Bay Area Travel Writers and Photographers

clips & pics

Featuring travel writing and travel photography from seasoned pros

”The best education for a clever man can be found in travel.”
— Goethe

CAROL CANTER


JOHN MONTGOMERY


LAURIE McANDISH KING


ANN JACKSON

“Certainly, travel is more than the seeing of sights;
it is a change that goes on,
deep and permanent, in the ideas of living.”

—Miriam Beard

About BATW

Established in 1984, in San Francisco, California, Bay Area Travel Writers, Inc. is a not-for-profit, professional association of journalists with outstanding achievements in the field of travel. These professionals share their unique stories in newspapers, magazines, broadcasts, blogs, videos, books, internet publications and travel industry publications.

BATW members travel and report locally and all over the world. Some specialize in guidebooks, others in golf, travel for singles, families, or seniors, or in photography. Each writer and photographer seeks to present the world in ways that enrich, inform and fascinate, and to expose their readers to the people, culture, arts and natural splendors of each destination.

Monthly meetings, held since 1984, provide a lively exchange of information among our widely traveled colleagues. Speakers from tourist boards and destinations make presentations to inform members of travel trends and news. We also hold panel discussions on such subjects as marketing, publishing and photography.

BATW encourages the highest professional standards among its members. Up-and-coming journalists may join as Provisional Members and may participate with veteran journalists. Travel industry professionals are invited to become Associate Members and profit from a mutually beneficial relationship with our journalists.

Ultimately, BATW promotes high professional standards within the field of travel journalism.

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President's Message

"A traveler without observation is a bird without wings."

—Moslih Eddin Saadi

At BATW, our job – indeed, our passion – is to foster a love of travel. Our mission, outlined on our website at batw.org, is to "seek to present the world in ways that enrich, inform and fascinate, and to expose readers to the people, culture, arts and natural splendors of each destination."

BATW began circa 1984 with a handful of aspiring travel journalists. This small group of writers took turns hosting meetings and critiquing one another's work.

Three decades later, we are widely considered the most respected regional travel journalists' organization in the country.

We hope you enjoy the travel stories and photography in our new e-book. We'd also like to invite you to check out "Travel Stories from Around the Globe," a juried anthology of discoveries, insights and adventures from BATW members. You can purchase this book at www.batw.org

—Ginny Prior
President
Bay Area Travel Writers

Lisa Alpine

Polka Dot Bikini

"Polka Dot Bikini" originally appeared in
Wild Life: Travel Adventures of a Worldly Woman

I once had an hourglass figure that could sport bikinis. My most sexy suit was a black-and-white polka dot number that fit like a glove and made the curves look even curvier. Not only did I think this suit was hot, but men did, too.

Not only men, but males of another species took a gander when I'd swim in this particular suit. I had no idea dolphins were fashionistas until one holiday visit to Anthony's Key Resort on Roatan in the Bay Islands of Honduras, where my husband, son, and I had stayed over many Christmas holidays. Scuba diving was the main attraction, as the world's second-longest barrier reef system lies just off Roatan's shores, providing some of the best diving in the Caribbean.

There is also a dolphin research station run by the Roatan Institute for Marine Sciences on nearby Bailey's Key. It supports itself by allowing guests to swim with the dolphins for a fee, after a brief orientation by one of the trainers.

My young son enjoyed these frolicking encounters, as the dozen Atlantic bottlenose dolphins were usually playful and friendly. The bottlenose dolphin is common in the Caribbean, and is rather large. They range in size from 6 to 14 feet, and their body is smooth like rubbery soapstone with a grey-blue patina that is pleasing to touch when they allow physical contact. The most outstanding feature are their expressive eyes, which can emanate a wide range of messages from a twinkly, whimsical invitation to play to a deep, yearning gaze that begs connection, or the complete opposite—a glowering warning to keep your distance.

We'd been on dolphin swims at the research station many times during our vacations at Anthony's, and each interaction was different. One time an adult female glided into my arms and flopped over, allowing me to rock her as she gazed languidly into my eyes. On another swim, a female dolphin grabbed Galen, my son, by the wrist with her teeth and tried to swim off with him. He was 6 years old and this frightened him. He felt he was being kidnapped and taken deeper into her watery realm against his will. It took a bit of coaxing to get her to leave him alone, and after a few tears were shed, Galen entered the water again and had fun throwing balls to the young males.

The next year we returned to Anthony's as usual. In my suitcase was my hot new bikini that I was a bit self-conscious about wearing, but I also kind of felt like strutting my stuff. Closing in on 40 years old does this to a woman.

We dove with the rainbow parrotfish and whitetip reef sharks during the day, and with the octopuses and spiny lobsters at night. On New Year's Eve I danced on the bar top, doing the windey-windey taught to me by a spunky teenage Honduran girl. The windey-windey is a dance that can get you pregnant. The hips are isolated and around and around they rapidly circle as you gyrate your way down the polished mahogany bar in an ecstatic Caribbean conga line of happy dancers. It is hella good fun—unless you take a nosedive off the bar and break your neck (which, thankfully, nobody did due to our limber state of mind). Like I mentioned, midlife crisis.

We stayed up till dawn limboing our way into the new year. Even my young son got dance lessons from the adorable teenage girl. Scuba diving was out of the question the following day—headaches do not mix well with deep diving. So we went for our annual dolphin swim at the research station.

I donned the polka dot bikini and felt slightly confident when I looked in the mirror and perused my still-shapely body in the snazzy suit.

Galen brought an underwater camera to photograph his marine mammal friends, many of whom he knew by name. After the introductory etiquette talk by the naturalist that we could, by this point, quote almost word-for-word, we waded into the gin-clear water with six other guests, avid scuba divers like us taking a break from diving after our New Year's Eve hoopla.

At first, there was no sign of our finny friends, so we stood in the shallows waiting to see what would happen. Suddenly, the water was turbulent. The entire pod frenetically circled me and then swam away. Again, the dolphins rushed straight at me and this time, the largest male chased the others away. He swam up close, lifting his steel-grey-blue face out of the water. He looked me in the eye and grinned. A really big, goofy grin. The other dolphins hung back, not socializing with any of the other people in the water.

I stared at him, wondering what was up with his faux stretched-out smile when he dipped down and swam against my legs, almost knocking me over. I regained my balance and he intentionally bumped into me again. He circled, and rubbed against me. This was kind of fun. He felt cool, solid, and smooth. It was amusing. Until it hurt. Suddenly, his smooth skin had a razor-like edge to it. I looked down and he was now sideways against me, and there was something oblong protruding from his belly. It was about 10 inches in length and pointed. And rough like sandpaper. Could it be? Why yes—it was a dolphin dick!

Then things really heated up. As he enthusiastically humped my leg, the female dolphins decided their homeboy was paying way too much attention to the wrong female. They rushed directly at me in a tight group, heads out of the water, pointy teeth displayed, and made a racketous, chittering noise in unison as they charged. Now I was alarmed. I knew a jealous female when I saw one—it didn't matter what species! They stopped a few inches from my chest, glowered at me, and then backed up with their tails and did it all over again. I felt like I was in a Flipper porn flick drama. I froze, cornered by the male, who simply ignored his harem's choreographed terror attack on me while busy trying to impregnate my thighs.

A shrill, piercing sound broke the spell. The trainer stood on the beach blowing his whistle hard and fast, yelling, "Everyone out of the water NOW!" I batted away my hard-on friend—and his agitated harem—then stumbled out of the water and onto the beach. Everyone else, including my husband and son, stood there gaping at me. No one asked if I was all right; they just stared. Looking down, I noticed my bathing suit was completely askew. Not only had Señor Randy Fish been getting a rub-on on my leg, he had also practically de-suited me. What a masterful horndog! This 12-foot-long male marine mammal took me right back to my high school years and the reason I avoided drive-in movies.

"I have never seen them behave this way!" exclaimed the flustered trainer. "I'm giving you all refunds as this is the first time I've ever canceled a dolphin swim experience." He then looked directly at me, gave me the once-over, and pointedly said, "I guess in the future I will have to request that guests not wear polka dot bikinis."

Author's Note: I have come to realize it is wrong to keep dolphins, or any wild animals, in captivity. I believe dolphins should swim freely in the oceans with their family pods and not be forced to live in isolation in aquariums, theme parks, zoos and hotels with "dolphin swims." No creature should have to leap through flaming hoops or swim backward on its tail to get fed. Join me in boycotting all venues where animals are held in captivity to entertain humans. Find out more at www.dolphinproject.org.

Lisa Alpine is the author of *Wild Life: Travel Adventures of a Worldly Woman* and *Exotic Life: Travel Tales of an Adventurous Woman* (Best Women's Adventure Memoir BAIPA Book Awards). She is the winner of many awards, including the 2014 Solas "Best Travel Story of the Year" Silver Award for "Fish Trader Ray."
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Joan Aragone

Joan Aragone is a freelance writer who lived in China for three years. Her love of travel began when she joined the Peace Corps and lived in the Philippines. She has worked as a reporter, columnist, editor and university instructor, and travels whenever she can. joanaragone@gmail.com

China's Surprising Tropical Resort: Development slowly luring tourists back to the beaches of Hainan Island

This story was originally published in the *Los Angeles Times*. Since then, the population of Sanya has more than tripled to about 700,000, with Sanya Airport receiving millions of passengers and high-speed trains delivering Hainan Island tourists to new five-star beach resorts, water parks, shopping malls and golf courses that now line the once-quiet coastline.

HAINAN ISLAND, China—As the 40-minute flight from Guangzhou cut through the clouds and began its descent to Haikou Airport, at the northern tip of Hainan Island, we could see new high-rises protruding over rice fields and tumbledown shacks. Lush fields and ribbons of beach lined both sides of the small city below. We were approaching Haikou, capital of Hainan, China's newest province.

It took an effort to remember this was China. Azure water lapped the edges of the land. Visible from the air were palm-fringed bays and hills covered with forests.

Hainan, an island slightly larger than Belgium, today is known as China's tropical paradise. But more than 1,000 years ago, a Tang Dynasty poet called it "the gate of hell."

The poet wasn't thinking of the island's topography, which hasn't changed much over the centuries, as much as its primitive living conditions and isolation. Thirty miles off the south coast of China, Hainan Island for centuries has been a backwater, cut off from the economic and intellectual forces that shaped the mainland. Court officials from the Tang Dynasty (AD 618-907) were banished there.

In the 1940s, Hainan was invaded by the Japanese and served as a setting for battles during the civil war between the Chinese Nationalist Party and the Communists. In 1949, Chinese immigrants from Malaysia and Indonesia settled there, followed by Vietnamese.

Yet Hainan, which translates in English as "south sea," remained an outpost. Reflecting its isolation, one of its beaches is called "the ends of the earth."

Still, the economic changes that swept through China in the 1980s finally reached its southern tip. Realizing the potential for foreign currency in the island's rich natural resources and scenic beauty, the government in 1987 made Hainan, with a population of 6.3 million, China's newest province. The following year, it was declared one of the country's five special economic zones. Lured by tax breaks and other financial incentives, foreign investors began to build hotels and office buildings and expand manufacturing and agriculture.

But the government's crackdown in Tiananmen Square in June 1989 put a halt to Hainan's burgeoning development. Most foreign investment was suspended, and according to the Hainan Provincial Tourism Bureau, tourism to the island in 1989 dropped by almost 20 percent. But investment slowly returned and tourism underwent what the Chinese media call a "recovery." By the end of 1990, the Hainan Provincial Tourism Bureau estimated the number of tourists visiting Hainan--mostly from Hong Kong, Taiwan and Macao—to be approaching 1988 levels.

The bulk of economic development and construction is apparent in Haikou, where high-rise hotels sprout near one-story shacks. The island's west coast, off limits to foreigners, is dotted with naval installations. On the south and east coasts, the focus is on natural resource development.

But for most visitors, a trip to Hainan means Sanya, the port city at the island's southern tip where beaches are long and empty and the sea is clear. (When this article was published, the only way to Sanya was from Haikou via a propeller flight or a challenging six-hour bus trip. Now jets fly directly from San Francisco via Los Angeles, Hong Kong, Shanghai or Beijing.)

Except for signs in Chinese, Sanya could be a provincial town in the Philippines, to the east, or Vietnam, to the west. The people, predominantly of the Li minority, are slim and small-boned, a different physical type than the Han Chinese, who represent more than 95% of China's population. Sailors from the local naval station, in snappy uniforms, stroll everywhere.

Sanya's wide main street is a mayhem of bus and pedicab traffic. Motors chug. Horns blast. Rock and disco music vibrates from loudspeakers. Street stalls offer clothing and fabric. At a huge daily open market you can buy ducks in bamboo cages, vegetables, herbs, guitars and a thousand household items. A flotilla of fishing boats and old navy vessels floats in the harbor.

The adventure starts at the bus station or airport, where a mob of pedicab drivers offer rides to local hotels, providing a fast introduction to the unruly atmosphere of this relatively small (by Chinese standards) city of 200,000. The pedicab ride is a bumpy, open-air race past buses, cars and other pedicabs, with horns constantly blaring, all for about $1.25. Just hold on to your hat…. and your luggage.

Sanya's main draw is its beaches, the best of which lie east of town, along a renovated road that reflects Hainan's revamping. In fewer than three years, this "national highway" was transformed from a rutted, two-lane road past shacks in banana groves, to a smooth thoroughfare dotted with shops that shoots past hotels at various stages of development.

One attraction east of Sanya is Luhuitou, the oldest resort in the area and available for more than 30 years only to high Party members. This scattering of cottages and bungalows, set in a grove of pine trees and coconut palms, has been open to the public since 1985. A tiny village with small cafes lies outside the hotel grounds. Jeepney and taxi service to and from an adjacent resort and Sanya operate into the evening.

Luhuitou, which means "deer turning around," got its name from a local folk tale about a hunter who was chasing a deer and, just as he was about to shoot it, the animal turned into a beautiful young woman—and the hunter fell in love. A statue of a deer stands atop the nearest hill.

Beyond the turnoff to Luhuitou lies DaDongHai (Big East Sea) Beach, a crescent of white sand and coconut palms facing an azure bay. This is the stuff of postcards and million-dollar tourism--though not quite yet, even as the new hotels are being built.

At one end of the beach, a small pavilion sits on a rise, while huge rocks at the other end invite climbing and views of the South China Sea. A path over the hill to Luhuitou offers views of Sanya to the west and miles of open sea.

Although the beach is open to the public, the easiest access is through the adjacent hotel, a two-minute walk from the sand. The hotel, DaDongHai Beach Resort, is at the end of a short lane lined with bamboo shops selling fresh seafood. The hotel's Sixties-style, pastel-colored stucco buildings face a palm garden and, beyond that, the sea. The main section is a comfortable, three-story modern hotel with double rooms, private baths and balconies overlooking the sea. A luxury wing is under construction. Dormitory accommodations are also available. The restaurant serves good food and has a small bar.

At the beach's west end is the gleaming new Jinling hotel, with its airy lobby and Western and Chinese restaurants.

Fifteen miles further along the main road lies another stretch of pristine beach at Yalong Bay, long and open and occasionally buffeted by winds. The government has announced plans for major development here.

Eating in Sanya means seafood, fruit and vegetables. The best places are the free-enterprise shacks at the beaches. Avoid the sturdy cement restaurant at Luhuitou Beach, state-owned, frequented only by tourists and notorious for terrible food. Best of all is to sit at a table on the sand, sip local beer and watch the sun set before devouring a plate of fresh prawns. The shacks also offer banana fritters, omelets, fresh coffee and other dishes geared to the Western palate.

For the connoisseur of tropical beaches, Hainan Island is worth a visit, especially before development takes off. The expectation and fear among some Westerners is that foreign money may turn Sanya into a Chinese version of Puerto Vallarta. The organized tours have started, and the parasailing entrepreneurs have set up shop.

But for now [1992], Sanya is authentic: virtually deserted beaches, gentle surf, clear water and coconut palms that stand like sentries. The Tang poet might be surprised to see what's happening to the "gate of hell."

Jacqueline Harmon Butler

Italian Lessons

City Girl on a Small Farm in Tuscany

Previously published in three newspapers: *La Nazione* and *Il Tirreno* in Italy and in *Fra Noi* in the U.S.

Piero's face turned scarlet, his big feet shuffling in the dirt as I told him how much I enjoyed the wild birds he sent over for dinner the night before. He's a bashful guy who speaks no English. My Italian was limited and I hoped he understood me.

My friend Claudio was living in an old restored farmhouse tucked away in the hills near Lucca, Italy. His apartment was in the middle, with farmer Piero and his wife on one end and Piero's parents on the other. When he invited me for a visit, my imagination conjured up a small villa with totally modern conveniences.

I envisioned myself in a pretty sundress, draped over a colorful lounge chair on the veranda, sipping something cool, surrounded by cascading flowers. I fantasized that we would take our meals on the terrace and sit long into the night, star gazing as we discussed love, life and dreams. Oh yes, I was thinking of something rustic but beautifully pulled together.

You can imagine my surprise when I arrived to find a very crude, broken-down farm and not the charming villa of my dreams. Claudio pulled into the yard and up to the front door of his apartment. There was no verandah in sight. No garden either. Just some dusty farm equipment, a couple of trees and a few pots of flowers. No brightly colored lounge chairs or cascading beds of flowers in sight.

The apartment was tall and narrow, with two bedrooms up a steep staircase and the bathroom downstairs, directly behind the kitchen and not very convenient for middle-of-the-night usage. Because the building is considered historical, Italian laws forbid changing anything to the outside of the building. What one does inside is up to personal whimsy.

The state-of-the-art country kitchen I had visualized Claudio preparing exquisite meals in turned out to be more like a cellar. It had a small cook stove in one corner and a sink in another.

However, I soon got used to the rhythm of country life. We didn't take our meals outside because there were too many flying insects and mosquitoes for that. Instead, Claudio prepared delicious foods and served them on the big round table in the kitchen. Sometimes we would carry our wine (and insect repellant) outside to enjoy the soft evening air. We did sit for hours talking about life, love and dreams. In the darkness I never noticed that we weren't in a lush flower garden. The stars were beautiful and the air smelled of growing things: ripening grapes, sweet grasses and the little pots of petunias.

One morning the sounds of laughing voices and barking dogs pulled me from sleep. Running to the window I saw a lively scene in the yard below. Vendemmia, the grape harvest, had begun.

I jumped into my clothes, pulled on a pair of Claudio's giant rubber boots and bounded out into the golden September sunshine. The grapes were luscious…deep blue/red and bulging with sweet juice. Claudio laughed as he popped grapes into my hungry mouth. The harvest was plentiful and by early afternoon the holding tanks were full and the picking stopped.

That night we dined on Uccelli, the wild birds. Claudio stuffed them with fragrant flowers, aromatic herbs and homemade sausage. I had always thought Italians were heartless to eat songbirds and I eyed them suspiciously. However, my squeamishness totally disappeared with the first taste. I almost hated to confess they were delicious, especially paired with the dark red wine from last year's harvest.

These birds are a delicacy in Tuscany and can be hunted only for a short period in September and I wanted to thank Piero. I waxed poetic in my basic Italian, about how tasty they were, how succulent, how juicy, how sweet the flesh and on and on. The more I talked the redder his face became.

Later, Claudio asked me what I said to Piero that caused such a reaction.

I replied that I was telling him how much I enjoyed his Uccello.

"Oh Jacqueline, you didn't say Uccello did you? Cara, the little birds are Uccelli – with an "i" on the end. Uccello is a Tuscan slang word for penis!"

Jacqueline Harmon Butler is an international award-winning writer and recipient of many press awards, including Italy's prestigious "Golden Linchetto Prize" for best foreign journalist. Her writing has tempted readers' palates with mouth-watering meals leaving them salivating for more. Her books include the 7th edition of the *Travel Writer's Handbook*.

Claudio's Farmhouse

Piero

Carol Canter

Carol Canter's award-winning travel articles have made the offbeat and exotic accessible to readers for decades, on topics like jazz clubs in Tokyo, barging in Burgundy, nursing in Cuba and biking in the Canadian Rockies. Some of her online work can be viewed at http://is.gd/52eoh.

Rainforest Symphony

An all-women's journey through the Amazon rainforest with three barefoot professors

The unedited version of this article was published in the anthology, *Travelers' Tales, A Woman's World*

"Para bailar la bamba
Para bailar la bamba
Se necessita una poca de gracia…."

How perfect it was: dancing to an old favorite song played by new friends: Moises on guitar, Segundo on spoons, Juan on metal flashlight and Jorge on Bar, concocting superb pisco sours deep in the Amazon rainforest. The homegrown band, our jungle guides by day, had come together this night to provide entertainment for a serendipitous celebration–the birthdays of two of 15 women brought together for a two-week experience in the Peruvian Amazon.

Juan Antolin, our multilingual Indian guide/storyteller/teacher/artist, presented the gifts: a calabasa gourd he had split open, cleaned and polished until smooth, then painstakingly carved for each celebrant: for Laura, 32, a bird we had seen that morning, the hoatzin, linked to the prehistoric archaeopteryx; for Jayne, 33, a pink freshwater dolphin, with which she had swum. Their names, the date and Juan's signature were engraved, making this a birthday souvenir they'd long cherish.

A diverse group we were—women aged 27 to 67, from East and West Coasts. We were a college professor, auto mechanic, social worker, chef, librarian, rancher, writer and several artists. Six were grandmothers, active and enthusiastic, who set an inspiring example of "aging." Several were avid birders; others had never hiked nor camped before!

Yet hike we all did, through the rainforest behind Carlos, Juan or Moises, our "barefoot professors." From them we learned not only to recognize countless medicinal and food plants, and bird and animal sounds, but to move quietly and efficiently with our senses open and hands touching nothing. On our first morning hike, Juan showed us a tree hosting millions of tangarana ants, whose bites are so painful they have been used to torture unfaithful spouses. We saw trees with sharp, black, sea urchin-like spines. Even after those two lessons deeply imprinted on our consciousness, it was difficult to break the habit of using hands for balance, as we walked trails sometimes narrow and muddy.

Yet the hiking was neither ominous nor difficult. We'd break into small groups according to how far we wanted to go: an hour or two, perhaps half a day. The pace was slow, the better to delight in a fleeting encounter with a neon blue morpho butterfly alighting on a trailside leaf or a bright red flowering bromeliad emerging from the forest of multitudinous greens. As we honed our microscopic vision, we tuned into the tiny world of the industrious leaf-cutting ants. Marching in columns with their flags of cut leaves, they cleared a path to the nest they were building, a mile away and as large as a garage!

This was the rainforest we'd all read so much about, fast disappearing in Brazil, and more slowly, if inexorably, here in Peru. To experience its wondrous fecundity with all our senses was the reason most of us had flown from Miami to Iquitos, overnighted in that once booming rubber capital, then made the dreamlike ten-hour journey upriver to a rustic lodge we'd call home for the next 12 days.

Our arrival at camp was illuminated by a full moon. It shone on the log pathways that led us up from the river, beneath African tulip, mango and guava trees, past the round, screened-in dining and neighboring hammock rooms, to our tambos. Each native-style, thatched-roofed cabin, built on stilts to accommodate the river's rise and fall, housed four in two semi-enclosed rooms. Single-mattress beds, atop wooden platforms, were enclosed in mosquito netting.

Dinner awaited us as it would every night with slight variation: moist, tender white fish straight from our Yarapa tributary or stewed chicken with rice or boiled potatoes, fried yucca (a staple of the region from the manioc plant), fried bananas, and the freshest salads of sliced cucumbers, beets and carrots dressed in lime juice. Twice, after successful fishing trips, we ate the piranha we caught—small, fried and defenseless; tastier was the dorado, and most succulent of all, the arapaima, known in the region as paiche, the Amazon's largest fish, weighing up to 400 pounds.

We began to know the lowland jungle that surrounded us in a variety of ways. When we explored its interior on foot, walking beneath the tree canopy, which deeply shaded and pleasantly cooled our steamy path, I felt like a tiny Alice in a wonderland of towering trees, muscular roots and nests the size of soccer balls. The liana vines that link the forest into a virtual maze were strong and sturdy enough for us to swing out our Tarzan fantasies. And when we were quiet and lucky, we watched the real jungle gymnastics of spider or howler monkeys. We learned survival skills: how to drink from the water vine that traps fresh rainwater in its spongy cells; how to build a tambo or a backpack with palm leaves; and how to recognize some of the jungle fruit, such as the aquaje palm that the natives use as a "female hormone." The taste of white liquid oozing out of a small machete-cut that Carlos etched in a tree was immediately identifiable as milk of magnesia.

More often the forest was a passing green wall lining the banks of our river highway, the Yarapa. This tributary branches from the mighty Amazon close to where it is formed from the merging headwaters of the Ucayali and Marañon Rivers. Daily we would pile into two simple, outboard-powered wooden boats for excursions—to neighboring villages, a lake to swim with pink river dolphins or the traihead of a hike to an early morning convocation of hundreds of brilliant, blue-and-gold macaws—each another step in piercing the mystery of the green wall. For we began to recognize the bare limbs of the kapok tree silhouetted against the sky; to search the upper branches of the cercropia trees for the three-toed sloth with its mystical Mona Lisa smile; to watch for a hanging orapendula nest or a tiger heron perched quietly in the early dawn light. Once, our boatman Segundo spotted a glistening yellow-and-grey, 15-foot anaconda coiled asleep on the riverbank and brought our boat just close enough!

Wherever we went, animal and bird watching became the focus, yet while the animals were elusive, we were always rewarded with the spectacle of brilliantly plumaged birds. Most common were the long, slender, yellow-billed herons that fluttered noisily from their riverside perch at the approach of our boat; the ring-and-belted kingfishers diving for fish; and the groups of parrots and parakeets that squawked back and forth across the river.

Carlos, masterful at identifying them by their calls, habits and habitats, guided our naked or binoculared eyes to just the right branch of the right tree, and to intimate encounters on the trail. One golden dawn, he led us to a sand bittern bathing in a marsh and three silver-beaked tanagers shaking themselves dry. His 70-year-old mother, a renowned healer, would buy their catch from passing fishermen and sell or trade her herbal medicines to the river dwellers (ribereños) scattered in small villages along the banks. Lithe and strong, the señora would disembark and scamper up the steep, often muddy riverbank to return with a basketful of food and bottles of mysterious potions: one to soothe our mosquito bites, others for ailments from fever to indigestion.

We may never use the healing or jungle survival skills learned in the Amazon, but life for most of us has changed. To inhabit, even for a moment, a world in which macaws and monkeys and morphos live wild and free is to affirm the majesty of life, even as we must be haunted by the specter of its destruction.

An artist in our group captured the Amazon's vitality in a painting that still links me back to those July days when life was stripped to the basics and clarity of thought and sensory awareness were at a peak. Her painting depicts the magic of nights we motored upriver, when we'd turn off the engine and drift for an hour, perhaps an eternity. Under a sky ablaze with more stars than we'd ever before seen, illuminating the river with their reflection, we would listen to the jungle symphony of tree frogs, howler monkeys and the plaintive cry of the ayaymama bird, and contemplate our own place in the universe.

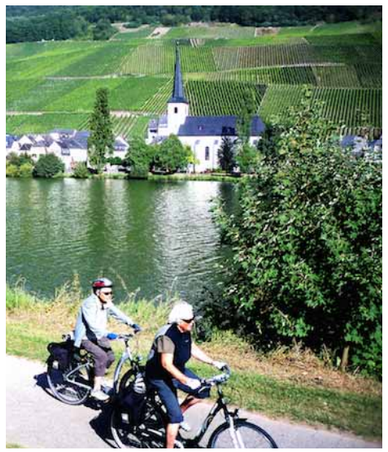
Bob Cooper

Wine Wonderland on Wheels

Germany's Mosel River Vineyard Valley is Best Explored by Bike

Originally published in Canada's
Ensemble Vacations magazine

The first hint of how deeply wine is rooted in the culture of the dozens of villages on the Saar and Mosel rivers came when I stepped off the train in Saarburg, Germany. I had arrived to pedal downstream on a solo, six-day bike ride on the rivers, and the first sounds I heard came from a trumpet-accordion duo (an odd pairing, I thought) who were belting out pop tunes. It was the last night of the town's weinfest, one of four I would encounter that week, and the local Rieslings being poured at 15 tasting tents were keeping it lively. White-haired weinguts (winemakers) were queued up at the bratwurst stands with their grandkids and I regretted only that I missed the Friday night fireworks and crowning of the wine queen.



While pedaling my upright "comfort" rental bike the rest of the week, I would come to expect in each town and village not only weinfests, but also cobblestone squares, 18th-Century houses with windowsill begonias, 16th-Century towering churches, 14th-Century castle ruins, and always, steep vineyards that occupied every spare hectare on the enclosing hills. Saarburg differed from the rest only for its bell foundry museum, a waterfall that cleaves the town square (I dined at an outdoor table above the falls) and a chairlift that soars to a mountaintop resort.

The Saar and Mosel cycle routes hug both sides of the two rivers near Germany's border with Luxembourg. I had a good map, bike-route signs were plentiful, the flood of cyclists on the path was constant and I needed only to follow the river to ensure I stayed on course. I frequently crossed the low bridges spanning the rivers, depending on which villages looked most intriguing. If you tire, you can hop a boat or the hourly regional train to skip a few kilometers, as I did once to shorten my longest planned segment.

While visiting Trier on Day Two, it was hard not to run into a Roman ruin, with three bathhouses, a bridge, a cathedral, a former palace, an amphitheatre and the iconic Porta Nigra gate all built two millennia ago. All are imposing, enthralling and within a 15-minute walking radius. Trier's residents are much younger than its buildings, as 20,000 university students keep the coffeehouse conversation humming on Hauptmarkt square. But the path beckons to smaller, quieter places that would counter the high energy of Trier like flipping binoculars to peer through the wrong end.

In Longuich I am encouraged at the visitor centre (there's one in every village) to see the 1360 castle, now a restaurant and guesthouse, and the restored Roman villa. Set in the vineyards, the reconstructed villa proves to be a perfect picnic spot and one of many treasures in the hills. On the Mosel you learn to look not only across the river, but skyward, to pick out castles, chapels and huge decorative clocks that cling to the steep, vineyard-cloaked slopes like Christmas ornaments.

