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SUMMER 2010

EXOTICS

Temple of the Soul
Angkor Wat

Chasing Luck in Macau

Dubai's Desert Bloom

Late Night Shopping
in Malaysia

Ein Gedi: Israel's
Treasure Park

Hong Kong Island's
Hidden Haunts

PLUS

Cruising to Bermuda

Australia's Otway Coast

Family Travel Tips

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BEST SURF
SPOTS





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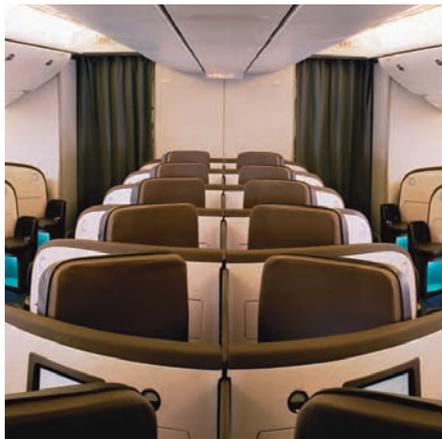
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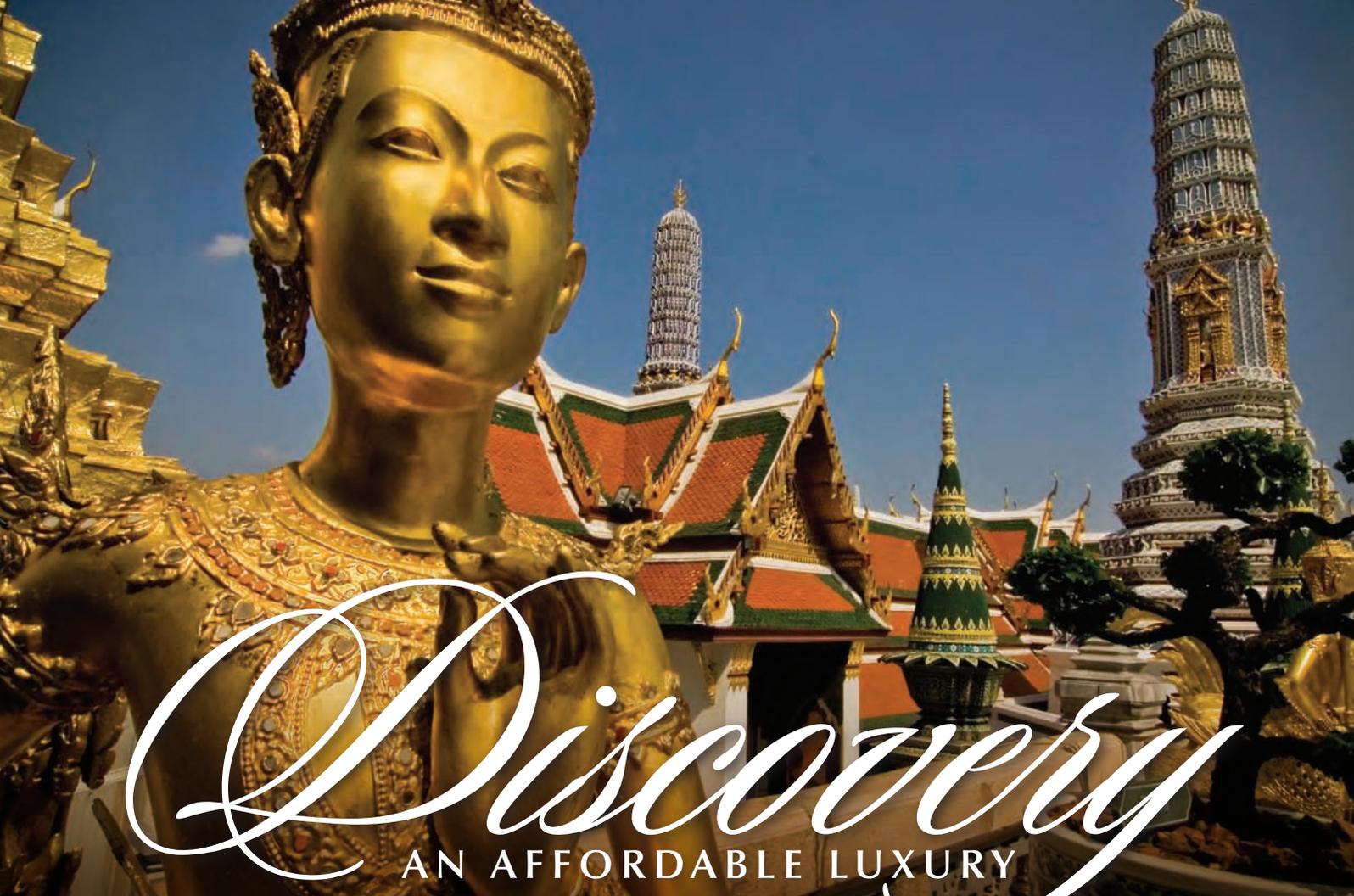
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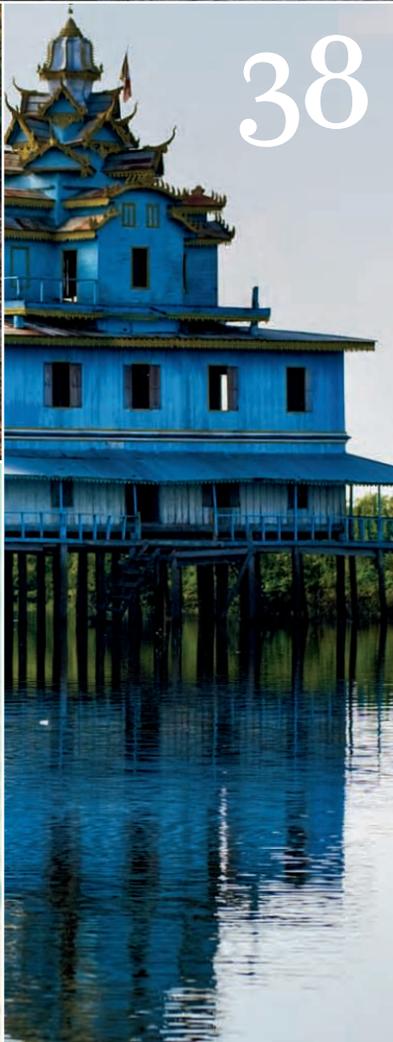
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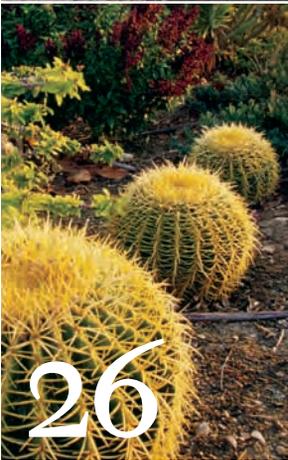
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Travel for the soul



Some people say that the human race is on the cusp of a spiritual awakening; a higher state of global consciousness that is growing exponentially. Others feel that this is nothing more than the equivalent of supermarket religion: people picking and choosing their spiritual options when befallen by difficulty, but forgetting them just as quickly when the good times roll.

From my own personal experience, it seems that a shift is indeed happening; I seem to be meeting more and more people who are interested in, learning about or involved with Eastern practices and philosophies. Maybe it's the increasingly volatile, stressful lives we lead but there is solace to be found in the quiet space of meditation, the concentrated efforts of yoga and the positive doctrines of ancient wisdom. Everything seems to be returning to a simpler state, including our desire for organic foods and all things natural.

Surely one impetus for such a shift is our increased opportunity for global travel; the exposure to foreign lands and the first-hand exploration of their cultures, beliefs and ways. Watching a group of elders gracefully practising early-morning tai chi in Hong Kong's Victoria Park, observing ceremonies

amid dozens of beehive-like incense burners and lighting joss sticks in the tranquil temples of Asia – these experiences are more significant and meaningful because of their local authenticity.

In this issue, our eye focuses on some of the exotic lands of the East. One writer takes a spiritual journey to the temples of Angkor in Cambodia (page 38), while another wrestles with luck – or is it fate? – in Macau (page 30). Find something new with each visit to Hong Kong (page 34), delight in the heavenly cuisine and myriad festivals of Malaysia (page 22) or indulge in the luxurious playgrounds of Abu Dhabi and Dubai (page 42).

In addition, you'll find some great tips for family travel (page 24) and kid-friendly destinations including Australia's Otway Coast (page 46). And, in a more adventurous vein, we round up eight of the world's top surfing schools and take a spin on the Indy 500 Speedway.

They say travel is one of the great educators. Indeed it is – on a variety of levels. ▣

FEDERICA MARABOLI, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
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Travel File

Ensemble® Hotel & Resort Collection



PAMPERED PUEBLO

The award-winning **Hyatt Regency Tamaya Resort & Spa** in Santa Ana Pueblo is a resort like no other. Voted 'Best in the World' by *Condé Nast Traveler* in 2009 and ranked among the world's best by *Travel + Leisure* magazine, Tamaya is sculpted into the stunning natural beauty of New Mexico and showcases the rich history of the Tamayame, the original inhabitants of the land.

A unique feature of this luxury resort is the Stables, which are a tangible reflection of the Tamayame's respect for their land and animals. With expert guides and trails of all levels, you'll enjoy the most beautifully groomed, mild-mannered, pampered horses and ponies in the Southwest. For a little more action, play a round of golf on the nationally ranked Twin Warriors course, surrounded by the magnificent Sandia Mountains, or simply relax at the Tamaya Mist Spa & Salon. Named after the soft morning mist that gently floats over the cottonwood trees and the Rio Grande, the spa's philosophy is based on the tradition of the Tamayame's hospitality and their intimate connection with the bounty of the land. Services at the spa focus on restoring physical and spiritual tranquility, providing a lasting sense of peace and well-being.

Ensemble® Exclusive Offer: Daily full American breakfast and one lunch for two

THE ART OF WELL-BEING

Ease the stress of everyday life and give your spiritual side a boost at **Uma Paro**, an oasis of tranquility located in the Kingdom of Bhutan just south of Tibet. Rising majestically from the cliffs, surrounded by pine-clad valleys and snow-tipped ranges in the Himalayas, this striking hotel offers exceptional style, activities and adventure.

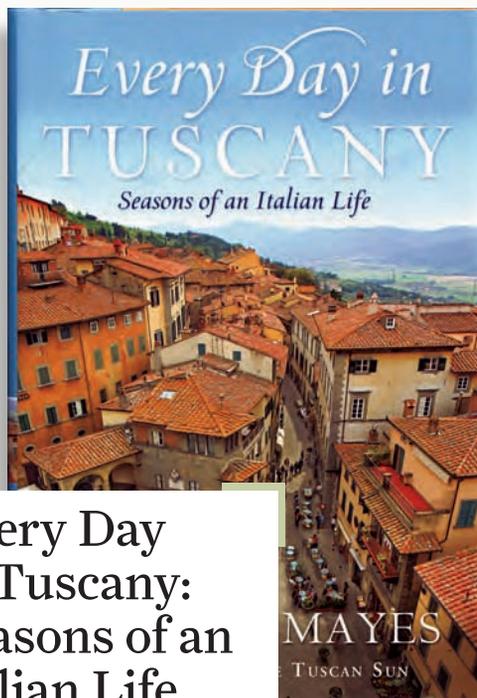
Its mystical location and Buddhist traditions inform Uma Paro's philosophy of quiet comfort and well-being. Check out its five-day, specialist Wellness Retreats, led by visiting masters, that involve daily yoga practice. A number of retreats are offered throughout the year, including The Freedom – Enquiry into Self led by Yoga Master Louisa Sear, scheduled for August 13 to 19. You'll be guided to an understanding of the concept of freedom in all spiritual practices, with an opportunity to meditate in Buddhist temples and monasteries throughout Bhutan as well as enjoy walks and picnics in the mountains. The hotel also offers an array of daily well-being options like authentic ayurvedic therapies, yoga and meditation, or more active pursuits like biking and trekking. It will even help plan itineraries around festivals or create customized privately guided tours.

Ensemble® Exclusive Offer: COMO Shambhala massage (one per room)



Required Reading

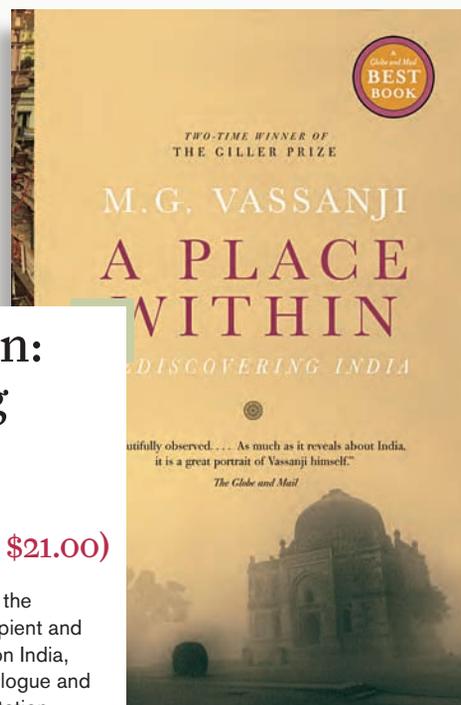
Enchanting escapes



Every Day in Tuscany: Seasons of an Italian Life

by Frances Mayes
(Broadway Books, \$29.95)

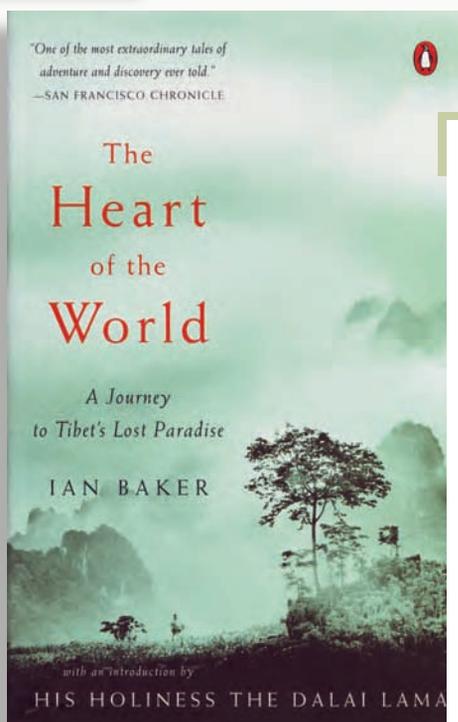
In her new memoir, Frances Mayes offers another highly personal account of her continuing life in Tuscany, encompassing both the changes she has experienced since *Under the Tuscan Sun* and *Bella Tuscany* and her evocative reflections on the timeless beauty and simple pleasures of Italian life. There are also 25 sumptuous recipes including *petto d'anatra glassato al caramello speziato e carciofi* (duck breast with caramelized spices and artichokes), playful recipes like *pollo al mattone* (chicken under a brick) and delectable desserts like *torta di suisine con mandorle* (plum tart).



A Place Within: Rediscovering India

by M.G. Vassanji
(Doubleday Canada, \$21.00)

M.G. Vassanji, two-time winner of the Giller Prize, Order of Canada recipient and best-selling author, turns his eye on India, his ancestral homeland. Part travelogue and description, part history and meditation, this is Vassanji's stunning journey to explore his origins. *A Place Within* is an intimate chronicle of his many visits to India, filled with fantastic stories, unforgettable characters and rich images.



The Heart of the World: A Journey to Tibet's Lost Paradise

by Ian Baker (Penguin, \$18.50)

Ancient Tibetan legends declare that the greatest of all hidden lands lies at the heart of the forbidding Tsangpo Gorge, veiled by a colossal waterfall deep in the Himalayas. Nineteenth-century accounts of this fabled waterfall inspired a series of ill-fated European expeditions. World-class climber and Buddhist scholar Ian Baker delved into the legends; encountering sheer cliffs, maelstroms of impassable white water and dense leech-infested jungles, Baker and his National Geographic-sponsored team reached the depths of the Tsangpo Gorge. *The Heart of the World* is a captivating, extraordinary journey to one of the wildest and most inaccessible places on earth, and a pilgrimage to the heart of the Tibetan Buddhist faith.

