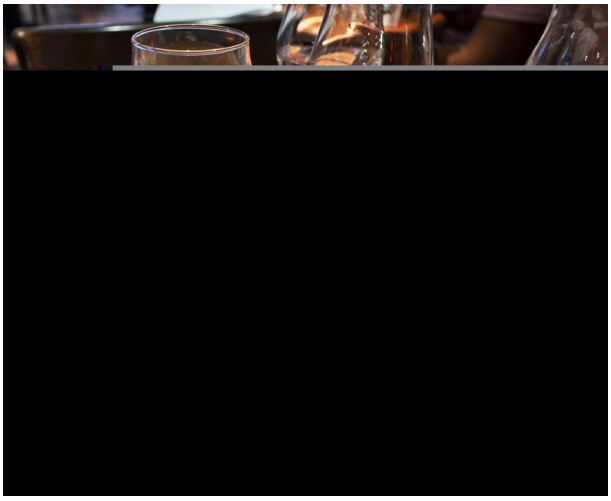
Just The Facts

- *When you go, a good place to base yourself is the Hôtel de L'Institut next door to the Sherbrooke Métro station, a short walk to Le Saint Bock. The hotel is also just across the road from the elegant Saint-Louis Square, distinguished by its Victorian cast-iron fountain and the perfect evening retreat to savour not only Montréal's ambiance, but some of the microbrews readily available for purchase nearby. For informaiton, go to http://www.ithq.qc.ca/en/hotel/*

- *Tip: it's legal to consume alcohol in Montréals parks providing you take food with you).*

- *MMontréals Métro offers visitors a Weekend pass, which allows unlimited travel from 6 p.m. Friday to 5 a.m. Monday for just $13.*





PHOTOS BY MARK WESSEL

Everyone has a good time at Montreal's micro brewery pubs, which have earned a world-wide reputation for their craft products infused with fruits, mustard and even meat. Some have even been specifically designed to accompany Quebec's unique food, including poutine. A micro brewery tour in Montreal introduces visitors to some of the city's charming neighbourhoods.

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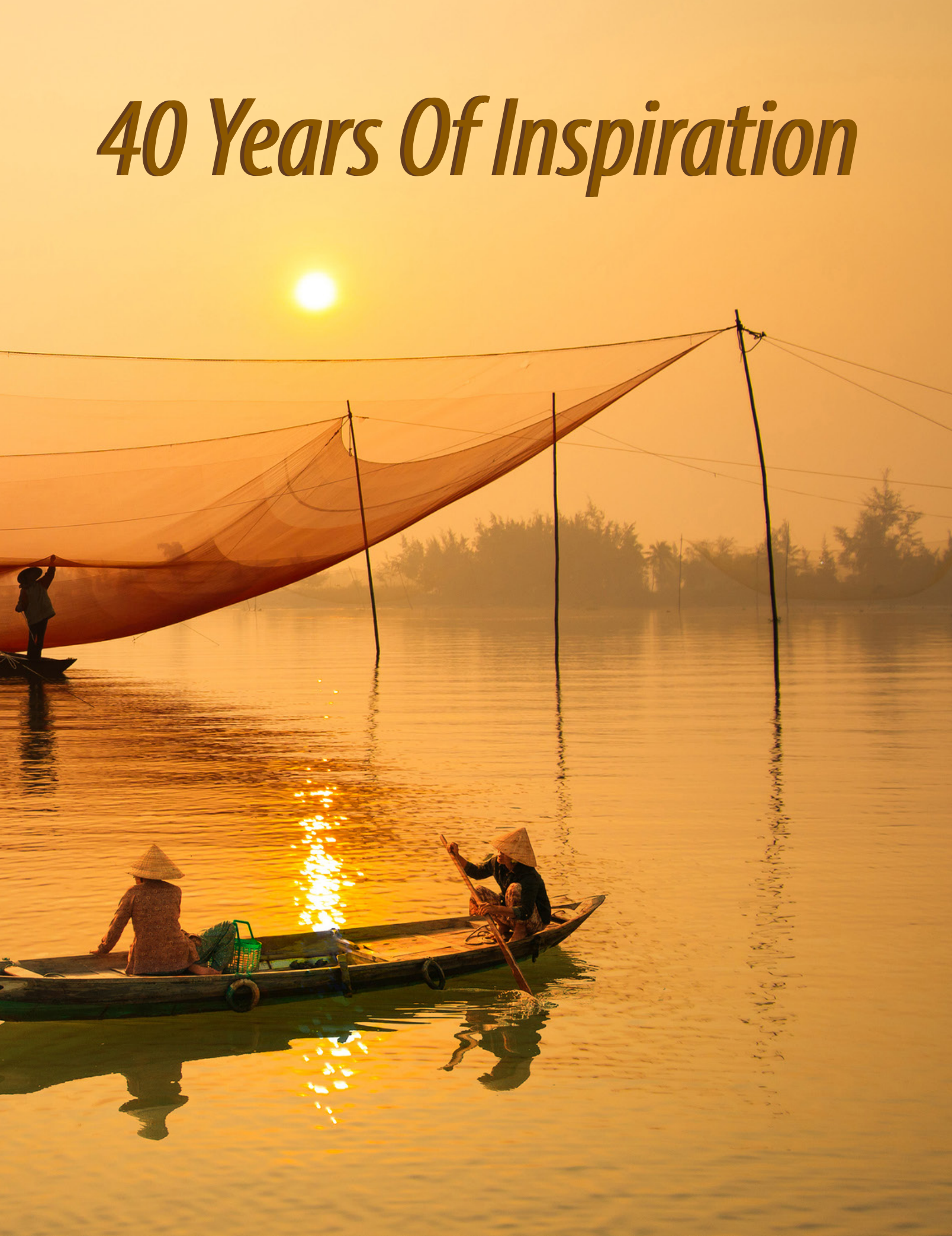

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