That evening I visit Christoph Schneider-Kranz to see how a 10th-generation Mosel winemaker lives. He tells me about tending to the family vineyards alongside his father and grandfather before inheriting the business, which also involves fermenting, pressing, bottling and labeling Schneider-Kranz wines in five wine-pungent rooms below his home. "Most customers are friends or friends of friends, and some come to help bring in the harvest," he says. The harvest takes 20 to 50 times more time on steep slate slopes like his because they're too steep for machine harvesting, but the result is a prized Riesling rich in mineral content.

Later I met a second winemaker, Christof Schwaab, who owns one of the few Mosel wineries to offer guided tours and tastings each weekend. (Most Mosel vintners offer tastings only by appointment, although many towns have vinotheks that are open daily and let you taste a variety of local wines.) On Weingut Schwaab educational tours in Koblenz, you traipse through the vineyards before tasting wines in 150-year-old caves. "Winemaking is always a family

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business in the Mosel," he says, "but we have to become entrepreneurs to survive." Like Schneider-Kranz, Schwaab family winemaking dates to the 18th Century.

In Neumagen-Dhron, I take the self-guided walking tour of Roman, wine-themed art and touch a Roman wall that now holds up one side of a wine bar. But I must be roamin' myself, so off I pedal past wineries, biergartens and guesthouses, often right on the path. Mostly I am in nature, with wildflowers and riverbank flocks of swans in abundance.

For two days I had leapfrogged four Swiss septuagenarians—I biked faster but made more stops—before asking for their story. "We only bike for errands in Interlaken, but each summer we do a bike trip together," says Vreni Mueller, their (ahem) spokeswoman. "We like this one because it's flat—no mountains!" The longtime friends relish their annual girlfriend cycling getaway and were going just as far (25K to 50K) and as fast (15K per hour) each day as most of the multi-day cyclists I saw. The idea is to take it slow, take in the sights and take a bit of wine each night.

Next is Bernkastel-Kues with its majestically high Roman castle and visitor-packed village, a maze of Seventh Century cobblestone alleys now brimming with restaurants and specialty shops. Across the river is the Mosel Wine Museum and Vinothek, where you descend to a 15th-Century cellar for unlimited tastings of 130 wines for 15 Euros. After a mid-ride visit the next day to Kloster Machern, a former convent with a delightful toy, doll and icon museum, I brake in Traben-Trarbach—not for the incongruent Buddha Museum or wine festival's "partyband musik" concert, but to soak my sore muscles in the gurgling pools at Mosel Therme spa. It was just what I needed before hiking a segment of the popular Calmont Klettersteig trail, which zigzags across the steepest vineyard in Europe.

I cruise past two more wine festivals in the colorful villages of Ediger-Eller and Cochem—known for tall half-timbre houses and a Gothic castle, respectively—and admire Beilstein, nicknamed the "Sleeping Beauty" for its well-preserved historic buildings. A boiled trout caught in the Mosel feeds my body that night in Klotten, then it's on to the Roman city of Koblenz to feed my ego. The finish line awaits.

Thousands are enjoying free outdoor concerts when I arrive at Koblenz's famed German Corner, where the cool, clean Mosel gushes into the mighty Rhine like a fine Riesling poured into a wineglass. My odyssey has ended, but like the aftertaste of the wines I tasted all week, the sweet, satisfying flavors linger long afterward.

Award-winning travel writer and photographer Lee Daley contributes features about local and international travel destinations to a wide variety of publications, from in-flight magazines to lifestyle and travel periodicals. Her travel app "Sausalito to Pt Reyes Exploration Guide" is available in the iTunes app store.
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Pozos: Artists Breathe New Life Into Old Mining Town

Previously published at Epicurean-Traveler.com

While spending a week in San Miguel de Allende, a city in the Mexican highlands that I love, I heard stories of a nearby ghost town that has gained new footing as a haven for artists. My curiosity was piqued by local expats around town, mostly retired Americans now living in San Miguel, who told me that the former mining colony of Mineral de Pozos was being repopulated by a small number of Mexicans, Europeans and Americans drawn to the city's austere beauty, reasonable housing prices and serene, small-town atmosphere. I was intrigued.

Some quick research revealed that this newly minted mini-hotspot was once a rollicking melting pot of some 50,000 inhabitants, all involved in silver mining and smelting, an industry fueled initially by Jesuit ingenuity and Indian labor and later by European miners. When the minerals eventually played out—several gold and silver bonanzas occurred from roughly 1576 through the Mexican Revolution of 1910—the population dwindled, leaving behind abandoned haciendas, mine workings and a good-sized unfinished church. Today's population fluctuates between 1,000 and 4,000 people. I soon booked two nights at one of Pozos' three inns and arranged a car hire. Pozos was only a 35-mile drive away.

Clean mountain air accompanied the journey. At 7,500 feet above sea level, the town sits in the opening of a mountainous ridge. En route we passed clumps of huge old mesquite trees tucked into gently rolling hills. The sight of ruins draped in vines, along with long neglected centuries-old haciendas, in such a primal desert landscape evoked a sense of time and place reminiscent of Tuscany colored by a Mexican paintbrush. American artist Georgia O'Keefe would have been in her element.

Upon arrival in town, I wondered what to expect in the way of lodging at the recommended Posada de las Minas. Would I be spending the night in a ruin or a modern upstart out of place with Pozos' almost mystical persona? The posada sat at the top of a slight rise. Below it, the imposing dome of the historic San Pedro Church rose above the town plaza and my first wish was for a room with a view of the dome.

Entering the front door of the posada, I did a double take. Built in the courtyard style, a grand upper-level verandah, draped in bougainvillea and open to the sky above, looked down upon an al fresco dining area. Overhead a retractable roof provided shelter in case of inclement weather. Innkeeper Julie Winslow, looking like a contessa in a long skirt and white-lace ballerina blouse, greeted me warmly. The inn was quiet that afternoon and I had my choice of several rooms. Naturally I chose the one with a view of tiled roofs and the glorious pink colonnaded dome of Iglesia de San Pedro.

Julie told me that she and her husband, David, are Texas natives. Seven years ago they sold their home in San Miguel to relocate to Pozos. When they bought the property here, it was a stark ruin: a few stone arches on bare land. In three years, David's civil engineering background and Julie's self-taught architectural design skills have transformed the site into an inviting inn. On the lower level they have opened a bar and cantina with a wood-burning fireplace. One wall displays a hand-painted mural of the imagined town as a mining mecca. As I later discovered, the cantina has become a late-night gathering spot for the nexus of artists who are creating new lives in this old ghost town.

David turned out to be an enthusiastic guide to Pozos' mining history. At dawn the next day we set out in his truck and drove through fields of cacti and mesquite to the area's oldest mine, Santa Brigida. At the entrance to the complex, three stone pyramids rose up. These hornos, or ovens, built in the 16th century by Jesuit priests, once smelted the mine's ore. In the early morning mist, they stood like sentries, guarding the spirits and dreams of those who toiled here.

In a field opposite the hornos, an abandoned hacienda, white with rust-colored cornices, dominated the skyline. We wandered among the fields, climbing over crumbling stone walls past a watch tower fitted with rifle slits. Obviously security was a concern during the area's heyday but now the stillness only enhanced the beauty of the ruins. David repeatedly warned me to keep an eye out for open mine shafts. This is the one serious danger in the area. One must not explore the unprotected mines without a guide.

Heading back to the inn, I speculated on the morning's activity. I had just explored 400 years of history surrounded by otherworldly serenity with a complete absence of tourists. I had done this on foot after driving a few miles from a welcoming way station in a tiny city permeated with authenticity. Few places in the world offer visitors such luxury.

That evening an adventure of a different sort occurred during dinner at the posada. Entering the cantina I noticed a small group who had pulled several tables together. They were so friendly that, within minutes of sitting down, I was invited to join them. They turned out to be mostly locals, full- and part-time residents. Sitting next to me was the artist, Janice Freeman. She told me that she and her husband, renowned photographer Geoff Winningham, a professor at Rice University, live part of each year in Pozos where they have built a home equipped with a darkroom and art studio. Some of the group exchanged comments about their horseback riding treks in the surrounding mountains. Others talked about an upcoming weekend art walk.

The Pozos Artwalk benefits the Pozos Children's Project, an outreach program in which eight students from Rice University under the direction of Winningham and Freeman mentor school kids. This year they worked with 20 village children and guided them in the creation of 39 large-scale, black-and-white photographs and 20 color monotypes. Their work was presented as part of the annual "Open Studios" weekend.

Ten art galleries, typically open on weekends, cluster around Pozos' main square. The city has a strong tradition of indigenous music and the craftsmanship of handmade instruments. A few shops display and sell hand-carved, pre-Hispanic-style musical instruments and it's even possible to serendipitously hear an impromptu concert. This ancient tradition is memorialized each July during Pozos' annual Toltequidad Festival.

Two shops in town specialize in mineral specimens and geodes. After admiring an especially enticing crystal in one, I asked, "Quanto es, por favor?" Mistakenly translating the figure from pesos to dollars, I came up with a $15 asking price, which seemed fair. Only after stepping outside the tienda did I realize that I had actually paid about five dollars for a treasure that would have easily garnered 10 times as much at home.

When I left Pozos the next morning, I knew I wanted to return. I had discovered much but barely scratched the surface. While gold and silver once attracted thousands, the ruins left behind deep in the Sierra Gorda Mountains still draw seekers looking for a richer life story.

Erin Caslavka Deinzer

From living on Crete with her father to a summer stint as an exchange student in Ireland, traveling has been part of Erin's life. Rock climbing outside Flagstaff, swimming with manta rays in Hawaii and attending a Celtic music festival in Nova Scotia are some of the adventures she's pursued. www.erincaslavka.com.

Borders in the West Worth Visiting

Published in the *San Francisco Chronicle*

As humans, we have a deep need to delineate, so we rely on borders. They can be historical, geological, psychological, but mostly geographical. (What would be the point of an atlas without them?) While it's rare to have an actual dotted line on the ground, there are places where borders take on a unique position or special meaning. Here are five of them in the West—which doesn't really have a border.

1. Port of Entry, San Ysidro, San Diego County
Reportedly the busiest border crossing in the world is at the confluence of California's San Ysidro and Mexico's Tijuana. More than six million people cross the north/south border via car, bus or on foot each year. Driving from the United States into Mexico is a breeze, but leave plenty of time for the wait to get back on U.S. soil. 720 E. San Ysidro Blvd.; (619) 690-8800; **www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/toolbox/contacts/ports/ca/2504.xml**

2. State Line, Primm, Nev.
What a difference a state line makes: On one side gambling is pretty much card rooms and Lotto picks; on the other you can play the slots in the grocery store. Primm literally is a stone's throw from the California state line, and with three casinos willing to take your hard-earned cash (Primm Valley Resort, Whiskey Pete's and Buffalo Bill's), there's little need to venture farther into Nevada to get your game on. (702) 386-7867; **www.primmvalleyresorts.com**

3. Strait of Juan de Fuca, North Olympic Peninsula, Wash.
Defined as a channel by the U.S. Geological Survey, the strait extends eastward from the Pacific Ocean between Vancouver Island and the Olympic Peninsula in Washington state. Where the waters begin and end in each country might be a matter of maritime dispute, but orcas don't recognize borders. You can watch them swim from one country to the other during their migratory season. (360) 452-8552; **www.fhwa.dot.gov/byways/byways/13740**

4. Four Corners Monument, Navajo Nation
On Navajo tribal land where four states come together—Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico and Utah—there's a simple concrete marker that was laid in 1912 to commemorate the spot and redone in 2010 in granite and brass. In recent years, the exact location has been disputed because of developments in GPS technology, but for now, the states and the U.S. Supreme Court have all agreed that, legally, the monument is in the right spot. Six miles north of Teec Nos Pos, Ariz., take Four Corners Road off Highway 160 in New Mexico.
www.navajonationparks.org/htm/fourcorners.htm

5. Point Roberts, Wash.
The Oregon Treaty of 1846 followed the 49th parallel (which divided the Pacific Northwest). As a result, a chunk of land was sealed off at the southernmost tip of Canada and deeded to the United States. It probably seemed like no big deal at the time to annex a 1,200-hectare parcel jutting into Boundary Bay, but because the 1,300-person community of Point Roberts is actually on American soil, you now have to cross over two U.S.-Canada borders to get there from Washington state. **www.pointrobertstourism.com**

Release the Hounds!

Truffle Hunting in Eugene, OR

The first thing you'll discover is that it's much easier with a dog. Following Chloe and her owner, John Getz, into the mist-shrouded woods about 20 miles outside of Eugene, OR, you become keenly aware of how much the 30-pound yellow lab cares for her master versus the small, round, white fungus she's been trained to detect. Truffle hunting is a labor of love, but none more so than of a dog for its owner — and the tidbits of kibble she'll get as a reward for pointing him in the direction of edible buried treasure.

Chloe is a fairly recent inductee into the world of truffle-hunting, but some of the dogs that are out working today are old hands at this. Take Tom, a 12-year-old Lagotto Romagnolo and well-known veteran in the truffle world who in one season sniffed out 200 lbs. of black Perigord truffles. At $1,200-per-pound, it's no wonder Tom's owner, Jim Sanford, quips, "That's why I carry his bags when we travel."

According to The Food Encyclopedia, "The black truffle, Tuber melanosporum, was known by the Greeks and the Romans, who endorsed its medicinal and especially aphrodisiac attributes. Truffles were an Egyptian favorite, eaten with goose fat. But in the Middle Ages, they were thought to be manifestations of the devil."

Perhaps its the heady aroma they dispense with such careless abandon that first compelled us to consume a truffle. Enter those "aphrodisiac attributes" the ancients were so quick to deduce: As it turns out, a truffle's scent is similar to androstenol, the sex pheromone of boar saliva. Luring a romantically-inclined wild sow towards a mature truffle's lair is key to their existence. As the female roots around looking for the source of her desire, she finds a truffle. After consuming it she'll move on, making her way across the woods. As her body processes and then eliminates its waste, the spores from the truffle will get dispersed across the forest floor and —viola! — the truffle can then begin to propagate.

But using a pig — even a muzzled one — is a lot more difficult than it looks. For one thing, they're huge; for another, they're not exactly easy to crate up and take with you on a plane. Enter the truffle dog.

Unlike a pig, treats and praise are what tempt the dogs to dig for truffles, making them enthusiastic yet non-threatening partners in this culinary "paws-de-deux." It's no wonder well-trained truffle dogs can cost more than $10,000. Many hopeful truffle hunters are therefore willing to pay to enroll their dogs in training workshops to teach them the fundamentals in how to recognize the smell of a mature truffle, and subsequently lead their owner to it.

In 1999, Giancarlo Zigante and his dog Diana (assumably named after the Greek goddess Diana, the huntress) found one of the largest truffles on record: a 1.31-kilogram white unearthed in Croatia. Another Italian, Luciano Savini, and his dog Rocco found a white truffle weighing 1.5-kilograms in Pisa, which brought $330,000 at auction in 2007.

If you're lucky enough to know someone with acreage in the state of Oregon, one of a handful of places on the planet where truffles like to live, you'll most likely be able to find one of the six varieties of truffles that grow there if the soil, moisture levels and species of tree are just right. In that case, you can contact someone like Anne Seward who lives just outside of Portland and who — with her dog Cooper — will help you survey the land for a hidden lair.

But even if you're don't know any local landowners you can still forage with a four-legged companion.

Umami Truffle Dogs (which Chloe and John Getz are a part of) is a group of truffle-dog owners that have made themselves available for individual forays in-and-around Eugene. With four expert truffle dog teams available to take you out on private land, Umami is a reliable source for hound-hunted truffle experiences. And all the dogs will ask in return is a pat on the head, a "good dog" spoken aloud and another piece of kibble.

Contact Umami Truffle Dogs at:
www.umamitruffledogs.com
Contact Anne Seward via email at:
cooperthetruffledog@gmail.com

Ginger Dingus

Ginger Dingus has ridden the rails aboard luxury trains around the world. When not train-spotting, you'll find her cruising the high seas. She has traveled to all seven continents and written about her adventures for magazines, newspapers and online. thetrainlady@earthlink.net.

Rocky Mountain Highs

A version of this article appeared in
Northwest Prime Time

Yahoo! I'm soaring like an eagle over an alarmingly deep gorge in Canada's rugged Rocky Mountains, summoning the courage to flip upside-down on the zipline and let it all hang out. That night, I'm indulging my taste buds at a hip mountain bistro. All heads turn when Nitro Man magically freezes fresh cream into ice cream right beside my dinner table.

The next morning, I'm looking for black bears in the forest and snapping photos of cubs perched on tree limbs. For my grand finale, I dress in full leather gear and hop on a Harley. Just call me "Biker Chick."

Who says train travel is boring?

OK. All my adrenalin rushes didn't happen on the train. They did happen during a train trip, one linking western Canada's adventure destinations together the way a cruise ship links ports. You could call my three-day rail journey from Vancouver to Jasper a cruise on land.

The adventure began the moment my companion and I boarded the Rocky Mountaineer in North Vancouver, British Columbia, and traded fast-paced city life for the laid-back mountain resort of Whistler, site of the 2010 Winter Olympics. The transition via train took a mere three hours, traveling along one of the planet's most scenic stretches of railroad track. Edging along the shoreline of Howe Sound, a striking fjord flanked by fir-covered cliffs and splashed by tumbling waterfalls, it was obvious why this is called the Sea to Sky Climb.

Our train pulled into the spotless Whistler station around noon, leaving the afternoon free for a genuine Rocky Mountain high. It's amazing how different the forest and creeks look when you're dangling from a zipline. Ziptrek Ecotours' crisscrossing network of steel ziplines soars up to 200 feet above the canyon floor. We tested our resolve on the bunny wire before zipping down five progressively longer and higher cables. As a bonus, our guides gave us an informative nature tour and a look at the bobsled run built for the Olympics.

We celebrated our high-wire stunts with dinner and wine pairing at the Bearfoot Bistro. The foie gras flavored with genuine Canadian maple syrup was exquisite, but every head in the place turned when Nitro Man showed up. With the help of smoldering wisps of liquid nitrogen, he deftly turned liquid cream into vanilla ice cream.

Early the next morning, we returned to the station, this time to board the Rocky Mountaineer for its Rainforest to Gold Rush route. The two-day, 642-mile trip between Whistler and Jasper, Alberta, was first introduced to the train's lineup in 2006.

We kicked back in the GoldLeaf dome's comfy seats, sipped mimosas and watched the world roll by through seat-to-ceiling glass. Then the attendants, three charming young women, called us downstairs to breakfast. We feasted on scrambled eggs with smoked salmon and eggs Benedict. Lunch menus offered choices of aged Canadian top sirloin, tiger prawns or wild Pacific salmon, all made to order.

Only the spectacular Rockies scenery could top such dining delights. Throughout the Rainforest to Gold Rush route, views alternate between lakeside, riverfront, forest and mountain peaks. Long stretches of track run beside the fast-flowing Fraser River, named for the early 1800s explorer Simon Fraser. When the train rolls through the Rocky Mountain Trench, the Rockies jut up on one side, and the Columbia Mountains loom on the other.

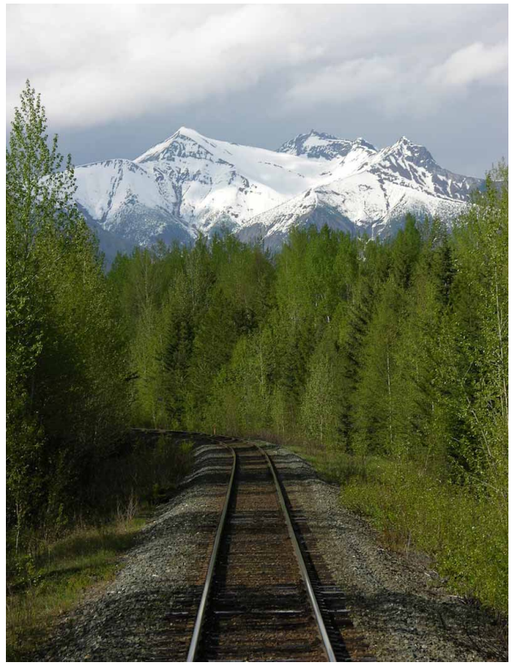
"Bear! On the left. In the tree." As if stunning vistas weren't enough, a British passenger started a game of "Who can spot the most bears?" She was shouting and pointing out the window as the train chugged past. I missed that furry critter, but by the end of the trip I had clearly seen five black bears on the ground, one cub in a tree and one grizzly.

Everyone saw the grizzly. It was calmly munching grain spilled on the tracks. The engineer stopped while we grabbed our cameras and raced to the open vestibules and rear platform for photos. Even the train attendants were caught up in the moment. "I'll remember that bear forever," one exclaimed.

As the Rocky Mountaineer neared Jasper National Park and the end of the line, we turned our attention to elk, farewell cocktails and snacks.

It was during our overnight stay at the historic Fairmont Jasper Park Lodge that we met Bowen Dolhan and Kevin Keldson of Jasper Motorcycle Tours. Owners of two gleaming Harleys, the two claim to have the first-ever chauffeured motorcycle sidecar tours. Little did we realize one of the best parts of the ride (Kevin drove) was dressing in full black leather gear—jacket, chaps, gloves, red bandana (for color) and helmet. Looking biker chic was a kick. Though it was a drizzly grey day in Jasper National Park, we got up close to big-eared mule deer and passed plenty of elk. I thought about the train and wondered if that hungry grizzly was back on the track.

Bear on the track in the Rocky Mountains



The Rocky Mountaineer rolls through Canada's Rockies

The Rocky Mountaineer rolls through Canada's majestic Rocky Mountains

Lee Foster

Lee Foster is an award-winning travel writer/photographer whose 250 worldwide articles—plus books, e-books, apps and photos—can be seen at www.fostertravel.com. In 2010 he received the BATW Rebecca Bruns Award, and his work has won eight Lowell Thomas Awards, including Travel Journalist of the Year.
Contact Lee at lee@fostertravel.com.

The Melancholy of Chile's Easter Island

Is Easter Island a Metaphor for Earth's Future?

Previously published on UniglobeTheTravelTimes.com and GreatWorldGetaways.com

A melancholic feeling arises on Easter Island when a traveler learns that the Stone Age people who lived here gradually destroyed themselves by incrementally degrading their environment.

They created remarkable monuments, the huge stone carvings at which a visitor marvels. Their tool was a simple hand ax. Archaeological scholars of Easter Island believe that the political and spiritual ambition of these people proved too great to sustain themselves on their small, isolated, mid-Pacific island.

The example is not lost on a modern-day observer. Easter Island is one of the most remote specks of land on Earth. Earth itself is merely a tiny habitable place in our immediate vast solar system. One wonders if the degradation of our environment on "island" Earth will eventually cause our destruction.

For the Easter Island people, the changes may have come gradually and may have been difficult to notice fully in a lifetime. After arriving sometime between the fifth and seventh centuries from the Marquesas or other Polynesian islands to the west, a remarkable journey of 2,500 miles, they built a sustainable society, living off the sweet potatoes, yams, taro, and chickens they brought, plus the fish and shellfish bounty in the ocean surrounding the island.

Gradually the concept arose that cutting huge sculptures from a volcanic mountain of compacted rocky ash was a pursuit with merit. The stone sculptures, called *moai*, were meant to represent the spirits of beloved ancestors. With a moai looking down on the village from its seaside position and with ancestral graves at its feet, a positive spirit or *mana* would flow into the village, resulting in protective and beneficial effects.

The island was divided politically into eight clan regions, and the moai were dragged to their individual destinations from the mountainside quarry on the east end.

About 300 of these enormous moai, some 30 feet in height, were created and positioned on *ahus* (stone platforms) from roughly the 10th to the 16th centuries, the period of cultural magnificence for Easter Island.

Then the social system began to collapse. Population numbers soared to burdensome heights. The largest trees on the island were cut to provide the log rollers, log sleds and log support structures for transporting the moai to coastal sites. Erosion of precious topsoil may have followed the deforestation. A huge amount of energy was diverted from practical pursuits to further the spiritual goal of constructing more stone statues. Possibly there was clan rivalry to build bigger and better moai.

Eventually, a period of internecine conflict broke out on the small, 10-by-15-square-mile island. In the warring period, the 1500s and 1600s, many of the moai on the island were toppled by rival clans seeking to intimidate and demoralize each other. The social system collapsed shortly before the era of European contact began. No further statues were carved or delivered.

One striking site to see is the mountainside quarry, Rano Raraku, where about 400 moai are lying today in various stages of completion. Some are ready to ship, standing upright and complete. Others are partially carved, still attached to their rocky birthplace. Some statues at the quarry are larger than any distributed around the island. One is more than 60 feet long, suggesting that the ambition of the designers may have overreached their capacity to deliver. The last shipment of a moai was probably in the 16th century.

The task of carving and transporting a moai must have been a Herculean feat. Some scholars believe they were moved upright, using only ropes and logs for support and as rollers. Large teams of men must have been required. Social cohesiveness would have been a prerequisite. The island terrain is highly uneven. If a statue toppled over while en route, it was abandoned because the locals believed that its mana (spirit) would have been destroyed in the fall at the moment when the carved head touched the earth.

Going to see the moai of Easter Island will provoke in a traveler a question that arises in other contexts of major human achievement, however arbitrary. Why and how did the Egyptians build the pyramids? Why and how did the Christians of medieval France construct the cathedral at Chartres? Why and how did the Chinese bury 7,000 terra-cotta warriors in the tomb of a certain emperor in Xian?

The Easter Island example of human vision is poignant because of the size of the stone carvings and the primitive tools available. The carvers had only stone tools of varying degrees of hardness, one to serve as the chisel and the other as the sculpted medium. They possessed only logs and ropes to move these monoliths relatively long distances over hilly ground to their designated resting places.

On one platform at Ahu Tahai there is a single, completely restored moai. This sculpture has a stone topknot of red rock, which came from a separate quarry, and has the white coral and black obsidian eyes with which most of the moai were believed to be adorned.

During the time of conflict, when the moai were desecrated by toppling and disfigurement, the eyes were stripped out, partly to diminish the mana of the statue.

Nearby is another platform with five partially restored moai. The entire grassy village site is striking because it is so complete. Uphill from the platforms, which are positioned adjacent to the sea, there are historic stone houses and stone chicken coops such as the islanders built. Chickens and their eggs, plus bananas, were considered the valuable currency of the classic period, 1000 to 1600 A.D.

Visit this site in the morning when the sun shines on the moai, which face inland toward the village they were meant to protect. Then return at sunset to savor the full power and beauty of the site as the sun drops into the ocean behind the monoliths.

The question persists in the mind of a visitor to Easter Island: Will Planet Earth be a future Easter Island? If we destroy our environment, perhaps by overpopulation and a depletion of our resources, not to mention our contribution to global warming, who will save us? Our earthly monuments might indeed appear dazzling and perplexing for a future, archaeology-minded explorer, whose life form, appearance and place of origin would undoubtedly be a shock for us to imagine. A melancholic feeling sinks in as today's Easter Island traveler internalizes this metaphoric possibility.

David Greitzer

David Greitzer has been documenting the world "as he sees it, one split-second at a time," combining his wanderlust and photography for over three decades—and claims he's just getting started.
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Escargot To Go – Take and bake escargot sold by the kilo in an open-air market in Paris.

Penny Whistle – This tin whistler provides traditional Celtic music to the tourists at the Cliffs of Moher.

Calving Glacier – Alaska's Hubbard Glacier on a sunny day is showing the effects of global warming as it calves chunks of ice the size of school buses.

Earth's Pimple — Arenal Volcano, about 90 km northwest of San Jose, Costa Rica, has been active since a 1968 eruption re-awakened it after centuries of dormancy.

Carolyn Hansen

Carolyn Hansen is the coauthor of PowerHiking San Francisco (in its third edition), PowerHiking Paris (in its second edition), PowerHiking London, PowerHiking New York City and PowerHiking Seattle. She is also the photographer for the books; publishes blogs and photos at www.powerhiking.wordpress.com; and co-owns PowerHiking Ltd.

Lands End

This is a chapter from the book
PowerHiking San Francisco

The city of San Francisco is on the tip of a peninsula, surrounded on three sides by water. To the east of the city is San Francisco Bay, to the north is the entrance to the bay through the narrows called the Golden Gate, and beyond, the Marin Headlands. To the west is the vast Pacific Ocean. At the far northwest tip of the peninsula is Lands End, with precipitous cliffs and treacherous rocks where seals and shorebirds thrive, and the magnificent view takes in the fabled shores of the Marin Headlands, rumored to be the landing place of Sir Francis Drake in 1589. From Lands End on a clear day, you can see the Farallon Islands, 27 miles out to sea, breeding ground for seals and home to great white sharks. As wild and adventurous as it seems, you can still walk along a very pleasant trail with wildflowers, stunning views of the Golden Gate, hidden beaches, and Monterey pine and eucalyptus forests. You might even hear or see a seal as the fresh ocean breezes make it a delightful PowerHike.

The PowerHike begins at the California Palace of the Legion of Honor, a Fine Arts museum, located in Lincoln Park, next to San Francisco's most beautiful public golf courses. The California Palace of the Legion of Honor is a 3/4-scale adaptation of the Legion of Honor in Paris, and was commissioned by the wealthy San Francisco Spreckels family to commemorate the California soldiers who died in World War I. It is Beaux Arts architecture, with Auguste Rodin's sculpture, The Thinker, in the courtyard. The interior of the museum is beautiful as well, with a permanent collection of mostly French paintings and decorative arts, and a significant Rodin Collection. There is an attractive café, and an irresistible bookstore as well. Just outside the museum is the Holocaust Monument in honor of victims of the Nazi Holocaust. Ponder the monument and the beautiful city views, as well as the period lampposts the overlook has to offer. Walk out to your left and down the road bordering the water side of Lincoln Park Municipal Golf Course to the trailhead that indicates the beginning of the Lands End Coastal Trail. You will find the trail is very well marked along the way. The trail is only 1.5 miles, mostly level with a few stairs. It is best to stay on the trail and not attempt to descend to the beaches or venture out to the edge to take photos. The ground can be unstable and crumble, and the surf below is dangerous. There is a very strong tidal current out from the Golden Gate and the water is quite cold. The views from the trail are stunning, and there are many opportunities along the way for unobstructed photos. The trail is wide because at the beginning of the 20th century it featured a train track that took bathers down to the Sutro Baths, a significant attraction in San Francisco history. A staircase at Mile Rock leads down to a beautiful, secluded beach. Mile Rock marks a buoy that warns ships of dangerous rocks and, at times, shipwrecks are visible.