Diversions

Innovations and celebrations

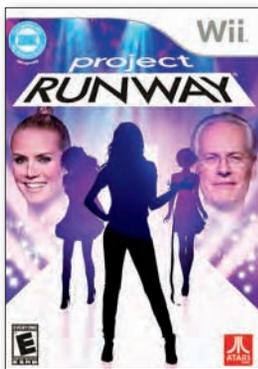
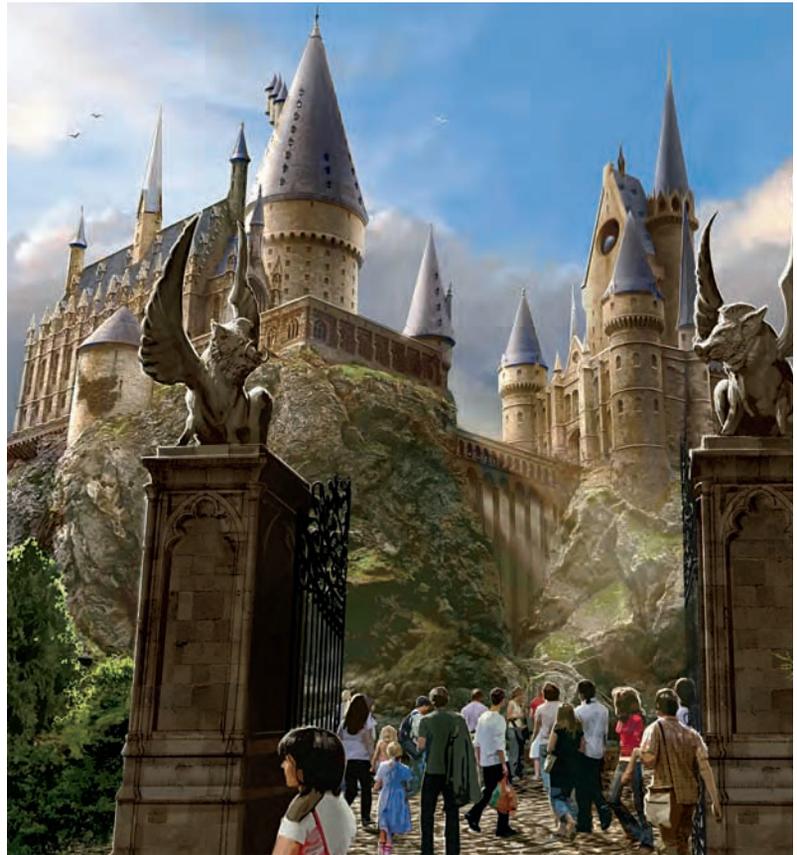
A family affair

Looking for something fresh and exciting for an upcoming family vacation? Here's a peek at some new attractions that will get everyone revved up:

Harry Potter-mania shows no signs of easing, especially now that The Wizarding World of Harry Potter™ has opened at Universal Studios Orlando. The attraction will bring the magic of Hogwarts Castle and Hog's Head alive to the amazement of muggles and non-muggles alike. The star attraction will be the state-of-the-art Harry Potter and the Forbidden Journey™, a ride that features guests experiencing Harry Potter tales as they virtually fly through the air.

Kids who love to read will be entranced by the Roald Dahl Museum and Story Centre, named for the Welsh author who wrote such classics as *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory* and *James and the Giant Peach*. Located in Buckinghamshire, U.K., the museum is a virtual funhouse where kids can play dress-up, create their own stories, do crafts and learn about Dahl and his creative inspiration.

In Limoges, just 20 minutes outside Ottawa, **Calypso Park is an amazing new attraction** expected to open in June 2010. In addition to 35 slides and the largest wave pool in Canada, Calypso Park features the Jungle Run: visitors float down six kilometres of water pathways in a paddle boat, guided by clues based on wildlife. It's the perfect combination of education and fun.



Game on

Whether on a long flight, a lengthy road trip or a rainy day at the resort, keep the kids amused and quiet with these latest games.

Girls with a penchant for clothes and shopping will dive right into the slew of new games with a fashion twist. Atari has introduced a **Project Runway** video game on Wii™, while wannabe fashionistas can play **Style Savvy**™ on Nintendo and work their way up at a fictional fashion company. As Paris Hilton would say to her BFF, we love it.

For all kids, Animal Crossing for the Nintendo Gamecube has youngsters building a village populated by cute critters. But the real hit this year is **Leapster** from **Leap Frog**®. The hand-held unit is ideal for kids aged four to seven. Verbal instructions help kids learn and play at the same time. It features a touch-sensitive screen and a special stylus to operate pre-loaded games.

Coming soon...



This year, expect travel to reach new heights when **Virgin Galactic** starts sending paying passengers into space. The project has been in the works for ages, but it appears that 2010 will mark the beginning of suborbital trips above the Earth. During the flight, passengers will have six minutes when they can unhook their seatbelts and float around weightlessly in the cabin of the high-tech spaceship. For the privilege, you can expect to pay in the neighbourhood of \$200,000 per person. Maybe we'll wait for a seat sale...

Chef Jamie Oliver is a household name, known primarily for his various television cooking shows. That hasn't stopped him from building up his restaurant biz. His latest venture is Jamie's Italian in Cardiff, Wales. It's a posh-looking space featuring a wrought iron and stainless steel bar, as well as a grand-scale antipasto counter. A local graffiti artist used one wall as a surface on which to paint a roaring red Welsh dragon. Food-wise, diners can expect cuisine that's fun and fresh, not flashy.

Also in the works is a **brand new LEGOLAND™ theme park** in Winter Haven, Florida, on the former site of Cypress Gardens. It will be the biggest LEGOLAND to date, joining sister properties in California, Denmark, England and Germany. The Florida version will have more than 50 attractions, ranging from kid-powered rides to life-size LEGO creations. It's expected to open in late 2011.



Chill out

When summer temperatures reach new highs, don't fret. There's always a cold spell happening in these famously cool spots around the globe:

Mumbai, India. Heat and humidity are a year-round phenomenon here, so it makes sense that the country's first ice lounge, 21 Fahrenheit, opened its doors last November. Those seeking a fashionable spot to cool down can sip drinks in a room made of ice and sit on an ice chair. Such frigid surroundings may be too much for some guests, so the bar will supply parkas, insulated moon boots and gloves. If that doesn't help warm them up, the house and hip-hop music might.

Miami, Florida. The Sunshine State knows plenty about surviving the heat, too. In Miami, the Icebar in the South Beach's Hotel Victor



takes its inspiration from the Arctic, with a lounge made from chunks of ice and covered with fur throws, and glasses carved from ice, perfect for tossing back a few cold ones. Though visits are limited to 45 minutes, it doesn't take that long to see the über-cool factor. Servers dress in white snowsuits, while guests wrap themselves in thermal capes.

Vernon, B.C. At the brand new Sparkling Hill Resort, a cold sauna, to the tune of -110° Celsius, is among 100 treatments on offer. The chilly service is common at European spas, but it's a first in the North American market. It's claimed to boost one's wellness, despite the frosty reception.

Trends: Style Notes



The Bright Stuff

The Bay's new contemporary department may be called **The White Space**, but this season it's anything *but*. Rolling out across Canada is a gleaming, modern blank slate filled with a riot of Technicolor pieces designed to mix and match for maximum impact, including the latest must-have labels such as Rachel Roy and Sonia by Sonia Rykiel.

PICTURED:

Peep-toe slingback platforms by AK Anne Klein, \$125

Coated canvas tote by Irish textile designer Orla Kiely, \$240

One-shoulder geometric colour block dress in silk jersey by Issa London, \$495



Here Comes the Sun

Family-owned Italian brand **Zegna** is known for its luxurious suiting and this year marks its 100th year of operation. To celebrate this milestone anniversary, Zegna has designed a series of special edition items from cufflinks to shades, like these **Centennial Aviator** sunglasses. Their ultra-light and flexible metal frames feature brown polarized lenses, horn acetate and vintage detailing, with "Ermenegildo Zegna 1910–2010" engraved inside the arm. \$395, ermenegildozegna.com for retailers.



Wet & Wild

Think of **SWIMS** as Crocs with a surprise twist – they're actually stylish. These latest additions from SWIMS (the company that brought out men's galoshes a few years ago) are basically a jelly shoe variation of the traditional men's loafer. Think cottage, boat and destination wedding. They look like a classic Italian driving shoe, but with ventilated mesh gills within the canvas and rubber to keep water out. (\$175 at selected **Harry Rosen** stores: Bloor St. W. and Yorkdale in Toronto, Les Cours Mont-Royal in Montreal, Pacific Centre and Oakridge Centre in Vancouver.)

**Trends:
Style
Notes**



Techno Chic

Life still happens when you're on vacation. Enter the **FinePix XP10**, for all-weather adventure: Fuji's first waterproof, shockproof, mudproof and freezeproof camera with 5x optical zoom and 12 megapixels. There's even an instructional video at youtube.com/fujiguys. Bonus: it comes in vivid green, pink or *Avatar* blue. \$199.99 at major retailers and specialty camera dealers, fujifilm.ca.



Another pint-sized powerhouse is the **Samsung F30 SD**. This digital camcorder has a flip-out 2.7" screen, a great zoom, three hours of battery life, connects directly and simply to social sites like YouTube – and fits in the palm of your hand. A great way for the kids (or you!) to instantly share vacation highlights with friends at home. \$259.99 at The Source by Circuit City, thesource.ca.



New York Stories

Since starring in and producing the generational benchmark show *Sex and The City*, Sarah Jessica Parker has become known as the quintessential New Yorker. So it should come as no surprise that she has been appointed president and chief creative officer of **Halston**, the quintessential New York fashion brand – remembered mainly for its silky, slinky jersey gowns on such Studio 54 regulars as Liza Minnelli and Bianca Jagger. This season, Parker is principally overseeing the secondary **Halston Heritage** range of modernized reissues from the archives, originally designed by Roy Halston Frowick himself (exclusively at 18 selected **The Bay** stores in Canada). One of the accessories is a chic gold-tone statement cuff worthy of Studio 54, with a sparkling secret compartment for solid perfume (\$39 at selected **Sears** and **The Bay** stores across Canada). And it's no coincidence that the multi-tasking star's new perfume, **SJP NYC**, also launches later this month, inspired by the zany wardrobe her character Carrie wore in the 1990s (\$59 for 60 ml at department and drug stores). Oh, and there's a little film hitting the big screen – the sequel *Sex and The City 2*. Maybe you've heard of it?



Odds & Evens

There is such a thing as too much fun in the sun – at least for skin. That's why Clinique has added a potent clinical dark spot corrector to its bestselling **Even Better** range. It's an over-the-counter treatment serum with plant-derived compounds to effectively fade age spots, discoloration, dark spots and sinful years of sun damage, and is clinically proven to yield a 53% improvement after 12 weeks of use. \$63 at Clinique counters, clinique.ca.

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Cruise News

Sailing in style

MORE TO EXPLORE WITH PAUL GAUGUIN CRUISES

There will be more opportunities to experience the ms *Paul Gauguin* in 2011, as more voyages have been added to such exotic destinations as Tahiti, French Polynesia, the Cook Islands, the Society Islands, the Marquesas and Tuamotus. The new schedule currently has 40 departures to choose from and includes stops at Raiatea, Taha'a, Bora Bora, Moorea and Tahiti.

The ship underwent a multi-million-dollar enhancement in 2009, with staterooms, public areas and restaurants upgraded to luxury standards. Aboard each cruise, you'll find marine biologists, environmentalists, naturalists, historians and special guest lecturers who reveal details of the islands visited and share their knowledge and insights. Lesley Paull, president of an Edmonton-based Ensemble Travel® Group agency, who recently returned from sailing French Polynesia on the ms *Paul Gauguin*, says, "Everything from the service and food to accommodation – and of course the destinations – are all exceptional. If you are looking to go somewhere that is peaceful and relaxed, while travelling in style, this is the way to go... it's an experience you'll never forget."



LIFE IS BETTER ON THE DECK OF A YACHT

Fans of the Yachts of Seabourn can soon experience the cruise line's new *Seabourn Sojourn*, which will depart June 6 on a 14-day maiden voyage, visiting Scotland, the Faroe Islands, Iceland, the Norwegian fjords and Amsterdam, before a series of 12- and 14-day voyages in Northern Europe. Following a transatlantic cruise to Fort Lauderdale, the ship will sail the Caribbean before embarking on a world cruise on January 5, 2011.

The *Seabourn Sojourn* promises the most exclusive all-suite accommodation available at sea – 225 suites in total – 90 percent of which have private verandahs and feature separate living areas and bedrooms, and spacious granite bathrooms with separate bath and shower and twin sinks. Special touches include personalized stationery and iPod and MP3 connections. You'll also be able to choose from four dining venues, and six bars and lounges serving a full range of beverages, including fine wines and spirits – all with Seabourn's compliments.

Sunquest

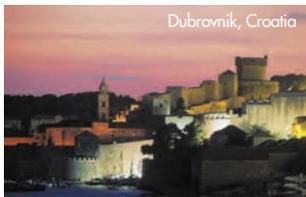
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DAY	PORT	ARRIVE	DEPART
Sat	Venice, Italy	-	5:00 PM
Sun	Bari, Italy	10:00 AM	3:00 PM
Mon	Katakolon, Olympia, Greece	8:00 AM	1:00 PM
Tue	Izmir, Turkey	9:00 AM	3:00 PM
Wed	Istanbul, Turkey	7:30 AM	5:00 PM
Thu	At Sea	-	-
Fri	Dubrovnik, Croatia	11:30 AM	4:30 PM
Sat	Arrive in Venice	9:30 AM	-

"Cruise of a Lifetime" also available.



Palma de Mallorca, Spain



MSC Fantasia, Western Med

June 13 – October 3, 2010

DAY	PORT	ARRIVE	DEPART
Mon	Naples, Italy	-	7:00 PM
Tue	Palermo, Sicily, Italy	8:00 AM	5:00 PM
Wed	La Goulette, Tunis, Tunisia	7:00 AM	1:00 PM
Thu	Palma de Mallorca, Spain	2:00 PM	-
Fri	Palma de Mallorca, Spain	-	12:30 AM
Fri	Barcelona, Spain	9:00 AM	6:00 PM
Sat	Marseille, France	8:00 AM	7:00 PM
Sun	Genoa, Italy	9:00 AM	5:00 PM
Mon	Arrive in Naples and transfer to Sorrento hotel for 1-night	12:00 PM	-

Tue Transfer from Sorrento to Rome hotel for 2 nights
Wed Tour of Rome and farewell dinner
Thu Transfer to Rome Fiumicino Airport for your Alitalia flight to Toronto.



Rome, Italy

MSC Splendida, Western Med

June 17 – October 7, 2010

DAY	PORT	ARRIVE	DEPART
Fri	Civitavecchia, Rome, Italy	-	7:00 PM
Sat	Genoa, Italy	9:00 AM	6:00 PM
Sun	Marseille, France	8:00 AM	6:00 PM
Mon	Barcelona, Spain	7:00 AM	2:00 PM
Tue	La Goulette, Tunis, Tunisia	2:30 PM	7:30 PM
Wed	La Valletta, Malta	9:00 AM	6:00 PM
Thu	Messina, Sicily, Italy	7:00 AM	2:00 PM
Fri	Arrive in Civitavecchia, Rome	8:00 AM	-

"Cruise of a Lifetime" also available.



Santorini, Greece

MSC Musica, Eastern Med

June 19 – October 2, 2010

DAY	PORT	ARRIVE	DEPART
Sun	Venice, Italy	-	6:00 PM
Mon	Bari, Italy	11:00 AM	6:00 PM
Tue	Katakolon, Olympia, Greece	12:30 PM	6:30 PM
Wed	Santorini, Greece	7:00 AM	3:00 PM
Wed	Mykonos, Greece	8:00 PM	-
Thu	Mykonos, Greece	-	2:00 AM
Thu	Piraeus, Athens, Greece	9:00 AM	5:30 PM
Fri	Corfu, Greece	2:30 PM	8:00 PM
Sat	Dubrovnik, Croatia	8:30 AM	2:30 PM
Sun	Arrive in Venice	8:00 AM	-

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Cultural Close-up: Malaysia



Turtle-shaped **Penang Island**, off **Malaysia's** northwestern coast, rich in architecture, magnificent food and an astonishing mix of friendly folk, still remains relatively unknown to Western tourists. Time is a factor: there are so many places to visit on an average trip. But Penang and its capital, **George Town**, are far from average: it's been listed among the **Seven Urban Wonders** and in 2008 was named a **UNESCO World Heritage City**. In its Victorian-Edwardian heyday, Penang welcomed the world's elite. Now the 'Pearl of the Orient' is ready for its 21st-century close-up.

TROPICAL NIGHTS

Perhaps you've arrived from high-rise Singapore or chaotic Bangkok. What makes George Town different? With a core population of just 220,000, the city exudes an old-time tropical languor – yet it's alive with multiculturalism. As a bonus, English is widely spoken.

Nancy Wigston celebrates Penang Island's capital city, George Town

DISCOVERIES

Warrens of winding streets, low-rise shop-house architecture, decorative tiles, shady five-foot pathways: this town is made for wandering. **Weld Quay**, behind the **Beach Street** banking hub, leads to communities on stilts stretching over the **Strait of Malacca**, each jetty home to a different Chinese clan. Newcomers from southern China thrived in George Town, aided by their clan houses or *kongsis*; **Khoo Kongsi**, tucked away on Cannon Square, is the most fabulously ornate of all.

TAKING IT SLOW

Passing through Penang in 1926, writer Aldous Huxley drily noted that the air was "like breathing steam." Take it slow – bargain gently in small shops for batik sarongs, Indian-crafted gold jewellery, Chinese snuff bottles or a Larsson thriller.



RESTORATION

Two spectacular homes, the work of renowned architect Laurence Loh, highlight heritage George Town. The **Blue Mansion**, built by tycoon Cheong Fatt Tze, was a derelict tenement a mere decade ago. Today the upscale B&B glows, jewel-like, at 14 Leith Street, resplendent with



Chinese art motifs and immaculate *feng shui*. **Suffolk House** was the home of Captain Francis Light, Penang's founder; Loh's meticulous restoration now houses one of the choicest restaurants in all of George Town.

HEAVEN FOR FOOD

Penang's cultural potpourri – Malay, Chinese, Indonesian, Indian, Armenian and more – has created a cuisine unrivalled in Asia.



Malay-Chinese unions begat the **Baba-Nyonya** way of life. *Nyonya kuih* (cakes), found at *pasars* (markets), make sticky, addictive treats; crunchy-sweet with palm sugar, rich with fresh coconut. **Char Kuay Teow**, the city's signature noodle dish, is crisp and delicious at **Tan Jetty**. Looking for Malay *laksa*? Head to **Gurney Drive**, with its myriad evening hawkers stalls. **Farquhar Street's** 1885 **Eastern and Oriental Hotel** boasts the world's longest hotel seafront and a splendid high tea: \$15 for pastries, scones, sandwiches and your choice of local or imported teas. From 'roti Chennai' at breakfast to a plethora of non-beef dishes all day, **India Town's** 'banana leaf' restaurants serve specialities (fish curry, *puri*, pulled tea) for a song.

FESTIVAL FUN

You'll find a mix of Malay, Chinese, Hindu and Muslim festivals on Penang's calendar. Sipping beers at a café one night, we were surprised by a Year of the Tiger parade: crashing drums, noisemakers, miniature temples rolling past. Chances are you'll stumble on something just as wondrous. For more contemporary entertainment, try the **Penang Jazz Festival**.

GETTING AROUND

Penang is a one-hour flight from Bangkok, Singapore or Kuala Lumpur, plus a ferry ride from the mainland. The city is stroll-worthy, but do avoid the noonday sun. Light clothing is recommended. Renting a car is not for the faint-hearted. Human-powered trishaws provide fun if unnerving transport: negotiate the price before climbing aboard. Air-conditioned buses cost two ringgit (60 cents) per ride. Taxis are numerous; the comfiest are the 'executive' type. Our driver, Tan Hock Chye, became our trusted guide, spoiling us with market treats and insisting on discounting each metered fare by 20%.

City Snap Guide: San Antonio

Federica Maraboli discovers the buzz deep in the heart of Texas



© CRAIG STAFFORD/SACVB

Haunted houses

The battle at the famous **Alamo** took hundreds of lives, following repeated attacks by Mexican general Santa Anna's army in 1836. Their ghosts have wandered the site ever since; to this day staff and tourists claim to hear screams and witness grotesque apparitions. Brave a visit to the **Chapel** and the **Long Barracks Museum and Library**. Explore more of the paranormal with **Alamo City Ghost Tours**. Guides lead you through graveyards, battlefields, old hotels and more. Tours feature ghost hunting equipment and stories about why San Antonio is known as one of the most haunted cities in the U.S. Who you gonna call?

Parks and recreation

Take a swim in a lake shaded by cypress trees at **San Pedro Park**, the second-oldest park in the U.S. Check out the **San Antonio Zoo**, ranked one of the best in the nation with more than 3,500 animals representing 600 species. Walk along the **San Antonio River** in a beautiful park-like setting that winds its way through the city. Downtown, the river is lined with bustling restaurants, galleries, shops and attractions like the **Aztec Theater**, the only surviving exotic-themed movie palace in Texas. Events include arts and crafts shows, music celebrations and a host of festivals.

Look and learn

For spectacular views of Alamo City, ride up the 750-foot **Tower of the Americas** and enjoy fine dining at the new **Chart House Restaurant** as well as breathtaking scenery from the revolving observation deck. Kids and adults alike will enjoy the **Witte Museum**, San Antonio's premier museum of South Texas history, culture and natural science. Located on the banks of the San Antonio River, the Witte offers permanent and travelling exhibits as well as a super-fun **H-E-B Science Treehouse** with four levels of hands-on displays.

Eats and treats

Get to know the heart of the city through **San Antonio Foodie Tours**, an outfit that offers a variety of cultural and culinary experiences from restaurant tasting tours to ranch and rodeo visits! Sample such local delicacies as fish tacos, prickly pear margaritas and smoked brisket smothered in 'secret recipe' Texas BBQ sauce. Each tasting tour is different so you can go on more than one. Get off the ol' dusty trail and step back in time for a brew at the **Buckhorn Saloon and Museum**, offering both history and classic Texan fare.

GET AWAY

San Antonio possesses a unique charm. With a cultural heritage that represents its dynamic history, this is a city of contrasts: one of the largest cities in the U.S that still boasts the relaxed friendliness of a small town. From down-home hospitality and cooking to high-brow dining, extensive art collections and excellent golf courses, San Antonio serves up an all-star winner.



5 ways to keep your family trips fun and hassle-free

MADLINE LAFRAMBOISE

If you are a parent, the days when you packed only for yourself are long gone. With a family to consider, here are some tips to help you keep your sanity and have a stress-free vacation.

1

Find the deals

Often destinations offer family packages, and this summer, some sun resorts are allowing children under 12 to stay free of charge. City coupon books can also help you minimize expenses. Smartdestinations.com is available in 14 North American cities and provides customizable passes. CityPass.com narrows in on five must-see attractions with affordable rates in 11 North American cities. Walt Disney World (disneyvacations.com) has a free vacation DVD planner available. Virginia, home to colonial Williamsburg (visitwilliamsburg.com), has onsite entertainment from blacksmiths to milliners, and colonial troop reenactments. At select RIU Hotels & Resorts, this summer kids under 12 stay and eat at no charge when sharing a room with their parents. This offer is based on availability and must be booked through Sunquest Vacations. Kids under two at RIU are always free. Public transit is free in cities like Park City, Utah and there are free greeter programs in Chicago (Chicagogreeter.org) and New York City (bigapplegreeter.org). These programs provide local volunteers who take you on a tour of the city.

2

Preplan as much as possible

Voyage.gc.ca has a government-issued booklet *Tips for Travelling with Children* available to download on their website. One tip reports: "Some airlines will escort and supervise an unaccompanied child from check-in through arrival. Note that airlines require a parent or guardian to stay at the airport until the flight has departed. The person greeting the child at the point of arrival must have appropriate identification and authorization." Pick up copies of the family travel series from **Frommer's**. I like *Family Vacations in the National Parks*, *500 Places to Take Your Kids Before They Grow Up* and *Walt Disney World and Orlando*.

3

Entertain the kids with the latest gizmos and electronic toys with these fun apps

Apple introduced HearPlanet (hearplanet.com) for iPhone users, the world's first talking tour guide for your cellphone. Simply touch the screen and select a travel topic to hear the Wikipedia-powered commentary. Among other portable gadgets, the Nintendo DSi is compact, light and Wi-Fi friendly and gives parents full rein on Internet surfing by allowing them to set browsing controls. Playstation Go is always a favourite. With a bigger screen than Nintendo's, this gaming console is popular among video gamers – especially the Tomb Raider and Final Fantasy types.

4

Back to basics

For younger children, eschew the techno stuff for some old-fashioned mind play in the car. The classic licence plate spotting is a good game, with several variations: pick a plate, add up the numbers and have the kids figure out which one it is, or get everyone to come up with a different phrase using the letters in the order they appear on a plate. Make a treasure hunt list of items the kids should watch out for, or play a game of virtual hide-and-seek. Pretend that you can be any size, pick a virtual spot in the house in which to hide and have a player pose questions with 'yes' or 'no' answers to figure out where you are. Telling stories or jokes, or singing along to music, are also wonderful time-fillers.

5

Stay healthy

With today's rising rates of childhood diabetes, why not leave the stroller behind and opt for walks? Practise portion control, especially when dining at all-you-can-eat buffets. At the hotel, have a family race to see who can get to the hotel room first, perfect for kids between ages four and 10. For sun destinations, be sun smart: pack the SPF, sun hats, sunglasses and long sleeves. Often resorts offer free babysitting services, which gives you the perfect opportunity for a spa treatment. Now smile and relax.



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EIN GEDI: ISRAEL'S TREASURE PARK

Miriam Feinberg Vamosh



*A botanical garden
bursting with vermilion,
orange and ivory blossoms,
luxurious spa treatments,
a dip in the Dead Sea,
exotic animals, synagogue
ruins and canyons with
rushing waterfalls – they’re
all part of what they call
‘Ein Gedi country’*

ROAD TO THE EIN GEDI KIBBUTZ

THE FLOOR OF THE ANCIENT synagogue of Ein Gedi contains an intriguing inscription about a secret no one in the community was supposed to reveal. Some scholars believe it referred to the production of balsam, from whose fragrant resin was derived a scent worth its weight in gold, that once grew on the terraces carved into the cliffs above the Dead Sea. But after a visit to the modern community of Ein Gedi, a kibbutz on the rocky slopes above the world’s lowest and saltiest body of water, you can’t help but think today’s residents have their own well-kept secret – some of the most beautiful and exotic scenery in the country and a magical air of sweetness and solitude that makes you want to put down roots there like the huge and unexpected African baobab trees that now shade its lawns.

Did the hardy pioneers who founded the kibbutz in 1956, when it was surrounded by desert and isolated by borders on three sides, ever imagine that today it would be home to an internationally famous botanical garden, a wellness centre specializing in ayurvedic treatments, a gourmet restaurant and a 180-room inn whose picture windows look out on magnificent canyons and the teal-blue waters of the Dead Sea? Did they ever think that visitors would come from the ends of the earth to spend a day, a week or a month here, and keep returning again and again?

They probably did; after all, these were people with vision. The kibbutz today – with 500 residents and successful agricultural, mineral water and tourism enterprises – is living proof of the adage attributed to David Ben-Gurion: “The difficult we do immediately. The impossible takes a little longer.” In the 1960s, for example, kibbutz landscape designer Eli Ron was inspired to try to grow the baobab tree at Ein Gedi by its mention in *The Little Prince*. All the experts asserted there was no chance of success. Now there are 30 leafy baobabs on the grounds, just as the author Antoine de Saint-Exupéry described them, growing “as big as castles.”

A visit to Ein Gedi, a little more than an hour’s drive from Jerusalem, can begin with a cup of coffee or cold juice at the guest house café, sitting in the shade of a pagoda tree, whose spreading branches drip bright Titian-coloured blossoms all around you. Then head out for a walk through the botanical garden that offers almost 1,000 species from all over the world, including cacti from South America that bloom for only a few hours at night – and draw aficionados from all over the country when they do. There’s

fragrant flowering plumeria (better known as frangipani) that seems more at home on a Pacific island than a patch of desert, and seven species of its relative, the magnificent desert rose known in Africa as the ‘star of impala.’ Aromatic myrrh, which grew here in biblical times and has been transplanted from Ethiopia, now flourishes again.

At the entrance to Kibbutz Ein Gedi is an information centre, staffed seven days a week, where friendly advice about the kibbutz garden is provided. The members and residents you’ll encounter on the paths give a warm welcome to visitors. Amnon, the chief gardener, has his hands full, but if you have something botanical to ask, he’ll hop off his motor scooter to chat.

Keen observers of the tourist scene say you’ll come for an hour and stay the night, and if you come for one night, you’ll stay for two. At the inn, you’ll find a variety of different rooms to choose from. The desert rooms, for example, feature furnishings designed by local artists and charming murals of local animal life on the walls. Early mornings are for walking high above the floor of the Nahal Arugot canyon, where wild goats, rabbits and the occasional fox are your companions, and you may even get a very rare glimpse of the spotted leopards that inhabit the hills. The rest of the day can be spent exploring further afield. Nahal David, a cascading waterfall, is just north of the guest house and a 20-minute walk along paths beneath caves where, according to the Bible, David hid from King Saul. A longer route leads to the hidden waterfall at Nahal Arugot. The trails reveal the miracle of fresh water in the wilderness that turns everything it touches green, and brings a host of birds and animals to feast on the plants while you feast your eyes on the scenery.

Historical gems abound in Israel, and in their desert setting the remains at Ein Gedi are particularly fascinating. Just beyond the kibbutz’s date plantation is the mosaic floor of the Ein Gedi synagogue, with its mysterious inscription and its bird, animal and geometric patterns – the jewel in the crown of a community that flourished here between the third and the sixth centuries A.D.

Australian native Michelle Hechtman, who made Ein Gedi her home more than two decades ago, explains, “This place can give you something that you can’t get anywhere else.” When pressed to describe what that something is, she takes a deep breath, gestures toward the sea and the mountains and says one word: “Magic.” ▣



NIGHT SHIFT

Michael DeFreitas

With its history of trade, colonization and immigration, modern-day Malaysia has an extraordinarily multicultural society. Nowhere is this more apparent than in its night markets, where exotic flavours of the past and present create an intoxicating, not-to-be-missed experience.

As the last rays of sunlight fade from the evening sky, a fascinating metamorphosis takes place all over **Kuala Lumpur**. Stores close for the day and traffic on the usually congested streets begins to thin. But as one cycle ends, another unfolds over a few crowded and brightly lit streets bearing such exotic names as **Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman, Chow Kit and Petaling**. Here, the night hawkers prepare for another busy evening, hanging lights, heating up woks, fastidiously arranging their wares and airing the latest Malay hits on their sound systems. It's *pasar malam*, or night market, time.

The origin of the night market dates back to the mid-19th century, when the Malay Chief of Klang sent a small group of Chinese tin miners up the **Klang River** to open a new mine. The miners established a settlement on the muddy banks at the confluence of the **Gombak** and **Klang** rivers. The village attracted workers from all over Asia and quickly became **Malaysia's** tin-mining capital. Since most residents worked all day, vendors set up food and produce stalls each evening along strategic thoroughfares to cater to the miners as they returned home.

As money poured in from the mining operations, the settlement evolved into present-day Kuala Lumpur (Malay for 'muddy confluence'), one of the most progressive cities in Southeast Asia. The **Gombak** and **Klang** rivers still snake through the centre of town and the *pasar*

malams are now firmly entrenched in Malaysian culture.

Although Kuala Lumpur's large, modern shopping complexes such as The Mall, Mid Valley Megamall and the Suria KLCC draw thousands of shoppers seeking off-the-rack brand name bargains during the day, the social and cultural heartbeat of Malay life is still the *pasar malam*.

But the night markets aren't only a convenient place to buy groceries, clothes and other household essentials. The plethora of food stalls and street entertainers make night markets the 'in' place to enjoy a delicious informal meal and socialize with friends and family. Of course, there are deals galore – especially for knock-off 'Rolex' watches, 'Nike' T-shirts and 'Louis Vuitton' handbags – but for visitors the real bargain is experiencing authentic Malaysian culture.

The country's multiracial composition makes the *pasar malam* unique to Asia. Throughout Malaysia the ethnic identity of a community greatly influences its *pasar malam*, and the variations from town to town and from state to state can be remarkable. Perlis and Kedah are traditionally Malay, while Penang boasts Thai and Chinese influences.

Even within Kuala Lumpur there are marked differences between its night markets. Strolling **Jalan Petaling** in **Chinatown** feels more like exploring the markets of Hong Kong's Mong Kok district, while **Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman** seems more like a Muslim or Indian bazaar.

The music and entertainment echoing throughout the markets typically reflect the cultural identity of the region. In **Bangsar Baru**, Chinese troubadours stroll amid the market stalls strumming ukuleles and singing old Chinese ballads. In Kuala Lumpur's distinctly Malay **Jalan Chow Kit**, hits by popular Malaysian performers like Siti Nurhaliza echo through the market. In rural areas, you're more likely to see performances by local medicine men and dancers dressed in traditional Malay costumes.

Although imitation watches, clothes and shoes dominate most night markets, you'll still find a variety of top-quality locally crafted goods. **Kelantan**, the most northerly state on the country's east coast, is a bastion of traditional Malay culture. Here you can buy traditional two-metre-wide *wau bulan* kites or *gasing* tops the size of dinner plates. The eastern state of **Terengganu** is the place to buy *sutera semai* (high-quality silk) products, while the western state of **Selangor** is famous for its fine pewter.

However, the single most defining ingredient of any culture is its cuisine. And there is no better place to experience the diversity of Malaysian cuisine than at a *pasar malam*. Amid steaming woks and smoking charcoal grills, vendors furiously fry, boil, grill, baste and stir up an array of traditional delicacies. The speed at which these vendors prepare the meals is surpassed only by how quickly the meals are consumed.

As you would expect, each state has its own specialties. In **Penang's Gurney Drive** market, you can savour *assam laksa* (hot and sour fish broth with noodles), *nasi kandar* (rice and curry), *mee yoke* (spicy prawn broth with noodles) and *telur bungkus* (spicy beef wrapped in an omelette).

Perak's specialty is *char kway teow* (noodles and bean sprouts) and **Glutton's Corner** in **Melaka** is famous for its mix of Malay and Portuguese cooking. For some of Southeast Asia's best authentic dim sum, *chung* (rice dumplings) and the famous **Ampang** dish *yong tow foo* (bean curd stuffed with minced fish) head over to Kuala Lumpur's **Jalan Petaling** Chinese market.

The past residents of **Johor** – a mixture of Arab, Javanese, Chinese and Bugi people from Sulawesi – have greatly influenced the region's cuisine. Accordingly, **Johor** night markets offer an array of exotic dishes such as *laksa johor* (noodles with spicy fish sauce) and *biryani gam* (spicy rice and meat).