As you approach Lands End, you can follow the trail to the right, which leads down to the remains of the once-famous Sutro Baths. The Sutro Baths had both fresh and salt water pools enclosed by a soaring glass structure—very popular with San Franciscans of the early 1800s. The baths were closed in the 1960s. Today, only the weathered and disintegrating ruins of the pools remain. The salt water pools were filled from the ocean tide which still laps over the site. You are now standing at Lands End, where the rocky shores were so dangerous that many ships entering the Bay foundered and sank. Rescue teams were called upon to try and save the passengers and crews, using ropes and pulleys to drag them to safety. At low tide you can still see the masts of some wrecks.

Just above the baths is the famed Cliff House, originally built in 1863. Inside is an excellent restaurant, Sutro's, designed to resemble the Sutro Baths and featuring organic California cuisine. The Bistro offers both casual and formal dining, with views that take in the magnificent shoreline of Marin County to the north, the long white sandy Ocean Beach stretching four miles to the south and the unending Pacific Ocean to the west. Reservations for Sutro's are necessary, but the bar area is available without reservation. Hint: Sit at the bar and order from the appetizers–a great sampling of fresh, local San Francisco cuisine! Take time to look at the historical pictures on the walls, too, so that you can truly appreciate the San Francisco of old, and visit the gift shop. If you want to dip your toes in the Pacific Ocean, walk downhill and step out onto Ocean Beach. Be watchful of children and those unused to surf. Remember to never turn your back on the water. There are "sneaker waves" that can catch the unaware. On a clear day you can see the hang gliders from the Fort Funston bluffs, four miles down the beach.

Walk up Point Lobos Boulevard from the Cliff House to Camino Del Mar. Cross the street and continue your PowerHike into Sutro Heights Park. Enter the park along the broad, tree-lined promenade between the two lion sculptures which once guarded the entrance to the estate of Adolph Sutro. Sutro was a mining magnate in early San Francisco who also served as mayor of the city and built Sutro Baths and the original Cliff House. The park, with its ruins and formal gardens, was his creation and the location of his mansion. His home on the property was destroyed, but the beautiful setting and gardens remain. Check out the view of the city from the overlook; Golden Gate Park is just to the south.

Cross back to Lands End Lookout, an intriguing shop and info center, and to the Lands End trailhead and scenic view, and enjoy the walk back toward the Golden Gate Bridge. You will notice different views and natural elements as you walk in the reverse direction. Wildlife and wildflowers abound along the trail, but do not disturb them. Be cautious of poison oak as well. A red, shiny, three-pronged leaf, it can cause an uncomfortable, itchy rash if touched. Follow the trail back to where you started. You can use your admission ticket to go back into the museum bookstore for unique gifts and mementos. Today you have immersed yourself in San Francisco culture, nature, history, food and beauty—a perfect PowerHike!

Georgia Hesse

Coasting: Here Today, Gone to Morro

Originally appeared in the
Nob Hill Gazette

A red sun shimmers into the sea beyond the cozy lounge windows of the Inn at Morro Bay in the mythical land of California. Sitting at the bar, you squint 24 million years back into space and time. On the near horizon humps Morro Rock, a stony sentinel of rhyolite rising 576 feet out of the darkening Pacific. It turns purple as you watch.

Shrink the scene into a shorter span. About 500 years ago, Chumash Indians paddled their skin cayucos out from small villages along the beach to greet the schooners of explorers approaching from Spain, including that of Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo in 1542. Was it he who named the Rock? Usually he is credited with that, although there's no evidence he came ashore at this point.

The Chumash could not have guessed it was the beginning of their last hurrah along this compelling coast.

Fast forward: On September 8, 245 autumns ago, soldiers led by Gaspar de Portolá camped right over there on the wave-sculpted sand dunes where tonight children scamper.

Historical dramas play themselves out along California's coastal beaches and cliffs wherever your gaze falls, especially when a good companion and a glass of fine wine are at hand, as on this evanescent evening.

Morro Rock is a volcanic plug, a mass of molten magma that rose in the throat of a volcano during the Miocene epoch when the San Andreas Fault was stretching northwest. Over ages, erosion stripped ash and lava away, leaving only the solid core. Despite the fact that six similar outcrops stepping inland toward Highway One have been named (probably by tourism officials) the Seven Sisters, geologists say the Rock itself marks the western end of a march of 14 such morros aligned from today's town to and beyond San Luis Obispo and U.S. 101.

It's not easy to see all these plugs as you travel through traffic, but you probably will spot Black Hill, Hollister Peak and Bishop Peak, and perhaps sense the presence of several more. As stated in Roadside Geology of Northern and Central California: "Watch southwest of the highway within a few miles of Morro Rock for the rocky summits and grassy lower slopes of the others."

Morro in Spanish means "small, crown-shaped hill," which these stony upthrusts aren't. To add to the semantic confusion, a small sylvan area nearby is dubbed El Moro (with only one "r") Elfin Forest. This could be a typographical error; it isn't. It means "Moor." Who is liable for such skimble-skambles? Maybe elves.

And now we leave the bar of the Inn, but only after serious brooding, bound directly for its newly-named Sixty restaurant. Insert to come here about mid-July when the restaurant reopens.

The census of 2000 gave the town a population of 10,350 citizens. Is it they or their visitors who resemble automated action figures? Look. There they go: golfing, hiking, surfing, kayaking, yachting, bicycling, horseback riding, snorkeling. A few less compulsive souls stroll along the Embarcadero or blink through binoculars at the peregrine falcons that nest on the Rock reserved for them.

A local slogan, "Discover Your Better Nature," is apt, if a bit too cute. Morro Bay State Park shelters within 2,700 acres the M.B. Ecological Reserve, the M.B. Museum of Natural History, the Heron Rookery Natural Preserve, a marina and restaurant, a picnic area and campground, and trails winding into the watersheds that feed the estuary. It's an easy amble from the Inn across Main Street/State Park Road to the rolling 18-hole M.B. Golf Course; every tee has a view of the sea.

To contemplate the curiosities in this corner of the compelling coast, take your time. Beauty rewards the beholder.

Heron and Cormorant Rookery. From the grounds of the Inn or from a bayside cluster of eucalyptus trees, you can stroll to this site to spy upon great blue herons and the great and snowy egrets as you catch courtship rituals, note nesting habits, and in spring, admire the adult birds as they care for their open-mouthed offspring."

Museum of Natural History. This only such museum in the State Park system lures grownups and their often alarmingly enthusiastic children to nature videos, wildlife and American Indian displays, lectures, and themed walkways. Build a sand dune, operate the hydrologic cycle, dig into the food pit. Afterward, you might laze an hour or so at the marina's Bayside Café nearby.

Los Osos State Reserve. For 800-some years—since the Magna Carta was signed at Runnymede and Marco Polo set out from Venice for Asia—a forest of stunted, moss-draped oaks, twisting like bad dreams, has occupied an ancient dunescape just five miles east of Morro Bay and eight miles west of San Luis Obispo. The word osos has nothing to do with oaks but a lot to do with bears. On September 3, 1769, Portola's hungry soldiers came upon an unwary bear near their camp, killed and ate him. They named the place La Cañada de los Osos, glen of the bears. Be watchful in this 90-acre woodland of warped trees and gnarly scrub. Someone (or something) may be gaining on you.

El Moro Elfin Forest. In Los Osos, a wooden walkway wanders for a mile through pigmy oaks, manzanitas, black cottonwoods, giant horsetails and stinging nettles, where towhees and flycatchers play. Contemplate the 200 species of plants and 110 kinds of birds. You might even surprise a striped skunk, or a dusky-footed wood rat, or an erkling escaped from Harry Potter.

Montaña de Oro State Park. The 8,000-acre "Mountain of Gold" State Park, seven miles south of Los Osos on Pecho Road, was named not for a mining site but in honor of the golden wildflowers that bloom in spring. It is a quiet, soothing space studded by 1,347-foot Valencia Peak and respected by naturalists, backpackers, mountain bikers, equestrians and convertible drivers who like solitude. (A note in the visitors' book at park headquarters at the old Spooner Ranch House reads: "Get out! Stay away, you noisy riffraff!")

The rock in the park is Monterey shale, mudstone encrusted with forms of once-living organisms and deposited on the floor of an ancient sea. Lo! The Pacific Plate once ground against the North American Plate and up popped Montaña de Oro (not complete with campers).

Getting to Morro Bay is at least half the fun. Coasting down Highway One from San Francisco or nosing north from Los Angeles will assure a pilgrimage sans pareil. That's another story.

Photos courtesy of Morro Bay Tourism Bureau

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Nikki Goth Itoi

For more than a decade, Nikki Goth Itoi has explored Baja California by land and sea, with extended stays on both the Pacific and Gulf coasts. A native of New York State, Nikki is also the author of Moon Hudson River Valley. She lives in Northern California with her husband and their two sons. nikkigothitoi@gmail.com

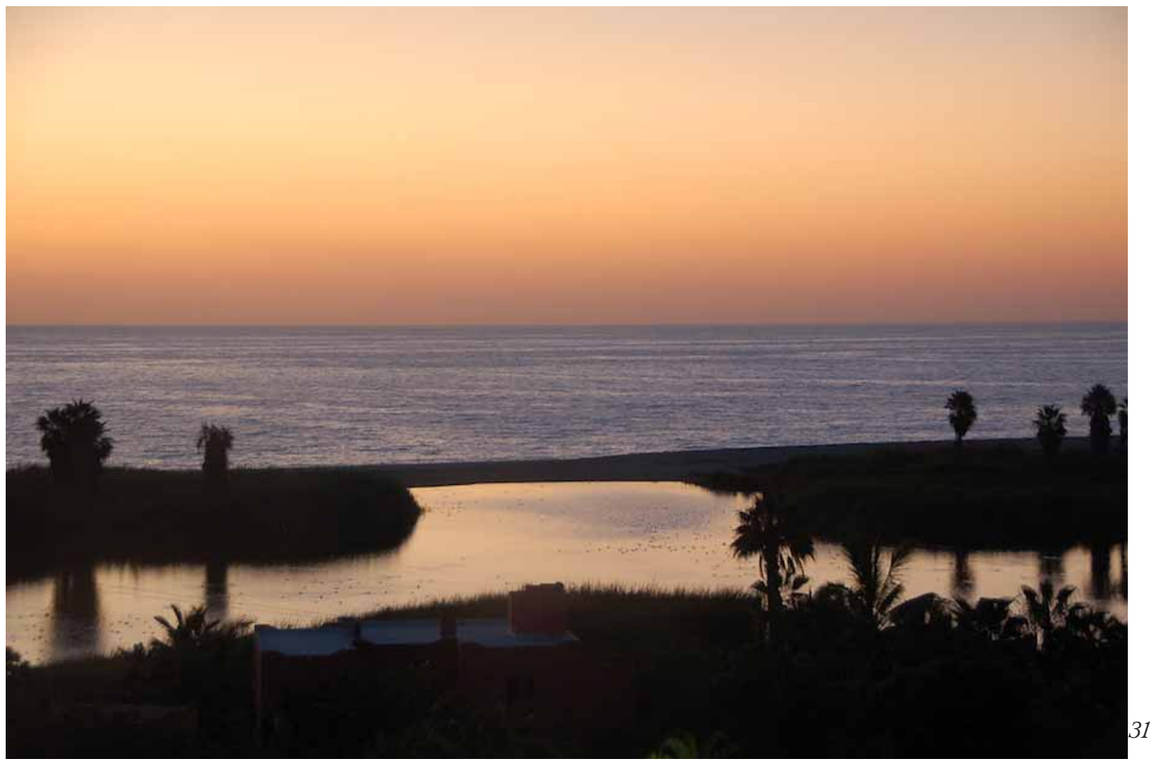
Snorkel Sign, Cabo Pulmo
Published in Moon Los Cabos 9th Ed.

Statue on the Malecón in La Paz
Published in Moon Los Cabos 9th Ed.

Stand-Up Paddleboarder in La Ventana
Published in Moon Los Cabos 9th Ed.

Spinner dolphin in the Sea of Cortez Published in *Moon Los Cabos* 9th Ed.

Sunset in La Paz Published in *Moon Los Cabos* 9th Ed.



Ann Jackson
and Don Jackson

The Jacksons, who use numerous pen names, have published hundreds of travel articles since 1985. Ann handles photography and research; Don writes and is travel editor for *Los Gatos, San Joaquin, Lavish Living* (Sacramento) and *Valley Lifestyles* (Greater Phoenix) magazines. Don has been an advisor/board member for the International Food, Wine & Travel Writers Association for 10 years.

Boston: Loving Liberty After Our Two Nights in Jail!

Versions of this article have appeared in *Entrée* travel newsletter, *San Joaquin Magazine*, two Silicon Valley newspapers and three other media outlets

A New England visit a while back reminded us that much of our country's early history has a direct connection to the Boston area. It offers such a plethora of historical sites and experiences that many historians consider it the true birthplace of our country and the freedoms we all enjoy today. We think Boston should be on most everyone's bucket list, especially for those history buffs. But before we go too much further, it's probably best to clear the air about that provocative title concerning our own freedom and our two nights in confinement. To keep our reputation intact, we need to emphasize there were no fingerprints, mug shots, bail, attorneys hired or trial involved. We were not implicated in any felony or misdemeanor crime, nor were we actually arrested, booked or indicted. As Paul Harvey used to say: "Here's the rest of the story!"

Back in 1851, Boston's city fathers built the Charles Street Jail at the foot of Beacon Hill and it became one of the most well-known historic landmarks of the era. Unfortunately it became overcrowded, outdated and in reprehensible disrepair, so it was closed in 1973 after housing some of Boston's most notorious criminals. After many years of discussions as to its fate and major efforts to secure governmental approvals, a local visionary developer opened this classic architectural gem as the luxurious Liberty Hotel in 2008. And quite by chance, as we planned our trip, we were "booked" into the Liberty without knowing its history and became two of its temporary inmates.

Of course, after checking in and hearing the story, we quickly realized those stunning accommodations must certainly be the finest found in any U.S. lockdown. With a multi-million dollar budget and masterful engineering and architecture, most of the original, iconic granite stone structure was retained. Interior designer genius has incorporated all the facilities and amenities necessary at a world-class hotel while creating a dazzling ambience throughout the public areas. Twenty tastefully decorated guest accommodations are within former jail cells and an additional 280 dramatic guest rooms and suites have been built in an adjoining 16-story tower with panoramic city views. Located just a footbridge away from the Charles River and its six-mile-long Esplanade are major plusses to the location. And a major touch of whimsy prevails: the original jail houses a trendy bar in the former drunk tank titled Alibi; their signature restaurant has been humorously called Clink where original jail cells and iron bars create cozy alcoves for dining; their Catwalk Bar is a hotel-guest-only retreat housed on the original jail's catwalk circling the stunning rotunda below; The Yard is a chic outdoor venue presumably representing the jail's former exercise yard; and of course, the Liberty Hotel moniker was a no-brainer whimsical choice. And don't you think those granite walls would have some very interesting tales to pass along?

During dinner in the Clink our first night, we noticed we were seated next to a rather loud table of diners so we asked to be moved. We later discovered that Mick Jagger, Eva Mendes, Meg Ryan and other celebrities were in the festive group. We may never ask to change tables again! The food offerings in Clink were first-rate, even though the celebrity table appeared to receive the best service. No one should be too surprised at that! The Liberty—under Starwood Hotel's Luxury Collection banner—has become one of the East Coast's most popular and talked about premier lodging destinations. And why not? Where else can you spend a couple of nights in jail and joke about it later with friends and family, yet maintain a clean criminal record?

Believe us when we say we've loved fooling a few folks recently about the jail time, stretching out the story as much as possible and extending the guessing games as to why we were in jail to begin with. And why is it that most everyone believes it was the male partner of our team who did something to warrant that jail time? For full details on "cell" rates, special packages, meeting facilities, etc., go to www.libertyhotel.com.

WHAT TO SEE AND DO: We strongly encourage readers to take the Beantown Trolley City Tour, offering the 'on and off' feature at numerous historic stops. The price includes a separate Harbor Tour. www.brushhilltours.com. Any avid fan of TV shows like "Cheers," "Boston Legal" and "Ally McBeal ," or movies such as "Good Will Hunting," "The Departed," "Mystic River," "The Town," "Legally Blonde" and "Fever Pitch" should enjoy the behind-the-scenes details and gossip offered by Boston Movie Tours. Hundreds of films and shows have been shot in Boston. www.bostonmovietours.net. Other recommended attractions and activities not included on the tours: Walk Beacon Hill, especially for visitors who enjoy antique shopping or viewing classic homes protected by a strict architectural commission; stroll the 2.5-mile Freedom Trail and relive the history of the American Revolution; visit Skywalk Observatory at the top of the Prudential Center for awesome 360-degree panoramic vistas of the Boston area. www.prudentialcenter.com. Wearing our sports writers' hats, we encourage a tour of Boston Red Sox's iconic Fenway Park, where we experienced the absolute best major sports venue insider tour ever by a young guide who had us rolling in laughter. Better yet, after the tour, attend a game with some of the country's most avid baseball fans in one of our country's most famous venues. www.redsox.mlb.com. Sports junkies will love a tour of the Sports Museum in TD Gardens, home to the NBA's Celtics and NHL's Bruins. This museum covers all of Boston's sports history to back up its claim as America's greatest sports city. And justifiably so! No other city can boast major championships in all four major pro sports in the last few years. Love 'em or hate 'em, the Celtics, Bruins, Patriots (NFL) and Red Sox (MLB) have had unprecedented success and unmatched fan support. www.sportsmuseum.org. Naturally you shouldn't visit Boston without enjoying a lobster dinner and plenty of delectable New England clam chowder. We both agreed that Legal Sea Foods Restaurant ("if it's not fresh it isn't legal") served us the best of both during our stay. www.legalseafoods.com. We also enjoyed seeing the hysterical "Shear Madness," the longest continuously running non-musical play in American theater history, going strong since 1980. We've also seen the show in Washington, D.C., and San Francisco and still can't stop laughing at the ever-changing twists and turns with ongoing changes in script, plots and crowd-involved endings. www.shearmadness.com.

Our number one tip on Boston: You don't need a car! Even Bostonians concur. It's a great walking city, taxis are reasonable and the subway system was one of the best we've experienced in years. That's true even if you venture just across the river to tour the Harvard and MIT campuses in the delightful town of Cambridge. Another tip: Boston hotels, like many major cities, can be very expensive, so if you're on any type of budget, do some research to arrange a trip that satisfies your budget. Visit in the off season, for example, when there are no major conventions in town. Also, book early as rates definitely climb as room availability decreases. And for that ultimate "booking" you can talk about for years, try locking down a "cell" at The Liberty!

For complete information on Boston lodging, dining, attractions, events, etc.: www.BostonUSA.com.

Farmhouse in Lillehammer, Norway

Photo: Ann Jackson

Don Jackson
and Ann Jackson

The Jacksons, who use numerous pen names, have published hundreds of travel articles since 1985. Ann handles photography and research; Don writes and is travel editor for *Los Gatos, San Joaquin, Lavish Living* (Sacramento) and *Valley Lifestyles* (Greater Phoenix) magazines. Don has been an advisor/board member for the International Food, Wine & Travel Writers Association for 10 years.

Big Sur
Big Moments! Big Vistas!
Big Memories!

Previously published in
Los Gatos and *San Joaquin* magazines

There are certain places on this earth that provide such special instances of memorable visuals and personal experiences, they remain forever etched in your remembrance vault. Big Sur is just such a place. Driving down the winding, cliff-side engineering marvel of Highway 1, south of Carmel, provides some of the most dazzling and rugged coastline anywhere. It's an area of stark contrasts: barren, rocky sea cliffs lie next to flora-filled wilderness; jetsetters, artists, writers, Bohemians and hippies are frequent visitors and residents; five-star, ultra-luxurious resorts are practically next door to rustic campgrounds; high-priced art competes with tie-dyed T-shirts for the most sales; diverse weather often provides cold, foggy mornings that turn into clear, warm afternoons. All of these contrasts are the essence of Big Sur, where diversity, serenity and spectacular vistas govern!

What to do and see: On the way south, be sure to stop at Bixby Bridge and Hurricane Point for panoramic visions. Soon thereafter a number of premier sites await. At the top of our list is the short walk to Pfeiffer Beach in Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park, where nature-tunneled, rocky outcroppings are framed by the purple-hued sand. When light illuminates the tunnels it's a foremost Nikon moment. This U.S Forest Service beach is so popular and important to locals that no highway signage exists to help with directions. We understand that past signs have mysteriously disappeared at night. Be persistent. Ask directions. You'll find it!

Other hikes to consider within the state park include the two trails through regal coastal redwoods to 60-foot-high Pfeiffer Falls and Valley View outlook. Be sure to keep an eye peeled for soaring California Condors, recently reintroduced to the region. Andrew Molera State Park has a two-mile loop path to its usually blustery beach where the Big Sur River enters the sea and driftwood shelters shield visitors from the wind. It's often a contrast to tranquil Pfeiffer Beach. For more strenuous hikes/back-packing/camping information: www.parks.ca.gov. For guided hikes, be sure to consider the highly regarded Big Sur Guides, headed by the knowledgeable Stephen Copeland. www.bigsurguides.com. Opting for a horseback trail ride to Molera Beach and return is an equestrian lover's opportunity. www.molerahorsebacktours.com. Drop into the funky Henry Miller Library (he's the famous, yet controversial author of Tropic of Cancer) for an event, concert or movie, or to browse book archives of Miller, Kerouac and other celebrated writers. www.henrymiller.org. Try scheduling a visit to Esalen, the eminent alternative education center, featuring a stunning coastal setting (don't miss the waterfall at the beach access), clothing-optional hot springs and an amazing variety of workshops. www.esalen.org. Tour Point Sur Lighthouse but allow a couple of hours for a moderately tough uphill climb, tour and return walk. www.pointsur.org. Another favorite Big Sur pastime: "Do nothing"! One local mantra is this: "Just sit back, enjoy the quietude and pretend you're reading a book."

Where to stay and dine: There are two highly regarded upscale resorts in the area, Ventana Inn and Post Ranch. We haven't experienced the Ranch but our stay at Ventana was so extraordinary, it's become one of our premier California lodging recommendations. Since the late Eighties we've heard from friends proclaiming the marvelous virtues of Ventana and it more than lived up to the hype! An exceptionally friendly and professional staff, their stylishly decorated accommodations (most with wood-burning fireplaces, some with ocean views), an ever-present serene atmosphere, and the glorious woodsy hillside setting are hallmarks. Sumptuous breakfasts, evening wine/appetizer receptions, high-speed internet, yoga, Tai Chi and Pilates classes and daily guided hikes are welcome complimentary offerings. Other first-rate amenities include their unique dual Japanese baths located near two beautiful swimming pools (one is clothing optional). Our evening dinner at the Restaurant at Ventana was a wonderful culinary experience, and on a warm clear day, be sure to take lunch on their outdoor patio overlooking the Pacific coastline. If you're into luxuriating renewal therapies, the Spa at Ventana awaits to fulfill expectations. www.ventanainn.com. Because children under 18 are not allowed at Ventana, we're pleased to also recommend the Big Sur Lodge, located at the entrance to Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park. Cottage-like accommodations were tastefully refurbished and the setting is perfect for families. Kids will love the seasonally heated pool, nearby soccer and softball fields, and many hiking possibilities. Junior Ranger and campfire programs are also offered. A family-friendly restaurant serving tasty comfort food, espresso café/ice cream parlor and general store are all on property. Major perk: lodge guests have free admission to all local state parks. www.bigsurlodge.com. No trip to Big Sur should be without a dining experience at Nepenthe, where a spectacular cliffside setting and fine vittles has been wowing patrons since 1949. www.nepenthebigsur.com. Yet another popular dining spot is the laid-back Big Sur Bakery and Restaurant, where creative dinner presentations are not surprising when you realize that two Culinary Institute of America grads are at the helm. www.bigsurbakery.com

Where to Shop: Because there is no downtown Big Sur, shopping is minimal and spread out. Not to miss: Phoenix at Nepenthe, where the distinctive variety should intrigue most shoppers. www.phoenixshopbigsur.com. Local Color, in the Village Shops near Big Sur River Inn, offers locally crafted gifts and art. www.bigsurlocalcolor.com. Gallery at Ventana presents high-end artwork and jewelry, also by local artists. www.ventanainn.com.

Whether it's your first visit or an annual return, we confidently SURmise that you'll consider Big Sur a little bit of paradise. For all things Big Sur: www.bigsurcalifornia.org.

Robert Kaufman

Robert Kaufman (www.rkaufmanphoto.com) is an internationally published photographer and travel writer with an observant eye and insightful journalistic style that is evident in the subjects he embraces. From his home in Marin County, Robert is always ready to embark on the next adventure life brings his way.

Gourmet Golf Tour

Originally published in *Golf Getaways* magazine

Considering it was the cocktail hour in Champagne, France, I had no problem justifying a sip of the bubbly some 5,682 miles away, near the edge of the Pacific at 8 a.m. on the California coast.

It's not my normal wake-up beverage but, after all, this was not just any golf course. I stood adjacent to Pebble Beach's famed first tee box, fulfilling my obligation—along with a slew of new friends—to toast the start of a four-day gourmet orgy.

After juicing my chops and nibbling my way through the breakfast spread, it was tee time for an 18-course, multidimensional feast and the kickoff to an overindulging, belt-loosening weekend of culinary activities at the 6th annual Pebble Beach Food & Wine extravaganza.

Over the past 25 years, I've strolled Monterey peninsula fairways during professional tournaments watching many of the greatest names in golf. But that pales in comparison to being with clubs in hand playing in the Celebrity Chef & Winemaker Golf Tournament, stopping at the Driscoll's fruit stand next to the 18th hole cart-park to pick up a bowl of fresh berries and then prancing over to the sea wall-bearing tee box to belt my first drive of the day at what many consider the most famous home hole in golf.

Had I the honor of starting my round with a far less genteel tee shot at, say, golf's most famous 7th hole—a downhill, cliffhanger par 3—I would have been granted the choice of spiked coffee drinks provided at the ocean-viewing tent hosted by The Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas. An opening round tee shot at the 5th tee box would have earned me a tummy-full of mouthwatering oysters or fresh tuna jetted overnight from Asia. Of course, I can still taste the mini-pulled pork sandwiches being served along the 9th fairway.

Eventually, I took advantage of all the nutritious pit stops, but seriously, is eating, drinking and being merry any way to play golf at Pebble Beach? Well, this was a weekend culinary celebration and it wasn't the U.S. Open, so can you spell a-b-s-o-l-u-t-e-l-y?

It's no secret that synergies between food, libations and golf are embedded into the game's culture and as inseparable as tailgating and football, but when these ingredients are incorporated into one stellar event with legendary food and wine talent cooking and pouring nonstop throughout the weekend at a world-class resort, it is the Super Bowl of 19th holes!

Food and wine events at chic locales are nothing new. The Scottsdale Culinary Festival has been going strong since 1978. The Food and Wine Classic in Aspen is 32 years running, South Beach has been hosting theirs for 13 years, and other popular foodie towns such as Las Vegas, Austin and New Orleans have jumped on the epicurean festival bandwagon. The list goes on.

Recognizing the breed of clientele attracted to these extravaganzas, Pebble Beach Resorts is not the only luxury property to exploit their golf asset to lure hedonistic golfers. Now 32 years old, the Kapalua Wine & Food Festival on Maui, in partnership with the Ritz-Carlton Kapalua, introduced a golf tournament on the Bay Course a dozen years ago. Three years ago, south of the border, St. Regis Punta Mita Resort's general manager, Carl Emberson, initiated the Gourmet & Golf Classic by taking advantage of two Jack Nicklaus-designed courses and inviting the home-country golf heroine, Lorena Ochoa, to conduct a golf clinic during the event.

But guess what? Even culinary wizards and grape Einsteins love to pack golf clubs along with their pots and corkscrew, and many of these gourmet bigwigs are highly coveted commodities used to strengthen the event's stature. As a result, they receive multiple invites throughout the year, but with their own business to operate, there are only so many. The added bonus of a grade-A golf course might be the tipping point.

Known to millions as the star of "Iron Chef," chef Masaharu Morimoto participates at six or seven Food & Wine events per year and, although his confidence level on the fairways may not be comparable to the kitchen, he is just as passionate about what he can to do with the irons in his golf bag.

"I love golf more than any other sport," says Morimoto. "Traveling for events is sometimes a bit stressful because I have to prepare for a demo outside my restaurant kitchen and also attend other events at night. If I can play golf, I can get rid of a lot of that stress."

Entrepreneur David Bernahl II, who along with his partner Robert Weakley at Monterey-based Costal Luxury Management founded the Pebble Beach Food & Wine (they also run the Los Angeles Food & Wine), contends that golf is an important component to the event. But when more than 8,000 people attend the four-day feast in the Del Monte Forest with the opportunity for only 144 golfers to compete and pick up cooking tips while playing alongside some of the brand names of the culinary universe like Morimoto, Thomas Keller or Daniel Boulud, one doesn't need to be a scratch golfer to guess how quickly that tee sheet fills up.

Pebble Beach Food & Wine gets down to business with an opening evening reception at The Inn at Spanish Bay, where attendees have access to more than 200 wine-tasting stations, including many of the industry's heavy hitters along with a fine selection of lesser-known choices, and 23 of the weekend's top chefs offering bite-size samples that showcase their culinary skills.

But the first-night affair is merely an appetizer for the weekend-long menu of cooking demonstrations, wine seminars and dining experiences, any of which would be a welcome break from my poor-man meals at home. Especially the "interactive dinner" with telegenic food personality Guy Fieri cooking dishes like lobster ravioli, bucatini carbonara and cilantro-wrapped prawns, each paired with premier wines. It's a meal I'd prepare about as often as receiving an invite to play Augusta National!