The closest thing Malaysia has to a national dish is the Kelantan specialty *ayam percik* (roasted chicken marinated in spices and basted with coconut milk). This spicy satay-style dish is commonplace in most night markets.

When you're late night shopping, remember that haggling is a traditional Malay activity, especially for dry goods (food is inexpensive and usually non-negotiable). In fact, accepting the first price offered will mark you as a *lemvik* (Malay for weak or weakling). On the other hand, never insult a vendor by offering a ridiculously low price (anything below half the asking price) for locally produced clothes, art and crafts. Keep in mind the effort involved in producing them. A traditional kite or top can take a couple of weeks to make. A decorative pewter mug can take a week or more to make. Open the bargaining at around 50 or 60 percent of the asking price.

No trip to Malaysia would be complete without a night market experience. So when the sun goes down, don't head back to your hotel. Join the festivities, indulge your senses and start haggling. ▣

FOOD STALL ON JALAN PETALING (top left)
CHINATOWN, JALAN PETALING (top right)
FRESH FISH (bottom left)
KITE MAKER, KUALA LUMPUR (bottom right)



©INVISIBLE/STOCKPHOTO



©EIGHTFISH/GETTY

MACAU'S

Ilona Kauremszky explores the soul of Old Macau and, with a little luck, finds what she was looking for

Back in university, my Asian roommate used to sweep the floors and corners spotlessly before New Year's Eve because she swore it improved the *feng shui*. She also had me change my black turtleneck to a red one because red was the colour of good luck.

I have never taken the notion of good luck too seriously. Unlike in Asian cultures where superstitions are often strongly held, I subscribe to the belief that 'whatever happens, happens.'

But I did take my former roommate's pearls of wisdom with me on a trip to



LADY LUCK

Hong Kong. After several days experiencing that city's frenetic pace, friends coaxed me to shift gears and visit nearby **Macau** to see the bougainvillea in full bloom.

"Besides, you'll really get a taste of this former Portuguese colony that is being transformed before our eyes," Winnie professed as she accompanied me to the jetfoil ferry, which would bullet me over to Macau in less than an hour.

I figured if I really wanted to see **Old Macau**, I'd better do it now. My earliest impressions of this place came during high school and, in later years, on a visit

to the Metropolitan Museum of Art where I came across the self-portrait of George Chinnery, whose bespectacled profile had a sombre look. The British painter's landscapes of Macau, completed during the mid-1800s, are now eulogized as part of the old city that is fast disappearing in the 21st century. Crossing the murky brown **South China Sea**, I recalled Chinnery's face and made a mental note to visit his final resting place, here in Macau at the **Old Protestant Cemetery**.

At the pier I left the maddening crowds of Hong Kong arrivals, who were undoubtedly headed for the ubiquitous casinos to try their luck. Instead, I darted to **Avenida da Amizade** to flag down a trishaw driver. After some negotiations using sign language and a little bit of broken English, the driver assured me that he would take me to "where Macau really started."

At **A-Ma Temple**, Mr. Ho, my gracious driver, drops me off and declares: "This is where Macau began." According to legend, a poor girl named A-Ma was seeking passage to Canton. A fisherman gave her refuge and then a storm hit, destroying everything

but his boat. When land appeared, she vanished into the hills and reappeared to seafarers as a goddess. At the site of the near-tragic incident, a temple was erected.

Walking in between a pair of ornate stone lions, I head to the Chinese-styled **Prayer Hall**. Smoke wafts from the smouldering honeycomb incense burners to the rafters above. An Australian woman whispers that I should seek a fortune teller. “There are plenty at **Kun Iam Temple** performing all kinds of ancient rituals,” she suggests, then with great ceremony drops her wooden sticks on the stone floor.

I wandered over to **Largo do Senado**, where a lively scene unfolded as musicians plied their craft. This famous square, surrounded by colonial buildings, is located near the **Ruins of St. Paul’s** and teems with markets and Chinese medicine shops. Among the ruins a series of vignettes form impressions of another era: tinsmiths ping bowls, locksmiths prepare intricate padlocks and, tucked further down the alley, tailors measure their customers for suits and brocade dresses. Along the way, a mélange of canvas sacks brimming with dried chanterelles and tables of dried fish are the prizes for the passersby who are welcomed by friendly vendors waiting for a sale.

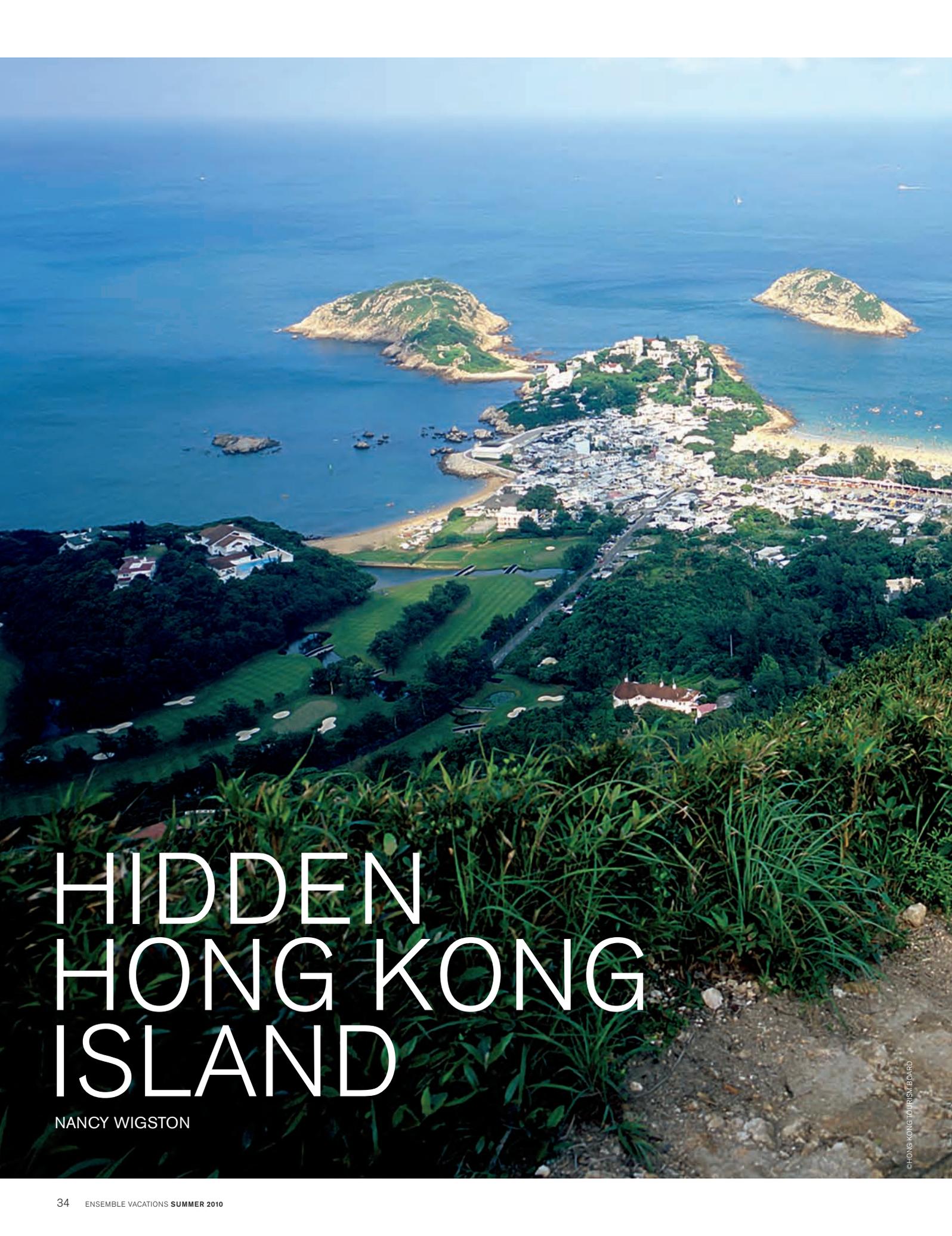
Along **Rua da São Paulo** antique shops are crammed between ateliers, calligraphers and woodworkers carving fine wooden furniture. A lacquered wooden chest revealing a scene of cranes on a desert isle catches my eye. Somewhere I had heard an ancient Chinese belief that the crane represents longevity, but it’s the simple design rather than the folklore that sold me. Clutching my new purchase, I head over to **Camões Gardens**, a quiet oasis that typifies the sweet lingering lifestyle the Macanese are renowned for. Crimson bougainvillea cascades over a wall where a bird seller reading a newspaper sits next to his gilded cages, while a mother and her child play ball by the jacarandas.

“This is where I should find the Old Protestant Cemetery,” I think to myself when, suddenly, I see the entrance gate. It’s locked. I’m drawn to the choral sounds from the **Morrison Chapel** and wait for a pause when the choirmaster speaks. He obligingly opens the gate and directs me to George Chinnery’s gravesite.

It occurred to me that perhaps some good luck from earlier in the day had brushed off on me after all. “Whatever happens, happens,” I mused as I finally arrived at this restful place in Old Macau. ▣







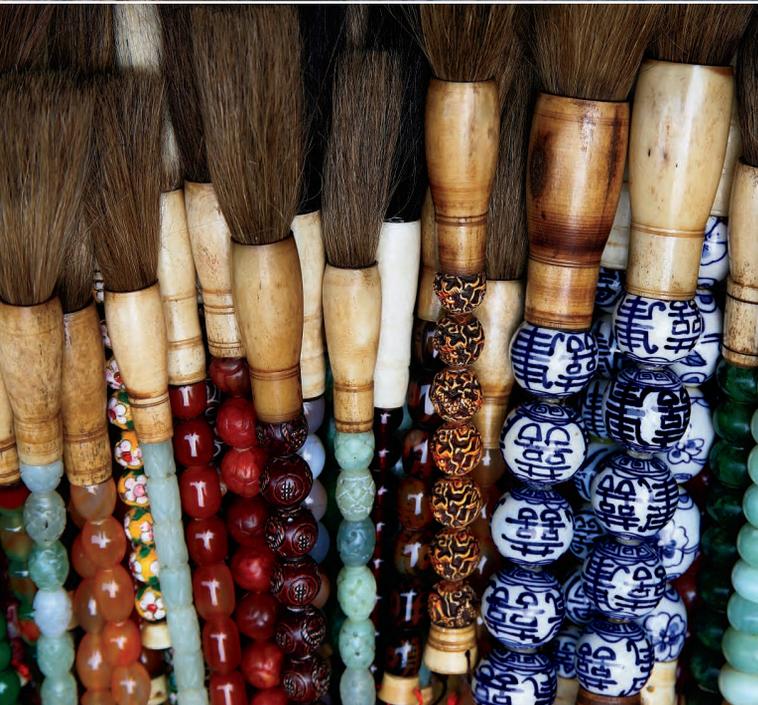
HIDDEN HONG KONG ISLAND

NANCY WIGSTON

© HONG KONG TOURISM BOARD



With each visit, Hong Kong reveals itself a little more,
offering its acquaintances new surprises every time



Ever feel like having your demons cast out? If you're like me, you'll seize the chance. That's why I'm sitting on a red plastic stool under the **Canal Road Flyover**, where **Causeway Bay** meets **Wan Chai**, on a typically frenetic **Hong Kong** morning. Cars zoom overhead, buses roar past and pedestrians flow by as an elderly woman chants ritual curses in Cantonese. *Whack! Whack! Whack!* She beats two paper figures (one male, one female) with a shoe – startlingly loud, these whacks, despite traffic noise. Incense sticks burn before her makeshift altar to the Goddess of Mercy; at intervals she scatters handfuls of rice on the ground for good luck.

We are engaged in an ancient ritual called 'beating a petty person,' or casting out misfortune. I've written two items on the paper figures – things I'd like banished from the lives of those I love and from my own. Chanting all the while, my lady (there are two) sets alight printed images (I spot snakes and a broom), waving the smoking paper over my bowed head. Our session concludes. Paying \$7 (HK\$50) I smile and bid them good-bye, thrilled to have added a new chapter to my Hong Kong narrative.

Whether you've visited Hong Kong once or 50 times, it guarantees enchantment. **Victoria Harbour**, bustling with watercraft, encircled by shining skyscrapers and framed by **Victoria Peak**, is never less than breathtaking. Since the 1997 handover of this former British colony, Hong Kong has maintained its status as a financial hub, a world of custom-made suits and silk and cashmere pashminas. And yet, like the ladies under the flyover, this metropolis offers much, much more to the curious traveller.

Sampling Hong Kong's cultural legacy is surprisingly easy, thanks to the tourist board's **Cultural Kaleidoscope** program. What better way to recharge your batteries than with a free *feng shui* lesson? A master of the 6,000-year-old art of geomancy sweeps into the room, imparting the basics about the relationship between fire, water, earth, metal and wood. We emerge after an hour, armed with confidence about harmony and good energy (*chi*), plus practical tips about the correct placement of furniture at home. The tourist board also offers classes in Tai Chi, traditional Chinese medicine, cake-making and more.

The name of our hotel in Causeway Bay means 'home' in Mandarin, which we take as an encouraging sign. One morning we board a double-decker tram to **Pacific Place**, glide up escalators past elegant shops and head toward the Peak Tram. An eight-minute ride deposits us at the top of **Victoria Peak**, 552 metres above the buzzing city. Passing a funky gauntlet of souvenir shops, Madame Tussaud's and Ripley's Believe It or Not! Odditorium, we begin the **Morning Trail**, a well-marked circular walk.

The very air speaks of vanished eras: we inhale the aroma of loamy earth, admire tropical greenery, watch butterflies dance in shafts of sunlight. Suddenly the greenery vanishes; the path shrinks to a bridge above a high-rise forest. Look down – we dare each other – there's the building from which Angelina Jolie seemed to tumble in a heart-stopping scene from *Lara Croft, Tomb Raider*.

Views stretch outward to the **South China Sea** and Hong Kong's more than 230 offshore islands. An hour later we reach the Victorian-era **Peak Restaurant**: time for cold drinks and fantasies about living in Hong Kong – 'Fragrant Harbour' in English – like the expat joggers at the next table. Descending on the 1888 funicular railway, we stroll through the terraces of peaceful Hong Kong Park. We're in luck: lotuses are in blossom. Ethereal beauties float calmly on a pond's surface.

On reaching **Flagstaff House**, the city's oldest surviving colonial building (from 1846), home to the K.S. Lo Tea Ware

Collection, we explore its splendid examples of tea ware and seals dating back to the Sung and Ming Dynasties. Outside, we discover the statue of Canadian soldier John Osborn of the Winnipeg Grenadiers, recipient of the Victoria Cross for heroism during the doomed defence of Hong Kong in 1941. Although so much glitters in Hong Kong – like the landmark **Bank of China Tower** – history is everywhere. You only have to look.

In the same magical park, we score a table at **Lok Cha Tea House**, a charming sanctuary panelled in dark wood: Chinese calligraphy on the walls, soft lighting, a multitude of teas and accessories. Very romantic. Tea is served in traditional fashion; lunch is a fabulous assortment of vegetarian dim sum. Tea master and founder Ip Wing-chi gives lessons in this ancient art. Unhurried comfort – we’ve found it. Buying a packet of tea to remember this special place, our choice of White Peony is met with praise: it’s the organic house specialty.

Everything has its own spirit, its own philosophy in this city – including shopping. Refreshed and energized after lunch, we explore **Hollywood Road**. “Train yourself to have a sense of beauty,” antique maven Victor Choi of Dragon Culture once told me, in his museum-worthy emporium at 77 Hollywood Road. “An object should speak to you.” Years ago, before scientists had developed tests to determine its age, I purchased a Ming vase (not!) from an unscrupulous dealer – the farthest thing from Mr. Choi. Yet I’ve grown fond of my faux Ming; after all, Chinese fakes have been around since at least the 18th century.

Fashion and Hong Kong remain inseparable. When **Organic Baby**, 52-60 Lyndhurst Terrace, catches our eye, we don’t hesitate; ringing the buzzer, we ascend the stairs to this new all-organic shop, scooping up Year of the Tiger T-shirts and a bright yellow cloth bandanna for our favourite little one. Visiting the flagship **Shanghai Tang** store at 12 Pedder Street is absolutely required, if only to gaze at David Tang’s witty, brightly coloured takes on oriental styles that are worldwide sensations.

After getting lost once or twice, we come to rely on the kindness of strangers – many of whom share Canadian connections. Foreigners gather by night in the twisting laneways of **Lan Kwai Fong** (and less noisy **SoHo**). At **Cul-de-Sac** on tiny D’Agulia Street, under a Canadian flag, a trio of Italians are tucking into poutine. Odd, but true. We discreetly depart to savour old-time Hong Kong treats at **Leaf Dessert**, 66 Hollywood Road: delicious black sesame soup and sago with coconut. Joining locals on sidewalk stools under a full moon, we feel at home.

After all, we’d begun the day with a visit to Man Mo Temple, where Ladder Street meets Hollywood Road, and admired its burning incense coils that resemble giant beehives. Climbing the steep streets, we found **The Museum of Medical Sciences** at 2 Caine Lane. Orchids bloom in the herbal garden and the Edwardian building dazzles. We check out its collection of ancient acupuncture tools and a thriller-style film showing how the mystery of the SARS outbreak was solved.

Hong Kong never fails to surprise. Old favourites – like high tea with potted palms and a live orchestra at the colonial-era **Peninsula Hotel** – endure. But each visit brings new firsts, from casting out demons to an avant-garde play we enjoyed at **Theatre du Pif**, 111 Queen’s Road West. At play’s end, the French doors opened and a character ‘escaped.’ As we gazed after him, we slowly realized those were real taxis gliding down the steeply curving street. Like my session on the Canal Road Flyover, the borders between magic and reality had blurred once again. Enchantment reigned. ▣



A photograph of the Angkor Wat temple complex in Cambodia at sunset. The sky is a mix of orange, yellow, and grey, with the sun low on the right horizon. The temple's silhouette is reflected in a body of water in the foreground. Palm trees are visible on the left side.

TEMPLE OF THE SOUL

Cambodia's Angkor Wat

DEBRA CONKEY



©SIMEA/STOCKPHOTO

EN ROUTE TO CAMBODIA on a dark, way-too-early morning, a young Asian man sits quietly next to me in the terminal of the **Taipei** airport while his seven-year-old son and younger daughter run amok. After 15 hours hunched over a pillow in my aisle seat in coach, I am not amused, and try to imagine myself already immersed in the peaceful quiet of my final destination: the 12th-century temple of **Angkor Wat**. The man smiles at me. I resist. But soon we begin talking.

Poly – a 42-year-old aircraft mechanic – talks about his kids, his 30-year-old wife and their home in Tucson, Arizona. When I learn he is Cambodian, I ask if his family had been affected by the violence of the Khmer Rouge in the 1970s.

“I lost half my family to the Killing Fields,” he says softly. “It’s still hard. I get very lonely.” Poly explains that from age eight to 12, he was imprisoned in a concentration camp. I look at his frolicking son, Sidney, and try to picture the young child in his place. It’s impossible to imagine.

As related in the book *First They Killed My Father*, an account of author Loung Ung’s life as a child soldier, the Pol Pot regime systematically killed an estimated two million Cambodians – almost one quarter of the country’s population – from 1975 to 1979.

“The Khmer Rouge tried to brainwash and control us,” Poly says. “But my mom brainwashed me, too. She told my brother and me not to reveal secrets about my father, who was a farmer. But he was also a French professor. If they had learned this about him, we would have been killed.”

Poly survived by escaping through the jungle to Thailand. I am amazed by his outlook, which is surprisingly similar to others I would soon encounter: Don’t dwell on the past. Focus on the present, and keep going forward.

According to Phil Cousineau, author of *The Art of Pilgrimage: The Seeker’s Guide to Making Travel Sacred*, the secret to soulful travel is “to believe there’s something sacred waiting to be discovered in every journey.” Here I am at the start of my trip, already making soulful connections.

I never travel during Thanksgiving; I prefer celebrating my blessings at home with my mom and family. But when I heard about a new eight-day river cruise down the 12th-longest river in the world – the Mekong – in Cambodia and Vietnam, off I flew.

The cruise starts at **Tonle Sap**, the largest lake in Southeast Asia, a short drive from the **Le Meridien Angkor Siem Reap** hotel where we stayed. It’s a far cry from the ramshackle hotel that was the only accommodation available in the war-torn area in 1993. Today, tourism is thriving – growing from 44,808 visitors in 1995 to 676,809 in 2005 to more than two million today – with a variety of excellent hotel and restaurant options available.

Two days before the cruise, we explore nearby Angkor, considered to be one of the most important archaeological sites in **Southeast Asia**, and the ancient capital of Cambodia, which from the 9th to the 12th centuries was one of the largest pre-industrial cities in the world. At its peak, this UNESCO World Heritage Site comprised 600 square miles and housed more than 500,000 people, who cultivated rice fields in and around dozens of elaborate temples.

A succession of Hindu and Buddhist kings created these “magnificent temples in stone,” according to Michael Freeman in *Ancient Angkor*. However, the durable sandstone, brick and laterite temples were “not meeting places for the faithful.” Rather, they served as palaces for the gods, with the ruling kings hoping to benefit from the connection.

The most famous temple, Angkor Wat – a shrine to Vishnu – is a microcosm of the Hindu universe and the world’s largest religious monument.

Angkor Wat Temple



Stilt mansion on Tonle Sap

©LUCIANO MORTUJA/SHUTTERSTOCK

“The moat represents the mythical oceans surrounding the earth and a succession of concentric galleries represents the mountain ranges that surround **Mount Meru**, the home of the gods,” Freeman explains. “The five towers represent the mountain’s peaks – the tallest of which was the home of Vishnu – and the experience of the ascent to the central shrine is, maybe intentionally, a fairly convincing imitation of climbing a real mountain.”

After 23 hours of travel and three flights – the last to **Siem Reap** – we wake up the next morning at the ungodly hour of 4 a.m. so that we can walk in the ancient footsteps of pilgrims at dawn – and photograph Angkor Wat at sunrise.

As we step blindly over the first threshold, I feel a chill. Not from the morning mist, but from some ancient calling. Perhaps I can feel the thousands of 13th-century villagers as they walked to their homes in the vast city around the temple. Riding in wooden carts pulled by water buffaloes. Guiding elephants along the path. Or perhaps I hear the echo of pilgrims. I do know one thing for sure: I’m thrilled with the possibility of discovering something ancient and mysterious with each step I take.

Our local guide, Davith, lights the stony corridor with a modern traveller’s lamp – his cellphone – in the moonless predawn blackness. We slowly make our way toward the five massive lotus-shaped towers silhouetted against the sky. Davith leads us to the edge of the pond, where several hundred visitors stake out their positions – some with tripods and plastic chairs – in front of an impressionistic brushstroked reflection of the five carved cylindrical towers and panoramic temple, amid lily pads and pink flowers floating on the water. We wait silently as the dawn approaches, revealing a blue sky with swirls of orangey-pink clouds. Suddenly, the sun bursts through the towers and hundreds of cameras capture the moment.

We head inside the temple, our guide carefully giving us a hand up the narrow, precipitous steps that lack a safety railing, a reminder of life’s precarious challenges.

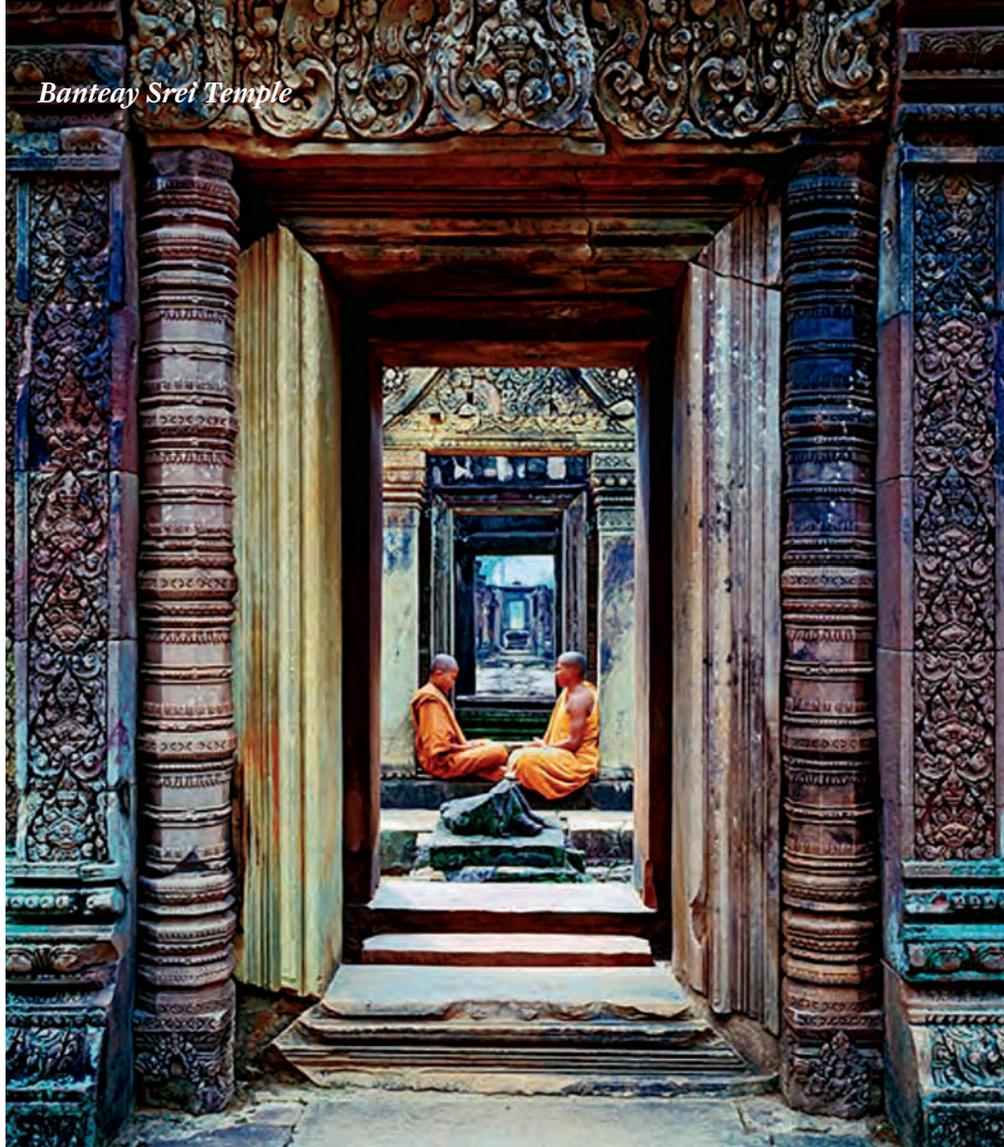


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Statues at Angkor Thom



©SIME/ASTOCKPHOTO



Banteay Srei Temple

“The steps were designed to make the pilgrim conscious of an ascent to a higher level, not just of altitude, but consciousness,” Cousineau writes. “The stairs were worn to a deep groove by 10 centuries of footsteps... by pilgrims who came to see heaven on earth... their imaginations inspired by faith and purpose.”

I gaze at sensual *apsaras*, among the 2,000 celestial dancers carved into the temple walls. Their beauty, however, is marred by bullet holes, another reminder of Cambodia’s turbulent history – and my comparatively unencumbered life. Davith leads us into an amazing chamber of sandstone pillars grown grey with time. A monk raises his hands in blessing over a man. A worker sweeps near a carved basin in the cruciform cloister. We light incense in front of a giant Buddha and wonder about the stories behind the thousands of carvings and bas-reliefs that surround us. We even elicit a profound echo by thumping our chests while backed into a special chamber.

Afterwards, we cross the street to a tiny outdoor market, where we buy a homemade sticky rice-banana treat grilled in a banana leaf from a local woman, as well as six perfectly textured baguettes. We eat vegetable pho soup at a simple outdoor café across from the temple, and are inundated by sweet but sales-savvy children selling bracelets and postcards.

It’s only 10 a.m., but it feels as if days have passed. There’s so much more ahead – the kindness and humour of our driver and guide, who offer stories of their own about the Khmer Rouge. Visits to other vine-choked temples like Ta Prohm, Angkor Thom and Bayon. A meal of stir-fried chicken with fresh ginger and a refreshing grapefruit-like pomelo salad at the **Sugar Palm Restaurant** in Siem Reap. A remarkable conversation at a small 13th-century Buddhist sanctuary, **Preah Palilay**, with a French tourist who declares: “It’s amazing we’re all standing here – Cambodian, French, American – in the middle of the jungle and we are communicating so well. Our governments should take note.”

Already, I am deeply touched by so many sacred connections. My heart has been stirred. And the journey has just begun. ▣

Desert Bloom

TOBY SALTZMAN

MORNING DAWNS on Dubai and Abu Dhabi with a mystical call to prayer. Echoing from every direction, it lures you to the window to witness an orange orb rising in an indigo sky, illuminating a modern skyline. In that glowing moment, the revelation hits: in this ancient land of prayers and tradition, dates and oil, spirited rulers have divined oases in the desert, conjuring burgeoning metropolises from land that, just 44 years ago, existed only as a humble trading port and a string of nomadic pearl-fishing communities dotting the Persian Gulf.

The first of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to attract global attention, Dubai's fantastical development under Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum was largely funded by Abu Dhabi, the richest and largest of the seven United Arab Emirates. Meanwhile, the ruler of Abu Dhabi and president of the UAE, Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, was deliberately cultivating a more sedate, traditional profile for his 'hometown' of Abu Dhabi, the financial, oil and banking capital of the UAE, as well as the seat of government and home of foreign embassies. When it became apparent that oil reserves were being depleted, an ambitious strategy was begun to diversify and strengthen Abu Dhabi's economy through business and tourism.

The results are astonishing. Never has it been more exciting to explore the glitter of Dubai, witness Abu Dhabi on the cusp of transition and, literally, see the greening of the desert, as landscapers turn patches of sandy turf into grassy enclaves sustained by intricate irrigation systems and architects transform barren landscapes from scratch.

As Dubai's cosmopolitan status is so strikingly brash by comparison, in retrospect it was smart to start off in Abu Dhabi. Decidedly more reserved, Abu Dhabi helped to open my eyes to the people's ancient culture and innate ways that some Westerners might consider eccentric yet are intrinsic to their lives.

Abu Dhabi, with its archipelago of 200 islets, sits on an island linked to the mainland by the Al Maqtaa Bridge.



"*Ahlan wa salaam*, a warm welcome," said my guide, Saoud, as he wheeled into traffic among the Mercedes and Ferraris cruising the palm-fringed Corniche - Abu Dhabi's waterfront promenade. I was immediately struck by the juxtaposing scenes of traditional and modern culture. Among the joggers and strollers lingering at shaded benches and fountains were men in pristine white *dishdashas* or crisp linen *kandura* cloaks and *ghutrah* headdresses, often talking on cellphones

or chatting with men in Western suits. Women wore burkhas covering their faces, or head shawls with black *abayas* that flowed open, revealing designer pants and shoes. Others wore smart business suits, sundresses or shorts.

As Saoud navigated through grand streets, their central boulevards spilling over with flowers, two iconic edifices spoke volumes about both Abu Dhabi's wealth and its respect for religion. The Emirates Palace Hotel, built with private



With its glittering towers rising from the sands, startlingly modern architecture and impossibly lush oases, Dubai and Abu Dhabi have seemingly perfected the alchemy of turning dust into gold



MARINA QUARTER, DUBAI

enclaves to accommodate the UAE's 22 heads of state for gatherings of the Gulf Cooperative Council, stretches along a mile of sandy beach, its majestic presence crowned by 114 mosaic-covered domes. The colossal Sheikh Zayed Mosque – pointing heavenward with 82 sparkling domes – is capable of holding 40,000 worshippers at once. Incidentally, it scores three mentions in the *Guinness Book of World Records*: for the world's largest carpet, biggest chandelier and

largest dome, at 246 feet (75 metres) high. Modest dress and a headscarf are mandatory for women visitors.

A stop at **Qasr al-Hosn Palace** – the Emirate's oldest architectural relic and former official residence of Abu Dhabi's ruling Al Nahyan family – was priceless for our guide's explanation of the people's early Bedouin lifestyle. Built in 1761, and also known as the **White Fort**, the palace houses a museum and theatre.

From there, the pavement turned to dust as Saoud drove 30 kilometres through a barren landscape that suddenly sprouted trees. The drive was worthwhile just to see **Al-Ain**, also called the **Garden City**, for its lush, date palm-lined **Qattarah Oasis** and its relic-filled museum. Al-Ain's camel market was abuzz with riotous action as vendors proudly showcased their grunting and salivating beasts, while meat buyers and racing buffs alike slapped hinds and felt up spindly legs to judge their suitability for either the grill or the racetrack.

Early next morning, Saoud followed the Corniche around to **Dhow Harbour**, where sun-weathered craftsmen were building and varnishing traditional wooden boats. "*Dhows* (sailboats) are to the sea what camels are to the desert," Saoud explained as we turned toward the city. Expecting to see dusty alleys and warrens of souks with raucous vendors haggling over tables brimming with spices and jewels, I was surprised by tidy stalls, the neat carpet souk and the swank gold and jewellery shops lining the air-conditioned **Madinat Zayed Market**. Evocative of the past, the outdoor fruit market was filled with vendors urging customers to taste their many varieties of succulent dates.

Noticing my pleasant surprise, Saoud chuckled and said, "The past is behind us," and proceeded to rave about the architectural transformation of **Saadiyat**. This glamorous island just off the coast has been fashioned into the UAE's cultural and educational hub, with the Jean Nouvel-designed **Louvre Abu Dhabi** housing works loaned from Parisian art galleries, the Frank Gehry-designed **Guggenheim Abu Dhabi** displaying contemporary art and the **Zayed National Museum**, named after the late UAE president, devoted to Abu Dhabi's history. Nearby **Yas Island** boasts elegant resorts, beaches, golf courses, a Formula One track and a Ferrari theme park. Eight other islands form a nature park.