With a far more intimate crowd (maximum 350) attending the Gourmet & Golf Classic, The St. Regis Punta Mita Resort and next-door neighbor Four Seasons Punta Mita Resort make grand use of their seductive beach setting for the opening night soirée, allowing many guests to stroll barefoot in the sand while sampling local cuisine prepared by acclaimed domestic and international chefs. Of course, "when in Rome"—so to speak—a few swigs of the indigenous tequila help cleanse the palate.

"This is an unprecedented extravaganza of culinary talent and sensational golf, all taking place in one of the most alluring settings in the world and it has become a proud tradition we're honored to host for years to come," says Emberson.

Now that I've experienced being holed up for a few days at posh golf resorts at exotic venues swinging around the fairways of life and indulging incessantly in epicurean heaven, I'll know next time to begin my diet and sobriety regimen well in advance.

And pack a few doggie bags.

Chef Tyler Florence from Wayfarer Tavern displays his plate from his demo at the Pebble Beach Food & Wine Celebrity Chef/Winemaker Tournament

The beach at the St. Regis Punta Mita provides a great setting for the Punta Mita Golf & Gourmet opening night reception

Laurie McAndish King

King is an award-winning travel writer and photographer specializing in nature, culture and cuisine. Her work has been published in *Smithsonian* magazine, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, *The Best Women's Travel Writing* and other literary anthologies. "Silk from Ashes" won the Lowell Thomas Gold Award for cultural tourism. www.LaurieMcAndishKing.com

Silk from Ashes

Originally published in *Travel Stories from Around the Globe*

"When war has happened to you, that is different from seeing it on the television in your living room," Jan Hasnal says. "Thousands were displaced. Old ladies—they arrived in Dubrovnik carrying plastic bags with all their things. They were cousins of the people I bought fruit from at the market; they were the mothers of my friends. I saw fear and disaster in their eyes."

There is no fear in Jan Hasnal's eyes—instead, they reflect the determination and resourcefulness of her Croatian heritage. Hasnal is explaining what life has been like in Dubrovnik since the war. She tells the story of 11,640 tiny eggs, her bra, and heroic transmutation.

Dubrovnik, "The Pearl of the Adriatic," is a comfortable labyrinth of white stone buildings, red rooftops and green shuttered windows. To the north and east are forests of oak and pine; to the south and west, sandy beaches and transparent turquoise waters. The soil is thin and rocky; nevertheless, residents have scraped out a living for centuries.

A smallish harbor in the medieval Old Town belies the city's historic importance as a center of diplomacy, once rivaling Venice with its prowess in navigation, shipping and trade. By some estimates, Dubrovnik boasted the highest GDP in the world during her Golden Age from the 14th to 16th centuries. But these successes, along with its position on the Silk Route, left Dubrovnik ripe for plunder, and the city was besieged by invaders.

Ruled successively by the Byzantine, Venetian, Hungarian and Turkish empires, the wealthy merchant republic encircled itself with protective turrets and towers; in some places, the city's fortified walls are as much as 20 feet thick. But that was not enough to stop Napoleon's forces as they lobbed 3,000 cannonballs at Dubrovnik in 1806. Italians and Germans occupied the city during World War II. And in the freezing December of 1991, Serbian forces attacked and laid siege, ruthlessly cutting off all water and electricity, reducing centuries-old buildings to rubble, and blanketing the pale city with smoke and ash. Dubrovnik was devastated, but her citizens endured.

Jan Hasnal was there, helping with the relief efforts. "We started where we could," she recounted, "to share underwear. Refugees streamed in from the countryside and we put them in hotels. We shared whatever we had in our homes as women made queues, waiting for soup or powdered milk. They had nothing; they couldn't even cook their own meals. The Red Cross sent clothes, but you had to sign an affidavit if you received even one shirt—it was humiliating. We needed to find some work for the refugees, so we cut up good clothes into strips and the women put them back together into recycled garments, to keep their fingers busy, to help their mental health.

"One old lady asked me, 'My dear, can you bring me a silkworm? I am very ashamed to be wearing my neighbor's clothing.' I asked the authorities, but they were no help. They thought because of the bombing someone in Dubrovnik had gone crazy, asking for silkworms instead of food."

Dubrovnik and silkworms go back a long way. Although the Chinese, who discovered silk, guarded it zealously, legend has it that two monks smuggled silkworm eggs and mulberry seeds out of the country in bamboo canes, letting the rest of the world in on the secret. For hundreds of years, silk was traded along with other precious commodities—gold and silver, pepper and spices—and by the 15th century Dubrovnik supplied it to much of Europe. Rural Croatian women used a traditional method of raising silkworms, in which they wrapped tiny silkworm eggs in cloth and placed them between their breasts, where it was warm and the eggs would hatch.

Perhaps this history of silken intrigue inspired Jan Hasnal. In 1993, she founded an organization called Desa, with the goal of helping both local women and the influx of refugees cope with the social and psychological horrors of war. Desa sponsored embroidery workshops in the refugee camps, providing a sense of purpose and the beginnings of economic independence for the women there.

Hasnal wanted to find silkworms so the women could reclaim their livelihoods, but was thwarted by a ban on transporting insects. She persevered for years, finally locating silkworm eggs in Lyon, France, and convincing women there to donate 11 grams of them—about two teaspoons full. A silkworm egg is the size of a pinpoint, and 11 grams are enough to produce 11,640 silkworms. Jan carried the tiny eggs the same way Croatian women had traditionally carried them—in her bra. "I couldn't get them across the border any other way, she explained. Maybe it is the destiny of the silkworm to travel incognito."

And, in a wooded valley near Dubrovnik, women once again produced silk thread the traditional way, beginning by carefully incubating the eggs of a blind, flightless moth, Bombyx mori. They fed fresh mulberry leaves to the young silkworms many times a day for more than a month. When the silkworms were fully grown—about three inches long—the creatures stopped eating and began to spin their fluffy white cocoons, which were ready to be harvested after four or five days. The cocoons were stirred in hot water and their delicate threads, sometimes as much as a kilometer in length, were reeled onto a holder, dried, and processed with soap and—ironically—the ashes that had covered Dubrovnik.

Soon the women of Desa were using silk thread and their embroidery skills to recreate the area's traditional folkloric costumes, replacing heirlooms that had been destroyed during the war. Intricate red and gold embroidery, tassels and cross-stitches, floral and geometric patterns, brightly colored scarves and sashes and blouses and jackets—all began to reappear in Dubrovnik.

These women had endured bombs and occupation, siege and starvation ... and they had found a way to transmute ashes and silkworms into dignity and independence. All with the help of 11,640 insect eggs hidden in the cleavage of a brave woman's breasts. "There were many obstacles," Jan Hasnal said. "But I am so glad I did it."

Vendor at Gunung Kawi Temple, Bali

Smithsonian Photo Contest — 1st Place Award Winner

My intrepid guide, Kahlid, lectures despite wind and rain. Leptis Magna, Libya

David A. Laws

David A. Laws (david.a.laws@gmail.com) was born in England and worked for Silicon Valley semiconductor companies for more than 40 years. His interests include travel writing, photography and the history of technology, and he has published on topics from California gardens to Silicon Valley to Steinbeck country.

Literary Landmarks of East of Eden

This article formed the introduction to a photo essay printed on pages 25-58 of the book *East of Eden: New and Recent Essays*.

"I want to describe the Salinas Valley in detail but in sparse detail so that there can be a real feeling of it.
It should be sights and sounds, smells and colors but put down with simplicity."

—John Steinbeck, *Journal of a Novel: The East of Eden Letters*

Many of John Steinbeck's works open with an evocative description of a setting that establishes a rich thematic association central to his story. As Steinbeck's biographer Jackson Benson explains, "Scene and setting assume a far heavier burden of meaning in his work than in the fiction of most other novelists" (*True* p. 140). For example, the sentence "Cannery Row in Monterey in California is a poem, a stink, a grating noise, a quality of light, a tone, a habit, a nostalgia, a dream" may be his most familiar use of this technique. These few words helped to vault a rusting, industrial, oceanfront strip into one of the most famous literary miles on the planet.

East of Eden presents Steinbeck's most fully developed and ambitious example of this approach. He fills the entire first chapter with descriptions of the topography, people, history, plants, animals and communities of the Salinas Valley to create a tantalizing introduction to the web of complexities and conflicting forces that underlie the novel. He then uses the physical contrasts between the flat valley floor and its steep hillsides, and the opposing "light gay" and "dark and brooding" features of the flanking mountain ranges to set the stage for the forthcoming struggle between the forces of good and evil, birth and death, east and west, and love versus hate that pervade the story. Many other scenes throughout the book contain descriptions in compelling but "sparse detail" of how the land and its features shape the lives and fortunes of his characters.

The photo essay on the following pages was inspired by an interest I share with novelist and travel writer Paul Theroux. As he describes it: "The topography of literature, the fact in fiction, is one of my pleasures ... A walking tour called something like Literary Landmarks is not everyone's idea of fun, but it is mine, for the way it shows how imagination and landscape combine to become art" (*Ghost* p. 97).

Although much has changed since Steinbeck returned to his hometown in the early 1950s to recall the "sights and sounds, smells and colors" of the Salinas Valley that fill the novel, and even more since Adam Trask arrived in search of his Eden, these "literary landmarks" present surviving examples of the scenes and settings that informed the author and that continue to convey the essence of those times. Each image is inspired by a phrase or reference from the text of the book.

I learned to appreciate Steinbeck's skill at painting word pictures while preparing for a presentation on Steinbeck Country at the "John Steinbeck's Americas" Centennial Conference at Hofstra University in 2002. His vivid descriptions seemed to reproduce actual surroundings, making similar locations easy to identify and capture with my camera.

"I hate cameras. They are so much more sure than I am about everything."

—John Steinbeck, *Steinbeck: A Life in Letters*

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The first chapter of East of Eden opens with a panorama of the Salinas Valley, its enclosing mountains and the seasonal moods of the Salinas River as it carves its way through rich agricultural land on its way to the Pacific Ocean. The sensuous curves of low rolling hills, such as this ranch on San Juan Grade Road in the shadow of Fremont Peak, inspired Steinbeck's description of the Gabilan Mountains as "full of sun and loveliness and a kind of invitation, so that you wanted to climb into their warm foothills almost as you want to climb into the lap of a beloved mother" (*EoE* p. 3). Although iridescent green in spring, "when June came the grasses headed out and turned brown and the hills turned brown, which was not brown but a gold and a saffron and red - an indescribable color" (*EoE* p. 5), by fall, when this photograph was taken, the grass had been cropped to dusty golden stubble by grazing cattle, the predominant agricultural activity of the foothills.

In depicting the Salinas Valley as the bottom of an ancient 100-mile inlet from the sea, Steinbeck notes that "The river mouth at Moss Landing was centuries ago the entrance to this long inland water" (*EoE* p. 4). Before 1910, when the Salinas River was rerouted to enter the ocean at its present location south of Castroville, it ran north to join the tidal salt marshes of Elkhorn Slough. Fremont Peak stands out as the high point on the horizon of this view of the slough from Highway One at Moss Landing. Today's Moss Landing harbor is part of the old Salinas River bed where as a youth Steinbeck worked on swamp dredges featured in "Johnny Bear." Images of salt marshes, from which the name Salinas is derived, are evoked at several other points in the text of East of Eden including: "Salinas was surrounded and penetrated with swamps, with tule filled ponds, and every pond spawned thousands of frogs" (*EoE* p. 426).

Ranch in the foothills of the Gabilan Mountains

Elkhorn Slough, Moss Landing

Diane LeBow

At Home in Afghanistan

A longer version of this story appeared in Travelers' Tales *The Best Women's Writing 2010: True Stories from around the World*. The original version won the Travelers' Tales Solas Gold Award for Best Women's Travel Writing. Read more at www.dianelebow.com.

"Those are the Hindu Kush Mountains, the killer of Hindus," said the Afghan man seated beside me, pointing. We were on a flight from Dubai to Kabul and, through the window, could see the flat desert of Iran and southern Afghanistan suddenly give way to barren blue-and-gray ridgebacks, like waves of a stormy sea. I wondered how stormy the political situation would be during my visit to this war-weary land. Twenty-four hours ago, as I prepared to leave for the San Francisco airport, a friend had called to say that another bomb had just exploded in Kabul. "Should you delay your departure?" she asked.

It was 2002, one year after the World Trade Center attack and the subsequent fall of the Taliban. I was traveling to Afghanistan as part of a human rights delegation sponsored by the San Francisco-based organization Global Exchange. There were eleven of us, mainly young Afghan-Americans and me, a recently retired college professor. Our mission was to assess the state of Afghan culture and the arts and set up projects both immediate and long-term. Having worked for women's rights all my life, I planned to focus on that area.

Optimistic Mujahadeen, Afghanistan

Yet, I had never visited a war zone and couldn't help feeling anxious. Small villages of stone and mud dwellings grew visible as we angled in toward Kabul Airport. Voices and nervous laughter grew louder as excitement mounted among the passengers. Many were Afghans returning home after absences of 15 and even 20 years.

"I left when I was three," one man said, while another confided: "I'm afraid to get off. Everything will be so changed."

Our plane swept past bunkers and a graveyard of smashed planes and cadavers of military aircraft. We were entering a land of lawlessness, anarchy, warlords and twenty-three years of conflict—a part of the world where civil war and foreign invasions were more "normal" than peace.

We stepped off the plane into the "Country of Light," as Afghanistan has been called. A young Afghan-American traveling with us said: "I thought I wouldn't remember anything, since I moved to the States when I was five, but now that I feel the air, I know I am home." Inside the terminal, young men in ragged brown garments who looked straight out of the Middle Ages pleaded to help me with my luggage to earn 10,000 Afghanis, about 25 cents.

A van awaited us outside. "Don't worry that there are no seat belts," said the driver. "I drive slowly." Then he floored it, racing up the wrong side of the divided street against the oncoming traffic. Indeed, there seemed to be no traffic rules or stoplights in Kabul. Traffic moved like spilled milk—anywhere space allowed.

Through the open window of our van, I bought the autumn 2002 Survival Guide to Kabul from a street child. "There's a lot to see, even if most of it is wrecked," it noted. On the way to our hotel, we passed bombed-out houses, stores and even palaces. Near the center of the city, burned skeletons of buses were stacked on top of each other around the devastated former public transportation center. Women in blue burqas and street children begged at the windows of our van. Men with no legs, victims of mines, negotiated along the street on a sort of skateboard amidst the traffic, pleading for baksheesh, or money.

As we approached our hotel, I noticed the top floor had no roof, only jagged remnants left behind by a past shelling or bombing. Affecting nonchalance, I joked to the driver that I hoped our rooms would be on a lower floor.

Diane LeBow, Ph.D. (www.dianelebow.com) is a travel writer and photojournalist; professor and lecturer; president emerita of the Bay Area Travel Writers; multiple-year winner of Travelers' Tales' Best Women's Travel Writing; and is published widely in print and online with stories on Afghanistan, Mongolia, France, California, the Canadian arctic and beyond.

Afghan orphan girls at school

Tana Toraja funeral ceremony, Sulawesi, indonesia

Moustafa, Tuareg, Libyan Sahara

Essaouira, Morocco

Stephanie Levin-Gervasi

Putting on the Dog

Previously published in the *New York Daily News*

"Ooh, la la! Not another morning at the *comptoir*," I howled, hip-to-hip with espresso aficionados as they flicked ashes and conversation over my head.

Testily, my master reminded me that I wasn't shelling out the euros for this vacation, so keep my doggy opinions to myself. *Touche!*

Allow me to explain: my traveling companion wasn't always so humorless. She lost her *joie de vivre* over a cup of coffee.

Our vacation in Paris started promisingly enough. We strolled into the Cafe de la Paix on the corner of Avenue de L'Opera and Boulevard Des Capucines and seated ourselves on the terrace.

A FAUX PAS

My companion ordered *cafe au lait* and a buttery croissant to dunk into the foamy stimulant. I stretched out lazily under the table, chin on paws. The waiter scratched my ears as he placed the soup-sized bowl of *au lait* under my snout. I thumped my tail. *Merci*.

Quietly I lapped, lifting my nose periodically from the sea of foam to ogle the multitude of legs scurrying past. Life was doggone good.

Under the table next to me, a hand patted a smooth slim thigh. Persimmon toenails wiggled delightedly. Ahh Pairee! I licked my left paw contentedly, willing to spend the entire day under this table. It was not to be.

"*Combien?*" gasped my master, shaking the check at the waiter.

Undaunted by a boisterous tourist, the waiter explained that coffee in Paris is like the stock market–prices fluctuate, depending on location.

"I didn't order six-figure coffee," barked my master. "Whoever heard of paying three different prices for the same cup?!"

Startled by the commotion, I jumped to all fours. My tail made a clean sweep atop a nearby table, sending a *croissant au beurre* flying onto the crotch of a pair of neatly pressed Pierre Cardin trousers. Overpowered by animal instinct, I leapt to the defense of the croissant and swallowed it

"Sit!!!" shrieked my horrified companion.

The Pierre Cardins froze. The man, minus the croissant, came over, patted me on the back, muttered "*mechant, mechant*" (naughty, naughty) and ordered another round of croissants. *C'est la vie!*

Service isn't everything in France, and you should certainly check the pyramid of coffee prices before sipping.

The *comptoir* (counter) yields the cheapest cup of coffee. You drink, stand, and watch the espresso machine hiss and steam. It's a good cup, but it's coffee on the run.

Take a table inside the cafe and the price of coffee goes up. Of course, you can sit all day at a table and nurse one cup while reading the newspaper and half a book. Dogs are fond of this area; it's cozy and a good place for a nap.

FRENCH JAVA JARGON

But if you want romance with a cup (and who doesn't in Paris?), move to a table near the window or terrace. This is the *crème de la crème* of coffee locations.

Ambience is everything, and to sip and watch the world sashay past your cup and saucer is worth every euro.

French coffee is a dark, robust roast. It doesn't require a refill, nor is one offered. A 15-percent gratuity is consumed with each cup.

Coffee prices fluctuate with cafes. The Deux Magot won't be the same price as a local cafe–*tabac*. Expect pricey on the Champs Elysees or other well-known boulevards.

If you ask for *café* you'll get a steamy espresso, lots of sugar cubes and no lemon rind. *Café Americain* does not exist in France. *Café au lait* is steamed milk and espresso coffee served in a large round cup. Don't look for sprinkles of chocolate and cinnamon.

Dogs, all shapes, sizes and nationalities are welcome. There's no extra charge for service under the table.

Travel companion Stephanie Levin-Gervasi assisted in the preparation of this tale.

My numerous journeys as a travel writer have taken me to exquisite places and graced my life with interesting and varied people. I'm trilingual, but at heart a francophile who lived in Paris for five years, where these two stories take place. Each reflects a window into my delightful life. www.steffelevin.com

In Defense of French Bread

Previously published in *American Way – Sojourns*

Ever since King Dagobert I recognized bread-making as a bona fide trade back in the seventh century, the savory scent of French bread has wafted through history. After all, the French Revolution might never have occurred had Marie Antoinette not uttered her fatal faux pas: *Il's ont plus de pain, qu'ils mangent de la brioche* ("They have no bread, let them eat cake"). Marie lost her head, bread guilds evolved, and *boulangeries* (bakery shops) proliferated, delighting gourmands and simple palates alike.

For centuries, *boulangers* have wakened before dawn to select the flour, knead the dough and bake their bread on the premises. The sumptuous results—crusty loaves of *ficelles* (skinny flutes), *betards* (plump ovals) and *pain de campagne* (country bread)—send even the most unsuspecting nose aquiver.

But in the last decade, bread chains and supermarkets have given rise to what amounts to heresy—mass-produced baguettes—causing culinary consternation among Parisian *boulangers*. In defense of a savorous national tradition, the French government recently decreed that the 5,000 bakers who don't conceive, knead or bake their loaves on-site may no longer hang a shingle espousing to be a blue-blooded *boulangerie*.

C'est la vie! Your nose can't always be your guide, even in Paris. So next time you shell out francs for your daily bread, check for that coveted word and seal of approval: *boulangerie*.

A well-heeled traveler laps up culture at a French café.

Audrey Medina

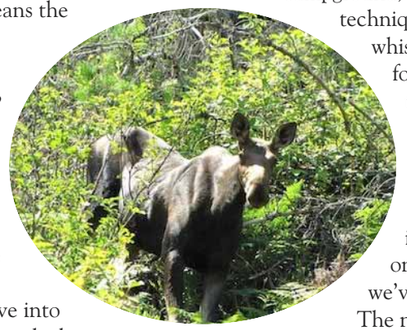
Audrey Medina lives in Placerville and specializes in travel, nature and cycling. Her writing credits include *Westjet's Up!, TravelWorld International, BirdWatching,* the *San Francisco Chronicle, Adventure Cyclist, The Christian Science Monitor* and others. www.audreymedina.com

Outdoor adventure and small town fun

This article was first published in
TravelWorld International

By embracing its wild beauty and colorful past, northern Idaho is creating eco-friendly options for all of us.

When Rand McNally and USA Today chose Sandpoint, population 7,300, as the "Most Beautiful Small Town in America" in 2011, cattle trucks and big rigs still hauled their loads through downtown. For small towns relying on tourist dollars, creating a bypass to allow heavy haulers and other traffic to circumvent the stoplights often means the beginning of the end. But Kate McAlister, president/CEO of the Sandpoint Chamber of Commerce, doesn't see it that way. "Getting the 18-wheelers out of the downtown core has been spectacular and it's also quieter," she explains."More of those living within four to five hours from here are coming because the traffic has gotten better." She's right. As I drive into town, Highway 95 no longer makes a dogleg to the left, but leads across an elevated bridge along Sand Creek, giving me an extraordinary new view of Lake Pend Oreille.



Sandpoint provides the perfect showcase for Idaho's outdoor bounty. I strolled through town as cyclists pedaled by in every direction. At MickDuff's Brewing Company, I tried a few samples and ordered a pint of Huckleberry Blonde Ale. Opened in 2006, MickDuff's offers a wide selection of brews. As testament to the growing craft beer movement, more microbreweries are opening in the area, and innovative brewers are using hops, huckleberries, and other local ingredients.

A few doors down at Northwest Handmade, nearly 90 regional artists display fine art and custom rustic furniture, all inspired by the Panhandle's wildlife and natural beauty. Images of moose, bears and eagles appear in headboards, quilts and paintings.

Sandpoint is returning to its roots. Highway 2, which still runs through downtown, is slated for future rerouting. Adding trees, more bike paths and wider sidewalks will help to re-create the original Sandpoint documented in vintage photos. McAlister envisions an idyllic Bedford Falls, the town from the movie, "It's a Wonderful Life."

Moosey Waters

"It's real moosey in here," says Randy Dingman, a guide for ROW Adventures, waving at a large marsh as we head east from Coeur d'Alene. A break in the clouds lights up a stand of yellow aspens on the far side, and I want to stop and look for moose, but we're on a mission: We've come to fish.

Digman grew up in Coeur d'Alene, and knows every undercut bank where brown trout rest and what they want for dinner. On the lawn near a riverside campground, Digman shows me some casting techniques. Freezing mid-cast, he whispers, "Look," pointing toward the forest. A huge bull moose ambles toward the trees, pausing momentarily when Randy's moose call catches his attention.

The morning's fishing is successful, my casting has improved, and even though my only catch is a small brown trout, we've had a good time.

The next day, I follow the Coeur d'Alene Scenic Byway, stopping at Old Mission State Historic Park, at Cataldo. Built in 1842, the mission is the state's oldest building. At the visitor center, a new exhibit tells the stories of the mission and the Coeur d'Alene people. Recorded songs and the voices of tribal elders follow me through displays of beadwork and mission artifacts. The hilltop provides a clear 360-degree view and I can see Digman's "moosey waters" a mile away.

Rails-To-Trails Hall of Famers

In Wallace, I meet Rick Shaffer, the town's Prime Minister, and my guide for a bike ride along the Trail of the Coeur d'Alenes. The old rail bed runs across the state for 73 miles and was a Rails-to-Trails (RTT) Conservancy Hall of Fame pick in 2010. Shaffer and I pedal along the Coeur d'Alene River, waving at anglers and admiring the scenery. Near the trail, a cow moose and her calf are bedded down in the grass near a small pond. The pair are a common sight and we see them feeding in the pond on our way back.

The next morning, my huckleberry pancakes arrive with a face smiling up at me. The 1313 Club is packed with funny photos and mining camp humor. Local sports uniforms and fishing gear dangle from the rafters and a stuffed beaver swims across the front window. A jackalope poses above the door, and antlers, steelhead, mountain goats and elk line the walls. A shelf of plastic "stope rats" hold hardhats and mine lamps as they show customers large, toothy grins at customers.

Full of pancakes, Shaffer and I set off for the Trail of the Hiawathas, RTT Conservancy's other 2010 Hall of Famer.

The old Taft Tunnel is 1.6 miles long and just wide enough for the Milwaukee Road's Hiawatha engines that pulled passengers through one of the most scenic stretches of railway in the country. I zip up my jacket, click on my bike light and enter the tunnel. The 15-mile ride cuts through the Bitteroot Mountains with eight tunnels and seven trestles, reducing the steep slopes and deep canyons to an easy two-percent grade. As I exit the tunnel, the only sounds are wind, waterfalls and the cry of ravens cruising overhead. I'm surrounded by wilderness for as far as I can see.

The Center of the Universe

In Idaho, even the center of the universe is off the beaten path. "Why not?" says Shaffer. "No one can prove otherwise, so we decided to claim it." A specially designed manhole cover marks the spot in the middle of town.

During the 1880s and 1890s, Wallace was the center of the world's richest silver mining district and five brothels operated in town. The last bordello, the Oasis, is now a museum. Early 1970s décor and vanities covered with makeup remain as they were left in 1973, when it closed forever.

A vintage trolley shuttles me and a tour group up a narrow road to the Sierra Silver Mine. As we adjust our hard hats, a retired miner explains how silver-bearing ore is drilled, followed by a very loud demonstration with a high-pressure stope drill. We learn about blasting patterns and mine safety, and the tragedy at the nearby Sunshine Mine that led to improved safety procedures for mine workers around the world.

The 800 or so folks who live in Wallace struggled for 17 years to get I-90 rerouted around town. Getting the entire town listed on the National Register of Historic Places helped, as did putting up the only stoplight between Seattle and Boston. These days, the bypass keeps the town intact and quiet. There's still plenty of treasure in those mines, but the lasting treasure is outside, in the deep lakes and dark forests of northern Idaho, and in people who value their small-town culture more than the quick flash of silver. By celebrating their history, and giving their guests local products and sustainable recreation, they'll continue to attract visitors eager for experiences not found anywhere else.

Carole Terwilliger Meyers

On Rooster Time
Taveuni Island, Fiji

Originally published in the *San Jose Mercury News*

Flying in to steaming Taveuni Island, passengers joked that it felt like we were going to Skull Island in a remake of "King Kong."

After our 20-seat plane touched down on a short banana republic-style landing strip at the Fijian island's tiny airport, my companions and I hopped into a four-wheel drive for the hour-long ride to the remote resort, Paradise Taveuni, at the island's southern end.

We bounced over roads that switched from paved to dirt with regularity and traveled through rainforest and coconut plantations, finally arriving at the surprisingly well-groomed resort. Here we settled into traditional thatched-roof bures (or cabins) that had no phones, televisions or clocks. Instead, with chickens running freely about the property, we woke to cocks crowing at first light. As personable owner Allan Gortan informed us with a grin, "We're on rooster time."

I came in search of palm trees and beautiful beaches on Taveuni, third largest of Fiji's 322 islands. I discovered much more on my three-day trip, from the island's rustic wildness to its remote resorts and welcoming people.

Like all guests at Paradise Taveuni, I was greeted with fresh coconut water and a relaxing foot massage on my private front patio. I wasn't sure I wanted to go anywhere after that.

My bure was a second home, with a bedroom and separate lounge. Locally made woven-fiber rugs covered some of its cool white tile floors. Two ceiling fans and traditional thatching with wood louvers kept air flowing. But there was nothing like the cool-off in my outdoor shower, privately tucked in a lava-rock-fence enclosed courtyard with flowers and ferns tucked in here and there. (There was also an indoor tub-shower.)

At breakfast, I enjoyed lovely sunny-yolk eggs with delicious spicy lamb sausage. In the evening, I couldn't wait for the addictive house cocktail: a Yellow Bird of Paradise, made with local white rum, coconut liquor, and fresh papaya and banana.

While divers searched the nearby waters at one of the world's top five soft-coral dive sites, I had my toenails painted while gazing out to sea. Fiji Fuchsia, anyone? At night I stood with other guests at the cliff's edge and ogled the bioluminescent flashlight fish that swam out of their coral caves.

Much as I loved relaxing at the resort, I couldn't resist some resort-sponsored excursions.

One brought us a glimpse of traditional Fijian life, where small rural villages produce a particular commodity, such as woven mats or ceramics.

Our charming native guide, Maikeli, led our excursion to nearby Vuna Village, which produces tapa bark cloth and woven mats, many of which decorated the Paradise's bures. A scenic route led us past vast forests of palm trees with red "sunburned" trunks and lush plants that grow in the fertile volcanic soil.

One smiling villager greeted me with a soft "Welcome home," something I also heard repeated at the resort and several times on the main island. I had the sense it was spoken from the heart as a communal greeting celebrating our human connection.

That night, we saw some of these villagers again when they visited the resort to dance and sing for the traditional meke feast. Although most native Fijians avoid alcohol and tattooing, believing their bodies are temples, it seems everyone drinks the narcotic kava because it is the drink of the chief and the Lord.

Sunday church

Another excursion took us to Wairiki Village and the 19th-century Holy Cross Catholic Mission Church. Built in the 1800s to reward a French missionary for helping locals defeat invading Tongans, the church overlooks a soccer field and the Somosomo Strait. As legend tells it, the chief promised his people would become Catholics if they won the battle—but before they converted, the warriors cooked their dead enemies in a traditional lovo oven and ate them with breadfruit.

On my Sunday visit, the church overflowed with worshipers. As a sign of respect, almost everyone sat on the bare floor. Attendance is high as most stores close on Sundays; the day is so respected as one of rest that the locals are not permitted even to cut flowers. The Mass is in Fijian, and hearing the harmonious choir gave me goose bumps.

After church, we visited the rainforest of Bouma National Heritage Park. The park has plenty of trails, including the popular, flat Tavoro Waterfalls path, which begins at the visitor center. As I walked I couldn't help but notice the cute, round, baby cane toads—measuring no more than an inch—hopping across the trail like Mexican jumping beans.

Falls swimming

Tavoro's three cascading falls descend from one to the other, into three cool pools.

The lower falls plunges about 600 feet into a big pool in which visitors can swim. Diving also is permitted from a cave ledge.

Here, cultures blend seamlessly. I saw both an Indian family in saris and pants and an Australian family in brightly colored bathing suits, frolicking and picnicking happily.

Most visitors spend their time at this first falls, but the trail also continues sharply up to the other two falls. I decided to stay put and later heard mixed reports about whether it was worth the trek. It seems dedicated hikers enjoyed the climb; swimmers found the payoff less rewarding.

Then it was on to the Waitavala waterside, a spot where locals slide down a stream running over smooth rocks that mimic a water chute. It is slippery and potentially dangerous, so sliding under the watch of a local guide is advised.

Ours was Big Ben, who was very helpful, with a strong hand and ready smile. Locals usually climb the slippery slope to the slide in their bare feet to get a better grip. I relied on Ben to help me navigate the narrow, muddy path. He later laughed that it was "the longest I've ever held a girl's hand." I chose not to attempt the slide, instead watching from my secure sideline perch while making videos.

We closed out the day with a stop at the official 180-degree Meridian Line, used as the basis for the International Date Line because it mostly passes through the Pacific Ocean. In Fiji the Date Line cuts across Taveuni and several other islands, so it was officially made to curve around the islands in order to keep the entire nation in one time zone. A sign marks the spot where today and tomorrow meet.

On my last day on Taveuni Island, I smiled sleepily as I heard the resort owner changing the low-powered nighttime generator to the regular one at 5:30 a.m. When I heard the familiar crowing shortly thereafter, I knew I would miss being on "rooster time."

Award-winning travel writer Carole Terwilliger Meyers is the author of 18 books, including *Miles of Smiles: 101 Great Car Games & Activities* and nine editions of *Weekend Adventures in San Francisco & Northern California*. In addition to freelance writing, she is a blogger (www.travelswithcarole.blogspot.com), website developer (www.berkeleyandbeyond.com) and webcam traveler (www.webcamtraveler.com).

Joanne Miller

Misty of Chincoteague Lives On! Sort of…

A version of this story appeared in *Moon Handbooks: Chesapeake Bay* (Avalon Travel; Peter Pauper Press)

Misty, a sweet-faced wild pony, was the subject of a children's book, "Misty of Chincoteague," by Marguerite Henry; the book was originally published in 1947 and became an enduring best-seller. The setting of the book, Chincoteague Island, lends its name to the largest community on Virginia's Eastern Shore. Life on Chincoteague Island is nature barely tamed, from migrating birds that perch on car tops in the parking lots to the periodic hurricanes that rearrange the shoreline.

Chincoteague Pony Center, VA

The 70-mile-long Eastern Shore of Virginia is one of the most subtly enticing parts of Chesapeake Bay, home to anachronistic harbor towns, gourmet crab shacks, and watermen who continue to make their living hauling oysters onto the bay's brackish shores. It's very isolation—the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel connecting Virginia's Eastern Shore to the mainland didn't even open until 1964—has kept its slow pace and quiet demeanor much as it was since the early colonists stepped ashore.

One settler, Capt. William Whitington, gained use of the island from Wachawampe, chief of the Gingo Teague tribe; Gingo Teague, meaning "Beautiful Land Across the Water," evolved into Chincoteague (SHINK-a-teeg). Over the years, the island became a tourist destination best known as a seasonal beach resort and native animal sanctuary; the origin of its wild ponies is attributed to a shipwreck off the coast. Misty's story popularized the island's annual wild pony roundup and charity auction.

The story centered around brother and sister Paul and Maureen Beebe and their grandparents, Clarence and Ida Beebe, as well as Misty, the filly they all loved on their island ranch. The Beebe ranch—at least 10 acres of the original property—really exists, as did Misty and Paul and Maureen Beebe. In 1961, 20th Century Fox came to Chincoteague and made a movie of the story using six professional actors and dozens of locals. Misty was ensured a place in the island's history and its economy; her hoofprints are in cement in front of the Roxy Theater, where the movie is still shown during the summer, and every shop in town sells something that's reminiscent of the cuddly pony.

Misty was 26 when she passed on in 1972 and her filly Stormy was 31 when she joined her mom in the big pasture in the sky, but Misty and Stormy live on. Sort of. In 2001, descendants of the original Beebe's converted a room on the ranch into a mini-museum where the ponies are corralled. It's just off the kitchen where Misty was sheltered during the big March storm of 1962. The ponies are in remarkably good shape considering their transition to the afterlife, thanks to modern taxidermy performed at the same place in California where Roy Rogers' horse, Trigger, was tanned. Misty, always a horse of iron fortitude, is made of Plaster of Paris and steel rods. Stormy, a modern pony in every way, is made of space age plastic. The Beebe Ranch museum is coupled with a tour (by reservation); visitors take in the pasture where Misty grazed. Her saddle hangs where it was placed in 1973 in her stable. Those who loved the book, or are looking for a quiet diversion on the Eastern Shore, will enjoy a visit to Misty's ranch.

Joanne Orion Miller is the author and photo-illustrator of seven guidebooks for Avalon Travel, Sasquatch Press and Peter Pauper Press, and a contributor to many others. Her short stories have appeared in *Carve and Ripe Fruit.* She has also published a novel, *Shaketown: the Madam's Daughter* (Quile Press, 2014).
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HI Drama, with Mules

A version of this story appeared in *The Little Black Book of Maui & Kaua'i*—Peter Pauper Press

Moloka'i is nothing if not dramatic. The western half is near-desert, while the north and east are covered by rainforest. Moloka'i was formed from three volcanoes: Kamakou in the east is the tallest at nearly 5000 feet; Maunaloa in the west rises a little over 1000 feet; and the collapsed third volcano created the Makanalua Peninsula on the north shore. Moloka'i boasts the highest sea cliffs in the world (you can see them in the film "Jurassic Park II"). The south shore of the island is fringed by the longest reef in the U.S. at more than 30 miles. Moloka'i is considered the most "Hawaiian" of the islands, home of the hula and true aloha.

Moloka'ians are determined to remain unscathed by the leveling power of commercial development. Your visit—and appreciation of this attitude—will help Moloka'i remain little touched by the 21st century. This bastion of natural beauty is home to one of the most fascinating sites in the world: Kalaupapa, a colony created for sufferers of Hansen's disease, once known as leprosy.

The only word to describe Kalaupapa National Historic Park is "beautiful," in both the physical and spiritual sense. It's set on a peninsula crowned by a defunct volcano that's filled with a lake hundreds of feet deep. For centuries, the three valleys on this peninsula were home to native Hawaiians who lived well off the land and water. The area came to the attention of the world after the reign of the last Hawaiian king of the Kamehameha lineage. He chose this isolated place to banish those who contracted leprosy, a then-incurable disease that horribly disfigured its victims. Dreaded from biblical times, leprosy was thought to be spread by casual contact. Separated from the rest of the island by a 1600-foot sheer pali (cliff), the colony became a place of frightening degradation and the worst of human predation. In 1873, a Belgian priest, Father Damien, chose to serve the populace here, restored order, and created a community with the help of the lepers themselves—volunteers such as Brother Dutton, Mother Marianne Cope and other selfless members of religious orders. Although exact records no longer exist, it's thought that more than 8,000 people were exiled to Kalaupapa over the years.

Hansen's disease was first treated successfully by sulfa drugs in the late 1940s. Further improvements in medicine have rendered the disease non-communicable, and those with Hansen's disease are now free to live normal lives. Fewer than 30 residents remain by choice in the small settlement of Kalaupapa. Access is only through Damien Tours and includes St. Philomena Church, built by Father Damien; monuments to him and Mother Cope; the Kalaupapa settlement; and other historic highlights. Visitors who reach the settlement on foot or by air must contact Damien Tours to make a reservation and arrange a pickup. Hikers are advised to start before 8 a.m. to beat the mules down the cliff. Many of the 26 turns have fairly steep drops between steps, so this is recommended only for those with sturdy knees and hips. The tour is included for those who ride mules down the pali.

You'll meet your smartest, most sure-footed friend on the Moloka'i Mule Ride. If you're not convinced when you saddle up, you will be when your clever equine backs up into a hairpin turn to make it down the next 20 steps. These big fellows know what they're doing, and it's a good thing—that's a mighty big cliff. This experience of a lifetime takes riders through pretty Pala'au State Park, down the pali (amazing views included), into Kalaupapa and back. This is an exceptional way to experience the drama of Moloka'i.

Karen Misuraca

Based in Sonoma's Valley of the Moon, veteran journalist Karen Misuraca is the author of eight travel guides, including the award-winning *The California Coast*. She contributes to a variety of media, specializing in California and the West, meetings and golf, worldwide. She curates cultural tours at www.DeepCultureTravel.com and blogs on www.BestGolfResortsOfTheWorld.com. www.KarenMisuraca.com

The Sounds and the Spectacle of San Miguel

Article and photos originally appeared on the San Miguel de Allende Writers Conference website

On our first visit all those years ago, a few days before Christmas, Michael and I came down to San Miguel from Mexico City on the train, arriving at the dusty little station to be met by a marauding posse of little boys and the owner of the apartment we were renting. "Joven!" she called out to them as she handed some coins through the car window."Nos dejen en paz!"

After she settled us into the little apartment over Cello's Pharmacy on Canal Street, we looked out as a full moon came up over the golden dome and crenelated walls of Bellas Artes. Rows of sparkly red and green garlands spanned the street all the way up and down Canal, and the sidewalks fluttered with people. We heard some faint sort of honky-tonky music, and as it got louder, we saw that it was a little parade—la posada as we later found out—with a couple of men playing trumpet and drums, leading a donkey and a pickup truck carrying a young girl and boy on hay bales, dressed as Mary and Joseph, and followed by a crowd of people carrying candles, flowers and paper lanterns. From that very first hour in town, we were hooked.

During the decades since, my husband and I have witnessed so many parades and festivals in San Miguel, from the flower-hatted Catrina skeletons who stalk the streets on Day of the Dead to Día de los Locos (Day of the Crazies) in March to the annual procession of little kids on United Nations Day. While we were having coffee one morning under the archways at a favorite breakfast place alongside el jardin, the central square, families began arriving, filling the park. Down the hill from the top of Canal marched the local police band, bugles blaring, ahead of hundreds of kindergarten-age children wearing elaborate costumes of the countries of the world. Solemnly, quietly following their teachers, they carried white paper doves and white balloons, and signs about world peace—we were in tears to see the innocence and the intent on those little faces.

Independencia

Throughout the year, weekend festivals are full of parades, Indian dancers, patriotic tableaus, religious ceremonies, horseback processions, music and fireworks at all hours–no kidding, it's a good thing that we're no longer buying film for our cameras or we'd be in serious debt.

As this town is one of the birthplaces of Mexican independence, the El Grito de la Independencia commemoration in September is a very big deal here. The hero for whom the town was named, Captain Ignacio Allende, and Captain Juan Aldama and others, kick-started the 1810 revolt against the Spanish that ultimately booted out the conquistadors. September 16 is Mexican Independence Day, a national holiday celebrated throughout the country and over three days in San Miguel with pyrotechnics each night and through the early hours of the mornings, and by military parades, band concerts and thousands of locals and visitors dancing in the streets, waving flags and even wearing them. Fancy banners with images of the conspirators arch over the main streets surrounding the Ignacio Allende House museum, el jardin and the cathedral.

We were in town once during Independencia with an expat friend, Ted, who is the great-great-great-great (I don't know how many greats) grandson of Doña Josefa Ortiz de Dominguez, a heroine of the revolution. Her bright face appeared on some of the banners around town, in fact, right beneath us while we sat at the rooftop bar at Mama Mia's while Ted recounted how his ancestor, although she was the mother of 14 children and the wife of the mayor of Queretaro, held clandestine meetings in her home and alerted the rebels that the Spanish had discovered their plans. She was arrested, tried and jailed in various convents until 1817, when she was released, and eventually continued her activism.

Fiestas!

My all-time favorite events are the "Fiestas de San Miguel de Allende" in honor of the Arcangel Michael, who vanquished the devil when he dared to defy God. In advance of the saint's feast day, September 29, dance troupes begin streaming into town from around the country, carrying costumes, sleeping mats and personal gear; the town feeds them and puts them up in the schoolhouses.

At midnight before the feast day, they begin their slow alborada (dawn) procession, dancing and drumming all the way, heading up the streets to el jardin and the iconic, soaring, pink- and coral-hued neo-Gothic cathedral, El Parroquia de San Miguel Arcangel.

The dance troupes represent tribes of semi-nomadic Chichimecas who inhabited the area long before the Spanish conquest. Continuing a centuries-old tradition, they construct elaborate xuchiles—huge wooden structures decorated with reeds and cucharilla cactus fiber, corn paste, marigolds and other flowers. Between the dancers, the xuchiles are carried through the streets, then hoisted upright and fastened to the wall in front of the cathedral. Outfitted in Spanish-style armor, helmets and swords, images of St. Michael are portrayed on truck-top floats by young girls, ironically, who are accompanied by gangs of sweet-faced angels in pastel clouds. In feathered headdresses and fearsome masks and body paint, hundreds of dancers perform for the crowd. Adding a carnival atmosphere, 10-foot-tall mojigangas—papier mâché puppets that are created here in town—totter along in the crowd. Townspeople carrying estrellas (stars), arrive at the cathedral, whereupon a mighty explosion of castillo fireworks and rockets is set off, and Saint Michael gets his Las Mañanitas (Happy Birthday) song.

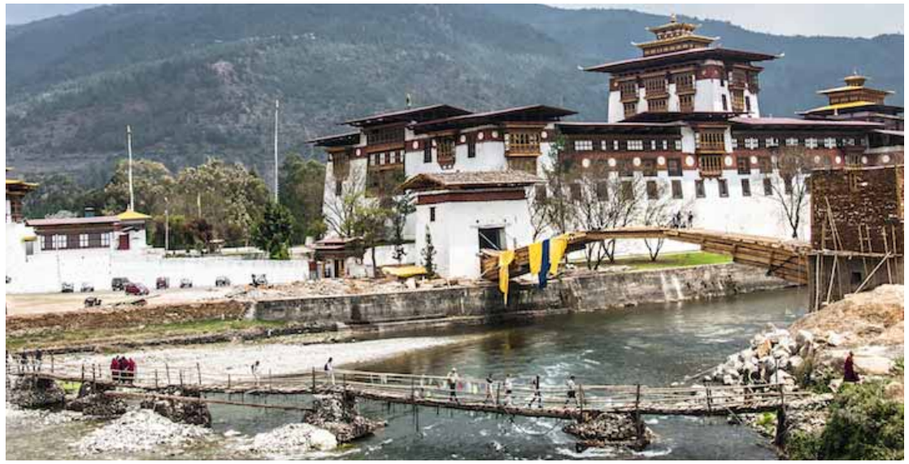
As dawn rises, the dancers and the spectators wander off for a few hours, until they gather again in el jardin. A special mass is held for St. Michael, and the famous "Voladores of Papantal" fly in dizzying circles, head first, from the top of a 30-meter-tall pole. Firecrackers, bottle rockets and more whirling, smoking, popping fireworks blow off from time to time, and the amazing Indian dancers continue their rhythmic gyrations around and around el jardin, by this time in an emotional frenzy.

The last night we were in town for all of this, our ears ringing from the ear-splitting fireworks, and tired and hungry after hours of sharing the sidewalks with the families who had streamed in from the countryside to watch the festivities, we retired to one of our favorite eateries in a nearby alleyway. Through the tall, open windows we watched the mojigangas drift past, their garishly painted heads bobbing and flowing gowns aglow in the lights from the streetside cafes—the dancers, the drummers, the high-flyers and all the rest floating through the warm night as if in a dream.

Day of the Dead—now that's another story.

John Montgomery

Photographer John Montgomery has been a commercial and travel photographer, television and film producer/director and studio owner for more than 30 years. Based in San Francisco, he has been published in a variety of newspapers, magazines, and on the Web. He also gives seminars and slide/lecture presentations.



River Dzhong,
Bhutan

Entrance to the Treasury, Petra, Jordan

Garifuna Boy and Blow Fish, Bay lles, Honduras

Woman and Baby Eat Snacks,
Paro Market, Bhutan

Coso Canyon, Petroglyphs
China Lake, Ridgecrest

Holy Man, Varanasi, India

La Vilia, Calvi, Corsica

Jim Nevill

My inspiration comes from a lifetime spent outdoors, from international backpacking and surfing travel and being the director of Go Adventure, a wilderness school for teens. As an artist I work to offer the viewer a fresh perspective, one that points out the many possibilities that life presents. My goal is to report reality without hyperbole and therefore all of my images are single click captures, no HDR. Prints and portfolio at www.JimNevill.com

"Road to Oblivion" – Shot in Sonoma County on August 10, 2013 during the Perseid meteor shower, on a completely black night. The Milky Way is visible to the naked eye. I chose to compose the gravel road and grasslands into the shot to make it more dramatic.

"Autumn Reflections in the Teton Range". – Generally there are 50+ photographers and tourists jockeying for position in the pre-dawn hours to access this vantage point of Mount Moran. On this chilly morning, October 2, 2013, it was eerily just me. The government shutdown resulted in the closing of all national parks but because I was attending the Wilderness Risk Management Conference at the Teton Lodge I was allowed to stay. This shot truly is a one-of-a-kind. I used a polarizing filter and an orange flash gel when I took the shot, which drew out those blue tones.

"Green Lantern"– This photo is one of my all-time favorite barrel shots. It was taken by shooting directly into the harsh sunset which for a split second illuminated the barrel. This day a big west swell was charging up the coast at this secret Central Cal break. Even though it looks like perfection all around was complete "victory at sea" making this day basically un-surfable.

"Smokers Lung" – I had to put at least one artsy shot into the mix. Here is a long exposure of a few friends sitting at a campfire. In the foreground is Tim exhaling vapor 'e-cig' and in the background, unintentionally juxtaposing the scene, is Vinny taking the more classic route with a Camel Wide.

"Yosemite Valley Sunset" – Taken from the top of a south rim (a grueling hike to reach), this incredible perspective shows a total view of Yosemite Valley. From the west entrance below to El Capitan on the left, Bridal Veil Falls in the bottom center, the Sentinel, distant Half Dome on the top right and the snow-covered Cathedral Peak in the top middle. It was an adventure to get to this vista and a sketchy hike out in the dark to get back out —but well worth the effort.

Effin Older

and Jules Older

Jules Older's latest ebook is *DEATH BY TARTAR SAUCE: A Travel Writer Encounters Gargantuan Gators, Irksome Offspring, Murderous Mayonnaise & True Love*. Effin Older's latest app is Kickass Grammar. Jules and Effin Older (www.julesolder.com) have published articles and/or images in the *Times*: London, New York, Los Angeles, Vermont and Washington.

Jules Older

and Effin Older

Derry: The Town with Too Many Names

This article and photo originally appeared in *Go Holiday* magazine in Great Britain.

At first—and "first" means the sixth century or before—it was called Doire, which means oak grove. Doire evolved into Derry. Also, Walled City. In 1631, the name was changed to Londonderry. Then, during the Troubles, it became Bomb City. That was the saddest name.

Next, attempting to bridge the lingering divide between the Nationalists (who call it Derry) and the Loyalists (for whom it's Londonderry), it got the moniker, Stroke City, as in Derry/Stroke/Londonderry.

Now, it has a new name—Legenderry. It's a name based on hope, on relief that the Troubles are over, and on Doire/Derry/Walled City/Londonderry/Bomb City/Stroke City acquiring one more appellation—in 2013, it was named the first UK City of Culture.

The question is, how does a place go from Bomb City to City of Culture in such a short time?

It wasn't easy. From the early Seventies—the deadliest years of the Troubles—through most of the Nineties, a third of the city's civic buildings were destroyed. Some 3,700 people were killed, including young children. Another 30,000 were injured and maimed. After years of hatred and discord, the people of Derry said, "Whatever the wrong, there's got to be a better way to right it."

There is. The struggle to end the Troubles involved Nobel Prize winners John Hume and David Trimble, church groups, civics groups, art and student groups, Protestants and Catholics, all struggling together to end the violence, end the armed response, end the petrol bomb, the car bomb and the building bomb.

And it's working. A city that by the end of the Troubles had no standing hotels today has seven, with an eighth under construction. The Peace Bridge now links the Protestant Waterside with the Catholic Cityside. Restaurants and cafes flourish in once-abandoned historic buildings by the River Foyle. The polluted river has been cleaned up and is now a focus of the city, not a blight on it. And the ancient wall, which has survived centuries of attack, siege, armed defenders and petrol bombers is once again a strolling place for Derryites of all stripes, as well as steadily growing numbers of Derry visitors.

There's music in the pubs, in the hotels, in the churches. Paintings adorn outdoor walls as well as gallery walls. Couples amble, crowds mingle, spectators cheer—all without fear of explosion.

And the Bogside, where the Troubles began and once an urban slum gerrymandered out of the right to vote, is now a comfortable inner-city neighborhood—and a shrine to the memory of the Troubles. Murals cover the sides of houses and tour guides describe the horrors that bloodied the streets within living memory.

That is one of the features of Legenderry; it embraces its past conflicts as it strives mightily to rise above them.

What accounts for the change from a city at war to one that's the pride of the UK? Ask around and you'll get a host of answers:

"The churches came together to bring peace."

"People were so sick of the violence, they demanded peace."

"John Hume, working tirelessly behind the scenes."

And one name always comes up as key to the end of the Troubles: William Jefferson Clinton, President of the United States. "He knocked our heads together and kept knocking till we finally had to take notice."

What to do on a visit to Derry? Start with breakfast. A "full Irish breakfast" is the same as a full English breakfast plus two items: white pudding and black pudding. Black pudding is sausage made from dried blood and filler. White pudding is black pudding without the blood.

Walk that cholesterol off atop the most intact medieval city wall in Europe. A city guide will enhance your understanding of why the wall was built (to keep out the Irish), who built it (the guilds of London, when Henry VIII made them an offer they couldn't refuse) and how they gave Derry yet another name (the Maiden City, since no army ever breached her wall).

Lunch at Browns in Town, the hot new restaurant-pub in the heart of the city. Skip the blood pudding.

Take a post-prandial stroll along the banks of the once filthy, now swimmable Foyle. Cross the river on the pedestrian Peace Bridge, the symbol of the massive effort to end Derry's ancient divisions and unite the once sharply divided town. The bridge leads to Ebrington Square, once the British military garrison, now growing into a major cultural-tourist-music space. Take in the military museum, and while you're there, see if there's a concert you want to book tickets for.

Jules Older's latest ebook is *DEATH BY TARTAR SAUCE: A Travel Writer Encounters Gargantuan Gators, Irksome Offspring, Murderous Mayonnaise & True Love*. Effin Older's latest app is Kickass Grammar. Jules and Effin Older (www.julesolder.com) have published articles and/or images in the Times: London, New York, Los Angeles, Vermont and Washington.

Oh, and enjoy that swords-into-ploughshares warmth you find yourself feeling.

For dinner, let's make it an all-Browns day: dine at the original Browns Restaurant in the heart of Waterside. Then, that concert, some pub music or something unexpected—see if there's a classical concert in the resonant hall of St. Columb's Cathedral. You'll cross the Peace Bridge once more to get there.

Next morn, briskly stride through Derry's made-for-walking downtown to the Shirt Factory and the Void Gallery, both housed in one of Derry's once-famous shirt-making factories. Lunch at the Custom House Restaurant, thriving in a long-abandoned historic stone building.

Now, gird your loins and hire a guide to take you through the heart-wrenching murals on Bogside walls. Next stop, the Museum of Free Derry, which Derryites all call the Freedom Museum. By any name, it is a must-see.

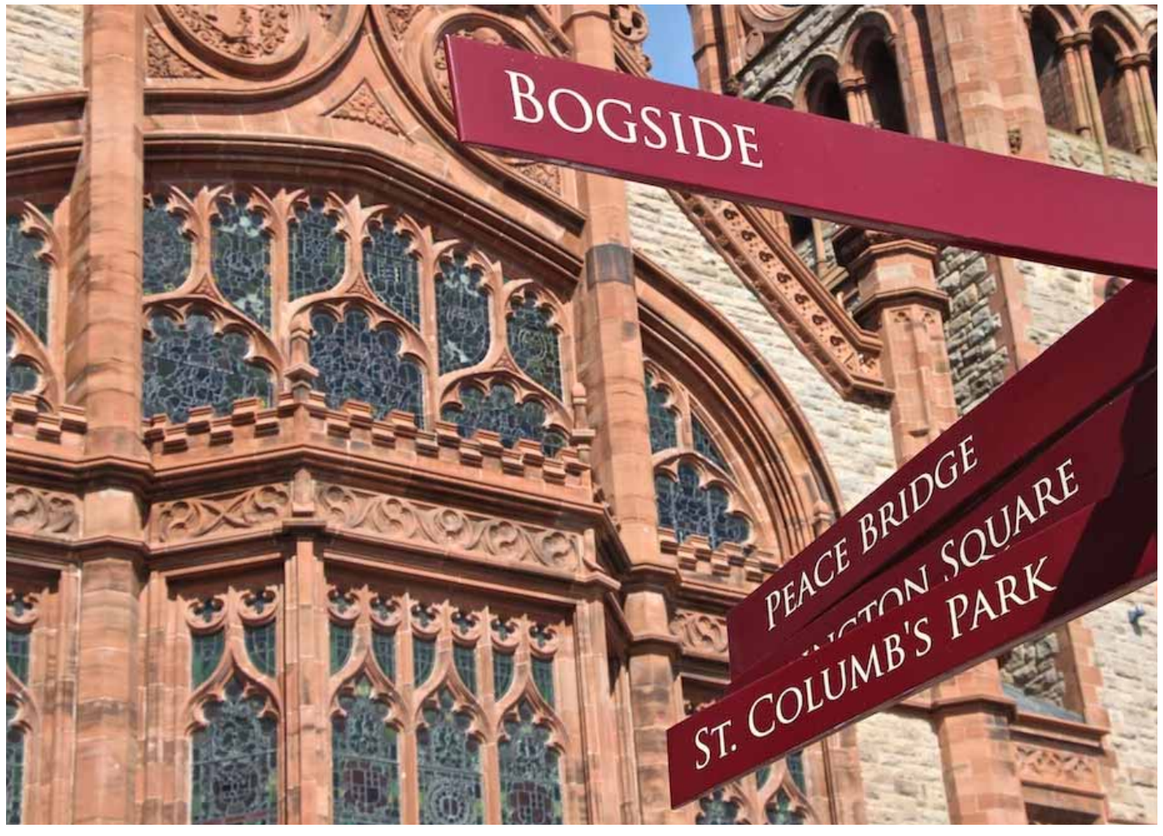
Big day, eh? Hoist a Guinness with dinner at Timber Quay Restaurant on the banks of the River Foyle. Maybe finish with a Baileys Irish Cream or a mug of Irish coffee. Sit back. Relax. Hear the sounds of the river and, perhaps, the strings of a distant fiddle.

And marvel in a city that's gone from bombs to culture in the blink—the prolonged blink—of an Irish eye.

The surest sign that the Troubles may be behind Derry? The graffiti looks like graffiti everywhere else in the world, not about what a wanker your neighbor is. And the political signs? The most prevalent urge you to "VOTE JORDAN".

Who's Jordan? The Derry lad on Britain's Got Talent. He didn't win. But Derry did.

Still interested? Watch "City of Culture: The Movie" at www.YouTube.com/julesolder.



John Poimiroo

California Rambling: Dry Tortugas

Originally appeared in Placerville's
Mountain Democrat in 2010

Mere mention of the Dry Tortugas evokes exotic images: a powder blue sky above a turquoise sea, old sailing ships anchored beside low-lying tropical islands, balmy trade winds, a massive stone fort guarding sea lanes, sandy sun-baked beaches, and sea life crawling ashore and colorfully flirtatious amidst the swirling fans of coral reefs.

On a recent trip to Key West, Florida, all those images became realized. Dry Tortugas is one of several islands among a grouping of seven coral rubble isles 68 miles west of Key West, approximately halfway between the southern tip of Florida and Cuba, the ideal location to base U.S. warships to guard the two entrances to the Gulf of Mexico.

U.S. military officials realized that when they commenced construction of Fort Jefferson on Dry Tortugas in 1846. The idea was not to defend the island, but to defend an ideal coral reef-ringed anchorage beside Dry Tortugas in which U.S. Navy warships could be based.

The resulting edifice is the second largest U.S. fort ever to be built. It is so large that Yankee Stadium could fit inside it. Conceived to contain 550 cannons, the fort was designed to spew red-hot, 300-pound iron balls from 15-inch Rodman Smoothbore cannons and, later, rifled shells from breech-loading Parrot guns mounted along its trapezoidal perimeter, to sink any warship attempting to prevent use of the anchorage. The angled fort walls provided supporting fire to lay a terrible toll on any ship attempting to come within three miles of the fort. Who would attempt such a thing? The British Navy.

In the early 1800s, America's greatest foe was Great Britain. The USA had fought the British twice and British colonial expansion across the world was at its height. "Just leave us alone" was the message the fort and others like it along U.S. coastlines were supposed to communicate. The concept of isolationism was articulated by President James Monroe in 1823 within the Monroe Doctrine, which sought to discourage European powers from further colonizing states in the Western Hemisphere. Fort Jefferson was to provide our country a means of enforcing that policy, and from 1846 to 1875 the huge fortress was built.