The next day, the one-and-a-half-hour drive to Dubai felt like a seamless transition between states until Dubai's skyscrapers appeared. The city's iconic **Burj Al Arab Hotel**, rising like a flared sail from its own man-made islet, is

dwarfed by **Burj Khalifa**, the world's tallest building at 2,717 feet (828 metres). Its observation deck provides panoramic views of the famed **Palm Islands** development, sugary-like sandy beaches, a new cruise ship terminal, the narrow alleys of the old Deira spice souk winding toward the gold souk, palatial private residences and monumental edifices fringing **Dubai Creek** as it meanders through the city core, dotted with *abras* (small wooden boats) carrying people from one side to the other.

I gleaned a sense of Dubai's evolution since the discovery of oil in 1966 at exhibits in the 19th-century **Al-Fahidi Fort**, the city's most venerable building. I witnessed the city's quest to imitate worldly experiences at frigid **Ski Dubai**, where I donned thermal duds, entered a cave dripping with icicles and rode a gondola to the crest of the indoor ski hill. I lived the high life staying at the stunning **Fairmont Dubai**, indulging in its rooftop pool and spa, and taking cues from the savvy concierge on where to shop, where to drink and dine, which galleries to visit, golf courses to play and adventure tours to take.

But by far the most thrilling experience was joining a desert dune-bashing safari. After bouncing along on a camel, sitting in a dune buggy felt easy, until it started a wild roller-coaster ride, climbing and careening over sandy hills. Ending the night in a Bedouin heritage camp, where chefs cooked an Arab feast over flaming barbecues, my new pals and I giggled over 'hubbly bubblyies' (*shisha* water pipes) while belly dancers twirled under the setting sun.

Early the next morning I headed back to Abu Dhabi for my final night's stay at the **Emirates Palace Hotel**. To call my suite - with its private butler, residential quality silk furnishings and rugs, marble bath and private garden terrace leading to the beach - exquisite is an understatement.

For all the lightning-quick pace of their development, it's likely already time to return to Abu Dhabi and Dubai for another look. ▣

WHERE TO STAY IN DUBAI

Fairmont Dubai
Grosvenor House (a Starwood Luxury Collection Hotel)

WHERE TO STAY IN ABU DHABI

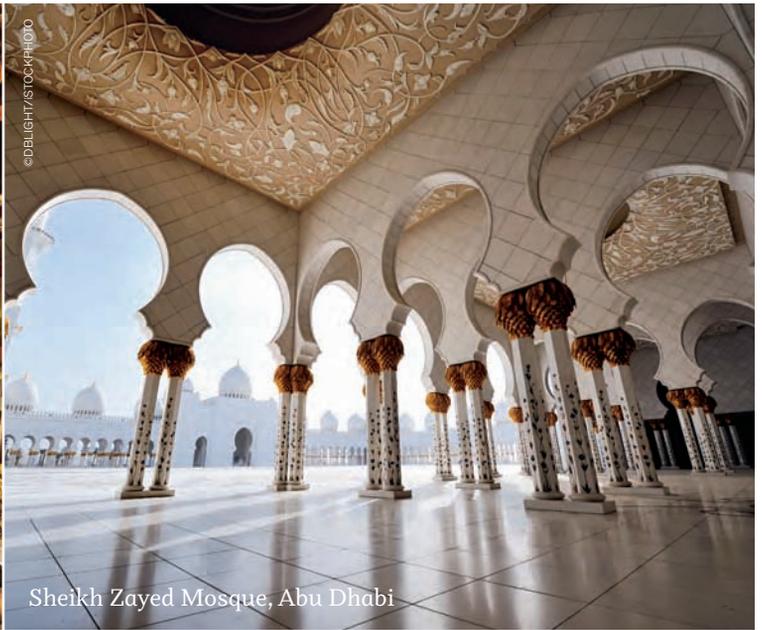
Emirates Palace Hotel
Fairmont Bab Al Bahr
Shangri-La
InterContinental



©SIME/ASTOCKPHOTO



Spice Souk, Dubai City



Sheikh Zayed Mosque, Abu Dhabi



Dubai Creek Golf and Yacht Club



Burj Al Arab looms behind the Madinat Jumeirah

Explor Great Oc



Great Ocean Road, Twelve Apostles sea rocks

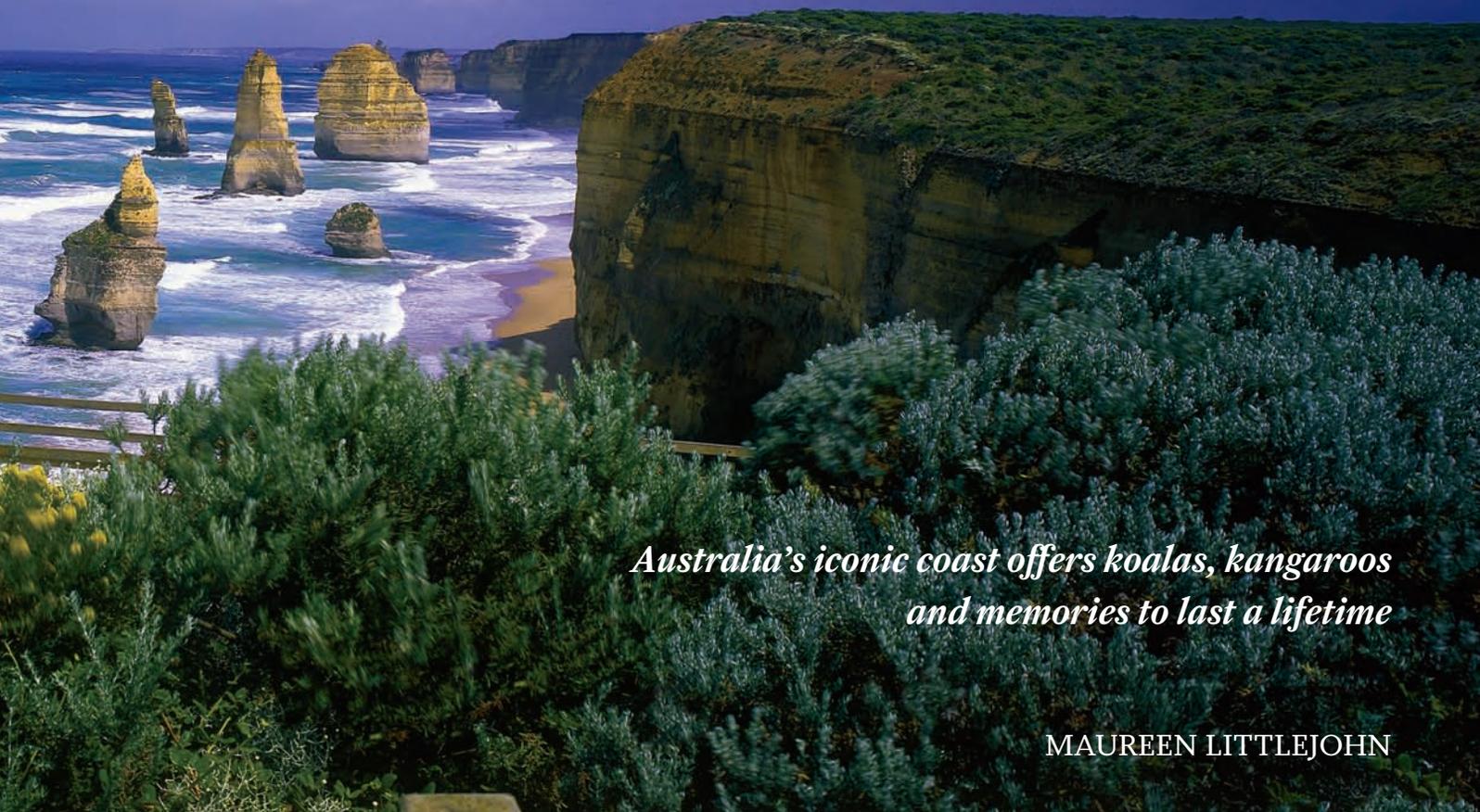
Below my feet the ocean swirled and crashed, pounding incessantly on the cliffs. Limestone stacks more than 45 metres high, Australia's famous **Twelve Apostles**, were scattered about like giant toppled chess pieces. I was in a helicopter, looking at one of the most breathtaking sights along the **Great Ocean Road** in southwestern **Victoria**, and all I could think was, were Sarah's children having a good time? Or were we doing things that were too adult? Without kids of my own it was hard to gauge. Wispy clouds obstructed my view from the front seat for a moment and then Rob, the pilot, lowered the chopper toward a slab of lonely rock, surrounded by waves. "That was **London Bridge**," he told us through the headsets we had plastered over our ears.

"It used to be connected to the mainland. There was a couple on it a few years back when the bridge part fell into the ocean."

"Were they OK?" I asked nervously. Rob laughed. "Oh yeah. A helicopter rescued them and they were all over the TV. Problem was, they were both married to other people. What a way to have the world find out about your affair," he said.

I looked anxiously to the back seats. Campbell, 9, and his eight-year-old sister Florrie hadn't heard a word of the racy tale. They had their faces glued to the windows. Phew. No awkward explanations necessary. When our 15-minute sky adventure was over, we scampered out excitedly to tell their mom how it went. "Too bad you were scared," taunted

ing the ean Road



*Australia's iconic coast offers koalas, kangaroos
and memories to last a lifetime*

MAUREEN LITTLEJOHN

Campbell. “That was awesome.” “Soooo great,” chimed in Florrie.

They were definitely having a blast.

I was in the middle of a minivan tour of Australia's Great Ocean Road. The three-day trip wasn't exactly what I had originally planned with my old pal, who had newly relocated to Oz. I had flown in from Toronto for a conference in **Melbourne**, and afterwards we were supposed to conquer the road together, *Thelma & Louise* style. That scheme was quashed when Sarah's husband Jim, the designated babysitter, was called away on business. The kids would have to come with us. Was this going to turn into *National Lampoon's Vacation*? With little

experience in the kid zone, I was a tad unsure about basics like meal times and entertainment. Thankfully, Sarah kept us on an organized schedule. Plus, she had sourced child-friendly accommodation, and some suites even came with laundry and kitchen facilities.

The Great Ocean Road was built after the First World War by 3,000 returning servicemen, who picked and hewed the 243-kilometre road from solid rock. **Torquay**, a surfing mecca around 100 kilometres southwest of Melbourne, is at one end, and at the other is **Warrnambool**, a favourite wintering place for whales and their calves. In between are a myriad of small hamlets, including **Lorne**, **Apollo Bay** and **Port Campbell**.



When the first part of the route was completed in 1932, tourists flocked to the stunning coastline's picturesque towns and parks, dipped their toes in the turquoise water and took in nature's majestic rockscapes. That's exactly what I wanted to do as well.

In Torquay, headquarters of multi-million-dollar surf gear giants Quiksilver and Rip Curl, Sarah insisted we stop for a quick look at the outlet stores. Before I knew it, the car was bursting with bags of brightly coloured beachwear. At **Bells Beach**, just outside town, we all stood and marvelled at the tiny figures riding huge, frothy waves. An internationally renowned surf spot, Bells Beach has hosted some of the sport's biggest competitions.

Down the road at **Anglesea** golf course, Sarah pulled in and parked the car. "Why are we stopping here?" I asked. The kids chimed in with the same question. "Shush. I've read about this place. Just follow me," she said. Leading us to the edge of the fairway, she pointed to some brownish lumps clustered on the green. "Kangaroos!" shouted Campbell and Florrie together. They were running toward the grass in a flash. "Wow, they're just like in the cartoons. This is the first time we've seen the real thing," exclaimed Sarah as we watched the kids shriek joyfully at the kangaroos bounding away.

In Lorne, a small village on **Loutit Bay**, we found a long, protected beach that was safe for swimming. Inspired by the wave riders we saw earlier, we all took a beginner's surfing lesson, with boards and wetsuits provided. Even though the waves were gentle, I could barely get past the paddling stage. A role in *Surfer, Dude II* was definitely not in

the cards for me. Campbell and Florrie, great little swimmers, were up and standing in no time. Luckily Lorne's **Stone Cold Ice Creamery** (also a laundromat) served sweet scooped treats that made me forget floundering about on that slippery surfboard, or 'big stick' in Aussie-speak.

At the Lorne pier we bought fresh-caught crabs, lobsters and crayfish and cooked them for dinner in the kitchen of our apartment-style hotel. After the kids went to bed, Sarah and I sat on the balcony, recounting our day over a chilled glass of chardonnay from the local **Otway Estate Winery**. It wasn't quite *Thelma & Louise*, but somehow it was even better. I was seeing her in action as a mom and getting to know her kids. We were becoming closer and carving out



The Grotto



©LARS SCHNEIDER/GETTY IMAGES

memories that would last us far into the future.

Surrounding Lorne, **Great Otway National Park** stretched out over more than 100,000 hectares of forests, woodlands and waterfalls. The next morning we took a short walk in the lush rainforest and then decided to look for wildlife. I had received a tip about koala bears from the girl behind the ice cream counter the previous day. “You’ll find a lot of ‘em at **Sausage Gully**, near milepost 168,” she said.

Her tip was spot on. Almost as soon as they were out of the car, the kids were jumping and pointing. “I can see five, no, six,” they were shouting. Sarah and I raised our eyes and there, sitting directly above us, was a fat furry bear. Looking around the grove of eucalyptus trees,

we started counting. There must have been around 15 sleepy, nonplussed creatures munching quietly and looking right back at us.

For pure oxygen-fuelled exhilaration, the **Otway Fly Tree Top Walk** northwest of **Apollo Bay** can’t be beat. Walking through the forest canopy 25 metres in the air, we had a bird’s-eye view of forest giants including mountain ash, myrtle beech and blackwood that would look right at home in a Harry Potter film. On the ground, Campbell and Florrie discovered the Prehistoric Path with life-like dinosaurs poking out among the ferns.

Another high point in the area was **Cape Otway Lightstation**, in operation since 1848. Scaling the tower, we looked for ships and whales (we didn’t see any, but southern rights and humpbacks are supposed to be common). A guide at the top of the tower told us about the many shipwrecks off **Cape Otway**, in which hundreds of people lost their lives.

At the end of the trip, I decided to splurge on the helicopter ride. It had been such a joy to discover the beauty of the Great Ocean Road through the eyes of Sarah’s children that I wanted to thank them and give them something to remember me by. The *Thelma & Louise* adventure could wait. I now knew that a road trip with kids, at least for three days, could be awesome. ▣

Worldly Delights: Vancouver Island

On the wild side: Vancouver Island's gastronomy is inspired by nature
Stephanie Ortenzi



From the air, **Vancouver Island** appears like a giant bird in full flight. It seems to hover over the ocean, approaching the mainland but stopping short. The island is rugged, rich and lush, and its cuisine is inspired by the wild foods of the First Nations inhabitants.

Pacific waters provide most of the island's dominant fare, namely **wild salmon, halibut, oysters, spot shrimp, mussels, clams, crayfish**

and **Dungeness crab**. Inland, **Cowichan Valley** is the island's fertile heart. Farmers, vintners and culinary artisans tend the raw ingredients that serve a growing eco-gastronomy scene with an international reputation. In the forests, professional foragers and woodland enthusiasts collect chanterelles, morels, shiitake and lobster mushrooms.

Cooking natural exotica, like stinging nettles and grand fir, gives island chefs

a proud sense of place. In the fall of 2009, *Slow Food International* gave Cowichan Valley the status of **Cittaslow** (Italian for 'slow city'), a certified designation recognizing the area's quality of food, environmental integrity and its distinct social identity.

Sinclair Philip is a champion of Canada's **Slow Food movement**. He owns **Sooke Harbour House** with his wife, Frédérique. Over the past 30 years, their inn and



On the grounds, overflowing botanical beds furnish the rooms with fresh flowers daily, but they do kitchen duty, too. **Anise hyssop** flavours a sauce for **black cod**. Chrysanthemum leaves give citrus notes to a **crab broth**. The shoots of hops are cooked like asparagus. **Sweet cicely** accents a **ginger sabayon** for **white peaches**. **Day lilies** become **sorbet** and **sweet woodruff** flavours **ice cream**.

Northeast of Sooke Harbour is **Duncan**, where Mara Jernigan runs **Fairburn Farm**, a culinary retreat and guest house. She is also active in the island's Slow Food scene and loves to cook wild foods like the edible **Nootka rose**, as well as her own **Jerusalem artichokes**, **heritage Anjou pears** and **white radicchio**.

Jernigan is a master of Slow Food's **Italian Regional Cuisine Program**. She leads culinary tours to Italy and teaches farm-to-table cooking at the farmhouse. Her meals always begin with a walk through her garden to see what's best and ready to eat. With accomplished skill, she turns simple ingredients into elegant food that she serves on her porch that overlooks meadows and the pear orchard, where her rare San Clemente goats and Navajo Churro sheep graze.

The farm was first homesteaded in 1884 and has a storied past, including the tale of Mary Reid, an Englishwoman who owned and worked the farm in the

1930s. While hosting a society party, she was called by a farmhand to help with the difficult birth of a calf, which she did, in her evening gown.

In the 1950s, the Archer family took over the farm. They did conservation work, offered farm stays and ran a B&B. Their offspring imported Canada's first water buffalo and established a dairy whose milk is used in artisanal cheesemaking.