During the American Civil War, U.S. prisoners–not Confederate soldiers–were brought to Dry Tortugas to work on the fort. These were U.S. Army deserters, malingerers and other U.S. soldiers whose usefulness to the Army was limited. Once confined in Fort Jefferson, they were forced to work in intolerable conditions (high summer temperatures, high humidity and miserable quarters that reeked of sewage), discouraging other soldiers from deserting or avoiding their soldierly responsibilities. Yellow fever and poor sanitation made life short-lived for many of these recalcitrant warriors.

At the end of the Civil War, convicted conspirators of the Lincoln Assassination, including Dr. Samuel Mudd–the physician who gave medical care to President Lincoln's assassin, John Wilkes Booth–were confined there. Although known to be a Confederate sympathizer, Dr. Mudd set Booth's broken leg not knowing that his patient had just shot the president. In tours of Fort Jefferson at Dry Tortugas National Park (now celebrating its 75th anniversary) provided by the ferry operator and amplified by park interpreters, Dr. Mudd's story is told with emphasis on how well liked Dr. Mudd was during his incarceration at the Fort: how he helped care for the fort's inhabitants during an outbreak of yellow fever, which led to the doctor's early release from his sentence, and that it's now believed Booth did not break his leg jumping from Lincoln's theater box to the stage, but later when falling from his horse when escaping from Washington, D.C.

Construction on the fort stopped only after the increasing weight of brick and stone added to the fort's walls began to crack the structure as it settled into the island, and after bullet-shaped, armor-piercing shells began replacing cannonballs on warships, making forts vulnerable and obsolete. Today the fort's gun ports remain unfinished, as they were when construction stopped. What remains is a remarkable reminder of that era and a fascinating place to visit when touring South Florida.

Dry Tortugas National Park is reached by taking the Yankee Freedom II, a ferry from the harbor at Key West Bight (www.yankeefreedom.com). A new interpretive center will be developed on Key West's docks by the ferry operator, Historic Tours of America. The ride to Dry Tortugas is a rollicking adventure, flying across the ocean on a high-speed catamaran and passing crab and lobster beds near outlying keys (islands) beyond Key West. The ferry ride takes about 2.5 hours out, the same back. Four hours is spent at the island. Limited tent camping is available on the island. Most visitors go out for the day to tour the fort and snorkel inside the reef surrounding Dry Tortugas. Breakfast, lunch, snorkeling equipment and a guided tour of the fort are provided by the ferry operator.

The name Dry Tortugas reflects both that the island has little fresh water and that it was originally identified as a good place to harvest sea turtles (in Spanish, "tortugas"). Sea life abounds surrounding the island. The best locations for snorkeling are along the west side of the island among old Navy coaling station pilings which are overgrown with coral sea fans and elk horn, and in other areas at the shoal's edge identified on park maps. There, you'll find yellow, pink, purple, blue, black, white, orange and red butterfly fish, angelfish, parrot fish, groupers, damsel fish, grunts, trigger fish, drums, wrasse and schools of silversides that turn in unison as you snorkel toward them. The 46-square-mile area comprising Dry Tortugas National Park is considered to be one of the best places in South Florida to see such displays of coral sea life with an ecological preserve that provides sanctuary for species affected by fishing and loss of habitat.

While sunning oneself on the coral sand shore of Dry Tortugas National Park, it's hard to imagine that these islands were once dreaded for their isolation and confinement. Today, their beauty and history are what attract people to this exotic, aquatic corner of the United States.

Beach: Visitors to Dry Tortugas have the option of snorkeling and sunbathing.

Daily ferries depart from Key West to Dry Tortugas N.P.

Moat: Visitors to Ft. Jefferson enter through the same gates Dr. Mudd entered.

Parrot Gun: Never fired, a Parrot gun awaits the call of duty at Ft. Jefferson.

John Poimiroo writes about travel and the outdoors for the *Mountain Democrat*, California's oldest newspaper, and reports about national parks and the outdoors for American Forces Radio Network. He has received many writing and photography honors, including SATW's Frank Riley award for travel writing and its Gold Portfolio for travel photography.

MJ Pramik

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Moulay Idriss: Sacred City

A serendipitous trip to the sacred center of Morocco opened my heart to the Muslim world

I had not visited a Muslim country since teaching English in Turkey in the early 1970s. Researching women's status in Morocco and neighboring Tunisia, I found not much progress over the ensuing four decades. Morocco missed the "Arab Spring" that had shaken so many Middle East countries. Preparing for the journey, I reminded myself "open mind, open mind."

Morocco—the word itself spills out spices, geometric arrays of raging colors, graceful Arabic characters, words like djellabas and hijabs. Once on the ground, the beehive frenzy that is Fez overtook my senses. The medina (old walled city with narrow alleyways) seized me, grabbed my entire body, sloshed my conscious mind and overwhelmed. Zigzags of steep steps puzzled, riots of color and shapes dazzled my vision, yeasty round bread slammed each inhale. Under circling bees, sweet honeyed nougat languished, and ras al hanout, that eternal blend of nutmeg, coriander, cumin, ginger, turmeric, cinnamon, paprika, black pepper, cardamom, allspice and cloves tempered with a dash of salt shouted 'Morocco.' The air inside this World Heritage site caressed my face like the evocative touch from a beloved habibi, the most frequently repeated term in Moroccan and Arabic poetry.

Muezzin, the Muslim call to prayer five times a day, rolled over me, calming the frenetic life within the city walls. On an evening at Riad Zany, restored home of Australians Suzanna Clark and Sandy McCutcheon, we stood on the riad rooftop, the entire labyrinth that is Fez spread in all directions surrounding us. At sunset, voices lifted in singing praise to Allah, the sound enveloping and levitating me above the concrete floor, truly. Swirling in a slow circle, eyes closed, I joined the unseen callers in a sort of prayer. Thus began the inspiration of Morocco. Fez, once the capital of Morocco and its cultural center today, jangled and surprised. Most inhabitants speak Arabic and French. Visitors are often greeted with, "Bonjour, madame (or messieurs)."

After a few days equilibrating in Fez, I traveled to Moulay Idriss Zerhoun, a sacred city and another medina, much smaller than Fez, yet holy to the people of Morocco. It lies within walking distance of the well-preserved Roman ruins of Volubilis. Moulay Idriss sits atop a knoll at the base of Mount Zerhoun. In 789, Moulay Idriss I arrived, intermarrying within local Berber tribes. He then introduced Islam to Morocco and established a four-century ruling dynasty.

The sacred heart of Morocco and a pilgrimage destination during Ramadan, Moulay Idriss only recently opened to foreign visitors. Entry into the guesthouses of the hilly medina requires a special local taxi service—donkeys. Drivers load and rope visitors' bags onto their animals. The kindly critters then clomp steadily up steeps stairs, picking their hoofs over cobblestone alleyways to riad Dar Zerhoune.

Hajiba, the guesthouse manager, spoke in the excellent English he acquired in school: "This is your home while you are here. I will help you."

Hiking around Moulay Idriss' outer perimeter on a sunny March day, voluptuous streams cascaded down the mountain, past the town's 'swimming pool,' a slab of pale gray concrete set near a side crop of the splashing waters. I collected shards of the daily lives of the town's inhabitants, brightly colored remnants of pots, dishes, and tiles, planning a mosaic memorial for later. The bag I gathered would strain my luggage limit. On this amble, I met women and children collecting water from the ubiquitous spouts of neighborhood fountains located throughout the city. One jolly woman motioned how strong she was and laughingly posed for my camera as she, beaming, hoisted two large plastic buckets for her home use.

In the evening, a group visited Scorpion House (Dar Akrab) for dinner. Scorpion House serves as the personal retreat for Britisher Mike Richardson, the proprietor of Café Clock in Fez and formerly of London's The Ivy restaurant. His terraced abode offers a spectacular view of the green-tiled roof of the mosque, tagine and brochette stalls, and sunsets. Views extend out over pale and painted homes of Moulay Idriss then outward toward the undulating countryside and the Volubilis ruins. At Scorpion House, Mike Richardson prepares special Moroccan meals for his guests to deepen their experience of the country.

After mingling with Mike's guests and reveling in the evening readings of poetry or prose, several of us descended into the medina to Dar Zerhoune at eleven o'clock. The tunnels of the medina stood dark, sparingly lit by single bulbs hanging about at random. As we stumbled into the steep alleyways, singing greeted us. As we approached, the volume of the voices crescendoed. We stopped outside an open door. A young woman and man at the entrance beckoned us, a group of 10 foreigners, to enter. Inside sat eight men, Sufis in their white gowns—tennures—a symbol of death, rocking and singing, faces ablaze with smiles of joy. Three held microphones; the tallest wore bright yellow, pointy shoes; another cradled his young son, feeding the boy a cookie. Women, children and other males populated the surrounding back areas. All were singing.

The ushers quickly seated us, moving in extra chairs. Young girls appeared with glasses of sweet mint tea and a tray of almond cookies. Attendees nodded welcome as if we were expected neighbors. The Sufi choir's boisterous chanting continued; the only Arabic word I understood clearly voiced—"Allah, Allah, Allah"—rose to the rafters. I found myself swaying in rhythm, alive and transcendent.

After a half-hour we rose, bowed our gratitude, and returned to our respective riads, quiet and meditative. The next morning, our Moulay Idriss guide, Magit, explained we had experienced a "one in a thousand event." We'd participated in the 40th day after death celebration, the end of the mourning period for one of their community. That they had invited us in and extended a gracious welcome astounded him, and pleased him too.

"If this would happen more often, we could learn from each other." Magit gazed out over the city's walls.

As a farewell to Moulay Idriss, I strolled through the town's central square just after sunrise. The particularly tall Sufi singer from the past evening walked toward me in white djellaba, white sikke hat, and those remarkable bright yellow shoes. He sang still, a blissful smile on his face. He passed, greeting the morning with praise for the new day, and his happiness splashed all over me.

My son once said, when studying world religions in high school, the only religion that attracted him was Sufism. My son, now a jazz musician, may have had it correct. When I close my eyes and "hear" that Sufi choir in full voice, I start to rock, swing, and feel deeply. Again elevated and transported back to that room at midnight in the Moulay Idriss medina sharing moments of time with fellow beings.

I returned home with a deep sense of Morocco, full of the ancient Sufi saying, "Some doors are only opened from inside." Indeed.

Ginny Prior

Happy Wanderer: Twain's boyhood home a magical place

Originally published in the *Hills Newspapers*

The sky was a palate of lilac and gray when we started our road trip from Minneapolis to Atlanta—the Tour d'Heartland, as I like to call it.

My daughter and I were taking my mom's '98 Ford Contour down to her nursing school in Georgia, with thunderstorm warnings along much of the route.

I like a good storm when I'm driving, especially in Iowa, where the landscape is often a monotonous monoculture of corn, corporate farms and large ethanol plants.

Just outside Waterloo, the sky started to swell and bruise like a boxer who's been punched relentlessly in the face. Minutes later, the heavens unleashed a thunderous boom and the sky split apart with a sharp shard of light that looked apocalyptic. This show continued for the next several hours as my wipers danced double-time to the sheets of driving rain. You can't buy entertainment like that.

By midday the torrent had stopped and we were pulling into Samuel Clemens' childhood home of Hannibal, Mo. He would have loved a good weather episode like the one we'd just been through.

Clemens lived in Hannibal from age 4 to 18 and the town inspired his best-known works. The Mark Twain Boyhood Home and Museum (including eight historic buildings) stand proudly in the center of town, just steps from the rambling Mississippi River and a vibrant Main Street.

Hannibal is also home to the 165-year-old Planter Barn Theater, where actor Richard Garey has been playing Mark Twain for more than four decades. We were thoroughly engaged as Garey took the stage, sporting a white cotton suit with silver hair spilling from his well-worn straw hat.

"The coldest winter I ever spent was a summer in San Francisco." Garey delivered the line with such authority that I swore Twain himself was standing in front of me.

The next day our immersion continued. My daughter and I toured the cave that Twain wrote about in The Adventures of Tom Sawyer. It gave us shivers to stand in the spot where hundreds of bats snuffed the flame from Tom and Becky's candles, leaving them stranded in darkness for three days.

Just outside town was the Garth Woodside Mansion, an 1871 Second Empire home where the author used to stay when he'd visit old classmates John and Helen Kercheval Garth. We were staying here, too, and with Twain's room just across the hall, we felt a kindred spirit with this man and his town.

The last night of our visit, I had a dream. I was down by the banks of the Mississippi, watching the riverboats belch out steam as they made their way to and from Saint Louis. And for a few fleeting moments, I felt the wonder that Twain must have felt as he stared at that watery highway linking destinations unknown.

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Happy Wanderer: Why Mothers and Sons need Disneyland

Originally published in the *Hills Newspapers*

My son had never been to Disneyland. Did that make me a bad mother?

No, it just made me a busy mother, with an active, well-adjusted kid. So why did it seem like I was keeping my child from a magical rite of passage? Why did I feel, for lack of a better term, like a "Mickey Mouse mom"?

The chance to redeem myself came in the fall of my son's senior year in high school. His schedule suddenly opened. "I need to go somewhere," he said with great urgency. "I never get to go on vacation." True enough—he was 17 and athletics had prevented him from taking a real family vacation for years. This I could not deny.

So, we packed up the car on a late summer Sunday and hit the I-5 express—just my son and me. I couldn't remember the last time we'd spent more than a moment alone, without my husband or daughter or friends. We needed to reconnect, and we both knew it.

Long stretches of highway have a way of loosening the tongue—out of boredom, perhaps, but it works. By Tracy we were having an actual discussion. By the time we hit Gorman we were sharing an In-N-Out shake, Double-Double Burger and Animal Fries. This was big—it meant I didn't have "cooties."

Pulling into Anaheim, the timing couldn't have been better. It turns out Sunday night is a great time to hit Disneyland. We were arriving as throngs of other families were leaving. Over the next two days, we were a blur on the landscape, running between California Adventure and Disneyland, riding the rides and working the Fast Passes.

And I, in my wisdom, had booked a hotel within walking distance (The Red Lion-Anaheim) and we fell into luxurious pillow-top beds at the end of each evening, then waking up to a breakfast buffet that fueled us through the day. I don't want to brag, but that Red Lion—and its proximity to Disneyland—put me in the running for mother of the year. All past transgressions were history.

By day three, we both needed a break from the heat. Due west was the beach and a cozy waterfront resort called The Portofino Hotel & Yacht Club. With a rack of free beach cruisers and bike trails for miles, this was the ideal home base for exploring Redondo Beach.

By this time, I was seeing a change in my son. He was softening. Sweetening. Surrendering to the idea of mom as a friend. He ruffled my hair on the Glass Bottom Boat as we took in the silver "school of fishies." We shared halibut sandwiches at Captain Kidd's Fish Market and pancakes at Polly's on the Pier. We played Yahtzee by the fire in the lobby of our hotel. And one night we picked the nicest restaurant we could find and got dressed up for dinner.

All those years of reminding my son of his manners—well, they paid off. He was the perfect companion at an exquisite window table at the upscale Baleen Kitchen overlooking the marina. The little boy who used to blow bubbles in his 7-Up had grown up to be a young man.

We shared plates of heavenly scallops, and short ribs and warm duck carnitas, and he never took too many, and always used his napkin. I was bursting with pride.

You see, unless you're a mom, this won't mean much. But bonding like this meant a lot. We always wonder what impact we'll have on our kids, how much of our "wisdom" they'll absorb. Now I know that the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson are true. "Men are what their mothers made them."

Lakshman Ratnapala

Laskshman Ratnapala is chairman of Enelar International and president emeritus of PATA, the multinational corporation for the development of travel. A former director of Sri Lanka Tourism in the Americas, he has also served as chairman of the Bay Area's Executive Service Corps and the Foreign Travel Club.

This Other Eden

Originally appeared in *Destination Insights: Sri Lanka*

SRI LANKA lies like an emerald pendant off the Indian peninsula, separated by only 20 miles of shallow sea. Smaller than the biggest, but bigger than the smallest of the Great Lakes, it was called many names by many people. The Macedonians knew it as Taprobane. To the Persians it was Serendib, to the Chinese it was the "island of jewels." The Portuguese called it Ceilao, the Dutch Zeilan and the British Ceylon. But, the indigenous people always knew it as Lanka—the Resplendent Land.

No place on earth has been likened to Paradise so often, for so long, by so many writers as Sri Lanka. The Persians pronounced that Adam and Eve, banished from Paradise, were sent to "this Other Eden, this demi-Paradise." Friar Marignolli, Papal emissary to Peking in the early 14th century, wrote that "from Seyllan to Paradise is a distance of forty Italian miles, so that the sound of the waters falling from the fountain of Paradise is heard there." And, Mark Twain exclaimed, "Dear me, it is beautiful! What a dream of fairyland and paradise!"

The history of Sri Lanka is shrouded in the mists of time and legend. Ramayana, the Asian epic which predates Homer's "The Odyssey" and "The Iliad," recounts the abduction of Indian princess Sita by the king of Lanka, Ravana. The Mahavamsa, Chronicle of the Great Dynasty, composed in the 3rd century AD, records the arrival of Indo-Aryan settlers in the 6th century BCand the Sinhala, the lion race, from the Sanskrit word for lion. Laying the foundations of a great civilization, they built Anuradhapura, their first great capital city, coinciding with the Golden Age of Periclean Greece. It lasted more than a thousand years as a major metropolis of the ancient world. Ptolemy recorded it in the earliest maps ever made. Pliny, the Roman historian, devoted an entire chapter in his encyclopedic work to the exchange of ambassadors between A'pura and Emperor Claudius' Rome in 45 AD. Chinese scholar Fa-Hsien who studied there for two years in the 4th century, described a planned city with handsome, richly adorned buildings.

The history of Sri Lanka was an inexorable cycle of invasions from South India and their repulse, time and again, by Sinhala warriors, establishing a legacy of bitter fruit in our own day. A'pura was repeatedly sacked and the Sinhalas in desperation moved their sacred capital to Polonnaruwa, where they raised a splendid new city and inevitably attracted the cupidity of new plunderers. In the face of continuing pillage and destruction, the Sinhalas retreated farther south, moving their capital to a dozen different sites, always carrying with them the symbol of national sovereignty, the sacred Tooth Relic of the Buddha.

Finally, taking refuge in the mountain fastnesses, they built yet another capital city, Kandy. Here again, peace eluded them as new enemies, now from the West—the Portuguese, Dutch and English, with vastly superior arms—mounted waves of invasions, but were routed by Kandyan forces who tenaciously defended their last royal redoubt for 300 more years. Finally, internal intrigue ceded the kingdom to the British in an 1815 treaty, ending a monarchy that had ruled for two and a half millennia. Sitting in a bowl of mountains, beside an artificial lake, with the Temple of the Tooth Relic as the piece de resistance, Kandy presents a picture-postcard scene of such beauty that British Governor, Sir William Gregory observed, "Kandy is the loveliest town in the loveliest island in the world."

Freedom was regained in 1948 and modern Sri Lanka is a democratic, multi-ethnic society reflecting the impact of foreign settlers in the wake of numerous invasions.

The culture of Sri Lanka is shaped by the pervading influence of Buddhism over the life of the country. The introduction of Buddhism in 247 BC was the most decisive event in the long history of Sri Lanka. The resultant royal patronage gave Buddhism the prestige of a state religion and set in motion the evolution of a distinctive culture that burst into a spectacular flowering of the national genius in art, architecture, literature, music and a lifestyle based on the Buddhist ethos.

The massive artificial reservoirs and canal systems that sustained a vibrant civilization whose very existence depended upon the conservation of water in a "dry zone" attest to the hydraulic engineering skills of the ancients with an astounding knowledge in fields such as trigonometry. These great lakes enhance the architectural ensembles of stupendous, rivaling the pyramids of Egypt: monumental statues and decorative sculptures, carved with amazing vitality, grace and beauty. The paintings of celestial maidens at the soaring citadel of Sigiriya and the frescoes at the temples of Dambulla display an artistic brilliance, even after one and a half millennia.

Today, Sri Lanka's culture is enriched by the traders and conquerors who transplanted their distinctive lifestyles. Yet the culture of the first Sinhala settlers and their religion, Buddhism, remain the hallmark of this multicultural society.

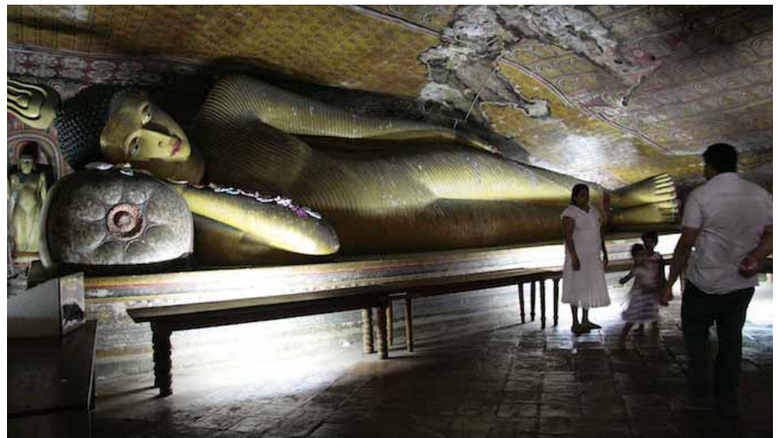
Nature has blessed Sri Lanka with incredible wealth. King Solomon sent emissaries here to find gems to woo the Queen of Sheba. Chinese writers of yore found rubies so abundant here, they wrote the gods had "sprinkled the land with a dew, causing it to produce red gems." Marco Polo, traveling from China to Persia in a squadron escorting the granddaughter of Kublai Khan to espouse the Khan of Persia in 1293, wrote: "The island produces more beautiful and valuable rubies than found in any other part of the world, and likewise sapphires, topazes, amethysts, garnets and many other precious stones."

Nature's bounty is such that there is no land more lush or more beautiful." And Emerson Tennant wrote: "Ceylon, from whatever direction it is approached, unfolds a scene of loveliness and grandeur unsurpassed by any land in the universe." Greenery dominates the countryside from the lowland rice paddies to the highland tea terraces. The land, adorned by a necklace of white sandy beaches, rises gently from the palm-fringed shores to mist-clad mountains with cascading waterfalls and the commanding presence of Adam's Peak, where Adam alighted upon his transfer to "This Other Eden."

The richness of Sri Lanka's flora is matched by the variety of its fauna, from elephant, leopard, bear and blue whale to a stunning array of birds. The startling diversity of physical features and wildlife within such a modest area, makes this a nature lover's paradise. Philip Brooks, rector of Trinity Church in Boston, visited Sri Lanka in 1883 and wrote home: "My dear Mary, this must be the most beautiful place in the world. I do not see how there could be one more beautiful. In the gardens cinnamon, nutmeg, cloves, tea and coffee plants, pineapples, mangoes, bamboos, banyans, India-rubber trees and a hundred other curious things are growing. Here and there you met an elephant or a peacock and the pleasant faced natives smile at you out of their pretty houses."

That pretty smile remains the best thing about Sri Lanka, where hospitality is second nature. I present this book with pride, wishing you the good fortune to experience the wonders of this enchanted land.

Photos by Jim Shubin



Suzie Rodriguez

Suzie Rodriguez writes on a variety of subjects—including travel, food, wine and people—from her Wine Country base in Sonoma, California. When not writing, Suzie indulges her love of hiking, biking, gardening, history, art and anything relating to food. She's currently working on a novel about early California history.

Best time to Visit Beaujolais?

When the Nouveau Wine Comes Fresh from the Barrel

A slightly altered version of this article appeared in the *Chicago Tribune, Baltimore Sun, Cleveland Plain Dealer, Newsday, San Jose Mercury-News, Minneapolis Star-Tribune* and more than a dozen other newspapers

It was the third Thursday in November, the official day of release for the young, sprightly wine famed throughout the world as le Beaujolais Nouveau. We were on the wine's home turf— roughly 55,000 acres of vineyards in the Saône-Rhône Valley, south of Mâcon and northwest of Lyon.

We were aware that frenzied wine lovers everywhere were popping corks in noisy, media-saturated events, celebrating the fact that this year's nouveau wine could at last be opened, sipped and judged.

But in the Beaujolais District, where the countryside hovered on that delicate cusp between autumn and winter, life was unruffled and quiet. Mornings were sharp, even cold: nearly naked trees were limned with heavy frost, a faint dusting of snow covered the meadows and puffs of vine-scented smoke drifted lazily above the ancient stone farmhouses. The afternoons were invariably warm, however, forcing us to relegate jackets to the rental car's trunk.

Unlike most wines, the light and flowery nouveau should be drunk very young. It thus comes to market about six weeks after harvest, providing it just enough time to be fermented, filtered and bottled. Until the early 1950s, most nouveau was consumed with great appreciation but little fuss in Lyonnaise bistros and cafés, but these days the annual release has become a worldwide event in which wine-lovers clamor for those first precious sips.

Every year, hours before the stroke of midnight gives birth to November's third Thursday, cases of Beaujolais Nouveau begin arriving in the world's capitals. Last year in New York crowds gathered inside Carnegie Hall to witness the city's first bottle being uncorked at 12:01 a.m. In Washington, D.C., the French Embassy celebrated release day with a tasting of seven different nouveau wines. In San Francisco a case of nouveau was taken from the airport, placed on a balloon-laden cable car, and ceremoniously paraded up and down the hills past cheering fans.

And in Oingt, a tiny 13th-century village in the heart of Beaujolais, my companion and I shared an earthenware pitcher of the new wine drawn straight from a barrel—delivered, the patronne informed us, by the very man who grew the grapes and made the wine not three miles from where we sat. We were lunching at Le Vieux Auberge, a small and quiet place with a tidy, banked fire, dark and heavy ceiling beams, and a stone floor polished by more than 700 years of footsteps. The meal—a crumbly terrine of pork, andouillettes in a complex Beaujolais wine-and-shallot sauce and pears with a St. Felicien cheese—couldn't have been better.

We'd come from Paris early that morning on the TGV—a two-hour, high-speed rail trip south to Lyon, where we had reserved a car at the train station. Lyon, with its maze of one-way streets, can be difficult for strangers to maneuver and it took us far longer to find our way out of town than to travel up the autoroute to Villefranche, the bustling commercial center of the Beaujolais District. Once there we picked up a stack of brochures at the tourist office and were soon studying them in a nearby café over buttery croissants and ink-black coffee.

Of particular interest was a pamphlet containing a map of the district superimposed with a series of suggested itineraries. We rejected those with names like "Tourist Route" or "Quick Route," opting instead for a circuitous tour called "Road of the Golden Stones." Armed with the itinerary and a trusty Michelin map, we set out to explore the land southwest of Villefranche.

At 35 miles long and 9.5 miles wide, Beaujolais is a compact world. Sheltered too: on the west it's bounded by the Monts de Beaujolais, which eventually descend into the Loire Valley; to the east by the Saône River; to the north by the vineyards of Mâcon; and to the south by the Turdine and Azergues Rivers.

While it's easy to delineate the District's boundaries, it's nearly impossible to define its interior. Beaujolais is a land of meandering, narrow roads that constantly delight and surprise the traveler. Go right at a fork and perhaps you'll climb hills, marveling at the vineyards running up the angled slopes and the thick chestnut groves crowning them; turn left and you might descend into a broad valley of lush meadows, clusters of pine and fir, and herds of slow-moving Charolais cattle. There are fields of rugged gorse, lively creeks, deep gorges, medieval castles, isolated villages, gold-stoned farmhouses—and, of course, vineyards.

Following the Golden Stones itinerary, we journeyed to Jarnioux, home to one of the most stunning castles in southeast France. Originally built in the 13th Century, it was remodeled during the Renaissance. Surrounded by a moat (now dry) and guarded by a massive, metal-studded door and six round pepperpot towers, the Jarnioux castle should not be missed.

From there we took a narrow, winding road to the beautiful medieval village of Oingt, which stands perched atop a small hill. After a late and leisurely lunch at Le Vieux Auberge, we explored Oingt's 13th Century church with its many ancient sculptures, and the 16th Century Village Hall, where exhibits delineate local history.

Leaving Oingt, we decided to visit one of the local wine châteaux—there are almost 200 in Beaujolais, many of which welcome visitors. In summer the châteaux are popular with tourists, French and foreigners alike, who come to taste the wine and perhaps buy a few bottles. Many villages also contain cooperative cellars, where, for a price, you can sample a variety of local wines.

But in late fall, after the grapes are harvested and the tourists are gone, most châteaux are officially closed until late spring. Unofficially, however, we found the châteaux owners surprised and happy to see us. With the year's work done and winter coming on, they seemed to welcome the opportunity for an hour's pleasant diversion.

We next backtracked to Jarnioux where, after traversing a narrow dirt road, we found Château de Boisfranc, a stately and impressive manor surrounded by acres of vineyards. Doors were open, but we saw no one. We wandered around the old stone outbuildings for about 10 minutes before the proprietor, Messr. Doat, appeared—he'd been cleaning out a cellar, he said, and hadn't heard us drive up. He was puzzled at first by our off-season appearance, but quickly grew enthusiastic when he learned we'd heard of his wine in California. Would we like a taste of this year's vintage straight from the barrel?

An hour later, after a tour of the ancient stone wine cellars and a generous sampling of the château's wines (which include a white Beaujolais and an organically grown red Beaujolais), we gathered our bottles and took our leave. The amiable Messr. Doat continued to wave goodbye until we'd turned a corner and disappeared.

We spent the remainder of the afternoon wandering slowly north along narrow, little-traveled roads toward Pizay, where we'd booked a room in a 14th-Century château. Along the way we stopped in Vaux, made famous in the novels of Gabriel Chevallier, and St.-Éttienne-la-Varenne, a tiny stone hilltop village reminiscent of Umbria's hill towns.

That night, after settling in our rooms at Château de Pizay and exploring its elaborate gardens, we traveled to nearby Belleville to dine at rustic Le Beaujolais. Considered by many to be the district's best restaurant, it's moderately priced, offering excellent French country cooking and a superb wine list. In late fall, when wooden barrels of nouveau rest behind the bar, the air is ripe with the aroma of earth, yeast and grapes.

That night I devoured a cassoulet of snails, followed by saucisson in Beaujolais sauce. My companion raved about the traditional escargot and was even more enthusiastic about his andouillettes in a white Beaujolais sauce. We finished our meal with ripe pears and a selection of regional cheeses, including an aged, hard-to-find Epoisse.

And—need I say it?—on the table, from start to finish, was an earthenware jug of Nouveau Beaujolais.

Maxine Schur

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Giving the Devil his Due Celebrating Carnival in La Vega, the Dominican Republic

Originally published in *Caribbean Travel & Life*

Here come the nuns! So eager to get to church, they're running down the street. BUT WAIT! These are the nuns from hell! As they come, they swing rubber sand bags the size of ping-pong paddles. The nuns have a lot of suspicious facial hair and are itching to whack the rear ends of anyone looking like a sinner or just anyone with a large derriere. THWACK! I suspect I've fallen into both categories for I feel a swift blow to my bottom. Now ordinarily I wouldn't take kindly to strangers smacking me, but today it's Carnival and I'm standing in the streets of La Vega, getting in the spirit. And in this small Dominican town nestled in the Cibao valley, the Carnival spirit is definitely different. Here people don't give a hoot about exotic dancers, parade floats, guys on stilts or clowns. No, here Carnival is closest to the medieval pre-Lent mockery of good and evil itself. Contrary to the rest of the world, the Dominican Republic celebrates Carnival all February with each region celebrating in its own unique manner. Other towns may boast more elaborate costumes and expensive floats, but La Vega's Carnival is the most unusual.

Every Sunday in February, the town divides into punishers and sinners. The punishers are those who parade, attired in endless variations of brilliant homemade polyester devil costumes, and who arbitrarily spank unsuspecting sinners. The sinners are us—the spectators who line the parade route and scream with nervous laughter.

So I'm standing, tourist-curious in the crowd while a bombastic DJ is narrating the scene from a truck whose loudspeakers blast jumpy merengue music. The parade boasts a seemingly endless supply of devils who march down the street in both directions at once and who unexpectedly dart out of line to mete out justice. Devils in gaudy red costumes lined with jingle bells, feather-lined purple pantsuits, satanic black robes, devils draped with tin cans, snakes, fake human heads. All the devils wear huge papier maché masks that sport real animal teeth and have wide leering mouths, bovine nostrils and horns that jut out from the forehead, curiously making all these devils look like cows.

This is probably no accident for La Vega sits smack dab in the center of the country's cattle producing region, so Joseph Campbell might have said there's some powerful myth-making going on here.

THWACK! I got it again! The woman next to me laughs with glee but THWACK! her rear end also gets the treatment. All around us people are laughing. Some people are getting rowdy. A couple of guys are pushing their friend into the path of the devils and THWACK! he gets his just desserts. The word "daredevil" takes on new meaning here as a few sinners even dare the devils to punish them by sticking their own rear ends out, just asking for it.

"Mas Fuerte! Mas Fuerte!" a woman next to me screams, jokingly urging the devils to smack others harder. She's jumping up and down and laughing and in her excitement falls against me and we both topple back nearly into the pan of hot oil in which a street vendor is frying plantains. Laughing, we quickly right each other, and soon I find myself shouting "Mas Fuerte!' too, for I'm celebrating Carnival Shirley Jackson style. A man dressed as a pregnant woman dances down the street, another man jiggles his enormous plastic breasts. The crowd watches amused but really we're all concentrating on the devils and we're hiding behind each other like little kids behind their moms and trying in vain to make our collective bottoms as inconspicuous as possible. A priest parades but instead of swinging a censer, he's swinging a butt-whacker! The crowd screams but to no avail for he's followed by the pope himself! Looking like…"The Punisher."

"Mas Fuerte!" the woman shrieks. We're all screaming now and laughing

and falling over each other when here they come—THE HOPPING COFFINS!!!!

Wooden coffins thump hop toward us. The DJ turns up the merengue music louder and sings the coffins' praises with an enthusiasm bordering on hysteria. Cheers go up! Each coffin has a hole at the top from which a corpse face leers. As the DJ exalts this creativity, the coffins hop quickly but awkwardly on as if in some morbid sack race.

An old man, grizzled and stooped and wearing a Giants cap, weaves through the crowds. He is selling La Vega key chains, Jesus key chains, Pringles, gum, candy and cheap plastic masks of discontinued American Superheroes: Wonder Woman and the Incredible Hulk.

"Fidel! Fidel!" the crowd shouts over the nervous music as a Castro lookalike puffing a Dominican cigar swaggers down the street. Assassinated Dominican dictator Trujillo is resurrected, and with a show of fake gunfire, an entourage of Secret Service men, looking suspiciously the size of 12-year-olds, swaggers before us.

Devils march in dazzling purple pantsuits lined with jingle bells yet they're sober as the judges and every so often a child runs out from the crowd to tie the laces on a devil's sneaker like an act of mercy.

Some of the spectators are in costume too—sort of. One guy has an enormous snake wrapped around his neck; a group of nursery school tots have been turned into a gang of red demons. A few children wear the handmade "lechone" masks from nearby Santiago, speckled in pink, yellow and blue and sprouting spikes. Others wear the cheap superhero masks. Three ragged boys about 10, looking too poor for costumes, run through the streets, their near-naked bodies greased with black motor oil. Of course this idea is ingenious for they can spank others to their hearts' content, yet their black oil-slimed skin is a deterrent to anyone wanting to spank them.

The centrality of the Devil is a medieval concept. Once the main figure of the Feast of Corpus Christi, his purpose was to make people reflect on their sins. The focus on Satan was ultimately banned by the church in Europe, yet in this island town throughout colonial times it seems the devil not only remained, but prevailed. For the good people of La Vega, Carnival is the festival of "Diablo Cojuelo"; the supreme devil and his goofy "punishment" is a 500-year-old tradition.

La Vega Devil *©2014 Daniel Harel*

What a wonderful tradition it is. The La Vega carnival is an enormously satisfying rite of reversal. How many of us might long to wear a mask and smack the backside of some insufferable boss? Talk about catharsis! And for kids, what could be more joyous then publicly, yet anonymously spanking that mean teacher or bratty brother? La Vega at Carnival time is a town in its subjunctive mood, celebrating in a mood of feeling, willing and desiring, a mood of fantasizing.

I may never see this festivity again but when Lent rolls around next year I'll remember it and know that the hardworking people of La Vega are getting what was coming to them all year—a devilish good time.

Alec Scott

Alec Scott has written for the *San Francisco Chronicle, Toronto Life* and *San Francisco* magazine and taught writing at Stanford. A graduate of Dartmouth College, he has been nominated for ten NMAs in his native Canada and won a North American Travel Journalists' Association gold for a piece on Germany. www.alec.ugali.com

To The Lighthouse

The Rough Coast and Post-Hippie Charm of Mendocino County

Published by the
Toronto Globe & Mail

We are standing on a grassy plateau, on pale cliffs, looking down at a semicircular cove with a pier stretching out into the Pacific. Given that this is California, they call what we're standing on merely a bluff. The landscape is heroic here in Mendocino County, three-plus hours of curvy coastal driving north of San Francisco. Inland are mountains and steep valleys with wide rivers. Up from them are redwood groves and increasingly renowned vineyards. But a first trip need not venture so far: It should focus on—and revel in—the coast.

And that's what we're doing. Here on the clifftop, there are red networks of seascape strawberry plants and tiny blue-and-yellow Douglas irises—and cows. Locals long ago scotched plans to put a nuclear facility on these headlands, precariously close to the San Andreas Fault. I toss a pebble off the edge and it takes four Mississippis to land–some bluff. A few surfers ply the moderate waves below and a fishing skiff arrives to unload the day's catch at the pier.

This part of Mendocino County is having a moment—Obama has just declared these lands, the Stornetta Public Lands, a national monument and, in part for that reason, the New York Times has advised readers to visit, rating these bluffs and the nearby town of Point Arena as among the top destinations for 2014. For now, the seaside county retains a rough post-hippie charm—the coast is more ragged, the land less manicured than what's on offer in the wine counties south of here.

We run into only a few other hikers as we walk along the cliffs, past a couple of small waterfalls carrying spring runoff into the sea. The coastal stone is soft enough—sedimentary, with slate and sandstone in the mix—that here the Pacific plays sculptor, carving tall sea stacks and arches. In the shelter lent by a small island, harbor seals bob in the surf, their blubbery heads all facing the sun. Out on the open sea, humpbacks blow up spume as they pass by on their way to the Arctic, but, alas, none breach the surface. Beyond, on a headland, sits the Point Arena Lighthouse, a classic model that, at 35 meters, is the tallest on the American West Coast.

The fact that Point Arena and area hit number three on the Times' annual list of places to visit makes some of the 449 locals belly laugh. Twenty percent of the county's residents live below the poverty line and the town has two types of establishments: old-timer hangouts and the glossy joints that newcomers and weekenders prefer. (There are two groceries, for instance, one with organic bulk food and artisanal olive bread, the other serving mainly packaged national brands under bright lights.) One afternoon, an evidently exhausted dad leaves his young children, including one in a stroller, unsupervised on the sidewalk while he pops in for a pint at the rough-and-tumble Sign of the Whale. Nearby, a renovated vaudeville theatre (built in 1929) screens operas from the Lincoln Center and highbrow dramas from Britain's National Theatre.

Robert and Jill Hunter, a husband-and-wife team, run Uneda Eat; the tiny space was an old butcher shop, Uneda Meats, and they blacked out two letters. Robert's a self-taught chef, and some well-thumbed, spattered-upon cookbooks fill a shelf above our table. On the wall facing us is a vertical installation of succulent plants and a small screen playing muted nature films.

The food is polyglot—much inspired by their recent menu-supplementing sabbatical in Southeast Asia—and the moist, salty meat falls off a pork rib that has been soaked in a soy-accented marinade for 72 hours, and cooked over low heat for a day. It's done sous-vide, of course, the mode of the moment.

Toward the end of the meal, I look up and see zebras nickering silently on the television—a good-enough prelude to the next day's visit to a breeding farm for rare and endangered African hoofed animals. Frank and Judy Mello own and run the B. Bryan Preserve. She is originally from Louisiana, but she doesn't drawl—she has too many jokes, too much information and conservationist passion to toss out to go slow.

Roaming about the moderate acreage are three species each of rare zebra and antelope and five of the last 670 remaining Rothschild's giraffes in the world—"they're teenaged males, so their barn reeks; the five bumps on their heads are called ossicones." She delineates the hierarchy in an all-female kudu antelope herd and they all turn, on cue, to show us their ample rumps and urinate.

"That's rude, girls!" Mello turns to us. "You know, I tell my Daddy, if he'd only given me a llama at age 12 as I'd asked, I'd have got it, this bug, out of my system."

Further up the coast sits the more posh, already discovered Mendocino, an old logging and lumber-processing town, prettied up by the artists who flocked here in the midcentury—a Bohemian migration that inspired the McGarrigle sisters' musical tribute, Talk to Me of Mendocino. The town is curiously reminiscent of a seaside hamlet in New England or the Canadian Maritimes—and lots of settlers came here from both areas. (It masqueraded as a fictional Maine town, Cabot Cove, in Angela Lansbury's 1980s TV show, "Murder, She Wrote.") Fancy carpentry and one-off detail distinguish many buildings—and it's one of only four towns in the U.S. named as historical landmarks. A Masonic lodge has, for reasons best known to the fraternity, a statue up top of a winged Reaper standing behind a fair maiden carrying an orb and wheat sheaf.

In a cove south of Mendocino, I go sea kayaking with Craig Comen, an eco-minded guide, former pro surfer and sales rep for Patagonia. Comen mixes paddling pointers with gossip about the curious habits of the peleagic cormorants nearby. He points out a dark layer at the top of many cliffs—native middens, the detritus of their former seaside encampments—and draws my attention to the modernist-inspired mansion of a pet-food magnate who flies in on his private plane on some weekends.

Standing ready to receive the jet set is a gussied-up group of cottages around the Heritage House, an old inn on a particularly spectacular seaside site. The 1978 film Same Time, Next Year, starring Alan Alda and Ellen Burstyn, was shot here. It tells the story of an adulterous pair who meet annually for dirty (and increasingly soulful) weekends with each other amid bright chintzes, busy wallpapers and dark-wood antiques.

But when Heritage House reopened last fall after four years of being closed, such decor was gone. Our suite has been thoroughly Zenned. Now, its neutral sofas, pale sisal rugs and slate-tiled bathroom all make what is outside the window pop. Clumps of bush lupine, flowering purple in front of a red fence. The grey-green ocean with its violent white surf. Caramel cliffs lit up by the setting sun.

On our last evening, after watching the old movie streaming on a hotel channel devoted to it, we go out and breathe in a nightcap of fresh salty air and stand silent under a sky bright with stars. The familiar huntsman Orion is barely discernible in this throng. Same time next year? If only.

Bill Scull

Bill is an acclaimed travel photographer and experienced photo lecturer. His work has been exhibited in Los Altos, San Francisco, Havana and Ghana. He completes photography assignments for travel companies and licenses images to travel organizations. Web gallery: www.pbase.com/scull. Photo Blog: billinghana.blogspot.com. Contact: bill@scull.net / 650-823-7007

Luis & Chevy — Both from 1953

Athlete and Bird

Cuban Caricature

Lovers in Trinidad

Central Havana

Havana Harbor & Malecon *(major road)*

Cuban Capital

Jim Shubin

Jim Shubin is an award-winning graphic designer and photographer. He designs and publishes books for Destination Insights, Wanderland Writers and the Book Alchemist. His travel photography has been published in print and on the web. He lives in northern California, but is always ready to go somewhere new.
www.destinationinsights.com — www.bookalchemist.net

Volga River, Russia

Auckland, New Zealand

Ramayana Ballet – Bali, Indonesia

Dance Student – Arma Museum – Bali, Indonesia

Caterpillar of the Blue Morpo Butterfly

Jamaica

Japan

Costa Rica

Sandy Sims

Sandy Sims, who has worked as a newspaper editor and feature writer, has written for a number of publications, including the *San Francisco Chronicle, California Tour & Travel, Women's Day, Image* and online publications. Her master's in English has a creative writing focus and her stories have been published in literary magazines.

Angel Island: Same Place, Different Times

Originally appeared in *Image* magazine

The ferry slowly pulls away from Tiburon. Toddlers stand on parents' legs, little noses pressed against windows. Older children and the captain's Labrador retriever climb stairs to the upper deck where passengers brave cold wind as we sail the mile over Raccoon Strait to Angel Island State Park. There, some will hike, some will ride bikes, some will take the tram tour around the island. I'm taking a Segway tour.

Early in the 1900s, groups sailing to Angel Island had a much bigger stake in the trip. This was the Ellis Island of the West, where immigrants from Asia, South Asia and Russia were processed, including "picture brides" from Japan. But the largest and most discriminated against group to land on Angel Island was the Chinese, who left an endearing mark—sad and angry poems carved into barracks walls at the Immigration Station. This is what I most want to see.

When our ferry arrives at Ayala Cove, I search out Freda, a small, muscular, young woman with bright eyes and a quick smile. She teaches me how to ride a Segway. Lean on my toes to go forward, on my heels to go back, turn the handles in the direction I want to go. She has me practice uphill and downhill. Although I fear I'll mess up and fall, Freda says I'm doing fine.

Off we roll, passed bike rentals and the cafe—which, by the way, has excellent food—and then by the Visitors Center deeper in the cove. In the late 1800s this building was a Quarantine Station, where ships from foreign ports were fumigated and immigrants suspected of carrying diseases were kept in isolation.

As we glide over the five-mile, paved road that circles the island, I gain confidence on my Segway, and we pick up speed. Fun.

I'm surprised when Freda says this island—the biggest in the San Francisco Bay—has played a part in much of U.S. military history. We pass Camp Reynolds, built in 1863 to protect gold and silver shipped through Raccoon Strait to help finance Union Troops during the Civil War.

We stop on the south side of the island where the view of the bay, San Francisco and the Golden Gate Bridge is spectacular. While I concentrate on balancing with my feet, Freda turns and points up to Mt. Livermore, once a Nike Missile Site. At 788 feet, this is the center and highest point on the island—named in honor of Caroline Livermore, who fought to create Angel Island State Park. Visitors hike and bike to the top.

As we round the east side of the island to Quarry Point, we glide through eucalyptus trees, Monterey pines and beautiful Fort McDowell, built in 1910. Thousands of WWI and WWII soldiers were processed here to and from their next assignment, and in and out of the Army. POWs arrived here before being sent to prison camps elsewhere in the country. At the hospital, Freda and I get off our Segways—carefully. My feet are thankful to walk a little.

We wander in the ruins. I swear I hear the bustle of starched nurses' uniforms, or was it the wind in the trees?

Back to our Segways, I step straight on without hesitation, as Freda taught me, and we roll uphill toward the Immigration Station at China Cove.

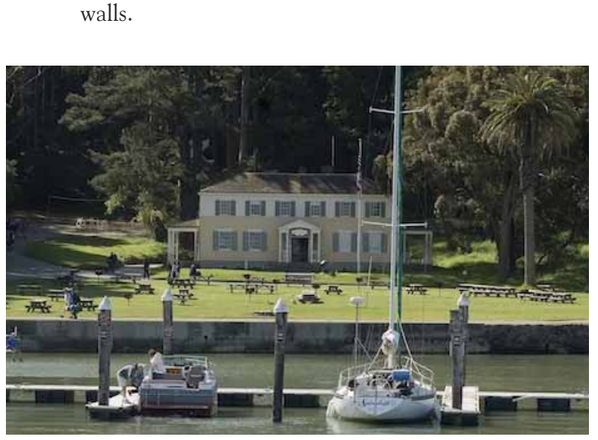
The pathway from the road down to the station is too steep for a Segway tour, or even a person with walking difficulties. But after I say goodbye to Freda back at Ayala Cove, I pick up the $5 shuttle at the café and return to the station.

I climb the covered stairwell to the barracks, opting for the $5 self-guided tour. There is also a $7 docent-led tour. (It's best to check ahead on availability.)

Here in the first dorm a cluster of bunk beds shows how detainees kept meager belongings. On one lower bunk sit two pair of tiny embroidered shoes, which I'm sure belonged to a toddler. But a booklet next to the shoes tells the history of the Chinese practice of foot binding, which included the eventual breaking of bones, to reshape the foot so it would ideally fit into three-inch shoes like these. Women would have borne the difficult voyage with such deformed feet.

More difficult were U.S. Chinese Exclusion laws, which lasted from 1882 to 1943. Meant to stop Chinese immigration to the U.S., the laws did not pertain to those who had a father who was a U.S. citizen living in this country. And women did not have separate citizenship from their husbands or fathers. This loophole spawned "paper" sons and daughters, who illegally purchased papers identifying them as the children of American fathers.

Some 170,000 Chinese immigrants came to Angel Island. The average detention time was two to three weeks; some stayed for several months and a few remained for nearly two years. Many were sent back to China. A peaceful group, the only outlet for anger was the poetry they carved into barracks walls.



At first, I only see a board display of poem translations in the barracks. But when I look closely at the walls, there they are. Chinese characters carved into the walls, faintly visible under layers of paint: words of despairing young men's shattered hopes.

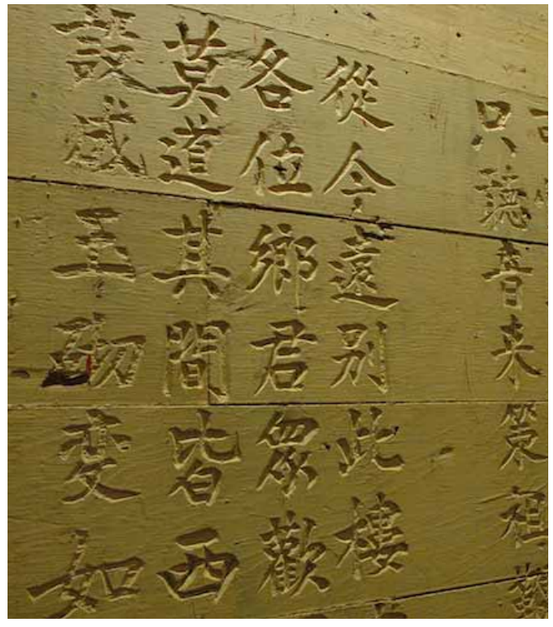
Some translated excerpts:

" … Don't say that everything within/is Western styled/even if it is built of jade, it has/turned into a cage."

"… My heart trembles at being deported back to China./I cannot face the elders east of the river./I came to seek wealth but instead reaped poverty."

" … America has power, but not justice./In prison, we were victimized as if we were guilty./Given no opportunity to explain, it was really brutal./I bow my head in reflection but there is nothing I can do."

On the ferry ride back to Tiburon, as toddlers sleep in parents' arms, I think about this quiet, peaceful island, the site of family fun, bike rides and picnics. How fraught with fear and emotion it must have been in earlier times with soldiers going to and from war and immigrants enduring long, harsh internments.



Gary Singh

Gary Singh (gsingh@metronews.com) is an award-winning journalist with a music degree who paints, publishes poetry and exhibits photographs. He's published more than 800 works, including newspaper columns, art and music criticism, profiles, business stories and lifestyle articles. He is a sucker for anything that fogs the opposites of luxury and the gutter, academe and the street.

Athens in the Summer

Originally appeared on TravelingBoy.com

Agents at the Athens International Airport should confiscate every travel guide from every American tourist that even attempts to lug his or her family into the country. Such are my thoughts as I revisit Zorba the Greek and Henry Miller's Colossus of Maroussi. As I travel through those masterpieces, I can visualize customs control swiping Fodor's Guides from suitcases and replacing them with Kazantzakis and Miller. I can see copies of Zorba and Colossus being issued at the airport to every prospective American en route to Greece.

A few recent conversations with a few different friends brought those books back into my consciousness and how they should be required reading for Greek-bound neophytes. Naturally, the conversations also brought back a scene from July of 2000—the last time I traveled to that country.

At that time, I had no job except for a few cobbled-together freelance writing assignments. I held two degrees from the university down the street, but I had drank away any possible academic career and was living on a friend's floor above a supermarket.

My solution to this predicament: go to Greece.

So there I was, that pre-smartphone summer, and it seemed way over 100 degrees in the Plaka neighborhood of Athens. A squawking battery of American tourist families surrounded me. In a roped-off taverna courtyard with potted plants and dust, hazed by pollution, I occupied one of a hundred tiny formica tables, faded orange in color. A bouzouki player, older than dirt and sporting a sequined vest, plopped himself on a chair by the counter and jammed like there was no tomorrow. With a plastic fork I powered through a dirt-cheap meal on a white paper plate: a slab of tourist Moussaka, plus a native salad and something else buried with an avalanche of garlic. I found it hysterical that the Greeks would bastardize their shtick to the point of force-cramming a "Greek Salad" on throngs of tourists.

I had studied enough to order a liter of beer—megalo meant large—but since I had finished it, along with the next one, a bountiful carafe of retsina now sat in front of me. While I ingested concrete fumes from nearby sewer construction and god knows what other flavors of pollution, the bone-cold retsina provided a sandy, resin-flavored counterpoint. It is the Greek chilled wine, intended to accompany native food, lift the spirits and ease the pain of a grotesquely hot summer.

None of that pain, however, was even remotely as miserable as one particular American tourist family that paraded right in front of me. The husband wore a T-shirt and shorts, plus glaring white socks and athletic shoes that would have looked oversaturated in Photoshop. The wife's outfit included a washed-out paisley muumuu and a flimsy sunhat almost as big as a sombrero. Under her arm she carried a three-inch-thick Lonely Planet book, a pompous tome dedicated to the entire country of Greece. Already engrossed in a clamorous argument and drenched in sweat, the couple dragged their two distracted kids between the folks eating at the tables. The husband complained over and over that it was too hot, way too hot. The kids didn't seem to mind. Their faces were filled with introverted curiosity, like they were continuously trying to figure out something in their heads.

I was somewhat drunk, the conventional pace of time was lost, and I could not stop staring at the American family, as the husband and wife complained about the unbearable Athens heat. "It's too hot," they kept saying. "Let's find a place that isn't so hot. Why is it so hot here?" And strained variations thereof.

I wanted to howl and break plates, throw a tantrum, and wring them out like soaked bar rags, all while barking: Well, you're in Athens in July. Of course it's freakin' hot. What the hell's the matter with you? You paid thousands of dollars to bring your whole family across oceans and continents to be here. In Athens. In the summer. Sheesh. Take that 900-page travel guide you've been lugging around the whole country and flip it open to page three, where it probably mentions the weather and where it probably indicates that July in Athens is hot.

But I felt indecisive, distant and cowardly, so I said nothing. I just watched them leave the courtyard and disappear into a labyrinth of cobblestone walkways, the children still trying to figure out something in their heads. Meanwhile, the dust lingered and the retsina was a glory to behold. The bouzouki player broke out a chromatic gypsy ballad. I closed my eyes and continued sweating. I don't think I ever wore white socks to Europe after that.

Erin Van Rheenen

Born in Oregon and raised mostly in California, Erin lived in Costa Rica while writing *Living Abroad in Costa Rica* and *The Manatee's Big Day*, a bilingual children's book. Lately she's been exploring her own backyard, from the Sierras to the inmate-planted gardens on San Francisco's Alcatraz. www.livingabroadincostarica.com

Costa Rica's Alcatraz

The author gets a sneak peak before a former prison opens to the public.

A longer version of this article appeared in the *Los Angeles Times*

"If you don't have anything to do," says the graffiti scratched into the cellblock wall, "don't come here to do it."

That would have been excellent advice from 1883 to 1989, when this penitentiary on San Lucas Island was synonymous with cruelty and isolation. Inmates labored in the tropical sun, breaking rocks and harvesting salt from the sea, dragging their leg irons and dreaming of escape.

I can hardly believe I made it here. Several months shy of the place opening to the public, it's as difficult getting onto the island as it once was to get off. The boat ride from the port city of Puntarenas takes 20 minutes; getting permission to come took half a year.

Ghosts and Graffiti

My local pal Josué and I—along with two park officials who live here—are the only souls on the island today. The only living souls, that is. The place is rife with ghosts.

They're in the bat-infested prison church, the upstairs offices where you walk the beams or risk rotting floorboards, the old dining hall invaded by strangler fig trees, and most of all in the dank and dilapidated cells. You can feel the weight of the former inmates' waiting, of their caniando—doing time.

The ghosts left graphic messages on the walls. Soccer players make winning goals. Knives drip blood. A jaguar stalks toward a cell's one tiny window. A grinning cat declares Sonría al canaso: Smile while you do your time. Crosses abound, as do sad-faced Jesuses and beatific Virgins, one with her robes flaring out like a river delta.

Most of all, there's a lot of hand-drawn porn, from scrawled privates to fully rendered multi-body scenes. Toward the shadowy back of one cell a larger-than-life woman totters on lovingly detailed high heels, her rust-colored bikini purportedly drawn in blood.

Privacy for enjoying racy pictures would have been hard to come by. These rectangular cellblocks, a little bigger than my studio apartment in San Francisco, held 60 to 80 men. In the early days, prisoners slept on the floor. Later they had iron bedsteads with thin mattresses. Ceilings were low and windows few.

"Hey!" Josué calls from outside the cell. "Come see what I found."

Midday sun floods the interior courtyard. Fallen leaves litter the cracked cement, looking like huge gnarled hands. I smell the ocean on the breeze and hear waves break on a nearby beach. What a relief it must have been for prisoners to come out here, if only for a few minutes.

Prisoner 1713

Josué and I both learned of this place through a book by a former inmate, José León Sánchez, who for 19 years was known as Prisoner 1713.

León Sánchez entered prison barely literate but emerged a published author, printing his first works in prison on a press he made following instructions in Popular Mechanics. He has more than two dozen books to his credit, but his most famous work remains the novel based on his time on the island: La Isla de los Hombres Solos ("The Island of the Lonely Men"). (God Was Looking the Other Way is the title of the out-of-print English version.)

Josué has found something he read about in the book. "It's the underground solitary confinement cell," he says, crouching next to a big metal disk almost flush with the ground. "Men spent months down there, with only 15 minutes above ground per day."

A dank smell wafts up out of the opening, a mix of wet earth and corroding metal.

Suddenly the prison seems to close in on me.

A white sand beach is a short walk from the prison, on a path shaded by overhanging trees. Ruins of wood-framed shacks are visible in the undergrowth. After the penitentiary became a prison farm in 1958, well-behaved inmates lived outside the main prison, fishing, tending their gardens and selling handicrafts to visitors.

The pre-1958 penitentiary León Sánchez depicts is a very different place. "I felt with my own flesh," he wrote, "the fire of steel, the long months of the dungeon, my hands chained with irons, the contempt for my condition as a human being. In the penitentiary I found out that a man can descend until he turns into a dog, or less than a dog."

But León Sánchez also waxes eloquent about the island's beauty, all the more poignant when contrasted with the horror of the prison. "There isn't anything prettier in San Lucas than these summer months," he writes. "Trees germinate and blossom...the foam on the sea laughs and each wave rears boisterously in the wind...yellow butterflies appear by the thousands."

Wildlife Trumps Development

The prison island is not just a park but a wildlife refuge and historical monument. A 2001 decree saved it from becoming a mega-resort. That was great news for the atmospheric old prison, the island's eight pre-Columbian archaeological sites, and all the monkeys and parrots.

For decades, animal and plant populations were poached and trampled, but they're now recovering. In 2005 officials brought to the 2.5-square mile island a Noah's Ark assortment of species that had once abounded here but were thinned out or obliterated by poachers. Deer, turkeys, parrots, iguana, armadillos and sloths were among the animals released.

About 120 howler monkeys call the island home, as well as 40 species of birds, including pelicans, owls and the magnificent frigate; 17 species of reptiles, including boa constrictors and crocodiles; and eight kinds of bats.

On this visit we've encountered bats, scorpions, countless varieties of birds and bugs, and an agouti, which resembles a glossy, dog-sized guinea pig.

On the way to the beach we pass under a troop of howler monkeys. They start in with their deep-throated howls, produced by a special echo chamber in the throat. The monkeys maintain their territory through sound, perceiving rival noise as a challenge. Josué imitates the call of the white-faced monkey, the howlers' archrival, and the howlers go wild; one even hurls excrement down onto the path, narrowly missing us.