Despite the fervency of Slow Food mavericks like Philip and Jernigan, Vancouver Island gastronomy is not purely locavore. On the island's western shore, the town of **Tofino** draws eco-travellers and surfers. Behind a surf shop, Artie and Lisa Ahier opened a 'restaurant' in 2003 in a purple 1971 Chevy truck with a functional kitchen and picnic-table seating. They called it SoBo, a combo of 'sophisticated' and 'bohemian,' with signature offerings like 'killer' **fish tacos** and **polenta fries**. Within months of opening, *enRoute* magazine included it in the top 10 new restaurants in Canada. *Saveur* magazine said SoBo was probably the most exciting lunch stand in North America. Four years later, SoBo went off-wheels and into a beautiful space with slate floors, a wall of ocean-view windows and an outdoor wood-burning pizza oven.

SoBo is strong on **wild fish** and **seafood**, and is shaped by a global, hipster sensibility. **Tacos**, **rotis**, **burritos** and **enchiladas** are garnished with tropical **salsas** and **slaws**, using ingredients like **green papaya**, **pineapple**, **avocado** and **jicama**. Fillings range from **island chicken** to **woodland mushrooms** with local artisanal **cheeses**. A breakfast sandwich features **tuna bacon** on a **homemade biscuit**. With a nod to Lisa's Culinary Institute of America training, SoBo also plays a Mediterranean hand: **pizzas**, **pastas**, a **bouillabaisse** and a **duck dish** of seared breast, roasted leg, **potato gnocchi** and a **citrus-cranberry jus**. Back on the mainland, Vancouver remains a national culinary leader, but Vancouver Island's unique wild gastronomy is quickly catching up. ▣



restaurant have become a benchmark for Canadian regional cuisine. The food is fresh, fiercely local, organic and executed with deft imagination. *Gourmet* magazine called it the best restaurant in the world for authentic local cuisine. More than once, *Wine Spectator* lauded Philip's international cellar, which specializes in British Columbia wines. The inn has earned *Audubon's* **Four Green Leaf** status, the highest eco-rating for a hotel.

Worldly Delights: Recipe

Stinging Nettle Tart

Serves 6

For Vancouver Island's Mara Jernigan of Fairburn Farm, the arrival of nettles is a much-anticipated event. The plant is a spring tonic for people as well as the island's animals. Nettles are foraged in the wild and are widely available dried in health food stores to make purifying teas, although this recipe requires the nettles to be fresh. If you can't find them, substitute spinach or Swiss chard, but make sure to squeeze the cooked greens between your hands to drain all the excess moisture.

Ingredients:

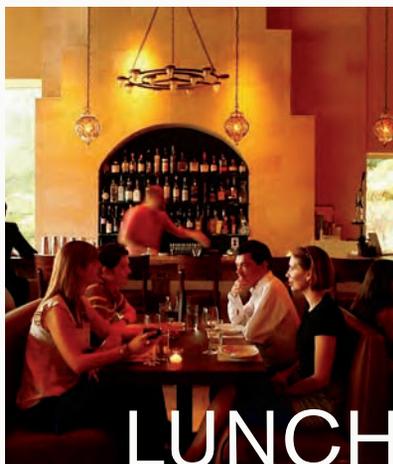
1 pie shell, blind-baked
1 cup blanched nettles
2 finely chopped shallots
2 tbsp butter
1 cup milk
1 cup whipping cream
6 whole eggs
1 egg yolk
salt and pepper to taste

Directions:

Preheat oven to 350°F. Sauté shallots in butter, but don't brown. Add the blanched nettles with a pinch of salt and cook another minute. In a bowl, whisk the eggs until well beaten. Add the cream and milk, and season with salt and pepper. Remove the shallots and nettles from the pan and allow to cool. Fill the par-baked pie shell with the nettles and shallots, and add the custard mixture. Bake approximately 35 minutes on the middle rack of the oven or until a knife inserted in the centre comes out clean.

Worldly Delights: Philly

Venerable old Philadelphia offers a surprising spectrum of palate-pleasing eateries
 Nancy Wigston



MUSEUM RESTAURANT, PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM OF ART

Follow the LOVE (Robert Indiana's iconic sculpture) from JFK Plaza along Benjamin Franklin Parkway to the **Philadelphia Museum of Art**. On the ground floor you'll discover a gastronomic gem. Chef J.C. Nuñez designs menus worthy of the landmark museum's stunning collections. Grazers are tempted by the **Artist's Table**, salads, fruits and mini-desserts. Nuñez also presents dishes inspired by major exhibits: last year, Cézanne; this year, Picasso. Genial wait staff respond to diners' queries with refreshing honesty: "How's the fish?" "I've seen people licking their plates," goes a typically candid exchange. The freshest skate in the world then arrives, with the lightest of buttery sauces. Desserts wittily mimic paintings. A lemon curd mountain, lapped by berry waves, rests beneath clouds of fresh cream, like an edible version of Cézanne's Mont Sainte-Victoire: tart, sweet, unforgettable.

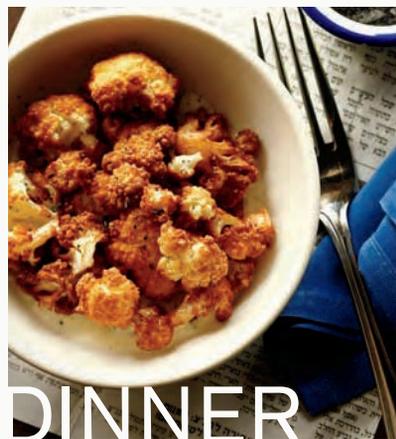
Museum Restaurant
Philadelphia Museum of Art
 26th Street & Benjamin Franklin Parkway
 (215) 684-7990

THE BELLEVUE

Tea at **XIX**, in this 1904 'Grande Dame of Broad Street,' offers mesmerizing views of the Philadelphia cityscape, with tea served the proper way: fresh and very hot, with pots of hot water on the side. Biscuits and cheese plates are available, but sandwiches must be ordered a day in advance. Come here after a day's touring or shopping. Relax. Savour Philly's golden era, for the nineteenth floor retains the elegance of the city's glory days. In the bar next door, a fire burns cheerily in a space that seems more country lodge than downtown tearoom, but both rooms exude a rare glamour.



Hyatt at the Bellevue
 200 South Broad Street
 (215) 790-1919



ZAHAV RESTAURANT

Manager Elon Gigi welcomes diners to this new darling near the Delaware River. The tapas-style menu, the Israeli native explains, is 'kosher-inspired.' Thinking deli? Forget it. **Zahav's** rave reviews (Best New Restaurant in Philadelphia; Best Restaurant Dish of the Year) poured in after co-owners Steve Cook and Michael Solomonov flew their staff to Israel for immersion in the real deal. Clad in desert beige, servers explain specialties to newbie diners: four spicy condiments, from mild to 'wow'; extra-creamy hummus; brick oven-hot flatbread; plus a range of eclectic dishes from Moroccan lamb to Bulgarian roasted red peppers. Diners eat, share and exclaim. Earnest conversations occur among patrons, servers and chef Solomonov, who periodically makes the rounds. Be warned: desserts are addictive. Pistachio baklava anyone? Israeli music and high, airy ceilings complete the mood.

Zahav Restaurant
 237 Saint James Place
 (215) 625-8800

©JASON VARNEY

©NANCY WIGSTON

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Worldly Delights: Beer

Humans have been making and drinking beer for longer than any other intoxicating beverage. You can find rice-, wheat- and barley-based beers all over the world. From boutique organic lagers to huge multinational brands, we make and drink more beer than any other form of alcohol. This leads me to believe that we must like it.



Nick Keukenmeester



©HELENE VALLÉE

Beer is believed to have a history of at least 7,000 years. Its birthplace is believed to be ancient Sumeria in Mesopotamia, although China was making rice beers pretty soon after. The Sumerians knew they were on to a good thing and even had a deity for it. **Ninkasi** is the ancient Sumerian goddess of beer. She may even be the one they fought in *Ghostbusters*, but I'll have to check my sources on that.

There are two kinds of beer: the ones you drink because they are great and the ones you drink because they are there. Most of the latter are lagers that are filtered and pasteurized to extend their shelf life, and as a result must be carbonated. With

all due respect to Molson Canadian and Coors Light, no one is calling them the apex of brewing.

That's not to say that you should avoid the beers that are light and easy. The 'thirst quencher' or lighter lager-style beers can be both reliable and good. **Asahi** in Japan, **Singha** in Thailand, **Moretti** in Italy, **Mythos** in Greece and **Efes** in Turkey all share this reliability. Now, some of these are better than others, but they all share an unobtrusive quality. The Med was scorching last summer and I often went for a local brew rather than risk the more dubious wine selections, and I've done the same throughout Asia and other parts of the world.



©MILL STREET BREWERY

Beer is a drink made from grains. This normally means **barley** and **malt**, but can include **wheat** or **rice**. These days, most of the good ones are flavoured with **hops**, which adds a vital bitterness that balances the sweetness of the malt. Good beers can be divided into lots of categories, but here are the two main ones.

Ales use warm and relatively rapid fermentation that leaves behind more fruity esters and a bolder flavour. These include such varied drinks as pale and golden **ales** as well as **porters** and **stouts**, which are dark brown, or black beers made with roasted grains.

Lagers are fermented at cool temperatures. It takes longer, but creates a cleaner, drier and lighter-tasting beer. These can have less flavour, making them more widely accepted.

Much like in the world of wine, most of the great beers are made by families and not large companies. **Coopers** is a family-run business started in Adelaide, South Australia in 1862, when a local stonemason decided to brew a natural beer as a tonic for his ill wife. In 1864, he wrote to his brother in Yorkshire, "There are some half-dozen breweries besides ours in and about Adelaide, but they all use a good deal of sugar and so on for brewing, but we use only malt and hops; consequently, ours being pure, the doctors recommend it to all their patients."

Five generations later **Coopers Sparkling Ale** has made the family famous. You can get it across Australia, and you can even find it further afield. No animal products are used so it's acceptable to vegetarians. I love it because its fruity depth makes it a great match for the fusion cuisine dominant throughout Australia.

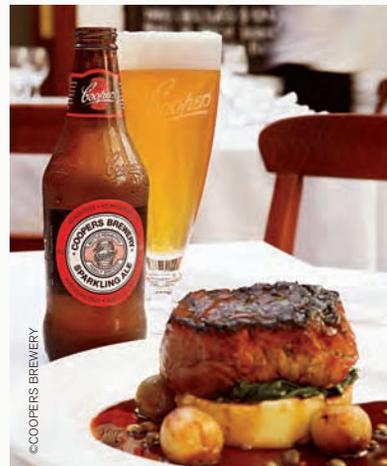
Of course, Europe is the epicentre of great beer production. Every town seems to have its own brewery and every pub, beer hall and café has many brews to choose from. A good, simple rule is to always ask what they have on tap. It is more likely to be local and popular.

No matter where you end up, a beer can either be a gastronomic high point in some cultures or a rescue plan in others. Cheers!

Lots of New Options

Gluten-free beers are now made around the world for those with allergies and in particular for sufferers of celiac disease. **Lakefront Brewery** in Wisconsin makes several varieties.

Organic beers are also now being produced. Wheat, barley and especially hops are susceptible to fungus, and so modern farming practices can include the heavy use of fungicides along with some pesticides and herbicides. **St. Peter's** in the U.K. and **Samuel Smiths** in the States are two good sources for organic beer, as well as **Mill Street** and **Nelson** back home.



©COOPERS BREWERY

Would You Care to See the Menu?

Food and beer pairings can follow the same general rules as those for food and wine. Golden lagers (such as **Grolsch**) work well with fish and English ales (such as **Adnams Broadside**) are a great match for roast beef. There are **oyster stouts** that suggest the best match, along with **chocolate stouts** that do the same. There are lots of options beyond Belgian beer and mussels, but that's good too! ▣



INDY 500 DARLING Sarah Fisher was the youngest female to make Indy history when, at the age of 19, she earned the record for fastest qualification lap – at 229.675 mph – by a woman. Now 29, Fisher has won the IndyCar series' **Most Popular Driver** award three years in a row and keeps adding accolades to her records list.

She is my inspiration today, and as my fellow race enthusiasts and I wait excitedly for our turn at the wheel, a squealing whine pierces my helmet when a Honda-powered Dallara whips by at full throttle. What am I getting myself into?

Ray Bische is happier than a cooing baby because his wife surprised him with this two-seater gift for their 10th anniversary. “You know, growing up I lived four blocks from the Speedway but have never been in one of these cars. It has always been a dream,” explains a beaming Bische, 40, who now lives eight miles from his beloved Speedway.

Long-time Indy fan Scott Jasek and two buddies, Joe Kennedy and Jeff Sinden, started the **Indy Racing Experience** in 2001. People thought they were crazy. “How do I convince a privately run company like the IMS to put people inside these cars and offer them high-speed rides? It’s a dangerous experience, but we make it safe.” And they do. The likes of Morgan Freeman, Angie Everhart and Hilary Duff are only some of the celeb passengers. “We supply safety crew members at the track and we outfit our riders and drivers in authentic fireproof suits, fireproof head socks, gloves and shoes, and racing helmets. Perhaps most important, we do not leave the pits unless the rider is comfortable,” adds Jeff Smith, Indy Racing Experience PR rep.

Good thing, because I am up next.

I shimmy inside the Italian-manufactured Dallara and cram inside the claustrophobic cockpit behind Sarah. “Make sure your legs are as far down as you can get them,” says a muffled voice from the pit as I am buckled into a five-point racing harness. Panicked, I know there’s nowhere to go but full speed ahead. A member of the pit crew slams my helmet visor down. Then with a thumbs-up and soothing Midwestern lilt, he smiles and says, “Go ahead and have some fun.”

An Indy car accelerates from 0 to 100 mph in less than three seconds. The G-force flattens my face; my cheeks flutter backwards to mimic bad plastic surgery, my saliva dries out and my eyes are pinned wide open. Then, drunken giddiness takes over. “Wow, this isn’t so bad,” I grin to myself.



COURTESY OF INDIANAPOLIS CONVENTION AND VISITORS ASSOCIATION

We approach the first turn at 175 miles per hour. The car remains in the outer lane near the famous wall that has seen many a spectacular crash over the years. In a stream of consciousness, memories from my childhood come flooding back. I’m on my dad’s lap, and my younger brother is sitting at his feet, cross-legged. Glued to the old Zenith, we watched the famous Indy 500 race, screaming at every turn to the excited machine-gun commentary of Jim McKay.

Dad was a race car nut, and he has many trophies to prove it. In 1965, the same year Jimmy Clark won the Indy 500, Dad won the ¼-mile drag race in Deseronto, Ontario. “I made a high 15.9-second win in my ’63 Fairlane,” he says, chuffed.

THE INDY 500: BLAZING A TRAIL

Shoe-horned into a purpose-built two-seater racing car, Ilona Kauremszky is ready to hit the world's most famous racetrack, the Indianapolis Motor Speedway (IMS). Who says chicks can't drive?



Much has changed in the 100 years since the oval opened in 1909. The two-and-a-half-mile track made from crushed rock and tar was so bad that the first race ended with injuries, fire and deaths. One of the principals of the project, entrepreneur Carl Fisher, went back to the drawing board and dreamed up a plan. He had the macadam track paved with 3.2 million Indiana-made bricks, and thus the Speedway came to earn its nickname of 'the brickyard.'