On the beach, broken flip-flops and limbless dolls remind us that even uninhabited islands receive the dubious gift of garbage from strong ocean currents. But farther along the island's coast, palm and mango trees arch over clean sand, and the views across the water to the heavily wooded hills of the Nicoya Peninsula are stunning.

Escape from Isla San Lucas

León Sánchez wrote of an inmate swimming out to sea, maybe from this very beach, with a dead pelican strapped to his head for camouflage. The warden, cruel to human beings but a lover of birds, had forbidden anyone from harming pelicans. But he could apparently tell a dead one from a live one, and shot this one out of the water.

Our escape from San Lucas Island is significantly less dramatic. But before we head back to the mainland, we say goodbye to the park administrator. Earlier, we presented the man with our letter of permission, resplendent with official seals and signatures. I tell the administrator how privileged I feel to have seen this remarkable island before the official park opening.

I stop mid-sentence, and we all watch as a Costa Rican family—kids and cousins and aunts and uncles—ambles toward us. Who knows how they got here, but it's clear they have arrived without a letter of permission. They chat easily with the administrator, then ask whether they can look around.

"Sure," he says. "Just watch your step. Make sure the kids don't fall through the floorboards or lock themselves in the cells."

Welcome to Costa Rica. Where official permission is needed, unless of course you just show up.

Graffiti in an old cell.

Approaching the prison island. San Lucas Island, Costa Rica

Wendy VanHatten

Wendy VanHatten is a published author, travel writer and editor-in-chief of *Prime Time Living Magazine*. She enjoys traveling with her husband, photography, wine tasting, cooking and her grandchildren. Follow her travel blog at www.travelsandescapes.blogspot.com and the magazine at www.primetimeliving.org.

Paris for the First Time

A version of this article was previously published in
Siouxland Magazine

A bad day in Paris is still better than a good day anywhere else.

Do you know who originally said this? Does it really matter once you're there?

Planning your first trip to Paris requires some thought. With so much to see and do and if your time is limited, it's best to have a hint of a plan. Do you know what you want to see? Do you love art and museums? Or, would you rather walk around, take a boat tour on the Seine, and sit at outdoor cafes?

If you want to do it all, you'll probably have to come back again and again. Not that that's a bad idea!

Let's start with some practical tips for three entirely different sights in the City of Lights.

First, the Eiffel Tower. Did you know it's open every day? Easily recognized as the showcase of Paris, over seven million people visit each year. This makes the Eiffel Tower the most visited monument in the world that you pay to visit.

With that in mind, plan your days in Paris and purchase your tickets ahead of time online to avoid standing in line just to buy a ticket. Even with your designated visiting time and your ticket in hand, you will still spend 30 minutes to an hour just to make it to the elevator to get to the top. It's all worth it once you step off that elevator and look out over the city at your feet.

Dress in layers. It may be warm at the bottom, but can be cold and windy at the top.

The Eiffel Tower was built by Gustave Eiffel for the 1889 Exposition Universelle, a celebration of the 100th anniversary of the French Revolution. Built in two years, two months and five days, this was quite the achievement for that time period. However, this impressive landmark was only intended to last 20 years.

On to the Louvre, one of the world's largest museums, which is also a historic monument. With over 652,300 square feet of space, it is viewed by over 9.7 million visitors each year, making it the world's most visited museum.

When the Louvre opened, it showcased an exhibition of 537 paintings, mostly royal and confiscated church property. Today, well over 35,000 objects and paintings are on display. Now you know why it would take weeks to see everything here.

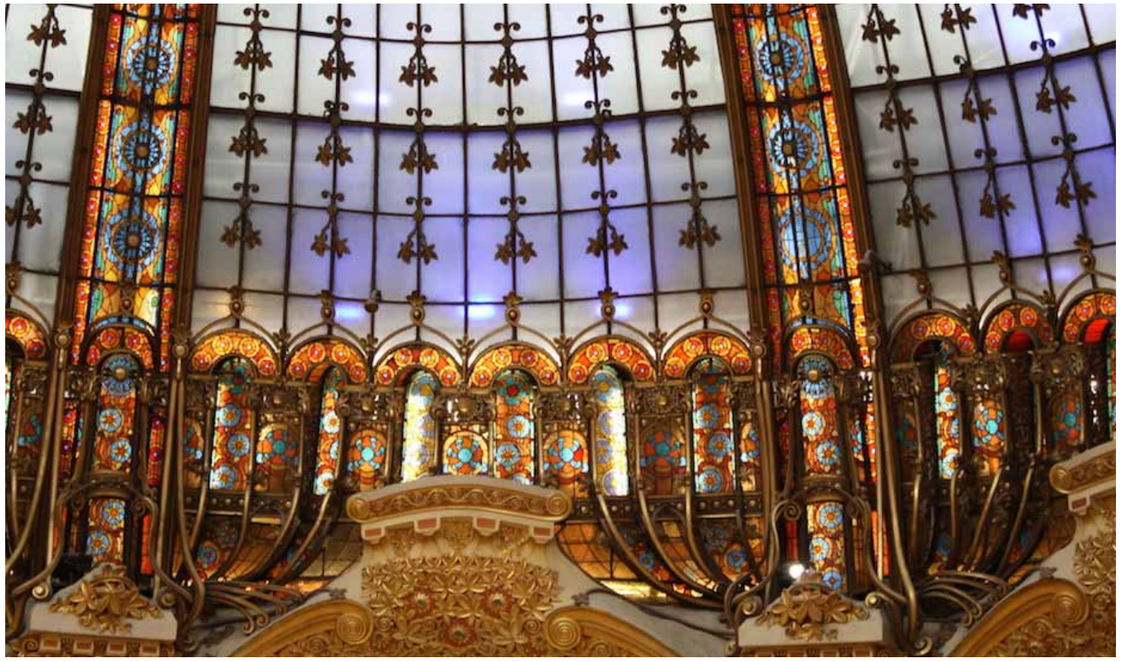
The good news: all floors and rooms are well laid-out, allowing you to see the areas or works you are particularly interested in viewing. Again, plan ahead for your museum visits and purchase the Paris Museum Pass at the airport or any other tourist information spot. This pass allows free admission and no standing in line to buy a ticket. Since the pass is good for more than 60 museums and monuments in and around Paris, it's one of the best buys. You can get a two, four or six day pass. Plan ahead here as well and activate it only when you are ready to visit your first museum because the number of days start on the first day and need to be used in consecutive order.

Switching gears, let's visit the Galeries Lafayette. For one thing, they have the largest cellar of Bordeaux wines in the world. Head to the rooftop terrace for a panoramic view of Paris and beyond.

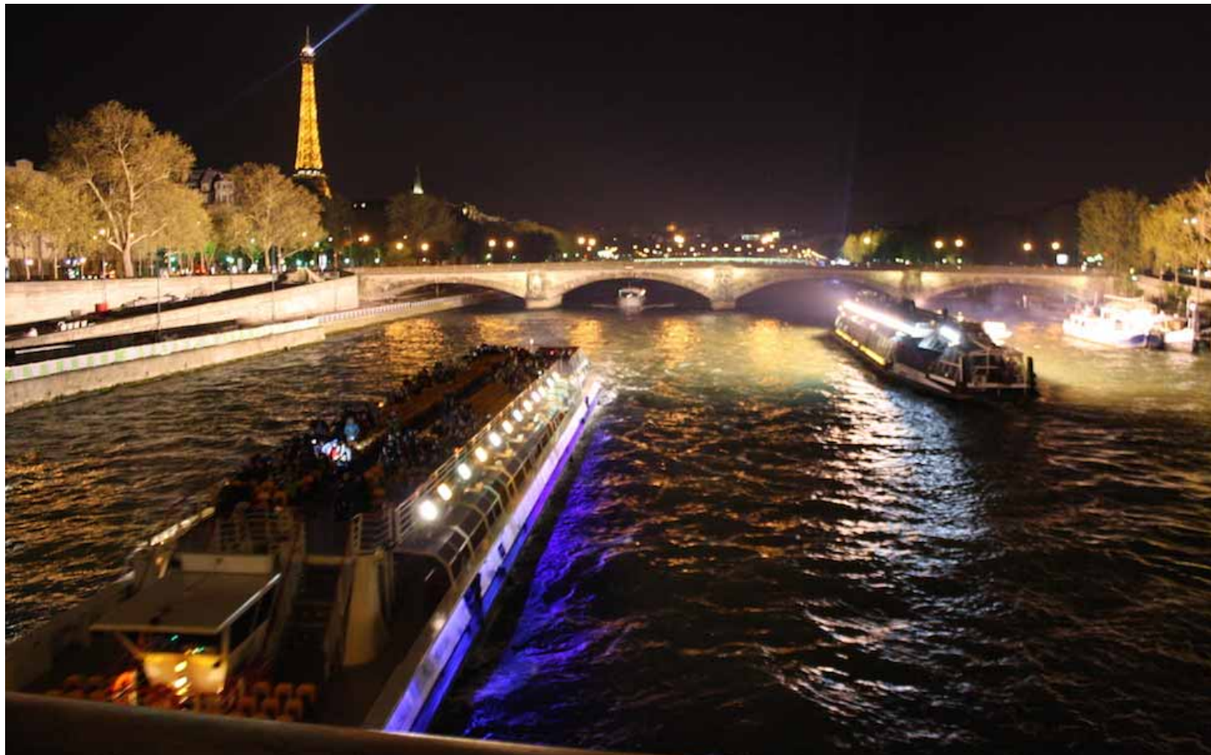
This 'luxury bazaar' was unveiled in 1912 as a store where the merchandise would wow the crowds with golden light filtering through the domed roof making all the products shimmer like gold. The building, with its Paris Art Nouveau style, the banister of the magnificent staircase inspired by the Paris Opera House, the ornate ironwork on the balconies and the 141-foot dome with stained glass windows designed by master glass maker Gruber delivers on all levels of artistic grandeur. It's the second most popular tourist attraction in Paris, right behind the Eiffel Tower.

More than a store, Galeries Lafayette is worth a stop in your busy day. Have some tea in the tea room, eat in an upscale cafeteria (complete with wine) or relax in the smoking room. Purse dogs and wine snobs are equally comfortable here.

Come back again and again…I know I will.



◄ Galeries Lafayette ▲ Paris at Night ▼



Tom Wilmer

Thomas Wilmer, the author of three books and 1,000-plus newspaper and magazine travel features, is a recipient of the Henry Lawson Travel Writing Award from Tourism Australia and Qantas. His 25 years as a public radio broadcaster has merited numerous awards, including the 2013 Lowell Thomas Silver Award.

Epiphany of Travel

Originally appeared in *Central Coast Magazine*

Several years ago, while riding on a cross-country bus in Costa Rica, I was seated next to a stranger from the States. We start talking, and he soon figured out I was a travel journalist. "I imagine you've traveled extensively?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, I suppose I've been around the world about four times."

He then asked, "So what did you learn?"

That was my epiphany, because until then I had never really thought about lessons learned. I had been too occupied savoring sights, sounds, scents and people encountered to stop and analyze the essence of the odysseys.

So, what have I learned? Foremost, it is that people across the globe are fundamentally the same; they embody tremendous similarities and minimal differences. Paradoxically, yet too frequently, I have learned that peace unravels most readily between rival groups with common roots. It is less often the unseen and unmet boogeyman from the other side of the world that stirs disorder. But the vast majority of people on the planet are peace loving, inquisitive and friendly. It is typically less than five percent of a given population that foment evil.

Most people are inherently good

Whether it is a friendly encounter with two ragamuffins in a back alley of Shanghai, a shopkeeper in a Moroccan souk, or a restaurant owner in Malacca, almost everyone I meet extends warm welcomes and many ask me to stay and visit. Around the globe, when I visit with everyday people on the streets and inquire about their lives, most desire better jobs, decent housing, food for their families and opportunities for their children.

And yet there is a collective poison that has lurked in the shadows throughout the ages. The Indonesians have a name for this miasmatic insanity that can swiftly waft over a region and transform even sweet and peaceful people into temporary sordid monsters. The word is called Amok. "To run amok" aptly describes the interludes of madness in the Congo and Kosovo, for example.

Life is inherently risky

Your chances of being injured or killed in an automobile within 30 miles of home are far greater than while flying around the world in a jet plane. Before I took off for a journey through Eastern China 19 years ago, I mentioned a concern for my safety to my father. He responded with a comment that has guided me well, "Do not forget that a fear of death is actually a fear of life."

Yes, bad things can and do happen when we leave home.

A man threatened to shoot me when I was walking through a souk in Rabat, Morocco; as I exited a subway in Atlanta, a hoodlum attempted to mug me; and in Toronto I foiled a pickpocket. But that's life–and a life not worth risking is not worth living. If I had arbitrarily changed a booking for a Kauai helicopter flight, I would have crashed into Mount Wai'ale'ale Crater. But none of that has slowed me up.

Those with so little are often blessed with abundance.

It is often the little things that make for lasting memories. For example, while spending time on the Caribbean island of Nevis, a local acquaintance introduced me to his friend, a tailor from India. Matilla lived in a remote part of the island in a dirt-floor shack with crumbling, cinder-block walls and a pockmarked, corrugated-tin roof. As I entered the tailor's hut, his wife extended a Coke as a welcome drink. A bottle of Coke cost one dollar on Nevis at the time. It suddenly dawned on me that their libation cost the couple the equivalent of $50. You see, Matilla, the tailor, earned about one dollar an hour and I earned $50 an hour, yet this couple proudly and readily shared a gift they really couldn't afford.

I have encountered endless examples of trust and good faith. While spending time on the Caribbean island of Virgin Gorda, I was in a rural general store when a tourist attempted to rent a video. The tourist paid for the video and then placed her driver's license and credit card on the counter. "What are those for?" the clerk asked.

"Oh, for the security deposit."

"This is not necessary," the clerk replied.

"But what if someone were to steal the video?" the tourist countered.

With a joyous Caribbean lilt she rejoined, "Honey, no worry. No one will steal your video!"

Moments of fear that conclude with a laugh.

A friend, freelancing for the Boston Globe, was with me in the Honduran customs queue. We stepped across the white line and presented our passports. The stern-looking customs officer never looked up. His only communication was the thud-thud of his official stamp colliding with our passports. He mechanically slid our passports back through the hole in his cage, and we assumed that everything was fine. But then the agent stood and leaned around the counter, gave my friend the evil eye and surreptitiously asked, "Are you Santiago?"

My friend turned ashen and asked me, "What did he say?"

"I think he wants to know if you are Santiago." We both shrugged and agreed that it was probably some sort of trick or code word and if improperly answered would earn us an immediate visit to the secret side-room for further interrogation. My friend stood at attention, looked directly at the agent and confessed. "No. Sir, I am not Santiago!"

The officer gave him an incredulous gaze as he retorted, "What? I say to you, 'Are you Sunday to go? Do you go home Sunday?'"

"Oh. Yes, Sunday we go," responded my relieved friend, and the agent pointed his index finger toward the exit door as he shook his head. To this day, my friend's nickname remains "Santiago."

Song and dance of life.

I have realized that song and dance define many cultures and serve as integral ingredients in people's daily lives. While visiting tiny Saona Island in the Dominican Republic, I stopped in at a thatched-roof, open-air, seaside pub as salsa tunes boomed out across the sandy seaside village. Washerwomen with bundles of clothes piled atop their heads, teenagers and little kids alike strolled along, gyrating and swaying to the beat belting from the grog shack. The lively, infectious tunes inspired smiles throughout the ramshackle village.

Similarly, while traveling through the Canadian Maritime Provinces, I was invited to dinner at a 19th-century restaurant in King's Landing, New Brunswick, where everything from the dress of the servers to the cuisine and brew was authentic period fare. Two young women next to me stood up and started belting out a Nova Scotian folk tune. After the women finished, I turned to my local historian host and commented: "That's so cool that they employ live entertainers." He laughed and replied: "Actually those two are just patrons like you, waiting to dine. It's quite common for folk up here on the spur of the moment to entertain each other like this." A second later, a white-haired woman, well into her seventies, got up and belted out an Irish sea shanty to raucous applause from her fellow, mostly thirty-something diners.

What I have learned? I've discovered that we have so much to learn from people around the world. People and cultures, when viewed from the outside, might have less than you or I in terms of material wealth, but their lives are nonetheless blessed with abundant and priceless treasures.

Janet Wilson
and Stuart Wilson

Award-winning travel journalists Janet and Stuart Wilson are freelance writers and photographers. Their work has appeared in the *San Francisco Chronicle, Preservation, RV Journal* and *Trailer Life*, among other publications. They are active members of the Bay Area Travel Writers and Outdoor Writers Association of California. Find them at www.wilsonstravels.com.

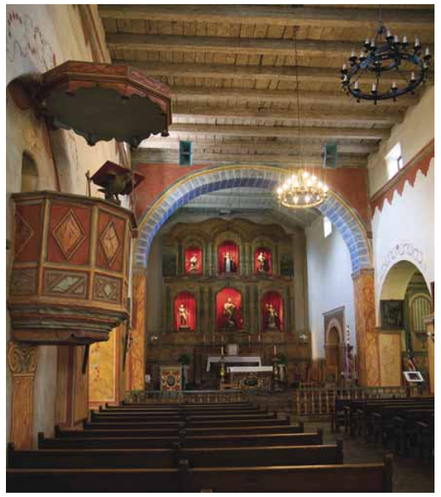
Fault (and time) Creep in San Juan Bautista

A version of this article appeared in the
San Francisco Chronicle

"The other half of this building's moving north while this half's just sitting still," said Ralph Hurd, Assistant Winemaker at DeRose Vineyards.

We were in San Benito County's Cienega Valley, in a cavernous warehouse that serves as both winery and tasting room, sniffing bouquet of Negrette, a rare, inky-dark red varietal said to be planted on only 150 acres in the world. But the fissure running down the center of the building's cracking, crumbling concrete floor proved even more memorable than the Negrette. "According to those geologic instruments over there, that half (of the building) moved one-and-a-quarter centimeters in the past 12 months," Hurd explained.

Trace the San Andreas Fault northwest for less than a dozen miles and you'll find the village of San Juan Bautista. Like the warehouse's western half, it drifts imperceptibly northward, perched on the very edge of the Pacific Plate. Here, not just the fault creeps slowly—time too seems to move at a leisurely pace.



Over a recent weekend here we awoke to a rooster crowing at dawn, trod the original El Camino Real, and got buzzed by iridescent hummingbirds while wandering through the mission's gardens. From the top of nearby Fremont Peak we took in vistas sweeping to Monterey Bay and beyond. We observed an ancient religious ritual in the 1812 mission church. And, poking around Third Street where antique shops, art galleries and restaurants occupy intact 19th century storefronts, we watched cars stop for chickens crossing the road.

Standing in the town plaza, San Juan Bautista State Historic Park guide James Rendon swept his arms wide and proclaimed that the surrounding buildings represent the Spanish, Mexican and American periods–the whole of 19th century California history. They include Mission San Juan Bautista, built between 1803 and 1812; the Plaza Hotel, built in 1858 but incorporating as its ground floor former Spanish military barracks dating from 1813-14; the Castro-Breen Adobe, constructed between 1838 and 1841; the Plaza Stable, built about 1861; and the 1874 Plaza Hall.

In continuous use since 1812, the huge adobe mission church withstood the 1906 earthquake and still serves as the local parish church. During our visit, it also served as a theater for performances of "La Pastorela" by El Teatro Campesino, San Juan Bautista's renowned professional theater company. Begun in support of United Farm Workers' organizing in the San Joaquin Valley, the nonprofit is still guided by its founder, artistic director Luis Valdez. El Teatro stages productions at their Fourth Street playhouse throughout the year.

"La Pastorela," a biannual holiday performance is one of its most popular. A folk art tradition dating from the Middle Ages in Europe and brought to Mexico in the 16th century by Franciscan missionaries, pastorelas, or shepherd's plays, dramatize the journey of shepherds to the Nativity. We could have reached out and touched the tattered shepherds, shimmering angels, even the gangster-style Devil himself, on a cross-shaped stage in the center of the church. Although almost entirely in Spanish, the occasional impeccably-timed English phrase, together with the expressive performance and English-language libretto, allowed us non-Spanish speakers to follow the story.

A self-guided tour of the mission includes the church, cemetery, garden and a former convent wing, now a museum. Another historic collection fills the Castro-Breen Adobe, part of the State Historic Park since 1933. Succeeding generations of Breens, members of the Donner Party, owned and occupied the two-story, balconied adobe beginning in 1848.

Built with the idea it would serve newly created San Benito County as a courthouse, Plaza Hall ended up as a family residence, its upper story where the court was to have sat became a dance hall and meeting room.

Turns out Hollister was selected as the county seat, signaling San Juan Bautista's deceleration to a slower pace.

On the Plaza's north side, a small bluff overlooks the flat, intensively cultivated fields of the San Juan Valley. Here we literally stood atop the San Andreas Fault and below, viewed a trace of the original El Camino Real linking California's 21 missions, and predating Mission San Juan Bautista by twenty or so years.

Juan Bautista de Anza's overland colonizing expedition to San Francisco passed by here in 1776. Segments of his route, part of a National Historic Trail, can be hiked or ridden on horseback. One morning we tackled a four-mile piece stretching from south of town into the Gabilan Range. It follows Old Stage Road, approximating El Camino Real and de Anza's route.

We set out thinking we'd take a leisurely two-mile walk for scenery and photos, but ended up hiking five miles, the first two and one-half an unrelenting climb. As we rested at the high point enjoying the views, approaching hoofbeats conjured images of de Anza leading his party of 240 settlers, who would found San Francisco.

Another day a steep, winding 11-mile drive delivered us to just below the summit of Fremont Peak. In changeable weather we climbed toward the 3,170-foot pinnacle, soon passing a sign marking John C. Fremont's 1846 encampment here and calling Fremont "the West's greatest adventurer." Our little adventure, a half-mile walk to a well-trod summit, began to look dubious as we neared the top. For the final few yards we scrambled over rocks, slippery with rain, our balance challenged by a cold, gusty wind. The view proved worth the effort but it would have been better on a clearer day.

Grape growing around here dates to mission days, so of course we needed to check out the current manifestation of this ancient tradition. Along Cienega Road, south of Hollister, Pietra Santa and DeRose wineries presented a dramatic contrast. Housed in a modern, brick-faced building with a tower and arched windows, and doors said to resemble the old Spanish missions, Pietra Santa sits on a gentle rise amid the vines. DeRose? Well, we've already described the mammoth 1950s gray warehouse, hard by the side of the road, that we almost drove by before realizing it was the winery.

Approaching Pietra Santa we passed the owners' residence, a beautifully restored Frank Lloyd Wright-designed house. Up a flight of stairs, the tasting room cum gift shop affords vineyard views from balconies, and purveys wine-related merchandise, Pietra Santa olive oil, some specialty foods and, of course, wine. We liked the Sassolino, a proprietary blend of Merlot and Sangiovese, but our favorite was the Zinfandel.

At DeRose, the day's offering was arrayed on a folding table where we stood, sniffed and tasted, surrounded by huge stainless-steel tanks and an old redwood one, a remnant of the time when Almaden made wine here. Along with the Negrette, we sampled several varietals and a proprietary blend called Hollywood Red. Hurd described the winery's dedication to dry farming exclusively, attentive viticulture, and limited production (6,000 cases total, some bottlings a mere 250 cases). We took home more Zinfandel and some Hollywood Red.

A glass of Hollywood Red enjoyed with dinner the previous evening at the Faultline Restaurant had peaked our interest in the local wineries. A quirky San Juan institution, the Faultline occupies a bungalow perched on the edge of the San Andreas. Chef/Owner Edie Franc prepares a limited number of a few entrees. The halibut in ginger, wine and lemon was perfectly cooked, moist and delicious; the chicken and prawn cacciatore had the traditional, subtle herb flavors but seemed to be missing prawns.

Our window table overlooking the fault line gave us yet another view of this unhurried place that has so far defied the onslaught of time, and the San Andreas.

Stuart Wilson
and Janet Wilson

Keeping the Light On

Volunteers Help Save America's Historic Lighthouses

This article originally appeared in *Preservation*,
the magazine of the
National Trust for Historic Preservation

Location, location, location—it's what makes any lighthouse indispensable, including New Dungeness Light Station in Washington state. Punctuating the end of a five-mile ribbon of sand and driftwood at the entrance to Puget Sound, New Dungeness has served as an essential beacon for sea captains traversing the Strait of Juan de Fuca for more than 150 years.

When we had the opportunity to volunteer here as lighthouse keepers, we grabbed the chance. How could we resist a bracing week in a spectacular setting, smack in the middle of a wildlife refuge? We couldn't. And the payoff exceeded our expectations. We witnessed bald eagles fishing in the early morning, a coyote prowling at dusk, sea lions just off the beach in the afternoon. Day and night we watched the parade of vessels cruising the strait in front of us—from tankers and ferries to fishing boats and nuclear submarines. We took in the drama of the snow-crested Olympic Mountains gleaming at daybreak and the serenity of sunset as the lights of Victoria, British Columbia, began glowing to the north. But best of all, for seven days we lived in and cared for a historic 1857 light station, one of the first to be built on the west coast of the United States.

Our group of six relief keepers—the two of us, one relative, and another family of three—arrived on a breezy Saturday morning, ferried over hard-packed sand at low tide by a trained lighthouse volunteer in a four-wheel-drive vehicle. After unloading luggage and a week's provisions (enough to stuff two refrigerators), we received a walk-around tour to learn about tools, equipment, paint, keys and the radio. There were two specific rules to follow: Always remove shoes upon entering the keeper's cottage to protect floors from sand, and observe the ironclad no-smoking and no-open-fire orders. (A wood escape ladder affixed to the outside of the keeper's cottage provided a powerful reminder that it could take firefighters up to two hours to reach this isolated outpost.)

After sharing an enchilada casserole around the large dining table, we retired early to a comfortable queen-sized bed, the arched window opposite framing a perfect view of the lighthouse. We awakened the next morning in time to raise the flag in advance of the prescribed 0800 deadline, only to find we'd been beaten to the task—the opening salvo in a friendly competition to see who would hoist the flag each day. Afterward we began quizzing one another about light-station facts to share with day trippers: How tall is the tower? Sixty-three feet, lowered in 1927 from 91 feet. Where's the original Fresnel lens? In the Seattle Coast Guard Museum. How old are the buildings? The masonry lighthouse dates to 1857, the wood barn to 1887, the original oil house to 1894, and the wood-frame keeper's cottage to 1904.

One of the last stations to be fully automated, New Dungeness has always benefited from on-site care. Local activist Harriet Fish succeeded in placing the light station on the National Register of Historic Places in November 1993, and Coast Guard veteran Al Simpkins, with assistance from the U.S. Lighthouse Society, organized a group of local residents to protect and preserve the structure. The Coast Guard Auxiliary provided keepers until transfer to the newly formed, nonprofit New Dungeness Light Station Association in September 1994, and volunteer keepers have tag-teamed here ever since. (The Coast Guard does retain title and maintains the lantern room's rotating beacon as an official aid to navigation.)

All volunteers perform regular duties, such as lawn care, brass polishing, window cleaning and daily sweeps of the spiral staircase. They also must offer guided tours that include the lantern room. During our unusually quiet off-season week in early May, we had only 15 or so takers. One young Florida woman arrived in a kayak, but the rest came on foot, hiking the 10-mile round trip on the sand. In addition to routine housekeeping, we also took on maintenance projects that included painting, mounting hooks in bedroom closets, and scraping the base and supports of the flagpole.

The tradition of maintaining lighthouses with volunteer help dates to the 1960s, when the Coast Guard's Lighthouse Automation Program gradually pulled keepers from 400-plus light stations. "There were problems," says Wayne Wheeler, who served as chief of the Aids-to-Navigation Branch of the Coast Guard's 12th District in Northern California in the 1970s and 1980s. "We were getting killed with vandalism….We tried fencing and boarding [the lighthouses] up. We even sent a man back to Pigeon Point, south of San Francisco, but that was not a sustainable solution."

In 1979, Wheeler and Commander Joseph Blackett negotiated a first-of-its-kind, 20-year lease for East Brother Light Station on an island in San Francisco Bay. A nonprofit raised contributions, obtained a matching grant from the Interior Department's Marine Preservation Program, and opened the 1874 light as an unusual accommodation offering bed and breakfast, dinner, and a roundtrip boat ride. East Brother provided a sustainable volunteer model, allowing the Coast Guard to maintain the navigational aid while divesting itself of responsibility for the entire property.

According to a National Park Service inventory, about 70 historic light stations have since been leased to local nonprofits or state or local governments. Around 250 have been transferred out of federal ownership, roughly half to states and local agencies, the rest to nonprofits (about 50) or private individuals (about 75). Approximately 400 light stations in every form of ownership remain active aids to navigation. The Coast Guard retains responsibility for more than 90 percent of those.

In 1983, Wheeler founded the U.S. Lighthouse Society to assist local groups restoring and preserving American lighthouses. The society's most significant legacy may be that it helped persuade Congress to pass the Lighthouse Preservation Act of 2000. This amendment to the National Historic Preservation Act provided a mechanism for federally owned lighthouses listed on (or eligible for) the National Register of Historic Places to be transferred at no cost to other federal, state, or local entities or to nonprofit organizations for educational, park, recreational or historic preservation purposes.

New Dungeness offers one example that works—brilliantly. Seven hundred dues-paying members (mostly local individuals and families) vie for the chance to work here. By performing routine maintenance duties, as we did, the volunteers keep the light station in fine shape. Maintaining a constant roster of visiting keepers who will conduct tours and generate interest among new and potential members also helps sustain and protect this stunning historic site.

One evening, as we peered out from the New Dungeness lantern room into the moonless darkness, we identified several nearby beacons, each distinguished by its own signature flash—Smith Island, Ediz Hook, Point Wilson. They all seemed reassuring to us, not just promising safety and assistance in avoiding hazards but also confirming a sense of place, and an unbroken connection to 150 years of lighthouse keepers and the mariners who relied upon them.

* * *

To serve as keepers, applicants must become members of the New Dungeness Light Station Association for one year. See www.newdungenesslighthouse.com. To learn about opportunities to tour, stay or work at historic light stations—including Point No Point, the new headquarters of the U.S. Lighthouse Society—visit www.uslhs.org.

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—Mark Twain

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