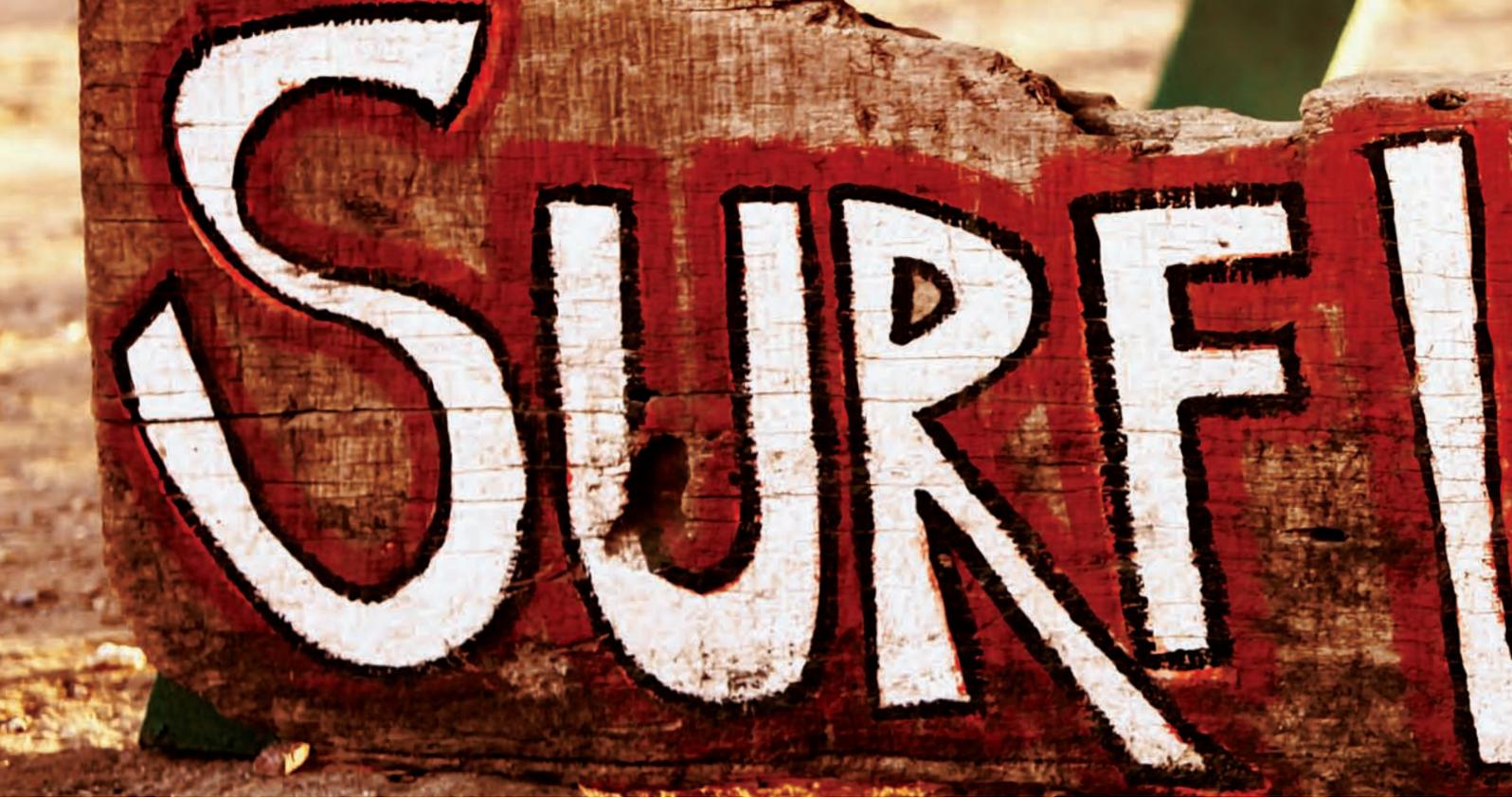
Dubbed 'the Greatest Spectacle in Racing,' the first official Indianapolis 500 was held on May 30, 1911. More than 80,000 spectators paid a \$1 admission to watch Ray Harroun in his self-designed single-seater, the Marmon Wasp, win the 500-mile race at 74 mph, a leisurely speed by today's standard. The Indy 500 was a gallant pageant with a bevy of ladies in long dresses and wide-brimmed hats, many of whom arrived by train from New York City, along with tycoons and industrialists who came to witness the motorsport event. "It was very much an upper society affair," noted Donald Davidson, the world's only full-time racetrack historian. Today, all that remains of that original track is three feet of bricks at the start/finish line and 'the brickyard' nickname.

As my own tribute, I dedicated this three-lap ride of a lifetime to Dad. I rounded the second, third and fourth turns before reaching the final straightaway, past the line-up of the next contenders. I imagined them as fans waving, clapping and whistling from the sidelines, though I couldn't hear anything but the roaring engine clocking 180 mph.

So, move over boys. Now it's: "Ladies and gentlemen, start your engines." ▣



©ILONA KAUREMSZKY

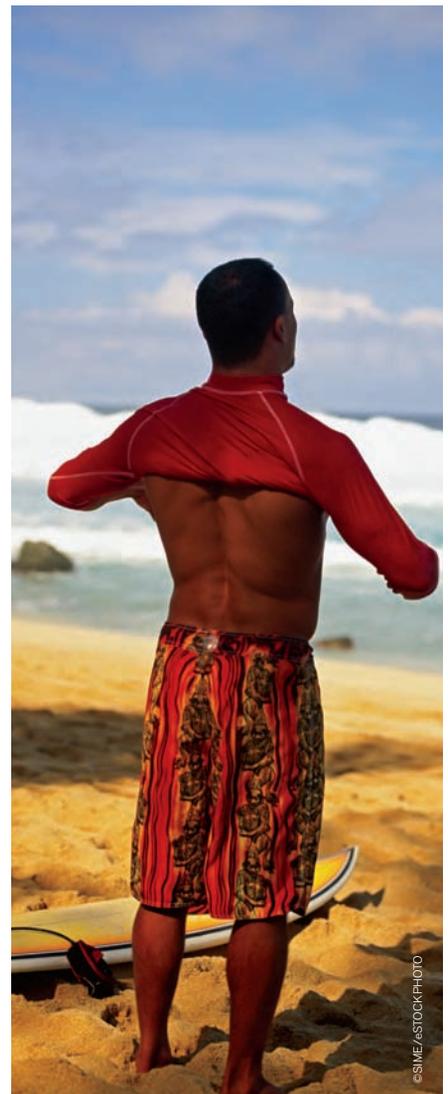


RIDING THE NEW WAVE OF COOL AT THE WORLD'S TOP SURFING SCHOOLS

In the 1960s, surf-themed movies were all the rage. Gidget and Frankie Avalon grabbed their boards and headed for the beach with the biggest waves. Fast-forward to today. Surfing has a new cool that has spread worldwide, well beyond such destinations as Australia and Hawaii. Even non-surfers are snapping up surf-inspired fashions by companies like Billabong and Quiksilver. But true sporty types need to be part of the action. Now, the next vacation you take could include a stint at a surfing school. You'll be 'hanging ten' in no time.

HAWAII

During his visit to Hawaii in 1866, Mark Twain was both dazzled and puzzled by the sight of locals riding on top of waves while standing on long wooden planks. Though new to him, Polynesians had been surfing for centuries. It's no wonder that some of the best surfing schools are located throughout the Hawaiian Islands. **Soul Surfing Maui** helps give beginners confidence and skills, while polishing the technique of more experienced surfers. Families can sign up for a five-day luxury surf camp experience that includes oceanfront accommodations, surfing lessons and fun sports like kayaking and snorkelling. On **Oahu**, **Hawaii Fire** enlists members of the Honolulu Fire Department as instructors. They're big on safety and they'll teach kids as young as five years old.



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©SIME/ASTOCKPHOTO



AUSTRALIA

Bondi Beach is a magnetic place that draws heaps of locals and tourists to its crescent-shaped shore, surrounded by a hopping bar and shopping scene. It's also where **Let's Go Surfing** promises to teach even the most terrified how to ride the waves. Private and group lessons (up to six people) are available all year round, thanks to the balmy water temperature. Along the fashionable Gold Coast, would-be surfers hit the beach first to practise their moves, then move to the water in the first two-hour lesson. Even if you don't manage to stand up on your board the first time around, the instructors still reward students with ice cream. Also consider stand-up paddle boarding. For those who are balance-challenged, holding a paddle while on the board is a huge help.

BONDI BEACH, SYDNEY



IRELAND

The Emerald Isle might not be the first place one thinks of as a surfing destination, but it's certainly becoming a hot spot, thanks to the rollicking surf along the northwestern coast. Though lessons are available all year round from the **Bundoran Surf Co.** overlooking Donegal Bay in **Bundoran, County Donegal**, students need to wear full wetsuits because of the chilly temperature of the water. During the summer, kids' surfer camps move youngsters at a steady pace from beach to board during daily three-hour sessions held over a week. Moms can leave husbands and little ones behind and sign up for a women-only surf and Pilates weekend that helps improve core strength, and hence, surfing skills.



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CANADA

Most Canadians think of **Tofino on Vancouver Island** as the best of the west in terms of surfing. It's difficult to beat the beauty of the location – towering pines, misty mornings and craggy cliffs. **Surf Sister** has been teaching newbies (women and men) to surf for more than 11 years. It takes an especially gentle approach with beginners, boosting confidence and skills with a kind of motherly support. A themed surf camp offers bonding time for mothers and daughters. Another one marries yoga sessions with surfing instruction. On the other side of the country, **Nova Scotia** is making waves on the surf scene. Nor'easters, the strong blustery winds that blow through the province, stir up awesome conditions that attract hard-core surfers and the curious alike. **One Life Surf**, near **Lawrencetown on the Eastern Shore**, has an all-girl crew of instructors on hand to teach three-hour sessions to hopefuls, with gear rentals included.



SPAIN

Attending surf camp on the sunny **Andalusian coast** isn't a bad way to spend your summer holidays. The water temperature averages 25° Celsius all year round, so no wetsuits are required. **El Palmar Surf Camp**, near **Cadiz**, packages its lessons with accommodations (either in a hostel, private bungalow or apartment) and even shows you how boards are made and repaired. The southwestern coast is blessedly uncrowded, so you'll have plenty of elbow room to show off your moves. On Spain's northern coast, attendees of the **Loredo Surf School** get an insider's look at the best surfing spots in the **Cantabria** area. Post-surfing, there's plenty of nightlife to be had at seaside bars and taverns, as well as great side trips to places like the Caves of Altamira and the medieval village of Santillana del Mar. ▣

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Bermuda

SHORTS



Jobson's Cove

Bermuda's celebrated short cruises aren't the only things that attract travellers to this tiny island paradise

MICHAEL DEFREITAS

A warm wind whipped around the forward observation deck as we squinted eastward, searching the distant horizon for land-fall. The sun was just beginning to peek above a line of low-lying clouds on the Atlantic horizon, revealing what appeared to be the faint silhouette of land. It turned out to be wishful thinking on my part.

We sailed out of New York Harbor only two days before and although the weather was ideal, the sea calm and the ship comfortable, I was getting anxious to step ashore and start exploring. My wife says I bring new meaning to the phrase 'active vacation.'

However, during our leisurely after-breakfast stroll around the promenade deck, I noticed a green smudge on the horizon. An hour later we were paralleling Bermuda's north coast heading for **Town Cut**, the entrance to sheltered **St. George's Harbour**.

Bermuda resembles a giant fishhook. Town Cut, between **Horseshoe Island** and the battlements of **Fort Cunningham** on the eastern tip of **St. George's Island**, threads the eye of the fishhook.

Despite what some people might think, this British overseas territory is not part of the Caribbean. The island rises out of the Atlantic Ocean about 600 nautical miles off the coast of North Carolina. However, even though it lies well within North America's temperate latitudes, the warm Gulf Stream that bathes its shores produces a subtropical-style climate and nurtures the world's most northerly coral reef, which in turn provides snorkelling and diving conditions similar to those on Caribbean islands.

Another misconception is that Bermuda is one island. It's actually an archipelago of about 138 islands and islets. Twenty causeways and bridges link the eight largest islands that form Bermuda proper. As you travel around you're actually moving from one island to another.

Since the Spanish explorer Juan de Bermúdez first sighted the uninhabited islands in 1503, more than 1,000 vessels have disappeared off Bermuda's shores. Not surprisingly, early explorers nicknamed the chain the **Isle of Devils**. But to 19th- and 20th-century visitors this mid-Atlantic archipelago was a slice of paradise. After vacationing in Bermuda in the late 1800s Mark Twain wrote in his diary, "You go to heaven if you want, I'll stay in Bermuda."

St. George, Bermuda's former capital, is claimed to be the oldest inhabited English settlement in the New World. Many of the town's pastel-coloured buildings date back to the early 1600s. The causeway between the pier and King's Square in the heart of town is like a bridge back to the past: 400 years of history within five square blocks.

A block north of the square stands **St. Peter's Church** – the oldest continuously used Anglican church in the western hemisphere – whose turquoise clock tower pierces the clear blue sky. Behind the church at the end of **Featherbed Alley** sits the church's original stone rectory, built in 1699. A block east is the island's dignified State House, built in 1620.

Even though you can't rent a car on the island, getting around is easy by moped or scooter. This will allow you to explore some of the higher, more remote spots for dramatic views of the island. The tourist information centre in **King's Square** provides all the maps and brochures you'll need for your island adventure. It can also help you with a scooter rental. Just take it slow like everyone else on the island.

Bermuda has three cruise terminals: **St. George's** in the north; **Hamilton**, about mid-island; and **King's Wharf** in the south. Most cruise lines spend two to three days in Bermuda (usually at more than one terminal) before returning to the mainland. This makes it easy to explore the entire island. Hamilton is Bermuda's bustling capital and business centre, offering great duty-free shopping and dining, while King's Wharf at the point of the fishhook boasts fabulous pink sand beaches, snorkelling and a dolphin swim encounter program.

Bermuda's close proximity to major Canadian gateways and its subtropical climate make it a convenient sun and fun alternative. As an added bonus, Bermuda offers spectacular wreck diving, one of the highest concentrations of golf courses in the world, a prosperous economy, friendly people, fabulous beaches and a wealth of historic sites.

Just remember to pack your shorts. ▣

GETTING THERE

Major cruise lines offer five- to seven-day Bermuda cruises between May and November from Baltimore; Boston; Cape Liberty in Bayonne, New Jersey; New York; and Norfolk, Virginia. Bermuda cruises are a quick and convenient Caribbean-style destination alternative. And let's not forget the wonderful bonus sightseeing opportunities if you elect to spend a few days before or after your cruise in one of these great port cities.

Aerial view of beach near St. George



©BOB KRIST

“You go to heaven if you want,
I’ll stay in Bermuda.”
– Mark Twain

Road Trips

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GRAVITAS QUOTIENT

Hot on the (successful) heels of the Winter Olympic Games in Vancouver, reigning ski cross world champion **Ashleigh McIvor** has much to be proud of. The girl who grew up in Whistler chasing boys down the mountain on skis and bikes, who prefers powder and drop cliffs to Alpine any day, brought home the first-ever Olympic gold in women's ski cross and took second place overall in the World Cup. We caught up with Ashleigh and asked her to play a different kind of game... one of discovery.



What is the best way to get out of a funk?

Take a deep breath and put your thoughts, ideas, potential solutions, etc. down on paper so that you stop thinking in circles. Then act.

Why are some people restless to seek extraordinary experiences?

Because they want their lives to be poetry, not prose.

What is it about being on the cusp that is so great?

It is fresh and exciting and full of risk and pure potential.

People reveal themselves through their fear.

What is your biggest fear?

Being happy but not content.

What is the most important lesson you have learned from your parents?

Just be nice.

Why should we pause on the threshold?

It's all about being present in your life. I like the saying "yesterday is history, tomorrow's a mystery, and today is a gift... that's why we call it 'the present'." Pause to take it all in. My friend Tracy

told me to "savour every second" of my competition at the Olympics. Those words echoed in my head all day. That approach allowed me to appreciate the suspense and the nerve-wracking emotions as I paused on the threshold and to channel it into positive energy.

What is it about risk that is so exhilarating?

The anticipation of that feeling we get when it all works out. Like when I come into a section on a DH mountain bike trail too hot and think – for a split second – that it's all over, and the next thing I know I've sailed through safely.

What determines how our life plays out?

I'm beginning to believe in fate and destiny. Winning the Olympics was just

too perfect. I felt as if everything that had happened in my whole life had led me to that point, and it had all come together so beautifully that I was in a position to feel 100% prepared to go out and win the first-ever Olympic ski cross race – on home soil. I truly believe that if we live by certain essential virtues and always try to do the right thing, our lives will play out quite nicely.

Where do you do your best thinking?

On airplanes.

Where does the road less travelled lead?

Nobody knows. That is why it has so much appeal for me. It's very mysterious. ▣

GRAVITAS THE GAME

Invented by Canadian **Alan Gratias** after hosting a particularly interesting dinner party, Gravitas is a game of discovery – of who we are and how we live. There are no dice or cards, just questions with no right or wrong answers. Although the game calls for reflection, you can make it as lighthearted as you wish. The player with the highest Gravitas Quotient (GQ) wins! Why not test your own GQ? Find out more about the game at www.gravitasthegame.com.

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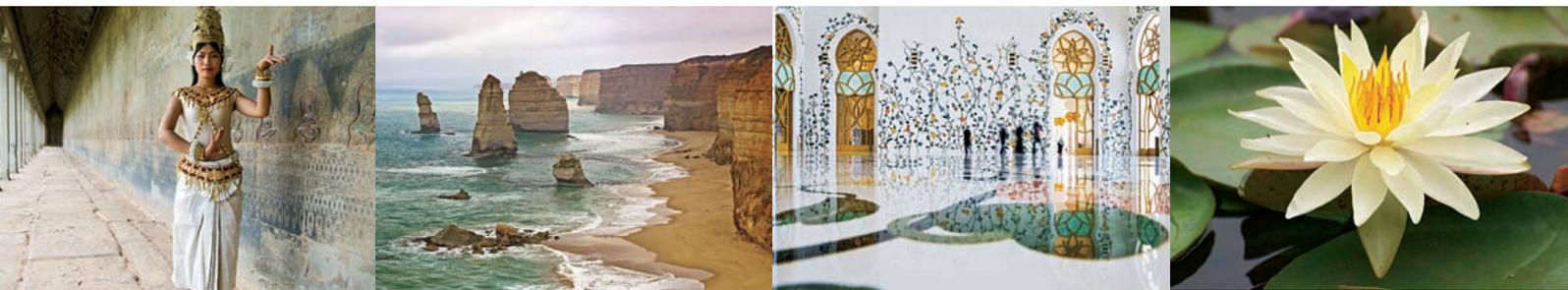
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